



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
April 10, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets

- PAGE 02: Columbus Dispatch: 'Monny' for Masterton: Sean Monahan's a deserving candidate for 'perseverance' award
- PAGE 05: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets continue push: 3 takeaways after win over Ottawa Senators
- PAGE 07: BlueJackets.com: Scoring goals is serious business for Marchenko
- PAGE 10: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets' Sean Monahan Nominated for 2025 Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy
- PAGE 13: 1st Ohio Battery: Three Things: Avoiding Dubious Mark, All Or Nothing, Fantilli First To 25

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/ Websites

- PAGE 15: The Athletic: Five U.S. forwards making their case for the Olympics after 4 Nations snubs
- PAGE 17: The Athletic: With Wayne Gretzky's goal mark gone, how many NHL records are truly unbreakable?
- PAGE 22: The Athletic: When NHL fighters become teammates — and even friends: 'You jumped me!'
- PAGE 25: ESPN: NHL playoff standings: What to watch Wednesday
- PAGE 38: ESPN: NHL Urgency Index: Who needs to win the Stanley Cup now?

Columbus Dispatch / 'Monny' for Masterton: Sean Monahan's a deserving candidate for 'perseverance' award

By Brian Hedger- April 10, 2025

Coming off the ice after a recent practice, the Blue Jackets were asked to pick which teammate they'd choose to pull a prank with.

Answers varied, but one name dominated the list: "Monny."

That's hockey lingo for Sean Monahan, whose quiet persona and monotone voice provide perfect cover for a side of him that's apparently a bit more devious.

"It's honestly just how I am," Monahan said, smiling. "I'm just trying to have fun, stay light and that's something I usually do on a daily basis. I get it back sometimes, too, so you've got to keep your head on a swivel."

The fact Monahan can still tap into his dry sense of humor is remarkable.

While becoming a franchise pillar for the Blue Jackets after signing a five-year contract last summer, Monahan has dealt with a searing heartache that followed the shocking loss of his friend Johnny Gaudreau, who was killed Aug. 29 along with his younger brother, Matthew, as they rode bicycles together in Oldmans Township, New Jersey.

Monahan signed with the Jackets mostly to reunite with Johnny Gaudreau, whom he'd become close to as Calgary Flames teammates. The rekindling of their friendship was cut tragically short, but Monahan has persevered to become a key part of the Blue Jackets, on and off the ice.

He's their top center, the key to their power play, and his mentorship of multiple young forwards — including second-year center Adam Fantilli — has made him a catalyst for speeding up the Blue Jackets' rebuild. Monahan, who's fourth on the team in scoring despite missing two-plus months after wrist surgery, has also produced at a point-per-game pace. He has 50 points with 18 goals and 32 assists in 49 games, and his +15 plus/minus ranks third highest on the team with five games left.

Sean Monahan is Columbus Blue Jackets' nominee for Masterton Trophy

For those reasons, the Columbus chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association has chosen Monahan as the Blue Jackets' nominee for this year's Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, which is named after the only player in NHL history to die from an in-game injury. The winner is determined by PHWA vote after nominees from the league's 32 markets are put up for consideration by each chapter.

Monahan was an easy choice for the Blue Jackets.

"He's just been everything you'd want in a teammate and more," Blue Jackets center Sean Kuraly said. "It's unprecedented challenges he's dealt with this year, and he showed up every day, worked his butt off and has been a really good teammate ... and would definitely be deserving of an honor like that."

Last summer, Monahan agreed to a five-year deal with the Blue Jackets worth \$27.5 million, but neither the salary nor term were the main reasons he signed. Choosing the Jackets was a chance to link back up with Gaudreau, who'd shocked the NHL two years earlier by making the same choice in free agency.

Johnny and "Monny" were eager to reunite in Ohio and rekindle their top line magic from Calgary. It was a perfect fit from that aspect and Monahan gave the Blue Jackets another seasoned "top six" center to go with captain Boone Jenner.

Tragedy struck two months later.

Sean Monahan bonded with Columbus Blue Jackets over shared stories about Johnny Gaudreau

Gaudreau and his brother were struck and killed by the driver of an SUV, Sean Higgins, who's currently jailed and has multiple criminal charges levied against him. Monahan and the Blue Jackets, meanwhile, were devastated.

Rather than attending training camp with Gaudreau, the Blue Jackets attended a vigil for him and Matthew outside Nationwide Arena. A short while later, they went to the brothers' heart-wrenching funeral services outside of Philadelphia.

A couple of weeks after that, wearing a Gaudreau T-shirt, Monahan met with reporters at the Blue Jackets' preseason media day and said that he and his family planned to live just a couple houses away from Gaudreau and his family.

Monahan's pain was visceral, just as it was for the Blue Jackets who played with Gaudreau the past two years. How could Monahan or any of his new teammates even possibly think about, let alone play hockey, at a time like that?

They had no choice.

The NHL's schedule is 82 games long — not including preseason tilts — and stops for nothing other than league-issued lockouts and worldwide pandemics. Neither of those affected this season, so Monahan and the Blue Jackets started on time. They've also made a surprising push to join the playoff race in the Eastern Conference while honoring Gaudreau in numerous ways.

Monahan first wore the team's new donkey hat postgame award after a 6-4 victory Oct. 12 over the Colorado Avalanche at Ball Arena in Denver, the day he turned 30. It was a tribute to Gaudreau, who'd kiddingly call friends or teammates a "donkey" whenever they made him laugh.

That was 75 games ago.

Since that night, the Blue Jackets have handed out "the donkey" after every win, kept Gaudreau's stall intact in their locker room at Nationwide Arena — right next to Monahan's — displayed his jersey after every single game.

It feels like Sean Monahan has been a Columbus Blue Jacket longer than one season

Monahan, meanwhile, has been a visible presence all season, despite the long-term wrist injury. He and Erik Gudbranson even walked with members of the Gaudreau family to lead the Blue Jackets out of the home tunnel at "The Shoe" for the NHL Stadium Series victory over the Detroit Red Wings.

Along the way, Monahan has connected with the Blue Jackets to a point where it now feels like he's been in Columbus much longer. They've bonded over memories of Gaudreau and have special moments of their own now.

"I've heard a couple (Gaudreau stories) for sure," Monahan said. "We talk about him a lot. The fun part is these guys knew him too. I was very excited to play with him again and be his teammate, but with the group knowing his personality and whatnot, it's fun to tell stories about him and relive some of the memories."

Messing with his new team helps too.

After a recent practice, Gudbranson emerged from a back entrance to the Blue Jackets' locker room and sauntered down a hallway lined with reporters. Numbers for players requested for interviews are written on a white dry-erase board inside the locker room, and Gudbranson's No. 44 was listed that day.

“Anybody here want to talk to me?” he asked a hallway of shaking heads. “Or did ‘Monny’ write my number on the board again?”

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets continue push: 3 takeaways after win over Ottawa Senators

By Brian Hedger- April 10, 2025

The Blue Jackets' resilience is a big reason they've got five games left and haven't been eliminated from the playoff hunt in the NHL's Eastern Conference.

Their odds of avoiding that fate are incredibly slim, but they're set on pushing hard until they're officially eliminated or run out of games, no matter which comes first.

That was evident in a 5-2 victory over the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday night at Nationwide Arena, where a crowd of 15,188 watched the Jackets' display more grit after losing three straight games. Facing a team that had already beaten them twice in Ottawa in the previous nine days, including a 4-0 loss Sunday at Canadian Tire Centre, the Blue Jackets never trailed.

"We know the situation we're in," center Adam Fantilli said. "We see the standings. We've still got to give ourselves the best chance to get in. We put ourselves in a tough position, but our goal is to win out the rest of the season, obviously, and put ourselves in the best position possible to get into the playoffs. That's still our goal."

Here are three takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets still need a miracle to qualify for the playoffs

Defeating Ottawa pulled the Blue Jackets even with the New York Rangers and Detroit Red Wings at 79 points each. All three have five games left and now they're chasing just one final playoff spot controlled by the Montreal Canadiens — who are close to clinching the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

Montreal's victory over the Red Wings on Tuesday gave the East's first wild card to Ottawa, so it's now a four-team race for the second wild card with the Canadiens just one more win in regulation away from clinching it.

The Blue Jackets likely need to win all five of their remaining games and hope the Canadiens, Rangers and Red Wings all stumble badly in their remaining games. The Jackets would cap out at 89 points in that scenario and would also need Montreal to finish with 89 points without adding another win in regulation — the NHL's primary standings tiebreaker. That's not impossible, of course, but it remains highly improbable.

Mathieu Olivier is more than a heavy fist for the Columbus Blue Jackets

Mathieu Olivier missed 28 of last season's first 53 games before playing the last 29 in a row. Only one of those 28 absences was due to injury, which means he was a healthy scratch for the other 27.

Olivier finished with 10 points on five goals and five assists, adding half of those points (four goals, one assist) in his finishing stretch of games while playing right wing on the fourth line. This season, Olivier has thrived offensively under new coach Dean Evason and new assistant Scott Ford — an assistant with the Milwaukee Admirals who'd coached the power forward at that level.

Olivier displayed a little bit of everything he's capable of providing in the victory over the Senators.

