



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips November 2-4, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets

- PAGE 02: Columbus Dispatch: Replay: Columbus Blue Jackets overwhelmed by Winnipeg Jets
- PAGE 06: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets struggle against scorching Winnipeg Jets: 3 takeaways
- PAGE 09: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets overwhelmed by Washington Capitals: 3 takeaways
- PAGE 11: The Athletic: Blue Jackets crumble under Winnipeg Jets' withering pressure
- PAGE 13: The Athletic: Winnipeg Jets' Scott Arniel learned tough lessons in Columbus: 'I thought I had all the answers'
- PAGE 16: The Athletic: Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Boone Jenner, Erik Gudbranson still involved despite injuries
- PAGE 20: BlueJackets.com: Ehlers gets hat trick, Jets ease past Blue Jackets
- PAGE 22: BlueJackets.com: Blue Jackets drop second straight at Washington
- PAGE 24: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets' Start Could Have Them Playing More Meaningful Games
- PAGE 26: The Hockey Writers: Jets Ride Ehlers' Hat Trick to Dominating Win Over Blue Jackets
- PAGE 27: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets Still Have A Lot to Figure Out This Season
- PAGE 30: 1st Ohio Battery: Merzlikins Gives Up Six, Blue Jackets Fall 6-2 To Jets In Most Lopsided Loss Of The Season
- PAGE 33: 1st Ohio Battery: Things: Jets Ground Jackets, Voronkov Makes Season Debut, Long Road Trip Awaits

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/ Websites

- PAGE 35: The Athletic: NHL Power Rankings: Halloween is over, but we're still scared
- PAGE 45: The Athletic: How 'phenomenal' Porter Martone has made a case for the top of the 2025 NHL Draft
- PAGE 49: The Athletic: The evolution of NHL officiating, from its 'biggest innovations' to its future
- PAGE 54: The Athletic: How is Sweden shaping up for 4 Nations? Catching up with coach Sam Hallam
- PAGE 57: The Athletic: Each NHL team's biggest concern a month into the 2024-25 regular season
- PAGE 63: The Athletic: One month into the NHL season, what's real and what's not?
- PAGE 72: The Athletic: 2025 NHL Draft ranking: James Hagens, Porter Martone lead Scott Wheeler's November top 64 list
- PAGE 111: ESPN: NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, top November game for each team
- PAGE 118: Sportsnet.ca: Friday Four: Not even Sidney Crosby can save these Penguins
- PAGE 122: Sportsnet.ca: 32 Thoughts: Trade talk beginning to pick up across the league
- PAGE 125: Sportsnet.ca: Who is trending up and down to make Team Canada for 4 Nations Face-Off?

[Columbus Dispatch / Replay: Columbus Blue Jackets overwhelmed by Winnipeg Jets](#)

By Brian Hedger- November 2, 2024

The Blue Jackets hit a big bump in the road Friday night at Nationwide Arena, falling x-x to the Winnipeg Jets to start their first of 12 back-to-back this season.

They'll play again Saturday at Capital One Arena in Washington in a game slated to start at 5 p.m., just 22 hours after the puck dropped Friday.

"You don't want to think about these too long," center Sean Kuraly said. "This is early in the season to be talking about maybe being tired (in a back-to-back), so I think we're ready to go (Saturday). We want to bounce back quickly. Lucky for us, we don't have to think about it long."

Here are updates and analysis against the Jets:

FINAL: Winnipeg Jets 6, Columbus Blue Jackets 2

The Blue Jackets found out what other NHL teams are learning about the Winnipeg Jets, who pressured them from start to finish in a dominant 6-2 victory witnessed by 15,823 at Nationwide Arena.

"Obviously, they're a good hockey club that has really good sticks," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "They got it on us quickly. They've got a lot of speed up front, and we got surprised by it a little bit, but we fed into it or compounded the issues by making soft plays out of our zone. They got sticks on pucks, turned it over and then away they went."

Nikolaj Ehlers led the way with a hat trick for the Jets, who got 20 saves from backup goalie Eric Comrie while improving to 10-1-0 in their first 11 games. Mason Appleton, Josh Morrissey and Gabe Vilardi scored the other three goals for Winnipeg, while Sean Kuraly and Sean Monahan provided the Jackets' goals.

Elvis Merzlikins took the loss in net, allowing all six goals while under siege the entire game.

"If you have a really good team and you allow them the opportunity to keep coming at us, they're going to get opportunities and they're going to score on them," Evason said. "We held our own after a little bit there, and we were fine, but we have to play a way more intelligent game, period. Forget about a really good opponent, the best team, points-wise, in the National Hockey League."

GOAL, 3rd period, 14:54: Winnipeg Jets 6, Columbus Blue Jackets 2

We have another six-goal game at Nationwide Arena. This one is considerably less enjoyable for the Blue Jackets, who now trail by four goals after Gabe Vilardi nets the Jets' six tally of the night from the low slot.

GOAL, 3rd period, 11:39: Winnipeg Jets 5, Columbus Blue Jackets 2

The rout is officially on thanks to a power-play goal for the Jets, who've upped their lead to a three-goal margin on a one-time blast from defenseman Josh Morrissey at the left point.

3rd period, 10:22: Winnipeg Jets 5, Columbus Blue Jackets 2

Through the first half of the third, it's just more of the same. Heavy pressure from Winnipeg and the Blue Jackets just doing their best to fend it off, thus far staying within remote striking distance down by two

goals. Mathieu Olivier was just sent off for cross-checking, as well. Jets get another power play, which is not good for the shorthanded Jackets.

3rd period start: Winnipeg Jets 4, Columbus Blue Jackets 2

The Blue Jackets have 1:13 of carryover time on the power play, which could spark a comeback effort if they can utilize it. The puck is on the ice for the final 20 minutes.

2nd intermission: Winnipeg Jets 4, Columbus Blue Jackets 2

The Blue Jackets are hanging in there, barely, against the NHL's hottest team to start the season. Winnipeg has dominated the first 40 minutes, building a wide margin in shots (31-17) and a two-goal lead going into the third period. That's not an insurmountable lead, but the Blue Jackets have to figure out a way to get more possession time inside the Jets' zone.

GOAL, 2nd period, 18:51: Winnipeg Jets 4, Columbus Blue Jackets 2

Just that quickly, more Jets pressure leads to Elvis Merzlikins attempting to clear the puck with a swat from in front of his crease and sending it directly to Nikolaj Ehlers for his third goal of the game. The hat trick for Ehlers is the fifth of his career. He also has seven goals on the season now.

GOAL, 2nd period, 16:30: Winnipeg Jets 3, Columbus Blue Jackets 2

That didn't take long. Sean Monahan pots one against his former team to cap the power play just eight seconds after the door closed on Schiefele. Werenski is getting initial credit for the goal, but it might be changed to Monahan, who appeared to redirect Werenski's shot with a tip in the slot. Either way, the Jackets are back within a goal and have new life late in the second.

2nd period, 16:22: Winnipeg Jets 3, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

The Jackets get their first power play of the evening when Jets center Mark Schiefele gets sent off for tripping Jake Christiansen with 3:38 left in the second. Winnipeg still has a two-goal lead.

2nd period, 7:54: Winnipeg Jets 3, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

Winnipeg has fully taken control of this game now. It's only a two-goal lead for the Jets because of several high-level saves from Elvis Merzlikins, who appears to be fine after Vladislav Namestnikov's barreled into him a couple minutes ago with help from Mathieu Olivier.

The Jets are now on a power play with Dmitri Voronkov in the box for slashing. That's not a great scenario for the Blue Jackets, since Winnipeg entered the game first in the NHL in power-play success rate (44.8%).

GOAL, 2nd period, 2:20: Winnipeg Jets 3, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

The Blue Jackets are getting quite a lesson tonight from the Jets in puck possession and sustained pressure. This time, it leads to Mason Appleton one-timing a blast past Merzlikins to increase Winnipeg's lead to a two-goal cushion early in the second.

Neal Pionk with the setup feed for the primary assist, Adam Lowry gets the secondary assist for some hard work low in the zone.

2nd period start: Winnipeg Jets 2, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

The Jets and Blue Jackets are back at it for the second period, when the home side will try to gain more possession time in the Winnipeg zone. Things are not off to a good start in that department for the Jackets in the first minute of the period.

1st intermission: Winnipeg Jets 2, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

Other than Sean Kuraly's first goal of the season, the Blue Jackets had some issues in the first period. Winnipeg has large advantages at the first break in total attempts (27-16) and shots on goal (12-8), including both of Nikolaj Ehlers' goals.

According to Natural Stat Trick, though, the Blue Jackets were nearly even with the Jets in high-danger 5-on-5 scoring chances (6-5) in the game's first 20 minutes.

GOAL, 1st period, 15:14: Winnipeg Jets 2, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

Winnipeg again presses the issue inside the Columbus blue line and nets a goal because of it. The Blue Jackets were unable to clear the puck when given a chance, it goes to Ehlers again, and this time he zips one past Merzlikins from the right circle past the blocker on the far side for his second goal of the game and sixth of the season. Unassisted goal.

GOAL, 1st period, 11:02: Columbus Blue Jackets 1, Winnipeg Jets 1

The Blue Jackets' fourth line gets it back to even at one goal each way. James van Riemsdyk, standing behind the Winnipeg net, finds Kuraly drifting down the slot for a redirection past Comrie.

Kuraly's first goal of the season knots it up and gets the home crowd back into it.

GOAL, 1st period, 5:13: Winnipeg Jets 1, Columbus Blue 0

Winnipeg's early pressure pays off with the game's first goal, scored by Nikolaj Ehlers with a clapper from distance off the rush.

After winding up in the neutral zone, Ehlers carried into the Columbus zone and pulled up high in the left circle for a slap shot that beat Elvis Merzlikins under the glove, over the pad and inside the far post for his fifth goal of the season. Colin Miller gets the assist.

1st period: Columbus Blue Jackets vs Winnipeg Jets underway

The puck is down at Nationwide Arena and there's hockey being played between the surprisingly strong Blue Jackets and red hot Jets. It's 0-0 early.

Here's a look at starters, lineups, scratches, coaches and officials.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Winnipeg Jets goaltending matchup

Blue Jackets: Elvis Merzlikins will make his third straight start since missing two weeks while allowing a hand injury to heal and waiting for a chance to start during a stretch of four straight starts by Daniil Tarasov.

Merzlikins has been dynamite since returning, coming within 26.8 seconds of posting back-to-back shutouts in victories over the Edmonton Oilers and New York Islanders. The Jackets' highest-paid goalie has stopped 58 of the past 59 shots he's faced, contributing to a 2-2-0 record, 2.05 goals-against average and .925 save percentage.

Jets: Comrie is making his third appearance of the season for Winnipeg. He's 2-0-0 with a 3.00 GAA and .915 save percentage. Comrie, who split last season between the Buffalo Sabres and AHL Rochester, made his NHL debut for the Jets on April 6, 2017 at Nationwide Arena. He earned a win in that game over the Blue Jackets, making 35 saves on 39 shots.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Winnipeg Jets statistical matchup

Here's a look at how the Blue Jackets stack up against the Jets at 5-on-5, using metrics tracked by Natural Stat Trick. Corsi measures total attempts (shots on goal, misses, blocked attempts) sent toward the opposing net. Fenwick measures unblocked attempts (shots, misses) and shots are attempts that get through on target for either goals or saves.

Morning skate report — The Blue Jackets held an optional skate, where they didn't skate line rushes. Voronkov's return from his shoulder injury bumps Kevin Labanc out of the lineup as the lone change from coach Dean Evason's lineup Wednesday against the New York Islanders. Elvis Merzlikins will make his third straight start in net.

Winnipeg Jets lineup vs Columbus Blue Jackets

Morning skate report — The Jets will start Comrie, their backup, rather than playing Hellebuyck for a third straight game. Otherwise, the Winnipeg lineup appears to be the same as the one used in the Jets' 6-2 victory Wednesday in Detroit.

All-time record: The Blue Jackets are 17-16-1 against the Jets, including 9-8-0 at Nationwide Arena. Winnipeg swept the two-game series last season by a combined score of 11-1.

Last meeting: The Blue Jackets lost 6-1 on March 7, 2024 in Columbus, allowing the Jets to sweep the season series with ease. Tyler Toffoli scored two goals to lead five different goal-scorers for Winnipeg, paving the way for Connor Hellebuyck to pick up the goaltending win. Brendan Gaunce scored the lone goal for Columbus, and Elvis Merzlikins took the loss in net.

[Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets struggle against scorching Winnipeg Jets: 3 takeaways](#)

By Brian Hedger- November 3, 2024

This wasn't the kind of six-goal night people have gotten used to seeing this season at Nationwide Arena. Rather than scoring goals in bunches themselves, the Blue Jackets (5-4-1) were the receiving end of a 6-2 final score Friday night against the Winnipeg Jets (10-1-0). Just like the aftermath of two matchups against the Jets last season, this one left a mark.

"We just didn't play smart," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "We had too many turnovers, and I didn't think we were sharp in the (defensive) zone. It kind of felt like we almost handed it to them tonight, didn't make them earn it. Obviously, it's a skilled team. They don't give you much, but I think we could've been a little better, just in terms of making it harder on them."

Here are three takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets head coach Dean Eavson scratches his neck with a paper during the third period at Nationwide Arena on November 1, 2024 in Columbus, Ohio.

What happened to the Blue Jackets on their own ice wasn't something new or even all that unexpected by those who've watched them play the past three years.

The Jets are bigger, faster and have even more skill than an upstart Jackets team showed during an impressive 5-3-1 start coming into this game. They forced the issue inside the Columbus zone from start to finish, displaying a style of hockey the Blue Jackets utilized a few times in their own blowout victories.

"We never had our forecheck going, not all night," Blue Jackets coach Dean Eavson said. "There was no pressure, no sustained heat for us in all three zones, but especially in the offensive zone."

Columbus Blue Jackets assistant coach Scott Ford talks into his watch during the third period at Nationwide Arena on November 1, 2024 in Columbus, Ohio.

The way the Jets play is exactly how the Blue Jackets strive to play, featuring a relentless push that's backed by smart plays to pressure opposing players into making mistakes.

This was the latest example of the Jets using that format to hammer the Blue Jackets, after pounding them in a two-game series sweep last season led to Winnipeg winning by a combined 11-1 margin. The goal for the Jackets now is figuring out how to turn that around against "heavy" skilled teams like the Jets, who have a lot of NHL impact talent at their disposal.

"That team put heat on us to make the mistakes," Blue Jackets coach Dean Eavson said. "If we didn't put pucks on our backhand and make some passes through the middle of the ice and soft plays ... that allowed them to get more touches in the offensive zone and gain confidence that they've already got to have success tonight."

Dmitri Voronkov gives Columbus Blue Jackets coaching staff depth

In his first of the season Columbus Blue Jackets game, left winger Dmitri Voronkov (10) plays during the game against Winnipeg during the first period at Nationwide Arena on November 1, 2024 in Columbus, Ohio. Around him is Winnipeg Jets defenseman Colin Miller (6) and Winnipeg Jets defenseman Logan Stanley (64).

Getting Dmitri Voronkov back into the lineup against Winnipeg was an early surprise after he sustained a left shoulder injury in the Jackets' penultimate game of the preseason. It's going to take a couple games to get him back up to speed after a lengthy absence, as evidenced by a -3 plus/minus rating in 13:24 against the Jets, but getting him back into the should provide a boost eventually.

Standing 6 foot 5, 227 pounds, the Russian power forward was a nice addition for coach Dean Evason and his staff to mix into the lineup against another opponent with a "heavy" lineup. Voronkov brings soft hands to go with his size and strength, and he demonstrated a nose for scoring as a rookie with 18 goals.

His return, however, signaled another positive development for the Blue Jackets. They're back to carrying 13 healthy forwards with a long road trip on the horizon, which gives the coaching staff more options when constructing line combinations. Voronkov, for instance, bumped Kevin Labanc despite the veteran winger's five assists in seven games and impressive performance Wednesday in the Jackets' 2-0 victory over the New York Islanders.

Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Kevin Labanc (62) skates during the third period of the NHL hockey game against the Edmonton Oilers at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024. The Blue Jackets won 6-1.

Evason spoke with Labanc prior to the Jackets' optional morning skate Friday to break the news that he was the odd man out.

"It's difficult to talk to a player and say, 'You played your best game, but guess what, you're not playing tonight,'" Evason said. "It's tough, but you do it face-to-face, you do it honestly, straight forward, and give him the opportunity to voice his opinion of why he didn't think he should come out. You listen and then hopefully make an educated decision as we move forward."

Evason said Labanc wasn't thrilled, but that's exactly what coaches hope to see from players in that situation.

"You want guys to be (upset) they're not playing, and he is, which is great," Evason said. "Hopefully, we have these tough decisions moving forward and we make the right ones."

Columbus Blue Jackets' favorable schedule flips vs Washington Capitals

Columbus Blue Jackets center Sean Kuraly (7) and Columbus Blue Jackets left wing James van Riemsdyk (21) talk during the second period at Nationwide Arena on November 1, 2024 in Columbus, Ohio during the game against the Winnipeg Jets.

One of the biggest storylines in the first month of the Jackets' season was how often they faced teams at home on the second half of back-to-back games.

Six of their first nine games, including five at Nationwide Arena, were played under that scenario and it likely played a role in their impressive 5-3-1 start. Saturday in Washington, it's the Blue Jackets' turn to wear it on the second leg of a back-to-back and this one's ugly. The game has a 5 p.m. start time at Capital One Arena and the Washington Capitals will be fresh after not playing Friday night. That's just how things roll in NHL scheduling, which typically works out evenly after 82 games.

"We talked already in the (locker) room that we're excited about getting right back at it," Evason said. "You pick your heads up and we've got a 5 o'clock game. Quick bite to eat, quick rest and away we go again. We can correct the mistakes that happened in this hockey game. If they don't happen (in Washington), we'll give ourselves a chance."

The Capitals are 7-2-0 and sitting in second place of the Metropolitan Division, so it's also a key clash for the Blue Jackets within their own division. Coming off Friday's tough matchup against Winnipeg, it will be interesting to see how their legs respond in the nation's capital.

[Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets overwhelmed by Washington Capitals: 3 takeaways](#)

By Brian Hedger- November 4, 2024

It's time to regroup.

After flying home from a 7-2 thrashing by the Washington Capitals on Saturday night, the Blue Jackets get a day off Sunday to rest, decompress and start to wrap their minds around what happened in their first of 12 back-to-backs this season.

The blowout loss in Washington followed a 6-2 rout by the Winnipeg Jets on Friday at Nationwide Arena, handing the Blue Jackets (5-5-1) their first consecutive losses by a stinging 13-4 margin that reduced their overall goal differential from +10 through the first nine games to +1 after 11.

Here are three takeaways from the Jackets' meltdown at Capital One Arena:

NHL scheduling 'monster' takes a bite out of Columbus Blue Jackets

Six of the Jackets' first nine opponents played them in the second game of back-to-backs, including five who traveled to Columbus. It was a scheduling anomaly that hadn't happened in the NHL since the 1950s, and it played at least a small role in the Blue Jackets' 5-3-1 start.

Head coach Dean Evason pushed back on that assertion by saying players are in better shape than ever and that it's way too early for tired legs to play a role in deciding games, but team's play Saturday night felt like a rebuttal.

Whether the Jackets had tired legs or just weary emotions after Winnipeg's dominant performance 20 hours earlier, the result was ugly. Washington scored 56 seconds into the game, made it 2-0 less than two minutes into it, pushed it to 3-0 at 7:28 of the first period and scored two more goals, 24 seconds apart, to decide the game with a 5-0 lead after 20 minutes.

The Jackets were outskated, outhustled and overwhelmed, which allowed the Capitals to play on cruise control for the final two periods. It wasn't all due to scheduling, but that had to be a contributing factor in the game unraveling so quickly. If there's any good news for the Blue Jackets to take from the weekend, it's that it's over.

Next is an off day Sunday, practice Monday, a flight to San Jose, California afterward and a four-game road trip to the West Coast starting Tuesday against the San Jose Sharks. The Blue Jackets must take a breath, refocus and not let a brutal weekend send them into a tailspin.

Kevin Labanc should stay in the Columbus Blue Jackets' lineup

Kevin Labanc netted the Blue Jackets' second goal against the Capitals by poking at a puck that goalie Logan Thompson appeared to cover. His jab sent it sliding under Thompson and over the goal line for his first goal as a Blue Jacket, which required a video review to confirm.

The play probably should've been blown dead once Thompson's prone body covered the puck, but officials didn't blow the play dead for some reason and Labanc pounced in his return to action after being scratched against Winnipeg.

Evason said Labanc played arguably his best game with the Jackets in their 2-0 victory Wednesday over the New York Islanders, which made it a tough call to sit him against the Jets while making room for

Dmitri Voronkov's return. Labanc wasn't happy about the decision, stated his case for why he should've stayed in the lineup and then played another solid game upon returning in Washington.

Labanc has one goal, five assists and six points in eight games now, mostly while playing a role on the fourth line. Voronkov's return gives Evason an extra forward on the roster, which should spark a healthy internal competition for ice time. James van Riemsdyk was scratched Saturday for the first time this season, but it could be somebody else's turn to sit Tuesday in San Jose.

Columbus Blue Jackets must find Cole Sillinger a steady role

Evason likes to play Justin Danforth at center on the third line for multiple reasons. He's solid on draws, is a right-handed option at the dots, is fast enough to cover all 200 feet of the ice down the middle and is sneaky good offensively.

The problem is that playing Danforth in that spot forces Cole Sillinger into a wing position rather than centering a line, which Evason has said multiple times is his best long-term position. Initially, Sillinger moved from center of the third line to left wing on the top line, skating with Sean Monahan and Marchenko.

When that didn't show much chemistry, he slid to left wing on a line with Adam Fantilli in the middle and rookie Mikael Pyyhtia on the right. That looked good for a couple games, but Pyyhtia started Saturday on the left wing of the third line, while Voronkov and Sillinger flanked Fantilli as the second group.

Down 6-2 starting the third period, Sillinger moved back with Monahan and Marchenko while Yegor Chinakhov went back to Fantilli's line. Neither of those moves made much of a difference, especially for Sillinger. He finished with a game-low -3 plus/minus rating and subpar possession metrics in 9:19 of 5-on-5, according to Natural Stat Trick.

Is it time for his return to center ice?

Stay tuned.

[The Athletic / Blue Jackets crumble under Winnipeg Jets' withering pressure](#)

By Aaron Portzline- November 2, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Since Columbus Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell was hired last spring, he has dropped the following line repeatedly: “There will be games where we get out-skilled, but we shouldn’t ever be outworked.”

Friday, the Blue Jackets’ effort against the NHL-best Winnipeg Jets wasn’t the issue. But the Jets ran roughshod past the Blue Jackets, taking them completely out of the structured, smart game they’ve flashed this season and rolling to a 6-2 win before a crowd of 15,823 in Nationwide Arena.

Don’t expect the Blue Jackets to ever agree they’ve been out-skilled, but that might have been the case Monday. The Jets are 10-1-0 for a reason.

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason was steamed his club made so many soft passes, high-risk passes and slow-developing decisions in their own zone, but he acknowledged Winnipeg’s relentless pressure played the biggest part in that.

“That team put heat on us to make the mistakes,” Evason said. “If we were playing the way we’re capable of playing, getting pucks behind them and getting our forecheck going ...

“We never had a forecheck all night. Not all night. There was no pressure, so sustained heat for us in any of the three zones, but especially in the offensive zone.”

Essentially, Winnipeg, fueled by Nikolaj Ehlers’ 4-point night (3-1-4), did to the Blue Jackets what the Blue Jackets have done to a handful of opponents already this season during a surprising 5-4-1 start.

Winnipeg held a 44-22 advantage in shots on goal and a 72-45 edge in shot attempts, which includes attempts that were blocked or missed the net. Put another way: The Jets were in Columbus’ zone all night, and the Blue Jackets couldn’t reciprocate.

Sean Kuraly and Sean Monahan scored goals for the Blue Jackets, and Elvis Merzlikins — on the heels of two strong outings, including a shutout — had 38 saves. Monahan’s goal, on the power play, was the 250th goal of his career and his team-leading sixth of the season.

The Blue Jackets hung in there for a while.

Kuraly scored his first of the season midway through the first period after a strong forecheck by the fourth line. James van Riemsdyk, who won a battle behind the net, found Kuraly coming through the slot for a one-timer to make it 1-1 at 11:02 of the first.

The Jackets fell behind 3-1 early in the second period but later scored a power-play goal — Monahan tipped a point shot from defenseman Zach Werenski at 16:30 — to make it 3-2.

Ehler’s third goal — his fifth career hat trick — made it 4-2, however, later in the second period, before Winnipeg pulled away in the third.

“We were going backward and holding on to the puck too long,” Kuraly said. “We want to (pass), we want to chip, we want to keep moving forward. When we’re not moving forward, when we’re not doing those things, it’s when we get in trouble.

“It’s pretty evident, usually, when we were getting scored on tonight, that it started somewhere with that.”

This is what the Jets have done all season. They came into the game with the highest-scoring offensive in the NHL, the fourth-stingiest defense and the best goal differential in the league. After Friday's game, they've outscored opponents by 26 goals in 11 games.

"They're playing well," said Monahan, who finished last season with Winnipeg after he was traded there by the Montreal Canadiens. "I don't think we had a great game. We gave them a lot. We can learn from that game."

A lot of lessons have been taught recently between these clubs. In the last three meetings with Winnipeg, the Jackets have been outscored 17-3. They lost 6-1 in Nationwide last March 17.

"It's a skilled team; they don't give you much," Werenski said. "I definitely think we could have been a little bit better, just in terms of making it harder on them. We just seemed a little bit sloppy tonight."

The Blue Jackets, who play in Washington on Saturday, did get positive news on the injury front Friday.

