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## Columbus Dispatch / Erik Gudbranson, Elvis Merzlikins swept into Columbus Blue Jackets' new injury plague

**By Brian Hedger- October 17, 2024**

It's beyond the point of ridiculous.

Another rash of injuries is biting the Blue Jackets three games into the season after health problems helped land them in the NHL's basement the past two seasons. Erik Gudbranson (upper body) a veteran defenseman, was placed on injured reserve Wednesday, while goalie Elvis Merzlikins (upper body) is hurt and expected to be out short-term.

Goalie Jet Greaves has rejoined the Blue Jackets on emergency recall from the Cleveland Monsters and is likely to backup Daniil Tarasov Thursday against the Buffalo Sabres.

Gudbranson, a stout defenseman who plays the right point on the third defense pairing, could be out for a while with his unspecified upper-body issue. The 6 foot 5, 225-pound veteran accidentally collided with teammate Sean Monahan in the Blue Jackets' 4-3 loss to the Florida Panthers. They knocked each other over during the second period of the Jackets' home opener at Nationwide Arena after an emotional pregame memorial was held to honor Johnny Gaudreau — who died along with his brother, Matthew, while riding bikes Aug. 29 in South Jersey.

Monahan wasn't injured after both fell to the ice, but Gudbranson stayed down in pain before scrambling to his feet, skating off and heading straight to the training room while holding his right arm. He was ruled out, and Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said the prognosis "didn't look good," after the game.

Gudbranson, who provides a steady defensive presence along with leadership and grit, will get a second opinion before anything else is announced or done regarding his injury. He joins forwards Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery), Justin Danforth (wrist), Dmitri Voronkov (upper body) and Gavin Brindley (broken finger) on injured reserve.

Jenner also got a second opinion before getting shoulder surgery done in Colorado that will keep him out most, if not all, season. Danforth has skated in full practices since Friday, so he may be close to returning, especially with the Blue Jackets placing forward Dylan Gambrell on waivers for the purpose of assignment to the AHL's Cleveland Monsters.

Merzlikins, meanwhile, is out with what was initially described by a team source as "physical fatigue," and then switched to a short-term, upper-body injury. He's the Blue Jackets' highest-paid goalie at \$5.4 million a season and has two more years left on his contract.

Merzlikins, 30, has dealt with injuries and illness the past two years, including 14 games missed last season with an upper-body injury (two), lower-body injury (seven) and five absences spanning four separate illness situations. That's par for the course for the Blue Jackets, who've lost a combined 890 man-games to injuries and other health issues the past two years, before also losing Gaudreau to the offseason tragedy.

Despite their latest setbacks, the Jackets have impressed in their first three games.

They're 1-2-0 going into the matchup against Buffalo, but the two losses were only by one goal while the Jackets pushed for a tying tally with their net empty in the waning minutes of the game. Each injury also

provides opportunity, and it looks like David Jiricek, a talented young right-handed defenseman, will get first crack at Gudbranson's spot.

Jiricek, selected sixth overall in 2022, has watched the first three games as a healthy scratch. He carries a lot of offensive ability while trying to improve in the defensive and neutral zones.

## Columbus Dispatch / Johnny Gaudreau remembered: Blue Jackets fans mourn NHL star at home opener

**By Bob Vitale- October 17, 2024**

The Columbus Blue Jackets' home opener Tuesday was much like the first holiday without a loved one.

The rituals were all familiar, the traditions locked in over more than two decades of NHL hockey at Nationwide Arena. Fans in Jackets jerseys and hoodies swarmed in, lined up for burgers and beers, and snatched up new merch. They shouted "Leo!" for National Anthem singer Leo Walsh. They chanted "CBI! CBI!" and "Let's go, Jackets! Let's go, Jackets!"

But nothing at all was the same. Many people wore No. 13 Tuesday night as the Jackets started their 41-game home schedule for 2024-25. But No. 13 himself was missing on the ice.

"I'm gutted," Cathy Kaplan said as she fought back tears that she said she has shed often since the death on Aug. 29 of Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau and his brother Matthew, who were struck and killed by a suspected drunk driver while riding their bicycles near their family's home in New Jersey.

Johnny Gaudreau: Here's the latest on the investigation into the NHL star's death

Tuesday was an emotional night for many who lingered near a tribute to the Gaudreau brothers on the arena's lower concourse. Four jerseys — from their days at Boston College, Johnny's time on a U.S. national team and with the Dubuque Fighting Saints — flanked his Jackets' No. 13. More than 100 hockey sticks that had been left outside the arena after the star's death leaned against a window. Signs, hockey pucks and other tributes were on display as well.

"It's not the normal uplifting opening night," said Paula Hammer, who was with her husband and daughter. But it was comforting, she said. "We're all sort of here for Johnny."

There were happy memories, too, though. As Jacob Barker looked over merchandise in a lower-concourse kiosk, he recalled buying a Blue Jackets jersey with Gaudreau's name and number in the summer of 2022 and getting it signed at a preseason meet-and-greet.

Gaudreau's wife, Meredith, was expecting their first child at the time, and when Barker got his moment at the autograph table, he told Gaudreau that he was a new father, too.

"His face lit up," Barker said. "He was a family man."

"It was right over there," he said, gesturing toward the area that now houses the Gaudreau memorial.

One of the biggest cheers during a pregame video tribute to Gaudreau came when the Images switched from his time with the Calgary Flames to the day in July 2022 when he got off a private plane in Columbus and put on a Blue Jackets jersey for the first time.

Three years after Jackets goalie Sergei Bobrovsky got off a plane in Miami and leading scorer Artemi Panarin landed in New York, Gaudreau was a top free agent who decided to come to Columbus. And he did it for a reason that earned him a place in the hearts of Jackets fans forever.

He liked it here.

Among the hockey sticks, pucks and posters that are part of the memorial to Gaudreau, a few were inscribed with the same message from fans.

"Thank you for choosing Columbus," they said.

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets fall one goal short after Gaudreau memorial: 5 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- October 17, 2024

It felt like the equalizer was moments away.

After seeing Blue Jackets forward James van Riemsdyk redirect Damon Severson's shot into the Florida Panthers' net while his own net was empty, the energy at sold-out Nationwide Arena skyrocketed Tuesday night. It pulled the Jackets within 4-3 of the defending Stanley Cup champions on the night Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau were remembered during an emotional ceremony — including Johnny's No. 13 sent to the rafters — but the tying goal didn't happen.

Spencer Knight, the Panthers' goalie, stopped everything the Jackets threw at him in the final two-plus minutes. Florida left with the victory, and the Jackets fell one goal short for the second time in their first three games.

"(The Gaudreau tribute) was very well done by the Blue Jackets, and the Blue Jackets players played their butts off tonight," Panthers coach Paul Maurice said. "So did we. Our goaltender was the key piece tonight, and we needed him to be."

Here are five takeaways:

### Columbus Blue Jackets, Florida Panthers honor Gaudreau on faceoff

It was one of those moments that instantly became historic for the Blue Jackets, who took the game's opening faceoff without Gaudreau's spot at left wing filled.

They had four skaters and goalie Elvis Merzlikins lined up against the Panthers' five plus Knight. As soon as the puck hit the ice, it became apparent what was happening. Players for each team froze for 13 seconds, until 19:47 was left. The puck was scooped up by an official right where Gaudreau would have been standing, and it was delivered to the Blue Jackets' bench.

A new opening draw followed, and that's how this game started. It was a humbling reminder of what the Blue Jackets and the entire sport have lost in both Gaudreau brothers. "It's hard, to be honest," Jackets center Sean Monahan said. "It was a special moment that, uh, I'll remember forever."

### Sean Monahan's goal another tribute to close friend Johnny Gaudreau

It lasted only 37 seconds, but Monahan's goal briefly gave the Blue Jackets a 2-1 lead at 11:22 of the second and it felt like a divine tally with Gaudreau's assistance. After his first attempt was stopped, Monahan charged after the rebound and basically willed the puck past Knight.

It was his second goal in as many games, second of the season and one of the most meaningful of his career.

"I felt like Johnny was watching down on us today," Monahan said. "I had a feeling I was going to get one. Fortunately enough I did, and we lost, which sucks, but I could definitely feel John today."

### Columbus Blue Jackets' Kent Johnson shows skill on short-handed goal

It's a good thing Evason and his coaching staff gave Kent Johnson a look as a penalty-killing forward in training camp. The right wing is not only a disruptive force while short-handed, but he's also an offensive threat.

It was only a matter of time before he created a short-handed goal, and it led to Cole Sillinger scoring the game's first goal 41 seconds into the second period. Spotting Sillinger breaking free in the neutral zone, Johnson sent a perfect backhand stretch pass from his own blue line to hit his target in stride for a breakaway.

Sillinger buried the shot for his first goal of the season, completing another big play between the two as further evidence of their growing chemistry.

"I really enjoy playing with him," Sillinger said. "We're opposites, in a way, but we're starting to think the game more and more alike and using each other more. We're just wanting it more for each other and believing in each other more. That's a big part of it. As long as we keep playing together, our chemistry is just going to keep building."

Columbus Blue Jackets' resilience persists in loss to Florida Panthers

It's only three games into an 82-game slate, but Evason is already learning something about the Blue Jackets. Even when they're down, they push to the end. This time, after falling behind 4-2 on Eetu Luostarinen's goal with 4:48 left, the Jackets pulled back within a goal on James van Riemsdyk's goal with 2:39 left and Merzlikins on the bench for an extra skater.

It's the second time in their first three games the Blue Jackets have cut a two-goal margin to one in the waning minutes of a third period, after doing the same in a 3-2 loss to open the season Thursday at Minnesota.

"This team won't quit," Evason said. "I know that for a fact. They won't let each other quit. That's what we've seen, that's what they've built in a short period. They push each other. At no time in the three games did we sag, and there were opportunities for us to have a letdown. There are signs that there's no quit in this group, for sure."

Gudbranson may be next Columbus Blue Jackets regular out long term

Another day arrived, and another injury happened to a Blue Jackets player. After already losing captain Boone Jenner and Dmitry Voronkov in the preseason, just 14 hours apart, the Jackets are now looking at a possible long-term stretch without defenseman Erik Gudbranson, another key locker room leader along with their on-ice sheriff of sorts.

This time, it was a collision between teammates that did it. Gudbranson and Monahan collided late in the second period behind a play and both fell to the ice. Gudbranson immediately reacted to an apparent injury, slowly getting to his feet and leaving the ice while holding his right arm or wrist.

Evason didn't have specifics on the injury following the game, but said the initial prognosis "doesn't look good."

When an NHL coach says that after a game, it almost always means multiple weeks out of the lineup as the best-case scenario. If so, that would be another big loss for a young team that leans heavily on Gudbranson's leadership, experience, savvy and toughness.

Assuming he'll miss time, it's likely David Jiricek's time to step into a regular role as Gudbranson's replacement. He's big, right-handed and was drafted sixth overall in 2022 by the Blue Jackets for a reason.

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson leaves game, doesn't return

**By Brian Hedger- October 18, 2024**

The Blue Jackets' injury luck continues to be rotten.

Despite getting some good news with the return of Justin Danforth from offseason wrist surgery, the bad news continued with another awkward fall Thursday at Nationwide Arena that knocked Kent Johnson out of the Blue Jackets' 6-4 win against the Buffalo Sabres.

With the Blue Jackets up 2-0 just 52 seconds into the second period, Johnson, skating at a high rate of speed, tumbled over teammate James van Riemsdyk just outside the Columbus blue line — near the same spot where defenseman Erik Gudbranson sustained an upper-body injury Tuesday during a collision with teammate Sean Monahan.

Johnson hit the ice hard, immediately grabbed his left arm/hand in pain and skated off the ice. He went straight down the tunnel to get medical assistance, angrily throwing a glove on his way out. It looked just like Gudbranson's exit two nights earlier.

"Again, just a freak thing, right, taken out again by our own player," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "(He) just freakishly falls, and we'll see how he is (Friday), but as I said with (Gudbranson), it didn't look good. But we'll get the evaluation (Friday)."

Like Gudbranson's injury, the Blue Jackets are only calling it an "upper-body injury" at this point.

Last season, when Johnson scored six goals, recorded 10 assists and averaged 13:32 of ice time in 42 games, his season came to a halt with a torn labrum in his left shoulder Feb. 28 at Madison Square Garden, which happened while taking the final meaningless faceoff in a loss to the New York Rangers. The young winger needed surgery to repair it and spent the first part of the Blue Jackets' offseason finishing his rehab for it.

This season, after adding more speed and explosive bursts to his skating during summer training, Johnson got off to a great start to his third full NHL season. His assist on the game's first goal Thursday against the Sabres was his fifth point (two goals, three assists) in four games. He put together a four-game point streak, as well, notching at least a point in all four games.

Johnson had also moved up a line Thursday to play right wing with Adam Fantilli and van Riemsdyk for the first time, after Danforth returned to skate on the third line with Cole Sillinger and Mikael Pyyhtia — Johnson's prior spot. The Blue Jackets are also without captain Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery), Gudbranson (upper body), Dmitri Voronkov (upper body) and goalie Elvis Merzlikins (upper body).

All but Merzlikins are on injured reserve, and Voronkov's injury is also believed to be a shoulder issue that keeps him out until late November at the earliest.

"Super tough (to see)," Sillinger said of Johnson, the NHL's fifth overall pick in 2021. "The way he was playing ... you never, ever want to see that. The thing with 'KJ,' he deals with adversity extremely well, so even talking to him, he's already got a smile on his face and is trying to think of the most positive outcomes and things like that. He doesn't deserve that, with what he went through last year, and whatever is evaluated, he'll be coming back stronger."



## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets injuries create opening for David Jiricek's season debut

**By Brian Hedger- October 19, 2024**

David Jiricek is set to make his season debut for the Blue Jackets on Saturday against the Minnesota Wild.

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said Jiricek, 20, will draw into a lineup that might feature seven defensemen and only 11 forwards rather than a typical six and 12 setup. It will be his first action since the preseason, which is notable because he's still a young defenseman with high potential. General managers in the NHL typically want those type of players, especially defensemen, maturing into impact players by logging a lot of ice time, whether they're in the NHL or American Hockey League.

"We've talked about earning the right to play and to be in that room, and so, if you don't play ... you have to earn the right to get into our lineup," Evason said. "How do you do that? Well, you do it with a positive attitude, you work your (tail) off every day, you are detailed, you're coachable and you get yourself ready to play, and we notice that. Coaches notice that. If you do all the right things, you give yourself a better chance to earn the right to get into our lineup, and he has done that."

Jiricek was selected sixth overall by the Blue Jackets in 2022 and has spent the bulk of the past two seasons playing on the top defense pairing for the AHL Cleveland Monsters. Last season, after helping Cleveland win the North Division title, he contributed to the Monsters' run into the Eastern Conference finals of the Calder Cup playoffs — pushing eventual champion Hersey to overtime in Game 7 before losing.

In the NHL, Jiricek has added one goal, nine assists and 10 points in 47 games over the past two seasons while playing for former Blue Jackets coaches Brad Larsen in 2022-23 and Pascal Vincent last season. Jiricek made the Blue Jackets' opening roster this season, but has watched the first four games as a healthy scratch. He struggled defensively in the preseason, but has high upside on both sides of the puck as a big, right-handed defenseman with a booming shot.

Jiricek's pathway to playing time also stems from the Blue Jackets' shortage of NHL forwards.

They're missing captain Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery) for most of the season, Dmitry Voronkov (shoulder) until at least November and now Kent Johnson — who left with an upper-body injury believed to be a shoulder issue in the Blue Jackets' 6-4 victory Thursday over the Buffalo Sabres.

Veteran defenseman Erik Gudbranson is also walking around with a sling after leaving early in Tuesday's loss to the Florida Panthers with a shoulder injury that landed him on injured reserve. Jenner was injured in a practice drill late in the preseason, while Gudbranson and Johnson were injured during falls after collisions with teammates the past two games — all fluke occurrences.

In other injury news, leading scorer Yegor Chinakhov didn't practice Friday. According to a team source, he's expected to play Saturday but had precautionary X-rays taken after blocking a shot Thursday.

"For sure, there's an element of, 'What the heck's going on?'" Evason said. "On the other side of it, there's not a thing we can do about it. What are we going to do, ask our guys never to get close to each other (on the ice)? Boone gets hurt in practice. Do we ask them not to work hard, not to play hard? It happens. Are we disappointed that we don't have some people in our lineup? Sure, but we have people in our lineup, and each night, each day, we conduct ourselves the same regardless of who's in our lineup."

## Columbus Dispatch / Another win, another big injury: Columbus Blue Jackets down Buffalo Sabres: 4 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- October 19, 2024

The Blue Jackets' injury luck continues to skew heavily toward bad over good.

Despite rattling off a six-goal performance in a 6-4 victory over the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday at Nationwide Arena, the Blue Jackets' celebration was muted by another key player lost to injury. This time, forward Kent Johnson went down with an upper-body injury that "didn't look good," according to coach Dean Evason. That could mean Johnson will land on injured reserve along with captain Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery), defenseman Erik Gudbranson (upper body) and Dmitry Voronkov (upper body).

The game turned in the Sabres' favor after Johnson's injury, but not enough to stem the Blue Jackets' offense on another impressive night where six different players scored goals and multiple defensemen got into the offensive gameplan — including Damon Severson scoring a goal.

Here are four takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets need luck to change with injuries

Voronkov and Jenner went down late in the preseason, both with shoulder injuries. Jenner's happened near the end of a practice session for players who weren't going to play in that day's road game in Pittsburgh to end the exhibition slate.

Gudbranson's injury, which had his right arm in a sling Thursday night, was also a fluke occurrence. He and Sean Monahan collided behind the play in the neutral zone, not far from where Johnson fell over van Riemsdyk two days later.

It's enough to make you wonder whether the Blue Jackets need to drop four-leaf clovers from the rafters or bring a team of various religious leaders into the building for a wholesale cleansing of bad mojo. This is the third straight season the Blue Jackets have dealt with a spate of key injuries after piling up a combined 890 man-games lost the previous two years.

Enough is enough.

Sean Monahan's line continues to shine for Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets' first forward line is developing into a formidable force with veteran Sean Monahan in the middle and wingers Yegor Chinakhov and Kirill Marchenko on the flanks.

Chinakhov's second goal of the season opened the scoring on a power play at 5:12 of the first period, while Marchenko added two points on a goal and assist. Chinakhov and Marchenko are tied for the team's scoring lead with two goals, four assists and six points apiece, while Monahan has 2-2-4 in the season's first four games.

After signing with the Blue Jackets on July 1 as a free agent, the veteran pivot is quickly developing chemistry with his new Russian linemates. They're only filling those roles out of necessity following Johnny Gaudreau's tragic death and Jenner's shoulder surgery, but all three are clicking to start the season.

"We call him 'Monahanov,'" Marchenko said, smirking. "It's like a Russian last name. He's good, too. He'll start to speak Russian, I think, after a couple months. I'm joking, but he's good. He's every time, in good

position, and can make a pass every time. He wins battles, he has big experience in the NHL and he's really a help for us, for me and (Chinakhov)."

According to Natural Stat Trick, the Blue Jackets thrived in 13:25 of 5-on-5 with their top line on the ice, posting large advantages in attempted shots (19-5, 79.2%), unblocked attempts (13-4, 76.5%), shots on goal (9-3, 75%), scoring chances (8-3, 72.7%) and expected goals (0.70-0.25).

Columbus Blue Jackets' fourth line capitalizes against Buffalo Sabres

They didn't get a lot of ice time, as usual, but the Blue Jackets' fourth line of Sean Kuraly, Zach Aston-Reese and Mathieu Olivier made the best of their 5-on-5 time (4:22).

Aston-Reese scored his first goal since joining the Blue Jackets as a waiver claim late in the preseason, pushing their lead to 5-3 just 15 seconds into the third period. Olivier scored his first goal of the season to make it 4-2 late in the second and Kuraly played a solid two-way game to finish with a +1 plus/minus rating while winning three of his five faceoffs (60%).

Olivier and Aston-Reese also spent time playing with Adam Fantilli after Johnson left the game early in the second period. Olivier played 14:34 and finished with two points on a goal and assist – just the third multi-point game of his NHL career (172 games).

Adam Fantilli impresses for Columbus Blue Jackets in win over Buffalo Sabres

Assuming Johnson is out longer than a few games, the Blue Jackets will need somebody else to account for his lost offense. Fantilli got a great start in that process against the Sabres, scoring his second goal of the season and skating a strong 17:49 on 24 shifts.

Fantilli and defenseman Ivan Provorov each had four shots to tie for the team high, and the Jackets' second year center won eight of 13 draws for a 62% success rate at the dots. Fantilli also centered a rotation of wingers following Johnson's injury and could see his usage increase going forward.

## Columbus Dispatch / Replay: Poor start trips up Columbus Blue Jackets in 3-1 loss to Minnesota Wild

By Brian Hedger- October 20, 2024

If this is how the post injury-spate portion of the Blue Jackets' season is going to look, prepare for a lot more tough nights ahead.

Missing five injured regulars — captain Boone Jenner, playmaking forward Kent Johnson, power forward Dmitri Voronkov, stout defenseman Erik Gudbranson and goalie Elvis Merzlikins — the Jackets got steamrolled by the Minnesota Wild, 3-1, Saturday night at Nationwide Arena.

"It's on all of us," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "If we're not ready to play, it's on me, it's on the coaches, it's on the players. There was one guy ready to go, and that was our goaltender (Daniil Tarasov). ... First time, right? It's one period, but we've got to catch it right now. Second period was good, but it's not enough. You have to start correctly, and we have to find a way to do that as a coaching staff and as a team."

It was the second time in nine days these teams played, and this matchup concluded the two-game season series as a sweep for Minnesota. The Wild won the first meeting, 3-2, on Oct. 10 at Xcel Energy Center.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Minnesota Wild updates

FINAL: Minnesota Wild 3, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

The Blue Jackets only trailed 1-0 heading into the third, but Minnesota scored twice in the first 8:26 of the period to blow the game open. Marco Rossi, Kirill Kaprizov and Mats Zuccarello have scored goals for the Wild and Kaprizov added an assist on Zuccarello's tally for a two-point game. Filip Gustavsson picked up his second win of the season against Columbus, stopping 23 of 24 shots while getting a lot of help from a stingy, smothering defensive effort in front of him.

Chinakhov scored the lone goal for the Blue Jackets and Daniil Tarasov made 32 saves in taking the loss.

GOAL, 18:35, 3rd period: Minnesota Wild 3, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

Chinakhov scored his third goal of the season to prevent a shutout, pulling the Jackets within 3-1 with 1:25 left to play.

GOAL, 8:26, 3rd period: Minnesota Wild 3, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

Mats Zuccarello got behind the Blue Jackets' defense and beat Tarasov at 8:26 to push the Wild's lead to 3-0 before the mid-point in the third. Kaprizov and Jon Merrill get the assists. It's a two-point night for Kaprizov, who has both points this period on a goal and assist.

GOAL, 2:52, 3rd period: Minnesota Wild 2, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

Back-to-back penalties taken by Jordan Harris (delay of game) and Cole Sillinger (tripping) led to the Wild taking a 2-0 lead early in the third with a goal by Kirill Kaprizov with a 5-3 man-advantage. Joel Eriksson Ek won the face-off cleanly following Sillinger's penalty, sliding the puck to Matt Boldy — who dropped a pass to Brock Faber for a diagonal setup to Kaprizov in the right circle.

Kaprizov's shot, a one-timer, beat Tarasov over the shoulder and under the crossbar on the near side of the net.

3rd period has started: Minnesota Wild 1, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

The Blue Jackets have one period left to catch the Wild, trailing by a goal while fighting through a suffocating forecheck and defensive effort in the neutral zone.

Second intermission: Minnesota Wild 1, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

The Blue Jackets managed to get more pushback in the second, but couldn't tie it up despite getting a four-minute power play off Yakov Trenin high-sticking forward Yegor Chinakhov in the face. The Jackets outshot the Wild 12-7 in the middle period, forcing Minnesota's Filip Gustavsson to work a lot harder than he needed to during Columbus' four-shot first period.

Overall, the Wild have a 21-16 edge in shots through the first two periods. Minnesota has also dominated the advanced metrics. According to Natural Stat Trick, the Wild are credited with taking 61.1% of the game's 5-on-5 attempts thus far, holding Columbus to just 38.9% in the first 40 minutes.

Yegor Chinakhov back on the ice for Columbus Blue Jackets

Chinakhov's stint in the training room didn't last long. He returned to the ice before the end of the second minor penalty assessed to Trenin for high-sticking. The Blue Jackets didn't take advantage of the four-minute power play and remain down a goal, 1-0, to the Wild with 10:13 left in the second.

Columbus blue Jackets' Yegor Chinakhov injured on high-stick, results in four-minute power play

Yegor Chinakhov took a vicious high-stick to the face from Wild forward Yakov Trenin, who was attempting a stick lift. Chinakhov was bleeding as he headed to the training room for repairs, which gave the Blue Jackets a four-minute power play with Trenin boxed for a high-sticking double-minor. The score remains 1-0 in the Wild's favor.

GOAL OVERTURNED, 4:48: Minnesota Wild 1, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

Minnesota appeared to take a two-goal lead after defenseman Jacob Middleton followed up the rebound of his own shot, tucking the puck home inside the left post after it skittered under Tarasov. Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason challenged for goaltender interference, and the goal was overturned.

The NHL's situation room ruled that Jakub Lauko's push of Jordan Harris sent the Blue Jackets' defenseman into goalie Daniil Tarasov, prompting the goaltender interference by way of Rule 69.1, which states in part, "Goals should be disallowed only if: (1) an attacking player, either by his positioning or by contact, impairs the goalkeeper's ability to move freely within his crease or defend his goal."

Minnesota Wild 1, Columbus Blue Jackets 0: second period is under way

The Blue Jackets created a couple good looks with their 1:10 of carryover power-play time to start the second, but they couldn't get the puck past Filip Gustavsson. They also struggled getting it to Gustavsson cleanly through good defensive sticks by the Wild in the highest danger areas.

It remains 1-0 approaching the 4:00 mark of the period.

First intermission: Minnesota Wild 1, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

The Blue Jackets head into the dressing room down a goal after their worst period of the young season. In short, they're lucky the Wild only lead 1-0 after being outshot 10-2 in the first period and finishing on the wrong end of a 20-13 margin in shot attempts.

Looking for good news?

Kirill Marchenko drew a cross-checking penalty on Wild forward Yakov Trenin late in the period, which gave the Blue Jackets a power play. They weren't able to tie it during the first 50 seconds of the minor infraction, but the Jackets have 1:10 left on the man-advantage to start the second period.

Daniil Tarasov stopped nine of the Wild's 10 shots in the first to keep the Blue Jackets within a goal, including a great sprawling effort to deny Jakub Lauko on a late breakaway that could've put the Wild up 2-0.

GOAL 12:40, 1st period: Minnesota Wild 1, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

The Wild strike first on a goal by Marco Rossi with 7:20 left in the first period.

Marcus Foligno got his stick on Damon Severson's backhand clearing attempt in the lower half of the right circle, sending the puck to Yakov Trenin for a quick pass that sprung Rossi alone into the slot for a wrist shot that beat Tarasov low to the blocker side for a 1-0 lead.

9:01, 1st period: Columbus Blue Jackets, Minnesota Wild have combined for one shot

After playing each other nine days earlier, the Blue Jackets and Wild are both opting to dump pucks into each other's zone, give up possession and attempt to force turnovers via the forecheck. It has resulted in a slow start offensively, with Columbus outshooting Minnesota 1-0 at 9:01 of the period. A tripping penalty called on Blue Jackets forward Mathieu Olivier will likely open it up.

1st period: Columbus Blue Jackets vs Minnesota Wild is under way

The puck is down for the Blue Jackets and Wild at Nationwide Arena, where Adam Fantilli's second line matched up off the hop against Minnesota's second line centered by Joel Eriksson Ek — who's playing tonight with a full plastic face shield due to a broken nose.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Minnesota Wild lineups, scratches and officials

Here are tonight's official lineups, including starters, scratches, coaches and officials.

Columbus Blue Jackets, Minnesota Wild warming up at Nationwide Arena

Blue Jackets goalie Daniil Tarasov and Minnesota Wild net-minder Filip Gustavsson led their teams into the ice to start pregame warmup at Nationwide Arena. Without Kent Johnson, who's out long-term with a shoulder injury, the Blue Jackets will use a lineup with seven defensemen and 11 forwards, including Jiricek mixing in as the seventh defenseman.

Jiricek took line rushes as the right wing on the fourth line, which is usually the case for seventh defensemen during pregame. Wouldn't expect to see him get shifts as a forward. That's likely just in pregame. Notably, however, Zach Aston-Reese has moved up to the second line with Adam Fantilli and Justin Danforth, while James van Riemsdyk is now with Kuraly on the fourth line. Mathieu Olivier, the usual right wing with Kuraly's group, has moved up a line to skate with center Cole Sillinger and left wing Mikael Pyhtia.

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman David Jiricek to make season debut

Jiricek, drafted sixth overall in 2022, struggled defensively in the preseason and watched the first four games as a healthy scratch. Getting an opportunity to play against the Wild on Saturday, the offensively gifted young defenseman is eager to earn more opportunities.

"It's a business, right?" Jiricek said. "It's hockey, so I hope I've earned the opportunity to play today, and I just want to prove I can play here. That's my point right now, and I just want to help the team win."

Minnesota Wild lineup changes vs Columbus Blue Jackets

After winning 4-1 on Tuesday in St. Louis, the Wild will get center Joel Eriksson Ek (broken nose) and left wing Marcus Johansson (lower body) back into their lineup. Minnesota might also get center Ryan Hartman back from an undisclosed injury, but then final decision will be made at game time.

#### Columbus Blue Jackets lineup vs Minnesota Wild

##### Forwards

Yegor Chinakhov — Sean Monahan — Kirill Marchenko

James van Riemsdyk — Adam Fantilli — Justin Danforth

Mikael Pyyhtia — Cole Sillinger — Mathieu Olivier

Zach Aston-Reese — Sean Kuraly

##### Defense pairs

Zach Werenski — Ivan Provorov

Jake Christiansen — Damon Severson

Jordan Harris — Jack Johnson

David Jiricek

##### Goalies

Daniil Tarasov

Jet Greaves

Scratched: F Kevin Labanc

Injured: F Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery), F Kent Johnson (shoulder), G Elvis Merzlikins (upper body), D Erik Gudbranson (shoulder), F Dmitry Voronkov (shoulder), F Gavin Brindley (broken finger)

#### Minnesota Wild projected lineup vs Columbus Blue Jackets

##### Forwards

Kirill Kaprizov — Marco Rossi — Mats Zuccarello

Marcus Johansson — Joel Eriksson Ek — Matt Boldy

Marcus Foligno — Marat Khusnutdinov — Yakov Trenin

Jakub Lauko — Frederick Gaudreau — Liam Ohgren

##### Defense pairs

Jacob Middleton — Brock Faber

Jonas Brodin — Zach Bogosian

Jon Merrill — Declan Chisholm

Filip Gustavsson

Marc-Andre Fleury

Scratched: D Daemon Hunt

Injured: D Jared Spurgeon (lower body), Ryan Hartman (upper body)

Where can I watch/listen to the Columbus Blue Jackets vs Minnesota Wild?

TV channel: Bally Sports Ohio

Streaming:ESPN+

Radio: 97.1 The Fan

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Minnesota Wild start time

Date: Saturday, Oct. 19

Time: 7 p.m.

Location: Nationwide Arena (Columbus, Ohio)

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Minnesota Wild series history

Series record: The Blue Jackets are 32-27-1-7 all-time, including 2-5-3 in the past 10 and 5-3-2 in the past 10 at Nationwide Arena.

Last meeting: Minnesota won 3-2 in the season-opener for both teams Oct. 10, 2024 in St. Paul, Minn., with Matt Boldy, Joel Eriksson Ek and Mats Zuccarello scoring goals for the Wild. Kent Johnson and Zach Werenski scored goals for the Blue Jackets, who scored late in the third to pull within a goal and pushed, unsuccessfully, for a tying tally in the waning minutes with their net empty for a 6-on-5 edge. Elvis Merzlikins made 23 saves for the Blue Jackets, while Filip Gustavsson earned the win in net for the Wild with 31 saves.

2024 matchups: This completes the two-game season series.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Minnesota Wild betting odds

Game lines and odds from BetMGM as of Saturday, Oct. 19

Spread: Blue Jackets (+1.5)

Over/under: 6.5

Moneyline: Blue Jackets +105, Wild -185

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Minnesota Wild injury updates

Columbus has captain Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery), defenseman Erik Gudbranson (shoulder), forward Dmitri Voronkov (shoulder) and rookie forward Gavin Brindley (broken finger) on injured reserve. The Blue Jackets are also without forward Kent Johnson (shoulder) and goalkeeper Elvis Merzlikins, who will miss his second game with a hand/wrist injury expected to keep him out short-term.

Joel Eriksson Ek (broken nose) will return to the Wild's lineup wearing a full face shield, forward Marcus Johansson will return from a one-game absence due to a lower-body injury, center Ryan Hartman (upper body) is a gametime decision after participating in morning skate and defenseman Jared Spurgeon (lower body) will miss his third game with a lower-body injury.

Columbus Blue Jackets October 2024 schedule, record

Here's a look at the Blue Jackets schedule for the month of October, along with start times, television, and radio information:

Thursday, Oct. 10: Blue Jackets at Wild (L, 3-2); Takeaways

Saturday, Oct. 12: Blue Jackets at Avalanche (W, 6-4); Takeaways



Tuesday, Oct. 15: Blue Jackets vs. Panthers (L, 4-3); Takeaways

Thursday, Oct. 17: Blue Jackets vs. Sabres (W, 6-4); Takeaways

Saturday, Oct. 19: Blue Jackets vs. Wild | 7 p.m. | Bally Sports Ohio | 93.3 FM

Tuesday, Oct. 22: Blue Jackets vs. Maple Leafs | 7:30 p.m. | Bally Sports Ohio

Saturday, Oct 26: Blue Jackets at Predators | 8 p.m. | Bally Sports Ohio

Monday, Oct 28: Blue Jackets vs. Oilers | 7 p.m. | Bally Sports Ohio

Wednesday, Oct 30: Blue Jackets at Islanders | 7 p.m. | Bally Sports Ohio

Record: 1-2-0, in 8th place in the Metropolitan Division

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Minnesota Wild records

Records: Blue Jackets 2-2-0, 4 points, in 6th place of the Metropolitan Division; Wild 2-0-2, 6 points, in 4th place of the Central Division

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets fall to Minnesota Wild at home: 5 takeaways

**By Brian Hedger- October 21, 2024**

There weren't many positives for the Blue Jackets after their 3-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild on Saturday night at Nationwide Arena.

Other than Yegor Chinakhov's goal late in the third period and speedy return in the second from medical repairs after a high-stick, the Jackets can also count their general health and goalie Daniil Tarasov as positives. They actually got through a full game without losing a regular to long-term injury, which feels like an accomplishment, and Tarasov made 32 saves to keep them in it.

The Blue Jackets refuse to except their injury situation as an excuse, but they looked like a team missing four regular skaters.

"It was just our effort," defenseman Zach Werenski said. "I don't think we started on time. If it wasn't for Tarry (Tarasov), it could've been a lot worse in the first period. So, we have to have a better effort."

Here are five takeaways:

Daniil Tarasov finding rhythm for Columbus Blue Jackets

Tarasov has started three of the Blue Jackets' first five games, including the past two due to a hand/wrist injury that put Elvis Merzlikins on the shelf. After struggling to reach peak form in the preseason, the Jackets' backup is finding his rhythm.

Tarasov stopped 32 of 35 shots and made several dazzling stops to keep it 1-0 through the first two periods. His biggest highlight save was late in the first, denying Jakub Lauko cold on a breakaway with a sprawling stop at the right post.

"There was one guy ready to go, and that was our goaltender," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "And if he wasn't ready, it probably should've been 6-0 after the first period. He was outstanding."

Oct 19, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Zachary Aston-Reese (27) watches the puck against Minnesota Wild center Marco Rossi (23) in the third period at Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

Minnesota Wild dominate stat sheet in win over Columbus Blue Jackets

Every way you look at it, the Wild dominated. They outshot the Blue Jackets 35-24, including 26-12 during 5-on-5, and finished with huge margins in scoring chances. According to Natural Stat Trick, Minnesota finished with a 23-13 edge in total scoring chances and 11-4 in high-danger chances.

The Wild also garnered 74.4% of the game's expected goals at even strength (2.79 to 0.96).

Oct 19, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Zachary Aston-Reese (27) shoots the puck in the third period at Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

Columbus Blue Jackets look disjointed without full forward assortment

This was the first game the Blue Jackets didn't have Kent Johnson in the forward mix. The 22-year old was off to a great start with five points in four games before injuring his left shoulder Thursday in a 6-4 win over the Buffalo Sabres.

It's not a short-term injury, which creates another big hole up front for a team already missing captain Boone Jenner and power forward Dmitri Voronkov with shoulder injuries. Playing without those three, the Blue Jackets struggled to bring the puck through the Wild's 1-2-2 checking scheme, hold onto it inside the Wild's zone and get enough shots through Minnesota's tightly packed defensive setup.

Facing a forward shortage, Evason leaned on the Jackets' defensive depth by going with 11 forwards and seven defensemen. It gave David Jiricek a chance to make his season debut, which he finished with an assist and +1 plus/minus rating in 11:23 of ice time, but Evason and assistant Mike Haviland had to shuffle the 11 forwards to make up for not having four full lines. The result was ugly, as the Jackets were ineffective for much of the game. Jiricek's addition also limited ice time for Jake Christiansen and Jordan Harris.

Kevin Labanc, a forward, watched the past two games as a healthy scratch. It will be interesting to see if the Blue Jackets, who next practice Monday, stick with 11 forwards against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Tuesday or bring Labanc back into a more standard lineup.

Oct 19, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Yegor Chinakhov (59) celebrates after scoring in the third period at Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

Yegor Chinakhov continues to shine for Columbus Blue Jackets

Aside from denying Wild goalie Filip Gustavsson a shutout with 1:25 left in the third, Chinakhov's goal extended his point streak to five games to start the season. That's one short of tying his career-long of six games, which he set Dec. 8-21, 2023 with a streak that produced six goals, four assists and 10 points. His streak is also tied for third-longest to start a season in franchise history, trailing two at the start of 2014-15: Nick Foligno with a six-game streak and Ryan Johansen's 10 straight with a point.

Skating with center Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko at right wing, Chinakhov leads the Blue Jackets with seven points on three goals and four assists. Even the high-stick he took from Yakov Trenin couldn't slow his start. Chinakhov left the ice bleeding, drawing a four-minute power play, but returned before the second penalty expired.

Chinakhov's line, centered by Monahan, was dominant again. During their 11:13 of 5-on-5, the Blue Jackets had 70% of the game's attempted shots and outshot the Wild 7-3.

Oct 19, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets Dean Evason waits for the referees to review the play in the second period at Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

Columbus Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason rolls the dice on coaching challenge

Evason isn't afraid to take a risk with a coaching challenge. Minnesota appeared to take a 2-0 lead at 4:48 of the second period on a goal by Jacob Middleton, but Evason's challenge for goaltender interference overturned it.

Replays showed Lauko shove Jordan Harris into the blue paint as Middleton took the initial shot, which sent the Blue Jackets defenseman into his own goalie. That contributed to the puck squirting loose for Middleton to tuck inside the post, which the NHL determined was an illegal play due to Lauko's shove of Harris. The Blue Jackets would have received a delay-of-game penalty if the goal had counted.

## The Athletic / Kent Johnson joins growing early-season list of injured Blue Jackets

**By Aaron Portzline- October 18, 2024**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Boone Jenner stood on the bench with his right arm in a sling, the product of a surgery he had last week in Colorado. To his left was Erik Gudbranson, whose left arm was in a sling, perhaps awaiting surgery, too. Next to them was Dmitri Voronkov, who doesn't need surgery but won't be back until late next month.

The Columbus Blue Jackets couldn't even make it to the "player introductions" part of the season without major players being snatched from their lineup.

While the club's healthy players skated to center ice to be recognized before the unofficial home opener in Nationwide Arena — the first home game of the season was instead dedicated to Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau — their captain, alternate captain and budding power forward stood in suits, watching.

And the list, incredibly, might be growing.

There was much to celebrate Thursday. The Blue Jackets smothered the Buffalo Sabres early and cruised to a 6-4 win before 16,176. It marked the second time this season the Jackets have scored six goals in a game, and in both instances, there were six goal scorers.

But, as often seems the case in Columbus, no bit of good news can be enjoyed without a sobering smack in the face just around the corner.

Kent Johnson, who has been arguably one of the Blue Jackets' best players, but inarguably the franchise's greatest beacon of hope at the start of the season, suffered a left arm injury in the first minute of the second period and immediately left the game, throwing his glove down the tunnel as he made his way through the bench to the dressing room.

Johnson, of course, missed the final six weeks of last season after suffering a shoulder injury that required surgery. He appeared to be holding the same arm Thursday as he left the ice.

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason let out a sigh and shook his head when asked about Johnson after the game.

"We'll see how he is tomorrow, but as I said with (Gudbranson on Tuesday), it didn't look good," Evason said. "We'll get the evaluation."

Johnson had a first-period assist to start the season with a four-game point streak (2-3-5), and he'd been elevated to the second line to play with center Adam Fantilli and veteran left winger James van Riemsdyk.

