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Columbus Dispatch / Florida Panthers stifle Columbus Blue Jackets, help Sergei Bobrovsky post 3-0 shutout

By Brian Hedger – March 7, 2025

Some blowouts don't require a lot of goals.

The Blue Jackets found that out Thursday against the Florida Panthers, whose stifling defense helped goalie Sergei Bobrovsky cruise to a 3-0 shutout at Amerant Bank Arena in Sunrise, Florida.

Playing without Matthew Tkachuk, a star power forward, the Panthers (39-21-3) helped Bobrovsky cruise to the 48th shutout of his career and fourth of the season, showing why they're leading the Atlantic Division with 81 points as the defending Stanley Cup champions.

Using size, strength and aggressiveness within a suffocating defensive structure, the Panthers controlled play against the Blue Jackets (30-24-8) from start-to-finish. They limited Columbus to seven shots in the first period, three in the second and six in the third for a dominant 36-16 edge that kept Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins scrambling.

The lone good news for Columbus is what happened in Detroit, where the Red Wings lost to Utah 4-2 for their fourth straight loss. The Red Wings could have leapfrogged the Jackets in a tight playoff race had they won.

Otherwise, the Blue Jackets had a second straight game to forget in Florida. Merzlikins, by far, was their best player with 33 saves to keep his team within striking distance and keep the final score respectable.

Sam Reinhart and Mackie Samoskevich capped power plays in the first and second periods, respectively, to give the Panthers a 2-0 lead starting the third. Aleksander Barkov scored Florida's third goal into an empty net for insurance with 2:12 left in the third and Merzlikins on the bench for an extra attacker. Barkov also assisted on the Panthers' first two goals for a three-point night.

The Blue Jackets will return to Columbus to await Friday's 3 p.m. trade deadline and regroup before playing the final two games of a tough road trip Sunday against the New York Rangers and Tuesday against the New Jersey Devils.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets claim Christian Fischer from Detroit Red Wings, add depth up front

By Brian Hedger – March 7, 2025

The Blue Jackets' approach going into Friday's 3 p.m. NHL trade deadline is to work on the "edges" of the market to bolster a stretch run.

One of those edges involves the league's 24-hour waivers process, which Blue Jackets president of hockey operations/general manager Don Waddell tapped Thursday to claim veteran depth forward Christian Fischer, 27, from the Detroit Red Wings.

"Christian Fischer brings additional size, versatility and energy to our forward group," Waddell said in a statement announcing the move. "He's played in over 500 NHL games, possesses great character and will fit in very well with our team and how we play."

Fischer, 27, will join the Blue Jackets after their return from a road game Thursday against the Florida Panthers and could make his debut against the New York Rangers on Sunday at Madison Square Garden. Fischer is listed at 6 feet 2, 212 pounds and has played 522 NHL games between the Red Wings and former Arizona Coyotes, who selected him in the second round (32nd overall) of the 2015 draft.

He's a pending unrestricted free agent with a contract that pays \$1.125 million this season. The Blue Jackets are only the hook to pay a prorated portion of that salary for the rest of the season. Fischer also just faced the Blue Jackets last Saturday night in the 2025 NHL Stadium Series matchup at Ohio Stadium, skating 5:09 on 10 shifts in a game won by Justin Danforth's late goal in the third period.

Fischer only logged one shift that lasted seven seconds in the third period of the outdoor game against the Blue Jackets, watching almost the entire final period as Red Wings coach Todd McClellan shortened the bench while chasing the lead. Fischer, however, has slumped most of the season and leaves Detroit after adding just one goal, six assists and seven points in 45 games.

He should be motivated, however, and will add experienced "grit" to a forward group that lost Kevin Labanc for the season to shoulder surgery in February. Rookie forward Mikael Pyyhtia, who has struggled to contribute offensively in multiple NHL stints, was re-assigned to AHL Cleveland to clear a roster spot for Fischer.

This is the third time Waddell has used waivers to supplement the Blue Jackets' roster during his first year in charge of the team's hockey side. Zach Aston-Reese, a versatile forward who's now on the third line, was claimed in the preseason from the Vegas Golden Knights and top-pairing defenseman Dante Fabbro was claimed in November from the Nashville Predators.

Fischer is expected to join the mix filling out center Sean Kuraly's fourth line, which most recently has filled the two wing spots using a combination of James van Riemsdyk at left wing, Joe Labate and Pyyhtia. Van Riemsdyk has skated on the left, Kuraly in the middle and the other two toggled in and out of coach Dean Evason's lineup on the right ever since the NHL returned from its break for the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Against the Panthers on Thursday, Van Riemsdyk moved up to play on the second line with Boone Jenner and Kent Johnson, while Yegor Chinakhov skated with Kuraly and Labate in just his second game back from a 39-game absence due to a back injury.

Labate, who's listed at 6-5, 225, is a great story as a journeyman who has rekindled his NHL dreams. His five games for the Blue Jackets, however, were his first in the NHL since playing 13 games for the Vancouver Canucks in 2017. Fischer has played the past eight-plus seasons in the NHL and has offensive potential.

Fischer, who's reached double-digits in goals three times, will most likely start out on Kuraly's right wing, skating opposite of Van Riemsdyk. That's an experienced combination for a fourth line that includes size, strength and enough skill across all three spots to be dangerous in the offensive zone.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets get a tough taste of playoff-stretch hockey in humbling 3-0 loss

By Aaron Portzline – March 7, 2025

SUNRISE, Fla. — Half of the players in the Columbus Blue Jackets' lineup Thursday have never competed down the stretch of the regular season for a chance to play in the NHL postseason, much less played in a Stanley Cup playoffs game.

No way they can anticipate the dialed-up physical play. No way they can prepare for how difficult it is to simply advance the puck past the red line when every inch of ice is contested.

The Florida Panthers, who have been in the last two Stanley Cup Finals and lifted the cherished chalice last spring, simply overwhelmed the Blue Jackets in a 3-0 win before an announced crowd of 19,402 in Amerant Bank Arena.

In the process, they may have done the Jackets a favor by showing them what's coming and what level they need to reach.

This two-game swing through Florida has actually been full of painful lessons. The Jackets were drubbed 6-2 in Tampa Bay on Tuesday.

"You have to fight for every inch down the stretch and into the playoffs," said Blue Jackets veteran forward James van Riemsdyk, who, during a 16-year career, has played in 1,066 regular-season games and 82 playoff games — the equivalent of another entire season.

"(Tampa Bay and Florida) are teams that have been successful the last 5-10 years; Tampa, for sure, and Florida in recent years. Learning from that a little, just knowing the style of play that's going to be successful ... we've responded a lot of times this year, and I'd expect a good response from us in our next game."

The Blue Jackets play next Sunday against the New York Rangers in Madison Square Garden, another stern test. Before the puck drops on that game, the Blue Jackets — and the rest of the league — will get through Friday's NHL trade deadline.

GM Don Waddell is not expected to be overly active, but he's continuing to try to add a forward who can play in the Blue Jackets' top nine. Thursday, the Blue Jackets claimed winger Christian Fischer off waivers from the Detroit Red Wings, but he's seen as a fourth-line player.

Later in the day Thursday, Waddell was still hoping the price would drop on a forward, likely a winger, with remaining term on his contract. But those deals might not happen until close to the 3 p.m. ET deadline Friday, if they happen at all.

Waddell has said he doesn't want to trade away any players — notably pending unrestricted free agent Ivan Provorov, who has garnered significant interest — because this Blue Jackets club has overachieved such that they deserve to take a run at it, he said.

But you have to wonder if Waddell would view this deadline differently if these last three games had occurred a week earlier in the season.

The Blue Jackets beat the Detroit Red Wings 5-3 last Saturday in a Stadium Series outdoor game in Ohio Stadium, but they were badly outplayed for much of the night. When coupled with the two losses this week in the Sunshine State, it's not a pretty picture.

The Blue Jackets have allowed 122 shots on goal and 103 scoring chances (per Natural Stat Trick) over the last three games, a defensive collapse that must be remedied soon.

“We can dial in better what we’re doing defensively,” Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. “We talked a lot about it (on Wednesday). Our sticks, our ending plays, our pressure ... we didn’t end a lot of plays or get out of our zone (vs. Florida). We’ve given up offensive chances and offensive time. We have to do a better job.”

The only bright spot for the Blue Jackets was goaltender Elvis Merzlikins, who made 33 saves and had a tremendous glove stop on Florida’s Aleksander Barkov early in the third period to keep it close.

“He was fantastic,” Evason said. “He was by far our best player. He definitely gave us a chance.”

Thursday’s game marked the fourth time this season the Blue Jackets have been shut out. They managed only 16 shots on goal, matching a season low from Dec. 3 when the Jackets lost 3-0 in Calgary.

The man who pitched the shutout was former Blue Jackets goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky, who improved to 12-2-1 vs. Columbus since he left the Blue Jackets to sign with Florida as a free agent in the summer of 2019. He has three shutouts against his former mates.

Really, it was a challenge for the Blue Jackets to simply gain the red line with the possession of the puck. That’s how hard and heavy the Panthers played, even though power forward Matthew Thachuk wasn’t in the lineup due to an injury.

The Blue Jackets were under the gun from the start, in part due to penalties. Of the first 7:58 of the game, the Blue Jackets were short-handed for 5:02 of it, thanks to three minor penalties. But it never got much better for Columbus, which remains in the top wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference ... at least for now.

“They didn’t allow us to get to our game,” Evason said. “They played a strong game. Smart, obviously. They did a lot of good things. We didn’t get in on the forecheck. We could have done some more aggressive stuff as far as getting pucks into the right areas to get forechecking and simplifying our game.

“We complicated it early and that fed into how they played the game.”

The Athletic / As NHL trade deadline looms, Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell wants to 'add around the edges'

By Aaron Portzline – March 7, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — For the first time in six seasons, the Columbus Blue Jackets will arrive at the NHL trade deadline on Friday without a “for sale” sign on their roster. Instead, GM Don Waddell has been telling rival GMs he’s looking to buy.

Waddell is not expected to be one of the league’s high-rollers on Friday. He’s already made it clear he’s not in “go-for-it” mode, stating several times that he has no interest in trading a first-round draft pick for a “rental” player who is a pending unrestricted free agent this summer.

But he would like to add a top-nine forward with a history of providing offense, especially with lingering injuries to first-line center Sean Monahan (wrist surgery) and third-line center Cole Sillinger (shoulder), who are both likely out until late March.

“If we can add (to our lineup) around the edges, certainly we’re going to try that,” Waddell said. “I’m more interested in hockey deals with players who have term remaining on their contracts. We’re exploring, obviously, as many of those as we can.”

Waddell’s descriptions — no high-priced rentals, support players rather than star players, and contract terms beyond this season — give us three pretty good clues to help parse the list of players believed to be available before the bell tolls at 3 p.m. on Friday.

Disclaimer: Any of this can change with one phone call, and a player not believed to be available could suddenly be on the table. But Waddell has been pretty clear in his thinking about where the Blue Jackets are in their growth curve and how the way this club has played makes them deserving of an added bump for the season’s stretch drive.

Don’t expect the Blue Jackets to be in on Carolina’s Mikko Rantanen, the New York Islanders’ Brock Nelson, or Vancouver’s Brock Boeser. They’re all UFAs who are going to draw massive player-and-pick returns.

Here’s another read on the situation: Don’t expect a player acquired with remaining term to be a center. It’s not out of the question, but there are multiple reasons the Blue Jackets would most likely be interested in wingers with existing term.

Why? Because the Blue Jackets are actually — maybe for the first time in franchise history — pretty deep down the middle, either with proven veterans (Monahan) or young, precocious players growing into prominent roles (Adam Fantilli, Sillinger).

Acquiring a center typically costs a premium, and Waddell wouldn’t want to bump Fantilli or Monahan into a third-line role or Sillinger to the fourth line, and you wouldn’t want to play a premium for a center who then — when the Blue Jackets are healthy — either plays on the third line or switches to wing.

Now, a center with an expiring contract could make sense, as Monahan and Sillinger are still a few weeks away from playing.

With all of this in mind, we’re looking at Waddell’s potential targets through two categories:

- Established scoring players (likely wingers) with remaining term, requiring a solid trade offer, perhaps involving a first-round pick (the Blue Jackets have their own and Minnesota’s in this summer’s draft).

- Solid contributors who know how to play in the playoffs and may have expiring contracts, requiring an offer that begins and ends with a mid-round pick, either this summer or next.

Against that backdrop, here are players in each category that Blue Jackets fans should keep in mind heading into Friday (listed alphabetically):

Remaining term

Rickard Rakell, RW, Pittsburgh: After a tough 2023-24, Rakell (29 goals) is on the verge of his first 30-goal season since 2017-18 with Anaheim. The Penguins don't have to move him, but they may be looking to strike while the iron is hot. Rakell, 31, has two years remaining with a \$5 million salary cap hit.

Alex Tuch, RW, Buffalo: Not sure why the Sabres would want to move on from a local product who brings size and scoring to the lineup, but GM Kevyn Adams — a former Blue Jackets player — is looking to change his mix to kick-start a rebuild that's taking too long. Tuch, 28, can become a UFA in the summer of 2026. He carries a \$4.75 million cap hit.

Jared McCann, LW, Seattle: Adding McCann in the 2021 expansion draft was one of the Kraken's top early moves. He peaked at 40 goals in 2022-23, slid to 29 last season and currently has 15 in 62 games. McCann, 28, has two years remaining (at a \$5 million cap hit) before he hits UFA status in 2027.

Expiring term

Kyle Palmieri, RW, New York Islanders: Nobody is quite sure what the suddenly resurgent Islanders are going to do: hold steady, sell or buy. Uncle Lou can keep a secret. If Palmieri is available, he'll be on the move again, as contenders crave steady vets. The 34-year-old has a \$5 million cap hit.

Joel Armia, RW, Montreal: This is a sturdy, solid player who is probably better suited to a third-line role. He's not a big goal producer — Armia's career high was 17, set last season — but he's consistent. He may seem redundant with James van Riemsdyk in Columbus. Armia, 32, has a \$3.4 million cap hit.

Reilly Smith, RW, New York Rangers: Smith has a history of scoring goals, though not consistently and not over the past two years with Pittsburgh and the Rangers. But he has Stanley Cup pedigree, having won it all with Vegas two seasons ago. Smith, 33, comes with a \$5 million salary cap hit.

Brandon Tanev, LW, Seattle: Plays with an edge and can score greasy goals, but not regarded as a big offensive contributor. The type of player who makes a bigger impact in a playoff series (you again?) than in a regular-season game. Tanev, 33, has a \$3.5 million cap hit.

Jason Zucker, LW, Buffalo: If Zucker moves, he'd be joining his fifth team in three seasons, and this would mark the second straight year he moved at the deadline. Crafty, speedy player who can score goals in bunches when he's rolling. Zucker, 33, has a \$5 million cap hit.

[BlueJackets.com / PREVIEW: Blue Jackets look to get back on track vs. Panthers](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – March 7, 2025

Call it a hangover from the Stadium Series. Call it just a tough game that maybe they were due for. Whatever it was, the Blue Jackets didn't have their best stuff Tuesday at Tampa Bay.

The Jackets had their legs but didn't manage the game well, and the end result was a 6-2 loss against one of the top teams in the Eastern Conference that ended Columbus' four-game winning streak.

A deflected shot and a breakaway goal put the Blue Jackets into a 2-0 hole less than two minutes into the game, and after the team found their footing from there, the wheels really came off with a slow start to the second period that allowed the Lightning to extend their lead to 4-1.

Two goals from Zach Werenski kept the Blue Jackets in it, but another mistake in the third – a penalty that led to a Tampa power-play goal that put the game away – was enough to doom the team to a loss.

"We put in some good minutes," Werenski said. "I thought we worked hard for a lot of the game. Definitely had some mistakes in front of Elvis (Merzlikins) that cost us tonight. Not a total dud effort by any means. We played hard, but I think just the positions we put ourselves in, going down 2-0 and 4-1, put them on the power play, there's some shifts in the second we'd probably like to have back.

"But we'll learn from it. We'll move forward. We're in a spot right now where we can't dwell on things for too long. So we'll think about it tonight and then get ready for Florida."

Perhaps the team was due to lose one after coming out of the 4 Nations break red-hot, and perhaps it was hard for the Blue Jackets to get fully engaged after a spectacle unlike any other on Saturday when almost 95,000 people packed Ohio Stadium to see the win over Detroit.

It also could just be that the team on the other side was pretty good, too – Tampa won its 10th in its last 12 games – but for whatever reason, the Blue Jackets just weren't able to catch the Lightning.

"We still had plenty of opportunities, like we had some really good looks to score, it just didn't go in the net," Evason said. "We just didn't have that little extra bite that we've had as of late, and we've got to get that back real quick."

Things don't get any easier tonight, though, as the Blue Jackets go from facing one scorching Florida team to another. Just like the Bolts on Tuesday night, the Panthers enter the game having won nine of their last 11, and the defending champs seem to have found their game nearing the stretch run.

With points at a premium as we near the final quarter of the NHL season, captain Boone Jenner said the Blue Jackets have to get back to their game tonight.

"I don't think we played enough like us tonight," Jenner said in the locker room Tuesday. "I know we have better in this room, and the next one is a bigger one."

Know The Foe: Florida Panthers

Head coach: Paul Maurice (Third season)

Team stats: Goals per game: 3.26 (7th) | Scoring defense: 2.77 (9th) | PP: 23.0 percent (13th) | PK: 80.3 percent (13th)

The narrative: One year after coming up just shy of capturing Lord Stanley's Cup, the Panthers ran it back and got to the top of the mountain last season, beating Edmonton in seven classic games to win

the franchise's first Cup. It was quite an accomplishment for former CBJ assistant GM Bill Zito's squad, and now the challenge becomes trying to repeat. Fellow Floridians Tampa Bay did so in 2020 and '21, so it's possible, and the Panthers still have the stars to do it.

Team leaders: Sam Reinhart inked a long-term deal to stay in Florida after tallying 57 goals last season to place third in the NHL, and he's continued to lead the way with team-high totals of 31 goals (tied for sixth in the league) and 64 points. Matthew Tkachuk follows with a 22-35-57 line but is out with an injury suffered at the 4 Nations Face-Off, while longtime Panther Aleksander Barkov has a 16-40-56 line. Carter Verhaeghe (16-28-44) and Anton Lundell (14-26-40) also top 40 points.

Sergei Bobrovsky looked like the "Bob" we know a season ago, going 36-17-4 in 58 appearances with a 2.37 GAA and .915 save percentage. This year, he's again been one of the top goalies in the league, going 26-13-2 in 41 games with a 2.55 GAA and .906 save percentage.

What's new: The Panthers added a familiar face ahead of the trade deadline, acquiring former Seth Jones over the weekend, and the former CBJ defenseman made his debut Monday vs. Tampa Bay. The injury to Tkachuk could be a major stumbling block for the Panthers' repeat hopes if he's out long term, but Florida still enters the game as one of the hottest teams in the league with a 9-2-0 record in its last 11 games while outscoring teams 39-20.

Trending: The Panthers won all three contests a year ago and downed the Blue Jackets by a 4-3 score in the Jackets' home opener Oct. 15. Columbus has won just three of the 18 contests over the past four seasons (3-12-3).

Former CBJ: Now six years into the seven-year deal he signed with Florida at the end of his CBJ tenure, Bobrovsky captured his elusive Cup ring in the spring. Bought out by the Blue Jackets this summer, Adam Boqvist was with the team for 18 games and had two goals and six points before being placed on waivers and joining the Islanders.

Scratches: Christian Fischer, Jordan Harris, Jack Johnson

Injured reserve: Cole Sillinger (upper body), Kevin Labanc (shoulder), Sean Monahan (upper body), Erik Gudbranson (upper body)

Roster Report: The Blue Jackets flipped van Riemsdyk and Chinakhov at practice Wednesday in the only change expected for tonight's game. Fischer was claimed on waivers today with Mikael Pyyhtia being loaned to Cleveland.

The Numbers Game

Columbus tied a franchise record (2018-19) with its 11th game with at least six goals Tuesday, and the Blue Jackets have at least five in 18 of 61 games this year. The Blue Jackets are first in the NHL with 145 goals at 5-on-5, and their 3.33 goals per game are fifth in the league. ... With two goals Tuesday, Zach Werenski has tied his own single-season CBJ record for defensemen with 20 tallies on the season. Werenski is also tied with Rick Nash for the franchise career record with 258 assists. He has a 17-39-56 line in his last 45 games and has 34 points (9-25-34) in his past 26. His average ice time of 26:56 leads all NHL players, and he's second among league defensemen in goals (20) and second in points (66) on the season. ... Kirill Marchenko has three goals in the last four games and has set a new career high with 24 goals on the season. He is second in the NHL with a plus-32 rating. ... Kent Johnson has 19 points (9-10-19) in the past 17 games, including a six-game point streak, and is third in the NHL in goals scored per 60 minutes at 5-on-5. ... Adam Fantilli has an 11-12-23 line in the last 23 games and points in six straight games. ... James van Riemsdyk has notched a 10-10-20 line in the last 23 games. ... Mathieu Olivier has points in three of the last four games and is one of two NHL players (Ottawa's Brady Tkachuk) with 10-

plus goals and 70 penalty minutes in 2024-25. ... Ivan Provorov has four goals and seven points in the last nine games and notched his 200th career assist Saturday. ... Boone Jenner has seven assists in five games this season since his return from injury. ... Blue Jackets defensemen have 42 goals this season, the most in the NHL, and 154 points, good for second place in the league.

This Day in CBJ History

March 6, 2003: Rick Nash scores the first overtime goal of his career, tallying 2:02 into extra time past Vancouver's Alex Auld to give the Blue Jackets a 5-4 win vs. the Canucks at Nationwide Arena.

BlueJackets.com / Bobrovsky, Panthers shut out Blue Jackets

By George Richards – March 7, 2025

SUNRISE, Fla. -- Sergei Bobrovsky made 16 saves, and the Florida Panthers won their fifth straight game with a 3-0 victory against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Amerant Bank Arena on Thursday.

Bobrovsky got the 423rd win of his career, tying Tony Esposito for 10th in NHL history. It was his fourth shutout of the season and second in his past three starts.

"It is a blessing to play in this league and to have the life I have," Bobrovsky said. "I enjoy every moment I get to put the gear on and get to go out and play, whether it is practice or a game. I have fun with the guys, work for them, and try to be there when they need me. Again, it's a privilege to be part of this team."

As for the company Bobrovsky is keeping on the wins list, Florida coach Paul Maurice said, "Tony Esposito, right? He's from my hometown (Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario), and I need to talk to [Bobrovsky] about that. ... When we were growing up playing street hockey, you were either Ken Dryden or Tony Esposito. Those were the two. The guys who picked first, always picked Tony. That's a pretty good name."

Aleksander Barkov and Sam Reinhart each had a goal and two assists for the Panthers (39-21-3), who have won 10 of 12.

"We had a good first and second period, and we knew lately, our third hasn't been that good," said Barkov, the Florida captain. "We wanted to be a little better. They had a push, but we did a better job. We're happy with that, and it helps us moving forward."

Elvis Merzlikins made 33 saves for the Blue Jackets (30-24-8), who lost their second straight and were outscored 9-2 during their two-game Florida trip. They lost 6-2 at the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday to end a four-game winning streak.

"They did not allow us to get to our game," Columbus coach Dean Evason said. "They played a strong game, smart, obviously. They did a lot of good things; we didn't get in on the forecheck, we could have done more aggressive stuff ... simplify our game a little. We complicated things early, and it kind of fed into how they play the game."

The Panthers had a 69-41 advantage in shot attempts.

"It was good," Maurice said. "We played well tonight. Deserved to win."

The Blue Jackets were 0-for-4 on the power play.

Asked what his team needed to do differently against Bobrovsky, Columbus captain Boone Jenner said, "I don't think we got enough action around him as far as making it difficult on him with screens and rebounds, and getting those secondary chances. I think that's where you can get to teams and kind of wear them down that way."

Reinhart gave Florida a 1-0 lead at 5:58 of the first period with a power-play goal. He took a pass from Barkov at the right hash marks, turned as he settled the puck and sent it over the stick of Merzlikins.

Mackie Samoskevich made it 2-0 on the power play at 6:34 of the second period, scoring from the left of the net on the rebound of a Barkov shot when Merzlikins went low.

“Coming in, we knew we had to be around the net for second chances,” Samoskevich said, “and that’s what happened.”

Barkov scored into an empty net at 17:48 of the third period for the 3-0 final.

NOTES: Reinhart scored his 10th power-play goal of the season, giving him four seasons with double digits in that category for the Panthers. He passed Olli Jokinen for the most such seasons in Florida history. Reinhart also scored his 26th game-winning goal, tying Jonathan Huberdeau and Ekblad for third in Panthers history, and passed Pavel Bure for fifth on the franchise goals list with 153. ... Ekblad had an assist to extend his point streak to five games (six assists). ... Samoskevich had a game-high seven shots on goal and scored for the fourth time in his past seven games. ... Vitek Vanecsek backed up Bobrovsky after being acquired in a trade with the San Jose Sharks on Wednesday. ... Blue Jackets forward Adam Fantilli had a six-game point streak end.

The Hockey News / Columbus Blue Jackets (68 pts) vs. Florida Panthers (79 pts) Game Preview

By Jason Newland – March 7, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets and Florida Panthers are playing for the second time this season. The Panthers won their first meeting in October.

The Blue Jackets go into Florida and will play a red-hot Panthers team. The Cats are 8-2 in the last 10, have won 4 straight, and sit tied with the Toronto Maple Leafs atop the Atlantic Division.

The Jackets lost to the Lightning, ending their four-game winning streak. They'll be looking to get back on the winning side of things. The playoff race is getting extremely tight, and the CBJ will need to continue playing the way they have for the last two months to keep pace.

