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February 4, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets

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Columbus Dispatch / Injuries, controversial goal give Columbus Blue Jackets stinging loss: 3 takeaways

By Brian Hedger – February 4, 2025

They put up a fight, but the Blue Jackets' winning streak ended at three games Sunday night in a stinging 5-3 loss to the Dallas Stars at American Airlines Center.

Cole Sillinger, Adam Fantilli and Ivan Provorov scored goals in the first two periods to make it 3-3 starting the third, but injuries to Kirill Marchenko (broken jaw) and Dante Fabbro (upper body) plus a controversial goal by Stars forward Evgenii Dadaonov made the difference for Dallas. The Blue Jackets (26-20-7) are 2-1-0 in the first three games of a four game road trip and play the finale Tuesday in Buffalo.

Here are three takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets own second wild card after loss to Dallas Stars

Despite losing in regulation, the Blue Jackets still hold the second wild card in the Eastern Conference. They're 26-10-7 with 59 points and have their current postseason slot by one point over the Tampa Bay Lightning (27-20-4), who were off Sunday.

The Boston Bruins (58 points) were also idle, while the New York Rangers moved within five points of the Blue Jackets with a victory over the Vegas Golden Knights. None of those teams, including the Blue Jackets, are slated to play Monday. The Jackets, Red Wings, Lightning and Bruins all play games Tuesday.

Dallas Stars receive favorable NHL ruling on controversial winning goal against Columbus Blue Jackets

The NHL loves to hand out fines to those under the league's control who complain about lousy officiating. Make no mistake here. The officiating crew led by referees Gord Dwyer and Mitch Dunning were lousy Sunday night in Dallas.

After missing two penalties in which the Stars blatantly hauled down Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson in the second and third periods — including one inside the Columbus zone seconds before Dallas scored a tying goal — the game's two refs outdid themselves on Dadonov's first of two goals in the third.

Dadonov wound up scoring a second goal that took away some of the angst attached to his first, which broke a 3-3 tie, but it didn't erase the controversy entirely. Dadonov made it 4-3 by tipping a shot from the point past goalie Elvis Merzlikins, who immediately signaled that he felt the Stars forward tipped the puck above the crossbar. Video replays on FanDuel Sports Network appeared to show Dadonov's stick shaft, near the heel, redirect the puck a few inches above the crossbar.

The league's official review, however, saw it differently. The NHL's situation room in Toronto upheld the goal instead, which incensed Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason on the bench. In a release about its decision, the situation room said it was determined that Dadonov's stick touched the puck, "at or beneath the crossbar," which adheres to the exact wording of rule 37.5 of the league's rulebook.

If the NHL has a different camera angle than what was shown on the broadcasts, it should make that view readily available to the public. The angle that's currently out for public consumption sure appears to show they got the decision wrong. Even Dadonov appeared to agree after tipping it. He didn't even celebrate as Merzlikins pointed out to the nearest ref that it was touched above the crossbar.

Hockey players celebrate every single goal they score, even during practice. Dadonov's reaction spoke volumes.

Here are the Columbus Blue Jackets options without Dante Fabbro, Kirill Marchenko

Fabbro was injured late in the first period when elbowed in the face by Stars forward Mason Marchment, who wasn't penalized for the action. Fabbro was penalized a short while later for tripping and served the first 1:10 of the minor infraction to conclude the period. He didn't return for the start of the second and was pronounced out for the game with an upper-body injury that's believed to be a concussion.

Following the game, Evason told traveling writers in Dallas that Fabbro was expected to miss "some time," with the undisclosed injury. That usually means at least a game or two, so the Blue Jackets will likely play without him Tuesday in Buffalo. Assuming that's the case, look for either Jack Johnson or Jordan Harris to draw back into the lineup on the blue line. It will be interesting to see who moves up to take Fabbro's spot as Zach Werenski's partner on the top defense pairing.

Damon Severson, a right-handed shooter, started the season there before consistency issues sent him to the right side of the third pairing. Ivan Provorov, a lefty, also logged time as Werenski's partner before Fabbro was claimed off waivers in November. Should Provorov move up, Severson could play on the second pairing with rookie Denton Mateychuk while Johnson or Harris skates with Jake Christiansen on the third pairing.

Marchenko could be out for weeks after sustaining a fractured jaw while struck in the face on the bench in Dallas. Kevin Labanc could return to the lineup to keep a 12-forward look, but Evason could also dress Johnson and Harris in a lineup with 11 forwards and seven defensemen against the Sabres.

[The Athletic / Blue Jackets top goal scorer Kirill Marchenko suffers broken jaw in loss to Stars](#)

By Aaron Portzline – February 4, 2025

DALLAS — Columbus Blue Jackets winger Kirill Marchenko, who has emerged as one of the NHL's top young forwards this season, is out indefinitely after suffering a broken jaw in Sunday's loss to the Dallas Stars, the team confirmed on Monday.

Marchenko was seated on the bench when he was struck by an errant puck late in the second period, heading directly to the Blue Jackets' dressing room with a towel pressed against his face. While the third period played out, Marchenko was taken to a Dallas-area hospital.

A typical timeline for a broken jaw is six to eight weeks. In surgery on Monday, Marchenko had metal plates and screws inserted in his jaw to stabilize the bone. That could mean an earlier return — as little as one month — than if he needed to have his jaw wired shut.

Blue Jackets lose two crucial players, fume over officiating in loss to Stars

The injury occurred with 2:44 remaining in the second period when Blue Jackets rookie defenseman Denton Mateychuk inadvertently sailed a puck out of play and onto the Columbus bench, striking Marchenko on the side of his chin.

It opened a nasty cut on the left side of Marchenko's chin and apparently struck with enough force to displace the mandible.

It's the latest big blow for a Blue Jackets lineup that has been riddled with injuries since even before the start of the season.

Marchenko, 24, leads the Blue Jackets with 21 goals and is second on the club behind defenseman Zach Werenski in both assists (34) and points (55). His plus-31 rating leads the NHL and his overtime goal versus Los Angeles on Jan. 25 made him the first Columbus player to start his career with three 20-goal seasons.

The Blue Jackets have now lost two-thirds of their No. 1 line, which was among the best in the league for the first three months of the season. Center Sean Monahan, who was playing at a point-per-game pace (14-27-41), suffered a wrist injury on Jan. 7 and had surgery late last month. He's expected back in mid-to-late March.

Those two join captain Boone Jenner, who has been out all season following shoulder surgery, and Erik Gudbranson, who was hurt in the third game of the season and had shoulder surgery. Jenner is expected back later this month after the 4 Nations Face-Off, but Gudbranson won't likely return until mid-to-late March.

The Blue Jackets also lost defenseman Dante Fabbro to an upper-body injury during Sunday's game after he was elbowed in the face by Stars forward Mason Marchment. Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said after Sunday's game that Fabbro, who has played next to Zach Werenski on the top pair since early this season, had already been ruled out of Tuesday's game in Buffalo.

It's unclear if the Blue Jackets will make a call to AHL Cleveland before they face the Sabres. Forward Kevin Labanc, who has been a healthy scratch in seven straight games, could go into the lineup for the first time since Jan. 18 to take Marchenko's spot.

The Jackets also have two extra defensemen — Jack Johnson and Jordan Harris — with them on the road trip to step in for Fabbro. Johnson has been a healthy scratch the past three games, while Harris has missed the last four games.

The Blue Jackets are trending toward missing 300-plus man-games to injury for the fourth straight season and fifth time in six seasons. Through Sunday's game in Dallas, they've missed 222 man-games.

The Athletic / Columbus Blue Jackets are No. 6 in 2025 NHL prospect pool rankings

By Scott Wheeler – February 4, 2025

Welcome to Scott Wheeler's 2025 rankings of every NHL organization's prospects. You can find the complete ranking and more information on the project and its criteria here, as we count down daily from No. 32 to No. 1. The series, which includes in-depth evaluations and insight from sources on nearly 500 prospects, runs from Jan. 8 to Feb. 7.

The Blue Jackets were the most difficult prospect pool to slot this year because Cayden Lindstrom, their top prospect and the No. 4 pick in the 2024 NHL Draft, is the most difficult prospect to slot. In theory, Lindstrom replaces the graduated Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson and traded David Jiricek and slots right in atop their pool with Denton Mateychuk. But he hasn't been healthy in over a calendar year now (going back to December 2023), has been in Columbus trying to get his back right and I think you have to start to wonder about this season eventually (he should be back skating soon, though).

I think the best way to do this is to rank him — and the Blue Jackets — according to what we've seen of him as a player and his potential/trajectory pre-injury. So that's what I've done here. But I'm not certain it's the right way to do this and did consider ranking Columbus' pool closer to 10 in the countdown. Still, the Blue Jackets have a good pool, with good players at every position and three legit young goalies who should give them good depth in net.

2024 prospect pool rank: No. 3 (change: -3)

NHL prospect pool rankings 2025: Scott Wheeler evaluates all 32 farm systems

1. Cayden Lindstrom, C, 18 (Medicine Hat Tigers)

Lindstrom is a big (6-foot-4, 215 pounds), strong center with prototypical power-forward tools as an excellent skater who already uses his size to his advantage, whether through finishing his checks (hard), shielding pucks, pushing through contact or going to the net front to provide screens or take pucks to the far post. He also has excellent skill and natural quick-twitch hands, both in flight and around the net and the wall (including getting off the wall and pulling pucks into his feet to release from different stances and change angles). He can play off the puck, take up space in front and make plays in tight, or jump into space off the rush with his skating, play on the cycle and stay over pucks to help his team maintain possession inside the offensive zone. He can create in transition — putting defenders on their heels with a head of steam — and even make skill plays from a standstill inside the offensive zone getting to the inside (a real strength). He's a powerful skater and athlete who can pull away in open ice and win races. He's also strong in the faceoff circle and distinctively competitive, with room to grow in both and really elevate as a true competitor. He looks like a safely projectable second-line center or winger, which at his height and with his skating would make him a pretty rare player type in the league. There are some who believe he might even have first-line upside if he can get healthy and stay on the track he was on before the injury in the first half of his draft year.

His sample is small but he's an easy player to like and one scouts saw a lot of potential in pre-draft because of his rare makeup and rapid development. In the front half of last season, it was really easy to see why so many were excited about him, given his makeup, size and position (though there are some who think he may end up on the wing and question his hockey IQ/decision-making/reads/play selection at times). He was utterly dominant just before the injury and looked like a force on the ice when he was at his best.

