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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets celebrate birthday of Johnny Gaudreau's 2-year-old daughter

By Nathan Hart – October 1, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets players and their families celebrated the birthday of 2-year-old Noa Gaudreau, the daughter of the late Johnny Gaudreau, at a party held Sunday, according to social media posts.

The players and family gathered for an expansive barnyard animal-themed party at an undisclosed home, complete with a milk and cookie bar, a child-sized banquet table and a two-tiered cake for the birthday girl, whose birthday is officially Monday.

Meredith Gaudreau, Noa's mother and Johnny Gaudreau's wife, posted pictures and videos of the festivities on her Instagram story early Monday.

Odette Peters, the fiancée of Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski, posted a photo showing over a dozen Blue Jackets players and their families posed behind a large sign reading: "Happy 2nd Birthday Noa!"

Noa's birthday comes just over a month since her father was struck and killed by an alleged drunk driver while biking with his brother, Matthew Gaudreau, in Oldmans Township, New Jersey, on Aug. 29. Matthew Gaudreau also died in the crash.

The incident happened as the Gaudreau brothers were in New Jersey to participate in their sister's wedding.

Columbus Dispatch / NHL to honor Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau with helmet stickers

By Brian Hedger – October 1, 2024

The NHL will start the upcoming season by honoring Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, with helmet stickers worn by players on all 32 teams.

The decal, featuring a capital 'G' flanked by a No. 13 on the left and No. 21 on the right, will be displayed starting with games Friday and Saturday in Czechia during the NHL's global series through Oct. 24, when the Los Angeles Kings host the San Jose Sharks for the league's final home opener.

Johnny Gaudreau wore No. 13 during a standout playing career at Boston College before taking it to the NHL with the Calgary Flames and Blue Jackets. Matthew Gaudreau wore No. 21 at Boston College, playing one season with his brother there, before shifting into professional hockey in the AHL, ECHL and Europe.

The Blue Jackets placed their own memorial sticker on helmets prior to their first preseason game last week in Buffalo. It features the brothers' numbers flanking two white doves that will adorn the Jackets' helmets all season. The Blue Jackets also played a video shown league wide before holding a 13-second moment of silence before their first home preseason game.

There is also a pregame memorial planned for the team's home opener Oct. 15 to honor the brothers, who were killed Aug. 29 while bicycling in New Jersey.

In addition, the Blue Jackets will wear a No. 13 patch on their uniforms for the duration of the season, starting with the first regular season game Oct. 10 in Minnesota. Fans attending the home-opener Oct. 15 against the Florida Panthers will also receive a No. 13 patch.

Columbus Dispatch / Sean Monahan grieving Gaudreaus, loving Columbus: 'I'm proud to be a Blue Jacket'

By Brian Hedger – October 1, 2024

The loudest cheers are usually reserved for the longest-tenured Blue Jackets.

Sean Monahan, however, just signed July 1 as an unrestricted free agent and played in a Blue Jackets uniform for the first time Saturday when he was greeted by roaring fans at Nationwide Arena. Monahan's two goals in the third period then sparked a 6-3 exhibition victory over the Buffalo Sabres.

"To be honest, from Day 1 I've felt good," Monahan said. "We have a real good group of guys here, and the organization is as well. It feels kind of like home right away. I'm proud to be a Blue Jacket."

That first cheer for him felt like a hug.

Monahan, 29, partly signed with the Blue Jackets to reunite with Johnny Gaudreau, a close friend and former teammate with the Calgary Flames who was killed along with his brother, Matthew, on Aug. 29 while riding bicycles in New Jersey. It was a tragedy that rocked the NHL, particularly in Columbus and Calgary, and left players across the league gutted.

Monahan, meanwhile, bonded with his new teammates in a new NHL city in a way that is unimaginable and unbreakable. His stall in the Blue Jackets' locker room is still situated right next to Gaudreau's, where a blue No. 13 jersey now hangs as a memorial that will be with this team – home and road – all season.

The Jackets will also wear stickers bearing both Gaudreau brothers' numbers, and the home opener Oct. 15 against the defending Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers will be preceded by a ceremony to honor the Gaudreaus, who each played at Boston College before advancing into professional hockey.

Seeing Johnny Gaudreau's jersey in its stall for the first time "hit different," for Monahan, who also bought a home down the street from Gaudreau after signing his five-year contract.

On the ice, it took a couple of periods to get the feel of playing an actual game back, but Monahan and his linemates – captain Boone Jenner and Kirill Marchenko – showed in the third what they can do together.

"It's the first game ... new organization, new linemates, new system," Monahan said. "There's a lot that goes into it. I'm not going to lie. It was a pretty heavy night, walking in to see Johnny's jersey hanging there for the first time, too. It was nice to get out there and play, so we got the first one out of the way and go from there."

As time passes, Gaudreau's jersey and other reminders will become welcome sources of motivation. Through their first two preseason games, all postgame player interviews took place with Gaudreau's jersey in the background. That will likely become a common visual.

"I look at it, and it brings back a lot of memories," Monahan said. "Smiles. Laughs. I mean, today was the first time seeing it. It obviously hit a little bit different, but anytime I see his stuff around the locker room and whatnot, it brings back good memories for me."

Making the Jackets' goal cannon fire might, too, eventually. Like Gaudreau, who'd often duck as a visiting player when the cannon fired, Monahan is still warming to it. Setting it off, like he did twice against Buffalo, will help with the adjustment.

“It was good,” Monahan said, smirking. “It still scares me a little bit, but I’ll get used to it, I’m sure.”

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets preseason: 4 takeaways from 3-2 loss to Washington Capitals

By Brian Hedger – October 1, 2024

Despite making a late push, the Blue Jackets dropped to 3-2-0 in exhibition games with a 3-2 loss to the Washington Capitals on Monday night at Nationwide Arena. Rookies Denton Mateychuk and Luca Del Bel Belluz scored goals for Columbus, which started goalie Daniil Tarasov (23 saves).

Washington's goals were scored by Nic Dowd, Tom Wilson and former Blue Jackets center Pierre-Luc Dubois, who capped a 5-on-3 power-play with the eventual winning goal less than a second before the second period ended. Mateychuk tied it 1-1 on his second goal of the preseason shortly after Dowd scored the game's first goal at 6:49 of the first.

Del Bel Belluz pulled the Blue Jackets within a goal late in the third on his first goal of the preseason. Columbus had multiple chances to tie it in the final minutes, pulling Tarasov for an extra skater with more than two minutes to play, but Capitals goalie Logan Thompson came up big.

"We definitely flipped the ice," Del Bel Belluz said. "We had the puck on our sticks. There were definitely chances for us to score. Sometimes the puck luck's not on your side, so it is what it is."

Here are four takeaways:

Denton Mateychuk isn't making things easy for Columbus Blue Jackets' GM Don Waddell

Mateychuk is a rookie, has played only in NHL preseason games and his most likely destination is the Cleveland Monsters of the American Hockey League. That doesn't mean it's written in stone.

Mateychuk's goal was another laser from distance to beat a solid NHL goalie, and that's a skill that can't be overstocked. That said, it's probably not enough on its own to move Mateychuk ahead of more experienced options for defensive depth. The rest of Mateychuk's game has also stood out positively, which may help in his chase for an NHL spot.

"I feel like I'm playing good hockey," Mateychuk said. "I feel good out there. I'm just going out there to play my game and whatever happens, happens. You still bring that intensity and prepare for games, whether it's a junior game or the NHL preseason."

The Blue Jackets' main emphasis for Mateychuk this year is for him to play and learn at the professional level rather than watch as a healthy scratch. That's why it's more likely he'll start out in the AHL after Blue Jackets president of hockey operations/general manager Don Waddell makes the final decision. For now, however, the possibility of Mateychuk grabbing an NHL defensive role remains open while he continues to impress.

"His calmness, his poise as a young player ... he doesn't panic in those situations," coach Dean Evason said. "You watch, even after he makes a mistake and turns the puck over, it's not a panic mode. He doesn't go chasing after it and then compound that one mistake. That's why you don't see that glaring error out of him."

Evason also cautioned against reading too much into Mateychuk's success in exhibition games.

"This is preseason, and the NHL is a great league," he said. "(It's) the best league in the world, and when the regular season starts there's a lot of heat and a lot of heat on defensemen ... and there's a lot of heat on young defensemen. So, we have to be careful what we do, and not get too far ahead of

ourselves. We like his progress, as we do with a lot of our players. If it works out that he's here, great. If it doesn't, great."

Columbus Blue Jackets' Kent Johnson is still killing penalties

Kent Johnson's speed and quickness have improved after an offseason of working on leg strength, sprints and power skating. The boost has allowed his offensive skills to jump out during this preseason, from deft passes to winning more puck battles, but he's also getting a new opportunity to shine.

Welcome to the Kent Johnson penalty-killing era?

Evason said Johnson was "exceptional" while short-handed in his first taste of playing on the PK and will continue to get ice time in that situation if it continues.