He set up the game's first goal with a great feed from behind the net to Dmitri Voronkov in the slot. His 18th goal was scored by putting himself into a great spot near the net before Erik Gudbranson fired a shot that Justin Danforth tipped for a redirection that bounced into the net off Olivier's left skate.

Olivier, the league's unofficial heavyweight champion, also threw his weight around while throwing Senators players around in scrums. If he can replicate this type of production throughout the six-year, \$18 million contract extension he signed March 5, that deal will be quite a bargain for the Blue Jackets.

"He's a very unique player," coach Dean Evason said. "(That's) clearly why we signed him to a contract. He's a rare breed, for sure. Do we love that he can beat the snot out of people and be physical and still score goals and score assists and block shots and kill penalties? Yeah, that's good."

Depth scoring sparks Columbus Blue Jackets against Ottawa Senators

The Blue Jackets' first two goals were scored by their third and fourth forward lines, but neither could be described as "greasy" or "dirty" unless using the latter term in conjunction with the word "dangle" following it.

Voronkov's goal was scored seven minutes into the first period with a one-timer off Olivier's feed to end the Jackets' scoring drought at 159:04 and his personal drought at 16 games. Justin Danforth made it 2-0 with 3:22 left in the first on the type of goal he used to score quite a bit in stops along his NHL path.

Getting the puck on the right wing in the neutral zone off a long clearing flip by rookie Denton Mateychuk, Danforth skated it into a 2-on-2 rush, dangled the puck to avoid a stick check in the slot and fired a wrist shot over goalie Anton Forsberg's glove for his ninth goal.

After watching the puck zip under the crossbar, Danforth turned around with his arms wide and skated to the left wing for a "fist bump" with Scott Collins of Lewis Center, a Blue Jackets fan who recorded it with his phone.

"I've scored some goals in my years," Danforth said. "It was nice to score a goal that wasn't in the paint tonight (the crease), so it felt good. Great play by (Mateychuk) and (Zach Aston-Reese) driving the net, opening it up for me. It was a great team goal."

[BlueJackets.com / Scoring goals is serious business for Marchenko](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- April 10, 2025

Wayne Gretzky's all-time record for career goals scored has been surpassed by Alex Ovechkin, a feat once viewed as unthinkable by just about everyone who follows the sport.

Considering no NHL player has topped 70 tallies in a single season in more than three decades, Gretzky's mark of 92 in 1981-82 seems much safer, but another dynamic Russian wing wouldn't mind taking a run at it.

Kirill Marchenko has 31 goals this season, most by a CBJ player in six seasons, and it feels like he's just getting started three years into his NHL career. Topping 30 is notable enough, but when asked how many goals he'd like to score in a season, Marchenko thinks big.

"Who scored the most NHL goals in a season?" Marchenko asked recently.

When told of Gretzky's all-time mark from more than four decades ago, Marchenko had a quick answer.

"Ninety-three," he said with his trademark smile. "It's my dream. Ninety-three is fine."

The line was vintage Marchenko – delivered with the lighthearted, joking nature and grin that have made him a fan favorite from the moment he stepped on the ice in Columbus, but also the answer of someone who takes his craft very, very seriously.

Marchenko wants to score goals – bunches of them, as many as he can, partly because it's a lot of fun but mostly because he wants to help his team win. When he steps on the ice for practice or a game, Marchenko is dialed in, always looking for a way to get better, no matter how tiny it might be.

When he can't execute a move or shoots a puck wide in a game, he's on the ice at practice the next day trying to perfect that skill so he gets it right the next time. If the Blue Jackets have an optional practice, you can almost bet on the fact he'll be out there working on something to improve. And he's the first player to get teammates together on the ice to either explain a drill or share an idea on how the Blue Jackets can get better.

"If I do something, I want to be the best at this," Marchenko said. "I know right now, I am not the best in the league, and I want to be. I think everybody wants to be the best if you play hockey. You want to be the best of the best."

"I don't want to stop. (Leon) Draisaitl has scored (52). Why can't I score (52)? I can. I just keep working. I want to stay in this way and try to be better and help our team win more."

Marchenko has certainly done that this season. Not only is he just the ninth player to reach 70 points in a season in Blue Jackets history, his plus-24 rating is one of the best ever for a CBJ forward. He's taken the step from talented goal scorer to all-around player, someone the Blue Jackets know they can build around as they try to make the next step from in the playoff race to contending for the ultimate prize.

"He honestly is a complete player," fellow CBJ forward Sean Monahan said. "He battles hard to get pucks back. He has a good stick. He has a really good shot and shoots the puck pretty uniquely to beat goalies with a straight shot without a screen."

"The biggest thing is he wants to be a difference maker. He wants the puck on his stick. He wants to score. He's a guy that's always trying to learn, change things up and improve his game. He's just a lot of fun to play with."

A Talent for Hockey

Given Marchenko's passion for scoring goals and the effort he puts in to get better at his craft, you might be tempted to say he was born to be a hockey player.

But when he was growing up in Barnaul, Russia, that wasn't necessarily the case.

"I wanted to be a soccer player," Marchenko said. "If I go play in soccer, for sure (I could be a pro). I play in Spanish league. Or French league. No, no, no – Italy. Nah, Germany maybe. Just a top-five league for soccer, for sure."

Marchenko's humor and confidence aside, it does seem like he was at least destined to be an athlete. He decided to use a stick rather than his feet for a living because of his environment, as one sport was much bigger than the other in his native country.

"Soccer in Russia is not really great," He said. "Hockey was big, and when I grow up, I go into hockey. I was just an energy kid. I loved playing all the sports – hockey, soccer, water polo a little bit, volleyball. My father and grandfather are volleyball players. I just love hockey right now. I try to do something with what was given to me."

And it was clear from an early age that Marchenko would be able to do that. He was a high-scoring forward from the time he arrived in Russia's U-16 and U-17 levels, making it to the country's top junior league by age 17 and the top-level KHL by 18.

His size and goal-scoring ability made him a rising star, both at home – he'd go on to qualify for Russia's teams at the IIHF World U-18 and World Juniors tournaments – and abroad, as NHL scouts zeroed in on Marchenko for the 2018 NHL draft. Columbus was the team that made the pick, selecting Marchenko with their second-round pick at 49th overall.

For his next season in Russia, he was acquired by SKA St. Petersburg, one of the traditional powers in Russia, and spent four years in that organization. Wherever he went, goals and points followed, including 27 goals and 48 points in 80 games with SKA his final two seasons in Russia.

Marchenko then signed his first contract with the Blue Jackets and made an immediate impact. After getting some seasoning with AHL Cleveland, he made his NHL debut in December 2022, notching his first goal in his fourth game and his first hat trick just 15 games into his career. By the time his first season was over, he set a CBJ rookie record with 21 goals but notched just four assists, becoming just the third NHL player in the last 85 years to score at least 20 goals with five or fewer helpers.

His game has grown the past two campaigns, as Marchenko had 23 goals and 42 points a year ago – joking he had become a playmaker along the way – and this season has become the first CBJ player ever to start his NHL career with three straight 20-goal seasons.

Boasting a more diverse offensive game, increased strength in puck battles and more attention to detail in the defensive zone, Marchenko has posted a 31-39-70 line, making him the eighth CBJ player to top the 30-goal barrier, and he became just the fourth Blue Jacket to notch three career hat tricks earlier this year.

He hopes the best is yet to come. Marchenko said in the preseason he took only a couple weeks off this past offseason before getting back to work in the gym, and he watches such players as Connor McDavid, Nate MacKinnon, Nikita Kucherov and Martin Necas to try to keep adding to his game.

"I am still a young guy and I have a lot of room for growth," he said. "And I feel it's normal because every year, if this year I was worse than last year, it's bad for me. If I grow up every year, it's nice. I hope next year I am better."

A Growing Leader

But if there's one place that Marchenko stands out when it comes to his preparation, it's his attention to detail.

If Marchenko has an opportunity to score or make a play in a game and it doesn't work out, he's out before or after practice the next day working on the same situation to make sure he doesn't miss the next time. He's always fine-tuning an area of his game, working on getting it right until he's close to perfection.

"It's small things, small details on the ice," he said. "I just focus on something where I can be better and where I can find more goals and goals for the team."

"I don't work on the D-zone after practice," he added with a laugh, "but I can find new moves on the power play or on like 5-on-5, some shots. I think it can be useful for the future, so it's nice."

Those on the team have taken notice. It wasn't hard to see the ever-present smile and chatter and the prodigious goal-scoring skills when Marchenko first arrived, but in the world of professional hockey, respect must be earned each day. As Blue Jackets players have spent more time around Marchenko, his work ethic and ideas about the game are what have impressed them most.

"He stays on late, he's on early, and he's always working on something," veteran teammate Zach Werenski said. "He's always super creative out there. He's always having these ideas, whether it's the power play or faceoffs or whatever it is. He has a very smart hockey mind. I think that mixed with his work ethic, it's starting to pay off for him."

Added Monahan: "I think out of all the guys I've ever played with, I talk to him the most about hockey. He's such a smart guy and he gets ideas, he studies the game and sees things where he wants to learn, and it works for him and it works for the team. He's so much fun. I sit beside him in the dressing room and we talk a lot."

Of course, anyone in Marchenko's orbit is going to talk – or at least listen – a lot. He is serious about getting better, but he always has something to say, usually of the comical or off-the-wall variety. Marchenko is always looking for a way to insert himself into a conversation and have some fun, whether it's teasing teammates, stealing voice recorders or phones from reporters in the locker room or engaging with fans during pregame warmups.

