



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips November 14, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets

- PAGE 02: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets fall to Seattle Kraken in sixth straight loss: 3 takeaways
- PAGE 04: The Athletic: Despite Blue Jackets' fast start vs. Kraken, their offensive funk extends losing skid
- PAGE 06: BlueJackets.com: Kraken rally back to down Blue Jackets
- PAGE 08: BlueJackets.com: Fabbro sees a new opportunity with the Blue Jackets
- PAGE 10: The Hockey News: Blue Jackets Drop Sixth Straight Game After Second Period Collapse In Seattle
- PAGE 11: The Hockey News: Using NHL EDGE To Analyze Blue Jackets Goals For Vs. Kraken
- PAGE 12: The Hockey News: Could The Blue Jackets & Penguins Become Trade Partners?
- PAGE 13: The Hockey News: Blue Jackets Should Target Maple Leafs Forward
- PAGE 14: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets Doomed by Second Period in Loss to Kraken
- PAGE 15: 1st Ohio Battery: 0-No: Blue Jackets Falter In Seattle, Lose 5-2 To Complete Five-Game Road Trip Without A Win
- PAGE 17: 1st Ohio Battery: Three Things: Fast Start Wiped Away, Kraken's Four-Goal Second, Fabbro's Debut

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/ Websites

- PAGE 18: The Athletic: Jury trial for Canada's 2018 world junior players charged with sexual assault set for April 2025
- PAGE 19: The Athletic: EA Sports to add P NHL teams and players to NHL 25
- PAGE 20: The Athletic: Tage Thompson or Vincent Trocheck? Brock Nelson or Cole Caufield? Bill Guerin talks U.S. 4 Nations roster
- PAGE 23: The Athletic: Who will be the NHL's next offer sheet targets? Which teams are vulnerable?
- PAGE 30: The Athletic: A brief history of skate-in-crease reviews, an awful rule the NHL might be going back to
- PAGE 35: The Athletic: NHL Draft 2025 top prospects: Porter Martone ranks No. 1, James Hagens drops to No. 2
- PAGE 36: ESPN: Can a goaltender win NHL rookie of the year this season?
- PAGE 41: Sportsnet.ca: Sportsnet's 2025 NHL Draft Prospect Rankings: November Edition

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets fall to Seattle Kraken in sixth straight loss: 3 takeaways

By Brian Hedger – November 14, 2024

The Blue Jackets are returning from a brutal road trip with a six-game winless skid, more question marks and no “moral victories” gained in Seattle.

More:Rewind: Columbus Blue Jackets fizzle after strong start against Seattle Kraken

After negating their best period of the season with one of their worst in a 5-2 loss Tuesday to the Seattle Kraken, the Jackets are stuck in a tailspin that looks all too familiar from the past two seasons.

Their encouraging 5-3-1 start is a speck in the rearview now, they’ve dropped to the basement of all NHL standings formats and their next game Friday at Nationwide Arena is against the Pittsburgh Penguins — who might as well hold ownership in the Blue Jackets based on the all-time series. That’s also the start of the Jackets’ third straight weekend back-to-back, which concludes Saturday at the Montreal Canadiens.

“We’ve played some good hockey on this trip, but the name of the game, obviously, is to come away with some points and there’s not as many as we wanted on this trip,” center Sean Kuraly said during a postgame interview on FanDuel Sports Network’s broadcast. “There’s definitely things we’re going to need to clean up.”

Here are three takeaways from the Jackets’ meltdown in Seattle:

Columbus Blue Jackets’ loss to Seattle Kraken was a tale of two periods

It was difficult to process what happened to the Blue Jackets in the second period at Climate Pledge Arena. They so thoroughly dominated the Kraken in the first period, building a 2-0 lead with an 18-6 shot advantage, that it felt like the end of their five-game slide would happen impressively.

Instead, Seattle released the Kraken in the second and the Blue Jackets wilted. They made a series of puzzling errors, all by veteran players, and paid for almost every single one. Goalie Elvis Merzlikins was hung out to dry, again, while the Kraken scored four unanswered goals.

At fault was a series of bad coverages in the defensive zone, bad decisions that led to four of five skaters getting caught in the Seattle zone while the Kraken raced toward Merzlikins plus a power-play goal allowed just seven seconds after it began. After the dust settled, the Kraken had outshot the Blue Jackets 20-8 in the middle period and carried a 4-2 lead into the third.

It was mindboggling to watch.

“For whatever reason, we lost a lot of battles in the second period, foot races ... we looked tired in the second period,” coach Dean Evason said during his postgame assessment. “We’ve got to find a way to sustain that type of a (game start) right through.”

Sound familiar?

Columbus Blue Jackets reeling after long, strange trip

Normally, teams that lose six straight games have stats to match.

That’s not the case here. This one’s bizarre due to how impressive the Blue Jackets have been in almost every offensive category other than goals. During this skid, they’ve been outscored 29-11 while

outshooting the opposition by a combined 214-179 for a +35 margin in their favor. According to Natural Stat Trick, they've also compiled 5-on-5 advantages in shot attempts (55.9%), scoring chances (55.4%) and high-danger chances (53.3%) during the losing streak.

What the Blue Jackets haven't done is convert enough of those opportunities into goals. They've also compounded their woes by making some egregious mistakes that opponents have turned into goals. It's a two-fold problem, but it starts with their own offensive failures. The Jackets are 1-5-1 in their past seven games, scoring exactly two goals in each one. That's how you drop into the basement of all NHL standings.

The most frustrating part is what their drought looks like on a shot chart, which shows the Blue Jackets just not scoring goals off their 'Grade A' chances.

Dante Fabbro had challenging assignment in Columbus Blue Jackets debut

Dante Fabbro met his new team late Sunday in Seattle after the Blue Jackets claimed him off waivers earlier that day from the Nashville Predators. He flew that night from Nashville, after the Predators had scratched him in all but six of games.

Adding up the factors — new team, new coaches, new systems plus a cross-country flight — made it seem like a role on the third defense pairing was most likely in his Blue Jackets debut. Instead, Fabbro played most of the game as Zach Werenski's partner on first pairing. He skated 19:17 and finished as Jack Johnson's partner on the third pairing.

Fabbro had four of the Blue Jackets' 14 giveaways, but it wasn't an awful debut. He needs more time to get his sea legs while learning a new system, structure and teammates. The game against the Kraken should only be taken for what it was with Fabbro, one early data point. He did step into the lineup ahead of both Jordan Harris and David Jiricek, though, which is worth noting and watching.

The Athletic / Despite Blue Jackets' fast start vs. Kraken, their offensive funk extends losing skid

By Aaron Portzline – November 14, 2024

There was a brief moment in the first period Tuesday when it looked as if the Columbus Blue Jackets were emerging from their scoring funk, and it appeared the club's fourth line — Sean Kuraly, flanked by Zach Aston-Reese and Kevin Labanc — would lead the way.

That line scored two goals in 22 seconds, part of a dominating period overall, to give the slumping Blue Jackets a 2-0 lead over the Seattle Kraken in Climate Pledge Arena.

But that was just a tease. The scoring woes continue, especially for the Jackets' frontline talent, and the losing skid has stretched to six games (0-5-1) with a 5-2 loss before 17,151. The Kraken scored five unanswered goals, four in the second period.

The Blue Jackets looked fast, aggressive and tenacious in the first period, much like they did in most of their games over the first two to three weeks of the season. But they looked like a completely different club in the second — shades of the 2023-24 Blue Jackets — when Seattle did most of its damage.

"We're trying to figure it out ourselves," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "We couldn't sustain it, for whatever reason. We lost a lot of battles in the second period. We lost foot races. We looked tired in the second period.

"There are a lot of positives in this game, but it's frustrating that we had the start we had and we can't close the deal."

Kuraly and Aston-Reese each had a goal and an assist for the Blue Jackets, while Labanc had two assists. Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins, who could have napped during the first 10 minutes of the game, faced a barrage in the second period. He finished with 28 saves, 16 in the middle stanza.

The Blue Jackets haven't won a game since Oct. 30. They've won one road game all season, and that came on Oct. 12 — now more than a month ago — at Colorado.

But it's not as if they've been completely outplayed during that stretch. Far from it, actually. Tuesday's game marked the third time during this losing skid that the Blue Jackets have totaled 40 or more shots on goal, and the fifth time the Jackets outshot their opponent.

It's no coincidence that the Blue Jackets' fourth line scored the goals.

At 13:46 of the first, Kuraly had worked his way to the front of the net when Aston-Reese's soft wrister from the left circle caromed off Seattle goaltender Joey Daccord and landed behind him in the crease. Kuraly pounced for his second goal of the season.

As a sign of respect, Evason kept the fourth line out of the ensuing faceoff. Only 22 seconds later, Kuraly twisted and turned with the puck in the corner, then found space to rifle a puck in Aston-Reese's direction for a close-range deflection past Daccord.

Driving to the net. Battling for pucks in hard areas. Looking for rebounds and "greasy" goals. Unfortunately for the Blue Jackets, there wasn't enough of that from other lines, which is why they scored fewer than two goals for the seventh straight game.

Making matters worse, the Blue Jackets collapsed defensively in the second, even though they knew Seattle was going to respond after a ragged first.

“It seems like for the last string of games, we’re just taking one period off,” Aston-Reese said. “It’s just like these one-period lapses where we give up five or six odd-man rushes, a couple of Grade-A (chances) ... we just shoot ourselves in the foot, and that makes it really hard to win.

“Sometimes we have to get the cuteness out of our game. We’re trying to make lateral, east-west plays, and they’re getting picked off and going the other way. Or it’s a tough read on a pinch and we’re giving up odd-man rushes.”

Seattle scored three goals in the first 7:23 of the second period, including two goals in 10 seconds.

At 7:13, Brandon Tanev scored off a two-on-one rush to tie the score at 2. At 7:23, Eeli Tolvanen scored a power-play goal to give Seattle the lead. The Kraken made it 4-2 later in the period — another odd-man rush — when Will Borgen scored.

“That second period was not us,” Kuraly said. “The first period was us.

“We knew they were going to come out strong. We knew they weren’t just going to lay over at home. For us, we need to learn to manage the momentum. Live to fight another day on some shifts. There are times when a nothing shift is fine, just to calm everything down and punt it out.”

The Blue Jackets spent the night in Seattle after the game, opting to fly home during the day to help keep their sleep schedules and body clocks synchronized. It will not be a fun flight home, however.

Next on the schedule is a Friday matchup in Nationwide Arena with another struggling club, the Pittsburgh Penguins, in a battle between two clubs at the bottom of the Metropolitan Division standings.

[BlueJackets.com / Kraken rally back to down Blue Jackets](#)

By Darren Brown and NHL.com Independent Correspondent – November 14, 2024

SEATTLE -- The Seattle Kraken scored four goals in the second period to rally for a 5-2 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Climate Pledge Arena on Tuesday.

Jared McCann had a goal and an assist, and Jordan Eberle had two assists for the Kraken (7-8-1), who have won consecutive games after dropping four straight. Joey Daccord made 38 saves.

