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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets keep playoff hopes alive against New York Islanders: 3 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- March 26, 2025

Just when the Blue Jackets appeared to be out of magic in their surprising playoff chase, the NHL made a devastating goal Monday night disappear.

Rather than reeling from a crushing defeat on a goal scored by the New York Islanders with 8.9 seconds left in the third period, the Jackets returned to Columbus rejuvenated after a wild finish led to a 4-3 shootout victory in Elmont, New York.

What happened to the Islanders is something that typically happens to the Blue Jackets (32-29-9), whose misery was spared after Kyle Palmieri's late goal to break a 3-3 tie was disallowed after a goaltender interference ruling that withstood an NHL review by the league's situation room in Toronto.

The game stayed tied, an exciting 3-on-3 overtime followed, and then a shootout gave the Blue Jackets a crucial second point on Adam Fantilli's goal in the second round.

Abacadabra, here are three takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets' shootout win over New York Islanders solidifies their position in Eastern Conference playoff race

A regulation win would have been the best outcome for the Blue Jackets in a tight race for the final postseason spot in the NHL's Eastern Conference, but beggars can't be choosers. The Jackets just needed a win of any variety to break the spell of a frustrating six-game losing streak, and got it done despite the Islanders also earning a point with the shootout loss.

The Islanders are tied at 74 points with the New York Rangers, one ahead of the Blue Jackets and one behind the Montreal Canadiens for the East's second wild card. Had the Isles won on Palmieri's overturned goal, Columbus would trail the Islanders and Canadiens by four points for the second wild card and Rangers by three points for ninth place in the East. The Detroit Red Wings also would've passed the Blue Jackets after their victory Monday night in Utah.

The Blue Jackets don't play again until a tough back-to-back that starts Friday against the Vancouver Canucks at Nationwide Arena and finishes Saturday in Ottawa.

Columbus Blue Jackets happy to go 1-1 on goaltender interference reviews against New York Islanders

Waiting for the NHL situation room to make its ruling on Palmieri's overturned goal had to feel like an eternity for the Blue Jackets, who could have dropped their ninth of 10 games.

So, was it or wasn't it the right call?

It depends on whom you ask, but the NHL always gets final say and ruled that Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins was interfered with enough to disallow the goal. Replays show Palmieri and Merzlikins bumping into each other at the top of the crease about a second before a shot from the blue line heads back toward them, which Palmieri deflected past an unprepared Merzlikins.

It would have been Palmieri's second goal of the game, after giving the Islanders a 2-0 lead late in the first period.

Here is the ruling by the NHL situation room:

“Video review supported the Referees’ call on the ice that New York’s Kyle Palmieri impaired Elvis Merzlikins’ ability to play his position in the crease prior to the goal. The decision was made in accordance with Rule 69.1 which states, in part, that ‘Goals should be disallowed only if: (1) an attacking player, either by his positioning or by contact, impairs the goalkeeper’s ability to move freely within his crease or defend his goal.’”

Earlier in the game, the Blue Jackets lost a coaching challenge for possible goaltender interference on Islanders power forward Anders Lee on a goal that put New York up 3-2 late in the second period. Despite Lee’s stick hitting Merzlikins in the mask during that goal, the NHL ruled there was no interference.

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said the rulings show the difficulty in contesting a referee’s judgment call.

“I guess what it says is that we’ve got to be very careful that the call on the ice is probably where it’s going to go,” Evason said. “You have to have such great, like, super clear evidence or (have it be) lopsided the other way to overturn it. Both were called on the ice and that’s how they stayed, so we’ll be mindful of that next time.”

Sean Monahan, Zach Werenski and Elvis Merzlikins impress in Columbus Blue Jackets’ shootout win over New York Islanders

Sean Monahan said it took a couple shifts to adjust to the pace of the NHL this late in the season, but otherwise he didn’t show any lingering effects from surgery to correct a wrist injury that happened Jan. 7 in Pittsburgh.

The veteran center returned to the Blue Jackets’ top line and finished with two assists to boost his scoring line for the season to 14 goals, 29 assists and 43 points in 42 games. Monahan also showed his wrist is fine to take faceoffs, winning 11 of 24 draws (46%).

The Blue Jackets also got standout performances from goalie Elvis Merzlikins and defenseman Zach Werenski.

Merzlikins earned his first assist of the season on Boone Jenner's short-handed goal to tie it 2-2 in the second, but his biggest contributions were making numerous key stops on his way to 31 saves. That included a desperate, diving denial 1:48 into OT to rob Islanders defenseman Ryan Pullock.

Werenski, meanwhile, set a career-high by skating the highest ice time in the league this season at 33:44 on 26 shifts. That included 16:06 between the third period and OT that, broken down individually, was 13:07 out of 20 minutes in the third and 3:02 of the five minute 3-on-3 OT.

Good thing the Blue Jackets have a day off Tuesday.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets snap six-game losing streak with comeback win over Islanders

By Aaron Portzline- March 26, 2025

It was a helpless feeling, Columbus Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said.

There were less than 10 seconds remaining, and the Blue Jackets' fate — not only in Monday's game vs. the New York Islanders but quite possibly their postseason aspirations — rested in the hands of NHL officials as they reviewed a goaltender interference call for the second time in the game.

NHL official Michael Markovic immediately waved off an Islanders goal that would have given them a 4-3 lead by ruling that Isles forward Kyle Palmieri had interfered with Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzljikins' ability to play the puck.

But the review...

"It took so long," Evason said. "It was really gut-wrenching there for a while, to look up at the clock and see basically nothing left and us being down. But we were fortunate. Maybe we caught a break there."

The review, initiated by the league's NHL situation room, determined Markovic's ruling on the ice should stand, keeping the game tied at 3-3.

Several minutes later, after Adam Fantilli scored the lone shootout goal for either team, the Blue Jackets mobbed Merzljikins. They were all hugs and high-fives after a desperately needed 4-3 win, snapping a six-game losing streak and reigniting playoff hopes.

Fantilli, Boone Jenner and Kirill Marchenko scored regulation goals for the Blue Jackets, while Sean Monahan — in his first game since Jan. 7 following wrist surgery — added two assists. Merzljikins, who was outstanding early and in overtime, finished with 30 saves.

This being called no goal because of GOALIE INTERFERENCE is ridiculous.

If this cost the islanders their playoff spot oh man

pic.twitter.com/yFAlxVI2z

— Drew Livingstone (@ProducerDrew_) March 25, 2025

The Blue Jackets, who hadn't won a game since March 9, came back from 2-0 and 3-2 deficits. It was Marchenko's goal, a wrister through traffic from above the right circle, that tied the score at three with 7:04 remaining in regulation.

"The first period, we didn't play the way we wanted and we all realized it," Merzljikins said. "That third period, you saw it. It was a huge, huge team win. We all knew that this game, especially, was very important for us. We needed to take these points from them. It was just beautiful to see how we managed to battle through this."

Despite the win, the Blue Jackets remain in 11th place in the Eastern Conference. But the two points change the picture dramatically, pulling the Jackets (73 points) within two points of Montreal (75) for the second wildcard. The New York Rangers (74) and Islanders (74), who earned a point in defeat on Monday, are just above Columbus.

"We've lost a little bit here," Jenner said. "We've not had the results, but we've played some good hockey. To get a result tonight was huge for us. Hopefully we can continue with that and run with it."

“But it feels great to come in here and get those two points and hear that music again.”

The Blue Jackets blare the song “Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!” by the 1970s supergroup ABBA after victories, but it’s been a while since they’ve heard the tune.

They were boosted, certainly, by news over the weekend that Monahan, who had missed 28 games, and veteran defenseman Erik Gudbranson, who missed 66 games after shoulder surgery, were ready to return. This is the time of season when veteran players are massively important.

WINNER WINNER BAGELS FOR DINNER! @FanaticsBook | #CBJ pic.twitter.com/xfQWsQ2sAG

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) March 25, 2025

For the Blue Jackets, not coming unglued after a rough first period was key. Evason was clearly fuming when they returned to the bench after the first intermission, and there were signs of frustration all over the ice for the Blue Jackets, especially early in the game.

After being denied on a rebound put-back attempt, Jackets forward Dmitri Voronkov skated to the bench on one leg so that he could elevate the other leg and break his stick over it. You don’t see that every day.

“The guys were saying all the right things on the bench,” Evason said. “It wasn’t for a lack of trying — (they) were just trying to ... trying to score, trying to do too much, way too much, instead of simplifying our game and getting after it, doing what we do.

“It’s not a negative. They’re trying their butts off to score goals and win games and get points, but you have to go about it intelligently. Once they adjusted themselves, we played the right way.”

Fantilli cut the Islanders’ 2-0 lead in half at 5:31 of the second period when he skated through the left circle and snapped off a shot that beat Islanders goalie Ilya Sorokin under the bar. It was Fantilli’s 22nd goal of the season.

Later in the second, with 2:47 remaining in the period, Jenner scored almost exactly the same goal from the other side. His wrist was deflected off the inside leg of an Islanders defenseman, changing the puck’s trajectory before it sailed past Sorokin.

There were strong individual efforts all over the ice for Columbus. The Islanders held Zach Werenski without a point, but he played a regular-season career-high 33:44, more than any player has played in a game this season. And Monahan’s wrist must be OK, since he won a team-high 11 face-offs.

Fantilli scored on a tremendous move — back and forth, back and forth, backhand roofer — in the second round of the shootout.

But the two goaltender interference calls played a huge role in the game.

With 48 seconds remaining in the second period, Islanders forward Anders Lee was in the crease next to Merzljikins when a puck glanced off him and went into the net for a 3-2 New York lead. Merzljikins was furious, and the Blue Jackets asked for a replay, but the call was allowed to stand.