Panthers Stats

- Power Play – 23.0% - 13th in NHL
- Penalty Kill – 80.3% - 13th in NHL
- Goals For – 202 – 6th – 3.26 GPG – 7th
- Goals Against – 172 – 10th – 2.77 GPG – 9th

Series History vs. The Panthers

- Columbus is 10-13-2 on the road and 26-20-5 in 51 all-time games against the Panthers.
- The Blue Jackets are 0-5-1 in the last 6 games vs. Florida.

Who To Watch For The Panthers

- Sam Reinhart leads the Panthers with 31 goals and 64 points.
- Aleksander Barkov leads the team with 40 assists.
- Sergei Bobrovsky is 26-13-2 with a SV% of .906.
- Newly acquired goalie Vitek Vanecek is 3-10-3 with an .882 SV%.

CBJ Player Notes vs. The Panthers

- James van Riemsdyk has 25 points in 41 career games against the Panthers
- Boone Jenner has 20 points in 33 games against Florida.
- Damon Severson has 14 points in 24 games vs. the Panthers.

Injuries

- Erik Gudbranson (upper body) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 16 (58 Games)
- Sean Monahan (upper body) is on Injured Reserve retroactive to Jan. 7 (20 Games)
- Kevin Labanc (shoulder) is on Injured Reserve on Feb. 21 (5 Games)
- Cole Sillinger is day-to-day with an upper body injury (2 Games)

TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 262

How to Watch & Listen: Tonight's game will be on FanDuel Sports Network. Steve Mears will be on the play-by-play. The radio broadcast will be on 97.1 The Fan, with Bob McElligott behind the mic doing the play-by-play.

The Hockey News / Revisiting Blue Jackets Trade History With The Florida Panthers

By Spencer Lazary – March 7, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets and the Florida Panthers facing off tonight and the 2025 NHL Trade Deadline only 1 day away. Now is a great time to revisit the trade history between the two clubs.

In total, there have been six trades, since the Blue Jackets' expansion year in 2000. Their first trade came on June 22, 2002, and the last one came on March 21, 2022. It is very unlikely that these two teams connect for a trade this deadline. However, this off-season there could be a chance they work out a deal together.

Here's a breakdown of their trade history:

March 21, 2022: (3 Team Trade Including CAR)

CBJ: Tyler Inamoto

FLA: Egor Korshkov & 2022 6th round pick

CAR: Max Domi

October 8, 2020:

CBJ: Cliff Pu

FLA: Markus Nutivaara

March 3, 2010

CBJ: rights to Matt Rust

FLA: Mathieu Roy

October 4, 2002

CBJ: rights to Petr Tenkrat

FLA: Mathieu Biron

June 23, 2002

CBJ: 2002 9th round pick (#263-Sergei Mozyakin)

FLA: 2003 9th round pick (#264-John Hecimovic)

June 22, 2002

CBJ: 2002 1st round pick (#1-Rick Nash) Panthers option to swap 2003 1st round picks (not exercised)

FLA: 2002 1st round pick (#3-Jay Bouwmeester) Panthers option to swap 2003 1st round picks (not exercised)

If you ask any Blue Jackets fan, they will likely say the biggest trade between these two was the draft pick swap at the 2002 NHL draft that landed them Rick Nash. Rightfully so, Nash went on to be the face of the franchise for the entire time the franchise has been in existence.

The Hockey News / Columbus Claims Former Red Wing Christian Fischer

By Jason Newland – March 7, 2025

The Detroit Red Wings put Christian Fischer on waivers yesterday.

Columbus has claimed former Detroit Red Wing Christian Fischer today.

Fischer played in 45 games for Detroit this season and totaled 7 points.

The 2015 2nd round pick has played 522 NHL games and has a total of 137 points.

Don Waddell, per a press release, said, "Christian Fischer brings additional size, versatility and energy to our forward group. He's played in over 500 NHL games, possesses great character and will fit in very well with our team and how we play."

Fischer makes 1,125,000 and will be a UFA after the season.

Look for another move to accommodate the claiming of Fischer, as the CBJ are currently at the maximum roster capacity.

What's Next: Columbus travels to Sunrise, FL, to take on the Panthers on Thursday.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Olivier's Extension Shows Belief in Where Team is Going

By Mark Scheig – March 7, 2025

When GM Don Waddell first took over the Blue Jackets, one of his main jobs out of the gate was to get to know the players on the team. While he knew most of them from afar while with the Carolina Hurricanes, he now had the chance to really get to know them on a daily basis.

Part of Waddell's job was to identify who will be part of the core of the Blue Jackets moving forward. On Wednesday, he signed one of those players to a new contract that will go beyond 2030.

Mathieu Olivier agreed to a six-year extension with an AAV of \$3 million per season. The deal is front loaded in salary and comes with a 10-team no-trade list.

Waddell and the Blue Jackets identified Olivier as a top priority especially given he was set to become UFA after this season. Olivier wanted to stay in Columbus. The two sides came to a fair deal. While the AAV is a little lower, the term is a little higher. Six years shows how much both sides wanted this to work.

The contract also shows how much belief Olivier has in where the Blue Jackets are going in future seasons.

Waddell's Thoughts

Waddell admitted getting calls on Olivier. But given what all he's done for the Blue Jackets in several areas, this contract was a top priority even in the midst of both the Stadium Series and Trade Deadline.

In Waddell's mind, Olivier's game took major steps to get to this point.

"Matthew's taken a big step, not only on the ice in his performance but in the locker room," Waddell said. "He's been one of our key guys who's led us through this charge here, and I've gotten to know him over the year. Obviously, I didn't know him before this year. I knew him as a player, and what he brings to the table, not just offensively but physically, I think he's second in the league in hits this year. He's our most physical player."

"And we just felt that ... I know I got a lot of calls on him, so I knew if this went to free agency, he would be in demand. Everybody's looking for these types of players for the most part, so we just felt that we're comfortable with the term and the AAV, and we're very happy to have him for six years."

Olivier is a special player in one sense. He's not only one of the toughest players in the NHL, he can contribute in other ways. His 12 goals is a sign of the kind of impact he has on games.

"Well, I know one thing: We don't get pushed around at all," Waddell said. "We have a few smaller guys and we're not overly physical. Guys play hard, but Mathieu certainly has stepped up when the time is needed. As the season progresses and that, he probably doesn't have as many fights as some people think he should have because nobody wants to fight him. Let's face it: He's, if not the heavyweight of the league, he's right up there, of course. You want to make sure your skilled players are comfortable with being able to play the way they are capable of playing, and knowing that Mathieu's on the bench or on the ice is just an assurance for our players."

"I think this type of role that he plays and can't forget he's got 12 goals this year too. He's playing fourteen, fifteen minutes a night. He's got a lot of trust in his play. He kills penalties. I think the old days of just having a 12th forward that can only fight, I think those days are gone. I think your tougher players

in the league if you look around the league, most of them all can play pretty well, and that was the important thing. His toughness is obviously great, but Matthew could play the game too, and that's what makes this guy a little more special than some other ones we've valued."

Waddell also opened up on a key concept of his when it comes to trying to keep teams together. When the time comes to discuss contracts, it's all about respect.

"I don't want to speak to the past. But the way I've always operated is that you treat these players with respect," Waddell said. It's not that you cater to them, but you respect them as people and get to know them as people. We just had the mothers trip. The timing maybe wasn't perfect with the outdoor game and the trade deadline, but I thought it was important for me to get there and be around the families. There's a personal side to every decision that is made. Money drives most contracts, but you build relationships out with the players and the families and I truly believe you get the benefit of the doubt. It doesn't always mean you're going to keep everybody, but I think it's important to know them as a player, but respect them as people."

Olivier's Thoughts

It was always Olivier's desire to stay in Columbus. The way he's grown as a person and player after being acquired in a trade from the Nashville Predators will always stick out for him.

Olivier called his new contract a humbling experience.

"It's a really good day for my family. Securing some years here is something I'm grateful for, and I'm truly humbled to sign that contract and to be able to stay in Columbus for years to come."

Olivier liked what he saw from the door. That love for the team and city only grew with time.

"It was definitely part of my journey and the process of becoming a steady NHL player," Olivier said. "I thought the first day I got to Columbus, I liked everything about it – the guys in the room, I liked the city. A couple of guys brought me into the city for an OSU game and that really opened my eyes to a bunch of stuff. Then, it just kept getting better and better as we stayed here. I couldn't be more fortunate than to stick around in a great city like Columbus for some years here."

Perhaps what's most exciting from Olivier's perspective is the chance to win. The Blue Jackets are in the thick of the playoff race now. There is a strong belief the team is on the right path for much more. That helped him make the decision to stay.

"That was part of my intention, as well, for wanting to stay here is I believe in what we're doing," Olivier said. "The last two years we've been at the bottom of the East, but I knew that we had some pieces that could make it work eventually, and it feels like this year ... we were turning a corner. We're making a really ... a realistic push to make the playoffs here, which is our goal. I couldn't be more proud of our group and the way we've been playing this year, and to me, it's kind of a no-brainer to want to ... I started out a couple years ago and went through the trenches with these guys, and now it's starting to pay off. And to me, that's something that's really important. That's something that's very cherished personally but also as a team."

Olivier Wants More

Now that the contract is secured, Olivier will turn his attention to his continued growth as a player while helping the Blue Jackets get to the next level. He says his biggest area of growth since arriving in Columbus has centered around his identity.

"I think I've developed a lot of stuff around my identity as a hockey player, which everyone knows I'm a physical guy that can stand up for my teammates. I hit, block shots, but I feel like the biggest growth

that I had as a hockey player was really just developing everything else around that and trying to make myself as valuable to this team as I can and then contribute in any way that I can. As the year's gone on, I've gotten more and more opportunity and really appreciate that. I was able to keep developing what I wanted to over the years. Right now it's working well. I mentioned this before. It's a day in, day out thing and every day is a new (day). You got to start over. So that optic and the way to look at it doesn't change."

Olivier might be an enforcer, but today's game mandates enforcers also be good at hockey. While he says it's been like that for a while in today's NHL, he knows he still needs to evolve more.

"There's a narrative going around guys that fight that some of them can't play which is not true. Those are all good hockey players now in this league and everyone tries to play the role that they've been given. That's something that I've always wanted to do was to keep evolving the stuff around it and become a very complete hockey player. This year, I've taken a step in that direction and I intend to keep doing that as my career goes on here in Columbus."

Final Thoughts

Olivier joined Damon Severson and became the second Blue Jacket to have a contract go past 2030. Players like Olivier are hard to find. That's why Waddell made it a top priority to sign him.

Just knowing Olivier is around is a big deal for the Blue Jackets. Teams know they will have to answer to him if the situation warrants.

Wednesday's contract reinforced belief in what the Blue Jackets are doing under Waddell. Gone are the days of everyone wanting to jump ship. Now are the days of players choosing Columbus for everything it has to offer.

Olivier is the latest example of a player being happy with the Blue Jackets. His signature on his new contract proved it.

1st Ohio Battery / Game Day #62: With Trade Deadline Looming, Blue Jackets Face Bobrovsky, Panthers As Road Trip Continues

By Ed Francis – March 7, 2025

Could this be the last game with this version of the Columbus Blue Jackets?

With the NHL's trade deadline Friday at 3 p.m. and the Blue Jackets in the market to add for a playoff push, Thursday night's game against the Florida Panthers could be the last before Columbus bolsters their lineup for the stretch.

President of Hockey Operations and General Manager Don Waddell said Wednesday that one player who won't be moved at the deadline is defenseman Ivan Provorov. The pending unrestricted free agent has been key to the Blue Jackets blueline, and Waddell is on record as saying he doesn't think it would be fair to take him off the team — even if that means the risk of losing him via free agency after the season.

Still, the Blue Jackets are actively looking to add a winger, so the 12 players in the lineup Thursday may not be the same 12 in for Columbus' next game, a big showdown with the New York Rangers on Sunday.

First thing first though: the game Thursday against Florida gives Columbus a chance to get back into the winning column after their 6-2 loss Tuesday night to Tampa Bay. The Blue Jackets, possibly coming off a Stadium Series hangover, seemed to have their energy but were sloppy with the puck in all three zones as their four-game winning streak came to an end.

The game — as they all will be from here out — are big in the standings. The Blue Jackets maintain the top wild card spot right now but are just a point ahead of the Ottawa Senators and New York Rangers, who are tied for the second (and final) spot. The Detroit Red Wings are just one point behind them, with a bevy of other teams following.

Here's what else to know as Columbus continues their four-game roadie:

- **RE: FLORIDA**

It's another hot opponent for the Blue Jackets, as the Panthers enter Thursday having won eight of their last ten. That includes four straight, with wins over the Oilers and Lightning included. ... This is the fourth game of a five-game homestand for Florida. ... Sergei Bobrovsky starts in net. The former Blue Jacket is having (to no surprise) another great season. He's 26-13-2 in 41 starts with a 2.55 goals against average and .906 save percentage. He's also given up two goals or less in four of his last five starts.

- **ELVIS BETWEEN THE PIPES**

Opposing Bobrovsky will be Elvis Merzlikins. He allowed five goals in the 6-2 loss to Tampa Bay on Tuesday, but Merzlikins also faced 39 shots and several of the goals were the result of turnovers or sloppy play from the Blue Jackets skaters. With two days off after tonight, giving Elvis a chance to quickly bounce back seems like the right call.

- **ONE GOAL AWAY**

With two goals Tuesday, Zach Werenski tied a career high with 20 goals on the season. That also tied his own franchise record for goals in a season from a defenseman. The only defenseman with more is Cale Makar, at 22.

- **LINEUPS CHANGES & PROJECTIONS**

The second and fourth lines will look a little different Thursday night, and that's because James van Riemsdyk and Yegor Chinakhov appear to be switching lines. JVR played briefly with Boone Jenner and Kent Johnson last Thursday after a first period injury to Cole Sillinger forced some shuffling, and the results were positive. Head coach Dean Evason is trying that again, which puts Chinakhov to the fourth line to play alongside Joseph LaBate and Sean Kuraly. No other lineup changes are expected.

1st Ohio Battery / Columbus Blue Jackets Add Winger Christian Fischer Off Waivers From Red Wings

By Ed Francis – March 7, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets added winger Christian Fischer off waivers from the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday, giving the team another bottom-six option as they continue a playoff push.

Fischer, 28, was waived by the Red Wings on Wednesday in his second season with the team. He had one goal and six assists for seven points in 45 games with the team this season, while averaging 11:09 per game.

His best season came with the Arizona Coyotes (now Utah Hockey Club) in his rookie year of 2017-18, when he had 15 goals and 18 assists. He came close to that in the 2022-23, also with the Coyotes, when he scored 13 goals and had 14 assists.

“Christian Fischer brings additional size, versatility and energy to our forward group,” said General Manager Don Waddell. “He’s played in over 500 NHL games, possesses great character and will fit in very well with our team and how we play.”

The 6'2", 210lb Fischer primarily plays right wing, and adds depth to the Blue Jackets. He carries a cap hit of \$1.1 million and will be an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season.

Fischer played against the Blue Jackets twice just last week, including 5:09 in Saturday's Stadium Series battle.

The NHL's trade deadline is set for 3 p.m. Friday, with the Blue Jackets still expected to be in the market to add a middle-six winger.

QUICK THOUGHTS:

Adding Fischer probably isn't going to move the needle, but the Blue Jackets have already been pleasantly surprised once this season via the waiver wire (Dante Fabbro) and this is a move that doesn't cost Columbus any assets. Fischer will likely bounce back and forth between the press box as a healthy scratch and a limited role in the bottom six, but he is an NHL veteran of over 500 games and Don Waddell has done nothing yet that hasn't worked out.

1st Ohio Battery / FLA 3, CBJ 0: Blue Jackets Drop Second Straight Game, Blanked By Bobrovsky, Panthers

By Ed Francis – March 7, 2025

Another tough night for the Columbus Blue Jackets in the Sunshine State.

Two days after losing 6-2 to the Tampa Bay Lightning, the Blue Jackets were shut out for just the fourth time this season Thursday night, falling 3-0 to Sergei Bobrovsky and the Florida Panthers.

"You've got to fight for every inch down the stretch," said James van Riemsdyk. "Those are two teams that have been successful the last few years."

Despite the loss, Elvis Merzlikins had an impressive night in net. He stopped 33 of Florida's 35 shots and let the Blue Jackets hang around into the final minutes of the game despite Columbus failing to get on the scoreboard.

"He was fantastic," said head coach Dean Evason. "He definitely gave us a chance."

Both goals allowed came on the power play, where the Panthers had five opportunities for the game. The Blue Jackets, meanwhile, went 0-for-4 on the man-advantage and had just three shots on goal in the 7:51 they were up a man.

"We couldn't get enough looks or enough momentum going," said captain Boone Jenner of the team's power play.

Here's how the action went down Thursday night in Sunrise — one day before the NHL's trade deadline:

1st Period:

(5:58 — FLA Goal): Sam Reinhart gets his team-leading 32nd goal, this one on the power play for the Panthers. A good feed from Aleksander Barkov to Reinhart, who does a quick spin move and beats Merzlikins to give Florida a 1-0 lead.

(19:03 — Olivier Fights Gadjovich): Columbus' new \$18 million dollar man, Mathieu Olivier, drops the gloves at center ice with Florida's Jonah Gadjovich. He had a battle with Joseph LaBate earlier in the frame, making it Gadjovich's second fight of the evening. There wasn't a clear winner in this one, but Olivier probably would have gotten the win via decision.

2nd Period:

(6:33 — FLA Goal): Florida picks up their second man-advantage goal of the game. Barkov's shot from the point has all kinds of traffic in front of it. Merzlikins makes the initial save but gives up a rebound and Mackie Samoskevich is right there to put it away and extend the Panthers lead to 2-0.

3rd Period:

(17:48 — FLA Goal): Make it a three-point night for Barkov, who gets an empty-net goal to add to his pair of assists.

- The second period was brutal for the Blue Jackets. They had just three shots on goal and the shot attempts were 28-5 in favor of the Panthers. Columbus' expected goals for the middle frame tonight per NaturalStatTrick was just 0.17.
- The shutout ended six-game point streaks for both Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson.

- Boone Jenner had a great night at the faceoff dot, winning 14 of 18 draws. His stay at center may be temporary, but he continues to do well at this aspect of the position.

Up Next:

The Blue Jackets are halfway through their four-game road trip. Next up: the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden. It's a 6 p.m. start Sunday.

The Athletic / NHL commissioner Gary Bettman says U.S. tariffs could be 'painful' for league if Canadian dollar drops

By Lauren Merola – March 7, 2025

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman called the current political tensions between the United States and Canada “really unfortunate,” during an interview on CNBC’s “Squawk Box,” and said the potential economic fallout could negatively affect the league.

After confirming that 25 percent of the league’s revenue comes from the seven franchises in Canada, Bettman said any impact on the Canadian economy will affect the rest of the league, regardless of where teams reside.

“All players, no matter which country they play in, get paid in U.S. dollars,” Bettman said. “So if the impact of the tariffs is to see the Canadian dollar drop relative to the U.S. dollar, it will make it more difficult and more painful.

“We have revenue sharing, but a lot of our Canadian clubs do quite well, but that’s going to be impacted by what happens with the Canadian dollar. We’re hoping — and I’m hoping — that this is a moment in time and both countries find a way to work through this.”

On Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump imposed new tariffs on neighboring nations — 25 percent on all imports from Canada and Mexico, as well as an additional 10 percent on imports from China. Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called the trade war “very dumb” in a televised address, saying Canada would “relentlessly fight” to protect its economy. Trump then threatened more drastic measures in response to any new Canadian tariffs on social media.

Bettman said he has not engaged in conversation with the Trump administration.

While Bettman voiced concerns about the economic impact tariffs could have on the league’s future financial stability, he did note that the league is currently in good financial shape. This season, Bettman expects the league to exceed \$7 billion in mixed-currency revenue and \$260 million in sponsorship revenue, but added that sponsors are dealing with a lot of uncertainty and the current unknowns are “going to cause some difficulties that are going to have to be adjusted for.”

And yet, Bettman said the league’s financial numbers have never been stronger.

“We’re in a good place, because the game has never been better,” Bettman said. “We saw that particularly with the 4 Nations tournament and what interest that generated.”

During the U.S. and Canada’s first meeting in 4 Nations Face-Off — an international hockey tournament between the U.S., Canada, Finland and Sweden held in place of an All-Star Game this season — fans at the game in Montreal booed “The Star Spangled Banner” in protest of Trump’s repeated suggestion that Canada become the 51st state of the U.S., past references to Trudeau as governor and proposed tariffs.

It was not the first time Canadian fans booed the U.S. anthem in protest of Trump’s rhetoric. Boos also rained down during the U.S. anthem ahead of the Toronto Raptors matchup with the LA Clippers in early February.

The Athletic / NHL rumblings: Rantanen talk heats up, plus updates on Nelson, Ferraro, Canadiens and more

By Pierre LeBrun – March 7, 2025

The Athletic has live coverage of the 2025 NHL trade deadline.

So we finally have at least one bit of clarity on Mikko Rantanen: He's not signing an extension with the Carolina Hurricanes by Friday's 3 p.m. ET trade deadline.

Multiple league sources confirmed Thursday morning that Rantanen's camp has made that decision and relayed it to the Hurricanes over the past few days, which explains why Carolina has reached back out to teams with interest in the pending unrestricted free agent to properly suss out the trade market.

One important note: The Canes as of Thursday morning had not given permission to teams to speak directly to Rantanen's camp, led by Andy Scott, about a possible extension. For the moment, that seems to rule out a sign-and-trade scenario, but that's always subject to change.

But it also makes sense. If Rantanen isn't ready to make a decision on Carolina's contract extension offer because he's just been with the team only six weeks or so (minus the two weeks at 4 Nations), why would he suddenly be ready to sign an extension with another team he hasn't even played with yet if he gets traded?

And it's important to reiterate that the Canes aren't 100 percent trading Rantanen. It will all come down to comparing the trade offers on the table for Rantanen versus the value in keeping him as a rental in an effort to go win a Stanley Cup this season.

Colleague Chris Johnston reported Wednesday evening that the Dallas Stars, Vegas Golden Knights and Florida Panthers were among the teams that have shown interest in Rantanen. And yes, there are more teams in there as well.

The Stars have the cap room via long-term injured reserve, the Golden Knights have been working the market for another winger and the Panthers still have ample cap room thanks to Matthew Tkachuk being on LTIR for the rest of the regular season.

The Panthers are mostly looking at a depth forward, but this would be on-brand for one of the most aggressive GMs in the league in Bill Zito. Same with Kelly McCrimmon in Vegas, who shows no fear. The Stars, my September pick to win the Stanley Cup this season, are definitely all in, but can they make the pieces work with Carolina to justify it?

And that's what will be the most interesting part of all if the Canes do indeed pull the trigger on a trade. What pieces can they get back from a Cup contender that would compare to having traded away Martin Necas and Jack Drury to Colorado on Jan. 24? And also, what pieces can they get back in a trade that trumps what Rantanen can give them the rest of this season?

Perhaps the idea of losing Rantanen for nothing on July 1 ends up trumping all. We're about to find out, either way.

Isles' Nelson decisions

As of late Wednesday night, things were still in flux on the New York Islanders' Brock Nelson. It still wasn't 100 percent that Islanders GM Lou Lamoriello was committed to trading him, according to league sources.

His team woke up Thursday morning four points out of a playoff spot but seventh out of the seven teams battling for those two wild-card spots. All things being equal, it feels to me like Lamoriello's probably bringing himself toward the trade route. But I also don't believe Lamoriello has given up trying to sign Nelson. He will try to the end.

Teams I believe have some interest include the Winnipeg Jets, Toronto Maple Leafs, Colorado Avalanche and New Jersey Devils (especially with Jack Hughes out for the season). I also never rule out Florida and Vegas.

Sharks listening on Ferraro

The San Jose Sharks are listening on Mario Ferraro, 26, who has one more year on his deal next season at a \$3.25 million cap hit. Pretty reasonable indeed. He's a UFA when his deal expires in July 2026.

Listening doesn't mean they'll move him, but given the small number of D on the trade market, the Sharks are seeing what comes their way.

It just so happens that the Edmonton Oilers are in need of a defense addition.

Canadiens' message to players

The Montreal Canadiens continue to listen on pending UFAs David Savard and Joel Armia, but my sense is that they don't plan on moving both. Maybe one if a team steps up, but not both.

They don't want to send that kind of message to their players, who are fighting hard to stay in the playoff race. And I mean, the last thing the Habs need is another fourth-round draft pick, so when I say a team would have to step up to grab Armia or Savard, they really would have to.

In the meantime, Habs GM Kent Hughes has continued to make calls looking around for a potential hockey deal — a player (did I say center?) who could help them now and longer-term, as well. Easier said than done in-season. Those are more apt to happen in June. But those conversations happening now could help plant seeds for the offseason.

Utah getting business done

Utah Hockey Club wasn't messing around Wednesday night, wrapping up extensions for Ian Cole, Alex Kerfoot and Karel Vemejlka.

That was a really important part of business done with the goalie, who was pending UFA. Good job by agent Ryan Barnes getting security with the five years. The goalie position is so volatile right now that the term is huge. But I also think GM Bill Armstrong did really well with a \$4.75 million cap hit — a somewhat cheaper rate than what we're seeing lately with No. 1 goalies all signing for above \$5 million.

There are some good vibes in Utah right now. They're playing meaningful games in March, and the franchise isn't a seller for the first time in forever. Watch out for them this summer. They'll have cap room and will be eager to add.

The Athletic / Full analysis of every NHL trade deadline deal from The Athletic's experts

By Shayna Goldman – March 7, 2025

With the NHL trade deadline on Friday, Shayna Goldman of The Athletic is providing instant analysis on the major moves as they happen.

The Athletic has live coverage of the 2025 NHL trade deadline.

