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**February 7, 2025**

**Columbus Blue Jackets**

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## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets claw out a point from OT loss to Utah Hockey Club

**By Brian Hedger – February 7, 2025**

Damon Severson woke up sold-out Nationwide Arena with his fists Thursday night, and Ivan Provorov scored a short-handed tying goal a couple minutes later to help the Blue Jackets scratch out a point in a 3-2 overtime loss to the Utah Hockey Club.

The two veteran defensemen weren't able to give the Blue Jackets a victory, which disappointed a crowd of 18,553 after Utah's Dylan Guenther scored with 33 seconds left in OT, but the Blue Jackets still collected a point from a gutsy effort during an injury crisis with six players out. They were also forced to kill a Utah power play with top defenseman Zach Werenski in the penalty box for the final 1:22 of regulation and first 38 seconds of overtime.

"That's a good point tonight," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "Of course we wanted two, but to kill a penalty 4-on-3 like that at the end and (deal with) some adversity that we went through, it's great that we can put this in the memory bank and go, 'OK, maybe we don't have some people, maybe we don't have our best stuff but we're able to play the way that we know how to play,' and we're going to give ourselves a chance."

Earning a point moved the Blue Jackets to 60 points through their first 55 games, which has them one point back of the Detroit Red Wings (61 points) for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference. The Jackets are two behind the Ottawa Senators (62 points) for the first wild card and are tied in points with the Boston Bruins (27-23-6) in one fewer game played.

The race in the East is tight, including the New York Rangers only three points behind the Blue Jackets heading into a game Saturday night in Columbus. Each team will start the NHL's annual February midseason pause afterward, so the stakes will be high again.

"Injuries happen throughout the season for everybody," Severson said. "Obviously, it sucks. You want to play with your full projected lineup and we're no different in that, but a lot of the guys have stepped in and done a real good job for us. There's no sugar-coating it, but we've got to put a team on the ice every night, and we'll do the best we can. We're still finding a way to get points. That's the main thing."

Lawson Crouse and Olli Maata scored the goals in regulation for Utah, while Justin Danforth and Provorov scored for the Blue Jackets (26-21-8). Elvis Merzlikins started his third straight game and made 30 saves while taking the OT loss for Columbus. Connor Ingram made 20 saves while earning the goaltending win for Utah.

Danforth's goal, his first since Nov. 18 and fourth of the season, gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead 5:51 into the game. After that, Utah dominated the game's underlying statistics with wide edges in shots, attempts and possession time. The yet-to-be-named club tied it 2:06 into the second on Crawson's goal and surged ahead, 2-1, at 12:33 into the second on goal by defenseman Maata.

Severson changed the game by fighting Utah's Michael Kesselring late in the second period, when Severson took exception to Utah defenseman Michael Kesselring's hit on Blue Jackets rookie forward Mikael Pyyhtia in the Columbus zone. He grabbed Kesselring, dropped his gloves and landed a punch or two before officials broke up the scrap.

Severson was given an extra two minutes for roughing, which incensed the crowd, and the Blue Jackets killed off the ensuing Utah power play. Provorov tied it, 2-2, with five seconds left in the man-advantage

on his first NHL short-handed tally, which gave Zach Werenski a point with an assist to extend his franchise record home point streak to 20-straight games.

## Columbus Dispatch / NHL finalizes plans for outdoor game at Ohio Stadium: 6 things to know

By Brian Hedger – February 7, 2025

The NHL was back in Columbus on Wednesday for final meetings at Ohio Stadium before the league sends an ice truck to town Feb. 16 to start constructing a rink at “The Shoe” for the Blue Jackets’ first outdoor game.

There’s less than a month until the Blue Jackets face the Detroit Red Wings on March 1 at the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union Stadium Series matchup, and the NHL has fully turned its focus toward hosting its 43rd outdoor game.

“There’s still plenty of work to do,” NHL President of Events/Entertainment Steve Mayer said Wednesday. “We believe that up until the time we drop the puck on March 1, we’re here to change ideas. We’re very flexible, but we think we have an amazing plan, and we do think this is going to be one of – if not the greatest – outdoor games we’ve ever done.”

Twenty-three days out, here are some things to know about the Blue Jackets’ first outdoor game:

NHL’s ticket sales ‘going well’ for outdoor game between Columbus Blue Jackets, Detroit Red Wings

Mayer didn’t cite specifics on ticket sales, but said the amount sold thus far is about what league officials expected.

“Ticket sales are going well,” he said. “This is very typical of any of the outdoor games we’ve ever done. We still have tickets remaining, but for us ... we’re finding more and more that there’s a level of fanbase that waits to look at, ‘What’s the weather going to look like?’ and ‘OK, what am I doing on March 1?’ So, we are exactly where we want to be. We know this building is going to be filled the day of the game.”

Expect to hear Columbus Blue Jackets’ cannon boom inside Ohio Stadium

The game being hosted on Ohio State’s campus means we’ll see a lot of OSU theming. We can also expect to hear the Blue Jackets’ cannon — or some cannon — booming for the same reasons it does at Nationwide Arena. More specifically, that’s when the Blue Jackets are first welcomed to the ice, after they score goals and to cap victory celebrations.

“There’s going to be things we’re going to do within the game that take advantage of the Columbus Blue Jackets’ traditions,” Mayer said. “There are things that go on in that arena that we’re just going to bring over to this stadium. I think you know one that’s really loud and makes a lot of noise.”

NHL to hold Stadium Series pep rally featuring free O.A.R. concert, Columbus Blue Jackets

They’re not calling it a skull session, like the packed pep rallies at St. John Arena that precede Ohio State football games, but that’s a matter of phrasing. The NHL will host its version of a skull session at St. John Arena prior to the Jackets’ outdoor game, and it will feature a free concert by the band O.A.R., which has OSU ties.

The Blue Jackets will also make an appearance at the “NHL Stadium Series Pep Rally” along with OSU’s athletic band, which plays during the football team’s skull sessions.

“The way they activate everything around the stadium, we’re going to take advantage of that,” Mayer said. “I think we did play into St. John Arena. We were very impressed by how that gets activated before a football game.”

Ohio State Buckeyes, Columbus Blue Jackets themes to stand out at NHL outdoor game

Mayer said the NHL's decorative plans for Ohio Stadium will be released soon and will carry strong OSU and Blue Jackets themes. Will there be a giant buckeye nut on the field? A Brutus mural? Huge inflatable Stinger?

"We're going to release within the next week or so what the field is going to look like," Mayer said. "It's very unique. It's very 'Ohio State' and 'Columbus Blue Jackets.' You'll get it the second you see it."

The Buckeyes' football national championship will also be recognized along with the national title won last year by the OSU women's hockey team.

NHL to memorialize Gaudreau brothers, honor their family during 'Stadium Series' game

Mayer said the tragic offseason deaths of Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, will be recognized by the league.

"It's an NHL story, whether we're doing an outdoor game here or not," Mayer said. "It's tragic. It's been some time, but there will be moments within the context of our game where we will honor Johnny, Matthew and the family, so we're not ignoring it at all, but we also want to be very respectful."

Rink construction for NHL outdoor game to start Feb. 17 at Ohio Stadium

An ice truck and construction crew are scheduled to arrive Feb. 16 in Columbus for the start of construction on the rink and other design elements the following day. The NHL used to keep its outdoor game designs under tight wraps, but everything is publicly available now.

Media wishing to watch the process can do that daily, while the league's website will provide a link to a live camera in the stadium that tracks progress. It takes a crew of 300 to complete.

"They work hard," Mayer said. "We're open 24 hours trying to get this done in time. ... It's a two-week process, and we use every minute of the two weeks. It's fascinating."

## The Athletic / Damon Severson's scrap, Ivan Provorov's short-handed goal help Blue Jackets steal a point

**By Aaron Portzline – February 7, 2025**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It wasn't Damon Severson's intent to send a jolt up and down the Columbus Blue Jackets' bench. He didn't mean to bring life to an above-capacity crowd in Nationwide Arena, which had spent most of its energy to that point booing NHL referees.

But when Severson, a veteran defenseman, stepped in for a fight after watching teammate Mikael Pyyhtiä get blasted along the wall, it delivered all of that and more.

It feels like the Blue Jackets are just holding on as they play their way to a much-needed two-week break for the NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off. Riddled by injuries, they need every player in the lineup to empty their tanks and take on new roles just to stay afloat.

Thursday's 3-2 overtime loss to the Utah Hockey Club was a clear example. No, the Blue Jackets weren't happy getting 1 point instead of 2. But with all things considered, it's a pretty good point.

Justin Danforth and Ivan Provorov scored goals for the Blue Jackets, while goaltender Elvis Merzlikins had 30 saves before allowing a goal with just 33 seconds left in overtime to Utah's Dylan Guenther, who finished a breakaway by scoring off his own rebound.

"The players aren't stupid," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "They understand where they're at, and whatever role we've asked a player to play, whether it's elevated or not, they're just competing and they're playing hard every night.

"That's why we're in these games. Even the ones like tonight when we lose, we're battling. It's a credit to all the guys stepping on the ice."

The Blue Jackets, just back from a four-game, four-time-zone road trip, could not get going for most of two periods. Part of that was fatigue, surely, but they're also trying to get by without two-thirds of their top forward line and half of their top defensive pair, among other injuries.

Defenseman Zach Werenski, who missed Tuesday's game in Buffalo, returned, but he's not playing at 100 percent. He did, however, have a second-period assist to become only the fourth defenseman in NHL history to score at least a point in 20 straight home games.

The Blue Jackets trailed 2-1 well into the second, but that's when Severson helped turn things around.

At 17:26 of the second, Utah's Michael Kesselring blasted Blue Jackets forward Pyyhtiä as he battled for a puck along the wall in the Columbus zone. Severson, standing nearby, skated a straight path toward Kesselring to challenge him.

"I'm not a huge believer in there having to be a fight after every hit, by any means," Severson said. "I just felt like that was one of those plays ... I don't want to say it was a blindside, but (Pyyhtiä) wasn't expecting it, just the way he was turned. He was in a vulnerable spot for sure.

"I had a chance to step up for a teammate there. We didn't have our best in the early going, so obviously that's going to help out. You make a split decision on the ice."

Severson handled himself well against Kesselring, glancing Kesselring's chin with a wild right before his momentum carried him to the ice.

The Blue Jackets were irate that Severson — not Kesselring — was given an additional roughing penalty in addition to the offsetting fighting majors, putting Columbus on the penalty kill.

“I don’t know why we killed,” Evason said. “That’s what you want a guy to do, go over and grab the guy and see if the guy wants to fight, and then they fight. I don’t know why the roughing was called.”

It worked out OK. Actually, quite well.

Near the end of the kill, Provorov skated the puck out of the zone and, finding no resistance, carried the puck the length of the ice. As he entered the right circle, he let loose a wrister that beat Utah goaltender Connor Ingram to the near post, tying the game at 2-2.

“We didn’t really agree with the call,” Provorov said. “It should have just been even strength. But anytime you get a penalty when somebody is defending a teammate, we’re going to kill that one and we’re going to battle extra hard. I saw an opportunity to jump up and make a play.”

In Provorov’s 669-game NHL career, that was his first short-handed goal.

“I’ll take ‘em any way I can,” he said.

For most of the third period, the Blue Jackets seemed intent on simply playing for OT and the standings point it would provide. They dragged it there, thanks to a penalty kill for the final 1:22 of regulation after Werenski went off for tripping.

It’s quite something to see the line combos and situational player usage Evason and his staff have turned to with center Sean Monahan, right winger Kirill Marchenko and defenseman Dante Fabbro out of the lineup. Those are just the recent losses.

Luca Del Bel Belluz, who spent the first three months of the season with AHL Cleveland, is the second-line center. Del Bel Belluz and Mathieu Olivier, already playing higher in an NHL lineup than ever (third line), are on the second power-play unit.

When Guenther scored the overtime winner, the Blue Jackets had third- and fourth-line grinders Danforth and Sean Kuraly on the ice with Provorov.

“It’s easy to go, ‘Ah, well, we’re missing these guys and we don’t have the depth and we’re elevating’ ... and all this stuff,” Evason said. “But it’s exciting, too, right? Guys are stepping up in different roles and thriving in it, and that’s exciting for us as an organization and exciting for us as coaches.

“To kill a penalty like that at the end, and the adversity we went through ... we can put this in our memory bank. Maybe we don’t have our best stuff. Maybe we don’t have some people. But we know how to play in a way where we give ourselves a chance.”

## [BlueJackets.com / Utah tops Blue Jackets in overtime on Guenther goal](#)

By Craig Merz – February 7, 2025

COLUMBUS -- Dylan Guenther scored in overtime for the second straight game, giving the Utah Hockey Club a 3-2 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena on Thursday.

Guenther took an outlet pass from goalie Connor Ingram for a breakaway and scored on his own rebound at 4:27.