But only 52 seconds into the second, van Riemsdyk was hooked coming out of his own zone by Buffalo's Alex Tuch and tumbled to the ice, sliding forward to a rest. Johnson was skating directly at van Riemsdyk, and might have had his view blocked by a Buffalo skater in front of him,

Johnson collided with van Riemsdyk and launched up and over him, landing hard on the ice and sliding to rest in obvious pain. He was up on his skates quickly but skated slowly to the bench holding his arm. The club announced early in the second intermission that he would not return.

“It’s super tough,” said Blue Jackets center Cole Sillinger, one of Johnson’s closest friends on the team. “Obviously, the way he was playing and everything like that, you never want to see it. The thing with KJ is, he deals with adversity extremely well.

“I’ve already talked to him and he’s got a smile on his face, trying to think the most positive outcome. He doesn’t deserve that with what he went through last year.”

The Blue Jackets have 890 man-games lost to injury over the last two seasons, one of the biggest numbers in the NHL. They’re off to a flying start again this season.

This recent wave of injuries has been truly bizarre, though.

Voronkov was injured in a preseason game when he was checked hard against the glass. Those things happen in the NHL, right?

But Jenner lost an edge in practice near the end of training camp and slammed hard into a wall, his right shoulder taking the brunt of his weight. Gudbranson was injured in Tuesday’s game when he collided with fellow Blue Jacket Sean Monahan away from the play.

And now Johnson gets hurt running into his teammate, van Riemsdyk.

“It’s again kind of a freak thing,” Evason said. “Taken out, again, by our own player, who freakishly falls.”

The Blue Jackets also lost goaltender Elvis Merzlikins to an upper-body injury, but his absence is expected to be short-term. They nearly lost Sillinger on Thursday after he was hit in the first period by Buffalo’s Connor Clifton, who was called for interference.

Sillinger continued to play the ensuing power play but was forced out of the game by the NHL’s concussion protocol. He was cleared, however, and allowed to return.

The Blue Jackets did get forward Justin Danforth back in the lineup Thursday after he missed camp and the start of the season after offseason wrist surgery. But there will be many fingers crossed over the next 12-24 hours while the Blue Jackets wait on a definitive word on Johnson.

“It’s not ideal, but what are you going to do, feel sorry for yourself?” Sillinger said. “Nobody else feels sorry for us. It’s an opportunity for guys to step up.

“We can’t hang our heads. We have to dig in for each other and guys have to step up.”

The Athletic / Growing trust: Dean Evason’s clean slate leads Kent Johnson to big role on penalty kill

By Aaron Portzline- October 18, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — When veteran coach Ken Hitchcock was hired early in the 2006-07 season to steer the Columbus Blue Jackets toward legitimacy, one of his first moves was to put high-scoring winger Rick Nash on the penalty kill.

It was viewed with some skepticism, because Nash wasn’t allowed anywhere near the penalty kill in his first three seasons in the NHL. But it didn’t take long for Nash to become one of the league’s most effective penalty killers, and he still acknowledges that as a pivotal moment in his career.

The anecdote has seemed relevant early this season in Columbus because history may be repeating itself some 18 years later.

Coach Dean Evason has promised a clean slate for every player on the roster since he was hired in late June. Believe it or not, Evason insists he didn't watch any video of his current players from last season or beyond. Further, he didn't ask any of his holdover assistant coaches for scouting reports.

That approach has led Evason to a lineup choice that most in Columbus could not have predicted: Kent Johnson, a playmaking winger with elite-level offensive instincts, has not only landed on the Blue Jackets' penalty kill, he's been their busiest forward so far this season when down a skater.

Asked how he arrived at the decision to play Johnson on the penalty kill, Evason started listing his attributes as a player.

"Let's see ... instincts," he started. "Hockey sense. Skating ability. Commitment to do all the right things from that first penalty kill.

"Everybody killed penalties in the preseason, as you guys saw. Then we evaluated and decided who was going to kill for us. I didn't ask the assistant coaches to tell me anything, we just put them in their positions. But there's absolutely no reason he shouldn't kill penalties with all of these assets he has as a hockey player."

Johnson said he was sitting in a power-play meeting before the first exhibition game last month when he saw the penalty-kill units posted on the board behind the coaches.

"I was like, 'Oh, let's go!'" Johnson said. "I was excited, and we got a lot of PK that game, so it was good. I've always wanted to play on the PK. But I've never had (that trust). I feel like coaches would look at me off the ice, maybe see me in the dressing room with my shirt off, and not even give me a shot on the PK. It definitely is nice to have a shot."

Johnson played 130 NHL games in his first two-plus seasons in the league. In those games, he had a grand total of 18 seconds on the ice when the Blue Jackets were down a skater.

"I don't even know how I had that (much)," Johnson said. "Probably just coming on at the end of a kill and getting a couple of seconds that way."

Before the NHL, Johnson spent two seasons at the University of Michigan. Almost the same thing, save for an early stretch of games his sophomore season.

"But when I got back from world juniors (in mid-January), I was off the PK," Johnson said. "I don't know what happened there. I thought I did a pretty good job."

In a 4-3 loss Tuesday to the Florida Panthers in Nationwide Arena, Johnson had the first short-handed point of his career when he made a stellar lob pass off his backhand to spring Cole Sillinger for a breakaway only 41 seconds into the second period.

It marked the second straight game in which Johnson has led Blue Jackets forwards in short-handed ice time.

"He's embraced it; he loves it," Evason said. "You ask any player if they want more ice time, they're not going to say no.

"When we said clean slate at the beginning of the season, that was legit. Everybody's earned their ice time, and he's earned the opportunity to play more in all kinds of situations."

Johnson is part of a cluster of young forwards — Yegor Chinakhov, Adam Fantilli, Kirill Marchenko and Sillinger are the others — that the Blue Jackets are counting on to provide brighter days in the not-too-distant future.

So far this season, Fantilli, Johnson and Sillinger are all playing heavy minutes at even strength, plus a role on the power play and penalty kill. Chinakhov and Marchenko are both on the power play. This is how development is supposed to look.

Johnson has two goals and two assists for four points so far this season. Of his four career games with the highest ice time, two came in the last two games. He'll be busy again Thursday night when the Buffalo Sabres come to Nationwide.

"It's more fun coming to the rink every day, especially compared to last season," Johnson said. "I'm already excited about (Thursday's game)."

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets look slow, disjointed in loss to Wild: 'We have to be better'

**By Aaron Portzline- October 20, 2024**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — They looked slow. They looked disjointed. Aside from a few flashes in the second period, they looked like an AHL team playing in the NHL.

In short, the Columbus Blue Jackets — for the first time in this young season — looked like the overmatched club that most expected to see this season.

The Blue Jackets lost 3-1 to the Minnesota Wild on Saturday before 16,876 in Nationwide Arena, but credit goaltender Daniil Tarasov (32 saves) for keeping it that close. It was a 1-0 until the Wild scored twice in the third period to push the lead to 3-0.

"It's on all of us," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "If we're not ready to play, it's on me, it's on the coaches, it's on the players ... yeah, there was one guy ready to go, and that was our goaltender.

"If (Tarasov) wasn't ready to go, it would have been 6-0 after the first period. He was outstanding."

It is, granted, a very small sample. But the Blue Jackets, through the first four games of the season, played a high-energy, high-pressure brand of hockey that looked dramatically different from the slow-motion version the past two seasons.

But the first period Saturday was particularly stinky.

For Blue Jackets fans, it was probably a chilling reminder of what the last two seasons have been like. For Evason, it was surprising, especially because he didn't see any signs of malaise in the Blue Jackets' practice Friday, their pregame skate Saturday or their prep work.

"We would have lost our cool if we did," Evason said. "We skated for 20 minutes (Friday), so we weren't taxed. Guys have played a lot of hockey, but who cares? It's not that hard.

"We're playing some guys more than they're used to playing, but who cares? It's early in the year, we're in good shape. We'll dive into it here tonight (and Sunday). We'll dive in as a staff and try to figure out what went wrong, and hopefully it never happens again."

The Blue Jackets have a ready-made excuse in the already overwhelming number of injuries this season.

They've got three prominent players — captain Boone Jenner, veteran defenseman Erik Gudbranson and dynamic winger Kent Johnson — walking about Nationwide Arena in arm slings, all suffering long-term shoulder injuries. Another winger, Dmitri Voronkov, isn't expected back until late next month, general manager Don Waddell said.

As a result, the lineup card Evason filled out Saturday looked like it was more suited for the fifth game of the preseason than the regular season.

The top line — Yegor Chinakhov-Sean Monahan-Kirill Marchenko — was kept intact. Evason would be silly to change it after the way they've started the season, but it wasn't nearly as solid Saturday. Chinakhov did, however, score the Jackets' only goal with 1:25 remaining.

The rest of the lines were dramatically altered, especially since Evason decided to dress 11 forwards and seven defensemen given the circumstances.



Adam Fantilli centered the second line, flanked by Zach Aston-Reese, a waiver wire claim at the end of training camp, and Justin Danforth, who just returned to the lineup after missing all of camp following offseason wrist surgery.

Mathieu Olivier, heretofore a fourth-line winger, skated on the third line with center Cole Sillinger and rookie Mikael Pyyhtiä.

The Blue Jackets have not publicly lamented their injury luck early this season. And “next man up” is a common phrase in sports today, but let’s be serious. At some point, especially on a Blue Jackets club that doesn’t have much forward depth to begin with, the talent drain has consequences.

“That’s not something we’re even looking at, to be honest,” Fantilli said. “Obviously, Boone and Buddy are two leadership presences in the room and that’s hard to fill. But we have guys who are being given opportunities, and with that opportunity comes responsibility.

“We have to be better. I’ll point the finger at myself first. I have to be better, and that’s in all five games (so far this season). I have to be a lot better.”

The Wild needed just five seconds of a five-on-three power play to take a 2-0 lead at 2:52 of the third. At 8:26, the lead grew to 3-0. On this night, it might as well have been 8-0.

Blue Jackets players are off Sunday. They’ll return to practice Monday ahead of a Tuesday game against the Toronto Maple Leafs in Nationwide Arena.

They’ll be looking for a bounce-back, but it’ll take more than a strong outing against Toronto to clear this game off their reputations.

The Blue Jackets played way too many games like Saturday’s loss the last two seasons. They’d say the right thing after each of those ugly losses — “This is unacceptable” or “This can’t happen again” — but it happened enough times to make it seem, well, acceptable.

Under Evason, the players believe it’s different now. Every team deserves a mulligan. Let’s see where this goes from here.

“We have a standard now of how we have to play,” Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. “We’ve done that for four games now, but tonight we weren’t there. We’re going to learn from it, move on and we’re not going to let it happen again.

“We didn’t work hard enough tonight. Everyone can do that. We lacked that from the start, myself included. It starts with me, trying to drive the play more. It just wasn’t there tonight.”

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: David Jiricek was being tested before making season debut

By Aaron Portzline- October 21, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — A collection of notes, insights, ruminations and did-you-knows gathered throughout the week that was for the Columbus Blue Jackets:

Item No. 1: Jiricek’s wait

David Jiricek was a healthy scratch for the Blue Jackets’ first four games of the season, even though they could have easily sent him up I-71 to AHL Cleveland to keep him playing and active. One gets the sense, though, that Jiricek was kept in Columbus as a test.

As noted often in this space, the relationship between the Blue Jackets and the No. 6 pick in the 2022 draft has not always been smooth. There was a stretch last season where it was downright contentious

as he languished with AHL Cleveland even after being told earlier in the season to “get a place” in Columbus.

Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell and coach Dean Evason have given Jiricek an opportunity for a fresh start, but they won't simply grant him a spot in the lineup. Remember, Jiricek isn't their No. 6 pick.

Given Jiricek's struggles in training camp and the preseason — he opened in a top-four spot beside Ivan Provorov but eventually slid down the depth chart due to his play — he wasn't in the lineup when the season started.

So why keep him here? Jiricek did not need to clear waivers to head to Cleveland.

One thought is they wanted to avoid another dust-up with Jiricek, who spoke openly last season of his disappointment in being sent down, and his agent, Allan Walsh, who is known to defend his clients as loudly and fiercely as any agent in the NHL.

But the sense in Columbus is they wanted to watch Jiricek closely and see how he responded to the stark realization that another GM and another coaching staff didn't think he was playing well enough to crack the Blue Jackets lineup.

“I had a chat with David this morning,” Evason said before Saturday's 3-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild in Nationwide Arena. “You know, we've talked about earning the right to play and to be in that (dressing) room. If you don't play, you have to earn the right to get into our lineup.”

“How do you do that? You're practicing hard, you're working out hard, and you're doing it with a positive attitude. You're working your ass off every day. You are detailed. You're coachable. And you get yourself ready to play. We notice that. Coaches notice that. And when you have a guy who doesn't go hard, who doesn't practice well ... well, sorry, you're not going to play.”

If Jiricek hadn't done all those things, Evason said, he wouldn't have made his season debut on Saturday.

“If you do all the right things, you give yourself a better chance to earn the chance to get into our lineup,” Evason said. “He's done that.”

Jiricek played only 11:23 on Saturday, partly because the Blue Jackets dressed seven defensemen. He assisted on Yegor Chinakhov's late goal and had a plus-1 rating, with one shot attempt and one giveaway.

It wasn't the easiest game in which to make an evaluation, and it remains to be seen if Jiricek will stay in the lineup for Tuesday's game vs. Toronto.

But there was an interesting moment as Jiricek met with the media on Saturday morning before his season debut.

On one end of the Blue Jackets dressing room, a motivational message is painted in large letters on the wall: “This is earned ... not given.” Jiricek literally pointed to the sign during his comments.

“I've worked hard for the opportunity right now,” he said. “It's earned, not given. That's my story right now. Earn an opportunity, earn a spot and work hard every day.”

“It's only one game. I hope it's more than that. We'll see what's going to happen.”

Jiricek's importance to this organization cannot be overstated.

The Blue Jackets will begin to climb the NHL standings when their young players become the drivers of play, and we're already starting to see that on the other end of the ice where Chinakhov, Adam Fantilli,

Cole Sillinger, Kirill Marchenko and Kent Johnson, before he was injured, have taken on big roles and begun to produce.

The Jackets need a similar push on the back end from Jiricek, Denton Mateychuk and others. Mateychuk is currently playing for AHL Cleveland, but he'll be in the NHL soon, most believe.

#### Item No. 2: Relentless injuries

Waddell and Evason are new to the Blue Jackets, so this recent wave of injuries feels like the typical rough patch every team goes through and not the continuation of a curse that seems to have befallen this franchise over the last three-plus seasons.

Only five games into the season, including Saturday's less-than-inspiring loss to Minnesota, the Blue Jackets have already lost 23 man games to injury. They're off and running, it seems, to another season of surgeries, rehabs, stitches and gauze.

They've lost 1,261 man games to injuries over the last three seasons, including a franchise-record 563 during 2022-23.

What makes this current wave unique — and more ridiculous — is that the injuries have come not from collisions with opponents, but from running into fellow Blue Jackets.

- Captain Boone Jenner got tripped up at practice near the end of training camp and slammed into the wall, injuring his right shoulder.
- Erik Gudbranson and Sean Monahan plowed into each other away from the play on Tuesday vs. Florida, leaving Gudbranson with a left shoulder injury.
- Johnson ran into a tripped-up James van Riemsdyk in Thursday's game vs. Buffalo, sending Johnson sailing over van Riemsdyk and landing awkwardly on his surgically repaired left shoulder. The Jackets are waiting for MRI results from multiple specialists to determine if Johnson's shoulder will need to be surgically repaired again.

"Of course, we joke in there (the dressing room) about, what was the movie, "Major League," where (Pedro Cerrano) gets the live chicken (to sacrifice)?" Evason said.

"Injuries happen, yes. Does it seem freakish that we've got these shoulder injuries and how they've happened, by tripping over our own guys? Yeah, for sure there's an element of 'What the heck is going on?'

"But on the other side of it, what the heck are we gonna do? Ask our guys to never get close to each other? Ask them not to work or play hard?"

The loss of Jenner, Johnson and Dmitri Voronkov (upper body) has sapped the Blue Jackets of three top-nine wingers. Johnson and Chinakhov had been Columbus' best forwards in the first two weeks of the season. Losing Gudbranson and Jenner means two of the most prominent voices are out of the dressing room.

Whenever a team gets hit this hard by injuries so consistently, everything is called into question — the training staff, the medical staff, the strength and conditioning staff, etc. That's a worthy endeavor, and Waddell is likely to consider all of that as the year moves along.

But Jenner and Gudbranson are two of the most well-conditioned players in the room, and they've both suffered long-term shoulder injuries. On the surface, that seems like it's just bad luck.

The Blue Jackets played Saturday against Minnesota with 11 forwards and seven defensemen, and they looked disjointed and ineffective all night. The only healthy scratch was forward Kevin Labanc, who has sat the past two games.

Expect more lineup changes ahead of Tuesday's game with Toronto in Nationwide Arena, perhaps with fortifications coming from AHL Cleveland.

"Injuries are part of it," Monahan said. "I think there are a lot of hungry guys within the organization, and guys who haven't played as many minutes as they'd probably like to. Guys are going to have to step up and have each other's backs."

Item No. 3: Change of scenery?

We don't often pitch trade proposals in this space, but the situation that began percolating again in Pittsburgh last week got us thinking.

The Penguins have a struggling goaltender, Tristan Jarry, under contract through 2027-28 with a \$5.375 million salary-cap hit. Jarry, 29, is a two-time NHL All-Star, but he was pulled from his last start and has been yanked from three of his last six starts (dating to last season) in Pittsburgh's PPG Paints Arena.

The Blue Jackets have a struggling goaltender, Elvis Merzlikins, under contract through 2026-27 with a \$5.4 million salary-cap hit. Merzlikins, 30, hasn't had a save percentage over .900 since 2021-22 and is off to a mediocre start this season.

Should the Blue Jackets and Penguins consider a change-of-scenery trade for their big-ticket goaltenders?

Waddell, soon after taking the job in Columbus last May, made it clear that "nobody is going to trade for (Merzlikins') contract," and that a contract buyout of Merzlikins, which would have lasted six years into the future, was not an option, either, as the Jackets may need the cap space in the final years with that buyout on the books.

But there's always been an understanding in the NHL that "bad" contracts can be moved in exchange for bad contracts, and maybe there's an opportunity here.

The salary-cap hits are almost a match. The money is close, too. Per Puckpedia, Merzlikins is set to make \$6 million this season, \$5.525 million in 2025-26 and \$4.225 million in 2026-27, while Jarry will make \$6.4 million this season, followed by \$5.425 million ('25-26) and \$4.125 in the final two years.

Jarry has one more year of term, which could be a sticking point for the Blue Jackets unless they believe Jarry is still a good goaltender who could be reinvigorated by a fresh start.

From the Penguins' perspective, if they're resigned to buying out Jarry's contract after this season — Alex Nedeljkovic appears to be the starter in Pittsburgh until Joel Blomqvist is ready to ascend — an acquisition of Merzlikins would give them a contract with less term and an easier buyout.

One more wrinkle: Jarry has a 12-team no-trade clause, while Merzlikins has a 10-team no-trade list. It's unclear which teams are on their lists.

Just something to ponder on a Sunday.

Item No. 4: Snacks

- So much has been made about the Blue Jackets' young group of forwards — Chinakhov, Fantilli, Johnson, Marchenko and Sillinger. They've certainly earned the ice time, but Evason has not been shy about sending them over the boards. In the first three games of the season, Johnson averaged 20:13 in ice time, up from 13:32 last season. The next biggest climb is Chinakhov's, up from 15:10 in 2023-24 to

19:13 this season. The others: Fantilli (from 15:42 to 18:09), Marchenko (from 16:24 to 19:03) and Sillinger (from 16:07 to 18:11).

- The Blue Jackets apparently lifted a decade-old club policy that required players to wear helmets during pregame warmups, as several players have been seen without lids before the first three home games this season. That may not last much longer, though. We're hearing the helmet-mandatory policy may be put back into place soon given the Jackets' injury luck. It started in 2012, shortly after Edmonton's Taylor Hall fell during warmups and was sliced in the side of the head by a teammate's skate.
- Evason was asked about going helmet-free before Saturday's game against the Wild. "When I played in San Jose (early 1990s), my hair was down past my nameplate, so I took my helmet off," Evason said. "That wouldn't work for me anymore." We found proof of his mullet days:
- Through five games, the Blue Jackets' top forward line with Monahan at center and Chinakhov and Marchenko on the wings has combined for 7-11-18 with a plus-8 rating. It's working, which is impressive because Chinakhov was a late add after training camp, taking Jenner's spot on left wing. Monahan has been a stabilizing force for the two young wingers. He's also allowing them to start with the puck more often than not, winning 54.9 percent of faceoffs.
- Monahan had played against Chinakhov and Marchenko sparingly the past two seasons, but the up-close view has been revealing, he said. "You could see (as an opponent) that they were both dangerous," Monahan said. "But getting to know them as people, it's been really cool, because they're motivated guys who want to be great players in this league. They want the puck, they want to make plays, they can both really shoot the puck and they see the game at a high level."
- Marchenko joked that he and Chinakhov have adopted Monahan as their "Russian brother." His new name? "Monahanov!"
- Sunday Gathering trivia question: Chinakhov (3-4-7) has a five-game point streak to start the season, tied with three others for the third-longest in franchise history. Which Blue Jackets player has the longest point streak to start a season?
- Merzlikins is out of the lineup with an upper-body injury but has continued to skate away from the group with goaltending coach Niklas Bäckström. Waddell has said it's a short-term injury.
- Also seen skating daily last week: Voronkov, Gavin Brindley and Cayden Lindstrom, the Blue Jackets' No. 4 pick last June.
- With AHL Cleveland's Rocco Grimaldi nursing a groin injury, James Malatesta has moved up to the top line for the Monsters with center Luca Del Bel Belluz and right winger Trey Fix-Wolansky. Del Bel Belluz has 3-2-5 in four games, including a hat trick last weekend in Hershey. Fix-Wolansky has 2-3-5 in four games, including a go-ahead penalty shot in the third period of Saturday's win in Charlotte.
- Trivia answer: The longest point streak by a Blue Jackets player at the start of a season is owned by Ryan Johansen, who began the 2014-15 season with a 10-game point streak (5-8-13). Nick Foligno (3-6-9) started with a six-game point streak that same season. The others with five points are Patrik Laine (2-4-6) in 2021, Johansen (1-5-6) in 2015 and Jaroslav Spacek (2-3-5) in 2002.

## [BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets score 6 in victory against Sabres](#)

**By Craig Merz- October 17, 2024**

COLUMBUS -- Kirill Marchenko and Mathieu Olivier each had a goal and an assist for the Columbus Blue Jackets in a 6-4 win against the Buffalo Sabres at Nationwide Arena on Thursday.

Yegor Chinakhov and Adam Fantilli also scored, and Zach Werenski and Jake Christiansen each had two assists for the Blue Jackets (2-2-0). Daniil Tarasov made 20 saves.

Columbus forward Cole Sillinger said the influence of the late Johnny Gaudreau is still felt.

Gaudreau, 31, and his brother, Matthew, 29, died Aug. 29 when they were struck by an alleged drunk driver who has been charged with two counts of death by auto, while riding bicycles near their home in Salem County, New Jersey.

"This is our work," Sillinger said, "If you're not having fun when you're coming to the rink, and battling with your teammates and brothers, what's the point? That's the kind of the mentality switch [this year], is realizing that there's more to life.

"[Johnny] taught a lot of us that. We just try to play like we're having fun, play loose, but not tight-minded."

Owen Power and JJ Peterka scored, and Jiri Kulich scored his first NHL goal for the Sabres (1-4-1), who lost 6-5 in overtime at the Pittsburgh Penguins on Wednesday. Devon Levi made 19 saves.

"Rough night by our D," Buffalo coach Lindy Ruff said. "Some of the puck play, probably four goals."

Chinakhov gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead at 5:12 of the first period with a power-play goal on a wrist shot from the left circle.

Marchenko made it 2-0 at 19:28, scoring unassisted with a snap shot from the left face-off dot.

"We have a great start tonight, and we have a good structure in this (offensive) zone. We played fast," Marchenko said. "If we don't cheat the game offensively, we have a lot of moments for scoring."

"It wasn't the best period. We were pretty slow to the puck," Kulich said. "We lost almost every puck battle, so we had to change something, but it was too late."

Ryan McLeod cut it to 2-1 at 9:34 of the second period on the rush.

Fantilli extended it to 3-1 at 12:18 with a shot from low in the right circle that went off Levi.

Kulich made it 3-2 at 17:29, tipping a shot by Dylan Cozens. The 20-year-old forward was a first-round pick (No. 28) in the 2022 NHL Draft.

"It feels nice to score your first NHL goal," Kulich said. "For me, a dream come true, but a tough loss."

Olivier made it 4-2 at 17:58, skating in from the right circle on the rush and beating Levi blocker side, before Power cut it to 4-3 at 19:35.

Zach Aston-Reese scored just 15 seconds into the third period to make it 5-3. He redirected a shot from the left point by Christiansen.

"That's a tough one because we built a lot of momentum at the end of the second period. We won the period," Ruff said.

Damon Severson pushed it to 6-3 at 8:10, coming down the slot to take a feed from Marchenko.

“We challenged them in between the second period to do those things, the right things,” Columbus coach Dean Evanson said. “We scored two goals, because we were doing the right thing. We were on the right side.”

With Levi pulled for the extra skater, Peterka made it 6-4 at 17:51 on a rebound from the right circle.

NOTES: Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson left with an upper-body injury 52 seconds into the second period after falling over teammate James van Riemsdyk, who had been tripped. There was no update. ... Chinakhov (two goals, four assists) and Johnson (two goals, three assists) each extended his point streak to four games. ... Tage Thompson assisted the final Buffalo goal to extend his point streak to three games (two goals, one assist). ... Columbus forward Justin Danforth made his season debut after undergoing wrist surgery in July. He had two shots on goal and a blocked shot in 16:38 of ice time.

## [BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets offense too much for Sabres](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- October 18, 2024

After CBJ wins, we'll give three takeaways about what stood out or what we'll remember from the Blue Jackets victory.

BLUE JACKETS 6, SABRES 4

### 1. Are you not entertained?

For the first time in Blue Jackets history, Columbus has scored at least six goals twice in the first four games of the season. Following in the footsteps of Saturday's 6-4 win at Colorado, the Blue Jackets have already shown they can be an explosive outfit, with six different CBJ players scoring in each of those games.

So where has the offense come from? You can point to a lot of factors, including the fact the Blue Jackets have a bunch of talented players, from veterans who can put the puck in the net to youngsters starting to feel a groove to defensemen who aren't afraid to jump in the play. In all, 11 different players have already scored through the first four games.

Add in a little confidence and a system that encourages attacking play, and you have a team that has shown it can put some points on the board in the early going.

"I think we're holding pucks down low in the offensive zone more, we're finding little seams, we're making plays, we're playing simple hockey in our D-zone, we're getting the puck out, and that's allowing us to score on the rush," Cole Sillinger said. "I think we have a lot of offensive lines. Our D like to jump up and make reads that way.

"We always knew we could score goals, it's just nice to get rewarded right now."

### 2. But it has to come the right way.

To a man, the Blue Jackets talked postgame about how the offense has to come from solid defensive structure, which is something Columbus had for most of Thursday night's win.

Most of it. Columbus rarely let Buffalo have the puck in the first period, but things turned into a bit of a track meet in the second frame. Buffalo scored three times in the middle period to turn what had been a 2-0 lead after one into a much more precarious 4-3 advantage after 40 minutes.

When Columbus got back to the locker room after the second period, head coach Dean Evason made his point clear – the offense was flowing, but it had to flow from solid defensive play.

The result? Game-sealing goals from Zach Aston-Reese and Damon Severson in the third that came from establishing a forecheck and then creating off of it.

"The two goals in the second period, we gave them because we are on the wrong side of the player or the puck, whatever (it may be)," Evason said. "We call it the Blue Jackets side. You can still be really good offensively, but you have to be in the proper position to not be bad defensively.

"Our group, we challenged them in between the second period to do the right things. We went in there (in the third), they scored a 6-on-5 goal, but we scored two goals because we were doing the right things, we were on the right side."

### 3. The top line was dominant again



We'll write more about this in the coming days, because how can you not?

It was another night where the top trio of Yegor Chinakhov on the left, Sean Monahan in the middle and Kirill Marchenko on the right got the job done. That trio worked to put three more goals on the board, with Chinakhov kicking things off with a power-play marker, Marchenko adding a tally late in the first period and then Marchenko setting up Severson for the 6-3 tally in the third.

While they finally ceded a goal for the first time this season – Buffalo won an offensive zone draw and then got a tip-in tally from rookie Jiri Kulich in the second – that trio again had massive advantages in shot attempts (19-5), shots on goal (9-3) and expected goals (0.70-0.25) at 5-on-5 per Natural Stat Trick.

When asked about the game what he likes about the trio, Evason had a simple answer.

“Everything,” he said.

OK, he expanded on it a little bit, but we'll save that for another day.

## [BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets drop home game to Wild](#)

By Craig Merz- October 19, 2024

COLUMBUS -- Kirill Kaprizov had a goal and an assist in the third period for the Minnesota Wild in a 3-1 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

Marco Rossi and Mats Zuccarello also scored, and Filip Gustavsson made 23 saves for the Wild (3-0-2), who extended their season-opening point streak to five games.

The Wild became the fifth team in NHL history to not trail in regulation through each of their first five games in a season. Minnesota joined the 1969-70 Boston Bruins (seven games), the 2015-16 Montreal Canadiens, the 1990-91 Bruins (five) and the 1930-31 Maple Leafs (five).

"It's just because we've outworked the teams we've played so far," Gustavsson said. "I think as a team, we've played some really good defensive hockey. We trust each other back there and everyone is doing their part of the job. It's made me comfortable."

Yegor Chinakhov scored, and Daniil Tarasov made 32 saves for the Blue Jackets (2-3-0).

"We didn't start on time," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "If it wasn't for (Tarasov), it could have been a lot worse in the first period. We have to give a better effort."

"We have a standard now of how we have to play. We've done that for four games and tonight we weren't there. We're going to learn from it and we're going to move on. We're not going to let it happen again."

Rossi gave the Wild a 1-0 lead at 12:40 of the first period with a wrist shot from between the circles.

The Blue Jackets failed to score during a four-minute power play in the second period after Yakov Trenin was called for a high-sticking double minor.

"They're a good squad, but we're looking at ourselves here," Blue Jackets forward Adam Fantilli said. "It doesn't matter who we're playing, we should be able to score on a four-minute power play."

Columbus had four shots on goal during the four-minute man-advantage and went 0-for-3 on the night.

"We're being junkyard dogs," Wild defenseman Jake Middleton said. "That's our mentality we've got going into our meetings and the kills right now and so far, so good."

Kaprizov made it 2-0 at 2:52 of the third period just six seconds into a 5-on-3 power play. Brock Faber controlled the puck at the top of the offensive zone and found Kaprizov for a one-timer from the bottom of the right circle.

"I liked the first period a lot. That was the identity we want to play with," Wild coach John Hynes said. "We got away from our game at the end of the second but I really liked how we came out in the third, the mindset we played with. We regrouped ourselves, played the game the right way."

Zuccarello made it 3-0 at 8:26, lifting a backhand over Tarasov's right pad as he drove to the net.

Chinakhov cut it to 3-1 at 18:35 with a wrist shot from the right circle to push his point streak to five games (three goals, four assists).

"If we're not ready to play, it's on me, it's on the coaches, it's on the players," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said.

NOTES: Minnesota is on an 11-game point streak (9-0-2) against Columbus. ... With his goal, Rossi extended his point streak to four games (two goals, three assists), tying his NHL best set Nov. 12-24, 2023 (one goal, three assists). ... Wild forward Ryan Hartman (upper body) did not play. He skated in the morning and was considered a game-time decision by Hines. Forward Marcus Johansson (lower body) returned from missing one game and was minus-1 in 13:18 of ice time. ... Wild forward Joel Eriksson Ek played with a full-face shield after missing two games because of a broken nose. He was minus-1 in 20:02 with five shots and four hits. ... Blue Jackets defenseman David Jiricek played 11:23 and had an assist in his first game of the season after being a healthy scratch. ... The Blue Jackets used seven defensemen and 11 forwards.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Facing Familiar Challenge of Overcoming Big Injuries

By Mark Scheig- October 19, 2024

Just four games into the new season, the Columbus Blue Jackets are already facing a familiar challenge. It's one that they can't seem to shake.

Not only are injuries happening in bulk, they're big injuries taking out some of their most important players. The latest example was a freak play that happened Thursday night in the Blue Jackets' 6-4 win over the Buffalo Sabres.

Kent Johnson had to leave Thursday's game after getting into a collision with James van Riemsdyk. The news on him is not good as the Blue Jackets prepare for their game Saturday night against the Minnesota Wild.

### Johnson Out Long Term

The Blue Jackets do not give specifics out when it comes to injuries. However head coach Dean Evason conceded on Saturday morning that Johnson's injury is "not short-term."

That's yet another devastating blow to a team that's had to endure several setbacks in the early going. As of this writing, Johnson hasn't been placed on IR yet. But the expectation is that will happen when the team shares any kind of official update.

"Don (Waddell) and I talked about it this morning," Evason said. "Don doesn't like to give timelines. I'm not giving timelines, but it's not short term."

Johnson was off to a tremendous start in the new season with five points in his first four games while recording at least a point in every game he played in. As for who will take his place to the right of Adam Fantilli, the expectation is that it will be Justin Danforth.

### Danforth Back and Promoted

Danforth returned Thursday after having offseason wrist surgery. He said the injury itself occurred at the end of last season against the Carolina Hurricanes. He says he felt good in his first game of the new season.

"I felt pretty good actually," Danforth said. "We got a great staff here to get me ready to get me in shape and get me ready to play. So I felt pretty good."

Danforth's final hurdle was to show he could handle some of the physical elements of the game. Once he could go through stuff with the hand, it was all systems go.

"The final part of it was the puck battles, 1-on-1's using the top hand so using it more," Danforth said. "We just did a couple of practices where I had (Jared Boll) leaning on me, going against guys 1-on-1 down low and it felt ready to go."

Danforth has played with Fantilli in the past so joining his line won't be new for him. He knows he has one job when they're on the ice together.

"I got a good feel for him," Danforth said of Fantilli. "He wants the puck on his stick as much as possible. I think my job when I get to play with him is just get him the puck and make sure I can be on forechecks and turn pucks over so he can have the puck on his stick more. I feel like when he has the puck on his stick, good things happen."

“Really loved his energy, loved his competitiveness, his puck battles,” Evason said. “He actually stated to me a couple days ago that’s one of his concerns when he was coming back is that he wasn’t able to win those puck battles when he had that competition. He’s worried about the injury. I told him by all accounts that the coaches said it has nothing to do with your hands. It has everything to do with your will and your desire. And he has both of those, killed penalties for us. Played a lot especially when (Johnson) went down. We had to slip him into a different role possibly. (He) played a lot of minutes. (He will) be a big part of our our team obviously tonight and moving forward.”

As for what to expect lines wise Saturday, Evason confirmed it would likely be an 11-7 setup as David Jiricek will be making his season debut. As it was an optional morning skate, here is what the projected lines look like for the Blue Jackets.

Yegor Chinakhov-Sean Monahan-Kirill Marchenko

Zach Aston-Reese-Adam Fantilli-Justin Danforth

Mikael Pyhtia-Cole Sillinger-Mathieu Olivier

James van Riemsdyk-Sean Kuraly

Zach Werenski-Ivan Provorov

Jake Christiansen-Damon Severson

Jack Johnson-Jordan Harris

David Jiricek

Daniil Tarasov starts. Jet Greaves backs up.

Side Dishes

As stated, Jiricek is making his season debut. He admitted it was tough being out but his teammates helped him through that. His practice and preparation was good in Evason’s sight where this opportunity was earned.

Chinakhov will play Saturday after missing practice Friday due to a lower-body injury.

Kevin Labanc started on the second line but now will be a healthy scratch for the second straight game. Evason has had to switch things up due to the injuries. But it’s also a competition for more ice time. “So there’s a healthy competition within our room. Hopefully, everybody wants to step up and play a bigger role on the hockey club.”

Evason says 11-7 can be a useful strategy. “I think there’s some strategic stuff. Then you can get other people involved and you can double up some guys that you feel as a group that are playing well. There’s positives and negatives. But if we use it as a positive and hopefully get everybody involved, then it’ll work out to our advantage.”

Elvis Merzlikins remains out with an upper-body injury. He did not skate with the main group on Saturday.

Erik Gudbranson will be out long term. The team hasn’t given any additional detail. He was seen in a sling on Thursday night.

We’ll end with some good injury news. Seriously. Both Dmitri Voronkov and Cayden Lindstrom skated on their own on Saturday. Voronkov’s upper-body injury didn’t require surgery so his timeline to return is within the foreseeable future. As for Lindstrom, the Blue Jackets have been cautious with him. The fact

he's getting on the ice is a good sign things are progressing in the right direction. He will go to junior when he's ready.

For these Blue Jackets, it will be a next-man up mentality when it comes to their injury situation. While they are certainly all too familiar with this, the only thing they can do is move forward with who is available. They have no other choice.

## The Hockey Writers / 3 Blue Jackets' Trends Needed to Overcome Recent Injuries

By Mark Scheig- October 20, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets could not overcome a slow start on Saturday night. This trend came back to doom them in their 3-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild on home ice.

Yegor Chinakhov scored their only goal late in the third period to spoil Filip Gustavsson's shutout. Outside of a couple stretches midway through the game, the Wild were the better team.

The game showed for the first time this season what some nights could look like for the Blue Jackets. With so many key players out of the lineup, head coach Dean Evason had to put a patchwork lineup together. This trend will continue for the foreseeable future while players continue their recovery.

### Not Making Excuses

Despite missing players, the Blue Jackets will not make excuses. They believe there are still plenty of good players in the locker room that can go out and execute.

Defenseman Zach Werenski immediately pointed to himself when describing why Saturday night went the way it did. He knows he has to be a difference maker. He opened admitted he didn't have it against the Wild.

"I think it starts with me trying to drive the play more," Werenski said. "And I just wasn't there tonight."

Adam Fantilli pointed to the start of the game. The Wild outshot the Blue Jackets 14-4 in the first period. From the start, it appeared the Blue Jackets weren't ready at puck drop.

"I think it was all on our start, to be honest," Fantilli said. "The first period wasn't great. We found a little bit in the second and third. But in the NHL, it's too late."

The Blue Jackets did hold a 12-6 shot advantage in the second period and only trailed 1-0 going into the third. But the Wild got an extended two-man advantage that Kirill Kaprizov scored on in five seconds to make it 2-0. Then Mats Zuccarello found a lane to make it 3-0.

Evason also looked at the start as a reason for Saturday night's result.

"It's on all of us," Evason said. "If we're not ready to play, it's on me. It's on the coaches. It's on the players. There was one guy ready to go and that was our goaltender. And if he wasn't ready, we should have been probably 6-0 after the first period."

### 3 Needed Trends

The Blue Jackets have said they don't want a game like Saturday to happen again. If they're going to accomplish that task, there are things they must do.

In light of who's currently available and who's not, here are three trends the Blue Jackets must have as they navigate this difficult injury situation.

#### Best Players Must Lead by Example

Werenski alluded to this in his comments. He pointed the finger directly at himself for not doing enough. If they Blue Jackets want to prevent games like Saturday again, the entire team needs to point at themselves and do more.

In particular, the top line of Chinakhov, Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko will have to lead the way on offense. Then their young talent must step up too. Fantilli and Cole Sillinger need to lead in this area.

The Blue Jackets are going to have to take a committee approach with so many guys missing. But if each can do their part on their own lines, that's what will benefit the team.

#### Defense & Goaltending

Tarasov was the Blue Jackets' best player on Saturday night. The team was one shot away from a tie going into the third. Consistent goaltending and an improved defense is the second trend needed to overcome the injuries.

While Tarasov played well, the defense is still a question mark overall. Five games into the season, the Blue Jackets have allowed at least three goals in each game. They've allowed 18 goals in their five games.

The Blue Jackets played 11-7 on Saturday night with David Jiricek making his season debut. While Jiricek played fine, the unit as a whole is still a work in progress.

If the Blue Jackets want to win games, it has to start with goal prevention. That won't be easy as their next game is Tuesday night when they host the high-powered Toronto Maple Leafs.

On Saturday night, penalties and turnovers led to the Wild goals. The Blue Jackets must limit these mistakes if they want to find success.

#### Must Be Hardest Working Team

The Blue Jackets have vowed to be the hardest-working team on the ice in a given night. On Saturday, that wasn't the case. It immediately caught Evason's attention.

"When we work our butts off for most nights, we give ourselves a chance for most nights," Evason said about his team after five games. "Even though we lose this game, we still had an opportunity. They scored a 5-on-3 goal to make it 2-1. So we were hanging around even with a poor start. We were caught the first 20 minutes and we still gave ourselves an opportunity. Our group has to have that. But again, that no-quit mentality and that play the same way, but we need to play the same way for 60 minutes, not just 40."

The Blue Jackets have to find a way to consistently outwork teams. While that won't happen every night, it has to happen on a majority of nights to give themselves a chance to win. While it doesn't make up for who's not in the lineup, this must become their identity as is.

If the Blue Jackets want to stay competitive in these games, these three mentioned trends must be at the center of what they do. Work hard, lead by example and goal prevention will dictate how the season will unfold.

