



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
January 16, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets

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Columbus Dispatch / Daniil Tarasov, Zach Werenski key fifth straight Columbus Blue Jackets win: 3 takeaways

By Columbus Dispatch Staff – January 16, 2025

It wasn't the kind of game the Blue Jackets have grown accustomed to playing at Nationwide Arena.

Stick checking and intense pressure by the Blue Jackets and Philadelphia Flyers led to a stilted, wonky and at times ugly game. It favored "mudders," and the Blue Jackets showed they can muck it up effectively in a gritty 3-2 shootout victory to extend their winning streak to five straight games.

Zach Werenski, whose 14th and 15th goals forced overtime, didn't think the Blue Jackets played up to their new standard. His coach had a slightly different take.

"Did we have our typical game in an offensive game?" Dean Evason said. "No, but did we have our 'muck' game? Yeah. It was a grinding, in the mud, 'muck' game, and both teams were committed. It was a good hockey game. We're fortunate to get the shootout goals."

Here are three takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski still going strong

Werenski, who logged a game-high 31:30 for his second-highest ice time this season, is the Blue Jackets' leading scorer with 50 points and padded that lead with two more goals. He leads all NHL defensemen with 15 goals, extended a franchise record home points streak to 17 games and is tied with Colorado Avalanche star Cale Makar for the league's scoring lead among defensemen.

According to the NHL, Werenski's home points streak is also the seventh-longest of its kind for an NHL defenseman. Those with longer streaks on home ice include legends Bobby Orr, Paul Coffey, Phil Housley and Brian Leetch.

"The one thing that we talked about in (the coaches' room) is that I honestly don't think, on (his) first goal, anyone in the world catches him," Evason said. "I honestly don't believe that. He separated by like 10 feet maybe, by the time he got to the goalie. His effortless skating and his drive to lead his team and help his team have success is as good as I've ever seen."

Daniil Tarasov rebounds with strong performance for Columbus Blue Jackets

Convincing Daniil Tarasov to accept a short AHL conditioning assignment couldn't have worked out better for the Blue Jackets or their struggling goalie.

After starting Friday and Saturday for the Cleveland Monsters against former Blue Jackets coach Pascal Vincent's Laval Rocket, Tarasov got a boost prior to facing former Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella's Flyers. Tracking pucks, dealing with traffic and helping the Monsters kill penalties in a 5-0 loss and 2-1 overtime win prepared Tarasov for his NHL return to the net.

Despite allowing a goal from the high slot by Owen Tippett that put the Flyers up 2-1 in the third period, Tarasov was sharp most of the night. He stopped 23 of 25 shots plus one in the shootout he wasn't credited for, showing why the Blue Jackets wouldn't risk losing a big, athletic goalie while trying to get him through waivers for a standard AHL assignment.

Tarasov, 25, is still young by goaltending standards and takes up a lot of net at 6 feet 5. He just needed to work through a prolonged slump while restoring his confidence without the pressure of doing it for an NHL team that's surprisingly competing for a playoff spot.

“You don’t do things like this to demote people or show them up, and even when we sit guys out it’s not to embarrass them,” Evason said. “It’s to hopefully help the team and the organization. If you commit to it and you have a positive attitude, then you can have success. ... (Tarasov) had a positive mindset going (to Cleveland). He had a positive mindset coming back, and it showed tonight.”

Kirill Marchenko's 'Magic Wand' clinches shootout for Columbus Blue Jackets

Needing a goal to end the shootout for the Blue Jackets, Kirill Marchenko went with a slick move that was first unveiled at Nationwide Arena by Alexandre Texier.

The former Blue Jackets forward used it twice to beat goalies for the Florida Panthers and Nashville Predators, deftly stickhandling the puck to the end of the stick’s blade for a quick push through the goalie’s leg pads. Marchenko studied it while playing with Texier last season and pulled it off with aplomb against the Vancouver Canucks’ Casey DeSmith.

Texier said he first got the idea from watching a YouTube clip of former NHL forward Henrik Borgstrom attempting it in Finland. Prior to being traded to the St. Louis Blues in June, Texier agreed to a suggested name for the move after turning down multiple proposals.

He gave “Magic Wand” a thumbs up, which the Blue Jackets can adapt to “Marchy’s Magic Wand” now that he’s 2 for 2 using it. Marchenko, who threw his arms up to celebrate, attempted the risky move because the Blue Jackets were ahead 1-0 in the shootout on Kent Johnson’s leadoff goal.

He also joked about paying Texier for usage rights after the two became friends last season.

“I paid him a little bit, and I can do it,” Marchenko said, smiling. “Not that much, but, yeah, I paid him. I don’t think a lot about what’s in my mind (before shooting). I just think about how I need to score a goal, and we need the win. Just go in, try not to think and just do what I can do best ... and it’s worked.”

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets grind their way past the Flyers](#)

By Garrison McDaniel – January 16, 2025

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

RECAP: BLUE JACKETS 3, FLYERS 2

1. Daniil Tarasov stopped 23 of 25 shots to earn Blue Jackets' fifth straight win.

After he got off to a 3-1 start to the season, Tarasov lost six straight games, one being an overtime loss, which resulted in his starts becoming few and far between. His last start for the Blue Jackets before Tuesday night's victory came Dec. 28 and was in a 4-0 loss to the Boston Bruins.

Tarasov was able to shake off the recent struggles, return to his game and find success against the Flyers, which included two saves in the shootout.

"He was awesome tonight," Zach Werenski said. "Just super calm in the net. Made all the big saves, made all the saves he needed to make, and was perfect in the shootout. So yeah, hats off to him for the work he's put in lately. I'm really excited for him."

Not playing for weeks can be difficult for a goaltender and can cause them to struggle to stay sharp for when they are called upon. In order to help Tarasov shake off the rust and find his game, the Blue Jackets elected to send him to AHL Cleveland this past weekend for a conditioning assignment. There, he played in two games against the Laval Rocket (Montreal's AHL affiliate), the first being a 5-0 loss Friday which he followed up the next night with a 2-1 overtime win.

"I'm happy that we got two points and he was a part of it," head coach Dean Evason said. "He did the work, as we talked about, did the right things by committing to playing hockey, and his game was ready."

Tarasov believes that the conditioning assignment was what he needed to feel more comfortable in net and refocus his play.

"It was really helpful. You know, two games in two days was kind of, I didn't really think much in the second game," Tarasov said. "Just trying to play, like letting the puck come to me, be like, one puck at a time."

He is looking forward to more opportunities now that he has regained some confidence and earned a win.

"Now I'm focusing on my game and getting back on track," he said, "getting good practice sessions and ready for the next game."

2. The Blue Jackets finding ways to win amid a tight playoff race.

On Dec. 18, the Blue Jackets were 26th in the overall NHL standings and five points back of a wild card spot. With the playoffs looking more and more out of reach thanks to losses in eight of nine games, they turned their season around.

Now, after a 9-2-1 stretch, the Jackets have solidified themselves as a team in the playoff hunt. Much of the turnaround has been from the team learning different ways to win in the NHL.

There is no game more evident of this than their win against the Flyers. Evason made sure the team knew they were not necessarily going to be able to play the free-wheeling style that had marked most of their home victories and wanted them to be able to earn a result nonetheless.

"We talked in between both periods about that – this is not your typical game," Evason said. "So did we have our typical offensive game? No. But did we have our muck game? Yeah."

The Flyers have had the Blue Jackets' number going into this game as their previous two meetings resulted in a 5-3 home loss on Dec. 12 and a 5-4 overtime loss on Dec. 21. However, Evason's team learned from those games and came into this one knowing what they needed to do to win.

"The guys, you have to play in different ways," Evason said. "It was just a grinding, in the mud, muck game, and both teams were committed. It was a good hockey game."

This win was a good indicator that the Jackets are moving in the right direction and have learned from previous games this season. There were times earlier this year when the team did not play up to their standard and, as a result, dropped games that have proven to be costly. However, on this night Werenski said he was happy how the team responded after going down 2-1 in the third period.

"I don't really think we had our game tonight fully, but we found a way to get a win," Werenski said. "Just kept sticking to the game plan. It wasn't pretty, but we found a way to get two points."

3. Kirill Marchenko used a former teammate's moves to seal the game.

On Jan. 28, 2021, Alexandre Texier utilized a new shootout move against the Florida Panthers and the hockey world took notice. The one-handed poke move known as the 'firepoker' has been replicated a few times now in the NHL, including by Marchenko, who pulled out the move for the winning shootout goal against the Flyers.

"I have no idea what he did; that is foreign to me," Evason said. "It's phenomenal. But, yeah, I don't know if I've seen it."

Marchenko first used Texier's famous move almost a year ago to the day in a shootout win against the Vancouver Canucks. Now, he is 2-for-2 when going with the firepoker. Marchenko joked that he gave Texier a little royalty, but that he wasn't sure what he was going to do until he scored the deciding goal against Ivan Fedotov.

"I don't think about what's on my mind," he said. "I just know I need to score a goal and we need a win. Don't think and try to do what I can do."

His move impressed his coach, who jokingly said he will not be trying to use it anytime soon.

"It's crazy. It was pretty special," Evason said.

[BlueJackets.com / For the Blue Jackets, Aston-Reese has been 'exactly what we needed'](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – January 16, 2025

Over the last three years, the only thing constant in Zach Aston-Reese's life has been change.

Hockey has a way of making that happen, especially when you're a versatile, bottom-six forward like Aston-Reese. After spending his first four-plus seasons in Pittsburgh, Aston-Reese has moved more than a U-Haul truck, going to Anaheim at the 2022 trade deadline, spending 2022-23 with the Toronto Maple Leafs, playing most of last year with Grand Rapids of the AHL with a three-game cameo in Detroit, then signing a PTO this offseason with Vegas.

He didn't get to enjoy Sin City very long, though, as he was placed on waivers on NHL roster cutdown day in October, only to be claimed by a Blue Jackets team that needed forwards. It turned into perhaps the most serendipitous thing that could have happened, though, as the 30-year-old wing has found a fit in Columbus to the extent he signed a one-year contract extension with the Blue Jackets on Monday.

As you might imagine, he could not have anticipated how any of this would work out just a few short months ago.

"If you go back all the way to summer, I never thought I would be in Columbus," Aston-Reese said. "Then signing an extension was the last thing on my mind. It feels good to have earned it. I know a lot of the guys are excited. Coaching staff is happy for me, so that feels good.

"I've always believed in myself, but it's nice to have everyone else believe in you as well."

Aston-Reese earned the deal – emphasis on earned – by doing a lot of things right in his first half season in Columbus. He's chipped in four goals and 11 points in 42 games, but his impact has gone far beyond that.

He has always been one of the top forwards in the league defensively when it comes to analytics, and Aston-Reese has a variety of facets to his game, including speed – he's in the 93rd percentile among NHL forwards in speed bursts over 20 mph and the 78th percentile in terms of top-end speed – and physicality, as he's third among CBJ players with 97 hits.

Add in the fact he can play up and down the lineup and on special teams and Aston-Reese is someone head coach Dean Evason can depend on.

"Work, commitment," Evason said when asked what Aston-Reese had done to earn the contract extension. "Just his forecheck, his intensity level to do the right things, playing hard, competing. He's done that. He's earned a contract and we're happy for him and for us as an organization."

Aston-Reese was one of several veterans brought in this offseason by the Blue Jackets front office whose presences have helped turned the team's fortunes around, as Columbus sits in a wild card spot in mid-January. Such additions as Aston-Reese, James van Riemsdyk, Jack Johnson and Kevin Labanc have not only stabilized the lineup for the Blue Jackets, they've added leadership and experience in key situations.

For Aston-Reese, that has largely meant skating on the opposite wing of Mathieu Olivier, and the two have used their penchant for big hits and responsible play to create a formidable defensive duo no matter who the center has been.

“He’s been awesome,” Olivier said. “He’s been exactly what we needed in our bottom six. He can fill in top six as well if you need him. I know playing with him is unreal. There’s something about predictable hockey that is really effective. When you’re in a bottom six role and you’re trying to make an impact night in and night out, playing with predictable guys is huge, and knowing what to expect from other guys on your line. Me and Reeser have figured that out pretty well together.”

