



**Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips  
November 15, 2024**

**Columbus Blue Jackets**

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## The Athletic / Columbus Blue Jackets' identity crisis continues — and will more changes be coming?

**By Aaron Portzline – November 15, 2024**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The first three weeks of the Columbus Blue Jackets' season were a pleasant surprise. The young players had puffy chests, the veteran players were stout and competitive, and the energy level was off the charts relative to the past two or three seasons.

The last two weeks, frankly, have been exactly what most expected from the Blue Jackets this season. The young players have been wildly inconsistent, the veterans look to be playing higher in the lineup than they should be, and the club's ability to defend or finish on scoring chances are major issues.

Which is the real picture of the Blue Jackets?

The Blue Jackets flew home from Seattle on Wednesday. It's a 4 1/2-hour flight on a good day, but it probably felt much longer given the lumps they took on a winless (0-4-1) five-game road trip that ended with a 5-2 loss against the Kraken on Tuesday.

Some will quibble if this was a four- or five-game road trip, since the Blue Jackets returned home for a day and a half following their 7-2 loss in Washington on Nov. 2. But we're calling this a five-game trip because it was five straight road games without an interruption (All-Star weekend, a bye week, etc.).

In the not-quite 24-season history of the Columbus franchise, they've had 22 trips that spanned five or more consecutive road games. This marked the sixth time that they've gone winless on one of those trips. Three of those have occurred in the last five seasons.

The Blue Jackets will say that they deserved a better fate in at least a couple of those games, and there's a compelling argument to be made.

For instance, Columbus outshot all five opponents — Washington, San Jose, Los Angeles, Anaheim and Seattle — often by large margins. All told, the Jackets had 58 more shots on goal than their opponents during the trip.

Further, the Jackets, according to Natural Stat Trick, had more high-danger scoring chances (all strengths) in each of the five games, too, including a 23-11 edge against San Jose on Nov. 5.

When Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason and players say they need to "stick with it," this is what they mean. But they're right to also say the Jackets need to get back to what brought them success early in the season — the relentless forechecking, the calculated risks by defensemen to join the play, the tireless battling for pucks along the wall.

And some of the numbers during the club's six-game losing streak are downright ugly. Consider:

Cole Sillinger, who has bounced from third-line center to second-line winger to first-line winger to second-line center and back to second-line winger on Tuesday, has zero goals, zero assists and a minus-9 rating.

Mathieu Olivier, who provided an unexpected burst of offense early this season, has zero points and a minus-7 rating.

Adam Fantilli, Zach Werenski and Justin Danforth haven't scored goals, while defensemen Jake Christiansen and Jack Johnson — the third pair on Tuesday — have zero points and minus-5 ratings.

Sean Monahan and Yegor Chinakhov, who carried the Jackets offensively in the early-going, have just one goal and one assist.

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell has continued to look for roster help, as seen by the addition of defenseman Dante Fabbro via waivers from Nashville last Sunday. Fabbro made his Blue Jackets debut on Tuesday on the No. 1 defensive pair next to Werenski.

But Waddell has also signaled that he's not interested in giving up future resources (draft picks or prospects) to acquire immediate but short-term roster help. It's worth noting that he could have traded for Fabbro (and his \$2.5 million salary) a week or so before he claimed him on waivers.

The Blue Jackets will likely make some roster moves on Thursday in advance of Friday's game in Nationwide Arena against the Pittsburgh Penguins, who are currently dealing with their own struggles.

The addition of Fabbro gives them eight defensemen. While that fits in their 23-man roster, it doesn't make much sense to keep 20-year-old David Jiricek and 24-year-old Jordan Harris out of the lineup. Harris has played in eight of the club's 15 games, while Jiricek has dressed in only five.

The next impact player to join the roster will likely be winger Kent Johnson, who has been out since Oct. 17 with a shoulder injury. The club hasn't given a timeline for Johnson's return, but it's expected to happen in the next couple of weeks.

Until then, the Blue Jackets will continue hoping for some puck luck, all the while working to create their own luck by getting back to the basics they stressed early in the season.

Late last month, there was an exciting air around the club, a belief that maybe — just maybe — they could be a surprise club in the NHL this season. Recently, as the losses pile up, it's beginning to show similarities to the past two seasons.

## [BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets host Hockey Fights Cancer Night on Nov. 21, presented by OhioHealth](#)

**By Jeff Svoboda – November 15, 2024**

The Columbus Blue Jackets are set to honor those who have experienced or are currently facing the journey of cancer by hosting a special Hockey Fights Cancer Night in partnership with OhioHealth. The event will take place on Thursday, November 21, as the Blue Jackets face off against the Tampa Bay Lightning at Nationwide Arena. The first 5,000 fans in attendance will receive an exclusive Hockey Fights Cancer fleece blanket. Attendees are encouraged to wear lavender, the official color of Hockey Fights Cancer, representing all cancers.

A special ticket package is available for the first 500 purchasers featuring a discounted game ticket and an exclusive Hockey Fights Cancer Adam Fantilli bobblehead.

### **Recognition and Support**

The evening will feature powerful stories including the debut of the Blue Jackets Foundation's 2024 Class of Pediatric Cancer Heroes. The Blue Jackets Heroes program honors a group of kids fighting cancer. The Heroes and their families are welcomed into the Blue Jackets family through several unique experiences including a special on-ice introduction during Hockey Fights Cancer Night.

Cancer survivors Molly Oldham, Lila Urbanic, and Aria Tarantine are set to deliver a powerful rendition of the national anthem for the first time as a trio. Each has performed the "Star Spangled Banner" at Hockey Fights Cancer Night in previous years – Oldham in 2019, Urbanic in 2022, and Tarantine in 2023.

More than 1,000 individuals representing families and the cancer care community will attend the game for free including Ronald McDonald House Charities of Central Ohio, A Kid Again, Flying Horse Farms, Karis Cause, NC4K, A Special Wish Foundation, Make-A-Wish Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, and more.

Fans will also have opportunities throughout the night to show their support and recognize loved ones with a variety of activities. A variety of ribbon colors will be provided by OhioHealth, located near the McConnell entrance on the main concourse, for fans to place on a giant cancer ribbon in honor of someone they fight for.

Battle cards will also be available for fans to write their connection to the fight against cancer. During the game, fans will be asked to display their "I Fight For..." cards in recognition of cancer survivors and all those who have been touched in some way by the disease. For those at home, battle cards are available digitally for fans to download, print and share a photo of themselves on social media using #HockeyFightsCancer. Fans can visit [bluejackets.com/hockeyfightscancer](https://bluejackets.com/hockeyfightscancer) to download the battle card.

### **For Each Other**

The fight against pediatric cancer has been one of the Blue Jackets Foundation's primary areas of focus since the team's inception in 2000. Each season, the Foundation hosts a series of Hockey Fights Cancer fundraisers supporting programs for pediatric cancer patients and their families, including therapy through distraction, critical research projects, and assistance in providing palliative care for youth. Last year, the Blue Jackets raised \$115,000 through Hockey Fights Cancer initiatives. This season, the Foundation's efforts can be supported by participating in the following:

- The Blue Jackets Foundation's 50/50 Raffle, presented by Kemba Financial, is open now through the end of the second intermission on Nov. 21 with a guaranteed jackpot of at least \$10,000.

The winner will be announced during the third period. To participate, fans 18 years of age and older can purchase tickets throughout Nationwide Arena during the game or go to [BlueJackets.com/5050raffle](http://BlueJackets.com/5050raffle).

- Hockey Fights Cancer jerseys autographed by the players are available for raffle beginning at 9 a.m. on Friday, November 15. The raffle will run through the second intermission on Saturday, November 23 when the team hosts the Carolina Hurricanes.
- The Foundation will also have an auction and merchandise available for purchase to raise funds for pediatric cancer initiatives. To participate, text CBJAUCTION to 76278 or visit [cbjauction.givesmart.com](http://cbjauction.givesmart.com).
- Hockey Fights Cancer souvenir cups are available for all home games this season at most concession stands in Nationwide Arena with \$1 per cup going to the Blue Jackets Foundation's pediatric cancer pillar.
- Visit the Blue Line at Nationwide Arena or Polaris Fashion Place and "round up" the total at the register to donate to the Foundation's pediatric cancer initiatives. Beginning Monday, November 18, the Blue Line will have exclusive Hockey Fights Cancer merchandise for sale including sweatshirts, hats, jerseys, pucks and more. Visit the Blue Line in-store or online at [www.TheBlueLineOnline.com](http://www.TheBlueLineOnline.com).

To learn more about the evening's events and how to support Hockey Fights Cancer initiatives, visit [BlueJackets.com/HockeyFightsCancer](http://BlueJackets.com/HockeyFightsCancer).

The Blue Jackets return to action on Friday when they host the Pittsburgh Penguins. Game time from Nationwide Arena is 7 p.m. ET. Live coverage on FanDuel Sports Network begins with the Blue Jackets Live pre-game show starting at 6:30 p.m. ET. The game will also be heard on the Blue Jackets Radio Network, including 93.3 The Bust in Columbus, and online at [BlueJackets.com](http://BlueJackets.com).