"Once I saw [Ingram] got it, I kind of figured he was going to shoot it and I didn't even really see it," Guenther said. "... Pretty bad first shot, to be honest. Like that didn't really have any chance of going in, but [I] got lucky that it came back to me."

The forward's goal with one second remaining in overtime on Tuesday lifted Utah to a 3-2 victory against the Philadelphia Flyers in his first game since missing 12 with a lower-body injury.

Guenther became the second player in NHL history to score in the final minute of overtime in consecutive games. Brent Burns did it for the Minnesota Wild on March 11 and 13, 2007.

Lawson Crouse and Olli Maatta scored, and Ingram made 20 saves for Utah (23-22-9).

"I don't think that we played our best today and we found a way to win, but when you're in those situations more often, you get more comfortable, more confident," Guenther said. "We're going to be in a lot of those moving forward, so it's important for us to get some of those wins doing it like that."

Justin Danforth and Ivan Provorov scored, and Elvis Merzlikins made 30 saves for the Blue Jackets (26-21-8), who have lost three straight. Zach Werenski had an assist to extend his home point streak to 20 games.

"You take as many points as you can," Columbus defenseman Damon Severson said. "We had a .500 road trip there (2-2-0, ending Tuesday). We would love to get a little bit better than that, but a .500 road trip, we come back, you get a point. Now, if we get a win (against the New York Rangers on Saturday) going to the break (for the 4 Nations Face-Off), that's going to set us up pretty solid moving forward here."

Danforth gave Columbus a 1-0 lead at 5:51 of the first period. Maatta rimmed the puck around the boards to the right wall, where Jordan Harris got a touch on it to send it to the front of the net, and Danforth shoveled it in.

"There's no excuses for us," Danforth said. "We pride ourselves on being a consistent team. I felt like we were there for most of the night but just not enough."

Crouse, a healthy scratch in the previous game, tied it 1-1 at 2:06 of the second period, six seconds after a Utah power play expired. He was in the slot to one-time a pass from Josh Doan.

"I think he played hard," Utah coach Andre Tourigny said of Crouse. "He was focused. He was intense. I really liked his game."

Maatta, who will play for Team Finland at the 4 Nations Face-Off from Feb. 12-20, made it 2-1 at 12:33. His centering pass intended for Nick Bjugstad in front went off the stick of Werenski.

Provorov tied it 2-2 at 19:21 with a short-handed goal, scoring with a wrist shot from above the right face-off circle off a pass from Werenski. It was Provorov's first short-handed goal in the NHL and extended his goal streak to a career-high three games.



“I saw an opportunity to jump up and just shoot the puck and it went in there,” he said.

Werenski, who will play for Team USA at the 4 Nations Face-Off, has 37 points (13 goals, 24 assists) during his home point streak. He is the fourth defenseman in NHL history with a streak of at least 20 games.

With the assist, Werenski set the Blue Jackets record for points in a season by a defenseman with 58 (17 goals, 41 assists). Seth Jones had 57 points (16 goals, 41 assists) in 2017-18, and Werenski tied the mark last season (11 goals, 46 assists).

**NOTES:** Werenski returned after missing a 3-2 loss at the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday with an upper-body injury. The defensemen with longer home point streaks than his are Bobby Orr (25 games in 1974-75 and 21 games in 1970-71), Paul Coffey (23 games in 1985-86) and Phil Housley (22 games in 1991-92). ... Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson had his career-high eight-game point streak end. ... Provorov joined Werenski (Dec. 21, 2019) as the second Columbus defenseman with a short-handed goal in the past 15 years. ... Tourigny coached his 300th NHL game.

## [NHL.com / Werenski returns for Blue Jackets ahead of 4 Nations Face-Off](#)

By Craig Merz – February 7, 2025

COLUMBUS -- Zach Werenski returned for the Columbus Blue Jackets on Thursday and is expected to be available for Team USA at the 4-Nations Face-Off after missing one game because of an upper-body injury.

"I feel pretty good," he said Thursday ahead of Columbus' game against the Utah Hockey Club at Nationwide Arena. "I'll see how I feel after the morning skate here and make a decision for tonight, but all signs are looking pretty good. I'll see how I respond this afternoon, but I feel pretty good about playing.

"I don't want to go out there and make anything worse and be out long term. I feel like two-day's rest really helped me and I feel a lot better now than I did a couple days ago."

Werenski missed the Blue Jackets' 3-2 loss to the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday. He left in the second period on Sunday, a 5-3 loss at the Dallas Stars, before returning at the start of the third.

The 27-year-old leads the Blue Jackets with 57 points (17 goals, 40 assists) and is second among NHL defensemen in goals and third in assists while leading the League in time-on-ice (26:48).

### **Canada, Finland, Sweden, United States go head-to-head Feb. 12-20 in Montreal, Boston**

In addition to the game Thursday, the Blue Jackets host the New York Rangers on Saturday before the break for 4 Nations, which will be held from Feb. 12-20.

The Blue Jackets (26-21-7) are one point out of a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

"Obviously, I want to play in that. I don't want to do anything that's going to hurt my chances of playing here, right?" Werenski said. "My first thought was Columbus, and that's the most important thing. If I felt like I was able to go the 4 Nations and make anything worse, I wouldn't go. But I don't think that's the case at all. I think a couple days of rest helped me and it definitely crosses your mind when it's that close to the tournament.

"But like I said, it's more important that I'm here playing for Columbus. And that's my focus and if all goes well these the next couple games, yeah, I'll be at the 4 Nations."

Werenski entered the game against Utah with the chance to extend his franchise-record home point streak to 20 games (13 goals, 23, assists; 36 points). He is tied with John Van Boxmeer (1981-92) for the fifth-longest streak by an NHL defenseman. Bobby Orr (25 games, 1974-75) holds the record.

Werenski's likely availability for Team USA at 4 Nations is a big plus, especially considering the status of Vancouver Canucks defenseman Quinn Hughes for the tournament is uncertain because of an undisclosed injury.

Team USA opens the 4 Nations Face-Off against Finland on Wednesday at Bell Centre in Montreal (8 p.m. ET; ESPN, ESPN+, SN, TVAS).

## The Hockey News / Columbus Blue Jackets (59 pts) vs. Utah Hockey Club (53 pts) Game Preview

By Jason Newland – February 7, 2025

The first-ever game at Nationwide Arena (kind of) between the Columbus Blue Jackets and Utah Hockey Club (hopefully soon-to-be Outlaws) will happen tonight.

The Jackets beat The Hockey Club in overtime last Friday night in spectacular fashion. Zach Werenski and Cole Sillinger played hot potato after a Werenski steal that would lead to the game-winner.

But that feels like an eternity ago. Since then, the Jackets have lost Werenski, Marchenko, and Fabbro to injury. Zach *might* be back against Utah though. The Jackets sent Dylan Gambrell back to Cleveland after he was sent up on emergency recall. The speculation is that someone, preferably Werenski could be back tonight. Columbus can ill afford to miss him in any more games if they want to continue the pace in the Eastern Conference Wild Card race because it's tight.

Columbus has played just one game at home since January 17th, so the Blue Jackets will look to get home in front of their amazing fans. The Jackets are tied for second for most home goals with 101 and are scoring 4.04 goals per game inside NWA. The 4.04 goals they're scoring per game is #1 in the NHL.

The Jackets will be looking to score a bunch of goals on Utah and send them packing back to Salt Lake City.

### Series History vs. The UHC

- The Jackets are 1-0 vs. The Hockey Club.
- Clayton Keller leads the team with 18 goals and 57 points.
- Nick Schmaltz has 30 assists on the season.
- Goalie Karel Vejmelka is 12-14-4 with a .910 SV%.
- Connor Ingram 8-7-4 with a .844 SV%.

### CBJ Player Notes

- Kent Johnson scored his 15th goal of the season against Utah.
- Zach Werenski got his 40th assist and scored his 17th goal, which was the game-winner in OT.
- Adam Fantilli recorded his 15th assist.

### Injuries

- **Boone Jenner** (shoulder) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 7; (54 Games)
- **Erik Gudbranson** (upper body) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 16; (51 Games)
- **Yegor Chinakhov** (upper body) is on Injured Reserve (33 Games)
- **Sean Monahan** (upper body); is on Injured Reserve retroactive to Jan. 7 (13 Games)
- **Kirill Marchenko** (jaw); is on Injured Reserve on Feb. 3 (1 Game)
- **Dante Fabbro** (upper body) unknown return date (1 Game)
- **Zach Werenski** (upper body) Day to day (1 Game)

**TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 222**

## The Hockey News / Blue Jackets & Bjorkstrand Could Reunite This Trade Deadline

**By Spencer Lazary – February 7, 2025**

The Columbus Blue Jackets have the chance to do something that many fans would love to see ahead of the March 7 NHL Trade Deadline.

Seattle Kraken's Oliver Bjorkstrand has become subject to trade rumors with the team's lack of success. With that, he has found himself on trade bait boards around the NHL.

With the injury to Kirill Marchenko, the Blue Jackets need more scoring help, and that is why bringing Bjorkstrand back to Columbus would be ideal.

Bjorkstrand, 29, is set to become a UFA this season. However, with the cap projection set to rise, the Blue Jackets may be able to re-sign him.

So far, in 54 games with the Kraken, he has 15 goals and 19 assists for 34 points. Last season, he had 59 points in 82 games.

The asking price for Bjorkstrand is unknown at this time. But with how surprising the Blue Jackets have been this season, GM Don Waddell may be willing to reward them by being buyers at the deadline.

Obviously, that would be based on each trade because Waddell likely wouldn't want to trade a ton of assets. However, if reacquiring Bjorkstrand meant giving up a prospect and a mid-round pick, he may be more inclined to do it.

The deadline is a month away, so buckle up because things are going to heat up and get interesting.

## The Hockey News / Zach Werenski Considered Game-Time Decision Against Utah

**By Spencer Lazary – February 7, 2025**

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski is considered a game-time decision for tonight's game against the Utah Hockey Club.

He told Aaron Portzline of *The Athletic* that he is leaning toward playing. However, things will be decided after his nap this afternoon.

Werenski appears hopeful to return to the lineup tonight. However, it still seems like his injury could keep him out another game.

Werenski has been very good when playing at home this season. He currently has a 19-game home point streak.

He also mentioned that his availability for the 4 Nations Face-Off, which starts next week, was a concern at first.

“It definitely crosses your mind when it’s that close to the tournament, but it’s more important that I’m here playing for Columbus. That’s my focus.”

Werenski suffered an upper-body injury during the Blue Jackets' 5-3 loss to the Dallas Stars on Sunday but returned to the game. He was held out of Tuesday's game against the Buffalo Sabres.

## The Hockey News / Does Casey Mittelstadt To The Blue Jackets Make Sense?

By Jason Newland – February 7, 2025

Yesterday, Matt Larkin of The Daily Faceoff listed a few potential landed spots for Colorado Avalanche forward Casey Mittelstadt, and the Columbus Blue Jackets were one of them.

Mittelstadt had some good years in Buffalo and had a career-high of 59 points in 82 games back in 22-23. In 73 games with the Avs, he's scored 13 goals and totaled 42 points. With the Avs though, he doesn't need to be the superstar.

Mittelstadt makes \$5,750,000 per season through 2027.

Larkin says about Mittelstadt, "The Blue Jackets have been an amazing story this season, grieving the tragic death of Johnny Gaudreau and remaining competitive in the Eastern Conference. That's despite a slew of long-term injuries they've endured; captain Boone Jenner hasn't played yet this season, first-line center Sean Monahan is out with a wrist injury and breakout right winger Kirill Marchenko just broke his jaw. Top blueliner Zach Werenski is banged up, too. If Columbus wants to stay in the race while it waits for its wounded to return, Mittelstadt could paper over the hole at center. They have plenty of cap space to fit Mittelstadt's full AAV, too."

He goes on to say, "If Colorado wants to move Mittelstadt while simultaneously trying to upgrade for the playoffs, does Columbus still make sense as a trade partner? Maybe if they parted with Jenner, but would the Jackets want to move their captain during a playoff push? They'd fit better if the Avs were looking purely to dump salary as a step toward a separate trade."

The mention of Jenner is sure to get CBJ fans worked up. Jenner is a fan-favorite and an all-time Blue Jacket who is coming back from a major shoulder injury. He's been on the ice and traveling with the team and is projected to be back after the Four Nations break.

Regardless of what players are coming back from injury, GM Don Waddell should always be wanting to make the team better, and Mittelstadt would definitely do that down the middle. But for Boone Jenner? Probably not.

## [The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Werenski, Olivier, Fabbro & More](#)

By Mark Scheig – February 7, 2025

Welcome to February. Didn't January feel like it lasted for two months? They call that the dogs days of the NHL season for a reason. As usual for the Columbus Blue Jackets, there is a lot to talk about.

