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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets keep slim playoff hopes going with victory over Ottawa Senators

By Brian Hedger- April 9, 2025

The Blue Jackets' pending elimination from the playoff race can wait.

A loss to the Ottawa Senators in regulation Tuesday combined with a Montreal Canadiens win would've put an elimination 'e' next to the Blue Jackets' spot in the standings, but that's not how things shook out at Nationwide Arena. Instead, the Jackets kept their slim playoff hopes going with a 5-2 victory over the Senators — who've all but wrapped up the Eastern Conference's first wild card and took the season series against Columbus with victories March 29 and this past Sunday in Ottawa.

"Until there's an 'e' or an 'x' next to our name ... until it's decided, we have to play like we have a chance and give ourselves the best chance to get in," forward Mathieu Olivier said. "Tonight was a good first step until the end of the year."

Dmitry Voronkov's goal 7:00 into the first period ended a season-long goal drought of 159:04 for the Blue Jackets, who were shut out this past weekend in Toronto and Ottawa.

Justin Danforth, Sean Monahan, Olivier and Adam Fantilli scored the other four for the Blue Jackets (35-33-9), who got two assists from Kent Johnson. Elvis Merzlikins picked up the goaltending win with 33 saves, while Anton Forsberg took the loss for the Senators (42-30-6).

The Blue Jackets led 2-1 after the first period on goals by Voronkov and Danforth, who later assisted on Olivier's goal late in the second for a two-point effort. That goal gave the Blue Jackets a 3-1 starting the third, when Monahan and Fantilli added tallies that made it 5-1 before Ottawa's Thomas Chabot cut it to 5-2 with a goal off a rebound.

The Blue Jackets host the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday in their effort to stave off elimination.

"We have a chance," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "(Reporters) know the numbers better than I do, and we'll talk about it (Wednesday), but we're not mathematically eliminated, so we're going to play freakin' hard every night."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets awaken offensively, stave off playoff elimination by beating Ottawa

By Aaron Portzline- April 9, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It doesn't look good, and everybody knows it. The Columbus Blue Jackets would need a miracle over the final five games and nine days of the regular season to jump four teams and claim the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

But "doesn't look good" is not the same as "mathematically eliminated."

The Blue Jackets awakened offensively and snapped an ill-timed three-game losing streak by beating the Ottawa Senators 5-2 on Tuesday before 15,188 in Nationwide Arena. If the Jackets had lost in regulation, they would have been playing out the string the rest of the way.

"We used different words in the locker room, but, basically, (we wanted) to play with great confidence," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "Have some bite. Play with an edge. We're good, too. I think we've lost that a little bit.

"We've gone over our last couple of games and while we didn't play poorly, we didn't play with that bite, that extra edge that we had tonight. We have to play like that the rest of the way. We have a chance. You guys know the numbers better than I do, and we'll talk about it tomorrow. But we're not mathematically eliminated, so we're going to play freakin' hard every night."

Dmitri Voronkov, Justin Danforth, Mathieu Olivier, Sean Monahan and Adam Fantilli scored for the Blue Jackets, who had been shut out in their previous two games, including once by these Senators. Kent Johnson added two assists while goaltender Elvis Merzlikins had 33 saves.

Voronkov's goal was big on two fronts.

It was the big Russian's first goal in 16 games — his longest scoring drought of the season — and it put the Blue Jackets ahead 1-0 only 7:00 into the game. Voronkov's last goal came on March 1, when the Jackets beat the Detroit Red Wings in the outdoor game at Ohio Stadium for the high-water mark of the season.

The goal ended a run for 14 consecutive goals against the Blue Jackets (dating back to an April 3 game vs. Colorado), and snapped their scoring drought at 159 minutes, 4 seconds.

"We're a desperate team right now and it showed early on," Danforth said. "For us, getting first goals is big for our confidence. We played a bit mean, played with a bit of swagger. Everybody played great up and down the lineup. We got one and we got rolling."

While the Blue Jackets were pulling away from Ottawa — a goal late in the second (Olivier) and a power-play goal early in the third (Monahan) made it 4-1 — the Montreal Canadiens were taking care of business at home against the Detroit Red Wings.

For weeks now, the battle for the final wild-card spot has been more like a potato-sack race than a sprint to the postseason. But the Canadiens, who have won six straight, have taken charge to put their grip on the final playoff spot.

A regulation loss by the Blue Jackets on Tuesday would have ended it. But any combination of a Blue Jackets regulation loss or a Canadiens win — Columbus hosts Buffalo on Thursday, while Montreal plays at Ottawa on Friday — would pull the plug.

That's just their situation with Montreal. The Jackets would also need to pass the Red Wings, the New York Rangers and the New York Islanders in the standings.

"We know the situation we're in," Fantilli said. "We see the standings. We still have to give ourselves the best chance to get in. We've put ourselves in a tough position, but our goal is to win out the rest of the season."

Evason said he and the coaching staff have noticed a tendency in recent weeks, and not a good one. The Blue Jackets, he noted, have been wading into games physically. That is, they've been responding to physical play, but not dictating it themselves.

That was not the case on Tuesday. There were greasy hits, hard checks and post-whistle scrums for most of the final two periods, with Sean Kuraly, Olivier, Monahan, Erik Gudbranson and others providing much of the spark.

"It was a bit of a chippy game, and that got us engaged," Evason said. "We talked to the team after the game that we need to do that on a consistent basis, not have something happen in order for us to get (there). I think we started that way (tonight). We had some bite in our game right from the start."

After Tuesday's slate of games, the Sabres were eliminated from the playoffs despite a shutout win over Carolina. The team directly above Buffalo in the standings is the Blue Jackets, but they're not looking over their shoulder, the players said.

"We can't lose. We just have to play like we can't lose," Olivier said. "Until there's an 'E' or an 'X' next to our name ... as soon as that's decided, we have to play like we have a chance. Tonight was a good first step."

BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets score first, pull away from Senators

By Craig Merz- April 9, 2025

COLUMBUS -- The Ottawa Senators clinched a berth in the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time since 2016-17 despite losing 5-2 to the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena on Tuesday.

Ottawa qualified with the Detroit Red Wings' 4-1 loss to the Montreal Canadiens on Tuesday. The Senators are three points ahead of the Canadiens for the first wild card from the Eastern Conference.

"Wish it was coming off a win, but very excited for our team, our players, our fans, and proud of our players," Senators coach Travis Green said. "They deserve to be in the playoffs this year. It's something that we talked about as a group really all summer, having a training camp, and where we wanted to be at this time of year."

Thomas Chabot had a goal and an assist, Fabian Zetterlund scored, and Anton Forsberg made 30 saves for the Senators (42-30-6), who had won three in a row.

Mathieu Olivier and Justin Danforth each had a goal and an assist, Kent Johnson had two assists, and Elvis Merzlikins made 32 saves for the Blue Jackets (35-33-9), who had been shut out in their previous two games, including a 4-0 loss at Ottawa on Sunday.

Columbus is eight points behind Montreal for the second wild card with five games remaining.

"There were so many people who contributed in so many different ways," Danforth said. "I think we're a desperate team right now, and I think it showed early on."

Dmitri Voronkov gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead at 7:00 of the first period, scoring with a one-timer from the high slot off a turnaround pass by Olivier from below the goal line.

Danforth made it 2-0 at 16:38. He skated into a backhand clearing attempt by Denton Mateychuk, toe-dragged Nikolas Matinpalo at the edge of the right circle, and roofed a shot glove side on Forsberg from the slot.

"They came out stronger than we did tonight," Chabot said. "They played better than we did. You've got to give them credit. I mean, their season was on the line. They were obviously going to play as hard as they could, and do we wish we would have come out better? Yes, for sure. But I mean, at the end of the day, that's the game of hockey."

Zetterlund cut it to 2-1 at 16:18 of the second period with a power-play goal. He put in the rebound of Claude Giroux's shot at the left post.

Olivier extended the lead to 3-1 at 19:38 when Danforth's redirection of Erik Gudbranson's initial shot deflected in off his left skate.

"We can't lose," Olivier said. "So, you've just got to play like you can't lose pretty much until there's an E (eliminated) or an X (qualified for the playoffs) next to our name."

"I've said this before, until it's decided we have to play like we have a chance and obviously give ourselves the best chance to get in. So, tonight was a good first step until the end of the year."

Sean Monahan made it 4-1 with a power-play goal at 2:37 of the third period, scoring with a shot from the bottom of the right circle.

Adam Fantilli pushed it to 5-1 at 11:42, scoring his 25th goal of the season on a breakaway.

Chabot buried a rebound in front at 15:10 for the 5-2 final.

"We haven't scored, but the way that we've played is not poorly, but we didn't play with that little bite, that little extra edge that we had tonight, and we have to play like that the rest of the way," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "We have a chance. I mean, you guys know the numbers better than I do, and maybe we will talk about it tomorrow, but we're not mathematically eliminated, so we're going to play freaking hard every night."

NOTES: Voronkov's goal was his goal since March 1 (17 games). It was also Columbus' first goal in 159:04 and ended the Senators' shutout streak at 160:00. ... Gudbranson played in his 800th NHL game.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets recapture some swagger in win over Senators](#)

By Garrison McDaniel- April 9, 2025

After CBJ wins, we'll give three takeaways about what stood out or what we'll remember from the Blue Jackets victory.

BLUE JACKETS 5, SENATORS 2

1. The third game in 11 days between the Senators and Blue Jackets resulted in a “chippy” contest.

As this game got underway, it was evident from the jump that there was some energy boiling over from the previous two meetings between these two teams in Ottawa.

Sixteen penalty minutes and numerous scrums after the whistle made it clear this game was a playoff-like game, and the Blue Jackets said they used that energy to their advantage.

“It was a bit of a chippy game,” head coach Dean Evason said. “I think that got us engaged. We talked after the game to the team that we need to do that on a consistent basis.”

Mathieu Olivier led the Blue Jackets in hits with four. He also was the team leader in the previous two meetings, as he has now totaled 15 in three games against the Senators. He noted the emotions behind the game afterwards.

“Playoff-type, a lot of emotion. I thought our group did really well handling it,” said Olivier, who was a fight shy of a Gordie Howe hat trick. “(The penalty) kill did a good job today, and obviously the power play came up big. A lot of edge in this game, and thought we responded really well.”

