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NHL.com (Dallas Stars)

Hey Heika: Taking a gander at the Olympics, trade deadline, playoff runs and more

By Mike Heika
Date: 02/16/26

Howdy folks.

It's been a while, but we are going to try a Hey Heika today. The longest running in-depth look into the Dallas Stars has been woefully absent, so we'll try to get back to this on a regular basis going forward.

I wanted to start with Olympic talk. Under the new rules of pool play, there really wasn't a ton of risk for anybody, as all teams advance. Yes, Sweden and Czechia don't get a bye and have to play an extra game, but that can actually be an advantage in some regards, because they get an extra game to sort out any issues and stay in game shape.

Basically, the three pool games helped Stars players, as there was some rust (or just unfamiliarity) with their new teammates and the international game. Thomas Harley stepped in and looked great with Team Canada. It seems his familiarity with Pete DeBoer (the former Stars coach who is running the defense for Team Canada) has been a big help, and Harley clearly likes being on this stage with this group. It really is a dream come true. Radek Faksa has been a big part of Team Czechia, although he is battling an unspecified injury and his status is up in the air right now. And Jake Oettinger has yet to play – and might not play – for Team USA, but the experience looks like it has been really good for him.

That leaves the four Finns, and they have all been great. Esa Lindell and Miro Heiskanen are kind of the engine for Suomi, as they play the most minutes and dictate the best pace. The experience has been great for both, because they seem to each want to do more in this role, and that could help them when they get back to the NHL.

That has been the same case for Roope Hintz, who has a little more edge to his game in Italy, and that also could be something he revisits when he's back in Texas. Mikko Rantanen is getting a lesson in what it's like to be the target of the opposition's game plan, and he might see that in the playoffs back here. At the very least, he will learn to handle that attention and adjust as needed.

I go back to my past experiences at different times, and that probably keeps me a bit too calm at times. I was at the 2002 Games in Salt Lake City and would have sworn that Team USA was going to win gold, as Mike Modano and Brett Hull dominated early games and Team Canada looked like it was struggling.

But then the red Maple Leaf took the gold medal game 5-2, and there was a lesson there on how adversity can build strength. I look at the Stars in Game 7 against Colorado last year in the playoffs, and see just how one performance by one player can change all of these things, and it really does allow a certain calm that you just have to wait and see what happens.

It's kind of fun when you get to that place.

Anyway, I like this tournament and I like what it could do for the players who are playing. I like how in a few months, this week could play a huge role, and I like the fact we have no idea what that role might be.

So have fun and watch the story unfold. Think of it like a good television show that will have you on the edge of your seat over the next week.

Now, onto your questions:

@StephGATC: do you think Jim can pull off another trade line masterclass without handcuffing the team's ability to sign Robo for a price that suits everyone?

@MikeHeika: It's a balancing act, and it will be a lot harder than it was last year. One, the NHL rules have changed. If they could simply take all of Tyler Seguin's cap hit and use it for a trade, that would open the door to a lot of options, knowing that Seguin could possibly return for the playoffs. However, the new rules make it so if you want to give Seguin a chance, you'll get a portion of his salary cap to use for trades. If you want a bigger chunk, you have to commit to Seguin not playing until next season. That's tough, but I think Nill will be able to navigate.

Just as important now is 1: What do the Stars have to give up? and 2: What kind of cap hit would an acquired player bring beyond this season? If Dallas really does want to go after a big fish, they might have to trade a younger player like Mavrik Bourque or Lian Bichsel. That's tough, but it's what they did with Logan Stankoven last season. Could they give up their first-round pick in 2027 or package some second round picks? Sure. But they don't want to do that.

So the question then becomes: How close are they? The thought process is that they are very close and have been for years now, but they also still need to make sure the team can continue to grow under Glen Gulutzan and the new coaching staff. The core of the team is in its prime, and the older players also are in a place where they are still contributing, so this might be a really important window.

I think Jim Nill will listen to everyone and do something. What that something is, I don't think even Jim knows. The great thing about his style is he is informed and prepared to move in an instant. So if history is an indicator, the Stars will be ready when a deal presents itself.

The whole Rantanen saga had huge ups and downs before it got done, and we could see the same thing this year. I know that's not predicting the future before it happens – as all of you would like – but I just think the Stars have to trust that Jim Nill will do everything he can to help this team win this year. That's a pretty good feeling, in my opinion.

@Skinna66: With Bichsel coming back to the team, does that change the Stars mindset on what pieces they might try to acquire before the trade deadline?

@MikeHeika: I think so. What would be great is if Bichsel had more playing time this year and the team had a better idea of if his presence was going to make a huge impact in the playoffs. As it is right now, he still is a question mark.

Bichsel played 18 playoff games last season but was protected at just under 12 minutes per game. The trio of Heiskanen, Lindell and Harley will carry the blue line, and the fact that Nils Lundkvist is healthy and playing almost 17 minutes per game gives the Stars some real options on what they want to do with Bichsel.

As I said earlier, if Dallas does want to swing for the fences and bring in a high-end trade piece, it might have to give up Bichsel – especially if that player is a defenseman. That is the hard part as we approach the trade deadline, because so many situations are so liquid. It puts your entire organization under duress, and that can actually help show you what you are made of.

@BrendanBauer1: Which Olympic sport are you most likely to medal in?

@MikeHeika: I have watched a lot of curling in my life, so I think I understand the sport pretty well and I think I still have the physical ability to compete there. I also have been good with precision activities in my life – putting or billiards – and that could lend itself well to curling.

When I was young, I was a good team handball (summer Olympic sport) player in gym class, and I always wondered if I could have focused on that and found a way to get really good at it. But those days are long gone now.

@TemLassila: Reason for which the Stars resigned some players such as Sam\] [Steel and didn't buyout Ilya\] [Lyubushkin in order to re-sign players like Evgenii\ if not 250-500k more

@MikeHeika: Every team has tough decisions to make. The Stars really wanted Granlund to return, but when the price went to \$7 million (which is what he signed for in Anaheim), they just couldn't do it. I actually think Steel is a bargain at \$2.1 million. He's 28, he is a lineup regular who can play up or down the lineup. He has 23 points (7 goals, 16 assists) in 57 games, so I don't know how much more he can do.

My guess is if Dadonov was playing those minutes, he wouldn't be doing what Steel does. He got hurt early in New Jersey, but at age 36, I just don't think he has the value that Steel does.

The Lyubushkin buyout would have been pretty expensive with two years left, and I think management figured that by the trade deadline it would still have the room it needed. Like I said, the Granlund contract going to \$7 million (especially with two more years to go after this one and Jason Robertson still needing a new deal) just didn't seem possible.

@dtxhockeydude: Is there any kind of concern with rebuilding the prospect pool and draft pick cupboard? I know we're probably a win now team for the next 5-10 years but at what point does reloading become a concern for the organization?

@MikeHeika: It's definitely a concern, and it tears at the conscience of an old scout like Jim Nill. But it is where they are right now. They want to win a Stanley Cup, and that takes quite a commitment.

The easy thing is to reference LA or Chicago and say they went for it, won, and then had to rebuild afterward. But the reality is that San Jose went for it, didn't win, and still had to rebuild. That's just the reality of the business.

Nill is very aware of the future, and the hope is that the likes of Heiskanen, Oettinger, Wyatt Johnston, Harley, Robertson, Rantanen and Hintz can keep this door open for a while. But pretty much every team that pursues a Cup hits a wall afterward, so you just have to hold on and hope for the best.

@Josh_Clark02: This one has a simple answer, but I just want to make sure you have it right: Van Halen or Van Hagar?

@MikeHeika: There is some irony in this question, because as I've said, I'm open to a lot of different music. But just as it is with Van Halen, it is also the same with AC/DC. I just think David Lee Roth and Bon Scott each had a smarmy charm that helped define the early group. I have no quarrel with Sammy Hagar or Brian Johnson, but I just think the early songs were the best.

@MegaMomMachine: Do the guys feel like this is their year? Or have the injuries taken their toll?

@MikeHeika: I reflect back on the NFL season, and believe that anything could happen any year. I've said this on many occasions: If Dallas had advanced to the Stanley Cup Final in either of the previous two years, my guess is they would have lost to Florida. It's just one of those matchups that doesn't seem to favor the Stars. So, it's hard to say that they could win it all right now. But, you have to go through the steps and see what happens. If the Stars were to advance to the Final, my guess is they would be a different team once they got there – and that is kind of the fun of all of this.

As I stay tuned to social media during the Olympics and as we head up to the trade deadline, I am intrigued by the buzz around teams who are “going for it.” That makes things fun. I think the Stars are in a great place even if they don’t make big changes. You have several players in the prime of their respective careers and you have a few veterans who are extremely hungry to win a Cup for the first time. I think that’s a good mix. Could they get even better? Definitely. They did it last year at the trade deadline.

@LacesOutFinkle: If you could use one song from the 80’s to describe what Jim Nill will likely do by the deadline what would it be and why?

@MikeHeika: Hungry Like the Wolf? Eye of the Tiger? Call Me? Everybody Wants to Rule the World? That’s four. I know, it’s cheating, but the point is Jim Nill is in a spot that can change a lot and yet he also has to understand what the price is to play in these games. He wants to win, everyone else wants to win, and yet only one can win. It’s a great opportunity, but it’s also a dangerous game. Hopefully he can get some old cassettes and let that vintage wisdom guide his heart.

NHL.com (Dallas Stars)

What a day: Stars continue to shine in Milan as six reach semifinals

By Mike Heika

Date: 02/19/26

That is definitely why they play the games.

The semifinals of Men's Hockey in the Olympics on Friday will be as almost everyone predicted – USA vs. Slovakia and Canada vs. Finland. How we got here, however, took one of the most incredible days in hockey history.

Of the four quarterfinal games, three went to overtime, two of which featured amazing comebacks. Both Canada and the Finns were trailing late in the game and could have easily been eliminated.

That would have made for quite a different experience for the NHL as it returned to Olympic play for the first time since 2014.

But the Finns rallied from an 0-2 deficit in the final six minutes against Switzerland thanks to some great plays by Stars players Miro Heiskanen, Mikko Rantanen, Roope Hintz and Esa Lindell. Finland tied the game on a Heiskanen goal with 1:12 remaining. They won in overtime on an Artturi Lehkonen that included an assist by Lindell. It was his second of the game.

