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[The Athletic / Boone Jenner takes on new role to help Blue Jackets' playoff push: 'Whatever is asked'](#)

By Aaron Portzline – March 19, 2026

It's not his style, but Columbus Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness could have made his lineup change two weeks ago without even talking first with captain Boone Jenner.

Bowness, though, wanted Jenner to know that his spot on the fourth line didn't mean he would start drawing fourth-line minutes every game.

"All I can tell you is that every team I've coached since (Jenner) has been in the league has probably tried to trade for him, and we kept getting a 'no,' " Bowness said. "And we know why.

"It's because he's a character guy, a great competitor … sometimes his minutes are down, but his minutes are so important, and his line has been so effective for us over the last little while."

Two years ago, Jenner was the Blue Jackets' top-line center. On Thursday, when the Blue Jackets host the New York Rangers in Nationwide Arena, he'll center the fourth line for the seventh straight game.

There are scores of players who would not know how to handle such a steady tumble down and around the lineup, especially a veteran player who is eligible for unrestricted free agency this summer.

Jenner is different, though.

In fact, when he was asked about the difficulty of accepting his "new role" in recent weeks, Jenner thought the question was about him switching from left wing back to center, not him playing on the fourth line.

"Whatever is asked … any way I can help, that's how I see it," Jenner said. "At this point of my career, it's all about winning. It's about getting into the playoffs.

"Everybody else in that room will say that, too. That's all that matters to us now."

The Blue Jackets have been on quite a run lately. Tuesday's 5-1 rout of the Carolina Hurricanes may have been their best game of the season, and it improved them to 17-2-4 (.826) since Jan. 11.

They're on the doorstep of a playoff spot, trailing the Detroit Red Wings and Boston Bruins by a point each for one of the wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference.

If you've watched the Blue Jackets play in recent weeks, you've recognized a coming-together in both their style of play and personnel. They have an identity now, and they no longer wade into games waiting for the opposition to dictate the pace of play.

It all changed when Bowness was hired Jan. 12. He arrived with answers where before there were only more questions. He has a naturally easy disposition and is a master communicator with players.

"Just the knowledge and the perspective he's brought," Jenner said, "getting us to buy into a lot of little details that are adding up in our plays. It's been a huge boost for us."

When a club is rolling like the Blue Jackets are, it's as much about the guys at the top of the lineup as the bottom. And Jenner's selflessness should get as much attention as Kirill Marchenko's goals, Charlie Coyle's two-way play or Jet Greaves' glove.

"It doesn't matter what line you're on or how you're situated," said Jenner, who has been the Blue Jackets' captain since 2021 and is the franchise's all-time leader in games played (793). "You have to be ready to go, ready to play. I don't really look at it like (it's the fourth line)."

Two years ago, Jenner was the No. 1 center, helping to protect 19-year-old Adam Fantilli from difficult matchups in his first NHL season.

Last season, the Blue Jackets signed Sean Monahan as a free agent. Monahan's arrival and Fantilli's emergence as a difference maker — he had 31 goals — helped push Jenner to the third line, either as a center or at wing.

A trade last summer to acquire Charlie Coyle, plus the free-agent signing of Isac Lundeström, pretty much cemented Jenner's lineup spot on the wing.

Then came this season. GM Don Waddell, in the search for a top-six or top-nine forward, has traded for wingers Mason Marchment and Conor Garland, both of whom play an energetic style and bring some scoring pop.

Jenner was playing on the third line for most of the season, but Garland's arrival pushed him further down. Now he's centering the fourth line between Lundeström and either Danton Heinen or Dmitri Voronkov on his wings.

It's depth — both at center and across the top nine — like the Blue Jackets have rarely seen. The only club that comes close would be the 2019 Blue Jackets, who upset Tampa Bay in the first round of the playoffs.

The Blue Jackets have three lines that can score, and they have three lines that can play against top lines. That's a luxury.

"To have that depth is huge," Jenner said. "The way Charlie (Coyle) has fit in this year, it's massive to have that. It's huge for our group to have depth like that, and to have it down the middle."

Bowness said he told Jenner he plans to get him 14 to 16 minutes per night, which is more than most fourth-line centers would get. He's played 13:54 per game since sliding to the fourth line.

Jenner still has a role on the penalty kill; he can join in on the second power-play unit, draw in for important faceoffs and join other lines on the wing late in games. In Tuesday's win against Carolina, Jenner was hard to miss.

He played 16:25, taking more shifts than any other forward. He also led the Blue Jackets with four blocked shots and was 10 of 11 on faceoffs.

"(Jenner's) line, they're hard to play against, just like he is," Bowness said. "He leads that line and makes sure they're on top of guys, in their faces, hard to play against. In any scrum, he's the first guy in there sticking up for his teammate.

"You see why he's our captain. And you see why he hasn't been traded."

BlueJackets.com / Mother-daughter duo gives back to the girls hockey community

By Jeff Svoboda – *March 18, 2026*

In many ways, Cynthia Bronson and her daughter, Sydney Kloth, are a perfect story to show how much girls hockey has grown over the years both in Columbus and nationwide.

When Bronson was growing up in Illinois, opportunities for girls in the sport were few and far between, and she didn't begin playing – and eventually coaching – hockey until she was an adult.

But living in Central Ohio, she was able to get her daughter on skates at age 2, then coach Kloth with the Columbus Chill Youth Hockey Association. Now a junior at Ohio State, Kloth has followed in her mother's footsteps as a coach, teaming up with her to mentor the CCYHA 10U girls development team this season.

The two were also on the Nationwide Arena ice together March 7 serving as instructors at the Blue Jackets annual Girls Hockey Day clinic, presented by Bread Financial. The event saw more than 70 girls age 6 to 14 put on the skates and learn from local coaches like Bronson and Kloth, members of the AAA Blue Jackets girls teams, Blue Jackets Hockey League instructors and 2006 U.S. Olympian and Ohio native Kristin King.

After spending more than an hour on the ice running a station together, the mother and daughter duo marveled at just how many girls turned out to see their passion and skill for the game grow.

"It's definitely a blast, and definitely nice to see the progression in terms of the number of girls out there," Bronson said. "There's a huge community, and it's really expanding, especially over the last 10-15 years."

For Kloth, the opportunity was there to lace up the skates when she was growing up, but it's expanded quite a bit even since she was coming through the ranks. In its fourth season of sponsoring girls hockey, the AAA Blue Jackets put three teams on the ice this year, and other local organizations have robust rosters of young women participating as USA Hockey registration among girls has exploded in recent years.

Events like Girls Hockey Day are recent additions to the yearly calendar, though Kloth did have the opportunity as a kid to play a few intermission games during Blue Jackets games, as well as learn from such CBJ players as Boone Jenner and Dalton Prout at summer events.

"I lined up next to Boone Jenner and never felt so small in my life," Kloth said with a laugh. "I felt really tiny."

"I have a picture of her with Dalton Prout and she's barely up to the top of his pants," Bronson added.

In fact, the thought that she's now old enough to serve as a coach for the next generation is something Kloth can hardly believe.

"It's crazy," Kloth said. "I feel like it's definitely surreal – like, that I'm old enough to now be coaching is crazy to me. I feel like I'm still that little 14-year-old who was playing, but it's definitely been a lot of fun."

And as someone who recently stopped playing the game competitively, Kloth feels a bit of a kinship with the young women she's mentoring. She has fond memories of growing up in locker rooms, making connections with her teammates and falling for a sport that she's found a way to stay involved in as she's gotten older.

