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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets trade talks on David Jiricek: What we know

By Brian Hedger- November 27, 2024

The NHL rumor mill is churning again with reports surfacing this week about Blue Jackets defenseman David Jiricek.

According to Daily Faceoff insider Frank Seravalli, TSN insider Chris Johnston and Sportsnet insider Elliott Friedman, Jiricek might be close to getting a change of scenery after his assignment to AHL Cleveland last week. Selected sixth overall in 2022, Jiricek is back with the Cleveland Monsters for a third season while NHL general managers reach out to Blue Jackets president of hockey operations/GM Don Waddell with trade pitches.

Here's what we know as of Tuesday:

NHL insiders say Columbus Blue Jackets will trade David Jiricek soon

Seravalli got the ball rolling Monday by telling a Vancouver radio station that a deal for Jiricek was "imminent" and could even happen Monday night. The Dispatch was told Monday that no trade was imminent.

Seravalli also said Waddell has "five-to-six concrete offers," on the table and named the frontrunners to be the Philadelphia Flyers, Minnesota Wild and Pittsburgh Penguins with additional fits in the San Jose Sharks and Buffalo Sabres.

Johnston said on TSN's Insider Trading podcast that he believes the Blue Jackets are shifting from getting a return package centered on a similarly ranked prospect or young NHL player to deals built around primarily draft picks. Friedman said on his 32 Thoughts podcast that Nashville Predators, the Flyers and Wild appear to be good fits as trade partners but added that Waddell could just sit tight and wait it out.

The Dispatch was told Tuesday the Blue Jackets' front office is not feeling pressured to complete a trade for Jiricek and is content keeping him in the fold if nothing "makes sense" in trade talks.

What do the Blue Jackets want in a David Jiricek trade?

Waddell addressed the topic of receiving trade calls from opposing GMs last week and said the price tag for moving Jiricek is high. He's not looking for an established NHL player already in his upper 20s, which the Blue Jackets have enough of right now. Instead, the ideal return would be either a young NHL player or prospect with a high ceiling similar to Jiricek's.

That could shift toward a return built around draft picks, but it's hard to imagine a scenario where a team is willing to fork over a pick with potential to match or even come close to where Jiricek was selected (sixth overall).

What's the latest on David Jiricek with the Cleveland Monsters?

Jiricek is now playing his third AHL season in Cleveland after starting the season as one of two extra NHL forwards in Columbus.

Some wondered whether he'd even report to Cleveland after being assigned to the AHL last week, but Jiricek is with the Monsters and played his first two games Saturday and Sunday against the Milwaukee Admirals.

In the first, he didn't record a point and had one shot. In the second, Jiricek added two points on a goal and assist, scoring the winning goal in overtime. Offensive output, however, is not what the Blue Jackets' front office is watching. They want to see improvement on the defensive side of the ice and without the puck, especially while working within systems and a structure the Jackets are also using at the NHL level under head coach Dean Evason.

The reports on his play in that regard were positive.

"Really good," Evason said. "He did a lot of really good things on both sides of the puck, which we wanted him to do on a consistent basis down there. Obviously, (he) scored an overtime goal, which is fantastic. We know his offensive side, but as we've talked about before, we need him to dial in when he doesn't have the puck – which it looked like he was committed to do that. ... Everything was really positive."

Columbus Dispatch / Cole Sillinger out for Columbus Blue Jackets vs Montreal Canadiens

By Brian Hedger- November 27, 2024

Cole Sillinger skated Tuesday but wore a track suit and helmet while working on his own.

The rest of the Blue Jackets practiced for a second day at Nationwide Arena without Sillinger, and coach Dean Evason said Sillinger, 20, will miss a game Wednesday against the Montreal Canadiens with an upper-body injury. Sillinger took a skate boot to the head midway through the Blue Jackets' 5-4 shootout win over the Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday.

More Blue Jackets news: Zach Werenski leading Columbus Blue Jackets with words, points: 'He is all business'

His absence from practices prompted a shake-up of the second, third and fourth forward lines.

Yegor Chinakhov is on the second line with Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson on the right. Justin Danforth is back to centering the third line, flanked by Zach Aston-Reese and Mathieu Olivier, and the fourth line centered by Sean Kuraly has James van Riemsdyk and Kevin Labanc on the wings now.

Sillinger is fifth on the team in scoring with three goals, nine assists and 12 points in 20 games. He's also solid on faceoffs at 47.2%, plays roles on both special teams and has developed a knack for needling opposing players to the point they become distracted or frustrated enough to take bad retaliatory penalties.

The Blue Jackets are fortunate to lean on Danforth as a versatile forward who's played center much of his career, but not having Sillinger will be felt against the Canadiens. The injury may involve concussion-related symptoms. Sillinger left the ice for a stretch after the hit but returned and skated a total of 17:56 on 25 shifts.

In other injury news, Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski returned to practice Tuesday after getting Monday off as a "maintenance" day. According to the NHL, Werenski skated a whopping 4.75 miles in 32:17 against the Hurricanes. Former Blue Jackets forward Patrik Laine is also getting closer to returning from a preseason knee injury with the Canadiens, but he isn't expected to play Wednesday.

Columbus Dispatch / Zach Werenski leading Columbus Blue Jackets with words, points: 'He is all business'

By Brian Hedger- November 27, 2024

The first sign that Zach Werenski's role had changed was after the Blue Jackets' first win of the season, an impressive 6-4 road victory on Oct. 12 over the Colorado Avalanche.

Quieting the din of a victorious locker room in Denver, the Blue Jackets' star defenseman got the team's attention to make two postgame announcements. The first was to issue a challenge to meet that level of play more consistently, and the second was about the Blue Jackets' new "player of the game" award – a gray hat with white ears, a long tail and Johnny Gaudreau's No. 13 on the side. The Blue Jackets replaced the kepi hat with the donkey hat, and Werenski explained why – as a nod to the late Gaudreau's habit of calling his friends "a donkey."

Boone Jenner, who was instrumental in picking it out, would've announced the switch if he wasn't out with a shoulder injury. Werenski did the honors in his place, awarding it first to Sean Monahan – one of Gaudreau's closest friends and his former Calgary Flames teammate. The sight of Werenski making the announcement might've come as a surprise to some, since he's always been more of a seen-and-not-heard leader.

This is year nine for him, though, so Werenski, 27, is a veteran.

He's engaged, playing for his fifth NHL coach and has been through a lot of ups and downs. He's also tired of losing, which the Blue Jackets have done a lot since last qualifying for the playoffs in 2020. After seeing Jenner go down, followed by Erik Gudbranson with another shoulder injury, Werenski knew his turn to speak up had arrived.

"I think I have to with some guys out, but I'm also at the age where I feel more comfortable doing it," he said. "I've been around for a long time. I feel like I can get a pulse on the room, what needs to be said in certain situations, and I've enjoyed it."

Zach Werenski 'all business' for Columbus Blue Jackets

Former head coach Brad Larsen named Werenski an alternate captain in October 2021, the same day Jenner was bestowed the captain's 'C.'

Oliver Bjorkstrand and Gustav Nyquist were the other alternates, but they're elsewhere now. Werenski's still around, playing his fourth season of a six-year contract signed in July 2021. It hasn't been his nature to address the team vocally, but that's starting to change as he's taking more "ownership" of the Blue Jackets' fortunes.

"I never want to be a guy who talks too much," Werenski said. "That's the worst, right? I just feel there's times now where I know something needs to be said, and I'm just saying it where in years past, I just bit my tongue. If I have something to say now, I'm going to say it."

The Blue Jackets learned that during a five-game road trip that led to a six-game winless streak. Despite playing solid hockey, they couldn't score more than two goals per game. Werenski sensed a need to reinforce the Jackets' belief in themselves.

"He called a players-only meeting when we were out on the road there and struggling," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "He knows those things. He's just deferred to other people because there's been other people here in the past. Now, there isn't and he's the guy that's stepping up and doing that."

Evason, in his first season with the Blue Jackets, is actually trying to get Werenski to loosen his collar a bit.

"He is all business," Evason said. "Like ... all business. We joke with him, because he's so serious, but he's been impressive."

Zach Werenski's hot start has boosted Columbus Blue Jackets

Werenski has also made sure his words aren't hollow.

He backs them up with outstanding play. Werenski's six goals, 14 assists and 20 points mark his highest point total through a season's first 20 games, he was named the NHL's First Star of the Week on Monday for adding 2-5-7 in three games last week – all wins – and he finished the weekend tied for second in scoring among the league's defensemen, trailing only Colorado's Cale Makar.

Werenski also tied a franchise record (and set a new team record for a defenseman) with five points on two goals and three assists in a wild 7-6 overtime win Thursday over the Tampa Bay Lightning. His second goal was in OT to end it.

"I've seen a lot of hockey players," Evason said. "I don't think I've seen one like him. Honestly. He's amazing, you know? When he wants the puck, he goes and gets it. When he wants to defend, he defends, and he has stepped up in a leadership role. He's really embraced that. In the past, maybe, he's been a little more quiet and reserved. I think this has pushed him forward, and I think it's helped his game on the ice, as well."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets report card: Burst of goals and surprise start help early grades

By Aaron Portzline- November 27, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The most obvious revelation by the Columbus Blue Jackets in the first six weeks of the season is their surprising ability to score goals. Who knows how long (or if) this will last, but the Jackets are averaging 3.45 goals per game, which would be a franchise record for an entire season.

Put another way, they score enough to mask the defensive mistakes they're making at too high of a rate for coach Dean Evason's liking, and they've scored enough to give them the confidence to keep playing despite early two- and three-goal deficits.

"I believe … we believe that we have a skill set in our group to score," Evason said. "We just have to keep harping on not giving up six (goals). We think we're going to score goals, hopefully consistently, but we have to hammer down keeping it out of our net."

Coaches are no fun, aren't they?

The Jackets (9-9-2) have scored 69 goals, matching the 2018-19 club for the most goals in the first 20 games of the season. They've allowed 72, though, which is why they're hovering at .500. Good enough? Maybe not. Better than most expected? Oh, heck yeah.

The report cards for the last two years have been brutal exercises. So many Cs, Ds and even Fs. But this is a good time for the Blue Jackets, one of the NHL's surprise teams so far this season, to be evaluated. Let's get to it:

A-plus

Zach Werenski, D: 20 games, 6-14-20, plus-4

Werenski is enjoying a breakout season, which is saying something for a two-time All-Star. Evason's system and Werenski's offseason work — he dropped weight — has allowed him to play all over the ice and eat massive minutes. He leads the NHL with 26:05 per night, nearly half the game. Norris Trophy candidate?

Kent Johnson, LW/RW: 6 games, 4-5-9, minus-1

None of the Blue Jackets' young talents has "popped" so far this season quite like Johnson, whose elusiveness and playmaking ability have been transformative. Evason has mentioned how Johnson has the singular ability to lift the entire lineup. There's star potential here.

Sean Monahan, C: 20 games, 7-13-20, plus-8

It's really hard to overstate how much of a stabilizing force Monahan has been, both on the ice and in the dressing room. He's anchored a highly effective and dangerous No. 1 line, and when's the last time you could say that in Columbus? He's also winning 51.5 percent of his faceoffs and playing more than 18 minutes a night.

A

Kirill Marchenko, RW: 20 games, 8-12-20 plus-9

Nobody's benefitted more from Monahan's arrival than Marchenko, but he deserves credit for improving his own game, too. Marchenko, still only 24, is not a power forward, per se, but he has started throwing his body into checks more. He's on pace for the 30-goal season that many scouts have predicted.