### **About Hockey Fights Cancer™**

Founded in 1998 by the NHL and NHLPA, the first national cause program pioneered by a major sports league, the Hockey Fights Cancer initiative powered by the V Foundation presented by AstraZeneca has raised more than \$36 million since its inception. Last season, Hockey Fights Cancer celebrated its 25th anniversary by setting a fundraising record of over \$4 million in its first season as Hockey Fights Cancer powered by the V Foundation for Cancer Research. From that total, \$2.9 million was raised with the V Foundation and will go directly to life-saving cancer research through 10 research grants to the best and brightest scientists across the U.S. and Canada. As part of that \$4 million+ raised, \$1.2 million was raised by Clubs for local cancer-related organizations and charities in the Clubs' communities.

## The Hockey News / Columbus Blue Jackets Games To Be Available On Amazon Prime

**By Jason Newland – November 15, 2024**

Diamond Sports Group and Amazon have reached a deal that should make a lot of people happy in the Columbus Metro area.

The deal that was announced will allow Amazon Prime Video to stream local FanDuel Network channels on its platform. The deal is a multiyear agreement and will be available on Prime as an add-on.

Per a Sports Business Journal report, "Customers in each team's designated geographic area will be able to purchase an add-on subscription on Prime Video to stream their team's live games and pre-and post-game shows." The SBJ report also says, "A fan in any of those team's designated geographic area would have to pay an undisclosed fee, above their regular Prime Video subscription, to watch the games. The add-on fee has yet to be released by Diamond."

FanDuel also announced that they will offer an a la carte option on the app. With this option, fans can purchase single games for \$6.99 each. This option will be available starting on December 5th. You can also pay \$19.99 per month for the streaming service.

One point of contention for fans all across the country who watched the NHL, NBA, and MLB on the Ballys app is that it hardly ever worked. Is this a workaround for that? I guess we'll find out.

Anything that will make watching the NHL easier, we're all for it.

**What's Next** - The Blue Jackets return home on Friday night to play the Pittsburgh Penguins.

## The Hockey News / Kent Johnson Returns To Practice

**By Jason Newland – November 15, 2024**

The Columbus Blue Jackets may be getting Kent Johnson back soon.

Kent Johnson was at Jackets practice this morning and skating. The better news is that he's also wearing a regular practice jersey and not a non-contact jersey, signaling that his return could be imminent.

Johnson had played in just four games this season before getting hurt. In those four games though, he scored 2 goals and had 5 points. He's on about a 39-point pace for the remainder of the season.

His return means something would need to happen with the roster, as they are already at 23 players. Might they possibly send David Jiříček or Jordan Harris to the AHL?

**What's Next** - The Blue Jackets return home on Friday night to play the Pittsburgh Penguins.

## The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Need Help Scoring Goals

**By Spencer Lazary – November 15, 2024**

The Columbus Blue Jackets are a good team. They have worked hard to build a core of young players that can compete at the NHL level. However, to be a great team, they will need to find more players that put the puck in the back of the net.

While we are months away from the 2025 NHL Trade Deadline, every NHL team is looking at external options to make their team better. The Blue Jackets have two trade options that could be made available before the deadline; both can score goals.

Vatrano is an under-the-radar goal scorer in the NHL. Although he is off to a slow start, he had 37 goals in 82 games last season with the Ducks. The year before that, he had 22 in 82 games. This year he has two goals in 14 games but will likely end the season with somewhere around 30-35 goals.

This is the type of player that the Blue Jackets could benefit from. They don't have a player that can score 40 goals at will like Vatrano can. He would pair very nicely with Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson as a line.

Kuzmenko is another player who has had a slow start to the season. After a few tough seasons, he is due to have a season similar to his first year in the NHL. With the Vancouver Canucks, he had 39 goals in 81 games. However, since then he has had eight and 14 in respective seasons. If Kuzmenko can find his footing this season, he can end the season with 25-30 goals.

Kuzmenko's fit with the Blue Jackets would make a lot of sense both on and off the ice. Especially given he is a Russian native and would likely find a home amongst the other Russian players on Columbus, like Kirill Marchenko and Yegor Chinakhov.

Blue Jackets' GM Don Waddell has work to do to fix the goal scoring issue; it wouldn't be surprising to see him have interest in one or both Vatrano and Kuzmenko.



## The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Activate Brindley Off IR

**By Spencer Lazary – November 15, 2024**

The Columbus Blue Jackets have announced forward Gavin Brindley has been activated off of IR.

The 20-year-old has now been assigned to the Blue Jackets' AHL affiliate Cleveland Monsters.

Brindley missed the first 15 games of the season after suffering a broken finger against the St. Louis Blues.

The Florida native was selected with the 34th pick in the second round of the 2023 NHL Draft.

**What's Next** - The Blue Jackets return home on Friday night to play the Pittsburgh Penguins.

## The Hockey Writers / CBJ Union Junction Podcast: Blue Jackets' Losing Streak, Jiricek Drama & More

**By Nicholas Arnold – November 15, 2024**

Another Union Junction from The Hockey Writers' Mark Scheig and me – Nicholas Arnold. In 47 minutes, we covered a myriad of topics, including a tough stretch for the Columbus Blue Jackets. Despite a record of above .500 briefly at the start of the month, the team has plummeted in the standings with six straight losses in November.

After a shocking discovery about Mark and the Hawk Tuah girl, we did a brief recap of the first 15 games. We went over a little about who has stood out, good and bad, for the Blue Jackets. We discussed the pickup of defenseman Dante Fabbro off waivers, the latest in the David Jiricek saga, and we talked goaltending. Then we close with your listener questions, including: Is it time for a Blue Jackets Tankathon in 2024-25?

### **Blue Jackets' Defense or Goaltending: Which is the Problem?**

A tough question to answer over the last several seasons has been the Blue Jackets' leaky defense and goaltending. It's been questioned ad nauseum. Is the team's remarkable goals against stat due to a lack of a structured defensive system, or is it a personnel issue – be it on defense or between the pipes? That's a question we explored and decided that both are likely to blame.

While we don't quite have the sample size to determine if head coach Dean Evason's new system is making enough of a dent in the team's overall defensive play, the returns are not favorable in terms of goaltending. Of the goalies who have played at least five games in the NHL this season, Elvis Merzlikins' .896 save percentage (SV%) ranks 36th, and Daniil Tarasov's .865 SV% ranks 50th. It's certainly not the start that Columbus was hoping for from their netminders.

Personnel-wise, the team hasn't necessarily set themselves up for complete success. Their defenders aren't particularly well renowned for defensive responsibility, nor are their goaltenders believed to be the second coming of Dominik Hasek. I'll have a piece coming out on this just around the corner, so stay tuned for more on this.

### **Blue Jackets' Top Players Coming Back to Earth**

Early on, we saw an explosion of offense from the Blue Jackets. Yegor Chinakhov led the way with an impressive seven points in five games. We also saw brief breakouts in production from Kent Johnson, who has been injured of late, and Sean Monahan. Enforcer Mathieu Olivier has almost hit his career-high in goals through less than a quarter of the season.

Pick a name on the Blue Jackets roster, and they were likely off to a great start. Adam Fantilli, Justin Danforth, James van Riemsdyk, the list goes on. They were all hot to open the season but have cooled since the calendar turned to November. Since Nov. 1, Cole Sillinger has zero points in six games and is tied with Danforth for a team-worst minus-9 rating.

The team's production from their top players has dropped off a cliff – aside from Kirill Marchenko, who has been their most consistent player this season. These are the team's top four scorers since Nov. 1.

1. Kirill Marchenko – 6 games played (GP), 2 goals (G), 2 assists (A)
2. Sean Kuraly – 6 GP, 2 G, 1 A
3. Zach Aston-Reese – 5 GP, 1 G, 2 A

4. Kevin Labanc – 4 GP, 1 G, 2 A

Nothing against Kuraly, Aston-Reese, or Labanc, but the latter two weren't even on the Blue Jackets during training camp, and that's because they were either placed on waivers or still an unsigned free agent still hoping for a team to take a chance on them. For the Blue Jackets' current core players to be outscored by those players for almost a tenth of the season... Woof.

**Other Topics Explored in this Podcast**

- Is Boone Jenner's absence as captain affecting this recent skid?
- The Blue Jackets depth players' production
- David Jiricek's descent down the depth chart
- Dean Evason's first 15 games as head coach
- Cayden Lindstrom's injury rehab process
- Blue Jackets' prospects and their start to the season

The Columbus Blue Jackets continue this month with back-to-back games at home against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Nov. 15 and on the road against the Montreal Canadiens on Nov. 16. For the Blue Jackets to be playing meaningful games late in the season, they'll have to get some points in the standings through those games. Union Junction will be back with another episode next Thursday.

## The Athletic / Hockey Canada summit tackles cultural issues within the sport. What's been done? And what's next?

**By Julian McKenzie – November 15, 2024**

OTTAWA — Thursday morning was a big deal for Normand Hector. It's not every day a Black, queer, drag performer is asked to remark on issues of hockey culture surrounding transphobia and homophobia, much less provide that blueprint to a national federation investing in a systemic refresh.

