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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets to start first season bonding with new center over loss of Gaudreau

By Brian Hedger- September 19, 2024

Dean Evason wasn't a fan of the way the Blue Jackets' locker room was situated when he took over as head coach earlier this summer.

Goalies and defensemen dressed in one cluster near the back. Forwards dressed in two other clusters on opposite sides. There were obvious divisions, too, among veterans, young guys and players of similar nationalities. So Evason told Don Waddell, the Jackets' new president of hockey operations/GM, that he wanted to shake things up. Young players were moved next to veterans, forwards moved next to defensemen and goalies, and photos above each stall would no longer be action shots of just the player who dressed there — a subtle shift toward a more team-first culture.

That was before Johnny Gaudreau and his younger brother, Matthew, were killed Aug. 29 while bicycling in New Jersey. In one heartbreaking instant, the Blue Jackets grew closer than ever, including newcomer Sean Monahan, who signed a five-year contract July 1 in large part to link up again with Gaudreau, his former teammate and close friend with the Calgary Flames.

Monahan now finds himself on a new team, in a new city without Gaudreau, who was supposed to be his neighbor just a few houses away in the Columbus area. Now Gaudreau will be Monahan's "neighbor" inside the locker room in the form of a No. 13 jersey the Jackets will carry with them all season — home and road.

"I'm actually still sitting beside Johnny," Monahan said Wednesday. "It's pretty special. I get to have that memory every day, so I've got that on one side and then (Kirill) Marchenko on the other side, and I'm just starting to get to know him."

Monahan now has the best locker location in the room. He's flanked by memories of Gaudreau on one side and hockey's "Danny Rojas" on the other. Rojas is a "Ted Lasso" character once used by Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson to describe the ever-smiling Marchenko.

"I've skated with him now a few times, and he's a funny guy," Monahan said. "I'm sure that I'm going to get to know a lot about him here soon."

He's already learned a lot about the Blue Jackets, who share a bond with their new veteran center that none of them wanted or could have predicted. They've been forced to grieve together for three weeks and now will use hockey together to heal. The Blue Jackets take the ice, officially, for training camp Thursday under a new coach in Evason and Waddell as the new head of hockey ops.

A little more than a week ago, they shed tears together and shared hugs with other NHL players at an emotional funeral in Pennsylvania. The Jackets also began asking each other something that will stick with them all season and likely much longer.

"We golfed one day with the majority of the guys, which was nice just being out there together," defenseman Zach Werenski said. "We shared some videos and pictures of John, and just good memories we've had, and one of the questions we've asked ourselves is, 'What would John want us to do in certain situations?' He'd want us to enjoy coming to the rink and being around our teammates, being together and enjoying this time."

It's won't be easy. In fact, it's probably the farthest thing from 'easy' anybody could imagine. Playing hockey less than two weeks after saying goodbye to a beloved teammate, friend and his brother may feel a bit trivial at first blush, but it can also be comforting.

"I mean, to say we know exactly what to do, I don't think that's fair," captain Boone Jenner said. "I don't think there's a playbook out there for the situation that has happened, and that's OK. We're going to learn and lean on each other as we go, whatever that may look like. Just staying true to ourselves and really helping one another out is going to uncover that and pull (us) through it."

They're determined to honor Gaudreau's memory, draw strength from it and lean on their bond — none more than Monahan, who wore a black T-shirt on Wednesday bearing an action shot of Gaudreau in a Blue Jackets uniform over a red No. 13.

"He's been arguably my best friend and a teammate for many years, and someone that ... we're going to miss a lot as a team and, personally, I'm going to miss him," he said. "I'll miss him the rest of my life. There's a lot of weight on our shoulders right now. There's a huge loss, a special person who's not here and it's on my mind every day, every second. We want to put our best foot forward and put our best effort out there for Johnny."

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets announce plans to memorialize Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau

By Nathan Hart- September 19, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets will look a bit different this year as the team continues to grapple with the sudden deaths of star forward Johnny Gaudreau, 31, and his brother Matthew Gaudreau, 29, in late August.

Both were bicycling in Oldmans Township, New Jersey, when they were struck and killed by a man prosecutors subsequently charged with drunk driving.

As the team gets ready for training camp, the organization shared some of its plans to remember the Gaudreau brothers.

Throughout the 2024-25 season, Blue Jackets players will wear helmet stickers that feature the brothers' last name, Johnny's No. 13, Matthew's No. 21 and doves. Once the regular season starts on Oct. 10, players will also don patches with the No. 13 on them, according to a Blue Jackets press release.

Every fan attending the team's regular season home opener against the Florida Panthers on Oct. 15 will receive their own No. 13 patch. The home opener will be dedicated to remembering the Gaudreau brothers, so the normal opening night festivities such as the players' blue carpet arrivals will occur before Columbus' next home game on Oct. 17.

A moment of silence will be held for the brothers at the team's first home preseason game against the St. Louis Blues on Sept. 25. Also, the Columbus Blue Jackets Foundation's 50/50 raffle will run through every preseason game until the second intermission of the team's home opener. Proceeds from the raffle will go to the John and Matthew Gaudreau Foundation.

The team plans to hang Johnny Gaudreau's jersey in the locker room every game, including road games, general manager Don Waddell said Wednesday.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets heal from Johnny Gaudreau tragedy together: 'We've got to play'

By Brian Hedger- September 19, 2024

The pain is still fresh and the emotions are still raw. Another season is starting for the Blue Jackets, but they're still grieving the tragic deaths of Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew.

One of the markers of a new season is the team's less experienced players taking the ice ahead of training camp, something they did this past weekend at the Buffalo NHL Prospects Challenge. Most members of the Jackets' roster in Buffalo didn't have a personal connection with Gaudreau, but some players did along with the coaching staff, front-office executives and scouts on the trip.

Reddened eyes were just a memory away, but the Blue Jackets knew it was time to play hockey, barely three weeks after the Gaudreau brothers were killed on Aug. 29 while riding bicycles in South Jersey. Just one week before the prospects event, a number of those representing the Blue Jackets in Buffalo attended a heartbreaking funeral service in Media, Pennsylvania.

Hockey is known for toughness and tight-knit bonds forged by those who play it, and now there's no team in the world leaning into those concepts more than the Blue Jackets. Tears are likely forming on a regular basis, but there's healing on the horizon, too.

Hockey season has arrived. There's no option but to play.

"Thinking of 'hockey' the last few weeks seems like the last thing on your mind, but the reality is they're not pushing the start date back for us," said Cleveland Monsters coach Trent Vogelhuber, who ran the Blue Jackets' bench in Buffalo. "It's as difficult of a two-week span as I think an organization can have, but there's a little bit of comfort and somewhat of normalcy just being in a group and being able to play hockey. We're not forgetting or moving past it, but we're moving with it ... together. That's all we can do."

It's what the rest of the organization will do during training camp, too. The Jackets have reported back to Columbus. Medical evaluations are Wednesday, and skates hit the ice Thursday for the first official practices at the OhioHealth Ice Haus under new coach Dean Evason.

Unofficial "captain's skates," took place last week, allowing some of those close to Gaudreau to start healing together. Now they're all back together.

"When (captain) Boone Jenner and I were talking about the guys, we both agreed," said Blue Jackets president of hockey operations/general manager Don Waddell. "The quicker we can get guys back in the room together, the better it will be for everybody. So, we worked to make sure we got the guys back together."

It should be cathartic.

"They're in their element," Waddell said. "They're with their teammates, their friends, every day, and I think that's a big healing part of the process. We all mourn and heal differently, but I think as a team, being together like that is going to be critical for moving forward."

Waddell's voice was low. He practically choked out those sentiments. Vogelhuber's voice cracked, too. The Blue Jackets are carrying heavy hearts into this season, but they're also cherishing their memories of "Johnny Hockey," while finding comfort doing what he loved.

"I think it just pulls everyone in the hockey world closer together, especially the guys in Columbus," rookie forward Gavin Brindley said. "I've been there for a little bit now, and just seeing all the guys and the interactions, it's just good to see everyone and have everyone's company around the locker room. Obviously, it's very tough, but I think it's pulling the guys together."

Brindley, an undersized forward, said the small-framed Gaudreau was one of his idols during his journey to professional hockey. He got to play one NHL game with Gaudreau while making his debut in the Jackets' finale last season and then got to know him much better last spring in Czechia while playing for the United States in the world championship.

"He was one of the biggest mentors for me," Brindley said. "I couldn't tell you how many times we hung out there, and (with) Meredith (Gaudreau's wife) ... pictures on my phone. It's just so hard to look back and see that kind of stuff."

He's not alone in those feelings. The Blue Jackets' challenge now is trudging forward together. That's hockey's way of healing from tragedy, and for them, there's no better method.

"You know ... we've got to play hockey," Waddell said. "We're not going to forget about Johnny and his family, the Gaudreau family. And everybody knows that Johnny wants them to play hockey. Meredith said it at the funeral: 'Let's go back,' and, 'We want the best for you guys.' Everybody's rallying around that."

The Athletic / How the Blue Jackets plan to honor Johnny Gaudreau this season

By Aaron Portzline- September 19, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — On the eve of training camp, Columbus Blue Jackets players said Wednesday they've embraced a simple but powerful question — “What would Johnny want?” — to help them prepare to play the 2024-25 season.

That's a reference, of course, to fallen teammate Johnny Gaudreau, who was killed, along with his younger brother, Matthew, when they were struck by a car while riding bicycles on a country road in suburban New Jersey on Aug. 29.

“He'd want us to play hockey, and he loved every second he was at the rink — practice, games, sharing time with the guys,” Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner said. “The last few weeks, it seems like when we get on the ice (for captain's skates), we can go be ourselves and have a good time.

“It's time to push ourselves, work hard and get ready. But also to just enjoy being out there. It's helped us prepare for the season.”

Meanwhile, the Blue Jackets announced preliminary plans to honor both brothers beginning immediately and lasting throughout the season, including a sticker on their helmets and a No. 13 patch on their home and away sweaters.

General manager Don Waddell said the club will maintain Gaudreau's locker stall in the Blue Jackets' dressing room, and they'll take his No. 13 sweater with them on the road to maintain his spot in the road dressing rooms, too.

The helmet sticker, which will debut with the Blue Jackets' first preseason game Monday in Buffalo, has Johnny Gaudreau's No. 13 and Matthew Gaudreau's No. 21, as worn at Boston College, on either side of two doves.