MARCHY'S LAST MINUTE EQUALIZER!!!!@FanaticsBook | #CBJ pic.twitter.com/l8jNbi2pJi

— Colu❌bus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) November 24, 2024

Mathieu Olivier, RW: 20 games, 6-3-9, minus-4

There's no better story in Columbus than Olivier's surprising goal-scoring, his emergence as a dressing-room leader and his climb higher in the lineup. He's already one of the NHL's top fighters. He's on his way to being a top power forward, too.

B-plus

Yegor Chinakhov, LW/RW: 20 games, 6-7-13, plus-1

Chinakhov has cooled after a hot start to the season, but this is the first season he's been consistently noticeable. The production will follow if that continues. There are nights when Chinakhov, 23, looks like one of the fastest skaters in the league, but then games where he doesn't quite have the burst. The future looks very bright.

Ivan Provorov, D: 20 games, 1-5-6, plus-3

With Denton Mateychuk percolating in the minors, it's widely assumed that Provorov will be on the move at the NHL trade deadline. At this rate, he'll fetch a first-round pick. Provorov has cut way down on turnovers, and seems to be much more consistent in his second season in Columbus.

Dante Fabbro, D: 6 games, 2-2-4, plus-6

From the waiver wire to an NHL top pair … that's how Fabbro's life has changed in the last few weeks. He played with Roman Josi in Nashville, and he's been playing with Werenski since joining Columbus. That's a fortuitous landing, to be sure, but Fabbro is able to keep up.

B

Cole Sillinger, C: 20 games, 3-9-12, minus-6

Already in his fourth season, Sillinger has emerged as one of the Blue Jackets' young leaders. He's played all over the lineup without complaint, and we're willing to grade his plus-minus rating on a curve because he often draws the toughest matchups.

Justin Danforth, C/RW: 17 games, 3-5-8, minus-7

Danforth missed the first three games of the season following offseason wrist surgery, but he's been a lineup fixture since being cleared. Evason has used him as a checking-line center, a fourth-line winger and a penalty-killer, thanks in part to his faceoff ability (53.5 percent).

Dmitri Voronkov, LW/RW: 11 games, 5-2-7, even

Voronkov is noticeably quicker — swift enough to hang on the top line — after dropping significant weight in the offseason. You don't expect a player with his size and frame to have such soft hands, but Voronkov is surprising that way. One complaint: he doesn't play nasty enough.

Elvis Merzlikins, G: 12 games, 6-5-1, .894, 3.08

It's been a few years since Merzlikins has been this high on a report card, but he deserves it. The save percentage is pretty decent considering the high-danger chances he faces. He's also taken big steps in his efforts to be less impulsive and self-destructive. The progress is clear.

Elvis Merzlikins with the acrobatic stop! 🛑 pic.twitter.com/GaRJ9TXsOC

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) November 24, 2024

Sean Kuraly, C: 20 games, 2-3-5, plus-4

Under Evason, Kuraly is playing significantly less (10:50 per game) than in his first three seasons in Columbus. But the anchor of the fourth line never takes off a shift. He's found quick chemistry with Zach Aston-Reese. A fourth line of all "plus" players is a real benefit.

Zach Aston-Reese, LW: 19 games, 4-3-7, plus-1

It's always been a mystery why Aston-Reese has bounced around so much in recent seasons. He's a solid fourth-line player, and a guy who can move up in the lineup as needed. The Jackets have an impact fourth-line for the first time in years.

Kevin Labanc, LW/RW: 15 games, 1-9-10, plus-7

This is a weird one. Labanc, a late free-agent signing at the end of training camp, has been a healthy scratch in one-fourth of the Jackets' games, which is typically a demerit. But he's been quite productive despite bouncing all over the lineup.

C-plus

Adam Fantilli, C: 20 games, 3-6-9, minus-5

We should probably be grading on a curve with Fantilli, because he's playing second-line center in the NHL at 20 years old. That's rare. The fact is, Fantilli would probably grade himself lower than this. Coaches have stressed improved defensive-zone play for Fantilli. The offense will come.

Jake Christiansen, D: 20 games, 0-5-5, minus-3

Christiansen earned a lineup spot with a strong performance in training camp and in the preseason. He deserves credit for sticking it out and working to get better — he spent most of the last three seasons in the AHL — but Evason's system has helped the mobile Christiansen immensely.

C

Damon Severson, D: 20 games, 4-5-9, plus-4

On a roster full of young players, Severson, surprisingly, has been one of the most inconsistent players over the first six weeks of the season. One game, he looks like a steady hand who can join the play and chip in offensively. The next night, he's making frustrating turnovers.

James van Riemsdyk, LW: 14 games, 3-2-5, minus-1

The signing of van Riemsdyk has gone just as expected. GM Don Waddell was intrigued by the veteran's leadership and net-front ability, and he's provided plenty of both. But van Riemsdyk's skating is an issue, which is why he's been in and out of the lineup.

Jack Johnson, D: 15 games, 0-1-1, minus-4

Very similar to the van Riemsdyk signing, but Johnson has played more than some expected due to injuries and struggles on the right side of the lineup. Johnson is perfectly suited for a third-pair role. He could be on the move again later this season to a contender.

Mikael Pyyhtiä, LW/RW: 17 games, 1-0-1, minus-6

Pyyhtiä may never get a better chance to grab an NHL opportunity than he did at the start of this season, when injuries left a hole in the Blue Jackets' top six. Pyyhtiä had a strong training camp to get the nod, but it was a little rich for him. He's currently playing for AHL Cleveland.

D

Jordan Harris, D: 11 games, 0-0-0, minus-3

The Blue Jackets thought they were getting a puck-moving defenseman who could click in Evason's system, but that hasn't yet happened. Harris has had almost no impact offensively. He's still looking for his first points of the season and he's generated only six shots on goal.

David Jiricek, D: 6 games, 0-1-1, minus-2

Jiricek should have been sent to AHL Cleveland weeks ago rather than sitting as a healthy scratch for most of the NHL season. But on the rare occasion he played, Jiricek never gave coaches a reason to keep him in the lineup or play him big minutes. Trade talks are brewing.

Daniil Tarasov, G: 8 games, 3-4-1, .861, 4.04

Tarasov's start to the season was decent, with three wins in his first four outings and an early challenge to Merzlikins as the club's No. 1 goalie. But it fizzled after that, and Tarasov's workload has dwindled, too. He has an .833 save percentage since an Oct. 22 win over Toronto.

BlueJackets.com / Small Business of the Month: Third Space Builders

By Garrison McDaniel- November 27, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets are excited to partner with First Merchants Bank to recognize small businesses in our community. Each month throughout the season, one company will be featured as the Small Business of the Month presented by First Merchants Bank. November's Small Business of the Month is Third Space Builders.

Founded in 2012, Third Space Builders is a company started by a father and son with a vision for, according to its website, "a place, different than work and normal home environments that encourages laughter, relaxation, and spirited conversation with the friends and family that are cherished the most."

Taylor McLaren, a design consultant for Third Space Builders, said she loves working in a small business. The reason is the relationships she has with her coworkers, as they have all become a part of the family.

"It really is a family; it's family run, family operated. We're small, so it's nice," McLaren said. "I probably will be with (the company) for the rest of my life. I love it. Everything's a team decision. … You feel like you're kind of a part of the family."

They make sure to put an emphasis on relationships to stand out against competitors who may have a bigger operation.

"We try to give the best customer support," she said. "We try to really give the quality that a client would expect from a company."

The company specializes in anything from additions to remodeling, outdoor living, basements, kitchens and everything in between.

"We do everything from designing the process," McLaren said. "So we'll do reading renderings, we'll do layouts, plans, all the permitting process and all the way up to construction, and finish the job out. My favorite part is definitely designing, but I also like building relationships with the clients."

Her favorite part of designing is putting the pieces together to make sure clients' dreams come to life.

"I love taking their inspiration pictures and putting it to real life and kind of developing the whole design plan," Taylor said. "It's so fun to try to figure out what the client is going to like."

Located in Plain City, Third Space Builders was founded more than a decade ago by Chris and Richard Graham.

"The owner of our company treats me like I'm his daughter," McLaren said. "He is the most incredible boss I could ever work for. I love it."

1st Ohio Battery / The Latest On David Jiricek: Here's A Tuesday Update On The Evolving Saga With The Blue Jackets' Young Defenseman

By Ed Francis- November 27, 2024

It's a whirlwind of speculation, these David Jiricek rumors.

Less than a week after being loaned to the AHL's Cleveland Monsters, rumors have intensified on what seems like a daily basis surrounding a potential trade of Jiricek by the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Here's the latest buzz surrounding the 2022 sixth overall pick:

- NHL insider Frank Seravalli reported early Tuesday afternoon on his Daily Faceoff podcast that he believes it's a matter of when, and not if, the Blue Jackets move Jiricek — and that a move is close.

  "Don Waddell has 5 to 6 concrete offers on the table that he's evaluating," said Seravalli, adding that his belief is the Blue Jackets are looking for "a young, top-end pick or prospect or potentially a package of players that the Columbus Blue Jackets and their fanbase can get excited about."

- Seravalli reported that there are "a number of teams that have wanted to get in the mix that, frankly, either haven't received a call back or have been politely told 'hey, we don't think is a fit. We don't see you having the pieces that we're looking for.'" He lists the Minnesota Wild, Philadelphia Flyers, and Pittsburgh Penguins as the three front-runners, but did throw in the San Jose Sharks and Buffalo Sabres as possibilities as well.

- Meanwhile, Chris Johnston of TSN and The Athletic seemed to paint a slightly less enthusiastic picture for the Blue Jackets. "Columbus is trying to sort through where the best offers are coming from and initially focus on trying to get another prospect like him sort of type of deal, but I think Columbus is shifting into draft pick packages" said Johnston on his Insider Trading podcast.

  Johnston did not confirm that Jiricek has requested a trade, but did say that Jiricek is "a player that wants a fresh start." He added that the Blue Jackets are "committed to giving it to him and we'll see if they can complete a deal here in the near future."

- Looking for a name? How about Rutger McGroarty? Rob Rossi, who covers the Penguins for The Athletic, wrote Tuesday morning that Pittsburgh general manager Kyle Dubas "simply loves" what Jiricek brings to the table as a young, highly-touted, right-shot defenseman.

We know that Dubas was in Cleveland this weekend to watch Jiricek, and Rossi reports that "no Penguins prospect is off limits as part of the package." That includes McGroarty, who the Penguins acquired in August for another top prospect, Brayden Yager, in a deal with the Winnipeg Jets. McGroarty, like Jiricek, as unhappy with his team and sought a fresh start elsewhere.

We also know, from a check of the NHL standings, that the Penguins are probably not a playoff team this year or anytime soon. They are last in the Metro division and have the second-worst record in the Eastern Conference, with a 7-12-4 mark. Their best players are well past their prime, their attendance is down more than it is for any other team in the NHL, and the proverbial wheels are falling off.

Meanwhile, McGroarty — who briefly started the season in Pittsburgh — has gotten off to a slow start

with their AHL affiliate, the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins. He has one goal and three assists in 12 points.

If Dubas loves Jiricek as much as Rossi reports, could McGroarty be dealt for the second time in three months? He was selected eight picks after Jiricek in 2022 (and just two picks after Denton Mateychuk), and would immediately jump to near the front of the line when it comes to forward prospects for a Blue Jackets team that is already solid in that department.

McGroarty would bring in another U of M guy into the fold. In the 2022-23 season, he was teammates with Adam Fantilli and Gavin Brindley.

For the Blue Jackets not to trade Jiricek at this point seems nearly out of the picture, but was on the ice for the Monsters in their Tuesday morning practice.

Stay tuned.

1st Ohio Battery / 20 Points In 20 Games: A Point-Per-Game Player, Sean Monahan Has Been A Critical CBJ Piece

By Will Chase- November 27, 2024

How about off-season acquisition Sean Monahan?