"I think he's just the same Marchy," Werenski said. "He's definitely more of a leader. He says more in the room for sure, speaks up more when it's needed, and I think that's great for him to feel like he has that voice in this locker room and guys respect him. Obviously the way he plays, he's earned that, and it's been fun to watch him grow as a leader. But him as a guy, he's just the same Marchy."

"He's fun to be around. It's fun seeing him at the rink. I think the best part is just that mixed with his work ethic. It makes him a special player and a special person for sure."

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Sean Monahan Nominated for 2025 Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy

By Mark Scheig- April 10, 2025

The Columbus Chapter of the Professional Hockey Writer's Association has nominated Blue Jackets' forward Sean Monahan as their nominee for the 2025 Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy. The award is given annually to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship, and dedication to ice hockey.

The Masterton Trophy is named after Bill Masterton, the only player in NHL history to die as a direct result of injuries suffered during a game.

All 32 chapters of the Professional Hockey Writer's Association select a nominee for their team. Then two rounds of voting will take place.

The initial list of 32 nominees will be voted on by the writers and three finalists will be announced. A second round of voting will take place then from those three finalists to determine the winner of the award.

The winner of the Masterton Memorial Trophy in 2023-24 was Arizona Coyotes' goaltender Connor Ingram. He led the NHL in shutouts last season after nearing almost retiring in 2021 due to clinical depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Monahan's season with the Blue Jackets is the very embodiment of what the Masterton Memorial Trophy is all about: Dedication, sportsmanship and perseverance.

Monahan's 2024-25 Season

Under the leadership of new Team President and General Manager Don Waddell, the Blue Jackets immediately went to work improving their roster in the offseason. On the opening day of free agency, they signed Monahan to a five-year, \$27.5 million contract.

With the signing, the Blue Jackets addressed an immediate need that they've been longing for over several seasons. They added a top-end center who was over his injuries and in the best shape of his life.

The signing of Monahan was to be a reunion as well. He was going to reunite with his best friend Johnny Gaudreau from their days with the Calgary Flames. Both players were under contract with the Blue Jackets for the next five seasons.

Then the absolutely unthinkable happened. On Aug 29, just a couple of weeks before NHL Training Camps were to open, Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau were killed by a suspected drunk driver while riding their bikes in New Jersey. The brothers were there to celebrate their sister's wedding scheduled for the following day.

Suddenly, hockey didn't matter anymore. The downstream effects of such a horrible tragedy would be far-reaching throughout the world. Husbands were lost. Sons were lost. Brothers were lost, gone in a flash. Somehow, without a playbook, the families as well as the Blue Jackets had to try to find a way to move forward.

For Monahan, he lost his best friend. It was going to be extremely difficult for the players to try to move forward. It would be that much harder for him to do so.

Yet, Monahan has not only found a way to move forward, he's been everything and then some inside the Blue Jackets' locker room and on the ice.

Going into Tuesday night's game against the Ottawa Senators, Monahan had 49 points in 48 games. He did have to miss time due to a wrist injury suffered in Pittsburgh. He had finished a season at a point per game just once, 2018-19 with the Flames. He had 82 points in 78 games.

At the time of Monahan's injury, he was on pace for a career high in points. His line with Dmitri Voronkov and Kirill Marchenko was one of the best lines in the NHL. They were a big reason the Blue Jackets stayed in the playoff race most of the season.

Monahan has also been a leader to many. He's credited for elevating the games of Marchenko and Adam Fantilli among others. But then he's been a source of strength to the Gaudreau family. Uncle Sean has been actively involved with being around the Gaudreau children among the many things he's done behind the scenes.

The Masterton Trophy nomination is something Monahan doesn't take lightly.

"The recognition for something like that, it feels special," Monahan said of the nomination. "I've never been nominated for that so it's something that you don't take lightly."

In the midst of a lot of dark days and sadness in the situation, Monahan has been able to find fun in the season. That has spread to his Blue Jackets' teammates.

"Emotionally, it wears on you daily," Monahan said. "But I think still being able to just step aside (next to John's stall, there's a lot of different things. The kids are around. I get to see them quite a bit. I feel like this is a place where I was supposed to be. I've really enjoyed my time and it's a special group to be a part of."

For Monahan, he's always been considered one of the most sportsmanlike players in the NHL. That comes from one simple concept from his perspective.

"Honestly, my biggest thing is I think be a good teammate first," Monahan said. "I've always tried to do that, tried to keep the room light, have fun everyday at the rink. And then build those relationships where you become a team. Everyone enjoys being around each other."

Evason & Players Share Thoughts

When discussing Monahan in the Blue Jackets' room, one common word comes up. It's class. In everything he does, he does it all with dignity and class. It rubs off on everyone.

"With class and dignity and professionalism," Evason said. "He's just been not only an incredible hockey player, but an incredible presence within our dressing room all year and continues to do that. Leads by ultimate example, just to watch him everyday. Our guys, everybody can get better."

"He comes to the rink, enjoys his time," Zach Werenski said. "Mony works hard. He's been a great leader in our room. Obviously he's come into a tough situation. I think he's just all about the team, all about winning. I think a lot of guys have learned a lot from him this year and it's a very well-deserved nomination."

"He plays the game the right way," Werenski continued. "Plays an honest game. I've learned a lot from him this year. Just the way he conducts himself, the way he goes about his business, the way he approaches the game, probably leads in the room. Just kind of everything. He's just an awesome teammate, an awesome leader, obviously hell of a player. Coming into the situation he came into this year has to be tough on him, I'm sure. And he's handled it tremendously. He's played at a point per

game. He's missed time and comes right back and picks up right where he left off. I just think the way he approaches the game, the perseverance. There's so many words to describe him."

Monahan has also taken on a role helping teach and mentor the younger players on the team. Fantilli in particular is someone who has been positively affected by Monahan's approach to everything.

"When I first met him, I didn't know what to expect," Fantilli said. "I didn't know what kind of guy he was. I didn't know how he was going to handle what had just happened to him because I knew how close he and Johnny were. I can't believe the way he handled (things.) It's been crazy how awesome he's been as a teammate, as a leader, as our number-one center. Just speaking from personal experience, I've had so much fun playing with him and being on the road with him and grabbing dinner with him.

"He is one of the best guys I've ever met in hockey. The tragedy would happen to him and to all of us but I know he is probably feeling it the most. He lost his best friend and to be able to still be the type of guy that he is, is pretty, pretty inspiring."

Final Thoughts

As we stated before, Monahan embodies each of the elements of what the Masterton Trophy is about. He has persevered through the most unimaginable situation. But through it all, his dedication to the sport of hockey and the sportsmanship he displays while playing the game make this a most deserving nomination.

Whether it's been on the ice, in the locker room or off the ice, Monahan has been a beacon of light that shines everywhere he goes. He is doing everything exactly the way Johnny would have wanted.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Avoiding Dubious Mark, All Or Nothing, Fantilli First To 25

By Will Chase- April 10, 2025

Feast or famine.

Justin Danforth and Mathieu Olivier each had a goal and an assist as the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the Ottawa Senators 5-2 on Tuesday night at Nationwide Arena to end a three-game losing streak.

Columbus improved to 23-10-5 at home. Elvis Merzlikins made 33 saves on 35 shots. Anton Forsberg had 30 on 35 shots.

Ottawa clinched a playoff spot with the Montreal Canadiens' 4-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings. Montreal is three points behind Ottawa for the first Eastern Conference wild card spot and holds an eight-point lead over the New York Rangers, Red Wings, and Blue Jackets.

Avoiding Dubious Mark

Dmitri Voronkov scored his first goal in 17 games, dating back to the outdoor game on March 1 at Ohio Stadium. His 21st tally gave Columbus a 1-0 lead at 7:00, and Olivier got his 13th assist.

It's the 40th time the Blue Jackets have scored first this season (tied for 12th). It's the fourth time they've scored first since March 1 (32nd in league). They were first in the league from the start of the season through March 1, when they scored first 37 times.

Voronkov not only ended a personal scoring drought, but the goal ended the Blue Jackets' shutout streak since the second period of last Thursday's 7-3 loss to the Colorado Avalanche, and the consecutive shutout losses over the weekend against the Toronto Maple Leafs and Senators.

Columbus' offense will have to wait until Sunday to end another drought when they complete another home-and-home, back-to-back against the Washington Capitals on the road.

Danforth scored his ninth of the year at 16:38 of the opening period. Denton Mateychuk (8) and Sean Kuraly (11) picked up the assists.

All Or Nothing

Mathieu Oliver and Sean Monahan each scored their 18th goal of the season.

Olivier's goal made it 3-1 at 19:38 of the second period with Danforth (11) and Erik Gudbranson (2) getting the assists. Gudbranson played in his 800th career NHL game. Olivier's previous career high in goals was five in 2022-23 and 2023-24.

Monahan's goal at 2:37 of the third period came on the power play, assisted by Kent Johnson (29) and Zach Werenski (55).

If both Olivier and Monahan can get to the 20-goal mark, they'll join Kirill Marchenko (31), Adam Fantilli (25), Kent Johnson (23), Werenski (20), and Voronkov (21).