Aston-Reese said he’s always had that physical nature to his game going back to squirts, when he was moved up a year early because of his propensity for taking the body. Even now, his 6-1, 200-pound frame allows him to pack a pretty good punch, and he tries to focus on that area of his game.

“I’ve always enjoyed it,” he said. “I had an older brother (William) that beat up on me all the time, so it was a way for me to get all that frustration out from being the younger brother. But I think since I came into this league, that’s something that’s always been expected of me. When I’ve gotten away from it, I’ve had conversations with coaches on where the lack of success is coming from, so that has to be a staple of my game to do well.”

While Aston-Reese tries to play with some bite to his game, he also showed he has the talent to score goals during his college days at Northeastern. He posted 14 goals and 43 points in 41 games as a junior to help the Huskies to the NCAA tournament, then led college hockey in both goals (31) and points (63) as a senior in 2016-17.

In the NHL, he’s totaled 46 goals and 91 points over his eight seasons, but he’s had to round out his game and do the little things to stick.

“I think it’s hard early on, especially for younger guys when you’re the best on your team playing 20-plus, 18-plus minutes a night and then come up and everyone is just so good,” he said. “Being able to stay in the game where you’re not getting a shift every five minutes, it’s such an important mind-set to be able to establish. It’s easy to throw yourself a pity party and feel bad for yourself, but at the end of the day, no one really cares. You’ve got to adjust.”

That’s exactly what Aston-Reese has done, and now he finds himself in Columbus for at least another season with some much-needed stability in his career. His laidback nature has allowed him to fit in not just on the ice but off it, as Olivier said their senses of humor mesh, and Aston-Reese has a fair number of interests outside of hockey ranging from music to golf to the occasional woodworking project.

That might help explain how he’s so quickly found a home in Columbus, and Aston-Reese makes no bones about the fact he’s enjoyed his time with his new CBJ teammates.

“It’s been great, honestly,” Aston-Reese said. “It feels like a big family. Dean is really big with us doing stuff as a team on the road, so we’ve done a couple of bonding events. I don’t know – there’s not really cliques. I feel like every road trip it’s a different group of guys you go to dinner with, so we all get along and I think it shows a bit on the ice.”

[NHL.com / Marchenko's 2-way game huge boost for surging Blue Jackets](#)

By Nicholas J. Cotsonika – January 16, 2025

COLUMBUS -- Edmonton Oilers center Leon Draisaitl leads the NHL at plus-27.

Can you guess who's second at plus-26?

It's Columbus Blue Jackets forward Kirill Marchenko, who was a combined minus-28 over his two NHL seasons before this.

The story behind it is about more than Marchenko. It's about the Blue Jackets under new coach Dean Evason, and it illustrates why they hold the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference after finishing last in the East last season.

"New coach have a different system," Marchenko said. "It's help for everybody here, I think, because whole team, everybody grow up right now and [rise to] the next level. He give me confidence, trust, and I try to be good."

Marchenko showed his skill immediately in the NHL and has increased his offensive production each season.

He had 25 points (21 goals, four assists) in 2022-23, third in goals among rookies, even though he played only 59 games. He had 42 points (23 goals, 19 assists) in 78 games last season.

The 24-year-old has 48 points (18 goals, 30 assists) in 44 games this season, leading Columbus in goals. Since Nov. 21, he's tied with Tampa Bay Lightning center Brayden Point for ninth in the NHL with 32 points (12 goals, 20 assists) in 26 games.

Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan said Marchenko can make plays few others can.

"I mean, he carries the puck with swagger," Monahan said. "I think you need a certain confidence and obviously a certain skill set to do that. The numbers show that he's producing, and I think those are only going to grow with the way he plays and how serious he takes it."

Marchenko put on a show against the Philadelphia Flyers at Nationwide Arena on Tuesday. First, he passed from left to right for defenseman Zach Werenski, who tied it 2-2 with 4:37 left in the third period. Then he clinched a 3-2 shootout win with a sick move, fooling goalie Ivan Fedotov and sliding the puck underneath him.

"I have no idea what he did," Evason said with a laugh. "That is foreign to me. It's phenomenal."

The Blue Jackets (21-17-6) have won five straight and play the San Jose Sharks at Nationwide Arena on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; FDSNOH, NBCSCA). They will host the Detroit Red Wings in the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series at Ohio Stadium on March 1 (6 p.m. ET; ESPN, TVAS-D, SN360).

"He's a really complete player," Werenski said of Marchenko. "He can shoot. He can pass. His hands are great."

Marchenko is more of a complete player than he has ever been before.

Plus/minus can be a misleading statistic, because so much is out of a player's control, but it can paint a broad picture. Marchenko was minus-23 as a rookie and minus-5 last season.

Columbus hired Evason on July 23 and signed Marchenko to a three-year, \$11.5 million contract (\$3.85 million average annual value) five days later.

“Dean emphasizes defense, and you’re going to get rewarded offensively if you do the things that you need to do,” general manager Don Waddell said.

Evason made his expectations clear to Marchenko.

“He’s got a great shot,” Evason said. “He’s got a great one-timer. He gets it off quickly. But what he was doing is playing on the outside, and we asked him to play on the inside and use that skill afterwards.

“He can still score pretty goals where he’s fading out and there’s a [one-timer on the power play] and what have you, but we’ve challenged him to get to the inside, to win his puck battles every single night, use his body. He’s got a big body [at 6-foot-3, 197 pounds, and needs to] use it to his advantage.

“And he’s committed to that.”

Marchenko has benefitted from playing often with Werenski; often on a line with Monahan and forward Dmitri Voronkov; and on a team that is second in the NHL in 5-on-5 goals (104), one behind the Washington Capitals.

Werenski has 50 points (15 goals, 35 assists) in 44 games, first on Columbus and tied with Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche for first among NHL defensemen.

Monahan, a veteran two-way center who has missed the past three games with a wrist injury, has 41 points (14 goals, 27 assists) in 41 games. Voronkov, another 24-year-old rising to a new level, has 30 points (17 goals, 13 assists) in 34 games.

Evason called it “almost the perfect line.”

“You’ve got a big, strong guy that goes to the net (in 6-5, 227-pound Voronkov),” Evason said. “You’ve got a guy that plays hard, that is good on face-offs, good defensively, good passer (in Monahan). And then you’ve got a goal-scorer that competes his butt off.”

But Werenski is plus-9, Voronkov plus-15, Monahan plus-17. No one else is plus-26.

No one else in the NHL is that high except Draisaitl.

Marchenko leads Columbus forwards with 20 takeaways.

“He’s committed to it, and it’s allowed him not only to score goals but to be on the right side of the plus/minus,” Evason said. “Now you’re on the ice scoring, sure, but you’re not a liability to your team.”

The Hockey News / Werenski Dominates Offensively; Tarasov Wins His First Game Since October In Shootout Win Over Flyers

By Jason Newland – January 16, 2025

Zach Werenski(14,15) scored the goals in regulation, while Kent Johnson and Kirill Marchenko scored the shootout tries to bury the Flyers for the first time this season. Daniil Tarasov stopped 23 of 25 Flyers shots in regulation and stoned Travis Konecny and Matvei Michkov in the shootout to seal the victory for the Jackets.

This is the Jackets 5th straight victory, and they now have the NHL's longest win streak. They're also a perfect 4-0 in shootouts this season.

This game was not pretty by any means. Both teams were sloppy and there seemed to be no energy. This win marks the second game straight where they had to grind out a win in low-scoring fashion. Yes, everyone knows the Blue Jackets can score goals in bunches, but can they win the 4-3, 3-2, or 2-1 games? Well, that's exactly what they've done in three of the last four.

Zach Werenski seems to be a man on a mission this season. With two more goals, he now pulls past Cale Makar in goals with 15. Makar registered an assist on Tuesday night to pull back even in points. Quinn Hughes leads Werenski in assists by three after Tuesday's play.

Zach Werenski is making a strong case for the Norris Trophy. There's a long way to go, but he's keeping pace with the usual suspects this year.

The Jackets are now 21-17-6 with 48 points, and sit in the second wild card spot, one point behind Boston.

Final Stats

FINAL/SO		1	2	3	OT	T
 PHI		1	0	1	0	2
 CBJ		1	0	1	1	3

GAME STATS 	
PHI	CBJ
2	3
25	28
14	13
24	13
28	24
0	0
4	6

Player Stats

- Zach Werenski scored his 14th and 15th goals of the season. He also had 31:28 TOI. He leads the league in goals by a defenseman and is tied in total points.
- Kirill Marchenko picked up his 30th assist of the season.
- Adam Fantilli registered his 12th assist,
- Daniil Tarasov made 23 saves and picked up his 4th win.

Team Stats

- The CBJ power play went scoreless on one man advantage.
- The Jackets PK was perfect on the night, stopping 2 Flyer power plays.
- The Blue Jackets won 46.2% of the faceoffs.

What's Next - The Blue Jackets and San Jose Sharks finish the season series on Thursday at Nationwide Arena.

The Hockey News / Justin Danforth Practicing With Main Group Today

By Jason Newland – January 16, 2025

Per Jeff Svoboda, forward Justin Danforth practiced with the main group today. An encouraging sign for the 31-year-old winger from Oshawa, Ontario.

Danforth suffered a lower-body injury against the Philadelphia Flyers on December 10th and hasn't played since.

Danforth was having a bit of a down year before getting hurt. In 25 games, he only managed 3 goals and 8 points while averaging 15:30 TOI. Last season, he 26 points in 71 games.

So who comes out when Danforth is ready? Our best guess would be Mikael Pyyhtiä or Luca Del Bel Belluz. Although both have played well in their roles, having another veteran like Justin Danforth playing every night can't be understated. Del Bel Belluz could be optioned back to Cleveland to continue playing.

What's Next - The Blue Jackets and San Jose Sharks finish the season series on Thursday at Nationwide Arena.

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets' Top Priority Is To Get Olivier Signed Long-Term

By Spencer Lazary – January 16, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets' GM Don Waddell was a guest on Jeff Marek's *The Sheets* podcast and revealed that one of the team's top priorities is securing Mathieu Olivier with a long-term contract.

Olivier has been nothing short of outstanding this season for the Blue Jackets. In 44 games, he has tallied 10 goals and seven assists for 17 points.

He is also widely regarded as the toughest fighter in the NHL, pound for pound. So far this season, Olivier has been involved in 10 fights, including two in one game against the Boston Bruins.

If Olivier were to hit the open market, there would likely be significant interest from more than a dozen teams eager to acquire his services.

Waddell recognizes his value and is determined to keep him in Columbus for the foreseeable future.

"We're in talks with his representation. You know, I've said publicly that that's number one priority on my list, to get him signed and locked up for years to come. He's another guy that's really stepped up in the locker room. I think it comes from, you know, maybe before he was only playing 8–10 minutes a night, and now he's playing 15–17 minutes a night, taking on a bigger role in the team. He's having a career year, scoring goals. But as you said, he makes our team better because of what he brings to the table. He's an important piece that we're hoping to get locked up for a long period of time."

The Blue Jackets would benefit immensely from keeping Olivier as a key part of their lineup while their young core develops. He not only provides 15–20 points while playing significant minutes but also adds much-needed protection for the team's rising stars.

What's Next - The Blue Jackets and San Jose Sharks finish the season series on Thursday at Nationwide Arena.

The Hockey News / Marchenko's Point Streak Continues; Now At 5 Games

By Spencer Lazary – January 16, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets have been on a hot streak as of late. They are winners of five in a row and are pushing further into the playoff picture.

During this impressive run, there have been a few players who have stood out. The first one is Zach Werenski, who is making a strong case for the Norris Trophy. However, there is one other player who has put the team on his back during the last five games.

Kirill Marchenko has been lights out over the last five games. He has two goals and four assists for six points during his five-game point streak. He also scored the shootout winner against the Philadelphia Flyers to give his club the win and extend their winning streak.

The 24-year-old has already surpassed his point total from last season (42) with 48 points in 44 games, setting a new career high.

If Marchenko can maintain this pace, he could easily reach 85-90 points by the end of the season. More importantly, his strong play could help the Blue Jackets secure a playoff berth.

What's Next - The Blue Jackets and San Jose Sharks finish the season series on Thursday at Nationwide Arena.

