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1ST Ohio Battery / Weekly Roundup: Blue Jackets Ties In The Stanley Cup Final, IIHF Play, Coaching Promotion, And Boone Jenner's Future

By Will Chase – June 1, 2026

The calendar has flipped to June, but plenty of things are happening around the NHL and the sport of hockey.

We're down to the final two in the NHL as the Stanley Cup Final gets underway on Tuesday. The IIHF World Championship concluded on Sunday. And a promotion is on the way.

Here's this week's news and notes from around the Blue Jackets and the hockey world.

It's Torts Versus Waddell's Former Team In The Stanley Cup Final

The Vegas Golden Knights are back in the Final for the third time in the franchise's first nine years as they try to win their second Cup in three years. They'll take on the Carolina Hurricanes, a constant threat this time of year, as they have finally broken through previous conference final woes.

It's an intriguing matchup because these Golden Knights aren't the Knights we saw for much of 2025-26.

For starters, former Blue Jackets head coach John Tortorella is steering the ship, as he left TV at ESPN for perhaps his last chance to win his second Stanley Cup. The Knights dismissed Bruce Cassidy, who guided the Knights to their first title in 2022-23, with eight games remaining in the regular season. Since then, Vegas has found its identity, going 18-4-1 under Torts, including a 7-0-1 run to end the season and win the division.

It's also been a reunion for Torts and William Karlsson (Blue Jackets, 2014-17).

The Hurricanes are trying to win the franchise's second Stanley Cup, 20 years after Rod Brind'Amour captained his club to the top over the Oilers in 2006. Now he's trying to tie it altogether as their head coach.

Since taking over as Carolina's coach in 2018-19, the Hurricanes have never missed the playoffs. They've been to the conference final four times, finally getting over the hump this year. In fact, the Hurricanes ended a dubious 1-17 mark in the conference final, dating back to 2008-09.

They were swept on three occasions, losing last year in five games to the eventual repeat champion Panthers, before finally dispatching the Canadiens in five this year. Though the Canadiens did win Game 1, 6-2, to make you wonder how this might go.

Another crazy stat: Brind'Amour has played or coached in 98 of the Canes' 100 playoff victories. That's 39 as a player and 59 as a head coach.

As it always ties back to the Blue Jackets, we'll see whether it's Torts and the Knights getting it done or Don Waddell's former team, the Hurricanes, where he was general manager from 2018-24. Carolina also has Eric Robinson (2017-24).

Another tradition continues, as for the 46th consecutive year, a former teammate of Jaromir Jagr will play in the final. Current Golden Knight and former Flames teammate Rasmus Anderson helped continue the streak.

Blue Jackets Play Overseas

Jet Greaves played a solid brand of hockey for Team Canada in the 2026 IIHF World Championship, which took place in Zurich and Fribourg, Switzerland. Canada was 8-0, including a 4-0 win over fellow Blue Jackets teammates Mathieu Olivier and Team USA before falling 4-2 to Finland. In the third-place game, Canada tied Norway with two goals inside the final minute of the third period (58:44 and 59:52) before falling in overtime 3-2. Norway claimed bronze and became the 13th different country to medal at the men's worlds. Denton Mateychuk was another Jacket to play for Team Canada.

Trent Vogelhuber To Join Rick Bowness' Bench

The Cleveland Monsters' playoff run came to an end on May 24, losing in five games to the Toronto Marlies in the North Division Finals. With Cleveland's season over, it paves the way for a major promotion as head coach Trent Vogelhuber is expected to be announced as a Blue Jackets assistant coach, joining Rick Bowness' staff.

With Bowness on a one-year contract, perhaps this allows for an on-the-job learning opportunity for Vogelhuber as a coach in waiting for Columbus' future.

A 37-year-old Dublin, Ohio native, Vogelhuber was an alternate captain for the then-Lake Erie Monsters in 2015-16, winning the Calder Cup under now Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar. Vogelhuber joined the Monsters' coaching staff in 2018-19, where he has been the head coach since 2022-23.

Culture Change?

Bowness preached it. Now, time will tell how the organization goes about changing the culture. We wrote about the pending UFA Boone Jenner's situation as he and the Jackets could be nearing an end.

Jenner has served as the longest tenured Blue Jacket since 2013-14, and the second-longest captain since 2021. Having played a franchise-leading 808 regular-season games in Columbus, we'll know soon if he'll be increasing that career games played mark in another city.

