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## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets trade for Luke Kunin in deal with San Jose Sharks

**By Brian Hedger- March 8, 2025**

It looked like the Blue Jackets might stand pat at the NHL trade deadline Friday, but they decided to add.

The Blue Jackets acquired center Luke Kunin, 27, in a trade with the San Jose Sharks in exchange for a 2025 fourth-round pick that originally belonged to the St. Louis Blues. The pick was in a trade last summer that sent forward Alexandre Texier to the Blues prior to the league's draft in Las Vegas.

"Luke can play any forward position," said Don Waddell, the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager. "He's played 'em all. Obviously, he's been a natural centerman for years, but he's played the wing. ... He's a very trustworthy player, where if you put him in a spot, he'd succeed, and he's a coach's dream, as far as he'll do what you ask him to do. Having that experience goes a long way, and when I talked to Luke, he was excited about being here."

Kunin, who stands 6-feet, 197 pounds, played for Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason with the Minnesota Wild and made left a good impression. Now, he's heading to the Blue Jackets after adding 11 goals, seven assists and 18 points in 63 games for the Sharks as a pending unrestricted free agent.

Kunin is the second depth forward the Blue Jackets added in as many days, after Christian Fischer was claimed off waivers Thursday from the Detroit Red Wings. Fischer, like Kunin, is a pending UFA at season's end.

The Blue Jackets opted not to trade any of their own "rentals" for draft picks, including stout two-way defenseman Ivan Provorov, who probably could've garnered a handsome return. Waddell preferred to add around the "edges" before the deadline rather than subtracting from a surprising team that has defied long odds to join the intense race for a playoff spot.

"I had a few (teams) that poked around today and (Thursday) to see if we'd changed our opinion on that," Waddell said. "For what we've been through, I just felt that I could not rip a big part of this team out of that locker room. I just didn't think it was fair to the rest of the guys, the coaches or the fans."

The Blue Jackets also re-assigned rookie defenseman Denton Mateychuk and loaned forward Joe LaBate to the Cleveland Monsters before the trade deadline, which makes both eligible to compete in the AHL's Calder Cup Playoffs this spring. Mateychuk's assignment was likely a "paper" transaction, which means he could officially rejoin the Blue Jackets at practice Saturday.

Kunin was selected 15th overall by the Minnesota Wild in 2016 and has played 422 NHL games over eight seasons between the Wild, Nashville Predators and Sharks. Playing for San Jose the past three seasons, one of the NHL's most overmatched teams, Kunin was saddled with an ugly -63 plus/minus while adding 27-22-49 offensively in 171 games.

He's versatile, shoots from the right side and averaged 15:15 in ice time this season. Kunin will most likely vie for a role on the Blue Jackets' third or fourth lines, which already have a host of veterans to fill out those lines with Sean Kuraly, Mathieu Olivier, Zach Aston-Reese, Justin Danforth, Fischer and James van Riemsdyk.

The Sharks' struggles as an inexperienced team make it difficult to put Kunin's play into full context for the Blue Jackets, who are involved in a tight playoff chase in the Eastern Conference and currently reside in the first of two wild-card spots.

Kunin has topped 160 hits each of the past two seasons and set a career-high with 223 hits for the Predators in 2021-22, one of two seasons he helped get Nashville into the postseason. Kunin has logged 14 playoff games between the Predators and Wild and provides the Blue Jackets with additional depth after along with Fischer.

"Adding a little size and grit (never) hurts, especially in the roles (Kunin and Fischer) are going to play," Waddel said. "They're up and down guys who finish checks and hopefully chip in (offensively) now and then."

## **Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets flattened by Florida Panthers: 4 takeaways**

**By Brian Hedger- March 8, 2025**

It's time for the Blue Jackets to hit the reset button.

After one of the highest emotional peaks an NHL team can experience in a regular-season game following their victory over the Detroit Red Wings in front of 94,751 on Saturday at Ohio Stadium, the Jackets were flattened in Florida.

Dealing with an NHL Stadium Series "hangover" was largely to blame Tuesday in a 6-2 thumping by the Tampa Bay Lightning, but losing 3-0 Thursday to the Florida Panthers had nothing to do with the Jackets' outdoors victory five days earlier. The Panthers dominated from start to finish, built a 36-16 edge in shots and allowed former Blue Jackets star Sergei Bobrovsky to earn his fourth shutout of the season while barely breaking a sweat.

The Blue Jackets are clinging to a playoff spot with 20 games left and have two more tough road games coming up against the New York Rangers and New Jersey Devils. They returned to Columbus late Thursday night, so it's time to regroup.

Here are four takeaways from their humbling loss Thursday in Sunrise, Florida:

Columbus Blue Jackets barely holding onto a playoff spot

The Jackets limped back to Columbus still in the first wild card spot of the Eastern Conference, but there's a pack of four teams all within two points hot on their heels.

The Blue Jackets might be one of those teams looking up at the Detroit Red Wings had it not been for Utah, a.k.a. The Team With No Name. Utah overcame a 2-1 deficit after one period in Detroit to hand the Red Wings their third straight loss, keeping them just outside the second wild card at 66 points.

The Ottawa Senators hold that spot with 67 points, but only via tiebreaker over the Rangers. They're both just one point behind the Blue Jackets, while the Montreal Canadiens and Red Wings are tied at 66. Expanding the scope even more, the Boston Bruins (64 points), New York Islanders (63 points) and Philadelphia Flyers are all within six points of the Jackets, who would have been leapfrogged by tiebreaker had the Red Wings beaten Utah.

Florida Panthers showed why they're Stanley Cup contenders again

Even without star power forward Matthew Tkachuk, who's likely out until the playoffs, the Panthers made Bobrovsky's night a breeze. While building a 2-0 lead after two periods on power-play goals in the first and second, Florida used a heavy forecheck and stifling neutral zone structure to almost completely shut down a Blue Jackets offense normally capable of scoring goals in bunches.

The Panthers finished the first two periods with shot margins of 16-7 and 12-3 while drawing four power plays and scoring twice during those man-advantages. They played bigger, stronger and more aggressively to give the upstart Blue Jackets a taste of the intensity they'll face during the season's final stretch.

Elvis Merzlikins now a key puzzle piece for Columbus Blue Jackets

One critical area the Blue Jackets have improved significantly from earlier in the season is goaltending, specifically with their highest-paid netminder.

Elvis Merzlikins allowed just two goals on 35 shots against the Panthers while being peppered heavily for the third straight game. Those looking for bright sides to the past two lopsided losses can start and possibly end right there. Merzlikins is the Blue Jackets' most experienced and highest-paid goalie, and he's played up to that billing for quite some time now.

Despite the Blue Jackets being outshot in 14 of his past 20 starts, Merzlikins has posted a 12-7-1 record, 2.84 goals-against average and .906 save percentage. According to Natural Stat Trick, he's also faced the third-highest number of shots (609) among goalies who've played a minimum of 1,100 minutes, making the third-most saves (552) and posting a solid 2.30 goals-saved above average during that span.

Merzlikins has also led the NHL in his past 20 outings in high-danger shots (168) and high-danger saves (136).

Mathieu Olivier takes a stand for Columbus Blue Jackets again

The Panthers came out of the gate looking to impose their will physically, including an early run at Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson that prompted James van Riemsdyk to take a roughing penalty standing up for his younger linemate.

That was 58 seconds into the game, and it got nastier. Florida's Jonah Gadjovich, a little-used forward, picked up a roughing minor and fighting major during an early scrap with Joe Labate, and he wasn't done fighting.

Gadjovich also squared with Mathieu Olivier late in the opening period after appearing to decline a fight invitation preceding a faceoff. Seconds after that conversation with Olivier, Gadjovich tried to smash Blue Jackets rookie defenseman Denton Mateychuk, which prompted Olivier to respond by crushing Panthers center Tomas Nosek into the wall near the benches.

Seconds later, the gloves came off in a scrap Olivier appeared to win against Gadjovich. It was a prime example of why the Blue Jackets love Olivier, an emotion-driven heavyweight whose versatility as a forward led to a six-year contract extension Wednesday worth \$18 million to keep him in Columbus.

"He's a big piece of what's going on here," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason told reporters Thursday.

"Everybody clearly sees his physicality and his ability to drop his gloves, but I think what a lot of people don't see is his leadership in the (locker) room, his physicality, his willingness to finish checks, block shots and do everything that he needs to do to help the hockey team win."

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets: Kunin, Fischer eager to honor Johnny Gaudreau in playoff push

**By Brian Hedger- March 9, 2025**

The Blue Jackets didn't just add forward depth prior to Friday's NHL trade deadline passed.

They also got two more products of the U.S. National Team Development Program in forwards Luke Kunin and Christian Fischer, and the newcomers can't wait to help the Jackets honor Johnny Gaudreau's memory with a strong finishing playoff push.

"That was the first thought that popped into my head was, obviously, Johnny," Fischer said Saturday.

"What a situation to rally for. We've all, obviously, paid attention throughout the year with this team and how they've rallied, and how well they've played. Just to get through that, alone, it's very impressive and I'm just completely honored to be a part of this group."

Fischer, who was claimed off waivers Thursday from the Detroit Red Wings, didn't know Gaudreau quite as well as Kunin or his new teammates. That doesn't mean he's any less motivated joining a locker room that still has a stall with Gaudreau's nameplate at the top and his No. 13 jersey hanging inside after games.

Fischer, who faced the Blue Jackets a week ago at Ohio Stadium, proudly wore Gaudreau's USA jersey as part of the Red Wings' chosen arrival "fit" for a game that included multiple tributes to Gaudreau, his brother Matthew and their surviving family.

"All the USA boys (on the Red Wings), we all snagged those jerseys right away," Fischer said. "I think (captain Dylan Larkin) put that together for our group. Him and Johnny were really close, and that was a cool thing we got to do."

Kunin, who was acquired in a trade Friday with the San Jose Sharks, got to know Gaudreau closely as his teammate for the U.S. at the men's world championships in 2019 (Slovakia) and last spring in Czechia. After grinding through a tough developmental season with the youth-oriented Sharks, Kunin now gets a chance to help the Blue Jackets honor Gaudreau's memory with a playoff push.

"It's something you see when you're on other teams around the league, even though you're not on the (Blue Jackets), how much you feel (the loss) and the emotions," Kunin said. "To see what the guys have done here, for him and the family, and his brother, it's just so special and I don't take it lightly. It means something to me, as well, and I'm very happy to be a part of this group."

Kunin and Fischer have deepened the Blue Jackets' pool of NHL proven forwards. Kunin, who can play all three forward positions, skated at right wing on the third line Saturday. He was matched with center Justin Danforth and Yegor Chinakhov. Fischer skated in a three-player rotation of wingers flanking center Sean Kuraly on the fourth line, including James van Riemsdyk and Zach Aston-Reese.

No matter what lineup coach Dean Evason's ices against the New York Rangers on Sunday at Madison Square Garden, somebody with a lot of NHL experience will sit as a healthy scratch. Reinforcements from within the system, most recently forwards Joe LaBate and Mikael Pyhtia, will now focus on helping the Cleveland Monsters prepare for the AHL's Calder Cup Playoffs.

"We certainly have depth," Evason said. "Not the guys in Cleveland haven't done a fantastic job when they've been called up in certain situations, but now we do have players who have played in the NHL, so to have that experience certainly is a positive thing."

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Erik Gudbranson cleared for contact, Dante Fabbro sits for 'maintenance'

The Blue Jackets' defensive pairings setup Saturday included a significant development, putting veteran Erik Gudbranson with Zach Werenski in Dante Fabbro's spot.

Evason said Fabbro stayed off the ice for a 'maintenance day' and is expected to play Sunday in New York. Gudbranson, meanwhile, has been cleared for full contact in practices after undergoing shoulder surgery in October.

Once a player is cleared for contact, that usually indicates they're nearing a return to the lineup. Waddell recently said Gudbranson might not be ready until April, which could still be the case, but it shouldn't surprise anybody if he exceeds that estimate.

Columbus Blue Jackets forward Mathieu Olivier primed for promotion

After agreeing to a six-year contract extension worth \$18 million Wednesday, power forward Mathieu Olivier practiced with an elevated role Saturday. Moving into the "top six" group up front, he skated at right wing on a line with Kent Johnson on the left and captain Boone Jenner in the middle.

Evason and his coaching staff may need a couple games to figure out how they want to use Kunin and Fischer, but Olivier now has a chance to carve out a spot on a two-way scoring line by adding size, strength, nastiness and a willingness to play around the net.

Playing most of the season on the third line, Olivier has already set career highs with 12 goals, nine assists and 21 points while racking up 232 hits, 12 fighting majors and 118 penalty minutes.

"Right now, that's what our thought is, that he plays with Boone and 'KJ,'" Evason said. "He's earned that right. He kills penalties, he gets in on the forecheck, disrupts and scores goals for us, and we expect him to do all those things for us, no matter where he plays."



## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets at NHL trade deadline: 5 things to know

**By Brian Hedger- March 9, 2025**

Don Waddell, the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager, had a fascinating trade market to navigate until the NHL deadline arrived at 3 p.m. Friday.

More teams than usual, including the Blue Jackets, are within striking distance of a playoff spot and their GMs sought help at the deadline rather than offering it. The result was one of the strongest selling markets in years, as a large group of buyers scoured a scant market for help.

Waddell, watching prices skyrocket, worked the market's "edges" instead, padding the Jackets' NHL forward depth with center Luke Kunin and forward Christian Fischer — the first acquired in a trade with the San Jose Sharks and the second a waiver claim from Detroit.

The Blue Jackets made their deadline statement by not making a splash, keeping together much of an upstart team that continues to revel in defying its own odds. Here are five other things to know about the Blue Jackets at the deadline:

Columbus Blue Jackets weren't swayed into trading Ivan Provorov

Waddell had a stash of five or six UFA "rental" targets he could've easily flipped for picks and prospects. In fact, it had to be a little tempting, even as a playoff contender, when he saw the returns some GMs demanded for rentals.

Ivan Provorov, a stout left-handed defenseman who just turned 28, could have returned a handsome haul, especially when you note what the Edmonton Oilers paid to the San Jose Sharks for Jake Walman, a conditional 2026 first-round pick and an AHL forward.

Provorov is a year younger than Walman, stands about the same size and has 424 more NHL games under his belt. Waddell stuck to his plan, hung on to Provorov and kept him part of the mix with the Blue Jackets for at least the rest of the season.

Waddell said a couple of GMs "poked around" about Provorov on Friday, but he wasn't available.

"For what we've been through, I just felt that I could not rip a big part of this team out of that locker room," Waddell said. "I just didn't think it was fair to the rest of the guys, the coaches or the fans. We made a decision to keep Provy, and I've had great conversations with his agent and I'm pretty confident that we're going to be able to get a (new) deal. And, if we don't, obviously we'll have to find a replacement for him."

Columbus Blue Jackets deepen forward group with Kunin, Fischer

Adding Kunin and Fischer didn't garner a lot of attention among NHL analysts or fans. Those were practical moves, not splashy, which makes this a good time to point out that practicality in the NHL often comes in handy during playoff pushes and games.

Kunin and Fischer make the Blue Jackets' forwards group deeper and better. Fischer didn't cost Waddell anything more than his remaining salary, which isn't much, while acquiring Kunin required only the fourth-round pick he received for trading Alexandre Texier to the St. Louis Blues last summer.

Waddell also has prior experience working with both forwards within the U.S. developmental program, and Dean Evason coached Kunin in Minnesota.

“Both players, first of all, are outstanding people,” Waddell said. “(As players) ... adding a little size and grit never hurts, especially in the roles they’re going to play. They’re up and down guys who finish checks and hopefully chip in now and then.”

Columbus Blue Jackets planned to use salary-cap space as trade broker

It’s becoming more commonplace for GMs to utilize third-party GMs as trade brokers to get deals done within their own salary constraints. Sitting on a lot of unused cap space, Waddell was willing to use it for brokering multiple trades that fell apart.

“We had two (Thursday) that were lined up and another one (Friday), and unfortunately the teams we were working with didn’t get the players they were hoping to get,” he said. “But we were definitely interested in trying to gain some assets if that was a way to do it.”

Columbus Blue Jackets' second-round void factored into trade talks

The Blue Jackets don’t have their second-round picks in this year’s draft or 2026 because of trades made the past two years.

One was used to acquire Provorov in a three-team trade in 2023, while the other was included as incentive for the Montreal Canadiens to take Patrik Laine plus his full salary last summer. There were multiple trades leading up to this year’s deadline that featured second-round picks, and Waddell said the Blue Jackets ran into some hurdles based on their voids in that round.

One solution would have required flipping one of his two first-round picks in this year’s draft to pick up a required second-round selection, but the Blue Jackets didn’t think the juice was worth the squeeze.

“We could have probably picked (a second-round pick) up by moving one of our first rounders for a couple seconds,” Waddell said, “but I didn’t think that would be a good asset management right now.”

Columbus Blue Jackets 'paper' rookie Denton Mateychuk to AHL

Technically, the Blue Jackets reassigned rookie defenseman Denton Mateychuk to the AHL’s Cleveland Monsters on Friday before the NHL’s trade deadline passed. They quickly recalled him, which is referred to as “papering” a player to the minors.

The reason for the move was to maintain Mateychuk’s eligibility to play in the AHL’s Calder Cup Playoffs, which requires players to be on AHL rosters prior to the NHL’s trade deadline expiring.

“He’s a young player, and hopefully we’ll be playing playoff hockey here in Columbus,” Waddell said. “If not, and Cleveland’s still (playing) down in the (AHL), I think it’s great experience. ... we just wanted to keep that as an option.”

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets rout of New York Rangers 7-3 to reclaim playoff spot

**By Brian Hedger- March 10, 2025**

The Blue Jackets got back to winning in a big way Sunday night at Madison Square Garden.

After dropping their first two games of a four-game road trip last week against the NHL's Florida teams, the Jackets rebounded with a 7-3 rout of the New York Rangers — passing the Ottawa Senators to reclaim the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

The Blue Jackets (31-24-8) have 70 points, the Senators have 69 and the Rangers (31-27-5) stayed at 68 points and sit just outside a playoff spot.

After coughing up a 3-1 lead in the second period on back-to-back short-handed Rangers goals, the Jackets answered with four straight goals to win. Mathieu Olivier and Dante Fabbro scored 1:44 apart late in the second to lead 5-3 before Olivier and Adam Fantilli scored in the third to seal it.

Fantilli's insurance goal was his third of the game for his second career hat trick. His first was during a 5-1 victory Jan. 22 in Toronto. Four other Blue Jackets finished with two-point games, including Zach Werenski's two assists to move ahead of Rick Nash as the franchise's all-time assist leader with 260.

Dmitri Voronko added two assists for two points, Fabbro finished with goal and assist for two points, and Olivier's two points were goals scored while slating in a "top six" role with captain Boone Jenner and Kent Johnson on the second line.

Got all that?

Backup goalie Daniil Tarasov started for the second time against the Rangers in New York this season, earning a win with 31 saves after losing 1-0 in a shootout Jan. 18 that made him the only goalie in NHL history to lose his first career shutout. Former Blue Jackets goalie Jonathan Quick took the loss for the Rangers, allowing all seven goals on 27 shots.

As a team, the Blue Jackets set a franchise record with their 12th game scoring six-plus goals, topping the previous high of 11 in 2018-19. They also moved within four points of the New Jersey Devils for third place in the Metropolitan Division two days before finishing the trip Tuesday against the Devils.

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets add Luke Kunin but leave roster intact at deadline: 'This group is special'

By Aaron Portzline- March 8, 2025

SUNRISE, Fla. — It's not as if Columbus Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell kept his NHL trade deadline plans a mystery. Not only had he told rival GMs that he wasn't going to trade away significant assets from his surprisingly competitive club, but he'd been telling local and national media the same for weeks.

Still, there were two text exchanges with Blue Jackets players early on Friday that reassured him he was on the right track.

"They were very supportive," Waddell said. "They know the situation. One in particular, and I'll leave this player nameless, said, 'We've gotten the team this far. We can get it the rest of the way.'

"That was good to hear from one of our top players. These guys, this is a tight group. I've been around a lot of hockey teams, around good groups of people. This group is special, as I've said all along here.

"The coaches have done a great job, but the leadership in that room has gotten us to where we are today, and it's going to finish the job for us as we move forward."

Waddell got what he wanted out of the trade deadline. In addition to vowing to give this roster a chance — that meant, most notably, not trading pending unrestricted free agent defenseman Ivan Provorov — Waddell wanted to add a proven NHL forward.

With less than two hours to go before the deadline, Waddell got into the action, landing third-line center Luke Kunin in a trade with the San Jose Sharks. For Kunin, a 27-year-old center, the Blue Jackets traded one of their two fourth-round draft picks this summer.

A proven leader joining the club! 🍷 [pic.twitter.com/ObGynhHpcl](https://pic.twitter.com/ObGynhHpcl)

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) March 8, 2025

The pick, previously owned by the St. Louis Blues, was acquired last summer when Waddell, in one of his first moves with the Blue Jackets, traded Alexandre Texier to St. Louis.

Kunin, listed at 6-foot, 200 pounds, has played in 422 NHL games with Minnesota, Nashville and San Jose. He was a first-round pick (No. 15) of the Wild in 2016.

"Luke can play any forward position. He's played 'em all," Waddell said. "Obviously, he's been a natural centerman for years, but he's played the wing.

"(Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason) coached him in Minnesota. Dean liked him as a player. He's a very trustworthy player, where if you put him in a spot, he'll succeed. He's a coach's dream, as far as he'll do whatever you ask him to do. Having that experience goes a long way, and when I talked to Luke, he was excited about being here."

Kunin's ability to play center could be especially important in the near term. The Blue Jackets have been without top-line center Sean Monahan since early February. They've been without third-line center Cole Sillinger for the past four games. Both are expected back this month, Waddell has said.

Three weeks ago, Waddell was targeting a scoring forward by the deadline, he said, and he was willing to part with a first-round draft pick if it was a young player who either had remaining term or had multiple years of club control before the player hit unrestricted free agency.

That plan was altered slightly when it was learned that leading goal scorer Kirill Marchenko would be returning from a broken jaw earlier than anyone expected. At that point, Waddell set his sights on a top-nine forward, one with NHL experience and an ability to stabilize the lines.

Due to an endless string of injuries, the Blue Jackets have had to rely on AHL Cleveland call-ups — Mikael Pyyhtiä, Luca Del Bel Belluz and, most recently, Joe LaBate — to fill out their lines. The acquisition of Kunin, along with Thursday's waiver claim of Christian Fischer from the Detroit Red Wings, will give them four lines full of NHL players who can make an impact in one way or another.

One NHL scout texted The Athletic with a brief description of Kunin's game: "He's Sean Kuraly with more offensive upside."

Rather than travel with the Blue Jackets to their two-game trip through Florida, Waddell stayed behind in Columbus to delve into the deadline. You wouldn't know it from the transaction wire: the Kunin acquisition and a pair of minor-league demotions were the only moves made by Columbus.

But Waddell was in on several trades that didn't materialize, he said, and was in talks to take on a salary as a third-party broker on at least three deals that the other two parties never ended up consummating. In that scenario, the Blue Jackets would have received a pick or a prospect to take on enough salary to help facilitate the trade.

Yes, the Blue Jackets have ample salary-cap space. What they could have used more of, oddly enough, were second-round picks. This week alone, 11 second-round picks in the 2025, 2026 and 2027 drafts were traded, either straight-up for players or as part of a package.

The Blue Jackets don't have a second-round pick in this summer's draft or in 2026. The 2025 pick was traded to Philadelphia two years ago in the trade that brought Provorov to Columbus. The 2026 pick was moved to Montreal along with Patrik Laine in a salary-dump trade.

"There were a couple teams that only wanted a 2026 second-round pick," Waddell said. "We could have picked up one by moving one of our first-round picks (the Jackets have two this summer) for a couple of seconds, but I didn't think that would be good asset management."

"I know one team that was wanting a second-round pick, and I told them, 'I'd give you a third and a fourth,' and they felt that was equal value. But then they decided not to trade the player."

The Blue Jackets sent Pyyhtiä to AHL Cleveland on Thursday after they claimed Fischer. They sent LaBate down when it was clear they were trading for Kunin. And then later in the day, just before the 3 p.m. ET trade deadline, they sent rookie defenseman Denton Mateychuk to the minors.

Pyyhtiä and LaBate will likely remain there now, with Fischer and Kunin in the fold. Mateychuk likely never left Columbus. He was sent down as a "paper" move to be eligible to play for AHL Cleveland in the postseason, should the Blue Jackets not qualify for the Stanley Cup playoffs or get bounced early.

Waddell said they hadn't made the decision yet, but wanted that option.

The Blue Jackets hope they have work for Mateychuk in Columbus come late April and into May. The Blue Jackets haven't made the playoffs in four seasons, but they entered play on Friday with a hold on the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

Now they face a 20-game sprint to the postseason. The Blue Jackets, who suffered the tragic death of teammate Johnny Gaudreau just before training camp, have been one of the most compelling stories in all of sports this season. Waddell believes a Hollywood ending is possible.

No way was he flipping the script on Friday.

“I know these guys are proud players,” Waddell said. “And I know everything we’ve been through to have gotten this far, and there probably wasn’t much optimism that we’d be at this spot. I’m very proud of them to be able to put ourselves in this spot.”

## The Athletic / Columbus Blue Jackets trade deadline report card: Grading Don Waddell's moves

**By Aaron Portzline- March 8, 2025**

Blue Jackets' trade deadline moves

In: C Luke Kunin

Out: 2025 fourth-round pick (previously owned by St. Louis)

Grade: B

If you weren't expecting much, you won't be let down. GM Don Waddell made a decision a few weeks ago that he wasn't going to subtract from this Blue Jackets roster, believing that his group of overachievers deserved a chance to challenge for a playoff spot. He did, however, want to give them a boost, believing his forward corps could use help. Kunin gives them another sturdy player, and so could Christian Fischer, who was claimed off waivers from Detroit on Thursday. They help fortify the bottom six in the short term. When Sean Monahan and Cole Sillinger return, there will be difficult lineup decisions to be made. But that's OK. Competition is a good thing. Depth is invaluable, too. — Aaron Portzline

What they're saying

GM Don Waddell's statement on Kunin: "Luke is a versatile forward who can play down the middle or on the wing, kills penalties and has tremendous character and work ethic. He has been a very consistent player throughout his career and we think he'll be a good addition to our club."

What it means for the Blue Jackets' lineup

The Blue Jackets are currently without top-line center Sean Monahan and third-line center Cole Sillinger, prompting coach Dean Evason to move Boone Jenner back to the middle from left wing. It's unclear if Kunin will supplant bottom-six centers Justin Danforth and Sean Kuraly, but he'll certainly play an important role. He played a significant role on the San Jose penalty kill. (one or two sentences of analysis.)

## The Athletic / Adam Fantilli's second career hat trick paces Blue Jackets' big win over Rangers

**By Aaron Portzline- March 10, 2025**

NEW YORK — Adam Fantilli is just getting started in his NHL career, but we can already say this about the Columbus Blue Jackets' 20-year-old center: He loves a big stage.

Fantilli had the second hat trick of his young career — his second this season — and the Blue Jackets rediscovered the style of play that has brought them so much surprising success, beating the New York Rangers 7-3 before 18,006 in Madison Square Garden.

It was a crucial win for the Blue Jackets, who pulled out of a standings tie with the Rangers and reclaimed the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. And even more crucially, they looked more like themselves after two desultory performances in Florida to start this trip.

"We talked about it before the game, how the last two games we didn't look like ourselves or play like ourselves," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "Maybe there's an element to coming off the outdoor game, or the trade deadline and all that stuff. We were a little tentative, a little apprehensive. But tonight we played right. We played the way the Columbus Blue Jackets play. We're not going to win every game, but when we play like that, we're going to give ourselves a chance."

MO DOES IT AGAIN!!! A NYC HATTY 🧢🧢🧢@FanaticsBook | #CBJ pic.twitter.com/rkaiNuJ5ML

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) March 10, 2025

Fantilli led the way. Both of his hat tricks have come not only on the road but also in two of the league's most glorious cathedrals.

His first hat trick came Jan. 22 in Toronto's Scotiabank Arena against his childhood favorite team, the Maple Leafs. Fantilli's mother, Julia, was the first fan with her hat over the glass and on the ice.

Then Sunday, Fantilli lit up Madison Square Garden, which calls itself "the world's most famous arena," scoring two goals only 26 seconds apart in the second period and another midway through the third period as the Blue Jackets pulled away.

"That was fun, yeah," Fantilli said. "I have to give credit to the boys. Those were sweet passes (from Dmitri Voronkov and Damon Severson). I'm playing with great players right now. They make it easy."

Adam Fantilli became the fifth player in @BlueJacketsNHL history to record two hat tricks in a season and first since Cam Atkinson (2 in 2018-19).#NHLStats: <https://t.co/uKbljcEQak>  
pic.twitter.com/gjl1pGGDHM

— NHL Public Relations (@PR\_NHL) March 10, 2025

Mathieu Olivier, Kent Johnson, Dante Fabbro and Justin Danforth also scored, and Zach Werenski and Voronkov each had two assists for the Blue Jackets, who matched a season high with seven goals and have now scored six or more goals in 12 of their 63 games. Goaltender Daniil Tarasov stopped all 16 shots he faced in the third period and finished with 32 saves.

"Those last two games in Florida just weren't us," Werenski said. "We worked hard from the drop of the puck. We were above them (positionally) and didn't really give them much for free."



All assists count the same, but not all are created equally. Werenski's first assist was a beauty. He had a Zherdevian toe-drag coming through the left circle, before feeding Danforth at the front of the net for the tap-in.

That assist allowed Werenski to move past franchise legend Rick Nash for the most assists in club history. After his second assist of the game, on Olivier's goal, Werenski now has 260 in his 547-game career.

"I said to these guys in the room after the game, it's not possible without my teammates," Werenski said. "I haven't really thought about (the record), to be honest. I'm trying to enjoy the year and enjoy the moment, enjoy the spot we're in as a team and just keep going, keep playing my game."

DANNY GETS US STARTED AT THE GARDEN! @FanaticsBook | #CBJ pic.twitter.com/rYbb0vHHty

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) March 9, 2025

Even in a game with a four-goal margin, there was a crucial turning point early in the second period after Fantilli had scored twice to give the Jackets a 3-1 lead. At 6:13 of the period, the Blue Jackets went to the power play with a chance to push the lead to 4-1.

But the Rangers had other ideas.

New York scored two short-handed goals on the same Columbus power play, with Braden Schneider and Chris Kreider scoring only 42 seconds apart. In a snap, a 3-1 lead was a 3-3 tie score.

According to the NHL, it marked the second time in franchise history the Blue Jackets have allowed two short-handed goals on the same man advantage. The previous occurrence was Nov. 3, 2018, against the Los Angeles Kings. The Blue Jackets lost that game 3-1, but Sunday it barely fazed them.

"It could have gone really sideways," Evason said. "It's a credit to the guys. Stuff happens. That's not the word I want to use, but you know.

"Hey, they're trying to score, too. They catch a couple of breaks and score a couple of goals and it would have been easy — understandable, really — if we didn't handle that well. But we did."

Olivier and Fabbro scored goals later in the second to give the Jackets a 5-3 lead heading into the third. Johnson and Fantilli scored their final goals of the evening just 1:34 apart midway through the third to end any drama.

"(The two short-handed goals) didn't faze us," Werenski said. "I feel like that says a lot about our group. We just keep playing and, for the most part, we were in control the whole time. Guys were dialed in. We knew how big of a game it was."

Speaking of big games, the Blue Jackets now wrap up the four-game trip Tuesday in New Jersey. The Devils, who beat the Philadelphia Flyers on Sunday, are only 4 points ahead of Columbus in the race for third place in the Metropolitan Division.

The Blue Jackets have only once finished top three in the Metro.

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Friends Luke Kunin, Christian Fischer join 'special group'

**By Aaron Portzline- March 10, 2025**

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: Fitting in

Don Waddell is beginning to let his true feelings show about what's happening with the Blue Jackets. Last week, Waddell, who has spent 40 years in the NHL, said this group of players and coaches has made him "by far the proudest I've ever been of a team."

The Blue Jackets are still mourning Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, who were killed before the start of training camp. They have also been hit with a wave of significant injuries. That they remain in the playoff race with a little more than a month remaining in the season makes "this a special group," Waddell said.

The last thing he wanted to do at the NHL trade deadline was to mess with that.

Waddell made it clear that he wasn't going to trade away veteran players — even those with expiring contracts — because he didn't want to subtract from the roster. That was especially notable with defenseman Ivan Provorov, who could have drawn a big return.

He also didn't want to acquire players who would block any of the Blue Jackets' precocious young talents — Adam Fantilli, Kent Johnson, Kirill Marchenko, Denton Mateychuk, Cole Sillinger, Dmitry Voronkov, etc. — from getting a full taste of pressure-packed regular-season games and possibly the playoffs.

Further, that meant that he was going to be careful about the personalities and attitudes he was bringing into the room with any possible trades. On-ice measurables are important, of course. But so are off-ice immeasurables.

On Thursday, Waddell claimed forward Christian Fischer off waivers from the Detroit Red Wings. On Friday, he traded a fourth-round draft pick for this summer to the San Jose Sharks to acquire center Luke Kunin.

Not only have Fischer and Kunin been close friends for more than half of their lives, but they have extensive histories with Waddell, other players in the room, and, in Kunin's case, coach Dean Evason. They didn't have to look far for character references.

"It goes back to what we talked about months ago with the guys we brought in here during the year or at the beginning of the year," Waddell said, referring to (without naming) Sean Monahan, James van Riemsdyk, Zach Aston-Reese, Dante Fabbro, etc.

"It's whether they were good players, but (also) good people, and we had to continue that here. I want to continue that forever, but this year's an exceptionally (important year) to make sure we get the right people."

Kunin, Fischer and Zach Werenski, all 27 years old, grew up playing against each other in regional and national youth tournaments. Kunin is from St. Louis, Fischer from Chicago and Werenski from Detroit. Eventually, they made their way to the U.S. National Team Development Program.

Waddell was a consultant for USA Hockey, helping to hire coaches and selecting players for the annual World Junior Championship roster. He knew everything that went on with the players and the program.

In the NHL, Kunin played for Minnesota and Nashville before making his way to San Jose. With the Wild, he played one season with Evason as an assistant and another with him as head coach. In Nashville, he played with defensemen Fabbro and Erik Gudbranson and winger Mathieu Olivier.

Kunin said he had the Blue Jackets “circled” as a “place he’d like to go” if the Sharks traded him by the deadline. Why?

“Just their style of play, their identity,” Kunin said. “What they’ve got going right now is something you want to be a part of, and it’s awesome to see.

“When you play against them you can see how they’re doing it. Very structured. They have that identity, that hard work, a simple style of hockey, guys doing their jobs. It’s cool when you’re watching it from afar, but then to step into it ... very exciting.”

go-deeper

GO DEEPER

'This group is special': Blue Jackets add Luke Kunin but leave roster intact at deadline

After they each were acquired, Fischer and Kunin said they heard immediately from Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner and Werenski via text. Within a few minutes, they’d heard from “almost every player on the roster,” Fischer said.

