



## **Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips September 25-26, 2024**

### **Columbus Blue Jackets**

- PAGE 02: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets recap: Gaudreaus honored before preseason win over St. Louis Blues
- PAGE 03: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets notes: Ivan Provorov on pending UFA, David Jiricek gets HS diploma
- PAGE 05: Columbus Dispatch: Blue Jackets color analyst Jody Shelley chosen as analyst for Prime Monday Night Hockey
- PAGE 06: Columbus Dispatch: Trey Fix-Wolansky still fixed on NHL career with Columbus Blue Jackets
- PAGE 07: The Athletic: How the Blue Jackets' long-maligned power play could be different in 2024-25
- PAGE 09: BlueJackets.com: Camp Q&A: Harris excited to join the culture of the Blue Jackets
- PAGE 11: BlueJackets.com: Blue Jackets shut out Blues in preseason action
- PAGE 13: BlueJackets.com: Camp Q&A: Olivier wants to keep adding to his game
- PAGE 15: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets Showing Hints of What NHL Roster Could Look Like
- PAGE 17: The Hockey News: 20 Days Until Opening Night At Nationwide Arena: The History Of Jersey #20
- PAGE 18: 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery: Blue Jackets preseason home opener: Up to ten regulars expected in the lineup as Columbus battles the Blues
- PAGE 19: 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery: Blue Jackets Fall In Monday's Preseason Opener, But Main Takeaway Is Beyond Box Score
- PAGE 20: NBC4.com: Team, fans to honor Johnny Hockey as Blue Jackets hold preseason home game

### **Cleveland Monsters/Prospects**

#### **NHL/ Websites**

- PAGE 22: The Athletic: How Amazon's NHL docuseries got player buy-in to reveal the 'raw emotion' of Stanley Cup hockey
- PAGE 25: The Athletic: Stamkos exit, deferred payments and more: Rating the East's offseason with the Bizarro-meter
- PAGE 29: ESPN: Blue Jackets honor Gaudreau brothers before first home game
- PAGE 30: ESPN: Regression candidates this NHL season: Matthews, Hyman, more
- PAGE 34: Sportsnet.ca: Five players who could have breakout seasons in the NHL
- PAGE 36: Sportsnet.ca: Sportsnet Insiders rank the NHL's top 50 players: 40-31

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets recap: Gaudreaus honored before preseason win over St. Louis Blues

By Brian Hedger – September 26, 2024

This one went much better.

Matched up against a comparable preseason lineup from the St. Louis Blues, the Blue Jackets churned out a 3-0 victory Wednesday night at Nationwide Arena to pull even at 1-1-0 with the help of several standout efforts leading the way.

After a pregame video and 13-second moment of silence to memorialize Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, the Blue Jackets — who've hung Gaudreau's jersey in his locker stall — found their preseason footing in a chippy game that included physical play and several post-whistle skirmishes.

"We're going to stand for each other here," Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins said. "We're not just going to let the other teams slash us or hit us. We are all here together."

Denton Mateychuk, a rookie defenseman, netted the game's first goal with 1:01 left in the first period, Kirill Marchenko made it 2-0 with 4:01 left in the second and Merzlikins went 19-for-19 on saves in two periods. Zach Sawchenko took over the Jackets' net in the third, polishing off the shutout with 12 saves.

Sean Kuraly centered the Blue Jackets' top line, assisting on their first two goals for a two-point game, while Kent Johnson notched two points with a primary assist and empty-net goal to seal it. Johnson impressed the whole game, winning puck battles, keeping possession and displaying the offensive skills that prompted the Blue Jackets to select him fifth overall in 2021.

"We've been seeing that for a couple weeks here," Kuraly said of Johnson. "He's been a dog on pucks, and you can see his mentality. It's no secret. It's the second effort on pucks. Even if he loses the first one, he's hunting these pucks. It's just the start, but he's off to a good start."

The Blue Jackets got off to a rough start to the preseason Monday with a 6-1 loss in Buffalo against, essentially, a full NHL lineup, but two days later they provided a glimmer of what this season could look like in Columbus under new coach Dean Evason.

Along with skilled offensive plays and aggression forechecking, the Blue Jackets didn't back down an inch when the Blues took some liberties against vulnerable players and ratcheted up the game's physicality — including Erik Gudbranson going after Matthew Kessel in the third period for a hit that appeared to include leg-on-leg contact in open ice.

"We've stressed right from the start a team-first mentality," Evason said. "That's team first, right? He didn't do anything silly you know? He went in there, challenged the guy, gave him a little shot and it showed 'team' right, that they know exactly what happened and they felt there was a cheap shot or a cheap hit or whatever, and they were confronted. As a group, that's a very positive thing."

The Jackets play their third exhibition game Friday at the Washington Capitals.

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets notes: Ivan Provorov on pending UFA, David Jiricek gets HS diploma

**By Brian Hedger – September 26, 2024**

Ivan Provorov might have a new contract extension if he played somewhere else.

The Blue Jackets defenseman is in his prime at 27, plays a solid two-way style, can quarterback a power-play unit and has played 614 NHL games for the Philadelphia Flyers (532) and Blue Jackets (82), who acquired him in June 2023 as part of a three-team trade.

The Blue Jackets also have \$24.7 million in salary-cap space available with a full 23-man roster signed before an expected \$5 million boost to the NHL's \$88 million ceiling in 2025-26. Money shouldn't be an issue if the Jackets want to keep Provorov, but their depth chart could be.

The Blue Jackets have several young left-handed defensemen at various stages of their careers, and some may become candidates to fill a projected void left by Provorov on the left side of the second pairing. Rookie Denton Mateychuk is mentioned most for that role, but the Jackets also have Jordan Harris (Patrik Laine trade), Jake Christiansen and Stanislav Svozil as potential replacement options.

That's primarily why all options for the Blue Jackets remain open with Provorov, which is less than ideal for him starting what could be his final season in Columbus.

"Whoever says that it's not in their mind even a little bit is lying," he said. "Obviously, as a player, you want to know what's going to happen. At the same time, I'm just trying to take one day at a time and try to make the most out of what's in front of me, and the opportunities that I get."

Don Waddell, who became the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager in May, hasn't discussed Provorov's situation with the defenseman or his representatives with International Sports Advisors Inc. – Mark Gandler and Todd Diamond.

After playing all 82 games last season, Provorov finished with five goals, 27 assists, 32 points and a –11 plus/minus rating while averaging 22:10 per game in ice time. His career scoring line is 70-179-249 with 10-44-54 added during power plays.

Drafted seventh overall in 2015, one spot ahead of Zach Werenski, Provorov has become a steady top four defenseman who could play an increased role on another team's top pairing. He could also slide to the third pairing for a Stanley Cup contender and instantly add quality depth.

He's just not ready to think about those options yet.

"I'm just coming out here and enjoying myself, trying to make the most out of every day, whether it's practice, a game or even a day off the ice and I'm doing something in the gym. I'm just trying to help the team any way I can to win games. The better the team does, the better everybody does individually too."

Columbus Blue Jackets' David Jiricek earned diploma, put smile on mom's face

David Jiricek, who's partnering with Provorov on the second defense pairing, arrived in Columbus from Czechia a little bit later than he'd originally planned.

Jiricek, 20, made it back about two weeks before training camp, but not before graduating high school in his home country. Jiricek's agent, Allan Walsh, called Waddell with the update and the Jackets' new GM was glad to hear it. More importantly, Jiricek's mother was also pleased.

“It was time, you know?” Jiricek said. “My mom was happy, so that was good.”

Jiricek was selected sixth overall in the 2022 NHL draft in Montreal and began his career the following season in North America. His mother and girlfriend moved from Czechia to be with him in Cleveland and help Jiricek's transition to playing on a new continent, but his expedited hockey career left him without a high school diploma.

“It’s not like here,” he said. “(In Czechia), you just get a diploma, and you just go (work). Some guys go to college. Most guys go to work. For hockey players, it’s (delayed) almost every time for Czechs. In the NHL, you have many guys without high school (degrees), just staying here trying to (take) that path to the NHL. I have it done now, so, that was important for me to get that done. I need to have all my things finished, so that was a great feeling.”

## Columbus Dispatch / Blue Jackets color analyst Jody Shelley chosen as analyst for Prime Monday Night Hockey

**By Nathan Hart – September 25, 2026**

Columbus Blue Jackets color analyst and former NHL enforcer Jody Shelley will be joining a national broadcast team in Canada this season. Amazon Prime has announced that the Manitoba native will serve as an analyst for the streaming program Prime Monday Night Hockey.

Shelley told The Dispatch that he will also continue to do Blue Jackets broadcasts, although there are a "handful" of games that conflict. He'll be working alongside the team's new television play-by-play announcer Steve Mears.

In the past, Shelley has been an analyst for NBC, the NHL Network, TNT Sports and, of course, Bally Sports Ohio.

As a player, Shelley had 18 goals, 36 assists and 1,538 penalty minutes – mostly with Columbus from 2000 to 2008. He went on to play for the San Jose Sharks, New York Rangers and Philadelphia Flyers before retiring in 2013 and starting his career as a Blue Jackets team ambassador and broadcast associate.

Prime Monday Night Hockey starts on Canada's Thanksgiving, October 14, and will run throughout the 2024-25 season. Prime subscribers in Canada can watch the games at no additional cost, according to the press release.

## Columbus Dispatch / Trey Fix-Wolansky still fixed on NHL career with Columbus Blue Jackets

**By Brain Hedger – September 25, 2024**

Training camp began the same way for Trey Fix-Wolansky as it has the previous five years in Columbus.

Along with his dad, Dallas, they loaded up his vehicle in Edmonton, hopped inside, fired up the engine and headed out for their annual journey to Columbus. It takes roughly 32 hours over three days of driving, but both like the quality father-son bonding time the haul provides.

“He does most of the driving,” Fix-Wolansky said of his father. “I always offer, but he just does it. We both really enjoy it. We enjoy each other’s company, so it’s always nice having him supporting me for camp. “

Dallas Fix-Wolansky always sticks around once they arrive. He watches a few practices, takes in a scrimmage and attends a preseason game or two before flying back home. The goal for both, at some point, is to make their annual trip knowing that Trey has an NHL roster spot secured.

That’s proven elusive after five seasons of pro hockey that has included just 26 NHL games for the Blue Jackets, but Fix-Wolansky's motivation hasn’t changed.

“The main thing to do is just not give up,” he said. “I’ve had looks before, but this year’s there’s new eyes – new general manager, new coach – so come into camp, play the best that I can and leave it up to them to make their decision.”

