



**Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
September 10, 2024**

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Columbus Dispatch / Memorializing Johnny, Matthew Gaudreau: 'We've been robbed of something here today'

By Brian Hedger- September 10, 2024

MEDIA, Pa. — The day began under crystal blue skies Monday at Saint Mary Magdalene Church, where groups of Blue Jackets and Calgary Flames exited buses and immediately embraced each other with hugs.

Nearly four hours later, a joint funeral for Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau concluded with the heartbreaking sounds of church bells chiming as Guy Gaudreau, their father, wept loudly while draping himself over his sons' caskets.

Jane Gaudreau, their mother, bore a look of anguish as her two sons, ages 31 (John) and 29 (Matthew) were loaded into shimmering silver hearses following a touching service that included eulogies from their wives.

Gathered outside was a large group of family, friends and NHL dignitaries who attended, including commissioner Gary Bettman. The hockey world joined the Gaudreau family in mourning the brothers, who were killed Aug. 29 after being struck by a vehicle while bicycling together in Oldmans Township, New Jersey.

Their younger sister, Katie Gaudreau, was set to be married the next day.

The driver, Sean M. Higgins, was arrested and remains behind bars while facing two charges of death by auto. Police say he admitted to drinking 5-6 beers before the crash and failed a field sobriety test.

The shocking deaths have rocked hockey. Both brothers were coached by their father, played at the junior level in the United States Hockey League, then collegiately at Boston College, including one season as teammates, and each reached the professional level. Matthew spent several seasons in the ECHL and AHL. Johnny made it to the NHL, where he became a star with the Flames for nine seasons in Calgary before signing with the Blue Jackets in July 2022.

In Columbus, Johnny Gaudreau became a father twice to a daughter, Noa, and son, Johnny. His wife, Meredith, revealed during her eulogy that she's 9 weeks pregnant with their third child. Speaking for roughly 30 minutes, she wore his dark wedding band along with her own.

Matthew's wife, Madeline, is also expecting their first child, a boy they'd named Tripp. Hers was the first eulogy, following a moving homily by Boston College reverend Anthony Penna, who met the Gaudreau brothers while they were students.

"All of us here today are having a hard time believing that we should not, as the gospel said, be burdened by our loss today because God has them in God's hands," Penna said. "Though that is true, there's not a person in this church today, all of you, who doesn't feel a burden, a pain, a loss. We've been robbed of something here today – two really wonderful young men, who had dreams yet to chase down, who had futures yet to live, who had goals and accomplishments yet to be achieved. How can we not feel bad today?"

Penna, whose homily was about love and the Gaudreau family's closeness, shared an anecdote about the brothers' love for each other as siblings, which he witnessed once during Matthew's visit to BC during Johnny's freshman year. Upon walking up to say hello to Matthew, the reverend heard the two brothers bantering back and forth, saying they loved each other.

“What I saw in those two brothers was a love that I didn’t have with my own brothers, and I love my brothers,” Penna said. “But they had an intensity to their love that was unbelievable, and I’m sure it’s that way for (their sisters) Katie and Kristen too because they had the best teachers in the world (Guy and Jane Gaudreau).”

Meredith and Madeline also talked about their husbands’ bond, saying that wherever one went, the other was likely to follow or have his name spoken.

“John took care of Matty and Matty would take care of John,” Madeline Gaudreau said. “To know both of them was to truly love them. It was impossible not to fall in love with them. Meredith said it best: ‘You do not hear one name without the other.’ They were so extremely proud of each other, and it brings me comfort knowing they’re still together forever, as they always were.”

The church was packed. The service began just after noon and lasted into the middle of the afternoon before the caskets, each covered with a white sheet and cross, were brought down the aisle and out to the waiting hearses.

The sun’s glare glistened brightly off the vehicles, as a somber crowd grew in front of the church.

Patrik Laine, who had just been traded to the Montreal Canadiens shortly before the Gaudreaus died, greeted his former Blue Jackets teammates with hugs, including Adam Fantilli, the 19-year-old center he’d taken under his wing last season. Former Blue Jackets forward Jack Roslovic, now with the Carolina Hurricanes, also greeted his former Columbus teammates, along with Gustav Nyquist, who played one season with Johnny Gaudreau as a Blue Jackets teammate and now is with the Nashville Predators.

They weren’t alone.

Players, coaches and staffers from several NHL teams showed up to support the family, including new Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan and former Blue Jackets forward Eric Robinson. Each was a pallbearer, Monahan for Johnny and Robinson for Matthew, whom he played with on a youth hockey team coached by Guy Gaudreau.

It was a beautiful day to honor and remember two beloved brothers, sons, husbands and fathers, along with a chance to reflect. Penna challenged those who attended to look inward.

“Maybe we can learn from this that we’re not guaranteed long lives,” he said. “So, maybe we should live our lives with more urgency. We saw what real love looked like. Maybe with our own families, we should find a way to be more loving.”

Also, more responsible.

“I urge everyone not to drink and drive,” Madeline Gaudreau said during her eulogy for Matthew. “Call for a ride. Please do not put another family through this torture.”

Columbus Dispatch / Meredith Gaudreau announces pregnancy in emotional eulogy for Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau

By Colin Gay- September 10, 2024

In an emotional and tear-filled eulogy for her husband, Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau, Meredith Gaudreau revealed Monday that she is 9 weeks pregnant with the couple's third child.

Gaudreau said the week she found out about her third child was her "favorite week" of her life.

"We're actually a family of five," she said during Monday's funeral in Media, Pennsylvania. "I'm in my ninth week of pregnancy with our third baby. A total surprise, but, again, Johnny's beaming and so excited. I was so nervous because, again, this was a total surprise, but his reaction was just immediately kissing me and hugging me even though I was driving the car.

"After the initial excitement sank in, every time he would look at me he would just say, 'You're nuts, you know that?'" Meredith said Monday. "Noa, our oldest, is not even 2 yet. In less than three years of marriage, we have created a family of five. It doesn't even sound possible, but I look at it as the ultimate blessing. How lucky am I to be the mother of John's three babies, our last one being a blessing and so special despite these difficult circumstances."

Both of Johnny and Meredith Gaudreau's children, Noa and Johnny, were born in Columbus.

Johnny Gaudreau and his brother Mathew were killed Aug. 29 when they were struck by a suspected drunk driver while bicycling in Oldmans Township, New Jersey, close to their hometown in Salem County, New Jersey State Police said.

As she remembered Johnny Gaudreau, Meredith Gaudreau said Columbus "quickly became home and became our family."

"The memories we made in Columbus as a growing family are the best years of my life," she said.

Meredith Gaudreau said there were many signs that Johnny's signing with the Blue Jackets was the right choice, saying, "You know it's a special place when the hockey season is over, but you're not quite ready to pack up and go home yet."

Meredith Gaudreau called Columbus "a hidden gem" and the "most underrated city."

"The way I described Columbus is similar to the way I describe John," she said. "You have to come and find out for yourself, and then once you know it, you love it."

After nine seasons with the Calgary Flames, Johnny Gaudreau signed a seven-year, \$68.25 million deal with the Blue Jackets as an unrestricted free agent.

"I can't describe how shattered I am that I don't get more time in your amazing city with John," she said.

In two seasons with the Blue Jackets, Gaudreau had 33 goals and 101 assists in 161 games.

"John was so proud to wear your colors every single day," Meredith Gaudreau said.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' Johnny Gaudreau was more than a really good hockey player

By Lori Schmidt- September 10, 2024

You've heard of letters to the editor? This is a letter from the editor. Assistant editor, I should specify. (I really don't want my boss's responsibilities.)

It's always been true that people will fall for cheap imitations. "Snake oil salesman" is not a term invented in 2024. But there is a whole lot of bad medicine being sold these days.

That's why Johnny Gaudreau's passing has wounded so many, so deeply. The man was not a cheap imitation.

In a world where some treat family as an expectation or religious obligation or act of patriotic participation, Gaudreau saw it as a celebration. The fact that he had a tangible tie to those he loved most brought him great joy.