The Hockey Writers / How Blue Jackets Are Quickly Becoming Greatest Story in Sports

By Mark Scheig and The Hockey Writers – January 16, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets are in a playoff spot. Let me say that one more time. The Blue Jackets, a team in which no one gave any chance to, would be in the playoffs if they started today.

Given what they have had to overcome since the end of the summer, it's truly a remarkable story that's still being written. While there's still half a hockey season to play out, there is no question the Blue Jackets are the story not only in the NHL, but all of sports.

The question on the minds of many is how? How exactly have the Blue Jackets been able to have such a turnaround in short order after dealing with an unimaginable tragedy coupled with years of hard times on the ice?

To pinpoint one main reason would be next to impossible to do. But there are several factors that have worked out so far that have put the Blue Jackets in position to shock the hockey world. To have a full understanding of how we got to today, we have to look back at drafts past under a different regime and then build from there.

Stockpiling Young Talent

Ever since John Tortorella left the Blue Jackets, the Blue Jackets haven't made the playoffs. Not only haven't they made the playoffs, they've had multiple top-10 picks in the NHL Draft.

The hockey in Columbus hasn't been good in recent years in any way, shape or form. On the ice, it was a struggle. Off the ice, they went through multiple coaches including one in Mike Babcock that didn't even reach Training Camp.

The silver lining to all of the struggles has been landing good, young talent. The Blue Jackets have boasted one of the best prospect pools over the last few years.

We are now starting to see those prospects become impactful NHL players. Not only have the top-10 picks been good, so have some of their other picks when Jarmo Kekalainen was in charge.

Take a look at some of the players currently on the roster drafted by the Blue Jackets that have had a major impact on this season.

- **Zach Werenski:** Leads all defensemen in goals and is tied for the lead in defensemen points. A serious argument can be made for him to contend for both the Norris and Hart Trophies. He was drafted 8th overall in 2015.
- **Kirill Marchenko:** Leads all Blue Jackets forwards in goals, assists and points. He is on pace for 34 goals and 90 points. He already has a career high 48 points in 44 games this season. He had 42 points all last season. He was drafted 49th overall in 2018.
- **Dmitri Voronkov:** Has 17 goals and 30 points in 35 games playing on the top line. He's on pace to shatter career highs in just his second season. He was drafted 114th overall in 2019.
- **Kent Johnson:** Has 11 goals and 24 points in 30 games this season. He started the season recording a point in each of his first nine appearances. He was drafted 5th overall in 2021.
- **Cole Sillinger:** Is on pace to break career highs in assists and points while establishing himself as a two-way middle-six center. He was drafted 12th overall in 2021.

- **Adam Fantilli:** Is starting to find his groove in his second season. He's playing on the top line in Sean Monahan's absence. He's reached double digit goals and shown improvement defensively. He's considered the team's number-one center of the future. He was drafted third overall in 2023.

That's just a tip of the iceberg when it comes to the impact of the Blue Jackets' draft picks. Denton Mateychuk 10 games into his NHL career is 8-2-0 and firmly in the top-four on the blue line. Luca Del Bel Belluz was drafted in the second round and is now considered a big part of the team's future. We haven't even gotten to Cayden Lindstrom, Gavin Brindley or Charlie Elick yet. Reinforcements are coming and we still haven't named the all of the potential impact players coming.

Getting young talent is just the first step. The Blue Jackets are starting to take the next step in finding the right mix to go with that young talent.

Surrounding the Talent

Another area the Blue Jackets have struggled with was putting the right pieces around the young talent. Without the right mix of leadership and veteran players, it's hard to win in the NHL.

The Blue Jackets saw firsthand what that looked like. Although there were some veterans on the team, it never became the right mix.

But now under GM Don Waddell, the Blue Jackets have started to turn the corner in that area. Here are some key players who have helped make an impact.

- **Sean Monahan:** Before the injury, Monahan was everything for the Blue Jackets as their number-one center. He played in all situations and was on pace for a career season offensively. He avoided the worst with his wrist injury. It is not a long-term injury according to Waddell. Monahan has helped open the games up for Marchenko and Voronkov.
- **Mathieu Olivier:** He is due for a pay increase in his next contract. He's done everything to bring energy to the team. He's dropped the gloves when needed and is a physical presence. He's also got double-digit goals showing he can make important contributions. Having him around means teams can't take cheap shots against the young talent.
- **James van Riemsdyk:** The Blue Jackets needed a veteran presence who would be a voice in the locker room. JVR has provided that and been an important presence to the younger players. He might be as fast as he used to be. However he's played in the top-six at times and has chipped in some offense.

Some other names of note in the veteran presence category are Sean Kuraly, Ivan Provorov, Damon Severson, Zach Aston-Reese, Dante Fabbro, Kevin Labanc and Jack Johnson. Also both captain Boone Jenner and Erik Gudbranson are recovering from injuries. These Blue Jackets have a good mix of young players along with the above mentioned veterans.

Now that you see the Blue Jackets have a good mix in the locker room, we have to talk about the impact of their new head coach. It has made a world of difference for the team both on and off the ice.

Dean Evason's Impact

The Blue Jackets went from Brad Larsen to Babcock to Pascal Vincent. Excluding Babcock, both Larsen and Vincent were first-time NHL head coaches. Over time, that showed on the ice.

The Blue Jackets needed an experienced voice behind the bench, someone that has seen different situations in the NHL. While both Larsen and Vincent tried their best, they fell short of getting the best out of the players.

In searching for a coach, Waddell made clear that experience was going to be a major factor. The Blue Jackets ultimately found Dean Evason. It's been a perfect match to this point.

Right away, the message from Evason was "team." In everything, it was all about team. Not only were the players moved around in the locker room from where they were before, the pictures of themselves that hung above their stalls were replaced with photos that had at least one teammate on it.

The standard was set. The players have taken the message to heart. Evason's honest approach has been a welcomed sight for the Blue Jackets.

Now factor in Evason bringing in a new system that is in line with what the Cleveland Monsters are doing and you have a situation where the Blue Jackets are starting to play some winning hockey.

What has Evason brought in? The biggest thing is a more aggressive forecheck. The Blue Jackets are at their best when they use their speed to pressure the puck carrier. As long as they stay above the puck, they can turn defense into offense where they thrive on the rush.

Evason's system is more black and white for the players compared to previous seasons. They know where to go and is simple for them to play.

Early on, there were growing pains. The defense and goaltending allowed too many goals against. What has offset that is the Blue Jackets being in the top-10 in offense. They're the most prolific offensive team bar none on home ice.

The biggest question Waddell had about this team in 2024-25 was where were the goals going to come from? There are seven Blue Jackets with at least 10.

Evason also put together the line of Voronkov, Monahan and Marchenko. They've been one of the best lines in the NHL this season vastly outscoring their opponents when on the ice.

In all, Evason has brought a good culture to the room, a system that players enjoy playing and a freedom for his players to be creative. This has resulted in a night and day difference for the on-ice performance.

Honoring Gaudreau

This is the part that makes what the Blue Jackets are doing extraordinary. Even after months, it still doesn't seem real that Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau are gone.

The Blue Jackets vowed to honor the Gaudreau's in everything they did. From hanging Johnny's jersey at his stall to taking him with them to road games, they have kept his memory alive.

Never underestimate the power of motivation. These Blue Jackets play with the ultimate motivation everyday. While they might not always have their best game on any given night, they will always have the motivation of honoring the Gaudreau's close to their heart.

The question during camp was how were the Blue Jackets even able to focus on hockey given the tragedy? As soon as Meredith Gaudreau said playing is what John would want, that gave them the motivation to go and make the Gaudreau's proud every time they step on the ice.

In the process, the Blue Jackets have become a very tight-knit group. To a man, every player we've spoken to has said in their own words that this is the closest locker room they've ever been a part of. They have each other's backs. They've had to go through the unimaginable together without a playbook. The bond they've made will last way beyond their hockey careers.

Why are the Blue Jackets quickly becoming the greatest story in sports? Thanks to having the right leadership in place on all areas of the team, they've been able to come together and overcome all challenges the tragedy has presented.

There have been good days. But there have been tough days too. No matter what kind of day it's been, the Blue Jackets have had each other throughout. That connection has translated to the ice.

The Blue Jackets are one of the best home teams in the NHL. They have the right mix of players with contributions coming from all over the lineup. They have a coach who is using his experience to guide them through whatever obstacles come up.

Now halfway into the season, the Blue Jackets are starting to show signs of progress in Evason's system. In their last three games, the team has allowed just five goals. That's a sign they can win in multiple ways, by scoring six or allowing no more than two. That's a recipe for success.

It all started at the drafts of year's past. That collection of talent is starting to show their potential while honoring their fallen teammate.

It's safe to say that the Blue Jackets have fans from all over the hockey world wanting to see them succeed. If they keep this up and make the playoffs, it will be a story that will be remembered for a lifetime. Even if they fall short, this story will be remembered for generations.

These Blue Jackets are already extraordinary. Soon they may become one of the greatest stories in the history of sports. That's no exaggeration either.

[The Athletic / NHL rumblings: Flames not selling on Andersson, Stars can be big-time buyers, Oilers D, Caps goalies, more](#)

By Pierre LeBrun – January 16, 2025

It is that time of year when trade speculation runs rampant — although, in some cases, for no real reason.

This brings us to Rasmus Andersson. Teams have called the Calgary Flames about the top-four defenseman, and the answer to each team has been the same: There's no interest in trading him.

Why would they? They're legitimately in a playoff race in the Western Conference, and Andersson's contract has another year on it after this season. The Flames plan to try to extend Andersson this summer. There's no guarantee they can get that done, but for the time being, they've got time on their side before crossing that bridge.

Flames general manager Craig Conroy has even talked to Andersson recently to make sure he knows the trade speculation is not real. The Flames want to keep some key veterans around as they continue their retool. They don't want to tear it down. They see Andersson as one of those key veterans. At least for this season, that's the plan.

Speaking of the Flames, they continue to scour the market for a 25-and-under, right-shot center, which is a difficult proposition. They are among the very long list of teams that have checked in with the Buffalo Sabres regarding 23-year-old Dylan Cozens.

Don't forget Matt Duchene for Team Canada

There are so many good forwards who didn't make Canada's 4 Nations roster, led by the likes of Mark Scheifele, John Tavares, Zach Hyman, Robert Thomas and Wyatt Johnston.

But don't forget about Matt Duchene. His name was more strongly considered by Team Canada before the Dec. 4 roster reveal than perhaps most people realized.

Duchene played on Canada's gold medal-winning team in Sochi in 2014, and the veteran forward has seen a resurgence in his game since signing with the Dallas Stars two years ago.

And yes, he was aware that he was on Team Canada's radar and hoped to get that call Dec. 4.

"I was obviously disappointed, but at the same time, I was proud that I was right there, and you want to keep playing in case something were to happen (injuries)," Duchene told The Athletic on Tuesday while the Stars were in Toronto. "I mean, the thing about being a Canadian forward is that you could probably make three teams and one of them could beat any of the other ones, you know? It's so equal.

"There's a lot of great players that aren't on that team as well. You can never look at it but feel anything but grateful that you had a chance. There's a lot of different ways to pick teams, and obviously I've been there before and I was disappointed not to be there this year. But going forward, there's another chance next year. That's how I'm looking at it. Playing for Team Canada has meant a lot to me in my career. Some of my best memories have been doing that. I would love to have a chance to do it again. So you just have to keep working and try to earn it."

Stars can be big-time buyers but will be patient

The Stars still haven't put Tyler Seguin on long-term injured reserve, wanting to wait as long as possible to accrue more cap space. But when they do park his \$9.85 million cap hit, they'll be one of the more dangerous Cup contenders to monitor ahead of the March 7 trade deadline.

They are making their calls right now, but the plan is to be patient and wait until after the 4 Nations event to decide where to act. The idea is to see if more injuries change their needs. Roope Hintz is the latest Stars forward to get dinged up, leaving Tuesday's win with an upper-body injury. There was no update on him after the game. Mason Marchment is also out a few more weeks, so Dallas is certainly banged up at forward.

The Stars could add both a top-six forward and a top-four defenseman, potentially, with all that cap flexibility. Or perhaps two forwards are what the doctor ordered. There's interest in Brock Nelson, but it's not clear yet if the New York Islanders will move him.