The Blue Jackets had five 20-goal scorers one other time (2018-19) when Cam Atkinson (41), Artemi Panarin (28), Josh Anderson (27), Pierre-Luc Dubois (27), and Oliver Bjorkstrand (23) did it. Columbus acquired Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel that season, who each had 12 points (four goals, eight assists) as Blue Jackets, but Duchene had 31 goals overall that season with Ottawa and Columbus. Dzingel had 26 total with Ottawa and Columbus.

This year's Blue Jackets team has scored 244 goals, the fourth-most in franchise history. They're putting up 3.17 goals for per game, the most in franchise history. It's amazing when you consider this stat from Sunday.

Fantilli First To 25

Fantilli's third-period goal at 11:42 gave Columbus its fifth goal of the night and Fantilli's first 25-goal season. He's the first from his draft class to accomplish the feat. Kent Johnson (30) had his second assist of the night, and Ivan Provorov picked up his 24th.

Fabian Zetterlund (18) scored for Ottawa on the power play in the second period to cut the deficit to 2-1. Claude Giroux (34) and Thomas Chabot (33) assisted. Chabot is on a three-game point streak (one goal, four assists). Chabot scored his seventh of the season in the third period at 15:10 to make it 5-2. Drake Batherson (40) and David Perron (7) assisted. Batherson is on a three-game point streak (zero goals, four assists).

Sabres On Tap

Columbus hosts the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday, April 10 at 7 p.m. ET.

The Athletic / Five U.S. forwards making their case for the Olympics after 4 Nations snubs

By Pierre LeBrun- April 10, 2025

We took a look at Team Canada's Olympic bubble forwards earlier this week, and now let's do the same with Team USA ahead of next February's Winter Games.

But first, a reminder that countries have until June 15 to name their first six players.

Last June, the first six players the U.S. named for the 4 Nations Face-Off were Jack Eichel, Auston Matthews, Matthew Tkachuk, Quinn Hughes, Charlie McAvoy and Adam Fox.

My six for June 15, as of today, would be Eichel, Matthews, Matthew Tkachuk as well as brother Brady, Hughes and McAvoy. So just the one change: Brady Tkachuk in for Fox. I'm not worried about going up to four forwards in my first six. Those four forwards are 100 percent locks.

I was torn here between McAvoy and Connor Hellebuyck as the last pick, but I went with the Bruins defender because my feeling is Team USA management will again avoid the goalie position in its first six picks — considering you're locking in six guys eight months before puck drop in Italy and the goalie position is so volatile around the NHL.

The counterargument is that even if, say, Jake Oettinger ends up passing Hellebuyck as the No. 1 by the February Olympics, Hellebuyck is obviously still on the roster. I mean, the dude is about to win his third Vezina Trophy. He's a safe pick, but all things considered and knowing Team USA wanted to avoid a goalie pick in its first six last year, I think management will do the same again.

The rest of the Olympic roster must be named by Dec. 31. Unlike the 4 Nations, which had a 23-man roster (13 forwards, seven defensemen and three goalies), the Olympic roster will be 25 players (14, eight and three).

With that in mind, let's look at bubble forwards for Team USA.

There's an extra forward spot available because of the expanded roster, and I think it's mostly a given as of today that Chris Kreider will get knocked off the roster for Italy. So that means at least two forward spots up for grabs.

Obviously, that's subject to change with injury and performance. There's lots of opportunities for this to play out, between the Stanley Cup playoffs and IIHF World Championships.

Kyle Connor struggled at the 4 Nations, but I find it hard to believe he won't be on the Olympic roster. He's just too good. His 92 points are second only to Eichel this season among U.S. skaters. And I still think it was a mistake to scratch him for the championship game against Team Canada in Boston. He's got his first taste of best-on-best hockey under his belt; he'll be better next time around.

Brock Nelson and Vincent Trocheck are not locks by any means, but I know Team USA management really values what those two guys bring, and if they were picking the Olympic team today, I think both would be on the team again.

So, again, I think there are two forward spots available for now. There may potentially be more, obviously.

Here are five forwards who didn't make 4 Nations that have helped their stock with their play this season:

1. Tage Thompson, Buffalo Sabres

Thompson's already got 40-plus goals in 2024-25 — for the second time in three seasons. I would have had him on the 4 Nations roster, too. The biggest thing working against him is that he's never played in the Stanley Cup playoffs. That's probably unfair, but I get that Team USA values big-game experience. Still, I just don't think you can ignore this goal machine — and his size and talent. If he's off to another 40-goal pace next season, he's got to be on the Olympic roster.

2. Clayton Keller, Utah Hockey Club

Keller is the highest-scoring U.S. forward this season who wasn't on the 4 Nations roster. He's shifty and creative and a wonderful playmaker. I would have him on one of the two Team USA power-play units. His Stanley Cup playoff resume consists of nine games with Arizona in 2019-20, so like Thompson, there's a big-game resume lacking. But also like Thompson, that's through no fault of his own.

3. Jason Robertson, Dallas Stars

A slow start to the season kept Robertson from making the 4 Nations roster, but he's been terrific in the second half of the season and now he could potentially benefit from another deep playoff run with the Stars. He's already played 45 career playoff games, putting up 14 goals and 38 points. Spring hockey could be a time for Robertson to further his case to Team USA.

4. Cole Caufield, Montreal Canadiens

Second only to Thompson for goals scored by U.S. forwards who didn't make the 4 Nations roster, the 24-year-old winger has gained valuable experience during Montreal's torrid stretch run, playing important minutes in critical, pressure-packed games. He has a potential opportunity to play in the Stanley Cup playoffs for the first time since his first entry into the league back in 2020-21. My concern in Caufield's chances of cracking the Olympic roster is figuring out which player he either knocks out or pushes down the lineup as far as the kind of role he would play, and I think it's something Team USA management struggles with as well. That's really his biggest challenge in going to Italy next year. But he's definitely improving his chances with his play this season.

5. Matthew Knies, Toronto Maple Leafs

This is probably a long shot, especially given that he's only completing his second full NHL season, but what I would say is this: If the Maple Leafs were to go on a deep playoff run (I know, I know), there's no question in my mind that the 22-year-old Knies will have distinguished himself in said run. He's getting his third taste of the Stanley Cup playoffs, and his game and 6-foot-3, 227-pound frame are meant to translate to this time of year. So, this is all tied to the Leafs finally getting over the hump, but if they do, it could really bump Knies up the Olympic radar.

The Athletic / With Wayne Gretzky's goal mark gone, how many NHL records are truly unbreakable?

By Sean McIndoe- April 10, 2025

And just like that, Wayne Gretzky's unbreakable record has been broken.

Well, one of them. Gretzky had more than his share. But for hockey fans of my generation, it really is hard to believe that Alexander Ovechkin actually did it. He broke Gretzky's career goals record. That wasn't supposed to be possible.

For decades, old-timers like me figured there was just no way anyone could get to 894. Not in the Dead Puck Era, which eventually gave way to the Only Comatose Puck Era. Not when it meant scoring at a 45-goal pace for 20 consecutive seasons. Not in an era where players were bigger and stronger, meaning just staying healthy was a challenge. Not in a league where forwards were supposed to peak in their mid-20s and then give way to the next generation.

But here we are. So now we have to ask: What other "unbreakable" records could we be wrong about?

We've had some fun in the past with unbreakable records, as well as a few breakable ones. But today, let's look at some of the sport's marks that have at some point seemed unreachable, and try to figure out if they could actually be in play.

Jesse already took a look at Gretzky's other records, and I'm mostly on the same page. I'd argue the nine Hart Trophies is probably unbreakable, given how much modern sportswriters seem to value the novelty of getting new names on their ballots. But I'd agree that the career points and assists records are untouchable, and I like Jesse stopping just short of taking the 92-goal regular-season record off the table.

What about the records that aren't Gretzky's? Let's have a look at 15 of the most imposing and determine if we think they can be broken one day.

Consecutive starts

The record: From 1955 through 1962, goaltender Glenn Hall started 502 consecutive games in the regular season (and 50 more in the playoffs).

I figured we'd start with an easy one, just to set the baseline. In an era where even workhorse goalies get 15 or 20 nights off, we'll probably never see anyone start 50 straight games again, let alone 500. This one is right up there with the most unbreakable records in all of pro sports.

Verdict: Unbreakable.

Sticking with the goalies ...

Career shutouts

The record: Martin Brodeur's 125 career shutouts is the all-time mark, well ahead of Terry Sawchuk's 103.

This one's a tougher call. I'm old enough to remember when Sawchuk's record was considered unbreakable. But the combination of Brodeur's magnificence, his durability and the Dead Puck Era added up to the record being shattered.

Could it happen again? It feels unlikely. Brodeur lasted 22 years and hit double-digits in shutouts on four occasions, while nobody in the NHL has had 10 in a year since Marc-Andre Fleury a decade ago. Maybe

more daunting, Brodeur often played 70 games in a season, a mark nobody in the NHL has touched since 2016-17. It all adds up to a massive hill to climb — remember, Dominik Hasek had “only” 81 shutouts, and Patrick Roy just barely hit half of Brodeur’s total with 66.

All that said, is it possible the next Hasek or Brodeur could arrive someday and challenge the mark, especially if scoring rates plunge again? All we’re looking for today is a sliver of possibility, and I think we can find it here. Barely.

