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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason '100% on the same page' with GM Don Waddell

By Brian Hedger- April 12, 2025

Dean Evason opened his press conference Friday by explaining a comment he had made Thursday following the Blue Jackets' 3-2 win over the Buffalo Sabres.

By answering a question about why goalie Jet Greaves hadn't been recalled earlier than Thursday by saying, "That's a Don Waddell question," Evason said he wasn't calling out the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager — and his boss — for keeping the talented rookie with the AHL's Cleveland Monsters while the NHL team stumbled out of a playoff position.

Greaves made 39 saves against the Sabres during his latest emergency recall from Cleveland, helping the Blue Jackets avoid playoff elimination on a day that top goalie Elvis Merzlikins was ruled out with an undisclosed injury.

Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves (73) stops a shot from Buffalo Sabres left wing Zach Benson (9) during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on April 10, 2025. The Blue Jackets won 3-2.

"I knew as soon as I said it last night it was going to create a storm, and I just want to clarify ... that Don Waddell and I are 100% on the same page," Evason said. "We communicate about everything. We communicate about everything."

Evason's initial comment, which he didn't expand upon, created a situation that left open the possibility of friction between the Blue Jackets' first-year head coach and first-year head of hockey operations/GM over the organizational depth chart.

Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves (73) takes the net for the second period of the NHL hockey game against the Buffalo Sabres at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on April 10, 2025.

Greaves has played only seven NHL games this season, going 3-2-2, but he's got the lowest goals-against average (2.71) and highest save percentage (.914) of the Blue Jackets' top three goalies — which includes Merzlikins and backup Daniil Tarasov.

Greaves has posted a blistering .949 save percentage in the AHL since Feb. 15, while Merzlikins and Tarasov have each dealt with stretches of inconsistency this season. Merzlikins had a lengthy stretch of success for the Blue Jackets that culminated in a dazzling performance in a memorable 5-3 outdoor victory over the Detroit Red Wings on March 1, but he's gone just 4-7-1 with a 3.85 GAA and .878 save percentage since.

The Blue Jackets also dropped out of a playoff spot after holding the first of two wild cards in the Eastern Conference following their outdoor victory against Detroit. They're now on the brink of elimination trailing the Montreal Canadiens by six points for the second wild card with four games left, sparking a hypothetical question among media and fans about whether they should have called upon Greaves sooner.

Evason said that wasn't an ongoing debate between his coaching staff, Waddell's front office staff and the Monsters' coaching staff. Greaves was recalled Thursday only due to Merzlikins' injury.

“There is not one point in this season where I’ve asked for a guy to get called up and (Waddell) said, ‘No,’ ” Evason said. “There’s not one point in this season where he’s said to me, ‘We’re going to call a guy up,’ and I’ve said, ‘No.’ ”

Evason said he knew almost instantly that his answer about Greaves after the game would stir up questions about friction between himself and Waddell, which he relayed to the Jackets’ GM after his postgame press conference concluded.

“The reason I said it was, at this point, I’m not talking about a call-up or a possible call-up two months ago, right after a game,” Evason said. “But as soon as I went back (to the coaches’ office), Don was in there and I said, ‘I’ve just got to tell you what I said,’ and I felt it right away, because it would be speculated that ... I wanted somebody, he didn’t want somebody, or he wouldn’t let me call somebody (up). That’s never the case. Don and I are 100% on the same page.”

Columbus Dispatch / Jet Greaves keys Columbus Blue Jackets' comeback against Buffalo Sabres: 3 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- April 12, 2025

They're not entirely out of it yet.

Facing the prospect of elimination from the playoff race in the NHL's Eastern Conference on Thursday at Nationwide Arena, the Blue Jackets edged the Buffalo Sabres 3-2 to stave off elimination for at least one more day.

Zach Aston-Reese and Boone Jenner scored goals in the third period to turn a 2-1 deficit into a 3-2 lead, while rookie goalie Jet Greaves picked up a win with 39 saves as an emergency recall for injured goalie Elvis Merzlikins.

Here are three takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets need Montreal Canadiens to stumble

The good news for the Blue Jackets is they kept their slim hopes alive and won in regulation to force the Montreal Canadiens to win in regulation Friday in Ottawa to clinch the second wild card in the Eastern Conference — the last playoff ticket.

The Blue Jackets will also be eliminated if the Canadiens' point total, currently at 87 points with four games remaining, exceeds 89 points. There is a tiebreaker scenario at 89 points after 82 games that favors Columbus if the Blue Jackets win their remaining four games in regulation and Montreal wins only one of its last four via overtime or shootout.

The NHL's first standings tiebreaker is regulation wins, which favor Montreal 29-26 over the Blue Jackets. The New York Rangers, who are tied with the Blue Jackets at 81 points with three games left, have 33 regulation wins and could also pull off an unlikely surge into the postseason via the same pathway.

Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves reaches for the puck against the Sabres on Thursday.

Jet Greaves' performance against Buffalo Sabres prompts question of whether Blue Jackets should have recalled him sooner

Since Feb. 15, Graves has posted a .949 save percentage for the AHL's Cleveland Monsters after going 2-2 with a 2.83 goals-against average and .905 save percentage in six starts for the Blue Jackets.

After Graves' dazzling 39-save victory over the Sabres, Jackets coach Dean Evason deferred a question about why Greaves remained in the AHL while Merzlikins and Daniil Tarasov scuffled in the NHL during a stretch in March and early April that led to the team's drop out of the two wild-card positions.

"That's a Don Waddell question," Evason said, referring to the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager.

Waddell didn't immediately reply to the same question via text message after the game, but the most likely answer is that Merzlikins and Tarasov are the Blue Jackets' top two goalies according to their NHL one-way contracts. Greaves is also a key reason the Monsters are still in a postseason spot for the AHL's Calder Cup playoffs.

Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves takes the net for the second period against the Sabres on Thursday.

His emergency recall Thursday started with a phone call in the morning that prompted a two-hour drive to Columbus. After picking up a win Wednesday in Cleveland, Greaves got the net for the Jackets and shined in his latest NHL opportunity despite allowing two goals on the Sabres' first seven shots. He stopped the next 34 in a row, including 18 in the second period and 15 more in the third to spark the comeback. Greaves is 3-2-2 with a 2.71 goals-against average and .914 save percentage.

Merzlikins, since posting an impressive 43-save victory over the Detroit Red Wings on March 1, is 4-7-1 with a 3.85 GAA and .878 save percentage prior to an injury that forced him to leave the Blue Jackets' morning skate Thursday earlier than normal.

The Blue Jackets didn't provide specifics about Merzlikins' injury, but Greaves could be sticking around for additional action if the issue isn't a day-to-day situation. It's also notable that Greaves got the start over the fully rested Tarasov, who has struggled at times this season adapting to the backup role.

Damon Severson hasn't played since April 1, when the Jackets blitzed the Nashville Predators 8-4 in Columbus. That might change Saturday if Jake Christiansen, who left the game Thursday in the first period and didn't return, isn't healthy enough to play.

Severson, a right-handed shot, skated with Erik Gudbranson on the third defensive pairing and played his off side on the left in his last action — finishing with a minus-1 rating in 16:49 against the Predators. Since that game, lefties Jack Johnson and Christiansen skated with Gudbranson.

Christiansen replaced Johnson after the latter posted a -5 plus/minus in in three games as Severson's replacement. Playing their 'off' side can be difficult for defensemen, especially in the defensive zone. Some have no issues with it. Others struggle.

Severson may be in the latter category, and that could become a problem while looking at the next six years of a contract that pays him an average annual value of \$6.25 million a season.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets keep fighting with rout of Washington Capitals: 5 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- April 13, 2025

With a little help from the Toronto Maple Leafs plus their own raucous 7-0 blowout of the Washington Capitals on Saturday, the Blue Jackets are still afloat in the Eastern Conference playoff chase.

They're clinging to driftwood, sure, but their postseason hopes aren't sunk yet. Facing another game where a regulation loss meant elimination, the Blue Jackets routed the Capitals with a flurry of goals, physicality and fists for an entertaining afternoon at sold-out Nationwide Arena.

A day filled with cannon fire and haymakers ended with the Blue Jackets (37-33-9) keeping their playoff hopes going before watching the Montreal Canadiens lose in overtime to the Maple Leafs, preventing the Canadiens from clinching the East's final playoff spot.

Here are five takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets playoff hopes riding on outcome of Montreal Canadiens' game

The Canadiens' lead over the Blue Jackets for the East's second wild card is now 88-83 with three games left for Columbus and two for Montreal, which can now clinch by winning either of those games in any fashion. Two regulation losses or a regulation loss plus another OT/shootout loss combined with the Jackets winning their three remaining games in any fashion would send Columbus to the postseason.

The chances of that happening, according to Money Puck, are just 1.3% but that's more than double the 0.6% chance that site gave the Blue Jackets prior to their win Saturday. Montreal's OT loss in Toronto eliminated the New York Rangers and Detroit Red Wings from the race, so the Blue Jackets are the last team left in the East that could catch the Canadiens.

"We're just focused on (Sunday) now," Blue Jackets center Sean Kuraly said. "It's another really important one for us."

Columbus Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli shows with one shift why he's a special talent

Adam Fantilli led the Jackets with his 26th and 27th goals of the season Saturday, but the first of those tallies will likely be included in his personal highlight reel for a long time.

Fantilli displayed in one shift all of the skills that made NHL amateur scouts gush before the Blue Jackets selected him third overall in the 2023 draft. He spotted a loose puck between the circles in the defensive zone, swooped over to get it, spotted Capitals rookie Ryan Leonard attempting the same thing, flattened Leonard with a huge — but clean — hit and sent the puck up ice.

He wasn't done.

After giving the puck to James van Riemsdyk, Fantilli skated into the Capitals' zone, received a crisp pass on the left wing from Kent Johnson and beat goalie Hunter Shepard with a wrist shot for a 3-0 lead. Throw in a primal scream at Rasmus Sandin — who'd drawn Fantilli's ire with a cross-check earlier — and that shift was a glimmering example of why the Jackets' second-year center is likely just beginning a long career as an impact player.

The game was also nationally televised, so more people saw it live as opposed to catching a replay.

"I was reaching for it, he was reaching for it, and at the last second I saw him — and I didn't want to be the one who went down there," Fantilli said. "It's not like I was hunting him all the way down the ice. I

saw him probably half a second before I ran into him, and then to go down and score, that was great. It gave us momentum going into the second period and we kept rolling with it.”

Zach Werenski snapped a goal drought broke his own Columbus Blue Jackets record

It only took 1:00 for Zach Werenski to set off the Blue Jackets' goal cannon to give his team a quick 1-0 lead that set the stage for another Columbus goal bonanza. Getting a pass from Sean Monahan on the left wing, he fired a wrist shot inside the right post against Capitals goalie Hunter Shepard to end a 17-game goal drought that stretched back to March 4 in Tampa.

The goal was Werenski's 21st of the season, which broke his own record for goals by a Blue Jackets defenseman in a single season. His prior high that set the record of 20 was in the 2019-20 season that was paused by the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Werenski is now second in scoring among all NHL defenseman with 77 points on 21 goals and 56 assists, trailing only Colorado's Cale Makar (30-62-92). Werenski is also second in defenseman goals after breaking a tie with Washington's Jakob Chychrun, who missed the game with an illness. Werenski's goal total is the most by a U.S. born defenseman since Mathieu Schneider's 21 for the Red Wings in 2005-06 — when Werenski was an 8-year old Red Wings fan growing up in Grosse Pointe, Michigan.

Columbus Blue Jackets may start goalie Jet Greaves again Sunday

Jet Greaves played his third game in four days after joining the team Thursday as an emergency recall from AHL Cleveland to replaced injured started Elvis Merzlikins. He's won all three, including his first NHL shutout Saturday with 22 saves, and Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason didn't rule out as a starting option Sunday.

That would be Greaves' fourth game in five days, but he's prepared to play. Greaves upped his NHL numbers in eight appearances this season to 4-2-2 with a 2.38 goals-against average, .922 save percentage and now a shutout.

“It's been amazing,” Fantilli said. “He's a kid who's been grinding all year ... not only this year but years past. Every time he's come up here, he's been great for us and right to the end he was stopping the puck today. He was awesome.”

Columbus Blue Jackets had interesting day with officials against Washington Capitals

It wouldn't be a big game in Columbus without some weird things happening with regard to officiating, and the game Saturday didn't disappoint.

The weirdness began in the first period, when Blue Jackets rookie Denton Mateychuk's apparent goal was overturned because his attempt to rim the puck around the boards deflected off a linesman's skate and slid into the Capitals' net.

Shepard left his crease while anticipating an opportunity to play the puck, which left his net open for a carom that initially looked like a friendly bounce off the yellow kick plate. After the officiating crew huddled, the goal was taken away due to a rule that states a puck can't go into the net off an official.

That was nothing compared to what happened in the third, when Dmitri Voronkov continued playing despite getting a 10-minute misconduct with 9:42 left in the game for giving former Blue Jackets center Pierre-Luc Dubois a face wash during a heated scrum.

That should've ended his day, but Voronkov didn't understand the referee's ruling due to his loose grasp of the English language. His teammates and coaches apparently didn't hear the misconduct ruling either, because Voronkov stayed on the bench and re-entered the game during an ensuing power play.

Once he was spotted, the officiating crew stopped the game, escorted him from the game and gave the Blue Jackets a minor penalty for using an ineligible player.

“I keep (saying) that (Voronkov) speaks better English than he (lets on), but, apparently, he doesn’t speak well enough to know the ref said that you have a 10-minute misconduct, and you can’t play anymore,” Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason said, smiling. “But it’s on us. We have to communicate that, we have to know that, so we’ll take accountability as a coaching staff.”

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets rout Washington Capitals to stave off elimination

By Brian Hedger- April 13, 2025

The Blue Jackets aren't going down without a fight or two.

Needing a win Saturday afternoon to keep their faint playoff hopes going, the Jackets got exactly what they needed at Nationwide Arena with a rousing 7-0 victory over the Washington Capitals.

Scoring three goals in each of the first two periods and getting rookie Jet Greaves' first career shutout, the Blue Jackets (37-33-9) moved to 83 points by cruising past the Capitals (50-20-9) — who didn't have NHL all-time leading goal scorer Alex Ovechkin (healthy scratch) or high-scoring defenseman Jakob Chychrun (illness).

The Jackets and Caps will rematch Sunday in Washington, but whether Columbus is still in the hunt for the Eastern Conference's second wild card is contingent on the outcome of the Montreal Canadiens' game Saturday night in Toronto. The Canadiens, who control the second wild card at 87 points, can clinch the East's final playoff spot with a regulation win over the Maple Leafs.

The Blue Jackets made sure their elimination wasn't from a loss to the Capitals, who started their third goalie. Hunter Shepard, and have the best record in the conference sewn up.

Zach Werenski, Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli scored in the first period to give Columbus a 3-0 lead at the end of a contentious first 20 minutes. Fantilli, Sean Monahan and Cole Sillinger scored the next three in the first 5:14 of the second to blow the game open at 6-0, which extended the Jackets' franchise record for scoring six-plus goals to 15 this season. James van Riemsdyk scored the seventh goal with 2:19 left to play for notch a "Gordie Howe Hat Trick" with a goal, assist and fighting major.

Fantilli's first goal, which made it 3-0 late in the first, sparked a physical game for the final two periods. After flattening Capitals rookie Ryan Leonard in the Columbus zone, he headed up ice, got the puck and ripped a shot past goalie Hunter Shepard on the short side for his 26th goal of the season.

He beat Hunter again at 2:01 of the second for his 27th goal to ignite the blowout win. The Blue Jackets also had a goal by Denton Mateychuk overturned in the first because the puck hit the skate of a lines official before sliding into the net.

Columbus Dispatch / USHL presents first award honoring Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau

By Brian Hedger- April 13, 2025

The United States Hockey League, the top junior hockey circuit in the U.S., presented its first Gaudreau Award on Saturday to Ethan Wyttenbach of the Sioux Falls Stampede.

Wyttenbach is the first recipient of an award, which honors USHL alums Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau. The brothers were killed Aug. 29, 2024, when struck by an intoxicated driver's SUV while biking in Salem County, New Jersey. Before each played for Boston College — and Johnny Gaudreau starred in the NHL with the Blue Jackets and Calgary Flames — the Gaudreaus played for USHL teams.

Johnny played for the Dubuque Fighting Saints (2010-11) and Matthew for the Omaha Lancers (2011-13).

"Johnny and Matthew left an immeasurable impact on the communities where they lived and played," USHL president and commissioner Glenn Hefferan said in a statement. "As a New Jersey native, I had the privilege of watching them grow up in our hockey community, with (their father) Guy behind the bench and (mother) Jane cheering proudly in the stands. They were not only exceptional players and teammates but, most importantly, extraordinary people."

Guy and Jane Gaudreau joined Hefferan in Sioux Falls to present Wyttenbach with the award, which has criteria rooted in traits the Gaudreau brothers displayed as players, on and off the ice.

"Their love for the game was only surpassed by their love for their families," Hefferan's statement said. "As devoted husbands to Meredith (Johnny's wife) and Madeline (Matthew's wife) and loving fathers to their beautiful children, they led with the same integrity, passion, and humility they brought to the rink. This award was created to honor their legacy and to serve as a shining example of excellence, character, and heart both on and off the ice."

Wyttenbach overcame an injury to lead the Stampede in scoring and was selected for the 2025 Chipotle All-American Game. He's ranked 222nd among North American skaters eligible for this year's draft by NHL Central Scouting.

Off the ice, he mentored his younger brother and local youth hockey players while racking up community service hours — filling food bags at a local food bank, serving dinners at the St. Francis House, ringing bells for The Salvation Army and making visits to local schools and hockey practices.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets sweep Washington Capitals to keep playoff hopes afloat

By Brian Hedger- April 14, 2025

WASHINGTON — Adam Fantilli, Jet Greaves and the rest of the Blue Jackets aren't rolling over.

Paced by two goals for Fantilli and Greaves' 29 saves while playing his fourth game in five days, the Jackets avoided elimination from the playoff race for the fourth straight game by downing the Washington Capitals, 4-1, at Capital One Arena to sweep the top team in the Eastern Conference in a weekend back-to-back.

"Obviously, we know it's win or go home," defenseman Zach Werenski said. "Guys are really playing our system right now, we're getting huge saves from Jet and it's been a fun couple days here."

Fantilli also scored two goals in the Blue Jackets' 7-0 victory over the Capitals on Saturday at Nationwide Arena to give him four goals in two games to raise his goal total to 29 with two games left to reach the 30-goal milestone.

"He's been huge, especially as of late," Werenski said. "He's scored some huge goals for us, made some big plays and he's playing the right way. He's playing responsible. He's taking care of all of his defensive duties and letting his skill take over, so it's been a ton of fun to watch him do his thing out there."

Werenski scored the first goal for Columbus, which can be eliminated while off Monday if the Montreal Canadiens defeat the Chicago Blackhawks. Should the Blackhawks pull off an upset at Bell Centre in Montreal, the Blue Jackets will play another game Tuesday in Philadelphia they'll need to win to keep their playoff hopes viable.

"Listen, we're trying to get into the playoffs," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "We know where we're at. I told you guys before, some guys watch, some guys don't. I don't know what you'd have to be to not know where we're at, so everybody knows we have to win. So, we're conducting ourselves like that. We're playing hard every night, trying to get two points every night to get where we want to be, and that's in the playoffs."

Washington took a quick 1-0 lead just 1:10 into the game on Alex Ovechkin's 896th career goal, pushing his all-time NHL record one higher with his first goal since breaking Wayne Gretzky's long-held record a week earlier. Ovechkin didn't play Saturday in Columbus.

Ovechkin one-timed a shot past Greaves from the slot after getting a perfect feed from Dylan Strome following a Blue Jackets turnover deep in their own end. That was the last thing they needed with their entire season at stake, but it didn't turn into a tidal wave of goals for the Capitals.

Instead, the Jackets battled back and tied it 1-1 late in the first on a goal by Zach Werenski, who scored for the second straight game to up his total to 22 for the season – second among all NHL defensemen.

Fantilli took it from there.

After putting the Jackets up 2-1 early in the second off a turnover, the second-year center pushed it to 3-1 early in the third with his second goal of the night, 29th of the season and fourth in two days against the Capitals. The third overall pick of the 2023 NHL draft has surged into a starring role down the stretch at the most opportune time for the Blue Jackets.

Greaves, originally signed as an undrafted free agent, continues to shine every time he gets the net while replacing injured starter Elvis Merzlikins. The Blue Jackets' next on-ice challenge is Tuesday in

Philadelphia, which could again have their playoff hopes at stake if they get some help from the Blackhawks on Monday in Montreal.

"It means a lot," Fantilli said. "You want to have everybody pulling on the same rope, and I think our whole team's been doing a great job of doing that. We've had a lot of depth scoring. Everybody's been dialing in as much as possible, and it's been helping us a lot."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets' Dean Evason clarifies comments, but goaltending mysteries persist

By Aaron Portzline- April 12, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Dean Evason arrives at most of his news gatherings with a barb, a shoutout or a one-liner for the assembled media or public relations staffers, but his post-practice chat on Friday was different. The Columbus Blue Jackets' first-year coach wanted to clear the air.

After Thursday's comeback 3-2 win over the Buffalo Sabres, in which Jet Greaves made 39 saves and was the game's star, Evason was asked why Greaves, despite his strong numbers and the Blue Jackets' chronically substandard goaltending, had been stuck with AHL Cleveland for so much of the season.

"That's a Don Waddell question," Evason said, referring to Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell.

Evason said he realized immediately that his answer could be construed in several different ways — none of them positive — and that he considered clarifying his comments before he walked away from the lectern and back into the coaches office, where his assistants and Waddell were gathered.

"I knew as soon as I said it that it was going to create a storm," Evason said. "I just want to clarify. I don't read (our coverage), as you guys know, but I've been told that there's some speculation on why I said it was a Don Waddell question.

"I'm going to clarify that Don Waddell and I are 100 percent on the same page. We communicate about everything. There is not one point this season where I've asked for a guy to get called up and he said no. There's not one point this season where he told me we were going to call a guy up and I said no.

"The reason I said it is, I'm not talking about a call-up or a possible call-up two months ago right after a game. My focus is the hockey game and the hockey team. I simply (meant), 'If you want to ask a question like that, that's for Don.' "

Waddell did not respond to messages from The Athletic seeking comment, either after Thursday's game or on Friday. But the question still stands:

Why did the Blue Jackets stick with their struggling tandem of Elvis Merzlikins and Daniil Tarasov as the team faded from a playoff spot in recent weeks? Between March 2 and April 6, the Blue Jackets went 4-11-1, the second-worst record in the NHL during that span.

During those 16 games, Merzlikins went 3-7-1 with an .872 save percentage and 4.01 goals-against average, while Tarasov went 1-3-0 with an .880 save percentage and 3.38 goals-against average.

That's not to mention some of the issues Merzlikins, who turns 31 on Sunday, has had recently with his temper — smashing his stick after allowing goals (vs. Colorado on April 3) and screaming at teammates during games (vs. Toronto on April 5).

The AHL is not the NHL, of course. But Greaves, who has never looked out of place in Columbus, has been on a burner with AHL Cleveland since the middle of February. He was 8-3-1 with a .949 save percentage in his 12 outings before getting recalled on Thursday.

Asked how much a Greaves recall had been discussed internally, Evason was vague.

"We talk about all the players in Cleveland who are playing well or not playing well, about the projections (of a player), that kind of stuff," Evason said. "When and if we need a call-up, then we discuss who that player is. It's day by day, and it fluctuates."

Greaves is almost certain to start at 12:30 p.m. (ET) Saturday when the Blue Jackets host the Washington Capitals at Nationwide Arena. Merzlikins will not be in the lineup, Evason said, meaning that Tarasov will serve as Greaves' backup.