Hector was the keynote speaker at Hockey Canada's "Beyond the Boards" summit, addressing a conference room full of hockey executives and administrators in a downtown Ottawa hotel.

Hector held the audience's attention by telling stories of his experiences speaking to hockey players and their families and coaches. He was brought in to counsel a team that kept throwing a player in a garbage bin after games. He implored another team to speak up if they ever saw a young woman treated in a "violent" way. There was a time when a young player confessed to Hector that his parents didn't want him to attend his session out of fear that he would "turn them gay," and that his parents saw him as the devil.

"How am I going to turn you gay? Am I going to turn you Black, too?" Hector said.

Hector says he's spoken to 800 players and their parents and 50 coaches. Hector also performed during the 2022 Memorial Cup in Saint John, N.B., as their drag persona "Normani."

"It was emotional to see how far it's come," Hector said. "When I started this journey, I never dreamed that I would be here, doing this."

The second annual Between the Boards summit comes as Hockey Canada's image continues to be clouded by sexual assault charges against five former World Junior players. In 2022, Hockey Canada faced intense national scrutiny and criticism for its handling of the allegations. Several senior leaders were removed from their positions as sponsors fled.

The inaugural Between the Boards occurred in September 2023 in Calgary during Hockey Canada president Katherine Henderson's first week on the job.

This year's event revolved around themes of gender-based violence, homophobia, transphobia and sexism. The two-day summit features panel discussions with former NHL executive Brian Burke, former National Women's Hockey League star Harrison Browne and Sportsnet's Ailish Forfar. Marni Panas, a transgender woman, LGBTQ2S+ activist and diversity and inclusion consultant, is the summit moderator. The Athletic was permitted to attend a portion of the event, but some sessions and panel discussions were closed to working media.

"I think it just really motivates me when I hear about things in systems that have really hurt people, and they're brave enough to come forward and they tell their stories and they're vulnerable. It just adds fuel to that fire of really wanting to drive change," Henderson told The Athletic.

Henderson says the thought process behind this year's theme came after the federations surveyed participants from their previous Beyond the Boards event. Last year, the focus was on themes of sexual assault and toxic masculinity. Former NHLer Sheldon Kennedy was the keynote speaker.

"We wanted to know how did this affect you? I didn't want the typical survey: Were the sandwiches good? How was the transportation from the airport? It was, what did you learn? What are you going to do about it? What do you want to know?" Henderson said.

The survey found that participants wanted more discussions on “gender” and “sexuality-based discrimination” as well as racism. Henderson said that, according to their internal data, 63 percent of instances of on-ice discrimination or “slurs” were gender-based. Henderson also acknowledged that racism will likely be a front-facing topic at a future Beyond the Boards event.

“I can’t imagine that this type of initiative wouldn’t become something that we want to tackle on an ongoing basis,” Henderson said.

Henderson thinks there will be a year where Beyond the Boards will have a discussion about the sport’s accessibility to Canadians and how it’s been affected by rising costs and facility availability. In turn, those economic factors have affected new Canadians or those from low-income situations who otherwise didn’t grow up with the sport or can’t afford to play.

“We want to reach out to those people and make sure that they feel at home in a hockey rink,” Hockey Canada board chair Jonathan Goldbloom said. “Which means figuring out ways of rolling out the red carpet so that if you’ve grown up on a soccer field, you feel that much more at home at one of our hockey rinks.”

Since the last Beyond the Boards event, Hockey Canada has sought to educate federation members and players on gender-based violence, consent and additional screening measures. A third-party group — Sport Complaints — trained them to address “maltreatment complaints in a procedurally fair manner.” Henderson added that Hockey Canada is working on two other projects that involve studying male hockey players as they transition from triple-A levels to major junior, and another that looks at the character development of players who’ve played through the major junior system.

Henderson also mentioned Hockey Canada’s dressing room policy which was unveiled in September 2023, shortly after the last Beyond the Boards event. The initiative advocates for “safe, inclusive and equitable dressing room environments” and requires participants to wear “minimum attire” (a bra, T-shirt, compression shorts, or any other type of base layer) as a way to promote locker room inclusion and personal privacy.

Henderson says member groups have worked “hand in glove” with these new protocols since they were implemented, but the next step is ensuring that discriminatory behaviours change across Hockey Canada.

“We don’t just want people to know what the minimum standards are. We want them to be able to call it out. We want people to be able to change behaviour,” Henderson said.

The trial for the five members of the 2018 Canadian World Junior team, Alex Formenton, Dillon Dubé, Carter Hart, Cal Foote and Michael McLeod, is scheduled to begin on April 22, 2025. They were each charged in January by the London Police Service with one count of sexual assault. McLeod faces a second charge of sexual assault for “being a party to the offense.” Henderson didn’t comment on the trial date or any specifics surrounding the ongoing case.

Ultimately, the challenge is to ensure that what’s been discussed at these Beyond the Boards events can seep into hockey culture and change it for the better, Henderson said.

“But for God’s sake, speak up if you see something that isn’t going your way. And it’s OK to do that.”

## The Athletic / Broadcaster Diamond will emerge from bankruptcy after judge approves plan

**By Evan Drellich – November 15, 2024**

A federal judge in Houston on Thursday gave broadcaster Diamond Sports Group the green light to emerge from bankruptcy, wrapping a 20-month saga that roiled the world of sports television.

Diamond, which operates 16 regional sports stations that were recently rebranded with the FanDuel name, is set to leave bankruptcy with a reduced portfolio of 13 NBA teams, eight NHL teams and six MLB teams.

The company is leaning into direct-to-consumer options: any of those teams can be watched in-market via a standalone streaming option that Diamond will sell, and that includes teams that had never been available that way before. One means of subscribing will be through Amazon's Prime Video, but an additional fee will still be charged. Full pricing hasn't been announced.

Amidst a drop in traditional TV subscribers because of cord-cutting, Diamond redid virtually all of its most significant contracts, be it with teams or distributors like DirecTV and Comcast. Nonetheless, the possibility Diamond could head for liquidation lingered for most of the proceeding.

"In every case, I'm always thinking about sophisticated parties and debt, but I'm also thinking about other folks," Judge Chris Lopez said when delivering his ruling. "Today, you're going to save a lot of jobs."

"There's gonna be somebody who's gonna turn on their television and be able to watch the Detroit Tigers," the judge continued, "and that's really important. It sounds not important, but it's important if you've had a stressful day and you want to root for your team and go home and enjoy the game with family. And hardcore fans are hardcore fans, and they want to see their teams play, and rooting for it is just as much as part of the American experience as anything else."

Diamond said it will carry about \$200 million in debt, shedding more than \$8 billion. The company acknowledged that it previously had a "materially overleveraged balance sheet with almost \$9 billion of funded debt" beforehand.

Diamond projects that its consolidated earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization will show a loss of \$74 million in 2024, turned around for a \$53 million profit next year, \$137 million in 2026 and \$216 million in 2027.

"I'd love to be able to tell you that I knew with confidence that we would reorganize this business. I thought we would, but I couldn't tell for certain," Diamond lawyer Brian Hermann told the courtroom. "We had to not only fix a balance sheet, but we had to fix a business in an industry that is in quite a bit of turmoil."

Diamond still has skeptics. At times, the proceeding felt like Major League Baseball vs. Diamond Sports Group. MLB was the most critical of Diamond among its three partner leagues — and less than a week ago, the league was hammering Diamond's financial outlook.

In his remarks Thursday, Lopez reminisced about a point in the case where James Bromley, a lawyer for MLB, told him, “I don’t think this is going to work. I’m just telling you judge, I don’t get it, I don’t see the answers.”

Three formal objections to the plan were filed, but two were pulled Wednesday, on the eve of the confirmation hearing. The withdrawal of an objection filed by MLB and the Atlanta Braves, in particular, lowered the stakes. The judge had carved out two days for the hearing, if necessary, but it wrapped up in just an hour and a half Thursday morning.

“These are incredibly different remarks than I thought I would be making 24 hours ago,” said a lawyer for Diamond, Andrew Goldman. “Over the past 24 hours, the debtors have reached agreement with the Atlanta Braves on revised deal terms, and that agreement allowed the Atlanta Braves comfort in withdrawing their objection to confirmation, which in turn allowed Major League Baseball to withdraw its objection to confirmation.”

All six MLB teams that are staying with Diamond — Atlanta, the Detroit Tigers, Los Angeles Angels, Miami Marlins, St. Louis Cardinals and Tampa Bay Rays — renegotiated their contracts. That includes the Braves, the one team whose contract Diamond had said it intended to move forward with intact. But the last-minute modifications to the Braves’ deal may also have been made at the behest of MLB and the team.

Only one change to their deal was immediately clear: The Braves newly granted Diamond streaming rights.

“Beyond the existing FanDuel Sports Network linear viewing options, fans will now be able to stream games directly from FanDuel Sports Network across a variety of platforms. In the near future, we will also be releasing more ways for fans to find Braves games and content,” Braves President Derek Schiller said in a media release. “With one of the largest territories in professional sports, this agreement is an important step forward in creating more access to our games for our fans who live across Braves country.”

