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## Columbus Dispatch / Replay: Pittsburgh Penguins upend Columbus Blue Jackets 3-1

**By Lori Schmidt – October 4, 2024**

Cole Sillinger's goal was the only tally for the Blue Jackets tonight at Nationwide Arena. Columbus outshot Pittsburgh 35-24.

Left alone in front of the Blue Jackets' net, Gruden got his stick on a pass from Joonas Koppanen and redirected the puck past Merzlikins at 4:56 of the third to give the Penguins a 2-1 lead. Almost four minutes earlier, Yegor Chinakhov rang a shot off the left post 1:09 into the third that nearly broke the 1-1 tie for Columbus.

The attempted shot was so close that it briefly fooled Nationwide Arena's game-ops staff, which played and quickly stopped the first few words of the Jackets' goal song. No errant cannon blast followed.

Despite continuing to dominate puck possession for most of the second period, the Blue Jackets couldn't extend their lead from the first and allowed the Penguins to pull even on Puustinen's goal 4:52 into it. The goal capped a strong opening five minutes for Pittsburgh, but Columbus dictated action the rest of the way.

Natural Stat Trick has the Blue Jackets with commanding 5-on-5 advantages in the second period in attempts (20-9), unblocked attempts (14-7) and shots on goal (11-2). The Blue Jackets will start the third with a 20-12 advantage in shots.

The Blue Jackets announced in the second that forward Dmitri Voronkov wouldn't return due to an undisclosed upper-body injury. The Russian power forward logged only one 15-second shift early in the first, his first and only shift, and didn't return.

"He's still getting evaluated," Evason said after the game. "Upper-body ... and we'll wait and see what happens after he sees the 'docs' here tonight and (Friday)."

Voronkov scored 18 goals for the Blue Jackets as a rookie last season, and he reported to training camp about 20 pounds lighter than at this time last year. Should he miss extended time, it will be a tough hole to fill at left wing on the third forward line.

Pittsburgh controlled play starting the second and finally knotted it 1-1 on Puustinen's tally at 4:52 of the period. Ville Koivunen and Tristan Broz assisted on the play, which capped a span that included the Blue Jackets turning the puck over in their own zone.

A little more than a minute before allowing the goal, Merzlikins needed help from the crossbar to keep an attempt from Jesse Puljujarvi from tying it.

After 20 minutes, the Blue Jackets held a 1-0 lead thanks to Sillinger's third goal of the preseason.

Pittsburgh outshot Columbus 10-9 in the opening frame, but Columbus launched more attempts (19-15) and had the puck more. That was the expectation in this game, which featured most of the Jackets' NHL roster matched up against an AHL-heavy Penguins lineup.

According to Natural Stat Trick, the Blue Jackets finished the first with a 58.3% edge in 5-on-5 attempts (14-10) and 64.7% advantage in unblocked attempts (11-6) in the first. Scoring chances at 5-on-5 were even (5-5), while the Penguins held a slight edge in high-danger chances (2-1). Merzlikins, who has played well in the preseason, stopped all 10 shots he faced.

"I thought out best (period) was the first," Sillinger said. "We were playing fast, playing simple, we were getting looks and we weren't giving up much."

Johnson continues to impress, setting up Sillinger's goal with a cross-ice return feed to set up his fellow 2021 first-round draftee's third preseason goal. It was Sillinger's first non empty-net goal, scoring with a quick snap shot from the right wing at 7:24 of the first period.

On the play, Sillinger came out of the penalty box to join a rush in progress. He got the puck and pulled off a give-and-go with Johnson, who sent it right back from the left wing. Sillinger fired the puck into the top right corner past Penguins goalie Tristan Jarry, who was out of position.

"I just was happy when he got out of the box," Johnson said. "He made a nice little break there and I kind of knew it was going to be a 3-on-2 if I sprinted. I knew he was going to hit me if I was the late guy, and I'd probably be going right back to him if it was open. I was happy to give it back to him because I know he's going to score that every time."

The assist was Johnson's fourth of the preseason and fifth point in four games. He also has one goal. Sillinger, who's centering the third line, has 3-0-3 in four game.

At 7:24 of the first period, Sillinger scored with an even-strength snap shot set up by a slick return feed from Johnson to cap a 3-on-2 rush. Ivan Provorov registered the second assist, helping the Blue Jackets take a quick 1-0 lead on the Penguins.

Did Sillinger know his pass would come right back?

"Uh, yeah, I did," he said. "That's just 'KJ.'"

## Columbus Dispatch / USA Hockey national teams to wear helmet decals honoring Gaudreau brothers

**By Brian Hedger – October 4, 2024**

The U.S. governing organization for ice hockey, USA Hockey, announced Thursday that all of its national teams will wear a helmet sticker this season honoring Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau.

The brothers were killed Aug. 29 while biking near their hometown in South Jersey, leaving the Blue Jackets, NHL and the sport of hockey grieving. Both brothers played in the United States Hockey League junior circuit, collegiately with Boston College and then at the professional level, with Johnny Gaudreau, the elder of the two, becoming an NHL and international star.

Last spring, he played for the U.S. in Czechia and became the country's career leader in points (43) and assists (30) during world championship play. He reached those marks with an impressive 3-8-11 in eight games during his final tournament.

The sticker logo designed for U.S. teams features the name "Gaudreau" in white set over a blue background with stars from the U.S. flag plus the brothers' numbers (13 and 21) in red. It will be displayed on the back of U.S. helmets.

The Gaudreus will also be honored by the Blue Jackets and NHL with helmet decals featuring those numbers. The Blue Jackets will keep their decals all season, while the other 31 NHL teams will display their logos from the start of the regular season Friday through Oct. 24, when the Los Angeles Kings host the league's last home opener.

National teams at all levels within USA Hockey will wear the Gaudreau decal for all tournaments and season play, including two teams that play under the direction of the U.S. National Team Development Program in Plymouth, Michigan.

The Blue Jackets honored the Gaudreau brothers with a video being shown at all NHL arenas plus a 13-second moment of silence prior to their first home preseason game. The team will host another pregame memorial before facing the Florida Panthers in their Oct. 15 home opener at Nationwide Arena.

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets preseason: 5 questions for GM Don Waddell

By Brian Hedger – October 4, 2024

The Blue Jackets' preseason is already winding down.

After back-to-back games Thursday and Friday against the Pittsburgh Penguins — the first at home and second at PPG Paints Arena — that'll do it for their eight-game exhibition slate. The front office will huddle with the coaching staff, final decisions will be made on the opening roster before the NHL's 5 p.m. Monday deadline and then it's onto the first week of the regular season.

Everything in this league moves fast.

It's barely been a month since Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were killed while biking near their hometown in South Jersey, which collectively shattered the Blue Jackets' hearts just a few weeks before training camp. Now, they're heading into a new season without him, at least in the physical sense.

Gaudreau is still with the Blue Jackets in spirit, and that has sparked positivity around their locker room. It's only the preseason, but they've won four of their first six exhibition games and have watched some of their most talented youngsters lead the way. There's also a new coach in Dean Evason, new systems, new approaches and a new president of hockey operations/general manager in Don Waddell — who has reshaped the Jackets' organizational depth chart since taking over in late May.

The Blue Jackets are already being written off by pundits, but external negativity hasn't seeped an inch into their minds.

"The spirit of the team has been great," Waddell said. "That's the one thing that I worry about, and the atmosphere in the locker room is very, very good. The guys know what's coming up in front of them, but what I like is that some of our young guys look like they're ready to take that next step."

That, of course, will be determined in a regular season that's fast approaching. As we await its start, here are five mid-camp questions for the Jackets' GM:

### **Will the Blue Jackets trade for an NHL forward?**

Well, they certainly have enough room to add a significant salary or two via the trade market. According to PuckPedia, the Blue Jackets have roughly \$23.6 million in cap space with 21 of the NHL's maximum 23 roster spots filled.

That's after signing veteran forward James van Riemsdyk prior to camp, which is a strong position from the business standpoint. It's also indicative of how much talent the Blue Jackets are missing without Gaudreau and Laine, who's dealing with a significant knee injury in Montreal now. Having lots of cap space, however, comes with its drawbacks this time of year.

Opposing GMs are looking to offload salary for their own compliance with the upper end of the cap's limits, but the offers Waddell is getting aren't exactly appealing.

"It's heating up, but everybody's trying to be my friend and send me players that I don't want," Waddell said. "We're listening and I'm talking to a lot of teams, but I send a list every day to my pro (scouts) and say, 'These are the guys that are available,' and nobody is jumping up and down yet."

The Blue Jackets were granted an exemption Monday by the NHL and NHL Players' Association that allows them to start the season under the salary minimum of \$65 million, so that will help Waddell wait the process out.

"We can be patient," he said. "I'm not forced to go out and get a bad contract just to get over the (floor)."

### **Will Justin Danforth be ready to start the season?**

Waddell doesn't expect for Danforth, who had wrist surgery in the spring, to be ready for the start of the regular season. He's currently skating with other injured players, hasn't played any preseason games and needs more time to get back into playing form.

The good news is that Danforth was cleared by a doctor at the outset of camp to resume stickhandling and shooting. It's just going to take more time to be fully recovered. Danforth will likely start the year on injured reserve, leaving a void on a fourth line that includes Sean Kuraly and Mathieu Olivier. The Blue Jackets have two roster spots to fill, at least, if they keep 13 forwards.

Owen Sillinger, Dylan Gambrell and Mikael Pyyhtia lead the pack of internal candidates, but Gavin Brindley and Luca Del Bel Belluz each impressed this preseason. Unfortunately for Brindley, he's now out contention with a broken finger sustained Tuesday in St. Louis. Brindley was moved to IR Thursday and will miss an estimated four-to-six weeks.

"Right now, whoever's coming into that fourth line, it's going to be who's the best guy for that fourth line," Waddell said. "It may not be the best player right now. It's 'Who's the best guy for that line?' is how we're looking at it if we don't add something in the next few days."

### **Will the Blue Jackets be compliant with the NHL's salary cap 'floor' before Oct. 7?**

The Jackets aren't required to get over the cap floor due to the NHL and NHLPA exemption, but Waddell said they could exceed the minimum by about \$300,000 without adding external help.

This could be accomplished by sending a 23-man roster, including some combination of 13 healthy forwards, to the NHL before the 5 p.m., Oct. 7 deadline. Should Pyyhtia and Owen Sillinger be two of those forwards, hypothetically, the Blue Jackets' cap figure would total a little more than \$65.3 million.

Waddell could also get his payroll over the floor through trades, waiver claims or free agency. What it all means is the biggest decisions ahead for the executive suite and coaching staff will be determining what's best for younger NHL prospects versus what's best for the current NHL roster.

### **Has Denton Mateychuk done enough to make the Blue Jackets' roster?**

The answer for most assessing from outside the team is yes, without a doubt. Mateychuk has impressed by showing poise, not compounding his mistakes and displaying a knack for contributing offensively.

It's just that he's competing with three older left-handed depth defensemen for time on the third pairing — Jordan Harris, Jack Johnson and Jake Christiansen — and there's a sense among the front office and coaches that Mateychuk's best starting point may be AHL Cleveland.

"There's always a shot (Mateychuk makes the NHL roster), but you've got to remember this is preseason, and they're not always playing against the best players with the highest intensities," Waddell said. "Young players, especially defensemen, it's hard for these kids. You've got to be careful, because we want him to be a Blue Jacket for the next 15 years, not just the next three months."

### **What's the latest on Blue Jackets prospects Jordan Dumais and Cayden Lindstrom?**

Dumais has a sports hernia that requires surgery, so he's back in Montreal awaiting that procedure.

The undersized, highly skilled forward will also do most of his post-op rehab work in Montreal, his hometown, before returning to play for AHL Cleveland. The expected recovery timeframe is three months after surgery, which is expected to happen next week. Dumais' hernia last season cost him significant time with the Halifax Mooseheads of the Quebec Maritimes Junior Hockey League, but it wasn't the same type of hernia repair.

This time, the issue is a more common sports hernia repair. Dumais is also awaiting a trial next June on impaired driving charges.

Lindstrom, the fourth overall pick in this year's draft, continues to skate with other injured players and make improvements with his back rehab. He remains one of the only unsigned North American prospects from the 2024 first round, but Waddell said that's essentially a formality. The biggest focus right now is getting Lindstrom ready for another junior season with the Medicine Hat Tigers of the Western Hockey League.

He's the only junior-eligible player left, but only because of his ongoing rehab process.

"He's doing really good," Waddell said. "He's doing a lot more in the gym now, and, again, we're going to be as cautious as we possibly can be with this guy. We never expected him to play here this year, so we want to make sure we get him 100% healthy if, and when, we send him back."

## [BlueJackets.com / Evason ready to put his stamp on the Blue Jackets](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – October 4, 2024

Of all the decisions Don Waddell faced in his first summer as Blue Jackets president of hockey operations and general manager – and there were many – there was one above all he had to get right.

The head coaching position.

It didn't come together as quickly as some Blue Jackets fans would have preferred, but Waddell and his front office took their time to make sure they hired the right person. In the end, the Blue Jackets brass settled on Dean Evason.

It wasn't just his success in Minnesota, where Evason made four playoff appearances and amassed the seventh-best points percentage of any coach in NHL history with at least 250 games. It wasn't just his 25 years as a coach at all different levels, or the passion and intensity he brings.

Indeed, what separated Evason was his drive to be behind this particular bench.

