



**Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
February 11, 2025**

Columbus Blue Jackets

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[Columbus Dispatch / Analytic models, oddsmakers give Columbus Blue Jackets low odds to make the playoffs](#)

By Brian Hedger – February 11, 2025

It's a good thing the Blue Jackets have already proven they're capable of taking statistical predictive analysis and tossing it into a bonfire, proverbially speaking.

Otherwise, they might consider forfeiting the remaining 26 games on their schedule after returning in a couple of weeks from the NHL's winter break to hold the 4 Nations Face-Off international tournament Feb. 12-20 in Montreal and Boston.

Despite overcoming long preseason odds, the Blue Jackets are one point behind the Detroit Red Wings for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference. Their presence in that spot, despite losing Johnny Gaudreau to an offseason tragedy and enduring multiple long-term injuries to key players, flies in the face of analysts who remain unconvinced of their playoff worthiness.

According to MoneyPuck, a site that relies on data analysis to predict what's going to happen each NHL season, the Blue Jackets have an 8.8% chance of qualifying for the playoffs, a 1.8% chance of advancing past the first round, a 0.5% chance of making it to the conference finals stage and no chance of winning the Stanley Cup.

Good thing the Blue Jackets aren't paying attention.

"We've been trying to get to the playoffs since I've been here," forward Justin Danforth said. "It hasn't been a lack of effort. It's just that things haven't played out the way we wanted them to play out yet. This is fun. It's just different, but it's something I've missed. We'll be excited for the stretch run."

Columbus Blue Jackets hurt by injuries

The Blue Jackets went into the NHL's break on a four-game winless skid (0-3-1) thanks largely to key injuries to top center Sean Monahan (wrist), leading goal-scorer Kirill Marchenko (broken jaw), captain Boone Jenner (shoulder), forward Yegor Chinakhov (back), top-pairing defenseman Dante Fabbro (upper body) and alternate captain Erik Gudbranson (shoulder).

Jenner, who underwent shoulder surgery in October, is expected to make his season debut following the break and the Blue Jackets could also get others back around that time. Fabbro is believed to be dealing with a concussion, Chinakhov is back to skating after missing 35 games with an unspecified back issue.

Gudbranson may return in early-to-mid March, Marchenko hasn't been given a set return timeline and Monahan – who's still the Jackets' third-leading scorer after missing the past 15 games — could return to center the Blue Jackets' top forward line in mid-to-late March.

The key questions for the Blue Jackets are whether they'll be able to stay afloat long enough to add those names back into their lineup and what president of hockey operations/general manager Don Waddell does with multiple pending free agents prior to the NHL trade deadline's arrival at 3 p.m. March 7.

Long odds for Columbus Blue Jackets

MoneyPuck predicts they'll drop far out of the playoff race, and oddsmakers agree. FanDuel Sportsbook, for example, has the Blue Jackets at +680 odds to qualify for the postseason and –1400 to miss for the fifth straight year.

BetMGM has Columbus with +500 odds to make the playoffs and –700 to miss, while BetOnline lists +425 for the Blue Jackets to qualify.

“The one thing I can tell you about our group is that we’re not a team that gets away from it too much,” Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. “They’re pretty tight. So, we expect them to come back ready to make a push at the end of this break.”

[BlueJackets.com / Q&A: Don Waddell discusses the state of the Blue Jackets](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – February 11, 2025

Life has come fast for Blue Jackets president of hockey operations and general manager Don Waddell in his first season in charge.

In just over eight months since he was hired, Waddell has selected a new head coach, oversaw his first draft, added six regulars to the CBJ roster, shepherded the Blue Jackets through a trying offseason, made a major trade, and watched as his team has defied the experts to be in the playoff race with a third of the season to go.

It's a lot of ground to cover, but we gave it our best shot. BlueJackets.com sat down with Waddell on Thursday to get his thoughts on the squad at the 4 Nations break, from what he's learned about the organization to his thoughts on the team's success this season to how he'll approach the upcoming trade deadline.

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Now that you're midway through your first season, you've gotten a chance to get to know the city and the fanbase. What have you figured out about the fans and this team and this organization so far?

"I sensed it last year, but the loyalty and the commitment from not just our fans but the whole city to root on the Blue Jackets has been tremendous. What I really like is everybody has been really welcoming wherever you go, and people have been very appreciative of how things are going. It's not always winning or losing, but how things have been handled through some tough situations. I just can't say enough about our support and the people I've had the opportunity to meet. It's been tremendous."

We see you on the concourse all the time interacting with fans. How have those conversations helped inform you to learn about what the fan base is all about?

"I like to get out and talk to our fans. Our last road trip in Vegas and Utah, I saw a lot of our fans out there, which was nice. You get people's feelings not only about the team but about other things, too, on the business side. And that's what I'm here for. I'm not going to have all the answers, but I can at least find out for them."

"To a person, everyone has been very complimentary toward the coaching staff and the players' commitment. I don't know if I've heard one negative all season about lack of effort. That was something we've said all along – we might not be the most talented team in the league, but we can be the hardest working team in the league. There's only a couple of games I can think of that I didn't think we were the hardest working team."

That leads into my next question. A lot of that goes back to head coach Dean Evason and the staff he's assembled. You had an important decision to make in that regard when you first got here, but it seems like it's worked out pretty well. What's impressed you the most about the staff?

"When I got here at the end of May, I went through a process with (former head coach Pascal Vincent) and decided to make that change. Media started asking me every week, 'When are you going to hire a coach?' I said, 'We have the draft coming up, we have free agency coming up.' The league wasn't changing those dates for me. I didn't want to make a rushed decision on the coaching. I wanted to make sure we did all of our homework on all the guys we were talking about. And every time I talked to Dean and then when I interviewed Dean, the passion he had not just to coach in the NHL but to coach the Blue Jackets, that stuck with me every time. He wanted to be the head coach of the Blue Jackets."

“And then when he started to assemble a staff, we brought three or four of the guys back from last year and then added a couple of new guys. I was very happy with those decisions. As we sat and talked to all of those people, everybody had the same common goal. And as we look here halfway through the season, the coaching staff is very close-knit. They do a lot of stuff together. They have each other’s support. There’s nobody ruffling feathers behind the scenes. I say the same thing about players – we want good players, we want good coaches, but we want good people. Good people take you a long way, and I really think we have that here.”

I think you can say the same thing about the guys on the ice as well – they’re close-knit, they’re good people, fun to be around. What’s impressed you most about the way they’ve performed this season?

“We had to add some players in the beginning of the year because we were short – James van Riemsdyk and Jack Johnson, Kevin Labanc, we picked up Dante Fabbro. We had to make sure I knew all of those players. I knew most of them as people, but I wanted to double-check and make sure their character and the type of person they were was going to fit in our locker room. That played a part in a lot of our decisions. We passed on a few guys I didn’t think would fit in there. I think that’s been important.

“The most impressive thing with this team is how tight they are together. Boone (Jenner) and (Erik Gudbranson) are leaders on this team and unfortunately both got hurt, but they’re around all the time while we’re at home. Other guys have stepped up – Zach Werenski, Sean Monahan, Mathieu Olivier. Not everybody is a leader, and it doesn’t mean it’s bad that you’re not a leader, but when tough times hit you, that’s when you see your true leaders step up. I certainly give a lot of credit to those guys for keeping this group together.”

I was looking back at your introductory press conference and one of the things you talked about was culture. Everybody talks about that, but you don’t get through some of the things this team has gone throughout without having a good culture. What have you noticed as you’re trying to build that?

“Culture is an overused word. I’ve said that multiple times. You can’t just say we’re going to have a good culture. You have to play the role, act the role, and the role continues to form the culture you want, but it’s lead by example. I think it starts at the top, all the way down to the trainers, everybody in the locker room, and eventually the players are a big part of that. But we all have to be on the same page, and one of the big things I always talk about is no individuals can have success without the team having success first. We live by that motto on a daily basis, and I think the team has done a good job to this point. That’s carried us a long way this year. There’s other things that have carried us also, too, but I can’t say enough about the leadership that we have and how the whole group has really come together. You go on the road, you see them together all the time. They go do different things like the curling the one time in Winnipeg. It’s just good to see.”

When you took this job, one of the things that had to be pretty exciting was the group of young players that had been drafted highly and gotten their feet wet at the NHL level. It seems like all of those guys have taken big steps this year. How exciting is that for the future of this franchise?

“Unbelievable. I said at the press conference, the cupboards aren’t bare. Do we have some work to do? 100 percent, but there’s some pieces here that we can continue to build on. We’ve put guys in a position – this is two parts. We’ve put guys in a position where it’s like a test to see how they’re going to do in that position. If they pass the test, they stay in that position and they keep growing. If they don’t pass the test, then they have to earn their way back to it.

“As we talk about the young guys, almost to a man, we gave them that opportunity and they’ve taken advantage of that. That’s what we can do as management and as coaches is provide the structure and

the opportunity, and it's up to the player. I don't care if you're drafted in the first round, if you're drafted in the fifth round. It's up to the players to take advantage of that."

You mentioned some of the veteran guys that you brought in early in the season. You look at being a young team, you need some of those guys that have been there before, and we've seen the impact that those veterans have had on the team. Was that something you really focused on in the offseason was making sure you had those guys that can show the way?

"Yeah. We were thrown some curves right off the bat, which created opportunities. When Zach Aston-Reese was put on waivers, we had that opportunity. I knew the player. I had him in training camp one year. I knew what kind of person he is. But I said before, we needed players and we needed players that could contribute, but we also needed really good people. The guys we brought in here have been everything we could ask for."

I'll ask you the question you probably get asked the most these days. The trade deadline is coming up, and this is obviously a long-term build, but you have to be enthused by the fact the team is in the race. How do you handle where you are at right now?

"I think right now, short term, I'm looking to see – and this has probably changed in the last week and a half – if we can add something up front to help this group right now because of the (Kirill) Marchenko and Monahan losses. Are we going to pay a high price for a rent-a-player? No, but if we get somebody that has some term left or a player that we think would fit well into our roster that we don't have to give up assets that I'm not willing to give up – I think if we can do that, it would be something that would send a message not only to the players and the coaches but our 5th Line support, saying that we're trying to do something.

"Saying that, a lot of teams are trying to do that. So as far as trading players away, I'm interested in hockey deals. We have a lot of draft capital. I don't need third- and fourth- and fifth-round picks. We have a lot of those. We have to make good decisions, though, if we get offered something that is going to make us better in the future. My job is to manage today but watch out for the future, obviously.

"That's why I spent so much time on the road the last couple of weeks. I went to a lot of different games, not just our games. It's going to come quick here. We have the two-week break, the trade deadline is March 7, with the outdoor game in between. There's not going to be much time. Our scouts, we had a call yesterday focused on different teams. They'll continue to do their jobs. We'll be ready for it. I anticipate there could be some in and out for sure."

A similar question about the unrestricted free agents-to-be. We get this question a lot from the fans. I'm sure you're working on a lot of stuff in regard to them, so how do you handle the fact you have players whose contracts are up at the end of the year?

"Getting mid-round picks for players and stuff like that, these players are too important for us as we go down the stretch regardless of where we're at. They've helped us get this far. I think we owe it to everybody to try to keep this group together. If there's something that blows our mind away, some kind of offer we can't refuse, we have to look at that. But where we're at, you look at the trade deadline. The guys that maybe you thought if you were out of it, you were going to move, they're almost like your deadline day acquisitions because you haven't moved them. ... We know what we have with some of these guys. If we can make this team better, that's my job to try to do that, but I'm not looking to move guys out for mid-round picks."

You've spent a lot of time with USA Hockey in your career. With the 4 Nations Face-Off this week, how great is to see best-on-best hockey happen again?

“I think it’s a great buildup to the Olympics. Unfortunately with the timing right now, you’re going to have some guys injured and stuff like that. I wish the timing could be different, but it is what it is. It’s always fun to get the best players in the league that are eligible – there’s only four countries being represented – to compete against each other. I think it’s going to be a hard tournament. I think the players, when they put the sweater on – I’ve been fortunate to wear the U.S. sweater not only as a player but as a coach and a manager. It’s a different feeling. You’re very proud of your country and want to represent your country. I’m excited to be able to watch these games and hope they’re really good, close games. And at the end of the day, I hope the USA comes out on top. We only have one player (USA defenseman Zach Werenski), so it’s easy for me to say that.”

[The Hockey News / The Blue Jackets Have A Problem Drawing Penalties. But Why?](#)

By Jason Newland – February 11, 2025

The Blue Jackets have had this issue over the last 15 games: They can't seem to draw penalties. But why? Is it something the Blue Jackets are doing wrong? Is something more sinister going on? If you're in Columbus, you may have heard of the 614Rule. Whether you believe that or not is up to you. But it's fun to talk about.

The Blue Jackets lost Sean Monahan to injury on January 7, and since then, their power play has gone cold, like ice cold. But it's not just that they can't convert; they barely seem to draw any penalties. The lack of penalties is weird considering the type of game the Blue Jackets play. They're not considered a "soft" team by any means.