Flexibility could be one of the trade-offs. A big remaining question is whether the six baseball clubs can get out of their deals (or whether their deals simply end) around 2028, when MLB’s national TV contracts are up. That’s the case for the Cardinals, and per the Los Angeles Times, the Angels as well. If MLB wants to sell a national package to a major streaming company at that time, having as many clubs available to bundle is key.

At least some of the six MLB teams took hits to their rights fees. Goldman said Diamond couldn’t move forward “without modifications to those teams’ agreements, so that the amount we were paying those teams fit within our business model and fit within our cash flow projections.”

The Cardinals’ reduction was around 25 percent for 2025 compared to what they were expecting to make under their old deal.

A lot of the work came down to the wire, and some of it is still ongoing. Diamond is continuing to negotiate with the Kansas City Royals over a potential return.

“The Detroit Tigers and their management team and outside advisors were literally around the clock this past weekend to get to a deal with us before we headed down to Houston to start prep for these confirmation hearings,” Goldman said.

Another six teams are not returning to Diamond after last season. One of them, the Cincinnati Reds, announced a couple hours after the hearing Thursday that they’re going to be the seventh team in MLB’s in-house broadcasting portfolio.

The one objection that remained Thursday was from the U.S. Trustee, a representative of the Department of Justice that oversees bankruptcy cases. The U.S. Trustee argued that Diamond’s plan included releases that were too broad in the wake of a U.S. Supreme Court decision from the summer. Lopez said the releases were appropriate.

In a filing Thursday, Diamond told the court it sees huge growth in its direct-to-consumer, or streaming business in coming years: a \$19 million consolidated EBITDA projection this year that grows to \$117 million, \$283 million and \$422 million in the following years, respectively.

On the linear side, though, Diamond sees a steady downward trend continuing: \$1.4 billion in 2024 drops to \$776 million in 2027.

Diamond’s arrival in bankruptcy arguably began the moment the company was created.

In 2018, Disney bought 21st Century Fox, but the Department of Justice stepped in because Disney, which already owned ESPN, was newly acquiring 22 sports stations. Disney agreed to sell the channels.

The next year, the broadcasting company Sinclair bought the networks in a deal that valued the networks at \$10.6 billion with an aggregate purchase price of \$9.6 billion. At the time, the collection of networks was branded as “FOX Sports” and carried 42 professional teams among them: 14 in MLB, 16 in the NBA and 12 in the NHL.

The deal was heavily leveraged. Sinclair put in \$1.4 billion in cash, and at least \$8.2 billion in borrowed money was used. A new company was started: Sinclair subsidiary Diamond Sports Group.

In a sliding-doors moment, MLB also bid on the networks. Commissioner Rob Manfred has said he believes things would have worked out better had the league bought them.

“People often say to me: ‘Aren’t you glad you dodged that bullet?’ And, not so much, not so much,” Manfred said in 2023.

Asked then whether he would go back in time and make that \$9.6 billion bid again, Manfred said he would.

“We thought that Major League Baseball was best positioned to manage through what we realized was a coming period of change,” Manfred said. “Our bid was really very, very different than the Sinclair bid. They put \$8.5 billion dollars of leverage on the \$10.5 billion dollar bid, I think I’m right about those numbers. We had some leverage, but it was \$3.5

billion. We had a major media player, Liberty Media, as a partner. ... We thought that put us in a much better position to have alternatives in order to distribute games.”

Cord-cutting and Diamond’s debt led the company to file for bankruptcy in March 2023.



In court, Manfred said a Sinclair executive, David Smith, had used the threat of bankruptcy as a way to try to convince MLB to grant Diamond more streaming rights.

“What I’m going to do is I’m going to keep this going long enough until I get my \$2 billion out, OK?” Smith said, per Manfred’s court testimony. “And then I’m going to start squeezing your clubs to take their rights fees down, OK, in order to make sure that I stay profitable in the RSN business. And if they don’t agree to that, I’m going to put the entity into bankruptcy, and then I’m going to selectively reject contracts.”

Diamond in 2023 sued Sinclair, accusing Sinclair of draining the company of \$1.5 billion. The two companies agreed to split, and Sinclair agreed to pay \$495 million to Diamond in a settlement.

On Thursday, Diamond and MLB were playing nice.

“Despite the acrimony that we and Major League Baseball have had at times during these cases, we do look forward to working collaboratively with the Commissioner’s Office,” Goldman said.

The NBA teams carried by Diamond are the Atlanta Hawks, Charlotte Hornets, Cleveland Cavaliers, Detroit Pistons, Indiana Pacers, Los Angeles Clippers, Memphis Grizzlies, Miami Heat, Milwaukee Bucks, Minnesota Timberwolves, Oklahoma City Thunder, Orlando Magic and San Antonio Spurs.

The NHL teams are the Carolina Hurricanes, Columbus Blue Jackets, Detroit Red Wings, Los Angeles Kings, Minnesota Wild, Nashville Predators, St. Louis Blues and Tampa Bay Lightning.

## The Athletic / The NHL's 9 most impressive bounce-back players this season

By Harman Dayal – November 15, 2024

There's very little sympathy for struggling NHL players.

Teams don't owe them any long-term loyalty and can move on from a player at a moment's notice. Fans can turn in a heartbeat, too, while the media picks apart flaws during bad stretches, especially in bigger markets.

It's a brutal mental experience to go through and many players are even harder on themselves than whatever criticism they get from the outside. No amount of money can replace the peace of mind when they live up to or even exceed expectations.

That's why it's so easy to root for bounce-backs and redemption stories. Today, we'll be breaking down nine players who are crushing it in response to a down/injury-plagued 2023-24 season (this isn't a list of breakout players so don't expect to see names like Connor McMichael, Philip Broberg, Anton Lundell, Ross Colton, Kirill Marchenko, etc.).

### **Tage Thompson, Buffalo Sabres**

Thompson looked like a franchise center when he exploded for 47 goals and 94 points in 2022-23. He was among the most exciting players in the league to watch because of his rare combination of towering size, elite shooting ability and silky smooth hands. But he took a massive step back last season, scoring 29 goals and 56 points in 71 games. Considering his limited track record as an upper-echelon first-line center, it prompted questions about whether his 94-point breakout was a one-off.

Not only has Thompson bounced back as an elite offensive producer, but he's also leveled up his all-around game to heights he's never reached before.

The 27-year-old sniper scored 16 five-on-five goals last year. Through 16 games this season, he's already up to a league-leading 10 goals at five-on-five.

Thompson's line is feasting off the rush — by my count, six of his 10 even-strength goals have come from a counterattack. It also helps that he's healthier than last season when a hand/wrist injury ailed him. He's back to ripping one-time rockets, which is a key part of his game that was hindered last season.

It's also remarkable to see the glow-up of his two-way results. The Sabres are dominating opponents to the tune of a 61 percent expected goal share and have outscored opponents 15-4 during Thompson's five-on-five shifts. His defensive metrics are miles better compared to his breakout 2022-23 campaign. He's certainly playing the best hockey of his career.

Thompson left Monday's game against the Montreal Canadiens with an injury and didn't return but he's considered day to day by the Sabres.

### **Jonas Siegenthaler, New Jersey Devils**

There are several reasons why the Devils had such a disappointing season last year, and their underperforming blue line is high on the list. Damon Severson and Ryan Graves' offseason departures stung and Dougie Hamilton's season-ending injury was a major blow, but Siegenthaler and John Marino's down years were the final blow to the back end's stability.

Siegenthaler, who'd been an underrated shutdown defender during his first two seasons in New Jersey, struggled mightily in 2023-24. Corey Sznajder's tracking data revealed he was becoming a turnover machine and allowing rush chances at appalling rates. The Devils were outscored by 10 goals during his five-on-five minutes last season.

The 27-year-old defender is back to his reliable old self again. Siegenthaler and his new partner Johnathan Kovacevic (who's been one of the most pleasant surprises in the NHL since being acquired from the Canadiens) have been assigned the toughest matchups on New Jersey's blue line and are crushing it — Siegenthaler's 57 percent expected goal share is the best mark of his career and they're outscoring opponents 17-8 at five-on-five.

Siegenthaler has been the Devils' most valuable defenseman so far this year, according to Dom Luszczyszyn's Game Score model. He's been one of the quiet drivers behind New Jersey's rise back up the standings.

### **Martin Necas, Carolina Hurricanes**

Necas dropped from 71 points in 2022-23 to 53 last season in addition to posting subpar defensive metrics. The 25-year-old has always flashed eye-popping skill, but many Canes analysts and fans wondered whether he was an ideal fit with Rod Brind'Amour's system and playing style. Carolina preaches two-way commitment first and hasn't given its forwards much freedom to freelance offensively in the past, which appeared to clash with Necas' high-risk, high-reward offensive instincts.

Necas' name was bandied in trade rumors all summer, but after signing a two-year bridge deal, he's quickly become an indispensable offensive driver. He's already up to nine goals and 25 points in 15 games, which is 11 points higher than the next-highest producer in Carolina. The Hurricanes appear to be giving their players more leash to aggressively push on the counterattack this season, which has unlocked Necas' top offensive gear. He's also gaining the coaching staff's trust by improving his decision-making to cut down his turnovers and limiting his mistakes away from the puck.