Either way, we can expect the Stars to potentially be involved in more than one transaction before the deadline. GM Jim Nill is never shy to be aggressive at the deadline, and now he's going to have ample cap money to play with. That should be a concern to every Western Conference contender.

Oilers cast wide net on D trade market

The Edmonton Oilers' defense has been better than advertised this season considering the summer losses and changes, but it has also been relatively healthy. With that in mind, upgrading the blue line is a priority ahead of the deadline. Whether that upgrade is to their top four or simply depth, Edmonton wants to add at least a defenseman.

Edmonton had pro scouting meetings last week to start trade-deadline preparations, putting names on a wish list, etc. And what came out of it was the idea of casting as wide a net as possible to start. The initial search doesn't necessarily zero in on one specific type of defender, as the front office feels it has flexibility in its current group. There are shutdown defensemen on the list and also puck-movers. Righties and lefties.

So, for example, a right-handed defenseman who kills penalties like David Savard would fit, but so would a puck-moving left-handed defenseman. It will really depend on how the market shakes out over the coming eight weeks.

TSN colleague Darren Dreger reported Tuesday that the Oilers are among the teams with interest in free agent John Klingberg as he continues to recover from a hip-resurfacing surgery as well.

Caps and their pending UFA goalies

The first-place Washington Capitals have a unique situation on their hands: Both of their goalies, Logan Thompson and Charlie Lindgren, are pending unrestricted free agents.

The latter was the big story last year as Lindgren had a career season that helped pave the way for Darcy Kuemper to get dealt in the offseason.

The trade for Thompson at the draft on June 29 has turned into a stroke of genius by the Caps. He's also having a career season. But he needs a new contract and a sizeable raise from the \$766,667 he's earning in the last year of the three-year deal he signed with Vegas.

While there have been very preliminary discussions with both Thompson and Lindgren, the sense I get is that the Capitals are treading carefully. They like both goalies and the way they've worked as a tandem this season but haven't convinced themselves of the need to re-sign both right away, especially with other pending UFAs on the roster such as Jakob Chychrun, Andrew Mangiapane and Nic Dowd.

And I think there's also some concern from Caps management that if they extend one goalie now and not the other, it could have a negative impact on the dressing room.

The Caps will continue to talk to the respective agents for both goalies, and I assume they'll end up signing at least one of them, but they're going about it very carefully for the time being.

Habs don't want to trade Evans, but ...

The Montreal Canadiens have let Jake Evans know they are interested in keeping him around but that it can't be a home-run deal. And that's the rub as far as how this may play out.

As of late last week, there had only been preliminary discussions with the pending UFA forward. He's playing some of the best hockey of his career, and at 28, this is his best shot to cash in. Term is likely going to be the hurdle in this negotiation, I'm not convinced the Canadiens are comfortable going five or six years, and again, Evans is at an age where that security might be important.

Both sides will take a crack at it, but there's no guarantee it gets done, and despite where the team is at in the standings, depending on trade offers they may have to listen hard if he's not extended by March 7. He's making only \$1.7 million this season, and cap-challenged contenders find that very appealing. The New Jersey Devils are among the teams that have already kicked tires.

Can he be extended and stay put? Yes. But it'd probably take both sides getting a little uncomfortable with the deal.

ESPN / Tiering 12 NHL teams' playoff odds: From fixable to broken

By Neil Paine – January 16, 2025

Hard as it might be to believe, the 2024-25 NHL season is already more than halfway over: The average team has played 53% (or 43.1 out of 82 games) of the regular-season schedule by now. That means struggling squads are quickly running out of time to turn things around -- a feeling of urgency made even more acute by the looming March 7 trade deadline, just 52 days from today.

There's a hierarchy to teams in the panic-mode category, too: Some are still right in the mix, such as the Boston Bruins, with playoff odds around a coin flip despite an underperforming start. Some are hanging on by a thread, such as the Pittsburgh Penguins, knowing that they have to run up a string of wins while their rivals in the standings falter. And some, such as the Buffalo Sabres, need a miracle to keep their playoff hopes alive (or must simply decide to give up any pretense of competing down the stretch).

Let's look at 12 teams who had designs on the playoffs before the season but have found themselves with a postseason probability around 50% or lower -- sorting them into categories based on their current playoff odds and level of panic within each group.

Jump to a panic level:

Can fix this | Hanging on | Resigned to fate

We can still fix this

These are teams with playoff odds near 50-50 -- so they could still make it in, but they have a lot more work to do over the next few months.

Boston Bruins (22-19)

Playoff odds: 41%

Sure, they regressed after their record-setting 2022-23 campaign. (Who wouldn't?) But the Bruins were still plenty good last season, surviving the losses of Patrice Bergeron and David Krejci to reach the second round of the playoffs. And they went into 2024-25 with a surprisingly young roster and the majority of the players who drove that success, aside from departed goaltender Linus Ullmark (trade) and winger Jake DeBrusk (free agency). There was no reason to think Boston would fall apart at both ends of the ice and fire former NHL Coach of the Year Jim Montgomery six weeks into the season. After showing signs of new life under new coach Joe Sacco, another recent slump has their playoff chances in jeopardy.

Must improve: The power play. Boston ranks third-to-last in scoring rate on the man advantage (13.2%), and only David Pastrnak ranks among the league's top 60 in power-play goals (barely). The Bruins have a severe scoring outage anyway, with most of their forwards producing below their norms and their defensemen creating almost no offense -- even Charlie McAvoy is struggling -- so they need to strike on the power play when they have the chance.

Special panic factor: Out of tricks? They've already played the coaching-change card, which is usually what a team does in times like this.

New York Rangers (20-20)

Playoff odds: 47%

The Rangers are this season's greatest embodiment of sudden-onset panic. The perennial Stanley Cup contenders were looking fine as recently as mid-November, but a mind-boggling series of losing streaks and injuries caused what once were near-certain playoff odds to abruptly fall off a cliff.

A few recent wins offer hope that the worst is in the rearview mirror, as does the return of elite netminder Igor Shesterkin from injury. But the Rangers remain well below the wild-card cut line; their playoff odds are this high only because the team's talent and track record suggest it can rebound in the second half.

Must improve: Big-name production. There is no excuse for a team with Artemi Panarin, Mika Zibanejad, Chris Kreider, Vincent Trocheck, Adam Fox and K'Andre Miller (among others) to rank 20th in scoring with a minus-9 goal differential. But with the possible exception of Shesterkin, who has still been a top goalie when healthy, practically none of the big stars who lead New York's roster have played to their potential this season.

Special panic factor: Market size. Slumps feel far worse under the NHL's largest American microscope.

Ottawa Senators (22-18)

Playoff odds: 48%

The Sens are a bit of a unique fit in any one of these categories, but we think they work best under the panic-with-potential umbrella. The panic part comes because this franchise hasn't made the playoffs since 2017 and the team has spent a fair amount over the past few offseasons to remedy that fact, only for Ottawa to find itself just outside the playoffs (and without big offseason pickup goalie Linus Ullmark due to injury).

It's easy for frustration to set in when a team has the young core to reach a higher level that dangles just out of reach. Then again, the potential that has perennially made Ottawa a breakout playoff pick in recent years remains intact for the league's eighth-youngest team -- the Senators actually have a positive goal differential (plus-3) on the season.

Must improve: Scoring output. As much as Ottawa's goaltending hangs in the balance with Ullmark on injured reserve, the Senators need more production from an offense that ranks 20th in goals per game overall, and 26th in goals per minute at 5-on-5. While Tim Stutzle, Brady Tkachuk and Drake Batherson are tracking for solid numbers, and Adam Gaudette is a pleasant surprise, Ottawa ranks 16th in points from forwards -- and is tied for 29th in points from defensemen, where Jake Sanderson is the only Senator tracking for even 40 adjusted points.

Special panic factor: Another stalled rebuild. Since appearing in the 2017 conference finals, Ottawa has already gone through multiple cycles of gearing up to compete. Will the Sens really fall short of the playoffs again?

Vancouver Canucks (19-14)

Playoff odds: 53%

After spending most of last season looking like a breakout Stanley Cup contender -- and playing well against the eventual West champion Oilers in a seven-game, second-round defeat -- the Canucks seemed like they had a bright future in 2024-25. However, an up-and-down start to the season for everyone -- except the outstanding Quinn Hughes -- gave way to a recent slump (losses in 12 of 16 games at one point) that has Vancouver clinging to the final wild-card spot in the conference and even reportedly listening to trade offers for two of its biggest names, J.T. Miller and Elias Pettersson. The

good news is the Canucks are more likely to make the playoffs than not, and they're a better team than their mediocre -0.14 GPG differential suggests ... but they need to start showing it again.

Must improve: Goaltending. Vancouver has dropped from No. 6 in save percentage to No. 22, and while much of that is because 2023-24 Vezina Trophy candidate Thatcher Demko has missed large parts of this season, he hasn't exactly been great (.883 save percentage) when he has been available.

Special panic factor: The prolonged tailspin. Whenever a team spends roughly a month straight in free fall, it can cloud judgment around the big picture.

Other teams that fall into this category:

Calgary Flames (21-15)

Playoff odds: 35%

Hanging on by a thread

This group has much lower playoff odds than the first. These teams might still be able to turn the season around, but none has made much of a serious charge up the standings yet.

Pittsburgh Penguins (18-20)

Playoff odds: 9%

Despite not making the playoffs for two seasons with the veteran star power of Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, Kris Letang and (later) Erik Karlsson, the Pens went back in with their aging big names -- they re-signed Crosby to a two-year extension in September -- and hoped to rekindle the old magic one last time. The results have been disappointing, to say the least. While Pittsburgh's power play is back on track (ranking fifth after dropping to 30th last season), the team is 16th in scoring overall and 29th in goal differential with an ailing Malkin on IR. Yes, the Penguins are only a few points out of the wild card, but they've shown few attributes of a playoff team thus far.

Must improve: Goal prevention. The first order of business for the Pens' playoff push is to tighten up the defense and goaltending. Pittsburgh has allowed fewer than three goals in a game just once since Dec. 17. Between a porous defense that ranks fourth-to-last in shots allowed per game, and the shaky Alex Nedeljkovic-Tristan Jarry tandem in net, this team is not going to make the playoffs defending this way.

Special panic factor: End of an era. This is the oldest team in the league by average age, and Pittsburgh is going to have to close the book on the Crosby era eventually.

New York Islanders (17-19)

Playoff odds: 14%

Whether under former coach Lane Lambert or current boss Patrick Roy, New York has been a playoff fixture the past few seasons. But if the Islanders' current odds are any indication, it's going to be difficult to stretch that streak to three years.

They're right next to the metro rival Rangers in the East standings, well below the cut line -- and unlike the Blueshirts, the Isles don't have as much talent, aside from goalie Ilya Sorokin (whose performance has ticked more and more toward average this season).

Must improve: Scoring. With Mathew Barzal missing much of the early season with an upper-body injury, the Isles find themselves ranked 26th in goals per game with the league's absolute worst power play (10.6%). Anders Lee has had some moderate success putting the puck in the net, and Barzal has been back on the ice for about a month now, but the team's GPG is barely up since then. The Isles of the

late 2010s/early 2020s found success despite a weak offense, but this version isn't nearly good enough on defense to sustain that formula.

Special panic factor: Running their course. The Islanders have the NHL's fourth-oldest roster, with some familiar franchise names (such as Brock Nelson and Kyle Palmieri) due for free agency soon.

St. Louis Blues (21-20)

Playoff odds: 17%

After 2019, the Blues will forever be linked with wildly improbable second-half turnarounds -- whether for themselves, or any other team (like the ones on our list here!) seeking to keep their Cup hopes alive in the face of insurmountable odds. And these Blues are not a bad team. They've been perfectly .500 (11 wins, 11 losses) since switching to Jim Montgomery at coach in late November. But merely treading water isn't going to be enough to gain the ground required to chase down a wild-card spot in the West.

Must improve: Special teams. Along with the Wild, Islanders, Bruins and Ducks, St. Louis is one of five teams who rank 23rd or worse on both the power play and the penalty kill. For a team with some solid offensive options (Robert Thomas, Jordan Kyrou, Dylan Holloway, Pavel Buchnevich et al), it is surprising the Blues have only two players with more than two power-play goals; meanwhile, Jordan Binnington -- a fine enough goalie overall -- has the league's seventh-worst SV% on the PK.