"I think for me, it's just seeing them continue to love the game," Kloth said. "I feel like as an assistant coach, it's my role to make sure that they're still having fun. Seeing that they continue to love the game and they're loving it a little more each day is really big for me, and making those improvements, too."

It helps that she has a good mentor in the coaching ranks. Bronson played sports her entire life but didn't pick up hockey until meeting her husband, Timothy, as an adult. She got into the behind the bench aspect of the sport when her travel team needed licensed coaches, so she started working her way through USA Hockey's certification processes.

Now a mainstay with the CCHYA, Bronson was one of six female coaches in Central Ohio to attend USA Hockey's Level 5 coaching symposium this summer, working to achieve the highest level of certification in the body's coaching pyramid. Her biggest joy comes from seeing the young girls on the CCHYA squad picking up the basics of the game and starting to understand the sport at such a young age.

"That was really nice with our team, being able to see them go from just clumping up on the ice and slowly working on things," Bronson said. "Each game, it's, 'All right, we're going to add this piece to the puzzle, then we're going to add this piece,' because you can't do it all at once. Definitely with that age, it's a journey over the season as opposed to being right on it right out of the gate with some of the older levels."

She did it all with her daughter by her side, as the two have become a big part of the Columbus hockey community simply by staying involved in the game and mentoring the next generation.

"It's a lot of fun," Bronson said of coaching with her daughter. "It's a nice full-circle moment. It's just another way that she can keep on the ice."

[Cleveland.com / 5 stats that show how Rick Bowness has turned the Blue Jackets into a legitimate playoff contender](#)

By Tim Bielik – Mar. 19, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets were in last place when they fired head coach Dean Evason on Jan. 12.

More than two months later, new coach Rick Bowness has engineered a remarkable turnaround as the Blue Jackets now sit one point behind both the Boston Bruins and Detroit Red Wings for a wild card spot in the hotly contested Eastern Conference.

Since hiring Bowness, the Blue Jackets have the highest points percentage (.818) in the entire NHL and have gone 16-2-4 (36 points). Only the Buffalo Sabres (38) have more points in this span than the Blue Jackets.

They also have more regulation wins in their 22 games under Bowness (13) than they did under Evason (11).

But just how have they done it?

How have the Blue Jackets reached the precipice of their first postseason since the 2020 bubble in Toronto?

Here are five stats behind the team's remarkable turnaround.

1. "You defend your way into the playoffs."

The above quote was one of the first things Bowness said at his initial press conference on Jan. 13.

At the time of his hiring, the Blue Jackets were 28th in the NHL in goals allowed per game (3.38).

Bowness' message about defense clearly got into the team and since his hiring, the Blue Jackets are second in the NHL in that category (2.55). Only the Dallas Stars (2.45) have allowed fewer goals per game.

According to Natural Stat Trick, the Blue Jackets rank eighth in the NHL in lowest expected goals against (70.56), which is a stat that explains how likely a team is to be scored on given expected situations.

By comparison, they had the 10th-most expected goals against (151.61) under Evason.

A big reason for the change is they have really cut down on shots against. The Blue Jackets under Bowness are allowing about 25.8 shots against per 60 minutes, which ranks eighth and is almost five shots fewer than their rate under Evason (30.3) per Natural Stat Trick.

Those numbers say the defensive improvement isn't luck based. Their structure and style of play have allowed them to keep the puck out of their net much better with Bowness on the bench.

2. Fewer 3rd-period woes

One of the big reasons the Blue Jackets moved on from Evason was that they were giving up too many third-period leads. From Nov. 2 until Evason's firing on Jan. 12, the Blue Jackets had blown 12 third-period leads in 34 games, a rate of about 35.3%.

Bowness' arrival has turned the team's fortunes around in that department, especially with how they're defending in the third period. The Blue Jackets are tied for the sixth-fewest goals allowed in the third period (19) after giving up a league-high 63 during Evason's tenure this season.

They've still blown five third-period leads under Bowness. But they won four of those games, and only two of those leads were more than a goal.

Blown leads are going to happen in the NHL. However, the fact that they are happening less frequently is a big reason why the Blue Jackets have been able to get on track.

3. Charlie Coyle has caught fire

The biggest move the Blue Jackets made last offseason was acquiring Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood from the Avalanche in exchange for prospect Gavin Brindley and two draft picks.

Coyle has done well as the team's third-line center and on the power play. But ever since Bowness was hired, Coyle's numbers are among the best in the NHL.

In 22 games, Coyle has 29 points, tied for ninth in the NHL with Tage Thompson of the Buffalo Sabres. Coyle has also outscored the likes of Kirill Kaprizov, Quinn Hughes and Macklin Celebrini among many others.

Coyle's 10 goals in 22 games are tied for 23rd along with Jake Guentzel, Nick Suzuki and Jason Robertson among others.

They've also gotten great production out of stars Zach Werenski (4-18-22 in 19 games), Adam Fantilli (7-14-21 in 22 games) and Kirill Marchenko (9-11-20 in 20 games).

But Coyle's offensive explosion has given the Blue Jackets another boost of offense at just the right time.

4. Much improved play on special teams in limited opportunities

Special teams often have an impact on big games, and the Blue Jackets' power play and penalty kill have both found different levels under Bowness.

In Evason's 45 games in charge this season, the Blue Jackets were tied for 19th with the Florida Panthers on the power play (18.8%) but fourth worst on the PK (76.4%).

Both units have been much improved under Bowness.

Since Jan. 12, the Blue Jackets are 11th on the PK (80.7%) and 10th on the power play (25.0%).

Columbus still has work to do on special teams, especially on the PK where they now rank 24th (77.7%) for the full season.

One important note about special teams is that the Blue Jackets are rarely on the power play or penalty kill compared to their peers. They have only been shorthanded 57 times, tied for the fifth fewest, and they are tied for the second fewest power-play chances (52) since Bowness was hired.

In that time, the Blue Jackets also spend the second-most time at 5-on-5 per Natural Stat Trick (49:58 per game) and rank No. 2 in goals for percentage in 5-on-5 (59.55%). Their 5-on-5 play means their special teams have needed to only be average under Bowness, and they have been above average either up a man or down a man.

5. Elvis Merzlikins has stepped up his play

Even though Jet Greaves has established himself as the No. 1 goaltender on the Blue Jackets, Bowness has split starts evenly between Greaves and Elvis Merzlikins, giving each goaltender 11.

Since Jan. 12, Merzlikins has a 2.54 goals-against average and a .899 save percentage, the latter of which is tied for 25th among goalies with at least four appearances. He also has a 0.90 goals saved above average since Jan. 12, according to Natural Stat Trick. That means he has saved nearly one goal more than he was expected to.

Those numbers aren't too special on the surface. But they are far, far better than they were under Evason.

From the start of the season until Evason was fired, Merzlikins had the second-worst GAA (4.03) among goalies with at least 10 appearances, and his save percentage of .877 was 10th worst.

He also ranked 12th in fewest goals saved above average (-9.33). By comparison, Greaves ranked 12th best in that category (9.63), meaning Greaves saved nearly 19 more goals above expectation than Merzlikins did under Evason

The team in front of Merzlikins has been much better defensively. He has appeared in 12 games since Bowness was hired, playing more than 20 minutes in 10 of them. In those 10 games, he has faced 26.1 shots per game. In the 14 games under Evason where he played more than 20 minutes, he saw nearly 33.3 shots per game.

So not only has the team in front of Merzlikins made it much easier for him, but he has also improved his game. That's allowed the Blue Jackets to sustain their outstanding form regardless of who has been in goal.