The No. 13 patch on the Blue Jackets' sweaters will debut with Columbus' regular-season opener on Oct. 10 in Minnesota.

Among the club's other plans:

A moment of silence will be observed before the Blue Jackets' first preseason game at home on Sept. 25 versus the St. Louis Blues.

The club's typical opening-night festivities, which include a blue-carpet entrance by players, will instead be held before the Blue Jackets' second home game of the season, Oct. 17 against Buffalo. The home opener on Oct. 15 versus Florida will celebrate the memory of the Gaudreau brothers, and all fans in attendance will be given a “13” patch like the one worn on the Blue Jackets' sweaters.

Proceeds from the club's 50/50 raffle for all four preseason games will be donated to the John and Matthew Gaudreau Foundation.

It was another emotional day at Nationwide Arena, and the players who spoke at the club's pre-camp media day — Jenner, defenseman Zach Werenski and Sean Monahan — all spoke powerfully and poignantly about Gaudreau's loss and how his memory will always stick with them.

Monahan signed as a free agent with the Blue Jackets this summer, in part to be reunited with Gaudreau, his longtime teammate and close friend from their time together with the Calgary Flames.

The Monahan and Gaudreau families spoke openly about wanting to raise their kids together. He was a pallbearer this month at the funeral.

"It's obviously tough," said Monahan, who wore a t-shirt honoring Gaudreau. "I still don't know the exact words to say. I'm excited for the season, I'm excited to get it going. We're going to miss Johnny. We're going to miss Johnny a lot. It's something I think about every day. It's really hard to get through, but we have a great group here and we're going to miss him as a team.

"I love it here. It's a beautiful place to live. My family loves it here. The staff is amazing. The players are very welcoming and very humble. It's exciting. I feel at home here, and I'm excited to get the season going."

The Blue Jackets made sweeping changes over the offseason. They have a new GM (Waddell), a new coach (Dean Evason) and several new players (forwards Monahan and James van Riemsdyk, defensemen Jordan Harris and Jack Johnson).

Evason, in his first public comments since Gaudreau's death, said the coaching staff plans to help keep Gaudreau's memory alive along with the players.

"The coaching staff is going to emphasize that to our group," Evason said. "His stall is going to be there. Tell stories. Remember. Laugh.

"With the (systems) videos that we put together for camp, somebody asked, 'Should we take Johnny out of all the clips we show to players? And we said, 'Absolutely not.' Johnny's going to teach, good and bad. (chuckles) If he didn't back-check, we'll show it.

"He's going to be with us. He's going to be a presence in our locker room."

[Bluejackets.com / Blue Jackets embrace togetherness as training camp begins](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- September 19, 2024

The Blue Jackets will never forget Johnny Gaudreau, and as they get ready to take the ice for training camp just weeks after the superstar's passing, one of the ways they believe they can honor his memory best is through following in his footsteps.

Life certainly hasn't been easy for the organization and team in the days since Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were struck and killed riding their bicycles Aug. 29 in their native New Jersey. There have been tearful memorials, candlelight vigils, and plenty of difficult conversations between grieving teammates.

Now, the Blue Jackets must begin to factor hockey into the journey when they hit the ice for the first time tomorrow morning. When it comes to making that transition, the Blue Jackets said at Wednesday's media day press conference that they can draw inspiration from the way Johnny Gaudreau lived his life.

"One of the questions we've asked ourselves is, what would John want us to do in certain situations," alternate captain Zach Werenski said. "He'd want us to enjoy coming to the rink and enjoy being around our teammates and being together and enjoy this time.

"Obviously, there's a lot of tough days that have happened, but we're trying to take some positives out of it. How did John come to the rink? That was with joy and excitement. We're trying to take how he lived and approach the game and use it in our locker room today as a group."

Indeed, the entire team is back in Columbus, and the normal unrolling of camp began in earnest today. There were medical tests in the morning, on-ice promotional videos to record, and the anticipation of a new season hangs in the air.

And perhaps most importantly, after all that has happened in the past few weeks, the team is fully together in one place. The Blue Jackets players made an effort to get back to Columbus to be with one another in the days after the passing of the Gaudreaus, and now that camp is starting, the necessity of flipping the page into hockey mode is at least made easier by being with one another.

"These past few weeks, I'm not going to lie, hockey is not really on your mind during a lot of that," captain Boone Jenner said. "But being here all together, coming in on day one of camp, we're excited to get things rolling here. What happened with John and Matt, it's not something that's going to go away or we're magically going to stop thinking about it. It's going to be with us.

"It's just realizing that new reality for us as a group, as a team. It's not like we're trying to park it and, 'OK, now it's the season.' Those emotions are going to be there for a long, long time. It is what it is where that's the new reality for our team, for us with missing John. Just realizing that and helping one another out when there's bad days or moments; there's going to be a lot of them.

"We're in it together and we're here to help one another. With that said, we're excited to get on the ice for good now that camp is open tomorrow."

The Blue Jackets on Wednesday announced preliminary plans on honoring the Gaudreau brothers throughout preseason and into the regular season, including the wearing of helmet stickers and jersey patches in their honor as well as using the Oct. 15 home opener to celebrate their memory.

Inside the locker room, president of hockey operations and general manager Don Waddell said the Blue Jackets have left Gaudreau's stall in the locker room and will hang his jersey before and during every game, home and away.

“Johnny will be with us all year long,” Waddell said.

Even before the tragedy involving the Gaudreaus unfolded, the Blue Jackets were coming to camp amid a feeling of uncertainty, or at least transition, given the major changes in the team’s front office. Waddell is taking over for longtime general manager Jarmo Kekalainen, while head coach Dean Evason will be in his first season behind the bench after five seasons in Minnesota.

The 10th full-time coach in team history is excited to get going, telling media members he is bringing a clean slate to be able to evaluate his players with his own eyes when skating begins Thursday. Bolstered by a strong group of veterans and a growing cadre of young players, Evason will try to pilot the team out of last place in the Eastern Conference and snap a four-year playoff drought.

One area where he’s already impressed, though, is in the vibe he gets from the team’s locker room.

“For me, walking into that dressing room, it seems like it has an incredible atmosphere in there,” Evason said. “They’re tight. They’re together. Obviously we haven’t been in practice, but I’ve walked around the room and talked to everybody, and I’ve had several individual meetings with players, and there’s a closeness.

“Do we have to change (the culture)? No. Do we have to enhance it? Sure. I try to do that with any team that I’ve been involved with. ... But as far as changing something that has to be turned right around, I don’t think that has to happen here.”

The Blue Jackets will stage practices each of the next four days – including Sunday’s open scrimmage at the OhioHealth Ice Haus – before beginning exhibition games Monday at Buffalo. The first home exhibition contest will be next Wednesday vs. St. Louis, and the Blue Jackets will play eight preseason games through Oct. 4 to get ready for the NHL’s roster deadline day of Oct. 7.

“I always say, we don’t pick the team,” Waddell said. “The players pick the team with how they perform. Obviously, we know there’s a group of guys that are going to be here for sure, but we have some opportunities right now that are available. We’re here to win hockey games. I don’t care if a guy makes a dollar or \$10 million dollars. We’re here to win hockey games and we’re going to keep the best players possible.”

Media Day Notes

- Waddell said the team got good news earlier this week when forward Justin Danforth was 100 cleared to return to stickhandling after offseason wrist surgery. He won’t be full-go at the start of camp but will work his way back into the mix.
- Also on the injury front, 2024 first-round pick Cayden Lindstrom and 2022 third-round choice Jordan Dumais will begin camp with an injury designation and not be full-go for drills.
- After the signing Sunday of forward James van Riemsdyk, Waddell noted he’ll continue to monitor the markets available to see if the Blue Jackets can add any more veterans that are the right fit, but that he was also happy with the group he has on hand. Evason’s (joking) request for Waddell on that front? “I asked Don for a 60-goal scorer and a 100-point guy.”

[NHL.com / Monahan ready to put 'best foot forward' for Blue Jackets without Gaudreau](#)

By Nick Cotsonika- September 19, 2024

COLUMBUS -- Sean Monahan stepped onto the podium Wednesday wearing a black T-shirt with the No. 13 and a picture of Johnny Gaudreau in a Columbus Blue Jackets uniform.

The center signed a five-year, \$27.5 million contract (\$5.5 million average annual value) with the Blue Jackets as an unrestricted free agent July 1, and now it was the first day of training camp. It should have been a happy time.

But a main reason Monahan came to Columbus was to play with forward Johnny Gaudreau, his teammate with the Calgary Flames from 2014-22 and maybe his best friend.

Johnny and his brother, Matthew, died Aug. 29 when they were struck by a car while riding bicycles at home in Salem County, New Jersey. Johnny was 31, Matthew 29.

"It's obviously tough," Monahan said. "Haven't really talked publicly about it at all. I still don't know the exact words to even say. But I'm excited for the season. I'm excited to get it going.

"We're going to miss Johnny. I'm going to miss Johnny a lot. It's something I think about every day. It's definitely really hard to get through, but we've got a great group here. We're going to miss him as a team."

Monahan said he and Johnny were supposed to live about three houses apart. His stall is next to Johnny's stall, which will remain in the Blue Jackets locker room at Nationwide Arena this season.

"I'm actually still sitting beside Johnny," Monahan said. "Pretty special. I get to get that memory every day."

Asked for his favorite memory of Johnny, Monahan struggled to answer and held back emotion. Johnny had two young children and another on the way with his wife, Meredith.

"Honestly, I couldn't pick one," Monahan said. "It's a little bit of everything. It's a tough question to answer. I think maybe one of my favorite moments was the day he found out 'Mer' was pregnant for the first time."

Monahan said he always has anxiety before training camp. This is different, though.

"You're excited," he said. "You get nervous. You want to make a good impression. You want to feel good. So, that's where that comes from.

"Yeah, there's a lot of weight on our shoulders right now. There's a huge loss, a special person who's not here. Like I said, it's on my mind every day, every second. We want to obviously put our best foot forward and put our best effort out there for Johnny."

Monahan knows a few of his new teammates, including defensemen Erik Gudbranson and Zach Werenski. He played with Gudbranson in Calgary in 2021-22. He had dinners with Werenski because of Johnny.

"He walked into a tough situation here, meeting the guys for the first time after this happened, so I give him a lot of credit for how he's handled everything," Werenski said. "Obviously, we know John was a big reason why he signed here, but I think it kind of goes back to that point of being together. We're there for him. I think it maybe speeds things up a little bit, the relationships. ...