If any of these lack, the results will show it.



## The Hockey News / Columbus Looks Disjointed In Home Loss To Minnesota

By Jason Newland- October 20, 2024

It was Kid's Opening Night at Nationwide Arena on Saturday, but if this game was a movie, it would've been rated R.

Yegor Chinakhov(3) scored the only Blue Jackets goal with 1:25 left in the game to ruin Filip Gustavsson's shutout bid. That would be it for the scoring.

The first period of this game was all Minnesota. They outshot the CBJ 14-4 and scored the only goal when Marco Rossi got the puck uncontested and blasted a shot past Daniil Tarasov.

The second period got a little better for the Jackets. They were able to close the shot clock gap but couldn't get on the board. The Wild had a goal reversed due to a successful challenge for goalie interference to keep it 1-0. Columbus also enjoyed three man advantages including a double minor, but couldn't score.

The CBJ would lose this game after Minnesota's top line of Kirill Kaprizov, Marco Rossi, and Mats Zuccarello all scored on Jackets goalie Daniil Tarasov to sweep the season series.

Columbus falls to 2-3 on the season.

Final Stats

Players Stats

- Yegor Chinakhov scored his third goal of the season. He had 4 shots.
- Sean Monahan tallied his third assist of the season. He had 4 shots on the night.
- David Jiříček notched an assist in his first game of the season. He played 11 shifts and 11:23 of ice time.
- Daniil Tarasov stopped 32 of 35 Wild shots.

Team Stats

- Columbus went 0/3 on the PP.
- The Blue Jackets stopped 2 of 3 Wild PPs.
- The Jackets won 53.2% of their faceoffs.
- CBJ led Minnesota in hits 27-to-13.

What's Next - Columbus is back home on Tuesday and will host the Toronto Maple Leafs.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Kent Johnson's Upper Body Injury the Latest in a String of Awful Injury Luck for the Blue Jackets to Start the Season

By 1OB Staff- October 18, 2024

In what has become an unfortunate theme for the Columbus Blue Jackets, injury woes struck again Thursday night when center Kent Johnson exited their 6-4 victory over the Buffalo Sabres after a second-period collision with teammate James van Riemsdyk.

The incident came as van Riemsdyk was hooked by Buffalo's Alex Tuch, sending him into Johnson's path. Immediately clutching his left arm, Johnson skated off the ice and went straight to the locker room, visibly frustrated—punctuating his exit by throwing his glove in the tunnel. The Blue Jackets reported the injury as an upper-body issue, and Johnson did not return.

"We'll see how he is tomorrow, but as I said with Goody [Erik Gudbranson], it didn't look good," Jackets head coach Dean Evason said after the game.

"it didn't look good."— Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason on Johnson's injury

For Johnson, the timing couldn't be worse. After a challenging 2023-24 season that saw him scratched from the season opener, sent down to the AHL for a stint with the Cleveland Monsters, and ultimately sidelined by a torn left labrum in March, the 21-year-old had been on a redemption arc. Through the first three games of the new season – and a period against Buffalo – Johnson had already amassed five points (two goals, three assists), including an assist on the Blue Jackets' first goal Thursday night.

"The way he was playing, you never, ever want to see that," teammate Cole Sillinger said in the locker room following the win. "The thing with KJ, he deals with adversity extremely well, so even talking to him, he's already got a smile on his face and is trying to think of the most positive outcomes and things like that. He doesn't deserve that, with what he went through last year, and whatever is evaluated, he'll be coming back stronger."

How soon Johnson will be back on the ice is anyone's guess, as the team will conduct a broader evaluation of the injury on Friday.

For the Blue Jackets, Johnson's injury is yet another hit in what's becoming a disturbing pattern of bad luck. Captain Boone Jenner is out for what is believed to be most of the season following shoulder surgery. Defenseman Erik Gudbranson, another key piece, is sidelined for months with an upper-body injury. And forward Dmitri Vronkov isn't expected back until late November after suffering a shoulder injury of his own. Now, Johnson, on a tear out of the gate this season, joins the growing list of sidelined players.

The Blue Jackets have been no strangers to injury crises in recent seasons, but losing Johnson after his red-hot start to the 2024-25 campaign cuts particularly deep. Johnson appeared to have turned a corner with newfound physicality and confidence, and his four-game point streak to start the season was an exclamation mark on that transformation.

For a franchise that has already seen its fair share of adversity, it's just one more test.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Three Things: Kent Johnson Injured, Offensive Firepower, Two-For-Two For Tarry

By Will Chase- October 18, 2024

What a win for the Columbus Blue Jackets on Thursday night.

Six different goal scorers combined for the 6-4 win over the Buffalo Sabres as the Blue Jackets claimed their first victory on home ice.

Two nights following the home opener against the Florida Panthers and honoring the memory of the Gaudreau brothers, the team treated Thursday's game against the Sabres as a home opener with the traditional festivities and team introductions.

Cole Sillinger left the game in the first period but returned.

Kent Johnson Injured

Johnson left Thursday's game early in the second period with an upper-body injury after he tripped over James van Riemsdyk and did not return.

The Blue Jackets are holding their collective breaths.

Already missing Boone Jenner, Dmitri Voronkov, Erik Gudbranson, and Elvis Merzlikins to injury, a significant injury for Johnson would be a crushing blow, already coming off the torn labrum and with how hot he's been to start the season.

Johnson (two goals, three assists) stretched his point streak to four games with an assist on Yegor Chinakhov's first-period power-play goal at 5:12 to start the scoring.

Chinakhov has points in all four games (two goals, four assists), joining Johnson.

Johnson was elevated to the second line to start the game with van Riemsdyk and Adam Fantilli. Justin Danforth made his season debut on the third line.

Offensive Firepower

The Blue Jackets continue to be an entertaining watch under head coach Dean Evason.

In Thursday's win, 11 players cracked the scoresheet with at least one point, including six different goal scorers. Four players had multi-point efforts.

Blue Jackets Scorers	Goals	Assists
Zach Aston-Reese	1	0
Yegor Chinakhov	1	0

Adam Fantilli	1	0
Kent Johnson	0	1
Kirill Marchenko	1	1
Mathieu Olivier	1	1
Cole Sillinger	0	1
Jake Christiansen	0	2
Ivan Provorov	0	1
Damon Severson	1	0
Zach Werenski	0	2

Mathieu Olivier had two points with a goal and an assist and Columbus also had goals by Chinakhov, Kirill Marchenko, Fantilli, Zach Aston-Reese, and Damon Severson.

Zach Werenski and Jake Christiansen each had two assists. Ivan Provorov and Sillinger notched assists. Aston-Reese made history with his first Blue Jackets goal.

Two-For-Two For Tarry

Merzlikins did not play due to an upper-body injury so it was up to Daniil Tarasov to contain the Sabres.

The 25-year-old made 20 saves to pick up his 14th career win and the second win for the Blue Jackets this season. He was also in net for last Saturday's 6-4 victory over the Colorado Avalanche.

Tarasov had it easy to start, relatively speaking, as the Sabres were held without a shot more than halfway through the first period.

Then things got a little more hairy in the second period as the teams got into a back-and-forth scoring match. The Sabres outscored Columbus 3-2 in the second period with the final three goals of the period coming in 2:06 and five goals in 10:01 overall.

"You can still be really good offensively but you have to be in the proper position to not be bad defensively," Evason said. "Our group, we challenged them in between the second period, to do those things, the right things.

"You can't cheat the game ... this league is too good to cheat and be on the wrong side and give up those easy odd-man rushes because we're not doing the right thing. But we did the right thing. Hopefully the reinforcement with our chat after and our video presentation will allow them to realize we can score but we can't give up what we gave up in the second period."

#### Rematch

The Blue Jackets continue their four-game homestand with an opening night rematch against the Minnesota Wild on Saturday, Oct. 19 at 7:00 p.m. ET from Nationwide Arena. The Wild won the first game 3-2.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / MIN 3, CBJ 1: Blue Jackets Held To Less Than Two Goals For The First Time This Season, Fall 3-1 To Minnesota Wild

By Ed Francis- October 20, 2024

For the first time this season, the Columbus Blue Jackets offense was stymied.

Filip Gustavsson stopped 23 of Columbus' 24 shots and the Minnesota Wild defeated the Blue Jackets 3-1 on Saturday night.

It was the first time in five games that Columbus was held to less than two goals.

Here's how it all went down:

### 1st Period

(12:40 — 1-0 MIN): After a great job of shutting down the Minnesota offensive attack for the first half of the opening frame, the Wild score with 7:20 remaining in the period. A nice keep in by the road team near the Blue Jackets bench allows the puck to get a streaking Marco Rossi in the slot and he has little trouble beating Daniil Tarasov to give the Wild a 1-0 lead.

(18:04): Joel Eriksson Ek sprung lose on a breakaway but Tarasov comes up with a big save to keep the score at 1-0. His best save of the night.

### 2nd Period

(4:48): Jake Middleton looks to have a goal, but it's challenged and overturned for goaltender interference. Minnesota forward Jakub Lauko shoved Jordan Harris into Tarasov on the play. It wasn't much, but it was enough. A good challenge here from Columbus head coach Dean Evason, his first successful challenge as the Blue Jackets bench boss.

MIN	GAME STATS	CBJ
35	SHOTS	24
47%	FACEOFFS	53%
1/3	POWER PLAY	0/3
3/3	PENALTY KILL	2/3
13	HITS	27

MIN	GAME STATS	CBJ
23	GIVEAWAYS	18
4	TAKEAWAYS	10
19	BLOCKED SHOTS	10

DATA VIA NHL.COM

(5:42): Less than a minute after it appeared the Wild had doubled their lead, momentum shifts in the Blue Jackets favor again when Columbus gets a four-minute power play. Yakov Trenin draws blood on Yegor Chinakhov with a high-stick. Chinny was fine, but the Blue Jackets came up with only a few low-to-medium danger chances on the double power play and the score would remain 1-0 Minnesota.

### 3rd Period

(2:52 — 2-0 MIN): This one is set up by a pair of Blue Jacket penalties. First, Jordan Harris flips the puck over the glass at 2:20 for a delay of game penalty. Just a few seconds later, Cole Sillinger trips Matt Boldy and heads off. The Wild would call a timeout to set themselves up and needed just five seconds of the 5-on-3 advantage to score. Kirill Kaprizov gets his second of the season, with Brock Faber and Boldy getting the assists.

(8:26 — 3-0 MIN): The clincher for Minnesota comes nearly halfway through the period. Mats Zuccarello gets a good entry into the zone, flips it over to Kaprizov, who gets it back to Zuccarello and he flips it over the stick of Tarasov. Kaprizov's second assist of the night.

(18:35 — 3-1 MIN): Columbus stops the shutout when Chinakhov rips one past Gustavsson to cut the lead to two. The goal would continue Chinakhov's hot start to the season, picking up a point in all five games and give him his team-leading third goal of the season.

### Up Next:

The Blue Jackets play their final of four straight at home with a Tuesday night battle against the Toronto Maple Leafs. All 32 NHL teams are in staggered action as part the league's Frozen Frenzy program, so the puck drops a little late on this one: 7:30 p.m. at Nationwide Arena.

## [BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets 2024-25 prospects preview](#)

By Garrison McDaniel- October 17, 2024

Now that the rosters have been set for NHL and AHL teams and the season has begun, we now know where CBJ draft picks and signees will spend the 2024-25 season.

With that in mind, as we usually do this time of year, we'll break down where those top prospects are playing to set the stage for the upcoming campaign, presented by Ruoff.

For the sake of simplicity, we won't include those who have begun the year in Cleveland – sorry to such names as Denton Mateychuk, Luca Del Bel Belluz and Jet Greaves, but we'll cover the Monsters throughout the season – but did want to plot a map of where the youngest Blue Jackets are playing this season.

Also, in a new development, CBJ fans can follow these players as well as the Monsters on our new Prospects hub here at BlueJackets.com. The page can be found at [BlueJackets.com/prospects](#).

The list is broken up by where the draft picks are skating, then by draft position.

### Junior Hockey

Cayden Lindstrom (C, Medicine Hat Tigers, WHL): Once he's done rehabbing from back and hand injuries in the past year, the fourth overall pick in the 2024 NHL Draft is expected to return to Medicine Hat. Lindstrom is known as a big and powerful center, standing at 6-4, and has a good scoring touch as he recorded 27 goals in 32 games before his hand injury last December. The Tigers have a loaded team pushing for a WHL title and Memorial Cup bid this season, and he'll be a big part of it.

Charlie Elick (D, Brandon Wheat Kings, WHL): Elick is a shutdown-style defenseman who is 6-3 and is one of the best skaters among blueliners out of the 2024 draft. Don Waddell emphasized bigger players in the 2024 draft, and the second-round pick fits that style to a T. Elick posted 27 points in 65 games last year in Brandon and has played in eight games with the Wheat Kings since returning from CBJ camp.

Evan Gardner (G, Saskatoon Blades, WHL): At the start of last season, Gardner was a backup in Saskatoon and was a sixth- to seventh-round prospect. He started just four games in the first two months of the 2023-24 season, but through impressive performances in his limited work, Gardner earned the starting role and posted a 25-5-0-2 record, had a .927 save percentage and a 1.91 GAA as he solidified himself as a top goalie prospect. He was chosen in the second round of the 2024 draft and has a 3-1-1 record with a 2.79 GAA in five games this year with Saskatoon.

Luca Marrelli (D, Oshawa Generals, OHL): Marrelli is a two-way defenseman that recorded 51 assists in 67 games last season. Marrelli has gotten off to a hot start in the 2024-25 season, recording four goals and four assists in the Generals' first eight games of the season.

Tanner Henricks (D, Lincoln Stars, USHL): Henricks is another player that fits the style Waddell was looking for in this previous draft. Henricks is a 6-4 shutdown defenseman who uses his big frame well, which made him a fourth-round pick in the 2024 draft. With the Stars, he had nine points in 61 games last year, plus one point in his first six games this season. The California native is committed to play at St. Cloud State for the 2025-26 season.

Luca Pinelli (W, Ottawa 67s, OHL): His shot stands out the most in his game, but Pinelli also forces many turnovers with his high-motor style of play. Another CBJ prospect off to a fast start on the season, Pinelli



has scored five goals in the 67s first six games. Last season in 68 games, he slashed 48-34-82 and was third in the OHL in goals.

Melvin Strahl (G, Youngstown Phantoms, USHL): A fifth-round pick in 2023 with high upside, Strahl chose to move to Ohio from his home in Sweden this summer after spending two years with the Under-20 team in the MoDo organization. He has a 3-1-0 record, 2.41 GAA and .915 save percentage in his first four games with Youngstown.

Tyler Peddle (W, Saint John Sea Dogs, QMJHL): The NHL's version of Mr. Irrelevant, Peddle was chosen last of the 256 players that went in the 2023 NHL draft, but there's a lot of upside in the 19-year-old. Peddle has some size, some speed and some skill and was the second overall pick in the 2021 QMJHL draft. Last season, he was traded from Drummondville to Saint John and had a line of 11-7-18 in 28 games played. He has five goals in the team's first six games of the 2024-25 season.

Nolan Lalonde (G, Kingston Frontenacs, OHL): Now on his third team in the past two years, Lalonde looks to have found his game in Kingston. Last season with the Memorial Cup-winning Saginaw Spirit, he appeared in 32 games, had a 3.16 GAA and a .874 save percentage. This season, the free agent signee has started in four games with Kingston, has a 1.64 GAA and a .932 save percentage.

#### College Hockey/USHL

William Whitelaw (C, Michigan Wolverines, NCAA): The latest member of the Michigan to Blue Jackets pipeline, Whitelaw transferred to Ann Arbor from Wisconsin after his freshman season where he posted a line of 10-7-17 in his 37 games played. The 19-year-old third-round pick in the 2023 draft looks to build on that campaign, as in his four games in the young season, he has one goal and an assist.

Aiden Hreschuk (D, Boston College Eagles, NCAA): A third-round pick in the 2021 draft, Hreschuk was acquired from Carolina at the 2022 trade deadline in the deal that sent Max Domi to the Canes. The product of the U.S. National Team Development Program is a shutdown defenseman that is going into his fourth season with Boston College and was on the losing end of the national championship in April. The 21-year-old has 29 points in 113 collegiate games.

Andrew Strathmann (D, North Dakota Fighting Hawks, NCAA): After two years with the Youngstown of the USHL, Strathmann is now going into his freshman season with North Dakota. The 2023 fourth-round pick profiles as a two-way defenseman that scored well at the USHL level with a line of 15-85-100 in his 165 games played. He had an assist in his first game with UND last weekend.

Guillaume Richard (D, Providence Friars, NCAA): Another shutdown defenseman in the CBJ pipeline, Richard is going into his senior season with the Friars. The 2021 fourth-round pick played in all 35 games for Providence last season and had a career-best line of 3-15-18.

Luke Ashton (D, Minnesota State Mavericks, NCAA): Another big-bodied defenseman that Waddell liked in this summer's draft, Ashton is 6-6 and uses his frame well in his defensive zone. Last season, Ashton had 36 points in 53 games for the Langley Rivermen of the BCHL. This season with the Mavericks, the sixth-rounder has a goal and two assist in his four games played.

James Fisher (W, Northeastern Huskies, NCAA): Now on his third team in as many seasons, Fisher returns to America after playing in the BCHL a season ago. The 2022 seventh-round pick is a big winger at 6-2 and skates well through the neutral zone during the rush. Fisher had 36 points in 54 games with the Penticton Vees and made his college debut over the weekend.

#### Overseas

Kirill Dolzhenkov (W, CSKA Moskva, Russia): Being a winger that stands at 6-6 makes him one of the most interesting prospects in the CBJ pipeline. The 2022 fourth-round pick split time among three levels of the Russian league last season and had a total of 21 points in 56 total games. This season he is currently in the second-tier VHL, where he has a 6-3-10 line in 10 games played.

Sergei Ivanov (G, Sochi, Russia): Now in his second full season at the KHL level, Ivanov has been loaned from Russian power SKA St. Petersburg to a Sochi team that is expected to struggle in the standings. As a result, the 2022 fifth-round pick has gotten off to a rougher start this season with a 1-7-1 record, a 3.04 GAA and a .905 save percentage in 11 games. He'll have to overcome his smaller stature (5-11) but was solid with Admiral of the KHL a season ago, posting a 2.63 GAA and .928 save percentage.

Nikolai Makarov (D, CSKA Moskva, Russia): A fifth-rounder by the Blue Jackets in 2021, this stay-at-home defenseman has been a mainstay for CSKA Moskva – winning a Gagarin Cup title in 2023 – and is going into his fifth season at the KHL level. The 21-year-old Makarov has not found the score sheet yet this year in the KHL, but in his eight games played in the VHL, he has a goal and three assists.

Oiva Keskinen (C, Tappara, Finland): The seventh-round pick in the 2023 draft had a solid rookie Liiga campaign last year when he recorded 27 points in 54 games, making him a potential late-round sleeper pick. This year he is looking to build off of that as he has three goals and eight points in the team's opening 11 games.

Martin Rysavy (W, Bili Tygri Liberec, Czechia): After spending the previous three years playing with fellow CBJ prospect Denton Mateychuk in Moose Jaw of the WHL, Rysavy has decided to return home for this season. He was a big part of the Warriors' WHL championship team a season ago, as he became known as the "Marty Party" while scoring 16 points in 20 playoff games played. This year he has two goals in the Czech team's opening 10 games played.

## [The Athletic / Predicting 4 Nations goalies: Who will the U.S., Canada, Sweden and Finland choose?](#)

By Jesse Granger- October 17, 2024

The first best-on-best international hockey tournament in nearly a decade is quickly approaching.

The 4 Nations Face-Off tournament in February will be the first time we've seen the best hockey players in the world compete for their countries since the 2016 World Cup of Hockey. With that long of a layoff, the national associations for the United States, Canada, Sweden and Finland are essentially selecting brand-new teams. The 23-man rosters must be submitted by Dec. 2, and some of the toughest choices will come in net, where teams will choose three goaltenders.

We already know one of the goalies, as Finland's Juuse Saros was amongst the 24 players announced in late June. That was an easy choice, as Saros is one of the brightest Finnish stars in the NHL. Some of the other decisions will require more deliberation, especially for the United States, which has three Vezina contenders vying for the net.

Canada has an entirely different dilemma. The country that has produced many of the best goalies in the sport's history is suddenly without a clear star in the crease. Pierre LeBrun detailed the decisions general manager Don Sweeney will have to make last week, so let's start there as we predict the goalies for each country.

### Canada

The perceived top option for Canada is St. Louis' Jordan Binnington, who is quietly coming off an excellent season. Because the Blues struggled as a team last year, it was largely overlooked how good Binnington was. His 29.74 goals saved above expected was good enough for second in the NHL, and higher than his miraculous 2018-19 campaign, which ended with the Stanley Cup. Binnington has a high ceiling and can steal a game in a manner few goalies can — when he's at his best. However, Team Canada could be looking for a more steady, predictable goalie to play behind what should be a stacked lineup from top to bottom.

Other options include the last two goalies to represent the Western Conference in the Stanley Cup Final: Vegas' Adin Hill and Edmonton's Stuart Skinner. Neither has been a true No. 1 goalie for an extended period, but both have proven they can get it done on big stages. They're also both big, positional goalies, which could be an advantage.

Another interesting option is Sam Montembeault in Montreal, who has never played in the postseason but has been excellent for the Canadiens. Montembeault has already stopped a league-high 6.59 GSAX in three starts this season, largely fueled by his 48-save shutout against Toronto on opening night.

Picks: Adin Hill, Jordan Binnington and Sam Montembeault

In contention: Stuart Skinner, Connor Ingram and Cam Talbot

### United States

No team in this tournament can match the United States when it comes to goaltending depth, but in the end, only three goalies make the team, and obviously only one will ultimately be between the pipes.

The reigning Vezina Trophy winner, Connor Hellebuyck, leads a stacked group of American goalies. He's coming off the best statistical season of his career, with a .921 save percentage and 39.35 goals saved

above expected. He's been even better to start the 2024-25 season, allowing only two total goals in his first three starts.

If there's an argument against Hellebuyck, it's his recent performance in the playoffs. He gave up 24 goals in the five-game series against Colorado last April, and has posted sub-.900 save percentages in each of the last two postseasons. Even with those struggles, Hellebuyck has been the most consistent goalie in the NHL for several years, so it would be a shock to not see him as one of the top two goalies.

The last time Hellebuyck represented his country was in the 2016 IIHF World Championship, when he won both of his starts as America's second goalie behind Jimmy Howard.

Jeremy Swayman doesn't have Hellebuyck's lengthy track record, but he's been just as impressive over the last couple years. Swayman also has last year's playoff performance on his resume, in which he led all goalies with a .933 save percentage. He was sensational in net for Boston, saving nearly a full goal above expected per game in the playoffs.

If you isolate the three biggest games of the season — Game 7 of the first round against Toronto and Games 5 and 6 in the second round facing elimination against Florida — Swayman stopped 84 of 88 shots for a .955 save percentage. He's a fiery competitor who has proven the ability to elevate his game in the biggest moments. U.S. general manager Bill Guerin will be splitting hairs deciding between these elite netminders, and Swayman's recent big-game performances could give him the edge. Swayman went 4-3-0 for the U.S. in the 2021 IIHF World Championship, helping the Americans to a bronze-medal finish.

Not to be overlooked in the conversation is Dallas' Jake Oettinger. Swayman and Oettinger are both 25 years old, drafted in 2017, but Oettinger has racked up 59 more NHL starts as he's established himself as a workhorse for the Stars. Last season was a bit of a down year for the Lakeville, Minn., native, but he was solid in the playoffs and is off to a 2-0-0 start in 2024-25. His calm, calculated approach could be a good fit behind what should be a talented American lineup.

Those are the clear-cut top three for the U.S., but there are several other goalies who could force their names into the conversation with great play between now and Dec. 2.

Joey Daccord is coming off a breakout season in Seattle in which he posted a .916 save percentage in 46 starts. He's splitting games with Philipp Grubauer for the Kraken, so he may not get the workload to prove himself in time for roster selection.

Charlie Lindgren is in a very similar situation in Washington, coming off a career year and projected to split starts with Logan Thompson. Joseph Woll is another talented young U.S. netminder, but he's been out with a lower-body injury to start the season in Toronto.

Picks: Connor Hellebuyck, Jeremy Swayman and Jake Oettinger

In contention: Joey Daccord, Charlie Lindgren and Joseph Woll

Sweden

Sweden has a long history of excellence in net, and this squad will be no different. The Swedes are led by two clear stars in the crease, with the biggest question being which of the two will get the majority of the starts. Jacob Markström and Linus Ullmark are both top-tier goalies, and are both on new teams for the 2024-25 season. How they adapt to their new surroundings and perform between now and December will determine who begins the 4 Nations Face-Off as the starter.

Markström had a strong 2023-24 season, but was largely overlooked because Calgary's defensive struggles hurt his base statistics. On the surface, his .905 save percentage is solid but not great, but when you factor in the difficulty of the shots Markstrom faced, his stats look a lot more impressive. He

led all goalies with a .857 save percentage on high-danger shots, and finished third in goals saved above expected (28.93) behind only Hellebuyck and Binnington.

Now playing behind a Devils team with expectations, Markstrom has the opportunity to re-establish himself as one of the NHL's best. His rare combination of size and athleticism make him one of the toughest to beat when he's on his game.

Ullmark also switched teams this offseason, but is entering a very different situation. After three impressive seasons in Boston (including a Vezina-trophy winning 2022-23), Ullmark was traded to Ottawa, where he signed a four-year contract extension. Expectations are high for the Senators, who are currently riding a seven-year playoff drought. If Ullmark can help that young squad take the next step toward postseason contention, it would go a long way toward solidifying himself as the top Swedish option in net. He's off to a nice start with a .914 save percentage through two games.

After those two, things get interesting for the Swedish team. The third goalie may not suit up for a single game in the tournament, which could impact GM Anders Lundberg's decision.

Sweden has several quality NHL options, such as Minnesota's Filip Gustavsson, Philadelphia's Samuel Ersson and Chicago's Arvid Söderblom, who had an excellent season debut on Friday.

But the best option for Sweden's third goalie may be youngster Jesper Wallstedt. The 21-year-old is one of the best goaltending prospects in the world, and is likely the country's future in net. While he is opening the season in the American Hockey League and isn't as established as the options above, it could be wise for Sweden to give Wallstedt the experience to continue grooming him as their future starter. He has already represented the country plenty of times, but taking part in this best-on-best tournament could provide value – even if only from the bench.

Picks: Jacob Markström, Linus Ullmark and Jesper Wallstedt

In contention: Filip Gustavsson, Samuel Ersson and Arvid Söderblom

## Finland

Of the four teams in this tournament, the Finnish crease may be the simplest to predict. As mentioned earlier, Saros is the clear No. 1, and Buffalo's Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen should be an easy choice for the backup spot.

Since 2019, only Hellebuyck has started more NHL games and made more saves than Saros. He's a proven workhorse goalie who has shown the ability to put up eye-popping numbers, even without an elite team in front of him. In 2022-23, Saros stopped 45.49 goals above expected, the third-best single season since Evolving-Hockey began keeping the metric in 2007. The Fins enter this tournament as underdogs, but if there's a goalie who can help them steal the show, it's Saros.

Luukkonen is an excellent backup option. He took a major step in his development last season, starting a career-high 51 games for the Sabres. The 25-year-old showed he has what it takes physically and mentally to handle a true starter's workload, and posted statistics well above the league average while doing it.

It is interesting how different the two styles of these Finnish goalies are. Saros is undersized, relying on quickness and athleticism. Luukkonen is a monster in net at 6-foot-5, 217 pounds, and is more of a cerebral goalie who relies on positioning.

Behind those two, it's pretty wide open for Finland's third goalie spot. Joonas Korpisalo, who is backing up Swayman in Boston, is the most established of the group. He is coming off a poor season in Ottawa and isn't off to the best start as a Bruin, but does have more than 250 starts in the NHL.

If Finland GM Jere Lehtinen prefers a steady, veteran presence as his third goalie, Korpisalo is the choice. If he chooses to give a younger goalie the experience, Colorado's Justus Annunen is a good option. The 24-year-old started 12 games for the Avalanche last season and had the highest save percentage of any goalie in the league with at least 10 games.

Other options for Finland include Kevin Lankinen, who backed up Saros for the last two seasons in Nashville before signing with Vancouver this summer, and Kaapo Kähkönen, who was recently claimed by Colorado as a third goalie.

Picks: Juuse Saros, Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen and Justus Annunen

In contention: Joonas Korpisalo, Kevin Lankinen and Kaapo Kähkönen

## The Athletic / Will an NHL goalie market reset allow No. 1 netminders to cash in?

**By Shayna Goldman- October 17, 2024**

Just how important is goaltending?

That has been a big question around the NHL over the last couple of seasons — especially after Colorado and Vegas won the Stanley Cup.

Teams around the league take notes from the reigning champ to try and replicate their success. One lesson from those two Cup runs was that a team could get by with average goaltending. The Avalanche did when Darcy Kuemper's game wilted in the playoffs in 2022. Then a year later, the Golden Knights won without a true number one.

Questions started to swirl about whether the age of bona fide number-one goaltenders was ending. The days of having a goalie play 70-plus starts have already passed, but did Vegas and Colorado take things a step further?

Teams built like the Avalanche and Golden Knights show it's possible to thrive without a true number one. But that lesson doesn't apply to everyone. As high-powered as the Devils can be in front of the blue paint, issues in net were unquestionably back-breaking last season. It was a strong reminder of the impact of reliable goaltending. And the Devils aren't the only team to recognize that.

After a flurry of goalie movement this summer to solidify creases around the league, a handful of teams have found their number ones. So now the focus has shifted to how much those goaltenders are worth in today's game.

That conversation was brought right to the forefront with the Jeremy Swayman contract.

It seems that the Bruins had \$66 million reasons to lock up Swayman as their number one in a deal that goes against the grain of the goalie market.

Swayman's officially paid like a top-five goalie in this league, but he doesn't have the same track record as some of the players around him. Connor Hellebuyck and Andrei Vasilevskiy have proven they're two of the best goalies in the world. Swayman doesn't even have one full season as a true starting goalie. The Bruins didn't even trust him to play consecutive starts last regular season, which led to some postseason questions about goalie deployment.

But one of the big differences with the Swayman contract is the age range; it covers ages 25 to 33 instead of starting in his early 30s. Most long-term goalie contracts start later and span through years of expected decline. There isn't a ton of recent work in the public sphere on how goalies age, but similar to skaters, the general gist is that the drop-off can be steep and dramatic once a player hits their mid-30s. Goaltending is a volatile position on a good day, so betting on those later years can be even dicier.

For Boston, the risk is that even with this more favorable age range, Swayman crumbles in a true starting capacity, leaving the Bruins with a weight on the books. But what he has done in a shared role was worth betting on. He was a top-10 goalie in goals saved above expected as a 1B in 2022-23 and moved up to the top five last season — and he carried his form into the playoffs with a more defined number-one role.

This contract set a new bar for starting goaltenders — one Linus Ullmark cashed in on days later in Ottawa. Considering how closely linked Swayman and Ullmark have been over the last few years, it was

only fitting they signed contracts with matching AAVs. The difference is the four-year term for Ullmark, which tracks for a contract kicking in at age 32 versus 25. And that will be something to keep in mind with pending RFA Jake Oettinger, who will be 26 when his next contract starts.

Swayman and Ullmark are now being leaned on as number ones, and their contracts reflect that. Joey Daccord, on the other hand, is a part of a shared crease in Seattle. He has even less of a track record than Swayman, with only one year of strong play at the NHL level under his belt so far. With Philipp Grubauer on the books as well, it makes sense Daccord's next contract comes in a few tiers below Swayman and Ullmark with a \$5 million AAV over five years.

If Daccord can earn the 1A role again this year and onward in Seattle, maybe his deal resets the bar for that role. And that should affect the market of 2025 goalies, both with 1As and overall average-caliber starters. Adin Hill, Alexandar Georgiev and Charlie Lindgren will all be UFAs next summer. And that should have a trickle-down effect on 1Bs as well, like Ilya Samsonov, Karel Vejmelka and Logan Thompson.

But the Daccord deal also sparks questions this next year should answer, including what a tandem is worth collectively. Is almost \$11 million too steep of a cost for two goalies? That is what the Kraken will be paying between 2025 and 2027 unless management moves on from Grubauer.

It wouldn't be the most expensive crease in the league. The Panthers have \$14.5 million dedicated to Sergei Bobrovsky and Spencer Knight. And the Rangers are looking at spending more than \$11 million on one goaltender at this rate.

Only two goaltenders are on the books for eight digits: Sergei Bobrovsky in Florida at \$10 million and Carey Price for another two years in Montreal at \$10.5 million. A new deal for Igor Shesterkin is almost certainly going to come out ahead and be the richest goalie contract signed.

The redefined goalie market only adds more oomph to Shesterkin's case. Swayman, a goalie with less of a track record, is worth \$66 million or 9.4 percent of the cap in Year 1. If that just became the bar for someone with a strong number-one starting capacity but some question marks, what does it mean for someone who has already proven they are one of the best goaltenders in the world?

Shesterkin has regular-season consistency behind him and has proven to be a game-breaker in the postseason. He is more than just a franchise player to the Rangers; all of their hopes are built around him. And that could be worth \$12 million in today's goalie market — even though he will be 29 when his next deal starts.

A \$12 million AAV would be 13 percent of a projected \$92 million ceiling in 2025-26, which would come in a shade below Price's 13.2 percent hit in 2018-19. It would just eclipse Henrik Lundqvist, who was worth 12.3 percent of the cap in Year 1 of his contract back in 2014-15. And it would jump ahead of Bobrovsky, a reigning champ who made the case that a team can win with a \$10 million goalie.

With Shesterkin, the question isn't only whether a team can build around a \$12 million goalie. It will also challenge if they can be a team's highest-paid player.

Auston Matthews, the Maple Leafs' MVP, leads the league with a \$13.3 million cap hit. Leon Draisaitl will jump ahead next year with a \$14 million AAV, and he isn't even the Oilers' most valuable player. Connor McDavid is only going to push the boundaries even further the following year.

While Shesterkin won't push into the same salary stratosphere as McDavid salary-wise, there is something that separates a team's willingness to invest this heavily in a goalie versus a skater: the volatility of position. As easy as it is to point to Bobrovsky's Stanley Cup ring, it doesn't overshadow the hot-and-cold regular seasons and playoff performances over the years.



The Swayman contract made a statement in the goalie market. Number one goalies still have a lot of value in today's game, even if some teams can succeed without a bona fide starter. That signing has already had a ripple effect on subsequent deals. And now it could help Shesterkin push the bounds on any conventions around the value of an elite number one.

## The Athletic / Meet top 2025 NHL Draft goalie prospect Jack Ivankovic, Canada's heir apparent in net

**By Scott Wheeler- October 17, 2024**

Jack Ivankovic has won just about everything there is for a goalie his age to win.

In a calendar year, three golds with Team Canada: the Hlinka Gretzky Cup with a .967 while surrendering just three goals in four games, U17 worlds with a .923 in eight games for Canada White, and U18 worlds as a third stringer but also Canada's only 2007-born goalie.

Two days after his 15th birthday, he won gold at the World Youth Championships in Philadelphia, too, playing to a perfect 7-0 record and a .956 save percentage. In the final, his Maroon Hockey team was outshot 29-16 by the Minnesota Blades and had "no business" winning 2-1, but a then-5-foot-9 Ivankovic stole the show.

The following season, he led Team Ontario to gold at the Canada Winter Games.

In those minor hockey years, when the then-Mississauga Steelheads (now Brampton Steelheads) finished their practices at the CAA Centre, head coach and general manager James Richmond would shower, eat and stroll back into the rink to watch Ivankovic's local Mississauga Senators AAA team. Ivankovic was always the top goalie every year, and at every tournament. Richmond remembers watching him steal a win against the Toronto Marlboros after the Marlies spent "75 percent" of the game in the Senators' end — "he won the game flat out," Richmond recalled on a recent phone call.

"And every other game I saw him he gave his team a chance to win. Every game," Richmond said. "And that doesn't happen very often because you're going to have stinkers. Marty Brodeur had stinkers. But this kid here it's like 'Oh boy.' And he loves to win at everything — whether it's corn hole or golf, he loves to win at everything."

Richmond eventually took him in the first round of the 2023 OHL draft, making him the first goalie off the board with the seventh overall selection. Last season, between collecting those gold medals and putting himself in pole position to potentially become Canada's goalie of the future, Ivankovic played to a 14-5-4 record as a 16-year-old rookie in the OHL, his .915 save percentage besting that of older tandem partner and would-be Sabres draft pick Ryerson Leenders.

This season, his NHL Draft year, he started with a perfect 4-0 record and a .936 save percentage. Though Team Canada seldom brings underaged goalies to the world juniors, Hockey Canada goalie coach Justin Pogge scouted his games early on.

He is one of the top prospects in the 2025 NHL Draft class, and one of the top Canadian goalies to come through the draft in years.

But whenever his name comes up, it's usually followed by a "but" about his size.

Today, he's listed at 6 feet and 179 pounds.

Fairly or unfairly, it's a talking point for NHL clubs. Last season, just eight of the 98 goalies who played in an NHL game were 6 feet or shorter. Predators star Juuse Saros was the lone goalie listed at 5-11. But there is also a wave of young goaltenders, drafted late or passed over on the basis of their size, now making headwinds in the league. Rookie Dustin Wolf (seventh-rounder), Devon Levi (seventh-rounder), Hunter Shepard (undrafted) and Jet Greaves (undrafted) were half of that number last year.

And those who've worked with Ivankovic, or played with or against him, say he's next up. They argue he should be in consideration for the first round in this year's draft.

"I think that he's a special, special goalie. I really do. I've been doing this so long that you can break these things down where you go, 'That kid's got that, and he's got that, and he's got that.' Jack's got it all. He's got the athleticism. He's got the compete. He's got the skill and the positioning for goalies. And sometimes it doesn't even look like he's moving," said Richmond, who has worked in junior hockey for 20 years. "There's not a piece that he's missing. And he's a great kid. He does everything right off the ice. In the gym you see him doing the extra stretches that sometimes the goalies don't."

Some of his peers in the OHL say he's the best goalie they've ever shot on. Barrie Colts defenseman and fellow top 2025 NHL Draft prospect Kashawn Aitcheson says the only way to beat him is to "get in front of his eyes."

"You have to make havoc, you have to make it a living hell for him," Aitcheson said.

"He's unbelievable. I get to see it firsthand every day shooting on him. It's hard to score on him in practice, which makes all of us better, and you see the work he puts into everything and he's always in the net early," said Steelheads captain and fellow draft eligible Porter Martone. "He never gives up on the play and never gives up on the puck. His skating's really good. He's never down and out of the play. You could be going backdoor and he finds a way to get there. And he's just very sound and very good positionally. We're very lucky."

According to Richmond, his Steelheads teammates don't like shooting on him in practice because "it takes away their confidence."

"He's fired up in practice. And in a good way. He's not getting pissed off at people but they know that he's in there to compete," Richmond said.

There's hope he's still got room to grow, too. He has grown an inch and a half a year since Bantam and still has a baby-faced look. He wears size 12.5 shoes and has big hands, a long wingspan, and long legs for his height.

"He can't be walking around like Ronald McDonald the rest of his life, he's going to sprout up a bit," Richmond said. "You hear the chatter that he's not 6-foot-2 or 6-foot-3 or anything like that but I don't know, he keeps the puck out of the net. I was in L.A. when Jonathan Quick was there and he was 6-foot and he was pretty good. They don't win two Cups without him."

His father, Frank, a former OHL goalie and draft pick of the Pittsburgh Penguins who is now an executive with Molson Coors, is 6-5. His sister, Morgan, who played competitive soccer and is now studying kinesiology at Laurier, Frank's alma mater, is almost 6-feet as well.

Frank and his dad were both also late growers. Frank joined the OHL late and didn't sprout up to 6-5 and 175 pounds until his third year in the league.

"I sort of woke up one day and my pants were short," Frank said. "I was skinny and awkward. Jack's a little slower. I think he's got two or three inches left in him for sure. He hasn't really hit that spurt. Some guys around the league have full beards and he doesn't have that. The average person probably sees him in net and goes 'He's not an overpowering kid yet' but we see him growing."

Whether another couple of inches come or not, Jack insists he'll block out the noise.

"I don't really listen to it that much. If the size does come, good, but if it doesn't I'm still going to keep stopping the puck. I mean, if you look at Saros, he's probably one of if not the best goalie in the league right now," Jack said. "I'm more focused on me. I'm still doing just fine."

Jack Ivankovic could be Canada's goalie of the future. (Steven Ellis / Daily Faceoff)

Their size — for now — isn't the only thing that's different about Jack and Frank.

During his career, Frank was a "hothead, kind of Ronny Hextall style" goalie known for smashing his stick, yelling at refs and trying to get into altercations.

"I've heard stories that he was a little crazy," said Jack.

Ask Frank if the stories are true and he sighs.

"Sadly," he said. "Yeah, sadly. I was crazy emotionally."

When old buddies from his playing days who are now coaches and scouts in the league — including his own coach Stan Butler — asked Frank in Jack's final years of minor hockey ahead of the OHL Draft if he was like his dad, he told them, "He's the total opposite of everything I was."

Jack is more like his mom, Kelly, a chiropractor and former competitive synchronized swimmer and water polo player, those who know him will say: calm, cool, collected.