"I've always loved to be on the PK," Johnson said. "I haven't done it too much. Obviously, not here, but when I was at Michigan I loved it and I was always trying to get coach to let me out there more. It's fun. There's a lot of reads for me to make, and I think I can do a decent job at it if I know the offensive guys at the other end and what they want to do. Hopefully, I can keep earning some of it."

Johnson wasn't anywhere near the top of short-handed forward options under former coaches Pascal Vincent and Brad Larsen the past couple years, but Waddell's trade of Alexandre Texier at the draft in June plus Justin Danforth's wrist injury created an opportunity.

Johnson has done the rest. He got another opportunity to kill penalties Monday and helped the Blue Jackets thwart two of the Capitals' three power plays. He wasn't on the ice for Dubois' 5-on-3 goal scored with 0.6 seconds left in the second.

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Erik Gudbranson dealing with 'minor' lower-body injury

Erik Gudbranson was busy at the end of the second period, but the veteran defenseman didn't play a minute in the third. Evason said Gudbranson probably could have played through an undisclosed lower-body injury, but it didn't make sense to risk it worsening during a preseason game.

Gudbranson will stay off the ice Tuesday and be re-evaluated before the Blue Jackets finish their preseason schedule with a game Thursday in Pittsburgh and a rematch Friday against the Penguins at Nationwide Arena.

Elvis Merzlikins' new mask includes tribute to Johnny Gaudreau

Elvis Merzlikins backed up Tarasov because Jet Greaves, who was initially slated for backup duties, was ill. Greaves may start for the Blue Jackets on Tuesday night in St. Louis.

Merzlikins, meanwhile, debuted a new paint scheme for his mask during pregame warmups. The design includes a memorial to Johnny Gaudreau, including a large red heart on top with his former teammate's No. 13 painted on the chin. Gaudreau and his younger brother, Matthew, were killed Aug. 29 while riding bicycles in New Jersey.

Merzlikins also includes a tribute on his masks to Matiss Kivlenieks, a close friend and former Blue Jackets goalie who was killed in a fireworks incident July 4, 2021, at the home of Manny Legace, the team's former goaltending coach.

[The Athletic / Columbus Blue Jackets 2024-25 season preview: Playoff chances, projected points, roster rankings](#)

By Dom Luszczyszyn, Shayna Goldman and Sean Gentile – October 1, 2024

In a press conference a few days after Johnny Gaudreau's death, Blue Jackets president Don Waddell put it succinctly.

"Where there's a huge hole in our lineup," Waddell said, "there's even a larger one in our hearts."

Replacing Gaudreau as a person isn't possible. Replacing him as a hockey player is both significantly less important and only a bit less difficult. Figuring out how to play games after a tragedy is something Waddell and the organization have both faced, and now it's a hill they'll have to climb once more.

The projection

This is no doubt going to be a challenging year on the ice for the Blue Jackets. With a 69-point projection, a noteworthy improvement on last year's 66 points isn't likely to be in the cards. For Columbus, the on-ice result — the farthest thing from anyone's mind at the moment — will probably be more of the same.

That projection bodes well for Columbus's future, as it gives the team an 84 percent chance of landing in the league's bottom five — it's just not very rosy in the short term. Barring some incredible and simultaneous jumps from several of the team's young players, the chances of Columbus being competitive on a nightly basis aren't high. New coach Dean Evason will likely give the team a bump in the right direction, one that's not accounted for here, but this roster can only go so far with the talent it has on paper.

All of that stems from a completely cold and calculating approach to what is an obviously delicate and human situation. The truth is, no one knows how the team will respond on the ice this season after losing a beloved friend and teammate. We can only hope — and root — for the best.

The big question

Is Adam Fantilli ready to take a leap to stardom?

Fantilli's rookie season started with a September coaching change and ended after 49 games due to a calf injury. There were speed bumps in the middle, too, thanks to the quality of the roster surrounding him, injuries to his teammates and, at times, limited minutes under Pascal Vincent, who replaced Mike Babcock on the eve of training camp.

That's certainly not how anyone from Columbus would have drawn it up after selecting Fantilli with the No. 3 pick in 2023. Still, his outlook heading into this season is a testament to the potential he possesses — and how he managed to convert that potential to strong play, even as a 19-year-old operating under circumstances that, even on their best days, were far from ideal.

Coming out of the draft, Fantilli drew ultra-high marks from prospect evaluators such as Scott Wheeler for his size, skating and transition-game dominance during his Hobey Baker-winning season at the University of Michigan. "It's not often we see players his size who can move like him," Wheeler wrote while labeling him the third-best drafted prospect in hockey.

"He's going to be a transition monster. On top of it all, he's physical, he's a fiery competitor, he'll get after it on forecheck and track pucks, he plays with energy, and he'll pounce on turnovers and be opportunistic."

By the middle of the season, that skillset was on display. After injuries to players such as Boone Jenner forced Vincent to move him up in the lineup, Fantilli had seven goals and six assists in 14 December games. Playing alongside Gaudreau meant Fantilli was facing top competition on a nightly basis, and he held up his end of the bargain.

“I don’t think it’s ideal to put (Fantilli) in a position like this, but I don’t think it’s bad, either. I don’t think it’s best for his development,” Vincent said on Jan. 2, according to The Athletic’s Aaron Portzline. “We want him to develop really good habits, and when you play against (Auston) Matthews, (John) Tavares, (Jack) Hughes, those top players ... there’s a line we need to walk. But for now, he’s getting great experience.”

January wasn’t as kind to his point production, but he still finished with 12 goals and 15 assists in 49 games, and a 2.05 points/60 at five-on-five that was third on the Blue Jackets. That’s a solid foundation on its own. It wasn’t just the points, either — it was how he went about scoring them. Fantilli, even as a rookie, positively impacted shots and scoring chances at rates comfortably above the average NHL center, according to Corey Sznjader’s data. His work at gaining the offensive zone might’ve been even more impressive: he was in the 96th percentile league-wide in controlled-entry percentage. “Transition monster,” indeed.

Defensively, Fantilli was involved quite a bit, making exits and puck retrievals at rates well above the average NHL center, but efficiency was an issue — those exits, more often than not, weren’t controlled, and the retrievals too rarely led to flipping the zone. This, perhaps more than anywhere else, is where Fantilli’s age is worth mentioning. A 19-year-old showing that degree of effort, and that willingness to try, speaks to his potential as a responsible two-way, top-line center. He has the desire, he has the skillset and he’s already begun to get the reps. That’s a recipe for improved results and a well-rounded game sooner rather than later.

Fantilli’s projection for this season reflects that. No Blue Jackets forward has a higher projected Net Rating than his plus-3. Finishing in that range wouldn’t constitute star-level production, and the talent surrounding him is likely to again be an issue, but everything continues pointing in the right direction. Fantilli looked the part of a franchise center the day the Blue Jackets drafted him, and he’s likely to continue growing into the role.

The wild card

Is David Jiříček ready for a top-four role?

After a wonky second season in North America for Jiříček — Columbus sent him to the AHL on several occasions, including at one point for nearly three months, and he wasn’t happy about it — it’s worth stating he certainly still projects to be a legit top-four defenseman. At some point.

Scott Wheeler called him a “confident, active, engaged, three-zone player who has almost all of the tools you look for in a top defender.” Corey Pronman, while noting Jiříček’s issues with adapting to NHL pace, still projects him as “an all-situations top-four defenseman.” He’s a big (6-foot-3, 199 pounds), athletic, booming right-shot, and that’s as true now as it was when the Blue Jackets drafted him No. 6 overall in 2022. He’s also still just 20 years old. There are, by all accounts, no real reasons to push the panic button.

That said, expecting him to fill that role in 2024-25 — as a top-four defenseman in performance, not just as a lineup designation — is probably overzealous. He’s still played in just 47 NHL games. So, while there have been elements of his game to like (solid work on zone exits and puck retrievals, the fact Columbus’ defensive results were better with him on the ice), he almost certainly will need more time to develop into an actual game-changer. The question for Evason, really, is whether Jiříček should learn on the job.

The strengths

Any team projected for 68 points usually doesn't have a lot of strengths on paper. But there is still long-term potential thanks to Columbus's up-and-coming core.

The best way to turn a team's trajectory around from the bottom of the standings is to lean on young, skilled forwards. Some of the strongest contenders in the league first had to bottom out to load up on top talent. Think of the Penguins, Blackhawks and Lightning — each team's foundation was built on top-10 picks who eventually helped fuel their championship runs. In Fantilli, Kent Johnson, and eventually 2024 first-round pick Cayden Lindstrom, the Blue Jackets have three top-five picks with high ceilings. Add players like Jiříček and Cole Sillinger, and the vision can start coming together.

Drafting those players is one part of the equation; developing them is another animal entirely. That's the task for Evason and the Blue Jackets' coaching staff this year. Evason isn't exactly known as a developmental coach, but he has experience with young players such as Matt Boldy. His time in Minnesota will help show what he can do on a team that isn't as defensively-minded.