In some regards, there’s never been a better opportunity for Fix-Wolansky. The Blue Jackets are running low on forwards, he’s 25-years old and there isn’t much, if anything, left for him to prove in the American Hockey League. After putting up high numbers at the junior level with his hometown Edmonton Oil Kings of the Western Hockey League, Fix-Wolansky has become an offensive threat for the Cleveland Monsters, too, including 26 goals, 34 assists and 60 points in 58 games last season.

He added 3-5-8 during a postseason run that didn't end until overtime of Game 7 against the Hershey Bears in the Eastern Conference finals of the Calder Cup playoffs. So, Fix-Wolansky now has playoff experience on his resume.

The problem is producing in the NHL with the Blue Jackets.

Fix-Wolansky has scored four goals and added two assists for six points in the NHL (26 games) and has struggled to do enough to gain an extended look. While his wheels spin, other young forwards have either passed him on the depth chart or pulled even. It’s not necessarily “now or never” for Fix-Wolansky, but the pressure is certainly higher than ever to seize a roster spot.

“I’ve had really solid years, back-to-back, in the AHL, and I know I can produce at that level,” he said.

“Now it’s up to me to produce at this level. I put a lot of work in this summer, getting quicker and stronger, so I’m looking to make a big impact in camp and make the (NHL) team out of camp.”

## The Athletic / How the Blue Jackets' long-maligned power play could be different in 2024-25

**By Aaron Portzline – September 26, 2024**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Every season begins with some level of optimism; that no matter what is expected by others or what has transpired over the offseason, somehow, someday things will be different — better, of course — in the coming campaign.

The Columbus Blue Jackets had a turbulent and tragic summer, to be sure. But the addition of several esteemed veteran players — forwards Sean Monahan and James van Riemsdyk, and defenseman Jack Johnson — can help a lineup that's waiting for its young forwards to bloom as NHL impact players.

There's one aspect of the game, however, in which any hint of optimism among even the most loyal fans is hard to find. The Blue Jackets power play has been a running joke for seven seasons now, finishing no higher than 24th in the league's rankings.

Last season, the Jackets hired Hall of Famer Mark Recchi, a power-play machine during his playing days, to coach the unit, and it only got worse, finishing 31st in a 32-team league. The last time the Blue Jackets power play was anything other than an energy drain was way back in the 2016-17 season.

Nobody would believe the Blue Jackets are going to suddenly improve with the man advantage in 2024-25, especially following the loss of their two most heavily relied-upon players on the power play. In August, Patrik Laine was traded to Montreal and Johnny Gaudreau was killed in a tragic crash while riding bicycles with his brother, Matthew.

We can say this about the Blue Jackets power play this coming season: It's going to look radically different.

There's a new head coach, Dean Evason. There's a new power-play coach, Mike Haviland, who was promoted to Columbus from AHL Cleveland over the summer. Newcomers Monahan and van Riemsdyk, meanwhile, are expected to play major roles on the power play.

The Athletic had a lengthy chat with Haviland on Tuesday during the second session of training camp, which was run by the AHL coaching staff.

Haviland's hiring by the Blue Jackets marks his return to the NHL. He was an assistant with the Chicago Blackhawks from 2008-12, running the power play in his final two seasons.

The Blackhawks, who boasted Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews, Patrick Sharp, Duncan Keith, Brent Seabrook and others, finished fourth (2010-11) and 26th (2011-12) in the league those two seasons, showing just how fickle the power play can be.

Haviland acknowledged so much has changed over the last decade with NHL power plays, but when asked to present his overarching philosophy on how a successful unit performs, he didn't hold back.

"I'm a big bumper guy," Haviland said, referring to the forward who roams up and down between the faceoff circles. "I think the bumper has to be very active. He's gotta move up and down, and what I call the flanks (players on the half-walls) have to move up and down with him. When the bumper is high, you're low, and vice versa.

"And then there are the so-called little things that are actually significant. Retrievals — getting the puck back — has to be a focus. Faceoffs have to be a focus. I want to attack the net. I want three or four guys at the net with the puck. Those are things we're going to emphasize."

The Blue Jackets have practiced power play almost every day of training camp, but as of yet, it's hard to discern what Haviland and others are thinking in terms of units. So far, every player has been involved, Haviland said, so that every player will know the concepts.

"We wanted everyone to get reps early in the camp," he said.

But Haviland did shed some insight on what he's thinking in terms of personnel. The three leading candidates to play the bumper, he said, are Monahan, van Riemsdyk and Cole Sillinger.

"I like movement, a lot of movement," Haviland said. "That's moving the puck along the blue line up top, but when your bumper has movement, it confuses that middle PK guy because he doesn't know if he's going to go high or stay in the middle. That confusion is what you want."

Movement leads to confusion, and confusion leads to breakdowns. It's those breakdowns that lead to power-play goals, much more often than a single shot from distance.

Zach Werenski is the overwhelming favorite to be the point man on the top unit, with Damon Severson, Ivan Provorov and young David Jiricek among the candidates to play on the second unit. Adam Boqvist, who had been the second-unit point man, had his contract bought out over the summer.

The net-front candidates are captain Boone Jenner, van Riemsdyk and towering young forward Dmitry Voronkov, who has surprisingly soft hands given his 6-foot-5 frame.

The candidates to play on the "flanks," as Haviland says, are Yegor Chinakhov, Adam Fantilli, Kent Johnson and Kirill Marchenko, or whoever doesn't fill the role at bumper or net front.

One aspect the Blue Jackets have been lacking for several years is a big shot on the power play. Laine, in theory, had that in his arsenal, but he rarely got it off on the power play and was in and out of the lineup too often with injuries to build chemistry.

Werenski's best weapon is a low and heavy wrister that he sneaks through traffic, but Haviland wants to see more snapshots this season. Not only can slap shots lead directly to goals — either by beating the goalie clean, leading to rebounds, or puck deflections on their way to the net — but they can help open up the entire unit, Haviland said.

"If you're not a threat from up top, teams are just going to take away your passing lanes to the flanks," he said. "That tendency would show up in pre-scouting pretty easily. We have to establish that 'shot' mentality from up top, absolutely."

Here's something else to consider: Jenner won 55.4 percent of his faceoffs on the power play last season, but the rest of the club was just 47.2 percent. That means that when the second unit was on the ice, more often than not they started without the puck.

Monahan's arrival gives the Blue Jackets two strong players in the circle. He won 53.3 percent of his power-play draws last season with Montreal and Winnipeg.

"If you don't start with the puck, you're wasting probably 20 seconds," Haviland said. "It makes a big difference."



## [BlueJackets.com / Camp Q&A: Harris excited to join the culture of the Blue Jackets](#)

By Garrison McDaniel – September 26, 2024

During the offseason, the Columbus Blue Jackets traded former All-Star forward Patrik Laine to the Montreal Canadiens, receiving defensemen Jordan Harris in return to help bolster their blue line.

Harris has played in 131 games in the NHL over the past three seasons, recording eight goals and 32 total points. The 24-year-old from Haverhill, Mass., was drafted by the Canadiens in the third round of the 2018 draft out of Northeastern University.

The new CBJ defenseman met with BlueJackets.com on Saturday after CBJ practice. The conversation has been edited for length.

### **How does it feel to get back on the ice after the offseason?**

“It's really nice to get back to some real action, real drills and skating with these guys. It's fun again. Get some contact in the corner and full-speed stuff. You can only play so much, you know, four-on-four, full ice in the summer before you're ready to get back.”

### **What kind of things do you do in the offseason on and off the ice?**

“I go back home to (Massachusetts) and train at a place called Mike Boyle's, so that's four days a week in the gym. A lot of guys stay in the area. It's really good. We did like, early morning sessions, so we skate before workouts and then cut the ice and then scrimmage. That's the week before we come back. So that's a really good way to get back here.”

### **Do you play any other sports?**

“Yeah, we play some golf once or twice a week. Not that much. Play a lot of pickleball. It's kind of all the craze. I got my girlfriend in it. We're really competitive with each other, and she always wants to play. Even now during camp, like, I can't play pickleball.”

### **Have you explored Columbus yet?**

“A good amount. We've gone into the suburbs a bit, to the East marketplace, drove around New Albany and then just walked around the city. We live five minutes from here. Checked out all the restaurants. It's a great area.”

### **How does this training camp compare to the ones that you have experienced while you were with the Canadiens?**

“It's similar in the sense of the tempo and the productivity. We're out there, we're working hard, and we're skating, but not just mindlessly. Like, we're getting something out of it. It's very detail-oriented, which is good.”

### **What kind of things do you work on while you're in training camp?**

“A lot. I mean, it's a lot to process in terms of new systems and kind of what the team wants to do as a whole, so you definitely want to focus on that stuff. Again, like getting some of your little details back in the summer, you don't really have strict drills the coach wants from you. You're more so working on your individual skills. So just get your legs onto you and make sure you're super detailed and all that stuff.”

**What were your initial reactions to being a part of the Blue Jackets?**

“Excitement, for sure. I didn't know much about the club, just a few guys, and then just kind of, the direction the organization was heading in, there's excitement because I feel like I fit in well in terms of where a lot of guys are in their careers. They're very hungry for growth. I feel like in some organizations that might be a little underrated. We're trying to prove to everyone what Columbus is about and what style of hockey we're gonna play. (Head coach Dean Evason) feels the same way, and you can feel that energy from him. I identify myself really strongly with that sense. It's been great so far, the guys have been fantastic.”

## [BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets shut out Blues in preseason action](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – September 26, 2024

The Blue Jackets welcomed fans back to Nationwide Arena for the first preseason home game of the season, downing St. Louis by a 3-0 score on Wednesday night.

### **Game in a Paragraph**

Columbus evened its preseason record at 1-1 as it scored a goal in each period to pull away from the Blues. Despite killing six St. Louis power plays, the Blue Jackets had a 41-31 edge in shots on goal and received a number of solid performances up and down the lineup, while goalies Elvis Merzlikins and Zach Sawchenko combined on a shutout.

### **Quote of the Game**

CBJ center and alternate captain Sean Kuraly: “Good to get a win. I think Elvis played really well, and Saw came in there and played really well, too. When you keep them out of your net, it’s a good feeling. You don’t want to be out there when they go in your net, so the no goals against is nice. You know what we’ve been through here. We’ve had too many goals go in our net.”

### **CBJ Standouts**

- Kent Johnson had a goal and an assist and tied for the team lead with five shots on goal.
- Denton Mateychuk and Kirill Marchenko each tallied in their first preseason games of the campaign.
- Merzlikins stopped all 19 shots on goal he faced through two periods of action.