"Every time I talked to him, I felt the passion to coach, but the passion to coach the Blue Jackets," Waddell said. "That was important to me. Everybody wants a head job and all that, but you want somebody that wants to be with your team."

Throughout training camp, presented by OhioHealth, that much is clear. Evason has brought a renewed energy to the Blue Jackets, with his relentless but fair style pushing the team on the ice.

Off of it, putting on the union blue coach's jacket each day has brought him energy in his second chance at a head coaching job.

"I'm very proud to represent not only the Columbus Blue Jackets but Columbus and the state of Ohio," Evason said. "It's one thing to build relationships with the players, which I personally want to do, but I also would like to build a relationship with the fans.

"It doesn't necessarily mean one-on-one, but they understand how our group is going to play, they understand how our coaching staff is going to coach. You build that trust in them that we are going to work hard every single night."

Through his first few weeks in charge of the Blue Jackets, that has been Evason's promise – that the team won't win every game, but it will show up every night and deliver a strong effort.

How does he plan to get that out of the Blue Jackets?

### **A Clean Slate**

Evason was hired in late July to take over in Columbus, giving him two months to learn what he wanted to learn about the squad before training camp. Video coaches Dan Singleton and Aron Augustitus sent him clips of his new players, and the Blue Jackets return excellent resources in assistant coaches Steve McCarthy and Jared Boll.

Yet Evason has been adamant that poring over video or inhaling scouting reports wasn't on his mind. Instead, he came to camp hoping to learn about his new charges in person, preferring to give each player a clean slate to work with.

"I don't care what happened last year," Evason said. "I don't care how a player played last year. I care how they're prepared this year, how they're going to play for our hockey club this upcoming season.



Why was that his approach?

“I just want to create the relationships and build relationships with a fresh start,” Evason said. “My opening conversation with the group was that everyone has a clean slate, and I wanted to be forthcoming with that. I didn’t ask for personalities. I didn’t ask how they played. I didn’t watch video. I just wanted to make sure that everybody truly had a clean slate moving forward.”

While from the outside, it may have appeared the Blue Jackets needed major changes after missing the postseason for the past four years, that’s not what Evason found when he arrived.

Injuries and a turn to youth on the roster have been major factors in the Blue Jackets’ struggles in the standings the past few years, but Evason was comforted by what he inherited in the locker room when he arrived. Not only are those young players set to make jumps forward given the experience they’ve gained the past few years, but there’s also a core of veterans who have helped create a strong atmosphere in the locker room.

That bond has only increased in the last few weeks as the team has come together following the passing of Johnny Gaudreau, and Evason sees a team and a culture that are in place to help the Blue Jackets both on and off the ice.

“A lot of people have talked about, ‘Oh, we have to change the culture in Columbus,’ and this and that,” Evason said. “I came into a situation where these guys are close-knit already. I think it’s a huge credit to our leadership group.”

Still, Evason has been looking for little ways to continue to drive home the team culture. Upon arriving in Columbus, he noticed that each player had a photo of himself placed above their locker in the room; Evason’s mandate was to make sure that there would be no individual photos – players were to be featured with their teammates instead.

In addition, while seats in the room were previously separated by position group, Evason wanted forwards and defensemen to be mixed together in order to build more personal relationships.

“It’s a subtle change, and I think it’s been a big change,” Waddell said. “It goes a long way.”

### **What He’s Looking For**

When it came to finding a new head coach, Waddell certainly did his due diligence. Some of that included putting a lot of trust in Rick Nash, the Blue Jackets legend who was recently promoted to director of hockey operations for the club.

Nash served as the general manager of Team Canada at this spring’s IIHF World Championship, and it just so happened that Evason was one of the assistant coaches for the squad. That time together in Czechia allowed Nash the opportunity to see Evason’s coaching style up close, and Nash came away impressed.

“I got to spend a month with Dean at the Worlds,” he said. “I got to know him well over there. He’s intense, he’s got a lot of personality to him, and he demands hard work in practice, hard work in games. That’s why most of his teams hardly ever get outworked.”

The Blue Jackets players already seem to be bought in. It helps that Evason brings a track record of success, and their early dealings with him show a coach that knows how to get the most out of his team.

“He demands respect,” Werenski said. “He’s been around for so long. Just the way he carries himself and how honest he is, you can’t not respect the guy. The way he approaches things, the way he’s been fair to all of us so far, I can’t say enough good things about it.”

Added captain Boone Jenner: “It’s been great getting to know Dean. It’s exciting for our group. We’re going to play as a team, we’re going to play for each other. I think that’s where our foundation needs to start. We can build on that, but he brings that experience and he’s been around the game for a long, long time and knows a lot about it and how to get a team together. We’re excited for that.”

On the ice, that means installing a system in a clear and concise manner. When it comes to systems and what is expected on the ice, Evason’s goal has been to reduce any confusion in what he’s looking for from his players.

“He’s been coaching pretty much as long as I’ve been alive, to be honest,” Werenski said. “He was really good in Minnesota. Obviously they struggled a little bit last year, but after having conversations with him, the one thing that I gathered was, it’s just black and white. He’s gonna tell you how it is. There’s no gray areas. And I think that makes it easy as a player, when you’re not thinking too much. You just know what’s right, know what’s wrong. It allows you to go out there and play and it frees you up a bit.”

Evason would likely smile were he to hear that comment from Werenski.

“You want to push them to get better,” Evason said. “I know what players want is less gray. They want black and white – ‘Here’s the deal. This is how things are going to go, and if you do it that way, you get rewarded. If you don’t, you don’t.’ Simple as that.”

### **A Team Atmosphere**

When each day’s practice is complete, the Blue Jackets like most NHL teams now form a stretching circle around center ice.

As the players stretch their legs, Evason skates around the entirety of the circle and gives each of the Blue Jackets a tap on the back with his stick. It’s a coach’s way to show his appreciation for a hard day’s work.

“It’s one of those little things,” defenseman Damon Severson said. “The confirmation that it was a good day. If the coach is saying, ‘All right boys, stretch out and finish,’ and he gets off the ice, it’s probably not a good thing. He might not be super happy with that. But he’s giving guys a whack, the odd chirp flies in with certain guys that maybe made a mistake or did something funny in practice, it’s a good way to end the day.”

While Evason clearly expects a lot of his players on the ice, one of the most underrated parts of his approach might be his personality. With a 13-year NHL playing career that began in 1984 and a coaching career that started in 1999, Evason has spent four decades in locker rooms, and he has an intimate knowledge of how they operate.

Part of that means speaking in the language of the room, which means not being afraid to have fun with his players.

“He likes to joke around, chirp guys,” Werenski said. “It comes with playing in the NHL. We’re all chirping each other in the room. That’s what happens when you’re around each other every day. He fits right in, in that aspect. All our coaches do. It’s been really good having these guys around and having some new faces in here. It’s a little bit different from years past. I’ve really enjoyed it so far.”

Severson agreed. The longtime NHL defenseman played under Evason at this spring’s Worlds, where Evason ran the defensive corps. When the new coach arrived, Severson joked with Evason – who now spends more time with the forward group – that he was getting a break now that he didn’t have to spend every day under his microscope.

“It just lightens the mood a little bit,” Severson said of Evason’s sense of humor. “He gets his point across that when it’s time to work at the rink, I’m your coach and I’m going to have to be hard on guys sometimes when they’re not pulling their weight. But when it comes time to leave and live our lives away from the rink, it’s a totally different thing.

“Obviously, things aren’t going to always go great no matter how good of a team you are. As long as you’re able to stick together and be able to have those lighthearted moments in a long season, it makes things a little bit easier and makes guys want to play for him that much harder.”

For Evason, that’s all part of being the best coach he can be.

“I think it’s important that you do (build relationships), but then you don’t change if things go sideways,” he said. “If I have to have a firm meeting with a player, if I see him in the parking lot or the hotel lobby or whatever, it’s over. We’ve had our discussion. It’ll be done one-on-one, hopefully correct it, and we move forward. We’re human beings. We’re men. We treat each other properly, I hope the players understand that.”

At the end of the day, Evason has a perspective on how he wants to approach things. While the work has to be put in, there’s still room for enjoying the game.

For someone who has spent his entire life dedicated to the sport, he’s appreciative of the chance to still have an opportunity to be working at the highest level.

“It’s fun,” he said. “Listen, we’re playing a game. It’s fantastic, right? We’re in the NHL. How do you get better than that? We’ve all dreamed of it, and I’m fortunate to still be in it.”

## [BlueJackets.com / Penguins rally to down Blue Jackets in Nationwide](#)

By Garrison McDaniel – October 4, 2024

The Blue Jackets couldn't generate enough offense Thursday night in Nationwide Arena as Pittsburgh took a 3-1 victory in game seven of eight of the preseason.

### Game in a Paragraph

The Blue Jackets got on the board early with a give-and-go goal between Cole Sillinger and Kent Johnson, however they could not generate any further offense as the Penguins battled back. Pittsburgh tied the game in the second and scored the only two goals of the third to hand the Blue Jackets a home loss.

### Quote of the Game

CBJ head coach Dean Evason: "We were doing a lot of really good things, and then we just kind of stalled out and stuck in the second period. They did a good job of checking, competing, collapsing in front of the net."

### CBJ Standouts

- Sillinger scored his third goal of this preseason, one shy of the team lead.
- Johnson set up the opening goal of the game by drawing three Penguins towards him, which opened up Sillinger for the one-timer.
- Elvis Merzlikins played all 60 minutes, stopping 20 of 22 shots in the loss.

### How It Happened

The Blue Jackets got on the board first as Sillinger scored after he stepped out of the box where he was serving a cross-checking penalty. Johnson found him and the two youngsters turned the odd-man rush opportunity into the first and only goal of the opening frame at 7:24.

In the second period, the Penguins got on the board as a play broke down in the Blue Jackets' defensive zone that resulted in a clear shot in the slot on Merzlikins by forward Valtteri Puustinen to make it 1-1 at 4:52. Columbus was unable to reclaim its lead in the period despite outshooting the Penguins 11-2 in the frame.

The Penguins took a 2-1 lead 4:56 into in the third period off a tip-in goal by Jonathan Gruden off an original shot by Joona Koppanen. They were able to hold the Blue Jackets off for the remainder of the period as they claimed their third goal via Kevin Hayes on an empty net in the final minute of play.

### Notable

The Blue Jackets outshot the Penguins 34-24. ... Johnson earned his team-leading fourth assist of the preseason... Merzlikins had a .913 save percentage in this game and is now posting a .931 mark in the preseason.

### Roster Report

The Blue Jackets have started cutting down the roster for opening night, as just 26 healthy players were left on the active roster heading into the night. ... Blue Jackets forward Dmitri Voronkov left the game in the first period with an upper-body injury and did not return.

### Up Next

Columbus is back on the road Friday to take on the Penguins in Pittsburgh at 7 p.m. for its last preseason game.

## The Hockey News / 12 Days Until Opening Night At Nationwide Arena: The History Of Jersey #12

By Jason Newland – October 4, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets have had many players don the Union Blue in its history. The #12 has only been worn a handful of times though. There hasn't been a lot of star power wear #12 either.

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Let's look at the players that have worn the number.

### **Who Wore It First?**

- **Ted Drury** - Drury played a single game for the Jackets during the 00-01 season. He never played another NHL game after Columbus and would retire in 2007 after playing five seasons in Germany. Ted is the brother of former New York Rangers Captain and current President and General Manager of the Rangers, Chris Drury.

### **Who Wore It Last?**

- **Ryan Craig** - Craig played 8 games for the Jackets and had zero points. He was also the Captain of the both the Springfield Falcons and Cleveland Monsters. He retired in 2017 and went into coaching for the Vegas Golden Knights. He is currently the head coach of the AHL's Henderson Silver Knights.

### **Who Wore It Best?**

- **Jiří Novotný** - Novotný played 107 games for the Jackets and had 29 points. He never played another NHL game and left for Europe where he played until 2023. He retired after that last season.

### **Others That Have Worn #12**

- **Sean Pronger** - The brother of Hall of Famer Chris Pronger played 104 games in Columbus and had 17 points. He retired in 2005 after playing in Germany.
- **Mathieu Darche** - Darche played 24 games for the CBJ over their first three seasons, totaling two points. He is now the Assistant General Manager and Director of Hockey Ops for the Tampa Bay Lightning.
- **Mike Blunden** - Played 41 games with the Jackets and totaled 4 points. He retired in 2020 after playing the last two years of his career in Europe.

There are 12 days left until opening night at Nationwide Arena.

## The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Put Gavin Brindley On Injured Reserve

**By Jason Newland – October 4, 2024**

Just when you thought the Jackets were out of the woods on the injury front - The bug strikes again.

The Blue Jackets have put Gavin Brindley on IR today. He will miss 4 to 6 weeks with a broken finger according to the team. On Tuesday night, Brindley had a very nice goal against the St. Louis Blues. He seemed to be in the mix for one of the final forward spots on the big club.

They also announced that they have loaned Ole Julian Bjørgvik-Holm to Cleveland Monsters. Bjørgvik-Holm had yet to appear in a preseason game for the Jackets, and will now report to Cleveland's training camp.

The injury bug must stay away from the CBJ locker room this season.

## The Hockey News / The U.S. National Hockey Teams Will Wear A Special Helmet Sticker To Honor The Gaudreau Brothers

**By Jason Newland – October 4, 2024**

USA Hockey announced today that they will wear a special helmet sticker to honor Johnny & Matthew Gaudreau.