Let's take a look at the numbers and you can draw your own conclusions.

Columbus has played 15 games since January 9th.

Home - 6 Games

- Total Power Plays - 5
- 23 Penalty Minutes Drawn - This includes 1 Fighting Major.
- Taking out the fight, the CBJ are averaging 3 PIM drawn per game. This includes two penalties that were matching minors, which nullified a power play.
- In the 2-8 Game vs. NYR, there were ZERO power plays awarded. NYR had zero power plays as well. The Rangers scored on a delayed penalty.
- Factoring everything in, The Jackets are averaging .83 power plays per home game over this time.
- Columbus took 33 penalty minutes leading to opponent power plays.

Away - 9 Games

- Total Power Plays - 17
- 50 Penalty Minutes Drawn - This Includes 2 Fighting Majors.
- Taking out the fights, the CBJ are averaging 4.4 PIM drawn per game. This includes multiple instances of matching minors.
- In the 1-22 Game vs. Toronto, the Jackets were awarded ZERO power plays. There was 1 fight and 2 matching minors. Toronto was given 3 power plays.
- Factoring everything in, The Jackets are averaging 1.88 power plays per away game.
- Columbus took 56 penalty minutes leading to opponent power plays.

Other Stats

- Penalty Minutes Taken per 60 - 7.98 over 56 games - 21st most
- Penalty Minutes Drawn per 60 - 7.54 over 56 games - 9th fewest

This is just a 15-game sample, but earlier in the season, they had a similar stretch where they weren't getting the benefit of penalties called against the other team. It became a "thing" when defenseman Zach Werenski even commented after a game on the lack of penalties being called against their opponents. When the players are noticing a trend, it might be a thing.

What's your take on the lack of power plays being awarded to the Jackets? There have been plenty of times when there were blatant missed calls by the officials, some even leading to injury. Defenseman Dante Fabbro was clobbered by a Mason Marchment elbow last week putting Fabbro out indefinitely.

Give us your takes below.

What's Next: Zach Werenski will now take the ice for the United States in the Four Nations Face-Off, which kicks off this coming Thursday, as the U.S. takes on Finland. The rest of the Jackets will get some much-needed R&R before coming back home to play the Chicago Blackhawks on February 22nd.

[The Hockey News / Zach Werenski Practicing As Top Pair Defenseman In First Four Nations Practice](#)

By Jason Newland – February 11, 2025

Zach Werenski is having a Norris candidate season through the first 56 games so far, and he was rewarded by being one of the first players chosen to represent the United States at the Four Nations Faceoff.

Today was the first practice for the American squad and Werenski is paired with Boston Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy on the top pair. McAvoy, from Long Beach, New York has played in 50 games and 23 points this season for the Bruins.

This comes as no surprise for people who follow the Jackets, or hockey in general, but some publications had Werenski slotted in as the 7th defenseman on the team, which is a sign that some people don't pay attention regularly.

With Quinn Hughes out, the choice for Head Coach Mike Sullivan was a simple one.

The United States schedule:

- Thursday vs. Finland (ESPN) 8 pm
- Saturday vs. Canada (ABC) 8 pm
- Monday vs. Sweden (TNT) 8 pm
- The Championship game is on February 20 on ESPN.

What's Next: Zach Werenski will now take the ice for the United States in the Four Nations Face-Off, which kicks off this coming Thursday, as the U.S. takes on Finland. The rest of the Jackets will get some much-needed R&R before coming back home to play the Chicago Blackhawks on February 22nd.

[The Hockey News / Does Noah Dobson Make Sense For The Blue Jackets?](#)

By Spencer Lazary – February 11, 2025

The New York Islanders have reportedly put their young star defenseman Noah Dobson on the trade block. Could the Columbus Blue Jackets be the team that lands him?

Dobson, 25, has been a huge part of the Islanders' blue line during his six-year NHL career. The former 12th overall pick from the 2018 NHL Draft could be on the move to a new home.

According to reports, some believe that the Islanders are dangling him on the trade market to see what the return could be.

For the Blue Jackets, it could make a lot of sense. GM Don Waddell has openly stated that he wants to reward the team for their great season while also not jeopardizing the future.

Dobson could help the team while also being a big part of their future. At 25 years old, he would fit well alongside Ivan Provorov, Zach Werenski, Denton Mateychuk, and Dante Fabbro as the core of the blue line for the foreseeable future.

If the Blue Jackets were able to add Dobson, he would slide right next to Werenski on the top pairing as a right-handed shooting defenseman.

Dobson is a pending RFA at the end of the season and currently makes \$4 million. He will likely expect a raise, which the Blue Jackets can easily afford.

However, they won't want to go higher than Werenski's \$9.5 million, which makes sense. It would keep an internal cap structure on its blue line. If Waddell can get Dobson signed for \$7-8 million and Provorov somewhere around \$7 million, it would lock up their defense core while the team continues to improve.

[The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Trade Revisit: The Deal That Sent Nash To The Rangers](#)

By Spencer Lazary – February 11, 2025

When most NHL fans think about the Columbus Blue Jackets, they think about Rick Nash. He is widely considered the greatest Blue Jackets player of all time.

Unfortunately, Nash's time with Columbus came to an end in 2012. It happens—it's sports. Even Wayne Gretzky was traded. However, that doesn't make it any easier to think about. Seeing the star player on the team you cheer for get traded will always sting. Regardless of the reason behind the move, it's something that never fully fades. But sometimes, it's good to revisit.

So, let's look back at the July 23, 2012, trade that sent Nash to the New York Rangers.

Full Trade Details:

Blue Jackets Received:

- Brandon Dubinsky
- Artem Anisimov
- Tim Erixon
- 2013 1st Round Pick

Rangers Received:

- Rick Nash
- Steven Delisle
- 2013 3rd Round Pick

Starting with the Blue Jackets, acquiring Dubinsky and Anisimov brought hope that they could help replace Nash's point production. However, it didn't turn out that way.

Dubinsky only hit 50 points once in his seven seasons with the Blue Jackets. He scored 70 goals, 153 assists, and 223 points in 430 games.

Anisimov didn't do much better. His highest point total with Columbus was 39 in three seasons. He recorded 40 goals, 44 assists, and 84 points in 168 games before being traded in 2015 as part of a package for Brandon Saad.

As for Erixon, his NHL career never took off. He played parts of four seasons in the league, three with the Blue Jackets. In his final year, he split time between three NHL clubs. He finished with one goal, 10 assists, and 11 points in 52 games.

The 2013 1st-round pick was used to select Kerby Rychel with the 19th overall pick.

On the Rangers' side, they landed the best player in the deal—and it wasn't even close. Nash played six seasons with New York, including a 69-point season. In 375 games, he tallied 145 goals, 107 assists, and 252 points before being traded to the Boston Bruins on Feb. 25, 2018. That would be the final stop of his NHL career.

As for Delisle, he never played an NHL game. Lastly, the 2013 3rd-round pick was used to select Pavel Buchnevich with the 75th overall pick.

[The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Trade Deadline Acquisitions Are Already in the Organization](#)

By Nicholas Arnold – February 11, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets find themselves in a place they may not have expected to be at the beginning of the season – squarely within the hunt for a playoff spot. Heavily aided by their group of young players seemingly all taking huge leaps forward in development, this team is going to be playing meaningful games late in the season. Because of the tragic way that the season began and since everyone loves an underdog story, there is going to be a lot of speculation as to how the Blue Jackets handle the March 7 trade deadline. Their general manager (GM) Don Waddell says they will be moderate buyers, and they can be because their big deadline acquisitions are already within the organization.

Injuries have been a major factor for Columbus over the last few seasons and they've again taken several key losses in that regard. Most players that are out right now are expected to come back at some point before the team's 82nd game in April, so the Blue Jackets shouldn't go too "hog wild" in an effort to replace them in the short term.

Blue Jackets' Returning Forwards

At the top of the list of forwards soon to return is Blue Jackets' captain Boone Jenner. He's been out after having shoulder surgery just before the start of the season. The longest-tenured Blue Jacket is versatile enough to play anywhere in the lineup and can slot in beside anyone that might need a boost in energy. It's been speculated that if all goes well Jenner could be back late this month after the 4 Nations Face-Off break. His return will provide a jolt to the lineup.

Sean Monahan was in the midst of the best season of his career. Resolidifying that he's capable of playing as the number one center on an NHL team, flanked by Kirill Marchenko and Dmitri Voronkov, he was part of one of the best lines in hockey. A wrist injury suffered against the Pittsburgh Penguins in January has had a setback and he's expected to miss another five to seven weeks.

Yegor Chinakhov has been another subtraction from the Blue Jackets' top-nine forwards. While there's been no official word from the team as to what exactly his upper-body injury is, it's become a far more significant issue than many initially expected. He's currently sitting at 35 games missed and as someone who was building on a breakout last season, his loss has been felt. Despite the lack of a timeline for his return, he's recently been reported as getting back out on the ice, so it could be expected before the season ends.

The recent loss of Marchenko will be a tough one to absorb. He's been their best and most consistent forward throughout the season, but is expected to miss the next six to eight weeks. It's due to a fluke incident where an errant puck hit him on the bench and broke his jaw. If it had to happen, at least it comes before the two-week break in the schedule which lessens the amount of games he'll miss. By that timeline, he should return by the end of March to help his team push for the postseason.

Blue Jackets' Returning Defensemen

While not hit quite as hard on the backend, the Blue Jackets have had one key subtraction. Erik Gudbranson's contract was criticized at the time of signing, but has looked better as the years have gone on. Listed at 6-foot-5 and 220 pounds, he's been a physical presence and grown to be a significant part

of the team's leadership group. His return is expected to be a couple of weeks behind Jenner, but he will solidify the Jackets' third pair and make them a little harder to play against.

The Blue Jackets have already made their key defensive addition from outside the organization for the season. They plucked Dante Fabbro off of the waiver wire from the Nashville Predators late in 2024, and he's been just what they needed. A steady defensive presence, who has allowed Zach Werenski to elevate his game to a Norris Trophy level. Fabbro has earned himself a new contract, we'll see if he gets it.

Per GM Waddell, the Blue Jackets are planning on being moderate buyers at the NHL trade deadline. Expectations of some sort of grand trade will need to be tempered as most of their success this season has come with many players on the injured reserve. With Jenner, Chinakhov, Gudbranson and the rest all expected back by the end of the season, most of their reinforcements should come from within as they continue to push for their first playoff berth post-pandemic.

[The Athletic / Top 100 drafted NHL prospects ranking: Demidov, Buium lead Wheeler's winter 2025 list](#)

By Scott Wheeler – February 11, 2025

Welcome to the winter 2025 edition of my ranking of the NHL's best prospects at The Athletic.

This two-part, twice-a-year project ranks the league's top 100 drafted skaters and top 20 drafted goalies (which will be released tomorrow).

This edition of my top 100 drafted prospects ranking includes 28 players from the 2024 draft, 32 from 2023, 29 from 2022, eight from 2021 and three from 2020. It's made up of 69 forwards and 31 defensemen (of which 13 are lefties and 18 are righties).

The Chicago Blackhawks and Washington Capitals lead the way with seven ranked prospects apiece, followed by the San Jose Sharks, Minnesota Wild and Nashville Predators with six each. The Florida Panthers are the only team without a prospect ranked.

To be considered a prospect, a skater must be under 23 years old and not fully established with their NHL club. The latter qualifier is the arbitrary section of the criteria. There, I trust my judgment for whether or not a rostered NHL player is being treated as a development case in the NHL or could still play games outside the league more than I trust any predetermined games-played cutoff. Preference for inclusion as an NHL prospect is more likely to be given to teenagers than 22-year-olds.

Since the last edition of this ranking, the following players have aged out or are now considered graduated: Macklin Celebrini, Matvei Michkov, Alexander Nikishin, Brandt Clarke, Logan Stankoven, Cutter Gauthier, Zach Benson, Lane Hutson, Kent Johnson, Shane Wright, Simon Edvinsson, Dylan Guenther, Olen Zellweger, Matt Coronato, Mavrik Bourque, Shakir Mukhamadullin, Lukas Reichel, Jackson Blake.

As always, the list is also broken down into tiers and presented within our fully customizable user interface.

[The Athletic / For the NHL's lost generation of Olympians, 4 Nations Face-Off is a reminder of what could have been](#)

By Mark Lazerus – February 11, 2025

It hurt then. It hurts a little more now.

Then, he was 21 years old, at the top of his game and the top of the world. The words “acetabular labrum” weren’t in his vocabulary, and COVID-19 didn’t even exist. There was nothing but 40-goal seasons ahead, and he’d be pulling that Team Canada sweater — and that gold medal, too — over his head soon enough. Time and talent were on his side.

So yeah, it stung when Tyler Seguin was left off the 2014 Olympic team. It had come down to the wire, and his red-hot start to his first season with the Dallas Stars, his fourth season in the NHL, wasn’t quite enough to get him in. But he was genuinely happy for his buddy Jamie Benn, who did make that Canadian roster that went on to win gold in Sochi, Russia.

