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January 17, 2025

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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets top San Jose Sharks for 6th straight win

By Brian Hedger – January 17, 2025

They didn't get to six goals, but the Blue Jackets did move into the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference over the Boston Bruins by extending their season-high winning streak to six straight games Thursday at Nationwide Arena.

Not a bad night for the guys from Columbus.

After building a three-goal lead through two periods, the Blue Jackets polished off a 4-1 victory over the San Jose Sharks in the third to move into the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference ahead of the Boston Bruins. Zach Werenski extended his franchise record home points streak to 18 straight games with an assist on a goal by Adam Fantilli to open the scoring in the first period.

"We played them in San Jose (Nov. 5) and really couldn't find the back of the net ... they beat us 2-1 (in overtime)," defenseman Zach Werenski said. "We knew tonight we wanted to come out strong and get a lead early, and we did that, and then we kind of got a little sloppy and slow in the third period. We'd like to clean that up, but I feel for the most part we played a good hockey game tonight."

According to the NHL, Werenski is one of just six defensemen in league history to put together a home points streak that long, matching Brian Leetch's 18-game run Nov. 11, 1991 to Feb. 21, 1992 for the New York Rangers. Those ahead on the list are John Van Boxmeer of the Buffalo Sabres (19 games), Bobby Orr of the Boston Bruins (21 games in 1970-71 and 25 games in 1974-75), Phil Housley of the original Winnipeg Jets (22 games) and Paul Coffey of the Edmonton Oilers (23 games).

Kent Johnson led the way offensively against the Sharks (14-27-6), finishing with two points on a goal and an assist. James van Riemsdyk scored two goals, including one into an empty net to seal the win in the third. Fantilli scored the other goal for the Jackets, who last put together a six-game winning streak five years ago (Jan. 11-22, 2020) during the COVID-19 shortened 2019-20 season.

Elvis Merzlikins made 18 saves to earn the goaltending win in a game that finished with the Blue Jackets holding a commanding 34-19 edge in shots. Tyler Toffoli scored the lone goal for the Sharks at 7:32 of the third, cutting the Jackets' lead to 3-1 while spoiling Merzlikins' shutout bid.

"Regardless of how we feel, we're playing for the most part the right way," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "When you do that, you can gain momentum and confidence in how you're playing because you're not feeding other teams, you're not chasing the game. We're just staying in hockey games and giving ourselves a chance to catch a break in these tight games."

Columbus Dispatch / Stadium Series jerseys revealed: What the Columbus Blue Jackets, Detroit Red Wings will wear

By Brian Hedger – January 17, 2025

The wait is over for those wondering what the Blue Jackets and Detroit Red Wings will wear while playing outdoors March 1 at Ohio Stadium.

The NHL and Fanatics, the league's official outfitter, released special edition uniform designs Thursday for the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series matchup at Ohio State University's iconic stadium — which has an official capacity of 102,780 and is nicknamed "The Shoe," as reference to its original horseshoe shape.

Starting today, 2025 NHL Stadium Series jerseys are available for pre-order exclusively at The Blue Line locations at Nationwide Arena and Polaris Fashion Place, as well as online at www.TheBlueLineOnline.com, through February 4. While jerseys are expected to be available for purchase and pick up in early-February, additional exclusive team Stadium Series items are on sale now.

Each team's outdoor uniform was designed by Fanatics with "input and alignment," from the teams and league, per a release. They feature "distinct cultural and historical identities," from Columbus and Detroit.

Columbus Blue Jackets outdoor uniforms include Ohio, Union Army nods

The Blue Jackets' look is in line with the Union Army's military uniform, which spawned the team's nickname as an ode to Ohio's patriotism during the Civil War and Columbus as a city that manufactured many of the North's uniforms.

Each sleeve of the Blue Jackets' special edition look includes a military chevron. The left shoulder includes a new 'CBJ' logo surrounded by crossed hockey sticks, an ode to the Union Army's unit designation pins worn on the front of soldiers' caps from the era, and then there's the main crest on the front.

The Blue Jackets' front logo is a new cannon colored with metallic silver and red accents. It's a nod to the Jackets' alternate uniform, which is dark blue and cream with a circular cannon logo on the front — a reference to the cannon at Nationwide Arena that blasts for each Blue Jackets goal, welcomes the Blue Jackets back to the ice after warmups and concludes home victories.

Ohio is also represented on the Blue Jackets' new uniform.

Patches in the state's outline will contain the captain's 'C' and alternate captain 'As' on the front, while "Columbus Blue Jackets" is printed inside the back neck with a buckeye leaf pattern to reflect the state's official tree — not to mention a certain collegiate football team that plays at Ohio Stadium.

That might not go over well with the Blue Jackets' four players from the University of Michigan — Ohio State's bitter rival — but it's nothing that a black marker can't hide. The Jackets' outdoor uniform also includes the star from their primary crest on the pants plus a large metallic team logo and player number on blue helmets.

Detroit Red Wings outdoor uniforms include odes to automotive industry, hockey history

The Red Wings' outdoor look is rooted in Detroit's history with the automotive industry and the NHL as one of the league's original six teams.

The front crest is the city's name written in a font "inspired by automotive insignias," plus an upholstered leather look to the lettering and back numbers. Speed stripes run down each sleeve and sock plus a white racing stripe runs down the middle of a red helmet that includes the team's winged wheel logo embossed on a metallic flake paint commonly used on vehicles.

Detroit's uniform also has a label featuring the Red Wings' unofficial mascot, Stanley, a cartoonish purple octopus, plus pants that include the team's "Hockeytown" slogan.

Each team's uniform includes a "Stadium Series" crest on the right shoulder along with "2025 NHL Stadium Series" on the inside to commemorate the game, which is the league's 43rd outdoor event and first to include the Blue Jackets.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets 'further ahead' than GM Don Waddell expected

By Brian Hedger – January 17, 2025

They're not supposed to be in the hunt for a playoff spot, but it's past the midpoint of the season and the Blue Jackets are right in the thick of things in the Eastern Conference.