“Obviously, it’s one of the worst times of his life, and he’s been awesome to be around, so that speaks volumes about the type of person he is. But as a group, we’re here for him, and we’re just going to be together and get through this thing together.”

Captain Boone Jenner said Monahan will help the Blue Jackets in many ways. The 29-year-old had 59 points (26 goals, 33 assists) in 83 games with the Montreal Canadiens and Winnipeg Jets last season. Instead of complementing Johnny, he will have to help fill the void.

“He’s a highly skilled forward that plays center,” Jenner said. “He’s good on face-offs. He kind of plays all over the ice. To add that to our lineup along with the experience and the leadership qualities he has, it’s a great, great addition for us.”

Monahan said he loves Columbus. It is a beautiful place to live, his teammates have been welcoming and he feels at home.

“I’m going to try to lead by example, do the things I do, do the things I’m comfortable with and try to help myself to get better and be able to push other guys on the team to be better,” he said. “It’s an exciting group with guys trying to obviously start off and take off in this league and guys that are continuing to try to be great players in this league. It’s a team that I’m really proud to be part of.”

[NHL.com / Blue Jackets have 'clean slate' with new general manager, coach](#)

By Nick Cotsonika- September 19, 2024

COLUMBUS -- Don Waddell and Dean Evason faced a tragic challenge as the Columbus Blue Jackets took the ice for the first time at training camp Thursday.

Waddell was hired as general manager May 28, Evason as coach July 23. They took over a team that missed the Stanley Cup Playoffs the past four seasons and finished last in the Eastern Conference last season.

Then forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, died Aug. 29 when they were struck by a car while riding bicycles at home in Salem County, New Jersey.

Mourning Johnny is most important. Waddell and Evason have made it clear he will remain a presence -- from his No. 13 jersey in his stall in the locker room, to stickers on the helmets starting in the preseason, to patches on the jerseys starting in the regular season. They have an open-door policy and will get the players the support they need, while encouraging everyone to come to the rink with the joy Johnny did.

"We're going to do it together," Evason said.

It feels insensitive to discuss. But the reality is, the Blue Jackets have not only lost a beloved friend and teammate, but their best player. Johnny led them in scoring in each of the two seasons he played in Columbus and ranked ninth in the NHL in points (742) from 2014-24. There is a hole in their hearts and their lineup that cannot be filled.

Consider the two biggest offseason moves the Blue Jackets made: signing center Sean Monahan to a five-year, \$27.5 million contract (\$5.5 million average annual value) as an unrestricted free agent July 1 and trading forward Patrik Laine to the Montreal Canadiens on Aug. 19.

A main reason Monahan came to Columbus was to play with Johnny, his teammate with the Calgary Flames from 2014-22 and maybe his best friend. He said they were supposed to live about three houses apart. Monahan's stall is next to Johnny's in the locker room.

When the Blue Jackets traded Laine, they traded a forward who had 138 points (64 goals, 74 assists) in 174 games for them from 2021-24. They didn't know they would lose Johnny 10 days later.

Columbus signed forward James van Riemsdyk to a one-year, \$900,000 contract as an unrestricted free agent Sept. 15. The 35-year-old had 38 points (11 goals, 27 assists) in 71 games for the Boston Bruins last season.

"He's very valuable there for us," captain Boone Jenner said. "He's got a thousand games in this league. He's been around for a little while and seen a lot of things, so you add someone like that into the locker room, it's going to help us."

Waddell said the Blue Jackets will look for more help, scouting players on professional tryouts with other teams and looking for whatever opportunities might present themselves. Johnny signed a seven-year, \$68.25 million contract as an unrestricted free agent July 13, 2022. His \$9.75 million average annual value comes off Columbus' salary cap.

"We're going to keep an open mind to it," Waddell said. "Because of the salary cap and where we're at, we have room. If a player becomes available and it has a higher salary, we don't have an issue with that, either, as long as it's a player who fits how Dean wants the guys to play. We're pretty open-minded about it."

Evason must bring together the team on and off the ice, getting the most out of what the Blue Jackets have. Even before the tragedy, he rearranged the locker room. Players used to sit together by position and pick their stalls; now they are mixed together. Each player used to have his photo above his stall; now there are no pictures of individuals.

"I thought it was a great idea -- put some young guys next to some veteran players, get players communicating," Waddell said. "You tend to in the locker room sit next to who your friends are away from the arena, and that's not what we were looking for, and that's not what Dean was looking for. It was a subtle change, but I think it's been a big change, and I've heard players talk about it."

Evason said he wants a team-first mentality, and he has asked returning members of the management and coaching staffs not to tell him about the players. He wants to form his own opinions.

"We are going to create an earned culture," Evason said. "It's a clean slate, right? Don's new. I'm new. I don't care what happened last year, how many goals you scored last year. It'll help you obviously to start, but after that, you're going to earn your ice time, you're going to earn your position, you're going to earn where you play and how much you play, and that'll be dictated by the player."

"We'll define roles for the players. Like, we'll define what we believe their role is, but that doesn't mean that that's their role for the rest of the year. They can change their role. You want more ice time? Then do more. You want to play on the power play? Then show that you're going to set goals up and you're going to score goals. You want to play on the PK? Then show that you're going to block shots, you're going to clear pucks, you're going to win your puck battles."

"It's a clean slate for everybody, young or old. I don't care if you've played one game or a thousand games. Everybody's starting fresh."

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets announce initial plans to honor Johnny & Matthew Gaudreau

By Mark Scheig- September 19, 2024

We now know the preliminary plans on how the Columbus Blue Jackets will honor the lives of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau. This is just the beginning of what's to come.

At the start of Media Day on Wednesday, the Blue Jackets announced that they will be honoring the Gaudreau's on both their helmets and their jerseys throughout the season. They also announced some of the events surrounding their opening week of regular-season home games.

Preseason

During the preseason, the Blue Jackets will wear a special sticker on their helmets. The sticker is blue with gray trim and will feature GAUDREAU on it. There will also be two doves between the numbers 13 and 21, the numbers that Johnny and Matthew wore throughout their careers.

https://twitter.com/mark_scheig/status/1836500577674760370

The Blue Jackets will then hold a moment of silence before their first preseason home game on Wednesday Sept 25 against the St. Louis Blues in remembrance of the brothers. The cumulative total raised with the 50/50's from all four preseason games running through until the second intermission of the home opener on Tuesday October 15 will go to the John and Matthew Gaudreau Foundation.

Regular Season

Once the regular season begins, the Blue Jackets will wear a number 13 patch on their jerseys. This will start on October 10 against the Minnesota Wild and continue throughout the regular season.

The Blue Jackets usually hold their Party at the Plaza and Blue Carpet arrivals on opening night. Those activities are now scheduled to take place for the second home game Thursday October 12 against the Buffalo Sabres.

On opening night, the Blue Jackets will celebrate the memory of Gaudreau brothers. Additional details surrounding this will be announced by the team at a later date.

Gaudreau Will Be With Them Always

It was obvious the emotions present at the media availability. Players Boone Jenner, Zach Werenski and Sean Monahan all spoke about starting camp with Gaudreau at the forefront of their minds.

GM Don Waddell announced on Wednesday that the team has taken steps to make sure the Gaudreau's are with them all season. First, they are keeping a stall in the locker room for Johnny. Monahan admitted that his stall will be next to Johnny's.

Johnny's jersey will also be hung every game. He will also travel with the team. "Johnny would want us to go play hockey and Meredith said it at the funeral," Waddell said. "Johnny would want you guys to play hockey. So we're going to honor them. Our first home regular season game is going to be a tribute to them and I think the players are going to respond very well to it."

Johnny & Matthew Gaudreau will be honored all season by the Blue Jackets. (The Hockey Writers)

Coach Dean Evason spoke for the first time to the media since the tragedy. One of the first questions they pondered along with the leadership was "what would Johnny want us to do?"

“And they said, we probably want to go watch football and have a couple beers,” Evason said. “And so that’s what I’m going to try to and the coaching staff’s going to try to emphasize to our group is that his stall is still here. Tell stories, remember, laugh with our videos we put together for camp. Our initial videos were like do we take Johnny out of all the clips? And said, absolutely not. Johnny’s going to teach. We’re going to (show) good and bad. If he didn’t back check, we will show it. So he’s going to be with us. He’s going to be a presence in our locker room at home and on the road.”

The Hockey News / Five pre-season predictions for the Blue Jackets, Rangers and Metropolitan Division

By Adam Proteau- September 19, 2024

The start of NHL training camps is here, and it's time for a few more pre-season predictions.

We kicked off the process by looking at five predictions for the Eastern Conference's Atlantic Division teams. Today, we're focused on five predictions for the Metropolitan Division. Here they are:

Prediction: New York Islanders addition Anthony Duclair wins the No. 1 left-winger's job in camp and begins the year with Mathew Barzal and center Bo Horvat.

The Islanders made very few changes this summer, cutting ties with longtime rugged winger Cal Clutterbuck and offering veteran enforcer Matt Martin only a professional tryout. Replacing Clutterbuck among the Isles' forwards is the much-travelled Duclair, who now is on his ninth NHL team in 11 seasons.

That doesn't mean there's something inherently wrong with the 29-year-old Duclair, who posted 24 goals and 42 points in 73 games with San Jose and Tampa Bay last season. In 2021-22, Duclair generated a career-high 31 goals and 58 points in 74 games with the Florida Panthers. Clearly, the man can create offense. And he will show the Islanders he can be a top-six forward this year.

If things don't work out, Duclair has a no-trade clause for the first two years of his new, four-year, \$14-million contract. But with Barzal and Horvat on his line, we expect Duclair to put up solid numbers and stay with the Isles for at least half of his contract. He's one of the more offensively talented Islanders, and he's earned the right to stay in one place for a while.

Prediction: First-year New York Rangers right winger Reilly Smith lands the second-line right winger job, bumping youngster Kaapo Kakko to the third line – and onto the trade block.

The salary cap squeezed the Rangers, but they opted for experience over youthful vigor when they acquired the 33-year-old Smith from the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Smith has the inside line on the Blueshirts' second-line right wing position, and that means less opportunity for the 23-year-old Kakko, who averaged just 13:17 of ice time last season.

Kakko doesn't have a no-trade or no-move clause in his current contract, which runs just one year at a \$2.4-million cap hit before he becomes an RFA next summer. If the Rangers have roster issues during the season and look to other teams for help winning in the short term, it could be the end of the line in New York City for Kakko, who probably could use a fresh start somewhere else.