Per a press release, "The decal artwork includes stars floating toward the heavens with the Gaudreau name and the jersey numbers of Johnny (13) and Matthew (21)."

The NHL announced in September that all 32 teams will wear the stickers until October 24th. The Blue Jackets will also wear a special stick for the entire season as well.

Johnny Gaudreau is a TEAM USA legend. Johnny set some records this past summer when he broke the record for most career points by an American during the IIHF World Championships. He also set the record for most career assists in that same game.

Johnny and Matthew's memory continues to be strong.



## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Cole Sillinger Scores, But Blue Jackets Fall 3-1 To Penguins In Preseason Home Finale

By Ed Francis – October 4, 2024

The home portion of the Columbus Blue Jackets' exhibition season came to a close Thursday night, in the form of a 3-1 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins.

### **Here are some of the key takeaways from the defeat:**

- Cole Sillinger continues to have a sensational preseason, scoring his third goal in four exhibition games. Kent Johnson and Ivan Provorov had the assists, with Provorov finding Sillinger coming out of the penalty box at the right time. Sillinger got it to Johnson, who was streaking up the middle of the ice and drew the attention of three Penguins before getting it back to Sillinger for a clean look at the Pittsburgh net. This was good puck movement all around:
- Zach Werenski and Provorov were on the top defensive pairing together, a first in the preseason. Nothing stood out exceptionally either way, but the experiment with Provorov on the right side and on the top line could, amongst other things, mean that head coach Dean Evason is looking at some late-preseason tweaks to the pairings.
- On the same day the team announced that forward Gavin Brindley would miss 4-6 weeks with a broken finger, Dmitri Voronkov left on his first shift of the night with an injury and did not return. The team is calling it an upper body injury.
- Elvis Merzlikins made 20 saves on 22 shots in what was his first full game of the 2024-25 campaign. Daniil Tarasov seems likely to get the start Friday night in Pittsburgh as the two teams complete a home-and-home to end the preseason.

## [The Athletic / NHL waiver tracker: Best players on the wire throughout 2024-25 preseason](#)

**By Corey Pronman and Harman Dayal – October 4, 2024**

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

### **Thursday, Oct. 3**

#### **Simon Lundmark, RHD, Winnipeg Jets**

Lundmark was a 2019 second-round pick by the Jets. He was picked that high because he's a big right-shot defenseman who skates well. At the time I'm sure Winnipeg was hoping for some more offense or meanness to develop in his game, but he's struggled to find a clear, definable NHL role for himself. He has tools that someone may be willing to take a chance on if they feel he can make a first pass at the top level.—Pronman

#### **Nick Blankenburg, RHD, Nashville Predators**

Blankenburg could be a genuinely intriguing project. The 26-year-old right defender is a thunderous body checker despite being listed at just 5-foot-9. He pairs that physicality with good skating ability and decent puck skills. Blankenburg looked like a legitimate NHL player whenever he suited up for the Blue Jackets. Blankenburg's biggest problem is durability — he hasn't played more than 40 games in a season since turning pro in 2021-22. It's fair to wonder if he can sustain his aggressive, max-energy playing style at such a small size in the NHL.—Dayal

Other players on waivers: Jarred Tinordi (Flames), Dryden Hunt (Flames), Walker Duehr (Flames), Rasmus Asplund (Panthers), Jaycob Megna (Panthers), Zac Dalpe (Panthers), Tobias Bjornfot (Panthers), Cale Fleury (Kraken), Nick Abruzzese (Maple Leafs), Patrik Koch (Utah), Ben McCartney (Utah), Andrew Agozzino (Utah), Axel Jonsson-Fjallby (Jets), Mason Shaw (Jets), Dominic Toninato (Jets)

### **Wednesday, Oct. 2**

#### **Calle Rosen, LHD, Colorado Avalanche**

Rosen, a 6-foot-1 left-shot defender, was solid in 49 games for the Blues in 2022-23. He drove decent underlying numbers in a sheltered third-pair role and chipped in with 18 points. He played well enough to deserve another NHL crack as a depth defender, but he became a victim of the numbers game. Last fall, as colleague Jeremy Rutherford explained, the Blues didn't want to risk losing Scott Perunovich or Tyler Tucker on waivers. Perunovich and Tucker were younger, higher potential defenders. Because of his older age and lack of upside, Rosen was waived and spent most of the year in the AHL. Now, on a loaded Colorado blue line, he couldn't crack an NHL roster again.—Dayal

Other players on waivers: Spencer Martin (Hurricanes), Trey Fix-Wolansky (Blue Jackets), Calle Rosen (Avalanche), Matthew Phillips (Avalanche), Jack Ahcan (Avalanche), Cal Petersen (Flyers), Jimmy Huntington (Penguins), Marc Johnstone (Penguins), Mac Hollowell (Penguins), Bo Groulx (Rangers), Andrew Poturalski (Sharks), Scott Sabourin (Sharks)

Update: All players cleared waivers.

### **Tuesday, Oct. 1**

### **Phil Di Giuseppe, LW, Vancouver Canucks**

What a difference a year can make. Last fall, Di Giuseppe not only made the Canucks out of training camp but earned a top-six role alongside J.T. Miller and Brock Boeser. The 30-year-old left winger made a strong impression on Rick Tocchet because of his disruptive forecheck and reliable defensive play. Di Giuseppe was relegated to a fourth-line role as the season progressed but stuck in the NHL as a full-time contributor for the first time in his career. Now, he's been cut after an offseason where the Canucks significantly upgraded their winger depth. Di Giuseppe could be a decent 12th/13th forward — he's trustworthy without the puck and a solid forechecker.—Dayal

Other players on waivers: Carson Meyer (Ducks), Josh Dunne (Sabres), Felix Sandstrom (Sabres), Jack Rathbone (Sabres), Brett Murray (Sabres), Mason Jobst (Sabres), Colton Poolman (Sabres), Ilya Solovoyov (Flames), Lane Pederson (Oilers), Ben Gleason (Oilers), Phil Kemp (Oilers), Collin Delia (Oilers), Jacob Moverare (Kings), Reese Johnson (Wild), Louis Domingue (Rangers), Anton Blidh (Rangers), Brandon Scanlin (Rangers), Casey Fitzgerald (Rangers), Gustav Olofsson (Kraken), Ales Stezka (Kraken), Ben Meyers (Kraken), Max McCormick (Kraken), Brandon Biro (Kraken), Jiri Patera (Canucks), Nate Smith (Canucks), Christian Wolanin (Canucks)

Update: Goalie Jiri Patera was claimed by Boston; the rest of the players cleared waivers.

With Jeremy Swayman still unsigned, the Bruins have landed extra goaltending insurance by claiming Patera from the Canucks. Patera posted a .903 save percentage in 25 AHL games last season, which seems underwhelming, but the Henderson Silver Knights weren't a good team. He has a .902 save percentage in eight career NHL games with Vegas. Patera struggled during Canucks training camp. He was getting beat during rush drills very often and didn't look comfortable. That may have provided extra impetus for Vancouver to sign Kevin Lankinen. However, Patera was very good during the preseason start he got a week ago against Calgary. Patera doesn't look very big in the crease despite being listed at 6-foot-3 but has intriguing potential because of his powerful legs and movement.—Dayal

### **Monday, Sept. 30**

#### **Nikita Alexandrov, C, St. Louis Blues**

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

#### **Travis Boyd, C, Minnesota Wild**

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

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

Update: All players cleared waivers.

### **Sunday, Sept. 29**

### **Vinnie Hinostroza, RW, Nashville Predators**

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

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

Update: All players cleared waivers.

### **Saturday, Sept. 28**

#### **Grigori Denisenko, LW, Vegas Golden Knights**

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

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

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

Update: All players cleared waivers.

### **Friday, Sept. 27**

#### **Ronnie Attard, RHD, Philadelphia Flyers**

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

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

## The Athletic / Best and worst moments from Amazon's 'Faceoff: Inside the NHL' documentary series

By Mark Lazerus – October 4, 2024

**Editor's note:** This story contains spoilers for Amazon's "Faceoff: Inside the NHL" documentary series, which releases to the public on Friday.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman's voice echoed through the delirious Amerant Bank Arena as a sweaty, shaggy Connor McDavid trudged into the small visitors' locker room, the last one in, seemingly in a daze. Bettman was announcing McDavid as the Conn Smythe Trophy winner as playoff MVP, a legacy-making honor, but McDavid's face didn't register any of it. The Edmonton Oilers captain had just been told outside the locker room by the NHL's chief content officer, Steve Mayer, that he had won the trophy, and that he was expected to accept the trophy despite having just suffered the most agonizing, consequential defeat of his life to the Florida Panthers.

"I wouldn't have gone out there for a million dollars," he later said.

So the greatest player on the planet walked into the silent dressing room and sat at his stall, staring into the middle distance, trying to hold back the flood. On his left, Leon Draisaitl reached over and grabbed McDavid's left leg and patted it. On his right, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins put his arm around him. And that's when it all landed — the grind, the work, the blood, the sweat, the fears. All of it adding up to one goal short of glory. And he couldn't hold it back anymore.

McJesus wept.

At that point, a voice rang out, "Get the f—ing cameras out of here."

Those cameras belonged to Box to Box Films, the production company behind the wildly popular Netflix series documenting the drama and personalities of Formula 1, golf and tennis, among other sports. Last spring the company turned its attention to the NHL, creating a series of six 45-minute episodes for Amazon Prime Video called "Faceoff: Inside the NHL" that will be released on Friday. Unlike recent behind-the-scenes documentaries such as "Road to the Winter Classic," the teams and league did not have editorial control on what was included and what was not. So the new series got much more of the vibe of the popular HBO "24/7" shows of yesteryear, with all the drama, all the joy and anger and, of course, all the curses.

While the Panthers' Matthew Tkachuk gets perhaps the most air time, McDavid is the clear star of the show. In Episode 5, he calls himself an introvert and notes that people call him "boring" and a "robot." The big revelation of this show is that he's anything but. He's fiery, emotional and in the postseason, seemingly constantly teetering on the edge of a meltdown, his eyes glaring and his legs fidgeting constantly — on the bus, during team meetings, on the bench. McDavid is all intensity and emotion, and we see it time and time again through the production's cameras. Amazon spoiled the best moment of the whole series — the all-time fit McDavid threw in the locker room after Game 2 of the Stanley Cup Final — in the trailer, but, of course, it's way better with all the F-bombs.

We'll get to all that in a bit. Here's a quick, spoiler-filled review and recap of each episode.

William Nylander and David Pastrňák out to dinner.

### **Episode 1: Best of Rivals**

**Featuring William Nylander and David Pastrňák**

## Overview

Let's start with the "newsiest" bit out of this. Yes, Nylander said exactly what we all thought he said during that infamous playoff bench argument with Mitch Marner and Auston Matthews. "F—ing shoot it! Stop f—ing crying! This is the f—ing issue, you guys f—ing b— about s—. Let's f—ing go!"

This being an NHL-adjacent production, it's legally required to start with a Toronto Maple Leafs-centric segment. In fact, this episode might be more Leafs-centric than every podcast in the hockey world. Pastrňák and the Boston Bruins are very secondary. The producers fell in love with William Nylander — a big personality, by hockey's modest standards — and made him the centerpiece of a story leading up to the Bruins' seven-game first-round victory over Toronto. Nylander's friendship with Boston star David Pastrňák, and the migraine that kept Nylander out of the first three games of the series, get the spotlight.

## Best exchange

Nylander and Pastrňák are getting dinner following a late-season matchup, discussing the standings.

Pastrňák: "Right now, we'd play each other in the playoffs."

Nylander: "That'd be fun."

Pastrňák: "Always fun, Toronto-Boston."

Nylander: "Just because you guys win all the time. For us, every time we have lost. It's been so s—."

Pastrňák: "It doesn't matter. If you don't win the Cup, it doesn't matter who moves on from the first round."

## Highlights

- Nylander, looking like the most casual man alive wearing shades and a puffy jacket, driving with one finger on the wheel with his left leg up against the door.
- The clips of Nylander and Pastrňák as kids are adorable.
- Seeing Nylander during Games 1-3 watching the games from home, living and dying with each play.
- Pastrňák's moving discussion about his devotion to his daughter, Freya, after he and his partner, Rebecca, lost their first child at just 6 days old: "You mature real quick when something like that happens in your life."

## Quibbles

- TNT analyst Paul Bissonnette, in a talking-head segment, says "The Boston Bruins are the standard." Really? The Bruins, while perennial contenders, have one Stanley Cup championship in the last 52 years.
- Auston Matthews is barely mentioned and interviewed just very briefly. Get used to it. Though Box to Box followed roughly 20 players around, including Matthews, Sidney Crosby and Connor Bedard, those three and many others were left on the cutting room floor in their entirety.

## Best use of profanity

Nylander: "A lot of years now, we've lost Game 7. People say, 'Next year. We'll be better next year. Next year.' F— that."

Jack Eichel, right, and Noah Hanifin, left, with their partners, before Eichel orders seemingly the whole menu.