THE CAPTAIN. #LGI | @Ford pic.twitter.com/2B8foq440F

— New York Islanders (@NYIslanders) March 25, 2025

Evason appeared to have a strong but constructive conversation with referees after that call. Who knows what impact that had on the second ruling, after the Islanders appeared to take a 4-3 lead late in the game.

Palmieri came out from behind Merzljikins' net and set up in front to create a screen. There was definitely contact, but replays showed it was initiated by Merzljikins. Also of note: Palmieri was stationed just outside the blue paint, which is permissible.

The Blue Jackets didn't like that the first goal was allowed to stand after replay. They agreed wholeheartedly with the call on the second one, though.

"If the second one didn't go my way, I would probably lose my ... I would be really mad," Merzljikins said. "The first one ... I need to go talk to the refs to understand why it's not interference. I was reaching for the puck and I couldn't get there.

"The second one was interference, or maybe not, I didn't see it very much. But it felt like a little touch (by Palmieri). I just want to see the first one and understand why."

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets get two huge points on Long Island](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- March 26, 2025

After CBJ wins, we'll give three takeaways about what stood out or what we'll remember from the Blue Jackets victory.

BLUE JACKETS 4, ISLANDERS 3, SHOOTOUT

1. The Blue Jackets stuck with it through a roller coaster of emotions to get a much-needed victory on Long Island.

In what felt like a must-win game, with two key veterans back on the ice, the Blue Jackets took the ice against the Islanders and ... well, it wasn't pretty to start.

Columbus was outshot 17-6 in the first period and went back to the locker room down 2-0, and it felt like the season might be hanging in the balance with what would happen over the next 40 minutes.

"The first period wasn't us at all, obviously," captain Boone Jenner said. "For whatever reason, we weren't playing our game. We were turning pucks over, losing battles. We talked about it, us in this room, that all year, we haven't accepted that. We knew we had to be better."

And they were. Columbus got back into the game with a pair of goals in the middle frame, tying the score on tallies by Adam Fantilli and Jenner, then watched the Islanders score in the final minute of the second to take a 3-2 lead.

It was another gut-check time, and the Blue Jackets responded. A desperate Columbus team outshot the Islanders 17-4 in the final period, pushing and pushing until Kirill Marchenko's shot beat goalie Ilya Sorokin with 7:04 to play.

There were also some reviews of note – a goalie interference challenge on the Isles' second-period goal that didn't go the CBJ's way, and then one that did on a potential winner for New York with 9.6 seconds left – that will certainly lead to some chatter, but the Blue Jackets kept their wits about them. After a tight overtime period, Fantilli scored the only goal of the shootout, roofing a sweet backhand past Sorokin, and the Blue Jackets ended a six-game losing skid.

The win pulled Columbus to within two points of the Eastern Conference's final wild card spot, and it all stemmed from their ability to get going after the tough start.

"It wasn't for lack of trying," head coach Dean Evason said. "We're trying to score, trying to do way too much instead of just simplifying our game and getting after it and doing what we did in the last two periods as far as getting pucks deep and getting after it and doing what we do."

"It's no negative that they're trying their butts off to score goals and to win hockey games and get two points, but you still have to go about it intelligently. Once they adjusted themselves, we played the right way."

2. The returns of Sean Monahan and Erik Gudbranson proved critical.

It should be no surprise that in the heat of a playoff race, experience and leadership matter, and both of those players provide those.

In their respective returns after missing 66 games (Gudbranson) and 28 games (Monahan) with upper body injuries, the two "had their fingerprints all over" the win, in the words of Evason.

Monahan skated 18:51 and contributed two assists to the victory, while Gudbranson was on the ice for 16:18 and was awarded the donkey player of the game hat in the locker room postgame.

"It's huge getting those guys back," Jenner said. "I can't say enough about each of them, what they bring on the ice and in the room here, just true pros that have been around for a long time. You add those two guys in your locker room, it's gonna help you. They've battled extremely hard, we've seen firsthand, to get back and come back at a crucial time of year.

"They both jumped in, played great today after missing a lot of time. It's not easy, but they played great, and we're happy to get that win for them and happy they're back with us."

With almost 1,600 games of NHL experience combined, the two know what it takes to win this time of year and what to expect jumping back into the lineup for such a key game.

"The legs and lungs felt good," Monahan said. "It's the speed of the game, and it's hard to recreate that when you're skating by yourself for a while, but it was good. I got a lot of opportunity to play some important minutes, and when you're out there in those times it keeps your details in check. It's nice to come out of here with a win."

3. The CBJ penalty kill turned in some game-changing efforts in the victory.

In a game where the shots and chances were basically even at 5-on-5, special teams can take on an outsized role, and that's the way it was for the Blue Jackets penalty kill in this game.

The Blue Jackets were shorthanded three times, and in each instance, they were able to build momentum off the PK. Columbus' kill outshot the Islanders 2-1 during those three penalties, including the shorthanded goal by Jenner that tied the score in the second period.

"I was just trying to get it through them, make sure it doesn't get blocked, and exactly that, use them as a screen," Jenner said of his goal, which went off the leg of Islanders D Noah Dobson and skipped past Sorokin. "I think it took a couple of bounces and found its way in, so obviously a good bounce for us there."

The Jackets didn't score on the other two kills, but they used both to help turn the tide at key times. Fantilli's opening CBJ goal was less than two minutes after a strong Jackets kill, and the excellent third period came after the Jackets killed off a delay of game penalty for an unsuccessful goalie interference challenge.

"Special teams are huge," Monahan said. "Penalty kill, you're trying not to get scored against. That was a huge goal for us to boost our team by Boone, a great shot. Special teams at this time of year, they can win and lose you games for sure."

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Almost Back to Full Strength With Monahan Return

By Nicholas Arnold- March 26, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets have had a heck of a run this season. While many expected them to be in the hunt for a lottery pick at the 2025 NHL Entry Draft, they instead made a push in the standings and are still in the wild card race. They have been in a tailspin as of late having only gotten one standings point in their last six games (0-5-1). This is a team that's been decimated by injuries since before the campaign began, and as such we still haven't seen this roster at full strength. With the return of Sean Monahan from injury, we're getting closer to finally seeing what this roster will look like at full strength.

Blue Jackets' Injury Recap

The team has been crushed by injuries this season. Not quite as bad as the last two, but it certainly hasn't been great. Right off the hop, captain Boone Jenner was sidelined with a shoulder injury that required surgery. He was finally reactivated from injured reserve (IR) after four months, just in time for the Stadium Series game at the beginning of March. Jenner had been a massive part of the team's top-six serving as the de facto top-line center for the past three seasons.

Fortunately, they'd brought in Monahan in free agency, who was more than capable of taking that first-line role and running with it. He formed one of the best lines in the NHL, flanked by Kirill Marchenko and Dmitri Voronkov, who've really broken out. Then, of course, right when the team was gaining traction with success and getting to the top of their game, Monahan was knocked out with a wrist injury and missed the next 28 games. He was reactivated on March 24 before playing the New York Islanders.

Erik Gudbranson missed 66 games with a shoulder injury and surgery – very similar to Jenner. He's been a valuable veteran addition to the team's blue line and leadership structure, on a contract that was heavily criticized when it was signed in the summer of 2022. He was reactivated at the same time as Monahan.

Cole Sillinger, Kevin Labanc, Jake Christiansen, and Daniil Tarasov are all dealing with lingering issues. My colleague Mark Scheig wrote a piece mentioning Sillinger said he isn't going to rush back, and he wants to ensure he is fully ready before lacing up the skates again.

Blue Jackets Lineup at Full Strength

When Sillinger finally makes his return to the Blue Jackets lineup, barring any other unexpected injuries, it should look pretty good. Especially in comparison to the roster they've been icing for the last two months. Let's take a dive into each skater position to see exactly what the team should look like once everyone is back in the lineup. For the basis of line combinations, I'm looking at the most recent trios and pairings that the team has been running.

Blue Jackets' Forwards at Full Strength

Left Wing	Center	Right Wing
Dmitri Voronkov	Sean Monahan	Kirill Marchenko

Boone Jenner	Adam Fantilli	Kent Johnson
Zach Aston-Reese	Cole Sillinger	Mathieu Olivier
James van Riemsdyk	Sean Kuraly	Justin Danforth
	Luke Kunin	Yegor Chinakhov

What really stands out looking at the Blue Jackets' forwards is their center depth. Monahan has done well in the top-line role and is definitely a top-six center. For the second line, Fantilli is able to learn the role, but being flanked by Jenner allows them to trade roles should the stakes be raised at the end of a game when a key faceoff needs to be won. Sillinger is really growing in that third center slot, and Sean Kuraly has been a perfect fit in that fourth-line center slot during his Blue Jackets' tenure.

Where I would have some concerns is their bottom-six wingers. Ideally, Yegor Chinakhov finds favor in head coach Dean Evason's system and can slide into the third-line right-wing slot beside Sillinger and James van Riemsdyk is elevated beside him. As good as Mathieu Olivier and Zach Aston-Reese have been this season, if you're playing those guys on your third line, you're going to have a tough time generating enough offense to make the playoffs.

Blue Jackets' Defense at Full Strength

Left Defense	Right Defense
Zach Werenski	Dante Fabbro
Ivan Provorov	Damon Severson
Denton Mateychuk	Erik Gudbranson
Jack Johnson	

With the return of Gudbranson, all three of Columbus' defense pairings look stronger. There has been some criticism of Damon Severson's play this season, mostly earned, but having him beside Ivan Provorov consistently should help improve his game. Young Denton Mateychuk slotted in beside defensive stalwart and the always physical Gudbranson should really balance his game and allow him to mitigate some mistakes, not that he makes many. It also pushes Jack Johnson and Jake Christiansen into roles that are more fitting to their current abilities – one on the downswing and one on the upswing.