The Blue Jackets will host the Utah Hockey Club for the first time on Thursday night. The two teams played last Friday night in Utah. Zach Werenski scored in overtime to give the Blue Jackets a big 3-2 win.

Werenski is where we'll start with this week's news portion. Will he be available Thursday night?

### **Werenski Update**

After scoring the game winner in Utah, things got tricky for Werenski. He briefly left the game Sunday in Dallas before playing in the third period. He then missed the game in Buffalo.

With the Blue Jackets having Wednesday off, the earliest we would get something of substance was at the morning skate Thursday. Werenski made his appearance there 15 minutes before the scheduled 10 A.M. eastern start.

Werenski did everything we would expect him to during the skate. He skated with Ivan Provorov on the top pair. He took part in all of the drills. However, coach Dean Evason stopped short of officially confirming Werenski would play.

"I haven't talked with (Mike Vogt) yet, but yeah it's possible."

Werenski told reporters after the skate that he'll see how he feels when he gets home. Then he added "I think I'm going to play for sure, but we'll see."

Utah expects Werenski to play. Unless some sort of setback came up in the afternoon, all indications point to the defenseman suiting up. That would be welcomed news given the overall injury situation.

As for the 4-Nations, Werenski told reporters that he wouldn't go there if he felt the injury would get worse. Then he said he doesn't think that's the case. Expect him to head to the 4-Nations as he said.

Check back at pregame warmups for official confirmation of Werenski's status. But there is plenty of optimism.

### **Olivier's Fight in Buffalo**

Something was going to happen at the beginning of Tuesday night's game against the Sabres. It wasn't a matter of if but a matter of when and what. Mathieu Olivier was prepared for whatever the Sabres were going to do.

Olivier spoke after the morning skate about his side of the fight that took place three seconds into Tuesday night's game. He and Sabres' Dennis Gilbert were each in the starting lineup.

According to Olivier, there was no conversation beforehand. But he wanted to prove a point not only to the Sabres, but to the rest of the NHL.

"I don't live under rocks, so I saw what happened there," Olivier said. "I was trying to put myself in their shoes. What would I do in that situation? And funny enough, we've had a situation like this. I don't remember if it was last year or a couple years ago where we had to address it as a team. I didn't get the



chance to play the next game after that, but I know that I was thinking we have to send a message. I was expecting some type of message. I don't know what it was gonna be, who, what, but I know that's what I would have done at least, try to send a message. Maybe not that way, but that's what I would've done. My mindset was we're not gonna accept that. It didn't happen against us, and we're not gonna have teams start sending messages against us. So it was about standing up for ourselves, for the team, and sending a message that we're not the team to do that against. Go do that against someone else."

Olivier has elevated himself and is widely known as one of the toughest players in the NHL. Not only that, he does things in such a way that has earned him respect around the league.

"He isn't dirty and he is an honest player," Utah's Lawson Crouse said.

Cameras showed Olivier looking at the Sabres' bench as he skated to the penalty box. We can only imagine what he was thinking in the moment. In the end, the message was sent loud and clear. The Blue Jackets won't be pushed around nor have messages sent to them.

### **Blue Jackets Want to Extend Fabbro**

According to a report from Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman, the Blue Jackets want to try to extend defenseman Dante Fabbro. He's currently out of the lineup and won't play Thursday against Utah. He took an elbow from Dallas' Mason Marchment.

There is no current indication how long Fabbro will be out.

Ever since Fabbro was claimed off waivers from the Nashville Predators, he's done everything asked of him and then some. He's played on the top pair next to Werenski. He's elevated Werenski's game while being a steady presence. He's also been a good fit in the locker room.

The question now becomes what does a potential extension look like? While it's not exactly apples to apples, one must wonder if the recent Will Borgen and Marcus Pettersson contracts will influence what Fabbro's looks like. Borgen got 5 X \$4.1 million while Pettersson got 6 X \$5.5 million.

It wouldn't surprise me to see Fabbro perhaps fall in the middle of Borgen and Pettersson based on career production. \$4.5-\$5 million seems reasonable on a longer term deal for a potential top-four defenseman. We'll see if they can find common ground on an extension.

### **Side Dishes**

- As for Thursday night's game, the top line will include Kent Johnson playing with Adam Fantilli and Dmitri Voronkov. Cole Sillinger will play with Luca Del Bel Belluz and James van Riemsdyk.
- Elvis Merzlikins will get the start for the Blue Jackets. Connor Ingram starts for Utah.
- Assuming that Werenski plays, it appears the Blue Jackets will play 12 forwards and six defensemen. Kevin Labanc would play and Jack Johnson would be out if so.
- Utah got Dylan Guenther back last game and he was a terror against the Flyers. He scored two goals and an assist which included the game winner in overtime. He didn't play in Friday's game at Delta Center. The Blue Jackets must account for him especially with Logan Cooley out.
- Evason said that he wants his team to clean up mistakes from the Buffalo game. They addressed it in their morning team meeting. "We gave up three goals because of what we did, not because of what they did."

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Grind Out Important Point in OT Loss to Utah HC

By Mark Scheig – February 7, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets met the Utah Hockey Club for the second time in six days on Thursday night. This time, Utah HC was able to flip the script on the Blue Jackets.

Dylan Guenther scored the game-winning goal in overtime for the second consecutive game to lift Utah HC to a 3-2 win in front of 18,553 fans at a sold out Nationwide Arena. Each team won 3-2 in overtime on the other team's home ice.

The story of this game ultimately became the Blue Jackets finding a way to grind out a point.

### **Game Recap**

The Blue Jackets were able to score early thanks to a good bounce. Jordan Harris on the wall met Lawson Crouse at the same time the puck got there. It went in front where Justin Danforth finished it for a 1-0 lead.

That was about the only good Blue Jackets thing for the next 30 minutes of game time. Utah HC dominated the rest of the first in faceoffs and in possession. The only thing they didn't do was score.

Utah made sure to take care of the scoring part in the second. Just 2:06 into the middle frame, Crouse made it 1-1. He returned to the lineup on Thursday after being a healthy scratch. He finished off a great pass from Josh Doan.

Then Utah took the lead about 10 minutes later. Olli Maatta threw the puck towards the net. The puck hit Zach Werenski and beat Elvis Merzlikins. The Blue Jackets were in need of some energy. They got it in the form of an unlikely fight.

Mikael Pyyhtia was hit by multiple Utah HC players. Damon Severson stood up for his teammate by dropping the gloves with Michael Kesselring. Somehow it was Severson that got hit with a roughing call. But it was the Blue Jackets who scored from that situation.

Ivan Provorov made it 2-2 on a feed from Zach Werenski. Provorov's shot from distance got by Connor Ingram giving him goals in three straight games. It was also the first shorthanded goal in his NHL career. Werenski's assist gave him points in 20-straight home games.

The Blue Jackets carried the energy from the Severson fight into the third and had the better of the play. No one scored although Utah got a power play to end regulation. Without several of their top players, the Blue Jackets grinded out a massive point. They weren't however able to get the second point.

After killing the penalty, the Blue Jackets were close to an odd-man rush only to have Ingram clear the puck up the ice. Guenther was stopped on his first shot but converted the rebound for the win.

Ingram made 20 saves for the win. Merzlikins stopped 30 in the tough-luck loss.

The Blue Jackets got to 60 points with one game left before the 4-Nations Faceoff. They host the New York Rangers on Saturday night. Utah now heads to Carolina and Washington on the weekend before their break begins.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Game Day #55: Zach Werenski On Track To Play When Utah, Columbus Meet Again Thursday Night

By Ed Francis – February 7, 2025

Pending any last-minute setbacks, Zach Werenski will return to the Columbus Blue Jackets' lineup Thursday night when they face the Utah Hockey Club for the second time in less than a week.

The Blue Jackets won in Salt Lake City in overtime on Friday night, with Werenski providing the game-winning goal after a tremendous defensive play seconds earlier.

But the Norris-candidate defenseman was injured in Sunday's loss to the Dallas Stars and though he did return to that game, Werenski — the NHL's Third Star of the Month for January — missed his first game of the season Tuesday night in Buffalo.

The Blue Jackets, who also lost Dante Fabbro and Kirill Marchenko in the Dallas game, lost 3-2.

Getting Werenski back is a sigh of relief for the Blue Jackets, given the fact that Marchenko is expected to be out at least a month with a broken jaw and no update has been provided on Fabbro's injury, typically a not-so-good sign. It's also a chance for Z to continue his home scoring streak to 20 games, which would put him into 4th all-time by a defenseman.

This is one of two games left before the Blue Jackets get two weeks off for the Four Nations Face-Off break. It is expected that Boone Jenner will return after that break, with other injured players (Marchenko, Sean Monahan, Yegor Chinakhov, and Erik Gudbranson) expected back at various times in March.

**Here's what else to know as Columbus returns home after a 2-2-0 road trip:**

- **RE: UTAH**  
There are only 12 teams that are a true .500 (losses + overtime losses) or better on the road, and Utah is one of them. They're 13-10-3 when visiting. ... Connor Ingram appears in line to start for Utah. He's lose his last three, though hasn't played terrible. He made 27 saves on 29 shots in a 2-1 loss in his last start, on Sunday. ... Dylan Guenther is coming into his own this season in a big way. The 21-year-old is tied for the team lead in goals (18) and is seeing big minutes on the power play.
- **POWER-PLAY STRUGGLES**  
Without Monahan, the Blue Jackets power play has taken a tumble. They're at seven straight games without a man-advantage goal and are just 2 of 21 since losing Monahan on Jan. 7th. Losing Kirill Marchenko doesn't help either. Meanwhile, Utah has went five straight games without allowing a power play goal, going 9/9 on the penalty kill in that stretch.
- **AN IMPORTANT GAME**  
The Blue Jackets are right in the middle of the playoff race. With just two games left before the Four Nations break, a home game against a team that's on the outside of the playoff picture looking in can be described as a must-win game for teams who are serious about their playoff hopes. It's not a rival, it's not a weekend game, it doesn't have a lot of fanfare attached to it, but make no mistake about it: this is a sneaky big game for Columbus.
- **LINEUPS & PROJECTIONS**  
Kent Johnson and Cole Sillinger swapped spots Thursday morning, an indication that Johnson

will get a crack at the top line with Dmitri Voronkov and Adam Fantilli. Werenski was joined by Ivan Provorov as Dante Fabbro remains out.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / UHC 3, CBJ 2 (OT): Blue Jackets Fight Back, But Come Up Short In Overtime Loss To Utah

By Ed Francis – February 7, 2025

Goals in each of the first two periods weren't enough for the Columbus Blue Jackets, who fell 3-2 to the Utah Hockey Club in overtime Thursday night in front of a sold-out Nationwide Arena crowd.

The loss returned the favor to Columbus, who had defeated Utah by the same score — also in overtime — just six nights ago.

Justin Danforth started the scoring for the Blue Jackets in an otherwise dull first period for the home team. His shot was one of just three for Columbus in the opening frame.

Utah would tie the game at 1-1 early in the second period, just six seconds after their period-opening power-play ended. They would then take a 2-1 lead later in the period on a deflected pass that wound up in the back of the net.

Late in the second, Ivan Provorov would score for the third consecutive game and pick up the first short-handed goal in his career. That came after Mikael Pyyhtia took an awkward hit, resulting in Damon Severson going to bat for his teammate and fighting Utah's Michael Kesselring. Both received fighting majors, but Severson would get an extra two for roughing, which put Utah on the power play.

While short-handed, Provorov took a good feed from Zach Werenski and quickly moved up the ice, getting off a shot from distance that beat Utah goalie Connor Ingram.

Werenski's assist on the goal made it 20 consecutive home games with a point, now the fifth longest streak in NHL history by a defenseman.

But despite those streaks continuing, the Blue Jackets came up short when Dylan Guenther scored his second straight overtime goal — this one on a breakaway after Columbus briefly had a breakaway of their own.

**Here's how Utah pulled out a late win in Columbus:**

### **1st Period:**

**(5:51 — CBJ Goal):** Danforth gets his fourth goal of the season in a sequence that started with a good bit of hustle in the corner to disrupt Utah's clearing attempt. Danforth then charges to the net and is in prime position to put the Blue Jackets on the board 1-0 after the puck is directed back to the Utah net.

### **2nd Period**

**(2:06 — UHC Goal):** Just six seconds after Utah's period-opening power play comes to an end, Lawson Crouse ties the game at 1-1. Josh Doan threads the needle perfectly to find Crouse in the slot.

**(12:33 — UHC Goal):** Olli Maatta gives Utah their first lead of the game. He throws the puck at Merzlikins and it deflects into the back of the net, making it 2-1 in favor of the Hockey Club. There wasn't much Elvis Merzlikins could do about this, and the Columbus netminder had another solid night between the pipes despite the loss. He finished with 30 saves on 33 shots.