Forward Dmitri Voronkov, who suffered a shoulder injury in training camp, made his season debut, playing on the fourth line with Kuraly and van Riemsdyk. He was minus-3 with no shots on goal in 13 minutes, 24 seconds of playing time.

[The Athletic / Winnipeg Jets' Scott Arniel learned tough lessons in Columbus: 'I thought I had all the answers'](#)

By Aaron Portzline- November 2, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — When Scott Arniel was hired as associate coach of the New York Rangers in 2013, there were already three familiar faces in the dressing room. That's always helpful, of course, for Arniel it turned out to be crucial.

Rick Nash, Derick Brassard and Derek Dorsett had played for Arniel when he was a first-time NHL head coach with the Columbus Blue Jackets in 2010-11 and half of 2011-12. He lasted only 123 games behind the Blue Jackets bench, and they were two of the longest seasons in franchise history.

When Arniel was fired midway through the 2011-12 season, few in Columbus were sorry to see him go. But it didn't make much sense that Arniel, considered a rising coaching star in the American Hockey League, could flop so badly — and seem so overwhelmed — in the NHL.

There were public fights with players. There were nasty public exchanges with the media. A veteran player publicly savaged Arniel for not running practices that were challenging enough.

Arniel went back to the AHL for one season, then landed the associate's job with the Rangers. By then, he was no longer angry with the Blue Jackets for firing him. He was ready to get back to work on earning a second chance as an NHL head coach.

"The biggest thing is, I thought I had all the answers," Arniel told The Athletic. "The NHL is a tough league, and some of those relationships ... I think I had too much of a hard-nosed way of approaching them."

The biggest thing I learned is that you have to build those relationships. You have to get the players believing in you, and you have to believe in them. That's how you get results."

And who helped Arniel see the errors of his way?

"Well, we had a lot of Columbus guys come through New York," Arniel said. "It was like half the team came over to New York."

Nash was traded to the Rangers in a blockbuster trade during the summer of 2012. Brassard, Dorsett and defenseman John Moore were all traded to New York in a trade deadline deal in 2013 for speedy winger Marián Gáborík.

By then, Nash was a well-respected veteran in the NHL. Brassard and Dorsett were NHL lineup regulars, and Moore was a young blueliner finding his way. For Arniel, they all became resources.

"I had a chance to have some long talks with those guys," Arniel said. "I asked them what they thought, what I didn't do right in Columbus and what I could have done differently. I talked to a couple of my assistant coaches, Brad Berry and Todd Richards. I talked to (former Blue Jackets assistant general manager) Chris MacFarland.

"There were a lot of things I could look back (on) now and see what I would have done differently. They helped me prepare for my next opportunity, and they helped me really find my way back. The hardest part of talking to those guys was the feeling that I'd let them down, too."

Arniel has been back to Nationwide scores of times after his firing as an assistant with the Rangers (2013-14 to 2017-18), Washington Capitals (2018-19 to 2021-22) and Winnipeg Jets (last two seasons).

But he returns tonight as head coach of the Jets, having been hired to replace Rick Bowness over the summer. Winnipeg (9-1-0) is the NHL's top team so far this season, including a 6-2 win over the Detroit Red Wings on Wednesday.

In addition to the heart-to-hearts he had with former Blue Jackets, Arniel said he grew exponentially over the last decade-plus working under Alain Vigneault, Todd Reirden, Peter Laviolette and Bowness.

But over the course of those 11 seasons, he did wonder if he'd ever get another chance to be a head coach in the NHL.

"I wasn't sure," he said. "I always trained hard for it. That's the lesson sports teaches you — life teaches you — if you fail at something, you want a second chance. All I ever wanted was to get another opportunity.

"When I got let go, (to me) it wasn't my fault. But at the end of the day, you look back and realize, I didn't do a very good job. And so you have to find some answers. If I had to get a second chance, I had to find out the reasons why my first one didn't go so well."

It would be entirely unfair to put all of the Blue Jackets' struggles in 2010-11 and 2011-12 on Arniel.

On Nov. 26, 2010, the Blue Jackets opened a weekend home-and-home series with Detroit that would determine first place in the Central Division. This was ho-hum for the Red Wings, who were still seen as Stanley Cup contenders. It was rare air for the Jackets.

The Red Wings won both games and the Blue Jackets' spiral to the abyss was underway. They won only 20 of their final 62 games that season, finishing with the third-worst record (34-35-13) in the Western Conference. When they started 11-24-5 the following season (last in the NHL), Arniel was fired in the middle of Columbus' road trip in California.

It's hard to look back on those seasons without wincing. Arniel had public run-ins with defenseman Mike Commodore and Brassard, and he was challenged by veteran Vinny Prospal for running practices that were too easy, in Prospal's opinion.

But some of the drama was beyond Arniel's control.

The Blue Jackets traded for Jeff Carter before the 2011-12 season, hoping he could be the long-sought center who could play with Nash and give them a bona fide No. 1 line. But Carter pouted from the moment the trade was announced and made it clear he never wanted to play in Columbus.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Nash's discontent was brewing after he learned the Blue Jackets had discussed trading him to facilitate a roster rebuild.

These were volatile times. Arniel was fired on Jan. 9. Carter was traded on Feb. 23. Nash was traded the following June. General manager Scott Howson — who hired Arniel, traded for Carter and traded Nash to the Rangers — was fired in February 2013.

Arniel stands on more stable ground these days. He's a wiser, more confident coach, he said, and the Winnipeg organization feels like home to him.

He began his NHL playing career with the Jets in the early 1980s, and finished his career with the Manitoba Moose of the old International Hockey League in the late 1990s. He was an assistant coach with the Moose when his playing career ended, and later was head coach of the franchise when they joined the AHL.

Now he has the Jets rolling. They'll likely be the biggest test so far this season for the Blue Jackets, who are 5-3-1 and playing better than most expected.

“As much as it didn’t work out here for me or the team, I love coming back here,” Arniel said. “There are some great people I got to work with and (got) to be around, so that’s great.

“I don’t have any hard feelings. I don’t come back sour and upset. I always want to win, but ... hey, it’s been a long time since all that happened here.”

[The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Boone Jenner, Erik Gudbranson still involved despite injuries](#)

By Aaron Portzline- November 4, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — A collection of notes, insights, ruminations and did-you-knows gathered throughout the week that was for the Columbus Blue Jackets:

Item No. 1: Stay close

In the not-so-long-ago NHL, many franchises, including the Blue Jackets, treated their long-term injured players like pariahs. The players could come to the rink for therapy and rehabilitation and were expected to attend home games, but they were not in team meetings, pregame work-ups or postgame celebrations.

It was as if getting seriously injured was a sign of weakness or a personal failing, or that shame was somehow an aide to recovery.

“I know there were lots of teams where, if the (healthy) players were coming in from 9 to 11 in the morning, you were either here and gone before they arrived, or you came in during the afternoon when they were gone,” Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell said. “I don’t know about (Columbus), but I’ve seen it in other places.”

Thankfully, that mindset has mostly drifted from the game. There’s no trace of it in Columbus now under Waddell and new coach Dean Evason.

The Blue Jackets were hit hard by injuries early this season, which took two of their leadership pillars — captain Boone Jenner and veteran defenseman Erik Gudbranson — out of the dressing room.

Or did it?

Jenner and Gudbranson both had shoulder surgeries and just started a grueling rehab process together, sitting side by side most days on the training tables down the hall from the Blue Jackets dressing room.

But they’re also sitting in on team meetings, chatting with players one-on-one before and after practice, and trying to stay involved as much as possible. During games, most nights they sit in a booth at press level with Kent Johnson and prospect center Cayden Lindstrom, who is returning from a back injury.

“I want to be around the guys,” Jenner said. “If you’re not in the fight, not in the game, you don’t have the pulse of the room during (games). But I want to get as much as I can on practice days, talking with the guys and staying involved that way.

“We’re sitting in on video (review) when we can, staying engaged. It’s big. We’re all part of it. We see how hard the guys are working, and I hope they see how hard we’re working to get back and be out there with them.”

Great to see #CBJ captain Boone Jenner here signing at the Meet the Team event despite his long-term injury pic.twitter.com/X70LsevjWx

— Jeff Svoboda (@JacketsInsider) October 24, 2024

Waddell has said he wants Jenner and Gudbranson to be around the club as much as they want. This isn’t new for him, either, he said. With his previous teams, Atlanta and Carolina, injured players were always treated like vested members of the team.

"I've never been into that," Waddell said. "We want Boone and Guddy around, absolutely. If they want to travel with us, I'd have no problem with that. If you're part of the team, you're part of the team."

"They're probably not going to stand up in a team meeting right now, but I see them every morning when I'm in the room, just having coffee with a guy or breakfast or whatever. If I'm a young guy, why wouldn't I want to hang around Boone or Guddy?"

The club has not put a timeline on either player's predicted return. Jenner had surgery on Oct. 10, while Gudbranson went under the knife five days later.

"I'm happy with the progress," Jenner said. "I'd definitely like to be back this season to play. Right now my target date is as soon as possible. It's going to be 2025, but as soon as possible."

They won't travel on the upcoming West Coast road trip through San Jose, Los Angeles, Anaheim and Seattle because they're getting daily treatment from team doctors in Nationwide Arena. But they'll jump right into the mix on the other side of the trip.

"We want them in our meetings, we want them to continue teaching and learning," Evason said. "It doesn't matter if they're projected to come back tomorrow or a few months down the road, why not continue with them involved?"

"It's important they're in there. They're important parts of our hockey team, not only when they're on the ice but off the ice. It's good for them, but it's good for us and our guys, too."

The immediate challenge, Jenner joked, is he and Gudbranson not getting on each other's nerves when spending hours upon hours together.

"It's only been a couple of days (on the training table), but we've been laughing about that," Jenner said. "We've spent a lot of time together anyway, but now this. We were joking the other day, wondering when we're going to get sick of each other."

"I'm sure it's coming quick."

Item No. 2: Drawing nearer

The NHL's Stadium Series game between the Blue Jackets and Detroit Red Wings in Ohio Stadium is now less than four months away, set for March 1, 2025.

The league's "special events" staff is returning home now from the latest Global Series games in Finland, and the focus will soon shift to this year's Winter Classic, set for New Year's Eve in Wrigley Field between the Chicago Blackhawks and St. Louis Blues.

"The NHL pretty much runs these games, and they're pretty busy right now," Waddell said. "Our people are having meetings to doing all of the work that they can do right now, but the league's focus on the Stadium Series will probably pick up after the (Winter Classic) game."

A big part of the anticipation for Blue Jackets fans, of course, is the reveal of the sweater they'll wear in the game. Will the cannon play a big role? Will it be the swirled flag logo? Is Boomer going to be on the shoulders or sleeves?

The Blue Jackets considered designing the sweater themselves but quickly decided against it.

"You'd spend hundreds of thousands of dollars designing something like this when the NHL has those people on staff," Waddell said. "So it just makes sense."

The league and representatives of Fanatics, which will produce the sweater, met with the Blue Jackets to discuss prototypes and what certain elements should or could be represented. They signed off on a few elements, too. Now they wait for the league to bring them a final product.

Some are more patient than others. Asked when the Blue Jackets will be ready to show their new kit to the public, Waddell said: "Great question. We just had a goaltender ask me that the other day, because he wants to get working on a mask (to go with the rest of the uniform). I gave him the same answer I'll give you: 'We haven't seen 'em yet. We don't know.'"

Item No. 3: Snacks

- The Blue Jackets carried a modest three-game point streak (2-0-1) into the weekend. (They haven't had a four-game point streak in more than a year.) But back-to-back humbling losses — 6-2 to Winnipeg on Friday and 7-2 in Washington on Saturday — have been eye-opening. They trailed 3-1 early in the second period to the Jets and 5-0 after the first period to the Capitals. "You get down early and all of a sudden you think you have to open it up and be a little bit more offensive," Evason told reporters after Saturday's loss. "You try to score goals as opposed to staying sound and simple and allowing that to translate into offense. We got away from playing proper and right and structured and all that good stuff."

go-deeper

GO DEEPER

Blue Jackets crumble under Jets' withering pressure

- The Jackets flew back to Columbus after Saturday's game and took an off day on Sunday. They'll get back to practice on Monday before flying to California in advance of Tuesday's game in San Jose. "We'll skate and actually practice some detail stuff," Evason said. "At the end of the day, we have to get back to competing and playing aggressive hockey. When you're chasing it like we were the last couple of nights, you're opening up and it doesn't result in good, defensive hockey. Teams have been able to tack on (goals) after they've gotten up early."

- Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski played his 497th career game in Saturday's 7-2 loss in Washington. He's due to play No. 500 on Nov. 10 in Anaheim, becoming the fourth Columbus defenseman to hit that mark. David Savard (597), Fedor Tyutin (553), and Rostislav Klesla (515) are the others. Jack Johnson, with 455 games in a Blue Jackets sweater, could become the fifth later this season.

- Werenski is also six points away from tying David Vyborny (317) for fifth on the Blue Jackets' all-time points list. Vyborny had 113-204-317 in 543 games during the early days of the franchise. Werenski is at 93-218-311.

Zach Werenski is set to play his 500th NHL game on Nov. 10 in Anaheim. (Casey Gower / Imagn Images)

- While the Blue Jackets were preparing to play the Capitals, Waddell was driving from Columbus to Saginaw, Mich., to be inducted, along with his 1980-81 Saginaw Gears teammates, into the Saginaw County Sports Hall of Fame. Waddell was a defenseman on the long-ago International Hockey League team that won the IHL championship, the Turner Cup. "I haven't seen most of these guys in 40-some years," Waddell told The Athletic. "It was a great group of guys and a really talented team. But how I ended up there was a wild story." Waddell was playing with the Houston Apollos, but the franchise folded around Christmas 1980. The Los Angeles Kings, who drafted Waddell in the seventh round (No. 111) in 1978, assigned him and two others to Saginaw. His best season in Saginaw was the following year when he totaled 26-69-95 in 77 games.

- Saginaw's Hall of Fame is not the only one to induct Waddell. In 1993, he became a member of the Northern Michigan University Hall of Fame, as he starred there as a defenseman for four seasons in the late 1970s. He played 120 games for the Wildcats, totaling 52-120-172.
- Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering trivia question: Mathieu Olivier is tied for second on the club with four goals, but he also leads the Blue Jackets — and is tied for 16th in the NHL — with 36 hits already this season. Who owns the franchise record for most hits in a season? Extra points if you get the franchise's all-time hits leader.
- Kent Johnson is no longer wearing a sling on his injured left shoulder, indicating his progress since being injured on Oct. 17 vs. Buffalo. The club has not announced a targeted return date, but he'll be back before Jenner or Gudbranson. "He's in the gym, which is a good sign," Waddell said. "Now it's just a time thing. He's not going to be back in two weeks, but it's not going to be two months, either."
- There's good news on Lindstrom, too. The No. 4 pick in June has been handled with kid gloves to make sure the back injury that cost him much of last season is completely healed before he returns, and it appears that is getting close ... provided there are no setbacks. "He's skating every day in full equipment," Waddell said. "We keep pushing him harder and harder. He's going to stay in Columbus and skate while the team is on the road trip. We'll see where he is when we get back. If there are no setbacks, we'll probably look to send him back to his junior team." That news will be well-received in southeast Alberta, home to Lindstrom's junior club, Medicine Hat of the Western Hockey League.
- Lindstrom will continue skating with Blue Jackets coaches, but he's not permitted to skate with the team until he's signed to a contract. And what about that contract? Waddell indicated earlier this summer he'd be signed before or during training camp, but that was put on hold because he wasn't able to take part. Here's Waddell on the latest plan for Lindstrom's entry-level deal: "The agent (Daren Hermiston) and I have continued to talk," Waddell said. "We've agreed: Let's get him back, let's get him playing. They're not pushing (for a deal), we're not pushing. At some point, when he starts getting ready to play or maybe he's played a few games, we'll get him signed. The contract is a relatively easy contract to do."
- Last Monday, Blue Jackets senior advisor John Davidson, a Hall of Fame broadcaster with the New York Rangers, stepped back into the booth to provide analysis next to play-by-play voice Steve Mears on FanDuel Sports Network. He'll fill in for FDSN's Jody Shelley whenever Shelley is occupied with Amazon Prime games on Mondays throughout the season. Twice already this season, Shelley has had to race back to Columbus from Canada on Tuesdays to be in place for a Blue Jackets game that night. It got us wondering who would step into the booth as an analyst if Shelley didn't make it back in time. Turns out it's Aaron Johnson, the former Blue Jackets defenseman who is now the team relations specialist for the club. Nobody's rooting for Shelley to have smooth travel more than Johnson.
- Goaltender Jet Greaves had a rough start to the AHL season, allowing 11 goals on 66 shots in his first two starts. But he's been much sharper in his last two outings, stopping 65 of 71 (.915), including 25 saves in a 4-2 win over Toronto on Saturday. The Monsters are back in action today, hosting Grand Rapids at 6:30 p.m.
- The Monsters' early season goal leader is ... Roman Ahcan? The 25-year-old, in his fourth pro season after signing out of Wisconsin in 2022, has 5-0-5 through seven games. He's already more than halfway to his career high (nine), set last season.
- Trivia answer: Brandon Dubinsky has three of the franchise's top five seasons for hits, including 248 in 80 games during the 2016-17 season. The all-time franchise leader is Jenner with 1,619.

[BlueJackets.com / Ehlers gets hat trick, Jets ease past Blue Jackets](#)

By Craig Merz- November 02, 2024

COLUMBUS -- Nikolaj Ehlers scored a hat trick and had an assist for the Winnipeg Jets in a 6-2 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena on Friday.

"I felt pretty good in warmups," Ehlers said. "I'd be pretty disappointed if I didn't score tonight with that warmup. It was pretty funny how that worked out."

Kyle Connor had an assist to extend his season-opening point streak (nine goals, nine assists) to 11 games for the Jets (10-1-0), who became the 12th team in NHL history to have 10 wins through their first 11 games.

They have outscored opponents 52-26.

"Our offense is generated by our defense," Jets goalie Eric Comrie said. "If you look at the games, we come back so hard, backcheck so hard, we play great in our D zone. We really take pride in what we do. It forces teams to do extra stuff, and we capitalize on their turnovers and their mistakes."

Mason Appleton, Josh Morrissey and Gabriel Vilardi scored for Winnipeg, and Comrie made 20 saves.

Sean Kuraly and Sean Monahan scored, and Elvis Merzlikins made 37 saves for the Blue Jackets (5-4-1). Their four-game point streak (3-0-1) was snapped on Friday.

"It was back and forth there for a little bit, who's putting each team under more pressure," Kuraly said. "Eventually they tilted it in their favor. I think maybe in some of those instances, we got a little impatient and didn't just punch back like we wanted to."

Ehlers made it 1-0 at 5:13 of the first period with a slap shot off the rush from the top of the left circle.

"When he puts his speed on display like that, he's a hard player to defend," Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said.

Kuraly tied it 1-1 at 11:02 before Ehlers gave the Jets a 2-1 lead at 15:14 with a wrist shot from the right face-off dot.

Appleton extended the lead to 3-1 at 2:20 of the second period, one-timing a shot through traffic from the right circle off a feed by Neal Pionk.

"They've got a lot of speed up front, and I think we got surprised by it a little bit," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "But we fed into it, or compounded the issues by making soft plays out of our zone that they got sticks on pucks, turned it over and then away they went."

Monahan made it 3-2 on the power play at 16:29. He tipped in Zach Werenski's shot from the point for his sixth goal, which leads the Blue Jackets.

"I don't think we had a great game," Monahan said. "We gave them a lot, but we can learn from that game."

Ehlers scored at 18:51 for the hat trick and a 4-2 lead. His three-goal game marked the fifth of his career and his first since Dec. 20, 2018.

Morrissey made it 5-2 at 11:39 of the third period with a power-play goal from the top of the left circle, and Vilardi scored at 14:54 to make it 6-2 after Connor dangled past two defensemen and fed him at the top of the crease.

The Jets are 6-0-0 on the road with a 30-12 goal differential.

“When you’ve got goalies like we do, and with the defensive structure we have going for us right now, giving limited scoring chances, that helps us a lot,” Ehlers said. “Columbus, they were really good tonight. They made us work but we found a way.”

Notes: Ehlers (fifth hat trick) is tied with Connor for the fourth most hat tricks in franchise history. ... Vilardi (three goals, two assists) and Mark Scheifele (one goal, three assists) have three-game point streaks for the Jets. ... Blue Jackets forward Dmitri Voronkov made his season debut after being on the injured list with an upper-body injury since Oct. 4. He had one shot in 13:24 of ice time. ... Monahan scored his 250th NHL goal. ... The Blue Jackets set a team record with 37 goals through their first 10 games.

[BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets drop second straight at Washington](#)

By Harvey Valentine- November 3, 2024

WASHINGTON -- Alex Ovechkin had a goal and two assists in his third straight multipoint game, helping the Washington Capitals to a 7-2 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Capital One Arena on Saturday.

Ovechkin scored his fourth goal in three games and has 859 for his NHL career. He needs 36 goals to pass Wayne Gretzky (894) for first on the all-time list.

"I told [forward Taylor Raddysh] that when he (Ovechkin) scores, he scores in bunches, so be ready," Washington forward Dylan Strome said. "That was three games ago. He just finds a way to get open. He has obviously a great shot. Try to pass to him as much as you can. It's fun to play with him."

Connor McMichael scored twice, Strome had a goal and two assists, and Aliaksei Protas had a goal and an assist for the Capitals (8-2-0), who have won six straight home games. Logan Thompson made 34 saves.

Washington scored the first five goals of the game, all in the first period.

"I thought we just came out, we were all over them," McMichael said. "Didn't give them any time and space, and thankfully a couple dropped early and we were just able to take over the game."

Damon Severson and Kevin Labanc scored for the Blue Jackets (5-5-1), who lost to the Winnipeg Jets 6-2 on Friday. Daniil Tarasov made 15 saves.

"When you get down early you all of a sudden think you have to open it up and be a little more offensive and try to score goals," Columbus coach Dean Evason said, "as opposed to staying sound and simple and allow that to translate into offense."

Protas gave the Capitals a 1-0 lead at 56 seconds, knocking in a return pass from Strome on a 2-on-0 rush.

McMichael made it 2-0 at 1:42, scoring on a wrist shot from the right face-off circle off a pass from Rasmus Sandin.

McMichael has seven goals in 10 games this season after scoring 18 in 80 games last season.

"For the most part it's confidence," McMichael said of his success this season. "I just feel like when I'm around the net I have a lot more confidence of trying to beat the goalie."

Andrew Mangiapane increased the lead to 3-0 at 7:28 on the rebound of Jakub Vrana's shot.\

Ovechkin made it 4-0 at 14:34, scoring through the five-hole with a slap shot from above the left circle off a pass from Strome.

Nic Dowd gave the Capitals a 5-0 lead at 14:58 when he knocked in a pass from Trevor van Riemsdyk on the rush.

"We just got down early and they kept coming with the pressure, and we just didn't bring anything back to the game at that point," Severson said. "Obviously it's 5-0 after one. The game definitely wasn't over, but it was tough to come back from that."

Severson cut it to 5-1 at 49 seconds of the second period when his wrist shot trickled between Thompson's pads.

McMichael pushed the Washington lead to 6-1 at 4:51. Tarasov made the initial save on Tom Wilson's shot from the left circle a 2-on-1, but McMichael banked the rebound in off Columbus defenseman David Jiricek in the crease for his fourth goal in three games.

"The ones we gave up were 3-on-1s, 2-on-1s," Blue Jackets defenseman Jack Johnson said. "Second wave is what beat us back to the net all night, and you can't let that happen in the NHL."

Labanc pulled the Blue Jackets within 6-2 at 14:36 after a video review determined the puck had crossed the line during a scramble in front.

Strome scored with 1:26 remaining in the third period off a pass from Ovechkin for the 7-2 final.

"What I like today is he led the charge from the start," Capitals coach Spencer Carbery said of Strome. "I thought his first period was outstanding. And he made not just the two plays he was involved in that result in goals, it was four or five different plays without the puck."

NOTES: Ovechkin has eight points (four goals, four assists) in his past three games. ... Strome leads the Capitals in assists (12) and points (16), and has had at least one point in nine of Washington's 10 games. ... Protas has seven points (three goals, four assists) during a three-game point streak. ... Columbus center Sean Kuraly won 11 of 13 face-offs (85 percent). ... The Capitals were 0-for-1 on the power play, making the Blue Jackets 13-for-15 on the penalty kill in their past six games.

[The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Start Could Have Them Playing More Meaningful Games](#)

By Nicholas Arnold- November 2, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets have gotten off to a good start in the 2024-25 season. Their 5-3-1 record through their first nine games may not seem overly impressive on paper, but there's a lot to like from this team early on. It's put them on a path to actually playing some meaningful games late in the season.

The last several seasons have been lean for the franchise, which is looking for its first playoff berth since the 2020 Playoffs that took place in the COVID bubble. While playoffs certainly remain the goal for this team, it's certainly not something that anyone projected for them coming into the new campaign. The Blue Jackets have been riddled with tragedy, injuries, coaching changes, and trade speculation over the last several seasons. For the team, a quiet season and finishing in the middle of the pack would be a massive step forward. They've set themselves up for progress on that path with the start they've had.

Blue Jackets' Goal Metrics in Good Shape

Through eight games, the Blue Jackets have been significantly improving in their goal metrics. The simple counting stats have been in the organization's favor, sitting 11th most in goals for and tied for seventh least in goals against in the league. They've also been getting contributions from throughout their lineup with 13 different goal scorers, 12 of those having scored multiple goals thus far. Depth is what will make a difference for this team moving forwards and that's who they've had stepping up to this point.