The Blue Jackets have seen glimpses of the star Fantilli can be, and more time at center in prime minutes should help. Sillinger has the skills to become a real scoring threat, too; he had a knack for generating shots and scoring chances last year at five-on-five.

Alongside those centers, there is some younger talent on the wings to help push the pace of play. Kirill Marchenko was a reliable secondary scorer last season in Columbus despite the team around him, while Yegor Chinakhkov's rush game impressed. If a healthy Johnson can get back on track, the Blue Jackets will have some building blocks for a long-term forward group in place.

Having Sean Monahan for extra center support doesn't hurt, either. He doesn't quite match the archetype for a top-six center that teams should strive for, but that doesn't matter for Columbus, given their current standing. The question is whether he can keep trending back up in this environment after rebuilding his value in Montreal and Winnipeg. At the very least, having extra center depth should help take some of the burden off the young stars — as long as he doesn't take meaningful minutes away from them when their play calls for it. Ditto for the newly signed James van Riemsdyk, who offers nice depth in the middle six. Both players were once top-10 picks themselves and can offer valuable wisdom, experience and leadership to the team's growing core.

On the back end, Zach Werenski looks like a true number one offensively, but has struggled defensively at times with a lack of support, which downgrades his value. At his best, he is a spark from the back end with his ability in transition. Werenski does a lot with little around him and it's why many insiders we spoke to for our annual Player Tiers project felt he deserved more love than his projected Net Rating suggested. He can be counted on to retrieve pucks, exit the defensive end with possession and drive play into the offensive zone. His zone entry numbers did slip last year, but if he can get back to his 2021-22 levels and stay healthy, he should be a major difference-maker in Columbus.

With the addition of Jordan Harris, the Blue Jackets add another capable defender to a blue line that can use all the support it can get.

The weaknesses

Even with the potential of their young talent, the Blue Jackets' roster as a whole is flawed. The young guns are simply too unproven and raw to take on the responsibility of carrying a thin supporting cast at this moment.

Fantilli, Johnson and Sillinger could become that; the one worry is that a coach blocks their path via veteran over-reliance. That was the case last year at times with Boone Jenner down the middle, which

put a crimp in Fantilli's progression. It could happen again with Monahan. If the coaches take their eye off the long term, it could stunt the development of the players this team's future is riding on.

But even with everyone slotted in appropriate roles, it's clear this forward group is going to have its work cut out for it this year. The high-end talent is missing, the middle-six isn't playoff-caliber and even the depth is lacking. That only changes if a bunch of players play to their absolute ceilings and outpace projections. Given everything that's happened in Columbus over the last year, no one can blame the players if that doesn't happen.

Offense is a troubling area for this squad, but defense is the real weak point. Between all 18 skaters, the Blue Jackets project to have a collective minus-45 Defensive Rating, the worst in the league. The forward group is a drag in that department, but the blue line ultimately isn't steady enough to make up for their issues, and that is what ultimately sinks them.

On defense, five of six defenders fall short of the ideal value for their respective positions. Maybe Werenski can push past that with a healthy season, but last year's big additions, Damon Severson and Ivan Provorov, don't look top-pair caliber.

Provorov's game took a step back in his first season in Columbus. After denying 72 percent of the entries he faced in 2022-23, according to AllThreeZone's tracking, he dropped down to just 48 percent last year. And once in the zone, he struggled to retrieve pucks and push play back out of the defensive zone.

Severson similarly saw big dips from 2022-23 as well. The big difference was his usage. He went from being a very solid third-pair defenseman in New Jersey to top pair with the Blue Jackets. While he obviously didn't have much help last year, he looked exposed with his new team. A minus-1 Net Rating is fine for a No. 4 defenseman or the third pair, but he was signed in Columbus to be more than that.

Gudbranson is a one-dimensional depth defenseman who doesn't do much to foster a team's offense. It's just that his old-school style isn't as sound defensively as the Blue Jackets need. His minus-9 Net Rating is the worst of the projected six starting defensemen and brings down the right side's collective rating to 31st in the league.

Maybe having a partner such as Harris will help Gudbranson. But if the coaches instead decide to roll out a third pair consisting of Gudbranson and Jack Johnson, those could be some troubling minutes. As problematic as that may be, it will only better the team's chances of earning another top draft pick, which is what they ultimately need to move forward, anyway.

Behind that blue line, the Blue Jackets don't have the most reliable goalie tandem, either. To his credit, Elvis Merzlikins rebounded from a disastrous 2022-23, when he ranked last in goals saved above expected in the entire league. But that year-to-year consistency just isn't there. His Net Rating is based on five years of play, which have been filled with more bad than good. Daniil Tarasov was fine in a backup capacity last year in 24 games and finished the year strong. If he can take on more this upcoming season, maybe it will help stabilize one position for Columbus.

The best case

The entire team rallies amidst tragedy led by enormous leaps from the young core. Fantilli, Johnson, Sillinger and Jiříček look like future stars and the Blue Jackets show clear-cut progression to future contention. They hit 80 points and get an unlikely draft lottery win.

The worst case

The kids continue to struggle defensively at the NHL level, leaving a weak defense corps and goaltending exposed on a nightly basis. Questions about how bright the team's future can be come to the forefront.

The bottom line

For the Blue Jackets, this season will be judged on how they support the Gaudreau family, their fan base and each other. If hockey can help with the healing process, and there's reason to believe that to be possible, results will be secondary.

[BlueJackets.com / Camp Q&A: Chinakhov hopes to build on last year's success](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – October 1, 2024

Yegor Chinakhov has come a long way in his three seasons with the Blue Jackets, and you can't help but think there's a lot more to come.

The 2020 first-round pick of the Jackets had his most successful NHL campaign a year ago, posting 16 goals and 29 points while starting to show his size and speed can make him a consistently dynamic player at the top level. But at the same time, he missed a large chunk of the season because of injuries for the second consecutive year.

Is Chinakhov primed for a breakout? BlueJackets.com caught up with the Russian forward to discuss that topic, as well as his summer activities back home and his thoughts on being in Columbus.

This conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

What's the best part about being home in the summer? It's a long way away, so you don't get to go in season.

"It's a good chance to see the family, my niece and friends who I'm close to in age. It's pretty good. You're just happy to be home."

You're originally from Omsk, but where you this summer?

"In Moscow. My family is in Krasnodar. It's kind of like Miami a little bit. I enjoyed the time."

Did you spend time in Krasnodar as well?

"No, because in Krasnodar, there's not any place to practice. You have to go to Moscow to practice."

You said it's like Miami though. Sounds like a good place to be.

"Yeah, but it's not enough hockey. (Smiles)."

Who were some of the players you got to work out with during the summer?

"I practice together with (Dmitri Voronkov). We skate every day. (Kirill Marchenko) skates with us, Kirill Kaprizov. A lot of guys who play in the KHL. Klim Kostin, too."

Did you get a chance to see Marchy and Vronny a lot?

"Yeah, we skate together sometimes. It's good. It's fun, but when you practice for four months with just training, you miss the games. It's pretty hard. You just practice every day and wait for the games. That's it."

The United States and Russia are pretty different places. What do you miss the most when you're here? When you get home, are there foods or certain things you can't wait for?

"I miss the food. In Russia, it's more natural. But (Columbus) is a second home. It's my fourth year here. I enjoy the time here, too. It's fun for me."

As you said, this is your fourth year in Columbus. How much have you grown to enjoy the city and enjoy being here?

"For sure. The last maybe month and a half, I missed it here. I just want to be over here playing games and being with my teammates. I have a lot of time here. It's my second home now. I just enjoy the city."

Hockey wise, how excited are you to get going? You've had some ups and downs – success, injury. You've gone through a lot, but do you feel like this is a chance to take a step forward?

“Yeah, for sure. Everybody wants to step forward, and if you want to win the game, be a good teammate and everybody steps forward. You need to just play the hockey and show what you can do. You need to (progress) up, up every year. Just try to learn how to play and just keep growing up.”

You had some success last year. Did you feel more confident, more comfortable as you were producing more?

“For sure. I just try to believe in myself and see I can play here, just play good. I just need to believe in myself and listen to the coaches and that's it.”

Do you have expectations or goals that you want to achieve?

“For sure. Everybody wants to score, but if you play right, you have a chance and can score, right? You need to earn the ice time, and that's it.”

I've noticed in camp you've been chirping Daniil Tarasov a bit in practice. On the ice, is it fun to have him here?

“Yeah, we have a hard practice, but it's still fun. We just try to have fun with each other.”

Does he ever chirp you back?

“Yeah, but not on the ice because I always score on him. (Smiles.) In the locker room for sure.”

[BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets drop 3-2 final to Caps](#)

By Garrison McDaniel – October 1, 2024

The Capitals got their revenge for the 8-4 loss they suffered on home ice late Friday night by downing the Blue Jackets by a 3-2 score Monday night.