### **How It Happened**

The teams played an even first period, but Columbus got the lone goal of the frame with 1:01 left when Mateychuk got on the board. The rookie defenseman hit the post on the rush earlier in the shift, but he didn’t miss this time, taking a cross-ice feed from Johnson and unleashing a wrister from the right circle that beat Blues goalie Joel Hofer.

Columbus then had the better of things in the second period, outshooting the Blues 16-8, and doubled the lead with 4:01 left in the period on Marchenko’s goal. Ivan Provorov fired on net from the left boards, and the puck deflected off Kuraly and into Hofer’s pads, then bounced out for the onrushing Marchenko to easily tap home.

Merzlikins was solid through two periods, while Sawchenko came in during the third and had to face both a nearly two-minute-long 5-on-3 disadvantage as well as an extended stretch when the Blues pulled their goalie in the final minutes. But he stood up to the challenge with 12 saves in the period, and Johnson iced the game with an empty-net goal at 19:20.

### **Notable**

Johnson, Provorov and Yegor Chinakhov each finished with a team-high five shots on goal. ... Provorov – who had to be helped off the ice after he blocked a shot on a St. Louis power play in the first period but quickly returned – also finished plus-3.

### **Roster Report**

The game marked the preseason debuts of alternate captains Kuraly and Erik Gudbranson as well as the team's leading goal scorer a season ago, Marchenko, and Merzlikins.

**Up Next**

The Blue Jackets are off Thursday before returning to the ice Friday for a 7 p.m. game at Washington. Columbus then hosts Buffalo on Saturday night at 7 p.m. at Nationwide Arena.

## [BlueJackets.com / Camp Q&A: Olivier wants to keep adding to his game](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – September 25, 2024

Mathieu Olivier has become a key part of the Blue Jackets, finding a home in Columbus the past two seasons.

The big, physical wing had played 48 NHL games over three seasons with the Nashville Predators before being acquired in a trade in the summer of 2022. Brought in to add some snarl to the CBJ lineup, Olivier has done just that, totaling 10 goals, 27 points and 17 fighting majors in 120 games the past two seasons.

In addition to that, Olivier has become an important voice in the locker room, using his hard-working nature and effort-based style of play to carve out a role with the squad.

BlueJackets.com caught up with Olivier in the early days of camp to talk about his role on the team, finally being fully healthy and his offseason time with his two kids. This conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

**You're a guy that you've had a defined role, but you're always looking to add to your game. As you're trying to get better this offseason, what were you focusing on?**

"At this point in my career, it's about maintaining whatever strengths I have. Obviously, I think I'm a pretty strong guy, but it's about maintaining that and staying in the upper echelon of that area now. I'm always looking to work on my game. During the year, I always do extra for my offensive skills, and I think this summer has been a really good summer for that. I've had a good group back home of old pros that are working with us. I've been putting a lot of effort into that. This summer, I think I put in more time on the ice than usual. Having a healthy summer is also very helpful, but I think that was where I tried to do more is actually get more on the ice and maintaining what I did in the gym."

**That's right – last year was tough for you because you came in and you were limited by a leg injury. You have to feel so much better this year.**

"You get a broken tibia, it takes a while to get back. I got a rod put in my leg. My knee, my ankle, my tibia, everything was compromised, so obviously I didn't have the same pop on the ice as I usually do, and that was hard to come back from. I didn't feel 100 percent until probably after Christmas. It was hard to get back from that, but this summer was nice. I'm pretty motivated to be 100 percent and get some work in."

**This is year three for you here. I think we've seen you getting more comfortable taking a leadership role, and it seems like you've found a home here. What's it like when you get back with this group?**

"We've all been in communication through the summer. You have FaceTimes with guys, a couple of texts here and there. We all go to different places, but we all stay close. So seeing everyone again was fun. Obviously there were tough circumstances this year, and we were able to go through it together, but the message was it was nice to be back at the rink so we could be together. I think it helped everyone. We're not shying away from it in the sense we're open, we talk about it, we reminisce and talk about Johnny the way he would want us to. I think that's brought us even closer together if that's even possible."

**On the ice, there's been some rough times the last few years, but sometimes you have to go through that to get to the good times. With the young players and the veterans you have and as close as you are, does it feel like the team can start turning it around here?**

“Absolutely. I think everyone is a year older, everyone is more mature, more experienced. That’s the good thing about having a young team is every year it gets more and more exciting. You’re going up. Everyone this year, the testing – well, I don’t have the official results, but the eye test, everyone has been really good. Everyone came in ready to go. We’ll see. Practices have been upbeat, they’ve been high-paced and everyone seems to be in a really good headspace and ready to go.”

**I wanted to ask about summer a little bit. What was it like going back home to Quebec?**

“Yep, we were in Quebec City. Both me and my wife’s family are from there. The kids get to see grandma and grandpa. We have big families and we’re both very family-oriented. It was mostly just being with family and friends and getting my training done through that. Very busy. Once I was done with my training, I was a full-time dad and family guy. A good kind of busy for the summer, that’s for sure, but it’s really good to get going as well. It was too long. Obviously, you want to be in the playoffs. But it was a good summer.”

**Did you get to do anything fun with the kids, get to go anywhere or anything like that?**

“We didn’t do any trips. We had our backyard completely redone so we just enjoyed that. (The kids) learned how to swim. My youngest is starting to skate and get into that as well. Just trying to keep them exposed to a bunch of different things and be as rounded out as possible. They’re having fun.”

**Did they get a new swing set or anything like that in the backyard?**

“A swing set is not good enough for them now. The swing is too boring. They need a little more. They went swimming on their own. They did gymnastics as well. I was joking (in a previous interview) about them wrestling, but I wasn’t. They’re actually always wrestling together. It’s fun to see.”

**OK, the big question – did you get any good poutine back home this summer?**

“I did, but I’m trying to think. I hit my body comp objective pretty early, so I had a few weeks in the summer where it was just off the rails, and then I got right back on it. But I was on the A&W train this summer. Just those two weeks, though. When you hit your objective early, you have to get a little bit of a treat there.”

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Showing Hints of What NHL Roster Could Look Like

**By Mark Scheig – September 26, 2024**

The Columbus Blue Jackets have only played one preseason game going into Wednesday night's home preseason opener against the St. Louis Blues. However, Tuesday's practice gave some insight into where things stand with the potential NHL roster.

Just one day after the Blue Jackets' 6-1 loss to the Buffalo Sabres, the team assigned goaltender Evan Gardner, defenseman Charlie Elick and forward Tyler Peddle to their respective junior teams. With the exception of forward Luca Pinelli, who will play Wednesday, most everyone else is destined for the NHL or AHL.

Head coach Dean Evason elected to split the two groups into mostly NHL and AHL groups. While these are certainly not final with seven preseason games to play, it does indicate where things currently stand.

Notably in the NHL group, forward Dylan Gambrell along with defensemen Jordan Harris and Jake Christiansen skated with those expected to make the opening night roster. Notably in the AHL group, forwards Owen Sillinger and Gavin Brindley along with defenseman Denton Mateychuk skated later in the day with those expected to start with the Cleveland Monsters.

Gambrell skated where Owen Sillinger skated to start camp, on a line with Sean Kuraly and Mathieu Olivier. Justin Danforth's injury has left a potential opening on the left side of the fourth line.

Gambrell has some decent NHL experience with the San Jose Sharks and Ottawa Senators. He spent the 2023-24 season in the AHL for the Toronto Marlies. Should Danforth not be ready for the opener, there's a good chance of that, several players could vie for that bottom-six spot.

Evason has said that they will look at different combinations and players to see where they could fit. Owen Sillinger is on the roster for Wednesday night's game. That could be his best chance to make an impression in a game. James Malatesta is also on the roster for Wednesday and could fill that spot.

### **Here is what the NHL group looked like on Tuesday in lines.**

- Boone Jenner – Sean Monahan – Kirill Marchenko
- James van Riemsdyk – Adam Fantilli – Yegor Chinakhov
- Dmitri Voronkov – Cole Sillinger – Kent Johnson
- Dylan Gambrell – Sean Kuraly – Mathieu Olivier
- Zach Werenski – Damon Severson
- Ivan Provorov – David Jiricek
- Jack Johnson – Erik Gudbranson
- Jake Christiansen – Jordan Harris
- Elvis Merzlikins and Daniil Tarasov

### **Initial Impressions**

Outside of who starts on that fourth line, there really isn't much of a surprise with the forwards or defensemen. Danforth's situation could allow 1-2 other forwards to make the roster.

The eight defensemen listed all need waivers except for Jiricek. Evason recently said that Jiricek has “as good a chance as anyone” to make the Blue Jackets. Given that he’s skating in the top four, that’s a good sign he’s in line to make this opening roster.

The two names of note that are not on the NHL group for now are Brindley and Mateychuk. With each being so new to the pros, it would take a lot for them to unseat a veteran. It’s not out of the question especially in Mateychuk’s case but with development being a top priority for the Blue Jackets, having them start in Cleveland is far from the worst outcome.

Monsters’ coach Trent Vogelhuber spoke on Tuesday after practice about Mateychuk and Brindley. What is the biggest thing they need to adjust to before they’re in the full-time NHL conversation?

“You can see their ceiling and how good they are,” Vogelhuber said. “In my short time with both of them, they’ve had really good games, periods and shifts. It’s the hardest thing for all of them is just doing it all the time at this level and doing it in the American League for 72 games. Last year, we played 95, right? So doing it 90-something and not having dips is the hardest thing when January, February rolls around and you’re like oh my God, we’re halfway. It can be daunting.”

“So you’re taking it one day at a time and hopefully not having big lulls. That’s the most common thing for adjustment for young players coming into the pro games. Because both of those guys individually are just so talented players. You want to avoid any kind of long, big dips. There’s going to be games for sure and that happens but you want to help them snap out of it as quickly as possible.”

The big question for both Brindley and Mateychuk will also be if they can hang in against bigger and stronger players. One of the things the Monsters do a nice job with is the plan they execute for guys who need to get stronger.

Luca Del Bel Belluz went through this process at first. He realized he needed to get stronger. Instead of getting him into every game right away, the Monsters had him do heavy workouts early in the week while not playing weekday games. Then he played on Fridays and Saturdays. It was the perfect blend of strength training and playing games.

Should it come to that, Brindley and Mateychuk could take a similar path of getting stronger while playing games. With the extra veteran presence on the projected NHL roster, the younger prospects do not have to be rushed. If they are ready now, then so be it. However based on the early alignment, it would take some massive efforts to jump into the NHL group at this time. They will each get a chance Wednesday against the Blues to state their case.

