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The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets roast Red Wings, 5-2, in statement win before outdoor rematch

By Brian Hedger – February 27, 2025

Bring on the elements.

After an impressive 5-2 victory over the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday night at Little Caesar's Arena, the Blue Jackets will now host the outdoor rematch Saturday at Ohio Stadium in the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series matchup.

Getting two goals from James van Riemsdyk to spark a four-goal second period, the Blue Jackets (29-22-8) made a 4-2 lead starting the third stand up in their third straight win coming out of the NHL's winter break. They also moved into a tie with the Red Wings (30-23-6) at 66 points and will stay in the Eastern Conference's second wild-card spot behind Detroit due to tiebreaker rules.

Saturday's rematch at Ohio State's famed "Horseshoe" will be for the East's top wild card, adding even more intensity into a game that already pitted two playoff-seekers battling for key points.

Daniil Tarasov, the Jackets' backup goalie, played for the first time since Jan. 31 and earned the win with 29 saves that included a 12-of-12 performance in the third. Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner led the Jackets with three points on three assists and Kent Johnson added two points on a goal and assist, including his 20th goal for his first 20-goal campaign. Sean Kuraly and Kirill Marchenko scored the other two Columbus goals, including Marchenko's diving effort to tap the puck into Detroit's empty net with 57 seconds left for his career-high 24th goal.

Following an exciting opening period without a single goal scored, the teams combined for six goals in the second, starting with Red Wings forward Alex DeBrincat scoring 27 seconds into it for a 1-0 lead. Van Riemsdyk tied it, 1-1, at 4:16 on his first of two goals that bookended the goals from Kuraly and Johnson during the Jackets' four-goal outburst. J.T. Compher scored on a power play late in the second to pull the Wings within 4-2, but they didn't get any closer.

Tarasov and the Blue Jackets' defensive play in front of him kept it that score to end the second and Tarasov rose up to stop all 12 shots he faced in the third.

The Columbus Dispatch / Jenner clutch for Columbus Blue Jackets after Sillinger injury in Detroit: 4 takeaways

By Brian Hedger – February 28, 2025

The NHL couldn't have hoped for a better matchup than what the Blue Jackets and Detroit Red Wings will provide for 90,000-plus fans Saturday night at Ohio Stadium.

After splitting the first two games of their season series with the Blue Jackets' 5-2 victory Thursday in Detroit, the final scheduled meeting this season now carries added importance when they rematch in the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series matchup.

A Blue Jackets win would boost them into the East's top wild-card spot while dropping the Red Wings, who currently have it via tiebreaker, into the second wild card. A Detroit win keeps the wild-card spots aligned as they are now. Putting it another way, the playoffs are already underway in Detroit and Columbus, where Saturday's attendance is expected to reach the second highest ever to watch an NHL game.

How's that for a storyline?

Here are four takeaways from the Blue Jackets' win in Detroit:

Boone Jenner gives Columbus Blue Jackets needed boost

This was Boone Jenner's third game since returning from a preseason shoulder injury that required surgery in early October and forced him to miss the Jackets' first 56 on the schedule.

After picking up two assists over the first two games, Jenner played a key role Thursday in Detroit after Cole Sillinger sustained an upper-body injury in the first period. The Blue Jackets' captain slid over from left wing to fill Sillinger's vacated spot at center on the second line, showing fast chemistry with James van Riemsdyk and Kent Johnson as wingers.

Van Riemsdyk moved up from the fourth line to skate with Jenner and Johnson, and the move quickly paid off. They generated three goals, two scored by Van Riemsdyk and Johnson's 20th of the season, while Jenner assisted on all three. He also won 53% of his draws (8 of 15) while leading all players in the game with seven shots on goal and 12 attempts.

Jenner has primarily handled the Blue Jackets' top center role the past three seasons, so shifting to the middle wasn't a problem. Depth down the middle could become an issue if Sillinger is out for extended time, but Jenner's experience and acumen at center would likely mitigate a daunting challenge.

Cole Sillinger's status for outdoor game at Ohio Stadium unknown following injury against Detroit Red Wings

It's starting to feel like the Blue Jackets can't play a game without losing one or more players.

It happened again in Detroit when Sillinger was injured during a heavy collision with Red Wings defenseman Moritz Seider in the first period. Seider was credited with a hit, but replays showed him bowling over Sillinger after turning forcefully to chase the puck.

Regardless of intent, Sillinger sustained an upper-body injury and left the game after logging four shifts. After initially leaving the bench to get checked out, the fourth-year center returned for just two more shifts before leaving for good. He was officially ruled out at the start of the second period.

Sillinger's status for the outdoor rematch is now in doubt. The only bright side to the situation was Jenner's availability to cover the center position on the second line without missing a beat.

Unheralded Kent Johnson's 20th goal for Columbus Blue Jackets further proof he's one of the NHL's top young forwards

Prior to the early shoulder injury that cost him 14 games, Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson showed signs he was ready to unfurl an impressive breakout season. Since returning Nov. 21 with two goals in the Blue Jackets' 7-6 overtime win against the Tampa Bay Lightning, Johnson has put together the type of breakout campaign he'd hoped to unfurl in his fourth NHL season.

After contributing two points with a goal and assist Thursday in Detroit, Johnson is scoring at nearly a point-per-game pace with 20 goals, 22 assists and 42 points in 45 games. His +2 plus/minus against the Red Wings also pushed him back into the positive side at +1 in that category. Since the calendar flipped to January 2025, Johnson also has a scoring line of 11-10-21 in 21 games that includes points added in 12 of the past 13 games.

Not many outside Columbus mention Johnson when talking about the NHL's brightest young stars, but he won't stay a hidden gem forever.

Kirill Marchenko goes superhero to seal Columbus Blue Jackets victory

Since returning from a fractured jaw in less than three weeks, wearing facial protection on his helmet, Kirill Marchenko has played with near reckless abandon.

He's starting to play like a new wave Marian Hossa, using relentless drive while battling for pucks and good size to gain inside position in the offensive zone. Marchenko and center Adam Fantilli buzzed around the Red Wings' net all game without producing a goal, but the Russian right wing finally got one over the goal line with Detroit goalie Cam Talbot on the bench for a 6-on-5 advantage.

After shoveling the puck between two defenders, Marchenko raced Seider to it before laying out inside the Detroit zone with a "Superman" dive to tap it into the empty net. As empty-net goals go, it was a thing of beauty that set Marchenko's new career-high for a season at 24 goals.

The Columbus Dispatch / A decades-long wait for an outdoor game for the Blue Jackets and The Shoe is over

By Michael Arace – February 28, 2025

Be it with an abacus or AI, it's difficult to count how many outdoor hockey games the NHL has staged since 2003. It's something like 42, although the Chicago Blackhawks might have played a couple more by the time you read this. The league has presented Heritage Classics, Stadium Series and, of course, the now traditional Winter Classics. There has been a Centennial Classic, an NHL 100 Classic and two (!) NHL Outdoors at Lake Tahoe. (They find Fredo down there?)

Twenty-nine of the league's 32 teams have played an outdoor game. The Seattle Kraken, who came into the league in 2021, have played an outdoor game. The Blackhawks have played seven (and they're 1-6). Twenty-two of the league's 29 metropolitan markets have had an outdoor game. True fact: In 1954, the Detroit Red Wings played an outdoor exhibition against the Marquette Prison Pirates on the premises of what is, essentially, a humongous penalty box.

We know the Ohio State Pen is gone, demolished to make way for Nationwide Arena. But there's a big ol' stadium around here somewhere, isn't there? Crew owner Jimmy Haslam can't find it; he has scheduled a game against Lionel Messi in Cleveland, because parking. It's funny how Jimmy wants to build a new domed stadium out by the airport for his Browns because Huntington Bank Field is inadequate – and yet, it is a first-class facility for a home game 150 miles away from the Crew's home. For the fans!

The Blue Jackets fans have been forced to wait for anything and everything except a coach firing. They're still waiting to win a draft lottery; they're zero-for-18 in draft lotteries, not counting 2016 when they moved up one place (to third) in a secondary drawing. They took Pierre Luc-Dubois. They're still waiting to taste a conference final as the Jackets have won just one playoff series, not counting the play-in victory over the Toronto Maple Leafs in the 2020 bubble. Seattle is the only other team in the league that has yet to make it to a conference final.

These fans have had to wait two full decades to get an outdoor game when it should have been a no-brainer: Ohio Stadium is one of the most venerable, storied buildings in American sports. It's perfect. Columbus knows how to throw a party. And, while this is purely subjective, when it comes to playoff hockey, you could put the decibel level of the 5th Line up against any fan base in the league.

For some Blue Jackets fans, this season will include a trip to Nationwide Arena for a gathering to remember forward Johnny Gaudreau and a sojourn to Ohio Stadium for the team's first outdoor game.

It was a question that became more common as the century went along: Why has there never been an outdoor game in The Shoe? It wasn't just Jackets fans who were asking. It was anyone, anywhere, who'd ever seen a Winter Classic (or an NHL Outdoors at Lake Tahoe). Columbus, Ohio State Buckeyes, Blue Jackets, Ohio Stadium ... just get the Red Wings in here, if not the Blackhawks, and the potential for an instant classic is soaring. Ohio vs. Michigan goes together like peanut butter and bananas.

Oh, sure, the NHL and Ohio State worked to get an outdoor game to Ohio's capital city for years and years and years. The problem was that winterizing Ohio Stadium that cost money, and neither the \$2.8-million renovation in 1991 nor the \$150-million renovation in 2000 did anything to assure that the pipes wouldn't freeze. When the college football playoff system expanded – and the specter of a home game in December became a possibility – the work was done to a tune of \$10 million. Gene Smith paid for it with money he found after he vacuumed out his car. (No, he didn't, but it's possible.)

It is finally here.