They're one of the NHL's most surprising stories, and it's not just preseason prognosticators who are surprised this isn't another painful grind in Columbus. Don Waddell, the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager, is also a little surprised by his new team's impressive progress.

Are they ahead of schedule?

"I'd have to say yes, to be truthful," Waddell said. "I thought we'd have a lot more trouble scoring goals. I think we're leading the league in scoring goals at home. We give up some goals, but openly and candidly, I'd have to say yes ... we're further ahead than I thought we'd be at this point."

The Blue Jackets have scored 98 goals in 23 home games for an average of 4.3 per game. They've also piled up 148 goals for the season, which was tied for sixth in the NHL with the Colorado Avalanche — a perennial Stanley Cup contender.

The Jackets had also scored six-plus goals in a game 10 times, which is just one shy of their franchise record for an entire season. They're also doing it without star forwards Patrik Laine, who was traded to the Montreal Canadiens, and Johnny Gaudreau, whose death in August tore up the Blue Jackets emotionally just weeks before training camp opened.

Gaudreau was their leading scorer for two seasons after picking the Blue Jackets as an unrestricted free agent. The Jackets, who hired Dean Evason as coach in July, also lost four key players to shoulder injuries early — including captain Boone Jenner and alternate captain Erik Gudbranson.

"It's not surprising from a 'skill set' standpoint," Waddell said of the season's first half. "It is after all the things that happened to us in the summer, though. You get thrown curveballs, and like I said to the team when we first started ... nobody's going to feel sorry for us, so let's not feel sorry for ourselves. Let's make the best of it."

That's what the Blue Jackets are doing, and they've put themselves in the middle of a tightly packed group chasing the playoffs. Nobody predicted that in October.

"I've always been a glass-is-half-full kind of guy, and when I go in the locker room every day, I get that smile on my face as these guys get ready to play," Waddell said. "Dean has obviously done a great job and we're going to be battling all the way to the end."

Columbus Dispatch / Former Michigan players on Blue Jackets, Red Wings pranked with Ohio State jerseys

By Craig Meyer – January 17, 2025

Even long after an athlete leaves campus, college rivalries have a habit of never truly dying. The vitriol between schools remains years and even decades later. When it comes to Ohio State and Michigan, that's especially true.

If they didn't already know, a few NHL players are finding that out.

In advance of the Blue Jackets' game against the Detroit Red Wings at Ohio Stadium on March 1, several former Michigan standouts on both teams — Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson of the Blue Jackets and Dylan Larkin of the Red Wings — were given Ohio State jerseys as a prank by apparel company Fanatics weeks before they prepare to play in the home football venue of their former school's archrival.

The players were handed a set of jerseys to look at and sign, with a Buckeyes hockey sweater mixed somewhere in the collection.

Each had a different reaction.

Larkin opened the box, saw a red jersey reading "Buckeyes" on it and quickly set it to the side before asking "Who did that?" with a laugh.

While working through a stack of jerseys he was signing one by one, Fantilli tossed a white Ohio State sweater off the table.

In a bit of a break from his fellow Michigan Men, Johnson laughed and held up the jersey to his chest. It didn't mean he was any less disgusted by being presented with a piece of scarlet-and-gray apparel.

"I don't think we're wearing this," Johnson said. "I think I'd scratch myself maybe."

The video was a part of Fanatics' promotion of its unveiling of the jerseys the teams will wear for the NHL Stadium Series game in March.

Unlike Larkin, a Michigan native who now plays in Detroit, Fantilli and Johnson are used to the exposure to the Buckeyes given where they live and play professionally.

Regardless of who emerges victorious in March, it will come with what has become a painfully familiar result to those in Columbus — a Michigan athlete winning in The Horseshoe.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets ride wave of confidence past Sharks for sixth consecutive win

By Aaron Portzline – January 17, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It's been a long time since the Columbus Blue Jackets could flex their muscles against an inferior opponent. Forgive them if they didn't handle it quite so well Thursday.

James van Riemsdyk scored two goals, Kent Johnson had a goal and an assist, and Zach Werenski marched closer to an NHL record as the Blue Jackets made quick work of the rebuilding San Jose Sharks, winning 4-1 before 15,943 in Nationwide Arena.

That's six straight wins, the Blue Jackets' longest winning streak since Jan. 11-22, 2020. The victory allowed Columbus to leap the Boston Bruins and claim seventh place — the first wild card — in the Eastern Conference playoff picture.

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason has said he doesn't often check the NHL standings. Regardless of whether you believe him, he speaks only for himself. After two seasons where the Blue Jackets hovered at the bottom of the league after an early settling, it's safe to check the ledger again.

"I definitely look. It's fun to look at it now," Johnson said. "I didn't look too much the last couple years. ... It's definitely a nice spot to be in. We just want to keep going."

Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins made 10 of his 18 saves in the third period. Perhaps the biggest development during the streak has been on the Blue Jackets' end of the ice, where they've started to play the type of defense that allows them to win on nights when they aren't scoring goals or playing particularly well.

The Jackets have allowed six goals in the last four games, the first time they've gone four straight games this season without allowing more than two goals. That's allowed them to win four straight without No. 1 center Sean Monahan, who is out with a sprained right wrist.

"Everyone's buying into our system, our structure," Werenski said. "We have that winning feeling right now and that's contagious in the room, all the little details that help teams win, especially in the defensive zone. We have buy-in right now, and everybody's doing what they can to help the team win."

Werenski's first-period assist on an Adam Fantilli goal extended his home point streak to 18 games. Only four NHL defensemen in the 100-plus-year history of the league — Bobby Orr (twice), Paul Coffey, Phil Housley and John Van Boxmeer — have had longer streaks.