Deadline resources: Trade board | Trade grades

Avalanche pay big price for Nelson

To Avalanche: F Brock Nelson (50 percent retained), F William Dufour

To Islanders: First-round pick in 2026 or 2027, conditional third-round pick in 2028, F Calum Ritchie, D Oliver Kylington (then traded to Anaheim Ducks for future considerations)

Years of buying or standing pat at the deadline wore on the Islanders, who have been in the mushy middle for far too long. And the team seemed destined to finish there once again this season, because the Islanders are too good to finish in the basement of the standings but have too many injuries to make a real playoff push.

The decision to move on from a franchise cornerstone is never easy. But the Islanders did what was necessary and got an absolute haul back for Brock Nelson. Adding a first-rounder and Calum Ritchie is a really strong start to a much-needed retool.

Centers are never cheap this time of year, and Colorado wasn't the only team in need of help down the middle. But Nelson is worth every penny. He is an elite 2C and was the best option on the trade market this year. His scoring has trended down this season on Long Island but there really aren't any red flags under the hood (except for the Islanders' power play). Nelson is a clutch goal-scorer, an excellent puck-mover and a reliable forechecker. And unlike the Av's current 2C, Casey Mittelstadt, he is sound in his own zone and can be counted on to retrieve pucks and break the puck out.

This is the upgrade the Avalanche needed in order to contend with top contenders in the West — and in the process, management stopped some of their rivals, such as the Winnipeg Jets, from adding someone of Nelson's caliber.

Wild, Bruins swap forwards

To Wild: F Justin Brazeau

To Bruins: F Marat Khusnutdinov, F Jakub Lauko, 2026 sixth-round pick

Justin Brazeau started to make a name for himself last year in Boston. He was an efficient scorer in a limited role late in the regular season. And then in the playoffs, he stood out a bit more at five-on-five with a 58 percent expected goal rate and 3-2 scoring edge in his five-on-five minutes. But he didn't carry enough of that level into this season, which spelled the end of his tenure with the Bruins. The team needs a quick retool, which means moving out any expendable pending unrestricted free agents.

The Wild add size and a much-needed right-handed shot to their lineup with Brazeau. And their prospect pool is pretty deep, which gives management some leeway to move out Marat Khusnutdinov.

While Khusnutdinov isn't a game-breaking prospect — Scott Wheeler ranked him No. 7 in the Wild's pipeline and projects him to be a third-liner — there is untapped potential. A 22-year-old with third-line potential is what the Bruins should be targeting in exchange for a 27-year-old bottom-six forward, considering how much this team needs an infusion of youth. While he is a restricted free agent this summer, he will probably be a cost-effective signing. There is a familiarity factor with Jakub Lauko, who can help fill out the lineup with the Bruins moving on from a couple of roster mainstays up front.

Rangers flip pick for Soucy

To Rangers: D Carson Soucy

To Canucks: 2025 third-round pick (initially from Sharks)

It's not surprising the Rangers were in the market for defense after trading Ryan Lindgren. New York acquired Calvin de Haan in that trade, but there is a pretty big gap in usage between the two. With the Avalanche, de Haan averaged less than 15 minutes a game, which has increased by about a minute in New York. Lindgren, on the other hand, averaged almost 20 minutes per game with the Rangers. Instead of putting more on the plate of K'Andre Miller or Urho Vaakanainen, management looked elsewhere for some top-four help.

Soucy's size and experience likely attracted the Rangers, and since he is signed through next season, he isn't a rental. But the real question is whether he can rebound outside of Vancouver. After handling a difficult role well with the Canucks in 2023-24, his game deteriorated this year. The Rangers might hope that reuniting him with Will Borgen, his primary partner in 2022-23 with the Kraken, will get him back on track.

Soucy's decline and Marcus Pettersson's arrival made Soucy expendable in Vancouver. Moving him opened up \$3.25 million in cap space. And the return, the Sharks' 2025 third-rounder, could help this team start reloading for next year.

Smith returns to Golden Knights

To Golden Knights: F Reilly Smith (50 percent retained by Rangers)

To Rangers: F Brendan Brisson, 2025 third-round pick (initially from Sharks)

The Golden Knights reacquiring Reilly Smith makes a ton of sense. Vegas already knows what he brings to the table and where best to deploy him (likely alongside another original "Golden Misfit" in William Karlsson, who should return from injury soon) — and maybe that will help reignite his transition game, which trended down a bit over the last couple of seasons. Smith isn't a prolific scorer, but he can create some scoring chances off the rush and be a reliable forechecker for a team's middle-six. He is solid defensively and disruptive on the penalty kill, and can be trusted in tough minutes.

Vegas doesn't need to do a ton this deadline. The team has strength down the middle and on the back end. But their winger depth has dwindled over the last couple of seasons, so this low-key add should help solidify the position.

The Golden Knights have no issue sending out future assets. Will it bite them eventually? Maybe, but that's a later problem for a team that prioritizes its current window above all else. It's not like Vegas' past high picks have been home runs, anyway.

The Rangers, on the other hand, could use more up-and-coming talent like Brendan Brisson. The Sharks' third-round pick has some value, too, whether used as a pick or trade asset. This should help New York reload for next year.

Panthers add depth with Sturm

To Panthers: F Nico Sturm, 2027 seventh-round pick

To Ducks: 2026 fourth-round pick

The Florida Panthers have a knack for spotting low-key supporting talent that can help accent their star-studded core. Nico Sturm is exactly that. He isn't a flashy name or a needle-mover in his own right, but he is a really good depth addition. He hits many of the notes most playoff teams look for — he is solid defensively, physical, has playoff experience and brings an element of versatility to the lineup as a center. He can play a gritty game and chip in goals here and there. This all checks out for the Panthers for the price of a fourth-rounder. As for the Sharks, moving out pending unrestricted free agents for future assets is the name of the game.

Devils acquire Dumoulin from Ducks

To Devils: D Brian Dumoulin (50 percent retained by Ducks)

To Ducks: 2025 second-round pick, F Herman Träff

Brian Dumoulin is the kind of depth defenseman contenders generally look for to shore up their blue line. He fits on a third pair, is fine defensively and can help move play out of his own zone. He was overexposed in Anaheim in tougher minutes than he should be tasked with, without much two-way support around him. So, getting out of that environment should help stabilize his game. But if the Devils want to maximize him, the coaches should shelter him away from top competition.

A second-round pick for Dumoulin at 50 percent retention is a good return for Anaheim. It's just a little steep for the Devils, especially considering their current situation. With injuries to Jonas Siegenthaler and Dougie Hamilton, New Jersey needs a stopgap on the back end until the team gets healthier. But with the Jack Hughes situation in mind, should management have spent this much on a stopgap? The focus should be on either bargain-bin rentals or longer-term fits.

Predators swap Novak, Schenn for Bunting

To Predators: F Michael Bunting, 2026 fourth-round pick

To Penguins: F Tommy Novak, D Luke Schenn

This is the most puzzling trade so far, especially from the Nashville Predators' perspective. Michael Bunting has had a positive impact on the Pittsburgh Penguins' expected goal generation at five-on-five relative to his teammates, and his zone entries and forechecking contribute to that. He has also been a reliable power-play scorer for Pittsburgh this season.

It just seems like an odd choice to sell low on Tommy Novak in exchange for that. Novak unquestionably took a step back this season — his scoring is down and so is his zone entry rate and his efficiency. While he hasn't been as active in the rush this season, he still has had a positive impact on the Predators' expected goal creation this season, thanks to his puck retrievals, zone exits and forechecking.

On the flip side, it's a solid addition for the Penguins, who should target any reclamation projects in their 20s. Novak's cap hit is pretty reasonable, and there is real bounce-back potential.

The Luke Schenn part of this deal is more perplexing unless the Penguins intend to flip him again before the deadline. Playoff teams generally are interested in veteran defensive defensemen such as Schenn, so there could be a market for him with salary retention. Until that happens, this trade feels unfinished for Pittsburgh.

Lightning swing big for Gourde, Bjorkstrand

To Lightning: F Yanni Gourde (50 percent retained by Kraken, 25 percent retained by Red Wings), RW Oliver Bjorkstrand, D Kyle Aucoin, 2026 fifth-round pick

To Kraken: F Michael Eyssimont, 2026 first-round pick (Lightning), 2027 first-round pick (Lightning), 2026 fifth-round pick

To Red Wings: 2025 conditional fourth-round pick

The Lightning came into deadline week with one clear need: forward depth. There is a hole on the right side of the second line, and around Nick Paul on the third line. Enter Yanni Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand.

Gourde's defensive strengths and disruptive play are exactly what the Lightning's third line needs. As a center, he adds more positional flexibility to the lineup if needed. Bjorkstrand's two-way game — from his ability to retrieve pucks and transition up the ice, to his shot volume in the offensive zone — will fit anywhere in the top-nine. The most perfect landing spot may be the second line alongside Anthony Cirelli and Brandon Hagel.

Draft picks are more valuable to the Lightning as assets than actual picks, considering where this team is in its contention cycle. The Lightning have an elite core that is firing on all cylinders and also some really high-end supporting talent, so the focus should be on maximizing that group while they still can to extend the window. Getting top-10 protection is key here, too.

Collecting future assets makes sense for the Kraken, and those first-rounders may be more valuable in 2026 and 2027. Seattle leveraged their cap space to better the return, and can start planning for next season after falling short this year. The Red Wings, on the other hand, add a fourth-rounder for some salary retention. It doesn't necessarily have to be a sign of the team selling — it's just a way to gain another asset, since so many non-playoff teams are already without retention slots.

Vanecek gives Panthers their backup

To Panthers: G Vitek Vanecek

To Sharks: F Patrick Giles

After moving Spencer Knight, the Panthers needed more support in net. While Sergei Bobrovsky is undoubtedly the No. 1 goaltender in Florida, goaltending is volatile and injuries happen, so it helps to have a reliable backup in Vitek Vanecek. Knight was exactly that this year, with nine goals saved above expectations in 23 appearances.

His departure made Chris Driedger the new No. 2 behind Bobrovsky. While he showed promise in Florida in 2021, injuries derailed his career. He got back on track with the Coachella Valley Firebirds in the AHL last year, but has struggled with a .878 save percentage in 20 games with the Charlotte Checkers this season. That isn't close to Knight's caliber, which helped balance out some up-and-down play from Bobrovsky this year.

So it makes sense why the Panthers wanted another goalie in the system. The Panthers have the defensive structure to support Vanecek, and the acquisition cost was reasonable since they could absorb his entire cap hit. But Vanecek comes with question marks. Considering his environment in San Jose, it's hard to hold this season against him, but he also regressed in New Jersey in 2023-24 after an impressive 2022-23 season. And his short playoff history is another concern. There is definitely some risk here, but the Panthers should be able to manage it in what will likely be a somewhat limited role.

Oilers address depth need with Frederic

To Oilers: F Trent Frederic (50 percent retained by Devils), F Max Jones, F Petr Hauser

To Bruins: 2025 second-round pick, 2026 fourth-round pick, D Max Wenner

To Devils: F Shane LaChance

While there is a path to the Boston Bruins making the playoffs, management has to be realistic about their trajectory. The Bruins have to take a step back out of the playoff picture and start preparing for next season. Trading Trent Frederic was a step in the right direction. It can't be their only move, but it's a fine start. The return wasn't incredible but it was never going to be for Frederic, especially with his injury status.

Frederic should help the Oilers address their most pressing area of need. Yes, their goaltending is pretty chaotic and unreliable. But this team needs to upgrade their forward depth to give their goalies more goal support, and add on defense first.

Frederic brings some snarl, size and forechecking to Edmonton. He adds an element of versatility to the bottom-six, and the team could always experiment with him higher in the lineup if they need a spark. It would help to get him up to speed in the regular season, but the worst-case scenario sees him staying on LTIR until the playoffs and buying the team a bit more cap flexibility. The cap situation, and the fact that the Oilers didn't give up a lot here, gives them leeway to add more.

The Devils leveraged their cap space well to gain an asset in Shane Lachance — other playoff teams should take note since the Blackhawks, Sharks and Predators don't have any retention slots to offer.

Jones dealt to Panthers

To Panthers: D Seth Jones (26 percent retained by Blackhawks), 2026 fourth-round pick

To Blackhawks: 2026 or 2027 first-round pick, G Spencer Knight

Two things can be true. Seth Jones can be a capable defender on a contender, outside of Chicago. And he may never be worth what the Blackhawks spent to acquire him, or signed him for. It's hard to separate the player from the contract.

In Chicago, he was over-leveraged as a No. 1 with very little support around him. And he is in the wrong age range for a rebuilding team like the Blackhawks; Jones will likely be in his mid-to-late 30s by the time this team is a contender again.

A 2026 first-rounder is valuable to the Blackhawks as draft capital or a trade asset. In Spencer Knight, the team may have found its goalie of the future. Playing in Chicago will be a wake-up call for Knight, who has benefited from the Panthers' defensive structure. But it's an opportunity to be the No. 1, which he wouldn't have been in Florida anytime soon.

As for Jones, his move to the Panthers is a chance to show what he has in a more stable environment. Despite all of the challenges in Chicago, he still showed a lot of skill with the puck, from his puck retrievals and breakouts to his ability to jump into the rush. That is exactly what the Panthers need to kick their top-four up a notch. The rising cap helps make his cap hit, which the Blackhawks retained a bit of, more manageable. If Jones can play at the caliber of a No. 2 or No. 3, it should age better over the next couple of seasons.

Wild hope to unlock Nyquist

To Wild: F Gustav Nyquist (50 percent retained by Predators)

To Predators: 2026 second-round pick

Last year, Gustav Nyquist scored 75 points at a rate of 3.13 points per 60. This year, his pace had dropped down to 1.25. After helping facilitate play on a hot top line with Filip Forsberg and Ryan O'Reilly, Nyquist's offensive value has plummeted in Nashville.

While the scoring numbers represent a red flag, there are some positive signs below the surface — from his effectiveness in all three zones, as tracked by Corey Sznajder, to a lowly 6.15 on-ice shooting percentage.

While the Wild should not expect to unlock last year's scoring heights from Nashville, there is more left in the tank than this season shows. He should provide some support to a forward group weakened by injury. But maybe the best value he can bring is stability on the penalty kill.

The Predators leveraged their cap space well to get a second-rounder for Nyquist — the fact that it's in 2026, considering some of the weaknesses in this year's class, is another win.

Lindgren dealt to Avalanche

To Avalanche: D Ryan Lindgren (50 percent retained by Rangers), F Jimmy Vesey, D Hank Kampf

To Rangers: 2025 second-round pick, 2025 fourth-round pick, D Calvin de Haan, F Juuso Parssinen

Ryan Lindgren's game declined in New York over the last couple of seasons, despite having the support of Adam Fox on his right. Injuries weighed him down, and he wasn't a fit for Peter Laviolette's taxing system.

With that in mind, it makes sense why the Rangers hesitated to commit to Lindgren long-term last summer. And it makes even more sense for management to reclaim some value on the heart-and-soul defender before he hit unrestricted free agency, especially with their playoff odds (and Fox's injury) in mind.

Considering some of the risk the Avalanche are taking on, the price for Lindgren is a bit high. But Colorado should be able to maximize his value here. Unlike in New York, he won't have to play first-pair minutes or against top competition. If the Avs can help Lindgren simplify his game to play to his strengths, he should be a stable bottom-four option.

Jimmy Vesey is a hard-working forward who can add some jump to the Avs' bottom-six, which could use reinforcements. Juuso Parssinen, on the other hand, is a reclamation project worth betting on down the stretch.

Sharks flip Granlund, Ceci to Stars

To Stars: F Mikael Granlund, D Cody Ceci

To Sharks: 2025 first-round pick, 2025 conditional third-round pick

After a disastrous experience in Pittsburgh, Mikael Granlund completely rebuilt his value in San Jose. He played big minutes with the Sharks, including on the power play, which helped get his offensive game back on track. There are still some weaknesses, including his defense. Still, it's tricky to isolate how much of that falls on the player or the environment, considering the team around him and his usage against top offensive talent. The Stars have a lot more structure and support to mask those weaknesses. So as long as his game doesn't diminish in lesser minutes, the Stars added a versatile forward to bolster the middle-six in Tyler Seguin's absence.

The Cody Ceci acquisition is a lot more suspect. Like with Granlund, the environment and workload have to be accounted for this year's defensive struggles. Then again, he has a longer history of them — including on a contender last year in Edmonton. The Stars' blue line, especially with Miro Heiskanen

sidelined, is an area of weakness, and Ceci only adds to it. While he likely won't play as meaningful a role when Heiskanen returns, the Stars still have to hope he won't burn them in the playoffs.

Granlund and Ceci both came to San Jose as reclamation projects, and they managed to move them in exchange for a first-rounder without any salary retention. That is a home run for the rebuilding Sharks.

Pettersson moves to Canucks

To Canucks: D Marcus Pettersson, F Drew O'Connor

To Penguins: 2025 conditional first-round pick, F Danton Heinen, D Vincent Desharnais, F Melvin Fernstrom

In a surprising turn of events, the Canucks quickly moved the most valuable part of the J.T. Miller return within hours of the initial trade. Vancouver had the right idea, because that pick was more valuable to them as a trade asset. But using it to add a pending UFA defenseman was a choice (even with management's plans to extend him in mind).

Marcus Pettersson isn't a flashy defenseman, or even a play-driver. But he is a stabilizer in his own zone who can help push play out of the defensive zone. That makes him a fit for the Canucks, just at a high cost before the market was even set.

In the process, the Canucks added cheaper depth in Drew O'Connor and moved out Vincent Desharnais' contract, which were solid bits of business.

The Penguins, on the other hand, maximized the value of a pending unrestricted free agent in exchange for a first-rounder. That should help this team in the long run.

Miller to Rangers solves a problem

To Rangers: F J.T. Miller, D Erik Brannstrom, D Jackson Dorrington

To Canucks: 2025 conditional first-round pick, F Filip Chytil, D Victor Mancini

More than anything, the Canucks needed to find a way to stop the noise in Vancouver. Management felt that moving J.T. Miller would accomplish that, even if the return was underwhelming.

Miller's 2024-25 play didn't help his trade value — he wasn't producing at the rate of monster 2023-24, making some poor reappearing defensive habits even more glaring. His no-movement clause made the situation even more challenging to navigate.

There are elements to like for Vancouver — Filip Chytil brings an up-tempo game to the lineup, and he has looked ready to take on 2C minutes for some time. Victor Mancini has a lot of two-way potential in a second- or third-pair capacity. And the conditional first-rounder has value, especially as a trade asset. It isn't quite the caliber of return that management could have wanted for someone as important to their team as Miller.

With Miller, the Rangers have a range of possible outcomes. Miller can be the engaged top-six center who makes life miserable for opponents, but he can also reflect his environment when things go poorly and drag down the team around him. In the middle of two extremes are an empty-calorie scorer who over-relies on power-play points to mask his defensive shortcomings. That uncertainty adds risk to this deal, but the acquisition cost helps mitigate some of it — even with his age and contract in mind. The rising cap also helps smooth out some of that.

Frost, Farabee to Flames in low-risk deal

To Flyers: F Andrei Kuzmenko, F Jakob Pelletier, 2025 second-round pick, 2028 seventh-round pick

To Flames: F Morgan Frost, F Joel Farabee

If the Flames need help anywhere, it's up front. Calgary took a step back last year at the deadline, but have gone into a full rebuilding mode. Dustin Wolf's excellence has kept them in the playoff picture, but he needs more goal support. The Flames aren't buying up rentals or overpriced veterans — management took a low-risk bet on Morgan Frost and Joel Farabee, who are in the perfect age range for this retooling team.

Frost and Farabee were not game-breakers in Philadelphia, so it makes sense why management would want to make some changes up front. But the return is pretty underwhelming. A second-rounder fits the profile of a rebuilding team (and the Flames can afford to move it with two first-rounders in 2025 and 2026), but that pick is only so worth so much in a weaker draft class. Jakob Pelletier has potential, but his AHL success has yet to translate to the NHL level. And while there is a familiarity factor with Andrei Kuzmenko for Matvei Michkov, his contributions are somewhat limited. Kuzmenko is a creative goal-scorer, but the consistency isn't there — and the production hasn't been either since his shooting percentage came back to earth. And there isn't a ton of dimension to his game behind that. He doesn't drive play and he struggles back in his own zone.

Hurricanes swing big for Rantanen

To Hurricanes: F Mikko Rantanen (50 percent retained by Blackhawks), F Taylor Hall, F Nils Juntorp

To Avalanche: F Martin Necas, F Jack Drury, 2025 second-round pick (Hurricanes), 2026 fourth-round pick (Hurricanes)

To Blackhawks: 2025 third-round pick (Hurricanes)

The Hurricanes are one of the best regular-season teams year after year. But Carolina needs to make more of an impact in the playoffs, and Mikko Rantanen thrives in high-pressure environments.

Without an extension in place, acquiring Rantanen carries risk — but the Canes need to take swings to move forward if they are going to go on a deeper playoff run. Rantanen not only brings the oomph the Hurricanes always crave but also impacts the depth chart by knocking everyone into more fitting positions. It takes some pressure off Andrei Svechnikov, who has never been The Guy the Hurricanes have needed.

Taylor Hall's play in transition and ability to set up scoring chances — even on a bad Blackhawks team — makes him a fit for Carolina's middle-six, too. Even though his value trended down this year, Chicago should have pressured for more in this trade, if not for Hall then to retain Rantanen's cap space. A deal probably wouldn't have broken down because the Blackhawks asked for more in return for leveraging their cap space, especially when the team doesn't have many retention slots to work with.

As for Colorado, it was a gutsy move to flip Rantanen, even with his contract situation in mind. But Martin Necas' skill and speed are a perfect fit for the Avalanche, and Jack Drury's penalty-killing addressed another area. Despite losing the best player in the trade, the Avs positioned themselves well to make more change leading up to the deadline.

ESPN / NHL trade grades: Report cards for the biggest deals of 2025

By Ryan S. Clark & Greg Wyshynski

The NHL trade deadline for the 2024-25 season is not until March 7, but teams have not waited until the last minute to make major moves.

For every significant trade that occurs during the season, you'll find a grade for it here, the Colorado Avalanche and San Jose Sharks swapping goaltenders, Cam Fowler to the St. Louis Blues, Kaapo Kakko to the Seattle Kraken, the blockbuster deal sending Mikko Rantanen to the Carolina Hurricanes and Martin Necas to the Avalanche, J.T. Miller from the Vancouver Canucks to the New York Rangers, and the Canucks staying busy and getting Marcus Pettersson from the Pittsburgh Penguins.

March 1 featured three big trades, with Ryan Lindgren headed to the Colorado Avalanche, the Minnesota Wild adding Gustav Nyquist, and Seth Jones joining the Florida Panthers. The middle of deadline week included a reunion for Yanni Gourde, heading back to the Tampa Bay Lightning along with Oliver Bjorkstrand.

Read on for grades from Ryan S. Clark and Greg Wyshynski, and check back the next time a big deal breaks.

Jump to a trade:

Smith to VGK

Dumoulin to NJ

Gourde to TB

Frederic to EDM

Jones to FLA

Nyquist to MIN

Lindgren to COL

Granlund to DAL

J.T. Miller to NYR

Pettersson to VAN

Farabee, Frost to CGY

Rantanen to CAR

Kakko to SEA

Fowler to STL

Blackwood-Georgiev

Trouba to ANA

Jiricek to MIN

March 6: Smith heads back to Vegas

An original misfit now looks as if he could be the right fit for the Vegas Golden Knights.

The Golden Knights reacquired forward Reilly Smith in a trade with the New York Rangers, with prospect forward Brendan Brisson and the San Jose Sharks' 2025 third-round pick headed in the other direction. The Rangers will retain 50% of Smith's salary.

Exactly how did the front offices perform with this trade? Let's break it down.

Vegas Golden Knights

Grade: B+

Ironically, the reason the Golden Knights had to trade Smith shortly after winning the Stanley Cup in 2023 was also the motivation for why they brought him back in 2025: the salary cap. Because in the NHL, it's always going to be the salary cap.

Smith was too expensive for a team that had other financial considerations -- a continuing refrain with this club.

It's why the Golden Knights had a mass exodus again this past offseason. But even with players such as Jonathan Marchessault and Chandler Stephenson signing elsewhere, they remained a contender, albeit one with questions in the top nine.

Pavel Dorofeyev continues to tap into his promise; he's on pace for 32 goals after scoring 13 goals and 24 points in 47 games during the 2023-24 season. Brett Howden, who had never scored more than nine goals in a season, is now three shy of his first 20-goal campaign.

But there was a belief that the Golden Knights needed more. That led Vegas general manager Kelly McCrimmon to search out top-nine options on team-friendly deals. That's why they added Brandon Saad after his contract was terminated by the St. Louis Blues; the Golden Knights signed him to a one-year prorated deal at \$1.5 million.

Finding another forward with a cap hit similar to Saad's made Smith an attractive option. Of course, the main difference being Smith has a familiarity with many players on their roster and with coach Bruce Cassidy's systems. But what might be his greatest value is the fact he costs only \$1.88 million in cap space for a team that now has \$503,260 in deadline cap space, per PuckPedia.

Then there's the fact that Smith's return could possibly extend beyond this season. PuckPedia projects the Golden Knights have \$16.74 million in cap space this offseason, which means Smith could re-sign.

Whether Smith returns next year is a conversation for another time (the Knights have other key UFAs, including both goalies); his return for this spring indicates that Vegas is once again valuing the present over the future, as Brisson was a first-round pick, and that Sharks pick will come quite early in the third round this summer.

Granted, Brisson struggled to carve a place within the organization. He was pointless in nine NHL games this season and is on pace for 26 points in the AHL.

Even though he was a player on a team-friendly deal, he fell down the pecking order. Cole Schwindt had yet to score a goal, but the fact he played 38 games (before an injury) spoke to how he found a place in the lineup. And while Raphael Lavoie was also pointless in nine NHL games, he was on pace to score 20 goals in the AHL.

