

DALLAS STARS COMMUNICATIONS

DAILY NEWS CLIPS

Wednesday, May 7, 2025



NHL.com

Robertson could return for Stars against Jets in Game 1

By NHL.com

May 6, 2025

Jason Robertson could return for the Dallas Stars against the Winnipeg Jets in Game 1 of the Western Conference Second Round at Canada Life Centre on Wednesday (9:30 p.m. ET; CBC, TVAS, SN, ESPN).

"He's close," Stars coach Pete DeBoer said Tuesday regarding the 25-year-old forward, who has not played since sustaining a lower-body injury during a 5-1 loss at the Nashville Predators in the regular-season finale April 16. "We'll see tomorrow morning. It's all in his recovery and how he feels tomorrow."

Initially considered week to week, Robertson led Dallas with 35 goals in 82 regular-season games and was second with 80 points, behind forward Matt Duchene (82).

The Stars were without Robertson and defenseman Miro Heiskanen in the first round, when they defeated the Colorado Avalanche in seven games. Following a 4-2 win in Game 7 on Saturday, DeBoer said each player was expected to return at some point during the second round, though he wasn't sure when that would be. DeBoer wasn't asked Tuesday about Heiskanen's availability for Game 1.

Each player skated Monday and practiced Tuesday, when Robertson was at right wing on the third line with left wing Mason Marchment and center Wyatt Johnston.

"You take two key players out of anybody's lineup and your team looks different," DeBoer said after the first round. "What I liked about it was, we look different but we found a way, and that's the most important part."

"To take the two guys out of our lineup, and what they mean to us in every facet of how we play, and still find a way for the group to not use it as an excuse and keep battling and to grind, I couldn't be prouder of our group because we had to do it a different way."

Heiskanen sustained a knee injury when he collided with Vegas Golden Knights forward Mark Stone during a 4-3 overtime win Jan. 28 and missed the final 32 games of the regular season after having surgery Feb. 4. The initial timeline for his recovery was 3-4 months. The 25-year-old had 25 points (five goals, 20 assists) in 50 games; his average ice time of 25:10 per game was the fifth-most among NHL defensemen.

"When you lose two guys like that, that are as important to our team as those two guys are, not many teams are getting through that," Johnston said. "I think it just shows the resiliency and the depth that we have. Everyone had to step up and cover those holes. It was awesome. Hopefully we get them back as soon as possible, because even though we can help try to fill those holes, they're two amazing players."

NHL.com (Dallas Stars)

Game Day Guide: Stars at Jets

By Stars Staff
May 7, 2025

Second Round: Game 1

When: Wednesday, May 7 at 8:30 PM CT

Where: Canada Life Centre

TV: ESPN

Radio: The Ticket 96.7-FM, 1310-AM

Live Stats: NHL Game Center

Watch Party: PNC Plaza

Five Points 5

The Dallas Stars face the Winnipeg Jets Wednesday night for Game 1 of their Second Round series. The Stars have a 32-33 all-time record in Game 1s including a 19-17 record on the road, while Winnipeg is 7-4 in Game 1s with a 4-3 record on home ice.

This will be the first meeting between the Stars and Jets in the Stanley Cup Playoffs. The Stars/North Stars hold an all-time series record of 10-13 when facing a franchise for the first time, while the Jets/Thrashers are 3-7 in that scenario according to NHL Stats.

The Stars finished their series against Colorado going 7-for-23 on the power play for a 30.4 percent success rate, which was the sixth-best mark in the NHL during the First Round. Dallas scored at least one power-play goal in six of the seven games they played against Colorado. Among teams still in the playoffs, Dallas has totaled seven power play goals for, which is the most of any team, while Winnipeg has allowed the second most power play goals against (6).

Forward Mikko Rantanen finished the First Round tied with Winnipeg's Kyle Connor for the league lead in scoring, totaling 12 points (5-7—12) in seven games. Rantanen's five goals were tied for the second-most in the league through the First Round and his seven assists were tied for fourth. Rantanen has registered nine points (2-7—9) in five playoff games against the Jets (with COL), averaging better than a point per game against them (1.80). His nine postseason points against Winnipeg are tied for fifth among active NHL skaters. Rantanen has recorded a point in each of his five playoff games against the Jets, riding a five-game playoff point streak against them.

Forward Mikael Granlund has three points (1-2—3) in five postseason games played against Winnipeg (with MIN). In the regular season, Granlund has 25 points (8-17—25) in 40 career games against the Jets.

Players To Watch

Stars forward Wyatt Johnston scored the game-winning goal in Game 7 to secure Dallas' series victory over the Avalanche. His goal came on the power-play with 3:56 remaining in regulation, which is the 11th-latest go-ahead goal in Game 7 history according to NHL Stats. With the goal, Johnston has now scored in each of the three Game 7s that he has played in in his career, which includes notching the game-winner in 2023 against Seattle. Johnston has now totaled seven points (3-4—7) in seven games this postseason, which is already the second-highest scoring postseason of his career, trailing only the 16 points (10-6—16) he had in 19 games during the 2024 Stanley Cup Playoffs. He also has 12 points (6-6—12) in his last 12 playoff games played dating back to May 25, 2024 against Edmonton. In his career against Winnipeg, Johnston has tallied five points (3-2—5) in 11 regular season games.

Jets forward Kyle Connor enters Wednesday's contest riding a four-game point streak (2-6—8), including two three-point performances. Connor leads Winnipeg skaters with 12 points this postseason and is tied for the league lead in scoring (4-8—12). According to NHL Stats, he factored on the game-winning goal in each of the Jets' first four wins to start the postseason and became the fifth player to do so over the past 20 years. Connor has 44 career playoff points (19-25—44) for Winnipeg, which is tied with Mark Scheifele for the most in Jets franchise history.

First Shift

Two of the best goalies in the NHL will square off when the Stars and Jets open up their Second Round series on Wednesday night.

They're also two goalies who played for Team USA at the 4 Nations Face-Off and know each other pretty well, so the competition should be a key in which team gains the upper hand.

"It's fun, you always want to go against the best," said Stars goalie Jake Oettinger of facing Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck. "He's about to be a three-time Vezina Trophy winner and it doesn't get much better than that. It's going to be a great series. Goals aren't going to be easy to come by for us, so you just have to take his eyes away."

Hellebuyck won the Vezina in 2020 and 2024 and is the hands down favorite to win it again this year. In fact, after posting a 47-12-3 record with a 2.00 GAA, .925 save percentage and eight shutouts, there is talk that he could win the Hart Trophy as league MVP. That's an impressive season. But Oettinger was no shrinking violet. He was third in wins at 36-18-4 and had a 2.58 GAA and a .909 save percentage. The two shared the crease at the 4 Nations, and both are the leading candidates to be the starter for Team USA at the 2026 Olympics.

"I think it's obviously a great opportunity for Jake," Stars coach Pete DeBoer said. "Hellebuyck is kind of the bar in the league for goalies, especially young American goalies. He's a Vezina candidate every year, best numbers in the league every year, that's always a guy you're trying

to chase and hunt down. And Jake is a competitive guy. I think he wants that opportunity to play against a guy who is the best."

Oettinger has the advantage on the comparison chart with his playoff performance. The 26-year-old has gotten Dallas to the Western Conference Final in each of the past two seasons and has a 27-25 playoff record with a 2.52 GAA and .915 save percentage. Hellebuyck is 22-30 in the playoffs with a 2.98 GAA and .902 save percentage in the postseason. Last year, he had a 5.23 GAA and .864 save percentage in a First Round loss to Colorado. This season, he was pulled twice against St. Louis, and has a 3.85 GAA and .830 save percentage through the first seven games. That has created some questions about his abilities in the playoffs.

DeBoer said that's not the focus.

"I'm sure he's going to be great," DeBoer said. "I'm sure we're going to see the guy who is up for the Vezina and we have to be prepared for that."

Hellebuyck went 3-1-0 against the Stars this season and told reporters in Winnipeg that he's looking forward to a reset after the First Round.

"I think there was definitely a moment there where I was able to take my game to another level," Hellebuyck said of helping the Jets to a 4-3 win in double overtime in Game 7. "And feeling that, it definitely gives you some momentum and some confidence going into the next round. That being said, we're in some new territory that we haven't been in in a little while. I'm really excited. It's a restart for me. Who cares about what just happened? We got through it, and moving forward here I'm really excited to put my best foot forward and do my job."

Oettinger said the Stars often talk about the areas in front of the goalies. They want to keep the area in front of him clean and they want to create as many distractions in front of the opposing goalie. It worked against Colorado and he's hoping it will work against Winnipeg.

"He's very cerebral," Oettinger said of getting to know Hellebuyck at the 4 Nations tournament. "He knows the position really well and he knows what works for him. He's had a ton of success doing things the way he does. I just got to learn a lot from him."

One of the things that could help in the battle is the potential return of top defenseman Miro Heiskanen. He's been out since late January with a knee injury, but is close to returning. Likewise, forward Jason Robertson appears to be close to returning after missing the First Round with a lower-body injury. Oettinger said both would be welcome additions.

"We all know what we're missing right now," Oettinger said. "Miro, in my opinion, is the best defenseman in the NHL and Robo has had 110 points in a season, so the fact we don't have those two guys, we're doing well. That shows how deep we are as a team and if we can add them it will help us even more."

Which, bottom line, is the key to this battle. As good as the goalies are, the team that plays better has the best chance to win.

“Obviously we were missing Miro and Robo the whole first round, they’re two elite players. Whenever we get them back it’s going to help give us even more depth,” Rantanen said. “But I think the depth is a really big key in a Cup run. And I got to say, Otter is a difference-maker and a really, really good goalie. It’s 2-0 and he made some key saves. If they score to make it 3-0, it’s probably over and they’re celebrating now. He’s one of the best goalies in the world.”

Key Numbers

.646

Since Pete DeBoer took over as head coach in 2022, Dallas has the best road points percentage (.646) and has scored the most road goals (418) in the NHL. In the past three seasons, Winnipeg is third in home points percentage at .711 and leads in home goals allowed at 280.

46.0

Winnipeg ranks second in the playoffs in hits per game at 46.0. Dallas ranks last at 29.7.

49.0 percent

Dallas ranks ninth in faceoff winning percentage in the playoffs at 49.0 percent. Winnipeg ranks 13th at 47.8 percent.

He Said It

“If I looked at seven games against Colorado, I liked the Roope\] [Hintz line, particularly the last three or four games. I thought they had some chemistry and got something going. Those other lines, I thought were spotty and we’re just trying to get some more consistency out of some of the combinations.”

-Stars coach Pete DeBoer on juggling lines in practice on Tuesday

Ready for the road: Why starting the Second Round away from home could be good for Dallas

By Josh Clark
May 6, 2025

There's nothing like the unique atmospheres created by each fan base in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Each team's traditions present a fascinating case study. Whether it's the coordination of the Winnipeg Whiteout, the rowdiness of Maple Leaf Square, a 'smash car' in Nashville or the ringing of the storm siren in Raleigh; each franchise boasts one-of-a-kind themes that can create a daunting environment for visitors. It's all a part of the desire to create a true and unchallengeable "home ice advantage" that could make or break a series.

The Stars have seen a lot of it in recent years. They've been fortunate enough to play a number of important games, specifically Game 7's, in front of their home fans at American Airlines Center. From the amped-up "STARS" chants during the national anthem, to every goal chant, wave of a rally towel, blink of a wristband and "BING BONG" after a goal, the AAC atmosphere in the late spring is raucous and energetic. Need further proof? Watch any of the highlights from Saturday's Game 7 win against the Avalanche.

On the flip side, they've also endured some hostile environments. From the pageantry and showmanship in Vegas, to the historic and deeply-rooted discontent held by Minnesota fans, Dallas has seen some chaotic and frenetic crowds.

Fortunately, the numbers have been mostly in their favor. In seven playoff series under head coach Pete DeBoer, the Stars owned home ice in six. Only the 2023 Western Conference Final saw them open on the road against Vegas. And whether it's getting the chance to draw first blood in front of your crowd or having a leg up in a do-or-die Game 7, home ice has its perks.

That's what makes their next series so interesting. After owning home ice in four straight matchups, Dallas will kick off the Second Round against the Winnipeg Jets in Manitoba on Wednesday night.

That may seem like a daunting task against the winners of the 2025 Presidents' Trophy. After all, the Jets finished the 2024-25 regular season with a ridiculous 30-7-4 record at Canada Life Centre, good for second-best in the NHL. They held visiting teams to an NHL-best 1.95 goals against per game and finished with a +58 goal differential.

To top it all off, they went a perfect 4-0 against the St. Louis Blues in the First Round, including a thrilling multi-goal comeback win in Game 7.

"We have to handle the momentum in that building," DeBoer said. "The one thing you take from the St. Louis series is that [the Jets] were a different team at home than they were on the road."

At home in that building, they really feed off their crowd and that environment. We have to manage that and everything that comes with that.”

Meanwhile, the Stars finished the First Round with a 1-2 record away from home, including two lopsided losses in Game 4 and Game 6.

Should there be a certain level of worry as the team faces the Winnipeg Whiteout for the first time in franchise history? Maybe. But there’s also a belief that starting the series on the road for the first time in a while might provide a necessary shakeup.

That belief is largely rooted in the fact that Dallas has lost eight consecutive Games 1’s dating back to the 2022 First Round against Calgary. Six of those came on home ice.

“Well, we’re going on the road which is a good one because the last three or four [Game 1’s] have all been at home,” DeBoer said. “Hopefully that changes it.”

And while he added that nothing changes in terms of preparation from game-to-game in a playoff series, he does believe that starting on the road could help with simplifying the Stars’ play.

Stars goaltender Jake Oettinger agrees.

