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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' offense roars again to down Chicago Blackhawks: 5 takeaways

By Brian Hedger – December 3, 2024

Remember when the Blue Jackets couldn't score more than two goals per game?

It wasn't that long ago, during a six-game winless skid to start November, but their scoring well is now overflowing with goals thanks to a balanced offensive attack. The latest to find out were the Chicago Blackhawks, whom the Blue Jackets roared past Sunday afternoon at United Center by a 6-3 score.

Six different goal-scorers. Two goals and seven points by defensemen. Four goals by the top two lines, including all three members of the top forward group — Sean Monahan, Kirill Marchenko and Dmitri Voronkov — hitting the back of the net. Only three players on the roster haven't scored a goal yet, and the Blue Jackets' 83 goals are the most in franchise history through a season's first 23 games. They're still ironing out some defensive issues, but the Jackets are outscoring their deficiencies.

Here are five takeaways from the Blue Jackets' latest high-scoring romp:

Columbus Blue Jackets' explosive offense is fun to watch

The rest of the NHL will eventually realize the Blue Jackets aren't a tomato can. Until that happens, it's entertaining to watch an upstart NHL "nobody" filled with productive veterans and a surging young core of talented players riddle opposing goalies — many of whom are still backups sent out by unwitting coaches hoping to give their starters a rest against "lowly" Columbus.

Give Blackhawks coach Luke Richardson, a former Blue Jackets captain, credit for not making that mistake Sunday by starting Petr Mrazek. It just didn't matter. The rolling Jackets swarmed the 'Hawks, who are truly one of the league's worst teams.

They made Mrazek's afternoon one to forget after quickly responding to Chicago goals with tallies of their own.

Dmitri Voronkov's goal, scored into an empty net with 1:26 remaining, made it the seventh time the Blue Jackets have scored at least six goals. That's one short of how many times they reached that number last season, and they've got 59 games remaining.

Columbus Blue Jackets defensemen play key role for surging offense

Zach Werenski is on a tear to start the season, adding two more assists Sunday to bump his point total up to 26 on eight goals and 18 assists. That's an average of 1.13 points per game, which ranks third in the NHL behind Colorado's Cale Makar (1.28 ppg) and Vancouver's Quinn Hughes (1.22 ppg).

Werenski's +12 plus/minus is tied with Washington's John Carlson for highest among the league's top 10 scoring defensemen, and he didn't even land one of the NHL's "Three Stars of the Month" designations for November. Werenski makes up the bulk of the Blue Jackets' scoring from the back end, but he's not alone. Their 17 goals scored by defensemen tops the league and the Jackets added seven more points by blueliners in Chicago on two goals and five assists.

Ivan Provorov and Dante Fabbro scored the goals, while Damon Severson (three assists) and Werenski (two assists) contributed the helpers. None of the Jackets' bottom three defensemen — Jake Christiansen, Jordan Harris and Jack Johnson — have scored a goal yet.

That's not intended as a slam on them. It's a compliment to the Jackets' impressive scoring balance, including defensemen.

Columbus Blue Jackets scuffling short-handed

So far, the Blue Jackets' penalty killing effort is a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, they're second in the NHL with four short-handed goals. On the other, they went 0-for-3 against the Blackhawks on PKs and have now allowed at least one power-play goal in nine straight games. That's a ghastly statistic.

If the Blue Jackets want to stay in the playoff hunt deeper into the season than anybody expected, they've got to improve while short-handed.

Kent Johnson is a dual-threat scorer for Columbus Blue Jackets

Some players are defined as either goal-scorers or playmakers. Kent Johnson is both, which makes him a dual-threat nightmare for opposing goalies to face.

His goal Sunday against the Blackhawks was his 12th point in nine games, split equally between six goals and six assists. Johnson has added points in all nine games he's played, which are bookended around a 14-game stretch he missed while rehabbing a shoulder injury. Since returning, Johnson has scored 4-3-7 while showing off a highly accurate shot from distance.

His latest goal was netted with a beautiful one-timer from the right wing, a shot he anticipated once spotting Cole Sillinger send a low-to-high feed to Severson at the top of the circles. Johnson cocked his stick back, called for the puck and smoked it past Mrazek.

The goal has him on pace for a whopping 90 points (45 goals, 45 assists) in just 68 games if he plays the remainder of the season at this scoring clip. Who besides Johnson saw this level of breakout coming this soon?

Chicago Blackhawks captain Nick Foligno becomes latest former Blue Jackets player to score against them

Nick Foligno, the Blue Jackets' former captain, pulled the Blackhawks within 4-3 on a 5-on-3 goal at 8:03 of the third period, making him the seventh former Columbus player to score against his former team this season.

In all, former Blue Jackets have accounted for a scoring line of 7-1-8 in eight games that former Columbus stalwarts have played against their old team.

The one assist belonged to Oliver Bjorkstrand on Nov. 12 in a win for the Seattle Kraken, while the goals were scored by Jonathan Marchessault (Nashville Predators), Alexander Wennberg (San Jose Sharks), Vladislav Gavrikov (Los Angeles Kings), Josh Anderson (Montreal Canadiens), Cam Atkinson (Tampa Bay Lightning), Jack Roslovic (Carolina Hurricanes) and Foligno.

So, rule of thumb: expect former Blue Jackets to score goals whenever they face their former team.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets deliver solid effort in Chicago](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – December 3, 2024

BLUE JACKETS 6, BLACKHAWKS 3

1. The Blue Jackets did what good teams do on Sunday.

Columbus headed to Chicago on a five-game point streak (4-0-1) and has been playing good hockey. The Blackhawks, meanwhile, entered the game last in the NHL in points and on the road to a fifth straight season without playoff hockey.

In that situation, teams that have high aspirations will show up and get the job done, and that's exactly what the Blue Jackets did with a workmanlike 6-3 victory in the United Center. Columbus had previously lost to such teams as San Jose, Anaheim and Montreal – all in the bottom six of the NHL – but this was a professional showing on Sunday afternoon.

The Blue Jackets will want to clean up the penalties – they allowed Chicago to score three power-play goals – but otherwise, there wasn't much to complain about for Columbus. They scored six goals for the seventh time this year, Elvis Merzlikins was again solid as he improved to 6-0-1 in his last seven starts, and the Blue Jackets didn't allow Chicago to score an even-strength goal.

"I think we just played simple," Zach Werenski said after another ho-hum two-point game gave him 16 points in an eight-game point streak. "We played hard. We didn't give them much 5-on-5. Obviously they had a few power-play goals we'd like to clean up, but I think we played a steady game. We didn't do too much – got pucks out, got pucks in and just worked hard today."

Fellow University of Michigan product Kent Johnson – hey, I guess we have to give the Wolverines their due this weekend – agreed.

"I think it was a good game," he said. "I think we were executing well, making the right plays, smart plays. Sometimes those are the simple ones, too, so that was good."

2. Another sign of growth is how the Blue Jackets don't have any panic in their game.

If you think about the last few seasons, the Blue Jackets often played like a young team, which they were. They had trouble creating or sustaining momentum, and they often gave up goals shortly after scoring them. In tense situations, such as a tight third period, they played like a team learning how to handle those moments.

So far this year, especially of late, Columbus is playing a much more mature game, and it showed in this one. There was certainly no panic as the Blue Jackets held and built on a third-period lead, and they were able to respond whenever Chicago scored.

The Blackhawks scored three times in this game, and the Blue Jackets countered 1:28, 1:50 and 2:44 after those tallies. Suddenly, the Blue Jackets are the team dictating momentum in tight contests.

"It's huge," Werenski said. "You obviously don't want to play from behind. It's nice to respond quick. It definitely makes the game a little bit easier. Then we got a lead and just stuck with it. I'm really happy with how we played today."

Head coach Dean Evason has preached a mentality that no matter what happens, the Blue Jackets just have to keep playing, so he was happy with how Sunday's game developed in that regard.

“We kept battling,” Evason said. “We had some adversity and some penalties and different situations and some things that probably could have rattled our group, and it didn’t. So yeah, it was a good win that regard.”

3. The Blue Jackets are a much better team with Kent Johnson on the ice.

Here’s a stat – the Blue Jackets are 6-2-1 on the season when Johnson plays and 5-7-2 when he doesn’t.

Here’s another one – Columbus has averaged five goals per game in the five games since the creative 21-year-old wing returned from an upper body injury.

That isn’t all Johnson, of course, but the youngster plays in all situations and can serve as the straw that stirs the drink for the Blue Jackets. With his first-period one-timer past Chicago goalie Petr Mrazek, Johnson has now scored in all nine games he’s played on the season; with six goals, he’s now just the fourth CBJ player all-time to score six times in his first nine games of a season.

“He does a lot of little things right,” Evason said when asked if Johnson is a difference maker for the Blue Jackets. “He carries pucks through the neutral zone. Our entries have been so much better with him in the lineup. What we like is he’s not turning pucks over. We don’t care how you get the puck into the offensive zone. You can carry it all night as long as you don’t turn it over, and he’s done a good job of leading us in that area for sure.”

And in many ways, this one was special for Johnson, who got to play against one of his best friends – Chicago wunderkind Connor Bedard – for the first time at the NHL level. The two have known each other for years growing up in the Vancouver area, skating on a summer roller hockey league team together and even playing in the same fantasy football league. For this game, their dads even sat together watching the game at the United Center.

Bedard won the Calder Trophy as the NHL’s best rookie a season ago, but Johnson was out of the lineup each of the two times the Blackhawks and Blue Jackets met a season ago. This time, they both saw the ice – Johnson noted he was chirping Bedard when the two lined up for the opening faceoff – and Johnson came out on top.

“It was cool,” Johnson said. “You wanted to come out on top. Anytime I’m going against him, it’s a team game, and he played really well, but it’s obviously a good one.”

The Hockey News / Columbus Starts Five-Game Road Trip In Chicago By Beating The Blackhawks 6-3

By Jason Newland – December 3 , 2024

Ivan Provorov (2), Kent Johnson(6), Sean Monahan(8), Dante Fabbro(3), Kirill Marchenko(10), and Dmitri Voronkov(6) provided the offense for the CBJ in a 6-3 Jackets win, while Elvis Merzljikins made 28 saves in the win.

This game was filled with back-and-forth scoring action, starting with Connor Bedard's power-play goal in the early minutes of the game. Shortly after Bedard scored the game-opening goal, Ivan Provorov and Kent Johnson would score the next two goals to give the Jackets the lead. From there, the Blackhawks would be the ones playing catchup. The Blue Jackets would go on to score 4 of the next 6 goals to finish the Blackhawks off.

The Blue Jackets penalty kill was downright bad on Sunday, allowing three goals on six Chicago man advantages. Elvis Merzljikins faced 12 shots on the power play and surrendered three goals. If the Blue Jackets want to be successful, they need to be better on the PK. After today's game, they're 26th in the league with a 74% penalty kill. This was the first game in team history where they allowed three power-play goals and won on the road.

The Jackets will now leave for Western Canada and will then finish off the road trip in Winnipeg. This was a good start. They've now earned points in six straight games, have won 6 of 8, and have gone 6-3-1 in the last 10.

Sunday's "Donkey of the Day" was Dmitri Voronkov.