New York Rangers

Grade: B

The Rangers are at a crossroads, caught between making a playoff push while trying to get something for players they could lose in the offseason for nothing.

They entered Thursday in the final Eastern Conference wild-card spot. They are a tiebreaker ahead of the Detroit Red Wings, while six teams are within four points of them.

And so, Smith became a trade candidate ahead of Friday's deadline, returning a second third-round pick for this summer's draft, while a team that hasn't been shy about giving players from its AHL affiliate a chance at NHL opportunities also adds a young forward.

So much of what Rangers GM Chris Drury has done this season has been about finding the right combination of players for a team that has gone from Cup contender to possibly missing out altogether back to one that could qualify for the postseason after all.

Smith scored 10 goals and 29 points in 58 games, on par with expectations as a top-nine forward. But the Rangers felt they could move on from him considering they had other options they could use on the third line.

All this became evident in the wake of the J.T. Miller trade. The reshuffling Rangers have averaged 3.33 goals per game (ninth best in the NHL in that span), while winning seven of the 12 games they've played since the Jan. 31 trade. Smith was playing nearly 15 minutes per game since the trade, but he had only four points -- all assists.

Moving on from Smith, despite retaining 50% of his salary, leaves the Rangers with \$3.7 million in cap space and \$16.691 million in deadline cap space, per PuckPedia. It also leaves the Rangers with one salary retention spot, with the other being by Ryan Lindgren. -- Clark

March 6: Devils get defenseman Brian Dumoulin from Ducks

In need of more defensive depth to combat their current injury woes, the New Jersey Devils traded for defenseman Brian Dumoulin from the Anaheim Ducks.

New Jersey sent a 2025 conditional second-round draft pick and prospect forward Herman Traff to Anaheim. The Ducks also retained 50% of Dumoulin's contract.

Here's a look at what it means for both parties.

New Jersey Devils

Grade: B

Dougie Hamilton being out on a week-to-week basis and Jonas Siegenthaler going to LTIR meant the Devils needed to find top-four help to keep their playoff hopes afloat.

Entering Thursday, the Devils were third in the Metropolitan Division on 72 points. They have a four-point lead over the Columbus Blue Jackets, who hold the first Eastern Conference wild-card spot and a five-point lead over the Ottawa Senators, who have the second wild-card entry. But in addition to missing Hamilton and Siegenthaler, the team announced Wednesday that star center Jack Hughes would miss the remainder of the regular season after having shoulder surgery.

Hamilton was second in 5-on-5 ice time, while Siegenthaler was fifth in average ice time among Devils defensemen and also logged more than 100 short-handed minutes.

Finding someone was more complicated because the new contract had to fit within the Devils' paltry cap situation. That became even more evident with PuckPedia stating the Devils had a little more than \$350,000 in deadline cap space available after they got Dumoulin at a reduced rate.

Dumoulin could be used on the Devils' second pairing next to Brenden Dillon as part of a new-look top four that has Luke Hughes and Brett Pesce as the top pairing. He also gives New Jersey another player

who can be trusted on the penalty kill. Dumoulin, a pending unrestricted free agent, has recorded his fifth straight season of more than 100 short-handed minutes.

Anaheim Ducks

Grade: B

Trading Dumoulin allowed the Ducks to collect more capital for the future without hurting their chances at potentially winning a Western Conference wild-card spot. The Ducks began the day six points behind the Calgary Flames for the final Western Conference wild-card opening.

Dumoulin was in a third-pairing role for the Ducks. They already had veterans such as Radko Gudas and Jacob Trouba in the top four providing balance to younger talents such as Jackson LaCombe and Pavel Mintyukov.

Part of Anaheim's strategy has been to play its young defensemen and with Dumoulin, it made it harder for the promising Olen Zellweger to receive the consistent ice time some of his cohorts have found over the last two seasons.

It currently leaves the Ducks with six defensemen who are either under contract or under team control entering next season at the team-friendly price tag of \$15.61 million. They'll get Dumoulin's salary off the books while still having the final year of Cam Fowler's retained salary.

As for the capital they attained, the Ducks are now back in the second round of this year's draft having lost their original second-rounder in a previous trade. Traff, a third-round pick in 2024, has spent the season in Sweden where he's played in the SHL and the HockeyAllsvenskan. He also had two goals in seven games with Sweden at the world junior championships. -- Clark

March 5: Lightning reunite with Gourde, add Bjorkstrand as well

Could a familiar face and a familiar strategy once again pay off for the Tampa Bay Lightning?

The Lightning re-acquired former center Yanni Gourde, All-Star winger Oliver Bjorkstrand, a 2026 fifth-round pick and prospect defenseman Kyle Aucoin in a three-team trade with the Seattle Kraken and Detroit Red Wings. The Kraken received forward Michael Eyssimont, a 2026 first-round pick, a 2027 first-round pick and a 2025 second-round pick via the Toronto Maple Leafs from the Lightning, while retaining 50% of Gourde's salary.

The Red Wings received a 2025 fourth-round pick from the Lightning (either Tampa Bay's own pick, or the Edmonton Oilers', whichever is earlier) for retaining 25% of Gourde's salary.

Here's a look at how each front office did in the trade.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Grade: A-

First-round picks are a universal currency. The way each team values them is the unknown variable -- unless it's the Lightning. In their case, first-round picks are simply bargaining chips they'll use to win right now.

This is why Isaac Howard, who was their first-rounder in 2022, is the only prospect drafted in the first round the Lightning have in their system. This is also why they've remained among the NHL's class of top contenders, including two Stanley Cups and three straight Cup Final appearances.

A team that successful in a salary cap world loses familiar faces occasionally -- sometimes they can get them back. It's why they struck a deal before the season to get defenseman Ryan McDonagh, and did it again by getting Gourde in addition to Bjorkstrand.

But make no mistake: While sentimentality is nice, it's all about winning, and that's why the Lightning made this move. Especially as they were able to get Gourde at 25% of his salary by getting the Red Wings involved as a third-party broker.

While it helps that there's a familiarity with Gourde, he gives them flexibility in a way that many contenders covet. He can play down the middle or on the wing, while providing stability to the middle or bottom six. He's an aggressive forechecker who can be deployed in any scenario, while providing contributions in all zones.

He has done those things for the Lightning. He had done those things for a team that didn't win a Cup but upset a defending Cup champion in the first round and got the Kraken within a game of the Western Conference finals.

That history -- along with the fact Gourde is a pending unrestricted free agent -- is what made him so coveted among all contenders entering the deadline. That's why Tampa Bay paid the price it paid.

Bjorkstrand doesn't have Gourde's playoff history. But what he does provide is another top-six option for Tampa Bay. If Jon Cooper deploys him on the second line with Anthony Cirelli at center and Brandon Hagel at left wing, that will be a major problem for opponents.

A Hagel-Cirelli-Bjorkstrand line gives the Lightning three players who play an aggressive yet responsible style. Plus, it gives Cirelli and Hagel a five-time 20-goal scorer as their linemate, as Bjorkstrand is aiming for his fourth consecutive campaign of more than 20 goals.

Bjorkstrand has a year left on his contract worth \$5.4 million annually, which gives the Lightning cost certainty -- especially if Bjorkstrand finds success with Cirelli and Hagel, who each have long-term deals.

Even with Bjorkstrand's contract, PuckPedia projects the Lightning will have \$14.5 million available in cap space this offseason, to improve a roster that has now has Gourde and Nick Perbix as its major pending UFAs.

Seattle Kraken

Grade: A

Kraken GM Ron Francis has traded players away three times in the team's four-season history. What Francis hadn't done was add first-round picks to his draft capital with those past moves.

Now he has two of them, although he might not get to use them right away. One of the stipulations of this trade is that both first-round picks are top-10 protected. Specifically, if the 2026 or the 2027 first-rounder is a top-10 pick, the Kraken would then get the Lightning's 2028 first-round pick while receiving an additional third-rounder in 2028. If both picks slide to 2028 and 2029, then, the Kraken gets a third-round pick in 2028 and a third-round pick in 2029.

Even with all those moving parts, this is one of Francis' best trade during his time in Seattle. Gourde came to the Kraken through the expansion draft and received a first-round pick in return. They signed Bjorkstrand as a free agent before eventually trading him for another first-round pick, while getting his contract off the books for next season. This gives the Kraken \$21.75 million in cap space ahead of the offseason, per PuckPedia.

At present, the Kraken still have \$7.83 million in projected deadline cap space. Having that much space - along with two of their three retained salary spots -- could lead to them being even more involved

before Friday's deadline beyond whatever happens with forward Brandon Tanev. Teams have used space and salary retention (as the Red Wings did here) to pick up additional draft capital.

In terms of what it means for the Kraken right now? Bjorkstrand's departure creates an opening on their second line, which could be filled by any number of forwards. Gourde returned to the lineup Tuesday, and had been in a fourth-line role.

Essyiment, who has five goals and 10 points in 57 games this season, gives Seattle another forward who could challenge for one of those middle-six or bottom-six roles. But that comes with the caveat that the Kraken are expected to receive offers for Tanev ahead of Friday's deadline, which would create yet another opening.

Detroit Red Wings

Grade: B-

Playing third-party broker is not a sign about the state of the Red Wings or their playoff chances. They entered Wednesday tied in points with the New York Rangers, who have the final wild-card spot based on tiebreakers.

This trade was simply a business decision for the Wings, who retain quite a bit of financial flexibility ahead of the trade deadline.

Retaining 25% of Gourde's salary will count for only \$1.29 million in salary cap space. PuckPedia projects the Red Wings will still have more than \$13 million in deadline cap space, while also having two of their three salary retention slots available if needed. But adding a second fourth-round pick gives the Red Wings a chance to add to a farm system that's already considered to be one of the strongest in the NHL. -- Clark

March 4: Oilers land Frederic from the Bruins

The Edmonton Oilers acquired Trent Frederic and Max Jones from the Boston Bruins in a trade that also included the New Jersey Devils as the third-party facilitator.

The Devils will retain 25% of Frederic's salary, sending prospect Petr Hauser to Boston (which is retaining 50% of Frederic's salary) and receiving unsigned prospect Shane Lachance from Edmonton. The Bruins sent Hauser and Jones to Edmonton for prospect Max Wanner, the St. Louis Blues' second-round pick in 2025 and the Oilers' fourth-round pick in 2026.

How did each GM do in the deal? Here are the grades:

Edmonton Oilers

Grade: B+

Frederic is an ideal addition to the Oilers' forward depth. He brings size (6-foot-3, 220 pounds) and can throw that frame around, leading the Bruins in hits per 60 minutes (11.2) over the past two seasons. But he's not lumbering -- Frederic can skate well and contribute offensively.

OK, that last bit is theoretical: The 27-year-old had two seasons of offensive growth, culminating in 18 goals and 40 points in 82 games last season. That has regressed to eight goals and 15 points in 57 games this season. He's a finisher whose shooting percentage has dropped by 4% year over year. But it should be said that he's not the only Boston forward to have an offensive setback this season.

Frederic can also kill penalties effectively, which is good news for an Oilers team that's not very good at that this season (75%, 26th in the NHL).

Best of all is the cap number, which GM Stan Bowman got whittled down to \$575,000 thanks to double retention by the Bruins and Devils. Edmonton is in a bit of a salary cap conundrum with Evander Kane's injury status, so a thrifty acquisition like this was paramount.

There is a downside for this trade, which is Frederic's health. He's currently out with a lower-body injury and considered "week to week." One assumes Edmonton got assurances about his injury timeline, but this isn't exactly ideal.

Jones is a throw-in winger, but one who has seven seasons of NHL experience under his belt -- although he saw more time in the AHL than in Boston this season. He was a bust with the Bruins, however.

Czech forward Hauser, a fifth-round pick by the Devils in 2022, stands around 6-foot-4. The 21-year-old is a project if the Oilers eventually sign him.

Boston Bruins

Grade: A-

Once GM Don Sweeney made it clear that Brad Marchand would potentially be the only pending unrestricted free agent the team would negotiate with before the trade deadline, Frederic might as well have started packing his bags.

Even if Boston was in a playoff spot, it might have traded this pending UFA anyway for future assets. The \$1.15 million they retained on Frederic is their first retention spot used this season. Hey, it's not like they're going to be adding.

That second-rounder they received should be upper-to-middle-range in the draft, given where the Blues are in the standings. Boston didn't have one of its own this season after trading it to Washington in 2023 in the Dmitry Orlov swap.

Wanner is a 21-year-old, right-shooting defenseman who spent the past two seasons with the AHL Bakersfield Condors. He was buried on the Oilers' depth chart, having struggled through a season that saw him miss time due to injury. Not a bad prospect for the Bruins to get into their pipeline.

The Bruins also found a taker for the last year of that Jones contract (\$1 million), which is a plus even though he was a minus in his seven games in Boston.

New Jersey Devils

Grade: B+

On the one hand, this is New Jersey basically paying \$575,000 for the rights to Shane Lachance, a 21-year-old winger who captains Boston University and stands 6-foot-5. He has 25 points in 32 games this season for the Terriers, after being selected No. 186 overall in 2021 by the Oilers.

On the other hand, let it never be said the NHL isn't a land of potential nepotism: Lachance's father is former New York Islanders defenseman Scott Lachance, who is the Devils' head of U.S. scouting.

Still, not a bad bit of salary retention business at the deadline for the Devils. If Lachance's skating ever improves, they might have something there. -- Wyshynski

March 1: Panthers land Jones, send Knight to Blackhawks

After saying he wanted to play for a contender, Seth Jones is now a member of the defending Stanley Cup champions.

The Florida Panthers acquired Jones and a 2026 fourth-round pick from the Chicago Blackhawks with goaltender Spencer Knight and a conditional 2026 first-round pick going the other way. The Blackhawks will also retain 25% of Jones' salary for the next five seasons.

How did each front office perform in the NHL's latest blockbuster? Let's find out.

Florida Panthers

Grade: A-

It was never a question of whether the Panthers needed Jones. They did. But many wondered whether the Panthers had the capital to pull off a deal. Turns out, the Panthers had a different kind of capital.

They provided the Blackhawks with a first-round pick one would expect for a top-pairing, right-handed-shooting defenseman such as Jones. But to include Knight in the deal and have the Blackhawks retain \$2.5 million in salary over the next four years?

There are many layers to that decision, so let's unpack it.

The package that Panthers GM Bill Zito presented to the Blackhawks was something that checked two significant boxes:

He provided a rebuilding team with a 2026 first-round pick that ensures the Blackhawks will have at least two first-rounders in every draft since 2022

Zito also offered Knight, a 23-year-old goaltender who was a first-round pick in 2019

The Panthers had a hole on the right side of their defense beyond Aaron Ekblad, the second-longest tenured player on the roster. Ekblad is an unrestricted free agent in the final season of an eight-year deal worth \$7.5 million annually. PuckPedia projects Florida will have \$20.5 million in cap space this offseason, which means a deal could be struck to keep Ekblad. The Panthers can also use that space to re-sign forward Sam Bennett, another pending UFA.

Jones is under contract for four more years at a rate that provides flexibility, and the Panthers have a top-four unit this season that features Gustav Forsling, Niko Mikkola and Ekblad.

Although ... at what potential long-term cost?

The Panthers needed to decide their long-term plans in net. They won the Cup last season -- and have had the greatest period in franchise history -- with future Hall of Famer Sergei Bobrovsky as their No. 1 option. Meanwhile, Knight developed into a backup, and was slated to be his heir apparent in the crease.

Bobrovsky, 36, has one year remaining on his deal at \$10 million before hitting free agency. Some thought the Panthers could recoup those savings and re-sign Knight, who is 13 years younger, to a new contract.

Including Knight in the deal to get Jones means the Panthers must find another solution in goal post-Bobrovsky. In the interim, the Panthers have a proven backup option in Chris Driedger, with the 30-year-old playing this season in the AHL.

If the Panthers win another Cup this season -- or when they have Jones on the roster, the cost of losing Knight is easily justified.

Chicago Blackhawks

Grade: A+

Finding a legitimate franchise goalie is difficult, yet the Blackhawks may have just found one in Knight.

Think about the conversation that's being had right now about the state of American hockey: Goaltending is one of the biggest advantages the United States has, with Connor Hellebuyck, Jake Oettinger, Jeremy Swayman, Thatcher Demko and rookie Dustin Wolf all being developed in the country.

It wasn't that long ago when Knight, who was a first-round pick partly due to his prototypical size, was in that conversation. Going to the Blackhawks and possibly establishing himself as the outright No. 1 goalie could see him get back into the mix.

But what does his arrival mean for the Blackhawks' goaltending landscape?

Knight is now the fourth goalie on the Blackhawks' NHL roster who is either under contract for next season or the team has control via restricted free agency. Laurent Brossoit, who is on injured reserve, has a year remaining at \$3.3 million while Petr Mrazek has a year remaining at \$4.25 million. Arvid Soderblom costs only \$963,000 but he's the RFA.

With Knight on the roster, the Blackhawks could trade one of those other goaltenders, with the hopes of adding even more draft capital to what's already a rather strong reserve of draft picks. This would also open the door for Knight to get more playing time. He's 12-8-1 with a 2.40 goals-against average and a .907 save percentage in 23 games for Florida. The most he has played in an NHL season is 32 games, while the most he's had in his professional career are the 45 he played last season in the AHL.

The more looming question around their goaltending landscape is: What does this mean for Drew Comness?

Comness was a second-round pick in 2020 that came through the famed United States National Team Development Program before he played three seasons at Hockey East powerhouse Boston University. Comness's final two seasons at BU reinforced the belief he could become the Blackhawks' goalie of the future.

He finished his first AHL season with a 2.65 goals-against average and a .906 save percentage in 2023-24. Comness is still in the AHL but played two NHL games in mid-December. He allowed four goals on 24 shots to the New Jersey Devils in one of those games before he was sent back to the minors.

Since then, he's had 15 starts in the AHL and has allowed more than three goals in 15 of those outings. That includes a run of five consecutive games in which he allowed more than three. In total, he's allowed more than three goals in 15 of his 25 games this season; to be fair, he's played behind a team that has been inconsistent throughout the season.

In other words, finding another young goaltending option was a possibility this trade season.

But instead of just another option, they added one of the few goaltenders who has gone in the first round in recent memory, further strengthening a youth movement that's considered one of the NHL's most promising. -- Clark

March 1: Predators trade Nyquist to the Wild

Shortly after one Central Division team made a trade on Saturday, two more made a deal with each other.

The Minnesota Wild received forward Gustav Nyquist from the Nashville Predators in exchange for a 2026 second-round pick, with the Predators retaining 50% of Nyquist's salary.

Here's a quick glance at what it means for both clubs.

Minnesota Wild

Grade: B

Any deal the Wild were going to make ahead of the deadline had to fit within their salary cap constraints. They entered Saturday with minus-\$603,556 in projected cap space, but Kirill Kaprizov and his \$9 million cap hit going to long-term injured reserve meant there was extra room, per PuckPedia.

Having a manageable cap hit, among other items, is what made Nyquist such an attractive option for the Wild -- or any team that needed additional offensive support at a team-friendly price tag.

Getting the Predators to retain 50% of Nyquist's salary means the Wild are on the hook for \$1.595 million. PuckPedia indicates the Wild have a little more than \$6.632 million in deadline cap space; it's possible they could add more before Friday's deadline.

The expectation is that the Wild could add another forward. There has been a need for offensive consistency since December when Kaprizov, who emerged as a Hart Trophy candidate, sustained an injury that has kept him out of the lineup. His 23 goals still lead the Wild, while his 52 points are tied for the team lead -- despite playing 23 fewer games than current leader Matt Boldy.

The situation got worse this week when top-line center Joel Eriksson Ek was injured, and he'll be out on a week-to-week basis with a lower-body injury. The Wild entered the weekend ranked 21st in goals per game; despite that, they are third in the Central Division, while having the same number of points but played one fewer game than the Colorado Avalanche, who hold the first wild-card spot.

The Wild could move Nyquist to their first or second line while shifting Vinnie Hinostroza, who was on their second line, to the third. There is belief that Nyquist can ramp his scoring back up to previous levels; he's scored just nine goals and 21 points in 57 games for the disappointing Predators, but he had 23 goals and 75 points in 81 games this past season.

Nashville Predators

Grade: B

At one point, the Predators were believed to be a team that was going to be active at the deadline because they would be challenging for a playoff spot.

Instead, the Predators are now focusing on their future. Part of that includes reshaping portions of their roster, and that's what ended Nyquist's time with the club before the deadline.

He was Nashville's most prominent pending UFA in a market that also has other forwards reportedly available, such as Yanni Gourde, Brock Nelson, Brayden Schenn and Jason Zucker, among others. His manageable cap hit meant the Preds were going to have options, and they found one that adds a nice bit of draft capital.

Given that they were already retaining part of Mattias Ekholm and Ryan Johansen's contracts, and would have to retain on Nyquist, this deal had to be the right one.

Getting the Wild's 2026 second-round pick adds to an impressive haul; the Predators may end up being one of the busiest teams ahead of the NHL draft if GM Barry Trotz elects to make subsequent deals.

The Predators have three first-round picks and two second-round picks in 2025, along with now having an extra second in 2026. -- Clark

March 1: Lindgren, Vesey to Avs; de Haan, Parssinen to Rangers

Finally! A trade has happened as we enter the final six days before the March 7 NHL trade deadline.

The Colorado Avalanche acquired defenseman Ryan Lindgren, forward Jimmy Vesey and prospect defenseman Hank Kampf from the New York Rangers on Saturday for forward Juuso Parssinen, defenseman Calvin de Haan, a conditional 2025 second-round pick and a conditional 2025 fourth-round pick. The Rangers will also retain 50% of Lindgren's salary.

Here's a look at how both GMs did in the trade.

Colorado Avalanche

Grade: B+

The Avs lost Josh Manson to an injury before 4 Nations Face-Off, and he remained out of the lineup through the Avs' first four post-tournament games. His absence created questions about whom they would pursue to strengthen a top-four group that was using Oliver Kylington as a fill-in.

Getting Lindgren accomplishes a few items for the Avs:

- He gives them a proven top-four, defensive-minded defenseman
- Like Manson, he provides balance to a second pairing, which allows Samuel Girard to continue operating as a facilitator in the offensive zone
- He can log heavy minutes on a penalty kill

This final part is critical, as it could lessen the burden on Devon Toews and Cale Makar, who lead the Avs in short-handed minutes (among other categories).

Vesey is a bottom-six forward with size who can be used in rotation with Ross Colton, Joel Kiviranta, Logan O'Connor and Miles Wood. He has just four goals and six points in 33 games this season, with the idea he could add more, considering he finished with more than 11 goals in consecutive campaigns before the 2024-25 season. He would also give them another forward option on the PK. He had three consecutive seasons of logging more than 85 minutes in short-handed sequences before this one. This season, he was limited to a little more than five total PK minutes with the Rangers.

This deal provides the Avs with a bit of a respite while Manson recovers, at a time when the club is trying to reach the playoffs either through one of the three Central Division spots or as a wild-card entry. Entering Saturday, the Avs were in the first wild-card spot. They have the same number of points as the Minnesota Wild, who are third in the Central, but the Wild have played one fewer game.

While both players are a fit, this trade works even better for the Avs because both Lindgren and Vesey are pending unrestricted free agents. That gives the Avs a six-player pending UFA class ahead of an offseason in which PuckPedia projects they'll have only \$8.2 million in cap space.

New York Rangers

Grade: B+

Lindgren's future with the Rangers was in question as a pending UFA who might not have had a place in the blue-line rotation moving forward.

The Rangers will need to re-sign RFAs K'Andre Miller and Zac Jones this summer, while having a projected \$17.83 million in cap space according to PuckPedia.

Re-signing Jones and Miller would complete a defensive unit that already has a Norris Trophy winner in Adam Fox signed to a long-term contract. Will Borgen, who they acquired in-season, went from earning \$2.70 million this season to signing a three-year contract extension with the Rangers worth \$4.10 million annually.

The Rangers also have Braden Schneider signed for one more season, while Urho Vaakanainen is another pending RFA. Plus, the recently promoted Matthew Robertson is another defenseman under contract for next season.

That gives the Rangers seven defensemen who were either signed or remain under team control for 2025-26, which made pending UFA Lindgren expendable.

That made it important for the Rangers to get something of value in return. They did so by adding draft capital for 2025, plus two players in de Haan and Parssinen who provide depth to a lineup that's still trying to make the playoffs. The Rangers came into Saturday four points behind the Detroit Red Wings and Columbus Blue Jackets for the two Eastern Conference wild-card spots.

Moving on from Lindgren means the Rangers have adjustments they'll need to make when it comes to who takes over on the second pairing and on the PK. It's possible that either Jones or Schneider will get promoted to the second pair, while de Haan could be one of those players who helps fill the void left by Lindgren on the Rangers' PK. -- Clark

Feb. 1: Stars get Granlund, Ceci from Sharks

It's been a week for the Dallas Stars.

Saturday was another extension of that week, with the Stars getting forward Mikael Granlund and defenseman Cody Ceci from the San Jose Sharks for a 2025 first-round pick and a conditional 2025 third-round pick.

How did both GMs perform in this trade? Let's find out.

Dallas Stars

Grade: A-

Let's go back to the week the Stars were having. A week that started with a healthy complement of players saw them lose four players and extended amount of time. It started Thursday when they announced Miro Heiskanen was going to be out for multiple weeks with a lower-body injury. It continued Saturday when they placed defenseman Nils Lundkvist and forward Tyler Seguin on Long Term Injured Reserve while moving forward Mason Marchment to injured reserve.

Less than two hours later, they traded for Granlund and Ceci in a move that should help the Stars in the interim and throughout the rest of the season.