Game in a Paragraph

Washington used goals at the start and end of the second period to defeat Columbus at Nationwide Arena. Former Blue Jacket Pierre-Luc Dubois scored the game-winning goal and recorded an assist for the Capitals. Columbus pushed in the third period but couldn't find the equalizer despite a late goal to pull within one.

Quote of the Game

Head coach Dean Evason: "Our fight has been good, our battle has been good and our desire has been good from day one."

CBJ Standouts

- Denton Mateychuk scored his second goal of the preseason as he continues to battle for an opening night spot.
- Daniil Tarasov played in all 60 minutes and stopped 23 of the Capitals' 26 shots in the game.
- Sean Monahan recorded his first assist in his second game of this preseason.
- Luca Del Bel Belluz scored his first of the preseason in the third to pull the Jackets within a goal.

How It Happened

Caps forward Nic Dowd opened the scoring at 6:49 of the first as he skated through the slot of the Blue Jackets' defensive zone and went bardown on Tarasov. The Blue Jackets answered back swiftly to make it a 1-1 game as Mateychuk tied things up with a snipe of his own from the left circle just 23 seconds after the Capitals goal.

Only 48 seconds into the second period, the Capitals reclaimed their lead on a deflection goal by Tom Wilson. The initial shot on the goal was by Trevor van Riemsdyk, brother of Columbus' newest addition James van Riemsdyk. After a boarding penalty on Marchenko and a high-sticking penalty on Gudbranson late in the period, Dubois capitalized off of the 5-on-3 opportunity and scored with 0.2 seconds remaining to give the Capitals a 3-1 lead heading into the third.

McKown got behind the defense but could not score on his one-on-one with Caps goalie Logan Thompson as he lost his footing and ran into the netminder. The play was followed by a scrum which resulted in a power play for Washington. Thompson also stopped another breakaway midway through the period on Werenski to keep his team's two-goal lead. Del Bel Belluz gave some hope for the Jackets faithful as he sniped one with 5:02 remaining in the third period, but the Blue Jackets could not convert on the 6-on-5 that ensued, ending the game at 3-2.

Notable

Shots were dead even at 26 apiece, including 10-2 in favor of the Jackets in the third. ... Both van Riemsdyks got on the score sheet, as James assisted on Del Bel Belluz's third-period goal. ... Kirill Marchenko and Jake Christiansen also notched assists for the CBJ.

Roster Report

The Blue Jackets' lineup was a blend of veterans and prospects/depth pieces looking to make a push for a roster spot. CBJ defenseman Erik Gudbranson left the game in the third period, leaving the Blue Jackets with five defensemen to finish out the game. Evason said it was for precautionary measures.

Up Next

Columbus is back on the road Tuesday as the Jackets head to St. Louis to take on the Blues at 8 p.m.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Evason, Fantilli, Long Preseasons & More

By Mark Scheig – October 1, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets enter the new week by playing four games in their next five days. The only off day is on Wednesday when it's a mandated day off from camp.

The Blue Jackets host the Washington Capitals on Monday night before travelling to St. Louis to play the Blues on Tuesday night. After the off day, they finish the preseason with a home and home series against the Pittsburgh Penguins. Thursday's game is in Columbus while Friday's game is in Pittsburgh.

We dive into a lot of stuff on this week's News & Rumors. We begin with how the Blue Jackets' new head coach is implementing his style in a fun and direct way.

Evason's Teaching Style

The Blue Jackets collectively are a young team. While they have their share of veterans in the lineup, their young talent is what stands out most.

Head coach Dean Evason is implementing his way of doing things in this Training Camp. Part of this involves teaching his concepts while teaching on different aspects of the game.

So far, the Blue Jackets have embraced the way Evason has handled these moments. During a recent availability, he was asked about Adam Fantilli's goal scoring.

While Evason acknowledged the obvious about the importance of goal scoring, he said something interesting about the other side of the game. That is the teaching he does in the correctable moments and how he approaches it.

Consider Fantilli a fan of this approach. He opened up about what he likes about Evason's both direct and fun approach to the game.

"What I really like is that he talks to me," Fantilli said of Evason. "In Washington, I had a couple turnovers at their blue line or just inside their blue line. He'll come up to you and just give you a tap and be like 'You're feeling it tonight but still don't be trying that stuff. We're still in a tight game. There's no reason for that.' And he's absolutely right. I tried to clean it up against Buffalo. I thought I did better with that. I really love the way he's been approaching that."

Fantilli and the other Blue Jackets don't know what to expect from the head coach sometimes. Let him explain what Evason does to keep things light while poking fun at himself.

"He walks in the room for video and you never know what he is going to say," Fantilli said of Evason. "He likes to keep it light. He trips the guys. He trips the other coaches. He trips himself. It's good. It's fun."

New Blue Jacket James van Riemsdyk has seen a lot in his time in the NHL. In the early going, count him a fan too of Evason's approach.

"He's got that great balance of he wants to hold you accountable but he gives you the leash and opportunity to go out there and figure things out too," van Riemsdyk said. "That's the way things are ingrained better is you learn sometimes through the trail by fire. He's still going to hold you accountable but he's got this way about how he interacts with people in a positive way. He gets his message across in a funny way a lot of times. He's good that way."

“He’s got a great temperament to him. I’ve enjoyed working with him so far. I think that’s very important especially for having a younger team and striking that fine balance of accountability. Half the battle over the course of a season is making sure guys are staying confident and feeling good about their games and there’s that fine balance of how you would go about getting your message across.”

In camp, the players have been glowing in their early reviews of Evason. The reason? He’s direct in his approach with open communication while having fun doing so.

Fantilli/JVR

So far in camp, Fantilli has centered the second line with van Riemsdyk to his left. The pair is working in practice to develop the chemistry that all players look for.

One of the players Fantilli has looked up to is van Riemsdyk. Now they’re playing together. Fantilli spoke on the influence someone like JVR can have on him.

“Quite a bit. He’s a really good communicator,” Fantilli said of van Riemsdyk. “He talks a lot. He’s seen a lot in the game. I’m all ears whenever he’s talking. He’s a guy I grew up watching when he was in Toronto. He’s got a lot of wisdom so I just try to listen whenever he speaks.”

The Hockey News / 15 Days Until Opening Night At Nationwide Arena: The History Of Jersey #15

By Jason Newland – October 1, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets have had many players don the Union Blue in its history. The #15 has only been worn a handful of times though.

Who Wore It First?

- **Mike Maneluk** - He played 39 games for the Jackets during the first season of the franchise and had six points. He left for Europe and never played another NHL game. He retired in 2010.

Who Wore It Last?

- **Gavin Bayreuther** - Bayreuther played in 103 games for Columbus and had 23 points. The Seattle Kraken legend is playing in the Swiss National League.

Who Wore It Best?

- **Derek Dorsett** - Dorsett played in 280 games for the Jackets. He only had 65 points, but where he made his mark was being the enforcer. He racked up 727 career penalty minutes for Columbus, and 1,314 for his career. He had to medically retire in 2019 and served as the CBJ Development Coach until 2024.

Others That Have Worn #15

- **Kent McDonell** - Played 29 games for the Jackets in 03-04 and had three points. He never played another NHL game and played in Europe until 2017.
- **Duvie Wescott** - Wescott played six seasons and 201 games for Columbus, where he totaled 56 points. Wescott was very close to being the top player on this list. He retired in Germany in 2015.
- **Nick Schultz** - He played nine for the Jackets after coming over in a trade from the Edmonton Oilers in 2014. He had one career point for Columbus. He retired in 2017.
- **Jakob Lilja** - Lilja played 37 games for Columbus during 2019-20, and had five points. He left for Europe in 2020 where he still plays today.
- **Michael Del Zotto** - Del Zotto played 53 games for the Jackets in 20-21 and had 13 points. He retired after spending 2023 in the AHL.
- **Gregory Hofmann** - Played 24 games for Columbus and had seven points during the 21-22 season. After one NHL season, Hofmann returned to the Swiss National League to continue his career.

There are 15 days left until opening night at Nationwide Arena.

The Hockey News / All 32 NHL Teams Will Wear Helmet Stickers To Honor Johnny & Matthew Gaudreau

By Jason Newland – October 1, 2024

NHL.com Senior Writer Dan Rosen has reported that the NHL will wear a helmet sticker to honor the Gaudreau Brothers.

Rosen says that all 32 teams will wear the stickers until October 24th.

The decal itself is very nice. It will have a "G" in the middle of a 13 and 21. Very modest, but very impactful, just like the Gaudreau Brothers themselves.

The Blue Jackets players will wear a special sticker on their helmets for the entire season as well. It'll be a blue sticker that says GAUDREAU, with two doves on it, and the numbers 13 and 21.

The Jackets will also wear a #13 patch on their jerseys this year too.

Opening night at Nationwide Arena is just 16 days away.

