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March 15, 2025

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Columbus Dispatch / Hill trips up Columbus Blue Jackets: 4 takeaways from loss to Vegas Golden Knights

By Brian Hedger- March 15, 2025

A thread the Blue Jackets are clinging to for playoff qualification is getting precariously thin.

A vexing 4-0 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights on Thursday night at sold-out Nationwide Arena removed another strand, but the Jackets haven't fallen from a playoff perch just yet.

Despite losing for the fourth time in five games and for the second time in a row, the Blue Jackets (31-26-8) own the second wild card in the Eastern Conference despite the New York Rangers pulling even at 70 points with a win in Minnesota. The Jackets have the tiebreaker over the Rangers via points percentage, and the two play in Columbus on Saturday night.

The playoffs have already started for the Blue Jackets, and the four teams chasing them, all within three points of the second wild-card spot. Only one will buckle it down, so buckle up for a bumpy ride.

"It's going to be a battle to the finish," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "It's fun for our group to try and win these games and get into the playoffs. It's going to be a battle to the end, but I think we're ready for it."

Here are three takeaways from Thursday night's defeat:

Columbus Blue Jackets stumble over a great start

Hockey can be a strange sport sometimes.

Odd bounces off sticks, skates, boards and various other hard objects make it predictably unpredictable and that's without even digging into its statistical anomalies.

And that's what that smacked the Blue Jackets in the face during the first period against Vegas, sending them to the locker room at the first intermission down 2-0 despite holding a 14-6 edge in shots and 33-9 advantage in attempts.

They dominated in almost every measurable way except for actual goals scored by Nicholas Roy and Brandon Saad, a former Blue Jackets forward who signed with the Golden Knights on Jan. 31 after the St. Louis Blues bought out his contract.

Allowing for some key saves made by Vegas goalie Adin Hill, the best way to describe the Jackets' fortune in that that first period is with a shoulder shrug.

They did almost everything right, still trailed by two goals after 20 minutes and never recovered.

"When it was 8-0 (in shots) and they hadn't had a shot yet and we had, I think it was 33 attempts in the first period to their (nine) ... they get (a power play) and it's like, 'Hmm' right?" Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "So, of course there's (an anxious) feel, and then when it does go in the net, it's like, 'All right,' but I don't think we folded. I don't think we sagged. I just think we didn't have something positive happen after that."

Columbus Blue Jackets scrambling to fix power-play outage

Neither of the Blue Jackets' special teams have been special of late, but the power play is the biggest concern.

After going 0 for 3 against the Golden Knights, the Jackets are 4 of 43 (9.3%) since losing Sean Monahan to a wrist injury Jan. 7 in Pittsburgh.

Evason and his coaching staff shifted some things around before facing Vegas, including Boone Jenner flip-flopping with Dmitry Voronkov for the top groups' net-front spot, but nothing worked. The Blue Jackets generated six shots on goal during six minutes of power-play time, but Hill stopped all six. That included a four-minute power play late in the first with Vegas up 1-0 on Roy's goal.

"They have video, too, right?" Evason said. "We changed the personnel, but we've talked about where to position people. ... At the end of the day, we had some looks. We've just got to finish, right? It's just got to go in the net, and it hasn't for a bit now."

Fischer makes Columbus Blue Jackets debut, Chinakhov sits

Christian Fischer played his first game with the Blue Jackets after being claimed off waivers from the Detroit Red Wings on March 6. Watching games in New York and New Jersey prior to his debut Thursday gave Fischer a look at the Blue Jackets' systems and structure, which he saw at ice level Thursday.

Fischer skated at right wing on the fourth line with center Sean Kuraly and left wing Zach Aston-Reese, finishing the night with 9:39 ice time on 12 shifts. Fischer's debut, meanwhile, forced Yegor Chinakhov out of the lineup as a healthy scratch. Chinakhov's return from a back injury that sidelined him for 39 games was paused for a reset after struggling, while Fischer at 6 feet 2 and 212 pounds brings a hard-nosed style to the fourth line that could mesh with better Kuraly and Aston-Reese.

"We just believe he plays like we play," Evason said. "He plays the game hard, plays on the inside, finishes checks, plays right, great teammate. That's all we're asking. We're just asking everybody to play the same way, the right way, how we play and give us a chance to win."

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Erik Gudbranson nearing return

Jake Christiansen, a young defenseman who's played all 65 games for the Blue Jackets, won't play against the Rangers on Saturday.

After sustaining an undisclosed upper-body injury midway through the second period, Christiansen left the bench and didn't return. His absence against New York creates a vacancy on the blue line that will be filled by Jack Johnson, Jordan Harris or possibly even Erik Gudbranson, who is practicing without contact limitations.

"He's in full practice now, so it'll just be evaluation and communicating with him," Evason said. "We'll go through the process and when he gets in there, he'll be ready to go."

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Everything But A Blue Jackets Goal, Offense Dies On That Hill, Urgent Times

By Will Chase- March 15, 2025

Following a 1-3-0 road trip, the Columbus Blue Jackets returned to the friendly confines of Nationwide Arena just in time.

They just didn't get the result they were seeking.

Adin Hill made 27 saves for his 11th career shutout and the Vegas Golden Knights beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-0 Thursday night at Nationwide Arena.

Columbus fell to 8-3-1 at Nationwide Arena since New Year's Day and 20-7-4 overall.

Everything But A Blue Jackets Goal

Columbus needed a better start in this one than Tuesday's 5-3 loss to the New Jersey Devils in which they surrendered three first-period goals.

It's hard to start more sound than they did against Vegas, doing everything but getting a goal or two.

The Blue Jackets outshot the Golden Knights 8-0 and had an 18-0 shot attempt advantage.

That came to a halt on the Golden Knights power play at 12:00 of the first period when Nicolas Roy (9) scored on the Knights' first shot attempt of the game. Jack Eichel became the Knights' all-time point leader in a single season with his 59th assist and 79th point, passing former Blue Jacket William Karlsson (78 points, 2017-18) as Eichel extended his seven-game point streak (one goal, nine assists). Tomas Hertl (26) added the secondary assist.

As much as the Jackets offense possessed the puck and swarmed the Knights' zone, they could not solve Hill in the crease while on the power play, including a double minor, or at 5v5.

Former Blue Jacket Brandon Saad has resurfaced with the Golden Knights and made his old team pay with his 12th goal at 19:01 of the first. Reilly Smith added his 21st assist and Roy (15) picked up his second point with the assist.

You cannot win without offense but Hill was perfect as the Jackets had a 33-9 advantage in shot attempts and a 14-6 shot total through one. Columbus had 13 total shots on net through the next two periods and was outshot 29-27 for the game.

Offense Dies On That Hill

Hill was the story in this one.

While the Jackets' skaters were basically skating laps around Vegas in the first period, Hill did everything to thwart the Columbus attack and stifle shooters.

That was the theme of the night.

In the second period, things leveled out a bit, and Columbus was down 3-0 through the first 40 minutes.

Pavel Dorofeyev scored his 26th at 12:17 to extend his three-game point streak (two goals, two assists). Hertl (27) and Saad (12) each picked up their second points of the game. Alex Pietrangelo (4) scored the empty netter at 15:38 of the third period. Keegan Kolesar (14) and Brayden McNabb (12) nailed down the assists.

Hill recorded his career-high fourth shutout of the season, tied for the league lead. Three of the last four Knights wins have come via shutout. Elvis Merzlikins made 25 saves.

Dire Times

Since the Blue Jackets' 4-0-0 stretch following the 4 Nations Face-Off, Columbus is now 1-4-0 in its last five games. They've surrendered at least three goals in each game, and at least four in all but one. Columbus has been shut out twice in the last four games, which happened at the Florida Panthers last week 3-0.

The Jackets have pivotal rematches against the New York Rangers on Saturday, the Devils on Monday, and the Panthers next Thursday, all at Nationwide Arena.

The Rangers beat the Minnesota Wild 3-2 in overtime on Thursday to pull even with Columbus at 70 points. The Jackets still hold down the second wild-card spot, with the Montreal Canadiens a point behind, and the Detroit Red Wings and Boston Bruins two points back. The Ottawa Senators beat the Bruins 5-3, leading the first wild card spot with 75 points.

Jake Christiansen has played in every game this season but has been ruled out of Saturday's contest after leaving Thursday's game with an upper-body injury. Christian Fischer made his season debut for the Blue Jackets. He had four hits and played 9:39. Fischer has four career goals at Nationwide Arena including a hat trick, which happened when he was with the Arizona Coyotes on Oct. 23, 2018.

Final Date With Rangers

The Jackets conclude their season series with a rematch against the Rangers on Saturday, Mar. 15 at 7 p.m. ET from Nationwide Arena.

The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: Stars take over top spot as we celebrate the league's OGs

By Dom Luszczyzyn and James Mirtle- March 15, 2025

One of the strangest things after any trade deadline is seeing players who have played on just one team for a very long time don another jersey.

Ray Bourque in Avalanche burgundy, Brian Leetch in Maple Leafs blue and white, Jarome Iginla in Penguins black and gold — the list goes on. And you can add Brad Marchand in Panthers red to that list once he finally suits up for Florida.