“I was able to live vicariously through him, and that took the edge off a lot,” Seguin said.

Because Seguin’s turn was coming. He was sure of it. When you’re young, you’re always sure of it. Doubt and regret don’t dwell in the mind of a 21-year-old superstar professional athlete. He had won the Stanley Cup as an 18-year-old rookie and returned to the Final two years later. Everything seemed to come easy back then.

“At that time, you’re still confident in yourself that you’re going to stay healthy and stay elite and be at the top of the league,” Seguin said. “You think you have another chance. Then all of a sudden, it’s 2025 and you realize you don’t have another chance.”

Seguin has enjoyed a hell of an NHL career. He’s 12 games shy of 1,000. He’s scored 360 goals, posted 808 points and played in 133 playoff games and six All-Star games. His name is etched in silver on the game’s most hallowed prize.

But there will always be a gap in that resume. He’ll never be an Olympian. He knows that now.

“Is there bitterness?” he asks himself. “You’d have to ask me again in 10 years. I’m still bitter about not making the World Juniors, that’s always bothered me. As far as the Olympics, I don’t know, you’ll have to ask me when I retire. But man, what an experience it would have been.”

Seguin is part of a lost generation of Olympians in the NHL whose careers peaked between 2015 and 2024. They missed out on the 2018 Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, because of a dispute between the NHL, IOC and IIHF, and the 2022 Games in Beijing because of the pandemic. With the 4 Nations Face-Off starting this week in Montreal and Boston, it’s pretty clear who’s on the radar for the 2026 games in Italy — and whose Olympic hopes have been dashed forever. And it’s quite a list.

Thanks to injury and/or circumstance, Steven Stamkos never played for Canada in the Olympics. Neither did Brent Burns, Ryan O’Reilly, Taylor Hall, Claude Giroux or Mark Scheifele. Anders Lee and Phil Kessel never suited up for the United States, nor did Mikael Backlund for Sweden.

Giroux put up 102 points during the 2017-18 season — he would have been a lock for Team Canada in Pyeongchang. Kessel had a career-high 92 points that same season — he would have finally cracked Team USA. O’Reilly was in the midst of his fourth straight top-five Selke Trophy season in 2021-22, less than three years removed from a Conn Smythe. He would have made Team Canada in Beijing. Stamkos

should be a three-time Olympian, but a broken leg cost him Sochi, the NHL robbed him of Pyeongchang, the pandemic took Beijing from him, and Father Time very well might keep him out of Milano Cortina.

These are some of the best and most accomplished players of their era. Many of them have worn their nation's colors for the World Championships, or the 2016 World Cup of Hockey.

But none of them played on the world's biggest stage. And it's likely none of them ever will.

"If it doesn't happen, it just wasn't meant to be," Stamkos said. "I had three years where I would have went. One year injury, two years didn't get to go. It could be a lot different story, but that's how life goes, right? It is what it is."

It's a fluke more than anything, an odd quirk of bad timing. And none of these players needed an Olympics to validate his illustrious NHL career. But it's one of those things that gnaws at the back of a player's mind, that leaves a hole in a resume and in a hockey soul. Sidney Crosby still would be one of the greatest hockey players of all time if he hadn't played for Team Canada in Vancouver in 2010, but the golden goal he scored against the United States elevated him to an even higher echelon in the game's history. Carey Price never won the Stanley Cup in Montreal, but his performance in Sochi gave him a champion's aura and reputation.

Not going to the Olympics doesn't hurt a legacy. But going to the Olympics can cement one.

"Playing in the driveway as a kid, you're pretending to win the Stanley Cup," O'Reilly said. "The journey of that and how hard it is to do that, that's why it matters the most. The Olympics is such a short tournament, so it's different. But it's truly best on best. That's what makes it special. I don't know if I ever thought I'd have the opportunity to do it, but being in that situation, being close but not getting in, it's disappointing. It's a bummer."

It's not just about legacy, either. The very idea of being an Olympic athlete conjures up something unique in the sports world — living in a quaint alpine village, checking out the ski jumping and the luge, mingling with elite athletes from all over the world.

Summer hockey in the Toronto Maple Leafs' rink against Team Europe and Team North America simply can't measure up.

"To be an Olympian is something so cool and different," O'Reilly said. "I've been lucky enough to still play a lot of international games. I got to be a part of the World Cup (in 2016), which was cool. Still, it's not the same. You hear the stories of guys just being in the village and getting to experience that, going to other events, it's something that is just so cool. It's not even the hockey and representing your country — it's just being an Olympian. That's something special. It would have been nice to have the opportunity to try, at least."

Same goes for the 4 Nations Face-Off. Like that 2016 World Cup, it should be fun, yes, but it doesn't involve Czechia, Slovakia, Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, Latvia and, of course, Russia. The tournament should be exciting and the hockey should be of high quality, but for the players, it's as much an audition for the 2026 Olympics as anything else. That's the one that counts. And make no mistake, NHL players have their eyes set squarely on Milano Cortina.

Olympic results with NHL participation

1998

Nagano

Czech Republic

Russia
Finland
2002
Salt Lake City
Canada
United States
Russia
2006
Turin
Sweden
Finland
Czech Republic
2010
Vancouver
Canada
United States
Finland
2014
Sochi
Canada
Sweden
Finland
2026
Milan Cortina

Hurricanes goaltender Frederik Andersen suited up for all three of Denmark's games in the IIHF qualification tournament last September just to make sure his country would make the Olympics, so he could finally realize his own dream of becoming an Olympian at 36 years old. He was 8 years old when he watched NHL players participating in the Games for the first time in Nagano, Japan, and that instilled in him two lifelong goals — to be an NHLer and to be an Olympian. The first dream came quickly. The second is three decades in the making.

"In Denmark, we didn't really watch the NHL as much growing up," Andersen said. "But I remember watching the '98 Olympics on TV because they were in Japan, and the time zone was better for us. It was really cool and it made me want to do that."

For NHL players, the 2018 Games in South Korea were the real missed opportunity, the one that engenders the most frustration with the league's decision-making. Gary Bettman and the owners are always wary of shutting down their league for three weeks in the middle of the season — during the one

month where they have no football or baseball competition, at that — but the players have been steadfast in their insistence on returning to the Olympics. The 2018 decision was a bitter pill for the players to swallow.

There's not nearly as much regret about the 2022 Games in Beijing, which were played under severe COVID restrictions and lacked the usual Olympic feel and flair.

"I know some of the guys who went, and they were obviously happy to be there, but they knew that it wasn't the real experience," Andersen said.

Andersen is a pending unrestricted free agent and is turning 36 in the fall, but he'll play for Denmark whether he has an NHL job or not. Other players won't be so lucky. Team Canada is simply too good, too deep, for aging veterans like Seguin and Hall, O'Reilly and Burns to make. Stamkos is still holding out hope that he can prove worthy of consideration next year, but getting left off the 4 Nations roster after a slow start doesn't bode well for the 35-year-old future Hall of Famer.

"Who knows what could happen until it actually goes off next year?" he said.

For the others in this lost generation, wearing their country's colors on the sporting world's grandest stage will remain a regret, a what-if, a dream unfulfilled.

"I don't think it's something I think about, but it's something I have thought about," Seguin said. "It pops in my head from time to time. It's something that I'll look back on once my career's done and it's just kind of unfortunate. I think it'll be harder as the years go on."

If nothing else, the lost Olympians hope they can serve as a reminder to the hockey world to never let this happen again.

"It's your dream to be in the NHL, but above that is representing Canada at a best-on-best tournament, and I was never able to do that," Hall said. "There's a whole generation of guys that weren't able to. Hopefully, they don't make that mistake again, because we belong at the Olympics. Hockey fans deserve to see best on best. It's good for the game and good for everybody."

[The Athletic / What I'm seeing from Team Sweden: 'Phenomenal' goaltending, do-it-all D and lines from first practice](#)

By Fluto Shinzawa – February 11, 2025

BROSSARD, Quebec — Jacob Markstrom has saved 11.3 goals above expected this season, according to MoneyPuck. This places him No. 10 among NHL goalies with 25 or more starts.

Being without a goalie of Markstrom's quality — the New Jersey Devils puckstopper hobbled off the Prudential Center ice with a knee injury on Jan. 22 — is not keeping Team Sweden coach Sam Hallam up at night. Rolling Linus Ullmark, Filip Gustavsson or Sam Ersson in the 4 Nations Face-Off is Hallam's ace card.

"Of course with Markstrom out, it's great to have Linus here," said Hallam, whose club opens against Team Canada, following Monday's practice at CN Sports Complex. "We're confident that any of the three can start Wednesday night. Good to have the Vezina Trophy winner in the room."

Hallam has not announced whether Ullmark, who nabbed the Vezina in 2023, will go against Canada. Ullmark's availability was not always set in stone. On Dec. 22, 2024, the Ottawa Senators goalie left in the first period against the Edmonton Oilers because of a back injury.

He did not play until Feb. 4, when he stopped 34 shots against the Tampa Bay Lightning. Four nights later, Ullmark had a final tuneup against the Florida Panthers. It was a busy one: 43 saves on 47 shots.

"We played him his first game back, and he looked phenomenal," said Sweden captain Victor Hedman. "I know he played in Florida as well. Faced 47, 48 shots. So he's had his workload, that's for sure. Obviously feel bad for Jacob not being here. But to have Sammy, who's been phenomenal for Philly the whole season — you look at our roster from goalies to forwards, tremendous to see how much talent we have."

Given Ersson was Markstrom's replacement, it's likely Ullmark or Gustavsson will start against Canada. It could be a coin flip. Gustavsson has saved 14.6 goals above expected. Ullmark is at 11.1 in 12 fewer appearances.

"I was never really concerned," Ullmark said. "It was a long time until we came here today. We didn't stress anything. We didn't feel like we had to rush through the process to get me to be part of this team. Once we settled that in, talked it over and had the communication throughout this whole process in the beginning, I never felt that I was stressed about it or concerned I wasn't going to be a part of it."

Do-it-all defense

Sweden will ride its defense as well as its goaltending. The team designed the blue line with a mix of shutdown presence and offensive creativity — on each pairing, no less.

In theory, Jonas Brodin's stay-at-home game will give Hedman the green light to go. Mattias Ekholm should have the same effect on Erik Karlsson. Rasmus Andersson will let Rasmus Dahlin roam up ice.

"I don't see our team as an underdog," Ekholm said. "I think we have incredible talent. Just being out there practicing today, the speed, everything is at a crazy high level."

Gustav Forsling did not practice because of an illness. The Florida Panthers defenseman is expected to practice on Tuesday.

Top-line skill

If Sweden's balanced defense can stop opposing pucks and get them onto their forwards' sticks, it will be up to the No. 1 line of Rickard Rakell, Mika Zibanejad and William Nylander to score timely goals. The three right-shot forwards will be asked to create speed through center ice and apply their east-west skill in the offensive zone.

Nylander (33 goals) will be the primary shooter. Rakell and Zibanejad have shared shifts during previous international play.

"I'm not really surprised how good he is," Zibanejad said of Nylander. "In terms of his puckhandling, the way he sees the ice and his all-around game, the way he's been the last couple years, it's been awesome to see. Maybe not as much fun to play against. But I get a chance to play with him now. I'm excited."

The No. 2 line of Adrian Kempe, Elias Pettersson and Filip Forsberg will be asked to create too.

"Trying to get the puck in their hands," Pettersson said of his wings. "Trying to set them up with speed through the neutral zone. I think all of us understand each other."

Olympics on the horizon

Ekholm enjoyed playing for Sweden in the 2016 World Cup of Hockey. But there is a difference this time. The NHL did not release its players for the 2018 Winter Games. As such, Olympic motivation did not exist during the World Cup.

That is not the case with the 4 Nations. The 34-year-old Edmonton Oilers defenseman wants the upcoming tournament to set up the 2026 Olympics in Italy.

"The World Cup was just the World Cup," Ekholm recalled. "There wasn't really a for-sure what's next. Here next year, we have an Olympic tournament that we're going to be in. That brings a little extra element or extra edge to it. You can look at it any way you want. This is just a tournament. But next year, it's about a gold medal."

Carlsson as an extra

Leo Carlsson was the No. 13 forward in Monday's practice. The No. 2 pick from 2023 could be a future go-to all-around forward for Sweden.

"We really felt we want him on the team," Hallam said. "We want him to be ready to get in there, but also to be comfortable in the environment around our other top Swedish guys. Because hopefully he's going to be a part of the national team for a long time here."

[The Athletic / What I'm seeing from Team USA: Replacing Quinn Hughes, splitting up the Tkachuks, practice lines, more](#)

By Michael Russo – February 11, 2025

BROSSARD, Quebec – Team USA won't play its first game of the 4 Nations Face-Off until Thursday night, but it's already suffered a big blow with Quinn Hughes bowing out due to a reported oblique injury.

Hughes, the defending Norris Trophy winner and one of the front-runners again this season, agonized over his decision on whether to once again wear red, white and blue for his first best-on-best tournament with his younger brother, Jack.