When president and general manager Don Waddell signed Monahan over the summer, he sought strength down the middle in a player who could handle face-offs, play in the top six, and score goals.

"He said Columbus has been a destination for his all along," Waddell said after signing Monahan.

Enter the 30-year-old from Brampton, Ontario.

Monahan, a point-per-game player for Columbus as we approach Thanksgiving, is tied for the team lead with 20 points, along with Kirill Marchenko and Zach Werenski. Monahan is second on the club with seven goals and second with 13 assists.

Monahan also leads the team with three power-play goals and has a face-off percentage of 51.5%.

The Athletic's Aaron Portzline released his Blue Jackets report card today, grading the players at this point in the season.

Not surprisingly, Monahan gets an A+.

It's really hard to overstate how much of a stabilizing force Monahan has been, both on the ice and in the dressing room. He's anchored a highly effective and dangerous No. 1 line, and when's the last time you could say that in Columbus? He's also winning 51.5 percent of his faceoffs and playing more than 18 minutes a night.

The Blue Jackets' first-line combination of Monahan, Marchenko, and Dmitri Voronkov has resulted in a dangerous combination for the Blue Jackets, and for opponents to contend with.

Voronkov-Monahan-Marchenko at 5v5 (per NaturalStatTrick.com)				
Corsi For/Against	Shots For/Against	Scoring Chances For/Against	High Danger Chances For/Against	Goals For/Against
73/53	39/22	39/22	21/10	7-1

"It's a lot of fun," Monahan said after Saturday's win. "Got a good group. Fun to be around. Fun to come to the rink. When you're winning games, it makes it even better."

Alongside Kent Johnson, Monahan helped set up Marchenko's game-tying goal in the waning minutes of Saturday's game against the Carolina Hurricanes before the Jackets came away with the shootout win and two points.

Monahan is riding a three-game point streak (one goal, five assists) into Wednesday's Thanksgiving Eve matchup with the Montreal Canadiens. Puck drop is set for 7:30 p.m. ET.

He'll also see another former team when the Blue Jackets battle the Calgary Flames on Friday at 3:00 p.m. ET.

[The Athletic / How Brady Martin's farm upbringing helped him become a top 2025 NHL Draft prospect](#)

By Scott Wheeler- November 27, 2024

Not far from the small Ontario town of Elmira, a farm — or farms, plural — sprawls out across the rural fields.

It all belongs to the Martin family, grown over a couple of generations. As Sheryl Martin explained on a recent phone call, they have "a few" dairy farms, they raise and sell beef, they crop a few thousand acres, and they "have some chickens, too."

"Well, a lot of chickens, I guess," she said, correcting herself.

A big part of the Martin family farms has always been the children. Sheryl and Terry Martin have three boys (eldest, Joey, middle son Brady, and Jordan) and one daughter (youngest Rylee) who've grown up working the stalls, and the fields, and choring. During the COVID-19 pandemic, her boys bought their own cows, raised them, and started their own line of beef themselves, a project that has taken on a life of its own over the last four years.

"COVID hit and we were all stuck at home, so I went and bought some cows and started raising them up myself and made money when I wasn't allowed to do anything," Brady said.

In June, Brady is expected to be a first-round pick in the 2025 NHL Draft.

"His hockey has looked different than most kids' hockey," Sheryl said.

Growing up, any "extras" that the boys wanted to do — training, skills, skating, anything outside of games and practices — they had to figure out on the farm.

They shot pucks in the basement. They rollerbladed in the barn. They built an outdoor rink themselves. They hung a rope from a tree and climbed it over, and over, and over again. They worked out by … working.

"We had to be very creative on the things that we did here because we weren't able to drive into town for this and that," Sheryl said. "Time just doesn't allow it."

After finishing his 16-year-old rookie season in the OHL with the Soo Greyhounds, last summer was Brady's first of proper training and even then he didn't go into the city for it. Instead, with the guidance of strength and conditioning coach Matt Nichol, they built a gym in the basement.

On one of Nichol's visits to the farm to help him get set up, he told stories about a hill Mats Sundin would run up and down at his home in Sweden, and showed him pictures of a time he took the Maple Leafs' prospects to a farm for a day of work. So Sheryl pulled out the backhoe and they built him a hill on the farm to the incline that Nichol recommended.

Brady's offseason consisted of being in the barn at 6 a.m. for his chores and whatever else came up overnight — from getting malfunctioning machines back working to tending to sick cattle — and then workouts in the basement with his brother going through programs Nichol prepared for them.

He has skated with local skills coach Tyler Ertel, whose home is a nine-minute drive from the Martin farm, since he was 9 or 10, renting ice in nearby New Hamburg "and other rural towns" wherever they can find it. He has surrounded himself with people who are from where he's from and get it. He chose his agent, Cam Stewart of KO Sports, late — and because Stewart was from Elmira, his mom's house was

20 minutes from the Martin farm, and Ertel recommended him. After having a bad experience trying traditional training in a gym and getting hurt, he first began working with Nichol on some rehab — and because Nichol was from the area and Cam recommended him.

Ertel also coached him in his minor midget year with the AAA Waterloo Wolves and then as an assistant in his first season in Sault Ste. Marie.

The Greyhounds selected Martin, a center, with the third pick in the 2023 OHL Priority Selection after "he basically took us to the OHL Cup," Ertel said.

"He was lights out. I know he was in talks for first overall strictly because of that," Ertel said. "And all of this load management talk and all of these things nowadays, he's just not that kid, he's actually the opposite. The more he rests, the worse he is. He's an absolute workhorse. And he doesn't seem like a big kid but he's an absolute beast."

In one of their games on the way to that OHL Cup, Martin put a full morning of work in in the barn and then drove into the city and scored a hat trick against the No. 1 team in the province.

"That's just Marty's way of life," Ertel said. "He's not into superficial things, and as cliche as it sounds he's just a typical farm boy: he likes people, he likes hard work, he thinks it's a good quality, and we all know as we age that it's actually a great quality but for him to have that right now at 17 years old is special. He's just got this aura about him. For me, he's got that it factor. And he knows who he is."

You have to see the farm to believe it, according to Ertel.

"It's absolutely mind-blowing to see what he does out there," Ertel said, laughing.

Last season, when the Greyhounds played the Guelph Storm in the OHL playoffs, Sheryl and Terry offered to pick Brady and his teammates up from their hotel and make the 25-minute drive to the farm so that they could see it for themselves.

Only a few took them up on the tour but stories of the visit spread and his teammates regretted not going. This year, on a day off between games in Guelph and Sarnia, Sheryl and Terry smoked 45 pounds of beef and the whole team visited, holding hens and visiting with the cows.

"It's a different lifestyle and it's uncommon to most people but it was a really great experience for Brady to have his teammates in so they can actually see and visualize what he has been talking about. Because it's a big deal to him," Sheryl said. "Most of the boys had never, ever been on a farm before and had no idea the function of a farm. And he'd kind of taken a little bit of a jabbing for, 'Oh, you're a farmer, what does that even mean?' And so it was fantastic for the boys on his team to see him in his element."

Greyhounds head coach John Dean said Brady "almost matured like right in front of my eyes" on that visit.

"You got to the farm and you could tell he felt more comfortable there, that that's his home and suddenly you could just see it, he was protective of things and taking care of little things and he just went into his natural rhythm of picking stuff up off of the ground and moving gates and he wasn't doing it to impress anybody it was just 'This is what I do,'" Dean said.

The Greyhounds players "were completely wide-eyed," according to Dean. Greyhounds general manager Kyle Raftis admitted he was, too.

"For our guys, it was amazing to see another way of life and how it works," Dean said. "They didn't understand what it meant to be on the Martin farm. I think they just thought that Marty was a guy who lived in a corn field and then they quickly realized that Marty is responsible for a lot of things at that farm day-in, day-out and every morning."

When Raftis scouted Brady in his OHL draft year, he was drawn to his ability to take games over through his physicality, work ethic and intangibles.

He was sold, though, after meeting with him before the draft, coming away from the introduction thinking, "This is the guy I want, these are the guys that you win with."

"(He's) a bit of a throwback. Years ago, there were a ton of guys who'd come off the farm and the work ethic, the responsibility that he has, he's up and ready to work and ready to go. It doesn't matter how you grow up but it's how those things are instilled in you and it's definitely apparent with (Brady)," Raftis said. "There's a lot of good players but it's one thing to build a list and it's another thing of 'Who do you want in your program?' and I think it's always the second part. You know what that guy's going to bring night in and night out. (And) he's got a lot of confidence, and not in a cocky way. And I think the guys kind of feed off of it actually."

When he first arrived in the Soo, Dean said he had a bit of a feeling out process with Brady. On the ice, things came naturally to him but he was raw and there was a lot of correcting and coaching. (Off of it, he actually asked a family friend with a farm in the Soo if it would be OK if he came by and did some chores on off days.)

Still, though he was injured in his first game as a Greyhound and didn't come back until after under-17, Brady was a leader with the Greyhounds even as a rookie last season.

Over time, Brady eventually became both a sponge with Dean as well, and extremely difficult to get off the ice, constantly asking "Is there a 3 p.m. skills session today?" and "Can I stay on longer, coach?"

Now Dean says they have "this incredible relationship where we feed off of each other," which includes often doing video together.

"His work ethic is extremely high, his care factor is extremely high, and those are two things which he naturally comes by from his farm upbringing," Dean said. "And he wants more and more I think because he's seeing exponential growth."

That exponential growth has seen Martin turn from a hard-working, raw talent into a mature player that Dean now views as "a power forward with high-end skill."

"This guy's got so many tools. He can cut you with anything. He can cut you with his shot, with his skill, with his physicality, he can win a game by being a bruiser or he can win a game by dancing your entire team. I think that's what makes him so special is he is multi-faceted and I think he can impact a game in a number of ways where I think some of his counterparts might not have that asset," Dean said. "And on his really special nights, he's doing it all. He feels very comfortable going to the next tool as opposed to trying to create something that's not there. (And) pound for pound (NHL Central scouting lists Brady at 6-feet and 178 pounds), when he hits guys, the way he's hard on pucks, that's something that he has come by completely naturally with his work on the farm and just naturally building his body up that way."

Raftis believes there's still "so much untapped potential" in front of him as well, arguing that his strengths — the work ethic, the will — are the ones you can't teach.

He has already tapped into some of that potential this season, playing big minutes for the Greyhounds in all situations, with 23 points in 23 games.

Brady is also one of the players on the Greyhounds who has the best self-assessment. When Raftis or Dean ask him how he played, he's normally bang on — something they say other young players struggle with.

Because of how late he was to traditional training, Raftis thinks even things like some of the athletic movements other players have worked on from an early age are still coming for Brady, too.

That's where Nichol's help comes in.

Nichol believes he can "accomplish the same goals that we would normally do at a gym with barbells, and dumbbells and machines" and that "he's got huge runway still." But he also believes that to find that next level "some of that can be found now for him in the gym."

"They were worried: 'Is he going to be able to still be at home and be on the farm and accomplish his goals?' I made sure that they knew that that was absolutely possible. And then it was a matter of saying, 'OK, how can we make it fit into his life?'" Nichol said. "The narrative on him was that he'd never worked out and I think he'd probably worked out more than most kids his age, just not in a gym."

For Brady, it'll be about marrying the two moving forward.

"There's a really special quality about Brady and a lot of it has to do with his upbringing and his family life and life on the farm. I think that it's a really cool story, but I think that it's more than just a really cool story — I think there's a lot of intangible benefits to the lifestyle that he leads. So I didn't want to lose that and I didn't want to throw the baby out with the bath water," Nichol said. "The idea was: 'How do we slowly start to introduce some of the more traditional types of training but don't lose all of the fantastic benefits that he has gotten from this incredible lifestyle that he lives on the farm that is spilling over into his hockey game.'"