That thought served as inspiration for this week's Power Rankings: An ode to the OGs. We check in with some of the longest-tenured players from each team and see how they're doing. The special bonus is that we've got The Athletic's own OG, James Mirtle, taking the reins for the week as Sean gets some much-needed time off.

1. Dallas Stars, 42-20-2

Last week: 2

Mirtle rank: 1

Dom rank: 1

The OG: Jamie Benn

The Stars captain has been here so long that he was teammates with Mike Modano and Marty Turco. That was ages ago, and Benn serves as a bridge between eras of greatness.

The 35-year-old is still searching for his own taste of glory and remains an incredibly effective top-six caliber player. His play-driving may have dropped off a bit this season, but on Dallas' third line, he's a luxury that helps with the team's depth advantage. For an old-timer, he still provides a lot of value and would be one of the top OGWAC (old guy without a Cup) candidates to root for this postseason.

2. Florida Panthers, 41-22-3

Last week: 4

Mirtle rank: 2

Dom rank: 2

The OG: Dmitry Kulikov

He may have left in 2016 to go on a nomadic expedition across the NHL (seven teams in seven seasons!) but Kulikov is the original Panther on this roster. He was drafted in 2009 and spent seven seasons with the team, back when the Panthers weren't exactly a destination franchise.

In his second tour of Florida, Kulikov has proven himself a steady defensive presence with a plus-3.0 Defensive Rating. The addition of Seth Jones pushes him to the third pair, where he's better served, but to his credit, Kulikov was pretty solid in the top four this season. It's a testament to the team's depth that the Panthers can deploy Kulikov lower in the lineup. After struggling with too heavy a burden in his first run with the Panthers, Kulikov has carved out a nice role for himself in his second Sunrise stint.

3. Winnipeg Jets, 45-17-4

Last week: 1

Mirtle rank: 3

Dom rank: 3

The OG: Mark Scheifele

The inaugural first-round pick for Jets 2.0 is still going strong. Scheifele is on pace for 43 goals and 89 points, both career highs, and turns the ripe old age of 32 on Saturday.

Now all he needs is some postseason glory, as his 42 career playoff games are a tough, Thrashers-like ratio compared to 863 in the regular season. The good news is his goalie is playing like a Hart Trophy candidate and the Jets are on track for a franchise-record 117 points, so maybe this is his year.

4. Washington Capitals, 43-14-8

Last week: 3

Mirtle rank: 4

Dom rank: 5

The OG: Alex Ovechkin

The ultimate of the OGs on this list. Ovechkin has played an incredible 1,476 regular-season games as a Capital, putting him fifth on the all-time list of NHL players who spent their entire career with just one franchise. The folks ahead of him? Nick Lidstrom, Alex Delvecchio and Steve Yzerman from the Red Wings, and Shane Doan with the Jets/Coyotes.

Ovechkin is just 89 games from moving to the top of that list, meaning he can set yet another NHL record next year. Which, coincidentally, Ovechkin has hinted will be his last in the NHL.

5. Vegas Golden Knights, 39-19-7

Last week: 5

Mirtle rank: 6

Dom rank: 4

The OGs: William Karlsson, Reilly Smith, Shea Theodore and Brayden McNabb

Poor Jonathan Marchessault lost his OG crown by grabbing the bag in struggling NashVegas in the offseason. But four Golden Misfits remain from that remarkable 2017 expansion draft, when the Golden Knights laid the foundation for a team that went to the finals in year one and won the Stanley Cup in year six.

The OG of the OGs is probably McNabb given he leads the Misfits with 566 games out of the 601 played by Vegas in franchise history, meaning he's missed an average of just four games a season while logging 20 tough, physical minutes every night.

This season? No games missed and 20:13 a night in ice time. Like clockwork. He's a really underrated defensive defenseman.

6. Colorado Avalanche, 39-24-3

Last week: 9

Mirtle rank: 5

Dom rank: 6

The OG: Erik Johnson

One of the best stories from the deadline was Johnson's return to Colorado. Johnson spent 13 seasons with the Avalanche and won the Stanley Cup with them in 2022 — now he's back for more after a two-year stint away.

Kudos to Flyers GM Daniel Briere for doing Johnson a solid and sending him back where he belongs for another Cup run. Johnson may not offer much on-ice value at this stage of his career, but off the ice, it's clear that Colorado's vibes-per-60 went way up after the deal. Johnson knows his role will be limited, but it's his veteran attitude that might be able to help put the team over the top. He's a leader.

Erik Johnson: "I'm willing to do anything here. Play 5, 10, 15 minutes."

7. Carolina Hurricanes, 39-22-4

Last week: 7

Mirtle rank: 8

Dom rank: 7

The OG: Jordan Staal

Incredibly, the blockbuster trade that sent Staal from the Penguins to the Canes for Brandon Sutter, Brian Dumoulin and a first-round pick was 13 years ago.

We'll give Carolina the edge in that one, as the captain has been a horse for them ever since.

Now 36 and the last of the Staal brothers still going, Jordan is on pace to top 40 points for the first time since 2017-18 and has a remarkable 94 percent defensive rating. All that for a bargain, too: \$2.9 million for two more years.

8. Tampa Bay Lightning, 37-23-5

Last week: 6

Mirtle rank: 7

Dom rank: 9

The OG: Victor Hedman

This could've been Steven Stamkos' spot, but we know how that turned out (and it looks like the right call for Tampa Bay given what Stamkos has accomplished this season). Stamkos' departure leaves Hedman as Tampa Bay's longest-tenured player and he's once again been a force for the Lightning.

While Hedman's production has dropped from last year's 80-point pace, that drop has been a worthy sacrifice in the name of his defensive game. After a couple seasons of questionable impact without the puck, Hedman's defensive value is back on track this season. The re-acquisition of Ryan McDonagh probably helps a lot there as that's eased Hedman's burden. Either way, it looks like the 34-year-old has turned back the clock this season.

9. Toronto Maple Leafs, 39-23-3

Last week: 8

Mirtle rank: 10

Dom rank: 8

The OG: Morgan Rielly

It's been an ugly season for the Leafs' No.5 pick from way back in the 2012 Kessel-Phaneuf-18-wheeler era. Rielly turned only 31 last week, so he's not old, per se, but his game certainly is looking its age, given how much he relies on speed on the counterattack.

But the coaching change is a big factor in Toronto, too, as Craig Berube's no-rush style has Rielly on pace for his worst offensive output since he was a kid. The minus-19 stands out, too.

The Leafs are hoping trade deadline big swing Brandon Carlo can be the partner Rielly's needed all year, but the early returns have been a bit tough. The good news is Rielly has tended to elevate his play in the postseason, something you can't say for many Leafs these days.

10. Edmonton Oilers, 37-24-4

Last week: 10

Mirtle rank: 9

Dom rank: 11

The OG: Ryan Nugent-Hopkins

You may not have heard much of Nugent-Hopkins' name this season and that's part of the problem in Edmonton right now. After scoring 104 points two seasons ago and putting up a respectable 67 last season, Nugent-Hopkins has struggled mightily on offense with just 39 points in 64 games this season. That's a 50-point pace, an unacceptable amount given how much time he spends next to Connor McDavid.

To Nugent-Hopkins' credit, he's putting up one of his best defensive seasons, but his job in the top six depends on him creating offense. With how barren the bottom six is, he needs to bring a lot more to the table down the stretch and in the playoffs. Otherwise, the Oilers won't go far.

11. Los Angeles Kings, 34-20-9

Last week: 12

Mirtle rank: 11

Dom rank: 10

The OG: Anze Kopitar

Patrice Bergeron and Jonathan Toews may be gone from their teams, but Anze Kopitar is still rocking it for the Kings. This is Kopitar's 19th season with the Kings. He's been a consistent marvel for the team and that has yet to change at 37. Kopitar is once again scoring at a near 70-point pace and the Kings are once again earning over 55 percent of the goals in his minutes. You can set a watch to Kopitar's impact for the Kings.

That said, the transition to the Kings no longer being "his team" looks well underway. Relative to teammates, Kopitar's impact on xG differential is minus-0.3 per 60 — a career low. He's also seeing less of the tough minutes he's used to soaking up.

It's a testament to Kopitar's greatness that it took 19 years to get to this point, though. The sun may be starting to set for him, but if that means a 65-to-70-point season and outscoring opponents considerably, then the Kings still have time before it hits the horizon. Kopitar still rules.

12. Ottawa Senators, 35-25-5

Last week: 15

Mirtle rank: 12

Dom rank: 12

The OG: Thomas Chabot

Chabot is 28 years old and the only Senator who's been around long enough to have played games in 2016-17. He's also still pushing for his first-ever playoff appearance, which has been looking more likely of late given the way Ottawa has played.

Health has been an issue at times for the silky-smooth defender, but he's put together a solid campaign this season, logging 23 minutes a game. Chabot should hit the 500-game mark next week, making him just the fourth Senators defenseman ever to get there (Chris Phillips, Wade Redden and Erik Karlsson).

13. New Jersey Devils, 36-25-6

Last week: 13

Mirtle rank: 13

Dom rank: 13

The OG: Nico Hischier

Can you be an OG at 26 years old? Apparently!