"He's so calm," his dad said. "He's a rink rat and that wasn't in my DNA. I wasn't staying on extra and doing extra work. So we're actually the opposite in everything hockey-related. He's everything that we hoped he would be. He's a really respectful young man, he's a great teammate, he puts others first, he thinks things through, and he's not emotional. You can't tell whether he just got a shutout or he got pulled in the game."

That's what made his goalie fight in just his fifth game of the season — which earned him and Niagara IceDogs goalie Owen Flores a four-game suspension — so out of character, catching those who know him off-guard.

OHL GOALIE FIGHT OHL GOALIE FIGHT (it was not close) [pic.twitter.com/tQVJKvCJ6](https://pic.twitter.com/tQVJKvCJ6)

— Lauren Kelly (@laurkelly24) October 6, 2024

Frank said it was "bizarre" for him to watch and that people who knew Jack asked, "What is that?"

"He's never had a penalty or a pillow fight in his life and now all of a sudden he's being chased out by a 20-year-old," Frank said.

Just three days earlier, shortly before a 4-1 win against the Barrie Colts at the Sadlon Center, Jack said his calmness was the biggest part of his identity as a goalie. Though he said his dad is the biggest part of his story, he likened himself more to his mom, describing her as "more well-rounded" in her emotions. He believes that calm helps him from getting jittery in the net, or to reset after a goal.

He's not superstitious, either, preferring to stay loose and relaxed with the rest of his teammates pre-game. He's got routines — but doesn't get bogged down in them. In his spare time, though he grew up a Leafs fan thanks to his grandfather, he doesn't actually watch a ton of hockey anymore, preferring to spend his time away from the rink golfing (he's got an 8 handicap), watching movies at the house, swimming in the Ivankovic pool and going out for dinners as a family.

"You wouldn't know he's a goalie. He's just one of us. (But) you know when you see him with his headphones on that he's ready to go," Martone said.

For the last three years, Jack has also done yoga to develop that peace of mind and calm. In the offseason, he meets with his yoga teacher Vicki Guido one to four times a week, working it in around his training with his longtime strength and conditioning coach Stephano Kim at his gym in Mississauga. In-season, he does it on his own and plans to stick with it throughout his career.

“I love that it’s all about being flexible and being in the right place of mind,” Jack said. “That’s a big thing for a goalie and as a hockey player — you need to make time away from the rink and yoga has really helped with that and helped my mental state.”

Guido commends Jack for making wellness a big part of his routine.

“There’s a huge amount of pressure he faces in his sport, there’s no doubt about that. The physical end of it is quite intense. Practices are intense. Games are even more intense. And he is really aware of the impact that his sport has not only on his physical self but also on his mental and emotional self,” Guido said. “Mentally, he’s got it. He’s ready. He’s about to embark on a really important time in his life and he’s got it. He’s solid. I mean, he’s got the gift.”

On the physical side, they work together on stretching, recovery after his workouts and flexibility.

When Jack first showed up to Guido’s studio at 15, she asked him what his goals were and he excitedly answered “I want to do the full splits!” Two years later, he’s almost there.

They’ve also worked to limber up his feet and ankles.

“When he came to me, his feet were really tight. And think about it, they’re in that boot all day every day,” Guido said. “And his feet are a lot more flexible (now). I know it’s odd to hear about feet but he had really tight ankles and really tight feet and we did a lot of work around that.”

Every session, the first thing Guido asks him is, “What’s hurting, Jack?”

The second thing she asks is, “How are you feeling, Jack? Are you happy? Are you nervous? Are you scared? Are you proud?”

As she puts him in his yoga poses, they talk about things like rest, balance, communication and even spirituality, things she says are “as important if not more important” than the physical side for an athlete — and which she believes are often overlooked in hockey.

Yoga has become an important part of Jack Ivankovic’s routine, both physically and mentally. (Vicki Guido)

She calls Jack “a great athlete” and said she has “no doubt that he’s going to go far with his sport.”

But more importantly than that, she says he’s a good person. Smart. Patient. Polite. Open.

Kim holds Jack in similar regard.

“Let’s put it this way: I’ve got a six-year-old kid and if he turns out to be like Jack, I’ll be thrilled,” he said. “If I had a daughter, that’s the kind of guys I’d like her to hang out with.”

Kim first noticed Jack on a school field trip to his gym when he was in seventh grade because he was stronger than the other kids and some of his trainers asked, “Who’s that kid? He’s a stud.” After training Kelly because the Ivankovics live down the street, the family then chose him to be Jack’s strength and conditioning coach once he was getting serious about pursuing hockey.

Ever since, though Jack has had offers to train at bigger gyms and in larger groups, he has stayed loyal to Kim and their one-on-one sessions together. The same goes for his longtime goalie coaches Dave Dolecki and Bujar Amidovski.

Kim, who has worked with a lot of hockey players over the years — including Brad Boyes, Chris Campoli, Carlo Colaiacovo and John Mitchell — says Jack is one of the best he’s ever had at listening and learning skills quickly.

Together, they do a combination of range of motion work, traditional strength and conditioning, cardio and goalie-specific coordination drills.

“There’s no lazy moment, he’s very coachable, he does everything well and he’s really, really strong,” Kim said.

This season, Jack knows what’s at stake and has set goals for himself.

One of them is to earn an invite to Canada’s selection camp for the world juniors as a 17-year-old.

In-season, he considers himself lucky that because he’s from Mississauga he gets to live at home for an extra couple of years instead of having to billet. Frank and Kelly have tried to create a billet environment at their place, though, and Martone, one of Jack’s closest friends, is over often. Jack and Steelheads newcomer Carson Rehkopf have become fast friends as well.

“It’s tougher for these 16-, 17-, 18-year-olds to be living away from home, so it’s nice to still have him there for dinners and catch up and see how his day was at school,” Frank said. “And he doesn’t get a free ride at home. He’s still got to make his bed, and clean his room, and get ready for the game.”

Richmond has no doubt Jack’s ready for what’s in front of him. When he watches Jack day-in and day-out, he says he just shakes his head.

At a recent practice, he caught himself thinking, “Man, when he gets dialed in it’s fun to watch.”

“I grew up around this area and the Leafs were always on TV, so you watch Cujo play and he’s a great goalie, and then you watched Eddie Belfour play and he’s a great goalie but they’re two totally different goalies,” Richmond said. “Cujo was flopping around and making all of these unbelievable saves and Belfour goes in there and it looks like he’s almost sleeping but he’s always in position and then it sticks to him like velcro. And Jack’s got that where it looks like he’s always in position. But then when something does get away, he dives back and he gets it with his paddle or his arm and he just never gives up on a puck.

“So for me that’s what I’m saying when I say special. I don’t use it very often but this guy is special, he really is.”

Frank? He has a tougher time with the stress of what’s ahead for Jack. But he wouldn’t change it for the world.

“Being a goalie is extremely nerve-wracking but in the same sense we’re really proud of the work he has put in and the results he’s having,” Frank said. “It’s pretty surreal. And then just watching your son play hockey is real exciting.”

Guido? She’s just proud of him.

“I feel like it’s such an honor and even a true privilege to be even a very small part of this journey with him,” she said. “He’s doing great.”

## The Athletic / Do Mark Scheifele or Mika Zibanejad have bad contracts? NHL Cap Court returns

**By Sean McIndoe- October 17, 2024**

Welcome back to Cap Court, where we put the questionable deals of NHL stars on trial to find out whether they deserve the dreaded “bad contract” label.

As always, we’re viewing “bad” contracts through the lens of the team that’s stuck with them, since that’s how fans are forced to do it, even though we’d never begrudge a player taking an offer that’s put in front of him. Importantly, we’re also only looking at contracts from this day forward; a deal could have made sense and even provided value for the first few years, but we’re only looking at what’s left on the books.

We’ve been doing this long enough that names like Jonathan Toews, Carey Price and Jakub Voracek have been on the docket. Heck, one of the early editions featured Ryan Suter and Oliver Ekman-Larsson, a combined five teams and three buyouts ago. Have all our calls been proven right? Look, we’ll do the cross-examining around here, thank you very much.

This time around, we have five more names. We’ll start with a big-market blueliner.

Morgan Rielly, Toronto Maple Leafs

The details: Rielly is in the third year of an eight-year deal that carries a cap hit of \$7.5 million.

The case that it’s a bad contract: You mean, besides the fact it was signed by the Leafs? (Pauses for uproarious laughter and standing ovation to end.)

Mainly, it would be that Rielly is being paid like a No. 1 defenseman despite never quite being that guy. To be clear, he’s been the No. 1 in Toronto, where the Leafs have chosen to focus their resources on high-end forwards while treating the blue line as an afterthought. But being a No. 1 somewhere doesn’t mean you’re a No. 1, and Rielly often looks like he’d be better suited as a solid No. 2, or maybe an excellent second-pairing guy. He does a lot of things well, but nothing stands out as elite on either end. It’s also worth noting that, just a few games into the season, he has already lost his spot on the Leafs’ top power play to Ekman-Larsson.

Though his previous contract, a six-year pact that paid him \$5 million a year, was generally viewed as a bargain, it feels like the pendulum swung to the other side with this one — especially since he’ll be 36 when it ends.

The case that it might be OK: Compared to the forwards he shares the ice with, \$7.5 million doesn’t seem like that much. That’s also true when you compare Rielly to some of the other guys in his age and salary range, such as Thomas Chabot (\$8 million), Vince Dunn (\$7.35 million), Brandon Montour (\$7.1 million) and Brady Skjei (\$7 million). Those are all good defensemen who’d play high in the lineup of any good team but aren’t Norris contenders. If that’s who Rielly is, maybe his deal is just about right.

One last point in his favor: If we’re going to mention the Leafs’ reputation for overpaying their stars, we also have to acknowledge that Rielly is one of the only members of the core with a reputation for elevating his game in the playoffs.

Key witnesses: Though the names mentioned in the previous section are reasonably flattering comparisons, others are a bit harsher. Rielly makes more than the younger Noah Hanifin just got in his new deal from the Vegas Golden Knights (\$7.35 million), for example, and just a little less than reigning

Norris winner Quinn Hughes (\$7.85 million) and perennial candidate Victor Hedman's recent extension (\$8 million). Hughes was still a restricted free agent when he signed, and Hedman will be 34 when his deal starts, but those are two much more accomplished names in Rielly's range.

The verdict: Not quite bad, at least not yet. But probably closer than you think.

Mark Scheifele, Winnipeg Jets

The details: Scheifele is in the first year of a seven-year extension he signed a year ago. The contract carries a cap hit of \$8.5 million.

The case that it's a bad contract: Scheifele is a first-line forward, but his lack of defensive impact means he's basically a one-way player in a league in which top centers are expected to be 200-foot contributors. Worse, his offensive impact hovers around a point per game and hasn't even reached that for the past few years. He's a good player but not an elite one, and though that might be just enough to make him worth his cap hit now, he's 31 and will be 38 by the time his deal expires. It's a great deal for Scheifele but not so great for the Jets, which is pretty much what everyone said at the time.

The case that it might be OK: Scheifele ranks just outside the top 10 in scoring among centers since 2018, and his "worst" season in terms of points per game was one in which he scored a career-high 42 goals. He's not Nathan MacKinnon, Leon Draisaitl or Auston Matthews. But those guys are resetting the market, and Scheifele is locked in a tier or two below. The contract might not age well, but that's life in the NHL, and a rising cap should mitigate a lot of that pain.

And yes, we have to mention the Winnipeg factor here. Scheifele was on the verge of a potential UFA departure when he signed his extension, and this team isn't exactly a top destination for stars when it comes to the trade or free-agency markets. Maybe his extension looks different if he signs it in Florida, but this isn't Florida. If the Jets slightly overpaid a longtime star to make sure he plays his whole career in Winnipeg, you can live with that.

Key witnesses: Scheifele's \$8.5 million is more than fellow centers Steven Stamkos and Elias Lindholm just got as UFAs and just behind what a younger Sam Reinhart got coming off a 57-goal season. But it puts him right in line with guys like Roope Hintz and Filip Forsberg. At the very least, you'd take him over fellow \$8.5 million man Pierre-Luc Dubois.

The verdict: Right now it's fine. It's the term that worries me, in addition to the potential for a steep drop-off for a player who doesn't contribute much if he's not driving offense. Given where the Jets are at these days, maybe Kevin Cheveldayoff isn't worried about Year 7. But at Cap Court, we have to be, and all that term nudges this one over to the bad side of the contract ledger.

And speaking of centers in their 30s with an \$8.5 million cap hit ...

Mika Zibanejad, New York Rangers

The details: Zibanejad is in the third year of an eight-year deal that carries an \$8.5 million hit. He'll be 37 when it expires.

The case that it's a bad contract: It would be largely similar to the one we just laid out for Scheifele, given how similar the contracts are. Zibanejad also has a full no-move clause until the final year of his deal, whereas Scheifele has only a partial no-trade list after 2027. And Scheifele's deal has fewer bonuses, so it's easier to buy out.

The case that it might be OK: Zibanejad's deal expires one year sooner than Scheifele's, and he's better defensively and has been slightly more productive (ranking one spot ahead on that list of center scoring



since 2018) while generally taking somewhat tougher assignments. We're not dealing with huge gaps here, but given how close a call Scheifele ended up being, those small margins matter.

Key witnesses: Essentially the same as Scheifele's, but maybe we should also mention Artemi Panarin and Adam Fox. Though Scheifele is the highest-paid skater on the Jets by a decent margin, Zibanejad ranks just third on the Rangers.

The verdict: I went into this thinking Zibanejad would narrowly escape a bad contract verdict, since I view him as a marginally better player and his deal is a bit shorter. But digging a bit deeper into the NMC and buyout aspects gave me some second thoughts.

For what it's worth, I asked my X followers what they thought of these players, and the results were conclusive if not lopsided:

Quick survey for something I'm working on:

Factoring in age, cap hit, term, etc., which contract would you rather have on your favorite team, starting today?

— Down Goes Brown (@DownGoesBrown) October 11, 2024

So you guys would take Zibanejad over Scheifele. But that doesn't mean he has to have a different ranking, and if there's not much room between his deal and Scheifele's, we have to give them the same verdict. That means a narrow "bad" for Zibanejad, somewhat to my surprise.

Timo Meier, New Jersey Devils

The details: Meier is 28 and in the second year of an eight-year deal that carries a cap hit of \$8.8 million.

The case that it's a bad contract: Meier has had a superstar's aura for pretty much his entire NHL career, coming in as a top-10 pick and peaking with 40 goals in a 2022-23 season that also featured his trade from the San Jose Sharks to New Jersey for multiple high picks. But somewhat surprisingly, he's never had so much as a point-per-game season in his eight years in the league, and last season his production dipped to 52 points. He's being paid like an elite winger, but reputation aside, is he one? The Devils gave him the extension shortly after that blockbuster trade, so there's a whiff of Shiny New Toy here.

The case that it might be OK: That 40-goal season might be a ceiling, but he had 35 the year before that, and the list of wingers who can score like that isn't especially long. And though last year's production was a disappointment, he was also reportedly playing hurt. In a season that was largely a write-off for the Devils from day one, maybe we shouldn't focus too much on those results.

Key witnesses: Among late-20s wingers, Meier ranks behind Matthew Tkachuk (\$9.5 million) and Kirill Kaprizov (\$9 million) but ahead of Patrik Laine (\$8.7 million) and Alex DeBrincat (\$7.87 million). That seems about right.

The verdict: I'm concerned about the contract, and I'm not the only one. But we can give this one a bit more breathing room before calling it a bad contract. Meier is a top-line winger for a Cup contender, and his cap hit is reasonable for that role, assuming he can post the offense to match. He's done it in the past, and as long as he finds that level again this year, we should be safe here.

Tristan Jarry, Pittsburgh Penguins

The details: Jarry is 29 and in the second year of a five-year deal that carries a cap hit of \$5.375 million.

The case that it's a bad contract: I wanted to include a goalie in this piece, but it gets tricky because most of the highest goalie contracts are too recent to judge, already obviously bad or about to expire. So let's try Jarry, which feels like a closer call.

The bad news, as far as the Penguins go, is that they're locked in for four more seasons (including this one) for a goalie who hasn't been all that good since 2021-22. He finished seventh in the Vezina voting that year, the second time in three seasons he landed there, but he hasn't had a vote since because his save percentage has dropped each year. Last year he was a .903, a bit worse than league average, despite leading the league in shutouts with six.

He's 12th in the NHL in terms of goalie cap hit among active players, and few fans would rank him that high in terms of goalies you'd want to build around. Worse, seven of the guys ahead of him have deals expiring by 2027, whereas Jarry's runs longer.

The case that it might be OK: Of the 11 goalies who make more this year, only Jeremy Swayman and Igor Shesterkin are younger than Jarry, so even with four years left, it's not like the Penguins bought up a ton of anchor years. Instead, they paid a hefty price to lock in their unquestioned starter for what's left of his prime. Remember, Jarry had some solid years when the Penguins were contenders. If the rest of the roster can get back to that level, he should be fine. If not, it doesn't really matter if they're overpaying a veteran goalie. The bottom line is this deal isn't anyone's idea of a discount, but it's not that bad.

Key witnesses: All over the map, as you might expect from goaltenders. Jarry makes a little less than big names like Jacob Markström (\$6 million) and Shesterkin (one more year at \$5.67 million) and a bit more than Thatcher Demko (\$5 million), all of whom have badly outplayed him lately. But you'd take him over John Gibson (\$6.4 million), Philipp Grubauer (\$5.9 million), Elvis Merzlikins (\$5.4 million) and Darcy Kuemper (\$5.25 million). What that tells us is ... I don't know. Goalies are weird.

The verdict: The near-randomness of that list of goalies in the same price range seems like proof it's not a great place to be; if you don't have a sure thing in net, it's probably better to go cheap rather than locking into mediocrity and hoping for the best. With all the runway left on this deal, I'm going to say it's bad, but with a caveat: If we end up looking back on the extensions for Swayman and Shesterkin as truly resetting the goalie market, Jarry has the right to appeal the verdict in a year or two.

## The Athletic / 2022 NHL re-draft: Juraj Slafkovský, Logan Cooley, Shane Wright lead the class

By Corey Pronman- October 17, 2024

Today is part two of our series looking back at recent NHL Drafts and how my ordering of those players would change with time and more information. This piece is about the 2022 NHL Draft. Despite a much-debated top of the class going in, much of the top group remains the same two years out. Players eligible for this exercise had to be drafted in the draft class mentioned, regardless of their first year of eligibility.

Tier 1: NHL All-Star

1

Juraj Slafkovský

LW

1

Montreal

Tier 2: Bubble star and top of lineup

2

Logan Cooley

C

3

Utah

Heading into the 2022 draft, Montreal was thought to be debating between three players with their No. 1 pick in Logan Cooley, Juraj Slafkovský and Shane Wright. Two years later, I still see those three players as the top three pro prospects of this class. Wright has gotten beat up a lot in the past two years, but he was actually very good in the AHL this past season and a leading part of a top team. Slafkovský and Cooley have separated a bit from him, in part due to their tools and the fact they've already shown well at the NHL level.

Tier 3: Top-of-lineup player

3

Shane Wright

C

4

Seattle

4

Pavel Mintyukov

D

10

Anaheim

Pavel Mintyukov shoots up to the No. 4 spot following a great rookie NHL season. He's a very talented defenseman with high-end skill, strong size and mobility. He projects to have a lot of NHL offense while playing decent enough defensively.

Tier 4: Bubble top and middle lineup

5

Simon Nemeč

D

2

New Jersey

6

David Jiricek

D

6

Columbus

7

Kevin Korčinski

D

7

Chicago

8

Cutter Gauthier

LW

5

Anaheim

9

Marco Kasper

C

8

Detroit

10

Danila Yurov

RW

24

Minnesota

11

Maveric Lamoureux

D

29

Utah

12

Ivan Miroshnichenko

LW

20

Washington

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 became a factor in NHL teams deciding whether to select Russian players like Ivan Miroshnichenko and Danila Yurov. Miroshnichenko, who many teams had rated as a top-five pick in the draft, was also diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in March of that year. He and Yurov went in the 20s.

Miroshnichenko has shown promising recovery and looked good this season in the AHL and NHL. Yurov was also a leading player on the KHL champion Magnitogorsk Metallurg this past season. Risks remain with both prospects for the same reasons teams saw two years ago, but I believe if you re-did the draft, both would go a lot higher.

Maveric Lamoureux was seen as a huge, mobile defenseman who played hard, but there were major questions about his skill and hockey sense and whether he could make a first pass in the NHL. The QMJHL's quality has deteriorated and I am rarely impressed by numbers being put up there, but Lamoureux was a point-per-game player last season and one of Canada's best players at the world juniors. He doesn't need to be a points type in the NHL with his athletic tools, he just needs to not hot potato every puck and he could have a long NHL career.

Tier 5: Middle of lineup player

13

Brad Lambert

C

30

Winnipeg

14

Conor Geekie

C

11

Tampa Bay

15

Lane Hutson

D

62

Montreal

16

Owen Pickering

D

21

Pittsburgh

17

Jimmy Snuggerud

RW

23

St. Louis

18

Jonathan Lekkerimaki

RW

15

Vancouver

19

Jiri Kulich

C

28

Buffalo

20

Noah Ostlund

C

16

Buffalo

21

Filip Bystedt

C

27

San Jose

22

Liam Ohgren

LW

19

Minnesota

23

Jani Nyman

RW

49

Seattle

24

Fraser Minten

C

38

Toronto

25

Nathan Gaucher

C

22

Anaheim

26

Tristan Luneau

D

53

Anaheim

27

Denton Mateychuk

D

12

Columbus

28

Sam Rinzel

D

25

Chicago

29

Lian Bichsel

D

18

Dallas

30

Matt Savoie

C

9

Edmonton

31

Rutger McGroarty

RW

14

Pittsburgh

32

Dennis Hildeby

G

122

Toronto

Brad Lambert got beat up in his draft season. He was always seen as a very talented prospect due to his great skating and skill, but his inconsistent effort and playmaking worried teams a lot. His play in recent months has been more reassuring, as he was quite good versus pros in the AHL as a very young player.

Lane Hutson has been among the most debated prospects in scouting circles over the last few years. He was outstanding in college the last two seasons. Some scouts see his elite hockey sense and skill and think he could be a very good NHL defenseman. Others look at his small frame and lack of standout mobility for his size and wonder if he will be able to defend in the NHL. I've come around to the idea he could be a top-four type, but he may have to be used in an extremely specific way.

Jani Nyman went in the second round due to concerns about his skating, but he's a good-sized winger with legit offensive skills and goal-scoring abilities who had a big year in Liiga. Tristan Luneau made the Anaheim Ducks out of camp as a teenager, although injuries shortened his season. His mobility is just OK, but he can move pucks and score goals and has a decent frame, too.



Dennis Hildeby was picked as a re-entry goaltender, and since then he's shown very well versus pros even without a ton of games in the last few years. He's big and very athletic and has solid hockey sense, too. He has a lot of NHL traits.

Matt Savoie was a top-10 pick in his draft after being a highly touted junior. He has a lot of speed and playmaking in his game and works hard. He is an undersized forward, though, who doesn't have the elite skill you'd ideally want in a player that size.

Rutger McGroarty had a big season in college and is a highly competitive forward who was Team USA's captain at the world juniors. I don't view him as a super creative player with the puck, though, and his skating is mediocre. There are questions about how his game is going to fare versus NHLers.

Tier 6: Projected to play NHL games

33

Owen Beck

C

33

Montreal

34

Dans Lochemis

C

119

Boston

35

Adam Engstrom

D

92

Montreal

36

Elias Pettersson

D

80

Vancouver

37

Artem Duda

D

36

Utah

38

Arseni Koromyslov

D

120

St. Louis

39

Joakim Kemell

RW

17

Nashville

40

Jagger Firkus

RW

35

Seattle

41

David Goyette

LW

61

Seattle

42

Sergei Ivanov

G

138

Columbus

43

Matthew Poitras

C

54

Boston

44

Frank Nazar

C

13

Chicago

45

Matyas Sapovaliv

C

48

Vegas

46

Luca Del Bel Belluz

C

44

Columbus

47

Seamus Casey

D

46

New Jersey

48

Vsevolod Komarov

D

134

Buffalo

49

Jorian Donovan

D

136

Ottawa

50

Maksymilian Szuber

D

163

Utah

51

Jordan Dumais

RW

96

Columbus

52

Isaac Howard

LW

31

Tampa Bay

53

Nikita Grebenkin

RW

135

Toronto

54

Gavin Hayes

LW

66

Chicago

55

Reid Schaefer

LW

32

Nashville

56

Kirill Dolzhenkov

RW

109

Columbus

57

Cameron Whitehead

G

128

Vegas

Tier 7: Has a chance to play games

58

Ryan Greene

C

57

Chicago

59

Aleksanteri Kaskimaki

C

73

St. Louis

60

Kenny Connors

C

103

Los Angeles

61

Jordan Gustafson

C

79

Vegas

62

Noah Laba

C

111

New York Rangers

63

Christian Kyrou

D

50

Dallas

64

Michael Buchinger

D

88

St. Louis

65

Ludvig Jansson

D

125

Florida

66

Gavin White

D

115

Dallas

67

Kasper Kulonummi

D

84

Nashville

68

Elias Salomonsson

D

55

Winnipeg

69

Jake Furlong

D

140

San Jose

70

Tomas Hamara

D

87

Ottawa

71

Ryan Chesley

D

37

Washington

72

Simon Forsmark

D

101

Carolina

73

Isaiah George

D

98

New York Islanders

74

Dyllan Gill

D

223

Tampa Bay

75

Frederic Brunet

D

132

Boston

76

Nikita Yevseyev

D

190

Edmonton

77

Daniil Orlov

D

110

New Jersey

78

Artem Barabosha

D

198

New Jersey

79

Cameron Lund

C

34

San Jose

80

Danil Zhilkin

C

77

Winnipeg

81

Jack Devine

RW

221

Florida

82

Hunter Haight

C

47

Minnesota

83

Dylan James

LW

40

Detroit



84

Josh Filmon

LW

166

New Jersey

85

Quinn Finley

LW

76

New York Islanders

86

Sandis Vilmanis

LW

157

Florida

87

Julian Lutz

LW

43

Utah

88

Samuel Savoie

LW

81

Chicago

90

Dmitri Buchelnikov

LW

52

Detroit

91

Gleb Trikozov

LW

60

Carolina

92

Niklas Kokko

G

58

Seattle

93

Sergey Murashov

G

118

Pittsburgh

94

Bryce McConnell-Barker

C

97

New York Rangers

95

Mattias Havelid

D

45

San Jose

96

Calle Odellius

D

65

New York Islanders

97

Ty Nelson

D

68

Seattle

98

David Spacek

D

153

Minnesota

99

Theo Wallberg

D

168

Ottawa

100

Marc-Andre Gaudet

D

152

St. Louis

101

Anton Johansson

D

105

Detroit

102

Noah Warren

D

42

Anaheim

103

Vladimir Grudin

D

156

Carolina

104

Stephen Halliday

C

104

Ottawa

105

Adam Ingram

C

82

Nashville

106

Paul Ludwinski

C

39

Chicago

107

Oskar Pettersson

RW

72

Ottawa

108

Devin Kaplan

RW

69

Philadelphia

109

Rieger Lorenz

LW

56

Minnesota

110

Miko Matikka

RW

67

Utah

111

Viktor Neuchev

LW

74

Buffalo

112

Samuel Jonsson

G

158

Edmonton

113

Topias Leinonen

G

41

Buffalo

114

Maxim Mayorov

G

147

Dallas

115

Vyacheslav Buteyets

G

178

Anaheim

## The Athletic / OHL aware of report alleging sexual assault by former players, will cooperate if police investigate

**By Chris Johnston and Pierre LeBrun- October 18, 2024**

The Ontario Hockey League is aware of a report alleging eight former players sexually assaulted a woman in 2014, and the league will cooperate with any corresponding police investigation, the OHL said Thursday in a statement.

The report from Rick Westhead detailing the alleged incident aired Wednesday on CTV's "W5" program. It included an interview with a woman who alleged the players sexually assaulted her in November 2014 at one of the player's billet homes.

The OHL has issued a statement regarding allegations in a CTV Report filed on Wednesday. [pic.twitter.com/MRZ4mOnCN4](https://pic.twitter.com/MRZ4mOnCN4)

— Ontario Hockey League (@OHLHockey) October 17, 2024

The woman — whose identity was protected by CTV — said she was 22 at the time of the incident. She said the player who invited her over to the billet house took her to a bathroom and initiated sexual acts before the other players — who ranged in age from 16 to 19 — joined in. The woman didn't attempt to report the incident to police until earlier this year.

"We learned about it yesterday when the news story was released," OHL commissioner Bryan Crawford said Thursday. "They had not been in contact with us about it prior. It wasn't something that anyone in our league or with our teams had been aware of. So we're learning about it as everyone else is. Obviously, we take it incredibly seriously.

"It takes a lot for someone to come forward that has been a victim of sexual violence and our job is to take that seriously and cooperate with any investigations that occur as we move forward. We're a bit in the dark of any of the other circumstances that have been reported."

According to the report, the woman attempted to file a police report earlier this year but was given different answers as to which department was responsible for handling the case. Per the report, Ontario Provincial Police said that policy was not followed to ensure that the woman was connected to the correct jurisdiction for her to make a report.

"We can confirm that the civilian call-taker provided the victim with the contact information for the police service of jurisdiction to facilitate their report. However, standard operating procedures state that the call-taker should have personally connected the caller to the police service of jurisdiction, and remained on the line until the call-taker could confirm that a report was being initiated," OPP spokeswoman Gosia Puzio wrote in an email to W5.

In the statement, the OHL said it takes allegations of this nature "very seriously" but added it had no prior knowledge of the alleged sexual assault before Wednesday.

"The OHL recognizes the courage required for victims of sexual assault to come forward with their experiences, and would always desire to see justice served and perpetrators held to account," the league said.

When reached for comment, an NHL spokesperson said, "The NHL is deeply troubled by any accusation of this nature. We have no information beyond what was in the media report from last night."

Crawford continued by discussing ways in which the league can offer players resources to be educated.

“We talk about the things that we can control and what we’ve been doing and investing in for nearly a decade when it comes to our ONSIDE program and these sorts of educational programs that we’ve put in place for our players and for our teams that have sought to address these sorts of issues so that we’re developing outstanding young people and community leaders. That’s ultimately our top priority. We were completely shocked like everybody.”

## The Athletic / Seven NHL players under the most pressure to prove their value in 2024-25

By Harman Dayal- October 18, 2024

An NHL player's response to pressure can mean the difference between rising as a hero or becoming a fan base's whipping boy.

Pressure is scary because of the stakes, but every athlete should relish it. Pressure is a privilege — it's reserved for those who are either paid a lot of money and/or play on a team with hopes of a deep playoff run. Unless you want to be a forgotten footnote in the history book of the thousands of players who have suited up in the NHL, you'll have to shoulder the weight of scrutiny and expectations at some point and perform under it.

Every year, there's no shortage of players under the microscope. In this article, we examined seven of the most intriguing names at the outset of the 2024-25 season. The players on this list are in different situations — some of them have boat anchor contracts and need to show a baseline level of competency on contending teams, one is a franchise-level star that needs to bounce back and there are a couple of blue-chip young players facing the heat to break out. What these players share in common is high expectations to prove their worth because of the ramifications their performance could have on their team or the future of their careers.

We're going to exclude Mitch Marner from this list because his future has been analyzed plenty already.

Darnell Nurse, Edmonton Oilers

Only seven NHL defensemen have a higher cap hit than Darnell Nurse's \$9.25 million annual average value. Nurse's contract is an albatross — there's no realistic way for him to come close to living up to that deal — but that's not even the bar that he's expected to live up to at this point. Oilers fans would be thrilled if Nurse could consistently perform at the level of a competent second-pair defenseman.

Nurse has stretches where he looks like a bona fide top-four defender — he's got a well-built 6-foot-4 frame and is a strong skater — but his poor hockey IQ leaves him prone to big mistakes and he struggles to break the puck out.

Most frustratingly, he's played some of his worst hockey in the playoffs when the stakes are highest.

Last spring, the Oilers controlled 43.7 percent of expected goals and were outscored 24-15 with Nurse on the ice at five-on-five. In the second round against Vegas in 2023, the Nurse and Cody Ceci were outscored 6-1 at five-on-five. That same pair was outscored 6-2 against Colorado in the 2022 Western Conference final, though it should be noted that Nurse was playing through a torn hip flexor at the time.

The Oilers have no choice but to continue leaning on Nurse to play crucial minutes in the playoffs because the blue line lacks other viable second-pair candidates. He's under even more pressure to perform and drive the second pair now because Edmonton has to saddle him with a subpar partner like Troy Stecher, Travis Dermott or Ty Emberson, at least until the club is able to make a midseason trade upgrade.

Edmonton needs Nurse to be a serviceable top-four player rather than a liability, especially come playoff time.

Alexandar Georgiev, Colorado Avalanche



The Avalanche proved that all they need is average goaltending when they won the Stanley Cup in 2022. That year, Darcy Kuemper was battling through an eye injury and posted a .902 save percentage in the playoffs, with Colorado's elite group of forwards and defensemen able to do the heavy lifting.

Alexandar Georgiev looked capable of hitting that level when he first arrived as Colorado's starter. He started a whopping 62 games and pitched an impressive .919 save percentage, finishing seventh in Vezina Trophy voting in the process.

However, it's been all downhill since then.

Georgiev slipped to a .897 save percentage last year during both the regular season and playoffs. He was pulled in his first two starts this season and didn't fare much better in his third outing, surrendering five goals on 36 shots against the Islanders on Monday. He gave up four goals on 24 shots against the Bruins on Wednesday night too, bringing his save percentage to .800 through four games. The heat is also ratcheting up on him following the club's Kaapo Kahkonen waiver claim.

Colorado is still a scary team on paper, but its skater group isn't as deep as 2022. The Avs can't prop up subpar goaltending to the extent that they perhaps could have in the past. Not only is Georgiev at risk of losing the starter's job, but a bad year would also cost him millions on his next contract because he's a pending unrestricted free agent.

The 28-year-old netminder needs to step up both for the sake of Colorado's contention chances and his individual earnings/NHL future.

Dylan Cozens, Buffalo Sabres

It's been 13 seasons since Buffalo last made the playoffs. Sabres fans are sick of being told they have a promising core or an elite prospect pipeline; they want meaningful on-ice progress.

The biggest reason the Sabres regressed last year, following a breakout 2022-23 season where they finished one point back of the playoffs, is that their offense fell off a cliff. Buffalo fell from being the league's third-highest goal-scoring team in 2022-23 to ranking 23rd in goals for last year.

The Sabres won't surge back up the standings until their top forwards return to the level they showed two seasons ago, starting with Tage Thompson and Dylan Cozens.

Cozens, 23, exploded for 31 goals and 68 points in 2022-23 but dropped to 47 points last season. He's also yet to develop into an above-average two-way driver, at least according to the underlying numbers. There's extra pressure for him to reach his potential as a high-end top-six center because he's got six years left at a \$7.1 million cap hit.

Cozens hasn't registered a single point through five games. He needs to come alive as a key offensive driver if the Sabres have any shot of climbing out of their early season hole.

Jacob Trouba, New York Rangers

Trouba is in a similar situation as Nurse: He's never going to live up to his monster cap hit (\$8 million), but he needs to play at a serviceable top-four level rather than being a liability.

The Rangers captain decisively lost his matchups last year, controlling less than a 50 percent share of shot attempts and scoring chances, while being outscored 55-44 at five-on-five. He was playing through a broken ankle late in the season but it healed by the playoffs. Trouba was a major detriment in the postseason; he couldn't move the puck, made costly defensive mistakes and was routinely hemmed in his own zone.

New York's core is older (Artemi Panarin, Chris Kreider, Mika Zibanejad and Vincent Trocheck are all over 30) and with the franchise facing a massive cap crunch next summer, this is one of this group's final cracks at contending for the Stanley Cup. Trouba needs to be a competent No. 4/5 contributor for the Rangers to be a solid enough five-on-five team during non-Adam Fox minutes.

There are critical ramifications beyond this season, too. By next summer, Trouba will only have one year left on his contract. The Rangers will desperately need to clear cap room to keep their core together and moving Trouba, who will have a 12-team no-trade list at that point, should be a key part of that game plan, even if it requires salary retention or tossing in some trade sweeteners. Trouba's play this year will have a major impact on how many teams will be interested in him in the offseason and where he could ultimately land.

Elias Pettersson, Vancouver Canucks

If you're outside the Vancouver market, you might not understand why Pettersson would belong on a list like this. After all, this is a player that scored 89 points last season (ninth among all centers) and 102 points the year before. He's an elite player and in a completely different stratosphere than most of the other names on this list.

Pettersson is still going to be under the microscope this season for a few reasons, however.

Firstly, he faded down the stretch and was a huge disappointment in the playoffs last season. He only scored seven goals in 33 games from the All-Star break until the end of the regular season (and only two of those seven goals were against playoff-bound teams) and followed it up with just one goal in 13 playoff games. That lack of playoff production was especially costly because Pettersson was freed up to play softer middle-six minutes since J.T. Miller and Elias Lindholm were handling the toughest head-to-head matchups. Vancouver's Swedish star revealed he was battling a knee injury from January onward, so that's important context, but it doesn't completely explain why he looked so lost on the big stage.

Secondly, Pettersson is entering the first season of an eight-year, \$11.6 million AAV extension. He should have no problem living up to that contract if he can continue being a 90-100-point center, but after his disappointing second-half play, fans aren't going to have much patience if he has a slow start.

Last year, he was stuck with inferior wingers like Ilya Mikheyev on his line. But after a busy offseason where the club substantially upgraded its winger depth, headlined by the Jake DeBrusk signing, the "Pettersson doesn't have any help" argument isn't going to cut it as a justification for his underwhelming play anymore.

Pettersson's had a quiet start with just one point in three games. He hasn't scored a five-on-five goal since Mar 5 against the Kings. He needs to get going soon and bounce back in the playoffs, otherwise, he's going to become a target of criticism for Canucks fans.

Trevor Zegras, Anaheim Ducks

The Ducks have an impressive collection of under-24 forwards in Leo Carlsson, Mason McTavish, Trevor Zegras and Cutter Gauthier. Anaheim's path to evolving from a perennial bottom-five team to an exciting, competitive young squad on the rise requires some of these players to develop into stars.

Entering his fifth season in the NHL, Zegras is under the most pressure out of that bunch to take a significant step forward because of his age (23) and experience. The dynamic, creative playmaking forward looked like a future first-liner when he broke out with 61 points in 75 games as a 20-year-old sophomore. He stagnated the following year and struggled with just 15 points in 31 games during an injury-riddled campaign last season.

Zegras' name has surfaced in the trade rumor mill at various points over the last year. His defensive game has come under criticism at times, although watching him play last season, his work rate and defensive commitment looked miles better than earlier in his career. It's especially frustrating that he hasn't hit his ceiling yet because he has the elite hockey sense, highlight-reel puck skills and outrageous creativity to be a point-per-game producer.

Zegras has one year left on his contract after this season. He's also been shifted to the wing because of Carlsson and McTavish's arrivals. That matters because if he profiles as a winger long-term he becomes less of an essential piece for the Ducks. Zegras needs to show meaningful progress this year and next, otherwise, his future in Anaheim could be up in the air.

Chandler Stephenson, Seattle Kraken

When the July 1 free-agent frenzy begins, there are always a few contracts that roll in and make you go "How did that guy get that much money?" Chandler Stephenson is a good player but his seven-year, \$43.75 million signing (\$6.25 million AAV) in Seattle certainly falls under that category.

The speedy 30-year-old center twice hit the 65-point range in Vegas, but he fell to 51 points last season and had a miserable first-round playoff series. Stephenson's defensive metrics also fell off a cliff — he surrendered five-on-five scoring chances and expected goals against at the worst rate of all Vegas forwards in 2023-24. He also has to prove he can be a legitimate top-six caliber player now that he no longer has Mark Stone on his wing to be the main driver.

Stephenson's impact will play a pivotal part in determining whether the Kraken can score enough to make the playoffs this season. If he struggles, and this ends up looking like an albatross contract, it'll be another strike against GM Ron Francis, who will be on the hot seat if the club underperforms again.

Honorable mentions: PL Dubois, Jesperi Kotkaniemi, Philip Broberg, Jamie Drysdale, Lukas Reichel, Timo Meier,

## The Athletic / Sizing up the NHL: Analyzing 2024-25 teams by age, height, weight and nationality

**By James Mirtle- October 18, 2024**

It's been a few years since I've pulled this data together, and it's fair to say things have shifted a bit in the NHL.

The league is slightly older, taller and thicker than three years back. There are also now more American players than ever, as they approach 30 percent of the NHL for the first time.

I've broken this all down team by team, as we've done here at The Athletic in the past. Included here is any player who played a game as of Monday night, as well as any backup goaltender that had sat on the bench by that point in time. Not included are any players out due to injury in this period.

All told, this analysis includes nearly 700 players, 66 of which are goalies, and information pulled from NHL.com.

NHL average age this season: 28.3

Analysis: Last year's runners-up, and a team many have pegged to go deep this season, the Oilers are the NHL's oldest club.

As of later this week, Edmonton will have only two players under 25 (Vasily Podkolzin and Ty Emberson) and 13 players who are 30 or older, including Corey Perry and Derek Ryan, who are both among the 10 oldest players in the NHL this season.