Kakko needs to either ratchet up his effectiveness in a hurry or wind up on the trade block, as Smith will challenge him in the depth chart and likely win out over him for the second-line spot. It doesn't look especially promising for Kakko in New York, but he does have one more chance to stick the landing and establish himself as a long-term Ranger.

Prediction: New Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Jordan Harris excels right out of camp, making veteran Ivan Provorov available on the trade market.

The Blue Jackets got a nice asset in Harris, who was acquired from Montreal in the Patrik Laine blockbuster deal. The 24-year-old Harris averaged 17:28 of ice time in 56 games with the Canadiens last season, and we suspect that number will increase notably in Columbus.

The Jackets are approaching a crossroads with the 27-year-old Provorov, who will be a UFA next summer and potentially seeking a raise on his \$6.75-million annual salary. If Columbus doesn't get close to a playoff spot in the Metro, Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell could bring in a haul for Provorov's services.

Columbus has plenty of salary cap space to retain Provorov in the long term, but as the Blue Jackets continue to retool, it likely makes more sense to deal him for younger players and prospects. If Harris grows his game in a hurry, dealing Provorov might happen relatively soon.

Prediction: In New Jersey, the injury to defenseman Luke Hughes opens up an opportunity on the first defense pairing to Jonas Siegenthaler. The ripple effect results in first-year Devils D-men Brett Pesce and Brenden Dillon forming the Devils' second pairing on 'D.'

The loss of budding star defenseman Hughes is not the way the Devils wanted to start the regular season, but New Jersey's depth on 'D' will help them thrive in his absence. Siegenthaler should get Hughes' spot on the top pair with Dougie Hamilton, while Pesce and Dillon will get the second-pair jobs.

Johnathan Kovacevic, Simon Nemec and training camp tryout Jakub Zboril will battle it out for the third pairing. Regardless, the Devils' defense corps could become one of the best in the NHL once Hughes returns in five to seven weeks, making New Jersey even more dangerous at both ends of the ice.

Prediction: First-year Washington Capitals defenseman Matt Roy forms a solid bond with youngster Rasmus Sandin on the Caps' second defense pairing, while Jakob Chychrun winds up on the first pair with star John Carlson.

Roy joined the Capitals on a six-year, \$34.5-million contract this summer, and the 29-year-old currently slots in as Washington's second-best right-shot blueliner behind Carlson.

As such, Roy will almost certainly start the season paired with Sandin, who posted 20 assists and 23 points in 68 games with the L.A. Kings last season. Although neither Roy nor Sandin will challenge the rest of the NHL in the points department, they don't have to do that to satisfy Caps management.

Instead, Roy and Sandin must be defensively responsible and help Washington's possession game. Both players will be key cogs for the Capitals for years, and they need to have a solid start to keep the skeptics at bay. We think they'll do that.

1st Ohio Battery / Blue Jackets unveil preliminary plans to honor Gaudreau brothers throughout the 2024-25 season

By Ed Francis- September 19, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets have announced their initial plans to honor Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, with a series of remembrances and on-ice memorials scheduled for both preseason and regular season games.

The club posted to X, formerly Twitter, on Wednesday morning to announce their preliminary schedule of events. In the post, the Blue Jackets say that "in lieu of the club's typical Opening Night activities, we'll celebrate the memory of the Gaudreau brothers on Tuesday, Oct. 15th."

Throughout the season (including the preseason), the team will wear a blue and grey sticker on their helmets. The sticker will feature the name "GAUDREAU", along with two doves and the numbers 13 and 21. Johnny wore the number 13 during his entire professional career, while the number 21 represents the number Matthew wore during his time at Boston College.

Moments of silence will be observed at the first preseason game Wednesday, September 25th, as well as the home opener Tuesday, October 15th against the Florida Panthers.

The traditional opening night activities, including the Party on the Plaza and the blue carpet walk, will instead take place on Thursday, October 17th when the Blue Jackets battle the Buffalo Sabres.

CBS Sports / Blue Jackets unveil plans to honor late NHL star Johnny Gaudreau during 2024-25 season

By Chris Bengel- September 19, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets are planning to honor the memory of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau throughout the 2024-25 season, according to an announcement from the team.

Beginning with the Blue Jackets' first preseason game against the Buffalo Sabres on Sept. 23, the team will wear a special sticker on their helmets to honor Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau. Columbus will wear the special helmet stickers through the duration of the 2024-25 season.

The sticker will be blue with gray trim and feature "GAUDREAU" along with two doves between the numbers 13 and 21. Johnny wore No. 13 throughout his entire NHL career, while Matthew wore No. 21 during his time at Boston College.

The Blue Jackets will also hold a moment of silence for Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau prior to the team's first home preseason game against the St. Louis Blues on Sept. 25. Columbus will also found a 50/50 raffle during all four home preseason games. Proceeds from the sale of those raffle tickets will go towards the John and Matthew Gaudreau Foundation.

The Blue Jackets will wear a special patch with Johnny's No. 13 on their jerseys, beginning with their first regular-season game against the Minnesota Wild on Oct. 10. The special patch will be worn throughout the entire season.

The Gaudreaus will be honored during the team's home opener against the Florida Panthers on Oct. 15. All fans attending the game will receive a No. 13 patch identical to what the jerseys will wear.

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

CNN / Columbus Blue Jackets announce plans to remember Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau

By Thomas Schlachter- September 19, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets announced preliminary plans to remember Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau on Wednesday.

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

Johnny Gaudreau played for the Blue Jackets at the time of his passing.

The Blue Jackets' uniform will be updated for the upcoming season to honor and remember the brothers starting with the team's first preseason game on September 23.

Players will wear a special sticker on their helmets to remember the brothers and a patch on their jerseys to remember teammate Johnny.

"The sticker is blue with gray trim and features GAUDREAU, two doves between the numbers 13, which Johnny wore throughout his career, and 21, which Matthew wore at Boston College, in white," the NHL team said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Beginning with the club's first regular season game at the Minnesota Wild on Thursday, October 10, and continuing throughout the season, Blue Jackets players will wear a patch featuring Johnny's number 13 on their jerseys," the Blue Jackets added.

Columbus will hold a moment of silence at its first preseason home game on September 25 against the St. Louis Blues.

The team will also celebrate the memory of the Gaudreau brothers at the Blue Jackets regular season home opener against the Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers on October 15.

ESPN / Blue Jackets announce plans to honor late Johnny Gaudreau

By Emily Kaplan- September 19, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Sean Monahan said he will miss Johnny Gaudreau for the rest of his life -- but called it "special to get that memory every day" as his locker stall is next to the one the team will keep reserved for the late Columbus Blue Jackets star.

Monahan, 29, signed a five-year deal in Columbus this summer in part to reunite with Gaudreau, his teammate for nine years in Calgary, whom he called "arguably my best friend."

As the Blue Jackets opened training camp on Wednesday, Monahan spoke for the first time publicly since Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were killed by a suspected drunken driver while riding bicycles on Aug. 29. Monahan was a pallbearer at the funeral and was going to live three houses down from the Gaudreau family in Ohio.

"I still don't know the exact words to even say," said Monahan, who wore a shirt featuring a large No. 13 and a photo of Gaudreau to the news conference.

"I'm excited for the season. I'm excited to get it going. We're going to miss Johnny. I'm going to miss Johnny a lot. It's something I think about every day. It's definitely really hard to get through, but we've got a great group here and we're going to miss him as a team."

The team announced plans to formally honor Gaudreau, including wearing a helmet sticker featuring the name Gaudreau, two doves and the numbers 13 and 21 -- which Johnny and Matthew wore in their hockey careers. The team will also have a No. 13 patch on their jerseys throughout the season and postponed traditional opening night festivities -- including player blue carpet arrivals -- to the second game, as the Oct. 15 opener at Nationwide Arena will be focused on honoring the Gaudreau brothers.

The Blue Jackets will reserve a locker stall for Gaudreau all season and will hang his No. 13 jersey in it, both at home and on the road.

"Going to what he would want, it was to just, play hockey. He loved every second of every time he was in the rink. At practice, games, sharing time with the guys," captain Boone Jenner said. "That's something, when we come in, we try to enjoy each other through the good times -- but especially through the bad times."

Several Blue Jackets players had already formed a relationship with Monahan because of his friendship with Gaudreau. Those players also recognized the difficult circumstance Monahan faces joining a new team, where he is tasked to be a mentor to young centers Adam Fantilli and Cole Sillinger.

"[Monahan] walked into a tough situation, meeting the guys for the first time after this happened," defenseman Zach Werenski said. "I give him a lot of credit. Obviously, we know John is a big reason of why he signed here. It goes back to that point of being together. We're there for him and I think it speeds things up a little bit, the relationships. It's one of the worst times in his life, and he's been awesome to be around. So that speaks volumes to what type of person he is. As a group, we're here for him. We're going to get through this thing together."

Blue Jackets management, coaches and players spoke Wednesday about grieving together, and honoring Gaudreau by constantly asking themselves, "What would Johnny want us to do?" On the night of Gaudreau's wake in New Jersey, coach Dean Evason met with the leadership group as they were sitting around and asked that very question. They decided Gaudreau would have wanted them to watch football and have a couple beers.

"With our videos we put together for camp, of the coaches asked, do we take Johnny out of all of the clips?" Evason said. "I said 'Absolutely not.' Johnny is going to teach. Good and bad. If he didn't back check, we'll show it. He's going to be with us. He's going to be a presence."

Columbus is beginning a new chapter with a new coach in Evason (who was fired by Minnesota last season) and new general manager in Don Waddell (who mutually parted ways in Carolina after his contract expired this spring). A big focus is reshaping the culture and expediting the rebuild so that the Blue Jackets can make the playoffs for the first time since 2020. They are on their fifth head coach in that span.

Before the tragedy, Evason was looking for ways to create a fresh start for players. He shook up locker room assignments and asked for all the photos above the stalls, which were previously individual photos of players, to be replaced with photos of players in groups. The coach also told his staff not to tell him anything about the players -- their personalities, how they played last year, how they conducted themselves.

"I don't care. I don't care what happened last year," Evason said. "I just care about what's happening at practice and moving forward."

Monahan said that he always has nerves entering a training camp as he wants to make a good impression, including this year -- his 12th season in the league.

"There is a lot of weight on our shoulders right now," Monahan said. "A huge loss, a special person who is not here. It's on my mind every day, every second. And we want to put our best foot forward, our best effort out there for John."