2. Denton Mateychuk, LHD, 20 (Cleveland Monsters/Columbus Blue Jackets)

At this point, Mateychuk might be the best star prospect that the average fan doesn't already view as a star prospect, if that makes sense. I believe he has a real chance to become a top-of-the-lineup No. 2-4 D in the NHL. Mateychuk has built quite a reputation for himself in hockey circles for his ability at 5-foot-11 to direct play and drive results in all four corners of the rink when he's on the ice. That style helped him work his way onto Team Canada's U18 worlds team as an underager, helped him become a first-pairing guy at the 2024 World Juniors in Gothenburg, made him one of the top defensemen in junior hockey in three consecutive seasons, helped him become Moose Jaw's captain and lead them to a WHL title, immediately made him one of the best young players in the AHL and quickly earned him a call-up to the NHL as a 20-year-old defenseman (pretty rare). He closed out his stellar junior career with 31 goals, 112 points and a plus-58 rating across 76 combined games in the regular season, playoffs and Memorial Cup and has been a point-per-game stud with Cleveland this year.

He's a plus-level skater, which helps him escape pressure with his feet, push up ice in control, trail in transition, walk the line and steer opposing players into tough spots despite not being the biggest guy. Mateychuk's the definition — or close — of the modern defenseman. He pushes when he can and does everything with poise and control (while still commanding). He plays a game that is confident but also reliable and calculating — built around his mobility and sound decision-making. He defends at a high level and is strong over his 5-foot-11 frame. He's a July birthday, which further underscores how impressive it is that he has been as high-end a player at the junior level and pro level as early as he has been at each. He's got a strong foundation and distinguishing qualities (namely his movement and control of the game). He's got creativity and vision. He can play in all situations. He can manage the puck smartly in the offensive zone or make a play when his team needs one.

He just always seems to be involved in all three zones and making positive plays. He's also a worker who by all accounts has a great personality/work ethic off the ice. I see a clear top-four D and there's nothing in his game that gives me pause in saying that. There are times when he needs to move the puck a little quicker but that would be my only nitpick and it's not uncommon in players who are as involved in the play as he is.

3. Jordan Dumais, RW, 20 (Cleveland Monsters)

Lindstrom wasn't the only prospect that made the Blue Jackets tough to slot. Dumais has also been kept off the ice for the better part of a year dealing with a combination of hernia/abdominal/hip (both hips) issues. Though he's closer to a return and has been skating with Cleveland, Dumais was also a super tricky — and polarizing — kid and prospect to project and evaluate even before he got hurt.

I've been a vocal defender of him as a player, though, and his statistical profile is certainly one that almost never misses. He was the QMJHL MVP and the most productive player in major junior hockey not named Connor Bedard over the course of his last three seasons in Halifax. In his post-draft season, he also impressed at the Traverse City Prospects Tournament against bigger, older players. He rattled off 54 goals and 140 points in 64 games last year. Before tweaking his hip in Team Canada's selection camp and playing through it at the World Juniors, he had again stood out in Traverse City (as well as main camp) and had racked up 47 points in 21 games to start the year (a pace which, had he stayed healthy, would have eclipsed his already-unheard-of numbers from a year prior).

Dumais is a fascinating case study as a 5-foot-8/9 winger whose skating has been a cause for some concern. His extensions through his stride need some cleaning up (they can look stunted and drag at the toe caps), but he's a harder-working player than he has ever gotten credit for (he doesn't waste energy when he doesn't need to, but when there's a puck to track and a stick to lift he'll work for it and excelled in the takeaway category in Halifax) with a wide-ranging offensive game that allows him to create

offense in a variety of ways at his own pace. He'll beat you with a quick give-and-go on one shift, a standstill pass or shot on the next, a dance to the high slot on the next and quick hands and quiet determination around the net on the next. He'll track back and make hustle plays when he needs to. His shot is pinpoint accurate and gets off his blade effortlessly in catch-and-release sequences. He's surprisingly good along the wall for a small winger. Though he's not physical, he'll involve himself when he needs to. He's got A-level vision, hands and anticipation. He's crafty as anything. He plays quickly when there's a quick play to be made and has a knack for identifying his next pass before he even gets the puck. He finds ways to play pucks into space for himself and escape traffic/congestion under the triangles of defenders with his small area touch and craft. He always seems to be open in little pockets. He can thread the needle and is a silky saucer passer. He routinely elevates his linemates and does things himself (as evidenced by the uptick in their production and the gap that he still maintains well above and beyond his peers).

If he can get his body sorted, I'm confident he's going to produce right away in the AHL and I'm a big believer that he's going to figure out how he needs to play at NHL pace, because he's too good and too intelligent on the ice not to (even if he's never a plus-skater or plus-value player defensively). He has some doubters who don't think the skating/body will get there, though, and is also a unique cat as a kid (quiet, a little cold, etc.).

Time will tell but he'd be one of the most productive players not to make an impact in the NHL if he can't elevate his game.

4. Gavin Brindley, C, 20 (Cleveland Monsters)

One of three top 2023 NHL Draft prospects who played college hockey in his draft year, it felt like Brindley got better with every game at the University of Michigan two seasons ago, to the point where he was impactful every single game, including at center and on the wing. (I think he'll be a winger in the NHL but he actually has a lot of the qualities of a center and would be a better fit there if he were a little bigger.) He then continued to build on that last year, leading the Wolverines in scoring, breaking the 50-point mark to finish eighth in the NCAA and playing an important role (with a letter on his sweater and scoring some big goals) in Team USA's run to gold at the World Juniors in Gothenburg. His rookie pro season got off to an unlucky start after he broke his finger in a preseason game and was sidelined until November, though. He got off to a strong start in the AHL after returning but has cooled off a little since. Still, he has had a respectable start to his pro career all things considered, playing 17 minutes per game to above half a point per game as a 20-year-old.

Brindley's a high-end, debatably elite skater who gets through his extensions quickly (including from a standstill), excels on his edges, rounds corners sharply and darts around the ice, hunting pucks and pushing through holes.

He's also got quick hands and natural touch on the puck. He thrives in the small-area game, using light passes and rapid movements to play in and out of coverage. He has impressed me across levels and events over the years (NCAA, USHL, Five Nations, U18 worlds, two World Juniors, etc.) as a small but highly involved forward who plays the game with energy and pace, making little skill plays between coverage. He buzzes around the ice and does such a good job releasing from one battle or chance to hunting or getting open for the next one. He's always moving. He'll make the soft play to the middle of the ice from the perimeter, or go there to get to rebounds or position himself on screens/tips. He's excellent in puck protection, twisting away from coverage to make things happen along the boards. He stirs the drink on whatever line he's on, can drive play at even strength and has dual special teams value because of his ability to skate, work and apply pressure on the PK (though Cleveland hasn't used him on the kill yet). He's a constant who can make his game work in the offensive zone because of his mobility,

maneuverability and tenacity, but I've also seen him wind up and go coast-to-coast with an impressive transition package that includes an ability to take his first touch in stride so, so well.

And he just always seems to play well, no matter the role/usage/stage. The beauty of Brindley's game is that while he may prove talented enough to play in a skill role at the NHL level, he's got the approach/tools to play an effective bottom-six game, too (plus, he's strongly built for 5-foot-9). That will limit concerns about his height (he has certainly never played small). I believe he's going to play in the NHL and you're not going to notice his size.

5. Luca Del Bel Belluz, C, 21 (Cleveland Monsters/Columbus Blue Jackets)

Del Bel Belluz is a player I struggled to wrap my head around earlier on in his career as he never really excited me, he had average feet and he was a November birthday who had good but not great production. But he's also a player who has done a good job answering some of the questions I had through steady improvement. He's a decently talented player with average size and above-average tools who scored 30 goals in his draft year and 40 in his post-draft year. He was productive while playing mostly center (he started the season on the wing but has played the middle for the majority now) as a rookie in the AHL last year and has been extremely productive in both the AHL and NHL as a sophomore pro this season, playing to above a point per game as Cleveland's leading scorer and contributing right away after a January recall to the NHL.

He's got some good tools in isolation, which reveal themselves over the course of a game even if it's not an every shift thing like it can be for a player like Brindley, whether that's a slight pre-shot deception in his release that can fool goalies, quick hands or his soft skills in execution when there's a play to be made. He's got skill, plays a desired position and has a 6-foot-1 frame he has slowly added lean muscle mass to (he's now listed at 185 pounds). He makes his fair share of plays on a line and has some talent, but usually isn't the driver or the pure skill guy (though he was that in the first half of this year in the AHL, which was great to see) of a trio. He projects as complementary middle-six, PP2 guy who gives the Blue Jackets 20 goals and 40-something points a year I think, and that's a nice find as a second-round pick in the end.

6. Stanislav Svozil, LHD, 22 (Cleveland Monsters)

Svozil, who was one of the top prospects in his age group growing up before settling in as more of a B-grade guy for a couple of years, reclaimed B-plus status with his play in two seasons between Regina and the World Juniors and has played well in my viewings with Cleveland (where he averaged 17 minutes per game as a rookie in the AHL last year and had a strong season and is up to 20 minutes per game as a second-year pro who plays in all situations this season).

Two years ago, playing on a Pats team where he and Connor Bedard were clearly the two best players and go-to guys, his game was allowed to develop a greater willingness to take charge offensively (which there was always some of even prior). Last year, though he had to pull back on that as he earned trust and established his game in the pro ranks, he has played with confidence throughout and has added elements back in offensively over the course of the last year. When he attacks and plays with confidence, he can look like an entry machine who dictates play when he's on the ice. I really enjoy watching him play when he's activating to join the rush into the high slot and looking to involve himself in the offensive zone. He's got good hands and mobility, particularly moving forward (I think he can struggle with his gaps at times). He's comfortable carrying the puck side-to-side to step past pressure in neutral ice, he's a comfortable skater on his heels, pivoting and curling into space and he's capable of defending well and has played to good two-way results as a young pro D. His shoulders sway a little too much when he's pushing forward through a long stride (he builds speed well when he's crossing over and weaving) and his short strides can look shuffled, but there are plenty of tools to like — the ability to

hit seams, the touch with the puck, the shimmies one-on-one, the anticipation with the puck. And while his decision-making let him down at times in the past, and some wondered whether he had either the defensive game or the offensive game to become more than a call-up type, he looks like a future NHL defenseman to me these days, even if that's just as a contributing third-pairing guy for the bulk of his career. He's still got another year left on his ELC after this one as well and I expect him to put himself in the mix for a roster spot by the end of it so that he's competing to hold a top-seven job during his first RFA contract.