One of the most impressive parts about Necas' breakout is that he's producing at an elite clip without the help of any high-end linemates. Jesperi Kotkaniemi and Eric Robinson have been his two most common running mates on the second line this season — Kotkaniemi and Robinson combined for just 36 points last year. Necas is doing the heavy lifting of driving a top-six line by himself; if he keeps this up, he'll be in line for a massive payday as an unrestricted free agent after the 2025-26 season.

### **Filip Chytil, New York Rangers**

Chytil was on the cusp of breaking out as a legitimate top-six-caliber center before being derailed by a suspected concussion. He missed all but 10 regular-season games last year and understandably didn't perform up to his potential in the playoffs when he did return, going without a point in six contests.

The speedy 25-year-old center is now driving arguably the best third line in the NHL this season. He's up to four goals and nine points in 14 games on top of driving elite two-way results. The Rangers have controlled a commanding 65.5 percent of expected goals and outscored teams 12-2 during Chytil's five-on-five minutes. Peter Laviolette is deploying Chytil's line more like a second line than a third line, as they've played more five-on-five minutes this season than Mika Zibanejad and his linemates.

Chytil's dynamic skill is unlocking more offense out of Will Cuylle and Kaapo Kakko, who are each enjoying breakout offensive campaigns. He's been the Rangers' best center in the early going, re-emerging as a game-changer for New York's middle six now that he's healthy.

### **Neal Pionk, Winnipeg Jets**

Pionk's arc in Winnipeg has been volatile.

He made an excellent first impression for the Jets as a high-end top-four defender to replace Jacob Trouba. He was rewarded with a lucrative extension carrying a \$5.875 million cap hit and, yet, whether it's because of previous injuries or other factors, he struggled in a top-four role last year.

But the 29-year-old right-shot defenseman is resurging in a major way to start 2024-25. He's already notched 17 points in 16 games, more than half the production he managed last season which slots him second among all NHL defensemen in points so far. Pionk's two-way impact has been stronger, too — this is the first time in his career that his team is generating more five-on-five scoring chances than they're surrendering when he's on the ice.

### **Filip Gustavsson, Minnesota Wild**

The up-and-down, roller-coaster-like trajectory for many NHL goaltenders is enough to give you whiplash.

In 2022-23, Gustavsson burst onto the scene as one of the league's most surprising breakout players, pitching a sparkling .931 save percentage in 39 games during his first season with the Wild. It earned him a sizable three-year extension at a \$3.75 million cap hit, only for his performance to fall off a cliff last season.

Gustavsson dropped to a .899 save percentage and surrendered nearly eight goals more than you'd expect from a league-average netminder, according to Evolving Hockey's model. He was remarkably inconsistent, one of the biggest reasons why the Wild missed the playoffs for the first time in four seasons. He was even possible trade bait last summer because the Wild had re-signed Marc-Andre Fleury and top goaltending prospect Jesper Wallstedt was knocking on the door of an NHL job.

The 26-year-old has rebounded with a .919 save percentage, starting 11 of 15 games for a red-hot Wild team that's second in the Central Division. Minnesota's defensive play has been significantly sharper compared to last year as well, which has to be noted because the environment in front of a goaltender often has a major impact.

### **Nick Jensen, Ottawa Senators**

Jensen had a long history of being a rock-solid two-way driver on Washington's second pair, but his play fell off hard last season at 33 years old.

The usually steady right-shot defender lost his matchups across the board (in shots, chances and actual goals) by fairly wide margins in 2023-24. Why? One reason he looked off may be that his skating — which is one of his best assets — declined last season. NHL Edge data shows that his speed bursts over 20 miles per hour and top speed fell compared to the year prior.

Jensen's skating has rebounded (he ranks in the top 10 percent of all defensemen for speed bursts over 20 miles per hour) which has powered a renaissance start for him in Ottawa.

### **Data according to NHL Edge**

He's been the perfect fit next to Thomas Chabot, driving a near 56 percent share of shot attempts and a plus-8 goal differential at five-on-five. Jensen has been a stabilizing force because of his all-around impact — he moves the puck well, makes quick reads defensively, has secondary offensive chops (six points in 15 games) and plays a competitive, physical style.

He's exactly what the Senators, who lacked a top-four-caliber right-shot defender besides Artem Zub, needed to solidify their blue line.

### **Mark Stone, Vegas Golden Knights**

There have been a couple of minor knocks on Stone in recent times.

**The first, most obvious one is health:** He's averaged 45 games played over his last three seasons. The more subtle difference is that his defensive numbers, which are usually elite, dipped last year. Vegas controlled just 50.6 percent of expected goals with Stone on the ice last year and he ranked 11th out of the club's 13 forwards in conceded high-danger chances. This was a far cry from the monster two-way results we were accustomed to seeing Stone put up.

He also had an underwhelming first-round playoff series last year, producing three points in seven games, getting crushed territorially (controlling less than 40 percent of scoring chances) and outscored 4-0 during his five-on-five shifts against Dallas.

Because of these factors, Stone's name has come up less frequently in fan and media discussions about the league's best, franchise-caliber wingers. But his electric start to the 2024-25 campaign is a reminder he's still an elite player.

The 32-year-old has raced away to 21 points in 13 games. He's missed the last three games because of an injury, but he's expected back in the lineup soon. If anything, his absence over the last three games (Vegas' only win in that span has been against Anaheim) has only underscored how irreplaceable he is.

Stone has mostly played on the top line with Jack Eichel, a combination the Golden Knights haven't often turned to in the past. Together, they've been a dynamic duo, outscoring opponents 12-5 at five-on-five.

### **Jake Walman, San Jose Sharks**

Detroit's offseason decision to pay San Jose a second-round pick to take on Walman and his modest contract (\$3.4 million cap hit) seemed puzzling at the time and already isn't aging very well.

Walman had a down year in 2023-24 but it came with the context that he and top pair partner Moritz Seider were handling some of the toughest matchups of all NHL defensemen. Plus, the smooth-skating left-shot defender demonstrated his ability to effectively contribute in a top-four role the year prior when he first broke out. But the Red Wings, facing a logjam on the blue line, clearly didn't view Walman as a key piece and preferred the cap relief.

The 28-year-old is quickly rebuilding his stock in San Jose. Walman's up to nine points in 13 games while logging nearly 23 minutes per game. Most impressively, he's somehow winning his matchups despite playing on a dreadful Sharks team. Walman is the only defenseman on the team with whom the Sharks are generating more shots and expected goals than they're giving up. It's paying off on the scoreboard, too, with San Jose earning an 8-7 edge in five-on-five goals during Walman's minutes. He's been by far the team's best defenseman.

Walman's missed four games this season — three of them because of an upper-body injury and one of them as a healthy scratch because he missed a treatment session — but he's expected back in the lineup soon.

## The Athletic / Hockey's forgotten pioneer: Support grows for Göran Stubb as a Hall of Fame builder

By Chris Johnston – November 15, 2024

Earlier this month, Finnish hockey fans packed the well-appointed Nokia Arena in central Tampere on consecutive nights to watch the Florida Panthers and Dallas Stars play two NHL regular-season games.

There they saw Aleksander Barkov, a Tampere native and the first Finnish-born captain to lift the Stanley Cup, take his spot in the Panthers starting lineup alongside three countrymen: Anton Lundell, from Espoo; Eetu Luostarinen, from Siilinjärvi; and Niko Mikkola, from Kiiminki.

Across the ice, the Stars sent out three Finns of their own in Espoo's Miro Heiskanen, Vantaa's Esa Lindell and Nokia's Roope Hintz.

Included among the other players suiting up for the Panthers and Stars were Americans, Canadians, Swedes, Russians, Czechs and a Latvian.

It was, quite frankly, a typical scene in 2024.

Roughly 30 percent of NHL rosters are composed of players from European countries, and the league takes meaningful games to that continent every season. These were the 45th and 46th NHL games played outside of North America and the 10th and 11th hosted in Finland alone.

But there would have been multiple points during Göran Stubb's remarkable life in hockey where an event like this would have been entirely beyond anyone's imagination.

Finland didn't even have an indoor rink when Stubb became chairman of IFK Helsinki at the age of 26. There wasn't a Finnish-trained NHL player until Matti Hagman became the first to do so with the Boston Bruins just as Stubb was taking over the Finnish Ice Hockey Association as its managing director in 1976. And there was no European scouting service to assist NHL teams in procuring talent from the continent until Stubb created one in 1983, beginning a run that spanned four decades and saw the world's top hockey league completely transformed by the flood of players from overseas.

In fact, had you stepped back and reflected on the evolution of the sport before the puck was dropped on that Nov. 1 Stars-Panthers game at Nokia Arena, you would have seen Stubb's fingerprints everywhere.

It helps explain why there's a growing push to see him inducted as a builder in the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Göran Stubb is a Hall of Famer.

He was inducted into the Finnish Hockey Hall of Fame in 1991 and the IIHF Hall of Fame in 2000, both as a builder. The only remaining question is whether he'll complete the hat trick with a call to the Toronto-based Hockey Hall of Fame in 2025 or beyond.