After the two previous losses to the Senators, the Blue Jackets were focused on preventing a season sweep against a team they have spent much of the season jostling with for a wild card spot. Although Ottawa ran away with the pack, clinching a postseason berth despite the loss, it was a focus of Columbus to keep those previous setbacks in the past.

“We went into their building, lost twice and got shut out once,” said Adam Fantilli, who scored on a breakaway to make it 5-1 and solidify the win. “That's never a good feeling. You don't want to get beat by a team three times in a season.”

2. Columbus scored first and won for the 26th time this season doing so.

At one point in this season, the Blue Jackets were the premier team in the NHL to draw the opening goal in a game. After their win against San Jose on Jan. 17, they had scored first a league-leading 28 times and were 18-6-4 while doing so.

Since then, they have managed to open the scoring only 11 times in 31 games and have gone 5-13-2 in the games in which they have conceded first.

Ottawa entered this game 33-6-0 when scoring first, so you can see how important it was that Dmitri Voronkov opened the scoring when he converted Olivier's pass exactly seven minutes into the game.

“Lately it's been a little harder coming by some goals, and especially the first one in the game,” Olivier said. “It's good to start off the right way and obviously set the tone for the rest of the game there.”

Taking a 1-0 lead has been an emphasis all season for the Blue Jackets, and they look to get back to coming into games with a jump as they believe that is when they are their best versions of themselves.

"Scoring first is huge, and it helps you get momentum," Fantilli said. "The guys came out hot, and it was great. (Ottawa) was taking exception with some of our players, and I thought it was really helpful for us to play with a little bit more with an edge there and made us feel more together."

3. The Blue Jackets enter the final stretch desperate for points, and they got two on this night.

A weekend sweep north of the border put a significant dent in the Blue Jackets' playoff hopes, but they returned home determined to prove they wouldn't just roll over with six games to go.

"I think we're a desperate team right now, and I think it showed early on," Justin Danforth said.

The team had their legs from the jump, as their 2-0 lead going into the first intermission resulted in the win. The first period can be credited to the motivation they have with their backs against the wall.

"We can't lose," Olivier said. "Just got to play like you can't lose, pretty much, until there's an (eliminated) or an X next to our name."

Now sitting eight points back of the Montreal Canadiens – who won tonight vs. Detroit – with five games remaining in the regular season, the Blue Jackets still have a steep mountain to climb. As Olivier said, though, it is not over until it is over.

"We see the standings," Fantilli added. "We still have to give ourselves the best chance to get in. We put ourselves in a tough position, but our goal is to win out with the rest of the season, obviously, and try and put ourselves in the best position possible to maybe have a chance to get into the playoffs."

Going into Thursday's game vs. Buffalo at Nationwide Arena, Columbus will try to do the same.

"We have to play like that the rest of the way," Evason said. "We have a chance. We're not mathematically eliminated, so we're going to play freaking hard every night."

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Need Outside Help to Solve Goaltending Problem

By Nicholas Arnold- April 9, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets' hopes to make an appearance in the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs are pretty well cooked. Mathematically, there's still a chance, however, it is very unlikely. They trail the Montreal Canadiens, who sit eight points ahead of them with only six games left on the schedule. We're just waiting for the proverbial fat lady to appear and begin to sing. A season that had many positive moments for Columbus again falls short of the ultimate goal of the playoffs.

In years past, there have been many scapegoats. In the last few years, injuries have been a predominant excuse thrown about by those with a vested interest in the team. That was an issue for sure, but the team was still in a playoff spot despite their key injuries in this campaign. There has been talk of inexperienced coaching, which led to the dismissal of both Brad Larsen and Pascal Vincent. That's been remedied by the hiring of Dean Evason, who has brought a steady hand to the bench. The overloaded quantity and subsequent logjam of players for each position had been a factor in the roster that Don Waddell trimmed upon taking the job as general manager this past summer.

The one scapegoat and problem with the roster that remains is the Blue Jackets' troubled goaltending. Fixing that has to be a priority for this team this offseason, or history will be doomed to repeat itself. There has to be an option somewhere in the NHL to fix what ails their leaky crease.

Elvis Merzlikins Needs Help

It's possible that no Blue Jacket in history has taken more flak in his time with the organization than Elvis Merzlikins. This is a guy who has been beaten down at every possible opportunity. If the team loses a game, social media is set ablaze with "It's time for Elvis to leave the building" posts. Sometimes fairly, most times not.

With the five-year contract extension Merzlikins signed in 2021, his \$5.4 million average annual value (AAV) was pretty well untradeable in a flat cap environment. Although he had one successful season after the deal was signed, the 2022-23 and 2023-24 seasons were disastrous. Through those campaigns, he had the worst save percentage (.889), second-worst goals-against average (3.78), and third-fewest wins (20 in 67 starts) of the 53 goalies that played at least 50 games. Abysmal.

Not all of that is his fault, because the team around him was a trainwreck. The defense was a sieve in front of him. Young, inexperienced, and poorly coached, it was a Kobayashi Maru-level no-win scenario. On top of that, the loss of two teammates in Matiss Kivlenieks and Johnny Gaudreau surely put more strain on his mindset in what is already the most mentally demanding position in team sports. There aren't many who have experienced the same level of adversity in such a public way, and yet still want to show up to the rink and do their job every day. I'm not sure I'd have the mental fortitude to do it.

Having said that, the numbers show that it's clear: the ship has sailed on Merzlikins as the team's number one franchise goalie. While that's the case, it shouldn't necessarily be a reason to jump to a buyout or give up a high draft pick for another team to eat his salary. He could use someone to help reduce the workload on his plate. We've seen success with the tandem method in the Washington Capitals' organization with Logan Thompson and Charlie Lindgren, and over the last couple of years in the Boston Bruins' crease with Linus Ullmark and Jeremy Swayman. It would serve the Blue Jackets well to explore a similar situation – Merzlikins still has his moments of occasional brilliance.

Tarasov Is Not The Answer

When considering a tandem approach to the goaltending, one has to look at their current situation and evaluate the viability of that concept with the current personnel. Merzlikins has been successful in that situation with Joonas Korpisalo when he first entered the league, he'd be able to do so again. Daniil Tarasov is a different situation entirely.

While the Russian netminder has had his moments, my colleague William Espy wrote a piece outlining the situation. If Tarasov is going to break out and become a legit NHL goalie, it's more than likely that it won't happen in a Blue Jackets' uniform. His Jackets' tenure has been injury-laden and bereft of success. Jet Greaves has really grown in his starting role with the American Hockey League's Cleveland Monsters. At the very least, he should be considered as an option for something different at the position in Columbus next season.

If the Blue Jackets are able to find another goalie on the market, they should consider it, even if it involves a more significant level of expense. The one trade from the last offseason that keeps coming to my mind is the one that sent Thompson to the Capitals for two third-round picks. Why wasn't that a trade that the Blue Jackets were sniffing around? Where can Columbus find the next Thompson? Someone who has already proven to be capable of playing as a 1A-1B tandem goalie to help Merzlikins carry the load until the end of his contract.

Despite the leaps forward this season, the Blue Jackets' team save percentage is 28th best in the NHL. Their .890 stat is only better than the Buffalo Sabres, San Jose Sharks, and Philadelphia Flyers, who are all lottery teams. It's also a mark well below the league median of .902. The third season of the Merzlikins-Tarasov tandem hasn't shown any positive strides. 2024-25 has proven to be another season of the Blue Jackets missing the playoffs, and goaltending being a key issue. Waddell and his management team cannot afford to run back the same two guys in 2025-26.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Stave Off Elimination With Win Over Senators

By Mark Scheig- April 9, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets played their third game against the Ottawa Senators in 11 days on Tuesday night at Nationwide Arena. Unlike the first two encounters, the Blue Jackets got a desirable result.

Mathieu Olivier and Justin Danforth each recorded a goal and an assist while Elvis Merzlikins made 33 saves to lift the Blue Jackets to a 5-2 win over the Senators. While the Blue Jackets kept their very slim playoff hopes alive, the Senators punched their ticket to the NHL Playoffs when the Montreal Canadiens defeated the Detroit Red Wings 4-1.

The story of this game was the Blue Jackets playing the kind of hockey that's been successful for them at different points throughout the season.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets had struggled getting leads early in games. They flipped the script on that seven minutes into the first period. Dmitri Voronkov scored his first goal in 17 games dating back to the Stadium Series to open the scoring. He found room in the slot and beat Anton Forsberg.

The Blue Jackets were able to extend to 2-0 late in the first period. Denton Mateychuk lifted the puck from his own zone. Danforth caught up to it to create an odd-man rush. He displayed patience, dragged the puck to the slot and beat Forsberg.

It was a chippy game throughout. Players on both sides took liberties with an extra slash or cross-check when possible. Sean Kuraly and Matthew Highmore each got roughing minors in the second when Kuraly responded to Highmore chopping him with his stick. Werenski also came to the aid of Kent Johnson after he was hit with multiple slashes.

The Blue Jackets had been missing that edge from their game. After suffering a pair of losses to the Senators, that was what they leaned on to find an important win.

On a power play late in the second, Fabian Zetterlund scored his first goal with the Senators since being acquired at the trade deadline from the San Jose Sharks. Olivier then scored a big response goal at the end of the second to extend to 3-1 after 40 minutes.



Then to open the third, Sean Monahan converted on the power play to make it 4-1. Adam Fantilli got a break 10 minutes later to make it 5-1. Thomas Chabot then finished the scoring by depositing a rebound past Merzlikins to get to the final score of 5-2.

Erik Gudbranson recorded an assist playing his 800th NHL game. He received praise postgame from head coach Dean Evason about what he's been able to provide the team since his return from shoulder surgery.

The Blue Jackets trail the Canadiens by eight points with five games left. The Blue Jackets next play Thursday night at home against the Buffalo Sabres. The Senators will head home and meet the Canadiens on Friday night.

1st Ohio Battery / CBJ 5, OTT 2: Five Different Jackets Score As Columbus Stays Alive In Playoff Race

By Ed Francis- April 9, 2025

	1	2	3	F
	0	1	1	2
	2	1	2	5

CBJ GOALS:

Voronkov (P1, 7:00)

Danforth (P1, 16:38)

Olivier (P2, 19:38)

Monahan (PP) (P3, 2:37)

Fantilli (P3, 11:42)

Dmitri Voronkov and Justin Danforth scored first-period goals and Elvis Merzlikins played his best game in weeks as the Columbus Blue Jackets kept themselves in the postseason race with a 5-2 win over the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday night.