Saturday evening, the Blue Jackets and Red Wings will meet on a sheet of ice in the middle of The Shoe. The puck will drop a few (too many) ticks past 6 p.m. A live audience of more than 90,000 has been projected. A national television audience will tune in to see America's Team and, presumably, the Red Wings. The Blue Jackets have been the best story of the NHL season, as they have risen to playoff contention in the wake of the tragic death of their superstar, Johnny Gaudreau.

"Mostly, the scenario around us nationally is what a hard time the team, the organization, the city had because of what happened last summer," said veteran Jackets defenseman Jack Johnson. "To be at this point of the season, playing games that matter, for points that matter in the standings – it has been a great story. A lot of people around the country are pulling for us."

"A lot of people around the country are pulling for us," Blue Jackets defenseman Jack Johnson said ahead of Saturday's game in which Columbus will play in front of around 90,000 fans.

Johnson, 38, is in his second stint with Columbus. He is a Michigan man. He is married to Dublin native Kelly Quinn, sister of former NFL quarterback (via Notre Dame) Brady Quinn and sister-in-law of former NFL linebacker (via Ohio State) A.J. Hawk. Imagine their Thanksgivings. They probably talked about an outdoor game at The Shoe, as we all have, for years.

It comes at a propitious moment.

The regime under former general manager Jarmo Kekalainen had some success, with five playoff appearances in seven years from 2014-2020. Johnson was a part of that. A rebuilding plan jumped its guardrails, and the Jackets lost 129 games over the past three seasons. The Mike Babcock horror show was followed by the firing of the GM, and the Jackets were back to being the Ipswitch Town of the NHL.

"These are hallowed grounds here in Columbus," Blue Jackets forward Sean Kuraly said of Ohio Stadium.

Then, Gaudreau and his brother were killed by an accused drunk driver while riding their bicycles, a tragedy with so many terrible layers that is just high incompressible. So many around the world mourned the loss.

And mourn yet.

Kekalainen left a well-stocked cupboard for new president/GM Don Waddell and new coach Dean Evason, two old hockey hands who've lived a life with steady hands. They put it out front: We will remember Johnny Hockey at every turn and celebrate his spirit. Then, they took this roster, with its mix of grit and talent, of blossoming youth and sage veterans, and they did what nobody thought was possible. They reached a March 1 outdoor game in the playoff hunt.

"These are hallowed grounds here in Columbus," veteran forward Sean Kuraly said in a recent interview at The Shoe. Kuraly is a Dublin native, grew up an Ohio State football fan and honed his game as a Junior Blue Jacket. He's as Columbus as a burger at the Thurman Cafe, the pinnacle of the Leveque Tower or Save the Crew.

"To be out here and playing hockey is going to be neat. I think what makes these events so special is all the people that can get in here, fit in here, make it so special," Kuraly said. "It's not a thing that can happen all that often for a hockey game, to get this many people together. I think it's going to be a big celebration of Columbus and the hockey community that has been here for a long time, especially since the Blue Jackets have been in town, 25 years."

It took way too long to get this thing scheduled yet, somehow, the timing feels right. Ohio Stadium, built by the great Columbus (actually, he was from Dayton) architect Howard Dwight Smith in 1922, just

might be a mighty platform to launch another Columbus team toward better fortune in a different century. There is hope.

The Athletic / Boone Jenner, James van Riemsdyk carry Blue Jackets in Stadium Series preview

By Aaron Portzline – February 27, 2025

When Columbus Blue Jackets center Cole Sillinger went down with an injury late in the first period, coach Dean Evason was forced to reconstruct his second line on the fly. Boone Jenner, who had been playing left wing, took Sillinger's spot in the middle, and James van Riemsdyk moved up from the fourth line to play left wing.

It was, in at least a couple of ways, a snapshot of Columbus' season. Losing a key player is nothing new to the Blue Jackets, but how they've responded each time has become a point of pride.

Van Riemsdyk scored two goals, and Boone Jenner had three assists in a four-goal second period, helping the Blue Jackets to a 5-2 victory over the Detroit Red Wings before a crowd of 19,515 in Little Caesars Arena. It was the Blue Jackets' third straight win.

"It's tough, obviously," Jenner said. "(Sillinger) is a big piece of our team here, and the guys came together. Again.

"It's been the theme all year. When guys go down, guys pick each other up. We had guys playing all over the lineup to fill in the four lines, and everyone did a great job."

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason would not say much about Sillinger's injury, except that it was to his upper body. He left the game with six minutes to play in the first period after taking the worst of a check by Red Wings defenseman Moritz Seider.

Sillinger's potential absence was the only downer as the Blue Jackets flew home late Thursday, flush with confidence and cleared to focus entirely on Saturday's Stadium Series outdoor game in venerable Ohio Stadium between these same clubs.

Kent Johnson had a goal and an assist, and Sean Kuraly and Kirill Marchenko also scored for the Blue Jackets. Daniil Tarasov, making his first start since Jan. 31, made 29 saves, including all 12 Detroit shots he faced in the third period.

Jenner, whose three assists matched a career high, had never had 3 points in a single period. He matched a franchise record set numerous times.

You might say the win was "mother-approved," too. With so many family members in town for Saturday's outdoor game, the Blue Jackets incorporated the traditional "mothers trip" into the weekend, and almost 20 moms were cheering from a private box.

Evason said he and the coaching staff pulled van Riemsdyk aside last week when the Blue Jackets returned to practice after the 4 Nations Face-Off and Jenner, out all season after shoulder surgery, was cleared to make his season debut.

They wanted to tell van Riemsdyk not just that he was dropping to the fourth line but why.

"When Boone came back, he took JVR's spot, right?" Evason said. "We had a chat with JV and told him it had absolutely nothing to do with how he's playing the game. He just thanked us and understood exactly what was going on. It's the captain of our hockey team. It's Boone Jenner.

"He was like, 'Yeah, I'll play wherever.' That's what our team has done from day one. There's no whining. There's no coming into the coach's office and asking why I'm not playing there or why I'm not

playing this number of minutes. It's a huge credit to our leadership in that room. JVR showed that. And when he got a chance (to move up in the lineup), he went out and (scored) a couple goals."

Van Riemsdyk, who has 14 goals on the season, scored his first on a deflection off a Jake Christiansen shot and his second off a pass from Jenner from behind the net. It helped the Blue Jackets turn a 1-0 deficit into a 4-1 lead with 4:59 remaining in the second.

Jenner, who had a game-high seven shots on goal, also assisted on Johnson's deflection goal.

It looked as if Jenner and van Riemsdyk, who have never played together, were speaking the same language immediately.

"Boone was someone who, when I signed here, I knew I'd have chemistry with if I had a chance to play with him — just the way he thinks the game," van Riemsdyk said. "I feel like I'm the same way. There's not a ton of fluff to our games. We're predictable to each other. We're not trying to make any fancy plays, just be very effective and play around the net."

Thursday's win pulls the Blue Jackets and Red Wings into a tie with 66 points each. The Red Wings are the first wild card in the Eastern Conference because they have more regulation wins (22) than the Blue Jackets (21), but both teams are 4 points ahead of their three closest challengers: the Ottawa Senators, Boston Bruins and New York Rangers.

It sets up for a game Saturday that will carry much weight beyond the spectacle of hosting an outdoor game in a 100-year-old football stadium.

"We talked about it (after the game), that it's a brand-new game (Saturday)," Evason said. "We'll hopefully ride some momentum. Both teams are going to be excited. They're going to be desperate. We're going to be desperate. Should be a real good hockey game."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets want to set the tone for wild weekend home-and-home vs. Red Wings

By Aaron Portzline – February 27, 2025

By mid-afternoon Wednesday, the construction of a hockey rink inside Ohio Stadium was right on schedule, with just the finishing touches required before the NHL is ready for the Stadium Series game between the Columbus Blue Jackets and Detroit Red Wings on Saturday.

As NHL executive Steve Mayer spoke with the media, workers could be seen prepping a platform beside the rink where the Blue Jackets' famous cannon will be staged as soon as it makes its way from Nationwide Arena to the Ohio State campus.

The Blue Jackets still have a game to play — they play the Red Wings on Thursday at Little Caesars Arena — but, in many ways, the momentum has begun to build toward Saturday's celebration.

"There's no better way than to go there and play the first one, then come back here with our fans for the Stadium Series," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski told The Athletic. "You can't really draw it up any better. It'd be nice to get the first one (on Thursday)."

"You never know what's going to happen in an outdoor game, there are just so many variables. It's one of those things that, even if you don't get two points, you want to play the right way and establish that it's going to be a hard two games for them. I'm sure they're going to want the same thing."

According to the NHL, this marks the fifth time in 43 outdoor games that the two opponents have faced each other in the previous game. It's one of four home-and-homes on the Blue Jackets schedule, including two later this season vs. Ottawa (April 6 and 8) and Washington (April 12 and 13).

The NHL schedule-makers know what they're doing, and they're well aware that familiarity breeds contempt. The Blue Jackets, through their struggles over the years, do not have a clear rival, so the league needed to be creative to add a little spice.

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason, who was one of the NHL's noteworthy agitators during his 800-game career in the 1980s and '90s, is hoping for two physical games vs. the Wings.

"That'll be interesting, right?" Evason said. "Hopefully it gets a little feisty. That'd be fun."

Perhaps the biggest reason these games should be played hard and fast: Both the Blue Jackets and Red Wings are in the throes of a playoff chase in the Eastern Conference.

Through Wednesday's game, the Red Wings (66 points) are the top wild-card team, while the Blue Jackets (64) hold the second wild card. Looming just behind them are the New York Rangers (62), Ottawa Senators (62) and Boston Bruins (62).

"It's pretty wild when you think about the fact that these games could determine who makes (the playoffs) and who doesn't," Blue Jackets defenseman Jack Johnson said.