Nichol, Raftis and Dean all believe he'll find the right balance.

Ertel knows it and believes Brady's "going to have a massive impact on some NHL team" as a top-six center who could start his career lower in a lineup but will play his way up.

He talks about an NHL shot "right now," IQ that's off the charts, and an interior, physical game that puts players into the boards like Tom Wilson.

"He's got a fire in him and once it goes I mean it, buckle up because it is something to behold," Ertel said.

Like Ertel, Dean also talks about a special kid.

"The kid's a f—ing great kid, like a really great kid," Dean said.

That kid says he has no plans to stop chipping in at the farm moving forward, either, though he admits next summer will be busier than most — what with the NHL Draft and rookie camps.

The farm will always be in his game, too.

"I think that's why I play like I do," Brady said. "My dad always told me hard work is the biggest thing and if you're working hard good things will come. I think the biggest part of my game is my engine and my work ethic."

And when it's all said and done, Nichol hopes that he'll show other kids they can chase their hockey dreams a little differently.

"I feel like guys like me are partly to blame for this idea that you've got to be doing the latest and greatest cutting edge training or whatever and I think that so many guys for years and years and years have gotten strong and fit without all of this fancy stuff so it's really nice to see a kid like that that can inspire some of those kids," Nichol finished.

The Athletic / NHL prospects I was wrong about, 2024 edition: Corey Pronman looks back

By Corey Pronman- November 27, 2024

Projecting what teenage hockey players will ultimately be when they are 24 years old is a difficult exercise with a high inherent error rate that even the best evaluators will encounter. Everyone makes mistakes, and plenty of them. But the difficult nature of the job doesn't excuse the errors or mean we can't learn from them. That's why I write this article every season. I use it to reflect on my misses and determine if there was anything I could have seen at the time to avoid doing it again.

Alex Vlasic, LHD, Chicago Blackhawks

I was worried about Vlasic's hockey sense and whether he would have any offense at higher levels. You can be a good NHL defenseman without offense, but you need to be able to make a pass at least. Vlasic's tools were always obvious. He's huge and quite mobile for his size and he would tease you with flashes of skill, especially during his U.S. NTDP days. I thought he was an NHL player at the time; it was his college career that worried me. I thought he looked average in Hockey East and lowered his projection. I don't think that assessment was off. He wasn't amazing in school, but the tools still looked excellent and I shouldn't have moved the needle so drastically from a guy I projected as a No. 4-6 NHL D to someone who wouldn't play.

Brock Faber, RHD, Minnesota Wild

Faber as an amateur always stood out due to his skating and competitiveness. There was no doubt he was an excellent defender who was a clear NHL-level skater. He didn't show much offense with the U.S. NTDP or in college, though. He wasn't a regular power-play type at lower levels, which is why it was surprising when he turned into a PP1 type in the NHL. I don't think even his biggest backers would say they realistically expected a 47-point rookie season at the top level, but they would argue his hockey sense was good enough for him to be a very good two-way player. The amount of plays he's shown he can make has been surprising to an extent, but some scouts would argue that when you're that good a skater, all you need is decent hockey sense and skill to have a lot of NHL success. I focused too much on the lack of offense in Faber's game and looked past all the clear NHL qualities in his play, including the fact that he did show decent enough puck-moving. The NTDP is a very talented team and only one defenseman can get the power-play time, which makes it difficult when evaluating kids such as Vlasic and Faber.

Alexander Holtz, Jacob Perreault, Brendan Brisson

I grouped these three players together because their skill sets and play styles are similar. They are highly skilled wingers who can rifle a puck, but there were questions on how their games were going to translate to the NHL due to so-so footspeed and compete. All three of these players — Holtz in particular, who went in the top 10 — were excellent junior players full of highlight reels. I thought all three of them would have legitimate NHL careers. Holtz is up in the NHL and Brisson has gotten games, but it's fair to say all three players' development hasn't gone as planned. That's the risk when your whole bet is based on skill and not a true athletic profile reminiscent of most NHL players or a very high compete level. If you are going to bet on skill, you better be sure the skill isn't just very good but special, and I would argue these players' pure talent doesn't rise to that level.

Corson Ceulemans, RHD, Columbus Blue Jackets

I was very high on Ceulemans going into his draft year, projecting him as a top-four NHL defenseman. I saw a tall, right-shot defenseman who skated well, had good skill and even played with some bite. He could be a bit wild at times, but I thought he showed he could make enough plays and had a lot of NHL tools. He still went in the first round, and it was a tough time to evaluate players due to the limited COVID-19 season, but numerous NHL scouts said "buyer beware on his hockey sense." That ended up being a major issue at the college level where he fought the puck at times, wasn't as crisp a defender as I thought he could be and was a middling player at that level. He could ultimately end up playing in the league, but he's clearly not the top prospect I had him rated as and I completely misevaluated his sense issues that at least some scouts did see.

Ryker Evans, LHD, Seattle Kraken

I was stunned when Seattle took Ryker Evans No. 35 in 2021. He was a slightly undersized re-entry defenseman who played hard and skated well and pointed in the shortened COVID WHL bubble season, but I didn't view him as a true puck-mover in the NHL. I underrated exactly how much offense was in Evans' game, as he went on to be a great AHL player shortly after and is now an important part of Seattle's offense several years since the draft. His defending is good enough at his size due to his feet and motor. I don't know if he's more than a No. 4/5 D on a good team, but he's a legit NHL player who can play both ways, and I didn't think he was more than a camp invite type going into his second NHL draft. I just completely whiffed on this one and didn't do the research that I should have in his draft season.

Connor McMichael, C, Washington Capitals

There's merit to doing this type of article, as I think it benefits my process and can inform readers, too. But there is an uncertainty around when to make the call to speak. How long do you wait to determine if a projection was wrong? Is it two years, four years, 10 years? Player development can fluctuate over the seasons and make it difficult.

Why do I mention this? Because I'm doing something today I absolutely, positively dread every time I write this article: mentioning a player for the second time. In 2022, I wrote up McMichael as a player I was too high on. Now, in 2024, I'm walking that back.

My evaluations of McMichael have fluctuated wildly. I went from a bottom-six forward in his draft season in 2019 to a potential top-line forward a year or two later. Then, in '22 after he struggled a bit in the NHL, was sent back to the AHL and wasn't lighting it up there, I saw a potential middle-six forward. A broken clock must be right at some point. I'm not going to sit here and tell you how wrong I was, because it's unclear which prediction was the wrong one!

McMichael has been excellent this season as a leading part of a surprising Washington team. My concern in junior was his skating (as it was for some NHL scouts I talked to). Whether the feet improved or I misevaluated it, his skating hasn't been an issue this season. He's playing fast enough to go with his hardworking style, high skill level and ability to score. Whatever the projection is for McMichael, he's a very good player. I arguably shouldn't have rushed to judgment on a then-21-year-old and I probably need to be more cautious before I mention a player in a piece like this in general.

ESPN / Grades for all 32 NHL teams at the quarter mark of 2024-25

By Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton- November 27, 2024

Reactions

With a little more than 25% of the 2024-25 NHL season complete (by total games) -- and all but one team, the Vancouver Canucks, at or beyond the 20-game threshold -- it's time to take a snapshot of each team's progress.

There have been some positive surprises -- such as the Winnipeg Jets, Minnesota Wild and Washington Capitals -- and some not-so-positive shocks too, like the sluggish start for the Nashville Predators, Boston Bruins and St. Louis Blues, the latter two of whom made coaching changes within the past week.

Which teams have earned A's for their play? Who is falling behind? Read on for the report cards for all 32 teams.

Note: Teams are arrayed alphabetically by letter grade. Ryan S. Clark graded the Pacific and Central Division teams, while Kristen Shilton graded the Metropolitan and Atlantic Division teams. Stats are through the games of Nov. 24. Preseason over/unders are courtesy of ESPN BET.

A grades

Carolina Hurricanes

Preseason over/under: 100.5

Current points pace: 121.0

What's gone right? Well, how much time do you have? Carolina ranks in the top 10 of nearly every statistical category. There were preseason concerns (reflecting in their projected points pace) that the Hurricanes were bound to take a step back with their aging blue line and injury-plagued goaltenders. Carolina has proved its critics wrong through powerhouse performances from Martin Necas (31 points in 19 games), Andrei Svechnikov and Sebastian Aho (both averaging a point per game), excellent defensive play (Carolina is fourth in goals against, first in shots against and shots on net), strong special teams (with a seventh-ranked power play and eighth-best penalty kill), plus a coming-of-age goalie in Pyotr Kochetkov. Oh, and offseason signee Jack Roslovic? He's having a career-best start, too.

What's gone wrong? One prediction that has unfortunately materialized for Carolina is another long-term injury to Frederik Andersen. This time, it's knee surgery. Andersen has missed significant time the past two seasons with a lower-body issue, and then blood clotting problems. Carolina is likely mulling whether a trade must be made to shore up its goaltending given the spring could be a long one. The Hurricanes have also been prone to turnovers at times, and that's come back to hurt them. All in all, though, the Hurricanes are tough to nitpick. They've been consistently good.

Grade: A+. It's only a quarter way through the season, but still, Carolina hasn't lost consecutive games (seriously). Even when the Hurricanes stumble, there's an immediate positive response. It speaks to Carolina's maturity that it can remain focused and dialed in regardless of the situation. And it's difficult to be so strong offensively and defensively; there truly isn't one area where Carolina feels lacking. If the Hurricanes can stay relatively healthy, it's hard not to see them pushing to represent the Eastern Conference in the Stanley Cup Final.

Minnesota Wild

Preseason over/under: 93.5

Current points pace: 117.1

What's gone right? They're continuing to show progress under John Hynes. It's been nearly a year since the Wild hired Hynes to take over on Nov. 27, 2023. Since then, the Wild have continued to build upon the progress Hynes established, with their defensive structure paying dividends. The Wild are in the top 10 in fewest shots allowed per 60, fewest scoring chances allowed per 60, and have allowed the fewest high-danger chances per 60. And if that's not enough, they're in the top 10 in goals per 60 and goals per game.

What's gone wrong? Yakov Trenin's start to the season. An argument could be made for a penalty kill that went from being in the bottom three to still being in the bottom 10. But Trenin's lack of production gives him the edge. Managing cap space has arguably been Bill Guerin's strongest trait as a GM because of the $14.743 million combined in buyouts for Zach Parise and Ryan Suter. It's why the decision to sign Trenin to a four-year deal worth $3.5 million annually drew attention. So far the return on that investment has been lacking, with Trenin sitting on zero goals in his first 20 games after hitting double figures in each of the past three seasons.

Grade: A+. Kirill Kaprizov is eating souls in a manner that could have him in contention for the Hart Trophy. A defensive structure that suppresses high shot totals and scoring chances is working in tandem with a pair of goalies that have a top five team save percentage. And above all? They're scoring goals and can still get even more from certain parts of their supporting cast. Every season, there's a team that went from the playoff wilderness to being a rather dangerous hunter. It's possible this season's version of that is the Wild.

Washington Capitals

Preseason over/under: 89.5

Current points pace: 113.2

What's gone right? Washington might be the darlings of this NHL season. The Capitals certainly weren't pegged to be one of the top Metropolitan clubs, or even a bona fide playoff contender. But Washington isn't sneaking around this season (like it did into the playoffs last year). The Capitals are strong all around. The offseason addition of Logan Thompson was brilliant (he's 8-1-1, with a .914 save percentage and 2.58 goals-against average), and Washington has been strong defensively in front of him (allowing fewer than 30 shots on net per game).

It's the Capitals' offense that's especially productive and has made them the league's highest-scoring club (averaging 4.05 goals per game). Dylan Strome is on fire (with 28 points in 20 games), Alex Ovechkin is nipping at Wayne Gretzky's heels (with 15 goals in 18 games prior to his recent injury), and Connor McMichael has been superb with 13 goals in 20 games.