It shows how much the Devils roster has turned over throughout this rebuild that Hischier and Jesper Bratt lead the way in longevity with 500ish games in New Jersey. Both have evolved through some lean years into superstars, with Bratt sitting tied for 11th in league scoring and Hischier on pace for nearly 35 goals.

They're going to have to find another gear, however, with Jack Hughes out, to keep the Devils relevant in the postseason. Good thing they're young and under reasonable contracts for a bit here, as this roster has potential if it can stay healthy one of these years.

14. Minnesota Wild, 37-24-5

Last week: 11

Mirtle rank: 14

Dom rank: 14

The OG: Jared Spurgeon

He debuted so long ago he was part of a D-corps with Brent Burns and Cam Barker. And, we'll be honest, the first time some of us saw him in the dressing room, we weren't sure if he was a player or not.

But the 2008 (!) sixth-rounder (!) from the Islanders (?) has had a terrific career despite his diminutive size, to the point that he can hit the 1,000-game mark with good health next season. Spurgeon has had a very solid bounce-back campaign after missing most of last season due to hip and back surgeries, playing big minutes and posting an impressive 95 percent defensive rating at 35.

Spurgeon sits just 111 games from passing Mikko Koivu into first all-time for the franchise.

15. Vancouver Canucks, 30-24-11

Last week: 14

Mirtle rank: 16

Dom rank: 15

The OG: Brock Boeser

The OG's of the league deserve respect, and it feels like Vancouver's highly public lack of it toward Brock Boeser speaks volumes about the current state of the franchise. And we know they're reading this so we'd just like to say "Hi Vancouver front office! Welcome to the Power Rankings!"

In fairness, the Canucks were in a bit of a pickle with Boeser. He probably isn't an \$8 million player and he should've been valuable enough to command a decent package via trade. But maybe don't air that out so publicly?

Allvin pressed by @FarhanLaljiTSN about what he could have got in a trade for Boeser.

Farhan: "Was there really no interest in him?"

Boeser is having a down year after a career season in 2023-24, but so is almost everyone else on the Canucks. The longest-tenured Canuck has endured a lot during his time in Vancouver. Having his name dragged through the mud by the GM after not dealing him from the only city he's ever played for shouldn't have been one of them.

16. Columbus Blue Jackets, 31-26-8

Last week: 17

Mirtle rank: 15

Dom rank: 18

The OG: Boone Jenner

The 2011 second-rounder has quietly become the Jackets' heart-and-soul leader, captain and all-time franchise games played leader. He's played only nine games this season due to injury but has posted a point per game, stepping into a key role as the 2C and on the top PP and PK units.

Despite never topping 49 points in his career, Jenner does it all for this team, and his return could be a big part of them sneaking into a wild-card spot.

17. New York Rangers, 32-28-6

Last week: 16

Mirtle rank: 18

Dom rank: 16

The OG: J.T. Miller

It's the year of the reunion, and for Miller, it's really good to be back. Miller's Rangers roots go back to the 2012-13 season, when he made his debut alongside Chris Kreider. He carved out a nice niche for himself in his first six seasons with the team, but it wasn't until he left that he became the star forward he is now. Leave it to the Rangers to ditch a player before his prime kicks off and re-acquire him just as it's ending.

The Rangers still have a long road ahead of them to make the playoffs, but Miller's addition has added a spark to the team. Miller has seven goals and 17 points in 16 games with New York while having average possession impacts at five-on-five. AKA: The usual.

18. Utah HC, 29-25-11

Last week: 19

Mirtle rank: 17

Dom rank: 17

The OG: Clayton Keller

We suppose Josh Doan has been with the organization since 2002, although his old man Shane gets the OG credit for that association.

Keller has been a force for the Utahns all season, but especially of late. The seventh pick in 2016, he struggled initially as a Coyote, bottoming out with just 35 points four years ago. Since then, however, he hasn't looked back, and this season's heroics have him into the top 10 in NHL scoring after piling up 33 points in his last 23 games.

He's one of the league's most fun players to watch when he's on. It would be nice to see him rewarded with a chance to shine in the postseason.

19. Montreal Canadiens, 31-27-7

Last week: 22

Mirtle rank: 19

Dom rank: 20

The OG: Brendan Gallagher

Back in the day, Brendan Gallagher was one of the original analytics darlings. A million years later, that hasn't changed. This season, Gallagher's impact on expected goal differential is plus-0.74 per 60, a career high and a top-five mark in hockey.

That doesn't mean he's a secret star or anything as he's lost the scoring touch that once made him special. But it does mean he's doing a fantastic job in Montreal's bottom six. By Net Rating, Gallagher's plus-1.5 is actually one of the best marks on the team this year. Montreal's OG still rocks.

20. Calgary Flames, 30-23-11

Last week: 20

Mirtle rank: 21

Dom rank: 19

The OG: Mikael Backlund

Unlucky for Calgary's playoff hopes is that Mikael Backlund got hurt in the team's last game against the Canucks, playing just 2:58. If he's out for any stretch of time, that's bad news for a club that needs all hands on deck given its lack of talent. Backlund may not bring much to the table offensively anymore (just 24 points in 63 games), but he remains an excellent defensive forward. That's always been his bread and butter and the Flames will need it down the stretch.

21. Detroit Red Wings, 31-28-6

Last week: 18

Mirtle rank: 20

Dom rank: 22

The OG: Dylan Larkin

Larkin has been a Red Wing for so long he's actually played playoff games for them. Just five of them, sure, but that's more than anyone else could say.

Larkin was supposed to serve as the bridge between eras, but there have been some unfortunate heavy construction delays. That Larkin, now 28, made his debut at 19 and hasn't been back to the playoffs since shows what a truly slow process this has been in Detroit. While the Red Wings have made some strides over the last two seasons, it still hasn't been enough. They have just a seven percent chance to make the playoffs this season.

That's not on Larkin, either. Over the last two seasons, he's shown he can be a true 1C, the kind you can win with and the kind you can build around. Larkin is a consistent point-per-game threat and a decent play-driver, both impressive feats given the lack of talent around him. It's that lack of talent that's held Detroit back.

Good things are on the horizon, but it is a bit heartbreaking for Larkin, who has endured a lot of losing in his 20s. He deserves better and hopefully he sees it in his 30s.

22. St. Louis Blues, 31-28-7

Last week: 23

Mirtle rank: 22

Dom rank: 21

The OG: Colton Parayko

Still only 31, Parayko has impressively already climbed to third all-time in Blues games played among defensemen, trailing just Barret Jackman and Alex Pietrangelo, both of whom he can pass next season.

We saw a lot of hopeful fan bases (especially in Toronto) throwing around Parayko's name before the trade deadline, but the big man wasn't ever going anywhere, not when he's still able to eat difficult minutes and more than earn his \$6.5 million salary.

The Blues have a lot of holes to fill if they're going to successfully pull off the retool on the fly, but a big, bruising top-pair defenseman is not going to be one of them.

They're in the thick of the playoff race now, and with Parayko likely sidelined for the rest of the season, we're about to see just how vital he is to the Blues.

23. New York Islanders, 29-28-7

Last week: 21

Mirtle rank: 23

Dom rank: 23

The OG: Casey Cizikas and Matt Martin

Not many franchises carry the same fourth-liners for 850-plus games, but the Islanders are a special case. Martin, 35, was a fifth-round pick way back in 2008 and has missed a lot of the season with injury.

Cizikas, 34, was a fourth-rounder a year later and has made it into every game this season in a depth role.

Cizikas still has another two years on his contract, so he has a good shot at becoming only the fourth player ever to hit 1,000 games as an Islander. Martin, however, might have a hard time landing another contract given he's averaged just 7:47 a game this season.

But it's probably time to turn the page on a lot of things on Long Island, given how it's going.

24. Boston Bruins, 30-29-8

Last week: 25

Mirtle rank: 24

Dom rank: 24

The OG: David Pastrnak

No more Brad Marchand means it's time for a new OG in Boston. And with so much turnover from the previous era, it's now the young man from all those competitive teams, Pasta, who takes up the mantle.

But what is he leading now with this franchise after the deadline sell-off? A retool? A rebuild? Is the Bruins' long, impressive run, with more regular-season points than anyone the past decade, finally over?

At 28, Pastrnak is still in his prime. And he's had a monster season, sitting fifth in league scoring, just behind Connor McDavid, on pace for 100 points yet again. But how long will it be until he plays in big, meaningful postseason games again?

25. Philadelphia Flyers, 28-31-8

Last week: 26

Mirtle rank: 26

Dom rank: 25

The OG: Sean Couturier

There was a time when Couturier was one of the best two-way centers in the world, but injuries have derailed that. While you probably haven't heard much about him since (save for when he's being healthy scratched by Torts), Couturier is still doing his job as an excellent two-way center — just in a more muted way than at his peak. On a contending team, he might still be a quality middle-six center, but on the Flyers he's sort of just faded into the background.

26. Nashville Predators, 25-32-7

Last week: 29

Mirtle rank: 25

Dom rank: 27

The OG: Roman Josi

Josi took over as the Predators' all-time games-played leader last month, rocketing past David Legwand for that coveted honor. But it's been a tough season to set the milestone mark, to say the least.