In a world where we often conflate competitiveness with being a jerk, Gaudreau – generously listed as 5 feet, 9 inches – had to outcompete so many of the players around him. Yet he skated with a joie de vivre and an aim to play beautiful hockey, not with the goal of bruising those in a different sweater.

Gaudreau's death is such a loss, not because he was true to himself. There are plenty of athletes (and businessmen and politicians and so on) who aren't phonies, but they are bad people. Being genuine is not a virtue in and of itself. But what Gaudreau valued was true. It was good.

Gaudreau's death is such a loss, not because he leaves behind a family. If it had been a childless man struck down on the road that rainy night in New Jersey, it would still be mournful. The man who outlives all those around him still leaves a hole when he dies, even if there is no one to attend his funeral. Gaudreau's death is a loss because his devotion to family was just one indication of his character.

And Gaudreau's death is such a loss, not because he was beloved. Lots of cruel, heartless individuals have big fan clubs, at least for a time. It's a loss because of why he was cherished: Gaudreau loved life and those in his life – his family and his extended hockey family. He rightly seemed to fans like someone who, were he not blessed with his talent and good fortune and work ethic, would be in the stands, sitting right next to us, enjoying the sport.

Gaudreau's funeral was Monday. He will be missed. He was a real one. A real good one.

[Columbus Dispatch / Johnny Gaudreau, brother Matthew mourned by family, teammates at Pennsylvania funeral](#)

By Colin Gay, Brian Hedger and Lori Schmidt- September 10, 2024

Friends and family are gathering in Media, Pennsylvania, Monday to remember Blue Jackets star forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew.

A funeral service for both Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau is being held Monday at Magdalen Catholic Church in Media, Pennsylvania.

Johnny, 31, and Matthew, 29, were killed Aug. 29 in South Jersey as they biked together along a road in Oldmans Township in Salem County. Police say the driver who struck them, 43-year-old Sean Higgins, told them he had five or six beers before getting behind the wheel, and Higgins has been charged with two counts of homicide by vehicle.

Johnny Gaudreau:Columbus Blue Jackets' Johnny Gaudreau was more than a really good hockey player

In a press conference Wednesday, Blue Jackets president of hockey operations and general manager Don Waddell confirmed that the team would be present for Gaudreau's funeral.

"In talking with people in the organization, including the guys here with me today, it's apparent just how special of a person Johnny was, and how significant his loss is being felt by everyone," Waddell said.

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

Johnny Gaudreau funeral live stream

The funeral was streamed live by FOX 29 Philadelphia.

Saying she would love him forever and was so very grateful that Johnny Gaudreau had made her a wife and a mother, Meredith Gaudreau ended her eulogy.

"Please, watch over us," she pleaded Johnny.

The funeral for Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau is wrapping up. As a hymn is sung, the two brothers are being carried away as they resume their journey to their final resting place.

Meredith Gaudreau says she felt embraced by the Gaudreau family

Johnny Gaudreau's widow discussed the family members Johnny leaves behind, including parents Guy and Jane who raised "two perfect boys."

Meredith Gaudreau also touched on Johnny's brother, Matthew, who died in the same collision that took Johnny's life.

"The fact that you are together in heaven gives me some comfort," Meredith Gaudreau said. Then she addressed Matthew directly: "I appreciate you sharing your best friend with me."

Meredith Gaudreau said she's expecting third child

In her eulogy, Meredith Gaudreau said that she and her late husband Johnny are expecting a third child. She and Johnny have two young children, Noa and Johnny. According to Meredith, she is nine weeks along and Johnny hugged and kissed her when she informed him of the pregnancy ... even though she was driving at the time.

Meredith Gaudreau reflected on Johnny Gaudreau's relationship with Sean Monahan, a relationship that started before she met Gaudreau. She said Johnny Gaudreau was "so excited" when Monahan signed with the Blue Jackets, and that she is heartbroken he won't be able to play with him.

"Sean, John loved you so much," Meredith Gaudreau said.

Meredith Gaudreau thanks Columbus, Blue Jackets

Meredith Gaudreau said she is "shattered" that Johnny Gaudreau didn't have more time with the Columbus Blue Jackets. She thanked the "5th Line and the Blue Jackets organization." She also called Columbus "a hidden gem" and the "most underrated city in America."

"John was so proud to wear your colors every day," Meredith Gaudreau said.

Meredith Gaudreau feels 'like the luckiest girl in the world'

Meredith Gaudreau said she remains "the luckiest girl in the world" for having met and married Johnny Gaudreau.

"Despite losing my husband way too soon, I still feel like the luckiest girl in the world to be his wife," she said.

Meredith Gaudreau begins remarks at Johnny Gaudreau funeral

Meredith Gaudreau, Johnny's wife, began her remarks by thanking those who have supported her and the Gaudreau family.

"I want to thank everyone for being here and for the support of my family," she said.

Johnny Gaudreau pall bearers include Sean Monahan

Newly-acquired Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan served as a pall bearer for Johnny Gaudreau Former Blue Jackets forward Eric Robinson served as a pall bearer for Matthew Gaudreau.

Johnny Gaudreau funeral procession begins

The funeral procession has begun. Hearses and funeral procession arrived with a police escort, motorcycles followed by cruisers, locals and Pennsylvania State Police.

Hearses arrive at Johnny Gaudreau funeral

Two hearses have arrived at St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church along with three shuttle buses with family.

Columbus Blue Jackets, NHL players present at Johnny Gaudreau funeral

Here's who we have seen at Gaudreau's funeral Monday:

Justin Danforth

Zach Werenski

Mathieu Olivier

Adam Fantilli

Gavin Brindley

Yegor Chinakhov

Elivs Merzlikins

Jake Christiansen

Jet Greaves

Daniil Tarasov

Kent Johnson

Ivan Provorov

Sean Kuraly

Erik Gudbranson

Jamie Healy — head equipment manager

Niklas Backstrom — goalie coach

Chris Clark — director of player personnel/Cleveland Monsters general manager

Patrik Laine — Montreal Canadiens

Gustav Nyquist — Nashville Predators

Seth Jones — Chicago Blackhawks

Connor Murphy — Chicago Blackhawks

Matthew Tkachuk — Florida Panthers

Cole Caufield — Montreal Canadiens

Adam Boqvist — Former Blue Jackets defenseman

Keith Yandle — former NHL defenseman

Patrik Laine arrives at Johnny Gaudreau funeral

Patrik Laine and his fiance arrived separately from the Blue Jackets Monday morning. But he walked into the church with the team.

Attendees arrive in Johnny Gaudreau jerseys

Many funeral attendees have shown up in Johnny Gaudreau Blue Jackets jerseys. Gaudreau Calgary Flames jerseys have been seen as well.

Columbus Blue Jackets welcomes Calgary Flames with hugs

The Blue Jackets and Flames greeted each other with hugs in the church. Many members of both teams are continuing to enter the church.

Former Columbus Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen at Johnny Gaudreau funeral

Along with Sean Kuraly, Erik Gudbranson and other members of the Blue Jackets, former CBJ general manager Jarmo Kekalainen is at Johnny Gaudreau's funeral.

The Blue Jackets and the Flames arrived at the same time on four busses. The teams used a back entrance to enter St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church.

Ahead of Gaudreau's funeral, there is a large police presence in Media, Pennsylvania. Attendees are parking in remote lots a few miles away from the church. Shuttles are taking attendees to the site.

The Athletic / Funeral for Johnny, Matthew Gaudreau draws overflow crowd, tear-filled remembrances

By Aaron Portzline- September 10, 2024

Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau were laid to rest Monday in the suburbs of Philadelphia, remembered in a tear-filled funeral service for their inseparable bond as brothers, but also for their ceaseless joy for life and a strong love of family.

In a two-hour service at St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church in Media, Pa., the Gaudreau brothers were eulogized by their widows, Meredith and Madeline, inside a sanctuary so full of attendants that folding chairs were brought in for overflow seating.

The packed pews reflected the outpouring of grief and love felt across both the hockey world and the non-sporting world since the brothers were killed when they were struck by a car while riding bicycles on a country road on Aug. 29. Johnny was 31, Matthew was 29.