That's proven to be an impossibly high hurdle for any European to clear. Incredibly, no builder originating from that continent has been called to the Hall since 1995, when former IIHF president Günther Sabetzki of Germany was inducted.

There is no clear reason why that's the case, and the Hockey Hall of Fame's selection process is notoriously shrouded in secrecy. Past and present members of the 18-person committee aren't even allowed to reveal the identity of those who have been considered for election. What is known is that a

successful candidate needs to garner the support of at least 14 of the 18 votes from the selection committee in a given year.

Evaluating candidates for the builder's category comes with an added layer of complexity because identifying those who have made a significant off-ice contribution to the sport can include such a wide range of possibilities.

In the 2024 class inducted Monday, the builder inductees were Colin Campbell and David Poile — a senior NHL executive who oversaw numerous rule changes and technical innovations, and the longest-tenured general manager in NHL history, respectively.

Builders can also include coaches, officials, broadcasters and administrators whose impact have been felt on a large scale.

When it comes time for the selection committee to gather in June and comb through a list of first-time eligible players for 2025 — including Joe Thornton, Zdeno Chara, Duncan Keith, Brianna Decker and Carey Price, among others — they'll be able to lean on statistical and career benchmarks that can easily be compared to players who came before them.

Those same objective measurements aren't available when considering the case of a builder.

When Stubb established the European Scouting Service in 1983, which essentially ran parallel to what NHL Central Scouting was doing in North America, it was a one-man operation.

Him.

There were only three NHL teams that even had a scout based in Europe at the time: the Edmonton Oilers, Calgary Flames and New York Rangers.

In addition to producing ranking lists of the continent's draft-eligible prospects and providing NHL teams with game reports and statistics — a practice that continues now — Stubb in those early days was essential in helping teams gain a footing in Europe. He helped several find their own scouts on the continent. And when North Americans were making a trip overseas to cover a tournament, he made himself available to assist them with everything from travel bookings to visas to credentials.

Stubb was a trusted adviser with deep industry connections in an era when the world seemed much larger — before the internet and cellphones were available to everyone.

"He had a difficult job, trying to placate a bunch of spoiled and entitled scouts thinking he should be there checking them into the hotel and arranging our travel," said David Conte, who first met Stubb while playing in Finland and went on to have a 40-year career scouting for NHL teams.

"In many respects, he did. He was a great conduit to allowing guys to do the job there. They were probably unlikely to navigate the environments by themselves."

Six years after the European Scouting Service began, Sweden's Mats Sundin became the first European player selected first in the NHL Draft, by the Quebec Nordiques. Three years after that, Roman Hamrlík of Czechia became the second when he went to the Tampa Bay Lightning at No. 1. European-trained players were being selected with increasing frequency across all rounds.

Stubb became such an essential part of the NHL's draft process that he was given his own table on the floor. That would allow team executives to race over to him directly to check on a player's eligibility or seek out another piece of information while making a last-minute decision.

"If there's something that describes my dad, it would be that he's down to earth, he's humble and he's loyal to the max," said Alexander Stubb, the eldest of Stubb's two children and the current president of

Finland. “I think that’s what a lot of the clubs and the NHL proper knew and understood — that you could always trust him.”

By the time Stubb transferred the European Scouting Service to Jukka-Pekka Vuorinen in 2023, the NHL and Europe were as closely tied together as a stick and puck.

Growing up as Göran Stubb’s son meant you never knew which hockey superstar might be on the other end of a ringing phone or a knock at the door.

Alexander Stubb recalls Bobby Orr, Igor Larionov and Phil Esposito stopping by his family’s “general box-standard apartment block in the suburbs of Helsinki.” He liked to race to answer the phone in case it was Bobby Hull or a famous NHL executive on the line looking to speak with his father.

“Of course, all of my friends were gobsmacked when they saw and heard who it was,” he said.

Alexander was born in 1968, which was a time of great change in Finnish hockey, driven in part by his father. Göran had been running Helsinki IFK on a volunteer basis since 1961 — taking over the club while it was in a perilous financial position — and helped guide it toward more stable ground with the help of a move to the country’s first indoor arena.

That created the conditions where the league could start to cater to professionals, and Göran took advantage by boldly approaching Carl Brewer at breakfast during the 1967 IIHF World Hockey Championship in Vienna with an offer to come to Helsinki as a player/coach. It proved to be a watershed moment. Brewer was a three-time Stanley Cup champion with the Toronto Maple Leafs, and the 1968-69 season he spent with HIFK produced the first of three Finnish league titles during Stubb’s tenure and left a lasting impression on the country’s broader hockey culture.

“He basically became what I would call the father of modern Finnish ice hockey,” Alexander Stubb said of Brewer. “He came and in many ways changed the style of play. IFK, my team, became very physical. He’s a big hero here. Actually in all of the teams.

“But of course our arena here in Helsinki, they have the Carl Brewer corners and in the locker room they have a big picture of him.”

The business experience Stubb gained with HIFK led him to a job running the Finnish Ice Hockey Association starting in 1976. That was the same year Conte came over to play for Kiekkoreipas Lahti and, while he discovered a country with a deep love of the sport, it hardly looked like the burgeoning hockey superpower it is today.

“I think the real measure of him is the transition of hockey in Finland,” said Conte. “When I went there, I think they only had 13 indoor rinks. The second division, they played outdoors a lot of them. When you look at the amount of rinks, the progression of Finnish hockey where they’re competitive on the world stage, the amount of players ... he was at the forefront of it.”

When it came time for Stubb to work his 39th and final draft in a full-time capacity for the NHL in 2022, he refused any and all attempts to have proceedings at the Bell Centre in Montreal interrupted by a video tribute or special recognition.

He did reluctantly consent to having a luncheon thrown in his honor that week, and the list of attendees included family, scouting colleagues, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly.

We are immensely proud of our Dad @goranstubb who was today given an award by Commissioner Gary Bettman for 40 years of service for the @NHL.



Quietly and with little fanfare, he stepped into semi-retirement. It was representative of how he conducted his business throughout a career that spanned 60 years in the sport.

“My dad is probably the guy who has done most for European hockey, but made the least noise,” Alexander Stubb said.

Göran Stubb will turn 90 in March and still watches about 200 games per year.

On his watch and with his help, he’s seen the NHL become a significantly more global league that puts a much better product on the ice. He’s also seen hockey reach a level of prominence in Finland that’s allowed a country of less than six million to punch well above its weight class against much bigger nations on the world stage.

“I know this is about Göran, but frankly it’s a little bit more about Finland and his contributions to them, and where they’ve come from and gone to,” Conte said. “The growth of hockey in Finland and his attachment to all of the stages of it, I think, is noteworthy. Probably the most comprehensive of anybody from Finnish hockey. That, to me, is the basis of (his Hall of Fame candidacy).

“Finland needs to be better represented and he should be the representative.”

## ESPN / Which current NHL players will make the Hockey Hall of Fame?

By Greg Wyshynski – November 15, 2024

The Hockey Hall of Fame is going to swing open its doors to some impressive former NHL stars in the next few years. Legends such as Zdeno Chara, Joe Thornton, Duncan Keith and Patrice Bergeron. Eventually Jaromir Jagr will be inducted. Probably in his 80s, when he's done playing.

The Hall can welcome up to four men's players in every annual class. Given how many current NHL players have a legitimate case for immortality, the selection committee will not suffer for a lack of choices.

Here is a tiered ranking of active NHL players based on their current Hall of Fame cases. We've picked the brain of Hockey Hall of Fame expert Paul Pidutti of Adjusted Hockey to help figure out the locks, the maybes, "the Hall of Very Good" and which young stars are on the path to greatness.

Let's begin with the two players who have defined this century of hockey, and another player whose legend has grown to the point where he's a sure-thing Hall of Famer.

In 1999, the Hall of Fame Selection Committee waived the mandatory three-year waiting period to enshrinement for Wayne Gretzky, which is what happens when your name appears in the record books as much as the word "hockey."

It was the 10th time a player was admitted early, and it would be the last time it happened for on-ice achievement. The committee amended its rules to waive the three-year wait only for "certain humanitarian circumstances."

But let's say the Hall still had the "let's not delay the inevitable" provision. Three current players would earn the golden ticket.

Through 1,289 games, Crosby had 1,612 career points, good for 10th all time in the NHL. He has Joe Sakic (ninth, 1,641) within reach this season. After that, it's Mario Lemieux (eighth, 1,723) -- who, it should be said, leads Crosby (1.25) in career points per game (1.88) -- Steve Yzerman (seventh, 1,755), Marcel Dionne (sixth, 1,771) and Ron Francis (fifth, 1,798).

But Crosby's case goes well beyond the numbers. Three Stanley Cup wins and two Conn Smythe trophies. Two Hart trophies, leading the NHL twice in points and goals. Triple Gold Club membership, including a rather significant goal in the 2010 Winter Olympics. Being the personification of hockey excellence for two decades in the eyes of his peers and subsequent generations. That's "skip the line" stuff.

So is becoming the greatest goal scorer in NHL history. One could make the argument that Alex Ovechkin is the goal-scoring GOAT when adjusted for era. But it's becoming increasingly clear with every goal this season that The Great 8 is likely to pass The Great One's 894 career goals, shattering a record many considered unbreakable. (Unless the NHL, like, made every goal count twice.)