The moment was spectacular for a lot of reasons, but mostly because it forced the Finns to dig deep and really feel the win after overcoming a multi-goal hole.

"I'm really happy for our country," Rantanen told reporters in Italy. "I know a lot of Finnish people were watching that game and for us to come back like that ... it's remarkable and hopefully the Finnish people can enjoy this one tonight and then reset."

All four teams will have to do that. Team Slovakia took a dominant 6-2 win over Germany, so it didn't have the drama. But the simple fact is Slovakia was the upset winner of Pool B that also featured Finland and Sweden and still has arguably the longest odds to win with powerhouses Canada, USA and Finland still in the mix. Of course, that's why they play the games.

Canada might have had the most hectic Wednesday of the tournament as the odds-on favorite fell behind Czechia 3-2 with about eight minutes left in the third period. Stars defenseman Thomas Harley tried to skate forward in the offensive zone, got the puck blocked and was trapped as Czechia skated the other way on a counter-attack and scored on an Ondrej Palat tally to take the lead.

However, Nick Suzuki of Montreal redirected in a tying goal with three minutes left and opened the door for Mitch Marner of Vegas to win it in overtime, and an entire country was able to take a deep breath.

Harley assisted on the overtime winner and now has a goal and three assists for Team Canada.

"This is the Olympic Games," Team Canada coach Jon Cooper said. "This is the best of the best. This is why all the players want to come to this, because they want to show who they are, and they want to flex. And if you think you're rolling through this tournament, you're sorely mistaken."

That was clear to Team USA, as well. They drew arguably the toughest quarterfinal opponent in Sweden and the game was airtight throughout. Team USA took a 1-0 lead midway through the second period and nursed it until late in the third when Sweden tied it up with 1:29 left in regulation. Minnesota's Quinn Hughes eventually won it in overtime to punch Team USA and Stars goalie Jake Oettinger (who served as the backup goalie in the game) into the semifinals.

Stars forward Radek Faksa suffered an upper body injury for Czechia last week and did not play in the team's final two games. His status will be updated when he returns to Frisco.

The Stars began practicing on Wednesday as they go through a mini training camp to get ready to return to regular season play on Feb. 25.

In the meantime, the six remaining Stars and their national teams will have to decide who gets which medal on the ice.

"Yes, we like the fact that we won the first three games and didn't have to play for the qualification game. But that doesn't mean you're going to keep on winning," Cooper said. "It doesn't mean because you got the Maple Leaf on your jersey that, 'Hey, oh my gosh, you're going to be first.' You've got to work to that. And the guys in there know it."

NHL.com (Dallas Stars)

Olympic break evaluation: Glen Gulutzan finding success amid crazy first season back with Stars

By Josh Clark
Date: 02/19/26

When asked about if he was excited for the three-week Olympic break, Stars head coach Glen Gulutzan couldn't help but laugh.

"You're never looking forward to breaks when you've won five in a row," he said with a smile on Feb. 3. "But at the end of the day, you know it's coming and, in this league, you don't get these very often. You might as well take advantage of it."

Of course, that feeling only amplified as the Stars defeated the Blues in dramatic fashion the following night. The win boosted Dallas to a season-high sixth straight victory and propelled them into the break on a high note. But after the wild twists and turns that have come with the 2025-26 season, the break provides a much-needed opportunity to breathe, step back and assess both all that has happened.

And there's plenty to unpack.

When the Stars hired Glen Gulutzan for the second time back on July 1, there was a sense of nervous anticipation that accompanied the move. Exciting thoughts of what a new head coach that had been behind the bench in the previous two Stanley Cup Finals were met with a dose of caution. Was making a coaching change after Pete DeBoer had helped lead the Stars to three straight Western Conference Finals a good idea? Would it create a dose of regression? Would the team regret not sticking to its same successful game plan?

But through 57 games, the Dallas Stars of today look much like the Dallas Stars of recent years: well-balanced, brimming with depth and sitting in the top five of the NHL standings.

Gulutzan deserves a lot of credit for that.

"Four months in now and it's still a little bit surreal," Gulutzan said of his second run in Dallas. "Mostly with the players and the team and how dedicated our team is to trying to win. That's been a real difference, not from when I've been here before, but just a team that's had this much success and then just watching how dedicated they are to winning and trying to be better.

Of course, that mindset is nothing new around Dallas. The Stars posted an NHL-best record of 149-68-29 (.665) over the previous three regular seasons. No team in the NHL has played in more playoff games (103) or posted more playoff wins (54) than Dallas

since the start of the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs. And yet, they're the only team in the top five of playoff wins without a Stanley Cup over the span. As a result, the hunger just keeps on growing.

That consistent hunger hasn't always been the case in Big D, especially in Gulutzan's first stint from 2011-13. Bankruptcy, a lockout, a lengthy playoff drought and dwindling attendance were just a handful of the themes that overshadowed the franchise as a 40-year-old Gulutzan took his first swing at NHL coaching. Two of the team's top five scorers in his second season as head coach were the same age as him (Ray Whitney and Jaromir Jagr). For comparison's sake, the Stars' top seven scorers this season are all under the age of 30.

Simply put, a lot has changed both on and off the ice since 2013.

"The growth is crazy to me," Gulutzan said. "Coming to the rink and seeing all of the people watching practice or going to the preseason games and seeing all of the people attending. Probably the biggest thing that struck me was our home opener with how many people were outside [before the game]. Since I left here, Tom [Gaglardi], Jim [Nill], Brad [Alberts] and everybody that has been involved building this has done such a great job. It's changed the whole dynamic of hockey for me in this town."

Of course, the winning dynamic plays a part in that. Gulutzan has kept the tradition of success humming along as the Stars posted an impressive 34-14-9 record heading into the break. They own the fourth-best points percentage (.675) and are top ten in goals per game and goals against per game.

But while the previous three seasons had a "Groundhog Day" feel to them, this season has been a different journey altogether. There's the compressed schedule which had the Stars play 12 games in a 21-day span at one point and will also see them play the final 25 games over a 50-day stretch. It's also the first full season with Mikko Rantanen in Victory Green, which has created a new need for line shuffling and managing an elite supporting cast.

The Olympics sparked a new level of anticipation, which created the potential for distractions. And to top it all off, he and the rest of the team have had to navigate a wild rash of injuries. Among the forwards group, captain Jamie Benn missed 22 games, Matt Duchene missed 25 and Tyler Seguin has been out since Dec. 2 with an ACL injury. In the back end, Nils Lundkvist, Thomas Harley and Lian Bichsel have all missed substantial time as well. Only five Stars skaters have yet to miss a game.

It's been nothing short of a juggling act with chainsaws and swords, but Dallas hasn't been fazed. Gulutzan is the first to give the players a lot of the credit, but is also quick to shout out his coaching staff.

Neil Graham has the Stars power play clicking at 29.9% (second in NHL) in his first year as an NHL assistant, while Alain Nasreddine is in his fourth season coaching the Dallas

defense and penalty kill. Gulutzan brought in David Pelletier from Edmonton to serve as another assistant coach and to be an “eye in the sky” on game nights, while Jeff Reese is in his 11th year as the Dallas goaltending coach.

“To have those guys with me has been a tremendous help,” Gulutzan said. “Reese has been a tremendous help for me as a veteran guy with the goaltenders. Nas and Grammer have helped me grow as a coach, and that’s all you can ask for. When you’re in this business, you always want to hire the best people. I know I’ve got really good people that have helped me more than I thought some coaches could.”

It’s all come together rather nicely through the first 57 games, but Gulutzan knows this is merely a checkpoint. As the non-Olympian Stars continue practicing this week in Frisco and prepare to resume play on Wednesday, their focus will be on the task at hand: the sprint to the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

And as has been the case for most of the season, they’re in the thick of a three-horse race with the Colorado Avalanche and Minnesota Wild for seeding and supremacy.

“I think when you’re running neck and neck with people, it makes you better and helps you keep your edge,” Gulutzan said of the race. “You have to keep pushing and finding different ways to get above those teams you’re running with. You’re looking for any edge you can get, whether it be psychological, tactical, physical or whatever you can find because it is that close.

“There are other teams that are getting up and want to win, and I’ve been on one. The challenge now becomes how do we get ahead of them? If everyone has the same internal ‘why,’ then what differentiates us? That’s what keeps you going as a coach is trying to find different ways to motivate and push us to a different level.

The difference maker might just be giving “one percent” more, a motto Gulutzan has preached since his introductory press conference on July 2. The coach has focused on keeping a lot of the Stars’ successful systems and habits in place while trying to turn a few key areas up one degree in hopes of getting the team over the hump.

“I’ve seen it in a few areas for sure,” Gulutzan said of the team’s growth. “Our next battle will be consistency, longevity and keeping it going for a long period of time. If you are going to take that one percent in the playoffs, it probably has to go 28 games. At the end of the day, that’s what we’re trying to push here. We got away from it for a little while, but we have to get back to it.”

Their next chance comes on Wednesday against the Kraken as the playoff push clicks into high gear. And as a coach who knows plenty about handling challenges, Gulutzan wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.

Dallas Morning News

Stars forward Radek Faksa injured at Olympics, out for Czechia's elimination game

By Lia Assimakopolous

Date: 02/17/26

Dallas Stars forward Radek Faksa missed Czechia's Olympic elimination game Tuesday against Denmark due to injury.

Faksa was injured late in Czechia's last game against Switzerland, did not practice Monday and was ruled out for Tuesday's qualification playoff. After Czechia advanced with a 3-2 win, Faksa was also ruled out for Wednesday's quarterfinals game against Canada.

The severity of his injury — and how it could impact his NHL season upon his return from Milan — is unknown.

Faksa has appeared Czechia's first three games of the tournament and recorded two assists in the 6-3 win over France Friday.

The first-time Olympian is one of seven Stars competing in the men's ice hockey tournament, which began its knockout rounds Tuesday.

Faksa has spent almost his entire 11-year NHL career in Dallas. He was traded to the St. Louis Blues for last season before GM Jim Nill brought him back to Dallas in free agency last summer.

Faksa has a goal and 15 assists in 56 games for Dallas this season.

Dallas Morning News

Inside the Dallas Stars locker room during Canada's Olympic comeback win over Czechia

By Lia Assimakopolous

Date: 02/18/26

FRISCO — While about 70% of the Dallas Stars were back in Frisco on Wednesday for their first practice since the Olympic break, you didn't have to look further than the TVs in the four corners of their locker room to see where the rest of the team was.