“That’s the mindset,” Oettinger said about playing a simple game. “We’ve always been at home and you feel like if you don’t win both of those games, you’re behind in the series. For us, it’s kind of like we’ve been great at home all year, so let’s go on the road, try to win Game 1 and go from there. Just a ‘nothing to lose’ mentality might help free us up a little bit. Just play loose and try to go up there and win a scrappy road game.”

In a weird way, a road Game 1 could provide less pressure. With no chance to get caught up in the waves of support from the home crowd and a need to block out a hostile environment and focus solely on hockey, the road presents an opportunity to stick to the basics.

“You just want to try and frustrate the home team and shut down their crowd,” defenseman Esa Lindell said. “We talk often about how we want to play the same way on the road, but at the same time you want to simplify it. Maybe the momentum shifts more if you make mistakes on the road and it feeds the home team.”

And that’s where the Stars must be careful. Mistakes in the playoffs are often easier to overcome on home ice. In enemy territory, they can feed the home team’s attack and turn the tide. Take Game 4 in Colorado for example. After successfully weathering an early storm, the Stars turned the puck over on a power play that led to a shorthanded goal against. What could’ve been an early lead turned into a deficit, and Colorado seized control. The Avs scored a power play goal a few minutes later and ended up outshooting the Stars 36-12 in the final two periods.

The shifts can be lightning quick. As a result, a cautious and confident approach is often the best remedy.

“On the road, you just establish that simple game,” Oettinger said. “We have all the firepower in the world in here. But if we do the little things right, we’ll get our offense. For us, it’s worrying about keeping the puck out of our net. We know we have the skill to fill up their net, so just try to play simple and let our skill take over.”

It’s a philosophy that the Stars have preached under DeBoer. Since the start of the 2022-23 season, Dallas owns a 73-37-13 record on the road along with 3.40 goals per game and 2.68 goals against per game. All three lead the NHL. In the 2024 playoffs, they went 6-3 on the road, including winning Games 3-4 of the First Round in Vegas (after dropping the first two at home) and all three contests in Colorado in the Second Round.

A sizable chunk of that success can be attributed to Oettinger, who seems to make a living off of silencing opposing buildings in the biggest moments.

The 26-year-old goalie boasts a .918 save percentage and 2.43 goals against average on the road since the 2022 playoffs. Both are second in the NHL over the span. He’s flat-out stolen wins in Calgary, Minnesota, Vegas and Colorado and provides a steady force in the crease.

“There’s just something about it,” Oettinger said about “wearing the black hat” in the opposing buildings. “Every time they get a shot, the whole building goes nuts or goes, ‘Ohh.’ Something about that just makes it feel super intense. There’s nothing better than going in there, playing great and quieting the building. I think it started in college with the student sections and all of the people rooting against you, that’s kind of when I first was like, ‘This is where I thrive.’ Every time you get to play on the road is great, especially in the playoffs.”

And how about facing the famous Winnipeg Whiteout for the first time?

“It’s going to be sick,” Oettinger said. “I’m really excited.”

So as the Stars descend on Winnipeg on Wednesday night in hopes of opening the series on a winning note, there’s reason to believe that enemy territory might be the perfect place to make that happen.

“You definitely want to start at home, but maybe it is a good thing to go on the road,” forward Wyatt Johnston said. “Maybe it puts the pressure on them to some extent. Obviously, winning Game 1 on the road is huge, so that would be a different look for us. This is my eighth series, and we’ve started six of them at home. It’ll be a little different, but it should be good. Excited to get going tomorrow.”

Dallas Morning News

Why Dallas Stars' path to a Stanley Cup won't get any tougher than the Winnipeg Jets

By Tim Cowlshaw
May 7, 2025

The hats, the confetti, the champagne perhaps, everything that comprised the celebratory finish after the Stars' 4-2 triumph over Colorado is long gone. The second round is a new world — not an altogether pleasant one for Dallas, it seems.

There's no question that Mikko Rantanen has this team riding high, that confidence should be soaring after eliminating the Avalanche in seven games without Miro Heiskanen and Jason Robertson. Both players will return at some point in this next round, making coach Pete DeBoer's team all the more formidable.

The Stars will need every bit they have to offer.

This is the key round for the Dallas Stars. Knock off Winnipeg, and the rest, well, it doesn't look easy but it won't get any tougher. The Jets won the Presidents' Trophy for a reason. The Stars went 1-3 against them, including a 4-0 loss at home down the stretch, for a reason. Including the first round, Winnipeg is 34-7-4 at home. No one else still playing has a record like that.

I have searched high and low for the scoring advantages Dallas is supposed to possess in this next round. Haven't found them yet. The Stars might be known as the team with the best forward depth in the league when it comes to scoring, able to play Wyatt Johnston and Jamie Benn on the third line, and that was without Robertson. The Avalanche are known for the dangerous speed that Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar bring night after night. The Jets are known for their world class goaltender who faltered in the first round, but please take note of the following.

Colorado scored 277 goals in the 82-game season. So did Dallas. And so did Winnipeg. The difference in the standings was a product of the Stars allowing 33 more goals than the Jets, the Avalanche 43 more.

In the first round, the Stars scored 21 goals in seven games. So did the Jets.

Rantanen took over the NHL playoffs scoring lead in the seventh game when he raised his total to 12 points (five goals, seven assists). Winnipeg's Kyle Connor tied him with 12 the next night (four goals, eight assists).

Now if Winnipeg's Mark Scheifele (second leading scorer) and Josh Morrissey (top scoring defenseman) continue to miss time with injuries — neither played in Game 7 against St. Louis — that's a decided advantage in Dallas' favor, especially if they have their two players coming back into the lineup. But hockey injuries being disclosed as they are in the postseason, all of that is anyone's guess.

The key for the Stars is Connor Hellebuyck, almost certain to win his third Vezina Trophy in six years, continuing to play poorly on the road. He wasn't good in any of the three games at St. Louis. The Blues won them all but could not win a single game in Manitoba.

Dallas went 1-3 against the Jets this season. In the three defeats they either scored one goal or were blanked. How relevant is any of that in May? We have certainly seen it go both ways in the playoffs. But if Hellebuyck continues his play from Game 7 in Game 1 against Dallas — the Blues were scoreless in the third period and 36 minutes of sudden death — then it feels like the Stars have their hands full again against this team trying to prove it's worthy in the playoffs.

Jake Oettinger was good enough in the first round, but you feel like he needs to take a step up, win a game early where he's the dominant force to make this a real showdown. In the back of his mind, is he still Hellebuyck's backup goalie on Team USA?

The Stars can save him from any despair those thoughts might inspire by getting their act together sooner in games. Colorado scored first six times in the opening round. Yes, the Stars advanced anyway but slow starts against a more complete team could do a lot more damage. Dallas always feels it can rally against the Avalanche and whatever average goaltender they send out from year to year. That has been crucial in the Stars knocking them out of the playoffs three times since 2020. Despite Hellebuyck's uninspired first-round play, I don't think Dallas can make that same assumption against the Jets.

Either way, both teams have spent a couple of days exhaling after taking their seasons to the brink of Game 7 eliminations. If you thought the Stars reached a heightened desperation level on Saturday before Rantanen rode to the rescue, keep in mind Winnipeg trailed by two before scoring twice in the last two minutes, the tying goal coming with 1.6 seconds on the clock.

The Stars were that close to hosting the Blues to start this series. Dallas feels like it can beat anyone anywhere right now, so maybe it's fine to get the best team out of the way in the second round. Just don't expect anything to come any easier than it did against Colorado.

Dallas Morning News

Will Jason Robertson play in Game 1 vs. Jets? Here's what Stars' Pete DeBoer said Tuesday

By Joey Hayden
May 6, 2025

The Dallas Stars survived a grueling seven-game series against the Colorado Avalanche to advance in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Their reward? Facing the NHL's top team from the regular season in Round 2.

Luckily for Dallas, however, reinforcements are on the way to face the Winnipeg Jets in the form of the expected returns by two of its top stars — forward Jason Robertson and defenseman Miro Heiskanen.

Both skated with the team as the Stars practiced Tuesday before heading to Winnipeg for Game 1.

Robertson was put on a line with Mason Marchment and Wyatt Johnston, according to reports, as Pete DeBoer juggled some forward groups after an occasionally bumpy offensive showing against the Avs.

"I liked the [Roope] Hintz line, particularly the last three, four games. I thought they started to get some chemistry and get something going. Those other lines I thought were spotty," DeBoer said.

"I think we're just looking for some more consistency out of some of the combinations."

But will Robertson be an active part of those combinations on Wednesday?

"He's close," DeBoer said. "We'll see tomorrow morning. It's all in his recovery and how he feels tomorrow."

Robertson sustained a knee injury in the regular season finale and was initially declared week-to-week. He did skate in Dallas, though, while the Stars traveled to and from Colorado during Round 1.

While speaking with reporters, DeBoer also said Colin Blackwell would "probably" not be in the lineup Wednesday, another seemingly positive indicator in favor of Robertson's return.

Heiskanen, who has not played since Jan. 28, has traveled and practiced with the Stars during the postseason but also hasn't yet been cleared to play.

Heiskanen had 25 points in 50 games this regular season. Robertson finished with 35 goals and 45 assists.

Dallas Morning News

Stars-Jets predictions: Does Dallas have edge in second-round series vs. Winnipeg?

By SportsDay Staff
May 6, 2025

The Dallas Stars are in familiar territory.

After a hard-fought opening round series, head coach Pete DeBoer concocted another Game 7 victory against Colorado, setting the stage for Dallas to face the West's top team, Winnipeg, in the second round.

Will the Stars overcome the Jets and reach a third-straight conference finals? Here's what our experts say:

Lia Assimakopoulos

Before the playoffs began, I chose the Stars to lose in six games in this round to the Jets, but I'm flipping my pick. Winnipeg and Connor Hellebuyck looked shaky in the first round, requiring double overtime in Game 7 to beat the lowest seed in the West. The Stars got better as their series against Colorado progressed. They also haven't reached their full potential, but should this round with Miro Heiskanen and Jason Robertson expected to return from injuries. If they can steal one of the first two games at Canada Life Centre, it should be smooth sailing with how Hellebuyck has played on the road. Stars in 6 games.

Tim Cowlshaw

This was just minutes away (and in Winnipeg's case two seconds away) from being a St. Louis-Colorado series. But it isn't. Two teams adept at surviving now clash, and the goaltender advantage that the Jets possess feels like it has been minimized by Connor Hellebuyck's erratic play in the first round. But Winnipeg remains awfully good at home and will be Dallas' toughest series the rest of the way. We will see how much Mikko Magic is left in a great playoff. Jets in 7 games.

Kevin Sherrington

The playoffs are, indeed, different from the regular season, where the Jets held a 3-1 advantage over the Stars. Miro Heiskanen's return also will boost Pete DeBoer's defense, which occasionally took a beating from the Avs. And the Jets' playoff history suggests they're not really up for this. Come to think of it, I think I've talked myself into the Stars winning this if they take one of the first two in Winnipeg. Stars in 6 games.

Dallas Morning News

Stars goalie Jake Oettinger's playoff-built reputation comes with a smile

By Lia Assimakopoulos
May 6, 2025

On the morning of Game 7, Jake Oettinger cracked jokes with those who walked by his stall in the Stars locker room.

He gave fist bumps, smiled, and had a carefree nature about him, like he does any other day.

Most goalies across the NHL have an invisible shield around them on a regular-season game day, let alone a playoff game or even a Game 7. They're unavailable to the media, as they start to zone in hours before the game begins.

But not Oettinger. That's never been his style.

"It doesn't really bother me," he said. "The game's not for 10 hours."

But Saturday evening, the 26-year-old goalie locked in for one of the most important performances of his career, making 25 saves in his team's 4-2 win over the Colorado Avalanche, bouncing the rival from the playoffs.

Through an up-and-down series, Oettinger was the one constant for Dallas, posting a .911 save percentage, the best among goalies that have started every playoff game for their team, and a 2.85 goals-against average. He also improved every game.

At just 26, Oettinger has already started 52 career playoff games with a 27-25 record. He's led the Stars to the Western Conference finals in back-to-back years, and has shown each playoff run an ability to up his game from the regular season and then the previous playoff round.

Nobody doubts his abilities this time of year, as he's repeatedly risen to the occasion on the game's biggest stage. But over the next two weeks, he'll face the ultimate challenge — going head-to-head with the league's best team and lining up across the ice from its best goaltender.

Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck is the reigning Vezina winner. He's a finalist again this year and the favorite to claim the hardware awarded to the league's top goaltender. Hellebuyck had a rocky start to his playoff run, especially on the road, but he's known as the gold standard in the league, and has been for years.

All eyes will be on both goaltenders when the puck drops at Canada Life Centre for Game 1 on Wednesday night. The opportunity for Oettinger isn't lost on his teammates and coaches, who understand what a chance to square off directly with the game's best means to him.

"I think it's obviously a great opportunity for Jake," Stars coach Pete DeBoer said. "I think Hellebuyck is kind of the bar in the league, especially for American goalies. I think he has been for probably the last five or six years. That's always the guy you're trying to chase and hunt down. Jake's a competitive guy. I think he wants that opportunity to play against the best."

A tale of two first rounds

No disrespect to Oettinger, but heading into the playoffs, most in the league would've chosen Hellebuyck to be their starter in net if given a choice between the two.

The 31-year-old Michigan native Hellebuyck had statistically the best regular season of his career, posting a .925 save percentage, 2.00 goals-against average and eight shutouts. He was not only selected as a Vezina finalist, but also as a Hart Trophy finalist, awarded to the most valuable player to his team in the NHL.

Hellebuyck led Winnipeg to the Presidents' Trophy and has the Jets well-positioned to overcome a poor playoff history and to finally reach the Stanley Cup Final.

But in the first round series against St. Louis, the Jets netminder struggled tremendously, posting an .830 save percentage and a 3.85 goals-against average. On the road, his numbers were far worse, with a .758 save percentage and a 7.24 goals-against average. He ranks last in the league in goals saved above expected this playoffs at -10.1.