Voronkov's goal ended a 16-game drought from the big forward, who hadn't scored since the Stadium Series on March 1. It gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead for just the second time in their last 14 games.

"Lately it's been a little harder coming by some goals, especially the first one of the game," said Mathieu Olivier, who assisted on the goal and later found the back of the net himself. "It's good to start off the right way."

After Danforth sent the Blue Jackets into the first intermission with a 2-0 lead, the Senators cut the lead to one with a power-play goal from Fabian Zetterlund late in the second period.

That's when Olivier answered with just 22 seconds left in the middle frame on a redirect to make it a 3-1 game. It was his 18th goal of the season.

Sean Monahan picked up his 18th of the season less than three minutes into the third period, connecting on a power-play goal that put the Blue Jackets up 4-1.

Adam Fantilli added a third-period insurance goal to reach 25 goals on the season.

Ottawa's Thomas Chabot scored in the closing minutes to bring the final to 5-2.

Merzlikins finished with 33 saves on 35 shots and was named the Second Star of the game.

Columbus' victory kept them alive in the playoff race for at least one more game, though the Montreal Canadiens were also victors Tuesday and remained eight points ahead of the Blue Jackets for the final spot in the playoffs.

Despite a game in hand, it's clear that winning out — and Montreal struggling in their final four games — is the only path for what is a highly unlikely chance at a playoff berth for Columbus.

"We can't lose," said Olivier. "Until there's an 'e' or an 'x' next to our name, I've said before, until it's decided, we have to play like we have a chance."

"Tonight was a good first step."

Here's how the Blue Jackets kept themselves in the playoff race:

1st Period:

(7:00 — CBJ Goal): Voronkov's 21st goal of the season gives the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead and ends a streak of 14 straight goals scored by the opposition going back to last Thursday. Mathieu Olivier shows excellent patience here as he handles the puck behind the net before a slick spin pass over to Voronkov, who is waiting to bury it in the slot and does just that.

(16:38 — CBJ Goal): Danforth shows off a toe drag for his 9th goal of the season to give the Blue Jackets a 2-0. Denton Mateychuk makes an excellent clear from the Blue Jackets' zone, and Danforth picks the assist up near mid-ice. The toe drag fools Ottawa defenseman Nikolas Matinpalo, and the shot fools goalie Anton Forsberg to double the Columbus lead.

2nd Period:

(16:18 — OTT Goal): The Senators get on the board to cut the Columbus lead to 2-1. Zetterlund gets a power-play goal after Claude Giroux's shot from the point generates just enough of a rebound. Zetterlund is outside the crease waiting on it and tucks it away to make it a one-goal game.

(19:38 — CBJ Goal): Olivier is, as broadcaster Steve Mears says, in the right place at the right time. Erik Gudbranson shoots it from the point, and it grazes off Danforth, redirecting it right to the skate of Olivier. He has no clue where it is, and because there's no distinct kicking motion, it's a good goal to make it a 3-1 game in the closing seconds of the second.

3rd Period:

(2:37 — CBJ Goal): Monahan's power-play goal makes it 4-1 in favor of the Blue Jackets. Kent Johnson has the puck near the boards and finds Monahan entering the circle without a lot of attention on him. He takes the pass and then takes his time, waiting a moment before getting off the perfect shot for the goal.

(11:42 — CBJ Goal): Fantilli makes it a 5-1 game as he simply outskates the Senators. He grabs the puck after Johnson throws it to center ice from near the Ottawa bench, and it's off to the races, with Mo beating three Sens to get off a clean look past Forsberg.

(15:10 — OTT Goal): Chabot gives the Senators a late goal. The defenseman gets his 7th of the season on a rebound to trim Columbus' lead to 5-2.

OTT	GAME STATS	CBJ
35	SHOTS	35
41%	FACEOFFS	59%
1/4	POWER PLAY	1/2
1/2	PENALTY KILL	3/4
27	HITS	23
13	GIVEAWAYS	16
0	TAKEAWAYS	7
23	BLOCKED SHOTS	20
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
3.66	EXPECTED GOALS	2.79
72	SHOT ATTEMPTS	72
28	SCORING CHANCES	29
12	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	10
Data via NHL.com & NaturalStatTrick.com		

Stat Chat:

- In his 800th career NHL game, Erik Gudbranson picked up his 101st career assist on Olivier's goal in the second period.

- The trio of James van Riemsdyk, Fantilli, and Johnson had a 20-7 edge in shot attempts in their 7:49 together on the ice.
- Both Ivan Provorov and Mateychuk finished with an assist and a +3 plus/minus rating on the night, as they continue to gel well together.

Up Next:

The second game of a three-game homestand for the Blue Jackets is Thursday night when the Buffalo Sabres come to town. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m.

The Athletic / Remembering Greg Millen, an NHLer, broadcaster and prankster who made his colleagues feel like family

By Chris Johnston- April 9, 2025

I always knew when I was in the same arena as Greg Millen.

That familiar greeting would come echoing down a hallway somewhere on the NHL circuit before I'd even had the chance to lay eyes on him.

"What's up, Scoops? What scoops are you working on today? What trouble are you stirring up now?"

The barrage of questions and accusations would arrive in rapid succession and inevitably be punctuated with a hearty chuckle. That was vintage Millsey. Quick to deliver a good-hearted needle and always with the last laugh.

By that point, he'd already spent more time behind a microphone than he did tending a goal crease in the world's best hockey league, but he never lost sight of the player's point of view.

During the years he worked as Sportsnet's analyst on Toronto Maple Leafs games, he never missed an opportunity to tut-tut the beat reporters when he felt we were pushing a storyline a little too far or barking up the wrong tree.

Whether it was myself, Jonas Siegel, Mike Zeisberger or any of the other reporters covering the team on a regular basis, we always knew that Millsey was reading our work. He wasn't shy about making it known. The man made sure he was incredibly well-prepared every time he stepped into the booth to call a game, although he probably would have bristled if I had characterized his vociferous consumption of the Toronto media in those days as actual research for the job.

You always knew when Millsey was working a game.

Not so much by his booming baritone or a signature call on the broadcast, but the spilled coffee in the press box. The man absolutely loved to pull a prank and seemingly never tired of his old standby: sticking a pin in the bottom of a paper coffee cup before finding a safe place to watch while an unsuspecting reporter fumbled around with a leaky next pour.

That gag was cited by more than one Toronto-based media member on an "in memoriam" text chain that started up Monday night after the NHL Alumni Association announced Millen had passed away suddenly at age 67.

His playing career spanned more than 600 games over 14 seasons with the Pittsburgh Penguins, Hartford Whalers, St. Louis Blues, Quebec Nordiques, Chicago Blackhawks and Detroit Red Wings in a league that bears little resemblance to the one that exists today. Millsey would often tell stories about the perils of traveling commercially in his era and delighted in pointing out the various creature comforts that were unavailable to players in the 1980s.

He went on to occupy one of the most coveted broadcast seats in the sport, working regularly on "Hockey Night in Canada" and earning a spot alongside legendary play-by-play man Bob Cole — including for Cole's last game at the Bell Centre in Montreal on April 6, 2019.

However, what I always appreciated most about Millsey was the fact he had so many interests beyond the game he loved. He spoke often with colleagues about his growing family, which includes wife Ann and children Caroline, Emily, Allison and Charlie. He was passionate about the master's degree in

leadership he earned from the University of Guelph in 2014, which led him to outside teaching and consulting work.

In recent years, our paths didn't cross nearly as frequently.

I haven't been on the road as much as I once was during the regular season, while Millsey mostly worked Calgary Flames broadcasts. When last we exchanged texts, we wished each other a Merry Christmas and I told him that I missed hearing his regular Leafs observations.

"Miss the crew as well but thankfully my new Calgary family is a good group!!" he replied.

You'll note his use of the word family in that text. It's how he treated his colleagues.

Which brings me to the other side of Millsey.

Early in the 2015-16 season, my mother Linda became unexpectedly ill and I took a leave from my job covering the Leafs beat to help my family manage that situation. My mom wound up fighting for two months following a glioblastoma diagnosis before dying in January 2016. Her funeral was held in my hometown of Cobourg, Ont., at the outset of the NHL's All-Star Weekend in Nashville, which prevented a lot of colleagues from being able to attend.

About the last person I expected to see walk through the doors that morning was Millsey, but there he was. He made the 45-minute drive on his own and came to pay his respects despite never having met any members of my immediate family.

Unless you've been through that kind of loss yourself, it might be difficult to understand just how meaningful his gesture was for me during an incredibly difficult time. It was massive. It blew me away.

And it breaks my heart today to know that Millsey's family is now navigating its own crashing waves of grief and sadness after losing him without warning far too soon.

May they eventually find solace in their warmest memories.

Because here's the thing about Greg Millen: Beneath the curmudgeonly veneer he occasionally adopted and that good-natured ribbing he always dished out was a man with a heart of gold.

A man of great integrity.

A man who always found his own unique way of not letting colleagues lose sight of the fact that there are much more important things in life than the games or the scoops.

The Athletic / Why NHL Eastern Conference playoff teams have reason to hope — and panic

By Shayna Goldman and Harman Dayal- April 9, 2025

With another two regulation wins under their belts, the Montreal Canadiens' playoff odds jumped to 89 percent on Monday morning. With Montreal firming up its standing as the eighth seed, the playoff picture is taking shape in the East.

Within those eight teams, teams are still jostling for position. All three Atlantic seeds are in flux, and the Senators are even pushing to jump from wild-card standing to divisional slots. As those teams vie for pivotal points down the stretch, it is time to start setting the stage for the playoffs.

Every playoff contender has strengths that got them here and should give them hope in the postseason. But with the good comes the bad; there is at least one reason for concern for every Stanley Cup hopeful that could hold them back this spring.

Atlantic Division

Toronto Maple Leafs

Reasons for hope: The Leafs are going to be a tough team to score against in the playoffs. Toronto has shifted its playing style under Craig Berube, opting for more dump-and-chase play, a tight defensive structure and a heavier, more hard-nosed identity that should theoretically translate better to playoff hockey. Toronto boasts three high-end shutdown defensemen in Chris Tanev, Jake McCabe and Brandon Carlo, and has received excellent goaltending from Anthony Stolarz, whose .922 save percentage ranks second-best in the NHL. The Leafs have surrendered just 2.1 goals against per 60 at five-on-five this season, which ranks fifth-best in the NHL.