Special panic factor: Franchise expectations. Like their baseball counterparts, the Blues are a proud hockey club that seldom goes too long without making the playoffs. If they can't turn around that 83% probability of being left out this season, it would mark just the second three-year playoff drought in team history.

Detroit Red Wings (20-19)

Playoff odds: 21%

Where to begin with the Wings? This team once made the playoffs in 25 straight seasons but hasn't made it back in eight (going on nine) years -- repeatedly teasing its fans with a return in recent seasons. But unlike last season, when Detroit was looking solid for the postseason until the tail end of the schedule, these Red Wings have seen their odds slowly slide throughout the first half, only recently making a modest climb to their current level around 20%. It is mystifying how a team with Lucas Raymond, Alex DeBrincat, Dylan Larkin and Moritz Seider is fighting for its playoff life and trying to keep one of the NHL's prestige franchises from reaching the doorstep of a decade-long playoff drought, but here we are.

Must improve: Depth. Detroit's top players -- all under age 30 -- would be the envy of many NHL teams. But the Red Wings have gotten the 10th-fewest adjusted goals above replacement (GAR) from outside their top five of any roster in the league.

Special panic factor: Impatience! It spoke volumes when a testy Steve Yzerman snapped at a reporter a few weeks ago when asked about his team's never-ending rebuild. The Red Wings have been at this for a long time, and it's surprising they haven't had their breakthrough under the "Yzerplan" yet.

Other teams that fall into this category:

Utah Hockey Club (18-18)

Playoff odds: 13%

Philadelphia Flyers (19-20)

Playoff odds: 6%

Resigned to their fate

These teams had a glimmer of hope before the season, panicked earlier on and now have all but accepted that a playoff trip isn't in the cards.

Chicago Blackhawks (14-28)

Playoff odds: < 1%

The Blackhawks started the season with low playoff odds according to the Elo ratings, which project largely based on a team's final form in the previous season, but there seemed to be some reasons to think Connor Bedard & Co. could outperform those basic expectations after Chicago added the most value of any team in the offseason. Instead, coach Luke Richardson was fired in December, the newcomers have uniformly flopped, and Bedard has faced intense scrutiny (mostly undeserved) for Chicago falling flat.

Must improve: Driving play. The Hawks have a lot of problems, but one thing they have not done in the Bedard era is tilt the ice in their favor. Chicago has ranked dead last in the team's share of total shot attempts at 5-on-5 in its games for two consecutive seasons.

Special panic factor: Bust worries. Much of the Bedard criticism comes from a place of impatience -- and a deep-seated fear that the generational prospect won't pan out. But Bedard is doing just fine. He's on pace for the eighth-most adjusted points as a teenager in NHL history.

Seattle Kraken (19-23)

Playoff odds: 1%

Always in the shadow of their expansion older brothers, the Golden Knights, Seattle has struggled to follow the Vegas trajectory -- a terribly unfair comparison, for the record. The Kraken appeared to be keeping up with a second-round playoff trip in Year 2, but they fell back in Year 3 and are going in the wrong direction again under new coach Dan Bylsma. A recent stretch of three wins in 13 games has all but sunk Seattle's chances to return to the playoffs this time around.

Must improve: Talent development. This sounds like a big "duh." But the Kraken took some early swings at prime-aged players in an attempt to compete right away, Vegas-style -- their first team ranked 22nd youngest in average age -- and it hasn't paid dividends. (Meanwhile, young players such as 2023 Calder Trophy winner Matty Beniers have stalled.) Seattle might need a different approach to building going forward.

Special panic factor: Return to expansion woes. Back in 2021, one of the big questions around Seattle's new franchise was whether Vegas' success was a one-off, or if the league was entering an era where expansion teams would be more immediately competitive. Right now, the worry for Seattle and any subsequent new clubs has to be that the Vegas plan cannot be replicated.

Nashville Predators (14-22)

Playoff odds: 3%

Hopes were high in Nashville after the team went on an offseason talent binge, headlined by the pickup of future Hall of Famer Steven Stamkos. On paper, the Preds looked like a Cup contender -- but it was always going to be a risky strategy to load up on veterans, forming the backbone of the league's third-oldest roster. That downside has reared its ugly head, as Nashville's new faces have struggled every bit as much as its mainstays have regressed. Aside from the solid (though not incredible) play of goalie Juuse Saros, this Nashville squad has never really lived up to its potential.

Must improve: Approach for 2025-26. Barring an all-time miracle turnaround, these Preds are done. But they are still locked in with much of the same core for years to come. So they'll need some cap magic, or they'll need a better plan to get more from the talent on hand in the future.

Special panic factor: Fear of the washed vet. Stamkos, 34, isn't necessarily washed up quite yet -- but this is tracking to be the worst season of his career. There's a special panic reserved for the feeling of giving a four-year, \$32 million deal to a veteran whose production promptly falls off a cliff.

Buffalo Sabres (16-22)

Playoff odds: 3%

Much like the Red Wings and Senators, the Sabres are mired in a lengthy playoff drought. But Buffalo's absence from the postseason, which now looks likely to extend to 14 seasons, is on another level. (The difference between the Sabres' drought and Detroit's would itself be one of the longest droughts in history.) Buffalo was in decent shape -- nearly 50-50 -- to end the streak as recently as a few days before American Thanksgiving, but a shocking 13-game losing skid unraveled just about any hope of getting back to the playoffs.

Must improve: Defense and goaltending. On offense, the Sabres have some talented scorers, led by Tage Thompson, Jason Zucker and Alex Tuch, all of whom are on track for at least 27 adjusted goals. Their defensive corps boasts some highly skilled young players as well, between Rasmus Dahlin, Bowen Byram and Owen Power. But Buffalo needs to apply a lot more focus on the defensive end, where it ranks 27th in GPG allowed, 26th in scoring chances allowed per minute and 28th in save percentage. It is not a coincidence this team has allowed fewer GPG than average just once since 2008-09, a span that almost completely overlaps the Sabres' postseason drought.

Special panic factor: Will it ever end?? Whenever a streak like this builds and builds, it takes on a life of its own. The panic to end it can inspire rash decisions, and it can cast a pall over the franchise. That's the concern for Buffalo at this point -- and it might take a special group of personalities like what the 2004 Boston Red Sox or 2016 Chicago Cubs had in order to overcome the weight of history.

Other teams that fall into this category:

Anaheim Ducks (18-21)

Playoff odds: 1%

San Jose Sharks (14-26)

Playoff odds: < 1%

[Sportsnet.ca / Real Kyper's Trade Board 2.0: Tight races and interesting UFAs](#)

By Nick Kypreos – January 16, 2025

In five short weeks the trade board has taken a dramatic turn.

The midway point of the schedule is typically when teams start to separate the pretenders and contenders. But that hasn't been the case yet, particularly in the Eastern Conference. What's setting this trade deadline season apart from some others is how many more teams are in a better position to make the playoffs now than they looked to be back at the American Thanksgiving mark.

We can thank the New York Rangers for that. Their 8-16-2 stretch that started right around American Thanksgiving opened the door for Ottawa, Detroit, Columbus and Montreal who all managed to rekindle and inspire their fanbases.

Potential trade sellers weeks ago suddenly look like potential buyers, and vice versa.

With New York already moving their captain Jacob Trouba to the Anaheim Ducks in early December, their spotlight has shifted straight to Mika Zibanejad, and interest in J.T. Miller. Meantime the Canucks, who finished first in the Pacific Division last regular season, are considering trading Miller, Elias Pettersson and pending UFA Brock Boeser.

The Canucks are locked in a playoff spot battle with, among others, the Calgary Flames and rookie sensation Dustin Wolf, who are stalling teams that are ready to advance trade discussions with them as well. Calgary's involvement in the race helps us move Rasmus Andersson's name off the board this month, but Nazem Kadri remains for now.

Same goes for the St. Louis Blues, who are also lurking in the race and obtained Cam Fowler in a December trade with the Ducks. They are not ready to consider selling.

At the same time, there is a block of pending UFA superstars on contending teams that we have to keep our eye on. Colorado's Mikko Rantanen, Florida's Sam Bennett and Toronto's Mitch Marner are all still unsigned. While the Leafs won't take calls on Marner, the phones won't stop ringing on Rantanen and Bennett, so they're on this month's list.

Overall, it's still very quiet when it comes to the front line of this summer's UFA class.

In Carolina, we also have a new young stud to keep an eye on in Martin Necas. Team owner Tom Dundon may finally be ready to make a big splash by opening up his wallet, and it may cost him this gem to pull off.

So, as the trade market still takes shape, sit tight and enjoy the latest nuggets on what I've heard since we've welcomed in 2025.

And be sure to look out for the next updated version of my list just before the NHL shuts down for the 4 Nations Face-Off in February.

When Pettersson was a pending free agent last season his name was appearing in trade rumours as he still hadn't signed an extension into February. That bit of pressure led to the Canucks and Pettersson coming to an agreement on an eight-year, \$92.8 million contract in March, six days before the trade deadline.

The 2024-25 season is the first year of that deal, and the only one that doesn't have a full no-movement clause attached to it, which has again kicked up trade speculation. When Canucks GM Patrik Allvin spoke

to Sportsnet's Iain MacIntyre last month he said he believed in Pettersson and that he was a No. 1 centre. He also didn't slam the door on trade talk, saying "Is it (a trade) possible? I guess I would say anything is possible."

The Canucks have been struggling to find consistency and are one point out of the West's second wild card spot with the conference's ninth-best points percentage. That, too, has opened the door to the possibility of some in-season roster turnover, with Jim Rutherford and his active trade history overlooking everything from the president of hockey operations chair.

If the Canucks make a massive and surprising move, Pettersson isn't the only candidate who could be in the middle of it. Miller, the team's other top-six centre, is also in the mix.

Five years older, \$3.6 million cheaper, and with two fewer years left on his contract than Pettersson, Miller was Vancouver's scoring leader last season, but has fallen off that 103-point pace. What complicates this move more than Pettersson's is that Miller does have a full no-movement clause, and in complete control of his destiny.

While it may be easier to move either, or both, of Miller and Pettersson in the off-season, it's not impossible something could happen before March 7. If it does, keep an eye on New Jersey for either player. They have assets and player pieces the Canucks could find attractive, and at the moment are on track to have about \$7.469 million in deadline day salary cap space, according to PuckPedia.

The interesting salary cap dynamics that will impact the league as a whole in the coming seasons are having an effect on the Avalanche right now. Nathan MacKinnon has set the team's internal salary cap with his \$12.6 million AAV, but that deal was signed in 2022 under much different market conditions. Rantanen, a 28-year-old one-time 50-goal scorer who leads the Avs in goals this season by a wide margin (he also leads the league in empty netters) is in position to net a huge contract just as the cap is set to take its biggest one-season hike in years, with more growth to follow. But would the Avalanche entertain the idea of his contract coming close to, or surpassing, MacKinnon's?

I'm not sure Colorado is getting traction in extension talks. There is a belief they already offered \$90 million over eight years (\$11.25 million AAV) earlier this season. It doesn't sound like the two sides are close, still well over \$1 million apart and maybe even \$2 million. So Rantanen's name is out there and if these contract negotiations don't progress soon, he'll be one of this season's biggest trade targets.

It's believed that three teams have made serious pitches for Rantanen, but have been turned down so far as the Avs still hope to re-sign him. Could Carolina have been one of them?

Despite a productive start to the season, Martin Necas' performance has cooled, scoring just six points in his last 14 games. Signed to a two-year, \$6.5 million AAV deal last summer, Carolina has yet to make a long-term commitment to the 26-year-old forward.

The Hurricanes are rumored to be in the market for a star player to help them clear the playoff hurdle, and Necas could be a centerpiece in such a trade. Vancouver and Colorado are logical trade partners, with the Canucks previously expressing interest in Necas.

The sense is the Bruins won't mess around with Marchand's future and they are saying all the right things that make it seem likely they'll re-sign him. But some people in the organization think Marchand should be on a year-to-year contract as he'll turn 37 this spring. It's notable that Marchand is represented by the same agency (Newport) as Steven Stamkos, who refused to take less value to stay in Tampa Bay and ended up signing elsewhere. Don't expect Marchand to take less value than he feels he's worth either.