As for the short-term outlook, Granlund provides them with another top-six, two-way forward who can be trusted to play in key minutes in 5-on-5 situations, the penalty kill and the power play. It's possible that the Stars would use Granlund as their third-line center with Seguin out of the lineup.

Heiskanen's absence created a top-four opening and the additional loss of Lundkvist meant there was an even greater need on the back end. Ceci gives them a player who can operate in a top-four role while Heiskanen is out. When Heiskanen returns, Ceci can be shifted into a third-pairing role, allowing the Stars to have a rotation between Lian Bichsel and Matt Dumba on that final pairing.

It's the sort of move that fits for a team in a championship window like the Stars. Ceci and Granlund are pending unrestricted free agents at the end of the season. They'll be part of an eight-player UFA class that features captain Jamie Benn and Wyatt Johnston.

San Jose Sharks

Grade: A+

The Sharks have built their roster in a way that allows their young core of Macklin Celebrini, Will Smith, William Eklund and Yaroslav Askarov more opportunities to develop. But it's also been constructed in a manner that has allowed them to have pending UFAs they could move ahead of the deadline.

That's what made having Ceci and Granlund so valuable for the Sharks.

With this trade, San Jose was able to accomplish two objectives. It was able to get what is now a second first-round pick in this year's draft while adding a third-round pick to give them a total of eight picks -- and they could add more.

Another is it didn't have to take on any salary or need a third-party broker to facilitate a trade for two players who had some of the higher salaries on the team.

Part of the challenge facing the Sharks ahead of this particular trade deadline is the lack of salary retention slots. They've retained money on Brent Burns, Tomas Hertl, and Erik Karlsson. They'll get the Burns contract off the books this year while having two more years of Karlsson and three more years of Hertl.

So, to get a deal done for two of their more coveted UFAs without having to retain any salary creates the potential to move some of their seven remaining pending UFAs without any additional financial challenges. -- Clark

Jan. 31: Miller to Rangers, Chytil and more to Canucks

The NHL. Where apparently Friday nights are the prime time for blockbuster trades?

This time it was the New York Rangers, who acquired long-time target and center J.T. Miller in a trade with the Vancouver Canucks. The Rangers received Miller, defenseman Erik Brannstrom and prospect defenseman Jackson Dorrington, with center Filip Chytil, prospect defenseman Victor Mancini and a protected 2025 first-round pick going to the Canucks.

Let's look at how each GM did and what the impact could be going forward.

New York Rangers

Grade: A-

The Rangers might be many things this season. Boring sure isn't one of them.

They traded their captain Jacob Trouba. They moved on from the one-time No. 2 pick in the draft (Kaapo Kakko) who was thought to be one of the future faces of the franchise. Now they have acquired one of the most coveted players more than a month ahead of the NHL trade deadline.

Can getting Miller be the move that helps the Rangers go from being five points out of the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference in late January to landing a playoff spot by the end of regular season?

Miller provides the Rangers with another dimension they were lacking within their top nine. He probably could find a place in the top six either as a winger or somewhere down the middle. Either way, he creates possibilities that they just didn't have before.

Miller gives them another two-way forward they could pair with Vincent Trocheck on the first line. Or he could be paired on the wing with Mika Zibanejad on the second line. But those aren't the only options. There's also the possibility the Rangers could play Miller down the middle to create a dynamic that has him, Trocheck and Zibanejad anchoring their top three lines.

That's one dimension. What he offers from an offensive consistency standpoint is another. Miller sat out games earlier this season but is still projected to finish with 57 points in 66 games. That's an average of 0.86 points per game.

Artemi Panarin is the only Ranger who's averaging more points per game this season. Miller is a candidate to play on the first-team power-play unit considering he has 14 power-play points, which would be third on the Rangers behind Panarin and Adam Fox.

Getting Miller goes well beyond what he could do for the Rangers this season. He's in the second year of a seven-year contract that provides the Rangers with cost certainty ahead of an offseason where they face looming decisions.

Having cost certainty probably played a role in why they were comfortable moving on from Mancini after signing Will Borgen, who arrived in the Kakko trade, to a five-year deal worth \$4.1 million a season.

The money the Rangers committed to Borgen plus what they've added from Miller's contract means they're going to have what PuckPedia projects is \$18.69 million available ahead of what should be a busy offseason. The Rangers have a six-player restricted free agent class led by Will Cuyllé and K'Andre Miller, while Ryan Lindgren is a pending UFA after signing a one-year deal worth \$4.5 million.

Vancouver Canucks

Grade: B-

NHL front offices are not a monolith. But they all value secrecy. So, when Canucks president of hockey operations Jim Rutherford confirmed there was a rift between Elias Pettersson and Miller, it made the possibility of a trade even more probable.

Of the two, Miller appeared to be the one who was going to leave. He's older by five years and his \$8 million annual cap hit was going to be easier to move than Pettersson's \$11.6 million.

Miller has finished with more than 80 points in the past three seasons and is averaging 0.88 points per game this season. Pettersson has had two seasons in the past three in which he has finished with more than 80 points and is averaging 0.72 points per game this season.

Miller's departure should hypothetically bring a resolution to the tension that was building within the Canucks' organization. Figuring out if his departure can lead to Pettersson regaining offensive consistency while also trying to make the playoffs is another matter.

The situation facing the Canucks meant there was always a possibility they wouldn't receive someone who could be a like-for-like replacement for Miller.

Now, the Canucks are in a position to trust Chytil with the demands that come with being a top-six center.

Promise has followed Chytil since he was drafted by the Rangers in the first round in 2017. There have been seasons when his potential surfaced such as when he had 22 goals and 45 points in 74 games in the 2022-23 season. But there have also been injuries that have made it hard for him to find consistency, including multiple documented concussions, one of which led to him sitting out 72 regular-season games last season.

The most ice time Chytil's received through a full season came in his second year when he was averaging 14 minutes, 50 seconds. Miller was averaging close to 18 minutes this season but has averaged more than 19 minutes in every season he has played for the Canucks since arriving in 2019-20.

Miller was an important part of the Canucks penalty kill having logged more than 93 minutes of short-handed ice time per season over the past four seasons. Chytil has logged less than 15 minutes of short-handed ice time through his career, according to Natural Stat Trick.

But the Canucks have also shown that newcomers can find success in a short time. They've seen it the past few seasons with Filip Hronek, Andrei Kuzmenko and with Jake DeBrusk, who is on pace for a career-high 28 goals this season.

What Chytil does provide the Canucks is additional cap space. He's making \$4.44 million annually, a savings of more than \$3.5 million that could prove useful before the trade deadline. Chytil has two more years left on his contract and would be eligible for free agency after the 2026-27 season.

It's also the type of savings that could aid the Canucks in the offseason given Brock Boeser is in the final season of a contract that pays him \$6.6 million annually.

As for everything else in the trade? The Canucks picking up a protected-top 13 pick means they'll have two picks in 2025. It's possible they could use one of those along with what PuckPedia projects to be \$12.198 million in deadline cap space to facilitate a deal.

Mancini, a fifth-round pick in 2022, provides the Canucks with another young defenseman in a system that already has Sawyer Mynio, Elias Pettersson and Tom Willander. Mancini had five points in 15 games for the Rangers before returning to the AHL where he has three goals and 10 points in 23 games. -- Clark

Jan. 31: Canucks add Pettersson, O'Connor from Penguins

Because one Friday evening trade wasn't enough for the Vancouver Canucks.

They used the first-round pick they received from the J.T. Miller trade few hours earlier in another deal to get defenseman Marcus Pettersson from the Pittsburgh Penguins. The Canucks also received forward Drew O'Connor with forward Danton Heinen, defenseman Vincent Desharnais, the rights to forward Melvin Fernström and the first-round pick going to Pittsburgh.

Let's look at how both front offices fared.

Vancouver Canucks

Grade: B

Certain issues have been present throughout the Canucks season and finding a consistent partner for star captain Quinn Hughes was one of them.

Hughes logged 389 minutes in 5-on-5 play with Filip Hronek while also getting 333 minutes in 5-on-5 play alongside Tyler Myers, according to Natural Stat Trick. It's a contrast from last season when Hronek and Hughes were nearly exclusive, logging close to 1,200 minutes together in 5-on-5 sequences.

The thought is Pettersson provides Hughes with a partner that can establish cohesion.

Pettersson is more than just a top-pairing partner for Hughes. He strengthens their top four options while adding to a defensive structure that is in the top five in fewest shots allowed per 60 and fewest scoring chances allowed per 60, according to Natural Stat Trick. He also logged more than 200 short-handed minutes last season, which gives Canucks coach Rick Tocchet one more option on a penalty kill that ranks 13th.

Although Pettersson fills one void, what role could O'Connor play in helping the Canucks address the void left by Miller's departure.

O'Connor gives them another top-nine, two-way forward who will likely replace Heinen on the Canucks' PK. But O'Connor, who scored 16 goals and 33 points last season, has only six goals and 16 points in 53 games. He is projected to finish with nine goals and 25 points.

It's possible the Canucks could pair him on the second or third line next to Filip Chytil, who arrived in the Miller trade. If so, that gives them two players who've combined to score 36 points this season. Miller had 35 by himself, which raises questions about what this could look like from an offensive production standpoint for the Canucks.

Goals have been harder to come by than they were last season for the Canucks. They're averaging the second-fewest shots per 60, the second-fewest scoring chances per 60 and rank 20th with 2.84 goals per game.

As for what it means in the bigger picture: The Canucks only took on an additional \$705,000 in salary, and Pettersson and O'Connor are pending unrestricted free agents, whereas Heinen and Desharnais each had one more year remaining on their respective contracts.

Pettersson and O'Connor will be part of a six-player UFA class that also features Brock Boeser and Kevin Lankinen.

PuckPedia projects the Canucks will have a little more than \$11 million in deadline cap space which means they could still find more offensive reinforcements over the next several weeks.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Grade: B

They're seven points out of the final Eastern Conference wild-card spot. But they're five points ahead of the Buffalo Sabres for the fewest points in the East and tied for the eighth-fewest points in the NHL which could see them being a factor in the NHL draft lottery.

It's what made receiving a first-round pick from the Canucks arguably the most important aspect of the trade. They now have two first-round picks and that could prove critical given the current state of the Penguins farm system.

Pittsburgh has kept its first-round picks four times since 2013 and only twice since 2020. Having a pair of first-rounders might soften the fact the Penguins won't pick again until the third round, where they currently have three picks.

What might be second-most-important detail is they were able to move on from Pettersson, who was previously their most expensive pending UFA, without having to fill their final retention spot.

Having that final retention spot could aid the Penguins as it appears they could be moving on from more players ahead of the deadline. They have six pending UFAs with the most expensive being Matt Grzelcyk, who carries a \$2.75 million cap hit.

Desharnais, who has a year remaining at \$2 million, provides the Penguins with another third-pairing option who can also be used on their penalty kill, as he logged nearly 43 minutes of short-handed ice time this season and nearly 160 minutes last season with the Edmonton Oilers.

Heinen, who also has a year remaining at \$2.25 million, could take over for O'Connor in the top nine while also filling his role on the Penguins' penalty kill. -- Clark

Jan. 30: Frost, Farabee to Flames; Kuzmenko, Pelletier to Flyers

Could one four-player swap prove beneficial for two teams in the wild-card race?

That's what the Calgary Flames and Philadelphia Flyers will find out after a Thursday trade in which the Flames got forwards Joel Farabee and Morgan Frost in exchange for forwards Andrei Kuzmenko, Jakob Pelletier, a 2025 second-round pick and a 2028 seventh-round pick.

Here's a look at how each GM operated and what it all means.

Calgary Flames

Grade: B+

Even after this trade, the Flames still have more than \$17.5 million in cap space (per PuckPedia), which is the second most in the NHL behind the Columbus Blue Jackets (\$18.75 million).

Plus, the Flames still have two first-round picks for 2025 along with two first-round picks in 2026.

It's a level of asset management and financial flexibility that could prove vital in their bid to reach the playoffs. At some point, they'll have to weigh whether it's worth parting with a first-round pick to land another player who would help their quest to secure a playoff spot; currently, they hold the second wild-card position in the West.

The question of what to do next will be determined over the next few weeks. For now, they have more pressing concerns. The main one being: What kind of production can they get immediately from Farabee and Frost?

Losing three-time 20-goal scorer Anthony Mantha to season-ending knee surgery in November meant the Flames needed additional scoring help. The promise Kuzmenko showed after he was traded to the Flames last season -- with 14 goals and 25 points in 29 games -- withered away, as he's mustered only four goals and 15 points in 37 games this season.

Placing Connor Zary on injured reserve earlier this month only reinforced that need to find top-nine help. The scoring totals just don't add up if this team is fighting for the playoffs.

Only the Anaheim Ducks, Nashville Predators, Chicago Blackhawks and San Jose Sharks are averaging fewer goals per game than the Flames.

Farabee and Frost could potentially help the Flames address their offensive concerns. Farabee is a two-time 20-goal scorer who scored 50 points last season, while Frost could notch his third consecutive 40-point campaign.

Thus far, Farabee has scored eight goals, averaging 0.39 points per game, which has him on pace to finish with 12 goals and 29 points in 77 games. If he continues at that projection, it will result in his poorest offensive season since his rookie season in 2019-20 when he scored 21 points in 52 games.

Frost, on the other hand, has an opportunity to get back on track after spending the last two seasons coming under fire from Flyers coach John Tortorella. He's on pace for 17 goals, which would be the second most of his career, while his 39-point projection over 76 games would just fall short of the 41 points he accrued in 71 games last season.

Making the playoffs for the first time since the 2021-22 season appears to be a priority for this franchise. Another is the need to find stability, considering the Flames' many trades over the last three seasons.

Any role Farabee and Frost can play in that playoff pursuit could further justify whatever plans the Flames may have for them down the road.

Kuzmenko was in the final season of a two-year deal (\$5.5 million average annual value), while Pelletier was a pending restricted free agent. Swapping them for Farabee and Frost provides the Flames with more certainty.

Farabee has three years left on his contract carrying a \$5 million AAV. Frost is a restricted free agent who is coming off a two-year bridge deal that saw him earn \$2.1 million. The Flames would have one more year of control after this season before Frost becomes an unrestricted free agent at the end of the 2025-26 campaign.

They were able to add two players that could help them now and possibly in the future while holding only losing a minimal amount of cap space and keeping those first-round picks.

Those are the circumstances that gives Flames GM Craig Conroy the sort of options ahead of the trade deadline most in his role would covet.

Philadelphia Flyers

Grade: B+

Moving on from Farabee could play a significant role in whatever path the Flyers opt to take in the offseason.

Initially, the Flyers were slated to have \$12.88 million in available cap space heading into the summer. But the only money coming off their books was the combined \$3.4 million between Rodrigo Abols and Erik Johnson on expiring contracts, along with the Tony DeAngelo buyout at \$1.67 million.

Shedding Farabee's salary (and with Kuzmenko on an expiring deal) means they are projected to have \$17.88 million in cap space entering the offseason, according to PuckPedia.

In addition, the second-round pick they received in this deal gives them seven in the first two rounds, including three in the first.

But just how the Flyers choose to spend their money in the summer could hinge upon how Kuzmenko performs.

Part of Kuzmenko's appeal is that he has found ways to have instant success in new places. His first season with the Canucks was a breakout, with 39 goals and 74 points. His second season was a step back, with just eight goals and 21 points in 45 games before he was traded to the Flames; he got off to a hot start again, with 14 goals and 25 points in 29 games.

That trend is what makes him a possibility on the second line where he could play alongside Sean Couturier and former SKA St. Petersburg teammate Matvei Michkov. The "high-scoring newcomer" version of Kuzmenko would be highly useful, as the Flyers are five points out of the second wild-card spot.

The scoring will help, but Kuzmenko's play in the defensive zone will dictate quite a bit. Especially with the Flyers in the top five in the fewest shots allowed per 60 and ranked 12th in the fewest scoring chances allowed per 60, according to Natural Stat Trick.

As for Pelletier, the Flyers hope he can continue to build upon what has been his strongest professional season to date. He began the campaign in the AHL, where he had 19 points in 20 games, before he was called up to the Flames in early December.

He has gradually made a case for more playing time. Pelletier went from averaging a little more than 11 minutes per game in December to just under 15 minutes per game in January. It resulted in an offensive return of four goals and 11 points in 24 games, while also logging more than 33 minutes of short-handed ice time.

Like Frost, he's a pending RFA. But Pelletier's \$800,000 cap hit means that he could become a more cost-effective option compared to what Philly would have had to pay Frost. --Clark

Jan. 24: Rantanen to the Hurricanes, Necas to the Avalanche

Quiet. Quiet. Quiet. Then the NHL got loud Friday with the first blockbuster trade in recent memory.

The Colorado Avalanche traded winger Mikko Rantanen in a three-team deal involving the Carolina Hurricanes and Chicago Blackhawks. Both Taylor Hall and Rantanen went to the Hurricanes, with Jack Drury and Martin Necas going to the Avs. The Avs also received a 2025 second-round pick and a 2026 fourth-round pick from the Hurricanes. The Blackhawks reacquired their 2025 third-round pick while retaining 50% of Rantanen's salary. Prospect Nils Juntorp went from Chicago to Colorado then to Carolina.

How did each GM perform on a landscape-altering trade? Let's find out.

Carolina Hurricanes

Grade: A+

Quite simply, the Hurricanes are coming for everyone.

The franchise that built its success from drafting and developing has now added an aggressive edge to be active in free agency, while pursuing the sort of trades that make them an even stronger Stanley Cup contender.

Already one of the NHL's more legitimate championship front-runners, the Canes getting Rantanen and Hall only heightens the expectations that they have a roster capable of winning it all this season.

Rantanen provides a level of goal scoring and playmaking ability that could make a potential first line featuring Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov one of the most dangerous in the NHL. Rantanen's ability to facilitate play while using his powerful 6-foot-4 frame to fend off defenders could be the detail that allows Aho and Svechnikov the needed time to find the type of space that puts opponents in a difficult spot.

Trading Necas takes away one of the Canes' most consistent two-way players. But it hypothetically moves Jackson Blake to the second line while Hall is part of a middle-six winger pool that also features Seth Jarvis, Jordan Martinook, Jack Roslovic and Eric Robinson.

Suddenly, a team that was averaging the fifth-most goals per game in the NHL this season has added more options in the form of Rantanen -- one of the game's most consistently prolific players -- while Hall, a one-time Hart Trophy winner, could potentially finish the season with 20 goals. Those additions could also jump-start a power play that came into Friday ranked 17th.

And this is being done with the Blackhawks retaining half of Rantanen's \$9.25 million cap hit while Hall, who is also a pending UFA, carries a \$6 million cap hit.

First-year Canes GM Eric Tulsky, who was previously one of their assistant GMs, has set a tone that the priority is to win this season. But this is also the sort of trade that is going to provide Tulsky with another test.

Can he re-sign Rantanen?

Rantanen is a pending unrestricted free agent who can land one of the NHL's richest contracts over the coming months. It's possible the Hurricanes could strike a deal for him. But it will take some work.

They have nine contracts coming off the books this offseason, with the most notable being Frederik Andersen (\$3.40 million), Brent Burns (\$5.28 million) and Dmitry Orlov (\$7.75 million). PuckPedia projects the Canes will have \$22.98 million available in cap space, which could be used to re-sign Rantanen while leaving enough left over to strengthen the rest of the roster.

But for now, Tulskey and his team get the highest marks.

Colorado Avalanche

Grade: B+

Practically any conversation about what has made the Avs one of the NHL's most successful teams over the past six seasons has included Rantanen's name.

His ability to create for himself, create for others, and do it in a way that could either complement Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar -- but wasn't reliant on MacKinnon and/or Makar -- is what made Rantanen quite valuable. He is a five-time 30-goal scorer and also hit the 50-assist mark five times.

And maybe all of that was the problem for the Avs and Rantanen when it came finalizing any sort of deal.

Rantanen was a pending unrestricted free agent in the final season of a six-year deal that saw him earn \$9.25 million per year. At the time he signed the contract, he was the Avs' highest-paid player. Entering this season, he was second behind MacKinnon, who is in the first year of a deal that sees him earn \$12.6 million annually.

Each month that passed without both sides agreeing to a deal led to talk that maybe the Avs could move on from Rantanen. But it initially appeared that the talk was, well, just that.

Until it wasn't.

It appears the impasse the Avs were facing with Rantanen was the premium that comes with having a third superstar. Even though the salary cap will continue its rise in the coming years, there were still financial considerations the Avs' front office had to ponder.

They have three more years of Valeri Nichushkin (\$6.31 million per year) and Devon Toews (\$7.25 million). Ross Colton (\$4 million), Samuel Girard (\$5.75 million), Arturri Lehkonen (\$4.5 million) and Casey Mittelstadt (\$5.75 million) are part of a group that has two years left on their deals.

Then there's the money they didn't expect to take on this season when their original goaltending tandem of Justus Annunen and Alexander Georgiev began to struggle and cost the team wins.

Annenen's and Georgiev's deals cost a combined \$4.237 million cap hit that brought an extra layer of financial flexibility. Annunen is a pending restricted free agent and Georgiev was going to be a pending UFA.

But then, the Avs replaced them with Mackenzie Blackwood and Scott Wedgewood. While it strengthened the weakest area of the team, it came with a cost. Blackwood signed a three-year deal less than a month after they acquired him, which saw his salary go from \$2.35 million annually to \$5.25 million annually next season.

Now the Avalanche have \$6.75 million committed to their goalies through 2025-26.

Having that much money wrapped up in those players -- along with the Gabriel Landeskog uncertainty, and the fact he has three more years left at \$7 million on his contract -- comes against the backdrop of what the Avs must contend with after the 2026-27 season when Makar will need a very large new contract.

It's possible Makar could command the biggest contract in the NHL. And if so, it would leave the Avs needing as much financial flexibility as possible in an offseason that also sees Colton, Girard, Lehkonen and Mittelstadt reach free agency.

That's one of the hypotheticals facing the Avalanche. Another was why take the risk in losing one of the NHL's premier wingers for nothing?

Although Necas is not a prolific producer like Rantanen, he does provide the Avs with a consistent two-way center who can anchor their second line in a way in which others have struggled since Nazem Kadri left in free agency after winning the Stanley Cup in 2022.

Necas is averaging a career-best 1.12 points per game this season, with the belief those figures could either sustain or increase given the Avs have a history of seeing new players succeed in their system.

There's also the financial implication in that Necas has one more year left on his deal at \$6.5 million before he hits free agency. Should the Avs look to re-sign him, the expectation is it would hypothetically come at a cost that is much cheaper compared to whatever Rantanen would have commanded.

While the chances of finding a like-for-like trade might have proved difficult, the Avs still received a two-way top-six center in Necas, with Drury giving them another bottom-six option.

Chicago Blackhawks

Grade: C-

Asset management is everything for rebuilding teams. The Blackhawks know this, which is what makes their return in this trade rather puzzling.

Hall was expected to be moved ahead of the trade deadline. The Blackhawks were perceived to be looking to receive draft capital in return for a player who could either be a top-six or at least top-nine option for a contender.

Getting a third-round pick for Hall whether the Blackhawks retained any of his salary? OK, bet. Getting a third-round pick for retaining 50% of a salary to facilitate a deal as a third-party broker? Sure, that's the price of doing business.

But to receive only a single draft pick while giving up Hall and retaining 50% of Rantanen's salary? That raises quite a few questions about why the Hawks couldn't attract more in this deal, particularly upon the realization that the Avs received a 2025 second-round pick and a 2026 fourth-round pick in addition to getting two NHL players in Drury and Necas.

The Blackhawks are not struggling for draft capital. They entered Friday with eight picks for 2025, nine picks for 2026 and seven picks in 2027. They'll have four picks in the first two rounds this summer, including two first-rounders. But no franchise in a rebuild has ever openly complained about having too many draft picks.

They couldn't get more than a single pick here?

There was always the hypothetical that Hall's \$6 million cap hit meant they would have had to retain salary. But retaining 50% of Rantanen's salary costs more than it would have to retain the same percentage of Hall's.

Moving on from Hall now means the Blackhawks have other pending UFAs who could be used to attain more draft capital. It's a group that includes Ryan Donato, Pat Maroon and Alec Martinez among others, as the franchise is in line for its fourth consecutive top-10 pick and its third straight top-three pick.

Donato carries a \$2 million cap hit and Maroon is at \$1.3 million, which makes their salaries more affordable for an interested team. Martinez has a \$4 million cap hit. -- Clark

Dec. 18: Kakko to the Kraken, Borgen to the Rangers

Another member of what was once considered the New York Rangers' future is now gone, with the club trading Kaapo Kakko to the Seattle Kraken.

The Kraken received Kakko in exchange for defenseman Will Borgen, a 2025 third-round pick and a 2025 sixth-round pick.

Here's a look at how both front offices performed with this trade and what it all means.

New York Rangers

Grade: C-

Shortly after the trade was announced, it was reported that Kakko's quote to reporters before the team's 2-0 loss Tuesday against the Nashville Predators did not play a role in the trade.

The 23-year-old forward was a healthy scratch in a 3-2 loss Sunday to the St. Louis Blues, which led to him saying, "I know you've got to do something as a coach when you're losing games, but I think it's just easy to pick a young guy and boot him out. That's how I feel to be honest."

Kakko had four goals and 14 points in 30 games. He was on pace for 11 goals and 37 points, entering the final season of his contract as a player who had yet to reach the heights of what was expected when he was the No. 2 pick of the 2019 draft.

Now Kakko is gone, and he becomes the latest personnel move in a season that has led to questions about where the Rangers go next -- and if it could still somehow result in the club reaching the Eastern Conference finals for the third time in four years.

The Rangers had lost five in a row and six of their past seven games around the time GM Chris Drury sent a memo to the rest of the league to inform them the Rangers were open for business. It led to them trading captain and defenseman Jacob Trouba to the Anaheim Ducks on Dec. 6, a move that added salary cap space with Trouba still having another year left on his contract worth \$8 million.