Player Stats

- Ivan Provorov scored his 2nd goal of the season.
- Kent Johnson scored his 6th of the season. He now has points in all 9 games he's played in this season.
- Damon Severson had three assists on the night.
- Sean Monahan got his 14th assist on the Provorov goal. He also scored his 8th goal.
- Cole Sillinger recorded his 11th and 12th assists.
- Zach Werenski got his 17th and 18th assists. His 8-game point streak is a team record for a defenseman.
- Dante Fabbro scored his 3rd of the season.
- Kirill Marchenko scored his 10th goal of the season. He now has 24 points in 23 games. He was also a plus-4.
- Dmitri Voronkov scored his 6th goal and had 17 PIMs.
- Elvis Merzljikins stopped 28 of 31 Blackhawks shots.

Team Stats

- The CBJ power play failed to score on two tries.
- The Jackets PK gave up three power-play goals to the Hawks.

- The Blue Jackets won 55.4% of the faceoffs.
- CBJ defensemen lead the league in goals by that unit.

What's Next - The Blue Jackets continue their five-game road trip as they visit the Calgary Flames on Tuesday.

The Hockey News / The Blue Jackets Are Loaded Up On Draft Picks For The Next Few Years

By Jason Newland – December 3, 2024

Don Waddell's plan to rebuild the Columbus Blue Jackets is in full swing.

On the surface, it seems Waddell traded Jiříček to rid them of a disgruntled player. But he got a player and some draft capital for him, so trading a player who wasn't playing NHL minutes wasn't all that bad, even for a former #6 overall pick.

Will Don Waddell use these picks? Or will he use them as bait?

In the Summer of 2025, Don Waddell will have major money to spend. After the 24-25 season ends, he's going to have 15 unrestricted free agents across the organization. There will also be 9 restricted free agents, three of which include Dmitri Voronkov, Daniil Tarasov, and Jordan Harris.

The summer of 2025 will undoubtedly be the biggest free-agent period in the history of the franchise.

Will Don Waddell spend the max to build a championship-caliber roster?

What's Next - The Blue Jackets continue their five-game road trip as they visit the Calgary Flames on Tuesday.

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Weekly Injury Report: Week 8

By Jason Newland – December 3, 2024

The new injury report sees young Yegor Chinakhov added to the list with an unspecified upper-body injury. He's missed two games so far and didn't travel on the road trip to Western Canada. He looks to miss the remainder of the trip unless he's cleared and flies out to meet the rest of his team.

This is one subject that fans who follow the CBJ hate to talk about, so we won't say anything that may jinx the team.

Blue Jackets Injury Report:

- Boone Jenner – C, Shoulder Surgery - 22 Games Missed
 - Expected to be out until at least Mar. 1, 2025
- Erik Gudbranson – D, Unspecified Shoulder Injury - 19 Games Missed
 - Expected to be an unknown amount of time
- Yegor Chinakhov - F, Unspecified Upper-Body Injury - 2 Games Missed
 - Listed as day-to-day

TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 87

Captain Boone Jenner and Erik Gudbranson aren't coming back anytime soon, so if the Jackets want to play at the level they have been, they need to hope that the Yegor Chinakhov injury isn't serious.

Columbus currently sits 6th in the Metro with 25 points, but only two points back of fourth place and a wildcard spot.

What's Next - The Blue Jackets continue their five-game road trip as they visit the Calgary Flames on Tuesday.

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Got Sizeable Haul For Jiricek In Trade With Wild

By Spencer Lazary – December 3, 2024

The David Jiricek saga finally came to an end this past weekend. The Columbus Blue Jackets and Minnesota Wild worked out a deal to send Jiricek and a 2025 fifth-round pick to the Wild in exchange for a top-five protected 2025 first-round pick, a 2027 second-round pick, a 2026 third-round pick, a 2026 fourth-round pick, and defenseman Daemon Hunt.

The Blue Jackets were able to acquire four draft picks and a depth defenseman for Jiricek, which is superb work by GM Don Waddell.

Jiricek was a former top-10 pick by the Blue Jackets back in the 2022 NHL Draft. Unfortunately, there wasn't a clear path to the NHL within Columbus' system. Which caused frustration for the blue liner.

Oftentimes, NHL teams that trade a top prospect who is ready to play with the big club are left without equal value in return. But Waddell made sure that he could get back another Jiricek style plus more assets through the draft.

If the Blue Jackets players were ever questioning how much the management group cares, this trade should answer the question.

They were able to acquire four NHL draft picks within the first four rounds for a young defence prospect who was not able to find his game at the NHL level.

This could go down as one of Waddell's best trades, not only in his career but also during his time as GM of the Blue Jackets.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Carry Over Home Success, KJ Is On Another Level, PK Problems

By Will Chase – December 3, 2024

A successful start to the road trip.

Kent Johnson scored to continue a nine-game point streak and the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the Chicago Blackhawks 6-3 on Sunday at the United Center.

Elvis Merzlikins picked up his eighth win of the season and the sixth of his last seven with 28 saves. Petr Mrazek made 30 saves.

Carry Over Home Success

The Blue Jackets have played well at home all season including a recent 3-1-0 homestand to improve their home mark to 8-3-1.

As the Jackets kicked off their five-game road trip with a stop in Chicago on Sunday, the goal was to score plenty of goals and carry that home success to the road.

Mission accomplished.

In addition to Kent Johnson staying hot, Zach Werenski continued his tear with two assists his career-best point streak (five goals, 11 assists) to eight games.

The Blackhawks entered play with a 3-1-0 record on home ice in their last four games.

Friends and counterparts Adam Fantilli, taken third overall, and Connor Bedard, taken first overall in the 2023 NHL draft, were in the opening face-off with Fantilli coming away with the draw.

However, Bedard had the first strike for the Hawks on the power play at 2:59 of the first period. It's his fifth of the season and the second in his last 15 games. The Jackets have allowed power-play goals in nine straight games. Ryan Donato (5) and Marc-Edouard Vlasic (10) assisted on the play.

Ivan Provorov scored his second at 4:27 to tie the game 1-1. Sean Monahan (14) and Damon Severson (7) had the assists.

Today was also Dmitri Voronkov's turn to get into a fight and score. He fought Connor Murphy at the 1:26 mark of the second period and scored the empty-net goal at 18:34 of the third period.

KJ Is On Another Level

Kent Johnson, another friend of Bedard's, is on another level.

Sunday's first-period goal at 11:23 gave Columbus a 2-1 lead and extended Johnson's point streak to nine games (six goals, six assists). He has seven points in his last five games (four goals, three assists) since his return from injury.

The Blue Jackets improved to 6-2-1 with Kent Johnson in the lineup this season.

PK Problems

As good as things have been for the Jackets lately, one troubling trend that continued was the inability to stop the opposition's power play. As mentioned above, it's the ninth consecutive game the Jackets' penalty kill has yielded a goal as Chicago was 3-for-6 on the power play.

The Blue Jackets' penalty kill is 26th in the league (74.0%). Fortunately for the Blue Jackets, they always had an answer for the Hawks as they continued their scoring ways on Sunday afternoon.

Emotional Rematch

Columbus heads out west to take on the Calgary Flames on Tuesday, Dec. 3 at 9:00 p.m. ET from Scotiabank Saddledome. The Jackets and Flames will honor Johnny Gaudreau and then we'll see if there is any on-ice emotion following last Friday's wild game.

The Athletic / NHL rumblings: What the Devils, Panthers and Hurricanes are looking for early in the trade market

By Pierre LeBrun – December 3, 2024

If there was a team screaming for a goalie upgrade the past couple of years, it was certainly the New Jersey Devils.

And a quarter of the way into this season, the upgrade has shown itself impactful with the Devils going from 26th in goals against per game at the end of last season to sixth entering play Monday night.

It's not just about Jacob Markström and Jake Allen — and I would argue Markström has another level to go in his game — but the two veteran netminders are certainly a big part of the Devils' defensive turnaround.

It sure is nice for Tom Fitzgerald not to have to constantly answer media questions about his goaltending anymore, that's for sure.

"Yeah, it is," the Devils GM told The Athletic on Monday. "There's a confidence knowing you're in every game, from your goalie out. Which is incredibly relaxing for a manager. With that being said, I do think our tandem has another level, which is good. But they give us a chance every single night.

"When you think the other team is ready to score, they make these incredible saves that keeps the game where it is."

The team's defensive turnaround is also about a healthy Dougie Hamilton this season and a revamped blue line that saw the additions of Brett Pesce, Brenden Dillon and Johnathan Kovacevic.

And a forward group more committed to not cheating for offense.

"I would also attribute it to our younger players maturing and understanding how teams win in this league, and that's defense," Fitzgerald said. "That's not exchanging odd-man rushes after off-man rushes and pinching and not having a third guy high, so systemically it's been very good.

"And yes, the additions we made on the back end have really emphasized defending. ... Dillon, Kovacevic, Pesce, these guys are defenders first. They take pride in defending. And letting our goalies see all the pucks."

All of which is contagious, Fitzgerald said, pointing to improved defensive play from Hamilton as well as second-year stud Luke Hughes.

"Dougie's defending better, and Luke is a different player," Fitzgerald said. "Man, you can see the pride that Luke is taking from defending with his legs and taking plays away."

New coach Sheldon Keefe has helped foster a mindset where defense comes first, Fitzgerald added.

The Devils have a deep lineup, but if there's an area they may look to tweak, Fitzgerald said it's adding a fourth-line center or maybe a top-nine forward, where the domino impact pushes someone down the lineup. Either way, he'd be looking for bottom-six depth — someone who can win defensive-zone and penalty-kill faceoffs.

"You can't have enough depth," Fitzgerald said. "I've been in touch with teams. ... I'm looking for utility players, I guess — guys who can skate. I like size and versatility and guys who can play in the middle and on the wing. Just to add depth to the organization."

Panthers after a D upgrade

The reigning Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers began the week bottom third in the NHL in goals against per game, and that's not where we're used to seeing them.

Some of that, sure, might be losing Brandon Montour and Oliver Ekman-Larsson to free agency last summer. The revamped blue line hasn't been as tight defensively.

But I also think part of what's happening is that when Florida plays to its true identity, it's a relentless, hard-nosed style that requires all kinds of energy.

It's doable over a playoff run, but I'm not sure how realistic it is to play that style 100 percent of the time over 82 regular-season games. I feel like we're seeing that relentless style in parts of games, on some nights, but not consistently all the time.

Having said, my understanding is the Panthers do intend to tweak the blue line between now and the March 7 trade deadline. That's already the internal discussion. They don't have much cap space, so they will need to be creative.

Hurricanes goalie options

The signing of veteran goalie Dustin Tokarski on Monday doesn't take the Carolina Hurricanes out of the goalie market.

My understanding is that the Canes intend to still keep on kicking tires on the goalie market, as they have for weeks now.

With Pyotr Kochetkov back, and with the Tokarski signing, there's not as much urgency for further action, but there are still two scenarios in which I could see Carolina adding in net:

- The Canes might act at any time if a goalie becomes available who would slot ahead of Spencer Martin and Tokarski.
- Closer to March 7, they'll have to see where Frederik Andersen is at in terms of his game and return from a knee procedure. He's a pending unrestricted free agent, and there could be an opportunity and a scenario where the Canes feel there's an upgrade over Andersen behind Kochetkov.

Joey Daccord's citizenship

Hockey Canada did its due diligence on Joey Daccord even if he most likely won't be named to the 4 Nations roster when it's revealed Wednesday night.