A brief practice ended, and as players entered the locker room, all eyes were glued to the screen for the final 10 minutes of the men's hockey Olympic quarterfinals game between Canada and Czechia in Milan, Italy.

The conversations between media and players were brief so as not to interrupt them from watching what was one of the best games of the tournament.

Just over 12 minutes into the third period, the locker room — filled mostly with non-Canadians at the time — burst with excitement when Ondrej Palat scored a go-ahead goal to put Czechia up 3-2 over the favorites to win the tournament.

A big smile came over Stars defenseman Lian Bichsel's face as Czechia, which is only a few countries away from his native Switzerland, took a late lead.

Then, the Canadians started to file in.

Mavrik Bourque from Quebec (and a notably passionate supporter of his home country) and Wyatt Johnston of Toronto looked nervous as an upset seemingly brewed.

Matt Duchene, also an Ontario native, offered his two cents on the tournament's flaws.

"That's the problem with these short tournaments," he said. "It's one game."

But none of the Canadians thought the game was over. Moments later, Nick Suzuki scored the late, game-tying goal. Bourque clenched his fists as he shouted, "Let's go!"

Duchene said, "It's over," rather confident in his countrymen's chances in overtime.

He went on to say he felt the Canadians would win gold if they completed the comeback.

American Adam Erne of Connecticut said, "You sure they're gonna get by the U.S.?"

Duchene was pretty sure.

The locker room closed before overtime began, so we didn't get to witness the players' reaction to Mitch Marner's back-handed game-winner, as he took on three Czech players at once.

But a minute after the game concluded, Stars coach Glen Gulutzan of Saskatchewan took the podium.

"Mitchy Marner, eh?" he said in truly Canadian fashion.

Marner may have taken on the entire Czech defense in his game-winner, but Gulutzan's own defenseman Thomas Harley helped make the goal happen with the secondary assist, his fourth point of the tournament.

"It looks very comfortable. I thought he's been really good. He's looked very solid. Big body, moves, made some great plays," Gulutzan said of Harley. "He's out there 3-on-3, so that tells you what kind of tournament he's having."

Gulutzan said he's thoroughly enjoyed watching the tournament, especially his players. He watched Harley and Radek Faksa get into a small scrum in the first meeting between Czechia and Canada last week.

"I was laughing," Gulutzan said. "I wanted to know what was said because I saw there was something said to each other. I'll have to ask them. Maybe they want to finish it out here."

But he's also held his breath at times, as Faksa has missed the last two games with an injury. Gulutzan said he hadn't yet received an update on his status but expects to soon given Czechia's elimination.

He's also watched star defenseman Miro Heiskanen play nearly 30 minutes a night for Finland.

"That's what he plays here," Gulutzan said. "The key with him and [Harley] is just making sure they get those rests in between. They can handle those minutes."

Hours later, the Stars' Finnish teammates completed a 3-2 overtime comeback of their own over Switzerland. Heiskanen scored the game-tying goal with 72 seconds left in regulation. Roope Hintz, Mikko Rantanen and Esa Lindell all assisted on either the game-tying or game-winning goal.

If only we could've seen the locker room's reaction to that finish.

Dallas Morning News

Stars' Matt Duchene still wants to see Jake Oettinger 'get a game in' at Winter Olympics

By SportsDay Staff

Date: 02/18/26

Dallas Stars fans aren't the only ones disappointed by Jake Oettinger's lack of playing time in the Milano-Cortina Winter Olympics.

Stars forward Matt Duchene joined Sportsradio 96.7 FM/1310 The Ticket (KTCK-AM) on Wednesday, where he shared some thoughts on his Dallas teammates competing in this year's Olympic Games. Duchene said he and Oettinger have kept in touch over the Olympic break, although they haven't had many hockey-related discussions.

"I know he's just very grateful to be part of that team and it's tough," Duchene said. "I really wanted him to get a game in, and really hoping for him to get a game in. Hopefully, maybe that still happens, but we'll see. He's still young. He's going to play in more than one of these, so his time might be coming."

Oettinger hasn't played for Team USA in the Olympic tournament, but he has dressed out as the team's backup for two games. Oettinger backed up Connor Hellebuyck in the United States' wins over Germany and Sweden.

Several fans took to social media last Saturday to make a push for Oettinger to start after Jeremy Swayman allowed a long-distance goal in a win over Denmark. Oettinger, 27, should have plenty of time left to represent the U.S. in other Olympic Games.

Oettinger and Team USA advanced to the Olympic hockey tournament semifinals with a 2-1 overtime win over Sweden on Wednesday. Can Oettinger return to Dallas with a gold medal in hand?

Dallas Morning News

Glen Gulutzan rooting for this key aspect as Stars standouts advance in Olympic tourney

By SportsDay Staff

Date: 02/18/26

Glen Gulutzan has plenty of teams to root for as the Winter Olympic hockey tournament heads into its semifinal round.

The last four teams in the tournament are Canada, Finland, Slovakia and the United States. Stars defenseman Thomas Harley is representing Team Canada, while Finland features Stars standouts like Miro Heiskanen, Esa Lindell, Roope Hintz and Mikko Rantanen. Meanwhile, goalie Jake Oettinger is representing Team USA.

Gulutzan told Sportsradio 96.7 FM/1310 The Ticket (KTCK-AM) that he plans to remain neutral for the semifinal showdowns. Several Stars players watched Wednesday's Canada-Czechia game in the locker room after finishing practice in Frisco.

"It is going to be interesting for me now because I am a Canadian, but we have four guys on that [Finland] team. I think I'm pretty neutral for that game," Gulutzan told The Ticket. "I'd like to see a good hockey game. No injuries is the biggest thing I'm praying for. I'm not celebrating a gold medal, no matter who gets it.

"I just hope our guys get back here healthy."

Gulutzan added that he thought hockey was one of the major highlights of the Winter Olympics. He said the international competition is good for the growth of the game moving forward.

"I think it's a big deal. It is great for the growth of the game. It's just so much exposure, and I think everyone benefits from that," Gulutzan said. "I know, probably, the 32 [NHL] owners don't like it, but I think long-term, it's so healthy for the growth of the game that everyone benefits."

Listen to the rest of Gulutzan's radio appearance [here](#).

Dallas Morning News

Mavericks have Chip Babcock, attorney to the stars, to argue their case against the Stars

By Brad Townsend

Date: 02/19/26

Long before Charles “Chip” Babcock litigated for the likes of Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Phil, Jerry Jones and Mark Cuban, his vocation was relatively pedestrian.

Sports writer.

Babcock, 76, has come a long way from early 1970s Philadelphia Inquirer scribe to renowned Dallas attorney, but his extensive sports roots uniquely qualify him as the Mavericks’ lead counsel in their legal squabble with the Stars.

He even got on ESPN’s SportsCenter as the Texas Rangers’ attorney during the mid-1990s MLB strike. Fans filed multiple lawsuits, arguing the Rangers’ use of replacement players made them an inferior product.

“On the third one, they had invited a bunch of TV stations,” Babcock recalls. “When I walked out of the courtroom they asked for comment and I said: ‘Well, they’ve tried three times now. And in baseball, as we know, three strikes and you’re out.’”

Babcock, fellow firm partner Chris Bankler and associate Sarah Starr are representing the Mavericks on behalf of Jackson Walker, Texas’ largest law firm with about 550 attorneys.

Babcock says he doesn’t recall previously facing the Stars’ legal firm, Winstead, or its lead attorney Joshua Sandler, though he has co-counseled on cases with Winstead.

At issue is whether the Stars, as the Mavericks contend, breached their American Airlines Center lease by having their primary headquarters outside Dallas city limits during most of the past quarter-century.

The franchises’ legal teams are scheduled for mediation on Feb. 27. If there’s no resolution, summary judgement motions are scheduled to heard on March 6 before Texas Business Court Judge Bill Whitehill. If the case survives that and subsequent hearings, a trial is scheduled for May 11.

While covering high school and college sports at The Inquirer, he fortuitously took law courses part time “because of a girl.” His epiphany occurred in June 1973, when The Inquirer’s Eagles writer was on vacation and Babcock got dispatched to a news conference at Veterans Stadium.

The Eagles had traded for 32-year-old Rams quarterback Roman Gabriel. Babcock, 23, found himself among a semicircle of reporters in their 40s who were hanging on Gabriel's every syllable.

"I sort of had one of these out-of-body experiences," Babcock said. "I said to myself, 'Maybe I should look into something else.'"

Upon his 1976 graduation from Boston University law school, Babcock applied for judicial clerkships in the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which at the time covered his home state of Florida and Texas.

A former BU classmate recommended a pair of federal judges in Dallas who were unusually young (40s) and "sports fanatics, so you would love these guys."

Both judges interviewed Babcock in Dallas. Judge Robert W. Porter later told Babcock he and the other judge flipped a coin to determine who would hire him. Porter prevailed. Or did he?

"They never told me who lost the flip," Babcock said.

In September 1978 he joined Jackson Walker, which at the time represented the Dallas Times Herald and KDFW-TV (Channel 4).

"So I walked into a ready-made media practice," he said. "The partner at the firm who was doing that work didn't really care for it. The minute I came in, he walked down with a bunch of files and said, 'Here, I understand you want to do media work.'"

He soon collected clients of his own. One of them, California's Transamerican Press, had a reporter who in 1980 was ordered by a Texas judge to reveal a confidential source in a libel case.

Second-year associate Babcock won the appeal, a landmark ruling that established qualified First Amendment privilege for reporters in civil libel cases.

Full disclosure: Among his numerous media cases, Babcock successfully represented The Dallas Morning News in a 2004 defamation suit brought by restaurant chain owner Phil Romano.

'Oprah's attorney'

Case by case, Babcock has forged a career that in 2010 compelled the magazine Texas Lawyer to count him among the state's greatest attorneys of the past quarter-century.

But of course he's primarily known as "Oprah's attorney." Funny thing is, Babcock was in the middle of a contentious eight-week trial and had no interest in Winfrey's case when her general counsel first reached out in late 1997.

“I came back from court and there was this letter on my desk, attaching a lawsuit,” he said. “It said, ‘We’d like you to represent us in this case that’s been filed in Amarillo.’”

“My initial reaction was, ‘This is the stupidest lawsuit I’ve ever read about in my life.’ So I padded around the corner to one of my partners’ office and said, ‘Hey, would you like to work on this Oprah Winfrey case?’”