From Columbus' perspective, trying to solidify themselves as a playoff contender as well as "changing the culture," the writing might be on the wall for Jenner.

Vanek To IIHF Hall of Fame

And finally, former Blue Jacket Thomas Vanek is headed to the IIHF Hall of Fame.

The 14-year NHLer played one season with Columbus in 2017-18, scoring 15 points (seven goals, eight assists) in 19 games.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Stanley Cup contender checklist: Columbus needs Fantilli to take the leap

By Dom Luszczyszyn and Aaron Portzline – June 1, 2026

So close, yet still so far away. On March 24, the Columbus Blue Jackets sat at 38-22-11, seven points up on the Philadelphia Flyers, with a 90 percent chance to make the playoffs. The Blue Jackets looked like they had finally arrived ... until they collapsed, going 2-8-1 the rest of the way and allowing the Flyers to pass them in the standings.

And that was just to make the playoffs. Contending? That's a whole other story.

As is the case for a lot of teams on the outside looking in, the Blue Jackets have a lot of pieces in place — they just don't have the ones needed in the most important places.

Here's where the Blue Jackets stand going into the 2026-27 season. All projected values are age-adjusted based on each player's profile of comparable peers. Here's a primer on the Stanley Cup Checklist.

What the Blue Jackets have

The biggest reason to remain optimistic about Columbus' future is the massive glow-up from Zach Werenski in 2024-25.

The likely 2025-26 Norris winner went from being a flawed No. 1 defender without help to a dominantly dynamic driver who didn't need it. Werenski became a one-man wrecking crew in the same sphere of influence as the league's upper-echelon defensemen and enters the upcoming season with the second-highest Net Rating in the league among defensemen. That's a heckuva starting point for Columbus.

Between the pipes, the hope is Jet Greaves can deliver a similar level of high-end upside. This season, Greaves finished seventh in GSAX and over his 75 games played the last three seasons, he has the highest GSAX/82 of any goalie to play 20 games or more. Greaves looks like a goalie with legitimate star upside and is just entering his prime; he starts the year with a top-10 projected Net Rating among goalies.

Within the support and depth core, every box is checked off with some spots more adamant than others. The blue line after Werenski isn't spectacular relative to a contender, but it is passable after the top four showed some growth last season. Ivan Provorov and Damon Severson have played up to their pricey contracts while Denton Mateychuk has the potential to be a strong No. 2 behind Werenski. Some of his top comps — Kris Letang, Roman Josi, Josh Morrissey are all in the top 10 — are downright tantalizing.

Up front, Columbus' depth is enviable with a strong fleet of needle-movers in the top nine. The problem? The major holes above them.

What the Blue Jackets need

There is no way around it: The Blue Jackets are missing the kind of forwards almost every Cup-winning team has possessed.

It's not just Columbus missing the uber-elite franchise type — it's also the lack of a high-end star alongside that piece and the elite two-way presence that makes life easier for them. Almost every Cup-winner over the last decade has a Big Three, like Florida's Aleksander Barkov, Matthew Tkachuk and Sam Reinhart. The Blue Jackets have a Big Zero and that's a big problem.

What that does is push players up the lineup to the point they're overwhelmed against better-equipped teams. Columbus has the depth to fill out the lower-level cores with players like Conor Garland, Mathieu Olivier and Cole Sillinger. And that especially holds true if they re-sign Mason Marchment or if Kent Johnson can return to his 2024-25 form.

But as players climb up the ladder, the situation becomes a bit more untenable, where Dmitri Voronkov and Sean Monahan look great as depth but don't exactly fit the bill as an appropriate second layer. That also pushes Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko up to the elite core and while that duo has shown flashes of dominance, they don't exactly compare favorably to other top duos in the East.

One name likely to get more time in Columbus next season is Luca Del Bel Belluz, who has played at just under a point-per-game for the past two seasons with AHL Cleveland. Is Del Bel Belluz a top-six player? Not right away, and maybe not ever. But he hasn't ever looked out of place in the NHL, and it's time to find out if he's a middle-six player (with the right mates) or a bottom-six guy. If his skating doesn't get markedly better, it's likely the former.