The Blue Jackets may feel as if they owe the Red Wings one (or two) after a tough loss at Nationwide Arena on Jan. 2.

With the game tied at 4, the Blue Jackets had a power play in the closing minutes of regulation. As the power play expired, Columbus defenseman Ivan Provorov had a slap shot from the right circle blocked by Detroit's Ben Chiarot, the puck ricocheting hard toward the neutral zone.

Former Blue Jackets center Tyler Motte lunged to swat the puck ahead just as Red Wings forward Jonatan Berggren was set free from the penalty box. Berggren beat Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins on a breakaway with 35.7 seconds remaining for a 5-4 Detroit win.

It was a heartbreaking loss, but the Blue Jackets moved past it quickly. They beat the St. Louis Blues two nights later, the start of a season-long six-game winning streak.

The challenge for the Blue Jackets on Thursday will be to deal with the task at hand, even as the world around them swirls with anticipation and potential distractions.

With so many family and friends in town for Saturday's outdoor game, the Blue Jackets decided to make Thursday's game in Detroit part of their annual mother's trip. The rink was busy with proud moms on Wednesday before they flew on the team's charter mid-afternoon.

Further, most of the Blue Jackets players and coaches have at least 10 family or friends coming to Columbus for the weekend, with a busy slate of activities planned. The Jackets will hold a 4:30 p.m. practice in Ohio Stadium on Friday, then host a family skate under the stars.

"We have every excuse to have a lot of distractions," Werenski said. "We have the mom's trip, the outdoor game. It's not a typical schedule.

"But, as a team, I think we've done a really good job just kind of staying focused on what's in front of us, the task at hand. These are big games, too, so that will help."

This is the 114th meeting between the Blue Jackets and Red Wings. Though they've played several home-and-home series through the years, this is arguably the most consequential.

Early in the 2010-11 season, under first-time NHL head coach Scott Arniel, the Blue Jackets were 14-6-0 and in second place in the Central Division when they played the first-place Red Wings (13-4-2) in a home-and-home on Nov. 26 and 28.

The Red Wings won 2-1 on Nov. 26 and 4-2 on Nov. 28, establishing themselves as the class of the Central Division and sending the Blue Jackets into a tailspin. They won only 20 of their final 62 games and finished last place in the Central.

This feels bigger, not just because it's much later in the season, but because both clubs are battling for the postseason.

"Home-and-homes always make it fun," Blue Jackets center Sean Kuraly said. "I'd like to think we have an advantage (on Saturday) when this is all ready. The fans are going to be excited. They're going to be loud."

NHL.com / Blue Jackets continue to defy odds entering Stadium Series against Red Wings

By Nicholas Cotsonika – February 28, 2025

It cannot be repeated enough: The Columbus Blue Jackets are the most inspiring story in the NHL, maybe in all of sports.

They showed why again Thursday in a 5-2 victory against the Detroit Red Wings at Little Caesars Arena, overcoming yet another injury, winning their third straight and setting up the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series at Ohio Stadium on Saturday (6 p.m. ET; ESPN, ESPN+, Disney+, TVAS-D, FX-CA).

Against all odds, Columbus is tied with Detroit for the first wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference.

“The coaches have done a great job, but the leadership of this team has kept this group together all year,” general manager Don Waddell said as he walked to the locker room. “To me, that’s the most amazing thing.

“I kept waiting for the bubble to burst, and they’ve been persistent in their message with the guys. We’ve got some really good young players, but they need good leadership -- and I think we’ve got great leadership.”

The Blue Jackets lost second-line center Cole Sillinger to an upper-body injury in the first period, then fell behind 1-0 early in the second. Captain Boone Jenner moved over from the left wing to replace Sillinger, and veteran James van Riemsdyk moved up from the fourth line to replace Jenner.

You have to understand the context: Jenner missed the first 56 games of the season with a shoulder injury. When he returned, he bumped van Riemsdyk down in the lineup.

“We had a chat with ‘JVR’ and said it had nothing to do with how he was playing the game, and he just thanked us and understood exactly what was going on,” coach Dean Evason said. “The captain of our hockey team is Boone Jenner. He’s like, ‘Yeah, I’ll play wherever.’

“So, that is what our team has done from Day 1. There’s no whining. There’s no coming into the coach’s office and asking, ‘How come I’m playing here, or how come I’m playing this minute, that minute?’ It’s a huge credit to our leadership in that room, and JVR showed that.”

And when he got his opportunity, he delivered. Van Riemsdyk scored two goals as the Blue Jackets took a 4-1 lead in the second. Jenner had three assists.

“Obviously, teams over the course of the season, you’re always going to be dealing with injuries,” van Riemsdyk said. “It’s a matter of different guys getting different opportunities at times and being able to take advantage of that and finding ways to win and finding ways to help the team.”

Columbus has dealt with far more than most teams, however.

Forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, died on Aug. 29 when they were struck by an alleged drunk driver, who has been charged with two counts of death by auto, while riding bicycles near their home in Salem County, New Jersey. Gaudreau was the Blue Jackets’ leading scorer each of the past two seasons. His mother sat in the stands with the other Columbus moms Thursday.

Jenner went down in the preseason. Defenseman Erik Gudbranson (shoulder) went down in the third game of the season. Defenseman Zach Werenski said at that point the Blue Jackets set a modest goal: "Let's just stay in it until the Stadium Series. Let's just be around and be in a position to kind of strike."

There were more injuries. Forward Justin Danforth (lower body) missed 18 games. Forward Kent Johnson (shoulder) missed 14. Forward Dmitri Voronkov (upper body) missed nine, defenseman Dante Fabbro (lower body, head) five, and forward Kirill Marchenko (jaw) three.

At least those players returned, along with Jenner. Gudbranson has missed 56 games now. Forward Yegor Chinakhov (upper body) has missed 38. Forward Sean Monahan (wrist) has missed 18. Evason said the Blue Jackets won't have a timeline on Sillinger until he returns home and sees the doctors.

"It's tough," Jenner said of Sillinger. "Obviously, he's a big piece of our team in here. The guys [came] together, again. I mean, it's kind of been a theme all year of guys going down and guys [picking] each other up. I think that's what you saw tonight. Guys were kind of playing all over the lineup just to fill in with the four lines. Everyone did a great job."

Jenner wanted to return specifically for the Stadium Series. He has spent his entire 12-season NHL career in Columbus. This will be the first outdoor game for him, his team and his city.

But this is about more than the big event on the big stage. This is about overcoming adversity as a team and returning to the playoffs for the first time since 2019-20.

"We're in a good spot," Jenner said. "We're playing fun hockey to try to get into the playoffs, and we're in a big playoff race. These games are big, and they're only going to get bigger. These games are where you want to be at this point in the year."

"I think it's just fun being part of this group, and it was a long wait. It definitely was very motivating to come back and be with these guys."

NHL.com / Best friends Larkin, Werenski set to do battle at Stadium Series for Red Wings, Blue Jackets

By Nicholas Cotsonika – February 27, 2025

When Zach Werenski gets married in Columbus in July, he'll have one hockey guy standing in the wedding: Dylan Larkin. The best friends have played together many times -- as kids, as college roommates, for their country -- and skate together in the offseason.

But don't think they won't compete against each other. They've become pillars of their NHL teams -- Werenski as the all-time leading scorer among defensemen for the Columbus Blue Jackets, Larkin as the captain and No. 1 center for the Detroit Red Wings -- and they'll go at it in two big games over the next three days.

After the Blue Jackets defeated the Red Wings 5-2 at Little Caesars Arena in Detroit on Thursday, the two teams have 66 points each and hold the first two wild card spots in the Eastern Conference going into their matchup in the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series at Ohio Stadium on Saturday (6 p.m. ET; ESPN, TVAS-D, FX-CA).

They'll be like brothers on a backyard rink.

"A couple years ago, Dylan and Zach got into a little scrum where they were kind of throwing punches or fake punches," said Joe Smaza, their youth coach. "You can't take the competitive nature out of these guys. I was like, 'What are you guys doing?'"

Smaza laughed. It's true. Although they weren't exactly throwing haymakers, Larkin and Werenski dropped the gloves and received fighting majors late in a 3-2 Columbus win at Little Caesars Arena on Jan. 18, 2021. They were just doing what hockey players do.

While representing the United States together at the 4 Nations Face-Off earlier this month, they sat side by side and recalled their first game against each other: a 4-1 Columbus win at Joe Louis Arena in Detroit on Dec. 9, 2016. Larkin scored on the power play at 4:46 of the second period after Werenski went off for hooking at 3:03.

"The first time we played was at the Joe, and he blew me up," Larkin said.

"Well, I took a penalty, and he scored when I was in the box," Werenski said.

"Yeah," Larkin said, laughing.

"And then, like, a couple shifts later, he's coming down the wing, and I was pissed at him," Werenski said. "So, yeah, I hit him pretty hard."

"That's where it started," Larkin said. "The first time playing against each other, and he did that. I was like, 'All right.'"

Here we go again.

"It's gonna be awesome," Werenski said. "I think the best part too is where both teams are at right now. Those games mean something to both of us, and we play on Thursday in Detroit and Saturday in Columbus. Those are big games. I think that's the most exciting part for us."

* * * * *

Larkin and Werenski grew up in the Detroit suburbs and played together for Belle Tire, winning a U14 national championship in 2011. They were young versions of what they are today for Detroit and Columbus.

"You look at the way Zach just took his game to another level, it seems like he should be in the conversation for an MVP for that team," said Winnipeg Jets forward [Kyle Connor](#), who also played for Belle Tire back then. "That's just the type of player he is. We knew that growing up. ...

"Obviously, we know Dylan. He's the heart and soul of that team in Detroit. He can rally the guys. He's that guy in the locker room getting everybody going. I think the thing that makes Dylan tick, his motor is second to none. He just goes and goes. He's got that skill, but I think that heart and grit is what I respect the most."