It's not quite clear what's going on with Merzlikins. On Friday, for a second straight day, he did not have a stall in the Blue Jackets' dressing room.

But that might indicate what it typically does — that a player is out with a long-term injury, or otherwise not in the team's plans — because the Jackets dressing room is over capacity following the late-season addition of several players. It's so crowded that forward Jack Williams is dressing in a temporary stall in the middle of the room.

Merzlikins took part in Thursday's morning skate, but left earlier than usual — even for that night's starter — and was ruled out with an injury. That's when the call was made to Greaves in Cleveland, who threw a pile of clothes into a suitcase and drove the 2 1/2 hours to Columbus.

Evason was asked if Merzlikins was injured during Thursday's skate, and after thinking for a moment, said, "Nope."

That would suggest that Merzlikins was trying to play through an existing injury when he skated on Thursday, as Waddell indicated to reporters on Thursday that Merzlikins was injured.

Greaves, who has played in 158 AHL games over the past three seasons, has a one-way NHL contract for next season. Is he already getting a jump on next season? Nobody will say. The Blue Jackets play a back-to-back with Washington — they play in D.C. on Sunday — and Greaves is expected to travel with the club.

Asked if Greaves has been told how long he's staying, Evason said it's "day by day."

The Athletic / Adam Fantilli helps Blue Jackets keep playoff hopes alive with 2 goals, 1 powerful shift

By Aaron Portzline- April 13, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — There were fights. There were big hits. There were at least two bizarre occurrences. And there were lots of goals, at least for the home team.

The Columbus Blue Jackets, clinging to faint playoff hopes, took a 6-0 lead midway through the second period and cruised to a 7-0 win over the Washington Capitals before a crowd of 18,645 at Nationwide Arena. The game had something for everyone.

Adam Fantilli scored two goals, including one at the end of a particularly memorable shift, to lead the way for the Blue Jackets, James van Riemsdyk (one goal, two assists, 3 points) had a Gordie Howe hat trick, and goaltender Jet Greaves (21 saves) had his first NHL shutout.

The Blue Jackets don't play many day games — the puck dropped at 12:30 p.m. ET — so there's always some curiosity about whether the game will have much early jump, although the desperate state of Columbus' postseason chances may have mitigated that concern.

"The intensity was there real early," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "That's not a bad thing."

The Capitals, who opted to rest star winger Alex Ovechkin and others, looked sleepy. They gave Zach Werenski (1:00 of the first) and Kent Johnson (4:45) way too much space on their goals for a 2-0 lead less than five minutes into the game.

The physicality picked up late in the first when Fantilli turned in a shift that featured an array of his skills and attributes. He won a puck battle against Washington's Ryan Leonard, sending Leonard sailing backward to the ice as the play went the other direction.

Seconds later, Fantilli took a pass from Johnson and scored off the rush to make it 3-0 with only 36 seconds left in the first.

The Capitals were furious. Leonard, who just joined them after finishing his season at Boston College, is a prized prospect. They went after Fantilli the rest of the night.

"I was reaching for (the puck). He was reaching for it," Fantilli said, recalling the hit on Leonard. "At the last second, I saw him. I didn't want to be the one who went down there. It's not like I was hunting him the whole way down the ice.

"I saw him a half-second before I ran into him. Whatever. To go down and score, that was great. It gave us some momentum going into the intermission, and we kept rolling with it."

The lead grew to 6-0 only 5:14 into the second on goals by Fantilli, Sean Monahan and Cole Sillinger. At this point, the Capitals, with AHL call-up Hunter Shepard in goal, started fighting back — literally.

Blue Jackets fourth-line center Sean Kuraly got tangled with Leonard in the defensive zone behind the play, and the two confronted each other coming up the ice. Leonard wanted to fight, and Kuraly eventually obliged him and pounded him down with three heavy rights.

Less than two minutes later, van Riemsdyk — whose brother Trevor was on the ice for Washington — had a spat with Capitals defenseman Rasmus Sandin. After a few jabs, they were fighting, too, with van Riemsdyk landing the first punch and landing on Sandin.

Oddly enough, two of the NHL's toughest players — Columbus' Mathieu Olivier and Washington's Tom Wilson — did not drop the mitts against each other or others. But Wilson did draw an "abuse of officials" penalty after the first-period buzzer.

The last violent display came midway through the third period, to the crowd's delight.

Washington's Pierre-Luc Dubois, who is seen as a villain in Columbus after demanding a trade and playing his way out of town several years ago, took a run at Blue Jackets defenseman Jordan Harris on the corner. He mostly whiffed, but the intent was obvious.

The Blue Jackets flocked to the scene, with the 6-foot-5 Dmitri Voronkov reaching across the top of the scrum to give Dubois an old-school face wash, which Dubois did not appreciate.

This is a serious time for the Blue Jackets. The Montreal Canadiens took a half-step toward clinching the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference with a 1-0 overtime loss on Sunday against the Toronto Maple Leafs, but they could have ended it with a regulation win.

So, we play on.

The Blue Jackets, with 83 points and three games remaining, can still catch the Canadiens (88 points, two games remaining) but any type of loss by Columbus the rest of the way or any type of win by Montreal — that's regulation, overtime or shootout — would clinch the final spot for the Canadiens.

This could be a nervy time for the Blue Jackets.

But that doesn't mean there isn't room for levity, and there were two instances Saturday that even longtime hockey observers might never have witnessed.

Just seconds after Johnson's goal made it 2-0, Columbus' Denton Mateychuk sent a puck ahead from the neutral zone, hoping to rim it around to the other side. As Mateychuk released the puck, Shepard left his net to meet it along the boards, but the puck instead kicked off the leg of an NHL linesman.

The angle of the carom sent it directly into the Capitals' net before Shepard could recover, but, per NHL rule 6.6, the goal was disallowed. A goal can not be scored directly off an official.

The doozy was in the third period.

After Voronkov's stinky-glove treatment of Dubois at 10:18 of the third, Voronkov was given a 10-minute misconduct that should have ended his evening. The message was lost in translation, however. Voronkov, a Russian, has only partially picked up the English language.

When the referee told him he had "10," meaning minutes, Voronkov thought he was merely identifying him, as he wears sweater No. 10. So instead of heading to the dressing room as Dubois did, Voronkov headed to the bench for a seat. And nobody noticed.

A minute later, when Voronkov came onto the ice for the power play, the Blue Jackets were given a minor penalty for using an ineligible player. Evason was furious — he later acknowledged that he and his staff had erred — but the players seated next to him on the bench thought it was hilarious.

"I could not stop laughing," Fantilli said. "I was sitting between Boone and Monny, and they were making it a lot more funny. It's hilarious.

"This guy gets a 10-minute misconduct, goes back for a sip of Gato and thinks he's ready for the peep (power play). The ref came over and said, 'I told him!' And we were like, 'He doesn't speak English at all.'"

Amid the goals, fights and giggles was Greaves, who was called up from AHL Cleveland on an emergency basis Thursday and has won both of his starts. Saturday, he made 11 of his 22 saves in the third period, but his best play was early in the game when the play was wide open.

Greaves is now 4-2-2 with a .921 save percentage this season.

"It's been amazing," Fantilli said. "He's been grinding all (these) years. Not just this year but years past. Every time he's come up here, he's been great for us."

The Blue Jackets know what's coming Sunday. Ovechkin is likely to return to the lineup, but the rest of the Capitals will be looking for a major response after getting embarrassed Saturday.

Greaves will likely be the goaltender, too, which would be four games in five days for him, including an AHL start the day before he was recalled. Starter Elvis Merzlikins is injured, the club said, and it's been made clear that Evason has no faith in Daniil Tarasov, who served as Greaves' backup Saturday.

"Whatever the situation is, if I'm going to play, I'll be happy to play," Greaves said. "I like to be in the net; I like to play hockey."

The Athletic / Jet Greaves keeps rolling, Adam Fantilli keeps scoring in crucial win for Blue Jackets

By Aaron Portzline- April 14, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets have been one of the NHL's most inspiring stories all season, and this storybook journey may yet get a storybook ending.

One week ago, the Blue Jackets were parked in 12th place in the Eastern Conference, with four teams and eight points separating them from the final playoff spot. It wasn't a pretty picture, either. There were verbal spats between teammates, ugly performances and shutout losses.

The Blue Jackets haven't won anything yet, but they've found a late-season surge that's putting an immense amount of pressure on the Montreal Canadiens with only two games remaining for both teams.

Adam Fantilli scored two goals for the second straight game and rookie goaltender Jet Greaves made 29 saves to continue his remarkable play in less-than-ideal circumstances, guiding the Blue Jackets to a 4-1 win Sunday over the Washington Capitals before 18,573 in Capital One Arena.

It marked the Blue Jackets' fourth straight win. The last three have come in the face of elimination, a pressure-packed way to play. Sunday's win marked the first time all season the Blue Jackets have won in regulation in the second half of a back-to-back.

"We played hard. We played simple. Jet, obviously, made some huge saves for us, but we played desperate," defenseman Zach Werenski told reporters in Washington, D.C. "All we can do is try to win hockey games and see what shakes out. Everyone's buying in. It's win or go home."

Werenski and Dmitri Voronkov also scored for the Blue Jackets, who fell behind 1-0 only 1:10 into the game on an Alex Ovechkin goal and didn't seem the least bit fazed. On the ensuing faceoff, Columbus' Mathieu Olivier dropped the gloves with Washington's Dylan McIlrath and landed two or three heavy punches.

After that, the Blue Jackets played right with the club that's been leading the Eastern Conference — and, at times, the NHL — all season.

The entire lineup deserves credit for that, of course, but nobody more than Greaves.

Sunday's game was his fourth in five days, including a start for AHL Cleveland last Wednesday before his call-up. And while Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason spent his pre-game and post-game media scrums acting like that was no big deal, it's a pretty rare feat at the pro level.

The first shot Greaves faced on Sunday was Ovechkin wide open in the slot, found there by a pass off the wall from Dylan Strome, and he blasted a one-timer into the net. Ovechkin has scored a few goals in his day — that was No. 896, an NHL record — but after that, Greaves shut the door. He stopped the final 29 shots, meaning he's stopped 90 of 93 shots (.968 save percentage) in his three starts since the recall.

Evason didn't want to single out Greaves for praise. Greaves wouldn't go there, either. But Werenski let it rip like one of his wrists.

"It's incredible," Werenski said. "He works super hard. We've seen it a number of times this year. For him to come in here and do what he's doing right now in these important games, it's unbelievable. It's given our team a big boost. Hats off to him. He's played incredibly, and he's played a lot of hockey in the last couple of days."

“Nothing seems to faze him. He just plays his game. He’s confident in there. He gives our team confidence with the way he plays. He’s probably ready for a day off, but so impressive. He gets scored on early in the game and he just settles right in.”

The Blue Jackets still have very little margin for error in making the postseason.

If Montreal wins either of their two remaining games — they host the 31st-place Chicago Blackhawks on Monday and the Carolina Hurricanes on Wednesday — the Blue Jackets are eliminated. If the Canadiens lose both of their remaining games in overtime or a shootout, they’re still in, no matter what the Blue Jackets do.

But if the Blue Jackets win their remaining two games — at the Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday, then home vs. the New York Islanders on Thursday — they’ll make the playoffs if Montreal goes 0-1-1 or 0-2-0.

The odds still favor Montreal, of course. But the odds aren’t as long as they were just a few days ago.

“We’re trying to get into the playoffs, right?” Evason said. “We know where we’re at. I’ve told you guys before, some guys watch (the scoreboard) and some guys don’t. But you’d have to be ... I don’t know what you’d have to be to not know where we’re at. Everybody knows. We have to win, so we’re conducting ourselves like that. We’re playing hard every night, trying to get two points to get where we want to be, and that’s in the playoffs.”

The Blue Jackets tied the score 1-1 at 14:36 of the first period when Werenski sent the puck sailing through heavy traffic from high in the zone. It was his second goal in two nights, and his 22nd of the season.

Fantilli’s first, at 4:39 of the second, put the Blue Jackets ahead 2-1. He pounced on a turnover by Tom Wilson in the middle of the zone, rifling a wrister past Capitals goaltender Charlie Lindgren.

The lead grew to 3-1 at 1:57 of the third with one of the most beautiful goals of the season. The Blue Jackets had the puck down low when James van Riemsdyk sent the puck out front to Kent Johnson, who carried it wide of the slot, bringing all of the Capitals’ attention with him. But when everybody thought Johnson was going to shoot, he spotted Fantilli streaking out of the corner of his eye. Fantilli gathered the pass and rifled it into an abandoned net, with Lindgren sprawled on the ice for a Johnson shot that never came.

Fantilli now has 29 goals on the season, second only to Kirill Marchenko (31).

Voronkov made it 4-1 with just 4:12 remaining when he blocked a Capitals clearing attempt and gathered the puck behind the defender, zooming in for a breakaway on Lindgren.

Now the Blue Jackets wait — and watch.

On Saturday, after they’d flown to Washington, D.C., after a day game in Columbus, they found a TV to watch Montreal lose in OT to Toronto. Not the perfect result, but an acceptable one.

They flew after Sunday’s game to Philadelphia, where they’ll spend an off day on Monday before getting ready to play the Flyers on Tuesday. But on the docket Monday evening is a viewing of the Canadiens game vs. Chicago, which is captained by former Blue Jackets captain Nick Foligno. (You can imagine the text message requests that have been made.)

Here it is, mid-April, with only two games left in an 82-game season, and the Blue Jackets are still playing meaningful hockey and doing playoff math.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Is goaltender Jet Greaves seizing his NHL opportunity?

By Aaron Portzline- April 14, 2025

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

Item No. 1: Jet set?

Jet Greaves wasn't drafted, but he showed enough ability in the Ontario Hockey League to earn an invitation in September 2021 to play for the Blue Jackets in the Traverse City rookie prospect tournament. He played so well in that tournament that he earned an invitation to training camp.

Greaves looked really good at that first NHL training camp, earning the right to stick around and skate with AHL Cleveland when they broke away from the NHL club and opened their own camp to get ready for the season. Among AHL players, Greaves played so well that he earned an AHL contract.

Are you sensing a pattern?

Greaves excelled with Cleveland, such that the Blue Jackets knew they'd better get him on a two-way NHL deal before they risked losing him to another club. So midway through his first pro season, Greaves signed a three-year, entry-level deal.

The Blue Jackets have been calling up Greaves, mostly on an emergency basis, over the last three seasons, and he's almost always played well. This summer, as a restricted free agent, new Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell signed him to a two-year deal that includes an NHL one-way contract next season.

At every step of his development, Greaves has blown through the doubters and detractors — He's too short! He gives up too much of the net! Is he big enough to handle the traffic? — and overachieved. Now, there's another hurdle for him to clear.

The Blue Jackets will almost certainly spend major resources this summer to overhaul their goaltending. A buyout of starting goaltender Elvis Merzlikins, after three substandard seasons, must be considered, because a trade would be almost impossible. He makes \$5.4 million over the next two seasons.

It's clear that coach Dean Evason and his staff have lost all faith in backup Daniil Tarasov, so how the Blue Jackets handle him as a restricted free agent this summer bears watching.

And then there's Greaves, who is certainly making the case for an NHL roster spot next season.

He earned the first NHL shutout of his career on Saturday, making 22 saves in the Blue Jackets' 7-0 rout of the Washington Capitals. In two starts since Merzlikins left a morning skate early and was said by the club to be injured, Greaves has stopped 61 of 63 shots to lead the Blue Jackets to two must-wins.

The Blue Jackets will either need to trade for a veteran goaltender or sign one in free agency, but it remains to be seen where Greaves will fit in the mix.

Let's be honest: If the Blue Jackets' brass thought he was a bona fide NHL starter, he wouldn't have been recalled to start Game No. 78. He would have come up much sooner, especially in mid-March, when Merzlikins' game started to head south.

There are concerns about Greaves' size. Twenty years ago, he would have been a big goaltender at 6 feet, 190 pounds. In today's game, he's on the small side, which means he'll need to be technically sound and incredibly athletic.

Kevin Woodley, a contributing editor to "InGoal Magazine," sits and reviews film with some of the NHL's top goaltenders, breaking down their reads, style, tendencies, etc. He met with Greaves at some point last season, he said, and came away impressed.

"I know there's a bias against goalies who are 6 feet tall," Woodley said. "I look at Dustin Wolf (6-0) and Juuse Saros (5-11). People used to say they'd never be anything more than a backup, too, right? I'm not saying (Greaves) is going to be those guys, but anybody who says he can't play the position because of his size should probably look at those guys.

"The way Jet works, his passion for the position ... I just feel like (Jet) is going to make it happen."

The hope, Woodley said, is that Greaves' athleticism and smarts will offset any size disadvantage he might have. But as Blue Jackets fans have seen, even big goaltenders look small when they're not in the right position.

"The game has become so much about East-West puck movement," Woodley said. "Yes, you have to fill nets on open looks, but guys who track well and have patience on their (skate) edges are effective, and those are two of the things that Jet does really well.

"There are nights when teams get to Wolf like Toronto has a couple of times this season on open shots from the slot. But, if you're allowing open shots from the slot, you're probably not a good team anyway."

Stats can be bent in any number of ways to support a theory, but it's hard to quantify the numbers of a goaltender who has made only eight starts this season.

Woodley's favorite metric in that instance is Adjusted Save Percentage, which is the measure of how many goals he's saved beyond expectations per 100 shots faced. Greaves, at plus-3.5 percent — which means he's saving 3 1/2 goals more than expected per 100 shots — is No. 1 in the NHL. Next on the list is Carolina's Frederik Andersen at plus-2.0 percent.

When you consider all of Greaves' 18 NHL outings over the past three seasons, he's averaging a plus-2.6 percent, which is also best in the NHL in that span. That may not prove empirically that Greaves is a bona fide NHL starter. But it's an idea worth considering.

If Greaves starts today vs. Washington, it'll be four games in five days for him. He made it clear he'll never say no to playing time after Saturday's game. He might make every start the rest of the way. He might be a permanent resident of Columbus as soon as next year.

"The biggest thing for me is just being where my feet are," Greaves said. "Doing what I can to help the Monsters win games, and I'm here, doing what I can to help the Blue Jackets win games."

Greaves has two dressing rooms — one in Columbus, one in Cleveland — full of players who are rooting for him to make it. He's been Cleveland's MVP this season. On Saturday, he wore the postgame donkey cap in the dressing room as the players' pick for player of the game.

It's worth noting that, at every opportunity, Blue Jackets players praise Greaves for being a hard worker and a great teammate. There's no drama in his world.

"I don't read too much of the stuff that's written," Greaves said. "But anytime you hear that, it just means so much. What anybody would say about who I am as a person or a teammate is a lot more important to me than anything on the ice. That's so important.

"I'm really grateful for all of the relationships I've been able to make with the guys here. I hold so much love for the guys in this locker room."

Item No. 2: Legend of Elmo

The Blue Jackets have been around long enough now to build a list of quirks and novelties that only hardcore fans would understand: Vinny Prospal's "scoreboard" point, Claude Noel's "play with joy" edict, Matt Calvert's head-wrapped game winner, and, of course, the unfortunate but hilarious one-game mascot, Boomer.

More than 15 years ago — most likely during the 2008-09 season and almost certainly during a "Sesame Street Live!" event on a day between games — a balloon floated to the top of Nationwide Arena and got stuck. It was an Elmo balloon, depicting the red, friendly, furry, third-person-speaking monster with a falsetto voice who has been part of "Sesame Street" since 1980.

It's lodged high above the catwalks in Nationwide Arena, too high for arena workers to snatch and pull down. But it's not out of sight for eagle-eyed fans in certain spots of the arena, who have noticed it high above the scoreboard and wondered how it's survived all these years.

"It's stuck on something," said Derek Dawley, the Blue Jackets senior director of event presentation. "And it's in a tough spot. We might need a long stick, with what, chewing gum on the end of the stick?"

An Elmo balloon has been stuck to the top of Nationwide Arena for more than 15 years. (Derek Dawley)

Dawley is having as much fun with this as anybody, but it wasn't his idea to pump up Elmo as part of the Blue Jackets' game presentation. That was the brainwork of Blue Jackets motion graphics producer Patrick Cantwell and season intern Maggie Murphy, a student at Columbus College of Art & Design.

"They were going back and forth with ideas," Dawley said. "And they'd both read posts about it on Reddit, with Blue Jackets fans bringing it up and talking about it. They thought it could be fun because there's an Elmo fire meme (on social media) that you see quite a bit. Maybe this could be fun.

"It went back and forth: 'Should we go for it? Should we try it out?' We went for it and we won the game. So, here we are. When the fans gravitate toward something, you go with it, right?"

On Nov. 15, 2024, the Blue Jackets led Pittsburgh 3-2 after two periods at Nationwide. Elmo debuted in the third period when the Jackets scored three goals to pull away for a 6-2 win.

Elmo usually makes his appearance near the end of a TV timeout in the third period, just as play is about to resume. The scoreboard in Nationwide shows the Elmo meme — his arms extended and his hand (paws?) imploring fans to be "louder!" — mixed with intermittent shots of the balloon stuck way up there.

The Blue Jackets aren't undefeated when Elmo makes an appearance, but they do have one of the better home records (25-10-5) in the NHL this season. At recent games, a member of the Blue Jackets spirit squad has dressed in a full-body Elmo suit, further driving home the point.

And, hey, he's lasted longer than Boomer.

Item No. 3: Take 5, Jordan Harris

Take 5 is a quick, breezy sitdown with a Blue Jackets player, coach or front-office staffer. This week's features defenseman Jordan Harris:

Favorite restaurant?

In the world? Bistro du Midi, a French restaurant in downtown Boston. Incredible. My wife (Codie Cross) and I found it. Amazing. As for Columbus ... this city is really a good restaurant town, probably better than I thought. I'd go with Marcella's in the Short North.

What's the best concert you've been to?

That's tough. Probably Zac Brown Band in Fenway Park. Everybody's outside, the place is rocking. The fit of Fenway, combined with that band ... it's unbelievable. I'm not a huge country music fan, but that was fun. I like a lot of hip-hop, a lot of modern hip-hop, like Future. I like the creativity of it, the beats, the poetry.

Three non-hockey people you'd join for dinner?

I'm going to say my grandfather — my dad's dad — who passed away when I was really young, maybe even before I was born. I'd like to hear stories of my dad when he was younger. I watched a lot of Duncan Keith growing up, but I've never met him. So he'd be good. Then maybe Shaquille O'Neal. That'd be a good time.

Who is the best dresser on the team?

You know who has sneaky good style is Chinny (Yegor Chinakhov). You should check out some of his suits. He has a dark green suit with orange pinstripes. That might sound really funky, but it goes together really nice. I like clothes and shoes, but I don't go shopping all the time. There's a place downtown called Soul Classics that's really nice, like street-wear stuff. Shoes are kind of my thing.

What are you watching these days?

I just finished "The White Lotus." I liked the first two seasons better. It looks like a great vacation spot. It makes you want to go to Thailand, but probably not with those people (laughs). We'd probably do our own thing on the side.