## **Episode 2: As Tough As It Gets**

### **Featuring Filip Forsberg and Jack Eichel**

#### **Overview**

The episode focuses on the Nashville Predators' Filip Forsberg and Vegas Golden Knights' Jack Eichel as they build toward first-round playoff exits, but it's Forsberg's pregnant wife, Erin Alvey Forsberg, who emerges as the MVP of the series. Her eloquent and insightful perspective on the sport from a partner's point of view — on watching her husband fight, on concussions, on living with a routine-oriented pro athlete, on the sting of defeat — is far and away the best away-from-the-rink portion of the series. Also, she has an air freshener hanging from her car's rearview mirror that is simply Forsberg's face. She wins the show.

Beyond that, we get a recap of Eichel's fight to become the first NHL player to have artificial disk replacement surgery and the trade to Vegas from the Buffalo Sabres. The show really leans hard into the idea that Eichel was very unhappy in Buffalo and is now very happy in Las Vegas. The cancellation of Nashville's trip to see U2 at Sphere and the subsequent 16-0-2 run gets a good chunk of time, too.

#### **Best exchange**

Eichel, on a double date with Noah Hanifin and his partner, summons a server and orders the following for the table: Shrimp cocktail, meatballs, calamari, penne alla vodka, rigatoni bolognese, sliced New York strip, creamed corn (?!), chicken parm and a (surely very expensive) bottle of Sassicaia. There are only four people at the table.

#### **Highlights**

- Learning that Forsberg wakes up at exactly 8:08 a.m. every day and puts his skates on before a game at exactly 7:07 p.m. "When you're speaking it out loud, it's pretty silly," Forsberg allowed.
- Eichel: "Everyone's biggest issue with (the surgery) was that it hadn't been done on a hockey player yet. I don't think, medically, that's a good enough reason to not let someone do something."
- Forsberg, mere days after being eliminated by the Vancouver Canucks, is holding his newborn, wearing a hat that says, "Hey, I'm Here For You." "The only silver lining of losing in the playoffs, I've been home for every single day." It's very sweet.

#### **Quibbles**

- Did you know that the Stanley Cup is the hardest trophy in sports to win? Well, you will after hearing it roughly 342 times.
- Extreme close-ups of Forsberg's foot and ankle as he gets acupuncture and electric stimulation therapy aren't necessarily for the squeamish.
- The Predators' postgame celebratory line dance thing is even harder to watch than the acupuncture.

#### **Best use of profanity**

- Nashville's Ryan O'Reilly in the locker room before Game 7: "I can guarantee you you're gonna get my f—ing best. I expect it from every single one of you motherf—ers."

Matthew Tkachuk, left, and his brother, Brady Tkachuk, taking it easy in Florida.

## **Episode 3: Learning to Win**

### **Featuring Jeremy Swayman and Matthew Tkachuk**

## Overview

If you were wondering if goaltender Jeremy Swayman was going to budge in his contract negotiations with the Bruins, you won't be after watching this episode. He ain't budging. Even though, as he says himself in this episode before losing in the second round, "I've still got so much more to offer, and I haven't proven s—." Meanwhile, Matthew Tkachuk is the happiest human alive, just driving his golf cart around Fort Lauderdale and literally hopping in the ocean and then his pool before every single home game.

## Best exchange

Tkachuk's dad, Keith, is grilling outside Tkachuk's house in Florida.

Matthew Tkachuk: "He basically lives at the house. F—ing annoying. Hey, a little smoky there, Dad. You gonna burn the house down?"

Keith Tkachuk: "Shut the f— up while I'm cooking. I'm doing you a favor, buddy."

Matthew Tkachuk: "I did you a favor by coming down here (to Florida)."

## Highlights

- Swayman has a framed photo in his home of himself and former teammate Linus Ullmark doing their postgame goalie hug. D'awwww.
- Tkachuk parking his golf cart at the beach for his pregame ocean ritual, looking at the meter, and saying, "I'm not paying." He makes \$9.5 million per year.
- Tkachuk to ailing Bruins forward Brad Marchand at the bench: "You all right? You all right? Never seen a captain quit on his team." Pastrňák responds: "Heh. Don't even listen to that."
- Swayman, after his star turn in the playoffs, on the arbitration process and the bad blood it engenders: "The arbitrator on their side, their job is to rip players. Hearing you're not worthy of what you think you're worthy of, that was hard to hear. You don't forget what was said. I wrote them down and I looked at them the other day, and I had a couple checkmarks. My biggest knock was how I wasn't trustworthy in playoffs. Check." Swayman also points to Tkachuk as someone he admires. "He wills his team to win games. I want to be like that."
- Like the Old Man in "A Christmas Story," Panthers coach Paul Maurice works in profanity the way other artists might work in oils or clay. It is his true medium.

## Quibbles

- N/A. Not much to quibble about in this one.

## Best use of profanity

Swayman: "We don't have to shy away from it. There's a contract on the line. ... I'm gonna be a motherf—er in the net."

Jacob Trouba to his baby: "You legend!"

## Episode 4: The Captains

Featuring Quinn Hughes, Gabriel Landeskog and Jacob Trouba

## Overview



In what is by far the weakest episode of the series, the show tries awfully hard to mythicize the idea of the NHL captain. Can Hughes be a leader at just 24 years old? Can Landeskog work his way back from a devastating injury? Can Trouba walk the line with his hits? Can we all stay awake while watching this?

### **Best exchange**

The New York Rangers' Braden Schneider breaks up a scoring chance with some quick stick work. Back at the bench, Trouba praises him.

Trouba: "Beautiful. Beautiful laydown of the stick."

Schneider: "I almost pooped my pants."

Trouba: "No pooping of the pants."

### **Highlights**

- Trouba, in roller blades and full Rangers uniform, getting his arms and legs slathered in black paint before jumping into a canvas repeatedly. Art is pain.
- Landeskog told his son that the huge scar on his leg was from a shark attack.
- Hughes talking about how he "went full health-freak mode this year" and read 20-25 books. "I just want to get off my phone." When it's time to cook: "I'm gonna chef up."
- Hughes gets a brief pep talk ("like 40 seconds") from his dad before every game. That's cute.
- Trouba, trying and failing to give his baby a bottle: "Come on, we're on camera, man. One time!" The baby immediately takes the bottle. "You legend! Dad of the year."
- "What Chaos" host Pete Blackburn, in a talking head segment: "The Washington Capitals basically puked their way into the playoffs."

### **Quibbles**

- If you're one of those cynical types who rolls your eyes when you hear people talk about leadership and intangibles, this episode could be hazardous to your health.
- Trouba, who has a long history of borderline, injurious hits: "If you watch hockey and you think I'm a bad guy, I have no control over that. I'm just doing my job."
- There's no way around it: That Trouba jumping-into-a-canvas painting was not very good.

### **Best use of profanity**

None. This episode was pretty thin.

Connor McDavid under pressure.

### **Episode 5: Cup or Bust Part I**

**Featuring Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Zach Hyman**

### **Overview**

Now we're getting to the good stuff. The Stanley Cup Final material is the series' strongest, even if it skews heavily toward Edmonton. On the ice, in the locker room, in the heads of the biggest names in the league — this is where the show really shines.

### **Best moment**

During an intermission in the Stanley Cup Final, Panthers bench boss Maurice takes one of his goalies' gloves and stick, gets on his knees in the middle of the locker room and demonstrates why he wants his players to shoot high on Oilers goaltender Stuart Skinner. "Under the f—ing bar!"

### **Highlights**

- The show really tries to portray McDavid and the Oilers as under unfathomable pressure in Edmonton while Tkachuk is the chilliest dude alive in South Florida. You see a tense, aching McDavid getting physical therapy — smash cut to Tkachuk in his pool with shades on, talking about how the Panthers are "almost too relaxed." You see Tkachuk before Game 1 smiling broadly and saying it's "like Christmas morning" — smash cut to McDavid all jittery and fidgety on the bus on the way to the arena. It might be exaggerated, but it's effective.
- McDavid's obvious love for his dog, Lenard, is adorable. "He's my most prized possession." There are pictures of Lenny all around the house.
- McDavid has a basketball court and a custom-built weight room in his house.
- McDavid on whether he feels he's the best in the world: "When I'm at my best, it's a tough level to match."
- Draisaitl on the adulation the Oilers get in Edmonton: "It's hard to describe. We don't walk around thinking we are the Beatles. We're just like any other guy at home, eating chips or watching 'Friends.'"
- Media personality Blackburn on Oilers fans: "When the team is bad, their life is bad."
- Maurice during the first intermission of Game 2: "Breathe through your nose, not through your a—hole. Let's go, baby!"

### **Quibbles**

- We could have used a little more Zach Hyman. He seems great.
- Apparently, Tkachuk is the only Panthers player. We couldn't hear a little from Aleksander Barkov? Or Aaron Ekblad? Anybody?

### **Best use of profanity**

There's no doubt it goes to McDavid's already famous tirade after the Oilers lost Game 2 in Florida. "Right f—ing now! RIGHT F—ING NOW. RIGHT F—ING NOW. This happens so many f—ing times. But that's not f—ing good enough. It's the f—ing finals! DIG THE F— IN. RIGHT F—ING NOW. WHATEVER THE F— YOU HAVE. THAT IS NOT F—ING GOOD ENOUGH."

An absolutely epic moment that will live forever.

Matthew Tkachuk on playing in Stanley Cup Final Game 7: "You dream of this."

## **Episode 6: Cup or Bust, Part II**

### **Overview**

Oilers vs. Panthers, McDavid vs. Tkachuk. It all comes to a head in an unforgettable Stanley Cup Final.

### **Best moment**

It's obviously McDavid's breakdown following the Game 7 loss. The raw immediacy of the moment is extraordinary, and something we rarely get to see. McDavid is so often performing superhuman feats that it's easy to forget he's actually human. But for variety's sake, the fact that Amazon gives us the

actual moment Mayer, the NHL's chief content officer, approached McDavid about winning the Conn Smythe is fascinating.

Mayer: "You won the Conn Smythe."

McDavid: "They want me to go out there?"

Mayer: "Yeah."

The audio then cuts out of the rest of the conversation, but McDavid quickly turns and walks into the room. That's when the producers cut to a follow-up interview in which McDavid said, "I wouldn't have gone out there for a million dollars."

### **Highlights**

- McDavid, calmly, on his post-Game 2 meltdown: "It's a high-emotion situation."
- Tkachuk's recounting of his broken sternum during the 2023 Final — brother Brady had to lift him out of bed so he could play — is harrowing.
- It's moving to see how much Tkachuk winning the Cup meant to his father, who never won it. Brady Tkachuk said getting the Tkachuk name on the Cup would be "big for our family." Seeing Keith in tears after Game 7, and seeing how much it meant to Matthew to hand him the Cup on the ice, was really something.
- Tkachuk before Game 7, after the Panthers had blown a 3-0 series lead: "You dream about this. I never dreamed about winning the Cup in Game 4, or 5, or 6. Or scoring the goal or making the big play in those games. It was always ... Game 7. Always. Each and every single time."
- The on-ice action and audio is terrific, as you'd expect.

### **Quibbles**

- Seriously, how did the Panthers win the Stanley Cup with Matthew Tkachuk as the only player on the roster?
- Do not take a drink every time a member of the Tkachuk family talks about "the dream." You will die.
- The five talking heads the show used for exposition and analysis were Bissonnette, Blackburn, PK Subban, Jackie Redmond and Sarah Nurse. All of them did well (Redmond does most of the heavy lifting) but Nurse felt under-served. We could have used more of her perspective as both an elite professional athlete and Oilers defenseman Darnell Nurse's cousin.

### **Best use of profanity**

Hyman, after Game 7, while McDavid sobs: "There's nothing I can say that's gonna make this feel better. But I know we'll be back. I f—ing KNOW we'll be back. I know it in my f—ing heart."

## The Athletic / Should the NHL preseason be shorter? How it could work and what top execs say

By Pierre LeBrun – October 4, 2024

NEW YORK — Drew Doughty and Patrik Laine are out with significant injuries.

Meanwhile, the triangle — or is it tribal? — three-team rivalry of the Montreal Canadiens, Ottawa Senators and Toronto Maple Leafs has everyone holding their breath each time they play each other in the preseason.

Which begs the rather obvious question: Why in 2024 is the NHL still holding onto this archaic ritual of playing so many preseason games?

It is long overdue to rethink the need and purpose of playing six to eight of these per team.

“The game is different now, and it’s been different for the last 20 years, I would say,” Los Angeles Kings president and Hall of Fame player Luc Robitaille told The Athletic this week at the NHL Board of Governors meeting. “If you go back in the 1970s and ’80s, guys used to show up at camp to get in shape. Now, every guy is in tip-top shape when they get to camp. This year, some teams had a game Saturday after camps opened on Thursday. That doesn’t make any sense.

“So if we were going to go down, to let’s say, four preseason games, I would be fine with it. Because I know guys show up and they’re ready to play. ... So, yeah, if we cut it down and added a game or two in the (regular) season, I’d be fine with that.”

What Robitaille is referring to is something that’s been talked about behind closed doors for the past several months. I originally reported back on July 1 that it’s my understanding that the NHL and NHL Players’ Association have had very preliminary discussions on making significant changes to the NHL schedule and calendar, something which wouldn’t go into effect until the next collective bargaining agreement at the earliest (the current CBA expires in September 2026).

### **What’s being discussed:**

- Cutting preseason down to four games per team
- Going to an 84-game regular season
- Beginning the regular season in early October (as early as Oct. 1) and handing out the Stanley Cup earlier in June

The first two items are still being discussed. The third may or may not see the light of day. Some teams will push back on an earlier start, as probably would U.S. TV rights-holder ESPN, which has stipulated its preference that the NHL regular season not begin until the second week of October to avoid scheduling conflicts with the first week of MLB playoffs on its air.