Smaza said Larkin was a two-way forward and natural leader who "just went out and battled and competed and played the right way" for Belle Tire. Werenski put up big numbers playing against kids a year older as "probably the biggest defenseman at the '96 age group as a '97."

"Their work ethic was ridiculous," Smaza said. "It wasn't just the on-the-ice work ethic. It was little things we did away from the ice. When you go back and you look at how hard specifically those two kids worked, they were always asking for more."

Larkin went to USA Hockey's National Team Development Program in 2012-13, when it was based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Werenski followed in 2013-14. Although Larkin was on the U18 team and Werenski the U17 team in 2013-14, they went to the same high school and skated in the same rink, and Werenski came up to play four games with the U18 team.

Don Granato got to know them as coach of the U17 team in 2013-14. He called Larkin a "fiery, fiery personality." He said Werenski leads differently, "because people look up to him as a person and as a talent."

Werenski accelerated his high school studies, at least partly so he could play with Larkin at Michigan in 2014-15.

"I think those guys just naturally gravitated towards each other," Smaza said. "They had the same mindset, obviously, going to play college hockey together. I think that was probably a big determining factor for Zach to actually go and finish up his senior year early so he could go to the University of Michigan to play with Dylan together and have that experience. I think that was huge for those guys."

Off the ice, they shared a dorm room at South Quad.

"We had a lot of good times," Larkin said. "I was the messy one. He's very organized. He makes his bed and does all the right things. We had the bunk beds set up for the first couple days, and I was on the top. We quickly changed. I think it lasted just the weekend. We had to change it so we were both on the floor."

On the ice, they shared a desire to be the best. Larkin had been selected by the Red Wings with the No. 15 pick of the 2014 NHL Draft. Werenski would be selected by the Blue Jackets with the No. 8 pick of the 2015 NHL Draft.

"We were competitive and wanted to get to the next level," Werenski said. "He was going to the NHL the next year, and it was my draft year, so we had some battles on the ice in practice, nothing off the ice. We're just competitive once we get out there. We enjoy playing against each other."

Red Berenson, the Michigan coach then, said he wondered how Werenski could handle the intensity of college hockey as a 17-year-old, but Werenski was the Wolverines' best player in his first college game: a physical 4-3 loss at Ferris State on Oct. 4, 2014.

"He just had a way," Berenson said. "He had a poise and a confidence no matter what, whether it was with the puck or without the puck. He played his game. And then he just grew from that. He was a terrific player."

Larkin and Werenski represented the United States together at the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship, and they played an outdoor game together, defeating Michigan State 4-1 at Soldier Field in Chicago on Feb. 7, 2015. Berenson said Larkin reached a new level after World Juniors. Larkin turned pro after the season.

"You couldn't wait to see him get on the ice again, and even when he got to the Red Wings, your eyes would be glued to him," Berenson said. "As soon as he got on the ice, he was a player to watch, and I thought for a young kid that was a big step."

Werenski joined Larkin in the NHL in 2016-17. Suddenly, they were opponents.

But they represented the United States together at the IIHF World Championship in 2019, and sometimes, it was like they never left their dorm room. At the 2022 NHL All-Star Game, Werenski walked up while Larkin was on a podium speaking to reporters.

"I've got a question for you, Dylan," Werenski said. "Who was your favorite teammate at Michigan?"

"Probably you," Larkin said, smiling. "Was that a two-way street, though? Was that mutual?"

"Yeah, we had some battles," Werenski said.

"Yeah, we did," Larkin said, laughing. "Was I a good roommate?"

"Certain days," Werenski said, laughing. "Not on game day."

* * * * *

Larkin and Werenski admire each other for what they have done in the NHL to reach this moment.

The Red Wings haven't made the playoffs since Larkin's rookie year. But he has been their captain since 2020-21, and he signed an eight-year, \$69.9 million contract (\$8.7 million average annual value) on March 1, 2023, committing to Detroit through 2030-31.

He has climbed to 12th in scoring in the Red Wings' 98-season history with 559 points (236 goals, 323 assists) in 711 games, including 53 points (24 goals, 29 assists) in 59 games this season, second on Detroit. He's tied for first in the League in power-play goals (13) with NHL goals leader Leon Draisaitl of the Edmonton Oilers.

"It's got to be tough, being from Detroit, spending your whole career in Michigan, kind of being the guy at a young age when it wasn't going well for them, and then just sticking with it and working hard and really embracing what it means to be a Detroit Red Wing," Werenski said.

"And he's done that, and now they're starting to have some success, and he's earned it. He deserves it. I'm just thrilled for him. I think for him it's just his attitude, how he approaches the game mentally. When it's good, when it's bad, he still approaches it the same way. He leads by example.

"It's easy to go south when things aren't going well. He's never done that. That's a credit to who he is as a person and how much he likes playing for the Red Wings."

Werenski has gone through ups and downs with the Blue Jackets, making the playoffs each of his first four seasons, missing them each of the past four, dealing with injuries. But he signed a six-year, \$57.5 million contract (\$9.58 million AAV) on July 30, 2021, committing to Columbus through 2027-28.

He has the most goals (108), assists (256) and points (364) among defensemen in the Blue Jackets' 23-season history, including 62 points (18 goals, 44 assists) in 58 games this season, first on Columbus and second among NHL defensemen. He leads NHL skaters in average ice time (26:50).

"There's a lot there, you know?" Larkin said. "I mean, what he's done and what he's been through, how he stayed. Very proud of him. Obviously, they had some success early in his career and were in the playoffs, and then they went through a little bit of a rebuild. He had some injuries that he dealt with personally that I know it really got to him."

Columbus forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, died Aug. 29 when they were riding bicycles at home in Salem County, New Jersey, and struck by an alleged drunk driver. Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner missed the first 56 games this season with an upper-body injury.

Werenski stepped up as a leader on and off the ice. Larkin got a good look in a 5-4 Detroit win at Columbus on Jan. 2. Larkin had a goal and an assist; Werenski had a goal and two assists.

"It was like how he was back in Belle Tire days, just dominating," Larkin said. "He was a year younger than us, but he was bigger, could skate faster than everyone and just toyed with kids a year older than him."

"It's great to see. It's changed the trajectory of their team the way he plays. He is their team. He drives the bus. It's just really cool to see. I'm very proud of everything he's been through and then how he's handled himself. It's great."

Werenski led the 4 Nations Face-Off in scoring with six assists in four games, and Larkin had two points (one goal, one assist) in four games, including the winning goal in a 3-1 victory against Canada at Bell Centre in Montreal on Feb. 15.

Now they will headline the NHL's next tentpole event.

More than 90,000 fans are expected Saturday, which would make the attendance the second largest in NHL history behind the 105,491 at the 2014 Winter Classic, a 3-2 shootout win for the Toronto Maple Leafs against the Red Wings at Michigan Stadium.

Larkin attended that Winter Classic as a fan and has played in two NHL outdoor games. But this will be a first for Werenski, the Blue Jackets and Columbus.

"I'm always a proud friend, and it's just great to see, so it's going to be a special afternoon," Larkin said. "It's going to be fun seeing him in front of that many fans and see the battle on the ice."

NHL.com / Blue Jackets GM aims 'to give this group a chance' approaching Trade Deadline

By Mike Zeisberger – February 27, 2025

Five months ago, general manager Don Waddell realistically figured the Columbus Blue Jackets would be sellers by the time the 2025 NHL Trade Deadline rolled around on March 7.

Thanks to the surprising play of his team this deep into the season, he's changed his mind.

As such, with the Blue Jackets in the midst of the hunt for a Stanley Cup Playoff berth in the Eastern Conference, defenseman Ivan Provorov, considered a leading candidate to be moved not so long ago because of his eligibility to become an unrestricted free agent on July 1, might be staying put.

"There's probably one guy that's a UFA that's going to command a big price, and that's Provorov," Waddell said Thursday. "But he's also our best shutdown defenseman."

One who stands to be a key cog in the postseason bid of the Blue Jackets (29-22-8), who are tied atop the wild card standings with the Detroit Red Wings (30-22-6) with 66 points each. They're four points ahead of the New York Rangers, Ottawa Senators and Boston Bruins.

Provorov is in the prime of his career at 28 years old and has had at least 26 points in each of his nine NHL seasons.

"Sometimes, as much as you like to get those assets, this is a different year as I'd probably look at it normally," Waddell said, "just because of what the guys have been through and how they continue to battle every day of the season and keep us in the position we're in as of Feb. 27. And for me to trade players for mid-round picks, it doesn't make sense.

"At the beginning of the season, I just hoped we'd have some kind of meaningful games in March. I didn't realize we'd be in a playoff spot. And so now, the way I look at it, I don't know if selling off is the right thing for this group. This group has done a great job of sticking together, and whether we can get there or not, I think I've got to give this group a chance."

Waddell said he has been busy fielding calls and texts from fellow GMs since the conclusion of the 4 Nations Face-Off last Thursday. His message to them all: "Let's get through this coming weekend and see where we are."

According to Waddell, so far, so good.

Columbus has come off the 4 Nations break with three consecutive wins after defeating the Red Wings 5-2 on Thursday. They'll play Detroit again in the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series in front of an estimated 90,000-plus fans at Ohio Stadium on Saturday (6 p.m. ET; Disney+, ESPN+, ESPN, TVAS-D, FX-CA). Completing the sweep would put the Blue Jackets in the East's top wild card position.

When all is said and done, Waddell said he'd like to be a buyer on the trade market, something he wouldn't have believed back in training camp. If he does opt to add, he said the moves have to be prudent.

"The thing is, my job is to manage our assets, so I can't make decisions that hurt us in the long term," he said. "We have a couple of first-round picks this year, and I'm not using them for rental players. That makes no sense at all. If someone's got term, well, that's different.