He was benched in all three road games.

As much as the hockey world has focused on his struggles, the Stars say they're not.

"We're not going in there thinking that we've got somebody leaking oil back there for them," forward Matt Duchene said. "He just won a series for his team."

Instead, they're gaining confidence from the effort of their own netminder through seven games.

Oettinger had the opposite experience of Hellebuyck in the first round. The Stars felt they had a significant goaltending advantage entering the series against Colorado, as starting Avalanche goalie Mackenzie Blackwood had never played in the playoffs. In Games 1-4, Blackwood posed a real problem. There wasn't anything wrong with Oettinger's game, but he wasn't getting enough help in front.

In Game 6, Oettinger faced 19 shots in the first period. In Game 4, he faced 22 in the second period, leading the Stars to rest him in the third, even though they trailed 3-0 at the time.

But throughout the series, he made critical, timely saves. He played arguably his best game of the series in Game 6, making 41 saves at Ball Arena. Even though he allowed five goals, he gave his team a chance to come back from a 2-0 deficit and take a lead in the second period.

"He bent but didn't break," DeBoer said. "He might not have a .980 save percentage, but the timing of his saves, he has that special ability to raise his game at the most important times."

And in Game 7, Oettinger again held his own down the stretch while his teammates orchestrated a comeback at the other end of the ice, led by Mikko Rantanen. The most important goalie stat is wins, and Oettinger finished the series with four of them.

After the seven-game losing streak to end the regular season, his hot start to the playoffs came at the right time. Now, his team just needs him to build on it.

"I don't think the end of the year really built much confidence for any of us, but in particular, the goalies," his goalie partner Casey DeSmith said. "I think it was really just difficult because I don't think either of us were playing particularly poorly, but we were giving up a lot of goals. But it's just been great that he's built confidence every single game since the start of the playoffs, and even when the team kind of performed poorly in front of him for a couple of those games, he really held us in."

From friends to foes

Just three months ago, Oettinger and Hellebuyck got to know each other well in the 4 Nations Face-Off as both played for Team USA.

Hellebuyck was the starter, and Oettinger started one game against Sweden as his backup once the United States had clinched its spot in the championship.

Both goalies take a lot of pride in playing for their country, and both are expected to make the Olympic roster for the 2026 Winter Games in Milan. Hellebuyck is still the favorite to start for Team USA, but with his recent playoff struggles, Oettinger could be knocking on the door.

When the Minnesota native returned from 4 Nations, he spoke fondly of his experience learning from Hellebuyck.

"I think I learned a ton from him," he said. "He reminds me a lot of Ben Bishop, how well he thinks the game and how smart he is. I think that's what makes him so good. Obviously, he's big and has physical tools, but I think his mind is what puts him over the top."

The two goalies' approach is different, and Oettinger is the one who strays from the norm. He's the one laughing and socializing on game days. He's the only Stars player to mention the importance of having fun so far during this playoff run.

Sure, goaltending is a job, but he doesn't treat it that way.

When the stakes are higher starting Wednesday in a showdown between the position's best, he'll probably still be smiling, cracking jokes and remembering to take in the moment.

"What more could you want as a player?" he said ahead of Game 7. "Ten years from now when I'm sitting on my couch watching these Game 7s, I'm going to be thinking about this moment. Just trying to enjoy every single second and have fun. I can't control every little thing. When the buzzer sounds, I just want to be proud of my effort."

DLLS

Dallas Stars unsung heroes in series win vs Avalanche

By Sam Nestler
May 6, 2025

The Dallas Stars first-round series victory against the Colorado Avalanche was full of storylines.

Mikko Rantanen stormed out against his former club and took over, scoring 11 points in the final three games for his Stanley Cup Playoff leading 12 points. The entire Finnish line of Rantanen, Mikael Granlund, and Roope Hintz was incredible after being put together ahead of Game 3.

Jake Oettinger elevated his play as the series went on and was the better goalie in the series by far.

Stars coach Pete DeBoer stayed calm and true to his game plans to improve to 9-0 in Game 7s.

Tyler Seguin and Jamie Benn turned the clock back and gave us goals in huge moments.

The power play stepped up at the key moments, as did Wyatt Johnston, who scored his third Game 7 goal in as many tries.

The Stars once again knocked off the Avalanche, cementing the rivalry and themselves as “the dragon” in this scenario.

I could go on and on.

But for me, the biggest surprise and X-factor in this series was the play of the Dallas D corps. Yes, the same defensive group that had most of us (myself included) believing it was susceptible after the Stars opted not to add at the trade deadline. The group that featured one, two, three, and four players who likely belonged in a bottom-pairing role.

The same group that many fans called weak and the reason Dallas would lose in round one. The group missing its best player in Miro Heiskanen, who not only changed the way they play, but also took the majority stake of responsibility in just about every on-ice situation.

Yes, that group. They were outstanding and a huge reason why Dallas was able to quiet Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar, the true key to beating the Avs in a seven-game series.

Let's talk about that group.

Lian Bichsel – Alexander Petrovic

This was one of the bigger question marks coming into the series. The rookie and the defenseman who has played nearly 90% of his games in the AHL over the past two seasons.

But they were great. And it was for one reason: they played their game and didn't try to do too much.

Lian Bichsel found his line of being mean and imposing his will without sitting too often in the penalty box. He was a physical force, often getting into battles with Parker Kelly and Joel Kiviranta, but also ending plays and separating many Colorado skaters from the puck.

He didn't look lost, he didn't look overwhelmed, and he made the simple and correct play with the puck more often than not.

Also a side note on Bichsel:

Alexander Petrovic came into Game 6 of the second round last year, but admitted he was a bit overwhelmed because he truly believed he was only called up to Dallas to serve as a 'Black Ace', essentially a practice player. This year, he was told throughout the season that he would likely be called up and may get a chance to play a big role come playoff time.

Petrovic told me Tuesday that he was far more prepared this time around. He said it helped that Texas played the same system, in terms of breakouts and defensive zone coverage, as Dallas, and that he was paired with Bichsel, who he spent plenty of time playing with in the AHL.

The biggest thing I saw from these two big defensemen was their ability to keep traffic away from Jake Oettinger.

Both did an excellent job of standing their ground at the edges of the circles or sides of the net, and didn't give up any space or allow themselves to be backed in. Oettinger was able to see pucks more easily, and they each finished with minus-1 ratings because of it — that doesn't sound great but is very respectable when they tallied just one point between them and were playing the Colorado Avalanche.

Thomas Harley – Ilya Lyubushkin

Thomas Harley's role increased in this series... which is hard to think because he was already doing so much for this team while Heiskanen has been injured. But on top of running the top power play (playing 90 seconds or more each time around), he was also thrust back into heavy penalty-killing minutes. While Harley looked a bit gassed in Game 7, he was a huge part of the Stars success in the series.

Harley ranks fourth on the club with five points in seven games. He played anywhere from 24 – 35 minutes a night (led the team with 28:09 of ice time per game) and took on the responsibility of just about every area of the game. He also recovered seamlessly after a tough mistake and showing in Game 4. Important for a young player.

Ilya Lyubushkin didn't do anything super noticeable, but that is just how he likes it. Lyubushkin is at his best when you really don't notice him.

He is in the right spots, makes the simple plays, and once in a while joins in a rush. He played a quiet 20 minutes per game paired with Harley, and most of all, allowed the offensive-minded defenseman to take some chances up the ice.

Esa Lindell – Cody Ceci

Esa Lindell does everything. He played basically every second of PK time, he is out there at the end of the game, and he ran the second power-play unit for 30-45 seconds once Harley came off. He is one of the best defensive defenseman in the game and proved it again in this series against a couple of the best players in the world.

For more on Lindell:

Cody Ceci, to me, was the biggest pleasant surprise.

Ceci is in a similar boat to Lyubushkin... they are both better in bottom-pairing minute roles. But because of the injury to Heiskanen, both are playing in the top four. Ceci was third on the team in minutes, killed penalties alongside Lindell, and added a bit of offense with three assists. He finished even on +/- as well.

I know once again that doesn't sound super sexy. But keep in mind, this team was and is doing everything it can to get by without Heiskanen. They are missing their best player and the key to the blue line. Until Heiskanen returns, the defense was given the task to step up and play well enough to help Dallas win. They did just that, and I give them, and coach Alain Nasreddine, full credit for doing so.

I feel like Colorado was the biggest test for the blue line. The speed and skill were unmatched. Now they can settle into playing structured hockey against a Winnipeg Jets team that does the same, and keep chugging along until Heiskanen returns.

Bravo, blue line.

Stars Thoughts

Tuesday Dallas Stars Roundup: Jason Robertson's Offhand Return, Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin Reunited, and a Note on Lian Bichsel

By Robert Tiffin
May 6, 2025

At practice today, I snapped the above (grainy) photo of Matt Duchene playing with Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin.

You might have forgotten, but Duchene actually played with Benn quite a bit this year after Mason Marchment took a puck to the face and had to have it put back together. And in a vacuum, it's been a good duo, as the Benn-Duchene pair has been more possession-positive than Marchment-Duchene have been. In fact, Benn's had his best possession numbers with Duchene of any other forward he's played with this year, so perhaps there's some latent chemistry there.

As for Seguin, the once-inseparable duo of Benn and Seguin hasn't been together since a brief cameo early in the 2022-23 season, during which Benn was otherwise with Wyatt Johnston in the latter's rookie campaign.

Last year, Benn also played eight or nine games with Joe Pavelski and Sam Steel. But for now, it looks like the three thirty-somethings will try to make that second line a consistent threat against Winnipeg. (Please submit your nickname suggestions for this line in the suggestion box next to the cafeteria. I have already submitted "The DadBod Squad.")

That trio was one of three new-look forward lines for Dallas. Pete DeBoer said after practice that second, third, and fourth lines were "spotty" in their performance in the Colorado series, hence the changes we saw today at practice, which included someone interesting:

Granlund-Hintz-Rantanen
Benn-Duchene-Seguin
Marchment-Johnston-Robertson
Bäck-Steel-Dadonov
Smith-Bourque-Blackwell¹

By the way, the defense pairings were the same as we saw against Colorado, as Miro Heiskanen participated in drills with Matt Dumba rather than factoring into what we presume to be the starting defense for Game 1.

Okay, let's talk about whether Jason Robertson is likely to actually return tomorrow, why Marchment might have been moved off Duchene's wing, and what Pete DeBoer might be thinking with each of these lines.

As for Robertson, here's what DeBoer said today:

“He’s close,” DeBoer said Tuesday. “We’ll see tomorrow morning. It’s all in his recovery and how he feels tomorrow morning.”

When answering a follow-up question about whether it was easier for Robertson to return as a forward rather than Heiskanen, DeBoer said, “Yeah, I think so,” but went on to qualify a couple of things.

“We don’t have to play [Heiskanen] 26 minutes. Obviously if he came in, we wouldn’t plan on doing that. I don’t think minutes are the issue...Is it easier for a forward? You know, the way Robo skates and the way Miro skates, it’s easier for Robo.”

The last part was said with a smile and laughter, as Robertson is well-known not to be the fleetest of foot—not that it tends to hamper his excellence too much.

My takeaway from today’s practice is that Robertson is probably returning to the lineup for Game 1 against Winnipeg, unless he wakes up feeling too far short of 100% tomorrow after a hard practice today. But I’ll talk you through my thought process in a second.

But as always, the playoffs tend to involve subterfuge and second-guessing, so take this all with the usual grain of salt. For example, Winnipeg had a couple of very important players for their squad wearing no-touchie sweaters today after suffering recent injuries in the first round of the playoffs, but I’m not sure anyone is certain that some or all of this trio won’t be back in the lineup Wednesday night.

As for Robertson, I’ve had a hunch lately that he’s closer than we realized, given that he missed far less time than players like Heiskanen or Seguin. It makes sense he wouldn’t need as much of a build-up period to get back into game shape, and the fact that he was skated on a regular line in practice with three mixed-up combinations suggest that the Stars well and truly are trying some new things.

DeBoer has also consistently said that Heiskanen has to get his return approved by his surgeon and “medical people,” so that process is likely to be more protracted, whereas Robertson’s availability is predicated on a (we think) simpler recovery from what looked like a knee injury a little over two weeks ago.

And given that Robertson’s game is not quite as dependent on his skating as Heiskanen’s (which DeBoer joked about today), it really wouldn’t surprise me to see the scoring winger back in action Wednesday night. But none of us really knows much of anything for sure, when it comes to injured players in hockey.

A Long Talk about These Line Combinations That Will Probably Not Even End Up Happening Just Because I Talked about Them

Now, because you’re a paid subscriber and have the privilege/misfortune of being inside my head, let’s dive into some possible reasoning for the new line combinations we saw today, if indeed they hold true for Game 1 tomorrow. And if they don’t end up being real-life trios at all, at least my logic here will be something useful, if only for its ability to be used to highlight my idiocy, as always.

First Line: Granlund-Hintz-Rantanen

If you touch this line after the last couple of games, you're crazy. I don't think I need to explain why, but in short: when Mikko Rantanen sets roughly eleventy-billion NHL records for scoring four points in a single period, twice, you don't mess with it. As the kids say, "Let him cook." Rantanen is him.

Second Line: Benn-Duchene-Seguin

While the Marchment-Duchene-Seguin trio has been great at times last year and this, Duchene had just three assists all series, all of which came on the power play, away from those two linemates.

Marchment had one even-strength goal (a slight deflection off the Alex Petrovic shot), and Seguin had one even-strength goal (from Marchment in the Game 3 overtime).

However, the line was still solid, with a roughly 50% expected goals share, and the trio only gave up one 5-on-5 goal against in their ice time while scoring two themselves.

Of course, they didn't see as much of the MacKinnon line as Johnston or Hintz's lines did, but nonetheless, they were a net positive in their 71 minutes of 5-on-5 play, and that's not nothing. It is, by definition, something.

