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Columbus Dispatch / New York Rangers hand Columbus Blue Jackets a second straight shutout loss

By Brian Hedger- March 16, 2025

Who turned the power off on the Blue Jackets' scoring machine?

Almost a week after setting a franchise record with their 12th game of six-plus goals in a rout over the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden, somebody pulled the plug in front of 18,464 Saturday night at sold-out Nationwide Arena. The Rangers struck back with goalie Igor Shesterkin pitching his second shutout of the season against the Blue Jackets in a 4-0 victory that gave New York the second wild card in the Eastern Conference and bumped Columbus out of a playoff spot with 16 games left.

"The last two games, we (scored) zero goals," said Kirill Marchenko, who leads the Blue Jackets with 25 goals. "It's not enough, and we need to work on that. We have good (scoring) chances. We (had) a lot of shots in these last two games, but we don't have goals. We don't have the luck, but maybe we need to work harder."

It was the Blue Jackets' second straight shutout loss and their third in six games since downing the Detroit Red Wings, 5-3, on March 1 at Ohio Stadium in the 2025 NHL Stadium Series matchup.

Alexis Lafreniere and former Blue Jackets star Artemi Panarin scored goals in the first two periods to give the Rangers (33-28-6) a 2-0 lead and Shesterkin (20 saves) did the rest for his fourth career blanking of Columbus. Daniil Tarasov (18 saves) started for the Blue Jackets while Elvis Merzlikins took a leave of absence to be with his wife who's expecting their second child.

Vincent Trocheck added two insurance goals for New York in the third, including the second into an empty net for the final score of 4-0. The loss was another gut punch for the Blue Jackets (31-27-8), who've taken their second straight shutout loss and haven't scored a goal since Mathieu Olivier's goal 10:29 into the third period of a 5-3 loss Tuesday at the New Jersey Devils.

They've gone a span of 129:31 without a goal, which the Jackets simply can't afford while trying to stay afloat among seven teams within four points of the second wild-card spot.

New York led 1-0 after the first period on a goal by Lafreniere that followed the Blue Jackets' second straight start without scoring.

Mika Zibanejad did everything but score the Ranger's first goal, poking the puck off Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson's stick, chasing it down, lifting Tarasov's stick outside the left post and tapping a pass to Lafreniere for a shot into the empty net.

"The puck just came back," Severson said. "I think 'Tarry' just missed it. Unfortunately, I think he expected it to come off the boards a little quicker and it didn't, and it was out of his trapezoid and he kind of got caught there. I was going back battling with (Zibanejad), and it was just kind of a cluster of bad things that could happen there."

It was the third straight time the Blue Jackets allowed the game's first goal, which lessened their odds of winning just 1:43 into the game. The Jackets, who are 24-9-5 when scoring first, dropped to just 7-18-3 when allowing the first goal.

Lafreniere's goal was the only one for either team in the first, which ended with the Blue Jackets holding a 9-4 edge in shots. Panarin made it 2-0 with 8:24 left in the second, scoring against his former team just 24 seconds after the Rangers killed off a power play.

That, however, wasn't the Jackets' biggest sting of that period.

That happened at 8:12 when Dmitri Voronkov was set up alone in the low slot with a backhand feed from Adam Fantilli. After deking Shesterkin to the ice with a great move to his forehand, the Russian power forward slid his attempted shot off the bottom of the right post on the far side and out of the crease. Rather than tying it 1-1, the puck caromed away and Voronkov slammed his stick into the end boards.

That's largely how it's gone for the Jackets since they torched the Rangers a week ago. Next up is a rematch Tuesday against the New Jersey Devils, who defeated them 5-3 this past Tuesday at Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey.

"We're getting down the stretch here," Fantilli said. "Guys (on other teams) are starting to tighten it up defensively. It doesn't matter. We've got to create our own chances and score. We had a couple and didn't bear down on them. ... we've all got to find a way to put it in the back of the net."

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets stagger out of playoff spot with third straight loss: 3 takeaways

By Staff Report- March 17, 2025

It's too soon to say the Blue Jackets' playoff hopes are dashed, but the sand inside the season's hourglass is officially dwindling.

They have 16 games remaining after dropping a third straight game Saturday night at Nationwide Arena in a 4-0 shutout for the New York Rangers — their second straight shutout loss — but time is also running out.

Combined with a goal drought of 129:31-and-counting, three shutout losses in the past five games plus a drop out of a playoff spot to 10th in the Eastern Conference, it's starting to feel like the Blue Jackets' season could tear apart at the seams.

"I'll be honest," coach Dean Evason said. "There was some frustration at the end. Like, you could tell we were frustrated. And, you know, when you get frustrated you kind of throw some blame around, and we haven't done that (before). We've stuck together. That's what our message was after, and what it will be again moving forward."

Here are three takeaways from another night of frustration on home ice for the Blue Jackets:

Ugly first goal puts Columbus Blue Jackets behind early in third straight loss

Evason and his staff reunited the Blue Jackets' "identity" line of forwards — Zach Aston-Reese, Justin Danforth and Mathieu Olivier — and put them on the ice first.

They quickly forced play into the Rangers' end, but things fell apart once that line and the second defensive pairing of rookie Denton Mateychuk and Ivan Provorov went to the bench. New York took a 1-0 lead 1:43 into the game on a goal by Alexis Lafreniere that was created by the Rangers' Mika Zibanejad and coughed up by the Blue Jackets.

Zibanejad caught Damon Severson off-guard while forechecking, poked the puck deep into the Columbus zone and beat the defenseman's attempt to impede his path to it. Zibanejad then beat goalie Daniil Tarasov to the puck below the goal line, using a quick lift of the goalie's paddle followed by a backhand feed through the empty crease for Lafreniere to clean up.

"The puck just came back," Severson said. "I think 'Tarry' just missed it. Unfortunately, I think he expected it to come off the boards a little quicker and it didn't ... and it was out of his trapezoid, and he kind of got caught there. I was going back battling with the guy, and it was just kind of a cluster of bad things that could happen there."

Evason had more pointed thoughts.

"It's not like they're coming (after us)," he said. "There's nothing there, and it ends up in our net. We need one of those to come our way, but we have to work towards that, as well."

Dmitri Voronkov's miss was apropos of Columbus Blue Jackets' slide

The Blue Jackets kept it 1-0 into the second period and worked to get their best scoring chance of the night against Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin at 8:12 after forcing a turnover.

The top line of Kirill Marchenko, Adam Fantilli and Dmitri Voronkov worked some magic inside New York's blue line and set Voronkov up alone in the low slot after a pass from Fantilli.

Voronkov deked Shesterkin to the ice with a forehand move toward the left post, but his attempt to slide the puck around the goalie's skates sent it off the right post and out of danger. Had it angled an inch or two left, the game would've been tied 1-1 and the Jackets' drought would've ended.

"It's a tough way to play when you're not scoring goals is to try to score goals when you know you have to score goals, right?" Evason said. "And we've scored a lot of goals, but for whatever reason, it's tough, obviously."

The sting from Voronkov's near-miss worsened 3:24 later, after former Blue Jackets star Artemi Panarin put the Rangers up 2-0 on the 15th goal of his career against Columbus.

"It was a nice play," Fantilli said. "He made a nice move on Shesterkin there, and it just didn't go in. The guy's got 20 goals this year. Usually, those go in, but they didn't tonight, and we've all got to find a way to put it in the back of the net."

Columbus Blue Jackets can't afford to play the blame game

Evason's comments about the Blue Jackets' frustration late in the game were striking.

They've been a lot of things over the course of a season that began with Johnny Gaudreau's gut-wrenching death, but never a divided group. The Blue Jackets have pushed back, together, to get through multiple pitfalls, but they could easily plummet if they're not reading from the same page.

Evason isn't the only one who pointed out that cracks could be forming in the Jackets' unity, as multiple players have also said recently that it's time to shelve any personal gripes about ice time, roles or usage. A players meeting was also held before practice Friday to focus on embracing the pressures of a tight playoff race.

There are also two new forwards in the locker room in Luke Kunin and Christian Fischer, and there's a search for chemistry following the recent returns of Chinakhov and Boone Jenner from long-term injuries.

"The guys care so much, right?" Evason said. "They're trying to do the right thing. Maybe we haven't been through (a playoff race), but who cares? We've been through it a little bit here, so that short learning curve, hopefully we can use that and move forward here in a couple of days (against the New Jersey Devils). That'll be our message. We just have to continually stay together and battle and believe that at the end of the day we're going to get the job done."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets look nervous, panicked vs. Rangers as they fall out of playoff spot

By Aaron Portzline- March 16, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — After Thursday's shutout loss to the Vegas Golden Knights, Columbus Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason reasoned that his struggling club needed "something good to happen early" in Saturday's game against the New York Rangers.

But like so much else over the last two weeks, the opposite happened.

The Blue Jackets are suddenly playing with an almost unbearable level of panic and fragility, and it took only 1:43 for the Rangers to expose it Saturday. The Jackets botched the same play twice, fell behind early yet again, and lost 4-0 before a beyond-capacity crowd of 18,464 in Nationwide Arena.

Who are these guys? And where did the upstart Blue Jackets go?

That's two straight shutout losses and three shutouts in their last five games. Yes, the Blue Jackets, one of the NHL's highest-scoring clubs all season, can't buy a goal.

This was the fifth time in six games the Blue Jackets have allowed the first goal of the game. This from the club that has been one of the NHL's top score-first clubs all season.

By losing five of their last six games, the Blue Jackets are no longer holding on to a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. The Rangers and the Montreal Canadiens leapfrogged the Blue Jackets with wins Saturday, landing New York in the second wild-card spot and the Jackets in 10th place.

Since the Blue Jackets' win in the Stadium Series game at Ohio Stadium, they haven't looked the same. Evason has recognized it, too.

"I'll be honest with you, there was some frustration at the end (of the game)," Evason said. "You could tell that we were frustrated. When you get frustrated, you kind of throw some blame around, and we haven't done. We've stuck together. That's what our message was after (the game) and will be again moving forward.

"The guys care so much, right? They're trying to do the right thing. Maybe they haven't been through it (a playoff race), but who cares? Now we've been through it a little bit here. We have to continually stay together and battle and believe that we're going to get the job done."

It's the Blue Jackets' youth that has carried them offensively most of the season, and it's that youth that is being tested now. These games are not being played at a playoff-level intensity, but they are definitely ramped up from earlier in the season.

Every inch of ice is contested. Pretty plays don't win games. Ugly goals get the job done.