“For rental players, yeah, I’d like to add. But it’s going to be a softer cost, either later picks or prospects. I feel we have a good nucleus of them. But I’m also concerned about what I’ve watched happen with other teams. You bring too many guys in, it could disrupt what our guys have right now.

“We just got our captain back in (forward) Boone Jenner (shoulder). He missed 56 games. We should get (center) Sean Monahan (wrist) back in the next few weeks. Those are like trade deadline adds to our lineup.”

In the meantime, Waddell understands the significance of what the upcoming outdoor game has to the community of Columbus.

It will be a chance to celebrate not only the sport but the memory of the late [Johnny Gaudreau](#), the Blue Jackets forward who died along with his brother Matthew on Aug. 29 when they were struck by a car while riding bicycles at home in Salem County, New Jersey. Waddell said the Columbus players and coaching staff have developed a tight-knit bond in overcoming the adversity of Gaudreau’s passing to put together the type of season some are describing as “overachieving.”

“Look, we’ve had seven or eight straight sellouts,” he said. “Our fans have come in droves, which has been great. On Saturday, they sang Happy Birthday to Johnny Jr., Johnny’s son who turned 1 and was there with his mother, Johnny’s wife Meredith. I can’t say enough about them and their support of us.

“But this outdoor game is more than that. We’re going to expose Blue Jackets hockey to 20,000 or 30,000 people who have never experienced it. People who are going to come from all over Ohio. People who have heard of the Blue Jackets but never had the chance to come to a game. This is our chance to grow our fan base. Look what an outdoor game did for Carolina, so there’s no reason why we can’t do the same thing here in Columbus.”

At the same time, he said, the main focus remains winning.

“Saturday, it’s all business,” he said. “It’s going to be a great event for family and friends but we’re going to prepare ourselves to get two points.

“It’s not an exhibition game. It’s not an all-star game. It’s a game we enter with the understanding that it could be the difference between making and not making the playoffs.”

And, in the process, being a buyer or not heading into the trade deadline.

NBC4 / Outdoor hockey at Ohio Stadium: What to know for Blue Jackets-Red Wings game

By Orri Benatar & Zach Paquette

After years of waiting, we are now just one day away from the first outdoor Blue Jackets game.

The Jackets will play the Detroit Red Wings at 6 p.m. Saturday at Ohio Stadium in another chapter of the NHL Stadium Series. An estimated 90,000 fans will pack the stands to watch an NHL game at the home of Buckeyes football with plenty of festivities scheduled before, during, and after the game.

But what the evening boils down to is one of the biggest Blue Jackets games of the season. They are competing for their first postseason spot in four years, and Detroit is right in the thick of that race as both teams sit in position for the wild cards in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

Here is what to know about the Stadium Series game at the Horseshoe.

Blue Jackets offense is on fire

It's been a difficult few seasons for Blue Jackets hockey since the turn of the decade but fortunes have changed this season behind a talented young roster.

Coach Dean Evason and his squad are pushing for the teams' first Stanley Cup playoff spot since 2020 with an aggressive, offensive style. Leading that offense is Zach Werenski, who enters Saturday's game with a team-leading 62 points and is the top contender for the Norris Trophy, awarded to the NHL's best defenseman.

Werenski, top goal scorer Kirill Marchenko, and young stars Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli have been instrumental in putting the Jackets as the fourth top-scoring team in the Eastern Conference. And standing in their way Saturday is a former division rival.

Red Wings returning to form

Unlike your typical Ohio State-Michigan game at Ohio Stadium, the Columbus crowd will be cheering the team in blue and booing the team in red.

Detroit comes into the Stadium Series fighting to return to relevancy as the eleven-time Stanley Cup champions are in the midst of a nine-year playoff drought. That looks likely to change as head coach Todd McLellan, who got the job in December after Derek Lalonde was fired, has turned this team around with a crop of budding talent.

Players to watch include Swedish winger Lucas Raymond, who leads the team in points (63) and assists (41), in-form right winger Alex DeBrincat and captain Dylan Larkin, who is one of a handful of Michigan alum playing on Saturday. Among other former Wolverines include Werenski, Fantilli, and Johnson.

NHL outdoor history

Saturday will be the 42nd outdoor NHL game since the league made a tradition of having at least one outdoor game since 2008. The Blue Jackets will be the 30th NHL club to play an outdoor game with the Utah Hockey Club not on that list and the Florida Panthers, who will play outdoors next season at the Miami Marlins' baseball park.

Detroit is playing outdoors for the fifth time since 2008 and have a 2-2 record in such games. One stat going the way of the Blue Jackets is true home teams have won five of the last six outdoor games. Columbus is also an impressive 19-6-4 in front of a home crowd this season.

Another area to watch is scoring. The last five outdoor NHL games have averaged 7.6 goals so we could see plenty of cannon fire at the Horseshoe on Saturday night.

Columbus is expected to pack the 'Shoe with NHL content and events president Steve Mayer estimating 90,000 fans will attend. That would make this game the second most-attended NHL game of all-time, behind the 2014 Winter Classic at Michigan Stadium (104,000).

"We fully expect this to be sold out by game time," said Mayer. "At the end of the day, that many people to watch an outdoor game is so satisfying. It shows the strength of the NHL, the Columbus Blue Jackets, and this stadium and the sports fans in Columbus."

The Athletic / Which NHL top lines have been the best and worst of the 2024-25 season?

By Harman Dayal – Feb. 27, 2025

Nearly every powerhouse NHL team boasts star forwards at the top of their lineup. This has been true for recent Stanley Cup winners like the Panthers, Golden Knights, Avalanche and Lightning.

Of course, there's way more to team-building than having a few elite forwards. This isn't the NBA, where one or two superstars are enough to form a contender; you need formidable depth throughout your lineup.

A dominant top line is one heck of a start, though.

With that in mind, it's worth analyzing which first lines around the NHL are producing and which are underperforming this season.

We'll begin by identifying every team's No. 1 center as a proxy for the first line and then examining the results when that player is on the ice. There will be exceptions for teams whose top center has moved up and down the lineup, as opposed to staying fixed on the first line, or has missed significant time with injury. In those cases, we chose a winger to represent his team's top-line minutes (e.g. Kirill Marchenko for Columbus, Mitch Marner for Toronto, David Pastrnak for Boston, etc).

To measure performance, we'll look at the goals for and against differential when that first line is deployed at five-on-five. As an example, it means we're looking at how many goals Edmonton scores and how many it allows with Connor McDavid on the ice at even strength. We're using that as our measure instead of points because points can't account for defense.

Goal differential can be skewed positively or negatively based on shooting and goaltending luck. Sometimes, a team's first line controls play well and generates tons of chances, but is snakebitten finishing-wise and/or doesn't get saves from its goaltender. We'll be sure to point out where that seems to have made an impact, especially later in the article when we look at other underlying metrics.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Nobody could have predicted that Columbus' first line would throttle opponents on the scoreboard to this extent.

Marchenko has had an exceptional breakout campaign on the top line and is one of the most underrated stars in the league. The 24-year-old Russian winger is tied with McDavid, among others, for the 10th most five-on-five points in the NHL this season. Marchenko and Sean Monahan have spent over 400 five-on-five minutes together on the top line, in which the Blue Jackets have controlled a whopping 60 percent of expected goals and outscored opponents 34-11.

The Blue Jackets' first line also gets a boost from how often they're self-matched with Zach Werenski, who's having a Hart Trophy-caliber season. Columbus looks unstoppable offensively when Werenski's pair is deployed with the first line.

Adam Fantilli has stepped up impressively, centering the top line since Monahan's injury. And Dmitri Voronkov has been a very underrated complementary piece to round out Columbus' first line with his monster 6-foot-5 frame, deft hands and net-front scoring to the tune of a 32-goal pace per 82 games.

Columbus' first line has surrendered just 1.68 goals against per 60, but that stellar number is misleading because it is bleeding scoring chances at a pretty high rate (2.69 expected goals against per 60). The

impressive goals-against rate for Columbus' top line is propped up by outrageously good goaltending (.937 save percentage with the first line on) and will likely regress over time.

This line's offensive success, however, is both elite and sustainable.

Vegas Golden Knights

The Golden Knights' top line is excellent at both ends of the rink — they score goals in bunches and have given up just 1.88 goals against per 60 defensively.

Jack Eichel has been the engine of this line's two-way success. The 28-year-old has a chance to crack 100 points for the first time in his career. He's a smooth puck-transportation machine, a sublime playmaker and outstanding defensively.

Eichel's line has slowed down a bit offensively over the last several weeks for a couple of reasons, however.

Mark Stone's been split up from Eichel lately to give more balance to a Vegas top nine that's missing William Karlsson due to an injury. Ivan Barbashev, a fixture on the first line, was scoring at a breakout 41-goal, 82-point pace through the first 30 games but has gone ice-cold with just five points in his last 18 games.

Vegas' top line is still decisively winning its matchups because it is so stingy defensively, but it's probably hoping to rediscover the elite offensive gear it showed through the first 30 games or so.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point and Jake Guentzel have been as dynamite together as you'd expect. They score goals at will and have cut down on the chances and goals they give up defensively.

Tampa's top line is surrendering just 2.27 goals against per 60 this season, which is a huge improvement from the 3.49 per 60 it was giving up last season. Andrei Vasilevskiy's bounce-back is a huge driver behind that, but the first line is also doing a significantly better job of limiting quality chances against.

Kucherov's magician-like vision and playmaking, Point's speed and elite finishing and Guentzel's net-front IQ/skill complement each other perfectly. Watching them play together feels like poetry on ice.

Minnesota Wild

Kirill Kaprizov was leading the NHL in five-on-five points heading into the Christmas break. He was tearing it up on Minnesota's top line and a front-runner for the Hart Trophy before being derailed by injuries.