Moving on from Trouba meant Braden Schneider and Victor Mancini would receive more opportunities. Those plans changed with K'Andre Miller going on injured reserve Friday, which put a strain on a Rangers team that is 2-6 since Trouba was traded.

It's why Schneider was partnered with rookie Zac Jones on the second pairing, with Urho Vaakanainen, who was acquired in the Trouba trade, on the third pairing with veteran journeyman Chad Ruhwedel.

Losing on Tuesday to the last-place Predators gave the Rangers a third straight defeat, during which time they were outscored 10-3.

Then came the trade that saw them get Borgen, send Mancini to the AHL and recall forward Matt Rempe.

Adding Borgen gives the Rangers another right-handed defenseman who has shown he can play top-four minutes while logging heavy minutes on the penalty kill -- something the Rangers needed with Trouba still leading them in short-handed ice time as of Wednesday.

It's also a move that provides them additional financial flexibility going forward. One of the challenges facing Drury and his front office staff was figuring out their cap situation ahead of next offseason. And that was before they signed superstar goaltender Igor Shesterkin to a long-term extension worth \$11.5 million annually.

Jones, Kakko, Miller and Will Cuyll were all pending restricted free agents, while top-pairing defenseman Ryan Lindgren is a pending unrestricted free agent.

By flipping Kakko for Borgen, a pending UFA, it allows the Rangers another outlet to get money off their books with Borgen earning \$2.7 million this season. It now leaves the Rangers with a six-player UFA class that also includes Jonathan Quick and Reilly Smith, among others.

This allows Drury & Co. more money to play with as the Rangers seek to keep their coveted core together. A core that no longer features a player who was once thought to be one of the faces of the future. And that's the bottom line here; while Borgen is useful to fill the Trouba-sized hole, Kakko might have some runway left in his development, which will now be revealed in a Kraken sweater.

Seattle Kraken

Grade: B

Kraken GM Ron Francis was able to take Borgen, who was the team's pick from the Buffalo Sabres in the expansion draft, eventually turn him into a top-four defenseman, and trade him (with Day 2 draft picks) for a potential top-six forward in Kakko.

The key word being potential.

Development is one of the items that makes the NHL distinctive -- and also makes it complicated. A 23-year-old in another professional sport would be met with the understanding that they're not a finished product at such a young age.

That's what the Kraken are banking on. It's what the Rangers were also banking on, before pulling the rip cord on a forward who has played the second-most games of his draft class yet is sixth in points; for context, his fellow Finland countryman, Matias Maccelli, was taken 96 picks later and is separated by nine points despite playing 131 fewer games.

Kakko's best season came in 2022-23 when he had 18 goals and 40 points in 82 games, averaging 15 minutes, 18 seconds in ice time. Since then, he has scored 17 goals and 31 points in 91 games, while averaging 13:16 in ice time.

Coming to Seattle should lead to Kakko receiving opportunities that were much harder to come by in New York. Whether it be with Matty Beniers, Tye Kartye, Ryker Evans and now Shane Wright, the Kraken have shown they are willing to give young players a chance to earn minutes. Especially with captain Jordan Eberle being on long-term injured reserve, while Yanni Gourde has been day-to-day since last playing on Dec. 10.

Getting the most out of young players is one of the reasons why the Kraken hired coach Dan Bylsma and assistant Jessica Campbell. The work they did developing and winning with quite a few of the Kraken's prospects at the AHL level could potentially lead to Kakko finding more continuity in Seattle.

Again, the key word here being, potentially.

Playing time isn't the only thing that's at stake. Kakko is a pending RFA who has one more year of team control before his UFA years start kicking in before the 2026-27 season.

How he performs this season could at least lead to a one-year deal, with the idea that the Kraken might also be tempted to give him more than that if he becomes a key player for them.

Entering Wednesday, the Kraken were four points out of the final Western Conference wild-card playoff spot. They played an extra game more than the team holding the last spot -- the Calgary Flames -- while the Utah Hockey Club is three points behind but has played three fewer games.

The Kraken were expected to be part of a grouping of teams that could potentially challenge for a wild card, with the notion they might have to decide their path (and role) ahead of the trade deadline.

Spending big money in the offseason to sign Brandon Montour and Chandler Stephenson signaled their intent about what they could do this season and beyond. Adding Kakko only adds to the belief of what this season could potentially mean for the Kraken. -- Clark

Dec. 14: Fowler traded to St. Louis

After 991 games wearing an Anaheim Ducks uniform, Cam Fowler will now wear a St. Louis Blues sweater.

The Blues acquired Fowler and a 2027 fourth-round pick from the Ducks in exchange for a 2027 second-round pick and prospect defenseman Jeremie Biakabutuka. The Ducks will also retain 38.4615385% of Fowler's salary.

Here's a look at how both front offices did with the trade.

St. Louis Blues

Grade: B+

There are two versions of the Blues in 2024-25: The first version was struggling under Drew Bannister; the second version is under the guidance of Jim Montgomery, who was hired to replace Bannister less than a week after his own dismissal by the Boston Bruins.

In Montgomery's eight games, the Blues have found a defensive cohesion that's been missing. That problem has been one of the largest challenges facing GM Doug Armstrong in his bid to get the Blues back into the playoffs.

Having four defensemen with no-trade clauses was also a massive hurdle when it came to making changes. What opened the door was when one of those defensemen, Torey Krug, sustained an ankle injury that required season-ending surgery in September.

That played a role in them adding Philip Broberg via offer sheet, with the idea that they could be tempted to potentially add more should a deal that fits within their parameters become available.

Enter Fowler, who now represents another potential change in a season that has already seen quite a few.

His future with the Ducks was already in question following the Jacob Trouba trade. To have another top-four option available at a price that could fit within their salary cap structure made Fowler an attractive option for St. Louis.

Now it's a matter of determining what sort of role Fowler, who has one more season after the 2024-25 campaign left on his contract, can play on a roster that's allowing the sixth-fewest goals per game since the Blues hired Montgomery on Nov. 25.

Part of what has helped the Blues is they now have a team save percentage that's fourth in the league in Montgomery's eight games in charge; they have risen to 14th for the whole season. They are allowing the eighth-fewest high-danger chances, while sitting 13th in fewest scoring chances allowed per 60 minutes, and are around league average in shots allowed per 60.

That's one area where Fowler could play a role. Another could be a power play that has struggled before and after they hired Montgomery. They are 20th since Montgomery took over and are 25th on the season.

This could be a win-win deal. Fowler gives the Ducks someone with experience operating a power play. The Blues provide Fowler with the ice time he wasn't receiving on the man advantage, as he had just

10:07 in power-play ice time this season after reaching the 100-minute mark in all but one season since making his debut in 2010-11.

Fowler could pair with Colton Parayko, a duo that could be the latest building block Montgomery could use to find more consistency.

The Blues entered Saturday four points out of the final Western Conference wild-card spot, and this is a move made with erasing that gap in mind.

Anaheim Ducks

Grade: B

Ducks GM Pat Verbeek knew what this season's climate was like for teams needing a top-four defenseman, having just acquired Trouba for Urho Vaakanainen and a 2025 fourth-round pick.

But the Ducks were facing a different situation with trying to move on from Fowler than what the Rangers were going through before they sent Trouba to Anaheim.

What helped Verbeek is that he had the necessary time to find what he felt was the strongest possible trade. And he made a deal that attained more draft capital for a franchise that's believed to have one of the NHL's brightest and strongest farm futures.

There's that word. Future.

The future is one of the major reasons the Ducks moved on from Fowler, who was less than 10 games from playing No. 1,000 for the club. Drafting and developing young defensemen has become a hallmark of what the Ducks have done over the past few years.

It's why they've brought up Jackson LaCombe, Pavel Mintyukov and Olen Zellweger. And while Drew Helleson was acquired in a trade, he's a 2019 second-round pick with promise and size.

The improvement by the young defensive core is why Fowler's power-play minutes significantly diminished this season. And once the Ducks got Trouba, it meant that playing Fowler came at the expense of not playing one of those younger defensemen like Helleson or Zellweger, given LaCombe and Mintyukov have already established themselves as nightly fixtures.

And for a franchise that has shown it is beyond comfortable giving young players a chance to play? Building that young core ultimately led the Ducks down the path to where Fowler was expendable. Getting Trouba, who has one more year left on his deal after this season, was essentially the final push that allowed the Ducks to feel comfortable moving on. -- Clark

Dec. 9: Blackwood to Colorado, Georgiev to San Jose

With goaltending being a major problem for the Colorado Avalanche, could Mackenzie Blackwood be the solution?

The Avalanche acquired Blackwood and forward Givani Smith in a trade with the San Jose Sharks that sees goalie Alexandar Georgiev, forward Nikolai Kovalenko, a 2025 fifth-round pick and a 2026 second-round pick head to the Bay Area. The Avs also retained 14% of Georgiev's salary.

How did both GMs fare in the trade? Let's find out.

Colorado Avalanche

Grade: B

The Avalanche's defensive structure ranks in the top 10 of fewest scoring chances allowed per 60 minutes and shots allowed per 60. Unfortunately, their save percentage as a team is second worst in the NHL.

That defensive zone disconnect is why changes needed to be made for an Avs team that's fighting for a wild-card spot as mid-December draws closer -- despite its status as a preseason Stanley Cup favorite.

But it's also symptomatic of a larger problem with the Avs in that they've had issues building a consistently strong supporting cast around their core led by Nathan MacKinnon, Cale Makar and Mikko Rantanen.

Having that supporting cast is what helped them win a title in 2022. Lacking that cast is why they were knocked out of the first round a year later and lost in the second round last season.

Georgiev averaged 39 wins per season in his first two with the team. But that came with questions: Was Georgiev the sole reason he won so many games in Denver? Or was it the structure around him that led to his success?

All Avs GM Chris MacFarland needed was 18 games this season to answer those questions.

It started when Colorado traded Justus Annunen to the Nashville Predators to get Scott Wedgewood. But it became even clearer when Wedgewood's first win came in relief of Georgiev on Dec. 3 -- when the latter allowed four goals on eight shots in the Avs' 5-4 win over the Buffalo Sabres.

Now the Avalanche are turning to Blackwood and hope he can steady the ship. His .911 save percentage is 12th among goalies with more than 10 games played, while his goals saved versus average is in the top 20.

Blackwood is not perfect, and there are questions about the newest Av:

Is he the answer for a team that has Stanley Cup aspirations? Is he different from the goalie who forced the New Jersey Devils to find alternatives when they made the playoffs in 2023? And while the Avs needed to make a move, was the price they paid to add Blackwood too much given he has never played in the postseason?

We'll find out the answers to all of these in the coming weeks and months.

San Jose Sharks

Grade: B+

Every move Sharks GM Mike Grier makes for the foreseeable future is about building a better tomorrow for the Sharks. The return package for Blackwood will play a role in those plans.

Go back to when Grier acquired Blackwood in 2023. The Sharks parted with a 2023 sixth-round pick to get him from the Devils. Now fast-forward to Monday, and the return Grier received goes well beyond the sixth-round pick he sent to the Devils.

And he still has two pending unrestricted free agent goalies on the roster.

Georgiev's arrival will impact the Sharks at the NHL level and beyond. He will join a tandem with Vitek Vanecek for a team that came into Monday seven points behind the Avs for the final wild-card spot and seven points ahead of the Chicago Blackhawks for the NHL's worst record.

Adding Georgiev gives the Sharks seven pending unrestricted free agents. It's possible that the Sharks could attain additional draft capital ahead of the trade deadline if there's a team seeking goaltending depth. That's another reason getting the Avs to retain 14% of his salary was crucial.

All three of the Sharks' retained salary slots are filled because of previous trades involving Brent Burns, Tomas Hertl and Erik Karlsson. It's what makes the need for the Sharks to present their pending UFAs as affordable to playoff hopefuls even more crucial.

But where it gets more captivating is how the Sharks now have two experienced options in net, meaning they can take their time with developing top goalie prospect Yaroslav Askarov, who had a 1.96 goals-against average and a .927 save percentage in two games before he was returned to the AHL.

Kovalenko is another player who could also help the Sharks this season and possibly beyond. He gives the Sharks a ninth player younger than 25 on the roster, in a group that includes Macklin Celebrini, William Eklund, Mario Ferraro and Will Smith, among others. Kovalenko, who has four goals and eight points in 28 games, could possibly challenge for a top-nine role. He's also a pending restricted free agent, which means the Sharks could look to sign him to a new deal or move on from him via another trade.

All in all, another tidy piece of business for Grier. -- Clark

Dec. 6: Trouba to the Ducks

The New York Rangers traded defenseman Jacob Trouba to the Anaheim Ducks, ending a tense few months of speculation about their captain's future.

The Ducks sent defenseman Urho Vaakanainen and a conditional 2025 fourth-round pick to the Rangers for Trouba. Anaheim takes on all of Trouba's contract, which carries an \$8 million average annual value against the salary cap through the 2025-26 season.

The Rangers will receive either the Ducks' or the Detroit Red Wings' fourth-round pick, depending on which one is lower in the draft order.

New York Rangers

Grade: A

The marking period for this trade began on July 19, 2019. That's when then-Rangers general manager Jeff Gorton signed defenseman Jacob Trouba to a seven-year, \$56 million contract to avoid salary arbitration.

Despite being one of the league's most effective defensemen at that point -- which is why the Rangers acquired him from the Winnipeg Jets in the first place -- many thought that Trouba's \$8 million annual cap hit was overcompensation, considering the bell curve of a physical defenseman's effectiveness in the NHL. The Rangers certainly took that into account: That overcompensation bought them flexibility in the final two years of Trouba's contract, which carried a no-movement clause from 2020-24 before switching to a 15-team no-trade clause.

That no-trade clause still gave Trouba some agency over his future, as the Rangers discovered last summer when his refusal to submit a list of approved teams early reportedly torpedoed a potential trade with the Detroit Red Wings. But it couldn't protect him from the Rangers using their nuclear option, which is what ultimately led to Trouba's trade to Anaheim.

Please recall when the Rangers placed forward Barclay Goodrow on waivers in June, clearing the last three years of his contract off their books when the San Jose Sharks claimed him in a prearranged move. There's no question that GM Chris Drury pointed to that example and told Trouba, "This could happen to you."

You could be on a rebuilding Chicago Blackhawks team that just fired their coach. Or the San Jose Sharks. Or the Red Wings, with whom you didn't want to play last summer. Or shuffle back up to Canada, not as a Winnipeg Jet but as a Montreal Canadien. Such was the waiver wire.

Or Trouba could select from the potential trade destinations placed in front of him, waiving his no-trade clause for one of them.

With that, the captain of the New York Rangers is now a member of the Anaheim Ducks.

Part of this grade goes to the Rangers' front office in 2019, when Drury was an assistant GM, for having the foresight to create this pressure point. And part of it goes to Drury, who exerted that pressure to move Trouba's cap hit off the books, remove an ineffective defenseman from his blue line and send a shock to the system of a struggling team.

The Rangers are 13-10-1 this season. They're in a wild card. But they've lost six games in regulation out of their past seven. Drury was so displeased with what he saw that he put out a memo to 31 other NHL teams telling them he was open for business and mentioning Trouba by name.

Trouba has been a liability all season. He's in the negatives across the board analytically relative to his teammates, including a 47.5% expected goals percentage. He has just six assists in 24 games, skating to a minus-3. Even the one thing the Rangers used to depend on from Trouba -- physicality -- was down, as he averaged 4.87 hits per 60 minutes after averaging 7.81 last season.

Of course, it should be said that Drury basically made him a lame duck, and that has to impact his performance.

In the immediate term, the trade opens up ice time for Braden Schneider and Victor Mancini, two players the Rangers are eager to see develop.

(Vaakanainen, whom they received from Anaheim, is a spare at this point, and was a healthy scratch for the Ducks this season.)

But taking the long view, we've now seen the other shoe drop for the Rangers: Clearing Trouba's salary allowed them to finally sign goalie Igor Shesterkin to his new contract worth \$11.5 million against the salary cap -- a record for NHL goalies. Which certainly alleviates one point of long-term planning stress for Drury and only increases this grade

Whether or not the roster shake-up goes beyond Trouba remains to be seen. Don't forget, Chris Kreider's name was in that Drury memo, too.

But getting Trouba off the books and off the ice was something the Rangers had been attempting for months. With more than a gentle nudge, he has sailed to the Pacific.

Nothing like trading your captain through pitiless means to get a locker room's attention.

Anaheim Ducks

Grade: B

I don't hate this from the Ducks' perspective.

Trouba is a better defenseman than the majority of the blueliners on the Anaheim roster. That's assuming some of his poor play was due to the Rangers basically standing in the doorway with his bags packed for six months, which will certainly weigh on a guy.

At least now he's with a team that he begrudgingly picked, with a couple of former teammates (Ryan Strome and Frank Vatrano) and a general manager in Pat Verbeek who says kind things such as "on the ice, he competes every shift, leads by example and is a presence on the blue line every night."

Verbeek also called him "a big part of our future success," and hopefully that means as a mentor to young defensemen rather than signing Trouba until he's 37 when his contract runs out after the 2025-26 season. The Ducks have up-and-comers such as Pavel Mintyukov, Olen Zellweger, Drew Helleson and Jackson LaCombe on the roster, with players such as Stian Solberg and Tristan Luneau in the pipeline. Trouba can be a "lead by example" type, having excelled offensively and defensively during his career. After six seasons in Winnipeg and six more in New York, he has seen some things.

It's safe to say that Trouba is in decline at 30 years old. He might have been a liability with the Rangers, but the bar is set rather lower in Anaheim. This is an atrocious defensive team. The Ducks are giving up 3.14 expected goals against per 60 minutes at 5-on-5, last in the league and the only NHL team over three expected goals against on average this season. They earn only 45% of the shot attempts in a game, 31st in the NHL. No one gives up more high-danger shot attempts (13.5 per 60 minutes) than Anaheim -- although please note that the Rangers were right behind them (13.1).

The Ducks have prioritized physicality, and Trouba can bring that. The idea that Anaheim can roll out Radko Gudas and Trouba on the same defense should have Western Conference opponents already reaching for the Advil.

They didn't give up anything for him. Even if Vaakanainen was playing, which he wasn't, the Ducks were dealing from a position of depth. The fourth-rounder is expendable, given they had two. The \$8 million salary cap hit shouldn't impact them much next season: While Mason McTavish will need a new deal this summer, Leo Carlsson's big-ticket second contract won't be until after Trouba's expires.

Plus, if he finds his game in Anaheim and the Ducks aren't in the playoff mix next season, they could always retain salary and flip Trouba at the 2026 trade deadline. He's exactly the kind of defenseman who has value for contenders at the right price.

Verbeek said, "It's rare you are able to acquire a player with Jacob's experience, stature and ability."

Despite this decline and the growing flaws in his game, that's undoubtedly true, and especially for this compensation. The Ducks need more adults in the room. They landed themselves an NHL captain, who can hopefully find more effectiveness in a place where he's wanted. -- Wyshynski

Nov. 30: Jiricek traded to the Wild

In need of a change, defenseman David Jiricek found one Saturday when the Columbus Blue Jackets traded the former No. 6 pick to the Minnesota Wild.

The Wild received Jiricek and a 2025 fifth-round pick, with the Blue Jackets receiving a top-five protected 2025 first-round pick, a 2027 second-round pick, a 2026 third-round pick, a 2026 fourth-round pick and defenseman Daemon Hunt.

Minnesota Wild

Grade: B+

Last season allowed the Wild to draw two conclusions about the state of their defense.

The first was that they appear to have a legitimate franchise cornerstone in Brock Faber, who finished second in Calder Trophy voting. The second was that the team needed to figure out how to continue to get younger on the back end, especially with injuries ravaging a unit that had quite a few players -- Zach Bogosian, Jonas Brodin, Jon Merrill and captain Jared Spurgeon -- all older than 30.

That process began in 2021 when they used one of their two first-round picks to select Winnipeg Ice defenseman Carson Lambos. They acquired Faber in 2022 in the Kevin Fiala trade with the Los Angeles Kings. In June, they used their first-round pick (No. 12) to draft University of Denver defenseman Zeev Buium. Now, they have added Jiricek, the sixth pick in the 2022 draft.

As for what this all means for this season?

Much of that could depend upon Jiricek. Part of what made him available in the first place was the belief that he was unhappy with his role in Columbus. He was averaging 11:11 in six games while logging less than 10 minutes over what became his final three contests before he was sent to the AHL.

Jiricek will remain in the AHL, where he will use his time with the Wild's affiliate to push for a role at the NHL level. Jiricek is a 6-foot-4 puck mover, and those traits have come through in the AHL, where he's scored 15 goals and 60 points in 88 games. This season, he has two goals and three points in four games.

Whether he can find a way to translate his AHL production to the NHL is the looming question. If he can, he'll give the Wild another facilitator with size who could be trusted to play key minutes. Beyond that, he could give the Wild those minutes on his entry-level contract, which is important for a franchise that's had to become adept at spending cap space because of the combined Zach Parise and Ryan Suter buyouts that currently cost \$14.7 million but will fall to \$1.66 million next season.

The Wild (15-4-4) were two points behind the Winnipeg Jets for the best record in the NHL and the Western Conference entering Saturday. They're allowing the fewest goals per game in the NHL this season, the fewest high-danger scoring chances per 60 and rank in the top 10 in the fewest scoring chances allowed per 60.

Not only have they established consistency, but the Wild also have the depth to go with that continuity. Faber is one of three defensemen who have played in every game, while four of their defensemen have appeared in more than 16 games this season.

Maintaining that level means the Wild don't have to be in a rush to call up Jiricek and can let him settle into their system. And if the Wild can remain in the hunt for a top seed, they've essentially added a one-time top-six pick for what will ultimately become a first-round selection that's toward the bottom of the draft.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Grade: B+

Moving on from a one-time top-10 pick such as Jiricek comes with the question about if a franchise has received or has come close to receiving a return of equal value.

It appears that Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell was able to achieve that by getting a sizable haul along with a defenseman who can play right now with Hunt.

At the time of the trade, the Blue Jackets (10-9-3) look as if they could go in a few directions this season. On Saturday, they were two points out of the final Eastern Conference wild-card spot while also being within five points of having the NHL's worst record.

The fact Jiricek struggled to get minutes and was sent to the AHL before being traded shows that the Blue Jackets were comfortable with their dynamic in the interim. But how this could work out for them in the future is where it gets interesting.

Waddell's time in charge of the Carolina Hurricanes saw the club rely upon the draft to build a roster that has since become one of the NHL's perennial favorites to win the Stanley Cup. One of the ways the Hurricanes reached that destination was to have as many draft picks as possible.

With this trade, the Blue Jackets now have 27 draft picks over the next three seasons.

Another detail that could factor into the decision to move on from Jiricek is the defensive youth the Blue Jackets have on their NHL roster and in their farm system. Five of the seven defensemen on the Blue Jackets' active roster are younger than 27. That does not include Hunt.

They also have youth in their system. They used one of their three first-round picks in 2021 to draft Corson Ceulemans. A year later, they used one of their two first-rounders to take Denton Mateychuk. Of course, the other player they drafted in the first round that year was Jiricek. They also used four of their six picks to draft defensemen in 2024, with the most notable being Charlie Elick, who went in the second round. – Clark

[Sportsnet.ca / What to expect from every team at 2025 NHL trade deadline](#)

By Rory Boylen – March 7, 2025

The trading has begun in the NHL, and you should expect more moves in a flurry of action on Friday.

Some teams we've seen buy already (Florida, Colorado, Vegas) still have space to strike big again. A number of teams that were still on the fence about buying or selling have come to decision time.

Many teams could be waiting on the Mikko Rantanen situation to play out. The prize of the trade season when he was sent from Colorado to Carolina could be the prize again if the Hurricanes decide to flip him, and Elliotte Friedman reports the Dallas Stars are intensifying talks. Once the dam breaks on that, the trade market could begin to flow.

So, what are we expecting from all 32 teams?

Here, we give you an outlook for everyone, with cap space, possible trade candidates and needs. We'll show you what Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman said about everyone on Monday's episode of the 32 Thoughts Podcast, anything the team's GM has said recently, and a general overview of each situation.

One thing to note: All cap numbers and draft-pick information come via PuckPedia. You will notice some very high "deadline day cap space" totals in some places. That's because, if a team has been under the cap, it accumulates space, and the longer it does this, the more room it'll have to play with at the trade deadline.

At this time of year, a traded player is paid the remaining percentage of his salary by the acquiring team, and the remaining cap charge is actually added to its total — the former team has paid everything up until this point. But, to make it simple when looking at the salary-cap charts, what the "deadline day cap space" number shows is simply the full, season-long value in AAV a team can add on March 7. (Of course, you have to be overall cap compliant again by October!)

With that in mind, here's what you need to get set for the big day.

Status: Straddling between seller and long-term buyer

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$74.126 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Futures. Contributing pieces to move forward with. Veteran star power.

Potentially Available: Trevor Zegras, John Gibson

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "This is a team that wants to take a jump. We've talked about this with Pat Verbeek. They took their shots last year at Stamkos and Marchessault, didn't get them, so it says to me that Verbeek wants to move things forward, so I think he's always looking at it like if he can add a big piece that makes them better, he's going to go for it."

Outlook: Between breakout star Jackson LaCombe, Pavel Mintyukov, Olen Zellweger and Brian Dumoulin, the Anaheim Ducks had a bunch of left-shot defencemen, so to make sure that the three younger players all see regular game action, Dumoulin, the 33-year-old pending UFA, was traded out Thursday for a second-round pick and prospect Herman Traff.

Aside from that, the Ducks find themselves in a playoff race for the first time in years and have to begin changing their mindset from accumulating futures to figuring out how to officially get out of this rebuild,

even if this year's chase falls short. John Gibson is having a good season and, with two years remaining on his contract, could be a tradable asset, though durability concerns persist as we saw Wednesday night when he left a game vs. the Canucks.