In a perfect world, Cayden Lindstrom — the No. 4 overall pick in 2024 — would already have his toes wet in the NHL and be ready to make an impact. But that timeline has been dramatically altered by the back surgery that pretty much wiped out the young center's 2024-25 season. He had a surprisingly unproductive freshman year at Michigan State (3-7-10 in 31 games), but the fact that his back made it all the way through the season was seen as good news. Obviously, he needs to have a huge sophomore season to restore confidence in the club that passed on Ivan Demidov to select Lindstrom.

The Blue Jackets have a lot of boxes checked, but lacking the most important ones leaves the team in a tricky predicament — and farther off from contending than the depth of their roster may indicate. Even if the Blue Jackets did make the playoffs this season, it's more than likely the top of their lineup would've been exposed.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Jet Greaves Due a Big Extension Following Stellar 2025-26 Season

By Wesley M. – May 31, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets have found their goaltender of the future, seemingly in the form of a young, budding star, Jet Greaves. Following a season where Greaves was dominant and owned the crease in almost every big game, the Blue Jackets are expected to make the restricted free agent a huge focal point of the future of the roster.

Greaves was not only a massive factor in net for Columbus all season, but also just finished up a fantastic showing at the IIHF World Championship, where he appeared in eight games for Team Canada, and had a save percentage (SV%) of .919 and a goals-against average of 1.88. Absolutely dominating numbers for Greaves.

Greaves has proven his worth now on the world stage, as well as performing extremely well in consecutive seasons for the Blue Jackets. This past season with Columbus, he had a 2.60 GAA and .908 SV%, which were outstanding considering where the team ranked in opposing offensive chances, which was well towards the top in almost all categories.

He also ranked ninth in the league in goals saved above expected at 16.5 goals. A stat that again shows just how often his team left him out to dry, and he bailed them out time and time again. Greaves should be due for a number that would put him towards the top yearly average for goaltenders, and it could make a lot of sense for the Blue Jackets to add some term to it, to even out the salary cap hit it would create.

However, with the Blue Jackets currently entering the summer free agency period with the fifth-most salary cap space available, it is their job to take care of their own.

Terms of the Contract

If Greaves wanted to be greedy, he likely could. The Blue Jackets would be hard-pressed to try and find a goalie that is better than him on the open market, and beyond that, it would make things rather difficult for the front office to have so many moving pieces on a team that is spending money to win now.

As a 25-year-old entering the 2026-27 season, he is going to be widely considered in the prime of a professional athlete's career, which means he should only be getting better. To crack the top five in average annual value for a goaltender contract, he would need to be making \$8.5 million, on par with Thatcher Demko and Connor Hellebuyck, ranking fifth in AAV.

I think a deal close to that would be on par for Greaves to stick around in Columbus. Something along the lines of seven years, \$8.75 million AAV, for a total of \$61.25 million would be something appetizing to both sides.

He has earned the respect of the world and made himself a known commodity across NHL circles, and in turn, Columbus needs to pay for him to stay; otherwise, he will likely make a large amount of money elsewhere.

It would not surprise me if Greaves asked for more money or had suitors in the offer sheet side of things, allowing the Blue Jackets to match a bigger offer. Whatever the number is, they should be more than okay matching it, and making him a Blue Jacket for a long time.

The open market will be a little quieter this offseason, but if Greaves were to leave, he could be a big splash free agent somewhere outside Columbus. Free agency opens at 12 P.M. ET on July 1. It should be fun, and hopefully, money will be spent in Columbus.

The Hockey Writers / 2026-27 Blue Jackets Roster Projection 2.0: The Charlie Coyle Effect

Mark S. – May 29, 2026

We have reached the start of NHL Combine week. With that, the NHL Draft is less than a month away. Teams are in the midst of actively putting their plans together for how they hope to handle the offseason.

For the Columbus Blue Jackets, they are actively getting ready for what is sure to be an interesting offseason. They still have a lot of business they need to take care of in the form of contracts for their own players as well as making decisions on guys they want to bring in.

Welcome to our 2026-27 Blue Jackets Roster Projection 2.0. Around once a month throughout the offseason leading into the start of the regular season, we will project what the roster may look like. In case you missed our first projection, you can read that here.

In Part 1, we discussed at length the possibility of all four pending UFA's leaving the Blue Jackets. Today, three UFA's remain as the team was able to re-sign one of their most important players.