With Monahan back from injury, the Blue Jackets' top-six forward corps is finally at full strength. With 13 games remaining in the schedule and currently four points out of the second wild card playoff spot, we'll

have to see if his return is too late to help propel the team into their first postseason berth in a post-pandemic world. The team has just over half of those games at home, which could benefit them since they're significantly better at Nationwide Arena than on the road. Every game is going to matter down the homestretch to game number 82.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Mounting The Comeback, Jackets Get Elusive Break, Big (Apple) Win

By Will Chase- March 26, 2025

The biggest win of the season. Until the next one.

Adam Fantilli scored the lone shootout goal, and Elvis Merzlikins stopped all three shooters he faced as the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the New York Islanders 4-3 on Monday to snap a six-game losing streak and win their first-ever game at UBS Arena (1-5-1).

The Islanders have points in six straight (3-0-3).

Mounting The Comeback

Did you know the Blue Jackets are one of the best teams in the league in scoring first?

They are tied for seventh in the NHL when scoring first with 38 goals. But before Monday, their last lead in a game was the last time they won, which was Mar. 9 against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

The trend continued with Pierre Engvall's first-period goal at 13:16. Adam Boqvist picked up his eighth assist, and Tony DeAngelo added his 12th to extend a three-game point streak (zero goals, four assists).

Kyle Palmieri added his 22nd goal at 18:41 to extend the Islanders' 2-0 lead. Bo Horvat (25) and Ryan Pullock (15) assisted on the play. Horvat's on a four-game point streak (three goals, two assists).

Columbus has allowed the first goal in seven straight games.

Something had to change, and though it had been a tough go of late, the Blue Jackets have been in just about every game they've played this season.

If they had that push in them, it was needed on Monday.

Adam Fantilli (22) scored at 5:31 of the second period to make it a 2-1 game. Dante Fabbro picked up assist No. 12, and Merzlikins picked up his first point of the year.

Boone Jenner tied the score 2-2 with his second goal in as many games, his seventh short-handed goal, and the Jackets' ninth shorty this season. Sean Monahan, back in the lineup for the first time since Jan. 7, added his 28th assist.

You knew it wouldn't be easy, though.

Anders Lee scored for New York with 19:13 left in the second period. The Blue Jackets lost the challenge for goaltender interference, so the Islanders went back on the power play but did not score. Mike Reilly picked up the assist, and Adam Boqvist earned his second of the game.

Jackets Get Elusive Break

The Islanders had the majority of the shot attempts in the first period, 30-15 (5v5). As the scoreboard indicates, the second period was more even as the Jackets scored twice, the Islanders once, and the 5v5 shot attempts were 16-15 for the Blue Jackets.

In the third period, Columbus had a clear shot attempt advantage of 25-10 and 29-11 in all situations and outshot the Islanders 17-4 in the third period.

Kirill Marchenko made good on the Jackets' third-period push as he tied the game 3-3 at 12:56 of the period for his team-leading 26th. The goal ended a five-game pointless drought. Ivan Provorov picked up his 23rd assist, and Monahan picked up his second of the game and 29th of the season.

This tweet by Jeff Svoboda before Monday's game perfectly encapsulates Monahan's impact.

With seconds remaining in the frame, the Islanders thought they had taken the lead, but the officials immediately waved off the goal. After a review, the call stood, and the two teams had to settle it in extra time as neither could score in overtime.

So, things evened out with the goaltender interference calls late in the second period and then late in the third period. Head coach Dean Evason had a long chat with the officials after the second-period goal by the Islanders, in which they challenged for goaltender interference, so whether it was a makeup call or whatever, the Jackets finally got a bounce to go their way.

Now, what would they do with it?

Big (Apple) Win

Elvis Merzlikins has had plenty of shootout success this season in stopping the shooters. He's only allowed one to score on him.

None of those goals happened in this game.

Anthony Duclair completely flubbed his first attempt without even getting a shot off, and Fantilli scored the only shootout goal that was needed as the Blue Jackets completed the comeback to win 4-3 and pick up two massive points.

Two points out of a playoff spot, the Blue Jackets trail the Islanders and Rangers by one point in the standings. Columbus improved to 3-7-1 in March and 2-0 in the state of New York this month.

Columbus is 5-1 in the shootout this season, while the Islanders fall to 2-2. Merzlikins is 4-0 in the shootout this season.

The Islanders are the best face-off team in the league (54.6%), but the Blue Jackets were the better team in this area, winning 33-of-60 (55.0%).

Zach Werenski played a career-high 33:44, the highest time-on-ice total for any player this season. Werenski passed Fedor Tyutin for the second-most games played by a Blue Jackets defenseman on Friday night and now has 555 career games under his belt. David Savard (597) has the record.

Erik Gudbranson returned to the lineup after missing the previous 67 games with a shoulder injury. Merzlikins made 30 saves on 33 shots. Ilya Sorokin made 27 saves on 30 shots.

Big Weekend

Columbus is off until Friday when they return home to face the Vancouver Canucks on Friday, Mar. 28 at 7 p.m. ET. Then they face the Ottawa Senators at Canadian Tire Centre on Saturday, Mar. 29 at 7 p.m. ET.

The Athletic / NHL Awards WATCH: Leon Draisaitl, Cale Makar, Connor Hellebuyck lead key races

By Dom Luszczyzyn- March 26, 2025

Throughout the season I'll be breaking down the numbers behind the race for each major player award: the Hart, the Norris, the Calder, the Selke, the Vezina, the Art Ross and the Rocket Richard. Numbers, of course, aren't everything, but they add much-needed context to the awards race and can help shine a light on players deserving of more recognition while adding caveats to other players that may have some warts. This post will present the top 10 for each category based on a set criteria of guidelines. There is plenty of room for discussion and debate within (and outside) those guidelines.

We're less than a month away from the season's end. Time for another Awards Watch.

While the front-runners all remain the same from the last edition, most of the races are still very tight and full of intrigue. There are a lot of things to consider for each race, so let's dive in.

Based on my interpretation of the numbers, here's how each of the key races currently shakes out.

Data as of March 23

Hart Trophy

Given to the player judged to be the most valuable to his team.

Criteria: Skaters ranked by Net Rating percentile relative to position.

There are six worthy candidates for the Hart Trophy. Let's break them down.

Leon Draisaitl: For a while now it's been clear who the league's best player has been this season. Draisaitl has the most goals, is second in points and has been absurdly dominant at five-on-five. Draisaitl's defensive growth has been a sight to behold and is the cherry on top of his exceptional season. It's what pushes him over the top as the current MVP front-runner. He's earned nearly 60 percent of the goals and expected goals — both career highs or close to it as a result of his improved defensive game. He leads in Net Rating by almost three goals for very good reason.

The real key to Draisaitl's potential victory is the Connor McDavid factor. In past years, the numbers pointed to Draisaitl benefitting greatly from their shared minutes. This season it's been the other way around. Whatever has made McDavid look off this season, it hasn't mattered — Draisaitl has picked up the slack.

I wasn't keen on Draisaitl winning the Hart in 2020 mostly because I believed there were real flaws in his two-way game that took away from his production. Five years later, that criticism comes full circle and I hope people can now see more clearly what I meant in 2020. The difference between 2020 Draisaitl and 2025 Draisaitl should be obvious: this is what an MVP season looks like.

Someone from Colorado: Is it controversial to say that Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar have been equally valuable this season? Given the state of Colorado's depth for much of the season, I don't really care that much about the weird results away from each other. I do care that when they are together they make some seriously beautiful music and it does feel like some lose sight of that by putting too much stock in their WOWY data. MacKinnon and Makar: both elite. Let's not overthink it.

I would imagine voters will lean more toward MacKinnon as the league's scoring leader, but I do feel that Makar's defensive work along with what he's done offensively makes him just as valuable. Scoring 30

goals, as he's on pace to do, is no small task and does carry some weight compared to a more assist-heavy stat line.

Both are equally deserving, but that lack of separation may be what undoes each of their candidacies. It's hard to pick between the two.

Zach Werenski: The fact that the Blue Jackets are still in the thick of the playoff race is nothing short of a small miracle and they have Werenski to thank for that. He's been the team's engine from the beginning of the season, driving incredible levels of offense while putting on one of the best defensive performances of his career. Werenski has emerged as a clear-cut top-five defenseman in the world and one of the league's most valuable players. A true franchise player, one whose value is right there with the Makars and Hugheses of the world. He's had a seriously special season where the Blue Jackets have earned 58 percent of the goals with him on the ice.

Nikita Kucherov: It's interesting how little buzz Kucherov's season is getting. Yes, he's producing less than last year, but there seems to be a lot more substance to his five-on-five game — especially without the puck. This season the Lightning have given up 2.51 expected goals against per 60 with Kucherov on the ice, down from 2.81 last season. That bump — without much of an offensive sacrifice — has led to a 54.7 percent xG rate. The team is scoring 60.4 percent of the goals, up from just 51.6 percent last season. The change also comes with increased responsibility, spending a fair bit of time on the team's shutdown line with Anthony Cirelli and Brandon Hagel. I'll take a 20-point sacrifice in favor of a 200-foot Kucherov every day of the week.