The Seattle Kraken netminder was born and raised in Boston but has dual citizenship because his father is from Montreal. And, actually, his mother is from Switzerland and the Swiss approached him last year about playing for them in the IIHF World Championship, but he didn't go. Daccord hasn't played for any country yet internationally. He has a Canadian citizen card but not a passport. And my understanding is the passport would be a requisite to play in 4 Nations.

That's why, even if he's not named to the roster, Daccord is thinking of getting himself a Canadian passport just in case there's an injury between now and the Feb. 12-20 event — because he would be among the goalies in consideration for Canada as a replacement. That part has been communicated to him.

And because the 4 Nations is an NHL-NHLPA event and not an IIHF event, even if he ended up playing for Canada at 4 Nations, that wouldn't make him ineligible to play for the United States or Switzerland moving forward in IIHF events such as the worlds or Olympics.

The Athletic / Canada's World Junior selection camp: The omissions, big decisions and a roster projection

By Scott Wheeler, Corey Pronman and Max Bultman – December 3, 2024

Team Canada has announced its 32-player selection camp for the 2025 World Junior Championship in Ottawa.

Here are reactions from The Athletic's Scott Wheeler, Corey Pronman and Max Bultman on the big exclusions, the invitees and the decisions that now lie ahead for Canada in their Dec. 10-13 camp, plus an updated roster projection for the tournament.

Four of the 2024 NHL Draft's top nine picks not invited

Wheeler: A couple of weeks ago, after we left Carter Yakemchuk off our projected roster, I spoke with Ottawa Senators general manager Steve Staios about it and I thought he made a compelling case.

"In camp, he impressed us in every area of the game. He has the ability that you can't teach. He has instinct and he's got poise with the puck. And in junior hockey, he uses that to his advantage but the question was: 'How well can he defend?' or 'How quickly can we get him up to speed to defend at the pro level?' And I think that's where we were the most impressed — once we put him in those situations, his instinct that he showed on the offensive side shone through defensively as well. And not only is he big and strong, and has length and the ability to defend but where I was most impressed was his instinct: off the rush being able to pick off passes, jumping into areas and closing gaps. And I think because he's that much better than a lot of players in junior hockey, he doesn't need to show it as much but certainly once he got into a more challenging situation, he defended at a better rate than we could have ever imagined.

"It was a very, very difficult decision and one that I think as he's leading into this World Junior, he could very well be on our team in Ottawa and still playing games. We knew that the decision was made for his best interest to not rush him along. And if we made the decision on Carter staying here, which was warranted, I'm sure Hockey Canada would be calling and begging for us to send him back for the tournament.

"As far as roster, it's difficult for me to say because I'm not in and evaluating these players on a day to day but to me, I don't see how he's not a top pairing guy and can play in all situations. That's how I see Carter.

"And here's the one thing that I think is most impressive about the player: his personality is very polite and a little bit quiet but it couldn't be further from what he is on the ice ... He is instinctual and aggressive, and the spotlight's not too big for him, as evidenced by how he handled himself in his first pro camp. If I'm looking at it from a World Junior perspective, the plan is to be playing in a gold medal game and you need someone with a steady hand and Carter certainly has that."

The part about how they'd be begging Ottawa for Yakemchuk if they'd kept him in the NHL rings particularly true.

Leaving off Beckett Sennecke and Tij Iginla didn't surprise me. We had neither on our projected roster.

But I was surprised that they didn't select Yakemchuk after his training camp with Ottawa, and Parekh's the reigning CHL Defenseman of the Year who is fresh off playing 30 minutes per game for the Memorial

Cup champs. I would have favoured Parekh and argued that he has more than proven he can defend against top players but I think both belonged in camp and had strong cases for the roster.

Pronman: One topic Canada's staff was debating was whether to bring either or any of Parekh or Yakemchuk. Both are top-10 picks who have been excellent junior defensemen and have dynamic offensive traits. However, both of their first halves haven't been as good as hoped for, and scouts still have some concerns about how trustworthy they are defensively. Did Sam Dickinson's offensive breakout, and the potential addition of Matthew Schaefer counterbalance those concerns? I think this blue line lacks the type of skill those two would bring. I would probably take one of those players, even if in a limited role but ultimately the staff likely felt they couldn't trust either at even strength.

Sennecke and Iginla also didn't get camp invites in part due to a lack of a clear role. Both need to be top-nine forwards and power-play types to be on this team. Both could play those roles, but it wasn't clear cut, and Sennecke wasn't going to be invited as a fourth-line type. Iginla competes harder and had a more plausible case for that role but it wouldn't be the best fit. Once Porter Martone had the first half he did, it cut out a top-nine job and there weren't many to go around.

Bultman: It's not as surprising to see Iginla and Sennecke left off, with Team Canada typically preferring older players at this event and the upper-lineup roles mostly spoken for. I do think Iginla has the traits to succeed in an energy role, but I can understand leaving them both off until next year. It's leaving off both of Yakemchuk and Parekh that surprised me. It always seemed like one would end up on the outside looking in, role-wise, but it felt like that would be a battle decided at camp. Instead, neither will be at camp. That's especially tough for Yakemchuk, who was in his final year of eligibility as a September 2005 birthdate — and who was auditioning to play for his fan base in Ottawa.

Who runs Canada's power play(s) now?

Pronman: The decision to cut Parekh and Yakemchuk will be questioned if Canada's power play struggles in the big games. Tanner Molendyk, Oliver Bonk, Dickinson and Schaefer are all very talented offensive players, and they are better two-way players. I would not call them true PP1 types for a typical Canada team. I probably would have brought one of Parekh or Yakemchuk and played them in a specialist role.

Bultman: You can make a case that Parekh and Yakemchuk are the best pure offensive D in Canada's player pool, so leaving them off has to be seen as a major vote of confidence in players like Schaefer, Molendyk and Dickinson (who, to his credit, is outscoring Parekh by a wide margin so far this year). With Dickinson's two-way profile, though, it felt like this team could take him in a prominent role and still have room for a prototypical power-play QB somewhere else in the lineup.

Certainly, there are multiple players in this group that can run a power play, though — and maybe that ends up being Schaefer, who has been great to start the season in Erie.

Wheeler: Molendyk, Dickinson and Schaefer are the natural candidates to run Canada's power plays now, no question, but I think there's also a scenario where Bonk plays his bumper role from London (they used him a little there even last year) and they have two D on one of the units (likely the second).

Canada bringing four underagers to camp

Pronman: Gavin McKenna has been arguably the best forward in the WHL and Martone the best player in the OHL. Schaefer has wowed scouts this year between his play at the Hlinka Gretzky, CHL/U.S. NTDP series and in the OHL. These are not small or slow players who you're worried about how well their skill will translate versus better players. At some point, if you don't bring them, you're likely overthinking it

to an extent. Martone and Schaefer have legit claims to be the No. 1 pick this summer and McKenna the following summer.

Bultman: McKenna is the one I'm really curious about among the young players. Even for as great a season as he's had, you just don't see many players this young (he'll turn 17 just before the tournament begins) in big roles for Canada. He's earned the opportunity, for sure, but it's going to be a real test to see if he can translate his junior production to this tournament more like Connor Bedard than Alexis Lafrenière.

Wheeler: Sometimes you have to work with what you have and it was pretty evident at U18 worlds that McKenna, Martone and Schaefer were the class of this cycle. I think all three belong on the team and will end up on the team barring disappointing camps.

It was nice to see Jack Ivankovic get the fourth goalie invite, too. That last invite likely came down to him, fellow draft-eligible Joshua Ravensbergen (who was at the World Junior Summer Showcase but didn't play his best), and Blue Jackets prospect Evan Gardner.

When asked if he'd heard at the CHL USA Prospects Challenge last week, Ravensbergen told The Athletic that he hadn't but that new Hockey Canada goaltending coach Dan De Palma had just given him a call.

"I don't know if it was a good thing or if it was bad. He was like 'Good work on your career so far and I'm just calling to get to know you, you deserved a call.' But then I was like, 'So maybe that means I'm not going to get a call.'"

Ivankovic was at the Hlinka during the World Junior Summer Showcase and has been phenomenal for Hockey Canada at the U18 and U17 levels.

Whether or not he makes it, he, Carter George and Ravensbergen are the guys for 2026 in Minneapolis.

Returnee ≠ lock

Wheeler: I think there are two returnees whose jobs aren't automatic heading into camp. Rehkopf might not be a lock, and I don't think goaltender Scott Razlaff is necessarily a front-runner to make the team based on performance (though it's worth noting that the Thunderbirds are a poor team this year in front of him). Canada usually only takes two goalies when the tournament is held in North America as a service to their junior teams and I'd guess that George and Carson Bjarnason are the picks.

Pronman: I think there are at least some reservations about a couple of returnees and whether they are true locks for this team. I've heard scouts raise enough concerns in particular about Rehkopf and Matthew Wood to think they may need to make a good impression at camp to stick. Cutting either would surprise me somewhat, especially given that Canada didn't play either versus the USA in the summer, which seemed to indicate their spot was safe.

Surprise inclusions?

Wheeler: He's not necessarily a surprise because he's a multi-time captain for Hockey Canada, but if you'd asked me coming out of last season whether I thought Cam Allen would have earned an invite to selection camp over Parekh or Yakemchuk, I would have put the odds at very, very slim. He has struggled with his identity and decision-making mightily over the years but has really gotten back on track with Guelph this season. His invite is a nice nod to that.

I was happy to see Beau Akey get an invite as well. He had a great camp with the Oilers last season and I think he would have been in consideration for the 2024 selection camp but his post-draft year was marred by injuries.

New roster projection

Parekh is the only player from our projected 23-man roster from a couple of weeks ago who wasn't invited to camp, so our updated lineup still features 22 of the same players, with Pittsburgh Penguins prospect Harrison Brunicke — who we debated for the initial projection — filling the last spot on the right side.

We've also tweaked our forward lines a little, with Wheeler and Bultman voting to move Andrew Cristall from the 13th forward spot to the top six, sliding Mathieu Cataford into the 13th forward role.

The Athletic / What we learned about the NHL in November: Coaching volatility, Rangers collapsing

By Shayna Goldman – December 3, 2024

The prevailing thought around the NHL tends to be that if something seems broken, a coaching change may be in order.

That may sound dramatic because coaches can only control so much — general managers have to shoulder the burden of a team underperforming, as do the 20 players dressed on a nightly basis.

But coaching changes happen so often in the NHL. It only took a quarter of the 2024-25 season for the first in-year firing after eight changes in the offseason.

A coach doesn't have to be bad or even at fault to be fired in some cases. Sometimes, it's a last-ditch effort by a general manager to mask their roster-building issues. In some cases, a coach just isn't a fit for a team stylistically anymore. In other situations, voices grow stale in the locker room, or they no longer have new ideas with the same group — take Paul Maurice in Winnipeg. Someone may be the right fit at the time of their hiring, but a team's needs can change as the years go on; that will be the case if Mike Sullivan ultimately gets fired by the Penguins.

Of course, there are times when the onus falls on the coach. The Kraken dismissed Dave Hakstol and Paul McFarland because the team underwhelmed offensively last year. The Sabres got stagnant under Don Grant and the Sharks disappointed with David Quinn behind the bench, even with their roster flaws in mind.