Charlie Coyle signed a new six-year deal to stay with the Blue Jackets. That's where we will focus most of Part 2 on as the defense and goaltending remain status quo as of this writing.

The importance of re-signing Coyle cannot be understated given the current roster construction.

Center Depth a Strength

Most successful teams have center depth on all lines to lean on. That was one of the strengths of the Blue Jackets in 2025-26 that helped them achieve over 90 points in the standings.

Although it wasn't enough to make the playoffs, it was good enough to be in the race. Coyle was a massive part of that. His line was the one that was trusted by head coach Rick Bowness in every important critical situation.

Not only did Coyle and his linemates deliver, they were one of the best 5-on-5 lines in the NHL for a period of time. They were making an impact at both ends of the ice.

That's why the Blue Jackets made it a top priority to re-sign Coyle. They had to. They knew it was going to cost them a premium given he would have been free to sign anywhere.

Six years is a lot for a 34-year old player. While that will be one of the main talking points, the Blue Jackets will cross that bridge when it gets here. Today, they couldn't afford to lose Coyle. It would have been a massive blow had he walked in free agency. Absent a massive trade, that would have been a hole no pending UFA would be able to fill.

Having Coyle in the fold now ensures depth down the middle on all four lines. He's also the only right-handed center on the team. He does so many things for this team it would have been hard to imagine them being a serious playoff contender in 2026-27 without him.

Potential Forward Lines

In Part 1, we identified 10 players who are under contract for the 2026-27 season or who were prominent RFA's in which a deal will get done at some point. Those players were:

Sean Monahan, Conor Garland, Dmitri Voronkov, Kirill Marchenko, Mathieu Olivier, Miles Wood, Cole Sillinger, Kent Johnson, Isac Lundestrom, Adam Fantilli.

Now add Coyle to the list and you see his importance immediately. Here's a look at what the lines could look like based on the above players.

Kent Johnson – Adam Fantilli – Kirill Marchenko

Dmitri Voronkov – Sean Monahan – Conor Garland

Cole Sillinger – Charlie Coyle – Mathieu Olivier

Miles Wood – Isac Lundestrom – ??

There is actually a lot to consider and several key questions we could be asking. We will try to hit some of those here to give you a perspective on the kinds of questions the team must answer.

Let's start on the top line. Fantilli is already the clear top center on the team. He's also going to get paid as such. Pay attention to the Connor Bedard and Leo Carlsson situations. That could be a guide to what Fantilli's next contract may look like. Expect it to be eight digits in length.

Next, who should Fantilli play with? He and Marchenko played a lot together and would seem to be destined to start on the top line together. The Blue Jackets outscored their opposition 38-28 when the two were on the ice together at 5-on-5 (per Nat Stat Trick.) But then who do they put with them? Does Johnson have a big rebound season? What about Voronkov as he has played on the top line before?

This now becomes one of the biggest questions of this offseason for the Blue Jackets. Is the answer to the other member of their top line on the roster or does Waddell go out and make a trade for help there? Given how Johnson and Voronkov played under Bowness, it's fair to wonder what approach the team will take.

Next, we list Coyle as the number-three center but could easily be the number-two. If Monahan is back to better health, the two can interchange. It was clear Monahan played most of the season through various ailments. If he can regain his form, that will only bode well for the Blue Jackets.

That question mark on the fourth line could be filled by someone in the organization. Waddell has said he wanted to save a roster spot for some open competition.

With the Monsters season now over, did anyone make enough of an impression to give them confidence they could contribute to the Blue Jackets next season?

That question mark could also be a placeholder for an incoming trade. The fact that this opening is there leaves room for several possibilities on how to fill it.

Coyle's Importance & Next Steps

In all, having Coyle back in the fold was a huge step to lock down the center depth while also providing a clearer picture of what the Blue Jackets need to do. With more trades league-wide being a possibility, we can't rule out a current roster player being involved in a bigger trade should one materialize.

The other question to consider here is do they really run it back? If the 11 forwards above all make the opening roster, that would be very telling about what the Blue Jackets think of what they have.

But two years in a row of being in the playoff race only to fall short is simply not good enough. The Blue Jackets need to take important steps this offseason not only to qualify for the playoffs but do damage in them.