But the Vancouver Canucks captain, who looked to be in discomfort during a skate Saturday morning as he tried to test the injury that has kept him out of four games, ultimately decided it would be most appropriate to rest and heal during the 4 Nations break so he can get healthy for the Canucks' stretch drive. With the Calgary Flames starting to fade and the Canucks 6-1-1 in their past eight, the Canucks are now three points up on the Flames for the final wild-card spot.

"I'd say it was probably the hardest decision that Quinn's ever had to make," Hughes' agent, Pat Brisson, told The Athletic. "He was looking forward to representing his country along with his brother, Jack. But at the same time, he's been carrying an injury that could continue to linger and perhaps make it worse while he also hasn't played in a few weeks. He did everything he could in his recovery to be ready.

"The decision not to play the tournament was finally made (Sunday) after a long marathon of conversations. He was completely devastated."

This is obviously a huge blow for the U.S. as Hughes would have been its No. 1 defenseman and likely quarterbacked the No. 1 power play. Hughes, 25, is second amongst NHL defensemen with 59 points and 22 power-play points. He leads the Canucks in scoring by 24 points.

Devils star Jack Hughes was obviously disappointed but said, "It's hockey at the end of day. People get injured all the time, and I was looking forward to spending time with him, but it's all good, and hopefully he heals up and is ready to go for a big second half with Vancouver.

"He wants to be a part of this. He was really excited to come with this group and put the USA jersey back on. So it's frustrating. But if you're injured, you're injured."

Ottawa's Jake Sanderson, a 2022 Olympian who came awfully close to making the initial roster in December before the United States brass chose Noah Hanifin, replaced Quinn Hughes on the roster. He stuck around Florida, where the Sens last played, and waited well into Sunday until finally being given the word that Hughes was officially out. Sanderson, asked Saturday by GM Bill Guerin to be on call just in case, canceled a tropical vacation and flew to Montreal.

Brady Tkachuk, Sanderson's teammate with the Sens, called him "one of the best defensemen in the league" and said it was a well-deserved honor. Sanderson looks like he'll start the 4 Nations as the United States' seventh defenseman, with anticipated seventh defenseman Noah Hanifin elevated to the third pair with Brock Faber.

"Quinn's such a special player," Detroit Red Wings captain Dylan Larkin said. "It's really unfortunate that he was unable to go. And I know he's at home and he wanted to be here. It's hard on him, but he's looking after his body, and he's just unable to go. So it's just an unfortunate situation, and you're going

to look at guys like Zach Werenski to step up. But we're going to miss (Hughes') offensive abilities and how he moves the puck."

Hughes has medaled in four international tournaments. He won silver in the 2019 World Junior Championship, bronze in the 2018 World Junior Championship and World Championship and gold in the 2017 World Under-18 Championship.

Jack said when the decision was finally made, Quinn texted him, "Sorry. I was so pumped," and Jack texted him back, "We're both gonna play a long time."

The good news is the NHL is committed to the 2026 and 2030 Winter Olympics, and the hope is there will be World Cups into the future starting in 2028. Jack Hughes recalled that last year, the Hughes bros also couldn't play together during All-Star weekend because he was hurt.

"At some point, we'll play a ... maybe the third year," Hughes said. "Last year was All-Star Game. Didn't happen. This year, this. So hopefully Olympics next year we'll get it done."

Matthews playing with Guentzel and Hughes

From well before the roster was finalized in early December, the U.S. coaching staff and management team had been tinkering with line combinations.

There have been several iterations, but coach Mike Sullivan plans to open Thursday against Finland with this:

"That's a starting point," Sullivan said. "We're looking to build some chemistry. We're looking for complementary skill sets. We're looking for balance throughout our lineup. And then we're also looking for certain roles or identities that each line might play with in order to help us have success.

"This is just my experience of putting together line combinations over the years in the NHL: Sometimes you think on paper that these combinations should work based on complementary skill sets or what each respective player brings to the table, and then, for whatever reason, it doesn't. And so there's always going to be ... a human element that's hard to predict. So we're going to feel it out.

"What I will tell you is that we're looking for complementary skill sets. We're looking for speed on every line. If we've got guys that have affinity to score goals, we need people that can get the puck and distribute."

One of the most intriguing lines in Monday's practice was U.S. captain Auston Matthews centering Jake Guentzel and Jack Hughes.

"(Matthews and Hughes) are two elite offensive players," Sullivan said. "I think Auston is a guy that is a pure goal scorer. That's not his only attribute, but he certainly excels at that attribute, and I think Jack Hughes is a guy that is as good as anyone at distributing pucks, and he has such great offensive instincts. He's elusive. He has the ability to create time and space. And he can get people to puck in the key areas. That tandem could potentially have complementary skill sets. We'll wait and see."

The United States opens play against Finland on Thursday night. Because they have one more day to prepare than Canada and Sweden, they did not yet work special teams Monday.

Accepting your role

Not everyone can be a top-six forward or be on the No. 1 power play. Heck, not everyone can play.

That was obvious Monday when the United States unveiled a fourth line that included Larkin. Chris Kreider, who scored 127 goals from 2021 to 2024 for the New York Rangers, looked slated to open the tournament as a healthy scratch.

“I’m just honored to be here and really happy,” Larkin said. “I’m one of the guys that will do anything to help the team and try and win. I’m probably going to be playing down the lineup, where I’m not used to that. But it’s something that I accept doing anything for the team.”

Sullivan said this is the biggest challenge.

“The reality is when you look at these teams, they’re all dream teams, so to speak,” Sullivan said. “Most of them are used to being on the first power plays of their respective NHL teams, or they’re used to being the go-to guys in all the key situations. And the reality is when you put 20-something of them in the same dressing room, not everybody can be that guy.

“And so that’s going to be an important element is just a certain selflessness, a certain level of humility and self-sacrifice for the group. And I think that goes a long way to build the chemistry and the team atmosphere that we’re looking for.”

Tkachuk brothers separated

One of the intrigues heading into the tournament was if the Tkachuk brothers would be linemates. But to start, Matthew Tkachuk will skate with Jack Eichel and Kyle Connor while Brady Tkachuk will skate with J.T. Miller and Matt Boldy.

“We’re not taking this moment for granted or lightly at all,” Matthew Tkachuk said. “We know with our situations — me in Florida and him in Ottawa — that we’re most likely not going to play with each other in the NHL itself, so this was our best bet. We just both want to play really well.”

You can also probably expect some run-ins Saturday night when Tkachuk faces his hard-nosed Florida Panthers teammate, Canada’s Sam Bennett.

“That’s the beauty of this tournament,” Bennett said. “As close friends as you are, we’re all competitive athletes and want to represent our country proudly. You’re gonna have to push those friendships aside for a week here and do whatever it takes to win.”

[The Athletic / What I'm seeing from Team Canada: Latest on Sidney Crosby and lines from a 'super intense' first practice](#)

By Chris Johnston – February 11, 2025

BROSSARD, Quebec — After five days of waiting and wondering if Sidney Crosby would be good to go for the 4 Nations Face-Off, Canadians got the news they were looking for.

Not only was Crosby a full participant in Team Canada's first practice ahead of the event on Monday morning, he pronounced himself fit to play after missing two Pittsburgh Penguins games over the weekend.

While Crosby later clarified that he'd still need to consult with team doctors before officially getting the green light to play in Wednesday's tournament opener against Sweden, it didn't sound like the captain expected it to be a long conversation.

He was injured last Tuesday during a Penguins loss to the New Jersey Devils after getting his left arm pinned awkwardly between Luke Hughes and Erik Haula. That set off alarm bells across the country, with Crosby's availability for the tournament in some degree of question until he stepped foot on the ice here. Crosby consulted with multiple doctors before getting clearance to join Team Canada and didn't show any apparent signs of being limited during a practice session that lasted more than an hour.

"Everything went well," he said. "I feel good from that standpoint. There's been a lot of questions. A lot of, 'How are you feeling?' the last five days, so I'm excited just to get into a routine here and get back to normal."

While Crosby had skated in recent days on his own, this was his first full practice since before he was injured.

Skating between Mark Stone and Nathan MacKinnon in line rushes, Crosby didn't miss a drill. Most encouragingly, he didn't show any reluctance to shoot the puck after gingerly handling it at times during skates last week in Pittsburgh. Just in case there was any doubt, the 37-year-old was among the last Canadian players to leave the ice and spent a good 10 minutes after practice hammering pucks.

In the NHL's first foray back into top-tier international competition since the 2016 World Cup of Hockey, the oldest player in the tournament didn't hide his enthusiasm to be here.

"It means a lot to us," MacKinnon said. "I think all of us would have been really bummed if he wasn't here. He's our captain. I think most of us grew up huge fans of him, I'm sure. I think this is his first time playing with a bunch of fans of his, for him. I think he looks great and I think he feels pretty healthy.

"But if he's not, then he's the last guy I'm worried about in terms of toughness."

When Crosby left the Penguins lineup with his upper-body injury last week, more than one Canadian teammate copped to being as anxious about the uncertainty surrounding his health situation as most fans were.

Stone said his "heart was pounding."

And yet, when the group took the ice for the first time together, Crosby was right where he was supposed to be all along.

“You talk about wanting to play for your country, this kid,” Canadian coach Jon Cooper said. “It’s remarkable the passion he has for it and that’s probably why he’s got a whole lot of wins and not a whole lot of losses when he plays in these events.”

Team Canada is 45-5-0 with No. 87 in the lineup.

How they lined up

The best part about watching Canada’s first practice before a big international event is that you finally start getting answers to the questions that have been debated among fans and media for months on end.

Of particular note was the lines, which looked like this Monday with forward Travis Konecny absent while feeling ill:

Those groupings were the product of hours of conversations. Cooper made a point of having individual conversations with his players to get a sense of the type of profiles each felt he needed from linemates in order to be successful.

“There was a lot to it, actually,” Cooper said. “This one we didn’t just pull out of a hat at the neighborhood pub and say, ‘This is what we’re going with.’”

In putting Sam Reinhart and Mitch Marner on Connor McDavid’s wings on the de facto No. 1 line, the head coach felt he found the perfect blend of talents.

“Well, you’ve got speed, you’ve got brains, and you’ve got guys that can shoot it in the net,” Cooper said. “You hand me a line like that, I’ll take my chances.”

By pairing MacKinnon and Crosby on the second line, he’s tapped into the familiarity the two Nova Scotians have from their skates back home in the summer. Stone can serve as the defensive conscience of that trio by filling a role similar to the one Patrice Bergeron has played alongside Crosby in previous international tournaments.

That left a third line of Brad Marchand, Brayden Point and Seth Jarvis, with an all-Florida fourth line: Lightning teammates Brandon Hagel and Anthony Cirelli alongside usual Panthers nemesis Sam Bennett.

“It’s nice for a change him being on our side,” Cirelli said of Bennett. “He’s hard to play against. He’s in your face. He’s physical. He makes plays. He wins battles, scores goals. He’s another guy that does it all really, really well.”

Doughty’s new digits

What was the weirdest sight during the Canadian practice?

That right-shot defenseman buzzing around the ice with a No. 89 sticker on his helmet.

Drew Doughty’s gap-tooth grin was certainly recognizable, but those digits were anything but for a guy who has worn No. 8 since arriving in the NHL some 17 years ago. As a late injury replacement to Canada’s roster, he saw teammate Cale Makar claim his usual number months ago.

“Makar wouldn’t give me No. 8,” Doughty said with a laugh. “No, it was too late to switch numbers and stuff. I’m sure he would have given me it. I’m born in ’89 so I went with 89.

“It’s going to look weird, but ... whatever.”

After Doughty was formally named to the roster late Saturday night in place of Alex Pietrangelo, Makar said he was expecting a call about a number switch. He was prepared to consider a change if the organizers would have allowed it.

“I think they might have been too far down the production line already,” Makar said.

Of note with Doughty in the mix: he quite literally skated in Pietrangelo’s spot alongside Pietrangelo’s Vegas Golden Knights teammate Shea Theodore. Makar was paired with Devon Toews, his usual partner with the Colorado Avalanche, while Josh Morrissey and Colton Parayko formed the third pairing.

It’s pretty clear that Doughty isn’t your usual injury fill-in.

He almost certainly would have been included among the players initially named to the Canadian roster in December had he not suffered a broken ankle in training camp. He didn’t make his season debut for the Los Angeles Kings until Jan. 29.

As Monday’s skate wound down, Cooper had a discussion with Doughty and Crosby near center ice. Those two players are the only returnees from Canada’s victories at the 2010 Olympics, 2014 Olympics and 2016 World Cup.

“We’ve experienced these things,” Doughty said. “Not that these guys aren’t all veterans in here, but they’ve never had a Canada best-on-best type of tournament. They can lean on us. Not that they’re going to need advice, but we can keep the room calm. We can bring the room up when we need to — maybe kick some guys’ asses if we need to.”

Power up

The Canadian power play looks to be an embarrassment of riches.