Fox News / Blue Jackets reveal one way they'll honor Johnny Gaudreau this season

By Scott Thompson- September 19, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets entered training camp Wednesday still hurting from the loss of veteran forward Johnny Gaudreau, who was killed, along with his younger brother, Matthew Gaudreau, by a suspected drunk driver in New Jersey three weeks ago.

Columbus was already taking the offseason to reflect on a poor 2023-24 campaign and the shake-up of the front office and coaching staff.

While the new regime is looking to start the new season off on the right foot, the entire organization is trying to deal with the grief and pain of losing one of its cornerstone players.

"I'll miss him the rest of my life," Sean Monahan told reporters Wednesday, via the New York Post. Monahan signed with the Blue Jackets to play alongside Gaudreau again after eight seasons with him on the Calgary Flames,

The Blue Jackets, though, have already thought of one way to honor their former teammate. The team will leave his locker room stall empty this season to pay tribute to Gaudreau. Monahan will be right next to it.

"There's a lot of weight on our shoulders right now," he added.

As a team captain, Boone Jenner is a leader among the players, but he's also grieving with the rest of them.

"To say we know exactly what to do, I don't think that's fair. I don't think there's a playbook out there for this situation and what has happened," he said. "And that's OK. I think we're going to learn and lean on each other as we go on."

Leaning on one another, especially on the ice where everyone feels comfortable, is one way the Blue Jackets will help each other through this tough time.

There's a void left without Gaudreau on the ice, but defenseman Zach Werenski said everyone is excited to be around the team again.

"It's been some tough stuff that's going on the last couple of weeks, but I think we're excited for it. Just keep playing hockey again and doing what we love to do and doing it together."

New GM Don Waddell added, "The guys know Johnny would want us to go play hockey."

Under new coach Dean Evason, the Blue Jackets are hoping to improve on last season's 27-43-12 record, the worst in the Eastern Conference.

Sportsnet.ca / Blue Jackets' Monahan mourns loss of friend Johnny Gaudreau: 'I'll miss him the rest of my life'

By AP- September 19, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Columbus Blue Jackets convened for training camp Wednesday weighed down by the grief of losing star forward Johnny Gaudreau three weeks ago.

One of the worst teams in the NHL last season, the Blue Jackets must find a way to move forward with a new general manager and new coach and with a huge void left on and off the ice by the death of the 31-year-old Gaudreau.

"There's a lot of weight on our shoulders right now," said Sean Monahan, who signed with Columbus July 1 because he wanted to play alongside Gaudreau again. They were teammates and best friends during eight seasons together playing for Calgary.

"I'll miss him the rest of my life," said a somber Monahan, who will dress next to Gaudreau's empty stall in the Blue Jackets locker room.

Captain Boone Jenner said coping with Gaudreau's death is "the new reality" for the Blue Jackets.

"To say we know exactly what to do, I don't think that's fair," said Jenner, who's in his 12th season in Columbus. "I don't think there's a playbook out there for this situation and what has happened. And that's OK. I think we're going to learn and lean on each other as we go on."

Gaudreau was killed along with his brother Matthew on Aug. 29 when they were hit by a car driven by an alleged impaired driver while bicycling near their hometown in Oldsman Township, New Jersey.

This is the team's second camp in recent years that follows the off-season death of a player.

Goaltender Matiss Kivlenieks died in July 2021 of chest trauma from an errant fireworks mortar blast at the wedding of an assistant coach's daughter.

The Blue Jackets will have their first day on the ice on Thursday with a new coach, Dean Evason, and the new general manager who hired him, Don Waddell.

Defenceman Zach Werenski, another longtime Blue Jacket, said the players are eager to get back to work.

"It's been some tough stuff that's going on the last couple of weeks, but I think we're excited for it," Werenski said. "Just keep playing hockey again and, doing what we love to do and doing it together."

Waddell said there will be counseling and other services available for players who may have a tough time making sense of playing hockey after Gaudreau's death.

"The guys know Johnny would want us to go play hockey," said Waddell, who was hired to replace Jarmo Kekalainen, who was the longest-tenured general manager in the history of the franchise when he was fired in February.

On the ice, the Blue Jackets are in serious need of some stability.

Injuries, bad luck and mismanagement have knocked Columbus off track in the past few seasons, despite Gaudreau's 74- and 60-point efforts in 2022-23 and 2023-24, respectively.

Last season under coach Pascal Vincent, the Blue Jackets finished last in the Metropolitan Division and out of the playoffs for the fourth straight season.

Columbus plays its first preseason game at Buffalo on Sept. 23 and opens the regular season Oct. 10 at Minnesota, the team that fired Evason after 19 games last season.

"Everybody's juices are going," Evason said. "And we're excited about getting on the ice and actually implementing what we want to do as a coaching staff, to start the process of establishing our structure, our work ethic."

Sports Illustrated / Blue Jackets to honor the late Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau on 2024-25 uniforms

By Patrick Andres- September 19, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets are preparing for the 2025 season with heavy hearts, as the deaths of forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother Matthew on Aug. 29 loom large over their upcoming campaign.

On Wednesday, the Blue Jackets revealed in a release how they intended to honor their fallen star.

Columbus will wear a helmet sticker paying tribute to Johnny and Matthew throughout the season—depicting two doves with the word "GAUDREAU" and the numbers 13 and 21. Johnny and Matthew wore those numbers as Boston College teammates in 2014.

Additionally, the Blue Jackets will wear Johnny's number 13 as a patch throughout '25.

Johnny and Matthew were riding their bicycles on Aug. 29 when they were struck and killed by an alleged drunk driver in their native New Jersey. They were 31 and 29, respectively; their deaths triggered an outpouring of grief across the hockey world.

Columbus is scheduled to open its season on Oct. 10 against the Minnesota Wild.

The Athletic / Dear NHL TV producers: One fan's 6 small requests for the 2024-25 season

By Sean McIndoe- September 19, 2024

While the never-ending dead zone of the offseason drags on, we're actually getting close to meaningful hockey. Rookie camps are already happening and the real training camps will open soon. From there, we'll only have to get past a few weeks of "best shape of his life" chatter, awkward PTOs and half-speed preseason games before things finally start to matter.

That means it's also the time of year when the TV broadcasters are holed up in the spacious meeting rooms in their office towers, holding top-secret meetings to plan out what their coverage for the new season will look like. (Note: I have no idea if this is true.) And that's good because this post is for them.

I have a few requests.

Nothing unreasonable. I know some fans have big-picture changes they'd love to see from the league's TV partners, but that's not the point of today's post. Instead, I've got what I think are a half-dozen relatively minor tweaks I'd love to see to the broadcasts. OK, sure, it's basically a list of pet peeves I'd like to see addressed, and maybe they only apply to me. But that's fine, because I'm the main character and everything the NHL does should be tailored to my whims, so I'm sure the TV bigwigs will be hanging on every word.

Grab a notepad, TV producers and directors, and get ready to make your product way better ... at least in one viewer's eyes.

You can give up on the bench shot of the coach right after a goal against

I'll admit, I get why this one is a staple of hockey broadcasts because it used to be fun. A team would give up a goal and you could count on a shot of the coach's reaction on the bench. He might be furious, screaming at a random player or maybe the referee. He might be stunned or confused, holding up his arms in disbelief. Sometimes you'd get disgust, with a sneer and a head shake that told you that intermission's speech would be an all-timer, or maybe you'd catch him barking at the backup goalie that it was time to go in. And occasionally you'd just get a guy contemplating all his life decisions that led him to that moment, complete with a thousand-yard stare and the world's saddest little head shake.

The point is, the reactions were worth watching. Now? Not so much.

No, today we get the same reaction every time, from every coach: A guy frozen in place, staring down at an iPad, watching a tiny replay in hopes of seeing something that might become a get-out-of-jail-free replay review.

We get it. The NHL has a replay system. It shouldn't, but that's a topic for a different day. For now, we're stuck with excitement-killing delays, all in the name of just getting it right, even though nobody seems to think we actually do. You don't have to like it, but it's the law of the land, at least until I'm named commissioner.

One thing we can do about it: Ditch those instant cuts to the coach. They don't tell us anything other than who's growing the biggest bald spot. When even a certified character like Paul Maurice is doing the slack-jawed iPad thing in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final, all hope is lost. Find someone thing else to show us.

You're being weird about faceoffs

You love faceoff stats. You show them to us constantly, giving them an air of way more importance than the analytics suggest they deserve. Lately, you've even made up new stats, kind of, by giving us those weird projected percentages that don't seem to add any value. Wow, my team's guy has a 52 percent chance of winning this draw? Thanks, precogs, I'll adjust my viewing strategies accordingly.

But fine, on some level it makes sense. Hockey is the ultimate team game, and a lot of what happens feels random or at least chaotic. When you have a clear one-on-one showdown between two players, with easy-to-understand winners and losers, it can make for good TV. You like faceoffs way too much, but it's understandable.

So ... maybe stop missing the actual draws?

It's weird. You seem to think they're the most important part of the game, or pretty close. But you also seem to forget to show them a few times a night because you're busy with an interview or a replay or a promo for some show nobody will ever watch. Sure, it's only a second or two of action we're missing, but you've spent a lot of the game telling us that they're the most important seconds we'll get, so ... huh?

If faceoffs matter, treat them that way. If not, settle down with the algebra class. Just please pick a lane.

Please be careful with which defenseman you zoom in on after a goal

Unlike the coach shot, the slow zoom on a defenseman after a goal is still a classic. Sometimes it serves up something juicy, like a storm of expletives or an "I just messed up" face. We might get the head-down-and-avoiding-eye-contact move, or maybe the exaggerated stare at the heavens. Occasionally it's the subtle head shake that we all know to be the universal language for "that one was the goalie's fault."

The defenseman zoom is great. Keep it.

But ... please be careful with who you use it on. Because every now and then, you get the wrong guy.

You have to understand how important the defenseman zoom can be to a fan base. Yes, some of us watch the game carefully enough to realize when a blueliner has been falsely accused. But not everyone does. To be blunt, your decision about which defenseman to zoom in on after a goal is going to drive the conversation among our angriest uncles for the next few days. It's a big responsibility.

If you know you've got the right guy, go right ahead. Often, it's obvious, like when a defenseman whiffs on a clearing attempt or sends a blind pass right onto the goal scorer's stick. Occasionally, things get a little dicier, but it's still fair game to show us the guy who wasn't hard enough on a rebound or didn't lift a stick in time. If you're confident beyond a reasonable doubt, feel free to convict.