Eighteen months later, Babcock found himself sharing an Amarillo bed and breakfast with Winfrey; her dog walker; her chef; the president of her company; her executive producer; and “Dr. Phil, when he was just plain ol’ Phil.”

For nearly two months, Babcock watched Winfrey go for daily 6 a.m. runs; return for trial prep; go to the courthouse; then tape her show at Amarillo’s Little Theater; then go back to the bed and breakfast at 8 p.m. for more trial prep.

“Incredible drive,” he said of Winfrey. “And delightful. Funny. Smart. Intuitive. Exactly in private as she appears in public.”

More than a quarter-century later they remain friends. He’s represented her in multiple cases and smaller legal matters. And he’s represented McGraw numerous times, most recently in a 2025 bankruptcy case involving his media company. Babcock shows no signs, or inclination, of slowing. He says he billed 2,300 hours last year. That’s the equivalent of 287 ½ eight-hour days.

Mavericks-Stars, if it makes it to May 11, won’t be the trial of the century or Oprah-in-Amarillo level, but it’s no accident the Mavericks have a sports writer-turned-titan in their legal corner.

Dallas Morning News

For Stars lawyer Joshua Sandler, legal battle with Mavericks hits close to home

By Lia Assimakopoulos

Date: 02/19/26

Joshua Sandler doesn't shy away from the word "scrappy."

It's how he describes himself — the first in his family to attend college, a proud North Texas native and now the lead attorney for the Dallas Stars in one of the most consequential sports-related legal battles the city has seen.

Sandler, a shareholder at the law firm Winstead, is at the center of the high-stakes dispute between the Stars and Dallas Mavericks over control of American Airlines Center. The Stars hired him not long after the conflict erupted in October 2024, when the Mavericks sent the Stars a letter alleging a breach of the teams' long-standing franchise agreement with the City of Dallas. A year later, the dispute escalated into dueling lawsuits, setting the stage for a courtroom showdown that could reshape the future of Dallas sports.

That showdown inches closer this week, with the two sides set for mediation Friday, Feb. 27, and a summary judgment hearing on March 6 ahead of a jury trial slated for May.

Sandler will face Jackson Walker partner Chip Babcock — a veteran attorney known for representing high-profile clients such as Oprah Winfrey and Dr. Phil McGraw.

But for Sandler, a 46-year-old D-FW native, it's a matter close to home — personally and professionally.

He graduated from Plano High School before earning his undergraduate degree from the University of Texas at Austin and his law degree from SMU's Dedman School of Law, where Texas Business Court Judge Bill Whitehill will be working out of a mock trial courtroom for this case.

His aspiration to become an attorney started when he was 5 years old because he liked the idea of wearing his church clothes to work. His Stars fandom started not long after.

"I've been a Stars fan since I was in middle school," he said. "At the end of this case, I want Dallas and the American Airlines Center to still be the go-to place to still be able to see these amazing teams."

Over two decades, Sandler has built his reputation as a trial lawyer, first and foremost. As co-chair of fiduciary litigation for Winstead, he often represents trustees in complex

disputes, while also handling high-level business litigation — including contract cases like the one now pitting the city's NHL and NBA franchises against each other.

Sandler joined Winstead in October 2022 on a simple condition — the ability to handpick his team. It's a group of eight attorneys he calls "hungry, hardworking and scrappy" — Frank Carroll, Cory Johnson, David Reynolds, James Snyder, JD Janicek, Ben Hamel, Max Ward and Andrew Patterson.

"[That] has really kind of been everything to me," he said. "The way in which we have chosen the individuals that are working with our team has been paramount."

Since 2024, Sandler says his team has gone to trial three times and won each case. The lawyers have prevailed in multiple appeals, including one affirmed by the Texas Supreme Court.

Sandler's personal policy is to avoid publicly identifying clients, though he said he's represented athletes, celebrities, Fortune 500 companies and small businesses.

So has his opponent, Babcock, who is known for high-profile cases. Their matchup spans generations and legal styles, and Sandler said he welcomes the challenge.

"I think in any case that I have, it's an opportunity to prove the extent of our ability to prepare and persuade and highlight substantively why our clients should legally prevail," he said.

"I respect that Mr. Babcock has had high-profile successes in the past. Of course, that's not relevant to the facts of the law at issue. What it does inform me is that he has the requisite skills to be prepared, and you can rest assured, we certainly will be prepared."

Sandler noted the firms have their similarities despite representing opposing sides. Winstead and Jackson Walker, he said, are among the few remaining Texas-based regional law firms, with deep roots across the state. Winstead's 300 attorneys are spread across Texas' major cities, with additional offices in New York and Nashville.

That Texas perspective, Sandler believes, matters in this case, which he views as about far more than one arena.

"My personal motivation in this case is ensuring that justice is served," he said. "That's my job."

Dallas Morning News

Dallas Stars give positive injury update on Radek Faksa

By SportsDay Staff

Date: 02/19/26

Dallas Stars head coach Glen Gulutzan on Thursday gave a positive update on Radek Faksa.

Gulutzan told reporters there's a "99%" likelihood the forward will be in the Stars' lineup when the NHL season starts back up next week. Dallas' next game comes at home against Seattle on Wednesday.

Faksa appeared in Czechia's first three games of the Olympics, but suffered an upper-body injury in their final group stage game against Switzerland.

Czechia was eliminated two games later in overtime by Canada on Wednesday. Faksa was sidelined for both contests.

Gulutzan said Faksa would probably have played the Olympic semifinal if Czechia had won.

The first-time Olympian was among seven Stars competing in the men's tournament, and has so far been the only one sent home.

Faksa has a goal and 15 assists in 56 games for Dallas this season.

DLLS

DLLS DieHard Dallas Stars mailbag: Trade targets, EBUG scenarios, & soda choices

By Sam Nestler

Date: 02/16/26

The Olympic break is a great time for a DLLS DieHard Dallas Stars mailbag.

So, thanks for your questions! Let's get to it.

I think Eeli Tolvanen on the Stars makes a lot of sense. He would help a lot with forecheck efficiency and has decently positive defensive impacts. There's also the Finnish connection. What do you think? (tylerhk93)

Sean Shapiro turned me on to Tolvanen, actually.

I like the player. I like any player that can shoot the puck, finds ways to score goals, goes to the tough areas, and plays with some snarl.

However, Seattle is now a buyer, proven by its attempt to purchase Artemi Panarin out of New York. And according to our show guest last week, Alison Lukan, he has started to find his game under coach Lane Lambert. I don't see any scenario where Tolvanen is moved at the deadline.

In fact, it's going to be very hard for Dallas to improve its roster this season because there are a whole bunch of Seattle type teams who will do whatever it takes just to get into the playoffs.

Who do you think are the biggest candidates for a bounceback or regression after the Olympic Break? (cleb)

I am going to include three players in here who really took a step forward over the final couple weeks before the break. Those are Matt Duchene, Thomas Harley, and Jamie Benn.

Duchene finally found his stride after a terrible head injury that forced him out for months and threw off his entire season. Duchene scored six goals over the final seven games and really looked like his old self.

This is important for so many reasons, as Dallas lacks scoring depth and cannot afford one of their point producers going quiet all year long. It's also important because Duchene had this success both playing in the top six with skill and on a third line with Sam Steel and Benn. He has to be able to carry a line right now, and he has.

Speaking of Benn on that third line, I have loved what the captain has done lately as well.

Benn racked up two goals and six assists over the final four games before the break. That also included a late game winner against St. Louis to close it out. The captain struggled after his collapsed lung, and many believed he was slowing down for good. Understandably so. But his resurgence has given Dallas more depth, a more inspired and impactful leader, and some hope that Benn still has more than just fourth-line grinder minutes left in the tank.

I am not saying he's going to come out and score 30 goals. But I think his progression, mixed with a few weeks without games (especially important as you age), can lead to him being a more consistent offensive threat down the stretch.

When it comes to Harley, we all know this story. While the Canadian defenseman was far from playing poorly leading up to 4 Nations last year, the tournament took him to an entirely new level. Harley praised the pace of play and lessons learned playing with the best in the world, and has consistently stated that the NHL game seemed that much slower when he returned.

This year, Harley has not been good. Nowhere near his standard of play. He dealt with an injury, signed a massive contract extension, and was still selected to play for Canada in his first Olympics. And so far, he has thrived.

Harley played the most minutes for Canada in their opening win and scored a goal in their second. He has looked calm, in control, and confident. And most importantly, he is not making the egregious mistakes we have seen in Dallas. Were those because of injury and distraction? Was he trying to make up for, perhaps, a partner playing above his skill level?

I'm not fully sure.

But I do expect the Olympics to vault him to a new level, just as the 4 Nations did before it.

Finally, I think Jake Oettinger could use the experience and motivation from being on Team USA, but barely dressing and never playing, to drive him to new heights in the spring.

And the Stars need that out of him. Dallas can add all they want. But if Oettinger cannot play near his best through four rounds instead of two, they don't stand a chance at winning a Cup.

Now that the men's hockey competition is about to begin soon, where are you guys at with Team USA with respect to no Robo on the team, go for the gold, indifferent, or want to see Billy G fail bad?(Matthew)

I think we are annoyed at the decision, especially adding to it Jake Oettinger being scratched or benched for all three preliminary games. But we also understand the business and are Americans who want Team USA to win a Gold Medal regardless.

That's where I stand, at least.

I say let them win gold. Also eat some cake. And then Dallas can destroy Bill Guerin's Minnesota Wild in round one of the playoffs. Last laugh, I suppose.

If you order a Coke at a restaurant, is Pepsi ok? (ctrlaltdowned)

I don't like soda.

Unless I am eating Texas BBQ, in which I will often order a Sprite. If my tummy hurts, sometimes I will have a Ginger Ale. Is that soda? Once in a while I will steal a sip from my fiance or friends at the movie theater if they are crushing a Dr. Pepp or Root Beer. But if it's not a float, I get bored. I am a big fan of Ollipop sodas, those are pretty dope and get the digestive system working right nice.

As for your question... Pepsi and Coke are the same. I actually prefer Pepsi though. I know, I assume that will result in some shame.

What's the blue line going to look like after the break with a healthy Bichsel, a rested (and assumed healthy) Boosh, reacquired Koly, standout substitute Capo, and the ever-present Petro? Does Boosh become the 7th defenseman? (Tocinoman)

First, they will activate Lian Bichsel off LTIR. That move will require someone going down the AHL, and I believe that will be Kyle Capobianco.