Verdict: Breakable.

That said, let’s circle back to that games played record ...

Career games played (goalie)

The record: Brodeur’s 1,266 stands well above the field, with Fleury, Roy and Roberto Luongo the only other goalies to even hit 1,000.

Brodeur played 20 full seasons, which is almost unheard of for a modern goalie. He had years in which he appeared in 78 games (once) and 77 games (twice) and hit the 70-game mark a dozen times. Fleury is the closest modern equivalent, and he’s going to finish 200 games behind Brodeur. This one’s an easy call.

Verdict: Unbreakable. And for the same reasons, we can lump Brodeur’s 691 wins in here, too.

OK, enough of those low-life goalies, let’s move on to the guys who are fun ...

Points in a single game

The record: Darryl Sittler set the mark with 10 points in a 1976 game.

Sittler’s mark will turn 50 next year. And not only did it manage to survive through the scoring explosion of the 1980s, but nobody has even come within a point of it. There have been 13 regular-season games in which a player has had eight points, plus two more in the playoffs. But nobody else has even managed nine points, let alone Sittler’s 10.

That said ... I mean, one of those eight-point games came from Sam Gagner. Two defensemen have done it. Patrik Sundstrom did it in a playoff game. Two brothers did it in the same game when they were rookies.

I’m just saying, if Gagner’s best night can get 80 percent of the way there, surely Connor McDavid or Nikita Kucherov are in the realm of possibility.

Verdict: Certainly matchable, and probably even breakable, although it would take one of those weird nights where everything broke just right.

Single-season plus-minus

The record: Bobby Orr was a plus-124 for the 1970-71 Bruins.

Yes, we all know that plus-minus is a flawed stat. But it can still tell us something at the extremes, and there’s never been a season more extreme than Orr’s plus-124. This one was actually nearly broken by Larry Robinson, who was plus-120 for the 1976-77 Canadiens. Meanwhile, the record for forwards is Gretzky’s plus-100 in 1984-85.

But wait, those numbers only tell half of the plus-minus story. We can’t celebrate the “plus” part of the equation without also mentioning the minus record. That would be Capitals’ defenseman Bill Mikkelsen, who was minus-82 for the expansion Capitals in 1974-75.

That's a horrifying number. (The worst mark of the cap era is a relatively mild minus-47.) But it actually looks sort of reasonable if you remember the context. Those Caps had a team goals differential of minus-265, so Mikkelsen was only on the hook for less than a third of that. Similarly, Orr's Bruins routinely outscored their opponents by well over 100 goals, including a plus-192 mark in that 1970-71 season. You just don't see those sorts of extremes in today's parity-stricken league, which means ...

Verdict: Unbreakable.

Most Cup rings

The record: If you're only counting rings earned as a player, it's Henri Richard's 11. But Jean Beliveau has a total of 17 — 10 as a player and seven more in the front office.

These days, we argue about whether a team is a dynasty if they win two Cups in a row. Next.

Verdict: Completely unbreakable.

Shots on goal in a game

The record: Believe it or not, this one belongs to a defenseman. Ray Bourque had 19 shots on goal in a 1991 overtime game against the Nordiques.

That easily broke the previous record of 16, held by Rod Gilbert. And nobody else has passed Gilbert since, although he's been tied once. Even Ovechkin, the most prolific shooter of his era by far, never got past 15 in a single game.

That said, the one other player to get to 16 was Marian Hossa in 2006, so we're at least talking about the cap era, if only barely. And seeing players get well into the double-digits isn't all that rare; Jack Hughes had 13 in a game in December, and Brady Tkachuk had 12 in a game three times in 2024. That's not all that close to the record, and there aren't any teams in today's league that are as bad as those awful Nordiques were. Still, this feels like Sittler's single-game mark: It would take a night where everything went right, but it doesn't feel impossible.

Verdict: Breakable

Goals scored by a rookie

The record: Teemu Selanne debuted with 76 goals in 1992-93.

That shattered the previous mark, which was Mike Bossy's 53. That's still the second-highest total ever, by the way. Ovechkin's 52 and Joe Nieuwendyk's 51 are the only other 50-goal seasons by a rookie. Meanwhile, only three players have ever scored more than Selanne's 76 goals in a season — Gretzky (twice), Mario Lemieux and Brett Hull.

Ovechkin's 52 in a high-scoring 2005-06 season feels like a reasonable benchmark for modern snipers, and even that's tough. (Auston Matthews has come closest since, and he "only" had 40.) Getting to the Ovechkin level, and then adding 25 more goals on top of that, seems ... difficult.

Verdict: Completely unbreakable.

Goals and points by a defenseman

The records: Paul Coffey's 48 goals in 1985-86 and Bobby Orr's 139 points in 1970-71.

Yikes. At first glance, both of these seem out of reach. Orr and Coffey dominate the top of the leaderboard; take them out, and the highest goal total is Doug Wilson's 39, and the points leader is Al MacInnis way back at 103.

It's tempting to look at what Cale Makar is doing this year and wonder if he could have yet another level he could get to, especially if the league ever starts handing out power plays again. Then you wonder what happens if the next McDavid/Lemieux-level megastar is a defenseman instead of a forward and scoring inched up a bit, and maybe expansion diluted the talent pool ... I mean, maybe, right?

A more likely scenario might be that someday we see a star who spends time at both forward and defense depending on the situation. This wouldn't just be a guy who changes position over the course of his career, like Red Kelly or Brent Burns, but someone who can actually be deployed differently shift-to-shift as a matchup nightmare. Sort of like how the Red Wings briefly used Sergei Fedorov, but all the time. Would that count as a defenseman scoring record, though? I'm not sure it would.

Verdict: At least theoretically breakable.

Most consecutive point-per-game seasons

The record: It was set by some guy named Sidney Crosby, way back in the bygone era of, uh, March. By scoring his 80th point of the year, he became a point-per-game player for the 20th straight season (and counting).

It's a genuinely impressive record, but it also feels like the mark should be higher. Granted, not many forwards last 20 years in this league, and far fewer are productive for that entire stretch. But because this is a rate-based stat, it at least doesn't insist on players staying healthy. The fact that guys like Gretzky and Gordie Howe couldn't do it should tell us how difficult the mark is to reach. But especially in an era where scoring is on the rise, it certainly doesn't feel impossible.

Verdict: Breakable, and not just by Crosby next year.

Undefeated streak

The record: The Flyers set the mark to start the 1979-80 season, going 35 games before finally losing.

We've seen the records for both consecutive wins and losses set or challenged in recent years, so they're clearly in play. But the Flyers' mark is different territory.

There are two reasons for that. The first is parity, or the lack thereof when the Flyers were rolling over the league. That year had seen four teams enter the league in the WHA absorption, to go along with the 11 expansion teams from the 1970s. Many of those teams were very bad, easy pickings for a legitimate contender like the Flyers.

But more importantly, you'll notice that this is an "undefeated" streak, not a winning streak. That's because we still had ties back then. The Flyers won 25 games and had 10 ties during their streak. Nobody beat them, but then again, there was no overtime that season, let alone three-on-three or shootouts.

That means some of this gets into semantics, and what exactly we mean by "undefeated." Are we counting an overtime loss as a loss? In today's NHL, a team that gets a loser point has still lost, a fact on which everyone agrees except for society's worst monsters. But if you want to change the phrasing a bit and call the Flyers' stretch a points streak, then OTLs wouldn't end it. The 2012-13 Hawks started the season 21-0-3, which didn't quite have those old Flyers sweating but was at least within range.

Verdict: If we mean games without a loss, it's unbreakable. If we mean games with at least one point, I think it's in play.

And finally, since we just mentioned the 1970s Flyers ...

Penalty minutes

The records: Let's end this on a two-for-one. Dave Schultz holds the single-season record with 472 for the 1974-75 Broad Street Bullies, while Tiger Williams has the career mark at 3,971.

By comparison, the career leader among active players is Tom Wilson's 1,520, and Micheal Haley's 212 minutes in 2017-18 was the last time anyone even got to a third of Schultz's single-season mark.

Verdict: Quite possibly more unbreakable than Hall's games streak.

The Athletic / When NHL fighters become teammates — and even friends: ‘You jumped me!’

By Peter Baugh- April 10, 2025

The realization hit Nicolas Aube-Kubel like a punch. He was driving to the Westchester County Airport on this late-March day, having just been called up to the Rangers, which meant the 28-year-old winger was becoming teammates with a fellow NHL player he had long hated to face.

“Shoot,” Aube-Kubel thought to himself. “I have to meet Trocheck now.”

Back in December, when Aube-Kubel was on the Sabres, he nailed Rangers center Vincent Trocheck with a reverse hit in his defensive zone, knocking Trocheck down. Trocheck took issue with the check, which caught him high, and charged at his opponent. The two dropped their gloves, and Aube-Kubel landed a couple of blows before Trocheck fell to the ice.

Three months later, on trade deadline day, the Rangers acquired Aube-Kubel from the Sabres for Erik Brännström. Since Aube-Kubel was in the minors at the time of the deal, he initially joined the AHL’s Hartford Wolf Pack. The Rangers recalled him before a West Coast road trip, setting up his first encounter with Trocheck since the fight. After arriving at the Westchester airport, Aube-Kubel approached his former foe on the team plane.

“I’m glad I have you on my side now,” he told Trocheck.