In rare cases, a team makes a change because a better option becomes available. That was the case just over a week ago when the Blues fired Drew Bannister and hired Jim Montgomery.

With coaching turnover trending up, seats get hotter a lot quicker

The average coach's tenure across all 32 NHL teams is 2.3 years, which is the lowest of the four major men's leagues.

That number doesn't include the tenures of the 10 coaches who have been dismissed or departed from their teams since the start of the 2024 offseason, either. Bannister, for example, didn't even hit the one-year mark before the Blues moved on from him, and neither did Pascal Vincent in Columbus. David Quinn fell short of the two-year mark. And there are less drastic examples, too — Granato and Sheldon Keefe each lasted more than four years with their teams.

Joe Sacco in Boston and Montgomery in St. Louis are two of 20 coaches who have been behind the bench of their current team for less than two years. On the other hand, Andre Tourigny, who has been with Arizona and Utah for a total of 3.4 years, is now the fifth-longest tenured coach in the NHL.

Coaches like Jon Cooper, Mike Sullivan and Jared Bednar, who have been with their respective clubs for eight or more years, are the exception and not the rule in the NHL. Few make it past the five-year mark in today's environment.

There aren't a lot of coaches who have surpassed the five-year mark in most other leagues, either. Eleven coaches have been with their current teams for at least five years in MLB, but only eight have in the NBA and five in the NFL. Most coaches have been in their current position for at least two years — 20 in the NBA, 19 in MLB and 17 in the NFL compared to the 12 in the NHL.

So it shouldn't be a surprise when an NHL coach's seat heats up, right or wrong. That is just a part of the reality in this league. The question isn't whether another coach will get fired this year, it's just a matter of who and when.

Derek Lalonde, who has been with the Red Wings for almost two and a half years, is on the hot seat after his team's disappointing start. While the roster is a big part of the problem, he is responsible for the team's shortcomings — from their even-strength offense to their awful penalty killing.

Andrew Brunette may only be in his second season with the Predators, but that doesn't preclude him from the hot seat. Nashville's struggling at five-on-five after management made key signings to upgrade the roster, and the coaches don't seem to have the answer on how to turn the season around.

Martin St. Louis could be faulted if the Canadiens don't start progressing soon; the same is true with Luke Richardson in Chicago. The Penguins may eventually want a new voice if their direction officially changes. Teams with hopes of contending could get impatient with their coaches if their playoff chances start to fade, too. The Golden Knights are the prime example of that, with three different coaches in just seven seasons of existence. Coaches in New York and Edmonton have had pretty short leashes, too, in recent years.

No NHL head coach is safe in their current position. The only safety net is that most bench bosses have a high probability of finding a job elsewhere at this level.

Rangers are falling apart

The Rangers had a 93 percent chance of reaching the playoffs early in November. That has dropped down to 67 percent after a disastrous stretch of play.

After a strong start to the season, defensive concerns started to emerge in New York. It led to some ugly losses, like a 5-3 fall to Washington in late October, and some ugly wins. But the last couple of weeks have been especially troubling.

The Rangers bled rush chances against the Flames on their Western swing. As losses started to pile up from there, everything started to spiral on and off the ice. The team fell flat against the Oilers two nights later before collapsing against the Blues at home for one of their worst losses of the season. Their loss to the Flyers was crushing and their win over Montreal the next day wasn't very convincing.

In three of the Rangers' last six games, they've earned less than 40 percent of the expected goal share. The team has only broken even once in those six games, and that was in a 6-2 loss to Edmonton.

There is a lot of blame to go around in New York, and two defensemen are shouldering a heavy burden of it. Jacob Trouba and Ryan Lindgren continue to struggle, both as a pair and individually when shifted to different combinations. And neither one of their declines is breaking news. The same is true with Mika Zibanejad, whose five-on-five game has trended down over the last couple of years.

The players aren't executing or playing up to expectations. But these three in particular don't seem to be a fit in Peter Laviolette's system, either. While a coach isn't responsible for the roster construction, it's their job to maximize players within their system — even if it takes tactical adjustments.

The Rangers' issues extend past three players. This last stretch seems to be weighing on most players in New York, which is only dragging their play down even further. It looks even worse when factoring in their strength of schedule so far, which isn't as daunting as their record shows. There are core issues in New York and trade rumors developing have only amped that up. Now the pressure is mounting for the players to pick up the pace and the coaches to get this team back in sync.

Avalanche make a change in goal

Goaltending continues to be the problem in Colorado. No matter how well the team plays at five-on-five or how many reinforcements return up front, goaltending often drags the Avalanche down.

Alexandar Georgiev's play has been the driving force behind that since Day 1 of the season. He allowed 7.9 goals above expected through his first three starts. While he has put up a few quality starts since — five in total now in 16 outings — many of the lows have been outright back-breaking. Just take Friday night's performance against the Stars; the Avalanche tried to mount a comeback in the third period but couldn't erase what Georgiev had allowed earlier in the game.

Georgiev's disastrous start opened the door to Justus Annunen playing more, but he hasn't been up to the task, either. And that finally inspired management to make a change. Annunen was sent to Nashville in exchange for Scott Wedgewood.

Wedgewood has proven to be a dependable backup in years past, most recently in 2022-23 in Dallas. But he struggled behind a stout Stars defense last year and hasn't had a great start with the Predators, either. Maybe he can help stabilize the goalie situation in Colorado this season, but it feels like management is just putting a Band-Aid on a bad situation.

The Avalanche added a backup who is eight years older than Annunen and, at best, can be a 1B to Georgiev. It wouldn't be surprising to see this team back on the market again in the spring if neither of these netminders turns its season around.

Annenen may not have handled the pressure well in Colorado, but the 24-year-old had the potential to help this team in the long run (especially since the team was without any NHL-caliber goalies signed past this season before the Wedgewood trade). Playing in a more limited backup role behind Juuse Saros should help Annunen stabilize his game. So should learning under director of goaltending Mitch Korn in Nashville.

Capitals are managing without Ovechkin

Between Alex Ovechkin's chase for Wayne Gretzky's record and the team strengthening its playoff chances from 19 percent in the preseason up to 93 percent, the Capitals have been one of the most exciting teams in the first quarter of the season.

The Ovechkin injury derailed some of that, and the first two games without him were especially tough to navigate. Washington fell short at five-on-five against the Avalanche and couldn't beat Georgiev in one of his best games of the season. Then came a regulation loss to New Jersey a game later.

Since then, the Capitals have rattled off four straight wins. While the team is still hovering around a 55 percent expected goal rate since Ovechkin's injury, it's getting there differently. The Capitals have tightened up defensively, which is important since their rush defense started trailing off after their hot start, but they're generating less offensively, too.

Some of that stems from a top line that clearly misses Ovechkin. Aliaksei Protas, Dylan Strome and Ovechkin had outscored opponents 16-5 to open the season while earning about 52 percent of the expected goal share. Without him, Protas and Strome have only broken even in scoring with four apiece and have sunk below 40 percent of the expected goal share. But even the second line of Connor McMichael, Pierre-Luc Dubois and Tom Wilson has slowed down, leading to more recent lineup adjustments.

What makes those offensive downticks even more challenging is that the Capitals' shooting percentage has dropped from 14.3 percent at five-on-five pre-Ovechkin injury down to 7.7 percent. That regression was bound to happen, but it's an even more dramatic drop without Ovechkin's finishing talent.

Power-play scoring has helped make up for that lately, with eight goals over the last five games, which has been especially clutch to counter some goaltending woes as well. Things are far from perfect in Washington, but most importantly, the Capitals are finding ways to win despite losing their biggest star.

Podkolzin steps up in Edmonton

The Oilers have two of the best players in the world in Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, but they still need a supporting cast around their star talent. It seemed like management did a good job addressing that over the summer, adding players like Viktor Arvidsson and Jeff Skinner to round out the top six with Zach Hyman and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins. But it's safe to say that hasn't gone according to plan so far.

Nugent-Hopkins is scoring at the lowest rate of his career and isn't nearly as effective at five-on-five. Hyman, before being sidelined with injury, lost his scoring touch. Arvidsson has underwhelmed when healthy. And Skinner hasn't stepped up, either.

The one bright spot? Vasily Podkolzin.

Podkolzin's potential was hyped up in Vancouver, but despite having the tools to be an effective player, he struggled to put it all together consistently. And that seemed to be the case to start his tenure in Edmonton, too. But he is starting to emerge as a difference-maker on Draisaitl's wing.

It's easy to chalk up Podkolzin's recent success to his surroundings. Playing with a star of Draisaitl's caliber has elevated his game; playing with him and McDavid together didn't hurt, either. This is probably the best position he has ever been in at the NHL level.

But ideally, supporting talent does more than ride their linemates' coattails — they contribute something. That's why players like Hyman have gained such a strong reputation — he is an elite supporting player who can complement star players, as he's shown in Toronto and Edmonton.

Podkolzin is putting in the work to complement Draisaitl. He's a relentless forechecker who helps retrieve pucks and keep plays alive, and he has one of the best impacts on the team's expected goal suppression at five-on-five. Now he has started to get rewarded for it.

Stars of the month

Connor McDavid

Since returning from injury, McDavid has only been held off the scoresheet twice — in his first game back against Vegas and once more against Montreal on Nov. 18. He scored nine goals and 21 points in 11 games in November and has a point on 51 percent of the Oilers' goals since returning. Edmonton is generating 0.74 more expected goals per 60 with McDavid on the ice, which is one of the best offensive impacts around the league at five-on-five. His star power is shining and helping him climb up the scoring charts to make up for lost time.

Aleksander Barkov

Like McDavid, Barkov hasn't missed a step since returning from injury. With 21 points in 14 games last month, he was one of the leading scorers in November — a feat made even more impressive by the fact he faces some of the toughest offensive competition in the league. Barkov has a knack for not just shutting down his opponents but turning defense into offense in all situations, usually alongside Sam Reinhart as one of the best dynamic duos in the league. The Panthers have limited their opponents to just 2.05 expected goals against per 60 in Barkov's minutes this month at five-on-five, earned 61 percent of the expected goal share and outscored opponents 15-8.

Connor Hellebuyck

Hellebuyck led all goalies in November with 13.3 goals saved above expected in all situations in his 10 appearances and a sparkling .931 save percentage. He has given his team a chance to win with eight quality starts in those 10 games, which helped the Jets extend their torrid start. And maybe most impressive is who his best games came against: Colorado, Dallas and Minnesota — division rivals, all in the playoff picture.

[The Athletic / Weekend NHL rankings: Rangers, Kraken, a November blockbuster trade and a new Top 5 team](#)

By Sean McIndoe – December 3, 2024

A big NHL trade in November? Are they allowed to do that?

Apparently they are. And while Saturday's deal that sent David Jiricek from Columbus to Minnesota may not quite rise to the level of a certified blockbuster, it's at least enough to be the November equivalent, and it's a fascinating trade. Let's dive into it a little deeper.

Bonus five: Thoughts on the Jiricek trade

5. I'm guessing Blue Jackets fans are fine with it — At least the ones who read me are, based on feedback from last week's post in which I wondered what was up with the situation. Columbus fans were pretty clear on their answer: The kid wasn't playing well and didn't deserve to be eating regular NHL minutes. To get a solid package of picks in return for a player who wasn't good enough to crack the roster isn't bad work.