## **Summary**

There are three main questions to consider when it comes to how the Blue Jackets’ roster will look. Who fills the 4LW role? Do any of the prospects make enough of an impression to unseat a veteran? And will the team sign a PTO or make a trade to add to their depth?

GM Don Waddell is still looking for a potential move in the right situation. As camps around the league start to whittle down in size, the Blue Jackets could strike if an immediate upgrade becomes available. An example of this would be someone like Tanner Pearson should the Vegas Golden Knights release him from his PTO.

Seven preseason games can determine a lot. But for these Blue Jackets, we at least have a framework of what the potential roster could look like for opening night. There is opportunity for those that make a big impression.



## The Hockey News / 20 Days Until Opening Night At Nationwide Arena: The History Of Jersey #20

By Jason Newland – September 26, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets have had many players don the Union Blue in its history. The #20 has only been worn a handful of times though.

Let's look at the players that have worn the number.

### Who Wore It First?

- **Martin Špaňhel** - Špaňhel played 10 games for Columbus during the first two years of the franchise and scored two goals. He never played another game in the NHL after leaving for Europe in 2002. He returned to North America in 2011 and played in the ECHL but then retired soon after. Nowadays he's the Commissioner of the Columbus Adult Hockey League.

### Who Wore It Last?

- **Riley Nash** - Played 179 games for the Jackets. He scored 10 goals and 33 points during his time in Columbus. He was traded to Toronto in 2021 and has bounced around since, playing for Winnipeg, Tampa Bay, Arizona, and New York. He's currently in year two of a deal with the New York Rangers.

### Who Wore It Best?

- **Kristian Huselius** - Huselius played 189 games for Columbus and had 142 points. After 662 games in the NHL, he left for Sweden where he would retire.

### Others That Have Worn #20

- **Lasse Pirjetä** - Pirjetä played 108 games and had 31 points for the Jackets. He played his final NHL games with Pittsburgh before returning to Europe, where he retired in 2008.
- **Mike Rupp** - The Cleveland, Ohio native played 39 games for the Jackets in 2005-06, scoring four goals and totaling six points. Rupp famously played for the Danbury Trashers during the lockout of 04-05 in the UHL. If you haven't watched that documentary on Netflix - DO IT! Nowadays he can be seen on The NHL Network as an analyst.
- **Curtis Glencross** - Glencross played 43 games as a Jacket and had 12 points. He was traded to the Edmonton Oilers in 2008.
- **Tim Erixon** - Erixon came to Columbus in the deal for Rick Nash. He only played 52 games as a Jacket and had 11 points. He was traded to the Blackhawks in 2014.
- **William Karlsson** - It's a common misconception that Karlsson was drafted by the CBJ. Taken by the Anaheim Ducks in 2011, he was traded to the Jackets in March 2015. He played 165 games for Columbus and had 47 points, mostly as a fourth-line grinder and penalty killer. He was chosen by Vegas in the expansion draft of 2017 and has been there ever since. His career in Vegas has been up and down, but he's managed 367 points playing in the desert.
- **Brandon Saad** - Saad played 160 games as a Jacket and had 106 points. Saad came to Columbus on June 30, 2015, in a trade with Chicago. On June 23, 2017, Saad was sent back to Chicago, along with Anton Forsberg for dynamic winger Artemi Panarin, Tyler Motte, and a sixth-round draft pick in 2017. He currently plays for the St. Louis Blues.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Blue Jackets preseason home opener: Up to ten regulars expected in the lineup as Columbus battles the Blues

By Ed Francis – September 26, 2024

On the heels of a 6-1 loss Monday in Buffalo to the Sabres, the Columbus Blue Jackets are at Nationwide Arena on Wednesday night to take on the St. Louis Blues. Here's what to keep an eye in the first home preseason game of the 2024-25 campaign:

- It's never fun to lose — especially by five — but don't pay too much attention to Monday's score. Columbus fielded a generally young and inexperienced roster for the game, while the Sabres lineup consisted mostly of their regular NHL lineup. Buffalo has an abbreviated six-game preseason schedule as a result of their Global Series trip that kicks off the NHL season next Friday, so there was a bit more sense of urgency by head coach Don Granato to get his group into regular-season form. A 6-1 final isn't ideal, but let's file that game under "no big deal."
- Wednesday's game might mean a little more. It's at home, sure, but the lineup will feature nine locks to make the opening night roster compared to Monday's seven. Forwards Yegor Chinakhov, Kent Johnson, Sean Kuraly, Kirill Marchenko, and newcomer James van Riemsdyk will be in the lineup, as well as defensemen Erik Gudbranson, Ivan Provorov, and Damon Severson (Jake Christiansen is in the lineup and is probably the 7th defenseman, though not a lock), along with goalie Elvis Merzlikins.
- It's also the first in-game look this season at wingers James Malatesta and Gavin Brindley and defenseman Denton Mateychuk. Any of those three are one good preseason away from claiming a roster spot. Really interested to see what Mateychuk is able to do. He'll be wearing #5.
- Merzlikins will likely see two periods of the game, with free agent acquisition Zach Sawchenko getting the other 20 minutes. The 26-year-old came to Columbus in July after time with San Jose, Carolina, and Vancouver. Waddell signed him in 2022 while he was with the Hurricanes, so he must see something he likes in the goaltender. It's not a stretch to think he's the fourth goalie in the Columbus hierarchy of netminders (Merzlikins, Daniil Tarasov, and Jet Greaves),
- The Blues aren't going to phone it in in their third preseason contest. They'll have Robert Thomas, Jordan Kyrou, and Kasperii Kapanen on the ice, as well as defenseman Justin Faulk and Ryan Suter. There is a former Blue Jacket who will be in the St. Louis lineup, too. No, it's not Alexandre Texier — instead, Scott Harrington, who is on a tryout contract with the Blues, will be on the blueline.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Blue Jackets Fall In Monday's Preseason Opener, But Main Takeaway Is Beyond Box Score

**By Will Chase – September 25, 2024**

On Monday, the Columbus Blue Jackets began their eight-game preseason slate with a 6-1 loss to the Buffalo Sabres at KeyBank Center.

Mathieu Olivier scored the lone goal for the Blue Jackets. Jet Greaves made 12 saves on 15 shots, and 2024 second-round pick Evan Gardner had 11 saves on 14.

There's only so much one can take from the first exhibition game of the preseason. Dean Evason mixed his club with a combination of veterans and mostly unseasoned prospects against a Sabres team that opted to dress most of its NHL regulars in what was their second exhibition game.

Devon Levi made 25 saves on 26 shots for the Sabres. Owen Power, Zach Benson, Peyton Krebs, Dylan Cozens, Mattias Samuelsson, and Nicolas Aube-Kubel scored for Buffalo.

The unassisted Olivier goal at 11:34 of the first period tied the game at 1-1. Buffalo led 3-1 heading into the final frame, and the Sabres scored the final three goals in the first seven minutes of the last period.

The six Buffalo goals notwithstanding, head coach Dean Evason found the positive takeaways from the exhibition opener, as reported by Blue Jackets insider Jeff Svoboda on Bluejackets.com:

They obviously had a very strong lineup. I thought there were spurts in that game that we were real good. We limit them to not a lot of chances early. Obviously it got away from us in the third period, but we competed hard. ... We got a lot of positive signs. Obviously the score isn't what we were looking for, but the experience is.

Adam Fantilli (two shots, one blocked shot, 18:43 ice time) had his first game action since a calf laceration cut his rookie season short on Jan. 28 in Seattle.

Trey Fix-Wolansky and Mikael Pyyhtia co-led Columbus with four shots each. Newcomer Jordan Harris led the club with 23:17 ice time. David Jiricek figures to make the club and he played 22:45 with two shots on net and a blocked shot.

Buffalo had 13 different players register a point and five finished with two points including Benson and Krebs each scoring a goal and collecting an assist, and JJ Peterka, Jack Quinn, and Bowen Byram picking up two assists each. Peterka and Beck Malenstyn each led the way with four shots apiece for Buffalo.

Columbus is back at it on Wednesday when they host the St. Louis Blues in their first preseason home game at 7:00 p.m. ET.

## [NBC4.com / Team, fans to honor Johnny Hockey as Blue Jackets hold preseason home game](#)

**By Anna Hoffman – September 26, 2024**

COLUMBUS, Ohio (WCMH) — Wednesday is the first preseason home game for the Columbus Blue Jackets.

However, anticipation for the season at Nationwide Arena comes with heavy hearts.

Wednesday marks the first home game since the death of forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother Matthew.

The fifth line said it has plans to help his legacy live on.

Team, fans to honor Johnny Hockey as Blue Jackets hold preseason home game

“I think between all the fans and players, the staff and our staff here at our bar, everybody’s still really feeling that,” said Natalie Darr, the owner of the R Bar.

Fans said there are a lot of emotions surrounding the start of the season and these last few weeks have been difficult for the entire City of Columbus.

“Well, it’ll be interesting because, obviously, you know, a lot of people are still grieving,” said Tim Emery, the owner of Boston’s Pizza.

It’s been almost a month since Johnny and Matthew were killed after being hit by a suspected drunk driver while riding bicycles in their hometown in New Jersey. They were set to be groomsmen at their sister’s wedding the next day.

Since their deaths, Blue Jackets fans have started a memorial outside the arena which has since been moved inside. The organization also held a candlelight vigil in their honor.

“We appreciate every small gesture, every huge gesture, but nothing changes what happened, and it’s definitely going to stick with everybody for a long time,” Darr said.

Both R Bar and Boston’s are arena district businesses that are hubs for CBJ fans. The business owners said the preseason game will be different than any other.

“I think people will be happy, as I said, to just get together and kind of be together in that area that they’re used to, and hopefully that starts to help people here a little bit,” Emery said.

The Blue Jackets will have a moment of silence in honor of the brothers. There will be a 50/50 raffle with all of the proceeds going to the John and Matthew Gaudreau Foundation. The team will also wear stickers on their helmets that have Johnny’s number 13 and Matthew’s number 21 along with their last name and a dove.

The team also plans to bring Johnny’s jersey to every game.

“I think they’ve done everything as well as can be expected,” Emery said. “They’ve handled this well. I mean, you know, there’s no playbook for this.”

Both businesses hope that, with the 13 jersey looking over the team, means it will be a fortunate year for the Blue Jackets.

“Just a successful, healthy year for all of our players,” Darr said.

Emery said his staff will be wearing patches with the number 13 on them in honor of Johnny Hockey. Darr said they have plans to add a memorial in honor of Johnny Hockey to their walls as well.