The Athletic / NHL waiver tracker: Best players on the wire throughout 2024-25 preseason

By Corey Pronman and Harman Dayal – October 1, 2024

As NHL teams trim their rosters before the regular season, The Athletic's Corey Pronman and Harman Dayal will provide analysis of the top players placed on waivers every day. Once a player is waived, the rest of the league has 24 hours to put in a claim for him. If a player goes unclaimed, they can be assigned by their team to the minor leagues.

Monday, Sept. 30

Nikita Alexandrov, C, St. Louis Blues

Alexandrov has intrigued scouts at points due to his high skill level combined with a solid work ethic and ability to help at both ends of the ice. He makes and finishes plays well, and is quite effective inside the offensive zone. He's average-sized with below-average skating, though, and while he's played 51 games with the Blues, there are questions on how well his game translates to the NHL with his pace.—Pronman

Travis Boyd, C, Minnesota Wild

Boyd is a veteran right-shot center with nearly 300 games of NHL experience. During the Coyotes' lean rebuilding years, Boyd was a decent middle-six stopgap, scoring in the 35-point range in back-to-back years. He was relegated to a fourth-line role last year, contributing eight points in 16 games before an injury ended his season. Boyd struggles in the faceoff circle and his two-way metrics aren't great, but he's demonstrated a long track record of contributing reliable secondary offence in a bottom-six NHL role.—Dayal

Other players on waivers: Jacob MacDonald (Avalanche), Cam Dineen (Oilers), Connor Carrick (Oilers), Jeff Malott (Kings), Devin Shore (Wild), Brendan Gaunce (Wild), Jimmy Schuldt (Sharks), Justin Bailey (Sharks), Kevin Connauton (Utah), Travis Barron (Utah)

Sunday, Sept. 29

Vinnie Hinostroza, RW, Nashville Predators

Hinostroza is a plug-and-play option for depth offense. The speedy, undersized winger has scored five-on-five points at a bona fide middle-six clip over nearly 400 career NHL games. He's a bit of a tweener, though; he isn't dynamic enough to contribute on the power play and his lack of size and strength mean he's not an ideal stylistic fit for many teams' bottom six.—Dayal

Other players on waivers: Marc McLaughlin (Bruins), Justin Kirkland (Flames), Martin Frk (Flames), Zach Sanford (Blackhawks), Brett Seney (Blackhawks), Reilly Walsh (Kings), Tyler Madden (Kings), Joe Hicketts (Kings), Glenn Gawdin (Kings), Joseph Cecconi (Wild), Cameron Crotty (Wild), Adam Raska (Wild), Lucas Condotta (Canadiens), Brandon Gignac (Canadiens), Matt Murray (Predators), Kieffer Bellows (Predators), Hunter Skinner (Blues), Hugh McGing (Blues), MacKenzie MacEachern (Blues), Mathias Laferrriere (Blues), Derrick Pouliot (Lightning), Tobie Paquette-Bisson (Lightning)

Update: All players cleared waivers.

Saturday, Sept. 28

Grigori Denisenko, LW, Vegas Golden Knights

Drafted No. 15 by Florida in 2018, Denisenko's initial transition to North American pro hockey was bumpy. The skilled but slightly undersized winger produced at a solid but unspectacular clip in the AHL through three seasons between 2020-21 and 2022-23 and struggled during his brief opportunities with the Panthers in the NHL. Vegas claimed him off waivers last fall.

Denisenko, 24, took a significant step in the AHL last year, producing 56 points in 65 games, although he still couldn't stick in the NHL, as he went pointless in six games for the Golden Knights. Denisenko is a crafty, slick offensive creator and the step forward he took last season could be a sign that he still has some untapped upside.—Dayal

Other players on waivers: Jonathan Aspirot (Flames), Clark Bishop (Flames), Keaton Middleton (Avalanche), Wyatt Aamodt (Avalanche), Kevin Mandolese (Avalanche), Maxime Lajoie (Kraken), Anthony Angello (Predators), Kevin Gravel (Predators), Jake Lucchini (Predators), Tyce Thompson (Islanders), Egor Sokolov (Utah), Callahan Burke (Golden Knights), Mason Geertsen (Golden Knights), Dysin Mayo (Golden Knights), Gage Quinney (Golden Knights), Robert Hagg (Golden Knights), Mason Morelli (Golden Knights), Ethen Frank (Capitals), Riley Sutter (Capitals), Alex Limoges (Capitals), Chase Priskie (Capitals), Hardy Häman Aktell (Capitals)

Update: All players cleared waivers.

Friday, Sept. 27

Ronnie Attard, RHD, Philadelphia Flyers

Attard has played games in each of the last three NHL seasons but hasn't broken through yet as a full-time player. He's a big right-shot with good offensive skills and can play both ways due to his frame and compete. He isn't an amazing skater, though, and his decision making has given him issues over the years.—Pronman

Other players on waivers: Louie Belpedio (Flyers), Rnett Gardner (Flyers), Hayden Hodgson (Senators), Cole Reinhardt (Senators), Jamieson Rees (Senators), Garrett Pilon (Senators), Nikolas Matinpalo (Senators), Maxence Guenette (Senators), Jeremy Davies (Senators), Luke Henman (Kraken), Nikolas Brouillard (Kraken), Zach Sawchenko (Blue Jackets), Jake Leschyshyn (Rangers), Ben Harpur (Rangers), Alex Belzile (Rangers)

[The Athletic / All 32 NHL teams to honor Gaudreau brothers with helmet decals to start season](#)

By Alex Andrejev – October 1, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets won't be alone in honoring Johnny Gaudreau this season. All 32 NHL teams will pay homage to Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, with helmet decals to start the 2024-25 season, the NHL announced Monday.

The decals will feature the letter "G" in the center for the brothers' last name with a No. 13 (Johnny's number) on the left and No. 21 (Matthew's number) on the right. The decals will be worn as the regular season begins Friday through the final home opener between the Los Angeles Kings and San Jose Sharks on Oct. 24 in Los Angeles.

The Gaudreau brothers were killed when they were struck by a car while riding bicycles in suburban New Jersey on Aug. 29.

The Blue Jackets previously announced plans to honor the brothers, including with a sticker on the team's helmets and a No. 13 patch on their home and away sweaters. General manager Don Waddell also said the club would maintain Gaudreau's locker stall in the club's dressing room, and they'll take his No. 13 sweater with them on the road to keep his spot in the road dressing rooms.

The Blue Jackets and Calgary Flames — where Johnny, 31, played for nine seasons before his final two with Columbus — held candlelight vigils for the brothers, and NHL teams played a video tribute honoring them ahead of their preseason games. Matthew, 29, played professional hockey for five seasons in the AHL, ECHL and in Sweden.

The New Jersey Devils and Buffalo Sabres will open the season Friday at O2 Arena in Prague wearing the decals. Players for the Sabres wore the helmet decals for practices Monday in Prague.

The league's regular season opens in North America on Oct. 8.

"I think it's an incredible tribute to an incredibly sad situation," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff told NHL.com. "We as a league, we as a team, have to try to honor these guys for what they did for the game."

The Athletic / Where did CapWages come from? How a Toronto tech entrepreneur created hockey's popular new website

By Pierre LeBrun – October 1, 2024

TORONTO — The announcement in June that CapFriendly was shutting down and being sold to the Washington Capitals sent much of the hockey world into a panic.

The website had become such a favorite tool for fans everywhere, not to mention the NHL media, and the idea that it was disappearing was disappointing, albeit understandable from the founders' perspective.

If you're unfamiliar, a quick story to illustrate how much CapFriendly had become part of the fabric of hockey: A few years ago, I was interviewing an NHL general manager, and he wanted to double-check a contract detail on an NHL player. So what'd he do? Called up CapFriendly on his phone. Even though he had access via the league to those details, it was just easier to check CapFriendly.

So, yes, the news of CapFriendly's exit left many searching for something new.

PuckPedia was already in place as a trusted alternative. While respecting that site, a Toronto-based tech entrepreneur believed he could build something that more fully filled the CapFriendly void. And he decided to spring into action.

Robert, 41, asked The Athletic not to use his last name in this article, citing a desire to protect his privacy. He launched CapWages in mid-June, just ahead of CapFriendly's shuttering — and NHL free agency on July 1.

"Listen, they're doing great," Robert said of PuckPedia, which provides player contract details and a full suite of features, including a new waivers tracker. "I think we're very lucky that they're around and providing that service."

But he thought he could create something that more directly mirrored the layout users were used to on CapFriendly.

"I said, 'How hard can it be to build something like (CapFriendly) myself?' So I did," he said.

"Then July 1 came around, and that almost killed me. It turns out, it's pretty hard."

He let out a laugh while saying that over coffee with The Athletic. Free agency was obviously quite a learning curve.

"We're a very small team — mostly me full-time, with a few other folks helping," he said.

CapWages has grown quickly, though.

"Once CapFriendly closed down, like a week after, we went from a few hundred visitors a day to just under 10,000 per day," Robert said.

The most obvious question, of course, is how does a tech guy with no background in hockey so quickly get a hold of NHL contract information?