"I don't think anybody on the bench was happy with the way the first period was going," Seattle coach Dan Bylsma said. "Maybe it's a reset after the period [when the] 20 minutes is up, but I just... the response from the group is great to see."

Sean Kuraly and Zach Aston-Reese each had a goal and an assist, and Kevin Labanc had two assists for the Blue Jackets (5-8-2), who have lost six straight games (0-5-1). Elvis Merzlikins made 28 saves.

"The key to the game is not playing our game in the second period," Kuraly said. "Obviously, when you look back at it, it's managing the puck. We knew they were going to come out strong [that period], they're not just going to kind of lay over at home."

Tye Kartye cut the lead to 2-1 at 2:50 of the second period, shifting the puck to his backhand and stuffing it around Merzlikins' left pad at the top of the crease.

"I was just standing in front of the net, and [Adam Larsson] got it there, [Andre Burakovsky] got it there, and I just kind of jammed it," Kartye said. "There wasn't much to it."

Tanev tied it 2-2 at 7:13. He picked up the puck in the neutral zone, cut to the slot on a 2-on-1 rush and beat Merzlikins with a wrist shot.

"Obviously it's not the start that we wanted," said Tanev, who scored his third goal in the past two games. "But we found a way to make some plays, and good things will happen when you're playing the right way."

Tolvanen put the Kraken ahead 3-2 with a power-play goal just 10 seconds later, tapping in a cross-crease pass from Eberle at the right post.

"Our first power play, we stepped over the boards with the mindset we were going to score, and that got us into the lead," Bylsma said.

Will Borgen extended the lead to 4-2 at 13:34 with a snap shot over Merzlikins' glove from the top of the right circle after Oliver Bjorkstrand found him streaking across the blue line.

McCann added an empty-net goal at 18:42 of the third for the 5-2 final.

"We came in after the first period and said for sure it's our best period," Columbus coach Dean Evason said. "But we don't want to go in and praise too much, we've got to keep the foot on the pedal, and then it just... we couldn't sustain it for whatever reason."

Kuraly gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead at 13:46 of the first period. He put the puck into an open net after Aston-Reese's shot from the high slot got behind Daccord.

Aston-Reese then pushed it to 2-0 just 22 seconds later. Kuraly won a race to a loose puck in the right corner and threw the puck toward the crease, where Aston-Reese redirected it over Daccord's glove.

“I think most of it’s just simple, and I think it’s repeatable things that we’ve done a lot of times,” Kuraly said. “And they don’t have to end up in goals, but I think it can be a blueprint for us to try and score goals. It’s a bunch of singles that [add] up in a home run.”

NOTES: The Kraken scored four goals in a period for a League-leading fourth time this season. ... McCann’s secondary assist on Talvanen’s goal made him the first player in Kraken history to record 200 points with the team (104 goals, 97 assists).

[BlueJackets.com / Fabbro sees a new opportunity with the Blue Jackets](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – November 14, 2024

Until Sunday, Nashville was the only NHL organization Dante Fabbro had known.

Chosen by the Predators in the first round (No. 17 overall) of the 2016 draft, Fabbro made his debut with the team in 2019 and played more than 300 games over seven seasons.

Players like that don't often end up on waivers, but with the Predators off to a sluggish start and the team looking for answers, that's where the 26-year-old found himself over the weekend. The Blue Jackets saw him as a potential low-risk, high-reward to add to the defensive corps, and come 2 p.m. Sunday, he was Columbus bound.

That's how life goes in the NHL, but the defenseman wasn't necessarily mad about it. In many ways, it was time for a fresh start, and Fabbro says it's exciting that's coming in Columbus.

"It was a bit of a shock, but I think change is good sometimes," Fabbro said. "It wasn't working out in Nashville. For a team to obviously feel like they want you, that feels great as a player. I'm just excited to be here. It's a great group of guys so far I've met, and it feels great."

Not only did Fabbro go right into the CBJ lineup on Tuesday night in Seattle, he was on the top defensive pair with Zach Werenski. It seems like it could be a good fit, with Werenski's offensive-minded, puck-possession style able to fit with Fabbro's more reserved, first pass-focused game.

There were signs of that in Nashville, when Fabbro had some of his best years skating on a pairing with do-it-all offensive defenseman Roman Josi. But the truth is Fabbro likely could have skated with anyone on Tuesday and just been happy to be back on the ice after being a healthy scratch at the end of his Nashville tenure.

"I'm just excited to get out there and go play again," Fabbro said before the game. "It's kind of nice to try to just rip the band-aid off and get going again. I obviously got a chance to meet the bunch of the guys here today, it seems like a great group of guys. and I'm excited to go to work with them."

The results in game one were a bit mixed, as Fabbro skated 19:17 of action with no points, a shot on goal and an even plus-minus. Per Natural Stat Trick, he was on the ice for 19 shot attempts for and 19 against at 5-on-5, and he was out there for one goal for each team.

Head coach Dean Evason said it will take time for Fabbro to learn the CBJ system, but he wanted to get the new guy on the ice as quickly as possible.

"I think the excitement level overrides maybe some of the systematic stuff that he's going to be thinking," Evason said. "I think the excitement level of being with a new team can generate that energy that you need to play with."

"He's gonna make some mistakes, coming to a new system, and we try to dial it in with video and chatting with him. But we just want him to play his game. He's a guy that is a steady player. He's not a flashy guy. He's a guy that's real good defensively, moves the puck, simplifies the game, so he should have no problem fitting into our system."

Once a top prospect of the Predators as he excelled at Boston University – he captained the Terriers in 2018-19, when he posted 33 points in 38 games during his final season of college hockey – Fabbro played 315 games with the squad over his seven seasons. In that time, he totaled 16 goals and 72 points while posting a plus-6 rating.

But this year has been a struggle to find playing time, as he skated in just six games for Nashville before ending up on waivers. Columbus saw him as a good option to add as a right-shot defenseman on a team short of them at the moment, and Fabbro sees his style of play as a fit as well.

“I think it’ll definitely take some time,” Fabbro said when asked about settling into the systems. “But I think the way I play, I’m a puck-moving defenseman. Anytime I can move the puck quick and transition and stuff like that, bring pucks out, I think it benefits the team in a good way. So I’m just going to try to stick to my strength and be simple and just try to get used to their system and play well for these guys.”

It helps that there are some familiar faces in the organization for the Coquitlam, B.C., native, including former Nashville forward Mathieu Olivier and former Preds coach Scott Ford, now an assistant with the Blue Jackets.

His goal is to try to complement Werenski or whatever partner it is as smoothly as possible by getting the puck out of the zone and up the ice.

“I think the faster I distribute the puck and get in transition, it helps our forwards go, and I think it’ll create a lot of offense, too,” Fabbro said. “I just try to stick to my game, which is passing and breaking pucks out and whatnot. We obviously have some high-end talent here, so I want to let them create some offense and see what happens.”

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Drop Sixth Straight Game After Second Period Collapse In Seattle

By Jason Newland – November 14, 2024

Sean Kuraly(2) and Zach Aston-Reese(3) scored 22 seconds apart in the first period to provide the only offense against Seattle, and Elvis Merzljikins made 28 saves in the loss.

The Kraken came out in the second period after being dominated in the first period and absolutely took it to the Jackets. Seattle scored four times in the second, including a power play goal to make the score 4-2 after two periods. They would add another into an empty net to make it a 5-2 final.

That would be it. The Jackets couldn't put together any more offense to make any kind of push. The Kraken pushed play and shut Columbus down in the final two periods to win the game. The third period was much like the second in terms of the play by Seattle, except Columbus was able to hold them off of the scoreboard.

It's not like the Jackets didn't shoot the puck either. They ended the game with 40 shots on goal, most of which Joey Daccord had no issue stopping. They also had 30 scoring chances, 16 of which were considered high danger chances. Right now, that's how it's going for the struggling Jackets.

The Jackets went 0-4-1 on the five-game road trip, and are 0-5-1 in the last six games.

Players Stats

- Sean Kuraly scored his 2nd goal and had one assist.
- Zach Aston-Reese scored his 3rd goal of the season and had an assist.
- Kevin Labanc had two assists and now has 8 points on the season.
- Jake Christiansen had a team-high 6 shots on the night.
- Dante Fabbro made his CBJ debut and played 19:17.
- Elvis Merzljikins stopped 28 of 32 Kraken shots.

Team Stats

- The Jackets PP went scoreless on a single power play.
- The Blue Jackets PK stopped 2 of 3 Kraken power plays.
- Columbus won 54.5% of the faceoffs.
- The expected goal share for the CBJ per NaturalStatTrick.com was 3.45.

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

[The Hockey News / Using NHL EDGE To Analyze Blue Jackets Goals For Vs. Kraken](#)

By Jason Newland – November 14, 2024

Goal #1 - 1-0 CBJ - Sean Kuraly Scores His Second Goal Of The Season

Kuraly Goal

This was a typical hard-working shift by Columbus and in particular, the fourth line. As the puck made its way into the Seattle defensive zone, the Kraken tried to move it out by passing it around. However, every time a Kraken player got near the puck, a Columbus forward was applying pressure. This led to a turnover being gathered by Kevin Labanc. Labanc skated the puck in between the two circles and passed it to Zach Aston-Reese who was in the left circle. ZAR let a soft shot go that ended in a rebound, where Sean Kuraly would punch it in for a 1-0 lead.

Goal #2 - 2-0 CBJ - Zach Aston-Reese Scores His Third Goal Of The Season

Just 22 seconds after the first CBJ goal, the Blue Jackets would strike again. It was the fourth line again who would score the goal as well. A few seconds after the faceoff, the Jackets again forced a giveaway in the neutral zone. The puck was possessed by Kevin Labanc who crossed the center red line and slung the puck around the boards. Sean Kuraly and his relentless forecheck got to the puck first. Rather than just push the puck back around behind the Kraken goalie, he held the puck for a split second and spotted a streaking Zach Aston-Reese on Daccord's left side. ZAR would take a blistering pass from Kuraly and would score by simply leaving his stick out in front of him. Very good play by both players.

That's all the CBJ could come up with in this game. Early on it looked as if the Jackets were going to run away with this game. But the Kraken refused to let that happen in their own arena and would shut the Jackets down completely after their second goal

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

The Hockey News / Could The Blue Jackets & Penguins Become Trade Partners?

By Spencer Lazary – November 14, 2024

After yesterday's trade between the Pittsburgh Penguins and Washington Capitals, it appears that the Penguins fire sale has started.

After a rough start to the season, Penguins GM Kyle Dubas has informed the NHL that he is preparing to shake up the roster, and the only player not available is Sidney Crosby.

A few names from Pittsburgh that could be worth a look by GM Don Waddell are: Drew O'Connor, Michael Bunting, Anthony Beauvillier, and Cody Glass.

Any of these four players would be great additions to the Blue Jackets roster.

GM Dubas could ask for a young player in return, potentially like Jordan Harris or David Jiricek. However, a player like Sean Kuraly, Dante Fabbro, or Ivan Provorov could be a veteran player that Pittsburgh is interested in.

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Should Target Maple Leafs Forward

By Spencer Lazary – November 14, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets can target a forward from the Toronto Maple Leafs.