“There is an unspoken message being given today that is more special than anything I could say to you,” said Father Anthony Penna, the director of campus ministry at Boston College, where the Gaudreaus attended and played hockey.

“The overwhelming presence and overwhelming number of people here today, they’re sending a loud and clear message to you that Johnny and Matthew’s lives mattered. They were noticed on this Earth. They were loved on this Earth, and valued on this Earth. This robust crowd is here to tell you — all of you — that they have your backs.”

In addition to hundreds of family and friends, the Columbus Blue Jackets, for whom Johnny Gaudreau played the past two seasons, filled several pews on the left side of the sanctuary. Also present were several members of his former NHL club, the Calgary Flames.

Current Blue Jackets forward Sean Monahan, who signed with Columbus as a free agent this summer in part to play with his Johnny, served as a pallbearer, as did current Carolina Hurricanes forward Eric Robinson, a childhood friend of the Gaudreaus.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman also attended.

Fans in Calgary and Columbus created makeshift memorials to Johnny outside Scotiabank Saddledome and Nationwide Arena. Those rinks were also the sites of evening vigils last week as fans struggled to come to grips with the loss of one of the NHL’s most talented and beloved players.

Matthew had a brief pro career in the minor leagues and had returned home to coach hockey at his high school alma mater, Gloucester Catholic. The brothers played together for one season at Boston College.

“All of us simply have a visa on this Earth; we don’t have a passport,” Penna said. “We’re here for a short time, sometimes too short a time.

“There’s not a person in this church who doesn’t feel a burden, a pain, a loss. We’ve been robbed of something here today — two really wonderful young men, who had dreams to chase down, futures yet to live. They had goals and accomplishments yet to be achieved.”

Meredith Gaudreau, who has two children under the age of 2, revealed during her eulogy that she had recently shared with Johnny that she was pregnant with the couple’s third child.

“I promise to be strong for our children and to take care of them and love them,” Meredith said. “They will know how special their daddy was and they will know how much you loved them, every single day.”

“The way I describe Columbus is similar to the way I describe John. You have to come out and find out for yourself, and then once you know it, you love it”

Madeline, Matthew’s widow, is pregnant with the couple’s first child.

“This last week feels like a nightmare that I can’t wake up from,” Madeline said. “I feel numb, angry, sad and blessed all at once. Some days the thought of this new reality is debilitating, but mostly ... I just miss Matt.”

Meredith and Madeline spoke of the uncommon bond between Johnny and Matthew, how they were always together and always wanting to be together, even as their careers took them to different places.

“The fact that you’re now together in heaven gives me a little bit of comfort,” Meredith said.

Meredith spoke fondly of Calgary and Columbus. Johnny Gaudreau spent 10 seasons with the Flames before signing as a free agent with the Blue Jackets in 2022.

“I still plan to one day show our kids the city of Calgary and where their daddy experienced the best times of his life, where he made lifelong friends and where he called home for 10 years. He’s forever a Flame,” she said.

“To Columbus and our Blue Jackets family ... I can’t describe how shattered I am that I don’t get more time in your amazing city with John. There were so many little signs as we got to know the city that we had made the right decision in choosing Columbus.

“Thank you to the Fifth Line and the Blue Jackets organization. John was so proud to wear your colors every single day. He felt comfortable there. He felt like he fit right in.”

Meredith said she had trouble sleeping one night, recently, and found one of Johnny’s favorite movies, “The Greatest Showman,” playing on TV.

“It says in that movie that the noblest art is making others happy,” Meredith said. “Johnny, you made me the happiest girl in the world.

“It’s really hard to wrap this (eulogy) up because I could go on forever about how much I love you and how special he was. These words still don’t touch my love for you, John, and no words ever will.

“John, my husband, my best friend, and my soulmate ... to (our kids’) daddy. You spent your entire life working hard for your family and they were so proud of you every day. Now it’s my turn to make you proud as you watch down on us from heaven. I will do that for you because you deserve that.

“A huge part of me died, but the other part of me will be stronger for our children.”

The Hockey Writers / CBJ Union Junction Podcast: Remembering Johnny Gaudreau

By Nicholas Arnold- September 10, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets' writing team at The Hockey Writers has decided to do 13 days of only Johnny Gaudreau coverage following the passing of the superstar and his brother Matthew Gaudreau on Aug. 29, including an episode of the Union Junction podcast dedicated to the life and career of Johnny Hockey.

Mark Scheig and I discussed a lot in this episode, including an attempt to unpack the emotions that the Gaudreau family, the cities of Columbus and Calgary, and the hockey community must be experiencing. We also talked about our favorite memories from Gaudreau's life and career, and Mark closes the show with a comment on the "journalism" in the wake of the tragedy.

Gaudreau's Impact and Legacy in Columbus

The day that Johnny Gaudreau signed as a free agent with the Blue Jackets is one of the most impactful days in team history. It's up there with the day they drafted Rick Nash, their first playoff berth, and when they swept the Tampa Bay Lightning in the 2019 playoffs.

Gaudreau was the best of the 2022 free-agent class, coming off a 40-goal, 115-point season, and had his pick of contenders to sign with. He decided to join the rebuilding Blue Jackets because of all the positive things he'd heard about the city, and he thought it would be a good place to start their family. This came at a time when it was believed that the team couldn't hold on to talented players following the exodus of stars Artemi Panarin, Sergei Bobrovsky, and Seth Jones.

Gaudreau's teammate Zach Werenski put the feelings of the city into perspective at the vigil in Columbus:

"I just want to say thank you John for choosing Columbus when other people wouldn't. You brought so much joy and excitement to this city. I've never seen anything quite like it."

Werenski speaking after the passing of Johnny Gaudreau.

Gaudreau left an indelible impact on Columbus. Despite only playing for the Blue Jackets for two seasons, he led the team in scoring in both seasons and was beloved by everyone.

Related: [NHL Should Rename Lady Byng Trophy After Johnny Gaudreau](#)

Scheig and I also talked about the possibility of retiring Gaudreau's number 13. While warranted, some exceptions might keep the number in circulation; if long-time friends of Gaudreau, Sean Monahan or Erik Gudbranson, chose to take the number on in homage to the late superstar, or the organization might return the number to Kent Johnson – who had always worn #13 in honor of Gaudreau, who inspired him in his youth.

A Stern Reminder from Gudbranson

Alcohol is a suspected factor in the tragic incident that took Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau. At the vigil and press conference, Gudbranson issued a stern reminder to the public that, in 2024 – with all of the rideshare apps and other methods of communication available – there is no excuse for drinking and driving.

“We just miss [Gaudreau] so much, and it’s wrong. I urge you. Please, please, please. And I beg you. Having fun is one thing, but please find a ride home. There’s no reason for a tragedy like this. There’s so many options available to you. Just please, please, please find an alternative way home.”

Erik Gudbranson speaking at the vigil held for Gaudreau in Columbus.

We’ll have another episode of the Union Junction podcast in the next couple of weeks as training camp opens and the prospects tournament in Buffalo gets underway. We’ll recap all of the hockey-related business from the summer and look ahead to the 2024-25 season.

The Hockey Writers / The Blue Jackets should retire number 13

By Nicholas Arnold- September 10, 2024

There are not enough words to describe the tragedy that befell the Gaudreau family and the hockey world on Aug. 29. So, I won't even try to. What I will do today is make a case for how the Columbus Blue Jackets can honor the life of their late superstar, Johnny Gaudreau.

There is no doubt that the team will do something to honor him and his brother Matthew throughout this season, as they've already made many tribute videos and held vigils for them. One thing that has been bandied about in conversations has been the retirement of Gaudreau's No. 13 and this is my case why they should raise it into the rafters of Nationwide Arena this season.