So as it stands, it’s not clear to me where the appetite is for an earlier regular-season start.

But the other two components? They’re still very much a discussion but one that will need to go to the next level once CBA talks begin in the New Year.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman was asked after the Board of Governors about reducing preseason games.

“Things that we might discuss in collective bargaining are best discussed in collective bargaining when we’re doing collective bargaining,” Bettman deflected. “We discuss lots of topics with the Players’ Association on an ongoing basis, but I don’t want to fuel any speculation on that or any other (CBA) topic right now.”

Asked again about the merits of shortening the preseason, Bettman responded coyly:

“We’ve heard that. We’ve heard that. It’s on the list of things to think about.”

Asked about adding two regular-season games?

“It’s on the list to think about,” he said.

And while I know many hockey fans would rather reduce the preseason without adding two regular-season games, let’s be realistic about the fact that players and owners share in hockey-related revenue and reducing the preseason means needing to balance out that revenue in the regular season. Which I’m fine with. I’d rather have more games that are real.

Reached by The Athletic for comment, as well, on the possibility of reducing the number of preseason games, NHLPA No. 2 executive Ron Hainsey declined to comment this week.

Again, executives on both sides are going to put a muzzle on publicly when it comes to potential CBA changes.

But in Hainsey’s case, I think it’s also because he wants to continue to canvass players throughout the membership during the NHLPA’s fall tour about CBA matters, including the scheduling ideas.

So for now, we’re left with speculation on the matter.

For one, forgetting for a moment the idea of reducing preseason games, Montreal Canadiens vice president of hockey operations Jeff Gorton offered this interesting insight on the matter.

“I would say this: The better thing to do as we continue with these (preseason) games is that both teams communicate better as far as what kind of players are in the games,” Gorton told The Athletic at the Board of Governors meeting. “I’m hearing a lot from the players that they would actually consider playing more on the road because they know they’re going to play against NHL players, right? So that’s an interesting concept for me. If they’re saying that, they know that other NHL players are getting themselves ready for the season, as well, instead of running into a situation where you’re getting a team that’s not NHL players and playing for their lives.”

That’s not a complicated fix, by the way. The NHL and NHLPA via the next CBA could further mandate how rosters look on game days during preseason, making sure they’re more alike, perhaps, based on experience.

Meanwhile, not everyone is going to be on board with reducing preseason games.

“I like it the way it is,” Vegas Golden Knights president of hockey operations George McPhee told The Athletic at the Board of Governors meeting. “It gives you a good opportunity to have veteran players get their legs under them and you have enough time to really evaluate the young players.

“You can’t put them all in the same game, either. It’s also hard to see (young players) during the season. They’re right in front of you (during preseason), playing with other NHL players. You can evaluate the young guys. There is also times where you’re trying to develop chemistry between the lines when you’ve had changes in personnel.”

All good points, but nobody is suggesting scrapping preseason altogether. The idea being discussed is simply to reduce the number of games.

“You have the option of playing six. We play eight in Columbus,” veteran exec Don Waddell, president of hockey operations and general manager of the Columbus Blue Jackets, told The Athletic at the Board of Governors meeting. “That’s just the way it’s been. Your veteran players want to play three or four games. I think we would all want to look at the options (to reduce preseason games), if there are any options, and at least explore it.

“We should never be satisfied with (the) status quo when things are happening like we’ve seen with some of the injuries this year. I’m sure the league, in time, will lay out some options.”

It sure sounds like it. And that’s a good thing.

## [The Athletic / NHL 2024-25 awards predictions: Picks for Calder, Rocket Richard, Hart and more](#)

**The Athletic NHL Staff – October 4, 2024**

Will Connor McDavid's current streak of seasons without a Hart Trophy end at one? Can Cale Makar regain his Norris-winning form? Is anyone capable of challenging Auston Matthews in the Rocket Richard race?

The 2024-25 NHL season is almost upon us, and that means it's time for The Athletic to ask its staff for their predictions. We'll have team picks — including the Stanley Cup winner and the full playoff field — coming soon. For now, we start with individual awards.

To pick apart the results of our polling, provide context and give us a healthy critique, we've brought in NHL senior writers James Mirtle and Sean Gentile, analytics know-it-all Shayna Goldman and betting expert Jesse Granger.

### **Hart Trophy**

Given to the player judged to be the most valuable to his team. Voted on by the Professional Hockey Writers Association (PHWA).

Connor McDavid

82.1%

Auston Matthews

7.1%

Nathan MacKinnon

7.1%

Jack Hughes

3.6%

**Goldman:** Breaking news, a bunch of us are projecting Connor McDavid to be the most valuable player in the league. The fact that he pushed himself into a really tight race last year after such a slow start is ridiculous, and now he has extra motivation to kick it up a notch after last year's Stanley Cup loss.

**Gentile:** Every year, I try to force myself to pick someone else. Every year, I fail. Voters got to take a break last season, but I don't think it'll happen.

**Granger:** McDavid was the easy choice, but I like the thought process of the few who chose Jack Hughes. If the Devils are as good as I think they are, Hughes should be in the conversation. He's hovered around the 100-point 82-game pace for the last two seasons. If he can reach triple digits and New Jersey is back in the mix as a contender, he's a solid pick at 11-1 odds.

### **Rocket Richard Trophy**

Given to the leading goal scorer at the end of the regular season.

Auston Matthews

82.1%

David Pastrnak

10.7%

Connor McDavid

3.6%

Leon Draisaitl

3.6%

**Mirtle:** Matthews has averaged 60 goals per 82 games in the past five seasons. Second-place David Pastrnak? A full 10 goals behind him. Picking anyone but the Leafs captain at this point is just a contrarian play.

**Granger:** I'll admit the Pastrnak pick was a contrarian play, but I see a clear path to a Rocket Richard if the Bruins' power play improves. Boston ranked near the middle of the pack last season, and Pastrnak scored only 12 goals on it. If he can get that number closer to the 18 he scored the year before (or the 20 he scored in 2019-20 when he won the award), he has a better chance than anyone to beat out Matthews.

**Goldman:** We're seeing more 50-goal scorers in recent seasons, but 60 ... that's a pretty high bar to reach.

**Gentile:** I love a contrarian pick! Elias Lindholm knows how to facilitate offense with elite linemates. That's good enough to get Pastrnak within spitting distance of Matthews. Maybe. Probably. Whatever.

### **Norris Trophy**

Given to the defenseman who demonstrates throughout the season the greatest all-around ability in the position. Voted on by the PHWA.

Cale Makar

53.6%

Miro Heiskanen

21.4%

Roman Josi

21.4%

Adam Fox

3.6%

**Goldman:** Surprised that no one put Quinn Hughes here, but a healthy Cale Makar is always a good front-runner. Miro Heiskanen would be fun, but I've voted for him here before and been wrong so ... back on the Makar train.

**Gentile:** Yeah, seems like a lot of people said, "Hughes got his Norris, time to move on." I get it — I voted for Makar, too — but that's still a little bit odd.

**Granger:** Makar is the best defenseman on the planet, and voters have had a two-year break. He's the runaway favorite, and oddsmakers agree, as he's only plus-250 to win the award.

### **Selke Trophy**



Given to the forward who demonstrates the most skill in the defensive component of the game. Voted on by the PHWA.

Aleksander Barkov

57.1%

Nico Hischier

21.4%

Auston Matthews

7.1%

Jason Robertson

3.6%

Roope Hintz

3.6%

Anze Kopitar

3.6%

Sidney Crosby

3.6%

**Mirtle:** Aleksander Barkov as the new Patrice Bergeron? I'll buy it. I chose Matthews, but realistically he's not going to get enough votes until he starts killing more penalties. Which, given Toronto's center depth, may actually happen?

**Goldman:** Of all the NHL awards, Selke voting may be the least creative. But honestly, it probably is Barkov's to lose again — he's solidified himself as the best two-way player in the league. But the race for second place should be fun.

**Gentile:** After 2022-23, I really felt like Nico Hischier had made up ground on Barkov to replace Bergeron as the default Selke vote, but he took a major step back last season.

**Granger:** If anyone can unseat Barkov, I think it's Roope Hintz. The Stars should be good defensively yet again, and he leads all Dallas forwards in defensive point shares. In fact, he's right in line with Barkov's DPS numbers over the last few years.

### **Vezina Trophy**

Given to the goalkeeper adjudged to be the best at this position. Voted on by the general managers of all 32 NHL clubs.

Igor Shesterkin

57.1%

Juuse Saros

21.4%

Jake Oettinger

10.7%

Connor Hellebuyck

3.6%

Andrei Vasilevskiy

3.6%

Ilya Sorokin

3.6%

**Granger:** I feel like at times this award is given to the goalie who's most due for a Vezina, and to me, that candidate is easily Juuse Saros. He's had Vezina-worthy seasons already, like in 2022-23 where he saved 45.49 goals above expected (the third most in the last 17 years) but was just edged out by Linus Ullmark. Saros is incredible, and now he has some scoring firepower in front of him, and could finally rack up the wins required to compete for this award.

**Goldman:** If Igor Shesterkin can pick up where he left off last season, watch out. He surged up the ranks from February on after a slow start and reminded everyone that he was one of the best in the world. I think he'd have more competition here if Ilya Sorokin was coming into the season 100 percent healthy.

**Gentile:** All apologies to Jake Oettinger, but I'm not going to make the same mistake twice. I'm all about fresh mistakes.

#### **Jack Adams Award**

Given to the coach adjudged to have contributed the most to his team's success. Voted on by the NHL Broadcasters' Association.

Sheldon Keefe, New Jersey Devils

42.9%

Lindy Ruff, Buffalo Sabres

10.7%

Andrew Brunette, Nashville Predators

7.1%

Craig Berube, Toronto Maple Leafs

7.1%

John Hynes, Minnesota Wild

3.6%

Patrick Roy, New York Islanders

3.6%

Jon Cooper, Tampa Bay Lightning

3.6%

Kris Knoblauch, Edmonton Oilers

3.6%

Paul Maurice, Florida Panthers

3.6%

Dean Evason, Columbus Blue Jackets

3.6%

Travis Green, Ottawa Senators

3.6%

Andre Tourigny, Utah Hockey Club

3.6%

Derek Lalonde, Detroit Red Wings

3.6%

**Mirtle:** With huge improvements in goal and on defense, the Devils are absolutely primed for the biggest bounceback around the league so this makes sense. And it will be entertaining after all of the arrows Sheldon Keefe took in Toronto the past few years for failings that, largely, weren't his.

**Goldman:** Honestly, I'm a little surprised there isn't more hype around Kris Knoblauch. But generally, coaches do get dinged for having elite talent on their roster — that's probably why Jared Bednar hasn't won this award. Andrew Brunette feels like a strong pick too. But the new coach bump tends to go a long way, so Keefe is a safe choice.

**Gentile:** Yep, Knoblauch is going to get the full Mike Sullivan treatment when it comes to the Jack Adams.

### Calder Trophy

Given to the player selected as the most proficient in his first year of competition in the NHL. Voted on by the PHWA.

Matvei Michkov

46.4%

Macklin Celebrini

39.3%

Logan Stankoven

7.1%

Jesper Wallstedt

7.1%

**Mirtle:** I have a hard time seeing Macklin Celebrini as the favorite given who he has to play with; only one Sharks player topped 45 points last season, and the roster looks similarly grim.

**Goldman:** That's a good point about Celebrini, but wasn't that also fuel for the Connor Bedard argument last year?

**Granger:** I know it's only preseason, but Celebrini has already looked special on the ice with NHL players. I'm sold ... as long as he's healthy.

**Gentile:** The Matvei Michkov hype train might have picked up a little too much steam, but he's still my pick. It's easy to imagine him hitting 20-25 goals and staying on John Tortorella's good side.

## The Athletic / From Stanley Cup contenders to bottom feeders: Predicting the 2024-25 season

By Sean McIndoe – October 4, 2024

**Fun fact:** In the NHL, the “pre” in preseason stands for predictions. We all have to make them, including you — the reader prediction contest is coming later this week, so be ready. For now, it’s my turn to lay my cards on the table, with my annual division-based attempt to dice up the league.

The rules, as always: I get four divisions, with exactly eight teams each. We’ll have the bottom-feeders, the middle-of-the-pack, the legitimate Stanley Cup contenders and then the teams I just have no idea about. Because I enjoy making my own life difficult, that eight teams per division rule is mandatory. (Insert your own joke here about the “no clue” division having all 32 teams in it otherwise.)

We’ll start from the bottom and work our way up...

### **The Bottom-Feeder Division**

The good news, if you see your team here, is one of the teams from last year’s bottom-feeders went on to make the playoffs, so there’s hope. The bad news is another one of the teams from last year no longer exists, so... yeah.

#### **San Jose Sharks**

**Last season:** 19-54-9, -146 goals differential, dead last in the league.

**Their offseason in six words:** Won the lottery, got Macklin Celebrini.

**Why they’re here:** Because even the most optimistic Sharks fan didn’t think they’d be anywhere else. While they did sign a legitimate player in Tyler Toffoli, this is still the phase of the rebuild where it’s about running out the string on bad contracts and collecting young players. The good news is they’re doing a great job on that second piece. The bad news is it won’t pay off for another year or two, at least.