With the Maple Leafs being tight to the salary cap and having too many NHL-calibre players, they will need to make a move to free up space. A player that makes sense for Columbus is David Kampf.

The depth center can provide the Blue Jackets with more versatility and increase their faceoff percentage. Kampf's cap hit is \$2.4 million, which is easy for the Blue Jackets to take on given their abundance of cap space.

It would also give them an extra NHL forward to jump in in the Blue Jackets' bottom six. This can help create healthy competition and, in turn, make players play harder for the spots in the lineup.

Based on the Maple Leafs cap situation, the asking price would more than likely be a draft pick or two. Similar to the Lars Eller deal, which was a draft pick in the third-rounder in 2027 and a fifth-rounder in 2025.

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

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Doomed by Second Period in Loss to Kraken

By Mark Scheig – November 14, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets were hoping to come home with a win to end their road trip to California and to Seattle. Although they started as well as they could have, they still couldn't find the result they were looking for.

Jared McCann had a goal and an assist and Jordan Eberle notched two assists while 10 different Kraken skaters recorded at least one point in their 5-2 win over the Blue Jackets on Tuesday night at Climate Pledge Arena. Goaltender Joey Daccord was good finishing the night with 38 saves.

The second period ultimately decided this contest.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets were expected to come out hard to start the game as they wanted to end the trip with a win and something to feel good about. If the first period was any indication, it was going to be a good night for them.

The Blue Jackets dominated the first period in all aspects. They got goals from Sean Kuraly and Zach Aston-Reese just 22 seconds apart. They took a 2-0 lead into the locker room and outshot the Kraken 18-6.

Seattle was going to respond after a poor period. Not only did they respond, they overwhelmed the Blue Jackets in the second period. The Kraken scored four times in under 11 minutes including goals from Brandon Tanev and Eeli Tolvanen 10 seconds apart. Tye Kartye and Will Borgen also scored in the middle frame.

The Blue Jackets simply had no answers to what the Kraken were throwing at them. It was a complete role reversal from how the first period went. They lost their structure and then chased the entire period.

The Kraken played a more defensive third period up by two goals. Although the Blue Jackets fired 14 shots in the final frame, they couldn't beat Daccord. McCann hit the empty net to get to the final score of 5-2.

The Blue Jackets finish their road trip 0-4-1 and now have lost six consecutive games. They haven't won a road game since Colorado, exactly one month ago. Elvis Merzlikins stopped 28 of 32 on the night.

The Blue Jackets will travel back to Columbus Wednesday and return to practice Thursday in advance of their next game at home against the Pittsburgh Penguins. Meanwhile, the Kraken broke their four-game losing streak. They now get set to host the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday night.

1st Ohio Battery / 0-No: Blue Jackets Falter In Seattle, Lose 5-2 To Complete Five-Game Road Trip Without A Win

By Ed Francis – November 14, 2024

All good things must come to an end.

For the Columbus Blue Jackets, that good thing was the first period Tuesday night against the Seattle Kraken.

And it came to an end when the teams came out for the second period.

The Blue Jackets gave up four goals in a woeful middle frame, turning a 2-0 lead after one into a 4-2 deficit they couldn't bounce back from en route to a 5-2 victory for the Kraken.

"It seems like for the last string of games, we're just taking one period off," said Zach Aston-Reese, who had one of the two goals in the first period and assisted on the other. "It's these one-period lapses where we just give up five, six odd-man rushes, couple of grade-A's (opportunities), and we just shoot ourselves in the foot and make it really hard for us to win."

During the losing streak, those lapses seem to lead the Blue Jackets to spiral.

"It's just something that we have to learn as a team. There are a lot of young guys in this room, and it is a bit of a learning process. Sometimes we just have to get the cuteness out of our game," said Aston-Reese.

Head coach Dean Evason echoed the sentiments of Aston-Reese.

"We'll watch that first period and we figure out exactly how we need to play — but we need to do it for 60 minutes, not 20," said Evason.

"When things go bad, we can't compound it by (making) another mistake," he added.

The loss completes a winless five-game road trip for Columbus, with the Jackets managing just one point — in an overtime loss to the San Jose Sharks on Election Night.

They've now lost six straight games after a 5-3-1 start.

Here's how it went down in Washington state:

1st Period:

(7:59): It took eight minutes for the Seattle Kraken to register their first shot on goal — Jared McCann's wrister from the near the left face-off dot at 7:59. The Blue Jackets had eight already on net at this point. Columbus came out with a sense of urgency

(13:46 — CBJ Goal): Good work here from the fourth line of Aston-Reese, Kuraly, and Labanc. Kuraly gets the goal after Seattle goalie Joey Daccord gives up a rebound on a shot from Aston-Reese, who took the puck after some good disruptive defense from Labanc. This is textbook bottom-six goal: get in, get rough, get dirty, and get in front of the net.

(14:08 — CBJ Goal): Same forward line, different goal-scorer. This time it's Aston-Reese getting the goal from Kuraly and Labanc. Seattle turns it over in the neutral zone after some good stick-work from Labanc. He dumps it in and the puck takes a nice bounce off the boards to Kuraly, who instantly dumps it right in front of the net. That's where Aston-Reese was waiting and has no problem doubling the Columbus lead.

Unfortunately, this would be the pinnacle of the night for the road team.

2nd Period:

(2:50, 7:13, 7:23, 13:34 — SEA Goals): For as good of a first period as the Blue Jackets played, it was equally bad in the second period — and then some. Seattle scored four times, including a pair of goals ten seconds apart with Columbus taking a penalty in between. Goals came in a myriad of ways: defensive miscues, sub-par goaltending, unnecessary penalties. Coming off arguably their best period of the road trip, the Blue Jackets second period was arguably their worst of the five-game stretch.

3rd Period:

(18:42 — SEA Goal): Columbus was able to generate a few chances in the third, but Seattle went into a safe defense and with just less than two minutes in the game, would get an empty-netter to give us the 5-2 final. The goal was from Jared McCann, his team-leading 8th goal.

Stat Talk:

- Columbus' first period was amongst the best they've had this period. They outshot the Kraken 19-8, and had big margins of victory on shot attempts (30-12), scoring chances (15-2), high-danger chances (8-1), and expected goals (1.59-0.16). There was a total shift in the second period, with the Kraken owning an advantage in all categories, including doubling up the Blue Jackets (10-5) in high-danger chances.
- The 22 seconds between the Kuraly and Aston-Reese goals was the shortest time between goals for Columbus this season, but not the fastest in the game: the Kraken scored ten seconds apart for the second and third goals of the four-goal second.
- With the 40-33 shots on goal advantage, the Blue Jackets outshot their opponent in all five games of the road trip — by a huge margin: 192-135, an average of +11 shots on goal per game.

Up Next:

For the first time in two weeks, the Blue Jackets are back in Nationwide Arena for the next one. That'll come Friday night against the Pittsburgh Penguins. Puck drop is 7:00 p.m.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Fast Start Wiped Away, Kraken's Four-Goal Second, Fabbro's Debut

By Will Chase – November 14, 2024

A road trip to forget.

Four second-period goals highlighted a 5-2 comeback win for the Seattle Kraken over the Columbus Blue Jackets on Tuesday night at Climate Pledge Arena. The Blue Jackets have lost six straight after going 0-5-1 on their road trip. They haven't won a road game since Oct. 12 at Colorado.

Fast Start Wiped Away

The Blue Jackets needed a fast start and they needed goals.

After getting off to a 2-0 lead, it appeared maybe Tuesday night was going to be the night for the Blue Jackets to get a win on the five-game road trip and end a five-game skid.

Sean Kuraly scored at 13:46 of the first period for his second of the season with assists to Zach Aston-Reese and Kevin Labanc.

The same trio that scored the first goal connected again soon after for the next goal. At 14:08, Aston-Reese picked up his third goal of the year, with the assists going to Kuraly and Labanc.

Columbus has scored two goals or fewer in seven straight contests. Once again they outshot their opponent 40-33. Joey Daccord made 38 saves.

Kraken's Four-Goal Second

After a 2-0 first period, this was the night the Jackets were going to add on and get a win right?

Not quite.

Just like this road trip started with a five-goal first period by the Washington Capitals on Nov. 2, the Kraken ended the Jackets' road trip with a four-goal second period.

Tye Kartye scored at 2:50 for his second of the season to get the scoring binge started. Then Brandon Tanev's fourth, unassisted, at 7:13, followed by Eeli Tolvanen (five) on the power play 10 seconds later at 7:23, and Will Borgen's first of the year at 13:34.

It was not the ideal night for Elvis Merzlikins and Co. Merzlikins made 28 saves.

Fabbro's Debut

Dante Fabbro was waived by the Nashville Predators and claimed by the Blue Jackets on Sunday. He debuted with the club Tuesday in Seattle on the first pair opposite Zach Werenski.

He played 19:17 with one shot. Werenski, per usual, led everyone with 28:06 ice time and had two shots. Jake Christiansen led the game with six shots.

Home Sweet Home

The Blue Jackets are back home to face the Pittsburgh Penguins at Nationwide Arena on Friday, Nov. 15 at 7:00 p.m. ET.

The Athletic / Jury trial for Canada's 2018 world junior players charged with sexual assault set for April 2025

By Dan Robson and Hailey Salvian – November 14, 2024

The trial of five members from Canada's 2018 world junior hockey team charged with sexual assault is set for April 22, 2025, beginning with jury selection, the Ministry of the Attorney General said in an email to The Athletic on Wednesday.

A Superior Court jury trial was previously slated to begin in London, Ontario, in September 2025. However, with the final pre-trial application beginning on Nov. 24, 2024, and lasting three weeks, it was agreed that the trial could start in April 2025, the Attorney General's office said.

In January 2024, Alex Formenton, Carter Hart, Dillon Dube, Michael McLeod and Cal Foote were charged by the London Police Service with sexual assault in connection to an alleged incident that occurred in June 2018. The five players were charged with one count of sexual assault, with McLeod facing a second charge of sexual assault for "being a party to the offense."

The allegations became public in late May 2022, when it was reported that Hockey Canada settled a lawsuit with a woman who said she was sexually assaulted by the players in a London hotel room following a Hockey Canada gala being held to celebrate the team for winning the 2018 World Junior Championship.

News of the settlement sparked public outrage and prompted parliamentary hearings with the Canadian federal government, as well as investigations by the NHL, Hockey Canada and the London police. The initial police investigation into the incident closed in February 2019 without charges being filed.

In February 2024, London police chief Thai Truong apologized to the alleged victim — who has been referred to as E.M. in previously filed court documents — and her family "for the amount of time that it has taken to reach this point."

In E.M.'s initial lawsuit claim, she said that eight players assaulted her over several hours in a London hotel room. She said she met the group of players at a local bar the night of the alleged incident and had willingly gone home with one player. She said she engaged in consensual sex with that player, but that he invited several of his teammates into the hotel room without her knowledge or consent.

E.M. said she did not consent to any of the sexual contact or acts that followed, during which she said she was spat on, slapped on the buttocks, laughed at and degraded. According to her initial claim, the victim said she spent part of the night crying in the bathroom and despite wanting to leave, was coaxed by multiple players to remain in the hotel room. She noted that several of them had golf clubs in the room and that she felt physically intimidated and unable to leave.