Gaudreau Made Such An Impact on the City of Columbus

The first thing that I will recognize is the impact that Gaudreau made on the city of Columbus over his two seasons with the team. It's not a stretch to say that one of the best days in franchise history was when he signed with the club in 2022. The team had been struggling with the narrative that "no one wanted to stay" in Ohio's capital city, following the exodus of stars Artemi Panarin, Sergei Bobrovsky, Matt Duchene, and Seth Jones.

Then came Gaudreau, the undisputed best player in the 2022 free agent class. He was fresh off of a 40-goal and 115-point season with the Calgary Flames and made the decision to find a new home. He could've had his pick of contenders as he searched for his first Stanley Cup, but he opted to be a big fish in a small pond with the rebuilding Blue Jackets. That decision electrified the city and made him instantly beloved by the fan base. It is most definitely among the top moments in franchise history, along with the drafting of Rick Nash, the team's first playoff berth, and their sweep of the Tampa Bay Lightning in 2019.

That brings us to reason one that the No. 13 should be hanging in the rafters: as a reminder of the fact that one of the best hockey players of his generation – in the prime of his career – chose Columbus and chose to be there long-term.

Gaudreau Was Not the Blue Jackets' Only Number 13 of Note

Another reason that the No. 13 should be hung up is that it's been steeped in history with the Blue Jackets. The first person to wear it was top prospect and skilled forward Nikolai Zherdev – who started well, but ultimately didn't pan out.

Then came Cam Atkinson, furthering my argument. Another smaller, skilled forward who made a massive impact on the Blue Jackets organization. He is third in games played (627), and second behind only Nash in goals (214) and points (402). He is as impactful as they come when talking about the team's history.

On his own, I'm not sure the No. 13 would be retired for Atkinson, but when you consider that two Blue Jackets' greats like he and Gaudreau wore the number I think that should constitute its official removal from circulation.

The Number Isn't Likely to be Worn Again in Columbus Anyways

The NHL is a league steeped in history. There is such a respect from players towards the hockey greats of yore and the numbers on their jerseys play such a critical part in that.

Wayne Gretzky started out wearing the No. 9 to honor his hero Gordie Howe, but had a second nine added when it was already taken on his team in juniors. Jonathan Toews wore his No. 19 in part to honor one of his favorites, Joe Sakic, and the list of players who have chosen their number for that reason is endless.

Numbers have also been worn to honor players who have passed on while they were active NHLers. In recent history, Pierre-Luc Dubois switched to the No. 80 to honor his late friend Matiss Kivlenieks and Cole Caufield has already said he'll be wearing the No. 13 this season in homage to Gaudreau.

What's different about this situation is that they're not wearing that number with the team that the player who passed played for. Dubois wore it with the Winnipeg Jets and Los Angeles Kings, while Caufield is wearing his new number with the Montreal Canadiens. When it comes to that number being worn again with the team, they're generally informally retired through an unwritten moral code.

That's exactly what happened with the Vancouver Canucks, who lost one of their top young players Luc Bourdon in a motorcycle crash in 2008. His No. 28 hasn't been worn since, despite not being officially taken out of circulation. Ian Cole initially picked the number when he signed with the team in 2023, but changed his decision after learning that it was Bourdon who last donned those digits.

Ultimately with the culture of the sport, it's unlikely the number will be worn in Columbus again anyway. They should just make the decision to retire it and include it as a part of the catharsis for the family and fan base as a lasting legacy to one of the greats of this era.

The Exceptions to the Rule

I was relatively set in stone on this opinion until our latest episode of the Union Junction podcast, when my colleague Mark Scheig brought up a couple of ways to honor Gaudreau by keeping the number in circulation for the time being.

One is if Sean Monahan, longtime friend and teammate of Gaudreau, chooses to wear the number in his honor. What with how close they were and imagining that playing with Gaudreau was likely a major selling factor in his decision to sign in Columbus this offseason, it would be a heartfelt tribute. The same case could be made for Erik Gudbranson, who had a similar tight-knit relationship with Gaudreau.

Another exception could be returning the number to Kent Johnson who had ceded it to Gaudreau when he signed with the club in 2022. Johnson said he wore it in homage to Gaudreau, so it would be a fitting tribute for the number to live on with a player who has a similar skillset to the late superstar.

While yes, many in the online world have been quick to say that decisions of importance shouldn't be made so soon after an emotionally compromising tragedy like this. However, with the way things have happened in the past following the loss of an active player, it's unlikely anyone would ever choose to wear 13 again for the Blue Jackets. Unless it's chosen to be worn as tribute by another current player who knew him well – like Monahan, Gudbranson, or Johnson – the Blue Jackets should do the right thing and hang Gaudreau's name and number in the rafters this season.

The Hockey News / Devastation of losing Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau on full display in heartfelt service

By Adam Proteau- September 10, 2024

The devastation that hit the hockey world after a tragedy was on full display Monday when a memorial service was held in Media, Pa., in memory of NHL star left winger Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew Gaudreau.

The service, which took place at Saint Mary Magdalen Parish, saw a massive turnout of friends, family and teammates of the Gaudreau brothers, who were killed by an alleged drunk driver on Aug. 29 in Oldsman Township, N.J.

Johnny Gaudreau's teammates on the Columbus Blue Jackets were in attendance, as well as NHL commissioner Gary Bettman. But it was the Gaudreau family's words that had the most impact.

To begin the service, Rev. Tony Penna, who serves as associate vice-president and director of campus ministry at Boston College where the Gaudreau brothers played, spoke to the theme of the afternoon: the Gaudreau boys' deep love for each other, and for their families.

"They had an intensity to their love that was unbelievable," Penna said of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau before offering a message of hope in memory of the brothers. "Let's be better at loving our own kids so that they might grow up to be the kind of people we celebrate here today."

One of the Gaudreau's two sisters, Katie, gave a brief reading at the start of the service from the Bible. Then, the Gaudreau brothers' widows, Meredith and Madeline Gaudreau, gave the assembled crowd – and those following the ceremony around the world via a livestream – a glimpse into the wonderful lives they'd been living with Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau prior to the tragedy.

"John took care of Matty, and Matty would take care of John," Madeline Gaudreau, Matthew Gaudreau's wife, said of the brothers. "To know both of them was to truly love them. They were so extremely proud of each other, and it brings me comfort knowing they are still together forever, as they always were."

That said, Madeline Gaudreau acknowledged the horror of the loss of her husband and brother-in-law.

"This last week has felt like I've been trapped in a nightmare I can't wake up from," Madeline Gaudreau said. "I feel numb, angry, sad, blessed all at once. Mostly, I just miss Matt."

Johnny Gaudreau's wife, Meredith, spoke longest at the service, chronicling her relationship with Johnny and the NHL journey that took them from a happy life in Calgary to Johnny's final NHL destination in Columbus. She painted the picture of a humble family man who did his utmost to live a joyful life every day.

"He didn't have a bad bone in his body," Meredith said of Johnny Gaudreau. "He never spoke badly about anyone. The most humble person I've ever met. Zero ego, quiet, sweet and shy. He was everything and more that I've only dreamt about finding in a husband, and then he made all my dreams come true. He did everything he was supposed to, and he did everything right."

Meredith Gaudreau also revealed she is pregnant with their third child, having already given birth to their daughter, Noa, and son, Johnny.

Meredith Gaudreau also spoke about the bond veteran NHLer Sean Monahan had with Johnny Gaudreau. Their relationship flourished when both were Calgary Flames teammates and continued

through this summer when Monahan became a Blue Jackets teammate. Meredith Gaudreau spoke emotionally about Monahan and also NHLer Kevin Hayes (a teammate of John's at Boston College) for their link to her husband.

"I know John is rooting for you on the ice as your guardian angel," Meredith Gaudreau said to Hayes and Monahan. "John loved you so much."

Gaudreau's parents, Guy and Jane Gaudreau, were understandably beside themselves with grief, particularly as the service was ending and the caskets containing their two children were led out of the church. But Meredith and Madeline Gaudreau truly set the tones for everyone – a tone of gratitude for the time they did have together and a tone of determination to carry on the brothers' legacy to their children, their family and their friends.

Everyone on hand was clearly in deep mourning, but their faith and memories of their time together with Matthew and Johnny are a solace for them as they look to find a way to carry on without two wonderful people.