Since Kaprizov's injury, Matt Boldy has moved up to play alongside breakout sophomore Marco Rossi and elder statesman Mats Zuccarello. This trio is doing an admirable job of keeping the lights on offensively, outscoring opponents 14-9, even though their play-controlling metrics haven't been the best.

Florida Panthers

Aleksander Barkov and Sam Reinhart are the backbone for the best defensive first line in the NHL.

Florida's top line has conceded 1.67 goals against per 60, which is the best mark in the league for the second year in a row. The Panthers' top line is only middle-of-the-pack in offensive scoring rate, but it's so stingy defensively that it still dominates its matchups night in and night out.

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Carter Verhaeghe and Evan Rodrigues have split time as the third wheel next to Barkov and Reinhart.

Buffalo Sabres

It is almost hard to believe the Sabres rank this high and are still nowhere close to the playoff race.

Buffalo's first line has piled up 3.91 goals for per 60, which is the second-highest rate among all top lines. Tage Thompson's huge bounce-back has been the main driver — he leads the NHL with 22 five-on-five goals despite having played several fewer games than the players right behind him.

Thompson's linemates have fluctuated — Alex Tuch, JJ Peterka, Jason Zucker and Jiri Kulich have all gotten looks — but most have supported him well.

The Sabres' underwhelming second line (Dylan Cozens and Jack Quinn have had miserable years), woeful 27th-ranked power play, poor defensive play, subpar goaltending and below-average penalty kill are some of the reasons the club is so far out of the playoff conversation despite its top line clicking at a strong level.

Washington Capitals

Every single member of the Capitals' top six has shattered expectations, starting with the top line.

Alex Ovechkin has turned back the clock. At age 39, his five-on-five goal-scoring rate this season is the third-best clip of his career. Dylan Strome is averaging over a point per game for the first time in his career.

The third member of the top line has fluctuated — it's included Aliaksei Protas, Connor McMichael and more recently Tom Wilson — but it hasn't really mattered because all of those players are having standout seasons, too.

New York Islanders

It's a bit surprising that the Islanders rank this high, given their lack of superstar talent and mediocre record. However, the Islanders are a genuinely solid even-strength team, boasting a plus-10 goal differential at five-on-five, which ranks 11th in the NHL. They've just been torpedoed by a 32nd-ranked power play and a 31st-ranked penalty kill.

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The Islanders' first-line defensive results (1.84 goals against per 60) are a bit inflated by exceptional goaltending (.932 on-ice save percentage). But they're also decisively outshooting and outchancing opponents, so this hasn't been all about luck.

Bo Horvat and Mathew Barzal have been terrific together, controlling nearly 58 percent of expected goals and outscoring opponents 10-3 in their minutes together; it's a shame Barzal has missed 27 games with injuries and is still out.

Anders Lee has been Horvat's most common winger. The 34-year-old Islanders captain is on pace for a 33-goal season after scoring just 37 points last season.

New Jersey Devils

The Devils' first line has been excellent across the board, controlling nearly 58 percent of scoring chances and 59 percent of goals. They're dynamic and fun offensively but also do a stellar job defensively, limiting scoring chances and goals against.

Jack Hughes demands most of the national attention, but Jesper Bratt has been an equally important catalyst for the first line's success. Bratt has scored more even-strength points than Hughes and is on pace for a career-high 94 points.

The only concern with New Jersey's first line is that 33-year-old Ondrej Palat has largely been a black hole dragging them down.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Auston Matthews, battling through an injury, hasn't been operating at the level of a top-five player in the league as he usually does. He's still comfortably over the point-per-game mark, but his five-on-five point production rate this season is the lowest since 2019-20.

Thankfully, Mitch Marner has picked up some of the slack on the top line. The 27-year-old pending unrestricted free agent has been flat-out sensational — he's tied for fourth in NHL scoring and is on pace to hit a career-high 105 points.

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Sophomore Matthew Knies is playing further down the lineup now but has also spent a large chunk of the year on the first line. Knies has taken a major step, scoring at around a 30-goal pace.

Los Angeles Kings

This is the third year in a row in which the Kings' first line has ranked slightly above average in goal differential.

Anze Kopitar probably doesn't get enough love for continuing to hold the fort down as an effective No. 1 center at age 37. Sure, he's not an explosive 80-to-90-point offensive producer, but he continues to be good for 70-ish points on top of a stout two-way profile. Adrian Kempe, meanwhile, is still the main offensive threat on that line, on pace for 37 goals.

L.A.'s first line is only scoring 2.79 goals for per 60, which ranks 20th, but is one of the best at preventing goals against defensively. Its sparkling 1.96 goals against per 60 could be boosted to some extent by goaltending; the Kings' top line is only about break-even at controlling shots and expected goals this season.

Montreal Canadiens

Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield and Juraj Slafkovský have been a high-event trio.

Montreal's first line has been prolific offensively, generating a ton of shots, chances and a 3.66 goals for per 60 pace that ranks fifth-best in the NHL. But it also bleeds scoring chances against: its 3.0 expected goals against per 60 rate is second-worst among first lines and its actual goals-against rate ranks 26th.

Caufield is on pace for a career-high 38 goals and Suzuki has a good chance of being a point-per-game player for the first time in his career. Slafkovský, however, hasn't taken a step after his promising 50-point breakout last season.

Utah Hockey Club

Clayton Keller and Nick Schmaltz are terrific creators on the wing, but with apologies to Barrett Hayton, they haven't played with a true No. 1 center to help them hit the next level.

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Lately, however, Logan Cooley has been bumped up to the top line after looking outstanding on the second line with Dylan Guenther for most of the season. It's a small sample, but the Cooley-Keller-Schmaltz trio has outscored opponents 11-4 in 150 minutes together.

Cooley's arrival could take Utah's first line to the next level, but how much will the second line hurt without him?

St. Louis Blues

The key to a productive top line for the Blues is keeping Robert Thomas and Pavel Buchnevich together.

Early in the season, the Blues experimented with Buchnevich as their second-line center. It didn't work, and the underlying results show that Thomas is far more dominant when he has Buchnevich on his wing compared to any of the alternative options. The Thomas-Buchnevich duo has commanded 57 percent of scoring chances and 62 percent of goals together.

Winnipeg Jets

Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor have leveled up their all-around game over the last couple of seasons.

This duo's defensive play has been criticized in the past, but this is the second year in a row that the Jets' top line is controlling at least 55 percent of goals. It's also the first time since 2017-18 (the year Winnipeg made the Western Conference final) that Scheifele's line owns an expected goal share above 50 percent. Gabriel Vilardi, meanwhile, has been a perfect complementary piece for them.

You might be surprised that Winnipeg's top line doesn't rank higher, but it's worth remembering Scheifele and Connor's truly elite play has come on the Jets' league-best power play.

Boston Bruins

Elias Lindholm catastrophically flopped as the Bruins' No. 1 center. He and David Pastrnak spent over 200 five-on-five minutes together, in which the Bruins mustered just 1.77 goals for per 60.

Lindholm has been bumped down the lineup, with Pavel Zacha operating as the de facto 1C and Morgan Geekie playing on the other wing. The results have been significantly better and Pastrnak has caught fire with a league-leading 17 goals and 35 points at all strengths in 20 games since Jan. 1.

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Dallas Stars

When we've done this annual exercise, Dallas' first line has routinely ranked among the best in the NHL. Unfortunately, that isn't quite the case this season.

Jason Robertson and Roope Hintz got off to really slow starts in the first 20 games. Robertson has been on an obscene scoring tear since about Jan. 1 — picking up points hasn't been an issue for him with 15 goals and 28 points at all strengths — but the Stars' top line isn't pushing an elite goal differential like it has in years past.

With that said, Dallas has among the best second and third lines in the NHL, so this drop-off isn't too concerning.

Anaheim Ducks

For most of the season, the Ducks have relied on Troy Terry, Ryan Strome and Frank Vatrano to lead their first line. This trio has controlled a positive share of shots, scoring chances and goals in nearly 500 five-on-five minutes together, which isn't too shabby.

It's very disappointing, however, that none of the club's marquee young players — Leo Carlsson, Mason McTavish, Trevor Zegras and Cutter Gauthier — have broken out as stars and forced their way onto the top line over the likes of Strome and Vatrano. McTavish is the only one of those four scoring over 0.5 points per game and even he isn't on pace for 50 points.

Head coach Greg Cronin has gotten the Ducks to play more structured defense, but he's also arguably stifling the offensive growth of the organization's most promising young forwards.

Seattle Kraken

Seattle's lack of star power is a problem.

Matty Beniers' line has scored just 2.31 goals for per 60, which ranks 29th among top lines in the NHL. The Kraken don't have a single forward on pace to hit 60 points or 30 goals. Seattle's first line defends very well and doesn't give up many goals, which has limited the damage on the scoreboard, but we're talking about a low-event, mediocre top line.

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Vancouver Canucks

Vancouver's first line has seen a ton of different combinations, but all of them have largely disappointed.

J.T. Miller was the club's No. 1 center, but he missed 10 games because of a leave of absence and has since been traded. Brock Boeser, meanwhile, missed seven games with a concussion and has played further down the lineup more recently.

Elias Pettersson has anchored the first line in the wake of Miller's departure and continues to struggle. The Canucks still have a positive goal differential in Pettersson's minutes because his defensive impact has been strong, but his line has scored just 2.4 goals for per 60, which ranks bottom-five among top lines in the NHL.

New York Rangers

The Rangers' top-line results are a microcosm of the team's season as a whole: They score at an above-average rate because of their high-end skill, but they give back most of that value because of their porous defensive play, leaving their overall results in a mediocre state.

Artemi Panarin, Vincent Trocheck and Alexis Lafrenière have been New York's most consistent first-line combination, but J.T. Miller and Panarin have been stapled as a duo since the former's acquisition. The early returns are optimistic — they've dominated most possession/scoring chance metrics, though we'll see how they fare defensively together long-term.