## [The Athletic / How Amazon's NHL docuseries got player buy-in to reveal the 'raw emotion' of Stanley Cup hockey](#)

By Chris Johnston – September 26, 2024

TORONTO — As the NHL's chief content officer, Steve Mayer lives behind the scenes with the world's best hockey players, engaging with them on everything from navigating the season-opening player media tour to revamping All-Star weekend to planning outdoor games.

But even the seasoned league executive didn't expect what he saw when cameras were granted an all-access pass to Connor McDavid and other NHL stars throughout last year's playoffs for a new Amazon Prime docuseries coming in October.

"You think (McDavid) is just focused," Mayer told The Athletic, "but there's a couple of scenes where he goes ballistic on his team as a leader.

"I was surprised. Like I didn't think he had that side to him."

NHL fans got a taste of it in a newly released trailer for FACEOFF: Inside the NHL that went viral Monday, showing McDavid screaming inside the visiting dressing room at Amerant Bank Arena during the Stanley Cup Final, where his Edmonton Oilers had fallen behind the Florida Panthers 3-0 in the series.

There's much more coming.

The same setting later produced some of the most powerful behind-the-scenes footage ever made available to NHL fans. Cameras were rolling when the Oilers players left the ice after the horn sounded on a 2-1 Game 7 loss that denied them a historic championship comeback.

"That emotion, that raw emotion after they lost, if you're a human you're going to feel it," Mayer said. "It's amazing. They all were bawling, but Connor, you could tell how much he wanted it.

"(The series) really does show an interesting side of him. I think out of all the players people will leave thinking they feel differently about him more than anybody."

The project promised to grant "unprecedented access" to life in the NHL when it was formally launched earlier this year, and by all accounts it achieved that objective with a six-episode series that will be available on Amazon Prime starting Oct. 4.

To understand how they managed to cut through layers and red tape that restricted previous attempts at NHL all-access programming, you need to go back to the decision to partner with Box to Box Films on its production.

The company behind Formula One's Drive to Survive and the PGA Tour's Full Swing docuseries brought instant credibility to the table. It held a meeting with players during February's All-Star weekend in Toronto, getting early buy-in from McDavid, William Nylander, David Pastrnak, Quinn Hughes, Filip Forsberg and others who would wind up playing starring roles.

There was initially some trepidation about how willing NHL players might be to open up their lives and put themselves out there, but Box to Box found them even more accommodating than athletes they'd worked with previously.

"Some other sports are just more managed," said Paul Martin, the company's co-founder. "There's more layers to kind of get through. Some sports feel they don't have work to do. But there was definitely a feeling that hockey wanted a show like this."

Nylander struck an encouraging early tone, jumping into the project “feet first,” according to showrunner Daniel Amigone.

The Toronto Maple Leafs star welcomed the cameras into his apartment for a shoot in March and placed no restrictions on access while they followed him on a visit to a favorite restaurant, an outdoor shinny rink and on walks with his dogs Pablo and Banksy. Later, when Nylander missed three games during a first-round series against the Boston Bruins due to severe migraines, he allowed the cameras to return to his home while he watched his teammates play without him on television.

The son of longtime NHLer Michael Nylander is a big fan of behind-the-scenes sports programming and saw it as a chance to give back to the next generation of aspiring hockey players.

He simply opened his doors and placed complete trust in the producers.

“I didn’t have (any) say or nothing in the final outcome of the show,” Nylander said. “So, that’s just me.”

He stars alongside Pastrnak in the debut episode of the series and was wearing a microphone when he returned to the Leafs lineup for Game 4 against the Bruins and had a heated exchange with teammates Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner on the bench.

That entire sequence appears unedited in FACEOFF, including audio of Nylander telling Marner, “Shoot it. Stop crying, bro.”

“That’s what is fun about the show and being able to see that aspect of the game,” Nylander said.

“Without the cameras there, nobody would know what was going on. You saw a scene with Connor (McDavid) in the locker room too. That’s just your emotion that everybody is looking for in players.”

Securing McDavid’s participation wound up being critical to the docuseries because it put the cameras in the right position to capture the most emotional moments of the Oilers’ trip to the Stanley Cup Final during a spring in which he was awarded the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP.

The Edmonton captain said that it forced him to open up and make himself vulnerable but that he felt a responsibility to do his part to help the sport reach a wider audience.

“We’re all in this together,” McDavid said. “The league and the players have to work together to grow the game.”

“It was never my plan to be the star of the show,” he added, per The Athletic’s Daniel Nugent-Bowman. “I think we wanted to dip our toe in, but — here we are — headfirst off the diving board.”

An added benefit of having someone with his stature on board was that it made participation in the series an easier sell to his peers. That was a big reason Vancouver Canucks captain Quinn Hughes got involved.

“I like my privacy,” Hughes said earlier this month at the NHL’s player media tour. “I like going back to Michigan (in the summer). Nobody hears anything about me for three months. So the Box to Box thing wasn’t something I had to do. But when I heard the other guys that were doing it, it’s like, ‘If these guys are doing it, how am I going to say no?’”

Ultimately, the final product should speak for itself.

There’s no questioning how seriously the NHL took the endeavor, with commissioner Gary Bettman, deputy commissioner Bill Daly and several other senior league executives in attendance at Monday’s swanky launch event in downtown Toronto.

It's also an important project for Amazon, which is getting much more involved with the league through the introduction of Prime Monday Night Hockey and the NHL Coast to Coast wraparound show starting this season.

The company has high hopes for how FACEOFF is received, too.

"It's really powerful," said Kari Roe, a vice president with Prime Video. "There's a little bit more honesty than I expected, especially in that series with the Panthers and Oilers. That was really tough. I really appreciated that they got people in their authentic selves."

Indeed, because of positive word spreading from those involved in the series, players have already started volunteering to participate in Season 2.

The bar for behind-the-scenes access has undoubtedly been raised in hockey circles.

"We learned a lot," Mayer said. "We pray that we'll have a second season only because there were so many little things along the way that we think we can do better."



## The Athletic / Stamkos exit, deferred payments and more: Rating the East's offseason with the Bizarro-meter

By Sean McIndoe – September 26, 2024

Slow news summer is finally over, meaningful hockey is almost here and it's time to get up to speed on the offseason. Let's get weird by firing up the trusty Bizarro-meter to measure which teams had the strangest summers.

If you've been following this gimmick for years, maybe even dating back to the original Leafs-only test run from the infamous David Clarkson offseason, then you know the drill and can just skip ahead to the rankings. But if you're new to this, please consider this very important caveat: "Bizarre" does not necessarily mean "bad." Teams can do strange things that work out brilliantly. And far more often, teams can take the predictable path of least resistance and end up wishing they'd been more creative. Over here at Bizarro-meter Industries, we are neutral on questions of good and bad. We're just looking for what was weird.

As always, we'll do this in two parts by conference. Today is the East, with the West coming tomorrow. Let's start in the Atlantic.

### **Atlantic Division**

#### **Florida Panthers**

The offseason so far: They barely did anything. What gave these guys the idea that they were already good?

But their strangest story was: Letting the Sam Reinhart UFA drama drag on until the last moments, before signing him to a deal everyone agreed was fine.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 2.7/10. Good team still good, stay tuned for further updates on this unique and breaking story.

#### **Detroit Red Wings**

The offseason so far: At a high level, pretty much the same offseason Steve Yzerman has had for the last few years, as the Wings added a few interesting players without doing anything that really made you think they'd take a significant step forward.

But their strangest story was: Getting the Lucas Raymond and Moritz Seider deals done, although it took until the last few days for it to happen. Still, both deals were reasonable and could even be bargains, so Yzerman clearly played it well.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 3.8/10. Pour one out for the theory that Seider's agent was playing the long game to get his payback against Yzerman and the Wings. Ah well, the Yzerplan marches on.

#### **Ottawa Senators**

The offseason so far: They didn't get much for Jakob Chychrun, but didn't give up much for Linus Ullmark, which felt more important. They also hired Travis Green, which the fan base didn't seem thrilled with at first but is coming around on. And there's progress, kind of, on the never-ending arena story.

But their strangest story was: They'll apparently hire just anybody to be their vice president of communications.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 4.1/10. There was a time when the Senators dominated the Bizarro-meter, but with competent new ownership and management, those days may be over.

### **Toronto Maple Leafs**

The offseason so far: After dramatically vowing “everything is on the table” after yet another early exit, the Leafs pretty much just had the offseason they always have, adding some veteran UFA depth to the same basic core. At least they hired Craig Berube, a move that may or may not have been leaked on live TV.

But their strangest story was: Probably the UFA signing of Jani Hakanpää, which was widely reported but then turned out not to have happened after all, until it finally did. But the biggest was Rogers buying out Bell, giving them control of MLSE and striking cold fear into the heart of every Leafs fan who also follows the Blue Jays.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 4.5/10. Staying the course after an early exit would be very weird in a lot of places, but not in Toronto, where something as simple as changing captains is apparently a three-month process.

### **Montreal Canadiens**

The offseason so far: They’re a rebuilding team taking a patient approach, so they pretty much stayed the course ... right up until mid-August, when they dropped a blockbuster on us.

But their strangest story was: The Patrik Laine trade, which saw them take on the struggling star’s full salary for two more years. It’s an expensive gamble, but one with a high ceiling.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 4.6/10. In terms of picks, prospects and players, Laine didn’t really cost the Habs anything. If he can rediscover his scoring touch, he could be the boost the team will need to get back near the playoffs.

### **Buffalo Sabres**

The offseason so far: The biggest news was hiring Lindy Ruff. As far as the roster, it was the Jeff Skinner buyout, which freed up a chunk of cap room for a team that desperately needed to take a few steps forward.

But their strangest story was: Not really using that cap room to do anything big. They did trade Matthew Savoie for Ryan McLeod, and they added Jason Zucker, but Kevyn Adams continues to go with the slow-but-steady approach.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 5.8/10. Nostalgia hires rarely work.

### **Boston Bruins**

The offseason so far: They kept the core intact and even made what could turn out to be one of the bigger UFA signings of the summer in Elias Lindholm.

But their strangest story was: Not signing Jeremy Swayman, at least not yet. The lack of a deal for the RFA goalie means he’s not in camp. There’s still time to figure it out, but it’s probably not a good sign that GM Don Sweeney is already talking about December 1. Is there still some lingering bitterness over last year’s arbitration hearing? Maybe not, but it’s a dramatic narrative, so let’s run with it.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 7.8/10. Bonus points for taking back Joonas Korpisalo’s contract in the Ullmark deal with Ottawa, a concession I still don’t understand.