Last February, lawyers for the five players confirmed their clients jointly agreed to have a trial by jury. All five players — Formenton, Hart, Dubé, McLeod and Foote — are unrestricted free agents and do not have NHL contracts for the 2024-25 season.

McLeod, Dubé, Hart and Foote were granted leaves of absence from their NHL teams in January. Formenton received a leave of absence from HC Ambri-Piotta in Switzerland, where he played for the past two seasons.

The Athletic / EA Sports to add PWHL teams and players to NHL 25

By Hailey Salvian – November 14, 2024

Professional Women's Hockey League players and teams will soon be featured in NHL 25, EA Sports announced on Wednesday.

Launching Dec. 5, all six PWHL teams — the Boston Fleet, Minnesota Frost, Montreal Victoire, New York Sirens, Ottawa Charge and Toronto Sceptres — will be integrated into the game as part of a multiyear partnership between the video game developer and the league.

“EA SPORTS is proud to support the PWHL, which has pioneered the growth of women's hockey in North America,” Andrea Hopelain, the GM and senior vice president of publishing at EA Sports, said in a statement. “We look forward to working together to help elevate and grow women's hockey to new and existing fans worldwide, starting by bringing PWHL teams and athletes to EA SPORTS NHL 25.”

Women's hockey was first introduced in an NHL 22 update, with the inclusion of IIHF Women's National Team members. The next year, Team Canada forward Sarah Nurse made history as the first women's hockey player to be on the cover of an EA Sports NHL game as one of two cover athletes for NHL 23, alongside Anaheim Ducks forward Trevor Zegras.

Still, the PWHL's integration into the game is a significant first for the league heading into its second season.

“As someone who grew up playing the EA NHL franchise, I am honored that the next generation of women's hockey players will have the opportunity to play the game as me and my teammates in the PWHL,” said Minnesota Frost forward Taylor Heise. “It is so meaningful that young girls will be able to see themselves in the game. It is a big milestone for inclusivity within the hockey community and shows that women's prominence in hockey only continues to grow.”

PWHL franchises will be featured in the game's play now, online versus, shootout and season modes. The PWHL's newly released uniforms will be available in “World of Chel,” with players, logos and uniforms all available in “Hockey Ultimate Team.” The Walter Cup — the league's championship trophy designed by luxury jeweler Tiffany and Co. — will also be in the game.

According to an EA Sports press release, the NHL game will also launch 4 Nations Face-Off content early next year ahead of the international tournament featuring NHL stars from USA, Canada, Finland and Sweden.

The Athletic / Tage Thompson or Vincent Trocheck? Brock Nelson or Cole Caufield? Bill Guerin talks U.S. 4 Nations roster

By Michael Russo – November 14, 2024

When you look at the vast pool of talented players that the Americans have right now, there's no doubt that when the United States' 4 Nations Face-Off roster is revealed Dec. 4, most of the scrutiny will be aimed at which players were "snubbed" rather than who made it.

Cole Caufield is the top U.S.-born goal scorer in the NHL right now. Tage Thompson is tied for second.

Yet if you project out the 13 forwards who could make the team, there's a chance the Montreal Canadiens and Buffalo Sabres stars, respectively, could be on the outside looking in.

The goal, USA Hockey general manager Bill Guerin told The Athletic, is not to choose an All-Star team; it's to create the perfect team to win a short tournament. That means the need for role players and versatile players.

So while Thompson may be one of the best goal scorers in the NHL, it might make more sense to take a player like the New York Rangers' Vincent Trocheck — somebody who can take draws lefty and righty, is an exceptional penalty killer and is more battle-tested playing on an NHL contender.

Caufield brings flash and a tremendous shot, but is he too much like Jack Hughes and Matt Boldy?

When you can take only one extra forward and one extra defenseman, would having a chameleon like the New York Islanders' Brock Nelson, who can be plugged onto any line at any position, make more sense than a Caufield, Clayton Keller or Brock Boeser?

And when you're so limited on roster space, can you afford to give a spot to decorated American and future Hall of Famer Patrick Kane if that roster spot would be better served by somebody else?

"Patty deserves the utmost respect, and we're watching him," said Guerin, who doubles as president of hockey operations and GM of the Minnesota Wild. "We talked a couple months ago about everything because I wanted to be open and honest with him, and he's great. He's a high-character, classy guy and understands it. But, like I said, we're watching him as close as we're watching everybody else."

Rosters must be submitted two days before the big reveal, so we're less than three weeks from Guerin and his leadership group making arguably the hardest decisions of any of the four nations (Canada, Finland and Sweden being the others) taking part in the 2026 Olympics appetizer that will take place in February in Montreal and Boston.

"We are picking apart these world-class players that we would all love to have on our team," Guerin said of his routine calls with assistant GMs Chris Drury (Rangers GM), Tom Fitzgerald (New Jersey Devils GM) and Bill Zito (Florida Panthers GM) and director of player personnel Chris Kelleher (Wild assistant GM). "We'll just start laughing and be like, 'Listen to us nitpick this superstar player. This is crazy.' But we're doing our best to work through it and make the best educated decisions that we can."

It's clear that most of the decisions have been made for the roster of 13 American forwards, seven defensemen and three goalies. The management group is down to the final spots. And if you pay attention to teams Kelleher has been scouting lately as he doubles his Wild duties, he seems to be taking a hard look at the Ottawa Senators, Vegas Golden Knights, Columbus Blue Jackets, Carolina Hurricanes, Sabres, Islanders and Detroit Red Wings.

That could mean gathering a bit more intel on defensemen like Jake Sanderson, Noah Hanifin, Zach Werenski and Jaccob Slavin, and forwards like Thompson, Nelson, Kane and Dylan Larkin.

Whoever is picked, and snubbed, Guerin says he doesn't care about the scrutiny he'll get from fans and media.

"I care about the players," Guerin said. "I don't care about what people on the outside think. I have to make hard decisions, and there's going to be a ton of them, and not everybody's going to agree with me — not everybody's going to be happy. But I have to make them. It's everybody's right to disagree with my decisions. But what I worry about is the players because the players put a lot into it and everybody wants to make the team.

"Unfortunately that can't be the case. I worry about the human side because some of these players will deserve an explanation. But I also really hope they handle it maturely because this may not be the last time they hear from us."

What Guerin is alluding to is that, with rosters set two and a half months before the tournament, there are bound to be injuries.

So while a player may be upset that he didn't make the team Dec. 2, Guerin's going to have to leave it in the right place if he knows the player is "next on the list."

Guerin also will have a bigger roster for the 2026 Olympics, so while he certainly wants to use this tournament to develop chemistry for the eventual Olympic team, he also wants to make clear that even if you didn't make the 4 Nations Face-Off roster, you still could have a shot at the Olympics.

That could especially be the case for young players like Sanderson, Caufield, Luke Hughes and K'Andre Miller.

Beyond the calls with his leadership group, Guerin has also been having private talks with the man he tapped as coach, the Pittsburgh Penguins' Mike Sullivan.

Sullivan's assistants are John Tortorella (Philadelphia Flyers head coach), John Hynes (Wild head coach) and David Quinn (Penguins assistant coach).

Guerin and Sullivan talk about style of game, style of player and roles.

"You're going to have to be able to play it any way," Guerin said. "Speed. Skill. We're gonna have to have some size. Up the middle, we have some potentially big players with (Auston) Matthews, (Jack) Eichel, J.T. Miller, Tage Thompson, Trocheck and Brock Nelson. I mean, it goes on and on. And special teams are going to be really important to me. The role buy-in is going to be huge — being able to put guys in the right positions as a team, hopefully having the team be able to jell quickly.

"Like, you look at our blue line, we have power-play guys (potentially Quinn Hughes and Adam Fox). You can see that we need penalty-killers. Those are some of the really tough decisions."

When it comes to role buy-in, this is what Guerin is focusing on. As a player, he took part in two world juniors, two World Cups and three Olympics. Most players on those teams were power-play guys, but 20 skaters can't be in the top six and power play.

"I'm one of those guys who didn't play on the power play in, I think, two of the Olympics, but you have to accept it," Guerin said. "You have to know your role. I was also cut from the '92 team, so I'm sensitive to people not making the team and the tough decisions that have to be made.

“I’ve been the result of making teams and not making teams, and it sucks when you don’t. But you know what? I let it be a motivator for me and ended up playing in three Olympics and two World Cups. So, yeah, I didn’t get to play in that one, but I got to play five.”

Two players who have jumped to the forefront in the process this time are Guerin’s own Wild players, Boldy and Brock Faber. Faber recently got into a fight right in front of Sullivan in Pittsburgh after a wrestling match with Sidney Crosby.

“I don’t think that hurt Brock’s cause,” Guerin said, laughing. “I know that wasn’t what Brock was thinking, but I bet Sully appreciated it — not so much the fight, but the way Brock didn’t back down from Sid and kept going at him.”

Boldy is tied for the Wild lead with nine goals and has seven goals in his past 11 games — four game-winners and another forcing overtime. It helps his cause that he can play left or right wing.

“Matt’s had a really strong year,” Guerin said. “He’s playing really well. He’s in the mix with other really good players.”

Guerin looks at the American roster and the choices he must make and believes the Americans could be a favorite.

But, he said: “I’ve seen enough of these and been in enough of these where I don’t care what the team looks like on paper. That doesn’t mean anything. You have to get there and it’s got to click. It’s got to jell. You’ve got to hit the ground running.”

The Athletic / Who will be the NHL's next offer sheet targets? Which teams are vulnerable?

By James Mirtle – November 14, 2024

When the St. Louis Blues served up dual (dueling?) offer sheets in mid-August to the cap-strapped Edmonton Oilers, targeting two of their young players in Philip Broberg and Dylan Holloway, it was a bombshell day for the NHL.

At the time, there was a debate among executives with other teams over whether either player would be worth his new contract, a debate that has largely subsided given both players' early play in St. Louis.

Before his injury, Broberg produced nine points in 12 games and had solidified himself as a bona fide top-four defenseman logging 20 minutes a night. And Holloway has established himself as a regular in the top six and "one of the Blues' top five or six players," according to our ace St. Louis beat writer Jeremy Rutherford.

In other words, well worth the second- and third-round picks in compensation, and the \$6.9 million in salary cap space they're taking up.

With that as a unique success story, one question our readers had in our latest mailbag callout was: Could this scenario repeat itself again in the summer of 2025? Which restricted free agents might be the best offer sheet targets? And which teams might be vulnerable as the Oilers were to a double- or triple-threat play?

Let's take a closer look by examining the case for a lot of the top RFAs, and how likely it might be that they can be pried loose by another team.

Tier 4: The bargain buys

This is the level at which the Blues were able to nab Holloway with a two-year contract for just \$2.29 million. Next summer, offer sheets of roughly \$1.63 million or less against the cap come with no compensation, while those worth \$2.4 million or less will result in a third-round pick going to the team losing the player.