[The Athletic / 16 stats: The Blue Jackets have arrived as a legitimate Stanley Cup dark horse](#)

By Dom Luszczyszyn – March 19, 2026

Sometimes, a good coach is all a team needs to unlock the best version of themselves. That's exactly where the Columbus Blue Jackets find themselves: A legitimate rising power in the East under new coach Rick Bowness, who has the team humming at a 16-2-4 clip since taking over. At long last, it feels like the Blue Jackets have arrived.

That was plain to see on Tuesday in a measuring-stick game against Carolina. Not only did the Blue Jackets handily win 5-1, but they also carried the run of play by a considerable margin with 62 percent of the expected goals. That's a big deal against the league's Corsi kings and one of the major indicators that this team is the real deal.

That game wasn't a one-off either. The Blue Jackets have been an elite five-on-five team since Bowness took over and they seem to get better with each game. From the time Bowness was hired on Jan. 12 to the trade deadline, Columbus earned 53.5 percent of the expected goals, the seventh-best mark in the league. The addition of Conor Garland, who has a strong history of driving play, has only added to that. It's only been six games, but what a run it's been with a league-leading 60.3 percent xG. That brings Columbus' full Bowness tenure to 55.4 percent, good for fourth in the league and just 0.1 percentage points behind Carolina.

It's the first time Columbus has been above 55 percent over any 20-game stretch since 2019-20, the last time the Blue Jackets made the playoffs. That level is usually the barometer of an elite team and Columbus looks to be trending in that direction. The run has pushed Columbus' projected Net Rating up from plus-9.5 the day Bowness was hired to its current plus-29.5, the eighth-best mark in the league behind the league's expected contenders.

That Columbus was sitting at plus-9.5 to begin with, despite its weak record at the time, suggests the Blue Jackets were a potential sleeping giant if they ever got their act together. Under Bowness, they've awoken.

This is a team that is starting to play as deep as it looks on paper. It's not just Zach Werenski dragging a team of mid; it's everyone stepping up, with the average Blue Jackets jumping from a Game Score of 0.47 to 0.72.

The top four looks the best it has in a long time, with Damon Severson finally playing up to his contract and Denton Mateychuk blossoming into a legit top-four option. Dante Fabbro, looking closer to last year's version of himself, has anchored the third pair well. Up front, Charlie Coyle continues to stun with 29 points in 22 games, but it also helps to have Kirill Marchenko and Adam Fantilli rising to a point-per-game rate on top of that. Mason Marchment has been an awesome fit and Mathieu Olivier has been

amazing on the team's shutdown line. Even the fourth line has been incredible, with Danton Heinen in particular not allowing anything while he's been out there.

From top-to-bottom, almost everyone is doing their part, doing it well and doing it better than before.

Most importantly, it's everyone prioritizing strong team defense. Before Bowness, Columbus allowed 2.82 xGA/60, the third-worst mark in the league. Since his arrival, that's down to 2.06, the best mark in the league.

Combine that commitment to off-puck play with Columbus' not-so-secret weapon, Jet Greaves in goal, and it's the difference between a Blue Jackets team that's just happy to be there and one that can do serious damage in the postseason. Greaves is up to ninth in GSAx this season and carries real series-stealing potential given his prior track record in that realm.

The potential for all this was there from the start of the season. Under Bowness, the Blue Jackets are realizing it. The only problem: Columbus currently sits outside a playoff spot. With the way the Blue Jackets have been playing of late, though, it wouldn't be a shock to see them not only get in, but potentially even have home-ice advantage in the opening round.

16 stats

1. Glowing comps for Denton Mateychuk

One of Columbus' most pleasant surprises this season has been Mateychuk. Looking at his current list of top comps shows some very intriguing upside for the 21-year-old sophomore as not just a top-four option, but potentially a future top-pair defenseman. Of Mateychuk's top 10 comps, six turned into real difference-makers: Kris Letang, Alexander Edler, Josh Morrissey, Ryan Ellis and Roman Josi.

2. Matthew Schaefer is back to dominating

While Matthew Schaefer's scoring has stayed consistent for most of the season, the rookie phenom hit a bit of a rookie wall just before the Olympic break in terms of driving play. Over his prior 25 games, Schaefer's xG rate was just 39.5 percent while allowing 3.47 xGA/60, way down from his team-leading 53 percent and 2.34 xGA/60 to start the season.

The good news is that Schaefer is all the way back since the much-needed break, thanks mostly to an elite offensive drive. Since the break, Schaefer leads the Islanders with a 60 percent xG rate on the back of earning 3.79 xGF/60. The latter mark is the fourth highest in the league behind Lane Hutson, Mattias Ekholm and Rasmus Dahlin. Add 10 points in 10 games to that and Schaefer's average Game Score during the stretch is 1.88, one of the best marks in the league.

3. Washington's strange season despite being elite at five-on-five

The Capitals have scored 55.1 percent of the goals at five-on-five, the fourth-best mark in the league. And yet they look extremely likely to miss the playoffs and are on pace for just 89 points. Exactly how peculiar is that? Since 2007-08, there have been 74 teams with a five-on-five goals percentage of 55 percent or higher. On average, they earned 111 points. Just three teams — 2008-09 Penguins, 2012-13

Rangers and 2014-15 Kings — paced for under 100 points and only the Kings, with a low of 95 points, failed to make the playoffs.

Teams this good at five-on-five are almost exclusively contenders. The Capitals are just a trivia question.

4. Devils need Jack Hughes' A-game off the rush

The Devils have been a resounding disappointment this season, and from the outside, it looks like it's because they're trying to be something they're not. Case in point: Jack Hughes' rush game.

For the last four years, that's been New Jersey's fastball; this year it's been noticeably more muted. Hughes has spent parts of the season hurt and the team has looked more like itself since the break. But on the whole, if you're looking for the smoking gun of New Jersey's lost season, this is it: In each of the last three seasons, Hughes has entered the zone with control over 82 percent of the time, over 21 times per 60 and earned at least 6.7 scoring chances off those rushes. This year, he's down to a 72 percent carry-in rate, 18.6 carry-ins per 60 and just 4.6 scoring chances generated, according to data tracked by Corey Sznajder.

If Jack isn't Jack, the Devils end up looking like they did this season. Optimizing Hughes' best is priority No. 1 for next season.

5. Toronto's dump-and-chase stubbornness

Only two Maple Leafs have carried the puck into the zone more than 55 percent of the time this season: Easton Cowan (62 percent) and William Nylander (58 percent). Only the Rangers and Predators have fewer such players.

For Nylander, that's down from 73 percent the last two seasons, while Auston Matthews, who's usually above 60 percent, sits at just 53 percent this season. The Leafs might be getting older and slower, but the inability to enter the zone certainly looks like a choice. The next Leafs coach can't be this archaically predictable.

6. Too little, too late for Stolarz and Bobrovsky

One reason among many that the Leafs and Panthers will miss the playoffs this year is because of goaltending. Before the Olympic break, Anthony Stolarz had allowed 8.6 goals above expected over 17 games, while Sergei Bobrovsky had allowed 19.8 goals above expected over 40 games. It's hard to win games starting off with a half-goal deficit and both goalies found themselves in the league's bottom 10 as a result.

Naturally, now that it's too late for both teams to get back on track, both goalies have reverted to their previous ways since the break. In six games, Stolarz has saved 6.8 goals above expected and boasts a .921 save percentage, while Bobrovsky has saved 3.5 in six games with a .905. This time, they're both in the top 15.