As Werenski was speaking with reporters in the postgame dressing room, forward Mathieu Olivier walked through the room and shouted, "Norris!" Consider that Olivier's vote for Werenski to win the Norris Trophy as the NHL's top defenseman.

Werenski was asked about extending the streak, but he once again declined to play along.

"Honestly, I don't want to talk about it," he said. "It's just one of those things where I'm going about my business, trying to help the team win and doing whatever I can to help."

Zach Werenski assisted on the @BlueJacketsNHL's 1-0 goal by Adam Fantilli and became the sixth defenseman in NHL history with an 18-game home point streak. #NHLStats

— NHL Public Relations (@PR_NHL) January 17, 2025

The Blue Jackets took a 1-0 lead at 12:11 of the first period.

Werenski gained the offensive zone with speed and found Fantilli streaking down the slot toward Sharks goaltender Alexandar Georgiev. Fantilli, who moved up in the lineup in Monahan's absence, made a nifty move at top speed to roof the puck for his 11th goal of the season.

Fantilli, only 20, has impressed Blue Jackets coaches for his ability to handle a top-six center's spot, especially the defensive challenges it brings. But his offensive game is awakening now. He has a career-best seven-game point streak, totaling 4-4-8 in that stretch.

The Blue Jackets pushed the lead to 2-0 only four minutes later. Sean Kuraly's forechecking dislodged a puck down low. He jumped on the turnover and found Johnson closing in on Georgiev, the puck trickling through the goalie's pads and over the goal line.

It moved to 3-0 early in the second when van Riemsdyk, a master deflector, got the shaft of his stick on a Damon Severson shot, sending it down and past Georgiev. The rout was on.

After two periods, the Blue Jackets had a 25-8 advantage in shots and a 47-26 edge in shot attempts.

If there was a blemish on the evening, it was the third period. The Sharks dominated puck possession and had most of the scoring chances, not to mention a huge edge in shot attempts: 31-14.

The Sharks pulled to 3-1 early in the third period. The Sharks are in the throes of rebuilding, probably two seasons behind the Blue Jackets in that messy process. If Columbus was playing a better opponent Thursday, it may not have survived.

"What happened in the third period started on the last shift of the second, where we turned the puck back twice and took a penalty (Johnson for hooking)," Evason said. "We start the third period with two minutes in the box. They're going to push.

"We did a good job of playing fairly well, but we challenged the guys after that ... you can't just stop and anticipate that it's going to be over. Little plays like that (penalty late in the second) ... they start the third with momentum, they score and now we're in a heap of trouble, right? There's a learning experience in there."

Van Riemsdyk's second goal of the night — and eighth on the season — was an empty net goal off a Kirill Marchenko feed with 2:01 remaining.

"We knew we wanted to come out strong and get a lead early and we did that," Werenski said. "It kind of got a little sloppy in the third period, and we'd like to clean that up. But I thought for the most part we played a good hockey game."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets, Red Wings introduce NHL Stadium Series jerseys

By Aaron Portzline – January 17, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Columbus Blue Jackets will bring their legendary cannon to the NHL Stadium Series outdoor game in the iconic Ohio Stadium. Figuratively, at least.

The cannon insignia, added to the franchise's look with the advent of a third jersey in 2007, is bigger and badder than ever — and now with a color splash — on the sweater the Blue Jackets will wear when they host the Detroit Red Wings at 6 p.m. ET on March 1.

The NHL and sports apparel company Fanatics, who worked closely with the Blue Jackets and Red Wings in designing the jerseys, released both looks on Thursday. This outdoor game, the 43rd staged by the NHL, will be the first for Columbus and the fifth for Detroit.

Columbus forward Sean Monahan sports the Blue Jackets' Stadium Series jersey.

The Blue Jackets' sweater is navy, like their current home fit, and features a more prominent cannon than the one on their current third jersey, aimed similarly from the right shoulder to the left, but with a red axle for the caisson and a metallic silver barrel, making it pop against the navy base of the sweater.

The cannon is so prominent that the captain's "C" and alternate captain's "A" are on the front of the right shoulder, surrounded by an outline of the state of Ohio in red.

That metallic silver is the look's secondary theme. Wide, bold chevron stripes in metallic silver peak above the elbow on each arm and extend toward the wrist. The color is also seen in a bold stripe across the base of the sweater.

On the left shoulder patch is a newly designed "CBJ" logo weaved within two intersecting hockey sticks. That logo and the chevron stripes on the arm are a nod to the uniforms worn in the Civil War by Union soldiers, the basis of the Blue Jackets nickname.

One other element kept from the Blue Jackets' current home and away sweaters is a silver star that flexes Columbus as the state capital. That star, now oversized like the cannon and numbers, is on the left leg of the pants and the helmet.

Red Wings defenseman Moritz Seider poses in Detroit's Stadium Series jersey.

The Red Wings' uniform celebrates the "world-renowned automotive industry and hockey culture of Detroit," the league said in its release.

"Detroit" is written in script across the front of the sweater, a nod to insignias used in the auto industry. It's in red against a white background, the classic Red Wings look.

The word "Detroit" and the large numbers on the back of the jersey are laser-perforated, making them visually consistent with the leather upholstery used for high-end interiors. There are "debased speed stripes," the release said, on the sleeve and socks, "reminiscent of racing car aesthetics."

The helmet has a bold white racing stripe down the middle and oversized winged wheels — the legendary Red Wings logo — on either side with a metallic flake finish similar to automotive paint.

On the left shoulder is the Red Wings' main logo, the crest of their home and away sweaters.

Both the Blue Jackets' and Red Wings' jerseys include, among other markings, a "2025 NHL Stadium Series" designation on the inside back hem, which the NHL called "a commemorative touch to this marquee matchup."

And both teams will wear a 2025 Stadium Series event crest on the right shoulder.