The Blue Jackets have been one of the best stories in sports this year. It’s a story that actually transcends sports; it’s about humanity and perseverance.

Waddell didn’t want to mess with the magic. Now, Kunin and Fischer are thrilled to be stepping into it at a highly charged point in the season.

“The season this team is having ... to be able to go through what they had to go through as a team, losing (Johnny Gaudreau) one of their precious teammates ... to see how they’ve responded to that is remarkable,” Fischer said. “These guys have rallied around that. They’re always playing for and thinking about Johnny. You can sense that, just how close this group is.

“I heard from Boone right away. I think Luke and I got a text from every guy in the group right after we came aboard. That stuff goes such a long way. It makes you want to compete harder on the ice for each other. They’ve grown close and they rely on each other. To be able to join a room like that, with that much camaraderie and that kind of bond ... man, that’s super exciting.”

Item No. 2: Bettman Q&A

The NHL has staged 43 outdoor games, and commissioner Gary Bettman has attended 42 of them. He was in Columbus last weekend when the Blue Jackets and Red Wings played a Stadium Series game in venerable Ohio Stadium, one of the more unique and memorable nights in the city’s sporting history.

The Athletic caught up with Bettman this week, after he returned to New York and the Blue Jackets resumed their schedule, wanting to get his thoughts on an event that drew 94,751, the second-largest crowd ever for an NHL game.

Here was the conversation:

You’ve seen so many of these outdoor games. What made this unique?

They’re all unique. You’ve seen enough of these to know that what we do to a stadium and to the environment, it tries to reflect the community we’re in and make it special for those fans. The context that I was focused on, and you’ve probably heard me say this enough, if 20 years ago, I would have told

you that we'd have 94,000 people at a hockey game in Columbus, people would have thought I was nuts. In taking on the essential attributes of Ohio State — the Ohio State University — they did a great job with it. But, to me, seeing the fan reaction and seeing the sheer magnitude of what has been built by the Blue Jackets in Columbus is what made this extraordinary.

The league has had its eyes on Ohio Stadium for quite a while now, correct?

That is fair to say. The question was, when did we think we could fill it? And we filled it. Every one of our (outdoor) games has been sold out. Again, 94,000 people at a hockey game in Columbus. You have to love it.

You were around most of the day on Saturday. Did fans approach you?

Absolutely. Everywhere I went, people were saying, "This was fantastic." They were grateful to see the support, not just for the Blue Jackets but for Columbus. People were excited, which is really what happens when you bring people into the elements and they brave the elements and come to something that's unique and special. Ohio Stadium has probably never seen something like this.

Meredith, Jane, Noa and Johnny Gaudreau Jr. lead the Columbus Blue Jackets out at Ohio Stadium

  #StadiumSeries

us: @espn  <https://t.co/S5tPrXCygm>

ca: FX & @TVASports [pic.twitter.com/g5SDRJCcWp](https://pic.twitter.com/g5SDRJCcWp)

— NHL (@NHL) March 1, 2025

I can confirm. Football games, soccer games, concerts ... but never a hockey rink.

There was a unique aspect to this game: bringing people together and again honoring the legacy and the memory of the Gaudreaus. To see Meredith there, leading the team out ... I got to spend some time with her during the game. It was an extraordinary day and a wonderful tribute. We had a really good conversation. She had a good day. She's incredible.

When this game was announced more than a year ago, the Blue Jackets were near the bottom of the NHL. The Red Wings were not a playoff team. Were you worried about this matchup? It turned out to be a compelling matchup, but ...

Oh, I don't know. We could speculate all we want. At the end of the day, we decided this was the right time, the right place, and the right teams. And I guess we were right. This turned out to be ... not only a meaningful game, it was a terrific game!

Columbus media and fans have been hounding you for years about an outdoor game. So now let me ask ... when do the Blue Jackets get to host another one?

Very funny. There are a couple of places we've been back to, but you have to let a few years pass. We've done 43 of these, but we haven't overdone them yet. That's a function of how we do them, when we do them, and who is in them. We're going to the world beyond next season by doing two games in Florida. Maybe people will call us crazy for that. The proof is always in the pudding. At the end of the day, we know it's important to make these special. We try to make this a lifetime memory for people, and I think we did that.

Item No. 3: The stretch

The Blue Jackets have 20 games remaining in the season. For Blue Jackets fans who haven't seen the playoffs in four straight seasons, that's six weeks of chewing fingernails, pacing in front of the TV and making strange deals with the hockey gods.

Let the angst begin today. The Blue Jackets play the New York Rangers twice and the New Jersey Devils twice in the next five games, with a matchup against mighty Vegas tucked into the middle of that. The first of those meetings with the Rangers is tonight in Madison Square Garden.

The Blue Jackets and Rangers are tied with 68 points, but the Jackets — for now — hold the second wild card over New York because they've played one fewer game. They meet again this coming Saturday in Nationwide Arena.

Now look up: The Blue Jackets are only four points back of the Devils, who have lost three straight and learned last week that top player Jack Hughes is out for the remainder of the season following shoulder surgery. The Blue Jackets play the Devils on Tuesday in Newark, N.J., then host them at Nationwide on March 17.

The Blue Jackets are just 7-6-3 against Metropolitan Division opponents this season, but they'd better get that corrected quickly. Six of Columbus' next eight games are against Metro opponents, the two exceptions being Vegas (gulp) on Thursday and Florida (oof) on March 20, both at Nationwide.

The good news for Columbus is that after this road trip ends in New Jersey on Tuesday, the Blue Jackets will have 11 of their final 18 games in Nationwide, where they are 20-6-4 this season.

#### Item No. 4: Snacks

- The Blue Jackets, according to PuckPedia, are \$18.4 million under the NHL's salary cap, more than any other team. That space will come in handy this summer, of course, when GM Don Waddell starts re-signing and extending players, signing free agents and acquiring players in trade. But he tried to put it to use at the trade deadline, too, making it clear to cap-strapped teams around the league that the Blue Jackets were willing to serve as third-party brokers to help facilitate trades. Typically teams get draft picks in return. The Jackets had two such deals in place on Thursday, Waddell said, and another on Friday. But all three deals fell through. "A lot of times, the team will line it up ahead of time, knowing that if they get the player, they've got to move fast," Waddell said. "Unfortunately, the teams we were working with didn't get the players they were hoping to get. But we were definitely interested in trying to gain some assets if that was a way to do it."
- Fischer had a great line in his first chat with the media in Columbus. Just last weekend, he was playing for the Red Wings when they faced the Jackets in the outdoor game. While the Blue Jackets came away elated with the 5-3 win, Detroit was furious that Justin Danforth wasn't called for highsticking when he plowed through two defensemen to score the go-ahead goal late in the third period. The change in teams gave Fischer a different, um, perspective on Danforth's play. "I'm on the right side of it now," Fischer said, smiling. "That was not a penalty at the end. All was good there." Then he paused. "God, the Detroit friends are going to hate me for saying that. But, yeah, just a clean play there."
- Another Fischer anecdote: He's played 522 games and scored 62 goals. Does he remember what happened on Oct. 23, 2018? "I had a hat trick against the Blue Jackets." Yep, the only one of his career. When it became known that the Blue Jackets claimed him on Thursday, Fischer said his close friends all peppered him with text messages, including clips of his three goals. "(The Blue Jackets) must not have forgotten," he joked.
- As of last week, the Blue Jackets were still of the mind that Gudbranson's return from shoulder surgery would most likely occur in early April, with just a few games remaining in the season. That timeline has

changed as of Saturday, when the Jackets announced that Gudbranson, who has been skating the past few weeks apart from the club, has now been cleared to practice with the team. He won't play Sunday against the Rangers, but he's now expected back within the next couple weeks.

- When Gudbranson was injured four games into the season, the Blue Jackets hadn't yet claimed Dante Fabbro off waivers from Nashville and hadn't recalled Denton Mateychuk from AHL Cleveland. They're both top-four fixtures now. The Blue Jackets have carried eight defensemen for much of the season, but something will have to give when Gudbranson is activated. Jack Johnson and Jordan Harris, who have been frequent healthy scratches the last two months — including the last six games each — would both require waivers to be sent to the minors.
- The Blue Jackets on Friday sent Mateychuk, 20, to the AHL by the 3 p.m. trade deadline so that he'd be eligible to play for Cleveland in the postseason. He was recalled after the deadline had passed and will be in the lineup tonight against the Rangers. It's not a certainty Mateychuk will play in the AHL postseason, however. "Hopefully we'll be playing playoff hockey here in Columbus," Waddell said. "And if not, and if Cleveland is still going on down in the AHL, I think it's a great experience. I've always said, playoff hockey, I don't care what level you're playing, it's hard hockey and it's a great experience. We wanted to keep that open as an option. I'm not saying it's going to happen for sure, but we definitely wanted to keep it as an option."
- With his next goal, Werenski will have 21 on the season, breaking his own record for goals in a season by a blueliner. He scored his 19th and 20th last Tuesday in Tampa Bay, matching his total from 2019-20. According to the NHL, Werenski is only the third American defenseman in the last 30 years to have two 20-goal seasons, joining Dustin Byfuglien (Atlanta, Winnipeg) and Brian Leetch (New York Rangers).
- With his next assist, Werenski will surpass Rick Nash for the most assists (258) in franchise history. We may be getting ahead of ourselves here, but you have to wonder if Werenski's No. 8 will someday hang beside Nash's No. 61 in the rafters of Nationwide Arena.
- This week's Sunday Gathering trivia question: On Thursday, Florida Panthers goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky shut out his former club for the third time in 15 career starts, making 16 saves in a 3-0 win over the Blue Jackets. Bobrovsky is tied with nine others for the second-most shutouts against Columbus. There are three goaltenders with four shutouts vs. the Blue Jackets in their careers. Name one of them.
- Former Blue Jacket and Columbus native Jack Roslovic, now playing for the Carolina Hurricanes, was rather oddly connected to the drama in Raleigh surrounding forward Mikko Rantanen, who was acquired by Carolina on Jan. 24 and then traded by the Hurricanes on Friday. When Rantanen arrived, his preferred sweater number — 96 — was occupied by Roslovic, who has worn 96 with both the Blue Jackets and Rangers. Rantanen coerced Roslovic into giving up the number — a \$10,000 Rolex was part of the deal — and so Roslovic started wearing No. 98. Rantanen played only 13 games with the Hurricanes before they traded him when it became apparent he wouldn't sign a contract extension with them by the deadline. On Saturday, Roslovic was back to wearing No. 96 again. And he gets to keep the watch.
- Trivia answer: The three goaltenders who have four shutouts vs. the Blue Jackets are Evgeni Nabokov (San Jose 3, New York Islanders 1), Roberto Luongo (Florida 2, Vancouver 2), and Semyon Varlamov (Colorado 3, New York Islanders 1).

## BlueJackets.com / Old friends Kunin, Fischer reunite on a new team

**By Jeff Svoboda- March 8, 2025**

Just one day after arriving in a new city to play for a new team, Christian Fischer has an old friend on his side.

Acquired on waivers Thursday by the Blue Jackets, Fischer like the rest of the NHL was watching trade deadline coverage yesterday when he saw Columbus had made a trade for Luke Kunin.

The two 27-year-old forwards have been friends for most of their lives, starting when they played against one another as kids – Fischer hails from suburban Chicago, Kunin from outside St. Louis – and continuing when they were teammates for two years at the U.S. National Team Development program from 2013-15.

This will be the first time they're NHL teammates, though, and Fischer and Kunin immediately caught up on FaceTime when the news broke yesterday afternoon.

"I think we're looking at a little apartment or something," Fischer said. "We might be roommates the next couple of months, which is going to be fun. It's really cool to do it with somebody you know."

Added Kunin: "It's pretty cool to see where we've come from and to play for the same NHL team."

Two new players joined the team before heading off to NYC for their first game!

The Blue Jackets are happy to have the two veterans, who will help lengthen the team's lineup by bringing a combined 944 games of NHL experience to the table. They're similar players as well, hard-working, character guys who can kill penalties, deliver hits and turn in a dependable effort.

"We've been real pleased with our depth of the entire organization this year – we've talked about that a few times – but (it's nice) to add guys that have played in the National Hockey League a long time," head coach Dean Evason said. "It's not that the guys in Cleveland haven't done a fantastic job when they've been called up into situations, but we do (add) players that have played in the NHL. To have that experience certainly is positive."

Added from San Jose for a fourth-round pick in the 2025 draft, Kunin slotted into the team's third line with Justin Danforth and Yegor Chinakhov at Saturday's practice. The 2016 first-round pick has played 422 NHL games with the Wild, Predators and Sharks, notching 11 goals, 18 points and 163 hits – tied for 24th in the league this year at the deadline – this season in 63 games while wearing an "A" for the Sharks.

Evason coached Kunin when the center/wing first broke into the league with Minnesota and is quite familiar with a player who has 73 goals and 142 points in his NHL career.

"I've had him before," Evason said. "I know his game. I know what he brings. He brings physicality, he brings an intensity level, he brings a leadership quality that's a fantastic factor to bring into your locker room. He will play the game hard every night. He'll fit in wonderful with this group."

Kunin was at the U.S. program at the same time as Zach Werenski and played in the Nashville organization with Blue Jackets Dante Fabbro and Mathieu Olivier, so he said he knows what to expect now that he's in Columbus.

"It's definitely a team I had circled and I wanted to be a part of, so I feel very lucky and fortunate that it happened like that," Kunin said. "It's the way they play. I'm close with Fabs and I talked to Z and Matty O,

and obviously with how close of a group of this is and the buy-in of the group, you hear just how special this room is. I'm very excited to be a part of that."

Fischer, 27, was added off waivers from the Red Wings and should bring size (6-2, 212), energy and personality to the table. A nine-year veteran known with Arizona and Detroit for his affable nature in the locker room, he's skated in 522 career games with 62 goals and 137 points while topping 100 hits six times. So far this season, he had a goal, six assists and 89 hits in 45 games with the Red Wings but said he struggled to find a role with the team after a midseason coaching switch.

As a result, he's happy for a fresh start in Columbus, and he alternated in with the team's fourth line Saturday morning.

"I've had the most frustrating year of my career up to this point," Fischer said. "With the coaching change in Detroit in December, it just never really fell my way after that. It's pretty cool to come to a competitive team. Not too many times do you get to jump in the standings when you get traded. I think that's a really cool scenario.

"Playing against them, you know how these guys play, and I think that's right up my alley. I think that's the coolest thing is to play my game, this whole team plays a similar way, and I want to do that."

And while Fischer gets a chance to join an old friend in Columbus in Kunin, he said he already feels like he has a bunch of new ones given his welcome to the Blue Jackets.

"Once I got traded here, almost every single guy sends you a text to welcome you to the team," he said. "I think little things like that go a long way. It makes you want to compete harder on the ice and work together. If you have to block that shot with your face, you got to do it because every other guy would, too.

"Like I said, it goes a long way. I would assume that's a big reason why they're having so much success on the ice is how well they get along down here, obviously led by (captain Boone Jenner) and Z. It's pretty cool to be a part of."



## [BlueJackets.com / Fantilli gets hat trick, Blue Jackets defeat Rangers](#)

**By Dan Rosen- March 9, 2025**

NEW YORK -- Adam Fantilli scored his second hat trick of the season, leading the Columbus Blue Jackets to a 7-3 win against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Sunday.

Fantilli had his first NHL hat trick in a 5-1 win at the Toronto Maple Leafs on Jan. 22. He has 10 goals in the past 16 games, and 21 this season, making good on an opportunity for a bigger role with Sean Monahan sidelined with a wrist injury.

"I'm feeling confident," Fantilli said. "I've said it so many times before that I've gotten to watch some pretty amazing centermen and I had to learn just how to chill out and slow down in my D-zone. I think that's helped produce offense in a weird way. The better you are there the less time you spend there and the quicker you can get in the O-zone. A lot of credit to Sean Monahan and Boone Jenner. I've been playing behind them for a long time. It (stinks) the way I was able to get this opportunity but I'm very grateful to have it."

Zach Werenski had two assists to pass Rick Nash for the most assists in Blue Jackets history (260). Mathieu Olivier scored the game-winning goal, Dante Fabbro had a goal and an assist, and Daniil Tarasov made 32 saves. Dmitri Voronkov had assists on two of Fantilli's goals.

The Blue Jackets (31-24-8), who lost their previous two games, moved into the first wild-card position in the Eastern Conference.

"I think we played how we play," Columbus coach Dean Evason said. "We talked about it before the game about the last two hockey games we didn't look like ourselves, we didn't play like ourselves. Maybe there's an element coming off the outdoor game (on March 1). Maybe the trade deadline and all that stuff. We were a little tentative, we were a little apprehensive, and tonight we weren't. We played hard. We played right."

Chris Kreider and Braden Schneider scored short-handed goals on the same penalty kill, Vincent Trocheck and Mika Zibanejad each had two assists, and Jonathan Quick made 21 saves for New York, which has lost three games in a row (0-1-2).

The Rangers (31-27-6) are one point behind the Ottawa Senators for the second wild-card position in the Eastern Conference. They lost in Ottawa on Saturday, 4-3 in overtime.

They play their next three games on the road at the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday, the Minnesota Wild on Thursday and in Columbus on Saturday.

"We have 18 more games," Zibanejad said. "Yes, it's tough, especially two teams we're battling against. As frustrating as it is, and trust me it is, we have a big road trip coming up, we're getting these guys again next weekend, just have to find a way to win the games."

Justin Danforth gave Columbus a 1-0 lead at 5:56 of the first period.

On the goal, Werenski collected the 259th assist of his career, passing Nash to become Columbus' all-time franchise assists leader. It was also his 47th assist of the season, breaking his own record for most assists by a Blue Jackets defenseman in a single season.

"I just want to keep helping this team win," Werenski said.

Artemi Panarin tied it 1-1 at 19:31 with a deflection of Alexis Lafreniere's shot to extend his goal scoring streak to five games.

Fantilli made it 2-1 at 3:07 of the second, keeping the puck on a 2-on-1, pulling it in and around K'Andre Miller, and scoring with a shot from the right circle. He scored again 26 seconds later off a pass from Voronkov to give Columbus a 3-1 lead at 3:33.

But the Rangers tied it with consecutive short-handed goals on the same penalty kill.

Schneider cut it to 3-2 at 6:54 with a shot from the right circle. Kreider scored on a 2-on-0 with Mika Zibanejad to get it even at 3-3 at 7:36.

"I hated the bang-bang at the start of the second period," Rangers coach Peter Laviolette said. "We fight back and get the two short-handed goals and now we're in the game again. Then it's right at the end of the period bang-bang again."

Columbus regained the lead, 4-3, on Olivier's goal at 17:03, a net-front deflection of Werenski's pass off the left-wing wall.

Fabbro made it 5-3 at 18:47 with a snap shot from above the right circle.

"The shorties were tough, but I thought we regrouped well, got to our game again," Werenski said.

"When we play like that, when we're playing hard, playing fast, playing above them, we're a good hockey team in this League. I think we showed that tonight."

Kent Johnson extended the lead to 6-3 at 10:17 of the third period on a goal originally credited to Olivier, who drove the puck through the left circle and shoveled it at the net. After Johnson got a touch on it, Zac Jones knocked the rebound out of midair with his glove past Quick.

Fantilli completed his hat trick at 11:51, making it 7-3 with a shot from between the circles.

"We just got back to our game, which is a lot more direct," Olivier said. "We got inside and I thought we handled those two short-handed goals we gave up really well. It could have been a turning point in the game, but we handled it and we turned the momentum around, found a way to get it done. Really resilient our group tonight."

Notes: Fantilli is the first player to have at least two hat tricks in a season at age 20 or younger since Patrik Laine had three with the Winnipeg Jets in 2018-19. ... The last time the Rangers scored two short-handed goals on the same penalty kill was March 5, 2014 against Toronto. It was the first time they scored two short-handed goals in the same game since Nov. 30, 2019 against the New Jersey Devils.

## [BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Start spreading the news](#)

**By Jeff Svoboda- March 9, 2025**

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

BLUE JACKETS 7, RANGERS 3

1. Adam Fantilli's hat trick was a statement for the CBJ top line.

As the Blue Jackets struggled offensively in a pair of losses Tuesday and Thursday in Florida, the CBJ trio of Fantilli centering Kirill Marchenko and Dmitri Voronkov was kept off the board. In fact, they weren't on the ice for a 5-on-5 goal in either of the previous two wins over Detroit, too.

As they say, big players make big plays in big games, and Sunday certainly qualified as a big game as the Blue Jackets entered tied with the Rangers for the final wild card spot. And the Jackets' biggest players showed up, none more than Fantilli, who notched his second hat trick of the season.

With the Jackets and Rangers tied at 1 early in the second period, Fantilli took over on a shift, racing the length of the ice and beating goalie Jonathan Quick with a wicked wrist shot to give Columbus the lead.

Just 26 seconds later, Fantilli had another when he slammed home a pass from below the net from Voronkov, giving him the second-fastest goals by the same CBJ player in franchise history.

By the time Fantilli capped the scoring in the third by finishing another sweet feed from Marchenko, that line had made an emphatic impact.

"That was fun, yeah," Fantilli said after becoming the fifth CBJ player to earn multiple hat tricks in the same season. "Gotta give credit to the boys. Those were two sweet passes for the second two. I'm playing with great players right now, so they make it easy."

Fantilli is up to 21 goals on the season, making him the third CBJ player ever to reach the 20-goal plateau in a season at age 20 or younger, joining Rick Nash and Pierre-Luc Dubois. His game has steadily built throughout the season, and head coach Dean Evason has noticed.

"I wish there was inside looks at where he was at the start of the year and how his commitment to playing the game right way, how his commitment to playing defense, how his commitment to being a good leader and a good teammate (has grown)," Evason said. "We get a guy that goes down (Sean Monahan) and he steps into a role of a real leadership spot, and he's done the work. He deserves to get all the accolades or whatever it is that he's getting."

Two hats hit the ice in Madison Square Garden after Fantilli's third goal, one of them belonging to backup goalie Elvis Merzlikins. Voronkov picked it up and playfully tried to put it on Fantilli's head, but the young CBJ centerman didn't get to keep it.

"I saw Elvis throw his hat. That was pretty funny," Fantilli said. "I gave it right back."

2. Zach Werenski had another standout performance while putting his name into the CBJ record book (again).

If you're going to pass Nash to become the team's all-time leader in career assists, it's nice to do it the way Werenski did. It was a beautiful helper in a season full of them for Werenski, as he set up Justin Danforth's opening goal 5:56 into the game with the type of play few defensemen can make.

Werenski intercepted a Rangers pass while skating back into his own zone, and the puck was in the CBJ net in a New York minute. The standout CBJ defenseman immediately turned and raced up the ice, exchanging passes with Danforth before a sublime toe drag around Carson Soucy and return feed to Danforth at the netfront for finish.

That helper gave him 259 assists in his career, breaking a tie with Nash for most in team history. It's always notable to see one of Nash's CBJ records fall – it's taken a while, eh? – and Werenski certainly deserves it.

Of course, as he noted after the game, he's not here for records, he's here to win games.

"I mean, it's cool," he said of the record. "It's one of those things, I said to these guys in the room after the game, it's not possible without my teammates. I haven't really thought about (the record), to be honest. I'm just trying to enjoy the year, enjoy the moment, enjoy the spot we're in as a team and just keep going and playing my game.

"It's one of those things where I don't really care, as bad as it might sound. I just want to keep helping this team win."

Werenski made it 260 career assists later with the helper on Mathieu Olivier's game-winning goal that broke a 3-3 tie in the second, as his pass from the left wall was perfectly on the tape for the big man to redirect past Quick.

Werenski already had the CBJ record for points in a season by a defenseman, and he entered the game tied for the most goals (20) and assists (46) by a blueliner as well. The funny part? They were already his records set in previous seasons. Now, with 48 helpers on the season, he's set that mark again and will surely keep adding to it.

3. The Blue Jackets yet again displayed their unique brand of perseverance through tough moments on the ice.

Let's just be honest – giving up two shorthanded goals on the same power play is nobody's idea of a good time.

Yet it happened to the Blue Jackets for just the second time in team history Sunday night, as what should have been a key moment to blow the game open turned into what could have been a disaster. Fantilli's back-to-back goals had given them a 3-1 lead in the second period, and when Will Cuyllle went to the box for holding, things were trending the Jackets' way.

Instead, the Blue Jackets' focus slipped and New York took advantage, as Braden Schneider and Chris Kreider scored shorthanded goals 42 seconds apart to pull the Rangers even.

But instead of panicking, the Blue Jackets just put their nose back to the grindstone and were rewarded when Olivier and Dante Fabbro scored 1:44 apart late in the second period to give Columbus the lead for good.

"It could have went real sideways, right?" Evason said. "It's a credit to the guys for (saying), 'It's OK.' Stuff happens in the game, and they're trying to score, too. They catch a couple of breaks. They score those goals, and it would have been easy or would have been understandable if we didn't handle that well. But we did."

Evason has said it before, but his team doesn't seem to panic in such situations. Again, the Blue Jackets showed that they can overcome adversity.

“It didn’t faze us,” Werenski said. “I feel like it says a lot about our group. We just kept playing, kept sticking with it. I feel like for the most part we were in control the whole time, and it’s just a testament to how we played tonight. I feel like guys were dialed in, and we knew how big of a game it was.”

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Deadline Shows Bigger Moves Will Come in Offseason

**By Mark Scheig- March 8, 2025**

Columbus Blue Jackets' GM Don Waddell laid out his NHL Trade Deadline roadmap as the days toward March 7 were counting down. When all the dust settled, he accomplished what he said he was going to try to do.

Waddell was on record as saying that they would like to add a forward if possible. With recent injuries to Kevin Labanc and Cole Sillinger, the Blue Jackets saw an opportunity to add experience to the bottom of their lineup. Thanks to the waiver wire and one trade, they were able to add a pair of experienced forwards to their team.

On Thursday, the Blue Jackets claimed Christian Fischer off waivers from the Detroit Red Wings. Then on Friday, the Blue Jackets acquired Luke Kunin from the San Jose Sharks in exchange for a 2025 fourth-round pick. This was the pick they acquired when Alex Texier was traded to the St. Louis Blues.

Waddell spoke to the media on Friday afternoon after the Trade Deadline passed. He opened up about some moves that they could have been involved in but fell through. He also opened up about how there is potential for some bigger moves in the summer.

### Fischer & Kunin

In Fischer, the Blue Jackets added an experienced bottom-six right winger with size who can play on the penalty kill. My colleague Matthew Buhrmann wrote about what the team can expect to get from Fischer here.

Here is what Waddell said about Fischer after the claim was announced and Kunin after the trade was announced.

"Christian Fischer brings additional size, versatility and energy to our forward group. He's played in over 500 NHL games, possesses great character and will fit in very well with our team and how we play."

"Luke is a versatile forward who can play down the middle or on the wing, kills penalties and has tremendous character and work ethic. He has been a very consistent player throughout his career, and we think he'll be a good addition to our club."

Waddell said he had familiarity already with Fischer from his days with the U.S. Program. For him, character and fitting into the room were important factors in bringing these players in.

"Both players, first of all, are outstanding people," Waddell said. "And it goes back to what we talked about months ago with the guys we brought here during the year or at the beginning of the year. It's whether they were good players, but (also) good people, and we had to continue that here. I want to continue that forever, but this year's an exception to make sure we get the right people."

As for where they'll fit in the lineup, Waddell admitted they'll work it to find where they'll go. There is a good chance we could see a line of Sean Kuraly centering Kunin and Fischer.

Kunin played under coach Dean Evason for a couple seasons in Minnesota. Waddell raved about how Kunin is a coach's dream.

"Luke can play any forward position. He's played them all," Waddell said. "Obviously, he's been a natural centerman for years, but he's played the wing. Dean coached him in Minnesota. Dean liked him as a

player. He's a very trustworthy player, where if you put him in a spot, he'd succeed, and he's a coach's dream, as far as he'll do what you ask him to do. Having that experience goes a long way, and when I talked to Luke, he was excited about being here."

The two moves allowed the Blue Jackets to send both Mikael Pyyhtia and Joseph LaBate back to the Cleveland Monsters. They're both eligible for the AHL Playoffs since players had to be on an AHL roster by 3 P.M. Friday. Waddell said they papered Denton Mateychuk to ensure he is eligible for the AHL Playoffs. A decision on if they'll send him down will come later on.

#### No Other Moves

Just because they were no other moves by the Blue Jackets doesn't mean they didn't try. Waddell said there were at least three deals that fell through that would have made them a third-party broker for salary cap purposes. They likely would have added a draft pick in those deals. Here's Waddell.

"We got approached several times, and we had two going down yesterday and both teams the deal didn't go through. We had two lined up yesterday. A lot of the times the team will line it up ahead time knowing that if they get the player they've got to move past. So, we had two yesterday that were lined up and another one today and unfortunately the teams we were working didn't get the players that they were hoping to get. But we were definitely interested in trying to gain some assets if that was a way to do it."

The seller's market was a big factor in limiting what the Blue Jackets did on Friday. With prices high across the league and the desire of the team to not trade first-round picks, it didn't make for a situation that made sense to jump into.

Waddell came out publicly and said they weren't going to trade Ivan Provorov. He's been a big part of where the Blue Jackets are at. In his eyes, it wouldn't be fair to pull him out now.

"What we've been through, I just felt that I could not rip a big part of this team out of that locker room. I just didn't think it was fair to the rest of the guys, the coaches or the fans. We made a decision to keep Provy, and I've had great conversations with his agent and I'm pretty confident that we're going to be able to get a deal. And if we don't, obviously we'll have to find a replacement for him."

Waddell agreed with the assertion that there could be a bigger message in play when talking about future players considering the Blue Jackets. They see a situation in which a pending UFA is not traded, that resonates when it comes to deciding who to play for when they're free agents themselves.

"When you make those decisions, no one ever hurts you. That's for sure," Waddell said. "Just because we're where we were, it doesn't mean we're always going to sell off free agents. I've been in this position multiple times in my career. Sometimes you have to make those tough decisions, but I think the time should keep the guys at the deadline. You always get that extra boost from your players and potentially from other players that look and say, hey. Just because we're a free agent and we signed there for one year, doesn't mean we're going to be playing someplace else at the trade deadline. I think it is a good message."

#### Big Offseason Ahead?

Waddell said something interesting when discussing potential hockey trades. While teams as expected didn't want to give up much now, the potential for summer fireworks is a real thing.

"We had a couple hockey trades that we were talking about, but nothing that materialized," Waddell said. "Actually, some things, I think we set some great ground for the summertime with some teams

that didn't want to give up a lot right now, but they had interest in some of our guys. So, we had some good conversations."

It's no secret that Waddell is willing to make deals when the situation is right and the opportunity is there. He's had the chance this season to really get to know his team. He now has a better sense of what they need to address in the offseason.

With some talks occurring at the deadline, they will be revisited in the offseason. The Blue Jackets have cap space and plenty of draft capital to work with. This makes them one of the more interesting teams to watch in the summer to see how they decide to utilize their assets.

The Blue Jackets were able to add experience in the bottom six while keeping their team together. Waddell rewarded his players for their season to date. It's clear the team is supportive of the moves that were made.

"I had a couple calls today, a couple texts from a couple of our players and they were very supportive," Waddell said. "They know the situation. And actually some of them — one in particular and I'll leave it nameless — said: 'We've gotten the team this far. We can get it the rest of the way.' That was always good to hear from one of our top players. These guys, this is a tight group. I've been around a lot of hockey teams, around good groups of people. This group is special, and I've said that all along here. We're in this position because of the leadership in that room. The coaches have done a great job, but the leadership in the room from the players I think has got us to where we are today, and it's going to finish the job for us as we move forward."



## The Hockey Writers / How Will Christian Fischer Fit Into the Blue Jackets' Lineup?

**By Matthew Burhmann- March 8, 2025**

If you can't beat them, join them, right? After losing twice to the Columbus Blue Jackets last week, including the Stadium Series on Saturday, Christian Fischer has now joined the Blue Jackets. General manager Don Waddell made a waiver claim early Thursday, picking up Fischer from the Detroit Red Wings. He played 45 games for the Red Wings this season, with just one goal and six assists before being placed on waivers the day before.

The 27-year-old forward had been scratched in 12 of Detroit's last 26 games since Dec. 29 or playing on the fourth line as a speedy "energy" forward.

Where Will Fischer Slot In?

Fischer is expected to fill a bottom-six depth role in Columbus, likely on the fourth line, hopefully bringing some physical value to the team. With 29-year-old winger Kevin Labanc out for the season, this move makes a lot of sense, especially since it's always good to have extra bodies down the stretch in a tight playoff race. Centermen Sean Monahan and Cole Sillinger also remain out, allowing Fischer to occasionally slot in, filling some gaps in the forward group. Another physical depth forward, Joseph LaBate, was sent down to the Cleveland Monsters early on Friday for American Hockey League (AHL) playoff eligibility purposes.

This was a smart little deadline move. Although it likely won't be a team-changing addition like claiming Dante Fabbro from the Nashville Predators in November, having someone like Fischer can only help. I've got a lot of faith in Waddell's decisions, especially given how much he values the current roster. With the trade deadline closing at 3 PM EST today, I don't expect many more moves.

Here are Waddell's thoughts on claiming Fischer:

"Christian Fischer brings additional size, versatility, and energy to our forward group. He's played in over 500 NHL games, possesses great character, and will fit in very well with our team and how we play."

Fischer's Confusing Career

The 6-foot-2, 212-pound forward's offensive output has dipped since his early NHL days, and he hasn't made many big contributions lately. His most productive season was in 2017-18 with the Arizona Coyotes, where he scored 15 goals and 18 assists after being drafted 32nd overall in 2015.

Born in Chicago, Fischer made his mark in the AHL with 22 goals and 28 assists over 63 games with the Tucson Roadrunners and Springfield Falcons from 2015 to 2017. His junior hockey career with the Windsor Spitfires in the Ontario Hockey League (OHL) was impressive, too, racking up 40 goals and 50 assists in 66 games during the 2015-16 season. He also represented the U.S. National Development Team from 2013 to 2015 and played an important role in helping Team USA secure gold at the 2015 IIHF U18 World Championship.

More recently, his role shifted to a defensive forward, mainly logging his minutes in penalty-killing situations while offering more of a hard forechecking presence five-on-five for the Red Wings.

Pyyhtiä Heads Up I-71

Adding Fischer resulted in Mikael Pyyhtiä heading back to the Monsters, where he can continue his development following the return of 24-year-old winger Yegor Chinakhov from injured reserve. Pyyhtiä,

a 23-year-old left winger/center, has put up four goals and three assists in 47 games this season with the Blue Jackets. Drafted by Columbus in the fourth round (114th overall) in the 2020 NHL Draft, he has registered four goals and six assists across 66 career NHL games since making his debut in the 2022-23 season. The 6-foot, 176-pound Finnish forward has also added one goal and five assists in ten games with the Monsters this season.