Add in a Stanley Cup win with a Conn Smythe, world junior and world championship gold to one of the most prestigious records in sports, and Ovechkin would earn the exemption. But let's not forget that the Hockey Hall of Fame exists to tell the story of the game. Crosby and Ovechkin were the two most important players to the growth of the NHL since Gretzky.

The last time we did this exercise, McDavid was in the "Immortal Locks" category, but we've bumped him up here. This is his 10th NHL season. He has won league MVP three times and five scoring titles. He

has been selected playoff MVP in a losing effort -- only the second skater to win the Conn Smythe on a team that didn't win the Stanley Cup, and the first since 1976.

So he doesn't have a Stanley Cup yet and has to wait until 2026 for a chance at Olympic gold. But he does have gold in the IIHF world championships and the U20 and U18 world championships.

McDavid is within reach of 1,000 career points and becoming the fourth fastest to hit the mark in NHL history behind Gretzky, Lemieux and Mike Bossy -- without the benefit of having played in the 1980s.

With his era in mind, it's inarguably one of the best stretches any player has had in NHL history. But beyond that is the sheer ethereal nature of McDavid: The NHL has never seen his combination of speed and playmaking ability. He's a 1-of-1 talent, the kind for whom they swing open the doors of the Hall of Fame.

"It's a good call," Pidutti said. "I recently wrote an article about Jaromir Jagr and the 'waive [the wait]' players. McDavid is one of them."

According to Pidutti, Malkin is the closest to the tier that Crosby inhabits. Using his own methodology to determine worthiness of candidates, he has determined 40 players whose on-ice achievement places them in the "inner circle" or "the greatest among the greatest" of players. Among active players, the only ones who qualify under Pidutti's criteria are Crosby, Ovechkin, McDavid ... and Malkin.

His career points-per-game average (1.13) is 23rd all time for players with a minimum of 500 games. He has a Calder, a Hart, two scoring titles and a Conn Smythe to his credit -- along with three Stanley Cups some international gold.

After Nicklas Lidstrom retired in 2012, two Swedish countrymen filled the void as the NHL's best defenseman. Karlsson won three Norris trophies and Hedman won one, but they had a combined 11 appearances as a finalist. Karlsson is one of the best offensive defensemen in NHL history, lingering around the top 10 in points per game. Hedman is the more complete defenseman, and a foundational piece for two Stanley Cup winners.

Kane has the 10th-most points for a right wing in NHL history, and is the third-highest scorer among U.S. players. Stamkos has the third-most goals in the Crosby/Ovechkin era. Kopitar has two Selkes, two Stanley Cups and is fifth in points among active players. Pidutti has Marchand ranked as the seventh-most worthy skater for the Hall of Fame. He's a clear second to Ovechkin among left wingers in that era.

Fleury's also an easy call: a Vezina, three Stanley Cups, second all time in wins and No. 1 in our hearts as a source of hockey cheerfulness.

Frankly, that's the only thing that gives us pause about one of the newest edition to this tier: Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov, who can be an acquired taste attitudinally. He has the third-highest points-per-game average among active players (minimum 500 games), four 100-point seasons, a Hart Trophy and two Stanley Cups. Using his Hall of Fame value metric, Pidutti has him eighth, right behind Marchand. At 31, he has time to build on a legacy that might already be Hall-worthy.

"I fully support it. I think he's the type of player that if he retired now, everyone would be absolutely stunned at how strong his numbers hold up," Pidutti said. "To me, he's an elite player in a way that people aren't appreciating now in terms of the offense he's produced and the awards he's won."

While we throw the term "generational talent" around in sports like a peanut vendor, Makar and Matthews have earned the label. The Avalanche defenseman is considered the best offensive blueliner since Bobby Orr. The Maple Leafs captain has the second-highest goals-per-game average in NHL history (0.65) behind Lemieux, for centers with at least 500 games played.

Draisaitl is 12th on that list (0.49) and has a Hart Trophy to his credit while playing in the considerable shadow of McDavid. That's the downside of an all-world teammate. The upside is that Draisaitl could have another eight-plus years vacuuming up points with McDavid on the ice.

Since 2016-17, Pastrnak is fourth in goals (330) and one of only five players with over 300 in that span. He has 355 career goals, well within range of Johnny Bucyk's Bruins record of 545, given Pastrnak's age (28).

MacKinnon might be close to making the leap to the next tier after finally winning a Hart Trophy last season. Since his 2017-18 breakout season, MacKinnon is third in points per game (1.43) among all skaters. Rantanen was ninth in points per game (1.20) during that span, the beneficiary of MacKinnon's dominance but a player building a Hall of Fame case of his own.

This tier has a trio of new additions since the last edition:

Barkov is building the offensive numbers case -- he's 16th among active players in points per game (0.97) -- but more importantly has become the kind of default choice for the Selke Trophy as best defensive forward that Patrice Bergeron and Pavel Datsyuk were -- to name a future and current Hall of Famer, respectively. Driving his team to the Stanley Cup last season also certainly helps Barkov.

Panarin is one of the most gifted scoring wingers of the past 20 years, and is fifth among active players in points per game (1.17). He won the Calder, was a Hart Trophy finalist and has world junior gold to his credit. But he's 33 years old and the clock is ticking on greater NHL accomplishments.

We had to move Panarin's countryman Kaprizov into this tier after witnessing the MVP-worthy start to his season with 28 points in 15 games. He's chasing his fourth straight season of 40-plus goals, which is goal scoring on the level of a Matthews or Draisaitl. He got a late start in the NHL at 23 years old after playing in Russia, but he has made up for lost time as one of the league's best goal scorers, with a Calder Trophy to his credit. Don't forget that unlike others in this tier, Kirill The Thrill also has Olympic gold from the 2018 Games, where he had nine points in six games during the NHL-less tournament.

In the interest of equal time, Pidutti makes the case that MacKinnon and Draisaitl should be one tier up in the "Immortal Locks" category.

"There's sort of the modern standard, at least from all of my work, which is essentially 700 games. That's where Peter Forsberg, Eric Lindros and Cam Neely are, some of the shortest careers you'll find in there," he said. "MacKinnon and Draisaitl both hold up really well to those guys."

Pidutti agrees that MacKinnon's MVP win bolsters his case and that Draisaitl's postseason numbers -- 108 points in 74 games -- could clinch the Hall for him.

At last check, the Hockey Hall of Fame is located in Toronto. Having Canadian hockey heroes as the centerpiece of induction weekend is never a bad financial idea. And nothing sells better in Canada than Canadian hockey exceptionalism.

Since 2010, the Canada men's national team won Olympic gold in 2010 and 2014, and captured the World Cup of Hockey in 2016 in a tournament held steps from the Hockey Hall of Fame. A number of these players starred on those teams, along with having exemplary NHL careers as well.

The highest-ranked player on this list via Pidutti's metrics is Doughty, who lands in the "exceeds the HOF standard" tier. He has two Stanley Cup wins, a Norris Trophy win and three times as a finalist. Though he was never an offensive juggernaut like some of his peers, he was a solid all-around defenseman and a winner.

Speaking of winners, Pidutti has Toews higher in his ranking than any forward listed here. The former Chicago Blackhawks captain stepped away from hockey after the 2022-23 season for health considerations but has not formally retired, as he remains an unrestricted free agent. With three Stanley Cup wins, a Conn Smythe and a Selke, he's probably Hall-bound.

Around these two are Price, who is still a member of the Montreal Canadiens despite not having played since 2021-22; and Tavares, the star center for the Maple Leafs. Pidutti has Price slightly exceeding the standard, no doubt bolstered by that all-timer 2014-15 season when he won the Hart, the Vezina, the NHLPA player of the year and the Jennings for fewest goals allowed. Tavares is the eighth-highest active scorer in the NHL (1,054 points) and was twice nominated for the Hart.

Perry won the Hart in 2010-11 and ranks seventh among active players in goals (432) and fifth in games played (1,327) -- the latter stat being a tribute to Perry's metamorphosis from antagonistic star winger for the Stanley Cup-winning Anaheim Ducks to antagonistic hockey nomad who specializes in losing the Stanley Cup as a depth forward.

Finally there's Pietrangelo, who was a foundational piece of two different Stanley Cup championship teams -- and Vegas might not be done winning them yet. He doesn't have a Norris Trophy win, but he has also played in an era with some really, really good defensemen.

The most prominent name in this category in last year's edition was Joe Pavelski, who ended up with 476 goals and 1,068 points. Giroux has more points than that (1,078 in 1,197 games) and is still producing with the Ottawa Senators. Backstrom is just behind them with 1,033 points in 1,105 games. He stepped away from the game last season and is on long-term injured reserve with the Capitals.

One of Backstrom's teammates makes this tier for the first time: Carlson is in his 16th season and has had a bit of a renaissance since Spencer Carbery took over the team. He was a Norris finalist only once but did help the Capitals to their only Stanley Cup win. Carlson also has world junior gold that he won with a memorable overtime goal against Canada in 2010.