The NHL said both sweaters are available for pre-order immediately.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets expect stretch-drive return for veterans Boone Jenner, Erik Gudbranson

By Aaron Portzline – January 17, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It's starting to get serious with the Columbus Blue Jackets. They're one of the NHL's highest-scoring clubs. They're riding their longest winning streak (five games) in five years. They've got legitimate candidates for some of the league's major awards.

The Jackets are starting to win games, such as Tuesday's 3-2 shootout win over Philadelphia, even when they don't play their best. They might be learning to win on the road, too.

More impressive, they've become perhaps the NHL's best story so far this season without their undisputed leader — and one of their best players — in the lineup. But there may be good news coming soon regarding captain Boone Jenner and other players.

The Blue Jackets expect to learn later this week if Jenner, who has missed the entire season following shoulder surgery in early October, has been medically cleared to start working toward his return to the lineup. That's good news considering Jenner was feared lost for the season when he was hurt one week before the season opener in a practice mishap.

If all goes well, Jenner could be back in the Blue Jackets' lineup by late February, just after the 4 Nations Face-off (Feb. 12-20) and before Columbus hosts the Detroit Red Wings on March 1 in the NHL Stadium Series outdoor game in Ohio Stadium.

Not long after Jenner was injured, rugged, stay-at-home defenseman Erik Gudbranson suffered a similar injury during an awkward collision during a game Oct. 15 — just three games into the regular season. He, too, was feared lost for the season after having surgery Oct. 22.

Gudbranson's return window isn't as clear as Jenner's, but he is expected to return before the end of the regular season in mid-April.

"You can't replace your captain, right?" Blue Jackets center Cole Sillinger said. "And Buddy's right next to him when it comes to the leadership aspects. That's two big hits right away from the start of the season, but it's been an opportunity for other guys to step up.

"When they do come back, it's going to be certainly uplifting. I know how hard they're working to try to make that happen as soon as possible. When that day comes, it's going to be big. And the timing is key, too."

General manager Don Waddell, speaking with The Athletic after finishing the Blue Jackets' pro and amateur scouting meetings last week in Nationwide Arena, said he views the anticipated return of Jenner and Gudbranson as "kind of like trade deadline acquisitions."

Here's what we know about the Blue Jackets' other injuries.

Sean Monahan

The Blue Jackets have won three straight games since Monahan went out with a sprained right wrist during a win in Pittsburgh on Jan. 7, but they miss the 30-year-old veteran, who joined Columbus after signing a five-year contract last summer.

A fracture was ruled out immediately, but the Blue Jackets had to wait for the swelling to subside before doctors could get a sense of the soft-tissue damage following a hit by Penguins defenseman Kris Letang.

The ligaments in Monahan's wrist aren't torn, Waddell said, but they are stretched.

Monahan is likely out until late January at the earliest. After two more weeks in a brace, Monahan will be re-evaluated to measure the healing process. That will give the Blue Jackets a better timeline for recovery.

Good news: The injury was not to Monahan's left wrist, which was surgically repaired after the 2016-17 season with Calgary.

Until he returns, the Blue Jackets will likely rely on 20-year-old center Adam Fantilli to play in Monahan's spot on the No. 1 line between wingers Dmitri Voronkov and Kirill Marchenko.

Yegor Chinakhov

All we know about Chinakhov's upper-body injury is that it's not a concussion. He'll miss his 24th straight game Thursday when the Blue Jackets host San Jose in Nationwide Arena.

Chinakhov has skated at least a couple of times over the last month or so but hasn't been seen on the ice in recent days.

Unfortunately, Chinakhov missing extended stretches of the season has become the norm in his young career. He missed nine games toward the end of his rookie season in 2021-22, missed 29 games in 2022-23 and missed the final 16 games of last season with a lower back injury.

He's missed 77 games with injury already in his career.

Justin Danforth

Danforth took part in an optional skate with the Blue Jackets on Wednesday and said he's close to being cleared to play. How close? He's planning to travel with the Blue Jackets on Friday when they depart for a four-game road trip, with plans to play at some point on the trip.

The Blue Jackets have been without Danforth since he suffered a lower-body injury Dec. 10 versus Philadelphia.

The Blue Jackets are carrying 22 players on the 23-man roster. That includes the minimum 12 forwards, meaning they wouldn't need to clear a roster space to activate him from injured reserve.

[BlueJackets.com / PREVIEW: Blue Jackets put win streak on line vs. Sharks](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – January 17, 2025

BLUE JACKETS (21-17-6) vs. SHARKS (14-26-6), 7 PM, NATIONWIDE ARENA

The Blue Jackets are starting to do things we haven't seen in a while.

For example, Columbus occupies a playoff position in January for the first time in years, thanks in part to their first five-game winning streak since Jan. 11-22, 2020.

But perhaps the most encouraging sign has come in the way the Blue Jackets have won the last three games. Columbus has allowed just five goals in that span, marking the first time the Jackets have allowed two or fewer goals in three straight games since March 14-20, 2021.

The latest victory, Tuesday night's 3-2 shootout triumph over Philadelphia, was a bit of a slog the entire way – a "grinding, in the mud" game, as head coach Dean Evason said – but the Blue Jackets stuck with it and got the two points.

"It's nice for the guys to get reinforced with having success and being excited about playing different ways," Evason said. "Whatever way the game dictates, we have some knowledge and some feedback now that we can play like this. If it's going to be a mucky game like it was last night, well, OK. If it's going to be a little bit more of a skill game, we can play that, but at the end of the day we have to play how we play in order to have success."

Another aspect of the win against Philadelphia that stands out is that it took a comeback to do it. The Blue Jackets are used to playing from ahead – they lead the NHL by scoring the first goal 27 times – but on this night, they responded to a 2-1 deficit in the third period by tying the game in the final five minutes.

It was the fourth third-period comeback win of the season for Columbus and the second of the winning streak, and Zach Werenski said the key is the lack of panic on the CBJ bench.