So in a vacuum, I don't think this line was as much of a problem at all, and it wouldn't shock me if Marchment winds up back in Benn's spot before long. Because I really think that switch was more about the third line than about the Duchene line, so let's talk about that.

Third Line: Marchment-Johnston-Robertson

Whenever Robertson returned, his likely spot always seemed to be on the top line at left wing, where Granlund is currently playing. But the Finnish line's recent ability to stop time and follow Rantanen through raindrops complicates that, and it meant Robertson had to displace either Benn or Marchment on the second or third left wing.

The third pair makes some sense, as Robertson and Johnston have plenty of chemistry. In fact, that duo was likely to flank Roope Hintz on the top line to start the season before an injury to Johnston in training camp and a slower-than-expected recovery from cyst removal for Robertson threw a spanner in those works.

But okay, if Robertson-Johnston makes sense as a duo, why not keep Benn on the left wing with them, rather than swapping Benn with Marchment?

When asked today if Marchment and Benn's being swapped was to add some forechecking to the line with the slower Robertson, DeBoer demurred and said it was really about "a little bit of everything," before going on to mention the "spotty" nature of the non-Finnish lines.

Obviously DeBoer isn't going to detail for the cameras what he sees as his lines' respective strengths and weaknesses, but I think we can safely conclude that a line with Jamie Benn and Jason Robertson is not going to be a terribly fast line. And while a line with Jason Robertson and Mason Marchment (whose skating is also not of the highest echelon) is not going to win any relay races, Marchment does have an ability as an F1 (first forward on the forecheck) that Evgenii Dadonov has had on that line with Benn and Johnston in the past, getting to pucks first and winning races to the far blue line to make transition play easier.

Speaking of Dadonov, who was skating on the fourth line today, I wonder if the idea of flanking Johnston with Robertson and Dadonov wasn't seen as adequate "protection" for the young center, especially given the large bodies and predilection for hitting that Winnipeg boasts. Marchment, on the other hand, is plenty big and mean enough to keep Johnston from getting bullied too much by Winnipeg, and in fact is much more likely to draw all the ire in the first place rather than need to intervene in it.

And with two lefties flanking Johnston, it makes more sense to put Robertson on his off-wing, where he's more open for one-timers and other playmaking possibilities, and where he has spent a lot of time on the power play in the past, too.

This, at least, is one possibility, in my thinking. As always with new line combinations, I take them with a large grain of salt until they start producing, as most NHL coaches (including DeBoer) are always likely to go back to something that has worked in the past when something new in the present is not getting the job done.

Fourth Line: Bäck-Steel-Dadonov

On the tough nature of making lineup decisions and scratching some guys, DeBoer said this today.

"They're not easy decisions, but when you get to this point in the playoffs, the guys understand. I mean, Colin Blackwell's probably out tomorrow. I told him we don't win Round 1 without Colin Blackwell in the lineup and his contributions. Guys understand. They want to be a part of it. They might not be a part of it and dressed every night, but they're all going to be a part of it some way, somehow."

-Pete DeBoer, on lineup decisions in the playoffs

We'll see how everything shakes out by Game 4 of this series, but if Robertson does indeed return, there's no question that multiple deserving players will be sitting out for a game, or more.

That's the nature of having perhaps the deepest forward group in the NHL: redundant skill sets might wind up sitting in the press box not because they aren't valuable, but because the team is blessed with so many of them.

For example, I'm from a big family, and many of us grew up playing the piano. I could play piano just fine, but I was never the best piano player in my family, and that was perfectly fine, once I accepted it. If someone needed an extemporaneous bit of ivory-tickling, probably I was not going

to be the first one in line, if other siblings were available. That is a good thing, for the family, even if my ego had to learn a lesson in the process.

Anyway, back to the fourth line: Colin Blackwell sat for 19 games this year and scored six goals. Evgenii Dadonov sat for just two games this season, and he scored 20 goals and 40 points.

Pete DeBoer loves Dadonov as a player from their time in Vegas and now in Dallas, and Dadonov is always going to have precedence over another 12th forward for that spot, in a vacuum. And given the season both had, Dadonov has kind of earned it.

Blackwell is also the smallest forward on the team, so you wonder if DeBoer is worried about how effective he'll be against a larger team like Winnipeg, too.

As for the penalty kill, Blackwell and Steel used to be the go-to forward duo to start shorthanded situations, with Hintz and Johnston following up as the more threatening duo after the top power play unit got later in their shift, and thus more susceptible to counterattacks.

But against Colorado, Oskar Bäck acquitted himself fabulously, seeing just one 4v5 goal against during over 14 minutes of shorthanded work against Colorado (who, coincidentally, moved on from their power play coach today).

The Dallas penalty kill has been fantastic for a long time now, but it was absolutely clutch against Colorado. And given Bäck's size and Steel's being-a-center-ness, that duo was always likely to stay in the lineup when Robertson returned, whoever their third forward ended up being.

Finally, I wanted to touch on something Sam mentioned from practice today:

That hit, which we talked about at length after that game, was a scary one. But Bichsel's ability to return makes more sense now that it would have if he'd suffered a serious shoulder injury, as I'd initially assumed it might be.

Now, the sobering thing here is that Bichsel already suffered a concussion a couple months ago. And players who have a history of concussions (as he now does) have that as another factor to consider when they are being evaluated for future potential concussions, as one concussion can increase the likelihood of suffering another one.

But the fact that Bichsel cleared all protocols indicates that he didn't suffer another concussion in that nasty fall, and that's a very good thing for him just on a human level, let alone for the Stars as a hockey team.

Winnipeg is a large team, and Bichsel is the sort of player who is very likely to take and give more big hits. Here's hoping the rest of them stay far, far away from his head. (Most things are pretty far away from your head when you're 6'7", after all.)

Stars Thoughts

The Privilege of Victory: Burying the Narratives after a First Round Victory

By Robert Tiffin
May 6, 2025

Connor Hellebuyck just avoided a catastrophic first-round loss against St. Louis. That means the Stars will get to see whether that experience hardened him or rattled him, which is to say we'll decide whether Hellebuyck is A True Playoff Goalie after the results come in, just like many folks have done with Jake Oettinger for his career.

But for Jets fans, they have to be breathing a massive sigh of relief on Hellebuyck's behalf, because who wants to go into the offseason with everyone talking about how the shiny trophies your all-world goaltender just won don't shine so brightly under the harsh spotlight of the postseason?

Depending on how the second round goes, that narrative may resurface. Winning one round only really solves big problems if you're Buffalo or Ottawa, but for the moment, the Jets have gotten a reprieve, and that's as it should be.

For the Stars, their first-round victory does much the same. The spotlight was never going to focused on one single player the way it was on Hellebuyck for Winnipeg, but there were some nasty narrative land mines lurking before and during this series, even bleeding into the third period of Game 7. Of course, thanks to Mikko Rantanen, the Stars pogo-sticked their way around all of them to safety in one of the most dramatic and memorable playoff games any Stars fans will ever see.

So today, let's revisit just how many of those potential narratives were quashed by Rantanen's superheroics, and shovel some extra dirt of them just to be safe. The anxiety comes back tomorrow, but let's take one more day to be grateful for a couple of the stories we won't have to seriously countenance. For now, at least.

You Can't Flip the Switch

Losing seven straight games the way the Stars did had everybody around Dallas grouching, including the coach. And rightly so, given the way they were blowing leads in fashions more darkly comical than a vaudeville antagonist. Evgenii Dadonov and Sidney Crosby dueling hat tricks? Poof. The record-setting Vancouver Meltdown? Gone. The Jamie Benn 400th goal-that-wasn't in yet another flop in Detroit? Once Benn scored that power play goal in Game 3, his goalless streak down the stretch became something you could actually laugh about (though I wouldn't advise doing so in front of either of Benn or Lian Bichsel).

Even Pete DeBoer's regular season avoidance of three consecutive regulation losses finally ceased, in that same Detroit loss. And Tyler Seguin's long-awaited return in Nashville looked like just what the doctor ordered 16 seconds into the game when his line scored, only for Dallas once again to fail to hold a lead while losing Jason Robertson besides.

It was a bitterly disappointing way to end the regular season. Going into the playoffs, everyone agreed that you can't really flip the switch from that level of ineptitude to defeating a healthy Colorado team about to add Gabriel Landeskog, right? A team playing this badly, without Miro Heiskanen or Jason Robertson? Good luck figuring out all those issues in time to weather the thin air of Colorado.

But it turns out the Stars absolutely did flip the switch. Even after dropping Game 1, they managed to remind everyone which of the two great teams had played the most playoff games of any team in the past few years. Dallas bore up under the pressure, and they landed the killing blow with a baseball bat Colorado sold at a garage sale back in January. This sounds gruesome, but it's only sports.

Colorado Earned the Better Bounces

When that goal went in, you felt two things: Disgust and admiration. The former, because are you kidding me, and the latter, because you absolutely will not see a goal like that again any time soon, and maybe ever.

And as the series went on, it seemed like Colorado kept earning bounces like that. The next goal in Game 1, even, when Nate MacKinnon shot a puck off Ilya Lyubushkin's business, allowing it to knuckle past Jake Oettinger. And who can forget the horrible, no-good, Aeschylusian own goal in Game 6 that appeared to have torched Dallas's last, best hope to cash in on a whirlwind second period from Mikko Rantanen and Roope Hintz?

And hey, let's throw officiating in this category, too. Nathan MacKinnon basically commanded the officials to call a high-sticking penalty in Game 1, and they obeyed. It was the right call, absolutely, but when you looked at how things combined for Dallas to lose Game 1, it sure felt like everything was breaking for the Avalanche.

There were, in the end, some missed calls for both sides, and things all evened out. But in Game 6, after a phantom high-sticking call on Thomas Harley and a "now we're calling this actually" interference call on Mikael Granlund, Stars fans began to feel quite aggrieved.

But this series doesn't have to be one you feel that way about, anymore. Because the Stars got a massive bounce off Sam Girard's skate, and if you don't think Mikko Rantanen earned every inch of that beautiful deflection, I don't know what to tell you.

Fate isn't always kind, but it's nice when its obedience to Newton's Third Law takes place within the same playoff series, rather than over a lifetime.

Jake Oettinger Was Only a Playoff Goalie in 2022

It's a shame that Oettinger's first playoff series as the starting goaltender had to set a bar so absurdly high that no human being could possibly hope to stay there.

He was always bound to come back to the land of mere mortals, and in 2023, his eventual numbers made it look like he kind of did.

Six games vs. Minnesota (who sort of blew it by trying to alternate goalies early on and letting Dallas back in the series after the traditional Stars' Game 1 loss), Seven games vs. Seattle (that featured losses with 5, 6, and 7 Kraken goals), and then the horrible disaster against somebody literally named Adin Hill, as Vegas nuked his postseason stats for good that year, despite two rebound victories after Jamie Benn's ordered absence.

Last year was better, and I still think he got a bit of an unfair shake after Stuart Skinner and Edmonton managed to stifle Dallas's power play. The team that loses doesn't always lose because their goalie let in more, even if that's what the scorekeeper says.

Nonetheless, everyone would agree that Oettinger needed to show up against (checks notes) Mackenzie...Blackwood? Okay, sure, I guess. Anyway, after Game 1, Blackwood looked every bit like he was set to play the part of Stuart Skinner or Adin Hill once again, a relatively obscure goalie playing great when it mattered, while Jake Oettinger wasn't great enough on the other side.

Except, after those bounces, Oettinger did play great when it mattered. He did reinforce Dallas's penalty kill and shut down almost everyone except possibly the best player in the world. And in Game 7, Oettinger finally closed the door as Dallas took a third-period lead with four minutes to go.

And unlike the last seven games of the season, Oettinger held that lead. Unlike earlier games in the series, Oettinger simply didn't allow a rough bounce or a tough penalty to undermine his team. He was exactly what you hope a franchise goalie will be: reliably excellent when you need him the most.

As a reward for that fantastic performance, Oettinger now gets to face the best goaltender on the planet. That's Life in Central Division.

No matter what happens in the second round, you will not have to wince when you hear about Mackenzie Blackwood, bicycle kick goals, or flipping the switch again any time soon. These narratives have been put to bed for good, even if other ones are likely to start rearing their head tomorrow night.

Anyway, these were the three big ones that stuck out to me, but I'm sure I missed some, so I'll open the comments to everyone on this post. What narratives are you glad you won't have to hear about, now that the Stars won this series? Let me hear from you, and remember: be sure to smash that WUPHF button and share with all your Tamagotchis and pogs and pet rocks.

Stars Stack

Light Work: If Miro Heiskanen and Jason Robertson return soon, what should the lines be?

By David Castillo
May 7, 2025

It's the moment we've all been waiting for. No, not Game 1. Although, yes, absolutely that. But Dallas' health. While it's only been days since Dallas last played a playoff game, it feels like it's been ages since they played with what you might call a full deck. There's no timetable for Miro Heiskanen and Jason Robertson's return other than "in the second round at some point." While this isn't particularly specific, we can still entertain the notion of how the lines could break down whenever they do.

It's been an odd year in terms of chemistry. Outside of the Matt Duchene line with Mason Marchment and Tyler Seguin — which missed a lot of time due to injury — nothing has ever truly stuck. A lot of ill-timed absences didn't help beyond Seguin's, but neither did the players in creating the necessary chemistry.

However, the cavalry is on its way, which means I'd like to have fun with stats. Who doesn't love playing tetris with a hockey roster pretending we know better than hockey coaches? Although to be fair, I think a lot of people enjoy making their own lines because we're fans, and it's just one more superfluous thing to talk about.

For this quick exercise, I'll be using Louis Boulet's SPAR model, which refers to Standing Points Above Replacement. It's basically WAR/GAR, just manifested in how many points in the standings a player adds to the lineup. Obviously, there's a lot more than goes into it, including Corey Sznajder's tracking data, but we'll skip the tutorial for now (and I'll be sure to write an explainer card for them). If you want to learn more about the model itself, [click here](#). If you want to follow a good dude like Boulet1, [click here](#).