The Blue Jackets' top line — center Adam Fantilli, with wingers Kent Johnson and Kirill Marchenko — are all three new to a playoff push. So are the two wingers, Dmitri Voronkov and Yegor Chinakhov, who flank veteran Boone Jenner on the second line.

But nobody wants to hear about a learning curve at this point in the season.

"We don't want any excuses," Fantilli said. "It's hockey. We're all good players here. We have to be better. I'm pointing the finger at myself first. I have to be better. I have to make better plays. If I create something, maybe it's a different game.

"It doesn't matter if it's my first time or my 10th time going through this, I need to be playing at the top of my game. Right now, it's not good enough."

The Blue Jackets' best chance to score came at 8:12 of the second period, when Voronkov was one-on-one with Rangers goaltender Igor Shesterkin. Voronkov, whose hands belie his size, made a nifty move to get Shesterkin lunging and missing at the puck.

But with an open net to shoot upon, Voronkov's shot from 7 feet away sailed across the crease, hit the far post and caromed out of harm's way.

"Two games in a row we don't score a goal," Marchenko said. "Not good enough. We have good chances. We have shots on the net the last two games. We don't have goals. Maybe we need to work harder."

"It's a battle for the playoffs. Everybody wants to be in. Everybody tracks (pucks) and plays the body. It's harder for all guys, but we can do it. We play all season in a good way. We need to stay in this way now."

The Blue Jackets' current stretch without scoring a goal — 129 minutes, 31 seconds — is their longest stretch of the season. The second-longest? A 95-minute, 7-second stretch just one week ago in the first three games of a trip after the outdoor game.

But the numbers are ugly in the other direction, too.

The Blue Jackets have allowed a goal on the first shot of the game in two straight games and three times in their last six outings. The one they coughed up Saturday was a two-man effort.

Veteran defenseman Damon Severson had the puck stripped off his stick by Rangers forward Mika Zibanejad in the neutral zone, sending it into the Blue Jackets zone with enough pace to reach the corner. That's not an easy read for a goaltender on the first touch of the game, and Blue Jackets starter Daniil Tarasov ended up in no-man's-land.

Zibanejad got to the puck first and zipped it off his backhand to Alexis Lafrenière for the easy tap-in before Tarasov could get back in position.

"Puck just came back. Tarry just missed it," Severson said. "I think he expected it to come off the boards a little quicker and it didn't, and then it was out of his trapezoid and he kind of got caught there."

"I was going back, battling with the guy (Zibanejad), and it was kind of a cluster of bad things that could happen."

And right like that, the Blue Jackets were down. Evason was exasperated the harm was done mostly by the Blue Jackets, not the Rangers.

"To have that first goal go in, in the manner it went in?" Evason said. "There's nothing there. It's not like they're coming. There's nothing there. It ends up in our net. We need one of those to come our way, but we need to work toward that as well."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: John H. McConnell II assuming bigger role with Columbus

By Aaron Portzline- March 17, 2025

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

Change at the top?

For many, the first public indication that the Blue Jackets are transitioning at the ownership level came in late May when Don Waddell was introduced as the club's new president of hockey operations and general manager in the Founders Club at Nationwide Arena.

Mike Priest, the longtime club president on the business side, was there, as expected. So was John Davidson, who would remain with the club even as Waddell replaced him at the top of hockey operations. But the other figure in the news conference photo piqued interest.

John H. McConnell II, son of Blue Jackets majority owner John P. McConnell and grandson of beloved franchise founder John H. McConnell, joined Waddell, Priest and Davidson on the dais. He did not speak at the assembly, but his presence spoke volumes.

And it wasn't a one-off.

McConnell II has become a regular at the NHL's board of governors meetings, was on site in Nationwide Arena last week as Waddell worked his way through his first trade deadline with the club and traveled with the Blue Jackets for last Sunday's game against the New York Rangers in Madison Square Garden, watching with Waddell at press level.

The Athletic has made multiple requests to interview McConnell II through the Blue Jackets public relations staff, but he has not yet been willing.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, in an interview with The Athletic earlier this month, acknowledged that John P. McConnell, 70, remains the majority owner of the Blue Jackets, but that McConnell II, an alternate governor with the club, is expanding his role.

"It's not unusual in a family-owned team for the younger generations to get more involved," Bettman said. "In Anaheim, the Samuelis' (Ducks owners Henry and Susan Samueli) daughter (Jillian Reddin) runs the (AHL) team in San Diego. Danny Wirtz stepped up (in Chicago) when Rocky Wirtz tragically passed.

"That's good for the community and the stability of the franchise. John H. has been attending board meetings. John P. I've seen recently and he's still involved, but he retired from Worthington Industries (in 2020), so this is consistent with that."

A club spokesman this week told The Athletic that there are no immediate plans for an announcement regarding John H. McConnell II's future role with the club.

"Getting more people involved doesn't require any change," Bettman said. "Who operates the club is up to the owner."

Ownership involvement with a sports franchise can be a tricky business.

John P. McConnell has stayed out of the way of his hockey executives, allowing his front office to make decisions without his input. Priest, who watches the money side of the business but also deals closely with Waddell and staff, has said he speaks frequently with McConnell.

But while John H. McConnell, the founder, was a regular at games and would often be shown on the scoreboard — drawing a huge ovation from the Nationwide Arena crowd — John P. McConnell took on a decidedly more private persona.

It bears watching how John H. McConnell will handle the job if he, as expected, ascends to become majority owner. He's a passionate hockey fan and has become friends with several players, past and present. From 2012 to 2014, he worked in the Blue Jackets marketing department and co-chaired the NHL All-Star Game events committee when Columbus hosted the game in 2015.

His growing presence in recent months, including at several team functions, suggests that he'll be more of a hands-on owner than his father.

John H. McConnell II, Mike Priest, Don Waddell and John Davidson pose after the Blue Jackets introduced Waddell as president of hockey operations and general manager in May 2024. (Aaron Portzline / The Athletic)

A time for veterans

One of the best aspects of this Blue Jackets season has been the explosive growth of the club's young talent, from Adam Fantilli's ascension as a two-way center to Kent Johnson's playmaking wizardry and Kirill Marchenko's next-level play as a finisher.

Those three were the Blue Jackets' top line — Fantilli in the middle, Johnson to his left and Marchenko to his right — in Saturday's 4-0 shutout loss to the Rangers. As angry as Fantilli was after the game and as frustrated as Marchenko seemed, this game is not on them.

The Blue Jackets look panicked and mentally overwhelmed right now, as if this first taste of a playoff stretch is too rich for them.

It's time for veteran players to take the lead. It's a time for ugly goals and relentless, tenacious checking. The older players, especially the ones who have been through this before, need to be the drivers.

Veteran defensemen Damon Severson can't cough up the puck to Rangers center Mika Zibanejad in the neutral zone less than two minutes into the game, starting the sequence that put the Blue Jackets down 1-0.

Center Boone Jenner, who centered the second line between two youngsters — Yegor Chinakhov and Dmitri Voronkov — matched a career-worst minus-4 rating on Saturday. Jenner has nine assists in 10 games since his return from shoulder surgery, but he's looking for his first goal of the season.

Tough guy Mathieu Olivier tried to get New York's Matt Rempe to fight him early in Saturday's game, but Rempe let him know it wasn't going to happen. The Rangers didn't want to give the Blue Jackets any extra juice, and the plan worked.

The bottom two lines were OK but didn't outwork the Rangers. They didn't make life difficult on goaltender Igor Shesterkin. Were there more than two scrums all night?

The Blue Jackets' pretty plays aren't working right now. All that room on the ice they've exposed this season with their skill and speed has evaporated. NHL refs are starting to swallow their whistles on calls that aren't egregious.

Hockey is different now. If the Blue Jackets don't figure that out quickly, their season will be a moderate success, not a storybook finish.

Take 5, Jamie Healy

Take 5 is a quick, breezy sit-down with a Blue Jackets player, coach or front-office staffer. This week's features head equipment manager Jamie Healy, who has worked in hockey — the now-defunct International Hockey League, the ECHL, and since the Blue Jackets were born in 2000, the NHL.

What are your favorite restaurants in Columbus?

Cento in German Village is a favorite. Barley's (Brewing Company) is good and always reliable. Tastes like homemade. We have food here at (Nationwide Arena) most days, so lunch is here. Back in the day, before we had food, we used to go out quite a bit. There are so many places up and down High St., it's hard to pick one. Away from this part of the city, I'm a big fan of Bonifacio in Grandview. And German Village Coffee Shop is a favorite. Always.

What is your favorite road city?

Vancouver. Love that city. I have a lot of friends there, so that helps. If you love sushi, seafood and oysters, it's the place to go. You can't go wrong with the scenery, too. The weather ... sometimes it's rainy, but it's usually mild. Great city. You always know you're going to have fun when you're there.

What's your top hockey memory?

With Columbus, it has to be the sweep of Tampa Bay (2019 playoffs). That's the loudest I've ever heard this building. I know what we're capable of. This building (Nationwide) can rock when you get that playoff atmosphere. And to win the way we did, against the Presidents' Trophy-winning team. I was in Peoria (ECHL) when they won (a Kelly Cup). To win a championship at any level is gratifying. That's the goal here, too.

You've worked with hundreds of players. Do you stay in touch with any?

I have. The guys that probably stand out from the Blue Jackets' early days would be (Rostislav) Rusty Klesla, the first Blue Jackets draft pick. I've visited Rusty in Czechia, on the outskirts of Ostrava. When Rusty first signed with us, he bought a piece of land, and it's right on the side of a mountain. Beautiful. He's done well. I've met up with (David) Vyborny in Prague, and I've seen a bunch of guys (working for Team USA) at the IIHF World Championships. Serge Aubin, Petteri Nummelin, Espen Knutsen ...

How did hockey start for you?

I worked through high school and college at the arena in Kalamazoo, Mich., already sharpening skates, scheduling ice, etc., and they needed a equipment guy, so the GM asked if I'd fill in until they found somebody. I said, "Sure." I was done with college. I have a degree in criminal justice from Western Michigan. That was going to be my path, but lo and behold, hockey turned into my career. The first coach I worked with in Kalamazoo was (former Blue Jackets coach) Ken Hitchcock. I remember having lunch with him and meeting him for the first time at the bowling alley across the street from the arena. He was in the NHL (Dallas Stars) two years later.