Nashville also became surprisingly old by bringing in a veteran free-agent crew including Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault, Luke Schenn, Ryan O'Reilly and Gustav Nyquist the past two summers.

On the other side of things, the struggling Sabres are incredibly young, with nine players who are 23 or younger and only one player in his 30s (Jason Zucker).

Most of the league's youngest teams are rebuilding right now, although it's very interesting to see Boston and Colorado down there. Part of that is they don't have a lot of older players pulling up the average: Brad Marchand is the only Bruin older than 32 and the Avs have only three players older than 30.

Surprisingly, there isn't a single player in the NHL over 40 years old right now, although three big-name players will get there by season's end. And there are only nine teenagers in the league this season, led by baby-faced Flyers rookie Jett Luchanko, who was born in August of 2006, meaning there are quite a few players (e.g. Sidney Crosby) who have been playing longer than he's been alive.

10 oldest players in the NHL this season

1. Marc-Andre Fleury, MIN, 39.9 years old
2. Ryan Suter, STL, 39.7
3. Brent Burns, CAR, 39.6
4. Corey Perry, EDM, 39.4
5. Alex Ovechkin, WSH, 39.1
6. Jonathan Quick, NYR, 38.7

7. Evgeni Malkin, PIT, 38.2
8. Derek Ryan, EDM, 37.8
9. Trevor Lewis, LAK, 37.8
10. Jack Johnson, CBJ, 37.8

10 youngest players in the NHL this season

1. Jett Luchanko, PHI, 18.2 years old
2. Macklin Celebrini, SJS, 18.3
3. Connor Bedard, CHI, 19.3
4. Zach Benson, BUF, 19.4
5. Will Smith, SJS, 19.6
6. Calum Ritchie, COL, 19.7
7. Leo Carlsson, ANA, 19.8
8. Matvei Michkov, PHI, 19.9
9. Samuel Honzek, CGY, 19.9
10. Adam Fantilli, CBJ, 20.0

NHL average height this season: 73.6 inches

Analysis: The league is creeping up on an average height of 6-foot-2, as teams continue to value length — especially in goal. The average netminder this season tops 6-3, the continuation of a trend where taller and taller athletes are getting the crease. (Exhibit A: Maple Leafs rookie Dennis Hildeby, all 6-foot-7 of him.)

I had to double-check the Bruins number to make sure it was right, as Boston really towers over everyone here, with a full half inch in height above the second-place team. No, I didn't accidentally include Zdeno Chara; bringing in 6-6 Nikita Zadorov and Riley Tuftte means the Bruins now have a remarkable 16 players listed at 6-3 or above. Even with Marchand bringing down the average, that's a tall team.

Vegas and Washington have long been near the top of this list; the Leafs, meanwhile, have been climbing this list under new management (and having two giants in goal doesn't hurt).

On the other side of things, Colorado has 12 players listed between 5-10 and 6 feet tall, surpassed only by the Kraken with 13. Jamie Oleksiak must be getting things off the top shelf in that dressing room.

10 tallest players in the NHL this season

1. Matt Rempe, NYR, 81 inches (6-foot-9)
2. Adam Klapka, CGY, 80
3. Tyler Myers, VAN, 80
4. Dennis Hildeby, TOR, 79
5. Mads Søgaard, OTT, 79

6. Ivan Fedotov, PHI, 79
7. Vincent Desharnais, VAN, 79
8. Jamie Oleksiak, SEA, 79
9. Victor Hedman, TBL, 79
10. Twenty players tied at 6-foot-6, including Jake Oettinger and Owen Power

10 shortest players in the NHL this season

1. Logan Stankoven, DAL, 68 inches (5-foot-8)
2. Daniil Gushchin, SJS, 68
3. Bobby Brink, PHI, 68
4. Cole Caufield, MTL, 68
5. Alex DeBrincat, DET, 68
6. Colin Blackwell, DAL, 68
7. Cameron Atkinson, TBL, 68
8. Mats Zuccarello, MIN, 68
9. Thirteen players tied at 5-foot-9, including Lane Hutson and Seamus Casey

NHL average weight this season: 201.1 lbs

Analysis: There's the Leafs again, this time at the top of the list. New netminder Anthony Stolarz being the heaviest goalie in the league is part of it, but the other factor is Matthew Knies just, well, eating his way into the power forward role (he's up to 227 pounds as a sophomore, with more room to grow).

Toronto has only four players listed under 199 pounds right now. And they'll get even heavier and taller once Jani Hakanpää is ready to return from a knee injury.

On the lighter side, the Canucks make a surprise appearance here despite having a lot of big boys on the back end in Tyler Myers, Vincent Desharnais, Derek Forbort and Carson Soucy. Led by 165-pounder Conor Garland, Vancouver has 12 players listed at under 195 pounds, including lanky goalie Kevin Lankinen (yes, pun intended), Elias Pettersson and Quinn Hughes.

10 heaviest players in the NHL this season

1. Jamie Oleksiak, SEA, 257 pounds
2. Matt Rempe, NYR, 255
3. Nikita Zadorov, BOS, 248
4. Nicolas Hague, VGK, 245
5. Victor Hedman, TBL, 245
6. Anthony Stolarz, TOR, 243
7. Adam Edström, NYR, 241
8. Arber Xhekaj, MTL, 240

9. Alex Ovechkin, WSH, 238

10. Austin Watson, DET, 238

10 lightest players in the NHL this season

1. Lane Hutson, MTL, 162

2. Seamus Casey, NJD, 162

3. Logan Stankoven, DAL, 165

4. Danil Gushchin, SJS, 165

5. Conor Garland, VAN, 165

6. Jared Spurgeon, MIN, 166

7. Dustin Wolf, CGY, 166

8. Albert Johansson, DET, 168

9. Bobby Brink, PHI, 169

10. Zach Benson, BUF, 170

NHL averages this season: Canadian 41.2%, American 28.6%, European 30.2%

Analysis: The rise of USA Hockey keeps showing up in this number, year after year.

Twenty years ago, only around 15 percent of NHL players were American. A decade ago, that had jumped to 23 percent. Now it's up again, this time approaching the level of all of the European nations combined.

That growth is obviously coming at the expense of Canadian players, which is happening for a couple of reasons.

No. 1 is simply population size, as the U.S. has nine times the people power. But the other big thing impacting this is simply participation in hockey. U.S. markets like Pittsburgh, Chicago, California, St. Louis, Washington D.C. and others have exploded over the last decade or two, offering more competition for spots in the pro game.

Minor hockey enrollment in Canada, meanwhile, has been stagnant for some time, in part due to cost reasons.

These trends are probably worth deeper analysis at some point later this season, especially as we ramp up for the return of international play with the NHL 4 Nations Face-Off in February and the Olympics in 2026. If you have suggestions on future stories that would look at how the demographics of the league have changed, let us know in the comments.

NHL averages this season: First-rounders 42.6%, Rounds 2+ 46.1%, Undrafted 11.3%

Analysis: I haven't done this type of analysis before, so I don't have historical comparables to look at, but I did find it interesting just to pull out the overall numbers.

The fact that nearly 43 percent of players are picked in the first round of the NHL Draft is telling, as is the realization more than 10 percent of the league wasn't drafted at all.

There are a lot of different ways to build a team in this league.

One thing that stood out with this part of the data is just how different goaltenders are. Only 9 percent of those in the league were drafted in the first round, as teams are often reluctant to use high picks on them. More than 15 percent of goalies weren't drafted at all, a group that includes recent Stanley Cup winner Sergei Bobrovsky and Alexandar Georgiev.

There were also a lot more mid- and late-round hits with netminders, with an incredible 20 percent of them picked in the fifth, sixth or seventh round. Only 10 percent of defensemen, by comparison, were found in those later rounds.

There's probably a fuller analysis that could be done on this data as part of one of our upcoming draft packages, as there's a lot to unpack here.



## The Athletic / 2021 NHL re-draft: Luke Hughes, Matty Beniers, Wyatt Johnston lead the class

By Corey Pronman- October 18, 2024

This is the third part of our series looking back at recent NHL Draft classes and at how my ordering of those players would change. The 2021 draft was a very difficult one to scout. Leagues were paused across the world, with many teams relying purely on underage viewings or sparse draft-season viewings. How this class ages will be very interesting, and to date, the results have been rather chaotic. Players eligible for this exercise had to be drafted in the draft class mentioned, regardless of their first year of eligibility.

Tier 1: Bubble elite and All-Star

1

Luke Hughes

D

4

New Jersey

The toolkit Luke Hughes has is rather special. He's an elite skater with size, who scored nearly 50 points as a rookie in the NHL. His defending and pure hockey sense are not the most inspiring elements of his play, but he has game-breaking abilities and his pure athleticism should allow him to be a sufficient pro defender. He projects as a true No. 1 defenseman.

Tier 2: NHL All-Stars

2

Matty Beniers

C

2

Seattle

3

Wyatt Johnston

C

23

Dallas

Matty Beniers took a step back this season offensively after winning the Calder last year, but I'm still a big believer in his long-term potential. He checks all the boxes between his skill, hockey sense, work ethic and ability to play at an NHL pace. He's not full of highlight reels, but he looks like a longtime big-minutes NHL center who will score and play tough minutes.

Wyatt Johnston has emerged as a premier young center in the NHL, especially after his recent playoff performance. He has a ton of skill, vision and natural scoring ability. He is super creative and is a highly competitive center who can play both ways despite being an average skater.

Tier 3: Bubble star and top of lineup

4

Mason McTavish

C

3

Anaheim

5

Owen Power

D

1

Buffalo

Mason McTavish and Owen Power are both excellent players at premium positions. McTavish has a lot of skill and a great motor, whereas Power is extremely mobile for a massive defenseman and can create offense, too. I don't think either will be a major point producer, but they can play big minutes in all situations.

Tier 4: Top-of-lineup player

6

Logan Stankoven

RW

47

Dallas

7

Dylan Guenther

RW

9

Utah

8

Matthew Knies

LW

57

Toronto

Logan Stankoven rockets up the boards after a great rookie pro season between the AHL and NHL with Dallas. He's very small, but otherwise checks every other box, often with emphasis. He has the speed and tenacity you'd want in a small forward who could have a long career, given how offensively talented he is.

Dylan Guenther and Matthew Knies also became important players for their NHL clubs this season. Guenther has always had all the tools, between his size, speed, skill and especially his shot. Knies' stock has risen a lot since his draft year when scouts questioned his skating and hockey sense. He's still not very fast, but he's shown much more offensive touch than some thought he would and, with his frame and high-end compete, has an excellent power game.

Tier 5: Bubble top and middle lineup

9

Brant Clarke

D

8

Los Angeles

10

Simon Edvinsson

D

6

Detroit

11

Kent Johnson

LW

5

Columbus

12

Jesper Wallstedt

G

20

Minnesota

13

William Eklund

LW

7

San Jose

Jesper Wallstedt versus Sebastian Cossa was a major debate during their draft year. Wallstedt seemed to be clearly in the lead for a couple of years post-draft, but Cossa closed the gap this past season. Wallstedt has been a more consistent and productive pro with notably superior hockey sense, but Cossa's natural athleticism is several notches stronger so it will be interesting to see who becomes better in five years.

Tier 6: Middle-of-the-lineup player

14

Cole Sillinger

C

12

Columbus

15

Caedan Bankier

C

86

Minnesota

16

Vincent Iorio

D

55

Washington

17

Logan Mailloux

D

31

Montreal

18

JJ Moser

D

60

Tampa Bay

19

Olen Zellweger

D

34

Anaheim

20

Matt Coronato

RW

13

Calgary

21

Brennan Othmann

LW

16

New York Rangers

22

Aaty Raty

C

52

Vancouver

23

Colton Dach

C

62

Chicago

24

Sebastian Cossa

G

15

Detroit

Cole Sillinger has a lot of NHL games after making Columbus at 18 years old. I'm unsure of his long-term projection, though. He has very good puck skills and plays with a lot of bite. I don't see his playmaking as a major asset, though, and he's an average-sized/average-skating forward. Despite his early success, his projection for me is as a third-line center; a highly likable one.

The depth of this draft could end up being an issue. Most players had abbreviated seasons or didn't play at all due to COVID-19 lockdowns. This age group was never the best to begin with, but it's interesting in that context to see how few legit players came out of this class. When you look at how many 'middle-of-the-lineup' players or better I project from this class, it's by far the least between the 2020-2024 classes.

Tier 7: Projected to play NHL games

25

Zack Ostapchuk

C

39

Ottawa

26

Fedor Svechkov

C

19

Nashville

27

Ilya Safonov

C

172

Chicago

28

Ryker Evans

D

35

Seattle

29

Ryan Ufko

D

115

Nashville

30

Ethan Del Mastro

D

105

Chicago

31

Carson Lambos

D

26

Minnesota

32

Nolan Allan

D

32

Chicago

33

Scott Morrow

D

40

Carolina

34

Zack Bolduc

LW

17

St. Louis

35

Mackie Samoskevich

RW

24

Florida

36

Jackson Blake

RW

109

Carolina

37

Tristan Broz

C

58

Pittsburgh

38

Carter Mazur

RW

70

Detroit

39

Chaz Lucius

C

18

Winnipeg

40

Ryan Winterton

C

67

Seattle

41

Oliver Kapanen

C

64

Montreal

42

Zakhar Bardakov

C

203

New Jersey

43

Shai Buium

D

36

Detroit

44

Ville Ottavainen

D



99

Seattle

45

Joshua Roy

RW

150

Montreal

46

Josh Doan

RW

37

Utah

47

Niko Huuhtanen

RW

224

Tampa Bay

48

Sam Lipkin

LW

223

Utah

49

Fabian Lysell

RW

21

Boston

Tier 8: Has a chance to play games

50

Xavier Bourgault

C

22

Ottawa

51

Ryder Korczak

C

75

New York Rangers

52

Zach Dean

C

30

St. Louis

53

Kirill Tankov

C

218

Pittsburgh

54

Sean Behrens

D

61

Colorado

55

Stanislav Svozil

D

69

Columbus

56

Jack Peart

D

54

Minnesota

57

Corson Ceulemans

D

25

Columbus

58

Kirill Kirsanov

D

84

Los Angeles

59

Daniil Chayka

D

38

Vegas

60

Isak Rosen

RW

14

Buffalo

61

Shane Lachance

LW

186

Edmonton

62

Owen McLaughlin

C

206

Philadelphia

63

Simon Robertsson

LW

71

St. Louis

64

Tyler Boucher

RW

10

Ottawa

65

Josh Bloom

LW

95

Vancouver

66

William Stromgren

LW

45

Calgary

67

Chase Stillman

RW

29

New Jersey

68

Ilya Fedotov

LW

43

Utah

69

Nikita Chibrikov

RW

50

Winnipeg

70

Oskar Olausson

RW

28

Colorado

71

Justin Robidas

C

147

Carolina

72

Prokhor Poltapov

LW

33

Buffalo

73

Francesco Pinelli

C

42

Los Angeles

74

Brett Harrison

C

85

Boston

75

Jakub Brabenec

C

102

Vegas

76

Simon Knak

RW

179

Nashville

77

Jakub Demek

C

128

Vegas

78

Emil Lilleberg

D

107

Tampa Bay

79

Topias Vilen

D

129

New Jersey

80

Tyson Hinds

D

76

Anaheim

81

Nikita Novikov

D

188

Buffalo

82

Evgenii Kashnikov

D

199

San Jose

83

Ville Koivunen

RW

51

Pittsburgh

84

Zachary L'Heureux

LW

27

Nashville

85

Dmitri Rashevsky

RW

146

Winnipeg

86

James Malatesta

LW

133

Columbus

87

Andre Gasseau

LW

213

Boston

88

Lucas Ciona

LW

173

Calgary

89

Jaroslav Chmelar

RW

144

New York Rangers

90

Eetu Liukas

LW

157

New York Islanders

91

Samu Tuomaala

RW

46

Philadelphia

92

Jakub Malek

G

100

New Jersey

93

Kirill Gerasimyyuk

G

152

Florida

94

Tristan Lennox

G

93

New York Islanders

95

Talyn Boyko

G

112

New York Rangers

96

Matvey Petrov

LW

180

Edmonton

97



Danila Klimovich

RW

41

Vancouver

## [The Athletic / What's next for the CHL? Latest on NCAA decision, expansion, draft age changes, Memorial Cup](#)

**By Scott Wheeler- October 19, 2024**

TORONTO — On Wednesday and Thursday, owners for nearly all of the CHL's 60 clubs — or a senior representative on their behalf — gathered at Toronto's Sheraton Gateway Hotel for what the league is calling its "Meeting of the Members."

The two-day event, organized by CHL president Dan MacKenzie and his leagues' three new commissioners — OHL commissioner Bryan Crawford, who began in August, WHL commissioner Dan Near, who began in February, and QMJHL commissioner Mario Cecchini, whose 18 months on the job make him the longest-tenured of the trio — marks the first time all three leagues and their teams have gathered together en masse in more than two decades.

It also comes at a critical juncture for Canadian major junior hockey as the NCAA mulls over opening up eligibility for CHL players to play in college hockey.

The Athletic went to the meetings to sit down with MacKenzie, all three commissioners and multiple owners to discuss a range of topics ranging from the health of the leagues, the new leadership, the upcoming CHL USA Prospects Challenge, W5's report this week on a new allegation of sexual assault within the OHL, the NCAA's looming decision, the 2025 Memorial Cup in Rimouski, and even expansion and potential changes to the leagues' drafts.

The NCAA elephant in the room

Earlier this month, the NCAA's Division I Council began discussions at its October meeting about aligning college hockey's rules governing pre-enrolment activity with those in other college sports. A final decision on the proposal, which could include removing language which has designated Canadian major junior hockey league players as professionals and ineligible to play NCAA hockey, could be made as early as the council's next meeting in November and implemented for August 1, 2025, opening the NCAA to CHL players for the 2025-26 season.

It, and its implications, were top of mind in the CHL's meetings this week.

There seems to be optimism and even excitement about what it could mean for the leagues.

"We see ourselves as the best development option for kids between 16-20 and anytime we don't get a high-end kid we're disappointed. And we'd argue that in a lot of cases they've been making the decision to go elsewhere to preserve NCAA eligibility, and in theory that wouldn't happen and all of the best players would play in the best league, which I think checks out for us," Near said. "We're not arrogant. We don't necessarily think that every player will play in the WHL through their 20-year-old year but we believe that the strong majority will. And we're not just going to sit here and rest on our laurels, we're going to react."

All three commissioners said they're happy players and their families won't have to make a decision about their future at 15 years old if the NCAA opens up eligibility.

"It's a tremendous opportunity for young players and their families," Crawford said. "We think it's going to be incredibly positive for our league and for the growth of hockey and the development pathway for hockey players."

Sarnia Sting owner and president of hockey operations David Legwand knows that decision firsthand as an American-born former NHL player who chose to play for the Plymouth Whalers in the OHL.

“I think guys think about it maybe too much. There’s a route for everybody and picking that route is hard. It’s a lifelong decision and to do it at such a young age is difficult. And you don’t ever want to see anybody make the wrong decision. If the rules do change, it’ll help kids out and maybe extend that life decision a couple of years and give kids the best opportunity to see where they end up,” Legwand said.

“Obviously the landscape’s going to change and we’ve got to keep up with the times and evolve, but it’s exciting for everybody — the kids, the players, the NCAA, our league, wherever kids are going it’s good. We want kids playing hockey. It gets back to the grassroots. It’s going to be the kids’ decision. Every league wants the best kids but that’s going to come about through recruitment and seeing your facilities and getting them involved to want to be a part of your team.”

Mackenzie said the CHL’s pitch won’t change, but they’re not going to necessarily sit still either.

“Our league is the best league in the world. We’re pretty confident that we’re going to be a destination. (But) we understand that we’re going to have to be open to change,” MacKenzie said.

Cecchini said he welcomes it for the QMJHL.

“We’ve had many calls since the rumors started with players, and parents, and agents, of ‘Can we come back?’ which goes to the reason that the only reason they went around our league was because they had decided to go to a U.S. college,” the QMJHL commissioner said. “And now we can attract Americans. We are very optimistic to attract the best of the best in our league and I think we will benefit from it, but the devil is in the details so we’ll see how they write it.”

Those details include whether a player who is signed to an NHL contract will remain ineligible (which Cecchini expects will be the case, though he also acknowledged “it’s not our rules, so it’s up to them”) and whether the NHL’s collective bargaining agreement, which is up in Sept. 2026, will align the signing rights for CHL players to line up with those of the NCAA: as it stands, NHL clubs retain the rights to drafted CHL players for two years but NCAA players for four.

“My first phone call to Bill Daly was actually understanding from him how CHL guys have two years to sign and NCAA guys have four years and even five years in Europe in some cases,” Cecchini said. “These are all things that are on the table right now and that paradigm shift is going to make us move a little bit quicker and forward towards the future.”

Notably, the NHL-CHL agreement, which governs the relationship between the two levels, is in place for “several years” beyond the expiry of the NHL’s CBA. Crawford said he hasn’t yet been in touch with the NHL about some of the particulars but that those conversations will come. For now, the OHL wants to let things play out organically over time to assess some of the impacts.

Mackenzie did have a call with officials from USports last week to discuss what some CHL players going the NCAA route after their junior careers could mean for Canadian university hockey, though.

“USports offers academically fantastic educational opportunities and the NCAA is not for everybody,” MacKenzie said. “USports should still provide a great opportunity for a lot of kids to play university hockey.”

Cecchini also clarified that right now, the scholarship money promised to players can be used for tuition “wherever (players) want in the world” and that “NCAA schools will become part of what (they) can look at.”

He has raised concerns specific to Quebec about French-language schooling options for their players, though, and has expressed that he'd like for the scholarship money to stay in the QMJHL's territories — which, he pointed out, also includes top programs like the University of New Brunswick and others across eastern Canada.

"We only have one French university in the province of Quebec, so we have to develop university hockey in Quebec as well," Cecchini said. "We've got two big English (universities), McGill and Concordia, who have to play with Ontario. It's not chauvinistic, it just makes good sense that you want to keep the brains that will build the future of our country here. (A French kid's) looking at a sea of English options."

Expansion?

Last week, as talk swirled around the NCAA's decision, I got the following text from a head coach in the USHL: "My hope is we can create one super junior league. I think this is a great opportunity to make hockey unbelievable in junior. Imagine having 32-36 teams across North America that is a mini NHL."

I don't think the half of the CHL's members who wouldn't be included in a league of that size would feel very good about that idea, but I did ask MacKenzie and Crawford expansion — specifically if, in whatever comes next, they'd be open to potentially adding more markets in the U.S.

They didn't rule it out.

Crawford has a lot on his plate in the early days of his tenure, with visits to all 20 OHL markets to complete (he got 25 percent of the way there with a trip to Barrie on Thursday night after the meetings), new arenas in the works in markets like Sudbury and Ottawa, and still-new teams in Brantford and Brampton.

But when asked if he'd thought at all about expansion yet, he answered simply, "Yeah."

"I think we absolutely need to be open to all sorts of opportunities to expand our business, whether that be broadcasting and media partnerships or potentially expansion as well and looking at opportunities to grow our league," said Crawford. "Those are things that we have to be consistently and constantly exploring and considering."

Though expansion happens at the league level with approval from their own board of governors, the CHL does also have approval and MacKenzie said he believes they should all keep an open mind about whatever comes after the NCAA's decision.

"We will have larger discussions and who knows what opportunities are going to present themselves through the initial dust settling if the rules do change," MacKenzie said. "It might create some opportunities that we haven't thought of, but right now we're not focused on them. Each of the leagues are looking at their league and the implications of expanding, the player pool, the right markets and the right buildings. This kind of a change could create opportunities, but it's too early to say what those are going to be."

Draft age changes?

A coach in the Big Ten conference also told me last week that he'd heard "rumours" the CHL might want to move its draft age to 15 in order to pivot towards having "the best 15-to-18-year-olds."

The WHL's bantam age (15U) draft is already set a year ahead of the OHL's (where players are selected after their minor midget, or 16U, season) and the QMJHL's (midget AAA, or 18U, is the more predominant level in Quebec minor hockey but its draft age, like the OHL's, is 16).

Crawford said lowering the OHL's draft age is "certainly a possibility."

“I don’t think that any of us are closed off to any of the possibilities and that includes the draft potentially being earlier,” Crawford said. “That’s also part of what we’ve been looking at as a group in the CHL is ‘do those sorts of things need to be aligned and harmonized so that we all have the same draft rules and those sorts of things?’ I think there’s an incredible number of considerations that need to be looked at that have far-reaching ramifications of a change like this (from the NCAA).”

#### Inaugural CHL USA Prospects Challenge

We’re a little more than a month out from the CHL USA Prospects Challenge, a new two-game series between the top draft-eligible players in the CHL and the U18 team at USA Hockey’s NTDP.

London and Oshawa will host this year’s games and it sounds like two WHL markets will get next year’s, followed by the QMJHL the following year. There is a fourth-year option for games in the United States, either in Plymouth, Mich., at the NTDP or potentially in an American CHL market.

The new partnership came out of a mutual desire to fill a void of best-on-best hockey between Canada and the United States at the U18 level. Right now, Canada sends its best to the Hlinka Gretzky Cup while the NTDP is between cycles, and the United States sends its best to U18 worlds while the CHL playoffs are ongoing. But the CHL also heard from the NHL that it would like to see the two sides’ prospects play in games.

While the CHL team could feature some American and European draft eligibles and some in the USHL have expressed frustrations that the U.S. side of the equation will be just the NTDP team, the hope is the two games will tug on the Canada-U.S. rivalry and offer a more competitive setting than the now-defunct CHL/NHL Top Prospects Game did.

Expect the CHL to announce its roster early next week.

#### Memorial Cup preparations in full swing

Alexandre Tanguay was the youngest owner in the CHL and one of the youngest in all of sports when his legendary grandfather, Maurice, passed down his majority stake in the Rimouski Oceanic to him at just 22 years old — while he was still finishing his finance major at the University of Quebec in 2015.

Almost a decade later, the now-31-year-old is still the youngest owner in the league and has successfully won the hosting rights for May’s Memorial Cup.

As part of Rimouski’s pitch, Tanguay put together a business plan which promised an affordable Memorial Cup for “every little family in Eastern Quebec.” Now, a little over two weeks after making full-tournament ticket packages available at a price point around \$500 (the cheapest in 15 years), they’ve sold out. They don’t expect an empty seat in the house for any game, including those Rimouski aren’t playing in, as they celebrate 30 years of history.

There could be some big names in town, too. Vincent Lecavalier and Brad Richards (who is a part of the organizing committee), for sure.

And maybe, just maybe, Sidney Crosby — who brought the Stanley Cup to Rimouski — and Alexis Lafrenière.

“I mentioned to a couple of my partners over the last couple of days in Toronto that I couldn’t have the conversation with Sidney yet because that would mean that he wouldn’t be in the Stanley Cup playoffs,” Tanguay said, laughing. “Everybody who knows Sidney knows you can’t go there with him but I’m sure that he’s going to be able to be with us.”

A new accusation of sexual assault

Though MacKenzie has been at the helm of the CHL for five years now, his new slate of commissioners, two of whom are in their first full season, spoke a lot this week about a clean slate and a desire to do some things differently.

“It’s a chaotic time and the landscape is really hectic as people are trying to figure out, ‘Hey, what does the development path of junior hockey players look like?’” Near said. “And it’s such a massive undertaking around ‘How do we take this thing to the next level?’ And I couldn’t be more excited to be doing it with two new commissioners and this notion that we’re all starting from scratch and we don’t have any preconceived notions. There’s not a lot of baggage, there’s not a lot of tension or history or things that get us too worked up.”

Beyond the NCAA’s ruling, it’s been a busy, tumultuous few years for the CHL and its leagues.

Cecchini is the QMJHL’s commissioner because commissioner Of 37 years Gilles Courteau resigned in March of 2023 amid a hazing scandal that rose to Quebec’s legislature. That season, attendance dropped and the QMJHL hit a low in players selected in the NHL draft.

This summer, two former QMJHL players were handed jail sentences for sexually assaulting a minor at a hotel in June 2021 after the Victoriaville Tigres championship.

“I’ve tried to rebuild the reputation that was hurt back in March of 2023,” Cecchini said.

He has also reduced the QMJHL schedule from 68 to 64 games, changed the league’s name and overseen a ban on fighting.

Their draftees were up in 2024 over 2023. The league’s finances are starting to bounce back post-pandemic as well, and they haven’t seen a reduction in sponsorship money in line with the reduction in games, according to Cecchini. Attendance was back up last year and is up year-over-year more than 10 percent into this season so far.

But in the OHL, another accusation of sexual assault hit the league in the midst of this week’s meetings after Rick Westhead and W5 spoke with a woman who alleges that she was sexually assaulted by 19-year-old player and seven other OHL players in November 2014.

Crawford said the league learned about it when the story was aired on Wednesday and that “it wasn’t something that anyone in our league or with our teams had been aware of.”

“Obviously, we take it incredibly seriously,” he said. “It takes a lot for someone to come forward that has been a victim of sexual violence and our job is to take that seriously and cooperate with any investigations that occur as we move forward. ... We talk about the things that we can control and what we’ve been doing and investing in for nearly a decade when it comes to our ONSIDE program and these sorts of educational programs that we’ve put in place for our players and for our teams that have sought to address these sorts of issues so that we’re developing outstanding young people and community leaders. That’s ultimately our top priority. We were completely shocked like everybody.”

## The Athletic / 2020 NHL re-draft: Tim Stützle, Jake Sanderson give Ottawa one-two punch

By Corey Pronman- October 19, 2024

In the final part of our series looking back at recent draft classes and seeing how my order of those players has changed, we conclude with the 2020 NHL Draft. With the most time between now and then of the four classes we've done, we would expect a lot to change and a lot more firm answers to be coming on who the real players are.

Tier 1: Elite NHL Player

1

Tim Stützle

C

3

Ottawa

There was a clear top three going into the 2020 draft, led by Alexis Lafrenière and then a debate for second best between Quinton Byfield and Tim Stützle. In the years since the draft, all three remain excellent players who project to have long, productive NHL careers. Stützle has separated from the pack though. He is such an elite skater, with a ton of natural skill and offensive instincts to go with a strong compete level. He looks like a true long-term star forward.

Tier 2: NHL All-Stars

2

Jake Sanderson

D

5

Ottawa

3

Alexis Lafrenière

LW

1

New York Rangers

It was a banner draft for Ottawa, as they picked the top two players in the draft in Stützle and Jake Sanderson. Sanderson may not be an ideal PP1 type of defenseman, but he's shown more offense early on in the NHL than some of his bigger backers could have hoped for to go with his great skating and defending.

Lafrenière had his best NHL season to date including a great playoff run for the Rangers. His so-so skating held him back initially as he needed time to gain strength and adjust to NHL pace, but now that he has, his elite skill and hockey sense can take over.

Tier 3: Bubble star and top of lineup

4

Alexander Nikishin

D

69

Carolina

5

Seth Jarvis

RW

13

Carolina

This was a great draft for Carolina. Their first-round pick Seth Jarvis developed well into an important part of their lineup. He's small, but full of speed and energy, has very good offensive skills and can play in the hard areas of the ice despite his size. Alexander Nikishin has yet to play an NHL game, but given his dominance in the KHL, I'm more than comfortable rating him this highly. His toolkit is unique given his big frame to go with strong mobility, skill and a highly physical brand of hockey. He has every trait you want in an NHL defenseman and when he does eventually come over, I expect him to have a long and productive career.

Tier 4: Top of lineup player

6

Lucas Raymond

LW

4

Detroit

7

Quinton Byfield

LW

2

Los Angeles

8

Anton Lundell

C

12

Florida

9



Brock Faber

D

45

Minnesota

10

Jack Quinn

RW

8

Buffalo

Anton Lundell isn't the flashiest player in the world, but he has a Stanley Cup and has played real minutes on a contender in recent years. The debate in his draft year was how much offense he would have as his skating and skill didn't truly stand out, but he always played up levels and excelled. He has shown enough offense versus men to go with his strong two-way play to look like a legit big-minute NHL center.

Brock Faber is one of the biggest risers from this age group, as he's become a true top-pair defenseman in the NHL who just got paid a lot of money. He's an excellent skater and competitor, whose offensive output was way higher than expected in the NHL than what he had shown as an amateur.

Tier 5: Bubble top and middle lineup

11

Marco Rossi

C

9

Minnesota

12

Braden Schneider

D

19

New York Rangers

13

Yaroslav Askarov

G

11

Nashville

14

Dawson Mercer

C

18

New Jersey

15

JJ Peterka

RW

34

Buffalo

16

Jamie Drysdale

D

6

Philadelphia

17

Kaiden Guhle

D

16

Montreal

JJ Peterka has been very good as a pro. He's a highly skilled winger who skates well and can score, but his compete has allowed him to hold his own versus NHL defenders despite his size. Jamie Drysdale's stock has fallen a bit after he was so highly touted in his draft year. He's still the elite skater we saw in junior, but the offense hasn't come in the NHL as hoped even if he does move the puck well.

Tier 6: Middle of the lineup player

18

Connor Zary

C

24

Calgary

19

Cole Perfetti

LW

10

Winnipeg

20

Luke Evangelista

RW

42

Nashville

21

Shakir Mukhamadullin

D

20

San Jose

22

Ridly Greig

C

28

Ottawa

23

Mason Lohrei

D

58

Boston

24

Justin Barron

D

25

Montreal

25

Lukas Reichel

LW

17

Chicago

26

Dylan Holloway

LW

14

St. Louis

27

Tyson Foerster

RW

23

Philadelphia

28

Jake Neighbours

LW

26

St. Louis

29

Hendrix Lapierre

C

22

Washington

30

Will Cuyllé

LW

60

New York Rangers

Luke Evangelista and Mason Lohrei were both picked in the second round but have looked quite good as pros and could have significant NHL careers. Evangelista fell due to his size and skating, but he's shown to have legit NHL skill and sense on top of playing hard and getting to the hard areas to create offense.

Lohrei was a re-entry defenseman who tantalized due to his skill in a big frame, but there were concerns over his skating and defending. He's shown himself to be not only skilled but very skilled, so he's been able to overcome those skating concerns by just how many plays he makes with the puck.

Tier 7: Projected to play NHL games

31

Mavrik Bourque

C

30

Dallas

32

Isaak Phillips

D

141

Chicago

33

Alex Laferriere

RW

83

Los Angeles

34

Yegor Chinakhov

LW

21

Columbus

35

Matt Rempe

RW

165

New York Rangers

36

Devon Levi

G

212

Buffalo

37

Thomas Bordeleau

C

38

San Jose

38

Marat Khusnutdinov

C

37

Minnesota

39

Nils Åman

C

167

Vancouver

40

Tyler Kleven

D

44

Ottawa

41

Brendan Brisson

LW

29

Vegas

42

Alexander Holtz

RW

7

Vegas

43

Aatu Jämsen

RW

190

Los Angeles

44

Leevi Meriläinen

G

71

Ottawa

45

Drew Comesso

G

46

Chicago

Alexander Holtz has been one of the bigger letdowns so far from this draft. He was a very exciting player to watch due to his skill level and ability to score goals from range. He could pull you out of your seat, but his game lacked pace and he plays too much on the perimeter. The result was his skill didn't translate to the NHL like some hoped it would.

Tier 8: Has a chance to play games

46

Topi Niemelä

D

64

Toronto

47

Emil Andrae

D

54

Philadelphia

48

Ronan Seeley

D

208

Carolina

49

Samuel Knazko

D

78

Columbus

50

Daemon Hunt

D

65

Minnesota

51

Ian Moore

D

67

Anaheim

52

Jérémie Poirier

D

72

Calgary

53

Alex Jefferies

LW

121

New York Islanders

54

Mikael Pyyhtiä

LW

114

Columbus

55

Luke Tuch

LW

47

Montreal

56

Emil Heineman

LW

43

Montreal

57

Riley Duran

RW

182

Boston



58

Danil Gushchin

LW

76

San Jose

59

Maxim Groshev

RW

85

Tampa Bay

60

Joel Blomqvist

G

52

Pittsburgh

61

Ryan Tverberg

C

213

Toronto

62

Jack Finley

C

57

Tampa Bay

63

Vasily Ponomarev

C

53

Pittsburgh

64

Wyatt Kaiser

D

81

Chicago

65

Matt Kessel

D

150

St. Louis

66

William Wallinder

D

32

Detroit

67

Yan Kuznetsov

D

50

Calgary

68

Lukas Cormier

D

68

Vegas

69

Justin Sourdif

RW

87

Florida

70

Sean Farrell

LW

124

Montreal

71

Brett Berard  
LW  
134  
New York Rangers  
72  
Landon Slaggert  
LW  
79  
Chicago  
73  
Jackson Hallum  
LW  
91  
Vegas  
74  
Dylan Peterson  
RW  
86  
St. Louis  
75  
Yegor Sokolov  
RW  
61  
Utah  
76  
Nico Daws  
G  
84  
New Jersey  
77  
Hugo Ollas  
G  
197

New York Rangers

78

Rémi Poirier

G

185

Dallas

79

Luke Prokop

D

73

Nashville

80

William Dufour

RW

152

New York Islanders

81

Roby Järventie

LW

33

Edmonton

82

Sam Colangelo

RW

36

Anaheim

83

Bogdan Trineev

RW

117

Washington

84

Maksim Berezkin

LW

138

Edmonton

## The Athletic / Nobody believes in Sam Reinhart, and other lessons from the NHL prediction contest

By Sean McIndoe- October 19, 2024

Every year, right before the season starts, I run a prediction contest for readers. I come up with 10 simple questions about what's about to happen — which teams will and won't make the playoffs, which jobs are safe, which players will have good seasons, that sort of thing. You send in your answers, and we throw it all into a big database and wait.

It's one of my favorite posts of the year for two reasons. The first is you guys are inevitably terrible at predicting the season, and I get to make fun of you all year for it while feeling better about my own equally terrible predictions. That's the main reason.

But there's a bonus to this sort of thing, in that it also functions as a stealth survey of where fans are at heading into a season. I don't know too many places where you can get this sort of volume of hockey fan opinions. It's not a truly unbiased poll because it's self-selected instead of random and I think we can all agree my readers are smarter than everyone else's. But it's pretty close, and it can be interesting to dig into the data and see what the wider hockey world seems to be thinking.

That's what we're going to do today. We'll take this year's contest and crack open the books to see what kind of insight we can find. We did this last year, when nobody knew what to make of the Bruins. Let's see where your heads were at this time around.

The teams

The first three questions are all about team success, or lack thereof. And as usual, some clear tiers start to form.

When it comes to who's definitely making the playoffs, you're almost unanimous on the Oilers. The Stars aren't far behind, followed by the Rangers, Panthers, Avalanche and Maple Leafs, before a drop-off to the Hurricanes and Devils. Among teams who made it last year, you didn't have much confidence in the Canucks, Golden Knights, Jets or even the new-look Predators. But they all did better than the Capitals, who didn't show up on a single entry. Meanwhile, the Islanders were picked just once, by Matthew S., which ties them in the confidence rankings with, uh, the NFL's Carolina Panthers.

As far as the teams you felt had no shot, the Sharks were the runaway leaders, appearing on almost every entry. The Blue Jackets and Ducks were right behind, followed by the Blackhawks, Canadiens and Flames — that last pick already has 559 of you sweating a hot start. There's a big drop-off from there down to teams like the Flyers, Sabres, Kraken and Blues. And sure enough, we do see the Capitals show up here, finishing with more votes than 2023-24 misses like the Red Wings, Penguins and Wild. If you're a Washington fan feeling that "nobody believes in us" energy, we've got your proof that you're right.

The third question asks you to name teams that will fall into the middle 16, which is to say the dreaded mushy middle. There's far less consensus here, with no runaway leaders and a smoother drop that defies any obvious tiers. But in an example of staying on-brand, our leader here is the Wild, who edged out the Islanders for top spot. Other teams you feel decidedly meh about include the Red Wings, Penguins, Kings, Blues, Senators and, yes, the Capitals. The best team to top 200 entries was the Jets, whose 110 points last year apparently didn't impress anyone.

Finally, maybe the most interesting thing we can find in the team section is something you're not directly asked about. By combing the answers to all three questions, we can see which teams show up on the

fewest entries overall — which is to say, the ones you have the least confidence in predicting. Last year, that team was the Bruins. This year, it's ... well, the Bruins again, who appeared on just 103 entries. That puts them narrowly ahead of the Canucks (118), the Golden Knights (131) and a team that surprised me: the Devils, who had just 147 mentions. There's plenty of Stanley Cup hype around this team despite last year's playoff miss, but you don't seem all that sure about buying it.

#### The hot seats

Questions 4 and 5 ask you to name five coaches and GMs whose jobs you feel are safe between now and July 1 without using recent hires, and it's another case where the names you don't offer are as interesting as the ones you do.

In terms of coaches, your top picks for job security aren't surprising: Paul Maurice, Jared Bednar, Rod Brind'Amour and Jon Cooper, then a small drop-off down to Peter DeBoer, Martin St. Louis and Rick Tocchet. Maybe St. Louis is a mild surprise, given he already has some tenure and his team isn't expected to be very good, but it's hard to argue with any of the picks, even as history tells us somebody from that list will be this year's Lindy Ruff.

Among eligible answers, one name emerged as the runaway leader in terms of the least confidence: Detroit's Derek Lalonde, who only showed up on 16 entries. That was a third as much support as anyone in the next group, which included Mike Sullivan, Andre Tourigny, Ryan Huska and Greg Cronin. For what it's worth, the bottom four picks from last year's contest — D.J. Smith, Craig Berube, Lane Lambert and Rick Bowness — all ended up moving on, so you guys are pretty good at this. Maybe don't make any long-term plans in Detroit, Derek.