Kirill Marchenko Columbus Blue Jackets

Kirill Marchenko is leading the way in Columbus Blue Jackets scoring. (Jess Starr/The Hockey Writers)

Looking through the lineup, the Blue Jackets have been getting key goals and contributions from players like Mathieu Olivier, Zach Aston-Reece, and James van Riemsdyk. Olivier is currently tied for second in team goal-scoring with four. And watching his performance against the Edmonton Oilers on Oct. 28, he could have easily potted one or two more with solid chances. He's one goal off his career high, which he hit in 54 games last season.

The Blue Jackets have also been helped by a return to form from netminder Elvis Merzlikins. Shocking that once the team's defense begins to improve so do his numbers. It's almost like he'd been shelled behind one of the worst defenses in the NHL over the last few years and his numbers were heavily reliant on the players in front of him. Weird how that works. He can thank new head coach Dean Evason for his work on restructuring the team's play.

Blue Jackets' Next Core Is Stepping Up Too

The key thing for the team when you look at their production early on is that their young players who've needed to take a step forward, have. Kirill Marchenko leading the way with over a point per game at this point is huge. Yegor Chinakhov getting off to the hot start that he did was massive. Cole Sillinger looks way more confident and has been a reliable piece to start the season. The same went for Kent Johnson before his injury.

A key factor in this evolution from those players has been the clearing of the roster logjam by general manager (GM) Don Waddell. After taking the job in June, he started by not re-signing many of former GM Jarmo Kekalainen's darlings that hadn't made their way to NHL success yet. Next were a few trades,

extricating the team from Patrik Laine's mammoth salary cap hit, and shipping Frenchman Alexandre Texier off to greener pastures in St. Louis. Those among other transactions have allowed this younger core to get comfortable and begin to take the lion's share of responsibility.

Getting production from those players is critical because if the team progresses as hoped, those names will be the ones guiding the Blue Jackets through their next period of playoff contention. If they can continue to keep a positive goal differential and keep getting contributions from throughout their lineup they should see growth in the 2024-25 season.

[The Hockey Writers / Jets Ride Ehlers' Hat Trick to Dominating Win Over Blue Jackets](#)

By Mark Scheig- November 2, 2024

The Winnipeg Jets came to Columbus and showed both the Blue Jackets and the NHL why they are currently the best team. Nikolaj Ehlers recorded a hat trick to help pace the Jets to a dominating 6-2 win on Friday night. The win puts the Jets at 10-1-0 on the new season. The Blue Jackets fall to 5-4-1.

Game Recap

The Jets had the better of the play in the first in attempts, shots and goals. It was the Ehlers' show. He scored both goals in the first in typical Ehlers' fashion. He blasted the 1-0 goal past Elvis Merzlikins on a shot that appeared to surprise him a little. Then the 2-1 goal was a well placed shot. Both goals beat Merzlikins to the far side.

In-between the Ehlers' goals, Sean Kuraly scored as the fourth line created pressure. James van Riemsdyk got the puck behind the net. His pass found Kuraly who made no mistake beating goalie Eric Comrie.

Nikolaj Ehlers Winnipeg Jets

Nikolaj Ehlers scored his fifth career hat trick Friday night in Columbus. (Amy Irvin / The Hockey Writers)

The Blue Jackets ended the period with some chances as Zach Werenski hit the post. Then Kirill Marchenko and Yegor Chinakhov had a 2-on-1 rush in which Marchenko's pass was blocked. The Jets held a 12-8 advantage in shots on goal in the opening 20.

The Jets were able to maintain their two-goal lead through the second. Mason Appleton made it 3-1 just 2:20 into the second. Then the Blue Jackets' power play was able to convert towards the end of the second to cut it to 3-2. Sean Monahan converted to get his 250th career goal.

Ehlers then completed his hat trick on a great play by Cole Perfetti to win possession. He swept the puck to Ehlers who had a wide-open net. Three lonely hats hit the ice in honor of that hat trick.

The Blue Jackets couldn't get any closer. Josh Morrissey and Gabriel Vilardi added third-period goals to get to the final of 6-2. Merzlikins made 38 saves while Comrie stopped 20 of 22.

Postgame, head coach Dean Evason said the Blue Jackets "didn't have a forecheck all night." They're looking forward to Saturday when they play the Washington Capitals at 5:00 P.M. The Jets head home and will host the Tampa Bay Lightning on Sunday.

[The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Still Have A Lot to Figure Out This Season](#)

By Mark Scheig- November 4, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets are off to a 5-5-1 start in 2024-25. We'd be willing to bet if this record was offered to you at the start of the season given all of the circumstances surrounding the team, you would have taken it immediately.

The team is trying to do the unthinkable in playing without Johnny Gaudreau. They're missing their captain in Boone Jenner who isn't expected to play until March or later. Kent Johnson doesn't need surgery but will be out for a while yet. Many folks felt that it would be a massive struggle this season.

To their credit, the Blue Jackets have surprised some folks. Thanks to some inspired play and some good performances, the team was able to start 5-3-1 while dominating a few teams. We're willing to bet no one had the Blue Jackets going 3-0 against the Avalanche, Maple Leafs and Oilers while scoring six on each of them.

Then there was these past two games. A harsh reality hit the Blue Jackets while being outscored 13-4 by two of the best teams in the NHL in the Winnipeg Jets and Washington Capitals. It shows while there has been plenty of good things in the early going, the team still has a lot to figure out as well. Let's look at the state of the team in early November at the 11-game mark.

Strong Offense

Although this has come back to Earth a little thanks to their last two games, the Blue Jackets' offense is still a strong point in the new season. With 39 goals for in the first 11 games, their 3.55 goals per game ranks 11th in the NHL.

Pacing the way for the Blue Jackets is winger Kirill Marchenko. He has four goals and 12 points in his first 11 games which is about a 90-point pace in the early going. His linemate Sean Monahan is right behind him with 11 points and leads the team in goals with six.

Alongside Yegor Chinakhov when he's up there, this trio has been one of the best lines in the NHL in 2024-25. They have a combined 13-18-31 in 11 games. Not only are they producing, they've had their way for the most part possessing the puck too which has allowed them the chance to post these numbers.

Columbus Blue Jackets Starting Lineup

The Blue Jackets have enjoyed a strong offensive start in 2024-25. (Amy Irvin / The Hockey Writers)

The other part of the offensive puzzle is defenseman Zach Werenski. He's produced 3-6-9 in 11 games which works out to a 67-point pace over the season. His health and availability has made a massive difference.

Not only is Werenski producing offensive numbers, he's become a workhorse in the two-way game. As of Sunday, his 24:50 average ice time ranks 7th in the NHL. He is a play driver which helps spark their offense. If he's quiet, there's a good chance the rest of the Blue Jackets are quiet too.

The key to the Blue Jackets' offense is their forecheck. If that's on, they thrive on the counterattack with speed. A big change from recent seasons has been their ability to go north quicker. Once they get the puck, it's quick passes north instead of a bunch of east and west.

When the forecheck is on, games like Colorado, Toronto and Edmonton happen. When it's not, games like Winnipeg and Washington happen.

Defense Showing Signs, But...

The Blue Jackets are outscoring teams on average. That in itself is a marked improvement. But the goal differential is a +1 for the season after losing by four and five respectively.

Simply put, while there has been noticeable progress, these Blue Jackets still have a lot to figure out on this end of the ice. Averaging 3.45 goals against per game will eventually catch up to them if they don't continue to improve.

The Blue Jackets have shown what they can do at times. They held the Maple Leafs to two, the Oilers to one (without Connor McDavid) and got a shutout of the Islanders.

Like their offense, their defense is predicated on their aggressiveness and their forecheck. In other words, their ability to dictate the terms will determine their success.

The Blue Jackets are built to play from ahead. That's the importance of playing this kind of aggressive system. Playing from ahead allows them to stay within their system. We all saw what happened when they had to play from behind. They played right into their opponent's hands.

The issue here that needs rectified ultimately is consistency. Yes, every team strives to find that consistency. Yet their record suggests some great nights and some awful nights. That usually results in a .500 record.

We mentioned Werenski earlier and how he drives the play. His defensive play has gotten a lot better in this part of his career. Playing with Ivan Provorov as the top pair has been good on most nights.

The second pair of Jake Christiansen and Damon Severson has been a mixed bag. They're either great or awful. The third pair is in a rotation and very much a work in progress.

The Blue Jackets are still learning the details of Dean Evason's system. While the players at large have loved the changes, they're showing they need to tighten up their details. Don't be surprised if you see Monday's practice in Columbus focusing on those details. They're on pace to allow 283 goals this season. That has to come down as this season goes on.

Goaltending

One of the big keys to how this season was going to go for the Blue Jackets lies in net. Would the number-one rise up and establish themselves?

In the first 11 games, it's been Daniil Tarasov with six starts and Elvis Merzlikins with five, an almost even split. Tarasov got the start on the second half of back-to-back in Washington meaning each goalie got five starts in the first 10 games.

How do the numbers look?

Merzlikins: 2-3-0 record. 2.86 goals-against average with a .907 save percentage.

Tarasov: 3-2-1 record. 4.02 goals-against average with an .860 save percentage.

The surface numbers suggest Merzlikins has been the better goalie so far. The advanced numbers suggest the same. According to moneypuck.com, in terms of goals saved above expected:

Merzlikins: Allowed 14 goals in 13.27 expected goals. The -0.7 goals saved above expected ranks 29th in the NHL among goalies with at least five games played.

Tarasov: Allowed 24 goals in 19.65 expected goals. The -4.4 goals saved above expected ranks 45th in the NHL among goalies with at least five games played. That's also the fourth worst in the NHL with only Stuart Skinner, Connor Ingram and Alexandar Georgiev behind him.

For comparison sake, Tarasov finished last year with a goals saved above expected at 0.0 in 24 games. Merzlikins was at -6.3 in 41 games. Small sample size alert. Jet Greaves in nine games had a +3.9 goals saved above expected. All three will be on one-way contracts next season.

Based on the above, Merzlikins has played better while Tarasov has played much worse. Both have plenty of room to be better as the season goes on. But it is the improvement of Merzlikins that has been most notable in the early going.

Upcoming Trends to Watch

Here are a few trends we will be watching in the month of November for the Blue Jackets.

With Merzlikins showing he's been the better goalie, will the starts work out that way? We would expect him to get the nod Tuesday night in San Jose and then see where it all goes.

Can the offense keep up their current pace? Some regression was expected based on shooting percentage. The last two games showed that.

The Blue Jackets are allowing under 30 shots per game on average early. Can they keep that up? That number has gone from 34.4 last season to 29.2 this season, a five-shot per game drop.

Adam Fantilli has six points in his first 11 games. Are we getting closer to the breakout? Remember he has yet to play one cumulative full season. It might not be right away but the right steps are being taken in practice. He's still learning the league.

In all, it's been a pleasant surprise to see the Blue Jackets do well offensively while dominating a few teams along the way. It shows that Evason's presence has been welcomed with open arms. But they still have a lot of questions to answer. Let's see what November has in store for them.

1st Ohio Battery / Merzlikins Gives Up Six, Blue Jackets Fall 6-2 To Jets In Most Lopsided Loss Of The Season

By Ed Francis- November 2, 2024

Both Sean's scored but nothing else went in Columbus' favor Friday night against the Winnipeg Jets in a 6-2 loss to the best team in hockey, with Elvis Merzlikins allowing six goals on 44 Winnipeg Jets' shots.

	1	2	3	F
WPG	2	2	2	6
CBJ	1	1	0	2

CBJ GOALS:

Kuraly (P1, 11:02)

Monahan (P2, 16:30)

CBJ ASSISTS:

Marchenko, van Riemsdyk, Werenski

The Columbus Blue Jackets four-game point streak came to an end Friday night at Nationwide Arena at the hands of the best team in the NHL.

Nik Ehlers had a hat trick as part of a four-point night and Eric Comrie stopped 20 of 22 shots for the Winnipeg Jets, who move to 10-1-0 on the season with a 6-2 win over the Blue Jackets.

Sean Kuraly and Sean Monahan scored for the Blue Jackets, but that was it for the Columbus offense. The Blue Jackets were outshot 44-22 and lost the shot attempts battle by an even wider margin (72-45) as part of the four-goal loss, their biggest of the season.

Elvis Merzlikins, after a pair of sensational starts Monday and Wednesday, gave up six goals on 44 shots. The Jets peppered Merzlikins throughout the night, getting off at least a dozen shots in each period.

Here's how it unfolded Friday night:

1st Period

(5:13 — WPG Goal): The Jets take a 1-0 lead at 5:13 when Nik Ehlers launches a huge slapper past Merzlikins. He was the only Winnipeg skater on that side of the ice against three Blue Jackets and rather than wait on reinforcements or dump it, decided to fire it as hard as he could. It worked.

(11:02 — CBJ Goal): The Blue Jackets kick it up a notch with the attack after the Ehlers goal and it pays off less than six minutes later as Sean Kuraly gets his first tally of the season. As the trend has been for the Blue Jackets' bottom six, it's a goal that comes via hard work, grit, and size all paying off. James van Riemsdyk wins a board battle against three Jets behind the net and finds Kuraly right in front of the net to beat Winnipeg goalie Eric Comrie.

(15:14 — WPG Goal): Ehlers again here to put the Jets back in front, 2-1. It starts with Winnipeg winning the faceoff and an impressive keep-in by defenseman Dylan Samberg. It ends up on the stick of Ehlers who rips it past Merzlikins' glove-side from the right face-off dot for his sixth of the season and second of the game.

2nd Period

(2:20 — WPG Goal): The Jets extend their lead to 3-1 early in the second period. There's plenty of traffic between Jets forward Mason Appleton and Merzlikins, and Appleton takes a good look from defenseman Neal Pionk and rips it perfectly between said traffic.

(16:30 — CBJ Goal): The power play strikes for the Blue Jackets to cut Winnipeg's lead in half for the second time of the evening. It took just seven seconds for Columbus to win the draw, get three passes off in quick succession, and Werenski to get a clean shot off. It was tipped by Monahan, who gets credit for the goal — his team-leading sixth.

(18:51 — WPG Goal): Just two minutes after the Blue Jackets brought the Nationwide Arena crowd back to life, Ehlers takes the life out of the barn again. He gets his hat trick goal with just over a minute left in the second period to reestablish a two-goal Winnipeg lead, making it 4-2 Jets with 1:09 left in the second.

3rd Period

(11:39 — WPG Goal): Josh Morrissey connects for a power play goal, just the second allowed by the Blue Jackets over their last 14 opportunities.

(14:54 — WPG Goal): Gabriel Vilardi scores to make it 6-2 Jets, with Kyle Connor getting the assist. Connor's only point of the night keeps his streak going: he's gotten onto the scoresheet in every game this season.

WPG	GAME STATS	CBJ
44	SHOTS	22
48%	FACEOFFS	52%
1/2	POWER PLAY	1/2
1/2	PENALTY KILL	1/2
17	HITS	20
12	GIVEAWAYS	17
8	TAKEAWAYS	5
11	BLOCKED SHOTS	13
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
4.19	EXPECTED GOALS	1.44
72	SHOT ATTEMPTS	45
36	SCORING CHANCES	21
17	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	5

DATA VIA:

NHL.COM

NATURALSTATTRICK.COM

Up Next:

The Blue Jackets play the second half of their first back-to-back of the 2024-25 season when they travel to the Nation's Capital to face off against Alex Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals. Puck drop is an early one, scheduled for 5:00 p.m.

[1st Ohio Battery / Things: Jets Ground Jackets, Voronkov Makes Season Debut, Long Road Trip Awaits](#)

By Will Chase- November 3, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets were the latest victims of the best team in the NHL.

Nikolaj Ehlers had a four-point night and scored his fifth career hat trick to help the Winnipeg Jets beat the Blue Jackets 6-2 on Friday night at Nationwide Arena.

Kyle Connor extended his point streak (nine goals, nine assists) to 11 games with an assist. Eric Comrie made 20 saves.

Winnipeg is off to a franchise-best 10-1-0 start. Former Blue Jackets head coach Scott Arniel is now the bench boss for the Jets.

Jets Ground Jackets

In case you needed a reminder as to why the Jets are the best team going in the NHL right now, they just served the cold hard truth to Dean Evason's group.

The league-best Jets scored six goals on Elvis Merzlikins, who came into the night stopping 57 of his last 58 shots faced. That included Wednesday's 2-0 shutout over the New York Islanders in which he stopped all 26 shots.

Winnipeg pelted Columbus with 44 shots and were 1-for-2 on the power play. They're an NHL-best 45.2% with the man advantage.

The Jets had nine players on the scoresheet with two having multi-point nights. Ehlers had a four-point night with three goals and an assist and Josh Morrissey scored a goal and had an assist.

"If you have a really good team and you allow them the opportunity to keep coming at us, they're going to get opportunities that they're going to score on," Evason said.

"We have to play a way more intelligent game. Period. Forget about a really, really good opponent, the best team points-wise in the National Hockey League."

Voronkov Makes Season Debut

There was a bit of good news.

Columbus got their big man Dmitri Voronkov back into the lineup on Friday after the forward missed the start of the season with an upper-body injury suffered during preseason. He played 13:24 though his plus/minus took a hit as he finished the night -3.

Voronkov finished last season fifth among rookies with 18 goals and eighth with 34 points. He led all rookies with six power-play goals.

During Friday's game, the Blue Jackets got their goals from the two Seans. Sean Kuraly scored his first of the year to tie the game 1-1 at 11:02 of the first period.

Sean Monahan scored on the power play at 16:30 of the second period to make it 3-2. The goal is the 250th of Monahan's career and his team-leading sixth this year.

Long Road Trip Awaits

Columbus finished the month of October with a winning record of 5-3-1 and a 2-1-0 homestand, including Monday's 6-1 win over the Edmonton Oilers and 2-0 over the Islanders.

Now the test continues as the Jackets play their first back-to-back slate of the year when they face the Washington Capitals on Saturday in D.C.

Columbus will then hit the West Coast to take on the San Jose Sharks, Los Angeles Kings, Anaheim Ducks, and Seattle Kraken.

The next home game for the Jackets comes Friday, Nov. 15 against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Quick Turnaround

It's a Metro division matchup as Columbus takes on Alex Ovechkin and the Capitals from Capital One Arena on Saturday, Nov. 2 at 5:00 p.m. ET. With 858 career goals, Ovechkin trails Wayne Gretzky by 36 for the all-time goal-scoring lead.

[The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: Halloween is over, but we're still scared](#)

By Sean Gentile and Dom Luszczyszyn- November 2, 2024

Happy Hauntings from Rankings HQ. Nov. 1 may mark the official end of Spooky Season, but The Rankings Boys are still in the spirit for this week's edition.

As the league closes the book on the first month of hockey, we've cooked up one spooky thought for each team — whether that means something scary for them or scary for everyone else.

1. Dallas Stars, 7-2-0

Last week: 2

Sean's ranking: 1

Dom's ranking: 2

Spooky Thought: Jason Robertson and Miro Heiskanen aren't even close to top gear.

We're not including this because we're worried about Robertson or Heiskanen, either. Both are legit, fully formed star players with track records more than long enough to excuse slow starts. They'll be fine. But two things are worth noting here. The first: Both players — Robertson at 1.86 points/60 and Heiskanen at 0.8 — are producing at rates that'd be their lowest in five seasons and a full point lower than 2023-24.

The second: It hasn't mattered. Dallas is tied for the Western Conference lead in points percentage and has a whole bunch of forwards (Tyler Seguin, Matt Duchene, Logan Stankoven) that have stepped up in the meantime. If they keep that up once Robertson and Heiskanen hit their stride, look out.

2. Carolina Hurricanes, 7-2-0

Last week: 7

Sean's ranking: 4

Dom's ranking: 1

Spooky Thought: They have vintage Shayne Gostisbehere.

Back in 2017-18, a 24-year-old Shayne Gostisbehere finished 10th in Norris voting and looked like a future stud. In the seven years since, Gostisbehere has struggled to come close to those heights, but he looks damn good to start this season. Sure, he's playing sheltered minutes on the third pair, but a 77 percent xG rate (with seven points in eight games) is nothing to scoff at. He's a big reason the Corsi Canes have stayed true to their brand.

3. Winnipeg Jets, 9-1-0

Last week: 4

Sean's ranking: 2

Dom's ranking: 4

Spooky Thought: They might be more than Connor Hellebuyck.

Good as the Jets were in 2023-24, they were still prone to asking too much of their all-world goaltender. For example, in the 17 games in which they allowed exactly three goals, the Jets lost eight. Doesn't quite seem fair.

This season, though, when either Hellebuyck or Eric Comrie get beat three times, Winnipeg is 4-0. Life is good when you've got the hottest power play in the league (a mind-boggling 18.1 goals per 60). If the Jets keep clicking at even half that rate, they'll look a lot different come April.

4. New York Rangers, 6-2-1

Last week: 1

Sean's ranking: 3

Dom's ranking: 3

Spooky Thought: They might have the best third line in the league.

The worry with the Rangers in recent seasons has always been about their depth. Usually, there wasn't enough after their stars. That looks like it's changed this year with the fantastic Will Cuyllé – Filip Chytil – Kaapo Kakko line, a trio that's helped power New York's fiery start. In 92 minutes together they're a perfect 9-0 putting them in a tie for the league's best goal differential with Tampa Bay's top line. And they've earned it too with a 65 percent expected goals rate. With the top six still looking strong, the Rangers now have a top nine to be seriously feared.

5. Florida Panthers, 7-3-1

Last week: 5

Sean's ranking: 5

Dom's ranking: 5

Spooky Thought: Sam Reinhart will continue to shoot 25 percent from the field.

Everyone on earth expected Reinhart to regress after scoring a career-high 57 goals. Reinhart said, "Sorry, but no." In his first 11 games he's got seven goals... on just 30 shots, good for a 23 percent shooting percentage. He's picked up right where he's left off, with much of that happening without the help of Aleksander Barkov or the power play.

6. Minnesota Wild, 6-1-2

Last week: 3

Sean's ranking: 7

Dom's ranking: 6

Spooky Thought: Kirill Kaprizov might be the best winger in hockey.

October is over, we've seen enough, it's time to get seriously spicy: Kirill Kaprizov is better than Nikita Kucherov.

Do we actually 100 percent believe that? Probably not! Are we just saying stuff to cause a commotion? Maybe!

Either way, Kaprizov has played well enough to spark a debate, so why not have some fun with it?

With Kaprizov, the thing that's often missed is how little help he has offensively compared to the other big stars, especially on such a defensive-minded team. That he's been a perennial 100-point threat

despite that is extremely impressive and that context should put him in higher esteem. He's also one of the league's most complete wingers, not sacrificing any defense for all that offense.

Kaprizov is the (very) early Hart Trophy front-runner and if he keeps this up, maybe the spooky thought becomes a spooky reality.

7. Washington Capitals, 7-2-0

Last week: 9

Sean's ranking: 6

Dom's ranking: 8

Spooky Thought: They might be actually good.

Wild to think, after watching the Capitals overpower Montreal in the third period on Thursday night, that there are folks in these parts who seem set on disrespecting them. Couldn't be us! There aren't many better signs of a team's quality than smoking a crummy opponent, and that's exactly what Washington did on Halloween. Coming into the night, the Caps were sixth in actual goal share and second in expected goal share — both would've been unimaginable with last season's mix of players.

8. Tampa Bay Lightning, 7-3-0

Last week: 6

Sean's ranking: 8

Dom's ranking: 7

Spooky Thought: They won the Sergachev trade.

And that's not because Mikhail Sergachev has been bad in Utah, either. Nine points in 11 games and solid goal share numbers in top-pair minutes is exactly what they'd hoped to get from him. The fact that Tampa still might come out on top is a testament to how much they've already gotten from young winger Conor Geekie and defenseman J.J. Moser. The former is part of the Lightning's freshly productive, play-driving second line; the latter looks like a terrific fit next to Victor Hedman, as Tampa has a 55 percent expected goal share with both on the ice.

9. New Jersey Devils, 7-4-2

Last week: 14

Sean's ranking: 9

Dom's ranking: 9

Spooky Thought: The San Jose version of Timo Meier has finally shown up.

Meier showed signs late in his first full season as a Devil, scoring 15 goals in his last 21 games, and that level of production has carried over to 2024-25. In some ways, he's been even better — 2.65 five-on-five points is 71st in the league among players with at least 50 minutes and right up there with his peak as a Shark in 2021-22. New Jersey has been particularly dominant when he's on the ice with Nico Hischier, and they'll need more of the same. That's why they got him (and paid him) in the first place.

10. Vegas Golden Knights, 7-3-1

Last week: 11

Sean's ranking: 10

Dom's ranking: 10

Spooky Thought: Their hot start might be a house of cards.

Not to rain on Vegas' parade, but so far the Golden Knights are one of the top teams whose process hasn't matched their early results. By xG the team ranks 25th at 47 percent, a huge departure from where they were the last two seasons.

The team has the talent to score above their means and the talent to win the scoring chance battle. But for now, the lack of puck possession looks like a red flag.

11. Los Angeles Kings, 6-3-2

Last week: 15

Sean's ranking: 11

Dom's ranking: 12

Spooky Thought: Brandt Clarke looks as good as advertised offensively.

We're just going to leave this here. Clarke is exactly what this team has long needed from the blue line.

Brandt Clarke ladies and gentlemen pic.twitter.com/92mWealzqH

— Russell Morgan (@NHLRussell) October 31, 2024

12. Toronto Maple Leafs, 6-4-1

Last week: 13

Sean's ranking: 13

Dom's ranking: 11

Spooky Thought: The power play might stink.

The Leafs took care of business against Seattle on Thursday night, but they failed to score on two power-play opportunities. Generating chances hasn't been a glaring issue — they started the night 13th in the league in expected PP goals per 60 — but finishing certainly has been. They're near the bottom in conversion rate and goals per 60, thanks in part to a major cold streak from Auston Matthews; he shot better than 26 percent on the power play last year and is just 1-for-13 thus far in 2024-25.