Now, Pyyhtiä will focus on developing with a solid Cleveland team that stands at 28-16-5-5, placing them third in the AHL's North Division. He's expected to slot back into the top-six forward group as the Monsters also push for a playoff spot in the final five weeks of the regular season.

The Blue Jackets and their new addition will now take their four-game road trip from South Florida to the Northeast, starting with a game against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden this Sunday at 6:00 PM EST. Following that, they will face the New Jersey Devils on Tuesday at 7:00 PM EST, a game with major implications for the Metropolitan Division standings.

As of Thursday night, the Blue Jackets hold the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference with a record of 30-24-8. This makes Sunday's game against the Rangers, who are just outside the playoff picture, that much more important.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Can Regain Momentum This Sunday Against the Rangers

**By Matthew Burhmann- March 8, 2025**

Road trips have not been the Columbus Blue Jackets' cup of tea this season. The stark contrast between their home record (20-6-4) and away record (10-18-4) is quite alarming. If this team wants to keep their playoff hopes alive, this is something that has to change—and fast.

With nine of their final 16 games on the road, many against Eastern Conference playoff contenders, Columbus must figure out how to compete in tough environments outside of Nationwide Arena. Their four-game road trip will now take them to the Northeast, where they'll face two Metropolitan Division opponents, the New York Rangers and New Jersey Devils—two teams directly in the mix alongside them in the playoff race. The Rangers, currently sitting just behind the Blue Jackets in the wild card standings, have a chance to leapfrog Columbus with a win over the Ottawa Senators on Saturday. This makes Sunday's matchup at Madison Square Garden even more important for both teams.

"It's gonna get harder, right? We gotta compete a little harder. We gotta battle a little harder. We gotta put pucks in areas where we can get it back instead of just hoping to get it into those areas. We gotta be a little firmer and heavier," said head coach Dean Evason after Thursday's 3-0 loss to the Florida Panthers.

### Get More Pucks on Net

Against the Panthers, the Blue Jackets struggled at even strength (five-on-five). Despite goaltender Elvis Merzlikins keeping them in the game, allowing only two goals on 36 shots, the team couldn't keep up.

Shot disparities like 36-16 vs. the Panthers and 46-21 vs. the Detroit Red Wings have been a recurring issue of late. The team has been spending too much time in their own defensive zone and conceded too many grade-A scoring chances in the past few games. Continuing this way is a recipe for disaster, especially in the midst of a tight playoff race, with many games against solid in-division teams looming.

### Win the Special Teams Battle

Staying out of the penalty box will surely be a huge focus against the Rangers. In their game against the Panthers on Thursday night, the Blue Jackets took five minor penalties, one of which came from an unsuccessful coach's challenge (delay-of-game). This led to the Panthers scoring two of their three goals on the power play, leaving the Blue Jackets scrambling for possession and struggling to generate offense, given they didn't have the puck most of the night.

Columbus has struggled with penalty killing this season, ranking 25th in the league (74.7%). While there have been improvements lately, maintaining discipline is key with a struggling penalty kill like this. The Rangers' power play isn't overpowering at 19.9% (below league average), but their penalty kill sits at an impressive 82.5% (fourth in the NHL). Crisper passing and quicker decisions will be key for the Blue Jackets to make an impact on special teams, on both ends for that matter.

Also, simplifying their game—forechecking harder, breaking out cleaner, and generating traffic in front of the net—will be just as important to offset the Rangers' strong defensive play, especially along their defensive blue line. Being heavier in all ends will help with this, winning more puck battles overall, leading to more shots on net due to more puck possession.

### Continue Blocking Shots

Blocking shots has been a hallmark of this season under Evason. With the league's fourth-youngest team (average age 27), the Blue Jackets have embraced a gritty, hard-working style. They blocked 22 shots in the Stadium Series game against the Red Wings and 15 more against the Panthers. Defensemen like Zach Werenski (108 blocks) and Dante Fabbro (103 blocks) lead the way, with four players boasting high blocked-shot totals, all defensemen, of course.

However, the Rangers also excel in this department, led by Braden Schneider, who has 117 blocked shots this season. To counteract this, Columbus must focus on getting pucks through to the net, creating screens, and capitalizing on odd-man rushes from quicker breakouts, allowing New York less time to get set up in their own end.

#### Build Some Momentum

If the Blue Jackets can get back to their identity, they have a good chance to take advantage of a tired Rangers team, who will be in the second game of a back-to-back and build momentum as they head toward the final stretch of the season. These next two games, against the Rangers and Devils, are critical. Two regulation wins (four points) could be monumental for their playoff aspirations, while even one win would help keep them up with the rest. With the Rangers breathing down their necks in the wild card race, Sunday's game could be a turning point for both teams.

## The Hockey Writers / Newest Blue Jackets Kunin & Fischer Excited For New Opportunities

**By Mark Scheig- March 9, 2025**

One of the main byproducts of the NHL Trade Deadline is when players change teams, they go into a completely different situation. In the cases of Luke Kunin and Christian Fischer, both went from their previous tough situations to one with the Blue Jackets that sees them enter the heat of the playoff race.

For Kunin, his time with the San Jose Sharks didn't go as planned. The team is going through a clear rebuild. Although their future is bright, they still have a ways to go on their timeline before they're back in the contender conversation. Kunin struggled mightily as you'd expect on a last-place team.

For Fischer, the Detroit Red Wings presented him with a new opportunity after spending his entire career to that point with the Arizona Coyotes. While he was a serviceable player, he fell into a fourth-line role that saw him out of the lineup a lot. He was placed on waivers in order to allow the Red Wings to explore other options for the roster.

But thanks to the Blue Jackets, both Kunin and Fischer get a new lease on life. Both are excited for the opportunity to make an impact while helping the team try to return to the playoffs this season.

Kunin and Fischer met with the media on Saturday before the Blue Jackets made their trip to New York for a showdown with the Rangers on Sunday night. It's clear both still have plenty to offer. It's also clear how much they're looking forward to a fresh start.

### Kunin Very Excited

Kunin knew a trade was coming when the Sharks held him out of a game this past week for roster management purposes. He admitted identifying the Blue Jackets as a potential option during the process of wondering where he could go to.

"It was definitely one that I had circled and I was hoping for," Kunin said of the Blue Jackets. "For it to happen, I was very excited. I'm really just happy to join this group and helping any way that I can."

GM Don Waddell spoke highly of Kunin's character when he met with the media Friday after the Trade Deadline passed. Kunin just wants to be the best teammate he can at this point.

"Just try to come in everyday, do my job, work hard, be a good teammate," Kunin said. "Where ever I'm playing in the lineup, just do my job and not try to do anything more. (I) play fast, hard, simple game, physical, get to the net, try to create energy and hopefully get some good looks as well. We'll see how everything shakes out but this is very exciting for me. Whatever I'm asked to do, I'm willing to do it."

Kunin also opened up about his time with the Sharks. When asked what his prevailing memory will be, he mentioned the lifelong friends he made while there.

"It was a tough few years obviously, but I just tried to be a good leader to the young guys and show them how to be a pro, do things the right way and just everyday come to work. Even when the results aren't there, just sticking in the process and never taking a day for granted. Just my lot of lifelong friends I'll have from that team. It was just part of the business and it's behind me and I'm happy to be here."

### Fischer Excited Too

Fischer was in and out of Detroit's lineup when he was placed on waivers. Right away, Fischer said he felt very welcomed by the Blue Jackets. His excitement to join the team started from there. He saw how the team rallied around the Gaudreau's from a distance.

"How they've rallied and how well they played and just to get through that alone, that's very impressive," Fischer said. "I'm just completely honored to be a part of this group and you see and read and just you could feel it just how close these guys are. I think it's you don't want to disturb it. You just want to come in and play your part. I got a text from almost every guy on the team welcoming me. Boone Jenner reached out right away. We know Zach Werenski. We're pretty familiar right away with the guys and it's been a fun two days so far.

Fischer then opened up and admitted that the 2024-25 season has been frustrating.

"Probably the most frustrating year of my career I'd say up to this point," Fischer said. "Just never really got with the coaching change that were over in Detroit in December. I just never really found my way after that. Pretty cool to come to a competitive team. Not too many times you get to jump up the standings when you get traded. I think that's a really cool scenario. Playing against them, you know how these guys play and I think that is right up my alley."

Fischer was a scorer going through the U.S. Program and then in his one season with OHL Windsor. He has had to transform his game to play a more defined role. Here's what he said about what you can expect from him.

"I like playing both sides of the puck. I really try to defend well. I think that's the biggest thing being more of a role player, bottom-six. You have to win your little battles. I think there's a lot of little things in the game, board plays, getting pucks on the blue line. Nothing too flashy. Don't expect too many highlight reel goals but I play the game the right way. I play the game hard and I really enjoy the penalty kill. That's been part of my game for 8-9 years now."

#### Evason's Thoughts

Up until now, the Blue Jackets had to dip into Cleveland for help in the bottom-six given their injury situation. Most recently, it was Mikael Pyhtia and Joseph LaBate playing in those roles.

With Kunin and Fischer on board, Pyhtia and LaBate were returned to the Monsters to help with their playoff chase. Meanwhile, the Blue Jackets got an infusion of experience that coach dean Evason likes.

"We certainly have depth and we've been real pleased with our depth of the entire organization this year," Evason said. "We've talked about it a few times. But to add guys like that (who) have played in the National Hockey League a long time. It's not that the guys in Cleveland haven't done a fantastic job when they've been called up in different situations. But now we do have players that have played in the NHL. So to have that experience is certainly a positive thing."

With the injuries to Sean Monahan, Cole Sillinger and others, the Blue Jackets have had to find some different lineups. Monahan is expected back sometime around the end of March. Sillinger is more likely in early April assuming no setbacks. With the injuries and the new players coming in, Evason admitted having to do some experimentation at the start.

"I think we've kept our lines pretty much the same," Evason said. "But yeah, it's definitely a situation and an opportunity for us to experiment a little bit. Hopefully, we make the right choice. But you're always trying to find some chemistry. We know the players that have been here who seem to fit well or does fit well together. So yeah, we'll play around a little bit but hopefully we don't have to do a lot of it. We can get some consistency in that area."

Evason reunites with Kunin from their days with the Minnesota Wild. That familiarity level is something the coach is looking forward to.

"I know his game. I know what he brings. He brings an intensity level. He brings a leadership quality that is a fantastic factor to bring into your locker room. He will play the game hard every night. He'll fit in wonderful with this group."

#### Werenski Fired Up

Waddell sent a message to the Blue Jackets' room when he added while not trading any pending UFA's. This has Werenski fired up for the stretch drive of the playoff race.

"I think it's awesome," Werenski said. I think it's a message from Don that he believes in us and we're in a good spot here. I think we should be confident moving forward in the group we have in here. Obviously, we have a couple additions that I know very well from the past. They're great locker room guys. I think they're going to help a lot. But I think our room in here should be very confident moving forward. We can push for the playoffs and make the playoffs. And once we get in, we'll hopefully do some damage. So I was fired up about it."

Werenski believes these kind of moves are helping the Blue Jackets build a winning culture. While every situation is different, the message from the top is now finish the job. That's exactly what Werenski wants to hear.

"In terms of guys coming here later on, I hope everyone wants to come here. I hope we make it a destination where guys want to come play. I think that comes with success on the ice though. The business side of it's a part of it as well. The majority of guys want to go to winning teams and winning cultures. We want to build that here. I think we're well on our way doing that."

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Fantilli & Olivier Combine For Five Goals in Rout of Rangers

**By Mark Scheig- March 9, 2025**

With just 20 games left, every game becomes the biggest game of the season for the Columbus Blue Jackets. On Sunday night, they took an important step forward against the New York Rangers.

Adam Fantilli recorded his second hat trick of the season while Mathieu Olivier added two goals to lift the Blue Jackets to a convincing 7-3 win at Madison Square Garden. Zach Werenski had two assists and became the franchise's all-time leader in assists passing Rick Nash's 258.

A key moment in the second period ultimately decided this game in the Blue Jackets' favor.

### Game Recap

The Blue Jackets took less than six minutes to open the scoring on one of the best assists you can see. Werenski gave the impression he would drive to the net. Instead, his pass found Justin Danforth for a 1-0 lead.

The Blue Jackets played well for the first 19 minutes of the game. But then an icing, a missed assignment and a bouncing puck led to the tying goal. Artemi Panarin tipped in his 28th of the season. That marks five consecutive games with a goal for him.

Then the Fantilli show took over in the second period. He scored twice in 26 seconds on consecutive shifts to build a 3-1 lead. The first one was a snipe. The second one he got lost in coverage and buried from in front of Jonathan Quick.

The Blue Jackets were then given a power play chance with a two-goal lead. Instead of making it 4-1, the Rangers converted on two shorthanded goals to make it 3-3. The first was from Braden Schneider. The second was from Chris Kreider on a 2-on-0 break.

The Blue Jackets had to grab momentum back in a pivotal moment. After taking about 10 game minutes to settle things down, Olivier took charge. He drove the net and received a pass from Werenski to make it 4-3. The team never looked back after that.

Dante Fabbro extended it to 5-3 just 1:44 later on a shot from distance. The Blue Jackets then added two midway through the third period to make it 7-3. Olivier got his second of the night on an own goal by Zac Jones. The puck hit his glove before going past Quick. Fantilli then completed his hat trick. He became the youngest player in franchise history to record multiple hat tricks in the same season (20 years 148 days.)

Daniil Tarasov was solid at MSG again making 32 saves on the night. Quick played the whole game and allowed seven on 27 shots.

The Blue Jackets play their next most important game of the season across the Hudson River in Newark on Tuesday night against the New Jersey Devils. The gap is four points between the two teams. The Rangers in the midst of nine games in 16 days now travel to Winnipeg to play the Jets on Tuesday night.



## The Hockey Writers / Projecting How the Blue Jackets' Mathieu Olivier Extension Will Age

**By Nicholas Arnold- March 9, 2025**

Lost a little bit in the shuffle of the hectic NHL trade deadline was the contract extension for Columbus Blue Jackets' enforcer Mathieu Olivier. He is one of the few NHLers that have been able to take the enforcer role and keep it relevant in the league's new skill-based era. He's not simply there for the big hit or to drop the mitts, but he can also be effective as a good skater and occasionally pitch in the big goal.

The Blue Jackets acquired Olivier in the summer of 2022 as they thought they were a little too soft and needed to add some muscle. You'll recall that was the same offseason that they signed gargantuan defenseman Erik Gudbranson for that same purpose. The two players have come in and performed as advertised, adding some grit to support their very skilled group of young players.

Now, Olivier has become a favorite of the Blue Jackets' organization and fanbase. He's been rewarded with a six-year, \$18 million contract extension – \$3 million average annual value (AAV) – and is tied for the player with the most term left on their contract in the organization with defenseman Damon Severson, the two locked up until 2030-31. It's not often you see a depth player get that much term. Let's look into how warranted this is and how it projects with the planned increases in the league's salary cap.

### Olivier's NHL Edge Metrics

In the days of old, the "enforcer" was something that every team had. One player that would play anywhere between three and eight minutes per night, only leaned on when their coach needed a big hit or a fight to inject a spark to jolt their team's energy level. They would rack up about as many penalty minutes as time on ice and many would end their careers that spanned hundreds of games with less than a handful of appearances on the scoresheet.

Then came the 2004-05 lockout and the crackdown on enforcement of rules. Referees started policing the game a little bit more, and so the vigilante justice often imposed by enforcers became less needed. Since then, we've seen a gradual uptick in the importance of skill-based hockey and a steep decline of physicality-based hockey. While the floodgates have opened and smaller skilled players have more of a home in the NHL than ever before, larger players with less speed that mostly were there to protect the team's stars have been phased out.

Fortunately for the Blue Jackets, Olivier has enough skill to bridge the gap between the enforcer of old and the skill players of today. He's one of a very rare breed, which certainly elevates his importance to the Blue Jackets' organization and explains why they've signed him for so long. Guys like him do not come around often.

And the advanced stats back him up, suggesting he's got what it takes to keep up with the skill side of things. Aside from his career-high 12 goals this season – for comparison, long-time NHL enforcer Colton Orr had 12 goals in 477 career games played – Olivier's NHL Edge metrics often put him above average.

Most of his skating stats put him in the 50th percentile or above in the league. His 22.73 miles per hour (MPH) top speed puts him in the 73rd percentile. His gross shooting numbers aren't the best, at least from a shot speed perspective, but most of his shots have come when he's in tight to the net. He certainly is capable of launching one though, his top shot speed of 88.19 MPH is in the 70th percentile

among forwards. However, you're just way less likely to get one off that hard when you're three feet from the net.

If he's able to maintain his strong skating and can make a home for himself in front of the opposing team's net, people will be happy with this contract. I'm not expecting him to go full-on Zach Hyman and score 56 goals a season from that spot, but he will certainly continue to make himself an effective part of the team.

#### Olivier's Contract Projected

When the Chicago Blackhawks signed their fourth line center, Marcus Kruger, to a three-year deal worth just over \$3 million AAV in 2016, that was a clear example of overpaying for a depth piece. Despite being two very different styles of players, Olivier's contract clocks in at around the same AAV. His doesn't have quite the same "overpaid" connotations, although it may seem to.

In 2016-17, the salary cap was \$73.1 million, which puts the Kruger contract at about \$3.7 million AAV in today's dollars – which is a lot of money to pay a fourth-line player. We can do the same level of projecting through percentage of the cap on the Olivier contract in reverse to see how this will be equivalent to today's cap situation based on the substantial rises coming over the next three seasons.

Season	Salary cap	Olivier percentage of cap	Value of \$3 million AAV in today's cap dollars
2025-26	\$95.5 million	3.14%	\$2.764 million
2026-27	\$104 million	2.88%	\$2.538 million
2027-28	\$113.5 million	2.64%	\$2.326 million

Three seasons from now, Olivier will be in year three of this extension making \$3 million. Projecting backward, in that season, his cap hit will be equivalent to just over \$2.3 million in today's economy. It's still double what he was making before the extension, but with how important he's become to the locker room, along with his uptick in on-ice performance, that's not an unruly amount to pay him. And that's only in year three of six; as the cap continues to rise, it will only get more and more palatable.

Time will be the true judge of the positive or negative impact of this long-term contract extension on the Blue Jackets' organization. If Olivier continues to impact the team the way he has this season, it should be a success. However, if his body breaks down due to the physical nature of his style of play, it could hamper the team for the foreseeable future.

My projection: his body is built like a tank, he has no major injury history, and he's got a low number of NHL games under his belt thus far – just over 230 games played. All available information lends itself to the idea that Olivier should be able to sustain what he's done in the long term. If he does so, he could see the same longevity that fellow enforcer Ryan Reaves has and could also play into his late 30s. If that's the case, this signing will be a home run for Columbus.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Trade Deadline Move: Luke Kunin Dealt To Columbus Blue Jackets

**By Ed Francis- March 7, 2025**

The Columbus Blue Jackets acquired forward Luke Kunin from the San Jose Sharks on Friday, just hours before the NHL's trade deadline.

The news was first reported by Pierre LeBrun of TSN and The Athletic.

In exchange, the Blue Jackets are sending one of their two 2025 fourth-round picks to San Jose.

Kunin can play any forward position but primarily rotated between center and right wing this season. In this his third season with the Sharks, Kunin had 11 goals and seven assists for 18 points in 63 games and also saw significant minutes on the penalty kill.

He was averaging 15:15 per game with the Sharks and was 47% at the face-off dot.

"Luke is a versatile forward who can play down the middle or on the wing, kills penalties and has tremendous character and work ethic," said President of Hockey Operations and General Manager Don Waddell.

"He has been a very consistent player throughout his career, and we think he'll be a good addition to our club."

Kunin is in the midst of a one-year, \$2.75 million dollar deal and will be an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season.

The 27-year-old was held out of the Sharks' lineup for Thursday against the Colorado Avalanche for "roster management purposes", indicating that San Jose was expecting to move him.

For his career, Kunin has 422 career games with the Sharks, Nashville Predators, and Minnesota Wild. His best season came in 2019-20 with the Wild, where he had 15 goals and 16 assists (31 points) in 63 games.

Current Columbus head coach Dean Evason was an assistant coach with the Wild that season.



Kunin was a first-round draft pick (15th overall) in 2016.

### QUICK THOUGHTS:

It's safe to categorize this as a minor deal. While he was playing middle-six minutes with the Sharks, Kunin figures to settle into a bottom-six role with the Blue Jackets. A likely fourth line of Kunin, Sean Kuraly, and Thursday's waiver-wire acquisition Christian Fischer is a veteran trio that would play a very physical style of hockey. Also important: By all indications, Kunin is a good character guy to have in the locker room.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / CBJ 7, NYR 3: Fantilli's Hat Trick, Olivier's Big Night Lead Blue Jackets To Win Over Rangers

By Ed Francis- March 10, 2025

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CBJ GOALS:

Danforth (P1, 5:56)

Fantilli (P2, 3:07)

Fantilli (2) (P2, 3:33)

Olivier (P2, 17:03)

Fabbro (P2, 18:46)

Johnson (P3, 10:17)

Fantilli (3) (P3, 11:51)

Adam Fantilli's hat trick led the way as the Columbus Blue Jackets left Madison Square Garden with two key points with a 7-3 defeat of the New York Rangers on Sunday night.

Justin Danforth's got the night started with his seventh tally of the season to give Columbus an early lead.

Zach Werenski got the assist on the goal to become Columbus' all-time assist leader, with 259. Werenski would later add another assist, the 260th of his career.

With the game tied at 1-1 early in the second, Fantilli regained Columbus' lead and then extended it to 3-1 with a pair of goals less than 30 seconds apart.

Up two, the Blue Jackets gave up two short-handed goals, allowing New York to tie the game at 3-3. It was the first time this season Columbus allowed multiple short-handed goals in the same game.

It would be the Rangers' final two goals of the night.

Olivier would put the Blue Jackets back in front with just under three minutes left and Dante Fabbro would score with just over one minute left to give Columbus a 5-3 lead through two periods.

In the third period, a goal originally credited to Olivier — which would have been his second the night — was officially scored by Kent Johnson. His 21st of the season made it a three-goal lead for the Blue Jackets and Fantilli's hat trick dagger 1:34 later made it a 7-3 game and sent many of the Madison Square Garden faithful for the exits.

"We just got back to our game," said Olivier. "I thought we handled those two short-handed goals that we gave up really well. It could've been a turning point in the game but we handled it and we turned the momentum around."

Daniil Tarasov stopped 32 of 35 saves, including all 17 in the third period, to pick up his third consecutive win in net dating back to January 31st.

The win puts Columbus in solo possession of the top wild card spot and just four points behind the New Jersey Devils for third in the Metro division with two games in hand.

"We're a good hockey team in this league and I think we showed that tonight," said Werenski.

Here's how the Blue Jackets picked up their biggest road win of the season:

#### 1st Period:

(5:56 — CBJ Goal): Danforth gets the goal but what an amazing effort from Werenski to make it happen. He starts by intercepting the puck in the Rangers offensive zone, then quickly transitions into the neutral zone and finds Danforth entering Columbus' offensive zone. Danforth gets it back to Werenski, who makes a nice move while Danforth charges the net. Z then gets it back to Danny, who's at the back post and buries it. Beautiful work from both here to put Columbus up 1-0.

(19:31 — NYR Goal): The Rangers gain momentum heading into the intermission. Lafreniere gets a shot from the point off and it's perfectly deflected by Artemi Panarin to tie the game at 1-1.

#### 2nd Period:

(3:07 — CBJ Goal): The Rangers fumble the puck a bit in their own zone, and that's all Fantilli needs. He grabs the puck and heads up ice with Dmitri Voronkov, creating a brief 2-on-1 before the Rangers are able to even it up. Still, Fantilli uses some fancy stickwork to give him just enough separation from defenseman K'Andre Miller and whips it past goalie Jonathan Quick for the goal. It's his 19th of the season to regain a Blue Jackets lead, 2-1.

(3:33 — CBJ Goal): Fantilli was stuck at 19 goals on the season for all of 26 seconds of ice-time; he gets his 20th here to extend the Columbus lead to 3-1. Kirill Marchenko doesn't get an assist, but does a good job of disrupting the play in the neutral zone and then just a couple of seconds, again disrupting play behind the Rangers net. Voronkov swoops in and gets the puck, then dumps it into the slot where Fantilli is waiting and again beats Quick to add to the Blue Jackets lead.

(6:54 — NYR Goal): The Rangers entered the game second in the league with 11 short-handed goals and they make it 12 here. Braden Schneider is the beneficiary of the Blue Jackets asleep at the wheel in their own zone; the defenseman gets his fourth of the season on a routine shot from near the right dot to cut the Columbus lead to 3-2.

(7:36 — NYR Goal): Another shorty, this one tying the game at 3-3 and giving the Rangers the league-lead with 13 on the season. Another blunder from Columbus, this time entering the offensive zone. It leads to a 2-on-0 breakaway with Mika Zibanejad and Chris Kreider, who gets the goal to tie the game.

(17:03 — CBJ Goal): Just before the Rangers pair of short-handed goals, Olivier couldn't settle the puck in front of the net in what almost certainly have been a goal. He makes up for that here on a goal that starts with (yet another) good pass from Werenski; this time it's from the boards and with plenty of

traffic in front of Quick. With Quick's view blocked by Boone Jenner, he never sees the puck end up behind him on the stick of Olivier, who quickly puts it away to regain Columbus' lead at 4-3.

(18:46 — CBJ Goal): The fourth and final goal of a wild second period comes from Fabbro, who had picked up the secondary assist on Olivier's goal less than two minutes earlier. Like Marchenko earlier in the period, Werenski does not get an assist here but makes a smart play to keep that puck in that eventually leads to the goal. Seconds later, Kuraly gathers the puck near the left dot and sees Fabbro near the slot with no one near him. He slips it his way and Fabbro gets his fifth goal of the season.

3rd Period:

(10:17 — CBJ Goal): While Johnson gets credit for the goal, Olivier helps make it happen with a good bit of hustle. He goes nearly end-to-end before throwing the puck at the net at the last second. It pops up and bounces around a little bit before going off the Rangers' Zac Jones and into the back of the net to give Columbus a 6-3 lead.

(11:51 — CBJ Goal): Fantilli completes the hat trick with an easy shot from the low slot on a great feed from Marchenko, who took a good look from Damon Severson just before that. Before that, Fantilli helped himself with some good keep-away of the puck behind the New York net. This one gave Columbus a 7-3 lead and effectively ended the game.

CBJ	GAME STATS	NYR
27	SHOTS	35
34%	FACEOFFS	66%
0/1	POWER PLAY	0/4
4/4	PENALTY KILL	1/1
7	HITS	16
11	GIVEAWAYS	13
1	TAKEAWAYS	3
19	BLOCKED SHOTS	10
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		

CBJ	GAME STATS	NYR
2.08	EXPECTED GOALS	4.31
51	SHOT ATTEMPTS	72
23	SCORING CHANCES	42
13	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	18
Data via NHL.com & NaturalStatTrick.com		

#### Stat Chat:

- NHL teams were previously 0-12 this season when giving up multiple short-handed goals in the same game.
- This was the 12th time this season that the Blue Jackets scored six or more goals in a game; a new franchise record with still well over a month left in the season.
- Fantilli is the fifth Blue Jacket in club history to record multiple hat tricks in the same season. The last player to do it was Cam Atkinson in the 2018-19 season.
- Werenski's two assists not only gives him the all-time franchise lead in that category, but it also puts him within two of Boone Jenner for third-most points in team history, too. They're, of course, likely to shuffle back and forth on that one for a while.

#### Up Next:

Columbus' four-game road trip ends in New Jersey with a Tuesday night contest against the Devils. It's another key divisional game with playoff implications; this one set for a 7 p.m. face-off.

## The Athletic / NHL trade deadline winners and losers: Mikko Rantanen, Brad Marchand reshape Stanley Cup race

By Mark Lazerus- March 8, 2025

The Athletic has live coverage of the 2025 NHL trade deadline.

What the 2025 NHL trade deadline lacked in quantity, it made up for in quality. After all, it's not often we have a prolonged drama like the Mikko Rantanen saga, which took several twists and turns before ending deep in the heart of Texas. And the Panthers' stunning acquisition of Brad Marchand is one of the great buzzer-beaters in deadline history.

Now that the dust has settled — and knowing full well that the true winners and losers won't be known until mid-June — let's take a look at who improved the most, who took the biggest chances and who fell flat on their face on deadline day.

Winner: Florida Panthers

Imagine going up against a line with both Brad Marchand and Matthew Tkachuk on it. Good luck with that. Panthers GM Bill Zito made the most of the cap space Tkachuk's groin injury opened up, snagging Marchand at the very last minute after adding Seth Jones earlier in the week.

Marchand might not be the 100-point player he was six years ago, but he's still an excellent all-around player and one of the game's all-time great pests. You can count on The Rat being showered with fake rats after a big win in South Florida at some point this spring. Both Marchand and Tkachuk are hurt right now, but both are expected back for the postseason, which is all that matters in Florida. And while Jones was overpaid as the Blackhawks' No. 1 defenseman, he can be an outstanding No. 3 in Florida (and potential No. 2 going forward as Aaron Ekblad hits unrestricted free agency this summer), and at a more manageable \$7 million cap hit with Chicago retaining \$2.5 million for the next five seasons.

Winner: Mikko Rantanen

Rantanen was a member of the Carolina Hurricanes for about six weeks. He spent his first week on the road. He spent the next two weeks with Team Finland in Montreal and Boston. He had all of six home games in Raleigh. It's entirely reasonable that he wasn't ready to commit the next eight years of his life to a franchise and a city he barely knows. And that he was pushing for a nine-figure deal, complicating matters further.

Then Rantanen went and signed an eight-year deal with Dallas, a team for which he's never played, a city in which he's never lived. And for \$96 million, less than Carolina reportedly offered. As if there were any doubt that teams in tax-free states had an inherent advantage over the rest of the league.

Rantanen had total control of his situation, so he must be happy with the deal or it wouldn't have happened. While it would have been fun to see what someone like Rantanen could have gotten on the open market — players like him so rarely get to that point — he's joining one of the best and best-run teams in the league, and he's earning generational wealth to do so. How could you look at that as anything but a win?

Winner: Dallas Stars

Jim Nill has painted himself into something of a corner, handing \$96 million to Rantanen with Tyler Seguin coming off long-term injured reserve (LTIR) and Jason Robertson, Wyatt Johnston and Thomas Harley all due significant raises in the next two years. Then there's captain Jamie Benn, who is a pending



unrestricted free agent. Whatever. He'll get to that eventually, and given Nill's history, he'll surely make it all work. What matters is that this is now the Stanley Cup favorite, the best team in the NHL. Getting Rantanen — at significantly less than he'd get on the open market — is a massive coup for the Stars. The NHL's center of gravity continues to shift south.

Loser: Carolina Hurricanes

There's no spinning this as a positive for the Hurricanes. GM Eric Tulsky did well enough to salvage something tangible out of it — and if you go all the way back to the initial deal with Colorado, it might even be a net gain — but it's a bad beat all the same. The Hurricanes gave up a premium talent with another year on a team-friendly contract in Martin Necas to acquire Rantanen, got 13 measly games out of him (won only seven of them), and then flipped him to Dallas for Logan Stankoven and two late first-round picks. Stankoven is an exciting young player, but will he even be at Necas' level, let alone Rantanen's? The fact is, this might have been Carolina's best chance to break through in a wide-open Eastern Conference. Instead, they're further from contention than they've been in years.

The Hurricanes broke from team tradition last year by getting Jake Guentzel as a rental, only to watch him leave for Tampa (another team in a tax-free state!). That apparently spooked Carolina enough that Rantanen's ambivalence about Raleigh as a long-term home prompted this rather drastic course of action. It's a shame. Rantanen's production was subpar (six points in 13 games), but he was generating a massive amount of scoring chances. The goals were going to come, and Rantanen is a monster in the playoffs. Carolina could have gone for it, consequences be damned. Instead, the Hurricanes hedged and were left trying to make the best of a bad situation.

Winner: Mitch Marner

With Rantanen off the board, guess who's the belle of the ball this summer in free agency? Get that bag, Mitch.

Winner: Colorado Avalanche

The trade deadline is typically an imperfect tool for filling holes, with teams scrambling and often settling to add something, anything, as the clock ticks down. There's rarely a perfect fit out there for a team, and it's even more rare for such a trade to happen. But Brock Nelson was the perfect fit for the Avalanche, giving them the second-line center they so clearly needed.

The price was high (a first-rounder and top prospect Calum Ritchie), and the Islanders can feel just as good about this deal as Colorado can. But the Avalanche can win the Stanley Cup this season. Nelson makes them that much better. Swapping Casey Mittelstadt for Charlie Coyle only helps. You won't hear anyone complaining about the Avalanche's lack of centers anymore.

Loser: Colorado Avalanche

Eight years, \$96 million for Rantanen? That's pretty much what the Avalanche reportedly offered him before they sent him to Carolina. There's the tax-free aspect, obviously, but if Rantanen never wanted to leave and Colorado was willing to hit the same number, that initial trade to Carolina looks premature in hindsight.

Winnipeg made a tiny step forward today, adding sensible depth players in Brandon Tanev and Luke Schenn.

Winner: Chicago Blackhawks

Trading Jones makes the Blackhawks worse; there's no way around that fact. Yet again, it could get even worse before it gets better in Chicago. But Spencer Knight's 41-save debut has Chicago fans feeling hope

for the first time since the 2023 draft lottery, and it's an undeniable victory for Kyle Davidson to only have to retain \$2.5 million on Jones' contract for the next five seasons.

With Jones forcing the issue and Chicago having no leverage, it seemed like a cap dump for futures with high retention was all the Blackhawks could hope for. Instead, they got a potential No. 1 goalie and a first-rounder, without an onerous retention. Unloading Petr Mrázek and landing a young, controllable, former first-rounder in Joe Veleno is a nice bonus that not only moves out a bad contract but averts an awkward three-goalie situation. Nice work by Davidson.

Loser: Chicago Blackhawks

Davidson, flush with cap space and desperate for a difference-maker up front, had his eye on Rantanen as an ideal linemate for Connor Bedard. Now that Rantanen is off the board, Davidson can only hope that Toronto doesn't strike a deal with Marner — and that Marner's up for a fixer-upper.

Winner: Tampa Bay Lightning

Some day, there will be a reckoning for Julien BriseBois and the Lightning, a day on which all their core players suddenly are tumbling down the aging curve and the cupboard is completely bare. But that day is not today.

Tampa has won 10 of its last 11 games and has muscled its way back into the true contender tier of the NHL. And when you have a chance to win, you go for it. BriseBois' utter disregard for draft picks is almost comical at this point — Tampa has had one first-round pick in the last five drafts and has dealt away its 2025, 2026 and 2027 first-rounders (the last two with top-10 protection) — but it's also absolutely the right attitude for a perennial contender.

Neither Yanni Gourde nor Oliver Bjorkstrand is a franchise-changing needle-mover, but the Lightning know as well as anybody that it's those second-tier depth additions that often make the difference in the postseason.

Every hockey fan should want their team's GM to think this way.