That leaves Bichsel, Miro Heiskanen, Esa Lindell, Harley, Ilya Lyubushkin, Nils Lundkvist, and Alex Petrovic. I think those are the seven we see until they do (or don't) make a move at the deadline to add a blueliner.

I would roll the pairs out like this to start:

Lindell – Heiskanen

Harley – Petrovic/Lyubushkin

Bichsel – Lundkvist

I think they will add. Or at least try. But if they somehow don't, they need one or multiple of Lundkvist, Petrovic, and Lyubushkin to take a step.

They could always run Bichsel with Harley, but I don't think he is ready for that yet, nor do I believe he is ready to thrive on his offside (if he wants to play in the top four, he will have to learn this eventually).

Petrovic should be the solution among those candidates, though. His playoff past and size gives him a leg up, and I could even see Lundkvist being the odd-man out come playoff time because he lacks that size.

Are we Team USA or Team Sumoi (Finland)? (Coach Davis)

Yes.

I wanted to just leave it at that for the added drama, but you took your time to ask a mailbag question, so I won't do that.

I am still rooting for Team USA. I know the Jason Robertson drama and now Jake Oettinger being scratched or benched doesn't sit well with the Stars fans. And don't worry, I think I can be professional and also say that leaving Robertson off the roster was one of the dumber things I have seen from USA Hockey in quite some time.

And they have done some dumb things. But, who hasn't?

Regardless, I am an American who salivates off any 1980 Miracle movie, book, or documentary. One that grew up absolutely dreaming of representing my country on the ice one day — I tried out for a USA travel team when I was younger. That was as close as I got. I am with the US until the end, and they will be the group I cheer for at this Olympics.

However, I love the Finnish Mafia. I find them fun to watch, as well as fascinating to talk to and observe. I hope they have success and back up their 2022 Gold Medal with, perhaps, a Bronze. It feels like it has to be USA-Canada for Gold. It's the way it should be.

I also think Finland and USA have two of the best kits (soccer term for you, Owen) in the Olympics. And, to me, that has ALWAYS been important.

Look good, play good. That's what I was told, at least.

Here's an interesting one. If the Stars somehow have a David Ayres situation come up in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final when they're up 1-0 and the EBUG shuts out the Star's opponent to win the Cup, should that EBUG get their name engraved on the Stanley Cup? (Clarotus)

First of all, I am ALL IN FOR THIS. Let's make it happen. Do it for the story. Do it for the fans. Do the John Wall.

Second, here is the rule directly from the NHL:

ENGRAVING ELIGIBILITY: A player is required to have appeared in at least 41 regular-season games with a team, or one Stanley Cup Final game, to be eligible to have his name engraved on the trophy. In 1994, a stipulation was added to allow a team to petition the Commissioner for permission to have players' names put on the Stanley Cup if extenuating circumstances prevented them from being available to play. The management staff engraved on the trophy is determined by the team. However, it must be approved by the Hockey Hall of Fame and NHL. The maximum number of names a championship team can engrave on the trophy is 55.

So, yes. That EBUG would absolutely have his (or her) name engraved on Lord Stanley. And what a story it would be.

The current games started for Otter and Casey are 37 and 20 respectively, which puts them on pace for 53 and 29. Considering the org goals for workload, and Otter potentially playing for Team USA, do you see Casey playing more games after the break to rest Otter before the playoffs? (Schmidt Happens)

I do, but not as much as I thought before the season.

Oettinger has to find his peak game. The Stars know that. And they know that playing him more is probably the secret to unlocking that. But more importantly, he is doubtful to see any game action at the Olympics, already being scratched twice and backing up once. That means he should be well rested, more so than any of the three previous seasons, and that he may have something to prove after I am sure, some disappointment in Milan.

On the other hand, though, DeSmith has been the better goalie. And Dallas knows they can use him to win some tough games while also giving Oettinger a night off.

Of the final 25 games, I would guess Oettinger plays 15, with DeSmith getting 10. That would land them just below the 53 and 29 starts that you referenced above (52 and 30), which I feel is right around the plan coach Glen Gulutzan and Jeff Reese had in mind before the season.

It's a condensed schedule again after the break, which should lead to more starts for DeSmith. But the majority of games are at home (only nine on the road), so that usually tends to lean toward Oettinger.

Personally, I hope it's closer to 50 and 32, respectively.

I don't really have any questions but I'm going to Milan next week and I'm so excited!
(Alistair Minton)

I expect stories on top of stories on top of stories when you return.

Maybe a blue Finland jersey too, eh?

I have a fun one, how often in the press box do you see people celebrating a goal? Do you personally get excited each time the stars score? (freelancer)

Very rarely.

Media does not celebrate, although we have developed the habit of getting authentically excited over awesome plays, saves, or goals. Well, at least, Robert Tiffin, Owen Newkirk, Taylor Newby, and I do. And I love that.

Hockey is fun, right? Why so serious?

The only real celebrations we see from up top come from opposing scratches who are sitting at the end of our row (see question below for more details).

Actually, you mentioned a player being a messy eater of popcorn in the press box. Any other press box player inside scoops? (MarshallSecond)

Oof, this one I have to be careful of because there are some things you don't share...

I'll say this, every player approaches a healthy scratch or injury differently during games. If it is a serious injury like a surgery, players will usually stay at home and watch on TV. For others, some like to rehab and workout during the game, watching it in the gym or training room. Others like to get their workout in earlier, shower up, and go full relax mode to enjoy the game like the rest of us up top.

I have seen players devouring candy, popcorn, and ice cream. Seeing an NHL player sifting through the Drumsticks and ice cream sandwiches is something I never dreamed of. But I probably should have.

My favorites are the social butterflies. I remember chatting with Freddie Olofsson up top just about every intermission and TV timeout. I also remember awkwardly finishing my DLLS pregame show during the playoffs, while Ben Kraws and a few other Black Aces sat three feet away. Were they judging me? Or because they were AHLers or prospects, were they in fact feeling just as uncomfortable as me... Waiting to see who made the first move. Kraws did have some popcorn in hand, I believe, and I told him I was finishing up and got out of their way.

You quickly learn, if you somehow didn't know heading in, that you may have some cool perks and opportunities, but media is nowhere near as special (or cool) as players, coaches, and team staff. Know your place!

Another cool moment for me came in the playoffs against Colorado. I got to sit next to former NHL defenseman and current NHLPA rep, Kevin Shattenkirk, for two games, one in Denver and one at the AAC.

Those were two of the coolest games I have ever worked. Not just because the games were awesome (I think one of them was Seguin's OT winner), but also because Kevin was very outgoing and we had some awesome conversations. We chatted about the game, dove deep into breakdowns of goals and plays on the ice, and also discussed his career, including his Stanley Cup Final Game 5 OT winner in 2020 that essentially ended the Stars Cinderella bubble run.

My final note will be about visiting players in the press box.

Often, those players sit at the very end of our row in the box, rather than in a suite away from the media. During the regular season, they are pretty tame. But in playoffs, it can get quite loud, with Avs scratches screaming and standing when Colorado scores and banging their fists on the table other times. It's pretty cool to get that inside look because you can see just how much these games mean to every player in that organization.

I hope that was sufficient. I promise to keep a mental tally of fun moments moving forward for you.

How are we feeling about how the US has played so far? Sure would be cool to have the leading American scorer on the team. Also, why do you think Swayman played before Jake? (S_tar726)

You know, they have not been perfect. But at a longer tournament like this, it can be all about growth from game to game. They played their best game in the win against Germany. They look to be finding their footing.

But with the lesser opponents, it is really hard to tell how good they are. Obviously, the skill is there. But the quarterfinal game against, presumably, Sweden should tell us a lot. I am still just as afraid of Team Canada as I was when these rosters were announced, though.

Swayman earned it, to be honest. He has been statistically better than Oettinger (and Connor Hellebuyck) this season. And that comes playing on a bad Boston team. I know Winnipeg has been bad too, but when compared to Dallas, that does show through.

I am annoyed that Hellebuyck backed up Swayman against Denmark, though. I think that was stupid, with Swayman getting the start likely for the sole purpose of resting Hellebuyck for Germany and beyond.

If that was the goal, why not have Oettinger back up in case Swayman gets hurt or struggles. But that would never happen, right? Well, he struggled mightily. And I think if Oettinger was on the bench in his baseball cap, he likely would have entered that game at some point with Swayman struggling to find pucks from all over the ice.

I still believe Oettinger will be the starting goalie for Team USA in a best-on-best one day. But I may be biased.

I got a question for luds.. what was your favorite level of hockey to play in? (Lightfoot94)

Pro...

Playing all other levels is fun but I played for a purpose... prove doubters wrong...

I could come from a small town with teams that had just enough players to form a team.

Then most important was a D3 coach that said "Not sure if you can make our team but this would be a good school to attend".

Yes, Luds included that middle finger emoji in his text response to me asking him this question...

DLLS

Dallas Stars practice notebook: Bichsel looks ready, watching Olympic drama in the dressing room, & taking things slow after break

By Sam Nestler

Date: 02/18/26

The Dallas Stars returned to the rink today, practicing for the first time since the Olympic break began nearly two weeks ago.

While seven players were absent due to their Winter Olympics participation, everyone else was accounted for.

Let's get into some notes.

Lian Bichsel is getting close & roster implications

Lian Bichsel has not played since breaking his foot against the Ottawa Senators on Nov. 30.

Bichsel's injury was similar to Nils Lundkvist's, requiring a surgery, some time in a boot and on a scooter, and a similar return timeline. Lundkvist was injured on Oct. 16. He returned just under two months later on Dec. 7. Not including the Olympic break, since he was about to return just prior, Bichsel has missed just over two months. Now, he is a full participant in practice and should return when the Stars drop the puck again on Feb. 25.

"When the time that [Nils Lundkvist and Thomas Harley] were out, he played some major minutes and did a great job. We were winning a lot of hockey games there," Gulutzan said. "Just to get him back, it gives us that physical presence. Just a guy who ends plays, especially in the D zone. Ends plays and a big body that can penalty kill. It's going to be nice to get him back."

With Bichsel's return, come some roster complications. Bichsel was placed on LTIR, meaning Dallas had the ability to exceed the salary cap and roster size while he was out. But with his return, they will need to make a move to get back under the 23-man roster limit. I expect Kyle Capobianco to be sent down to the AHL to make this happen. They are in an okay spot cap wise, since Tyler Seguin remains on LTIR.