"We just stuck to our game plan," said Werenski, who scored both goals in regulation. "We obviously know we can score goals in here. We have a lot of skill and guys who can make plays. It's one of those things where you can't change your game plan and try to do it yourself. We stuck to the plan and once we got our chance there, we found a way to make it count. I think our group is realizing that we have to stick to our game for 60 minutes and good things are going to happen."

Columbus will try to extend the winning streak to six tonight against San Jose.

"It's fun, and I think everybody wants to do that again and again," Kirill Marchenko said of the streak. "We need to keep going."

Know The Foe: San Jose Sharks

Head coach: Ryan Warsofsky (First season)

Team stats: Goals per game: 2.61 (28th) | Scoring defense: 3.41 (28th) | PP: 18.5 percent (23rd) | PK: 78.6 percent (18th)

The narrative: San Jose made the playoffs 19 of 21 seasons from 1998-2019, but the rebuild is fully on in Silicon Valley. You could certainly do worse, though, than the team's top draft picks each of the past two years, as the Sharks took Macklin Celebrini with the No. 1 overall pick in this summer's draft and

talented forward Will Smith at No. 4 in 2023. Fellow attackers William Eklund and Thomas Bordeleau were also taken high in recent drafts, and all four are starting to make an impact with the Sharks.

Team leaders: While there's a bunch of young talent on the roster, a veteran that leads the way in Mikael Granlund, as the Swedish center in his 13th NHL season has 12 goals and 37 points on the season. Now in his second full season, the 22-year-old Eklund is next with a 10-24-34 line, while Celebrini is posting nearly a point per game (13-18-31 in 34 games) in his rookie campaign to be firmly in the Calder Trophy race. Tyler Toffoli has a team-best 16 goals, while Jake Walman leads the defense with 26 points.

In net, Mackenzie Blackwood and Vitek Vanecek have a combined 30 starts, but neither is on the active roster as Blackwood was traded to Colorado and Vanecek is on IR. Acquired from the Avs, Alexandar Georgiev is 2-6-0 with a 3.56 GAA and .887 save percentage, while rookie Yaroslav Askarov was added from Nashville this offseason and is 3-3-2 with a 2.39 GAA and .917 save percentage.

What's new: There have been some brutal stretches for San Jose at times this season, including an 0-7-2 start and a 2-9-2 record in December, but the Sharks can be a tough out with recent wins over Tampa Bay, New Jersey and Detroit. Captain Logan Couture has been out all season, but the Sharks have brought in a cadre of veterans to try to help bring the youngsters along, while first-year coach Warsofsky was promoted from an assistant's role to lead the charge.

Trending: Columbus had won four games in a row in the series before a 2-1 loss in overtime Nov. 5 in San Jose in which the Blue Jackets put 50 shots on goal.

Former CBJ: Now 30, Alexander Wennberg has landed in the Bay Area and has an 8-13-21 line so far on the campaign including the game-winning goal in the first matchup between the teams.

The Numbers Game

With 50 points, Zach Werenski has the most ever for a CBJ player through the team's first 44 games of a season, while Kirill Marchenko (48) is tied for second. Artemi Panarin previously held the franchise record with 48 in 2018-19. ... Werenski has a 12-28-40 line in the last 29 games to place third in the NHL in scoring in that span and has 18 points (4-14-18) in the past 10 games as well as a 17-game home point streak, longest in the NHL since Ray Bourque in 1992-93. His average ice time of 26:40 leads all NHL players, and he's first among league defensemen in goals (15) and tied for first in points on the season. ... Marchenko has a five-game point streak, an 8-13-21 line in the last 15 games and 32 points in the last 25 (12-20-32). ... Dmitri Voronkov has 18 points (10-8-18) in the last 14 games and leads the NHL with nine goals since Dec. 19. ... Also since Dec. 19, Werenski is second in the NHL with 19 points, Marchenko is tied for sixth with 17 and Voronkov is tied for ninth with 16. ... Adam Fantilli has a career-best six-game point streak (3-4-7), tied for the second longest ever for a CBJ player under age 20. ... Columbus leads the NHL with 94 home goals and is second with 104 goals at 5-on-5, and their 3.36 goals per game are fifth in the league. In addition, Columbus has scored at least six goals 10 times in just 44 games this season, one shy of a franchise record (2018-19). ... Columbus has power-play goals in 13 of the last 18 games (16 for 46, 34.8 percent) and is now tied for ninth in the NHL for the season in power-play percentage at 23.9. ... Blue Jackets defensemen have 30 goals this season, most in the NHL. ... Cole Sillinger is three points from 100 in his NHL career.

This Day in CBJ History

Jan. 16, 2002: Marc Denis notches his first shutout as a Blue Jacket, turning aside 31 shots in a 2-0 win vs. the New York Rangers in Nationwide Arena. Grant Marshall has a goal and an assist while Tyler Wright also scores.

Jan. 16, 2004: Rick Nash scores his third career overtime goal, his second tally of the game, as the Blue Jackets take a 3-2 win vs. Los Angeles at Nationwide Arena.

Jan. 16, 2007: Jason Chimera tallies in overtime to give Columbus a 5-4 OT win at Chicago. Fredrik Modin has a goal and an assist while Sergei Fedorov, Rostislav Klesla and Joe Motzko tally; Motzko's goal was his only as a Blue Jacket.

[BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets defeat Sharks, extend winning streak to 6 games](#)

By Craig Merz – January 17, 2025

COLUMBUS -- James van Riemsdyk scored twice, and Zach Werenski extended his home point streak to 18 games for the Columbus Blue Jackets, who won their sixth straight game with a 4-1 victory against the San Jose Sharks at Nationwide Arena on Thursday.

Werenski has 35 points (12 goals, 23 assists) during the home point streak, which is tied with Brian Leetch (1991-92) for the sixth-longest by a defenseman in NHL history.

"I'm just going to about my business, trying to help the team win," Werenski said.