At the very least, that leaves some hope for both goalies returning to form next season.

7. Ottawa's defense without Jake Sanderson

The Senators were dealt a devastating blow to their playoff chances with the loss of Jake Sanderson, who was putting up some Norris-caliber numbers before getting hurt. Sanderson was a big part of Ottawa's defensive identity, taking care of the toughest assignments extremely well and allowing Thomas Chabot to thrive in a secondary role. With the injury, we now get to see just how big Sanderson's impact is in that regard and early returns have been telling.

Ottawa has only played four games without Sanderson, but in that time, the Senators' xGA/60 is 2.58, up from 2.14 with Sanderson in the lineup. Artem Zub, Sanderson's usual partner, has seen his xGA/60 rise from 1.99 to 3.44 playing with Chabot instead, who has seen a similar rise from 2.33 to 3. It's a small sample, but it's one to keep an eye on as long as Sanderson is out of the lineup.

8. Detroit's new shutdown pair

It's always interesting to see how teams integrate new players into the lineup and Justin Faulk sure fits the bill in Detroit. Faulk filled the Red Wings' biggest deadline need and was naturally going to play with Ben Chiarot on the second pair. What I didn't expect: That pair being used as Detroit's shutdown pair over Moritz Seider and Simon Edvinsson.

It's a puzzling move given how strong the top pair has been in that role this season. While it's freed them up tremendously (64 percent xG share for Seider since the trade), I'm worried about whether it'll be a worthy trade-off given Chiarot's previous inability to handle that burden. Faulk should help more than past options, but the pair has an expectedly low 43 percent xG together in that role.

That's an improvement over Chiarot's pair with Axel Sandin-Pellikka (41 percent in secondary matchups), but it still doesn't seem justifiable with a pair on the team that can handle the job much better. Finding the right balance in the top four will be key to Detroit maintaining its spot in the playoff race; I'm not convinced this is the right path forward.

9. The suddenly surging Blues

The Blues have been one of this season's biggest disappointments this season and entered the Olympic break with a 20-28-9 record. What we've seen since, though, looks a lot closer to the Jim Montgomery magic from last season that many fans hoped would continue with the Blues now on a 7-2-1 run.

While it may be a bit annoying for fans hoping for a high pick, it is encouraging to see the players expected to be difference-makers this year looking the part again. The team's new-look top line has been especially encouraging with Robert Thomas, Dylan Holloway and Jimmy Snuggerud all scoring above a point-per-game pace while crushing opponents at five-on-five. Since being put together six games ago, they have a 65 percent xG and have outscored opponents 8-0. In net, they're finally getting some saves with Joel Hofer leading all goalies with 10.6 goals above expected in just six games (and Jordan Binnington has rebounded nicely, too).

It may feel like a pyrrhic victory this late into the season, but it bodes well for next season that the Blues can return to the playoff hunt.

10. Greener pastures for MacKenzie Weegar

Playing for a losing franchise is tough. It's a combination of the mental toll piling up, playoff hope vanishing, and the burden of responsibility without enough support. That's what it looks like for a lot of players from Canada's saddest organizations and escaping those fates has looked good on MacKenzie Weegar in particular. Weegar has been a difference-making player for a long time, but struggled immensely in Calgary this year.

Sometimes it's the player, sometimes it's the environment; Utah bet it was the latter and so far the Mammoth look right on the money to believe in Weegar. He immediately stepped onto Utah's top pair, taking on tough minutes and is back to looking like himself again. While he may only have one point in six games, Weegar has a 58 percent xG rate while allowing just 1.59 xGA/60. His average Game Score has jumped from minus-0.25 to 0.69. He's back, and that's massive for a Utah back end whose biggest need was a two-way sidekick for Mikhail Sergachev.

11. Mikhail Sergachev returning to form

In the season's first half, Sergachev really struggled on Utah's top pair. He was bleeding chances and struggling to control play to the level he showed last season. Just before the Olympic break, though, he started to turn the corner with more consistent efforts. Since the break, he's been lights out with an average Game Score of 1.65 backed by a 60 percent xG rate while outscoring opponents 6-2. If Sergachev is back to playing like a legit No. 1 with a legit No. 2 beside him in Weegar, the Mammoth could make some real noise in the playoffs — especially if they sneak onto the Pacific side of the bracket.

12. The rise of Elias Salomonsson

There hasn't been a lot that's gone right for the Jets this year, but one thing that has is the play of rookie defenseman Elias Salomonsson. The 21-year-old has played 24 games for the Jets, but the most important have been the 20 he's played since Neal Pionk got hurt.

During that time, he leads the team with 58.3 percent of the expected goals while outscoring opponents 12-6, both of which lead the team's defenders. That's not in sheltered minutes either; he's been paired with Dylan Samberg in the top four, taking on equally tough minutes to Josh Morrissey's pair. The Jets look like they have a good one here.

13. Matt Savoie is figuring it out

It takes time for young players to learn the ropes in the big leagues and Matt Savoie's defensive work this year is a great example of that.

Over the first two months of the season, Savoie had a 45.2 percent xG rate undermined mostly by allowing 3.22 xGA/60, one of the 10 worst marks in the league. But every month, he's become a little better and he's been especially good since the Olympic break. In 10 games, Savoie has a 59 percent xG and has seen his xGA/60 drop to 2.53. He's also getting the results to show for it and the effect of having the puck more has also been great for his production with 10 points in 11 games — eight of which have come at five-on-five.

That's been enough to warrant another look next to Connor McDavid on the top line over the last three games. The duo had a failed experiment together back in November, but have tilted the ice heavily together over the past week with 67 percent of the expected goals.

14. How Artemi Panarin has bolstered the Kings' power play

Aside from one random season where they finished second, Los Angeles' power play has always been a pressure point during this era of playoff contention. The Kings finished 26th in goals-per-60 last season and were trending for a similar finish this year, landing at 27th before the Olympic break, scoring just 6.0 goals-per-60.

The main reason for that is the team lacked true star talent; so, how much could the addition of Artemi Panarin change that equation? Turns out the answer is a fair bit, as expected. Since adding Panarin, Los Angeles' power play is up to 8.9 goals-per-60, the ninth-best mark in the league. That's no fluke either, with 10.4 expected goals per 60, the second-best mark in the league, and well up from where they were before the trade (7.0, 23rd).

One other noteworthy tidbit: Brandt Clarke is up to 22 points in 31 games since becoming a permanent fixture on the Kings' top power-play unit. That's a 58-point pace. Not bad.

15. Rasmus Andersson vs. Zach Whitecloud

Back in January, Vegas traded a first-round pick and a conditional second for the privilege of upgrading from Zach Whitecloud to Rasmus Andersson. The only problem? It hasn't been much of an upgrade.

In Calgary, Andersson had a 45 percent xG rate and while that's up to 49.4 percent with Vegas, that's actually right on par with the 49.5 percent the Golden Knights were already getting with Whitecloud, who's up to 52.7 percent with the Flames. Andersson adds a little more production, sure, but even with that, his average Game Score in Vegas has been minus-0.18, way down from his 0.60 in Calgary. As for Whitecloud, he's been at 0.63 with the Flames, playing on the top pair with Kevin Bahl. Ouch.

16. How much has Andersson's value dropped since the trade?

According to AFP Analytics, Andersson is projected to sign a seven-year deal this summer as a UFA with a cap hit coming in at $9 million. That would've been easier to see coming in Calgary, but I wonder how much his weaker play with the Golden Knights brings that number down.