Josi remains a special player offensively, but Nashville has been filled in defensively with him out there this season. How much of that is whom he's been playing with and how much of it is simply being 34 is

hard to parse at this point, but in a sea of troubling developments for the Preds, the fact their best player has been closer to OK all year is concerning given he still has three years on his contract at more than \$9 million a season.

Nashville is at a big-time crossroads this offseason, and it's anyone's guess what comes next. But it feels like just about everything is on the table. Including the captain.

27. Pittsburgh Penguins, 27-31-10

Last week: 28

Mirtle rank: 28

Dom rank: 26

The OG: Sidney Crosby

Who knew that 20 years later we'd still be talking about Crosby and Ovechkin? That duo defined an era and now they continue to dominate the next one — even with some salt and pepper in their hair.

Though all eyes are on Ovechkin now for his Gr8 chase, Crosby is quietly on track to break a Wayne Gretzky record of his own: most consecutive point-per-game seasons. It may not be as illustrious as “most goals ever” but it's still absolutely wild that Crosby will likely be a point-per-game player for 20 straight seasons. Consistency has always been one of the hallmarks of his game, and setting this record would be a perfect symbol of that. Crosby: the player who always delivered.

28. Anaheim Ducks, 28-30-7

Last week: 24

Mirtle rank: 27

Dom rank: 28

The OG: John Gibson

Somehow, Gibson did not get traded at the deadline. That's cool for the Ducks — their tandem has been among the league's best this season — but it would've been cool to see what Gibson could bring to a playoff team. This season finally felt right in terms of the Ducks having a steady in-house replacement (Lukas Dostal) and Gibson finally playing up to his reputation. He may have had some tough seasons lately, but it's easy to believe he's still got it given his work this season. In 26 games, Gibson has 10.7 goals above expected, one of the better per-game marks in the league.

29. Seattle Kraken, 28-34-4

Last week: 30

Mirtle rank: 29

Dom rank: 29

The OGs: The Seattle Seven

With Yanni Gourde gone, seven players remain from Seattle's original roster: Jared McCann, Jordan Eberle, Jaden Schwartz, Vince Dunn, Adam Larsson, Jamie Oleksiak and Philipp Grubauer.

Seattle has had a fairly underwhelming season, so you'd be forgiven if you haven't paid much attention to any of these guys. But there's also not much to write home about for any of them either. McCann and

Dunn haven't been nearly as effective as in years past. Eberle, Schwartz and Larsson have been mid. Oleksiak has struggled. And Grubauer is, well, Grubauer.

Compared to Vegas' Golden Misfits, this group seriously pales in comparison. The future is in the hands of Matty Beniers and Shane Wright — will any of the OGs even remain by the time that future is competitive? It doesn't look likely.

30. Buffalo Sabres, 25-33-6

Last week: 27

Mirtle rank: 30

Dom rank: 30

The OG: Rasmus Dahlin

Dom left me some notes for this one, which should be helpful given we're more than 4,000 words in.

holds up card

squints

"Lot of time spent on a bad hockey team, but he rules."

That about sums it up, unfortunately, for Dahlin. He is already closing in on 500 games of awfulness in Buffalo, and you can't help but feel sorry for him given the waste of talent there. Dahlin is already a top-five NHL defenseman, somehow outplaying his \$11 million salary, but how do you get Norris Trophy votes and other leaguewide accolades when your team is doing whatever it is the Sabres are year to year? Instead, often what happens is the best players get blamed, even when they have little to work with.

Dahlin was quick to shoot down rumors this week he wanted out but would anyone blame him if that were the case? Here's hoping for better days, for his (and the fans') sake.

31. Chicago Blackhawks, 20-36-9

Last week: 31

Mirtle rank: 31

Dom rank: 31

The OG: Teuvo Teräväinen

Rebuilds aren't kind to OG status. Only Connor Murphy has continuously been with Chicago longer than five seasons, and he was acquired in the Niklas Hjalmarsson trade way back in 2017.

But we'll go with Teräväinen as the OG given he's had a shockingly productive season with the rebuilding Blackhawks in his second go-round with the franchise. A first-rounder back in 2012, Teräväinen won the Cup as a rookie in 2015 and was immediately a cap casualty, going to Carolina for eight seasons before he signed a three-year UFA deal for \$5.4 million to come "home" this past summer.

Teräväinen has somehow piled up 50 points for the low-scoring Hawks, setting himself up to be a nice rental for someone a year or two from now.

32. San Jose Sharks, 17-40-9

Last week: 32

Mirtle rank: 32

Dom rank: 32

The OG: Marc-Edouard Vlasic

Thankfully, just one year is left on Marc-Edouard Vlasic's deal. The former best defensive defenseman in the league has obviously had a tough few years, and this season hasn't been very different. Vlasic plays the team's easiest minutes these days and still gets badly outscored in them.

Interestingly, Vlasic has posted his strongest relative xG impact (plus-0.43 per 60) since 2013-14 this year. While that's not saying much on a truly bad Sharks team, it could indicate that he still has some game left in him — albeit in a very sheltered role. Not that we'll ever see it again on an actually good team, given he's 37 and still has that one year left.

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: Who wins the Central Division?

By ESPN staff- March 15, 2025

As has been the case for the past few campaigns, the Central Division includes multiple top-tier Stanley Cup contenders this season. Going simply by points percentage, the Central boasts the second- (Winnipeg Jets) and third-best (Dallas Stars) teams in the league, as well as the eighth (Colorado Avalanche).

Those first two clubs face off Friday night (8 p.m. ET, NHL Network), with one additional matchup on the schedule (April 10 in Dallas). The Jets and Stars have split the season series thus far, and Winnipeg holds the No. 1 spot in the division, with 94 points and 37 regulation wins in 66 games. Dallas is not out of range to make a run at that spot, with 86 points and 35 RW in 64 games.

Neither team wants to match up against Colorado in the first round, as the Avs loaded up (again) at the trade deadline, including deals for Brock Nelson and Charlie Coyle. Colorado is at 81 points and 34 RW through 66 games and theoretically could catch the other two teams, but it would need losing streaks out of its opponents to make much of a dent. The Avs visit the Calgary Flames on Friday (9 p.m. ET, ESPN+).

How do the projections see this playing out for the rest of the season -- and beyond? StatHletes projects the three teams to finish in the exact same order: Jets (115.2 points), Stars (106.7) and Avalanche (103.0). But, of those three clubs, the Avs have the highest chance of winning it all (15.3%), followed by the Jets (8.8%) and Stars (2.4%).

There is a lot of runway left until April 17, the final day of the regular season, and we'll help you keep track of it all with the NHL playoff watch. As we traverse the final stretch, we'll provide details on all the playoff races, along with the teams jockeying for position in the 2025 NHL draft lottery.

The NHL uses a draft lottery to determine the order of the first round, so the team that finishes in last place is not guaranteed the No. 1 selection. As of 2021, a team can move up a maximum of 10 spots if it wins the lottery, so only 11 teams are eligible for the No. 1 pick. Full details on the process are here. Matthew Schaefer, a defenseman for the OHL's Erie Otters, is No. 1 on the draft board.

1. San Jose Sharks

Points: 45

Regulation wins: 13

2. Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 49

Regulation wins: 17

3. Buffalo Sabres

Points: 56

Regulation wins: 21

4. Nashville Predators

Points: 57

Regulation wins: 21

5. Seattle Kraken
Points: 60
Regulation wins: 22

6. Anaheim Ducks
Points: 63
Regulation wins: 20

7. Philadelphia Flyers
Points: 64
Regulation wins: 17

8. Pittsburgh Penguins
Points: 64
Regulation wins: 18

9. New York Islanders
Points: 65
Regulation wins: 23

10. Boston Bruins
Points: 68
Regulation wins: 23

11. Detroit Red Wings
Points: 68
Regulation wins: 23

12. Utah Hockey Club
Points: 69
Regulation wins: 21

13. Montreal Canadiens
Points: 69
Regulation wins: 22

14. St. Louis Blues
Points: 69
Regulation wins: 22

15. New York Rangers
Points: 70
Regulation wins: 29

16. Vancouver Canucks

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 23

ESPN / NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, each team's playoff heroes

By ESPN staff- March 15, 2025

Reactions

With the NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments right around the corner, we were inspired for a little March Madness of our own.

Specifically, who are the postseason tournament legends for all 32 NHL teams? With the help of the NHL's official records site, here are the top career playoff scorers for each of the league's teams.

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

Note: Previous ranking for each team refers to the previous edition,

Published March 7. Points percentages are through Thursday's games.

1. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 71.21%

Alex Ovechkin. Who else could it be? As he chases down that other record this regular season, Ovi eyes another long postseason run where he can add to his franchise-leading career total of 141 points in 151 playoff games.

Next seven days: @ SJ (March 15), vs. DET (March 18), vs. PHI (March 20)

2. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 71.21%

Blake Wheeler. It's here we mention that this franchise's totals include their heritage as the Atlanta Thrashers: Keith Tkachuk and Pascal Dupuis each had three points in their lone playoff appearance, a sweep, in 2007. At least for right now, Wheeler holds the franchise record for postseason points, with 39 in 44 games. It's only for "right now" because Mark Scheifele (38 in 42) and Kyle Connor (32 in 45) are in striking distance.