### **Tampa Bay Lightning**

The offseason so far: Despite being tight to the cap, they found a way to sign arguably the best UFA on the market in Jake Guentzel.

But their strangest story was: They had that room because they let franchise icon Steven Stamkos walk. Even with a season's worth of chatter that it could happen, nobody seemed to completely believe it, especially after the Mikhail Sergachev deal at the draft. But here we are.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 8.2/10. Look, it absolutely might be the right move, but seeing Stamkos in a different uniform after 16 years is very, very strange.

## **Metro Division**

### **Columbus Blue Jackets**

The offseason so far: A new GM and a new coach are in place, and they made a big trade that saw Patrik Laine move on to Montreal. But of course, all of that was overshadowed by an unthinkable tragedy, one the team is still reeling from.

Bizarro-meter ranking: None. This piece is all in good fun, but I'm sure you'll understand if we don't bother trying to put an awful Blue Jackets summer into that sort of context.

### **New Jersey Devils**

The offseason so far: They finally got their goalie, as the long-awaited Jacob Markström trade finally came through. Factor in their other reinforcements, including Brett Pesce, and the Devils would appear to be a much better team on paper than the one that was so disappointing last year.

But their strangest story was: Hiring Sheldon Keefe right after he was finally let go in Toronto. Keefe is a good coach who deserved a second chance in the league, but seeing him snapped up almost immediately was a mild surprise.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 4.2/10. It's been fascinating to see the Devils re-emerge as a trendy Cup pick despite last season's faceplant.

### **New York Islanders**

The offseason so far: Pretty quiet, with no major trades and Anthony Duclair being the biggest addition. The plan for improvement seemed to be about Ilya Sorokin returning to form, but then we found out he had offseason surgery.

But their strangest story was: The departure of Cal Clutterbuck and (maybe) Matt Martin means the end of the most famous fourth line in hockey, and it will be weird to watch the Islanders without them.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 4.6/10. You might expect more from Lou Lamoriello, but there are worse ways to spend a summer than making small improvements to an underrated playoff team.

### **Pittsburgh Penguins**

The offseason so far: Reilly Smith out, Kevin Hayes in, a Kris Letang trade request rumor that was shot down, and a fun prospect trade. But it was all overshadowed by the long wait for a Sidney Crosby extension.

But their strangest story was: Those Crosby talks dragged on all summer, even blowing by the August 7 date we all figured he was waiting for. It was long enough to have some legitimate trade speculation start to bubble up, even as that always felt unthinkable. In the end, the deal got done and we can all relax ... for now.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 5.87/10. Find someone who loves you as much as Sidney Crosby loves losing millions of dollars because he has a favorite number.

### **New York Rangers**

The offseason so far: The Rangers went into the summer looking like a team on the verge of big changes. Chris Drury's to-do list was long, and seemed to include an Igor Shesterkin extension, Jacob Trouba trade, some top-six firepower and maybe a new home for Kakko Kaapo. And then none of that happened, with Reilly Smith being the biggest name of the offseason.

But their strangest story was: With a nod toward some light Barclay Goodrow waiver drama, this would probably be the Trouba trade saga involving a shifting no-trade clause and family concerns before ending without anything happening at all because apparently the media made it all up. Oh, we also found out he's an artist.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 6.2/10. This is one of those situations where a quiet offseason feels bizarre, given the expectations heading into the summer.

### **Carolina Hurricanes**

The offseason so far: On the ice, they lost Guentzel and Pesce, but kept Martin Necas and Seth Jarvis. Off the ice, they promoted Eric Tulsky to GM and eventually extended Rod Brind'Amour.

But their strangest story was: Jarvis and his deferred payments, a confusing story that initially seemed to be some sort of ground-breaking cap loophole but now seems to be something less than that. It's still neat to see a team (and player) get creative on contract structure, but this one wasn't quite the bombshell it initially felt like.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 6.5/10. Tulsky also hired Tyler Dellow, meaning we're a fake rumor guy and a podium parody account away from having your Twitter feed from 2012 basically running a Stanley Cup contender.

### **Philadelphia Flyers**

The offseason so far: The big story is Matvei Michkov, who'll debut this season despite some speculation the team might have to wait years after drafting him in 2023. Beyond that, they didn't add much at all.

But their strangest story was: Ryan Johansen and his alleged contract breach, which remains confusing. We're still not sure what he was supposed to have done, although it would seem to revolve around a mysterious hip injury. At this point, there are conflicting reports on whether the contract termination is even official. Expect this one to get ugly, especially when the NHLPA starts weighing in.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 7.4/10. I gave a few bonus points for that weird subplot of Jay Woodcroft randomly showing up last week for reasons nobody seemed quite clear on.

### **Washington Capitals**

The offseason so far: They kept busy, trading for Chychny, Logan Thompson and Andrew Mangiapane. They even slipped in a new GM, which I'd completely forgotten about until just now. But the big name was Pierre-Luc Dubois, as the Caps became the latest team to decide they could fix him. With that contract, they'd better hope they're right.

But their strangest story was: Buying CapFriendly, a weird transaction that probably benefits them but just made everyone else annoyed.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 8.2/10. Honestly, I think this guy was on to something.

## ESPN / Blue Jackets honor Gaudreau brothers before first home game

**By Associated Press – September 26, 2024**

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- An emotional video tribute to Johnny Gaudreau and 13 seconds of silence -- for his uniform number -- opened the Columbus Blue Jackets' first game at Nationwide Arena since the star player's death nearly a month ago.

The tributes came before the Blue Jackets' 3-0 preseason victory over the St. Louis Blues on Wednesday night.

Gaudreau and brother Matthew were killed Aug. 29 near their boyhood home in New Jersey when police said they were struck by a suspected drunken driver while they were riding bicycles on the eve of their sister Katie's wedding. The driver who police say struck them is charged with two counts of death by auto, along with reckless driving, possession of an open container and consuming alcohol in a motor vehicle.

Starting with preseason games, the Blue Jackets are wearing helmet stickers with "Gaudreau" printed between the images of two doves and the uniform numbers of the brothers, No. 13 for Johnny, No. 21 for Matthew, the number he wore as a player for Boston College.

Players stand for a 13-second moment of silence -- for his uniform number -- in memory of Blue Jackets player Johnny Gaudreau and his brother Matthew before the start of Wednesday night's preseason game in Columbus. Jay LaPrete/AP

"I think you put yourself in some of these situations where you'd have John around," Columbus forward Sean Kuraly said. "Thinking about him all day, obviously. Drive to the rink and a lot of times I'd pick him up on the way. So he's not there for that. I spent a lot of the day thinking about John. When he's not there with us, it's a tough day."

Columbus players will wear a commemorative patch beginning with the first regular-season game with Johnny Gaudreau's No. 13.

Traditional activities for the home opener Oct. 15 will be postponed so the night can be dedicated to paying tribute to the Gaudreau brothers. The home opener will be celebrated two nights later instead.

One of the worst teams in the NHL last season, the Blue Jackets must find a way to move forward with a new general manager, new coach and a huge void left on and off the ice by the death of 31-year-old "Johnny Hockey."

Gaudreau's jersey still hangs in his dressing stall in the Columbus locker room.

"The guys are close," new coach Dean Evason. "And that doesn't just mean the guys that have been here in Columbus. It's everyone here in this camp. We've seen a real close-knit group."

This is the team's second training camp in recent years that follows the offseason death of a player. Goaltender Matiss Kivlenieks died in July 2021 of chest trauma from an errant fireworks mortar blast at the wedding of an assistant coach's daughter.

On Wednesday night, Denton Mateychuk and Kirill Marchenko scored for Columbus, with Kuraly picking up assists on both. Kent Johnson scored an empty-net goal with 43 seconds left.

## [ESPN / Regression candidates this NHL season: Matthews, Hyman, more](#)

By Rachel Doerrie – September 25, 2024

### Reactions

The NHL preseason is underway, and many teams have new faces. Last season saw some astounding performances, including a 69-goal performance from Auston Matthews, two players (Connor McDavid and Nikita Kucherov) reaching the 100-assist mark, 17 forwards hitting the 40-goal mark and five defensemen scoring at greater than a point-per-game pace. It is hardly bold to say we are unlikely to have a season like that in 2024-25.

Candidates for regression include those most likely to see a 10% drop in production (or more) either in goals or points, based on their situations according to my projections model. The biggest regression factor is shooting percentage; many players featured on this list shot well over their expected paces. While a few may not regress to their career averages, it is likely they will regress toward their talent level and therefore, a dip in goal production would be expected.

Other factors include players expected to be in different situations, team environments or matchups. Most of the players on the list have multiple factors contributing to their projected regression and are certainly not the only players who are likely to experience a meaningful performance regression.

Here are a handful of the most high-profile regression candidates for 2024-25:

### **Auston Matthews**

#### **F, Toronto Maple Leafs**

Matthews is here for one reason: The probability of scoring nearly 70 goals in any season is extraordinarily low, never mind in back-to-back seasons. Health is always a factor for the league's premier sniper, as he has reached the 80-game plateau just twice in eight NHL seasons.

Matthews shot 2.5 percentage points higher than his career shooting percentage last season, which is not entirely unsustainable. On the other hand, his 51 even-strength goals and setting the record for most hat tricks in a season during the salary cap era (6) were phenomenal.

This season, Matthews is projected for 58 goals, accounting for his games played projection. If Matthews plays a full season, the projection jumps to nearly 64. Matthews needs 53 goals to break Mats Sundin's franchise goal-scoring record. It is more likely than not that Matthews owns that record by some point this March.

However, it is unreasonable to expect Matthews to score 70 goals this season, making him a candidate for this list because his goal total is likely to decrease by around 15%. It won't be shocking if Matthews scores more than 60, but 15% regression is the most likely outcome for the new Maple Leafs captain.

### **Sam Reinhart**

#### **F, Florida Panthers**

Could Reinhart, coming off a shooting percentage nine points higher than his career average, have a Stanley Cup hangover? That's a regression candidate. Reinhart set career highs in goals (57), power-play goals (27), points (94) and power-play points (34) last season -- and not by a slim margin. His previous career high was 33 goals, meaning his goal total jumped 72%.

Finishing with a shooting percentage of 24.5% when his career SH% is 15.6% points to coming regression. Reinhart is projected for 41 goals this season, a nearly 30% drop from his 2023-24 total. On the bright side, a 41-goal season would put Reinhart among the league's leaders and be the second-highest total of his career.