"Some agents reached out and have been very, very helpful," he said. "We were on Twitter pretty early on and we got noticed on Reddit and things like that, and agents started to reach out to us."

He's short on detail, of course, wanting to protect his sources.

In a nutshell, it sounds like people in the hockey world were eager to help him fill the CapFriendly void and have gone out of their way to help CapWages do so.

And yes, this is obviously a passion project, because Robert has a full-time job in tech, but he is a huge hockey fan.

“I have friends who are huge hockey nerds. I have friends who are spreadsheet nerds. I’m sort of like in the middle,” he said. “They don’t really get along. They each think that the other group is ridiculous. I’m kind of the overlap: technology. I love the data analytics and that side of it, but I’m a huge hockey fan since I moved here.”

He was born in Europe and moved to Toronto in 1995 and, yes, naturally became a Maple Leafs fan.

With CapWages going out of its way to look and feel similar to CapFriendly, did he have any concerns about how the Capitals might react? “Definitely not,” he said. In his mind, what the Caps were worried about in that purchase was gaining the knowledge, tools, know-how and day-to-day application of CapFriendly. Not the site itself.

(The Caps hired Jamie, Ryan and Christopher Davis from CapFriendly as part of the purchase, while the Oilers recently announced the hiring of CapFriendly co-founder Dominik Zrim, who has also worked with the Chicago Blackhawks and San Jose Sharks.)

The Caps confirmed they have no issue with CapWages.

“Our intention in acquiring CapFriendly and bringing on some of their staff was solely to enhance our hockey operations department and infrastructure,” Sergey Kocharov, senior vice president of communications for the Capitals, told The Athletic on Thursday. “We are pleased and not surprised that another similar website is preparing to launch, as has happened in the past.”

Right. Remember when CapFriendly replaced CapGeek? History repeats itself.

“The goal for me was just to create something that looks like what I was used to, just for me to use basically,” Robert said. “The other thing was that I wanted to play around with the technology that’s out there — A.I. especially.”

There are still features missing on CapWages that were on CapFriendly. It’s a work in progress. And Robert intends to integrate more A.I. software as the site grows.

“A lot of the stuff that I’m spending my time on is A.I.-related,” he said. “How do I figure out what’s going on and extract this information in an automated way and make it easy to bring it into the site?”

But A.I. is expensive. So at some point, decisions will be made on how to finance that.

“The way we structured the website, it’s very reasonable to run,” he said. “We can handle the current traffic basically on donations that we get. The goal is to not have ads, hopefully ever, but definitely for as long as possible.”

Instead, there could be a subscription model with some A.I.-backed enhanced features.

“Realistically, at some point we’re going to have to support ourselves,” he said. “But whatever we can keep free, we will.”

“Basically anything that CapFriendly had would continue to be free, but some of the enhanced features we’ll have, those that cost a lot of money, we would have to put behind some sort of paywall.”

One of those features is scheduled to be introduced within the next week: an interactive tool that Robert said users will find “very helpful.”

Long term, he has another vision for the site: to help NHL teams with their cap tooling.

“I would think teams would want to have access to really good cap tooling,” he said. “So long term, what I’d love to do is provide a service for these teams to take what we have and use it internally so that they would have their own version of CapWages. And they could do additional things — run projections or simulations — with the proprietary data that they have.

“Basically, I’d love to take this and provide this as a service to teams.”

While still keeping the main site open to hockey fans.

The site still has a lot of work to do to fulfill its vision — not to mention competing against a polished site in PuckPedia. So we’ll see where it all goes for CapWages.

But it’s been an encouraging start for those missing CapFriendly.

The Athletic / Inside the nomadic world of NHL players on PTOs: 'You have to believe in yourself'

By Joshua Kloke – October 1, 2024

The winding Trans-Canada Highway took on one of its most stunning stretches through British Columbia and Tyson Barrie's head kept moving.

The 13-year NHL veteran would glance out the window of his SUV at sprawling mountains, then look to his right at his six-year-old Aussiedoodle named Ralph, sitting in the passenger seat. Midway through a 14-hour drive, the world of chartered flights felt far away.

At one end of the drive, his home on Vancouver Island including his wife Emma, his three-year-old son and his new daughter, not even a month old.

On the other, uncertainty: His final destination was an AirBnb in Calgary.

Barrie was once considered one of the NHL's pre-eminent offensive defencemen. Between 2013 and 2019, his 73 goals were the 10th-highest among blueliners. His last contract, signed with the Edmonton Oilers, was worth \$13.5 million over three years. Yet when that contract ended, Barrie was 32 and had been traded to the Nashville Predators. He was a free agent waiting for contract offers from other NHL teams.

The only call he got around free agency was an offer from the Calgary Flames. Not with the security of one last lengthy deal, but with three letters Barrie was not accustomed to: PTO.

A "Professional Tryout" is just that: An offer from a team to come to training camp and try out for a roster spot without a guaranteed contract and prove you're capable of playing in the NHL.

Barrie and Emma shook their heads back in early summer. They decided to wait throughout the long, hot months for a better offer to emerge.

"It never did," Barrie said. "You wrap your head around that, and you have to regroup."

And so as morning turned into late night, Barrie spent his drive recalibrating a future that remained up in the air.

Barrie is one of many players recently considered core pieces of NHL teams that have since been forced to fight for a roster spot in an unconventional way.

It is easy to become swept up by the evolution of the game at the NHL level. Younger players improving sooner has seen the league skewing younger. A quicker and more entertaining pace of play has come as a result. But at the other end are veterans fighting for their professional lives.

"It's all part of the journey. I'm grateful for what I've been given by the game. If you want to continue, sometimes you have to do unconventional things," Barrie said.

As training camp continues this week, NHL regulars like Barrie, Travis Dermott, Max Pacioretty and Sam Gagner on PTOs will start to learn their fate.

"I'm not doing this for the money," Gagner, on a PTO with the Carolina Hurricanes, said. "I'm doing this because I believe I can be a valuable contributor at the NHL level, and I still love to play."

Being on a PTO sees players take on a nomadic hockey life. They usually live thousands of kilometers away from family. They receive the standard NHL per day per diem when they're on the road with their

team, which is \$132. At a time when NHL players are more focused than ever on their diets and depend on their bodies for their success, being on a PTO often means living strictly off food delivery services. Fun for a day or two, not ideal once it starts to feel like an eternal road trip.

“Being in a hotel is tough. You’ve got to make sure you eat the right things, but you open the Doordash app and McDonald’s is the first thing thrown in your face,” Zach Aston-Reese, who was on a PTO with the Maple Leafs in 2022 and the Hurricanes in 2023, said. “It takes a certain type of maturity to handle it.”

Few have seen the evolution of the NHL and players having to mature quicker than Gagner, 35. The league is changing, and Gagner’s role has changed with it. A generation ago, veterans like Gagner and his 1,043 games of NHL experience would have been in demand.

But now, the economics of the league have shifted. NHL teams are forced to take a bet on players on entry-level contracts instead of experience. Teams can shave a few thousand dollars here and there and get players who are better prepared for the pro game than young players a generation ago would have been.

“It’s the evolution of the salary cap,” Gagner said when asked about why PTOs are becoming more common. “It’s been flat, essentially, for a while and teams have gotten comfortable giving young guys on entry-level deals opportunities to see where they’re at. And young players are ready now.”

But the changing face of the league has forced veteran players to make difficult choices to keep their careers alive. Gagner, for example, told his agent, Judd Moldaver, that even if European-based teams came calling with lucrative offers, it wasn’t worth even letting him know.

Gagner has three children aged nine, seven and five back in Oakville, Ont. While their friends are beginning another year with their peers at school, they’re being home-schooled by his wife, Rachel. Quickly rooting them from one school and throwing them into another wasn’t worth it.

This is not new terrain for Gagner. After double hip surgery in 2023, Gagner missed training camp. He wanted to keep playing, but no NHL teams were calling.

He took an unconventional step to swallow his pride: Gagner himself called his former agent and current CEO of hockey operations with the Edmonton Oilers, Jeff Jackson, to pitch himself. He believed he could help the Oilers once he got up to game speed. Being familiar with the training staff as he recovered from surgery would help, with the Oilers having drafted Gagner back in 2007.

Eventually, he turned that PTO into a one-year deal.

“You have to believe in yourself going into these situations,” Gagner said. “It has to come across when you’re having these conversations.”

As Gagner outlines this belief, his situation still hasn’t improved much. He is sitting alone in an empty hotel room in Raleigh, N.C.

“There’s not many guys on the team that I know,” Gagner said. “It’s a unique experience.”

A preseason spent essentially on his own when his children miss him dearly sums up much of the PTO experience. Gagner’s self-belief can be strong, but that still doesn’t dampen the stress of being separated from his family and not knowing where and when his children will begin school.

“We’re just...waiting to see what’s next,” Gagner said. “I’m fortunate to have their support. They all want to see Dad play hockey.”

Players who accept PTOs are not just grey-haired veterans.