#### **Anaheim Ducks**

**Last season:** 27-50-5, -90, seventh in the Pacific.

**Their offseason in six words:** Didn’t add much, didn’t trade Zegras.

**Why they’re here:** They were very bad last year and didn’t improve during the offseason, so I ran the numbers and it says they’ll be bad again. They’re young, and sometimes young teams take bigger steps forward than you expect. And the John Gibson health news increases the uncertainty by temporarily replacing a known commodity with Lukáš Dostál to start the season; more variance is a good thing when you’re looking for a long shot. That said, there’s just too much ground to make up here, so the Ducks are an easy call for another year of bottom-feeder duty.

#### **Chicago Blackhawks**

**Last season:** 23-53-6, -111, last in the Central.

**Their offseason in six words:** Lots of reinforcements, probably not enough.

**Why they’re here:** The Hawks were busy over the summer, adding plenty of talent and quite possibly earning the title of the league’s most-improved team. But even if it all clicks, and even assuming Taylor Hall stays healthy and Connor Bedard takes a big stride toward MVP-level production, it still feels like

there's just too much ground to make up. Last year's team was truly awful, so even the best-case scenario here isn't all that good... yet.

### **Columbus Blue Jackets**

**Last season:** 27-43-12, -64, last in the Eastern Conference.

**Their offseason in six words:** "I just miss him so much."

**Why they're here:** The Johnny Gaudreau tragedy means a bad team lost its best player, which should mean a tough season. Mix in dumping Patrik Laine, and even a new coach and GM shouldn't be enough to get this group out of the basement.

All that said, we really don't have a blueprint for how a team will respond to an unthinkable tragedy like losing Gaudreau. It's possible the team and the community come together, not unlike what we saw with Vegas in 2017, especially if they can generate some momentum by upsetting teams like Florida, Colorado and Toronto early in the schedule. That would be a fantastic story, and it's hard not to root for it. But the likelier scenario is still that they struggle through another difficult season.

### **Philadelphia Flyers**

**Last season:** 38-33-11, -27, sixth in the Metro.

**Their offseason in six words:** The Matvei Michkov era has arrived.

**Why they're here:** Because last year felt like an overachievement and we're not sure if the goaltending will work behind a roster that, on paper, is just OK. That's enough to offset the excitement of Michkov's arrival and probably keep them outside of the playoff race. Of course, nobody believed in them last year either, and they spent the first four months of the season making us look bad.

### **Calgary Flames**

**Last season:** 38-39-5, -14, fifth in the Pacific.

**Their offseason in six words:** Markström traded, maybe rebuilding, maybe not.

**Why they're here:** This might feel a little too negative; the Flames have traded away a ton of veteran talent in the last year, but they haven't stripped it all down to the studs. They don't seem like they want to, either, at least based on what the front office has been saying. It's certainly possible Dustin Wolf lives up to the hype and keeps them closer to middle-of-the-pack, but all things considered, it's probably better for their long-term hopes if this bottom-dweller prediction comes true.

### **Montreal Canadiens**

**Last season:** 30-36-16, -49, last in the Atlantic.

**Their offseason in six words:** Rolled the dice on Patrik Laine.

**Why they're here:** There's some budding optimism in Montreal, and you can see why. The prospects are strong, the roster is young enough to improve organically and while Laine represents a significant gamble, he's at least one with some upside if and when he's healthy. The lingering question is still whether the ceiling is high enough, both among the Nick Suzuki/Cole Caufield types and the kids on the way. That's probably not a question that gets answered this year because that undetermined ceiling is still a few years away.

### **Seattle Kraken**

**Last season:** 34-35-13, -18, sixth in the Pacific.

**Their offseason in six words:** Long UFA deals, plus new coach.

**Why they're here:** We spent a few years waiting to see if Ron Francis would get more aggressive in building this roster, and when he did on July 1 nobody seemed to like the results. Aside from one year where they shot the lights out in a plainly unsustainable way, this has been a very mediocre team at best. Maybe that gets them closer to middle-of-the-pack than where I have them, but that's as far as my optimism can stretch.

### **The Middle-of-the-Pack Division**

It's not a bad place to be as long as you're passing through. Get stuck here for more than a couple of years, though, and the future starts looking mighty bleak.

### **Ottawa Senators**

**Last season:** 37-41-4, -31, seventh in the Atlantic.

**Their offseason in six words:** New goalie, new coach, annual optimism.

**Why they're here:** Because I only just now realized they finished just two points ahead of the Canadiens last year. I knew their season was disappointing, but I didn't realize it was quite that bad. Still, a year of Linus Ullmark should be enough to get them back over .500, and continued development from the youth could put them squarely in the playoff race. Yes, I know we say that every year, but this time we mean it.

### **Washington Capitals**

**Last season:** 40-31-11, -36, swept in the first round.

**Their offseason in six words:** Honestly, they maybe kind of cooked?

**Why they're here:** Because they were a playoff team last year who seemed to get better in the offseason, but literally nobody seems to be picking them for the postseason this time around. I get it because I'm not picking them either. But with an apparent upgrade in net, plus the addition of Jakob Chychrun and Andrew Mangiapane and fourth-time-is-the-charm Pierre-Luc Dubois, you can at least imagine them gliding into another wildcard and making us all look silly.

### **New York Islanders**

**Last season:** 39-27-16, -13, lost in first round.

**Their offseason in six words:** Mostly quiet, although Duclair could work.

**Why they're here:** They've pretty much owned this territory for a while now, finishing between 84 and 94 points for three straight years without ever getting out of round one. On paper, the forwards aren't good enough to get them to the next level, but with Ilya Sorokin in goal and a first full year of Patrick Roy behind the bench, you don't want to count them out.

### **Pittsburgh Penguins**

**Last season:** 38-32-12, +5, fifth in the Metro.

**Their offseason in six words:** Guess Sid's new AAV. You're correct.

**Why they're here:** With Sidney Crosby locked in for another three years, the Penguins are very clearly going for it. Whether "it" is another championship or just a playoff appearance depends on how much optimism you can summon, and I can't summon anywhere close to enough to move them up to the contender list. Either way, the rebuild is on hold, so this feels like the only spot for them.

## **Detroit Red Wings**

**Last season:** 41-32-9, +2, fifth in Atlantic, missed playoffs on tie-breaker.

**Their offseason in six words:** Tarasenko in, Perron out, kids extended.

**Why they're here:** Because they've pretty much always been here, ever since Steve Yzerman arrived and started the world's slowest rebuild. That's not exactly a compliment, but it's worth noting the Wings do keep shuffling forward, which is better than some other rebuilds we've seen over the years. Last year they came as close to the playoffs as you can without actually making it, so another few baby steps should get them in... assuming they don't get leap-frogged by someone who's moving quicker.

## **Toronto Maple Leafs**

**Last season:** 46-26-10, +37, you'll never guess what happened in the first round of the playoffs.

**Their offseason in six words:** Berube and Tanev arrive, core remains.

**Why they're here:** Because after yet another offseason of tinkering around the edges, the Leafs are firmly in the "believe it when we see it" zone in terms of actual Cup contention. Chris Tanev should fit well, at least early on, and maybe a new coach can change the culture. But this still looks a lot like the 2023-24 team that had about 100 points and lost as a road team in round one, and these days that's closer to the middle than real contention.

## **Minnesota Wild**

**Last season:** 39-34-9, -12, sixth in the Central.

**Their offseason in six words:** Barely anything, except for Faber extension.

**Why they're here:** They are the Minnesota Wild.

## **Winnipeg Jets**

**Last season:** 52-24-6, +61, lost in the first round.

**Their offseason in six words:** Arguably the worst in the league.

**Why they're here:** Because I need eight teams in each division, and sometimes that means squeezing in a team that I'm not sure fits. The Jets are the best team in this group by a decent margin, at least in terms of last year's regular-season record. But that team made an embarrassingly easy exit from the playoffs, and this year's version seems like they'll take a step back. Betting against Connor Hellebuyck is rarely smart, but unless he's playing at a Vezina level again this year, I think the Jets take a step or two back.

## **The Contenders Division**

These are the eight teams with the strongest Cup case heading into the year. Maybe worth noting: There's not as much year-to-year turnover as I would have expected, with six of last year's teams back this time.

## **Colorado Avalanche**

**Last season:** 50-25-7, +50, lost in the second round.

**Their offseason in six words:** Not much, but Landeskog possibly returning?

**Why they're here:** Because we don't need to overthink things. The Avs are a recent-ish Cup winner that have been good for years and are returning essentially the same lineup, maybe even eventually with the

beloved captain returning. The Central is a tough path, but Colorado is clearly one of the league's eight best teams.

### **Tampa Bay Lightning**

**Last season:** 45-29-8, +21, lost in the first round.

**Their offseason in six words:** Guentzel in, Stamkos and Sergachev out.

**Why they're here:** Because it's fun to live dangerously. Not that dangerously, mind you, because we're picking a recent Cup winner with a bunch of stars and the best coach in the league to do well. Still, it's felt like the clock was ticking on the Lightning for a few years now, and in the last two seasons they haven't made it to 100 points or won a round. It would be poetic for the window to finally slam shut the moment Steven Stamkos leaves, but there's enough history here that I'd rather be a year too late on ruling them out than too soon.

### **Carolina Hurricanes**

**Last season:** 52-23-7, +66, lost in the second round.

**Their offseason in six words:** New GM. Same coach. Diminished roster?

**Why they're here:** I've seen a few smart people make the case that the Hurricanes will be worse, and I can see it. What I can't quite see is them missing the playoffs in the Metro. Others can, and they're completely not unconvincing. But for now, I think they're safe enough that they can spend 60 games or so figuring out where the weaknesses are and then aggressively addressing them at the deadline.

### **Dallas Stars**

**Last season:** 52-21-9, +62, lost in the conference final.

**Their offseason in six words:** Pavelski retires. And again. And again.

**Why they're here:** Because even though I picked them to win the Cup last year and they let me down, I'm not the sort of person who holds a grudge. The Stars figure to go back and forth with the Avalanche for top spot in the Central, and probably meet them in the second round for the right to face the Oilers. In other words, a lot like last year, although Stars fans will be hoping for a better ending.

### **Vegas Golden Knights**

**Last season:** 45-29-8, +20, lost in the first round.

**Their offseason in six words:** Even Marchessault gets no loyalty here.

**Why they're here:** I went back and forth on the Knights, who really weren't very good last year and enter the season with questions in goal and on the wing. Middle-of-the-pack certainly isn't out of the question here. But with a full season of Tomáš Hertl to (hopefully) make up for a loss of forward depth, and the knowledge they'll be aggressive during the season, I think they get to the postseason in solid shape to do some damage.

### **New York Rangers**

**Last season:** 55-23-4, +52, won Presidents' Trophy, lost in the conference final.

**Their offseason in six words:** Not the big changes we expected.

**Why they're here:** Because even if you forecast a step back from last year, which you probably should, they've still got enough star power to waltz into the playoffs. The one wild card here is the Igor



Shesterkin contract situation, and just how much of a distraction that turns into. But having your most important player in a show-me contract year isn't the worst thing in the sports world.

### **Florida Panthers**

**Last season:** 52-24-6, +67, won the Stanley Cup.

**Their offseason in six words:** Lost some guys, but not Reinhart.

**Why they're here:** In the last three years, they've won a Presidents' Trophy, went to the final and then won it all. I think they might be good, you guys.

### **Edmonton Oilers**

**Last season:** 49-27-6, +56, lost in the Stanley Cup final.

**Their offseason in six words:** Offer sheets, Bowman hired, cheap UFAs.

**Why they're here:** Because while I'm sure Oilers fans are starting to get a little bit nervous over how unanimously everyone is picking Edmonton to dominate this year, I'm not enough of a contrarian to try to pretend it won't happen. That doesn't mean they're guaranteed to win it all, but it's hard to imagine a scenario where they don't at least wind up with home ice in a weak-ish Pacific. Yes, they're my Cup pick, even as I won't get any points for originality.

### **The Your-Guess-Is-As-Good-As-Mine Division**

Here's hoping you didn't forget about this division and then get all excited when your team wasn't in the bottom-feeders or the middle-of-the-pack groups. Ah, who am I kidding, I love when that happens.

### **Boston Bruins**

**Last season:** 47-20-15, +42, lost in the second round.

**Their offseason in six words:** Roughly 64 million reasons to worry.

**Why they're here:** They apparently enjoyed last year's role as the league's most confusing team so much that they figured they'd go for an encore based on goaltending drama. With Jeremy Swayman's status still up in the air, it's really impossible to project how the Bruins' season will go. Swayman could sign tonight, join camp tomorrow and be ready to go early enough in the season to chase a Vezina. Or he could be out until December 1, and maybe even all season. That still feels exceedingly unlikely, but until this is put to bed, Boston is a question mark.

### **New Jersey Devils**

**Last season:** 38-39-5, -17, seventh in the Metro.

**Their offseason in six words:** Goalie acquired, so ignore last year.

**Why they're here:** Last season's biggest disappointment is apparently right back on everyone's list of contenders heading into this year. And sure, it makes sense. They have Jacob Markström now, Dougie Hamilton is healthy, Jack Hughes is another year into his prime... the Devils should be a lot better. But they need to be about 15 points better just to get into the playoff mix, and that's a big gap. Are we sure they're an elite team? OK, just checking, I guess I'll go along with the crowd.