Running it back would depend heavily on Bowness' influence and if he can get the team to buy into the way he does things. That feels risky given how last season ended. Look how far ahead teams like the Hurricanes and Golden Knights are. If the Blue Jackets want to shrink that gap, they'll need to do more than run things back. They need to add impact to their roster.

The 2026-27 season for the Blue Jackets is massive. They're in "win now" mode. Signing Coyle was a good step. It shows there is a plan he believes in. The focus now becomes the rest of the offseason business and what the Blue Jackets can do to finally get back to the playoffs.

As for what else to watch for in the coming days, Sergei Ivanov's contract expires on Sunday. Will we hear news of his signing with the Blue Jackets? Seems likely.

The Hockey Writers was able to confirm that Monsters' head coach Trent Vogelhuber will be joining Rick Bowness' staff on the bench with the Blue Jackets. Add this to the long to-do list for Waddell to find a new head coach in Cleveland.

Jet Greaves is enjoying a massive World Championships. Not only has he positioned himself well as the Blue Jackets' number-one, he could be working his way into Team Canada discussions in the future.

Then on Boone Jenner, Mason Marchment and Erik Gudbranson, it's premature to say the door is 100% shut on all three of them. Waddell is comfortable with talks going towards July 1 as demonstrated with Ivan Provorov. While we still believe the chances of them walking is better than 50/50, it's still wait and see on all three.

The NHL Combine starts on Sunday in Buffalo with all teams and agents together in one place. We will start finding out what 's real and what isn't as we are now on the fast track to the 2026 NHL Draft.

The Athletic / NHL Mock Draft 2026: Gavin McKenna to Leafs, Caleb Malhotra to Canucks in Round 1 projection

By Corey Pronman – June 1, 2026

Today is my second attempt to project the first round of the 2026 NHL Draft. This is based on my best understanding of the range I think players could go in, team preferences, needs and any other information I've heard over the past few weeks.

1. Toronto Maple Leafs: Gavin McKenna, LW, Penn State (NCAA)

McKenna is the consensus favorite for the top pick, and sources in the league still believe he is the likeliest outcome at this slot. However, it is a tight top group, and when new Toronto GM John Chayka was in Arizona, he was a huge public proponent of premium positions in the draft. You can read into that as you will, but my hunch is McKenna is still very likely the pick here.

2. San Jose Sharks: Chase Reid, RHD, Sault Ste. Marie (OHL)

If McKenna goes first, the Sharks face a massive debate between adding another high-skill forward into what's becoming a crowded young power play or anchoring their blue line. Reid's name comes up often in those conversations as arguably the draft's most talented defender who can quarterback the power play with those forwards for a decade. Most of the league thinks that's who San Jose will go with.

3. Vancouver Canucks: Caleb Malhotra, C, Brantford (OHL)

The Malhotra noise in Vancouver has become palpable to the point where I question a bit how much of it is real, as do some sources in the league, but I still think the smart money is on Malhotra at this pick, even if Ivar Stenberg or Reid would very much be in the conversation here, too.

4. Chicago Blackhawks: Ivar Stenberg, LW, Frölunda (SHL)

This is an ideal scenario for Chicago. They get a dynamic offensive player, even if he's yet another small player, to line up with Connor Bedard and add to a promising young core. If Stenberg is gone, it becomes a bit trickier, and I would guess the Blackhawks would lean toward a defenseman with this pick.

5. New York Rangers: Carson Carels, LHD, Prince George (WHL)

If the board goes like this to start, I think you will see a run on defensemen, as there is a very good top group of blueliners remaining. Carels' heavy, competitive style to go with some offense will certainly fit what the Rangers like from their defenders.

6. Calgary Flames: Keaton Verhoeff, RHD, North Dakota (NCAA)

Calgary needs everything right now in its rebuild, except probably a power-play QB after taking Zayne Parekh. Verhoeff's combination of size, feet and offense will be hard to pass up at No. 6.

7. Seattle Kraken: Daxon Rudolph, RHD, Prince Albert (WHL)

Seattle has heavily drafted forwards in recent years, leading to early speculation that they might pivot to the blue line with this pick. Talent evaluators around the league love Rudolph; his elite brain makes him a strong top-10 pick candidate, and he offers the type of steady, high-end projection they need with the potential to run a power play in a few years.