Even Zdeno Chara (at 43 years old) left the Bruins and played two more years in the NHL before calling it quits.

In some ways, this could be a comparable scenario to Joe Pavelski. San Jose was at a crossroads and didn't want to give him an extra year when he was 35 years old, so Pavelski signed a three-year deal with Dallas and was a highly productive player for them. In fact, he signed two more one-year deals with the Stars and retired at 40 years old. This is why Boston has to think long and hard about giving term to Marchand, their captain and second-highest scorer.

The Bruins got a coaching bump after making the November change from Jim Montgomery, starting 7-2-0 under Joe Sacco. But they've gone 7-8-2 since, have earned just five points in seven January games so far, and are 10th in the East by points percentage. Though this is still heading towards an amicable resolution, if Boston's hold on a playoff spot keeps loosening, Marchand will more and more become a situation of great interest.

Until we hear about more firm negotiations between Marchand and the Bruins, he remains on this list.

In the third year of an eight-year contract, Jones is a long shot trade candidate because this won't be an easy one to get done during the season. But Chicago needs to find a way to move this heavy \$9.5 million cap hit.

At full value it would be next to impossible to find a taker, but if someone could convince the Blackhawks to eat 50 per cent of the value, suddenly it's not such a bad flyer for a competitive team to take on Jones with a \$4.75 million cap hit.

This wouldn't be an outright salary dump, so it would still cost a top asset, or two, if the Hawks are going to keep that much salary for another five years. There's no doubt this would be a tricky move to get across the finish line, but make no mistake that Chicago would like to move off this contract -- and Jones needs a fresh start as well.

The Rangers have been spiralling for a while and are 12th in the Eastern Conference by points percentage. That they haven't made a change at head coach tells us management thinks this might be more of a player personnel issue, so we're keeping an eye on what movement could happen on the ice.

Zibanejad, 31, still has another five years left on his current contract that pays \$8.5 million against the cap. And though he scored 163 points combined over the 2022-23 and 2023-24 seasons, Zibanejad has just 27 points in 43 games this season, which is his worst pace in seven years.

He also has a full no-movement clause and while that doesn't mean the Rangers can't work with him to find a deal, the centre still has control. If New York is eyeing Miller or Pettersson from Vancouver they'd probably have to accomplish that with a different player as the centrepiece because Zibanejad will not waive to go to British Columbia.

Things have quieted down somewhat for the Rangers lately, but how much has management's outlook really shifted?

Think of all the players who've suited up for the Sabres during their rebuilding years, then were moved and had far greater success elsewhere. Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Brandon Montour and Ryan O'Reilly all won Stanley Cups. Linus Ullmark became one half of the league's best tandem, then earned a No. 1 goalie's contract in Ottawa.

Now at the bottom of the Eastern Conference again, in a season they had to make a playoff push, the Sabres are cornered. Cozens' name is out there, but GM Kevyn Adams had better be very careful with how he handles this player. He's still just 23 years old, is two seasons removed from being a 30-plus goal

scorer, and is still signed for another five years at a \$7.1 million cap hit. Between him and Tage Thompson, the Sabres could have a heck of a 1-2 at centre locked in for the long term as the salary cap spikes.

So, if they do trade Cozens, what are they getting back that will help them? This could be a mistake waiting to happen.

There are some teams that will look at their pending UFAs as own-rentals they need to chase a Stanley Cup with. But at this point, the Canucks are battling for the second wild card spot, a far cry from last season's division-winning squad when everything fell just right.

Make no mistake, the Canucks like their team overall, but don't feel they're in a position to rent their own player this season, which makes it far more likely than not Boeser gets traded before the deadline. Kiefer Sherwood's arrival and fit as a top-nine player with sandpaper to his game and a productive 13 goals in 43 games (third on the Canucks) is a huge plus that can help absorb the loss of Boeser, who has 15 goals in 36 games.

While in the past it may have been an easy decision to rent your own player I think Florida is still contemplating a lot on Bennett. He started the season red-hot and all but assured of a career season, running just shy of a point per game pace through the first two months. But Bennett hasn't scored a goal since Dec. 3 and has just four assists in his past 18 games.

Teams continually ask about him and he has a unique style that elevates in the playoffs. Bennett was an important factor in Florida's Stanley Cup win last season and its run to the final two years ago. There's no question he has value around the league so, until the Panthers sign him or definitively say they're not trading him, he'll stay on my list.

Florida understands his contract demands, or the price he may get on the open market as an unrestricted free agent this summer, doesn't align with where they think they can pay him.

Making \$7 million against the cap through the 2028-29 season, it remains more likely than not that Kadri won't still be a Flame when Scotiabank Place Arena opens in a few years. And, in fact, it remains possible that he'll get traded before this season's deadline.

The reason why Rasmus Andersson came off this list and Kadri stayed on largely has to do with age. At 34, Kadri is in a much different place in his career and would find interest from various teams around the league that are looking for a centre. He was a key part as the second line centre for Colorado when they won the Stanley Cup in 2022 before becoming a free agent.

Kadri remains in control with a full no-movement clause but, especially if the Flames ever fall behind in the playoff race, he'll remain a player to keep a close eye on.

Ferraro's name will linger in trade rumours all season. He has one more year left on a very reasonable \$3.25 million cap hit, doesn't have any trade protection and is a valued penalty killer.

What makes him attractive to the Sharks is what will make him attractive to trade suitors, but San Jose won't be looking to just offload the player. Still just 26 years old, Ferraro has long-term value and, should it come to it, the Sharks could still hang on to him and explore trading Ferraro as a rental next season -- or even re-signing him.

While there is no rush here, teams will like both what Ferraro does on the ice and what his contract looks like off it.

Teams won't be looking to Ristolainen as a blueliner to add some offence, but there will always be a market for big, right shot defenders with a huge reach who can play top-four minutes, kill penalties and throw their weight around.

Ristolainen is just that. He leads all Flyers defencemen in hits and is second in average time per game on the penalty kill.

Making \$5.1 million against the cap for another two seasons past this one, as the upper limit spikes that cap allocation will be less of a concern when Ristolainen moves into his 30s. However, the Flyers also have time here and can hang on to the player if they don't find the market for him is quite right yet. They are also still in the playoff race, trailing a wild card spot by four points. One hot streak could put them in it, so they may want to see how this plays out.

Outside of a 6-0 loss to Philadelphia over the weekend -- one of his potential trade suitors -- Gibson has been playing well since starting his season in November and has a .908 save percentage in 18 appearances. He's ninth in the league among all goaltenders in Goals Saved Above Expected, according to Money Puck, and has another two years left on a \$6.4 million contract.

Gibson has made a regular appearance on trade lists for years, and though Ducks GM Pat Verbeek is still asking for a lot in return, this could be the year it finally happens. Lukas Dostal is a rising talent and pending RFA Anaheim will have to figure out a contract for. The question is, after some goalies have been moved already, what is the market like for this position?

Signed through the 2029-30 season with a \$3.5 million cap hit, Mayfield is a big, right shot defender who kills penalties, blocks shots and is physical. Just the type of defenceman teams seek out at the trade deadline. But he's not a rental, which could potentially complicate things.

Would the Islanders have to eat any money to make the deal work? Possibly, but considering the incoming cap spike, \$3.5 million won't be so challenging to manage as Mayfield ages into his mid-30s. There is the consideration that he has a no-trade clause, so it would require him to sign off on a move, but if Lou Lamoriello wants to move Mayfield, there will be a market. The Maple Leafs would love to get this player.

Still appearing on this list because Laughton's name is out there and has been since last season. He's positionally flexible, kills penalties, and is tracking towards one of the better offensive seasons of his career. He'd be an attractive addition to any team's bottom-six.

The Flyers' asking price in a trade remains high, and a first-round pick-plus is the starting point. That's because the organization highly values Laughton and he's well-liked in the room by the players and coaching staff. With one more season left on his contract that pays \$3 million against the cap there just isn't a pressing need to flip him yet, but it's always possible.

When I did the first of these trade candidate lists, it seemed a certainty the Blue Jackets would be sellers, and of course UFA-to-be Provorov was setting up to be the headliner among rental players. Though that may still be the course this takes -- even the most likely one -- the picture has changed a little bit.

The Blue Jackets have gone 9-4-3 since I released my first list, which is tied for eighth in points percentage across the entire league since Dec. 11. That run has brought them back into the playoff picture and today Columbus is one of the best stories of the season, holding the East's second wild card spot.

With how crowded everything is in the East, some organizations are afraid of giving up too early and weakening their team. Columbus falls into that group for now. Let's see where they sit in a month.

Pittsburgh is another one of those teams in the thick of the Eastern Conference playoff race, sitting just four points out of a wild card spot Wednesday morning. But unlike some of these teams who may want to hang on and re-consider what their plans are for the trade market and how to handle their pending UFAs, Pittsburgh's path is clear.

The fact is the Penguins are one of four Eastern teams with a points percentage under .500 so GM Kyle Dubas' attention will remain on the years ahead and accumulating assets rather than getting caught up in the race and hanging on to free agents as either an own-mental, or to re-sign later on.

At the time of my last list, Pettersson had been on the ice for more goals against at 5-on-5 than any other player in the NHL, which mostly had to do with the Penguins' overall struggles. He doesn't lead the league in that stat any more and, in fact, since that list was

Published on Dec. 11 the Penguins have scored 10 goals at 5-on-5 when Pettersson's been on the ice, and allowed just four.

The Canadiens made a move for a defenceman who appeared on my 1.0 list, bringing in Alexandre Carrier from the Nashville Predators. It was a good push to add a player young enough to still be part of this team when it is scheduled to take off, but still old and experienced enough to play key minutes and take on high value assignments.

After a nice run through the holidays, the Canadiens are in the playoff picture now, which has everyone wondering how they'll recalculate their trade deadline. It's hard to imagine them being much more of an aggressive buyer, but will they be less of a seller now? At his mid-season media availability, GM Kent Hughes appeared to suggest he'd rather keep a player like Savard as an own-mental to play with the kids in this run and then possibly lose him for nothing in the off-season instead of sending him out as a rental.

Still, Montreal's best years are ahead of them and Savard could pull a trade offer that is too good for Hughes to turn away. Could they get second- and third-rounders offered? Hughes is saying all the right things, but may have to keep those options open. That said, if the Canadiens are still in the race come March, Savard may stick around after all.

We'll keep Nikolaj Ehlers in play on our list for now, but he may be one of the tougher players to truly judge on whether he stays or goes.

In the past, Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff has been good at moving guys he isn't going to get signed or that won't sign with him, but never before has he felt closer to having a Stanley Cup calibre team so 'renting your own player' doesn't seem out of the question this time.

The interesting dynamic here for the Jets is that they're using Adam Lowry in the second line centre position and have a need to trade for someone in the third slot.

Ehlers is fourth in points and ice time per game among Jets forwards, but their top line of Kyle Connor, Gabe Vilardi and Mark Scheifele average collectively around 19 and a half minutes per night, while Ehlers plays as often as the next group of five forwards around 15 and a half minutes per night. That's at odds with what most other teams do in having four-to-six forwards average closer to 17 minutes. Ehlers has never been given big minutes in Winnipeg and now, with an expiring contract, has an opportunity to try getting them somewhere else this summer.

At the same time, the lack of minutes Ehlers is getting to show he can be a front line guy may hurt his overall perceived value. This will continue to be a situation to watch and could change at any time, but keeping him seems the more likely outcome for Winnipeg.

The Islanders are in the playoff race, have won three of their past four games and we know Lamoriello has been loyal to this group. There is still time for the GM to make an ultimate decision on how he's going to approach trades.

However, lots of people in the industry think the 82-year-old won't be back in this position with the organization next season, so ownership could be putting pressure on Lamoriello to ensure he brings back assets and not leave the Islanders without more futures for a new GM to work forward with.

Nelson might return the most of any player the Islanders could trade. He's a big guy who can play inside the top-six and deliver goals in any situation. He has a partial no-trade clause but will have plenty of suitors. The Dallas Stars need to find someone to fill in for Tyler Seguin, while the Toronto Maple Leafs have signalled they are going after a centre, and the Jets could also be a destination.