It was a bit of a struggle finding RFAs teams would be able to pry loose for such low salaries, as most teams are going to match, but here are some interesting names I came up with.

Jack Quinn

BUF

RW

23

Nikolai Kovalenko

COL

RW

25

Mavrik Bourque

DAL

C

22

Devon Levi

BUF

G

22

Jonatan Berggren

DET

RW

24

Matt Rempe

NYR

RW

22

Again, it's going to be hard to pry away players at these salary levels. But Jack Quinn and Devon Levi, while top prospects in Buffalo, are having tough years, and perhaps you can make things uncomfortable by offering both more than the Sabres might want to pay them after their entry-level contracts.

The ever-rebuilding Sabres have a ton of cap space, however, so that's likely going to be more of a nuisance than a success.

Nikolai Kovalenko, Mavrik Bourque and Jonatan Berggren, meanwhile, are all unestablished young players, having played around 120 NHL games combined. Teams could even raise their offer sheet spend outside of this tier if they felt comfortable enough that they were going to be impact players, as very well might be the case with Bourque, who lit up the AHL last season.

With all of the Rangers' cap headaches related to the Igor Shesterkin contract, I suspect you could sneak Rempe out of there with an offer in the no compensation range. That might be a worthwhile move for a rebuilding team with plenty of cap space that wants to take a flier on the big man and try to develop him into a useful bottom-of-the-roster player.

Pairing these offer sheets with larger ones for players further down this list might make sense, too.

Tier 3: The midlevel targets

This is where the Blues were able to nab Broberg. Next summer, offer sheets between approximately \$2.41 million and \$4.8 million will require a second-round pick in compensation if successful.

Here are some names that might make for a tough call for their teams at the higher end of that range.

Tyson Foerster

PHI

LW

22

Morgan Frost

PHI

C

25

Cam York

PHI

D

23

Dmitri Voronkov

CBJ

LW

24

Will Cuyllé

NYR

LW

22

Kaapo Kakko

NYR

RW

23

Alex Laferriere

LAK

RW

23

Ryker Evans

SEA

D

22

Maxim Tsyplov

NYI

LW

26

Joel Hofer

STL

G

24

The three young Flyers at the top are all interesting names. Cam York, in particular, has become a big-time contributor in Philadelphia, logging 23 minutes a game, and that alone makes it feel unlikely he would be available without going above this tier.

But Tyson Foerster has struggled mightily early this season, with only three points in 15 games, and his two-way profile should be of a lot of interest to other teams. Morgan Frost, meanwhile, was a John Tortorella healthy scratch just recently and it's unclear how committed they might be to him on his next contract.

What will work against these offer sheets forcing the Flyers' hand is that GM Danny Brière has plenty of cap space to work with in the offseason and should be able to match even a triple threat of contracts in July.

The Rangers and Islanders players might be the most effective targets, given those teams' cap situations. And someone like Alex Laferriere or Ryker Evans could be interesting as they are having breakout seasons at young ages.

Tier 2: The rising stars

Here is where the compensation can start to hurt a little. A successful offer sheet of between approximately \$4.81 million and \$7.2 million would mean giving up a first- and third-round pick as compensation to the team losing the player.

So, not only do you have to give out a higher salary, you also lose some draft capital that matters a lot more than the picks forfeited for Broberg and Holloway.

Still, there are a lot of interesting candidates here, and contract offers pushing \$7 million are going to make things uncomfortable for most of these teams.

Lukáš Dostál

ANA

G

24

Alexander Romanov

NYI

D

24

Gabriel Vilardi

WPG

RW

25

Luke Hughes

NJD

D

21

JJ Peterka

BUF

RW

22

Marco Rossi

MIN

C

23

K'Andre Miller

NYR

D

24

Matthew Knies

TOR

LW

22

Lukáš Dostál is in the midst of a breakthrough campaign with Anaheim, leading the NHL in goals saved above expected as of this writing. And the Ducks are still paying John Gibson a lot of money on his legacy deal.

If Dostál plays enough this season, he could get Vezina votes, which makes him a target for a team looking for a young starting goalie.

What's interesting about this list, too, is a lot of these teams are going to be dealing with a cap crunch, even under a rising ceiling. I suspect Buffalo and Minnesota don't hesitate for a second to match anything thrown at JJ Peterka and Marco Rossi (especially with the Wild having plenty of cap space now that those massive buyouts are fading off their books). But can the Rangers really afford a massive offer directed K'Andre Miller's way with everything else they have to do this offseason?

I doubt it.

The Leafs could be vulnerable with Matthew Knies, who is emerging as a top power forward (230 pounds and climbing) while putting up a 35-goal pace on their top line. Toronto currently has flexibility, but if GM Brad Treliving signs Mitch Marner to a big extension and gets a discount deal done with John Tavares, a lot of that breathing room disappears. They also have some lower level RFAs, such as Conor Timmins, to deal with.

Tier 1: The true superstars

The tough thing when you get to this level of player is their team is almost always going to match an offer sheet. Who wants to lose a superstar for draft picks?

Successful offer sheets of between a projected \$7.21 million to \$9.6 million are set to come with compensation of first-, second- and third-round picks. Offer sheets of more than \$9.6 million (up to \$12 million) come with compensation of two firsts, a second and a third-round pick.

Looking at this very short list, it feels likely their teams are going to match offers in the \$10 million range. And how much higher would competitors really be willing to go, while also giving up all those picks?

Evan Bouchard

EDM

D

25

Noah Dobson

NYI

D

24

Wyatt Johnston

DAL

C

21

We already know the Oilers are prepared to pay Evan Bouchard eight figures. And I suspect the Islanders are going to have to get close to that for Noah Dobson, too, as uncomfortable as that will be. (Keep in mind that Seth Jones, Zach Werenski and Darnell Nurse are all making in that ballpark using cap percentage.)

Wyatt Johnston is the interesting one, given he's in only his third NHL season and has one big year under his belt (32 goals and 65 points last season). But his terrific performance in the playoffs last year certainly turned some heads, and there could be teams willing to make him a huge offer if he gets to RFA status on July 1.

The great news for the Stars, however, is GM Jim Nill has done an excellent job with their cap sheet and they have acres of space to work with, especially with Jamie Benn's contract coming off the books. They should be able to easily match anything thrown at their three main RFAs, with Johnston the No. 1 priority.

Which teams are most vulnerable to offer sheets in 2025?

As hinted at above, the two New York teams stand out the most.

In addition to Shesterkin, the Rangers have useful veterans Ryan Lindgren and Reilly Smith about to become UFAs. They also have four RFAs listed above in this article, meaning the possibility for mixing and matching is there.

Trading away Jacob Trouba will help, but there's no question they're vulnerable here if teams get aggressive with players like Will Cuyllé, who is having a nice breakout season early on this year and brings the size and playing style so many teams covet on the wings.

As for the Islanders, two of their top veterans in Brock Nelson and Kyle Palmieri are up as UFAs, and three useful RFAs already mentioned in this article. It'll basically be impossible to return their current roster if they're targeted with an offer sheet or two — and it's a lineup that's struggling to win as it is.

They'll have to make some uncomfortable decisions even without another team throwing them a grenade to deal with.

Most of the other teams with players listed above can likely match an offer sheet, thanks in part to the fact the salary cap is projected to rise to \$92.5 million next season. But the big caveat is that offer sheets often come in after July 1, when teams have already committed to some UFA spending.

The Oilers, for example, signed Viktor Arvidsson and Jeff Skinner for a combined \$7 million this past UFA period, and those signings made them far more vulnerable to losing Broberg and Holloway the following month.

Teams with compelling RFAs may have to be more concerned about the offer sheet threat this July, meaning they'll have to extend their young players sooner or simply leave more cap space available to sign them later in the summer.

It's possible Doug Armstrong's bold move last August is going to change the game when it comes to how young RFAs are dealt with going forward.

The Athletic / A brief history of skate-in-crease reviews, an awful rule the NHL might be going back to

By Sean McIndoe – November 14, 2024

NHL general managers are meeting this week, and one of the items expected to be discussed is the replay review system. It's mostly working fine, the league's power brokers seem to agree. But reviews are taking too long, and maybe we should learn from the NFL's recent changes that allow replay officials to nudge referees over missed calls. And, of course, people are mad about goaltender interference reviews. As always.

This latest flare-up in the debate was prompted by a close call in a recent game between the Jets and Lightning. That one initially went against Winnipeg and was upheld after a coach's challenge, much to the frustration of Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck. You wouldn't think that "guy whose whole job is preventing goals thinks goal he allowed shouldn't have counted" would be major news, but here we are.

It's all led to another round of the usual "nobody knows how interference works" discourse, the sort of performative confusion that certain fans, media and even coaches love to put on whenever a call goes against their team (but weirdly, never when it goes the other way). It's also led to the latest appearance of what seems like a reasonable question: Why is this all so subjective? Why can't we just have a clear-cut rule that works the same way every time, and that we don't have to argue about?

It's a fair question. And apparently, some of you are either too young or too new to the sport to know that there's an answer. So on behalf of us old timers, here's the short version: We tried that, it was a disaster and everyone hated it.

We also vowed never to do it again, but lately it feels like that might not last. If the "just get it right" crowd forms a coalition with the "just keep it simple" brigade, maybe we're headed back to the cut-and-dried interference calls of the past. It might even be inevitable because if we can't stomach any ambiguity on these calls, then we don't really have any other options.

But if so, we should at least know what we're getting into. And if you're the sort of fan who's found themselves wondering why we can't just do this the easy way, you should know the history of how we got here.

How it started

The goal crease has existed for almost as long as the NHL itself, having first been painted on the ice in the 1930s. Ever since, the league has tinkered with the size and shape of the crease, with the original rectangle being phased into the now-familiar semicircle starting in 1986. Rules around interference changed too, but the bottom line was understood: The crease belongs to the goaltender, and attacking players aren't allowed in unless the puck got there first.

Most fans understood that at a basic level and controversies were relatively rare. You'd certainly get the occasional argument over a goal, including some that linger on decades later. But in the days before replay review, there wasn't much to be done about them. We got mad, we waved our glasses at the ref and then we moved on, as we did for any other missed call.

But in the early 1990s, the league was trying to drag the sport away from its reputation as a violent and dangerous spectacle. Bench-clearing brawls had been essentially eliminated, the instigator rule was about to transform the enforcer's role, and harsher rules and suspensions were targeting stickwork. As part of that movement, concerns were raised about goaltender safety.

Initially, at least, the consensus was near unanimous. Goaltenders should be protected from crease intruders, and not just by a wishy-washy “you know it when you see it” sort of judgment that had previously rested with the whims of the referees.

The league, it was widely agreed, needed something more specific. And so that’s what we got.

The original change

The big change came in the 1991-92 season, and the new rules were crystal clear. Clear-cut, you might say.

If the attacking team was in the crease when a goal was scored, it wouldn’t count. That was it. If the puck wasn’t there and you were, then any goal would be waved off. And on top of that, you’d get a two-minute penalty.