Snacks

- A frost has fallen on the Blue Jackets' offensive output at the worst possible time. They've been shut out in consecutive games — Thursday vs. Vegas and Saturday vs. the Rangers, both by 4-0 scores — for the seventh time in franchise history. The last time it happened was on Dec. 20 and 23, 2008, when the Jackets lost 2-0 at Phoenix (Ilya Bryzgalov was the goaltender) and 3-0 vs. Los Angeles (Jonathan Quick). Since the last time these current Jackets scored — Olivier scored at 10:29 of the third period vs. New Jersey on March 11 — they've fired 51 shots on goal without finding the back of the net.
- The longest the Blue Jackets have gone without scoring is 219 minutes and 46 seconds, set during the franchise's second season (2001-02). Yes, those Blue Jackets were shut out in three consecutive games:

2-0 at Florida (Roberto Luongo) on Dec. 5, 1-0 at Tampa Bay (Nikolai Khabibulin) a day later, and 2-0 vs. Colorado (Patrick Roy) on Dec. 8.

- When Olivier is credited with his next hit — likely early in Tuesday's game vs. New Jersey — he will set a Blue Jackets regular-season record for most hits in a single season. Through Saturday's game, when Olivier had five hits, he's tied with Brandon Dubinsky, who had 248 hits during the 2016-17 season. It's an impressive feat, to be sure, but this stat requires an asterisk. The NHL didn't start charting hits until the 2007-08 season, so players like Tyler Wright, Grant Marshall, Aubin and others would have put up some impressive totals.
- Two Serge Aubin references today. You're welcome.
- Marchenko played in his 200th NHL game on Saturday. He has 69-60-129, giving him the third most goals in his first 200 games with Columbus. The only two players with more are Rick Nash, who had 84, and Geoff Sanderson, who had 75.
- Washington's Alex Ovechkin is closing in on history, and it could take place in Columbus. Ovechkin scored his 887th career goal midway through the third period of Saturday's 5-1 win over San Jose. He's now eight goals from breaking Wayne Gretzky's NHL record of 894 goals. At his current pace, he'd break the record vs. the Blue Jackets on April 12 in Nationwide Arena. Late last month, the NHL announced the faceoff for the game — originally set for 7 p.m. — would be moved to 12:30 p.m. to be aired nationally on ABC.
- Here's your Sunday Gathering Trivia question: Which former Blue Jackets player has scored the most points against Columbus after moving on from the club?
- Many have asked if the Blue Jackets plan to wear their Stadium Series sweaters again or if their only appearance will be that magical night in Ohio Stadium on March 1. We asked around this week. According to club PR boss Todd Sharrock, the Blue Jackets do not plan to wear them again this season, but nothing has been decided beyond that. Stay tuned.
- The Blue Jackets' top minor-league affiliate has hit a rough patch, too. AHL Cleveland was swept in a weekend series in Texas, losing 5-4 (Saturday) and 4-1 (Friday) to the Texas Stars (Dallas Stars affiliate). That's four straight losses for the Monsters, who are just 2-6-1-1 in their last 10 and have slid to fifth place in the AHL's North Division. They're still in a playoff spot, but sixth-place Belleville sits just two points back with a game in hand. Next up is a two-game set next weekend in Laval, Quebec, against the AHL's top club, which is coached by former Blue Jackets bench boss Pascal Vincent.
- Trivia answer: According to the NHL stats department, the Rangers' Artemi Panarin, with 11-12-23 in 18 games, has scored the most points vs. Columbus among former Blue Jackets players. Panarin left the Blue Jackets as a free agent after the 2018-19 season. Two others are not far behind: Jeff Carter, who retired after last season, had 12-7-19 in 28 games, and Anthony Duclair has 6-13-19 in 15 games against the Blue Jackets after playing for them.

[BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets blanked by Rangers](#)

By Craig Merz- March 16, 2025

COLUMBUS -- Igor Shesterkin made 21 saves for his fifth shutout of the season, and the New York Rangers defeated the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-0 at Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

Vincent Trocheck scored twice and Alexis Lafreniere and Artemi Panarin each had a goal and an assist for the Rangers (33-28-6), who have won two straight after a four-game losing streak (0-2-2).

"Early on, I thought we had a little bit too many turnovers when we weren't taking care of the puck as much as we wanted to," Trocheck said. "They're very good on transition. But I thought after the first 10 minutes of the first period, we really started playing the right way, getting pucks in, making sure at the blue lines we weren't turning the puck over and then our defense led to offense."

New York now holds the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference with 72 points.

"We're in charge of what we do. We're in complete charge of winning hockey games and won't have to look anywhere else," Rangers coach Peter Laviolette said. "It's great if other teams don't win on any given night, but we've just got to be responsible for ourselves right now. There's still a ton of work, though, and so that's, I think, the focus."

Daniil Tarasov made 17 saves for the Blue Jackets (31-27-8), who have lost three straight and five of their past six. They have been shut out in three of the past five games, including 4-0 to the Vegas Golden Knights on Thursday.

"I'll be honest, there was some frustration at the end. Like you could tell that we were frustrated," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "And when you get frustrated, you kind of throw some blame around and we haven't done that, right? We've stuck together and that's what our message was after and will be again moving forward."

Lafreniere opened the scoring at 1:43 of the first period. Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson lost the puck to Mika Zibanejad left of the net. Tarasov went to poke check the puck but Zibanejad managed to slip a backhanded pass to an open Lafreniere for the easy score into the open net.

"It was just kind of a bit of a cluster of bad things that could happen there," Severson said. "So, yeah, bad bounce there."

Evason saw it another way.

"We need one of those to come our way, but we have to work towards that as well," he said.

Panarin made it 2-0 at 11:36 of the second period when he skated in from the left wall and sent a wrist shot past Tarasov's blocker from the left circle. He has 12 points (six goals, six assists) during an eight-game point streak.

"We're getting down the stretch here," Blue Jackets forward Adam Fantilli said. "I mean, guys are starting to tighten it up defensively. Doesn't matter. We've got to create our own chances and score. We had a couple and didn't bear down on them."

Trocheck extended the lead to 3-0 at 14:38 of the third period when he scored from the right circle from a Panarin cross-ice pass.

"We're up 2-0 in the third," Lafreniere said. "You don't want to sit back but you also want to be careful and make the right plays. So, that's all we really wanted to do."

“We didn't really give up much and it was a really good, complete team effort.”

Trocheck then scored short-handed with Tarasov pulled for an extra attacker at 16:41 for the 4-0 final.

“I thought we got better, honestly, almost every minute of the game,” Laviolette said. “Started a little bit jumpy but by the end of the first I thought we were playing pretty well, and then the second and third, I thought outstanding. So that's three periods, three games in a row where I thought we defended well, defended hard, gives us a chance to be successful.”

NOTES: Panarin's streak tied his season best (Oct. 9-26). He had three eight-game point streaks in 2023-24, including a career-high 15 games, which set a Rangers record for the longest run to open a season. ... Blue Jackets forward Kirill Marchenko played his 200th NHL game. He has 129 points (69 goals, 60 assists). ... Rangers defenseman Adam Fox returned after missing eight games due to an upper-body injury. He had one assist and two blocks in 20:36 of ice time.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Drop Out of Wildcard Spot With Shutout Loss to Rangers

By Mark Scheig- March 16, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets had another chance to break their funk on Saturday night against the team right behind them in the standings. However, it was more of the same frustration for the Blue Jackets in front of another sellout crowd at Nationwide Arena.

Igor Shesterkin stopped all 21 shots he faced while Artemi Panarin and Alexis Lafrenière each added a goal and an assist to lift the Rangers to a big 4-0 win on Saturday night. Vincent Trocheck added two goals in the third period to ice the game away.

A costly mistake early put the Blue Jackets behind. They weren't able to come back from that.

Game Recap

Not even two minutes into the game, a turnover led to the first goal for the Rangers. Daniil Tarasov tried to play the puck but it ended up in front where Lafrenière buried it. Although the Blue Jackets kept their structure in tact most of the night, they couldn't find much room to maneuver.

In the second, both teams found it difficult to generate much. But then midway through the second, Panarin was able to find the middle of the ice and scored from the slot to double the lead.

Although the Blue Jackets were still within striking distance, the game felt like a bigger deficit than 2-0. They couldn't generate offense consistently. Even when they did, some bad luck got in the way.

Dmitri Voronkov appeared to have a wide open net. Only the puck hit the far post and stayed out. It was that kind of the night for the Blue Jackets.

In the third, there was just one shot on goal recorded in the first nine minutes. The Rangers locked the Blue Jackets down at every turn throughout the period.

Then Trocheck put the game out of reach by converting on a 2-on-1 rush to make it 3-0. Then while shorthanded, he scored an empty netter to get to the final score of 4-0.

The one bright spot for the Blue Jackets was they only allowed 20 shots on goal to the Rangers. Most nights, that will lead to wins. But a second consecutive home shutout leaves the Blue Jackets searching for answers on how to break through.

Tarasov finished with 17 saves on the night. They are back in action Monday night at home against the New Jersey Devils. Meanwhile, the Rangers head home for a date with the Edmonton Oilers on Sunday.

Quotables

Damon Severson: "I think a lot of us crave that pressure. That's a big part of the game. It's crunch time. It's the time you're trying to get into the playoffs. And this was obviously a team chasing us and they leapfrogged us tonight so we got some work to do."

Kirill Marchenko: "Two games with zero score, zero goals. It's not good enough and we need to work on this."

Adam Fantilli: "Two games getting shut out. I mean you're pointing at our top guys first. We gotta score. Even if we lose 1-0, we're getting shutout. We gotta score. And it's a point of emphasis right now. We gotta be better. Nothing else to say."

Dean Evason: “We have to find a way more than anything just to build the confidence back up and continually build towards and then catch a break. Catch a couple of breaks.”

The Hockey Writers / 3 Takeaways From the Blue Jackets' Second Straight Shutout Loss at Home

By Matthew Burhmann- March 17, 2025

The New York Rangers delivered sweet revenge in front of a roaring sellout crowd of 18,464 at Nationwide Arena. Igor Shesterkin delivered a dominant performance to secure a 4-0 shutout victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets. The win catapulted New York into the second wild card spot in the Eastern Conference, bumping Columbus out of playoff position.

For the Blue Jackets, this marked their second straight shutout loss and their third in just five games—a tough pill to swallow in an important part of the season.

New York struck early and didn't look back. Alexis Lafreniere opened the scoring, and former Blue Jacket Artemi Panarin added to it in the second period with his 29th goal of the season. Shesterkin handled the rest, making 21 saves in total. Meanwhile, Columbus' goaltender, Daniil Tarasov, who made 18 saves, started in place of Elvis Merzlikins, who is currently on leave to be with his wife as they await the arrival of their second child. Vincent Trocheck poured salt in the wound in the third period with two more insurance goals for the Rangers, sealing the shutout win.