Item No. 4: Snacks

- Read this quickly before everything changes. Montreal's 1-0 overtime loss in Toronto on Saturday helped keep the Blue Jackets' season alive. If the Canadiens had won in regulation, the Blue Jackets would be eliminated. The Blue Jackets must win their three remaining games, beginning with tonight's game in Washington D.C., then at Philadelphia on Tuesday and home vs. the New York Islanders on Thursday. Similarly, Montreal must lose its remaining two games — Monday vs. Chicago and Wednesday vs. Carolina, both at home — for the Jackets to advance. If the Canadiens lose one of those games in overtime or shootout and lose the other in regulation, the Blue Jackets, provided they win their remaining three games in regulation, would advance via the first tiebreaker (greater number of regulation wins, 30-29).
- All the Blue Jackets can control is what they do, and they face a tall task tonight in Washington. The Jackets are just 1-10 in the last half of back-to-backs this season, one of the worst records in the league.
- If the Blue Jackets score five goals in their final three games, they'll be the highest-scoring club in franchise history. The seven-goal outburst on Saturday vs. Washington gives the Jackets 254 goals. The 2021-22 club had 258 goals, while the 2018-19 club had 256.
- With a win in the home finale next Thursday vs. the Islanders, the Blue Jackets would finish 26-10-5 at Nationwide Arena this season, tied in wins with the 2017-18 club for second-most in a season (the 2016-17 club went 28-12-1). They could tie that '16-17 club with 57 home points.
- Adam Fantilli's two-goal game on Saturday, his fifth multi-goal game of the season and third since March 9, gives him 50 points (27-23-50) on the season. The Blue Jackets now have five 50-point producers this season: Zach Werenski (77), Kirill Marchenko (72), Kent Johnson (55), Sean Monahan (53) and now Fantilli. It's the third time in franchise history the Blue Jackets have had five players hit 50 or more points. The others: 2009-10 (Rick Nash, 67; Antoine Vermette, 65; Kristian Huselius, 63; R.J.

Umberger, 55; Jake Voracek, 50), and 2016-17 (Cam Atkinson, 62; Alex Wennberg, 59; Brandon Saad, 53; Nick Foligno, 51; Sam Gagner, 50).

- It wouldn't have been considered a slump for most defensemen, but Werenski's goal just one minute into Saturday's win over the Capitals snapped a 17-game streak without a goal, his longest streak of the season. He last scored on March 4, when he potted two goals in a 6-2 loss to Tampa Bay, then sent 71 shots on goal without finding the back of the net. His goal on Saturday was his 21st of the season, breaking his own single-season mark by Blue Jackets defensemen. It also put him at 77 points on the season, the fourth-most points — forward or defenseman — in a season for Columbus. With 12 shots on goal in the Blue Jackets' final three games, Werenski would become only the second player to register 300 shots on goal in a season. Nash did it three times: (329 in 2007-08, 306 in '11-12, and 305 in '10-11).

- Harris has been a healthy scratch in 49 games this season. In fact, he was healthy but out of the lineup for 22 straight games before he played on Saturday for the first time since Feb. 8, when the Blue Jackets dressed seven defensemen and Harris played just 2:02. Playing with Erik Gudbranson on the third pair, Harris played a season-high 16 minutes, 50 seconds and had a plus-2 rating.

- There was a lineup spot available for Harris because Jake Christiansen was injured in Thursday's game vs. Buffalo. But the decision to dress Harris gives you an indication of how the coaching staff feels about veteran Damon Severson, who has now been sat for six straight games and nine games overall this season. Severson has six years remaining on a contract that pays him \$6.25 million per year.

- The tributes to former Blue Jackets winger Johnny Gaudreau and his brother Matthew continue to accumulate. On Saturday, the USHL awarded Sioux Falls forward Ethan Wyttenbach the first annual Gaudreau Award, named after the late brothers, who both played in the USHL — Johnny for Dubuque (2010-11) and Matthew for Omaha (2011-12, '12-13). The award will honor the player who best exemplifies on-ice excellence with joy, enthusiasm, care and responsibility. Guy and Jane Gaudreau were onsite in Sioux Falls on Saturday to present the award to Wyttenbach in a pregame ceremony.

Stampede forward Ethan Wyttenbach has been named the inaugural recipient of The Gaudreau Award. USHL Commissioner Glenn Heffernan will present the honor to Ethan prior to puck drop at tonight's game.

- Two members of the Blue Jackets' 2024 draft class signed amateur tryout agreements with AHL Cleveland last week. Defenseman Charlie Elick (No. 36) and goaltender Evan Gardner (No. 60) both signed three-year, NHL entry deals with the Blue Jackets this spring, but those ELCs don't start until next season. Both Elick and Gardner could play for the Monsters, who currently hold a playoff spot, and still return to the Western Hockey League next season. However, if they look ready to turn pro, their junior days may be finished. No word yet on when Elick or Gardner will make their pro debuts. The Monsters play this afternoon in Toronto.

- The AAA Ohio Blue Jackets program had two players selected in the Ontario Hockey League priority draft on Saturday. Forward Cruz Cassels, son of former Blue Jacket Andrew Cassels, was chosen by Barrie (OHL) in the 10th round (No. 199), while defenseman Cooper John was picked by Oshawa in the 15th round (No. 297).

[BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets, Greaves cruise past Capitals](#)

By Craig Merz- April 12, 2025

COLUMBUS -- Jet Greaves made 21 saves for his first NHL shutout, and the Columbus Blue Jackets kept their Stanley Cup Playoff hopes alive with a 7-0 win against the Washington Capitals at Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

Adam Fantilli had two goals, and James van Riemsdyk had a goal and two assists for the Blue Jackets (37-33-9), who won their third straight game. Sean Monahan and Kent Johnson each had a goal and an assist.

"I never thought about it too much," Greaves said of the shutout in his 18th NHL game. "I just like to try to win games. Obviously, when you have shutouts, it usually means you're winning so I like it there, but otherwise it's just trying to help the team win."

Columbus trails the Montreal Canadiens by four points for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference and can be eliminated if Montreal defeats the Toronto Maple Leafs later Saturday.

"We're ready to live with whatever fate comes our way and just keep playing hard," Blue Jackets forward Sean Kuraly said. "We know we're just going to keep playing hard regardless of what happens elsewhere. Tonight was a good example."

The Blue Jackets led 3-0 after the first period.

"We just gave up those early goals, which puts us in a hole, and then the game's essentially decided at that point," Capitals coach Spence Carbery said. "So, then it becomes what it was. You just get through the periods."

Hunter Shepard allowed seven goals on 26 shots for the Capitals (50-20-9) in his season debut.

Forward Alex Ovechkin, who set the NHL all-time goals record last Sunday, and defenseman Jakob Chychrun each did not play due to rest. Washington previously clinched the Metropolitan Division and No. 1 seed in the East.

Carbery said after the game Ovechkin would play in the home game against the Blue Jackets on Sunday, although he was unsure about Chychrun.

"Obviously, the stakes are different for both teams," Capitals forward Nic Dowd said. "But it doesn't matter. I think if we play our game and play with detail and work hard, I think good things are going to happen."

Zach Werenski made it 1-0 at 1:00 of the first period from the left face-off dot. His 21st goal set the Blue Jackets record for most goals by a defenseman in a season.

Johnson upped the lead to 2-0 at 4:45 scoring in front.

Fantilli made it 3-0 at 19:24, completing the rush with Johnson that started with Fantilli's check at the other end that leveled Ryan Leonard.

"I feel like we studied it for a little bit but to give up that third one was tough," Washington defenseman John Carlson said.

Fantilli then made it 4-0 at 2:01 of the second period.

Monahan increased the lead to 5-0 at 4:37 at the crease from a setup by Kirill Marchenko, and Cole Sillinger extended it to 6-0 at 5:14, taking a pass in the slot from Dmitri Voronkov. It was his first goal in 15 games.

Van Riemsdyk scored for the 7-0 final at 17:41 of the third.

"Do we need to play chippy? Do we need to play undisciplined? No," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "Do we need to have an edge? Do we need to have some bite? Are we desperate? Yeah, we need that tomorrow night."

NOTES: Werenski's goal total is the most by a U.S.-born defenseman since Mathieu Schneider of the Detroit Red Wings had 21 in 2005-06. ... Fantilli (27 goals, 23 assists) become the fourth Blue Jackets player with 50 points in a season at age 20 or younger joining Pierre-Luc Dubois (61 in 2018-19), Rick Nash (57 in 2003-04) and Jakub Voracek (50 in 2009-10). ... The Capitals have allowed at least three goals in each of their past 10 games (4-5-1).

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets take care of business vs. Caps](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- April 12, 2025

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

BLUE JACKETS 7, CAPITALS 0

1. Adam Fantilli's two goals – and massive hit – sparked the Blue Jackets to a big victory.

In some ways, it's not a major surprise the Blue Jackets were able to down the Caps on Saturday afternoon. Columbus was playing to keep its postseason hopes alive, while Washington has clinched the top spot in the Eastern Conference. Alex Ovechkin didn't dress after a week of ceremony after setting the NHL's all-time goals record, while 30-goal forward Aliaksei Protas, standout defenseman Jacob Chychrun and goalie Logan Thompson were out because of injury.

But you still have to take care of business, and the Blue Jackets did that. Fantilli had a pair of goals to lead the attack, James van Riemsdyk added a Gordie Howe hat trick and Zach Werenski, Kent Johnson, Sean Monahan and Cole Sillinger all got on the board.

Johnson's goal was a highlight-reel tally, but for pure hockey theater, none was better than Fantilli's goal in the final minute of the first period that gave the Blue Jackets a 3-0 lead.

On the defensive end of the ice, Fantilli laid out Washington rookie Ryan Leonard with a clean shoulder-to-shoulder hit as both players reached to find a loose puck in the slot. As Leonard was on his hands and knees still trying to get his bearings, the Blue Jackets took the puck up the ice, and Johnson found Fantilli open back door for a short-side snipe past goalie Hunter Shepard.

If you think that for a hockey player, it doesn't get much better than laying someone out on one end of the ice and scoring on the other, well, you'd be right.

"Yeah, that was great," Fantilli said, starting with the hit. "I was reaching for (the puck), he was reaching for it. The last second I saw him, and I didn't want to be the one that went down there. It's not like I was hunting him the whole way down the ice. I saw him probably half a second before I ran into him, and to be able to go down and score, that was great. I thought it gave us some momentum there going into the second period, and we kept rolling with it."

Fantilli added a second goal early in the middle period, and the rout was on. His two tallies moved him to 27 on the year – 30 is on the table in his second season – and gave him 50 points on the campaign. The No. 3 overall pick in the 2023 draft has excelled down the stretch, and teammates are taking notice.

"Fants is bringing it for us," Sean Kuraly said of the 20-year-old center. "We need him to. We rely on him pretty heavily now, and we're going to need him the next week here to get some things done. He's playing really well for us, and we expect that. He shows it every day. He's a really good player and a good teammate. We're lucky to have him."

2. The Blue Jackets more than held their own in a physical affair.

Fantilli's hit and ensuing goal was like throwing a match into a dry pile of kindling wood, and by the time the Blue Jackets extended their lead to 6-0 early in the second period, you knew some shenanigans would be afoot.

That was the case the rest of the way, as there were two fights – Kuraly buried Leonard under an avalanche of right hands amid an old-school team-wide donnybrook, and van Riemsdyk dropped the gloves with defenseman Rasmus Sandin – in the second period and a kerfuffle in the third that led to misconducts for CBJ forward Dmitri Voronkov as well as Caps players Pierre-Luc Dubois and James' brother Trevor van Riemsdyk.

The 76 combined penalty minutes – including a 10-minute misconduct for Tom Wilson, who had words for the officials after there was no penalty on the Fantilli hit – were the most in a CBJ game this year, and you could sense the temperature rising as the two division rivals battled in the one-sided affair. The Blue Jackets didn't back down, though, and seemed to thrive on the physical play.

"When you have so many guys that are in the battle, I think it helps," Kuraly said. "They're not just looking at a couple of guys. Everyone is in the battle, and it's what we expect, and it's kind of what's helped us come out on top of these games."

Indeed, with the Blue Jackets riding a 4-11-1 stretch going into Tuesday's must-win game vs. Ottawa, head coach Dean Evason told his team it needed to play with more edge and bite – and confidence. The message was that you belong, so go play with swagger and let the chips fall where they may.

In winning three games in a row, the Blue Jackets have done just that, and physical play is a part of that equation.

"Do we need to play chippy? Do we need to play undisciplined? No," Evason said. "Do we need to have an edge? Do we need to have some bite? Are we desperate? Do we know where we're at? Yeah."

3. Jet Greaves continues to impress, earning his first career NHL shutout in the victory.

It seems almost impossible not to like Greaves. He's an underdog story, working himself from an undrafted goalie into an NHL netminder. The fans love him, partly because of his name and backstory but also because you can tell how hard he works and plays. Teammates love him because he's both a likable guy and he's easy to play in front of with his calm demeanor and no-fuss personality.

Greaves has been impressive each time he's been called up to Columbus, but his last two games might show just how high the ceiling is for him. Greaves made a season-high 39 saves in Thursday's win over Buffalo, keeping the Blue Jackets in the game when their play dipped at times, and then earned his first career shutout with 22 stops in the win over the Caps.

"The guys were so good in front of me tonight," Greaves said, "right from the start all the way to the end of the game. It was fun to see everyone bought in. I'm just super grateful today."

"Honestly, I never thought about (shutouts) too much. For me, I just like to try to win games. Obviously, when you have shutouts, it usually means you're winning, so I like it there, but otherwise I'm just trying to help the team win hockey games."

Greaves has shown his mettle in Cleveland, setting a team record for career wins, backstopping the team to within a win of the Calder Cup final a season ago and catching fire down the stretch this year. With a one-way contract next season, he seems ticketed to be with the Blue Jackets, but he's showing that the future might be now.

"It's been amazing," Fantilli said of having Greaves in net. "The kid has been grinding all year, not just this year but years past. Every time he's come up here, he's been great for us. He was awesome. It was really great to see."

[BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets down Capitals, win fourth straight](#)

By Harvey Valentine- April 14, 2025

WASHINGTON -- Alex Ovechkin scored his 896th NHL goal, but the Columbus Blue Jackets stayed in Stanley Cup Playoff contention with a 4-1 win against the Washington Capitals at Capital One Arena on Sunday.

With the win, the Blue Jackets moved three points back of the Montreal Canadiens for the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference. Columbus and Montreal each have two games remaining.

"I don't know what you'd have to be to not know where we're at, so everybody knows we have to win," Columbus coach Dean Evason said. "So, we're conducting ourselves like that. We're playing hard every night, trying to get two points every night to get where we want to be, and that's in the playoffs."

Adam Fantilli scored twice, and Zach Werenski also scored for the Blue Jackets (38-33-9), who beat the Capitals 7-0 on Saturday. Jet Greaves made 29 saves after recording his first NHL shutout on Saturday.

"We've seen it a number of times this year, and for him to come in here and do what he's doing right now this time in these important games, it's been unbelievable," Werenski said of Greaves. "I think it's given our team a big boost. Hats off to him. He's played incredible and obviously played a lot of hockey the last couple days."

Charlie Lindgren made 19 saves for the Capitals (50-21-9), who are 3-6-1 in their past 10 games and locked into first place in the Metropolitan Division. With the Washington loss, the Winnipeg Jets clinched the Presidents' Trophy awarded to the team with the best record at the end of the regular season.

"I think tonight was a little bit better. The compete was there," Capitals forward Tom Wilson said. "A couple of mistakes that just end up in the back of our net. At this time of year, it's such a thin line as to winning and losing. We've just got learn from this and know down the stretch in the playoffs it's going to be those little things going our way that are going to be the important part."

Ovechkin gave the Capitals a 1-0 lead 1:10 into the first period, scoring on a one-timer from the slot off a pass from Dylan Strome. It was his 43rd goal in 63 games this season.

After Ovechkin's goal, Greaves stopped the Capitals' final 29 shots.

"Sometimes the goals happen earlier than later, and it's just being able to handle every experience and for me, just being able to control what I can control and doing what I can to help the team," Greaves said.

Werenski tied it 1-1 at 14:36 when he scored on wrist shot from the point through traffic.

Fantilli gave the Blue Jackets a 2-1 lead at 4:39 of the second period. Capitals forward Tom Wilson failed to control a pass in the Washington zone, and Fantilli controlled the loose puck and beat Lindgren from the slot.

"Games are determined by a couple of plays either way," Capitals coach Spencer Carbery said. "We made two or three mistakes, ends up in the back of our net. They made a few mistakes, made a bunch, we just didn't take advantage of them."

Fantilli made it 3-1 at 1:57 of the third period, scoring over a sprawled Lindgren from the slot off a behind-the-back pass from Kent Johnson.

Dmitri Voronkov broke up a pass from Strome in the neutral zone, chased down the puck and beat Lindgren short side at 15:48 of the third period for the 4-1 final.

"I think we played a solid two periods," Ovechkin said. "We had plenty of chances. But I think on some nights you just can't score. Lots of positive moments. We'll take it and move on."

NOTES: Fantilli became the fourth player in Blue Jackets history to record multigoal outings in consecutive days, joining Patrik Laine (Jan. 30-31, 2022), Scott Hartnell (Nov. 7-8, 2014) and R.J. Umberger (March 30-31, 2012). ... The Capitals have allowed at least three goals in 11 consecutive games. ... Carbery said goalie Logan Thompson (upper-body injury) skated today on his own, and that forward Aliaksei Protas (lower body) may start skating in the middle of this week.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Greaves shines again in CBJ victory over the Capitals](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- April 14, 2025

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

BLUE JACKETS 4, CAPITALS 1

1. Jet Greaves continues to inspire the Blue Jackets in their late-season run.

Adam Fantilli had two goals, Zach Werenski and Dmitri Voronkov also tallied, and Kent Johnson set up one of Fantilli's scores with a superb pass, but there was little doubt who the Blue Jackets' best player was on Sunday night as they won their fourth consecutive game.

Greaves continues to impress in net, winning his third straight start and getting a third victory for the Blue Jackets in four days. After giving up a goal to Alex Ovechkin – no shame in that – on the Capitals' first shot of the game, Greaves stopped the next 29 that came his way, including all 13 by Washington in the second period as the Caps took over the game at times.

Greaves has now denied 90 of 93 shots (.968 save percentage) in the last three games, providing a boost for the Blue Jackets as their playoff hopes hang on with no margin for error.

"It's incredible," Zach Werenski said. "Coming here and doing what he's doing right now at this time in these important games, it's been unbelievable. I think it's given our team a big boost, so hats off to him. He's played incredible."

If there was some debate on the outside if Greaves would get the start in what was his fourth game in five days – he also backstopped AHL Cleveland to a win Wednesday night – there wasn't much for head coach Dean Evason.

"It's just hockey," Evason said. "It can't be that much work, right? You're playing hockey. Gosh, when we were kids, I mean, you play two in one day. When you become a pro, why can't you play two hockey games in one day? You do it as a kid all the time. What's the difference?"

For Greaves, there was little debate that he'd take the assignment. He started three games in three days last year as the Monsters clinched a division title in the season's final weekend, so he has some experience in handling a heavy workload, but he's also a young guy who would rather be nowhere else than where he is – playing NHL hockey games that matter.

"At the end of the day, it's so fun to be out there playing and competing," Greaves said. "It's an important game, and it's always awesome to be out there playing, so I'm enjoying it."

And as for Ovechkin, after letting in the opening goal by the Great 8 – the NHL-record 896th of his career – Greaves turned aside the next five shots by the legend. Two of those were grade-A chances from the slot in the second period that Greaves made look a lot easier than they were considering who was on the other end.

"It's fun," Greaves said of facing Ovechkin. "It's fun to challenge yourself against the best guys in the world. It's awesome to have those opportunities, to be in that situation. It's fun just trying to keep the puck out of the net."

2. The Blue Jackets knew the Capitals would come out hard, but they were ready for what Washington threw at them.

With Ovechkin – as well as a fair number of other injured Caps – out for Saturday’s matinee in Columbus, the Blue Jackets romped to a 7-0 home victory. Considering the personnel matters, the desperation with which the Blue Jackets are playing as they battle for their playoff lives, and the fact Washington has sewn up the top spot in the Eastern Conference, it wasn’t a huge surprise Columbus had the upper hand in its own barn.

But you knew Sunday would be different. The Capitals returned home smarting after Saturday’s loss and had both Ovechkin and top defenseman Jacob Chychrun (illness) back in the lineup, and after how physical Saturday’s game was, you knew Washington would bring a better effort in the second half of the back-to-back.

The Blue Jackets handled that push, though, even with the early Ovechkin goal. In the eyes of Greaves, it helped that CBJ heavyweight Mathieu Olivier went toe-to-toe in a fight with massive Caps defenseman Dylan McIlrath at the ensuing faceoff after the goal.

“I thought the guys did a good job in front of me responding,” Greaves said, “especially with that fight right after it.”

It would be overstating it to say that was what got the Blue Jackets into it, but they did settle down after and found their game. Werenski knotted things up late in the first with his 22nd goal of the season to cap a strong shift by the top line, then Fantilli’s first goal after a Tom Wilson turnover gave the Blue Jackets the lead for good.

Washington pushed from there in the second, but Columbus locked things down in the third, helped by Fantilli’s early goal and Voronkov’s final tally.

“We had a chat before the game about that we need to be prepared to play any game that presents itself to us,” Evason said. “Not that it’s different. We’ve asked our group to do that all year and they’ve responded to it, and they did here tonight.”

3. The Blue Jackets will be very interested viewers as Montreal takes on Chicago on Monday.

With two games to go, Columbus remains alive for the Stanley Cup Playoffs, but their fate also is out of their hands.

The Canadiens host the Blackhawks – the 31st-place team of 32 in the NHL – on Monday night, and a Habs’ win would clinch their playoff spot and end the CBJ quest for playoff hockey. You can bet Centre Bell will be hopping with anticipation, and you can also surmise the Blue Jackets will be checking in Monday evening on how things are going north of the border.

“Of course,” Werenski said. “We were watching the game last night at dinner when we got here, and we’re watching the game tomorrow as well. We’ll see what happens, but all we can control is our game. Hopefully it works out in our favor.”

Montreal now sits three points ahead of Columbus with each having two games to play. An overtime loss by the Habs would keep the Jackets alive, but it would mean Columbus would have to win its final two games – Tuesday at Philadelphia and Thursday at home vs. the Islanders – in regulation and hope Montreal also then loses its finale Wednesday vs. Carolina.

No matter what happens, though, the Blue Jackets have been taking care of business over the past four games to keep the pressure on Montreal.

"It's one of those things where we can only control what's in front of us, and that's the games and winning them," Werenski said. "It's just been a collective buy-in these last three, four games. Everyone's been stepping up, playing the right way. It's been a lot of fun, so hopefully we can just keep this thing going."

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Crush Capitals Behind Jet Greaves' First NHL Shutout

By Mark Scheig- April 12, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets faced their latest do or die situation on Saturday afternoon against the Washington Capitals. They started early and on-time. They never looked back.

Jet Greaves made 22 saves to record his first NHL shutout. Adam Fantilli's two goals helped pace the offense in a 7-0 blowout win over the Washington Capitals.

The story of this game was the Blue Jackets taking care of business. They now await the result of the Montreal Canadiens game against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Saturday night.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets wasted no time getting on the board. Zach Werenski made it 1-0 just one minute into the game. He took a feed from Sean Monahan and beat Hunter Shepard. His 21st goal of the season set a new franchise record for goals in a season by a defenseman.

The Capitals were without some regulars. Alex Ovechkin didn't play but is expected to play Sunday when the same two teams meet at Capital One Arena. Jakob Chychrun didn't play again. The Blue Jackets took full advantage of the Capitals resting guys knowing their spot in the playoffs was secured.

Kent Johnson extended the lead to 2-0 on a filthy goal. He got the puck at the blue line, dangled around a defender and then beat Shepard.

The temperature of the game spiked when Fantilli made it 3-0 at the end of the first. He laid a clean hit on Ryan Leonard and then scored at the other end on the resulting rush. Tom Wilson was highly displeased and mouthed off to the officials. He got 12 minutes in the box for his efforts. Fantilli said postgame the hit was clean but was expecting to have to answer later in the game.

The Blue Jackets opened the second with three goals in the span of 3:13 to extend to a 6-0 lead. Fantilli scored his second of the game. Sean Monahan added his 19th of the season for 5-0. Then Cole Sillinger scored his 10th of the season. Then things got very physical from there while Greaves shut the door.

Leonard and Sean Kuraly got into a fight with each player getting seven minutes. Less than two minutes later, Rasmus Sandin fought James van Riemsdyk. They got seven minutes a piece also.