Harsh, sure. But it was exactly the sort of approach so many of today’s fans seem to be begging for. There wasn’t room for philosophical arguments about whether the interference had affected the goalie or by how much, whether he had time to reset, whether contact was incidental, or if it could have been avoided and by who. There didn’t need to be contact at all. Much like offside, intent didn’t matter. Where was your skate? If you’re in the crease, it’s no goal. Nice and simple, the way we all seem to want it.

It took all of one month before everyone was complaining about it.

The problem, as explained in this article from The New York Times in November 1991, was that the referees took this new rule and then actually called it as written. As that article says, while the “spirit of the law is obvious and justifiable,” the problem was that “so far, the referees have been calling the harsh letter of the law.” If a forward had the tip of his toe in the crease at one side of the net and a goal was scored at the other, it would be waved off.

One owner summarized the feeling bluntly, saying “We made a mistake” and “The rule about the goal crease was an error.” OK, that owner was Norm Green, and maybe he’s not exactly the sort of beloved figure I want to have on my side in this sort of debate. But on this specific issue, he was right. Jim Gregory, the league’s VP of hockey operations, acknowledged teams hadn’t understood “the severity of the rule” they were voting for, and many now wanted it overturned. There was even talk of trying to get a unanimous vote from the board of governors to scrap the new rule mid-season and go back to the old way.

A reminder: This is one month into the “clear-cut” era.

That vote never happened. Instead, the league and its officials handled the complaints the way they often do: by slowly but surely easing up on enforcement of the new rule, moving back toward the previous rules without explicitly acknowledging them. Over time, referees largely stopped calling the truly meaningless crease violations, focusing instead on plays that actually impacted a goaltender’s ability to do his job.

That wasn’t clear-cut anymore, but just about everyone liked it better. And it could work, because of a key factor you may have already spotted: We haven’t mentioned anything about instant replay yet.

The bigger change

The NHL was already using replay in the early 90s, but it was extremely limited. In those days, the only situation that could be reviewed involved whether or not a puck entered the net. The “how” didn’t matter, since that could get subjective. The league was only interested in using replay to determine whether the puck crossed the line or not.

That worked reasonably well most of the time, although you'd occasionally get some truly bizarre outcomes that prompted outraged calls for more use of replay. With technology improving and other sports moving in that direction, it was inevitable that the NHL would too. And so, in time for the 1996-1997 season, the NHL expanded its replay review protocol to include crease violations.

At the time, it didn't necessarily feel like a massive change, and I don't remember it being an especially big story. After all, we already had a rule in place — adding replay review would simply ensure that, to borrow a phrase from modern times, we'd just get it right. Who could be against that?

A lot of us, as it turns out. In what should have been a valuable lesson on the dangers of unintended consequences, fans learned there's a big difference between a call that officials are supposed to make and one they have to make, especially if they have replay looking over their shoulder to make sure. We saw more goals being waved off, a lot more, and fans began to express frustration at how often it was happening. The rule itself hadn't changed, but its impact had. (In fact, I'd be willing to say most fans of the era don't even remember the skate-in-crease rule being a thing for the five seasons before the replay element was added.)

Suddenly, it felt like any goal could be wiped out due to "interference" nobody had even noticed. Fans being fans, they were mildly annoyed when they saw it happen to other teams and irate when it happened to their own. Worse, the league was training us not to get too excited about the goals we did see, because there was always a good chance it would vanish on a technicality.

I'll pause here so modern fans can think about whether any of this sounds familiar.

I'm not sure where this clip comes from, but it includes a pair of controversial goals, one of which stands and one of which comes back. Stick around to the end and you'll get an exhausted-looking guy named Wayne Gretzky explaining why the rule isn't working. He probably doesn't know much about selling the sport.

In researching this piece, I came across this fascinating essay by sportswriter and broadcaster Stu Hackel. It's written in defense of the increasingly unpopular reviews, with a cheeky headline of "What's Wrong With Getting the Call Right?" Hackel had helped the NHL design its initial foray into replay review, and he was writing during the 1997 playoffs amid an outcry over how many goals were being wiped out. According to Hackel's piece, the league was averaging nearly one interference review per game through 62 matchups — 54 in all, with 40 of them resulting in overturned goals.

Hackel's defense is that rules are rules, and the one in question is unambiguous. If anything, he argues, the problem is that "the system worked too well." It's a reasonable argument, one that wouldn't feel out of place in today's debates. And he makes the very valid point that hockey fans seem to want it both ways when it comes to subjectivity in the rulebook, writing that "many of the same voices that lobby for less ambiguity in officiating want to junk a rule that provides clarity."

Hackel was right, at least as far as the NHL was concerned. They kept the rule essentially as-is, determined to ride out fan complaints and stick to a clear-cut approach.

We all know what happened next ...

The Goal

On June 19, 1999, Brett Hull scored the Stanley Cup-winning goal with one skate planted firmly in the crease.

This was, to put it mildly, controversial. For eight years, fans had been told that a skate in the crease negated a goal. For the last three of those years, they'd seen that rule enforced by replay, over and over

again, to the point where they were sick of it. Now one of the greatest goal scorers in history had just scored an overtime goal to win the Stanley Cup with a skate in the crease, and the league was telling us it was fine.

And ... they may have been right. There are still some who question the call to this day, but the league has always maintained that the goal was good. Their reasoning is that Hull had control of the puck, and while that's a surprisingly ambiguous term in the rulebook, there was apparently a memo sent out to teams just weeks before Hull's goal that clarified those plays should count. And to their credit, the league even immediately sent its director of officiating onto Hockey Night in Canada to explain how the rule was meant to work.

You don't have to be playing the contrarian to say the league got it right (although it helps). But ultimately, it didn't matter. Fans outside of Dallas were furious. Years and years of perfectly good goals taken off the board based on a rule nobody seemed to like, and then a Cup-winner is allowed to stand without so much as an on-ice review, ruining what should have been a magic moment. It was as if three seasons of frustration came crashing down, a literal worst-case scenario for a controversial rule.

The league scrapped the replay review days later.

That's not an exaggeration; it took all of three days from Hull's goal to the announcement that the rules would change. Gary Bettman still defended the clear-cut approach, mildly, insisting that "(t)he rule was fine." But he conceded that the league needed to make a change. So did just about everyone else.

Replay review would no longer apply to goaltender interference and the crease rule. It would be up to the referee's judgment, and if we didn't like how a call turned out, we'd all just have to live with it. And for the next 15 seasons, we did.

The lesson had been learned. Until it wasn't.

The legacy

Replay review for interference was reintroduced for the 2015-16 season, with several important twists. It would now be initiated by a coach's challenge, and a delay-of-game penalty for unsuccessful challenges was later added. Reviews were no longer just based on the crease, with additional factors now considered.

And — stop me if you've heard this one before — nobody thinks it's working.

Which brings us back to this week, and this latest controversy, and the question of why all this can't just be simple and clear-cut. The problem with the current implementation is one I highlighted in my explainer on how the goaltender interference rule works — it's extremely subjective. It's not well-suited to review, because it doesn't matter how much you slow down a replay, you're not going to get everyone to agree on factors like intent, or how much time a goalie needs to reset, or when swatting at a loose puck turns into pitchforking a pad. There's too much room for opinion, and guess what — every fan's opinion is that the call should go their team's way every time. When it doesn't, we get mad, and we pretend it's the rule's fault.

And yes, there's a simple answer: Scrap the subjectivity and make the rule clear-cut. I really hope this little trip through history has convinced you that that's a terrible idea.

If your response is that we should make the rule clear-cut in a different way, one that isn't as silly as the 1990s version ... well, please feel free to explain what that looks like. I've tried. Strip away any and all the subjectivity, and pretty soon you're just left with "is anyone in the crease," and we're right back in 1997.

Instead, my solution is still the one I've proposed before: scrap replay review for goaltender interference. Make essentially the same choice the NHL did back in 1999, days after its poorly implemented replay system had become an international embarrassment. Understand that these calls have to be subjective, that subjective calls don't work with replay, and that it's better to live with the occasional questionable call than to promise perfection that you can't deliver.

In fact, I don't think I can put it any better than someone else already has, so I'll just leave you with their quote to consider the next time there's an interference review controversy and everyone is freaking out and feigning confusion. Remember these words:

"To rely on replay too much isn't good. The fact that so many people didn't understand the rule and how it was applied in that situation — and that you had controversy on a correct call — simply cemented the fact that there was a better way to do it."

That's Gary Bettman in 1999, by the way. What do they say about those who don't learn from history?

The Athletic / NHL Draft 2025 top prospects: Porter Martone ranks No. 1, James Hagens drops to No. 2

By Corey Pronman – November 14, 2024

Boston College center James Hagens and Brampton Steelheads winger Porter Martone are neck and neck for me in the first-overall pick conversation, as they were entering the season.

Hagens is a smaller but dynamic play-driving center, and Martone is a highly skilled big winger with a lot of athleticism. It's not completely analogous, but their skill sets and positions remind me of how Logan Cooley was contrasted to Juraj Slafkovský ahead of the 2022 NHL Draft. I leaned Hagens entering the year; today I lean Martone, and my lean could change in my next update. I have Erie defenseman Matthew Schaefer at No. 3 on my list, but he's in the conversation to go No. 1 or 2 in part due to the fact that there is a giant chasm between him and the next-best defense prospect in this class.

The top of the 2025 class isn't overly deep, leading to what looks like a below-average draft overall, though it's still early and a lot can still change. There are anywhere from four to six truly premium prospects, though, depending on who you talk to in the league. Overall, I have 27 players graded currently as projected middle-of-the-lineup or better players, but that number tends to grow as seasons go along. While it's still early and a lot can change, I've seen enough data to start moving guys up and down my board significantly. You'll notice several highly rated guys in the offseason are either hanging on to their first-round range, or have fallen off completely.

ESPN / Can a goaltender win NHL rookie of the year this season?

By Ryan S. Clark – November 14, 2024

SEATTLE -- Dustin Wolf has faced a number of questions over the past seven years:

Is he really that good? Can a smaller goalie be trusted when every team wants a bigger option in net? Can he replicate his WHL success in the AHL? Can his AHL success be parlayed into giving the Calgary Flames a franchise goalie to win games and get into the playoffs?

Wolf now faces another question: Could he or someone else in this season's rookie class become the first goalie in more than a decade to win the Calder Trophy?

"I had no idea," Wolf said of the 15-year gap since the last Calder-winning goalie. "But you know what? My job is to try to stop as many pucks as I can and try to help the team win games. If the extra stuff comes along with that, then, it's just an extra bonus."

Steve Mason was the last goalie to win the NHL's award for rookie of the year, in the 2008-09 season. Mason went 33-20-7 with a 2.27 goals-against average and a .916 save percentage, playing a crucial role in the Columbus Blue Jackets' postseason berth. Since then, the Calder has been a forward-centric award, with 11 of the past 15 winners being a center or winger.

There have been two goaltenders who have finished second in Calder voting since Mason won the award: the St. Louis Blues' Jordan Binnington in 2018-19 and Edmonton Oilers' Stuart Skinner in 2022-23. But there was a major gulf in first-place votes for Binnington (18 to Elias Pettersson's 151) and Skinner (24 to Matty Beniers' 160).