The Blue Jackets' offensive struggles are glaring—they've now gone over 129 minutes without scoring a goal, an issue that couldn't come at a worse time. With many teams pushing for the second wild card spot and separated by only four points, every missed opportunity stings. Columbus now sits at 31-27-8, trailing the Montreal Canadiens by one point in the standings (71) and falling further away from playoff contention. To make things worse, they're now just two points ahead of the Detroit Red Wings (68).

Rangers' 1-3-1 Defensive Style Proved Too Much for the Blue Jackets

The Rangers' 1-3-1 defensive strategy stumped the Blue Jackets on Saturday night, clogging passing lanes, disrupting zone entries, and forcing Columbus into turnovers all night long, a total of 22, most coming at the blue line. Time and again, the Blue Jackets struggled to break through the layers of the big Rangers' defensemen, leading to dump-and-chasing with little sustained offensive zone possession.

For Columbus, this performance was painfully similar to Thursday night's shutout loss against the Vegas Golden Knights. Once again, the Jackets couldn't establish any kind of rhythm. In the third period, their struggles were most glaring, with just one shot on goal in the first nine minutes.

What really stood out wasn't a lack of effort but the growing frustration. You could see it in the way Columbus played—a team pressing hard, desperate for a breakthrough that never came. They've now gone six straight periods without a goal, over 129 minutes of hockey, which is certainly weighing hard on this squad.

"Everybody's talked about it before. Whenever teams are in a bit of a funk, you need something positive to happen. Which we'll work (for). We've never not worked. It would be a different story if I came in here and said we got outworked tonight and that's why we lost the game. We didn't. We have to continue to work and believe there's enough games left for us to get there," said head coach Dean Evason

From @JacketsInsider/Jeff Svoboda

Key Blue Jackets Struggled

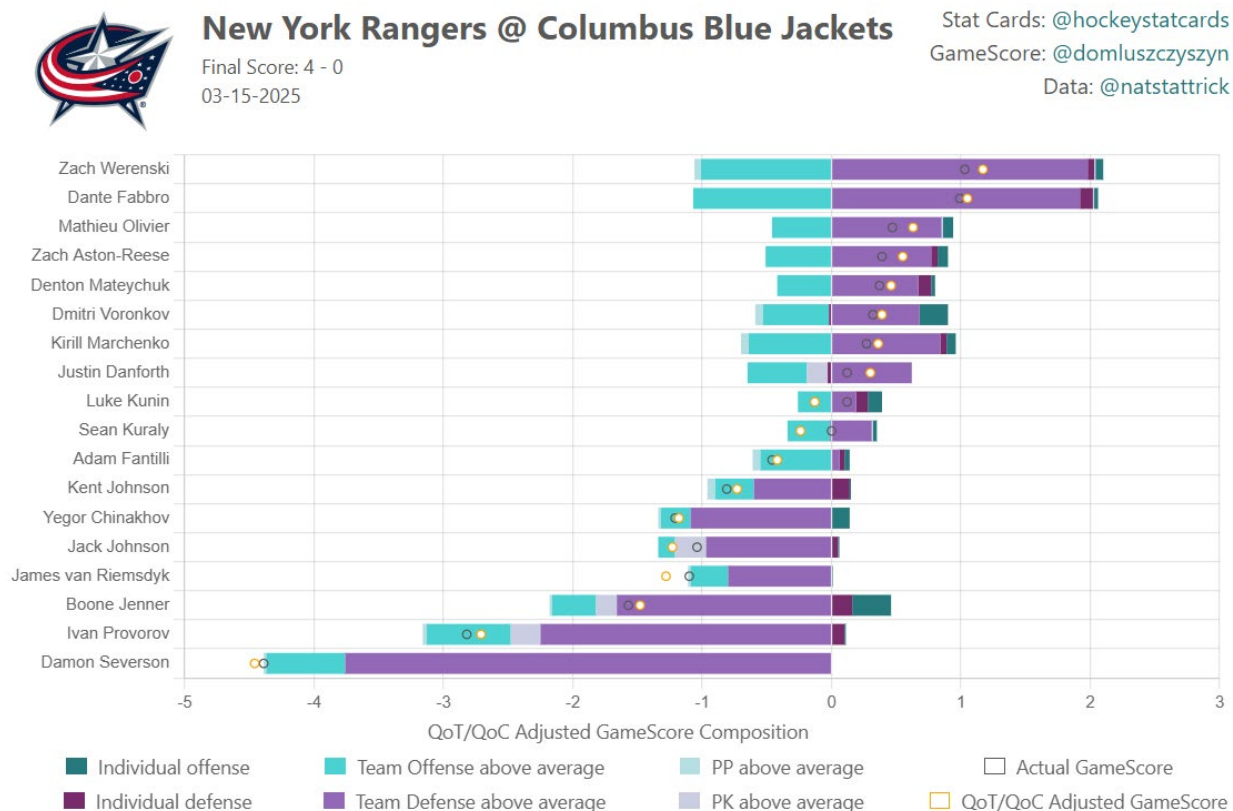
It was a tough night for several Blue Jackets players, and the struggles were evident across the lineup. Damon Severson had a particularly rough game on defense, finishing with a minus-3 rating. His night got

off to a bad start when a costly turnover deep in the defensive zone led directly to the Rangers' opening goal. That moment set the tone for the evening—a mix of mistakes and missed opportunities that Columbus couldn't overcome.

Severson's adjusted game score of minus-4.39 (via HockeyStatCards.com) was the lowest on the team, reflecting the defensive struggles of this team lately.

"It was just kind of a bit of a cluster of bad things that could happen there. So, yeah, bad bounce there," said Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson

From Craig Merz/NHL.com Independent Correspondent



HockeyStatCards.com/CBJ vs NYR/3-15-25

Boone Jenner, the captain, had his own difficulties too, ending the game with a minus-4 rating, failing to create much offensively.

The Rangers, on the other hand, knew exactly how to exploit Columbus' mistakes. They got bodies in front of Daniil Tarasov, creating screens and making it nearly impossible for him to track the puck. Two of their goals came directly from traffic in front, showing just how effective that strategy was. Tarasov did what he could with 18 saves, but it's hard to blame him entirely when the team in front of him struggled so much to hold their ground.

Something's Gotta Give with the Power Play

The Blue Jackets' power play has hit rock bottom, and this game against the Rangers made that crystal clear. Columbus had three chances with the man advantage but failed to convert, with no sign of improvement of late. While they managed a few decent looks early in the first period, their efforts

repeatedly fell apart before they could even get set up in the offensive zone during their six minutes of man-advantage.

Credit should go to the Rangers' penalty kill, though, as they didn't give the Blue Jackets any breathing room. The Rangers were relentless when it came to blocking shots, blocking 17 in total, most coming on the penalty kill. Clogging the shooting lanes frustrated Columbus' power-play efforts, making it nearly impossible to get clean shots through to the net. When the Blue Jackets did manage a shot, Igor Shesterkin was unbeatable in the net. His rebound control and ability to smother every puck made sure there were no second-chance opportunities on most shots.

At this level, you have to score to stay competitive. It's that simple. The Jackets' lack of execution is glaring, and they know it.

—



“Two games getting shut out. I mean you're pointing at our top guys first. We gotta score. Even if we lose 1-0, we're getting shutout. We gotta score. And it's a point of emphasis right now. We gotta be better. Nothing else to say.”

From Mark Scheig/thehockeywriters.com

The Blue Jackets are back in action Monday night at home against the New Jersey Devils, a team that beat them 5-3 earlier last week. This game will be a great opportunity to earn some revenge and regain momentum in this tight playoff race.

1st Ohio Battery / NYR 4, CBJ 0: Blue Jackets Blanked On Home Ice For Second Straight Game

By Ed Francis- March 16, 2025

	1	2	3	F
	1	1	2	4
	0	0	0	0
CBJ GOALS: None				

Not good.

For the second straight game, the Columbus Blue Jackets were shutout on home ice, this time falling 4-0 to the New York Rangers in a pivotal divisional game.

The Blue Jackets played from behind nearly the entire game after the Rangers scored less than two minutes in on a disastrous sequence.

Damon Severson lost the puck in Columbus' zone and both he and goalie Daniil Tarasov go for it. They're beat by New York's Mika Zibanejad, who then threw it in front of the net to Alexis Lafrenière for one of his easiest goals of the season.

"To have that first goal go in in the manner that it went in ... there's nothing there and it ends up in our net," said head coach Dean Evason.

Columbus had a golden chance to tie game in the second period, but Dmitri Voronkov's would-be goal went off the post to keep the Rangers lead intact. Just minutes later, former Blue Jacket Artemi Panarin scored to give the Rangers a 2-0 lead.

Vincent Trochek scored two goals in the third period to put the game out of reach.

Tarasov, making his third start of the season against the Rangers, stopped 17 of 20 shots.

The loss puts Columbus on the outside looking in for a playoff spot for the first time since Feb. 25. The Rangers, now at 72 points and two ahead of the Blue Jackets, take over the second wild card spot.

Here's how the Blue Jackets came up short Saturday night:

1st Period:

(1:43 — NYR Goal): Columbus' mistakes results in an early lead for the Rangers. Severson turns the puck over to Zibanejad falling back into Columbus' own zone. They both go for the puck to the right of Tarasov — who also goes for the puck, leaving the net wide open. Zibanejad is first to it and throws it back in front of the net, where Lafrenière is waiting to give the Rangers a 1-0 lead.

2nd Period:

(11:36 — NYR Goal): The Blue Jackets don't convert on a power play for the 15th consecutive time, and they pay for it almost immediately after. Artemi Panarin gets his team-leading 29th of the season to put the Rangers up 2-0.

3rd Period:

(14:38, 16:41 — NYR Goal): Vincent Trocheck scores twice in 2:03 to put the Rangers up 4-0. The second goal comes with Tarasov pulled and the Blue Jackets on a power play, making it a short-handed goal — the third time in two games the Rangers get a shorty on the Jackets.

NYR	GAME STATS	CBJ
21	SHOTS	21
59%	FACEOFFS	41%
0/1	POWER PLAY	0/3
3/3	PENALTY KILL	1/1
21	HITS	24
11	GIVEAWAYS	22
2	TAKEAWAYS	3
17	BLOCKED SHOTS	13
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		

NYR	GAME STATS	CBJ
3.64	EXPECTED GOALS	2.63
47	SHOT ATTEMPTS	57
28	SCORING CHANCES	26
9	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	10
Data via NHL.com & NaturalStatTrick.com		

Stat Chat:

- Make it six straight games and 0-for-16 on the power play for the Blue Jackets. They had just one shot on goal tonight while on the man-advantage.
- The Blue Jackets are without a goal in 129 minutes, 31 seconds. That is the longest streak of the season.
- Columbus was able to generate a game-high 23 shot attempts in the third period, but quality matters over quantity: the Blue Jackets registered just six shots on goal on Shesterkin and just one high-danger opportunity in that time.