Start with the fact there’s three Conn Smythe Trophy winners on the first unit alone: Sidney Crosby, who operates net front, with Connor McDavid on the left flank and Cale Makar at the point. Then you’ve got reigning Hart Trophy winner Nathan MacKinnon on the right flank and Sam Reinhart in the bumper.

While Reinhart’s name might not occupy the same spot on the marquee as the others, he did score 27 of his 57 goals last season while patrolling that spot for the Florida Panthers.

“That’s where I’m comfortable,” Reinhart said. “We’ve got so much playmaking on the outside, we’re going to need to get the puck to the net. So I think that’s why I’m there in the middle to try and find those holes and relieve some pressure when we need to.

“I look forward to that challenge.”

Canada’s second power-play unit features Josh Morrissey and Devon Toews, with Brayden Point in the bumper, Mitch Marner on the right flank and Mark Stone at net front.

Not too shabby.

Come together

One final note from Monday’s skate: The pace was incredible.

Fast, crisp and intense.

It’s pretty clear that holding this event midseason as opposed to in September, when the 2016 World Cup was staged, should make for a high-level brand of hockey.

“It’s tough not to go balls to the wall, to go full out, when you’ve got those guys around you,” Reinhart said. “The adrenaline’s high. The excitement’s high. That’s what you want in a situation like this.”

The biggest challenge for Team Canada is bringing everyone together in a cohesive unit with no exhibition games or a training camp. That exercise started as players and staff started arriving in

Montreal over the weekend. They watched Sunday's Super Bowl together while kicking back at the team hotel.

"It's funny how quickly you jell in a day, even," MacKinnon said. "We hung out for seven, eight hours yesterday just around a table, shooting it and having a great time, getting to know each other and today we had a great practice. Guys are super intense, buzzing around.

"Excited for another practice tomorrow and get after it Wednesday."

[The Athletic / Team Canada's 4 Nations nuclear option: Could they channel 1987, put MacKinnon, McDavid together?](#)

By Pierre LeBrun – February 11, 2025

BROSSARD, Quebec — The greatest hockey ever played featured a rather simple concept.

Put the best two players in the world together.

Midway through the three-game final of the 1987 Canada Cup, Mike Keenan put Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux together and played the living hell out of them.

It was magic.

Which brings us here to 4 Nations. Hear me out.

BetMGM has the U.S. and Canada as co-favorites coming into the tournament, but in my mind, Team USA on paper should win this event, the goaltending alone giving them a real edge. The Americans are deeper, top to bottom, than any of the other three teams. I mean, when Dylan Larkin is on your fourth line, you know you're cooking with oil.

The U.S. being the team to beat is, of course, a tough thing for any Canadian hockey fan to hear. But right now, it's the truth.

All of which is why Team Canada may need to steal a page out of Keenan's '87 Canada Cup playbook.

Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar should be over the boards all the freaking time in the event. With no back-to-back games, Team Canada's best chance to win this event is to unleash the world's best player, the world's second-best player and arguably the world's greatest defenseman as much as possible.

"You can't overplay your best players," Keenan told The Athletic on Monday. "It's a very short tournament, and the results are immediate. It's a little bit different than the Canada Cup that way. But in my opinion, and Jon Cooper has a lot of experience and a winning pedigree. He's going to be able to read the bench and read the game as it's going along."

"But in my history of coaching, I never hesitated about playing my best players. That was just a given."

And there's this: The NHL is running an extra 30 seconds during TV timeouts in the 4 Nations. That may not sound like a lot, but it's a pretty big deal for these finely tuned athletes.

If you're Team Canada, that longer TV timeout allows you to come right back with McDavid or MacKinnon or Sidney Crosby.

"It's something that you can utilize and take advantage of," Keenan said. "The caliber of those players obviously is exceptional. Jon is in a position because of the commercial breaks and so on, to have them ready at any time."

I asked Cooper during his news conference Monday about the '87 Canada Cup and how Keenan deployed 66 and 99 and whether he could see himself pulling out the nuclear option at some point in 4 Nations.

"Well, I've been on record saying the '87 Canada Cup was arguably the greatest hockey and three-game segment you've ever seen," Cooper said. "But I think today's players are different than those players back then. We don't have Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux, but we have Nathan MacKinnon and

Connor McDavid and go down the list. But that gap between say the 12th forward in '87 and the first forward, I think, was a lot farther than the gap between the 12th forward in today's teams and the first forward.

"So, there's just weapons all over the ice. It was super cool being on the ice, being at ice level, and getting to watch what was going on. There's just no holes. Not saying these other teams in the past had holes, but I think you can put a lot of guys together and create that chemistry. But we'll have to see."

That last little comment could be rather important. Cooper isn't saying he won't do it. He's just saying he's not opening the 4 Nations with that as Plan A. But just like Keenan didn't pull out the nuclear option until Game 2 of the championship final with the Soviets in '87, Cooper has it in his back pocket if things go sideways.

For now, there's been a lot of thought put into the forward lines deployed in practice Monday, and for sure you get what Cooper was thinking.

Crosby in the middle of a line with MacKinnon on the left and Mark Stone on the right. The Crosby-MacKinnon Nova Scotia partnership was a slam dunk. They work out together back home in the summer, but this will be a first playing together wearing the Maple Leaf.

"I'm definitely comfortable with him as a human being which is important," MacKinnon said of Crosby. "And with Stoney, I think he's an awesome player as well. So it's pretty exciting to be playing together."

MacKinnon said he didn't know for sure what line he'd be on until he showed up to the rink Monday. Having said that, Cooper did pick his brain earlier this season. The Team Canada head coach made a point of doing that with many of Canada's players, including meeting individually earlier this season with Crosby and McDavid.

Cooper said Monday that he had some lines in his head but talking to some of the players made him alter them.

"You think you've got something picked and then you go talk to the players and what they feel they need," Cooper said. "It's not where a player says, 'Oh, I want to play with Mitch Marner' or 'I want to play with Mark Stone.' It's, 'I feel comfortable with this type of player.'"

"It was a great experience. There was a lot of communication with the players on how we felt things could go and who would benefit who and what would put players in the best position to succeed. And this is what we came upon."

Stone, a brilliant two-way player, is playing the role of Patrice Bergeron, who had such great chemistry with Crosby in a Team Canada uniform.

As for the world No. 1, McDavid was slotted between Sam Reinhart and Mitch Marner. Marner's Toronto chemistry with Auston Matthews as his center should translate to McDavid. And Reinhart is a goal machine.

So yes, it all makes sense to start.

But I'm telling you, at some point, Team Canada may have to contemplate pairing McDavid and MacKinnon, the two fastest players in the world. How do you defend that? How did the Soviets in '87 feel about defending Wayne and Mario?

"When Mike put Mario and Gretz together ... that was a smart idea," Igor Larionov told me in 2020. "The best should play with the best."

"Yeah, it worked out pretty good. That was fun," Mario Lemieux told me in 2020.

Um, yeah.

At some point before the end of this event, a MacKinnon-McDavid combo may have to happen.

Crosby's health is a factor in all this as well. The man who authored the Golden Goal in 2010 has been nothing short of spectacular at best-on-best in his career. Obviously at 37, he's not Prime Sid anymore, but he remains one of the best players in the world, with poise and leadership that factor significantly into the next 11 days.

And perhaps his connection with MacKinnon will be too good to deviate from.

All I can tell you is that if I were a defender, seeing MacKinnon and McDavid flying toward me at the same time would be as challenging as anything in the sport.

"It would be fun," Team USA defenseman Charlie McAvoy said Monday, his face lighting up. "Those are the challenges that you have to be welcoming to — that you have to accept. You're playing against the best of the best, that's what this is. That's what this tournament is.

"So you rise, you have to compete, and you have to look at it as an opportunity to go against the best in the world and show that you, too, are the best in the world."

[The Athletic / Weekend NHL rankings: No, your predictions are wrong](#)

By Sean McIndoe – February 11, 2025

Well, well, well, what do we have here?

We asked. You voted. The results are in.

Yes, it's yet another batch of predictions. But this time it's not me or the other writers making the picks, it's you. Yes, you, personally, because I'm going to assume you took part in The Athletic's recent survey. More than 2,500 readers did. Including you.

And that means this week, I get to tell you why your predictions are bad.

Oh, how the turns have tabled. Give me a second while I get into full "comment section" mode. (Hits self in the head with a brick several times.) Heh, heh ... clicks. OK, let's do this.

Bonus five: Fan survey predictions you're wrong about, you dummies, you morons

1. You don't believe in the Capitals — This was surprising, because it's been explained to me that anyone who watched the games would know this Washington season is for real. I haven't had them in my one-spot all season, despite them starting to pull away at the top of the standings. But I've had them as high as No. 2, and they've been somewhere in the top five for 10 straight weeks. Meanwhile, you all had them as just your seventh-most mentioned Cup pick. Any thoughts on that you'd like to share, Caps fans?

2. You're wrong on the Hart Trophy — You think it's going to be Leon Draisaitl in a narrow win over Nathan MacKinnon, and both of those picks are reasonable. But only 14.2 percent of you have the right answer: This is the year the Hart goes back to the goalies, with Connor Hellebuyck uniting the "this isn't just supposed to be an offense award" voting block while Draisaitl, MacKinnon and Connor McDavid split the forward vote.

3. You're super wrong on the Calder — Lane Hutson is the best player ever and the 79.4 percent of you who don't think he's the best rookie in the world have never watched a single hockey game in your miserable lives! Am I doing this right, Habs fans? Too calm and reasonable? I thought so, I'll try to get a little more amped up for next time.

4. You're probably wrong on last place — The Sharks have opened up a reasonably significant lead on the Hawks in the battle for dead last, but 53.7 percent of you still think Chicago is going to take the top lottery odds. I thought so, too, up until a few weeks ago, but the Sharks are not only worse right now, they're probably in better position to subtract at the deadline. Also, that people were picking teams like the Sabres, Ducks and (especially) Rangers suggests that some of you don't know how standings work.

5. You're still somehow sleeping on the Panthers — I get that picking the defending champs feels boring, especially when that same team also went to the Final the year before. Voter fatigue is real. But still ... only 2.7 percent of you have the Panthers as your Cup pick? That's less than what you'd expect if we just distributed the votes randomly among all 32 teams. All this for a team in a very winnable Atlantic, whose only competition for top spot in the division is an inconsistent Leafs team, and whose main competition in the conference finals would either be that Capitals team you don't believe in, or a Hurricanes team you mostly do believe in but that hasn't really clicked since the Mikko Rantanen deal.

Sometimes, the boring pick is the right one, and while the Panthers have been in and out of my top five all year long, you'd better believe I wouldn't have them lumped into "other."

On to this week's rankings, which are better than yours, you imbecile.

Road to the Cup

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

The trade board has been updated, and ... honestly, maybe don't bother taking deadline day off this year.

5. Florida Panthers (34-20-3, +23 true goals differential*) — Hey, after that rant up above, I've got to put my money where my mouth is. But five wins in six to regain top spot in the Atlantic helps make my case.

4. Dallas Stars (35-18-2, +42) — Funniest non-celebration of the week honors go to Jamie Benn, who apparently didn't feel like putting an eight-spot on the lowly Sharks was even worth acknowledging.

3. Washington Capitals (36-11-8, +59) — The Caps' shootout loss to Utah was a reminder of how weird it is that Alex Ovechkin, the greatest goal scorer in the history of the sport, often doesn't get chosen to take part in the goal-scoring contest. I mean, we get it — he's never been a breakaway guy, and it's hard to set up the top-of-the-circle one-timer in a shootout — but try explaining that to a non-fan.

2. Edmonton Oilers (34-17-4, +31) — Prediction contest update: The dreaded all-or-nothing bonus question could be a bloodbath, with Draisaitl sitting as the only player in the league comfortably on pace for 50 goals. About 64 percent of you chose to roll the dice on that question ("Name one and only one player who will finish this season with at least 50 goals, but who is not Auston Matthews") and less than 20 percent of those took Draisaitl.

1. Winnipeg Jets (39-14-3, +68) — Yep, I'm on board. Count me in with the other rankings, who also picked this weekend to move the Jets into top spot. They head into the break having won eight straight, including wins over the Avalanche, Hurricanes and Capitals. And they come off the break with a stretch of seven games in which Ottawa is the only playoff team they'll face. The race for top spot in the West might be over by March.

In other Jets news, Mark Scheifele is reportedly next up if Sidney Crosby can't go for Team Canada, although that decision might not come down until right at tonight's final roster deadline.

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

Not ranked: Detroit Red Wings — OK, now that they've finally lost a game, let's regroup and see where this team is really at.

Saturday's loss to the Lightning snapped a seven-game win streak and left the Wings with a mark of 15-5-1 under Todd McLellan. That's still an excellent record, obviously, and it's been enough to get them into the last wild-card spot. It's been an impressive climb — when the win streak started on Jan. 23, they were 14th in the conference, five points out of a playoff spot. When McLellan took over, they were 15th, and eight points back. To cover all that ground and pass all those teams in just six weeks is an impressive feat.