**(19:21 — CBJ SH Goal):** Puck. Don't. Lie. After Severson gets two minutes for roughing on a very questionable call that got the crowd involved with a loud chorus of boos and chants, Provorov gets the equalizer on the first short-handed goal of his career. Great defensive work on the penalty kill from

Columbus leads to Provorov being able to move the puck up the ice. He sees just enough room between him and the defense and snipes it past Ingram to tie the game at 2-2.

### **3rd Period + Overtime**

There was no scoring in the third period, but the Blue Jackets certainly had their chances. Columbus had a pair of power-plays that came up empty, and five of their ten high-danger chances for the game came in the final frame.

A wild sequence unfolds in overtime as the Blue Jackets appear to briefly have a 3-on-0 breakaway, but the puck is too far front of any of them. That's when Ingram springs into action, throwing the puck down the ice and catching Guenther, who gets a breakaway himself. His first shot is saved by Merzlikins, but he puts the rebound home to give Utah the 3-2 overtime win.

### **Stat Chat:**

- Werenski's 20th straight home game with a point puts him behind only the following names when it comes to longest home point streaks by a defenseman in NHL history: Bobby Orr (25 games; 1974-75), Paul Coffey (23 games; 1985-86), Phil Housley (22 games (1991-92), and Orr again (21 games; 1970-71).
- Despite their 1-0 lead after the first, the Blue Jackets had just three shots on goal in the first period and were out-attempted 27-6.
- Columbus is now 11-0-2 at home when leading after the opening period.

### **Up Next:**

One more game before the 4 Nations Face-Off and it's a big one: the Blue Jackets welcome the New York Rangers to town Saturday night. Puck-drop is slated for 7 p.m.

## The Athletic / With so many centers and too few spots, how 4 Nations stars will adjust to the wings

**By Shayna Goldman and Sean Gentile – February 7, 2025**

Not all rosters at the 4 Nations Face-off were created equally. When we base our evaluations strictly on talent, there are two mega-powers at the top in Canada and the United States, a strong bronze-medal contender in Sweden and then, well, Finland.

If there is a common theme for all four squads, though, it's emphasis on center depth. Team USA and Finland each have seven players who regularly play down the middle. Team Canada has six. With William Karlsson's injury, Team Sweden is down to five.

That glut at the position means one thing: Quite a few everyday centers (and some of the biggest names in the sport) are going to play on the wings. That isn't unique to this tournament. It's not unique for any other tournament, really. It tends to be par for the course — a feature, not a bug.

What does that mean for the teams involved and the folks watching the games? We can start by looking back at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey, the last time NHLers were involved in a best-on-best tournament. Team Canada's championship squad had 10 centers. The only true wingers on that roster were Brad Marchand and Corey Perry. Sidney Crosby, Ryan Getzlaf, Jonathan Toews and Ryan O'Reilly only played center during the tournament, while Patrice Bergeron, Logan Couture, Matt Duchene, Steven Stamkos, John Tavares and Joe Thornton took reps on the wings.

With that group, Canada put out lines like Marchand-Crosby-Bergeron that came up clutch against Team Europe in the final.

And at points in the tournament, like Canada's semifinal against Russia, a star-powered second line of Tavares-Getzlaf-Stamkos helped generate key offense.

Tavares scored that goal more than eight years ago. Both he and Stamkos are still productive NHL players, but they're not competing in this tournament and are unlikely to play at the 2026 Olympics in Italy. Getzlaf is part of the Department of Player Safety.

Crosby is the last remaining member of Team Canada's 2016 forward group. No one is left from Team USA or Sweden.

Team North America, composed of the best Canadian and American players 23 and under, is a different story. Connor McDavid, Sean Couturier and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins were all constants down the middle for North America; Nathan MacKinnon, Auston Matthews, Dylan Larkin, Jack Eichel, Vincent Trocheck and Mark Scheifele all shifted to wing at points. Of those nine players, six will be competing in this tournament.

Superstar-loaded lines are the norm at tournaments like this. If MacKinnon and Crosby are going to get reps together for Canada, MacKinnon will likely have to shift to wing. Jack Hughes and J.T. Miller both have experience playing on the wing in the NHL, so they should be considered two of the more likely candidates to shift. Mikael Granlund, who doesn't play a ton of center anymore at the NHL, will probably stick to playing wing. So will Eetu Luostarinen, especially if Finland's coaches opt to keep him with a familiar face in Anton Lundell; the two are teammates on the Florida Panthers.

The more players are open to shifting away from their natural position, the more options a team has. That obviously helps in case of injury, but also in different matchup settings. With so many centers at a coach's disposal, teams aren't as handcuffed to certain combinations or deployments.

With more natural centers on the ice, there will be more options to take the draw when someone is thrown out of the faceoff dot. Coaches can also make tweaks for the faceoff depending on the matchup. When MacKinnon and Nugent-Hopkins were on a line with Jonathan Drouin for Team North America, handedness factored into decisions for each faceoff based on the opponent.

Having a lineup filled with centers should also help boost a team's two-way game, which can be especially important in a best-on-best setting filled with high-octane superstar talent.

"Playing center, you have a lot more responsibility down low in the zone," Stamkos explained. "Depending on what kind of system you play — it's a little different here than it was in Tampa — I'd say that's the biggest adjustment."

Not every center is Selke-caliber. But even elite offensive threats can evolve into stronger defensive players, which we've seen from Jack Eichel and Matthews and, to a lesser extent, Hughes.

Some systems essentially view centers as a third defenseman. Centers usually are tasked with positioning themselves in the middle of the ice in their own zone, where they can focus on taking away passing and shooting lanes.

"If you'd ask a winger who's never played center before, it's probably a different answer," Stamkos said. "I find myself in the middle of the ice more, where you can generate more speed and (get to) the underneath pucks."

Stamkos, though, is accustomed to switching between roles — and not just on the international stage. He played wing at times in Tampa Bay and has done the same this year in Nashville, often with O'Reilly as his center.

Take the clip below. As the center, it was O'Reilly's job to get back in his zone and support his defenders down the middle. After Brady Skjei defended the initial rush, O'Reilly blocked a pass to stop a second-chance opportunity. With that play, the center shifted the Predators from defense right back to offense.

When Stamkos is at center, as has been the case recently, the middle of the ice again becomes his primary responsibility.

"You're in different positions on the ice. You're not used to battling on the walls as much," Stamkos said.

That is one of the more noteworthy adjustments a center has to get acclimated to on the wing — like Stamkos did in the clip below when he battled for possession in the corners. O'Reilly, the center in that situation, skated around the circle and stayed more in motion.

"There are more stop-and-start situations as a winger, where as the center you can try to generate more speed and maintain that speed," Stamkos said. "At the end of the day, if you're the first man back in the zone, that guy has to play center anyway, so everyone has had a taste of it."

Centers generally have to be strong skaters, ready to cover a lot of ice. Having a roster filled with that skill can be an advantage. But there is obviously a difference between straight-line speed and quick-twitch acceleration.

The talent on these teams should help smooth the process. Leon Draisaitl doesn't just play some games at center and others at wing. The Oilers often move him up to McDavid's wing in-game when they need an offensive boost. That would be a challenge for some, but not for a pair of MVPs. The fact that the two have so much familiarity with each other assists the process, too.



Just look at how fluid the two are in their movements in the clip below. McDavid is playing center here and roves more toward the middle of the ice, while Draisaitl spends a lot of his time along the boards. But there's still plenty of movement and free-flowing play within the zone.

Maybe most relevantly, coaching staffs have limited time to instill their system — and even less than they did at the Olympics or World Cup. Some players, including Team Canada forwards Brayden Point and Anthony Cirelli, have NHL games two days before the tournament begins.

That is what makes this all the more challenging to navigate. Asking, say, Larkin to move off center for the Red Wings, with teammates whose tendencies he knows and in a system he's comfortable in, is one thing. Asking him to do the same in a short tournament is something else.

The X-factor, of course, is that we're talking about special players in a special environment.

"Guys are obviously comfortable in their positions, but under those circumstances, you're willing to play whatever. The majority of those guys are centers anyway, so I think that works in your favor a little bit," Stamkos said.

"But guys are willing to do whatever at those types of tournaments, and when you have the quality of players that are going to be there, it's a little easier."

## [ESPN / Ranking all of the players in the 4 Nations Face-Off](#)

By ESPN.com – February 7, 2025

### Reactions

The 4 Nations Face-Off is less than a week away, with Canada and Sweden meeting in the first matchup on Feb. 12. The United States and Finland follow up on Feb. 13 (8 p.m. ET, ESPN/E+), with the championship game set for Feb. 20 in Boston (8 p.m. ET, ABC/E+).

There will be 92 players representing the four countries in the inaugural tournament. How do all the players stack up with each other? (Note: There are currently only 91 players because Canada hasn't replaced Alex Pietrangelo.)

We asked a panel of more than 50 ESPN broadcasters, analysts, reporters and editors to rate players based on how good they will be in the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Write-ups for the top 40 in the rankings are courtesy of ESPN reporters Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton and Greg Wyshynski.

### Jump ahead to top 40

#### **91. Urho Vaakanainen, D, Finland**

Preseason rank: NR

#### **90. Samuel Ersson, G, Sweden**

Preseason rank: NR

#### **89. Henri Jokiharju, D, Finland**

Preseason rank: NR

#### **88. Eetu Luostarinen, F, Finland**

Preseason rank: NR

#### **87. Joel Armia, F, Finland**

Preseason rank: NR

#### **86. Sam Montembeault, G, Canada**

Preseason rank: NR

#### **85. Jordan Binnington, G, Canada**

Preseason rank: NR

#### **84. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, G, Finland**

Preseason rank: NR

#### **83. Rickard Rakell, F, Sweden**

Preseason rank: NR

#### **82. Juuso Valimaki, D, Finland**

Preseason rank: NR

**81. Erik Haula, F, Finland**  
Preseason rank: NR

**80. Kevin Lankinen, G, Finland**  
Preseason rank: NR

**79. Niko Mikkola, D, Finland**  
Preseason rank: NR

**78. Kaapo Kakko, F, Finland**  
Preseason rank: NR

**77. Jeremy Swayman, G, United States**  
Preseason rank: 47

**76. Jonas Brodin, D, Sweden**  
Preseason rank: NR

**75. Olli Maatta, D, Finland**  
Preseason rank: NR

**74. Joel Eriksson Ek, F, Sweden**  
Preseason rank: NR

**73. Gustav Nyquist, F, Sweden**  
Preseason rank: NR

**72. Teuvo Teravainen, F, Finland**  
Preseason rank: NR

**71. Chris Kreider, F, United States**  
Preseason rank: 67

**70. Esa Lindell, D, Finland**  
Preseason rank: NR

**69. Elias Lindholm, F, Sweden**  
Preseason rank: 61

**68. Colton Parayko, D, Canada**  
Preseason rank: NR

**67. Linus Ullmark, G, Sweden**  
Preseason rank: 73

**66. Rasmus Ristolainen, D, Finland**  
Preseason rank: NR

**65. Vincent Trocheck, F, United States**

Preseason rank: NR

64. Jake Oettinger, G, United States

Preseason rank: 33

63. Travis Sanheim, D, Canada

Preseason rank: NR

62. Rasmus Andersson, D, Sweden

Preseason rank: NR

61. Leo Carlsson, F, Sweden

Preseason rank: NR

60. Mika Zibanejad, F, Sweden

Preseason rank: 69

59. Artturi Lehkonen, F, Finland

Preseason rank: NR

58. Viktor Arvidsson, F, Sweden

Preseason rank: NR

57. Brock Nelson, F, United States

Preseason rank: NR

56. Matt Boldy, F, United States

Preseason rank: NR

55. Mattias Ekholm, D, Sweden

Preseason rank: NR

54. Sam Bennett, F, Canada

Preseason rank: 90

53. Seth Jarvis, F, Canada

Preseason rank: NR

52. Noah Hanifin, D, United States

Preseason rank: NR

51. Anton Lundell, F, Finland

Preseason rank: NR

50. Mikael Granlund, F, Finland

Preseason rank: NR

49. Erik Karlsson, D, Sweden

Preseason rank: NR

**48. Jaccob Slavin, D, United States**

**Preseason rank: 96**

**47. Brad Marchand, F, Canada**

**Preseason rank: 48**

**46. Patrik Laine, F, Finland**

**Preseason rank: NR**

**45. Adin Hill, G, Canada**

**Preseason rank: NR**

**44. Anthony Cirelli, F, Canada**

**Preseason rank: NR**

**43. Brandon Hagel, F, Canada**

**Preseason rank: NR**

**42. Travis Konecny, F, Canada**

**Preseason rank: NR**

**41. Gustav Forsling, D, Sweden**

**Preseason rank: 56**

**40. Devon Toews, D, Canada**

**Preseason rank: 82**

His partnership with Cale Makar has led to them not only being one of the NHL's best pairings, but also one who can play in every scenario. -- Clark