Up Next:

The homestand continues with vital points on the line as the Blue Jackets face the New Jersey Devils on Monday night. The St. Patrick's Day tilt begins at 7 p.m.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Warmer Temperatures, Frozen Offense, Marchenko's 200th, Where Things Stand

By Will Chase- March 17, 2025

Are they running out of gas?

Igor Shesterkin made 21 saves and Vincent Trocheck scored twice as the New York Rangers beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-0 on Saturday night at Nationwide Arena.

Since their 4-0 run out of the 4 Nations Face-Off break, the Blue Jackets are 1-5-0.

Warmer Temperatures, Frozen Offense

The weather is getting nicer, the playoffs are looming, and the Blue Jackets offense is as cold as ice — and at the worst possible time.

For the first time since Dec. 2008 — and the first time ever at home — the Blue Jackets have been shut out in consecutive games after losing 4-0 to the Vegas Golden Knights on Thursday and 4-0 to the Rangers on Saturday.

After Saturday's loss, the Jackets are on the wrong side of the playoff divider line for the first time since Feb. 25 as the Rangers take over the second wild card spot in the Eastern Conference.

The game got off to a dubious start when Alexis Lafreniere (15) scored at 1:43 of the first period on a botched play when Damon Severson made a costly turnover and Daniil Tarasov was caught behind his own net. Mika Zibanejad (34) was able to center the puck to Lafreniere who made it 1-0.

Artemi Panarin had two points with a goal and an assist to extend his point streak (six goals, six assists) to eight games. His 29th goal at 11:36 of the second period made it 2-0. Lafreniere (23) and Will Borgen (7) had the assists.

Trocheck scored both of his goals in the third period, making it 3-0 at 14:38 on his 19th. Panarin picked up his 42nd assist while Will Cuyille added his 19th. Trocheck scored with the empty net at 16:41 for his 20th. J.T. Miller (37) and Adam Fox (44) added the assists. Miller is on a three-game point streak (three assists). Fox (upper body) played in his first game since Feb. 25 and is on an eight-game point streak (two goals, seven assists).

It was the second consecutive game in which the opponent scored first and on their first shot. Since Mar. 4, when the Jackets' recent slide started, they're 30th in the league in goals for per game (2.00).

Playing catch-up once again, the Jackets were unable to solve Shesterkin, who has a shutout streak of 141:36 against the Blue Jackets. Four of his 20 career shutouts have come against the Blue Jackets including his last two starts. His first this season came on Jan. 18 when the Rangers won 1-0 in a shootout. Tarasov made the start for Columbus in that game and recorded his first career shutout. He made 17 saves on 20 shots on Saturday.

The Jackets have been shut out for the third time in five games.

Marchenko's 200th

He'd rather have a win but Saturday's game was a milestone night for Kirill Marchenko as he played in his 200th career game.

The 2024-25 campaign has been a career year for the third-year pro, as Marchenko has career highs in points (62), goals (25), and assists (37). He leads Columbus in goals, is second in points and assists, and leads the team with a plus-31. Marchenko is tied for fifth in the league in plus/minus.

Where Things Stand

Point blank the Blue Jackets are on the wrong side of the playoff picture but there are 16 games remaining as they sit two points out of a playoff spot.

Columbus battles the New Jersey Devils on Monday and the Florida Panthers on Thursday to wrap up the homestand.

As bleak as things feel at the moment, Columbus still has an opportunity to right the ship but obviously, they have to find their game. The Jackets have one of the best home records in the league at 20-8-4 but are on a two-game losing streak at Nationwide Arena for the first time since dropping consecutive games Feb. 6-8.

Columbus has 24 wins when scoring first, tied for 12th in the league, but only seven when trailing first (30th) which has been the case of late. The power play is 23rd in the league (19.4%) but 31st in the league (12.5%) since Sean Monahan went down with a wrist injury on Jan. 7. Without Monahan in the lineup since Jan. 8, they're 4-for-46 with the man advantage (32nd).

Erik Gudbranson is expected to return to the lineup next week. Monahan and Cole Sillinger recently skated as they work their way back.

Devil Of A Rematch

The Blue Jackets look to stop the bleeding when they host the Devils on Monday, Mar. 17 at 7 p.m. ET.

The Athletic / Seeking a free-agent goalie upgrade this offseason? Bad news: the options are sparse

By Jesse Granger- March 16, 2025

This season, NHL general managers have been handing out goalie contract extensions like Oprah Winfrey giving prizes to her live studio audience.

You get a contract!

You get a contract!

Twelve NHL regulars have signed contract extensions worth a combined \$437.95 million. The latest came on Friday morning, when the Vegas Golden Knights inked Adin Hill to a six-year extension with an average annual value of \$6.25 million. He joins the long list of pending unrestricted free agents whose teams chose to lock them in before they could test the market this summer.

The Utah Hockey Club signed Karel Vejmelka less than two weeks ago. The Washington Capitals signed both of their expiring-contract netminders — Logan Thompson and Charlie Lindgren — to extensions, and the Vancouver Canucks committed to Kevin Lankinen for the next five years in late February.

All of these contracts have left the upcoming free agency class of goaltenders looking extremely sparse, which means teams looking to upgrade in the crease this offseason could be forced to delve into the trade market.

Here's an overview of all the goalie extensions signed this season, in order of total dollars.

Igor Shesterkin

NYR

8

\$11.5M

\$92M

Jake Oettinger

DAL

8

\$8.25M

\$66M

Jeremy Swayman

BOS

8

\$8.25M

\$66M

Adin Hill

VGK

6

\$6.25M

\$37.5M

Logan Thompson

WSH

6

\$5.85M

\$35.1M

Linus Ullmark

OTT

4

\$8.25M

\$33M

Mackenzie Blackwood

COL

5

\$5.25M

\$26.25M

Joey Daccord

SEA

5

\$5.0M

\$25M

Karel Vejmelka

UTA

5

\$4.75M

\$23.75M

Kevin Lankinen

VAN

5

\$4.5M

\$22.5M

Charlie Lindgren

WSH

3

\$3.0M

\$9M

Jonathan Quick

NYR

1

\$1.55M

\$1.85M

Some of these deals may look rich when compared to the depreciated goalie market we had seen since 2020, but projections for the salary cap to rise considerably over the next several years have re-set the market. That, combined with what is looking to be a shallow overall free agent class this July, motivated general managers around the league to secure their goaltending now.

Here are the top goalies currently set to hit the open market this offseason.

2025 Free Agents

Frederik Andersen

35

Jake Allen

34

Alexandar Georgiev

29

Ilya Samsonov

28

Dan Vladar

27

David Rittich

32

Alex Lyon

32

Anton Forsberg

32

Vitek Vanecek

29

Jonas Johansson

35

James Reimer

36

Ville Husso

30

If your team is in need of a reliable, veteran backup, you're in luck. There will be plenty of those, and a few rather good ones. If you're looking for a bonafide starter – or even a goalie to lead a tandem with a 50-50 split – there won't be much available.

The Carolina Hurricanes' Frederik Andersen could be the top option. He has put up elite numbers over the majority of his career, but rarely has been available to the Hurricanes lately due to a combination of injuries and other medical issues. Andersen has made only 29 starts over the last two seasons combined, has reached the 35-start threshold only once in the last five years, and will turn 36 before the 2025-26 season begins.

Even with all of that, Andersen's numbers when healthy are good enough that he should draw some interest. Over the last four seasons, he has saved 56.1 goals above expected, which ranks seventh in the NHL between Andrei Vasilevskiy (62.33) and Jacob Markstrom (54.27) according to Evolving-Hockey. Andersen shouldn't cost much, so if he finds a way to stay on the ice he could be a major steal, but he carries quite a bit of risk.

Jake Allen is having an excellent season for the New Jersey Devils. The 34-year-old is a quintessential backup goalie at this stage in his career. He's a consummate professional, a great goalie partner and, most importantly, he can still play. Allen actually has a higher save percentage (.910) and GSAx (17.73) than his partner, Markstrom.

Alexandar Georgiev and Ilya Samsonov are both interesting options. Both Russians have experience as starters, but profile as a better fit as a backup or 1B option in a tandem. Georgiev is having a nightmare season for the San Jose Sharks with a career-low .876 save percentage, but led the league with 78 wins from 2022 to 2024. If nothing else, it shows he is good enough to win behind a strong team. These two won't be viewed as upgrades for most teams, but can be a strong second goalie.

Dan Vladar is the youngest of the group at 27, but hasn't been overly impressive this season for the Calgary Flames, especially in comparison to rookie sensation Dustin Wolf. In four full seasons with the Flames, he has yet to produce a save percentage above the league average.

Alex Lyon, 32, was a late bloomer, not finding his footing in the NHL until his 30-year-old season, but has since put up relatively impressive numbers behind two different teams. He had a breakout 2022-23 season with the Florida Panthers and started three playoff games before eventually being replaced by Sergei Bobrovsky. He's since put together two respectable seasons for the Detroit Red Wings. He also won't be viewed as a starter, but could have a higher ceiling than some of the other options.

David Rittich, Anton Forsberg and Vitek Vanecek are all proven commodities capable of handling a reasonable workload. They'll be options for teams searching for an NHL goalie at a low cap hit.

As you can see, options are slim. It's one of the reasons that general managers in Vegas, Utah, Washington, Vancouver and Colorado all opted to lock their pending UFAs up early, rather than waiting and potentially missing out in free agency. It also explains why goalies with relatively short resumes, such as Mackenzie Blackwood, Lankinen and Veijmelka, were able to secure five-year contracts. The demand

for starting NHL goalies is higher than the supply, so when you find one you believe in, you sign them long-term.

This dynamic should create an active trade market in the crease this summer. We saw significant moves last June, with Markstrom traded to New Jersey and Linus Ullmark traded to the Ottawa Senators, and we could be heading toward something similar this year.

The obvious place to start is with the Anaheim Ducks' John Gibson, who has been on The Athletic's trade Big Board for what feels like forever. The biggest reason Gibson hasn't been moved to this point is his contract, which runs through 2026-27 with a \$6.4 million AAV, but every year that becomes more palatable to absorb. He has struggled with injuries but has performed well with a .909 save percentage and 10.67 GSAA. With Lukáš Dostál's emergence as Anaheim's clear goalie of the future, Ducks GM Pat Verbeek could lower his asking price.