The pair shared a laugh, reminiscing about the fight; Trocheck brought up how Buffalo Bills offensive lineman Dion Dawkins, a four-time Pro Bowler, had been sitting in the front row that night and evidently loved what he saw, banging on the glass and pumping up the KeyBank Center crowd. Then they settled into being teammates.

“It’s not something you’re going to hold a grudge over,” Trocheck said later. “Part of the game.”

And it’s far from unique to Aube-Kubel and Trocheck. The continued existence of fighting in the NHL forces players to occasionally join forces with someone they’ve punched. Aube-Kubel, for example, has now skated alongside three of the seven players he’s fought in the NHL. Among them is Sabres defenseman Connor Clifton, with whom Aube-Kubel said he has since become “best buddies.”

When Rangers center Sam Carrick was with the Ducks’ AHL affiliate in 2021, for instance, he challenged Vincent Desharnais to a bout after Desharnais delivered a knee-on-knee hit to one of Carrick’s teammates. Then, after the Oilers acquired Carrick at the 2024 trade deadline, he and Desharnais became teammates themselves. They relitigated the hit, chuckling about Carrick finding it dirty.

“Eventually you always laugh about it,” Carrick said. “It’s one of those things where maybe in the heat of the moment you’re mad, but I think there’s a mutual respect there.”

Players take different approaches to reuniting with former combatants on the same roster. Some address it as soon as possible. They discuss the plays that led to it, compare perspectives, and share a laugh.

“It’s just more of a ball-busting thing,” Rangers center J.T. Miller said.

Carrick illustrated as much. With Trocheck in earshot in the Rangers’ dressing room, Carrick loudly exclaimed, “I forgot about (Aube-Kubel) beating the wheels off Trocheck earlier in the year.” Carrick also mentioned Miller fighting his brother, Trevor Carrick, during their junior hockey days.

“Beat his ass,” Miller recalled.

But other players leave their previous encounters unaddressed. While with the Coyotes last season, defenseman J.J. Moser fought Mikey Eyssimont, who was playing for the Tampa Bay Lightning at the time. Then, over the summer, the Lightning traded for Moser. The defenseman said he could have made a joke when he met Eyssimont, but the right opportunity never came up.

“You probably are not talking about any other situation,” Moser said. “If you are playing against a guy and you take the puck away from him, you’re not going to go back and (say), ‘Oh, you remember when I took the puck away?’”

Eyssimont, meanwhile, fought multiple eventual Lightning teammates: Brayden Point in 2023, and Moser and Cam Atkinson last season. “You jumped me!” Atkinson recalled joking when they later met in Tampa. “That’s bulls—!” Atkinson had played more than 700 NHL games without a fight before taking on Eyssimont, and found it amusing that “the one guy I get into some sort of scrap with is my teammate the next year.”

To Atkinson, keeping the situation light was a way to show there was no bad blood. As if to further demonstrate this point, the winger referred to Eyssimont, who was traded to the Kraken at the deadline, as a great guy.

“Nine times out of 10 there’s really no animosity,” Miller said. “Have a beer with a guy after. It shouldn’t be a problem.”

There are times when players who drop the gloves genuinely don’t like each other, Miller added, but it’s not common. For example, he had nothing against Carson Soucy when they fought in 2022-23. Miller was with the Canucks at the time, and Vancouver had gone winless through its first seven games of the season. Coach Bruce Boudreau had called his players out ahead of a game against the Kraken, Miller remembered, so he felt he needed to do something. Soucy, then with Seattle, just happened to be standing close to Miller early in the first period when Miller was looking to fight. There was nothing personal to it. Soucy respected Miller for trying to pump up his team.

Soucy signed with the Canucks ahead of the next season, and he and Miller were both traded to the Rangers in separate deals this year. The two teammates joked about their fight early on after Soucy joined Vancouver, but they haven’t really discussed it since.

“Guys don’t fight each other on the ice because they hate each other,” said Rangers winger Brennan Othmann, who fought eventual teammate Casey Fitzgerald in the AHL last season. “They fight each other to get momentum or they’re sticking up for a teammate after a hit or whatever it is.”

Unsurprisingly, league heavyweights are the most likely candidates to wind up playing with someone they once fought. When Ryan Reaves was traded from the Rangers to the Wild in November 2022, he found himself sharing a dressing room with Marcus Foligno — a player he had fought multiple times, including two months prior to the trade.

Foligno thought about their previous fights as soon as Minnesota acquired Reaves, particularly how the recent punches “stuck with me for about two more weeks on the top of my head.” Foligno, still with the Wild, said fans have since asked him to sign a photo that Reaves had posted on his Instagram page in the wake of one of their fights. The two even dropped the gloves again after Reaves left for the Maple Leafs, but they still talk. There are no hard feelings.

“Reavo was awesome and easy to get along with right away, despite having some run-ins with him,” Foligno said. “Usually those guys understand what it takes to win and what it takes to bring a team close.”

As is the case with Foligno and Reaves, there's plenty of familiarity between frequent fighters. The Devils' Kurtis MacDermid and the Flyers' Nicolas Deslauriers, for example, once lived together as roommates during Kings development camp. The two have gone on to fight five times over their careers.

"Nothing personal," MacDermid said during the 2021-22 season, when he twice fought Deslauriers. "I respect him as a player and a person, and he's a really great guy and good player. It's just a part of the job."

Rangers bruiser Matt Rempe has yet to become teammates with one of his past opponents, but he's encountered plenty away from the rink: While playing junior hockey in the Western Hockey League, he sometimes palled around with them at bars over the summer in his native Calgary.

"You run into guys and (say) 'oh, I fought you! Let me buy you a beer,'" he said.

But the longer Rempe's career goes, the more likely it is that he'll end up playing alongside someone he's tried to beat to a pulp. His reaction then will probably be similar: share a laugh, enjoy a drink and proceed on good terms.

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: What to watch Wednesday

By ESPN staff- April 10, 2025

Following a busy 10-game Tuesday night in the NHL, it's a relatively quiet five-game evening Wednesday. Nevertheless, there are playoff and draft lottery ramifications aplenty, so let's hit all five matchups rapid-fire:

Toronto Maple Leafs at Tampa Bay Lightning

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

While the Leafs appear destined for a top-two spot in the Atlantic, the Lightning can still catch them for the No. 1 seed. If the Lightning are going to do it, a game like this is a prime opportunity to make up ground with a regulation win.

Philadelphia Flyers at New York Rangers

7:30 p.m. (TNT)

The Rangers lost their two most recent games by a combined score of 9-1, and their playoff hopes are dwindling quickly. A win over the Flyers would be a good step toward potentially climbing back into the playoffs. Philly is fourth in the draft lottery order heading into this matchup -- and bear in mind the Flyers also own the first-round picks of the Colorado Avalanche and Edmonton Oilers.

San Jose Sharks at Minnesota Wild

8 p.m. (ESPN+)

Speaking of occupying a great place in the draft lottery order, the Sharks are No. 1, and they are four points clear of the Chicago Blackhawks for that spot. The Wild are holding on to the second Western wild-card spot, and they enter the evening four points up on the Flames.

St. Louis Blues at Edmonton Oilers

10 p.m. (TNT)

The Blues' 12-game winning streak came to a halt Monday at the hands of the Winnipeg Jets, and they'll be looking to start another one here against the Oilers. St. Louis is in the first wild-card position, two points ahead of the Wild. The Oilers appear to be a lock for the No. 3 spot in the Pacific, bringing on a first-round matchup with the Los Angeles Kings for the fourth straight postseason.

Calgary Flames at Anaheim Ducks

10 p.m. (ESPN+)

Calgary's chances to jump into wild-card position have faded recently, so getting two points out of this game is crucial. As noted above, they are four points back of the Wild for that final spot. The Ducks enter the contest in the No. 8 spot in the lottery order, right in a jumble of teams between 73 and 76 points, so they can move up pretty easily based on their performance in the final five games.

With the regular season ending April 17, we'll help you track it all with the NHL playoff watch. As we traverse the final stretch, we'll provide details on all the playoff races, along with the teams jockeying for position in the 2025 NHL draft lottery.

Note: Playoff chances are via Statthletes.

Jump ahead:

Current playoff matchups

Today's schedule

Yesterday's scores

Expanded standings

Race for No. 1 pick

Current playoff matchups

Eastern Conference

A1 Toronto Maple Leafs vs. WC1 Ottawa Senators

A2 Tampa Bay Lightning vs. A3 Florida Panthers

M1 Washington Capitals vs. WC2 Montreal Canadiens

M2 Carolina Hurricanes vs. M3 New Jersey Devils

Western Conference

C1 Winnipeg Jets vs. WC2 Minnesota Wild

C2 Dallas Stars vs. C3 Colorado Avalanche

P1 Vegas Golden Knights vs. WC1 St. Louis Blues

P2 Los Angeles Kings vs. P3 Edmonton Oilers

Wednesday's games

Note: All times ET. All games not on TNT or NHL Network are available to stream on ESPN+ (local blackout restrictions apply).

Toronto Maple Leafs at Tampa Bay Lightning, 7 p.m.

Philadelphia Flyers at New York Rangers, 7:30 p.m. (TNT)

San Jose Sharks at Minnesota Wild, 8 p.m.