Detroit Red Wings

Despite their elite, No. 2 ranked power-play, the Red Wings' top line has had trouble scoring even-strength goals for most of the season. However, it appears it has unlocked a new gear recently and could be on the cusp of a monster breakout.

Todd McLellan has put Dylan Larkin, Lucas Raymond and rookie Marco Kasper (who has 16 points in his last 18 games) together for the last several weeks, and they've annihilated opponents from a territorial standpoint. This new-look first line has controlled nearly 58 percent of expected goals and is scoring goals at a much higher rate than the first line managed earlier in the season.

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Nashville Predators

The Preds' lack of a true No. 1 playmaking center has cost them dearly.

Ryan O'Reilly and Steven Stamkos have split time centering Filip Forsberg this year to mostly underwhelming results. Forsberg scored 27 five-on-five goals in 2023-24 but has mustered just 11 so far this season. Nashville's top line isn't scoring proficiently and leaks plenty of goals against defensively, too.

Calgary Flames

The Flames have found something by pairing Nazem Kadri and Jonathan Huberdeau together on the first line. In nearly 450 five-on-five minutes together, that duo has outshot and outchanced teams decisively. It hasn't lit the world on fire offensively, scoring 2.54 goals per 60 together, but it has been tight defensively and given a ragtag Flames team reasonable play at the top of the lineup.

Without Huberdeau, Kadri's line has been outscored 11-5 and mustered a woeful 0.76 goals for per 60 in nearly 400 five-on-five minutes. That explains why the Flames' overall first-line results this year are lackluster offensively.

San Jose Sharks

Macklin Celebrini has exceeded all expectations this season, scoring at a rate of 73 points per 82 games. Sure, his line is having a tough time controlling play and has lost its matchups more often than not this season, but that's to be expected when you're an 18-year-old center on a bad, rebuilding team.

Lately, Celebrini has been flanked by William Eklund and Tyler Toffoli. This new first-line trio has driven 55 percent of shot attempts and scoring chances together in 161 minutes, which is extremely impressive considering the team's overall struggles to control play. San Jose's new-look top line has been fast, dynamic and entertaining to watch.

Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton's top line has been *miles* better than the goal differential in the first table would suggest.

These play-driving metrics show that McDavid's line has skated laps around their competition when it comes to piling up shots and high-quality chances. Nobody generates scoring chances at a higher clip than the Oilers' first line, and they defend well in front of their goalies.

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Their goal differential has suffered, however, because they aren't getting any saves. Stuart Skinner and Calvin Pickard have combined for a woeful .872 save percentage when McDavid is on the ice despite Edmonton's top line ranking top-five in the NHL at suppressing expected goals against.

Colorado Avalanche

Nathan MacKinnon's line ranked in the top 10 for goal differential, but it still deserved better results based on how ruthlessly it has throttled opponents territorially.

The Avs have scored on less than 9 percent of their shots during MacKinnon's five-on-five shifts. Over the last five seasons, MacKinnon's on-ice shooting percentage has very consistently been in the 10-11 percent range, which indicates they've been unlucky with their finishing.

The new MacKinnon/Martin Necas duo also looks near unstoppable — they've generated 131 scoring chances and given up just 55 against in just 170 five-on-five minutes together.

Carolina Hurricanes

Sebastian Aho's line has the worst goal differential of all first lines in the NHL this season, but it's not really the skaters' fault.

Carolina's first line has scored a respectable 2.87 goals for per 60, which ranks 19th. Its overall goal differential is deeply in the red because it has given up an appalling 3.72 goals against per 60. Most of that is likely due to bad goaltending, however, because it is only conceding 2.52 expected goals against per 60, a league-average rate.

Aho and Mikko Rantanen haven't paid elite dividends together on the top line yet, but it's too early to write them off. Let's wait and see.

Pittsburgh Penguins

It's crazy that Sidney Crosby, at 37, is among the top five players in five-on-five points this season despite losing star linemate Jake Guentzel. Rickard Rakell and Bryan Rust deserve credit for strong seasons on Crosby's wing.

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Pittsburgh's top line has scored an impressive 3.42 goals for per 60, but its goal differential was slightly negative because it has leaked lots of goals against. This line's strong underlying numbers, however, suggest that it mostly has to do with the team's porous back end and poor goaltending rather than the top line's two-way performance.

Philadelphia Flyers

The Flyers don't really have a distinguished first line, instead rolling an ultra-balanced top-nine. Travis Konecny is their best forward, though — he leads the team in scoring by 21 points and leads the forwards in ice time — so I looked at his on-ice results as a proxy for the club's "first-line" performance this season.

Konecny has been fantastic individually, but Philadelphia desperately needs a bona fide 1C to take its first line to the next level. Philly's top line has been outscored by a fair bit this season, but its underlying metrics are decent and suggest it has been unlucky both offensively and defensively.

Ottawa Senators

Tim Stützle's line has seen an impressive defensive glow-up under Travis Green this year. Ottawa's top line is surrendering just 2.12 expected goals against per 60, which is the second-best mark among all first lines in the NHL, behind only Barkov's line.

However, like the entire Senators team, it's been tough for Stützle's line to score at even strength. Ottawa's first line ranks 26th in generating expected goals offensively, and its actual scoring rate ranks 23rd.

Chicago Blackhawks

This isn't quite the monster sophomore breakout many expected from Connor Bedard: His line has been outscored by a wide margin and its underlying metrics are by far the worst of all first lines in the NHL.

It's essential, however, to interpret these results with the right context.

Bedard is only 19, has no true first-line caliber wingers to play with and is supported by a horrible blue line that can't defend or move the puck. Are there areas in which Bedard could be better individually? Absolutely. But the lackluster first-line results are more of an indictment on the front office's inability to surround him with the proper insulation.

Oh, and before you sour on Bedard's superstar ceiling, don't forget that MacKinnon didn't have his first point-per-game season in the NHL until Year 5 of his career.

The Athletic / NHL trade deadline 2025: Which player (or pick) each team is most likely to deal

By The Athletic NHL Staff – February 28, 2025

Who or what will your NHL team be saying goodbye to before the league's March 7 trade deadline? This week, *The Athletic* asked its NHL staff for their expert picks and analysis on all 32 teams.

In response, we heard about veteran role players, expiring contracts, valuable picks and prospects.

Here are our writers' picks for the most likely assets to be dealt.

Anaheim Ducks

Brian Dumoulin, LHD

A recent surge moved the Ducks into the outer fringes of the Western Conference playoff race and Dumoulin has played a big role as a stabilizing veteran in the team's defense corps. But they should keep their eye on the bigger picture. He's an impending UFA and New England product who spent most of his career in the Eastern Conference, winning two Cups with Pittsburgh. The price for a minutes-crunching shutdown defender could rise in the days leading up to the deadline. Moving him would also get both Pavel Mintyukov and Olen Zellweger into Anaheim's lineup. Having the developing youngsters rotate in and out isn't an ideal setup. — *Eric Stephens*

Boston Bruins

Trent Frederic, LW

Frederic is unsigned after this season, and the Bruins may not be interested in bringing him back for the price he wants. He is out week-to-week with a lower-body injury but when back will play a heavy and confrontational style that would reinforce a Stanley Cup contender's third line and penalty kill. — *Fluto Shinzawa*

Buffalo Sabres

Henri Jokiharju, RHD

Jokiharju is a pending unrestricted free agent with a \$3.1 million cap hit. The right-shot defenseman has been a healthy scratch at times this season but after scoring for Team Finland at the 4 Nations Face-Off, he now has goals in consecutive games for Buffalo coming out of the break. He's only 25 and could be a useful addition for a team looking for depth. He also has plenty of reason to want to play elsewhere given his inconsistent role this season. — *Matthew Fairburn*

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Calgary Flames

2026 third-round pick

The Flames have two third-round picks in 2026 — their own and the Canucks'. If the Flames are willing to buy low ahead of the deadline, it would be easy to make one of these draft picks expendable in a trade. — *Julian McKenzie*

Carolina Hurricanes

Jack Roslovic, RW

The Hurricanes look positioned to make some depth additions and nothing more, but if GM Eric Tulsky wants to add another significant player, it will require money going out. Roslovic has added needed secondary scoring (19 goals through 58 games) but has just two goals since the calendar flipped to 2025. If Carolina wanted to add another player, his \$2.8 million cap could be the one to move out. — *Cory Lavalette*

Chicago Blackhawks

Ryan Donato, RW

Donato and Taylor Hall were considered the most likely players to be traded. Hall is gone. The question now is whether Donato will follow. It's unlikely Donato will re-sign with the Blackhawks, but they may still keep him through the season. It all may depend on what teams are offering for him. — *Scott Powers*

Colorado Avalanche

Casey Mittelstadt, C

If the Avalanche are looking to make a sizable move, it would likely come with a corresponding move to open up a bit more cap space. The most likely candidate has to be Mittelstadt, who still has two years left on his deal with a \$5.75 million cap hit. Mittelstadt has played well for stretches, but it feels like moving that cap hit may be the easiest way for Colorado to improve elsewhere. — *Jesse Granger*

Columbus Blue Jackets

2025 fourth-round pick or 2026 third-round pick

There's a chance Don Waddell trades defenseman Ivan Provorov, right winger Mathieu Olivier or another prominent pending UFA if he gets a substantial offer, but it's hard to see him messing with the core of this club after the season they've had. Think mid-round picks. He's got two fourths this summer, so there's some flexibility. — *Aaron Portzline*

Dallas Stars

2026 first-round pick

This is almost by default. With Logan Stankoven, Lian Bichsel and Mavrik Bourque unlikely to be made available, and a shallow prospect pool beyond them, a distant first-round pick is all the Stars really have to bargain with. They've already moved their first-, second- and fourth-round picks in the 2025 draft. — *Mark Lazerus*

Detroit Red Wings

2025 third-round pick

It remains to be seen how aggressive the Red Wings will be at the deadline — or if they'll really add at all — but if they do, the Rangers' 2025 third-round pick they got for Olli Määtä earlier this season gives them some bonus draft capital to work with that could suit their needs for a depth defender. Obviously, doing something more substantial would require a higher price (whether it's picks or prospects) but having a surplus pick makes one of the 2025 third-rounders the most likely to move. — *Max Bultman*

Edmonton Oilers

2025 second-round pick

The Oilers have little to trade off the roster unless they jettison a goalie to upgrade the position. Their first-round pick was already conditionally dealt to Philadelphia at last year's draft. There aren't many prospects in the stable to move. Their best chip could be the second-rounder they received from St.