Gulutzan said they are just trying to get through the Olympic break before they discuss this any further. "You don't make those decisions until you have to make those decisions."

Olympic watch party in the dressing room

After practice came one of the cooler and more unique moments of my career.

As I watched the third period of Canada-Czechia on my laptop next to the glass at the end of practice, the Stars stretched and skated off to the dressing room. When we walked in, the game was tied 2-2 with about nine minutes left.

After talking to a few players, Nathan Bastian and I looked up and saw Czechia block a shot by Thomas Harley, skate the other way, and take a 3-2 lead that put their bench and fans into bedlam. Bastian was excited to see his old Devils teammate Ondřej Palát score the big goal, while the Canadians were in shock.

Were the Czechs cheating? Perhaps, lol.

But, as Team Canada usually is on the ice, Matt Duchene remained calm and said there was a lot of time left and that if Canada found a way to win, they were going to take the Gold Medal.

Well, Nick Suzuki tipped a puck five-hole in the final minutes, and Mitch Marner scored an incredible 3-on-3 overtime goal to send Canada to the semifinals. We waited a bit for Gulutzan to come to the podium, and it was surely because he was watching the end of the game in the coaches office.

Side note: I think it is SO stupid to play 3-on-3 in knockout games at the Olympics. Like, SO stupid. It's one thing to do it in the preliminary round, but having these meaningful sudden-death moments coming in a street hockey style that can go either way is absurd. Even dumber that they go to a shootout after 10 minutes other than in the Gold Medal game, where they play continuous 3-on-3.

Harley picked up the secondary assist on Marner's goal, which was cool to see because of the ridiculous skill and depth Canada has. Despite that, Harley was still out there in the biggest moment.

Harley wasn't the only one from Dallas to make some noise at the Olympics today. Unfortunately, Radek Faksa missed his second consecutive game with an upper-body injury, but his Czechia team nearly pulled off the biggest upset we have seen in quite some time. Gulutzan had no further update on Faksa, by the way, but one can only imagine he is dealing with a serious injury if it kept him out of this massive game in his only Olympics.

In the third quarterfinal of the day, Team Finland — aka the Dallas Stars and Florida Panthers, plus Mikael Granlund — trailed Switzerland 2-0 after 40 minutes. But in the third, they got the proximity goal to make it 2-1, and then some guy named Miro Heiskanen shot a puck off a Swiss defenders stick to tie the game in the final minutes.

The goal read Heiskanen from Mikko Rantanen and Roope Hintz. That's pretty cool.

“We’ve been down that road with him, and we want to do that” Gulutzan said about Heiskanen activating more from the blue line when playing with Finland and wanting more of that from him in Dallas. “I think the better we play as a team and the way we played in the last five games will enable him to do that even more. So he’s not defending as much, because he takes great, great pride, he’s so underrated in our league, but he takes great, great pride in defending.

“You can see he’s in that situation where it requires a little bit more offense from their group (Finland). But, I think if we play the way we play, he can do that here a little easier, we can make it easier for him to do that.”

And in overtime, Arturri Lehkonen ripped a breakaway wristed off the bar and in to push Finland into a likely matchup with Canada in the semis. Esa Lindell had two assists in the game, the second coming on the OT winner.

I only wish that we were watching the end of that game in the dressing room because I would love to see the Stars reaction to Heiskanen scoring late to tie the game.

It was a great day for the Stars in Milan, as Jake Oettinger also got the promotion to back up Connor Hellebuyck for Team USA.

Gulutzan said he has enjoyed the Olympics as well. However, it has been a bit nerve racking to watch so many of his key skaters playing big minutes in Milan.

“I do, I do,” Gulutzan said about getting nervous. “Especially after seeing Kevin Fiala go down, right? You don’t like that. We all know it could happen.”

As for the non-Olympians, the Stars coaching staff left them to be on their break, not having too many nerves that Craig Ludwig would drag them all into a snowmobile race or down to Mexico City...

“We left them all alone,” Gulutzan said. “Even yesterday, at two o clock we could have our first skate, and we left it optional and we didn’t come to the rink. We didn’t want to check in who’s skating, who’s not, it’s their break. But now, starting tomorrow, start showing a little video and individual stuff to guys, and go from there. We’ve left them completely alone.

“Probably in the last 12 years, 10 years even, these guys look after themselves. I’m sure they had three of four days off, had a couple of pops and some food. But they look after themselves.”

Taking things slow after the break

Most Stars players got away during the Olympic break.

Whether it was a tropical vacation to Cabo, like Bastian, Bichsel, Mavrik Bourque, and Wyatt Johnson, or some time back home, like Casey DeSmith or Justin Hryckowian, it

was a much-needed rest after a condensed NHL schedule. I also get the feeling that there was not a lot of skating going on during these days off. I think the team knew that would be the case, too, which makes this full week of practices before a game that much more important to get back up to speed.

As for the practice itself, Gulutzan said his goal was pretty simple.

“We do have a plan,” Gulutzan said. “To kind of tick off one box, we did a little of neutral zone today and some breakout stuff. But then, basically, looking at these next four days, we have four full days of practice, so just how that structures out to get them back into hockey mode the best we can. We’ll work with [director of sports performance Troy Van Biezen] and [strength and conditioning coach Mike Donoghue] to see how we want to structure these practices from hard, medium, light flow.

“So, we got that work in. Today’s not a killer day. Today was just a little bit of length, 45 minutes, and some touches to get them back in the game, kind of a medium day. Tomorrow, we’ll ramp up a little bit and then ramp down. We’ve kind of got a program built for ourselves for the next week.”

Dallas entered the break playing some of its best hockey on a six-game winning streak.

For the Olympians, all but Faksa remain in the hunt for a Gold Medal, and Gulutzan understands there will likely be a dip in energy and performance at some point after they return to the NHL.

“There’s going to be a little dip,” Gulutzan said. “We’re talking about some of these players coming back, especially as they go further for more important games, there might be a little bit of a dip. I mean, Olympics is a huge event. So, you play game 58 or 59 in the NHL, it might not be where they are at mentally now. So, we’re going to try to get through that dip as quick as we can and get them right back to where we were.”

Nils Lundkvist told me this was not because I was wearing a Team USA hat on the day they took on his Swedes in the quarterfinal. Lundkvist will be joining the DLLS show tomorrow, so be sure to check that one out!

Stars Stack

Tales From The Clipped: Matt Duchene's revenge tour would make John Wick proud

By David Castillo

Date: 02/19/26

'Revenge' is meant to be tongue in cheek here. Although how much I don't know. Matt Duchene didn't just get concussed from what should have an obvious and predatory hit in any normal sport where safety is a genuine or even minimum necessary concern — but when he came back, he looked bad, he played bad, and all of a sudden the idea that the Dallas Stars might be carrying \$4.5 million in dead weight wasn't crazy.

The end result was a lot of criticism from every corner of the internet and zero faith in the player who just last season led the team in points with 82.

Was Duchene listening? The list of reasons explaining Duchene's lack of juice is a sloplist of items anybody can mark. Concussion, post-concussive syndrome, losing his bandmates Mason Marchment and Tyler Seguin, and of course — the current system under Glen Gulutzan that simply does not generate even-strength offense. But I don't want to go backwards.

The aha moment came in the Columbus win on January 22. Duchene didn't score any points. It was a 1-0 game after all. But there was real urgency to his play. The missing elegance seemed present. He was doing all the things he did last year despite lacking any real chemistry or consistent linemates to latch on to. Since then, he's been on a tear, with nine points in the last seven games. Looking at his last seven (January 22 to February 5) versus the previous 25 games illustrates not simply a bounceback. But a breakout.

He's got his groove back. 57 percent in expected goal share, up from 42 percent is a different player altogether. Sure, seven games is a small sample, but I would argue that the reasons for Duchene's breakout appear much more sustainable than the previous 25, which had an unsustainable explanation.

Why am I so confident that Duchene's current run is here to stay? Today the tape tells the truth; not just about Duchene, but about the environment that's helping Duchene play like the point leader from last year.

We'll get into the way better (and more cinematic) highlight reel in a second. For now, here's 54 seconds of Duchene doing what he couldn't do early on: connect the teammate dots. Starting with the Blue Jackets game, this is when I noticed he was on the come-up.

Duchene's playmaking tends to get overlooked. He's not super creative so much as narrow and patient. The two make for a potent mix when maximized. I stress this because it's an important reminder of just how much Duchene has managed to succeed late in his career. Players like Duchene are not supposed to age well, which says a lot about how layered he's always been. Marchment and Seguin were not world beaters, but together they formed one of hockey's most dominant depth lines. Duchene was the central nervous system of it. When he's on, he's on because he's able to utilize his teammates with a precision few can match.

It was tough watching Duchene struggle with some other things that have defined his career. Duchene's game carries another feature that tends to go unnoticed: he's actually quite good in the battle grid. No, I'm not saying Duchene is a physical player. However, his play along the walls and in the corners tends to be understated precisely because he's neither physical, nor heavy on the forecheck. That doesn't mean he's not putting in work though.

On the contrary, Duchene's combination of playmaking and old man strength has been on full display over the last seven games.

That St. Louis shift starting at six seconds in particular has it all; 30 seconds of brilliant cornerwork, the aforementioned playmaking, and even a little dawg at times.

I don't want to oversell Duchene, however. While I didn't make a mix of his warts, they were on display too. Duchene is a floater when it comes to backchecking, often times letting the play develop in front of him instead of taking a proactive approach. He's never been a Selke type, but that doesn't make him immune from criticism. After all, Duchene needs to be a player in the postseason if the Stars have a chance. We can forgive him if he's not producing and playing strong defense. But if he's not producing and playing poor defense? That's a different story.

But here's the kicker. You may have noticed something different about one mix versus the other. The second is nothing but clips of the Steel DJ line. That looks and feels like a line that can play well into the postseason given their raw nerve. It's not a perfect line, but 57 percent expected goal share is dominant. It's exactly the kind of environment that can protect Duchene's weaknesses and further leverage his strengths.

I know we looked at Duchene's splits earlier. Thankfully we have David Johnson's The Stanley Cap to further help visualize the difference. Because this is intuitive, this won't take long. Below we have a visualization for all the teams in the league, and the percentage of where each unblocked shot attempt is coming from and the likelihood of said unblocked shot becoming a goal. This helps us understand what the league looks like right now.