4. Jiricek's skating was clearly an issue — That's been the messaging out of Columbus, as Aaron breaks down here. I won't pretend I've watched Jiricek closely enough to know whether the issues are fixable, although Bill Guerin is clearly betting they are. But it's a fascinating reminder of how much the modern NHL has changed from even what the league was a decade ago — even a 6-foot-4 defenseman still has to be a smooth skater in today's game.

3. It's still a big risk by Don Waddell — Jiricek was the No. 6 pick in 2022, taken ahead of blueliners like Kevin Korchiński and Pavel Mintyukov. It's rare to see teams give up on a player drafted that high that quickly, although Waddell wasn't the GM who drafted him, so it's easier for him to invoke the concept of sunk costs if he just doesn't see a future.

2. It doesn't change my view of the Wild right now, but it might change the deadline — As Guerin said, this deal is more of an investment in the future than an attempt to get better immediately. That's not always the priority for teams playing as well as the Wild are right now, although you take the opportunities where you find them. The bigger potential impact on this year's Wild might come at the trade deadline, when they won't have their own first-round pick to move for short-term help.

1. I'm not picking a winner yet — That's the coward's way out, obviously, because readers expect to see trades evaluated immediately. Luckily for me, Corey's already taken care of that — he thinks it's a poor return for the Blue Jackets even as he doesn't view Jiricek as a sure thing. I'm a little more positive on this from a Columbus perspective, since there's value in making tough decisions early enough that they don't transform into impossible ones. But ultimately, this is one of those moves, like last year's Jamie Drysdale/Cutter Gauthier swap, where we'll likely have to wait a few years before a clear winner emerges.

Let's move on to the rankings, which are kind of a mess this week.

Road to the Cup

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

5. Minnesota Wild (16-4-4, +21 true goals differential*) — It feels like it's time. Maybe it is for the Capitals, too, but we move slowly around here, so one new team at a time. For now, fair warning: This week's top five is way too Central-heavy, which is an issue we'll have to figure out in the weeks to come.

For now, the Wild ride three straight wins to a league-best .750 points percentage and a spot in our rankings, with a fun matchup with the Canucks up next.

4. Winnipeg Jets (18-7-0, +31) — Three straight losses, and five in their last eight, all in regulation. Yeah, I'm getting worried, and I'm pretty sure I know which team's spot might be up for grabs this time a week from now.

3. Dallas Stars (15-8-0, +19) — Beating Colorado and Winnipeg in quick succession was a nice reminder they've still got a solid claim as the class of the division, even if the standings say otherwise. And as our buddy Jeff reminds us, some nice stories are developing in Dallas.

Tyler Seguin with his 9th goal, 19th point quietly having an excellent start to his season.

2. Carolina Hurricanes (16-7-1, +22) — Where does "NECAS" and "CANES" rank among all-time NHL anagrams? I'm thinking ahead of "ME IDIOT" but behind "MARIO JR," but I'm open to discussion.

1. Florida Panthers (15-9-1, +11) — That four-game losing streak did a number on their record, but we're looking at more than just wins and losses. Seeing them regroup in time to beat the Leafs in a showdown for top spot in the Atlantic was impressive. Seeing them sweep the Hurricanes in a home-and-home was even better. Now let's see if they can keep the momentum going against the Penguins and Flyers, or whether they're firmly in the "We only show up for the big games" mode that champions sometimes allow themselves to drift into.

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

Not ranked: New York Rangers — Here's my question: Are the Rangers the best team to ever reach a full-blown crisis by the end of November?

Dating back to 2021-22, the Rangers have made the playoffs with double-digit points to spare every year. They made the conference finals twice, won a Presidents' Trophy and played at a 109-point pace.

They've also already fired one coach, apparently spent the offseason trying to overhaul the roster and recently pulled the equivalent of hanging a "FOR SALE" sign on some of the core players.

Those two were from a game they lost by one goal plus an empty-netter, by the way. If the playoffs started today, the Rangers would make it comfortably.

From a distance, it's a strange scene. The panic level in New York feels appropriate for a team in the running for dead last, not one tracking for a slightly lower playoff seed than they'd like. But here we are.

Is it justified? Well ... maybe. Friday's loss to the Flyers was their fifth straight in regulation. They snapped that streak against the Habs on Saturday, and their overall record is still OK, but it's just OK and the trend is clear. Something has to change soon, or else the Rangers aren't going to be a playoff team for much longer.

The question is what you're going to change. Everything coming out of New York is saying the same thing: It's going to be the roster, and it won't be minor tinkering. The Rangers want to move a big piece or two.

On Wednesday's podcast, we didn't really believe them, although that was two losses ago. It's certainly possible this is indeed a bluff from Chris Drury, an attempt to fire up his veteran squad by threatening to break up the boys. We've seen that sort of thing work in this league before, but it comes with two major risks. The first is that the players you're naming don't respond well to the threat of having their families' lives disrupted. The second is that if the team keeps losing, you might bluff your way into a corner where you now have to make a big move.

That might not sound like the worst thing in the world to Rangers fans right now, but the only thing we're told is more difficult for an NHL GM than pulling off a midseason trade is doing so when your team is losing. With apologies to Elliott Friedman, you can see the other front offices around the league warming up to start tossing those anvils. It's all well and good to make calls on J.T. Miller, but these days, Drury might be lucky to be offered the rights to J.T. Wyman.

This team has one of the league's two best goalies, one of its five best young defensemen, its best left winger, and again, a Presidents' Trophy banner that's barely had time to collect any dust in the rafters. Do you blow it all up? Can you blow it all up? With another bad week or two, do you even have any other choice?

They've got the Devils at MSG tonight, by the way. No pressure, guys.

The bottom five

The five teams that are headed toward dead last and the best lottery odds for James Hagens, or maybe someone else.

A reminder that today is 4 Nations roster reveal day. **Here's what they'd look like if Dom was in charge:**

5. Anaheim Ducks (10-10-3, -8) — If you missed this week's podcast, Frankie is trying to manifest a John Gibson-to-Colorado trade for later in the season. I don't love it from an Avs perspective, but I'd be interested to hear what fans of either team think about that sort of move. For what it's worth, Gibson's looked good since returning.

4. San Jose Sharks (9-13-5, -14) — Well, look who got hot. They won three of four this week, and more impressively, scored 22 goals while doing it. We'll see how sustainable this offensive burst turns out to be, but for now, let's reward the Sharks with their best ranking since the end of the 2022-23 season.

3. Nashville Predators (7-12-6, -21) — The good news is they've banked points in three straight. The bad news is they were all losses, and charity points aren't going to get this team back into the race. I'm not sure swapping backup goalies will do it either, but at least it made them younger.

2. Montreal Canadiens (8-13-3, -24) — It's fair to say that shutout win over the Oilers did not turn the season around. They're now 1-3-1 after weekend losses to the Rangers and Bruins. Being the "get right" opponent for struggling Original Six teams wasn't exactly the goal in Montreal, although at least they get a five-game homestand that kicks off tomorrow against the Islanders.

1. Chicago Blackhawks (8-14-2, -14) — It's bad enough that the Sharks have left them in the dust for dead last, but apparently we're also going to start doing the "Is Macklin Celebrini better than Connor Bedard?" debate.

Not ranked: Seattle Kraken — So do back-to-back regulation losses to San Jose mean the Kraken are a bad team, or just one that was in the wrong place at the wrong time as a young team starts to find its stride?

I'd like to pick the latter option since it's more fun for the Sharks, but I'm worried it's more like the former.

Let's run down some of the ugly details of the Kraken. They're sitting 23rd overall in goals scored and 20th in goals allowed. They haven't beaten a single playoff team in regulation all year. Their big offseason addition, Chandler Stephenson, has not been good. The Philipp Grubauer reclamation project is, to put it mildly, not going great. Shane Wright looks like an NHLer, but so far not much more than that. They've lost Jordan Eberle long-term. And any kind of new-coach bounce from Dan Bylsma either

isn't happening or has already faded. The only bit of good news is that Joey Daccord has been good enough that Canada is trying to enlist him. After that, it's grim.

It all adds up to an 11-13-1 record and the sixth-worst points percentage in the league. They're only five points out of a playoff spot, although that's misleading because teams like Edmonton and Vancouver have played fewer games. This just feels like a team that's not terrible but not all that good, headed straight toward the dreaded mushy middle. "Painfully mid," as the other rankings put it. Not unlike a lot of fourth-year expansion teams that weren't the Golden Knights, come to think of it.

Now that I've already shoveled a bit of dirt on their season, we can probably go ahead and congratulate them on beating the Hurricanes in Carolina tomorrow. But even beyond that, the path back to the playoffs will be a tough one, and at some point, you have to wonder what the big plan is in Seattle. Hoping you can sneak into the playoffs and get hot can work sometimes, and kind of already did for this team in 2023, but it's not a long-term strategy.

ESPN / The Wyshynski Awards for the first quarter of the NHL season

By Greg Wyshynski – December 3, 2024

The first quarter of the 2024-25 NHL season is in the books, having produced a few juggernaut teams counterbalanced by preseason favorites who have cratered early on -- including the Boston Bruins, who fired coach Jim Montgomery after 20 games.

What can the best and worst from the first chunk of the schedule tell us about what's yet to come this season?

Here are my NHL awards and superlatives for the first quarter of the season, from outstanding achievements to bitter disappointments to some unfathomable goalie gaffes.

Best team: Winnipeg Jets

The Jets aren't lapping the field. The Minnesota Wild have caught up to them in the Presidents' Trophy race. Teams like the Washington Capitals, Carolina Hurricanes, Vegas Golden Knights and New Jersey Devils are right in their rearview mirror. By the end of the quarter, Winnipeg was a lot like these other hot starters: banking points early to decrease the pressure later in the season.

What separates the Jets from that pack is their utter dominance in banking those points. Through 24 games, Winnipeg was second in goals per game behind Washington, second in goals against per game and team save percentage behind Minnesota, and second in power-play percentage behind New Jersey.

We went deep inside the numbers recently to figure out how Winnipeg became this early-season steamroller. Connor Hellebuyck is the most obvious advantage, not only in having the world's best goaltender in the crease, but in what that does from a confidence perspective for everything else they've done. "Everybody knows if you don't have goaltending, it makes for a long year. So Helly gives us that foundation," coach Scott Arniel said.

When Rick Bowness retired, Arniel moved up from associate coach and unlocked something in this team. Of course, it helps to have a receptive group. Back-to-back first-round exits -- including one courtesy of the Colorado Avalanche last spring that left them motivated by their humiliation -- can open a player's mind to new possibilities.

If the Jets continue to play like this, their five-game dismissal last postseason will also be the thing that keeps their egos in check.

"It's why we're not over the top, living the high life right now, because we know what happened last year," Arniel said.

Most disappointing team: Nashville Predators

There are a few smoldering piles of disaster that could have captured this dishonor.

The Edmonton Oilers lost in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final and offered up an encore of disastrous goaltending and curious underperformance from key skaters. The Pittsburgh Penguins earned more questions about their core's future than points in the standings. The Detroit Red Wings appear unable to make the leap to playoff contention even if you spotted them a trampoline. The Bruins are outside a playoff spot, playing poorly enough to encourage the panic-firing of Montgomery.

But the Predators are a special kind of terrible.