A major reason for regression outside of shooting percentage is power-play production. Reinhart's 27 power-play goals were the most in the NHL. While he is expected to remain one of the NHL's top power-play producers, he is projected for 18 power-play goals, a significant drop-off. Reinhart's goal total is expected to regress, but his points total is expected to be in the high 80s if he remains healthy.

Reinhart is unlikely to score 57 goals and 94 points, but it's entirely plausible that he eclipses 40 and 85, which would keep him among the elite two-way players.

### **Jonathan Marchessault**

#### **F, Nashville Predators**

A new team with a new system awaits Marchessault in Nashville, after a 42-goal campaign in Vegas. The former Conn Smythe winner shot a career-high 15.8% last season and is projected to finish with 33 goals -- a nearly 25% drop. Marchessault will not be the primary power-play shooter in Nashville with Filip Forsberg and Steven Stamkos in the mix. He will see regular top-six minutes, and he is likely to remain a focal point for defenders, especially if he plays with Stamkos.

It is fair to expect regression after he shot 30% better than career average, more so when changing situations and age are taken into account. Marchessault's 69-point performance last season is projected to fall toward 60 this season.

He will be a key contributor to Nashville's offense and remain a formidable offensive threat, but the model expects his performance to dip by 15% from last season.

### **Zach Hyman**

#### **F, Edmonton Oilers**

This is a dangerous one, because Hyman is the net front guy on the best power play in decades. He is glued to the hip of the best offensive player of the generation, and he's going to continue producing while in that situation. Prior to his 54-goal season in 2023-24, Hyman's career high was 36. Given the situation he plays in, 40-plus goals is a reasonable expectation, with the model projecting Hyman for 42 goals in 2024-25.

Hyman's shooting percentage was an astounding 18.6%, a major departure from his career percentage of 13.7%. In his seasons as an Oiler, his shooting percentage has been 15%, which is repeatable given his proximity to the net front on his shots and scoring opportunities generated by his line. If Hyman regresses to 15%, he'd need 360 shots to match last season's goal total. Only three players accomplished that last season (Nathan MacKinnon, Auston Matthews and David Pastrnak). Hyman is likely to score the most goals from the net front in the league this season, but 54 is unlikely to be repeated.

### **Nikita Kucherov**

#### **F, Tampa Bay Lightning**

Many factors are at play here, but Kucherov is not expected to tally 144 points again. Neither is Connor McDavid for that matter, but Kucherov is projected to see a 20% dip in production to 115 points. With a 20% decrease in production, he is still expected to finish in the top 5 in league scoring. The model projects him to tally 33 goals and 82 assists.

The loss of Stamkos cannot be ignored. The chemistry he had with Kucherov and Victor Hedman on the power play is tough to immediately replicate with another player, regardless of how talented Jake Guentzel is. It is reasonable to expect a period of familiarization and hiccups throughout the season as everyone adjusts to life without the long-time captain.

The Lightning are not as deep as they were during their Stanley Cup years, with major losses to the lineup every season. That's the price of success in the NHL. It results in a top-heavy lineup where teams will likely key in with their best shutdown players on the Kucherov line.

In past seasons, teams struggled to match up against Tampa Bay because of their depth. This season, Kucherov will get a steady dose of the league's best defenders, and while he's capable of winning those matchups, the probability of repeating a 144-point season is less than 15%.

## **Lucas Raymond**

### **F, Detroit Red Wings**

Shiny new contract in hand, Raymond should find himself glued to Dylan Larkin this season. However, it is entirely unreasonable to expect a player to replicate a 19% shooting percentage season when his career mark before last season was 12.6%. Raymond is likely around a 14% shooter and is still developing his NHL scoring toolbox. The model's projection has his production remaining similar overall, with a reduction in goal scoring and an addition in assists.

This is likely to be the first season where he is a defensive focal point, facing tougher matchups. Playing on the top line with Larkin and Alex DeBrincat should result in elevated scoring opportunities for Raymond, but he is not the primary shooter on that line. He will be relied upon to retrieve pucks, create off the rush and play a two-way role.

To replicate his 31 goals last season at a 14% shooting percentage, Raymond would need to record 222 shots, a 36% increase in shot production and an average of 2.7 per game. His goal production is expected to decrease to the mid-20s, but his assists total is expected to increase to nearly 50. He's projected for 74 points this season, which is more than respectable for the fourth-year player.

### **A trio of Vancouver Canucks**

The Canucks had quite the 2023-24 season, winning the Pacific Division title and taking the Oilers to seven games in the second round. The Canucks' style of play controlled games, and made their team success more sustainable than in past seasons. However, the Canucks had more than a handful of players perform well above their career averages, with many setting career highs. It is unlikely the team regresses in a major way (if Thatcher Demko is healthy by November), but there is reason to believe a few players will not be as productive this season as last.

Brock Boeser hit the 40-goal plateau and was brilliant in the playoffs before being sidelined with a blood clot. All signs point to Boeser being healthy, which is a fantastic bit of news. Boeser shot 19.3% last season, nearly six percentage points higher than his career mark of 13.8%. Given that he's likely to play with J.T. Miller, he will often be facing opponents' best shutdown pairing. Furthermore, teams will focus on him defensively and look to limit his scoring opportunities. Brock is projected for a goal total in the low 30s, which would be a solid season for a top-six winger making \$6.65 million.

Quinn Hughes' point total is likely to regress by about 10% to the mid 80s, but the reigning Norris Trophy winner has established himself as an elite defender in the NHL and that is not expected to change. Hughes will continue to drive play from the blue line and dictate the pace of play for 27 minutes per game. While his offense may dip, his defensive play should remain steady and he'll continue to be one of the league's most valuable defensemen.



The Nils Hoglander discourse on Canucks social media over the past few seasons has been quite something. Since his surprise rookie season, the young Canuck has struggled to find his way in a consistent lineup spot. Last season, his shooting percentage skyrocketed to 20%, resulting in 24 goals. When you're scoring that much, you earn a regular lineup spot; Hoglander played in 80 games. He's unlikely to match that total this season, but he has proved he can be a contributor at the NHL level. Given the Canucks' signings of Daniel Sprong and Jake DeBrusk, Hoglander may not have the same opportunities. He is projected to score around 20 goals this season if he remains in a top-six role. Should his role diminish, that number falls closer to 15.

## [Sportsnet.ca](https://www.sportsnet.ca) / [Five players who could have breakout seasons in the NHL](#)

By Adam Vingan – September 25, 2024

Every NHL season, a relatively unknown player breaks through in a big way. Think Edmonton Oilers defenceman Evan Bouchard, whose stock skyrocketed last season as he nearly doubled his career high in points, or Dallas Stars forward Wyatt Johnston, who was a revelation in his second year with 42 combined goals in the regular season and playoffs.

Who could be next? Here are five possibilities:

### **Philip Broberg, St. Louis Blues defenceman**

The Blues landed Broberg and forward Dylan Holloway last month after the Oilers declined to match St. Louis' two-year offer sheets. A depth defenceman for the Oilers, Broberg is slated to start in a top-four role with the Blues in place of the injured Torey Krug. (In his pre-season debut Sunday, Broberg played with big-minute blueliner Colton Parayko.)

Broberg, 23, stepped into the Oilers' lineup late in the playoffs and showed poise in high-pressure situations. His 28.8 defensive plays, which include stick checks and blocked passes, per 60 minutes ranked third among 63 defencemen who had at least 100 minutes of 5-on-5 ice time during the post-season. Edmonton outscored the Stars and Florida Panthers 6-2 when Broberg was on the ice at 5-on-5.

Drafted eighth overall in 2019, Broberg was unable to unlock his full potential with the Oilers. More opportunity awaits him in St. Louis.

### **Leo Carlsson, Anaheim Ducks forward**

Carlsson was limited to 55 games in his rookie season, which was partially by design. The Ducks put their prized prospect on a load-management plan of sorts to prepare him for the rigours of the league. He also missed time because of injuries but still finished with 29 points (0.53 points per game).

No such restrictions exist this season, which could mean big things for Carlsson.

The 19-year-old centre pushes the pace, as evidenced by his 66.2 possession-driving plays per 60 last season. That ranked 32nd out of 391 forwards who played at least 500 minutes in all situations. His 4.46 rush pass completions per 60 were 10th most at the position.

At Ducks training camp, Carlsson is skating with Calder Trophy candidate Cutter Gauthier and veteran Alex Killorn — a combination with plenty of offensive potential.

### **Jalen Chatfield, Carolina Hurricanes defenceman**

The departures of second-pairing defenders Brett Pesce (New Jersey) and Brady Skjei (Nashville) should lead to more playing time for the 28-year-old Chatfield, who signed a new three-year contract worth a total of \$9 million with the Hurricanes in June.

Despite averaging just 15:12 of ice time per game in 2023-24, Chatfield led all Hurricanes defencemen with 1.27 points per 60 at 5-on-5. He is not shy about firing the puck from the back end, scoring on 3.6 per cent of his 5-on-5 shot attempts — ninth-best out of 138 qualified defencemen (minimum 1,000 minutes played).

Offensive production is not Chatfield's only specialty. Only rugged blueliner Chris Tanev (6.76) won more 5-on-5 puck battles per 60 than Chatfield (6.58) among qualified defencemen.

The Hurricanes rely heavily on their defencemen for offence; Carolina has finished in the top five in points at the position in each of the past three seasons. Alongside partner Dmitry Orlov, Chatfield appears capable of handling a bigger role.

#### **Dylan Guenther, Utah Hockey Club forward**

The newly christened Utah Hockey Club (formerly the Arizona Coyotes) has multiple breakout candidates, including Guenther, who just signed an eight-year deal worth roughly \$7.14 million per season.

Guenther put up 35 points in 45 games in 2023-24 — a 64-point pace over a full season. If he takes a step forward this season, it will be on the strength of his one-timer. Guenther averaged 4.59 one-timer attempts per 60 in all situations — 13th-most out of 391 forwards (minimum 500 minutes). Around a quarter of his overall attempts (56 of 218) were one-timers, leading to five of his 18 goals.

Utah, which has one of the youngest rosters in the league, intends to compete in its inaugural season. Guenther, 21, could quickly become a fan favorite in Salt Lake City.

#### **Jack Quinn, Buffalo Sabres forward**

Serious injuries derailed Quinn's 2023-24 season. After missing the Sabres' first 32 games while recovering from a ruptured Achilles, the No. 8 overall draft pick in 2020 broke his left fibula in January. When healthy, however, Quinn was outstanding, recording 19 points in 27 games.

How efficient was Quinn last season? The only forwards who produced more points per 60 at 5-on-5 were the top four vote-getters for the Hart Trophy.