Palmieri is another of the Islanders' pending UFAs who is likely to move on, especially if they don't go on a run and put themselves more securely in a playoff spot by the trade deadline. Like Nelson, Palmieri also has a partial no-trade list. He'll turn 34 years old in February.

Palmieri still adds an element every team needs come playoff time: goals. Coming off a 30-goal season last year, Palmieri has 12 in 43 games this season, 10 of which have come at even strength. He and Nelson are two of the Islanders' top-four goal scorers this season, but this team hasn't won a playoff series since 2021 and needs to start thinking about a path forward.

The most difficult part of trading Hall is that his cap hit is \$6 million, which is not going to be easy for most buyers to fit in at the deadline and may require the Blackhawks to retain some salary. Chicago has one of their three retention slots already used and it comes off the books after this season (Jake McCabe). A Hall retention would disappear when the season ends, too.

Though Hall has struggled to get too much going this season he's still fourth on the team in scoring. Hall has scored just three goals since Dec. 1, but in that time he's third among all Blackhawks in primary assists.

While the Eastern Conference playoff race is so tight, without anyone willing to give up yet, the Western Conference has a lot more separation to it. Seattle, with just four wins in their past 14 games have slipped behind Anaheim and are now eight points behind the second wild card spot. With hopes fading, it's becoming much more clear that they'll sell by the deadline.

Injured at the moment, Gourde has playoff experience and two Stanley Cup wins other teams will be attracted to. Making \$5.166 million against the cap in the final year of his deal, the Kraken will have a tough time keeping his salary at a reasonable rate if they try re-signing him before he hits the market in July. It's likely \$5 million will be too much for Seattle to invest in the 33-year-old this time, meaning it's more likely he'll be moved by March 7 -- and certainly will be if he doesn't have a contract by then.

Check out the NHL blocked shot leaders by position: Toronto's Chris Tanev is third among all defencemen with 122, while brother Brandon has more blocks than any other forward with 75. The toughness just runs in the family.

Brandon is also a physical player and averages more penalty kill time than any other Kraken forward. He has a skill set valued by playoff teams and is a great energy player to pick up.

Because of the playoff-style element he brings to the table, Tanev could wind up netting the Kraken a third- and fourth-rounder in a trade, and possibly even a second-rounder straight up.

[Sportsnet.ca / 25 things you need to know ahead of the 25th Hockey Day in Canada](#)

By Kristina Rutherford – January 16, 2025

Twenty-five years ago, Ron MacLean stood in a puddle that was supposed to be an outdoor rink on a mild January day in Toronto nursing a sizeable concern ahead of the first-ever Hockey Day in Canada broadcast. Namely, “How are we going to talk hockey for 13-and-a-half hours?”

Not long after the cameras went live, former Toronto Maple Leaf Howie Meeker joined the show and for 10 straight minutes, the three-time Stanley Cup champion laid into MacLean for holding a stick he felt was far too long for a forward, thus setting a bad example for the many fans watching the show.

“He really gave it to me,” MacLean says now, and though he admits being torn apart on TV while standing in a puddle was a tough start, once Meeker got going on MacLean’s stick, the host was no longer worried about running out of Hockey Day material. Instead, MacLean had a new concern: “Good grief, 13-and-a-half hours isn’t enough time!”

On Saturday, Jan. 18, this time from picturesque Canmore, Alta., Hockey Day in Canada will celebrate its 25th anniversary with another epic day of talking and watching and playing hockey.

Ahead of the anniversary event that will see all seven Canadian NHL teams in action, we reached out to MacLean to weigh in with some of his favourite memories, plus things he’s most looking forward to. MacLean has hosted every single Hockey Day, so who better to provide 25 things to know about Hockey Day in Canada, ahead of its 25th birthday.

- 1.** A spectacular show opening is planned for Big No. 25, though you’ll have to wait to see exactly how that looks — the host spills no secrets. “Helicopter, train, dog sled, boat — we’ve done ‘em all,” MacLean says. The opening is shot in advance of the show, and on the day of, MacLean will spend much of his time in a rink and on a stage featuring a tough-to-beat backdrop: “Canmore with its mountain majesty offers up perhaps the greatest setting in the 25 years,” he says. “The setting is outrageously beautiful.”
- 2.** And the hope is that the town’s outrageous beauty is visible. “One of the funniest parts about this show is they check the weather every 12 minutes for a month, hoping for nice weather,” MacLean says. Sadly, early looks at this year’s conditions aren’t promising. “It’s not going to be cold [only -11, according to The Weather Network]. It’s going to be overcast, though, and that might just blot out some of the mountainscape,” MacLean says. But forecasts aren’t always right... right?
- 3.** The schedule is one certainty. Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa all hit the ice, with only the Senators facing an American opponent, as they take on the Boston Bruins at 1 p.m. (all times are local, MST). The Canadiens host the Maple Leafs and the Jets host the Flames, both at 5 p.m., while the 8 p.m. finale features the Oilers visiting the Canucks. All games will be broadcast on Sportsnet.
- 4.** Canmore’s own Noah Philp made his NHL debut with the Oilers earlier this season, the 26-year-old forward and former University of Alberta star playing three games with the big club in the fall. Philp has a wonderful story: He took the 2023-24 season away from hockey before setting out on an eight-month comeback that culminated in his first steps on NHL ice. Impressive, indeed.

- 5.** The most spectacular thing about Hockey Day isn't necessarily on the ice, if you ask MacLean. "I always use Crocodile Dundee's line: 'You don't go back to someone's house because you like the furniture.' And that's the story of Hockey Day," he says. "It's the people — the rink rats."
- 6.** Sometimes those rink rats are mighty famous, too. One who comes to MacLean's mind was key in celebrations back in 2004 in her hometown of Shaunavon, Sask., and that's none other than four-time Olympic champion, Hayley Wickenheiser. "By then she was one of our country's most decorated athletes, and she was also blazing the trail," MacLean says, pointing to the work Wickenheiser continues to do to grow the game, not only by way of her dominance, but also through initiatives like WickFest, her annual female hockey festival.
- 7.** Canmore will host a U Sports women's game as part of its Hockey Day schedule, featuring Edmonton-based MacEwan University taking on Calgary's Mount Royal University. The MacEwan Griffins sit in last place in the Canada West conference and will be looking to score an upset over the Cougars, who are near the top of the standings. U Sports women's games are now a regular part of the Hockey Day schedule, and this one gets going Saturday at 3:30 p.m. at the Canmore Recreation Centre.
- 8.** The rec centre will be busy on the big day, and Sportsnet's broadcast will feature highlights and live look-ins from the games taking place there. At noon, an Alberta Elite Hockey League U-18 AAA boys' game will feature in the festivities, with the Airdrie CFR Bisons taking on the Calgary NW Flames. And at 7:30 p.m., the Alberta Junior Hockey League's Drumheller Dragons will take on the local club, the Canmore Eagles.
- 9.** Former Eagles alumni include Philp, Lightning star and two-time Stanley Cup champion, Brayden Point, and Mark Bombersack, Canadian Junior A's all-time leading scorer, whose Eagles jersey can be found in the Hockey Hall of Fame.
- 10.** The Eagles play their home games on one of two NHL-sized rinks in town, the Alex Kaleta Rink. Kaleta was born in Canmore, and played seven seasons in the NHL, for Chicago and the New York Rangers, before joining the WHL's Saskatoon Quakers to close out his career. The winger known as "Killer" had a big impact on the game: He's credited with helping to invent the term, "hat trick." There are a few different origin stories for the concept, but this one is recognized in the Hockey Hall of Fame: As the story goes, Kaleta went shopping for a new hat while his Blackhawks were in Toronto. He didn't have enough money for the grey fedora he had his eye on, but the owner of the store, Sammy Taft, offered him a deal: If Kaleta scored three times that night against the Maple Leafs, Taft would give him the hat for free. Kaleta scored four goals that night, in January of 1946, and the hat trick was born. Taft reportedly continued to offer a free hat to players who scored three times or more at Maple Leaf Gardens.
- 11.** This is the third time Alberta has played host to Hockey Day, with previous stops in Red Deer ('01) and Lloydminster ('14). The Canmore event ties Alberta with B.C. and Saskatchewan for the second-most Hockey Day hosting gigs, behind only Ontario, which has hosted six times.
- 12.** One of MacLean's fondest Hockey Day memories: A big goal he had a hand in during the alumni game in Kamloops, B.C., in 2016, scored by former NHLer Rob Brown. "All because Rob said to me before the game: 'Ron, if I pass you the puck, give it right back — I didn't mean it!' So, I did, and he wired one from the slot," MacLean says.
- 13.** That alumni game is the highlight of the day for three-time Olympic gold medallist and HNIC studio analyst Jennifer Botterill, who will again be part of the Hockey Day coverage. Last year, she played in that alumni game in front of a sold-out crowd of 5,000 in Victoria, B.C. MacLean, Kevin Bieksa and Botterill were on the same team, and even cooked up some faceoff plays in advance. In the end-of-game

shootout, Sportsnet anchor Ken Reid suggested Botterill use his “disgusting gloves,” as she puts it. She’d missed on a previous breakaway attempt, and Reid thought they might help. He was right, too — Botterill scored on the shootout wearing his filthy mitts. It was her first time playing in full equipment in years, and Botterill is looking forward to the chance to gear up again in Canmore.

14. Canmore’s Nordic Centre was built ahead of the 1988 Winter Games in Calgary, and played host to the Olympic Nordic events. It also served as the training base for this country’s most decorated winter Paralympian, Brian McKeever, who won a whopping 16 Paralympic gold medals and 19 world championships. The cross-country skier and biathlete, who’s visually impaired, is now head coach of Canada’s Para Nordic team.

15. When the Flames play host to the Jets on Hockey Day, the broadcast will be available in Plains Cree, a dialect of the Cree language. The game is one of three to be broadcast in Cree on Sportsnet this season, featuring play-by-play commentary from Clarence Iron and analysis from Earl Wood, John Chabot and Jason Chamakese.

16. The Jets will probably win. They’re 10-3 on Hockey Day in Canada (a stat MacLean pulled out of his near-photographic memory bank), while the other six Canadian teams have records in the neighbourhood of .500 (also via MacLean’s Brain).

17. Celebrations in Canmore begin two days before Hockey Day, and include a Chad Brownlee concert, an opportunity to skate with and eat brunch alongside the Stanley Cup, and an NHL alumni game watch party and after party.

18. 32 Thoughts: The Podcast will record live from Canmore. Hosts Elliotte Friedman and Kyle Bukauskas will be stationed at the Silvertip Resort on Jan. 16 at 3 p.m. Canmore is special to Bukauskas, who tied the knot in the town two summers ago.

19. MacLean’s Hockey Day highlights are many, but the most special in his books is also due to a personal connection, which came in Whitehorse, Y.T., in 2011. MacLean spent much of his childhood in the city since his dad, Ron Sr., was stationed in Whitehorse with the Air Force in the mid-’60s. When the city played host to Hockey Day, Ron Sr. and Jr. revisited the home they lived in, and Hillcrest, the outdoor rink where MacLean learned to raise the puck. Ron Sr., who was then 89, passed away in 2015. MacLean holds dear those memories of celebrating Hockey Day in Whitehorse with his dad.

20. As hinted above, weather is always a big story on the big day, and Hockey Day has seen it at both ends of the thermometer. In Year 2 in Red Deer, it was -40, and many of the locals who’d gathered to stage the world’s longest outdoor hockey game got frostbite. Iqaluit in Year 4 saw the broadcast move inside after 30 minutes because camera wiring froze and snapped due to temperatures that hit -70 with the wind chill. In 2006 in Stephenville, Nfld., MacLean did the opening in Gros Morne National Park while wearing a t-shirt on a 10-degree day.

21. The Most Deserving Host City Award may go to Owen Sound, Ont. Hockey Day in Canada tried to get there three times, but had to pivot twice due to COVID. Owen Sound had its well-deserved celebration in 2023, and hasn’t stopped celebrating since. “They’ve kept the legacy by having their own little Hockey Day each year,” MacLean says. “I think they’re the first to do that.”

22. There’s an outdoor Fan Fest Area in Canmore, which will be the site of a ball hockey tournament on Hockey Day, open to all ages and skill levels. The tournament will feature an adaptive game, too.