This was a 99-point playoff team that augmented a talented roster with three stunning free-agent coups: forward Jonathan Marchessault, a former Conn Smythe winner jettisoned by the Golden Knights; defenseman Brady Skjei of the Hurricanes; and most significantly, Steven Stamkos, the goal-scoring superstar from the Tampa Bay Lightning.

But there's an alchemy to building a championship-caliber team, and the Predators have failed that chemistry test. That infusion of offensive talent somehow led to a massive regression, to the point where Nashville was last in the NHL in goals per game (2.32) and in expected goals at 5-on-5.

Even as Nashville has picked up a few points in the standings, things are getting uglier. Stamkos, who had one goal in his first 10 games with Nashville and only seven goals in 24 games so far, recently called out his teammates' effort during this offensive drought.

"If you're not scoring, what else are you doing out there? What else can you do to help your team win? I've just felt like, for whatever reason, in these stretches, we tend to go the other way," he said to a collective yikes from outside observers.

But there's still hope in NashVegas. After all, this was a team that made the playoffs on the strength of 18 straight games without a regulation loss. All they need to do is rebook U2 at Sphere and then not attend their concert as a form of penance. Easy stuff.

Most valuable player: Kirill Kaprizov

Minnesota coach John Hynes was recently asked what has driven Kirill Kaprizov to the best start of his five-year NHL career.

"He loves the game," he said. "He's the first guy on, last guy off. Great practice player, unbelievable physical condition, coachable. Willing to get better and learn how he can do things better."

Those kinds of players are always easy to celebrate, but in Kaprizov's case that work ethic is attached to a player with 174 goals in his first 300 NHL games. Kirill the Thrill has been the rocket fuel for the Wild's torrid start, playing well in all facets of the game and leading the league in points (38).

Through 24 games, there was a 14-point gap between him and the next-highest Minnesota scorer, Matt Boldy. That stat shouldn't be the sole harbinger of an MVP candidate ... but it's a very solid plank in his platform. He's been delightfully dominant.

Least valuable player: Connor Ingram

It brings us no joy to report that Connor Ingram, last season's winner of the Masterton Trophy and general feel-good story with the Arizona Coyotes, landed in Salt Lake City with a thud. Through 13 games, Ingram was last in the NHL in goals saved above expected (minus-10.9, per StatHockey) and cost his team a league-worst 1.4 wins according to Evolving Hockey. His .871 save percentage was the worst among goalies with at least 13 appearances. If that were not enough, he also has been out since Nov. 18 with an upper-body injury.

Again, he's a likeable guy with an incredible backstory who just happened to be the worst goalie in the NHL statistically at the quarter mark. Here's to Ingram turning his season around with Utah.

Best goal: Evan Bouchard

This goal by the Oilers defenseman had both the wizardry and the distance traveled.

Bouchard collected the puck deep inside his own zone and then turned on the afterburners through the neutral zone to leave most of the Ottawa Senators in his wake. Thomas Chabot futilely attempted to

defend him and got toyed with, as Bouchard unleashed a pinpoint shot to complete this goal of the year candidate:

Worst goal: Brayden Point

It's hard to imagine there's another hat trick in NHL history that was completed this absurdly. Brayden Point's third goal on Nov. 27 against the Capitals was scored when goalie Charlie Lindgren put the puck into his own net.

OK, that description doesn't do it justice. That happens all the time, with goalies accidentally nudging the puck over the line with their skates or misplaying the puck on a shot. Lindgren took the puck on his backhand, attempted to play it to the end boards and emphatically deposited it dead center into his net.

Point was the last Lightning player to have touched the puck before Lindgren was revealed as a possible double-agent, and was credited with the goal:

Weirdest goal: Leon Draisaitl

Minnesota goalie Marc-Andre Fleury has been celebrated in many road arenas during his final tour in the NHL. But in a recent game in Edmonton, he decided to give Oilers star Leon Draisaitl the gift of a goal in this season's most bizarre sequence.

Draisaitl sent the puck from the opposite blue line and then watched it travel through the legs of a teammate and a Minnesota defender. The bounding puck found its way to Fleury, who tried to knock it away quickly with his paddle. Instead, the puck was already rolling through his five-hole before his stick was in motion. Fleury tumbled into his own net with the puck, having given up one of the biggest clunkers of his career.

"It was dumb. I should have just make sure I stopped it first," Fleury said after the game, who shared that his Minnesota teammates made him feel better about the gaffe by joking about it. Eventually winning the game 5-3 helped ease the embarrassment, too.

Most remorseless decision

St. Louis Blues GM Doug Armstrong does cold and calculated better than anyone. Whether it's letting a beloved veteran walk over contract conditions or cutting bait on a season because the team isn't playing to postseason standards, warm and fuzzies have no home in the St. Louis front office.

Just ask Drew Bannister, who was given 22 games as head coach before the Blues dumped him for Montgomery, five days after the Bruins had fired him. Bannister got his first NHL head coaching job after 54 games as interim coach last season. "Having a full training camp and two-year term to put his stamp on this team, we're looking forward to that," Armstrong said six months ago.

In fairness, Armstrong also said the team conducted a search before committing to Bannister: "You're just looking, like: 'Is there any better out there? Is there something different that we're missing?'"

There was something better out there. Problem was he was the Bruins' coach.

And so Armstrong became the hockey embodiment of the Distracted Boyfriend meme. He made it clear that the only reason Bannister was out was because Monty was available, giving the former Blues assistant a five-year contract. Again, he's a general manager that has never met a callous decision he couldn't make. And many times, they've worked out.

Worst coaching move

While Blackhawks coach Luke Richardson made Taylor Hall a healthy scratch without nary a hint to the former league MVP that it was a possibility -- something Richardson acknowledged should have

happened -- he wasn't the coach who submitted the wrong starting lineup before a game to earn a minor penalty.

That would be Predators coach Andrew Brunette, who submitted a lineup with Stamkos in the starting lineup but started the game with Filip Forsberg in his spot. Seattle Kraken coach Dan Bylsma's staff noticed the error. Just 43 seconds into the game, the Kraken notified the referees of a violation of NHL Rule 7, which states "no change in the starting line-up of either team as indicated in the submitted line-up, or in the playing line-up on the ice, can be made unless reviewed and approved by the referee prior to the start of the game."

Brunette told TNT that the No. 1 was accidentally added to Forsberg's No. 9 to make Stamkos' No. 91. This did not make things better.

Nashville killed off the Seattle power play but lost the game 3-0. In what has been an embarrassing season for the Predators, this was downright comical.

Best trade condition

The Wild saved David Jiricek from a life of driving between Columbus and AHL Cleveland in perpetuity by trading for the 21-year-old Blue Jackets defenseman on Nov. 30. Among the draft picks changing sides in the deal was the Wild's 2025 first-round pick.

Wild GM Bill Guerin doesn't just hand out first-round picks like food samples at Costco, so he made this a conditional pick: If Minnesota's first-round pick in the 2025 draft is one of the first five selections, the Wild will retain the pick, and transfer its 2026 first-round selection to the Blue Jackets.

Yes, that's right: A team that was 16-4-4 on the night of the trade and tied for first overall in the NHL in points percentage wanted to ensure this Jiricek trade didn't muck up its lottery odds if the bottom falls out on the season. You have to respect that level of underlying dread for an NHL franchise.

Biggest trend: Even-strength scoring

Scoring is actually down a tick from last season after 386 games, with 3.08 goals per game per team. That's despite average save percentage hitting .900, which would be its lowest point since the 1995-96 season.

Where scoring is way up: even-strength play. The NHL reported that through the first quarter of the season, 77.6% of all goals were scored at evens. That's the highest such rate in 51 seasons! One must go all the way back to 1972-73 (79%) to find the previous high mark.

This even-strength surge makes up for the fact that while power-play conversion rates remain quite high -- tracking to be the fourth straight season over 20% -- power-play opportunities are down slightly. But again, it's early.

Worst trend: Dismissing the champs

In ESPN's preseason predictions for the 2024-25 season, 11 experts picked the Oilers to win the Stanley Cup, followed by the Stars (eight), Bruins (one), Maple Leafs (one) and Rangers (one). That the Toronto Maple Leafs had more support as a potential champion than the Florida Panthers speaks volumes about the respect the reigning champions still don't seem to garner.

Maybe it's the idea that a team can't make the Stanley Cup Final in three consecutive seasons, even though a team that plays in the Panthers' home state just did that. Maybe the personnel losses, including standout defenseman Brandon Montour, were seen as too deleterious. Maybe we saw those videos of Cup celebrations at the Elbo Room and wondered whether these guys would ever be steady on skates again.

Yet here's Florida, chugging along at a .620 points percentage in the Atlantic. Sam Reinhart is having an MVP season (18 goals, 16 assists). Aleksander Barkov made up for missed time to injury with 24 points in 17 games. Matthew Tkachuk is nearly a point-per-game player for an offense that has been in the top five.

They're not perfect, ranking 25th in goals against per game thanks to below-replacement goaltending by Sergei Bobrovsky. But he's the best example of "it's all about the postseason," which might be the mantra for a team that's gone Super Saiyan in consecutive postseasons.

Anyway, the point here is that the defending champion doesn't always get its flowers because the odds are long on a repeat. Despite, you know, it happening twice in the past decade.

Worst interruption: Alex Ovechkin

What a time to be alive during Alex Ovechkin's first 18 games of this season.

The Capitals star scored 15 goals for the fastest offensive start of his 20-year NHL career, shattering or threatening records for a 39-year-old player in the process. He was scoring goals in a variety of ways. He looked faster and more impactful than he did last season, and especially last postseason. Ovechkin moved to within 27 goals of breaking Wayne Gretzky's all-time career mark (894) and in the process dramatically moved up his timeline for claiming the goal-scoring throne.

And then he broke his left fibula. Scoreus interruptus.

The hockey world now waits to see whether Ovechkin can continue his mastery on the other side of that injury. When he does return, Ovechkin will find a Capitals team that has just kept rolling in his absence to the top of the Metro Division. That's something Ovechkin wanted most during his goal-record chase: To play relevant, important hockey with a playoff-bound team. Not every star veteran can be so lucky. (Glances at Pittsburgh.)

Most important document: 'The Memo'

The New York Rangers were in a playoff spot at Thanksgiving, and have a .587 points percentage through 23 games. But playing good isn't playing great, and the latter is what a team needs to do when it's chasing its first Stanley Cup since 1994.

GM Chris Drury decided to light a fire under his team by sending a memo to 31 other general managers letting them know that the Rangers were open for business on the trade market. He mentioned two players by name: defenseman Jacob Trouba, which was no surprise given the team tried to trade him in the offseason; and winger Chris Kreider, who was a surprise given his 13 seasons with the franchise and 127 goals over the previous three seasons.

Whether Drury was seeking deals -- difficult, considering six members of his group of veterans have trade protection -- or looking to have that memo hit the media as a message to his team, the Rangers have yet to turn their play around, with a shakeup still looming.

Between "The Memo" and "The Letter" back in 2018, the Rangers have produced the most landscape-shifting documents by a New Yorker since Alexander Hamilton.

Worst tanking job: Calgary Flames

In fairness, GM Craig Conroy said this wasn't going to be a rebuild but a retool for the Flames ... even if a rebuild might have been the most effective path back to championship contention. For better or worse, he got what he was after with this Flames team. Calgary has a 25% chance of making the playoff cut and was in a wild-card spot in the West as of Monday morning.