**39. Charlie McAvoy, D, United States**

**Preseason rank: 41**

McAvoy can match up with any teammate -- and across from any opponent -- to be one of Team USA's brightest stars on defense. His transition game is elite and McAvoy will open up space for Team USA's forwards while also providing his own offense. -- Shilton

**38. Filip Gustavsson, G, Sweden**

**Preseason rank: NR 41**

The Wild goalie has put up strong numbers as the team's primary starter, ranking in the top 15 in goals saved above replacement. Plus, if the Swedes need more offense, Gus is their guy, with a goal and an assist this season for Minnesota. -- Wyshynski

**37. Juuse Saros, G, Finland**

**Preseason rank: 36**

Even though the Predators have struggled, Saros has remained a constant as he's played in all but 11 of their games. -- Clark

**36. Elias Pettersson, F, Sweden**

**Preseason rank: 24**

While this season has proven challenging, Pettersson has had moments when he's looked close to the player who scored 102 points two seasons ago. That version of Pettersson could determine how far Sweden goes in the 4 Nations Face-Off. -- Clark

**35. Rasmus Dahlin, D, Sweden**

**Preseason rank: 37**

Dahlin is second to Erik Karlsson for scoring by a Swedish defenseman over the last three seasons. -- Wyshynski

**34. Brock Faber, D, United States**

**Preseason rank: 53**

Whether it's in 5-on-5, the power play or the penalty kill, Faber has proven he can be trusted to play heavy minutes in all scenarios. -- Clark

**33. Dylan Larkin, F, United States**

**Preseason rank: 49**

The speedy center had heated up as the Red Wings have climbed back into the playoff race in the East, with 9 goals in 14 games during January. -- Wyshynski

**32. Josh Morrissey, D, Canada**

**Preseason rank: 43**

Morrissey combines high-end defensive skills with a strong offensive upside and that's what will help drive Canada's contributions from the backend in this tournament. He's quick, smart and super competitive. -- Shilton

**31. Shea Theodore, D, Canada**

**Preseason rank: 43**

The Golden Knights defenseman is on pace to shatter his career high in points, with 45 in his first 53 games, making him a top-three scorer for Vegas this season. -- Wyshynski

**30. Roope Hintz, F, Finland**

**Preseason rank: 39**

Hintz is one of the most underrated goal-scorers in the NHL, with three straight 30-goal seasons and on his way to a fourth with 22 goals in his first 48 games. -- Wyshynski

**29. Lucas Raymond, F, Sweden**

**Preseason rank: 86**

Raymond is a highly-skilled winger who has followed up a breakout 31-goal season with another strong offensive campaign for the Red Wings. -- Wyshynski

**28. Adrian Kempe, F, Sweden**

**Preseason rank: 85**

Kempe has been a top-line goal-scoring winger for the Los Angeles Kings over the last four seasons thanks to his swift skating. -- Wyshynski

## **27. Jake Guentzel, F, United States**

### **Preseason rank: 18**

Guentzel is opportunistic and a brilliant finisher with the puck. It's no wonder then he can easily average over a point per game and pairs relatively well with just about anyone. The ability to form quick chemistry will be imperative now and Team USA will be counting on Guentzel to make that magic happen. -- Shilton

## **26. Mark Stone, F, Canada**

### **Preseason rank: 29**

Canada boasts one of the game's best two-way forwards in Stone to anchor its bottom-six forward group. The veteran is also an excellent playmaker who can frustrate opponents in the corners and break up plays in transition. -- Shilton

## **25. J.T. Miller, F, United States**

### **Preseason rank: 28**

Miller won't be sweating any trade rumors now and is free to be the versatile asset Team USA needs. He can play center or on the wing, and combines good speed with a heavy shot and physical presence. Whatever the USA has to dial up, count on Miller to be a significant factor in the team's offensive success. -- Shilton

## **24. Adam Fox, D, United States**

### **Preseason rank: 38**

Fox has three straight 70-plus point seasons, playing in all situations for the Rangers. -- Wyshynski

## **23. Filip Forsberg, F, Sweden**

### **Preseason rank: 34**

Forsberg's offensive prowess has him on pace for his third season of more than 80 points in the last four years. -- Clark

## **22. Jesper Bratt, F, Sweden**

### **Preseason rank: 79**

Bratt is one of the NHL's most explosive stickhandling wingers, playing at nearly a point-per-game pace over his last three seasons. -- Wyshynski

## **21. Sebastian Aho, F, Finland**

### **Preseason rank: 19**

Aho is an elite two-way center on a Finland team that already boasts another such rarity in Aleksander Barkov. So watch out. Aho is a premier scorer and playmaker who handles every responsibility with apparent ease. His penalty killing isn't bad either. This may be the flashiest Fin of them all -- Shilton

## **20. Kyle Connor, F, United States**

### **Preseason rank: 58**

Now that Connor is fully healthy, he's on pace for his first 100-point season as the Jets remain in contention for the NHL's top record. -- Clark

### **19. William Nylander, F, Sweden**

**Preseason rank: 32**

Nylander is crafting a career year offensively in Toronto while continuing to show his growth at both ends of the ice -- which has only made the Swede more dangerous. He's also been a cunning threat and his penchant this season especially for creating -- and capitalizing on -- breakaway goals should have the other three teams on high alert. -- Shilton

### **18. Zach Werenski, D, United States**

**Preseason rank: 74**

Werenski has been the Columbus Blue Jackets' MVP this season, leading his team in scoring as a defenseman and logging nearly 27 minutes per game. -- Wyshynski

### **17. Brady Tkachuk, F, United States**

**Preseason rank: 25**

Ottawa's captain is known for his passion and typical Tkachukian grit. But Tkachuk is more than just a younger Matthew -- he's a tenacious skater who can drive any line and elevate teammates. When Team USA players need a sparkplug, they'll have it every shift doled out to Tkachuk. -- Shilton

### **16. Brayden Point, F, Canada**

**Preseason rank: 21**

Canada coach Jon Cooper knows exactly what he'll get from Point -- and it's a top-tier performance. Point is versatile and determined, strategic and quick on pucks, and always (seemingly) one step ahead of an opponent's defense. It's what helps drive the Lightning's offense and could be a game changer for Canada. -- Shilton

### **15. Sam Reinhart, F, Canada**

**Preseason rank: 30**

It's hardly overreaching to say Reinhart has become one of the best forwards in the game. He's coming off a 94-point season and is on pace to hit terrific numbers again as a savvy, high-octane scorer who doesn't skimp on the defensive side, either. Reinhart is one of Canada's most well-rounded skaters. -- Shilton

### **14. Victor Hedman, D, Sweden**

**Preseason rank: 23**

Several items have come to define Hedman throughout his illustrious career. Consistency is among them. That consistency has allowed the Lightning to remain an Eastern Conference challenger and could give Sweden a path to the championship game. -- Clark

### **13. Mikko Rantanen, F, Finland**

**Preseason rank: 8**

Rantanen's recent trade to the Carolina Hurricanes means he's now going to be the primary focal point. It'll be the same way for Finland too. The hulking winger has established himself as one of the game's strongest facilitators while consistently proving that he can score just as many goals as he creates. -- Clark



## **12. Jack Eichel, F, United States**

### **Preseason rank: 16**

It's never been a question of talent for Eichel. It's been more of a conversation about what he could do with that talent. What he's done for the Golden Knights is emerge as a top-line center who can be trusted in every situation in a way that makes him a factor each time he steps on to the ice. It's also another reason why he's in the running for the Hart Trophy. -- Clark

## **11. Matthew Tkachuk, F, United States**

### **Preseason rank: 5**

Tkachuk can (and does) do it all on the ice and that will continue to be his superpower in this tournament. Whether it's channeling his physicality around the net, terrorizing the defense with his scoring skills or separating himself as a playmaker, Tkachuk's teammates know they'll get a determined effort from him in every game. -- Shilton

## **10. Jack Hughes, F, United States**

### **Preseason rank: 15**

Hughes is a dominant passer who will push the pace for the U.S. up front and create his own chances along the way. New Jersey's star skater is dangerous in all three zones and should pad his team's transition game with a top-end level of speed. Somehow, Hughes makes it all look effortless. -- Shilton

## **9. Mitch Marner, F, Canada**

### **Preseason rank: 14**

Marner won't be taking a back seat to anyone on Canada's roster given the level of skill and talent he's bringing. The winger is a powerhouse at even strength and on the power play. He can eat up shorthanded minutes. And did we mention the playmaking? It's second to none in the league -- and this tournament. -- Shilton

## **8. Sidney Crosby, F, Canada**

### **Preseason rank: 13**

If Crosby's done anything this year it's show why he can never be counted out. In a horrific year for Pittsburgh at large, Crosby has kept producing and continuously wills his team into the fight. It's that latter leadership ability that could benefit Canada most and is a key reason why, whether Crosby falls into a top-six or more complementary role, he's an indispensable piece of the lineup. -- Shilton

## **7. Aleksander Barkov, F, Finland**

### **Preseason rank: 10**

Barkov is doing what Barkov does best this season. He's averaging a point per game while still operating as one the game's strongest two-way forwards. Knowing that Finland could have Barkov anchoring a line with Rantanen is the sort of combination that could see them go far in the tournament. -- Clark

## **6. Quinn Hughes, D, United States**

### **Preseason rank: 12**

For all the challenges facing the Canucks, Hughes's performance this season hasn't been one of them. The reigning Norris Trophy winner looks like he could collect the award again as he's on pace for a second straight 90-point season while keeping the Canucks in the race for a playoff spot. -- Clark

#### **5. Auston Matthews, F, United States**

**Preseason rank: 6**

Matthews was tapped as Team USA's captain for a reason -- he's made the most of this injury-plagued NHL campaign as a point-per-game skater who, as ever, can tilt the ice in his team's favor. And that shot? It's lethal as ever -- just like Matthews is proving to be. -- Shilton

#### **4. Nathan MacKinnon, F, Canada**

**Preseason rank: 3**

The reigning Hart Trophy winner for the NHL's MVP, MacKinnon is having the sort of season that could see him repeat that feat. He leads the NHL in points and his all-around play could help Canada challenge for a 4 Nations title. -- Clark

#### **3. Connor Hellebuyck, G, United States**

**Preseason rank: 31**

What he did last season saw Hellebuyck win his second Vezina Trophy. What he's done this year has allowed him to have what might be the best season of his career and could see him win more than just a third Vezina. -- Clark

#### **2. Cale Makar, D, Canada**

**Preseason rank: 4**

Makar's ability to impact several facets of the game is what makes him one of the NHL's best players at any position. Already teammates with MacKinnon, having those two on the ice along with McDavid for a power play could cause quite a few problems. -- Clark

#### **1. Connor McDavid, F, Canada**

**Preseason rank: 1**

His status as the game's best player has been consistently cemented by the fact he's finished with more than 100 points seven times in his career. McDavid is on pace for a fifth straight season of more than 100 points, which only adds to the intrigue of what he could achieve at the 4 Nations Face-Off. -- Clark

## Sportsnet.ca / NHL Power Rankings: The international moments teams will remember forever

By Ryan Dixon – February 7, 2025

The 4 Nations Face-Off — which begins Wednesday — may not be a tournament we have any history with. And nobody is here to claim it's going to feel the same as the Olympics.

But ask yourself this: When Canada and Team USA — with Connor McDavid wearing the Maple Leaf for the first time at a best-on-best and Auston Matthews doing the same for the stars and stripes — drop the puck in Montreal one week from Saturday, do you think every guy in that rink will be playing like it's Game 7 of a playoff series?

Me too.

With respect to the always-fun world championship and world juniors, international competition has been a huge hole in the hockey scene the past 10 years and it's beyond exciting to have the 4 Nations here to usher in a period where we're going to get NHL participation in Olympics and World Cups.

The goal for any player suiting up for the national team is — in over-the-top terms — to bring honour to his country on the field of play. Of course, by extension, you're also doing your club team proud when you go out and achieve great things on the world hockey scene.

With that in mind, we're using this week's power rankings to highlight moments where each NHL club could be proud of a player (or even coach) thanks to his performance at an international event.

For the record, we're linking players to the teams they were associated with at the time of the international tournament.

**1. Winnipeg Jets (38-14-3):** There hasn't been a lot of best-on-best hockey in the Jets 2.0 era. Of course, from the original Jets, Dale Hawerchuk played a significant and somewhat cheeky role in Mario Lemieux's legendary tally that won the 1987 Canada Cup. It was Hawerchuk who won the critical defensive-zone faceoff against Vyacheslav Bykov with just over 90 seconds to go that allowed Canada to grab possession of the puck. As the boys flew up ice, Hawerchuk tugged Bykov from behind in the neutral zone — hey, it was the '80s! — and pulled him to the ice, creating the space Wayne Gretzky and Lemieux needed to perform their magic.