Loser: Buffalo Sabres

As they hurtle toward a 14th straight spring without a playoff appearance, the Sabres had to do something. And they did something. But they did something that doesn't really change anything.

At best, swapping Dylan Cozens (and depth defenseman Dennis Gilbert) for Josh Norris (and depth defenseman Jacob Bernard-Docker) is a wash. At worst, it's selling low on a player with a very high ceiling. That the Sabres sent a second-rounder to Ottawa for the privilege is baffling.

Instead of getting aggressive and truly remaking a talented but continually underperforming roster by dealing away the likes of Jason Zucker or even Alex Tuch, the Sabres are stuck running in place. And that place is last.

They are in the same position after the trade deadline as they were before the trade deadline — lost.

Winner: Toronto Maple Leafs

The Leafs didn't have the splashiest deadline — at one point in the day, while chaos swirled, you wanted to poke Brad Treliving with a stick and see if he was still awake. But Scott Laughton and Brandon Carlo are sneaky good gets who make Toronto a better defensive team, first and foremost.

Laughton's certainly an upgrade over Max Domi, who can shift to the wing. With the Flyers retaining half of Laughton's salary, the Leafs get a reliable two-way, third-line center for two playoff runs at just a \$1.5

million cap hit. And it didn't cost them any of their top prospects or young players. Even the 2027 first-rounder is top-10 protected.

Laughton is good on the ice and great in the room. It's not the most exciting move, but for a team that's been done in by its lack of forward depth in previous postseasons, it's a savvy one.

Loser: Vancouver Canucks

It sounds like there could be progress toward a Brock Boeser extension, but what are these Canucks? They're not going for it, having traded J.T. Miller away earlier in the season and Carson Soucy to the Rangers for a third-rounder at the deadline. They're not retooling, having held on to Boeser and Elias Pettersson. Their captain and best player is hurt, they're on the periphery of the playoffs, and they seem to be going nowhere slowly.

Winner: San Jose Sharks

For absolutely nothing, Sharks GM Mike Grier got 50 solid games from Jake Walman, a second-round pick (from Detroit as a cap-dump sweetener last summer) and a first-round pick (from Edmonton for Walman on Thursday). Steve Yzerman could never.

Loser: Edmonton Oilers

Dallas went out and added the best player available in Rantanen and locked him up long-term. Colorado went out and added the top rental available in Nelson. Edmonton added a solid second-pair defenseman in Walman and a third-line forward in Trent Frederic. If this is an arms race, Edmonton is losing. The Oilers are the defending conference champion and were the preseason favorites to win it all. Now, they look like the fifth-best team in the West. It's foolish to ever doubt Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid, but the Oilers have an uphill climb to get back to the Final.

## The Athletic / NHL trade deadline: Grading every deal completed this trade season

**By The Athletic NHL Staff- March 8, 2025**

The Athletic has live coverage of the 2025 NHL trade deadline.

The 2025 NHL trade deadline has come and gone. While there were significant trades going back to the fall, the “trade season” really kicked off in a big way in late January when the Colorado Avalanche shocked the hockey world by trading Mikko Rantanen to the Carolina Hurricanes.

We’ve been dishing out trade grades analysis ever since.

Panthers swoop in to nab Brad Marchand from Bruins

Panthers get: Forward Brad Marchand (at 50 percent salary retention).

Bruins get: Conditional second-round pick in 2027 (becomes a 2027 or 2028 first-rounder if Florida wins two rounds of the playoffs this year and Marchand appears in at least 50 percent of the team’s playoff games).

Marchand may not be the player he once was, but in tough minutes he can still put up points. On a team like Florida, he won’t have to be the guy driving play either and having less of a burden in that way could squeeze more value out of the player he currently is. On the Panthers, he’s a tremendous fit, a game-changer that cements Florida as the team to beat in the East and a Stanley Cup co-favorite.

This is a no-brainer for Florida and a serious head-scratcher for Boston.

Panthers grade: A+

Bruins grade: D

Maple Leafs and Bruins pull off a blockbuster at the buzzer

Maple Leafs get: Defenseman Brandon Carlo

Bruins get: First-round pick in 2026, prospect Fraser Minten

Penguins get: Defenseman Conor Timmins, forward Connor Dewar

The Bruins did very well for moving essentially their No. 4 defenseman during a down season. Getting a first-round pick and a quality prospect in Fraser Minten is a solid haul, even in this inflated market and with 15 percent retention (roughly \$600,000) for the next two years.

The Leafs, meanwhile, desperately needed an upgrade on the back end, especially given how their depth defenders had struggled of late. Carlo will get a chance to come in and stabilize the second pairing with Morgan Rielly, who’s had a really tough season with a variety of partners.

The Penguins rounded out the deal by acquiring a couple Toronto castoffs for not a whole lot. Possibly they can convert those players into picks in the offseason or a year from now at next year’s deadline, when they’ll likely continue to be very bad.

Bruins grade: A

Leafs grade: B+

Penguins grade: B-

Avalanche keep loading up, swap Casey Mittelstadt for Charlie Coyle

Avalanche get: Centre Charlie Coyle, fifth-round pick in 2026

Bruins get: Center Casey Mittelstadt, prospect Will Zellers, second-round pick in 2025

Colorado's spending is risky because the team can do all this to fall short in Round 1. But the Avs at least get two playoff runs out of Coyle.

As valuable as Coyle has been in Boston over the last few years, this team needs a retool and a 32-year-old isn't a part of that. The Bruins have to make difficult decisions because realistically, they only have so many trade assets. Adding Zellers and a 2025 second-rounder helps replenish the Bruins' depleted pipeline. Mittelstadt may be having a down year, but he is the exact type of reclamation project Boston should be targeting.

Avalanche grade: A-

Bruins grade: B+

Blackhawks resolve logjam by dealing Petr Mrázek to Red Wings

Chicago Blackhawks get: Center Joe Veleno

Detroit Red Wings get: Goaltender Petr Mrázek, center Craig Smith

Petr Mrázek was fabulous last season. Behind one of the worst defenses we've seen in the modern NHL, Mrázek kept the Blackhawks competitive more often than not and was far better than his pedestrian numbers would suggest. But he crashed down to Earth this season. He's been the worst goalie in the league since Dec. 1, with an .866 save percentage and a minus-14.95 goals saved above expected, per Evolving Hockey.

He carries a \$4.25 million cap hit, he's signed through next season, and Chicago was out of salary retention spots. A trade seemed like a long shot. So, to get out from underneath that contract less than a week after acquiring Knight — and to get a 25-year-old, controllable former first-rounder in Joe Veleno, to boot — is nifty work by Chicago GM Kyle Davidson.

Blackhawks grade: A+

Red Wings grade: B-

Maple Leafs fill a need by getting Scott Laughton from Flyers

Maple Leafs get: Center Scott Laughton, fourth-round pick, sixth-round pick

Flyers get: First-round pick in 2027, forward Nikita Grebenkin. Flyers retain 50 percent of Laughton's salary

Laughton slips into the lineup on a bargain cap hit of just \$1.5 million through to the end of next season. He also is a significant upgrade over who the Leafs have been playing on an often-overmatched third line, bringing the type of edge and heart-and-soul game that the organization has been looking for in the postseason.

The Flyers, meanwhile, did well to wait this one out until the finish line. In a sellers' market, they pulled out strong value for a third-line player who has topped 40 points only once in his career.

Maple Leafs grade: B-

Flyers grade: A

Stars get Mikko Rantanen from Hurricanes and become Cup favorites

Stars get: Forward Mikko Rantanen

Hurricanes get: Forward Logan Stankoven, two first-round picks, two third-round picks

Dallas has been two wins away from the Stanley Cup Final in each of the last two years and was two wins from a championship in 2020. The time is now, and GM Jim Nill knows it. It's never a bad idea to add one of the best players in the world, damn the consequences.

Stars grade: A

Hurricanes grade: C+

Penguins, Kraken soak up sellers' market in 2 deals with Jets

Winnipeg Jets get: Defenseman Luke Schenn

Pittsburgh Penguins get: 2026 second-round draft pick, 2027 fourth-round draft pick

Winnipeg Jets get: Forward Brandon Tanev

Seattle Kraken get: 2027 second-round draft pick

In Schenn, the Jets got themselves a physical right-shot defenseman who can kill penalties and clear the net-front. In a vacuum, that's fine — it's certainly a player profile that they can use. Given how the Western Conference is shaping up, he should help the Jets along the way.

Still, they need to be careful about how much they put on Schenn's plate. He's 35 years old now and was never going to win any foot races in the first place.

You could say something similar about Tanev. He can still skate and still seems like a player who can be a factor over the course of a playoff run, but his overall game has dipped over the past two years.

Jets grade: C-

Penguins grade: A

Kraken grade: A

Kings overpay for Kuzmenko, but he might fit

Kings get: Forward Andrei Kuzmenko

Flyers get: 2027 third-round draft pick (Flyers retain 50 percent of Kuzmenko's salary)

Even with 50 percent salary retention, a third-round pick is a bit much to give up for Andrei Kuzmenko. So this is a nice move for the rebuilding Flyers, because the winger was never going to be a long-term fit there.

Finding an ideal fit for Kuzmenko is tricky, but there's actually some juice with the Kings.

Kings grade: B-

Flyers grade: B+

Senators land Dylan Cozens as Sabres sell low on young center

Senators get: Forward Dylan Cozens, defenseman Dennis Gilbert, second-round pick in 2026

Sabres get: Forward Josh Norris and defenseman Jacob Bernard-Docker

At a first, surface-level glance this is a trade of similar players: two young-ish second-line centers with strong pedigrees who have had a hard time matching 30-goal career years a few years back.

But a few key things that separate Norris and Cozens make this one a win for the Senators.

Senators grade: A

Sabres grade: C-

Penguins get strong return for flipping Anthony Beauvillier to Capitals

Capitals get: F Anthony Beauvillier.

Penguins get: Washington's 2025 second-round draft pick.

Beauvillier has scored his share of goals this season. He shoots the puck a bunch. He can skate. The Caps, meanwhile, aren't getting a ton of production from their bottom six. Beauvillier, if nothing else, can help in that particular space.

Pittsburgh couldn't have played it any better. Beauvillier was signed to be traded, and everything fell into place for a pretty impressive return.

Capitals grade: C+

Penguins grade: A

Avalanche pay big for Brock Nelson, but he's worth it

Avalanche get: F Brock Nelson (50 percent of salary retained), F William Dufour.

Islanders get: First-round pick in 2026 or 2027, conditional third-round pick in 2028, F Calum Ritchie, D Oliver Kylington (then traded to Anaheim Ducks for future considerations).

Nelson is an elite second-line center whose effectiveness sometimes goes under the radar. Nelson is a reliable goal-scorer and his play-making is top-notch. What separates him from Mittelstadt is his reliability in his own zone. As much as Nelson meant to the Islanders, management actually did what needed to be done.

Avalanche grade: A

Islanders grade: A

Oilers gamble on Jake Walman bolstering their blue line

Oilers get: Defenseman Jake Walman.

Sharks get: Conditional first-round pick in 2026, forward Carl Berglund.

Walman isn't a perfect fit — he's another lefty and his game can be a bit inconsistent — but he represents a huge upgrade for the Oilers at a reasonable cost, especially considering the extra year of term he has left on a modest \$3.4 million cap hit.

Oilers grade: B+

Sharks grade: A-

Wild add big winger Justin Brazeau in deal with Bruins

Wild get: Forward Justin Brazeau.

Bruins get: Forward Marat Khushnutdinov, forward Jakub Lauko, sixth-round pick in 2026.

Brazeau is enjoying a breakout season with 20 points in 57 games as an everyday NHL player for the first time in his career. The 27-year-old pending free agent is one of the slowest players in the NHL but makes an impact with a heavy playing style and genuine net-front utility.

Khusnutdinov was a highly touted prospect from the KHL and while he's struggled to make an offensive impact in his first full NHL season (seven points in 57 games), he's still only 22, boasts an impressive speed/work rate combo and is already a very solid defensive player.

Wild grade: B-

Bruins grade: B+

Penguins, Predators pair up for puzzling deal

Penguins get: Forward Tommy Novak, defenseman Luke Schenn.

Predators get: Forward Michael Bunting, fourth-round pick in 2026.

Tommy Novak is the best player involved in this deal. If that signpost matters to you — and it probably should — the Penguins are your winner. Beyond that, two bad teams exchanged a few players who are varying degrees of mediocre.

the deal is more proof Pittsburgh isn't necessarily punting on next season, either. Novak is a decent player signed to a reasonable contract (\$3.5 million AAV for two more seasons). He might not be more; he's certainly nothing less. If you're prioritizing your lottery odds, you do not go out and acquire the Tommy Novaks of the world to play on your bottom six.

Penguins grade: C

Predators grade: D

Lightning go all in for Yanni Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand

Lightning get: Forward Yanni Gourde, forward Oliver Bjorkstrand, fifth-round pick in 2025, prospect Kyle Aucoin.

Kraken get: First-round pick in 2026, first-round pick in 2027 (both top-10 protected), Toronto's second-round pick in 2025, forward Michael Eyssimont.

Red Wings get: Fourth-round pick in 2025 (earlier of Tampa or Edmonton's pick) for taking on 25 percent of Gourde's cap hit.

The Atlantic arms race is fully in motion. First, the Panthers addressed their biggest need by acquiring Seth Jones. Now the Lightning do the same with a massive swing, adding Oliver Bjorkstrand and Yanni Gourde.

The cost was not cheap, but it's hard not to love what Tampa Bay did here.

Lightning grade: A

Kraken grade: A

Oilers take a chance on injured Bruins forward Trent Frederic

Oilers get: Center Trent Frederic and forward Max Jones.

Bruins get: Second-round pick in 2025 (from Blues), fourth-round pick in 2026, defenseman Max Wanner.

Devils get: Rights to forward Shane LaChance for retaining 50 percent of Frederic's salary.



This is an intriguing roll of the dice for the Oilers.

Frederic is a big-bodied winger with above-average speed and a gritty, abrasive playing style. The 27-year-old is a wrecking ball physically and a top-notch forechecker, which are two ingredients that the Oilers needed more of in their lineup. This size and sandpaper will instantly make Edmonton a harder team to play against. Frederic is a versatile player who can play both wing and center.

Oilers grade: B

Bruins grade: B-

Devils grade: B+

Blackhawks grant Seth Jones' trade wishes as Panthers press on

Florida Panthers get: D Seth Jones (Blackhawks retain \$2.5 million of Jones' \$9.5 million contract per season).

Chicago Blackhawks get: G Spencer Knight, 2027 first-round pick

This could easily be a win-win for both sides.

This had the potential to drag out into an awkward, ugly saga. Instead, the Blackhawks found a swift solution and got a couple of intriguing pieces.

Spencer Knight is enjoying a breakout season. Landing a first-round pick on top of Knight is impressive work for the Blackhawks.

However, the Panthers desperately needed more help on the blue line. Their bottom-four defense has looked compromised without Brandon Montour and Oliver Ekman-Larsson. Jones is a polarizing player, but most of that is because he was miscast and paid to be an elite No.1 defenseman on an awful team.

Blackhawks grade: C

Panthers grade: B

Wild's pickup of Gustav Nyquist from Predators is a worth a shot

Minnesota Wild get: F Gustav Nyquist

Nashville Predators get: 2026 second-round draft pick

Will playing for a better Wild team unlock the Gustav Nyquist of old? Or, at least, the Nyquist of last season?

Minnesota can only hope so. But if this really is the year that the Wild break out of the mushy middle and win a playoff series for the first time in a decade, they're going to need more than just a third-line depth scorer.

Wild grade: B

Predators trade: A-

Rangers flip pending UFA Ryan Lindgren to Avalanche in sensible deal

Colorado Avalanche get: Ryan Lindgren, Jimmy Vesey, prospect Hank Kempf

New York Rangers get: Juuso Parssinen, Calvin de Haan, 2025 second-round draft pick, 2025 fourth-round draft pick

Rangers retain 50 percent of Lindgren's salary.

This trade threads the needle for both the Rangers and Avalanche, just in different ways.

The Rangers could have kept battling it out in the Eastern Conference playoff race and bet on their goaltender to drag them into Round 1. But maybe the Adam Fox injury was the final straw that persuaded management to take a step back and start loading up for next year.

While there is some risk to Lindgren's game, between his on-ice decline and durability (thanks to his playing style), the Avalanche should be able to maximize him better. At 50 percent retention, he should be an upgrade over Calvin de Haan, because he can step up into a bigger workload if needed.

Rangers grade: B+

Avalanche grade: B

Hurricanes acquire Mikko Rantanen in stunning blockbuster with Avalanche

Hurricanes get: RW Mikko Rantanen, LW Taylor Hall.

Avalanche get: RW Martin Necas, C Jack Drury, second-round draft pick in 2025, fourth-round draft pick in 2026.

Blackhawks get: Third-round draft pick in 2025. Chicago retains 50 percent of Rantanen's salary

The Avalanche give up the best player in the deal, and traditional reasoning in the NHL is that means they lose the trade. But the reality is there had been rumors all season they weren't going to meet Rantanen's asking price — said to be Leon Draisaitl-ish — and it made no sense to walk him to UFA status in July. But this one will sting, big time, on the ice, as Rantanen was one of their heart-and-soul leaders, an all-situations superstar playing the second-highest minutes for a forward in the league.

Necas has had a nice offensive breakthrough this year, but he's not the all-around player Rantanen is and there remains some debate about how high the 26-year-old's ceiling really is given his limitations.

Hurricanes grade: A

Avalanche grade: B-

Blackhawks grade: C

Stars land Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci

Dallas Stars get: F Mikael Granlund, D Cody Ceci.

San Jose Sharks get: 2025 first-round pick, 2025 fourth-round pick (becomes third-round pick if Dallas makes Stanley Cup Final).

If the Stars get the Granlund who has thrived on a bad Sharks team with a scoring resurgence, they are adding someone who can help retrieve puck from his own zone and transition the puck up the ice. Last year, his passing was up in San Jose and this season he seems to be emphasizing his shot volume more. Dallas may need some depth to navigate the Miro Heiskanen injury, but Ceci isn't the answer. He is a one-dimensional defensive defenseman who tends to play in roles that are above his head.

Getting a first-rounder in return is a great bit of business for the Sharks, especially without any salary retention.

Stars grade: C+

Sharks grade: A-

Canucks pay Penguins steep price for Marcus Pettersson, Drew O'Connor

Vancouver Canucks get: D Marcus Pettersson, F Drew O'Connor.

Pittsburgh Penguins get: F Danton Heinen, D Vincent Desharnais, F Melvin Fernström, 2025 first-round pick (via New York Rangers, top-13 protected).

After it looked like Vancouver was set to take a step back by sort of punting with the J.T. Miller trade, it flipped the Rangers' first-rounder and picked up exactly what the team needed: another top-four defender who can play significant minutes and take some of the pressure off Quinn Hughes.

O'Connor, meanwhile, has been mired in a season-long slump and brings at least some potential to offer physicality and depth scoring off the wing after he had 16 goals and 33 points last season.

It's obviously a lot for the Canucks to pay for two rentals, but their need on D was so glaring that it threatened their season, even with all the focus on the Miller drama.

Canucks grade: B

Penguins grade: B+

Canucks finally send J.T. Miller to Rangers in big swing for both teams

New York Rangers get: F J.T. Miller, D Erik Brännström, D Jackson Dorrington.

Vancouver Canucks get: F Filip Chytil, D Victor Mancini, 2025 first-round pick (top-13 protected).

A high-risk, high-reward trade for both sides.

For the Rangers, this comes down to what version of Miller they're going to get. Miller has been an excellent player for the Canucks through six seasons, but he's alternated between two different versions of himself. The upside for New York is that it didn't give up a lot and that Miller could give them a home run-like jolt if he regains last season's form.

For the Canucks, this is an underwhelming return on paper for a player of Miller's stature.

Rangers grade: C

Canucks grade: C+

Flames bet on upside, Flyers hope for short-term Andrei Kuzmenko spark

Calgary Flames get: F Joel Farabee, F Morgan Frost.

Philadelphia Flyers get: F Andrei Kuzmenko, F Jakob Pelletier, 2025 second-round draft pick, 2028 seventh-round pick.

The Flames, wild-card spot aside, are an abysmal offensive team, enough for Morgan Frost and Joel Farabee to represent upgrades. These aren't world-beaters. They're not going to make the Flames good. Better, maybe, but not good.

Kuzmenko is a creative, skilled player. He's had offensive success in the past, most notably the 39 goals he scored with the Vancouver Canucks in 2022-23, but that was a flash in the pan, given that he scored on an outrageous 27.3 percent of his shots playing next to Pettersson. Kuzmenko's defensive habits are poor, and he's a very slow forechecker.

Flames grade: B+

Flyers grade: C

## The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: Jets stick at No. 1, plus your team's perfect trade deadline

**By Sean Gentile and Dom Luszczyszyn- March 8, 2025**

The Athletic has live coverage of the 2025 NHL trade deadline.

At long last, deadline day is here and the NHL has brought out all the big names: Laughton, Donato, Suter, Kuzmenko — it's going to be an exciting day!

For now, you can still hope for the absolute best to happen to your favorite team. So that's what we're doing: Cooking up a best-case scenario for each team's deadline day. Enjoy before everything we wrote becomes out of date, which will probably happen roughly five minutes after you finish reading. In fact, several things became out of date while we were writing it. Thanks for that, Colorado and Dallas.

### 1. Winnipeg Jets, 43-16-4

Last week: 1

Sean rank: 1

Dom rank: 1

Best case: A major offensive piece and third-pair help

Amazing as the Jets have been, there's a reason that many aren't quite fully sold. We've seen almost this exact same team look strong during the season only to get humbled quickly in the first round by a team with high-end talent. Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor both deserve credit for how they've played, but they're not Nathan MacKinnon or Jack Eichel.

If the Jets win, it's because they'll have waves of offensive talent to lean on. Find a 2C who can play with Nikolaj Ehlers, and they'll have the pieces to go all the way.

Aside from that, some help on the third pair would be appreciated. If the Jets are hellbent on having someone extremely tall there, Jamie Oleksiak would be a major upgrade.

### 2. Dallas Stars, 41-19-2

Last week: 3

Sean rank: 2

Dom rank: 2

Best case: Find a way to spend all their LTIR dough

With both Miro Heiskanen and Tyler Seguin likely done for the regular season, the Stars have a whoooooole lot of money to play with at the deadline. Basically, they can afford to do whatever they want.

The problem: they don't actually have a lot of holes in their lineup to fill and there aren't a lot of worthwhile players out there. It's no shock the Stars are closing in on Mikko Rantanen, because why not, but aside from that there aren't many things that make sense. At the very least, all the financial flexibility does mean one thing: not having to pay exorbitant prices for salary retention. If the Stars do make a splash, that could be a big advantage.

### 3. Washington Capitals, 40-14-8

Last week: 2

Sean rank: 3

Dom rank: 4

Best case: A 3C who fits is still out there

It's been said plenty of times but still bears repeating; the Capitals don't have to do much of anything. They have a relatively limited amount of money to play with, and there's no real reason to mess with the secret sauce. They're an elite offensive team in terms of chance creation and overall production, and they're defensively good enough. Plus, Ryan Leonard could be on the way.

Still, in a perfect world, they'd find another bottom-six center. Lars Eller has been adequate, in the sense that the Caps aren't losing his minutes, but "adequate" isn't quite ideal. Jake Evans was an option, but he's sticking with the Canadiens. Maybe they could clone Nic Dowd.

#### 4. Florida Panthers, 39-21-3

Last week: 4

Sean rank: 4

Dom rank: 3

Best case: A bottom-six lottery ticket hits

Nobody should ever count out the Panthers when it comes to needle-moving trades. They've still got \$4 million, give or take, of Matthew Tkachuk LTIR money to spend. Still, it feels like Seth Jones was their capital-M Move of the season.

If that's indeed the case, you've got to assume Paul Maurice and Co. would settle for one of their recent bottom-six additions to pan out. Maybe it's Jesse Puljujarvi; maybe it's Nico Sturm. Maybe it's someone else from the dollar bin. Anyone who can skate and forecheck at a high level would be welcome.

#### 5. Vegas Golden Knights, 37-18-6

Last week: 6

Sean rank: 6

Dom rank: 5

Best case: Someone we haven't heard about

After Thursday's Reilly Smith re-acquisition, logic would dictate that the Golden Knights are done. They needed a half-decent winger, and they got one who they know quite well. Now, they're capped out.

That's never stopped them before, though. And hey, if they need pieces, they've got a first-rounder still in the organization. Literally, one. Trevor Connelly. Everyone else has been traded.

#### 6. Tampa Bay Lightning, 37-21-4

Last week: 7

Sean rank: 5

Dom rank: 6

Best case: The new guys do their job

The Lightning paid a hefty price at the deadline, as they always do. Usually it works out (Brandon Hagel, Blake Coleman, Barclay Goodrow), but sometimes they get a Tanner Jeannot situation. Tampa Bay's latest move — acquiring Oliver Bjorkstrand and Yanni Gourde — looks a lot more like the former, and that's really good news for the team's Cup aspirations. The only thing left to do is see how it all turns out. It's one thing to be better on paper, it's another for the guys to go out there and prove they were worth the high cost of acquisition.

#### 7. Carolina Hurricanes, 37-22-4

Last week: 9

Sean rank: 7

Dom rank: 7

Best case: Keeping Mikko Rantanen

Flags fly forever, and Rantanen gives Carolina the best chance to earn one this season. With him in tow, the Hurricanes are right there with the league's absolute best teams — even if Rantanen hasn't quite produced at his usual rate. With the Devils losing Jack Hughes for the year, Carolina's path to go deep also just got a lot easier.

A roster with Rantanen on it at 3 p.m. ET is Carolina's best chance to go the distance. There is nothing the Hurricanes can acquire that will make their team better than it is today.

There are other things to weigh here, obviously, and in a seller's market it makes sense to do some due diligence. But, at the very least, Rantanen is the ultimate rental — might as well see how far the team can go with him and worry about the contract later. Rantanen was always going to go to July 1. It's time for the Hurricanes to show him why he should stay: by winning it all.

#### 8. Toronto Maple Leafs, 38-21-3

Last week: 5

Sean rank: 9

Dom rank: 8

Best case: Foe turned friend

If we're talking best-case scenarios, how about the Leafs acquiring Mitch Marner's buddy Brad Marchand? Toronto could still use a top-six left winger and while that's not the top priority (3C and defensive depth), Marchand is enough of a difference-maker to change those priorities. He's been a thorn in the Leafs' side for over a decade now, an absolute villain in a completely one-sided rivalry.

With the Bruins out of it and at least entertaining the idea of trading Marchand, the Leafs would be a perfect fit. It may feel wrong to even imagine Marchand in blue-and-white, and in fact, it's probably a pipe dream to even imagine two rivals making this kind of deal. But we're going to dare to dream anyway because it's hard to deny that Marchand is exactly what the Leafs need: a talented veteran scorer who knows exactly why they always lose in the playoffs. His expertise could be the missing piece.

#### 9. Colorado Avalanche, 37-24-2

Last week: 11

Sean rank: 8

Dom rank: 9

Best case: Brock Nelson. Your best case became reality, Avalanche fans.

You may notice that for every other team we wrote something vague that could apply to a multitude of players. For Colorado, it's specific. That's because for the Avalanche, it really was that simple: they needed a 2C and Nelson was kind of the only true 2C available. And they got him! Neat!

It was hard to imagine too many other players that would've checked off all the necessary boxes. In order for the Avalanche to really contend in a gruelling Central Division, they needed to fix their biggest hole. That's Nelson.

And let this blurb serve as wishcasting for the rest. Fans of other teams, your dreams can also come true!

#### 10. Edmonton Oilers, 36-22-4

Last week: 10

Sean rank: 10

Dom rank: 10

Best case: Getting Evander Kane off their cap

Somehow, the Oilers didn't need to put Kane, who's still recovering from a buffet of offseason surgeries, on LTIR to acquire Jake Walman. Still, the situation isn't resolved, and it's stopping them filling more holes — maybe in goal or on the bottom six.

#### 11. Minnesota Wild, 36-22-4

Last week: 12

Sean rank: 12

Dom rank: 11

Best case: A Michael Russo article saying Kirill Kaprizov's return is imminent

Simple. As Russo has already written, the Wild — assuming Kaprizov, Joel Eriksson Ek and Jonas Brodin come back this season — are basically handcuffed. Luckily, one of those guys is an MVP-caliber talent. That's not meant as a knock on Eriksson Ek or Brodin, either. Both are great players. Kaprizov, though, is the Wild's engine, wheels and soundsystem.

#### 12. Los Angeles Kings, 31-20-9

Last week: 8

Sean rank: 11

Dom rank: 12

Best case: A meaningful offensive addition

No team allows fewer expected five-on-five goals per 60 than the Kings. In actual goals against/60, they're second to the Jets (and Connor Hellebuyck) and nobody else. This is a good team. Still, if they're going to make it past the Oilers, they're probably going to need to add a little offensive juice.

Maybe that comes in the form of a premium winger like Mikko Rantanen. Maybe it's a more complementary piece like Brock Boeser or Rickard Rakell. Maybe they sign up for the Erik Karlsson experience. Either way, they've got room to improve.

#### 13. New Jersey Devils, 33-24-6

Last week: 13

Sean rank: 13

Dom rank: 13

Best case: Accept reality

Losing Jack Hughes for the rest of the year is a huge bummer. It means the Devils, who might've been a dark horse with Hughes in the fold, will likely be nothing more than first-round fodder in this year's playoffs. We don't want to say they're cooked, but ... have you seen their forward group? It's rough. Add a Dougie Hamilton injury to that and it's clear that this just isn't going to be the year for New Jersey.

That's the reality and New Jersey's best deadline is one where the team doesn't waste assets on a likely lost cause. Whether the Devils choose to accept that remains to be seen, but trading a second-round pick for Brian Dumoulin in 2025 is certainly not a good start.

14. Vancouver Canucks, 28-22-11

Last week: 16

Sean rank: 15

Dom rank: 14

Best case: Quinn Hughes in the lineup

The Canucks, for a variety of reasons, are one of the day's most interesting teams. That starts with Brock Boeser, a rental winger one year removed from a 40-goal season. He's going to be, at minimum, a fall-back option for teams who miss out on Rantanen. From there, who knows?

What's most important for the Canucks as they try to regain their wild-card spot, though, is that Hughes gets healthy and stays healthy. With him, they've got a shot. Without him, hoo boy.

15. Ottawa Senators, 31-25-5

Last week: 18

Sean rank: 14

Dom rank: 15

Best case: A top-six winger

As ever, it's hard to figure out just what to do with the Senators; they're in a playoff spot, but just barely, and because they're capped out, it'd be tough to meaningfully improve the roster in one spot without weakening it in another. Their most realistic move might be hoping that David Perron, coming off one of his best games of the season against Chicago, turns back the clock for a few months.

16. Columbus Blue Jackets, 30-24-8

Last week: 14

Sean rank: 16

Dom rank: 17

Best case: Sensibly priced help

Don Waddell isn't one for games. If he's telling rival GMs that he's looking to buy but not interested in expensive rentals, you can assume that's indeed the case. Seems like the right move to us; Columbus can



make the playoffs, and no roster is more deserving of reinforcements, but there's no reason for Waddell to upset the apple cart either. Down the line, the Blue Jackets can be a legit contender. That — not a sell-out, short-term run — should be the priority.

#### 17. New York Rangers, 31-26-5

Last week: 17

Sean rank: 17

Dom rank: 16

Best case: Their main playoff competition striking out or standing pat

Of all the teams not currently in a spot, the Rangers are probably still the best on paper. Even after selling some pieces off.

That's their key to still making the playoffs, but that calculus can change depending on what Columbus, Ottawa, Detroit and the Islanders do at the deadline. With the Rangers (probably?) unlikely to buy further after adding Carson Soucy and likely done selling, their best-case deadline day is making sure their competition doesn't get better.

#### 18. Detroit Red Wings, 30-26-6

Last week: 15

Sean rank: 18

Dom rank: 18

Best case: To not do anything stupidly short-sighted

Wings fans have been very patient with the Yzerplan, and it's important to stay patient on a day known for its wackiness. While the Red Wings may be on the cusp of the playoffs, actually making it isn't very likely. That's a reality that they need to weigh properly. That could mean rewarding the team with a small push that can help them beat the odds or staying pat, but the key is to not do something that might jeopardize the long-term picture.

Making the playoffs would be a terrific bonus, and as long as Detroit avoids anything that jeopardizes future postseason runs, it'll be a successful deadline.

#### 19. Utah HC, 28-25-9

Last week: 19

Sean rank: 19

Dom rank: 19

Best case: A high pick for Nick Bjugstad

After re-signing seemingly everyone on their roster, it feels like a quiet deadline for the Utah Hockey Club. That means the best-case scenario is cashing in on Bjugstad, the team's lone trade chip. With this year's deadline being a seller's market, maybe Bjugstad could fetch a shockingly high pick, assuming that whatever kept him out Thursday night was a short-term ailment.

#### 20. Calgary Flames, 29-23-10

Last week: 20

Sean rank: 20

Dom rank: 20

Best case: A Rasmus Andersson trade?

It'll never happen — Calgary is in a playoff spot and could certainly use a playoff series — but Andersson should probably be on the block. Is he a foundational piece for a good team? Nope. But he's certainly better than Brian Dumoulin, and Dumoulin just netted the Ducks a second-rounder. If that's a representative price on defensemen, look out.

21. New York Islanders, 28-26-7

Last week: 22

Sean rank: 22

Dom rank: 21

Best case: A haul worthy of trading away a fan favorite

Brock Nelson wasn't just the best center on the market; he was one of the best players in Islanders history. He also produces offense like a legit first-liner, with a well-rounded game as a scorer and playmaker. Isles fans saw it up close for years. Now, it's time to hope that Calum Ritchie, the main piece they received from Colorado, comes through.

22. Montreal Canadiens, 30-26-6

Last week: 24

Sean rank: 21

Dom rank: 23

Best case: A second-round pick for David Savard

We said something similar back in the Flames blurb. Seriously, if that's what Dumoulin brought back to Anaheim, why not? A Joel Armia bidding war would be pretty funny, too.

In the meantime, the Canadiens can bask in their early playoff push, and Jake Evans can buy some nicer stuff.

23. St. Louis Blues, 30-27-6

Last week: 21

Sean rank: 23

Dom rank: 22

Best case: Apparently, all three of Toronto's top prospects for Brayden Schenn

The price for Brayden Schenn has been rumoured to be extremely high. So high that TSN's Darren Dreger reported it could take Toronto's top three prospects to make it happen ... before somehow adding, "Would that be enough?"

Needless to say, one of the biggest deadline day hauls ever in exchange for an overpaid 33-year-old with three years left on his deal would be an incredible win for the Blues.

24. Anaheim Ducks, 27-27-7

Last week: 25

Sean rank: 24

Dom rank: 24

Best case: Sending John Gibson to Edmonton

This one might be tough considering Gibson is out with injury — again. It just makes too much sense not to consider this for both sides. Lukas Dostal is the team's goalie of the future and has outplayed Gibson in each of the last three seasons. Gibson has played well and should carry some real value on the market. Why not make the most of it?