Programming note: big thanks to the new paid subscribers. I promise I won't let you down if the Stars don't. You have access to this calendar listing all the paywalled articles separated by year (bottom of the sheet), section (video, analytics, or prospects, etc), and a link to the article in question. As I try to ensure that paywalled pieces tend to be evergreen in nature, this isn't the 80s and my writing isn't flannel. It won't go out of style. At least I hope not. Flannel's not coming back is it?

Current Lineup (Unhealthy)

Again, even if you don't believe in these numbers or stats, you can still humor me here. According to Boulet's model, the lineup that just beat Colorado in seven games profiled like a wildcard team. (Alex Petrovic didn't log enough games to acquire data on, so I stuck Matt Dumba in his place.)

Given the shot differential, I would say that's a decent estimation. Again, it is only that: an estimation. Obviously, a wildcard team doesn't just go out and beat a Cup contender, which is

what makes (IMO) Pete DeBoer such a monumental factor. However, this leaves out the other critical factors, like the special teams matchup, and systems/tactics — or just the God Mode that Mikko Rantanen activated. Whatever your hangups, I think most would agree that this Dallas team is special when healthy, but losing two key players will put a dent in any roster's maximum efficiency.

Badge breakdown: Boulet's model gives weight to Corey's data and thus assigns value to styles hence the badges on the bottom left. Full glossary is [here](#). Part of what I love about Boulet's work is that decoding these models can be hard for layfans. Finding ways to condense them and make them intuitive with clearer language is huge, and it's why you'll be seeing more of Boulet's work here moving forward.

Dallas has two badges that the roster is given credit for and they are configured as such (these definitions have been 99 percent copy and pasted from Boulet's glossary):

Got That DAWG In 'Em (Gold): Very cool little profile, which tries to define 'clutch' as offense in late trailing situations, playoff performance, and defense in late leading situations.

Bang For Your Buck (Gold): GM fingerprints. They refer to value added (points in the standings) in proportion to cap.

Efficient Attacker (Silver): Players who consistently generate offence and produce at a high rate.

Coach's Dream (Silver): Those who embody the style of a coach's favourite through responsible consistent play and checking effort.²

Shutdown Stalwart (Silver): The most competent defensive players against the cycle within their own zone, while defending the rush, and on the penalty kill.

PK Specialist (Silver): Best penalty killers in the league / By suppressing chances on the man disadvantage, clearing pucks, and preventing the opposition from getting set up in the zone.

So while the roster they used to defeat Colorado is only statistically a wildcard team, they're still very unique. With all that out the way, what should we expect from their statistical profile when healthy?

Projected lineup (when healthy)

Here I'll be taking cues from Robert Tiffin's observations on the ice at practice. These were the lines practicing on the ice, so while neither gospel nor fact, it's a useful starting point. So what do we got when Heiskanen and Robertson return?

I'm fascinated by that Johnston line. It makes a lot of sense if Johnston is once again getting the tough matchups. Adding Robertson, who has a track record of being good defensively, would theoretically be a massive boost to making DeBoer's matchups more effective. Still, sticking Marchment on his offside (though he has experience playing his offwing) is something of an unknown.

It's also hard to say how a Benn-Seguin reunion could look. They were pretty quiet versus Colorado, as was Duchene. Could that further suppress their impact or ignite them? It's definitely worth a shot, especially if it means giving the Johnston line a stronger look in more minutes.

Defensively, I think it goes without saying: Alex Petrovic will be the odd man out. Lyubushkin was played moderately well, and was quite good on the penalty kill, so while I know some fans have warmed up to Petrovic, he doesn't have seniority, or the cap hit. And no, whether deserved or not, Cody Ceci will not be pushed down to the third pair. Whatever my own personal opinions, DeBoer deliberately gave Ceci and Esa Lindell the Nathan MacKinnon matchup. He obviously trusts them. The only way that trust is breached is if the Stars end up on the precipice at some point.

Regardless, we're talking about a 12-point difference in value from the perspective of standings. As you'll notice on the bottom, they also get new gold badges for "efficient attacker" and "elusive carrier." Here's the new badge breakdown.

Efficient Attacker (Gold): Players who consistently generate offence and produce at a high rate.

Elusive Carrier (Gold): Shifty skaters who carry a bulk of zone entries and use their skating prowess to draw penalties.

Coach's Dream (Silver): Those who embody the style of a coach's favourite through responsible consistent play and checking effort.

Scoring Threat (Silver): The league's top scoring options that leverage their ability to get open for strong chances, create opportunities for themselves with the puck, and pure finishing prowess.

My question is this: is it possible that the spreadsheets hold something even better in store?

What the spreadsheets recommend (when healthy)

I mean, it's inconsequential but I still find it amusing. Stacking the second line gives Dallas a slightly better profile.

(Also, I really think Blackwell deserves a spot in the lineup. Like Dadonov, he's one of the few players who can play up the lineup should another injury hit, and he's a strong penalty killer.) It also gives Dallas an added badge for Wrist Master, which refers to a higher incidence of wrist shots. I find that as amusing as Lian Bichsel and Ilya Lyubushkin getting the highest chemistry boost (I'm assuming this primarily comes from their physicality) on a team filled with superstars.

Granted, that's the great thing about Dallas' lineup when healthy: it's kind of hard to go wrong.

Bonus: another preview of Winnipeg vs. Dallas worth reading

For the sickos out there who weren't satisfied by my preview, here's another one from a vastly superior puck-knower. Garret's been around for awhile (remember when SB Nation had blogs for every hockey team?), and I've always had tremendous respect for his work. Yes, it's data-

driven, but he happens to have a better command of the data than most. For you BlueSky nerds, he's also a good follow.

1

He's a Senators fan but we won't hold that against him. Besides, I like the Senators too.

2

Checking is a tangible dataset in Boulet's model that includes hot volume, dump-in recovery, forechecking pressure, takeaways, and more.

Shap Shots

On what to look for in the goaltending battle between Connor Hellebuyck and Jake Oettinger

By Sean Shapiro
May 7, 2025

In addition to the fact it features the Dallas Stars — one of the two teams we cover most here¹ — the Stars vs. Jets series is one of the most intriguing for me as a goaltending nerd.

I love the subplot battle between Jake Oettinger and Connor Hellebuyck, and everything it represents, which I wrote extensively about this morning over at D Magazine.

Oettinger's primary focus is beating Winnipeg and helping Dallas advance to a third consecutive conference finals. In order for the Stars to do that, he'll most likely have to outplay Connor Hellebuyck, a fellow American widely considered the best goalie in the world, and the starter for Team USA at the 4 Nations Face-Off back in February. And if Oettinger, a backup on that team, outplays Hellebuyck, there's a strong case to be made that he'll have taken a step to potentially steal the No. 1 job for the Americans at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy.

I also discussed the series at length yesterday with my pals over at Winnipeg Sports Talk, my segment starts right around the 1 hour, 36-minute mark if you are interested.

And if you need even more, the folks I work with at DLLS Sports did further preview yesterday as well, which you can watch here.

Before we get into the hockey, this series is really cool to me from a media perspective.

It features two markets that have passionate hockey fans — the Winnipeg playoff whiteout is a bucket list item for me — that have been underserved by traditional media.

While the Jets still have a writer assigned at my former employer², they did have coverage slashed at one point by that company and in Dallas, all coverage from that outlet is from outside reporters parachuting in for this series.

Both media markets have also dealt with travel cuts on coverage, and it's left a void where some non-traditional voices have been able to step in and become part of the mainstream discussion.

In Winnipeg, it's really cool to see what they've built with YouTube channel at Winnipeg Sports Talk after some radio cuts left folks without jobs in that market.

In Dallas, the addition of the DLLS Stars show has been an awesome addition to the daily game coverage, and I would say that even if I wasn't on two shows per week.

It's also been a pretty cool to see a space where Robert Tiffin can be recognized for all the work he's done independently, and if you haven't followed his stuff already, you should right here.

OK, back to the meat of where I was trying to go with this.

Let's talk about the goaltending matchup and what a pre-scout might look like for both teams tonight before Game 1.

First, we'll start with the likely league MVP, who struggled in the first round against the St. Louis Blues.

First here are the raw numbers.

And here is a quick, and succinct observation that friend of the program and former NHL goalie Mike McKenna pointed out about Hellebuyck during the first round.

The Stars will obviously go to that playbook, they'll also have a chart similar to this up in the locker room.

This data is courtesy of InStat.

You'll notice the numbers above the glove. Shoot high, avoid the ice, where Hellebuyck is pretty close to perfect.

It's also worth talking about Hellebuyck's stance, because he intentionally holds his hands lower than most goalies, with his glove and blocker completely even. This is because he's as tall as he is and relies on what the puck sees.

Here is an example from a shootout against Edmonton this season.

Here is Marc-Andre Fleury's stance for an example of what most goalie glove positions look like in a stance.

Here is Jake Oettinger's stance, since he is also an important part of this article.

For an amateur example, this is a more "traditional" goalie positioning with the glove, which I use when I play beer league on Monday and Wednesdays.

Here is what the shooter sees.

Here is what the puck sees.

Now let me try and mimic Hellebuyck stance here, which I've tried once in a game and felt very unnatural to me³ because it took away some of my traditional explosiveness (whatever that means for a beer league goalie), with catching pucks.

Here is what Hellebuyck's glove position looks like to the shooter.

And here is what it looks like to the puck.

Consider Hellebuyck is half a foot taller than me (I'm 5-foot-10), but you get the thought process here. It's not what the shooter sees, but what the puck does that matters when it comes to net coverage with the glove.

For Hellebuyck glove saves are more about already being at typical glove height and coming up, rather than moving up and down explosively, like many goalies.

This is what McKenna is mentioning when he talks about passive hands and not active ones. Hellebuyck's game is so heavily built on play reading and reacting before the shot — he's probably the best play reader in the NHL — that his passive hands aren't typically a weakness.

So with Hellebuyck, who I expect to be pretty dominant this series, the play is to attack with pace and shoot high when possible. If he reads the play well, the glove is fine, if his tracking is off, there's a weakness to shoot for.

Now let's look at Jake Oettinger, who posted these numbers in the first round against the Colorado Avalanche.

Oettinger was very good in the first round like Hellebuyck he was pretty close to unbeatable on the ice.

From the first round, Oettinger's slight weakness has been on the stick side. In fact, of the Avalanche goals in the series, most came on plays developing to the goalie's right.

Oettinger has become a great skater that smothers plays well with size, he combines some of the traits he picked up from both Ben Bishop and Anton Khudobin, but is noticeably better at it on the glove side which is why teams tend to have more success against the blocker.

For Oettinger, as the Avalanche did at times, the book is to try and take advantage of his aggressiveness on the rush, potentially looking for a pump fake on the shot or a pass if possible.

And with goaltending, the goalies are well aware these books are out there.

It's one of the things, in fact, that Oettinger says he loves about playoff hockey. The chess match and battle of each side knowing weaknesses.

Again, using an amateur example, there's a team in my beer league that we've played for a couple years know and there is a guy with a visor and red gloves that I know shoots high glove every single time. I cheat high glove when he's on the rush, and because he's a beer leaguer, I usually win that battle since he doesn't adjust.

I brought this up to Oettinger, in a semi self-deprecating manner, and he corrected me that in the NHL these very battles happen each shot.

“No, it’s exactly like that,” Oettinger said. “Especially with these Central Division teams, you know what they do, they know what you do. So when a certain player comes down the wing, I have a note in my head of what they might like to do or where they shoot. I won’t share those, because maybe that player doesn’t even know it’s their tendency. But you play on that, and part of goaltending is sometimes guessing ahead to get an advantage.”

So the chess match for Oettinger and Hellebuyck starts tonight in Winnipeg against the respective offenses, and it’s something that for me, as a goalie nerd, I’m really excited about watching.

1

I’m really, truthfully, looking forward to the day I get to balance playoff coverage of both the Detroit Red Wings and Dallas Stars in the same spring. Someday soon, I hope.

2

And you should still read Murat. He’s a good friend and one of the good ones.

3

It should be noted Jack Campbell tried this same thing at one point in his career, and trying to hard to emulate Hellebuyck led to some of his struggles.

Dallas Could Get Star Forward Back in Time for Game 1

By Taylor Newby
May 6, 2025

The Dallas Stars are a day away from Game 1 of the second round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. They will head to Manitoba to take on the Winnipeg Jets for the first two games.

The Stars managed to make it past the Colorado Avalanche in Game 7 thanks to Mikko Rantanen taking the third period by storm. Despite the success, the Stars were fighting an uphill battle before the series even started, due to missing two of their most important pieces in Jason Robertson and Miro Heiskanen.

Robertson has been out since taking an awkward hit against the boards from Michael McCarron in the last game of the season. He was seen leaving Bridgestone arena in a knee brace and the next day was listed as week-to-week. His status has been moved to day-to-day but the updates previously have been short and sweet, that he was still progressing.

However, today head coach, Pete DeBoer, stated that Jason Robertson was an option for Game 1 but would have to see how he feels tomorrow. DeBoer also stated that Colin Blackwell has to come out of the lineup, so all signs point to Robertson slotting in if Blackwell comes out, instead of Mavrik Bourque.

Robertson took line rushes with Mason Marchment and Wyatt Johnston. Before the injury, Robertson had been on a line with Roope Hintz and Mikko Rantanen. Although, DeBoer highlighted the line of Rantanen, Hintz and Mikael Granlund and stated he would to keep the Finns together. He also said that the other lines haven't been consistent, so he is wanting to try some other combinations out.