Teams have a lot of cap space and not a lot of players to sign, which makes pricing the few worthwhile players tricky. A desperate team might just give Andersson $9 million, no questions asked. But Andersson's work with Vegas has been alarming enough to wonder whether he still qualifies as "worthwhile." His projected Net Rating is down to just plus-0.1, which is just average second-pair defenseman territory. On a seven-year deal, I've got his current market value at just $4.5 million, with the second half of the deal looking particularly rough.

Unless his next team can really optimize his strengths and limit his weaknesses, Andersson's next deal could end up being one of this summer's biggest mistakes.

The Athletic / The 5 most consistent NHL goalies this season, and what makes each unique

By Jesse Granger – March 19, 2026

If there's one trait NHL coaches desire most from their starting goaltender, it's consistency.

Having a goalie stand on his head and single-handedly win a game is great, but it's also rare at the highest level. Knowing a goalie will make the saves he is supposed to make, and play well enough for his team to earn points on a nightly basis, can inspire confidence and elevate the play of the entire team.

Let's look at the five most consistent goalies in the NHL this season and examine what has allowed them each to play at such a high level for long stretches. To quantify consistency, we'll be dividing the number of starts each goalie has finished with a save percentage above .900 by their total number of starts.

There are several different ways of calculating the stat, often referred to as "quality start percentage," but for the sake of this exercise, we'll keep it simple and use that .900 save percentage as the threshold. We will also only be including goalies with at least 40 starts this season, as it's more impressive to maintain a high level of consistency when a team is counting on a single goalie to carry the load most nights.

You'll notice that some world-class goalies are missing from this list — most notably the two Vezina Trophy favorites, Andrei Vasilevskiy and Ilya Sorokin. While those two are arguably having better seasons than these goalies, their performances have had higher peaks and lower valleys. Sorokin, for example, leads the NHL with six shutouts and has nine other games with a save percentage north of .920, but he has also finished with a save percentage below .900 in 22 of his 42 starts.

This list isn't meant to identify the best goalies in the league this season, although there's certainly some overlap. We're looking at the goalies — and by extension the defense in front of them — who have performed the most consistently on a nightly basis.

There are 21 total goalies with at least 40 starts this season. The full list with the quality start percentage for each is at the end of the story. These are the five most consistent performers:

1. Jeremy Swayman

(68.2 quality start percentage)

It's no surprise Boston's Jeremy Swayman tops this ranking, with a save percentage above .900 in 30 of his 44 starts (68.2 percent).

The Alaska native is as fundamentally sound as any goalie in the NHL. He has a great understanding of angles and how he fills the net behind him, and forces shooters to execute perfect shots to beat him.

Since Swayman entered the NHL in 2020, he ranks sixth with a 59.9 quality start percentage. The only goalies who have been more consistent are four Vezina winners (Connor Hellebuyck, Linus Ullmark, Igor Shesterkin and Vasilevskiy) and Sorokin, who should be the favorite to win this year's Vezina.

Swayman's consistency comes from his calmness. Goalies sometimes move themselves out of position by overcommitting to plays, but Swayman has a knack for smothering shots without opening holes in his stance. He also moves with a noticeable control when sliding across to make saves on the backside of the play.

This save on a dangerous rush chance by Washington Capitals defenseman Rasmus Sandin on March 14 is a great example of that.

Swayman can explode across the crease far quicker than he did on this play, but he realized that only a small, controlled push was required to get over in time. Watch how he used his right skate against the post to not only stop his momentum, but also rotate his body to square up to Sandin's release.

Sandin was planning to use Swayman's momentum against him by shooting back against the grain to the far side of the net, but because Swayman slid across with such composure and control, and stopped precisely on his angle with the help of the post, he made the save without even needing to extend his glove.

Swayman makes lots of saves with his chest and arms because of excellent positioning. Those are higher-percentage saves, which helps explain his consistency. They also typically make it easier to control rebounds, as Swayman did on this example.

2. Dan Vladař

(67.5 quality start percentage)

The most surprising name on this list is Dan Vladař in Philadelphia. After spending his first four NHL seasons as a backup in Calgary, the big Czech netminder signed with the Flyers this offseason for a chance to prove he's more than that, then spent the summer working hard on his lateral movement. That's typically an area of weakness for goalies his size, but Vladař has been noticeably quicker going side-to-side this season, and the results have been stellar.

Vladař's improved lateral quickness has led to more highlight-reel saves on back-door passes. His .827 save percentage on high-danger shots around the net is his highest in four years, and his explosion off of his posts has been especially noticeable.

One of the biggest boosts to Vladař's consistency is a byproduct of his improved mobility. Compared to his film in Calgary, he has challenged further out from his goal line in obvious shooting situations this season in Philadelphia. He knows the further he ventures out, the more distance he must cover in the event of a pass, but his improved mobility has given him the confidence to do it more often.

This save against Toronto Maple Leafs defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson is a good example. Not only is Vladař at the top of his crease, he also shifts his body into the shot.

Vladař does this quite a bit on mid- to long-range shots. It shows patience. He's not dropping straight down the moment he senses a shot is coming, he's reading the release and leaning into the shot. By getting more of his mass in front of the puck, Vladař increases his margin for error. Ekman-Larsson's shot actually rose over his blocker on this save, but it still hit his elbow.

It's fun to watch a talented goalie take strides in his game and put it all together, which is what Vladař has done this season.

3. Jet Greaves

(65.9 quality start percentage)

In his first full season in the NHL, Jet Greaves has given the Columbus Blue Jackets the best goaltending they've seen since Sergei Bobrovsky was winning the Vezina.

The quick, twitchy Ontario native has been one of the most consistent goalies in the NHL since he took over the Blue Jackets' crease late last season. Even with only 11 starts in 2024-25, his last two seasons rank among the best in franchise history by goals saved above expected, according to Money Puck.

That's a pretty impressive list. Bobrovsky won the Vezina in two of those seasons, and received votes for the Hart Trophy in the other.

Greaves has done it with elite edgework, athleticism and one of the fastest glove hands in hockey. In an era in which goalies can sometimes be too stiff or robotic with their hands, Greaves makes glove saves look fluid and athletic, like he's a shortstop snaring a line drive.

Greaves' glove is a major key to his consistency for several reasons. There are so many different ways to play the position successfully, as long as a goalie's individual traits support each other.

With an undersized goalie such as Greaves, shooters inevitably see more space available in the top half of the net when approaching, so his glove gets tested more than most. Secondly, Greaves is very mobile, which can cause chaotic situations as he darts around the ice. His trusty glove helps him freeze plays, slows down the action and allows his defenders to reset with a whistle.

Greaves tracks pucks well through traffic and has a softness to his shoulders and arms that allows him to get his glove on shots that many goalies don't.

4. Igor Shesterkin

(64.3 quality start percentage)

Even an injury that held him off the ice for nearly two months and playing behind a depleted, rebuilding Rangers squad can't keep Shesterkin from being one of the most consistent goalies in the NHL.

The 30-year-old finishes near the top of the league in quality start percentage on a regular basis, and it's obvious why. There aren't many things Shesterkin doesn't do at a world-class level, but there's one aspect of his game that helps particularly in the way teams attack him.

When a goalie is as talented as Shesterkin, teams send bodies to the front of the net at an even higher rate, hoping for unpredictable bounces. Unfortunately for them, Shesterkin is better than just about everyone at keeping his eyes on the puck in these situations, and his reaction time to those bounces is even more impressive. This series of saves against Anaheim on Dec. 15 is a good example.