**2. Washington Capitals (35-11-7):** Alex Ovechkin-led Russian teams just did not have the success you would have expected at the Olympics. That said, it was a true holy bleep! moment when — at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver — Ovi absolutely levelled KHLer Jaromir Jagr right at centre ice. Caps legend Peter Bondra scored seven goals in nine outings at the 2002 world championship, when Slovakia won its only gold medal at the event. John Carlson delivered just the second American gold at the world juniors with an overtime winner against Canada in 2010.

**3. Dallas Stars (34-18-1):** We're saving one from the Minnesota North Stars days for the Wild, if you don't mind. Derian Hatcher drew the assist on Tony Amonte's tournament-winning goal at the 1996 World Cup of Hockey by firing the puck toward Canadian goalie Curtis Joseph, who was beaten by Amonte's tip.

**4. Edmonton Oilers (34-16-4):** Nobody who witnessed it will ever forget the preposterous sight of seeing Wayne Gretzky team up with Mario Lemieux — both at the height of their powers — at the '87 Canada Cup. That said, let's recall the work of Paul Coffey at the 1984 Canada Cup. After Canada scraped

through the round robin, they were on the verge of being knocked out of the tournament in the semifinals by a Soviet team that had yet to lose. In overtime, Coffey executed a perfect poke-check to break up a 2-on-1, headed back up ice and eventually put the shot on goal that Mike Bossy tipped home for the winner. Canada went on to beat Sweden in a best-of-three final to win the Cup.

**5. Toronto Maple Leafs (32-19-2):** "Henderson has scored for Canada!" Four years after Henderson's goal that won the 1972 Summit Series versus the Soviets, Maple Leaf Darryl Sittler scored the goal that clinched the 1976 Canada Cup in overtime versus Czechoslovakia. Also at that tournament, Sweden's Borje Salming received a standing ovation from the Canadian crowd at Maple Leaf Gardens for his trailblazing excellence. What a decade (internationally) for the Buds!

**6. Carolina Hurricanes (32-18-4):** Eric Staal became a member of the exclusive 'Triple Gold Club' when he won an Olympic title in 2010. Staal is one of just 30 players to have a Stanley Cup (2006), World Championship (2007) and Olympic gold on his resume and all that winning came when he was with the Canes.

**7. Florida Panthers (32-20-3):** Roberto Luongo began as Martin Brodeur's backup at the 2004 World Cup, but was suddenly thrust into action in the semifinal when a wrist injury sidelined Brodeur for a game. Luongo — who had an all-time showing at the 1999 world juniors when he was still Islanders property — stepped in and backstopped Canada to a thrilling 4-3 overtime victory against the Czech Republic.

**8. Minnesota Wild (31-19-4):** Neal Broten was a North Stars third-rounder when he helped the 'Miracle on Ice' squad shock the world with Olympic gold in 1980. Broten, of course, is also a 'State of Hockey' native, hailing from Roseau, Minn. Kirill Kaprizov was still a prospect Wild fans were dreaming on when he scored the overtime winner for the Olympic Athletes from Russia at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games. It was the first Olympics in 24 years that did not include NHLers.

**9. New Jersey Devils (30-19-6):** Martin Brodeur was the man for Canada at the 2002 Games, replacing Curtis Joseph after one game and leading the Red and White to its first Olympic gold in 50 years. Zach Parise scored the game-tying goal in the 2004 WJC final versus Canada that pushed the affair to OT, where Team USA won its first-ever world junior gold. Parise was MVP of the tournament.

**10. Detroit Red Wings (28-21-5):** Nick Lidstrom drilled the game-winner eight seconds into the third period to give Sweden its first-ever best-on-best win at the 2006 Olympics in Italy, where they narrowly defeated their rivals from Finland 3-2 in the final. Steve Yzerman — who'd been a final cut from previous Canadian teams — scored the Game 1 overtime winner in the best-of-three 1996 World Cup of Hockey final against Team USA.

**11. Los Angeles Kings (28-17-6):** Anze Kopitar, of course, is the face of Slovenian hockey, having competed for his home nation at numerous World Championships and the 2014 Olympics. Drew Doughty was barely 20 years old when he played for the Canadian squad that won 2010 Olympic gold on home ice in Vancouver and was back four years later to win gold again.

**12. Vegas Golden Knights (31-17-6):** Check back in two weeks. Vegas originally had seven guys going to the 4 Nations, but Canadian Alex Pietrangelo and Swede William Karlsson had to pull out. Goalie Adin Hill could be the key to the tourney for Canada. He'll be joined by usual teammates Mark Stone and Shea Theodore, while Knights coach Bruce Cassidy is a Canadian assistant. Team USA will be leaning on Jack Eichel and Noah Hanifin.

**13. Ottawa Senators (29-21-4):** Daniel Alfredsson was an assistant captain on the 2006 Swedish team that claimed Olympic gold. He finished with an impressive 5-5-10 line in the tournament. But the headline from that event, from a Sens perspective, was goalie Dominik Hasek sustaining an abductor

injury at the event and being sidelined for the rest of the season during a year in which Ottawa had a great shot at the Cup.

**14. Colorado Avalanche (31-22-2):** The Mount Rushmore of international goals must include Peter Forsberg's one-handed deke of Canada's Corey Hirsch in the 1994 shootout that won Sweden's first-ever Olympic gold. The technique is known to this day as 'The Forsberg' and the moment was captured on a stamp in Sweden. In real time, you truly had no idea what you'd just seen. It was as if a 1950s basketball player just broke out a 360-degree dunk. Joe Sakic's goal late in the 2002 gold medal game in Salt Lake City clinched the game for Canada and gave us Bob Cole's all-time "Jooooooooo Saaaakic!" call.

**15. Tampa Bay Lightning (28-20-4):** Vincent Lecavalier, fresh off winning the 2004 Stanley Cup in Tampa, scored the overtime winner in the semifinal of the 2004 World Cup of Hockey to save Canada from a potential upset at the hands of the Czech Republic.

**16. New York Islanders (25-21-7):** Mike Bossy scored the OT winner in the 1984 Canada Cup semifinal that helped propel Canada to a tournament win and John Tonelli was named MVP of the event, as the Islanders brought their winning pedigree from that era. Defenceman Ken Morrow joined the Islanders shortly after being part of the 'Miracle on Ice' squad.

Also, can you name the one and only player — of 10 guys who made attempts — to score a goal in the 1998 Olympic semifinal shootout between Canada and the Czech Republic? It was Isles centre Robert Reichel, who beat Patrick Roy on the Czech Republic's first attempt. Roy stopped four other Czech shooters, but no Canadian player could get one over the line behind Dominik Hasek.

**17. Calgary Flames (26-20-7):** Jarome Iginla scored two goals in the 2002 gold medal game versus Team USA. Of course, he also answered Sidney Crosby's "Iggy!" call and dished the puck — after it had hit the referee — to Crosby before the latter slid it past Ryan Miller for the golden goal in 2010.

**18. Columbus Blue Jackets (26-21-7):** Rick Nash was a monster at the 2007 world championship, leading Canada to gold with two tallies in the final game. The second of Nash's goals — which put the game out of reach late — was deposited with defender Pekka Saravo basically looking like a Finnish backpack draped all over No. 61.

**19. Vancouver Canucks (24-18-11):** It wasn't always smooth, but Roberto Luongo guided Canada to 2010 Olympic gold in the same city where he was starring for the Canucks. The leading scorer at that event was Slovakian Pavol Demitra (10 points in seven contests), who was in his final NHL season that winter with Vancouver.

**20. New York Rangers (26-23-4):** How about a pair of goalie performances? Henrik Lundqvist was an NHL rookie when he backstopped Sweden to Olympic gold in 2006. With respect, that showing can't equal what Mike Richter did for Team USA in 1996. In the winner-take-all third game of the final, Richter stood on his head for 50 minutes and bought his teammates enough time to write the storybook ending authored in the game's final handful of minutes.

**21. Boston Bruins (27-23-6):** Brad Marchand scored the game winner with 44 seconds remaining in the contest to help Canada down \*checks notes\* Team Europe at the 2016 World Cup in Toronto. Paul Henderson's Game 8 winner in 1972 will live forever, but Phil Esposito was Canada's offensive engine during that entire set and cued the third-period, final-game comeback with the strike to pull Canada within one. That team was also coached by Bruins GM Harry Sinden. Four years later, at the 1976 Canada Cup, Bobby Orr was MVP of the tournament in what amounted to his final hoorah being what many considered — especially at the time — the best player anybody had ever seen.

**22. Anaheim Ducks (23-24-6):** Eight years after he was thwarted by Swede Tommy Salo in the shootout of the 1994 Olympic final, Paul Kariya got his redemption and got Canada rolling with his first-period marker in the 2002 gold-medal game against Team USA. The Americans were up 1-0 when Mario Lemieux let Brendan Shanahan's feed pass through his legs to Kariya's stick.

Ron Wilson was the coach who brought it all together for the group of Americans that won a generation-defining victory over Canada at the 1996 World Cup. Teemu Selanne tied teammate Saku Koivu for the scoring lead at the 2006 Olympics (11 points in eight games), but the pair couldn't lead the lovable Finns to an upset win over Sweden in the final. (Believe it or not, Selanne and Koivu also tied for the scoring lead at the 1998 Olympics, too).

**23. Montreal Canadiens (25-24-5):** Yvan Cournoyer was one of Canada's best players in the '72 series and scored the goal that tied Game 8 halfway through the third and set the stage for Henderson's heroics. Ken Dryden was in goal for Canada in that contest, though to be fair, he did allow five goals. Carey Price didn't surrender a single tally in Canada's 3-0 gold medal-game win over Sweden at the 2014 Olympics and backstopped Canada to a World Cup victory two years later in '16. Juraj Slafkovsky became a Slovakian legend by leading the 2022 Olympics with seven tallies, including two in the bronze medal-game.

**24. Utah Hockey Club (22-22-9):** Shane Doan — the forever face of the Arizona Coyotes — scored the game-winner 34 seconds into the third period as Canada edged Finland 3-2 in the one-game final of the 2004 World Cup.

**25. Pittsburgh Penguins (22-24-9):** Talk about an embarrassment of riches. Lemieux's 1987 showing at the Canada Cup was outrageous, scoring the double-overtime winner in Game 2 of the final — considered the best game ever played by some — to keep Canada alive in the best-of-three set versus the Soviets. Next time out, we got his signature game-winner over the glove of Sergei Mylnikov in the dying minutes. All three games in that set ended 6-5, the same score as Game 8 in Moscow in 1972. Just as Henderson's goal defined a generation that year, so too did Sidney Crosby's golden goal in 2010.

**26. St. Louis Blues (24-25-5):** Brett Hull tied the decisive game of the 1996 World Cup 2-2 with just 3:18 to go. Hull also led the tourney in goals (seven) and points (11).

**27. Philadelphia Flyers (23-25-7):** Mike Keenan oversaw the 1987 Canadian team that won the three-game thriller over the Soviets. Bobby Clarke brought a 1970s Prairie hockey mentality to the Summit Series, where he cracked his oak tree of a hockey stick over the ankle of Russian whiz Valeri Kharlamov in Game 6 of what, hilariously, was technically an exhibition series. Clarke was a force for Canada in that eight-game set, as was John LeClair 24 years later for Team USA at the 1996 World Cup.

Rasmus Ristolainen became a hero in his home country with an OT winner for Finland against the Tre Kronor in Sweden at the 2014 WJC. Another Finn, goalie Antero Niittymaki, nearly led Finland to glory at the 2006 Olympics before falling to Sweden in the final. Niittymaki was brilliant in the tourney, earning MVP honours.

**28. Buffalo Sabres (22-26-5):** There may not be a more event-defining performance at an international tournament than what Dominik Hasek did at the 1998 Games, leading the Czech Republic to gold in the first Olympics to feature NHLers. Hasek left Nagano with a 0.97 goals-against average and .961 save percentage in six games. He didn't allow a goal to Canada in the semifinal until Trevor Linden buried from in close with 63 seconds left in the game. After shutting the door in overtime and the shootout, Hasek blanked Russia in the final as the Czechs won the gold medal game 1-0. The party in Prague, it's safe to say, was something else.

Somewhat lost to history is the fact another Sabres goalie, Ryan Miller, was MVP of the 2010 Games in a silver-medal showing.

**29. Seattle Kraken (23-28-4):** It's a cheat, but remember how crazy clutch Jordan Eberle was at the WJC as an Oilers prospect? In 2009, he tied the gold-medal game with six ticks left in regulation and scored in the shootout as Canada downed Russia. A year later, Eberle scored two third-period goals in the decisive contest to pull Canada even with Team USA. The Canucks lost in OT, but Eberle's heroics were undeniable.