There have been no signs the Montreal Canadiens are willing to move Samuel Montembeault, but he's worth making a call on, when it comes to contenders looking to upgrade. He is just finishing the first year of a three-year extension he signed with Montreal, but considering the Canadiens' timeline for contending and the number of talented young goalies in the pipeline, it wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility to trade Montembeault.

The Canadiens have Jakub Dobeš, 23, who is having a nice rookie campaign; Cayden Primeau, 25, who is dominating the AHL since being sent down; and Jacob Fowler, 20, who is a star at Boston College and is one of the top goalie prospects in the world. It wouldn't be cheap to pry Montembeault away, but it could happen.

Thatcher Demko's future in Vancouver is another interesting storyline that could throw a wrench into the goalie market. Demko isn't even a year removed from finishing runner-up to Connor Hellebuyck in the Vezina Trophy voting, but has dealt with serious injuries lately – and throughout his career.

The Canucks may have shown their hand by signing Lankinen to a five-year deal last month. That contract runs through 2029-30 with a cap hit of \$4.5 million. While that isn't true starter money, it could make things tight when Demko's current deal expires in 2026. If Demko isn't in the Canucks' plans beyond that and they receive the right offer, Demko could be a high-risk, high-reward trade candidate.

Finally, if a team is willing to take on an inflated contract, the Columbus Blue Jackets' Elvis Merzlikins (\$5.4 million AAV) and the Boston Bruins' Joonas Korpisalo (\$4 million AAV) are both options. While neither has lived up to their current deals, they've both shown flashes of brilliance as starters. They wouldn't normally be considered great options, but with this free agent class as thin as it is, contenders in need of upgrades could be desperate.

The Athletic / Is the NHL's next scoring breakthrough hiding behind the net?

By Fluto Shinzawa- March 16, 2025

Jack Johnson was in good shape. On Dec. 27, 2024, once David Pastrnak stickhandled out of the left corner at Nationwide Arena, the Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman broke for the near post to deny his opponent's net-front arrival. By doing so, Johnson angled Pastrnak to where the majority of NHL players cannot score: behind the net.

The Boston Bruins right wing didn't have many options. Instead of stopping in front for a between-the-dots bumper shot, Pavel Zacha cut across the slot. Damon Severson filled Pastrnak's passing lane to Morgan Geekie inside the left faceoff dot.

But Pastrnak can make something out of nothing. When he carries the puck behind the net, he considers it a refuge until he can create a play.

Pastrnak paused. This triggered Columbus breakdowns.

Johnson pursued him behind the net. Severson and Cole Sillinger turned to face Pastrnak. Then Severson turned his stick to deny Pastrnak's pass to Geekie at the left dot. This opened up a slot-line seam for Pastrnak to Zacha, who had drifted inside the right dot. Goalie Elvis Merzlikins, who was tucked against the near post in reverse-vertical-horizontal position (RVH), could not lunge over in time as Zacha caught the puck on his forehand and whipped it into the top of the net.

As Clear Sight Analytics chief operating officer John Healy explains in this clip, the Blue Jackets were guilty of paying too much attention to Pastrnak:

"We want to stay on each other's forehands when we pass to each other," Zacha explained. "So when I see him coming on his backhand behind the net, I know that most of the time, he's going to curl up back to his forehand. So I was just waiting. I saw him turning and he saw that I'm high. He always tells me to slide and go far side — not go to the net front. I was trying to get lost."

Pastrnak excels at creating offense from below the goal line. According to Clear Sight Analytics, as of March 14, he had created five high-danger scoring chances off passes from behind the net during five-on-five play. The Bruins scored on four of the five chances.

Leaguewide, Sidney Crosby had created an NHL-leading 14 five-on-five high-danger chances with below-the-line passes. The Pittsburgh Penguins scored twice. Other players comfortable behind the net, according to the data, include Alexis Lafrenière (nine chances created, one goal), Robert Thomas (nine chances created, two goals), Drake Batherson (seven chances created, three goals) and Bo Horvat (seven chances created, three goals).

"When you're defending and you use the back of the net, it's tough on the opposition," Bruins interim coach Joe Sacco said. "Because all eyes are focused on the puck. So you usually have the opportunity, at times, to catch someone out of position."

The challenge of creating impossible-angle chances discourages most players from attacking the back-of-the-net problem. But given the high percentage of a well-executed below-the-line sequence becoming a goal, perhaps more NHLers should follow Pastrnak's lead.

Tricky trapezoid

Wayne Gretzky made the ice behind the net his office. No. 99 is an exception.

The back of the net can be the NHL's offensive badlands. The 275-square-foot trapezoid, specifically, is practically designed to deter offense.

Trevor Zegras and Andrei Svechnikov can occasionally execute the Michigan. But most NHL players cannot score from behind the net, especially from a standstill.

"When you get pucks below the goal line, you can't get stuck," Tampa Bay Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "Whether it's going east-west, stretching out the zone, that's a big thing for us. Once you get stuck, it's trouble."

Defending a stationary puck carrier who stands behind the net is straightforward. If there is no net-front presence, defensemen are usually free to close.

But pursuit is not necessary. Well-positioned sticks, slot awareness and discipline lead to containment. The priority is to deny pass-outs, especially on the forehand, to the slot.

"When he's behind the net, he's not necessarily the most dangerous guy at the current moment," Bruins defenseman Andrew Peeke said. "It's the guys that are coming downhill and sitting net-front waiting for that pass-out."

If each defenseman occupies a post, the attacker is practically in quicksand. Chance creation becomes limited if the defensemen stretch their sticks toward the puck. The puck carrier is trapped. The defensemen can also steer the attacker up the boards.

"If he's directly behind the net, he's not going to have anywhere to go," former Bruins defenseman Brandon Carlo, who was traded to the Toronto Maple Leafs at the deadline, said of a scenario in which he and his partner seal the posts and extend their sticks. "You challenge him a little bit more, rather than letting him walk out like that. You can't let him walk out like that. You've got to push him either up the wall or keep him directly behind the net. If you want to push him out, push him on his backhand."

Wingers, meanwhile, are collapsing on the biggest threats in the slot. The center is low supporting his defensemen.

All of this pack-it-in play, however, can make life predictable for the attacking team. It's where the brightest back-of-the-net thinkers can anticipate how coverage will align and initiate a dangerous sequence.

"You're just trying to find a place, a starting point, to expand the zone," Florida Panthers coach Paul Maurice said. "You know that everybody's going to collapse heavy. The puck starts there. You have a really strong idea of where their five players are. At some point, it has to go east-west, back up north or back to the blue line. It's like an accordion. They're going to collapse on you. Now we've got to pull them apart. Much safer to try and do that behind the net than at your blue line."

There's another reason offense can commence from behind the net. Goalies don't like looking back for the puck.

Eyes everywhere

"Those are hard plays," Bruins goalie Joonas Korpisalo said. "Really hard plays."

Goalies like Korpisalo go down a checklist when the puck carrier goes behind the net. The No. 1 priority is to eliminate wraparounds. A goalie has to stay on his line.

Some goalies will fan their pads out to take away everything down low. Others will sit in RVH on the attacker's forehand post.

But goalies also have to keep slot threats in sight while keeping track of the puck. It requires regular side-to-side scans from behind to out front, all while keeping their skates unlocked to move in a yet-to-be-determined direction.

"It's preparing your feet in a way that you minimize the time trying to push out," Korpisalo said.

"Because you've got to get out. You have to get out. Once you're stuck on the goal line, you take up less net. A play like that, coming from behind to the slot, you've got to get out."

The sequence is so tricky that Clear Sight Analytics classifies a pass-out that produces a slot one-timer as a high-danger chance. It becomes even harder when the pass-out crosses the slot line.

"The degree he has to move to track the puck from passer to shooter is typically close to 180 degrees," Healy said of a goalie in such situations. "He's got to get up onto his feet and move his feet to find the shooter before he gets his angle, depth and squareness."

Some shots are less dangerous. If the strong-side defenseman seals his post and forces the back-of-the-net player to hit a teammate outside the dot, it should be a routine save. The goalie exits RVH, gets to his feet, pushes slightly inside and out and squares up to the shooter.

If the attacker rolls up the boards and walks out front, the defenseman can challenge or hand off coverage to a wing. This gives the goalie enough time to set his feet and anticipate the shot.

But when the pass enters the slot, the goal-scoring probability spikes. Leon Draisaitl, Connor McDavid and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins are among the Edmonton Oilers who can thread the net-front needle. They are taught to pass to the slot with purpose.

"You want to put the puck in the slot. That's where your most dangerous opportunities are," Oilers coach Kris Knoblauch said. "But if you run the risk of just throwing the puck there blind, you end up giving away possession and you end up having to defend. A lot of teaching we've talked about is making that high-percentage play. You've got to see it before you make that play."

Superstars like Pastrnak with exquisite hockey sense are optimized for back-of-the-net patience. They wait for teammates to find openings in the slot. They buy time by keeping the puck away from defenders. They take advantage of a tendency players have trouble shaking: watching the puck.

"If you have time and space like this," Pastrnak said, referring to his Zacha setup in Columbus, "you definitely try to look for the guy in the middle with the one-timer. Instead of forcing it to Geeks, for example, because it's his off side. That's definitely not there. So you definitely look first for the one-timer in the slot. If everything closes off, then you think about O-zone possession. Maybe go low to high to the D's and create some movement around."

Pastrnak's first job is scoring goals. But in their time as teammates, Carlo noticed that he takes just as much pleasure in making plays from behind the net. Carlo has not played against his former team since being traded but does not enjoy the idea of having to defend Pastrnak in this situation.

"You probably look up and you're like, 'Oh f—, it's Pasta,'" Carlo said.

The Athletic / How ‘incredible’ Jake O’Brien became one of the 2025 NHL Draft’s top prospects

By Scott Wheeler- March 17, 2025

Jake O’Brien is the reigning OHL Rookie of the Year. After leading all OHL rookies with 64 points in 61 games last season at 16, he’s chasing 100 points and a top-10 finish in OHL scoring at 17 this season.

He’s got a chance to be a top-10 pick in the 2025 NHL Draft, too. NHL Central Scouting slotted him eighth among North American skaters on their midterm rankings.

And he has ascended to the top of the 2025 class as a center, as one of the youngest top prospects in the draft because of his June 16 birthday, as an alternate captain and without his Brantford Bulldogs running mate, Blackhawks first-rounder Marek Vanacker, for much of the season.