Then in the third, a slew of misconducts were handed out. Trevor van Riemsdyk and Pierre-Luc Dubois got 10 each along with Dmitri Voronkov. Well, at least Voronkov didn't think so.

On the resulting Blue Jackets' power play, Voronkov came off the bench and played for 32 seconds before officials realized he was an illegal player. That's a bench minor for an ineligible player. Fantilli said postgame he couldn't stop laughing at what happened. Evason ultimately said that falls on him and that there will be a coach's accountability meeting before Sunday's game.

Advertisement: 0:14

It appeared Voronkov didn't understand he was given a penalty due to not being able to fully understand English. Kuraly said he'd never seen anything like it before. "I think he thought they said number 10, not 10 minutes. I don't know. We'll give him some slack for that one."

James van Riemsdyk scored with 2:19 left in the game to complete his Gordie Howe hat trick to make it 7-0. Shepard made 19 saves on the 26 shots he faced.

The Blue Jackets expect some carryover for the rematch on Sunday in Washington. If it's anything like it was Saturday, it could make for some bigtime fireworks.

The Hockey Writers / 3 Takeaways From the Blue Jackets' Dominant 7-0 Victory Over the Capitals

By Matthew Buhrmann- April 13, 2025

On Saturday afternoon, the Columbus Blue Jackets faced a crucial game against the Washington Capitals, knowing their playoff hopes were hanging by a thread. There was no room for hesitation, and the Blue Jackets came out swinging from the opening faceoff. They took control early and never let up, putting together a dominant 7-0 victory that showed what this team is capable of when everything is clicking in both ends.

Jet Greaves Shines in His First NHL Shutout

It's hard to ignore the impact that Jet Greaves had on this game. The young goaltender was rock solid, stopping all 22 shots to earn his first NHL shutout. The performance was as much a reflection of his skill as it was his mindset. After the game, Greaves humbly credited his teammates for their strong defensive play.

"The guys were so good in front of me tonight. Right from the start all the way to the end of the game. It was fun to see everyone bought in. I'm just super grateful today," said Jet Greaves post-game.

His journey to this point has been nothing short of remarkable, going from undrafted to now showing his talent in the NHL is the kind of story the fifth line should rally around.

Adam Fantilli, who had a big night of his own, scoring two goals, praised Greaves' hard work.

"It's been amazing. The kid has been grinding all year, not just this year but years past. Every time he's come up here, he's been great for us. He was awesome. It was really great to see," said Adam Fantilli post-game.

This wasn't a one-off performance, either. Earlier in the week, Greaves made 39 saves against the Buffalo Sabres, proving that he can handle pressure and deliver results in a tight playoff race. With performances like this, Columbus fans should feel optimistic about what the future holds for their young netminder.

Blue Jackets Were the More Physical Team

Columbus didn't just control the game—they owned the physical battle as well. Fantilli set the tone with a thunderous hit on rookie Ryan Leonard that led directly to his goal, which was the heaviest hit of the game, in my opinion. By the time Columbus pushed their lead to 6-0 early in the second period, the tension between the two teams had boiled over.

The second period later turned into a battle with fists flying. Sean Kuraly took on Leonard in a one-sided fight, while James van Riemsdyk squared off against Rasmus Sandin.

The third period wasn't any calmer, with Dmitri Voronkov and Capitals players Pierre-Luc Dubois and Trevor van Riemsdyk earning misconduct penalties in a heated meeting.

In total, there were 76 combined penalty minutes—the most in any Blue Jackets game this season. Despite the chaos, Columbus thrived in the physical environment, something that will definitely carry over into Sunday's matchup on the road vs. the Capitals.

"Do we need to play chippy? Do we need to play undisciplined? No. Do we need to have an edge? Do we need to have some bite? Are we desperate? Do we know where we're at? Yeah," said head coach Dean Evason post-game.

Stayin' Alive

With the Blue Jackets' playoff aspirations still alive but hanging on by a thread, the Blue Jackets needed this win to keep their hopes intact. Now, the path ahead is clear but daunting. Columbus must win each of their remaining three games, and even that won't be enough unless the Montreal Canadiens falter. The Canadiens' 1-0 overtime loss on Saturday night gives Columbus a sliver of hope, but they'll need Montreal to lose both of their remaining games against the Chicago Blackhawks and Carolina Hurricanes. There's a caveat, though, as Montreal can make it in if they lose both games in overtime or a shootout, so this scenario is very unlikely for the Blue Jackets, but not impossible.

The odds are stacked against Columbus, but Saturday's performance showed they're more than capable of rising to the occasion, despite the preseason projections for this team. Whether or not they make the playoffs, the Blue Jackets have proven they won't go down without a fight, and they've given their fans plenty of reasons to believe in the future of this team.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Complete Weekend Sweep of Capitals to Stay in Playoff Race

By Mark Scheig- April 14, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets knew what they had to do on Sunday night against the Washington Capitals. They needed to win. Otherwise, their playoff race would end. Thanks to a pair of magnificent performances, the race will go into Monday.

Adam Fantilli scored two more goals while Jet Greaves playing his fourth game in five nights made 29 saves to lift the Blue Jackets to a 4-1 win over the Capitals at Capital One Arena. With the win, the Blue Jackets went 2-1-1 against the best in the East. It also ensured the Winnipeg Jets won their first President's Trophy in franchise history.

The story of this game was the duo of Fantilli and Greaves.

Game Recap

The Capitals did get Alex Ovechkin back in their lineup for Sunday's game. It didn't take him long to immediately make his presence known. He scored on the first shot on the game Greaves saw to make it 1-0.

Turns out that all Greaves would give up the whole night.

A turning point in the game happened four seconds after Ovechkin's goal. Mathieu Olivier and Dylan McIlrath dropped the gloves. Olivier knew he needed to give his team a spark. It served its purpose.

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At 14:36 of the first, the Blue Jackets were able to tie the game. Zach Werenski scored his 22nd of the season through a massive screen in front of Charlie Lindgren. That seemed to settle the team down.

In the second, Fantilli gave the Blue Jackets the lead. Tom Wilson wasn't able to corral a pass from the corner. The puck went right to Fantilli who buried his 28th of the season.

The Capitals pushed hard after that for the rest of the second period. Greaves answered all of them. His most notable save was on Lars Eller to keep things at 2-1. Despite a 13-7 edge in shots, the Capitals couldn't solve Greaves. This allowed the Blue Jackets to put the game out of reach in the third.

Fantilli scored his second of the game and 29th of the season. The pass from Kent Johnson was simply out of this world to make the goal happen. He completed a no-look pass to a streaking Fantilli which left a wide-open net.

Then as the game was winding down, Dmitri Voronkov drew a penalty on Dylan Strome. But before the call could be made, Voronkov iced the game away by scoring his 22nd of the season to make it 4-1.



Fantilli scored four goals this weekend and now needs just one goal in the last two games to secure his first 30-goal NHL season. Greaves stopped 51/52 this weekend against the Capitals, who did rest players on both games with their playoff spot locked in.

Now to reset the Blue Jackets' playoff situation. They await the result of Monday's Blackhawks/Canadiens game. If Montreal wins in any fashion, the Blue Jackets will be eliminated. If Montreal loses in any fashion even with an overtime loss, Tuesday's game in Philadelphia will matter. We'll revisit should it get to that point.

Both the Blue Jackets and Capitals will rest Monday with off days. The Blue Jackets will take on the Flyers Tuesday night and the Capitals will play the New York Islanders at UBS Arena on Tuesday night. The Capitals will face either the Canadiens or the Blue Jackets in the first round of the playoffs.

1st Ohio Battery / CBJ 7, WSH 0: Greaves Records First NHL Shutout, Fantilli Scores Twice As Blue Jackets Win Big Over Capitals

By Ed Francis- April 12, 2025

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CBJ GOALS:

Werenski (P1, 1:00)

Johnson (P1, 4:45)

Fantilli (P1, 19:24)

Fantilli (2) (P2, 2:01)

Monahan (P2, 4:37)

Sillinger (P2, 5:14)

van Riemsdyk (P3, 17:41)

A dominant performance.

Adam Fantilli scored twice and Jet Greaves recorded his first career NHL shutout as the Columbus Blue Jackets put a seven spot on the Washington Capitals in a 7-0 win Saturday afternoon.

The victory keeps the Blue Jackets alive in the battle for the Eastern Conference's final playoff spot.

Zach Werenski got the scoring started early for the Blue Jackets with a goal exactly one minute into the game.

It was his 21st of the season and broke his own franchise record for most goals in a season by a defenseman.

Less than four minutes later, Kent Johnson found the back of the net to make it 2-0 Columbus.

The Blue Jackets would extend their lead to 3-0 in the final minute of the period on the first of Fantilli's goals. Just seconds earlier, he had leveled Washington's Ryan Leonard to start the sequence that led to the goal.

It was a clean hit, but drew the ire of the Capitals in a game that immediately turned chippy.

"I was reaching for it, he was reaching for it, and at the last second I saw him and I didn't want to be the one that went down," said Fantilli.

Fantilli would score again, putting Columbus up 4-0, just over two minutes into the second period. It was the first of three Columbus goals in a span of 3:13, with Sean Monahan and Cole Sillinger adding goals to make it 6-0 Columbus.

Later in the second, Leonard would drop the gloves with Sean Kuraly in a one-sided fight that went Kuraly's way. James van Riemsdyk and Rasmus Sandin picked up fighting majors for an exchange just two minutes later, giving van Riemsdyk the second leg of a Gordie Howe hat trick. He had assisted on Johnson's earlier goal.

van Riemsdyk completed the Howe hatty with a goal in the final minutes of the game, one that gave the Blue Jackets a game with 7+ goals for the fourth time this season.

Greaves finished with 22 saves, the trickiest of which came in the closing seconds on the game.

"That one-timer was kind of some through traffic," said Greaves with a chuckle. "Just was trying to keep it out of the net."

When asked after the game if there's a chance the team turns to Greaves for the third time in four nights when the teams complete their home-and-home Sunday evening, head coach Dean Evason said it was "possible, yes."

The win put Columbus at 83 points and just four points behind the Montreal Canadiens for the final wild card spot in the Eastern Conference. Each team has three games remaining, with the Canadiens needing just one regulation win to clinch the final spot and eliminate the Blue Jackets.

Here's how Columbus kept themselves in the hunt:

1st Period:

(1:00 — CBJ Goal): One minute in and one goal for the Blue Jackets. Werenski dumps the puck into the zone and Columbus quickly gets to work. Dante Fabbro disrupts the Caps' clearing attempt and slips the puck to Sean Monahan, who moves into the slot before finding Werenski cut into the circle. He rips one from the dot and beats Shepard glove-side to give Columbus an early 1-0 lead.

(4:45 — CBJ Goal): James van Riemsdyk pokes the puck away from a pair of Capitals near center ice and Johnson collects it just outside of the Washington zone. As he skates in, Caps defender Martin Fehervary tries to disrupt a potential pass to a streaking Adam Fantilli — but Johnson isn't thinking pass. He skates right up to Shepard and flicks a quick snapper past him to double the Columbus lead.

(19:24 — CBJ Goal): Fantilli has done a lot of great things season but this may be his best sequence of the season. It starts in front of Greaves, with Fantilli putting Washington's Ryan Leonard on the ice with a powerful hit. He collects the puck and dishes ahead van Riemsdyk, who skates up into the Capitals zone. Johnson is with him and takes a pass near the boards, drawing attention away from the fact that Fantilli rejoined the play. KJ finds him with a crisp pass and Fantilli is all alone from close proximity and beats Shepard to make it 4-0 Columbus.

2nd Period:

(2:01 — CBJ Goal): Fantilli gets his second of the game on a far more pedestrian sequence. The Blue Jackets do a good job here of maintaining the puck in the Caps zone with their play along the boards. Denton Mateychuk skates around Washington's Connor McMichael as Fantilli slides behind them. Mateychuk slides it back to Fantilli who lets one go from the point. It gets through traffic, into the back of the net, and puts Columbus up 4-0.

(4:37 — CBJ Goal): Monahan makes it a 5-0 lead, putting home a rebound from a Kirill Marchenko shot. Marchy enters the zone and works his way around a defender before getting off a tough-angle shot on the edge of the circle. Shepard makes the initial save but the puck slides off his blocker and right to Monahan, who is waiting at the crease for the easy put-back.

(5:14 — CBJ Goal): Columbus goes up 6-0 on Sillinger's goal. Dmitri Voronkov bumps Washington's Lars Eller off the puck behind the Capitals net and slides it backhand to Sillinger, who is waiting in front of the net. Shepard is out of position and that allows Sillinger to score on a relatively open net.

(11:53 — Kuraly vs. Leonard): Leonard is not a fighter, but he drops the gloves here with Sean Kuraly and it doesn't end well for the Washington rookie. The two get tied up in the corner and shove and slash their way up the ice before it finally boils over near center ice. Dylan Strome comes in after the punches are flying and tries to intervene but it's too late.

3rd Period:

(17:41 — CBJ Goal): van Riemsdyk completes the Gordie Howe hat trick with a goal in the final minutes to put the Blue Jackets up 7-0.

WSH	GAME STATS	CBJ
22	SHOTS	26
55%	FACEOFFS	45%
0/2	POWER PLAY	0/2
2/2	PENALTY KILL	2/2
21	HITS	22
21	GIVEAWAYS	12
10	TAKEAWAYS	4
21	BLOCKED SHOTS	17
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
3.06	EXPECTED GOALS	2.69

WSH	GAME STATS	CBJ
61	SHOT ATTEMPTS	60
28	SCORING CHANCES	29
12	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	13
Data via NHL.com & NaturalStatTrick.com		

Stat Chat:



- Fantilli becomes the fifth different Blue Jacket to hit 50 points this season. That's tied for the most in franchise history for a single season. Next up would be Dmitri Voronkov, who is at 45 after adding an assist today.
- This was the third time the Blue Jackets had multiple 3+ goal periods, and all have come recently: March 28th against the Vancouver Canucks and April 1st against the Nashville Predators.
- The game had four 10-minute misconducts and a total of 76 penalty minutes. The Capitals picked up 48 of them; the Blue Jackets had 28.

Up Next:

These same two teams meet tomorrow in D.C., with puck-drop scheduled for 6 p.m.

1st Ohio Battery / CBJ 4, WSH 1: Fantilli Scores Twice Again, Greaves Near Perfect As Blue Jackets Sweep Weekend Set Against Capitals, Remain Alive In Playoff Race

By Ed Francis- April 14, 2025

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CBJ GOALS:

Werenski (P1, 14:36)

Fantilli (P2, 4:39)

Fantilli (2) (P3, 1:57)

Voronkov (P3, 15:48)

Deja vu.

Adam Fantilli scored twice for the second straight game and Jet Greaves was nearly perfect between the pipes as the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the Washington Capitals 4-1 on Sunday evening.

The win gave the Blue Jackets a weekend sweep over the Eastern Conference leaders and put Columbus within three points of the Montreal Canadiens for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

Washington's only goal of the game came on their first shot, and it came from the league's new all-time leading goal scorer: Alex Ovechkin.

Columbus would tie the game later in the period on Zach Werenski's 22nd of the season and then take the lead in the second period on the first of Fantilli's two goals.

Fantilli's second goal gave the Blue Jackets a 3-1 lead less than two minutes into the third period.

"We just played the same style we did (yesterday)," said Fantilli. "That was the way we want to play consistently and it benefitted us tonight."

Dmitri Voronkov added a late goal — like Werenski, his 22nd of the season — to give the Blue Jackets a 4-1 lead and put the game out of reach.

Voronkov's goal gave the Blue Jackets 258 on the season, tying the franchise record for goals in a season that was set in 2021-22.

Throughout the game, Greaves made big save after big save. After one of Ovechkin's six shots on goals for the night, he appeared visibly frustrated as he shook his head and looked upward.

"It's been fun," said Greaves. "The guys were doing a great job in front of me, just making my job easier."

Werenski gave the credit right back.

"For him to come in here and do what he's doing right now, in these important games, it's been unbelievable," said Werenski. "I think it's given our team a big boost, so hats off to him. He's played incredible."

Columbus' win means the Blue Jackets will stay alive for at least one more day in the playoff race. If the Canadiens win Monday when they host the Chicago Blackhawks, the Blue Jackets will be eliminated.

A loss in that game in any form by Montreal will keep Columbus in the picture.

Here's how Columbus kept themselves in it for at least another day:

1st Period:

(1:10 — WSH Goal): The Blue Jackets scored exactly one minute into the game Saturday and the Caps return the favor here. Provorov's clearing attempt gets disrupted by Dylan Strome, who pushes it to Ovechkin near the slot and he does what he does best. A rip for his 896th career goal and a 1-0 Capitals lead.

(1:14 — Olivier vs. McIlrath): A good, long bout between a pair of heavyweights right after Ovechkin's goal, with Olivier trying to reset the tone. This was an excellent scrap, but the edge goes to Olivier.

(14:36 — CBJ Goal): Werenski's goal comes as a result of an excellent shift from the top line and the pairing of Werenski and Provorov, who were on the ice together for a set play. The forward group gets the Capitals out of sorts with a long shift and a lot of good work down low. The puck eventually makes its way to Provorov, where he and Werenski cross before he gets it to Z, who shoots through traffic from the point. Lindgren never sees it, and it's a 1-1 game.

2nd Period:

(3:59 — Jet Denies Eller): Connor McMichael flips the puck to Lars Eller in the slot and he is turned away with a big-time save from Greaves.

(4:39 — CBJ Goal): The Blue Jackets go up 2-1 on a Washington turnover in their own zone. Tom Wilson overskates the puck, leaving it in the slot. Before he can back to it, Fantilli charges in and takes a quick burst forward before ripping it past Lindgren.

(17:26 — Greaves Stops Ovechkin): The league's all-time goal-scorer gets past the Blue Jackets defense but is denied by Greaves, with Ovechkin looking up in frustration afterward.

3rd Period:

(1:57 — CBJ Goal): Fantilli gets his second of the night and gives the Blue Jackets a 3-1 lead on an elite no-look pass from Johnson. After a scramble in front of the net, Johnson collects the puck and fools everyone into thinking he's shooting. Instead, he gets a back-hand, no-look pass to Fantilli in the slot and with Lindgren down, it's an open net for Mo to extend the Columbus lead. Erik Gudbranson doesn't get an assist on this play but it was his excellent work along the boards that helped make the goal happen.

(15:48 — CBJ Goal): Voronkov makes it 4-1 and wraps this game up. This is an unassisted goal on an unassisted effort. Big Boss disrupts Strome's attempt to move the puck on the ice, muscles his way past him, then draws a penalty on Strome before shaking that off to charge the net with the puck and snapping one past Lindgren.

CBJ	GAME STATS	WSH
23	SHOTS	30
39%	FACEOFFS	61%
0/3	POWER PLAY	0/2
2/2	PENALTY KILL	3/3
16	HITS	32
11	GIVEAWAYS	12
6	TAKEAWAYS	4
12	BLOCKED SHOTS	16
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
1.48	EXPECTED GOALS	3.01
48	SHOT ATTEMPTS	64
16	SCORING CHANCES	37
5	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	10

CBJ

GAME STATS

WSH

Data via NHL.com & NaturalStatTrick.com

Stat Chat:

- Greaves has stopped 90 of 93 shots in his three starts over the last four days for a save percentage of .968. Since allowing two goals on the first seven shots against Buffalo, he's stopped 85 of 86 opposition shots.
- Fantilli's multi-goal game made him just the fourth Blue Jacket to score multiple goals on back-to-back days and the first since Patrik Laine did it on Jan. 30-31, 2022. Scott Hartnell and RJ Umberger are the others.
- This was just the second time this season the Blue Jackets won the second leg of a back-to-back, finishing 2-10-0 in such games for the campaign. It was just the second time in those 12 games that Columbus scored four (or more) goals.

Up Next:

The final road game of the regular season comes Tuesday night when the Blue Jackets visit Philadelphia to take on the Flyers at 7 p.m. If the Montreal Canadiens lose Monday to the Chicago Blackhawks, the Blue Jackets will still be alive for the final playoff spot.

The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: Previewing the playoffs with a playoff team draft

By Dom Luszczyzyn and Sean Gentile- April 12, 2025

After a long time spent apart, the Rankings Boys are back. How did we celebrate the occasion? With a playoff team draft, of course.

With the 16-team field likely set (barring an epic collapse) and a pile of work ahead of us next week to prepare, we decided to do our playoff preview ranking a week early. And we did that by doing a draft of the 16 playoff teams.

The scoring system: one point for a first-round win, two for a second, three for a third and four for winning it all. The prize? Bragging rights and exactly one beer.

Dom and Sean took turns drafting one team apiece and used that as the rankings framework for the week. The person who drafted the team then had to say why that team would win it all this year, with the other offering a rebuttal.

And here are the teams:

Dom: Panthers, Jets, Oilers, Avalanche, Leafs, Kings, Wild, Canadiens

Sean: Stars, Golden Knights, Capitals, Hurricanes, Lightning, Blues, Senators, Devils

Let us know in the comments which side you think will win the first-ever Rankings Playoff Draft.

1. Florida Panthers, 46-29-4

Last week: 4

Drafted by Dom

“Boring but correct.”

Why they’ll win: The defending champs are still the league’s most feared team — even if they’ve limped to the playoffs over the last few weeks. Sure, they have a gantlet ahead of them, but this team is absolutely stacked from top to bottom and will have a healthy Matthew Tkachuk ready to roll for Game 1. No team has a better combination of star power and depth, or offense and defense. They’re the Cup favorites for good reason and a relatively easy first choice.

Why they won’t: They’re on track to have a brutal first-round matchup (hello, Battle of Florida), and the blue line is still kind of a mess; Aaron Ekblad’s suspension lasts until Game 3, and Dmitry Kulikov is hurt. The result, for now, is that Niko Mikkola is playing top-pair minutes. Not ideal.

2. Dallas Stars, 50-23-6

Last week: 2

Drafted by Sean

“This team kinda stinks without Heiskanen.”

Why they’ll win: They’re a bit of a mess without Miro Heiskanen. No way around that. They’ve been demolished at five-on-five for the last six weeks, and they made a nasty bit of history on Tuesday. Still, Heiskanen is on track to play in the first round. If that happens, everything falls into place. They have too much talent up front and in net to fall all that far, even though this feels like a reach.

Why they won't: No Heiskanen is reason enough. If the Stars were playing the Blues or Wild in the first round, it would be easier to give them a pass. Against the Avalanche, though? Good luck. They're going to have Cody Ceci lining up against Nathan MacKinnon. That's ... a sizeable downgrade from the guy they had doing that last year in Chris Tanev. The lack of defensive depth will be Dallas' demise.

3. Winnipeg Jets, 54-21-4

Last week: 1

Drafted by Dom

"The underrated Winnipeg Jets, this feels like their year to actually do something."

"Yeah their five-on-five scoring definitely won't dry up when it matters, no way."

Why they'll win: Everything feels to be lining up for the Jets this season. A likely division win means they'll avoid Colorado in Round 1 (and maybe get a worn-out version in Round 2). Connor Hellebuyck is at the top of his game, and the other stars are shining bright. Plus, the Jets are as deep as usual. It feels like the likely Presidents' Trophy champions aren't getting the respect they deserve right now.

Why they won't: Since the 4 Nations break, Winnipeg is 22nd in the league at five-on-five in goals/60 and 19th in shots/60. That's not awful, but it's certainly not great — and maybe a bit ominous, given how things have gone for them in the recent past.

4. Vegas Golden Knights, 48-22-9

Last week: 6

Drafted by Sean

"I almost took them at No. 2."

Why they'll win: They're a territorially dominant team with a ton of defensive skill (behind only the Kings in five-on-five goals against/60 since March), and they've got a track record of playoff success. They're also going to avoid the Colorados, Dallases and Edmontonons of the world in the first round.