Through Tuesday night, Carlson is sixth among active defensemen with 685 points. That puts him behind Penguins defenseman Kris Letang (748), who has three Stanley Cup wins for Pittsburgh.

"Carlson is still playing really well this year and he's creeping up and up and up," Pidutti said. "I think he could end up looking closer to Kris Letang than people think."

Josi is also ahead of Carlson with 697 career points along with a Norris Trophy win. He's the highest scoring Swiss-born player in NHL history by nearly 250 points.

For all this talk about high-scoring defensemen, it should be noted that no one has scored more than Brent Burns (886 in 1,429 games). It should also be noted that he wasn't a defenseman during his entire NHL run. But he has a Norris Trophy and he's 14th all time among defensemen in scoring -- although his production has slowed to a crawl.

Benn (914 points) has a higher total than Dallas teammates Duchene (827) and Seguin (799), although Seguin is the only one of the three to have a Stanley Cup win. Tarasenko has a pair of Cup wins to his credit, but he's out of the top 30 for active goal scorers.

O'Reilly and Stone are both interesting cases from a two-way player perspective. They were both integral parts of Stanley Cup championship teams. They're both elite defensive players, although only O'Reilly has a Selke win thanks to the award's inherent bias against wingers. (Stone is a two-time finalist, however).

Is Ryan Suter a Hall of Famer? He's eighth all time in games played for a defenseman (1,460) and sixth among active defensemen in points (685). But he was a Norris finalist only once, never won a Stanley Cup but does have some world junior gold. This smells like a "Mark Howe, veterans' committee years down the line" selection if anything.

Finally, there's sweet Phil Kessel, currently a free agent. He's an NHL iron man with 413 goals and 992 points, the owner of three Stanley Cup rings. Kessel has a case. It would be a victory for the everyman if he were to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. And a speech for the ages.

The highest career scorer in this group is Scheifele, with 738 points and 306 goals. He has been a classic "very good but not a superstar" center for most of his career, but with the way the Jets are cooking this season who knows what his reputation ends up looking like?

Marner has 659 points in 593 career games, and it'll obviously be fascinating to see where his career takes him after this season. Maybe a change in scenery is good: Like with Eichel, whose time in Vegas has substantially raised his Hall of Fame case, especially with the way he played in the team's Stanley Cup run.

Guentzel has a pair of Cup wins with the Penguins and 504 points in 534 career games. Point, who plays with Guentzel in Tampa Bay, also has a pair of Cup wins to go with outstanding postseason numbers. Matthew Tkachuk earned his Stanley Cup ring last season, has a pair of 40-goal seasons and at 26 years old has plenty of time to build his case -- one might say he already has the "fame" part down. His brother Brady has some work to do, with 367 points in 455 games as compared to 589 points in 601 games for Matthew.

Both Tkachuk brothers could add to their accomplishments with international championships in the 4 Nations Face-off and the 2026 Winter Olympics. The same goes for their Team USA mates McAvoy of the Bruins and Fox of the Rangers, the latter of whom has a Norris Trophy to his credit.

Of course, international play doesn't just mean the U.S. vs. Canada, despite the assumed focus of the 4 Nations Face-off. Aho, one of the best two-way centers in the NHL, will chase gold for Finland. Pettersson and Forsberg should do the same with Sweden.

"Filip Forsberg made a year-end all-star team for the first time," Pidutti said. "His numbers are tracking similarly to Scheifele's."

The selection committee's overall approach to player induction is challenging for observers to decipher. That's never more evident when it comes to goaltenders.

The legends get in quick, such as Martin Brodeur and Henrik Lundqvist. Then you get goalies such as Tom Barrasso and Mike Vernon, who waited 18 years, and Rogie Vachon, who was in the Class of 2016 after playing his last game in 1981-82 season a.k.a. Ronald Reagan's first term in office.

Pidutti has Fleury as a lock, but Vasilevskiy isn't all that far behind him in the rankings, right on the cusp of "slightly exceeds" status. He has one Vezina Trophy, four straight finishes as a finalist, to go along with two Stanley Cup wins and a Conn Smythe Trophy. His reputation as an impenetrable postseason goalie has taken a hit, but he's tied for fourth all time in postseason save percentage for goalies with a minimum of 100 games played.

Pidutti is also high on Hellebuyck, who won his second Vezina Trophy last season. His work rate has been his calling card, facing 15,779 shots in 518 career games and posting a stellar .917 save percentage. He could use a little more postseason hardware and some team success -- with either Winnipeg or Team USA.

Bobrovsky has had team success, winning the Stanley Cup last season. Like Hellebuyck, he also has two Vezina wins and a solid .915 save percentage. In Pidutti's rankings, he has Bobrovsky third behind Fleury and Vasilevskiy among active goalies.

At 28, Shesterkin would need an epic run to get on the Hall of Fame short list, although he does have a Vezina win to his credit and three straight seasons of 30-plus wins. His current backup with the Rangers, Quick, is a fascinating case: He was fourth in wins and led the league in shutouts from 2010 to 2018, winning two Stanley Cups with the Kings. He added another as a member of the Golden Knights. At the peak of powers, few were better in Quick's era.

We're casting a bit of a wide net in this category, with ages that range from 25 down to 19. Just let it be known that these are the players on the way up, with a few having a rocket strapped to their backs.

Like the Hughes brothers. Quinn won the Norris last season after a 92-point season. Jack has 300 points in his first 325 NHL games. Both will play a key role on U.S. national teams. The same goes for Robertson, who had back-to-back 40-goal seasons before dipping to 29 goals last season. The jury remains out on the Stars' star. Stützle, meanwhile, continues on an upward trajectory for the Sens.

Dahlin, Heiskanen and Seider, the latter of whom won the Calder in 2021-22, are all looking for their first Norris.

Finally, there's Bedard. For all of our previous poo-poo'ing of "generational talents," Bedard has shown flashes of being just that, with 22 goals in 68 games last season en route to winning the Calder. He won world junior gold twice and set a world record for world junior points by a player under age 19 -- previously held by Jagr.

Obviously, Bedard's career success depends greatly on the Blackhawks getting their collective act together and him fulfilling his potential.

And if that happens, maybe one day Bedard will be an immortal lock for the Hockey Hall of Fame.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Rasmus Andersson super-motivated to crack Sweden's 4 Nations squad](#)

By Eric Francis – November 15, 2024

CALGARY — It was with a tennis racquet in hand that Rasmus Andersson's motivation grew for the upcoming season.

"They invited a few of us up (to Stockholm) this summer, like 40 people, to give us information on the 4 Nations Face-Off, World Championship in Sweden and the Olympics," explained the Flames' minute muncher from Malmo.

"There was no skate, but we played tennis, had dinner and drinks and had some fun getting to know all the guys."

In a setting like that, who wouldn't start thinking about the possibility of being included on Sweden's entry in the NHL's best-on-best tourney in mid-February?

"Yeah, for sure it was motivating," said Andersson, who was then asked if he remembers counting the number of defencemen on hand.

"Oh, my God, no. There are so many good defencemen.

"I think five are pretty set in stone, and then we'll see."

Indeed, the 28-year-old will be in tough on a blueline led by Victor Hedman, Erik Karlsson and Gustav Forsling — who've already been named to the team — followed by locks Rasmus Dahlin and Adam Larsson.

Although no one in the NHL has played more minutes in the last 10 games than Andersson, his ability to lead the team in scoring (four goals, seven assists) while averaging 24:37 in ice time isn't what could land him on the team.

It's the fact he leads the league in blocked shots and plays with a snarl that could make him an attractive addition to a squad of sublimely skilled defencemen.

But ultimately what gives him his best chance is the fact he's a right-handed shot on a team with very few of them.

Although Andersson hasn't played for his national team since the Ivan Hlinka under-18 tourney in 2014, the Flames alternate captain does possess a different set of tools than most of his fellow countrymen.

"I think I've proven this year I can play good defensive hockey and am reliable, I block shots and can try to loosen up the group a little bit, be vocal and contribute any way I can," said Andersson, who is routinely tasked with shutting down the opposition's top line.

"If they need me in a defensive role, no problem. If they need me in an offensive role, no problem.

"If they need me in the stands, no problem. Wherever they see a fit for me."

Injuries, playoffs, a wedding and the birth of his two children have prevented him from playing in various world championships, as his father did.

But his game has grown to the point he's on the short list to fill the sixth or seventh spot in February when Canada, the U.S., Finland and Sweden do battle in Montreal and Boston.



“It obviously would be a super-cool tournament to get my first kind of national team experience,” said Andersson, whose teammate Mikael Backlund has a good chance at wearing the Tre Kronor up front.

“To play against the best would be something else. You do it on a nightly basis, but when it all comes together, it's different and it would mean a lot to me, that's for sure.”

He knows he's in tough, and that all he can do is continue to showcase himself right up until the rosters are announced Dec. 4.

“I think it's such a cool, cool event, and to represent your country will be a dream,” he said.

“It's kind of what you watched when you were younger, so, yeah, I'd be pissed off to miss it because it's such a cool event.

“If they select me, they select me. If they don't, they don't. I'm just pushing for a spot and trying to make it as hard as possible.”