8. Winnipeg Jets: Alberts Šmits, LHD, Munchen (DEL)

Winnipeg has a track record of coveting big, rangy defensemen. Šmits offers great size and mobility along with decent offensive skills, which could make him a prime target if they look for someone to play major NHL minutes in their top four.

9. Florida Panthers: Wyatt Cullen, LW, NTDP (USHL)

It's been a while since Florida picked this high, so it's hard to get a read on the Panthers' preferences. Cullen's massive recent growth spurt has his stock rising, making him one of the true wild cards of the top 10 due to his elite skill level. Guys with late helium tend to keep rising, and he's been one of the real late risers in this draft cycle.

10. Nashville Predators: Viggo Björck, C, Djurgarden (SHL)

Where Björck lands will be fascinating because he is extremely talented and competitive, but he is also 5-foot-9. Teams will wrestle with whether he's more like Brayden Point or closer to Marco Rossi or Matt Savoie. Nashville takes the swing on his immense ceiling as the team looks to add some needed high-end skill to its depth chart.

11. St. Louis Blues: Malte Gustafsson, LHD, HV71 (SHL)

Gustafsson's name has generated a lot of buzz in this range recently after a great U18 worlds. His excellent gap control, good puck-moving skills and rugged play make him an easy projection for a top-four in the NHL. He and Adam Jiricek would project to play a lot of minutes for the Blues over the next decade.

12. New Jersey Devils: Ethan Belchetz, LW, Windsor (OHL)

Belchetz was once thought of as a potential top-five pick due to his massive 6-foot-5 frame, hard elements and ability to score. He didn't have a great season, though, and scouts have concerns about his pace. This deep into the draft, though, he starts to become very enticing, and New Jersey takes the swing on his rare physical tools.

13. New York Islanders: Tynan Lawrence, C, Boston University (NCAA)

Lawrence was very well thought of by evaluators six months ago, with many teams having him as a top-three prospect, but he's plummeted in the second half of the season after average performances in college and at the U18 worlds. He's a great skater and competitor down the middle, but the level of offense in his game is a minor concern. The Islanders are happy to get him at 13, though, given their thin center depth.

14. Columbus Blue Jackets: Oscar Hemming, LW, Boston College (NCAA)

Hemming is very well thought of in the league. He's highly physical with size, while also having a good amount of talent that makes him a potential hard-nosed top-six winger for the Blue Jackets.

15. St. Louis Blues: Oliver Suvanto, C, Tappara (Liiga)

With their second pick, the Blues bolster their center depth. Suvanto's direct, highly competitive net-front style to go along with legit offense is a highly desirable player type, even if his feet are a bit heavy. Between him and Gustafsson, they have now added two legit players at premium positions.

16. Washington Capitals: Alexander Command, C, Orebro (J20 Nationell)

Washington ideally will add a center or defenseman at this pick after drafting a lot of wingers high in recent years. Command is a very competitive, skilled player who projects as a middle-six center.

17. Los Angeles Kings: Elton Hermansson, RW, MoDo (Allsvenskan)

Hermansson's stock is a bit all over the place right now, with teams loving his skill but questioning his consistency. He is coming off a great tournament at the U18s, where he led Sweden to gold, though. He's one of the most purely talented players left in the draft, and the Kings have shown they are willing to take swings on this type of skill.

18. Washington Capitals: JP Hurlbert, LW, Kamloops (WHL)

After getting a well-rounded center with its first pick, Washington rolls the dice in some ways on a much more skilled player in Hurlbert, who has more holes. Hurlbert is one of the more purely talented scorers and playmakers in the draft, but he's just an OK skater who can be inconsistent.

19. Utah Mammoth: Ilia Morozov, C, Miami (NCAA)

Utah grabs a big, physical center in Morozov, who plays a style that translates directly to winning playoff hockey. He skates well for his size, uses his frame to win battles and competes at a high level. He may never be a prolific point producer, but if he can be a third-line center on a winning team, the Mammoth will be happy with him at No. 19.

20. San Jose Sharks: Gleb Pugachyov, RW, Nizhny Novgorod Jr. (MHL)

After securing an elite defenseman at the top of the draft, the Sharks add a big, heavy winger to their forward corps with this pick. Pugachyov has exciting pure tools, skates well and plays with a ton of bite. While there are some questions about his pure offense, his heavy elements will complement the skill in San Jose's system.