After thumping Edmonton 6-2, the Oilers should be a lot more desperate in the goaltending department. The key word being "should." Not much Anaheim can do if there's no market out there for a goalie, but if the Ducks can extract a high pick for Gibson, that would be a big win.

#### 25. Boston Bruins, 28-28-8

Last week: 23

Sean rank: 26

Dom rank: 25

Best case: A blissfully ignorant team to overpay for Brandon Carlo

For those who haven't been paying attention to the Bruins, Carlo has had a tough season. It seems not having Hampus Lindholm by his side hasn't been ideal for the shutdown defender, which has led to career low on-ice numbers at both ends of the ice. Carlo plays tough minutes, but without Lindholm he's struggled mightily in them, looking closer to a 4/5 than a bonafide top-four guy.

And yet, it's hard to deny that Carlo's name carries a certain level of cache. We'd still bet on him being a solid defensive defender, especially on the right team. But in a seller's market there's high potential for Carlo to not be worth the likely significant bounty he's traded for.

#### 26. Philadelphia Flyers, 27-28-8

Last week: 26

Sean rank: 25

Dom rank: 26

Best case: A first-round pick for Scott Laughton (and maybe more for Rasmus Ristolainen?)

It'll be fun to see how many different ways Canadian TV networks manage to say, "Scott Laughton is a decent, high-character third-liner who pushes play but doesn't score all that much." Because he is! No lies detected! Whether that's worth the price tag, though, is another issue entirely.

#### 27. Buffalo Sabres, 24-31-6

Last week: 27

Sean rank: 27

Dom rank: 27

Best case: A surprise blockbuster with Dylan Cozens and Bowen Byram as the centerpieces

The Sabres seemed like a deadline non-factor last year and then out of nowhere, they pulled off the most shocking trade of the day: Casey Mittelstadt for Bowen Byram. One for one.

That trade worked out damn well for the Sabres, and now we're on the edge of our seats waiting for the next trick. With Cozens and Byram both on the block, we're hoping for something seriously spicy where the Sabres turn two solid players into one actually great one. The kind of trade that brings this franchise back to relevancy this time next season.

#### 28. Pittsburgh Penguins, 24-30-10

Last week: 28

Sean rank: 28

Dom rank: 28

Best case: That Mikko Rantanen drives the cost of wingers even higher

The Penguins, it would seem, are sitting pretty; they can offer Rickard Rakell as a consolation prize to the 31 teams who don't currently employ Rantanen. Rakell has rediscovered his 30-goal form, and he's posting some solid two-way impacts at five-on-five. If you want a productive, well-rounded winger who can play with elite linemates and is signed to a favorable contract with term, he's your guy. He won't come cheap — and given the market, he shouldn't. The Penguins aren't burning to move him, but it's easy to imagine a Godfather offer hitting Kyle Dubas' desk.

#### 29. Nashville Predators, 23-32-7

Last week: 30

Sean rank: 29

Dom rank: 29

Best case: A haul for Ryan O'Reilly

Who knows what Barry Trotz is doing? We ask that with all honesty because the Michael Bunting/Tommy Novak trade was bizarre (on Nashville's end, at least). A big-time offer for O'Reilly would be interesting. It'd also force the Preds to seriously consider blowing the whole thing up, which ... might not be a bad idea.

#### 30. Seattle Kraken. 26-33-4

Last week: 29

Sean rank: 30

Dom rank: 30

Best case: A home for Brandon Tanev and Jamie Oleksiak

The Kraken already scored one of the biggest seller wins, getting two firsts and a second for Oliver Bjorkstrand and Yanni Gourde. Now it's time to bring it home with their other two pieces on the block. It's unlikely either Tanev or Oleksiak net a first, but both players will be sought after and can definitely add to the pile.

#### 31. Chicago Blackhawks, 19-35-8

Last week: 31

Sean rank: 31

Dom rank: 31

Best case: Two high picks for Ryan Donato and Connor Murphy

In Donato and Murphy, the Blackhawks have two fairly coveted pieces: a solid middle-six winger and a decent top-four defensive defender. In a seller's market, that could net a pretty big haul. Maybe not "two firsts and a second" big, but enough to get at least one first out of the deal. There aren't many wingers who bring more value than Donato, and Murphy might genuinely be one of the better defensemen remaining on the board. Chicago needs two big wins.

32. San Jose Sharks, 17-38-9

Last week: 32

Sean rank: 32

Dom rank: 32

Best case: A desperate team to give them a first for Mario Ferraro

On one hand, with Jake Walman headed to Edmonton, the Sharks are going to need someone to play defense. On the other, Ferraro doesn't seem like anything close to a long-term answer and NHL GMs do weird stuff when they're short on time.

## The Athletic / NHL's wild trade deadline reveals a shift in philosophy. Will it last?

**By James Mirtle- March 9, 2025**

When the dust settled on Friday's trade deadline, there were 24 trades made. Within those deals, 47 players changed teams, the fourth-highest total in NHL history.

But that number didn't really do justice to just how busy the week was, with 18 more trades and 38 more players and prospects swapping organizations in the four days leading up to deadline day.

The sheer volume of all that, however, wasn't the story at the end of the day. Instead, what people around the league were left talking about was how unique this deadline period felt.

It wasn't so much a deadline window filled with superstars getting new homes — although Mikko Rantanen's history-making turn going through not one but two deadline trades in less than six weeks helped on that front — as it was a massive all-in by contending teams offering up piles of first-round picks and prospects for any upgrades available.

The fact sellers were few and prices were high hardly seemed to deter executives with teams firmly in playoff position, a shift in mindset from years past.

Tampa Bay Lightning GM Julien BriseBois seemed to set the tone for it all Wednesday after completing his blockbuster, which involved dealing two first-round picks, a second and a fourth for Oliver Bjorkstrand and Yanni Gourde.

His comments read like a more modern-day, well-lawyered version of Cliff Fletcher's famous draft schmaft rant 29 years ago.

"I'd rather have a lineup full of good players than a bank of a ton of draft picks," BriseBois said. "Because I think ultimately what we're trying to do is win hockey games. We want to win a lot of hockey games this season, next season, every season. We're chasing a championship now this season, but we're going to be chasing a championship next season and for the foreseeable future."

And he has company on that front.

According to PuckPedia, top teams have traded 14 first-round picks throughout this season, nearly double the total of a year ago. In the aftermath of Friday's big selloff, the Lightning don't have a first-round pick in 2025, 2026 or 2027. Same for the Toronto Maple Leafs.

The Colorado Avalanche, Dallas Stars, Edmonton Oilers, Florida Panthers and Vegas Golden Knights all lack first-rounders in the next two seasons, as well.

That's a group that includes the five teams with the best odds to win the Stanley Cup this year — and seven of the top 10.

It's a carpe diem mindset that makes a lot of sense, especially in a league where the draft is kind of a crapshoot outside of top 10 picks and parity is so high among the contenders that even adding a Bjorkstrand or two late in the season can be enough to separate from the herd.

Add a Rantanen, like the Stars did in dramatic fashion Friday? Even better.

That's not to say first-round picks lack value. Nearly half of the league is made up of former first-rounders, with 44 percent of skaters who have played 20-plus games this season being selected in that round.

But their value tends to be highly concentrated among the best of those picks, with a 10th pick holding more than three times the value of a 30th selection. Even then, those high picks typically take years to be realized, especially when it comes to helping a contending club win it all.

Drafting a talented 18-year-old out of junior hockey at No. 25 isn't going to pay dividends for teams like the Lightning or Leafs for four or five years, at which point Nikita Kucherov and Auston Matthews and the rest of their stars may age out of their primes or blow out a knee or head off to free agency.

And that's if you can hit on the pick, which is a coin flip at best given fewer than 50 percent of late first-rounders get to the 100-game mark.

What BriseBois' comments earlier in the week and Friday's aggressive movement elsewhere seemed to showcase more than anything is a shift away from the conservatism that NHL general managers had become known for in previous eras.

Whereas teams were once reluctant to trade talent within their division, the Bruins shipped captain Brad Marchand to the rival Panthers for a mere conditional second-round pick Friday. The Senators, meanwhile, left their captain in tears after moving his best friend, Josh Norris, in another unusual blockbuster with the perpetually rebuilding Buffalo Sabres.

And the Leafs upgraded their blue line substantially — by trading a first-round pick and their second-best prospect — after nabbing behemoth Brandon Carlo, a 600-game lifer in Boston.

Friday's excess wasn't just apparent in the use of first-round picks, either. Depth players were commanding more draft capital than ever, with Luke Schenn, for example, going to the Jets for a second- and fourth-round pick when it took only a third-rounder two years ago.

It all felt a little ... weird? At least by this conservative league's standards.

It's at least partly due to the fact there's immense pressure on GMs around the league, especially after newer upstart owners and their GMs in Florida, Vegas and Tampa have completely owned the Cup chase of late, winning four of the last five championships and remaining among the favorites again. Those organizations have become known for a willingness to be bold and make massive trades, taking advantage of salary freed up due to injuries, or their favorable tax situation, or any other workable angle, in order to get better.

These more cutthroat, analytical and aggressive front offices have clearly gained an edge over the traditional and genteel approach that dominated the early salary-cap era, which has helped lead to the unusual arms race we've witnessed the past six weeks.

In the end, the Stanley Cup chase remains fairly wide open — 10 teams with roughly a 7 percent chance or better of winning — and few of the contenders have heavily separated themselves away from the pack by expending so much draft capital. Part of what makes that difficult is the NHL's playoff format, where several of the top teams will have to face one another in Round 1 — including potentially the Stars and Avs, and two of the three top teams in the Atlantic — and face an early exit.

But the alternative to going all in by moving picks is standing pat and heading into a brutal early series as the underdog, a scenario BriseBois explained he wanted to avoid.

"Ultimately, the calculation is that trying and failing will yield less regret than failing to try," he said.

It's not often we get Confucian-like musings about trades at the NHL's deadline like that, but then again, front offices — and how they do business — are continuing to change and evolve.

And the new way of thinking seems to be winning more rings than ever these days.

## The Athletic / 2025 NHL trade deadline report cards: Grading every team's moves (or lack thereof)

**By The Athletic NHL Staff- March 9, 2025**

The start of the NHL's 2025 trade deadline featured everything from major moves that saw the rich get richer to reunions to big names in new uniforms before, predictably, a flurry of moves Friday.

Which teams accomplished their goals, and which left their fan bases fuming? The Athletic asked its NHL staff to assign a grade to every club on their moves (or lack thereof) ahead of the deadline — in context of how successfully they improved their situation — whether they're rebuilding, trying to make the playoffs or pushing to win the Stanley Cup.

We had to define "ahead of" somehow, so we decided on everything including and after the Mikko Rantanen trade to the Hurricanes on Jan. 24. Any moves made before that are excluded.

Anaheim Ducks: B

This didn't set up to be a prolific deadline for general manager Pat Verbeek. After all, the Ducks have been through the pain of a teardown and it's time for them to start taking the initial steps toward playoff contention. Which they have done. Getting a second-round pick and an intriguing forward prospect for Brian Dumoulin was fine work, though one wonders if there was a chance of getting even more, given how much of a seller's market it was. The chances of the Ducks moving either John Gibson or Trevor Zegras were very slim at best. It's not as though either (or both) couldn't still play a key role in their future. But the Ducks — as their young impact players are finally starting to show some growth under coach Greg Cronin — should be laying the groundwork for upgrading. And with a ton of cap space to play with this summer, that's where the real action could take place. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins: B+

Team president Cam Neely and general manager Don Sweeney shattered the 2024-25 roster by trading their captain (Brad Marchand) and two of their alternates (Charlie Coyle and Brandon Carlo). By doing so, the Bruins closed the book on their 2011 Stanley Cup days (Marchand was the last championship winner remaining) to initiate a rapid makeover emphasizing speed and youth. Casey Mittelstadt is younger, faster and more skilled than Coyle. He does not have Coyle's physicality, matchup presence, penalty-killing skill or faceoff touch. Fraser Minten, one of Toronto's top prospects, could become a regular matchup forward in the NHL and assume some of Coyle's responsibilities. All of this was necessary because of the Bruins' plunge in the standings and their absence of NHL-ready youngsters. What darkens the youth infusion, however, is the return on Marchand. The Bruins set a high price for the left wing. In retrospect, it was too high because of Marchand's age, current injury status and partial no-trade protection. A conditional second-round pick is a disappointment. Now the Bruins will have to hit on their inbound draft capital. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres: B

There's now a clearer vision of what the Sabres could look like in 2025-26, and it's a different vision than the one general manager Kevyn Adams had two seasons ago when he signed Dylan Cozens to a seven-year contract worth more than \$7 million per year. Adams said earlier this season he was willing to listen to trade offers for core players, and he followed through with one of his boldest moves during his tenure. Adams wanted to make his roster better with player-for-player trades that could shake up the mix of a roster that has underachieved for two straight seasons. Whether he accomplished that remains to be



seen. The Sabres added Josh Norris, who can be a prolific scorer when he's healthy. This deadline is just the beginning, but it's also the clearest sign yet that Adams is altering his plan and trying to change the identity of this team on the fly. — Matthew Fairburn

#### Calgary Flames: C-

The Flames were sellers at the trade deadline this time last year, parting with players for younger pieces and draft picks. This year, the Flames are overachievers thanks to Dustin Wolf and timely contributions up and down the lineup. Calgary decided to hold firm completely and not part ways with any of their pending unrestricted free agents including Dan Vladar or Joel Hanley. General manager Craig Conroy essentially put his hands up and decided to let his team determine its own fate as it pushes for the playoffs. The Flames were active long before the deadline, adding Joel Farabee and Morgan Frost in late January, so they can at least say they tried to help the team make a push in some way. The real disappointment is in Calgary not weaponizing its cap space as trades flew on Friday. Over \$18 million in cap space gave the Flames ample opportunity to take on salary with the hope of obtaining picks and prospects. Even if they had gotten in on a less heralded deal that would've netted them a draft pick, the Flames would've emerged as a small winner. But it's hard to give them much more than a passing grade for their (lack of) effort. — Julian McKenzie

#### Carolina Hurricanes: D

The overall swap of assets at this year's trade deadline doesn't look terribly awful for Carolina — trade away Martin Necas, Jack Drury and some Day 2 draft picks for Taylor Hall, Logan Stankoven, two first-round picks and two third-round picks. It's the middle of the sandwich that looks a bit rotten. The acquisition, courting and departure of Mikko Rantanen will be seen as a stain on the Hurricanes, another example of the team landing a star player but not getting him to commit long term to the franchise. The Hurricanes lack the oomph they had before the Rantanen trade — Stankoven is a fine player but he's not Necas, and Hall has a higher ceiling than Drury but also stripped Carolina of a key faceoff man and penalty killer. The Hurricanes will have to dust themselves off, fix their power play and navigate the playoffs as underdogs instead of as favorites. — Cory Lavalette

#### Chicago Blackhawks: B

The Blackhawks accomplished what they sought to do this trade deadline — and a bit more. Fans obviously will want to know how these deadline moves make the Blackhawks better for the future. This offseason should be telling. The Blackhawks have the cap space and future assets to be aggressive in free agency and the trade market. There is an expectation for them to improve the NHL roster this summer. How the Blackhawks look come next season might be a fairer way to gauge these trade deadline moves. — Scott Powers

#### Colorado Avalanche: A-

The Avalanche flipped their roster in a way we rarely see from contending teams, moving on from star winger Mikko Rantanen and re-working their center depth behind Nathan MacKinnon. The return on the Rantanen trade is already looking good, with Martin Necas fitting right in. The late additions of Brock Nelson and Charlie Coyle should make Colorado the strongest it's been up the middle since losing Nazem Kadri. The additions on the blue line were more minor, but Ryan Lindgren and Erik Johnson solidify the Avs' depth. Given all of that, along with the upgrade of Mackenzie Blackwood in net early in the season, general manager Chris MacFarland made a lot of changes for the better. — Jesse Granger

#### Columbus Blue Jackets: B

If you weren't expecting much, you won't be let down. General manager Don Waddell made a decision a few weeks ago that he wasn't going to subtract from this Blue Jackets roster, believing that his group of overachievers deserved a chance to challenge for a playoff spot. He did, however, want to give them a boost, believing his forward corps could use help. Luke Kunin gives them another sturdy player, and so could Christian Fischer, who was claimed off waivers from Detroit on Thursday. They help fortify the bottom six in the short term. When Sean Monahan and Cole Sillinger return, there will be difficult lineup decisions to be made. But that's OK. Competition is a good thing. Depth is invaluable, too. — Aaron Portzline

Mikko Rantanen was traded to the Stars by the Hurricanes and signed an 8-year, \$96 million contract with Dallas. (James Guillory / Imagn Images)

Dallas Stars: A+

The Stars have been close to the Stanley Cup three times in the past five seasons. If they fall short again this season, it won't be for a lack of trying. Jim Nill is all in, dealing away his next three first-round picks for two point-a-game players in Mikko Rantanen and Mikael Granlund. Signing Rantanen — a true superstar in this league — for eight years at sub-market value only makes this all look better. Yes, there will be questions going forward. Is this the end of Jamie Benn's illustrious tenure in Dallas? Can the Stars manage to pay the pending raises for Jason Robertson and Thomas Harley in the next two years? It won't be easy to make the math work. But doubt Nill at your own peril. This is the team to beat in the NHL. — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings: C

Craig Smith is a veteran who brings some scoring and needed hard elements to the Red Wings' bottom six, likely on the fourth line. At 35, he's not likely a long-term piece, but for 2025 he's a nice addition and someone who should help Detroit, which hasn't gotten enough offense down the lineup this season. Petr Mrázek is the more confusing piece of this deal. The Red Wings' goaltending has struggled of late, to be sure, but Mrázek is having one of the worst statistical seasons of his career, with an .890 save percentage and minus-9.52 goals saved above expected through 33 games. His environment is key context, as he's been playing behind the lottery-bound Blackhawks, but Mrázek's trajectory hasn't been inspiring: his save percentage has been below .900 in three of the last four seasons. Maybe he turns that around in Detroit, where he previously played from 2013-2018, but with another year at \$4.25 million on his contract, it's a risky bet on him turning things around. Detroit gets credit for bringing in Smith, who is the kind of deadline addition playoff teams typically seek, but the Mrázek portion is a giant question mark. A goaltending boost would certainly help the Red Wings, but counting on that from Mrázek is an iffy bet. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers: C+

Oilers general manager Stan Bowman filled some key areas of need by acquiring Jake Walman to bolster the back end, plus Trent Frederic and Max Jones for some speed and muscle up front. The Oilers are better now than they were at the start of the week. Those moves didn't come cheap, though. Bowman said he tried to make a big swing but ultimately didn't. Though he said the Oilers are "all in to try to win right now," he opted not to overhaul the mix. There was no goaltending or top-six winger acquired. There wasn't a fourth-line center, either, although there are internal options and that position isn't that important given the makeup of this roster. The Oilers have improved, but that improvement isn't as notable as it could have been. It might not be enough, either. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Florida Panthers: A+

If Friday's moves never happened, the Panthers would've already been close to A-level. Seth Jones isn't a perfect player, but he might be a perfect fit on the right side of their defense — he's no longer overpaid, he'll no longer be overextended and they'll no longer have to cross their fingers on the right side when Aaron Ekblad isn't on the ice. Adding Brad Marchand for, realistically, the lowest price imaginable drives the grade up even further. It doesn't matter that he's 36 years old; he's still a difference-maker. With him in the fold, they've regained their status as the Eastern Conference's team to beat. — Sean Gentile

#### Los Angeles Kings: C

The Kings taking a chance on Andrei Kuzmenko is fine on its own, since no significant assets were lost, but the winger isn't moving the needle when it comes to closing the gap on the top teams in the Western Conference. General manager Rob Blake confirmed that he was in "on a lot of conversations, specifically around the offensive side of the game." Kuzmenko has shown to get hot on occasion in his career — he did have the 39-goal year with Vancouver and scored a bunch right away when he got to Calgary — but he doesn't add a whole lot if he's not scoring. He could help an ailing power play. And the Kings didn't mortgage any important future pieces. But this is an underwhelming trade deadline for the second straight year. — Eric Stephens

#### Minnesota Wild: B

The moves certainly weren't splashy, especially compared to some of their Central Division rivals, but general manager Bill Guerin didn't have much cap space or roster flexibility to work with. In that context, the Wild did make solid moves to improve the depth of their injury-depleted forward group. They reacquired Gustav Nyquist (giving up a 2026 second-rounder), and the 35-year-old provides versatility (he can play both special teams and add scoring punch) and immediately jumped onto the top line. The trade for Justin Brazeau was pretty much dollar in, dollar out and gave them a player who provides size, net-front presence and an upgrade in the bottom six. Had Guerin known Kirill Kaprizov, Joel Eriksson Ek or Jonas Brodin were going to be out the rest of the regular season, he could have tapped into a chunk of cap space to make a bigger swing. As is, these moves won't make the Wild Cup contenders, but they'll help them stay afloat while their injured stars are out and give them a better chance to advance past the first round. — Michael Russo and Joe Smith

#### Montreal Canadiens: B-

The Canadiens held on to their three impending unrestricted free agents — defenseman David Savard and forwards Joel Armia and Christian Dvorak — despite all three of them generating varied levels of interest on the trade market. And they signed Jake Evans to a four-year contract extension Tuesday. The Canadiens could have easily cashed in on one of their rentals, but it would have weakened a group that has fought to climb back into a playoff race and might have done some cultural damage to what the Canadiens are trying to build long term. Captain Nick Suzuki told general manager Kent Hughes that it would be his preference to keep the group intact before the break for the 4 Nations Face-Off, and Hughes responded that he should go win some games. The Canadiens won their first five games out of the break and got a point in an overtime loss in Edmonton on Thursday. They have held up their end of the bargain, so the general manager held up his end as well. — Arpon Basu

#### Nashville Predators: D

Things got off to a good start in a disastrous season for Preds general manager Barry Trotz when he got a second-round pick from Minnesota for Gustav Nyquist. But then he sent Tommy Novak and Luke Schenn to Pittsburgh for Michael Bunting and a 2026 fourth-round pick. Uh, OK. That one got a "D" from Sean Gentile and a "D-plus" from Shayna Goldman, and that was before Penguins' Kyle Dubas flipped Schenn to Winnipeg for a second and a fourth. That embarrassment was followed up by Trotz getting nothing

else done. Oy. On the positive side ... this is still a better grade than Trotz's overall season grade of "F," I guess? — Joe Rexrode

#### New Jersey Devils: C

The Devils were dealt a tough hand. Jack Hughes went down with a season-ending injury, leaving Tom Fitzgerald in a pickle. He wanted to add, but with Hughes out, it likely was not a good year to go all in. Cody Glass gives the Devils a little more center depth, which they needed, but is not a top-six player. Brian Dumoulin helps the defense, especially with New Jersey dealing with a few injuries on the blue line. I like taking a shot on Daniel Sprong, who has scored throughout his career. Nothing was going to make up for the loss of Hughes, but this doesn't come particularly close. The Devils' hopes for a deep playoff run will likely have to shift to 2025-2026, even if they'd still like to make the playoffs and have a competitive team this year. New Jersey didn't give up any prime draft capital this deadline, but Herman Traff is a legitimate prospect and a second- and third-round pick isn't nothing. It feels a little much for what the Devils got given their playoff chances with Hughes out. — Peter Baugh

#### New York Islanders: B

Lou Lamoriello hates selling at the deadline. He tried to sign his two big pending UFAs and will succeed on Kyle Palmieri, who didn't move on Friday. But Brock Nelson decided he didn't want to extend on Thursday and Lamoriello made a big move, getting a couple of good future pieces back from the all-in Avalanche. That move is exactly what the stale Islanders needed — another first-round pick, most likely next year, and a good center prospect in Calum Ritchie. But, given the ridiculous prices being thrown around on Friday, a bigger sell-off seemed to be warranted from this team. The Islanders are out of the playoffs, but even if they make it, they're still an underdog. Had they moved Palmieri for a second-rounder plus, had they considered trades for Jean-Gabriel Pageau and perhaps even captain Anders Lee, the asset stockpile would have been huge and ripe for some aggressive trades in the offseason. — Arthur Staple

#### New York Rangers: B+

The J.T. Miller addition is obviously the biggest of the Rangers' deadline season (from Jan. 24 on), which doesn't include the Jacob Trouba and Kaapo Kakko trades in December. New York paid a hefty price to get him, but it's hard to find legitimate top-line centers. Miller gives that to New York and brings snarl to which the team has responded. Mika Zibanejad's production has also seen an uptick with him as a linemate. After acquiring Miller, the Rangers successfully moved on from pending unrestricted free agents — Ryan Lindgren, Reilly Smith and Jimmy Vesey — which allowed them to recoup draft capital they lost by pursuing rentals at previous deadlines. General manager Chris Drury immediately used one of those picks, a 2025 third originally belonging to San Jose, to shore up the defense a bit more by adding Carson Soucy. Soucy is under contract through 2025-26. New York also gave Urho Vaakanainen, who came over in the Trouba trade, a reasonable \$1.55 million cap hit through 2026-27. All told, Drury did not do anything rash this season by trading for rentals. He capitalized on a seller's market, recouping picks and players who could help the team beyond this season, all without depleting the roster to the point that it can't make an honest playoff push. This is a minor gripe, but the Rangers did not use their third cap retention slot to broker a deal that would have netted them a fourth- or fifth-round pick. There might not have been a move available to help with, but it would have been a nice cherry on top of a solid deadline. — Peter Baugh

#### Ottawa Senators: A

The Senators weren't expected to be too active on Friday. But that changed when the possibility to land Dylan Cozens came into view. General manager Steve Staios likes his size and ability to work in hard

areas and to produce at five-on-five despite his statistics over the last two seasons trending downward. Adding Dennis Gilbert for depth and a 2026 second-round pick wasn't too bad either. But it meant having to give up Josh Norris, a popular player in the Senators' room, and Jacob Bernard-Docker, who was on the outside looking in for playing time. Norris' departure in particular will be fascinating to navigate considering the personal relationships with players such as Brady Tkachuk and Drake Batherson among others. And then, the Senators added Fabian Zetterlund who they could plug into their top six as he's on the verge of another 20-goal season while also producing at five-on-five. Ottawa entered the day quietly and made a pair of solid moves to end it. It should be considered a deadline-day winner. — Julian McKenzie

#### Philadelphia Flyers: B+

Flyers general manager Daniel Briere's patience paid off, as the Maple Leafs seemingly overpaid for Scott Laughton after other center options were already off the board. They also turned Andrei Kuzmenko, who might have left in the summer as a free agent, into another asset. Still, the removal of Laughton from the dressing room does carry some risk. No player was more popular with his teammates than Laughton, who played a key role in establishing a culture that the front office believes will help their younger players and prospects along. Further, the top-six center that Briere is still seeking remains elusive. — Kevin Kurz

#### Pittsburgh Penguins: B

Since trading Jake Guentzel last season, Kyle Dubas seemed to prioritize building for the future more than the present. He has never used the word "rebuild," and his call to hang onto Rickard Rakell may confirm the Penguins won't do a tear-down while captain Sidney Crosby is playing. The Penguins haven't won a playoff series since 2018. They are about to miss out on their third consecutive postseason. They came away from this deadline period with some intriguing pieces, and with some NHL Draft Lottery luck, perhaps they'll land the impact prospects for which their system is desperate. Rakell's value may never be higher than it was going into Friday. If it's not, Dubas missed an opportunity. Time will tell. — Rob Rossi

#### San Jose Sharks: A-

Sharks general manager Mike Grier still must do the heavy lifting when it comes to building a competitive team, one that will get in the playoffs. Let's be clear, that's more difficult than tearing things down. But Grier is conducting a masterclass in asset management. At this deadline, he was among those taking full advantage of a seller's market. This season, Mackenzie Blackwood, Mikael Granlund, Cody Ceci, Nico Sturm, Luke Kunin and Jake Walman have been shipped out. But San Jose wasn't winning with them and now it has added more higher-round selections to boost an already thriving prospect pool — rated No. 1 by The Athletic — or to trade for more immediate help. Grier has two first-round picks for 2025 (including the potential No. 1 overall) and could have two for 2026 or 2027. The Zetterlund trade is a head-scratcher (a 25-year-old pending RFA with 17 goals) and worth docking Grier, but he could have eight selections in the first and second rounds over the next two drafts. That's how you rebuild. — Eric Stephens

#### Seattle Kraken: B-

The Kraken made a difficult choice, trading several good players in their late 20s and early 30s, as they began their pivot toward building a young team around a pair of cornerstone centres in Shane Wright and Matty Beniers. Though the decision is a necessary one, and the club was strongly compensated for the veterans it dealt in terms of draft capital, one would like the moves a lot more if the team hadn't clearly been focused on being in the Western Conference wild-card race this season (and fallen well

short, in a race that's been something of a turtle derby). Nonetheless, netting two first-round picks, two second-round picks and a good young worker bee middle-six winger in Michael Eyssimont for Brandon Tanev, Yanni Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand is a very solid haul. Getting a real asset for Daniel Sprong, acquired for free in November, is the cherry on top. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues: C+

Just a few weeks ago, it appeared the Blues would be on the outside looking in at the playoffs. But a run of 6-1-1 in their past eight games put them just one point out of the second wild-card spot in the West going into Friday's deadline. There was some optimism building, but then Thursday the news came that No. 1 defenseman Colton Parayko would undergo a knee scope and likely miss the rest of the regular season. At that point, what was general manager Doug Armstrong to do? He could trade assets to try to improve the roster slightly, but would that be worth it? Would it upgrade the Blues enough to win a round in the playoffs? The more likely scenario was selling, but their biggest asset, captain Brayden Schenn, has a full no-trade clause, and teams might've been turned off by the cost for the 33-year-old who has three more years left on his contract at a \$6.5 million cap hit. As far as trading others, who? Ryan Suter? Radek Faksa? Armstrong may have been able to move them, but the return would've been light. They are worth more to the Blues than another team, and Armstrong probably felt he owed it to the current players to keep the roster intact and let them try to make the playoffs. So I'm giving the Blues an average grade because while Armstrong didn't do anything at the deadline, what was in his control would've been inconsequential. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning: A-

The Lightning had one clear task heading into the trade deadline: add two-way forward depth. In Yanni Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand, management did exactly that. The market price was steep for forward depth this year, and the Lightning moved out two firsts, a second and Michael Eyssimont for a rental in Gourde and two playoff runs with Bjorkstrand. It's risky, but it is better to bet on this group — led by an elite core that is thriving — than the uncertainty of a draft pick amounting into something that won't help this window of contention. Tampa Bay's window has an eventual expiration date, and the future after that may be bleak. But if this helps the Lightning extend their dynasty, it will all be worth it. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs: B-

The Leafs shipped out first-round picks and prospects for Brandon Carlo and Scott Laughton. Carlo is the real big hit here for the Leafs. That partner for Morgan Rielly the team has been searching for since the Chris Tanev partnership evaporated? That'll be Carlo. He's a 6-foot-5, 220-pound right-shooting defender who plays just the kind of simple game that Rielly seems to need by his side. The Leafs suddenly have a top four that makes sense — Tanev next to Jake McCabe, Rielly next to Carlo. A team that's struggled to defend just added a really strong defender who should provide a meaningful boost on the penalty kill. Add the fact that Carlo is signed for two more seasons after this one at \$3.48 million and the Leafs have nailed things on the back end for the foreseeable future. Laughton is a more questionable fit. Laughton hasn't really even been a center most of this season. And so a roster hole at third-line center that's been filled unsatisfactorily since last summer has been only partially taped up. Laughton doesn't feel like the centerpiece of a line that can stymie elite players in a playoff series, nor is he a sure thing to provide offense. One silver lining is that Philadelphia agreed to retain half of Laughton's contract, meaning the Leafs get the 30-year-old for next season too at \$1.5 million on the cap. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Hockey Club: C+

The Utahns certainly didn't do anything Mammoth at the deadline, but they also weren't entirely quiet. General manager Bill Armstrong quietly swapped out Shea Weber's long-term injured reserve contract to Chicago, along with two meh prospects, in exchange for a fifth-round pick on Friday, a move that looks pretty weird at first glance. Trading a player like Weber with a career-ending injury isn't Outlawed, but typically it's something that happens when a team doesn't want to be in LTIR, which very well could be the case for the Hockey Clubbers in 2025-26. It's a potential signal they'll spend very aggressively in the offseason to get right to the cap. Otherwise, Utah was surprisingly silent. It entered deadline week with eight pending UFAs and only a 20 percent chance of making the playoffs, but chose to extend Karel Vejmelka, Alex Kerfoot and Ian Cole and hang onto its other rentals in order to keep the excitement alive in Salt Lake City. Certainly different vibes than the Arizona days, whether Utah sneaks in as a wild card or not. — James Mirtle

Vancouver Canucks: D-

As the trade deadline neared, the Canucks intended to be both a seller (of older expiring free agents) and a buyer (of younger players with term remaining on their deals) and categorically failed on both fronts. Even worse, in his post-deadline commentary explaining what exactly transpired, Canucks general manager Patrik Allvin blamed the club's lack of activity solely on the lack of market interest in his players. Either the Canucks missed the market, or their real motivation — make the playoffs at all costs — is something that Vancouver's hockey operations was reluctant to declare publicly. If the inaction was troubling, the explanation for it completely beggared belief. As much goodwill as this Allvin and Jim Rutherford-led management team has built up in the market over the past few years, this deadline performance represented a confidence-shaking showing for the Canucks. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights: B

Bringing Reilly Smith back makes a lot of sense for the Golden Knights. Not only is he a former alternate captain on the Stanley Cup-winning team who is well-liked in the dressing room, but he also fits Vegas' biggest need entering this deadline: depth scoring on the wing. It's tough to grade Vegas much higher than a B considering the way other Western Conference contenders upgraded at the deadline. Unlike most years, the Golden Knights were more under the radar, but it still feels like they helped their team, especially considering the limited cap space and future assets they came into the deadline with. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals: C

Nobody was expecting much action from the Caps; this is a really good, really complete team, and the market didn't support their areas for potential improvement. Sure, they could've used a third-line center. How many of those changed hands on Friday, though? That's a supply issue. Elsewhere, Anthony Beauvillier as a scoring element along the wing will pay off at some point. They've still got the inside track in the Metro Division, and that counts for plenty. Still, several teams in their class — Florida, Tampa Bay, Dallas, Colorado — dramatically improved. That darkens their doorstep a bit. — Sean Gentille

Winnipeg Jets: D

Winnipeg's trade deadline will ultimately be remembered for what it didn't get done. The Jets made small steps forward by adding well-liked depth players Luke Schenn and Brandon Tanev, but the Jets paid prices that reflect a seller's market — and they didn't get a high-end upgrade, like Brock Nelson, despite their efforts. Schenn and Tanev are highly competitive depth players who kill penalties, block shots, and — in Schenn's case — throw a ton of bodychecks. Tanev gives Winnipeg a lot of speed and energy on the fourth line, albeit at the cost of Morgan Barron or David Gustafsson's minutes. Schenn represents much-needed depth on the blue line where the Jets' recent deployment implies they're an injury away from

using Logan Stanley in the top four. Neither player drives play — that's fine, Winnipeg needed depth — but it's wildly underwhelming compared to work done by Colorado and Dallas. The Jets began the day as the favorite to emerge from the West. They're still in the mix but it isn't fair to call them favorites anymore. — Murat Ates



## ESPN / Winners and losers of the 2025 NHL trade deadline

**By Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton, Greg Wyshynski- March 8, 2025**

### Reactions

The days leading up to the 2025 NHL trade deadline were a furious final sprint as contenders looked to stock up for a postseason run while rebuilding clubs added prospects and draft capital.