**30. Nashville Predators (18-27-7):** Canada was going mad against Latvian goalie Kristers Gudlevskis in the quarterfinals of the 2014 Sochi Olympics. With the score somehow tied 1-1 and fewer than seven minutes to go in the third, Shea Weber bombed one past Gudlevskis and Canada escaped with a 2-1 victory over the pesky Latvians. Another Preds D-man, Roman Josi, is the face of Swiss hockey. Josi netted 12 points in 10 games at last spring's worlds as Switzerland — which has never won gold at the worlds — claimed its third silver medal of the past 11 years.

**31. Chicago Blackhawks (16-31-6):** Tony Amonte was Captain America after he tipped home the shot that gave Team USA the late lead in the final game of the 1996 World Cup. The Americans trailed 2-1 with under four minutes to go but would not be denied and wound up scoring four times for a stunner of a 5-2 win.

Jonathan Toews — facing future Hawks teammate Patrick Kane — went three-for-three in a 2007 semifinal shootout versus Team USA at the world juniors (remember, international rules allowed the same player to attempt multiple times) and won gold with Canada one game later. Toews was also named best forward at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, where he played alongside teammates Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook on Canada.

**32. San Jose Sharks (15-34-6):** The Sharks had two players — Joe Thornton and Patrick Marleau — on the 2010 Canadian team that won Olympic gold and once again sent two — Marleau and Marc-Edouard Vlasic — in 2014, when Canada successfully defended its title.

## [Sportsnet.ca / 32 Thoughts: The NHL is heading into uncharted territory](#)

By Elliotte Friedman – February 7, 2025

The NHL is entering a new age. The hockey version of Captain Jean-Luc Picard: going where it has never gone before.

Everything we understood is changing. Contract comparables, economics, you name it. And if it is confusing for you and me, imagine what it's like for the people who really need to make these decisions on the fly — one month from a trade deadline.

Brief history lesson: when the NHL/NHLPA did their COVID CBA, there were two options. One was “low escrow” — less withheld from player paycheques, but it meant the cap would stay lower for a longer time. The other was paying back their debt faster, allowing the ceiling a quicker rise. But that meant higher holdbacks.

There is no phrase players hate more than escrow, so they avoided it like the plague.

Back then, no one knew where we were going. How long before fans returned to arenas? Would revenues recover? Everyone was on edge.

Thankfully, the worst-case scenarios evaporated. Depending on who you talk to, if the 50/50 split that existed in 2019 was still in place, the cap would be anywhere from \$102-\$105 million now. With record-high revenue projections, we're headed into uncharted territory: \$95.5 million in 2025-26, \$104 million in 2026-27 and \$113.5 million in 2027-28. The memo outlining these numbers indicated next season is set, but the following two can be adjusted. The world is more volcanic than stable, so you never know where things are going. But several sources believe that if the current path continues, those limits will go slightly higher.

The league, overall, is healthy. There are always worries (regional television, Canadian dollar) but the good outweighs the bad. Tampa Bay's sale price was just under \$2 billion and minority-stake franchise valuations are strong. It's very interesting that the NHL and the union agreed to “de-link” the cap from exact revenues for another three seasons — keeping escrow low was a motivating factor for the players — but if numbers dictate that's how much they are to be paid, that's what they've earned.

At the same time, not only is the overall player share larger than ever, so are the individual rewards. It is not exactly apples to apples, but, in the final season of the pre-cap system, Peter Forsberg and Jaromir Jagr each earned \$11 million. There were times contract structure allowed some to earn more in individual seasons — Brad Richards, Shea Weber, John Tavares among them — but no one did it on an overall AAV basis until Connor McDavid's \$12.5-million extension in 2018. Now we've gone from McDavid to Nathan MacKinnon (\$12.6 million) to Auston Matthews (\$13.25 million) to Leon Draisaitl (\$14 million).

Objects arriving faster than they appear: Mikko Rantanen, Kirill Kaprizov, Mitch Marner, Cale Makar and McDavid, once again. The bar will raise, multiple times. I never have a problem with anyone in life — player, manager, business-owner, blue-collar, white-collar — negotiating their best deal. Sometimes you have the hammer, sometimes you get hammered. You can't fault anyone for trying.

Does a player like Dylan Cozens become even more valuable because he's locked in for five more seasons at \$7.1 million? You have certainty on his salary. Does trading for an RFA like Bowen Byram or extending a UFA-to-be like Sam Bennett become even more complicated? What was true two weeks ago may not be true now.



The upcoming 4 Nations break will give GMs a chance to breathe, to address their own situations. They'll have a good idea of their negotiation situations by the end of the event.

When Marc Bergevin became Montreal's GM, he explained one of his core philosophies: know when you are ready to hit home runs.

He worked for the Chicago Blackhawks in 2006, when they had the opportunity to trade for Chris Pronger. They declined, the right decision because the draft pick that turned into Patrick Kane would have gone to Edmonton.

"Hit singles," he said, "until you are good enough to hit home runs."

Several years into his tenure, Bergevin modified his outlook.

"Those kinds of players aren't available often. If they are, you have to look at it."

Next year will still be tight for many, but it won't be long until almost everyone has room to swing their biggest bat. There is potential for bidding wars.

Maybe.

Days before Rantanen's earth-shattering move, one executive said: "No way Colorado can trade him, can they? You can't replace those guys."

The Avalanche did it anyway.

Clearly, they are going to pay Makar, which affected what they were willing to do with Rantanen, even though he's a stud. Roster construction/cap flexibility concerns are real. But the trade revealed something else.

While players are excited about the rising financial wave, teams are extremely wary. Maybe you're a Canadian club collecting revenues with a weakened dollar, paying players in American cash. In today's dollars, US\$95.5 million is CDN\$140 million. Maybe you believed you've squeezed as much as you can from your building or fanbase. Some will be very happy to flex financial muscle. Others aren't so sure.

It's tough to tell what's real and what's noise. This is competition, and many teams are consistently close to the cap. They want to win and there's fan/media/internal pressure to do what it takes. Rebuilding teams will drop to the floor, with others saying, "We'll spend later in the season if we're in it." Even the most reluctant, however, will find it extremely hard to avoid the pull to the top when their window opens.

What is true is that teams are uncomfortable.

There still are major variables to be introduced. Commissioner Gary Bettman is negotiating a new Canadian television deal, and he never aims low. There will be expansion. Those will bring financial spikes, potentially easing ownership concerns.

Last weekend's astonishing Luka Doncic deal made me think more about Rantanen. Two tremendous players. Both teams had the ability to pay them (Doncic on a much larger scale), and both opted not to.

The Avalanche are an extremely well-run organization with extremely wealthy ownership. Look at the choice they made. They aren't finished with this renovation, so it's hard to give a final grade, but they moved on from one of the 10 best players in the sport.

MacKinnon-Makar-Rantanen. Those three make you a Stanley Cup contender every season. The GM who traded him even called Rantanen a superstar. Yet he basically said, "The numbers don't work for us."

We're not going there." They made this choice before knowing exact cap numbers, but I'm not sure things would be different if they did.

Who else is thinking like this? Who else is saying, "Sooner or later, we'll be doing it, too?"

Everything is different. New economics, on the ice and off. A better idea of the landscape, but more changes coming. Two quieter weeks to map strategy right before the trade deadline. Where are we going, together?

### **32 THOUGHTS**

**1.** Another area to WATCH: contract negotiations around "percentage of cap." Players/agents have made it their strategy, and it's a smart one. When he signed, McDavid's percentage was 15.72, which remains highest overall. (Draisaitl, MacKinnon and Matthews are the others above 15.) This tactic has spread from superstars to everyone up and down the roster.

One exec said last week that negotiations with a solid, appreciated player on his team — but not one of their top guys — halted because this tactic took things where the organization wouldn't go. Like most contract conversations, it comes down to leverage, but teams will try to limit percentage arguments to top players. We'll see.

**2.** Ryan Hartman appealed his 10-game suspension. Commissioner Bettman is next on the agenda on the appeal, and he rarely decreases a sentence. A recent exception is Jason Spezza, reduced from six to four games in 2021. But he had a clean record. If Bettman keeps it above six, Hartman can go to an independent arbitrator — where Dennis Wideman and Tom Wilson received reductions.

Unique to this is the 4 Nations break, as this process doesn't usually happen fast enough to get a player back in the lineup before the original suspension is over. Generally, the NHLPA isn't crazy about appealing these if they don't think they can win. One thing I heard about this situation: on-ice officials warned Hartman several times during the Ottawa game that he was in danger of losing control.

**3.** The Penguins practice Thursday. We'll see if Sidney Crosby skates. If he doesn't, I'm slightly worried.

**4.** I exist because of Canadian/American soldiers (and others) in the Second World War, so anthem booing is not for me. Canadian Flag Day is Feb. 15, and 2025 is the 60th anniversary of the red-and-white Maple Leaf. That night is Canada vs. USA in Montreal. Apparently, there are plans to hand out 20,000 flags at the game. Gonna be nuts.

**5.** As expected, the Canucks quickly extended Marcus Pettersson at six years, \$33 million. That was not going to be a difficult negotiation. The left-side jam made Carson Soucy available. Not an easy year for him, but I like Soucy — who played his weak side during Tuesday's 3-0 win over Colorado. Very good for Vancouver in last year's playoffs, and effective when Seattle beat Colorado in 2023. He can help someone. Calgary makes sense (he's from Alberta), but the Flames want to see some Ilya Solovyov.

**6.** Watching the Rangers and Canucks post-J.T. Miller makes you realize how much better off everyone is now that this saga is over. No more uncertainty, no more stress. Miller is a different, more energized player in New York, and you can see how happy his new teammates — particularly Vincent Trocheck — are to have him.

With their two trades, the Canucks look like a different team. Remodelled defence; the entire group quicker both on their skates and moving the puck. For different reasons than Miller, Filip Chytil needed his own fresh start. The Canucks outwrestled Western rivals Edmonton and Vegas (among others) for Drew O'Connor, and will attempt to extend him, too.

The Athletic's Arthur Staple reported New York was unwilling to part with 2023 90th overall selection Drew Fortescue, a defenceman at NCAA Boston College. Vancouver will be happy with Victor Mancini, but Fortescue was an original target. Rangers GM Chris Drury knows him very well, as his son, Luke, was a minor-hockey teammate for several seasons.

**7.** Colorado made a run at Miller, but it never got close enough to threaten the Rangers deal. That's why Casey Mittelstadt's name is out there. Believe New Jersey, Ottawa and Toronto poked around, but not with much traction.

**8.** The Devils, Senators and Maple Leafs also were among those who went hard for Brandon Saad, as did Tampa Bay. Can't fault Saad for picking Vegas, despite the team's current struggles. The Golden Knights will be just fine.

**9.** Will be interesting to see if Pittsburgh keeps that top-13 protected Rangers 2025 pick (unprotected for 2026). A couple teams were disappointed to not snare it. There's value. Everyone knows what the Penguins want — controllable young talent, preferably in the NHL or close.

**10.** Toronto is seeing how high it can go at centre. Won't be easy, and might not be able to shoot as high as a 2C, but the Leafs are looking. First-round picks matter, and they don't have one in June.

**11.** My Rantanen theory: Carolina's brain trust will do the math. Let's assume that, on the open market, he's getting seven years at \$14 million per. That's \$98 million. The Hurricanes will beat that total with the eighth year available to them, so we're talking nine digits. Maybe they offer deferment to keep the cap hit a little lower, but that didn't work with the same agency (Octagon) and Draisaitl.

Owner Tom Dundon has talked before about having a true star — one of the league's best players — on his roster, in his market. What it would do for interest, ticket sales, etc. Now he's got one. GM Eric Tulsky pointed out they are in a much better cap situation than with Jake Guentzel a year ago, but the organization learned one other important lesson: don't wait. Carolina eventually agreed to what the winger wanted, but it wasn't until right before the draft. By then, Guentzel decided to hit the market.

That won't happen this time. The Hurricanes are eager to give this a real run. How high will they go? Will it be enough? And, most importantly, what happens if it isn't done by March 7? All questions we await to see answered.

**12.** The Rantanen deal could have been a four-way. The Hurricanes called around to see if anyone else would get involved. I assume that was to eat some of Taylor Hall's salary.

**13.** Rantanen's got two points in five games with the Hurricanes, though he's had some great chances. It gets forgotten in all the hype, but there are always adjustments. A lefty, he's used to playing with two incredible righties: MacKinnon and Makar. His new centre, Sebastian Aho, is a lefty. When Aho was out a game sick, Rantanen scored his first Carolina goal on a terrific play by temporarily inserted righty Jack Roslovic.

Aho's a great player and they'll figure it out, but it's one of those neat things to watch. (I did see righty Brent Burns replace Shayne Gostisbehere on the power play; the lefty was there when I first watched after the trade.)

Martin Necas likes to carry the puck; the Avalanche have some pretty high-level guys who like that, too. He's got the skill and IQ to learn where to go for MacKinnon, but he is a different partner for Colorado's No. 1 centre than the physically imposing Rantanen.