"Despite losing my husband way too soon, I still feel like the luckiest girl in the world to be his wife," Meredith Gaudreau said. "He was my person, and when you know, you know. It wasn't any more complicated than that. He was, and still is my soulmate."

ABC News / Johnny Gaudreau's widow announces pregnancy with their 3rd child at memorial service

By Emily Shapiro- September 10, 2024

The widow of Columbus Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau, Meredith Gaudreau, announced her pregnancy with their third child at Monday's memorial service for Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew Gaudreau.

"John and I had the best six months as a family of four. These will forever be the best six months of my life," Meredith Gaudreau said at the service. "There's specifically one week that I will cherish forever -- it will be my favorite week of my life out of those six months. We're actually a family of five. I'm in my ninth week of pregnancy with our third baby."

She called the pregnancy a "total surprise."

"John was beaming and so excited," she said. "His reaction was just immediately kissing me and hugging me."

Their first child, daughter Noa Harper Gaudreau, was born Sept. 30, 2022. Their second, son Johnny Edward Gaudreau, was born Feb. 22.

"Noa, our oldest, hasn't even turned 2 yet. In less than three years of marriage, we've created a family of five," Meredith Gaudreau said at the memorial service. "It doesn't even sound possible, but I look at it as the ultimate blessing. How lucky am I to be the mother of John's three babies? Our last one being a blessing and so special despite these difficult circumstances."

"To my babies, daddy loves you all so much and you have the best daddy in the world," she said.

On Aug. 29, Johnny Gaudreau, 31, and his brother Matthew Gaudreau, 29, were riding bikes in Salem County, New Jersey, when they were struck and killed by a driver suspected of being under the influence of alcohol, according to police. The suspected driver was arrested and charged with two counts of death by auto, according to police.

Matthew Gaudreau's wife, Madeline Gaudreau, is also pregnant with their first child.

"This last week has felt like I've been trapped in a nightmare I can't wake up from," Madeline Gaudreau said at the memorial service. "I feel numb, angry, sad, blessed all at once. Some days the thought of this new reality is debilitating. But mostly, I just miss Matt."

"The 14 years we spent together will never be enough, but I will cherish those and carry them close to me, especially on the extremely hard days," she said.

"He was born to be a dad," Madeline Gaudreau said. "The moment we found out about our son Tripp, it consumed his every day. He was downloading apps, ordering books, finding the best diaper brand, making sure I had the best vitamins and asking for tips from John. I will never forget the tears he had in his eyes when he first heard Tripp's heartbeat."

"I know Matt will surround his son for the rest of his life," she said through tears.

She said she hopes her son and Meredith Gaudreau's baby, Johnny, have the same bond their dads did.

To Meredith Gaudreau, she said, "I promise that I will always be there for you and the kids."

Madeline Gaudreau also made a point at the service to urge people to not drink and drive.

"Please do not put another family through this torture," she said.

The Gaudreau brothers died the night before their sister, Katie, was set to get married, according to their former coaches.

The brothers were "always side by side" and "absolute best friends," Meredith Gaudreau wrote on Instagram two days after their deaths.

"I don't think John could live a day without you so I'm comforted knowing you are of course together in heaven," she said in a message to her brother-in-law.

"Matty, thank you for loving our babies like your own and for being such an amazing uncle and godfather," she added, pledging to take care of his wife, Madeline, and their future son.

"Please continue to take care of John like you always have. I got Madeline and Tripp," she said.

[CBS Sports / Johnny Gaudreau death: Late NHL star's widow reveals she is pregnant with their third child in touching eulogy](#)

By Chris Bengel- September 10, 2024

Friends and family, including members of the Columbus Blue Jackets and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, gathered Monday to pay their respects to NHL star Johnny Gaudreau, who was killed in a cycling accident last month.

During a heartfelt eulogy for her husband, Gaudreau's wife, Meredith Gaudreau, revealed she is pregnant with the couple's third child.

"We're actually a family of five," Meredith Gaudreau said during her eulogy. "I'm in my ninth week of pregnancy with our third baby. A total surprise, but again, John was beaming and so excited.

"I was so nervous because this was, again, a total surprise. But his reaction was just immediately kissing me and hugging me even though I was driving the car. After the initial excitement sank in, every time he looked at me, he would say, 'You're nuts, you know that? Three kids?'"

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Meredith Gaudreau also took the opportunity to reflect on her relationship with the Blue Jackets star during her 40-minute eulogy. The couple previously had Noa Harper Gaudreau, who was born on Sept. 30, 2022, along with Johnny Edward Gaudreau (born on Feb. 22, 2024).

"John and I had the best six months as a family of four. These will forever be the best six months of my life," Meredith Gaudreau added. "There's specifically one week that I will cherish forever -- it will be my favorite week of my life out of those six months."

Gaudreau, 31, along with his brother, Matthew Gaudreau, were riding bicycles in Oldmans Township, New Jersey when they were struck and killed by a drunk driver, according to police. The driver was arrested and charged with two counts of death by auto.

Matthew Gaudreau's wife, Madeline Gaudreau, was also pregnant with their first child at the time of his death. The Gaudreau brothers were in town to be groomsmen in their sister's wedding at the time of their deaths.

[CNN / Johnny Gaudreau's widow reveals pregnancy with their third child at funeral](#)

By David Close- September 10, 2024

The lives of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau were remembered at an emotional, joint memorial service at St. Mary Magdalen Catholic Church in Media, PA, on Monday.

Many NHL players, including Sean Monahan, Kevin Hayes, Seth Jones, Cole Caufield, Jack Eichel, and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, were in attendance to commemorate and honor the two late hockey players.

The brothers' caskets, draped in matching white cloths with golden crosses, were placed head-to-head at the base of the lectern and in front of the mourners within the church.

The pair were killed on August 29 after being struck by a suspected drunken driver while riding bikes on a New Jersey roadway, just hours before they were to serve as groomsmen at their sister's wedding in Philadelphia.

Mourners arrive for the joint funeral of NHL player Johnny Gaudreau and his brother Matthew Gaudreau.

Matthew and Johnny's wives spoke at the service.

Matthew Gaudreau's widow, Madeline, said through tears that she felt she was "trapped in a nightmare" she couldn't wake from this past week. "I feel numb, angry, sad, blessed all at once."

Madeline is pregnant with the couple's first child.

During her eulogy, Johnny Gaudreau's widow Meredith revealed she was in her ninth week of pregnancy with the couple's third child.

"In less than three years of marriage, we've created a family of five. It doesn't even sound possible. But I look at it as the ultimate blessing.

"How lucky am I to be the mother of John's three babies?

"Our last one being a blessing and so special despite these difficult circumstances," she said.

Johnny Gaudreau, 31, starred in the NHL for 11 seasons with the Calgary Flames and Columbus Blue Jackets – scoring 243 career goals and amassing 743 points while making seven All-Star game appearances.

"Despite losing my husband way too soon, I still feel like the luckiest girl in the world to be his wife," she said.

Meredith thanked those who were with Johnny while he played in Calgary for ten years. "He is forever a Flame, and I am so proud of that. I am so proud to call Calgary my home away from home as well."

She got especially emotional when talking about the city her husband chose to play starting in 2022.

"To Columbus and our Blue Jackets family. I can't describe how shattered I am that I don't get more time in your amazing city with John."

She recounted how the couple's two children were born while her husband played in the city.

"The memories we made in Columbus as a growing family are the best years of my life."

While speaking to her late husband, Meredith said, "I miss you so much, and I love you. You are my forever, and I cannot wait until we are all together again. Please watch over us."

The brothers starred on the ice at Boston College, playing together during the 2013-14 season.

Matthew Gaudreau, 29, played professionally for five seasons after college.

Pastor Tony Penna, who is the associate vice president and director of campus ministry at Boston College, addressed the congregation during the service, noting the brothers' strong parental foundation.

"They went to the right school. Not Gloucester Catholic High School or B.C. They went to the Gaudreau School."