What's gone wrong? The Ovechkin injury was a true disappointment. It's rare that Washington's leader ever goes down with something like this fractured fibula, and it did put a stop to what was an undeniably entertaining first few weeks of him chasing Gretzky's goals record. Washington has room to improve on special teams (their 20th-ranked power play is at just 17%) although the fifth-ranked penalty kill is pulling its weight. The Capitals also rank too high in losses when scoring first; holding onto leads and closing teams out will be a continued priority for Spencer Carbery's charges.

Grade: A+. Washington is dynamic without sacrificing defensively. That's basically the dream. The Capitals have established a strong foothold in the Eastern Conference with their depth, and a clear vision from the top down on how they need to play to have that constant success. Even when Washington is off

-- like in recent back-to-back losses to Colorado and New Jersey -- they're not alarming defeats (both were by a single goal). The Capitals appear to learn from their mistakes and get stronger because of them. If that holds -- and Ovechkin can return to his prior form quickly post-injury -- it could be a year to remember in Washington.

Winnipeg Jets

Preseason over/under: 95.5

Current points pace: 134.2

What's gone right? Practically everything under the sun. The Jets are second in the NHL in goals per game, just percentage points behind Washington. They're second in shooting percentage with 13.4 percent success rate. They're allowing the third-fewest goals per game. Their power play is scoring at a rate of 33.9% while their ability to score is so balanced that they already have 11 players with more than 10 points. They're giving Connor Hellebuyck a level of offensive production that's only made life easier for the two-time reigning Vezina Trophy winner.

What's gone wrong? Not much. But if there has to be an answer, it's their penalty kill, but even that comes with caveats. The Jets have a league-average PK that has a 77.9% success rate. While it's one of the few areas in which the Jets are not among the league leaders, it hasn't been a problem in a way that has cost them multiple losses.

Grade: A+. Right now, there are three questions facing the Jets. Is this the best team in the NHL? How long can they sustain this start? And the third and perhaps most important: Can they translate their early-season success into the postseason and advancing out of the first round? The Jets have used the past several seasons to show that they are a perennial playoff team. Showing that they are one of the teams in the West that can challenge for a Stanley Cup, however, has been the problem. Is this the year that changes?

Florida Panthers

Preseason over/under: 102.5

Current points pace: 93.2

What's gone right? Florida looks primed to run it back -- right into a third consecutive Stanley Cup Final appearance. Bold? Maybe. But the Panthers could do it. Florida is cruising along with a top-five offense (3.58 goals per game), a top-10 power play (23.7%) and penalty kill (82.5%), and they're a relatively tight group defensively (allowing just 28 shots on goal per game). Sam Reinhart (with 29 points in 19 games) is proving last season's breakout was no fluke, Sam Bennett is a point-per-game player, and the Panthers' depth scoring remains enviable. Coach Paul Maurice has Florida on track again to be a balanced, bullish contender.

What's gone wrong? The Panthers' major faults have come on the goaltending and defensive side. Sergei Bobrovsky's numbers are mediocre by his standards (.893 SV%, 2.98 GAA), and Florida is 12th in goals against (3.26 per game). The club lost Brandon Montour in free agency, and that's a large hole to fill on the blue line. Florida is also one of the most heavily penalized teams in the league, potentially alluding to a lack of discipline that could be harmful in key moments going forward.

Grade: A. Florida could easily get a pass on starting slow after consecutive short summers. And yet the Panthers are skating close to the high expectations that come with being reigning league champions. It's a testament to how Florida has operated in recent years -- GM Bill Zito has prioritized internal signings (like with Reinhart) and maintaining that consistency appears to be paying off. The Panthers have real

chemistry and aren't just star-driven. There's enough talent to feel secure that, on most nights, they can and should be favored to win.

Vegas Golden Knights

Preseason over/under: 97.5

Current points pace: 111.8

What's gone right? Jack Eichel could have the best season of his career. When it comes to the Golden Knights, the whole has always been greater than the sum of its parts. It's just that many of those parts have also been NHL All-Stars in the past. Eichel's time in Vegas has seen him win a Stanley Cup while reestablishing his place as one of the game's top 10 centers. What he has done this season, however, has him on pace to finish with his first 100-point season.

What's gone wrong? It's something with their defensive performances, but what it is remains a question. On the surface, the Golden Knights are 15th in goals allowed per game which is right at league average. Here's where it gets complicated. Their structure has allowed the fifth-most scoring chances, the fifth-most high-danger chances and the seventh-most shot attempts per 60. But their goaltending is also in the bottom third of team save percentage despite the fact their goalies are either slightly above or below league average in terms of goals saved versus average (GSVA).

Grade: A. The cap crunch caught up to the Golden Knights, which led to a mass exodus in the offseason. They've responded to those departures by playing at a pace that could see them best their point total in 2023-24 by nearly 11 points. While losing captain Mark Stone to another injury in the midst of a strong start is an issue, the Golden Knights appear to have the depth to once again handle that void. And if they can find cohesion when it comes to their goal prevention tactics? It could see them pose an even stronger case for adding another championship.

Calgary Flames

Preseason over/under: 81.5

Current points pace: 100.6

What's gone right? Dustin Wolf has been their most consistent player. Wolf has used the first quarter of the season to show he can handle the demands of being a No. 1 goalie. The Flames are still using a tandem approach with Wolf and Dan Vladar. It's just that Wolf was responsible for eight of the Flames' 11 wins through Nov. 22. He was tied for third with a .926 save percentage and was 10th in GAA as of Nov. 22.

What's gone wrong? The disconnect between their goals and offensive metrics. Being a team that's in the bottom 10 of goals per game typically suggests that everything about their attack is a challenge. But their underlying metrics suggest otherwise as they are 10th in shots per game while also being 12th in both scoring chances per 60 and shots per 60. While it's clear the Flames are getting chances on net and are consistently generating a strong volume of scoring chances, they're still trying to solve the mystery of turning that into goals.

Grade: A-. Going into the season, there was a belief that after missing the playoffs in 2023-24, the Flames could be in the discussion in 2024-25. They're off to the kind of start that should keep them in that mix. Wolf's efforts in net could help the Flames stay in the playoff chase while strengthening his bid for the Calder Trophy. If the Flames can find a way to turn their strong offensive metrics into goals? It could make them one of the West's more formidable teams for the remainder of the season.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Preseason over/under: 102.5

Current points pace: 109.3

What's gone right? Toronto might be the only NHL team to lose its best player (Auston Matthews) to injury and play significantly better without him. But that's how the Leafs' season has gone, with veterans and new additions alike stepping up to fill the void. John Tavares looks renewed, averaging a point per game, Mitch Marner is taking advantage of a contract season with terrific play (28 points in 21 games), William Nylander is flying (24 points in 21 games) and Toronto has lost only one game since losing Matthews. New coach Craig Berube has the Leafs playing a more defense-focused game too, something that's hindered Toronto in the past. But perhaps the biggest game-changer this season has been Anthony Stolarz in net. He wasn't pegged initially as the club's starter, but he's been excellent (.927 SV%, 2.18 GAA), as has Joseph Woll (4-2-0, .922 SV%, 2.00 GAA).

What's gone wrong? The Maple Leafs' sick bay has become alarmingly full. Beyond Matthews, Toronto has lost Max Domi, Calle Jarnkrok, Max Pacioretty, David Kampf and Matthew Knies to various ailments. And of course, Ryan Reaves went and got himself suspended for five games, further degrading the Leafs' depth up front. Toronto managed with a patchwork offense, although they are only 16th in scoring (averaging 3.05 goals per game). The Leafs' awful power-play numbers to start the season have only recently begun to recover (they're 15th now, at 20%). Toronto's hardest days though may still be ahead. Center depth could become a larger issue (the Nylander experiment there did not pan out) and the Leafs have to hope there are healthier days on the horizon.

Grade: A-. Toronto has overcome its share of hurdles already and looks stronger because of them. The Leafs have plugged skaters into new roles -- like Bobby McMann in a top-line role -- and seen young skaters like Knies truly begin to thrive. What stands out about the Leafs though is they are more balanced than ever. Defense, for the first time in years, isn't an issue, and Toronto is showing it's more than just an offensive powerhouse; the Leafs can win tight, low-scoring games as well. Maybe it's the new mindset under Berube, but these Leafs are tougher all around than versions of this team in the past.

B grades

Dallas Stars

Preseason over/under: 103.5

Current points pace: 106.6

What's gone right? Their second line. Everything Matt Duchene, Mason Marchment and Tyler Seguin have done to this stage of the season reinforces why the Stars are one of the strong favorites to win the Stanley Cup. Duchene's second season in Dallas could see him break the 90-point mark for the first time in his career. Marchment, who scored a career-high 55 points in 2023-24, is on pace for 78 points. Yet it's Seguin who could be enjoying the best season of the trio and is on pace to score 30 goals and score more than 60 points for the first time since the 2018-19 season.

What's gone wrong? Their power play. Averaging 3.39 goals per game (10th in the NHL) has not translated to the extra-skater advantage. After finishing sixth last season with a 24.2 percent success rate, the Stars are only converting 16.1 percent of their chances in 2024-25, which ranks 25th. So what's changed? They lost Joe Pavelski, who led them with 10 power-play goals, to retirement. Roope Hintz and Jason Robertson, who were second and third in power-play goals, have combined for two points in the Stars' first 18 games on the man-advantage. That's also the same amount of points Miro Heiskanen had through 18 games after finishing with 21 power-play points last year.

Grade: B+. They have the goal-scoring power to keep pace with teams or put them away. They have a defensive structure that once again ranks in the top 10 of scoring chances allowed per 60 and shots allowed per 60. They're No. 1 overall in GAA at 2.32 and fifth in save percentage. They also have a top-10 penalty kill. But the power play remains a concern, especially when one looks at the fact the power play went 0-for-14 in the Western Conference finals loss to the Oilers.

Los Angeles Kings

Preseason over/under: 96.5

Current points pace: 93.2

What's gone right? They're (mostly) filling their Drew Doughty void. Doughty remains out on a month-to-month basis while he recovers from a fractured left ankle sustained in the preseason. The injury left questions about how the Kings would manage without Doughty, who was among the league leaders in ice time and played in every situation. They've done it by using Brandt Clarke and Vladislav Gavrikov. Clarke has provided the Kings with a puck-moving option that's filling in as the first-team power-play quarterback, while Gavrikov is leading them in short-handed minutes. Gavrikov also leads the Kings in average ice time while Clarke is fourth.

What's gone wrong? Their power play has struggled. Even though Clarke is third on the team in power-play points, it's still a unit that has largely struggled. It's the fourth-worst unit in the NHL, with a success rate of 15.6%. Last season, they were 12th and boasted a 22.6% conversion rate. One difference could be the Kings are missing two players who were among their primary contributors. Despite his struggles, Pierre-Luc Dubois was third on the team with seven power-play goals as was Doughty. It's also possible the Kings could gain cohesion once Doughty, who also had 20 power-play points, returns to the lineup.

Grade: B+. Trying to win games without a top-pairing do-everything defenseman can prove challenging enough. But the Kings have made it work by committee and also received some of the more consistent goaltending in the NHL, which hasn't always been the case. Still, everything the Kings accomplish during the regular season comes with questions about if they can parlay that into postseason success and avoid what a fourth consecutive first-round exit.