ESPN

2025 Stanley Cup second-round betting guide: Best bets, Conn Smythe predictions

By Sean Allen Victoria Matiash
May 7, 2025

The NHL will drop the puck on the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs on Monday night, when the Toronto Maple Leafs host the defending champion Florida Panthers. The Maple Leafs are seeking to break the longest championship drought in the NHL, while the Panthers dispatched their in-state rival Tampa Bay Lightning in the first round. A team from Florida has made the Stanley Cup Final in each of the past five seasons.

Elsewhere in the East, the Carolina Hurricanes head north to take on the Metropolitan Division-winning Washington Capitals. That series will start Tuesday.

Also on Tuesday night, the Edmonton Oilers will face the Vegas Golden Knights in the Western Conference semifinals.

The Dallas Stars and Winnipeg Jets both advanced in dramatic fashion in Game 7s and will open their semifinals series on Wednesday.

With the matchups set, Sean Allen (East) and Victoria Matiash (West) provide their best picks in each series, along with picks for the Conn Smythe Trophy (playoffs MVP).

Dallas Stars at Winnipeg Jets

Game 1: Canada Life Centre, Winnipeg; Wednesday, 9:30 p.m.

Game 1 Puck line: Stars -1.5 (+210), Jets +1.5 (-300)

Series line: Stars (-175), Jets (+150)

Series length: Four games (+700), five games (+270), six games (+195), seven games (+180)

Series winner Winnipeg Jets (+150). Following Sunday's excessively dramatic, come-from-behind, double OT win against the Blues, the Jets face a fresh dawn with less pressure. No matter what, The Presidents Trophy winners won't have to endure months upon months of hearing about how they squandered away an unmatched season by getting the boot in the first round. No one on that team is going to feel the lift of that weight more than the Vezina/Hart candidate in the crease.

Sure, Connor Hellebuyck was awful in St. Louis, earning the hook in all three road games. He was also lousy to start Game 7 back home, appearing poised to pave the way for an early exit. Then the Jets No. 1 appreciably improved as the contest wore on, to the point of looking like the best version of himself in the extra frames. Anyone who understands the mental element to the game, especially at the goaltending position, will appreciate the cleansing aspect of righting the

ship when it comes down to the wire. Point is, we could now see a version of Hellebuyck more akin to what we've been accustomed to all season.

Sticking with the regular campaign, Winnipeg's No. 1 is 3-1 versus Dallas with a .965 SV% and 1.01 GAA. Impressive stuff. No doubt, the Jets defense will have their hands full with an inspired Mikko Rantanen, plus a returning Miro Heiskanen and Jason Robertson, but they've managed before. The most pressing concern on Scott Arniel's side is the health of Mark Scheifele and Josh Morrissey. However, before being ruled out for Game 7, Scheifele was considered a "maybe", which holds promise following days of extra rest.

Another option for those siding with the underdog in this set: Jets to win Game 1 & win the series (+230). The opener, of course, is taking place at the Canada Life Centre, where the home side has yet to lose.

Best bets: Kyle Connor to record 2-plus shots on goal in each game (+180). The Jets sniper averaged 3.14 shots/game, while the Stars surrendered 34.4 shots/contest -- the most of any team advancing to round two -- in their respective opening sets. So, the arithmetic shines a positive light on this play.

Plus, anyone who believes Jake Oettinger is good for a minimum of one blowup game in this series might also consider siding with Kyle Connor to score 4-plus goals in series (+170). The Stars netminder was far from rock-solid in three contests versus the Avalanche in round one, allowing 12 goals in fewer than 160 minutes of play. If Oettinger gets lit up, there's an excellent chance Winnipeg's top-scorer will play a part in that onslaught.

If the Stars win the Stanley Cup, who wins the Conn Smythe? Mikko Rantanen (+900). The Stars aren't playing anymore this spring if not for an exceptional showing from the former Avalanche skater. After a sleepier start, Rantanen scored five goals and six assists in the three final games against his old buds, including a nail-driving hat trick in Game 7.

If the Jets win the Stanley Cup, who wins the Conn Smythe? Connor Hellebuyck (+2500). Same refrain as from before the postseason started: If the best goalie in the NHL is near his best, the Jets hold a legit shot at driving to the end. If not, they won't get past the Stars, never mind Vegas or Edmonton.

ESPN

2025 Stanley Cup playoffs: Latest championship, Conn Smythe odds

By ESPN
May 7, 2025

There's a long way to go in the Stanley Cup playoffs, but if the first round is any indication, well, we have a lot to look forward to.

The defending Cup champion Florida Panthers fell to the Toronto Maple Leafs in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference semifinals Monday night by the score of 5-4. William Nylander had two goals and an assist in the first period to put the Leafs ahead, but starting goalie Anthony Stolarz left the game with an apparent head injury in the second period. Both teams are even at -110 odds to win the series at ESPN BET Sportsbook.

In the other Eastern semi, the top-seeded Washington Capitals fell to the Carolina Hurricanes in Game 1 after Jacob Slavin's OT goal. Despite having the conference's best record, the Capitals have the longest odds of the remaining teams to win the Eastern Conference, while the Hurricanes are the new favorites to win the Stanley Cup, moving from +475 to +360.

The Edmonton Oilers scored three third-period goals to win their fifth straight game after trailing early, taking Game 1 from the Vegas Golden Knights. Connor McDavid is the current favorite to win the Conn Smythe Trophy for playoff MVP, which would be his second in a row.

One day after the Dallas Stars pulled off a miraculous third-period comeback in Game 7 against the Colorado Avalanche, the Winnipeg Jets one-upped them on Sunday night.

The Presidents' Trophy winners scored with 1:56 left in regulation against the St. Louis Blues to get within 3-2 before netting an improbable game-tying score in the waning seconds to force overtime.

Adam Lowry would then deflect Neal Pionk's shot past Jordan Binnington at 16:10 of the second overtime for the winner.

The Jets will now face the Stars in the Western Conference semifinals in the teams' first postseason meeting. Game 1 is Wednesday at 9:30 p.m. ET on ESPN.

Below, you can see all of the top favorites for Conn Smythe, as well as the odds for every team to win their current series, advance to, and to win the Stanley Cup.

ESPN

Conn Smythe Watch after Round 1: Mikko Rantanen tops ranking

By Greg Wyshynski
May 7, 2025

With one round in the books and eight teams sent home, the race for Stanley Cup playoffs MVP is starting to come into focus.

That focus is currently on one player who set a handful of records with his Game 7 heroism.

Here's the first Conn Smythe Watch of the 2025 postseason. Keep in mind that in the NHL, the Conn Smythe is based on a player's performance during the entire postseason, not just the championship round. The award is voted on by an 18-person panel of Professional Hockey Writers Association members.

We polled more than a dozen writers who are still on the beat in the playoffs for the Conn Smythe Trophy top three.

Here's a look at some of the current leaders for MVP honors, as well as players on the cusp of breaking through in the Conn Smythe race.

The current MVP

Mikko Rantanen, RW, Dallas Stars

The "Revenge Tour" against his former team the Colorado Avalanche wrapped up in spectacular fashion with 11 points in the last three games of the series (five goals, six assists). That included his third-period hat trick -- along with an assist on Wyatt Johnston's game-tying goal with less than four minutes remaining in regulation -- in the Stars' Game 7 win.

Rantanen is the first player in NHL history to record four-point periods in back-to-back games in the regular season or the playoffs. He's the first player to score a third-period hat trick in a Game 7. He's also the first player with at least 10 points in Games 5 through 7 in a series. Overall, Rantanen has 12 points through seven games.

GM Jim Nill handed Rantanen an eight-year, \$96 million contract extension after acquiring him from the Carolina Hurricanes for his regular-season dominance (705 points in 652 career games) and his reputation as a clutch playoff performer, as he now has 113 points in 88 career postseason games.

Rantanen was ranked first on all but one ballot we collected from our voters. He's easily the favorite for playoff MVP at this point, and rightfully so.

On the cusp

Wyatt Johnston, C, Dallas Stars

Jake Oettinger, G, Dallas Stars

Rantanen has deservedly grabbed the headlines, but don't sleep on the contributions of Johnston to the Stars. His power-play goal gave Dallas a 3-2 lead in Game 7 with less than four minutes remaining against the Avalanche. He has seven points in seven games.

Oettinger held down the fort in the final moments of Game 7 and has posted strong numbers so far in the postseason, with a .911 save percentage and a 2.85 goals-against average.

ESPN

Stanley Cup playoffs: Previews for Stars-Jets, Panthers-Leafs

By ESPN Staff
May 7, 2025

The second round of the 2025 Stanley Cup playoffs is off to a ferocious start, and the Central Division series has yet to begin.

What should fans expect out of the Dallas Stars and Winnipeg Jets (9:30 p.m. ET, ESPN)? Will there be any fallout from Game 1 of Florida Panthers-Toronto Maple Leafs in the next clash Tuesday night (7 p.m. ET, ESPN)? And what should we make of the initial showdowns in the other two series that transpired Tuesday night?

Read on for game previews with statistical insights from ESPN Research, a recap of what went down in Tuesday's games and the three stars of Tuesday from Arda Öcal.

Dallas Stars at Winnipeg Jets
Game 1 | 9:30 p.m. ET | ESPN

The Jets won the regular-season series between the two teams 3-1, with an aggregate score of 13-5. The Stars are favored to win the series (-175) by ESPN BET, while the Jets are +150 to win.

These two franchises have never met in the postseason, and the Jets 1.0/Arizona Coyotes never met the North Stars/Stars franchise either.

Dallas' Jake Oettinger and Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck are the top candidates to be Team USA's goalie at the 2026 Olympics, and both are among the most-used goalies in the NHL. Since 2021-22, Oettinger is third in games played (including regular season and playoffs) with 274, trailing only Andrei Vasilevskiy (277) and Sergei Bobrovsky (275). Hellebuyck is tied for fourth in that span with Igor Shesterkin (270).

Mikko Rantanen set a few new benchmarks for his heroics late in Round 1, becoming the first player in Stanley Cup playoffs history with a hat trick in the third period of a Game 7 and the first player in history with a hat trick against his former team in a Game 7. He also became the first player in NHL history (regular season or playoffs) to have a four-point period in consecutive games.

Stars captain Jamie Benn now has 28 career playoff goals, which is tied with Dino Ciccarelli and Neal Broten for fourth most in North Stars/Stars history, behind Mike Modano (58), Steve Payne (35) and Brian Bellows (34).

Kyle Connor's 12 points (four goals, eight assists) in the first round set a Thrashers/Jets 2.0 franchise record for points in a single postseason series. The previous high was 11, set by Blake Wheeler and Mark Scheifele in 2018 vs. Nashville.

Playing in his franchise-record 56th career postseason game, Adam Lowry scored his first career overtime goal to win Game 7 against the Blues. He is one of two captains in Stanley Cup playoff history to score an OT goal in Game 7; Steve Yzerman (1996, also against St. Louis) is the other.

Breakaway on Sports Illustrated

Veteran Center X-Factor in Jets vs. Stars Series

By Jacob Punturi

May 7, 2025

The second round series between the Dallas Stars and Winnipeg Jets features huge superstars. The Jets bring Connor Hellebuyck and Kyle Connor, while the Stars counter with Jake Oettinger, Mikko Rantanen, Wyatt Johnston, and top players Jason Robertson and Miro Heiskanen chomping at the bit to return from injury.

Yet, the x-factor in this series between the Jets and Stars is not one of the many superstars involved. Instead, the most important player of this series is veteran Dallas forward Matt Duchene.

The 34-year-old Duchene has gone through a post-30 resurgence in the NHL. First with the Nashville Predators and continuing on with the Stars the past two campaigns, Duchene's gone from second or third line pivot to 65+ point scorer. During the most recent regular season, he registered 30 goals and 52 assists to average a point-per-game for the second time in the past four years.

In the first round, Duchene was decent, but not a standout performer. He finished with three assists in seven games, but hasn't scored a goal yet in the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Where he needs to improve is his 5-on-5 play. He has yet to record a point at even strength in the postseason, and that must change in the second round.

He has excelled on the power play, however. The Stars are firing on all cylinders with the man advantage, converting on 30% of their chances. Duchene's three points have all come on the man advantage as well, including a two-assist performance in Game 7 against the Colorado Avalanche. Going up against the Jets, that power play must continue its dominance. That means Duchene must find a way to continue producing on special teams.

If Duchene finds that next level, the Jets' defense is in trouble. They face an imposing challenge already trying to stop the potent offensive attack of the Stars, and that's without Duchene pitching in as much as he should. If he finds his game, he will be the x-factor in this series.

Breakaway on Sports Illustrated

Elite Goalies Lead Jets, Stars Series

By Jacob Punturi

May 7, 2025

The Dallas Stars and Winnipeg Jets, the top two regular-season teams in the Western Conference, kick off their second-round series in the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs. Each team battled through a hellacious first-round matchup, but is now one step closer to the ultimate prize.

As the second round commences, the focus shifts to the starting goaltenders for both the Jets and Stars. Connor Hellebuyck of the Jets and Jake Oettinger of the Stars are the top players at the position, but neither was at their best in the opening round. The winner of this series will come down to which goalie gets to that next level and stays there.

Hellebuyck's postseason devolving is becoming as reliable as his incredible regular-season campaigns. He's just waiting to be named the 2025 Vezina Trophy winner, the third of his career and second consecutive honor. He's also the two-time reigning William M. Jennings Trophy recipient, given to the goaltender(s) who allow the fewest goals during the regular season.

In Round 1 against the St. Louis Blues, Hellebuyck struggled. He was pulled each time they played in St. Louis, and finished the series with a 4-3 record, a 3.85 goals-against average, and a .830 save percentage.

Oettinger has performed better, but he'd be the first to say he hasn't quite hit his stride. He also went 4-3 in the first round against the Colorado Avalanche, with a 2.85 GAA and .911 save percentage. While the numbers are still solid, they differ considerably from his career playoff statistics and regular-season averages. He boasts a career GAA of 2.52 in both the regular and postseason. A Vezina Trophy-level net minder, Oettinger aims to mirror that performance against the Jets.