Those in attendance laughed.

Fr. Penna continued, "That's true.

"They had the best teachers. They had the best professors - Guy and Jane (Johnny and Matthew's parents). 'Cause they taught their kids how to love."

The service was live-streamed on the Blue Jackets website.

Fox News / Late NHL star Johnny Gaudreau's widow reveals she's pregnant with their 3rd child

By Ryan Gaydos- September 10, 2024

The widow of late NHL star Johnny Gaudreau announced at the memorial service for him and his brother on Monday that she is pregnant with their third child.

Meredith Gaudreau spoke at the service, calling the pregnancy a "total surprise." She said she was able to tell her husband before he died and his reaction was heartwarming.

"John and I had the best six months as a family of four. These will forever be the best six months of my life," she said, via ABC News. "There's specifically one week that I will cherish forever – it will be my favorite week of my life out of those six months. We're actually a family of five. I'm in my ninth week of pregnancy with our third baby."

Their oldest child, a girl, will turn 2 years old later this month. Their youngest, a boy, was born earlier this year.

"In less than three years of marriage, we've created a family of five," Meredith added. "It doesn't even sound possible, but I look at it as the ultimate blessing. How lucky am I to be the mother of John's three babies? Our last one being a blessing and so special despite these difficult circumstances."

Gaudreau were killed in Salem County, New Jersey, when they were struck by a suspected drunken driver while riding their bikes. Their deaths came on the eve of their sister Katie's wedding.

Madeline Gaudreau, Matthew's wife, is also pregnant.

Sean M. Higgins was arrested in the incident. He was charged with two counts of death by auto, along with reckless driving, possession of an open container and consuming alcohol in a motor vehicle.

"This is a tragedy involving a great deal of emotion and impacting many individuals," Higgins' lawyers, Matthew Portella and Richard Kineburger III, said in a joint statement. "It is too early in the stages of the legal process to make any out-of-court statements."

[NBC4 / Widow of Blue Jackets' Johnny Gaudreau reveals she's pregnant with their third child at his memorial](#)

By Brian Hofmann, Orri Benatar and Delaney Ruth- September 10, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio (WCMH) — During the memorial service Monday for her husband, Johnny, Meredith Gaudreau announced that she is pregnant.

Blue Jackets forward Johnny Gaudreau was killed Aug. 29 when he was riding a bicycle along the right shoulder of a southern New Jersey road and struck from behind. A driver had attempted to pass a car that had drifted to the center of the roadway to give Gaudreau space. He was killed alongside his brother, Matthew, who was biking with him.

Johnny, 31, and Matthew, 29, were in New Jersey with other family for the wedding of their sister, Katie. The driver of the vehicle was Sean Higgins, 43, a rehab facility employee who told police he had been drinking. He remains in custody until at least his next court appearance Friday.

Johnny Gaudreau left behind Meredith, his wife of almost three years, and two children: Noa, born in September 2022, and Johnny, born this February. Meredith's pregnancy was not known publicly until the memorial service, held in Broomall, Pennsylvania.

"We are actually a family of five," Meredith said. "I'm in my ninth week pregnancy with our third baby. A total surprise but again, John was beaming and was so excited. I was so nervous, because this was, again, a total surprise, but his reaction was just immediately kissing me and hugging me — even though I was driving the car [when I told him]."

"After the initial excitement sank in, every time, he looked at me, he would say, 'You're nuts, you know that?' In less than three years of marriage, we created a family of five. It doesn't even sound possible, but I look at it as the ultimate blessing."

Not only is Meredith pregnant, so is Matthew's widow, Madeline, who is expecting their first child. Like Johnny, Matthew was a hockey player and more recently coach of a high school program in New Jersey.

Meredith expressed gratitude for the time she got with her husband.

"I'm so grateful for that day I met you and every day after that," she said. "Thank you for choosing me as your wife and making me a mother. Thank you for being my best friend. I miss you so much and I love you. Please watch over us."

At the service were Johnny's Blue Jackets teammates and front office staff members after the team had a vigil last week at Nationwide Arena with hundreds of fans in attendance. The start of the season is about one month away, with the Blue Jackets' first exhibition game Sept. 23 and their regular-season opener Oct. 10 against the Minnesota Wild.

"To Columbus and our Blue Jackets family," Meredith said, "I can't describe how shattered I am that I don't get more time in your amazing city with John."

[Sportsnet.ca / Gaudreaus honour John and Matthew's life-long bond, dedication to family](#)

By Sonny Sachdeva- September 10, 2024

A week and a half after the tragic deaths of John and Matthew Gaudreau, hundreds gathered for an emotional funeral service Monday in Media, Penn., to honour the brothers' lives.

The service follows days of tributes pouring in from across the hockey world and sports world at large, honouring the pair's time on the ice together at Boston College, and their separate journeys through the professional ranks, too. On Monday, the Gaudreau family remembered John and Matthew for all they were away from the game they loved: as adoring sons, brothers, husbands and fathers.

"Most people know Matty as a hockey player, a hockey coach, a friend, a mentor," said Madeline Gaudreau, wife of Matthew. "While he was all of those things, he was so much more."

As much as the pair dedicated themselves to their craft, from the beginning, they put family above all else, both Madeline and Meredith Gaudreau — wife of John — said Monday. Even as the elder Gaudreau's career took him north of the border to Calgary, and to the height of his sport, his priorities remained unchanged.

"He truly was a family-first guy, and this is something about him I admired," Meredith said of her husband. "Early mornings with two (children) under two were hard, but John truly never, ever complained. He would do his workouts during nap times, even though it hung over his head all morning. He drove to different rinks every week to skate, depending on where we were. Whatever worked best for our family was exactly what John always did.

"He never lost sight of what was most important to him, which was time with his family."

Rev. Tony Penna, who presided over the service at St. Mary Magdalen Catholic Church Monday, urged the brothers' parents, Guy and Jane, to look out among the crowd and feel the weight of the impact their sons had on their communities.

"By the overwhelming presence, and overwhelming number of people here today, they're sending a message to you," he said. "That John and Matthew's lives mattered. That they were noticed on this earth. They were loved on this earth and they were valued on this earth."

Meredith took a moment to share words of appreciation for two among the gathered crowd in particular — Kevin Hayes and Sean Monahan, the latter of whom spent nearly a decade alongside John in Calgary, and was set to reunite with him in Columbus.

"He looked up to you both, on and off the ice," she said. "You are his brothers, which means you're my brothers, too. Thank you for being there with me, when you're experiencing such a great loss as well. Some of my favourite memories with John have both of you right there with us.

"Sean, John loved you so much. Such an effortless and genuine bond, I was honoured to be a part of. As one of a kind as John was, I think you are as close as it gets to being just like him. Whatever you did, he copied. If you got a new truck, we were in the truck lot the next day. You got a golden doodle, John got a golden doodle. If you were at the dog park, we were on our way.

"You made John the most excited for hockey that I've ever seen when you signed in Columbus. I'm heartbroken for you that he cannot be with you on the ice. But I'm rooting for you every single night, and I know John is too, as your special guardian angel."

Above all others, though, there was no bond stronger in either John or Matthew's life than the one the brothers shared with each other, Madeline said.

"Unless you knew them personally, even the most perfect words, pictures or videos could not accurately describe it. They were attached at the hip," she said. "They slept in the same room up until college, and neither of them ever wanted that to change. I remember in our early years of dating, our friend group would go to country concerts, and when we got back to the house we were staying at, Matty and I would go to bed — we would always wake up with John right in the middle somehow.

"John took care of Matty, and Matty would take care of John. To know both of them was to truly love them. It was impossible not to fall in love with them. Meredith said it best — you do not hear one name without the other."

"Everything was always John and Matty," Meredith added during her eulogy. "Matty was the best brother to John — he was John's biggest fan, and John was his. Matty wanted everything for John, and all John wanted to do was share it with his brother. And they did. John delayed starting his NHL career to be with Matty at Boston College. John was well into his NHL career, but chose to come home in the summers, to his twin-size bed, to share a room with Matty.