The Flames' offense remains without much pop, ranking 28th in goals per game and with no player with more than 15 points after 25 games. But Dustin Wolf has been a revelation in goal, with a .918 save percentage and a 2.59 goals-against average, saving 3.5 goals above expected per Stathletes while playing himself into Calder Trophy contention. Hot goalies, forever the antidote to tanking.

Best bounce back: Martin Necas

For two seasons, Necas had been the subject of trade rumors and questions about his offensive output, which tumbled from a career-high 71 points in 2022-23 to 53 (along with a minus-9) last season for the Carolina Hurricanes. He avoided arbitration with a two-year bridge deal worth \$6.5 million annually against the cap.

GM Eric Tulsky didn't really need any more evidence of his genius, but we can add "got one of the league's best scorers at a discounted rate" to the list.

Necas, 26, has 37 points in 24 games, easily the best scoring pace of his career to lead the Hurricanes to near the top of the conference. Necas always had this kind of season in him. Carolina fans are relieved to finally see it happen -- and happen in Raleigh.

Worst regression: Connor Bedard

Is this a sophomore jinx, or the reality of playing for the current incarnation of the Chicago Blackhawks? Whatever the case, Bedard has been ineffective and frustrated in his second NHL campaign after winning the Calder Trophy last season.

He has four goals (and 17 points) in 23 games after potting 22 goals in 68 games last season. Bedard's defensive numbers have improved year over year, which was by design: Richardson moved him to the wing and had him playing with more defensively oriented linemates this season. But they need him to be Connor Bedard, not Connor Brown. Beyond his stat line, Bedard has clearly shown frustration about the way his season has played out, and what could be year-over-year regression for the Blackhawks.

Memo to Connor: Patience is a virtue in a total rebuild. Crosby had Evgeni Malkin, Kris Letang, Jordan Staal and Marc-Andre Fleury with him the first time his Penguins made the postseason. Ovechkin had Nicklas Backstrom and Mike Green as teammates when he made the playoffs for the first time. Granted, those examples were from when Bedard was around 3 years old, and our bones just turned into dust writing that.

Overwhelming offseason goalie acquisition: Anthony Stolarz

After posting impressive numbers as a backup goalie with Anaheim and Florida, with whom he won the Stanley Cup, Stolarz signed in Toronto as the latest attempted solution to their goaltending issues.

Through 13 games, he has looked the part: 7-4-2, .921 save percentage and a 2.33 goals-against average. Stathletes has him with 3.6 goals saved above average. All that for \$2.5 million against the salary cap.

Underwhelming offseason goalie acquisition: Jacob Markstrom

The Devils hit on most of their offseason additions. Brenden Dillon and Brett Pesce added veteran presence to their blue line. Stefan Noesen and Paul Cotter have produced more offense than expected from depth forwards. But the centerpiece of their offseason resurrection plans hasn't actualized quite yet.

Jacob Markstrom is 11-6-1 on the season. His .902 save percentage is just over league average. But his underlying numbers are rough: he has a minus-6.6 goals saved above expected (Stathletes), is

underwater in save percentage above expected (MoneyPuck) and hasn't added a win to the Devils in the standings (Evolving Hockey).

Again, it's a little unfair when the bar is set at "positional savior" after poor goaltending subverted the Devils last season. There's still plenty of time to find his footing in New Jersey, but at this point, backup Jake Allen has had the better season among Devils goalies.

Best future star: Macklin Celebrini

The first NHL Awards Watch of the season made it clear that the only thing keeping some voters from crowning Celebrini as the top rookie this season was the number of games he had played. He has appeared in only 15 games through Saturday's action but had scored eight goals and six assists in those games. Eventually, the sample size concern will give way to acknowledgment that Celebrini is a special player.

It couldn't have come at a better time for the Sharks. Seeing Joe Thornton honored the other day conjured memories of this franchise's glory years as a Stanley Cup contender, back when the Shark Tank would vibrate from the volume of its fans. San Jose might not create much chaos in the standings this season, but thanks to Celebrini, Will Smith and other players in the franchise's next wave, the Sharks are fun again.

It has been a while since San Jose gave the East Coast a reason to stay up late for home games. Celebrini is that reason.

What's next? Biggest storylines for the next quarter

1. Can the Bruins stabilize?

While Montgomery appears to have the Blues pointed in the right direction, can the team that fired him find its footing under interim coach Joe Sacco? Results are mixed in the early going, but it's clear GM Don Sweeney believes this roster can succeed based on the timing of the firing. Any turnaround needs goalie Jeremy Swayman to be at his best, and he's finally finding his form after a disastrous first six weeks of the season.

2. The 4 Nations Face-Off fallout.

This week, we'll learn who made the cut for the U.S., Canada, Sweden and Finland for the first 4 Nations Face-Off tournament this February. There will be some surprises and some snubs. How will players react to missing the cut, especially with 2026 Olympic roster spots potentially on the line? Or, more to the point: How many young scorers will try and light up the Minnesota Wild because Team USA GM Bill Guerin left them off the national team roster?

3. Who is the best in the West?

As mentioned, the Jets aren't alone at the top of the Western Conference, with the Wild and Golden Knights both within a reasonable distance of the lead. Vegas has gotten an MVP performance from Jack Eichel so far this season. Speaking of MVPs: Nathan MacKinnon and Connor McDavid could power the Avalanche and Oilers back up the standings before the midpoint of the season. Are the Los Angeles Kings for real after a solid start? Can Dallas start playing like the Stanley Cup champ many expect them to become? What's the Blues ceiling with Montgomery behind the bench?

The West is going to be wild.

[Sportsnet.ca / Gaudreau's father skates with Flames ahead of emotional return to Calgary](#)

By Eric Francis – December 3, 2024

CALGARY — The warm embrace said plenty, the slow skate around the rink together said even more.

Invited to join the Flames as a guest coach ahead of Tuesday night's tribute to his sons, Guy Gaudreau was showered with love the minute he stepped onto the ice.

A hug and chit-chat with Dan Vladar was followed immediately by a reunion with one of Johnny's closest teammates, Rasmus Andersson.

The hug was followed by a series of slow laps together during warm-up, during which Andersson put his arm around Gaudreau as they exchanged hearty helpings of healing.

"It's hard because you still want to talk about it, but we talked about life," said Andersson of their stroll.

"He loves talking about hockey, so we spent a lot of time talking about hockey. I told him he's got to help us out there get our goal-scoring going. He had his own conclusion as to why we're not scoring."

Andersson didn't reveal Guy's theory, or the contents of their chat.

What mattered more was their being together.

"This is his therapy, to be around the rink," said Andersson, who said Guy and wife Jane babysat his daughter at Andrew Mangiapane's summertime wedding, at which he and Johnny were best men.

"That helped him going through what he's going through.

"It was great.

"It will never be the way it used to be for him, and none of us, but he still loves to be around the rink and it was great to see him here today.

"For him to be on the ice, it's not easy for any one of us, and it's definitely not easy for him, but this is his therapy, and I told him, 'Come out whenever you want. You always have a spot on the ice and I hope they make it out again.'"

You get the feeling they just might.

The connection between Johnny's family and the city was that strong, making their visit ahead of Tuesday's pre-game celebration of life something they've likely looked at with mixed emotions.

More will be forged in bittersweet fashion over the next couple of days, including a quiet ceremony for the family at a local rink where a bench made out of the sticks left at the makeshift memorial will be dedicated in Johnny's honour.

Powerful.

Guy arrived at the Saddledome like a child excitedly approaching an outdoor rink, with skates in hand.

As part of their rock star existence in town, Guy would often arrive with his gear so he could join random beer league skates around town.

“It’s great to see him laughing and helping out — it’s healing for everyone to be together and spend some time,” said Blake Coleman, whose lengthy friendship with Gaudreau is such that their parents are also tight.

“You can just tell he loves the game of hockey, and being around it, and I think it helps take his mind off it. And it’s fun for us.”

Late in the Flames practice Gaudreau was tasked with feeding the slot — a natural for Gaudreau’s apparently — and then shielding the puck for a corner battle with an approaching forward.

Guy wasn’t interested in taking it lightly.

“Just making sure he still had it,” chuckled Coleman, who approached Guy with significant speed, only to receive a series of playful hooks and a high stick as he exited with the puck.

“Then he started chirping me, saying, 'That’s all you got?’

“So it’s fun. You enjoy the banter. He’s always been that type of guy you could mess around with. It’s great to see he’s still got that.”

Flashing plenty of grins on the ice as he visited with familiar faces, and was introduced to new ones, Guy really lit up when Sean Monahan showed up on the visitors’ bench with Boone Jenner for a massive hug and welcome visit.

Healing together.

It would be impossible to know just how hard so many of Guy’s days have been since Johnny and son Matthew were taken from him by an alleged drunk driver who killed both in late August while they rode bicycles on the side of a rural road.

This was one of the good days, taking his and his family’s minds to the good times.

“Hockey is kind of family, and he and his family were a big part of this community and probably the most enjoyable times he’s had were around his family and the rink,” said coach Ryan Huska of the rationale behind inviting Guy to skate.

“It gave us an opportunity to bring him in today and be around the players and the game he loves.

“He told a few of them he was going to slash or crosscheck them if they came and took the puck from him, so he did that a few times. It was good to see.”

The smile on Guy’s face as he battled in the corner was heartening, as this whole city has tried so hard to help bring comfort to him and his family.

They’ll get another chance before puck drop, as a video tribute will be followed, no doubt, by one of the most stirring ovations the Saddledome has ever seen.

“I hope tomorrow everyone can just appreciate, first of all what a great person he was, and then a great hockey player,” said Andersson, who said Friday’s game in Columbus was the toughest game mentally he’s ever played.

“It will be difficult for many of us. Hopefully some of the guys who haven’t played with Johnny can pick us up.”

Coleman appreciates the chance for the city to help carry on the legacy Johnny created with nine seasons of memorable contributions on and off the ice.

“It’s that expression of gone but not forgotten,” said Coleman. “Sharing his memory is important to do.

“Hopefully his family enjoys the reunion of coming back to Calgary because I know the people here really care about him and want to show their love and appreciation.”

The tragedy hit home for everyone in Calgary, in different ways.

“For me it’s a reminder every day of how fragile life is and you have to have your priorities right,” added Coleman, as his two young daughters frolicked and spread smiles around the dressing room.

“I’ve got my little ones here today, just little reminders of spending time and being there for your family because you never know.

“Every time I go down the rabbit hole and think about it it’s still difficult. Gone too soon but the only way to honour him at this point is just to live your life, be a really good person, be a good friend, good father, good teammate — all the things Johnny was, and try to carry on that legacy.”

[Sportsnet.ca / Team Canada check-in: Who will make the cut for 4 Nations Face-Off?](#)

By Josh Beneteau – December 3, 2024

We are just days away from learning who will represent Canada at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

The highly anticipated roster will be unveiled Wednesday night on Sportsnet, giving us answers to the many debates that have been held from coast to coast.

Will this team be all-skill? Or will some sandpaper be mixed in?

Will the defence be an even right-left split? Or will some players be asked to play on their off-side?

And who will start in net?