13. Vancouver Canucks, 4-2-3

Last week: 10

Sean's ranking: 12

Dom's ranking: 14

Spooky Thought: Elias Pettersson forgot how to be Elias Pettersson.

If you thought Pettersson would start the season on some sort of playoff revenge tour, you've been sorely disappointed; 1.38 points per 60 is nice work for the Drew O'Connors and Beck Malenstyns of the world, but not a guy with 191 points over his last two seasons. Overall, he's got four (1G, 3A) in nine games.

There could be any number of reasons for that drop — Harman and Drance noted in their October Canucks reports cards that he doesn't physically look right — and the situation won't be fixed unless he starts shooting the puck more often. His individual shots/60 are down by nearly three (7.71 to 4.83).

14. Edmonton Oilers, 4-5-1

Last week: 12

Sean's ranking: 15

Dom's ranking: 13

Spooky Thought: Darnell Nurse has picked up where he left off in the playoffs.

It's getting harder and harder to defend Darnell Nurse. His numbers last season were fine and he had started to settle in as a capable No. 3 — and then the playoffs happened. He looked downright unplayable on a lot of nights and that's starting to look like the real Nurse. He doesn't have the excuse of playing tough minutes. He doesn't have the excuse of playing with Cody Ceci. And still, he's losing his minutes badly every night. The other two pairs are doing their part earning 60 percent of the expected goals this season. Nurse, no matter who he's been paired with, is closer to 40. Woof.

15. Colorado Avalanche, 5-6-0

Last week: 8

Sean's ranking: 14

Dom's ranking: 15

Spooky Thought: They won't survive these injuries.

At a certain point, even a team with one of the best cores in the league will have a difficult time staying afloat amidst so much injury turmoil. With Valeri Nichushkin, Gabriel Landeskog, Artturi Lehkonen, Jonathan Drouin, Ross Colton and Miles Wood all on the shelf, Colorado's forward ranks have been massively depleted. It's so bad that the Avalanche had Logan O'Connor, Joel Kiviranta and Ivan Ivan in the top six the other night.

It would help if their goalies could make a save and to their credit, the team is possessing the puck well so far. But this much talent out of the lineup would be difficult for any team to handle. The Avalanche aren't cooked just yet, but there's a real chance this hellish October does them in.

16. Ottawa Senators, 5-4-0

Last week: 17

Sean's ranking: 16

Dom's ranking: 16

Spooky Thought: Travis Hamonic is on the top pair.

For whatever reason, the Senators have slotted Hamonic next to Jake Sanderson in a tough usage role and the pair is predictably sinking. Sanderson is good, but he's not "carry one of the league's worst defensemen against top competition" good. Few are! In 96 minutes together the pair has been outscored 5-1 while earning 45 percent of the expected goals. We know who to blame there. Artem Zub can't come back soon enough.

17. Utah HC, 5-4-2

Last week: 18

Sean's ranking: 17

Dom's ranking: 17

Spooky Thought: Connor Ingram can't repeat his Coyotes magic.

There might not be a less scary team in the league (in either direction) than Utah — the players they need to be good (Mikhail Sergachev, Dylan Guenther, Clayton Keller, et al) are handling their business in sustainable ways, but there's also not a ton of meat left on the bone.

Ingram's play is a bit of an issue, though. After two seasons of slightly above-average goaltending in Arizona, his save percentage (.880) is down dramatically, and he's allowed more than four goals above expected.

18. Seattle Kraken, 5-5-1

Last week: 22

Sean's ranking: 18

Dom's ranking: 18

Spooky Thought: They're committing to the bit with Chandler Stephenson.

The Kraken paid big money for Stephenson this summer, which was scary enough. Perhaps even scarier? They seem to truly believe he is the team's most important forward. Stephenson is playing 20 minutes per night, over two more than the next Kraken forward as he's seeing time on the top line, power play unit and penalty kill unit. Seattle is treating him like he is the team's unquestioned best forward, and we're just not buying that. Not with half his points being secondary assists and not while he's getting absolutely roasted at five-on-five with 33 percent of the expected goals.

19. St. Louis Blues, 5-6-0

Last week: 20

Sean's ranking: 19

Dom's ranking: 21

Spooky Thought: Jordan Binnington has turned into a pumpkin.

Let's take a look at Binnington's save percentages over the last three seasons.

2021-22: .901

2022-23: .894

2023-24: .913

2024-25: .900

Yeah, one of those things is not like the other. Binnington has been fine, but last season's excellence is looking more and more like the exception to the rule.

20. Buffalo Sabres, 4-5-1

Last week: 25

Sean's ranking: 20

Dom's ranking: 20

Spooky Thought: They might never make the playoffs again.

Low-hanging fruit? Sure. But after an eternity outside the playoffs, the Sabres still don't feel all that close to reaching that modest goal with a deserved 4-5-1 start. Is there anything scarier than cheering for a franchise that can't seem to build an above-average team once in 14 tries?

21. Nashville Predators, 3-5-1

Last week: 24

Sean's ranking: 23

Dom's ranking: 19

Spooky Thought: You can't build a contender through free agency.

In hindsight, perhaps Barry Trotz should've considered passing on one of those aging snipers and making sure that he started the season with a depth chart without Tommy Novak and Colton Sissons as the second- and third-line centers. Novak has four points, Sissons has none and no team has fewer five-on-five goals than the Preds' eleven.

22. Calgary Flames, 5-4-1

Last week: 16

Sean's ranking: 21

Dom's ranking: 23

Spooky Thought: The four-game win streak to start the season keeps them out of the best lottery odds.

If you're a Flames fan who thinks bottoming out is necessary, though, take heart — they're 1-4-1 in their last six games and have been outscored 24-11. It's not too late. A couple more weeks of that will have the tank back on the tracks.

23. Columbus Blue Jackets, 5-3-1

Last week: 27

Sean's ranking: 24

Dom's ranking: 22

Spooky Thought: The reality of offensive regression.

Columbus deserves tons of credit for winning five of its first nine games, but a 63-percent actual goal share vs. a 47-percent expected goal share is not going to hold up over the long term. Either something can change, or the Blue Jackets can enjoy their hot streak while it lasts.

24. Boston Bruins, 4-6-1

Last week: 21

Sean's ranking: 22

Dom's ranking: 25

Spooky Thought: They might be actually bad.

We're not dumb enough to shovel dirt on the Bruins just yet, 8-2 humiliation against Carolina aside, but if you're a fan, it's probably time to start worrying. Jim Montgomery threw his lines in a blender ahead of the Hurricanes game — rarely a good sign, and Thursday night was no different. Focus on the production

issues if you want, but there's not much to like about the overall process; a Bruins team being 23rd in goals against is hard to believe.

25. New York Islanders, 3-5-2

Last week: 19

Sean's ranking: 25

Dom's ranking: 24

Spooky Thought: They might never score again.

We figured the Islanders might have some trouble scoring, but yeesh. They've only played 10 games and have somehow already been shutout four times. They're bottom five in scoring at both five-on-five and on the power play and the team just doesn't seem to have any offensive swagger at the moment.

The good news? They are creating chances at a league-average rate and you have to figure that both Mathew Barzal and Bo Horvat can score above a 41-point clip. Still, it's a scary start that has confirmed a lot of worries from before the season started.

26. Detroit Red Wings, 4-5-1

Last week: 23

Sean's ranking: 26

Dom's ranking: 26

Spooky Thought: They spent a decade building a lemon.

Credit to the power play for keeping this team (kind of) afloat, but at five-on-five, hoo brother. The Red Wings are 25th in goals percentage and 31st in expected goals percentage; no player has more than five points; first-line center Dylan Larkin is stuck on two. Prospects like Marco Kasper and Jonatan Berggren aren't popping. Weren't they supposed to be good by now?

27. Anaheim Ducks, 4-4-2

Last week: 26

Sean's ranking: 27

Dom's ranking: 29

Spooky Thought: Their core won't be good enough.

We're still waiting for that jump from the team's ducklings, but what if that day just isn't coming? What if the core they've built just isn't that good? Leo Carlsson is fine and the team's brightest hope, but what's been built around him continues to lack sizzle. Mason McTavish doesn't have a goal and is getting cooked defensively. Trevor Zegras feels like a lost cause. None of the young defensemen have stepped up in a significant way. The clock's not ticking and there's still time, but this start hasn't shown much signal that this team presently has franchise cornerstones to build around. Lukas Dostal looks great at least.

28. Philadelphia Flyers, 4-6-1

Last week: 31

Sean's ranking: 28

Dom's ranking: 28

Spooky Thought: Jamie Drysdale isn't going to live up to his potential.

While getting Drysdale back for Cutter Gauthier may have seemed like an exciting return at the time, the hard truth was that he was an oft-injured defender who had been struggling mightily at the NHL level. The hope is that, at some point, he figures things out under John Torterella's tutelage, but the early returns this season haven't been great. Despite playing the cushiest minutes on the team, Drysdale currently sports a minus-3.3 Net Rating, ahead of only Egor Zamula among Flyers defensemen. Earning just 42 percent of the expected goals while being outscored 10-3 will have that effect (after being outscored 21-4 in his first taste of Flyers hockey last season).

Drysdale is still young and comes with a lot of pedigree, but the Flyers have a lot of work cut out for them.

29. Pittsburgh Penguins, 4-7-1

Last week: 28

Sean's ranking: 29

Dom's ranking: 27

Spooky Thought: Sidney Crosby might be old.

In the last four seasons, opponents' expected goals per 60 while Crosby is on the ice have gone from 2.69 to 2.9 to 3.13 to 4.79. The latter is fifth-worst in the NHL among players with at least 50 minutes of ice time. Some of that is due to his teammates' defensive deficiencies/disinterest — but not all of it. On some nights (like Thursday), he has enough offensive pop to counterpunch, but expecting that for a full season is unreasonable.

30. Montreal Canadiens, 4-6-1

Last week: 30

Sean's ranking: 30

Dom's ranking: 31

Spooky Thought: Defense is not optional in this league.

If it were, the Canadiens would be on track for a playoff push. Alas, there are two sides of the ice. The good news for Montreal is that it can't get worse; no team on the books at Evolving Hockey, dating back to the 2007-08 season, has allowed more five-on-five goals per 60, either actual (4.09) or expected (3.72).

31. Chicago Blackhawks, 3-6-1

Last week: 29

Sean's ranking: 31

Dom's ranking: 30

Spooky Thought: Seth Jones heard us talking smack.

For a long time, there have been questions regarding Jones' place in the defenseman hierarchy and recently it seemed like he had found his level. Jones is a really good No. 2, but a questionable No. 1. Good player, but perhaps not an elite one.

All that talk looks like rubbish now as he is (finally!) looking like the legit No. 1 Chicago paid a lot of money and assets for. He's scoring, he's tilting the ice, he's commanding play — he's been an all-situations force for the Blackhawks, capably winning his difficult minutes (and that means actually winning his minutes, not just looking good relative to a terrible team).

32. San Jose Sharks, 2-7-2

Last week: 32

Sean's ranking: 32

Dom's ranking: 32

Spooky Thought: Yaroslav Askarov looks scary good.

In five AHL games thus far, the Sharks' future starting goaltender has put up a .959 save percentage and 1.20 goals-against with two shutouts. He threw in an assist, too. San Jose can let Askarov cook with the Barracuda for as long as they want, given the presence of Mackenzie Blackwood and Vitek Vanecek, but at some point, he's going to force their hand. Dominating the AHL is nothing new.

[The Athletic / How 'phenomenal' Porter Martone has made a case for the top of the 2025 NHL Draft](#)

By Scott Wheeler- November 2, 2024

His junior head coach and general manager, his skills coach and his minor hockey coach all use the same three names.

Corey Perry. Brady Tkachuk. Matthew Tkachuk.

That's what you're getting, they'll tell you — and are telling NHL teams — in Porter Martone.

James Richmond, his head coach and general manager with the Brampton Steelheads, sees Perry in particular — and not, he says, just because both have worn No. 94.

"That's Corey Perry" was the first thought he had when he watched Martone all the way back in minor hockey.

"When I've watched Corey Perry I say, 'Man that guy is just a dog and he's super skilled,'" Richmond said. "(Martone's) around the puck all the time and he's unbelievable with the puck on his stick, and he gets under the skin of people on the other team, and he can score and he can pass and he's ultra-ultra-competitive."

Shortly after arriving at Barrie's Sadlon Arena ahead of a recent game against the Colts, Martone, dressed in a checkered suit, said those names suited him just fine.

"That's who I am," he said of modelling his game after Perry and the Tkachuk brothers. "I feel like I'm a big, powerful forward who sees the ice very well, can make plays and can score. But I like to be a hard player to play against. I like to get underneath the other team's skin and just make an influence on the game every night and be a big player in big moments."

A little more than two hours later, Martone did just that in a tie game, scoring once and setting up another on the same shift. A couple of shifts later, he scored again to make it 3-0 for his second goal and third point of the period. Early in the third period, he got into it with Gabriel Eliasson, the toughest player in the OHL, the two exchanging gloves to the face for offsetting roughing minors.

A day later, an NHL scout texted this: "How good was Martone last night!!"

Nights like that have turned Martone, a 6-foot-2.75, 208-pound winger, into a front-runner to go in the top two or three picks in the 2025 NHL Draft.

If he keeps having them — and everyone who knows him believes he will — they might just make him a front-runner for the No. 1 pick, too.

The way Daniel Sisca's story goes, it started with a call from his old agent, Quartexx's Paul Capizzano.

"Hey, listen, I've got one of the top players in the province, he's from Peterborough, his name's Porter Martone, he's a big right-shot," Capizzano told Sisca, then the head coach of the Toronto Jr. Canadiens' U16 AAA team.

He wasn't looking for a player and because nobody had played the season prior in 2020-2021, he hadn't heard of Martone either. His team was already loaded with its fair share of the top players in the province, too, with the dynamic duo of Michael Hage and Jacob Battaglia up front, a blue line that featured Henry Mews and Anthony Cristoforo, and another top prospect, Jack Van Volsen, set to join them. Martone was young, too, an October 2006 who was an NHL draft class behind those guys.

But he trusted Capizzano; he'd played against Martone's dad, Mike, a former captain with the Petes and fourth-round pick of the Sabres, during their playing days; and he knew how big, strong and tough Mike was. And so he took Capizzano's word and had Martone out to a skills session to give him a look.

Immediately, he could see Martone's passion for the game and how much he loved being on the ice. By the end of the skate, he'd seen the skill, too.

And so he added him to the team as well.

Martone hasn't looked back since. That season, on what was supposed to be the second line with Van Volsen and Antonio Tersigni, they challenged Hage and Battaglia, in essence becoming a second first line. Martone even set up a group chat with the three of them to draw up different faceoff plays they wanted to run.

"(Hage and Battaglia) were like, 'Well alright, Porter's a hell of a hockey player and now we have to elevate our game,'" Sisca described. "It was 'You guys went out and scored and now we're going to go out and score and if you score again then we're going to score again.' And they were split on the power play too, where I basically said 'Alright, you guys have a minute and you guys have a minute, it's a healthy competition, let's see who can do it.' And they really fed off of each other. There was no jealousy."

After Martone and Van Volsen's line carried the Jr. Canadiens in the early part of that minor midget year, the former became a source of conversation at rinks.

"As the year went on, everyone was like 'Where'd he play?' And then as the games started passing by everyone was like 'Woah, this guy's a legit stud,'" Sisca said. "He could bring everything. He could penalty kill, he could play the power play bumper, he could play the half-wall (which he's doing now in the OHL), he could be a net-front guy and score garbage goals, he could score highlight-reel goals. Porter just brings the full package. He can adapt and be a third-line power forward or a first-liner who can score 100 points. He'll fight, he'll block shots, he's not just a one-dimensional player who only thinks about skill — he'll do whatever it takes to help the team win and help himself develop."

That year, he did score 100 points, too. To be exact, 104 in 53 games.

When Sisca looks back on that team, which won the GTHL championship and lost in the OHL Cup final (after Martone scored seven goals and 15 points in seven games), his most memorable moment is a five-on-three goal Martone scored against the Mississauga Senators at the Silver Stick where he gave the Jr. Canadiens the late lead and celebrated the full 200 feet of the ice until he found the parent group behind the net.

At year's end, that Jr. Canadiens team had five players selected in the first round of the 2022 OHL draft. Martone was the first off the board, the Sarnia Sting taking him with the fifth pick (though Hage, who went ninth to the Kitchener Rangers, may have gone higher had he not been considering the college route).

That summer, he moved to Toronto five days a week, returning home to Peterborough on the weekends, so he could skate with skills coach Leland De Langley and work out with strength coach Andy O'Brien and his team at Junxion Performance.

Though the Sting traded him at the deadline of his rookie year as part of a blockbuster move to acquire then-Mississauga Steelheads captain and Blackhawks draft pick Ethan Del Mastro as they chased a championship (Sting general manager Dylan Seca calls the Martones "incredible people" and said the trade was "100 percent Sarnia-driven"), he has gone on to become the now-Brampton Steelheads captain himself.

That rookie year, he registered seven goals and 12 points as an alternate captain with Canada Red at U17 worlds, 22 points in 32 games with the Steelheads after the trade, was the youngest forward on Team Canada at U18 worlds (where he registered six points in seven games) and then represented Canada for a third time in a season at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup, winning his first gold medal with five points in five games and again wearing a letter.

Last season, he then led the Steelheads in goals with 33 and finished second on the team in scoring with 71 points in 60 games before appearing in his second U18 worlds, this time captaining Team Canada to his second gold medal with 17 points in seven games (good for the tournament All-Star team). Before his draft year even began, he was invited to the World Junior Summer Showcase, where he was also again Canada's youngest forward.

This season, his third in the OHL, he got off to one of the hottest starts in the CHL, registering 12 goals and 25 points in his first 11 games.

It followed his first summer spent skating with De Langley's pro group, a decision De Langley made after all of the players from that group said, "No, this kid could really benefit from being out here."

Asked about how Martone fit into those skates, De Langley said there were times in small area games or drills where he'd catch himself saying "Wow" or "What the hell did I just see there?"

It didn't matter whether he was out against a big defenseman like Jamie Oleksiak or forwards like Sam Bennett, Andrew Mangiapane and Barrett Hayton, either. Martone wanted to prove to them what he was capable of.

"He's definitely not timid," De Langley said, chuckling. "(Martone) worries about himself. There's just no complacency, which I absolutely love and which I know the guys respect because it's not often that the junior guys get to skate with the pro guys all summer. It's every day and it's cliché to say but he really does embody that with his maturity and always wanting to put in that extra little bit of work. I've just been really happy with that because the talent's there but it can go wasted sometimes and he doesn't waste it."

Each summer when he returns for their skates, De Langley has noticed a bigger and stronger Martone, filling out his nearly 6-foot-3 frame to the point he looks more like a professional than a teenager.

His commitment off the ice has shown in his constant improvement on it, too.

"When I first saw him the first summer, you knew that there were so many unique skills and talents that he possesses with his unbelievable shot. He uses his frame really well. And for me he has just developed an overall maturity and understanding of how good he is and the potential and ceiling that's there for him," De Langley said. "You don't expect it from a guy with that big frame to have the nice soft touch that he does and control things in tight to make things happen. The sky really is the limit."

De Langley said he wouldn't even be surprised if Martone wears an 'A' in the NHL within 3-5 years because of the combination of his work ethic, personality and game.

"Even just his style of play, yes he's extremely offensive and has quite the gift in that sense, but he just plays with the jam and bite that you love. (He's) always around it and always engaged. And those types of players, they bring people up. That's what I see — a kid that works, that comes prepared, engaged, always has a good attitude, those things that define leaders. That's just what he embodies. He's just a phenomenal, phenomenal kid."

Porter Martone's commitment off the ice has shown in his constant improvement on it. (Steven Ellis / Daily Faceoff)

What sets Martone apart, Richmond says, is that there isn't one single thing he has had to work on — or that has taken off — in his development.

"Truthfully," he said when asked about where the development in Martone's game has come in the last three seasons, "he has just gotten older. His legs are starting to get thicker, his butt is getting bigger, the back is getting bigger, so now things are starting to happen. We didn't have a chance to draft him because he was going to be well gone before we picked but really since he has come over he has just gone up, and up, and up."

He's also a hockey geek in an age where others aren't.

"A lot of guys don't know players," Richmond said. "He knows all the guys. He knows guys on the fourth lines, he knows coaches, he knows how the teams are doing, he follows them. He doesn't just watch highlights. And that's been a bit of an issue with guys wanting to put on a show because they see what gets put on YouTube, but that's not really going to win you hockey games at the end of the day. He's a student of the game."

Martone says that comes from his parents, who are both now teachers (Mike's a high school teacher and his mom, Angela, is an elementary school teacher). But it also comes from growing up in what he calls a "hockey lifestyle." He played competitive lacrosse until COVID when he was 15 and he had to choose a sport, but it was always going to be hockey. His parents met when Mike played in Peterborough and raised a hockey family after Mike attended teacher's college following his playing career. His sister plays U18 AA and hopes to play junior hockey next year with a goal of getting a Division I NCAA scholarship.

Though his parents were always hard on him and his sister about getting good grades, Thursday nights at the Peterborough Memorial Centre watching the Petes growing up and stories from his dad about the best years of his life in junior hockey had him dreaming about playing in the OHL as a kid.

Now, like his dad before him, he's a captain in the league. He's also chasing an OHL title with a contending Steelheads team, a roster spot with Canada at the world juniors, a Memorial Cup and a place at the top of the draft.

Richmond said the players decided the captaincy piece of the equation, not him.

"There's older guys on our team but when you come to the rink and come to the room, it's easy to see that it's Porter's team. He might not be (the) loudest guy or the oldest guy but it's his team, so he's the captain. Guys gravitate towards him off the ice. He's great to deal with for coaches, he's open to learning and he wants to add to his game so he's the choice," Richmond said plainly.

Asked to put this year and all that comes with it into context, Martone just shook his head.

"This is pretty cool, right?" he said. "Just being acknowledged as the captain is big. I'm excited to lead this group. We're all expecting to go on a deep run this year. It's your NHL draft year. This is the year you dream of since you're a kid. You want to come out every night and impress the people in the stands that are watching. But I also think that what will impress them is team success, and if we continue to keep on winning then that will lead to individual success and more eyes on everyone in this room."

So far, that's exactly what he's done.

[The Athletic / The evolution of NHL officiating, from its 'biggest innovations' to its future](#)

By Eric Duhatschek- November 2, 2024

Is NHL officiating bad? Trick question, I know. Because viscerally, most people who follow the NHL as a supporter of a single team would almost universally answer, yes, it is.

When people are asked to consider officiating in the abstract, they usually begin by saying they just want it to be consistent. They want a penalty in the first minute to be a penalty in the last minute. And when it comes to the most controversial moments, which nowadays usually involve what is or isn't goalie interference, they wonder: How come no one ever knows what the final decision is going to be?

And the easy answer is, goaltender inference — like so much of what is involved in NHL refereeing — requires a judgment call. Every play is different which means there'll never be a one-size-fits-all answer to satisfy everyone.

Incidentally, all of this ruminating about the state of officiating is because recently, while pawing through an old copy of the NHL's Official Guide and Record Book, I came across a page outlining the most significant rule changes in league history. I realized we are at a significant anniversary — and no one is talking about it.

That anniversary: the 25th year since the adoption of the two-referee system. And even that requires a caveat. Because the NHL's decision to go from one referee to two was actually phased in over a three-year period, between 1998 and 2000.

Prior to that, NHL games were officiated by a single referee and two linesmen. The decision to adopt the new protocols over a 36-month span was made primarily to train enough new staff, given that the league was effectively doubling its refereeing workforce.

In the first season of the new system, 1998-99, each team played only 20 games with two referees. The remaining 62 were played, as in the past, with just a single referee. The major shift came the next season when each team played 50 games with two referees, 25 at home and 25 on the road. By 2000-01, the system was fully integrated — and its implementation created a seismic shift in how the game was played.

"Going to two referees was one of the biggest innovations of all time in hockey," said David McNab, a longtime NHL executive. Former NHL coach Dave King called the shift to two referees "the most significant on-ice change of the Gary Bettman era."

Former NHL defenseman Cory Sarich, now an analyst on the Calgary Flames' television broadcasts, says the way a player approached the game had to change once a second referee appeared on the scene — primarily because now there was a second set of eyes trained on players, which forced them to be more watchful about exchanges that happened behind the play.

"There was no more getting away with the chippy little plays when you were exiting your own end," explained Sarich. "That was the time when you could get in a cheap shot on somebody, or a little bit of retribution — when the refs' eyes weren't around. You could just delay a little bit and as soon as the referee turned his head, you could chop the guy in the back of the legs, or jab him, or pop him in the lips with your glove or give him a big face wash — things like that."

“All the little crap that went on when the referee had his back turned, that’s probably the biggest thing that went away. I’m sure the linesmen saw a lot of what was happening, but they didn’t have the power to call that. It all fell on one referee.”

According to King, switching to a two-referee system eliminated a lot of the holding, hooking and interference that went on behind the play, which in turn helped the league get most of the obstruction out of the game.

“It had gotten to the point where the skill players couldn’t show what they could do,” said King. “It became clear to the people in New York that they couldn’t take fighting out of the game, so they said, ‘We’ve got to take this other baloney away.’”

“Back in 2007, I made a presentation at a coaching clinic in Sweden where I took old video of the NHL, before the two-referee system. I had gotten together all kinds of clips of plays that weren’t called, things you could not believe players were getting away with. It was about four minutes long — and the audience’s response to seeing this video was to laugh.

“And I thought, that’s the best reaction I could have gotten. Some of these were young coaches, who couldn’t believe what they were seeing. Guys were literally getting tackled. They may as well have gotten out a rope and tied them up, like in the rodeo. But that was the thinking back then: if they weren’t going to call it, you kept doing it.”