Connor Hellebuyck: Goalies don't often get love for the Hart Trophy partly because of the opportunity they have to accrue value. It takes a truly transcendent performance to be considered — is Hellebuyck giving one? He leads all players in total value by 9.1 goals, but for context, Carey Price nearly doubled up the next closest skater and goalie in value (around 19 goals) when he won in 2015. Hellebuyck's separation isn't quite on that level which is part of the reason he ranks sixth in percentile relative to position. He has a strong argument given what he's driven the Jets to accomplish this year. But if the standard is what Price did in 2015, there is a reason Hellebuyck is part of a pack of MVP contenders rather than the one leading it.

Quinn Hughes: For the people who read "most valuable to his team" as literally as possible, Hughes has the most compelling argument considering how lost the Canucks are without him. There's a 10.4-goal gap between him and the next-best Canuck in Net Rating. For Werenski it's 6.5 goals, for Draisaitl it's 5.6 goals, for Kucherov it's 0.7 goals (apologies to Hagel for being excluded from the list above) and the two Colorado players are tied. Hughes' separation — despite missing 14 games — is his best case.

We're almost at the end of the season and this still doesn't feel like an easy choice. Draisaitl is the front-runner and he'd be my pick today. But him missing some action — depending on how long he's out — could tighten the race.

Norris Trophy

Given to the defenseman who demonstrates throughout the season the greatest all-round ability in the position.

Criteria: Defensemen ranked by Net Rating.

How much does playing 14 fewer games matter? That's the question that will decide this year's Norris vote. By total value, Makar holds a 4.5-goal lead over Quinn Hughes in Net Rating. He's been the most valuable defenseman. On a per-82 game basis, Makar's pace of plus-25.9 is a shade behind Hughes' pace at plus-26.2. By the slimmest of margins, Hughes has been the better defenseman this season.

That was on full display against the Rangers over the weekend, a dominant game where Hughes was all over the ice, tilting it significantly in Vancouver's direction. Despite playing on a weaker team with less help, Hughes' xG rate is only marginally behind Makar's (55.8 percent to Makar's 56.1 percent) and the same is true for their goal percentages (57.8 percent to Makar's 58.5 percent). Vancouver's next-best player is nowhere close to the level of MacKinnon, a player Makar shares a lot of ice with. That's the case for Hughes: essentially the same per-game impact with far less help from his own team. Few players control the game as much as Hughes who is one of the game's best transitional players.

Some analytically savvy folks may be shocked that the two grade out so evenly and the difference stems primarily from quality of competition. On both ends of the spectrum, Makar faces some of the most difficult opponents in the league: the best offensive players and the best defensive ones. It's full power versus power, which is part of what makes his output so impressive.

Yes, of course, it's easier with MacKinnon on the ice at the same time and that's accounted for, but I do think people underrate the degree of difficulty that the toughest minutes entail — even with help. Producing offensively against the best defensive players is hard and Makar creates chances better than any defenseman. Defending against the best offensive players is also hard and it's an area Makar also excels in. That he has to do both, even when he doesn't share the ice with MacKinnon, partly explains some of the weaker xG numbers without him.

Defensively, the difficulty of Makar's minutes ranks in the 98th percentile. Hughes, in comparison, is in the 63rd percentile. Hughes is not sheltered by any means, but he does receive secondary matchups which makes it a bit easier to dominate — even if he doesn't have as much help. It allows him to focus more on offense and control the game. It's a similar strategy that Nashville employs with Roman Josi and Tampa Bay uses with Victor Hedman, one that allows Vancouver to fully utilize and maximize Hughes' gifts with the puck.

Werenski is a strong candidate as well with excellent play at both ends of the ice. The gap between the top three and the rest of the field is considerably large and it would be a shock to see any other defenseman be a finalist. This trio should be a lock.

Beyond them are a lot of usual suspects. Evan Bouchard and Adam Fox remain extremely valuable for their teams, even in down seasons. Thomas Harley has really stepped up this year, while Josh Morrissey has been a rock for Winnipeg. Rasmus Dahlin is one of the few bright spots in Buffalo and Hedman still rules.

The one surprise to some on the list might be John Carlson. He's been a critical part of Washington's epic rise this season and deserves some love for his role in the team's success. His plus-0.26 relative xG rate is a career best and some of his on-ice numbers also rank highly. He may not be scoring at a 70-plus point pace as he did during his Norris contention years, but he's added a lot of substance to his game the last few years. He's been a star for the Capitals this season.

Selke Trophy

Given to the forward who best excels in the defensive aspects of the game.

Criteria: Forwards who play over 16 minutes per game, receive 15 percent of their team's short-handed minutes and face top-line forward competition, ranked by their Defensive Rating.

The last time a winger won the Selke was Jere Lehtinen in 2002-03, a 21-year drought that should end this season. With a Defensive Rating of plus-8.0, Sam Reinhart has been the league's best defensive forward.

Reinhart's main competition is his linemate and the Selke incumbent Aleksander Barkov. While I don't doubt many voters will lean toward Barkov thanks to his reputation, I do believe that Reinhart has been more impressive defensively this season. He's been on the ice for fewer expected goals against per 60 (1.86 to Barkov's 2.02), similar goals against (1.85 to Barkov's 1.84), and the same level of competition (average Offensive Rating of 2.95). Reinhart has also played 10 more games which increases his total defensive value over Barkov's. Even on a per-game basis, though, Reinhart comes out ahead by 1.4 goals if they played the same number of games.

I know it's hard to vote against the incumbent and the guy we know is generally the better defensive forward. But if voters can acknowledge that better players can sometimes have worse offensive seasons than their sidekicks (Evgeni Malkin over Sidney Crosby or Leon Draisaitl over Connor McDavid, for example), that same logic should apply to defensive seasons. Almost anyone would take Barkov over Reinhart as a shutdown option in a Game 7 matchup, but Reinhart has still arguably been more impactful this season.

After those two, there are a lot of strong options to fill out the ballot. The Lightning duo of Anthony Cirelli and Brandon Hagel have separated themselves from the pack and are right there with Barkov. Cirelli eats tough minutes and defensive zone starts and has posted some exceptional impacts at five-on-five relative to teammates — slightly better than Barkov's.

Lower down the list, Seth Jarvis is probably the best option from Carolina these days. He's played tougher minutes than Jordan Staal and has been on for fewer expected goals against despite also taking on a heavier offensive workload. Jarvis looks like the next Mark Stone and it's fitting that the two are side-by-side on this list. Stone has had a resurgent defensive season and deserves some consideration. Teammate Jack Eichel also deserves praise given what he's accomplished despite the extreme difficulty of his usage, though it should be noted that much of his impact comes from suppressing actual goals more than chances.

There are a lot of great options this year, but most of them are fighting for fourth and/or fifth. The top three spots, at the very least, belong to someone from the state of Florida.

Calder Trophy

Given to the player selected as the most proficient in his first year of competition in the NHL.

Criteria: Rookie skaters ranked by Net Rating percentile relative to position.

No trophy race has been more of an actual race than this one. At times, all four of Dustin Wolf, Lane Hutson, Macklin Celebrini and Matvei Michkov have had a strong case as the top rookie.

As the season reaches its conclusion, though, the Calder has become a two-player race between Wolf and Hutson. Wolf is having a very special rookie season for a goalie. Hutson is having a very special rookie season for a defenseman. Picking between the two is not easy. Based on their percentile relative to their position, Wolf comes out narrowly ahead. But it's close enough that Hutson has a strong case. Arguably a stronger one given historical precedent.

Based on a blend of Evolving Hockey's and MoneyPuck's models, Wolf ranks seventh among starting goalies in GSAx. The only other times a rookie goalie has been a top 10 starter are Carey Price in 2008 (eighth), Tuukka Rask in 2010 (seventh) and Matt Murray in 2017 (sixth). Wolf has arguably had a stronger rookie season than all of them and has been an immediate star saving 15 goals above expected. Goalies don't usually get a lot of love for the Calder — all three of those aforementioned goalies finished fourth — and that needs to change for Wolf. He's been amazing and is the only reason the Flames are somehow in the thick of the playoff race. If there's an exception to the rule, he's it.

So too, though, is Hutson whose offensive output as a defender puts him in rarified air. For the season, Hutson is on pace for an Offensive Rating of plus-11.6, a mark that's only been bested by one other rookie defenseman in the analytics era: Cale Makar at plus-13.4. Hutson is scoring at a 62-point pace this season and has completely unlocked Montreal's offensive potential. The Canadiens perform a lot better offensively at five-on-five with Hutson on the ice, and his tape speaks to that.

The caveat with Hutson is that he gives back a lot defensively (unlike Makar) and that's plain to see with a minus-2.0 Defensive Rating this season. Hutson more than makes up for it with his offensive ability, but it is something to consider. It's also not unlike Hughes' rookie season when he had his own issues defensively (that he's cleaned up since). A positive sign for Hutson: Hughes' Defensive Rating in his rookie year was even lower at minus-4.1 per 82 games (made up for by a plus-10.9 Offensive Rating).

If Hutson's best comp is Hughes and the only rookie defenseman who has shined more offensively is Makar ... that's hard to vote against.

It's a tough call because Wolf has been more valuable and shines brighter relative to his position, but what Hutson has done feels more rare as a rookie.

Both have separated themselves a bit from Celebrini and Michkov. That's not to say that those two haven't also been excellent. Celebrini is scoring at a scintillating 74-point pace while Michkov has scored at a 57-point pace. Both have shown a knack for driving offense at five-on-five too, though Michkov has the edge there which is why his Offensive Rating is a little higher. That Celebrini has performed so well despite a desolate roster around him is also commendable. It's just that what Wolf and Hutson are doing feels more significant.

Vezina Trophy

Given to the goalkeeper adjudged to be the best at this position.

Criteria: Goaltenders who have played half of their team's games or more, ranked by goals saved above expected courtesy of Evolving Hockey and MoneyPuck.