But if not, consider giving us something else to look at. Because there may not be a single more dangerous moment in a broadcast for steering the reaction in an unfair direction. People's reputations are at stake. Proceed with caution.

(As a side note, I'd feel the same way about zooming in on a forward who blew a coverage, except that this has never happened in 70 years of hockey broadcasting.)

Stop being cute with the goalie pulls

It's late in regulation, the game is close, and the trailing team is about to play their last and riskiest card in pursuit of a comeback. They're about to pull the goalie, abandoning their last line of defense in favor of an all-out attack. It's the ultimate gamble, one that provides irresistible drama for both old and new fans alike. It's great.

It's also not your time to try for an Emmy.

We're going to double-dip on this one, with a pair of suggestions.

First and foremost, never cut away from the action to show us a goalie sprinting to the bench. Some of you are still doing this, and it's never worth it. If a goalie is heading for the bench, that means his team has the puck in the other team's zone, and that means that we do not want to see some dude in giant pads trying to waddle-dash his way to his own bench. Every one of these looks exactly the same, and not in a good way. The only time this shot would ever be useful is if the goalie tripped and took a header into the bench, and that's what slow-motion replay is for.

To your credit, a lot of broadcasts seem to have already gotten the memo on this one and have replaced the cutaway with a picture-in-picture approach. That's good, as long as it's small and out of the way. Another alternate: The play-by-play person could just tell us the goalie is being pulled. That works, too.

OK, so now the goalie is on the bench, and his team is pressing for the tying goal. But wait, the defending team has gained possession and sent the puck all the way down the ice toward the empty net. The entire game/series/season could be hinging on whether the shot finds the vacated cage. What should you do?

If you said, "Cut away from the standard shot to one from the net cam," please whack yourself on the nose with a rolled-up newspaper while I shout "NO!" at my screen.

Stop doing this. It's not all that dramatic, even when the puck does hit the net. More often than not, the shot misses, but we don't get the full effect because of the weird angle. And almost every time, you're just a fraction of a second too late on the switch, meaning by the time the disorientation wears off, we've essentially missed the most important part of the play.

Remember that agonizing rink-length empty-net attempt from the legendary 2014 USA/Canada gold medal game? The live broadcast shot of that play was absolute perfection because nobody tried to get fancy. Learn from it.

Maybe, just maybe, dial down the gambling stuff a bit

No? Not possible? Fine, it was worth a try.

Look, we all get it. The era of legalized sports gambling is still relatively new, which means a lot of companies are trying to establish themselves in a sea of new customers, which means all sorts of marketing money is flying around to anyone who wants it.

But we've all gone overboard, and that's especially true for our friends in TV land.

Could we dial it down just a bit? Maybe not. I'm not a business guy, just a viewer who's tired of the near-constant reminders that I'm apparently supposed to be betting on just about everything. This certainly isn't a new type of problem for the sport because I grew up with TV broadcasts that featured wall-to-wall beer ads. But back then, at least we were spared intermission segments with actual broadcasters talking about which pint to try next. And more importantly, we didn't all have our local pub in our pocket, ready to serve and then over-serve us with little to no regard for the long-term harm being done.

So how about this, TV folks: Keep doing what you feel like you have to do, but just know the product is suffering, at least for a lot of us. The backlash is out there, and I suspect it's a lot bigger than you or your corporate overlords might realize. Maybe think about it just a little bit harder, OK?

Those fans of the road team aren't as fascinating as you think they are

When the home team does something exciting, the producer's job is easy: You serve up the chain reaction of shots of various fans cheering. Excited dude, cute little kid, drunk middle-aged fan, happy couple, cute little kid who also might be drunk (Boston only). If you can find a little old lady or a baby with headphones, you're golden.

But what about when the pendulum swings the other way, and it's the road team that does something worth cheering? Things get a little tougher. If you're lucky, you can catch a hometown fan reacting. Maybe they're booing, looking horrified, or doing that hands-on-head surrender-cobra pose. If you've pre-scouted some guys wearing paper bags on their heads, you're all set.

But often, we get something else instead: The shot of the smug visiting fans.

It makes sense. It can be a good visual, especially if that visitor is the only one standing in a sea of dejected home fans.

It's a good shot. Feel free to use it. Sparingly.

See, some of you have fallen in love with this shot, and seem to want to force-feed it to us after every goal. That can even be true — and is maybe even especially true — if you don't have many visiting fans to choose from. I promise you, we really don't need to see the same fan over and over again, especially when they're inevitably doing the same schtick after every play.

They're just not as interesting as you seem to think. Yes, they're braving hostile territory and all that. But that's not exactly newsworthy. It's the NHL, and these buildings hold about 18,000 people. Somebody is going to be cheering for the other side. You're never going to find a game in which the entire building is unanimously behind the same team, unless it's a Leafs game in Ottawa. Beyond that, "some fans are cheering for the other team" isn't really news.

An occasional reaction shot? Yep, that makes for good TV. But when that one fan is on camera more often than Ray Ferraro, maybe you've gone a little overboard. Just a thought.

That's it for my list, but I'm guessing you folks might have an idea or two that you'd like to add. I'm sure every TV bigwig in the hockey world is furiously scribbling notes right now, so head down to the comments and get those suggestions on the record while they're paying attention.

[The Athletic / The 6 NHL goalie competitions we're watching closely in training camp](#)

By Jesse Granger- September 19, 2024

Over the past few seasons, more goalies have played NHL minutes than ever before. Last season, that number was 98 goalies, an average of 3.06 per team. The year before it was 107, an average of 3.34 per team. The days of a team designating a true No. 1 goalie who will play the vast majority of games are fading quickly, as teams turn to more of a tandem approach, which means more opportunities for starts.

Training camps are opening across the league, and some teams are more settled in the crease than others. These position battles are no longer just about who is the No. 1 goalie. With the new approach teams are taking at the position, even the second, third and fourth spots on the goalie depth chart are important. Which goalie tandems have the most up for grabs as pucks start to hit pads? Where are the biggest opportunities for a new goalie to step into a bigger role?

These are the six creases to keep an eye on as camps and preseason games begin.

Detroit Red Wings

Motor City is the home of the most crowded crease in North America. The Red Wings enter the season with four netminders with extensive NHL experience. Ville Husso, Cam Talbot, Alex Lyon and Jack Campbell have 887 combined starts between them, and that's not mentioning one of the top goalie prospects in the world: Sebastian Cossa.

Husso should have the inside track to the starting job (or at least the 1A in a tandem). He enters the final year of his contract with the largest cap hit of any goalie on the team (\$4.75 million) and probably has the highest ceiling of the group. Husso signed that deal immediately after his breakout season with the Blues in 2021-22, when he received votes for the Vezina Trophy, but has followed it up with two seasons with a sub-.900 save percentage.

The biggest problem for Husso has been health. He made only 18 starts last season due to several lower-body injuries, but if he can stay on the ice, he has the talent to be the Red Wings' top option. His underlying numbers last season were actually better than his .892 suggests. He stopped 80.7 percent of high-danger shots (above the league average of 78.8) and saved 2.3 goals above expected, according to Evolving-Hockey.

Adding Talbot to the fold was an astute move by GM Steve Yzerman, especially considering Husso's injury history. Talbot is 37 (the third-oldest goalie in the league behind Jonathan Quick and Marc-André Fleury) but is coming off a strong season in Los Angeles. If Detroit is going to end its eight-year playoff drought, having a dependable second goalie is key, and Talbot fits the bill.

The Red Wings carried three goalies for most of last season, but Yzerman has said he prefers only two, which means Lyon and Campbell could both be destined for the minors. Both have obvious talent and will be hoping to impress enough in camp to make that a tough decision for the front office. Lyon is still only a couple years removed from starting playoff games in Florida, and Campbell hopes to make the most of a fresh start. Seeing how Detroit deploys its goalies in the preseason will be one of the more interesting storylines.

Chicago Blackhawks

The Blackhawks return Petr Mrázek, who is coming off his best season in a while. The 12-year NHL vet put up a solid .907 save percentage last year, considering the defense in front of him, and was 14th in the league with 14.39 GSAs. Initially this camp would've been a competition between Mrázek and newcomer Laurent Brossoit for the top spot, but Brossoit had surgery to repair the meniscus in his right knee in late August and isn't expected to be back until around the start of the regular season.

Brossoit is coming off a great season in Winnipeg, albeit with limited workload. He started only 22 games backing up Connor Hellebuyck, but stopped an impressive 17.82 GSAs and had the highest save percentage of any goalie with at least 20 starts with .927. He could be ready for the start of the season, and will challenge Mrázek for the starting role eventually, but the surgery pushes back that timeline.

Brossoit's absence opens a door for Chicago's two young, talented netminders — Arvid Söderblom, 25, and Drew Comesso, 22 — to show what they've got. Chicago has increased Söderblom's workload for three straight seasons, but after he struggled with a .879 save percentage and minus-12.99 GSAs last year, it could be time to give Comesso more of a look.

Comesso was dominant at Boston University and showed well in his first year of professional hockey with the Rockford IceHogs last season. He's still very young, so not likely to see much NHL action — at least early in the season — but this is a big camp for him to show coaches he's ready to take the next step. The Blackhawks are still mid-rebuild, but Comesso has an opportunity to continue establishing himself as the future franchise goalie who will be in net when this team is ready to win.

Toronto Maple Leafs

The top job in Toronto is Joseph Woll's to lose. He's done nothing but impress in every NHL opportunity to this point, and if he can remain healthy, he should be the primary starter. Woll has all of the physical tools to be a top goaltender and is a grinder off the ice. By all accounts, he has what it takes to succeed in one of the hardest positions to succeed in the sport. Having said that, he has missed considerable time with injuries over his short career, and now has a talented goalie partner who's hungry to become more than just a backup.

One of Toronto's additions this offseason was Florida backup Anthony Stolarz. The hulking 6-foot-6 netminder put up impressive numbers last season (they were actually better than his teammate and Vezina finalist Sergei Bobrovsky). Stolarz has consistently produced excellent numbers in net over the last five years, but he's always been stuck behind a workhorse starter. While Woll is the incumbent starter, he isn't so entrenched that Stolarz can't gain some ground with an impressive camp.

Calgary Flames

Say goodbye to the Jacob Markström era in Calgary and hello to the Dustin Wolf era. Trading the veteran to New Jersey this offseason cleared a path for one of the most talented goalie prospects in the world to finally become a full-time NHL player. The only question now is, what share of the starts will Wolf get?