The Ducks got exactly what they were hoping for on this play: a deflection right in front of Shesterkin that he wasn't able to handle cleanly. Not only that, the rebound bounced directly to Alex Killorn on the side of the net.

Shesterkin never lost sight of the puck, and reacted so quickly that he dug his right skate blade into the ice and began his push to his left before the puck even hit the ice. Against most goalies, Killorn would tuck that puck into a wide-open net. Shesterkin's processing speed is so quick, he made the save with time to spare.

The more chaotic the situation, the more impressive Shesterkin's puck tracking and processing are. This sequence in Shesterkin's 46-save performance against Minnesota on Saturday night highlights that.

All of these saves on off-schedule plays add up over time, and they're a big reason Shesterkin leads all goalies with a .917 save percentage since he entered the NHL in 2020. His combination of puck-tracking habits, quick reflexes and recovery speed make him one of the best scramblers in the crease.

Here's one more example of Shesterkin moving as if he's watching the puck in slow motion on a preposterous reactionary save against Carolina on Dec. 29. This puck was so close to crossing the goal line, the crowd at Lenovo Center rose to its feet in celebration, but Shesterkin just kept it out with his toe.

5. Logan Thompson

(63.0 quality start percentage)

Logan Thompson has established himself as a premier starter over the last few seasons in Vegas and Washington. Thompson plays a throwback, reactionary style of goaltending, which typically doesn't lend itself to consistency, but his exceptional instincts and aggression have helped him produce some of the most consistent numbers in the NHL.

Thompson doesn't fill the net with his natural stance. He stands extremely hunched over, compact and coiled, showing the shooter more net that most goalies, then springs into action. Thompson reads the shooter's body language and stick positioning to anticipate their next move, which is a vital skill for that style.

This save against Boston Bruins forward Mark Kastelic on Saturday night is a great example.

This is a really difficult situation for a goalie. Washington's turnover, right in front of its own net, didn't give Thompson much time to establish his usual depth, so he could flow back toward his net with the shooter. Instead, he was caught slightly flat-footed as Kastelic walked in all alone.

Kastelic knew this and tried to take advantage by firing the puck underneath Thompson while he shuffled laterally, but Thompson saw it coming and sealed the ice with his pads before Kastelic even released the shot.

What tipped him off? When Kastelic pulled the puck back, not only was it extremely close to his skates, making it difficult for him to elevate the puck, but he also rolled his wrists forward to shut his stick blade down in preparation for the low shot. With the video slowed way down, you can actually see Thompson reacting to the change in angle of the stick blade, dropping before the puck is ever shot.

That's one example, but Thompson uses anticipation throughout games to allow his athleticism to shine. It has made him one of the most entertaining goalies in the NHL.

Honorable mentions

Scott Wedgewood, Devin Cooley and Jesper Wallstedt all have quality start percentages high enough to be included on this list, but fell short of the 40-game threshold to be included.

Wedgewood has been brilliant for the Avalanche this season and is making a case to be Colorado's starter entering the postseason. The job Cooley has done behind a struggling Calgary team is one of the best stories in the NHL this season, and Wallstedt's propensity to play at his best against the toughest competition bodes extremely well for his future.

Unfortunately, we had to make a cut-off somewhere for the minimum number of starts to be included in this list, and these three didn't quite make it.

[NHL.com / Super 16: Sabres continue rise, Senators enter power rankings](#)

By NHL.com Writers – Mar. 19, 2026

All 32 teams have played at least 10 games since the NHL returned from the break for the 2026 Winter Olympics.

It's a big enough sample size now to take stock into how everyone has done reintegrating back into the NHL season after a long time away.

The good news: It's been more of the same from many of the top teams, and some that were near the bottom not long ago have continued their climb up the standings and into contention to make the Stanley Cup Playoffs such as the Ottawa Senators and Columbus Blue Jackets.

The bad news: Some of the teams that should be near the top and have been all season, namely the Tampa Bay Lightning and Vegas Golden Knights, have struggled since returning, and others that needed a post-Olympic surge have not gotten it.

The Super 16 this week is here to analyze how the top 16 teams in the League, at least how we see the top 16, have fared since the break, what's working and what might need tweaking or all together fixing.

As always, to come up with the Super 16, the 15 voters this week put together their own version of what they think the rankings should look like and a point total was assigned to each, with the team selected first given 16 points, second 15, third 14, and so on.

Here is the post-Olympic returns edition of the Super 16:

1. Colorado Avalanche (44-13-10)

Total points: 229

Last week: No. 1

"Though Nathan MacKinnon gets all the attention with the Avalanche, and rightfully so, Martin Necas has been one of the hottest players in the NHL since the Olympics. The forward has nine goals since play resumed Feb. 25, most in the NHL, and 19 points, one behind the leader Nikita Kucherov of the Tampa Bay Lightning. MacKinnon is no slouch either, with 18 points (five goals, 13 assists) since coming back from Milan. That is a huge 1-2 punch that will be hard for anyone to handle come the postseason." – *Bill Price, Editor-in-Chief*

2. Dallas Stars (43-15-10)

Total points: 228

Last week: No. 2

"How have the Stars done since the Olympic break? It says here they have done swimmingly. They were 8-0-1 in their first nine games and extended the point streak to 15, which tied a Dallas/Minnesota North Stars record. They scored 43 goals and allowed 24, not a bad ratio at all. Their power-play, a strength all season, was 26.3 percent. Four players averaged more than a point per game led by Wyatt Johnston's 15 points (eight goals, seven assists). Goalie Jake Oettinger, who won a gold medal with Team USA, was 6-0-1 with a 1.80 goals-against average and .930 save percentage. There's a reason this team will have a say in who raises the Presidents' Trophy." -- *Shawn P. Roarke, director of editorial*

3. Buffalo Sabres (42-20-6)

Total points: 213

Last week: No. 4

"What's worked for the Sabres since the break? Pretty much everything. How do you find warts on a team that's 10-1-0 after returning to action? The Sabres have outscored opponents 41-24, symbolizing the dominance that has rocketed them to the top of the Atlantic Division standings. Perhaps the most encouraging sign is how they've tightened up defensively and received stellar goaltending, two recipes for success. To that point, Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen earned his first shutout of the season in Buffalo's 2-0 win against the Vegas Golden Knights on Tuesday at T-Mobile Arena, one of the most difficult buildings for opposing teams to play. Not for the Sabres. Right now, they're a difficult out wherever they play." -- *Mike Zeisberger, staff writer*

4. Carolina Hurricanes (43-19-6)

Total points: 195

Last week: No. 3

"The Hurricanes haven't been as consistent as they were prior to the break. They will need to defend better. They allowed 3.55 goals per game in 11 games (7-4-0) after giving up 2.81 before the Olympics. Carolina is 28th on the penalty kill (72.7 percent; 24-for-33) since Feb. 25, 11th (80.6 percent) before that. The positive? Many star players are producing, including forwards Sebastian Aho, Seth Jarvis, Nikolaj Ehlers and Andrei Svechnikov. They continue to get positive play out of their young players too, including defenseman Alexander Nikishin, 24, and forward Jackson Blake, 22." -- *Mike G. Morreale, senior draft writer*