The Vezina has been Connor Hellebuyck's all season and that remains unchanged going into the final month of the season. He's the only goalie in the league who has played over 15 games and has a save percentage over .920. That the games played threshold for that is so low speaks to how special Hellebuyck's season has been given his game-to-game consistency. To play at this level over such a high volume of games is seriously impressive and is why he's not just the current Vezina leader, but also in the thick of the Hart race.

Hellebuyck's 34.2 goals saved above expected laps the field with Logan Thompson at 28 and Igor Shesterkin at 20.5 being the only others above 20. As impressive as Thompson has been on a per-game basis (0.7 GSAX per game to Hellebuyck's 0.63), the lack of start volume does matter. Being a workhorse goalie is a difficult job where it's harder to maintain such a high level of play over such a high number of games. The extra rest that Charlie Lindgren affords Thompson is a luxury that Hellebuyck doesn't have. As for Shesterkin — the Rangers' defense has seriously let him down this season. He's still been excellent.

Down the ballot: Lukas Dostal and Sam Montembeault have been strong despite playing behind porous defensive teams. Darcy Kuemper has been quietly excellent, Dustin Wolf has made a name for himself and Andrei Vasilevski deserves some consideration too with a resurgent season.

Art Ross Trophy

Given to the player who leads the National Hockey League in scoring points at the end of the regular season.

Criteria: Skaters ranked by their projected end-of-season point total.

This one would've been a tight race to the finish if not for a late injury to Draisaitl that could have him sidelined for enough games to be unable to catch MacKinnon. The Colorado superstar has a four-point lead with 11 games to go and projects to finish with 121 points, a mark that looks unlikely to be surpassed. Kucherov had a chance at one point but has slowed down of late. Missing four games also hurts his chances.

Also noteworthy: the NHL had nine 100-point scorers last year, 11 in 2022-23 and eight in 2021-22. This year there may only be four or five, though Kyle Connor, Mitch Marner and David Pastrnak all have a shot.

Rocket Richard Trophy

Given to the NHL's top goal scorer.

Criteria: Skaters ranked by their projected end-of-season goal total.

With an 11-goal lead and 11-to-12 games to go for his biggest challengers, it's safe to say that Leon Draisaitl has already won the Rocket Richard. Even if he misses the remainder of the season (which seems unlikely), it doesn't appear likely that either William Nylander or Kyle Connor can catch him. Both players are projected to finish just shy of 45 goals; Draisaitl already has 49.

ESPN / NHL Bubble WATCH: Projecting playoff hopes for all 32 teams

By Greg Wyshynski- March 26, 2025

The NHL playoff races are anything from settled, from seeding within the divisions to the mad dash to grab the remaining wild-card spots.

But when the dust clears and the 16 postseason spots are secured, it'll be time to ask the big question: Who will win the Stanley Cup?

As we wait for that to play out, we'll ask a different question: Who can realistically win the Stanley Cup?

The NHL Bubble Watch is our monthly check-in on the Stanley Cup playoff races using playoff probabilities and points projections from StatHletes for all 32 teams. We also reveal which teams shouldn't worry about any of this because they're lottery-bound already.

As a bonus this month, we're looking at the Stanley Cup championship probabilities from StatHletes, and which teams have the best percentage chances of raising the chalice should they get in.

But first, a look at the projected playoff bracket:

Projected playoff bracket

Note: Projected point totals via StatHletes.

Eastern Conference

M1 Washington Capitals (117.6) vs. WC2 Montreal Canadiens (88.0)

M2 Carolina Hurricanes (106.6) vs. M3 New Jersey Devils (92.5)

A1 Tampa Bay Lightning (102.4) vs. WC1 Ottawa Senators (95.1)

A2 Toronto Maple Leafs (102.0) vs. A3 Florida Panthers (102.0)

Western Conference

C1 Winnipeg Jets (114.1) vs. WC2 St. Louis Blues (93.5)

C2 Dallas Stars (108.8) vs. C3 Colorado Avalanche (104.0)

P1 Vegas Golden Knights (108.4) vs. WC1 Minnesota Wild (97.1)

P2 Los Angeles Kings (102.8) vs. P3 Edmonton Oilers (100.2)

ATLANTIC DIVISION

The locks

Florida Panthers

Record: 43-25-3, 89 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

The Panthers are finishing the regular season with a diminished roster due to player absences. Matthew Tkachuk is likely out until the playoffs with a lower-body injury. Dmitry Kulikov is week-to-week with an upper-body injury.

They're hoping trade deadline coup Brad Marchand is back soon, but defenseman Aaron Ekblad won't be back until the third game of the playoffs after violating the terms of the NHL/NHLPA Performance Enhancing Substances Program.

Stanley Cup win chances: 3.7%. Making the Stanley Cup Final is hard. Making it twice in a row is harder. Making it three straight seasons? Put it this way: Before the Lightning three-peated as a finalist from 2019-21 -- winning the Stanley Cup twice -- the NHL hadn't seen a team make three straight final rounds since the Oilers' dynasty from 1983-85. The Panthers are trying to repeat the feat of their state rivals. Stathead gives the Cats the 10th-best odds of getting there (8%) and winning it.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Record: 40-25-5, 85 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

When the Lightning were at the apex of their Stanley Cup contention, they'd be near the top of the league in goals per game and in the top 10 for team defense, thanks in no small part to having Andrei Vasilevski, considered at the time the best goalie in the world.

Well, what do we have here: The 2024-25 Lightning are one of the NHL's top scoring teams thanks to another MVP-worthy campaign by Nikita Kucherov; and while Vasilevski has ceded the goalie throne to Connor Hellebuyck, he's back to his dominant self after a few middling seasons. Stathead gives the Lightning the best percentage chance of winning the Atlantic.

Stanley Cup win chances: 13.0%. Tampa Bay has the third-best chance to win the Stanley Cup. While getting a higher seed and a presumably easier first-round matchup would help, the Bolts also boast a roster of proven playoff performers -- including Jake Guentzel, one of the most accomplished postseason scorers (top 10 in goals) in the past nine postseasons.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Record: 42-25-3, 87 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

What should be clear about the Maple Leafs by now is that the regular season doesn't matter, outside of securing playoff qualification. It's all about what Toronto does -- or annually, doesn't do -- in the postseason. And yet the emotional swings for the Maple Leafs and their fans since the 4 Nations Face-Off have been palpable: five straight wins, followed by losing five of six games, followed by three quality victories, followed by a loss to moribund Nashville.

Everyone is looking for reasons to panic weeks before the playoffs. Probably not the best time for Scott Laughton to go pointless with a minus-5 since the trade deadline.

Stanley Cup win chances: 5.6%. The Maple Leafs' pursuit of their first Stanley Cup championship since 1967 has some numbers in their favor, including an 11% chance of emerging from the Eastern Conference, the fourth-highest chances among those teams. Are Joseph Woll and Anthony Stolarz the goaltenders to backstop the Leafs to a championship round for the first time since the 2002 conference finals?

Ottawa Senators

Record: 37-27-5, 79 points

Playoff chances: 98.2%

Welcome to the locks, Ottawa Senators. Their recent 8-2-1 streak was enough to propel them into the first wild-card spot and up their playoff probability over 98% -- not bad for a team that had around a 43% chance of making the postseason cut in our last Bubble Watch.

What's turned their season around? Well, giving Linus Ullmark the crease was a start, as he has started 13 of the past 14 Senators games entering Tuesday night against Buffalo. The addition of Dylan Cozens at the trade deadline is getting great early returns, and their forward group overall has been contributing greatly to the cause.

Stanley Cup win chances: 2.2%. Not for nothing, but Ottawa's last trip to the Eastern Conference finals was also their last appearance in the Stanley Cup playoffs: 2016-17, losing to the Penguins in double overtime in Game 7. (What a sliding doors moment that would have been for the franchise.) As the first wild card, Ottawa will face the top seed in the Atlantic Division, and there's certainly one matchup on the table they'd love to make happen, for the sake of Ontario.

Work to do

Montreal Canadiens

Record: 33-27-9, 75 points

Playoff chances: 48.8%

The Bubble Watch is nothing if not a snapshot of the NHL at a given moment.

In January, the Habs had a 43.4% chance of making the playoffs. Then they lost eight of 10 games before the February Bubble Watch, knocking those chances down to under 9% and ending up in the lottery-bound tier.

But Montreal has jumped ahead of the mediocre pack on the bubble and into the last wild-card spot thanks to a stretch of 13 games in which they have just one regulation loss (8-1-3).

Stanley Cup win chances: 0.9%. The Canadiens aren't going to be favored in a first-round series if they get into the postseason. Stathead gives them just a 13% chance of advancing to the second round, which probably also explains their miniscule Stanley Cup odds.

But the Habs are a classic "team that you don't want to face in the first round": an unexpected playoff contender without much to lose, a team that plays with exuberance and confidence, and one that has some game-changing players who can turn a series. Ask a Capitals fan who remembers the 2010 postseason if they want to see the Canadiens in this scenario again ...

Long shots at best

Detroit Red Wings

Record: 33-31-6, 72 points

Playoff chances: 3.0%

Last month, we asked if the Detroit playoff drought was finally over, as the Red Wings last made the playoffs in 2016. The answer appears to be "the drought shall continue," as a stretch of nine losses in 11 games has taken Detroit's point projection from around 90 points to 81.6 points on the season.

Coach Todd McLellan could do only so much to turn the season around in Detroit. Ultimately, this comes down to the players and the general manager who constructed the roster.