Jay McKee, the Bulldogs’ head coach, told The Athletic that O’Brien has been “incredible” in his two years in the OHL. He talks about an “elite, elite hockey IQ,” about how games just “flow and slow down for him,” and about how he “sees plays developing before they happen.” He talks about his passing ability, his deceptiveness, his unpredictability, how coachable he is, a shot that has improved and his leadership.

But most of all, he talks about his love for the game.

And that part he comes by honestly.

Jake O’Brien playing in the 2024 CHL/USA Prospects Challenge. (Eric Young / CHL)

Hockey was always going to find Jake O’Brien.

His dad, Dan O’Brien, played four seasons at Clarkson University and one in the ECHL.

His mom, Amy Turek, was a captain at Laurier University and reached the pinnacle of the game as a member of the Canadian national women’s team from 1999 to 2000. She also represented Canada at the 2003 and 2004 Inline Hockey World Championships, winning a gold and a silver. After her playing career, she opened Victory Hockey School, offering summer, holiday and March break hockey programs to girls from an all-female coaching staff. Her dad played for the Hamilton Tiger-Cats and won a Grey Cup.

The Tureks at the 50th anniversary of Ed Turek winning the Grey Cup. Left to right: Jake’s sister Maddy O’Brien, Ed Turek, Jake O’Brien, Amy Turek, and Adele Turek. (Courtesy of Amy Turek)

O’Brien grew up in Brooklin, Ont., a suburb northeast of Toronto, and they billeted former NHLer Christian Thomas after he got traded from the London Knights to the Oshawa Generals and Dan reached out to Thomas’ dad, former NHLer Steve (a childhood friend of his), offering to have him at their place.

Though Amy’s hockey school didn’t accept players until age 6 and was originally just for girls, he spent his summers on the ice at her camps starting at 3. Eventually, when O’Brien grew adamant about hockey, she started a boys division and they’d split the ice with boys on one side and girls on the other.

“He’d be there all day, every day, all summer long with the older kids on the ice,” Amy said.

When he wasn’t on the ice with her, he was playing mini sticks, floorball or street hockey at home. At 2, he could sit and watch a full Generals game.

“As long as I can remember, as soon as Jake could walk and talk, he had a hockey stick in his hand. He would take slapshots with this mini stick and a puck in our living room and that’s all he did,” Amy said.

A young Jake O'Brien. (Courtesy of Amy Turek)

By 7 and 8, he was on the streets of Brooklin beating teenagers in games of road hockey, and Dan and Amy started to sense it.

In his first game for the AAA Whitby Wolves, they got blown out by a Toronto team but he dominated and scored the lone goal. That season, coaches from the GTHL teams would try to find him after their games. After they eventually moved to Toronto, he later joined the Toronto Jr. Canadiens. In spring hockey, minor hockey, and eventually internationally, he always won.

At 14, he won the GTHL title. At 15, he finished his minor hockey career by registering 17 points in seven games at the 2023 OHL Cup, winning tournament MVP and leading the Jr. Canadiens to the title. That performance made him the eighth pick in the 2023 OHL draft.

"Ever since Jake was this high," Dan said, lowering his hand to his knee during the intermission of a recent game, "you could tell. I think the whole way along we kind of knew. ... He has always been that kid who has carried the team. And I'm not just saying that from a dad's perspective. I played college and pro and I coached junior, and from a hockey guy he's always had that mentality and the will."

Jake O'Brien with the GTHL atom AAA 2017-18 regular season champions trophy. (Courtesy of Amy Turek)

At 16, O'Brien followed in his mom's footsteps, representing Canada for the first time at the Under 17 World Hockey Challenge. Last summer, shortly after his 17th birthday, he won gold with Hockey Canada at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup — a unique moment for Amy.

"It was always an amazing feeling to wear the jersey, and to see him have the same experiences is really special and to see him standing on the blue line for 'O Canada' with the jersey on is such a memory for me and now I get to experience watching him," Amy said.

Soon, she'll get to experience watching him get drafted into the NHL in Los Angeles in June.

"It's a special time to see the progression and be part of the journey. To experience it as a parent, I just can't wait to be there for him," Amy said.

Ask O'Brien about the people who've had an impact on his young hockey career, and after his parents and his sister Madison (a student at Queen's University), he goes to his skills coaches, Dan Sisca and Leland de Langley, and his strength and conditioning coach Matt Nichol.

Sisca coached the 2006 Jr. Canadiens AAA team and O'Brien was always one of his call-ups from the 2007 age group when someone missed a game through injury, illness or suspension. Because the 2007s always played before the 2006s, Sisca watched O'Brien's games, too. The team invited him to their practices as well. Eventually, Sisca started working with him through the on-ice development work he does with his CAD Sports Group, with O'Brien coming by after school and in the summers for skates.

At an early age, Sisca was always struck by how focused and determined to get better O'Brien was every time he was on the ice.

In atom and peewee, before any of the players had hit puberty, O'Brien was "that special player" who made "everybody around him better." He always had the skating and the IQ, too.

There was a time, though, into the bantam years, when his teammates and opponents all grew, he stopped dominating quite as much and people wondered, "When's he going to hit puberty and get that man strength?" He didn't start growing until minor midget, and he and that Jr. Canadiens team didn't really take off until after Christmas. But once he grew (he's now almost 6-foot-2 and a lean 172 pounds), he pushed them to that OHL Cup win, according to Sisca.

A letter Jake's grandfather, Jack, sent to a friend. (Courtesy of Dan O'Brien)

Throughout, Sisca credited Amy and Dan for never being overbearing hockey parents.

"They have been through it already so they weren't overly concerned about everything, they were like 'All right, let it take its path when he grows and gets bigger,'" he said. "He has all of the tools, it's obviously going to come." And when you have all of the tools and then you actually hit that growth spurt, then it gets to where it is."

And where it is today, Sisca insists, is that "everything that he does (stands out)." At their summer skates, people stop at the glass to watch him do drills because of how skilled he is.

"His edge work is elite. His shot's elite. His stickhandling ability in complicated drills and taking pucks off the wall," Sisca said. "No matter who he is skating with, whether he's skating with NHL players now or other OHL players, his skill set in a skills session is like a wow factor."

de Langley has seen the same things in their skates, too. He saw O'Brien play a few times with the Jr. Canadiens but last summer was their first full offseason skating together: two to three times a week for four months.

Watching him in U16 play, de Langley saw the ability but also the demeanor and attitude to excel at the next level. Now he has seen the practice habits and maturity firsthand as well.

"I was like, 'Oh, OK, s—, this guy's focus is laser sharp, laser sharp.' And in summer training a lot of guys can take it easy, but he's always looking to get better and he's a sponge where he's able to do things and learn from mistakes in practices, and he can just keep building off of it. That's why he's a leader on his team. That's why he was a leader at the (OHL) prospects game. And that's why I truly believe he's going to have a long career and potentially be a future captain one day," de Langley said. "So I'm not surprised at all by the season he's been having. Nothing seems to overwhelm or faze him."

On the ice, O'Brien is a cut above in de Langley's small-area games and decision-making drills.

"He has this knack for time and space," de Langley said. "He's very smooth. He's effortless. His two-way game right now is exceptional. The sky really is the limit for him. He's really going to be able to produce offensively but it's his two-way game and that defensive aspect that's really going to help him excel. I know a lot of people compare him to a Ryan O'Reilly or an even more high-end Phillip Danault where you can just trust these guys in all situations. There's still so much room for him to grow into his body from a physical maturity standpoint, too, and that's only going to help him."

O'Brien at the 2024 CHL/USA Prospects Challenge. (Eric Young / CHL)

Over the last two years, O'Brien has worked on that physical piece with Nichol both through the Bulldogs and in the offseason.

"He's muscular and strong and fit, but he does have a very slight frame and he's quite aware of that so it's always been something that's on his radar," Nichol said. "Everyone's got their areas of focus and it's been one and will probably continue to be one for him."

Nichol's also quick to point out, though, that "it's not bodybuilding, it's hockey," and that he shouldn't just add weight for the sake of adding weight.

And while weightlifting is still a big part of the work Nichol and O'Brien do together, so is other athletic training. And when they do things outside of the gym, the body control and spatial awareness that people talk about in hockey terms also stand out in other settings and sports.

“Some people just have a little bit more (athleticism) to start off with than others and he’s definitely got that,” Nichol said.

Nichol has also seen him come out of his shell.

“As proud of him as I am for his statistics on the ice, I think the thing that I’m even more proud to see is that he has taken on a leadership role with his team,” Nichol said. “(O’Brien) has always been a wonderful kid and extremely coachable and hardworking and polite and respectful, and I never like to label people as shy because I don’t know if I’m qualified for that, but he was definitely a quieter kid. And he has really come into that and his play has always spoke for itself and his leadership by example has always been there but he has also taken on a more vocal leadership role within the team and you can see that in the gym as well, encouraging others and he’s got some guys that he’s bringing along and pushing and that’s cool to see.”

The focus that Sisca, de Langley and Nichol all talk about is something Amy said he has had since he was little.

Though he never saw her play, she said he has always been a lot like her in that way. He’s the same way with everything that he does, whether it’s hockey or staying out all day muskie fishing to try to catch that 50-incher.

“He’s really routine-oriented. And he has always had really good habits. Like at a young age he had really good habits as far as eating properly, and working hard, and being the hardest worker on the ice, and setting goals and striving to achieve those goals, so I never had to bug him to try to work extra on his shot or anything else. He was always doing the extra stuff,” Amy said, smiling.

“Anything he does he jumps in with two feet. He just wants to be great at anything he does.”

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: Dissecting the East wild-card race

By ESPN staff- March 16, 2025

Each of the teams in the Eastern Conference playoff mix has 15 to 17 games remaining in the regular season.

Three teams in the Atlantic Division have all but clinched their spots -- the Florida Panthers, Toronto Maple Leafs and Tampa Bay Lightning -- and two from the Metro are essentially shoo-ins, the Washington Capitals and Carolina Hurricanes. The New Jersey Devils are knocking on that door, and a current three-game winning streak certainly helps.

The Ottawa Senators have opened up a nice gap as the first wild card, with 75 points and 26 regulation wins in 65 games. Beyond them, things get interesting.

The Columbus Blue Jackets technically are in the second wild-card spot thanks to getting to 70 points in fewer games played (65) than the New York Rangers (66). The Montreal Canadiens (69 points) are right behind them, followed by the Detroit Red Wings and Boston Bruins, both with 68 points.

If it comes down to the regulation-wins tiebreaker at season's end, the Rangers have an upper hand over all the rest, with 29 in that column, compared with 23 for the Jackets, Red Wings and Bruins, and just 22 for the Habs.