Next seven days: vs. DAL (March 14), @ SEA (March 16), @ VAN (March 18), @ EDM (March 20)

3. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 67.19%

Mike Modano. With a career that spanned both locations in franchise history, Modano's 145 points in 174 career playoff games is well ahead of second-place Brian Bellows (83 in 81). Captain Jamie Benn leads the list among current Stars (77 in 102).

Next seven days: @ WPG (March 14), @ COL (March 16), vs. ANA (March 18), vs. TB (March 20)

4. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 65.38%

Jonathan Marchessault. Tied with his fellow original Golden Misfit William Karlsson for the playoff games played mark (95), the 2023 Conn Smythe winner edges his former linemate out 75 to 65 in the points column. The recently re-acquired Reilly Smith (66) and Karlsson can both make up some ground this spring.

Next seven days: @ BUF (March 15), @ DET (March 16), vs. BOS (March 20)

5. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 64.39%

Aleksander Barkov. The top of the Panthers' career playoff scoring list is mostly composed of their current core, and who better to hold the top spot than the player who has helped bring them from laughingstock to perennial Cup contender? Barkov sits at 59 points in 71 playoff games, with more to come this spring.

Next seven days: @ MTL (March 15), @ NYI (March 16), @ CBJ (March 20)

6. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 63.08%

Sebastian Aho. There have been a lot of great players to suit up for the Whalers/Hurricanes franchise through the years, but there's a clear leader in postseason scoring: current star Aho, who has 70 points in 74 playoff games.

Next seven days: vs. DET (March 14), @ PHI (March 15), @ SJ (March 20)

7. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 62.31%

Doug Gilmour. By the end of their time in Toronto, Mitch Marner (50 points in 57 playoff games), Auston Matthews (48 in 55) or William Nylander (43 in 54) may make a run at this one. But for now, Gilmour -- with 77 points in 52 postseason games -- is well ahead.

Next seven days: vs. OTT (March 15), vs. CGY (March 17), vs. COL (March 19), @ NYR (March 20)

8. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 61.36%

Joe Sakic. By the end of his career, Nathan MacKinnon -- who has 114 points in 88 career playoff games - - may earn this franchise mark, but for now he's behind Sakic (188 in 172) and fellow Hall of Famer Peter Forsberg (159 in 140).

Next seven days: @ CGY (March 14), vs. DAL (March 16), @ TOR (March 19), @ OTT (March 20)

9. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 61.72%

Nikita Kucherov. No shock here, as the dynamic winger who typically eclipses 100 points each regular season is well ahead on the franchise's career playoff leaderboard. His 167 points in 147 playoff games is 50 ahead of No. 2 Victor Hedman (117 in 165).

Next seven days: @ BOS (March 15), vs. PHI (March 17), @ DAL (March 20)

10. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 60.94%

Wayne Gretzky. Among many, many other records, The Great One holds the lead on the Oilers' playoff scoring chart, with an almost comical 252 points in 120 playoff games. Connor McDavid leads current Oilers, with 117 in 74.

Next seven days: @ NYI (March 14), @ NYR (March 16), vs. UTA (March 18), vs. WPG (March 20)

11. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 61.72%

Wayne Gretzky. Yes, The Great One holds this record for two different teams. His 94 points in 60 playoff games is the best in L.A.'s history, but Anze Kopitar could break this one with another few trips -- he's at 80 through 97 games, with the Kings headed to the playoffs again this season.

Next seven days: vs. NSH (March 15), @ MIN (March 17), @ CHI (March 20)

12. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 10

Points percentage: 59.85%

Zach Parise. A player who many associate with the "new" hockey franchise in Minnesota, Parise still holds the playoff scoring lead, with 37 points in 44 games. Current leader Jared Spurgeon has a chance to set a new mark, as he has 29 through 67, with the Wild likely to reach the playoffs again this season.

Next seven days: vs. STL (March 15), vs. LA (March 17), vs. SEA (March 19)

13. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 58.21%

Patrik Elias. It's somewhat hard to believe that Elias is still not in the Hockey Hall of Fame but his No. 26 hangs in the rafters at the Prudential Center. He is atop the Devils' postseason scoring list, with 125 points in 162 playoff games.

Next seven days: @ PIT (March 15), @ CBJ (March 17), vs. CGY (March 20)

14. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 57.69%

Daniel Alfredsson. A mainstay during Senators playoff runs of years past -- who scored 100 points in 121 postseason contests -- Alfredsson is now behind the bench as an assistant coach as the team hopes to return this spring.

Next seven days: @ TOR (March 15), @ MTL (March 18), vs. COL (March 20)

15. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 14

Points percentage: 53.85%

Cam Atkinson. The Blue Jackets do not have the same storied playoff history as some other teams on this list, so Atkinson's 26 points in 35 career playoff games takes the top spot. Among current Blue Jackets, Boone Jenner leads the way with 15 points in 37 games.

Next seven days: vs. NYR (March 15), vs. NJ (March 17), vs. FLA (March 20)

16. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 55.47%

Al MacInnis. With a booming slapshot, MacInnis was a mainstay for the Flames (and later, the Blues). He scored 102 points in 95 playoff games for Calgary, including 18 power-play goals.

Next seven days: vs. COL (March 14), @ TOR (March 17), @ NYR (March 18), @ NJ (March 20)

17. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 53.08%

Jean Beliveau. From a franchise leaderboard that is full of Hall of Famers, Beliveau sits in first place by a 37-point margin ahead of Jacques Lemaire -- Beliveau scored 176 points in 162 playoff games, while Lemaire finished with 139 in 145.

Next seven days: vs. FLA (March 15), vs. OTT (March 18), @ NYI (March 20)

18. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 54.62%

Trevor Linden. With a couple more long playoff runs, the Sedin twins might've surpassed Linden, but his 95 points in 118 career postseason games is No. 1 on the franchise leaderboard.

Next seven days: vs. CHI (March 15), vs. UTA (March 16), vs. WPG (March 18), @ STL (March 20)

19. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 52.27%

Brett Hull. The Golden Brett would eventually get his name etched on the Stanley Cup with two of St. Louis' rivals (the Stars in 1999 and the Red Wings in 2002), but he remains atop the club's playoff scoring leaderboard, with 117 points in 102 postseason games with the Blues.

Next seven days: @ MIN (March 15), vs. ANA (March 16), @ NSH (March 18), vs. VAN (March 20)

20. Utah Hockey Club

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 53.08%

N/A. Technically, this is a new franchise, and the Arizona Coyotes/Winnipeg Jets 1.0 records don't carry over. The leader for that team is Hall of Famer Dale Hawerchuk, with 49 points in 38 career postseason games.

Next seven days: @ SEA (March 14), @ VAN (March 16), @ EDM (March 18), vs. BUF (March 20)

21. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 53.03%

Brian Leetch. One of the elite offensive defensemen of his era, Leetch scored 89 points in 82 career playoff games. If the Rangers qualify for the playoffs this season, Chris Kreider can chip away at the lead as the current leader, with 76 in 123.

Next seven days: @ CBJ (March 15), vs. EDM (March 16), vs. CGY (March 18), vs. TOR (March 20)

22. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 50.75%

Ray Bourque. Though he wouldn't win a Stanley Cup until he was traded to the Avalanche, the legendary defenseman scored 161 points in 180 playoff games for the Bruins.

Next seven days: vs. TB (March 15), vs. BUF (March 17), @ VGK (March 20)

23. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 52.31%

Steve Yzerman. Although he is well behind Nicklas Lidstrom in the postseason games played column (196 to Lidstrom's 263), Stevie Y has the slight edge in playoff points, 185-183.

Next seven days: @ CAR (March 14), vs. VGK (March 16), @ WSH (March 18)

24. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 50.78%

Bryan Trottier. With 168 points in 175 playoff games, the Isles legend -- who also had 14 points in 46 playoff games with the Penguins -- narrowly edged out his dynasty-era teammates Denis Potvin (165 in 185) and Mike Bossy (160 in 129).

Next seven days: vs. EDM (March 14), vs. FLA (March 16), @ PIT (March 18), vs. MTL (March 20)

25. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 48.46%

Ryan Getzlaf. No surprise here; the Ducks' all-time franchise-leading scorer has also scored the most playoff points in the club's history, with 120 in 125 postseason games.

Next seven days: vs. NSH (March 14), @ STL (March 16), @ DAL (March 18), @ NSH (March 20)

26. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 47.76%

Bobby Clarke. One of the most iconic photos in NHL history depicts Clarke -- missing teeth -- holding the Stanley Cup, following the Flyers' win in 1975. So it's only fitting that he leads this franchise in playoff scoring, with 119 points in 136 postseason games.

Next seven days: vs. CAR (March 15), @ TB (March 17), @ WSH (March 20)

27. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 47.06%

Sidney Crosby. Although the points-per-playoff game rate leader for Pittsburgh is Mario Lemieux (with 172 in 107 games), Sid the Kid has him beat overall, with 201 in 180.