Stanley Cup win chances: 0.1%. If the Red Wings somehow sneak into the final wild-card spot with a torrid last few weeks -- they have a 2.9% chance of taking WC2 -- the odds are heavily against them doing anything of consequence in the postseason.

Lottery-bound

Boston Bruins

Record: 30-33-9, 69 points

Playoff chances: 0.1%

The NHL trade deadline was GM Don Sweeney waving the white flag on this season, and his team has responded in kind. The Bruins have lost six of eight games since the deadline, although the malaise set in well before that: three wins in their past 17 games, tracking back to Feb. 5.

They weren't lottery-bound in the last Bubble Watch. They certainly are now.

Buffalo Sabres

Record: 28-35-6, 62 points

Playoff chances: 0.0%

The Sabres' postseason drought will reach 14 seasons, as a six-game losing streak after the 4 Nations Face-Off sent them plummeting down the Eastern Conference standings.

As usual, the only thing Sabres fans have to watch in May is Bill Daly turning over logo cards at the draft lottery.

METRO DIVISION

The locks

Washington Capitals

Record: 47-15-8, 102 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Spencer Carbery has been the head coach of the Capitals for two seasons. In his first campaign, he turned a Washington team many assumed would be in the lottery into a wild-card team, albeit one that made but a cameo appearance in the playoffs. In Year 2, his Capitals were the first team to receive an X next to their name in the standings, clinching a playoff spot before the calendar turned to April.

Alex Ovechkin's goal record chase rightfully gets all the attention, but Washington has been a heck of a story in support of it.

Stanley Cup win chances: 9.8%. The Capitals have the fifth-best odds to win the Stanley Cup, better than those of the Jets, against whom they've been jockeying for the Presidents' Trophy. Of course, perhaps they're actually playing hot potato with it, considering the last 11 Presidents' Trophy winners have all fallen short of the Stanley Cup Final, with as many losing in the first round as the conference final (two).

Carolina Hurricanes

Record: 43-23-4, 90 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

All that drama surrounding Mikko Rantanen did little to knock the Hurricanes off course. Their eight-game winning streak ran through the trade deadline, having won nine of 10 overall.

Carolina is doing what it does: Possessing the puck, placing in the top 10 offensively and defensively, and killing penalties better than anyone in the NHL. The question is whether coach Rod Brind'Amour's team can unlock whatever has held them back in the playoffs without the benefit of "rental with playoff gravitas" like Rantanen or Jake Guentzel.

Stanley Cup win chances: 14.0%. When the Hurricanes retraded Rantanen at the deadline, many wondered what that meant for their Stanley Cup chances. Statisticians have them with the second-best odds of any NHL team to make the Stanley Cup Final (25.9%) and to win the whole thing. How they've played post-Rantanen has done little to dismiss that notion.

New Jersey Devils

Record: 37-28-7, 81 points

Playoff chances: 94.6%

When the Devils lost Jack Hughes on March 5 to season-ending surgery, they were third in the Metro with 71 points but had gone just 9-11-3 since Jan. 1. They subsequently went 4-4-0 heading into Monday's battle with the Canucks, hanging onto the No. 3 seed in the division by their fingertips.

Making matters worse: a long-term injury to top defenseman Dougie Hamilton and the porous play of starting goalie Jacob Markstrom.

Stanley Cup win chances: 1.0%. No Jack Hughes, no chance the Devils can overcome the beasts of the East or the best of the West to win the Stanley Cup this season. At least based on how they've played for most of their time without him. Their 3.33 goals-against average at 5-on-5 in that span was ahead of only the Sabres and Blackhawks leaguewide.

Work to do

New York Islanders

Record: 32-28-10, 74 points

Playoff chances: 28.0%

The Islanders are doing what they need to do in order to stay in this playoff race: Ride Ilya Sorokin, who has started 16 of their past 18 games; and don't leave points in the table, having gone 3-0-2 in their past five games.

But as the Isles continue to push for the final wild-card spot, they do so with the seventh-toughest schedule in the NHL down the stretch -- including multiple games against Tampa Bay and Washington.

Stanley Cup win chances: 0.4%. The odds aren't in the Islanders' favor to do anything in the postseason, with just a 7.5% chance of making the second round.

New York Rangers

Record: 34-31-6, 74 points

Playoff chances: 17.9%

The Rangers simply can't get rolling long enough to bank points in the playoff race.

They've had three two-game winning streaks since the 4 Nations Face-Off; twice, they erased those gains with multi-game losing streaks.

The Rangers looked to be turning things around with a win in Minnesota and a convincing victory against Columbus, a fellow playoff contender in the East. They followed that up with three straight regulation losses at home.

One step forward, three stumbles back, all seemingly all season long for this group.

Stanley Cup win chances: 0.3%. Could the Rangers find another level in the postseason? This was a conference finalist last season, with an all-world goaltender in Igor Shesterkin, and some elite offensive talent still on the roster. Plus, they have J.T. Miller's "my problem is I care too much" intensity now, too. The odds say very much no -- just a 1.5% chance of making the conference finals again -- but it would be fun to find out.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Record: 32-29-9, 73 points

Playoff chances: 9.4%

There is no discernible Stadium Series curse, but if there was ever time to establish one it would be to explain how the Blue Jackets went from looking like a playoff team -- and the best story in the NHL, to that end -- to a group struggling to find its footing late in the season.

After their win over Detroit at The Horseshoe on March 1, the Blue Jackets lost eight of nine games, all but one of them in regulation. Their scoring dried up: 2.01 goals per game at 5-on-5 in that stretch, despite an expected goals of 3.13 per 60 minutes at 5-on-5. There's still time for Columbus to finish its story, but time is running short.

Stanley Cup win chances: 0.1%. Like the rest of the Eastern Conference bubble, not much is expected from Columbus if they make the wild-card cut. But if the Blue Jackets overcome all they've dealt with, in a season dedicated to the memory of late star Johnny Gaudreau? If there was ever a time to expect a team to defy the odds ...

Long shots at best

Pittsburgh Penguins

Record: 29-32-11, 69 points

Playoff chances: 0.1%

It speaks volumes about the current playoff race that the Penguins still have any mathematical chance of making the postseason cut, but here we are. Their recent play, going 5-1-1, gives them a different trajectory than a team like Boston, despite being tied in points and playoff probability.

Tristan Jarry returning from the AHL to lead the Penguins to a playoff spot would be one of the most inexplicable things of the NHL season, but Sidney Crosby would take it.

Stanley Cup win chances: 0.1%. Pittsburgh has had a "just get in" mentality for a while, hoping that their veterans could take on anyone in a seven-game series. As of now, Statisticians doesn't expect any winning if they somehow got in: Pittsburgh has the same minuscule chance of winning a playoff round (0.1%) as they do winning the Stanley Cup.

Lottery-bound

Philadelphia Flyers

Record: 28-35-9, 65 points

Playoff chances: 0.0%

The Flyers didn't have much of a chance anyway with the worst goaltending in the NHL, sporting a .873 save percentage on the season. But Philly went from near the playoff bubble to absolutely cratering after the calendar flipped to March, with one win in 11 games (1-8-1).

It wasn't just the goaltending that did them in: They Flyers were 27th in 5-on-5 offensive (1.96 goals per 60 minutes) during that span.

CENTRAL DIVISION

The locks

Winnipeg Jets

Record: 48-19-4, 100 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Sometimes the Jets lose games that leave one baffled: This is a likely conference champion that has dropped games to the Predators, Flyers and Sabres in the past month.

But whenever Winnipeg wobbles, the Jets find their footing again rather quickly as the league's best defensive team and its third-best offensive team. Having a buster of slumps like Connor Hellebuyck in goal certainly helps, especially when he has been in MVP form for most of the season.

Stanley Cup win chances: 6.5%. The Jets have the sixth-best Stanley Cup odds despite being one of the two best regular-season teams throughout the campaign. For Winnipeg, first thing's first: This team has been bounced in five games in the first round in consecutive seasons. Statisticians give the Jets a 60% chance of advancing to the second round this postseason.

Dallas Stars

Record: 45-21-4, 94 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Mikko Rantanen makes the Stanley Cup-contending Stars team even more formidable. It's the same logic the Hurricanes had in acquiring him: Like Carolina, Dallas has hit a ceiling in their conference, falling one series victory short of the Stanley Cup Final.

Rantanen's reputation as a playoff force is, theoretically, something that could push Dallas over the top to their first Cup Final since losing to Tampa Bay in 2020. With a little luck, and a lot of good health, it could happen.

Stanley Cup win chances: 3.0%. The Stars are not going to be lucky with their seeding, as they seem destined to face Rantanen's old mates the Avalanche in the first round. They might also not be healthy: Coach Peter DeBoer said that star defenseman Miro Heiskanen might not be ready for the start of the playoffs, having been on the shelf since January. Dallas has the 11th-best odds to win the Cup per Statisticians. They have just a 37.1% chance of advancing past the first round. Not coincidentally, the Avalanche have a 64.7% chance of moving on to Round 2.

Colorado Avalanche

Record: 43-25-3, 89 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

The Avalanche turned a likely playoff berth into a near certainty since the last Bubble Watch, thanks in part to a post-4 Nations surge in which they went 10-1-1. They scored five or more goals in six of those games.

Nathan MacKinnon has played himself into a potential second straight Hart Trophy win, while GM Chris MacFarland's trade deadline moves have appeared to make a great team even better -- to say nothing of his work in fixing their goaltending earlier this season or getting Martin Necas for Rantanen, who has outscored Rantanen since that blockbuster.

Stanley Cup win chances: 12.0%. The Avalanche have the fourth-best odds to win the Stanley Cup this season, and the second-best in the Western Conference. If they can get past what's going to be an opening-round war against the Stars -- assuming the Wild or Blues don't surge up to the top three in the Central -- the sky's the limit for Colorado. (And boy, do we want to see that Rantanen vs. Avalanche matchup in the West.)