Combine that stout defensive structure and above-average goaltending with offensive stars up front and the best power play in the NHL since Feb. 1, and you have a compelling recipe for potential playoff success.

Mitch Marner's clutch play for Team Canada in the pressure-cooker environment of the 4 Nations Face-Off also provides hope that he can finally break through on the big stage.

Reasons for concern: The Leafs' best players tend to fade come playoff time. And when that happens, the team's overall scoring dries up completely because they lack secondary contributors who can step up.

It's the same potential issue this year: Marner, William Nylander, John Tavares, Matthew Knies, Auston Matthews and Bobby McMann have combined to score 72 percent of the Leafs' total goals this season. If the big guns go quiet, Toronto is cooked offensively, especially since they generate fewer shots and scoring chances as a team under Berube's low-event system.

Matthews in particular hasn't looked 100 percent physically this year and it's hindered his production — he's potted 30 goals in 61 games, which is a far cry from 69 goals in 2023-24. They need him playing at an MVP level again.

Finally, while Stolarz has been terrific this year, he's never started an NHL playoff game in his career. We'll see how he fares under that pressure.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Reasons for hope: Tampa boasts one of the most terrifying top-six forward groups in the NHL. Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point and Jake Guentzel are a nearly unstoppable trio, while Brandon Hagel and Anthony Cirelli are the backbone for one of the best second lines in the league.

Andrei Vasilevskiy has been lights-out over the last few months, notching a .929 save percentage over his last 33 games. Few teams have the luxury of elite goaltending like Tampa does.

The Lightning are excellent on special teams, ranking top 10 in the NHL on both the power play and penalty kill.

Ryan McDonagh's offseason acquisition has restabilized the top-four blue line and the team's overall defensive structure. Speaking of upgrades, Yanni Gourde (10 points in 15 games and strong two-way metrics) and Oliver Bjorkstrand have beefed up the club's forward depth, previously their biggest weakness.

The Lightning are revitalized and look far closer to a Cup contender than last year's team, which had major flaws and holes.

Reasons for concern: They're staring at a Round 1 matchup against the defending Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers. Tampa is much better equipped to hang with Florida compared to last year, but this series would be a nasty, grueling battle. Even if they beat the Panthers, the wear and tear of that series could catch up with them later in the playoffs, especially since this is an older core.

The Lightning's group of blueliners also aren't the most mobile bunch. How will they fare breaking the puck out against aggressive, heavy-forechecking teams like the Panthers and even the Berube-led Leafs? If Tampa's defensemen struggle on zone exits, it could hinder their top forwards' ability to produce.

Finally, while Gourde and Bjorkstrand have upgraded the depth, this is still a relatively top-heavy forward group.

Florida Panthers

Reasons for hope: It's easy to understand why the Panthers won the Cup last year and made it to the Final in 2023.

When healthy, Florida has one of the best forward groups in the NHL, led by Aleksander Barkov, Sam Reinhart, Matthew Tkachuk, Brad Marchand, Carter Verhaeghe, Sam Bennett and Anton Lundell. It's a near-perfect blend of dynamic offensive skill, high-end defensive chops and a heavy, physical makeup.

Paul Maurice has helped Florida forge an identity and playing style that's perfectly suited to the postseason. The Panthers have arguably the best forecheck in the league, are elite defensively, beat teams up physically and find ways to manufacture offense from the slot even when time and space are hard to come by. The Panthers are dominant at controlling play, ranking second-best in the league at controlling five-on-five shot attempts and expected goals this season.

This team has a daunting combination of talent, championship pedigree and a system that's unlocked exceptional play-controlling results.

Reasons for concern: The Panthers are limping into the playoffs. They're 5-8-1 since the trade deadline, which is by far the worst record of any team in a playoff spot.

Injury context obviously matters. Florida has been decimated by absences to key players, with Tkachuk, Barkov, Aaron Ekblad (due to suspension) and Dmitry Kulikov, among others, all missing time lately. The Panthers will get their top players back for Round 1, but it isn't always easy to flip a switch and immediately play your best, most dominant hockey. If their returning players show rust, it could put them behind the eight ball against a stacked Lightning team, assuming they play Tampa in the first round.

Verhaeghe, who's been snakebitten and scored just 17 goals this year, must return to being a high-end force in the top six come playoff time.

Lastly, will the physical toll of back-to-back Finals appearances cause the Panthers to eventually run out of gas at some point this spring?

Washington Capitals

Reason for hope: Coaching plays a key role in the Capitals' success. Spencer Carbery did a lot with a little last year, and with big offseason reinforcements, he has helped revitalize this team into a real playoff contender.

The Capitals may not have the big guns to stack up to the league's best, but their balance is a major asset. Dylan Strome and Alex Ovechkin form a high-scoring tandem on the top line, while Pierre-Luc Dubois is the second-line center this team craved. A healthy Tom Wilson has rebounded in a big way on both ends of the ice. And the most recent addition, Ryan Leonard, joined at the right time with Aliaksei Protas' recent injury.

The team's depth extends to the blue line, with John Carlson leading the way. Rasmus Sandin has grown into a top-four role, Matt Roy is a steady shutdown presence and the coaches have found a way to maximize Jakob Chychrun's high-end offense in the proper usage. This defense excels at retrieving pucks and breaking out with control, which helps the Capitals control pace at five-on-five.

Reason for concern: Goaltending was a strength all season, but Logan Thompson's injury status is one reason for worry — especially since his game was trending in the wrong direction leading up to his injury. While Charlie Lindgren has the chops to be the 1A, he hasn't found last year's magic yet.

If the goaltending doesn't stabilize, the Capitals will have to keep outscoring their problems. The team has managed to do that at five-on-five, which has helped compensate for a somewhat underwhelming power play. But an elevated shooting percentage is something to keep an eye on — the Ovechkin-led Caps have the finishing talent to outscore expectations, but usually, what goes up eventually does come down.

Barring a massive upset, the Capitals should be able to at least reach Round 2. But can that balanced attack take them further than that?

Carolina Hurricanes

Reason for hope: No other team's system has moved beyond a strategy to become its identity. The strength of the Hurricanes' system has shined this year despite a lot of roster turnover since last spring. It's a driving force behind the team's five-on-five success, which has been especially impressive since the trade deadline. The Canes have rocked a 55 percent expected goal rate over the last 16 games.

Carolina's shot suppression is top-notch, led by Jacob Slavin on the back end with shutdown forwards up and down the lineup. This team creates more shot volume than anyone else in the league. Unlike last year, this group is doing a better job driving to the middle of the ice, pushing their expected goal generation to the best in the league.

While the forecheck is the cornerstone of their success, the Hurricanes have included more rush chances into their attack to add dimension thanks to the efforts of players like Seth Jarvis and Sebastian Aho, whose disruptive offense extends to short-handed situations.

While the Canes' big swing for Mikko Rantanen didn't work out as expected, this team still made a few moves to bolster this lineup. Taylor Hall has been a strong fit in the middle six, while Logan Stankoven

has a ton of long-term potential. Mark Jankowski has helped strengthen the team's fourth-line depth behind the Jordan Staal line. This team is well-positioned to contend for years to come.

Reason for concern: Carolina may be playing the long game, but the pressure is rising to go on a deep run after some disappointing early exits. For all the offense this team creates, one lingering issue haunts them year to year: The Hurricanes don't have enough finish.

It may seem like a tired narrative at this point, but the Canes have scored 25 goals fewer than expected based on their shot quality; that's the fourth-highest in the league, behind only Nashville, Florida and Calgary. Goal support at five-on-five is pivotal for a team that 1) isn't dangerous enough on the power play and 2) doesn't have the most reliable goaltending tandem. Both goalies have fine numbers, but Frederik Andersen's durability is a concern while Pyotr Kochetkov has struggled over this last stretch of play.

New Jersey Devils

Reason for hope: The Devils have managed to power through despite a number of key injuries. Nico Hischier is one of the best two-way forwards in the league, thriving in matchup minutes against the opponents' best. Jesper Bratt is scoring at a career-high rate thanks to his elite playmaking ability. Luke Hughes has adjusted to an expanded workload and has picked up the pace on the back end, too. While the team has endured rough stretches this season, the Devils are trending in the right direction again.

The Devils' power play is dangerous, and their two-way game has improved under Sheldon Keefe. Thanks to an improved forecheck, they have a more balanced attack than they did in their last postseason appearance in 2023. That should help them in a likely Round 1 meeting with the Hurricanes after falling short to Carolina last time.

And this time, the team has more reliable goaltending. Jacob Markstrom is getting back on track after returning from injury; he now has four quality starts in his last five outings.

Reason for concern: The Devils are going into the postseason without some of their best players. That starts with Jack Hughes, whose two-way game took strides under Keefe this season. On the back end, the team is missing Dougie Hamilton and Jonas Siegenthaler. Hamilton is skating again, but there is no certainty on when (or if) he will return this spring. It's unlikely the Devils will have Siegenthaler's shutdown presence since he reportedly hasn't even put skates on since his injury.

The Devils have weathered major absences in the regular season, but the playoffs are a different animal. Without some of its best players, New Jersey could be exposed to the same Hurricanes team that ended its playoff hopes a couple years ago.

Wild card

Ottawa Senators

Reasons for hope: The Senators have been a solid team all year, but they're catching fire at the perfect time, too. Ottawa's 13-4-2 record since March 1 is the best in the Eastern Conference. That included a couple of impressive victories last week against the Lightning and Panthers despite missing Brady Tkachuk.

Travis Green has helped lead a dramatic defensive glow-up in Canada's capital this season. The Senators are a responsible, structured team in their own end. Their top-four blue line is a strength, with Jake Sanderson emerging as one of the game's best defensemen and Thomas Chabot and newcomer Nick Jensen forming an above-average second pair. Linus Ullmark's sturdy play in net is a major plus.

Ottawa's second and third lines are rounding into promising form. Dylan Cozens, David Perron, Drake Batherson, Shane Pinto and Michael Amadio have each scored at least 10 points in their last 19 games. That's impressive depth to have behind the first line.