### **Los Angeles Kings**

**Last season:** 44-27-11, +44, lost in the first round.

**Their offseason in six words:** PLD traded. Dreams do come true.

**Why they're here:** Because I don't have the guts to put a 99-point team in the bottom-feeder group, but I'm also not confident they can stay in contention. That was true even before the Drew Doughty injury, although that obviously doesn't help. This just feels like a rebuilding team that's stalled out in the mushy middle, and may have got worse over the summer. When the best-case scenario is the annual first-round door-kicking from the Oilers, I'm not sure where the optimism comes from.

#### **Utah Hockey Club**

**Last season:** They didn't exist!

**No but really, last season:** 36-41-5, -20, seventh in the Central (as the Coyotes).

**Their offseason in six words:** We put a team where now?

**Why they're here:** Because I have absolutely no idea how this will play out. The Coyotes did their best under tough circumstances at Mullett Arena, but it's hard to really get a sense of how good this roster could be, especially with the blue line upgrades this summer. Mix in some cap space and an owner who presumably wouldn't mind winning right away, and Utah still feels like a work in progress. Last year's Coyotes are probably the floor, but I'm not sure how high the ceiling goes.

#### **Buffalo Sabres**

**Last season:** 39-37-6, +1, sixth in the Atlantic.

**Their offseason in six words:** It's going so well, why change?

**Why they're here:** Because after an offseason that saw them mostly stay the course, they'll be about the same as last year, which is to say middle-of-the-pack. Unless Jesse is right about their goaltending being secretly great and the kids all take a stride forward and Lindy Ruff works his magic, in which case they'll finally return to the playoffs. Unless the Sabres gonna Sabre, in which case they'll fake us out with one early-season win streak and otherwise be terrible and we'll all make fun of them. Unless it's something else. But definitely one of those things.

#### **St. Louis Blues**

**Last season:** 44-33-6, -14, fifth in the Central.

**Their offseason in six words:** You like offer sheets? Here's two.

**Why they're here:** Even if we assume the hockey gods aren't going to punish Doug Armstrong for committing the cardinal sin of actually trying to win using offer sheets, there are still enough questions here that it's hard to know where to slot in the Blues. Armstrong is treating them like they're a playoff team, and if Jordan Binnington is really good then maybe they are. Then again, Binnington was really good last year and it wasn't quite enough, so what if he has an off year? (Casually ducks flying water bottle.) You're right, that wouldn't happen, forget I brought it up.

#### **Nashville Predators**

**Last season:** 47-30-5, +18, lost in the first round.

**Their offseason in six words:** Nice franchise icon. He's ours now.

**Why they're here:** They were already a 99-point team, which I had to double-check because I didn't remember them being quite that good last year. But yep, they were just short of the century club before Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault arrived, so you'd think those additions put them in the running for the Central and maybe even a Cup. Then again, adding mid-30s UFAs hasn't exactly been a recipe for success in the cap era, and last year's Preds couldn't even beat a playoff opponent that was

down to its third-string goalie. I hope Nashville does well because teams that take big swings are fun, but you could imagine it all adding up to a letdown.

### **Vancouver Canucks**

**Last season:** 50-23-9, +58, lost in the second round.

**Their offseason in six words:** Thatcher Demko prayer circles forming regularly.

**Why they're here:** The Canucks were already going to be a tricky team after defying expectations for pretty much all of 2023-24. The regression predictions were already inevitable back when we thought they'd have healthy goaltending. With Demko out, this could be headed downhill. Then again, didn't we all get tired of being wrong with doom-and-gloom calls about the Canucks last year?

## [The Athletic / Why the 2024-25 NHL season could be the year of the comeback](#)

By James Mirtle – October 4, 2024

You could almost hear the hockey world breathe a sigh of relief when the news on Patrik Laine's injury came through Tuesday afternoon.

It was bad — he will miss two to three months with a knee sprain — but it wasn't catastrophic. His season wasn't over like last season when he managed just 18 games due to a broken clavicle and then time spent in the NHL's player assistance program.

There's hope he'll be back in regular form by midseason, patrolling the left side in the top six with the rebuilding Montreal Canadiens.

After watching the first couple weeks of training camps and preseason around the NHL, I started to pull together a list of remarkable comeback stories. There are a lot of veteran stars, up-and-comers and likable journeymen attempting to resurrect their careers this season, and Laine was going to be one of the headliners.

A popular figure since he was drafted No. 2 eight years ago, Laine is one of the game's colorful characters and landed with a marquee franchise after a lost 2023-24 campaign in Columbus.

More than just Habs fans were hoping to see him succeed. That's why his injury status was headline news after a controversial knee-on-knee collision with Toronto Maple Leafs farmhand Cedric Pare.

You see players like Laine, 19-year-old teammate David Reinbacher and Los Angeles Kings star Drew Doughty go down in preseason, and you can't help but want to see a different outcome. In the wake of those incidents, some have called for a shorter preseason — something that will certainly get support from a lot of corners around the league — but the reality is this can be a brutal, unforgiving sport, with devastating injuries rather commonplace, no matter the time of year.

Rather than focus on the negative, I wanted to highlight some of the inspiring stories that are taking place around the league this fall. Laine's is one comeback that will have to wait, but others could begin as soon as this weekend when the NHL season opens in Prague.

Here's hoping these players can turn their careers around after trying circumstances coming into the year.

### **Gabriel Landeskog, Colorado**

I was hard-pressed to find many other examples of an NHL captain missing an entire two seasons due to injury and making a comeback, outside of Mario Lemieux nearly 25 years ago. But that's what the Avalanche veteran is about to attempt.

Landeskog last took the ice on June 26, 2022 — 829 days ago — when he led Colorado to its third Stanley Cup with a win in Game 6 over the Tampa Bay Lightning. He even assisted on the game's tying goal.

Since that point, however, Landeskog has been going through some significant medical procedures to repair a badly damaged knee. He had cartilage transplant surgery in May 2023 after undergoing multiple knee surgeries in 2022.

There's no real timeline on when he can return, but the Avs have been pointing to early in the season as a possibility.

Landeskog is only 31 years old and in the fourth year of an eight-year, \$56 million contract he signed in the summer of 2021. He would be the first player to return from cartilage transplant surgery, making any kind of return to the ice a remarkable story.

### **Dougie Hamilton, New Jersey**

A lot of the Devils' implosion last season — as they fell from third to tied for 23rd in the overall standings — was understandably blamed on what happened in goal.

But missing their top defenseman, and one of their best (and highest paid) players, for all but 20 games was a huge reason for their freefall. Hamilton needed surgery on a torn pectoral muscle at the start of December a year ago, and without his 22 minutes a game, New Jersey threw two of the youngest defensemen in the league in Simon Nemeč and Luke Hughes into key minutes.

With Hamilton back healthy and the additions of solid veterans Brett Pesce and Brenden Dillon, the Devils suddenly have a pretty crowded group on the back end. If Hamilton can regain his 2022-23 form — when he put up 72 points and finished sixth in Norris Trophy voting — and Nemeč and Hughes take another step, New Jersey could definitely boast one of the deeper defense cores in the league.

And that's a significant reason why — in addition to the reinforcements in goal — the Devils are suddenly getting some of the best Stanley Cup odds in the league.

### **Matt Murray, Toronto**

Murray missed almost all of 2023-24 due to offseason surgery on his hips.

His last NHL appearance was way back on April 2, 2023, one of only 26 games he was able to play in during his first season with the Leafs. After winning back-to-back Stanley Cups with the Penguins in 2016 and 2017, Murray has started just 109 regular-season games over the past five seasons due to a variety of injuries.

Only 30 years old, Murray is penciled in as the Leafs' No. 3 behind Joseph Woll and Anthony Stolarz this season, but he will have to clear waivers by Sunday in order to join the AHL's Marlies. He struggled in three appearances with the farm club to end last season, which marked the beginning of this latest comeback attempt.

The Leafs are likely going to need to call on Murray, however, given their two primary netminders have a long injury history and are short on experience. Murray will be back in the NHL at some point, defying the odds.

### **Kirby Dach, Montreal**

After posting two points in the Canadiens season opener a year ago, Dach's year ended after just four minutes played in Game 2 when he tore his ACL and MCL.

Montreal dealt a No. 13 pick along with a third-rounder for Dach in 2022, but the promise he displayed as a junior that led to him being picked No. 3 in 2019 has been derailed by a series of injuries.

Dach showed some nice mettle and maturity in how he spent his recovery last season, as he remained around the team, soaking up lessons from coach Martin St. Louis and helping the Habs' other young players like Juraj Slafkovský.

Dach is expected to center the Canadiens' second line this year and should receive plenty of minutes on a team that remains relatively thin up front. He's already scored a couple of goals in preseason but not having a veteran like Laine to play with until midseason is going to add another level of difficulty in his return to play.

### **Logan Couture, San Jose**

Couture is another popular NHL captain with a very murky future.

He hasn't been skating in camp with the San Jose Sharks this fall after playing sparingly last season while dealing with osteitis pubis, a painful condition involving inflammation of the pubic bones that can impact athletes in particular.

"Some days were terrible," he told The Hockey News earlier this year. "Some days, I couldn't get out of bed."

Couture's last NHL game was at the end of January, one of only six he played all of last season. He had a setback at that point and hasn't been back on the ice since, meaning his return for the rebuilding Sharks remains very uncertain.

Now 35, Couture's playing future is in doubt, but he hasn't given up on a potential return at some point.

## [Sportsnet.ca / What's wrong with the NHL's pre-season and ideas to fix it](#)

By Andrew Brewer – October 4, 2024

Has the NHL pre-season jumped the shark?

In exhibition play so far we have seen serious injuries to Patrik Laine, Drew Doughty and David Reinbacher, among others, and had a multitude of NHL stars held out of games or leaving early for precaution.

Last Saturday night we saw a roster of mostly Toronto Marlies play against essentially the opening night lineup for the Canadiens -- three hours later two Canadiens left the Bell Centre on crutches. A few nights earlier at Scotiabank Arena, Toronto dressed over \$60 million in player salaries against a version of the Belleville Senators.

It's not like these examples of two wildly different lineups going against each other are relegated to just Canada either. It's a league-wide issue. Just this week we've seen the NHL Devils get ready for their regular season to begun in Europe while the AHL Utica Comets played a back-to-back against the New York Rangers. New York's Artemi Panarin left one of those contests for precautionary reasons.

With the way this year's pre-season has gone, many fans (and those in management and coaching) have been left to question whether it's time for a bigger change in how the league approaches this time on the calendar. Is shortening the pre-season schedule the only solution that's needed, or are there other ideas to consider?

Before we can get into ways to improve the current situation, we need to understand how teams handle the period between training camp and the start of the regular season.

### **SEGMENT 1: TRAINING CAMP (3-4 Days)**

**Players in Camp:** 60-plus

**Purpose:** Set the foundation and tone for the season

**Roster Construction:** Split across three "teams"

**Length of Schedule:** 2-3 split squads

### **SEGMENT 2: PRE-SEASON WEEK 1**

**Players in Camp:** 40-plus

**Purpose:** Get reps, players start to play in 'NHL games'

**Roster Construction:** Usually split between two even groups

**Length of Schedule:** 3-4 Games

This is where the biggest issues have come this year, with teams more often dressing an NHL lineup at home and an AHL lineup on the road. Current roster rules allow this and we saw a huge discrepancy between teams and players on the ice (ECHL-AHL-NHL Star).

### **SEGMENT 3: PRE-SEASON WEEK 2**

**Players in Camp:** Around 36

**Purpose:** Preparing players for the first game of the NHL season

**Roster Construction:** Split into NHL and AHL groups

**Length of Schedule:** 3-4 Games

By now the pre-season starts to drag on and players who have no realistic chance to make the NHL club are still in town to play a meaningless pre-season game that management doesn't put any real weight into.

### **HOW WE GOT HERE**

In the past teams there were two main reasons to have training camp and pre-season games.

1. Get players back in shape: This isn't the 1972 Summit Series anymore. Players come to town out of summer in the best shape of their lives and are physically ready to compete. They do need a few games to get back up to NHL pace, but for this to be effective the competition and their teammates need to actually be NHL players.

2. Evaluate players teams aren't as familiar with: The GM of an NHL team in the 1980s may have rarely, if ever, seen a certain player under contract play hockey. Now with video scouting and analytics, managers can see every shift and have every piece of data they would ever need on any player. The need today is to evaluate players as they seek to switch between levels: can an AHL player keep pace in the NHL?

I look at a situation like Max Pacioretty. Sure, he scored two goals in his first pre-season tryout game, which should be enough. But he was playing on a stacked Maple Leafs lineup against players who largely won't make the NHL, so what did we really learn? Teams need to trust their gut, use scouting, video and analytics to sign whoever they target and keep pre-season decisions down to six players or so -- and not 20.

### **WHAT CAN WE DO TO FIX THE NHL'S PRE-SEASON?**

Shorten the whole preparation window: This isn't a new idea, and it seems to be a discussion point for the next CBA, but the pre-season needs to be more compact. Currently training camp and pre-season lasts around 19 days (plus about another three or four days until the first game of the regular season).

Instead, start training camp on a Monday, with pre-season games beginning on the Friday. Owners could still get two weekends worth of games to sell. Then drop the puck on the regular season the following Tuesday/Wednesday. This would shorten the pre-season window from 20-21 days to 14-15 days between the opening of camp and the start of the season.