Again, pretty intuitive. Unblocked shot attempts are 30 percent more likely to become goals in the royal road area (the space between the main dots) of the ice. The bottom of the dots are especially tough on goalies this year, and as usual, so is the crease.

Duchene's first 25 games revealed a player who could threaten in some of the dirty areas, but not all, and was an active drag on Dallas' shooting ability everywhere you see blue, which is a lot.

Now he's a beast in those areas (okay not all, but still). That 1.3 percentage increase in team shot threat behind the net, and the 6.8 percentage point increase directly in front of the crease are phenomenal.

Even though his shooting percentage is running a little too hot, his expected shooting percentage is pretty warm itself, suggesting a certain level of sustainability

Stepping back, and heading into the postseason, Duchene returning to form helps solidify the gameplan from here on out. Essentially, Dallas' bottom six is now set. The Seguin injury kind of clouded the situation, but no longer. That's why replacing one of Justin Hryckowian or Mavrik Bourque in the top six should be the first order of business. The bottom six support group has finally poured in the concrete. Now Jim Nill just needs to fix his high-rise above.

If he can, he'll have Duchene to thank.

Stars Thoughts

Quick Olympic Thoughts: Czechia Advance without Radek Faksa

By Robert Tiffin

Date: 02/17/26

Radek Faksa suffered some kind of upper-body injury in Czechia's final game of the tournament. As a result, he didn't dress for Czechia's elimination game against Denmark today.

We'll wait to see what exactly Faksa's status is for Czechia's Wednesday tilt against Canada in the quarterfinals, but considering he didn't even work out on the ice this morning, it's hard to see him going from street clothes to game-readiness in 24 hours.

For the Czechs, Faksa's absence made it that much more impressive when they held onto a 3-2 lead for all of the third period, despite Denmark's mounting as decent a push as you could ask for. Not having your top penalty-killing center (and one of your best face-off guys) could have given Denmark a look at an upset, but Czechia managed to get the horse into the barn, giving themselves another 24 hours of Olympic life.

Of course, for most NHL fans, the Olympic hockey tournament was always going to be looked at through a Canada vs. USA lens. The hockey equivalents of the Red Sox and Yankees of 20 years ago are the ones with the most NHL talent, the two countries where NHL teams reside, and thus, the ones with the most money to spend.

That last factor is also why it was something of a story that Canada ultimately decided to start putting its players up in a hotel rather than keep them in dorm-style accommodations in the Olympic Village. After all, if you have the resources, why not use them, if it helps you win gold? If you're focused on winning, even an extra hour of deeper sleep could matter, in theory.

The USA has opted to lean into their grit-it-out ethos by staying in the Olympic Village (and perhaps, by playing Clayton Keller over Kyle Connor tomorrow). They've made a couple of choices from the roster-building on out that bespeak something of an affected underdog mentality. And of course, if they manage to take down Canada, everyone will lionize them for it.

But make no mistake: This tournament is top-heavy, and the USA are one of the top-est of the heavyweights. Here are the numbers: USA, Canada, and Sweden all have 25 NHL players on their 25-man rosters, while Finland has 24. Czechia is next on that list, with just 11.

That's not to say that there aren't great hockey players in leagues other than the NHL, of course. Far from it! But generally speaking, the best players want to play in the NHL if they possibly can, because that's where

With Russia banned from IIHF (and Olympic) participation due to the ongoing invasion of Ukraine, there's a stark divide between the top four teams in the tournament (who also played last February in the Four Nations Face-Off) and everyone else. And probably, there's another (smaller) divide between the two North American teams and their two Nordic counterparts.

But until we winnow the field down to four teams (whoever those end up being), we get games like Tuesday, where Czechia boasted 11 NHL players on their Olympic squad, and Denmark just six. That sort of ratio makes for a more competitive and entertaining game than many of the necessarily lopsided matches we saw in the group stages, and this game delivered.

Matěj Stránský nearly scored for Czechia in the first period, but Frederik Andersen played every bit like the goalie that beat the Dallas Stars in Jamie Benn's very first playoff series back in 2014—the same year Benn would end up winning gold at the Olympics.

And that memory sent me down a rabbit hole from a decade ago, if you don't mind following me.

You may not remember it, but Jonas Hiller actually won Game 6 for Anaheim in 2014. Andersen was pulled after giving up four goals on 12 shots to Dallas in what looked like the game of Trevor Daley's life (and maybe still was), until the Stars coughed up the lead late and Hiller wound up getting what would be his next-to-last win for Anaheim, despite being their go-to starter that season.

<https://youtu.be/D5VeyRo7H7o>

Andersen would get injured in the second round, and that's when John Gibson passed Hiller by as a rookie despite only having played three games that season compared to Hiller's 50.

Andersen is a fascinating player to go down memory lane with, if you're a Stars fan. He and John Gibson (who is now reinvigorating his career in Detroit) were the Jennings-winning tandem for Anaheim in 2016, and the Ducks finally decided to bet on John Gibson going forward, trading Andersen to Toronto for a couple of draft picks. And they used one of those draft picks on...Sam Steel.

Incidentally, the Andersen/Gibson situation back then with Anaheim bears some similarities to Minnesota's current tandem of Filip Gustavsson and Jesper Wallstedt. Except in Minnesota's case, they sound open to trading their version of Gibson, in Wallstedt. It's a fascinating discussion any time a team has to choose which of two solid goalies to bet on, as the Stars did in 2008 when they traded Mike Smith for Brad Richards.

This year, the Ducks finally traded John Gibson a decade after taking him over Andersen. And the goalie that has stepped up in Gibson's absence? That would be Lukáš Dostál, who faced Anderson today at the other end of the ice.

So with that, let's get back to the game itself.

Ondřej Palát got robbed by Frederik Andersen on Czechia's best chance of the second period after a pass across the crease. But after a penalty on Lars Eller for high-sticking Palat later in that same shift, the Czechs got on the board, with a gorgeous one-timer into the top corner by Martin Nečas.

Malte Setkov was himself robbed by Czechia's goaltender—another Ducks player, as it happens, in Lukáš Dostál. The Danes were only down 1-0 when Setkov got a Grade-A chance in tight on Dostál that the goaltender got over for.

But just as Czechia got their goal after a great stop, so did Denmark prove Dostál to be mortal, when Alexander True carried a puck in, then dished it off before getting position on Radko Gudas (another Duck), before finishing a nice give-and-go to tie the game up.

But just when Denmark was starting to find the sparks of confidence, the Czechs would douse them with vicious authority, as David Kampf finished a perfect pass from Jan Rutta to restore their lead.

Rutta, by the way, is himself a great story, as the 35-year-old's NHL career may have ended after last year in San Jose. Rutta now plays in what we call the Swiss-A league, on a team with a whole bunch of former NHLers who still haven't scored as much as Matěj Stránský has for Davos.

Additionally, Rutta's tournament looked like it might have ended after just one game, when he took a hard cross check from Nathan MacKinnon away from the play. Instead, he returned to a lineup that is now missing Radek Faksa, and he made a big play to give the Czechs momentum when they needed it most.

Czechia would add a third goal shortly after that from Roman Cervenka, and that looked like it would quiet Denmark for good. But if there's one thing we've learned about these Olympics, it's that teams always find a little more to give. And with their tournament lives on the line, Denmark dug a little deeper, and Nick Olesen (who plays in the *Czech* league, because of course he does) rewarded that effort on the power play and roofed a puck far side to make it 3-2.

Denmark nearly scored again before the second intermission, but Dostál came up big. As a neutral observer, that made the third period that much more compelling, with Denmark having to push against the Czechs without giving the most dangerous top guys a look in the meantime.

But Denmark nearly did just that, only for Andersen to make another incredible save to keep it 3-2, stacking the pads to rob Nečas on a wicked shot. You can see the puck squarely hit the lower part of Andersen's right pad here:

[https://substackcdn.com/image/fetch/\\$s !bKjB!,w 1456,c limit,f webp,q auto:good,fl_p rogressive:steep/https%3A%2F%2Fsubstack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com%2Fpublic%2Fimages%2F95099b1d-b831-4bcc-809c-b6f5ce7fe185_2006x1088.png](https://substackcdn.com/image/fetch/$s !bKjB!,w 1456,c limit,f webp,q auto:good,fl_p rogressive:steep/https%3A%2F%2Fsubstack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com%2Fpublic%2Fimages%2F95099b1d-b831-4bcc-809c-b6f5ce7fe185_2006x1088.png)

The third period was tight the rest of the way, with Czechia clogging the slot and standing up at the blue line for most of the period, opting to wait for clear chances on the counterattack rather than risk allowing an odd-man rush the other way.

As a result, shots on goal were 12-5 for Denmark in the third period. Dostál had a couple of tough ones in there, but in the final couple of minutes, Denmark finally brought the house, and you can bet Czechia would have loved to have Radek Faksa on hand to defend.

Denmark loaded up again and again, generating a couple of dangerous rebounds right in front. I kept thinking the top Danish players would show their obvious exhaustion and allow the empty-netter, but to their credit, Ehlers, Eller, and company made a couple of nice keeps and forced the Czechs to sweat a whole lot.

But the game ended 3-2 for Czechia. Now, they move on to face Canada in the quarterfinals. That would be the same Canadian team that beat Czechia 5-0 in the teams' first game of the tournament, just a few days ago. And this time, the Czechs will have to do it while playing their second game in two days.

The odds, to put it kindly, are not in Czechia's favor. But then, they never were, in this tournament. And for every team that isn't one of the top four (or top two), that only makes the potential of an upset that much more exciting. They put these things on television for a reason, you know.

The Hockey News

Stars' Radek Faksa Injured At End Of Czechia-Switzerland Overtime Thriller

By Jake Tye

Date: 02/16/26

The men's ice hockey tournament at the Winter Olympics has delivered a wide spectrum of results, from lopsided blowouts to edge of your seat thrillers.

On one end, powerhouse Canada flexed its offensive muscle in a commanding 10–2 victory over France, showcasing the depth and firepower that has long made the Canadians a gold medal favorite.

On the other, fans were treated to a dramatic showdown Sunday as Switzerland edged Czechia 4–3 in overtime in one of the tournament's most entertaining contests to date.

For Czechia, the depth forward of the Dallas Stars has steadily improved his play with each outing as his performance against France was particularly notable. Faksa recorded a pair of assists in just under 14 minutes of ice time while playing an efficient two way game.