Next seven days: vs. NJ (March 15), vs. NYI (March 18)

28. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 44.53%

Filip Forsberg. The Preds are unlikely to qualify for the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs, but the next time they do make the postseason, Forsberg will increase his franchise record. He leads the list with 59 points in 81 playoff games.

Next seven days: @ ANA (March 14), @ LA (March 15), vs. STL (March 18), vs. ANA (March 20)

29. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 45.46%

Yanni Gourde. There have been only 14 playoff games in Kraken history, and the club is unlikely to add to that total in 2025. The recently-traded Gourde leads the group, with 13 points in those 14 games; Jordan Eberle (11) leads among players remaining with Seattle.

Next seven days: vs. UTA (March 14), vs. WPG (March 16), @ CHI (March 18), @ MIN (March 19)

30. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 43.75%

Gilbert Perreault. The first draft pick in Sabres history, Perreault played 17 seasons with the franchise and scored 103 points in 90 playoff games.

Next seven days: vs. VGK (March 15), @ BOS (March 17), @ UTA (March 20)

31. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 37.12%

Stan Mikita. Further immortalized in the 1992 movie "Wayne's World" as the namesake of a donut shop, Mikita's Hall of Fame career included 150 points in 155 career playoff games.

Next seven days: @ VAN (March 15), vs. SEA (March 18), vs. LA (March 20)

32. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 33.58%

Patrick Marleau. Although recent campaigns haven't seen the Sharks get too close to the postseason, they were once a mainstay. Marleau (with 120 points in 177 games) is just ahead of long-time teammate Joe Thornton (115 in 144).

Next seven days: vs. WSH (March 15), vs. CAR (March 20)

Sportsnet.ca / NHL Playoff Push: How deadline moves altered contenders' potential paths to Cup Final

By Sonny Sachdeva- March 15, 2025

We've arrived at the final month. Five weeks from now, the slates will be wiped clean, the pressure will be ratcheted up, and the fight for the Stanley Cup will truly begin.

And as is the case every season, the trade deadline has thrown some bonus chaos into the title race. Cup favourites previously feared around the league have gotten even stronger. Clubs that have been rolling all season long, taking up residence atop the standings, are left to second-guess their deadline decisions. And other usual contenders now find themselves facing down a gauntlet of recently beefed-up rivals.

With the dust settled on the March 7 moves, and the playoff bracket coming into focus, this iteration of Playoff Push takes a closer look at how the deadline action impacts the potential path to the Cup Final for each conference's best.

The Capitals elected to largely stand pat at the trade deadline, acquiring depth forward Anthony Beauvillier but passing on a swing to add a more impactful piece for the season's home stretch. You can't really blame them — the Caps have been the story of the campaign, rebounding from a middling performance last season to emerge as one of the best squads in 2024-25.

The biggest impact the deadline action could have on their potential path to the Final might not come in anything Washington did, but in what happened elsewhere in the East. If the playoffs were to begin today, the Caps would line up across from the Ottawa Senators — the young Sens look hungry and primed to upset a veteran behemoth, even more so after bringing in Dylan Cozens at the deadline.

Were the Caps to get by Ottawa, though, the bracket as it stands would have them face the winner of a battle between the Carolina Hurricanes and New Jersey Devils, two clubs that just don't seem to have it this year.

The Devils' playoff hopes were dealt a significant blow in the form of a shoulder injury that ended Jack Hughes' season. And the Canes are fresh off a tumultuous deadline saga that saw them pull off a blockbuster to land Mikko Rantanen, before having to author a second blockbuster to trade him away. The jury's still out on whether the club wound up better or worse off overall by the time the dust settled on the frantic action, but either way, the month-long distraction hardly seems the first chapter of a storybook run.

With three of the conference's most dangerous squads sitting on the other side of the bracket, and the strongest on Washington's side remaining in flux, the path through the opening rounds seems to line up for a Caps run.

Florida Panthers

On the other side of the bracket, the Panthers pulled off a couple key moves to aid in their title defence bid, first bringing in Seth Jones to bolster the blue line — an acquisition made all the more important by the Aaron Ekblad suspension — and then adding Brad Marchand in a true deadline shocker.

The Cats have their own in-house issues to worry about, namely the injury that's going to keep playoff talisman Matthew Tkachuk out for the rest of the season. But the bracket shouldn't look too daunting.

Were the playoffs to begin today, Florida would face off against the upstart Columbus Blue Jackets for an opener in which the defending champs would be heavily favoured. If they get past the Jackets, next

up would be the winner of a Toronto Maple Leafs-Tampa Bay Lightning meeting. It's a familiar feel for the Atlantic's best, the three clubs having faced off against each other in the post-season plenty of times in recent years.

But the Panthers bringing in Brad Marchand adds a novel element to the potential 2025 iteration of a Panthers-Leafs or Panthers-Bolts series.

Neither club would look forward to having to navigate the physicality of Tkachuk, Marchand and Sam Bennett in order to move on — adding insult to injury, the Panthers beat both the Leafs and Bolts in the past two weeks without Tkachuk.

Carolina Hurricanes

Despite the tumult that's enveloped the Hurricanes — from the Rantanen acquisition and the trade that sent him away, to the comments from head coach Rod Brind'Amour and the response from Rantanen's agent — Carolina finds itself on a five-game win streak.

In their first game after the deadline, the Hurricanes took down the Winnipeg Jets, one of the best squads in the league. So, there's a world in which the Canes could be just fine, their potential playoff success undeterred by the blur of the last month's front-office chaos.

Still, when Rantanen originally landed in Raleigh, it seemed to give the Canes a long-needed missing piece, a bit of extra star power, needed size, proven playoff ability. Now the all-world Finn is gone, as are Martin Necas and Jack Drury, who were sent to Colorado in the original deal. The net gain player-wise is the addition of Taylor Hall and Logan Stankoven. There's still plenty to like about the Canes' roster overall, and they should still be favoured if they get Jersey in the first round.

But with Canes seeming to hit a wall each post-season when they face the East's top dogs, it's fair to wonder if their deadline decisions gave them enough to get by Washington or Florida, who seem on a crash course for the conference final.

Winnipeg Jets

Jostling for position alongside the Caps in the Presidents' Trophy race, the Jets added quality depth pieces at the deadline — defenceman Luke Schenn and forward Brandon Tanev — but similarly opted to pass on a blockbuster to capitalize on their resurgent season. As with Washington, it's understandable, the team's brass electing to avoid tinkering too much with the squad's chemistry. But a glance at how the bracket looks likely to shake out for them shows the risk of that approach.

Flying high as the No. 1 seed in the West, the Jets will get a wild-card matchup to start, which they'll have every chance of winning — at the moment, it's the Calgary Flames on track to meet them in Round 1, setting up what would be an excellent all-Canadian clash.

If Winnipeg advances, though, the bracket as it stands would have the Jets meet the winner of a Dallas Stars-Colorado Avalanche bout. And their fellow Western contenders took exactly the opposite approach at the deadline. The Stars — arguably the favourite to come out of the conference — head into the home stretch with Rantanen and Mikael Granlund added to an already potent offence. The Avs, who have been performing roster surgery all season, added Necas and Drury when they traded away Rantanen, and then went out and got Brock Nelson and Charlie Coyle, too, along with some blue-line depth.

Given the assets Winnipeg had available to deal, and the cap space it had to work with, running into one of those two squads and falling just short would sting just a little bit more — or, the Jets win, and put a point on the board for those who believe you shouldn't mess with winning chemistry.

Dallas Stars

One thing seems clear in the wake of the deadline: the path to the Cup runs through Dallas. The Stars have put themselves in as enviable a position as you can be in heading into the post-season — having built a genuine contender slowly and methodically, one stocked with stars both young and old, the club also went out and added an all-world offensive talent to their mix, and locked him up long-term. More importantly, they added a proven playoff performer, Rantanen having amassed 34 goals and 101 points through 81 post-season appearances. The towering Finn finished second in post-season scoring in 2022, when he helped Colorado reach the Stanley Cup summit.

The awkward part, of course, is that Rantanen seems on track to meet his former club in the first round, with Dallas and Colorado sitting Nos. 2 and 3 in the Central. That's a worst-case scenario for the Avs, surely, and one they likely didn't foresee when they shipped Rantanen to the Eastern Conference. And it's an opportunity for Rantanen, who should enter the bout with plenty of motivation to show the Avs brass they made a mistake when they dealt him away.

If the Stars do what they've done for most of the past half-decade and piece together another deep run in the West, all eyes will be on how much of a difference Rantanen's presence can make this time around. Dallas has long found success by committee — now, it has a superstar-calibre talent of its own, the X-factor piece who can step up with the type of marquee big-moment performances we've often seen from the other Western contenders.

Vegas Golden Knights

Everyone expected a big swing from Vegas at the deadline, given the Golden Knights brass's reputation for aggressive team-building.

But, in the end, the club's only move was a nostalgic one, Vegas bringing back former misfit Reilly Smith. Vegas doesn't exactly need much — its only a year removed from emerging as Cup champs, and added another vet in Brandon Saad just a couple months ago. Once they get healthy, and get back into the post-season grind, the Golden Knights have proven time and time again that they can make noise when it matters most.