Reduce the number of exhibition games: This one is a bit trickier. Teams like making money, and home games generate money. Realistically, though, teams should only play four or five pre-season games to keep competition high, and to reduce the chance for injuries in games that mean nothing or serve no purpose.

So, the solution to the money question is simply to add two more regular season games and make it an 84-game schedule. With considered for hockey-related revenues, both players and owners should be able to walk away happy.

This would have to be a collectively bargained issue, since it's covered in this clause of the CBA:

“15.4 (b) Each Club shall schedule no less than six (6) and no more than eight (8) Exhibition Games during Training Camp.”

The current NHL/NHLPA CBA runs through the 2025-26 season, so this change couldn't be applied next year.



Changing rules for who can dress in pre-season games: Reducing the number of pre-season games will help decrease the chance of injury, though it's a risk that can never be completely removed. One bigger concern is how some of the injuries we've seen to NHLers have come from run-ins with players who won't be cracking an NHL lineup.

Also, if teams are trying to measure who should win a roster battle, which prospects are ready for regular season action, or just want to get their core up to NHL speed, it'd be better to also change rules that would force teams to dress stronger lineups through a reduced pre-season schedule.

This is another collectively bargained issue. Too many pre-season games are watered down, with teams dressing strong lineups at home and far weaker ones on the road. The current CBA enforces these rules for pre-season lineups:

“15.4 (c) A Club shall be permitted to dress a minimum of eight (8) veterans for any Exhibition Game.

**For purposes of this Section 15.4(c), a veteran shall constitute either:**

- (1) a forward or defenseman who played in thirty (30) NHL Games during the previous season,
- (2) a goaltender who either dressed in fifty (50) or more NHL Games or played in thirty (30) or more NHL Games in the previous season,
- (3) a first round draft choice from the most recent year's Entry Draft, or
- (4) any Player who has played one-hundred (100) or more career NHL Games.”

As written, this rule still allows too much leeway for weak lineups. For instance, in Toronto's lineup last Saturday, the eight players who qualified as veterans were Pontus Holmberg, Matthew Knies, Stephen Lorentz, Simon Benoit, Nick Robertson, Alex Nylander, Logan Shaw, and Philippe Myers.

At most, five of those players could be in their opening night lineup, and possibly only four.

Along with a reduced pre-season schedule, the NHL will need to fine-tune the lineup rules to ensure the majority of players in a game are truly NHL players. Some ideas to accomplish this include:

- Changing the threshold of 30 games played the previous season to 50.
- Changing the 100 career games threshold to 200.
- Eliminating the first-rounder rule.
- Increase the required amount of dressed veterans from eight to 12.

With this setup, you'd still realistically be able to rest one full line of your regular season lineup each game, making room for players on PTOs or prospects to get their chance to show something.

The majority of the analysis on players should be done before training camp even starts anyway, and teams should be wary of drawing conclusions based on small sample sizes.

**Let's be honest:** if you were truly trying to make a decision on whether or not to sign someone like Pacioretty to a standard contract, wouldn't you rather see him compete in tougher situations, against true NHLers?

Any time something changes, there will be unexpected consequences. But as we see more players getting hurt in the 2024 pre-season, and weaker lineups being iced against much stronger ones, it's necessary to consider how to evolve the NHL's pre-season and to resolve it in the next CBA.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Highs, lows and best swearing in Amazon Prime's Faceoff series](#)

By Ryan Dixon – October 4, 2024

Sometimes, even with art, it's best not to veer too far from a reliable template. So it should surprise nobody that Faceoff: Inside the NHL has no shortage of salty language and slow-motion eye blinks set to both soaring and sorrowful music.

### **That sound like it might work for you?**

Amazon Prime's behind-the-scenes look at the best hockey league in the world is a six-part piece that drops as one package on Friday. This type of high-gloss storytelling has become very common in the sports world, from the Quarterback and Receiver series centred on the NFL to Amazon's own All or Nothing that's focused on mega-teams such as the Toronto Maple Leafs and Arsenal of the English Premier League to what feels like gold standard of them all, Formula 1: Drive to Survive.

What makes Drive so unique is that it truly seemed to convert people with absolutely zero sports-watching habits into racing fans glued to the Grand Prix of Monaco. That's a high bar to clear and it's hard to imagine Faceoff will evangelize loads of people with no previous sports leanings into hockey heads.

That said, if you like hockey — and, hey, you're reading this on Sportsnet.ca — it's hard to imagine there isn't something here for you, from cheeky fun with the Tkachuk family to William Nylander's dog-loving existence to an unvarnished look at Connor McDavid in his most vulnerable professional moment.

It's a cool and, at times, jarring ride.

To get you, well, primed for the experience, we've broken down all six episodes below and evaluated them across a few categories.

So, as they say inside closed dressing rooms, "Let's go, right f----- now, OK!"

### **Episode 1 Best of Rivals**

#### **Vibe Genuinely touching**

Best use of swearing "Just f----- shoot it. Stop crying, bro. This is the f----- issue, you guys bitch about s-- -." --William Nylander, to teammates Austin Matthews and Mitch Marner

**Why watch?** It's a pretty sweet tale of friendship between Toronto's William Nylander and Boston's David Pastrnak. The latter, specifically, has been through some very difficult times in life, from losing his dad as a teenager to having a son leave this world just six days after he entered. Nylander and Pastrnak have been good buddies ever since Pastrnak landed in Nylander's native Sweden to play hockey two years before he was even drafted by the Bruins. "He was so much better than me at that age," Pastrnak says of Nylander. "So, I could see it for him."

While most of the heartstrings are plucked by Pastrnak's tale, there's touching elements on Nylander's side, as well. While it's easy to think of his life as being one of extreme privilege — he grew up the son of a highly successful NHLer, Michael Nylander — the Leafs star opens up about why the city he plays in means so much to him. "This place is the only place that's been home for me," says the guy who moved around constantly as part of a nomadic hockey family. "I've never spent so much time in one place my entire life, which is pretty crazy."

#### **Vibe Ouch!**

Best use of swearing "Does a bear s--- in the woods?" --Jack Eichel, when asked if he's ordering wine with dinner.

**Why watch?** Well, you kind of have to see the mustache balloons and Filip Forsberg air freshener for yourself to truly appreciate them. Aside from that, this episode takes just 90 seconds to make you feel something real, as you're on the bed with Forsberg while he's receiving acupuncture treatment to play through an excruciating ankle injury. And, indeed, the theme of this chapter is the chunk of flesh players give to the game, from Forsberg battling through his injuries — including a severe concussion in 2023 — to reliving the saga Eichel went through in Buffalo with regard to the major neck injury that ultimately caused an unrepairable rift with the Sabres organization. Everybody sacrifices in this game, including the families they're a part of. "Even the miracle of life has to work around Filip's schedule," jokes Forsberg's wife, musician Erin Alvey Forsberg, after giving birth to Felix Forsberg.

### **Vibe Family is everything**

Best use of swearing "I've still got so much more to offer. And I haven't proven s---." Jeremy Swayman, NHL goalie

**Why watch?** Uh, if you're a Bruins fan, maybe don't watch, actually. It's almost surreal seeing Jeremy Swayman — whose real-life contract squabble with Boston dominated headlines earlier this week — profiled and giving honest, unfiltered thoughts about his future with the team. Swayman was a big story early in the 2024 Stanley Cup Playoffs, with everything set against the backdrop of the fact he'd soon become a restricted free agent. And not just a restricted free agent; a restricted free agent who'd been through the arbitration process in the summer of 2023. "You don't forget what was said," Swayman says in the episode. "I wrote them down and I looked at them the other day, and I had a couple checkmarks. My biggest knock was how I wasn't trustworthy in playoffs. Check."

After the Bruins are eliminated by the Florida Panthers, Swayman — who seems equal parts intelligent and headstrong — talked about what it was like in the immediate aftermath of losing, when he left the ice to the sound of Bruins fans chanting his name. "I was just thinking about that jersey, like, is it the last time?" he says. "That's when I was like, whoa. And you're skating around the Garden, you're looking up and you're hearing your name chanted and it's like, whoa ... like ... f---."

Meanwhile, who would ever pass up a chance to ride around Fort Lauderdale with Matthew Tkachuk in a golf cart? "I don't know what to tell ya," a grinning Tkachuk says when a jeep full of "partiers" pulls up next to him on the road. "It's Florida, everyone is having a good time! Sucks me in every time." So will the Tkachuk family chirps, which inspired a bonus round of "best use of swearing."

"You'll be f----- washing my car next year; you'll be working for me!" --Matthew Tkachuk to somebody on the Ottawa Senators

"Oh, my dad. He basically lives at my house. It's f----- insane." --Matthew Tkachuk on father Keith Tkachuk

"Shut the f--- up while I'm cooking." --Keith Tkachuk's instructions to sons Matthew and Brady

### **Vibe Get pucks deep**

Best use of swearing "I have a mic on or I'd be gong f----- crazy." Quinn Hughes, unhappy on the Canucks bench.

**Why watch?** This chapter focuses on three captains in different career phases. Quinn Hughes is learning how to be a young leader in the first year of wearing the 'C' in Vancouver; Jacob Trouba is profiled as a veteran who knows exactly who he is and what he brings to the New York Rangers, while the injured

Gabriel Landeskog is wrestling with how much his voice matters when he's not on the ice and what his own identity is if it's not that of a pro hockey player.

There's less that jumps off the page in this episode, but the visual of Trouba doing what could only be described as bodycheck-painting is a cool melding of sports and art fit for New York City. And it's also easy to get an appreciation for how Hughes' life as a high-profile player in a hockey-mad city requires a graciousness the 24-year-old seems to have natural supplies of.

### **Vibe Raw emotion**

Best use of swearing "It's not like I'm going a million miles an hour and thinking to myself, holy s---. I'm comfortable going that speed. It feels like you're walking; you're seeing everything clearly, you're feeling a lot more calm there than you think." --Connor McDavid, basically explaining that his brain somehow moves as fast as his skates

**Why watch?** You'll rarely see a sports megastar in a more stripped-down state. The passion you know bubbles underneath the surface with Connor McDavid spills all over the dressing room floor in a couple wrenching scenes. There's the explosion of anger after the Oilers lose Game 2 of the Stanley Cup Final to the Panthers and McDavid implores his mates to "Dig the f--- in! Right now!" And there's the final thud of the end, when the tears roll down his face as he strips his equipment away piece by piece after losing the decisive contest to the Panthers. It's real, raw and something to behold.

Even beyond that, there's lighter looks into 97's life, like fiancée Lauren Kyle explaining that Connor is "afraid of ketchup" after their in-house chef sneaks a bottle of it to the kitchen table. McDavid even briefly acknowledges he's an introvert by nature and it's not always fun to know people refer to you as "boring" or a "robot."

There's also a glimpse into Leon Draisaitl's life and it's striking to hear him sincerely marvel at the attention he, McDavid and the Oilers get in Edmonton. "It's pretty cool to see how much people appreciate you," he says. "It's hard to describe sometimes because we don't walk around thinking we're at The Beatles; we're just like any other guy at home eating chips and watching Friends."

### **Vibe Fight to the end**

Best use of swearing "There's nothing that's going to make this feel better, nothing we say. But I know we're going to be back. I f----- know we're going to be back, boys. I know it in my f----- heart." --Zach Hyman in Edmonton's dressing room after the Game 7 loss to Florida in the Stanley Cup Final

**Why watch?** Even though you know how it ends, it's chilling to relive Edmonton's failed comeback from an 0-3 series hole and Florida's eventual triumph. And, to be honest, Cats GM Bill Zito's intensity still blasts through the screen and sends a legit fright up your spine. It's also time, to the surprise of nobody, to note that Florida coach Paul Maurice — who honestly sounds like a pirate — does the most with the least amount of screen time in this doc. Maurice never address the camera directly, but any time he talks to his team in the room it represents some of the best TV you're going to get. In Episode 5, he puts on goalie gloves, grabs a goalie stick and gets down on his hands and knees in the middle of the Florida room to demonstrate how they're going to get a puck past New York goalie Igor Shesterkin in the Eastern Conference Final. With his team training 4-2 after two periods in Game 5 at home, Maurice lets fly. "They're gonna sit on it; they f----- are. So we're going to get our action on the change of f----- possession in the offensive zone, you hunt. That's where you'll f----- get it. That being said, let's blow the f----- doors off 'em."

While nothing in the series moves you more than the emotion shown by McDavid — and the hands of Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins that try to console him — after the Game 7 loss, it's also something

to see the other end of the spectrum up close when Keith Tkachuk is reduced to a blubbering happy mess in the seconds after realizing his family name will go on the Stanley Cup.

As with the most special moments of Faceoff, it feels like you're right there with him.

**Episode rank 4th-best of 6**

## USA Hockey / U.S. National Teams Will Wear Helmet Decal Honoring Gaudreau Brothers This Season

**By USA Hockey Staff – October 4, 2024**

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – A helmet decal honoring Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, who tragically passed away in a bicycle accident on Aug. 29, will be donned by U.S. national teams at all levels this season, as well as by the two teams part of USA Hockey’s National Team Development Program, it was announced today by USA Hockey.

The decal artwork includes stars floating toward the heavens with the Gaudreau name and the jersey numbers of Johnny (13) and Matthew (21).

“Johnny and Matthew, along with their families, will forever be a part of the USA Hockey family,” said Pat Kelleher, executive director of USA Hockey. “This is a small way to not only honor their memory, but help keep their wonderful spirit for our great game and life in general in the forefront.”