St. Louis Blues at Edmonton Oilers, 10 p.m. (TNT)

Calgary Flames at Anaheim Ducks, 10 p.m.

Tuesday's scoreboard

Buffalo Sabres 3, Carolina Hurricanes 0

Montreal Canadiens 4, Detroit Red Wings 1

Florida Panthers 3, Toronto Maple Leafs 1

Boston Bruins 7, New Jersey Devils 2

Columbus Blue Jackets 5, Ottawa Senators 2

Pittsburgh Penguins 5, Chicago Blackhawks 0

Nashville Predators 7, New York Islanders 6 (OT)

Vancouver Canucks 6, Dallas Stars 5 (OT)

Utah Hockey Club 7, Seattle Kraken 1

Colorado Avalanche 3, Vegas Golden Knights 2 (SO)

Expanded standings

Atlantic Division

x - Toronto Maple Leafs

Points: 98

Regulation wins: 39

Playoff position: A1

Games left: 5

Points pace: 104.4

Next game: @ TB (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Tampa Bay Lightning

Points: 96

Regulation wins: 39

Playoff position: A2

Games left: 5

Points pace: 102.2

Next game: vs. TOR (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Florida Panthers

Points: 94

Regulation wins: 36

Playoff position: A3

Games left: 4

Points pace: 98.8

Next game: vs. DET (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Ottawa Senators

Points: 90

Regulation wins: 33

Playoff position: WC1

Games left: 4

Points pace: 94.6

Next game: vs. MTL (Friday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Montreal Canadiens

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 29

Playoff position: WC2

Games left: 4

Points pace: 91.5

Next game: @ OTT (Friday)

Playoff chances: 97.7%

Tragic number: N/A

Detroit Red Wings

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 84.1

Next game: @ FLA (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 0.4%

Tragic number: 2

e - Buffalo Sabres

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 80.9

Next game: @ CBJ (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Boston Bruins

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 25

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 75.8

Next game: vs. CHI (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Metro Division

y - Washington Capitals

Points: 107

Regulation wins: 42

Playoff position: M1

Games left: 5

Points pace: 114.0

Next game: vs. CAR (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Carolina Hurricanes

Points: 96

Regulation wins: 41

Playoff position: M2

Games left: 5

Points pace: 102.2

Next game: @ WSH (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

New Jersey Devils

Points: 89

Regulation wins: 36

Playoff position: M3

Games left: 4

Points pace: 93.6

Next game: vs. PIT (Friday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

New York Rangers

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 32

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 84.1

Next game: vs. PHI (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 0.7%

Tragic number: 3

New York Islanders

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 27

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 84.1

Next game: vs. NYR (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 0.8%

Tragic number: 2

Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 25

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 84.1

Next game: vs. BUF (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 0.3%

Tragic number: 2

e - Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 22

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 78.9

Next game: @ NJ (Friday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 20

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 75.6

Next game: @ NYR (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Central Division

x - Winnipeg Jets

Points: 110

Regulation wins: 42

Playoff position: C1

Games left: 4

Points pace: 115.6

Next game: @ DAL (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Dallas Stars

Points: 106

Regulation wins: 41

Playoff position: C2

Games left: 4

Points pace: 111.4
Next game: vs. WPG (Thursday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Colorado Avalanche
Points: 100
Regulation wins: 39
Playoff position: C3
Games left: 3
Points pace: 103.8
Next game: vs. VAN (Thursday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
St. Louis Blues
Points: 93
Regulation wins: 31
Playoff position: WC1
Games left: 3
Points pace: 96.5
Next game: @ EDM (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 97.2%
Tragic number: N/A
Minnesota Wild
Points: 91
Regulation wins: 33
Playoff position: WC2
Games left: 4
Points pace: 95.7
Next game: vs. SJ (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 91.8%
Tragic number: N/A
Utah Hockey Club
Points: 84

Regulation wins: 28
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 4
Points pace: 88.3
Next game: vs. NSH (Thursday)
Playoff chances: 0.1%
Tragic number: 1
e - Nashville Predators
Points: 64
Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 4
Points pace: 67.3
Next game: @ UTA (Thursday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
e - Chicago Blackhawks
Points: 54
Regulation wins: 19
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 4
Points pace: 56.8
Next game: @ BOS (Thursday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
Pacific Division
x - Vegas Golden Knights
Points: 103
Regulation wins: 43
Playoff position: P1
Games left: 4
Points pace: 108.3
Next game: vs. SEA (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Los Angeles Kings
Points: 97
Regulation wins: 39
Playoff position: P3
Games left: 5
Points pace: 103.3
Next game: vs. ANA (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
Edmonton Oilers
Points: 93
Regulation wins: 32
Playoff position: P2
Games left: 5
Points pace: 99.0
Next game: vs. STL (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 99.6%
Tragic number: N/A
Calgary Flames
Points: 87
Regulation wins: 28
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 5
Points pace: 92.7
Next game: @ ANA (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 11.3%
Tragic number: 6
Vancouver Canucks
Points: 85
Regulation wins: 27
Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4
Points pace: 89.4
Next game: @ COL (Thursday)
Playoff chances: 0.1%
Tragic number: 2
e - Anaheim Ducks
Points: 76
Regulation wins: 24
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 5
Points pace: 80.9
Next game: vs. CGY (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
e - Seattle Kraken
Points: 74
Regulation wins: 28
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 3
Points pace: 76.8
Next game: @ VGK (Thursday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
e - San Jose Sharks
Points: 50
Regulation wins: 14
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 5
Points pace: 53.3
Next game: @ MIN (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E

Note: A "y" means that the team has clinched the division title. An "x" means that the team has clinched a playoff berth. An "e" means that the team has been eliminated from playoff contention.

Race for the No. 1 pick

The NHL uses a draft lottery to determine the order of the first round, so the team that finishes in last place is not guaranteed the No. 1 selection. As of 2021, a team can move up a maximum of 10 spots if it wins the lottery, so only 11 teams are eligible for the No. 1 pick. Full details on the process are [here](#). Matthew Schaefer, a defenseman for the OHL's Erie Otters, is No. 1 on the draft board.

1. San Jose Sharks

Points: 50

Regulation wins: 14

2. Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 54

Regulation wins: 19

3. Nashville Predators

Points: 64

Regulation wins: 23

4. Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 20

5. Boston Bruins

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 25

6. Seattle Kraken

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 28

7. Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 22

8. Anaheim Ducks

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 24

9. Buffalo Sabres

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 28

10. Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 25

11. New York Islanders

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 27

12. Detroit Red Wings

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 28

13. New York Rangers

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 32

14. Utah Hockey Club

Points: 84

Regulation wins: 28

15. Vancouver Canucks

Points: 85

Regulation wins: 27

16. Calgary Flames

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 28

ESPN / NHL Urgency Index: Who needs to win the Stanley Cup now?

By Neil Paine- April 10, 2025

Reactions

The 2024-25 NHL regular season has certainly been a journey, between the emergence of unexpected Stanley Cup and MVP contenders, an incredible 4 Nations Face-Off, blockbuster trades, big winning streaks and, most recently, Alex Ovechkin breaking Wayne Gretzky's record for career NHL goals.

But we all know the real hockey season starts April 19 when the puck drops on the Stanley Cup playoffs. With it will come the intensity and rugged play that we've come to expect over the years as teams make their quest for the Cup.

Oh, and there will also be pressure. Lots and lots of pressure.

To quantify exactly how much weight each team is under to win the Cup right now, I developed the Urgency Index. In it, every playoff team is graded on a 0-10 scale (relative to other playoff squads) in different categories representing reasons why they need to win ASAP:

- Contender status (based on their Elo rating-based odds to win the Cup)
- Market pressure (based on a combination of fanbase and market size)
- Current Cup drought for the franchise
- Recent playoff frustrations (based on total postseason wins over the past five years without a Cup)
- Average roster age (where older = more pressure)
- Contract urgency (average remaining years for the team's top three active players by goals above replacement before they hit free agency).

Since some situations imply more urgency to win than others, double weight has been added on the contender status, team age and market pressure categories and half-weight on the average free agent years remaining (since teams can often find a way to extend stars if they need to). Then, the totals have been added up to arrive at this semi-scientific ranking of the top playoff teams that have to win a championship this season -- or else.

Jump to a team:

Carolina | Dallas | Edmonton

Los Angeles | Minnesota | Tampa Bay

Toronto | Winnipeg | 8 more teams

1. Edmonton Oilers

The Oilers' Cup chances have slipped in recent weeks, which caused their contender rating to dip here -- for what it's worth, they're still tied for fifth in ESPN BET's odds -- but they didn't need it to rank first on the Urgency Index anyway. This is the oldest playoff roster in the league, trying to win the first titles for two of the game's greatest players (Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl) in a hockey-obsessed market, not having won a Cup since 1990, and coming fresh off a Game 7 loss in the Finals last season.

Add in that the Oilers need to work out contract extensions soon for McDavid and Evan Bouchard, and Edmonton is the model of a franchise that's at the peak of its contending era. If not this season, when will they finally win one?

Playoff outlook: As the likely third-place team in the Pacific, Edmonton will get a very familiar first-round foe: the Los Angeles Kings, whom they've defeated each of the past three seasons.

That's the good news. The bad news is that the Oilers are dealing with injuries to McDavid and Draisaitl, and their 46.2% win percentage against above-average Elo teams is well below any other top contender's mark this season. It would be tough to see another season of McDavid's prime be derailed at the very end.