"You have that duo," Minnesota's Marcus Foligno said last week. "Now, you take one away. It's weird ... I always respected Rantanen because he carries a lot of the load. I don't think (everyone) realizes how

good he is and how much he helps out MacKinnon. Necas is a really good player, but it's going to be weird not seeing Rantanen and MacKinnon coming over the boards together."

Necas is averaging 22:43 ice-time in his first six Colorado games. No player is going to complain about that, but it's an adjustment from the 18 in Carolina.

**14.** No one thinks Dallas is done. Depending on how they handle Miro Heiskanen's injury status — and nobody's going to be rushing him back for the regular season — the Stars still have about \$5 million in LTIR space. Don't be surprised if they aren't finished remodelling the right side of their defence.

**15.** The Sabres have won four in a row, but we will see if there is any long-term fallout from Sunday, when Stefan Noesen's hit on Tage Thompson went unaddressed. One player on another team said he heard from a friend on Buffalo that there was talk of the leadership group and/or alternate captaincies being switched over what didn't happen. What a gamer, Dennis Gilbert. Fought Mathieu Olivier three seconds into Tuesday's game to make everyone look better. Not easy.

**16.** If he's available, can see Tampa Bay lusting after Alex Tuch. They wouldn't be the only ones.

**17.** In addition to Olivier, the Blue Jackets will try to extend Dante Fabbro, who has found a nice role there.

**18.** A three-game Wednesday means massive scout concentration, with plenty of attention at Edmonton/Chicago and Montreal/Los Angeles. There was interest in Connor Murphy a year ago, but injuries ruined his season. He's healthy now, so plenty of eyes on him — along with Ryan Donato and Seth Jones. A lot of focus on Jake Evans in Montreal, but do not discount Joel Armia. His play is not going unnoticed.

**19.** The NBA's Utah Jazz were the middleman in the massive Doncic deal. ESPN's Tim MacMahon reported that Jazz president Danny Ainge didn't know Doncic nor Anthony Davis were involved "until about an hour before it was completed ... But by then it was too late to do much about it."

Kind of funny it happened a week after the Blackhawks were criticized for not getting more out of eating part of Rantanen's salary. I asked around about this: should the Blackhawks have changed their minds, or asked for more? "How do you feel about breaking your word?" was the general response.

One thing everyone understood: GM Kyle Davidson wasn't told specifics because Colorado demanded secrecy from Carolina. A couple executives said that, in this situation, you know what you're being asked to retain, so you're guessing who it could be. And, they bet Davidson was given a higher number than actually needed, to make it harder to guess who it was. Apparently, that's a regular tactic.

**20.** What Connor Hellebuyck does for Winnipeg, Dustin Wolf has a chance to do for Calgary. Not only has he taken the number one job and breathed new life into the franchise, but veterans are beginning to believe he can be a franchise cornerstone. They recognize Wolf's talent. GM Craig Conroy told teams Rasmus Andersson, Nazem Kadri and MacKenzie Weegar are off-limits. We'll see where it goes when it really matters, but the Flames are confidently talking about keeping Andersson.

**21.** It did not go unnoticed that Conroy took a private plane to Philadelphia to pick up Joel Farabee and Morgan Frost. At least one Flyer took time to text the Flames about what great people they were getting.

**22.** Winnipeg (among others) will get down to contract business during the 4 Nations break. During my brief trip to the Manitoba capital, the quote that struck me most was from Dylan DeMelo. "This is where I wanted to be," he said about re-signing last summer. "I love that (management) doubled down on what we have."

Apparently, exit meetings last year were brutally honest about what went wrong against Colorado and what needed to happen to avoid a repeat. Players showed up in great condition, they started strong and haven't looked back. The most mystery surrounds Nikolaj Ehlers, and his teammates didn't want to speak for him. As written above, we are in a new era, and it's hard to predict where all of this is going. What the Jets did say was that players want to win more than anything else, and thanks to Hellebuyck, they believe they have that chance.

**23.** Thought Rickard Rakell would be a perfect fit for Winnipeg, but don't believe that's likely.

**24.** If you need a defenceman, keep an eye on Utah. They will soon have extra.

**25.** Unlike Heiskanen, Wiliam Karlsson, Jacob Markstrom et al, whose 4 Nations absence is as a result of long-term injury, Alex Pietrangelo continues to play. Watch this reaction to a hit last Sunday from Matthew Tkachuk. It's an awkward play, but nothing you'd think would be so agonizing. It's clear he's playing in pain.

Is there any way Drew Doughty doesn't get this spot the way he's playing?

**26.** Hated to see Kaiden Guhle's skate cut put him out; he's suffered enough injuries. The details were gruesome, just a disgusting injury. A gentle reminder: wear the cut-resistant gear underneath socks, too.

**27.** As Hockey Canada considers a full-time world junior coach, one name to keep an eye on: Kris Mallette. Mallette was fired as WHL Kelowna's bench boss in January, due to a poor start after three consecutive playoff berths. More importantly, he knows this age group of Canadian players, and has had success with them: three Gold medals at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup — one as a head coach, two as an assistant.

**28.** Thought it was great for hockey that McDonald's brought together Auston Matthews and Connor McDavid for an updated commercial showdown. I loved the original — Larry Bird/Michael Jordan from 1993 "Nothing But Net" — followed by Wayne Gretzky/Mats Sundin in 1997. McDavid said he re-watched both "quite a bit as soon as I knew we were going to try to do something similar."

In the Jordan/Bird version, the latter says, "No dunking," so I wondered if any limits were applied between these two. "No restrictions," said Rebecca Smart, McDonald's Canada's Brand Strategy Director. "We encouraged as much ad-libbing, riffing and chirping as possible to highlight their real friendship and a side we don't often get to see from them."

The Oilers captain said the two players didn't have a ton of input "as the directors seemed to know our styles and preferences."

"We definitely had some fun with it," Matthews added. "The one where I hit Connor's tooth out of his billboard is one of my favourites."

**29.** There was never any resolution. No winner. Bird and Jordan were so fiercely competitive, I can't imagine either being convinced to lose. Matthews and McDavid are cut from the same cloth. "They are so competitive we can't imagine there ever being a winner," Smart said. "They will consistently want to one up each other."

Closest I got was asking who is the more accurate shooter. McDavid: "Tough to tell, situational for sure but I will say that 34's release is second to none." Matthews laughed: "Connor is one of the most accurate shooters in the league. I think we both take a lot of pride working on our accuracy."

**30.** One year after the original basketball version, McDonald's came out with an updated one, adding Charles Barkley. Will this follow the same pattern, a sequel adding another superstar? "We will leave

that to McDonald's to decide," McDavid said. Smart: "No sequel in the works, but we left it open ended for a reason." This has Leon Draisaitl written all over it.

**31.** Finally, because I had to know, what is each one's favourite food order? McDavid: "Non-Showdown related? Chicken McNuggets." Matthews: "The Quarter Papi, obviously." Both good choices, but nothing will ever beat two original cheeseburgers.

**32.** If you're looking for something to listen to, I would recommend Tim Ferriss's late January podcast with Chris Sacca. A real eye-opener.

## [Sportsnet.ca](https://www.sportsnet.ca) / Forecasting the NHL's Atlantic Division in weird playoff race

By Justin Bourne – February 7, 2025

When you're trying to make sense of who's who in the NHL standings, "games in hand" are a funny thing. At this time of year I've always thought it most logical to sort the standings by points percentage, given the usual disparity in games played. But in discussing that on Real Kyper and Bourne, my co-host made a salient point: in a year with a condensed schedule thanks to the 4 Nations Face-Off, I'm not sure you want to be the team that's counting on "games in hand" to make up points, even if it's just a small number of them.

Being light on games played implies that somewhere in the coming weeks a team's schedule is going to get bogged down, maybe with back-to-backs, and those points become tougher to win. And further to that, with a congested schedule, injuries become more likely. Getting through the NHL's schedule is part of the battle.

However you feel about games in hand, it's impossible to avoid the reality that the Atlantic Division is tight. That's made clear just by how different the order looks when you toggle between raw points and points percentage.

I've done us all the courtesy of cutting off the Sabres (they're done), and have included the Habs juuuust in case, but their miracle needs to start right about now, or they may not be in these graphics next week.

**For the playoff race, let's bring the Metro into the conversation:**

**Let's pick through some thoughts and work our way towards conclusions:**

- 1.** Columbus is in trouble. They just lost Kirill Marchenko to a broken jaw after he took a puck to the face, and if we're calling a spade a spade their season to date has felt like an accomplishment already. They finished at the bottom of the East by 10 points last year, suffered the tragic loss of Johnny Gaudreau, and find themselves already only seven points behind their 2023-24 point total. It's hard to see them powering through all these teams above them and into the playoffs. I've got them missing out, unfortunately.
- 2.** The Rangers are a very real threat. Last season they won the Eastern Conference with 114 points, and they aren't so different from that team. The addition of J.T. Miller emphasizes that they're going for it. They have talent and goaltending. It's not hard to imagine them flipping the switch and getting hot.
- 3.** The Islanders remind me of the old "Why won't you die?" scene from Austin Powers, or if you wanna go back way further, the Monty Python "Black Knight" sketch which ends with the limbless knight saying "Come back here and take what's coming to you! I'll bite your legs off!"

At some point, being a fairly average team with a constant deluge of injuries has to force them into being sellers, but Ilya Sorokin has been the best goaltender in the league since the start of 2025. He's better the more work he faces, and of late he's faced a pile. Sorokin's last seven starts: 7-0-0, 1.16 GAA, .960 SV%.

Still, it's hard to imagine the Islanders continuing to win at a rate that outpaces all these other teams. But you never know what a hot goalie can do.

**And so...**

4. The Atlantic could see five teams make the playoffs if the Rangers don't get hot over their final 29 games. There are six teams who right now think they'll get in, and in alphabetical order they are: Boston, Detroit, Florida, Ottawa, Tampa Bay, Toronto.

5. The Panthers and Leafs are a pretty solid nose above the pack and would have to fall off significantly to tumble clean out of the playoffs, so let's call them "in." The Athletic has both their odds at over 97 per cent, with multiple other websites listing the Leafs as the team with one of the few easiest remaining schedules in the NHL.

6. It's really hard to see Tampa Bay missing. They have too many elite, veteran (but not old) talents and a great coach, with a good goalie. The Athletic has their odds at 87 per cent, third-highest in the division.

7. And so, the dog fight is this: You have Ottawa, Detroit, and Boston fighting for two spots -- and maybe just one if the Rangers get hot.

8. The longest odds in this group via The Athletic are that of the hottest team in the NHL, the Detroit Red Wings, who are listed at an astonishingly low 24 per cent. The Bruins are a breath higher at 26 per cent, while the Senators -- right there with those teams in points -- are listed with a whopping 78 per cent chance to make the post-season.

9. The thing about these odds is that they're not assessing these teams as neutral in a points race, they're assessing the talent levels of the roster and what games each team has remaining. That means Ottawa's big advantage there isn't built on having one more point than Detroit, it's built on their good players (who have to live up to expectations), and eating up a softer schedule.

In the two sites referenced earlier covering "remaining strength of schedule," both have Detroit with the hardest remaining schedule in the league. Both also have Ottawa at 29th, or the fourth-easiest if you want to flip that perspective.

10. And so what we're left with here are the Bruins. Their remaining schedule is middling-to-hard (average rank of 13.5), and they're kind of a strange animal this year. After a garbage start (he'd say the same) Jeremy Swayman had a .904 SV% in January (better than league average) and he's been above .950 in three of his past four starts, so he could be rounding into form. And they do have top-end talents, as we know.

But they're also in trade rumours as sellers, from Trent Frederic to Charlie Coyle to Brandon Carlo. They're frustrated and don't feel like legitimate Cup contenders. They're ninth in the conference Thursday morning and have played the most games. There's reason to believe they're in real peril here.

11. I check a scatter plot graph on Sportlogiq that uses the simple XY axis and drops teams in based on expected goals created for and against. By now, the good teams are clustered in the top right (high expected goals for, and low against), and the bad at the bottom left.

#### **Some quick notes from that:**

- The Habs are the only team we've discussed that's bottom left (bad).
- Florida and Tampa are the only teams top right (good), while the Leafs are just a breath outside that quadrant because they give up too much against (relying too much on their goaltending).
- Ottawa is the next-best looking team, as they defend well. They just need to create a bit more offensively to get in the right section.
- Detroit and Boston score even less than Ottawa, and defend worse than the Sens too. Again, this is Ottawa's spot to lose.



**12. In conclusion:** as of Thursday, Feb. 6, I've got it as the Leafs, Panthers, Lightning and Sens in the playoffs. One of Detroit or Boston will need to get (or in the Wings' case, "stay") hot to beat out the Rangers for the final wild card spot.

The other thing to watch is that the trade deadline is on the horizon: how do these teams see themselves, and how dramatically do they plan to change their rosters?