Kent Johnson had a goal and an assist, Adam Fantilli scored, and Elvis Merzlikins made 18 saves for the Blue Jackets (22-17-6), who are 10-2-1 in their past 13 games.

"We are confident that any night we can give ourselves a chance to win," Johnson said.

"He's very good, got a lot of offensive skill," San Jose defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic said. "He can skate, sees the ice really well. He's already at 50-plus points."

Tyler Toffoli scored, and Alexandar Georgiev made 30 saves for the Sharks (14-26-6), who have lost four of five.

They trailed 2-0 after the first period.

"I don't think we were very good executing anything," Toffoli said. "Passes. We weren't forechecking. We weren't breaking pucks out and obviously turning the puck over and they capitalize. We gave them too many chances."

Fantilli made it 1-0 at 12:11 of the first period to extend his NHL career high point streak to seven games (eight points; four goals, four assists).

"We knew tonight had to come out strong and get a lead early," Werenski said. "We were a little slow and sloppy in the second period. I'd like to clean that up."

Werenski fed him coming down the slot and Fantilli took the pass on the backhand before going to the forehand for his 11th goal.

"Everyone is buying into our system," Werenski said. "All those little details that help teams win; we have collective buy-in right now. Everyone is on board with what we are doing and getting results out of it, so it's been fun."

Johnson scored at 16:17 to make it 2-0 after Sean Kuraly took a giveaway and passed to him in the left circle. His shot trickled through Georgiev's pads for his 12th goal.

The Sharks were outshot 12-1 in the second period and 25-8 going to the third period.

"It's hard to keep that focus and understand what they are doing," Merzlikins said. "It's hard to read the game if you don't have shots. It's a tough one, but I am happy with the end result."

Van Riemsdyk tipped a shot from the left point by Damon Severson for a 3-0 lead at 6:37 of the second period.

"Very disappointing. Slow start. The first two periods were sloppy. Just couldn't get anything going," Sharks coach Ryan Warsofsky said.

Toffoli made it 3-1 at 7:32 of the third period when he scored his 17th goal from the slot off a pass from the right wall by Macklin Celebrini.

“We just can't seem to put a couple (wins) together,” Vlasic said. “We had some at the beginning of 2025 and then let up. In this League, you're not guaranteed a win no matter who you're playing so we've got to find a way to put these together, start on time, execute passes, the things we need to do to win.”

“Regardless of how we feel, we are playing for the most part the right way,” Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. “When you do that, you can gain momentum, and you can gain confidence in how you are playing because you are not feeding other teams or chasing the game.”

NOTES: Kirill Marchenko assisted the second van Riemsdyk goal to give him seven points (two goals, five assists) in a five-game point streak. ... Fantilli, 20, became the second Blue Jackets player to have a seven-game point streak before the age 21, joining Rick Nash (eight games, 2003-04). ... Van Riemsdyk has eight points (four goals, four assists) in his past seven games. ... Celebrini has 32 points (13 goals, 19 assists) to tie Patrick Marleau (13 goals, 19 assists) for the most by an 18-year-old Sharks player. ... Vlasic became the 21st NHL defenseman to play 1,300 games.

The Hockey News / Columbus Blue Jackets (48 pts) vs. San Jose Sharks (34 pts) Game Preview

By Jason Newland – January 17, 2025

The Blue Jackets will be looking for revenge tonight as they welcome in the San Jose Sharks. The Sharks won the prior meeting this season by a score of 2-1 back in November.

But this is a different Columbus team from the last time San Jose saw them. The Jackets currently sit in a playoff spot and have won five straight games. They've also gone 8-2 in the last 10 games and own the NHL's longest current winning streak. The CBJ are hot.

The Sharks, on the other hand, are not hot. Despite winning their last game 6-3, they've dropped 7 of 10 and sit last in the Pacific.

The Blue Jackets sport one of the NHL's best home records at 15-5-3 and score a blistering 4.20 goals per game. The Sharks are the polar opposite of the CBJ on the road. They're 6-12-5 and are scoring 2.61 gpg.

The Columbus Blue Jackets have all the motivation in the world to not have a letdown game against San Jose and keep that winning streak alive.

Series History vs. The Sharks

- Columbus is 18-13-3 at home and 28-34-6 in 68 all-time meetings vs. the Sharks.
- The Jackets are 4-0-1 in the last 5 against San Jose.
- The Blue Jackets have beaten the Sharks in 4 of the last 5 games at NWA.

Who To Watch For The Sharks

- Tyler Toffoli leads the team with 16 goals.
- Mikael Granlund leads the Sharks with 25 assists and 37 points.
- Goalie Alexandar Georgiev is 2-6 with a .887 SV%. He won his last start on Tuesday.
- Yaroslav Askarov is 3-3 with a .917 SV%

CBJ Player Notes vs. The Sharks

- Zach Werenski has 6 points in 12 games vs. the Sharks.
- Kent Johnson has 3 points in 4 games.
- James van Riemsdyk has 9 points in 23 career games against San Jose.

Injuries

- **Boone Jenner** (shoulder) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 7; (44 Games)
- **Erik Gudbranson** (upper body) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 16; (41 Games)
- **Yegor Chinakhov** (upper body) is on Injured Reserve (23 Games)
- **Justin Danforth** (lower body) is on Injured Reserve on Dec.10; (16 Games)
- **Sean Monahan** (upper body); is on Injured Reserve retroactive to Dec. 7 (3 Games)

TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 178

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

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Pay Tribute to Ohio & Columbus With Stadium Series Jersey

By Mark Scheig – January 17, 2025

Fans have been waiting patiently for the big jersey reveal for the 2025 Stadium Series. On Thursday, the NHL and Fanatics unveiled the uniforms of both the Columbus Blue Jackets and Detroit Red Wings.

The 2025 Stadium Series will be the 43rd regular-season outdoor game set to be played at Ohio Stadium on March 1. The uniforms will highlight the distinct cultural and historical identities of both Columbus and Detroit.