There's no question Calgary views Wolf as the eventual franchise goalie, but he may not be quite ready to take the full reins just yet. The Flames still have reliable backup Dan Vladar, who is entering the final year of his deal. I'll be keeping a close eye on how Wolf performs. With an impressive camp and preseason, he could establish himself as the clear No. 1. If he still looks like he's acclimating to the NHL, like he did last season with a .893 save percentage in 15 starts, then perhaps Vladar will shoulder more of a load while they continue to develop Wolf.

Wolf has tremendous potential and is at the age where he should begin showing it. Looking at other top American netminders, Connor Hellebuyck and Jake Oettinger both made the jump to full-time starters in

their age-23 season, then earned votes for the Vezina the following year. If Wolf is to follow a similar path, it starts with an impressive camp.

San Jose Sharks

Last season Mackenzie Blackwood had one of the most impressive seasons with a sub-.900 save percentage that I've seen. Playing behind a historically bad defense, he still managed to save 11.07 goals above expected. Despite his nightly heroics in net, his base statistics were still not very good, and that has been the story of Blackwood's career.

He's clearly a physical specimen. He's big, powerful and acrobatic. But he's also had four straight seasons with a save percentage below the league average, and eventually you are what the numbers say you are. He should enter this camp as the incumbent starter, but it's what happens behind him that is most interesting.

The Sharks sent multiple prospects and a first-round pick to Nashville this summer to acquire their future franchise goalie, Yaroslav Askarov. He's one of the top goalie prospects in the world, and after two straight dominant seasons in the AHL, he's clearly ready for more. The question is, what does Sharks director of goaltending Evgeni Nabokov believe is best for Askarov's development?

San Jose still has Vitek Vanecek, and would likely have to waive him in order to keep Askarov up with the big club. How Askarov looks in camp and preseason could determine how Nabokov handles the situation. If he comes in and shows he clearly belongs in the NHL, it'll be an easy choice.

Washington Capitals

The symmetry between the Capitals' top two goalies is a bit odd. Not only do both Charlie Lindgren and Logan Thompson catch with their right hand (something that only seven of the 98 goalies who played in the NHL last year do), they're also both unheralded, undrafted netminders who have taken a long road to eventually proving they belong in the NHL.

As the returning starter, Lindgren holds a slight edge, but these two will likely share the crease evenly this season. The way they perform in camp, preseason and the start of the regular season will determine who earns the 1A spot. The fact Washington has only \$1.87 million in cap hit invested in the tandem as a whole is a major advantage, regardless of how it plays out, but this may be the starting job that's most up for grabs this fall.

[The Athletic / Every NHL team's biggest question heading into training camp](#)

By The Athletic NHL Staff- September 19, 2024

When and for how much will restricted free agent goaltender Jeremy Swayman sign with the Bruins? Can Rangers captain Jacob Trouba put the trade rumors behind him? Will Linus Ullmark be the answer in goal the Senators have been waiting for?

This week, The Athletic asked its staff for the biggest question facing each team heading into camp, and those were a few of the enticing storylines we heard about in response.

With training camps opening across the league and preseason games right around the corner, here's what we have our eyes on.

Anaheim Ducks

Will Cam Fowler (or someone else) be traded? Could the Ducks as we know them be the same by the time they open the season in San Jose? Trade winds have blown around them for some time and the recent entry of Fowler into the steady breeze only adds to a persistent storyline around the club. A separation with longtime No. 1 goalie John Gibson has felt inevitable but Gibson's contract and rough statistics in recent seasons have hindered a potential deal. Trade proposals for Trevor Zegras have taken on a life of their own in the hockey sphere. Now it's Fowler, who's entering his 15th season but appears open to a new NHL home. Major trades don't often occur during training camp and it's very possible all three start the season in Anaheim. Perhaps all three will end there. But it feels like change could be in the air. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

When and for how much will Jeremy Swayman sign? Swayman is without a contract. A summer of negotiating has not gotten the sides close to an agreement. Swayman believes he is one of the league's best goalies. The Bruins share that opinion, but they can point to an indisputable fact: Swayman has never been a No. 1 goalie in the regular season. This could lead to Swayman missing camp time. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Can the scoring bounce back? The Sabres didn't add a top-six forward this summer, instead banking on bounce-back seasons from Tage Thompson, Alex Tuch and Dylan Cozens along with continued growth from players like JJ Peterka and Jack Quinn. General manager Kevyn Adams is betting an improved fourth line and Lindy Ruff's coaching will be enough to get the Sabres back closer to the offensive team they were in 2022-23. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

How good is the Flames' youth movement? The Flames enter the season as underdogs, but their veterans shouldn't be the sole focus. Can Connor Zary and Martin Pospisil take a step forward? Dustin Wolf will get his chance to compete for NHL time: how will he fare? Can Matthew Coronato carve out a spot for himself? Does Jakob Pelletier still have a future with the Flames? Which other Flames youngsters will see time with the big club this season? If the Flames are in the business of selling hope, this season will play a role in how excited fans should be for their future. — Julian McKenzie

Carolina Hurricanes

Who is the No. 1 goalie? Plenty thought Frederik Andersen wouldn't be back with the Hurricanes after he unraveled in the Game 6 loss to the Rangers that ended the Hurricanes' season in May. But Carolina — led by new GM Eric Tulsy — decided to stand pat with its goaltenders, keeping Andersen, Pyotr Kochetkov and Spencer Martin as the team's three goalies. Kochetkov made a team-high 40 starts last season with Andersen on injured reserve, but it was Andersen who took the net in the postseason. Can Andersen, 35 at the start of the regular season, carry the load this year, or is it finally time to give Kochetkov the reins for good? — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

Other than Connor Bedard, how many young players will actually make the Blackhawks roster out of camp? The Blackhawks drastically changed the look of their NHL roster by adding eight veterans this offseason. Those additions likely mean most of the Blackhawks' younger players are at least starting their season in the AHL. From Artyom Levshunov to Kevin Korchinski to Frank Nazar, the Rockford IceHogs, the Blackhawks' AHL affiliate, could have a packed roster of promising prospects. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

How healthy will they be up front? The biggest question facing the Avalanche entering training camp is the health of their talented forward group. Colorado coach Jared Bednar said he hopes Gabriel Landeskog, who hasn't played since 2022, will be ready to play sometime near the start of the season, and Artturi Lehkonen won't be a full participant to start camp following offseason shoulder surgery. That could open opportunities for other forwards to push their way up the lineup with impressive performances. Wingers Miles Wood, Logan O'Connor and Joel Kiviranta have a lot to gain from a great camp. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

How can they live with the grief of Johnny Gaudreau's death? The sudden, senseless tragedy that took the lives of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau has cast a pall on the organization, and it's not one that will be lifted soon. Forget about hockey and how impossible it will be to replace Johnny Gaudreau on the ice. The Blue Jackets will be challenged to focus and prepare for the season without their beloved teammate. Every player will handle grief in their own way, but this will not be easy. — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

Will the real Jake Oettinger please stand up? Dallas addressed its most pressing concern on Tuesday by signing RFA defenseman Thomas Harley to a two-year bridge deal. The Stars have plenty of veterans — Jamie Benn, Tyler Seguin, Matt Duchene — to ease the blow of Joe Pavelski's retirement, and they have dynamic young stars ready to take on larger roles in Wyatt Johnston, Logan Stankoven, Mavrik Bourque and Harley. But as deep and as talented as Dallas is, none of it might matter if Oettinger doesn't return to form in goal. Oettinger's save percentage plummeted from .919 to .905 last season, his goals saved above expected dropped from 21.65 to 1.46 (51st in the league), and he was rather pedestrian by his lofty standards in the Western Conference final against Edmonton. Given his pedigree and his track record, it's likely more a blip than a trend. But Oettinger enters the 2024-25 campaign with something to prove. — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings

Is the team's defense improved? The Red Wings lost a lot of production this offseason, and while they'll hope to replace that scoring with contributions from Vladimir Tarasenko and via internal improvements, their bigger short-term priority will be defending better as a team. Detroit gave up the league's ninth

most goals per game last season (3.33), and too often gave away easy scoring chances via turnovers and defensive breakdowns. They'll certainly hope the full-time arrival of Simon Edvinsson can help on the blue line thanks to his length and mobility, but a big part of the equation will need to come from their forwards, who last season tended to be more offensively tilted. Tyler Motte will help there as a matchup forward who can kill penalties, and Christian Fischer will return in a similar role. From there, it's about getting a little more responsibility out of some of the more skilled forwards, a task which will fall to Derek Lalonde and his staff to execute. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

Can the Oilers get by at right defense? There are options aplenty on the starboard side of the blue line after Evan Bouchard, but there's also tons of uncertainty. The Oilers lost Vincent Desharnais to free agency, Philip Broberg to an offer sheet and traded Cody Ceci, so turnover is high. Josh Brown was signed, depth contributor Troy Stecher was retained and Ty Emberson was the return for Ceci — but none of these guys are surefire top-four defensemen. Neither is lefty Travis Dermott, who's at camp on a tryout and can play the right side. This is unquestionably the biggest concern with the roster. It might have to be addressed quickly if issues are apparent early in the season. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Florida Panthers

Who's up next on defense? We're trying not to use the term "Cup hangover" here, and it's difficult. The Panthers — like nearly all champions — experienced attrition over the summer, particularly on the blue line, where key contributors Brandon Montour and Oliver Ekman-Larsson both signed for more money and years than Florida could offer. Paul Maurice has faced uncertainty at the position before, including at the start of last season. His task this time is figuring out how much he can rely on additions Nate Schmidt and Adam Boqvist. — Sean Gentille

Los Angeles Kings

Can they replace Matt Roy on the blue line? The Kings saw Roy, their homegrown defenseman from the seventh round in 2015, cash in with Washington to the tune of six years and \$34.5 million while opting not to directly replace him either through trade or free agency. They signed Joel Edmundson and dealt for Kyle Burroughs but neither fills that hole on the right side in L.A.'s second pairing. But they also know 21-year-old Brandt Clarke is set to make the jump to the NHL for good. Clarke figures to get plenty of opportunities to stick and Jordan Spence could also be bumped up in the lineup, but the Kings will have a problem if they can't replace Roy's sound defense, penalty killing and ability to eat a lot of five-on-five minutes against other teams' better forwards. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