New York Rangers

Preseason over/under: 100.5

Current points pace: 102.5

What's gone right? New York is the same reliable group it has been the past few regular seasons. That is to say, the Rangers are a star-powered offensive team with excellent goaltending. Artemi Panarin has scored at a blistering pace (26 points in 19 games), Alexis Lafreniere is making that seven-year extension look good (with 16 points in 19 games), Will Cuylle has leveled up, and the Rangers are hovering around top 10 in league scoring because of their depth (averaging 3.42 goals per game). Igor Shesterkin remains elite as ever (.914 SV%, 2.82 GAA) but New York doesn't need him to be the savior. There's a solid defensive foundation in place led by Adam Fox's strong performance and excellent special teams (including the second-ranked penalty kill) have kept the Rangers humming.

What's gone wrong? It's the small things that can put New York off its game. Recently it's been poor first periods throwing the Rangers off track and forcing New York to try battling back from early deficits. The Rangers also give up a surprisingly high number of shots on net (32.6 per game, fourth most in the league), a product of New York being too frequently hemmed into its own end. Being stingier on defense is something coach Peter Laviolette should be emphasizing, especially after the Rangers' latest skid, where they were outscored 9-4. That's led to speculation about certain Rangers veterans being on the

trade block in an effort to freshen things up. Injuries have become a concern as well, from Filip Chytil still sitting on the sideline to Chris Kreider -- one of the names being bandied about as potentially on the move -- recently joining him there.

Grade: B+. New York hasn't taken any steps backward. The Rangers are a contender in the Metropolitan because of a balanced approach that doesn't force them to lean on any one aspect of their game. The key for New York is to maintain its consistency. When the Rangers slip up it's usually because their attention to detail -- particularly on the defensive side -- is falling, or they're relying too heavily on power-play opportunities to make a difference. New York is a good team, period. When the buy-in is all there, they look like a tough out.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Preseason over/under: 98.5

Current points pace: 98.4

What's gone right? Tampa Bay has mastered the art of retooling on the fly. The Lightning said goodbye to captain Steven Stamkos, hello to Jake Guentzel and carried right along looking like a contender. Nikita Kucherov is once again among the league's top scorers (with 29 points in 18 games), Guentzel being a point-per-game guy and Tampa's entire offense is humming along in the top five (averaging 3.67 goals per game). Andrei Vasilevskiy remains in fine form between the pipes (with a .919 SV%, 2.13 GAA and a 300th career win under his belt) and Victor Hedman is the backbone of a solid defensive group.

What's gone wrong? The Lightning are trending slightly behind their projected points pace, and they have weathered some uncharacteristic losing skids (the longest being four games). Tampa Bay has played down to its competition, too (and underestimated a few opponents -- see the blown 3-0 first period lead recently against Columbus). The special teams have been middle of the pack and haven't generated the same positive momentum shifts as before. A lingering injury to Brayden Point hasn't helped matters, but Tampa Bay's issues don't stem so much from offense; it's consistency from a full-team defense effort that will keep the Lightning on track.

Grade: B+. The Lightning find ways to win because there's a foundation of winning and general excellence at the core of their organization. It's expected that Tampa Bay will overcome its own challenges and come out the other side stronger. That said, the Lightning can't become complacent here. They're ranked among the Atlantic's best teams because of a powerful offense, but their defensive play has felt too precarious. Vasilevskiy can do plenty in helping the Lightning shine, but relying too heavily on goaltending is rarely a strong pursuit in the long term. If Tampa Bay can continue striking the right balance they'll be right in the mix come spring -- again.

New Jersey Devils

Preseason over/under: 101.5

Current points pace: 109.3

What's gone right? New Jersey at its best is playing hard, physical hockey. Cliche? Yes. True? Fact. The Devils were pushed around in seasons past, but the offseason addition of Brenden Dillon, for example, has helped set a tone for New Jersey. Speaking of offseason moves, acquiring Jacob Markstrom has (finally!) set the Devils up for success in net. Markstrom is providing a much-needed boost in goal (.907 SV%, 2.54 GAA) and that, along with New Jersey's overall defensive buy-in, has them sixth in goals against per game (2.61). Meanwhile, Jesper Bratt (28 points in 23 games) and Jack Hughes (25 points in 23) are packing a punch up front, and the Devils' special teams have been good. In most ways, New Jersey has performed right to expectations.

What's gone wrong? Inconsistency. New Jersey has lost to San Jose, only to beat Florida in consecutive games. The Devils have been blanked by Tampa Bay -- and then crushed the Hurricanes. Being shut out happens to the Devils too frequently, with their past three defeats all coming without a goal from New Jersey. It suggests a lack of depth scoring the Devils must address. And they have been average in shot generation (16th), another potential offensive issue that could slow New Jersey's progress. First-year coach Sheldon Keefe may still be getting his message across to the Devils.

Grade: B. New Jersey is right on pace with where it is supposed to be. Nothing wrong with that -- but it also feels like the Devils could be further ahead. They have weathered some injury issues but none so debilitating that the Devils couldn't rally. Putting together the same effort each night will move New Jersey along. Backsliding against the league's lowest-ranking teams only to rise against stiff competition rarely takes a club where it wants to go in April. The Devils establishing and maintaining an identity from here is critical.

Vancouver Canucks

Preseason over/under: 99.5

Current points pace: 99.3

What's gone right? They're one of the strongest defensive teams in the NHL. Forget about the fact that the Canucks are allowing the 10th most goals per game for a moment. When it comes to their underlying metrics, they're actually one of the most suppressive teams in the league when it comes to other areas. They lead the league in fewest scoring chances allowed per 60 while allowing the sixth-fewest shots per game. They're also fourth in fewest high-danger chances allowed per 60 and ninth in the fewest shots allowed per 60. But if they're that good ... why are they giving up so many goals?

What's gone wrong? The disconnect between their defensive structure and goalies. We mentioned some of the metrics above, but take a look at the Canucks' team save percentage. Only seven teams in the league have a lower save percentage than the Canucks. Veteran Kevin Lankinen has a minus-3.4 GSVA whereas young playoff hero Arturs Silovs is at minus-6.9 which is 71st out of the 76 goalies who have played a game this season. This is another reason why the eventual return of Thatcher Demko could have a massive impact on the Canucks.

Grade: B. Could the Canucks receive more goals and a bit more offensive consistency similar to what they had last season when they were sixth in goals per game? Sure. They're still in the top half of the league in goals scored. It's just that one of the key principles of Rick Tocchet's system is being defensively responsible. If the Canucks can continue to add goals to their two-way approach, it could help them offset the inconsistent performances they've received in goal.

Anaheim Ducks

Preseason over/under: 72.5

Current points pace: 77.9

What's gone right? Their goaltending has been among the best in the NHL. Seeing how Lukas Dostal would perform with John Gibson recovering from an injury was a major question facing the Ducks to start the season. Dostal has answered, posting a .924 save percentage and a 13.7 goals-saved above expected which was the best in the NHL through Nov. 22, according to MoneyPuck. Gibson's first three games have all been victories in which he recorded a save percentage of more than .900 in two of those games. Altogether, the Ducks have the eighth-best team save percentage in the NHL.

What's gone wrong? They're struggling to score goals. The Ducks are currently ninth in the NHL in goals per game (2.62 per game). Of their 48 goals, 20 of them have been scored by just four players. Some of that stems from the fact they have the 12th fewest shots per 60. But what makes that even a bit jarring is that the Ducks are league average in high-danger scoring chances and scoring chances per 60. So while they might not record a high volume of shots, they're still creating chances at a rate that should hypothetically yield more results.

Grade: B-. What they've done to this point in the regular season suggests certain parts of their rebuild could be taking a step toward progress. But that's not to say there aren't areas of concern. Yes, there's the lack of goals. But there's also the reality the Ducks might be relying too much on their goaltending to win games.

Buffalo Sabres

Preseason over/under: 88.5

Current points pace: 89.8

What's gone right? Buffalo weathered early hardships and came out the other side looking stronger for it. The Sabres have seen solid production from top skaters such as Tage Thompson (18 points in 16 games), Alex Tuch (21 in 21) and JJ Peterka (16 in 19) while Rasmus Dahlin is back carrying a heavy workload (nearly 25 minutes per game) to anchor their back end. That's allowed Buffalo to hover near the top 10 in league scoring (averaging 3.24 goals per game) and their power play has recovered from being atrocious to slightly below average (17.5%). Goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (8-4-1, .910 SV%, 2.55 GAA) gives the Sabres a chance every night he's in net, too. When Buffalo is healthy they can keep up with the competition and put themselves in that playoff discussion.

What's gone wrong? The Sabres aren't on a clear-cut path to the postseason and that was the ultimate goal going into this campaign. That 1-5-0 start put Buffalo behind the eight ball in a competitive Atlantic Division, and forced them into catch-up mode. While Luukkonen has taken over the starter's job, Devon Levi was a disappointment (2-5-0, .870 SV%, 3.95 GAA) before being sent down to the minors. Buffalo is middle of the pack in goals against per game (3.10) and 18th in shots against per game (29.0), which too often is contributing to self-inflicted wounds. Lindy Ruff hasn't quite found the right mix everywhere, on offense or defense, so Buffalo isn't getting into a rhythm it can sustain. It all feels part and parcel with taking on another new head coach's strategy and structure.

Grade: B-. Buffalo gets graded on a slight curve here because playing those first two games in Prague was its own adventure. But, the Sabres are behind their internal expectations to make the playoffs. GM Kevyn Adams didn't make any big swings to improve through the offseason, and while Buffalo's top performers are showing their mettle, others haven't -- Jack Quinn, Zach Benson and Dylan Cozens are all trending well below expectations, and that's where the Sabres need to see a shift if they're going to sneak into an Eastern Conference wild-card spot by spring.

Colorado Avalanche

Preseason over/under: 102.5

Current points pace: 89.5

What's gone right? Their superstars have been at their best. Nathan MacKinnon is performing as if he could win a consecutive Hart Trophy. Cale Makar is playing as if he could win a second Norris Trophy while also finishing with more than 100 points. Mikko Rantanen is on pace for a third consecutive 100-point campaign in the final year of his contract and could command more than $10 million annually on

his next deal. Plus? Casey Mittelstadt is projected to finish with more than 30 goals for the first time in his career.

What's gone wrong? Their supporting cast has gone through a bumpy start. Look no further than what happened to Ross Colton. He was third in the NHL in goals before sustaining a broken foot in late October. Six of the Avalanche's top-nine forwards have been either injured or suspended at some point. Some of those players have gradually returned to the lineup, but there have still been other issues -- namely, their goalies. Inconsistent performances and/or injuries have led to the Avs going through four goalies by mid-November and having the NHL's worst team save percentage in 5-on-5 play.

Grade: B-. Winning a Stanley Cup back in 2022 cemented the Avs are in that class of teams in a championship window. Being in that class means the Avs are going to be judged by what they do in the playoffs and not the regular season. But that also comes with the caveat that an inconsistent supporting cast played a central role in why they've been knocked out within the first two rounds in the last two postseasons.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Preseason over/under: 69.5

Current points pace: 82.0

What's gone right? Columbus has been surprisingly fun to watch, and Sean Monahan is a major reason for that. The Blue Jackets brought him in this summer, and while Monahan intended to play with his good friend Johnny Gaudreau, he channeled Gaudreau's energy as the team's leading scorer (with 19 points in 19 games). Zach Werenski is back at full strength to helm Columbus' back end, and a collective defensive effort has helped the Blue Jackets to sit 20th in shots against (29.1 per game). Columbus is tenacious and scrappy and they've earned wins over good teams too, including a wild overtime victory over Tampa Bay in which the Blue Jackets trailed 3-0. Somehow, Columbus finds a way to trend ahead of its curve.

What's gone wrong? The injury to Boone Jenner that may sideline the team's captain for up to six months was a bad start to the season. The Blue Jackets have received average goaltending again, with Elvis Merzlikins clocking in with a below-.900 SV% and 3.08 GAA. Backup Daniil Tarasov hasn't been much help in that respect either (.861 SV%, 4.04 GAA). Columbus is now third-worst in goals against per game (3.58) and it doesn't have the offensive scoring depth to outrun that issue. It's the self-inflicted wounds that get the better of Columbus and keep it from being a possible competitor. Its mediocre power play (18.2%) and penalty kill (77.8%) haven't been momentum-shifters, either. The Blue Jackets have notched consecutive wins only twice, and those losing skids (say, for six games) can do a number on confidence.