7. Luca Marrelli, RHD, 19 (Oshawa Generals)

Marrelli was a productive, offensively intelligent defender in his draft year who registered 70 points in 88 combined regular-season and playoff games (which included sticking on PP1 as part of a two-D unit even after they acquired Connor Punnett via trade), but he has taken his offensive production to another level this year, emerging as one of the OHL's most productive D as a third-round pick. He's a late '05 who's in his fourth year in the OHL but he has played a top role for a good team in back-to-back years and looks like a legit prospect. He's 6-foot-2 and a decent skater who has worked hard to add more pace to his game (it was a concern for some pre-draft) and who's eager to activate and plays an active game generally, involving himself in a lot of plays. You'll often catch him below the dots inside the offensive zone and while he can be a little haphazard and wayward at times, he does show poise and smarts and he's competitive enough. He walks the line well and manages the point atop the umbrella proficiently. His shot is an asset and he does a good job taking available space in the offensive zone to get better looks for it. He's confident with the puck on his stick and doesn't tend to cave to pressure. Though he will make some mistakes and occasionally misread plays with and without the puck, he has cut back on that this year and I think it has more to do with his involvement level than his on-ice intelligence. He's a smart player who does a good job staying out of trouble considering the style he plays. He's also got pro size and shoots right. He's got a chance to become a mobile and active top-six D if he stays on this positive upward trajectory in his development.

8. Evan Gardner, G, 19 (Saskatoon Blades)

Gardner was an interesting debate ahead of last year's draft because his numbers were excellent (.927 save percentage in 30 regular-season games and .910 in 15 playoff games) but he didn't play in the WHL as a 16-year-old, he was playing behind an excellent Blades team and so there were some who wondered about the sample size vis-a-vis a 6-foot-1 goalie. This year, though his numbers have hovered more between .905 and .910, I think you can feel better and better about him as a second-round pick because he has continued to play well and play a lot to grow the data points on him as a top goalie in the WHL. I also liked him in Buffalo at their rookie tournament this year. I know both the Blue Jackets and the Blades are big believers in him and that both felt he should have been invited to Canada's selection camp for the World Juniors. They've got a deep pool of goalies for next year, with returnees Carter George and Jack Ivankovic as well as Gardner and 2025 projected first-round pick Joshua Ravensbergen (who was invited to the World Junior Summer Showcase) but he should be one of the goalies in the mix for the 2026 Team Canada in Minnesota. Gardner has great reflexes on tips and redirects both with his feet and hands/shoulders. He's got an excellent glove hand. He's got good feet and sticks with shooters on dekes. Despite not having ideal size he plays a sound position game to fill the net, makes the first save, rarely gets frozen and is good down low and good into his recoveries after making kick saves. I think he's got the makings of a solid NHL goalie someday.

9. Sergei Ivanov, G, 20 (HK Sochi)

I liked the Blue Jackets' decision to take Ivanov in the fifth round in 2022. He was one of a few netminders I would have considered taking in the draft's later rounds and I like his odds of becoming a

No. 2/3 NHL goalie despite being small by today's goalie standards at 5-foot-11/6-foot and 176 pounds. For years one of the top 2004-born goalies in Russia, Ivanov built a strong track record against his peers both internationally and domestically in the MHL and has now begun to do the same in the KHL (where he was excellent last year and has continued to play well this year, both on poor teams) as a teenager and 20-year-old. He's got excellent feet and tracking shuffling to stay with shooters one-on-one or on scrambles. He holds his lines really well to make himself look bigger than he is and then has the mobility to recover if the play moves side-to-side off his challenges. He's got good hands and rarely gets frozen glove or blocker side. He reads play at a high level, sticks with shooters and plays the game with the control needed in smaller goaltenders (who require more movement).

It's always a waiting game with Russian goalies but he's a legitimate prospect as far as I'm concerned and I think he'd have more notoriety had the Russians been allowed to participate in the World Juniors he was eligible for.

10. Jet Greaves, G, 23 (Cleveland Monsters/Columbus Blue Jackets)

Greaves is an awesome story as an undrafted 6-foot goalie whose pro career basically got started after his agent called Manny Legace to ask for a favor/to give him a look. He has now played in NHL games in three consecutive seasons and was one of the top goalies in the AHL last year, where his underlying numbers in terms of shot quality and goals saved above expected were all really, really strong. He has played to a save percentage around .910 in his NHL starts too and looks like a solid No. 2 now who has a real chance of becoming a respectable tandem goalie. Greaves is a true competitor who battles in the net, plays a very sound position game, has fallback athleticism, has good hands and makes the stops he's supposed to make. I don't know whether he's going to become more than what he is now (which is an average NHL goalie) but he's consistent.

11. Charlie Elick, RHD, 19 (Tri-City Americans)

This has been a disappointing season for Elick, who was drafted 36th on the back of his impressive skating and athleticism for a 6-foot-4 right-shot D but still has some of the warts he had a year ago.

The good: Elick is an extremely impressive athlete who crushed on-ice testing at the CHL/NHL Top Prospects Game with the second-best overall results among the 12 defensemen last year. Though his statistical profile through two seasons in the WHL doesn't point to the NHL or even to where he was drafted, his game has plenty of pro quality and he has impressed alongside his peers internationally, including in a 26-minute performance in the gold medal game at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup two summers ago and again as a top-four D for Canada at U18 worlds. Led by standout physical attributes and excellent skating both forward and backward, Elick is an engaged defender with real defensive upside. I like the way he defends in-zone and boxes out. He's got a good stick and great feet defending the rush and gapping up, but can also step up and lay the body, which he does with force (he's one of the hardest-hitting players in the WHL, regularly driving through players to sit them down along the wall and occasionally even leaving his feet). He's got a good first pass that I've seen him stretch the ice with. He has shown at times (though not consistently enough) that he can use his skating to be more involved in the rush/transition.

The bad: There are times when his decisions can catch him out of position, his reads and processing on and off the puck need work, he lacks soft skill and his intuition/IQ with the puck have not developed.

You hope that he can get the bad to a passable enough level that you can turn him into a staunch depth defender with length, skating and athleticism but you would have also hoped to see more progress there this year.

12. Daemon Hunt, LHD, 22 (Cleveland Monsters)

Hunt was an excellent junior hockey defenseman and played some pretty significant minutes in Iowa to become a call-up option for the Wild before he was traded to the Blue Jackets. I was a little lower on him in junior than those in the WHL/with Hockey Canada/with the Wild were, though, and I think he has often been credited for things I'm not convinced are actual strengths. He's physically engaged, for sure. He likes the challenge of defending good players one-on-one. He's strong, he keeps his head up and he skates well, which helps him defend the rush and move the puck. Though he has made progress in his reads (mistiming pinches, being too eager to shoot, playing too much on instinct and directness instead of poise, etc.), I think those things may still present some trouble as he tries to go from call-up option to full-time NHLer with the Blue Jackets (and will never be perfect even once/if he becomes a full-timer).

I've been more and more impressed by his gaps and overall defensive presence, coaches have always liked him, he's got the athletic tools and there's just enough skill to his game to hang, but I do think for a player who's known for his defensive aptitude that it's not as polished as his roles/minutes/trust have always indicated. His injury history also hasn't done him any favors. There are more than a few who believe he's going to be a solid third-pairing defenseman at the NHL level and his early underlying results in the league have been mostly positive, so I'm open to needing to come around on him more than I already have. He looks more like a No. 7-8 to me, though.

13. James Malatesta, C/LW, 21 (Cleveland Monsters/Columbus Blue Jackets)

After garnering attention as a potential top two-round guy in his rookie season in the QMJHL, Malatesta's progression has been slow but steady since. Across his four years in junior, even when the production wasn't always there, you'd notice Malatesta shift-to-shift and game-to-game because of his advanced speed and competitiveness. Those who know his game weren't surprised when he impressed the Blue Jackets enough in rookie camps and tournaments to get an NHL deal, or when he made winning plays in big moments to help the Quebec Remparts to a QMJHL title (as playoffs MVP with 14 goals in 18 games) and a Memorial Cup (also as MVP with five goals in four games). He quickly established himself as a solid AHLer as a rookie last year too and while he hasn't taken a step this year and may never have much offense at the NHL level, he's in the call-up mix because of his speed and aggression.

He fascinates me as a kid who has clear pro tools and value but just wasn't able to fill the net in junior like those tools would suggest he should.

He's a gamer and just seems to consistently assert himself with his skating, physicality and overall jump even if he's not always the one making the finishing play at the end of his hard work (though he still scored 56 goals in a combined 77 regular-season, playoff and Memorial Cup games in his final junior season and has produced fine in the AHL).

He's a superbly athletic, fast north-south skater who gets after it on the forecheck, finishes his checks, plays in bursts between battles and has good hard skill (he's got quick hands, he's got a hard wrister, etc.). He's built like an ox for a 5-foot-9 player (he's listed at 193 pounds, which is actually down four from a year ago, and it's all muscle/he excels in the gym). He can put himself in tough spots playing more on instinct than processing, but there are some who believe he's going to make a solid bottom-six contributor/energy guy regardless. The tools, work ethic and physique keep him relevant. He's a likable player, too.

14. Luca Pinelli, C, 19 (Ottawa 67's)

A high-energy player, Pinelli (like Brindley and Malatesta) plays bigger than his size and finds a way to involve himself in the action from shift to shift by keeping his feet moving and making quick plays in possession. He's a talented handler, shooter, passer and skater who wins races, wins plays, plays in and

out of coverage and just hustles. There's also some delaying and deception to his game, and he can load up his wrist when he gets free in the slot.

I wasn't surprised when he was Ottawa's leading scorer in the playoffs, outproducing older, already-drafted players like Jack Beck and Vinzenz Rohrer or OHL top scorer Logan Morrison in his draft year. I wasn't surprised that he was named 67's captain (it only takes one conversation with head coach Dave Cameron to realize that he's a fan of the player and the kid, who he credits as a worker off the ice as well) or led them in scoring last year with 48 goals (third in the OHL) and 82 points last season. I wasn't frankly as surprised as the masses seemed to be when he made Team Canada for the World Juniors this year, either. In fact, I thought he had a good camp and gave something when others didn't at times during the tournament and while I know there was criticism of his selection I thought there were Canadian forwards who looked out of place at the tournament and I didn't feel he was one of them.

He's not promised anything at his size but I'm confident he'll take his career as far as it'll go and I've tended to be impressed whenever I've watched him play over the last couple of years. He has come a long way since entering the OHL, plays with determination, spark and a choppiness, supports play actively defensively and has enough secondary skill and scoring to give it a go. I think there's a chance he tops out as a top-nine AHLer but I think he's got at least an outside chance of becoming a third-line NHLer at some point.