The goaltending is the biggest storyline of this series, and that's exactly how it should be. Hellebuyck and Oettinger are two of the best puck-stoppers in their prime, and they each are looking for a marquee moment in the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs. That opportunity arrives when the puck drops for Game 1 between the Jets and Stars.

Sportsnet

Stars coach says Jason Robertson 'close' to returning ahead of Jets series

By Sportsnet Staff
May 6, 2025

The Dallas Stars could have forward Jason Robertson back in the lineup for Game 1 of their second-round series against the Winnipeg Jets.

Robertson sustained a knee injury during the team's regular-season finale on April 16 and missed the entire opening round against the Colorado Avalanche.

The 25-year-old skated with Wyatt Johnson and Mason Marchment during Tuesday's practice.

"He's close," Stars coach Peter DeBoer told reporters, according to Brien Rea of FanDuel Sports Network Southwest. "We'll see tomorrow morning."

Robertson played in all 82 games during the regular season and finished second on the team in scoring with 80 points (35 goals and 45 assists).

For Winnipeg, injured forward Mark Scheifele and defencemen Josh Morrissey and Logan Stanley are all game-time decisions.

The Stars host the Jets for Game 1 of their second-round series Wednesday at 9:30 p.m. ET / 8:30 p.m. CT.

Watch live on Sportsnet and Sportsnet+.

Sportsnet

Stanley Cup Playoffs Round 2 Preview: Jets vs. Stars

By Ryan Dixon
May 6, 2025

Welcome to a second-round series where both teams likely feel like they've already spent the amount of emotional capital required to win the Stanley Cup.

Two series went the full seven games in Round 1 and, as it happens, they were both Central Division matchups.

On Saturday night, the Dallas Stars became the first club in NHL history to overcome a multiple-goal deficit in the third period of a Game 7 and win in 60 minutes. Mikko Rantanen, an Avalanche member for a decade, scored a third-period hat trick to bury his old squad, then used an ice-side, post-game interview to declare he still loved every one of his former teammates.

Twenty-four hours later, the Winnipeg Jets scored two goals with the goalie yanked to pull even versus the St. Louis Blues. The second tally, courtesy Cole Perfetti, came with three seconds remaining in the third and represented the latest Game 7 equalizer in league history. Captain Adam Lowry won the game for Winnipeg in double-overtime.

Anything left in the tank, guys?

Of course, once the puck drops for Game 1 Wednesday in Winnipeg, both the Jets and Stars will be ready to roll — at least mentally, that is.

Making these two teams' first-round experience even more similar, both Dallas and Winnipeg played Game 7 of their matchup without a top forward and (for the most part) without their best defenceman.

The Stars squeaked by Colorado without a single minute from second-leading regular season scorer Jason Robertson or stud blue-liner Miro Heiskanen.

As for the Jets, No. 1 centre Mark Scheifele was injured in Game 5 versus the Blues and didn't play again. Meanwhile, defenceman Josh Morrissey left Game 7 after skating for just 2:09, meaning his team had to get by without him for most of five periods.

The Stars have said they expect Robertson and Heiskanen back in Round 2, though they haven't committed to a timeline.

Scheifele was a game-time decision before Game 7 and the Jets gave no update on Morrissey after their big win.

For the sake of all of us watching this great matchup — the first ever between the franchises — let's hope all four guys get in the series, and soon.

Head-to-Head Records

Winnipeg 3-1-0

Dallas 1-3-0

Jets X-Factor: Getting Scheifele, Morrissey back

Whether they'd admit it or not, the Jets had to be mentally bracing to go through another post-mortem where the team failed in the first round. Winnipeg has more wins than every team in the league in the past two seasons combined (108), but was easily dismissed in five games by the Vegas Golden Knights in 2023 and — despite holding home ice advantage — was pushed aside in five by Colorado last spring.

Then they go out, win the Presidents' Trophy and choke on home ice in Game 7 courageously battle back versus the Blues and snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

Will the weight of the Prairies come off Winnipeg now?

As crucial as it is for both teams to get their injured guns back, you have to think the Jets really, really need Scheifele and Morrissey in the lineup. Without Scheifele, you're looking at a squad where Adam Lowry or Vlad Namestnikov are centering the top unit. And amazing as Neal Pionk was playing 46:15 in Game 7 versus St. Louis, it's not fair to ask him to fill the role of No. 1 guy for two weeks of high-stakes playoff hockey.

Stars X-Factor: Mikko Rantanen

Is the Moose loose?

Mikko Rantanen — the man they call "Moose" — was quiet for four games versus Colorado, then raged like an angry swamp donkey through the wetlands with 11 — 11! — points in the final three contests.

It's obviously been a harrowing season for Rantanen. First, he's ripped away from the only team he's ever known in a January trade. Then, he's pretty much immediately under the gun to decide whether he'd be willing to ink a long-term deal with the Carolina franchise that traded for him. When that didn't come to pass, he was on the move again, this time inking an eight-year extension with the Stars as part of the deadline day transaction.

settling in with the Stars and getting back to being the six-foot-four, 215-pound playoff terror he is.

Also, can Dallas finally get off on the right foot here? Despite making two consecutive conference finals, the Stars have managed to lose eight consecutive Game 1s. That's an almost

unthinkable stat for a team that's had the playoff success Dallas has experienced the past couple springs.

It's all well and good that Stars coach Pete DeBoer has an insane 9-0 career record in Game 7s, but maybe Dallas could do a better job of avoiding those winner-take-all situations by posting the odd 'W' out of the gate.

Key Stat: .758

What else can it be but Connor Hellebuyck's save percentage in three Round 1 road games?

If there's an answer for how this all-world goalie struggles so mightily in road playoff games — he's .838 away from Winnipeg in the past three post-seasons — it requires more expertise to provide than you'll find in this corner.

If you're a Jets backer, you have to be hoping it's just an all-time bizarre anomaly and things will normalize now that Hellebuyck is getting a crack at Round 2.

This playoff yips narrative — he's better at home, but still nowhere near what you'd expect for a perennial Vezina contender — felt like it was going to get downright painful when the Blues grabbed a 2-0 lead just over seven minutes into Game 7 on Sunday. Credit Hellebuyck, though, for gathering himself and allowing just one goal in 88:56 of play after that.

Maybe this extremely odd subplot dies with the rest of Winnipeg's Round 1 ghosts.

How Winnipeg Wins: The Jets had the league's best power play in the regular season (28.9 per cent) and were especially deadly on home ice, converting 31.6 per cent of the time.

In the playoffs, those two numbers dipped to 22.7 per cent overall and 20 per cent at home.

Recall, before Scheifele went out of the lineup, the Jets were playing without top wingers Gabe Vilardi (who returned in Game 5) and Nikolaj Ehlers (returned in Game 6).

If Scheifele gets back in the lineup, can the Jets get their man-advantage mojo back?

In terms of players who were in the lineup all seven games, Kyle Connor was fantastic for Winnipeg and is tied with Rantanen and William Nylander for the playoff scoring lead with 12 points. If Connor can keep firing with more support behind him and Hellebuyck looks like his regular self, the Jets — who had a league-best plus-86 goal-differential in the regular season — will improve their playoff-worst minus-9 mark (at five on five) from Round 1.

How Dallas Wins: If this team puts Robertson and Heiskanen back in the lineup, it's going to be able to grind opponents into dust.

Remember, Tyler Seguin joined the squad right before the playoffs began after missing five months following hip surgery and he popped two goals and four points in the first round. Put Robertson in there and the top nine on this team is unrelenting.

Then there's the defence.

Thomas Harley, who's grown to become one of the best two-way defencemen in the league, saw more total time on ice (197:06) than any player in the league in Round 1. If Heiskanen can come back and relieve that burden by anchoring the other top 4 pair, it's going to be huge for Dallas. Really, DeBoer will get to a point where either Harley or Heiskanen is on the ice for every single life-and-death minute of a contest.

The Stars survived Round 1, but did so with the second-worst five-on-five expected goals for percentage (42.85 per cent) of the 16 teams playing. Getting Heiskanen back could really help swing that.

That's also a good segue to mention one key Star we've glossed over so far, goalie Jake Oettinger. Hellebuyck's Team USA batterymate from the 4 Nations Face-Off had a .911 save percentage against a dangerous Avs team. Basically, Oettinger made all the stops he was expected to and, when the rest of the team is as good as the Stars, that can be enough.

TSN

Stars' Robertson 'close' to returning for Game 1 against Jets

By TSN.ca Staff
May 6, 2025

Dallas Stars talented winger Jason Robertson is close to returning to the lineup with Game 1 of their second round series against the Winnipeg Jets beginning Wednesday in Manitoba, head coach Pete DeBoer told the media.

“He’s close. We’ll see tomorrow morning,” DeBoer said on Tuesday.

The 25-year-old skated alongside Mason Marchment and Wyatt Johnston during Tuesday's practice.

Robertson, who suffered a knee injury during the team's regular season finale on April 16, missed the entire seven games series against the Colorado Avalanche in the opening round. The native of California ranked second in team scoring this year, netting 35 goals and 45 assists across 82 games.

DeBoer added forward Colin Blackwell, who scored one goal over six games against the Avs, could be the player coming out of the lineup.

No. 1 defenceman Miro Heiskanen, who's been out since Jan. 28 with a knee injury, skated with Matt Dumba at practice on Tuesday, but DeBoer didn't indicate his availability for Game 1 against Winnipeg.

The 25-year-old native of Finland had five goals and 20 assists over 50 games with the Stars in 2024-25, his seventh year with the franchise.

Winnipeg Jets injury update

The Athletic

As NHL playoffs enter Round 2, who will win the Stanley Cup and why?

By James Mirtle
May 7, 2025

We're down to eight teams left playing for the Stanley Cup, and as of Wednesday morning, three of four Round 2 series are already underway.

Over the past few days, I've noticed that the Stanley Cup probabilities have been shifting dramatically, with each big win, key injury and poor performance from a top player having a significant impact.

Some of that is simply because the field is so closely bunched up talent-wise, which means little things can create some newfound separation between teams. But there are other factors that go into picking favorites that I think are worth looking at a little more in-depth.

Here's my attempt to break down where all eight teams sit, going from those with the lowest odds to the highest, after Tuesday's games in Washington and Las Vegas.

4. Dallas Stars
Stanley Cup probabilities
The Athletic: 14%
MoneyPuck: 12.3%
BetMGM: 16%

Analysis: The Stars ranking here, despite being one of only two teams that hasn't played in Round 2, shows just how tough their first-round matchup was with the equally talented Avalanche.

Now that they've slipped past that hurdle, and with Heiskanen and Robertson projected to return at some point, there's heavy money in the markets on Dallas. When I surveyed a few executives around the league heading into Round 2, the majority were picking the Stars, which matches the results of our staff predictions earlier this week.

Dallas would likely be No. 1 on this list if it had a Game 1 win under its belt like the three teams below. And playing in the West, with a date with the Presidents' Trophy and Vezina Trophy winners in Round 2, doesn't help either. Even if they might be the best team remaining, talent-wise, when everyone is healthy.

The Athletic

NHL playoff picks, odds, how to watch info for Panthers at Maple Leafs, Stars at Jets

By Sarah Jean Maher
May 7, 2025

Round 2 of the Stanley Cup playoffs continues on Wednesday when the Toronto Maple Leafs host the Florida Panthers, and the Dallas Stars head to Winnipeg to face the Jets. The Maple Leafs beat Florida 5-4 in the first game of a possible seven but are the underdogs in Game 2 while favored to win the series. The Jets and Stars begin their second-round series on Wednesday, and the odds favor the Stars to take the series, naturally, as Dallas is the favorite to win the Stanley Cup at +450.

Viewing guide for Wednesday

Dallas Stars at Winnipeg Jets

Series tied 0-0

Series odds: -165 Stars, +140 Jets

The Jets pulled off an amazing series win over the St. Louis Blues, scoring twice in the final two minutes (including with under two seconds to go) in Game 7 to tie it up. Then, they completed the comeback in double overtime, thanks to captain Adam Lowry. Murat Ates shed some light on Lowry's OT heroics and the emotional responses around it.

Meanwhile, the Stars also pulled off an extraordinary comeback. Deadline addition Mikko Rantanen scored a third-period hat trick against his former Colorado Avalanche in a third-period four-goal rally to win Game 7. Pierre LeBrun said it best: "Watch out, NHL, the Stars are getting healthy."

However, both teams are still missing key players. The Jets are without Mark Scheifele and defenseman Josh Morrissey, and the Stars are still missing forward Jason Robertson and defender Miro Heiskanen.

These games could be tight, as the Jets and Stars boast top goaltenders in Connor Hellebuyck and Jake Oettinger. Hellebuyck's Round 1 was shaky (like many of his postseason performances), but Game 7 was something of a redemption arc for him and his Winnipeg teammates.

The Associated Press

Jets and Stars meet in second round of NHL playoffs after both had epic Game 7 rallies to advance

By Stephen Hawkins
May 6, 2025

There was that natural inclination for Dallas Stars coach Pete DeBoer to start paying more attention to St. Louis while watching the game that would determine who his team would play next in the NHL playoffs. But he never really started preparing for the Blues, even as they had a multigoal lead over Winnipeg much of that game.

“That would have been a mistake,” DeBoer said Tuesday. “Just like, you know, whoever was watching our game with Colorado.”

Dallas will instead play the top-seeded Jets after both teams had epic Game 7 rallies at home by overcoming two-goal deficits the third period. Now the teams that finished 1-2 in the Central Division, and have never met in the postseason before, open the second round Wednesday night in Canada.

Winnipeg scored twice in the final 1:56 of regulation against St Louis, tying the game with 1.6 seconds left and winning 4-3 when Adam Lowry scored 16:10 into the second overtime late Sunday night.