Will the Wild carry three goalies? After re-signing Marc-André Fleury for what he says will be his 21st and final season, the Wild tried all offseason to trade Filip Gustavsson — including making him part of their recent attempt for Patrik Laine. No trade transpired yet, but the Wild still want to get 2021 first-round pick Jesper Wallstedt more NHL games than the three he got last year. So as general manager Bill Guerin has said, this could be a "hybrid" season where the Wild carry three goalies often. For a team that can't currently afford two league-minimum extra players, Wallstedt's \$925,000 cap hit will demand roster and cap gymnastics. — Michael Russo

Montreal Canadiens

Can Kirby Dach pick up where he left off? Coming out of training camp last year, Kirby Dach looked like the Canadiens' best forward. Then his season was over after two games. In two years in Montreal, Dach has played a total of 60 games. Over the second half of 2022-23 and in last year's training camp, he

looked like a difference-maker with the potential to form a very good 1-2 punch down the middle with Nick Suzuki. There is not much depth at center behind those two in the organization. The Canadiens need Dach to be that impact player; it is critical to their rebuild. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

How will the Preds deploy their new stars? That's more of a topic with the forwards because it seems obvious Brady Skjei will be paired with Roman Josi. But the questions for Andrew Brunette are the extent to which he wants to keep last year's superb top line — Filip Forsberg, Ryan O'Reilly, Gustav Nyquist — together, and the center of choice for Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault if that desire is high. Tommy Novak is the logical choice, but that would mean separating him from Luke Evangelista. Regardless, there are new stars, and Nashville is excited. — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

How do the new pieces fit in? Tom Fitzgerald had as active an offseason as any general manager. The roster looks capable of contending for the playoffs, assuming the new players gel under new coach Sheldon Keefe. Jacob Markström, Brenden Dillon, Brett Pesce, Stefan Noesen and Tomáš Tatar will all help the team, but there will be an adjustment period. That's worth watching during training camp. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Did they do enough to be competitive? Lou Lamoriello didn't do anything drastic to a roster that sneaked into the playoffs for a second straight year and slunk away after a first-round loss. Anthony Duclair was the lone NHL free-agent addition. Lamoriello is banking on a full season of Patrick Roy behind the bench to give the Isles enough juice early in the season, but the continuity on this roster might just be wearing too thin. — Arthur Staple

New York Rangers

Where does the Jacob Trouba situation stand? After being in trade talks during the offseason, Trouba will naturally be a storyline heading into camp. He knows the drill, though, and already showed in his early comments that he'll handle everything professionally. His fit on the ice will also be interesting. Assuming Adam Fox and Ryan Lindgren are a pair, will Peter Laviolette start K'Andre Miller and Braden Schneider together and put Trouba on the third pair? He tried that out in the playoffs, and it'll be an option in camp. — Peter Baugh

Ottawa Senators

Is Linus Ullmark the answer in goal? A year ago, the Senators thought Joonas Korpisalo might answer their goaltending questions after they signed him as a free agent but unhappily, it didn't work out. Korpisalo's numbers (a 3.27 GAA and an .890 save percentage) were the worst in the league among the 15 goalies who played 3,000 minutes or more last season. But Ullmark, acquired from Boston, won the Vezina Trophy as the league's top goalie as recently as 2023 and thrived in a regular-season timeshare with Jeremy Swayman. If the Senators tighten up defensively under new coach Travis Green, see continued growth among their young players and get the sort of reliable netminding Ullmark provided in his three years with the Bruins, then the Senators should finally contend for a playoff spot after missing the postseason for the last seven years. — Eric Duhatschek

Philadelphia Flyers

Who will skate with Matvei Michkov? The unexpected, early arrival of the talented rookie winger gives coach John Tortorella a much-needed weapon in the top six, particularly after the Flyers' biggest issue

last season was a lack of elite-level talent. Does Tortorella stick Michkov with captain Sean Couturier, a former Selke Trophy winner who faded down the stretch last season? Or might it be Morgan Frost, a creative player in his own right when he's on his game? Surely there will be some experimentation over the next few weeks, but it will be intriguing to monitor. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

Can David Quinn fix the power play? All those Hall of Famers, and all that futility. A power play that included Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, Erik Karlsson, Kris Letang and Jake Guentzel (for most of the season) finished 31st out of 32 teams and led the league in most short-handed goals allowed. New assistant coach David Quinn is in charge of the power play moving forward. Can he fix it? The season will likely depend on it for the Penguins, who would have easily qualified for the postseason had their power play been even average. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

How much better will the Sharks be? Last year was a nightmare somewhat by design. Macklin Celebrini was going to be the no-doubt No. 1 pick of the NHL Draft, and the Sharks plowed through a dreadful NHL-worst season where they had only 47 points. But they had the best draft lottery odds, and a win there netted them Celebrini. Mission accomplished. General manager Mike Grier then had a busy summer trying to upgrade the talent level around their new franchise center. Veteran additions such as Tyler Toffoli, Jake Walman, Barclay Goodrow and Alex Wennberg should make them more competitive. Toffoli, in particular, is a proven sniper who could be on Celebrini's wing. The defense could still be leaky, though Cody Ceci gives them an upgrade. The stunning late summer trade for top goalie prospect Yaroslav Askarov and 2023 No. 4 pick Will Smith provide further hope for the future. The Sharks won't make the playoffs, but they shouldn't be as big of a tire fire in 2024-25. — Eric Stephens

Seattle Kraken

Will Matty Beniers bounce back? Matty Beniers' rookie season was electric. The Kraken center looked like a burgeoning superstar, played with incredible swagger and led the team to a stunning run through to the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. Beniers' sophomore campaign, however, was a reminder that development isn't always linear. Even for potentially elite young players. Last season Beniers' shooting luck ran cold and the joyful assertiveness in his game appeared to disappear. After racking up 24 goals and 57 points as a first-year pivot, Beniers' production sagged to 15 goals and 37 points in 77 games last season. The Kraken don't have enough offense or enough elite players to overcome another good but not great season from Beniers. If he can bounce back, however, the Kraken could get back into the playoff mix in the Pacific Division. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

Who will be the No. 2 center? The Blues expect Robert Thomas, who is signed through 2030-31, to be their No. 1 center for the long-term future. But who's their No. 2? Brayden Schenn has filled the role in the past, and the Blues have experimented with Pavel Buchnevich there for the past two seasons. Dalibor Dvorský, the No. 10 pick in the 2023 draft, will likely have the job one day. But for the 2024-25 season, the big question: Will it be old reliable (Schenn), the alternative (Buchnevich) or the prospect (Dvorský)? — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

Can the Lightning extend their window? We have quite a few questions for Tampa Bay. Can Ryan McDonagh stabilize the blue line? Will the team miss Mikhail Sergachev? What will life look like without Steven Stamkos? How will Jake Guentzel fit? Is there enough depth scoring? And will Andrei Vasilevskiy

bounce back? But there is one overarching theme that runs through each of those questions, and that revolves around the Lightning's window of contention. The big question is whether a busy offseason will be enough to give this core another championship run after two consecutive Round 1 exits. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Can Easton Cowan force his way into the Leafs? You could go in a few different directions here — what's life like with Craig Berube as coach, for instance? Why Cowan? He's the team's top prospect, he's 19, he's coming off a huge year in junior, and he's got a chance to actually make the team. The Leafs do have a number of forwards competing for jobs — including Nick Robertson, Ryan Reaves and Connor Dewar — so there are obstacles in Cowan's way. But if he looks like he might just be ready for the NHL, with his unique skill set, Leafs management will be inclined to give him a look in the regular season — if only because Cowan will have to return to juniors if he's not playing in the NHL. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Hockey Club

Will aggressive new ownership translate into a playoff spot? No team underwent a greater offseason makeover than Utah HC. They relocated to Salt Lake City from Arizona, are back playing in an NHL-size building and made three important offseason acquisitions — Mikhail Sergachev from Tampa Bay, John Marino from New Jersey and Ian Cole as a UFA — to bolster the back end of a young but improving squad. More than anything else, however, there is a new attitude and level of excitement under the ownership of Ryan Smith. Instead of just trying to survive under flailing ownership, playing in an undersized college arena, there's a collective feeling among players and staff that they are back in the big leagues. That development — plus better overall talent — should provide the environment for a bump in on-ice performance. — Eric Duhatschek

Vancouver Canucks

What's the status of Thatcher Demko? The Vancouver Canucks won the only playoff game Thatcher Demko started last season. The Vezina nominee goaltender, a core piece for this team, sustained a knee injury late in the 2023-24 regular season. He worked his way back and returned for two regular season games and Game 1 of the postseason, only to suffer another knee injury late in that fateful postseason contest. By all indications, Demko was close to returning before the Canucks were eliminated by the Edmonton Oilers in Game 7 of the second round, but there's uncertainty around his status and timeline for training camp — and even perhaps the start of the regular season. The club is hopeful Demko will be back in the blue paint for opening night and Canucks fans will be too. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

Who will replace the scoring lost to free agency this summer? The Golden Knights lost 35.7 percent of the goals scored last season through trades or free agency this summer. The franchise's all-time goal leader Jonathan Marchessault makes up the majority of that, but they'll also be looking to replace Chandler Stephenson, William Carrier, Michael Amadio and Paul Cotter up front. Vegas brought in former first-round pick Alexander Holtz, and three-time 20-goal scorer Victor Olofsson to supplement the scoring, and hope 2020 first-round pick Brendan Brisson takes a step in his development. The biggest storyline for Vegas' camp will be which forwards can grab ahold of big top-six opportunities. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

What's the plan for the new guys? Over the summer, the Caps added (among others) top-six forwards Pierre-Luc Dubois and Andrew Mangiapane, top-pair defenseman Jakob Chychrun and goaltender Logan

Thompson. That's nothing to sneeze at for any team, let alone one that made the playoffs last season. They were also utterly necessary moves, given Washington's underlying numbers in 2023-24. It'll be particularly interesting to see whether Dubois (a center) and Mangiapane (a right-winger) play on a line together and how much of a look each gets with Alex Ovechkin. — Sean Gentile

Winnipeg Jets

If 110 points is too much to ask for, how about a playoff round? Training camp does present Winnipeg with important questions. Can Brad Lambert make the team? What does Cole Perfetti's next step look like? Who plays second-line center, how does the new Jets coaching staff revamp Winnipeg's special teams, is this Nikolaj Ehlers' last season as a Jet, and what can Gabriel Vilardi accomplish in year two? The answers are important and the details will shape Winnipeg's future. No specific element matters more than the Jets' playoff aspirations — qualify, win a game, and then follow through by winning a round for the first time since there was a North Division. — Murat Ates