15. Corson Ceulemans, RHD, 22 (Cleveland Monsters)

Ceulemans was a bold and brash player at the AJHL level pre-draft who has had to find his way and put his pieces together at each level since. After a freshman year at Wisconsin that started roughly before really finding itself, Ceulemans made the most out of a difficult situation as a sophomore, leading the Badgers' defense in scoring while playing on a team that lost more than it won. His play in the AHL since turning pro two springs ago has been a bit of a mixed bag as well but he seems to be learning it and figuring out how to better apply his tools and I still think he's got another level to find there.

Ceulemans can make his fair share of mistakes, turn pucks over and get caught flatfooted and burned when he's not ramped up and dialed in. But he can also play a commanding style that his raw tools allow him to when he's at his best — a game of take, take, take. There's plenty to like about Ceulemans' package. He's right-handed. He's big (6-foot-2 and a compact 200 or so pounds), sturdy and athletic and he uses it to play a rugged and physical style against the rush and in his own zone along the wall (though he can sometimes settle into a lackadaisical defensive posture and get caught puck-watching). He's also capable of imposing himself offensively, with an attacking style that is complemented by a hard point shot (off his snap shot and his low slap shot, both of which he does a good job keeping low), quick offensive-zone instincts through holes as they open, eager pinches and a willingness to step off the line to make a play on or to the puck. When he plays within himself while remaining aggressive, he looks like a professional defenseman. I like him best when he's really active, ramped up, looking to engage and playing decisively on both sides of the puck, even if it comes with some blunders. He's not the most cerebral player but when he plays to beat the first layer and then make his play, it can work. There's a boldness to his game that I expect to come out more at the pro level as he establishes himself more, too. I still think he's got a chance to become an assertive No. 6-7 defenseman with the right coaching and development, even if there are some warts.

The Tiers

As always, each prospect pool ranking is broken down into team-specific tiers in order to give you a better sense of the proximity from one player — or group of players — to the next.

The Blue Jackets' pool is divided into three tiers: 1-2, 3-6, 7-15+.

Considered but not ranked were Monsters forward Hunter McKeown, Monsters D Samuel Knazko, smooth-skating Lincoln Stars D Tanner Henricks, Finnish forward Oiva Keskinen, Michigan Wolverines transfer William Whitelaw, towering Minnesota State D Luke Ashton and North Dakota D Andrew Strathmann.

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Lose To Dallas In A Game Filled With Injuries & Controversy

By Jason Newland – February 4, 2025

Cole Sillinger(9), Adam Fantilli(16), and Ivan Provorov(4) scored the goals for Columbus, and Elvis Merzljikins played great despite the score. He made 34 saves on 39 Stars shots.

The game had a few storylines - Injuries, missed penalties leading to Stars goals, and a controversial goal for Dallas.

Dallas's first three goals were preceded by what the game referees could have easily called penalties. Before two of their first three goals, Dante Fabbro took an elbow to the head, and Kent Johnson was hooked down. Both were not called, and both led to goals within seconds.

Later in the third period, controversy struck. Dallas took a long shot in which Stars forward Evgenii Dadonov knocked out of the air with his stick and in. Even in live action, it looked like it was a high stick that scored the goal. Dadonov himself didn't even celebrate the goal. The play went to review and was "confirmed" by Toronto.

You take a look at the picture below and make a decision.

The NHL released the following statement regarding the goal: "Video review confirmed that Evgenii Dadonov's stick was at or below the height of the crossbar when he directed the puck into the Columbus net."

That goal ended up being the game-winner. Everyone on the Columbus bench disagreed.

And now the injuries:

- Dante Fabbro took a high hit from a Star, had to leave the game, and did not return. A penalty was not called on the play. HC Dean Evason said after the game that Fabbro won't be available to them.
- Zach Werenski was injured after getting tied up with a couple of Stars players. He looked to have maybe taken a slash or cross-check that led to the injury. He was in obvious pain sitting on the bench. He left the game with four minutes left in the second period but would return for the third.
- Mikael Pyyhtiä took a puck to the face and was bleeding. He would eventually come back.
- Kirill Marchenko took a puck to the face and would leave the game. One of his teammates tried to clear a puck, and while Marchenko was sitting on the bench, he got drilled by the puck. He never returned to the game.

Dean Evason said after the game, "It's not a bad break. It's a bad call. It's a high stick. I just don't understand it." Evason was generally not happy with the way the game was officiated on Sunday night.

The Blue Jackets hung tough against one of the best teams in the league, despite being down their top pairing on defense, and their top forward at times during the game. This was a game that could've should've been won by Columbus.

Player Stats

- Cole Sillinger scored his 9th goal of the season. The goal was his 100th career point.

- Adam Fantilli scored his 16th goal.
- Ivan Provorov scored his 4th goal of the season.
- Kent Johnson recorded his 19th assist. That point gives him a 7 game points streak.
- James van Riemsdyk got his 13th assist. He now has points in 14 of his last 15 games.
- Dmitri Voronkov tallied his 17th assist.
- Kirill Marchenko got his 34th assist.
- Justin Danforth recorded his 7th assist.
- Mikael Pyyhtiä got his 3rd assist.
- Elvis Merzljikins made 34 saves on the night

Team Stats

- The Jackets power play went 0/3.
- The Columbus PK went 2/3.
- The Blue Jackets won 42.2% of the faceoffs.

What's Next: The Blue Jackets finish their four-game road trip in Buffalo against the Sabres on Tuesday night.

The Hockey News / Report: Kirill Marchenko Has A Broken Jaw And Is Expected Miss 6 To 8 Weeks

By Jason Newland – February 4, 2025

Aaron Portzline of The Athletic has reported that Blue Jackets star winger Kirill Marchenko suffered a broken jaw in Sunday's loss to the Dallas Stars. He is expected to miss 6 to 8 weeks.

Marchenko was on the bench when a teammate made a clearing attempt that went into the bench and hit him while he was sitting down. According to Portzline, he was taken to an area hospital to have his jaw reset. According to the report, he will also stay in Dallas to see a specialist.

Marchenko will be sorely missed in the CBJ lineup. He leads the team with 21 goals and has a total of 55 points. He also leads the entire NHL with a plus-31.

What's Next: The Blue Jackets finish their four-game road trip in Buffalo against the Sabres on Tuesday night.

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Weekly Injury Report: Week 17

By Spencer Lazary – February 4, 2025

Last week, the Columbus Blue Jackets entered a few more names onto the injury report.

In last night's game against the Dallas Stars, the Blue Jackets lost both Kirill Marchenko and Dante Fabbro.

Unfortunately, as my colleague Jason Newland reported via Aaron Portzline this morning, Marchenko suffered a broken jaw and is out for six to eight weeks. As for Fabbro, the news is still pending, and he is listed day-to-day with an upper-body injury.

On the more positive side, they did have Cole Sillinger rejoin the lineup, and has played well since.

Now on to the injury report.

Injury Report

Boone Jenner (shoulder) – Placed on Injured Reserve on Oct. 7 (52 games missed)

Erik Gudbranson (upper body) – Placed on Injured Reserve on Oct. 16 (49 games missed)

Yegor Chinakhov (upper body) – On Injured Reserve (31 games missed)

Sean Monahan (upper body) – Placed on Injured Reserve retroactive to Jan. 7 (11 games missed)

Total Man Games Lost: 218

What's Next: The Blue Jackets wrap up their four-game road trip against the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday night.

The Hockey News / Two Potential Forward Replacements For The Injured Marchenko

By Spencer Lazary – February 4, 2025

With the news breaking about Kirill Marchenko's injury and him being sidelined for six to eight weeks, the Columbus Blue Jackets will likely need to look externally for a replacement.

Many Blue Jackets fans have been saying it should be a "next man up" approach and that the organization should give someone internally a chance.

However, my colleague Jason Newland believes that isn't the case when it comes to losing Marchenko.

Now, the attention turns to the trade market to try and replace Marchenko ahead of the March 7 NHL Trade Deadline. Here are three potential forward replacements the Blue Jackets could target.

1. Scott Laughton – Philadelphia Flyers

Scott Laughton is a name the Blue Jackets should inquire about. With reports that the Philadelphia Flyers are looking to go "big game hunting" and clear cap space, it could lead to a trade. Laughton, 30, has been in trade rumors for the last few seasons, but this could be the year the Flyers move him.

In 51 games this season, he has 10 goals and 15 assists for 25 points. He can play down the middle or on the wing and is known as an emotional leader who could step in and provide stability for Columbus.

2. Ryan Strome – Anaheim Ducks

Another player the Blue Jackets could look into is Ryan Strome of the Anaheim Ducks. He brings a lot of the same characteristics as Laughton—leadership, experience, and the ability to produce offensively.

In 52 games, he has seven goals and 23 assists for 30 points. When the lineup is healthy, Strome could play a similar role to Sean Monahan, which would be a valuable addition for the Blue Jackets.

With Marchenko sidelined for at least six weeks, the Blue Jackets have a decision to make. If they do decide to go the trade route, Laughton, Strome, can help Columbus get through this stretch without one of their top offensive players.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Sillinger Hits Century Mark, Black And Blue 2nd, Goal Controversies

By Will Chase – February 4, 2025

A weird one on Sunday in Dallas.

Evgenii Dadonov scored two third-period goals as the Dallas Stars beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 5-3 at American Airlines Center on Sunday.

Casey DeSmith made 27 saves to improve to 5-0-1 against Columbus in his career. Elvis Merzlikins made 34 saves.

Sillinger Hits Century Mark

Cole Sillinger has points in three straight games (two goals, one assist) since returning from an injury last Thursday in Vegas. He opened the scoring on Sunday with a first-period goal at 6:43 for his ninth.

The goal came on Columbus' first shot on goal, as Dallas had a 6-1 shots advantage.

The point is the 100th of Sillinger's career. Kent Johnson (19) and James van Riemsdyk (13) each assisted on the goal.

Black And Blue 2nd

The Jackets and Stars traded goals all second period with each team scoring twice and heading into the third period tied 3-3.

One of the major storylines for Columbus was the injury front.

Dante Fabbro left the game due to an upper-body injury after taking a stick up high to the face. Dmitri Voronkov took his place in the penalty box to start the second period.

Mikael Pyyhtia took a puck high. Zach Aston-Reese took a stick to the face. Werenski was in discomfort on the bench and left in the second but returned for the third. Kirill Marchenko was hit by an errant puck while sitting on the bench and did not return for the third period. While it sounds like Fabbro will miss time, it was announced on Monday by The Athletic's Aaron Portzline that Marchenko has a broken jaw.

Goal Controversies

Through all the bumps, bruises, and goals in the second period, the Jackets were battling adversity but still in a position to win a hockey game.