That said, their path to another crack at the Cup is looking like a minefield. As it stands, the Knights would match up with Minnesota in Round 1. Were they to get past that opening-round bout, they'd meet the winner of an Edmonton Oilers-Los Angeles Kings series. History suggests that'll be the former — Edmonton has bounced L.A. in the first round three years in a row — meaning the Golden Knights will have the unenviable task of trying to shut down Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and an Oilers squad that, while flawed, is just months removed from a trip to the Cup Final. And past that? A conference final that seems sure to feature one of Dallas, Colorado and Winnipeg — three monsters who seem to have all they need to go all the way.

Vegas still heads into the post-season as a bona fide contender and is arguably the strongest squad on its side of the bracket. But for a club that's made its name through an unyielding aggressive approach, the decision to play it cool at this year's deadline certainly seems a risky one, given how the landscape changed around them.

Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing who has the best schedule in final month for the Western Conference

By Justin Bourne- March 15, 2025

Earlier in the week I took a look at the Eastern Conference playoff race, which has a huge number of teams still in it. The Western Conference offers fewer teams but maybe a more compelling race to get in, while the division races are a little more clear, save for one...

Pacific

Vegas, Edmonton, and Los Angeles

This one feels like it's all but sorted out except for "Who gets home ice, Edmonton or Los Angeles?" Vegas has a six-point lead on the Kings (and LA has a game in hand), but that's a fairly sizeable total to make up in league that hands out three-point games like candy, and where Vegas isn't going to go in the tank suddenly. They're just not.

This leaves the red-hot Kings (four straight wins) and the ice cold Oilers (5-9-0 since Feb. 1st) set to face-off in round one. The good news for Oilers fans is, nobody wants to peak a month from the playoffs. It's not the right time of year yet, and we know they have the talent to hit higher notes. There's still 20 per cent of the playing calendar to ramp up for late April.

Central

Winnipeg, Dallas, Colorado

It's common for people covering the Atlantic to say "winning the division is crucial," as you badly want to avoid that 2-3 matchup. Well good lord, look at the 2-3 in the Central. So, full credit goes to the Winnipeg Jets, who deserve to draw someone like Calgary or Vancouver while Dallas and Colorado play a deathmatch of a series that will undeniably be better quality hockey than the Stanley Cup Final (as they'll be healthy, and both worthy anyway).

Winnipeg deserves a chance at a shorter series for their great regular season, and checking the standings, it doesn't seem like anybody has a chance to catch them.

West Wild-Card Race

Calgary, Vancouver, Utah, St. Louis, (Minnesota)

The only reason I throw Minnesota in the mix is math. They've been struggling badly, and only have 16 games left. If they were to go, hypothetically here, let's say 6-10 – which is bad but not impossible? – they would finish with 91 points. The Canucks would need to go 10-7 in their final 17 – not remotely impossible – to get to 91 points. An improvement from that record, or if the Wild tanked worse, there could be some wiggle room. So mathematically, the Wild still need to win a few games before we can say they're in the clear.

Let's look at the teams individually.

Calgary: The Flames have an average difficulty of schedule remaining, and are mathematically in a good spot to close the deal. They're trying to become the second team in over 20 years to finish last in the league in goals and make playoffs, which means a good portion of their success comes on the back of Dustin Wolf. Still, I think they do it. They've got the veteran experience to get this thing across the line,

and they work extremely hard, to go with great coaching. It's gonna be tight, but I like them. One point of concern is the injury to Mikael Backlund, paired with the suspension to Connor Zary.

Vancouver: It seems impossible that the Canucks could get in considering all that's gone wrong this season. But they're right there, in spite of it all. They've got a three-game home stand followed by a six-game road swing, where they'll be playing out of division while the other teams have the chances to get three-point games. They gotta find those 10 or 11 wins in 17 tries, which isn't unattainable. If Hughes is healthy, they can do it. Stand by.

Utah: The Hockey Club has a fightin' chance despite their abysmal home record. They've got a three-game Pacific Division road trip over the next five days, including a head-to-head matchup with the team above them here, the Canucks. If they win that matchup it would be huge, and it helps that four of their final five regular season games are against non-playoff teams, including Nashville twice.

St. Louis: Of the Blues next eight games, SEVEN are against non-playoff teams, with five of those games at home. Yes they're without Colton Parayko, but it's hard to imagine a scenario where we wake up two weeks from now and they're not in the hunt, they're simply better than their soft upcoming schedule. Of their remaining 16 games, only five opponents are playoff teams, so yes: look out for this club.

[Sportsnet.ca / NHL's Top 11 UFAs of 2025: Latest rumours, reports](#)

By Luke Fox- March 15, 2025

Former captains and current Cup champs. Top-pair defencemen and elite playmakers. All-world goalies and unique talents enjoying career years.

Yes, even with several franchise studs and key support players signing pocket-padding extensions way before deadline and avoiding the stress of free agency, the NHL's 2025 UFA class still sets up to be an intriguing one.

And with the salary cap guaranteed to rise by \$7.5 million — to \$95.5 million — those spendy general managers should have even more budget to splash the pot on the next Steven Stamkos or Jake Guentzel to test the open waters.

Here's a rundown and ranking of hockey's best impending unrestricted free agents, plus the latest buzz circulating about their future.

NHL on Sportsnet

NHL on Sportsnet

Livestream Hockey Night in Canada, Scotiabank Wednesday Night Hockey, the Oilers, Flames, Canucks, out-of-market matchups, the Stanley Cup Playoffs and the NHL Draft.

Broadcast schedule

Trade deadline has passed, so free agency now looms large.

1. Mitch Marner

Age on July 1: 28

Position: Right wing

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$10.9 million

The latest: Once Mikko Rantanen got traded for a second time (and not for Marner) and signed his eight-year, \$96-million extension with Dallas, Marner shot to the top of the charts. And the rest of the pack lags behind the undisputedly most coveted pending UFA of 2025.

The Toronto Maple Leafs superstar, management, and agent Darren Ferris are all on the same page when it comes to handling what could be Marner's final tour with his hometown team: Silence is golden.

Marner had previously expressed a desire to re-sign, yet he has rebuffed the Leafs' attempts to negotiate in-season and has now positioned himself to take a run at not only becoming the NHL's highest-paid winger but highest-paid player.

If he tests the market.

"Growing up in this area, I've always been a Leafs fan. I've always wanted this team to succeed and to win just to see what that would feel like fanwise. Now being part of it is very special," Marner said at training camp.

"It's my home. It's the place I've grown up. I've got many, many memories watching this team play Saturday night hockey with my family. Sitting there for hours watching."

Marner came up clutch for Team Canada at the 4 Nations Face-Off and is on pace for his best and most productive campaign as a Leaf.

So, the onus falls on Treliving — who bought high on peak William Nylander last winter — to either extend Marner at the best rate possible or make some quick adjustments if he walks.

When the Carolina Hurricanes proposed a Rantanen-for-Marner trade at the deadline, Treliving brought the idea to Marner, who refused to waive his no-move clause.

So, here we are: A team unsure if its star winger wants to stay, and an in-demand talent who holds all the power over his future.

2. Nikolaj Ehlers

Age on July 1: 29

Position: Right wing / Left wing

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$6 million

The latest: Unlike the monster extensions for centre Mark Scheifele and goalie Connor Hellebuyck signed in 2023 just ahead of their walk years, all is quiet in Winnipeg on the Ehlers extension front.

A frequent subject of trade rumours, the speedy Dane was reportedly open to a change of scenery in the off-season, according to The Fourth Period.

The Jets are the toast of the Western Conference, and the point-per-game winger should have no issue posting his most productive campaign yet under new coach Scott Arniel.

GM Kevin Cheveldayoff has been noncommittal on the topic, often saying that he hopes his Jets win a Stanley Cup with Ehlers in June.

Ehlers himself says everything is business as usual.

If he has come this far, though, one must wonder if it's worth a peek behind the curtain.

Competing teams would surely try to outbid the Jets for Ehlers' services this summer in a market thin on 25-goal scorers.

3. Jakob Chychrun

Age on July 1: 27

Position: Defence

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$4.6 million

The latest: From his spotty injury history to wearing three sweaters by age 26, there's been so much commotion in Chychrun's career, you wonder if the well-rounded defenceman wouldn't leap at the chance for long-term security.

The left shot has fit in seamlessly with the Washington Capitals — a pre-season dark horse that has leaped to Presidents' Trophy contention — and it falls on GM Chris Patrick to keep Chychrun in the fold.

"Hopefully (I'm) here for a long time," Chychrun told reporters in late February. "The sky's the limit for us."

The productive Chychrun and the Capitals have been an excellent fit, and there is a growing feeling on both sides that the relationship should continue beyond one season.

That said, Chychrun — who has already touched career highs in goals, points, and plus/minus — now wants all focus to be on a deep playoff run before extension talks intensify.

Until this magical season, the 500-game veteran has appeared in just nine post-season games.

4. John Tavares

Age on July 1: 34

Position: Centre

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$11 million

The latest: Already top 70 on the NHL's all-time scoring list, the still-productive Tavares is not entertaining any notions of quitting.