23. The broadcast will see MacLean honour his mentor, the late Ed Whalen — nicknamed ‘Wailin’ Ed’ — a world-famous sports broadcaster and writer who covered everything there was to cover in Calgary and the surrounding area. Whalen — famed host of Stampede Wrestling — gave MacLean the most valuable

guidance he's ever received, early in his career. "He would explain to me all the time how scared he was before his early shows, how mad he got at himself several times during his young career. He would sort of explain to me, you know, the feelings I would have," says MacLean, who suffered from anxiety and panic attacks in those early days. "I wouldn't have made it without him."

24. Canmore is the birthplace of Olympic champion Chandra Crawford. Crawford won gold in freestyle sprint cross-country skiing at the 2006 Winter Games in Turin, and she's the founder of a charitable organization that seeks to empower girls through sport, physical activity and education, called Fast and Female.

25. Now 25 years in, MacLean has exactly zero worries about talking hockey for a day-long stretch. His says his worries ahead of the first Hockey Day broadcast stemmed from a quote that goes like so: You celebrate something at the expense of its playfulness. "Which I took to mean, the minute you start to put something on a pedestal when it's supposed to be fun, like our game, you've ruined it," he says. "I was always really afraid of that, this idea that celebrating hockey would be a 'gag me' experience. But it's been the opposite for the reasons that I should have understood." Those reasons, as he knows well now: "Why are you there?" he asks. "You're there to elevate. You're there to celebrate, is the word, the folks who are the rink rats."

[Sportsnet.ca / Scout's Analysis: An updated look at how 2024 NHL Draft prospects are faring](#)

By Jason Bukala – January 16, 2025

Fresh off the world junior hockey championship, it's a good time to provide some updates on players selected at the 2024 NHL draft in Las Vegas. As is always the case, some prospects have been trending up significantly while others are battling through growing pains and injury setbacks.

January marks the halfway mark of the NHL season. Most teams are gathering for midseason meetings with pro and amateur scouting staffs to evaluate their organizational depth and strategize for the upcoming draft and trade deadline.

Decisions that are made in the next couple of months can have significant, short- and long-term, ramifications on the trajectory of a franchise.

Here's a fresh look at my top-10 list from last year's draft class, followed by analysis of the top players from Rounds 2 through 7.

1. Macklin Celebrini, 5-foot-11, 197 pounds, Left Shot - Centre

Drafted 1st overall by the San Jose Sharks

Celebrini is the clear-cut top prospect out of the draft class. He's a Calder Trophy candidate who is averaging just shy of 20:00 TOI per game for the Sharks.

Celebrini is one of the leading rookie scorers in the NHL this season. He's posted 13 goals and 16 assists in only 33 games. He isn't a one-dimensional player and competes the full length of the ice. He pushes through traffic and works to create turnovers. The 18-year-old's energy and enthusiasm are evident on a nightly basis, and the Sharks have an elite franchise player to build their team around for years to come.

2. Ivan Demidov, 6-feet, 192 pounds, Left Shot - Forward

Drafted 5th overall by the Montreal Canadiens

Demidov has been running hot in his last 10-game segment, producing seven goals and four assists for SKA St. Petersburg of the KHL. He's averaged over 14 minutes per game in that span, all of his ice time coming at even strength and the power play. Equally as important is the fact Demidov was plus-five during that stretch.

It's no secret that I had Demidov as the second-ranked prospect last June and he's done nothing to relinquish the spot. He's a dynamic offensive talent who, like Celebrini, plays in traffic and battles for pucks. He has elite offensive instincts and has displayed much-improved attention to detail in all three zones this season.

Here's an example of what I've been witnessing from Demidov recently. The following clip illustrates how quickly he reads, reacts, makes plays and pushes back physically:

3. Beckett Sennecke, 6-foot-3, 192 pounds, Right Shot – Forward

Drafted 3rd overall by the Anaheim Ducks

Sennecke had one of the best surprise reactions when the Ducks took him third overall last June at the Sphere in Las Vegas. He's been working hard to prove Anaheim made the right selection.

The 18-year-old is one of the top scorers in the OHL this season and has been very difficult to defend in the offensive zone with his length and stature. He protects pucks very well along the wall and rips plays on net in a flash. Sennecke has produced 28 goals and 35 assists through 35 games. His entire game is on the rise. He's engaged defensively and can be trusted in a variety of roles.

4. Zeev Buium, 6-feet, 186 pounds, Left Shot – Defenceman

Drafted 12th overall by the Minnesota Wild

Many years ago, when I started my NHL scouting career with the Nashville Predators, I witnessed the beginning of Ryan Suter's career and the potential that was on the horizon. In the prime of his career, Suter logged an incredible amount of ice time in all situations.

Buium is a different player in some skill categories but his approach to playing the game and overall reliability is very much the same as Suter's. Buium is a winner. He has won two World Junior gold medals and an NCAA championship in the last year alone. He averages north of 25 minutes of ice time playing college hockey at Denver University. He also led the nation in scoring for a defenceman last year and is tied for the lead this year, with 24 points in 20 games. Buium also possesses a sneaky physical element, setting up to be a future top-pairing NHL defenceman.

5. Zayne Parekh, 6-feet, 187 pounds, Right Shot – Defenceman

Drafted 9th overall by the Calgary Flames

Parekh continues to thrive in the OHL and play to his identity. He's a transitional defenceman who quarterbacks the power play and produces offence. His defensive game has improved a great deal from the start of the year; Parekh is being deployed in all situations and is generally more engaged in his zone. He's been physical and reacts quicker than most of his opponents when jumping to loose pucks.

In Parekh's last 10 games, he averaged just shy of 27:00 TOI per game while deployed in all situations. He produced three goals and nine assists, and was a tidy plus-seven.

6. Berkly Catton, 5-foot-10, 175 pounds, Left Shot – Forward

Drafted 8th overall by the Seattle Kraken

Catton was one of the few Team Canada forwards at the World Juniors in Ottawa who played to his identity throughout the tournament. He was truly one of the players who was snake-bitten in terms of results. He drove play and created his fair share of scoring chances.

Catton is playing for the Spokane Chiefs and has been one of the top point producers in the entire WHL, averaging 1.8 points per game (15 goals and 39 assists in 30 appearances). His most recent outing saw him explode for a goal and six assists against Wenatchee.

Catton projects as a top-six scoring forward at the NHL level. In the meantime, he's rounding out his game at the junior level, being deployed in all situations and averaging over 20:00 TOI. I appreciate his quickness, vision and all-around compete. He's trustworthy and works.

7. Tij Iginla, 6-feet, 191 pounds, Left Shot – Forward

Drafted 6th overall by the Utah Hockey Club

Iginla is out for the remainder of the season after undergoing hip surgery in December. He produced 14 goals and 18 assists in 21 games before being shut down. Iginla's combination of power, skill, high-end compete and elite shooting project him as a top-six winger at the NHL level. He's also generally engaged defensively and can be trusted in a variety of roles overall.

8. Liam Greentree, 6-foot-2, 215 pounds, Left Shot – Forward

Drafted 26th overall by the LA Kings

The Kings have to be very excited about landing Greentree with the 28th overall selection last June. He's a big part of the reason his junior club, the Windsor Spitfires, is one of the top teams in the OHL and CHL this season.

Greentree is in a tight race with draft-eligible Michael Misa from the Saginaw Spirit for the OHL scoring title. He's already produced 30 goals and 42 assists and is on pace to easily surpass 100 points by year's end. His combination of size and skill gives opponents all they can handle at the junior level and his skating has improved as well. Greentree is quicker out of the blocks now and showing an ability to separate from checks in open ice and transition. He's the captain in Windsor and is being deployed in all situations.

Below is an example of the effort Greentree puts forth on a nightly basis. He's killing a penalty in this clip. The goal he scores is a bit of a muffin that should have been stopped, but the sequence shows how Greentree uses his length to kill a play in his zone. He ends up separating in the neutral zone and taking the puck to the net for the short-handed tuck:

9. Michael Hage, 6-feet, 188 pounds, Right Shot – Centre

Drafted 21st overall by the Montreal Canadiens

Hage is a quick-strike forward who's a threat to create off the rush and gets pucks to the net effectively in high-danger scoring areas. Opponents have to respect his speed and creativity.

Hage is the leading scorer for the Wolverines (11 goals and 13 assists) and sits in the top 15 of the NCAA scoring race. I appreciate his skill and competitive nature, but the next thing I'm looking for is a bit more detail defensively. There are times he ends up on the wrong side of his man, high in the defensive zone, resulting in opposing scoring chances. At the end of the day, for now, his offence wins out. Montreal has another potential top-six scoring forward on the horizon.

10. Konsta Helenius, 5-foot-11, 189 pounds, Right Shot – Center

Drafted 14th overall by the Buffalo Sabres

Helenius is developing at the AHL level, playing for the Sabres long-time affiliate the Rochester Americans, and having a solid rookie campaign. The Finnish youngster has produced six goals and 11 assists while averaging over 18 minutes of ice time per game in a variety of roles. Helenius captained Team Finland at the WJC in Ottawa.

The 18-year-old is a diminutive player, but he's quick and smart. In my opinion, he leans toward being a play driver and distributor more than a goal scorer at the NHL level. He makes plays from the perimeter on the power play and tracks the entire 200 feet to assist defensively. He's adjusted well to the smaller ice surface in North America and projects as a potential top-six forward.

Top players from Rounds 2 through 7

Round 2. Cole Hutson, 5-foot-10, 165 pounds, Left Shot – Defenceman

Drafted 43rd overall by the Washington Capitals

Hutson is a dynamic play driver and power-play quarterback. His skill set was on full display at the WJC playing for Team USA as Hutson finished the tournament with 11 points in seven games.

Round 3. Ilya Protas, 6-foot-4 198 pounds, Left Shot – Forward

Drafted 75th overall by the Washington Capitals

Illya's brother "Aleksai" is having a wonderful year at the NHL level with the Caps and Washington has to be excited about the younger Protas' potential as well. He's a big body whose skating is rounding into form, which opens up more opportunity for him to produce offence. Protas has great puck touch as well: he's produced 29 goals and 38 assists playing for the Windsor Spitfires this season.

Round 4. Kevin He, 5-foot-11, 185 pounds, Left Shot – Forward

Drafted 109th overall by the Winnipeg Jets

He is a powerful skater in the open ice and a threat off the rush. The 18-year-old possesses a quick and accurate release, and shows a willingness to take the play to the net off the wall. He averages nearly 20 minutes of TOI per game playing for the Niagara Ice Dogs. His defensive detail is a work in progress but his offensive numbers are very impressive (26 goals and 28 assists in 39 games played).

Round 5. Marcus Gidlof, 6-foot-6, 179 pounds, Catches Left – Goaltender

Drafted 147th overall by the New York Islanders

Gidlof takes up a ton of net. His size affords him the luxury of playing deep in his net and he rarely tracks outside his posts, moving side to side and squares up very well. He's a hybrid-style goaltender who's splitting time between the Swedish junior league and top pro league, SHL. His SHL numbers are excellent (2.07 GAA and a .917 save percentage). Gidlof was the goalie of record in Sweden's shootout loss to Czechia in the bronze medal game at the WJC but it certainly wasn't his fault, considering the shootout wasn't decided until the 14th round.

Round 6. Kieron Walton, 6-foot-5, 211 pounds, Left Shot – Forward

Drafted 187th overall by the Winnipeg Jets

Walton's skating has gone to another level this season and the results speak for themselves. Walton has fantastic touch, pucks are on and off his stick in a hurry. His long reach extends plays and his stature allows him to shield opponents. He's already produced 26 goals and 43 assists in only 39 games. Walton could end up being a steal for the Jets as he appears to have middle-six NHL upside at this stage of his development.

Round 7. Jakub Fibigr, 6-feet, 171 pounds, Left Shot – Defenceman

Drafted 202nd overall by the Seattle Kraken

Fibigr is a two-way defenceman who's deployed in all situations at the junior level. He's playing for the Brampton Steelheads in the OHL and suited up for Team Czechia at the WJC. He relies on his skating ability and hockey sense to read and react ahead of opponents in the defensive zone. He isn't elite offensively but a capable distributor on the power play. Fibigr has produced two goals and 14 assists in 29 games at the OHL level this season. He contributed five assists for Team Czechia in Ottawa.