On the GM side, Bill Zito was the runaway winner in terms of your confidence. He appeared on 874 entries for a lead of over 300 on the next tier, which included Jim Nill, Julien BriseBois, Kyle Davidson and Chris MacFarland. Somewhat surprisingly, only 171 of you picked Blues GM Doug Armstrong, even though the team has already announced its plans to have him keep the job through 2026 before giving way to Alex Steen.

As with the coaches, there was a clear pick for the name with the least job security — Buffalo's Kevyn Adams, who was named by only 10 of you. Other GMs who should apparently worry include Kevin Cheveldayoff, Lou Lamoriello, Bill Armstrong and Rob Blake.

And finally, in what is now an annual tradition, we have to shout out the multiple entries who picked Joe Sakic, who hasn't been the Avalanche GM since July 2022 but still gets votes every year. We're down to just five entries this year, which is progress. Hey, that's only half a Kevyn Adams.

#### The players

The question about goalies starting at least 50 games had nearly the same big five answers as last year: Igor Shesterkin, Connor Hellebuyck, Jake Oettinger and Juuse Saros, with a healthy Andrei Vasilevskiy reclaiming a spot and Ilya Sorokin dropping down the list. No surprises there.

The always dangerous Calder question had the predictable two near-unanimous picks in Macklin Celebrini and Matvei Michkov, and then Logan Stankoven coming in at just over 800 entries before a steep drop to Cutter Gauthier, Lane Hutson and Will Smith. Shout out to Dylan H. for being the only entry to name Devils defenseman Seamus Casey, who started the year with three goals in his first six games.

The Norris question had Cale Makar as another near-unanimous pick, followed by Adam Fox, Quinn Hughes and Roman Josi and then a drop down to Miro Heiskanen and Evan Bouchard. What caught my eye here were the three players who were top 10 finishers in last year's Norris balloting but didn't have

much support from contest entrants: Noah Dobson (67 mentions), Gustav Forsling (26) and Josh Morrissey (just 25). At least they all did better than 2023 winner Erik Karlsson, who was mentioned just five times.

For the Hart Trophy, Connor McDavid's 1,214 mentions were the most of any answer to any question. Auston Matthews and Nathan MacKinnon both clear 1,000 as well, before a big drop down to Nikita Kucherov (502). You'll note that our top four looks suspiciously like the top four in last year's Hart balloting, so I'm sure nothing can go wrong for all of you here. The next names up were David Pastrnak, Jack Hughes and Leon Draisaitl.

It's always fun to keep scrolling on the Hart question and find the guys who had extremely limited (but non-zero!) support. This year's list includes two entries each for Jack Eichel and Steven Stamkos, and one each for J.T. Miller, Chris Kreider and Clayton Keller. Oh, and also two for Luke Hughes, presumably from people mixing him up with brother Jack but maybe from a pair of entrants who just really think our first blue line Hart winner since Chris Pronger in 2000 is going to be a 21-year-old with 49 career points.

#### The hot stove

The 10th question asks you to predict players who'll switch teams between now and July 1 and rarely sees much consensus. That held true again this year, with Frank Vatrano leading the field with just 404 mentions. Other popular choices include Cody Ceci, Anthony Mantha, David Savard and Nikolaj Ehlers. A sparse 75 of you are still holding out hope on Trevor Zegras, 42 have the Rangers finally moving Kaapo Kakko, and 39 think Mitch Marner is on the way out in Toronto. Meanwhile, the dreaded early season extension probably spells doom for the 22 of you who had Linus Ullmark and the eight with Jeremy Swayman.

Also, exactly one of you thinks Pierre-Luc Dubois will wear out his welcome and be on the move yet again, and history says you're probably right. Other big names getting a single mention include Karlsson, Drew Doughty and Kirill Kaprizov. And Avalanche fans will be happy to know that only one of you thinks pending UFA Mikko Rantanen will actually be on the move.

#### The bonus

The optional all-or-nothing bonus question got a revamp this year, asking you to name a player who'd score 50 goals but isn't Auston Matthews. Just under two-thirds of you took the bait, but you couldn't settle on a consensus answer.

The top name ended up being David Pastrnak, with just under 300 mentions. The next most common answers were Draisaitl, McDavid, MacKinnon, Kaprizov and Rantanen, with nobody else topping 20 entries. As always, a few of you tried to stake out your territory with unique answers here; names with exactly one mention included Michkov, Jordan Kyrou and Wyatt Johnston.

What stands out here is how little faith you all have in two of last year's surprise members of the 50-goal club. Zach Hyman was mentioned just 12 times, despite a breakout 54-goal campaign last season and a spot on McDavid's wing. But that was a better showing than Sam Reinhart, whose 57 goals ranked second in the league last year — he was only mentioned twice, tying him with names like Kyle Connor, Tim Stützle and Cole Caufield. Sorry Sam, hopefully that \$69 million extension offers some consolation.

Finally, let's tip our caps to Brian B., the only entrant whose bonus answer for the player who'll score 50 goals and isn't Auston Matthews was ... Auston Matthews. It's my contest and I can make up the rules, so I've decided that if Matthews gets to 100 goals this year, I'll count this one as correct for our pal Brian. As a wise man once said, I say he does it.



## The Athletic / What we're seeing from each NHL team early in the 2024-25 season

**By The Athletic NHL Staff- October 20, 2024**

It's early. Very early.

NHL teams have only played between three and seven games in the 2024-25 season.

Still, that's enough to make an early impression of how this season and standings could shape up. Whether it's a star player's resurgence or the solution to a hole in the lineup, there is plenty to take away from a team's first handful of games.

This week, The Athletic asked its NHL staff for one thing they're seeing from each team so far. Here's what they said.

### Anaheim Ducks

Mixed results from their talented youth: With just three games played entering Friday, the Ducks don't have a large sample size to have any major trends emerge. But they've gone into this season with eight players 23 years of age or younger who could have regular roles. (And that doesn't include 24-year-old goalie Lukas Dostal). Pavel Mintyukov has been logging big minutes on defense and is coming off his first two-goal game. On the other hand, Tristan Luneau and Olen Zellweger have had shaky moments on the back end. Jackson LaCombe has been dealing with an illness but figures to get in the lineup after a terrific training camp. Up front, Leo Carlsson got his first overtime winner Wednesday against Utah. Trevor Zegras and Mason McTavish didn't click in their first two games together but appeared to generate some traction with veteran Robby Fabbri. Cutter Gauthier has started slowly and sat for long stretches Wednesday. Moments of advancement and schooling are to be expected.

### Boston Bruins

Jeremy Swayman has work to do: It was always going to be this way, even before Swayman spent all of training camp unsigned. He lost partner Linus Ullmark. Swayman would have to adjust, physically and mentally, to the workload of being the clear-cut No. 1 goalie. Once he signed, Swayman had to manage the pressure of his eight-year, \$66 million contract. Given all that, it's natural that Swayman has not looked like himself. He is behind.

### Buffalo Sabres

Special teams sinking them: The Sabres are 1-4-1 to start the season, and their play on special teams is a big reason why. Buffalo has started the season 0-for-17 on the power play and also has the seventh-worst penalty kill in the NHL. There are quite a few issues with the Sabres, but none is as glaring as their inability to score on the man advantage. After finishing 29th on the power play last season, the Sabres haven't shown any signs of figuring it out under new coach Lindy Ruff.

### Calgary Flames

Martin Pospisil is a center: It was not on many bingo cards to start the season. Even head coach Ryan Huska wasn't sure what to expect when he put Pospisil at center during training camp. But through the first juncture of the season, he's near the top of the Flames' leaderboard in points and has somehow become a viable option alongside Jonathan Huberdeau. The Flames are the league's biggest surprise. Pospisil can make a case to be the team's biggest reason why. — Julian McKenzie

### Carolina Hurricanes

Sputtering special teams: It's early, but the Hurricanes' special teams have been iffy in the first two games of the season. Carolina can't be faulted for allowing a five-on-three goal late against the Devils on Tuesday — especially when it killed off the remaining five-on-four to help secure the team's first win of the season — but the Hurricanes have still allowed three goals in nine opportunities entering Friday night's game. More concerning is the power play, which was 0-for-5 and produced just two shots on goal in 7:40 with the man advantage. They did score two power-play goals Friday night vs. the Penguins so they can only hope that this is the start of a turnaround.

#### Chicago Blackhawks

The Blackhawks more resemble an NHL team: The Blackhawks went out this offseason after a couple of dismal seasons and added a number of NHL veterans. That's showing up on the ice. We'll see how good this team is, but it's definitely playing with more structure and predictability.

#### Colorado Avalanche

Defensively, things aren't as bad as they look: The Avalanche have given up nearly two more goals per game than the next-worst team through the first couple of weeks of the season, but underlying defensive metrics suggest things aren't as bad as they seem. Colorado isn't playing great defense, but the goaltending struggles are magnifying every mistake. The Avs have allowed fewer high-danger shots (7.09) and expected goals (2.15) per 60 minutes than they did last season (and in 2021-22 when they won the Cup for that matter). The problem is the .652 save percentage on high-danger shots. No other team is below .700 in that metric.

#### Columbus Blue Jackets

Yegor Chinakhov is set for a breakout season: Chinakhov was in line for a second-line role before Boone Jenner's long-term shoulder injury opened a spot on the No. 1 line. So far, Chinakhov — a streaky support player the past two seasons — has been a revelation. Chinakhov has opened the season with a four-game point streak (2-4-6) and a team-best plus-5 rating playing on a line with veteran center Sean Monahan and right winger Kirill Marchenko. The No. 21 pick in the 2020 draft has shown flashes in the past — he had 16 goals in 53 games last season, including a career-long six-game point streak last December — but he's looked like a consistent dangerous offensive player this season.

#### Dallas Stars

Jake Oettinger looks like his old self: Interestingly enough, the Stars' underlying metrics are middling at best early on. But they're 4-1-0 thanks in large part to goalie Jake Oettinger, who's off to a dynamite start and who just signed an eight-year, \$66 million contract extension. His .948 save percentage through three starts trails only Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck, and his 5.79 GSAs trails only Sam Montembeault and Hellebuyck. That includes a 34-save shutout of the Islanders. Oettinger was ordinary last season, and the Stars still had the best record in the Western Conference. If he keeps this up and returns to form this season, Dallas could be the team to beat in the NHL — and he'll be worth every penny.

#### Detroit Red Wings

Way too many goals against: The emphasis for the Red Wings this summer was improving their team defense. Or at least, it was supposed to be. Steve Yzerman signed Tyler Motte as a solid defensive forward for the bottom six, and brought in Cam Talbot in goal, but really didn't do much to change the overall makeup of Detroit's lineup. The early results have been predictable: Detroit has lost three of its first four games by three goals and already had two midgame goalie changes in that span. Granted, there's also a shutout win mixed in there — but even that game required Talbot to stop 42 shots. It's early, but Detroit's team defense has not looked up to snuff. And that's a big problem.

## Edmonton Oilers

Special teams need improvement: It took two games for the Oilers to allow more opposition power-play goals than they did over their entire run to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final. For reference, the Oilers surrendered four tallies in 25 contests in the postseason. Clearly, the penalty kill has had a rough start to the season. But at least there's an excuse: The Oilers lost four regulars in Cody Ceci, Vincent Desharnais, Ryan McLeod and Warren Foegele. The five stars are once again working the first-unit power play. Uncharacteristically, they've converted on just one of 13 chances through five games.

## Florida Panthers

Aleksander Barkov's quick rehab: We expect the Panthers to handle their business in the regular season, but a lengthy absence from Barkov could throw a wrench in the works. The defending champs got some good news Thursday — Barkov skated for the first time since a nasty slide into the boards on Oct. 10 and could return next week.

## Los Angeles Kings

A rough transition away from the 1-3-1 system: Kings players — particularly their best offensive talents — were eager to shift away from their neutral-zone trap that helped them become one of the better defensive teams in the league but also left them feeling a bit stifled when it came to generating offense. The move to a 1-2-2 was supposed to let forwards like Adrian Kempe and Kevin Fiala get their feet moving sooner and create more in transition. The flip side of opening their game more was the potential of exposing their goalies to more scoring chances. That's been apparent in the first five games. Natural Stat Trick has the Kings allowing 102 scoring chances, including 37 of the high-danger variety compared to 85 and 22 respectively after five games last season. Thursday's 4-1 win at Montreal was their best game in a 2-1-2 start as they were far better with their neutral-zone play and got saves from David Rittich. Adapting without Drew Doughty on the back end doesn't make the task any easier.

## Minnesota Wild

The three-goalie plan is already an issue: Carrying three goalies always seemed like it would be problematic for a Wild team that couldn't afford another league-minimum player with Jesper Wallstedt on the roster. And as we saw in two of the first three games, Wallstedt couldn't even be on the roster when the Wild needed a seventh defenseman because of illness and then suffered three injuries. Wallstedt's now down in AHL Iowa to get games and reps. He may be there for a while if the Wild continue to get great play from goalie/goal scorer Filip Gustavsson, who is 2-0-1 with a 1.66 goals-against average and .948 save percentage and has more goals than 13 Wild skaters through four games. — Michael Russo

## Montreal Canadiens

The defense is a work in progress: The clear weakness of the Canadiens roster was always going to be the young defense, but the inability to find three pairings that work has been the defining feature of the first five games. Mike Matheson leaving the game Thursday after one period with an upper-body injury only further complicated an already complicated situation. The reality is this will one day be the strength of the team, but right now the Canadiens lack the personnel to have a strong, cohesive blue-line group. And a solution in the short term, barring the acquisition of external help, is not evident.

## Nashville Predators

They have a hole to fill at center: Andrew Brunette gave Tommy Novak the expected first crack to center a line featuring massive additions Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault, and that lasted for about as long as it takes to polish off a Prince's hot chicken wing. Granted, the early struggles have been so

widespread that Brunette had Novak back with Stamkos (and with Novak's favorite fellow young gun, Luke Evangelista) in advance of a visit from Edmonton. But the reality is, Novak is best suited on a third line with Evangelista and TBD, and the Preds need to be out searching for a No. 2 center.

#### New Jersey Devils

The trade acquisitions are fitting right in: The Devils acquired goaltender Jacob Markstrom, forward Paul Cotter and defenseman Johnathan Kovacevic via trade this past summer. All three have had strong starts to the season. Markstrom has a .918 save percentage and has saved 1.33 goals above expected, per Evolving-Hockey. Cotter leads the team with five goals, and Kovacevic has five points and a plus-3 rating. All three have contributed to the Devils' 5-2-0 start.

#### New York Islanders

More of the same: The Islanders are trying to break out of a three-year doldrums in which they've either fallen out of contention quickly (2021-22) or had to make a mad dash to reach the postseason for a very brief stay. One of the keys to changing that was a strong start that showed off the identity the team built under 37 games of Patrick Roy last season. So far ... it hasn't been there. A 1-1-2 record, two shutouts already and too much inconsistency make this first week of 2024-25 feel very familiar. — Arthur Staple

#### New York Rangers

Five-on-five numbers are up: The Rangers have excellent special teams and an elite goalie in Igor Shesterkin, but their five-on-five play has sometimes lagged behind in recent seasons. The early returns this season are that the team has improved at even strength. Through four games the Rangers have had 56.30 percent of the expected goal share at five-on-five, per Natural Stat Trick, and have also out-chanced and out-high-danger chanced opponents. That's been a big part of the team's hot start.

#### Ottawa Senators

Special teams could use consistency: Four games in and the Senators' penalty kill is near the bottom of the league with a 69.2 percent success rate. The Senators' power play looks good on paper, but much of that had to do with going 4-for-6 with the man advantage in their 8-7 OT win over Los Angeles. Ottawa is 2-for-10 excluding Monday's game. Considering that Ottawa has looked fine at five-on-five, the Senators need more success with special teams to keep them afloat early in the season. — Julian McKenzie

#### Philadelphia Flyers

The power play looks better: After finishing last in the NHL for three straight seasons, the Flyers put a priority on trying to fix the power play this summer. So far, it looks strong — scoring on the power play in each of the first four games (5-for-19 overall). Rookie Matvei Michkov is a big reason for that, with two goals and two assists on the top unit, including the first two goals of his career in Edmonton on Tuesday. The second unit, with rookie Jett Luchanko, has also looked dangerous at times, and could help his cause to stick around for the season.

#### Pittsburgh Penguins

A functioning power play: Erik Karlsson didn't come to Pittsburgh last season for the Penguins' power play to wreck best-laid plans. But that's what happened. And it happened early, with the Penguins scoring only four power-play goals through nine games. They had that many through five to start this season, including two in a history-laden win over the Sabres on Wednesday. With Tristan Jarry in a funk and Alex Nedeljkovic on a conditioning assignment, the Penguins are counting on rookie Joel Blomqvist to play behind a turnover-prone group. That's tempting fate. But a good power play will make life easier. A potentially great one might change everything. — Rob Rossi

## San Jose Sharks

Winning isn't going to be any easier: The Sharks have yet to get Ryan Warsofsky his first win as an NHL head coach and they're now working through a rough end to their road trip. At 0-3-2, they are better than last year's awful 0-10-1 start. They felt much better in their first three games, which included an opening-night overtime loss to St. Louis where they let a three-goal lead get away and taking Dallas to a shootout in a road game where they never trailed in regulation. But their level of play dropped in back-to-back losses in Chicago and Winnipeg. The penalty kill was lights out until the Blackhawks and Jets took advantage of a depleted lineup. Jake Walman and Cody Ceci will help on defense, and Tyler Toffoli is off to a scorching start. Still, they're allowing too many shots on goal and need more offense. Getting an injured Macklin Celebrini back in action at some point will help.

## Seattle Kraken

The Kraken can score again: The Kraken struggled enormously to buy goals throughout last season. Despite their structural discipline and pace, Seattle could rarely find answers when it fell behind and struggled to pull away when it built an early lead. A lack of goal scoring up and down the lineup was a fatal flaw for this lineup a year ago, and so far, it's been a different story. In fact, no team in hockey has scored more five-on-five goals than Seattle has in the early going this season. There's some percentage-driven noise in this, and we won't expect the Kraken to finish the year as an elite offensive team necessarily. But Seattle's offensive approach looks more thoughtful, tighter and far more dynamic through Dan Bylsma's first five games. — Thomas Drance

## St. Louis Blues

Philip Broberg has boosted the Blues' defense: When the Blues acquired Broberg via an offer sheet from the Oilers this summer, it was understood that it might take time for the 23-year-old to fit in. It has taken no time. Broberg and defensive partner Justin Faulk have not been on the ice for a single five-on-five goal against in five games. If that's not enough, Broberg has a point in each of those games, including an incredible saucer pass for an assist on the Blues' game-winning goal in a 1-0 overtime victory over the Islanders. If Broberg's \$4.58 million cap hit is considered an overpayment, it may not be for long.

## Tampa Bay Lightning

The stars are starring: The Lightning's strategy revolves around their star power, which seems to be delivering so far. After a year weighed down by back surgery, Andrei Vasilevskiy has looked sharp to open the season. Victor Hedman is driving play from the blue line. And offseason signing Jake Guentzel is clicking with Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point — just look at how they dominated Thursday against Vegas with 73 percent of the expected goal share and a 2-0 edge in scoring at five-on-five. — Shayna Goldman

## Toronto Maple Leafs

Matthew Knies is making a leap: This wasn't unexpected. I wrote before the season that Knies was the Leafs' most intriguing player and someone with real breakout potential. It's still early, but the early signs are there that the breakout is happening. To start with, Knies is playing a lot more than he did last season, with regular roles on both the penalty kill and power play as well as the Auston Matthews-led No. 1 line. More than that, Knies looks stronger and faster than he did as a rookie, more sure of himself and what he can do too. He's shooting the puck a ton (something he didn't do enough as a rookie) and looks like a good bet to crack 20 goals for the first time. Knies is just scratching the surface of what he might become for the Leafs.

## Utah Hockey Club

Mikhail Sergachev has been a huge addition: Sergachev was always considered a solid defenseman in Tampa, but behind Victor Hedman and the other stars up front, he was often a bit overshadowed. Not in Salt Lake City. The Utahns have loaded Sergachev up with the third-highest minutes in the NHL so far (26:47 per game), and he's crushed that opportunity, with a 63 percent expected goals mark when he's on the ice at even strength. The high-scoring kids are getting a lot of attention early, but Sergachev could be their early MVP. And he'll need to be with Sean Durzi out for a while.

#### Vancouver Canucks

Quinn Hughes is still the best defender on the planet: The reigning Norris Trophy winner has driven the Canucks in the early going and has become thoroughly peerless in terms of how he influences the game from the back end. Consider that with Hughes on the ice, Vancouver has outshot its opponents 50 to 31. In all other minutes, the Canucks have been outshot 33 to 60 at five-on-five. You'd be hard-pressed to find a skater anywhere on the planet capable of making that sort of consistent impact on an NHL ice sheet, but those few players who do, they're all forwards. Hughes has been at the top of his game from the outset, playing over 27 minutes a night and functioning as Vancouver's primary engine right off the hop this season. And Vancouver has needed it.

#### Vegas Golden Knights

Jack Eichel leveled up: Eichel has been good from the moment he arrived in Vegas, but he's taken his game to another level early this season and is driving the Golden Knights offensively. He's second in the NHL with 6 points at even strength, trailing only his linemate, Ivan Barbashev (7). Eichel's 6.34 points per 60 minutes is an absolutely ridiculous figure (for perspective, his career high is 2.45 in 2022-23). Eichel's ability to transport the puck up the ice and establish possession in the offensive zone has been vital to Vegas' offensive production. — Jesse Granger

#### Washington Capitals

A revamped first line: It's too early for grand proclamations about any team, let alone one that's only played three games, but Spencer Carbery's decision to play Aliaksei Protas with Alex Ovechkin and Dylan Strome has already paid off. Washington is controlling the goal share, both real and expected, with those three on the ice. If Ovechkin keeps setting up Protas for goals as he did Tuesday — you'd expect the opposite — good things could follow.

#### Winnipeg Jets

Special teams are helping them win in a brand-new way: Winnipeg is a perfect 4-0-0 and it has achieved that record on the back of a 50 percent power play and a penalty kill that was the last to allow a goal this season. The Jets' star players have also stolen games, with Mark Scheifele doing so in the home opener and Scheifele and Kyle Connor combining to steal Sunday's game against Minnesota. Give credit to Scott Arniel and especially to assistant coaches Dean Chynoweth (PK) and Davis Payne (PP), though — Winnipeg's special teams have been elite as opposed to abysmal early this season. That is a marked change from last year, with the power play (7-for-14) looking particularly dangerous thanks to great entries, multiple setups and crisp passing.

## [ESPN / Ranking every NHL team's prospects: Why the Sharks are No. 1](#)

By Rachel Doerrie- October 17, 2024

Rachel Doerrie is a professional data consultant specializing in data communication and modelling. She's worked in the NHL and consulted for professional teams across North American and Europe. She hosts the Staff & Graph Podcast and discusses sports from a data-driven perspective.

### Reactions

The 2024-25 NHL season has begun, which means it's time for another set of rankings of all 32 teams' prospect pipelines -- and how the business of the offseason changed those rankings compared to April's edition.

In several cases, prospects are getting a nine-game look at the NHL level before their team must decide whether to send them back to the Canadian junior leagues. The rest have already begun their seasons there or in the NCAA or other leagues worldwide. To qualify as a prospect for this list, the player must be under 23 years old and have his rights owned by an NHL team.

Players expected to be on the NHL roster for most of the NHL season are not considered in the pipeline. Notable players fitting that description include Macklin Celebrini, Will Smith, Matvei Michkov, Cutter Gauthier, Shane Wright, Logan Stankoven, Brandt Clarke and Rutger McGroarty.

### 32. Boston Bruins

The Bruins find themselves at the bottom of the rankings, specifically after Matthew Poitras and Mason Lohrei graduated last season. The Bruins were able to add Dean Letourneau in the draft, and he joins Fabian Lysell as the only two forwards projected to play in more than 200 games in a meaningful capacity.

Outside of that, the Bruins lack prospects who are expected to reach the 200-game threshold in the NHL, a consequence of sustained success over two decades.

### 31. Tampa Bay Lightning

The Lightning haven't drafted much in the past five seasons, and it shows. The acquisition of Conor Geekie in the offseason via the Mikhail Sergachev trade gives Tampa Bay a prospect expected to play a middle-six scoring role in the NHL. Meanwhile, Isaac Howard and Ethan Gauthier are expected to become NHL regulars, with Howard expected to fit in a secondary scoring role.

If Gabriel Szturc and Dylan Duke can continue to develop with Syracuse, they could be reliable bottom-six options in the future.

### 30. Edmonton Oilers

When you consistently trade away draft picks and don't hit home runs on the ones you keep, you end up with bare cupboards.

Then again, there's little to complain about in general, because the Oilers have two of the best players in the league and are firmly in their contention window.

The acquisition of Matthew Savoie and Roby Jarventie through trade and Sam O'Reilly in the draft added quality up front. Those three are young players who will need to step up on Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl's wings.

After Edmonton lost Philip Broberg to an offer sheet, Beau Akey is the player in the Oilers' pipeline with the best chance to play a top-four role in the NHL. There's more here than in previous seasons, and the Oilers are hoping their current superstars can elevate the play of those prospects as they filter into the lineup.

#### 29. Ottawa Senators

Carter Yakemchuk is far and away the best prospect in the pool; he's the only prospect expected to be a true difference-maker in this pipeline. Outside of Yakemchuk, who looks like a blue-chip defender, Zack Ostapchuk projects to be a reliable bottom-six player. Tyler Boucher continues to be perplexing and is likely to top out in a bottom-six role as a physical, forechecking presence.

Tomas Hamara and Xavier Bourgault have NHL projections as depth players, and could improve their stock with continued development in Belleville this season.

#### 28. Vegas Golden Knights

Given how the Golden Knights' habit of trading their prospects and picks, it is somewhat shocking that this group isn't ranked last. They traded David Edstrom to San Jose in the Tomas Hertl swap, and drafted Trevor Connelly to replace him in June. Connelly has tremendous talent; if he can mature on and off the ice, he's got a chance to be a real difference-maker.

Outside of that, forward Brendan Brisson and defenseman Lukas Cormier are the prospects with the best chances to become middle-of-the-lineup players at their respective positions. Matyas Sapovaliv projects as a middle-six winger with modest confidence, but is most likely a third-line player in the NHL. Carl Lindbom is a noteworthy goaltending prospect, but there is not a lot in the nets in the Vegas pipeline.

Keeping with the organization's modus operandi, there's a greater chance most of these guys are traded than play 200 games in Vegas.

#### 27. Florida Panthers

The Panthers won the Stanley Cup and therefore, there is a moratorium on their fans complaining about prospects for a couple seasons. Often, the price of winning includes trading away picks and prospects, and that's the case here too.

Mackie Samoskevich graduates to the big club this season, leaving a big hole in the pipeline. Justin Sourdif and Jack Devine are both projected to be serviceable, bottom-six players, and Gracyn Sawchyn has a less confident projection as a middle-six player. The development of Sandis Vilimanis and Marek Alscher last season present good depth options for Florida if they continue to progress in the AHL this season.

#### 26. New York Islanders

The Islanders' prospect pipeline lacked an impact player until Cole Eiserman fell into their laps at the draft in June. He is projected to be a true scoring threat in the NHL, something this system has lacked for years.

Jesse Pulkkinen was a solid selection at No. 54, and projects to be a top-four, all-situations defender. Calle Odellius and Danny Nelson project to be reliable middle-of-the-lineup players who should fit well in Patrick Roy's offensive system. William Dufour, Matthew Maggio and Alex Jefferies are potential depth options, but are likely to be bubble players.

The Islanders' prospect pool improved with the additions of Eiserman and Pulkkinen, and they will need both to play meaningful roles in the near future.



## 25. Pittsburgh Penguins

The Penguins haven't had a strong prospect pool in two decades, probably because they've won a few Stanley Cups and have had three first-ballot Hall of Famers on their roster for the duration of that time.

Owen Pickering is projected to play NHL games, but he is going to need to take some major development steps to be the impact defender the Penguins projected when they drafted him in 2022. Tristan Broz is on his way to becoming a middle-six offensive contributor, and he will look to find his groove in the AHL after leaving Denver. Ville Koivunen provides a boost to the pipeline and has a shot to be a bottom-six player. Joel Blomqvist offers a good option in goal and will see limited action in the NHL this season.

## 24. Colorado Avalanche

Calum Ritchie is the lone exciting forward prospect, and he projects to be a middle-six play driver at the NHL level. Ritchie scored a highlight-reel goal in the preseason and has developed into a two-way threat in the middle of the lineup. He's starting the season with the NHL club but should be sent down barring an extraordinary performance.

Sean Behrens and Mikhail Gulyayev are both noteworthy prospects, with Gulyayev projected to be an impact defender.

Two impact players are why Colorado is ahead of a few other teams who have more prospects, as those two are both expected to be cornerstone pieces of the future. Behrens, Oskar Olausson and Jean-Luc Foudy are expected to play NHL games, but their projections are less confident as their development plateaus.

## 23. Los Angeles Kings

The Kings' pipeline has taken a bit of a hit because of the graduations of Alex Laferriere, Alex Turcotte and Brandt Clarke.

Liam Greentree is a good addition to the prospect pool, and represents Los Angeles' best chance at an impact player. The Kings have projectable depth players in Koehn Zimmer, Francesco Pinelli, Kenny Connors and Samuel Helenius. Zimmer is the best of that bunch and should fill a third-line role in the next few years.

But for the first time in recent memory, the Kings lack a true top-tier prospect and will need to rely on developing the current stable to fill the lineup.

## 22. Dallas Stars

The Stars have made it their modus operandi to extract value out of late first-rounders and middle-round picks. They lack depth in the prospect pool but have a few players who are expected to play major roles at the NHL level. The fall in the rankings (they were No. 18 in the spring) is directly related to the graduations of Logan Stankoven and Mavrik Bourque.

Lian Bichsel and Emil Hemming are the top names in the pool, and both are expected to play middle-of-the-lineup roles. Defensemen Christian Kyrou and Aram Minnetian have chances to play meaningful games, but they have less confident projections.

Dallas might not have the highest prospect pipeline value, but if there is one team capable of developing future stars, it is the Stars.

## 21. Vancouver Canucks

Tom Willander and Jonathan Lekkerimaki are the prized prospects of the pool, with Lekkerimaki representing the best shot for a true impact player in the top six. Willander didn't have the season the

Canucks had hoped for in 2023-24, but he is comfortably projected to become a reliable second-pairing option and should take a major step forward this season. Both players carry tremendous value at their respective positions, and are more likely to be impact players than not.

Elias Pettersson (the defenseman) and Kirill Kudryavtsev have fair shots to be depth defenders, providing good value for the selections.

#### 20. Toronto Maple Leafs

Easton Cowan took a leap last season, to the point where quite a few in hockey circles opined he'd be a top-15 pick in a 2023 redraft after going No. 28 in the actual one. The Leafs have needed a player to match up against players like Brad Marchand and the Tkachuks in the Atlantic Division, and while Cowan is unlikely to hit that level, his play style is a rare commodity.

Artur Akhymov is a real possibility to be starting in goal for the Leafs in the next few years. Fraser Minten needs another big season to cement himself as a middle-six possibility, but the talent is there. Ben Danford and Topi Niemala are valuable defenders, and while Niemala might not fit under Toronto's new management, he has value around the league. Nikita Grebbyonkin caught the eyes of many in the preseason and is likely to be a depth player for the Leafs in the next year or so.

The Leafs have quality prospects at every position, something they will need if they are to have success given their current salary cap situation.

#### 19. New Jersey Devils

The Devils continue to draft well, specifically in the early rounds. Seamus Casey is starting the season with the Devils but might head back to the AHL when other players on the blue line get healthy. He is projected to be a No. 4 or No. 5 defenseman as soon as next season.

Anton Silayev, this year's first-rounder, is a great addition to the pool as a big, rangy defender who can balance out the team's soft skill on the blue line. Arseni Gritsyuk and Lenni Hameenaho have fair NHL projections as middle-of-the-lineup players.

The Devils are a young team with exciting players, and their fall in the rankings is more a function of graduations of players such as Simon Nemeč. They are set up for long-term success at all positions.

#### 18. Philadelphia Flyers

Cutter Gauthier is gone, and Matvei Michkov is with the big club. The top two prospects are no longer in the pipeline, and Jett Luchanko is starting the season with the Flyers (though I'd be surprised if he played all season in Philly).

Oliver Bonk and Emil Andrae represent a bright future on the Flyers' blue line. The Flyers have three potential middle-six players in Denver Barkey, Elliot Desnoyers and Massimo Rizzo, with all three projected to contribute in the next two or three years. In goal, the Flyers have two intriguing prospects in Alexei Kolosov and Carson Bjarnason.

The Flyers have quite a bit of talent in the pipeline at each position, with much of the attributed value at the goaltending position.

#### 17. Washington Capitals

The Caps' pipeline lacks depth but has a few gems. Ryan Leonard is one of the best prospects outside of the NHL and projects to be a long-term player in the top six who impacts the game at both ends of the ice. He's not Tom Wilson 2.0, but he certainly fits the mold of a skilled player who drives opponents nuts.

Ivan Miroschnichenko and Hendrix Lapierre have shown they can make an impact at the NHL level, and both come out of the pipeline given their expected NHL roles this season. Andrew Cristall is a high-risk, high-reward player whose projection is less confident, but his ceiling is as a top-six playmaker. The recent addition of Terik Parascak gives the Caps another skilled forward with top-six potential. Jake Karabela has tools to become a bottom-six NHL player if he continues to develop at the current pace.

The Caps have two defensemen projected to play consistently at the NHL in Ryan Chesley and Vincent Iorio, but they lack a true blue-chip defender in the pipeline.

#### 16. Winnipeg Jets

The Jets have multiple forward prospects expected to be top-nine impact players. Colby Barlow, Chaz Lucius and Brayden Yager are projected to be middle-six players. Brad Lambert is a high-risk, high-reward player and projects to play in a secondary scoring role. Kevin He has some projectable NHL-caliber tools and is worth monitoring over the next few years.

Two Swedish defensemen, Elias Salomonsson and Alfons Freij, could play in depth roles for the Jets, with Freij having a fair chance at a second-pairing role with good development.

#### 15. Calgary Flames

Zayne Parekh leads the way and buoys the Flames' prospect pool value in a significant way. He's projected to be a top-pairing offensive dynamo in the NHL.

Samuel Honzek, Andrew Basha and Matvei Gridin all have fairly confident second-line projections. Luke Misa and Aydar Suniev have top-nine NHL projections with variance.

Outside of Parekh, the blue line has a few notable prospects in Hunter Brzustewicz, Henry Mews and Jeremie Poirier all having NHL potential. Brzustewicz and Poirier have the strongest NHL projections, as both are projected to play No. 4 or No. 5 roles at the NHL level with continued development.

#### 14. New York Rangers

The Rangers lack depth, but their top prospects are expected to be difference-makers. Gabe Perreault and Brennan Othmann are both projected to play offensive roles in the middle of the lineup.

Perreault had an incredible season with Boston College in the NCAA and should become a top-six player, with a decent chance to become a top-line scoring winger. He will be a key member of the Rangers' offensive scheme for years to come. Othmann isn't quite ready yet after a good first AHL season, and he projects to be a third-line player that plays both special teams.

EJ Emery is the key prospect on the blue line; he comfortably projects as a top-four defender. Other notable prospects include Bryce McConnell-Barker, Adam Edstrom, Adam Sykora, Brett Berard and Victor Mancini, who are expected to have solid seasons in the AHL.

#### 13. Nashville Predators

The Predators skyrocketed up the list when Barry Trotz stated they would draft players with star potential -- and followed that up by taking Matthew Wood and Tanner Molendyk in 2023. However, the trade of Yaroslav Askarov, who is arguably the best goaltending prospect in the game, is a big loss to the pool value.

Outside of Wood and Molendyk, who have solid NHL projections toward the top of the lineup, the Preds have good depth. Adding Egor Surin and Teddy Stiga to Fedor Svechkov, Zachary L'Heureux and Joakim Kemell gives the Predators more than a few darts at the board when it comes to the middle of their

lineup. Losing Askarov is a calculated risk, but the Preds are well set up to score goals for quite some time.

#### 12. St. Louis Blues

The Blues are loaded with NHL forward talent and drafted Adam Jiricek this summer, a player with incredible potential on the blue line.

Dalibor Dvorsky, Jimmy Snuggerud, Zach Dean and Zachary Bolduc are all expected to contribute offensively at the NHL level. The combination of those four players brings a blend on scoring, dynamic transition play, playmaking and forechecking. Add Otto Stenberg, a two-way player who controls the pace of game, and Adam Jecho, a player with skill and size, and the Blues have six players projected to be impactful in top-nine roles.

The Blues lack that level of talent on the blue line aside from Jiricek, with Theo Lindstein representing the best chance at developing into a middle-pairing defenseman. The value is clearly with the forward group, one that could be really good for years to come.

#### 11. Seattle Kraken

The Kraken have quite a few interesting prospects that are expected to be impactful at the NHL level, led by Berkly Catton, a skilled center who piles up points.

Beyond Catton, the Kraken have Eduard Sale, Jagger Firkus, Carson Rehkopf, David Goyette and Jani Nyman, all of whom have fair NHL projections in middle-six roles.

The back end is loaded with prospects, with Ryker Evans, Lukas Dragicevic and Caden Price projected to play consistently in the NHL. Niklas Kokko is a good prospect in goal with a reasonable NHL projection.

The Kraken have built themselves quite the prospect pipeline, with lots of players who should make an impact in the NHL in the next two to three seasons.

#### 10. Carolina Hurricanes

The Canes are routinely in the "winners" conversation after every draft because they pick high-ceiling players with tons of skill.

The most impactful players in their system are on defense, with Alexander Nikishin expected to be a top-pairing defenseman in the next few years, and the recently signed Scott Morrow projecting to be a solid, second-pair option. Dominik Badinka is another interesting defender who is further away from NHL-readiness but is projected to be a good depth defender.

The Canes have good depth up front, with Bradly Nadeau projected to be a second-line scorer while Jackson Blake and Gleb Trikozov are expected to play top-nine roles.

With three prospects at each skating position expected to be impactful to varying degrees, and depth in the form of Felix Unger Sorum, Nikita Artamonov and Jayden Perron, the Canes' prospect pool remains strong.

#### 9. Utah Hockey Club

After graduating Logan Cooley and Dylan Guenther last season, and trading Conor Geekie at the draft, Utah is in a different spot than their previous life as the Arizona Coyotes. New owners who want to win allow the league's newest club to leverage their deep prospect pool to acquire impactful NHL players.

The pipeline is now headlined by Tii Iginla, Cole Beaudoin and Dmitry Simashev, who are all projected to be impactful NHL players. Julian Lutz and Daniil But are intriguing prospects but lack a confident offensive projection.

On defense, Maveric Lamoureux has developed nicely and should fit in a depth role, and Michael Hrabal is projected to be an NHL goalie.

Utah has a stocked prospect cupboard that can be leveraged in trades to make the NHL roster better, and they are not far away from being a real problem in the Western Conference.

#### 8. Chicago Blackhawks

It's usually helpful when you have back-to-back high lottery picks, and that description fits Chicago. Artyom Levshunov -- the No. 2 pick this summer -- has all the makings of a top-pairing defender, joining Kevin Korchiński as another impact defender in the pipeline. Oliver Moore and Frank Nazar are head and shoulders above the other forward prospects, with both projected to be top-six offensive contributors.

Beyond Levshunov and Korchiński on the blue line, Sam Rinzler and Nolan Allan are projected to become depth NHL players. Chicago's prospect pool gets a boost in goal with Adam Gajan and Drew Comness, who have a fair chance of becoming NHL goaltenders.

They have potential impact players at every position in the pipeline, with good depth when Sacha Boisvert, Marek Vanacker, Ryder Rolston, AJ Spellacy, Ethan Del Mastro and Wyatt Kaiser are considered.

#### 7. Buffalo Sabres

The Sabres use a distinct blend of analytical tools and scouting to approach the draft, and very clearly, approach every pick with the "best player available" mantra. As a result, they have a well-rounded pool that includes Devon Levi in goal, Maxim Strbak and Gavin McCarthy on defense, and a litany of high-value forwards in Jiri Kulich, Noah Ostlund and Konsta Helenius.

Trading Matthew Savoie to Edmonton drops them in the rankings, as does the graduation of Zach Benson.

They have projectible NHL players at every position, four potential impact players and good depth to complement the talent on their NHL roster. Buffalo is set up for long-term success but needs to start translating the value into wins at the NHL level.

#### 6. Minnesota Wild

I'm not quite sure what magic potions director of amateur scouting Judd Brackett and his staff are using to consistently extract value out of the draft, but every year they snag two or three players well past where they should be selected.

Zeev Buium and Aron Kiviharju were those two players in 2024, and the Ryder Ritchie selection at No. 45 was a solid one, too. The Wild have signed the highest percentage of their draftees to entry-level contracts since 2020.

Jesper Wallstedt leads the way in this group, as he looks like Minnesota's goalie of the future after signing his new contract. Up front, the Wild have Danila Yurov, Marat Khusnutdinov, Riley Heidt, Charlie Stramel and Ritchie as projected top-nine players.