While his captaincy was removed by the new GM and his ice time chopped by the new coach, the proud Toronto Maple Leaf is still a force in the face-off dot, a threat on the power-play and below the hash marks, and the consummate professional.

Armed with a full no-move clause and understanding he's up for a pay cut, Tavares has already shown a willingness to sacrifice a little me for the sake of the we.

His agent, Pat Brisson, and Treliving did begin some preliminary extension talks in September — and it's clear that Tavares wants to stay.

The Maple Leafs, however, are letting things play out. As much as Tavares would like to put pen to paper yesterday, Toronto has other priorities.

Tavares and wife Aryne are raising three young children in the city. He is close to the necessary support of extended family. He has benefitted from multiple outside endorsement deals. And he did score the clinching goal of the one series the Leafs have won since ex-GM Kyle Dubas backed up the Brink's truck with \$77 million.

"I love playing here. It's a remarkable place to play," Tavares said last May. "And when I committed here six years ago, obviously I saw a tremendous amount of talent and an amazing hockey market and organization that's fully committed to winning and doing whatever it can — and I still feel that way."

Critics will point to Tavares's age. Defenders will argue that he slid seamlessly into the No. 1 centre role when Auston Matthews got injured and is still producing near a point-per-game pace.

5. Sam Bennett

Age on July 1: 29

Position: Centre

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$4.4 million

The latest: When Florida Panthers GM Bill Zito identifies a core piece of his championship roster worth retaining, he usually finds a way to keep his man — with an assist from his state's tax laws, of course.

Zito prioritized locking up Gustav Forsling, then Sam Reinhart, then Carter Verhaeghe. All re-upped for fair rates.

Now, Zito is grinding away with Bennett, that rare middle-six centre who can score, defend, and truck over an opponent.

That Verhaeghe came in at a reasonable \$7 million AAV helps with the Bennett budget.

Leverage rests here with player agent Darren Ferris, who has a reputation for stressing deadlines and knows his client would be coveted leaguewide because of his unique skill-set and the dearth of under-30 centre options.

Ultimately it boils down to this: If Bennett likes the South Florida life, a deal will be made. If he wants top dollar, he'll find that elsewhere.

No doubt, the Team Canada fourth-liner could spark a bidding war — presumably landing somewhere between \$6 million and \$7 million per season, depending on term — if he reaches July 1.

6. Brock Boeser

Age on July 1: 28

Position: Right wing

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$6.65 million

The latest: Boeser has stumbled after his first 40-goal season, making Vancouver Canucks fans wonder if he'll be moving to a second team this summer.

GM Patrik Allvin stated publicly that he wanted to decide on Boeser's future prior to the trade deadline. Then he tried — and failed — to deal the sniper for a decent return. The Hurricanes are one club with some measure of interest.

"If I told you what I was offered for Brock Boeser, I think I would have to run out of here because you would not believe me," Allvin told reporters on March 7, when asked why he had hung on to the expiring asset.

At that point, Boeser had 18 goals and 38 points through his first 55 games.

The eight-year veteran is aware of Allvin's comments — which are hardly flattering — but said he hasn't processed the implications.

"I'm trying not to really think about that," Boeser told reporters post-deadline. "I honestly have no idea what's going to happen.

"Anytime you have uncertainty, it's scary. You know, the unknown is scary, so it's obviously a little bit of stress involved in that. It's not a great situation.... I'm still here. I'm still on the Canucks, and that's my main worry right now."

7. Aaron Ekblad

Age on July 1: 29

Position: Defence

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$7.5 million

The latest: An occasional subject of trade rumours, the second-longest-serving Florida Panther played an integral role in the franchise's two trips to the fourth round and is finally entering the eighth year of his max-term contract.

Neither Ekblad nor management have projected concern here, despite the uncertainty. But the deadline trade for another righty, Seth Jones, does raise an eyebrow.

Jones comes with retained salary and five more seasons of term. In short, he can serve as Ekblad insurance should the latter walk.

Ekblad already has \$62.775 million (state tax free!) in career earnings, but he is one of the few top-pair defencemen under age 30 who could go to market in a summer where the cap spikes.

How is the second-longest-tenured Cat dealing with contract pressure?

“I mean, it’s one of those things. It’s always going to linger around,” Ekblad said. “But at the end of the day, I’m well taken care of. I’m able to go out and play pretty free on a nightly basis and not have to worry about something like that. It’s going to come when it comes. And if it doesn’t, it doesn’t. And life goes on.”

Life, however, is on hold for Ekblad — who got slapped with a 20-game suspension in March for violating the NHL/NHLPA’s performance enhancing substances program.

His ban stretches into Round 1. Does it sour an appetite for an extension?

8. Brad Marchand

Age on July 1: 37

Position: Left wing

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$6.125 million

The latest: The former Boston Bruins captain’s ability to produce deep into his 30s and elevate his impact in important moments has made his previous contract look like a bargain.

While it has been difficult for fans to watch Marchand pulling a Florida Panthers sweater over his head, it has been equally difficult for the player to move south and for Bruins GM Don Sweeney to wave the white flag and detonate a chunk of his core.

Marchand met with the Bruins’ brass prior to his last-minute stunning trade with an appeal to negotiate an extension, reportedly through three years.

The money didn’t work, Sweeney decided to get younger, and the sides agreed to send the loyal veteran to a contender he’d like.

“Just had a gap,” the GM said.

The Bruins were prepared to pay Marchand no less than his current \$6.125-million AAV, according to Sportsnet’s Elliotte Friedman, but he could fetch more on the open market.

And so, as crazy as it seems, a banged-up and disappointed Marchand will try to win a second Cup with Florida, previously a bitter rival.

“I suspect that it’s going to be a rather seamless transition,” Zito said.

Much like the Cats’ rental of long-serving Flyers captain Claude Giroux in ’22, this one feels like a wait-and-see.

How does Marchand fit? And how far can Florida’s repeat bid go?

9. Adin Hill

Age on July 1: 29

Position: Goaltender

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$4.9 million

The latest: Hill and the Vegas Golden Knights agreed to a six-year extension on March 14.

10. Brock Nelson

Age on July 1: 33

Position: Centre

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$6 million

The latest: A late-career surge has Nelson riding a three-season streak of 35-plus goals into his last best chance for another pay day.

With a dearth of legit centremen on the rental market, Nelson fetched a tidy return for GM Lou Lamoriello and the aging New York Islanders at the deadline: blue-chip prospect Callum Ritchie, a first-round pick plus a conditional third.

Leaving the only franchise he's known, Nelson slides into the 2C role in Colorado between a couple of quality scoring wingers in Jonathan Drouin and Valeri Nichushkin.

Lamoriello did right by the player by trading him to his most desired destination. And with the Avalanche waving goodbye to Mikko Rantanen, GM Chris MacFarland has the cap space to extend Nelson if he makes for a smart fit.

The player holds all leverage, of course, but a deep playoff run could keep this relatively new relationship alive.

Last time the Avalanche had a second-line pivot of Nelson's pedigree, they won the Cup but lost Nazem Kadri (2022).

"A lot of excitement," Nelson said after the trade. "I'm jacked up."

11. Neal Pionk

Age on July 1: 29

Position: Defence

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$5.88 million

The latest: Funny. When researching the Winnipeg Jets' top-four defenceman, we stumbled across a column titled "Jets Should Buy Out Neal Pionk..." That piece was written in May and has aged like a banana in the sun.

Pionk has been worth every penny of his salary in his contract season, ranking second in ice time (22-plus minutes) and among the team leaders in plus/minus while taking a run at 50 points.

With Winnipeg surging into legitimate contender status, the right shot became an easy "own rental" — at minimum.

Much like the case of Ehlers, there is no sense that the player nor GM Cheveldayoff is rushing to extend before the playoffs run their course.

Just because the sides appear to be playing this situation out doesn't mean they can't come to an agreement eventually. (Last season, Cheveldayoff waited on Dylan DeMelo but got a deal done.)

Pionk's uptick in performance is simultaneously boosting the Jets' place in the standings and the blueliner's market value.

"The newsflash is, we probably won't get all of these guys signed, from a UFA standpoint," Cheveldayoff warned during a late-January address.

“We’ve got, obviously, some RFAs that are performing very well and are in various different stages of their years before unrestricted free agency. We’ll tend to that.”

12. Matt Duchene

Age on July 1: 34

Position: Centre

2023-24 salary cap hit: \$3 million

The latest: Cast away by Nashville, Duchene has not only found a niche but thrived with his former city’s greatest rival.

The veteran has already linked consecutive 25-goal, 65-point seasons since getting rocked by 2023’s summer buyout and is tracking his two best plus/minus seasons of his 1,120-game career.

While younger star teammates Wyatt Johnson and Mikko Rantanen strike multi-year, eight-figure extensions, Duchene and his family have reached the stage where happiness and winning are king.

In short, Duchene seems to be slipping into his Joe Pavelski years: short term, reasonable money, stick with a Cup contender.

As thin as the 2025 UFA market is on bona fide centremen, there should be an appetite on both sides to continue this relationship for another state-tax-free run in ’26.

Duchene still has a hunger for the game. So much so, he’d love to play his way onto Canada’s Olympic squad.