We already know Sidney Crosby, Nathan Mackinnon, Cale Makar, Brad Marchand, Connor McDavid, and Brayden Point will be on the team.

But before the rest of the names are announced, let's take one more look at who is trending up and down for the final spots.

FORWARDS

Trending Up

Mitch Marner and John Tavares, Toronto Maple Leafs

Marner has stepped up in a big way this season, especially with Auston Matthews unavailable, scoring 31 points in 23 games. Tavares has played for Canada at every possible level and with 21 points in 22 games this season, he remains in contention this time around at age 34.

Sam Reinhart and Sam Bennett, Florida Panthers

Reinhart hasn't slowed down after a season to remember last year and leads the NHL with 18 goals. Bennett is one of the players Canada may turn to to provide a physical edge, but he also has some offensive talent, with 23 points in 24 games.

Mark Scheifele, Winnipeg Jets

The NHL's best team has been getting scoring from plenty of people but Scheifele has been one of the leaders with 12 goals and 26 points. Canada's centre depth might be the best in the tournament but Scheifele can slide to the wing to provide some secondary scoring.

Travis Konecny, Philadelphia Flyers

Konecny is coming off back-to-back 30-goal seasons and is on pace to crack 40 for the first time this year. His 20 points in 14 November games were tied for fifth-best in the league with Jack Eichel and Kirill Kaprizov.

Anthony Cirelli and Brandon Hagel, Tampa Bay Lightning

Team Canada coach Jon Cooper knows Cirelli and Hagel well and trusts them in all situations, often on the same line. Cirelli (10 goals, 23 points) and Hagel (10 goals, 29 points) are both on pace to set career highs in scoring this year.

Matt Duchene, Dallas Stars

Duchene has been leading the way offensively in Dallas while some of his teammates navigate slow starts. The 2014 Olympic gold medalist has 27 points in 22 games to lead the Stars, putting him on pace to set a new career-high in scoring at age 33.

Dylan Strome and Tom Wilson, Washington Capitals

While much has been made about Alex Ovechkin's goal-record chase, plenty of other Capitals have stepped up, too. Strome has emerged as an elite set-up man this season with 26 assists and 34 points already. Wilson continues to be one of the more feared hitters in the game, but his nine goals and 19 points in 24 games so far have him on pace to set a new career-high offensively, too.

Alexis Lafrenière, New York Rangers

Lafrenière is a rising star as a scoring winger who will certainly be part of Team Canada's future plans. This season he's on pace to crack the 30-goal and 60-point marks for the first time in his career.

Trending Down

Zach Hyman, Edmonton Oilers

Hyman has not been able to replicate the success he had last year when he scored 54 goals. Through 20 games so far, he has just three goals and eight points. Now with an injury keeping him off the ice, he's run out of time to earn his way back onto this team.

Mark Stone, Vegas Golden Knights

Stone last played on Nov. 6 due to a lower-body injury, a concern that has hovered over his career for years now. He is one of Canada's more impactful wingers when healthy, but will management be willing to take that risk for a short best-on-best tournament?

Connor Bedard, Chicago Blackhawks

While we can all dream about a line featuring Crosby, McDavid and Bedard, the reality is Chicago's superstar is stuck in a sophomore slump. With just four goals and 17 points in 23 games, we'll see if he's done enough to crack this team.

DEFENCEMEN

Trending Up

Josh Morrissey, Winnipeg Jets

Morrissey is tied for fourth in defenceman scoring with 22 points this season as a major contributor to the NHL's best team. His analytics have also been improving in November and he's now up to a 47.61 per cent expected goals rate.

Alex Pietrangelo and Shea Theodore, Vegas Golden Knights

Pietrangelo would be one of the more experienced blueliners on Team Canada but even as he nears age 35, he's showing he can still make an impact. Theodore's calling card is his offence and with 18 points in 24 games this season he's off to a great start.

Owen Power, Buffalo Sabres

Power contributes to both special teams and has 15 points this season, putting him almost halfway to his previous career-high in scoring. He just turned 22 in November and figures to play a larger role for Canada in future tournaments.

Brandon Montour, Seattle Kraken

Montour is getting his first taste of being a No. 1 defenceman after signing a big contract in Seattle and he's lived up to the billing. The 30-year-old has a 52.25 per cent expected goal rate and isn't afraid to throw a hit when called upon.

Dougie Hamilton, New Jersey Devils

Hamilton continues to make strides this season coming off an injury-ravaged 2023-24. The six-foot-six right shot has 19 points and a 52.32 per cent expected goals rate in 27 games.

Trending Down

Devon Toews, Colorado Avalanche

Toews has an advantage as Cale Makar's primary partner and that should be enough to get him on the team. But he has just seven points in 21 games, which is concerning after three straight 50-point seasons.

Evan Bouchard, Edmonton Oilers

Bouchard was very hot and cold offensively in November. He had 11 points in 13 games during the month, but those 11 came in just five games. With so many other power play leaders available to Team Canada, Bouchard hasn't been able to separate himself from the group with his play so far.

Morgan Rielly, Toronto Maple Leafs

Another offence-first defenceman, Rielly's scoring (four goals, 14 points) just hasn't matched the others competing for spots on the left side so far. Without a path to powerplay time, it will be difficult for Rielly to crack the final seven.

GOALTENDERS

Trending Up

Logan Thompson, Washington Capitals

Thompson asked for a trade out of Vegas to escape Adin Hill's shadow and now has a chance to surpass his former tandem mate for Canada's No. 1 spot. Thompson has 10 wins in 12 starts this season and his .911 save percentage ranks second among Canadian starting goaltenders.

Jordan Binnington, St. Louis Blues

Binnington is a former Stanley Cup champion and the winningest goalie in Blues history. He has a .899 save percentage this season but just seven wins in 19 appearances.

Adin Hill, Vegas Golden Knights

Hill had a disastrous start to the season but is climbing back up the Canadian goaltender ranks. His save percentage is up to .894 now after winning six of 10 starts in November.

Cam Talbot, Detroit Red Wings

Talbot is now on his eighth NHL team and continues to be a steady presence. His .916 save percentage leads all Canadian goaltenders two months into the season.

Marc-Andre Fleury, Minnesota Wild

Fleury is a future Hall of Famer who just turned 40 and has said this will be his last season. He's been effective in six starts as a backup in Minnesota, collecting five wins and a .905 save percentage.

Trending Down

Stuart Skinner, Edmonton Oilers

Skinner built up a lot of goodwill coming within one win of the Stanley Cup last spring but he still hasn't separated himself as an elite starting goaltender. The Oilers are tied for third in the Pacific Division and Skinner's .887 save percentage in 16 starts is one of the reasons why.

Samuel Montembeault, Montreal Canadiens

Montembeault's season has featured some highs (two shutouts) and some lows (three times pulled). His .897 save percentage is decent among Canadian goaltenders but he hasn't done enough to overcome the playoff-experience edge the other goalies have.

PROJECTED LINEUP

Forwards

Brayden Point-Connor McDavid-Mitch Marner

Sam Reinhart-Nathan MacKinnon-Mark Scheifele

Brad Marchand-Sidney Crosby-Travis Konecny

Brandon Hagel-Anthony Cirelli-Mark Stone

Connor Bedard

Defence

Devon Toews-Cale Makar

Shea Theodore-Alex Pietrangelo

Josh Morrissey-Dougie Hamilton

Drew Doughty*

Goaltenders

Logan Thompson

Jordan Binnington

Adin Hill

*Doughty has yet to play this season due to a broken ankle but is expected to return to the ice before the tournament begins.

[TSN.CA / Guy Gaudreau skates with Flames ahead of ceremony honouring sons](#)

By Salim Valji – December 3, 2024

Guy Gaudreau took the ice at the Saddledome on Monday, chatting with numerous Calgary Flames players ahead of an emotional game on Tuesday against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The father of the late Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau was a fixture in Calgary rinks for the decade that Johnny starred for the team before signing with Columbus in 2022. The Flames asked him to serve as a guest coach at Monday's skate.

Johnny and Matthew died in August after they were struck by a car driven by a suspected drunk driver while riding their bikes in Oldmans Township, N.J. Thousands of Flames fans attended a vigil for the brothers at the Saddledome a week after they died.

The Blue Jackets hosted the Flames last Friday, and many members of the Gaudreau family, including Guy and his wife, Jane, Johnny's wife, Meredith, and sisters Katie and Kristen, have made the trip to Calgary for Tuesday's rematch. The Flames have a pregame ceremony planned that will feature a video tribute and ceremonial puck drop.

Gaudreau spoke with several Flames players between drills during Monday's practice, including Rasmus Andersson and Blake Coleman. At one point, Andersson and Gaudreau embraced.

"We talked about life," Andersson said. "You try to spend a lot of time talking about hockey."

Andersson said that Gaudreau was in good spirits and even had some friendly constructive criticism for the team.

"I told him he's got to help us out there get our goal scoring going," Andersson said. "He had his own conclusion why we're not scoring. It was great just talking to him about that."

Coleman said that Gaudreau was even teasing him.

"He started chirping me [after a drill]," Coleman said. "He said, 'That's all you got?' It's fun."

Flames head coach Ryan Huska said that he called Guy several weeks ago and invited him to skate with the team ahead of the game.

"Hockey is kind of a family, and he and his family were a big part of this community," Huska said. "We asked him to help teach our guys how to score. He did a good job with his son, so we asked if he could help some of our players along today. It was nice to have him out there, for sure."

Several players and coaches said that the death of the Gaudreau brothers has changed their perspective on life.

"It's a reminder everyday of how fragile life is and you've got to have your priorities right," Coleman said. "I've got my little ones here today. Just little reminders to just spend time and be there for your family because you never know."

"Anytime something like that happens, you always re-evaluate," Huska added, "especially if you're a parent."

Long-time Flames teammate Sean Monahan, who signed with the Blue Jackets last summer to play with Johnny, was visibly emotional when talking about their relationship on Monday.

"I'm still going through [the grief]," he said. "Good days, bad days...you just kind of take it day by day and try and enjoy life as much as you can."

Monahan singled out Johnny's Game 7 overtime winner in 2022 versus the Dallas Stars as a memory that stands out. Monahan was injured and didn't dress, but met Johnny in the hallway right after.

"That hug after he scored that overtime goal is definitely one that I'll always look back on and we have footage of it too," Monahan said.

Four months after the tragedy, the Blue Jackets and Flames keep Johnny's memory alive in various ways both public and private.

Columbus has kept his locker room stall at home and on the road. Monahan said he purposely does interviews in front of it. The Calgary Flames Foundation has made donations in his honour to the Calgary Food Bank and other charities. Coleman and Andersson have said they think of him often.

Blue Jackets blueliner Erik Gudbranson met Johnny during his lone season in Calgary in 2021-22. They formed a tight friendship and each wound up Columbus that off-season in free agency.

Gudbranson said the Jackets still share Johnny stories.

"We giggle about him all the time," he said. "You have a beer and you're sitting down talking to each other and you're like, 'Remember when Johnny did this?' Or 'Imagine if John saw that.'"

Guy Gaudreau's presence has been part of that healing process.

He's skated with the Flames, Blue Jackets, and Philadelphia Flyers this season. He and the Gaudreau family will surely get a rousing ovation from Flames fans before Tuesday's game.

"It's good to see him back where he belongs, on the ice," Coleman said. "It's healing for everybody to be together."