Blue Jackets' Uniform

The Blue Jackets' uniform is not surprisingly inspired from the uniforms worn by the Union Army. The jersey features several military-like details.

- A chevron sleeve stripe denoting the rank insignia of the era.
- Shoulder featuring a new "CBJ" mark surrounding two crossed hockey sticks, a nod to the unit designation pins worn on the front of soldier's slouch caps.
- A front crest featuring "The Cannon," derived from the Blue Jackets alternate logo and key element of any Columbus Blue Jackets home game, colored with new metallic silver and red accents.

In addition to those things, the jersey includes the following:

- Captain and Alternate Captain designation letters are displayed within a state of Ohio-shaped patch, while the inside back neck includes "Columbus Blue Jackets" wordmark in conjunction with a buckeye leaf pattern, the state tree of Ohio.
- The uniform is completed with the star from the team's primary logo on the pants and a helmet design that features an oversized metallic application team logo and player number.

As for our overall thoughts, the jersey design is simple yet very effective. The Cannon is a nice, needed touch. That seems to be popular amongst a majority of the fans. Having the captains wear their letter within a State of Ohio patch is also a good look.

The only question that comes to mind will be how the team chooses to incorporate Johnny Gaudreau's number 13 and if a separate patch will be included on the jersey. The Blue Jackets have done everything to keep Gaudreau's memory going. We don't see how it would be different now especially for a franchise-historic game.

Between both the Red Wings and Blue Jackets, this might be one of the better jersey combos in recent memory. The color scheme fits both teams well and will be easy to distinguish during the game itself.

Starting Thursday, 2025 NHL Stadium Series jerseys will be available for pre-order exclusively at all Blue Jackets and Red Wings team store locations. In addition, Blue Jackets fans can pre-order their jersey at the team's official online store through Feb 4.

You can see an image of what the Red Wings' jersey looks like below.

Both uniforms include the “2025 NHL Stadium Series” designation on the inside back hem as a commemorative touch to this marquee matchup. The Stadium Series event crest is affixed to the right shoulder location.

Tickets for the Stadium Series are still available on Ticketmaster. The game will be aired on ESPN at 6 P.M. eastern on March 1.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Dispose of Sharks For Sixth-Straight Win

By Mark Scheig – January 17, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets were about to embark on an extended road trip. They could have easily overlooked the San Jose Sharks. Thanks to a quick start and a good first two periods, the Blue Jackets avoided the trap game.

James van Riemsdyk scored twice including an empty netter while Kent Johnson added a goal and an assist to lift the Blue Jackets to a solid 4-1 win over the Sharks on Thursday at Nationwide Arena. Their winning streak now sits at six games.

The story of this game was their improving defense continuing to take strides.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets took control of the game possession wise early. They eventually broke through just over 12 minutes into the game.

Zach Werenski extended his home-points streak to 18 games with a primary assist on Adam Fantilli's 11th goal of the season. The goal for Fantilli extended his points streak to a career-high seven games.

Then the Blue Jackets turned defense into offense to double their lead. Sean Kuraly created a turnover in the Sharks zone and found Johnson on the other side. His shot squeaked through goalie Alexandar Georgiev to make it 2-0.

The Blue Jackets were able to extend to 3-0 in the second period thanks to van Riemsdyk. From the slot, he deflected home a Damon Severson point shot. It felt like things were in control for the Blue Jackets as they held the Sharks to just two shots in the second and eight total for the game in the first 40 minutes.

One trend started creeping into the Blue Jackets' game towards the end of the second. They took a pair of penalties including one at 20 minutes of the second when Johnson sat for hooking.

This allowed the Sharks to gain some momentum. This led to Tyler Toffoli's goal to break Elvis Merzlikins' shutout bid. Rookie phenom Macklin Celebrini found Toffoli to cut it to 3-1.

Despite the Sharks pushing, the Blue Jackets were able to hold them off. van Riemsdyk converted on his second goal of the night into an empty net to get to the final score of 4-1.

Before this last stretch of games, the Blue Jackets haven't allowed two or less goals in four consecutive games since 2020. The defense has taken some major strides in recent games. Both Elvis Merzlikins and Kent Johnson acknowledged it's the best the defense has looked in recent memory. According to Zach Werenski, "everyone's just buying into our system, our structure."

Merzlikins stopped 18 to earn the win. That means each of the three goalies including Daniil Tarasov and Jet Greaves have one win each during the last three games. Meanwhile, Georgiev made 30 saves for the Sharks.

The Blue Jackets next play Saturday night at Madison Square Garden against the New York Rangers. The Sharks head to New York as well to play the Islanders on Saturday night.

1st Ohio Battery / They're Here: Blue Jackets, Red Wings Unveil Sweaters To Be Worn For The Stadium Series Showdown

By Ed Francis – January 17, 2025

The wait is over.

The Columbus Blue Jackets and Detroit Red Wings have unveiled the sweaters that will be worn in their 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series match-up Saturday, March 1st at Ohio Stadium.

The Blue Jackets' look prominently features the cannon, with a new shade of dark blue as the base of the sweater. The cannon has a scarlet and grey look to it, providing a sleek tie-in to the location of the game and the rivalry between the Ohio State Buckeyes and Michigan Wolverines collegiate programs.

In the jersey, the captain and alternate captain designations have are outlined in the state of Ohio, providing a nice nod to the Buckeye State.

The sleeves offer up another homage to the Buckeyes, with a grey stripe running down the elbows and a scarlet line at the base of both the sleeve and the front and back of the sweaters.

The Red Wings sweater offers a clean and simple look, with the word "Detroit" spelled out on the front.

Last week, NHL Content & Events President Steve Mayer spoke to FanDuel Sports Network and provided new insights on the presentation of the game between the two teams, letting fans know to expect a heavy dose of the relationship between the venue, the history of the football rivalry, and the game.