Travis Dermott is 27, the age when many players finally sink their teeth into a long-term contract as an unrestricted free agent. But the only offer he got came very late in the summer: A PTO with the Oilers.

Even though he's young, Dermott's life on a PTO is no different than, say, Barrie and Gagner. A 2015 second-round pick and at one time a regular NHL defenceman, Dermott has been squeezed out by a salary cap that has barely increased as of late.

In Edmonton, his existence has become more of a solitary one. Dermott has two young children but will hardly see them through training camp on the other side of the continent.

When Dermott, Barrie, Gagner and others find out their fate remains anyone's guess.

"I have no idea," Barrie said when asked if he's aware how or when he'll be told if he will be a Calgary Flame this season.

The strain of wondering "Is today the day I get cut or offered a contract?" can be overwhelming.

"This is definitely more stressful than ever because it's not just about me and my hockey career. I'm providing for my family now," Dermott said.

But the proverbial carrot on the stick put at various distances from players? That's what keeps them coming back.

When Logan Shaw signed a PTO with the Flames in 2018, he was without the comforts he'd enjoy had he signed a contract and known where he'd be for the season. Living in a downtown hotel without a car – as many players do – Shaw would make the 20-minute walk to the Saddledome every day to suit up and keep trying to crack the NHL.

There were days in the autumn when the temperature dipped and he wasn't prepared. Shaw had packed just one bag of clothes – his summer bag, he called it – while he left a second bag of winter clothes at his parent's house in Cape Breton, N.S.

"It's stressful," Shaw said. "If you're a single guy and you're trying to make it, it's less stressful, but you're still asking yourself, 'Where am I actually going to be?' You don't know what to pack. You can't bring a car. You can't get a place to stay."

The Flames took off for Beijing for preseason games while Shaw remained in Calgary skating with a few other players who didn't make the trip. Shaw quietly wondered if he was making a mistake. But he reminded himself that a PTO is not just an audition for the Flames but for the rest of the league.

He played well enough during his preseason games. While the Flames cut him, Shaw's audition caught the eye of the Winnipeg Jets and he signed two one-year NHL deals with the organization.

For all the sacrifices players make and the lack of comfort that comes throughout training camp, PTOs can sometimes be worth it in the long run.

Just ask Noah Gregor. He scored 10 goals in 57 games in 2022-23, but the only offers he had were PTOs.

"It's something I wasn't expecting to have to do so early in my career," Gregor said of signing a PTO with the Leafs at 25. "It was disappointing."

Yet Gregor turned that PTO with the Maple Leafs in 2023-24 into a one-year \$775,000 contract that season and then another one-year deal this season, with a bump up to \$850,000 with the Ottawa Senators.

Gregor thinks back to how uncomfortable he was. He understands he could have walked away from his NHL dream when the guaranteed contract offers weren't coming.

But Gregor now has a spot firmly in the Senators' top 12. When he takes to the ice, getting the kind of increased ice time that will likely come with his new role, Gregor will be happy he bet on himself.

"There's a lot of different stories and a lot of different ways you can end up in the NHL," Gregor said. "A lot of players make a good career after coming off of a PTO. You've got to keep that in mind and keep that belief in yourself."

[The Athletic / NHL waiver wire targets: Who could be the best pickups when teams trim rosters in 2024-25?](#)

By Corey Pronman and Harman Dayal – October 1, 2024

Waivers are often the graveyard of NHL fans' former hopes and dreams, full of players fans hoped would fill a meaningful role on their favorite teams. They can be a second chance for players who, due to various circumstances, haven't been able to secure a full-time role with their current NHL team. Today we highlight several players NHL teams could target if they hit waivers, looking specifically at young players who could have upside.

This article is largely speculative — we don't know if these players will for sure be on waivers or will for sure be claimed, but several players in this article get claimed each year.

Isaak Phillips, LHD, Chicago Blackhawks

Phillips has played games in each of the last three seasons with Chicago. I'm sure some would argue that if he can't make Chicago's blue line, why would a team want him? I think he does have a lot of NHL traits. He's big, moves well and plays hard. His puck play has been a question in his game, but as a pro, he has shown some offense. There could be a spot as a depth defenseman for him in an organization if he doesn't make Chicago.

Albert Johansson, LHD, Detroit Red Wings

The Red Wings organization and some scouts have liked Johansson for years, but he's struggled to break through in Detroit. He's a good skater with solid hands and vision and has shown he can play both ways as a pro. He doesn't stand out at either end of the rink, though, leaving him without a clear projected NHL role.

Samuel Fagemo, LW, Los Angeles Kings

Fagemo has been through waivers several times. After being reclaimed by the Kings last season, he scored 43 goals in 50 AHL games. He's talented, but a bit of a tweener. He's a good skater with legit skill and scoring ability, but I wouldn't call him a dynamo with the puck, and while he works hard enough he's average off the puck. If a team were to claim him, they would have to have a power-play spot to give him, otherwise he'll be back in the AHL.

Nolan Foote, LW, New Jersey Devils

Foote's been on the bubble in New Jersey for a few years due to injuries and average performance in the AHL. He's a big body with skill and goal-scoring ability for the highest level, but he's a heavy skater who has struggled to show he can consistently create offense at NHL speed. He does have a history of being a legit scorer, though, and he could potentially help a team on which he isn't competing with a great forward group but is given a real look.

Matthew Robertson, LHD, New York Rangers

Robertson has been in tough to crack an elite Rangers blue line. He's been on both special teams for AHL Hartford, playing legit minutes. He's big and mobile and can make a lot of stops, and while he's not a natural puck-mover, he has enough skill to be OK with the puck. He's a toolsy player who could be worth a gamble to see how he fares with opportunity.

Jakob Pelletier, LW, Calgary Flames

Just two years ago, Pelletier looked like he could eventually develop into a top-six NHL forward. Many talented prospects struggle at first when graduating from junior to AHL hockey, but Pelletier crushed it with 62 points in 66 games during his age-20 season in 2021-22.

Pelletier was expected to break out and establish himself as a full-time NHL player last year, but was derailed by a shoulder injury that cost him most of the season. He's only 5-foot-9 and is an average skater, but his offensive vision, two-way reliability, skill and competitiveness are all above-average traits. He's also still only 23. Given his statistical profile, his pedigree (first-round pick in 2019), his skill set and the context of his injury, there's still a chance he can develop into a top-nine contributor.

Nils Åman, C, Vancouver Canucks

Åman could be molded into a defensive-minded fourth-line center. The 24-year-old Swede has been a reliable plug-and-play depth option for the Canucks over the last two years. He's trustworthy defensively because of his length (listed at 6-foot-2), positioning and anticipation, which has earned him penalty-killing time, too. You're rarely going to see him make a mistake that costs the team, which is a valuable trait in a depth forward. Åman's drawbacks are that he's limited offensively, struggles in the faceoff circle (45.6 percent win rate last year) and isn't much of a physical force despite his size.

If Åman can improve on faceoffs and take another step as a penalty killer, he could become an effective defensive specialist.

Conor Timmins, RD, Toronto Maple Leafs

The right side of the Leafs' blue line is deep with Chris Tanev, Jake McCabe, Timothy Liljegren and Jani Hakanpää, which could leave Timmins as a roster casualty. Timmins has shown flashes of potential in Toronto, as he's quietly notched 24 points in 50 games from the back end over the last two years. He's driven promising results in a sheltered role, as the Leafs controlled 59.4 percent of scoring chances and a plus-10 goal differential during his five-on-five minutes in that sample. The two biggest concerns are that he's prone to being a defensive liability and struggles to stay healthy.

Oliver Wahlstrom, RW, New York Islanders

Wahlstrom is one of those tweeners who hasn't been productive enough to earn a consistent middle-six role but isn't multi-dimensional enough to fill a checking/energy-line identity for a bottom-six job. The 24-year-old has a great release on his shot, but he's one of the slowest players in the league. He isn't a play-driver and doesn't provide defensive value either. Wahlstrom has nearly 200 NHL games of experience, though (scoring at a 28-points-per-82-games rate) and pedigree (drafted No. 11 in 2018). Perhaps he could be useful to a team that needs a sheltered scorer, especially if he can learn to use his size to play a more physically engaged game at even strength.

Philip Tomasino, RW, Nashville Predators

A couple of years ago, Tomasino looked like he was on the path to becoming a surefire top-six forward. He dazzled with his speed and creativity, scoring 32 points in 76 games as a 20-year-old rookie despite averaging just 11:32 per game. Unfortunately, his development has been stuck in the mud since then.

Tomasino didn't make the Predators out of camp as a sophomore in 2022-23. He was called up in the second half and again flashed tremendous promise, scoring 18 points in 31 games in a bigger role playing 15:36 per game. This season, he scored 20 points in 41 games for the Preds before being sent back down to AHL Milwaukee again. Tomasino's defensive habits and overall play away from the puck have been the main issues preventing him from becoming a full-time NHL contributor.