"All John ever wanted was Matty. I don't know how to say it, but the fact that you're both together now in heaven gives me a little bit of comfort. ... I know John would not be able to live a day without his brother. He loved him so much."

As tributes continue to pour in from Calgary and Columbus — where thousands gathered over the past week to pay their respects to the brothers' lives — and on social media — including a GoFundMe set up to support Madeline and Matthew's first child, which has surpassed \$655,000 — the Gaudreau family said they hope to honour John's and Matthew's lives in how they navigate the difficult path forward without them.

"The loss of Matty and John will leave a hole in the family, with his close friends, the community, for eternity," said Madeline. "However, their legacy will live on through the lives of everyone they touched — their kids, their wives, their parents, their siblings.

"God really did draft the best two boys. Linemates forever."

The Athletic / Why these 8 NHL teams are in danger of being stuck in the mushy middle

By Harman Dayal- September 10, 2024

The NHL has its contenders, its basement dwellers and then the forgettable, often overlooked mushy middle.

The mushy middle is home to teams that aren't good enough to be Stanley Cup contenders but not bad enough to collect picks in the top 5-10 range where you're most likely to draft future stars. The Minnesota Wild and Calgary Flames (up until their recent rebuild) are prime examples of teams recently stuck in this mediocre territory. There's nothing wrong with being middle-of-the-pack for a year or two, especially if you're trying to accelerate from a tear-it-down rebuild to being playoff-competitive again, but eventually everybody wants to escape this no-man's-land.

It's pretty straightforward to identify teams that will probably land in the mushy middle this coming season. But the more interesting question is which teams might find themselves stuck here over the medium-term future, for the next three seasons (through the 2026-27 campaign). I went through every NHL team's roster, cap situation, prospect pool and more to identify clubs likely destined for this reality for the next three years.

The teams we're going to highlight in this "mushy middle" aren't all in the same situation. Some of the franchises on this list are aging and capped out. These clubs look like they'll remain playoff competitive for a bit longer, but beyond the three-season window we're projecting, they've got a bleak future. The opposite is true for the young, rebuilding teams on this list: They may be mediocre for the next three years or so as their young core develops, but four or five years from now, they may blossom into Stanley Cup contenders.

Without further ado, let's dive in.

New York Islanders

The Islanders made the playoffs last season despite being overlooked and underrated by many out-of-market fans. They're strong contenders to squeak in again — having Patrick Roy for a full season will have a positive impact (they had the 12th-best record in the NHL once he was hired), they boast one of the best goaltending tandems in the NHL (especially if Ilya Sorokin bounces back) and they added a couple of intriguing top-nine wingers in Anthony Duclair and Maxim Tsyplov.

New York's problem is that this roster doesn't look capable of a deep playoff run anytime soon. The Isles struggle to score, ranking 23rd in goals scored per game over the last two seasons, lack star power/game-breakers and have an aging core with many key players in their late 20s and early 30s.

It's hard to see how this front office can significantly improve the medium-term outlook. Their cap situation isn't ideal as they're held back by inefficient contracts to the likes of Anders Lee and Jean-Gabriel Pageau. Scott Mayfield, Ryan Pullock and Adam Pelech have battled injuries and are starting to decline, which is concerning because they're each locked up for at least the next four years. Noah Dobson and Alexander Romanov will be in line for major raises next summer which will further limit the club's cap flexibility. And to top it all off, they have one of the most shallow prospect pools in the NHL.

There is a path for the Isles to be more than first-round fodder, at least for this season, but it'd require a lot to break right. New York made the playoffs despite having the worst penalty kill in the NHL last season. If that can improve to around league average — and remember, their PK ranked in the top 10 in

2022-23 — they'll be a tougher team to beat. If Mayfield, Pelech and Pulock can bounce back they'll have a legitimately high-end blue line once you factor in how much Dobson and Romanov improved last season.

The most probable outcome, however, is landing in the mushy middle again. It'll require an extraordinary level of creativity and aggressiveness for the Isles to avoid this fate in the medium term.

Seattle Kraken

Seattle's been on a strange arc over the last two seasons.

In 2022-23, everything broke right for the franchise. Several players had career-best seasons and the Kraken rode the league's highest five-on-five shooting percentage to Game 7 of Round 2 against Dallas. Last year was the opposite: It felt like nearly everything went wrong. Many players' production (most notably Matty Beniers) regressed and their finishing luck didn't just fall off a cliff, it arguably overcorrected as their five-on-five shooting percentage ranked 27th.

The Kraken should be closer to the playoff race than they are to the bottom of the league standings this year. Seattle was the only team that missed the playoffs despite ranking top 10 in goals against per game. They'll be competitive if they can manufacture more offense and that seems like a realistic aspiration. Seattle signed risky contracts in free agency, but Chandler Stephenson and Brandon Montour will inject more scoring and colleague Dom Luszczyszyn's model had them as the league's seventh most improved team this offseason. Beniers was snakebitten last year and should take a major offensive leap in Year 3. Shane Wright is also ready to jump into the NHL full-time and should emerge as a core piece.

It's hard to see how the Kraken can become anything more than a fringe playoff team over the next three seasons, though. Seattle still lacks top-of-the-lineup star power and the club is hampered by inefficient contracts (Philipp Grubauer, Andre Burakovsky, Jaden Schwartz, Stephenson). There's no clear path for them to become a Cup contender.

Washington Capitals

The Capitals made the playoffs last season despite a minus-36 goal differential and were swept in the first round. Heading into the summer, it looked like Washington was at risk of tumbling down the standings and soon becoming a bottom feeder. Brian MacLellan's bold, active offseason moves have revitalized the roster to the point where they should be playoff-competitive again.

Washington's blue line looks robust and deep with Jakob Chychrun and Matt Roy now in the fold. Andrew Mangiapane profiles as a savvy middle-six pickup. PL Dubois' contract poses a major long-term risk, but if we're strictly focusing on short-term improvement, he's sure to provide more value than trade counterpart Darcy Kuemper, who had lost the starting job in goal.

Can the Caps maintain some semblance of competitiveness beyond this season? It's far from a guarantee because Alex Ovechkin and John Carlson are another year older, but between Ryan Leonard, Ivan Miroschnichenko and Andrew Cristall the club has some quality prospects on the way. They're also projected to have \$25-30 million in cap space next summer, which can be weaponized to land more impact players.

The Capitals don't have enough high-end talent to make any noise if they do make the playoffs, but they're also not bad enough to truly bottom out. This front office is going to do whatever it can to avoid a full tear-it-down rebuild while Ovechkin is still around, and given the cap flexibility at their disposal, they'll likely continue finding avenues to maintain some level of relevancy.

Los Angeles Kings

L.A. has suffered three consecutive first-round playoff exits and the outlook moving forward doesn't look much better. The Kings are a solid but unspectacular team — they defend well, have a deep forward group and a quality blue line. However, they aren't elite in any one area, have questionable goaltending and generally lack star talent. Rob Blake also failed to significantly improve the roster this summer.

Because of the divisional playoff format, the Kings' path to a deep postseason run will almost certainly require beating the Oilers in either Round 1 or 2. This has been a nightmare matchup for L.A. and if anything, the gap between these two teams on paper is only becoming larger.

The Kings will need Quinton Byfield and Brandt Clarke to break out as true stars for the club's outlook to meaningfully change. There's a chance that can happen but even if it does, it's probably not happening overnight. L.A. looks destined to continue its trend of above-average regular seasons followed by quick playoff exits.

Detroit Red Wings

The Red Wings have arrived as a team that should consistently be in the playoff mix. I'm not sure if they've improved enough this summer to actually win one of the final wild-card spots, but they're at least in the race, just like last season when they were one point away from getting in.

That's crucial, positive progress.

However, the path for Detroit to take the more meaningful leap to Cup contender status looks difficult over the next three seasons.

For starters, Detroit lacks a true superstar or two, especially at forward. The Red Wings' prospect pool is exceptionally deep, but the likes of Nate Danielson and Marco Kasper aren't projected to become stars.