Buium is the jewel of the blue line, along with Carson Lambos and Daemon Hunt in the group. The three have confident projections as a top-pair, second-pair and No. 4/5 defenseman, respectively.

The Wild continue to draft incredibly well, which is why their value does not drop with the graduations of Liam Ohgren and Marco Rossi.

## 5. Anaheim Ducks

The Ducks have been a top drafting team for over a decade, so there is no surprise they remain in the top 5 here. The Ducks have prospects at every position that are high-end, with 2024 No. 3 pick Beckett Sennecke headlining the pipeline. With Sennecke and Olen Zellweger adding to a young NHL core that includes Leo Carlsson, Mason McTavish, Cutter Gauthier, Pavel Mintyukov and Lukas Dostal, the Ducks are primed for years of success.

On the back end, Stian Solberg joins Tristan Luneau, Tyson Hinds and Noah Warren as defenders who are projected to fit in bottom-two pairings. Nathan Gaucher and Sasha Pastujov could be good depth pieces up front, with Calle Clang and Tomas Suchanek as reasonable depth options in goal.

The value of the Ducks' pool is on defense, with five players expected to make the NHL in varying roles.

## 4. Detroit Red Wings

The Red Wings have collected some top talent in recent drafts, giving them the fourth-most-valuable prospect pool.

Simon Edvinsson and Axel Sandin-Pelikka are both projected to be impactful top-four defenders in the next two years. William Willander and Shai Buium are two other candidates who could be depth defenders at the NHL level.

Michael Brandsegg-Nygard and Nate Danielson should become middle-six players, with Marco Kasper making the leap to the NHL lineup.

Both Sebastian Cossa and Trey Augustine are solid options in goal and provide the Red Wings with depth at the position.

Five of the players in the Red Wings pool are projected to be impactful NHL players, and three more are projected to be serviceable NHL depth. There is a lot to like about Detroit's future with the level of prospects they have at each position.

## 3. Montreal Canadiens

Montreal passed on Matvei Michkov in the 2023 draft, but it wasn't going to pass on Ivan Demidov. Adding Demidov to a pipeline that has Lane Hutson and David Reinbacher on the blue line is tidy work. Demidov is projected to be a star at the NHL level, and will be a key piece of Montreal's scoring.

Hutson looks as if he's going to be a difference maker offensively at even strength and running the power play. Reinbacher's development is a concern given his injuries, but he has the talent to become a solid top-four defender.

Michael Hage is off to a good start with Michigan, and has a good chance to be a middle-six offensive contributor. Filip Mesar, Owen Beck and Joshua Roy all project as reliable bottom-six contributors. Jacob Fowler's development has been outstanding and while goaltenders are harder to project, he could be Montreal's goalie of the future if he continues on his current trajectory.

## 2. Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets' prospect pool is loaded with skill and depth. The strength of the prospect pool is on the blue line, with blue-chip prospects in David Jiricek and Denton Mateychuk, who are confidently projected to be top-four defenders. Stanislav Svozil, Charlie Elick, Corson Ceulemans and Samuel Knazko project to be No. 4/5 defenders with reasonable confidence.

Up front, adding Cayden Lindstrom is a big boost. He and Adam Fantilli will be a strong duo down the middle for years to come. They've added quite a few skilled forwards to the pool in recent drafts by

selecting Gavin Brindley, Jordan Dumais and Luca Del Bel Belluz, who have all developed well and are not far off from contributing in the middle of Columbus' NHL lineup.

When a prospect pool has three projected stars, four players projected to be impactful and depth behind them, that is a lot of value.

#### 1. San Jose Sharks

There is quite a bit to be excited about in San Jose, and while the current team is tough to watch, help is on the way.

The Sharks' prospect pool got a big boost with the drafting of defenseman Sam Dickinson and acquisition of goaltender Yaroslav Askarov. Add Quentin Musty and Mattias Havelid to the group and the Sharks have plenty of talent with which to surround Macklin Celebrini and Will Smith. Every player mentioned has the potential to be a difference maker at the NHL level.

Outside of that, the value of the pool is buoyed by the presence of Luca Cagnoni on the back end, and several potential middle-six players in Filip Bystedt, Daniil Gushchin and Thomas Bordeleau. The strength of the Sharks' prospect pool is in the forwards, but the addition of Askarov and Dickinson will make the Sharks a formidable opponent in the next few years.

There are a lot of baby sharks on the way who could turn the Shark Tank back into a feeding frenzy for years to come.

## ESPN / Ranking all 32 NHL goalie tandems for the 2024-25 season

By Greg Wyshynski- October 18, 2024

The Edmonton Oilers understand the importance of a dependable goalie tandem.

In the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs last season, the Oilers were trailing the Vancouver Canucks 2-1 heading into Game 4. They needed a spark. More importantly, starter Stuart Skinner needed a mental reset. So backup goalie Calvin Pickard entered the series for two games, going 1-1 and playing well. The Oilers rallied with two straight wins after Skinner returned in Game 6, and their starter was mentally locked in from that point all the way through Game 7 of the Cup Final.

Whether it's the regular season or the postseason, today's NHL is such that teams have multiple goaltending options. Sometimes that means having a competent backup to give an overworked star goalie a breather. Sometimes that means having a goalie rotation that goes three netminders deep.

So which teams have the best goaltending depth?

These rankings were formulated through discussions with a variety of goalie experts -- coaches, analytics gurus, former players -- as well as through stats from sites like Evolving Hockey, Money Puck, Hockey Reference and Stathead.

Rosters are through Oct. 16. And keep in mind that these rankings are a combination of past performance and projections for the 2024-25 season.

Let the debates begin!

### 32. Columbus Blue Jackets

Elvis Merzlikins, Daniil Tarasov

This duo had a bounce-back season after both finished in the bottom 10 in goals saved above replacement in 2022-23. Dean Evason's man-on-man defensive system was beneficial to the Minnesota Wild's defensive metrics during his time as head coach, but he was dealing with a different experience level with much of his personnel there vs. being in Columbus, which had the seventh-youngest roster in the NHL on opening night.

Merzlikins, 30, has three more years left on his contract at \$5.4 million annually. Tarasov, long considered the goalie of the future in Columbus, is entering his third full season and showed flashes of that potential in the second half of 2023-24.

### 31. San Jose Sharks

Mackenzie Blackwood, Vitek Vanecek

The Sharks were originally higher in this ranking before they demoted Yaroslav Askarov to the AHL ahead of the season, where the former top Nashville prospect is already showboating after shutouts.

Yaroslav Askarov is up to his old shutout tricks 🤪 [pic.twitter.com/gl2BhEw6Te](https://pic.twitter.com/gl2BhEw6Te)

— American Hockey League (@TheAHL) October 13, 2024

It won't be too long before Askarov takes his act to the NHL, but as it stands, the Sharks have a solid but unspectacular veteran goalie tandem that previously shared the crease with the 2022-23 Devils.



Blackwood, 27, has the greater potential to break out ... but alas, he's also the more breakable of the two.

"Blackwood has the talent to be Team Canada's starter. But not the health," one goaltending analyst said.

### 30. Anaheim Ducks

John Gibson, Lukas Dostal, James Reimer

The Ducks lost Gibson for at least the first month of the season after an appendectomy. Every season that passes brings Gibson closer to the end of his contract (summer 2027) and inches the salary cap higher to make his cap hit (\$6.4 million annually) more palatable for potential trading partners. Speculation about a Gibson trade feels like it has been going on since the Ducks were "Mighty" without a deal manifesting, partially because their 31-year-old starter has been in statistical decline for several seasons.

Dostal, 24, outplayed Gibson last season in a career-high 44 games and looks to build on that promise.

Reimer was a waiver claim when Gibson was lost at the end of training camp. He's a steady veteran hand in his 15th NHL season.

### 29. Calgary Flames

Dan Vladar, Dustin Wolf

With Jacob Markstrom now wearing Devils' red, the Flames turned their crease over to Vladar, a career backup, and Wolf, a promising 23-year-old who had 18 games of NHL experience entering this season.

"I'm still not sure he's an NHL guy now," one goalie analyst said of Wolf. "I think they're going to give him all the opportunity, but I'm not sure that he is a full-time NHL guy."

Inexperience and a down year for Vladar last season earned the Flames a low place in this ranking, but one goaltending analyst believes they have a high ceiling.

"They have a tandem that could make this ranking look very silly," the analyst said. "But it's also hard to argue that they belong anywhere else."

### 28. Chicago Blackhawks

Petr Mrazek, Arvid Soderblom, Laurent Brossoit

In his 13th NHL season, hockey fans know what they're getting from Mrazek at this point: average goaltending punctuated by a few weeks when he looks like Dominik Hasek. He played to three goals above expected last season for the rebuilding Blackhawks.

Söderblom ... did not, as he had a minus-17.7 goals saved above expected in 2023-24. Former Winnipeg Jets goalie Brossoit signed a two-year free agent deal but, unfortunately true to form, begins the season on the shelf after meniscus surgery.

Waiting in the wings: former Boston University star Drew Commesso, 22, in his second season with the AHL Rockford IceHogs.

### 27. Philadelphia Flyers

Samuel Ersson, Ivan Fedotov

The Flyers believed they had finally found an answer to the goaltending questions that had vexed them for decades in Carter Hart, 25, last season. But he took leave from the team after 26 games, as one of

four NHL players charged with sexual assault by London, Ontario, police following an investigation into Canada's 2018 world junior championship team. Hart is an unrestricted free agent.

Ersson took the crease and played 51 games for the Flyers last season, finishing with an .890 save percentage and a 23-19-7 record for coach John Tortorella.

Fedotov is a 6-foot-7 netminder, and finally arrived in the NHL at the end of last season after a circuitous journey that included a season of mandatory military service in Russia. It took him nine years between when he was drafted to when he debuted in the NHL. He turns 28 years old in November.

"It's a disadvantage," Marty Biron, a former NHL goaltender and studio analyst for the Buffalo Sabres, told ESPN. "You should be in your prime years and you still have to learn. If the Flyers are looking at it and saying they're going to spend a few years getting him to the level he needs to be at, well, all of a sudden he's 30 years old."

There was hope that Fedotov's arrival could give the Flyers another clear starter, but some are skeptical.

"Fedotov has agility challenges, and I don't love the way he reads plays," one goaltending analyst said.

"The Flyers are a giant question mark for me," another said.

There is another hope: Alexei Kolosov, a 22-year-old from Belarus, who finally reported to the Flyers after being discontent with his place on the depth chart. The talented netminder is currently at AHL Lehigh Valley, along with veteran Cal Petersen.

## 26. Detroit Red Wings

Cam Talbot, Alex Lyon

The goalie competition in Red Wings training camp was slightly more intense than "Squid Game," with several netminders vying for two jobs. In the end, it was Talbot and Lyon who secured the spots, with Ville Husso, in the last year of a three-year contract, sent through waivers to the AHL. Lyon played 44 games with a .904 save percentage last season for the Wings.

Talbot was given a two-year free agent contract after what appeared to be a strong comeback season with the Los Angeles Kings -- or so his .913 save percentage would indicate. A glance under the hood showed he had a minus-5.7 goals saved above expected for the Kings.

"Talbot's going to be interesting there," one goalie analyst said. "L.A. just makes a lot of guys look better than they actually are."

## 25. Seattle Kraken

Philipp Grubauer, Joey Daccord

Ranking the Kraken was a difficult task thanks to the sample size. Before last season, Daccord had played 19 games in his NHL career before appearing in 50 contests for Seattle last season, posting a stellar .916 save percentage and a 2.46 goals-against average while finishing on the plus side of goals saved above expected. Was that an aberration or did the 28-year-old unlock something?

Grubauer is more than halfway through that six-year contract he signed with the Kraken before their inaugural season. He hasn't finished with a save percentage above .900 in any of those three seasons, nor has he posted a positive goals saved above expected.

"Grubauer is a league-average goaltender at best," one goaltending analyst said.

## 24. Colorado Avalanche

Alexandar Georgiev, Kaapo Kahkonen, Justus Annunen

A recently retired NHL goaltender who submitted his ranking to ESPN had the Avalanche trio ranked last overall. Many of the others we surveyed had the Avs somewhere in the 15 to 20 area.

"Georgiev looks like a shell of himself, Annunen is an .800 goalie and I'm not sure what, if any, depth they have beyond him," the former netminder said.

One's mileage with the Mile High goaltending depends entirely on how one feels about Georgiev as the primary starter, and how far away one feels Annunen is from potentially usurping him. On the former point, Georgiev was a minus-7.4 goals saved above expected last season, which was a huge plummet from his 2022-23 metrics (12.8 goals saved above expected). His 0.83 wins above replacement ranked 23rd overall for goalie with at least 20 games played.

He was better in the postseason for the Avalanche, specifically when he outdueled Connor Hellebuyck in Colorado's series win over Winnipeg.

Annunen is young (24) and inexperienced, with 18 NHL games entering this season. "They were clearly picking their spots with him last season, putting him in situations that were relatively easy," one goalie analyst said.

The question of whether the team has faith in Annunen playing a significantly higher chunk of the schedule or supplanting Georgiev if his struggles deepen was answered with the team's waiver claim on former Jets goalie Kähkönen. He arrives as a veteran insurance policy and to help steady what's been a chaotic crease for the Avs to start the 2024-25 season.

### 23. Montreal Canadiens

Sam Montembeault, Cayden Primeau

GM Kent Hughes smartly locked Montembeault into a new three-year contract at a \$3.15 million annual cap hit in the middle of last season. That price might have climbed for the 27-year-old goaltender, who posted a .903 save percentage and a .700 quality starts rate for the Canadiens last season.

"Montembeault had a strong start and then tailed off, which is understandable behind a team that played like Montreal did last season," one goaltending analyst said.

While Montembeault is one of the most underrated goalies in the NHL, our goalie experts believe that Primeau is also flying well under the radar.

"I like Montembeault, but Primeau really surprised me last year with how well he played," one goaltending analyst said of Primeau, who had a .910 save percentage in 23 games last season.

"Cayden took a massive step last season," another goalie expert said.

### 22. Buffalo Sabres

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, Devon Levi

The man they call "UPL" had his breakout season in 2023-24: a 27-22-4 record in 54 games, with a .910 save percentage and 10.2 goals saved above expected. That included five shutouts.

His performance was clutch for Buffalo after rookie Levi struggled early before finding his game: His final line included a .899 save percentage and 5.8 goals saved above expected.

"They like Levi a lot. It's tough sometimes for those guys that come right out of college. They gave him the crease last season and then he was down in [AHL] Rochester, where he did great, actually," said one

goalie analyst, who also would like to see Levi eat into some of those UPL starts. "I think Levi is ready for the NHL but he has to play."

## 21. Edmonton Oilers

Stuart Skinner, Calvin Pickard

It's hard to ignore that vision of Skinner from last postseason: giving up two goals or fewer in 11 of his last 15 games through the Oilers' Game 7 loss in the Stanley Cup Final. He stepped up huge in critical spots for the Oilers, like when he stopped 33 of 34 shots to eliminate Dallas and 32 of 33 shots to spark the Edmonton rally in the Final.

But if you set aside those moments of playoff stardom and his undeniable charm -- we're talking about an NHL goalie who plays as Toad in postgame "Mario Kart" tournaments -- we're left with a player who posts pretty average numbers.

Skinner had a .905 save percentage in the regular season and a .901 in the postseason. According to Stathead, he had a minus-8.5 goals saved above expected in the postseason and just 2.31 in the regular season. Some of the analysts we spoke with believe Skinner should have posted better numbers after Edmonton figured itself out defensively when Kris Knoblauch was hired.

"Skinner really found his game after the coaching change last season and the Oilers stopped giving up so much off the rush defensively," one analyst said.

Pickard was fine last season, with a .909 save percentage in 23 games after it was apparent Jack Campbell wasn't working out in Edmonton.

But this is Skinner's show. He's just good enough where the Oilers don't need to sweat about their goaltending if they play well in front of him. But can he repeat that glorious run again in next spring's playoffs?

## 20. Washington Capitals

Charlie Lindgren, Logan Thompson

The rise of Lindgren was an unexpected joy for the Capitals last season, as he played a career-high 50 games and posted a .911 save percentage behind coach Spencer Carbery's solid defensive system. That took him from a solid backup to Washington's starter, making Darcy Kuemper expendable.

"You can trust Charlie now. He's done it for two years," one goalie analyst said of Lindgren, who is in the last year of a three-year deal for the Caps.

With Kuemper having been traded to the Kings for Pierre-Luc Dubois, the Capitals turned to former Golden Knights goaltender Thompson, whom they acquired in a memorable draft weekend trade -- memorable because Thompson was doing an autograph session in Vegas as a member of the Knights moments after the news broke. (To his credit, he still made the appearance.)

Thompson is seeking a bounce-back season after his save percentage slipped from his breakout 2022-23 campaign to last season. He still went 25-14-5 for Vegas last season.

"Thompson is so cocky. He had a vibe to him, which I kind of thought was great," one goaltending analyst said. "One person in Vegas told me he wasn't very coachable, but I don't know if that's an issue."

## 19. Los Angeles Kings

Darcy Kuemper, David Rittich

Kuemper is GM Rob Blake's latest attempt to stabilize his goaltending in the post-Jonathan Quick era.

"If you get the Darcy of every other year in his career other than last year, they'll be fine," one goalie analyst said.

Kuemper's only season with the Capitals was a disaster, as he posted the lowest save percentage of his career (.890) and a terrible minus-15.6 goals saved above expected. He lost his gig to Charlie Lindgren, and the Kings acquired him in a "problem for problem" swap for center Pierre Luc-Dubois.

"In theory, the Kings' defensive environment is always going to make their goaltending look good," one goaltending analyst said.

Rittich was the Kings' best goaltender last season, with 8.8 goals saved above expected and a sterling .921 save percentage in 24 games. He's earned the backup role in the NHL, with Pheonix Copley relegated to the AHL to start the season.

Perhaps Kuemper is the answer. Or perhaps it's like how one goalie analyst put it: "The Pacific Division looks like where good goaltending goes to die."

#### 18. Pittsburgh Penguins

Tristan Jarry, Alex Nedeljkovic, Joel Blomqvist

Few Pittsburgh athletes have been more divisive over the past decade than Jarry. He has shown he can play upward of 56 games as a starter and be in the Vezina Trophy conversation. He's a goaltender who shows flashes of greatness, like he did in his six shutouts last season.

But his save percentage has declined for three straight seasons, he lost the crease to Nedeljkovic last season and might lose it to Blomqvist in 2024-25 with the way the 22-year-old has looked.

"Blomqvist is a legit prospect. A lot of teams are already kicking themselves for letting him fall to 52nd in the 2020 draft," one goaltending analyst said.

Still, there are those who believe in Jarry's abilities, even as the Penguins have been checking trade options for the 29-year-old.

"I think Jarry is due for a major bounce-back season," one goaltending analyst said.

#### 17. Utah Hockey Club

Connor Ingram, Karel Vejmelka

The NHL's newest team inherited some advantages from the former Arizona Coyotes: young scoring forwards, a slew of prospects and a fairly clean payroll contractually. But Utah also inherited Ingram, which means they inherited one of the most dependable goaltenders in the league.

Ingram, 27, put together two straight solid seasons, with .907 save percentages in both. He posted six shutouts in 2023-24 and 3.4 goals saved above expected, playing 23 more games year over year.

"They're a team that defends well and puts their goalies in a good situation," one goalie analyst said.

Vejmelka was one of those goalies who got a bunch of credit for keeping the Coyotes competitive in games, even if his own numbers weren't that stellar. But as Ingram thrived last season, Vejmelka struggled to a minus-3.6 goals saved above expected.

"Goaltending is cyclical. Vejmelka was fantastic two season ago and then the opposite last season," a Western Conference executive said. "We'll see if he cycles back."

#### 16. Vegas Golden Knights

Adin Hill, Ilya Samsonov

After Hill backstopped the Golden Knights to their first Stanley Cup, Vegas rewarded him with a contract extension. The hockey world waited to see if he was a postseason fable or a veteran goalie who finally unlocked his game.

"He played the same way at the start of last season that he did during their Cup run, before the injuries hit," one goalie analyst said. "Adin Hill has tons of upside."

Injuries limited him to 35 games last season, which still ended up being a career high. He posted a .909 save percentage and it looked like the Golden Knights made the right call -- if Hill can remain healthy.

Samsonov is an upgrade over Logan Thompson, who had been a tandem starter for three seasons. He's looking to rebound from a stumble in Toronto last season (.890 save percentage), and coach Bruce Cassidy's 5-on-5 system could offer him that opportunity.

Akira Schmid, acquired from the Devils, is tending goal in the AHL.

#### 15. Carolina Hurricanes

Frederik Andersen, Pyotr Kochetkov

Kochetkov nearly doubled his appearances year over year, posting a .911 save percentage in 42 games last season. The anticipation is that the 25-year-old is poised to take over the crease for the Hurricanes this season, as veteran teammate Andersen looks at free agency next summer and hasn't been a model of availability.

"Andersen is a question mark with injuries," one goalie analyst said.

Is Kochetkov ready to make a leap to elite status? Coach Rod Brind'amour's system should offer him a comfortable environment. But some still have questions about his overall play.

"The tools are all there for Kochetkov, but his underlying numbers make him a question mark," another goaltending analyst said. "There's potential, but also some uncertainty there."

#### 14. Minnesota Wild

Marc-Andre Fleury, Filip Gustavsson, Jesper Wallstedt

The farewell tour for Fleury finds him as part of a trio in the Wild net, aka NHL King Ghidorah for you kaiju fans.

Fleury, who turns 40 in November, is in his 21st NHL season. His numbers declined significantly in 2023-24, which saw him play in 40 games, his lowest total in a full season since 2016-17 with the Penguins. Fleury went from a .908 save percentage down to .895 and had a whopping minus-11 goals saved above expected.

Gustavsson got the majority of the games (45) but was also underwater analytically (minus-7 goals saved above expected). But hey, now that he's a goal scorer perhaps it all evens out.

"Minnesota is such a tough one to figure out," a goaltending analyst said. "[Fleury's] been better than his numbers would indicate, but Gustavsson went from being solid two years ago to being underwater last season based on the analytics."

Wallstedt, 21, is the goalie of the future and projects to get a share of starts for the Wild as well this season. He had a .910 save percentage in 45 games in the AHL last season.

#### 13. Ottawa Senators

Linus Ullmark, Anton Forsberg

Last season's goalie tandem ranking had the duo of Joonas Korpisalo and Forsberg ranked 15th overall, as it appeared the Senators had sufficiently addressed their netminding issues. And then they finished last in the NHL in team save percentage (.884).

Now, it appears they really, really sufficiently addressed their netminding issues by trading for Ullmark, who was half of the best tandem in the NHL with the Boston Bruins. Ullmark's numbers normalized after his preposterously good Vezina Trophy-winning 2022-23 season (40-6-1, .938 save percentage, 1.89 goals-against average). But his typical seasons have him around a .915 save percentage, which Ottawa would take every day of the week and twice on Sunday.

The reason this tandem isn't higher is Forsberg. He tore the MCL in both knees in 2023 and never really found his form after that. A groin injury took him out of action last season as well.

"Ullmark makes a huge difference. But Forsberg is a year removed from double knee injuries," a goalie analyst said. "I've always liked him, but he showed some signs of slowing down."

Forsberg was considered one of the best bargain goalies in the NHL from 2021-22 to 2022-23, including a 46-game campaign that saw him finish with a .917 save percentage. But he posted an .890 save percentage in 30 games last season.

"If he can bounce back, I like Forsberg as a backup more than a 1A," another goalie analyst said.

## 12. Toronto Maple Leafs

Joseph Woll, Anthony Stolarz

The Leafs revamped their goaltending again during the offseason, letting Ilya Samsonov and Martin Jones walk, handing the keys to the promising Woll and signing Stolarz off the Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers.

Woll looked great in limited action last season, with a .907 save percentage in 25 games and 7.9 goals saved above expected. His postseason numbers in three games were extraordinary: .964 save percentage and an 0.86 goals-against average before an injury cut his playoff run short in the Leafs' series loss to the Bruins.

"I think Woll is extremely talented, can be an NHL goaltender and a good one," one goaltending analyst said. "But they're going to need Stolarz to give him a lot of help in Year 1. I could see a 42 to 40 split in games if they're both healthy."

Therein lies the rub: If they're both healthy. Woll and Stolarz have been known to miss time with injuries during their pro careers.

"The problem with Woll? It's that old sports cliché: 'One of the greatest abilities is availability,'" one goaltending analyst said.

But if they're healthy? The Leafs could have a special tandem.

"If Woll and Stolarz could both get through a season healthy, you could put them in the top six," the goaltending analyst said. "But since Woll is already hurt, it's probably too late for that."

## 11. Nashville Predators

Juuse Saros, Scott Wedgewood

There was a decent spread of opinions on where the Predators should rank. Some had them higher. One former NHL goalie had them slightly lower than this, at No. 15. But given how solid Saros is as a starter, a placement just outside the top 10 seems about right.

"Saros had a down year last season and I still think he might be better than the next two starters on this list," one goalie analyst said.

Saros led the NHL in games played for the third straight season, but saw his numbers dip to a .906 save percentage after three straight campaigns of .918 or better. That was despite improvement in the Predators' even strength defensive metrics under new coach Andrew Brunette.

With a new eight-year contract starting next season, now would be the time for Saros to show last season was an anomaly while continuing to be one of the NHL's hardest working goaltenders.

"Wedgewood and Saros are good," another goalie analyst said.

Others see it differently.

"I see Wedgewood as a downgrade here," another said, in reference to former Predator Kevin Lankinen, now with Vancouver.

#### 10. Boston Bruins

Jeremy Swayman, Joonas Korpisalo

The Bruins had the best goaltending tandem in hockey. Alas, they also had two goalies who both wanted to play around 55 games. So unless owner Jeremy Jacobs was going to convince the NHL board of governors to expand the season to 110 games, Boston had to ship one of them out. That goalie ended up being Ullmark to Ottawa, which meant the Boston crease now belongs to Swayman.

With this preseason contract drama settled, Swayman is now a solo artist. His first four seasons in the NHL have been outstanding, including a .916 save percentage in 44 games last season. While coach Jim Montgomery's defensive system yields solid results for the Bruins, the underlying numbers tell us that their goaltending has helped that system succeed more than the system has helped them. Swayman had 9.45 goals saved above expected last season.

That might not bode well for Korpisalo, who came over in the Ullmark trade. While there's no question Boston provides a more proactive defensive environment for him than Ottawa, he's going to have to regain his form to make this a successful tandem after a dud season with the Senators (.890 save percentage).

"Does Korpisalo look like the goalie he was two years ago or does he look like the goalie he was last season?" a goalie analyst pondered.

Brandon Bussi, 26, lurks in the AHL if the Bruins need him this season.

#### 9. Vancouver Canucks

Thatcher Demko, Kevin Lankinen, Arturs Silovs

Two things can be true about Demko. The first thing is that when he's healthy, few goaltenders in the NHL can match the 28-year-old's abilities. He was second for the Vezina last season with a .918 save percentage in 51 games. The second thing is that "when healthy" is doing a lot of work here.

"I had been flip-flopping Vancouver and Winnipeg as the top goalie tandem for Canadian teams, but Demko's injury had me put the Canucks a little lower," a goaltending analyst said.

Kevin Woodley of InGoal Magazine and NHL.com told Sportsnet 650 last month that Demko is having an issue with the popliteus muscle, which is in the back of the knee and what he called a "small but significant stabilizing muscle" for an athlete.



When Demko comes back, whether he's impacted by this injury when he does come back ... it's all a mystery early in the season for Vancouver.

"There remains a lot of uncertainty about the injury," Woodley said.

Because of Demko's injury, Silovs played more postseason games (10) than he had played regular season games (9). The 23-year-old Latvian had his moments, but the Canucks signed free agent Lankinen to stabilize the crease until Demko returns.

One goalie analyst felt that Lankinen has been underestimated. "Both of his years in Nashville, he had really good underlying numbers," the analyst said. "On a per shot basis, he might have outperformed Saros last season."

For what it's worth, one ex-NHL goaltender we surveyed had the Canucks ranked 17th overall as a tandem.

## 8. St. Louis Blues

Jordan Binnington, Joel Hofer

There might not be another goaltender in the NHL who elicits more reactions than Binnington.

After leading the Blues to a Stanley Cup championship in 2019 as a confident rookie, Binnington struggled to establish himself as elite goalie based on traditional stats and perception -- many fans saw him as a goaltender just as likely to take a hot-headed penalty as he was to post a shutout. But those who watched the Blues with regularity swore he passed the eye test. And some in the goalie analytics community said a few metrics, relative to team performance, backed that up.

But even the haters had to tap their sticks for Binnington last season. He had a .913 save percentage and a quality starts ratio of .600, his highest since his rookie season. While his expected save percentage (.899) was right at the league average, his 14.9 goals saved above expected ranked him fourth overall.

"You can completely justify having St. Louis this high based on how Binnington and Hofer play relative to the team around them last season," a goalie analyst said.

Hofer's numbers were analogous to those put up by Binnington, and he topped the starter in some categories when averaged out on a per game basis. He appeared in 30 games last season.

"Hofer has a smaller sample size in the NHL, but his numbers compared well to Binnington's last season," another goalie analyst said.

## 7. Tampa Bay Lightning

Andrei Vasilevskiy, Jonas Johansson

For all the focus on signing Jake Guentzel instead of Steven Stamkos, and Mikhail Sergachev getting shipped to Utah, the Lightning's fate this season ultimately comes down to whether Andrei Vasilevskiy is Andrei Vasilevskiy again.

Vasilevskiy's save percentage declined for three straight seasons following the Bolts' last Stanley Cup win. He played a lot of hockey from 2019 to 2023. He also missed the start of last season after microdiscectomy surgery to address a lumbar disk herniation, and he wasn't the same for months after his return. Once considered the best goalie in the world, Vasilevskiy's .900 save percentage was below league average and he had a minus-11 goals saved above expected.

The assumption here is that Vasilevskiy returns to form and plays upward of 60 games for the Lightning, mitigating the impact of Johansson (.890 save percentage), a below-average backup whose best attribute is his cap hit (\$775,000).

"We can judge tandems, but it's about the No. 1 guy, most importantly," a goalie analyst said of the Lightning.

#### 6. Dallas Stars

Jake Oettinger, Casey DeSmith

After finishing fifth for the Vezina in the 2022-23 regular season, Oettinger has had his ups and downs. He hit the wall in the 2023 playoffs, eventually finishing with a sub-.900 save percentage. Last season, he was limited to 54 games due to injury and finished with a .905 save percentage.

"Oettinger didn't have the strongest regular season last year for Dallas. Kind of flat," one goalie analyst said.

That said, he had a banger of a postseason with a .913 save percentage, despite facing Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl for six games in the conference finals.

Expectations couldn't be higher for Dallas this season, a team that's lost in consecutive conference finals. Oettinger is a big reason. Coming off a normal offseason and with better injury luck, he could win the Vezina for the first time.

He has a new backup in DeSmith, replacing Scott Wedgewood. As DeSmith showed in Pittsburgh, he understands the assignment, although his 2023-24 with the Canucks could have been better.

"DeSmith [exemplified] the law of diminishing returns in Vancouver. Started great, finished average," one goalie analyst said.

#### 5. Florida Panthers

Sergei Bobrovsky, Spencer Knight

Is there a more "the numbers don't matter" goalie in the NHL than Bobrovsky?

It doesn't matter if he's got a .901 save percentage and loses the crease toward the end of the regular season, or if he has a .915 save percentage and finishes third for the Vezina. Those situations played out over the past two seasons, and both times he backstopped the Panthers to the Stanley Cup Final, hoisting the trophy for the first time last season.

(Of course, the biggest example of "the numbers don't matter" might be his cap hit, which went from overpayment to justifiable cost over the span of two playoff runs.)

"Bob's difficult to define here," a goalie analyst said. "Look what he did in the regular season. Then look what he did in the postseason. There's no denying the latter."

Bobrovsky has a new primary backup this season in Knight, who moves up to replace new Leafs goalie Anthony Stolarz. His challenges off the ice have been well-documented. This is Knight's time to shine on the ice after years of preparation.

"We haven't seen Spencer in a while, but he has the potential to be better than a lot of the backups here," another goalie analyst said.

#### 4. New York Islanders

Ilya Sorokin, Semyon Varlamov

Like other elite goaltenders in the top-10 tandems, Sorokin is also looking to bounce back from a down season. The 29-year-old posted a .908 save percentage last season, the first time in his career he's been lower than .918.

He was still well above average in goals saved above expected (7.7) and right at league average in expected save percentage (.899). His tandem mate Varlamov was even better: 9.0 goals saved above expected and a .901 expected save percentage.

"A lot of these other tandems have a starter and a backup. I think Varlamov can be a No. 1," a goaltending analyst said.

This tandem has been the bedrock of the Islanders since Sorokin's rookie season in 2020-21. Assuming Sorokin bounces back statistically, it belongs firmly in the top 10.

### 3. New Jersey Devils

Jacob Markstrom, Jake Allen

The Devils had a goaltending problem, watching their team save percentage drop from 10th in the NHL to 30th over the past two seasons. They allowed the first goal of the game 70% of the time last season. Even if they would dig out of that hole, porous goaltending would give the lead right back.

The first major solution to that problem was the trade that brought Allen from Montreal on March 8 -- too late to save that season, but a building block for this one. Step two was the long-anticipated trade with the Flames for Markstrom, a 15-year veteran expected to finally strengthen the weakest part of the Devils.

"Markstrom and Allen could be really good. Allen still has good games in him, and Markstrom is looking at this as his 'let's go!' season behind a contending team," one goalie analyst noted.

The analysts we spoke to all had the Devils in their top-five tandems. One former NHL goaltender had them second overall.

### 2. Winnipeg Jets

Connor Hellebuyck, Eric Comrie

It's hard to argue against the reigning Vezina winner. It's even harder to argue against the reigning Vezina winner when he was also sixth for the Hart Trophy last season, credited with getting his team to a 110-point season.

"Connor Hellebuyck is the reason why the Jets are here," one NHL goalie analyst said, in an understatement.

Hellebuyck does it all. He's played 60 games or more in each of the past three seasons. His save percentage was north of .920 over the past two campaigns. He led the NHL in goals saved above expected (22.6).

Returning as his backup is Comrie, who was his understudy in 2021-22 before signing with Buffalo, where he played two ill-fated seasons. Comrie had an .874 save percentage in 10 games last season.

"Comrie's season in Buffalo was absurd last season, but I really think he's a perfect fit in Winnipeg, where he's comfortable," another goalie analyst said.

It's all about Hellebuyck, and he's the best in the NHL at what he does. Whatever Comrie gives them is gravy. Although not having a better backup is what kept the Jets out of the top spot in the tandem ranking.

## 1. New York Rangers

Igor Shesterkin, Jonathan Quick

Our panel of experts agreed that the Rangers deserved the top spot in the goalie tandem ranking, now that the Bruins broke up the band.

Shesterkin is well-established as one of the top goaltenders in the NHL, even if he hasn't hit the heights of his Vezina-winning 2021-22 campaign again. He had a .912 save percentage last season in 55 games, although he had only 3.46 goals saved above expected. He's going to break the bank on his next contract for a reason: Few netminders in the NHL are even in the conversation with Shesterkin as far as ability to take over a game.

But the reason this tandem could be considered the NHL's best has to do with the 27 games Shesterkin didn't play. Quick, 38, was 18-6-2 last season for the Rangers, reviving his career after it looked like it might have reached its end with the Kings and Golden Knights in 2022-23. (Quick did win a third Stanley Cup ring with the Knights as a backup goalie.)

Quick's underlying numbers were better than Shesterkin's in some cases last season.

"If Jonathan Quick plays like he did last season, they absolutely deserve to be here," an NHL goalie analyst said.

That's a significant if given Quick's age and mileage, but the NHL should know better than to count him out by now.

## ESPN / NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, fantasy pickup for each team

By Sean Allen, Victoria Matiash- October 19, 2024

There is still quite a bit of the 2024-25 NHL season left to be played. But after a week and change in the books, there are some clear early risers (and fallers) on our rankings of all 32 clubs.

But beyond the new 1-32 list, do you need some help with your fantasy hockey roster? If so, you're in luck, because Sean Allen and Victoria Matiash have provided a waiver wire target from each team.

Keep in mind that it's not too late to play ESPN fantasy hockey this season. Sign up for free and start playing today!

How we rank: A panel of ESPN hockey commentators, analysts, reporters and editors sends in a 1-32 poll based on the games through Wednesday, which generates our master list here.

Note: Previous ranking for each team refers to the previous edition,  
Published Oct. 7. Points percentages are through Thursday's games.

### 1. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 80.0%

Logan Stankoven, F (68.8% available, 1.9 FPPG, 7.6 fantasy points): The rookie is contributing from wherever coach Pete DeBoer plunks him in the lineup, be it on the top unit or elsewhere. Through his first four games, the versatile youngster provided an assist on goals by five different teammates, including one on the power play.

Next seven days: vs. EDM (Oct. 19), @ BUF (Oct. 22), @ BOS (Oct. 24)

### 2. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 87.5%

Will Cuyllle, F (98.5% available, 2.3 FPPG, 7.0 fantasy points): Reilly Smith would be the only other likely available place to look, but there's more potential in Cuyllle getting enough minutes to earn a fantasy-relevant amount of hits and shots. It looks like this third line will get enough 5-on-5 minutes to do the job.

Next seven days: @ TOR (Oct. 19), @ MTL (Oct. 22), vs. FLA (Oct. 24)

### 3. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 75.0%

Anthony Stolarz, G (66.9% available, 13.8 FPPG, 4.6 fantasy points): With a head start on an injured Joseph Woll, Stolarz is doing his best to create some early separation for the crease-share lead. A permanent 60-40 share is more than enough for fantasy stardom on this winning team.

Next seven days: vs. NYR (Oct. 19), vs. TB (Oct. 21), @ CBJ (Oct. 22), vs. STL (Oct. 24)

### 4. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 58.3%

Anton Lundell, F (93.3% available, 2.0 FPPG, 7.8 fantasy points): With Aleksander Barkov to miss at least the rest of the month, Lundell is a top-line center for the Cats with Sam Reinhart on his wing. It's not a shock he has four points in three games since Barkov was hurt.

Next seven days: vs. VGG (Oct. 19), vs. MIN (Oct. 22), @ NYR (Oct. 24)

#### 5. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 71.4%

Jake Allen, G (88.5% available, 16.4 FPPG, 8.2 fantasy points): Early returns suggest this will be a beneficial arrangement between Allen and Jacob Markstrom this season. Even with a 40% crease share, it looks like Allen is worth having on daily-lineup rosters.

Next seven days: vs. WSH (Oct. 19), vs. TB (Oct. 22), @ DET (Oct. 24)

#### 6. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 14

Points percentage: 100.0%

Gabriel Vilardi, F (86.7% available, 0.8 FPPG, 2.5 fantasy points): As long as he remains a fixture on the Jets' top line and power play with Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor, Vilardi will put up impressive scoring numbers in short order -- just as he did last season, when not out injured.

Next seven days: vs. SJ (Oct. 18), vs. PIT (Oct. 20), @ STL (Oct. 22), @ SEA (Oct. 24)

#### 7. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 60.0%

Ilya Samsonov, G (48.3% available, 6.4 FPPG, 6.4 fantasy points): You can bet your bottom casino chip Samsonov intends to challenge Adin Hill for the starter's gig with one of the better teams in the West. Including preseason play, the former Leaf and Capital has performed well to this point.

Next seven days: @ FLA (Oct. 19), vs. LA (Oct. 22)

#### 8. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 60.0%

Pavel Zacha, F (71.0% available, 1.1 FPPG, 4.6 fantasy points): Zacha held on to his role as linemate to David Pastrnak, splitting faceoff duties on the top line with Elias Lindholm. What really juices him for fantasy is that he also stays with them both when the Bruins go on the power play.

Next seven days: @ UTAH (Oct. 19), @ NSH (Oct. 22), vs. DAL (Oct. 24)

#### 9. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 100.0%

J.J. Moser, D (96.1% available, 2.1 FPPG, 2.1 fantasy points): Victor Hedman's new defense partner plays a physical game and will be due a ton of ice time thanks to his running mate. The blocked shot statistics should help keep him on the fringes of roster-worthy.

Next seven days: @ OTT (Oct. 19), @ TOR (Oct. 21), @ NJ (Oct. 22), vs. MIN (Oct. 24)

10. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 40.0%

Viktor Arvidsson, F (51.5% available, 0.6 FPPG, 2.4 fantasy points): No, it hasn't been a great start, but fresh on-ice chemistry often isn't forged overnight. As long as coach Kris Knoblauch is sticking with Arvidsson in his top six, fantasy managers in deeper leagues should do the same. The production will come.

Next seven days: @ DAL (Oct. 19), vs. CAR (Oct. 22)

11. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 50.0%

Shayne Gostisbehere, D (68.4% available, 1.4 FPPG, 1.4 fantasy points): It's only two games, but 20 minutes of average ice time is above expectations. We knew Gostisbehere could steal power-play time, but the added counting minutes is huge for his fantasy output.

Next seven days: @ PIT (Oct. 18), @ STL (Oct. 19), @ EDM (Oct. 22), @ CGY (Oct. 24)

12. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 75.0%

Jake Middleton, D (77.7% available, 2.9 FPPG, 11.5 fantasy points): The Wild blueliner is worth his fantasy salt in any league that rewards hits and blocked shots. Brock Faber's top-pairing partner can also be counted on for pitching in on the production side enough to average 2.0 FPPG.