Why they won't: I have a hard time thinking of reasons not to like Vegas aside from, "I like a different team a little more." The Golden Knights feel like a jack-of-all-trades team, but I'm not sure they have a truly overwhelming player. Their best at any position or role is matched fairly well by other powers in the West. Vegas may have no weak links, but the team's strong links are a little weaker than others. Not by a lot, but perhaps by enough.

5. Edmonton Oilers, 45-28-5

Last week: 10

Drafted by Dom

"I'm a bit worried about the ol' gambler's fallacy. The Oilers usually have 3-to-1 odds of beating the Kings. What if this is 'the one' where they finally lose?"

Why they'll win: They have Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl. They have one of the deepest defense corps in the league. Those factors are more than good enough to carry an otherwise lackluster team. I'll gladly bet on two of the league's absolute best players to do what they do best and win a few playoff series on their own.

Why they won't: Stuart Skinner's save percentage starts with "8," and they've lost more games than they've won since Feb. 1. I'm not sure they are what we want them to be.

6. Washington Capitals, 50-19-9

Last week: 3

Drafted by Sean

“This one definitely feels like a ‘please don’t yell at us’ pick for the fans in D.C.”

“Little worried about Thompson and Protas being hurt, too.”

Why they’ll win: Points carry over to the postseason, right? I regretted this one almost immediately. But here goes: I think Spencer Carbery is a truly elite coach. I think they’re going to get a favorable draw in Round 1 — no offense to whichever young Atlantic Division team it turns out to be. I love them for storyline purposes. And I’ve been wrong about them before.

Why they won’t: The power of friendship can take a team only so far. This has been a magical season for the Capitals in which everything has gone right, but the clock has to strike midnight at some point. This team shot under 9 percent for three straight seasons at five-on-five and is suddenly at 11 percent this year? Not buying it. That’s the highest-ever mark in the analytics era. The Capitals are giving off 2023 Kraken vibes. Washington may win a round. Maybe even two. But against the league’s truly elite, it’s hard to see them stacking up.

7. Colorado Avalanche, 48-28-4

Last week: 7

Drafted by Dom

“I’m all-in on the Landeskog factor.”

“Just imagine him on the fourth line at the very least. How do you compete with that?”

Why they’ll win: The vibes from a Gabriel Landeskog return might have enough juice on their own. Beyond that, the Avalanche have two of the best players in the world, improved depth, and an excellent goalie between the pipes. They’ve also been throttling good teams down the stretch. They made the Golden Knights look like the Sharks earlier this week, dominating play from start to finish.

Why they won’t: They’re banged up beyond whatever happens with Landeskog, and the first-round matchup — even if they win it — is going to be brutal.

8. Carolina Hurricanes, 46-27-5

Last week: 5

Drafted by Sean

“Might have the easiest path to a conference final.”

Why they’ll win: They’re going to get a weakened version of the Devils in the first round, then potentially a weakened version of the Caps in the second, and they’re still doing Hurricanes stuff; they’ve got four really effective lines and a deep group of defensemen who give them exactly what they need. I’m just going to pretend I picked them at No. 2 and the Caps down here. Problem solved.

Why they won’t: Same reason as always: a lack of oomph. That was the main reason to love the initial Mikko Rantanen deal, and while they made out fine pivoting when it didn’t work, the resulting roster without him (or Martin Necas) lacks game-breakers. That’s especially true given Andrei Svechnikov’s struggles this season, scoring 19 goals and 46 points in 68 games. Maybe they’ll Corsi their way to a Cup, but this roster just doesn’t look like it has the offensive juice.

9. Toronto Maple Leafs, 48-26-4

Last week: 8

Drafted by Dom

“Great value, I might’ve taken them at 10.”

“I was wondering how long I could push the Leafs down before you felt like you had to take them.”

Why they’ll win: The Core Four still rules, and Matthew Knies has been an animal lately. The top four on defense looks stronger than ever, the goaltending is a genuine source of strength, and they have the inside track to winning the Atlantic, guaranteeing a non-Florida team in the first round. Sure, they’ve looked off at times this season, but Berube-hockey has them looking better prepared for the playoff grind. Maybe this time really is different!

Why they won’t: Because they’re the Leafs. Also, both goalies have spotty injury histories.

10. Tampa Bay Lightning, 45-26-7

Last week: 9

Drafted by Sean

“I was going to take them at No. 8 but felt safe that the Leafs would be gone at No. 9 and the Lightning would still be there.”

Why they’ll win: High-end talent, baby. Also, Andrei Vasilevskiy leads starters in save percentage since the 4 Nations break (.930) and is third in goals saved above expected. Nobody should feel comfortable picking against the Lightning if he’s playing that way.

Why they won’t: There’s a reason we both waited so long to grab the Lightning despite them being arguably a top-five team. A first-round date with the Panthers is a brutal draw. If that’s the general consensus top team, that’s a tough way to start the playoffs. Even if they win, surviving without a few battle scars that will affect them down the road feels impossible. Beyond that, the Leafs have kind of owned them this season, winning all four games.

The Lightning look scary good and have all the pieces to win it all, but the Atlantic pecking order makes things really tough to start.

11. Los Angeles Kings, 45-24-9

Last week: 11

Drafted by Dom

“This is the last good team.”

Why they’ll win: The Kings are arguably the league’s top defensive team and look like a force with Darcy Kuemper at the top of his game. They’ll be extremely hard to score against. They also look a lot closer to the Oilers than usual — enough to believe this might finally be the year they get past their bitter first-round rival. If defense wins championships, the Kings are well-positioned this year.

Why they won’t: Good as they are, they’re still just too short on offense to make it through the Western Conference. At some point, whether it’s against McDavid or MacKinnon or Eichel or Barkov, they’re going to need a star to drag them to a few wins. Love the roster, but there, it’s lacking.

12. St. Louis Blues, 43-30-7

Last week: 16

Drafted by Sean

“Hopefully Holloway is ready for the playoffs. Otherwise ...”

Why they'll win: They may well start the postseason after playing to a 130-point pace for two full months. Why should we assume that'll immediately change? Also, Robert Thomas has led the league in points since the 4 Nations break.

Why they won't: Dylan Holloway has become a huge part of St. Louis' core, and the early signs of his injury being a long one aren't ideal. That genuinely might be enough to sour St. Louis' chances of going deep. A lot depends on which bracket the Blues draw into, but as nice as their run since the 4 Nations break has been, they'll be an underdog to either Winnipeg or Vegas. They're legit, but that's a tough place to start without one of your better forwards.

13. Minnesota Wild, 43-29-7

Last week: 14

Drafted by Dom

“Kaprizov and Eriksson Ek are back and they dropped eight. Maybe they're not that bad!”

“Shocker.”

Why they'll win: When healthy, the Wild were a juggernaut early in the season. Now that Kirill Kaprizov and Joel Eriksson Ek are back, the Wild feel like a dark-horse team that might be able to pull off a surprise upset. They've got more offensive firepower than past teams while continuing to be defensively sound. Filip Gustavsson has the chops to steal a series, too. They may be a level below the league's contending class, but when they're on their games, they can be a force.

Why they won't: It's unfair and unrealistic to expect Kaprizov and Eriksson Ek to immediately turn them back into a high-end contender. They were one of the very worst offensive teams in the league without them.

14. Ottawa Senators, 42-30-6

Last week: 12

Drafted by Sean

“Great value for when they beat the Leafs in the first round.”

Why they'll win: Because they're playing the Leafs.

Why they won't: Ottawa's top end does not compare favorably to the other beasts of the Atlantic, and that's the crux of the issue at hand. Where does Tim Stützle rank next to Auston Matthews, Aleksander Barkov and Brayden Point? Where does Brady Tkachuk rank next to Mitch Marner, Matthew Tkachuk and Nikita Kucherov? In both cases, it's at the bottom. Ottawa has some decent depth, but the team's stars don't look Cup-caliber. Not yet, anyway.

15. Montreal Canadiens, 39-30-9

Last week: 17

Drafted by Dom

“The X-Factors for a repeat of 2010 against Washington are lining up: eighth seed against one of the top teams, underrated goalie who can steal a series, electrifying rookie debuting for the playoffs, Ovechkin led by a great bald coach. It’s destiny.”

Why they’ll win: Nick Suzuki, Lane Hutson and Sam Montembeault have legitimately been among the best players at their respective positions since the 4 Nations break. That could offer some serious star-power in a series, enough to get by with a little luck on their side. The Canadiens have a history of going deep when they have no business doing so throughout the salary cap era. This team looks cut from the same cloth.

Why they won’t: They have the worst goal differential of any playoff team and are still a complete mess defensively. The Canadiens were a team many expected would be below .500 this season, and that version of the team still comes out from time to time, especially when the team’s stars are off the ice. Montreal’s depth will likely get crushed when the games matter.

16. New Jersey Devils, 41-30-7

Last week: 13

Drafted by Sean

“Maybe Jack Hughes will come back early.”

Why they’ll win: Jacob Markstrom is capable of stealing a series — it’s why the Devils went out and got him in the first place. Also, they’ve gone 8-6-1 since Hughes’ season ended. Too many people, present company included, have already written them off.

Why they won’t: Maybe they could win with Hughes, and they certainly looked that way to start the season. But without him, the rest of the lineup just doesn’t fall into place the way you’d like it to. The team’s depth was already a sore spot and looks like an absolute mess with everyone moving up the lineup in Hughes’ absence. The Devils are simply spread too thin.

17. Vancouver Canucks, 37-29-13

Last week: 15

Disappointing is an understatement. Regression was fair to expect, but man did the Canucks just look offensively pathetic most of the year. It’s not even that they weren’t scoring at last year’s rate; it’s that they weren’t the team that drove play to close the year, either. A season from hell.

18. Calgary Flames, 37-27-14

Last week: 19

Dustin Wolf has wobbled a bit down the stretch, but he still deserves the lion’s share of credit for Calgary staying in the race so long. Only six goalies in the league have saved more goals above expected. Put him on your Calder ballots.

19. Columbus Blue Jackets, 36-33-9

Last week: 16

The Blue Jackets were an absolute treat this season, a pleasure to watch nightly with their electric offense. They’ll be back in the mix next season and beyond.

20. Detroit Red Wings, 36-35-7

Last week: 21

They just got passed by two other young(ish) Atlantic Division teams. Can't imagine that feels great.

21. Utah HC, 36-30-13

Last week: 18

Utah came shockingly close to a playoff spot, but a final push was too little too late. Is next year the year? Maybe. But they'll need better health than they got this season. Early injuries to John Marino and Sean Durzi did a lot of damage.

22. Anaheim Ducks, 35-36-8

Last week: 28

Don't be shocked to see the Ducks this high; they're 17-12-2 since the 4 Nations break, and in that span, Leo Carlsson and Mason McTavish each have more points than Connor McDavid. Next season, you should take them seriously.

23. Buffalo Sabres, 35-37-6

Last week: 30

The Sabres are ending the season on a high, winning 10 of their last 14 games — enough to get right back toward a .500 season. This team is better than its record, but it would be nice if the Sabres actually had some tangible success to show for it.

Bold proclamation: Next year is the year they finally get it.

24. New York Rangers, 37-35-7

Last week: 17

Add this bit to the list of reasons to hate what's gone on with the Rangers.

The only good thing the Rangers did this season was gut the roster in order to open up cap space to overhaul the team for next season.

One small problem. They've already spent it all. pic.twitter.com/Fc08L34ALw

— Adam Herman (@AdamZHerman) April 10, 2025

25. New York Islanders, 34-33-11

Last week: 28

Are the Islanders a playoff team with a healthy Mathew Barzal? Probably not, but they'd be a whole lot closer than they are now. Barzal missing 52 games was a heartbreaker. Even if his production wasn't up to his usual standards, his puck possession dominance suggested he was ready to turn it on in a big way. A real shame we have to wait until next season for that.

26. Philadelphia Flyers, 32-37-9

Last week: 25

Not to downplay the rest of the Flyers' issues, but their goaltending this season never gave them a chance. Philadelphia has the worst team save percentage in the league (.871) and allowed nearly 0.6 goals above expected per game.

27. Pittsburgh Penguins, 32-35-12

Last week: 27

Sidney Crosby is 37 years old and scored at a 93-point pace this season. It's his seventh straight season scoring above a 90-point pace. That's legendary. If not for a dip in league-wide goals between 2014 and 2017, Crosby's point-per-game record could've been an even more absurd 90-point pace record.

28. Seattle Kraken, 34-40-6

Last week: 29

Matty Beniers deserves credit for his defensive work, but it's Year 3 and he's producing points at the same rate as Jordan Martinook. Some concern there is warranted; if he's not a high-end piece, Seattle's long-term plan doesn't work.

29. Nashville Predators, 29-42-8

Last week: 26

What a disaster. Shoutout to Steven Stamkos for a four-point night earlier this week. That slightly salvaged his stat line for the year, though 52 points while being a huge negative defensively obviously doesn't come close to being worth \$8 million. The Predators need a huge bounce-back from him next season.

30. Boston Bruins, 32-39-9

Last week: 24

We'll focus on two positives: The season is almost over, and the Bruins have only 11 players under contract for 2025-26.

31. Chicago Blackhawks, 23-46-10

Last week: 31

Everything that could go wrong did go wrong for the Blackhawks this year — and they still weren't the league's worst team. Impressive feat.

32. San Jose Sharks, 20-47-11

Last week: 32

The Sharks had a stretch in March in which they won five of 10. Since that, the tank has gotten back on track. A hat trick in a loss for Macklin Celebrini, which we saw against Minnesota on Wednesday, is their ideal outcome.

The Athletic / Which NHL players stood out as MVP of their team in the 2024-25 season?

By The Athletic NHL Staff- April 12, 2025

The NHL regular season is almost in the books, and every team from the top to the bottom of the standings had individual performances worth highlighting.

Before we get set to turn the page to the playoffs for some teams and the offseason for others at the end of next week, The Athletic asked its NHL staff for the player who provided the very best on a nightly basis on each team: our 2024-25 MVPs.

Here's who our writers picked.

Anaheim Ducks

Lukáš Dostál, G

At times this season — especially early on — Dostál won games for the Ducks that they didn't deserve. The 24-year-old has spent the rest of the year proving that he's a No. 1 goalie, with 23 wins and a .905 save percentage while making 18 more saves than expected before Thursday for a team that's still rough defensively. He's had five games of 40 saves or more. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

David Pastrnak, RW

Pastrnak has had no help since the Bruins traded Brad Marchand, Brandon Carlo, Charlie Coyle, Trent Frederic and Justin Brazeau. But the No. 1 right wing still hit the 40-goal mark for the fourth straight season and the 100-point mark for the third straight season. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Rasmus Dahlin, LHD

It's close between Tage Thompson and Dahlin, but Dahlin's all-around impact is tough to beat. During the Sabres' 13-game winless streak, they were without Dahlin for nine of those games. He has 62 points in 68 games and a 54 percent on-ice expected goal share at five-on-five before Thursday. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

Dustin Wolf, G

If it wasn't for Wolf, Calgary would be much further down the standings. Wolf carried one of the NHL's lowest-scoring teams virtually every game he played for the Flames this season. Wolf had only 11 appearances out of 50 where his team scored four goals or more. He's the Flames' undisputed MVP. — Julian McKenzie

The Wolf Man 🐺 pic.twitter.com/V7aQEPN187

— Calgary Flames (@NHLFlames) April 10, 2025

Carolina Hurricanes

Seth Jarvis, RW

Jarvis has continued to grow into a star, a quest helped by his infectious personality. He's eclipsed 30 goals for the second straight season, is among the league leaders in short-handed goals on the NHL's best penalty kill, and was an effective role player on Canada's 4 Nations Face-Off gold medal team. — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

Ryan Donato, LW

Donato has had a career season with 29 goals heading into Thursday, smashing his previous best of 16. He's also tied for 15th in the league with 21 goals at five-on-five heading into Thursday. He was the Blackhawks' most consistent player and did so while playing up and down the lineup. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

Nathan MacKinnon, C

Heading into Thursday, MacKinnon led the NHL with 116 points (32 goals and 84 assists) and has the third-best odds of winning the Hart Trophy. It would be tough to argue for anyone but the potential back-to-back league MVP as Colorado's most valuable player. MacKinnon's speed and playmaking fuel the Avs' high-octane attack in a way that perhaps no other player could. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

Zach Werenski, LHD

The Blue Jackets' late-season nosedive and Werenski's late-season slump — he's gone 16 games without a goal through Tuesday — may have affected his shot at the Norris Trophy and even the Hart Trophy. But Werenski carried the Blue Jackets this season, leading them in points, assists, ice time, game-winning goals, etc. He has been irreplaceable. — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

Thomas Harley, LHD

The Stars' forward group is so balanced that it's difficult to pick one standout. But Harley has shouldered a heavy burden on the back end. As of Monday, the Stars were outscoring opponents by a whopping 78-48 at five-on-five with Harley on the ice. And since Miro Heiskanen was hurt in January, Harley has been a point-a-game player while averaging 25 minutes. — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings

Alex DeBrincat, LW

DeBrincat has been Detroit's leading goal scorer and perhaps its most consistent forward, maintaining a steady rate of production while managing to regularly impact shifts regardless of whether he's putting the puck in the net. He's been tenacious, brought pace to his lines and put points on the board with his dangerous release. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

Leon Draisaitl, C

Most Oilers have underperformed this season, but Draisaitl sure isn't one of them. He'll win his first Rocket Richard Trophy and is a lock to be a Hart finalist. Oilers coach Kris Knoblauch has been touting his Selke candidacy, too, and for good reason. Throw in his six overtime goals, an NHL record, and the choice here is obvious. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Oilers Leon Draisaitl

Sets NHL single-season record with 6 OT goals pic.twitter.com/Im3OabCC3g

— Sportsnet Stats (@SNstats) March 30, 2025

Florida Panthers

Sam Reinhart, RW

With all due respect to the great Aleksander Barkov, Reinhart is going to lead the Panthers in goals and points while playing defense and staying healthy. He's a remarkable player. — Sean Gentile

Los Angeles Kings

Darcy Kuemper, G

The stellar play of Vladislav Gavrikov during Drew Doughty's injury absence through the first half of the season won't soon be forgotten, but Kuemper has been wondrous for Los Angeles, posting top-five numbers in goals-against average, save percentage and shutouts. At age 34, Kuemper might be having his finest season in a solid 206-win career before Thursday. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

Filip Gustavsson, G

In the first half, the only thing that was keeping Gustavsson from being the team MVP was the fact that Kirill Kaprizov was a legit Hart Trophy contender. Things have been tougher for Gustavsson in the second half, but that's mostly because he's had to be perfect with the Wild so depleted by injuries. If they make the playoffs despite Kaprizov and Joel Eriksson Ek missing half the season, it's because of the goaltending Gustavsson has provided under immense pressure. He's won 30 games, with a 2.54 goals-against average and a .915 save percentage. — Michael Russo

Montreal Canadiens

Nick Suzuki, C

"He's just the best player on our team, there's no doubt about that. He's been unbelievable." That is Cole Caufield describing Suzuki on Saturday night. And he is on the money. Suzuki has put up the best offensive performance by a Canadiens player in three decades, is a responsible defensive player and has thrived in difficult matchups. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

Filip Forsberg, LW

In a season loaded with individual disappointments, Forsberg took a big step back from last season's career highs of 48 goals and 94 points, but he was still the Predators' best player. And production of nearly a point a game is pretty good for an off year. — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

Nico Hischier, C

Jesper Bratt would have been a worthy winner here, as well as Jack Hughes had he not gotten hurt. Hischier, though, feels most deserving. He is in the midst of a career-best goal-scoring season (35 in 72 games) while averaging more than 20 minutes a game and playing a strong two-way game. Sheldon Keefe relies on him in all situations. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Bo Horvat, C

No one (obviously) rescued the Islanders this season, but Horvat had a pretty consistent 2024-25, which puts him atop this list. He leads the team in points heading into Thursday (54), leads the forwards in ice time and is among the league leaders in faceoff percentage. The Islanders need a lot more from everyone, but Horvat gave a decent amount. — Arthur Staple

New York Rangers

Igor Shesterkin, G

Shesterkin's surface numbers might not seem remarkable — he entered Thursday with a .903 save percentage — but that's because of the number of difficult chances the Rangers allow. Through Wednesday, he was sixth in the NHL in goals saved above expected, according to Evolving-Hockey. He is among the league leaders in starts, too. — Peter Baugh

Ottawa Senators

Linus Ullmark, G

The Sens have a few candidates for team MVP this season. But we're picking the goaltender whose performances have helped solidify Ottawa's case as a dark horse for the playoffs. Sens fans know all about how goaltenders have crippled their seasons in years past. — Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

Travis Konecny, RW

Konecny endured a pretty miserable slump in March, but he was still the team's most consistent scorer throughout the course of the season. He's already reached a new career high in points, which is particularly encouraging in that his eight-year contract extension doesn't begin until next season. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

Sidney Crosby, C

He's still one of the world's greatest hockey players and has been especially spectacular in the season's second half. He just keeps going and going. The Penguins would be a candidate for the NHL's worst team without him. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

Macklin Celebrini, C

If the 18-year-old Celebrini isn't already the Sharks' best player, he will be shortly. His great rookie season may not win him the Calder Trophy, but he's finishing with a flourish with his first hat trick Wednesday in Minnesota as part of a five-point game. Before Thursday, Celebrini is tied for first among first-year players in goals (24) and is second in points (62). — Eric Stephens

Macklin Celebrini's got his first career hat trick! 🎉

Hat Trick Challenge presented by @AstraZenecaUS pic.twitter.com/PEsAj5dWyl

— NHL (@NHL) April 10, 2025

What You Should Read Next

Celebrini is the fifth Sharks rookie to record a hat trick and the first to have a five-point game.

Seattle Kraken

Jared McCann, LW

McCann has led the Kraken in scoring every season of their existence, and did so again this year. The Kraken controlled play exceptionally well with him on the ice at five-on-five and outscored their opposition by a wide margin (plus-14), with him doing a lot of the neutral zone driving to help achieve those results. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

Robert Thomas, C

If Thomas hadn't missed 12 games with an injury, we could be talking about his first 100-point season. He has 78 points in 68 games (a 94-point pace), has been one of the NHL's top defensive centers and is winning a career-high 54.9 percent of his faceoffs. The Blues were 4-7-1 without Thomas; they are 39-23-6 with him. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

Nikita Kucherov, RW

Kucherov is having another Hart-caliber season. He is a dangerous shooter and a slick puck-mover. But what separates this year from years past is that Kucherov's two-way game is actually on the rise; the Lightning have allowed less in his minutes at five-on-five, and it hasn't come at the expense of his offense. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Mitch Marner, RW

There's a case to be made for William Nylander. He's been the team's most reliable goal scorer in the wake of Auston Matthews' injury-plagued down season and isn't far off Marner in terms of primary points. Yet, Marner is the far superior defensive player while still driving home a whack of offense, even amid Matthews' scoring drop-off. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Hockey Club

Clayton Keller, LW

Keller is the obvious pick. As the face of the franchise, he took another step this season into the top 15 in NHL scoring, despite Utah's offensive issues. The Utah captain, 26, is closing in on the 90-point mark for the first time and mentored youngsters Logan Cooley and Dylan Guenther through ups and downs. Karel Vejmelka is the other worthy choice. — James Mirtle

Vancouver Canucks

Quinn Hughes, LHD

Hughes might be more valuable to his team than any other player in the NHL is to theirs. With Hughes on the ice at five-on-five this season, Vancouver outscored its opponents at a similar rate to what the Panthers did. In non-Hughes five-on-five minutes, only the Sharks, Predators and Blackhawks were outscored by a wider margin than Vancouver. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

Jack Eichel, C

Eichel has been everything for the Golden Knights this season. He shattered his career high and Vegas' franchise record for points in a season, racking up 27 goals and 66 assists before Thursday. He's the team's time on ice leader at even strength, as well as both on the power play and the penalty kill. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

Logan Thompson, G

Not an easy call here; Dylan Strome led the Caps in points, Aliaksei Protas broke out and some other guy broke an obscure record. Thompson wasn't perfect either, but the work he put in from October to February (.924 save percentage, 27.06 goals saved above expected) helped Washington build a big-time lead in the Eastern Conference. — Sean Gentile

Winnipeg Jets

Connor Hellebuyck, G

Hellebuyck may be the most valuable player to any team this season. He's the runaway favorite for his second straight Vezina Trophy and should finish in the top five in Hart Trophy voting: Hellebuyck leads all starters in wins, shutouts, save percentage, goals saved above expected, and promises to do the "Gangnam Style" dance on the ice. — Murat Ates

I would be -delighted- if this Connor Hellebuyck prophecy came true: <https://t.co/Ov7Gulhkh5>

— Murat Ates (@WPGMurat) March 29, 2025

The Athletic / How do you fix an NHL arena where the fans don't cheer? 'Play in the sandbox'

By James Mirtle- April 11, 2025

It was a small moment in the Toronto Maple Leafs season, a late-January footnote that most of the NHL hardly noticed.