We strongly suspect Tomasino will make the Preds roster because he still has intriguing potential and has played well in camp on a line with Colton Sissons. He's probably the player on this list least likely to land on waivers. But on the outside chance he gets cut, he should be a player who attracts considerable interest on the wire.

Ryan Suzuki, C, Carolina Hurricanes

Suzuki is a quick, skilled playmaking center who hasn't yet been able to put it all together. The 2019 first-round pick has been severely hampered by injuries and, even when healthy, hasn't produced at an elite level in the AHL. There's a chance he could become a late bloomer with improved health, though, because his offensive skill set has always stood out.

Samuel Poulin, LW, Pittsburgh Penguins

Poulin, drafted No. 21 in 2019, has some heavy, hard skill to his game. He hasn't had the smoothest transition to pro hockey, largely because his footspeed is a concern. He also missed a large chunk of the 2022-23 season as he stepped away to take care of his mental health. Last season, he started to find his groove in the AHL, producing 31 points in 41 games. Poulin has projectable NHL tools if he can improve his skating.

[Sportsnet.ca / One bold prediction for all 32 NHL teams](#)

By Ryan Dixon – October 1, 2024

Some words do a lot of work for you.

Dropping a pre-season prediction for every NHL team can leave you feeling more exposed than a goalie who's wandered a little too far from his crease. Breathe a thought into the world and it's your butt that's on the line when the take turns green.

Enter the word "bold."

A prediction is one thing, but when you preface it with a word that says, "Buckle up, we're getting a little crazy here," it allows your slightly unhinged alter ego to take over and let fly with some ideas that might otherwise stay suppressed.

It's like telling a fourth-liner hopped up on smelling salts to get out there and win the game.

So with our caveat firmly in place, let's drop 32 nuggets that skew a little (to a lot) spicy.

Anaheim Ducks: A team that finished with two 20 goal-scorers last season (Troy Terry and Frank Vatrano) will have seven this year as the Ducks offence takes a big step forward. In addition to Terry and Vatrano getting back to the 20-goal mark, Leo Carlsson, Mason McTavish, Trevor Zegras, Alex Killorn and rookie Cutter Gauthier will also get there.

Boston Bruins: A career year for Charlie McAvoy results in a Norris Trophy win.

Buffalo Sabres: Four of the Sabres' top-six forwards — Tage Thompson, Alex Tuch, Jack Quinn and J.J. Peterka — will exceed 30 goals.

Calgary Flames: Despite a strong rookie season from Dustin Wolf, the Flames will finish near the bottom of the league and draft in the top three for the first time since moving to Calgary from Atlanta 45 years ago.

Carolina Hurricanes: Seth Jarvis will become just the third player wearing a Carolina Hurricanes uniform to register a 40-goal season, then Andrei Svechnikov will become the fourth, following Eric Staal (twice) and Jeff O'Neil.

Chicago Blackhawks: Piggybacking off Connor Bedard's progress, Taylor Hall will have his best season since winning the 2018 MVP, finishing with a line of 25-40-65.

Colorado Avalanche: Justus Annunen will be the Avs' undisputed starter by mid-November and never look back, posting a .917 save percentage this season.

Columbus Blue Jackets: The Jackets' first goal of the season will be scored by Sean Monahan at 13:13 of the first period and there won't be a dry eye inside or outside the building.

Dallas Stars: The all-in Stars will bite down and trade from an area of strength — young forwards — to address an area of need — the right side of the defence — and deal Mavrik Bourque to the Flames for Rasmus Andersson.

Detroit Red Wings: The Wings will continue to push for playoff action by acquiring local boy Cam Fowler to bolster the defence corps. Fowler can slide into a second-pair role with Detroit thanks to the stepforward Simon Edvinsson is about to have in his first full NHL campaign.

Edmonton Oilers: Jeff Skinner — the 2011 rookie of the year — will score two goals in his first career NHL playoff game.

Florida Panthers: Two Panthers will have 20-goal swings; Sam Reinhart will drop from 57 to 37 goals, while Matthew Tkachuk will spike from 26 to 46.

Los Angeles Kings: The Kings won't lose to the Oilers in the first round of the playoffs... because ongoing goaltending issues will cause them to miss the second wild card by a single point.

Minnesota Wild: Zeev Buium — drafted 12th overall in June — will sign with the Wild after his college season ends and immediately make it clear Minny is set up on the back end for 15 years with Brock Faber on the right side and Buium on the left.

Montreal Canadiens: The Habs have a 31-year Cup drought. That will continue. Believe or not, they also have a 52-year Calder Trophy drought. That will end with Lane Hutson putting together Montreal's first rookie-of-the-year campaign since Ken Dryden in 1972.

Nashville Predators: Filip Forsberg will become the first 50-goal scorer in franchise history by hitting the number bang-on. Jonathan Marchessault will score exactly half that many in his first year with the Preds and Steven Stamkos will more or less split the difference with 37.

New Jersey Devils: Jack Hughes will record 130 points and be a Hart and Ted Lindsay finalist.

New York Islanders: Despite some concern around his health status, Ilya Sorokin will be just fine. So fine, in fact, he'll secure the Vezina Trophy with a stellar second half of the season.

New York Rangers: The now-or-never Rangers will send Kaapo Kakko to the Jets as part of a package to obtain Nikolaj Ehlers.

Ottawa Senators: Brady Tkachuk will improve his goal total by 10 to 47, netting one more than the 46 his brother, Matthew, scores.

Philadelphia Flyers: Cam York and Jamie Drysdale will both become 50-point defencemen.

Pittsburgh Penguins: This old, brittle lineup will buckle and the Pens will tumble down the standings. The silver lining, though, is 20 years after drafting Sidney Crosby, Pittsburgh's lottery luck will strike again and the Pens will draft first overall in 2025.

San Jose Sharks: Summer acquisition Jake Walman will get all kinds of ice time and score 20 goals from the back end.

Seattle Kraken: Shane Wright will show why he was a fourth-overall draft pick in 2022.

St. Louis Blues: Robert Thomas will record his first 100-point season.

Tampa Bay Lightning: The Bolts will win the Atlantic Division with 107 points, thanks to a strong bounce-back year from Andrei Vasilevskiy and the seamless fit with Jake Guentzel.

Toronto Maple Leafs: All the crease consternation will be for naught; Joseph Woll and Anthony Stolarz will prove to be one of the best duos in the league.

Utah Hockey Club: Utah Hockey Club will make the playoffs. Repeat, Utah Hockey Club will make the playoffs.

Vancouver Canucks: Newcomer Jake DeBrusk will set a career-high with 35 goals.

Vegas Golden Knights: After scraping into the 2024 Stanley Cup Playoffs as a wild card team, the Golden Knights — with Noah Hanifin and Tomas Hertl getting full seasons in Vegas, and a healthy Shea

Theodore having a huge bounce-back year — will surge back up the standings and finish with 111 points, one less than Edmonton for top spot in the Pacific.

Washington Capitals: Alex Ovechkin will leave us all hanging by scoring 40 goals this year, putting him one behind Wayne Gretzky's all-time mark of 894 heading into next season.

Winnipeg Jets: Gabe Vilardi plays 82 and scores 35.

Sports Illustrated / NHL to Honor Gaudreau Brothers on Helmets

By Jacob Punturi – October 1, 2024

The death of former Calgary Flames and Columbus Blue Jackets forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother Matthew has rocked the NHL and hockey world this summer. A beloved pair of brothers gone too soon, it's been a struggle for many players and coaches who knew and worked with them to move forward as the regular season approaches.

In an incredible gesture, the NHL and its organizations announced a beautiful way to honor the memories of Johnny and Matthew. To begin the 2024-2025 season, every team will wear a helmet decal through the first month of the season. The decal contains both Johnny and Matthew's numbers, as well as a "G" for Gaudreau. NHL insider Dan Rosen, who is traveling with the Buffalo Sabres and New Jersey Devils during their Global Series games, shared the first image of the Sabres players donning the decal.

"Every team will be wearing this decal honoring the Gaudreau brothers on the back of their helmets from opening night through 10/24," Rosen wrote on his X account. "The Sabres and Devils are the first. The Sabres got them today."

Rosen then showed an image of Sabres' defenseman Connor Clifton. Clifton's helmet was displaying the decal on the back right corner of the helmet.

The Gaudreaus tragically passed away earlier this summer in a vehicle collision. The tragedy has had huge effects around the hockey world.

Johnny was one of the Flames best players for nearly a decade. Originally a fourth round pick by Calgary, he was a standout member of the Boston College Eagles in the NCAA before making his NHL debut. He played all but two of his professional seasons with the Flames, including a 115-point season during the 2021-2022 campaign.

His final two years in the NHL were spent with the Blue Jackets. He signed there on a massive contract in the hopes of being their franchise's face during their current rebuild. He was a star player in Columbus for two seasons, including 60 points last season.

With this gesture, the NHL's franchises are offering another beautiful way to honor the Gaudreaus. As so many players and coaches come to terms with the loss and the grief, kudos to the NHL for providing another outlet for the league to remember Johnny and Matthew.