King, who coached the Calgary Flames and the Columbus Blue Jackets in the 1990s, noted that in the first year of the two-referee system, his pre-game messaging to players would shift.

“That first year of the two-referee system, we got just 20 games with the two referees,” said King, “so if it was a game with two referees, you’d remind your guys, ‘tonight, we’ve got two officials so this is what we can and can’t do.’ And not every player could make the adjustment. Some weren’t great skaters and had to rely on their sticks to hold people up. They knew this might be the beginning of the end for their careers.”

Technology and officiating

Technology has changed how different sports make calls. Wimbledon this year is going to electronic line calls. Baseball is trending toward using the available technology to call balls and strikes. Every scoring play in the NFL is automatically reviewed. Ultimately, hockey may be able to determine whether a puck fully crosses the goal line via a microchip in the puck. Offside challenges are simply a fact of NHL life today.

The NHL was at the forefront of video innovation when it introduced the situation room in Toronto, which — on a nightly basis — has a staff in place, to review calls and otherwise assist referees when there are coaching challenges or questions relating to whether a puck has definitively crossed the goal line for a good goal.

But the vexing problem — of getting everybody to agree on the correct outcome, if it’s a maybe-yes, maybe-no grey area — remains, according to McNab.

“NHL hockey is probably closest to NFL football because there are so many judgment calls,” said McNab. “That’s where it’s impossible to make everybody happy — and why it’s impossible to go strictly to computers or cameras to make the calls. That would be hit-and-miss as well.”

The million-dollar question

Circling back to our original question, is NHL refereeing any good?

“That’s a tough question to answer because as coaches, we’re never really satisfied with the refereeing, but yes, I think it is,” answered King. “Back before, when we had one official, I always thought there were lots of calls, blatant calls that were missed. Now I think it’s almost reversed. They probably call too much. Things that are pretty subtle and don’t make any difference in the game are called and you think, why? It has no impact on the game.

“Whenever you go to a coaching conference now, or do a podcast, everybody talks about playing fast. The one thing that’s overlooked is, the two-referee system is really the reason you are allowed to play fast. A speedster can use his speed. Whereas in the old days I used to have guys that could really fly, but they had the stick on them all the time, going through the middle zone. At one time, I thought our game looked too much like wrestling.

“There are nights now when the game looks over-refereed, but in the grand scheme of things, it’s a major improvement. It’s been good for the game.”

Sarich agrees that while referees may have good nights and bad nights, the same way players do, the overall standard is pretty good.

“I think it is,” said Sarich. “I always say, there are two jobs I’d never want — being a ref or being a head coach, because someone always hates you. When everything goes smoothly, and both sides are happy, and there are no blown calls, no one ever says, ‘That was an amazing job by the refs.’ There’s no credit for those guys. It’s a thankless job.”

Sarich began his NHL career in 1998-99, the first year the league started the transition to the two-referee system. But he played his entire junior career with a single referee and was there, at the start, to see how the NHL integrated the new system. And while he thinks it is impossible to go back, Sarich does think something was lost when the league switched away from a single referee calling penalties.

“Back then, because there were less of them, and you saw them more often, in some instances, you could form a relationship with the referees and linesmen,” said Sarich. “Sometimes, that could be advantageous. Sometimes, not.

“I remember, with (former referee) Kerry Fraser, I got on his bad side, right to begin with, and I paid the price almost every time I played a game that he called. I almost had myself chalked up for a trip to the box every time I saw him — because I probably insulted him, or did something early. It was a more personal time. Now, you have way more refs and because of the rotation, you don’t see the same guys as often. So a little bit of that has been taken out of the game. It used to play to some guys’ advantages — and sometimes, to a disadvantage. If a ref got a sour taste about you, and you saw them all the time, it didn’t help.”

King believes it was easier for a single referee to manage the game compared to today, when the two referees have to read off each other and might not always agree on what they see.

Back when it was just one referee, he alone could dictate how to call a game. Some might call it tight. But frequently, others would just let them play.

“I remember once, a referee came over after a close playoff game that we lost and apologized; and explained, ‘I didn’t want to be a factor.’ We were playing against a team that we outshot something like 63 to 21 — and we lost.

“And my answer to him was, ‘Yes, you did affect the outcome. Because you didn’t call a lot of penalties, they were able to tackle our players in the corner.’ I said, ‘You can’t escape the game. You either call it or you don’t — but either way, you have an impact on the outcome.’”

No matter how officiating evolves in the future, McNab can't imagine the league ever going back to having just a single referee on the ice, even if he gets extra technological help from the press box or the situation room in Toronto.

"Can you imagine having a triple-overtime playoff game with just a single referee, and having him try to keep up with the play, skating back and forth and not missing things that would have an impact on the outcome of the game? He'd be exhausted," said McNab.

"The two-referee system has made refereeing — not easy, because refereeing is not easy — but easier because the guy behind the play only has to cover half the ice and has a view of everything that's going on in front of him. Trying to call a game now with one ref? With the speed of today's game? It'd be impossible."

The Oil watch

The Edmonton Oilers will receive the first major test of the Kris Knoblauch era now that center Connor McDavid has been officially ruled out for two-to-three weeks with an ankle injury suffered in last Monday's loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets. That timeline constitutes good news, given that the Oilers don't have an especially difficult schedule between now and the middle of November which, if the prognosis is accurate, suggests McDavid could be back by mid-month. That would coincide with the start of a three-game eastern Canada road swing on Nov. 16 in Toronto. And if McDavid is back then, it'll mean just a seven-game absence. The Oilers played their first game without their captain Thursday vs. Nashville and went into the game with a mediocre 4-5-1 record.

Still, that was better than this time last year, when they limped out to a 3-9-1 start, prompting the Oilers to fire Jay Woodcroft and replace him with Knoblauch. The turnaround was almost instantaneous. People may forget: McDavid was in the midst of an eight-game goal-scoring drought during last year's slow start but scored in Knoblauch's first game. The Oilers won their first two with Knoblauch behind the bench, then lost three, won eight, lost three more and then won 16 in a row between Dec. 21 and Jan. 27. In fact, the winning streak ended in the first game out of the All-Star break, against Vegas in early February, but by then, they'd recovered to a 29-15-1 record and eventually made it all the way to seventh game of the Stanley Cup Final.

All of which is to say that based on recent history, the Oilers with a healthy McDavid are capable of turning it around after a slow start. In some ways, while the Oilers muddle along without him, they may be able to test some new line combinations and see if newcomers such as Viktor Arvidsson and Jeff Skinner can assert themselves more with enhanced roles.

Speaking of bad injury luck ...

Ross Colton had been thriving as a member of the Colorado Avalanche's top line, making the most of a chance to play with Nathan MacKinnon by scoring a team-leading eight goals in the team's first 10 games. Colton broke his foot this past Monday stopping a shot in a game against the Chicago Blackhawks; he'll be out six to eight weeks. So a mid-December return at the earliest, and in the meantime, the Avalanche's depth at forward — already tested by the absences of Jonathan Drouin, Artturi Lehkonen, Valeri Nichushkin and Gabriel Landeskog — is put under even more pressure.

In the short term, it meant that Wednesday, in a loss to Tampa Bay, Joel Kiviranta was promoted to the top line alongside MacKinnon and Ivan Ivan replaced Colton on the first power-play unit (and promptly responded with a goal). Defenseman Oliver Kylington, who was signed as a free agent this summer from Calgary, played sparingly at forward and T.J. Tynan, a star at the minor-league level, also drew into the lineup and got 8:36 of playing time. Tynan will be interesting to watch, because he's always scored at a lower level, mostly in the L.A. Kings' organization, but has never really gotten an NHL chance. Is this the

opportunity he's been waiting for? Desperate times, as coaches keep reminding us, do create unexpected opportunities.

[The Athletic / How is Sweden shaping up for 4 Nations? Catching up with coach Sam Hallam](#)

By Pierre LeBrun- November 2, 2024

There's a double-edged sword facing Sweden as it decides over the next month which four defensemen to add to its roster for the 4 Nations Face-Off.

The Swedes have big-time depth on their blue line. That means difficult decisions — and leaving some brand names off their roster.

Victor Hedman, Gustav Forsling and Erik Karlsson were already named to the roster in June (along with forwards William Nylander, Mika Zibanejad and Filip Forsberg), meaning there are four defense spots left on the 23-man roster to be submitted Dec. 2.

So, go ahead and pick four D from the likes of:

Rasmus Dahlin, Rasmus Andersson, Mattias Ekholm, Jonas Brodin, Hampus Lindholm, Philip Broberg ...

"And OEL (Oliver Ekman-Larsson) is having a great start to the year, Adam Larsson in Seattle is really solid ... so, yeah, I mean, we have all this," Sweden national team head coach Sam Hallam said in completing my train of thought this week.

It won't be easy. Personally, I would take Dahlin, Andersson, Ekholm and Lindholm from that list of eight, but it's hard leaving off Brodin and Ekman-Larsson, to be sure.

What I think will help the Calgary Flames' Andersson is that he's a rare righty for Sweden. Aside from Karlsson and Larsson, the rest of those defensemen are left-handed.

"We have a couple of lefties who move so well they can do a good job on the right side, too," Hallam told The Athletic in a phone interview from Sweden. "But that's of course something we're looking at (the right-left situation). We're happy for how many good Swedish D there are at the moment.

"We need to do our due diligence in a smart way and really figure out which way we want to play the game and which kind of D would suit us best — and maximize our opportunities to win it."

Bigger picture, Hallam sees a positive in the crazy decision he has to make on D. That's the beauty of best-on-best hockey.

"That's why we want these tournaments," Sweden's head coach said. "That's why we love them. Because it's so many good players on the ice playing each other. It's going to be hopefully spectacular and a great show for hockey. So that we get even more kids who get interested and want to go down to a rink."

Sweden is different from its 4 Nations competitors in how its team is picked. The head coach makes the final roster decisions, unlike Canada, the United States and Finland, where a general manager does.

For Sweden, it's always been the head coach.

So Hallam, 45, named national team coach in 2022, gets to decide his NHL star roster.

"It's a tradition in Sweden," Hallam said. "You're both the head coach and the GM. It's a role that we pretty much have in all team sports here. It goes back for a long, long time. But I have to say, I have both Josef Boumedienne and Patric Hornqvist as assistant GMs. Just the other night, we had a long meeting

going through lineups. So I have a lot of help from those guys — both seeing games live, traveling and reporting back.

“It’s a team thing. But yes, my word is the last word.”

A lot of NHL head coaches wish they had his power.

“Well, it’s always good to be able to blame the GM as a coach,” Hallam responded with a laugh.

Having both Hornqvist, who works with the Cup champion Florida Panthers as a scouting and development consultant, and Boumedienne, a former assistant coach with the Columbus Blue Jackets, based in North America gives Hallam more eyes at live NHL games.

Hallam also has been able to pick the brain of a certain Hockey Hall of Famer who works on the Ottawa Senators bench.

“I mean, first of all, Daniel Alfredsson has played in five Olympics,” Hallam said. “He’s got huge experience playing in international tournaments, naturally, for us. We get the chance to put some questions on the table for him. And also he’s an assistant coach with the Senators. He sees plays from the front row every night.”

There’s a possibility that Sweden makes Alfredsson’s role more official closer to the 4 Nations.

“I hope we will find something for the 4 Nations, but at the moment we get to pick his mind — we get his experience and his thoughts coming into the tournament,” Hallam said. “We’ll see if we can find a way to get him into a more formal role closer to the 4 Nations.”

Hallam recently came over to scout the NHL in person as well, catching games over a 10-day period in Toronto (twice), Detroit and Ottawa.

“It was a good chance to meet with some of the Swedish players to talk about and prepare for the 4 Nations, and also seeing some games live,” Hallam said. “So it was good. We watch a lot of video, of course, but there’s a difference being in the building and seeing all the movement live.”

He plans to come back in January to watch more games and roam further across the continent.

“It’ll be a different situation then,” he said. “We will have picked the team already then, but it will also give us a chance to talk to all the players for the 4 Nations.”

There are two important periods: the next month heading into Dec. 2 to pick the roster, and then all those NHL games leading into the February event, too.

“There’s a lot of games that are going to be played from early December to February, so I mean, the lineup (where everybody fits) will probably change a little bit,” Hallam said. “And when we see the other teams (announced), we’ll try to figure out how the other teams are going to play. Then it’s more preparing the system and the lines and usage of the personnel.”

Hallam, a former defenseman who won Swedish Hockey League titles with Vaxjo Lakers in 2015, 2018 and 2021, isn’t a known commodity in NHL circles. It will be interesting to see how he decides he wants his team to play.

“It’s about winning. Getting to the final and winning,” Hallam said of his hockey philosophy and how he envisioned Sweden playing. “I won’t say that there’s an ideology that I stand for. I think we have to see the circumstances here. We get together for two days, and then we have to play Canada. I think you know a couple of guys in their lineup (chuckling). We need to be ready to play very well defensively and take our chances. I believe in that. Traditionally, Sweden has always had their biggest strengths in the team game. We want to keep on building on that tradition.”

“We also have some offensive firepower in our lineup and, of course, want to put them in good situations. But in a short period like this, it’s going to be a lot of smart plays, smart defensive plays, having the patience and having the structure to stay in the game and control some of the best players in the world.”

All of which makes roster selection even more intriguing. All four teams in the 4 Nations say the same thing: They don’t want to pick an all-offense team and are seeking balance and players to take on certain roles.

“We want to have the best team,” said Hallam. “That means we need to have players that are used to playing different roles. So we’re not just going to look at how many points they scored in late November and then pick them. It’s building on different roles. But at the same time, we have a lot of good players who play offensive roles who can adapt and play deeper down the lineup.”

As far as players on the bubble, Hallam wasn’t tipping his hand where he was leaning.

Second-year NHL center Leo Carlsson, who turns 20 in late December, figures to be an especially interesting case.

“I think that Leo really used his first year in a smart way, and he looks great from the start this season,” Hallam said. “You’re not too young or too old (to make the 4 Nations roster), it’s just about how good you are. He’s a name we’re looking at. Hopefully he can keep on doing what he’s done from the start here for another stretch of eight, 10 games here, but he’s definitely on the watch list.”

In goal, there’s no real mystery as far as the three goalies in the lead right now: It’s Jacob Markstrom, Linus Ullmark and Filip Gustavsson. But the pecking order will be determined by their play leading into the February event.

“Things are looking good for all three of them there,” Hallam said. “Both Ullmark and Markstrom seem really happy with their new spots and new teams. And Gus is really showing that he wants to have that starting job in Minny. We’re fortunate. Hopefully they all stay healthy come February. Then we’ll see who will be the starter.”

[The Athletic / Each NHL team's biggest concern a month into the 2024-25 regular season](#)

By The Athletic NHL Staff- November 3, 2024

We're just over a month into the NHL regular season, and for some teams, the high hopes and optimism of the preseason have faded away for one reason or another.

The Athletic asked its NHL staff this week for each team's biggest concern at this point. The responses covered the full spectrum, from goaltending and lack of offense to bad defense, injuries and more. Here's what they said.

Anaheim Ducks

Their offense is still bottom tier: The Ducks have scored only one or two goals in six of their 10 games. They've avoided being shut out but their 2.2 goals per game ranks 31st, putting them above only the equally punchless New York Islanders. Several of their top offensive players are struggling. Mason McTavish and Cutter Gauthier have yet to score. Frank Vatrano and Trevor Zegras each have one empty net goal. It hasn't helped that their power play is just 4-for-31, but they're also being decisively outshot by an average of nine. The offense would really be inept if Troy Terry, Leo Carlsson and Ryan Strome didn't have 12 of their 22 goals. Lukas Dostal's tremendous goaltending is keeping them afloat. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

Five-on-five offense: Through 11 games, the Bruins have scored only 16 five-on-five goals. David Pastrnak has just one. Brad Marchand, Charlie Coyle, Pavel Zacha and Morgan Geekie, all of whom started the season in the top six, have zero. It would be one thing if the Bruins had high-end goaltending like they did for the past three seasons. Jeremy Swayman, without Linus Ullmark, is still finding his game. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Secondary scoring: Heading into Friday night, the Sabres had only two power-play goals this season and had only one goal total from second-liners Dylan Cozens and Jack Quinn. Of Buffalo's 24 five-on-five goals, 11 have come with Tage Thompson on the ice. Lindy Ruff tried mixing up the second and third lines this week in an effort to get more from players like Cozens and Quinn. The second line and power play are the key to getting more consistent offense. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

Are young players still progressing? This should be the No. 1 priority for the Flames. Connor Zary is near the top of the Flames' leaderboard in points. That's good. Dustin Wolf has lost his last two starts after winning his first three. That's less good. The shine of Martin Pospisil as a center has already worn off. That's also less good, but at least he's playing with Zary again. Matthew Coronato doesn't have a regular spot in the lineup. The Flames crashing down to Earth after a hot start was expected. It's all about the youth continuing to push themselves forward. — Julian McKenzie

Carolina Hurricanes

Goaltending: The Hurricanes' goaltending has been good — entering Friday's games, Carolina had allowed the second-fewest goals in the league at 2.33 per game — but that doesn't mean there isn't cause for concern. Frederik Andersen missed Monday's game in Vancouver, leading to Spencer Martin

being recalled. Andersen was later announced to be out week to week with a lower-body injury. Andersen (3-1-0, .941 save percentage, 1.48 goals-against average) had a better GAA and save percentage than Pyotr Kochetkov (4-1-0, .891, 2.61) in October, and the Hurricanes are thin after Martin should another injury occur. The position is surely on the minds of the coaching staff and front office. — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

Goal scoring: There's no doubt the Blackhawks are a better team than a season ago, but the offense remains an area of concern. They just don't have a ton of depth scoring. They could especially use more five-on-five scoring from Tyler Bertuzzi, Taylor Hall, Philipp Kurashev, Ilya Mikheyev and Teuvo Teräväinen. Those five players combined for four goals in five-on-five play through the first 11 games. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

Goaltending: Colorado's .858 save percentage ranks last in the NHL, and it's without a doubt the biggest contributor to the disappointing start to the season. The Avalanche haven't been bad defensively by most metrics, allowing the 10th-fewest expected goals per 60 minutes, but all three goalies have struggled. Alexandar Georgiev's minus-9.42 GSAX ranks 71st out of the 71 goalies to play this season, more than three goals worse than the next goalie. He should progress back to being near the league average, but it needs to happen quickly before the Avalanche lose too much ground in an incredibly competitive Central Division. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

Paper-thin depth: The Blue Jackets' 5-4-1 start is solid enough just at face value. But considering the players they've lost to injuries — captain Boone Jenner, Kent Johnson, Dmitri Voronkov and defenseman Erik Gudbranson — they've patched lines together and continued to play well. However, they can't possibly suffer that many injuries and expect to compete. Right? Right? — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

Wyatt Johnston's lack of scoring: It's all relative, right? The Stars don't have a whole lot to be concerned about. They're 7-3-0, Jake Oettinger is in top form, Matt Duchene is having a turn-back-the-clock season. But this was supposed to be the year Johnston took that final step into superstardom. Instead, he has one goal and four assists in 10 games, he has some of the worst possession numbers on the team and is on the third line while Logan Stankoven takes over on the top line. The Stars were still outscoring opponents 6-3 at five-on-five (heading into Friday) with Johnston on the ice; it's hardly a crisis. But if the Stars are going to make another Stanley Cup run this season, Johnston has to be a big part of it. — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings

A lack of offensive zone time: There are a lot of concerns accompanying Detroit's 4-5-1 start, but this is the one that sums them all up best. Detroit just hasn't spent enough time in its opponent's end. According to data from NHL EDGE, the Red Wings have played just 37.3 percent of the time in the offensive zone, the lowest percentage in the league. That stat is likely a symptom of multiple issues, including getting hemmed into their own zone too often and flaws with the team's forecheck, but it sums up Detroit's offensive woes accurately. The Red Wings knew they lost a lot of offense this summer and that it would be hard to replace, but they're not even really giving themselves a chance to do so. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

Connor McDavid's injury: The Oilers got off to a good start in their first full game without McDavid, who's expected out of the lineup for two to three weeks with a lower-body injury. They recorded a season-high five goals in a victory over the Nashville Predators on Thursday. But that's just one game and it was against Nashville. They always beat Nashville. The Oilers won just once in five tries last season with McDavid sidelined due to injury, and they'll be in tough until he returns. Even with the Music City result, the Oilers still have just five wins in their first 11 games. A slide this month could cost them the Pacific Division crown they're coveting. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Florida Panthers

The third pair: Everything is going about as well as could be expected for the defending champs, starting with Aleksander Barkov's return to the lineup, but they're going to need to figure out how to proceed with their bottom defensive pairing. There are three possible combinations of Adam Boqvist, Nate Schmidt and Uvis Balinskis, and none have been good — Florida has been outscored 10-1 with them on the ice. — Sean Gentile

Los Angeles Kings

Quinton Byfield's slow start: Byfield is without a goal over the first 11 contests. He's chipped in five assists, but it's not the kind of beginning he or the Kings imagined after the sides agreed on a five-year extension worth \$31.25 million. His advanced metrics aren't bad, and the Kings haven't done him any favors by committing to return him to his natural position at center and abandoning that just five games in. It's possible that he bounces between the middle and the wing, which may not be great for maintaining consistency or chemistry with his linemates. The worry with him offensively is that he's had a tendency to fall into lengthy scoring droughts. Even in his breakout last season, the 22-year-old went 19 games without a goal before he scored his 20th in the regular-season finale. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

Jared Spurgeon's health: One big reason the Wild were confident this season would be better than last was the return of the captain after he was limited to 16 games last season due to shoulder, hip and back injuries. But after season-ending hip and back surgeries, Spurgeon was sidelined after his second game and missed six in a row before returning Tuesday in Pittsburgh. The team has said the discomfort is "part of the healing process." Spurgeon said they took "different routes" medically to get him back in the lineup, but he couldn't say he was confident this would not be a season-long issue. The good news is the Wild went 4-1-1 without him. — Michael Russo

Montreal Canadiens

A lack of maturity: When you are the second-youngest team in the NHL, with the youngest blue line, a lack of maturity probably should not be a concern. It should be expected. But despite their youth, the Canadiens have elevated internal expectations, and that means recognizing game situations and just how badly things can go wrong when your reads are off. Basic notions like playing a deep game, defensive coverage on faceoffs or defensive zone play in general have been problems at various points already this season. Perhaps it's a sign this team is not yet mature enough to execute relatively simple concepts, but if the Canadiens hope to be mildly competitive this season, they will need to mature in a hurry. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

No. 2 center: Defensive zone coverage deserves a nod, as well. Though the Preds have rebounded well from losing their first five games, they are still forcing Juuse Saros to deal with too many Grade-A chances. But just as Saros, the power play and other aspects of the Preds' game are progressing, that

will, too. There's no clear answer on No. 2 center, which is part of why Andrew Brunette has done so much shuffling with his top two lines. The answer is likely on another roster right now. — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

Ondřej Palát's struggles: The Devils are off to a solid start, and their forward group has been good. Palát, however, is off to a slow start. Entering Friday, he had the worst expected-goals-for percentage among Devils forwards, according to Natural Stat Trick, and was averaging his lowest ice time per game since his rookie season. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Goals: When you get shut out four times in your first 10 games, there can be no other concern that tops this one. The Islanders haven't been a goal-scoring juggernaut for a long time, but this season's futility is a new low — and they've been shut out by very mediocre teams (Red Wings, Ducks, Blue Jackets) to make it even worse. — Arthur Staple

New York Rangers

Mika Zibanejad's struggles: Zibanejad had seven points in nine games through Thursday, which on the surface is a respectable total. But he was also a minus-3, and coach Peter Laviolette lowered his ice time from past seasons. His underlying numbers have suffered, too. The Rangers had only 41 percent of the expected goals share with him on the ice at five-on-five, according to Natural Stat Trick, and were getting out-chanced with him on the ice. Center play is vital for playoff teams, and the Rangers could use a Zibanejad resurgence. — Peter Baugh

Ottawa Senators

The defense: The Sens defense has had good moments like an 8-1 domination over the St. Louis Blues. But they've still allowed three goals or more in the majority of games. The Senators have also adjusted to life without Artem Zub, who normally plays alongside Jake Sanderson, and are making the most of their Jacob Bernard-Docker—Tyler Kleven pair. But if the Sens want to compete, they will still need an extra defender. — Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

Five-on-five scoring: Through their first 11 games, the Flyers have managed only 16 goals at five-on-five — and five of those came in a single game, a win over Minnesota on Oct. 26. Part of that is because they have looked much too disjointed all over the ice at times and have too often been hemmed in their own zone. But players like Morgan Frost (zero five-on-five goals), Matvei Michkov (zero), Travis Konecny (zero), Owen Tippett (1), Tyson Foerster (1) and Joel Farabee (1) have still had plenty of opportunities to do more damage and haven't. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

Erik Karlsson's offensive production: Never an own-zone marvel, Karlsson has consistently created chances at a historic rate for defensemen. That is not the case this season, as his paltry point total reflects an ineffectiveness offensively that is very outside the norm. Karlsson is in Pittsburgh to be a prolific offensive force. But he had only one goal and seven points through 12 games, and he hasn't driven play the way he has in previous seasons. Perhaps an upper-body injury that kept him from participating in training camp remains an issue, or at least it didn't afford him the time he needed to get game-ready. Whatever the cause, Karlsson's poor offensive start is one of the big reasons the Penguins began 3-7-1 and look nowhere close to competing for the playoffs. — Rob Rossi

San Jose Sharks

Will Smith's early struggles: Eight games. No points. It was weighing on the 19-year-old rookie, who also was scratched from three other contests as part of the team's load management plan for him over the first half of the season. It looked like the former Boston College star was having trouble with the speed and size of the NHL game as he had minimal impact. Thursday night saw the pressure valve pop. Smith scored his first goal (and his first point) when he beat Chicago goalie Petr Mrázek in the first period and then added another successful wrist shot in the second that would be the winning goal in a 3-2 victory. The big night should be a confidence jolt for the No. 4 pick in the 2023 draft, who is expected to be a big part of San Jose's future. — Eric Stephens