Status: Seller

Deadline Day Cap Space: ~\$7.8 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: To restructure. Centres, young players, futures.

Potentially Available: Charlie Coyle, Brad Marchand, Brandon Carlo, salary retention

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "They don't react well to seasons like this, which is one of the reasons they're a great franchise, and they never have long points where they're not a factor. They just don't accept this. So I've sat here saying, 'OK, how do they deal with it from here?' No. 1 to me is (Jeremy) Swayman, and what do they think his difference is next year. I believe the Bruins are not only talking about dealing their rentals, they're also looking at what can they add that can make them better long term. I don't think they're just looking at this as a rest-of-year conversation, I think they're looking at it as an into-the-future conversation."

What the GM has said: "Historically, we've been pretty aggressive when our team's in a position. I think we'll take a much more cautious approach as we approach the deadline. ... (We) may plant a seed for the draft and beyond."

"We've been in negotiations with Brad (Marchand) and communicating with him through the year. We'll have to have a conversation now that the 4 Nations is over, sit down with Brad and his representatives and have a clearer path in the next two weeks as to what his final outcome will be." — Don Sweeney on Feb. 23.

Outlook: This season started off on the wrong foot when contract negotiations with RFA Swayman dragged on into training camp and then into the public sphere. The Bruins, long a contending team in the East, now face a steep climb back up into the playoffs — never mind the point differential, they have the second-worst goal differential in the East and have to climb over four teams to get into a wild-card spot.

All the right things are being said by management and player about Marchand's future, but it'd be a risk for a team in Boston's position to go past the trade deadline without a contract in place. Surely there are contenders who would love to add his big-game pedigree. Injuries have smoked the Bruins, making any late-season surge seem unlikely, so we're looking for them to take an uncharacteristic seller approach.

Justin Brazeau was moved Thursday night. Is that just the start of their sell off?

Status: Cautious seller/reshaper

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$29.22 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Veterans to surround a young core. A shake-up.

Potentially Available: Dylan Cozens, Mattias Samuelsson, Bowen Byram, Alex Tuch, Henri Jokiharju, JJ Peterka

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "(GM Kevyn Adams) has been saying all year he's willing to do something, as long as it's a hockey trade. He's made it very clear he's not giving guys away. ... I also think

there's just a fear at what's happened with all the guys they've dealt. (Jack) Eichel, Stanley Cup champion. (Sam) Reinhart, Stanley Cup champion. Everybody knows what I'm talking about here.

"Cozens and Detroit was very real, it obviously didn't happen. I don't know. Sometimes you just have to say you don't know because I've been waiting for it to happen all year and I guess we're all still just waiting for it to happen."

What the GM has said: "I'm not happy with where we're at, but we're not going to panic or overreact or make a knee-jerk decision or reactionary trade that sets you back. We have to look at things we think will improve our team and act on it." — Kevyn Adams at a media gathering on Dec. 6.

Outlook: This is probably the most dangerous situation to monitor at the deadline. Four teams were looking to take a step up in the East this season: Detroit, Ottawa, Montreal and Buffalo. The first three are in a heated playoff race. The Sabres are, once again, on track for a front-row seat at the draft lottery.

So some reaction to this failure is necessary from the front office. What comes now, and what waits until after the season? The Sabres have a culture problem and need more and better experienced players to surround the young core they've invested in, but we're at the point where we have to ask if this core is the right mix. That's where the danger comes in. Trading someone like Cozens or Byram could come back to bite the Sabres in the same way Reinhart or Ryan O'Reilly or Eichel have, and risks setting back the rebuild for the well, we've lost count how many times. It's been nearly a decade and a half since this team made the playoffs, and there's no end in sight. Meantime, how hot is Adams' GM seat?

Status: Non-rental buyer.

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$82.649 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Young contributors, assets under control, defence, depth goalie

Potentially Available: Dan Vladar, Daniil Miromanov, Joel Hanley, rental retention

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "(GM Craig) Conroy's made it very clear that his veterans, the Colemans, Kadris, Weegars, Anderssons, they're not going anywhere ... they're in the race. I think that's important to the Flames. I also believe that they want their young players who are going to be a big part of their team in the future, the Coronatos, the Zarys, Pospisil is another of those guys, they want those guys playing important games. Dustin Wolf, I think that's also really good for him. Let Wolf play important games. They believe it matters."

What the GM has said: "You're always looking to improve the team, but it's got to make sense.

"If it's a younger player, and we have them under control, or even maybe a 26-year-old that you're gonna have control of, it might make more sense.

Outlook: This playoff race is all gravy for the Calgary Flames, whom most expected to miss out on the post-season back in October. Of course, there are enough NHL players on this roster that there was a certain base line they were never likely to fall under — this wasn't shaping up to be a team sinking as low as San Jose or Chicago.

The door was left open by the Vancouver Canucks, and now the Flames find themselves on the inside of the cut line at the deadline. They've already acquired Frost and Farabee from Philadelphia, two mid-20s players with scoring upside who are under team control. They aren't likely a destination for any costly rental, but the Flames are buyers and have oceans of cap space to use.

Status: Buyer, but also potentially selling one huge piece

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$499,077

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Scoring. A star, the type they already acquired.

Potentially Available: Mikko Rantanen, picks, prospects.

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "Carolina has to make a decision here (on Rantanen): What do they feel comfortable doing? Do they feel comfortable going for it, or do they say, 'You know what, we don't like where this is going and we're going to try to see the best player that we can get, or the best return we can get?'"

Outlook: Deadline morning might start with Carolina. They've already made the biggest trade of the season by acquiring Mikko Rantanen, and now they may make the second-biggest trade -- sending Rantanen back on his way.

The morning begins with a framework in place for a trade that would send Mikko Rantanen to Dallas, if a contract can be ironed out. Immediately Dallas, already a contender, becomes a far bigger threat in the Western Conference. Carolina also has the ability to win a few rounds and hopes to take a shot at the Stanley Cup -- so what exactly will they be getting in return?

Various teams around the league are looking for a scoring winger, and the decision on Rantanen may be holding that up. Once this blockbuster goes through, the market could open up to a wild day.

Carolina is not a traditional seller — it is a Stanley Cup contender and has been for years, but its offence always seems to sputter along the post-season journey.

Status: Seller

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$24.107 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Picks, prospects, players who can make an impact in next few years

Potentially Available: Ryan Donato, Pat Maroon, Petr Mrazek, Connor Murphy

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I look at them now and I wonder, if they can do more deals like (the Seth Jones trade) where they get young players who are ready to play, kind of like in the (Spencer) Knight mold, I can see them trying it."

What the GM has said: "I think there's always side effects and things you have to handle around any deal you make, certainly a big one. I wouldn't say we're concerned with anything. There are things that we'll have to explore, in terms of how we fill minutes, certainly. Does anyone, internally, can they do that for the rest of the season? How does that go? Do we explore over the next week if we can fill some holes there?"

"There are certainly some things we'll have to look into. Again, we're in a time crunch here before the deadline, but we'll explore some options and see if there's anything out there." — Kyle Davidson to The Athletic after trading Seth Jones to Florida

Outlook: It's much of the same in Chicago, one of the basement-dwellers in the NHL with no clear path up. The Blackhawks at least have Connor Bedard, but one wonders if they'll soon regret passing on Ivan Demidov. One player, no matter how special, does not make for a successful NHL team, and the Blackhawks have to be aware that at some point soon things need to start getting better around Bedard.

Jones is gone to Florida and although that's a hit to their depth chart, the return of Knight and a first is a nice win for Davidson. However, that trade also cost Chicago its final salary retention slot, so anyone it sends out will come at full value unless a different broker can be found.

Status: Buyer

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$1.336 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Depth, but most of their needs have been accomplished

Potentially Available: Casey Mittelstadt, draft picks, prospects

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "They've tried to remake their bottom six a bit, but I still think that (second-)line centre, I still think it's something that if they can, they will do it."

What the GM has said: "I think it's no secret we had to try and get deeper up front and on the back end. I don't think we're totally satisfied. If we can still find a way to improve the team, we'll try. How? I don't know. We've used some draft capital and things of that sort, but I think we're deeper (now)." — Colorado GM Chris MacFarland on March 3, after acquiring Ryan Lindgren.

Outlook: The Avs are in their win-now window, even after trading out superstar winger Mikko Rantanen, who wanted more on an extension than Colorado was comfortable dishing out. In that deal, Colorado acquired Martin Necas to fill the void on the wing, as well as Jack Drury to become a much-needed upgrade in their third-line centre hole. It's been a home run so far, as Necas has been ripping along at a point-per-game pace.

But that's far from the only move the Avs have made this season. They also addressed another need by acquiring rental defenceman Ryan Lindgren this past week, and earlier this season they re-tooled their goal crease on the fly by acquiring MacKenzie Blackwood and Scott Wedgewood in separate trade, signing Blackwood to a long-term extension.

The last glaring need was for a second line centre, and that was accomplished late Thursday night/early Friday morning when they brought in Brock Nelson from the Islanders.

That could be in for the Avalanche, though with a little cap space still remaining, they could seek out more depth security in case of injuries.

Status: Would-be seller turned into buyer or, at least, a stand-pat team

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$86.223 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Top-six right winger

Potentially Available: Sean Kuraly, Dante Fabbro, maybe a first-rounder

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "If you trade (Ivan) Provorov, unless you're going out and getting something to replace him — and they shouldn't lose grip of the future, they shouldn't be giving up anything big for a rental — but you gotta reward your players. If you trade Provorov, you're creating a bit of a hole on your blue line, so how do you deal with that?"

What the GM has said: "From my end, I think prices are a little high in some areas, especially for rentals. But I think things will settle down in the next 36-48 hours and we'll see where they come out."

"We have a couple first-round picks, but we're not going to trade those for rental players, it doesn't make much sense. Our team's done a great job to hang in there, but we very well could miss too, and if you give up a first-round pick, it just doesn't make sense for where we're at. Hockey deals, we're wide open for. I've talked to several teams today about those types of deals because we're gonna need good players going forward too and we're willing to pay those prices. I'd prefer to make the hockey deals, but if there's a rental deal that makes sense, we'll certainly jump on it." — Don Waddell to Kyper and Bourne on March 5.

Outlook: The best story of the NHL season, Columbus has had to recalculate its approach to everything because they're in a playoff spot. No longer sellers, the Blue Jackets are talking about keeping Provorov with or without a contract extension by March 7, and they've re-signed another pending UFA Mathieu Olivier.

There's reason to believe they could finish stronger, too. Sean Monahan and Cole Sillinger are hoping to be back in March — the former was the centre of one of the NHL's best lines with Dmitri Voronkov and Kirill Marchenko when he went down in January. The team is also considering its buying options on the trade market. Unlikely to be much of a rental destination, the Blue Jackets could seek an upgrade through a hockey trade that gives them something to move into the future with as well. With a huge amount of cap space, they have surprise deadline-team potential.

Status: Buyer with room to do something big

Deadline Day Cap Space: *\$4.598 million (*add \$8.45 million if Miro Heiskanen misses rest of regular season)

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Defencemen, roster depth

Potentially Available: Mavrik Bourque, Logan Stankoven, draft picks, prospects.

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "When I look at Dallas, I look at the right side of their D. I still think they could try to upgrade there. That's one position I look at for them and, yes, I do look at it up front. The one thing here is, Rantanen at (\$2.3 million), because that's what it'll be if Carolina retains 50 per cent if we get there, teams will jump all over that and I would think Dallas would be one of them. They've got a Finnish mafia too and they've got things to trade that you would look at them and say, if Rantanen gets flipped, they would be a team that could do it both in terms of cap space and what they have in their organization. So I would watch for that."

What the GM has said: "He's back in Dallas. He's rehabbing. Time frame, is he going to be available just before the playoffs or sometime at the start? That's what we're anticipating. But, you know, injuries, you don't know, is it going to be a little bit before that or a little bit after that? We'll get a better feel for that once we get probably to mid-March, late-March, somewhere in there. Get a better feel for it."

"We do expect him back ... sometime in the playoffs. I don't know when that is. We'll just have to wait and see." — Jim Nill talking about Miro Heiskanen's return on Sportsradio 96.7FM in Dallas on Feb. 26.

Outlook: Dallas could be deadline winners right out of the gate if their Mikko Rantanen goes through. The Stars already have the fourth-best offence in the league and now add a player capable of reaching 100 points in a season, and who had 25 points in 20 games with the Avalanche when they won the Cup.

This is one of the top Stanley Cup contenders and Nill will look at everything he can to maximize the Stars' chances. He already acquired Mikael Granlund to add to their riches up front, and Cody Ceci to fill

in the empty spot on the back end. They'll be as aggressive as they can after being eliminated in the conference finals two years in a row.

Status: Fringe buyer with plenty of cap space but unclear aggressiveness

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$13.248 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Defencemen, centre, depth toughness

Potentially Available: Vladimir Tarasenko, Marco Kasper

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I think (GM Steve Yzerman) has been looking for a defenceman. I think he was looking at (Ryan) Lindgren, and I think he also had some interest in other guys who've been out there, like Will Borgen kind of guys. So I think it's safe to say that's been on his mind. He definitely looked at Cozens earlier this year, that didn't happen."

"They lost (Andrew) Copp, he's out for the year. They lost (Michael) Rasmussen in that game where (Trevor) Zegras got suspended, he's a big loss for them, so I think people are wondering, does Yzerman go out and get someone who can fill those kinds of roles?"

Outlook: Detroit took a bigger step than most of the East's rebuilders last season, missing the playoffs only by the regulation-wins tiebreaker. The Wings are back in the thick of it this season though, in a much more crowded field.

Not much leaks out of Yzerman's front office, which is why past big trades involving Filip Hronek and Anthony Mantha were so shocking. That kind of surprise is always on the table and the Wings have been attached to Cozens rumours earlier this season, which tells you they're sniffing around on big moves. The recent injury losses, especially to Copp, are big setbacks. Will that spur the front office into action, or have it thinking about being more reserved?

Status: Buyer, if they can make (or guarantee) the cap space

Deadline Day Cap Space: *\$300,560 (additional \$5.1 million if Evander Kane remains on LTIR for the rest of the regular season)

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Defence, winger, possibly goaltending

Potentially Available: Evander Kane, picks, prospects

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "At the low end, they're looking for a defenceman who hopefully can play both sides and a fast forward. Not necessarily a top-six forward, but a forward who's got some speed. Maybe a depth forward who's quick and aggressive, that kind of thing. We'll see if they can create any flexibility to do more."

"In goal, I just don't think there's anything there. If they're going to do it, you have to be able to say we're 100 per cent convinced that what we can get is better than what we have. And I don't think they feel that."

What the GM has said: "We're just putting our heads down, readying ourselves for a lot of different scenarios. Whether it's adding a forward, adding a centre or winger with some size, speed with grit. A left defenceman, a righty defenceman ..."

"I tend to try to take the full picture into play and not be too focused on the noise of the last couple games." — Stan Bowman to Sportsnet's Mark Spector on Feb. 24.

Outlook: The Oilers signed John Klingberg earlier this season, traded for Trent Frederic this week, and then acquired Jake Walman in the middle of the night. They've tried to address their roster needs, but will it be enough for a team that hasn't got a great return from some notable off-season pickups?

If the Oilers want to do more, they need clarity on Kane. On LTIR and having not played a game since last year's playoffs, it appears Kane and the team have a difference of opinion on when he'll be able to come back. If Kane remains on LTIR for the rest of the regular season, Edmonton could still add at the deadline. But if there's any chance he returns before the playoffs, that room would be absorbed by his cap hit coming off LTIR and the Oilers would have to be prepared for that space to be available.

The surprising thing to do would be to trade Kane, who now has only a partial no-trade clause. That would take care of any looming issues and ensure Edmonton would have the space for more trade deadline action. But who is taking Kane at full value, a \$5.125 million AAV through next season?

Vegas, Colorado and Dallas have all been making waves buying on this market, but it remains to be seen if Edmonton can keep up.

Status: All-in buyer

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$4.1 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Defence, scoring winger

Potentially Available: Any picks or prospects

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I think they're going to take another shot at something. That's (GM Bill) Zito's way. They're a Stanley Cup champion and want to go for it every year. Sam Bennett, there was a time earlier in the season where I think Bennett and the Panthers were close. I've heard from several people it was in the park, doable. I don't know if it was because the cap changed, but it didn't get done, but I don't think they're going to move him. They'll keep him and go for it and see how it plays out in the summer. You have to look at them right now and say, with all that cap room, they're going to strike again.

"The Panthers clearly see a wide-open East and are saying, 'We're jumping in.'"

What the GM has said: "I don't know that it necessarily says anything other than we have space. Matthew (Tkachuk is) going to be out for an extended period of time and we hope to get him back for the playoffs.

"We're still sort of in that, you have a projection diagnosis and rehab course of action, but how and where and in what manner the progress of that rehab is still yet to be determined." — Bill Zito on Matthew Tkachuk's injury status and what it means for the team's deadline plans as of March 3.

Outlook: "Vegas east?" The defending champs have already brought in Seth Jones as a huge move, then Vitek Vanecek as a smaller one to address goaltending depth behind Sergei Bobrovsky, and Nico Sturm for more bottom-six grit. And they still have \$4.1 million of cap space to find another sizeable upgrade, thanks to Tkachuk's salary going on LTIR for the rest of the regular season.

They're as all in as anyone could be, especially facing the chance they lose one or both of Aaron Ekblad and Bennett to free agency this summer. Bobrovsky is also 36 and has just one more season left on his contract — without Spencer Knight as the safety net for the future anymore, who knows what becomes of Florida's crease when "Bob" is done? Zito will aggressively push those chips in and use as much cap space as he can.

Status: Buyer, seeking upgrades

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$4.478 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Scoring, perhaps a goalie upgrade

Potentially Available: Brandt Clarke, futures

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "They're definitely looking for a scorer. I get different debates on how big they're thinking here. I've had some people say to me, 'They're going to go bigger than you think.' I've had other people say, 'Yeah, I don't see it, but I think they're going to try and get the best scorer they can find.' I wonder if they upgrade in goal, not (Darcy) Kuemper, but maybe the backup position."

Outlook: Quinton Byfield and Clarke have popped up in trade rumours at various points this season, though it seems both have cooled off, even though Clarke was scratched for a couple games in a row. A few years ago when rumours were also floating around about these young players, the team had to tell them they weren't being traded. Something big would have had to change if that weren't the case today.

The fact is the Kings face a difficult road through the playoffs, staring down the possibility of a fourth straight Round 1 meeting with Edmonton. The Kings are stingy on defence, but have the 23rd-ranked offence, lower than any team in a playoff spot except Calgary. Their power play is even worse — 29th and behind every playoff team. If they look to make an addition with that first-round opponent in mind, it's clear scoring has to be in focus.

Status: Small-time buyer

Deadline Day Cap Space: *\$7.538 million (*If Joel Eriksson Ek, on IR, misses rest of season, add \$5.25 million of space. If Kirill Kaprizov, on LTIR, returns, remove \$9 million of space. If both come back, they have almost no space. If both are out for the regular season, they'd have \$12.75 million in space)

Draft Picks

Team Needs: More scoring, centre

Potentially Available: Futures

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I think (Bill Guerin) would like to do more. I have no doubt that he would like to do more, but sometimes it's out of your control, and it's a little bit out of control for Minnesota right now."

What the GM has said: "I'm not kicking my feet up and just taking a break. We're going to proceed business as usual and see what works out there. You never know — it could be a dollar for dollar. It could be an actual hockey trade. Those are pretty rare this time of year, but it could happen." — Bill Guerin to The Athletic after acquiring Gustav Nyquist.

Outlook: The day will soon come for the Wild to be a very interesting star chaser, but that is not likely to be at this trade deadline. Still pinned down by the \$14.743-million cap charge for the Zach Parise and Ryan Suter buyouts, Minnesota will have basically no cap space if and when Kaprizov is activated off LTIR. And, since that is expected to happen before the end of the regular season, they are not in a buyer's position anymore. Guerin has also said he hopes to not have to put Eriksson Ek on LTIR at all.

Gustav Nyquist appears to have been their "big" trade. Justin Brazeau was brought in from Boston on Thursday to add some toughness to the bottom-six, but there isn't too much space for anything more

significant. The Wild have cooled from a great start, 13-11-0 since Jan. 1. Much of that stretch has been played without Kaprizov, who himself will be a huge addition when he's put back into the lineup.

Status: Long-term buyer, possibly soft seller

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$6.694 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Young players to buy low on, perhaps a surprisingly big add

Potentially Available: David Savard, Joel Armia, Christian Dvorak, Michael Pezzetta

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I think Montreal is a hockey-deal team. If (GM Kent Hughes) can add something for term, he'll do it. They're not just a deadline team, they're a hockey-deal team. He's thinking big picture.

"If there's a big swing that comes to Hughes, he takes it."

What the GM has said: "I don't think we'll deviate from the plan, in the sense that the plan is to build a team that can compete for the championship for years.

"We want to see where we go in the next stretch before the deadline, and we'll make decisions based on that." — Canadiens GM Kent Hughes on Jan. 8, after the team won eight of 10 games to get back in the playoff hunt.

Outlook: The Canadiens were still thought to maybe be a year or so behind Ottawa (or, ahem, Buffalo) in their rebuild, so the honest goal for the season was to get further into it playing meaningful games and have the young players feel pressure in March, or April. That has been a success and now the Habs are very much a real competitor in the playoff race.

But, still, management insists the eyes remain on the future. So much of what will make up the final version of this core is still on the way — Ivan Demidov and David Reinbacher top that list. That doesn't mean they couldn't pull a rabbit out of the hat at the deadline though, and perhaps make a Kirby Dach-type deal — a young player with upside and long-term controllability.

Re-signing Jake Evans shows they're not just giving up on every expiring deal and selling off rentals for more draft picks. Perhaps that means Savard or Armia stays, but there's likely some middle ground where at least one or two expiring contracts get moved out. Above all else, what the Canadiens want to find is trade value, and if they can get it, they'll pull the trigger on a deal, big or small.

Status: Seller, short-term builder

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$30.448 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Picks, young NHL-ready or near-ready players

Potentially Available: Colton Sissons, Ryan O'Reilly, Michael McCarron

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I think (GM Barry Trotz) is looking. I think if he found a more long-term piece, I think he would do it. He's open for business. The key thing is the key group, the core group, especially the ones brought in over the last couple years, I haven't heard any evidence that any of them have asked out. That means he's keeping that group together and trying again."

What the GM has said: "We started doing some of our work a bit early, obviously with the Justin Barron trade, we felt that was the right move. So we sort of were preparing for it, but at the same time trying to

use some young players to go forward with. I'm very aware of where we are, and if the right deal comes our way, then we'll be a seller more than a buyer, I know that. In our situation, it will probably be closer to the trade deadline and when we make that move at the trade deadline, some of those names (Sissons) may be included. We don't have any big, big pieces that people are going to do a Rantanen-type of trade with you." — Nashville GM Barry Trotz to 102.5 The Game host Jared Stillman before 4 Nations Face-Off.

Outlook: Rather than trading Juuse Saros last year, Trotz re-signed the 29-year-old for the long term, then traded away prospect Yaroslav Askarov and spent big in free agency on Jonathan Marchessault and Steven Stamkos. Those moves committed the team to restructuring for the playoffs rather than any retool or rebuild and early returns are ... not great.

It doesn't stand to be an exciting trade deadline in Nashville, who have already moved out Alexandre Carrier, Luke Schenn and Tommy Novak. The Preds aren't going to give up on the overall direction chosen, and will more likely look to try to fix things in the summer and run back some version next season (when \$8.55 million worth of buyout penalties for Matt Duchene and Kyle Turris remain on the books).

Status: Buyer with potential to go big

Deadline Day Cap Space: ~\$13.4 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Scoring, centre

Potentially Available: Dawson Mercer, Simon Nemec, futures

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "The Devils, even before (Jack Hughes' injury), they were looking for a centre. They'd been pretty known about that, they'd been very active. Tom Fitzgerald had been one of the most active general managers. He was looking for a centre. I think he was also looking for a defenceman. I think they were one of the teams that poked around on Brayden Schenn, but didn't like the price.

"Now you're thinking, OK, we've got a bigger hole, potentially, how do we attack it? Can you attack it in this short term or is it you stick to your plan, see what kind of centre you can add and just handle it from there?

"I don't want to guess about what the Devils may end up doing here, but all of a sudden they are looking at it and objects in the rearview mirror are closer than they appear."

Outlook: There's no question the injury to Jack Hughes threw a giant wrench in New Jersey's plans. His \$8 million AAV goes on LTIR, so the Devils will have around \$13 million they can add at the deadline (Dougie Hamilton is believed to be week-to-week and able to return for playoffs). But unlike some other situations where that LTIR player will return in the post-season, this doesn't appear to be the case for Hughes. He's not expected back until training camp.

So, the question now is: how much does the injury alter the Devils' overall plans to be a contender looking to buy? Indications are the plan will remain the same and the team will look for a centre to push on with. But unless they blow up the deadline with an unforeseen blockbuster, there's no sugarcoating the fact this injury is a huge blow to the Devils' Stanley Cup hopes.

On Thursday, New Jersey acquired pending UFA defenceman Brian Dumoulin from the Anaheim Ducks. Dumoulin, a left shot, gives the Devils some defensive depth and, though not a direct replacement, helps them cope with the loss of Dougie Hamilton to injury.

Status: Seller

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$10.875 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: To pivot to a different future

Potentially Available: Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Kyle Palmieri, Noah Dobson, Scott Mayfield

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "Teams believe that their players are going to be available. They do think they're going to get a shot at Nelson, at least. Palmieri is out there too, but Nelson is the one with the buzz and has a bunch of people waiting.