Next seven days: @ CBJ (Oct. 19), @ FLA (Oct. 22), @ TB (Oct. 24)

13. Utah Hockey Club

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 70.0%

Barrett Hayton, F (65.4% available, 2.7 FPPG, 13.3 fantasy points): Clayton Keller's center has earned at least one point in all five games to launch 2024-25, comprising four goals and two assists. Unlike Keller and winger Dylan Guenther, Hayton remains available in more than half of ESPN fantasy leagues. For now.

Next seven days: vs. BOS (Oct. 19), vs. OTT (Oct. 22), vs. COL (Oct. 24)

14. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 100.0%

Jonathan Huberdeau, F (41.9% available, 3.2 FPPG, 12.7 fantasy points): The Flames' trio of Huberdeau, Martin Pospisil and Anthony Mantha have combined for 15 points through four games. Of those three, Huberdeau is the only member of the club's top power play.

Next seven days: @ SEA (Oct. 19), vs. PIT (Oct. 22), vs. CAR (Oct. 24)

15. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 60.0%

Joel Blomqvist, G (98.6% available, 8.8 FPPG, 2.9 fantasy points): This is becoming less and less speculative. The pump is primed for a hostile takeover of the crease by the talented, young netminder. Tristan Jarry has been shaky and Alex Nedeljkovic is injured. More solid starts could force the Pens' hand.

Next seven days: vs. CAR (Oct. 18), @ WPG (Oct. 20), @ CGY (Oct. 22)

16. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 60.0%

Brandt Clarke, D (82.6% available, 2.4 FPPG, 9.5 fantasy points): Filling in for Drew Doughty on the Kings' No. 1 power play, the eighth overall draft selection (2021) has three assists with the extra skater, plus another at even strength, though four games. Doughty isn't expected back until late December at the earliest.

Next seven days: @ ANA (Oct. 20), @ VGK (Oct. 22), vs. SJ (Oct. 24)

17. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 0.0%

Casey Mittelstadt, F (68.3% available, 2.5 FPPG, 9.8 fantasy points): The Colorado center has more goals than Nathan MacKinnon. That trend won't last, but a temporary spot on the top power-play unit ensures Mittelstadt will continue to produce with the extra skater. Then more at even strength once Valeri Nichushkin, Artturi Lehkonen and others are back in the mix.

Next seven days: vs. ANA (Oct. 18), @ SJ (Oct. 20), @ SEA (Oct. 22), @ UTAH (Oct. 24)

18. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 50.0%

Maxim Tsyplov, F (97.3% available, 1.5 FPPG, 4.4 fantasy points): Though Anthony Duclair is another tempting option, the unknown upside of Tsyplov is admittedly intriguing. Especially with the Isles giving him ample ice time (17:39 per game) and power-play time (3:04).

Next seven days: vs. MTL (Oct. 19), vs. DET (Oct. 22)

19. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 10



Points percentage: 50.0%

Jake DeBrusk, F (60.0% available, 1.8 FPPG, 5.5 fantasy points): Any fantasy manager who believes Elias Pettersson will soon return to form should also anticipate solid numbers from his new winger. DeBrusk has 70-point potential alongside Pettersson when the center hits his best level.

Next seven days: @ PHI (Oct. 19), @ CHI (Oct. 22)

20. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 50.0%

Josh Norris, F (87.1% available, 3.4 FPPG, 10.2 fantasy points): Off to a hot start, Norris is making us forget the injury-riddled recent seasons we've endured. As is the theme for early season fantasy targets, he's fueling his stats with power-play opportunities.

Next seven days: vs. TB (Oct. 19), @ UTAH (Oct. 22)

21. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 0.0%

Gustav Nyquist, F (74.2% available, 0.4 FPPG, 1.1 fantasy points): Give it a minute. Nyquist registered only four points in his first month with the Predators last season, then wrapped up with 75 total. As long as the veteran winger sticks on a scoring line with Filip Forsberg and Ryan O'Reilly, we'll see an uptick in production soon.

Next seven days: vs. DET (Oct. 19), vs. BOS (Oct. 22)

22. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 60.0%

Jordan Eberle, F (88.0% available, 2.6 FPPG, 10.0 fantasy points): The Kraken's new captain is off to a hot start, potting three goals and an assist through his first four contests. A gig on a new-look power play -- including Vegas export Chandler Stephenson -- offers additional fantasy promise.

Next seven days: vs. CGY (Oct. 19), vs. COL (Oct. 22), vs. WPG (Oct. 24)

23. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 66.7%

Tom Wilson, F (74.0% available, 4.2 FPPG, 4.2 fantasy points): This is still Tom "Bodycheck" Wilson we are talking about. The Caps have an upgraded top six, and he's still a major part of it. He should be rostered in more leagues.

Next seven days: @ NJ (Oct. 19), @ PHI (Oct. 22), vs. PHI (Oct. 23)

24. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 60.0%

Philip Broberg, D (92.0% available, 1.7 FPPG, 6.9 fantasy points): Heading into Thursday's tilt with the Islanders, the eighth overall draft selection (2019) has pitched in a point per game through four. A regular top-four role and spot on the secondary power play should result in a breakout season from the former Oiler.

Next seven days: vs. CAR (Oct. 19), vs. WPG (Oct. 22), @ TOR (Oct. 24)

#### 25. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 37.5%

Jamie Drysdale, D (93.1% available, 1.6 FPPG, 3.2 fantasy points): A healthy Drysdale came in with the quarterback job on the power play, supplanting Cam York despite York's success last season. This Flyers' power play was brutal in 2023-24, but the talent has been upgraded thanks to rookie Matvei Michkov.

Next seven days: vs. VAN (Oct. 19), vs. WSH (Oct. 22), @ WSH (Oct. 23)

#### 26. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 25.0%

Owen Power, D (67.5% available, 1.4 FPPG, 5.4 fantasy points): While we could make an argument for Power or his defense partner Bowen Byram, Power is the one getting blue-line time on the first unit for the power play alongside Rasmus Dahlin.

Next seven days: @ CHI (Oct. 19), vs. DAL (Oct. 22)

#### 27. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 25.0%

J.T. Compher, F (93.4% available, 1.6 FPPG, 4.9 fantasy points): It might not last because it's currently at the expense of both Alex DeBrincat and Vladimir Tarasenko, but Compher is rolling on the top power-play unit. It's his only access to ice time with Dylan Larkin, which is key in Detroit.

Next seven days: @ NSH (Oct. 19), @ NYI (Oct. 22), vs. NJ (Oct. 24)

#### 28. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 40.0%

Kirby Dach, F (93.8% available, 1.3 FPPG, 5.1 fantasy points): The Habs are light on fantasy options beyond the top line, but Dach joins them on the power play. He has had plenty of power-play time, averaging 4:31 across the first four games.

Next seven days: @ NYI (Oct. 19), vs. NYR (Oct. 22)

#### 29. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 66.7%

Lukas Dostal, G (86.6% available, 7.1 FPPG, 14.2 fantasy points): One shutout win against the Sharks and a lively hard-fought victory over a spunky Utah bunch suggests the Ducks' current No. 1 could serve as a viable option in the deepest of fantasy leagues. At least until John Gibson (appendectomy) returns, and when the matchup makes sense.

Next seven days: @ COL (Oct. 18), vs. LA (Oct. 20), vs. SJ (Oct. 22)

### 30. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 50.0%

Kent Johnson, F (94.9% available, 3.0 FPPG, 6.1 fantasy points): The skill has been there all along, so it's no surprise that 20:12 of ice time per game in the early stages of the season has teased out results. Ice time and power-play time are the keys to his success, and he's getting both.

Next seven days: vs. MIN (Oct. 19), vs. TOR (Oct. 22)

### 31. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 50.0%

Alec Martinez, D (96.4% available, 2.3 FPPG, 9.0 fantasy points): Though currently on IR, the veteran defenseman has been back to his shot-blocking ways. Martinez finished with 165 blocks last season, despite playing only 55 games. He also pitches in more points than the typical high-end shot-blocking defender. He'll be out until at least Oct. 25, but a good stash for your bench.

Next seven days: vs. BUF (Oct. 19), vs. VAN (Oct. 22)

### 32. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 25.0%

Jake Walman, D (87.1% available, 2.0 FPPG, 6.0 fantasy points): The Sharks defender is eager to both shoot on net and block a good number of opposing shots. He's also pegged to provide a hearty serving of time on ice, including quality minutes on the club's No. 1 power play.

Next seven days: @ WPG (Oct. 18), vs. COL (Oct. 20), @ ANA (Oct. 22), @ LA (Oct. 24)

## [Sportsnet.ca / Sportsnet's 2025 NHL Draft Prospect Rankings: October Edition](#)

By Sam Cosentino- October 17, 2024

There's very little rest for the scouting departments of NHL teams. Scouts were able to take in some summer hockey at the Hlinka-Gretzky tournament in Edmonton in early August, then enjoyed a little down time before the grind of a new season got going again in the third week of September.

One year ago, we tabbed Macklin Celebrini as the No. 1 prospect for the 2024 NHL Draft. He did not disappoint, holding the top spot from wire-to-wire and was eventually taken first overall by San Jose. Along the way, he became the youngest ever Hobey Baker Award winner, and was arguably Canada's best player at the world juniors at just 17 years of age. He scored a goal in his long-awaited NHL debut last week and didn't look out of place at the next level.

We may see something similar this season with Boston College's James Hagens. Hagens debuted this past weekend and picked up an assist in both of Boston College's two games at Michigan State.

Hagens has excelled at every level before. He tore up the U17 World Challenge with 21 points. His 22 points at the U18 worlds established a new record, surpassing Nikita Kucherov's 21 set in 2011. Hagens is quick, smart, has good hands and is a dual threat to create offence, while being a responsible defensive player. It's not inconceivable that he'll go wire-to-wire as this year's top prospect.

He will have a few challengers along the way, though. Porter Martone of Brampton brings many of the same characteristics as Hagens, but in a bigger package. If teams are leaning defence, Matthew Schaefer and his elite skating may be the one to move into that top spot. There's also Anton Frondell, Roger McQueen and don't sleep on the exceptional status wonder, Michael Misa, who's off to a torrid start with OHL Saginaw.

It's notable that the projected top end of this draft class is full of late birthdays, which means players born after September 15, 2006. Last year, five of the top 16 picks were late birthdays, but the 2025 draft could see five late birthday players go inside the top 10. My top two ranked players (Hagens and Martone) are both late birthday players. Typically, this is advantageous for the team that drafts those players because the player will have had an additional year of experience and, in some cases, scrutiny.

Some other trends that will separate this draft include the number of high-end players coming out of the Canadian Hockey League. Fourteen CHL-trained players were taken in Round 1 of the 2024 draft and this year all three leagues, led by the OHL, have players projected to go in the top 32. The QMJHL, which has struggled the past couple of drafts, will experience a resurgence with the likes of Moncton's Caleb Desnoyers and Chicoutimi's Emile Guite amongst others. The OHL looks to have a strong class with Martone and Schaefer leading the way. McQueen and Jackson Smith represent the high end crop out of the WHL. My initial list below includes 18 CHLers.

Interestingly, this draft class features a couple of high-end goaltending prospects as well. Two in particular are likely to go in the first round, which we haven't seen since 2021. Brampton's Jack Ivankovic was lights out at the Hlinka tournament, while Prince George's Joshua Ravensbergen has come out of nowhere to lead the way in the WHL. Two Russian netminders playing overseas, Pyotr Andreyanov and Semyon Frolov, are off to great starts in the MHL.

Noticeably absent on this list is a Finnish player, as this year's class clearly represents a downturn in the cycle of players coming out of that country. A number of scouts at the Hlinka-Gretzky commented that the Finnish entrant into that event was one of the least talented they'd seen in ages. While it does speak

to the cyclical nature of the draft, we're not used to seeing a list devoid of Finnish-born players. Surely some will emerge as the season progresses, but this is a rarity.

Here is our first draft ranking of the season.

1. James Hagens, C, 5-foot-11, 176 pounds, Boston College (NCAA): He's destroyed competition at every level. Most notably, his 22 points collected at the 2024 U18 worlds surpassed Nikita Kucherov to establish a new tournament record.
2. Porter Martone, C, 6-foot-3, 196 pounds, Brampton Steelheads (OHL): Size and skill set are a rare combination, which is why he will generate plenty of first overall pick talk as the season progresses.
3. Matthew Schaefer, D, 6-foot-1, 175 pounds, Erie Otters (OHL): May be the most beautiful and efficient skater this draft class has to offer. Absolutely brilliant in the Hlinka-Gretzky this summer, but he hasn't yet played this OHL season due to a bout with mono.
4. Roger McQueen, C, 6-foot-5, 190 pounds, Brandon Wheat Kings (WHL): Somewhat of an enigma because he has all the elements in his game to dominate and the size that scouts love, but there's some inconsistency in his play.
5. Michael Misa, LW, 6-foot-1, 185 pounds, Saginaw Spirit (OHL): It's not easy living up to the expectations that come with attaining exceptional status, but Misa has done everything expected of him and has plenty left to give here in his draft year.
6. Ivan Ryabkin, C, 6-feet, 170 pounds, Dynamo Moscow (MHL): One-on-one skill and ability to navigate through traffic are elite elements in his game. He can score, make plays and isn't a defensive liability.
7. Logan Hensler, D, 6-foot-2, 196 pounds, Wisconsin (NCAA): A dynamic puck transporter with a sneaky extra gear. Uses reach and mobility to defend.
8. Anton Frondell, C, 6-feet, 196 pounds, Djurgardens (Allsvenskan): With off-season training time limited due to injury, his early draft stock will live off the currency he established as an underaged player. He's been back playing since late August bouncing between the national team, and Djurgardens' U20 and Allsvenskans teams.
9. William Moore, C, 6-foot-2, 161 pounds, USNTDP (USHL): Can work through checks, but can also excel in the one-on-one game with good foot speed and hands to match.
10. Malcolm Spence, LW, 6-foot-2, 201 pounds, Erie Otters (OHL): Leans more playmaker than scorer. Wore a letter at 17 years old in the OHL and did the same for a gold medal-winning U18 team in April.
11. Jake O'Brien, C, 6-foot-2, 170 pounds, Brantford Bulldogs (OHL): The reigning OHL Rookie Of the Year is a playmaking machine. He controls the puck with his head on a swivel and often makes plays that surprise opponents.
12. Victor Eklund, LW, 5-foot-11, 161 pounds, Djurgardens (Allsvenskan): Brother of San Jose Shark William, Victor works well in small areas and can score from mid-range. Has been able to produce good numbers early in the Allsvenskan season.
13. Caleb Desnoyers, C, 6-feet, 178 pounds, Moncton Wildcats (QMJHL): After a solid showing at the Hlinka-Gretzky, injury issues interrupted the start to his regular season. He possesses great hands and creativity.
14. Radim Mrtka, D, 6-foot-6, 200 pounds, Trinec (Extraliga): Size is back in the NHL and Mrtka is the biggest of all the projected first-rounders. He is far from a finished product, but there's plenty to like in his skating and defending ability.

15. Jakob Ihs-Wozniak, RW, 6-foot-3, 185 pounds, Lulea (J20): Plays a heady game and is well aware of what his best option likes. Can shoot it accurately with a lightning quick release.
16. Joshua Ravensbergen, G, 6-foot-5, 192 pounds, Prince George Cougars (WHL): Size makes him an option for any NHL team. Undrafted into the WHL, he's since lit the league afire, having tied the rookie record with six shutouts as a 16-year-old in 2023-24.
17. Cole Reschny, LW, 5-foot-9, 161 pounds, Victoria Royals (WHL): Is constantly in motion working to track pucks and create offence through transition. In spite of his smaller stature, he's put up offensive numbers wherever he's played.
18. Jackson Smith, D, 6-foot-3, 190 pounds, Tri-City Americans (WHL): The early returns are that he's a player similar to Carter Yakemchuk where his skating, edge work and playmaking ability are elite for a defenceman.
19. Emile Guite, LW, 6-foot-1, 174 pounds, Chicoutimi Saguenéens (QMJHL): Tall and lanky, Guite has plenty of room for growth. His shot is elite and NHL-ready right now.
20. Braeden Cootes, C, 6-feet, 183 pounds, Seattle Thunderbirds (WHL): He could be this year's version of Jett Luchanko as a riser, but plays with more physicality.
21. Blake Fiddler, D, 6-foot-4, 207 pounds, Edmonton Oil Kings (WHL): Having NHL bloodlines always helps. Vernon's son, Blake Fiddler, is a great skater for his size. He can transport pucks, make a good first pass and shoots it a ton.
22. Kashawn Aitcheson, D, 6-foot-1, 198 pounds, Barrie Colts (OHL): Missing the cut off for last year's draft by only a few days, Aitcheson plays a hard physical game and has some offensive tools.
23. Sascha Boumedienne, D, 6-foot-2, 182 pounds, Boston University (NCAA): A smooth skater, and adept puck handler, he will be challenged to play a more simple game against older, tougher competition at the college level.
24. Viktor Klingsell, LW, 5-foot-10, 183 pounds, Skelleftea (J20): Had a great start to the scouting season with a 12-point effort for the Swedes at the Hlinka-Gretzky. He plays at a high pace, creates space for himself and finds others.
25. Jan Chovan, C, 6-foot-3, 181 pounds, Tappara (J20): Has already played in two Hlinka-Gretzky's and a world U18. Chovan's size and playmaking ability make him an attractive pick out of a country that has enjoyed a resurgence of late.
26. Milton Gastrin, LW, 6-foot-1, 183 pounds, MODO (J20): A two-way centre who can drive play offensively. He's an effective checker and match-up player and competes hard all over the ice. He has already made his SHL debut this season.
27. Adam Benak, C, 5-foot-7, 161 pounds, Youngstown Phantoms (USHL): The first of two diminutive forwards who have world class ability. His record-setting performance at the Hlinka-Gretzky can't be overlooked, where he put up 21 points in five games for bronze medal-winning Czechia.
28. Cameron Schmidt, RW, 5-foot-8, 152 pounds, Vancouver Giants (WHL): Logan Stankoven should be a great example why NHL teams shouldn't necessarily turn their backs on a small forward. Schmidt is off to better than a goal per game start with 11 in nine games.
29. Jack Ivankovic, G, 6-feet, 179 pounds, Brampton Steelheads (OHL): He was so good in his 16-year-old season that Brampton GM James Richmond was able to deal away Buffalo prospect Ryerson Leenders and hand the reins over to the now 17-year old Ivankovic.

30. Justin Carbonneau, RW, 6-foot-1, 190 pounds, Blainville-Boisbriand Armada (QMJHL): Is adept at handling the puck at high speed and working through traffic. His 31 goals a year ago were not by accident. He's fun to watch because his game is so unpredictable.

31. Charlie Trethewey, D, 6-foot-1, 190 pounds, USNTDP (USHL): Plays the position honestly. Uses good feet to defend, and is also an effective passer. He processes the game quickly, which leads to efficient and effective decision making.

32. Brady Martin, C, 6-feet, 175 pounds, Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds (OHL): Country-strong, he combines great skating ability with a deadly shot.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Which slow starters have legitimate cause for concern?](#)

By Justin Bourne- October 17, 2024

During the 2022-23 season where the Boston Bruins set the NHL points record, they had a three-game stretch in late January where they lost three in a row. When last season's Presidents Trophy-winning New York Rangers crossed into 2024, they did so by going loss, win, loss, loss, loss.

My junior coach used to say "Good teams don't lose two in a row," and that message was useful. The mindset of "When you fall off you get right back on the horse" is great for an athlete, but it's also not exactly true. Good teams do lose games, and sometimes they lose several in a row, for a variety of reasons.

But you know who also loses stretches of games in a row? Bad teams.

It's with that in mind that we're going to evaluate the NHL's slow starters this season, as a handful of teams with Stanley Cup Playoff aspirations (at a minimum) have fallen flat out of the gates. Are these poorly-timed blips from good teams, or are they worse teams than we thought?

Ten days ago I wrote "Two sentences on every NHL team's expectations," which I'll crib from below to summarize my expectations.

Colorado Avalanche

Pre-season expectations: Top-two in the Central

So far: 0-3-0, -10 goal differential, losses to Vegas, Columbus and the Islanders

Key "pre-season expectation" quote: "...a division crown and more rides on the two players above (Landeskog and Nichushkin) helping out upon returning, plus getting good goaltending from Alexandar Georgiev and Justus Annunen."

Analysis: That last part is interesting.

Only one team in the NHL has spent a higher percentage of their games in the O-zone than the Avs. They're one of a few teams who grade out well by both expected goals for and expected goals against.

After getting out my spectacles and abacus I can tell you their team save percentage is dead-freaking-last (about 75 per cent), and their team shooting percentage is also in the bottom half of the league, which puts them at 27th in "actuals goals compared to expected goals" according to SportLogiq.

I'm not saying they've been good, but let's pump the brakes on the Avs, who are moderate goaltending away from getting it together and looking like the team we expected them to be. (Returns from Landeskog and/or Nichushkin, as well as Devon Toews will go a long way too.)

Nashville Predators

Pre-season expectations: Better than last season's 99 points

So far: 0-3-0, -8 goal differential, losses to Dallas, Detroit, Seattle

Key "pre-season expectations" quote: "...their blue line is just OK, and their most important forwards are old, so they just seem built to get 97 points and be eliminated by Dallas in the first round."

Analysis: Clearly I wasn't as high on them as most.



They can make some of the same claims as Colorado, in that their goaltending has been abominable (second-worst save percentage in the league), and their shooting percentage has somehow been worse, clocking in at dead last (just a bit over five percent).

But Colorado has been good in expected goals for and against, while the Preds are packed in a quadrant of sadness with four other teams: San Jose, Montreal, Chicago, and Philadelphia. That is ... not a positive sign.

I'm not sure they're going to match last season's freakish 99 points, but this is still the team that played a stretch of 18 games without a regulation-time loss in early 2024. Their shooting and save percentages will improve, and they'll find their way back to playoffs.

#### Vancouver Canucks

Pre-season expectations: Top 2 or 3 in the Pacific

So far: 0-1-2, -5 goal differential, taking points off Calgary and Philly then losing outright to Tampa Bay

Key "pre-season expectations" quote: "...I expect them to finish second in the Pacific (behind Edmonton), with their fate from there riding entirely on the health of Thatcher Demko."

Analysis: Maybe I messed up by saying "from there," as "with their fate riding entirely on the health of Thatcher Demko" might have been more accurate. The Canucks are fifth-last in team save percentage, as Arturs Silovs (-3.5 goals below expected according to MoneyPuck) hasn't quite been Demko.

But he certainly hasn't been the only problem, as the team finds themselves on the wrong end of the expected goals for and against categories, Elias Pettersson is struggling to produce, and they just haven't quite found last year's mojo.

All that said, there's still too much talent there for them to suddenly be bad, so I'm not overly worried about a moderately slow start, particularly when I thought they played well against their last opponent, Tampa Bay. But a lot went right last season, and so some early adversity will provide a good test.

#### Buffalo Sabres

Pre-season expectations: Threaten playoffs

So far: 1-3-0, -4 goal differential

Key "pre-season expectations" quote: "...but they have a higher upside than other non-playoff teams because there's at least a chance a D-corps with Rasmus Dahlin, Owen Power, and Bowen Byram hits levels most teams can't match."

Analysis: Sometimes you just hit rough patches in the schedule, and playing the NJ Devils — a likely home-ice playoff team — in Prague to start and then the defending Cup champs in three of your first four games would qualify as a "tough patch."

Even with that challenge, they've still managed to be 11th in expected goals against, which makes me feel pretty good about the prediction above. Four of their next five opponents missed playoffs last year, so it's possible they get their house back in order fairly quickly.

And if they do, look for "Rasmus Dahlin lit up Peyton Krebs" to be the "emotional turning point" narrative for the team, rather than "their schedule got easier."

And finally...

#### Edmonton Oilers

(I have them here rather than the winless San Jose Sharks because we're talking about teams we thought were going to be good.)

Pre-season expectations: President's Trophy and Stanley Cup faves

So far: 1-3-0, -11 goal differential after four straight at home, three against non-playoff teams from last year

Key "pre-season expectations" quote: "...I like Stuart Skinner's odds of having a great year..."

Analysis: Bit of a theme among struggling teams, isn't there?

Skinner has played three games and has an .845 save percentage while being second-last in goals saved above expected (giving up four goals more than you'd expect he should, roughly). But he's better than awful, so that will improve. And their PK, which was so good last season, is currently well below 50 per cent, so that will improve too.

They're going to be good (still divisional favourites), but I do have one concern now that I didn't have two weeks ago: I'm not sure that their changes, particularly those on defence, didn't leave them worse off. They're without Philip Broberg, Cody Ceci and Vincent Desharnais, none of whom are world-beaters, but currently look far better than Ty Emberson, Travis Dermott, and Troy Stecher.

It's hurting their expected goals against, and their losses up front (Dylan Holloway, Ryan McLeod and Warren Foegele) leave them a little slower than last year and less PK-ready.

As mentioned, this is still a good team that's gonna get hot. But after just a few games I may be downgrading them from "the best team" to "one of the best teams in the league."

## [Sportsnet.ca / NHL Power Rankings: 32 scorers who need to ... start scoring](#)

By Ryan Dixon- October 18, 2024

Any kid can tell you October, with pumpkin pie and Halloween candy, is a month of treats. And with the annual arrival of a new NHL season each fall, any goal-scorer can tell you they sometimes have the patience of a toddler when it comes to getting that first cookie of the year.

Whether you're a Rocket Richard contender, a middle-sixer hoping to pop 20 or a D-man expected to deliver from the back end, Step 1 in the process is always netting that first goal. A couple games without a goal? Sure. But once it's nearly a handful, the pressure to get on the board mounts.

Heck, 385 NHL skaters are being outscored by Minnesota Wild goalie Filip Gustavsson right now.

So with grips getting a little tighter on the stick, we're using this week's power rankings as a way to identify one offence-oriented player on each squad who is still looking to bury his first biscuit of the season.

1. Dallas Stars (4-0-0) Logan Stankoven is off and running in his pursuit of the Calder Trophy with five assists through four games. The 21-year-old, though, has yet to thwack the twine.
2. Toronto Maple Leafs (3-1-0) It's been the second and third lines in Toronto doing the damage, with Auston Matthews scoring his first goal on Wednesday night and Mitch Marner also on one tally. Max Domi has five apples, but is still looking for his first goal.
3. New York Rangers (2-0-1) Eleven Rangers have already found the net, contributing to the Blueshirts' league-best 5.0 goals-per-game. Offensive force Adam Fox, however, is not one of them.
4. Winnipeg Jets (3-0-0) Gabe Vilardi scored at a 38-goal pace (22 in 47 games) in an injury-shortened season last year, so there was some hope he might hit the 30-goal barrier this time out. So far, he's 0-for-3. Nik Ehlers is also sitting on a goose egg for the perfect Jets.
5. Vegas Golden Knights (3-1-0) Only 10 defencemen had more goals than Noah Hanifin's 13 last season. The blue-liner is still in search of his first one this year.
6. New Jersey Devils (4-2-0) Some surprising names — Paul Cotter, rookie defenceman Seamus Casey — are at the top of the Devils goal-scoring charts. Dougie Hamilton has not converted in half a dozen games, though, and you know he'd love to get going after last season's injury-ravaged showing.
7. Tampa Bay Lightning (2-0-0) Tampa is one of three teams to have played only two games, so there hasn't been that much opportunity to get on the board. However, you know big UFA fish Jake Guentzel won't wait much longer for his first as a Bolt.
8. Florida Panthers (3-2-0) Carter Verhaeghe has a brand new \$56-million contract extension; what he doesn't have just yet is his first goal of the year.
9. Boston Bruins (3-2-0) The Bruins and Penguins are the only teams with an even dozen guys who've found the net. Believe it or not, though, captain Brad Marchand is not one of them in Boston.
10. Edmonton Oilers (1-3-0) Connor McDavid failing to find the net is part and parcel with Edmonton's sluggish start. Two years ago, he won the Rocket Richard with 64 goals. Last season, he had exactly half that many, with 32. Where will he land once he gets rolling this year?
11. Carolina Hurricanes (1-1-0) Through a couple games, Andrei Svechnikov has yet to bury.

12. Calgary Flames (4-0-0) Blake Coleman set a career high with 30 goals last year. He's still after No. 1 this season.
13. Minnesota Wild (2-0-2) Filip Gustavsson's one goal has him just one back of the team lead! So even though sophomore Brock Faber doesn't have one yet, he's still just two off the pace.
14. Utah Hockey Club (3-1-1) Nick Schmaltz and Logan Cooley have combined for 11 points in five games, but neither has scored a goal yet.
15. Pittsburgh Penguins (3-2-0) After getting blanked by the Rangers on opening night, the Penguins have been finding the net as a team, with 20 goals in four games. Michael Bunting — in his first full year with the squad — has yet to get in on the party, though.
16. St. Louis Blues (2-2-0) Jake Neighbours had a 27-goal breakout last season, so he'd surely like to get off the schneid this October.
17. Vancouver Canucks (0-1-2) Quinn Hughes and newcomer Jake DeBrusk are in search of their first goals, but — with just one assist through three games — being goalless is likely weighing heaviest on Elias Pettersson right now.
18. Philadelphia Flyers (1-1-1) After back-to-back seasons of 27 and 28 goals, it sure feels like 30 is in reach for Owen Tippett. But he's got to find that first one.
19. Seattle Kraken (2-2-0) Big UFA signing Chandler Stephenson does more than provide offence, but won't want to wait much longer for his first Kraken goal.
20. Ottawa Senators (2-1-0) If this is the year Brady Tkachuk scores 40, he better get going.
21. Los Angeles Kings (1-1-2) We all see big things for Quinton Byfield, but it hasn't come together quite yet through four games.
22. Colorado Avalanche (0-4-0) Depth is a huge problem in Colorado, so it would be great to see somebody such as Logan O'Connor start kicking in a goal here and there.
23. New York Islanders (1-1-1) The Isles offence has been all or nothing through three games; they were blanked in Dallas, but put up four against Utah and hung six on Colorado. Noah Dobson, following a huge 70-point year, has yet to find the range.
24. Montreal Canadiens (2-2-0) Nick Suzuki set a new career high with 33 goals last season. The Habs would love to see him getting rolling this fall.
25. Anaheim Ducks (2-1-0) Remember Frank Vatrano's scorching start last season? He had a hat trick in his second game and nine goals by his ninth. He's still looking for that first tally this year.
26. Washington Capitals (1-1-0) It's been only two goalless games, so let's not write off the idea of Alex Ovechkin taking aim at Wayne Gretzky's all-time mark this season.
27. Detroit Red Wings (1-2-0) After inking his huge contract before the season, Lucas Raymond would surely like to find the net and get on with it.
28. Chicago Blackhawks (1-2-1) Tyler Bertuzzi is still in search of his first Chicago celie.
29. Nashville Predators (0-3-0) Oh, boy. It's not fair to pin this bad start on the new guys, but let's just say it will help things if Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault can start scoring.
30. Columbus Blue Jackets (1-2-0) Damon Severson is off to a nice start in Year 2 with Columbus, recording one assist in all three games. The only thing that would make it better is his first goal.

31. Buffalo Sabres (1-3-1) New captain Rasmus Dahlin has just a single assist — and no goals — through this rocky start.

32. San Jose Sharks (0-1-2) Rookie centre Will Smith is seeing fewer than 13 minutes a night and still awaiting his first big-league goal.

## [Sportsnet.ca / What to make of the five NHL teams still undefeated in regulation](#)

By Justin Bourne- October 19, 2024

Earlier this week I wrote an article that looked at the league's winless teams and tried to assess whether they were legitimately bad, or just off to bad starts. Most teams not named San Jose had pretty good excuses, and were likely to sort things out. (Just days later, it seems like the Edmonton Oilers have.)

Today we're going to look at the NHL teams that haven't lost in regulation yet. Given some of them weren't exactly world beaters last season, we'll assess whether these hot starts are potentially a sign of surprisingly good things to come, or not.

For reference on the below, here is my pre-season article "Two sentence expectations for every NHL team."

Let's start with the first of two Canadian surprises, the...

### CALGARY FLAMES

Pre-season expectations: A potential lottery team

Record to date: 4-0-0

Pre-season expectations quote: "They sent away Jacob Markstrom and Andrew Mangiapane for long-term gain, and in turn, they should be clearly out of the playoffs before the deadline."

Analysis: Sometimes things just go right for a stretch of games, and the Flames may well be in that pocket. Their combined save and shooting percentage (PDO) is third highest in the league, and they've counted Chicago and Philadelphia among their early season victims thus far, two pretty not-great teams.

But something has changed about the perception of this team. If their veteran guys happen to have good years at the same time, there are enough quality players here for Calgary to be a challenge most nights. Combine that with some good young talent to energize the group, and you could see them parlaying a good start into a season that's filled with positivity, rather than being some negative slog. They'll still miss the playoffs, but they're no pushover.

### TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING

Pre-season expectations: Fighting for anywhere from second to fifth in the Atlantic

Record to date: 3-0-0

Pre-season expectations quote: "Make no mistake, the Bolts are an analytics organization that's trying to win Stanley Cups."

Analysis: Early returns are that this team is good, very good. If they can figure out a way to upgrade their D-corps, they could be back among the tier of teams with a legitimate shot at the Cup. (But again, that hinges on a very particular positional upgrade.)

They've got too many threats up front, and too good of a goalie to think their start is a fluke. They're giving up more expected goals against than the average NHL team so far, so they've got some work to do. But they're fast, they work hard, and they're smart, which translates to a good team that could push for home ice in the post-season.

### WINNIPEG JETS

Pre-season expectations: Wild card playoff team

Record to date: 3-0-0

Pre-season expectations quote: "While this is a very good team, they fell short last post-season, and let several good players go without really replacing them, so it'll be a year-long battle for the playoffs."

Analysis: During the 2023-24 season, the Jets allowed 198 goals against, tied for fewest in the league -- a pretty significant accomplishment. Their goalie won the Vezina Trophy, they played team defence and built off it.

Well, so far this season they have allowed just two goals against in three games and have the lowest expected goals against of any Western Conference team. I don't know that "best defensive team in the NHL" is sustainable this year, and it remains to be seen if they can score above league average, but any team that defends this well is going to win hockey games.

I now expect to see the Jets add some offence as they go, and becoming a stronger team than I felt they were a whopping 10 days ago.

NEW YORK RANGERS

Pre-season expectations: Drop by 10 points (from 114) and be a tough out in the playoffs

Record to date: 3-0-1

Pre-season expectations quote: "But they did win (the Presidents' Trophy), and they didn't change much of anything, so I guess they'll be a 100-plus point team again this season, though it won't be another Presidents' Trophy."

Analysis: Sure they haven't won every game in regulation, but few teams have better underlying numbers thus far and they've shown the can maintain a strong pace over a full season before.

Artemi Panarin is en fuego, Alexis Lafreniere is a star, and Igor Shesterkin is going to be the highest paid goalie in league history before long. This is no mirage, and so all told, the Rangers may actually threaten for that Presidents' Trophy yet again. Shows what I know.

And finally...

MINNESOTA WILD

Pre-season expectations: If healthy, be in the playoff hunt before falling just short in April

Record to date: 2-0-2

Pre-season expectations quote: "Their combined shooting and save percentage (PDO) last year was bottom-10 in the league, so I expect some bounce-back."

Analysis: It's probably a stretch to have them here, as they've lost twice beyond regulation, but hey! The Wild haven't lost outright yet!

They're a strange team, in that they've got six of eight possible points, but no team in the league has been worse at creating expected goals. They've done it on the backs of great goaltending (over .950 save percentage thus far), and the puck has gone in a bit more than they maybe deserve, so they look pretty good in the standings.

Positive vibes can snowball into something more lasting, but all told, I see an average team having a fortuitous run of hockey.

We always talk about how teams are reasonably well sorted just five or six weeks after the start of the season, and in some ways, we can see it happening. The teams in the wrong statistical cluster include the Sharks, Flyers, Canadiens, and Blackhawks. The good cluster has the Rangers, Lightning, Stars, and the...Flames?

Mostly, those clusters make sense.

But the drift will continue as more games get played, and it's a busy weekend of hockey ahead.



## Sportsnet.ca / Boston College honours Gaudreaus, Voce in emotional home opener

**By Ryan Dixon- October 19, 2024**

CHESTNUT HILL, Mass. — A college hockey rink, like Johnny Gaudreau himself, makes an enormous impact for its size. The one Gaudreau played in for three seasons, Kelley Rink, was on fire Friday night for the Boston College Eagles home-opener. The brass band blew the hits and huge swaths of boisterous students behind each net were always standing, except when they were jumping.

All that energy, though, made the calm of a pre-game moment of silence that much more poignant. It came following a video tribute to honour Johnny Gaudreau, his brother Matthew Gaudreau and Tony Voce, a third former Eagles player who was taken too early after passing suddenly in the summer at age 43.

The losses weigh heavy on the Eagles community. In addition to honouring the men on Friday, the team is carving out a night in November when it hopes both the Gaudreau and Voce families can come to Kelley Rink and remember their loved ones in a place that meant so much to Johnny, Matthew and Tony.

This is, after all, college. It's supposed to be the time of your life, especially when you're in a rowdy arena with your fellow students cheering on the school team. And all the more so if you happen to be one of the talented, lucky guys playing on that squad. Being an Eagle was certainly a cherished existence for Johnny and Matthew. And what BC coach Greg Brown will never forget about the brothers is the fact they managed to take an experience that is already magical for all involved and somehow sprinkle a little more fairy dust on it.

"It's a tough one [to think about], but just the way they could light up a room," Brown said when asked what he recalls about the Gaudreaus one day before the home-opener. "They came with smiles every day. They loved being teammates; they loved being in the locker room; they went on the ice with joy. All those things have a great effect on your teammates, your coaches, everything. When the enthusiasm to be there every day is that consistent and that noticeable, it picks up everyone else's mood."

Brown was an associate coach when Johnny and Matthew played, but joined head coach Jerry York's staff one year after Voce's final season in 2003-04. That said, Brown certainly knew Voce to be a great person and tireless competitor. "He had an edge to him and really got into the dirty areas," Brown said. "Could score a ton of goals and played a fearless game. He wasn't the biggest guy, but he was always around the blue paint."

Of course, few players in the history of hockey have ever thrived with a small frame like Johnny Gaudreau. And while, as Brown notes, the outpouring of emotion we've witnessed across the hockey world is due to who Johnny and Matthew were as people, they were student-athletes at BC and the level their athletic ability rose to is worth celebrating, too.

In his final senior year with the squad, the 2016-17 campaign, Matthew tied for the BC scoring lead. Johnny, of course, was a dizzying talent who helped push the Eagles to a national title in his freshman season of 2011-12. The game Friday night, though a lopsided 5-0 win for the home team against overmatched American International College, was a tough affair, with plenty of big-body collisions and heavy stickwork. Johnny encountered that brand of hockey at 18 years old with, perhaps, all of 150 pounds to carry into the fight.

"Not quite [150], I think," Brown said with a chuckle.

In all seriousness, Brown recalls the coaching staff having genuine concerns about how Johnny would fare at the start of his career, specifically in an early-season tilt versus an always-physical North Dakota squad. Brown can't remember exactly how fat Gaudreau's stat line was from the game, but suffice it say their worries were put to rest.

"One of the USA Hockey people described it this way; when you see him in person, there's nothing that can prepare you for what he's able to do on the ice," Brown says. "And that's really true. The vision, the creativity, the ideas were just [at] the highest level. To be able to just survive at that size is incredible, but to be able excel and control games and make all the plays he made at that size while avoiding much bigger players really defies logic.

"He started well [as a freshman], but it seemed like the second half of the year he was already an elite college player. When we came back from Christmas, he just had an impact on every single game, right through the national championship."

The BC player exhibiting next-level offensive abilities against AIC was Gabe Perreault, who was named first star of the contest for his three-point showing. Afterwards, the sophomore winger spoke about what these Eagles wanted to do to honour Johnny, Matthew and Tony.

"Personally, I didn't get meet them, but the things you hear about them are unbelievable, those three guys were a huge part of this community," Perreault said. "I think the biggest thing we could do tonight was play for them."

One of the guys doing his best out there was James Hagens, the young man who stands a strong chance of being picked first overall in the 2025 NHL Draft. Hagens got his first NCAA goal against AIC and also drew the primary assist on the beautiful snipe that opened the scoring by Aram Minnetian, who happens to be a New Jersey boy just like Johnny and Matthew.

Hagens is also experiencing the added joy of playing college hockey alongside his brother, Micheal, something Johnny and Matthew got to do at BC for one season before Johnny moved on to dazzle even bigger crowds in the NHL.

"Again, they just loved to be together," Brown said. "The happiness they had together just brought energy you couldn't describe, but you loved seeing it; you loved seeing it in the locker room, you loved seeing it on the ice. Unfortunately, the whole world is going to miss that now."

Nothing can fill the real-life void created by these three losses. But on the ice at BC, the current team will forge a link to the past with their play. Perreault and Hagens will be Johnny-esque with their offensive wizardry; Ryan Leonard will remind people of Voce — a Hobey Baker finalist in 2004 — thanks to his board-rattling, greasy game; Will Vote — who scored his third goal of the year versus AIC — is finding success in a five-foot-8, 161-pound frame that's very similar to the one Matthew played with. They can all be the excuse to remember who Johnny, Tony and Matthew were at Boston College.

"It's just hard to let go," Brown said after the game. "They were such a big part of the community here."