“I think we can ride the momentum from the last series win, but at the same time, reset and get ready for a new challenge with Dallas,” Jets defenseman Dylan Samberg said.

The Stars trailed Colorado 2-0 in the third period, but rode Mikko Rantanen’s four-point period that included a hat trick against his former team to win 4-2. He had 11 points (five goals, six assists) in the last three games of that series.

“When your life flashes before your eyes like it did the last 10 minutes of that Game 7 the other night, when you get that close to your season ending, I think you appreciate every day you can come to work,” DeBoer said. “Those are always emotional wins, and we both had them. It’s how do you recover from that quickly and get reengaged in the next series. I’m sure both teams are talking about that.”

The goalies

Two-time Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck, one of three finalists to win the top goalie award again this season, has been at his best against the Stars.

Winnipeg was 3-1 this season against Dallas, while Hellebuyck had a .965 save percentage, stopping 109 of 113 shots for a 1.01 goals against average. His Game 7 win came after the Jets failed to get past the first round the last two seasons after not even making the playoffs in 2022. He gave up 16 goals in three road games against the Blues, but only 10 in four at home.

"At this point, the pressure has kind of fallen off. The weight of the world is off my shoulders. And that had nothing to do with anyone else. It's just the mental grind of that series," Hellebuyck said Tuesday. "That being said, in that moment it was a second chance for me. I just had to go and play my game and do what I do best."

Hellebuyck is 22-30 in his 52 career playoff games, with a .902 save percentage and 2.98 GAA.

Jake Oettinger, the 26-year-old Stars goalie who backed up Hellebuyck for Team USA in the 4 Nations tournament this year, has a better playoff record at 27-25. He has a .915 save percentage and 2.52 GAA in 54 playoff games.

"You always want to play against the best goalies in the world," Oettinger said. "This is going to be a great series. Goals aren't going to be easy to come by for us."

Game 1 struggles

The Stars have lost eight consecutive series openers in the NHL playoffs since 2022, including all seven under DeBoer after a 5-1 loss in Game 1 to the Avs.

"Well, we're going on the road," DeBoer said when asked if there was anything he could do to try to change that trend. "Other than that, not really. There's only so much you can do. I like our preparation. The way we prepare for a Game 7 is the same way we prepare for a Game 1."

Six of Dallas' seven Game 1s under DeBoer have been at home. So have all three Game 7s, like Saturday against the Avs that made DeBoer 9-0 — the most wins by any NHL coach or player in such games.

Hurting key players

Top centers and top defensemen are hurting for both teams.

Winnipeg's center Mark Schiefele didn't play the last two games of the first round after exiting early in Game 5 with an undisclosed injury. Defenseman Josh Morrissey then got hurt two minutes into Game 7.

Jets coach Scott Arniel said Tuesday that both would be game-time decisions.

Dallas has been without top goal scorer Jason Robertson, who got hurt in the regular-season finale, and defenseman Miro Heiskanen since late January. Both have lower-body injuries.

Robertson skated with a line in practice Tuesday, and DeBoer said his availability would depend on how he feels Wednesday. Heiskanen could return later in the series.

Bones connection

Rick Bowness was on an NHL bench as a head coach or an assistant for a record 2,726 regular-season games over 38 seasons. The last two teams he coached were the Stars (2019-22) and the Jets (2022-24), making him the predecessor to DeBoer and Arniel.

Bowness, now 70, was 89-62-25 in Dallas and took the Stars to the Stanley Cup Final in the Canadian bubble during the pandemic-impacted 2020 playoffs. He was 98-57-9 and made the playoffs each of the past two seasons in Winnipeg before retiring.

CW33

Round Two: Key skaters set for return ahead of second-round matchup against Jets

By Daniel Esteve
May 6, 2025

FRISCO, TX (KDAF) – With the excitement of a game seven triumph in the rearview mirror, the Dallas Stars are set to begin round two of the Stanley Cup Playoffs Wednesday night.

The Stars face off against the Winnipeg Jets, a team that also triumphed in a dramatic, overtime win in game 7. The Jets defeated the St. Louis Blues in an instant classic, evening the score with just two seconds left in regulation before winning the series in double overtime.

Here's how the series schedule shapes up:

GAME 1: MAY 7 | 8:30 p.m. CT at Jets
GAME 2: MAY 9 | 8:30 p.m. CT at Jets
GAME 3: MAY 11 | 3:30 p.m. CT vs Jets
GAME 4: MAY 13 | 7:00 P.M. CT vs Jets
GAME 5: MAY 15 | TBD
GAME 6: MAY 17 | TBD
GAME 7: MAY 19 | TBD

Aside from qualifying for the second round, the Dallas Stars have more good news heading into the series.

Stars Head Coach Peter DeBoer believes both Forward Jason Robertson and Defenseman Miro Heiskanen will see the ice in round two. Both key players missed the entire first-round series against the Colorado Avalanche with respective injuries.

Robertson sustained a lower-body injury during a regular-season finale matchup against the Nashville Predators. Heiskanen has been out since Jan. 28, when he sustained a knee injury that required surgery after a collision with Vegas Golden Knights Forward Mark Stone.

DeBoer did not give an exact game he expects each player to return, but both participated in practice Tuesday morning at the Comerica Center in Frisco.

More drama expected as Jets, Stars clash in Game 1

By Field Level Media

May 6, 2025

After a couple days to soak in their stunning-yet-similar comebacks in the first-round of the Stanley Cup playoffs, it's back to business for the Winnipeg Jets and Dallas Stars on Wednesday night. That's when the Jets are scheduled to host the Stars in Game 1 of their best-of-seven, second-round series. Winnipeg survived its opening-round matchup against the St. Louis Blues with a dramatic rally in Game 7 on Sunday. The Jets trailed 3-1 before scoring two goals in the final two minutes of regulation with goalie Connor Hellebuyck pulled for the extra skater, including the tying goal with three seconds left. They won 4-3 late in the second overtime. "These games are special," Winnipeg forward Nikolaj Ehlers said. "You don't get these very often. To be able to come back in the third period like we did and battle our (butts) off in overtime, yeah, it's really special and we did it as a group. So we want to carry that forward."

A day earlier, the Stars trailed the Colorado Avalanche 2-0 with 12 minutes remaining, but Mikko Rantanen scored two straight goals to tie it against his former team. Wyatt Johnston put Dallas ahead with 3:56 left and Rantanen sealed the 4-2 win to complete the hat trick on an empty-net goal with three seconds remaining. Looking ahead, much of the attention will be on the injury lists for both teams. Winnipeg played the final two games against the Blues without top-line center Mark Scheifele, who sustained an undisclosed injury in the first period of Game 5. Scheifele was second on the Jets in goals (39) and points (87) during the regular season. The best defenseman on the Jets, Josh Morrissey (upper body), was injured in the first period of Game 7 and did not return. Scheifele and Morrissey attended Tuesday's optional practice but wore non-contact jerseys. Another player who was injured in Game 7, defenseman Logan Stanley (undisclosed), also wore a non-contact jersey. Morrissey and Stanley left the ice before the official start of practice, but Scheifele remained. All three are considered game-time decisions, Jets coach Scott Arniel said. The Stars will likely get forward Jason Robertson (lower body) back against Winnipeg, but defenseman Miro Heiskanen (knee) will remain out of the lineup. Robertson and Heiskanen each skated during an optional practice Monday and again on Tuesday in Dallas, but Heiskanen did not participate in any drills with the top three pairings, while Robertson was on a line with Mason Marchment and Johnston. Both missed the entire first-round series against the Avalanche. Robertson led Dallas in goals (35) and was second in points (80) during the regular season, while Heiskanen is considered the team's best defenseman.

"It would be really nice to get our full team together," said forward Matt Duchene, who led Dallas with 82 points in 82 regular-season games. "At the same time, we're not counting the hours until we get those guys back. We know we can do it with what we have. We just showed that." The Stars also are expected to be without fourth-line wing Colin Blackwell, who sustained an undisclosed injury in Game 7. Jake Oettinger will continue to start in goal for Dallas. He is 6-4-1 in his career against the Jets with a 2.57 goals-against average and .905 save percentage. He will be opposed by Hellebuyck, who is 14-10-5 in his career against Dallas with a 2.45 GAA and .922 save percentage.

FW Star-Telegram

Stars Make Major Announcement on Jason Robertson Before Jets Series

By Matt Levine Athlon Sports
May 6, 2025

The Dallas Stars survived a first-round scare from the Colorado Avalanche, taking Colorado down in a thrilling Game 7 win. Dallas will now face off against the Winnipeg Jets in the second round, offering them an even tougher challenge. The Stars have been playing with multiple crucial players in the postseason, but the team has found a way to succeed. However, ahead of the series against the Jets, Stars head coach Peter DeBoer "He's close," Stars coach Pete DeBoer said Tuesday regarding the 25-year-old forward, who has not played since sustaining a lower-body injury during a 5-1 loss at the Nashville Predators in the regular-season finale April 16. "We'll see tomorrow morning. It's all in his recovery and how he feels tomorrow." If the Stars could get Richardson back for this series, it could massively swing momentum toward Dallas. Richardson was the leading goal scorer for the Stars this season, putting 35 goals into the back of the net.

His presence on the ice could make a difference against the Jets, giving Dallas some extra offensive firepower. Winnipeg is dealing with some injuries itself, so if the Stars can get healthy, it could change everything. "You take two key players out of anybody's lineup and your team looks different," DeBoer said after the first round. "What I liked about it was, we look different but we found a way, and that's the most important part. "To take the two guys out of our lineup, and what they mean to us in every facet of how we play, and still find a way for the group to not use it as an excuse and keep battling and to grind, I couldn't be prouder of our group because we had to do it a different way." Richardson was able to practice ahead of Game 1, but his status remains unknown. The Stars will provide more information before puck drop on Wednesday.

FW Star-Telegram

Victory+ Sees Over 200,000 viewers During Each of the First Six Games of the Dallas Stars and Colorado Avalanche Match-Up

By ACCESS Newswire
May 6, 2025

DALLAS, TEXAS / ACCESS Newswire / May 6, 2025 / Victory+, the premier sports streaming service owned by A Parent Media Co. Inc. (APMC), saw massive digital viewership during the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, as every game of the Dallas Stars vs. Colorado Avalanche series surpassed 200,000 digital-only viewers, with Game 6 topping 225,000, the highest single-game viewership of the series on the platform.

This milestone demonstrates the success Victory+ has seen during its first NHL season and reinforces excitement for the digital platform's position providing fans with live access for free. The Dallas Stars and Colorado Avalanche delivered one of the most hard-fought and electrifying series of the postseason so far. From last-minute goals to highlight-reel saves and momentum-shifting hits, the showdown was packed with unforgettable moments that had a total of over 1.2 million viewers on the edge of their seats, while watching Victory+. "The Dallas Stars and Colorado Avalanche delivered an unforgettable first-round series, and fans showed up in record numbers," said Neil Gruninger, President & CEO of APMC. "Crossing 200,000 viewers for every game, proves that fans are choosing Victory+ because we meet them where they are, online and with free access." With round two now underway, Victory+ continues to bring fans live games from the Texas Rangers and WHL in addition to thousands of videos of on-demand sports content. For game schedules, exclusive content, and ongoing prize opportunities, visit www.victoryplus.com. ABOUT APMC and Victory+ A Parent Media Co. Inc. (APMC) is a media and technology company focused on providing innovative solutions to consumers and brands. APMC is a leader in Safe Streaming™ delivering an end-to-end solution to brands and platforms with an emphasis on unlocking incremental revenue. Utilizing proprietary streaming and monetization technologies, APMC reaches millions of homes globally through its products including Kidoodle.TV®, Dude Perfect Streaming Service, Glitch+™, Victory+™ and Safe Exchange™. Victory+ a groundbreaking FREE end-to-end, direct to consumer, sports streaming service made for fans, by fans. Featuring free regional broadcasts of various sports teams including the Dallas Stars and Anaheim Ducks, Victory+ is also the home to a library of on-demand, premium sports-based, outdoors, and extreme sports content. Visit www.aparentmedia.com and www.victoryplus.com to learn more.

WFAA

Dallas Stars give keys to winning in Winnipeg

By Michelle Montaine
May 6, 2025

WINNIPEG, MB — The last time the Dallas Stars won Game 1 in a postseason playoff series was in the Western Conference Finals against the Las Vegas Golden Knights in 2023.

Almost two years later, they're trying to win Game 1 of their next playoff series: a second-round matchup against the Winnipeg Jets.

The good news is, they might be getting some reinforcements that could help them achieve the feat.

When asked about lineup decisions, Stars Head Coach Peter DeBoer stated, "Collin Blackwell's probably out [of the lineup] tomorrow." That would seemingly indicate Robertson's return. When asked directly about Robertson, DeBoer responded, "He's close. We'll see tomorrow morning. It's all in his recovery and how he feels tomorrow."

But as a whole, hoping to get one of their best players back isn't the tactic the Stars are taking as they face off against the best team in the NHL all season.

We obtained four keys to winning four games against the Jets in this round, from players and Coach DeBoer.

Mikko Rantanen feels like they need to start strong and frustrate the opponent. "Their building is a tough place to play at," Rantanen said. "They won all four home games against St. Louis, and that was the difference maker in that series."

As for goaltender Jake Oettinger, he feels like they can pull on the series win against the Avalanche. "I think we learned against Colorado [if] we put pucks behind them, and we play the right way, we can beat anyone. If we play 'run and gun,' we can get stung."

For 21-year-old Wyatt Johnston, the forward is acutely aware that "every little thing matters in the playoffs", so he's aiming to "do all the little things that will help do some big things."

And as for the head coach, what is the one thing that Peter DeBoer needs to see the Stars execute for them to win in Winnipeg?

"I think we have to handle the momentum in that building," DeBoer explained. "They really feed off of their crowd and that environment, so we have to manage that and everything that comes with that."