Reasons for concern: The Sens lack the game-breaking superstar forwards Tampa, Florida and Toronto can flex. Tim Stützle and Brady Tkachuk are terrific players, but Ottawa is the only playoff team in the Atlantic that doesn't have a single point-per-game-or-better forward.

That disadvantage is a moot point if the Leafs stars no-show in a Battle of Ontario, but at some point in the postseason, especially against more battle-tested opponents, you'd expect the elite forward skill deficit to show. The Senators have found offensive success lately, but for large chunks of the season, they've struggled to score. They rank 20th in the NHL in goals scored per game for 2024-25 — Minnesota is the only playoff team to score less.

This is a good team that's getting hot at the right time, so they have a very real chance to upset somebody in Round 1, but we're not sure they profile as a true Cup contender yet, which is understandable because this is the first year they've successfully emerged out of their rebuild.

Montreal Canadiens

Reason for hope: The Canadiens got hot at the right time and have taken advantage of a weak wild-card race. Montreal has surged up the standings since the 4 Nations, bringing its playoff chances up from 2 percent to 89 heading into Monday night's matchups. And that turnaround is thanks to franchise cornerstones who will lead this next window of contention.

Nick Suzuki has ice in his veins. His two-way game in all situations, playmaking and clutch scoring have led the way, especially since the 4 Nations break. And he is getting a lot of support from high-end wingers Cole Caufield and Juraj Slafkovsky in a first-line combination. Together, they have a 56 percent expected goal rate and a 19-7 scoring advantage since returning to play. Veterans, like the Brendan Gallagher line, support those up-and-coming forwards.

A young star, Lane Hutson, is leading the way on the back end, too. Hutson has an elite offensive ceiling and is progressing defensively in meaningful games. Kaiden Guhle and Jayden Struble have also developed on the back end.

Pair that with Sam Montembeault giving his team a chance to win most nights, and there is a lot to like about Montreal.

Reason for concern: Despite an impressive turnaround over the last month and a half, this team may not be ready to do damage in the postseason. There are still a lot of defensive warts to work out for a team that can get trapped in its own zone. The Canadiens don't retrieve enough pucks to turn defense into offense, and those gaps extend to the penalty kill.

The difference between Montreal and most other teams in the playoff picture is that this team solidifying its standing as the eighth seed makes this season a success regardless of what happens next. It was a key step in rebuilding and will help season the young guns.

The Athletic / At the good old (emphasis on 'old') hockey game: How 13 octogenarian skaters lived their NHL dream

By Julian McKenzie- April 9, 2025

OTTAWA — When asked to give his name, Larry Doshen instead grabbed his trading card. The photo was fairly recent, capturing him in black hockey pants as he cradled a hockey stick. He was helmetless, with a head of gray hair to match his “Silver Foxes” jersey.

Holding the card aloft, Doshen’s hand shook. He chalked it up to old age, but he was also filled with boyish nerves. And for good reason: The 84-year-old had just stepped off the ice after finally living his childhood fantasy of playing on an NHL rink.

“Once you get to skating, it’s fine,” Doshen said, pausing to reach into his mouth and remove his upper dentures. “I’ll take this thing out so you can hear me.”

An average NHL intermission typically features children from local minor hockey associations, often as young as the under-7 “Timbits” level in Canada, either scrimmaging or competing in a shootout. Following the second period of the Ottawa Senators’ 4-0 win over the Columbus Blue Jackets at Canadian Tire Centre on Sunday, the youth made way for some much older gentlemen.

Or, as one attendee less delicately dubbed them, the “Stalebits.”

Forgive my lack of tweets during this game. I’ve been following this group of 80-year-olds who are playing in the second intermission of this Sens-Blue Jackets game. pic.twitter.com/kQ88PgWvpX

— Julian McKenzie (@jkamckenzie) April 6, 2025

Thirteen players representing multiple 80-and-over non-contact hockey teams in the Ottawa area — the eldest of whom were 88 years old — participated in the unusual exhibition on Sunday afternoon. The action lasted a brief three minutes, with Doshen battling through his brief anxiety at the front of the net to score the only goal. But the group of octogenarians drew cheers from the tens of thousands in attendance throughout, starting from the moment they each stepped onto the ice.

“This is a dream come true for me,” Aime Beaulne, one of the 88-year-olds, told The Athletic.

The game also brought awareness to the 80+ Hockey Hall of Fame, a nonprofit that recognizes active hockey players above the age of 80 across Canada. The initiative was founded in 2011 with an inaugural class of six, each of whom were inducted according to what the organization describes as its “knighting protocols using a vintage 1930 one-piece wooden hockey stick.” Applicants can be nominated online. In addition to the age requirement of its eligibility criteria, the 80+ Hockey Hall of Fame’s website lists “sound character and good sportsmanship.”

“Because now we’re getting guys right across the country,” said Herb Brennen, the 80+ Hall of Fame’s president. “We need to know that.”

The number of inductees has since grown to nearly 400 players and almost 40 builders since its launch. An induction game is played every year and each new member receives their hockey card, as Doshen did. The Hall plans on inducting its first female player later this year.

“We try to make sure that this is really family-oriented,” Brennen said. “Because most of our children and certainly our grandchildren have never seen us play hockey, so it’s rather an amazing experience for them to actually see the old guy on the ice.”

Members of the 80+ Hockey Hall of Fame get ready for their game at the Canadian Tire Centre in Ottawa.

The 80+ Hockey Hall of Fame got the opportunity to skate at the Senators game through a mutual connection. Back in January, Hall of Fame vice president Loris Bondio met with a friend, Liam Maguire, over drinks at the latter's titular restaurant just east of Ottawa's downtown. It wasn't planned, but they wound up discussing the 80+ Hall. A self-proclaimed hockey historian, Maguire was blown away by the concept and wondered how he could get the Senators involved. Bondio replied that his organization had tried, but failed, to meet with the Sens.

"I'll get you your meeting," Maguire told Bondio.

Maguire tapped his connection to team president Cyril Leeder, who alongside fellow Senators co-founder Randy Sexton once sold Maguire a season ticket pledge in the hopes of eventually luring an NHL franchise to the Canadian capital city. When Ottawa ultimately succeeded in its bid in 1990, Maguire celebrated with Leeder and Sexton. Thirty-five years later, it was Maguire pitching Leeder on the 80+ Hockey Hall of Fame as an intermission showcase.

"I think it's a beautiful, beautiful way of encapsulating why the Hall exists," Bondio said. "Those kids have got to keep skating. Doesn't matter if you don't make the NHL. Doesn't matter if you don't make the team, keep skating. There's always a place to play."

Before their game at the CTC, the 80+ Hall of Famers sat in makeshift dressing rooms covered by curtains just near the Zamboni entrance, surrounded by stacks of wooden pallets, a pair of lowered basketball hoops, and a portable emergency eye wash station. After putting on their gear — including jerseys bearing the 80+ Hall's logo — they lined up single-file and hit the ice.

"It's uplifting to think one day like this could be me too," said Matt Franczyk, the Senators' specialist in hockey outreach. "Like, if I stay healthy, stay active, I could be on the ice playing with these guys as well."

Most of the men who participated Sunday play hockey twice a week, for teams like the "Elder Skatesmen" and the "Octokids." Others, like Barclay Frost, might play more often.

The 83-year-old Frost is considered the oldest goalie in Ottawa and is a member of Athletics Ontario's Hall of Fame for his various athletic contributions as an athlete, coach and official — he filled the last role at the 1976 Summer Games in Montreal. Frost even represented Team Canada at an 80+ USA-Canada hockey event last fall. That is, until the American starting goaltender became unavailable and Frost was forced to change allegiances.

"I know what it's like to be a traitor," Frost said. "People wouldn't talk to me. My wife was sitting up in the stands with all the Team Canada wives and all our Team Canada staff. And I'm on the other team."

Herb Brennen's hockey card was given to him after being inducted into the 80+ Hockey Hall of Fame in 2023.

The fact that these over-80-and-above hockey teams exist is already impressive, but they also stand to combat a worrisome trend for elders. A Canadian government report estimated that 30 percent of seniors in the country — a group expected to grow from nearly 15 percent today to up to 25 percent of the population by 2036 — are at risk of being socially isolated. The International Federation on Ageing has added that "keeping older people socially connected and active" is the "number one emerging issue facing seniors" in Canada.

"I would really, really miss it if I didn't have the dressing room to go to, to talk to the guys, and the banter back and forth," Doshen said. "Talk about what we do on the ice, talk about what we do off the ice. A

couple of the guys I know are having health problems, so you listen to them. Some others are having family health problems as well. It gives them a chance to talk.”

Indeed, playing means everything for these seniors, whether it’s because they want to stay fit — or, as Brennen recalled himself recently doing with fellow skaters, to chirp one another.

“I said, ‘I don’t know why the hell you even bring a hockey stick to the game,’” Brennen said. “(The pucks) go in off your ass. They go in off your elbow. What do you need a hockey stick for? You’ve probably got the same stick you ever started with.”

And then there are men like 88-year-old Wil Côté, who just appreciates the support that comes with playing with a band of brothers.

“It keeps me going for sure,” Côté said. “I like playing, but I like the camaraderie. When I come home, I’m happy.”

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: What's at stake on 10-game Tuesday?

By ESPN staff- April 9, 2025

The hockey world had a tremendous moment over the weekend when Alex Ovechkin broke Wayne Gretzky's goal-scoring record. And now, it's time to hone in on the remaining playoff races.

Ten games populate the NHL calendar on Tuesday, all of which will have some impact on either playoff positioning or the draft lottery standings.

Carolina Hurricanes at Buffalo Sabres

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Hurricanes appear all but completely locked in as the No. 2 seed in the Metropolitan Division (and a first-round matchup against the Devils). Meanwhile, the Sabres' recent heater -- they've gone 7-3-0 in the past 10 -- has pushed them down to No. 9 in the draft lottery order, at the bottom end of a group of six teams in the 71- to 74-point range.

Detroit Red Wings at Montreal Canadiens

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Red Wings lost a few too many games in the month of March, and their playoff hopes are dim but flickering. A win here against the team they're chasing would go a long way. The Habs are six points ahead of Detroit, though the Wings have one game in hand.