Although it was not to be on this night.

Back in the second period, Dallas tied the game 2-2 when Logan Stankoven (7) scored but Kent Johnson was spun around on the play. Mikael Granlund picked up his first assist as a Star following Saturday's trade from San Jose.

Dadonov scored twice in the third to put this one away. The go-ahead goal at 11:22, his 14th, assisted by Thomas Harley (19) and Ilya Lyubushkin (11), appeared to be a high stick, although the officials reviewed and deemed it a good goal. He scored his 15th at 15:47, assisted by Wyatt Johnston (30) and Jamie Benn (19).

Going For Winning Trip

Columbus caps off its four-game road trip when they play the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday, Feb. 4 at 7 p.m. ET from KeyBank Center.

[The Athletic / Do NHL players care about the 4 Nations Face-Off? Here's what they said](#)

By The Athletic NHL Staff – February 4, 2025

Much of the NHL will scatter to the winds next week for a rare 10-day in-season break — a chance to recharge and heal up ahead of the playoff push.

But while they're back home in Europe or hanging with the family stateside or lounging on a beach in the Caribbean sipping piña colodas, most of them will be keeping tabs on the first best-on-best hockey tournament since the 2016 World Cup of Hockey.

"I think it's sick," one player said. "Best-on-best. That's what everybody wants to see. I'm gonna watch."

The 4 Nations Face-Off might not have the history of the Olympics or the depth of field of a World Cup, but it's still going to have Connor McDavid squaring off against Auston Matthews, Aleksander Barkov against Elias Pettersson and countless other tantalizing matchups.

The best players from Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States will go head-to-head in Boston and Montreal in a round-robin tournament. The two teams with the best round-robin record (three points for a regulation win, two points for an overtime or shootout win, one point for an overtime or shootout loss and zero points for a regulation loss) will meet in Boston on Feb. 20 for the championship.

The Athletic asked 110 active players — who were granted anonymity so they could be brutally honest, if need be — if they were interested in the tournament, and the overwhelming majority of them said yes ... with some exceptions, of course.

Naturally, those who are playing in the event are interested. Well, 15 of the 16 we asked, at least. But some of them are living in both the present and the future, seeing the 4 Nations as an audition for the 2026 Olympics in Italy.

"The last time we had a full international, best-on-best tournament was the World Cup, and that was a week before I made the NHL," one Team Canada player said. "In my entire career, we haven't had this. ... With the Olympics next year, you want to perform well — to obviously win the 4 Nations and hopefully be a part of more of these events in the next few seasons."

"Just because it's a precursor to the Olympics," said another player who voted yes. "As a fan of hockey, I'm watching it. I remember growing up, those are just such big hockey moments. For hockey in general, it's great. It's unfortunate we've missed the Olympics because it's such a big worldwide event. I want to watch the best-on-best, too, and the best players want to play in them. It's long overdue."

"I'm on it, so I will care about it, for sure," one Team Sweden player said. "You look at the bigger picture, too, is the Olympics is right around the corner. So, it's a big chance for me to show who I am, and it's a coaching stuff that I haven't had too much to deal with in the past. Absolutely, I care about it."

And the participating player who wasn't interested?

"I'd rather go back home to (my home country)," he said. "I'd rather (have) a two-week break. It sucks you miss the two-week break, but it's cool you're playing against the best players right now. Except the Russians aren't allowed to be in there. That's stupid. They're the best players right now."

Understandably, he wasn't the only one to express apathy over countries left out of the tournament.

"When our nation is not part of it, I don't (care)," a Czech player said.

"(My country) is not in it, so not really (interested)," one German player said. "I will enjoy my break and get my body ready for the home stretch and hopefully a good playoff run. However, I do think that it has been too long since fans got to watch best-on-best hockey, so it is exciting for them. It will also raise anticipation for the Olympics that are coming up."

"Me, a guy whose country isn't participating, I don't really care," another Czech player said. "I'll watch to watch the guys I play with or used to play with."

"There should be Russia there, too," a Russian player said.

Interestingly, another Russian player said, "I'll watch U.S.-Canada, but that's it."

One Canadian player, who was not chosen to participate, said it comes down to wanting to see his country come out on top.

"Anytime there's an international stage with the best players, there's a sense of Canadian pride."

Indeed, Canadian players in general indicated more likelihood to watch than Americans.

Some players said they could take it or leave it. They won't go out of their way to follow the action, but they won't change the channel if it comes on, either.

"Do I care about it? No," said one player. "Do I think it's a cool concept? Yes."

"That's our break," one player said. "But if we're at a bar, I'll definitely check and tune in. If it's Canada-U.S. in the final, I'll tune in."

You hear a lot of talk about "growing the game" around international play, and while that's largely the purview of the league offices, players too understand the value of getting a spotlight during one of the quietest months of the sports calendar.

It's certainly a step up in excitement from another tepid All-Star weekend, which plenty of players flat-out dread.

"I think anything public like that is great for league, just getting eyes on it," one player said. "It's great for everyone. The more new stuff they do, mix it up and not do the same thing every year, is great for the league. Even for guys not playing, it'll be fun to watch."

"I think it's cool," another player said. "I think it's something that will definitely grow the game. That best-on-best competition is awesome as a fan. If I'm able to watch it, I'll definitely be tuning in myself. I think it's really cool to have those kinds of things. It obviously makes the schedule a bit tougher, but it's something I think is still cool and enjoyable to watch."

"It will be really good hockey," another player said. "And that's what they're going for. It's not like there's meaning behind it like the Olympics or worlds or World Juniors. It doesn't have that. But it's a spin-off of that, but also you're creating a crazy, awesome tournament that's gonna be really fun to watch, hockey-wise. And I'll be interested to see how it goes."

As for the 20 players who said they don't really care? Leave them alone. Can't you read the out-of-office reply?

The Athletic / Can NHL players be traded during 4 Nations? Explaining roster rules for the tournament break

By Chris Johnston – February 4, 2025

The NHL's upcoming foray back into international hockey will leave a big blank space right in the middle of February's schedule.

With no regular-season games due to be played from Feb. 10 to 21 while the 4 Nations Face-Off is contested in Montreal and Boston, a huge majority of the league's players, coaches and executives can look forward to a rare chance to step back and catch their breath amid the steady drumbeat of a busy campaign.

While no one will be hanging a "Gone Fishing" sign the way they might during the dead quiet of August, it's unlikely there will be much official team business conducted in that window for a variety of reasons.

This will be the NHL's first extended (and scheduled) in-season break since February 2014, when it paused 16 days for the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

Here's an explainer on what is and isn't permitted under league rules while the 4 Nations Face-Off is being played.

The status of team rosters

Unlike the Christmas holiday period, where the NHL severely limits roster movement with an eight-day freeze on waivers, trades and loans, there will be no restrictions placed on what the 32 teams can do during the February break.

Each of them will have to remain cap-compliant in that window and will continue to be subject to daily cap calculations based on their active roster.

However, provided they operate within those parameters, they're free to move players around even while those players are vacationing in Mexico or potentially representing the United States, Canada, Sweden or Finland in the 4 Nations tournament.

That means a player can be subjected to waivers or assigned to the AHL or even dealt to another team while the NHL is on international hiatus.

On paper, anyway.

Wait, so there might be trades?

Technically, yes.

There is nothing in the league rules to prevent it from happening. However, in speaking with multiple team executives, the general expectation seems to be that any moves discussed during the 4 Nations break aren't likely to be officially consummated until after the tournament is over.

For starters, this is an important event being co-run by the NHL and NHL Players' Association, and no one will be looking to take any spotlight away from the first competition of its kind in more than eight years.

Beyond that, there's not really any apparent urgency to add a player while your team is neither practicing nor playing, especially since that addition would immediately affect your cap sheet. Typically,

most deadline buyers are teams trying to tango under the salary cap ceiling by accruing as much space as possible for as long as possible before pulling the trigger on a move.

It seems reasonable to expect the 4 Nations break to allow NHL front offices to take stock of where they stand and begin zeroing in on their approach to the trade deadline. That represents an ideal time to gain a detailed understanding of the market at large and start getting your ducks in a row.

There should be plenty of fireworks when the regular season resumes with less than two weeks to go before the 3 p.m. ET deadline on March 7.

That represents a narrow window to squeeze in an avalanche of transactions league-wide.

Demotions to the AHL

Another trend to keep an eye on during the 4 Nations break is teams assigning young or waiver-exempt players to their AHL affiliates.

That league will continue operating with a typical schedule right through February. As a result, NHL teams will get the opportunity to find more minutes for some guys on the farm or they'll simply take advantage of the chance to save 12 days of cap accrual by shifting players off their roster during the break.

Some of these transactions may only end up being conducted on paper.

League rules dictate that a player assigned to the AHL any time after 11:59 p.m. local time on the date of the NHL team's final game before the break isn't "obligated to report to the team to which he has been loaned" until after the break formally ends.

In other words, a player can't be summoned back from vacation in the event he gets loaned during the international window. He would have to be sent down before the break was formally underway to be required to actually report to the AHL team.

Back to work

The 600-plus NHL players who aren't participating in the 4 Nations Face-Off are required to punch the clock again starting Feb. 18.

Just like when teams have returned from the All-Star Weekend or a bye week in prior seasons, practices that first day back can't be scheduled before 2 p.m. local time. That allows some extra time for those traveling back from outside their own market to return home.

Per the terms of the NHL's 2020 Memorandum of Understanding, there's some leeway in the event of an explained absence: "Players shall be excused from the first post-Break practice if unforeseen travel delays or other compelling circumstances prevent them from participating," it reads.

If desired, NHL teams will have the runway necessary to hold as many as four practices to get back up to speed before the sprint to the end of the regular season officially begins.

There are 14 games scheduled league-wide on Saturday, Feb. 22 — two days after the 4 Nations champion is due to be crowned at TD Garden.

The Athletic / Fox Sports executive accused in lawsuits of sexual battery placed on leave

By Katie Strang and Andrew Marchand – February 4, 2025

Fox Sports executive vice president Charlie Dixon, a co-defendant in two lawsuits filed last month in which he was accused of sexual battery, has been placed on administrative leave, sources briefed on the matter told The Athletic.

Noushin Faraji, a former hairstylist for Fox Sports, alleged in her complaint that Dixon groped her at a co-worker's party in January 2017. Former Fox Sports anchor and reporter Julie Stewart-Binks alleged in her complaint that Dixon asked her to come to his hotel room following a work meeting and pushed her against a wall, pinned her arms and forcibly kissed her in January 2016.