Grade: B-. Columbus went through the wringer this summer and is going to feel the effects of losing Gaudreau for this entire campaign and beyond. First-year bench boss Dean Evason inherited a team that had cycled through two previous coaches in short order and were working under a new GM in Don Waddell. But Columbus still needs more from its young stars, including Adam Fantilli (just nine points in 20 games) and Justin Danforth (eight points in 17 games). There's still untapped potential in Columbus.

San Jose Sharks

Preseason over/under: 63.5

Current points pace: 64.9

What's gone right? Mikael Granlund's trade value. Similar to the Blackhawks, one of the items that can help the Sharks' long-term goals is by trading pending UFAs who could potentially offer a contender another dimension in their chase for a title. It's possible that Granlund's efforts with the Sharks could see a title contender taking interest. Granlund is on pace to finish with what would be a career-high 89 points with his previous personal best being 64 points. He's in the final year of a deal that pays him $5 million annually and could present himself as a top-six or top-nine option for a team needing two-way help down the middle.

What's gone wrong? Macklin Celebrini missed 12 games because of injury. Suffering through one of the most trying seasons in recent NHL history came with the reward of drafting Celebrini and seeing the impact he could make. A lower-body injury kept him out of the lineup which saw him miss 12 games. The former Boston University star center marked his return by scoring three goals and five points in his first five games in November. For the season, he has seven points in 10 games.

Grade: B-. Context and perspective are crucial when it comes to understanding how the Sharks have performed this season. While they remain in the sensitive stages of their rebuild, they are already projected to finish with more points than what they had in 2023-24 when they finished with a league-worst 47 points. If they can continue to win games while providing chances for their young core of Celebrini, William Eklund, Will Smith and Yaroslav Askarov, who was just called up, to grow? The 2024-25 season has a chance to be a formative one for their future.

C grades

Detroit Red Wings

Preseason over/under: 90.5

Current points pace: 78.1

What's gone right? The Red Wings have benefited from an (unexpected?) youth movement headlined by Marco Kasper, Simon Edvinsson and a (suddenly!) striking Jonatan Berggren. Kasper, 20, has been so reliable as a physical force up front that coach Derek Lalonde recently promoted him to play on a line with Patrick Kane and Alex DeBrincat. And the 21-year-old Edvinsson had been terrific patrolling Detroit's blue line before suffering a lower-body injury. The Red Wings have also received solid goaltending from offseason signee Cam Talbot (.921 SV%, 2.62 GAA) and their power play is excellent, sitting just outside the top 5 at 28.1%. Detroit is good in one-goal games, too, posting a 4-1-2 record in those outings this season.

What's gone wrong? Detroit has been so strong on the man advantage its nearly overshadowed how poor their 5-on-5 scoring is. The Red Wings are 31st in even-strength goals -- only Nashville is worse. Detroit's inability to generate offense has robbed them of too many wins already this season. The Red Wings' penalty kill is a league-worst now (66.7%), which is another constant hurdle holding them back. And, as has been the case for several years, Detroit simply can't deliver a full-team by-in on defense -- they're giving up the fourth-most shots on net (31.9 per game, fifth-most in the league), and allowing 3.15 goals against per game.

Grade: C+. Detroit is running out of excuses. The Red Wings have been maturing throughout this extended rebuild and yet the purported progress simply isn't showing. And it feels like Lalonde is increasingly closer to paying the price with his job. The Red Wings are by all accounts a quiet group, and it could be the lack of vocal veteran leadership keeping them in a rut. Captain Dylan Larkin must be the change there, and veterans like Kane, Vladimir Tarasenko and J.T. Compher can help too (some added offense from those three wouldn't hurt, either). The Red Wings have been shuffling the deck up front lately and maybe that'll help jump-start Detroit in the next quarter.

Edmonton Oilers

Preseason over/under: 108.5

Current points pace: 89.5

What's gone right? At least they're better off now than they were this time last year. It was around this time a year ago when the Oilers made the decision to move on from Jay Woodcroft following a 3-9-1 start. They turned to Kris Knoblauch, and proceeded to come within a game of winning their first Stanley Cup in more than 30 years. As of Nov. 21, the Oilers were in one of the two Western Conference wild-card spots. While the Oilers aren't in first place in the Pacific, there is less ground for them to make up compared to this time last season.

What's gone wrong? A number of different items have led to the Oilers appearing disjointed at times this season. They've received goals from their supporting cast but the production from the now-injured Viktor Arvidsson along with Zach Hyman, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Jeff Skinner isn't what was expected. While they're among the NHL's best in allowing the fewest scoring chances per 60 and shots per 60, their goaltending is in the bottom 10 of team save percentage. Their special teams have also struggled. Their power play is in the bottom third of the NHL while their penalty kill, a strength from their playoff run, is the fourth worst unit in the league.

Grade: C+. Last season proved the Oilers don't need to be in a playoff spot by mid-November in order to make the playoffs. That said, one of the strengths of last year's Oilers' team was the ability to recognize and then adapt to adjustments. It was something Knoblauch and his staff not only did during the regular season, but they did it throughout the entirety of the playoffs. If the Oilers can use that same formula again this season, it could make their slow start seem like a minor misstep toward a much bigger journey.

Philadelphia Flyers

Preseason over/under: 85.5

Current points pace: 78.3

What's gone right? Philadelphia coach John Tortorella may have choice words for those calling Matvei Michkov a "savior," so instead we'll just say the Flyers' electrifying rookie has given Philadelphia some salvation. He's already the club's second-leading scorer (with 16 points in 19 games) and is the focal point for a fan base desperate to believe Philadelphia can return to its former glory. Travis Konecny (with 25 points in 21 games) is doing his part. Tortorella has seen progress from some of the Flyers' young stars (other than Michkov), including Morgan Frost. Philadelphia's penalty kill is also a major strength (third overall at 86.8%), a testament to heavy-minute contributions from Cam York and Travis Sanheim.

What's gone wrong? The Flyers have faltered compared to a season ago, when an exciting early push made them look like a possible playoff contender. The Flyers have been slower out of the gate this season, with a middling offense (averaging 2.71 goals per game) and a long list of defensive problems that's put them sixth-worst in goals against (3.43 per game). Some of that is goaltending issues; Samuel Ersson has been fine, but they have lacked a solid backup. There's not often enough depth scoring, either. And while Tortorella has been optimistic about Philadelphia's up-and-comers, they haven't shown enough progress to move the needle and offer the Flyers a needed boost to get them back in that postseason hunt. At some point Philadelphia must turn a corner in that respect.

Grade: C. Tortorella cost his team some points because he's made Michkov -- the organization's biggest bright spot -- a healthy scratch at times, and continuously seems to downplay his importance. Yes, Tortorella wants to avoid putting too much pressure on a 19-year-old, but like it or not he's one of the team's best players and deserves to be recognized as such. Outside of that, the Flyers just haven't played

up to expectations. Philadelphia feels capable of stronger output if they can see some strides up front and get regular contributions from more skaters.

Seattle Kraken

Preseason over/under: 87.5

Current points pace: 85.7

What's gone right? Everything involving Joey Daccord. Perhaps the place to start is that the Kraken got Daccord signed to a five-year deal, which gives them two more years of contract certainty with a goaltending tandem that includes Philipp Grubauer. From there, Daccord has essentially performed like one of the NHL's best goalies. His 10.6 GSVA ranks second in the league behind Dostal's. On the whole, the former Arizona State star ranks in the top 10 in wins, GAA and save percentage.

What's gone wrong? They've missed Vince Dunn. Although it was just four games, Dunn was starting to look like the version that had a breakout season in 2022-23 when his 14 goals and 64 points helped the Kraken reach the playoffs. Dunn had three points in four games before he sustained an upper-body injury that saw him miss the next 17 games. Getting Dunn back would give the Kraken another puck-moving option on the back end that, along with Brandon Montour, could help facilitate more scoring chances.

Grade: C. Dan Bylsma's first year in charge of the Kraken has seen them retain the defensive identity they had under Dave Hakstol but add a bit more offense. Averaging 2.76 goals per game means they're 20th in goals which is slightly below league average, but it's still a major improvement considering the Kraken finished with the fourth-fewest goals per game last season. If those improvements can continue and they can fix a sputtering power play, they could hold on in the Western Conference wild-card race.

Montreal Canadiens

Preseason over/under: 76.5

Current points pace: 65.6

What's gone right? Montreal has gotten significant performances from its key forwards, including Nick Suzuki (averaging a point per game), Cole Caufield (12 goals in 20 games) and resurgent veteran Brendan Gallagher (with eight goals in 20 games). Rookie Lane Hutson has made a strong transition to the NHL game, averaging 22:55 of ice time per game with good results (11 assists). The Canadiens as a whole have also begun generating and capitalizing on more high-danger opportunities up front, and their special teams (ranked 11th on both the power play and penalty kill) are solid. And when goaltender Sam Montembeault is dialed in (he's got a .899 SV% and 3.08 GAA), that's a major difference-maker for the Canadiens in the crease.

What's gone wrong? The preseason injury to Patrik Laine -- whom Montreal acquired via trade to bolster their offense -- was a bad omen. But it's the Canadiens' defensive deficiencies that seem never-ending. Montreal is allowing the second-most goals-against (3.80 per game) -- the Canadiens gave up four or more goals in nine of their first 15 games alone -- and they allow the seventh-most shots against (30.2 per game). Montreal has earned consecutive victories just twice all season while they've strung together multiple losing skids. The Canadiens are prone to slow starts they can't recover from, and playing from behind won't ever get Montreal where this rebuild is supposed to take them.

Grade: C-. The Canadiens just don't look like a team making progress -- or at least enough of it. The same narratives keep cropping up and Montreal appears powerless to change course on its own story. Martin St. Louis has tried to stay positive about what strides the Canadiens do make, but they aren't lasting long enough from game to game. Montreal is too often beating itself, speaking to a potential lack of growth

and maturity for the entire group. If the Canadiens can come into their own and truly establish an identity, then some of those problems might be overcome and allow Montreal to make the most of this season.

Utah Hockey Club

Preseason over/under: 87.5

Current points pace: 74.2

What's gone right? The Mikhail Sergachev trade. Acquiring Sergachev was done with the intent of giving the Utah Hockey Club a top-pairing defenseman who could be trusted to play in every situation ranging from 5-on-5 to the penalty kill to the power play. Through his first 21 games, he's been just that. He's averaging a career-high 25:29 per game which is first on the team and ranks third in the NHL. Sergachev also leads the UHC in 5-on-5 minutes and short-handed minutes and is third in power-play minutes. He's also on pace to finish with what would be a career-high 20 goals.

What's gone wrong? Consistently scoring goals and/or consistently preventing them. The UHC is in the bottom 10 when it comes to goals per game and have the league's third worst power play with a 12.7% success rate. Plus, if it's not for the Canadiens and Red Wings, the UHC would have the fewest shots in the NHL, too. As for its defensive profile? Utah is eighth in goals allowed and the penalty kill is the seventh worst in the league.

Grade: C-. Could this be a potential wild-card team? Could this be a team that is more in line for a lottery pick? Or is this a team that's not good enough for a wild-card spot but is too good to be in the draft lottery? What makes the Utah Hockey Club's situation so challenging is it could go in a number of directions. On Nov. 25, the team was five points out of the final wild-card spot.