Toronto Maple Leafs at Florida Panthers

7 p.m. (ESPN)

Although these two teams were tight in the standings in recent weeks, a skid by the Panthers coupled by an 8-1-1 span by the Leafs have yielded the possibility that they could match up in the first round -- as division title winner vs. wild-card team. So this game could have meaning long beyond the final horn on Tuesday night, should they meet again in the postseason. As far as the standings, Toronto carries a four-point lead on Tampa Bay atop the Atlantic into this matchup, and they are six ahead of Florida. The Panthers have a two-point cushion on the current first wild-card team, the Senators.

Boston Bruins at New Jersey Devils

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Bruins were mathematically eliminated from postseason contention in the last week and sit fifth in the draft lottery order, among the bunched group of six between 71 and 74 points. The Devils are likely to finish in the No. 3 spot in the Metro Division, and face the Hurricanes in Round 1 but could theoretically still pass them to earn the No. 2 seed (and home-ice advantage in the series).

Ottawa Senators at Columbus Blue Jackets

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

Ottawa is one of the NHL's hottest teams, and it allowed zero goals in two victories over the weekend. The gap between the Senators and third-place Florida is down to two points, though they are two behind in the regulation wins column. As for the Blue Jackets, they begin this game eight points behind Montreal for the final wild-card position, and they will need this W along with a lot of help to surpass the Canadiens.

Chicago Blackhawks at Pittsburgh Penguins

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Blackhawks are four points behind San Jose for the top spot in the draft lottery, and have five additional regulation wins if the two teams finish tied after 82 games. The Penguins -- mathematically eliminated from playoff contention over the weekend -- sit eighth in the draft order right now.

New York Islanders at Nashville Predators

8 p.m. (ESPN+)

While Ovechkin scored historic goal No. 895 on Sunday, it was the Islanders who won the game, maintaining a shred of hope that they can rally into a playoff spot. They enter this game seven points behind the Canadiens. Nashville is headed for a top-3 spot in the draft lottery order, although likely no higher than No. 3 given the gap between them and the Blackhawks at No. 2.

Vancouver Canucks at Dallas Stars

8 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Canucks' playoff hopes have faded precipitously of late, and every game is essentially a must-win at this point -- they enter this game eight points back of the Minnesota Wild for the final spot, with five games remaining. Dallas has its sights set on the Winnipeg Jets for the No. 1 seed in the Central, as the team in that position earns a first-round matchup against the Wild (as opposed to the Avalanche).

Seattle Kraken at Utah Hockey Club

9 p.m. (ESPN+)

The NHL's two youngest franchises square off in this one. Seattle enters the game in the No. 6 position in the draft lottery order, but that spot can fluctuate down the stretch as they are in the 71- to 74-point club with six other teams. The Hockey Club's playoff chances have taken a nosedive, and it officially needs to run the table (and have Minnesota lose the rest of its games) to qualify for the playoffs.

Vegas Golden Knights at Colorado Avalanche

9:30 p.m. (ESPN)

For those willing to stay up late on a school night, the NHL saved the best game for last on Tuesday's slate! The Golden Knights are well on their way to another Pacific Division title, and the Avalanche seem pretty well locked in as the Central's No. 3 seed. But, this is certainly a potential preview of the 2025 Western Conference finals, given the star power on both of these rosters -- and their recent postseason successes.

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

Note: Playoff chances are via Stathead.

Jump ahead:

Current playoff matchups

Clinching scenarios

Today's schedule

Yesterday's scores

Expanded standings

Race for No. 1 pick

Current playoff matchups

Eastern Conference

A1 Toronto Maple Leafs vs. WC1 Ottawa Senators

A2 Tampa Bay Lightning vs. A3 Florida Panthers

M1 Washington Capitals vs. WC2 Montreal Canadiens

M2 Carolina Hurricanes vs. M3 New Jersey Devils

Western Conference

C1 Winnipeg Jets vs. WC2 Minnesota Wild

C2 Dallas Stars vs. C3 Colorado Avalanche

P1 Vegas Golden Knights vs. WC1 St. Louis Blues

P2 Los Angeles Kings vs. P3 Edmonton Oilers

Clinching scenarios

The New Jersey Devils will clinch a playoff spot if they win or lose in overtime/shootout to the Boston Bruins.

The Ottawa Senators will clinch a playoff berth if:

- They defeat the Columbus Blue Jackets in any fashion, OR

- They lose in OT/shootout to the Blue Jackets, AND there is any result in the Detroit Red Wings-Montreal Canadiens game other than a Red Wings win in regulation, OR

- The Red Wings lose to the Canadiens in any fashion

The Washington Capitals will clinch the Metropolitan Division title if the Carolina Hurricanes lose to the Buffalo Sabres in regulation.

The Toronto Maple Leafs will clinch home-ice advantage in the first round if they defeat the Florida Panthers in regulation.

The Carolina Hurricanes will clinch home-ice advantage in the first round if they defeat the Sabres in any fashion AND the Devils lose to the Bruins in any fashion. They will also clinch if they lose in OT/shootout to the Sabres and the Devils lose to the Bruins in regulation.

The Dallas Stars will clinch home-ice advantage in the first round if:

- They defeat the Vancouver Canucks in any fashion, OR

- They lose in OT/shootout to the Canucks and the Colorado Avalanche lose to the Vegas Golden Knights, OR

- The Avalanche lose to the Golden Knights in regulation

The Golden Knights will clinch home-ice advantage in the first round if they win in any fashion or lose in OT/shootout to the Avalanche.

Tuesday's games

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

Carolina Hurricanes at Buffalo Sabres, 7 p.m.

Detroit Red Wings at Montreal Canadiens, 7 p.m.

Toronto Maple Leafs at Florida Panthers, 7 p.m. (ESPN)

Boston Bruins at New Jersey Devils, 7 p.m.

Ottawa Senators at Columbus Blue Jackets, 7 p.m.

Chicago Blackhawks at Pittsburgh Penguins, 7 p.m.

New York Islanders at Nashville Predators, 8 p.m.

Vancouver Canucks at Dallas Stars, 8 p.m.

Seattle Kraken at Utah Hockey Club, 9 p.m.

Vegas Golden Knights at Colorado Avalanche, 9:30 p.m. (ESPN)

Monday's scoreboard

Tampa Bay Lightning 5, New York Rangers 1

Winnipeg Jets 3, St. Louis Blues 1

Anaheim Ducks 3, Edmonton Oilers 2

Seattle Kraken 2, Los Angeles Kings 1

Calgary Flames 3, San Jose Sharks 2

Expanded standings

Atlantic Division

x - Toronto Maple Leafs

Points: 98

Regulation wins: 39

Playoff position: A1

Games left: 6

Points pace: 105.7

Next game: @ FLA (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Tampa Bay Lightning

Points: 96

Regulation wins: 39

Playoff position: A2
Games left: 5
Points pace: 102.2
Next game: vs. TOR (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Florida Panthers
Points: 92
Regulation wins: 35
Playoff position: A3
Games left: 5
Points pace: 98.0
Next game: vs. TOR (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
Ottawa Senators
Points: 90
Regulation wins: 33
Playoff position: WC1
Games left: 5
Points pace: 99.9
Next game: @ CBJ (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Montreal Canadiens
Points: 85
Regulation wins: 28
Playoff position: WC2
Games left: 5
Points pace: 90.5
Next game: vs. DET (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 89.2%
Tragic number: N/A

Detroit Red Wings

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 6

Points pace: 85.2

Next game: @ MTL (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 5.4%

Tragic number: 6

Buffalo Sabres

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 27

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 6

Points pace: 79.8

Next game: vs. CAR (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 1

e - Boston Bruins

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 24

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4

Points pace: 74.6

Next game: @ NJ (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Metro Division

x - Washington Capitals

Points: 107

Regulation wins: 42

Playoff position: M1

Games left: 5

Points pace: 114.0

Next game: vs. CAR (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Carolina Hurricanes

Points: 96

Regulation wins: 41

Playoff position: M2

Games left: 6

Points pace: 103.6

Next game: @ BUF (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

New Jersey Devils

Points: 89

Regulation wins: 36

Playoff position: M3

Games left: 5

Points pace: 94.8

Next game: vs. BOS (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

New York Rangers

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 32

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 84.1

Next game: vs. PHI (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 1.9%

Tragic number: 5

New York Islanders

Points: 78

Regulation wins: 27
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 6
Points pace: 84.2
Next game: @ NSH (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 3.0%
Tragic number: 5
Columbus Blue Jackets
Points: 77
Regulation wins: 24
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 6
Points pace: 83.1
Next game: vs. OTT (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 0.5%
Tragic number: 4
e - Pittsburgh Penguins
Points: 74
Regulation wins: 21
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 4
Points pace: 77.8
Next game: vs. CHI (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
e - Philadelphia Flyers
Points: 71
Regulation wins: 20
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 5
Points pace: 75.6
Next game: @ NYR (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Central Division

x - Winnipeg Jets

Points: 110

Regulation wins: 42

Playoff position: C1

Games left: 4

Points pace: 115.6

Next game: @ DAL (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Dallas Stars

Points: 105

Regulation wins: 41

Playoff position: C2

Games left: 5

Points pace: 111.8

Next game: vs. VAN (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Colorado Avalanche

Points: 98

Regulation wins: 39

Playoff position: C3

Games left: 4

Points pace: 103.0

Next game: vs. VGK (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

St. Louis Blues

Points: 93

Regulation wins: 31

Playoff position: WC1

Games left: 3
Points pace: 96.5
Next game: @ EDM (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 97.3%
Tragic number: N/A
Minnesota Wild
Points: 91
Regulation wins: 33
Playoff position: WC2
Games left: 4
Points pace: 95.7
Next game: vs. SJ (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 92.1%
Tragic number: N/A
Utah Hockey Club
Points: 82
Regulation wins: 27
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 5
Points pace: 87.3
Next game: vs. SEA (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 0.1%
Tragic number: 1
e - Nashville Predators
Points: 62
Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 5
Points pace: 66.0
Next game: vs. NYI (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
e - Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 54
Regulation wins: 19
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 5
Points pace: 57.5
Next game: @ PIT (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
Pacific Division
x - Vegas Golden Knights
Points: 102
Regulation wins: 43
Playoff position: P1
Games left: 5
Points pace: 108.6
Next game: @ COL (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Los Angeles Kings
Points: 97
Regulation wins: 39
Playoff position: P3
Games left: 5
Points pace: 103.3
Next game: vs. ANA (Thursday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
Edmonton Oilers
Points: 93
Regulation wins: 32
Playoff position: P2
Games left: 5
Points pace: 99.0