But it still leaves them in a precarious spot, setting up a second half in which every point will be crucial. And for our purposes, it makes them a tough team to evaluate. The pessimist's view is they're a mediocre team that got hot for just long enough to barely climb into a wild-card spot. Every team has a win streak at some point, and while those wins count as much as any other, regression arrives eventually. When it does, these Wings will revert back to being what they've been for a few years now — a wild-card bubble team that ends up falling short.

The optimist's case is McLellan, and the fact his arrival coincides with the best six weeks this team has played in years, isn't some random quirk. This is his team now, and he's unlocked something here. Derek Lalonde had sucked the life out of this group, and McLellan brought it back. Maybe they won't play at a 120-point pace for the rest of the year, but we shouldn't worry about anything that happened in the pre-McLellan era. And if you buy that, the Wings are going to roll to a playoff spot.

Of course, you could also be boring and say the truth is somewhere in the middle. That might be good enough for Wings fans, who haven't seen a playoff game since 2016 and might figure an underdog run as a wild card would be good enough for this season especially given how it started. But at least they can spend the break hoping for something more, as unlikely as it seems.

The bottom five

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

The 4 Nations Face-Off is here, meaning the NHL is on break until Feb. 22. We have a ton of insightful preview content coming over the next few days. We also had this post, in which we made a bunch of trades for an event that has no trades, which was maybe not as insightful but you should definitely still read it.

5. Montreal Canadiens (25-26-5, -31) — Well, it was fun while it lasted.

4. Philadelphia Flyers (24-26-7, -30) — It's possible I'm just slipping them in here because nobody in Philadelphia is thinking about hockey this morning. But while they're here: Am I reading too much into it, or is it a little weird to have traded two guys away who then immediately start talking about how they feel respected?

3. Nashville Predators (19-28-7, -36) — Saturday's matchup featured the Predators on a six-game losing streak and the Sabres having won four straight, so it goes without saying Nashville won. They gave Juuse Saros the night off, which was probably a good move given how much action he might be seeing over the next week with that mess of a Team Finland blue line.

2. Chicago Blackhawks (17-31-7, -41) — We've apparently made a collective decision that February will be international pick-on-Connor Bedard month. Is that fair? Not necessarily, and Scott went back and broke down Bedard's recent shifts to see which criticisms have been valid and which may have been misdirected.

1. San Jose Sharks (15-35-7, -64) — Saturday's blowout loss to the Stars was the last chance to see them on home ice for a full month. After 4 Nations ends, the Sharks head out on a seven-game road trip and don't get back for a game until March 8.

Not ranked: Buffalo Sabres — No Sabres in the bottom five this week, for the first time since mid-December, thanks to those four straight wins heading into the weekend. That stretch hasn't pushed them back into the playoff hunt, mind you; it would probably have needed to hit double digits to even come close to that.

So today, I just want to ask Sabres fans one question: Was that win streak a good thing?

Yes or no. And this isn't meant to be rhetorical, I'm really not sure. Do you want to see this team win right now?

I can see both sides. On one hand, you root for a team because you want to see them win. And even if that's more of a long view, you have to start somewhere. The journey of a thousand miles begins with four consecutive steps, that sort of thing. If there's any hope of the Sabres winning anything with this

core, they have to start showing us some proof of concept at some point. If it's happening right now, that's good news.

Unless it isn't, because come on, we all know this story. A broken team drops out of the running, then heats up against backup goalies and opponents who are looking past them, winning just enough games to accomplish two things: tanking their lottery odds and convincing their front office to take the path of least resistance and stay the course.

I'm torn. So Sabres fans, nice and simple: Is this streak a good thing or a bad thing? Let me know in the comments. I'm genuinely curious how this is playing out in the fan base.

[The Athletic / 4 Nations Face-Off reignites NHL players' long-delayed quest for best-on-best hockey](#)

Dan Robson and Chris Johnston – February 11, 2025

After Czechia won gold at the IIHF World Championships last May, David Pastrnak posted a photo of himself grinning in his stall, clutching the championship trophy in one hand, a beer in the other, with a gold medal hanging over the crest of his home country's jersey.

Pastrnak used the celebratory moment after Czechia's 2-0 victory over Switzerland to take a shot at the NHL's latest attempt at running its own international best-on-best showdown.

"Maybe Four Nations invite now?" the Boston Bruins' four-time All-Star typed beneath the Instagram image.

Despite a proud and successful place in international hockey, Czechia was excluded from the nations chosen to compete in the NHL's newest iteration of its World Cup of Hockey, the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Only NHL players from Canada, the United States, Finland and Sweden will compete in the tournament, which begins Feb. 12 — taking the place of the league's usual All-Star event.

The limited nature of the tournament left many of the world's best players upset about sitting on the sidelines while their NHL counterparts compete for their home countries. "Of course we are sad, pissed, you know," Pastrnak said when the 4 Nations Face-Off was first announced last year. "A lot of talented guys who would love to play for their country."

The tournament — with games taking place in Montreal and Boston over a nine-day window — is meant to herald in a new era of NHL involvement in international hockey, with NHL players returning to the Winter Olympics in 2026 and a commitment to host future World Cup tournaments. But the limited scope of this year's event and the sprint to get it off the ground underscore more than a decade of struggle between players, the league, and the sport's international governing bodies.

For a generation of players who have never represented their countries in a best-on-best competition during their NHL careers, it's an imperfect solution — but it's a solution.

"This is my first opportunity playing for Team USA at the highest level," says Matthew Tkachuk, now more than 700 games into his career. "I've been pretty upset with the last few events that have been canceled, or whatever, the last few years. I've had this circled for however long it's been rumored that we'd be doing it."

Connor McDavid, arguably the world's best player, has never represented Canada at the Olympics, but has longed for it. "It's no secret that I've been vocal in terms of wanting best-on-best hockey," he says.

These pleas are nothing new from members of the NHL Players' Association.

Former players union head Donald Fehr often urged an aggressive pursuit of new international opportunities during his 13-year run. He was part of failed negotiations with the NHL on multiple potential tournaments.

When Marty Walsh succeeded Fehr in February 2023, the lack of best-on-best international competition was one of the main issues players brought up with him.

Since the Sochi Olympics in 2014, a generation of NHL players had been denied the opportunity to represent their countries at the highest level.

In that time, the IIHF's World Championship was the sport's biggest international prize. But that tournament lacked a best-on-best pedigree because it runs concurrently with the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Four years before Sochi, when McDavid was just 13 years old, he watched Sidney Crosby score his golden goal for Canada at the Vancouver Olympics. But since he's been in the league, he's never had the opportunity to experience that kind of thrill. Victor Hedman — who was 23 years old when Sweden controversially passed on taking him to the Sochi Olympics — is now a 34-year-old veteran and father of two.

"The last time I played in best-on-best was the World Cup in, I don't even know when that was ... 2016?" says Hedman.

The NHL returned to a new hybrid-version of the World Cup in 2016, when Toronto hosted a World Cup that included a hybrid of pseudo-national teams, a European team, and a team of young stars from North America.

The event took place before the NHL season. And — while entertaining — it didn't carry the stakes of past World Cup events or the Olympics. Alex Pietrangelo remembers it feeling more like a training camp tournament.

"I'm trying to think of the politically correct answer here," the Canadian defenseman says, when asked if the event felt intense to play in.

The first time NHL players competed in a best-on-best event was the 1976 Canada Cup. That grew out of the immense public interest created by the 1972 Summit Series, which pitted Canada against the Soviet Union in an eight-game series. That initial event grew into a six-team offseason tournament that was held in 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1991.

The Canada Cup was eventually succeeded by the World Cup of Hockey in 1996, which expanded to eight teams and saw Team USA beat Canada in a memorable three-game final.

While that was a high-water mark for best-on-best hockey, the new tournament failed to gain a consistent footing after NHL players participated in their first Olympics at the 1998 Nagano Games, and that quickly became the priority.

Plans for a 2000 World Cup slipped away because the NHL and NHLPA were focused on a deal to return players to the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics. And when the tournament was revived in 2004, it was played under the shadow of a looming labor dispute. Within hours of Canada beating Finland in the final, the NHL initiated a lockout that spanned 310 days and saw the entire 2004-05 season canceled.

NHL players would compete in three more Olympics — 2006 in Turin, 2010 in Vancouver and 2014 in Sochi — but the logistical challenges grew with each successive event. Some team owners began questioning the value of pausing the NHL season to loan their players to the tournament. They feared some of their greatest assets were risking injury for no direct payback, especially given the strict control the International Olympic Committee (IOC) maintained over marketing and media rights.

Further complicating matters, the NHL, IIHF and IOC came to an impasse in April 2017 over rising insurance and travel costs, which prompted the league to walk away from the 2018 Pyeongchang Games. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman told reporters that team owners weren't eager to pay for the "privilege of disrupting our season."

What it all boiled down to was control.

The NHL was seeking more say in tournaments featuring its biggest stars and hoped to generate more of a tangible payback. But without the involvement of the IOC or the IIHF it's been impossible to create an event that rivals what came before.

A planned 2020 World Cup was canceled when the NHL and NHLPA could not come to terms over extending an expiring collective-bargaining agreement between the parties. An attempt at a 2021 World Cup failed as well.

The Covid pandemic scuttled plans for NHL players to return for the 2022 Olympics in Beijing at the 11th Hour.

There were plans between the NHL and the players association to stage a World Cup in February 2024, but they fell apart amid resistance from the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) and other international bodies.

The players and the league worked jointly to negotiate a path for NHL players to be involved in the 2026 Olympics in Milano. When there was some certainty that the NHL would return to the Olympics, the league and union turned their attention to some kind of competition before the 2026 Games.

"This was something we both thought was a good idea," said Bill Daly, the NHL's deputy commissioner.

In trying to kickstart a new era in international hockey, the feedback the NHLPA received from players was that they wanted to represent their nations and move away from gimmicks of the past.

So the 4 Nations Face-Off was conceived. But which nations would be allowed to compete? The IIHF banned Russia from all international competitions following the country's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. That meant excluding superstars like Alex Ovechkin and Nikita Kucherov.

And by allowing only players currently under an NHL contract to compete, the talent pool for many European nations — like Switzerland and Germany — was constricted.

To work with the NHL schedule, the tournament would have to fall into the league's annual week-long All-Star break, which significantly limited the number of games that could be played.

So the focus shifted to a smaller scale event, leaning into traditional rivalries between countries that could fill rosters with NHL players.

Canada, the United States, Sweden and Finland were obvious choices — with 385, 278, 92 and 50 NHL players, respectively. Though Czechia has 29 NHL players, it would be a stretch to fill out each position. And there was no interest in returning to the Team Europe format used in the 2016 event.

The players' association canvassed its members, particularly regarding the exclusion of those not from one of the four nations represented.

"Is there a desire from a broader group of players to play? Absolutely," says Rob Zepp, the NHLPA's senior director of International Strategy and Growth.

The union spoke directly with players like Roman Josi, the star Swiss defenseman, who will be excluded from the tournament. "It would be great for Swiss hockey to be part of that just to have people watch in Switzerland, for young kids, and just all the other countries too, that are not in it," Josi says.

At the same time, he's not complaining about the break. "It'll be fun to watch," he says. "But I'm not too mad about getting a little vacation either."

Tomas Hertl was also aware Czechia would have trouble finding enough NHL defensemen to fill its roster. "Nothing you can do," Hertl says. "We just have to keep making a good name for the Czechs and bring in more players."

But despite that disappointment, Zepp says most players agreed it was a positive move toward more international competition.

The sprint to pull off the event included arranging logistics between the two host cities over a nine-day window.

The lead up required the negotiation of new media rights and sponsorship deals, planning game operations and game presentation, while also organizing ancillary events in Boston and Montreal. For the past several months, it's been an all-day, every-day sprint for this "massive event," Zepp says.

And it's expected to mark the NHL's consistent return to international competition.

"While this event might be the one and only 4 Nations Face-Off you see, this is really a building block to establishing that long-term international calendar that involves international best-on-best, which is something the sport hasn't seen," Zepp says. "The consensus is that this is a stepping stone to 2026, 2028, and beyond."

Daly expects the next World Cup to look much different. In 2028, the plan is a return to an eight-team World Cup event — though the specifics still need to be determined. There is some thought around creating a qualifying tournament in which countries would play for a chance to join a group of six automatically invited nations.

But even though the 4 Nations Face-Off won't be that kind of event, Daly believes players will embrace it.

"I don't think there's any concern at all that this will be the most important things that these players are focused on during that time period," Daly says. "I don't think there was any player in our league who didn't want to be selected or considered for selection in their teams."

Victor Hedman is intrigued to face his Tampa Bay Lightning coach Jon Cooper, who will be at the helm for Team Canada — while reuniting on Team Sweden with current NHL rivals like the Leafs' William Nylander, with whom he won a world championship in 2017.

"I think it's a tremendous tournament just for hockey in general," Hedman says.