After the overnight Brock Nelson blockbuster Thursday, Friday lived up to expectations, with Mikko Rantanen, Brad Marchand and other high-profile players finishing the day on different teams than they started with. All told, NHL teams made 24 trades on deadline day involving 47 players.

Which teams and players won the day? Who might not feel as well about the situation after trade season? Reporters Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton and Greg Wyshynski identify the biggest winners and losers of the 2025 NHL trade deadline:

### WINNERS

#### Florida Panthers

We now live in a universe in which the Panthers can field a line of Sam Bennett, Brad Marchand and Matthew Tkachuk at some point in the Stanley Cup playoffs, and that says everything about how serious their front office is about winning a second consecutive Cup.

But it also speaks to how Panthers general manager Bill Zito and his staff managed their salary cap situation. Look at the Seth Jones trade. They leveraged the promise of goaltender Spencer Knight by including him and getting \$4.5 million off their cap. By having the Chicago Blackhawks retain \$2.5 million of Jones' contract, they were able to fit in the right-handed shooting defenseman to strengthen their top four.

Moving Tkachuk to long-term injured reserve came with the reality that he would miss rest of the regular season, which created a need to get another top-six forward. But it was instrumental in the Panthers creating that deadline cap space, which was used to secure Marchand in one of the most shocking moves of the week. Thanks to the dealing this week, the Panthers are now co-favorites to win the Stanley Cup. -- Clark

#### Toronto Maple Leafs

Toronto had two glaring areas of need going into the deadline -- and for once, the Leafs actually addressed them both in a significant way.

It's almost as if all those first-round playoff exits taught Toronto something. Namely, at the toughest time of the season, the Leafs need to be, well, a little (or a lot) tougher to play against.

So GM Brad Treliving targeted what the Leafs didn't have in-house: a rugged third-line center in Scott Laughton who will complement Auston Matthews and John Tavares down the middle, and a bruising stay-at-home defenseman in Brandon Carlo to give Toronto its best top-four rotation in some time.

Yes, the deals were expensive -- the Leafs parted with three young skaters in Fraser Minten, Conor Timmins and Connor Dewar, plus two first-round picks and other draft capital -- but there was no way around it: Toronto has tried filling in the edges before; it has failed to provide an advantage in the postseason.

The Leafs are heavier and more experienced now than they were Friday morning. And the way Florida and Tampa Bay loaded up, there was no way the Leafs couldn't follow suit and hope for a better result this postseason. Treiving has given his team the components to succeed. It's on the Leafs now to run with their opportunity. -- Shilton

What other franchise in the NHL could cause utter chaos among fans and media by simply saying "hi" in lowercase letters minutes before the trade deadline? The Vegas Golden Knights have earned their reputation as the league's "win by any means necessary" front office, just as they've become the NHL trade deadline's leading shock merchants -- please recall last season's stunner for San Jose star Tomas Hertl.

The Knights are also known for not particularly caring about how they're perceived, either, which is why they're probably delighted by the fact that this message caused such a stir without leading to anything Friday. Vegas' only deadline move came Thursday when it reunited with "Golden Misfit" Reilly Smith in a trade with the Rangers. -- Wyshynski

#### Dallas Stars

Much can be said about how the Stars handled deadline day. But there are two statements that say it all. The first: There's at least one GM of a team inside the American Airlines Center who not only keeps his franchise players but then adds another franchise player.

The second? Everything Stars GM Jim Nill and his front office staff achieved Friday speaks to the shift in their organizational philosophy. Draft capital was traditionally sacred in Dallas because it's how the Stars built their team. They entered Friday with a dozen homegrown players on their roster, a group that includes captain Jamie Benn, Miro Heiskanen, Wyatt Johnston, Jake Oettinger, Roope Hintz and Jason Robertson.

It's one thing to build through the draft; it's another to constantly select foundational players. That's what made the Stars hesitant about moving on from draft capital. But when they decided to move on from their 2025 first-round picks in the deal to get Mikael Granlund in February, it signaled that the Stars were operating differently. Trading Logan Stankoven, two first-round picks and two third-round picks for Mikko Rantanen -- and then signing him to an eight-year contract extension -- proved the Stars were going all-in. -- Clark

#### Tampa Bay Lightning

Tampa Bay GM Julien BriseBois is no wallflower. By his own admission, the Lightning are willing to try and fail rather than fail to try. Once again, that guided BriseBois at the deadline as he added Yanni Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand to make Tampa Bay all the more intimidating moving toward the playoffs.

Never mind that the Lightning have used one first-round draft choice in five seasons, and no longer own a selection there in 2025, 2026 or 2027. If that's the price of playoff contention well, so be it. Tampa Bay has thrived off of following its instincts when it comes to adding depth at the deadline (and the offseason) -- and been proven right more often than not.

Gourde and Bjorkstrand aren't Jake Guentzel-like change-makers, but that's not what the Lightning needed (or what has put them over the top in years past). This team knows how to win as a sum of its parts. Role players are the Lightning's bread and butter come spring, and they're primed and ready to roll the dice again. Did we mention they're also on a hot streak, winning 10 of their past 11? Good thing the Bolts' Atlantic Division rivals in Toronto and Florida also made deadline moves, because the Lightning aren't holding back in their pursuit of another championship. -- Shilton

#### Colorado Avalanche

When the Avalanche cut ties with Rantanen in January, not many would have guessed that Colorado would become one of the trade deadline's most aggressive teams. But they probably also wouldn't have guessed that Martin Necas, whom they acquired from Carolina, would have more than double the points (15) than Rantanen (6) in the aftermath of that trade.

Necas' snug fit into their lineup is one reason why the Avalanche look like Stanley Cup contenders. So is Mackenzie Blackwood, acquired from the San Jose Sharks earlier this season, who has stabilizing their goaltending. That's not even mentioning another MVP season from Nathan MacKinnon, a Norris Trophy-worthy campaign from Cale Makar, and the rest of their talented roster.

So GM Chris MacFarland came to the trade deadline ready to make a great team even better. The Islanders' Brock Nelson solves their riddle at No. 2 center, making Casey Mittelstadt expendable, so Colorado shipped him to Boston for Charlie Coyle. That was after the Avalanche acquired defenseman Ryan Lindgren and forward Jimmy Vesey from the Rangers.

Topping it off: the happy vibes of defenseman Erik Johnson's return to Colorado in a trade with the Flyers, the onetime "old guy without a Cup" from their 2022 championship team joining a roster built to win another. -- Wyshynski

#### San Jose Sharks

Although most of the focus is understandably on the teams trying to win now, there's also competition that exists for those franchises seeking to build a better future. That's the game the Sharks have been playing for the past few years, and the deadline saw the organization make substantial progress.

Part of the challenge facing Sharks GM Mike Grier and his front office staff was how they'd manage to gain draft captain despite having all three salary retention slots filled. They showed in early February that they could find a workaround when they received a 2025 first-round pick and a 2025 fourth-round pick from the Stars for Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci.

They used the deadline to move on from Jake Walman, which led to them gain another first-round pick for 2026 while adding more draft capital in other deals. Bear in mind, they acquired Walman plus a second-round pick last offseason for future considerations (i.e., nothing) in a salary dump from the Red Wings.

The Sharks now have two first-round picks in 2025 followed by another two in 2026. In total, they have nine picks in this summer's draft and six picks in the first four rounds of next year's draft. -- Clark

#### The double-flip trade trend

As shocking as the Carolina Hurricanes' acquisition of Mikko Rantanen was in January, their decision to trade him at the deadline is even more stunning. Another front office might have dabbled in the sunk-cost fallacy of keeping Rantanen for a Stanley Cup run after it became clear that he wouldn't sign an extension. Instead, GM Eric Tulsky flipped him to Dallas -- one of the few teams Rantanen would agree to an extension with before the deadline -- for forward Logan Stankoven and four draft picks, calling it the "best thing for the organization in the long term."

Carolina's hand was forced by Rantanen, but other teams got in on the flipping too.

The Pittsburgh Penguins acquired Luke Schenn from Nashville on Wednesday, touted his intangibles and then traded him to Winnipeg. The Philadelphia Flyers got seven games out of winger Andrei Kuzmenko after acquiring him in January from Calgary and then moved him to the Kings. Colorado defenseman Oliver Kylington was a New York Islander for about a millisecond before they moved him to the Anaheim Ducks for future considerations after the Brock Nelson trade. -- Wyshynski

## LOSERS

### Carolina Hurricanes

Be cautious, or be a cautionary tale. Crass as that might sound, this is the reality every front office must consider whenever it does a deal in which the overall success hinges upon a pending unrestricted free agent signing a contract with the team that just acquired them.

Years of caution is how the Hurricanes pieced together a roster that has been good enough to make the playoffs every season. But that's what also made their trade with the Avalanche to get Rantanen such a jarring one, because it was so unconventional. At the time, it appeared as if there could be a long-term solution for both sides. The Hurricanes could offer the sizable contract Rantanen was seeking while also making him the focal point of their franchise for years to come.

Yet each week that passed without Rantanen signing led to questions about whether his time in Carolina was going to be the NHL's version of when future Hall of Fame catcher Mike Piazza was a member of the Florida Marlins before he was traded to the New York Mets. And that's exactly what happened, with the Hurricanes trading Rantanen to the Stars, where he immediately signed an extension.

Although the Hurricanes received promising young forward Logan Stankoven and four draft picks, they're still left trying to fill the Rantanen-sized hole in their lineup. -- Clark

### Winnipeg Jets

There is reason to believe Winnipeg is resting on its laurels here. Yes, the Jets sit atop the NHL standings, and they've been formidable across most of this season.

However, Winnipeg is also part of the uber-competitive Central Division. And those rivals --- hello, Dallas and Mikko Rantanen! Nice to see you, Brock Nelson in Colorado! -- did some damage at the deadline. The Jets? Not so much.

Winnipeg's only additions were veterans Luke Schenn and Brandon Tanev. Those are fine, respectable players. But will they really help to keep Winnipeg as not only the Central favorite but also as the Western Conference's top contender?

It's one thing for GM Kevin Cheveldayoff to put his faith in a Jets team that has, by all accounts, soared above expectations this season. Not taking advantage at the deadline with a swing of their own on a larger trade acquisition might hurt Winnipeg's chances down the road. At least, it seems as if that could be the case. And what a disappointment it would be for the Jets to look back and wonder if they could have done more to stay ahead of the competition. -- Shilton

### The Boston Bruins as a Stanley Cup contender

Boston GM Don Sweeney was asked outright after his trade deadline sell-off: Is this now a rebuild?

"We didn't burn it down," he said. "You have to have a little bit of a step back at times. Did we know this morning that we'd end up making all of these moves? No. But we were prepared if the things that we liked were presented."

As Sweeney said, it's not in the DNA of the franchise to tear it all down. He talked about finding "another wave" of players and said Boston isn't far away from being a competitive team. In fairness, it has a decent foundation on which to build: David Pastrnak, Charlie McAvoy and Jeremy Swayman.

But this is the end of an era. Trading away Marchand, Carlo and Coyle follows the departure of Zdeno Chara and the retirements of Patrice Bergeron and David Krejci, which effectively ends a decade of

Stanley Cup contention for this group. Whatever the Bruins become now, it won't be the next chapter of that legacy. That book is closed. Time to write a new story. -- Wyshynski

#### Vancouver Canucks

The Canucks took an interesting approach to the deadline. And in the end, it doesn't seem as if Vancouver has helped itself improve. If anything, the Canucks' waters appear murkier than ever.

The J.T. Miller deal in January was inevitable, and did bring in a decent haul with Filip Chytil and a first-round pick that turned into Marcus Pettersson and Drew O'Connor. Then it was the middling Carson Soucy move to New York.

From there, GM Patrik Allvin stalled out. He didn't trade Brock Boeser. He didn't trade Elias Pettersson. He didn't acquire anyone else to make Vancouver -- a team teetering on the edge of not making playoffs at all -- better for the season's final quarter.

That would be questionable enough even if Quinn Hughes -- Vancouver's Norris Trophy-winning captain - weren't battling an injury. Adding insult to all that, Vancouver is getting nowhere with Boeser on an extension. The sum total of the club's activity -- or lack thereof -- just forces you to wonder where the Canucks are headed, or if they even know. -- Shilton

#### Los Angeles Kings

Perhaps it's premature to say the Kings were a loser at the deadline. They are, after all, occupying a playoff spot and have quite a bit of talent. But the question facing Los Reyes entering the deadline was whether they had enough consistent scoring in their attempt to get out of the first round for the first time since they won the Stanley Cup in 2014. It's a passage of time that's so old that the NHL's latest two expansion teams, the Vegas Golden Knights and Seattle Kraken, have been to the second round more recently than the Kings.

The Kings do have 14 players who are in double figures from a points perspective, and seven with 12 or more goals. But they were also 24th in goals per game. That's the second-lowest average of a team that entered deadline day in a playoff spot. It's a concern that has once again been discussed, with the Kings on a five-game losing streak that has seen them average 1.6 goals.

How they addressed that concern was to trade for winger Andrei Kuzmenko, who could slot next to captain Anze Kopitar and Adrian Kempe on their second line. But that means they are banking on Kuzmenko's recent success of finding instant results whenever he joins a new team. He had 39 goals in his first season in Vancouver before scoring 14 goals and 25 points in 29 games when he was traded to the Calgary Flames. Kuzmenko had five points in seven games with the Flyers before he was sent to the Kings. Is that really all they could have done at the deadline? -- Clark

#### Mikko Rantanen

Things worked out OK for Rantanen. He wasn't happy in Raleigh; and instead of keeping him for the near term, the Hurricanes offered him at the deadline. The Dallas Stars were a preferred location, and there's no doubt Rantanen will enjoy contending for a championship annually with countrymen such as Miro Heiskanen and Roope Hintz on the roster. He got paid, too: eight years and an average annual value of \$12 million in a state with no income tax.

However, Sportsnet reported that the Avalanche had offered Rantanen a contract with an average annual value of \$11.75 million that his representation rejected. The assumption was that Leon Draisaitl's \$14 million AAV, also negotiated by Rantanen's agent, had reset the market, and thus Rantanen could be much better as a free agent.

In the end, he signs for more real dollars in Texas, but just \$250,000 more in annual in cap space than what the Avs offered. For that, he gave up upwards of eight more years playing with Nathan MacKinnon?  
-- Wyshynski

Casey Mittelstadt

It was a year ago Thursday when the Avalanche traded Bowen Byram to the Buffalo Sabres to get Mittelstadt. Acquiring Mittelstadt came with the belief that he could become the long-term answer to the second-line problem that had been plaguing the Avs ever since Nazem Kadri left in free agency after they won the Stanley Cup in 2022.

Mittelstadt had four goals and 10 points in 18 regular-season games, and nine points in 11 postseason games, after the trade. That was enough for the Avs to offer Mittelstadt, who was a pending restricted free agent, a three-year contract worth \$5.75 million annually. His first full season in Denver has been ... challenging. There was a point when he was dropped to the fourth line, in a campaign in which he averaged 0.54 points per game. Though that figure is close to his career average, he averaged 0.72 points per game in 2022-23 and 0.71 last season.

That inconsistency meant the Avs were forced to find another second-line center, thus the trade for Brock Nelson. That trade cost the Avs a first-round pick, and it cost them their top prospect in Calum Ritchie too. It also created questions about what would happen to Mittelstadt, with the eventual answer being he was moved to the Bruins with Charlie Coyle coming to Colorado.

It's a trade that has Mittelstadt on his third team in 366 days, going from a top Cup contender to a team staring at a rebuild (or at least a retool). – Clark

## ESPN / NHL trade grades: Report cards for the biggest deals of 2025

**By Greg Wyshynski - March 8, 2025**

### Reactions

The NHL trade deadline for the 2024-25 season has passed.

For every significant trade that occurred during the season, you'll find a grade for it here, the Colorado Avalanche and San Jose Sharks swapping goaltenders, Cam Fowler to the St. Louis Blues, Kaapo Kakko to the Seattle Kraken, the blockbuster deal sending Mikko Rantanen to the Carolina Hurricanes and Martin Necas to the Avalanche, J.T. Miller from the Vancouver Canucks to the New York Rangers, and the Canucks staying busy and getting Marcus Pettersson from the Pittsburgh Penguins.

March 1 featured three big trades, with Ryan Lindgren headed to the Colorado Avalanche, the Minnesota Wild adding Gustav Nyquist, and Seth Jones joining the Florida Panthers. The middle of deadline week included a reunion for Yanni Gourde, heading back to the Tampa Bay Lightning along with Oliver Bjorkstrand. March 6 also brought a flurry, with Reilly Smith traded back to the Vegas Golden Knights, Brock Nelson headed to the Avalanche and Jake Walman shipped to the Edmonton Oilers.

March 7: Rantanen traded again -- headed from Carolina to Dallas

Mikko Rantanen got the long-term contract he was seeking. But just not with the Carolina Hurricanes.

The Dallas Stars traded for Rantanen with an agreement in place that he would sign an eight-year extension worth \$12 million annually, with the Hurricanes getting forward Logan Stankoven, a 2026 first-round pick, a 2027 first-round pick, a 2026 third-round pick and a 2027 third-round pick.

Exactly how did both front offices perform in what could be the biggest deal on deadline day?

### Dallas Stars

Grade: A

Facing Rantanen when he played for the division rival Colorado Avalanche meant the Stars had a strong appreciation for a 6-foot-4 winger.

So when the opportunity to get Rantanen without giving up a lot became a reality and they could offer him a long-term deal? It's what made the Stars decide to go all-in to get the former 50-goal scorer.

But getting Rantanen meant a shift in philosophy. The Stars worked their way into a championship window by drafting well. There are 11 players, including the injured Miro Heiskanen, on the Stars' roster who were drafted by the franchise.

That's why their decision to part with a 2025 first-round pick and a 2025 third-round pick for Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci earlier this season was a sign that the mentality in Dallas could be shifting.

Getting Rantanen reaffirms that shift and shows they're willing to win at all costs.

Rantanen gives the Stars a top-line winger who can be used on the first line with Roope Hintz at center and Jason Robertson on the left wing. Those are two wingers who've scored more than 100 points, playing with a center who is one of the premier two-way forwards in the game. Rantanen gives them another primary facilitator and finisher on the power play, in addition to Wyatt Johnston, Thomas Harley, Hintz, Robertson and Heiskanen (when he eventually returns).

The Stars, who were already a front-runner to win the Stanley Cup, might have the strongest roster when they have their full complement of players.

Though getting Rantanen is a move for the present and the future, there is a strong emphasis for the Stars to win this year because of what lies ahead.

Stars captain Jamie Benn and Matt Duchene are part of a seven-player pending unrestricted free agent class. Shortly after Rantanen was traded, the Stars signed Johnston to a five-year deal worth \$8.4 million annually as he was set to be part of a pending restricted free agent class that also includes Mavrik Bourque.

PuckPedia projected the Stars to have \$25.83 million in cap space ahead of the offseason. Between the new Johnston and Rantanen deals, it slashes that figure to just \$5.43 million.

Again, the Stars are built to win for the years to come, but there is an emphasis on trying to win right now.

Carolina Hurricanes

Grade: B

The Hurricanes' original trade to get Rantanen was done to help them win a Stanley Cup. They believed they had the cap space to offer him a significant contract, while also showing they learned the lessons that came from watching Jake Guentzel leave in free agency last offseason.

There was some thought the Hurricanes could use one of the first-round picks in this deal to go get another forward, but that didn't happen. So essentially, they moved on from Martin Necas and Rantanen, adding Stankoven and two first-rounders, while failing to get a proven top-line or top-six winger as they seek to win the Stanley Cup that has eluded them.

Or to say it another way: The Hurricanes are going through it.

Any return for Rantanen would be considered along with what the Hurricanes traded to get him in the first place. Necas has become the latest forward to find success within the Avs' attack-minded system. Jack Drury has created a role for himself in the bottom six. Though Rantanen's departure was unexpected, it still led to a return that has been fruitful for the Avs since that Jan. 25 trade.

This is what made the decision to go after Rantanen in the first place a complicated one. Front offices are often criticized for being too cautious if they're in a championship window, which the Hurricanes are certainly in at the moment. But the fact that the Hurricanes presented Rantanen with what they believed was a sizable contract offer and still felt the need to trade him? It reinforces why front offices are often risk-averse.

Stankoven, who has nine goals and 29 points in 59 games, projects as a top-six forward who could take a spot on the Hurricanes' third line. Though this was a trade that saw them receive an NHL player in return, it didn't see the Canes get someone who could instantly replace Rantanen on their top line.

March 7: Bruins send Marchand to Florida

Once again, Brad Marchand will be trying to help an Atlantic Division team win a Stanley Cup.

It just won't be the Boston Bruins with the club trading their captain to the Florida Panthers in exchange for a conditional 2027 first-round pick that could become a 2028 first-round pick if certain stipulations are met. The Bruins are also retaining 50% of Marchand's salary.

Here's a look at how both teams performed.



## Florida Panthers

Grade: A-

Moving Matthew Tkachuk to long-term IR meant the Panthers were going to miss their star winger for the remainder of the regular season with the hope he would return in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

It created a need for the Panthers to find a potential top-six replacement for Tkachuk if possible. PuckPedia projected that the Panthers had \$4.1 million in deadline cap space, which left them with the sort of financial flexibility to make a move.

That "something" was getting one of the best players of his generation who is also a certified expert in gamesmanship. And they got him for just 50% of his \$6.13 million cap hit as he's set to hit the open market at the end of the season.

Although Marchand is out with an upper-body injury, he has scored 21 goals and 47 points in 61 games this season. He's a perennial playoff performer who had 10 points in 11 games last year and has averaged 0.88 points per game in the postseason. He has scored 13 game-winning goals in postseason play.

Every interested team knew he could play a pivotal role in winning a Stanley Cup. Or in the case of the Panthers, winning a consecutive Stanley Cup.

Yet what makes Marchand going to the Panthers even more alluring is the combinations it provides Paul Maurice. He could elect to place Marchand on a line with Sam Bennett and Tkachuk. Together, it would create a group that could score goals, forecheck, check and play numerous mind games just for the fun of it.

## Boston Bruins

Grade: C+

Everything Marchand achieved in Boston created the idea that moving on from him could lead to the Bruins receiving a significant return.

Yet they were able to get only a conditional second-round pick that could become a first-round pick. The conditions of the trade are that if Marchand plays in more than 25% of the Panthers' games over the first two rounds, the pick then becomes a 2028 first-rounder.

And that's it. No other draft picks. No prospects. Just a conditional second-round pick that could become a first-round pick if Marchand plays in more than a quarter of the Panthers' playoff games through the first two rounds.

What makes the return puzzling is how it compares with what the New York Islanders received for Brock Nelson. The Islanders received a 2026 or 2027 first-round pick, a conditional 2028 third-round pick and the Colorado Avalanche's top prospect, Calum Ritchie, plus defenseman Oliver Kylington.

Sure, there is a debate to be had about the value of a center versus that of a winger. Although Nelson is three years younger than Marchand, they're both at the end of their deals, with the caveat that Marchand has won a Stanley Cup. Considering the Bruins made it clear this deadline they are hitting a reset button, there is enough to suggest that they could have garnered more for their now former captain.

March 7: Leafs land Carlo, ship picks, players to Boston, Pittsburgh

A couple of trades by the Toronto Maple Leafs resulted in them adding Brandon Carlo to their blue-line group while sending three players and a first-round pick away.

The Maple Leafs traded top prospect Fraser Minten and a 2026 first-round pick to the Boston Bruins for Carlo. They also traded forward Connor Dewar and defenseman Conor Timmins to the Pittsburgh Penguins for future considerations to clear roster space. The Bruins are retaining 15% of Carlo's salary.

How did each GM do here?

#### Toronto Maple Leafs

Grade: B+

Oh, the irony -- Toronto trading for a key player in the Bruins' core after years of being ousted from the postseason by, well, the Bruins' core.

And Carlo is undeniably exactly what the Leafs need for their blue line.

Toronto has established a top pairing of Chris Tanev and Jake McCabe, but hadn't found the right consistent partner for Morgan Rielly on their second pair. Enter Carlo. The 28-year-old is a 6-foot-5, stay-at-home, right-shot defenseman who can anchor a more offensive-minded D-man such as Rielly. Carlo is a disrupter, wielding a heavy game and towering net-front presence.

He instantly makes the Leafs' top-four rotation better and harder to play against. Plus, bringing in Carlo allows Oliver Ekman-Larsson to sit in a third-pairing slot where he's a more natural fit.

The Carlo acquisition also works in the Leafs' long-term picture, given he has two years remaining with a reasonable \$4.1 million annual cap hit (15% of which will be picked up by the B's) -- excellent news for the perpetually cap-strapped team.

The Leafs couldn't get something for nothing, though. The price was high to snag Carlo, and Toronto had to make sacrifices for the future, starting with giving up their second first-round pick of the deadline (the other having gone to Philadelphia for Scott Laughton). Moving Timmins and Dewar to Pittsburgh was essentially to free up cap space. Them's the breaks.

Minten is a 20-year-old center who has performed well in his 15-game NHL tenure. Timmins, 26, has been a regular on the Leafs' back end as a serviceable third-pairing skater. And Dewar, 25, is a fourth-liner now who could have a greater impact up front with a larger opportunity -- something he's likely to find in Pittsburgh.

However, the Leafs were able to hold on to top prospects Easton Cowan and Ben Danford. That's fine work by GM Brad Treliving all around. Toronto must take advantage of its window to compete in the postseason and the addition of Carlo -- to supplement adding Laughton up front earlier -- gives the Leafs an excellent chance to be at their best this spring.

#### Boston Bruins

Grade: B+

The Bruins as we once knew them are gone.

First, it was Charlie Coyle to the Avalanche. Then Brad Marchand to the Panthers. And now, Carlo to the Leafs. It's the end of an era in Boston, and that's what makes this trade so solid for them. The Bruins bring in some fine young talents who will be part of their next chapter.

Minten is the centerpiece here. He doesn't have much NHL experience yet, but all the makings are there for him to be a consistent two-way forward. As Boston trends younger and rebuilds, it will give Minten an opportunity to grow within one organization that could keep him on for years to come.

The addition of another first-round pick to the Bruins' collection will help in the retooling process too.

Basically, this trade is exactly what Boston needed to do in order to fully embrace its current situation. We won't know the full extent of how it will impact the club until Minten settles in and the pick becomes a player, but right now Boston is using what assets it has available in the smartest way possible.

#### Pittsburgh Penguins

Grade: A-

It wouldn't be a trade season without Penguins GM Kyle Dubas adding at least one former Sault Ste. Marie Greyhound to his team's mix -- in this case, Timmins.

The Penguins were a third-party facilitator here so the Leafs could dump enough salary to bring Carlo into the fold. Naturally, the Leafs' former general manager was happy to pick up a couple of his own draftees in Timmins and Dewar.

But still, it's a trade that benefits the Penguins. Pittsburgh, like Boston, is barreling toward a retool, and it'll move along quicker with somewhat established skaters such as Timmins and Dewar as part of the process. There's a familiarity with their strengths and weaknesses, and the twosome should slide into more significant roles with the Penguins than they have in Toronto. -- Shilton

#### March 7: Bruins send Coyle to Colorado for Mittelstadt

Colorado and Boston both stayed busy ahead of the deadline with a major final-hour trade sending Charlie Coyle and a 2026 fifth-round pick to the Avalanche in exchange for Casey Mittelstadt, William Zellers and a 2025 second-round choice.

#### Colorado Avalanche

Grade: A-

Avalanche GM Chris MacFarland is going all-in on another Stanley Cup run and loading Colorado up for the journey.

It started late Thursday night with adding Brock Nelson from the New York Islanders. That ultimately pushed Mittelstadt into a third-line role for the Avs -- but MacFarland is upgrading there by swapping for Coyle. The 6-foot-3 pivot is a powerful presence who's good in front of the net and has an underrated scoring touch. That secondary scoring ability can make up for what Coyle lacks on the defensive side. Coyle also comes with one year remaining on his deal (with a \$5.25 million cap hit) to give Colorado some insurance when Nelson, Ryan Lindgren and Jonathan Drouin all hit free agency.

Either way, Colorado is lining up Nathan MacKinnon, Nelson and Coyle down the middle. That's a fairly formidable trio and addresses a concern the Avalanche have had since Nazem Kadri walked away in free agency following their last Cup victory in 2022. Coyle brings some heft and physicality that Colorado has been searching for, and he's versatile to the point you could slot him higher up the chain if injuries become a factor.

While the Avalanche had great expectations for Mittelstadt when they traded for him at last year's deadline, the forward didn't pan out the way they hoped. And Colorado's unwillingness to stand pat -- made clear in earnest by the Nelson trade -- made Mittelstadt expendable despite what the Avalanche originally gave up acquiring him (including Bowen Byram).

The deal's sweeteners -- Zellers, a fine prospect, and a high draft pick -- to go along with Mittelstadt is no small haul for MacFarland to part with. But it falls in line with Tampa Bay GM Julien BriseBois' philosophy: better to try, and fail, than fail to try.

Colorado is attempting to win now. This is the kind of top-tier trade that can help them do it.

## Boston Bruins

Grade: A

This isn't the Bruins' year. And GM Don Sweeney knows it.

May as well take advantage of a good market to be trading players away.

Sweeney grabbed a great return for Coyle. Mittelstadt comes with term (he's got two years left with a reasonable \$5.75 million cap hit) and the 26-year-old can be a productive scorer (with 34 points in 63 games this season) and would benefit from a bigger opportunity in Boston.

Mittelstadt started strong in Colorado, but his playmaking tapered off and never fully recovered to the expected level. A fresh start with the Bruins -- who are on the cusp of searching for their own next direction -- takes some pressure off Mittelstadt and gives him a chance to reconnect with the confidence that made him a coveted target last year.

Zellers gives the Bruins needed prospect depth, too. Zellers has 37 goals in 40 games with the USHL's Green Bay Gamblers. The 18-year-old is headed for the NCAA at North Dakota next season.

Being able to put a second-round pick in the cupboard as well is more fine work by Sweeney. The Bruins are going to go younger anyway -- hence swapping out the 33-year-old Coyle for a younger player -- and picking up a good prospect and pick means more now to Boston than ever. Sweeney was able to capitalize on Coyle's value to a contending club and set his own up for a better future at the same time. - Kristen Shilton

March 7: Leafs get Laughton from Philly

Having already possessed one of the stronger center situations in the NHL, the Toronto Maple Leafs decided to add more down the middle.

The Maple Leafs acquired center Scott Laughton in a trade with the Philadelphia Flyers that saw a conditional 2026 first-round pick and prospect forward Nikita Grebenkin head in the other direction.

Let's look at how both teams did.

### Toronto Maple Leafs

Grade: B+

Options. That is what Laughton brings and it's exactly why the Leafs felt the need to part with a first-round pick plus a prospect to get him.

Laughton is a do-everything, two-way center who can be trusted to play in every situation. His 11 goals this season mark his fourth consecutive year of reaching double figures, and he's three points shy of his fourth straight year of more than 30 points.

His time with the Flyers saw him emerge into someone who could anchor a penalty kill as he has logged more than 115 short-handed minutes in three straight seasons.

Getting Laughton means the Leafs could push Max Domi, who was their third-line center, to right wing. If so, Domi and Laughton could play with Bobby McMann, giving the Leafs a slightly new-look third line that has a chance to be together next season with Laughton under contract for one more season at \$3 million annually.

### Philadelphia Flyers

Grade: B+

Laughton's versatility, his cap hit along with the extra year of cost certainty he provided interested parties is what made him the Flyers' most attractive player entering deadline day. But like any player, it was a matter of what the Flyers could receive in return.

What they got was a 2026 first-round pick that adds to their larger plan of building toward the future. The Flyers already have three first-round picks and four second-round picks in this year's draft. By adding another 2026 first-round pick, it gives them a consecutive draft cycle in which they have multiple first-rounders. It'll also be the third time in four years, with the Flyers having two first-round picks back in 2023. As for Grebenkin, he's a 21-year-old winger who has nine goals and 21 points in the AHL as he makes the adjustment to North America. -- Clark

March 7: Jets add forward depth in Tanev

In a week that already saw Yanni Gourde and Reilly Smith return to a familiar place, Brandon Tanev was able to do the same.

The Winnipeg Jets reacquired the veteran two-way forward in a trade with the Seattle Kraken, with a 2027 second-round pick heading in the other direction.

Here's a look at what it means for both sides.

Seattle Kraken

Grade: B

At this point, the goal for the Kraken is to add draft capital. They came into the deadline 12 points out of the final Western Conference wild-card spot in a week that saw them move on from Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand.

Those conditions made Tanev, a pending unrestricted free agent, a strong candidate to get moved before the deadline. It was just a matter of what the return would be for a player who the Kraken got as part of the expansion draft back in 2021.

Considering Tanev had a \$3.5 million cap hit, there was a chance the Kraken could have had to retain salary. But they didn't have to, and the return was a 2027 second-round pick that now gives them four picks in the first two rounds of that year's draft.

Winnipeg Jets

Grade: B

There was a time when relying on their bottom-six forwards was an issue for the Jets. But this season has been different. The play of their bottom-six forwards is one of the reasons why the Jets are in the hunt for the NHL's best record.

Bringing back Tanev, who spent the first four seasons of his career with the Jets, only reinforces that approach. Any team that was interested in Tanev knew it would be getting an aggressive forechecking forward with speed who could also provide production at the bottom of a lineup.

His arrival now gives the Jets another fourth-line option who could enhance what they already have with Morgan Barron, David Gustafsson and Alex Iafallo, while also providing them with another forward who can be trusted on the penalty kill. -- Clark

March 7: Jets get Luke Schenn from Penguins

As it turns out, Luke Schenn will remain in the Central Division after all.

Schenn was traded to the Winnipeg Jets with the Pittsburgh Penguins receiving a 2026 second-round pick and a 2027 fourth-round pick just days after he was initially traded to Pittsburgh by the Nashville Predators.

Here's a quick glance at what it means.

#### Winnipeg Jets

Grade: B

It's not that the Jets were struggling to figure out what their top-four setup would look like going into the playoffs. In fact, it's the opposite. The Jets, like the Edmonton Oilers, are a team in which their four leading skaters in ice time are all defensemen.

Even with four defensemen who are averaging more than 20 minutes, the Jets still wanted to add more depth for their third pairing and more playoff experience.

Getting Schenn fits those needs. He's a two-time Stanley Cup champion who has operated in that role before. His arrival also gives the Jets someone who provides a physical presence while giving another option on the penalty kill.