The Calder has been historically dominated by forwards, with 62 winning the award first introduced during the 1932-33 season. By comparison, just 16 goalies have won. Yet the current 15-year drought since Mason won it is the longest. The previous long was 11 years, from 1972-73 to 1982-83.

In the time since Mason won the Calder, the conversation surrounding goaltending continues to evolve.

There are more data points and metrics beyond traditional statistics that can be used to evaluate their performances. More front offices continue to use tandems rather than the conventional approach of one goalie playing more than 60 games. After having some drafts in the early 2000s who saw as many as four go in the first round, there are fewer goalies who are first-round picks. Even the economics around goalies is in flux, with teams investing anywhere between \$1.9 million in cap space to \$14.5 million in their tandems.

Now there's another talking point around the sport when it comes to goalies: Why hasn't one won the Calder in 15 years?

"It's really hard. You don't see too many rookie goalies come in and just light it up right away," 2020 Calder Trophy winner and Colorado Avalanche defenseman Cale Makar said. "You have to be set up in the right position. A lot of times rookie goalies don't play on teams with the best defense and that doesn't support their stats. I think there's a lot of aspects that go into it."

ESPN SPOKE TO an agent with clients who have won the Calder and/or were finalists, along with an experienced Calder voter, an NHL goalie coach and two Calder winners in Makar and former NHL goalie Andrew Raycroft.

They each provided various reasons for the current gap, although there was one common theme: Rookie goalies are at a major disadvantage when it comes to winning the public attention battle.

"I think a lot of it too is what you are going up against," one NHL goaltending coach said. "That's only going to make it harder for a goalie. Everybody right now is anticipating that players like Macklin Celebrini, Matvei Michkov, Will Smith -- those high-end guys have been hyped going into the NHL and for good reason because they are great hockey players. You talk about those guys and you bring Dustin Wolf into the conversation. How much better does [Wolf] have to be?"

Following hockey prospects isn't like following football recruiting. Collegiate and junior hockey broadcasts aren't as easily accessible, and it's even more difficult to watch prospects playing in Europe. In contrast, Washington Commanders quarterback Jayden Daniels has received attention since getting his first scholarship offer in 2017 as a 16-year-old.

In hockey, the spotlight is brighter on non-goaltenders, as evidenced by last season's Calder race. Chicago Blackhawks center Connor Bedard won, with Minnesota Wild defenseman Brock Faber finishing second and New Jersey Devils defenseman Luke Hughes third:

Bedard was long touted as the NHL's next great generational talent. The 2023 draft was known as "The Bedard Draft" after he scored 100 points in his first full WHL season and followed up with 71 goals and 143 points entering his draft season. He also helped Canada to consecutive gold medal finishes at the IIHF World Junior Championships. He was then drafted by an Original Six team, and debuted just months after being drafted No. 1 in 2023.

Faber, a second-round pick in 2020, played for the United States National Team Development Program and at collegiate blue blood University of Minnesota, and was a two-time Big 10 Defensive Player of the Year before guiding the Gophers to the national title game. He also won gold for the United States at the WJC and was a U.S. Olympian before playing for his hometown team in a state that's considered to be synonymous with hockey.

Hughes, the No. 4 pick in 2021, was a standout in a family of standouts as his older brothers, Jack and Quinn, were also first-round picks. The youngest Hughes brother also played for the USNTDP and a collegiate blueblood (Michigan). Hughes was a two-time All-American who averaged more than a point per game as a sophomore. He helped the Wolverines reach consecutive Frozen Fours and was in the NHL after two NCAA seasons.

As rookies, they maintained high profiles: Bedard was a top-line center who led the Blackhawks in several categories and was tied for first in goals. Faber played all 82 games in a top-pairing role, and was given copious power-play and shorthanded minutes. Hughes was a top-four option who led the Devils in ice time, and was first among the team's defensemen across several offensive categories.

Goaltenders are often presented with a different path when it comes to development, exposure and how long it takes to reach the NHL.

Between 2000 and 2009, 22 goalies were selected in the first round, including Rick DiPietro and Marc-Andre Fleury going No. 1. Since 2010, there have been only nine who went in the first round, with the highest going 11th. None of the goalies from the 2023 and 2024 draft classes have reached the NHL. There have been only 12 goaltenders who have played at least one NHL game since being selected in the 2020, 2021 and 2022 drafts.

One goalie who had a slightly quicker path to the NHL, with a higher profile, was Devon Levi. A seventh-round pick in 2020, Levi's stock soared after his performances led Canada to a second-place finish at the WJC in 2021. He led Northeastern to a Hockey East regular-season title. Levi signed with the Buffalo Sabres after two college seasons and went 5-2 in the final stretch of the 2022-23 season.

He was set up as a Calder contender in the same season as Bedard, Faber and Hughes -- only to struggle throughout a 2023-24 campaign that led to his demotion to the AHL.

"I think there is something to be said that in this world of accelerated everything that kids who don't play in the AHL are given more consideration for the Calder," the agent said. "But the guys who have been up and down in the minors might have sort of gone through some of the rookie challenges in people's minds."

Raycroft, who won the Calder back in 2003-04, said it's not just the visibility that No. 1 picks such as Bedard and Celebrini have received over the years that's different. Those No. 1 picks are being used differently compared to when he played.

In Raycroft's era, No. 1 picks such as Joe Thornton weren't immediately trusted with top-line minutes or first-team power-play opportunities. With front offices now placing an emphasis on providing chances to their younger players, it's allowing those elite prospects the chance to make an immediate impact.

Bedard proved he was a top-line center. During Beniers' first full season with the Kraken, he was also a top-six center that was second in goals, fourth in assists and fourth in points for a playoff team. Detroit Red Wings defenseman Moritz Seider, who won the Calder in 2022, emerged as a top-four option that led the team in ice time, assists and power-play points, and was one of three Red Wings to play all 82 games.

With young goalies, it's a bit more complicated.

"That's the biggest difference first and foremost. From the goaltending side of it, they bring up goalies a lot differently now," Raycroft said. "Even Wolf played in the NHL last season -- he was able to get some games. Someone like [Carolina Hurricanes goalie Pyotr] Kochetkov had his rookie of the year opportunity eaten up because he played over parts of two or three seasons."

THE KOCHETKOV SITUATION might be one of the strongest examples of what makes the current Calder landscape challenging for goalies.

Kochetkov played twice during the 2021-22 season, with injuries opening the door for him to get more playing time in 2022-23 before he was sent back to the AHL. In 2023-24, Kochetkov was firmly entrenched as part of the Hurricanes' plans. He started 40 games for a playoff team, and won 23 of them while having a 2.33 GAA along with a .911 save percentage.

Kochetkov was named to the All-Rookie Team, while finishing fourth in Calder voting.

"He had a winning record. His save percentage was not in the top three, but he was in the top three in GAA," the goalie coach said. "But when you look at the big picture? He had 20-plus wins and I don't know which one [voters] look at the most."

The Calder is voted upon by the Professional Hockey Writers Association. The longtime voter said they use several items to evaluate skaters such as point production, ice time, role, special teams usage and shots because, "it indicates stick on puck and you are controlling the game."

The voter said they'd have no problem voting for a goalie -- with some caveats.

"If a goaltender took a mediocre team to the playoffs but played 44 games, I'd have a hard time casting my vote," the voter explained. "But if he played 55 or 58 games, had a low GAA, a high save percentage and was in the top 5 in the league in those categories? They did something that was truly special -- I'd have no problem casting a vote for them."

Last season, there were only 10 goalies overall who played more than 55 games. Two of them were in the top five in GAA among those with more than 25 games, and only one goalie was in the top five in save percentage among those with more than 25 games.

The only goalie in the entire NHL who checked all of those boxes was Winnipeg Jets star Connor Hellebuyck, who won his second Vezina Trophy.

Faber, by comparison, was the only defenseman or forward of last season's rookie class to finish in the top 10 of a major traditional statistical category. He was sixth in average ice time.

By that voter's logic, does it appear that there's a double standard for rookie goalies? Especially at a time in which more teams are moving toward tandems -- and only four rookie goalies since 2010 have played in more than 55 games throughout a single season?

"I do feel like the bar has to be higher for a goalie," the voter said. "I also think that's going to make it harder for voters now. Goalies don't play as many games anymore. With the league going to the 1A or 1B strategy, you rarely see a goaltender get over 55 games."

BACK TO THE original question: Could any of this year's rookie goaltenders end the Calder drought?

Dustin Wolf was a seventh-round pick who shattered expectations at every level before reaching the NHL, which makes him one of the higher-profile rookies of this particular class -- and rookie goalies in recent history.

That allowed him to enter his first full rookie season under a spotlight. Playing a role in the Flames winning four straight games to start the 2024-25 season also helped. Although the Flames have since cooled, they remain a team that could emerge as a long-term challenger in the Western Conference wild-card race.

"He plays an eye-appealing style with his athleticism, and I think that could help him as opposed to being just a big blocker," the agent said. "He's going to have some highlight-reel saves, and I think that could help him too."

While Wolf entered this season as the most well-known rookie goaltender, he's part of a rookie class that could have more than one netminder in position to present a strong Calder case at season's end.

Injuries and inconsistencies have led to the Avalanche trudging to a 8-8-0 start, with five of their wins coming when Justus Annunen has been in net. Annunen was a third-round pick in 2019, and has provided a sense of consistency that has been vital with the Avs weathering the first month without a handful of their top-nine forwards. The 2022 Stanley Cup champions are expected to reach the playoffs for what would be an eighth straight season, and Annunen may well be a critical part of that outcome.

Through the first month, Joel Blomqvist appears to have provided the Pittsburgh Penguins with a strong option in net as they also seek stability. The Penguins entered November allowing the most goals per game in the NHL. Through seven starts, the second-round pick from 2020 is averaging 29.5 saves per game, posting a .904 save percentage for a team that's also in the top five in the most scoring chances allowed per 60 minutes, most shots allowed per 60 and most high-danger scoring chances allowed per 60, according to Natural Stat Trick. The Pens are one point outside of wild-card position in the East.

So could Annunen, Blomqvist or Wolf emerge to become one of the finalists in a Calder race that includes Celebrini, Michkov, Smith, Cutter Gauthier, Lane Hutson and Logan Stankoven?

Or does the streak extend to a not-so-sweet 16 years since a goalie won the Calder?

"One of these goaltenders who becomes a starter at Christmas and carries the team down the stretch and wins a division would help," Raycroft said. "Not just being a wild-card team. That is prerequisite No.

1 to be in the mix for being the Rookie of the Year as a goaltender. Numbers will fall into place. I don't think you can give it to a guy who is not on a playoff team."

[Sportsnet.ca / Sportsnet's 2025 NHL Draft Prospect Rankings: November Edition](#)

By Sam Cosentino – November 14, 2024

A week after our last list was released in the middle of October, NHL Central Scouting issued its preliminary players to watch for the 2025 draft. With so many players to see, there hasn't been enough time yet to get multiple viewings on most of them, or at least enough for a deep dive. As such, Central Scouting likes to put them in tiers with a letter rating as opposed to individual number ratings. The list also is mindful of players who haven't played a lot or who have been injured, listing them with an 'LV' rating, or 'limited viewing.'