Make it TWO goals for Will Smith 🏒 pic.twitter.com/bNOm0OpaH8

— B/R Open Ice (@BR_OpenIce) November 1, 2024

Seattle Kraken

Backup goaltending: The Kraken have played well in the first month, but despite some promising signs, they are still chugging along at roughly a .500 point percentage. They're one of only two Pacific Division teams in the black by goal differential and their underlying profile looks consistent with that of a playoff team, but they've been held back by porous depth goaltending performances in October. Philipp Grubauer is sporting an .881 save percentage across his four starts, and the Kraken have won just one of those four games. It's early yet and the samples are small, but for a team like Seattle, you need to be at least at a .500 point percentage in games your backup goaltender plays if you're going to be a playoff team. In the first month of the season, Seattle's depth goaltending prevented it from consolidating a more auspicious start. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

Robert Thomas' injury: Thomas suffered a fractured ankle Oct. 22 and will be re-evaluated in late November. Any club that loses its No. 1 center will miss him, but the Blues were already thin at the position. They've forced winger Pavel Buchnevich into the role, which hasn't worked as they hoped. The offense (2.7 goals per game, tied for 24th in the league) and power play (16.7 percent, 21st) are struggling. As a result, the team has played a lot of catch-up hockey, trailing by two goals or more in seven of its 11 games. Thomas can't get back soon enough. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

Depth support: Depth was always going to be a weakness in Tampa Bay. Cap casualties have depleted the bottom six and third pair, and management hasn't found cost-effective options to adequately replace what the Lightning lost. Outside of Nick Paul, the bottom six is pretty much a black hole for offense. While the team's strategy is built around its elite core, and with Ryan McDonagh back, plus Brandon Hagel and Anthony Cirelli clicking, the supporting cast got a major boost. But the bottom of the lineup seriously lacks. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

The power play: On one hand, this is surprising. On the other, it's not surprising at all. The surprising aspect: The Leafs have had one of the league's top regular-season power plays for years and still boast all the same familiar parts of it. Strong starts have been the norm for the five-pack of Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, William Nylander, John Tavares and Morgan Rielly. That same unit, of course, struggled mightily in second halves year after year and, more damagingly, in the postseason. The Leafs, with first-year coach Craig Berube, opted to keep that top group intact to start the season. That's changed recently, with Berube pivoting to two balanced units. Whether that makes a difference in the long run (if the Leafs even stick with it) is very much TBD. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Hockey Club

Where did the offense go? After a terrific 3-0 start where the team piled up goals and brought the Salt Lake City crowd to its feet, it has been a tough go for the Utahns. They have only two wins in their last eight games, a stretch during which they're 29th in the NHL in goals scored. Even with their two big losses on defense — Sean Durzi and John Marino are both out with long-term injuries — they've managed to play OK in their own end, but the power play has been misfiring and top prospect Josh Doan was sent down to Tucson. Utah especially needs more from Logan Cooley, Barrett Hayton and Lawson Crouse, who have combined for just six points during this funk. — James Mirtle

Vancouver Canucks

The power play: Vancouver's core group has high-end skill and it's consistently combined on the power play to manufacture goals at about a 22 percent clip over the past several seasons — which is very good, but not elite. For whatever reason through the first month of the season, however, the power play is struggling enormously to get set up and generate shot attempts. Though the conversion rate is just below average — buoyed by a two-goal outburst against the Blackhawks in mid-October — Vancouver's power play isn't passing the eye test and its underlying footprint is league-worst. The Canucks, for example, are the only team in the NHL generating shot attempts at a rate south of 80 attempts per hour. And they're in the mid-70s. They're also generating shots at a league-worst rate. If that continues, the club will need to get lucky or shoot at an incredibly efficient clip to produce at even an average rate with the man advantage. Even if the Canucks have the skill level to pull that off, it's a very tough way to live. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

Performance on the road: The difference between how the Golden Knights have performed inside the friendly confines of T-Mobile Arena compared to on the road has been stark. Vegas is a perfect 7-0-0 at home but has yet to win in four contests as the visitor. Part of that could be competition, as all four opponents on the road were playoff teams a year ago. It could also be a result of the lineup not being quite as deep as it once was. Vegas' top line of Jack Eichel, Mark Stone and Ivan Barbashev has dominated, but on the road, it's tougher for coach Bruce Cassidy to get favorable matchups. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

The power play: It feels like picking nits given how good the Caps look overall, but there's some work to be done with the man advantage. They're 30th in percentage, which is rough, but it might be as simple as getting a bounce or two because they're generating chances. As a team, they're at 9.35 expected goals per 60, ninth in the league. In other words, the process isn't broken. — Sean Gentile

Winnipeg Jets

The Jets are special teams merchants: Last year's Jets would have loved a power play this good: an NHL-best 45.2 percent behemoth that has looked dangerous from every position on the ice. Kyle Connor is on fire, tied for the power-play goals lead with four, and Cole Perfetti has three from the second unit. The problem is that this year's Jets are not as good at even strength as last year's team. The 10-1-0 record deserves plaudits, but Winnipeg has outscored its opponents only 27-20 at five-on-five. Those numbers are top-10 as opposed to best in the league like the Jets were last season. Keep working on that through a grueling November schedule and this team will be a contender. — Murat Ates

[The Athletic / One month into the NHL season, what's real and what's not?](#)

By James Mirtle- November 4, 2024

Today marks exactly one month since the NHL season started in Prague with games between the New Jersey Devils and Buffalo Sabres.

Since then, the league's 32 teams have played 189 games, or 14.4 percent of a full season, and there have been some pretty wacky things happening.

As ancient philosopher George Costanza once said, "Up was down. Black was white. Day was..." Well, you get the idea.

But hockey's a funny sport, and this can be a weird league. Fringe players can go on unbelievable scoring runs. Weak teams can pile up wins over a short period, and powerhouses can look like minnows over a stretch of a month or two.

So to try and make sense of some of the unusual things that have happened so far, I'm going to break down some of the biggest outliers and weigh in on whether there's sustaining power to these trends. Let's dig in.

How teams are on pace to change

Minnesota Wild

87

134

47

Winnipeg Jets

110

150

40

Washington Capitals

91

119

28

Carolina Hurricanes

111

131

20

Vegas Golden Knights

98

116

18

Chicago Blackhawks

52

69

17

Columbus Blue Jackets

66

82

16

Anaheim Ducks

59

75

16

New York Rangers

114

127

13

New Jersey Devils

81

94

13

Utah Hockey Club

77

89

12

Ottawa Senators

78

89

11

Florida Panthers

110

120

10

Calgary Flames

81

89

8

San Jose Sharks

47

51

4

Los Angeles Kings

99

103

4

Tampa Bay Lightning

98

96

-2

Vancouver Canucks

109

107

-2

Dallas Stars

113

104

-9

Detroit Red Wings

91

82

-9

St Louis Blues

92

82

-10

Seattle Kraken

81

69

-12

Toronto Maple Leafs

102

88

-14

Montreal Canadiens

76

62

-15

Edmonton Oilers

104

89

-15

Pittsburgh Penguins

88

69

-19

Buffalo Sabres

84

62

-23

Philadelphia Flyers

87

62

-26

New York Islanders

94

68

-26

Boston Bruins

109

82

-27

Nashville Predators

99

67

-32

Colorado Avalanche

107

68

-39

Let's start with the three teams at the top. The Winnipeg Jets finished with the fourth-best record in the NHL last season with 110 points and didn't dramatically change their roster. They have perhaps the best goaltender in the world in Connor Hellebuyck and a lot of offensive firepower, so while they're on an 11-1-0 heater and a 150-point pace, I feel pretty comfortable saying they're for real.

But what about the two surprise teams leading the way in this chart?

Are the Wild and Capitals great now?

Let's start with Minnesota. The Wild have the second-best record in the NHL for many reasons, with strong play from goaltender Filip Gustavsson right up there.

Minnesota finished 24th in team save percentage a year ago with .893; through 11 games, it's way up to third (.914).

That jump alone would have been enough to improve the Wild's goals against last season by more than 35, which quite likely would have made them a playoff team. Having Gustavsson healthy and playing a larger share of the games should help compared to a year ago.

But it's not just improved goaltending that has allowed Minnesota to climb from 20th to tied for third in goals against. After Sunday's big win over the Toronto Maple Leafs, the Wild are ranked second in expected goals against, meaning the quality of scoring chances they've allowed is better than almost every other team so far.

All of that points to the Wild being able to maintain their spot as one of the stingiest teams in the league.

Where we see some unsustainability creeping in is in their offensive game. The Wild have jumped from 21st in goals per game to eighth this season, driven in part by an incredible start from Kirill Kaprizov (21 points in 11 games after a rare quiet night against Toronto).

Overall, Minnesota isn't generating a much higher level of scoring chances compared to a year ago. But its shooting percentage is more than 13 percent, one of the top marks in the league and definitely not something that is sustainable over an 82-game season.

That said, there are a lot of positive indicators for the Wild, who are tracking to be one of the biggest positive success stories leaguewide if they continue to get better goaltending and a Hart-level performance from Kaprizov. Even if they fall back to the pack a bit in goal production, they're such a

strong defensive team — thanks in part to what looks like another step forward for Brock Faber, who sits fifth in the NHL in ice time at 25:28 a night — that it won't sink their season.

As for the Capitals, they're off to a similarly terrific start after taking a lot of criticism last year for sneaking into the playoffs with some ugly underlying numbers.

What's different about Washington? The Capitals have greatly improved their analytical profile thanks to some smart offseason additions (Jakob Chychrun and Pierre-Luc Dubois) and unexpected performances from prospects already in their system (Connor McMichael and Aliaksei Protas). Washington, for example, is third in the NHL in expected goals share at even strength right now, behind only the Carolina Hurricanes (who they narrowly lost to on Sunday) and New York Rangers.

They were 24th in that metric a year ago, which means they've made a league-best jump in their ability to control play and outpace their opponents.

Like the Wild, the Capitals' shooting percentage is unsustainable, but even if it comes down, they have plenty of room to fall back from 4.18 goals per game and still remain a top-10 offensive team in the league.

Goaltender Charlie Lindgren, meanwhile, has started slower than a year ago, and big free-agent defenseman signing Matt Roy has played just one game due to injury. So there's still room for improvement from that perspective.

So, we're obviously very early in the season, but based on what we've seen, the Wild and Capitals appear largely for real, and two of the biggest surprises overall. And coaches John Hynes and Spencer Carbery have their names on the Jack Adams candidates list already.

Honorable mentions: Anaheim, Calgary and Columbus

Are the Bruins, Avs and Preds bad now?

Let's go through these one by one ...

Boston: The Bruins needed their big weekend. Two games, two wins and two shutouts will help. Before beating the Philadelphia Flyers and Seattle Kraken, the Bruins certainly appeared to be in big trouble.

Even with the wins, it's not pretty. Long one of the NHL's analytic darlings, they currently sit 20th in expected goals share, 23rd in puck possession and 20th in shot share in all situations.

They haven't been scoring. They weren't getting great goaltending until the shutouts this weekend. Both of their special teams are bad (24th and 17th). And perhaps most troublingly, big offseason addition Elias Lindholm has really struggled with a 44 percent expected goals share and 50-point scoring pace for his seven-year, \$7.75-million-a-season UFA contract.

They've looked like David Pastrňák and a bunch of guys on too many nights right now.

Maybe this weekend is a sign. Maybe Jeremy Swayman can turn things around and carry them to a respectable record the rest of the way, but the early returns have been awful. And it'll take more than two wins over mediocre opponents to shake that feeling.

Colorado: The Avs' issues with injuries have been well-publicized. At one point last week, they were missing six of their top 10 forwards and had to resort to playing rookies Ivan Ivan and Nikolai Kovalenko in the top six and on the power play.

The good news is they still have Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar, and they're carrying a roster that is missing more than \$30 million in talent some nights.

Their biggest problem right now (beyond the infirmity) is that No. 1 netminder Alexandar Georgiev is basically unplayable with an .820 save percentage and the league's worst goals saved above expectations mark.

Once they get healthy — with some big names like Valeri Nichushkin, Artturi Lehkonen and Jonathan Drouin all getting close — they should be OK. So don't write them off yet.

Nashville: The Predators' big, splashy offseason has not worked out very well so far.

But you can make a decent case they have just been incredibly unlucky. They're dead last in five-on-five shooting percentage (4.6 percent) and PDO, which aren't going to be that low for much longer.

If there's a concern for the Predators, it's that even if they do regress to where they should be, they look like a very average team that will be on the playoff bubble even in a better-case scenario. They are top-heavy, don't have a lot of depth, and invested a lot in aging scorers (Jonathan Marchessault and Steven Stamkos) from whom they might be asking for too much as they decline.

And considering what they're paying Juuse Saros, they need him to be a lot more than what he's given them of late.

Honorable mentions: Edmonton (although after Sunday's win, they've now won four of five!)

Those are some of the key team trends to watch.

Let's drill down one level further to some of the surprising players having unusual starts and see if they have sustaining power.

Skaters off to amazing starts

Neal Pionk, Winnipeg: We're going to go out on a limb and predict that Pionk is not going to finish the season with 89 points. Pionk, 29, is in his eighth season and has never really gotten a ton of attention leaguewide; he's always kind of been just a dependable No. 3 defenseman in a small market. He has 13 points through 12 games, but his career average is closer to 35 a season. The Jets have a ridiculous 19 percent shooting percentage when he's been on the ice, but, hey, ride the hockey gods' lightning while you can.

Mark Stone, Vegas: What a welcome name to see atop the NHL scoring leaders early on this year. Stone, 32, has battled a pile of injuries for years. In fact, he hasn't played more than 56 games in a season since way back in 2019-20. There were a lot of concerns about how Vegas was going to produce offensively after losing Marchessault and Chandler Stephenson in free agency, but Stone has more than picked up the slack, piling up 20 points through 12 games to help the Golden Knights climb to second in the NHL in goals per game early on. He's not going to pile up more than an assist per game, obviously, but his shooting percentage is close to normal-ish, and, if healthy, it's certainly plausible he can put up big numbers alongside Jack Eichel.

Alex Laferriere, Los Angeles: Eight goals in 12 games is a nice little heater for the 23-year-old in his second season. His shooting percentage is nearly 30 percent, but Laferriere is also getting bigger minutes, is on PP1, and is playing with better players than he was a year ago. He had big goal totals with Harvard two years ago in college, so there's talent there, and he could surprise by hitting the 25-goal mark. Not bad for a third-round pick.

Honorable mentions: Connor McMichael, Casey Mittelstadt, Pavel Dorofeyev, Yegor Chinakhov

Goalies off to amazing starts

Lukáš Dostál, Anaheim: The 24-year-old Czech has had potential building for a bit now. That he's leading the NHL in goals saved above expected, however, is a surprise, especially behind the Ducks' makeshift defense. Dostál absolutely dominated the Finnish league as a youngster and falls in a long line of very good goalies picked by Anaheim over the years. Whether this season is his breakout or not is tough to predict but don't be surprised by an upward trajectory, given his skill set and pedigree. With John Gibson hurt, this has been his time to shine.

Kevin Lankinen, Vancouver: Where would the Canucks be without him right now? Lankinen landed in Vancouver late and on a bargain-basement \$875,000 contract, but he's been excellent with a 5-0-2 record and .919 save percentage. The undrafted Finn has shown flashes in a backup role in Nashville before, and it certainly helps that the Canucks are playing some nice defensive hockey in front of him (sixth in the NHL in expected goals against at even strength). Obviously they're looking forward to getting Thatcher Demko back at some point, but Lankinen just might be one of this season's breakout players in goal — and one of the NHL's top bargains in doing so.

Honorable mentions: Joel Blomqvist, Dan Vladar

Skaters off to tough starts

Zach Hyman, Edmonton: From a 54-goal season last year to ... just two points in his first 11 games? Two points — and the winning goal — on Sunday were nice, but no star has slumped more so far than Hyman, who just isn't getting as many chances at the net as he did a year ago. He obviously wasn't going to shoot 3 percent for the whole season, but the more troubling thing is he's producing close to one fewer shot per game, in part because he's missing the net more and has had a lot more opportunities blocked. It's possible he falls back into the 30-goal range at this point, especially with Connor McDavid missing time.

Elias Pettersson, Vancouver: One goal and only four points in 10 games for the \$11.6 million man is tough. Tougher is some of the highlight packs that have been circulating on social media showing his mistakes and brain farts blown up in a bigger way. The Canucks' shooting percentage with Pettersson on the ice is way down, so perhaps there's some bad luck at play here, but his shot rate is down almost 50 percent, his scoring chance numbers are some of the lowest of his career, and giveaways have skyrocketed. The most concerning thing about Pettersson's funk is it's a continuation of what happened in the second half of last year and into the playoffs, when he produced just 23 points over his final 40 games. There's real reason for concern here.

Steven Stamkos, Nashville: Unlike the two stars above, Stamkos is getting his usual looks at the net and putting three pucks on goal a game, right in line with his recent averages. But he has been a 17 percent shooter for 15 years, and right now, he's converting at just 6 percent. (And Nashville collectively is shooting only 1 percent with him on the ice at five-on-five, which isn't going to continue.) Stamkos actually has the highest individual expected goals per minute of his career right now, so he should start finding the back of the net more regularly soon.

Honorable mentions: Charlie McAvoy, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Quinton Byfield, Devon Toews

Goalies off to tough starts

Jeremy Swayman, Boston: I already mentioned him above, but I think it's worth a bit more context. Missing training camp and preseason is no joke, especially for a goalie; it can really set players back, and that appears to be the case for Swayman. He didn't ink his eight-year, \$8.25-million-a-season deal until Oct. 6, two days before the regular season, and his numbers are basically down across the board, including an ugly .884 save percentage before Sunday's shutout. Swayman was one of the most reliable goalies in the NHL his first three seasons in a tandem role, so this was probably a blip, but the Bruins are

hemorrhaging chances against and he doesn't have a reliable partner in the crease to work with for the first time. We'll see if this weekend is something they can build on.

Stuart Skinner, Edmonton: Is it the short offseason, maybe? Skinner was phenomenal in the Oilers' run to the Stanley Cup Final last spring, but between the regular season and playoffs, he logged a grueling 82 appearances in only his second season as an NHL starter. Skinner's goals saved above expected numbers aren't far below league average this season, so this isn't all on him as the Oilers' makeshift blue line is definitely more porous than it was a year ago (they've fallen from eighth down to 19th in expected goals against at even strength so far). It may make sense to go with more of a tandem usage here for a bit until both goalies find their way a bit more. We'll see how Calvin Pickard fares against the New Jersey Devils on Monday.

Honorable mentions: Alexandar Georgiev, Juuse Saros, Adin Hill, Connor Ingram

[The Athletic / 2025 NHL Draft ranking: James Hagens, Porter Martone lead Scott Wheeler's November top 64 list](#)

By Scott Wheeler- November 4, 2024

Welcome to my November ranking of the top 64 prospects eligible for the 2025 NHL Draft.

This preliminary top 64 (plus 26 honorable mentions for a total of 90 players to watch) is my third of what will be seven 2025 rankings. It follows my way-too-early top 28 and my preseason top 32, and will be followed by a midseason top 64 (released in January), a March top 64, a post-U18 worlds top 32 (released in May) and my final top 100 (released in June).

This class, made up of 2007s and late-2006s, is led by star Boston College freshman center James Hagens, Brampton Steelheads winger Porter Martone, OHL exceptional status Saginaw Spirit center Michael Misa and Erie Otters defenseman Matthew Schaefer.

The ranking, packaged in our sortable and customizable user interface, is also broken down into tiers. This list is divided into six tiers: 1, 2-6, 7-14, 15-31, 32-60, 61-64+. The final cut for this edition of the list was Kamloops Blazers standout forward Nathan Behm, who belongs in the sixth tier.

Note that while I consult scouts, coaches, general managers, team staff, and those around these players, the following evaluations and rankings are strictly my own.

Here are full reports on the top 64 (honorable mentions sorted alphabetically).

Pos.

Natl.

Tier

League

Search

Tier 1

1

James Hagens

C1

U18

Height:

5' 10.5"

Weight:

177 lbs

DOB:

Nov. 3, 2006

C

us

Tier 1

NTDP

Tier 2

2

Porter Martone

RW1

Brampton

Height:

6' 2.75"

Weight:

208 lbs

DOB:

Oct. 26, 2006

RW

CA

Tier 2

OHL

3

Matthew Schaefer

LHD1

Erie

Height:

6' 1"

Weight:

174 lbs

DOB:

Sep. 5, 2007

LHD

CA

Tier 2

OHL

4

Michael Misa

C2

Saginaw

Height:

6' 0.75"

Weight:

175 lbs

DOB:

Feb. 16, 2007

C

CA

Tier 2

OHL

5

Anton Frondell

C3

Djurgården

Height:

6' 1"

Weight:

198 lbs

DOB:

May 7, 2007

C

SE

Tier 2

J20

6

Roger McQueen

C4

Brandon

Height:

6' 5.25"

Weight:

197 lbs

DOB:

Oct. 2, 2006

C

CA

Tier 2

WHL

Tier 3

7

Ivan Ryabkin

C5

Dynamo Moscow

Height:

5' 11"

Weight:

201 lbs

DOB:

Apr. 25, 2007

C

RU

Tier 3

MHL

8

Logan Hensler

RHD1

Wisconsin

Height:

6' 2.25"

Weight:

192 lbs

DOB:

Oct. 14, 2006

RHD

US

Tier 3

NCAA

9

Malcolm Spence

LW1

Erie

Height:

6' 1"

Weight:

203 lbs

DOB:

Sep. 22, 2006

LW

CA

Tier 3

OHL

10

Caleb Desnoyers

C6

Moncton

Height:

6' 1.5"

Weight:

178 lbs

DOB:

Apr. 11, 2007

C

CA

Tier 3

QMJHL

11

Victor Eklund

LW2

Djurgården

Height:

5' 11"

Weight:

161 lbs

DOB:

Oct. 3, 2006

LW

SE

Tier 3

HockeyAllsvenskan

12

Cole Reschny

C7

Victoria

Height:

5' 10.5"

Weight:

183 lbs

DOB:

Apr. 6, 2007

C

CA

Tier 3

WHL

13

Jackson Smith

LHD2

Tri-City

Height:

6' 3.25"

Weight:

195 lbs

DOB:

May. 13, 2007

LHD

CA

Tier 3

WHL

14

William Moore

C8

U18

Height:

6' 2.25"

Weight:

175 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 24, 2007

C

us

Tier 3

NTDP

Tier 4

15

Cameron Schmidt

RW2

Vancouver

Height:

5' 7.25"

Weight:

161 lbs

DOB:

Jan. 19, 2007

RW

CA

Tier 4

WHL

16

Kashawn Aitcheson

LHD3

Barrie

Height:

6' 1.5"

Weight:

196 lbs

DOB:

Sep. 21, 2006

LHD

CA

Tier 4

OHL

17

Lynden Lakovic

LW3

Moose Jaw

Height:

6' 4.25"

Weight:

190 lbs

DOB:

Dec. 12, 2006

LW

CA

Tier 4

WHL

18

Radim Mrtko

RHD2

Trinec

Height:

6' 5.75"

Weight:

207 lbs

DOB:

Jun. 9, 2007

RHD

CZ

Tier 4

Czechia

19

Cullen Potter

C9

Arizona State

Height:

5' 10"

Weight:

172 lbs

DOB:

Jan. 10, 2007

C

US

Tier 4

NCAA

20

Justin Carbonneau

RW3

Blainville-Boisbriand

Height:

6' 1"

Weight:

190 lbs

DOB:

Nov. 25, 2006

RW

CA

Tier 4

QMJHL

21

Blake Fiddler

RHD3

Edmonton

Height:

6' 4"

Weight:

209 lbs

DOB:

Jul. 9, 2007

RHD

us

Tier 4

WHL

22

Jack Ivankovic

G1

Brampton

Height:

5' 11"

Weight:

178 lbs

DOB:

May 22, 2007

G

CA

Tier 4

OHL

23

Jakob Ihs Wozniak

RW4

Lulea

Height:

6' 2.25"

Weight:

184 lbs

DOB:

Feb. 1, 2007

RW

SE

Tier 4

J20

24

Charlie Trethewey

RHD4

U18

Height:

6' 1"

Weight:

200 lbs

DOB:

Aug. 2, 2007

RHD

us

Tier 4

NTDP

25

Kurban Limatov

LHD4

Dynamo Moscow

Height:

6' 3"

Weight:

198 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 20, 2007

LHD

RU

Tier 4

MHL

26

Brady Martin

C10

Soo

Height:

6' 0"

Weight:

178 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 16, 2007

C

CA

Tier 4

OHL

27

Joshua Ravensbergen

G2

Prince George

Height:

6' 5.25"

Weight:

190 lbs

DOB:

Nov. 27, 2006

G

CA

Tier 4

WHL

28

Cameron Reid

LHD5

Kitchener

Height:

5' 11.75"

Weight:

193 lbs

DOB:

Apr. 8, 2007

LHD

CA

Tier 4

OHL

29

Jack Murtagh

LW4

U18

Height:

6' 0.75"

Weight:

200 lbs

DOB:

Aug. 22, 2007

LW

US

Tier 4

NTDP

30

Milton Gastrin

C11

Modo

Height:

6' 0.5"

Weight:

185 lbs

DOB:

Jun. 2, 2007

C

SE

Tier 4

J20

31

Adam Benak

C12

Youngstown

Height:

5' 7.25"

Weight:

160 lbs

DOB:

Apr. 10, 2007

C

CZ

Tier 4

USHL

Tier 5

32

Alex Huang

RHD5

Chicoutimi

Height:

6' 0"

Weight:

170 lbs

DOB:

Jul. 30, 2007

RHD

CA

Tier 5

QMJHL

33

Sascha Boumedienne

LHD6

Boston Univeristy

Height:

6' 1"

Weight:

175 lbs

DOB:

Jan. 17, 2007

LHD

SE

Tier 5

NCAA

34

Jake O'Brien

C13

Brantford

Height:

6' 1.75"

Weight:

172 lbs

DOB:

June 16, 2007

C

CA

Tier 5

OHL

35

Ben Kevan

RW5

Des Moines

Height:

6' 0.25"

Weight:

182 lbs

DOB:

Jan. 3, 2007

RW

US

Tier 5

USHL

36

L.J. Mooney

C14

U18

Height:

5' 7"

Weight:

162 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 8, 2007

C

US

Tier 5

NTDP

37

Emile Guite

LW5

Chicoutimi

Height:

6' 1.25"

Weight:

176 lbs

DOB:

May 31, 2007

LW

CA

Tier 5

QMJHL

38

Luka Radivojevic

RHD6

Muskegon

Height:

5' 10"

Weight:

165 lbs

DOB:

Jan. 3, 2007

RHD

SK

Tier 5

USHL

39

Carter Bear

LW6

Everett

Height:

6' 0"

Weight:

179 lbs

DOB:

Nov. 4, 2006

LW

CA

Tier 5

WHL

40

Pyotr Andreyanov

G3

CSKA

Height:

6' 0"

Weight:

207 lbs

DOB:

Jan. 22, 2007

G

RU

Tier 5

MHL

41

Cole McKinney

C15

U18

Height:

6' 0"

Weight:

200 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 16, 2007

C

us

Tier 5

NTDP

42

Owen Conrad

LHD7

Charlottetown

Height:

6' 2.5"

Weight:

214 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 10, 2007

LHD

CA

Tier 5

QMJHL

43

Conrad Fondrk

LW7

U18

Height:

5' 11.75"

Weight:

193 lbs

DOB:

Jun. 1, 2007

LW

us

Tier 5

NTDP

44

Viktor Klingsell

LW8

Skelleftea

Height:

5' 9.5"

Weight:

188 lbs

DOB:

Feb. 10, 2007

LW

SE

Tier 5

J20

45

Braeden Cootes

C16

Seattle

Height:

5' 11.25"

Weight:

183 lbs

DOB:

Feb. 9, 2007

C

CA

Tier 5

WHL

46

Tomas Pobezal

C17

Nitra

Height:

5' 11"

Weight:

179 lbs

DOB:

Sep. 18, 2006

C

SK

Tier 5

Slovakia

47

Bill Zonnon

LW9

Rouyn-Noranda

Height:

6' 1.5"

Weight:

185 lbs

DOB:

Oct. 3, 2006

LW

CA

Tier 5

QMJHL

48

Reese Hamilton

LHD8

Calgary

Height:

6' 0"

Weight:

172 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 26, 2007

LHD

CA

Tier 5

WHL

49

Donato Bracco

LHD9

U18

Height:

5' 10"

Weight:

166 lbs

DOB:

Jul. 26, 2007

LHD

us

Tier 5

NTDP

50

Haoxi 'Simon' Wang

LHD10

King

Height:

6' 5.5"

Weight:

215 lbs

DOB:

Jul. 27, 2007

LHD

CN

Tier 5

OJHL

51

Filip Ekberg

LW10

Ottawa

Height:

5' 9.75"

Weight:

166 lbs

DOB:

Apr. 14, 2007

LW

SE

Tier 5

OHL

52

Carlos Handel

RHD7

Halifax

Height:

6' 0.5"

Weight:

172 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 31, 2007

RHD

DE

Tier 5

QMJHL

53

Dakoda Rheaume-Mullen

LHD11

Michigan

Height:

5' 11.75"

Weight:

178 lbs

DOB:

Dec. 18, 2006

LHD

us

Tier 5

NCAA

54

Lasse Boelius

LHD12

Assat

Height:

5' 11.75"

Weight:

179 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 16, 2007

LHD

FI

Tier 5

Liiga U20

55

Jack Nesbitt

C18

Windsor

Height:

6' 4.25"

Weight:

185 lbs

DOB:

Jan. 12, 2007

C

CA
Tier 5
OHL
56
Benjamin Kindel
C19
Calgary
Height:
5' 10"
Weight:
176 lbs
DOB:
Apr. 19, 2007
C
CA
Tier 5
WHL
57
Ryker Lee
RW6
Madison
Height:
5' 11.5"
Weight:
181 lbs
DOB:
Nov. 8, 2006
RW
us
Tier 5
USHL
58
Henry Brzustewicz

RHD8

London

Height:

6' 1.75"

Weight:

203 lbs

DOB:

Feb. 9, 2007

RHD

us

Tier 5

OHL

59

Jordan Gavin

LW11

Tri-City

Height:

5' 11"

Weight:

187 lbs

DOB:

Nov. 13, 2006

LW

CA

Tier 5

WHL

60

Asher Barnett

LHD13

U18

Height:

6' 0.5"

Weight:

198 lbs

DOB:

May. 16, 2007

LHD

us

Tier 5

NTDP

Tier 6

61

Aiden Lane

RW7

St. Andrew's College

Height:

6' 1"

Weight:

193 lbs

DOB:

Feb. 4, 2007

RW

CA

Tier 6

PHC

62

Artyom Vilchinsky

LHD14

SKA

Height:

6' 4"

Weight:

243 lbs

DOB:

Sep. 16, 2006

LHD

RU

Tier 6

MHL

63

Mikkel Eriksen

C20

Farjestad

Height:

5' 11"

Weight:

181 lbs

DOB:

Sep. 13, 2007

C

NO

Tier 6

J20

64

Michal Svrcek

C21

Brynas

Height:

5' 10"

Weight:

178 lbs

DOB:

Jan. 26, 2007

C

SK

Tier 6

J20

Tier Honorable Mention

Maxim Agafonov

RHD

Ufa

Height:

6' 2"

Weight:

198 lbs

DOB:

Apr. 10, 2007

RHD

RU

Tier Honorable Mention

MHL

Carter Amico

RHD

U18

Height:

6' 5.25"

Weight:

225 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 15, 2007

RHD

us

Tier Honorable Mention

NTDP

Karl Annborn

RHD

HV71

Height:

6' 1"

Weight:

188 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 6, 2007
RHD
SE
Tier Honorable Mention

J20
Quinn Beaudesne

RHD
Guelph
Height:

6' 0"

Weight:

185 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 1, 2007

RHD

CA

Tier Honorable Mention

OHL

Nathan Behm

RW

Kamloops

Height:

6' 1.5"

Weight:

192 lbs

DOB:

Apr. 18, 2007

RW

CA

Tier Honorable Mention

WHL

Carson Cameron

RHD

Peterborough

Height:

6' 1"

Weight:

193 lbs

DOB:

Jun. 27, 2007

RHD

CA

Tier Honorable Mention

OHL

Vojtech Cihar

LW

Karlovy Vary

Height:

6' 0"

Weight:

175 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 29, 2007

LW

CZ

Tier Honorable Mention

Czechia

Kale Dach

C

Sherwood Park

Height:

5' 10"

Weight:

165 lbs

DOB:

Feb. 15, 2007

C

CA

Tier Honorable Mention

BCHL

Semyon Frolov

G

Togliatti

Height:

6' 3"

Weight:

203 lbs

DOB:

Jan. 17, 2007

G

RU

Tier Honorable Mention

MHL

Lucas Karmiris

C

Brampton

Height:

5' 11"

Weight:

190 lbs

DOB:

Sep. 27, 2006

C

CA

Tier Honorable Mention

OHL

Liam Kilfoil

C

Halifax

Height:

5' 11"

Weight:

179 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 21, 2007

C

CA

Tier Honorable Mention

QMJHL

Jesper Kotajarvi

LHD

Tappara

Height:

5' 11"

Weight:

173 lbs

DOB:

Jul. 24, 2007

LHD

FI

Tier Honorable Mention

Liiga U20

Owen Martin

C

Spokane

Height:

5' 11.75"

Weight:

185 lbs

DOB:

May. 11, 2007

C

CA

Tier Honorable Mention

WHL

Mason Moe

LW

U18

Height:

6' 1.25"

Weight:

186 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 26, 2007

LW

US

Tier Honorable Mention

NTDP

Eric Nilson

C

Orebro

Height:

5' 11.5"

Weight:

156 lbs

DOB:

May 11, 2007

C

SE

Tier Honorable Mention

J20

Mateo Nobert

C

Blainville-Boisbriand

Height:

6' 0"

Weight:

166 lbs

DOB:

Aug. 12, 2007

C

CA

Tier Honorable Mention

QMJHL

Viggo Nordlund

LW

Skelleftea

Height:

5' 9"

Weight:

167 lbs

DOB:

Sep. 22, 2006

LW

SE

Tier Honorable Mention

J20

Bruno Osmanis

RW

Bjorkloven

Height:

5' 11"

Weight:

170 lbs

DOB:

Dec. 16, 2006

RW

LV

Tier Honorable Mention

HockeyAllsvenskan

Tomas Poletin

LW

Pelicans

Height:

6' 1.25"

Weight:

200 lbs

DOB:

Apr. 30, 2007

LW

CZ

Tier Honorable Mention

Liiga U20

Luca Romano

C

Kitchener

Height:

5' 11.25"

Weight:

177 lbs

DOB:

Jun. 25, 2007

C

CA

Tier Honorable Mention

OHL

Drew Schock

LHD

U18

Height:

5' 11.25"

Weight:

180 lbs

DOB:

Feb. 7, 2007

LHD

US

Tier Honorable Mention

NTDP

Oliwer Sjostrom

LHD

Lulea

Height:

5' 10"

Weight:

177 lbs

DOB:

Apr. 8, 2007

LHD

SE

Tier Honorable Mention

J20

Caden Taylor

LW

Peterborough

Height:

6' 2.25"

Weight:

185 lbs

DOB:

Mar. 31, 2007

LW

CA

Tier Honorable Mention

OHL

Shane Vansaghi

C

Michigan State

Height:

6' 2.25"

Weight:

210 lbs

DOB:

Oct. 11, 2006

C

us

Tier Honorable Mention

NCAA

Max Westergard

C

Frolunda

Height:

5' 10"

Weight:

158 lbs

DOB:

Sep. 3, 2007

C

FI

Tier Honorable Mention

J20

Vit Zahejsky

RW

Kamloops

Height:

5' 9.75"

Weight:

175 lbs

DOB:

Aug. 10, 2007

RW

CZ

Tier Honorable Mention

WHL

[ESPN / NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, top November game for each team](#)

By ESPN staff- November 2, 2024

Reactions

The second calendar month of the 2024-25 NHL season is here. But which games are the most tantalizing in the next 30 days?

For this edition of the Power Rankings, we've identified the game (or games) of the month for all 32 teams, whether it's a rivalry matchup, a reunion with an old teammate or a key early season clash between top Stanley Cup contenders.

How we rank: A panel of ESPN hockey commentators, analysts, reporters and editors sends in a 1-32 poll based on the games through Wednesday, which generates our master list here.

Note: Previous ranking for each team refers to the previous edition, Published Oct. 25. Points percentages are through Thursday's games.

1. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 90.00%

Nov. 7 vs. the Avalanche. The Jets' promising 2024 playoff entry ended pretty quickly at the hands of the Avalanche this past spring. A single game in November will not be sufficient for vengeance, but as the Jets continue to prove themselves as a top contender, beating other top-tier teams is a requirement.

Next seven days: @ CBJ (Nov. 1), vs. TB (Nov. 3), vs. UTA (Nov. 5), vs. COL (Nov. 7)

2. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 77.78%

Nov. 1, 2 vs. the Panthers. It's another round of the NHL Global Series. Though the Devils-Sabres series in Prague proved one-sided, this pairing of Finn-loaded contenders will be a delight to the thousands in the building in Tampere.

Next seven days: vs. FLA (Nov. 1), vs. FLA (Nov. 2), vs. CHI (Nov. 7)

3. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 72.22%

Nov. 23 at the Oilers. Not only is this the "Mark Messier matchup" -- and one that would've made a great Stanley Cup Final this past spring -- but these two teams have the shortest Cup-winner odds in their respective conferences, per ESPN BET. Perhaps we'll get these two iconic franchises in the Cup Final this season?

Next seven days: vs. OTT (Nov. 1), vs. NYI (Nov. 3), vs. BUF (Nov. 7)

4. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 77.78%

Nov. 19 at the Blues. The Wild and Blues fell just shy of the playoffs last season, and given the strength of the Central Division, one imagines there won't be room for both of them in the 2025 postseason. Can the Wild get revenge for the Blues' 4-1 win back on Oct. 15?

Next seven days: vs. TB (Nov. 1), vs. TOR (Nov. 3), vs. LA (Nov. 5), @ SJ (Nov. 7)

5. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 68.18%

Nov. 17 vs. the Capitals. It's not often that a player gets traded on the same day he's scheduled to do a meet-and-greet with fans. But such was the case for goaltender Logan Thompson. He'll make his return to Vegas with his new teammates for this one, after stopping 24 of 26 shots to beat his old team 4-2 on Oct. 15 in D.C.

Next seven days: vs. UTA (Nov. 2), @ EDM (Nov. 6)

6. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 10

Points percentage: 77.78%

Nov. 8 vs. the Penguins. Although Alex Ovechkin and Sidney Crosby are on the proverbial back-nine of their careers, both are still performing at a high level; that makes any Capitals-Penguins game a must-see (even if Sid's Penguins are seriously lagging behind Ovi's Capitals in the standings).

Next seven days: vs. CBJ (Nov. 2), @ CAR (Nov. 3), vs. NSH (Nov. 6)

7. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 70.00%

Nov. 27 vs. the Capitals. Long live the Southeast Division. The Lightning and Capitals are both in playoff position as of this writing -- and might well be at the end of the month when this game takes place, too. An important game for each club as they hope to remain in the postseason mix by season's end.

Next seven days: @ MIN (Nov. 1), @ WPG (Nov. 3), @ STL (Nov. 5), vs. PHI (Nov. 7)

8. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 77.78%

Nov. 27 vs. the Rangers. The Hurricanes' playoff run this past spring was terminated by the Blueshirts, and this will be their first showdown with their divisional foes.

Next seven days: vs. WSH (Nov. 3), vs. PHI (Nov. 5), vs. PIT (Nov. 7)

9. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 68.18%

Nov. 16, 19 against the Jets. November is a quirky month in the Panthers' schedule: They have four occurrences of consecutive games against the same opponent. We'll highlight occurrence No. 3 for this spot, as the Jets look every bit as awesome as their NFL namesakes do not. A potential Stanley Cup Final matchup.

Next seven days: vs. DAL (Nov. 1), vs. DAL (Nov. 2), vs. NSH (Nov. 7)

10. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 61.54%

Nov. 12, 14 at the Panthers. The Panthers represent the standard to which all top Eastern Conference contenders are comparing themselves. So this pair of games in Sunrise will be critical for the Devils, a team that wants to count itself in that cohort.

Next seven days: @ CGY (Nov. 1), @ EDM (Nov. 4), vs. MTL (Nov. 7)

11. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 59.09%

Nov. 5 vs. the Bruins. No matter which team is higher in the standings -- or favored in the playoff series -- the Maple Leafs have had major trouble beating the Bruins in recent seasons. As the Bruins' season is off to a tepid start, it could be time for a statement victory for the Leafs.

Next seven days: @ STL (Nov. 2), @ MIN (Nov. 3), vs. BOS (Nov. 5)

12. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 61.11%

Nov. 9 vs. the Oilers. There's nothing like a heated playoff series to throw more fuel on a rivalry's fire. So after the players (and fans) got after one another in the second round this past spring, what can we expect in the opening clash between these Pacific contenders?

Next seven days: @ SJ (Nov. 2), @ ANA (Nov. 5), @ LA (Nov. 7)

13. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 14

Points percentage: 63.64%

Nov. 29 at the Ducks. This SoCal rivalry isn't as heated as it was when both teams were contenders, but there is always a little extra juice when they match up. And, with two of this season's best uniform redesigns, it will be aesthetically pleasing, too.

Next seven days: vs. CHI (Nov. 2), @ NSH (Nov. 4), @ MIN (Nov. 5), vs. VAN (Nov. 7)

14. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 55.00%

Nov. 3 vs. the Oilers. Few rivalries in professional sports are as consistently nasty as the Battle of Alberta. The Flames had to watch their cross-province antagonists get to within a game of a Stanley Cup this past spring. Will they continue their pursuit of derailing another Edmonton playoff run by taking another W from them, as they did back on Oct. 13?

Next seven days: vs. NJ (Nov. 1), vs. EDM (Nov. 3), @ MTL (Nov. 5), @ BOS (Nov. 7)

15. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 55.56%

Nov. 12 at the Maple Leafs. The Battle of Ontario is another excellent NHL rivalry -- the most recent flare-up occurring in February when Leafs defenseman Morgan Rielly took umbrage to Ridly Greig's enthusiastic empty-net goal. Will this next bout feature similar fireworks?

Next seven days: @ NYR (Nov. 1), vs. SEA (Nov. 2), @ BUF (Nov. 5), vs. NYI (Nov. 7)

16. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 50.00%

Nov. 20 vs. the Predators. It was quite a low-scoring affair on Oct. 15 as the Seahawks beat the Titans 7-3 ... oh wait, it was a hockey game. As it turns out, the total of 10 goals in that game has been matched twice since in Kraken games, both of which Seattle has won. Will it be another offensive onslaught in this return match against the Preds?

Next seven days: @ OTT (Nov. 2), @ BOS (Nov. 3), @ COL (Nov. 5)

17. Utah Hockey Club

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 54.55%

Nov. 2, 15, 30 against the Golden Knights. The Golden Knights set the benchmark for early success as an expansion team, getting all the way to the Stanley Cup Final. The Utah Hockey Club isn't technically an expansion team, but as the NHL's newest club, they hope to chart a similar path of early success. A win (or three) against Vegas in November would signify they're well on their way.

Next seven days: @ VGK (Nov. 2), @ WPG (Nov. 5), @ STL (Nov. 7)

18. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 61.11%

Nov. 5-12, against the Sharks, Kings, Ducks, Kraken. To the surprise of some, the Blue Jackets remain on the (early) playoff bubble in the Eastern Conference. An extended West Coast trip can help bring a team together, and grabbing some Ws doesn't hurt either.

Next seven days: vs. WPG (Nov. 1), @ WSH (Nov. 2), @ SJ (Nov. 5)

19. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 45.45%

Nov. 29 at the Stars. Enjoy watching elite puck-moving defensemen? Circle this game on your calendar, as Colorado's Cale Makar will visit Dallas' Miro Heiskanen.

Next seven days: @ NSH (Nov. 2), vs. SEA (Nov. 5), @ WPG (Nov. 7)

20. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 45.45%

Nov. 12, 16 against the Bruins. Goalie goals are a thing of beauty. Goalie fights are a thing of beauty ... in another way. Jordan Binnington has been on the verge of one for years -- and nearly got in one against the Senators this week -- while Bruins netminder Jeremy Swayman also has the fighting spirit, as one might say.

Next seven days: vs. TOR (Nov. 2), vs. TB (Nov. 5), vs. UTA (Nov. 7)

21. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 40.91%

Nov. 9 vs. the Senators. It's Linus Ullmark-Jeremy Swayman reunion night! Though Ullmark didn't play for the B's as long as Steven Stamkos did for the Lightning, he did win the Vezina Trophy for a team that set an NHL record for regular-season dominance. What will the reception be like at TD Garden?

Next seven days: @ PHI (Nov. 2), vs. SEA (Nov. 3), @ TOR (Nov. 5), vs. CGY (Nov. 7)

22. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 45.00%

Nov. 2, 5 against Red Wings, Senators. For the past few seasons, we've been waiting for one of these three rising Atlantic Division teams to take the next step and qualify for the playoffs. Is this the season? These two games for the Sabres will be a good barometer of where they stand in particular.

Next seven days: vs. NYI (Nov. 1), @ DET (Nov. 2), vs. OTT (Nov. 5), @ NYR (Nov. 7)

23. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 50.00%

Nov. 30 at the Avalanche. The Oilers and Avalanche are not exactly where many predicted they'd be in the standings. And the loss of Connor McDavid for the next two to three weeks doesn't help matters for Edmonton. But with McDavid back in time (hopefully) for this matchup, this should be a good measuring stick for both clubs.

Next seven days: @ CGY (Nov. 3), vs. NJ (Nov. 4), vs. VGK (Nov. 6)

24. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 45.00%

Nov. 9 vs. the Rangers. At some point, the Red Wings have to turn a corner back toward contention. Will this Original Six matchup be that turning point, following two losses to the Blueshirts in October?

Next seven days: vs. BUF (Nov. 2), @ CHI (Nov. 6)

25. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 50.00%

Nov. 3, 19 against the Blackhawks. There was no uncertainty about who should be the No. 1 pick in the 2023 NHL draft; and sure enough, Connor Bedard was selected by the Blackhawks. However, the Ducks' selection of Leo Carlsson at No. 2 raised some eyebrows at the time. Not anymore, as the Swede is second on his team in scoring this season. This pair of matchups will be a showcase for two of the league's brightest young stars.

Next seven days: vs. CHI (Nov. 3), vs. VAN (Nov. 5)

26. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 40.00%

Nov. 3 at the Rangers. Perhaps this Sunday matinee against their archrivals will stir something in the Isles, who haven't gotten off to the best start in the first full season with Patrick Roy behind the bench.

Next seven days: @ BUF (Nov. 1), @ NYR (Nov. 3), vs. PIT (Nov. 5), @ OTT (Nov. 7)

27. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 35.00%

Nov. 2, 11 against the Avalanche. The truth is, we could list all 15 games in November here; high preseason expectations have led to underwhelming early results, making every game count from here. But we'll pick this pair against the Avalanche, as Nathan MacKinnon & Co. have been in that upper tier of contention (to which the Preds aspire) for the past handful of seasons.

Next seven days: vs. COL (Nov. 2), vs. LA (Nov. 4), @ WSH (Nov. 6), @ FLA (Nov. 7)

28. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 40.91%

Nov. 26 vs. the UHC. At the 2022 NHL draft in Montreal, the Canadiens shocked many of their fans in attendance by selecting Juraj Slafkovsky first overall. Two picks later, the Coyotes took Logan Cooley. Much has happened since then -- including the Coyotes transforming into the Utah Hockey Club -- but this game will another showcase for two rising stars from that class.

Next seven days: @ PIT (Nov. 2), vs. CGY (Nov. 5), @ NJ (Nov. 7)

29. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 31.82%

Nov. 6 vs. the Red Wings. Two iconic franchises. One of the most aesthetically pleasing uniform matchups in pro sports. No, they're not exactly on top of the standings as they once were, but there's something special about this old-school Norris Division showdown.

Next seven days: @ LA (Nov. 2), @ ANA (Nov. 3), vs. DET (Nov. 6), @ DAL (Nov. 7)

30. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 40.91%

Nov. 7 at the Lightning. Matvei Michkov, the Flyers' first-round pick in 2023, has taken the NHL by storm, with nine points through 10 games. In this matchup, he'll be sharing the ice with two of the best Russian players in recent history, winger Nikita Kucherov and goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy.

Next seven days: vs. BOS (Nov. 2), @ CAR (Nov. 5), @ TB (Nov. 7)

31. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 37.50%

Nov. 19 vs. the Lightning. Jake Guentzel lost his first game as a non-Penguin in Pittsburgh (with the Hurricanes, after last season's trade deadline). Will his second trip back to the visitors locker room go any better -- and how will fans greet him?

Next seven days: vs. MTL (Nov. 2), @ NYI (Nov. 5), @ CAR (Nov. 7)

32. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 33.33%

Nov. 16 at the Penguins. In 2016, these two teams met in the Stanley Cup Final. This season, they're meeting in the basement of the standings -- with one of their appearances more shocking than the other's. Can the Sharks punctuate this mini East Coast trip with a win against Sidney Crosby & Co.?

Next seven days: vs. VAN (Nov. 2), vs. CBJ (Nov. 5), vs. MIN (Nov. 7)

[Sportsnet.ca / Friday Four: Not even Sidney Crosby can save these Penguins](#)

By Michael Amato- November 2, 2024

The Friday Four is a collection of thoughts and information on some intriguing player storylines from around the NHL. On deck this week:

- Penguins have too many roster deficiencies for Crosby to overcome
- Stone still one of the game's best when healthy
- Monahan easy to root for
- What Rossi's next deal could look like after Lafreniere extension

Sidney Crosby, Pittsburgh Penguins

Sidney Crosby was in vintage form Thursday night. His two goals, including a beautiful overtime winner, powered the Pittsburgh Penguins past the Anaheim Ducks 2-1. The Pens don't get a much-needed two points without Crosby's heroics, and it's becoming increasingly clear they'll need him to bear even more of the load going forward. But how much can he carry?

Even the most loyal Penguins fans couldn't have had very high expectations this season after the way things went for the team last year, but I'm not sure anyone thought things would get this bad this fast. Prior to the victory over the Ducks, the Pens lost six straight games, and their only other victories came against Montreal, Buffalo and Detroit. They've given up four goals in eight of 12 games, sit 15th in the East and are digging themselves a hole they can't get out of.

This certainly isn't what Crosby had in mind when he extended in Pittsburgh for two more years just before the start of the season. Even at 37 years of age, Crosby is still an elite player and is coming off back-to-back 90-plus point seasons. He's carried the Penguins on his back the past two years and kept them in the playoff chase right down to the wire, but it seems like any post-season aspirations for Crosby this year are going to be almost impossible to come by.