In net, the Red Wings look shaky with none of Cam Talbot, Alex Lyon or Ville Husso inspiring much confidence. They're in good shape long-term as Sebastian Cossa and Trey Augustine are excellent goaltending prospects, but goalies often take a long time to develop and hit their NHL peak.

Cap-wise, Husso and Petry will come off the books next summer which will free up additional room to bolster the roster for 2025-26. However, they are still hampered by Andrew Copp, Justin Holl and to a lesser extent Ben Chiarot's contracts.

Big picture, the Red Wings have a bright future. They have a ton of quality prospects on the horizon, with an especially strong long-term outlook on the back end (Simon Edvinsson and Axel Sandin-Pellikka stand out) and in goal. Detroit can eventually become a Cup contender, but because of how long it can take prospects to develop and hit their prime, that doesn't seem like a probable outcome within the next three seasons.

Ottawa Senators

For the last two seasons, the Senators have looked ready to take a step toward playoff contention only to fall flat on their face. There are reasons to believe they're finally ready to become more competitive, even though there's no guarantee it'll lead to a playoff spot.

Acquiring Linus Ullmark should stabilize the goaltending position, which has been very problematic in recent years. Ottawa, of course, needs to defend well enough that it doesn't completely leave Ullmark out to dry, but this is a valuable upgrade considering the Senators ranked bottom-five in goal prevention last season.

Up front, Tim Stützle, who's still only 22, should bounce back and be closer to the 39-goal, 90-point player he was in 2022-23 rather than the 70-point producer he was last year. Stützle has a good chance

of developing into one of the premier first-line centers in the NHL as he enters his prime over the next three years, which can have a huge impact in dragging a franchise forward. Having Shane Pinto available for a full season will be a nice boost — he and Ridly Greig will keep improving as they gain more experience.

The jump from being a bottom-10 team to being in the playoff mix looks doable, but it's going to be challenging to elevate into true contender status over the next three seasons. Ottawa's prospect pipeline is weak (Scott Wheeler ranked their pool No .31 in January 2024, although since then they've added Carter Yakemchuk as a top-10 pick), the depth of its blue line is questionable and the club still has defensive flaws. Ullmark is on an expiring contract and will need a significant raise if he performs well. The Senators can afford to extend him, but it would mean less flexibility to upgrade other parts of the roster.

Winnipeg Jets

You may be surprised to see the Jets land here given they picked up 110 points last year. Simply put, I believe they overachieved in the regular season and will struggle to re-establish themselves as true Cup contenders.

Think about it this way: The Jets couldn't beat Colorado in Round 1 then lost Tyler Toffoli, Sean Monahan, Brenden Dillon and Nate Schmidt with no major acquisitions to replace them. Winnipeg still has a big hole at the second-line center and on the back end of its top four. Moreover, can a team that's led by Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor up front do serious playoff damage? Scheifele and Connor aren't superstars and have defensive flaws. Winnipeg's top forwards are always going to be weaker on paper than Western contenders like Colorado, Edmonton, Dallas and even Vancouver.

Winnipeg's future isn't totally bleak. The Jets have an intriguing prospect pool led by Brad Lambert, Brayden Yager and Colby Barlow, plus Cole Perfetti still has untapped potential. Kevin Cheveldayoff will also have more money to play with next offseason when Neal Pionk and Alex Iafallo's contracts expire, in addition to the shrinking dead cap hit of Blake Wheeler and Schmidt's buyout penalties. These factors will ensure Winnipeg remains a quality, middle-of-the-pack team but ascending as a true contender seems unlikely, especially given how hard it is to attract and keep high-end players in the city of Winnipeg.

St. Louis Blues

Doug Armstrong and the Blues are in the middle of a retool-on-the-fly.

St. Louis' current roster should be in the mix for a wild-card spot — the forward group is legitimately fascinating, especially after some of the bottom-six upgrades this offseason. The Blues also have an above-average prospect pool with the likes of Dalibor Dvorský, Jimmy Snuggerud, Otto Stenberg, Adam Jiříček and Zach Bolduc among others all potentially graduating to the NHL over the next three seasons.

However, it's unlikely the Blues can re-emerge as contenders within the next three seasons. Firstly, the blue line is still a mess and while Jiříček, Philip Broberg and Theo Lindstein are nice young pieces, there's no future No. 1 defenseman projected in the pipeline. St. Louis' cap situation isn't pretty as the club is hampered by Justin Faulk, Torey Krug (although we'll see if he ends up being stashed on LTIR for the rest of his deal following ankle surgery) and Brayden Schenn's bad contracts. All of them are in their 30s and have at least three years left on their deal. And despite the strength of their prospect pool, there likely aren't any transformative, star-level players on the way.

Just missed the list

Teams that were close to making this “mushy middle” list but ultimately missed for one reason or another

Minnesota Wild: This might be a hot take, but I think the Wild can become a formidable team within three years. Between Kirill Kaprizov, Brock Faber and Jesper Wallstedt, Minnesota could have a cornerstone star at forward, defense and goalie. I’m not sure you can say that about any other team on the “mushy middle” list. Minnesota will also finally gain major cap relief next summer when Ryan Suter and Zach Parise’s dead cap hit shrinks from \$14.7 million to \$1.66 million. The Wild have an elite prospect pool with Wallstedt, Danila Yurov, Zeev Buium, Liam Öhgren and Riley Heidt among others all possibly graduating within the next three seasons. They’ll need to work out a Kirill Kaprizov extension for 2026-27 and Bill Guerin’s cap management has been suspect, so there’s certainly still a risk of getting caught in the middle, but I can see the upside case for them to break through and eventually hit a higher ceiling.

Buffalo Sabres: The Sabres’ current roster isn’t any better than Atlantic foes Detroit and Ottawa, and they’ll likely be stuck in the middle of the pack for a couple of seasons, but they could become contenders by 2026-27. Their young forwards (Jack Quinn, Dylan Cozens, Zach Benson and JJ Peterka) have tons of untapped potential, they have a strong cap outlook, an elite prospect pool and a quality young goaltending tandem between Ukka-Pekka Luukkonen and Devon Levi.

Tampa Bay Lightning: Tampa Bay isn’t the powerhouse it used to be, but I’m not prepared to write the Lightning off just yet. Andrei Vasilevskiy missed the start of last season because of injury and had the worst season of his NHL career with a .900 save percentage. Vasilevskiy bouncing back alone would give the Bolts a major boost. As unpopular as it was to move on from Steven Stamkos, Jake Guentzel profiles as a significant five-on-five upgrade. Tampa Bay’s depth is a concern, but I’m not ready to close the book on a core with Vasilevskiy, Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point, Victor Hedman and Guentzel, especially with Julien BriseBois, one of the NHL’s best general managers, steering the ship. Dark days will eventually come, but I can see Tampa Bay staving off the decline for two or three seasons.

Utah Hockey Club: Utah will be middle-of-the-pack for a year or two but I think it’s only a matter of time before they become a dangerous team. Logan Cooley, Dylan Guenther and Matias Maccelli have only scratched the surface of their potential, they’re projected to have nearly \$30 million in cap space next summer, they aren’t tied down by any questionable contracts (unlike Detroit and Ottawa, for example), their prospect pool is high-end and they still have surplus draft picks they can trade to acquire win-now help over the next few seasons.

Calgary Flames: After selling off major pieces over the last year, I think the Flames will lose too many games to be part of the mushy middle. I don’t expect them to completely tank, but it’s more likely they collect multiple top-10 picks over the next three seasons rather than being close to the playoff bar.

Pittsburgh Penguins: The Penguins might stay competitive this season, but I think they’re going to be closer to contending for top-10 picks than they are to a playoff spot in a year or two.

Toronto Maple Leafs: Toronto is the fourth-best team in the NHL over the last five seasons based on points percentage. The Leafs’ lack of playoff success may make them mediocre in some fans’ eyes, but to me, they’ve been too strong in the regular season to be considered a team in no man’s land. Toronto’s problem is choking and underperforming its talent level on paper on the biggest stage, not a mediocre roster.