Jack Eichel is excited for the opportunity to represent the United States. "Listen, when you put guys in that situation and you have your country on your chest and you're representing more than you normally do, I think there's not only a lot of pride that comes with it, but yeah, I think there's going to be a ton of competitiveness," Eichel says. "We all want to win right? We want to be the champions of that tournament. We're going there to win."

Bruins captain Brad Marchand, who will represent Canada, expects the tournament to be as intense as past Olympic clashes.

"Guys are going to be out for blood. We're not out there as an exhibition match," he says. "It doesn't matter how quick it gets thrown together, or who's involved — when you put that Canada jersey on or U.S., whatever it is, you're going to leave it all on the ice."

[ESPN / NHL 4 Nations Face-Off preview: Schedule, rosters, how to watch](#)

By ESPN Staff – February 11, 2025

Instead of having an All-Star Game this season, the NHL and NHLPA are staging the 4 Nations Face-Off, which will run from Feb. 12 through Feb. 20. This is a round-robin tournament that will feature four national teams -- Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States -- with NHL players from those nations filling the rosters.

The top two teams in the standings after round-robin play will compete in the championship game on Feb. 20. The points system for the round robin will include three points for a regulation win, two points for a win in overtime/shootout, one point for a loss in overtime/shootout and zero points for a regulation loss.

The overtime format for round-robin games is 3-on-3 sudden death for a 10-minute period, followed by a shootout. In the championship game, the overtime format is full-strength sudden death in successive 20-minute periods until one team scores.

Read on for full coverage of the event, including rosters, team previews, betting picks, schedule and broadcast information from the opening round games all the way through the championship matchup.

Game schedule

Note: All times Eastern.

Wednesday, Feb. 12: Canada vs. Sweden, 8 p.m. | TNT

Thursday, Feb. 13: USA vs. Finland, 8 p.m. | ESPN/ESPN+

Saturday, Feb. 15: Finland vs. Sweden, 1 p.m. | ABC/ESPN+

Saturday, Feb. 15: USA vs. Canada, 8 p.m. | ABC/ESPN+/Disney+

Monday, Feb. 17: Canada vs. Finland, 1 p.m. | TNT

Monday, Feb. 17: Sweden vs. USA, 8 p.m. | TNT

Thursday, Feb. 20: Championship game, 8 p.m. | ESPN/ESPN+

Rosters, team previews

Note: Players are listed alphabetically by position. These are not projected lineups.

Canada

Captain: Sidney Crosby

Assistant captains: Connor McDavid, Cale Makar

Keys to winning the gold medal: Canada has arguably the most explosive crop of top-tier skaters in this tournament, and that talent has to be working for them in every period. Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon, Cale Makar, Sam Reinhart, Brayden Point ... and on down the list. Coach Jon Cooper can mix and match up front with some of the best offensive threats in the world, and that will be Canada's weapon at 5-on-5 and the power play.

Scoring should be Canada's superpower, and depending on how Cooper disperses ice time among the savvy veterans -- looking at you, Sidney Crosby -- and those under-the-radar finds -- Travis Konecny as a

30-goal scorer on the fourth line (?) -- Canada will be a nightmare to contain when they have the puck. That alone could carry them to a championship-worthy performance.

X factor: It's the goaltending. How exactly is Canada going to fare between the pipes? Jordan Binnington appears to be their No. 1 (at least in the early goings) with Adin Hill as his backup. So, no Logan Thompson? Who has the second-best save percentage among NHL starters this season?

All credit to Hill and the fine season he's had in Vegas, but Canada's netminding could leave them feeling exposed (Sam Montembeault is the country's projected third-stringer). And a swell of uncertainty -- if it were to come -- can seep into the defense, too. Canada's depth on the back end wasn't this tournament's best to begin with, and it took a hit when Alex Pietrangelo -- a veteran with championship experience -- bowed out due to injury. If goalie confidence becomes shaky, does that also rattle Canada defensively? Mental toughness will be an element in all this as well. -- Kristen Shilton

Finland

Captain: Aleksander Barkov

Assistant captains: Sebastian Aho, Mikael Granlund, Mikko Rantanen

Keys to winning the gold medal: It's not that Finland doesn't have players who can score. But a hallmark of Finnish forwards who've come to the NHL is that many of them are consistent two-way players. How much does that factor in a tournament in which teams such as Canada and the United States are expected to have large chunks of possession?

Receiving those two-way contributions from forwards -- such as two-time Selke Trophy winner Aleksander Barkov, Sebastian Aho, Mikko Rantanen and Roope Hintz -- could prove even more crucial.

X factor: How they manage without Miro Heiskanen. Losing Heiskanen was significant beyond the fact that he's one of the NHL's premier defensemen. Heiskanen can do everything -- from logging heavy 5-on-5 minutes to running a power play to anchoring a penalty kill to making life difficult for an opposing top line.

Figuring out how they can make up for his absence could be the difference in playing in the championship game or finishing in a less desirable place. -- Ryan S. Clark

Sweden

Captain: Victor Hedman

Assistant captains: Mattias Ekholm, Erik Karlsson, William Nylander

Keys to winning the gold medal: Sweden's back end should be its backbone. Led by the incomparable Victor Hedman, the Swedish defense could be the tournament's best, and that bodes well for their prospects. The Swedes' blue line has a strong mix of talent with players who can provide offense -- Hedman and Rasmus Dahlin, especially -- with Gustav Forsling, Mattias Ekholm and Jonas Brodin locking things down behind them. Add Erik Karlsson's general ability to that mix and no matter how you slice it, there's something special for Sweden to tap.

If the forwards can complement a strong defensive game with consistent scoring, then the Swedes might have the right recipe for success.

X factor: Can Sweden overcome potentially losing both the goalies originally named to their roster? And, if the goaltending situation is impacted, will Sweden get the offensive performances it needs to outlast countries like the USA and Canada? Projected starter Jacob Markstrom was already replaced by Samuel Ersson; Linus Ullmark has been battling injury for much of this season.

That doesn't speak to a possibly dominant showing in the crease. Leaving that aside though, can Sweden squeeze enough from their top-six forward group -- with the likes of William Nylander and Filip Forberg leading the way -- to keep pace with the aforementioned juggernauts? It might come down to will over thrill for this Swedish team to be victorious. -- Shilton

United States

Captain: Auston Matthews

Assistant captains: Charlie McAvoy, Matthew Tkachuk

Keys to winning the gold medal: Do they want to play fast? Do they want to be physical? Do they want to constantly apply pressure? Do they want to create lines that can score? Do they want lines that make two-way play a priority? Or do they want all of the above?

Asking this many questions about the U.S. speaks to how many directions the tactics can go, with a roster that is arguably the most talented in the tournament, top to bottom. The notion that there appears to be several identities the U.S. could have makes this roster adaptable to every situation. That could prove useful in their bid to win gold.

X factor: The defensive pairings. Let's recap. Adam Fox and Quinn Hughes are Norris Trophy winners. Charlie McAvoy and Jacob Slavin have finished in the top 10 in Norris voting on multiple occasions. Zach Werenski and his point-per-game average is factoring into this season's Norris discussion. Noah Hanifin's athleticism and length makes finding time and space a problem, while Brock Faber was already a legitimate No. 1 option as a rookie last season.

And yet? One of them will be the U.S.'s seventh defenseman up in the press box. Which combinations would make the most sense for the U.S.? And can those pairings help lead the nation to a first-place finish in the build-up to the 2026 Olympics? -- Clark

Betting pick

If nothing else, the Finnish defense and Canadian goaltending certainly suggest that a team of All-Star-caliber forwards on both sides of the puck can drive scoring to a total greater than 5.5. These forward lines are so stacked on each of these teams, how can we not go in expecting goalscoring showcases?

Not that many of the players involved will be the same, but the last four Olympics with NHLers had all four of these nations averaging close to four goals per game each. The 2016 World Cup of Hockey, which was much more condensed and NHL-roster heavy, had a total of 7.88 goals per game from both sides across all games.

These aren't apples-to-apples comparisons, but when you distill the skill on rosters to the point that some fourth lines look like top scoring lines on some NHL teams, we anticipate lots of goals.

Give me the over on any game that doesn't involve Connor Hellebuyck and the United States team defense. -- Sean Allen

Parlay: +593

Canada @ Sweden - Over 5.5 (-125)

Finland @ Sweden - Over 5.5 (+110)

Canada @ Finland - Over 5.5 (-120)

[Sportsnet.ca / Team Canada notebook: Nuclear option will be exercised at 4 Nations Face-Off](#)

By Eric Engels – February 11, 2025

BROSSARD, Que. — The doors open to Team Canada’s dressing room and Seth Jarvis is sitting smack in the middle of it, sandwiched between the two greatest players of their respective generations, peeling off his equipment much slower than he should be peeling it off.

“Best seat in the house,” Jarvis says of his spot beside Connor McDavid and Sidney Crosby, but that’s before dozens of reporters and cameras threaten to box him into it for the entirety of this long first post-practice media availability.

Even if Jarvis had gotten stuck there on Monday — and thankfully, he didn’t — he’d have rather been sitting right there than in the chair he was occupying earlier as a penalty killer to a power-play unit comprised of Crosby, McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon, Sam Reinhart and Cale Makar.

“We were talking on the bench that if you could choose anyone in the world for a unit, it’d be these guys. They’re the five best you could possibly have on a power play,” Jarvis said. “That’s pretty scary. Thankfully I don’t have to face them in a game.”

But thankfully, we’ll get to watch them in one.

It’s a dream scenario that we hoped would come to life before the under-23 North American team was built to compete with Canada at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey.

We were robbed of the McDavid-Crosby-MacKinnon nuclear option then — and once again at the 2018 and 2022 Winter Olympic Games, which were held without NHL participants. And a freak collision Crosby was involved in last week nearly robbed us of it again for this 4 Nations Face-Off.

But Captain Canada isn’t just filling a seat next to Jarvis in the dressing room, he’s bringing his gold-medal-winning experience to the ice.

“Good to go,” Crosby said.

They were three words all of Canada needed to hear after he missed the last two Pittsburgh Penguins games with an upper-body ailment.

Crosby skated on his own and consulted with doctors before landing in Montreal. He said he met with Team Canada’s doctors upon his arrival, and then, on Monday, he hopped on the ice for practice and into his power-play spot between McDavid and MacKinnon.

MacKinnon qualified it as “special,” saying, “those two are definitely top five ever.”

“It’s exciting,” Crosby said. “Obviously a ton of talent, a ton of skill. Having to think and move quickly and that sort of thing, be instinctive but also react to some of the plays that they make. I think that’s fun.”

We think it’s the most compelling thing we’ll see over the coming days, with respect to the Americans, Finns and Swedes.

It’s been 38 years since we saw Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux play on a line with Dale Hawerchuk at the 1987 Canada Cup, and it’s hard to say we’ve seen as powerful a combination for any hockey nation since.

That Canada's Jon Cooper even has the option of calling out 97, 87 and 29 for a shift is a coach's dream, even if he downplayed it slightly after Monday's practice.

"I've been on record saying the '87 Canada Cup was arguably the greatest hockey/three-game segment you've ever seen," he said of the final between Canada and the former Soviet Union. "But I think today's players are different than those players back then. We don't have Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux, but we have Nathan MacKinnon and Connor McDavid and go down the list. But that gap between say the 12th forward in '87 and the first forward I think is a lot farther than the gap in today's team and the first forward. There's just weapons all over the ice, and it was super cool being on the ice at ice level to watch what was going on here. There's just no holes. Not saying these other teams in the past had holes, but I think you can put a lot of guys together and create that chemistry..."

Fair.

But Cooper didn't wait to roll out his biggest guns on a single power-play unit, and we know we weren't the only ones who would be delighted by the possibility he'd do that.

"You always want to see the best players play together," said Gretzky when we spoke with him at the NHL's Board of Governors meeting in early December.

The Great One is getting what he wants, and so are we.

Crosby's dedication sets the tone for Canada

The three-time Stanley Cup winner, who scored the Golden Goal in the 2010 Vancouver Games and captained Canada to gold at the 2014 Sochi Games and the 2016 World Cup, is unquestionably this team's leader.

"He's the guy guys are kind of looking towards, especially in an experience like this where it's new for so many," said the 29-year-old Reinhart of his 37-year-old captain. "It's been 10 years (since the 2014 Olympics), a lot of us weren't even kids in the league when that was going on. So, guys are aware, guys know we haven't played the last couple (Olympics), and it's easy to see what it means to him. That's kind of what it is to a Canadian growing up with the game, so he sets the tone in every way."

Crosby set it just by showing up here, with his presence at this tournament obviously put in jeopardy by the injury he suffered last week.

What a relief.

Cooper knows how much it means to have No. 87 leading this team.

"The way he is and interacts as the guy that carries so much weight... There's just so much humility about him, and it just comes through him, and that's why people follow him," the coach said. "You talk about wanting to play for your country, this kid, it's remarkable the passion he has for it, and that's probably why he's got a whole lot of wins and not a whole lot of losses when he plays in these events."