"The Dobson one, someone asked me what I think on Dobson, and I don't think for a second he's asked for a trade, I don't think the Islanders have really thrown him out there. It's been a hard year for him. I want to see what happens when they really start talking about his contract, which I assume is going to happen in the summer. They have time for this. This does not have to be decided now."

Outlook: By trading Brock Nelson out on Thursday night for a healthy return that included Calum Ritchie and a first-round pick, it was the first signal that the Islanders will, in fact, sell at this deadline.

Four points back of the playoffs, but with five teams to leap over to get there, now we wonder how deep the selling will go for Lou Lamoriello and how much pressure he's getting from ownership to secure future assets.

Kyle Palmieri, a 30-goal scorer a year ago, is another pending UFA who should generate a healthy market. Jean-Gabriel Pageau is an excellent penalty-killing depth centre, but he's under team control beyond this season. Still, it'd be an opportunity for the Isles to pivot.

Noah Dobson wouldn't appear to be an urgent call to make, and if they're trying to get younger and set up for a brighter future, trading out a 25-year-old defenceman who scored 70 points last season wouldn't seem the kind of move you make.

So the Islanders are open for business and we'll find out on Friday just how much more they're looking to accomplish.

Status: Seller, potential to surprise and buy big

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$14.457 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Depth centre, defence, scoring right winger

Potentially Available: Mika Zibanejad, Chris Kreider

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "We'll see about Kreider. He's been hurt, so you wonder about something like that heading into a deadline. Something that will become a bigger storyline if it isn't cleared up, (Artemi) Panarin's heading into the last year of his contract. He's going to be 34 in October, so that's another one that, suddenly, you're looking at and saying, 'OK, what does this mean for him and them?' I don't think they're rebuilding. You don't get J.T. Miller because you're thinking about rebuilding. I think this is going to be a big summer for them.

"I expect them to be looking at it and saying, 'OK, we're moving these pieces off the board now, but anybody who thinks we're going to be quiet or not heard from or anything like that, not true.'

"I think whether it's now or later, we're going to be hearing from the Rangers."

Outlook: "Uneven" might be a good word to describe New York's season. The Rangers didn't start too badly, 11-4-1 in the first month and a half, though they did have some concerning underlying numbers when it came to high-danger chances being allowed. When Jacob Trouba's and Kreider's names appeared in trade rumours, the team took a sudden nose dive and over the next month and a half, New York was 7-15-0, last in the league. Since Jan. 3? The Rangers are 14-7-3 and looking like they could be a tough out ... if they manage to get back to the playoffs.

Of course, this might not be the final version of the Rangers. Reilly Smith was traded to Vegas on Thursday after being held out of games all week -- New York retained \$1.875 million of his AAV, so have one spot left to utilize. New York has all sorts of cap space to buy with, but there's a sense it's more in the sellers' bin right now, and preparing to jump back in as a big buyer this summer. Of course, if the right deal comes along by Friday, we can't count out the Rangers using that cap space and nearly any roster player, to be the surprise actor of the day. They're not dead yet.

Status: Want to be a buyer, have almost no space to do it with

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$850,000

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Scoring, defensive depth

Potentially Available: Draft picks

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I wonder about a guy like Ryan Donato. That's a name I've heard linked to Ottawa a bit, and that makes sense to me.

"I'm sure there's a bunch of other players if you go through and see who scores at a low (AAV) number who might be available, I'm sure you can find names out there for Ottawa. But Donato is the one that comes up for me.

"I think Ottawa, they don't have to do anything reckless, but I do think they have to add. I think this is a season where you really have to go for it. You're right there."

Outlook: Oh, how they'd love to be a buyer. The Senators are on the cusp of returning to the playoffs, though a heated battle down the stretch awaits. This is where you might look for defence depth, an upgrade behind Linus Ullmark in net or — surely, for the 31st-ranked team in five-on-five goal scoring — a forward or two who can put the puck in the net.

But the Senators are in a tough cap spot, with less than \$1 million to spend. They've been attached to Chicago's Donato in rumours, but even that may not be so straightforward now that the Hawks can't retain any of his \$2-million cap hit. If Ottawa finds a trade, it's likely for something small and in the depth mode. But even that would be a show from management that they believe and want to help the group where they can.

One note is that while the above graphic shows Ottawa has all its first-round picks, the penalty from the Evgenii Dadonov trade was to forfeit its first-rounder in either of 2024, 2025 or 2026. So, either this year or next, the Senators will have to give it up. That is, unless the NHL ends up rescinding the penalty, as it did for the New Jersey Devils for the Ilya Kovalchuk cap circumvention contract.

Status: Will have pressure to sell, but can be patient

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$8.426 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Young players under control, centre, shoot for the stars

Potentially Available: Rasmus Ristolainen, Scott Laughton, Andrei Kuzmenko

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "Laughton, it's a big price. Someone called me and said, remember they held out a year ago for a first-rounder and they got it (for Scott Walker). I think you look at the prices right now and Laughton, with another year of term, you can see it, that they could potentially get it. I've heard Laughton has told the Flyers he doesn't want to leave, he'd prefer to stay. And I do think the Flyers would like to do right by him in the sense that where would you be interested in if we did send you somewhere? I think he's been prepared for this. He's liked. There's no question about that.

"Ristolainen, publicly and privately (coach John) Tortorella has been very blunt he doesn't like the idea of them losing him.

"When we talk about New York and the Rangers, whatever they're doing now, it's setting up to try and do something big. I think Philly thinks the same way. I think they'd like to make an add that has significant impact for them at some point. They have this cap space, they're not saving it."

What the GM has said: "We're looking at what's out there. The reality is, there's not a lot of high-end centremen in this league. When teams have them, they want to keep them or the price is crazy. We're not willing to give up on our future at this point. Yes, I realize that it's a glaring need that we'd like to upgrade. But, it has to make sense," — Daniel Briere at his mid-season press conference.

Outlook: The two biggest trade chips the Flyers have, Ristolainen and Laughton, are both under contract beyond this season, so unless their price is reached, they can hang on. Besides, they're kind of in the playoff race — on the fringe of it, at least — and can fall back on giving the group a chance.

This is a sellers' market so if someone steps up to offer a first-rounder for Laughton, the Flyers might just have to take it because the fact is they're building toward better days and the pick might help accomplish that in the end, whether they use it on a prospect, or in a bigger trade at a later date.

Status: Sellers seeking futures, early-20s players

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$10.863 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Ideally, young players who can help turn the corner in the next two-to-four years. Failing that, first-round picks and more long-term prospects for the post-Crosby era.

Potentially Available: Erik Karlsson, Rickard Rakell, Noel Acciari, Anthony Beauvillier, Matt Grzelcyk

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I don't see anything happening with (Sidney) Crosby.

"With Karlsson, I don't know if it's going to happen now, but after his bonus is paid this summer, all of a sudden the actual cash left on his deal is about \$11.5 million over two years. That's not impossible. So I do think we will see Karlsson talk, but I don't know if I expect it until this summer.

"I've heard Pittsburgh has asked about some of Buffalo's young players. Like (JJ) Peterka, that's a big price if it ever happens, but that guy has Pittsburgh written all over him. I think they've asked Buffalo periodically this year about some of their younger guys, AHL guys who look like players. I continue to think that's what they're looking at."

What the GM has said: "Going into the deadline, we're going to continue to have discussions that fit where we are at in our strategy overall. But we'll also try to be in the mix for any younger players that become available and can come in and help our team. So we'll try to use the collection of assets we have now to try to add to the group, if the right younger player becomes available. That collection of assets

will get us into those discussions,” — Kyle Dubas on Feb. 1, after trading Marcus Pettersson and Drew O'Connor to Vancouver.

Outlook: If Buffalo's spot at the trade deadline is the most dangerous, Pittsburgh's is the most difficult. A team that really should be rebuilding, but can't, the Penguins are having to straddle that line, searching for young players with upside, while not giving up on Crosby's final years yet.

The Penguins acquired Tommy Novak and Luke Schenn from Nashville on Wednesday for Michael Bunting, which raised some eyebrows. Novak scored 43 and 45 points the past two seasons, but the 27-year-old has sagged with the rest of the Predators this season. He's the type of young-enough player with proven upside that makes sense for the Penguins' stated goals.

But Schenn? Could the team flip him again before the deadline, or does it see a dressing-room fit with the player signed through next season?

The biggest questions around what Pittsburgh could do revolve around Karlsson, and the Penguins have one more salary retention slot to help make that work. Rakell, Crosby's linemate, is also a potential trade candidate, but could rock the boat. As for Crosby — if that fanciful move ever happens, it doesn't appear as though it'll be in 2025.

Status: Seller

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$35.452 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Everything to do with futures

Potentially Available: Luke Kunin, Mario Ferraro

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I think that's what you're looking at with San Jose, what do they do with their UFAs and what else can they accumulate? They added (Tyler) Toffoli, Toffoli's been good for them. They tried to bring in a few more veterans. I just wonder if that's what they continue to try to do, get more veteran players around there."

What the GM has said: "It's important for me to have an open mind about where we're going and what another team might be willing to offer for one of our players, and weigh it against the value of keeping those players around and having them with our group."

"We're not in the mode of just gathering picks for the sake of gathering picks." — Mike Grier at his mid-season press conference.

Outlook: Keep building up those blocks. San Jose may trail Chicago in the league standings, and far and away has the worst goal differential, but it is starting to have some exciting pieces show up in the lineup. Macklin Celebrini is making a strong case for the Calder Trophy, William Eklund leads the team in scoring at 21 years of age, Fabian Zetterlund is showing great upside at 25, and Will Smith is quietly flying under the radar as another excellent rookie at 19.

But the final product still seems to be a few years off, so the top priority for the Sharks remains to trade expiring contracts, and anyone else who may age out by the time the team is ready to make the next step, if they can get a solid offer for them.

Status: Seller

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$5.336 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: To turn over a core that hasn't grown since the franchise's first playoff appearance two years ago

Potentially Available: Brandon Tanev, Jaden Schwartz, Andre Burakovsky, Jared McCann, Jamie Oleksiak

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I think the interesting thing is what happens with some of the guys who have term. Jaden Schwartz, one more year. Burakovsky, two more years, but a big number, (\$5.5 million). ... McCann, two more years at (\$5 million), but I don't think they have put McCann out there, I've heard that's the other way around, teams calling them. Oleksiak, one more year (at \$4.6 million), I know they've gotten calls on him.

"This trade deadline could be very interesting because I think Seattle has big decisions to make on overall franchise direction. It's been a hard year for them, so I don't even think this is a trade deadline discussion, this is a philosophical discussion for them too. Where do they want to go?"

Outlook: The sell-off began Wednesday when Seattle traded Yanni Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand to Tampa Bay. Gourde was certainly expected as a pending UFA, but Bjorkstrand has one more year left on his deal, so the Kraken could be thinking of taking a bigger pivot at this deadline.

After making the playoffs two years ago, when they surprised with the fifth-best offence in the league, the Kraken have failed to build on that and been a bottom-half scoring team since. They lack star power, players who can take games over, and goaltending depth has been a huge concern. They've tried to patch some holes with veteran additions over the years, but it's clearly not working. The only question now is, how deep will the cuts go?

Status: Borderline seller, possible kingmaker, or may be quiet after all

Deadline Day Cap Space: ~\$12 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: To decide if they're in or out on this season and how to proceed with a core it's committed to that hasn't shown too much growth

Potentially Available: Pavel Buchnevich, Jordan Kyrou, Justin Faulk, Jordan Binnington, Brayden Schenn, Radek Faksa, Ryan Suter

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "They're starting to win, so do the Blues look at it and say, 'Hey, we're in the playoff race now we're not doing anything'? Regardless of it, I don't think Schenn is going anywhere unless it's a high price."

"I think Toronto is weighing Schenn for sure. I think Vegas has looked at it. But now you're sitting here, does St. Louis even want to do it now that they're in the race?"

What the GM has said: "As we say every year, the players will tell us what we're going to do. Right now, we have a massive uphill battle. I think we really dropped the ball coming out of Christmas. (Coach Jim Montgomery) had done a nice job getting the guys in a good spot and then we didn't take advantage of a really positive schedule in January. Now, everyone has to live with the white noise around us until mid-March, but we've created that for ourselves." — St. Louis GM Doug Armstrong on Feb. 23

Outlook: Go back to the 4 Nations break, and the Blues were far enough out of the playoffs that they seemed highly likely to sell. A plethora of big names were popping up on trade boards — five on Nick Kypreos' — and while the expectation wasn't that Armstrong would trade all of them, the signal was that he was fed up with a lack of development and was open to shaking the foundation of the core.

Now, however, the Blues are very much in it, helped both by a 5-1-1 run since the 4 Nations break and from the fact Vancouver and Calgary aren't sprinting away. Two trade candidates, Buchnevich and Schenn, have no-trade clauses, so will have ultimate say. That also goes for four defencemen. But if it's not going to work in St. Louis and the alternative is to get traded to a contender, at least one of them might be talked into the idea. The team announced Thursday that Colton Parayko was having a scope done on his knee and would be re-evaluated in six weeks, which ensures he won't be a trade candidate anymore.

As of Friday morning, the Blues are just two points behind Calgary for the second wild card spot, though with one more game played than them. Is that enough for Rutherford to hold on, or will he get a nice enough offer for Schenn (or anyone else) to force his hand?

Status: Buyer

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$819,227

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Depth defence

Potentially Available: Why not more draft picks and prospects?

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I think they're looking for some scoring. I mentioned (Alex) Tuch. I don't know what Tampa has to trade. Every year of going for it, they don't have a ton.

"I do think they're going to add. I do think they see themselves as a team that can be a threat, and a legitimate threat, so I don't think they're going to sit here and let this all go by. But you look at a guy like Tuch, I think he'd be perfect to them, I just don't know if they're going to be able to do it. So I'm looking for other fits like that."

What the GM has said: "We've added \$10 million in players today (Gourde and Bjorkstrand), so we've kind of used up most of our cap space. ... Anything we do between now and Friday, if we do anything — big if — it's going to have to be that \$800,000 with something coming out." — Julien BriseBois on Wednesday after acquiring Yanni Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand from Seattle.

Outlook: We had listed a "scoring winger" as a team need before this piece was

Published Thursday, but that was taken care of Wednesday when the Lightning acquired both Gourde and Bjorkstrand from Seattle. One of the NHL's best teams for the past two months, the Lightning are springing into action just in time for the stretch run, gearing up for another playoff season and looking to avenge back-to-back opening-round losses.

After acquiring those two players, the Lightning aren't left with much more cap space, so their biggest trades are probably done. They could still nibble around the edges, but anything bigger would require roster players moving out. They're nearly back to a dollar-in, dollar-out situation.

Status: All-in buyer

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$876,562

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Scoring centre who can play on second or third line, defence

Potentially Available: Max Domi, Nick Robertson, David Kampf, prospects, 2026 first-rounder

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I also believe that if it becomes a thing — it's just (GM Brad) Treliving's way — he would poke into Rantanen. It can never be a long-term thing unless their cap situation

completely changed, but I find it very hard to believe that if Rantanen got out there, Toronto wouldn't at least see what it took to do it.

"Now that St. Louis is winning, would they even (trade Brayden Schenn)? And Toronto, it's a big price. They don't have a lot of futures. They have four things people are looking at: their first-rounder in 2026, (Easton) Cowan, (Fraser) Minten and (Ben) Danford. And, plus, Toronto would probably need retention. I think they're going to add a centre, although again if Rantanen's out there, I think they poke around on him."

What the GM has said: "That's the trick is you gotta determine fact from fiction, what players are actually available. You look around, there's still lots of teams in the race. If I had to categorize it, it's busy and you're talking to lots of guys, but in comparison to years past, it's a little bit slower just because I think there's a lot more teams that maybe haven't declared yet. We'd certainly like to help ourselves." — Brad Treliving to the media last week.

Outlook: Toronto is looking at Florida adding Seth Jones, with room to do more, and Tampa Bay adding Yanni Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand. Meanwhile, the Leafs are sitting here with \$876,562 in deadline-day cap space, which is going to require some cap gymnastics to get anything done.

But it is doable. The team moved Ryan Reaves to waivers to find relief and if he clears on Friday they will add another \$1.15 million in cap room. If he's claimed, they'd clear \$1.35 million of extra space. In the right trade, they could open themselves up to including Robertson or Domi or Kampf to free up even more space. The bottom line is they have options to create the cap space they need to bring in the players they desire, but it has to make sense.

And, the fact is, none of those players will be the central pieces of a trade. Toronto is also going to have to give up Minten or Cowan or Danford to move the needle for a selling team. The Leafs also don't have a 2025 first-round pick, so would need to dip into their 2026 pool of picks to go that route. If they do, it would certainly have to be for a player with term ... or Rantanen. And it's clear that, above all else, the Maple Leafs need a centre.

Status: Capable buyer, possible seller, unclear intentions

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$28.522 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: A star player, big splash move, to cash in picks and prospects for players

Potentially Available: Matias Maccelli, Nick Bjugstad, Lawson Crouse, Barrett Hayton

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "They're in the race, it's a bonus for them. They can at least say, 'Hey, we're here, we've got meaningful games.' I think Utah takes a big-picture look at this. They want to take a big swing at some point. Like, if Rantanen hits the open market, that's a team I could see (saying), 'OK, we'd like a shot at this.'"

What the GM has said: "If we can make dynamic changes and add a dynamic piece, we're all for that. We've got the assets to do that."

"But I'd like to see this group fight together, and I think they've earned that right. I think we lead the league in man-games lost on defence, and yet we were able to kind of battle through that and find ways to win and stay in the hunt. I think it's good for this group to stay in battle together." — Utah GM Bill Armstrong on March 4 to Craig Morgan at NHL.com.

Outlook: We can all see the buying window is opening here in Utah. It has too many picks and prospects and, eventually, will run out of reserve and contract spaces for them all. The owner wants to spend and

compete, the front office surely will embrace that mindset after years of putting along in Arizona, and the time will come. Is that for free agent Rantanen or Mitch Marner? Is that for a blockbuster trade? Certainly, Utah is a big team to watch when the summer markets open.

But could it get a jump on things now? Utah is in the playoff hunt as well and may act as a buyer at the deadline. That could mean adding something small to give the roster a vote of confidence, or it could mean being a surprise blockbuster team that puts the NHL's newest team on the map. There's no question it's coming, but will the first splash happen by the deadline?

Status: More buyer than seller

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$13.648 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Scoring, depth forward, centre

Potentially Available: Brock Boeser, Elias Pettersson (F), Pius Suter

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "They're looking for another forward, I think they'd like to add another centre. I've heard them and Suter are not close on an extension, and that was not going to be an easy gap to bridge. The Boeser thing, everyone you talk to there is like, 'I have no idea where this is going to go this week.'

"I've been told unlikely anything happens (with Elias Pettersson) this week, but after this season, it's going to be really fascinating to see where it goes here."

What the GM has said: "I believe that, with this group, we're just going to continue to build and get better. I don't envision us to take a step back. The results might not be the way we want (this season), but I don't envision us to take a step back." — Patrik Allvin to Sportsnet's Iain MacIntyre.

Outlook: Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of the Canucks.

The NHL's top-rated soap opera goes on, with the next exciting chapter wrapping up on March 7.

It's wild how we got here, one year on from the Canucks' surprising the hockey world by nearly knocking Edmonton out of the playoffs, to a team in such disarray that a core centre has already been traded. As inconsistent and frustrating as it's been, the team is not giving up, and is still very much in the playoff race. The Canucks defence corps has actually been built up quite nicely, but the forwards have to come together better (and we'll see what the next days and weeks bring on the Thatcher Demko front). They did trade out Carson Soucy on Thursday, who was sliding down the team's depth chart.

Trading Elias Pettersson before the deadline seems a long shot, and he walked back some prickly comments this week to take some responsibility for his own struggles. We'll likely revisit that one in the summer after seeing how the rest of the season goes, though any team run by Jim Rutherford has wild-card potential.

The Canucks do have a call to make on pending UFA Boeser, with 40-goal upside but more likely something less than that. How do you trade such a player and not take a step back? This is what Canucks management is having to juggle right now. They're sort of in seller mode with their UFAs, but will be looking to buy anyone with term who they think will be able to help improve things in the seasons to come. Good luck.

Status: Expected buyer, big-game hunter

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$503,260

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Scoring forward

Potentially Available: Futures

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I think we always know with Vegas you expect the big swing. That's another team that if Rantanen becomes available as a rental, you have to believe (GM Kelly McCrimmon) will do what it takes to try and get it done."

"Vegas is a really good team, everybody knows how talented they are. I don't know really what they have to trade. They don't have as deep a prospect pool — they have some good prospects — but don't have as deep a prospect pool as some other teams. He's traded away his first-round draft pick already this year (in the Tomas Hertl deal). Next year, it's gone from the (Noah) Hanifin deal, so he doesn't have a first-rounder until 2027. It's just about giving him credit as a guy who is aggressive and tries to get things done. But I do think they're going to add a scorer, somewhere, somehow."

What the GM has said: "I don't see us being big players at the trade deadline this year, but the amount of work you do oftentimes is pretty similar whether you (don't) get much accomplished in terms of making trades versus when you might have a year where you make quite a few trades. We'll be diligent and very engaged, but it's impossible to say what exactly might happen between now and March 7." — Vegas GM Kelly McCrimmon to the Las Vegas Review-Journal on Feb. 21.

Outlook: I (and probably no one) cares what McCrimmon says about this being a quiet deadline for the Vegas Golden Knights. If there is a surprise blockbuster to be had out there, you know they are in on it and, somehow, might be able to actually pull it off. We've seen this play too many times before.

After acquiring Reilly Smith on Thursday, the Golden Knights have about half a million in available deadline-day space and only William Karlsson on LTIR, though he is expected back before the playoffs, so that extra room is not really available. Shea Theodore, out week-to-week, could still get put on LTIR, and if he were to miss the rest of the regular season, Vegas would have that extra space. Hmmm ...

Status: Cautious buyer

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$4.425 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Depth forward, depth defenceman

Potentially Available: Futures

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "They've got Ryan Leonard coming and not every college player comes and makes an impact, but there's guys that do, like Chris Kreider did in 2012, and I think Leonard has the ability to do that. But I still think they look at another forward and just say, 'OK, is there another guy we can bring in here who can maybe play multiple positions, multiple roles, score some goals and defend?' I would think that's going to happen here."

"Are they happy with their seventh D? Right now, it's Dylan McIlrath, but do they look at that and say we need to add?"

"Based on what they've said and what I've heard, I'm not expecting anything big, which of course means they're going to drop a massive deal on us."

What the GM has said: "Obviously, the team's had a really good year so far. We got a couple months here to go where we need to continue improving our game and getting to the next level. Obviously, when the playoffs start, everything ramps up, and we got to make sure we're ready to do that. I think it's

going to be a balance of: Are there ways to improve our team versus risking over-tinkering with what's been a pretty good group so far this year?" — Capitals GM Chris Patrick on Feb. 27.

Outlook: The Capitals did so much remodelling of their roster last summer, and the results have been so good, that it's hard to imagine they'll change much more and be a big buyer by the deadline. They do have the cap space to make a notable addition, however, and may want someone more experienced than Leonard, should he join the team at the end of his college season.

Washington added Lars Eller earlier this season and if it buys more at the trade deadline, it will probably be for experienced depth along similar lines.

Status: Buyer, aggressiveness to be determined

Deadline Day Cap Space: \$12.403 million

Draft Picks

Team Needs: Defenceman, second- or third-line centre

Potentially Available: Alex Iafallo, futures

From the 32 Thoughts Podcast: "I think (GM Kevin Cheveldayoff) has looked around and I think he's tried to figure out, What are the swings I can take, big or small.

"I don't know that they look at it and say there's a huge swing available to us. They've got their next three first-round picks, so they could do it if they wanted to. I'm not sure there's that kind of huge swing available to them and I think they've looked around to see what it is. So then I think what you're doing is you're saying, 'How do we fill the holes?' And I think one of the holes is, these are the kinds of names I think about: (Jamie) Oleksiak, has term, left-hand shot. I think about (Mario) Ferraro, he's not as big as some of the other guys but he's got another year, left-hand shot. I think about (Rasmus) Ristolainen, he's a right-hand shot and you might want more a lefty than a righty, we'll see. But he's got term as well.

"If they don't land the biggest name or the sexiest name, I don't think it's for a lack of trying."

What the GM has said: "We've been all-in here every single year for the last little while and we've used lots of different capital, so a lot of the assets that maybe traditionally are there aren't there, so that makes it a little more difficult. Sometimes when you're talking to teams (about) their ask, you just don't have what they want." — Kevin Cheveldayoff to the Winnipeg Jets' Check In.

Outlook: Look, we have to be honest about where the economics are heading in the NHL and fairly question for how much longer the Jets can be an upper-limit team — or at least how often they could pay those numbers when the cap rises to \$113 million and beyond. It's a small market with a small arena and creeping attendance concerns. It's just the reality and could one day develop into a competitive disadvantage in the market.

But, in this moment, the Jets have been at the top of the NHL standings since the start of the regular season and are clearly Stanley Cup contenders — probably the best team Canada has to offer. If they don't go all-in every way they can on this group, under what other conditions would you do it?

They have all the cap space they need to go big, or fix several needs. They still have all their first-round picks, and even a fair amount of prospects other teams would want. There's a clear need for preferably a second-line centre, but at least a third-line centre with some scoring punch. They could also use a sizeable addition to the blue line, preferably someone who can play top-four minutes (even top-pair minutes). Heck, they could use two of them. They could even stand to add another depth forward for the bottom of the lineup.

But as dawn breaks on trade deadline day, Winnipeg's rivals in Dallas, Colorado, Vegas and even Minnesota have all added something meaningful to their teams, while the Jets have yet to act. They could always be handcuffed by players unwilling to waive a clause to play in Manitoba, but there has been no better time to go out and get the players who are attainable.