Louis for not matching Philip Broberg's offer sheet. That's got a bit more value than theirs (which was dealt) would have, too. — *Daniel Nugent-Bowman*

Florida Panthers

2026 second-round pick

The Panthers, at the moment, won't pick until the fourth round of the 2025 draft, and their prospect pool is brutal. So it goes; winning Stanley Cups is expensive. That does mean, though, that the most valuable trade asset they have is probably their 2026 first-rounder. It's easy to imagine Bill Zito moving that if the right deal came around, but we'll err on the side of caution. — *Sean Gentile*

Los Angeles Kings

2025 first-round pick

A few possibilities were considered. Would it be all that shocking if the Kings were to put one of Alex Turcotte, Brandt Clarke or Jordan Spence in a deal? Turcotte is healthy and could get more ice time elsewhere, Clarke is now the No. 7 defenseman after playing a lot early on and Spence is a viable asset to move if Clarke is the right-shot defender to keep long term. But with the 2025 draft not considered to be all that strong and the Kings in line to draft later in the first round, GM Rob Blake could use that toward getting another offensive threat. Especially with his unsettled future and L.A. needing to shake its first-round bugaboo. — *Eric Stephens*

Minnesota Wild

Liam Ohgren, LW

The Wild have already dealt their 2025 first-round pick (in the David Jiricek trade with Columbus) and would be reluctant to move their 2026 first. That means they'd likely deal from a prospect pool ranked No. 2 in NHL by *The Athletic's* Scott Wheeler. Ohgren, a 2022 first-rounder, comes with some NHL experience (25 games). He has a great shot — 12 goals in 25 games for AHL Iowa this season — and some upside in his 200-foot game. — *Joe Smith*

Montreal Canadiens

Jake Evans, C

Evans' contract is set to expire, he and the Canadiens are far apart in negotiations and there are teams interested in acquiring his services. He is a right-shot center who is strong on faceoffs and one of the league's elite penalty killers. The Canadiens are trying to package Evans with Joel Armia — his penalty-killing partner and fourth-line linemate — in a single trade to try and increase the return. But of the two, it seems Evans is more likely to move if the Canadiens can't swing the package deal. That said, the Canadiens are not desperate to move him, or anyone really, and will expect a strong return for Evans. — *Arpon Basu*

Nashville Predators

Gustav Nyquist, LW

This is virtually a lock. Nyquist, in the last year of a deal with a \$3.2 million AAV, is a classic rental forward for someone looking for a bit more offense entering the stretch run and the playoffs. He has fallen off significantly from last season's career-best production, but he's a heady, skilled player who can help someone and will no doubt be glad to get away from all the losing. — *Joe Rexrode*

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New Jersey Devils

2025 second-round pick

The Devils can get a helpful player by using a second-round pick, either alone or packaged with another player or pick. New Jersey has three second-rounders (its own, Edmonton's and Winnipeg's) in this summer's draft. Flipping one or more could make a lot of sense to bring in some help at forward.

— *Peter Baugh*

New York Islanders

Brock Nelson, C

Nelson is this year's ideal trade chip: a high-performing center who plays in all situations on an affordable (\$6 million cap hit), expiring deal. The perfect rental. If the Islanders pass up this chance, then what exactly is the trade deadline for? — *Arthur Staple*

New York Rangers

Reilly Smith, RW

Smith isn't one of the top available forwards, but he can bring a contender a player with postseason experience (he won the Cup with Vegas in 2023) and some offense. The Rangers could probably get a mid-round pick for the veteran. — *Peter Baugh*

Ottawa Senators

Jacob Bernard-Docker, RHD

If the Senators are going to move for a piece, whether a player or a prospect, don't be surprised if a draft pick or a young defenseman in Bernard-Docker gets dangled in exchange. As the Senators resume play, Bernard-Docker is at risk of being on the outside looking in with the emergence of Nikolas Matinpalo as a bottom-pairing defenseman. It could be time for the 24-year-old to experience a change of scenery. — *Julian McKenzie*

Philadelphia Flyers

Rasmus Ristolainen, RHD

Big, physical right-shot defensemen are often coveted by teams looking to add at the deadline, and Ristolainen checks all of those boxes. Not only that, his skating has notably improved over the past couple of seasons, making him a much more effective 200-foot player than he was earlier in his career. Suddenly, Ristolainen's \$5.1 million AAV doesn't look so bad. The 30-year-old could also be a target for teams that have difficulty luring free agents, because he's signed through 2026-27. — *Kevin Kurz*

Pittsburgh Penguins

Anthony Beauvillier, LW

Beauvillier has been fine for the Penguins, moving up and down the lineup and chipping in with some goals. He's fast. He plays hard. He has playoff experience. He's on an expiring contract. He'll be a nice depth addition for a team looking to fortify its forwards. — *Rob Rossi*

San Jose Sharks

Nico Sturm, C

The Sharks have already done their heavy lifting in trading Mackenzie Blackwood, Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci, so there isn't a whole lot left to actively peddle. But the classy Sturm is a big-bodied fourth-

line center who can win faceoffs and help on the penalty kill. The 29-year-old has a Stanley Cup with Colorado to his name and is on an expiring contract. He's back in action after some injury time off and played a season-high 15:38 on Monday in Winnipeg. Feels like some showcasing is on tap. — *Eric Stephens*

Seattle Kraken

Brandon Tanev, LW/RW

Brandon Tanev is 33 and on an expiring deal with a clear non-playoff team. Unlike Yanni Gourde, there's no injury complications where Tanev is concerned. A lightning-quick skater with enough skill to punish opponents' mistakes, Tanev is the perfect bottom-six add for just about any playoff team in need of wing depth. He's going to have a robust market, and looks like the most straightforward deadline deal we'd expect from Ron Francis and the rest of the Kraken hockey operations. — *Thomas Drance*

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St. Louis Blues

Zack Bolduc, RW

To be clear, I don't think Bolduc will be traded before the deadline, or even this summer. But the Blues aren't trading prospects Dalibor Dvorsky or Jimmy Snuggerud, and they don't have many draft picks (only a first-rounder, a fifth and a sixth this year, and no seconds for the next three drafts). I don't think the Blues want to move Bolduc, but he's got potential and might be the player other clubs are asking about. It would make much more sense for the Blues to keep prospects such as Bolduc while the retool continues. — *Jeremy Rutherford*

Tampa Bay Lightning

2025 second-round pick (from Kings)

The Lightning's prospect pool is pretty thin, so draft picks are their best trade assets right now. Tampa Bay is without its own first and second in 2025, but has two seconds to work with from Los Angeles and Toronto. The Kings pick is probably more valuable here, especially if they continue on their collision course to another matchup against Edmonton. — *Shayna Goldman*

Toronto Maple Leafs

2026 first-round pick

If the Leafs are going to make a splash, they are going to have to part with a premium asset. And while they could certainly opt to move a top prospect such as Easton Cowan or Ben Danford, moving this pick instead would allow them to hang onto those prospects, who aren't far from becoming NHLers. I'd also circle the team's third-round pick in the upcoming draft as one that could get moved. Thirds are often exchanged for depth rentals at the deadline, including Joel Edmundson last spring. — *Jonas Siegel*

Utah Hockey Club

2025 first-round pick

It's not the strongest draft class and Utah is trying to make a late push into the playoff picture. Draft picks should be expendable to the team, as they could help them help in the race to acquire players such as Brock Nelson, Brock Boeser, Rickard Rakell or any other high-end forwards available. — *Shayna Goldman*

Vancouver Canucks

Brock Boeser, RW

Boeser's contract is expiring, there has been no meaningful progress in contract talks and the club is on the fringe of the playoff picture out West. As much as Boeser wants to stay and as much as Vancouver needs offense, we know how this sort of story usually plays out. — *Thomas Drance*

Vegas Golden Knights

2025 second-round pick

Vegas doesn't have a first-round pick in 2025 or 2026 after trading them for Tomas Hertl and Noah Hanifin, respectively, ahead of last year's trade deadline, so this year's second-round pick is one of their most valuable assets. It wouldn't surprise me if we see the Golden Knights package this pick with another to bring in a winger to improve the depth scoring. — *Jesse Granger*

Washington Capitals

2025 second-round pick

The good news for the Caps if they want to make a relatively big move is that they've got plenty of draft capital, including their own second-round pick along with Boston's in the 2025 draft. Top prospects such as Ryan Leonard, Andrew Cristall and Cole Hutson don't seem to be in play. — *Sean Gentile*

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Winnipeg Jets

Colby Barlow, LW

Winnipeg has traded a first-round pick in all three of its best seasons: the 2018 run to the Western Conference final, 2019's attempt at an encore and last season's Sean Monahan pick up. Combine that with contender status and ample cap space and it would be unusual if Winnipeg wasn't willing to go that route — for the right player. At the same time, I think Jets management wants to give its scouts more to work with on draft day. Barlow could give the Jets a way to go big while keeping their first-round pick. It's rare for the Jets to move top prospects, mind you, so it may have been safer to answer this question with draft capital. — *Murat Ates*