Crosby's just glad he has one more opportunity to play in one.

"It means a lot: another opportunity to represent Canada, get to play with guys that I've played with before — a couple — but mostly a lot of new faces, too, and guys that haven't had the opportunity in a long time to play for Canada," he said. "A lot of different reasons, but obviously playing for Team Canada is always a huge honour, and especially to be here in Montreal. It's a great atmosphere."

Starting goaltender still a mystery

While Cooper couldn't hide his line and special teams combinations at Monday's practice, he did say he wouldn't confirm a starting goaltender for Wednesday's opening game against Sweden until after Tuesday's practice.

We got a bit of clarity about part of the pecking order when Montreal Canadiens goaltender Samuel Montembeault started practice on the sidelines.

Montembeault eventually rotated in at both ends, where St. Louis Blues goaltender Jordan Binnington and Vegas Golden Knights goalie Adin Hill did the lion's share of the work.

Then, after practice, Montembeault was pushed from his regular stall with the Canadiens, where Hill was placed.

"That's where Carey Price used to sit," Montembeault said to Hill.

Binnington was across from them, in the seat typically reserved for the backup goaltender of the Canadiens.

Still, there are no guarantees he'll be the backup come Wednesday.

One thing we can guarantee after having spoken to all three goaltenders is they don't care for the narrative that's developed that they represent a potential weakness for this strong Canadian side.

Hill and Binnington are Stanley Cup winners, Montembeault backstopped Canada to gold at the world championship in 2023, and all three want to prove they belong here.

But more than anything, "we're just looking to win," said Hill.

"At the end of the day, it's a four-game tournament, so it's just coming into every game with a killer mentality," he added. "There's no time to have a bad game, so just go out and win."

Speaking of narratives...

Crosby takes no issue with the one that's developed around USA Hockey's rise to supremacy.

Many people see the Americans as the team to beat at this tournament and Crosby understands why.

"I think that's fair," said the native of Cole Harbour, N.S.

As Crosby continued, though, it sounded more like he was just acknowledging he knows that narrative is out there.

"There's always going to be narratives, and you look at their team and the depth and you look how they've done internationally, there's always going to be certain narratives," Crosby said. "Really, it's just about our group and making sure that we do everything we can to be at our best. Whether it's the U.S. or Sweden or Finland, there's some good teams. We just got to worry about what we need to do to be the best team we can."

Quick hits

- Travis Konecny missed Monday's practice because he was too sick to participate. We don't know his status for Wednesday's game against Sweden, but the thought of him joining Brad Marchand and Brayden Point and potentially playing in favour of Jarvis would give Canada two of the peskiest lines the country has ever assembled.

The other one features Tampa Bay Lightning forwards Anthony Cirelli and Brandon Hagel and Florida Panthers superpest Sam Bennett.

- Cirelli said there will be nothing awkward about playing with Bennett, his cross-state nemesis. "It's crazy how quickly those rivalries dissipate when you are on the same team as someone and playing on a line together," he added. "It's going to be awesome. They're both great competitors and great players. Excited to play with 'em."

- Mitch Marner took a hard fall in practice and was delighted to hear barely anyone noticed because Crosby's line with MacKinnon and Mark Stone was taking a rush at the other end at the same time.

- On the line combination of Reinhart-McDavid-Marner, Cooper said, "You got speed, you got brains, and you got guys that can shoot it in the net. You hand me a line like that, I'll take my chances."

Marner has 71 points in 54 games so far this season. McDavid has as many in 49 games. And Reinhart, who had 57 goals last regular season before scoring 10 in 24 playoff games to help the Panthers win the Cup, has 31 goals and 31 assists through 57 games through this year's campaign.

So yeah, decent line...

- Last lines of this notebook go to Drew Doughty, the two-time Cup winner and two-time Olympic gold medalist who was the last player added to this team following Alex Pietrangelo's withdrawal.

"We've experienced these things," Doughty said of the leadership he and Crosby can provide. "Not that these guys aren't all veterans in here but (a lot of them have) never had a Canada best-on-best type of tournament. They can lean on us. Not that they're going to need advice, but we can keep the room calm, we can bring the room when we need to, maybe kick some guys' asses if we need to. I think it's important to have some leadership in the room."

[Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing the goaltenders for each team at 4 Nations Face-Off](https://www.sportsnet.ca)

By Jason Bukala – February 11, 2025

Every professional sport has a particularly important position that can dictate the outcome of games on its own. In the NFL, good teams need an athletic, durable quarterback to have any chance of winning a Super Bowl. Major League Baseball teams are always searching for ways to bolster their pitching staffs. NBA teams require their version of a quarterback with a creative guard who can distribute the ball or drain threes from long range. In hockey circles, it's imperative to have an elite goaltender to elevate your chance of success in high leverage scenarios.

The 4 Nations Face-Off has potential to provide hockey enthusiasts with a buffet of entertaining games. Every roster, from Canada, to USA, Finland and Sweden, every roster is loaded with high-end skill at the forward and defence positions. It's hard for me to imagine one team running away from the pack at the event. Every roster has its share of strengths and question marks.

But the team that wins the tournament will likely ride a hot goaltender. And I believe, after breaking down the rosters, there are a couple of teams with a significant advantage heading into the event.

Here's a look at the goaltenders who will be representing their countries at the 4 Nations Face-Off:

TEAM USA

The American team is dealing from a position of strength with their goaltenders. Connor Hellebuyck will be the starter for Team USA, but Jake Oettinger is more than capable and would be the starter on other teams in the tournament. Team USA has two top-flight No. 1 goalies on their roster.

Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets

The Jets are currently the top team in the NHL (39-14-3) and Hellebuyck has an incredible 34-7-2 record, a 2.06 GAA and .925 save percentage. The defending Vezina Trophy winner looks poised to win the award for the second time in a row and third overall.

Despite the fact Hellebuyck has enjoyed a great deal of regular season success in his career, his playoff results have been average in comparison. He has only won 18 of his 45 starts in the playoffs and his goals-against average spikes to 2.85, while his save percentage lands at .910. He has something to prove at the 4 Nations and a positive result could provide even more confidence for Hellebuyck when the Stanley Cup Playoffs begin in April.

Jake Oettinger, Dallas Stars

At 26 years old, Oettinger looks poised to be Team USA's future No. 1 goaltender. He's having a solid year in Dallas. The Stars are a contending team and Oettinger's 26-12-2 record, combined with his 2.35 GAA and .911 save percentage, provides Dallas with security at the position. Oettinger has played in 38 playoff games the past two seasons and has already gained experience dealing with the pressure that comes with high leverage scenarios. In last year's playoffs he posted an impressive 2.24 GAA and .913 save percentage.

Swayman and the Bruins went through a long, drawn-out contract negotiation in the off-season that didn't get resolved until the eve of the regular season puck drop. He missed all of training camp in Boston and has suffered through some ups and downs in the first year of his new deal (\$8.25 million for eight years). He's team USA's third goalie for the 4 Nations and not likely to suit up for any games. His 18-18-4 record, 2.98 GAA and .898 save percentage speak to his inconsistency this year in Boston.

TEAM CANADA

It will be interesting to see who wins the net for Team Canada. Long gone are the Martin Brodeur, Carey Price and Roberto Luongo years of elite goaltending for Canada on the international stage. I'm not sure the Canadian coaching staff and management group have settled on their starter for the tournament.

Binnington is a Stanley Cup champion with a 20-20 playoff record in his career and 2.73 GAA, .910 save percentage. Similar to Swayman, Binnington has had a very inconsistent year with the Blues. His 15-19-4 record, 2.89 GAA and .896 save percentage doesn't exactly inspire confidence heading into the tournament, but the other goalies on Canada's roster haven't elevated their games either. I expect Binnington to start for Canada, but whoever it ends up being will be on a short leash at an event that requires a positive result every night. Canada can't afford to lose a game due to poor goaltending. One loss in the round-robin makes for a more difficult journey to the final.

There is certainly an argument to be made for Hill to be Team Canada's starter. I understand the reasoning and it certainly could happen. Hill has a 20-10-4 record this year with a goals-against average of 2.64 and a .900 save percentage. Those stats are better than Binnington's, but Hill has allowed four goals against in four of his last six starts and has recently been splitting games with Ilya Samsonov for Vegas.

I haven't loved Hill's tracking, ability to find pucks in traffic, and crease composure at times this year. Team Canada can't have goals sneaking through their netminder when they are killing penalties. Goals against from high danger areas are acceptable, and understandable. But goals like the one in the following clip, that slip between the pads of the goaltender when he doesn't get set and square to the play on time, simply can't happen and has been too noticeable for Hill this season.

The Canadiens are a rebuilding outfit and, depending on the week, capable of looking like a playoff team. They have been wildly inconsistent this year, however, and Montembeault's results have mirrored his teammates. Montembeault is a nice story. He's still coming into his own as an NHL starting goalie, but his last 10-game segment was all over the map. Only two of his starts ended with him allowing two goals against or less, and he posted a 3.00 GAA and .898 save percentage in the segment. He's probably Team Canada's third goalie for the tournament, but the fact the Habs give up more chances against than Vegas for example, has to be factored into his stats line.

TEAM SWEDEN

The Swedes looked set in goal with Jacob Markstrom likely to be the starter before going down with an MCL sprain. Markstrom is having a solid year in New Jersey and looks like the answer in net that they have been searching for in recent years. Before he was placed on injured reserve Markstrom had posted a 21-9-5 record, a 2.20 GAA and .912 save percentage.

But, without Markstrom available, Sweden will turn to these three goalies for the 4 Nations Face-Off:

Gustavsson is Minnesota's starter and one of the top goalies in the NHL. He's big in the net (6-foot-2, 184 pounds) and very athletic. He has the ability to steal a game and, if named the starter, could be the key to Sweden's success at the tournament. Gustavsson is only 26 years old and will be in the mix to be the starter for Team Sweden at the Olympics next year and beyond. On balance, his performance this NHL season has been very impressive (22-11-3, 2.63 GAA, .915 SV%) but his numbers fell off a bit in his last 10-game segment (3-5-1, 2.72 GAA, .906 SV%). It will be interesting to see how he responds to the challenge of these high leverage games.

Ullmark has only played 25 games for the Senators this year and has dealt with injuries that have led to long stretches of rehab. Ullmark is certainly capable of providing top flight goaltending for Team Sweden

and might be the starter over Gustavsson. He's posted a 12-9-2 record in his first season with the Senators. The former Vezina Trophy winner (2023) is a big body (6-foot-5, 212 pounds) who generally positions himself well to make first stops, but can get a bit messy in the crease when tasked with making second or third saves. His record in his last 10 games is 5-3-2 (2.68 GAA, .902 SV%).

Ersson has played 31 games for the Flyers this season and posted very respectable numbers (16-10-3, 2.81 GAA, .896 SV%) considering the Flyers are still growing as a team and provide inconsistent detail in front of their goalies when defending their zone. He's only 25 years old with plenty of learning to do at the NHL and international levels. He will benefit from being around this group but I don't see him getting into games.

TEAM FINLAND

Team Finland will no doubt be led by Nashville Predators goalie Juuse Saros at the tournament. Their chances of success rests heavily on him. The Finns are always a tough out on the international stage. They play with the kind of structure, and compete, that leads to their skill players having the time and space to produce offence. But their defence was heavily banged up ahead of the event.

Juuse Saros, Nashville Predators

Saros is a workhorse for the Predators. He and Hellebuyck play more than most other NHL starting goalies.

The Preds are having a disappointing year and Saros' stats reflect a team that has struggled from the outset. The 5-foot-10, 180-pound goalie is very athletic. He's active in his crease, but makes himself as big as possible fronting shooters to take away net. His 11-23-6 record, combined with his 2.95 GAA and .898 save percentage is the worst of his NHL career, but he's plenty capable of stealing games for the Finns.

It's debatable who ends up being Finland's backup goalie at the tournament but Lankinen is a great story this year. He was picked up late in free agency by the Canucks, but is a big part of the reason the Canucks were able to win games early in the year with their starter Thatcher Demko rehabbing from injury. Prior to this season, Lankinen's career high in games played was 37 with the Chicago Blackhawks in 2020-21. He's already played 34 games for the Canucks this season and posted a 2.53 GAA and .905 save percentage, with a 19-8-7 record.

Luukkonen has won the crease in Buffalo. He's their undisputed starting goalie, having played 37 games so far this season already. The Sabres are an unpredictable outfit, to say the least, and Luukkonen has had some tough nights. On balance, however, his body of work has resulted in a respectable 18-16-4 record, a 3.02 GAA and .895 save percentage. He generally gives the Sabres a chance to win on a nightly basis. Luukkonen is a big goalie, listed at 6-foot-5, 216 pounds. He's only 25 years young so he will have a role on Team Finland for the foreseeable future and will definitely benefit from the experience of the 4 Nations Face-Off.

GOALIE RANKINGS

Heading into the tournament here is how I see the teams ranking by their goaltenders:

No. 1: USA

No. 2: Sweden

No. 3: Finland

No. 4: Canada