Next game: vs. STL (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 99.6%

Tragic number: N/A

Calgary Flames

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 92.7

Next game: @ ANA (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 10.9%

Tragic number: 6

Vancouver Canucks

Points: 83

Regulation wins: 27

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 88.4

Next game: @ DAL (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 2

e - Anaheim Ducks

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 24

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 80.9

Next game: vs. CGY (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Seattle Kraken

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4

Points pace: 77.8

Next game: @ UTA (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - San Jose Sharks

Points: 50

Regulation wins: 14

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 5

Points pace: 53.2

Next game: @ MIN (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

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

Race for the No. 1 pick

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

1. San Jose Sharks

Points: 50

Regulation wins: 14

2. Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 54

Regulation wins: 19

3. Nashville Predators

Points: 62

Regulation wins: 23

4. Boston Bruins

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 24

5. Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 20

6. Buffalo Sabres

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 27

7. Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 21

8. Seattle Kraken

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 28

9. Anaheim Ducks

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 24

10. Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 77

Regulation wins: 24

11. New York Islanders

Points: 78

Regulation wins: 27

12. New York Rangers

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 32

13. Detroit Red Wings

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 28

14. Utah Hockey Club

Points: 82

Regulation wins: 27

15. Vancouver Canucks

Points: 83

Regulation wins: 27

16. Calgary Flames

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 28

[Sportsnet.ca / NHL Awards WATCH: The top candidates for each major trophy](#)

By Sonny Sachdeva- April 9, 2025

Just a week-and-a-half remains before we put this NHL regular season in the rear-view and shift focus to the playoffs.

But first, there's the matter of looking back and appreciating what we've witnessed over the past seven months, of celebrating the individual greatness we've seen authored. Across the board, multiple awards races have been tightly contested this season as a crop of all-world talents produced no shortage of marquee performances.

With that in mind, let's take a look at the top candidates for five major trophies:

HART TROPHY

Awarded to the league's most valuable player, as voted by the Professional Hockey Writers' Association
Nathan MacKinnon, Colorado Avalanche

Why he could win: The Avs talisman has been on a tear this season. Fresh off a Hart Trophy-winning 140-point season, he currently sits tied atop the league with 115 points through 78 games. Strip away the noise, and he leads the league in even-strength scoring too, with point-per-game production on that front alone. MacKinnon is the engine that drives this Colorado team forward, but it's more than just the point totals. It's the manner in which he leads, the method to his dominance, that makes him so pivotal to the Avalanche's success — pushing forward relentlessly, dragging his team forward, wearing down the opposition. His elite performance has proven especially crucial in a season that saw Colorado start slow, retool much of its team on the fly and navigate a slew of injuries. Despite the tumult, Colorado remains on the cusp of 100 points, with a playoff ticket already locked up.

Leon Draisaitl, Edmonton Oilers

Why he could win: The German pivot has faced the same knocks since he first rose to prominence in Edmonton — Draisaitl's detractors have dismissed at least some portion of his success because he plays on the same squad as the game's most lethal scorer. But what of this season, in which Connor McDavid has taken the kind of step back offensively we never thought would come while Draisaitl has still proved a dominant force in his own right? The 29-year-old is authoring one of the most prolific seasons of his career as the Oilers' leading man. His 52 goals position him as the favourite for the Rocket Richard, and Draisaitl paces the league in even-strength tallies (36), power-play goals (16), overtime goals (six) and game-winners of all sorts (11). He remains a lethal facilitator too, his 106 points ranking him third in the overall scoring race. Through a middling Oilers season, with McDavid navigating injuries and a down year, No. 29 has been crucial.

Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets

Why he could win: Over the past two decades, only one netminder has taken home the Hart: Carey Price, back in 2015, after leading the league in wins, save percentage and goals-against average, and becoming the first goaltender to sweep all three categories in 24 years. A decade after Price, Hellebuyck's flirting with that same rarefied air. The reigning Vezina winner — and the favourite to claim the trophy once again — currently leads the league with a .924 save percentage, a 2.02 goals-against average, 44 wins and seven shutouts. Perhaps most impressive is that Hellebuyck posted such sterling numbers while shouldering the league's heaviest workload, tied with Andrei Vasilevskiy for the most

appearances in the cage. It's no coincidence the 31-year-old's marquee campaign comes while the Jets sit atop the league's standings.

Nikita Kucherov, Tampa Bay Lightning

Why he could win: After finishing as the runner-up to MacKinnon last year — having put up a league-leading 144 points, the second-most anyone has managed in decades — Kucherov finds himself back in a race against the Avs pivot. Sitting level with MacKinnon at 115 points, and two goals up on him in five fewer games, the Russian winger surely has a chance to claim the second Hart Trophy of his career. Aiding his case is the consistency he's shown in carrying the Bolts offence in a season that saw the club's forward group significantly reshaped, namely through the parting of ways with Steven Stamkos. Without the former captain, it's been all Kucherov, a 32-point gap separating Kucherov's point total and his next highest-scoring teammate — the biggest for any forward on this list.

Jack Eichel, Vegas Golden Knights

Why he could win: The second-biggest discrepancy between an elite scorer and his club's next-best producer resides in Vegas, where Eichel's 93 points sit 26 above any of his teammates. It would be tough to make a case for the Golden Knights pivot over any of the four names above him here, but there's no question the 28-year-old has come into his own and authored a career year, stringing together his most productive season and emerging as the most important cog in the Golden Knights machine. He's been an important piece since he first arrived in Vegas — Eichel paced the Knights with 26 points in 26 games during their 2023 championship run — but the former Sabre has found a new level. Whether it's enough to snag a Hart Trophy remains to be seen, but there's no question it changes the complexion of Vegas's hopes at a return to the Stanley Cup summit this spring.

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Watch the Stanley Cup Playoffs on Sportsnet

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Broadcast schedule

NORRIS TROPHY

Awarded to the league's top defenceman, as voted by the Professional Hockey Writers' Association

Cale Makar, Colorado Avalanche

Why he could win: Agree with it or not, there's little doubt incredible scoring feats factor into the Norris Trophy voting — a fact made clear by Erik Karlsson's 2023 win on the heels of his 101-point outburst. Makar's current 30-goal season seems to fall in that same category — only nine defencemen have previously reached that mark. In total, it'd only been done 17 times, and never in the past decade-and-a-half. Of course, Makar's game isn't defined by his ability to put pucks in the net — he's as lethal a facilitator as he is a sniper, and a quality defensive presence, too. With 91 points on the year — ranking him eighth overall, just between Kyle Connor and Connor McDavid — the Norris seems all but a lock for the smooth-skating Avs rearguard.

Zach Werenski, Columbus Blue Jackets

Why he could win: If the Norris doesn't go to No. 8 in Colorado, it's No. 8 in Columbus who seems best poised to take home the award. After a career year last season, the Blue Jackets veteran has found an even higher gear this season, collecting 20 goals and 74 points through 75 games. He logs the most minutes of anyone in the NHL — just a hair under 27 per night — and has made his name as an elite

presence on both sides of the puck. There's little question he's been crucial to the Blue Jackets' cause this season as he leads the team in points while his four game-winners are tied for the team lead, too. That Werenski managed to find a way to perform at this elite level amid such a difficult season in Columbus, and managed to lead his Blue Jackets to more success than anyone expected, is worthy of praise too.

Quinn Hughes, Vancouver Canucks

Why he could win: The reigning Norris winner endured a roller-coaster of a season in Vancouver that saw a Canucks team seemingly on the verge of making some real playoff noise instead get sidetracked by contentious in-fighting, off-ice drama and a trade that sent one of the club's highest scorers out of town. Still, through the tumult, Hughes has remained elite for Vancouver, and amid J.T. Miller's exit and Elias Pettersson's struggles, it's the defenceman who emerged as the leader of Vancouver's offence. Battling injury all season, the American blue-liner has still managed 72 points through 63 games to lead the Canucks, outpacing his forward teammates by 23 points. He might not have put together as dominant a campaign as the two names above him, but it's tough to argue any other defenceman is as vitally important to his team's success.

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

32 Thoughts: The Podcast

Hockey fans already know the name, but this is not the blog. From Sportsnet, 32 Thoughts: The Podcast with NHL Insider Elliotte Friedman and Kyle Bukauskas is a weekly deep dive into the biggest news and interviews from the hockey world.

Latest episode

Josh Morrissey, Winnipeg Jets

Why he could win: Realistically, the odds are long for anyone not among the three names above. But beyond the leading trio, the top blue-liner on the top club seems a worthy No. 4. Morrissey has finished among the top seven in Norris votes for two straight seasons since establishing himself among the league's elite. Amid what's been a picture-perfect Jets season, he's put in another quality campaign, collecting 56 points, averaging more than 24 minutes of ice and contributing as a key leader for a Jets team that's been rolling through the league since October. An all-situations contributor who leads the way for Winnipeg through his competitiveness and elite understanding of the game, the Jets likely aren't in the running for the President's Trophy in April without No. 44's steady greatness.

Victor Hedman, Tampa Bay Lightning

Why he could win: The Bolts' elder statesman remains in the conversation of the game's best rearguards. He doesn't dominate the blue-liner scoring race, and at age 34, he isn't pushing 25 minutes a night like he once was, but Hedman's still averaging over 23 minutes a night in his 16th year, and he has 14 goals and 60 points in what's been one of his most productive seasons. There's a reason Hedman has found himself in the Norris conversation so many times before — aside from winning once, in 2018, the Bolts captain has been named a finalist five other times — and it's the unwavering, all-around elite play he brings to the table every year. Like Kucherov, Hedman has been key in leading a Bolts group that navigated some key changes in the off-season, and the captain has them on track to finish second in the Atlantic for the first time since 2020, the year their annual Cup Final tour began.

VEZINA TROPHY

Awarded to the league's top goaltender, as voted by the league's 32 general managers

Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets

Why he could win: The fact that Hellebuyck's accolades have already been lauded in the Hart Trophy section up top should make clear how locked up his Vezina chances are. After claiming the award last season, the 31-year-old has managed to best his own performance with a career year. His .924 save percentage matches a career high, his seven shutouts are a career-best, and the Jets veteran leads the league with 30.45 goals saved above average at 5-on-5, per Natural Stat Trick. He hasn't just been a crucial piece of the Jets' dominant season — he's arguably been the most important one, and he should become the first back-to-back Vezina winner since Martin Brodeur in 2008.