Dixon did not respond to requests for comment when The Athletic

Published Stewart-Binks' allegations last Friday. On Monday, he did not immediately respond to further inquiries. Fox, also a defendant in both lawsuits, declined to comment on Dixon's work status. In response to Stewart-Binks' account, Fox Sports said in a statement: "These allegations are from over eight years ago. At the time, we promptly hired a third-party firm to investigate and addressed the matter based on their findings."

Dixon joined Fox in 2015 and gradually expanded his role at the network, rising to head of content at Fox Sports and FS1. He was expected to be involved in FS1's coverage of the Super Bowl this weekend in New Orleans.

Stewart-Binks said in an interview and in her complaint that Dixon's alleged assault followed at meeting at a hotel bar, which she attended after Dixon conveyed that he wanted to discuss her assignment at the 2016 Super Bowl. Later, he asked her to come to his room to see the view from his balcony, and it was there where the alleged assault occurred.

According to her complaint, Stewart-Binks spoke to a Fox human resources representative in 2017 and disclosed what Dixon allegedly said to her in that meeting and what occurred on the balcony of his hotel room.

The Athletic / Weekend NHL rankings: Huge cap news, more blockbuster trades and oh yeah, games

By Sean McIndoe – February 4, 2025

It was another weekend in which the biggest stories came off the ice, including our second consecutive Friday night blockbuster. We'll get to the J.T. Miller trade and the follow-up deal with the Penguins in a bit.

But first, let's focus on the biggest news of the weekend, a story that will have repercussions in the league for years to come. The salary cap is going up — way, way up. After years of stagnation due to the pandemic, the ceiling will rise from the current \$88 million to an estimated \$113.5 million over just three years, an average jump of \$8.5 million per year. And it's possible those numbers end up even higher.

Let's break down what this could mean.

Bonus five: Thoughts on a \$113.5 million cap

1. This is great news for any pending free agents — Obvious point is obvious, but we have to lead with it. If you're Mikko Rantanen or Mitch Marner or Brock Boeser, you're a happy guy these days, or at least your accountant is. To be clear, this news didn't come out of nowhere, and teams were probably already factoring a major jump into their offers. But having it confirmed should help everyone get on the same page. And while that's true for the stars, it may be even truer for the middle-of-the-lineup types who were often the ones getting squeezed by the flat-cap era.

2. Some young stars are going to be huge bargains very soon — Some already are, but just wait a few years. Players like Miro Heiskanen (\$8.45 million until 2029), Lucas Raymond (\$8.075 million until 2032), Cole Caufield (\$7.85 million until 2031) and Tim Stützle (\$8.35 million until 2031) all decided to lock into max-length deals in a flat-cap world. There's a non-zero chance Jack Hughes (just \$8 million until 2030) will be making half of what his brother Quinn makes in a few years.

There's value in security, and all of these guys will take home more than enough money to be set for life, so nobody's shedding any tears. You would assume all these players knew what they were getting into and made a choice they're comfortable with. Let's just hope they don't mind being the fifth- or sixth-highest-paid player on their team for years to come.

3. This won't be good news for some smaller-market teams — Or at least, that's the early concern, with suggestions that some teams won't be able to get near the new upper limits. Pierre digs into that question here.

Teams have always had internal budgets, and not all teams spent to the cap every year. But most did, and the gaps were small enough that it still felt like everyone could compete. A rapid rise to the ceiling could mean a return to the days where bigger markets have a significant advantage — not to the extent they did in the pre-cap era but certainly more than we've been used to in recent years.

That said ...

4. This isn't completely unprecedented — In terms of percentage, these won't actually be the biggest jumps of the cap era. The very first cap increase, which came after the 2005-06 season, saw the ceiling rise from \$39 million to \$44 million, an increase of nearly 13 percent. The rise in 2008 was also just

under 13 percent, while in 2011, the jump was over 8 percent. For comparison, the three jumps announced on Friday range from 8.5 percent to 9.1 percent of the previous year's cap.

Those pre-2012 seasons were a different world, under a CBA that saw players get 57 percent of revenue as opposed to the 50 percent it's been since the 2013 agreement. But it's worth remembering those big jumps didn't seem all that seismic at the time, and we didn't see a league in which the big-market teams gobbled up all the talent and won all the championships. If anything, maybe we should view this week's news as a return to how things are supposed to look in a hard cap system, not as some sort of outlier.

5. This should be way better for fans — This will sound odd to younger or newer fans, but there really was a time when hockey fans spent most of their time arguing about which players were better, or how a star would fit into a lineup somewhere, without immediately mentioning their salary. After 20 years of the cap era, it's become second nature to view everything through a dollar lens, where good players with bad contracts aren't good players. As Justin Bourne noted, it would be nice to move away from that.

Contracts will always matter in a hard cap league and will always be part of the picture in evaluating anything an NHL team does. We're not talking about that factor disappearing. But it sure would be nice if it became something other than the primary concern for every single move. The flat-cap era has been exhausting. Good riddance to it.

Anyway, here's hoping you had a better weekend than James van Riemsdyk. On to the rankings, and then to those trades ...

Road to the Cup

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

While it won't get them near the top five quite yet, we have to recognize the Senators putting an absolute beating on the Wild in the single most impressive team performance of the weekend. That's four straight wins for Ottawa, as they start to pull away from the crowded Eastern wild-card field. Not bad for a team that's still missing its star goaltender, and yes, I think we all know exactly where this is headed.

The game was also notable for this ugly moment:

Ryan Hartman earned an in-person hearing for that one, meaning he can expect a lengthy suspension.

5. Carolina Hurricanes (32-17-4, +32 true goals differential*) — They haven't exactly dominated in the four games of the Rantanen era, but tomorrow provides a good test and potential final preview against the Jets. Let's see how that goes before nudging them out of their spot.

4. Dallas Stars (34-17-1, +38) — Five straight wins while adding Mikael Granlund is more than enough to get them back into the top five, pushing the slumping Golden Knights out.

(Speaking of the Knights, and only because I know fawning goalie sycophant Jesse Granger would want me to mention it: Congratulations to New York's Jonathan Quick, who beat Vegas last night to record his 400th career victory.)

3. Washington Capitals (34-11-7, +55) — They've suffered back-to-back 5-4 losses in overtime, but get a chance at redemption tomorrow against the Panthers. Also, be sure to check out the new Alex Ovechkin goal tracker.

2. Winnipeg Jets (37-14-3, +64) — Their win over the Capitals gave them a league-leading 77 points, they've got the best goals differential, and they've won six straight. It sure feels like top spot in next week's rankings is there for the taking. But for one more week, at least ...

1. Edmonton Oilers (32-16-4, +30) — I'm keeping them here, but let's just say it's an extremely shaky hold. They nearly pulled off the comeback against the Leafs on Saturday and probably would have if it weren't for yet another dumb and nitpicky offside review. Still, Cup favorites shouldn't be falling behind by three goals at home, especially against an opponent that had been slumping. Daniel has more on the loss, which was Edmonton's fourth in its last seven.

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

Not ranked: New York Rangers, Vancouver Canucks and Pittsburgh Penguins — It's not quite a three-way trade, but it feels like it might as well be. First, the details if you missed them over the weekend: The Canucks send J.T. Miller, Erik Brännström and prospect Jackson Dorrington to the Rangers for Filip Chytil, Victor Mancini and a 2025 first-round pick that's top-13 protected. Vancouver then immediately flips that pick along with Danton Heinen, Vincent Desharnais and prospect Melvin Fernström to the Penguins for Marcus Pettersson and Drew O'Connor.

Let's start in Vancouver, where the Canucks finally close the book on the long-running Miller vs. Elias Pettersson saga that apparently was not all made up by the media after all. In return, they essentially get Chytil and Marcus Pettersson, two good players with significant question marks. For Chytil, it's his health, with a long history of concussions hanging over what should be a bright future. For Pettersson, it's his status as a pending UFA, and the Shiny New Toy potential of the contract the Canucks will now presumably have to give him.

Is essentially trading a 100-point player for two question marks a good move? Well ... yeah, I actually think it might be. I'm more bullish on this move from Vancouver's perspective than others seem to be. While the old cliché about addition by subtraction is usually nonsense, it's fair to say that getting Miller out of town is probably a good thing for the Canucks, or at least a necessary one. And remember, as good as he's been in recent years, this is a guy signed to an \$8 million deal that runs until he's 37. Even with the cap jumping up, that has the potential to be an ugly contract fairly soon. The move is certainly a step back for the Canucks in the short term, but the ongoing dressing room drama had mostly torpedoed the short term already, and now they've got two players who could be significant contributors to the reload. (And Frankie likes Mancini a lot, too.) Add it all up and I'm with Drance: I like this just fine for Vancouver.

That doesn't mean I hate it for the Rangers, because that's a team very much in win-now mode. Given how the season has gone so far, New York is one of the few teams that can justify adding Miller now and hand-waving away the remaining years on his deal as a problem for another time (and let's face it, if things go poorly, almost certainly another GM). Dom's model says this move gives the Rangers a significant jump in their playoff odds, and right now that's close to all that should matter for this team. Four points in two games is a nice start to the Miller era.

As for the Penguins, they get a first for a pending UFA, which is a nice bit of business. They also all but wave the white flag on their playoff hopes, which is tough to swallow but probably a necessary dose of reality for a team that needs to rebuild whether they want to use the word or not. And maybe the signal to the rest of the league induces a few more calls to Kyle Dubas about what else could be for sale.

All told, I think all three teams come out ahead, given where on the timeline each should be focused. The team that needs to get better right now did it. The team that needs to rebuild for the future got a high pick. And the team that needed to clean up the mess of its own making and then turn the page for the short-term future took the first step in doing so. Nice work by all involved. I'm calling it a three-way win.

The bottom five

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

If you missed it, Corey had his midseason rankings for the 2025 draft, and one player seems to be separating from the pack on his list.

5. Philadelphia Flyers (23-25-6, -29) — They've lost three straight and five of six, all in regulation, and made the sort of trade that probably means it's time to bottom out. Welcome back to the bottom five, for the first time since November.

4. Buffalo Sabres (21-26-5, -14) — They've won three straight, including over decent teams like Boston and New Jersey. They've got Columbus tomorrow, and then only one of their next seven against a team currently in a playoff spot, so there's potential for a second-half push toward ruining their draft pick .500.

3. Nashville Predators (18-26-7, -31) — Saturday's shutout in Pittsburgh was their fourth straight regulation loss, and they get the Senators buzzsaw next. But after that come two very big games: at the Blackhawks and then at home to the Sabres. Yes, we're at that point of the season where it's all about losing to the other bad teams, preferably in regulation. If the Predators are going to take serious a run at the top lottery odds, this would be a good week to make some progress. Or not make it. You know what we mean.