But when the team captain remarked how he was disappointed in the home crowd for showing so little enthusiasm for an early-game fight, it set off plenty of commentary in the center of the hockey universe about the Leafs fan base.

Or, to be more specific, the lack of one in the seats.

"I would've liked a little more energy from the crowd after that (fight)," Auston Matthews said following a 5-1 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets, during which the Leafs' Ryan Reaves dropped the gloves with Mathieu Olivier in the first period. "I thought it was a little quiet tonight, especially after two guys like that go at it."

"He's just admitting what everybody knows," TSN commentator Bryan Hayes later added. "That building on a Wednesday night in January is never loud."

Criticism of the crowds at Scotiabank Arena is not new in Toronto, where ticket prices have long outpaced the average fan's means.

The tepid game atmosphere was raised by many of the hundreds of Leafs faithful who responded to our ownership survey last month. It was heavily featured again when we interviewed season-ticket holders about eye-opening price increases for next year's packages.

Part of the issue in Toronto has to do with the nature of sports attendance in general over the past 20 years. More and more tickets are bought by companies as corporate perks, to the point that sitting in the lower bowl often doubles as attending a business meeting in major markets such as Toronto, New York and Vancouver.

Swanky suites and expensive lounges near the best viewing areas help woo clientele, who then help inflate revenue beyond what anyone could have imagined in earlier eras.

And yet, even with this growing trend across all sports, many organizations have started sinking millions of dollars into improving the atmosphere in their respective arenas. What's become known as the "event presentation industry" has grown dramatically in that span. The impact has become particularly noticeable over the last decade or so in hockey, as newer markets have pushed the envelope of what's possible at an NHL game.

According to some in the event presentation industry, the Nashville Predators may have started it all when they erected a band stage above the Zamboni entrance at Bridgestone Arena, embracing their Music City reputation with live performances integrated into the gameday experience. Plenty of other teams have followed suit, between the Tampa Bay Lightning's outdoor areas and Tesla coil; the Seattle Kraken's flying fish; and how the Vegas Golden Knights have ... well, there's a lot going on at T-Mobile Arena.

The result? When you travel to non-traditional markets these days, it's jarring how much better the arena environment can be compared to some of the most venerated hockey cities on Earth.

It's a contrast that made me wonder about the science behind working the crowd — and whether, perhaps, the NHL's old guard can learn something from the new.

When Las Vegas landed an NHL expansion franchise in 2016, the soon-to-be Golden Knights heavily invested in the in-game experience. But they didn't simply airlift in "hockey people" for the roles.

President Kerry Bubolz, who came by way of the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers, instead hired two staffers from the WWE to build out their presentation team: Jonny Greco, who became the Golden Knights' vice president and chief experience officer, and Andrew Abrams, who specialized in video production at the arena level.

Greco and Abrams had worked in the NHL before — Greco with the Columbus Blue Jackets and Abrams with the St. Louis Blues — but their assignment for the Golden Knights was significantly different. In Vegas, they were tasked with combining what they had learned in both hockey and wrestling; applying the lessons to a unique market; and establishing a new brand that would stand out in an old league.

"Everybody thought we'd just have, like, strippers everywhere," Greco added. "You know, 'Vegas — that's what they're gonna do!' And it was like, well, hold on, there needs to be more thought to it than that. ... Let's honor the game and honor the traditions, but let's also play in the sandbox a little bit. Let's innovate."

In the beginning, Abrams and Greco didn't know if they had a winning product to work with, given the sorry state of most expansion rosters. Instead, the Golden Knights went on to reach the Stanley Cup Final in their first season of existence.

"The show was our No. 1 priority," said Abrams, now the Golden Knights' vice president and executive producer. "We had to make it good because if the team wasn't good, we still needed people to come and have a good time, pay for the ticket and generate the revenue. Luckily for us, the team has been good."

The Golden Knights' initial version of innovation included deploying an actor dressed as a medieval knight to give rousing pregame speeches on the ice while carrying out a plot of a looming battle against an opponent. The team has since added more layers to its game experience, including a group of drummers who can fire up the crowd even while play is going; a "Knight Club" experience with DJs and special celebratory bottle service at the second intermission; and, as of last season, a 34-foot-wide, smoke-emitting dragon at one end of the rink.

Abrams explained that the Golden Knights have taken a lot of inspiration from theme parks, especially when it comes to the scale of some of their designs (see: dragon). And that they try to switch things up, so even season-ticket holders don't know what they're going to see any given night.

Even on a Wednesday in January, NHL games in Vegas are never boring.

The approach has won the Golden Knights a boatload of recognition, including the best overall production award at the 2023 IDEA conference, an Emmy Award for their Stanley Cup banner-raising ceremony that same year, and honors as the NHL's top team for game presentation three times in the past four seasons.

Yes, some of the success is because it's all happening in Las Vegas. But other teams around the league have taken notice, too. And not just in the Sun Belt. The Edmonton Oilers, for example, installed an area for a band — the Oilers Drum and Brass Crew — that fires up the Rogers Place crowd during games, a new twist for a Canadian market.

The push to innovate the fan experience has been so pronounced that Greco has branched out to start his own company, Shine Entertainment. He now travels the globe helping sports franchises push their

crowd work to the next level, bringing some of that Golden Knights touch and encouraging teams to channel that “potential energy” into something fun and authentic for everyone in the building to experience. In one presentation that he regularly delivers, on the “ingredients of a goal moment,” Greco details the appropriate music, animation, lighting, scoreboard visuals and timing for every time a goal is scored.

More and more franchises, Greco said, are rewarding game presentation staff with executive titles and “a seat at the table,” having recognized how important the role is in building momentum with ticket holders.

“People are really realizing the power of the engagement — what I call scoreboard-proof programming,” said Greco, who before launching Shine, also worked as a senior vice president for both the Madison Square Garden Company, which owns the New York Knicks and Rangers, and the Seattle Kraken. “To be able to connect differently, to be able to have the conversations with hockey ops, but also the brand people, and then try to create something that plays and hits all the feels right, that creates home-ice advantage.”

But Greco acknowledged that the challenges for established, traditional franchises can be more pronounced than for those starting anew in, say, Vegas or Seattle.

“It’s way, way harder,” he said. “Some teams do have leaders that are very micromanaging of your show and can’t tell you why they don’t like something. But it’s like, ‘Oh, I don’t like that, don’t do that anymore,’ without maybe a rhyme or reason.”

As interesting — and successful — as the in-arena efforts of newer teams such as the Golden Knights and Kraken have been, some of it will likely never happen in more established NHL markets.

In Toronto, the Leafs have invested in advanced video projection technology, and there’s an impressive display on the ice at Scotiabank Arena before games. But they are not about to put the equivalent of a giant dragon in the corner of their rink.

One idea Greco believes could work to boost the energy level in traditional markets: soccer-like supporters’ sections. It’s already added a new wrinkle to Los Angeles Clippers games this season with “The Wall,” and it’s been tested in NHL arenas to a limited extent over the years in Nashville and Vancouver.

For the Canucks, the group is known as The Larscheiders, and starting in 2016, they worked with the team to purchase large sections of nosebleed seats to seven or eight games a season.

This Larscheiders’ section in the lower bowl is so cool. Never really seen this kind of electric, soccer-like atmosphere at a #Canucks game before pic.twitter.com/xDbLj93Xur

— Harman Dayal (@harmandayal2) April 20, 2022

The Larscheiders have a 10-point code of conduct for fans who buy into the section — “No. 2: Stand the entire game and react to what happens on the ice” — and they’ve received media attention for coming up with popular chants such as “Bruce, there it is!” (in honor of former coach Bruce Boudreau) and rowdily cheering on Elias Pettersson’s first NHL goal.

The motivation behind starting the group was to inject some life into Vancouver’s Rogers Arena, which had become quiet in recent years due to so many seats being sold to corporate interests, group co-creator Carlo Bodrogi said.

“Cheering for your home team while surrounded by other fans who are with you — not on their phones or closing deals — in the same mindset, that’s something really powerful and different from other entertainment options,” Bodrogi said. “It’s a feeling of solidarity and group joy.”

The challenge with building a supporters section, he explained, involves the need for buy-in from the team, as purchasing a block of tickets where hundreds of fans can stand together isn’t possible through Ticketmaster. This season, after making the playoffs last spring and with ticket prices on the rise, the Canucks didn’t set up a section for The Larscheiders, a move that drew criticism in the market.

With the playoffs approaching and the Leafs on a first-round collision course with their long-time rival, the Ottawa Senators, it’s likely the energy will pick up organically in Toronto beginning next weekend. More tickets will find their way to die-hard fans, and the stakes of the postseason will bring more passion to a building that’s needed it at times this season.

Whether the future brings something more, however, remains an open question. At the very least, it’s one worth investing some additional time, money and thought into over the years to come.

The Athletic / Finding 3 positive thoughts for each of the NHL's 15 most hopeless teams

By Sean McIndoe- April 12, 2025

The theme of this post is kindness.

As in, let's be kind to the fans of the league's worst teams. It's easy to forget these days, as some fans watch their teams fight for a playoff spot and others are already thinking about the Stanley Cup, that not all of us are having fun right now. Some of us cheer for teams that are already out of the playoff hunt, and in some cases might have been for months now.

That's where the kindness comes in. Let's show empathy and basic human decency to those fans, the ones who have the misfortune of rooting for one of those horrible, embarrassing, miserable loser teams.

I'll admit that last sentence could have gone better. Kindness isn't easy. But it can be instructive.

For example, we did this post last year, featuring 11 teams. Of those 11 teams who were in bad shape, two — the Devils and Senators — have already clinched playoff spots this year. Another, the Canadiens, is about to join them. Optimism can be real.

Um, and one of those 11 teams ceased to exist a few days after the column ran. So sure, a mixed bag. Let's stay focused on the positive. Kindness, remember.

According to Dom's model, there are 15 teams that are either eliminated from playoff contention or have odds of less than 1 percent. In other words, they're done. And they could probably use a kind word or two. Well, we're going to give them three, as in three positive thoughts in a season of despair.

As always, we'll do this in order, starting from the easiest team to be positive about and working our way down to the most challenging.

15. Utah Hockey Club

The negative: After being a trendy playoff pick, they only sort of stayed in the race, ending up stuck in the mushy middle.

Positive thought #1: Guys, you have a team now. I'd call that an improvement over last year.

Positive thought #2: Maybe someday soon you'll even get a real name.

Positive thought #3: Last summer was chaos, understandably so, and it was probably unrealistic for folks like me to expect Utah to light up the offseason. But now you have that first season under your belt, plenty of prospects, a few extra picks for down the road and an owner with actual money. This year was the awkward pilot episode; the fun starts in a few weeks.

OK, "you didn't exist before but now you do" is about as easy as this gets. Let's keep going ...

14. San Jose Sharks

The negative: You're going to finish dead last for the second year in a row. Is that bad? It seems bad.

Positive thought #1: You have Macklin Celebrini, who didn't just live up to expectations but may have already passed Connor Bedard on the next-big-thing rankings.

Positive thought #2: You've got lots of other great young players both in the lineup and on the way, and unlike a lot of rebuilding teams, that talent is spread out through every position, including goaltending. Mix in extra first-round picks in each of the next two drafts, and no team has a brighter future.

Positive thought #3: Honestly, why did you even click on this article? I feel like you've had enough smoke blown up your caudal fins. We get it, you're going to be amazing soon, leave some young talent for the rest of us.

13. Columbus Blue Jackets

The negative: After shocking the hockey world by staying in the playoff race into March, a six-game losing streak dashed their wild-card chances. Now they'll probably both miss the playoffs and pick outside the top 10.

Positive thought #1: Coming off a 27-win season followed by the Johnny Gaudreau tragedy, the Blue Jackets didn't just exceed expectations — they shattered them. It's possible no other team silenced as many doubters as Columbus did.

Positive thought #2: More important than the plaudits, though, is how the Blue Jackets got here. Start with Zach Werenski, who made The Leap into the Norris conversation. Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli look like future studs, Kirill Marchenko is pretty much there, and just about all the other young pieces are living up to expectations or exceeding them. The goaltending is an issue, sure, but that's both a big problem and one that can be solved in one move, if it's the right one. The point is that this season doesn't feel like a one-off fluke, and if anything, Dean Evason has this team looking like they're finally on the verge of being real contenders.

Positive thought #3: Along the way, they became the league's best story and everyone's second favorite team. Seriously, if this were a reality show, the Blue Jackets would be the contestant who gets the standing ovation from the other competitors on their way out. In an unimaginably tough season, you did us all proud.

Spoiler: This is the part where the difficulty starts to ramp up ...

12. Anaheim Ducks

The negative: They made some progress this year, but was it enough, or is the ceiling on this group starting to lower?

Positive thought #1: If you had to choose one young player on the team to have a breakthrough, Lukas Dostal wouldn't be a bad pick. He doesn't just solidify the goaltending outlook for years to come, but might help make a John Gibson trade finally happen with just two years left to go on that deal.

Positive thought #2: Speaking of contracts, the cap outlook is excellent and there are no UFAs you'd worry about for at least two more years.

Positive thought #3: While the overall numbers for some of the younger players weren't great, guys such as Leo Carlsson and Mason McTavish were more productive as the season went on. And Jackson LaCombe might be on the verge of becoming a legitimate blue-line star (and is super cheap for another year).

11. Philadelphia Flyers

The negative: A year after flirting with the playoffs, the Flyers collapsed down the stretch, losing 18 of 27, which led to a weird coaching change.

Positive thought #1: Any team can play the “we’ll improve if our goaltending does” card, but few teams can do it with as much confidence as the Flyers. The goaltending will absolutely be better next year, and probably significantly so, because it could hardly be worse.

Positive thought #2: Matvei Michkov looks like the real deal. No, he didn’t come in and dominate the league, and he won’t win the Calder we all assumed was his for the taking. But he’s here, a lot earlier than anyone expected, and he’s already showing he belongs. The big swing in 2023 worked, and that was the single biggest thing you could hope for heading into this season.

Positive thought #3: John Tortorella is a very good coach, but that doesn’t mean he wasn’t the wrong guy for this team at this time. Look around the league at some of the new-coach bounces in places such as Columbus, Ottawa, Winnipeg and St. Louis. Get this hire right, and the baseline can be reset.

10. Chicago Blackhawks

The negative: In what was supposed to be a season where they’d take a big step forward, the Hawks seemed to regress. Maybe even worse, Connor Bedard hasn’t looked like the next great superstar and is even occasionally hearing the word “bust.”

Positive thought #1: Bedard will be fine. Yes, the year-two Hart Trophy stuff was way out over its skis, but he’s had two 60-point seasons already. Leon Draisaitl had 60 points total in his first two years. Joe Thornton didn’t get over 60 until year three. Nathan MacKinnon had 63 as a rookie and then didn’t top that until year five. Trust in the talent.

Positive thought #2: Not that Hawks fans don’t know this, but the pipeline remains great. Just stop being mean to Corey.

Positive thought #3: Mitch Marner’s people are going to convince him to take \$15 million to be the face of the franchise in the summer, and by the time he realizes he’s made a huge mistake, it will be too late.

9. Vancouver Canucks

The negative: They followed a 109-point season with a near-total collapse full of infighting, drama and (eventually) a roster detonation. Now they’ve missed the playoffs, everyone thinks their coach is about to head to Philadelphia, Brock Boeser is probably gone and they’re still not sure if their \$11.6 million forward is worth anywhere near that.

Positive thought #1: Let’s start with the obvious — Quinn Hughes absolutely rocks. He’s also young, signed cheap for a few more years and plays the position that’s the toughest to find sure-things to build around. There’s lots of work to do in Vancouver, no doubt, but they have just about the best foundational piece you could ask for to start from.

Positive thought #2: Hey, remember that comeback against Dallas? That was fun. In fact, let’s watch it again:

Good times.

Positive thought #3: I know it seems bad now, as you head toward the finish line of an 80-something-point season and miss the playoffs with little in the way of optimism. But I remember a team that was in a similar situation two years ago, and then they improved by 26 points pretty much out of nowhere. That would be the Vancouver Canucks. Hockey’s weird, is the point here, and this team’s true talent is probably somewhere in between the extremes of 2023-24 and this year. That’s not a bad starting point for a retool, especially on a team where basically nobody important is over 30 yet.

8. New York Islanders

The negative: A team whose entire strategy seems to be “be old and boring and just barely good enough to sneak into the playoffs” got the old and boring part pretty much right, but didn’t come all that close to sneaking into the playoffs.

Positive thought #1: Mathew Barzal got hurt and missed 52 games. He’s their best offensive player, so you can give them a bit of a mulligan for struggling to score.

Positive thought #2: Ilya Sorokin didn’t exactly have a rebound season, but he looked OK and is back as the clear starter. Given there’s really no world where the Islanders contend without Sorokin being a star, we’ll squeeze whatever positivity we can out of his season.

Positive thought #3: Um ... I mean, you got to see the Alex Ovechkin goal up close, which was extremely cool. Let’s rewatch that a few times while we wait for a new GM to arrive and start fixing this mess.

7. Seattle Kraken

The negative: You kind of forgot they were a thing, didn’t you?

Positive thought #1: It took a while, but it sure looks like Shane Wright is going to be a legitimate NHLer after all, and maybe even one who lives up to some of that draft-year hype.

Positive thought #2: Speaking of top-five picks, there could be another one on the way this year. Remember, this team has had only two high picks in its entire history, and building from scratch is tough without those.

Positive thought #3: Don’t forget they added two more firsts at the deadline. Not for this year’s draft, unfortunately, but having 2026 and 2027 picks from an aging Lightning squad isn’t a bad bet at all. Bottom line: The present is extremely uninspiring, but the future is ... well, maybe not bright, but at least mildly luminous.

Man, there are six teams that are bigger bummers than the Kraken? Rough year. OK, let’s keep going.

6. Detroit Red Wings

The negative: After falling just short of the wild-card last year, the Wings took a step back while being passed by several teams they were supposed to be ahead of in the rebuild process.

Positive thought #1: Hey, remember how painful it was to miss the playoffs by a single point last year? At least they didn’t put you through that again.

Positive thought #2: The goaltending wasn’t great, yet again. But unlike other teams on this list, the Wings have the future all set at the position. Now it’s just a case of waiting for that future to arrive.

Positive thought #3: This one applies to a lot of teams on this list, but just take a minute to look at this year’s Montreal Canadiens. They had 76 points last year, and everyone figured they had a few more years of steady progress ahead of them to get back into the playoffs. Now they’re (probably) there, just one year later. It can happen way quicker than the experts think.

5. New York Rangers

The negative: After winning the 2024 Presidents’ Trophy with 114 points, they are currently on pace for (checks numbers) not 114 points.

Positive thought #1: Coming into the season, the big question was whether they could get Igor Shesterkin signed. And they did. Yep. Sure did.

Positive thought #2: You probably can’t tear it down this summer, because everyone other than Artemi Panarin is locked in for years to come. Fine. But this was the best team in the league one regular season

ago. Assuming a new coach and front office to refresh the vibe, are we sure they can't at least be a playoff team, and maybe much more than that if Shesterkin heats up? Like, completely sure? I'm not.

Positive thought #3: Do you know what happened the last time the Rangers went from Presidents' Trophy winner to missing the playoffs in one year? Let's just say the following season turned out OK.

4. Boston Bruins

The negative: After years of contending, the Bruins' window didn't just close, it slammed shut and then shattered all over the floor. Just two years removed from arguably the best regular season in NHL history, they're on pace to miss the playoffs by 20 points.

Positive thought #1: As painful as the season was, missing by a mile is a far better result for this franchise than falling just short. There can't be any excuses now, or any talk of just needing a mild reset. This organization has kicked the can down the road on tough decisions over the years, and it has paid off. But a reckoning is needed and this season will make sure that it happens. (And they're actually set up to do it in the summer, if they choose to.)

Positive thought #2: You're going to pick in the top 10 for the first time since 2011, and maybe even in the top five. You haven't been this excited for a draft since 2015, and that was ... OK, bad example, the point is that high picks are good. Usually.

Positive thought #3: You get to hate-watch Brad Marchand in the playoffs for the first time. It's a lot of fun, you're going to love it.

3. Pittsburgh Penguins

The negative: They're old and expensive and bad, which would at least open up some opportunity for their prospects, except they don't have any.

Positive thought #1: (Insert "rigged lottery" joke that's so old and worn out that the Penguins just gave it a long-term contract.)

Positive thought #2: Next season's cap situation isn't great, but a ton of money comes off the books in the summer of 2026. This might be a long rebuild project, but it doesn't necessarily have to be.

Positive thought #3: Honestly, the next few years could be rough. But you're going to get to watch Sidney Crosby while it happens, which will be more fun than fans of most teams get to have in a lifetime. Enjoy that part of the present, reminisce on a wonderful past, and the future will get here. Eventually.

2. Nashville Predators

The negative: After a frantic summer that was supposed to push them into contention, they crashed badly and now look like a capped-out mess.

Positive thought #1: Well, at least there's no cap money for another UFA spending spree this summer.

Positive thought #2: They haven't had a top-five pick since 2013, when they took Seth Jones. And the only other one besides that was David Legwand in their very first draft. That's somehow it, for the entire history of the franchise. Now they're guaranteed one this year, even if the lottery gods smite them twice.

Positive thought #3: Speaking of guarantees, the Predators are the only team in the league who are completely locked into their standings spot. That means there's literally no reason for their fans to be watching any hockey for the next few days. It's spring and you live in Nashville. Go have fun, try to forget this season ever happened and just be glad you're not these next guys ...

1. Buffalo Sabres

The negative: It's been 14 years since their last playoff game. Four years since the fan base appeared to hit rock bottom. Twenty-two months since they watched the franchise savior who quit on them be rewarded with a Stanley Cup. And most important of all, two years since they finished a 91-point season, their first time finishing over .500 since 2012, to finally signal that better days were ahead and they were ready to contend for the playoffs.

And ... they took a big step backward. Again. Again!

I've been doing this column gimmick since the Grantland days, and the Sabres have been in every single one. In 2019 I wrote, "It could be worse." In 2021 I wrote, "It can't get any worse." In 2017 I wrote, "Eventually some super volcano will erupt and none of this will matter," and I'm kind of mad about that because I could sure use that line now.

Honestly, I don't know how you Sabres fans do it.

Here's the worst part: Those last four paragraphs were just a straight cut-and-paste from last year. All I changed were the lengths of time. I've literally run out of words to describe how miserable it is to be a Sabres fan, which isn't great because coming up with words is my whole job. I'm reduced to just tapping the sign.