21. Philadelphia Flyers: Jack Hextall, C, Youngstown (USHL)

Philadelphia continues to build its young center depth with this pick. Hextall is a highly intelligent, diligent pivot who's a slick playmaker with excellent offensive sense. He doesn't shy away from going into traffic to make plays. Though his skating doesn't stand out and he hasn't been a prolific scorer, his strong two-way detail makes him a very safe bet to be a useful pro down the middle for the Flyers.

22. Pittsburgh Penguins: Ryan Lin, RHD, Vancouver (WHL)

Pittsburgh doesn't really have a future power-play QB in its prospect pool, and Lin could be one. He's a highly intelligent defenseman, and despite being undersized and having average skating, he competes hard and wins a surprising amount of battles, giving him a chance to be a quality NHL defenseman.

23. Boston Bruins: Adam Goljer, RHD, Trencin (Extraliga)

Goljer is trending up with teams after a strong U18 worlds. He skates well, breaks up plays effectively and makes a good first pass, even if he doesn't project as a major offensive driver. He projects as a two-way defenseman of whom the Bruins have very little of in their system.

24. Vancouver Canucks: Maddox Dagenais, C, Quebec (QMJHL)

After taking Malhotra at No. 3, the Canucks use their second first-rounder on a talented center in Dagenais. He's big, fast, skilled and physical, although inconsistent.

25. Buffalo Sabres: Casey Mutryn, RW, NTDP (USHL)

Buffalo adds some much-needed heaviness and jam to its prospect pool with Mutryn to complement all the skill it has drafted recently. He's a hardworking, physical 6-foot-3 winger who plays at an NHL tempo and has some offensive touch, too.

26. Seattle Kraken: Adam Novotný, LW, Peterborough (OHL)

Seattle uses its second first-round pick on the versatile Novotný. He has NHL-level speed and skill and can play in a variety of spots in a lineup, giving the Kraken a player they hope projects as a dependable middle-six forward.

27. New York Rangers: Brooks Rogowski, C, Oshawa (OHL)

The Rangers take a massive swing on sheer upside with Rogowski, whose aesthetic tools are impossible to ignore. A 6-foot-7 center who moves well with enough puck skills is a rare thing to see. His ultimate scoring potential will be debated, but he's just as talented as someone like Dean Letourneau was at the same point.

28. Montreal Canadiens: Liam Ruck, RW, Medicine Hat (WHL)

Montreal has shown it isn't afraid to bet on sheer hockey sense, making Ruck an intriguing target here. He's a dangerous, intelligent scoring winger who relies on his great stick and brain rather than elite athletic tools. Despite being an average skater, he gets to the hard areas to generate offense, giving him a chance to be a middle-six contributor.

29. St. Louis Blues: Tommy Bleyl, RHD, Moncton (QMJHL)

With their third pick of the first round, the Blues can afford to swing on Bleyl's immense raw offensive talent. An undersized, dynamic puck-mover, he skates very well, possesses highly gifted hands, and can break open a shift with his flashy abilities. He comes with notable risk due to his frame, but he has the potential to be a PP QB in the NHL.

30. Calgary Flames: William Håkansson, LHD, Luleå (SHL)

Calgary adds a massive, highly competitive defenseman in Håkansson with its second pick. He moves very well for his size, plays the body aggressively and excels at killing plays defensively. While his offensive ceiling and puck play are limited, his high-end compete level and physical tools project him as a highly dependable NHL defender.

31. Carolina Hurricanes: Nikita Klepov, RW, Saginaw (OHL)

Carolina has a long history of betting on pure hockey sense and skill in the draft, and Klepov fits that mold perfectly. He's a highly intelligent winger with the ability to consistently make difficult plays and potentially run an NHL power play. He lacks dynamic athleticism and can be pushed to the perimeter, but the Hurricanes are the exact type of organization to bet on his talent after a strong OHL season.

32. Ottawa Senators: Juho Piiiparinen, RHD, Tappara (Liiga)

Ottawa closes out the first round by adding a steady, projectable right-shot defenseman to its system. Piiiparinen is a mobile blueliner who moves pucks up the ice cleanly and uses his length to break up plays defensively. He doesn't truly excel at any one specific trait, and his offensive upside is a question mark, but he's a dependable defender whom coaches tend to trust and who projects to log a decent number of NHL minutes.