5. Minnesota Wild (39-18-12)

Total points: 180

Last week: No. 5

"The Wild are 5-4-2 since the break, which assumes a mixed bag for how they've played, but really that's not so much the case. They're scoring 3.09 goals per game and allowing 2.55. Their special teams have been solid, 23.7 percent on the power play and 89.7 percent on the penalty kill. They have wins against the Avalanche (5-2), Lightning (5-1), Utah Mammoth (5-0) and Golden Knights (4-2). They lost 3-2 in a

shootout to the Avalanche but weren't that great with consecutive losses to three teams out of the playoff race: the Philadelphia Flyers (3-2 in a shootout), New York Rangers (4-2) and Toronto Maple Leafs (4-2). The Wild needed overtime to win 4-3 against the Chicago Blackhawks on Tuesday. Things could be better, but overall the Wild are in a good place and can focus on little details of their game heading down the stretch." -- *Dan Rosen, senior writer*

6. Tampa Bay Lightning (41-21-4)

Total points: 163

Last week: No. 6

"The Lightning were on a 19-1-1 run entering the Olympic break but haven't come close to discovering that level since play resumed. After winning their first game back, they're 3-7-0. Defensive play has been a major issue; they've allowed at least four goals in a game seven times in 11 games and 30.5 shots against per game. Offensively, they've been strong, averaging 3.45 goals per game and Kucherov playing at a Hart Trophy level with 20 points (eight goals, 12 assists) in 11 games. But that scoring won't help when they can't outscore their mistakes the other way." -- *Adam Kimelman, deputy managing editor*

7. Montreal Canadiens (37-20-10)

Total points: 145

Last week: No. 7

"The Canadiens are 5-3-2 in 10 games since the break. It's far from perfect, but not the end of the world. They've have given up too many goals (34) but scored 37. Goalie Jacob Fowler was recalled from Laval of the American Hockey League on March 11. He is 1-1-0, allowing six goals on 62 shots in two starts for a 3.05 goals-against average and .903 save percentage." – *Jean-Francois Chaumont, senior writer LNH.com*

8. New York Islanders (39-24-5)

Total points: 132

Last week: No. 8

"The Islanders have won seven of 10 since returning from the break and control their own destiny when it comes to clinching a playoff berth. Matthew Schaefer has four goals and six assists in that span, the defenseman continuing his march to the Calder Trophy as NHL rookie of the year. What shouldn't be overlooked is the play of forward Mathew Barzal, who is averaging 1.20 points per game (12 points; one goal, 11 assists), including three assists in a 3-1 win at the Maple Leafs on Tuesday. Barzal still maintains the ability to dazzle when he has the puck on his stick and has been a force the past three weeks." -- *Brian Compton, managing editor*

9. Pittsburgh Penguins (34-18-16)

Total points: 117

"The Penguins got Sidney Crosby back Wednesday, and their captain had a goal and an assist in a 6-5 overtime loss to the Carolina Hurricanes after the forward missed 11 games with a lower-body injury while playing for Team Canada at the Olympics. They continued to thrive despite missing Crosby and losing Evgeni Malkin for five games because of a suspension. Others picked up the slack like Anthony Mantha, who has NHL career highs in goals (26), assists (27) and points (53), and Erik Karlsson, who is playing at the level that helped him win the Norris Trophy voted as the League's top defenseman three times." -- *Tom Gulitti, senior writer*

10. Columbus Blue Jackets (35-21-11)

Total points: 88

Last week: No. 13

"The Blue Jackets have picked up right where they left off before the break, continuing their surge up the standings in the Metropolitan Division and Eastern Conference. They're 6-1-4 since the break. They're fourth in the division, but just two points behind the third-place Islanders and three behind the second-place Pittsburgh Penguins. They're one point behind the Boston Bruins and Detroit Red Wings, who are in the two wild-card spots. Adam Fantilli and Charlie Coyle each have 13 points in 11 games since the break to lead the Blue Jackets. Kirill Marchenko has six goals and Conor Garland, acquired before the NHL Trade Deadline on March 6, has four goals in six games. The Blue Jackets' .727 points percentage is second in the Eastern Conference behind the Sabres (.909), so, yes, they're still looking up in the standings, but things continue to look up in Columbus." -- *Rosen*

11. Boston Bruins (37-23-8)

Total points: 82

Last week: No. 12

"It's been a mixed bag since the Bruins came back from the break with four medals -- gold for Jeremy Swayman and Charlie McAvoy, and bronze for Joonas Korpisalo and Henri Jokiharju. They're 5-3-3 and particularly notable have been the points left on the table in their past two games, overtime losses to the New Jersey Devils and Canadiens. Most concerning for the Bruins is how their power play has gone cold. They are 1-for-13 in their past four games and 5-for-39 (12.8 percent) since the break after going 44-for-167 (26.3 percent, third in the NHL) up until that point." -- *Amalie Benjamin, senior writer*

12. Anaheim Ducks (37-27-4)

Total points: 71

Last week: No. 11

"The Ducks are 7-4-1 coming out of the break after Wednesday's 3-2 overtime loss to the Philadelphia Flyers. That's not bad, but they're definitely looking for more to finish first in a Pacific Division that is up for grabs, with the Ducks one point ahead of the Edmonton Oilers and two ahead of the Vegas Golden

Knights. It helps that they got back Troy Terry, who had three points (goal, two assists) in a 4-3 win against the Canadiens on March 15 after the forward missed nine games with an upper-body injury. John Carlson, acquired in a trade with the Washington Capitals on March 6, made his Anaheim debut against Montreal, playing 22:59. He'll also be a big help to the Ducks in these final regular-season games." -- *Tracey Myers, staff writer*

13. Detroit Red Wings (37-23-8)

Total points: 60

Last week: No. 10

"The Red Wings are 4-4-2 since the break, falling from third in the Atlantic Division to the second wild card into the playoffs from the East. While they've given up 2.80 goals per game in that span, ninth in the NHL, they've scored 2.60 goals per game, tied for 25th. The big issue right now is lower-body injuries to their top two centers. Captain Dylan Larkin has missed five games. Andrew Copp has missed three." -- *Nicholas J. Cotsonika, columnist*

14. Ottawa Senators (34-24-9)

Total points: 37

Last week: Not ranked

"The Senators have played their way into the playoff race in the Eastern Conference with a strong push coming out of the break after winning five of their final six games going into it. They are 6-2-2 in 10 games. They've been somewhat dynamic offensively and stout defensively, scoring 3.50 goals per game and allowing 2.50. They've gotten balanced scoring, with an exceptional push from forward Drake Batherson (team highs of eight goals and 10 points). There's still work to be done, but the Senators are pushing and playing meaningful games. It wasn't long ago that there were questions in Ottawa if that would happen this season." -- *Rosen*

15. Utah Mammoth (35-27-6)

Total points: 34

Last week: No. 16

"Utah is 5-4-2 in 11 games since the break. Dylan Guenther and Clayton Keller each have 11 points in that span. Starting goalie Karel Vejmelka, who played for Team Czechia at the Olympics, has struggled with a 3.49 goals-against average and .866 save percentage but backup Vitek Vanecek has picked up the slack (1.98 GAA, .917 save percentage). Utah may not move up into a top-three spot in the Central but has played well enough that it has a cushion in the wild-card race and is playing meaningful games down the stretch." -- *David Satriano, staff writer*