Did I mention that I don't know how you Sabres fans do it? Because I don't know how you Sabres fans do it. And by "it," I mean find the will to live. On that note, here we go:

Positive thought #1: I mean, at least you didn't have to CTRL + F to figure out where your team would rank like all the other fan bases did.

Positive thought #2: Hey, remember how last year the Coyotes were on this list and then they ceased to exist apart from a vague and non-binding promise to someday get to start all over with an expansion team? Maybe that could happen to the Sabres!

Positive thought #3: OK, fine, let's do this. As bad as it's been, you're not starting from scratch. You've got some pieces up front, including a 27-year-old giant who can score 40+ without much support. The blue line is young and promising. The goaltending might be OK for now, and the future outlook is actually decent. It's all added up to something nowhere near good enough, but there's plenty to work with here.

There's also plenty of cap room, which unfortunately leads us into ownership and the front office. And yeah, this doesn't feel like an organization that's built to win much of anything. But that can change. You have to think it will change, if not this summer then very soon.

Most of this ultimately falls on Terry Pegula, and sure, a bad owner is usually a death sentence for a fan base's hopes. The difference with Pegula is that he's having success with the Bills, meaning there's at least proof of concept here. With most bad NHL owners, it's impossible to imagine them ever winning anything. With Pegula, you don't even have to look all that far to see it happening. So ... maybe, right?

That "maybe" is the best I can do here. But for Sabres fans, unquestionably the most loyal and downtrodden fan base in the league, maybe it's all they need. If you're still a fan of this team after the last 14 years, then you might not even need that. What do you need? A stiff drink and a time machine, probably. But failing that, a little hope can go a long way. The Sabres have a little hope. Very little, fine, but a little.

Just know that the rest of us are rooting for it to pay off for you someday. Or at least that you let some other team have the top spot on next year's list.

The Athletic / Every NHL team's most disappointing player in the 2024-25 regular season

By The Athletic NHL Staff- April 13, 2025

The NHL regular season is almost in the books, and every team had an MVP performance worth highlighting. But on the other side of the spectrum, some players have failed to impress.

Before we turn the page to the playoffs for some teams and the offseason for others at the end of next week, The Athletic asked its NHL staff for the player who emerged as most disappointing on each team this season.

Here's who our writers picked.

Anaheim Ducks

Robby Fabbri, RW

Fabbri came from Detroit in a salary dump, and if he had solidified the Ducks' third line and provided the kind of depth scoring that's helped him hit double digits six times in his career, they could have gotten great value for very little. But while he played with energy, Fabbri had two long-term injuries and played only 44 games while scoring eight times. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

Jeremy Swayman, G

Swayman signed an eight-year, \$66 million contract after missing all of camp. He has not fulfilled the expectations of his deal (.894 save percentage through 57 appearances). Goaltending became a weakness for the club after being a position of strength. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Jack Quinn, RW

Quinn was supposed to be a breakout candidate for the Sabres. He gets top-six minutes and power-play time but is minus-19 this season with just 14 goals and 36 points. And 10 of those points have come in the last eight games with the playoffs well out of reach. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

Yegor Sharangovich, C/RW

Sharangovich's stats took a sharp fall in 2024-25 after he was the team's leading goal scorer last season. What makes matters worse is his down year comes on the eve of a five-year contract extension that begins next season. The Flames will hope for a return to his 2023-24 form. — Julian McKenzie

Carolina Hurricanes

Brent Burns, RHD

Burns' point production has gone from 61 in his first season in Raleigh to 43 last year and now 28 with four games remaining this season. He's still logging big minutes and has taken on a bigger defensive role, both at even strength and on the penalty kill, but his days as a feared offensive player are over, and that makes his mistakes more glaring. — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

Philipp Kurashev, RW

Kurashev was one of the Blackhawks' top offensive players last season, setting career highs with 18 goals and 36 assists. He excelled alongside Connor Bedard, getting talked about as a future duo. This season couldn't have gone much worse for Kurashev. He has seven goals and seven assists in 50 games and has often been a healthy scratch. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

Casey Mittelstadt, C

There was hope Mittelstadt would level up in Colorado's system, but he struggled to generate offense before he was traded to Boston at the deadline. He had only 34 points in 63 games, with a team-worst rating of minus-12. Logan O'Connor was also an option here, but he picked up his offensive production a bit down the stretch. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

Damon Severson, RHD

It was hoped that Severson would find a foothold in the Blue Jackets' top four in his second season in Columbus, but it hasn't happened. Severson, who still has six years remaining after this season at \$6.25 million per season, has played almost exclusively on the third pair since late December. He's been a healthy scratch in five straight games. — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

Cody Ceci, RHD

It's all relative because Dallas doesn't have any obvious weaknesses. Ceci has filled a role and been, for the most part, fine in tough minutes. But the Stars have been heavily out-attempted and out-chanced with Ceci on the ice. That said, they were still outscoring opponents 28-17 in his minutes as of Monday (his PDO of 110 is by far the highest on the team). — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings

Vladimir Tarasenko, RW

Tarasenko hasn't come close to being the player the Red Wings needed him to be this season, after signing him to a two-year deal worth \$4.75 million annually. His production has been a shell of even what he did last season in Ottawa, and he hasn't been notably impactful beyond the scoresheet, either. A buyout has to at least be a consideration. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

Jeff Skinner, LW

There are many, many options for consideration, but Skinner is the pick. He was signed to be a staple on Leon Draisaitl's left side and barely remained in the top six out of training camp. He'd been a healthy scratch 10 times entering Friday. Skinner has been much better in the second half in all facets but has rarely gained traction from his coach. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Florida Panthers

Adam Boqvist, RHD

Boqvist seemed like a candidate to be Florida's latest reclamation project on the blue line, or at least a power-play option. He was neither. The Panthers waived him Jan. 31, and he was claimed by the Islanders. — Sean Gentile

Los Angeles Kings

Phillip Danault, C

There aren't many candidates from a Kings team that has performed well, especially at home, and has challenged Vegas for the Pacific Division title. Danault's lack of goal scoring could fall into this column, and he's had only one power-play point despite playing regularly on the second unit. But he's still a solid, trusted defensive presence. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

Yakov Trenin, LW

With limited cap space last summer, the Wild signed the former Predators and Avalanche forward to an exorbitant four-year, \$14 million contract on July 1. It was thought the Wild would devote that money to some kind of scoring threat, but they changed paths and looked for somebody who could help them rediscover a hard-nosed, defensive-minded identity. The problem is Trenin still hasn't really found traction in the lineup. He's picked it up physically and scored a goal Friday, but he was part of a penalty kill that has mostly disappointed. Still, at the recent GM meetings, Predators GM Barry Trotz told The Athletic he still feels Trenin's full value to the Wild will be felt in the playoffs. — Michael Russo

What You Should Read Next

Trenin, who played for coach John Hynes in Nashville, was one of the most physical and solid penalty-killing forwards in free agency.

Montreal Canadiens

Kirby Dach, C

Another serious knee injury derailed Dach's chance to make up for a lackluster first half, which was at least in part due to his last serious knee injury. Still, it would be impossible to characterize his season as anything other than disappointing, and the Canadiens have a hole at second-line center that needs filling this offseason. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

Juuse Saros, G

Some will disagree — including some in the Predators organization — and excuse Saros' season as the product of failure all around him. Certainly, there are other prime candidates, such as defenseman Brady Skjei. But Saros is supposed to be elite; he just got an eight-year deal with that in mind, and his season was terrible. It's not all on everyone else. — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

Simon Nemec, RHD

There's no reason to get too down on Nemec, the No. 2 pick in the 2022 NHL Draft, but he has not had a great sophomore season. He played nearly 20 minutes a night in 2023-24 in 60 games, and this season, he's down to 14:34 in only 24 games. He's spent much of the year in AHL Utica and has yet to fully earn the trust of coach Sheldon Keefe. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Anthony Duclair, LW

Not to pile on Duclair, who's away from the Islanders after Patrick Roy publicly lambasted the 29-year-old winger, but he was the one prominent free-agent signing last summer and, after missing two months with a groin injury and scoring just 11 points in 44 games, it's safe to say this wasn't a great move by Lou Lamoriello. — Arthur Staple

New York Rangers

Chris Kreider, LW

There are plenty of options to choose from. Kreider, though, has seen a dramatic decrease in every offensive category. His 21 goals would be respectable for another player, but the Rangers had gotten used to him scoring more than 30 in recent years. Plus, he has only five assists, one primary — hard to do given his power-play usage. — Peter Baugh

Ottawa Senators

Travis Hamonic, RHD

Hamonic is a seventh defenceman at this point in his career. But due to injuries, he's found himself playing on every pairing. He carries a lot of meaning to players in the room but doesn't carry the same skills that justified his usage over players such as Nikolas Matinpalo until recently. — Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

Ivan Fedotov, G

Goaltending has been an issue all season, particularly from the backups: Fedotov and Aleksei Kolosov. Fedotov had some decent games from time to time, but consistency eluded him. This essentially looks like a failed experiment, and Fedotov is still on the hook at \$3.275 million next season. — Kevin Kurz

What You Should Read Next

The checklist to make the Flyers a better team is a long one. But the first item is plainly obvious — address the goaltending.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Tristan Jarry, G

Simply put, he was exiled to the minor leagues not once but twice this season. It sure hasn't all been his fault. But if he had produced even an average season, the Penguins might have been a playoff team. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

Alexandar Georgiev, G

Look, the veteran Georgiev is playing behind a bad defense. Very bad. And there wasn't much question that getting him as part of the trade return for Mackenzie Blackwood would be a downgrade in net. But Georgiev, with an .870 save percentage and 4.03 goals-against average, didn't find his old form in San Jose and figures to be moving on. — Eric Stephens

Seattle Kraken

Philipp Grubauer, G

The Kraken performed like a playoff-caliber team in games that Joey Daccord started. Though Grubauer found his form a bit later on in the year, the Kraken picked up 15 of 50 available points in games that Grubauer started, including a run of eight losses in Grubauer's first nine games. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

Brandon Saad, LW

Saad signed a five-year, \$22.5 million contract in 2021, and in the first three years of it, he was the same consistent winger he's been over his 14-year career. This season, Saad had just seven goals and 16 points in 43 games and was scratched. He was assigned to the AHL but instead walked away from \$5 million left on his contract and signed with Vegas. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

Cam Atkinson, RW

The Lightning's elite core has been firing on all cylinders, and a lot of the high-end supporting cast has delivered exactly what the team needed. It's tough to pinpoint this one, but Atkinson wasn't able to provide the secondary scoring the team signed him for in the bottom six and his two-way game also disappointed. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Max Domi, C

Not only has Domi, in the first year of a four-year contract, had two goal droughts of more than 20 games, he also hasn't set up nearly as many goals as last season — fewer than half as many at five-on-five in fact. In Year 2 as a Leaf, Domi has taken significantly more penalties than he's drawn, his giveaways have spiked, and he's mostly struggled at third-line center. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Hockey Club

Lawson Crouse, LW

After back-to-back seasons with 20-plus goals and 40-plus points, Crouse has cratered badly to just 12 goals and 18 points in a supporting role. He's in the middle of a five-year deal that pays him \$4.3 million — third most among Utah forwards — so they need more out of him. But part of it is he's simply been passed by the team's youth movement. — James Mirtle

Vancouver Canucks

Arturs Silovs, G

Silovs was a playoff hero for Vancouver last spring and was named Vancouver's Game 1 starter to open the season. He struggled in that game, however, and promptly ceded the net to Kevin Lankinen. In Silovs' nine starts, Vancouver accumulated just five of 18 possible points, with both of his wins coming against Chicago. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

Alexander Holtz, RW

Vegas last summer traded for Holtz — the No. 7 draft pick in 2020 — hoping it could unlock some of the offensive potential that made him such a highly touted prospect, but it just didn't happen. Holtz scored only three goals in 49 games before being reassigned to the AHL, where he spent most of the second half of the season. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

Hendrix Lapierre, C

He hasn't played an NHL game since December, but Lapierre is still the choice. He started the season as Washington's third-line center but couldn't hold onto the job. Ideally, he'd have been part of the Caps' success, and he hasn't come close. — Sean Gentile

Winnipeg Jets

Logan Stanley, LHD

Winnipeg hasn't had a lot of disappointments this season. The Jets have been at or near the top of the standings all season and are only 2 points away from surpassing the team record of 114 points set in 2017-18. So, in a world where even the "most disappointing" Jets player is not all that disappointing, who fits the bill? Dylan DeMelo's play has taken a gentle step back. Haydn Fleury started well but struggled in top-four minutes. Ultimately, Stanley wins this unwanted prize by virtue of his 17 minor penalties while being out-chanced and outscored at five-on-five despite a largely sheltered third-pairing role. — Murat Ates

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: What's at stake in Friday's games

By ESPN staff- April 12, 2025

A week from now, the Stanley Cup playoff bracket will be set, and the first games of the postseason will take place on April 19.

Many of the teams competing in the playoffs are known, but the final seeding remains up for grabs -- as does the final order in the draft lottery. Here's what to watch in Friday's matchups:

Montreal Canadiens at Ottawa Senators

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Senators have punched their ticket to the postseason, but it remains to be determined if they will move into the No. 3 spot in the Atlantic (they trail the Florida Panthers by six points and four regulation wins) or stick as the first wild card. The Canadiens are well ahead of the competition for the second wild-card position, entering Friday's game six up on the Columbus Blue Jackets and New York Rangers. They can also catch the Sens, as the gap between those two clubs is three points at opening puck drop.

Detroit Red Wings at Tampa Bay Lightning

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

Detroit's playoff chances are slim, and each of its remaining games is a must-win; on the draft lottery front, the Red Wings are currently 11th. The Lightning remain in the hunt to finish first in the Atlantic Division, beginning the evening three points back of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Pittsburgh Penguins at New Jersey Devils

7 p.m. (NHL Network)

This offseason will include a bit more roster tinkering for the Penguins, who are hoping for another playoff push during the Sidney Crosby era. They are currently slated No. 7 in the draft lottery order, two behind the Seattle Kraken and tied with the Buffalo Sabres. The Devils clinched a playoff berth this week and will take on the Carolina Hurricanes in the first round; Carolina clinched home-ice advantage with a shootout loss to the Capitals on Thursday.

San Jose Sharks at Edmonton Oilers

9:30 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Sharks have a five-point cushion over the Chicago Blackhawks atop the draft lottery order, with four games remaining; they also have the benefit of a six-regulation win gap just in case it comes down to that tiebreaker. The Oilers' magic number to clinch the final playoff spot in the Pacific Division is one, and they start the evening four points (and seven regulation wins) behind the Los Angeles Kings for the No. 2 seed.

Minnesota Wild at Calgary Flames

10 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Flames' playoff hopes are flickering, and this is a must-win game against one of the teams that they are chasing for a wild-card spot. The Wild are currently five points and five regulation wins ahead.

With the regular season ending April 17, we'll help you track 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.

Note: Playoff chances are via Stathead.

Jump ahead:

Current playoff matchups

Today's schedule

Yesterday's scores

Expanded standings

Race for No. 1 pick

Current playoff matchups

Eastern Conference

A1 Toronto Maple Leafs vs. WC1 Ottawa Senators

A2 Tampa Bay Lightning vs. A3 Florida Panthers

M1 Washington Capitals vs. WC2 Montreal Canadiens

M2 Carolina Hurricanes vs. M3 New Jersey Devils

Western Conference

C1 Winnipeg Jets vs. WC2 St. Louis Blues

C2 Dallas Stars vs. C3 Colorado Avalanche

P1 Vegas Golden Knights vs. WC1 Minnesota Wild

P2 Los Angeles Kings vs. P3 Edmonton Oilers

Friday's games

Note: All times ET. All games not on TNT or NHL Network are available to stream on ESPN+ (local blackout restrictions apply).

Montreal Canadiens at Ottawa Senators, 7 p.m.

Detroit Red Wings at Tampa Bay Lightning, 7 p.m.

Pittsburgh Penguins at New Jersey Devils, 7 p.m. (NHL Network)

San Jose Sharks at Edmonton Oilers, 9:30 p.m.

Minnesota Wild at Calgary Flames, 10 p.m.

Thursday's scoreboard

Chicago Blackhawks 5, Boston Bruins 2

Florida Panthers 4, Detroit Red Wings 1

Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Buffalo Sabres 2

Washington Capitals 5, Carolina Hurricanes 4 (SO)

New York Rangers 9, New York Islanders 2

Winnipeg Jets 4, Dallas Stars 0

Vancouver Canucks 4, Colorado Avalanche 1

Nashville Predators 4, Utah Hockey Club 3 (SO)

Vegas Golden Knights 2, Seattle Kraken 1

Los Angeles Kings 6, Anaheim Ducks 1

Expanded standings

Atlantic Division

x - Toronto Maple Leafs

Points: 100

Regulation wins: 39

Playoff position: A1

Games left: 4

Points pace: 105.1

Next game: vs. MTL (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Tampa Bay Lightning

Points: 97

Regulation wins: 39

Playoff position: A2

Games left: 4

Points pace: 102.0

Next game: vs. DET (Friday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Florida Panthers

Points: 96

Regulation wins: 37

Playoff position: A3

Games left: 3

Points pace: 99.7

Next game: vs. BUF (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Ottawa Senators

Points: 90

Regulation wins: 33

Playoff position: WC1

Games left: 4

Points pace: 94.6

Next game: vs. MTL (Friday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

Montreal Canadiens

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 29

Playoff position: WC2

Games left: 4

Points pace: 91.5

Next game: @ OTT (Friday)

Playoff chances: 98.3%

Tragic number: N/A

Detroit Red Wings

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4

Points pace: 83.1

Next game: @ TB (Friday)

Playoff chances: 0.4%

Tragic number: 1

e - Buffalo Sabres

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4
Points pace: 79.9
Next game: @ FLA (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
e - Boston Bruins
Points: 73
Regulation wins: 25
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 2
Points pace: 74.8
Next game: @ PIT (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
Metro Division
z - Washington Capitals
Points: 109
Regulation wins: 42
Playoff position: M1
Games left: 4
Points pace: 114.6
Next game: @ CBJ (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Carolina Hurricanes
Points: 97
Regulation wins: 41
Playoff position: M2
Games left: 4
Points pace: 102.0
Next game: vs. NYR (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A

x - New Jersey Devils

Points: 89

Regulation wins: 36

Playoff position: M3

Games left: 4

Points pace: 93.6

Next game: vs. PIT (Friday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 26

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4

Points pace: 85.2

Next game: vs. WSH (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0.4%

Tragic number: 3

New York Rangers

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 33

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 84.1

Next game: @ CAR (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 1

New York Islanders

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 27

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4

Points pace: 83.1

Next game: @ PHI (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0.9%

Tragic number: 1

e - Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 22

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 78.9

Next game: @ NJ (Friday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 21

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4

Points pace: 76.7

Next game: vs. NYI (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Central Division

x - Winnipeg Jets

Points: 112

Regulation wins: 43

Playoff position: C1

Games left: 3

Points pace: 116.3

Next game: @ CHI (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Dallas Stars

Points: 106

Regulation wins: 41
Playoff position: C2
Games left: 3
Points pace: 110.0
Next game: vs. UTA (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Colorado Avalanche
Points: 100
Regulation wins: 39
Playoff position: C3
Games left: 2
Points pace: 102.5
Next game: @ LA (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
Minnesota Wild
Points: 93
Regulation wins: 33
Playoff position: WC1
Games left: 3
Points pace: 96.5
Next game: @ CGY (Friday)
Playoff chances: 97.9%
Tragic number: N/A
St. Louis Blues
Points: 93
Regulation wins: 31
Playoff position: WC2
Games left: 2
Points pace: 95.3
Next game: @ SEA (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 94.7%

Tragic number: N/A

e - Utah Hockey Club

Points: 85

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 88.2

Next game: @ DAL (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Nashville Predators

Points: 66

Regulation wins: 23

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 68.5

Next game: @ VGK (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 56

Regulation wins: 20

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 58.1

Next game: vs. WPG (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Pacific Division

x - Vegas Golden Knights

Points: 105

Regulation wins: 44

Playoff position: P1

Games left: 3
Points pace: 109.0
Next game: vs. NSH (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Los Angeles Kings
Points: 99
Regulation wins: 40
Playoff position: P3
Games left: 4
Points pace: 104.1
Next game: vs. COL (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
Edmonton Oilers
Points: 95
Regulation wins: 33
Playoff position: P2
Games left: 4
Points pace: 99.9
Next game: vs. SJ (Friday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Calgary Flames
Points: 88
Regulation wins: 28
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 4
Points pace: 92.5
Next game: vs. MIN (Friday)
Playoff chances: 7.5%
Tragic number: 3
e - Vancouver Canucks

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 90.3

Next game: vs. MIN (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Anaheim Ducks

Points: 78

Regulation wins: 24

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 81.0

Next game: vs. COL (Sunday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Seattle Kraken

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 2

Points pace: 75.9

Next game: vs. STL (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - San Jose Sharks

Points: 51

Regulation wins: 14

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4

Points pace: 53.6

Next game: @ EDM (Friday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Note: A "z" means that the team has clinched the top record in the conference. A "y" means that the team has clinched the division title. An "x" means that the team has clinched a playoff berth. An "e" means that the team has been eliminated from playoff contention.

Race for the No. 1 pick

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: 51

Regulation wins: 14

2. Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 56

Regulation wins: 20

3. Nashville Predators

Points: 66

Regulation wins: 23

4. Boston Bruins

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 25

5. Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 21

6. Seattle Kraken

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 28

7. Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 22

8. Buffalo Sabres

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 28

9. Anaheim Ducks

Points: 78

Regulation wins: 24

10. New York Islanders

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 27

11. Detroit Red Wings

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 28

12. New York Rangers

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 33

13. Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 26

14. Utah Hockey Club

Points: 85

Regulation wins: 28

15. Vancouver Canucks

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 28

16. Calgary Flames

Points: 88

Regulation wins: 28

ESPN / NHL playoff WATCH: Key intel for 11-game Showdown Saturday

By ESPN staff- April 13, 2025

The NHL has reached Showdown Saturday, with less than a week to go in the season -- and exactly one week before the start of the 2025 Stanley Cup playoffs!

The identity of 12 of the 16 playoff clubs is known, but final seeding remains up for grabs, along with the race for the Presidents' Trophy as the No. 1 overall seed and positioning in the draft lottery order.

There are 11 games on the schedule throughout the day. Here's what is at stake in each matchup:

New York Islanders at Philadelphia Flyers

12:30 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Islanders are close to being eliminated and the Flyers have been out of the mix for some time now, but there are draft lottery implications here. The Flyers begin the day in the No. 5 spot -- tied in points with the Boston Bruins, one ahead of the Kraken -- while the Isles are 10th, two ahead of the Detroit Red Wings and one behind the Anaheim Ducks.

Washington Capitals at Columbus Blue Jackets

12:30 p.m. (ABC/ESPN+)

Alex Ovechkin's goal-record chase is complete, but watching him down the stretch will be fun as he looks to bolster that record even further. The Caps begin the day having clinched the top seed in the Eastern Conference, but three points behind the Jets for the Presidents' Trophy. The Blue Jackets are six points behind the Canadiens in the race for the final wild-card spot and 13th in the draft lottery order.

New York Rangers at Carolina Hurricanes

3 p.m. (ABC/ESPN+)

Speaking of the Presidents' Trophy, last season's winners are on their last leg of the playoff hunt and are six points behind the Canadiens for wild card No. 2 in the East. They will need to win out (and get A LOT of help) to qualify for the playoffs. On the other side, the Hurricanes are locked in at the No. 2 spot in the Metro Division and will host their first-round series against the New Jersey Devils.

Colorado Avalanche at Los Angeles Kings

4 p.m. (ESPN+)

It's impossible for the Avalanche to win their division, and they'll most likely finish third in the Central. The Kings still have a shot at the Pacific Division title, but it's more likely they'll stick in the No. 2 slot. What do both teams have in common? Both are finishing strong, and will make for tough outs this postseason. This game could be a preview of the Western Conference finals.