Quinn was most dangerous off the rush, averaging 3.48 scoring chances per 60 at 5-on-5 — 12th out of 431 forwards who played at least 300 minutes in that situation. He scored five of his nine total goals off the rush.

The Sabres fell off a cliff offensively last season, dropping from third in goals per game (3.57) to 23rd (2.98) and missing the playoffs for the 13th year in a row. They hope Quinn, 23, will be part of the solution.

“(A) healthy Jack Quinn in your lineup every day is a difference-maker,” Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams told The Buffalo News. “He can play any type of role. He can play either wing. He’s got elite offensive ability with his shot, and he can make plays and make others around him better, but he can also kill penalties. He’s just an impact player in your lineup.”

## [Sportsnet.ca / Sportsnet Insiders rank the NHL's top 50 players: 40-31](#)

By Sonny Sachdeva – September 25, 2024

The familiar sounds of training camp have ushered in a new NHL campaign — skates carving up ice, pucks ricocheting off glass, the din of voices and sticks and bodies colliding. After an off-season that saw veteran stars swap sweaters, young phenoms prepare for their first run, and Cup finalists shake up their lineups, we've arrived on the cusp of 2024-25.

But before we get there, it's worth stopping to take stock. We're half a decade into an offensive renaissance around the league, the NHL's overall offensive output lifting to levels not seen since the '90s, the game's best outdoing themselves on the scoresheet season after season. So, facing that swell of talent, creativity and production, we've asked the question: Who are the leaders of this new era? Who are the best of the best?

We turned to our Sportsnet Insiders for an answer, asking them to rank the top 50 players in the NHL at this moment — all positions, all skillsets, one list.

There was only one ground rule: This ranking is forward-looking. It doesn't factor in legacy or stature in the game — it considers only how the league's best are expected to perform in 2024-25. The overall ranking below is an amalgam of the Top 50 lists from Insiders across the network. For each Insider's list, players were assigned points based on how high they finished in that particular ranking — the higher they ranked on an Insider's list, the more points they accrued.

Each player's position on the overall ranking is a result of how many total points they collected across all of the Insiders' lists.

With that, here is the next installment of Sportsnet's ranking of the Top 50 Players in the NHL — a look at Nos. 40-31:

After years of promise and potential, the 2023-24 campaign saw Noah Dobson take the next step as a clear-cut No. 1 defender. The career performance lifted the rangy rearguard into rarified air among the game's elite offensive-minded blue-liners — Dobson's 70 points winding up as the seventh-most posted from the back end, just a handful off the likes of Adam Fox and Victor Hedman. There's no question he's thriving as the leader of the Isles' blue line, pacing the defence corps in minutes during his first campaign in the role and earning Norris Trophy consideration for the first time in his career. Now comes 2024-25 and a chance for the 24-year-old to prove he can not only reach those heights, but stay there.

Long the picture of consistent greatness in an NHL cage, Andrei Vasilevskiy is coming off a season of tumult. First came back surgery and a delayed debut. Then came the rollercoaster, signature starts alternating with nights that saw the former Vezina and Conn Smythe winner look uncharacteristically human. In the end, the campaign finished as a largely forgettable one for the 30-year-old. Still, at his best, there's little mystery where Vasilevskiy stands among the game's top netminders. Just look to how his fellow NHLers view him — four years in a row, players around the league have been asked who they would want in net for a single must-win game, and four years in a row, Vasilevskiy's name came up first. With last year's back issues hopefully behind him, the veteran takes aim at recovering that elite form in 2024-25.

It took a half-decade for Nico Hischier, but after years of navigating the expectations that came with his draft position, the Devils captain seemed to find something during a sterling campaign in 2022-23. Career marks on the offensive front, dominant form in the other half of the rink, and by the year's end, the second-most Selke Trophy votes of any two-way practitioner in the league — losing out to the man

who's won the thing more times than anyone else in history. Then came the slide, the Swiss pivot's 2023-24 going much the way it did for the rest of his club's leaders — a disappointing step backwards after that flag-planting breakout. A new season brings a chance to right the ship in New Jersey, with a new coach and an improved roster set to aid in that effort. For Hirschier himself, it brings an opportunity to prove it was the middling effort last year that was the aberration, not the impressive one a year prior.

Entering the league as a much-hyped blue-line phenom, stepping into an organization not short on chaos, Rasmus Dahlin simply put his head down and pushed forward, chipping away at his steady pursuit of the league's upper echelon. Over the past two years, he seems to have arrived there. In that span, among all NHL defenders, Dahlin's collected the fourth-most goals (35), seventh-most points (132), and third-most shots (493), all while logging the second-most minutes per night (25:36). Amid a disappointing Sabres campaign in 2023-24 — the latest in a string of them — Dahlin remained a bright spot, a workhorse for a club whose young core is still finding its footing. Still only 23 years old, the trajectory of his career seems pointed sharply upwards, Dahlin looking every bit the next great blue-liner produced by the Tre Kronor.

At 26, Charlie McAvoy's only played two seasons in a Bruins sweater that didn't end with him earning Norris votes. But the nature of the American rearguard's game has largely kept him out of the conversation about the sport's best blue-liner. He can produce offensively, but he's no world-beater on the scoresheet. He can shut down the opposition, but he's not an out-and-out smothering presence. What separates McAvoy from the rest of the game's best defencemen, though, is the balance he brings between those two roles — and the bruising, unyielding approach he takes to achieving it. A new top-pairing partner in Nikita Zadorov should help him hone his game further in 2024-25, the big-bodied newcomer sure to shoulder some of that physicality, while allowing McAvoy to lean harder into his offensive instincts.

After the trio of elite campaigns he's strung together in Dallas, you could be forgiven for forgetting just how young Jason Robertson is. One year after he finished second in Calder Trophy voting in a solid, pandemic-shortened rookie season, the Stars phenom was already earning Hart Trophy votes, putting up a 40-spot in the goals department as a sophomore. In Year 3, he blossomed into one of the game's brightest young talents, pushing his totals to 46 goals (seventh-most league-wide) and 109 points (sixth-most), while finishing fourth in Hart voting (just behind Connor McDavid, David Pastrnak and Matthew Tkachuk; just ahead of Nathan MacKinnon). The all-world production took a hit in 2023-24 as Dallas brought more balance to its offensive approach. Still, Robertson found other ways to impact the success of one of the West's best squads, growing as a defensive presence and earning Selke votes for the second straight year. He's proven he can excel offensively and hold his own on the other end of the puck — now, the task is fine-tuning the balance between those two, and reasserting himself among the game's very best goal-scorers.

For those wondering what changed in Edmonton last season, what allowed them to finally break through in the post-season and get within one win of hanging a banner at Rogers Place, here's the answer: Evan Bouchard. The gap between the glimpses of potential Bouchard showed through his first few seasons in Edmonton and what he became in 2023-24 is seismic. The 24-year-old flat out dominated from the back end during his fifth year in an Oilers sweater, stacking 18 goals and 82 points over the course of the campaign — both totals more than doubling what he collected a year previous. Crucially, he was no less prolific in the post-season, amassing 32 points over Edmonton's 25-game Cup Final run, second only league-wide to Connor McDavid himself, and the third-most for a blue-liner in the history of the playoffs. Having No. 97 running rampant over the league in front of you certainly helps boost the numbers — and yet, plenty of talented defenders have worn that Oilers crest during McDavid's time in Edmonton and none have managed to match Bouchard. The young blue-liner proved during the club's

2024 run that he could perform on both ends of the sheet, that he could hang when the stakes were highest. Now, he just needs to prove he can do it all again.

The Florida sunshine has done wonders for Sam Reinhart, it seems. Rewind back to the 28-year-old's pre-Panthers days, when he was part of a young Buffalo Sabres core struggling to find its way, and this late-career resurgence seemed far from a sure thing. There was promise, but not dominance. Then came the move south and everything shifted. Year 1 in Panthers threads brought a career season; Year 2, a second run of Selke votes. And in Year 3? He had the campaign of his life — 57 goals (the second-most league-wide), 94 points (12th most league-wide), and, most importantly, a Stanley Cup championship. More impressive still, that flourishing offensive performance didn't come at the expense of the defensive acumen he showed over the two years prior — instead, Reinhart managed an uptick there too, finishing fourth in Selke voting by the year's end. The late-blooming breakout came at a perfect time for the versatile forward, earning him a hefty eight-year, \$69-million extension to remain in Florida long-term. Now comes the pressure to live up to that price tag, and prove it wasn't the sole motivation for the career-best campaign.

Even the most staunch Zach Hyman supporters couldn't have seen it going quite this well when the plucky winger left Toronto and headed west. A steady, hard-working complementary piece on Auston Matthews' wing during his Maple Leafs years, Hyman has blossomed into something entirely different on McDavid's. After a couple 20-goal efforts out east, the top-line winger has amassed 117 goals over three seasons in Edmonton — highlighted by a career-altering 54 this past season. The grind of the post-season, of a 25-game run to the Final, did little to slow him down, Hyman pacing the league with 16 goals during Edmonton's playoff march. Much has been made of how the 32-year-old's hockey career began, and who he's gotten to line up with during his time in the big leagues. But you don't simply fall into a 50-goal season. Playing with No. 97 is a gift to the numbers, no doubt, but the ability to work off of and alongside that level of on-ice genius is a skill in its own right — one Hyman's shown he has in spades. All eyes will be on the winger to prove he can continue lighting the lamp at that pace. But in truth, the goals were never the foundation of Hyman's game. It's the simple, detailed approach that earned him what he's found in the league so far, and it's that approach that should set him up for success again in 2024-25.

The game's newest generational phenom had no shortage of obstacles thrown in his path during Year 1 as a big-leaguer — injuries sidelining one of the few other game-changers on the roster, off-ice chaos upending the lineup further, injuries of his own holding Bedard off the sheet for a spell, and of course, the hurricane of hype that blew in with him as his career began. But from the start, there was one thing that remained undeniable about the young pivot — his all-world skill with the puck on his stick. Undersized, 18 years old, with a supporting cast that left much to be desired, Bedard still managed 22 goals and 61 points through 68 games in a fine rookie campaign, earning a Calder Trophy for his troubles. More importantly, he answered the biggest question asked of him: whether his game-breaking shot could beat netminders at the highest level. He beat them, and danced around the defenders in front of them, and he's only getting started. With a year of seasoning under his belt, and a noticeably improved forward corps around him — Taylor Hall has returned from injury, while Tyler Bertuzzi and Teuvo Teravainen join Chicago's top six — a next-level sophomore effort seems on the horizon for young Bedard.