Heading into the final round robin matchup against Switzerland, Czech fans hoped Faksa might break through with his first goal of the tournament or provide another timely contribution. Instead, it was a quiet night for the 32-year-old, and not for the reasons anyone hoped.

Late in the game, Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman reported on his podcast 32 Thoughts, that Faksa was dealing with an injury. The nature of the ailment has not been disclosed, but it clearly affected his usage. Faksa finished with just 8:51 of ice time.

Any prolonged absence would be a major setback for Czechia as they prepare for a qualification round matchup against Denmark on Tuesday. Losing one of their NHLers would thin out a lineup that relies heavily on structure and depth.

Through three Olympic games, Faksa has totaled two assists, a pace that compares favorably to his role in Dallas this season. With the Stars, he typically operates in a middle to bottom six role and has produced 17 points in 56 games while averaging 11:41 of ice time per contest.

For now, there is cautious optimism as Faksa has not been officially ruled out, and Friedman's report remains the only update regarding his status. Czechia's practice Tuesday should offer the first indication of whether he will be available for the crucial clash against Denmark.

The Hockey News

Stars' Radek Faksa Suffers Upper-Body Injury At Olympics, Could Miss Time

By Jake Tye

Date: 02/17/26

The Dallas Stars managed to avoid one major Olympic concern, but another situation is now drawing attention as the 2026 Winter Games continue to affect NHL rosters.

Dallas had some relief when star forward Jason Robertson stayed home for the tournament.

That decision looks even more important as injuries begin to pile up for other teams overseas, including the Los Angeles Kings losing top winger Kevin Fiala for the rest of the season.

The Stars, however, are not completely untouched as bottom-six center Radek Faksa was performing well for Czechia with two assists in three games before suffering an upper-body injury late in the overtime thriller against Switzerland in the final round robin matchup. The injury was reported by Elliotte Friedman and Czech reporter Robert Rampa.

Faksa missed Czechia's qualification round game against Denmark and it was confirmed after Tuesday's game that he will also sit out Wednesday's meeting with Canada. He has not been taking part in practices, which increases concern about a longer absence.

Czechia enters the game against Canada as a significant underdog. An early exit would allow Faksa to return to Dallas sooner for a full medical evaluation ahead of the Stars resuming NHL play next week.

Faksa has been a key part of Dallas' forward depth this season, centering the fourth line with Oskar Bäck and Adam Erne while handling defensive zone starts and penalty killing duties.

If he misses extended time, players such as Nathan Bastian or Colin Blackwell could see increased opportunities in the lineup.

The Hockey News

Could Dallas Target Jeff Skinner As Low-Cost Depth Forward Option?

By Jake Tye

Date: 02/17/26

The Dallas Stars have reportedly been exploring the market for middle-six forward help, with names like Blake Coleman and Nazem Kadri surfacing in speculation. As the trade deadline approaches and the playoff race tightens, a new and potentially more affordable option may have unexpectedly become available.

Veteran winger Jeff Skinner cleared waivers on his \$3 million cap hit before mutually terminating his contract with the San Jose Sharks. Skinner had recorded 13 points in 32 games this season and was at times a healthy scratch, signaling that his role with the rebuilding Sharks had diminished.

The 31-year-old forward is now free to sign elsewhere, and league observers believe he will seek a larger opportunity with a contending club. For a Stars team looking to add secondary scoring without sacrificing major assets, Skinner could represent a low-risk, low-cost gamble.

Skinner's production has dipped in recent seasons, but his resume suggests there may still be something left in the tank. In his final year with the Buffalo Sabres in 2023-24, he posted 46 points in 74 games, solid middle-six numbers. Over the past two seasons split between the Edmonton Oilers and San Jose on one-year deals, he combined for 42 points in 104 games.

While those totals are well below his earlier 82-point campaign, Skinner has rebounded before. During the 2019-20 season, he managed 23 points in 59 games and followed that with 14 points in 53 games the next year. He responded with a strong 63-point effort in 80 games in 2021-22, proving he can rediscover his scoring touch in the right situation.

With forward depth occasionally tested and uncertainty surrounding Radek Faksa, who is returning from the Winter Olympics and could miss an unknown amount of time, Skinner could provide offensive support in the middle to bottom six. He could also complement skilled veterans like Matt Duchene, adding creativity and finishing ability to a secondary scoring unit.

For Skinner, the motivation is clear as he is at this stage of his career, where joining a legitimate Stanley Cup contender could be appealing. If Dallas can sign him at a discounted rate, the move would carry minimal financial risk and offer notable upside.

The question now shifts to the front office. Does general manager Jim Nill see Skinner as a savvy bargain capable of rediscovering 30 to 40 point form? Or does the organization view him as a player whose best years are behind him?

As the Stars weigh their options, Skinner's availability adds an intriguing wrinkle to Dallas' pursuit of forward depth, one that could quietly bolster a Cup run if the fit proves right.

The Hockey News

Thomas Harley Sets Up Mitch Marner's OT Winner in Canada's Wild Comeback Over Czechia

By Jake Tye

Date: 02/18/26

In one of the most thrilling games of the men's ice hockey tournament so far, Team Canada erased a late 3-2 deficit against Czechia and rallied for a dramatic 4-3 overtime victory, sealed by a winner from Vegas Golden Knights star Mitch Marner and assisted by breakout defenseman Thomas Harley.

The back-and-forth contest showcased Canada's resilience, but for Dallas Stars fans, much of the attention has centered on the play of Harley. The 24-year-old has emerged as a difference-maker on the international stage, delivering in key moments while logging heavy minutes against top competition.

Entering Wednesday's matchup, Harley had already produced a goal and three assists through his first four games, averaging a point per game from the blue line. In a tightly contested battle against Czechia, he finished with 20:55 of ice time, ranking among Canada's leaders despite sharing the spotlight with established top tier defenders like Cale Makar and Devon Toews, who saw slightly heavier usage in certain situations.

Rather than settling into the third-pairing role many projected before the tournament, Harley has consistently skated on the second pairing alongside veteran Drew Doughty. The elevated responsibility has not fazed him. Instead, it has highlighted his poise, puck-moving ability and defensive awareness against elite international talent.

Canada now shifts its focus to the semifinals, where it will face the lowest remaining seed. That opponent will be determined following the quarterfinal between the United States and Sweden, with Finland also in the mix depending on results.

For Dallas fans, the primary concern remains health as depth forward Radek Faksa appears to be the only Stars player dealing with injury concerns from Olympic action. The hope in Texas is that Harley can maintain his strong form through the remainder of the tournament and return to Dallas carrying momentum into the second half of the NHL season.

If Harley's Olympic performance is any indication, the Stars could gain a confident, battle-tested defender poised to help push them over the hump and avoid a fourth consecutive loss in the Western Conference Final.

The Hockey News

Stars' Finnish Four Complete Late Comeback in Olympic Quarterfinal Thriller vs. Switzerland

By Jake Tye

Date: 02/18/26

In one of the most thrilling comebacks of the men's ice hockey tournament at the Winter Olympics, Finland erased a two-goal deficit in the final minutes to defeat Switzerland in overtime and secure a spot in the semifinals.

Finland entered the quarterfinal as a potential upset contender for gold despite a shocking opening-game loss to Slovakia. Switzerland, widely viewed as heavy underdogs, set the tone early with two first-period goals and controlled the pace for much of the contest. The Swiss defense held firm deep into the third period, frustrating a Finnish team loaded with NHL talent.

With under seven minutes remaining, Sebastian Aho finally broke through. The Carolina Hurricanes forward found the back of the net to cut the deficit to 2–1 and breathe life into the Finnish bench.

Switzerland continued to cling to its lead, but the pressure mounted with every shift. The equalizer came off the stick of Miro Heiskanen, who fired a shot from the point through traffic that slipped past the Swiss goaltender.

The game-tying goal was engineered entirely by Dallas Stars teammates, as Mikko Rantanen and Roope Hintz each recorded assists on the play. For Stars fans, seeing their Finnish core deliver on the Olympic stage provided a proud moment even outside the NHL season.

The late goal forced overtime, where Artturi Lehkonen completed the comeback. The Colorado Avalanche forward buried the game winner to send Finland to the semifinals and eliminate Switzerland in devastating fashion.

All four Finnish Stars made significant contributions. Heiskanen led the way with the tying goal while logging a team-high 29:19 of ice time, his heaviest workload of the tournament. His defensive partner, Esa Lindell, added assists on two of Finland's three goals and skated 25:19 in a strong all-around performance.

Up front, Hintz and Rantanen played 18 and 22 minutes respectively, each assisting on the crucial tying goal and helping drive the late offensive surge. Finland now advances to Friday's semifinal, where it will face either Slovakia or Canada depending on the result of the final quarterfinal matchup.

The Hockey News

Six Dallas Stars Featured in Olympic Semifinals

By Jake Tye

Date: 02/18/26

The men's ice hockey tournament is nearing its climax, with the semifinals set to begin Friday with Finland facing off against Canada, while the United States is set to take on Slovakia.

For fans of the Dallas Stars, the event has provided a chance to watch some of the team's top talent compete on the world stage, gain confidence, and return to Texas with momentum for a potential Stanley Cup run.

Dallas sent seven players to the Olympics, and six remain in contention heading into the semifinals. Leading the way is the "Finnish Mafia," which features four Stars in Mikko Rantanen, Roope Hintz, Miro Heiskanen, and Esa Lindell on Team Finland. Meanwhile, Thomas Harley has been stellar for Team Canada, and Jake Oettinger serves as a backup goaltender for Team USA behind Connor Hellebuyck.

The Stars' Olympians have made significant contributions throughout the tournament. Rantanen has been dominant, tallying one goal and four assists for five points in four games, looking as sharp as he has in Dallas this season.

Heiskanen and Lindell have made their presence felt on the blueline, each recording three points through Finland's first four games. Hintz has been saving his best for the final stretch, contributing two points in four games and poised to make a big impact in the semifinals.

Harley has been a standout for Team Canada, logging massive minutes while adding unexpectedly strong offense with a goal and three assists. While Oettinger has yet to see game action, his presence on Team USA has provided valuable depth as the Americans pursue their first Olympic gold medal since the "Miracle on Ice" in 1980.

The tournament will wrap up quickly, with the semifinals on Friday, the bronze medal game on Saturday, and gold medal action set for Sunday.