Buffalo Sabres at Florida Panthers

6 p.m. (ESPN+)

It's going to be another spring outside of the playoffs for the Sabres, although a recent 8-2-0 run does inspire some hope for the future. They sit in the No. 7 spot in the draft lottery order as play begins Saturday. The Panthers remain in the hunt for the Atlantic Division title, two points behind the Lightning and four behind the Maple Leafs.

Montreal Canadiens at Toronto Maple Leafs

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

Playoff hockey is (very likely) returning to la belle province! The Canadiens are six points ahead of the Blue Jackets, Red Wings and Rangers, with a magic number of three. As for their rivals from Toronto, the Leafs are fending off the hard-charging Lightning and Panthers to retain the No. 1 seed in the Atlantic Division. Toronto enters this game with a two-point cushion over Tampa Bay, and four over Florida.

Winnipeg Jets at Chicago Blackhawks

7 p.m. (NHL Network)

Two teams at different ends of the standings table square off here. The Jets hold a three-point lead over the Capitals for the NHL's No. 1 overall seed heading into the playoffs -- and a six-point lead over the Stars for the Central's No. 1 seed (yes, they still haven't clinched the division). A win here clinches the division and bolsters their hold on the Presidents' Trophy.

The Blackhawks will finish no worse than No. 2 in the draft lottery order, as they can finish with no more than 62 points, and the Predators already have 66. Will they reach No. 1? The Sharks are five ahead (at 51), with four games remaining. This could come down to the wire.

Utah Hockey Club at Dallas Stars

8 p.m. (ESPN+)

The first season of hockey in Utah resulted in the Hockey Club sticking around in the playoff race until the penultimate week, which is better than what a team called the Arizona Coyotes did with a very similar group of players last season. The UHC is No. 14 in the draft lotto order, four points back of the Blue Jackets and Rangers. As noted above, the Stars can still catch the Jets for the Central's No. 1 seed, although they'd need to win out and have the Jets lose the rest of their games.

Minnesota Wild at Vancouver Canucks

10 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Wild looked wobbly for a stretch there in March, but the return of Kirill Kaprizov and Joel Eriksson Ek has them back on track. They begin play on Saturday as the West's No. 1 wild card, with a three-point edge on the Flames. Vancouver went from Pacific Division champs in 2023-24 to out of the playoffs entirely in 2024-25, and currently they sit 15th in the draft lotto order, two points behind the UHC.

Nashville Predators at Vegas Golden Knights

10 p.m. (ESPN+)

One of the original Golden Misfits, Jonathan Marchessault won the Conn Smythe as playoff MVP the year the Knights won the Stanley Cup. This will be his first game back in Vegas wearing a different team's uniform, so while this game won't have much of an impact on the standings, it's notable for that reunion!

The Preds are locked in at the No. 3 spot in the draft lottery order, while the Knights lock up a division title with a regulation win.

St. Louis Blues at Seattle Kraken

10 p.m. (ESPN+)

A recent two-game skid for the Blues might have increased the amount of hope in Calgary, but Jordan Binnington & Co. hold a three-point advantage over the Flames for the final Western wild card heading into this one. Seattle begins play sixth in the draft lottery order, a point back of Philly and Boston.

With the regular season ending April 17, we'll help you track 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.

Note: Playoff chances are via Statthletes.

Jump ahead:

Current playoff matchups

Clinching scenarios

Today's schedule

Yesterday's scores

Expanded standings

Race for No. 1 pick

Current playoff matchups

Eastern Conference

A1 Toronto Maple Leafs vs. WC1 Ottawa Senators

A2 Tampa Bay Lightning vs. A3 Florida Panthers

M1 Washington Capitals vs. WC2 Montreal Canadiens

M2 Carolina Hurricanes vs. M3 New Jersey Devils

Western Conference

C1 Winnipeg Jets vs. WC2 St. Louis Blues

C2 Dallas Stars vs. C3 Colorado Avalanche

P1 Vegas Golden Knights vs. WC1 Minnesota Wild

P2 Los Angeles Kings vs. P3 Edmonton Oilers

Clinching scenarios

The Montreal Canadiens will clinch a playoff berth if:

They defeat the Toronto Maple Leafs in regulation

They defeat the Maple Leafs in any fashion, and there's any result other than a Columbus Blue Jackets regulation win against the Washington Capitals

They lose in overtime/shootout to the Maple Leafs and the Blue Jackets lose to the Capitals in any fashion

The Minnesota Wild will clinch a playoff berth if they defeat the Vancouver Canucks in any fashion, AND the St. Louis Blues lose to the Seattle Kraken in regulation.

The Winnipeg Jets will clinch the Central Division title and the No. 1 seed in the Western Conference if:

They win or lose in OT/SO to the Chicago Blackhawks

There is any result in the Dallas Stars-Utah Hockey Club game other than a Stars win in regulation

The Vegas Golden Knights will clinch the Pacific Division title if:

They defeat the Nashville Predators in regulation

They defeat the Preds in OT/SO, AND there is any result in the Los Angeles Kings-Colorado Avalanche game other than a Kings win in regulation

They lose in OT/SO, AND the Kings lose to the Avs in any fashion

The Kings lose to the Avs in regulation

Saturday's games

Note: All times ET. All games not on TNT or NHL Network are available to stream on ESPN+ (local blackout restrictions apply).

New York Islanders at Philadelphia Flyers, 12:30 p.m.

Washington Capitals at Columbus Blue Jackets, 12:30 p.m. (ABC/ESPN+)

New York Rangers at Carolina Hurricanes, 3 p.m. (ABC/ESPN+)

Colorado Avalanche at Los Angeles Kings, 4 p.m.

Buffalo Sabres at Florida Panthers, 6 p.m.

Montreal Canadiens at Toronto Maple Leafs, 7 p.m.

Winnipeg Jets at Chicago Blackhawks, 7 p.m. (NHL Network)

Utah Hockey Club at Dallas Stars, 8 p.m.

Minnesota Wild at Vancouver Canucks, 10 p.m.

Nashville Predators at Vegas Golden Knights, 10 p.m.

St. Louis Blues at Seattle Kraken, 10 p.m.

Friday's scoreboard

Ottawa Senators 5, Montreal Canadiens 2

Detroit Red Wings 4, Tampa Bay Lightning 3 (OT)

Pittsburgh Penguins 4, New Jersey Devils 2

Edmonton Oilers 4, San Jose Sharks 2

Calgary Flames 4, Minnesota Wild 2

Expanded standings

Atlantic Division

x - Toronto Maple Leafs

Points: 100

Regulation wins: 39

Playoff position: A1

Games left: 4
Points pace: 105.1
Next game: vs. MTL (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Tampa Bay Lightning
Points: 98
Regulation wins: 39
Playoff position: A2
Games left: 3
Points pace: 101.7
Next game: vs. BUF (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Florida Panthers
Points: 96
Regulation wins: 37
Playoff position: A3
Games left: 3
Points pace: 99.7
Next game: vs. BUF (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Ottawa Senators
Points: 92
Regulation wins: 34
Playoff position: WC1
Games left: 3
Points pace: 95.5
Next game: vs. PHI (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
Montreal Canadiens

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 29

Playoff position: WC2

Games left: 3

Points pace: 90.3

Next game: @ TOR (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 98.3%

Tragic number: N/A

Detroit Red Wings

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 29

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 84.1

Next game: vs. DAL (Monday)

Playoff chances: 0.4%

Tragic number: 1

e - Buffalo Sabres

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4

Points pace: 79.9

Next game: @ FLA (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Boston Bruins

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 25

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 2

Points pace: 74.8

Next game: @ PIT (Sunday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Metro Division

z - Washington Capitals

Points: 109

Regulation wins: 42

Playoff position: M1

Games left: 4

Points pace: 114.6

Next game: @ CBJ (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Carolina Hurricanes

Points: 97

Regulation wins: 41

Playoff position: M2

Games left: 4

Points pace: 102.0

Next game: vs. NYR (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - New Jersey Devils

Points: 89

Regulation wins: 36

Playoff position: M3

Games left: 3

Points pace: 92.4

Next game: vs. NYI (Sunday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 26

Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 4
Points pace: 85.2
Next game: vs. WSH (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 0.4%
Tragic number: 3
New York Rangers
Points: 81
Regulation wins: 33
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 3
Points pace: 84.1
Next game: @ CAR (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 0.1%
Tragic number: 1
New York Islanders
Points: 79
Regulation wins: 27
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 4
Points pace: 83.1
Next game: @ PHI (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 0.9%
Tragic number: 1
e - Pittsburgh Penguins
Points: 78
Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 2
Points pace: 80.0
Next game: vs. BOS (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E

e - Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 21

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 4

Points pace: 76.7

Next game: vs. NYI (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Central Division

x - Winnipeg Jets

Points: 112

Regulation wins: 43

Playoff position: C1

Games left: 3

Points pace: 116.3

Next game: @ CHI (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Dallas Stars

Points: 106

Regulation wins: 41

Playoff position: C2

Games left: 3

Points pace: 110.0

Next game: vs. UTA (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

x - Colorado Avalanche

Points: 100

Regulation wins: 39

Playoff position: C3

Games left: 2

Points pace: 102.5

Next game: @ LA (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 100%

Tragic number: N/A

Minnesota Wild

Points: 93

Regulation wins: 33

Playoff position: WC1

Games left: 2

Points pace: 95.3

Next game: @ VAN (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 97.9%

Tragic number: N/A

St. Louis Blues

Points: 93

Regulation wins: 31

Playoff position: WC2

Games left: 2

Points pace: 95.3

Next game: @ SEA (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 94.7%

Tragic number: N/A

e - Utah Hockey Club

Points: 85

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 88.2

Next game: @ DAL (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Nashville Predators

Points: 66

Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 3
Points pace: 68.5
Next game: @ VGK (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
e - Chicago Blackhawks
Points: 56
Regulation wins: 20
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 3
Points pace: 58.1
Next game: vs. WPG (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
Pacific Division
x - Vegas Golden Knights
Points: 105
Regulation wins: 44
Playoff position: P1
Games left: 3
Points pace: 109.0
Next game: vs. NSH (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
x - Los Angeles Kings
Points: 99
Regulation wins: 40
Playoff position: P3
Games left: 4
Points pace: 104.1
Next game: vs. COL (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
Edmonton Oilers
Points: 97
Regulation wins: 34
Playoff position: P2
Games left: 3
Points pace: 100.7
Next game: @ WPG (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Calgary Flames
Points: 90
Regulation wins: 29
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 3
Points pace: 93.4
Next game: vs. SJ (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 7.5%
Tragic number: 3
e - Vancouver Canucks
Points: 87
Regulation wins: 28
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 3
Points pace: 90.3
Next game: vs. MIN (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 0%
Tragic number: E
e - Anaheim Ducks
Points: 78
Regulation wins: 24
Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 81.0

Next game: vs. COL (Sunday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Seattle Kraken

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 28

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 2

Points pace: 75.9

Next game: vs. STL (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - San Jose Sharks

Points: 51

Regulation wins: 14

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 3

Points pace: 52.9

Next game: @ CGY (Sunday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Note: A "z" means that the team has clinched the top record in the conference. A "y" means that the team has clinched the division title. An "x" means that the team has clinched a playoff berth. An "e" means that the team has been eliminated from playoff contention.

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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. More 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: 51

Regulation wins: 14

2. Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 56

Regulation wins: 20

3. Nashville Predators

Points: 66

Regulation wins: 23

4. Boston Bruins

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 25

5. Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 21

6. Seattle Kraken

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 28

7. Buffalo Sabres

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 28

8. Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 78

Regulation wins: 23

9. Anaheim Ducks

Points: 78

Regulation wins: 24

10. New York Islanders

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 27

11. Detroit Red Wings

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 29

12. New York Rangers

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 33

13. Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 26

14. Utah Hockey Club

Points: 85

Regulation wins: 28

15. Vancouver Canucks

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 28

16. Calgary Flames

Points: 90

Regulation wins: 29

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: What's at stake in Sunday's games

By ESPN staff- April 14, 2025

Reactions

The 11 NHL games on Saturday helped solidify the playoff picture, as three teams (the Detroit Red Wings, New York Rangers and New York Islanders) have been officially eliminated from the race. Now it's just the Columbus Blue Jackets chasing the Montreal Canadiens.

In the West, the St. Louis Blues kept hope alive for the Calgary Flames, losing in the shootout to the Seattle Kraken. Meanwhile, the Winnipeg Jets and Vegas Golden Knights won their games to clinch division titles.

With the end of the regular season approaching on Thursday, here's what's at stake in the nine games taking place Sunday:

Philadelphia Flyers at Ottawa Senators

1 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Senators are locked in to the first wild-card position in the East (and a matchup against the top team in the Atlantic). The Flyers are currently fifth in the draft lottery order, two points behind the Boston Bruins and one ahead of the Kraken.

New York Islanders at New Jersey Devils

1 p.m. (TNT)

The Isles' playoff hopes were extinguished with their shootout loss on Saturday, and they are in the No. 10 spot in the draft lottery order, two points behind the Ducks and Penguins, and one ahead of the Rangers and Red Wings. On the other side, the Devils are locked in to the No. 3 seed in the Metro, and will open the playoffs on the road against the Hurricanes.

Boston Bruins at Pittsburgh Penguins

3:30 p.m. (TNT)

One day, these proud franchises will be battling it out again for postseason positioning, but that day is not today. For this iteration of the matchup, Boston enters as the No. 4 seed in the draft lottery order, two points ahead of Philly and three ahead of Seattle (the Bruins cannot catch the Predators for the No. 3 spot). The Pens are eighth, one point behind the Sabres, tied with the Ducks, and two ahead of the Islanders.

Toronto Maple Leafs at Carolina Hurricanes

5 p.m. (ESPN+)

If things break correctly in the coming weeks, we could see these two teams collide again in the Eastern Conference finals. Toronto holds a four-point lead over the Lightning and Panthers atop the Atlantic Division and clinches the title today if it wins and the Lightning lose in any fashion. The Canes will go no higher or lower than second in the Metro, and they'll face off with the Devils to begin postseason play.

Buffalo Sabres at Tampa Bay Lightning

6 p.m. (ESPN+)

As noted above, the Lightning remain in the chase for the Atlantic crown and will just about need every W left on the schedule to do it. On the other side, the Sabres are high up in the draft lottery order (they begin Sunday No. 7), but that hasn't stopped them from playing some great hockey as of late, going 7-2-1 in their past 10 games.

Columbus Blue Jackets at Washington Capitals

6 p.m. (ESPN+)

A rematch from Saturday's matinee in Columbus, which the Blue Jackets won 7-0. Columbus is five points and two regulation wins behind Montreal for the final wild-card spot with a game in hand. The Capitals are locked in to the top seed in the Eastern Conference, but their Presidents' Trophy dreams are on thin ice; they are five points behind the Jets with three games left.

Edmonton Oilers at Winnipeg Jets

7 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Oilers recently clinched their spot in the postseason and a first-round matchup against the very familiar Los Angeles Kings (this will be the fourth straight season they'll face off in the first round). What's left to determine is home-ice advantage; the Kings are currently in second place in the Pacific, four points ahead of the Oilers with three games left for both clubs. The Jets are locked in as the No. 1 seed in the West and are just waiting to see whether they'll be playing the Minnesota Wild, St. Louis Blues or Calgary Flames in Round 1.

San Jose Sharks at Calgary Flames

8 p.m. (ESPN+)

Speaking of the Flames, they begin Sunday four games behind the Blues and five games behind the Wild, with two games in hand on both clubs. The chances are slim, but the door remains open for a final-week surge into the postseason. By way of potential tiebreakers, the Sharks have clinched the No. 1 spot in the draft lottery order.

Colorado Avalanche at Anaheim Ducks

10 p.m. (ESPN)

Sunday's nightcap pits the Avalanche -- who are locked in to the No. 3 spot in the Central, and a first-round matchup against the Dallas Stars -- against the Ducks, who appear to be about one year away from mounting a real run at the playoffs. Anaheim begins Sunday ninth in the draft lottery order, tied in points with Pittsburgh, one behind Buffalo and two ahead of the Islanders.

Tragic number: E

Note: A "z" means that the team has clinched the top record in the conference. A "y" means that the team has clinched the division title. An "x" means that the team has clinched a playoff berth. An "e" means that the team has been eliminated from playoff contention.

Race for the No. 1 pick

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. More details on the process are [here](#). Matthew Schaefer, a defenseman for the OHL's Erie Otters, is No. 1 on the draft board.

[Sportsnet.ca / Will any player be able to challenge Alex Ovechkin's goals record?](#)

By David Morassutti- April 14, 2025

For 31 years, Wayne Gretzky held the crown as the best goal-scorer in the NHL, a mark that was largely viewed as untouchable until Alex Ovechkin made a run and completed the historic chase last weekend.

When Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman asked Ovechkin about possibly breaking Gretzky's record in 2016, he wouldn't entertain the possibility.

"Impossible to catch Gretzky?" Friedman asked.

"It's impossible," Ovechkin said in response.

However, Friedman was pushing the idea more, "You could challenge him, you might be able to do it—"

"No," Ovechkin interjected. "I have to have six seasons of 50 goals, I don't know if I'm going to be able to skate in six seasons."

At that point, Ovechkin had 525 goals in 839 career games and was coming off his third-straight 50-goal campaign.

As the years went along, Ovechkin's belief started to change, and despite the COVID-19 pandemic putting a pause on hockey and his chase, the Russian star remained determined to get back on track.

This season, Ovechkin is scoring at a 0.69 goals-per-game pace, his best mark since the 2019-20 season, when he had a 0.71 goals-per-game pace. Even more impressive, the 39-year-old didn't let a 16-game absence from a fractured fibula slow him down.

While it's certain that Ovechkin will add to his total with one year left on his contract after this season, it's not clear whether he will try to extend his NHL career beyond that, or decide it's the right time to retire from the NHL.

How high can Ovechkin go from here? And will he reign atop the NHL's all-time goal scoring list for as long as Gretzky did, or will anyone be able to challenge him in the near future?

Let's take a look at whether any of the active goal-scoring leaders in the league will challenge Ovechkin.

Ovechkin has owned the Maurice "Rocket" Richard Trophy during his career with nine goal-scoring titles to his name. However, over the last four years, Matthews has earned three Rockey Richard Trophies.

It didn't take long for many to point to the Toronto Maple Leafs captain as the next challenger for the goal-scoring mark, but he was not willing to put himself in that conversation.

"That's such a long way away or such a long way to go," Matthews said after practice Monday. "And, you know, I don't even think I should be in that conversation."

"I mean, this guy just broke the record. I'm so far away from that, and I don't think that should be a focus on myself. I mean, it should be on Ovi, and rightfully so. It should be on Ovi, and what he's been able to accomplish in his career, and obviously this record being one of them."

It's a respectable comment from Matthews, considering Ovechkin's total will continue to go up as long as he plays.

However, the Leafs' sniper is selling himself short if he doesn't think he can challenge the mark. He is only two goals away from scoring 400 in his career, a mark that Ovechkin took 634 games to accomplish, while Matthews has played in 623 career games.

Matthews has not only been the most productive goal scorer since entering the league in 2016, but his current goal-scoring pace has him among some of the top goal scorers of all time.

There's no denying that Matthews has the ability to challenge Ovechkin thanks to a pair of 60-plus goal scoring seasons, but there is one hurdle that he would have to overcome.

Staying healthy.

Durability has been an issue for Matthews throughout his career, missing 71 games spread across nine seasons. That's a significant amount of time missed, considering how many goals Matthews could have had over that time.

If we take his career goals-per-game pace of 0.64 and apply that to the number of games that he has missed, we're looking at about 45 goals that Matthews could have added to his total.

But Ovechkin has also had a bit of luck go against him at points throughout his career. His NHL debut was delayed by a year because of the 2004-05 lockout, the lockout in 2012-13 shortened that season to 48 games, and the pandemic cut the 2019-20 season short and was followed by a 56-game season in 2021.

If Matthews continued to score at the pace he's currently on, he would need roughly 778 more games to reach 896 goals. That means Matthews would need to play at least another 10 seasons before he really gets into this conversation -- and since Ovechkin is still adding to his total, Matthews' climb will have to continue from there.

Can the Oilers duo enter the conversation?

Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl are no strangers to scoring goals, but the route for them doesn't hold the same potential as Matthews'.

Let's start with Draisaitl, who got off to a slow start in his career but has seen a massive uptick in production since the 2018-19 season. Right now, the Oilers forward has scored 399 goals, which puts him 496 goals away from Ovechkin's current mark.

At his 0.51 goals-per-game pace, he'll need to play around 975 more NHL games to reach Ovechkin's current mark. That doesn't consider how many more goals Ovechkin adds to his total, so the more goals he scores, the longer Draisaitl will need to play.

The 29-year-old has played 790 career games and hasn't dealt with many injuries, but he's already behind the pace. However, he has scored at a 0.62 goals-per-game pace since the 2019-20 season, which helps his chances, but unless he plans to play and continue to score at that rate for another 900 games and Ovechkin retires soon, it still might not be enough.

Like Draisaitl, McDavid finds himself in a tough position to challenge Ovechkin because he hasn't scored at the same pace as those top goal-getters, with 361 goals through 708 career games. The Oilers captain has scored at a 0.51 goals-per-game pace during his career, even with his 64-goal season back in 2022-23, but he's followed that up with 32 and 26 goals (currently).

For McDavid, the real question will be about where he finishes on the NHL's all-time points list. Catching Gretzky is probably impossible, but maybe he can get close and finish No. 2 all-time. That's an article for another day, however.

Pastrnak faces similar uphill battle

When you look at David Pastrnak's career he's been a valuable contributor for the Boston Bruins with a respectable 0.52 career goals-per-game average. The 61-goal season that he had in 2022-23 showed his

potential as a top goal scorer in the league but that was the only season where he's scored over 50 in his career.

In 753 career games, he's scored 389 goals which puts Pastrnak off the pace of the other contenders but when his career is over, he should be in a good position unless the Bruins' retool impacts his production.

Any contenders down the road

While there might not be many active players capable of challenging Ovechkin's record, there is always an influx of talent that could one day try to put themselves in the conversation.

When Connor Bedard was coming into the NHL, he was touted as the "Next One" after scoring 71 goals and 143 points in 57 games during his draft year. But it's been a slow start to his career, partly due to the fact he's on a Chicago Blackhawks team that lacks talent to support him. With 42 goals scored through his first 146 NHL games, it's far too early to say if Bedard could one day make a charge or not, but unless he starts to break out with some stellar goal scoring seasons soon, his pace could fall off enough to make it unlikely.

Then you have the potential for players waiting to enter the league.

Let's start with this upcoming draft, where Michael Misa has put himself in the conversation as a top-three pick. The Saginaw forward had an impressive season with 62 goals and 134 points in 65 games, and Central Scouting used Steven Stamkos as an NHL comparable.

Can Misa bring that kind of goal-scoring production to the NHL? There is a reason the Oakville, Ont., native was one of four players in the OHL granted exceptional status.

Then there is the 2026 NHL Draft, where WHL phenom Gavin McKenna is already turning heads. He recorded 41 goals and 129 points through 56 games, but his 45-game point streak had everyone talking.

During that 45-game stretch, he produced 34 goals and 116 points, which put him in rare company. Sportsnet's Jason Bukala broke down McKenna's scoring prowess and how aggressive he is at getting pucks on net between the faceoff circles.

You certainly have to be cautious when looking at production from a player during his junior career and assume that it will translate to success in the NHL, and very few players will ever have a career that could rival Ovechkin's, but there is some exciting talent as part of the next wave of prospects set to make the jump.

Ovechkin is the new record holder and he will hold that for a long time into the future yet, with 900-plus goal on the horizon. Will he one day reach 1,000 goals? Will he retire after next season?

The more goals Ovechkin scores from here, the tougher the math gets for anyone else to catch him in the future.