Minnesota Wild

Record: 40-26-5, 85 points

Playoff chances: 96.8%

Has any NHL coach been more overlooked than John Hynes of the Wild this season? Minnesota lost its MVP in Kirill Kaprizov back in January to a lower-body injury; he last played on Jan. 26. That's after he was injured back in December, missing a month of games then as well. In total, their star has played 37 games this season.

Since he went out in January, the Wild are chugging along with an 11-8-0 record (0.575 points percentage) despite other injuries, including one to center Joel Eriksson Ek. They missed Jared Spurgeon in January for a bit, too. But Hynes has coached them to a wild-card spot they haven't surrendered.

Stanley Cup win chances: 1.0%. All that said, the Wild have yet to show the makings of a Stanley Cup contender this season, even when Kaprizov was healthy. If they're at full strength, they could certainly make life interesting for any number of contenders in the West. But the Wild have just a 7.8% chance of making the conference finals, let alone play for the Cup.

Work to do

St. Louis Blues

Record: 37-28-7, 81 points

Playoff chances: 71.1%

Full marks to the Blues: In a league where so many teams are trying to open the door to a playoff spot only to fumble with the handle, St. Louis has basically kicked it down. The Blues had a 13.4% chance of making the playoffs in the last Bubble Watch.

Their 12-2-1 run since Feb. 23 gives them the best points percentage in that span (.833), right ahead of the Avalanche (.800). It's the Blues' wild card to lose at this point.

Stanley Cup win chances: 4.6%. The Blues have a nearly 34% chance of advancing past the first round if they make the cut, which might be what happens when your potential first-round opponent can't seem to get out of the first round (Winnipeg). St. Louis has much longer odds in capturing the Cup. If only there were a recent example of a Blues team that had a dominant second half of the season, with a combination of solid offense and strong goaltending from Jordan Binnington, that shocked the NHL by winning the Cup ...

Utah Hockey Club

Record: 32-28-11, 75 points

Playoff chances: 13.3%

This is the playoff race that the Arizona Coyotes should have had last season, before relocation talk permeated their dressing room and was arguably the main cause of their spiraling losing streak. Instead, it's Utah fans that get to watch a collection of young stars learning what playoff race intensity is all about.

They're hanging tough in the Western Conference, getting healthy at the right time and watching goalie Karel Vejmelka giving it everything he's got night after night (after night after night). Don't count out the Hockey Club yet -- and don't sleep on the fact they close the season with a game against St. Louis.

Stanley Cup win chances: 0.7%. Look, it would be a blast to see playoff hockey in the NHL's first season in Salt Lake City. But let's give this team a nickname before seeing anything etched on the Cup, shall we?

Lottery-bound

Nashville Predators

Record: 26-36-8, 60 points

Playoff chances: 0.0%

The Predators are predicted to finish with 73 points at the end of this nightmarish season, after which they'll count their lottery blessings and reassess how it all went so wrong after their free agent spending spree last offseason.

Chicago Blackhawks

Record: 21-41-9, 51 points

Playoff chances: 0.0%

According to Statthletes' points projections, it'll be a thrilling race to the bottom for the Blackhawks (59 points) and the Sharks (58.7 points) to see which team ends up with the highest percentage of balls in the ol' lottery machine.

PACIFIC DIVISION

The locks

Vegas Golden Knights

Record: 42-20-8, 92 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

The Golden Knights have been atop the Pacific for most of the season, cruising along with a .657 points percentage despite several injury bumps along the way: Entering Monday, only 10 Vegas players had appeared in more than 60 games on the season. William Karlsson, Mark Stone and Shea Theodore -- expected back soon -- all missed time.

The hope is that Tomas Hertl, injured against the Lightning on Sunday, won't miss too much of it. Vegas has powered through it all with a team that can beat you offensively or defensively, ranked in the top seven in both.

Stanley Cup win chances: 14.3%. At ESPN BET, seven teams have better odds than the Golden Knights to win the Stanley Cup. Stathletes evaluates the field differently: Vegas has the highest percentage probability of winning the Stanley Cup this season. The Knights also have the highest probability of making their conference finals (49.0%) of any team in the league.

Los Angeles Kings

Record: 39-21-9, 87 points

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Talk about under the radar: The Kings had the sixth-best points percentage in the NHL through 69 games (.630), ahead of teams like the Avalanche and Panthers. They've steadfastly been in the top three defensively this season, playing well in front of Darcy Kuemper's resurgent season.

Los Angeles averages less than three goals per game (2.93) and has only three players with 20 or more goals. But as Carolina and Boston recently found out when the Kings hung seven goals on both of them, when Los Angeles gets its offense going it can really go.

Stanley Cup win chances: 4.6%. The Cup chances aside, the probability Kings fans are most interested in would be the 57.7% chance that Los Angeles will reach the second round. That would mean the Kings will have done something they've been unable to do for three straight seasons: Defeat the Oilers in the opening round. Home ice could be a factor here: The Kings are an astonishing 25-3-4 at home, including a franchise-record home point streak of 14 games.

Edmonton Oilers

Record: 41-24-5, 87 points

Playoff chances: 99.5%

The Oilers are ensconced in the top three of the Pacific Division, with a 96.7% chance of finishing either second or third. That's important given the fact that both Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl are out of the lineup in the near term with injuries.

Edmonton has been an inconsistent group all season, especially defensively. But they've already shown how far a healthy and dominant McDavid and Draisaitl can carry them in the postseason.

Stanley Cup win chances: 1.9%. This was the most surprising number in the Bubble Watch. The Oilers came within one win of capturing the Stanley Cup last season. While there are some players missing from that team, the majority of this Edmonton group experienced that run. But given their play this season and the strength of the conference, Stathletes computes the Oilers' probability to win the Stanley Cup is worse than 13 other teams.

Work to do

Calgary Flames

Record: 33-25-11, 77 points

Playoff chances: 10.6%

The Flames are 4-2-1 in their past seven games, including a sweep of the New York teams. The problem is that the team they're chasing went 6-1 in that span. As much as the Blues are rolling right now for wild card No. 2, Calgary has a few games in hand and has played well enough to hang tight in this race.

As long as Dustin Wolf keeps coming up large in his outstanding rookie season, the Flames are going to be in this thing. Alas, they don't have any games left against the Blues.

Stanley Cup win chances: 0.1%. The accomplishment for the Flames would be to get back into the playoffs in a season in which few expected they could make the cut. The experience for players like Wolf in a Stanley Cup postseason atmosphere would be a win in itself.

Vancouver Canucks

Record: 33-26-12, 78 points

Playoff chances: 8.9%

This Canucks season has had, in no particular order:

- A player vs. player feud that ended with J.T. Miller getting traded

- The baffling statistical regression of franchise player Elias Pettersson

- A major injury loss of starting goaltender Thatcher Demko

- A major injury loss of star defenseman Quinn Hughes, who was having an MVP season

- Another soap opera surrounding that defenseman's availability as a late-tournament replacement in the 4 Nations Face-Off

- The trade deadline mystery of star winger Brock Boeser's pending unrestricted free agency and lack of a contract extension

- And the ongoing speculation that head coach Rick Tocchet might leave after this season

That they have a percentage chance at the playoffs over zero at this point is nothing short of miraculous.

Stanley Cup win chances: 0.1%. While there would be no fitting way to cap a chaotic season with the first Stanley Cup win in franchise history, the odds are unfortunately against it.

Lottery-bound

Anaheim Ducks

Record: 30-32-8, 68 points

Playoff chances: 0.1%

The Ducks stoked some faint playoff hopes by winning six of seven games around the 4 Nations Face-Off, but haven't been able to put together another streak to make things interesting. Anaheim is 28th in the NHL in goals per game.

Seattle Kraken

Record: 30-36-5, 65 points

Playoff chances: 0.0%

The Kraken's fourth season might be their most disappointing campaign: Regression under a new head coach and after some significant offseason signings, while finishing with a points percentage that isn't good enough for playoff contention or bad enough for strong lottery odds. The epitome of "just there."

San Jose Sharks

Record: 19-42-9, 47 points

Playoff chances: 0.0%

As the Sharks and Blackhawks vie for the league's worst points percentage, keep in mind that Chicago has the fifth-toughest schedule for the rest of the season while San Jose has the eighth-hardest.

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: Toughest opponents for Capitals, Jets

By ESPN staff- March 26, 2025

The Washington Capitals have officially punched their ticket to the postseason dance already, and the Winnipeg Jets are well on their way to doing so as well (a win over the Buffalo Sabres on Sunday would have done it, but that was not in the cards apparently).

Those two teams meet on Tuesday night (8 p.m. ET, ESPN+), and could meet again if they make the Stanley Cup Final. As of now, each is poised to face the second wild-card team in their respective conference -- might they prefer one of the bubble teams over the others?

In Winnipeg's case, the team currently in the second wild-card spot is the St. Louis Blues. The Jets have gone 2-1 against the Blues this season, with one of the wins coming via shootout, and they'll face off again on Apr. 7. If the Calgary Flames slide into that spot for an old-school Smythe Division showdown, the Jets also went 2-1 against them this season (though the last game was back on Jan. 26).

The Utah Hockey Club could make a push into that spot, and -- you guessed it -- the Jets have gone 2-1 against the NHL's newest team. The final team with a legit shot at the West's last spot is the Vancouver Canucks, against whom the Jets have gone 1-1, with their final matchup this Saturday.