It's an interesting time in the prospect world as the seismic shift we expected in the developmental ranks is slowly becoming reality. The NCAA has voted to allow CHL players to participate in college hockey, forever changing the prospect landscape. That will take effect on August 1, 2025, well past the end of this season's NHL draft cycle, but in time for NCAA programs to recruit for the 2025-26 season. In fact, that recruiting has already started to take place.

The movement between the two entities is extremely complicated. A number of issues must be resolved, and questions answered before we truly know the impact this decision will have. At first blush, it looks like the CHL will get younger and be able to attract even more high-end talent, while the NCAA will benefit from older players making their way south of the border after finishing CHL careers to continue playing elite level hockey. On a more immediate basis, it will be interesting to watch high school, Tier II and USHL players to see if draft eligibles in those leagues make their way to the CHL.

While we wait to see how this all plays out, there's still the 2025 draft to consider, and it's full of intrigue. It's a down year for the USNTDP, in part because James Hagens and Cullen Potter fast-tracked their way into college. Those two omissions have impacted the program in terms of speed and pure point producing potential. League play and games against college competition for the USNTDP have been challenging. Through nearly 20 games, only one player is averaging a point-per-game or better and Jack Murtagh has only played in half of them.

Internationally, there are no Finns on this list for the second straight month, which we're not used to seeing. Finland's Hlinka-Gretzky roster foreshadowed what will be a rare down year for the country. We see some Russian talent on this month's list, but not quite as high-end as what we've come to expect in recent years. Sweden has a fascinating prospect base in that we haven't seen any one of them play consistently at the top SHL level in that country. Usually there are a couple of young players who have outgrown the J20 league and are beyond the Allsvenskan, too. This season, only Viktor Eklund has played and excelled regularly in Sweden's second division. However, there are a number of Swedish players that may end up getting called in the NHL's first round who are playing well and producing in the J20 ranks.

This draft class definitely pops for the CHL, with strength in both the OHL and WHL, and a sprinkling of high-end players out of the QMJHL. OHLers Porter Martone, Michael Misa and Matthew Schaefer are all in the same company as Boston College's Hagens. From there, a healthy Roger McQueen out of Brandon should re-enter consideration inside the top five. A few bigger bodies in Jackson Smith, Lynden Lakovic, and Blake Fiddler are projected to be spread out in round one. From the QMJHL, Caleb Desnoyers is off to a fast start under the guidance of new Moncton bench boss Gardiner MacDougall.

I would expect more shuffling to occur in the coming months based on a couple of factors. First, the impact of the NCAA's vote and whether or not players start shifting to the CHL to hasten their

development, knowing their college eligibility will remain intact. We also have the CHL-USA Prospects Challenge coming up later this month, a new event on the calendar, and a two-game series that may result in some shifting of draft projection. Then there's the world juniors and more prospect games in January.

But for now, Hagens once again earns top honours for our November list.

1. James Hagens, C, 5-foot-11, 176 pounds, Boston College (NCAA): Scoring at over a point per game pace, Hagens has met expectations as an impact player. Eight of his 10 assists have been primary helpers.

2. Porter Martone, C, 6-foot-3, 196 pounds, Brampton Steelheads (OHL): Dominating the OHL in every facet. His size and skill set are such a rare combination that he will generate plenty of first overall pick talk as the season progresses.

3. Michael Misa, LW, 6-foot-1, 185 pounds, Saginaw Spirit (OHL): No longer the youngster on an older team, Misa is getting all the prime time minutes at centre ice and taking full advantage, averaging well over a goal per game.

4. Matthew Schaefer, D, 6-foot-1, 175 pounds, Erie Otters (OHL): Erie has won five of eight games since his return and is putting up four goals per game. He has come out firing since that time as well, averaging almost five shots per game.

5. Roger McQueen, C, 6-foot-5, 190 pounds, Brandon Wheat Kings (WHL): Remains out of the lineup to injury. His presence in the CHL-USA prospect games would've been a nice baseline to gauge against the higher-end players of this draft class he hasn't recently played against as a late birthday (October).

6. Victor Eklund, LW, 5-foot-11, 161 pounds, Djurgardens (Allsvenskan): Is adept at building speed through neutral ice and backing off or burning defenders who aren't ready for that second gear. He brings an electric element to the table that has helped him produce early and often in the Allsvenskan.

7. Ivan Ryabkin, C, 6-feet, 170 pounds, St. Petersburg Dynamo (VHL): Looks as if he's played himself out of the MHL and on to the next challenge in the VHL. But, averaging just over 11 minutes of ice time a game in a small sample size, he's yet to produce notable results at that level.

8. Anton Frondell, C, 6-feet, 196 pounds, Djurgardens (Allsvenskan): A strong showing at the recently completed Five Nations tournament quelled concerns that had arisen in his return to Allsvenskan play. It was important to get back to playing with his peers and proving he belongs in the top half of this draft class.

9. Jake O'Brien, C, 6-foot-2, 170 pounds, Brantford Bulldogs (OHL): His style of game should translate well to the NHL because he can operate quickly and effectively with little time or space.

10. Caleb Desnoyers, C, 6-foot-2, 178 pounds, Moncton Wildcats (QMJHL): Understands pace and uses it to his advantage with or without the puck on his stick. Once he has possession of the puck, he has game breaking abilities both as a playmaker and a goal scorer.

11. Malcolm Spence, LW, 6-foot-2, 201 pounds, Erie Otters (OHL): Makes his mark by playing with detail. Is effective at stealing pucks with his strength and a quick stick. How high a team projects his offensive game will determine how early he goes in the draft.

12. Jackson Smith, D, 6-foot-3, 190 pounds, Tri-City Americans (WHL): He can lead the rush, transition the puck, make plays and shoot. On the defensive side, his footwork and lateral movement allow him to maintain good gap control.

- 13. Logan Hensler, D, 6-foot-2, 196 pounds, Wisconsin (NCAA):** Projects as a two-way defenceman, but so far providing offence as a young freshman has been slower than anticipated. The currency he gained from playing in the USNTDP program last year is still valid.
- 14. William Moore, C, 6-foot-2, 161 pounds, USNTDP (USHL):** Like many on his team, there's hope that the recent Five Nations tournament will springboard the rest of his season. Other than physical strength, everything in Moore's toolbox speaks top six forward, but overall the production has yet to match the projection.
- 15. Joshua Ravensbergen, G, 6-foot-5, 192 pounds, Prince George Cougars (WHL):** While his numbers don't jump off the page (.904SV%, 2.96GAA) they're still good enough to put his team second in its conference. He possesses everything you project in a future No. 1 NHL goalie. His size, athleticism, poise and presence all check well above average.
- 16. Radim Mrtko, D, 6-foot-6, 200 pounds, Trinec (Extraliga):** Can do all the things required of a transitional defenceman, but because he has yet to grow into his body, he doesn't look as fluid as some of his fellow draft mates. He's better suited playing closer to his peer group at this point.
- 17. Jakob Ihs-Wozniak, RW, 6-foot-3, 185 pounds, Lulea (J20):** His J20 play has earned him a couple of low-minute games at the SHL level. Excellent vision and spatial awareness are adaptable traits.
- 18. Cole Reschny, LW, 5-foot-11, 183 pounds, Victoria Royals (WHL):** Able to work through the triangle effectively in one-on-one play. He quickly changes pace and is so shifty that he's able to avoid solid contact.
- 19. Viktor Klingsell, LW, 5-foot-10, 183 pounds, Skelleftea (J20):** Has been at his best while playing with the national team as evidenced by his recent performance at the Five Nations. He's a creative player who shows patience in his playmaking.
- 20. Blake Fiddler, D, 6-foot-4, 209 pounds, Edmonton Oil Kings (WHL):** Will be in an interesting spot for the CHL-USA Prospects Challenge, having played for the US during the Hlinka-Gretzky. Having NHL bloodlines always plays and Fiddler is a great skater for this size. He can transport pucks, make a good first pass and shoots it a ton.
- 22. Kashawn Aitcheson, D, 6-foot-1, 198 pounds, Barrie Colts (OHL):** A player who embraces the physical side of the game, Aitcheson is well aware his best asset is that he's difficult to play against. He is getting power play minutes and can provide secondary offence.
- 22. Jack Ivankovic, G, 6-feet, 179 pounds, Brampton Steelheads (OHL):** Plays a technically sound game, and is rarely out of position. He's calm, confident, efficient and extremely competitive. At his current height, many teams will strike him from their list, but a growth spurt is projected.
- 23. Justin Carbonneau, RW, 6-foot-1, 191 pounds, Blainville-Boisbriand Armada (QMJHL):** Possesses game-breaking ability when engaged. He is equally a dangerous shooter and a deft passer. Speed and skill make him a threat off the rush, but his hands also make him an effective creator off the cycle.
- 24. 27. Adam Benak, C, 5-foot-7, 161 pounds, Youngstown Phantoms (USHL):** An extremely hard worker who, despite his size, isn't afraid to go anywhere on the ice. He has yet to show he can impact a game in the USHL the way he did at the past two Hlinka-Gretzky tournaments.
- 25. Lynden Lakovic, LW, 6-foot-4, 190 pounds, Moose Jaw Warriors (WHL):** Moves up ice with ease and his head up. Extremely dangerous off the rush, where he can score from distance, drop the shoulder and go to the net, or find a linemate driving the net.

- 26. Cameron Reid, D, 6-feet, 193 pounds, Kitchener Rangers (OHL):** On pace for point per game numbers and is running Kitchener's power play. He processes the game quickly and efficiently, which pairs well with his above average skating.
- 27. Cameron Schmidt, RW, 5-foot-8, 152 pounds, Vancouver Giants (WHL):** A number of teams will turn their back on this prospect due to size, but his WHL numbers are undeniable and do mean something (20G-10A-17GP). He's an excellent finisher and plays with a ton of energy.
- 28. Nathan Behm, RW, 6-foot-1, 192 pounds, Kamloops Blazers (WHL):** There's a Kyle Connor vibe to Behm's game in that he is an upright skater who is aware of his surroundings. He has a deceptive release like Connor and doesn't need a lot of time to get off a heavy shot.
- 29. Cullen Potter, C, 5-foot-10, 172 pounds, Arizona State (NCAA):** Easy to see he has grown up in a hockey family (mother Jenny is an Olympic gold medallist). Absolutely electric when his hands and feet are working in sync.
- 30. Brady Martin, C, 6-feet, 178 pounds, Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds (OHL):** Doesn't overwhelm in any one particular area, but is good all-around. He can create space and make plays.
- 31. Carter Bear, LW, 6-feet, 179 pounds, Everett Silvertips (WHL):** On a tear with four multi-point efforts in five November games. Plays a solid positional game and his energy is infectious for teammates.
- 32. Haoxi (Simon) Wang, D, 6-foot-5, 215 pounds, King Rebellion (OJHL):** The Boston University commit has made several scouts detour to see him on their way through Ontario. He's far from a finished product, but the raw skill is intriguing. He may be one of the players who benefits from the NCAA's rule change should he make his way to the OHL at some point this season, where his game would be better put into context.