The Penguins rank last in the league when it comes to high-danger chances allowed, having conceded almost 30 more than the next closest team heading into Thursday night. Pittsburgh is giving up a lot, and Tristan Jarry is no longer able to help them. Jarry was made a healthy scratch and sent to the AHL after posting an .836 save percentage in three games. He's on the books at \$5.3 million for three years after this season, and he isn't the only bad contract Pittsburgh is dealing with.

Erik Karlsson and Kris Letang are nowhere near the players they once were and will count significantly against the cap late into their 30s. Ryan Graves and Michael Bunting are both making \$4.5 million a season and aren't having nearly enough of an impact. Bunting has just a single point and was made a healthy scratch earlier in the year. Pittsburgh has a bunch of unmovable contracts and no cap space to do anything to acquire reinforcements for Crosby.

Evgeni Malkin, on the other hand, started the year on a torrid scoring pace but even that wasn't enough to get the Pens going. Malkin is still an effective player and hasn't missed a game in more than two seasons, which should further illustrate Pittsburgh's conundrum. Even when Malkin and Crosby are at their best, it's no longer enough to overcome the rest of the Penguins' roster deficiencies.

For Crosby's part, he's still his usual efficient self and playing at a very high level. He's averaging a point per game and is still a handful for opposing defences in the offensive zone. It won't be long before Crosby passes Joe Sakic for ninth all-time in scoring, and if he plays a few more seasons, there's a realistic

chance he'll crack the top five. Crosby may very well end up on the NHL's Mount Rushmore when all is said and done, and it's a shame we aren't getting to see him play post-season hockey while he's still at the top of his game. It's not going to last forever.

Crosby has never wavered in his commitment to finish his career in Pittsburgh, but the team has never looked this bad since his rookie season. You'd think if it continues, Crosby would at least have a conversation with management next summer to get a temperature check on future plans for both parties. If he stays and, barring a drastic turn of events, Crosby will likely never compete for another Stanley Cup because it doesn't feel like there's anything close to a quick fix for this Penguins team.

On Tuesday night, Penguins fans were at least treated to a bit of nostalgia as the Minnesota Wild came to town and Marc-Andre Fleury made his final stop in Pittsburgh on his farewell tour. It put into perspective just how much time has passed for this Penguins core. As for the game itself, Crosby had three assists, but that wasn't nearly enough, and the Pens still lost 5-3. It really did feel like the end of an era — in more ways than one.

Mark Stone, Vegas Golden Knights

During the summer and heading into the pre-season, Mark Stone likely wasn't on many projection lists for Team Canada at the Four Nations Face-Off. Now he's a virtual lock.

Stone has exploded out of the gates for 19 points and is tied for the league lead in scoring. The Vegas Golden Knights forward and teammate Jack Eichel have been unstoppable this season, as Stone has found the scoresheet in every game but one and Eichel in each contest but two. Vegas came into the season much thinner at the forward position and wasn't receiving as much hype as the likes of Dallas, Edmonton and Vancouver. However, Stone is making sure no one forgets the Golden Knights are still a Western Conference powerhouse.

If Stone wasn't on everyone's radar for Team Canada heading into 2024-25, it's likely because he's been largely out of sight and out of mind over the past few regular seasons. Even though there was an impressive playoff run sandwiched in there that helped Vegas to a Cup, Stone has played just 37, 43 and 56 games, respectively, over the past three years. It feels like he's spent forever on LTIR due to injuries, causing many to complain Vegas was doing it intentionally to circumvent the salary cap.

Now, that's often the first thing that comes to some people's minds when you mention Stone, and it can overshadow just how elite of a player he is at both ends of the ice. Since the start of the 2019-20 season, Stone has notched 264 points in his past 267 games. Not to mention, he had 11 goals and more than a point per game during Vegas' run to the Cup.

Stone is also a force on the defensive end as well. He pressures the puck relentlessly and has averaged well over a takeaway per game over the past three seasons, and has been named a Selke finalist on multiple occasions in his career.

When you consider the direction Stone's career has taken, I can't help but draw comparisons to Peter Forsberg. Much like Stone, Forsberg was an ultra-competitive two-way player but had a lot more high-end skill and a career that was derailed by injuries. Forsberg was limited to just 708 games and although it was clear he was an elite talent, we unfortunately never got the full picture of his greatness.

Stone is currently sitting at 651 career games, and we can only hope he can stay healthy and continue writing his story for several more seasons. He's one of the game's unheralded superstars.

Sean Monahan, Columbus Blue Jackets

No one could blame Sean Monahan if he wasn't at his best this season.

The tragic deaths of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau are no doubt weighing heavily on the Columbus Blue Jackets forward, who played with Johnny for nine seasons in Calgary and was a close friend. One of the reasons Monahan chose Columbus in free agency was the chance to be reunited with Gaudreau.

That alone would make it understandable if Monahan got off to a slow start, but the Blue Jackets forwards have also been depleted by injuries. Boone Jenner, Dmitri Voronkov and Kent Johnson have all been sidelined, leaving the Jackets very thin up front and placing more pressure on Monahan to produce. Instead of struggling, though, Monahan is thriving with five goals and nine points in his first nine games.

As unlikely as this start has been for Monahan, many perhaps doubted he would ever be a productive NHL player again well before this season. A myriad of serious injuries and surgeries in recent years really put Monahan's future playing career in question, culminating in the Flames essentially giving him to the Montreal Canadiens along with a first-round pick just to get his cap hit off their books. However, the 30-year-old has done an incredible job rebuilding his career, notching 26 goals and nearly 60 points last season while splitting time with Montreal and Winnipeg. Monahan parlayed that into a lucrative deal in Columbus, where the franchise and city dealt with an unthinkable tragedy before he even stepped on the ice.

Like Monahan, the Blue Jackets have turned heads this season with their inspired play. Columbus owns convincing victories over Toronto, Edmonton and Colorado and has scored six goals four times. Even if you aren't a Blue Jackets fan, most are pulling for Columbus and Monahan in some capacity this season. He's an easy player to root for.

Marco Rossi, Minnesota Wild

While Igor Shesterkin's pending contract extension has received all the attention on Broadway, the New York Rangers completed another tidy bit of business this week in locking up Alexis Lafreniere. The 23-year-old signed a lucrative extension for seven years with an AAV of \$7.45 million, and it's a deal that looks like it's going to age very well.

Lafreniere took a few seasons to really make an impact, finally scoring 28 goals last season and following that up with 14 points in 16 playoff games. It feels like Lafreniere is just scratching the surface of his abilities, and he should be a steal at that price for years to come while playing next to Artemi Panarin.

Another player from Lafreniere's draft class who went in the top 10 has also taken some time to prove his value. Marco Rossi, who will need a new deal at the end of the season, looks cemented as the Wild's top centre and has notched eight points in nine games. So, what will Rossi's deal look like compared to Lafreniere's?

For starters, Rossi hasn't had anywhere near the success Lafreniere has had. He did score 21 goals last season but topped out at just 40 points. That said, Rossi is a centre, whereas Lafreniere plays the wing, and centres are much more valuable, especially to Minnesota. The Wild have been looking for a first-line pivot to pair with Kirill Kaprizov for some time, and it appears Rossi is ready to fill that role on a permanent basis.

You'd also have to think Minnesota would like to lock him up sooner rather than later and probably for as much term as possible. They could always propose a bridge deal to Rossi, but that runs the risk of watching him play a couple more years with Kaprizov and racking up the points. Offensive production always equals more dollars on a contract, and the Wild could end up paying a much larger AAV if Rossi pops off for a couple of big scoring seasons on a bridge.

That said, the Wild will be operating with significantly more cap space next season. Currently, they have \$14.7 million of dead cap thanks to the buyouts of Ryan Suter and Zach Parise. In 2025-26, that number drops down to \$1.6 million. Minnesota could obviously use a chunk of that to extend Rossi, but they also may want to make a bigger splash in free agency next summer. It's something they've been unable to do in recent years because of the Suter and Parise buyouts.

If I were in Bill Guerin's shoes, I'd try to extend Rossi for as long as possible with a number similar to Lafreniere's. No. 1 centres are hard to find, and Rossi's value will only increase as he continues to build chemistry with Kaprizov.

[Sportsnet.ca / 32 Thoughts: Trade talk beginning to pick up across the league](https://www.sportsnet.ca/32-Thoughts-Trade-talk-beginning-to-pick-up-across-the-league)

By Elliotte Friedman- November 2, 2024

Everyone enshrined into the Hockey Hall of Fame receives 50 tickets to distribute among family and friends.

Two of Shea Weber's seats will be occupied by his billets from WHL Kelowna. Barry and Ingrid (or "Ingy") Davidson are in an epic 22-day run — witnessing the hulking defender's induction after celebrating three 1,000th games: Luke Schenn, Tyler Myers and Mikael Backlund.

Twenty-five years ago, after three children moved out to begin their own life journeys, the Davidsons were spending a weekend on Okanagan Lake with Herman Elfring, WHL Lethbridge's long-time president. They were asked if they'd be interested in hosting players. Both big hockey fans, they thought about it for a day, and said yes.

That night, they got a call from Bruce Hamilton, the Rockets' owner since they moved to Kelowna in 1995. Their first full-time billet was Carsen Germyn, a terrific junior who played four NHL games in Calgary. Germyn was traded to Red Deer for the Rebels' 2001-02 playoff run. Then came Nick Marach, a 20-year-old who finished his WHL career in Kelowna before attending the University of British Columbia.

Next season, Weber moved in.

"Shea's mom (Tracy) came in for weekend games," Ingrid Davidson said. "She came to check out our house. After the month of September, she knew he was OK."

It began a lasting and powerful friendship. Tracy Weber, idolized by her son, died of cancer in August 2011. Two years later, at Weber's wedding, Ingrid had the honour of the first dance with him.

Her job at the Interior Lumberman's Benefit Group allowed time to come home and make pre-game meals. "Nobody complained about her cooking ... impossible to do that, she's great," Barry said, laughing.

"Shea ate one particular thing the first half-year — spaghetti sauce with noodles," she said. "But he said he started bringing it up during games."

So Weber became a tuna casserole guy.

He graduated to the NHL in 2005, with Schenn moving in. He loved Ingrid's desserts, and the cookie jar was always full. As you'd expect, he was the most outgoing, while Weber was the quietest. But they didn't overlap, much to Schenn's chagrin.

"He was disappointed that Shea was gone," Barry said. "He wanted to learn from him."

At the end of the 2005-06 season, 16-year-old Myers arrived for the final nine games. The Davidsons hosted him with Schenn before he found a more permanent arrangement. Teammates have told stories about Myers' father, Paul, and how he demanded his son keep excellent grades.

"Tyler was the smartest, and he was taking advanced courses," Barry said. "At that time, Paul didn't know that Tyler would make it, and he cared a lot about what happened to him. If his grades fell below 90, he'd say, 'You go take his cellphone away.' But it was always done with a good purpose."

In 2009, Backlund arrived mid-season, after winning a silver medal at the world juniors.

“He was unique, how much he could eat, the biggest appetite,” Barry said, laughing. “They train differently in Sweden. His thighs were as big as his waist. He ate twice as much as Shea.”

They served him a dish he liked from Sweden: macaroni and hot dogs. He also grew to love red and white tortellini.

The boys didn’t just eat, they won. A lot. During that time, the Rockets — and the Davidsons — celebrated three WHL championships and the crowning achievement of it all, the 2004 Memorial Cup.

The room the players lived in became the “Rocket Room.” All five names listed were in raised letters on the door, their jerseys are hung, clippings remain. But the friendships eclipse the memories.

“All of our boys were respectful of our home,” Ingrid said. “It was an honour and a treat to have them.”

“We treated them like sons, had certain expectations of them,” Barry added. “They never disappointed us. They came home from games, generally we didn’t talk hockey in the house. We didn’t coach. They were all serious about moving their careers ahead. Driven.”

They went to Weber’s wedding, Schenn’s wedding and even Backlund’s in Sweden. They are invited to be part of Backlund’s 1,000th game celebration. (Their daughter, Chelsea, lives in Calgary with her family, and has remained friendly with Backlund. She moved back home for a time while he was billeting.)

The 2009 championship was the end for their billet days, however. (Backlund, Schenn, Tyson Barrie and Jamie Benn remain in the NHL from that team.) They were retiring, bought a place in Arizona and were starting to travel more.

When I asked Ingrid how old she is, Barry responded, “85.” She started laughing, as Barry gave the correct answer, “73.” (He’s 74.) When I said my wife would kill me if I did that, she said, “We’ve been married 53 years. I’m used to it.”

But when Weber called to invite them to his induction, they were speechless.

“I couldn’t believe it,” Ingrid said.

She said that, of all the teenagers they billeted, Weber changed the most — even as he remains careful with what he says.

“I remember asking him one time (while he was in Nashville), ‘Would you ever think of coming back to Canada (to play)?’ He said, ‘Oh my God, no.’ He’s become much more confident in that particular way.”

Maybe he changed in some ways, but he never forgot how to show gratitude.

32 THOUGHTS

1. Talk has picked up, and will continue to do so. Some of the teams who preached patience are starting to run out of it. And you can see (and feel) the pressure ramping up on the coaches, too.
2. One of the more active early-season general managers is Buffalo’s Kevyn Adams, but he’s made it clear he does not wish to subtract. He’s trying to add.
3. You will not be surprised to hear Colorado is looking for forwards. Need to get through a miserable stretch where five of their top nine are out.
4. As mentioned Saturday, Montreal is looking for edge up front, but not at the expense of any young players/prospects it wishes to insert over the next two seasons.
5. Another update from last week: Utah’s Michael Carcone hasn’t played since Oct. 16, and that one’s growing some urgency to it.

6. There are a few teams looking for defencemen, but two who were available were just traded for each other — Timothy Liljegren and Matt Benning. Liljegren gets the fresh start he needed in San Jose. Benning was back in the Sharks lineup for their two wins after being scratched for four straight. Neither San Jose nor Toronto was afraid of the second season on each contract. Several teams looking for defence didn't want term.

7. Whenever Winnipeg thinks it has a chance, it adds. Watching the Jets' blazing 9-1 start, the one thing that stands out is the size of their defence. You have to be mobile, you have to be skilled, but you have to be big. The recent Stanley Cup champions had that in common: a long, agile, aggressive defence that always seemed to have a body, a stick, an arm or a leg in your way. A thicket for opposition to navigate. NHL heights and weights can be deceiving, but the Jets' sizes — minus Dylan Samberg, Logan Stanley and Haydn Fleury — are the smallest since the 2018 Washington Capitals. That doesn't mean you can't win, but it certainly flies in the face of what's recently worked.

8. The Connor McDavid timeline is as good as it gets for Edmonton, similar to Aleksander Barkov's in Florida. Thankfully, neither injury was as bad as it looked. The Panthers went 5-2-1 without their captain — including wins over Boston, the Rangers and Vegas — reminding everyone the path to victory in the Atlantic still goes through the Elbo Room.

9. The eye-test says that even with McDavid, the Oilers look slower than normal. It's not just skating speed, but puck-moving. According to NHL Edge data, McDavid is 92nd percentile in skating speed, which actually seems low. (Part of me thinks he automatically should be adjusted to 99th, on principle. Or at least 97.) Even with him, Edmonton is below league average as a team. As the Oilers attempt to stabilize themselves, how will they quicken their pace without their fastest player?

11. The average NHL save percentage hasn't been below .900 since 1995-96 (.898), but we were at .897 heading into Tuesday's games. My theory is that players hiring skills coaches at younger ages have turned them into spectacular marksmen. Combine that with the thinning of goaltender equipment, and, for the first time in a long time, the skaters have surpassed the stoppers. Teammate Justin Bourne has a good article with his ideas here.

12. The NCAA's vote to open eligibility for CHL players will be held Nov. 7. Seismic changes are afoot.

That's it for this week. More thoughts to come.

[Sportsnet.ca / Who is trending up and down to make Team Canada for 4 Nations Face-Off?](#)

By Josh Beneteau- November 3, 2024

We are one month into the NHL season and one month away from the deadline for teams to submit rosters for the 4 Nations Face-Off. So let's take a look at who is in contention to make Team Canada.

Canada has won the last three best-on-best tournaments and expectations are always high for these events. But a lot has changed since the 2016 World Cup of Hockey and the United States, Sweden and Finland are all opponents that should not be taken lightly.

So far this season 291 Canadian skaters and 18 goalies have appeared in the NHL, giving Canada the largest pool of players to draw from for the tournament. Sidney Crosby, Nathan MacKinnon, Cale Makar, Brad Marchand, Connor McDavid and Brayden Point were named to the roster in June but plenty of players are still battling for the final spots.

We won't truly know which direction Canada will decide to go until the roster is selected on Dec. 2, but we can certainly speculate on who has played their way into contention through the first four weeks of the season (and who has fallen off the pace with a slow start).

Statistics courtesy: NHL.com and Natural Stat Trick.

Forwards

Trending Up

Mitch Marner, Toronto Maple Leafs

A speedy, playmaking winger, Marner is off to a hot start in his contract year with 11 points in 10 games. Marner can also be trusted away from the puck as he leads the NHL with 13 takeaways and averages 2:33 of shorthanded ice time per game.

Mark Stone, Vegas Golden Knights

Stone is tied for second in league scoring with 19 points in 11 games early in the season. Like Marner, the Golden Knights captain can contribute to both special teams and be trusted to slot in on any line.

Anthony Cirelli, Tampa Bay Lightning

Cirelli might have an edge in the battle for the fourth-line centre role as he has been a reliable player under Team Canada head coach Jon Cooper since cracking the NHL full-time in 2018. While not the most physical, Cirelli is fast and can win faceoffs. Offensively, he is on pace to smash his previous best season with 12 points (10 assists) in 11 games so far this year.

Mark Scheifele, Winnipeg Jets

Scheifele has been a reliable scorer in the league for a while now but his hot start this year — 14 points in 11 games — has him on pace to crack the 100-point mark for the first time in his career. On the first-place Jets Scheifele is the No. 1 centre, but on Team Canada Scheifele would be an option to move to the wing for some middle-six scoring.

Jets' Scheifele wires home wild buzzer-beater off the draw

Sam Reinhart and Sam Bennett, Florida Panthers

Two forwards from the defending Stanley Cup champions are pushing for consideration for Team Canada.

Sam Reinhart is coming off a career year (57 goals, 94 points) and has a blazing-hot nine goals and 19 points in 12 games so far this season. He leads all Canadian skaters in goals and is tied with Stone and Makar for the most points. Reinhart is a great candidate for a top-six role on the national team and also has experience playing on both special teams.

Sam Bennett is right behind his teammate Reinhart with eight goals already, and 13 total points. He can play centre or wing and his physicality — 30 hits in 12 games — separates him from many of the other players on this list.

Connor Bedard, Chicago Blackhawks

Bedard is still only 19 but his skill is undeniable. His nine points in 10 games once again lead the rebuilding Blackhawks in scoring, but it's exciting to think about what the reigning rookie of the year will do when paired with some of Team Canada's brightest stars, especially on the power play.

Blackhawks' Bedard buries goal from one knee vs. Predators

Tom Wilson, Washington Capitals

Wilson is one of the tougher players in the NHL but with five goals already this season — and a 68 per cent expected goals rate — he's been flashing his offensive talents early. At six-foot-four and 220 pounds, Wilson would be an option as a net-front player on the power play and would be an intimidating presence against any of Canada's opponents.

Travis Konecny, Philadelphia Flyers

Konecny is coming off back-to-back 30-goal campaigns and is off to a good start this season with five goals and 10 points in 11 games. A bit undersized at five-foot-10, Konecny is one of a few players on this list in contention for a secondary-scoring role off the wing.

Trending Down

Zach Hyman, Edmonton Oilers

Hyman is coming off a 50-goal campaign and his chemistry with McDavid would have made him almost a lock for Team Canada before the season started. But Hyman's offence has all but dried up through the first month. He was held without a point for the first seven games and finally scored his first goal in game No. 11. Hyman has still been getting his chances with a 60 per cent expected goals rate, but he'll need to start converting on those chances to lock up his spot on this roster.

Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault, Nashville Predators

The Predators have been one of the more disappointing teams early in the season and a big reason for that is the lack of scoring from their two big free-agent signings.

Stamkos and Marchessault both were coming off 40-goal campaigns before signing with Nashville. But so far through 10 games this year, Stamkos has one goal and two assists while Marchessault has just two goals and six points. Both players are in their mid-30s now and their slow starts should give pause to Team Canada management.

Stamkos receives video tribute, massive standing ovation in Tampa return

Mathew Barzal, New York Islanders

It's easy to get excited about the idea of the speedy Barzal playing with McDavid or MacKinnon but not much has gone right for the Islanders star early in the season.

Barzal is generating a 60 per cent expected goals rate, but he has just two goals and five points (with none coming at five-on-five) in 10 games. Now he is recovering from an upper-body injury that will keep him out four-to-six weeks, and may not have time to show he deserves a spot on Team Canada.

Wyatt Johnston, Dallas Stars

Johnston is only 21 and already has an impressive resume, including 32 goals last season. So far this year, however, he has just one goal and five points in 10 games. Look for Johnston to become a fixture on future Team Canadas, but there are more productive players ahead of him on the depth chart this time around.

Defencemen

Trending Up

Devon Toews, Colorado Avalanche

Cale Makar is easily Canada's most important defenceman but his partner in Colorado is an impact player, too. Toews and Makar have a 58.78 per cent expected goals rate in seven games, ranking 20th league-wide. Add in the fact that Toews shoots left-handed and plays both special teams, and he checks a lot of boxes for Team Canada.

Evan Bouchard, Edmonton Oilers

Bouchard is an all-offence blueliner coming off a massive 80-point breakout campaign, thanks in part to a role on last year's No. 1 power play. This year, the Oilers power play has gotten off to a slow start but Bouchard has seven points in 11 games while posting an impressive 59.07 expected goals rate.

Leafs' Rielly rips one timer past Swayman in 800th game

Morgan Rielly, Toronto Maple Leafs

Rielly doesn't bring a lot of size or physicality to the table but his skating and passing help him escape danger in his own zone. This season Rielly has six points in 11 games with a 54.19 expected goals rate, making him a candidate to provide some secondary offence from the left side.

Dougie Hamilton, New Jersey Devils

Hamilton was limited to just 20 games last season due to a torn pectoral but he has returned to form early this year. The six-foot-six veteran has seven points in 14 games but what separates him from others competing for spots is that he contributes to both special teams.

Owen Power, Buffalo Sabres

The 2021 first-overall pick is on track to have a breakout season with nine points in 11 games so far, putting him on pace to double his previous career high (35, set two seasons ago). The six-foot-six left-shot defender doesn't kill penalties but he makes a positive impact on the ice with a 54.19 expected goals rate. Power will be a big part of Team Canada rosters for years to come, regardless of whether or not he makes this team.

Alex Pietrangelo, Vegas Golden Knights

Pietrangelo, who will be 35 when the tournament begins, trails only Makar and Josh Morrissey in scoring among Canadian defencemen with 12 points. With two Stanley Cups and multiple tournament wins with

Team Canada, he would be one of the most experienced players on Team Canada's blue line if named to the team.

Trending Down

Noah Dobson, New York Islanders

Dobson had a big breakout last season with 70 points, including 60 assists. With no goals and six assists in 11 games so far this season Dobson is slightly off last year's pace but the six-foot-four right-shot defender continues to have a positive impact with a 54.19 expected goals rate on one of the lower-scoring teams in the league.

Josh Morrissey, Winnipeg Jets

Morrissey has had a productive start to the season as the No. 1 defenceman on the NHL's top team. He has 11 assists and 13 points in 11 games this season, ranking third among all Canadian defencemen. However, compared to his peers, Morrissey's play at five-on-five (a 42 per cent expected goals) is significantly lower and concerning as the stakes rise in a best-on-best tournament.

Shea Theodore, Vegas Golden Knights

Theodore is also off to a fast start with nine points in 10 games but five of those points have come on the power play. At five-on-five, Theodore has not been as effective at keeping puck possession with a 41.36 expected goals percentage that will need to improve if he wants to push for this team.

MacKenzie Weegar, Calgary Flames

Weegar is coming off a 20-goal season for the rebuilding Flames. He has three goals and five points already this season but his expected goals rate of 41 per cent at five-on-five is low even as the Flames navigate a rebuild.

Goaltenders

Trending Up

Jordan Binnington, St. Louis Blues

Binnington is the only Canadian starting goaltender who has a goals-against average below three, sitting at 2.98 through eight games. The 2019 Stanley Cup champion has an .896 save percentage which is low but still among the leaders for Canadian keepers early this season.

Sam Montebault, Montreal Canadiens

Montebault has been slowly developing in Montreal but has seized the full-time starter role this season. His .914 save percentage through six games was the best for a Canadian primary starter but allowing five goals on 10 shots to the Kraken in start No. 7 lowered it down to .891.

Montembeault denies Matthews in dying seconds to earn shutout victory

Trending Down

Stuart Skinner, Edmonton Oilers

After backstopping the Oilers to the Stanley Cup Final, Skinner entered the season in pole position to start for Canada. He may still get the job, but for now, his .872 save percentage has him below Montebault and Binnington on the depth chart.

Adin Hill, Vegas Golden Knights

Like Skinner, Hill is a goalie with recent experience in the Stanley Cup Final but his start to this season has been a disaster. Hill started the season allowing 19 goals in five games but followed that up with a shutout win over the Flames in start No. 6. That shutout pushed his save percentage up from .864 to .878.

Roster Projection

Brayden Point-Connor McDavid-Mitch Marner

Sam Reinhart-Nathan MacKinnon-Mark Stone

Brad Marchand-Sidney Crosby-Connor Bedard

Sam Bennett-Anthony Cirelli-Mark Scheifele

Zach Hyman

Devon Toews-Cale Makar

Morgan Rielly-Evan Bouchard

Owen Power-Alex Pietrangelo

Drew Doughty*

Jordan Binnington

Sam Montembeault

Stuart Skinner

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