Furthermore, this isn't just a trade for this season. The Jets are a perennial playoff team that now has certainty with Schenn -- who has one more year left on his contract at \$2.75 million annually -- ahead of an offseason in which Neal Pionk is a pending unrestricted free agent and Dylan Samberg is a pending restricted free agent.

#### Pittsburgh Penguins

Grade: A-

The Penguins are clearly not hiding the fact that they are concentrating on the future. And when a team chooses to walk down that path, it places an emphasis on getting as much draft capital as possible.

It's what made their decision to acquire Schenn earlier this week one that was always about a much larger picture.

Being nine points out of the final Eastern Conference wild-card spot meant the Penguins were more about draft capital than trying to make a late playoff push. Schenn was always going to be one of those defensemen whom a playoff hopeful was going to have interest in attaining because of what he provides.

Having Schenn meant the Penguins needed to capitalize on his value by getting draft capital. They did by adding a 2026 second-round pick which now gives them three second-round selections in 2026 alone. The fourth-rounder for 2027 now means they have two picks in that round as part of a 2027 cycle in which they have three consecutive rounds of more than two picks. -- Clark

#### March 7: Cozens to Ottawa and Norris to Buffalo

The Buffalo Sabres and Ottawa Senator hooked up on an Atlantic Division trade, with Dylan Cozens and Josh Norris the headliners.

Cozens, defenseman Dennis Gilbert and a 2026 second-round draft choice are headed to Ottawa for forward Josh Norris and defenseman Jacob Bernard-Docker, the teams announced.

#### Ottawa Senators

Grade: B

Cozens has been in trade discussions pretty much all season, as teams coveted the 6-foot-3 "Workhorse from Whitehorse." He's 24 years old and this is the second year of a seven-year contract extension he signed with the Sabres that carries a \$7.1 million average annual value.

Ottawa is trading for potential here, but with some proof of concept: Cozens is two seasons removed from 31 goals and 37 assists in 81 games -- a season during which, perhaps not coincidentally, he signed his \$49.7 million extension. He has failed to replicate that over the past two seasons, with just 18 goals in 79 games in 2023-24 and 11 goals in 61 games so far this season, where he's shooting a putrid 7.9%.

His defensive play has really trended in the wrong direction, too: Cozens is second to last among Sabres players in even-strength defense goals above average, per Evolving Hockey. He's an average skater, which impacts his overall game too.

But the glimpses are important. Cozens showed so much potential in 2022-23. He had moments over the next two seasons that have recalled that dominance. There's something there that the Senators can unlock, with Cozens' ceiling being a solid No. 2 center worth the contractual investment. But we haven't seen that guy in two seasons.

What we have seen, and this is important: Cozens playing the majority of his team's games. He missed seven games over the course of three seasons and hasn't missed one yet this season. That's the sharpest contrast with Norris, a talented player who simply can't stay in the lineup.

Gilbert is a journeyman through six NHL seasons, playing for Chicago, Colorado, Calgary and then Buffalo for 25 games this season. A clear downgrade from Bernard-Docker as far as age, but pretty much a wash as depth defensemen.

What pushes this grade up a bit for Ottawa is the second-round pick from the Sabres in 2026. It's a deep draft and given Buffalo's recent fortunes, that might end up being like a low first-rounder.

Buffalo Sabres

Grade: B+

The Sabres will probably get crushed for doing this trade because Cozens is younger, cheaper and has certainly stayed in the lineup more than Norris. But I'll submit my minority report: I understand what GM Kevyn Adams did here and I don't mind it.

Buffalo hasn't been in the Stanley Cup playoffs since "Fast 5" was in theaters. (To put that in context, the 11th "Fast and the Furious" movie is scheduled for 2026.) The past few seasons of this unwavering drought have seen the Sabres double down on the same collection of young players who haven't shown significant growth. It was time for Adams to start turning a few of his "maybes" into established NHL players, and he has done that with Norris.

Like Cozens, Norris has one season of fulfilled promise: 35 goals and 20 assists in 66 games back in 2021-22 with the Senators. His past two seasons have been at two points for every 60 minutes of play on average. He has been over that average four times in his career, including this season with 20 goals and 13 assists in 53 games. There's no question he's a more established NHL-caliber center than Cozens at this point in their careers.

But he's older, turning 26 in May. While both Cozens and Norris have contracts that expire in 2030, Norris has a higher cap number (\$7.95 million AAV). And as has been noted a few times here, Norris has missed significant time in each of the past four seasons.

The Sabres are already selling low on Cozens' contract, and the wager here from Adams is that his value might only decrease if he doesn't recapture the magic of that breakout season. If Cozens struggles for a

third season offensively -- and this might be Buffalo acknowledging that's likely, given its own trajectory - then he becomes a disappointment with a fat contract. Trading him now for an established NHL player is the kind of trade he should be making to get the Sabres back to the postseason.

We just wish it wasn't for someone made of porcelain.

Giving up the second-rounder in this deal is just acknowledgement that Norris is the better player.

Bernard-Docker, 24, had been on long-term injured reserve and is a pending restricted free agent. He's a depth defenseman in his fifth NHL season, playing just over 13 minutes a night in 25 games.

As much as we support Adams turning young players into established ones, we also have to acknowledge the concerns of Sabres fans that every talented player who leaves Buffalo -- Sam Reinhart, Ryan O'Reilly, Jack Eichel -- finds instant success in his next stop. Perhaps Cozens will be the exception. -- Wyshynski

March 6: Avs land Nelson in overnight blockbuster

The need to find a second-line center led the Colorado Avalanche to Brock Nelson, the player considered to be the top center available before Friday's deadline.

Nelson and prospect forward William Dufour were traded to the Avalanche, with the New York Islanders receiving defenseman Oliver Kylington, prospect forward Calum Ritchie, a 2026 or 2027 first-round pick and a conditional 2028 third-round pick. The Islanders retained 50% of Nelson's salary, and immediately traded Kylington to the Anaheim Ducks in a separate deal for future considerations.

If Colorado's 2026 draft pick is transferred to the Philadelphia Flyers subject to terms of a previous trade, or it is not transferred and is in the top 10 of the 2026 draft, Colorado will send its 2027 first-round pick to New York. The Avalanche sent that lottery-protected pick to Philadelphia in acquiring defenseman Sean Walker last season.

How did both front offices fare in one of the biggest trades before the deadline?

Colorado Avalanche

Grade: B+

This trade could help the Avalanche win their second Stanley Cup of the 2020s -- and it could also lead to another big move ahead of Friday's deadline.

The narrative surrounding the Avalanche since winning their most recent title in 2022 has been the need to find consistent secondary offense, particularly a No. 2 center after Nazem Kadri left in free agency after that Cup run.

Nelson is the latest potential solution to a problem that has been attempted to be solved by Ross Colton, Jonathan Drouin, Ryan Johansen, Casey Mittelstadt and Martin Necas over the last few years. It's led to some players finding success, with others moving on. In the end, the Avs have failed to get beyond the second round the past two postseasons.

Nelson is a legitimate top-six forward, and can handle the demands of being a second-line center also capable of scoring goals. His 20 goals and 45 points in 61 games mark the ninth time he's hit the 20-goal mark. He's on pace to finish with more than 50 points for a fourth straight season.

The veteran pivot gives the Avs a responsible two-way center who could anchor a second-line with Drouin and Valeri Nichushkin. That's a combination that can score goals while also being actively aggressive on the forecheck to control possession.



Nelson's potential usage could go beyond the second line; a 6-4 forward would make a fine addition to the first-team power play too. They could also use Nelson on the penalty kill, considering he has logged more than 76 short-handed minutes this season, the third-highest total of his career.

So what does this mean for Mittelstadt?

He's gone from being a candidate to be Colorado's second-line center to someone who just cost the Avs their top prospect and a first-round pick to get a more proven option in Nelson, who is on an expiring contract.

It was just a year ago when they traded Bowen Byram for Mittelstadt, with the premise that he could be their long-term second-line center. He signed a three-year contract worth \$5.75 million annually, but did not play up to that standard, being moved down to the fourth line at one point this season.

Adding Nelson pushes Mittelstadt to the third line. It's possible the Avs could keep him there and then figure out what the future looks like this summer, when Drouin, Nelson and Ryan Lindgren all hit free agency. Or they could trade him now, with the belief what they receive in return will strengthen their bid for a championship.

New York Islanders

Grade: A+

The Islanders made this trade while four points behind the Ottawa Senators for the final Eastern Conference wild-card spot, though there are four teams between them.

And with the Isles having the center considered to be the strongest at that position ahead of the deadline, they demanded -- and got -- quite a bit for Nelson.

Conceding that the playoffs might not be in their immediate future meant the Isles had to examine the larger picture. A farm system that once supplied them with players like Josh Bailey, Mathew Barzal, Anders Lee, Adam Pelech, Ilya Sorokin, John Tavares and Devon Toews was struggling.

Aside from Sebastian Aho, Noah Dobson, and Simon Holmstrom, the Isles hadn't developed much home-grown talent since 2016, compounded by trading away a number of first-round picks.

It's why their prospect pool has just one first-round pick since 2020: Boston University freshman forward Cole Eiserman (2024), who is their top prospect.

This fallow farm system meant the Isles needed to get a first-round pick or a top prospect from another franchise. Nelson was able to get them a first-round pick and Ritchie, the top prospect in the Avs system.

A first-round pick in 2023, Ritchie projects as a playmaking, two-way forward. He has 14 goals and 67 points in his fourth full season with the OHL's Oshawa Generals. He's on pace to finish with 78 points in 48 games after recording 80 points in 50 games in the 2023-24 season.

He adds to a prospect forward group that's headlined by Eiserman and Notre Dame sophomore Danny Nelson, a second-round pick in 2023. Eiserman has 19 goals and 27 points in 32 games for the Terriers, while Nelson has 13 goals and 26 points in 32 games for the Fighting Irish.

While the first-rounder they received is for 2026 or 2027, they now have a pair of first-round picks one of those years. They have seven picks for the 2025, and could add to that total if they move on from other veterans ahead of 3 p.m. Friday. -- Clark

March 6: Oilers add to blue line with deal for Walman

The Edmonton Oilers followed up with their latest victory on Thursday night by acquiring defenseman Jake Walman in a trade with the San Jose Sharks. A conditional 2026 first-round pick and forward Carl Berglund head to San Jose.

Here's a look at what the deal means for both teams.

#### Edmonton Oilers

Grade: B+

No four skaters have logged more 5-on-5 ice time this season for the Oilers than their top-four defensemen: Evan Bouchard, Brett Kulak, Mattias Ekholm and Darnell Nurse.

That quartet has played a central role in why the Oilers are in the top 10 in terms of fewest shots allowed per 60 minutes, fewest scoring chances allowed per 60 and fewest high-danger chances allowed per 60, according to Natural Stat Trick.

Heavily relying on four players that much is risky, which was evident in the 3-2 overtime win Thursday over the Montreal Canadiens. Ekholm missing the game meant that the Oilers had to use Troy Stetcher on the top pairing. That led to a third pairing featuring Ty Emberson, who is in his first full NHL season, playing with Cam Dineen, who has spent the last three campaigns in the AHL.

In other words, they needed to add some depth to the blue-line group, a search that ended with Walman. He continued to build upon what he did with the Detroit Red Wings in his first season with San Jose. Walman served as a facilitator, who can quarterback a power play and also anchor a penalty kill.

Walman was more intriguing because has one year remaining on his contract, at \$3.4 million annually; this is part of the reason why the Oilers had to pay such a hefty price.

Any team that wanted Walman either had to find a third-party broker or be willing to take on his salary, because the Sharks already filled their three salary retention slots. The Oilers were able to make his cap hit work by moving Evander Kane to LTIR and Trent Frederic to IR.

Adding Walman left the defending Western Conference champions with just \$300,560 in deadline cap space, per PuckPedia.

#### San Jose Sharks

Grade: A

The Sharks acquired Walman this past offseason in a salary dump from the Red Wings, gaining a second-round pick in the 2024 draft in the process (used on defenseman Leo Sahlin Wallenius).

Walman continued making progress as a Shark, and San Jose was able to turn him into a first-round pick less than a year after they traded future considerations for him. And they did it with the Oilers taking on his full freight, given that San Jose's three retention slots were all used.

The Sharks will get one of those slots back next year with the Brent Burns deal coming off the books, while they'll still have two campaigns of Erik Karlsson's contract at \$1.5 million annually and three more seasons of Tomas Hertl at \$1.39 million.

Sharks general manager Mike Grier's plan of stockpiling draft capital has included grabbing as many early-round picks as possible, and that continues here. They currently have six picks in the first four rounds of this year's draft, and they will pick four times within the first two rounds in 2026.

Of course, the Sharks might not be done moving on from players. They could trade another pending UFA such as forward Luke Kunin, who has a \$2.75 million cap hit, and was held out of Thursday's game for roster management purposes. -- Clark

March 6: Wild add some heft to lineup via Brazeau swap

One team that needed more goals struck a deal with another team that's trying to plan for the future.

The Minnesota Wild acquired Justin Brazeau from the Boston Bruins in exchange for forwards Marat Khusnutdinov, Jakub Lauko and the Bruins' own 2026 sixth-round pick (previously acquired in the Pat Maroon deal).

Here's a look at how both teams performed in the trade.

#### Minnesota Wild

Grade: B

The Wild have been searching for more scoring consistency, but have had to contend with injuries and an extremely tight cap situation.

Part of what makes Brazeau's arrival vital is his addition to a bottom-six forward group that is expected to be critical for the Wild to qualify for the postseason.

They have six players with more than 10 goals this season, and when healthy, five of them occupy top-six roles. A fully healthy complement of forwards means that sixth scorer of more than 10 goals, Marcus Foligno, is on the third line. But injuries have seen him move up to the second.

Adding Gustav Nyquist last week while Joel Eriksson Ek and Kirill Kaprizov recover from injuries gave the Wild another top-six option, which pushed Foligno back to the third line. Brazeau provides goals at a cheap price, and he provides another potential scoring option to the bottom six.

Namely, the Wild's fourth line. Foligno is playing with Ryan Hartman, who has returned from suspension and Vinnie Hinostroza, who has four points in eight games this season.

Should that combination hold, it would give the Wild a fourth line featuring Devin Shore, Yakov Trenin and Brazeau, and could potentially spark Trenin, who is trending below his past production.

#### Boston Bruins

Grade: B+

Given the Bruins' spot in the standings, the buzz was that any pending unrestricted free agent could be on the move. The Bruins already traded Trent Frederic to the Edmonton Oilers, and did so again with Brazeau.

Brazeau has 10 goals and 20 points in 57 games, while carrying a \$775,000 cap hit, which made him a useful addition for cap-strapped contenders. His 6-6 frame makes him a net-front presence who adds size to a forward group entering the playoffs.

Speaking of the playoffs, the Bruins aren't entirely out of it just yet; they were three points behind the Ottawa Senators for the final wild-card spot as one of six teams within five points of the Senators.

As a result, finding a strong return was crucial; they were able to nab two players who can help them now and beyond, plus a draft pick.

Lauko, a third-round pick by the Bruins in 2018, has gone through an injury-riddled season. He has six points in 38 games a year after having 10 in 60. He provides the Bruins with another bottom-six option to replace the one they just traded.

Khusnutindov, a second-round pick by the Wild in 2020, came to North America last season after playing in Russia. After scoring four points in 16 games in 2023-24, he had just two goals and seven points in 57 games for the Wild. It's possible the Bruins could also use Khusnutdinov in a bottom-six role, or they could send the 22-year-old to the AHL for more development. -- Clark

March 6: Smith heads back to Vegas

An original misfit now looks as if he could be the right fit for the Vegas Golden Knights.

The Golden Knights reacquired forward Reilly Smith in a trade with the New York Rangers, with prospect forward Brendan Brisson and the San Jose Sharks' 2025 third-round pick headed in the other direction. The Rangers will retain 50% of Smith's salary.

Exactly how did the front offices perform with this trade? Let's break it down.

Vegas Golden Knights

Grade: B+

Ironically, the reason the Golden Knights had to trade Smith shortly after winning the Stanley Cup in 2023 was also the motivation for why they brought him back in 2025: the salary cap. Because in the NHL, it's always going to be the salary cap.

Smith was too expensive for a team that had other financial considerations -- a continuing refrain with this club.

It's why the Golden Knights had a mass exodus again this past offseason. But even with players such as Jonathan Marchessault and Chandler Stephenson signing elsewhere, they remained a contender, albeit one with questions in the top nine.

Pavel Dorofeyev continues to tap into his promise; he's on pace for 32 goals after scoring 13 goals and 24 points in 47 games during the 2023-24 season. Brett Howden, who had never scored more than nine goals in a season, is now three shy of his first 20-goal campaign.

But there was a belief that the Golden Knights needed more. That led Vegas general manager Kelly McCrimmon to search out top-nine options on team-friendly deals. That's why they added Brandon Saad after his contract was terminated by the St. Louis Blues; the Golden Knights signed him to a one-year prorated deal at \$1.5 million.

Finding another forward with a cap hit similar to Saad's made Smith an attractive option. Of course, the main difference being Smith has a familiarity with many players on their roster and with coach Bruce Cassidy's systems. But what might be his greatest value is the fact he costs only \$1.88 million in cap space for a team that now has \$503,260 in deadline cap space, per PuckPedia.

Then there's the fact that Smith's return could possibly extend beyond this season. PuckPedia projects the Golden Knights have \$16.74 million in cap space this offseason, which means Smith could re-sign.

Whether Smith returns next year is a conversation for another time (the Knights have other key UFAs, including both goalies); his return for this spring indicates that Vegas is once again valuing the present over the future, as Brisson was a first-round pick, and that Sharks pick will come quite early in the third round this summer.

Granted, Brisson struggled to carve a place within the organization. He was pointless in nine NHL games this season and is on pace for 26 points in the AHL.

Even though he was a player on a team-friendly deal, he fell down the pecking order. Cole Schwindt had yet to score a goal, but the fact he played 38 games (before an injury) spoke to how he found a place in the lineup. And while Raphael Lavoie was also pointless in nine NHL games, he was on pace to score 20 goals in the AHL.

#### New York Rangers

Grade: B

The Rangers are at a crossroads, caught between making a playoff push while trying to get something for players they could lose in the offseason for nothing.

They entered Thursday in the final Eastern Conference wild-card spot. They are a tiebreaker ahead of the Detroit Red Wings, while six teams are within four points of them.

And so, Smith became a trade candidate ahead of Friday's deadline, returning a second third-round pick for this summer's draft, while a team that hasn't been shy about giving players from its AHL affiliate a chance at NHL opportunities also adds a young forward.

So much of what Rangers GM Chris Drury has done this season has been about finding the right combination of players for a team that has gone from Cup contender to possibly missing out altogether back to one that could qualify for the postseason after all.

Smith scored 10 goals and 29 points in 58 games, on par with expectations as a top-nine forward. But the Rangers felt they could move on from him considering they had other options they could use on the third line.

All this became evident in the wake of the J.T. Miller trade. The reshuffling Rangers have averaged 3.33 goals per game (ninth best in the NHL in that span), while winning seven of the 12 games they've played since the Jan. 31 trade. Smith was playing nearly 15 minutes per game since the trade, but he had only four points -- all assists.

Moving on from Smith, despite retaining 50% of his salary, leaves the Rangers with \$3.7 million in cap space and \$16.691 million in deadline cap space, per PuckPedia. It also leaves the Rangers with one salary retention spot, with the other being by Ryan Lindgren. -- Clark

#### March 6: Devils get defenseman Brian Dumoulin from Ducks

In need of more defensive depth to combat their current injury woes, the New Jersey Devils traded for defenseman Brian Dumoulin from the Anaheim Ducks.

New Jersey sent a 2025 conditional second-round draft pick and prospect forward Herman Traff to Anaheim. The Ducks also retained 50% of Dumoulin's contract.

Here's a look at what it means for both parties.

#### New Jersey Devils

Grade: B

Dougie Hamilton being out on a week-to-week basis and Jonas Siegenthaler going to LTIR meant the Devils needed to find top-four help to keep their playoff hopes afloat.

Entering Thursday, the Devils were third in the Metropolitan Division on 72 points. They have a four-point lead over the Columbus Blue Jackets, who hold the first Eastern Conference wild-card spot and a

five-point lead over the Ottawa Senators, who have the second wild-card entry. But in addition to missing Hamilton and Siegenthaler, the team announced Wednesday that star center Jack Hughes would miss the remainder of the regular season after having shoulder surgery.

Hamilton was second in 5-on-5 ice time, while Siegenthaler was fifth in average ice time among Devils defensemen and also logged more than 100 short-handed minutes.

Finding someone was more complicated because the new contract had to fit within the Devils' paltry cap situation. That became even more evident with PuckPedia stating the Devils had a little more than \$350,000 in deadline cap space available after they got Dumoulin at a reduced rate.

Dumoulin could be used on the Devils' second pairing next to Brenden Dillon as part of a new-look top four that has Luke Hughes and Brett Pesce as the top pairing. He also gives New Jersey another player who can be trusted on the penalty kill. Dumoulin, a pending unrestricted free agent, has recorded his fifth straight season of more than 100 short-handed minutes.

Anaheim Ducks

Grade: B

Trading Dumoulin allowed the Ducks to collect more capital for the future without hurting their chances at potentially winning a Western Conference wild-card spot. The Ducks began the day six points behind the Calgary Flames for the final Western Conference wild-card opening.

Dumoulin was in a third-pairing role for the Ducks. They already had veterans such as Radko Gudas and Jacob Trouba in the top four providing balance to younger talents such as Jackson LaCombe and Pavel Mintyukov.

Part of Anaheim's strategy has been to play its young defensemen and with Dumoulin, it made it harder for the promising Olen Zellweger to receive the consistent ice time some of his cohorts have found over the last two seasons.

It currently leaves the Ducks with six defensemen who are either under contract or under team control entering next season at the team-friendly price tag of \$15.61 million. They'll get Dumoulin's salary off the books while still having the final year of Cam Fowler's retained salary.

As for the capital they attained, the Ducks are now back in the second round of this year's draft having lost their original second-rounder in a previous trade. Traff, a third-round pick in 2024, has spent the season in Sweden where he's played in the SHL and the HockeyAllsvenskan. He also had two goals in seven games with Sweden at the world junior championships. -- Clark

March 5: Lightning reunite with Gourde, add Bjorkstrand as well

Could a familiar face and a familiar strategy once again pay off for the Tampa Bay Lightning?

The Lightning re-acquired former center Yanni Gourde, All-Star winger Oliver Bjorkstrand, a 2026 fifth-round pick and prospect defenseman Kyle Aucoin in a three-team trade with the Seattle Kraken and Detroit Red Wings. The Kraken received forward Michael Eyssimont, a 2026 first-round pick, a 2027 first-round pick and a 2025 second-round pick via the Toronto Maple Leafs from the Lightning, while retaining 50% of Gourde's salary.

The Red Wings received a 2025 fourth-round pick from the Lightning (either Tampa Bay's own pick, or the Edmonton Oilers', whichever is earlier) for retaining 25% of Gourde's salary.

Here's a look at how each front office did in the trade.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Grade: A-

First-round picks are a universal currency. The way each team values them is the unknown variable -- unless it's the Lightning. In their case, first-round picks are simply bargaining chips they'll use to win right now.

This is why Isaac Howard, who was their first-rounder in 2022, is the only prospect drafted in the first round the Lightning have in their system. This is also why they've remained among the NHL's class of top contenders, including two Stanley Cups and three straight Cup Final appearances.

A team that successful in a salary cap world loses familiar faces occasionally -- sometimes they can get them back. It's why they struck a deal before the season to get defenseman Ryan McDonagh, and did it again by getting Gourde in addition to Bjorkstrand.

But make no mistake: While sentimentality is nice, it's all about winning, and that's why the Lightning made this move. Especially as they were able to get Gourde at 25% of his salary by getting the Red Wings involved as a third-party broker.

While it helps that there's a familiarity with Gourde, he gives them flexibility in a way that many contenders covet. He can play down the middle or on the wing, while providing stability to the middle or bottom six. He's an aggressive forechecker who can be deployed in any scenario, while providing contributions in all zones.

He has done those things for the Lightning. He had done those things for a team that didn't win a Cup but upset a defending Cup champion in the first round and got the Kraken within a game of the Western Conference finals.

That history -- along with the fact Gourde is a pending unrestricted free agent -- is what made him so coveted among all contenders entering the deadline. That's why Tampa Bay paid the price it paid.

Bjorkstrand doesn't have Gourde's playoff history. But what he does provide is another top-six option for Tampa Bay. If Jon Cooper deploys him on the second line with Anthony Cirelli at center and Brandon Hagel at left wing, that will be a major problem for opponents.

A Hagel-Cirelli-Bjorkstrand line gives the Lightning three players who play an aggressive yet responsible style. Plus, it gives Cirelli and Hagel a five-time 20-goal scorer as their linemate, as Bjorkstrand is aiming for his fourth consecutive campaign of more than 20 goals.

Bjorkstrand has a year left on his contract worth \$5.4 million annually, which gives the Lightning cost certainty -- especially if Bjorkstrand finds success with Cirelli and Hagel, who each have long-term deals.

Even with Bjorkstrand's contract, PuckPedia projects the Lightning will have \$14.5 million available in cap space this offseason, to improve a roster that has now has Gourde and Nick Perbix as its major pending UFAs.

Seattle Kraken

Grade: A

Kraken GM Ron Francis has traded players away three times in the team's four-season history. What Francis hadn't done was add first-round picks to his draft capital with those past moves.

Now he has two of them, although he might not get to use them right away. One of the stipulations of this trade is that both first-round picks are top-10 protected. Specifically, if the 2026 or the 2027 first-rounder is a top-10 pick, the Kraken would then get the Lightning's 2028 first-round pick while receiving

an additional third-rounder in 2028. If both picks slide to 2028 and 2029, then, the Kraken gets a third-round pick in 2028 and a third-round pick in 2029.

Even with all those moving parts, this is one of Francis' best trade during his time in Seattle. Gourde came to the Kraken through the expansion draft and received a first-round pick in return. They signed Bjorkstrand as a free agent before eventually trading him for another first-round pick, while getting his contract off the books for next season. This gives the Kraken \$21.75 million in cap space ahead of the offseason, per PuckPedia.

At present, the Kraken still have \$7.83 million in projected deadline cap space. Having that much space -- along with two of their three retained salary spots -- could lead to them being even more involved before Friday's deadline beyond whatever happens with forward Brandon Tanev. Teams have used space and salary retention (as the Red Wings did here) to pick up additional draft capital.

In terms of what it means for the Kraken right now? Bjorkstrand's departure creates an opening on their second line, which could be filled by any number of forwards. Gourde returned to the lineup Tuesday, and had been in a fourth-line role.

Essyiment, who has five goals and 10 points in 57 games this season, gives Seattle another forward who could challenge for one of those middle-six or bottom-six roles. But that comes with the caveat that the Kraken are expected to receive offers for Tanev ahead of Friday's deadline, which would create yet another opening.

Detroit Red Wings

Grade: B-

Playing third-party broker is not a sign about the state of the Red Wings or their playoff chances. They entered Wednesday tied in points with the New York Rangers, who have the final wild-card spot based on tiebreakers.

This trade was simply a business decision for the Wings, who retain quite a bit of financial flexibility ahead of the trade deadline.

Retaining 25% of Gourde's salary will count for only \$1.29 million in salary cap space. PuckPedia projects the Red Wings will still have more than \$13 million in deadline cap space, while also having two of their three salary retention slots available if needed. But adding a second fourth-round pick gives the Red Wings a chance to add to a farm system that's already considered to be one of the strongest in the NHL. - Clark

March 4: Oilers land Frederic from the Bruins

The Edmonton Oilers acquired Trent Frederic and Max Jones from the Boston Bruins in a trade that also included the New Jersey Devils as the third-party facilitator.

The Devils will retain 25% of Frederic's salary, sending prospect Petr Hauser to Boston (which is retaining 50% of Frederic's salary) and receiving unsigned prospect Shane Lachance from Edmonton. The Bruins sent Hauser and Jones to Edmonton for prospect Max Wanner, the St. Louis Blues' second-round pick in 2025 and the Oilers' fourth-round pick in 2026.

How did each GM do in the deal? Here are the grades:

Edmonton Oilers

Grade: B+



Frederic is an ideal addition to the Oilers' forward depth. He brings size (6-foot-3, 220 pounds) and can throw that frame around, leading the Bruins in hits per 60 minutes (11.2) over the past two seasons. But he's not lumbering -- Frederic can skate well and contribute offensively.

OK, that last bit is theoretical: The 27-year-old had two seasons of offensive growth, culminating in 18 goals and 40 points in 82 games last season. That has regressed to eight goals and 15 points in 57 games this season. He's a finisher whose shooting percentage has dropped by 4% year over year. But it should be said that he's not the only Boston forward to have an offensive setback this season.

Frederic can also kill penalties effectively, which is good news for an Oilers team that's not very good at that this season (75%, 26th in the NHL).

Best of all is the cap number, which GM Stan Bowman got whittled down to \$575,000 thanks to double retention by the Bruins and Devils. Edmonton is in a bit of a salary cap conundrum with Evander Kane's injury status, so a thrifty acquisition like this was paramount.

There is a downside for this trade, which is Frederic's health. He's currently out with a lower-body injury and considered "week to week." One assumes Edmonton got assurances about his injury timeline, but this isn't exactly ideal.

Jones is a throw-in winger, but one who has seven seasons of NHL experience under his belt -- although he saw more time in the AHL than in Boston this season. He was a bust with the Bruins, however.

Czech forward Hauser, a fifth-round pick by the Devils in 2022, stands around 6-foot-4. The 21-year-old is a project if the Oilers eventually sign him.

#### Boston Bruins

Grade: A-

Once GM Don Sweeney made it clear that Brad Marchand would potentially be the only pending unrestricted free agent the team would negotiate with before the trade deadline, Frederic might as well have started packing his bags.

Even if Boston was in a playoff spot, it might have traded this pending UFA anyway for future assets. The \$1.15 million they retained on Frederic is their first retention spot used this season. Hey, it's not like they're going to be adding.

That second-rounder they received should be upper-to-middle-range in the draft, given where the Blues are in the standings. Boston didn't have one of its own this season after trading it to Washington in 2023 in the Dmitry Orlov swap.

Wanner is a 21-year-old, right-shooting defenseman who spent the past two seasons with the AHL Bakersfield Condors. He was buried on the Oilers' depth chart, having struggled through a season that saw him miss time due to injury. Not a bad prospect for the Bruins to get into their pipeline.

The Bruins also found a taker for the last year of that Jones contract (\$1 million), which is a plus even though he was a minus in his seven games in Boston.

#### New Jersey Devils

Grade: B+

On the one hand, this is New Jersey basically paying \$575,000 for the rights to Shane Lachance, a 21-year-old winger who captains Boston University and stands 6-foot-5. He has 25 points in 32 games this season for the Terriers, after being selected No. 186 overall in 2021 by the Oilers.

On the other hand, let it never be said the NHL isn't a land of potential nepotism: Lachance's father is former New York Islanders defenseman Scott Lachance, who is the Devils' head of U.S. scouting.

Still, not a bad bit of salary retention business at the deadline for the Devils. If Lachance's skating ever improves, they might have something there. -- Wyshynski

March 1: Panthers land Jones, send Knight to Blackhawks

After saying he wanted to play for a contender, Seth Jones is now a member of the defending Stanley Cup champions.

The Florida Panthers acquired Jones and a 2026 fourth-round pick from the Chicago Blackhawks with goaltender Spencer Knight and a conditional 2026 first-round pick going the other way. The Blackhawks will also retain 25% of Jones' salary for the next five seasons.

How did each front office perform in the NHL's latest blockbuster? Let's find out.

Florida Panthers

Grade: A-

It was never a question of whether the Panthers needed Jones. They did. But many wondered whether the Panthers had the capital to pull off a deal. Turns out, the Panthers had a different kind of capital.

They provided the Blackhawks with a first-round pick one would expect for a top-pairing, right-handed-shooting defenseman such as Jones. But to include Knight in the deal and have the Blackhawks retain \$2.5 million in salary over the next four years?

There are many layers to that decision, so let's unpack it.

The package that Panthers GM Bill Zito presented to the Blackhawks was something that checked two significant boxes:

He provided a rebuilding team with a 2026 first-round pick that ensures the Blackhawks will have at least two first-rounders in every draft since 2022

Zito also offered Knight, a 23-year-old goaltender who was a first-round pick in 2019

The Panthers had a hole on the right side of their defense beyond Aaron Ekblad, the second-longest tenured player on the roster. Ekblad is an unrestricted free agent in the final season of an eight-year deal worth \$7.5 million annually. PuckPedia projects Florida will have \$20.5 million in cap space this offseason, which means a deal could be struck to keep Ekblad. The Panthers can also use that space to re-sign forward Sam Bennett, another pending UFA.

Jones is under contract for four more years at a rate that provides flexibility, and the Panthers have a top-four unit this season that features Gustav Forsling, Niko Mikkola and Ekblad.

Although ... at what potential long-term cost?

The Panthers needed to decide their long-term plans in net. They won the Cup last season -- and have had the greatest period in franchise history -- with future Hall of Famer Sergei Bobrovsky as their No. 1 option. Meanwhile, Knight developed into a backup, and was slated to be his heir apparent in the crease.

Bobrovsky, 36, has one year remaining on his deal at \$10 million before hitting free agency. Some thought the Panthers could recoup those savings and re-sign Knight, who is 13 years younger, to a new contract.

Including Knight in the deal to get Jones means the Panthers must find another solution in goal post-Bobrovsky. In the interim, the Panthers have a proven backup option in Chris Driedger, with the 30-year-old playing this season in the AHL.

If the Panthers win another Cup this season -- or when they have Jones on the roster, the cost of losing Knight is easily justified.

Chicago Blackhawks

Grade: A+

Finding a legitimate franchise goalie is difficult, yet the Blackhawks may have just found one in Knight.

Think about the conversation that's being had right now about the state of American hockey: Goaltending is one of the biggest advantages the United States has, with Connor Hellebuyck, Jake Oettinger, Jeremy Swayman, Thatcher Demko and rookie Dustin Wolf all being developed in the country.

It wasn't that long ago when Knight, who was a first-round pick partly due to his prototypical size, was in that conversation. Going to the Blackhawks and possibly establishing himself as the outright No. 1 goalie could see him get back into the mix.

But what does his arrival mean for the Blackhawks' goaltending landscape?

Knight is now the fourth goalie on the Blackhawks' NHL roster who is either under contract for next season or the team has control via restricted free agency. Laurent Brossoit, who is on injured reserve, has a year remaining at \$3.3 million while Petr Mrazek has a year remaining at \$4.25 million. Arvid Soderblom costs only \$963,000 but he's the RFA.

With Knight on the roster, the Blackhawks could trade one of those other goaltenders, with the hopes of adding even more draft capital to what's already a rather strong reserve of draft picks. This would also open the door for Knight to get more playing time. He's 12-8-1 with a 2.40 goals-against average and a .907 save percentage in 23 games for Florida. The most he has played in an NHL season is 32 games, while the most he's had in his professional career are the 45 he played last season in the AHL.