Four of the five teams are in action Saturday:

The Bruins host the Lightning at 7 p.m. (ESPN+)

The Canadiens host the Panthers also at 7 p.m. (NHL Network)

The Blue Jackets face the visiting Rangers also at 7 p.m. (ESPN+)

And if they have their sights set on catching the Senators, these clubs are all rooting for the Maple Leafs, who host Ottawa (7 p.m., ESPN+). It's a great night for multiple streaming devices!

There is a lot of runway left until April 17, the final day of the regular season, and 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 StatHletes.

Jump ahead:

Current playoff matchups

Today's schedule

Yesterday's scores

Expanded standings

Race for No. 1 pick

Current playoff matchups

Eastern Conference

A1 Florida Panthers vs. WC1 Ottawa Senators

A2 Toronto Maple Leafs vs. A3 Tampa Bay Lightning

M1 Washington Capitals vs. WC2 Columbus Blue Jackets

M2 Carolina Hurricanes vs. M3 New Jersey Devils

Western Conference

C1 Winnipeg Jets vs. WC2 Calgary Flames

C2 Dallas Stars vs. C3 Colorado Avalanche

P1 Vegas Golden Knights vs. WC1 Minnesota Wild

P2 Edmonton Oilers vs. P3 Los Angeles Kings

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).

Vegas Golden Knights at Buffalo Sabres, 12:30 p.m.

New Jersey Devils at Pittsburgh Penguins, 3 p.m. (ABC/ESPN+)

Washington Capitals at San Jose Sharks, 5 p.m.

Tampa Bay Lightning at Boston Bruins, 7 p.m.

Ottawa Senators at Toronto Maple Leafs, 7 p.m.

Florida Panthers at Montreal Canadiens, 7 p.m. (NHLN)

Carolina Hurricanes at Philadelphia Flyers, 7 p.m.

New York Rangers at Columbus Blue Jackets, 7 p.m.

St. Louis Blues at Minnesota Wild, 8 p.m.

Nashville Predators at Los Angeles Kings, 8 p.m.

Chicago Blackhawks at Vancouver Canucks, 10 p.m.

Friday's scoreboard

Carolina Hurricanes 4, Detroit Red Wings 2

Edmonton Oilers 2, New York Islanders 1 (OT)

Winnipeg Jets 4, Dallas Stars 1

Colorado Avalanche 4, Calgary Flames 2

Anaheim Ducks 2, Nashville Predators 1

Seattle Kraken 4, Utah Hockey Club 2

Expanded standings

Atlantic Division

Florida Panthers

Points: 85

Regulation wins: 35

Playoff position: A1
Games left: 16
Points pace: 105.6
Next game: @ MTL (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Toronto Maple Leafs
Points: 81
Regulation wins: 31
Playoff position: A2
Games left: 17
Points pace: 102.2
Next game: vs. OTT (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Tampa Bay Lightning
Points: 79
Regulation wins: 32
Playoff position: A3
Games left: 17
Points pace: 99.7
Next game: @ BOS (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 99.8%
Tragic number: N/A
Ottawa Senators
Points: 75
Regulation wins: 26
Playoff position: WC1
Games left: 17
Points pace: 94.6
Next game: @ TOR (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 98.7%
Tragic number: N/A

Montreal Canadiens

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 22

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 17

Points pace: 87.1

Next game: vs. FLA (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 10%

Tragic number: 34

Detroit Red Wings

Points: 68

Regulation wins: 23

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 16

Points pace: 84.5

Next game: vs. VGK (Sunday)

Playoff chances: 11.1%

Tragic number: 31

Boston Bruins

Points: 68

Regulation wins: 23

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 15

Points pace: 83.2

Next game: vs. TB (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 8%

Tragic number: 29

Buffalo Sabres

Points: 56

Regulation wins: 21

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 18

Points pace: 71.8

Next game: vs. VGK (Saturday)

Playoff chances: ~0%

Tragic number: 23

Metro Division

Washington Capitals

Points: 94

Regulation wins: 36

Playoff position: M1

Games left: 16

Points pace: 116.8

Next game: @ SJ (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Carolina Hurricanes

Points: 84

Regulation wins: 35

Playoff position: M2

Games left: 16

Points pace: 104.4

Next game: @ PHI (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

New Jersey Devils

Points: 78

Regulation wins: 32

Playoff position: M3

Games left: 15

Points pace: 95.5

Next game: @ PIT (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 97.1%

Tragic number: N/A

Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 70

Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: WC2
Games left: 17
Points pace: 88.3
Next game: vs. NYR (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 19.2%
Tragic number: N/A
New York Rangers
Points: 70
Regulation wins: 29
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 16
Points pace: 87.0
Next game: @ CBJ (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 41%
Tragic number: 33
New York Islanders
Points: 66
Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 17
Points pace: 83.3
Next game: vs. FLA (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 12.7%
Tragic number: 31
Philadelphia Flyers
Points: 64
Regulation wins: 17
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 15
Points pace: 78.3
Next game: vs. CAR (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 1.7%

Tragic number: 25
Pittsburgh Penguins
Points: 64
Regulation wins: 18
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 14
Points pace: 77.2
Next game: vs. NJ (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 0.6%
Tragic number: 23
Central Division
Winnipeg Jets
Points: 96
Regulation wins: 38
Playoff position: C1
Games left: 15
Points pace: 117.5
Next game: @ SEA (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Dallas Stars
Points: 86
Regulation wins: 35
Playoff position: C2
Games left: 17
Points pace: 108.5
Next game: @ COL (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Colorado Avalanche
Points: 83
Regulation wins: 35
Playoff position: C3

Games left: 15
Points pace: 101.6
Next game: vs. DAL (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Minnesota Wild
Points: 79
Regulation wins: 29
Playoff position: WC1
Games left: 16
Points pace: 98.2
Next game: vs. STL (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 94.6%
Tragic number: N/A
St. Louis Blues
Points: 69
Regulation wins: 22
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 16
Points pace: 85.7
Next game: @ MIN (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 22.7%
Tragic number: 31
Utah Hockey Club
Points: 69
Regulation wins: 21
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 16
Points pace: 85.7
Next game: @ VAN (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 31.8%
Tragic number: 31
Nashville Predators

Points: 57
Regulation wins: 21
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 17
Points pace: 71.9
Next game: @ LA (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 0.1%
Tragic number: 21
Chicago Blackhawks
Points: 49
Regulation wins: 17
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 16
Points pace: 60.9
Next game: @ VAN (Saturday)
Playoff chances: ~0%
Tragic number: 11
Pacific Division
Vegas Golden Knights
Points: 85
Regulation wins: 36
Playoff position: P1
Games left: 17
Points pace: 107.2
Next game: @ BUF (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Edmonton Oilers
Points: 80
Regulation wins: 27
Playoff position: P2
Games left: 16
Points pace: 99.4

Next game: @ NYR (Sunday)

Playoff chances: 99.4%

Tragic number: N/A

Los Angeles Kings

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 31

Playoff position: P3

Games left: 18

Points pace: 101.2

Next game: vs. NSH (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 99.4%

Tragic number: N/A

Calgary Flames

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 24

Playoff position: WC2

Games left: 17

Points pace: 89.6

Next game: @ TOR (Monday)

Playoff chances: 29.2%

Tragic number: N/A

Vancouver Canucks

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 23

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 17

Points pace: 89.6

Next game: vs. CHI (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 22.9%

Tragic number: 35

Anaheim Ducks

Points: 65

Regulation wins: 21

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 16

Points pace: 80.8

Next game: @ STL (Sunday)

Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 27

Seattle Kraken

Points: 62

Regulation wins: 23

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 15

Points pace: 75.9

Next game: vs. WPG (Sunday)

Playoff chances: ~0%

Tragic number: 22

San Jose Sharks

Points: 45

Regulation wins: 13

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 15

Points pace: 55.1

Next game: vs. WSH (Saturday)

Playoff chances: ~0%

Tragic number: 5

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: 45

Regulation wins: 13

2. Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 49

Regulation wins: 17

3. Buffalo Sabres

Points: 56

Regulation wins: 21

4. Nashville Predators

Points: 57

Regulation wins: 21

5. Seattle Kraken

Points: 62

Regulation wins: 23

6. Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 64

Regulation wins: 17

7. Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 64

Regulation wins: 18

8. Anaheim Ducks

Points: 65

Regulation wins: 21

9. New York Islanders

Points: 66

Regulation wins: 23

10. Boston Bruins

Points: 68

Regulation wins: 23

11. Detroit Red Wings

Points: 68

Regulation wins: 23

12. Utah Hockey Club

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 21

13. Montreal Canadiens

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 22

14. St. Louis Blues

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 22

15. New York Rangers

Points: 70

Regulation wins: 29

16. Vancouver Canucks

Points: 71

Regulation wins: 23

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: Inside the Western wild-card race

By ESPN staff- March 17, 2025

Reactions

Though it lacks the volume of teams in close proximity like the Eastern Conference wild-card race, the Western derby is no less wild. Sunday's action will provide yet another clue as to who will earn the final spot in that half of the postseason bracket.

Heading into Sunday's slate, the Minnesota Wild appear pretty well locked in to the the first wild-card spot, with 79 points and 29 regulation wins through 67 games. But who gets the second one?

Right now it's the Vancouver Canucks, with 73 points and 24 RW in 66 games. They're taking on the Utah Hockey Club on Sunday (8 p.m. ET, ESPN+). Once past that game, they'll play eight games of their final 15 against playoff teams.

Next up are the Calgary Flames, with 71 points and 24 RW in 65 games. They are idle on Sunday and will play against teams currently in playoff position in nine of their final 17 contests.

The St. Louis Blues are also two behind the Canucks in points, with 23 RW through 67 games. Jordan Binnington & Co. host the Anaheim Ducks (6 p.m. ET, ESPN+), then play just four of their final 14 against teams in playoff spots.

Speaking of the UHC, following Sunday's game against the Canucks, seven of the remaining 15 games are against current playoff-positioned clubs.

Stathead gives the Canucks the best playoff chances of the group (31.1%), followed by the Blues (30.2%), Hockey Club (22.4%) and Flames (20.2%). The "prize" for the team that wins this race is likely a first-round matchup with the Winnipeg Jets, but upsets do happen!

There is a lot of runway left until April 17, the final day of the regular season, and 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.

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.

[Sportsnet.ca / NHL Playoff Push: How deadline moves altered contenders' potential paths to Cup Final](#)

By Sonny Sachdeva- March 16, 2025

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Florida Panthers

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

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

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

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

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

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

Carolina Hurricanes

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

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

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

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

Winnipeg Jets

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

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

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

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

Dallas Stars

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

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

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

Vegas Golden Knights

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

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

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

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