The Caps' first-round opponent at the moment is the Montreal Canadiens; Washington won two of three against Montreal, with the loss coming in OT. If the New York Rangers slide in as the opponent, the Caps will hope to avenge their sweep in last year's playoffs, and appear likely to do so based on regular-season results; they won each of the three matchups against the Blueshirts. Washington won its only matchup against the New York Islanders this season, with two games remaining.

The Capitals have also had success against the Columbus Blue Jackets (two wins in two games thus far, with two remaining in April) and Detroit Red Wings (two wins this month after a loss on Dec. 29).

So although the path will get more difficult as the playoff tournament wears on, it appears that both the Caps and Jets are in good shape -- on paper, at least -- heading into the opening round.

There is less than a month left until April 17, the final day of the regular season, and we'll help you track it all with the NHL playoff watch. As we traverse the final stretch, we'll provide details on all the playoff races, along with the teams jockeying for position in the 2025 NHL draft lottery.

Note: Playoff chances are via Statathletes.

Jump ahead:

Current playoff matchups

Clinching scenarios

Today's schedule

Yesterday's scores

Expanded standings

Race for No. 1 pick

Current playoff matchups

Eastern Conference

A1 Florida Panthers vs. WC1 Ottawa Senators

A2 Toronto Maple Leafs vs. A3 Tampa Bay Lightning

M1 Washington Capitals vs. WC2 Montreal Canadiens

M2 Carolina Hurricanes vs. M3 New Jersey Devils

Western Conference

C1 Winnipeg Jets vs. WC2 St. Louis Blues

C2 Dallas Stars vs. C3 Colorado Avalanche

P1 Vegas Golden Knights vs. WC1 Minnesota Wild

P2 Los Angeles Kings vs. P3 Edmonton Oilers

Clinching scenarios

The Winnipeg Jets will clinch a playoff berth if either:

They win, or lose in overtime/shootout to the Washington Capitals

The St. Louis Blues lose to the Montreal Canadiens in any fashion

Tuesday's games

Note: All times ET. All games not on TNT or NHL Network are available to stream on ESPN+ (local blackout restrictions apply).

Ottawa Senators at Buffalo Sabres, 7 p.m.

Philadelphia Flyers at Toronto Maple Leafs, 7 p.m.

Pittsburgh Penguins at Tampa Bay Lightning, 7 p.m.

Nashville Predators at Carolina Hurricanes, 7 p.m.

Montreal Canadiens at St. Louis Blues, 8 p.m.

Vegas Golden Knights at Minnesota Wild, 8 p.m.

Washington Capitals at Winnipeg Jets, 8 p.m.

Detroit Red Wings at Colorado Avalanche, 9 p.m.

Seattle Kraken at Calgary Flames, 9 p.m.

New York Rangers at Los Angeles Kings, 10:30 p.m.

Monday's scoreboard

Vancouver Canucks 4, New Jersey Devils 3 (SO)

Columbus Blue Jackets 4, New York Islanders 3 (SO)

Dallas Stars 3, Minnesota Wild 0

Detroit Red Wings 5, Utah Hockey Club 1

Expanded standings

Atlantic Division

Florida Panthers

Points: 89

Regulation wins: 35

Playoff position: A1

Games left: 11

Points pace: 102.8

Next game: vs. UTA (Friday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Toronto Maple Leafs

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 34

Playoff position: A2

Games left: 12

Points pace: 101.9

Next game: vs. PHI (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Tampa Bay Lightning

Points: 85

Regulation wins: 34

Playoff position: A3

Games left: 12

Points pace: 99.6

Next game: vs. PIT (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Ottawa Senators

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: WC1

Games left: 13

Points pace: 93.9

Next game: @ BUF (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 98.2%

Tragic number: N/A

Montreal Canadiens

Points: 75

Regulation wins: 24

Playoff position: WC2

Games left: 13

Points pace: 89.1

Next game: @ STL (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 48.8%

Tragic number: N/A

Detroit Red Wings

Points: 72

Regulation wins: 25

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 12

Points pace: 84.3

Next game: @ COL (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 3.0%

Tragic number: 22

Boston Bruins

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 23

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 10

Points pace: 78.6

Next game: @ ANA (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 15

Buffalo Sabres

Points: 62

Regulation wins: 22

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 13

Points pace: 73.7

Next game: vs. OTT (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: ~0%

Tragic number: 14

Metro Division

x - Washington Capitals

Points: 102

Regulation wins: 40

Playoff position: M1

Games left: 12

Points pace: 119.5

Next game: @ WPG (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Carolina Hurricanes

Points: 90

Regulation wins: 38

Playoff position: M2

Games left: 12

Points pace: 105.4

Next game: vs. NSH (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

New Jersey Devils

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 33

Playoff position: M3

Games left: 10

Points pace: 92.3

Next game: @ CHI (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 94.6%

Tragic number: N/A

New York Islanders

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 25

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 12

Points pace: 86.7

Next game: vs. VAN (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 28.0%

Tragic number: 24

New York Rangers

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 31

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 11

Points pace: 85.5

Next game: @ LA (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 17.9%

Tragic number: 22

Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 23

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 12

Points pace: 85.5

Next game: vs. VAN (Friday)

Playoff chances: 9.4%

Tragic number: 23

Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 20

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 10

Points pace: 78.6
Next game: @ TB (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 0.1%
Tragic number: 15
Philadelphia Flyers
Points: 65
Regulation wins: 17
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 10
Points pace: 74.0
Next game: vs. OTT (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: ~0%
Tragic number: 11
Central Division
Winnipeg Jets
Points: 100
Regulation wins: 38
Playoff position: C1
Games left: 11
Points pace: 115.5
Next game: vs. WSH (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Dallas Stars
Points: 94
Regulation wins: 36
Playoff position: C2
Games left: 12
Points pace: 110.1
Next game: @ EDM (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Colorado Avalanche

Points: 89

Regulation wins: 36

Playoff position: C3

Games left: 11

Points pace: 102.8

Next game: vs. DET (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Minnesota Wild

Points: 85

Regulation wins: 32

Playoff position: WC1

Games left: 11

Points pace: 98.2

Next game: vs. VGK (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 96.8%

Tragic number: N/A

St. Louis Blues

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 27

Playoff position: WC2

Games left: 10

Points pace: 92.3

Next game: vs. MTL (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: 71.1%

Tragic number: N/A

Utah Hockey Club

Points: 75

Regulation wins: 24

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 11

Points pace: 86.6

Next game: @ TB (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 13.3%
Tragic number: 17
Nashville Predators
Points: 60
Regulation wins: 22
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 12
Points pace: 70.3
Next game: @ CAR (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: ~0%
Tragic number: 4
e - Chicago Blackhawks
Points: 51
Regulation wins: 18
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 11
Points pace: 58.9
Next game: vs. NJ (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
Pacific Division
Vegas Golden Knights
Points: 92
Regulation wins: 39
Playoff position: P1
Games left: 12
Points pace: 107.8
Next game: @ MIN (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Los Angeles Kings
Points: 87
Regulation wins: 34

Playoff position: P3
Games left: 13
Points pace: 103.4
Next game: vs. NYR (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Edmonton Oilers
Points: 87
Regulation wins: 30
Playoff position: P2
Games left: 12
Points pace: 101.9
Next game: vs. DAL (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 99.5%
Tragic number: N/A
Vancouver Canucks
Points: 78
Regulation wins: 25
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 11
Points pace: 90.1
Next game: @ NYI (Wednesday)
Playoff chances: 8.9%
Tragic number: 20
Calgary Flames
Points: 77
Regulation wins: 26
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 13
Points pace: 91.5
Next game: vs. SEA (Tuesday)
Playoff chances: 10.6%
Tragic number: 23

Anaheim Ducks

Points: 68

Regulation wins: 22

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 12

Points pace: 79.7

Next game: vs. BOS (Wednesday)

Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 12

Seattle Kraken

Points: 65

Regulation wins: 24

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 11

Points pace: 75.1

Next game: @ CGY (Tuesday)

Playoff chances: ~0%

Tragic number: 7

e - San Jose Sharks

Points: 47

Regulation wins: 14

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 12

Points pace: 55.1

Next game: vs. TOR (Thursday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Note: An "x" means that the team has clinched a playoff berth. An "e" means that the team has been eliminated from playoff contention.

Race for the No. 1 pick

The NHL uses a draft lottery to determine the order of the first round, so the team that finishes in last place is not guaranteed the No. 1 selection. As of 2021, a team can move up a maximum of 10 spots if it wins the lottery, so only 11 teams are eligible for the No. 1 pick. Full details on the process are [here](#). Matthew Schaefer, a defenseman for the OHL's Erie Otters, is No. 1 on the draft board.

1. San Jose Sharks
Points: 47
Regulation wins: 14
2. Chicago Blackhawks
Points: 51
Regulation wins: 18
3. Nashville Predators
Points: 60
Regulation wins: 22
4. Buffalo Sabres
Points: 62
Regulation wins: 22
5. Philadelphia Flyers
Points: 65
Regulation wins: 17
6. Seattle Kraken
Points: 65
Regulation wins: 24
7. Anaheim Ducks
Points: 68
Regulation wins: 22
8. Pittsburgh Penguins
Points: 69
Regulation wins: 20
9. Boston Bruins
Points: 69
Regulation wins: 23
10. Detroit Red Wings
Points: 72
Regulation wins: 25
11. Columbus Blue Jackets
Points: 73
Regulation wins: 23

12. New York Rangers

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 31

13. New York Islanders

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 25

14. Utah Hockey Club

Points: 75

Regulation wins: 24

15. Calgary Flames

Points: 77

Regulation wins: 26

16. Vancouver Canucks

Points: 78

Regulation wins: 25