The more looming question around their goaltending landscape is: What does this mean for Drew Comesso?

Comesso was a second-round pick in 2020 that came through the famed United States National Team Development Program before he played three seasons at Hockey East powerhouse Boston University. Comesso's final two seasons at BU reinforced the belief he could become the Blackhawks' goalie of the future.

He finished his first AHL season with a 2.65 goals-against average and a .906 save percentage in 2023-24. Comesso is still in the AHL but played two NHL games in mid-December. He allowed four goals on 24 shots to the New Jersey Devils in one of those games before he was sent back to the minors.

Since then, he's had 15 starts in the AHL and has allowed more than three goals in 15 of those outings. That includes a run of five consecutive games in which he allowed more than three. In total, he's allowed more than three goals in 15 of his 25 games this season; to be fair, he's played behind a team that has been inconsistent throughout the season.

In other words, finding another young goaltending option was a possibility this trade season.

But instead of just another option, they added one of the few goaltenders who has gone in the first round in recent memory, further strengthening a youth movement that's considered one of the NHL's most promising. -- Clark

## March 1: Predators trade Nyquist to the Wild

Shortly after one Central Division team made a trade on Saturday, two more made a deal with each another.

The Minnesota Wild received forward Gustav Nyquist from the Nashville Predators in exchange for a 2026 second-round pick, with the Predators retaining 50% of Nyquist's salary.

Here's a quick glance at what it means for both clubs.

### Minnesota Wild

Grade: B

Any deal the Wild were going to make ahead of the deadline had to fit within their salary cap constraints. They entered Saturday with minus-\$603,556 in projected cap space, but Kirill Kaprizov and his \$9 million cap hit going to long-term injured reserve meant there was extra room, per PuckPedia.

Having a manageable cap hit, among other items, is what made Nyquist such an attractive option for the Wild -- or any team that needed additional offensive support at a team-friendly price tag.

Getting the Predators to retain 50% of Nyquist's salary means the Wild are on the hook for \$1.595 million. PuckPedia indicates the Wild have a little more than \$6.632 million in deadline cap space; it's possible they could add more before Friday's deadline.

The expectation is that the Wild could add another forward. There has been a need for offensive consistency since December when Kaprizov, who emerged as a Hart Trophy candidate, sustained an injury that has kept him out of the lineup. His 23 goals still lead the Wild, while his 52 points are tied for the team lead -- despite playing 23 fewer games than current leader Matt Boldy.

The situation got worse this week when top-line center Joel Eriksson Ek was injured, and he'll be out on a week-to-week basis with a lower-body injury. The Wild entered the weekend ranked 21st in goals per game; despite that, they are third in the Central Division, while having the same number of points but played one fewer game than the Colorado Avalanche, who hold the first wild-card spot.

The Wild could move Nyquist to their first or second line while shifting Vinnie Hinostroza, who was on their second line, to the third. There is belief that Nyquist can ramp his scoring back up to previous levels; he's scored just nine goals and 21 points in 57 games for the disappointing Predators, but he had 23 goals and 75 points in 81 games this past season.

### Nashville Predators

Grade: B

At one point, the Predators were believed to be a team that was going to be active at the deadline because they would be challenging for a playoff spot.

Instead, the Predators are now focusing on their future. Part of that includes reshaping portions of their roster, and that's what ended Nyquist's time with the club before the deadline.

He was Nashville's most prominent pending UFA in a market that also has other forwards reportedly available, such as Yanni Gourde, Brock Nelson, Brayden Schenn and Jason Zucker, among others. His manageable cap hit meant the Preds were going to have options, and they found one that adds a nice bit of draft capital.

Given that they were already retaining part of Mattias Ekholm and Ryan Johansen's contracts, and would have to retain on Nyquist, this deal had to be the right one.

Getting the Wild's 2026 second-round pick adds to an impressive haul; the Predators may end up being one of the busiest teams ahead of the NHL draft if GM Barry Trotz elects to make subsequent deals.

The Predators have three first-round picks and two second-round picks in 2025, along with now having an extra second in 2026. -- Clark

March 1: Lindgren, Vesey to Avs; de Haan, Parssinen to Rangers

Finally! A trade has happened as we enter the final six days before the March 7 NHL trade deadline.

The Colorado Avalanche acquired defenseman Ryan Lindgren, forward Jimmy Vesey and prospect defenseman Hank Kampf from the New York Rangers on Saturday for forward Juuso Parssinen, defenseman Calvin de Haan, a conditional 2025 second-round pick and a conditional 2025 fourth-round pick. The Rangers will also retain 50% of Lindgren's salary.

Here's a look at how both GMs did in the trade.

Colorado Avalanche

Grade: B+

The Avs lost Josh Manson to an injury before 4 Nations Face-Off, and he remained out of the lineup through the Avs' first four post-tournament games. His absence created questions about whom they would pursue to strengthen a top-four group that was using Oliver Kylington as a fill-in.

Getting Lindgren accomplishes a few items for the Avs:

- He gives them a proven top-four, defensive-minded defenseman

- Like Manson, he provides balance to a second pairing, which allows Samuel Girard to continue operating as a facilitator in the offensive zone

- He can log heavy minutes on a penalty kill

This final part is critical, as it could lessen the burden on Devon Toews and Cale Makar, who lead the Avs in short-handed minutes (among other categories).

Vesey is a bottom-six forward with size who can be used in rotation with Ross Colton, Joel Kiviranta, Logan O'Connor and Miles Wood. He has just four goals and six points in 33 games this season, with the idea he could add more, considering he finished with more than 11 goals in consecutive campaigns before the 2024-25 season. He would also give them another forward option on the PK. He had three consecutive seasons of logging more than 85 minutes in short-handed sequences before this one. This season, he was limited to a little more than five total PK minutes with the Rangers.

This deal provides the Avs with a bit of a respite while Manson recovers, at a time when the club is trying to reach the playoffs either through one of the three Central Division spots or as a wild-card entry. Entering Saturday, the Avs were in the first wild-card spot. They have the same number of points as the Minnesota Wild, who are third in the Central, but the Wild have played one fewer game.

While both players are a fit, this trade works even better for the Avs because both Lindgren and Vesey are pending unrestricted free agents. That gives the Avs a six-player pending UFA class ahead of an offseason in which PuckPedia projects they'll have only \$8.2 million in cap space.

New York Rangers

Grade: B+

Lindgren's future with the Rangers was in question as a pending UFA who might not have had a place in the blue-line rotation moving forward.

The Rangers will need to re-sign RFAs K'Andre Miller and Zac Jones this summer, while having a projected \$17.83 million in cap space according to PuckPedia.

Re-signing Jones and Miller would complete a defensive unit that already has a Norris Trophy winner in Adam Fox signed to a long-term contract. Will Borgen, who they acquired in-season, went from earning \$2.70 million this season to signing a three-year contract extension with the Rangers worth \$4.10 million annually.

The Rangers also have Braden Schneider signed for one more season, while Urho Vaakanainen is another pending RFA. Plus, the recently promoted Matthew Robertson is another defenseman under contract for next season.

That gives the Rangers seven defensemen who were either signed or remain under team control for 2025-26, which made pending UFA Lindgren expendable.

That made it important for the Rangers to get something of value in return. They did so by adding draft capital for 2025, plus two players in de Haan and Parssinen who provide depth to a lineup that's still trying to make the playoffs. The Rangers came into Saturday four points behind the Detroit Red Wings and Columbus Blue Jackets for the two Eastern Conference wild-card spots.

Moving on from Lindgren means the Rangers have adjustments they'll need to make when it comes to who takes over on the second pairing and on the PK. It's possible that either Jones or Schneider will get promoted to the second pair, while de Haan could be one of those players who helps fill the void left by Lindgren on the Rangers' PK. – Clark

## ESPN / NHL playoff standings: Resetting the postseason races

By ESPN staff- March 9, 2025

The final week ahead of the 2024-25 NHL trade deadline brought new faces to contending teams across the league, reaching a crescendo on deadline day, with Mikko Rantanen traded to the Dallas Stars, Brad Marchand shipped to the Florida Panthers and the Colorado Avalanche loading up with two new centers (Brock Nelson and Charlie Coyle).

And now, the race for the playoffs is officially on!

In the East, the Atlantic Division seeds seem pretty well set, and that goes for two of three Metro Division seeds as well; the New Jersey Devils, in the No. 3 spot, are dealing with major injury woes. They are currently without Jack Hughes, Dougie Hamilton and Jonas Siegenthaler.

But it's in the wild-card race where things get truly, well, wild. The Columbus Blue Jackets (68 points in 62 games) and Ottawa Senators (67 in 61) hold those positions heading into Saturday's slate of games. But five teams are within four points of the Sens, with around 20 games left each.

There are six teams in the West that seem fairly secure in their playoff position -- the top three Central teams (along with the Minnesota Wild in the first wild-card spot), as well as the Vegas Golden Knights and Edmonton Oilers in the Pacific. The Los Angeles Kings (71 points in 60 games) and Vancouver Canucks (69 in 62) have some work left to do to stave off the Calgary Flames (68 in 62), St. Louis Blues (68 in 64) and Utah Hockey Club (66 in 63).

There is a lot of runway left until the final day of the season on April 17, and we'll help you keep track of it all here on the NHL playoff watch. As we traverse the final stretch, we'll provide detail on all the playoff races -- along with the teams jockeying for position in the 2025 NHL draft lottery.

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

## Sportsnet.ca / Trade Deadline Winners and Losers: We all benefit from non-stop day of deals

**By Ryan Dixon- March 8, 2025**

How crazy was the 2025 trade deadline season?

One team that traded Mikko Rantanen away is somehow about to be listed here as a deadline winner; a second squad that sent Rantanen packing is a loser and the buried lede in all of that is the simple fact one of the very best skaters in the world was swapped twice in six weeks.

Oh, by the way, there's a decent chance the Dallas Stars — Rantanen's current team — will face the Colorado Avalanche — Rantanen's first team — in the opening round of the playoffs.

Beyond an elite winger criss-crossing the continent, we also had Atlantic Division rivals swapping locked-up, still-young No. 2 centres; the Avalanche — who won the Cup less than three years ago — rendering their lineup utterly unrecognizable from the one they iced on opening night and, in a pro wrestling-style team-up, Brad freakin' Marchand joining the rat pack known as the Florida Panthers for their title defence.

Given all that, the annual task of identifying trade season winners and losers — an equally perilous and fun adventure — has a little extra juice this March.

Let's dive right in.

### WINNERS

#### Dallas Stars

When the smoke cleared, and the double deal had actually happened, Rantanen was on the Stars and armed with a new eight-year, \$96-million extension. Remember, in addition to their new six-foot-four winger, the Stars also landed forward Mikael Granlund and right-shot defenceman Cody Ceci from the San Jose Sharks on Feb. 1.

Dallas gave up a fantastic young player in Logan Stankoven to get Rantanen from Carolina, but GM Jim Nill also locked up 21-year Wyatt Johnston to a five-year contract extension on Friday.

What a day in Dallas.

#### Colorado Avalanche

Since the end of January, the Avs have added six meaningful pieces to their lineup. And that's without even mentioning a full battery change in the crease before Christmas, with Scott Wedgewood and Mackenzie Blackwood replacing Alexandar Georgiev and Justus Annunen.

The overall calculus is pretty simple: Colorado moved on from one elite stud in Rantanen to spread the love around and fill multiple holes. They now have Martin Necas on the top line for basically half of what Rantanen's cap hit will be in Dallas next year (which likely would have been even higher in a place with state income tax), Brock Nelson filling a glaring need as a 2C, Charlie Coyle coming in to be an overqualified third-line pivot and Ryan Lindgren banging bodies on the back end.

It's odd to contemplate the idea of Colorado improving its 2025 Cup chances by moving on from Rantanen, but that just might be what happened.

#### Florida Panthers



The buzzer-beater to get Brad Marchand — even with all the other excitement around the league — was the biggest “Holy Bleep!” moment of deadline day. Marchand, Matthew Tkachuk and Sam Bennett in the same lineup? That’s more heel than a cobbler sees in lifetime of work.

Of course, the most meaningful add the Cats made was getting Seth Jones to patrol the right side of the ice in the top 4 of the blueline.

Obviously Tkachuk’s health is a big question mark, but the Cats aren’t losing the Cup without a fight.

It went down to the wire, but the Leafs got their guys. Had the day ended with third-line centre Scott Laughton being the Buds’ big prize, it probably would have felt like a slight disappointment given everything else that went on directly around them in the division. But grabbing Brandon Carlo right before 3 p.m. ET made this a strong deadline for GM Brad Treliving. Laughton is under contract for another spring, Carlo is inked for another two and both come with lighter cap hits thanks to salary retention.

Carlo, as a huge, right-shot blue-liner, should really help Toronto’s defencemen fill roles they’re best suited for.

Dylan Cozens was widely coveted around the league despite underwhelming counting stats ever since a 68-point breakout in the 2022-23 season. Cozens is a big, right-shot centre who just turned 24. The Sens may be giving up the better goal-scorer in Josh Norris, but his spotty health history makes this one a no-brainer for Ottawa. And if Cozens reaches his ceiling in Canada’s capital, it could go down as a really meaningful day for a Sens club trying to not only make the playoffs, but do something significant once there.

It’s sort of reminiscent of Ottawa snagging Kyle Turris from Arizona once upon a time.

The Sens also grabbed Fabian Zetterlund from San Jose. He’s a 25-year-old winger on pace for a second consecutive 20-goal season and an RFA at season’s end.

It might seem like small potatoes given what the Leafs and, in particular, the Panthers, just pulled off, but Tampa’s lineup got a lot longer with old friend Yanni Gourde and fellow third-liner Oliver Bjorkstrand coming aboard. And, remember, Tampa was red-hot before this move.

Okay, that’s finally it for the Atlantic ... at least in the winners category.

You can like a deal from both sides and while we’ve got Tampa down as a winner for acquiring Gourde and Bjorkstrand, the Kraken exit that swap with two first-round picks and a second. That’s a nice asset haul for GM Ron Francis, who also grabbed a 2027 second from the Jets for Brandon Tanev.

Good on the Jackets, who removed potentially the most consequential rental player (non-Rantanen division) from the market when GM Don Waddell stated they would not be trading pending UFA defenceman Ivan Provorov despite the lack of a new deal.

Ride with what you’ve got and if Provorov walks, he walks.

Also, the Jackets are just four points behind the Devils (with a game in hand) for third place in the Metropolitan Division and if they can overcome a New Jersey squad that didn’t do much of anything — possibly in part because it’s tough to buy right after you lose a player like Jack Hughes to injury for the year — they’ll draw a Hurricanes team in the first round that has to be hurting a little at the end of this Rantanen affair.

Landing a prospect like Calum Ritchie — even if it meant saying good-bye to franchise mainstay like Brock Nelson — has to be marked as a ‘W.’

And finally ... US!

Wow, what rush! Deadline day itself often tends to fall a little flat because teams get their heavy lifting done ahead of time. But we saw big-time swaps today, with A-list players, prospects and league personalities on the move. Well done, suits.

## LOSERS

No format offers less wiggle room than winners/losers and — unlike the games themselves — it can take a long time for us to learn the ultimate results of transactions.

But, as any fourth-liner jumping over the boards to get his nose dirty and possibly a little broken can tell you, the job is the job, and we live in a binary sports world that demands declaring victory or defeat.

You had to love the Canes' all-in play to get Rantanen from Colorado after a couple years of coming up short in the playoffs. That he isn't staying in Raleigh for the next nine springs is an obvious disappointment.

On the bright side, Logan Stankoven — with his skill and crazy motor — almost seems born to be a Cane. Still, this is a tough one right now for Carolina.

If you want to zag — and, pulling back in the curtain a bit, I almost did — and call the B's winners, you laud them for picking a lane and hammering the accelerator. There was no hemming or hawing from GM Don Sweeney, who, to the surprise of many, ushered in a new phase of team-building in Boston by moving out some central-core pieces.

Selling pending UFAs like Trent Frederic and Justin Brazeau is one thing, but moving your captain, Brad Marchand, is another, and dealing away important players with term left on their deals like Charlie Coyle and Brandon Carlo can only be interpreted as a major shift in approach for Boston.

The team wasn't going anywhere this year, but we didn't enter deadline day prepared to do a real re-evaluation of what Boston's next two or three seasons look like.

The Jets made solid, if unspectacular, additions in edgy bottom-sixer Brandon Tanev and hefty right-shot defenceman Luke Schenn. But that second-line centre spot remains a question mark and you can't be a Jets fan and feel good about the gains made by division rivals in Dallas and Colorado.

If Josh Norris stays healthy and scores the way he can, Western New Yorkers can calm down a little. But this is a big bet by the Sabres given the player's extensive injury history. Buffalo was bent on getting players back who can help right now if it was going to move somebody like Dylan Cozens and that's fair enough. But did Sabres GM Kevyn Adams try to match the pieces too perfectly by acquiring another middleman who's basically signed to the same contract as Cozens?

Also, it's one thing to make a trade the blows up in your face — it's another to make it with a team you're, in theory, competing for a wild-card spot with year after year.

Sabres fans, on behalf of the entire hockey world — minus Sens supporters — I hope I'm wrong.

## The second round of the playoffs

The fact we can say, right now, it's very likely two of Toronto, Tampa, Florida, Dallas and Colorado will be gone in Round 1 is a slight bummer. All five of those clubs pushed in chips and, assuming the Avs can catch the Minnesota Wild down the stretch, the 2 vs. 3 matchups in the Central and Atlantic are going to feature four of these clubs.

Of course, that means Round 1 could be two weeks' worth of the fun we had today.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Two sentences on every notable trade during deadline week](#)

**By Justin Bourne- March 9, 2025**

New York Rangers acquire: Juuso Parssinen (C), Calvin de Haan (D), 2025 second-round pick, 2025 fourth-round pick, retain 50% of Lindgren's contract

What the Rangers did reminds me of what the pre-Cup St. Louis Blues did when they had good teams, yet still moved players like Paul Stastny and Kevin Shattenkirk. They're getting assets for guys who they don't want to lose for nothing, while simultaneously trying to compete, which doesn't look super promising here but you'll recall worked out pretty damn well for the Blues.

Minnesota Wild acquire: Gustav Nyquist (C)

Nashville Predators acquire: 2026 second-round pick, retain 50% of Nyquist's contract

The Wild's salary cap picture has their hands tied, and injuries have hurt them this season, so this feels like a half-baked attempt at improving. The Central is just so loaded that this doesn't move the needle.

Florida Panthers acquire: Seth Jones (D), 2026 fourth-round pick

Chicago Blackhawks acquire: Spencer Knight (G), 2026 or 2027 first-round pick, retain 26% of Jones' contract

This is the type of trade that makes sense for both parties, as the Panthers take a guy who gets dumped on because he makes so much, they cut down his pay, and then put him in a better position to succeed. Meanwhile, the Blackhawks take a swing at finding their goalie of the future while grabbing a first, so retention aside, you can see how they prefer this package over a guy who didn't want to be there.

Edmonton Oilers acquire: Trent Frederic (C), Max Jones (LW), Petr Hauser (RW)

Boston Bruins acquire: Max Wanner (D), 2025 second-round pick, 2026 fourth-round pick, retain 50% of Frederic's contract

New Jersey Devils acquire: Shane Lachance, retain 50% of Frederic's contract

I love this addition for the Oilers, with the caveat that I'm hopeful Trent Frederic can be the best version of himself for Edmonton upon returning from injury. It seems like a lot of pieces out, but it's unlikely any of them are massive NHL difference-makers, and a healthy Frederic can protect Connor McDavid, shoot it in the net and give the Oilers a more punch-first mentality.

Florida Panthers acquire: Vitek Vanecsek (G)

San Jose Sharks acquire: Patrick Giles (C)

With Spencer Knight being shipped out, the Panthers made sure they got both a capable backup and a capable backup backup (they added Kaapo Kahkonen as well). Neither goalie is exceptional, but behind a great team, they both have the NHL experience necessary to give them at least baseline-level goaltending.

Tampa Bay Lightning acquire: Yanni Gourde (C), Oliver Bjorkstrand (RW), Kyle Aucoin (D), 2026 fifth-round pick

Seattle Kraken acquire: Michael Eyssimont (C), 2026 first-round pick, 2027 first-round pick, 2025 second-round pick, retain 50% of Gourde's contract

Detroit Red Wings acquire: Conditional 2025 fourth-round pick, retain 25% of Gourde's contract

I like basically everything the Lightning have said about this deal, namely their GM saying, "Ultimately, the calculation is that trying and failing will yield less regret than failing to try." That makes me want to run through a wall for Tampa Bay, which is quietly third in the NHL in goal differential and getting better.

San Jose Sharks acquire: Vincent Desharnais (D)

Pittsburgh Penguins acquire: 2028 fifth-round pick

Fact is, somebody's gotta play for the Sharks, what with their plan to trade everyone away who isn't 24 or younger. I like Vincent Desharnais fine enough.

Pittsburgh Penguins acquire: Luke Schenn (D), Tommy Novak (C)

Nashville Predators acquire: Michael Bunting (LW), 2026 fourth-round pick

Bunting makes \$4.5 million this year and next, and is on pace for 40 points and is going to turn 30 this year, and the Penguins turned him and a fourth into a cheaper (and pretty damn good) Tommy Novak, a second and the return for Schenn, which was a second and a fourth. Quality asset management there.

New Jersey Devils acquire: Brian Dumoulin (D)

Anaheim Ducks acquire: Herman Traff (RW), conditional 2025 second-round pick, retain 50% of Dumoulin's contract

I like that the Devils aren't rolling over after the Jack Hughes injury. Brian Dumoulin is obviously not a huge needle mover, but he's a big-body defensive defenceman, and he'll help them in playoffs.

New York Rangers acquire: Brendan Brisson (C), 2025 third-round pick

Sometimes a player is worth more than the general perception if you put him in the right environment. And this is the one Reilly Smith wanted to be in all along, meaning, I think they'll get more out of him than any other team would have.

Florida Panthers acquire: Kaapo Kahkonen (G)

Winnipeg Jets acquire: Chris Driedger (G)

The Panthers are just trying to protect Sergei Bobrovsky, who can run hot and cold. I'm not sure if this does that at all, but it maybe improves their emergency scenarios a few per cent?

New York Rangers acquire: Carson Soucy (D)

Vancouver Canucks acquire: 2025 third-round pick

Sneaky like this for the Rangers, and at a fairly low cost. Carson Soucy is big and can defend, and in the playoffs, they're gonna need to help out Igor Shesterkin.

Edmonton Oilers acquire: Jake Walman (D)

San Jose Sharks: Carl Berglund (C), conditional 2026 first-round pick

I like this move for Edmonton, too, as he wasn't really a name on many teams' radars. Jake Walman has offensive upside, size and is really coming into his own (and the Oilers need help at that position!).

Colorado Avalanche acquire: Brock Nelson (C), William Dufour (RW)

New York Islanders acquire: Calum Ritchie (C), Oliver Kylington (D), 2026 or 2027 first-round pick, conditional 2028 third-round pick, retain 50% of Nelson's contract

This was great work by the Islanders, who turned an expiring contract on a declining asset into a first and a very good prospect. Now, I hope that doesn't sound like I'm denigrating Brock Nelson, because this is still a very good player who immediately helps bump the Avs from "pretty good" to "one of the contenders."

Washington Capitals acquire: Anthony Beauvillier (LW)

Pittsburgh Penguins acquire: 2025 second-round pick

I'm not sure Anthony Beauvillier makes the Caps all that much better, but depth is depth. More than anything, this is an example of how crazy the prices get on deadline day.

Los Angeles Kings acquire: Andrei Kuzmenko (LW), 2025 seventh-round pick

Philadelphia Flyers acquire: 2027 third-round pick, retain 50% of Kuzmenko's contract

Pretty incredible that the Flyers turned Andrei Kuzmenko into a third, even with retention. He's streaky, and the Kings could use some scoring help, so maybe he's got a big goal or two in him come the playoffs.

Ottawa Senators acquire: Dylan Cozens (C), Dennis Gilbert (D), 2026 second-round pick

Buffalo Sabres acquire: Josh Norris (C), Jacob Bernard-Docker (D)

I liked Josh Norris, but his health was a major issue, and I can't help but love the upside of Dylan Cozens for the Sens. On a better team, Cozens could have the support he needs to take a step and really make this thing a win for Ottawa.

Dallas Stars acquire: Mikko Rantanen (RW)

Carolina Hurricanes acquire: Logan Stankoven (C), conditional 2026 first-round pick, conditional 2028 first-round pick, 2026 third-round pick, 2027 third-round pick

When Carolina acquired Mikko Rantanen, it was always "try to sign him, and if we can't, flip him," and it ended up being the latter. While the team didn't manage to get better in the short term (and that is worth noting), a franchise in that market has to protect against bottoming out, and adding Logan Stankoven, two firsts, and two thirds as assets represents a big opportunity to add to the overall return for Martin Necas.

Winnipeg Jets acquire: Luke Schenn (D)

Pittsburgh Penguins acquire: 2026 second-round pick, 2027 fourth-round pick

Two things can be true, and in this case, Luke Schenn being both a useful NHLer and an overpay demonstrates that. The Leafs acquired him for a third-rounder a couple years ago, and now he's older and makes more money, while the Jets spent quite a bit more to get him.

Toronto Maple Leafs acquire: Scott Laughton (C), 2025 fourth-round pick, 2027 sixth-round pick

Philadelphia Flyers acquire: Nikita Grebenkin (RW), conditional 2027 first-round pick, retain 50% of Laughton's contract

In a year where guys like Beauvillier and Kuzmenko cost second- and third-round picks to acquire, getting Scott Laughton for a player who might top out as Laughton and a late first (while getting multiple picks back and 50 per cent salary retained) is a plus-move for the Leafs. He's maybe not the big improvement up front many Leafs fans hoped for, but he fits in their puzzle neatly, solidifying a big hole at 3C.

Winnipeg Jets acquire: Brandon Tanev (LW)

Seattle Kraken acquire: 2027 second-round pick

While Dallas and Colorado were taking big swings, the Jets were getting more competitive and deeper. They didn't want to mess with their room chemistry and good vibes, so Tanev should help them on the ice while not disrupting things off it.

Colorado Avalanche acquire: Charlie Coyle (C), 2026 fifth-round pick

Boston Bruins acquire: Casey Mittelstadt (C), William Zellers (LW), 2025 second-round pick

The Avs went from just about no centre depth to one of the deepest teams at centre in the league, rolling out Nathan MacKinnon, Nelson, Charlie Coyle and Jack Drury. Seems like a pretty moderate price too, so a great add for them.

Columbus Blue Jackets acquire: Luke Kunin (C)

San Jose Sharks acquire: 2025 fourth-round pick

This trade is the equivalent of eating a healthy dinner and then thinking, "Y'know what? I deserve a little treat." The Jackets certainly do deserve a little treat after an incredible year, so if Luke Kunin helps them a bit, that's great.

Detroit Red Wings acquire: Petr Mrazek (G), Craig Smith (C)

Chicago Blackhawks acquire: Joe Veleno (C)

A nice move for the Blackhawks, who want Spencer Knight to hold the crease for a while. It also buys low on a young guy who may yet have more to give.

Florida Panthers acquire: Brad Marchand (LW)

Boston Bruins acquire: Conditional 2027 second-round pick, retain 50% of Marchand's contract

The return on this is about the same as the return for Beauvillier, in that it's apparently a second (albeit one that could turn into a first in 2028). It's insanely cheap to move a franchise icon, so Brad Marchand must've really wanted this, and the Bruins wanted to do right by him.

Toronto Maple Leafs acquire: Brandon Carlo (D)

Boston Bruins acquire: Fraser Minten (C), conditional 2026 first-round pick, 2025 fourth-round pick, retain 15% of Carlo's contract

Love this fit for the Leafs, who get a proper shutdown right-shot D to pair with Morgan Rielly this season and two more after it on Brandon Carlo's contract. He's just 28, and the cost of Fraser Minten and what's likely a late first is more than worth it to get a player who can help the PK and be a part of a very solid back-end.

Fabian Zetterlund is just 25 years old. He's built like a brick ... "out" house we'll say (five-foot-11 and 220 pounds) and is a 20-goal-plus scorer. That's a nice addition for the Sens, who could use that depth during their playoff push.

New Jersey Devils acquire: Daniel Sprong (RW)

Seattle Kraken acquire: 2026 seventh-round pick

The poor Devils had a good start and have just gotten smoked by injuries. At least Daniel Sprong can help out, he's a legit NHLer, so at least there's that?

## [Sportsnet.ca / Most shocking deals from 2025 NHL trade deadline](#)

**By Justin Arenburg- March 10, 2025**

The NHL trade deadline is usually something everyone builds up in their heads to be this crazy day, but in the end, falls well short of everyone's expectations. However, this time, that wasn't the case.

The 2025 NHL trade deadline was one for the ages with all the madness that took place, and Elliotte Friedman surely wasn't the only one with 21 hours of screen time.

With one blockbuster after another, including Dylan Cozens heading to the Ottawa Senators and Mikko Rantanen being traded for the second time in 42 days to the Dallas Stars, everyone thought that would be the end of the massive deals.

But at 3:01 p.m., everyone except Florida Panthers fans had the same reaction as Paul Bissonette when Friedman dropped the bomb that Brad Marchand was headed to Florida. NHL social media immediately compared it to John Cena turning heel.

Especially Toronto Maple Leafs fans, who were disappointed for a whole 10 minutes before finding out the jaw-dropping, all-in move to get Brandon Carlo from the Boston Bruins and possibly form the best defensive pairs the Maple Leafs have ever had.

Throughout the week leading up to the trade deadline and the day itself, it felt like teams (especially in the Central and Atlantic) were saying, "that's cute, but watch this," and following it by adding another massive piece.

So here are some of the deals that left us stunned:

Marchand (the Rat) joins the defending Stanley Cup Champions (also the rats)

Florida Panthers acquire: Brad Marchand (LW)

Boston Bruins acquire: Conditional 2027 second-round pick, retain 50 per cent of Marchand's contract

Don Sweeney and the Boston Bruins actually did it.

As we approached the 3 p.m. ET deadline, it didn't look like Marchand was going to be moved.

\*The Vegas Golden Knights have entered the chat\*

After making several big-time moves in the last couple years at the trade deadline, including Mark Stone and Tomas Hertl, the Vegas — one of the teams rumoured to be in on Marchand — social media team had everyone fooled when they struck again by posting "hi" on X at 2:48 p.m.

So, when Elliotte Friedman came on air and said, "Brad Marchand could become a..." everyone was expecting the Golden Knights to be the next words out of his mouth.

Boston Bruins acquire: Fraser Minten (C), conditional 2026 first-round pick, 2025 fourth-round pick, retain 15 per cent of Carlo's contract

Before 1 p.m. on deadline day, Maple Leafs fans couldn't understand why their general manager Brad Treliving hadn't made any moves while everyone was getting better around them. Turns out he had a plan, a good one I might add.

After being in on the Mikko Rantanen sweepstakes, it seems Treliving had an internal deadline time, and once it hit, he moved on to the next best thing.

After acquiring Scott Laughton earlier in the afternoon, it appeared that would be the lone big move for the Maple Leafs. It looked like a great plan until the Panthers acquired Marchand.

While the exact moment fans were trying to wrap their head around hearing the news, Conor Timmins was summoned off the ice at practice, leading everyone to believe the Leafs had made a deal.

Nobody, not even Friedman, expected what would come next, though: Brandon Carlo being dealt to the Maple Leafs, leaving everyone on the outside in shock, while the Maple Leafs front office said, "checkmate."

Oilers surprisingly add another offensive defenceman in Jake Walman

Edmonton Oilers acquire: Jake Walman (D)

San Jose Sharks: Carl Berglund (C), conditional 2026 first-round pick

Is it shocking the Edmonton Oilers traded for a defenceman? No, but what is surprising is who they traded for.

The Oilers desperately needed an upgrade on defence before gearing up for another run at the Stanley Cup. All season long, the problem with the Oilers has been their lack of defence, led by Evan Bouchard, who seems to be on the bad end of every highlight against the Oilers.

So, when the deal for Jake Walman was officially announced early Friday morning, it was indeed a shock considering the offensive-defenceman style of game Walman was playing on the Sharks.

Outside of stars Elias Pettersson and Rantanen, Dylan Cozens might have been the most talked about trade target heading into the deadline, with teams like the Canadiens, Maple Leafs, Canucks and Red Wings all in the mix for him.

But out of nowhere, the Senators become the team to land him, sending shock throughout the dressing room after realizing Josh Norris was the man to leave.

Moving for Cozens sends a message to the fans and other teams that Ottawa is not only talking about the next step, but taking action by making a blockbuster trade the team will look back on in years to come.

Do you think the Colorado Avalanche front office thought when they traded Rantanen to the Carolina Hurricanes he would end up back in their division not even two months later, signed to a deal that comes in with a lower AAV than Nathan MacKinnon?

I would reckon not.

While it was expected for the Hurricanes to look to move Mikko Rantanen, it's still a shock considering the magnitude of the player and what has happened since Jan. 24 when he was first traded to Carolina from Colorado.

The Dallas Stars pulled off what nobody thought would be done and now are the betting odds favourite to win the Stanley Cup.

The Sharks surprisingly traded away Fabian Zetterlund, who looked like a core piece of their future. At just 25 years old, Zetterlund now joins the Senators in a top-six role that will help improve their five-on-five scoring, which currently ranks second last in the league.

This was a player nobody expected to move, but it might be the best one when we look back on it.

Panthers add yet another former top draft pick in Seth Jones



Florida Panthers acquire: Seth Jones (D), 2026 fourth-round pick

Chicago Blackhawks acquire: Spencer Knight (G), 2026 or 2027 first-round pick, retain 26 per cent of Jones' contract

When Seth Jones spoke after the game against the Utah Hockey Club, everyone knew he would be traded, it was just a matter of where.

The Panthers answered that for us, trading for him in what was the first big deal of deadline week. The surprise came from the fact that it was the defending Stanley Cup champions who pulled the trigger on Jones.

Kyle Dubas loves to make trades

Pittsburgh Penguins acquire: Luke Schenn (D), Tommy Novak (C)

Nashville Predators acquire: Michael Bunting (LW), 2026 fourth-round pick

This one was way out of left field. Not because Barry Trotz and the Nashville Predators traded Tommy Novak or Luke Schenn, but because the team receiving them was the Penguins. In a year where Dubas was looking to do a "fire sale," he ended up making trades to instead bring more players into the fold.

Johnson goes home to Colorado in the feel-good surprise of the day

Colorado Avalanche acquire: Erik Johnson (D)

Philadelphia Flyers acquire: Givani Smith (RW)

Honestly, this deal will probably have no impact on the rest of the season for either team in terms of product on the ice, but the Flyers did something special. They traded Erik Johnson back to the Avalanche, where he spent 12-and-a-half seasons and won the Stanley Cup in 2022. Johnson probably won't play a lot for the Avalanche during this attempt to go deep in the playoffs, but one thing is for sure: The vibes in the locker room just got 10 times better.