D grades

New York Islanders

Preseason over/under: 91.5

Current points pace: 78.3

What's gone right? New York leans on goaltender Ilya Sorokin to be fantastic, and he is, holding a .917 SV% and 2.52 GAA). Semyon Varlamov (.903 SV%, 2.60 GAA) is good, too. New York has held its goals-against average below three, and shots-against average under 30, and that's due to not just the goaltending but a decent back end run by the rising star Noah Dobson and veterans like Ryan Pulock. Kyle Palmieri picked the perfect season to have his best showing in years (with 18 points in 21 games) while Bo Horvat (14 points) and Anders Lee (13 points) have been solid.

What's gone wrong? New York doesn't have enough scoring. And it's not just because Mathew Barzal has been out most of the season with an injury and Anthony Duclair recently joined him in the sick bay. Regardless, it's the same old story for these Islanders, where they'll be in a low-scoring, one-goal game, hoping either for a goal (unlikely) or Sorokin (more likely) to save them. It's not happening. New York is 26th in scoring (2.48 per game). Its awful power play (31st, 13.3%) is doing the opposite of getting New York on a scoresheet, and its penalty kill (31st, 68.2%) is surprisingly bad. The Islanders don't seem to be getting the message from coach Patrick Roy about what needs to change for them to dig out of this early-season hole.

Grade: D+. The Islanders are being docked another point here because their problems are frustratingly identical not only season to season but game to game. New York is losing games it should win in head-scratching fashion because of careless mistakes it isn't focused enough on avoiding given how goals are

at such a premium. GM Lou Lamoriello can't wait much longer to address some of the needs up front if New York is going to round into any sort of playoff form by the new year. It already feels like it could be too little, too late.

Ottawa Senators

Preseason over/under: 90.5

Current points pace: 74.2

What's gone right? Ottawa has been solid defensively when it comes to limiting shots against -- it is relenting the sixth-fewest overall (27.0 per game) and it isn't prone to serving up high-danger scoring opportunities. The Senators have maintained a strong power play to start the season, sitting fifth overall (28.8%), and offensively they're generating plenty of shots (third overall, at 32.4). Tim Stutzle and Brady Tkachuk have both produced at a point-per-game pace, and Thomas Chabot looks improved, helping to lead Ottawa's defensive corps. Ottawa has earned tough wins over Atlantic rivals -- including Toronto and Boston -- to boost its confidence.

What's gone wrong? Linus Ullmark was Ottawa's splashy offseason acquisition, and he hasn't played consistently like the Vezina Trophy winner Boston could lean on. That fickleness -- leading to a 4-7-1 record with .881 SV% and 3.10 GAA -- is too often hurting Ottawa. The Senators' penalty kill -- for which good goaltending is key -- ranks 14th (78.7%). Ottawa is also one of the lowest scoring teams at 5-on-5 (24th overall) and while having a hot power play is one thing, it's not going to sustain the Senators for long stretches. The recently announced injury to Artem Zub -- out long term with a fractured foot -- doesn't help Ottawa's prospects from here either.

Grade: D+. Ottawa should be better than this. Ullmark's disappointing start is one thing, but there's too much young talent for the Senators to once again be so far off their preseason point pace and out of the playoff race. It's not about making trades; the changes should be able to come from within. The Senators start to shrink and visibly deflate when there's a breakdown or costly mistake. Mentally tough teams can power through those setbacks. That's where Ottawa can do themselves a great service -- because the talent is there to compete.

Boston Bruins

Preseason over/under: 99.5

Current points pace: 85.7

What's gone right? Well, not a whole lot. But what the Bruins haven't done is waste time in the face of their challenges. GM Don Sweeney relieved Jim Montgomery of head-coaching responsibilities before Thanksgiving and turned the bench over -- in the interim -- to Joe Sacco. That puts a well-respected part of the organization in position to pull Boston out of its skid and potentially salvage something from this season before it's too late. Kudos to Sweeney for making a change sooner than later; it's better for everyone involved. It's also fair to say the Bruins made a decent signing in Joonas Korpisalo, who's been solid at 4-2-1 with a .911 SV% and 2.38 GAA backing up Jeremy Swayman (and oh yes, we will get to him).

What's gone wrong? Let's start with Boston's goaltending. Swayman took a hard line with the Bruins in offseason contract negotiations, and he hasn't remotely lived up to the eight-year, $66 million investment as Boston's starter (Ullmark being long gone to Ottawa). Swayman is an abysmal 6-7-2 with an .887 SV% and 3.30 GAA. Yikes. The Bruins' offense has been no help, either. The Bruins are last in scoring (2.21 goals per game) with the league's worst power play (12.8%) and 19th-ranked penalty kill (77.9%). There was no way Montgomery could hold onto his gig with that sort of poor production across

the board -- although the players don't deserve a pass, either. Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak haven't been remotely good enough leading Boston's offense, and that's got to become the norm for Boston to get rolling.

Grade: D. Boston couldn't have scripted a worse start. The Bruins have had an aging core for a while, but the drop-off they've displayed over the past six weeks is still a shock. It's not as if the Bruins are just deficient in one area; that might make the fixes appear more manageable. Right now, Boston isn't receiving the right contributions from its core or its new additions -- Elias Lindholm and Nikita Zadorov were heralded offseason signings that haven't moved the needle. Can Sacco kick-start the Bruins back into gear? That's Boston's best hope of climbing out of their current hole.

Chicago Blackhawks

Preseason over/under: 73.5

Current points pace: 62.5

What's gone right? Ryan Donato's trade value. Pending UFAs can be valuable for rebuilding teams because of the draft capital they could command in a trade. With Donato on pace for his first 30-goal season, and with a team-friendly $2 million cap hit, it could make him an attractive option for contenders needing a top-six or a top-nine forward. The Blackhawks could capitalize on Donato's success by adding more capital for a rebuild that has 17 draft picks over the next two cycles, with seven of those picks in the first two rounds.

What's gone wrong? They're struggling to score goals -- again. Rebuilds can be judged on the progress they've made from season to season. A lack of goals was a problem in 2023-24 and is still a problem in 2024-25. Last season saw them average 2.17 goals per game which was the worst mark in the NHL. This season they are averaging 2.32 goals per game which is the second-worst return in the NHL. That's further compounded by the fact they're averaging the fewest scoring chances per 60, the second-fewest high-danger scoring chances per 60 and the sixth-fewest shots per 60. Their offensive woes have extended to their teenage star Connor Bedard, who recently said he felt like he could name "100 things" he could do better while adding, "hopefully I'll find my game again."

Grade: D. An aggressive offseason that saw them add veterans such as Tyler Bertuzzi and Teuvo Teravainen created an expectation the Blackhawks could surpass the 52 points they accrued last season. Perhaps there's a chance the Blackhawks might be able to establish some sense of cohesion at some point. For now, the Blackhawks are projected to finish with 56 points. Should that hold, it would be a mere four-point improvement from last season. Furthermore, it could see Chicago facing the prospect of winning the draft lottery for the second time in three years.

St. Louis Blues

Preseason over/under: 86.5

Current points pace: 74.9

What's gone right? It could be the late-November coaching change. Blues GM Doug Armstrong told reporters that firing Drew Bannister was largely based on Jim Montgomery being available less than a week after he was fired by the Bruins. Still, the Blues struggled in several areas in Bannister's first full season after he went 30-19-5 during the 2023-24 after taking over from Craig Berube in December. The Oilers are the most recently prominent example of a November coaching change paying dividends. Could the Blues be next?

What's gone wrong? Quite a bit. They've already had a pair of three-game losing streaks before American Thanksgiving. They're in the bottom five of goals per game. They're in the bottom five of shots per game. They're in the top 10 of most goals allowed per game. They have a bottom five power play and a bottom 10 penalty kill. They have the fourth-worst team save percentage in 5-on-5 play. They've also watched two of their most consistent performers to start this season -- Philip Broberg and Robert Thomas -- miss games due to injuries.

Grade: D. If not for the Predators, the argument could be made that the Blues have had the most disappointing start to the season of any Western team. Finishing six points out of the final wild-card spot in 2023-24 created the belief that the Blues could be back in the mix for a playoff spot this season. Maybe there's still a chance that the Blues can find the consistency that's eluded them. That's why Armstrong felt a coaching change in late November was necessary. It'll now be up to Montgomery to help the Blues avoid missing the playoffs for a third straight season.

Nashville Predators

Preseason over/under: 98.5

Current points pace: 63.4

What's gone right? Juuse Saros continues to keep them in games. Struggling teams look for any sort of consistency as a proverbial lighthouse. Saros has been that, despite the fact that so many other items have been problematic. As more teams move to tandems, he continues to be one of the few goalies who can play every game. He's on pace for his fourth straight season of more than 60 games played. While much can change between now and the end of the season, Saros has a 2.56 GAA that could be his best since the 2020-21 season. He also has the NHL's best GSVA, at 7.8.

What's gone wrong? They're the NHL's worst-scoring team. Entering Nov. 21, the Predators were averaging a league-worst 2.30 goals per game ... while somehow still having a top-10 power play. What makes that disconnect even more damning is the fact they bolstered their top-six forward group by adding Jonathan Marchessault and Steven Stamkos in the offseason. Furthermore, coach Andrew Brunette's reputation is his teams score goals in bunches -- the Devils and Panthers were top five teams in goals per game when he was the interim and assistant coach for both teams.

Grade: D-. They were a playoff team last year and were considered one of the teams to watch in the West heading into this season because of their aggressive offseason. Instead, they've become a team that's getting further away from a wild-card spot as the unofficial American Thanksgiving Day cutoff draws closer. As of the quarter mark, they are 32.1 points off their projected preseason pace, the worst differential in the league. On the optimistic side, they showed last season that they could overcome poor stretches of play and pile up victories. Replicating that again this season could get them back in a wild-card spot. If not? It could force the Preds to confront some tough decisions about their long-term plans.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Preseason over/under: 90.5

Current points pace: 64.2

What's gone right? Two words: Sidney Crosby. The Penguins captain secured another milestone when he became just the 21st player in history to hit 600 goals. And that was after he hit the 1,600-points mark this season (only the 10th player ever to do it). Crosby paces the Penguins in points (21 in 23 games) and is a beacon of hope on the ice every game. Evgeni Malkin (20 points in 23 games) remains a top-tier contributor as well, and Drew O'Connor has centered a third line packed with potential to help. And

there's a potential emergence in young Owen Pickering, the club's 2022 first-round draftee who's been a steady presence on their back end.

What's gone wrong? Pittsburgh is lacking in direction. GM and president of hockey operations Kyle Dubas is trying to retool and compete at the same time, and it's just not working. The Penguins are already poor in most statistical categories -- they're 25th in scoring, are allowing the most goals against per game (3.96), the third-most shots against per game (32.7) and rely on average special teams. Pittsburgh has won just four games in regulation, and their goal differential is a league-worst minus-34. Tristan Jarry was usurped in net by Alex Nedeljkovic and Joel Blomqvist, both who were fine, but playing behind a porous defense that's led to one embarrassing loss after another. Even Jarry's return has been poor (he's 0-2-1) thanks to those issues. Dubas swung and missed on too many moves -- the glaring one being Erik Karlsson, already a minus-13 on the season -- and even Michael Bunting has been a disappointment. There's no depth for the Penguins to rely on, and few options for coach Mike Sullivan to believe in.

Grade: D-. Dubas has said for fans to "be careful what you wish for" when it comes to potentially rebuilding a team. And that's fair; we've seen how long an overhaul can take. But what Pittsburgh is doing now isn't fair, either. The Penguins have to be better in every aspect. Crosby can't carry the offensive burden alone, there's too little commitment defensively and without a strong No. 1 goaltender, Pittsburgh is doomed to stay mired in its current mess. Will Sullivan be around long enough to see them out of it? That's a question that will continue to linger well into this season unless -- or until -- a change is made.