2. (tie) Dallas Stars

The Stars would make this list just for the bold deadline trade that produced Mikko Rantanen from the Carolina Hurricanes, but they solidify their spot by virtue of not making the finals since 2020 despite having knocked on the door so often with this group in recent postseasons. And even if that Cup Final trip is included, the Stars had the third-most playoff wins (45) by any NHL team in a six-season span from 2019 to 2024 without a ring to show for it.

They're still young -- 12th youngest in the league overall, to be exact, and one of the youngest playoff teams -- so there's plenty of runaway ahead for Jake Oettinger, Jason Robertson, Thomas Harley and the rest. (But the latter two of those do need new contracts after 2025-26, and captain Jamie Benn is up this summer.) After a pair of losses in the conference finals, Dallas might not get a better Cup chance than it has right now.

Playoff outlook: Dallas is pursuing Winnipeg for both the top spot in the Central and the No. 1 seed in the West, which matters quite a bit -- it means the difference between playing one of the wild-card teams (St. Louis or, most likely, Minnesota) as a heavy first-round favorite, and having to deal with Cale Makar, Nathan MacKinnon and the Colorado Avalanche in Round 1.

The Stars are better than Colorado by metrics such as Elo ratings and Hockey-Reference's simple rating system (SRS), but the prospect that their run could end right away ratchets up the pressure in Dallas even higher.

2. (tie) Toronto Maple Leafs

When is there ever not crushing pressure on the Leafs to win the Cup? No need to belabor the details here, but Toronto hasn't seen a championship parade for this team down Bay Street since the spring of 1967 -- and mix in the size and avidity of the Toronto market, and these are the kings of both our "Cup drought" and "market pressure" stats.

The only mitigating factors might be that this team is still relatively young, so it will have more chances down the road, and Leafs fans have seen seasons like this go sideways so many times before that they tend to temper their expectations with the hardened cynicism that comes with decades of heartbreak. But make no mistake, with Mitch Marner's contract situation hanging over the future of the Leafs' core, there is as much urgency to win now as usual.

Playoff outlook: With what will probably be the No. 2 seed in the East, Toronto is looking at a likely first-round matchup with the wild-card Ottawa Senators. The Leafs ought to be favored on paper, and an uncharacteristic balance between offense and defense might offer this version of the team a higher postseason ceiling than usual.

But who are we kidding? It's the Leafs. They're not under pressure to win so much as to outrun the cloud of doom that has followed the franchise everywhere.

4. Winnipeg Jets

As far as best chances to win go, it's hard to top what Winnipeg is facing this season. While there are still questions about whether it is ready to make a deep postseason run -- it has won one playoff round since going to the conference finals in 2018 -- the Jets are as poised on paper to win the Cup as any team, with the league's top SRS (by far) being driven by the league's best goalie, Connor Hellebuyck.

They might also be underrated by our system for a few reasons. First, for the purposes of their Cup drought, we're using Hockey-Reference's definition of the Jets franchise, which extends to the Atlanta Thrashers, rather than the Utah Hockey Club/Coyotes incarnation that includes the original Jets. Second, Winnipeg gets dinged for being the league's only market under a metro population of 1 million -- but although we also adjust for fan avidity, it still might undersell the support the Jets receive while carrying the banner for that long-awaited Canadian Cup win.

Playoff outlook: If they can hold off the Stars in the Central division, the Jets will set themselves up to face Minnesota in Round 1 -- a favorable matchup between a goaltending stalwart and a team struggling to score with Kirill Kaprizov on injured reserve. After that, though, all bets are off in the tough West.

But unlike Edmonton above, the Jets have the best winning percentage against good opponents (73.8%) of any NHL team this season.

5. Los Angeles Kings

There is built-in urgency when you've lost to the same opponent in three -- going on four -- consecutive postseasons. In fact, that might be the main factor the Kings are confronting in the 2025 playoffs: Can they finally beat the Oilers? (Admittedly, this is a way in which the "recent frustration" category lets us down -- you can't rack up playoff wins if you keep losing right away ... to the same team.)

But beyond that, the Kings have uncertainty with their core after next season -- how long will the Anze Kopitar era last? -- and they do play in the NHL's second-largest market. L.A.'s renaissance in recent seasons is a great story, but if they want it to produce anything beyond early playoff exits, the clock is ticking.

Playoff outlook: Again, the most immediate concern is whether L.A. can finally get past Edmonton, in a battle of teams who each have their own sources of pressure to win right now. Beyond that, the Kings still have the same limitation as last season: Their top-5 defense is held back by an inability to score (No. 18 in goals per game) despite getting a 20-goal season from Warren Foegele after poaching him from the Oilers, of all teams.

But if there's hope for L.A. to finally get its breakthrough over Edmonton, it's that they will go into the playoffs in better form (according to Elo) than they did a year ago.

6. Carolina Hurricanes

Carolina often strikes a similar profile to Dallas, in terms of highly talented teams that have been trying again and again for that Cup breakthrough in recent years -- and their connection was deepened further through the Rantanen trade. So it's a bit surprising that Carolina's urgency index is so much lower than that of Dallas. Certainly the teams are similar in terms of contender status, as well as recent frustration: the 2018-19 to 2023-24 Hurricanes have won the second-most playoff games (38) in any six-season span by a team that made zero finals trips over the same range of years. The Canes even check in with an older roster, No. 7 in the league by average age.

One difference is the Raleigh, North Carolina market is among the smallest in the playoff field, even though it punches above its weight in terms of attendance, slicing into the pressure in our formula. And the other is a testament to the job done by former general manager Don Waddell and his successor Eric Tulsy, who reduced the amount of free agent urgency around this core by locking Sebastian Aho, Seth Jarvis, Shayne Gostisbehere, Jaccob Slavin and Andrei Svechnikov into deals that keep them with the club for at least the next two seasons after 2024-25.

Playoff outlook: Carolina will face the New Jersey Devils in Round 1, matching it with a team that has injury problems -- Jack Hughes is out for the season and Dougie Hamilton will sit out a chunk of the playoffs as well -- but also the No. 4-ranked defense by goals allowed per game.

The Canes are favored as long as they can play their usual puck-control game, and they've taken two of three from the Washington Capitals so far in the regular season, which might become pertinent in Round 2. Another trip to the conference finals is very possible, as is the urgency that comes with it.

7. (tie) Tampa Bay Lightning

A lot of the Lightning's placement comes from ranking as the fourth-oldest team in hockey this season. Though the Bolts have added players since their run of three straight Cup Final appearances in 2020-22, the most notable being Jake Guentzel, each of their other top-10 players by GAR were with the team in at least one of those dynastic seasons.

All of this underscores just how much Tampa Bay is still powered by Andrei Vasilevskiy, Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point, Victor Hedman and the rest of the core that was so dominant earlier in the decade. But the downside of that reliance is that it comes with urgency to win while they're all still together and producing, because one never knows when it will end.

Playoff outlook: The Battle of Florida has been a staple rivalry in recent postseasons, with either the Lightning or the Panthers ending the other's season in 2021, 2022 and 2024 -- and we're probably due for another installment this spring. Although Florida is still the defending champion, Tampa Bay has the better goal differential and Elo rating, as well as far better health as the playoffs near.

Unless Matthew Tkachuk and Sasha Barkov can come back and play well again quickly for the Panthers, the Bolts' early playoff outlook is far from gloomy.

7. (tie) Minnesota Wild

The Wild seldom have huge expectations as a Cup contender, so it can be difficult to think of them as a team with urgency to win. But although they check in with just a 1% chance to make the Final, Minnesota checks off a lot of the other boxes defining a team under pressure. The Wild are the league's eighth-oldest team, and they must make deals soon with a number of their key players, from Filip Gustavsson in net to prime-age star Kirill Kaprizov and young Marco Rossi at forward.

And then there's the building pressure for a team in hockey-mad Minnesota to make a dent in the postseason: In their 23 previous seasons, the Wild have won four playoff series, half of which came in a single magical 2003 postseason. Success for this franchise is long overdue.

Playoff outlook: Said success is, admittedly, not overly likely in 2025. Though they are a good bet to hold the last wild-card spot in the West, the Wild probably will draw either the Jets or Stars in Round 1, where they would be big underdogs in either scenario. Kaprizov hasn't played since late January because of a lower-body injury, and he will have to shake off the rust even if he returns by the playoffs.

Again, the expectations aren't necessarily there for a deep playoff run -- or else we might really be talking about how badly this team needs to win a playoff series.

Ranking the rest

I was a little surprised Washington didn't crack the top eight, as this unexpectedly amazing season -- capped off by Ovechkin's record goal -- creates plenty of pressure to cash in with a Cup. But the truth is, Washington's front office has done an excellent job of building a bridge to a sustainable post-Ovechkin future, which reduces the franchise's urgency index. (And they won a Cup fairly recently anyway.)

The rest of the list is a mix of other recent winners (Vegas, Florida, Colorado, St. Louis) or just longshots to win. And the Devils and Canadiens are especially interesting cases -- the former is a team that has gone from young and up-and-coming to one of the oldest rosters in the league, increasing the urgency level; the latter made a surprising late-season run in one of the league's top hockey markets, though their youth might mean the future really begins next season and beyond.