2. Chicago Blackhawks (16-31-5, -44) — Not a bad start. They should use this play every period, in my opinion.

Don't ask how the rest of the game went, I'm sure it was fine.

In other Hawks news, captain Nick Foligno had some interesting thoughts about Connor Bedard, diving and the evolution of emotion in the NHL.

1. San Jose Sharks (15-33-6, -57) — The Canucks moves stole most of the spotlight away from Saturday's Granlund trade, but I like it for the Sharks. They're one of the few obvious sellers with rentals available, and cashing in two of them for a first-round pick is solid work by Mike Grier. The Sharks are still at that tricky stage of the rebuild where soon it's going to be time to start making progress up the standings. For now, banking picks and prospects still makes sense, and they've sent a clear signal to the rest of the league that they're open for business.

Not ranked: St. Louis Blues — The Brandon Saad buyout certainly wasn't the biggest transaction of the week, let alone the season. But it was one of the year's strangest, as a player voluntarily walked away from over \$5 million to ensure he could go to a contender rather than the AHL.

Jeremy breaks it all down here, including why Saad chose the path he did. He ended up signing with the Golden Knights, adding some top-nine scoring punch to a team that's already a lock for a playoff spot. Meanwhile, the Blues get out from the rest of the contract with no cap penalty.

The question is what we can learn from the original plan to send Saad down to the AHL. Was that an admission that it's time to rebuild, by clearing space for younger players at the expense of a veteran? Or was it more about changing the mix for a team that still thinks it can contend for the playoffs? Heading into the week, four straight regulation losses had dropped the Blues seven points back of the final wild-card spot, so the reality of the situation isn't hard to see. But recognizing reality isn't exactly a strong suit of struggling NHL teams, so ... last night's win over Utah means they're completely fixed, right?

I guess we'll see. The next week or so probably tells us the tale, because four of their next five come against the Oilers, Panthers, Jets and Avalanche. Make some hay against that group of contenders, and

maybe there's still some life left in this St. Louis season after all. But if the more likely scenario plays out, we can probably write the 2024-25 Blues off once and for all.

The Athletic / The NHL salary cap is rising, but why else is the goalie market booming now?

By Jesse Granger – February 4, 2025

The NHL goalie market is changing. Goaltenders signed more eight-year contracts in the last four months than in the five years prior. During those same four months, goalies also signed twice as many contracts worth at least \$8 million per season than in the prior five years.

Igor Shesterkin became the highest-paid goalie in NHL history with his \$92 million extension with the Rangers in December. In October, Dallas' Jake Oettinger and Boston's Jeremy Swayman recommitted to their teams for eight more years. The Avalanche signed Mackenzie Blackwood to a sizable contract just weeks after acquiring him. Most recently, the Capitals committed five more seasons to Logan Thompson in the midst of his excellent season.

It certainly seems that money is flowing to the crease more freely than it has in some time. Is that just our perception, or do the numbers back it up? If there has been an uptick in money allocated to the position, what is the cause? Is it simply a product of the new projected rise in salary-cap space as a whole, or are general managers suddenly more willing to pay for goaltending?

For answers, we asked the people who understand the dynamics of the market better than anyone: goalie agents. They are on the front lines, speaking with general managers and negotiating deals.

"It's good to see that overall there are more general managers who are willing to dish out higher AAVs (average annual value) for goalies," said Ray Petkau, an agent at Alpha Hockey and founder of Net360, who specializes in representing goalies with a client list that includes Connor Hellebuyck, Stuart Skinner, James Reimer and Laurent Brossoit. "That's definitely a welcome change, but I think we're still well below where we should be, just overall for the position and the importance of it."

Allaine Roy, an agent at RSG Hockey who recently negotiated Thompson's new deal with the Capitals and who also represents Anthony Stolarz, Joseph Woll, Philipp Grubauer, Jake Allen and others, said of the change: "I think if you ask all 32 general managers, you're going to get 32 different answers. It's probably the most important position on your team, but it doesn't seem like every front office feels that way."

In general, though, what's behind the shift toward paying goalies?

First, and most importantly, projections that the NHL's salary cap will rise dramatically after several years of a flat cap have given general managers more money to work with, so contracts will grow across all positions. The league announced an agreement with the NHL Players' Association on Friday that the salary cap will rise to \$95.5 million in 2025-26, \$104 million in 2026-27 and \$113.5 million in 2027-28.

That's an increase of \$25.5 million in a three-year span, directly following a period in which the cap went up only \$4 million over six seasons. It's a dramatic change and we've already begun to see the results. While the announcement was just made, general managers have been planning for these increases for some time and recent goalie signings were made with them in mind.

While it feels as though the goalie market has stagnated over the past several years, it's actually right in line with the rest of the skaters. The flat cap put a damper on contracts of any kind. This chart shows the average of the top 10 goalie salaries has closely mimicked the average of the top 10 skater salaries.

Still, it seems general managers have been more willing to commit to long contracts with goaltenders than as recently as last summer, and agents agree.

Just compare the most recent deals to ones signed a little more than a year ago. In October, Swayman signed for \$8.25 million per year after only three full NHL seasons, with his highest finish in Vezina Trophy voting being seventh in 2023-24. The year prior, Hellebuyck signed for \$8.5 million per year after eight straight seasons of consistent excellence and a Vezina Trophy (and he has since added another). Last July, Nashville signed Juuse Saros at \$7.74 million per year, and he had finished top-six in Vezina voting for four straight seasons.

Petkau, who represents Hellebuyck, stressed that comparing these deals is a bit of an apples-to-oranges situation because of the outside factors considered in each of the deals. Petkau was aware that Hellebuyck could demand the highest-paid contract in goalie history, but both men were more focused on the fit and situation.

“He took a significant discount by design,” Petkau said. “We talked about it. There’s no question that, at the time, we knew he was taking a discount, and the conversation with Helle was a lot more about, ‘Where can I win a Stanley Cup?’ more than it was, ‘How can I squeeze out the top dollar?’”

Saros likely felt similarly about his situation in Nashville. So while there are plenty of reasons for a goalie to take less, it does seem like teams have been more willing to commit to them recently.

Still, goalie contracts are viewed as more risky than those of forwards and defensemen, and for good reason.

Margins are incredibly slim for goalies, and as a result, their statistics can fluctuate more from season to season. Hellebuyck is having an incredible season for Winnipeg with an impressive .925 save percentage. But that is .023 higher than the league-average save percentage of .902, which means the difference between league-average goaltending and great goaltending is 2.5 extra saves for every 100 shots faced.

Meanwhile, a bad week — or even a bad month — doesn’t derail a season of statistics for a scorer. We see scoring slumps all the time and rarely equate them to the forward suddenly being a worse player, or not worth his contract. Because the margins are much slimmer, and poor goaltending affects a team’s chances of winning significantly more, goalie slumps are viewed differently.

Teams also can’t hide a struggling goalie in the same way they can a struggling forward or defenseman. Coaches can remedy most situations by playing a skater fewer minutes, giving them easier line matchups or by lining them up with better players to elevate their play. The goalie is on an island, and when he struggles, the team struggles.

“It’s one thing to overpay a winger or a defenseman who goes from being your No. 2 defenseman to your No. 6 defenseman,” Roy explained. “At least he’s still playing. If you overpay a goalie and he loses his confidence or doesn’t live up to expectations, you’re paying him to not play.”

We’ve seen recent examples of goalies on large contracts getting waived to the minors, where they still count a significant amount toward the team’s cap hit. Tristan Jarry is playing for the AHL’s Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins after being waived by Pittsburgh, but still counts \$4.225 million toward the Penguins’ cap. Grubauer is in a similar situation in Seattle, with a buried cap hit of \$4.75 million for the Kraken. After buying out the remainder of Jack Campbell’s contract this past offseason, the Oilers will have his dead-cap hit on their books through the 2029-30 season.

“High-quality (goaltending) is hard to find, so when you get it, then you pay for it,” Roy said. “If you make a mistake, you pay the price because you’re paying a guy to not play at all.”

General managers don't always have the luxury of remaining patient through a goalie's slump. The NHL is a results-oriented business and jobs are on the line. The agents do believe that some teams would benefit from relying more on their goalie coach's opinion of a goalie rather than simply the results.

"Most teams employ brilliant people at the position, and so often they don't have a loud enough voice when it comes to the draft, free agency or contacts," Petkau said. "They just don't seem to put as much weight on the goalie coach's opinion as I believe they should. Not right across the board, but a lot of teams."

The hesitancy to commit a lot of term and dollars to goalies in recent years is also the result of the NHL — like most professional sports — being a copycat league. When one team does something one way, and wins the Stanley Cup doing it, other teams take notice. It could be a coincidence, but the timeline of the goalie market directly correlates with the failures and successes of Sergei Bobrovsky and his mega-contract with the Florida Panthers.

When the Panthers signed Bobrovsky to the seven-year, \$70 million contract in 2019, the consensus around the league was that it was a bit too rich for most front offices.

"It seemed like it was just a little bit ahead of where a lot of GMs felt it should be," Petkau said. "If that were to happen now for a two-time Vezina winner, nobody would blink an eye."

Bobrovsky struggled over the first few years of the contract. He saved 26.27 goals below expected between 2019 and 2021, according to Evolving-Hockey, while the Panthers won only one playoff series.

Simultaneously during that span, the St. Louis Blues won the Stanley Cup with Jordan Binnington, who began that season playing in the minors and carried a cap hit of only \$650,000. Then, in 2022, the Colorado Avalanche won the Cup while getting league-average goaltending in the playoffs from Darcy Kuemper, and in 2023 the Vegas Golden Knights rode an unlikely tandem of Adin Hill and Laurent Brossoit to a title.

All of those outcomes gave general managers plenty of examples when it came to the perils of committing too much to a goaltender.

"I think it had a chilling effect on the marketplace, a little bit," said Gerry Johannson, an agent at The Sports Corporation who represents 19 goalies between the NHL and AHL, including Hill, Elvis Merzlikins, Petr Mrazek and Alexandar Georgiev. "Also, there are so few goalies. If you have a forward who signs a big contract that's bad, there are probably 10 other guys that signed contracts that are out-producing it, so you don't really notice it as much. When you look at how many goalies there are, the Bobrovsky signing was a unicorn deal."