16. Edmonton Oilers (34-26-9)

Total points: 30

Last week: No. 15

"It has been a defense-first attitude for the Oilers since the returning from the break. Edmonton is focusing on playing better defensively and acquired defenseman Connor Murphy, and forwards Jason Dickinson and Colton Dach, from the Chicago Blackhawks prior to the Deadline to help. Defending will become even more of a priority with star forward Leon Draisaitl out for the rest of the regular season with a lower-body injury sustained in a 3-1 win against the Nashville Predators on March 15. Going into the break, Edmonton was allowing 3.29 goals per game. It's now up to 3.73 goals per game, so the Oilers still have work to do. Goalie Connor Ingram has taken over the No. 1 role from Tristan Jarry and is 5-2-1 with a 2.77 GAA and .893 save percentage in nine games (eight starts) since the break. If Ingram continues to trend in the right direction and the Oilers can play well in front of him, they should be able to chip away at the goals-against toward the end of the season and into the playoffs. Their success depends on it with Draisaitl and his 97 points (35 goals, 62 assists) in 65 games no longer in the lineup." -- *Derek Van Diest, staff writer*

Dropped out from last week: Golden Knights (No. 14)

Others receiving points: Golden Knights 29, Seattle Kraken 4, Philadelphia Flyers 3

HERE'S HOW WE RANKED 'EM

AMALIE BENJAMIN

1. Dallas Stars; 2. Colorado Avalanche; 3. Buffalo Sabres; 4. Carolina Hurricanes; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. Anaheim Ducks; 9. New York Islanders; 10. Boston Bruins; 11. Pittsburgh Penguins; 12. Columbus Blue Jackets; 13. Utah Mammoth; 14. Detroit Red Wings; 15. Edmonton Oilers; 16. Vegas Golden Knights

JEAN-FRANCOIS CHAUMONT

1. Colorado Avalanche; 2. Dallas Stars; 3. Buffalo Sabres; 4. Minnesota Wild; 5. Carolina Hurricanes; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. New York Islanders; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Anaheim Ducks; 11. Columbus Blue Jackets; 12. Boston Bruins; 13. Detroit Red Wings; 14. Edmonton Oilers; 15. Utah Mammoth; 16. Vegas Golden Knights

BRIAN COMPTON

1. Colorado Avalanche; 2. Dallas Stars; 3. Carolina Hurricanes; 4. Buffalo Sabres; 5. Tampa Bay Lightning; 6. Minnesota Wild; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. New York Islanders; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Columbus Blue Jackets; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. Ottawa Senators; 13. Detroit Red Wings; 14. Anaheim Ducks; 15. Utah Mammoth; 16. Philadelphia Flyers

NICHOLAS J. COTSONIKA

1. Colorado Avalanche; 2. Dallas Stars; 3. Carolina Hurricanes; 4. Buffalo Sabres; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. Pittsburgh Penguins; 9. New York Islanders; 10.

Columbus Blue Jackets; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. Detroit Red Wings; 13. Ottawa Senators; 14. Anaheim Ducks; 15. Philadelphia Flyers; 16. Vegas Golden Knights

TOM GULITTI

1. Dallas Stars; 2. Buffalo Sabres; 3. Colorado Avalanche; 4. Carolina Hurricanes; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. New York Islanders; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Columbus Blue Jackets; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. Detroit Red Wings; 13. Anaheim Ducks; 14. Ottawa Senators; 15. Vegas Golden Knights; 16. Edmonton Oilers

ADAM KIMELMAN

1. Colorado Avalanche; 2. Dallas Stars; 3. Buffalo Sabres; 4. Tampa Bay Lightning; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Carolina Hurricanes; 7. Anaheim Ducks; 8. New York Islanders; 9. Vegas Golden Knights; 10. Edmonton Oilers; 11. Montreal Canadiens; 12. Utah Mammoth; 13. Columbus Blue Jackets; 14. Pittsburgh Penguins; 15. Boston Bruins; 16. Detroit Red Wings

MIKE G. MORREALE

1. Colorado Avalanche; 2. Dallas Stars; 3. Buffalo Sabres; 4. Minnesota Wild; 5. New York Islanders; 6. Carolina Hurricanes; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. Tampa Bay Lightning; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Columbus Blue Jackets; 11. Ottawa Senators; 12. Boston Bruins; 13. Detroit Red Wings; 14. Anaheim Ducks; 15. Utah Mammoth; 16. Edmonton Oilers

TRACEY MYERS

1. Colorado Avalanche; 2. Dallas Stars; 3. Carolina Hurricanes; 4. Buffalo Sabres; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. Pittsburgh Penguins; 9. New York Islanders; 10. Boston Bruins; 11. Detroit Red Wings; 12. Columbus Blue Jackets; 13. Anaheim Ducks; 14. Vegas Golden Knights; 15. Edmonton Oilers; 16. Utah Mammoth

BILL PRICE

1. Buffalo Sabres; 2. Colorado Avalanche; 3. Dallas Stars; 4. Carolina Hurricanes; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. New York Islanders; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Columbus Blue Jackets; 11. Anaheim Ducks; 12. Vegas Golden Knights; 13. Edmonton Oilers; 14. Utah Mammoth; 15. Seattle Kraken; 16. Boston Bruins

SHAWN P. ROARKE

1. Dallas Stars; 2. Buffalo Sabres; 3. Carolina Hurricanes; 4. Colorado Avalanche; 5. Tampa Bay Lightning; 6. Minnesota Wild; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. Pittsburgh Penguins; 9. Columbus Blue Jackets; 10. Anaheim Ducks; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. Utah Mammoth; 13. New York Islanders; 14. Ottawa Senators; 15. Seattle Kraken; 16. Vegas Golden Knights

DAN ROSEN

1. Dallas Stars; 2. Buffalo Sabres; 3. Colorado Avalanche; 4. Carolina Hurricanes; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. New York Islanders; 8. Montreal Canadiens; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Columbus Blue Jackets; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. Utah Mammoth; 13. Detroit Red Wings; 14. Anaheim Ducks; 15. Ottawa Senators; 16. Edmonton Oilers

DAVID SATRIANO

1. Buffalo Sabres; 2. Dallas Stars; 3. Colorado Avalanche; 4. Carolina Hurricanes; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. New York Islanders; 8. Montreal Canadiens; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Columbus Blue Jackets; 11. Ottawa Senators; 12. Boston Bruins; 13. Detroit Red Wings; 14. Edmonton Oilers; 15. Utah Mammoth; 16. Anaheim Ducks

PAUL STRIZHEVSKY

1. Colorado Avalanche; 2. Dallas Stars; 3. Buffalo Sabres; 4. Carolina Hurricanes; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. New York Islanders; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. Pittsburgh Penguins; 9. Tampa Bay Lightning; 10. Boston Bruins; 11. Detroit Red Wings; 12. Columbus Blue Jackets; 13. Ottawa Senators; 14. Anaheim Ducks; 15. Vegas Golden Knights; 16. Edmonton Oilers

DEREK VAN DIEST

1. Colorado Avalanche; 2. Dallas Stars; 3. Buffalo Sabres; 4. Carolina Hurricanes; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Montreal Canadiens; 7. Tampa Bay Lightning; 8. Pittsburgh Penguins; 9. New York Islanders; 10. Boston Bruins; 11. Columbus Blue Jackets; 12. Detroit Red Wings; 13. Anaheim Ducks; 14. Ottawa Senators; 15. Edmonton Oilers; 16. Utah Mammoth

MIKE ZEISBERGER

1. Colorado Avalanche; 2. Dallas Stars; 3. Carolina Hurricanes; 4. Buffalo Sabres; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. Montreal Canadiens; 8. Detroit Red Wings; 9. New York Islanders; 10. Pittsburgh Penguins; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. Vegas Golden Knights; 13. Anaheim Ducks; 14. Edmonton Oilers; 15. Utah Mammoth; 16. Ottawa Senators