Andrei Vasilevskiy, Tampa Bay Lightning

Why he could win: It's tough to see anyone wrestling the Vezina away from Hellebuyck this season, but Vasilevskiy slots in as a quality No. 2. After earning four straight nominations between 2018 and 2021 — winning in 2019 — the Bolts netminder saw his numbers take a tumble over the past three seasons. But after a career-worst season, Vasilevskiy has righted the ship and finds himself back among the game's best. His .923 save percentage ranks second among 'tenders who've suited up as bona fide No. 1s, playing at least half of their club's games to this point, and he sits second behind Hellebuyck in wins (37), shutouts (six) and 5-on-5 GSAA (29.21).

Filip Gustavsson, Minnesota Wild

Why he could win: Gustavsson deserves to be in the wider conversation of the game's best this season. After a dominant 2022-23, the young netminder saw his numbers dip last season, but he's rebounded with a quality campaign that has Minnesota back in the playoff picture following a 2024 miss. At 5-on-5, he's put up a .928 save percentage, sixth-best among bona fide starters, and he ranks fourth in the league with 21.15 goals saved above average at 5-on-5. If not for Gustavsson's bounce-back effort, the Wild likely aren't preparing for a return to post-season hockey, particularly given the key injuries they've had to navigate all season.

Logan Thompson, Washington Capitals

Why he could win: Speaking of bounce-back performances, how about Logan Thompson's debut in D.C.? After seeing his numbers fall in Vegas and getting shipped out of town by the Golden Knights, Thompson established himself among the season's best in Capitals colours and has been a key component of the club's resurgent effort. The 28-year-old boasts a middling .910 save percentage, but rewind to the middle of the season and he looked unbeatable for a hefty stretch of the campaign, ranking third-best league wide from November to late February with a .926 over that span before a late-season stumble sunk his averages. It won't be enough to knock off Hellebuyck, but for much of this season, Thompson deserved a spot in the conversation.

Darcy Kuemper, Los Angeles Kings

Why he could win: It's been a bit of a roller-coaster for Kuemper since backstopping Colorado to its 2022 championship. After an unsuccessful run in Washington that saw the veteran's numbers plummet, a trade to California has the 34-year-old back among the league's elite. At 5-on-5, only Hellebuyck has posted a better save percentage than Kuemper's .934, and he ranks third behind Hellebuyck and Vasilevskiy with 21.38 goals saved above average at 5-on-5, too. Like Thompson, he's played fewer games than the rest of the crop — still, after navigating injury issues, adjusting to a new club and working through the worst season of his career, Kuemper's come out the other side as a top-tier No. 1 option again.

Sportsnet's Matt Marchese and former Los Angeles Kings executive Mike Futa take you around the league on Sportsnet 590 The FAN's national hockey show, airing live across the country daily from noon-2 p.m. ET.

Latest episode

CALDER TROPHY

Awarded to the league's top rookie, as voted by the Professional Hockey Writers' Association

Dustin Wolf, Calgary Flames

Why he could win: If the Flames manage to claw their way into the playoffs, Wolf should have as good a case for the Calder as anyone. While his efforts have flown under the radar among the high-flying names below, make no mistake: the 23-year-old is doing something special. Playing out his first season as a starter, the undersized Wolf has been pivotal for Calgary, and undeniably the central reason they've been close to the playoffs at all. At 5-on-5, the Flames netminder boasts a dominant .929 save percentage, a mark bested only by three of his position's elite veterans: Hellebuyck, Kuemper and Vasilevskiy. He ranks fifth-best in terms of GSAA and high-danger save percentage at 5-on-5, too. But really, there should be no other reason than this: the Flames score the third-fewest goals per game of any NHL club — only basement-dwellers San Jose and Nashville tally less — and yet Calgary still finds its playoff dream alive in April. That wouldn't be the case without Wolf's heroics.

Lane Hutson, Montreal Canadiens

Why he could win: For many, it's Montreal's Lane Hutson who's already locked up the award — and whether Wolf guides Calgary to a playoff berth or not, Hutson seems a worthy choice. The dynamic blue-liner has looked flat-out dominant for the Habs, collecting 64 points and emerging as a key reason the Canadiens have charted their own path back to the post-season. You have to rewind more than three decades to find a rookie defender who amassed more points in his first campaign — the last would be Brian Leetch's 71 points for the Rangers, back in 1989. Hutson's 64-spot already ranks as the seventh-highest sum ever posted by a rookie defender — just a handful more and he could unseat third place all-time (currently held by former Flame Gary Suter and the 68 points he managed back in '86). Regardless of where his season lands, the Canadiens rearguard has proven he's capable of greatness just one year into his big-league career.

Macklin Celebrini, San Jose Sharks

Why he could win: The 2024 first-overall pick has had much stiffer competition to deal with in his rookie year compared to the phenom that came before him. Still, Macklin Celebrini has performed roughly on par with Connor Bedard's rookie year — the Sharks pivot has collected 57 points through 65 games, good for .88 points per game. Bedard managed 61 points in 68 games during his own rookie campaign, producing at a .90 points-per-game clip. Like his Chicago counterpart, Celebrini is doing what he can with what he has at his disposal, navigating injuries and a woeful Sharks team that ranks last as he looks to establish himself. He's had a fine season, but to this point he's done little to outperform Hutson or Wolf.

Matvei Michkov, Philadelphia Flyers

Why he could win: Michkov finds himself in much the same boat as Celebrini. The much-hyped Flyers winger leads all rookies with 24 goals through 75 games this year and ranks second, behind Hutson, with 58 points in that span. He also leads all rookies with 43 even-strength points, and 17 even-strength goals. It's been a fine first-year campaign in all — Michkov's 58 points are more than any rookie not named Bedard posted over the past two seasons — but again, amid a tumultuous 2024-25 that's seen his Flyers fall into the league's basement, Michkov's campaign seems a step behind the two Calder front-runners.

Zack Bolduc, St. Louis Blues

Why he could win: You could go in a few different directions to round out the group, but how about Blues rookie Bolduc, who's emerged as a solid goal-scorer for a resurgent St. Louis squad. The 22-year-old's 18 goals rank third among rookies behind Michkov and Celebrini and fifth among all Blues scorers. Of note is the young winger's performance since St. Louis began picking up steam and turning its season around. Over the course of the club's 12-game win streak, which began in mid-March, Bolduc collected six goals, tied for the second-most on the team and first among all rookies.

JACK ADAMS AWARD

Awarded to the league's top head coach, as voted by the NHL Broadcasters Association

Spencer Carbery, Washington Capitals

Why he could win: The second-year Caps coach has long seemed a lock for the Jack Adams, and it's tough to look any other direction when it comes to this year's crop. Rewind to two seasons ago, and the Capitals missed the playoffs for the first time in nearly a decade. Carbery came in the next year and got the club back to the post-season, but just barely. Now, in his second season holding the reins, he has the club looking like a Cup favourite. Washington's 107 points are already 16 better than the sum the Caps finished with last season, and the most the franchise has managed since its pair of high-flying Presidents' Trophy seasons from 2015-17. The club made the playoffs last year with a paltry goal differential of minus-37 — worst among all playoff participants, by far. This year? The Capitals are barrelling towards the post-season with a plus-66, the third-best mark in the league. The Jack Adams tends to favour coaches who guide clubs to drastic turnarounds, and Carbery's Caps certainly seem to fit that bill.

Jim Montgomery, St. Louis Blues

Why he could win: If there's one man who could realistically push Carbery off the throne, it's Montgomery, the 2023 winner. Fired by Boston on Nov. 19, Montgomery was hired by the Blues five days later. When he took over the team's bench, St. Louis sat well out of a playoff spot, with four clubs sitting between them and a wild-card ticket. Then the Blues started stringing together wins — by the new year, St. Louis was just three points out, with just one team separating it from the two wild-card clubs. In mid-March, things truly turned as Montgomery guided the Blues through a 12-game win streak that only ended at the hands of the league-leading Jets. The dominant 24-point stretch moved the Blues into the top wild-card slot and has them on track to end their two-year playoff drought.

Scott Arniel, Winnipeg Jets

Why he could win: And then there's the likely Presidents' Trophy winners in Winnipeg. The Jets were already among the league's best before Arniel took over, finishing second in the West last year before pushing for the top spot this season. Still, continued success was far from a certainty last May when head coach Rick Bowness retired in the wake of the club's first-round defeat. Stepping from associate coach to the top job, Arniel's not only kept the Jets rolling, he's helped them find a new level — the team's 53 wins are a franchise record, they've already matched last year's 110 points with a handful of games to go, and they've improved last season's plus-60 goal differential to an even more dominant plus-83 this season. It likely won't be enough for Arniel to unseat either of the bench bosses above him, but the Jets leader deserves credit for the seamless transition.

Travis Green, Ottawa Senators

Why he could win: If we're talking turnarounds, the Senators should be in that mix, too, led by the newly appointed Green. After a half-decade run in Vancouver and a brief stint in New Jersey, Green arrived in Ottawa with the task of turning potential into performance. The pieces were seemingly all there —

what's been missing in Ottawa is consistency, and the ability to keep the puck out of its own net. As Sportsnet's Alex Adams pointed out, the Sens' defensive play has improved significantly under Green, the club going from allowing the fifth-most goals in the league last season to the 10th-fewest now. Their goal differential, which sat at a paltry minus-26 last season — fourth-worst in the East — has flipped too, to plus-7. That's good for sixth-best in the conference, and a key reason why the Sens sit comfortably in the first wild-card slot, on track to end their seven-year playoff drought.

Dean Evason, Columbus Blue Jackets

Why he could win: Few NHL coaches have had to navigate a situation as difficult as the one Evason faced this season. In the wake of the unimaginable tragedy that hit the Blue Jackets in late August, there eventually came the question of how this group could move forward and play out a hockey season, how they could focus on the game at all while navigating such immense grief. Evason, in his first season with the organization, has seemed to handle the situation with grace, his patient approach allowing the club to accomplish far more than what was expected of them when this campaign began. A late-season slide pushed the Blue Jackets back to the outside of the East's wild-card race — still, as recently as a month ago, Columbus held onto a playoff spot and remained in the thick of the race. Regardless of where it all finishes, there's no question the Jackets have managed something special this season, and Evason's guidance seems at the core of that effort.