Johannson makes an excellent point that goalie contracts are judged more harshly simply because there are fewer of them. Rangers star defenseman Adam Fox has only three goals this season (and only one with a goalie in the net), yet there is very little criticism of his \$9.5 million cap hit. That deal isn't used as an example of why teams shouldn't pay defensemen big money, because at the same time, Cale Makar, Quinn Hughes, Zach Werenski and others are flying around the ice helping their teams tremendously.

"I do think that with the smaller pool, every wave is a bigger deal," Johannson said.

The outlook on Bobrovsky's contract has changed dramatically in the years since. He backstopped the Panthers to the Stanley Cup Final in back-to-back seasons, won the Cup last summer and likely punched his ticket to the Hockey Hall of Fame. Perhaps more importantly, the Panthers proved it's possible to build a talented, deep roster around a \$10 million goalie and showed the advantages of having a star in the crease.

Now top-tier goalies are getting paid in a way we haven't seen in some time, and the agents believe the trend will continue.

"It's a little bit like a slinky — when the top end moves, it does drag some of the guys up there with them," Johansson said. "I do think there's a little more tolerance for risk in terms of what lies ahead. Five years ago, it looked pretty bleak."

Contracts will still fluctuate more than those of skaters, because goalies and their agents are generally more focused on fit than maximizing the dollar amount. Fit is important for every player when determining where to sign, but it's magnified for goalies. Because they can only react to the play in front of them, their statistics — and by extension the trajectory of their careers — are more at the mercy of their situation than forwards and defensemen.

"The best deal isn't necessarily the most money," Johansson said. "The best deal is the best deal, and there's a lot that goes into that. There are so many variables in our business. What does the player really want to do? Our job is to make sure they don't take a bad contract, but the difference between a really good contract and an amazingly great contract, there's a lot of room in there for players to make decisions."

In order to better serve his clients, Petkau has completely immersed himself in the goalie world. He works with goalie coach and biomechanic expert Adam Francilia at Net360, is friends with several NHL goalie coaches and even started goaltending himself in men's league a couple years ago, at nearly 50 years old.

"I wanted to learn the position from a different perspective," Petkau said. "So, even with my aging hips, I got some gear and I occasionally play in goal. I'll never understand the pressures of the position at a high level, but I wanted to get everything from a goalie's perspective that I could, to better represent my goalies."

"I don't pretend to be a coach or a trainer, but having a deeper knowledge base of the position allows me to place goalies properly. I look carefully at analytics. Is this team a rush-shot team as far as what they allow, or is it more sustained pressure? Do they box out? What kind of defensive systems do they play? I use those things to determine a good fit."

Goalies will often take slightly less in a deal to play the long game.

"You may look at a deal and think, 'That guy probably should've gotten \$6.5 million, and he took \$6 million,'" Roy explained. "Well, that's because if he wanted \$6.5 million, he would've had to move. He realizes that if he stays where he's at, maybe he's not facing as many quality shots, and extends his career by two years, so he'll make that money back anyway."

At the very least, the combination of salary-cap increases and a general sense of comfort committing to goalies around the league has given the world's best netminders more opportunities to choose from. There seems to be a new market set, with a clear delineation of tiers:

The elite of the elite make between \$8 million and \$11.5 million.

The next level of clear-cut starters make between \$5 million and \$7 million.

The 1B tandem goalies make between \$1.8 million and \$4.75 million.

The clear backups make \$1.5 million and under.

Several agents believe the next necessary step is for the salaries of tandem goalies to creep upward, as teams give them more of a workload, but for now, they're pleased with the upward trajectory at the top.

[Sportsnet.ca / Who else could move after busy weekend of trades in NHL?](#)

By Ryan Dixon – February 4, 2025

We're here to talk hockey, but what a "hold my beer" showing by the National Basketball Association on the weekend.

For the second straight Friday night, the NHL discourse was popping off over a huge swap, with J.T. Miller going to the Rangers seven days after Mikko Rantanen had been shipped from Colorado to Carolina. The Miller trade was one of three big hockey transactions on the weekend, but it all paled in comparison to the shocking Sunday-morning news (for many of us in the east), that the Dallas Mavericks had dealt Luka Doncic to the Los Angeles Lakers, seemingly without ever deciding to tell any other NBA franchises that the 25-year-old megastar could be had via trade.

I can't claim to know a tonne about the NBA, but to put this in context for those who follow it less than I do, it would be the loose equivalent of the Minnesota Wild offering up Kirill Kaprizov — like Donic, a potential free agent in the summer of 2026 — to one team and one team only, then pulling the trigger on a deal that provides an underwhelming return.

And, still, that doesn't do it justice because of the impact a single superstar of Donic's calibre can have on an NBA game.

For good measure, the NBA saw another landscape-shifting move on Sunday that put talented point guard De'Aaron Fox on the San Antonio Spurs with the league's next chosen one, Victor Wembanyama.

Hockey fans are unlikely to witness trades on that scale anytime soon, but — with all the wheeling and dealing happening in the sports world right now, not to mention Friday's news that the NHL salary cap is going way up in coming years — it sure feels like anything is in play in the coming week.

With the start of the 4 Nations Face-Off hiatus hitting in seven days, there's sort of a Trade Deadline Part 1 vibe to the market right now. The Canucks, after dealing Miller, swooped in and grabbed one of the top rental D-men on the market in former Penguin Marcus Pettersson. Then Dallas quietly went about its business by grabbing middle-six contributor Mikael Granlund and — from the always-scarce right-shot defenceman pool — Cody Ceci from San Jose.

With Pettersson now gone, and Ivan Provorov playing on a Blue Jackets team that presently holds a wild card spot, you wonder how things might shake out in what is now a pretty thin market for defencemen.

Could a team look at Seth Jones and try to shake him loose? You must get the player — who holds a full no-move clause — on board, plus offer Chicago sufficient prospect/player capital, to convince the Hawks to eat enough salary for three-plus seasons to make Jones sensible on your books.

If you can, you've landed a 6-foot-4, right shot defenceman who might thrive in a lesser role and doesn't turn 31 until next October.

Is Philadelphia's Rasmus Ristolainen a perfect player? Nope. But, again, he's 30 years old, huge and shoots right. Is there a defence corps somewhere in the league where he makes sense on a reduced salary for the next couple years? Absolutely.

Trevor Zegras has quietly returned from injury and his name may be the only one that was in rumours longer than J.T. Miller's was. Perhaps the Ducks finally throw in the towel on building his value back up, and find a package that works for them.

The Bruins beat the Rangers on Saturday, but it feels like we're two bad Boston losses — like the 7-2 and 6-2 drubbings it took last week — away from a "Make your best Brad Marchand offer today" memo coming out of Massachusetts.

It's not all going to happen. But, thrillingly, it's harder and harder to rule any of it out.

Weekend Takeaways

- We don't know how things will go for Zegras in Orange County, but Mason McTavish is certainly showing the most promise of his fledgling career right now. The third-overall pick in 2021 — who turned 22 last week — scored the goal that got Anaheim rolling in a 3-2 comeback win over Montreal on Sunday afternoon. McTavish now has seven goals in his past six outings and is suddenly a good bet to register well over 20 goals in year three with the Ducks.
- The Islanders finally lost on Sunday in Florida, as the Panthers halted New York's winning streak at seven games. Still, it was a good weekend for the new Islanders defencemen, as the team earned that seventh victory over Tampa Bay on Saturday in a game where waiver pickup Adam Boqvist scored in his Isles debut, and Tony DeAngelo — who joined the squad as a free agent leaving the KHL in late January — netted the overtime winner for his first with the club. So far, so good on the blueline additions meant to blunt the blow for a team that's fought through losing a couple very important defencemen in Noah Dobson and Ryan Pulock.

The Week Ahead

- The Senators are in the lone Monday night game when they visit the Preds in Nashville. Ottawa then has a monster two-game set in Tampa Bay on Tuesday and Thursday, as those teams fight for the upper hand in the battle for third place in the Atlantic.
- Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci should make their Stars debuts Tuesday night in Anaheim. The pair will see their old friends in San Jose on Saturday.
- The Canadiens are in San Jose on Tuesday, as two of the leading Calder Trophy candidates — Montreal's Lane Hutson and the Sharks' Macklin Celebrini — go head-to-head in a tasty rookie showdown.
- J.T. Miller scored two goals in his first game back with the Rangers on Saturday in Boston, then made it a four-point weekend with two helpers in a huge win at Madison Square Garden over Vegas on Sunday. (By the way, Jonathan Quick became the first-ever American goalie with 400 career victories in that triumph). Miller and the Blueshirts have another huge, Original Six tilt with Boston on Wednesday in New York.
- This weekend marks the last NHL action we'll see until Feb. 22 thanks to the 4 Nations Face-Off. For the second straight Saturday, the Leafs — who won in Edmonton on Saturday — will be out west, wrapping up a road trip with a tilt in Vancouver. The Canadiens, meanwhile, will have their traditional back-to-back Super Bowl Weekend matinees. The Devils are in town on Saturday, and Tampa visiting on Sunday for a 1 p.m. ET tilt is one of just two games on the sked that day. It will be the final contest before the Super Bowl on Sunday night and the 4 Nations Face-Off action of next week.

Red and White Power Rankings

1. Winnipeg Jets (37-14-3) The Jets went into Washington on Saturday night and beat the only team in the NHL with a better points percentage than their own by a 5-4 margin in overtime. Winnipeg has won six straight games and is averaging 4.7 goals-per-game during the run.

2. Edmonton Oilers (32-16-4) After their comeback bid versus the Leafs came up short on Saturday, the Oilers will now hit the road and play 11 of their next 15 away from Northern Alberta.

3. Toronto Maple Leafs (31-19-2) John Tavares (primary assist on the game's first goal) and Matthew Knies (power-play marker in the first period) sure made an immediate impact on the Leafs in their return to the top two lines in Saturday's 4-3 win over the Oilers.

4. Ottawa Senators (28-20-4) Drake Batherson's 1-2-3 night in Saturday's 6-0 laughter over the Wild had to feel good. The Sens winger had previously posted just two goals and eight points in his previous 23 outings.

5. Calgary Flames (26-19-7) Morgan Frost's first goal as a Flame was an absolute beauty and opened the scoring in what turned out to be a huge 3-2 road win in Seattle on Sunday night.

6. Vancouver Canucks (23-18-11) One game, one goal for Filip Chytil in Vancouver. The tally tied the contest with Detroit halfway through the third period and ensured the Canucks at least picked up a single point in the 3-2 OTL.

7. Montreal Canadiens (24-23-5) The Canadiens have four games left before the 4 Nations Face-Off break and it's already now-or-never time if they want to stay in the playoff chase. After giving up a 2-0 first-period lead in Anaheim on Sunday, the Habs have lost five straight contests.