"We're going to take advantage of Ohio State traditions. If you attend a (Buckeye) football game, you're going to feel that when you attend a (Blue Jacket) hockey game," said Mayer.

Earlier this week, it was announced that Columbus-based band O.A.R. will perform a pregame set. They join another Columbus-based group, Twenty One Pilots, on the list of performers.

Twenty One Pilots will play during the first intermission.

The game appears as if it will be a meaningful one in the Eastern Conference playoff race, as well. As of Thursday, the Blue Jackets hold the second wild card spot with the Red Wings just four points behind and a game in hand.

It will also be the second half of a home-and-home between the two teams, with Columbus playing in Detroit two days earlier, on Thursday, February 27th.

According to the Blue Jackets, Stadium Series jerseys are available for pre-order at Blue Line locations at both Nationwide Arena and Polaris Fashion Place, as well as online at TheBlueLineOnline.com, through Feb. 4. They're expected to be available for pick-up and delivery in early February.

Puck-drop for the Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series is scheduled for 6 p.m.

1st Ohio Battery / Game Day #45: Blue Jackets Look To Keep Winning Streak Going As Macklin Celebrini And The Sharks Visit Columbus

By Ed Francis – January 17, 2025

It hasn't been this way in years.

The Columbus Blue Jackets put a five-game winning streak on the line Thursday night when they face Macklin Celebrini and the San Jose Sharks at Nationwide Arena.

If they can win their sixth straight tonight, it will tie Columbus' longest winning streak of the current decade: the Blue Jackets won six in a row between Jan. 11th and 20th, 2020. Inside of that streak was the last time the club won five in a row.

They're in the perfect place to pick up another two points: Columbus is 15-5-3 at home lead the NHL with 94 home goals. The Sharks, meanwhile, have won just six road games in 23 tries.

Here's what else to know as Columbus and San Jose conclude their season series:

- **RE: SHARKS**

This will be Celebrini's first visit to Nationwide Arena. The top pick in the NHL draft over the summer missed a little bit of time, but is still putting up nearly a point a game with a stat line of 13 goals and 18 assists for 31 points through 34 games. ... After losing their last eight games in December, the Sharks are 3-3-0 in January with impressive wins over Tampa Bay and New Jersey to start 2025 and Tuesday night in Detroit. They don't win a lot, but they're capable of beating anyone in the league. ... Shots have been a problem this season for San Jose. They give up more than anyone in the league and are tied for 25th in generating shots, at 25 per game. That number is on the decline, as over their last ten games they're averaging just 24.8 per contest.

- **18 STRAIGHT FOR Z?**

The hockey community has taken notice of Zach Werenski. With a point in tonight's game, the Norris-candidate defenseman will have a point in 18 straight games. That would tie Brian Leetch for the 6th-longest streak of all time for consecutive home games with a point from a defenseman. The all-time record is Bobby Orr, who had 25 straight at home for the Bruins in the 1974-75 season. Z is currently tied with Ray Bourque at 17 games, a feat the Hall of Famer accomplished in the 1992-93 season.

- **LINEUPS & PROJECTIONS**

Elvis is in net, but the players in the lineup remain the same. One change on the forward groupings: Luca Del Bel Belluz moves up a spot in the middle six and he will play with James van Riemsdyk and Kent Johnson. Cole Sillinger will center Zach Aston-Reese and Mathieu Olivier in the other middle line.

1st Ohio Battery / CBJ 4, SJ 1: Merzlikins, Johnson Lead Blue Jackets Over Sharks For Columbus' Sixth Straight Win

By Ed Francis – January 17, 2025

Six. Straight. Wins.

Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson scored first-period goals and Elvis Merzlikins was nearly perfect in net to help lead the Columbus Blue Jackets a 4-1 win over the San Jose Sharks on Thursday night.

James van Riemsdyk scored twice for the Blue Jackets, including an empty-netter in the final minutes.

It was van Riemsdyk's first two-goal game with Columbus.

Johnson had an assist on the first on van Riemsdyk's goals, giving KJ his first multi-point effort since Dec. 10th.

Merzlikins, who picked up his fourth straight win, finished with 18 saves on the Sharks' 19 shots and earned the game's Third Star of the night.

van Riemsdyk and Johnson were First and Second, respectively.

The win kept Columbus as the hottest team in the NHL; no other team had won more than three straight entering the day. Their sixth straight win comes five years to the week after their last six-game streak, between Jan. 11th and 20th, 2020.

It was also the fourth straight game in which the Blue Jackets allowed two goals or less, something they haven't done since Feb. 4th-10th, 2020.

Zach Werenski picked up an assist on Fantilli's goal for an 18th consecutive home game with at least a point. That's the longest such streak by a defenseman since Phil Housely and Brian Leetch went on runs of 22 and 18 games in the 1991-92 season, with Werenski tying Leetch for the sixth-longest streak in NHL history.

Werenski was mum on the streak after the game.

"Honestly I don't want to talk about it," said Werenski. "It's just one of those things where I'm just going about my business, trying to help the team win."

Here's how Columbus made it six in a row in the win column:

1st Period:

(12:11 — CBJ Goal): Jan Rutta turns the puck over to Werenski, which is a huge mistake anywhere on the ice. This one is in Columbus' own zone, but Werenski is immediately off to the races with Fantilli on a two-on-two. Z finds Fantilli streaking through the slot and feeds him to give the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead.

(16:17 — CBJ Goal): The Blue Jackets double their lead on Johnson's 12th goal of the season after he and Sean Kuraly force the Sharks into a turnover behind Sharks goalie Alexandar Georgiev. Kuraly has the puck to the dot left of Georgiev and goes across the slot with a pass to Johnson, whose shot trickles across the line for a goal and a 2-0 Columbus lead.

2nd Period

(6:37 — CBJ Goal): Another one for the Blue Jackets; van Riemsdyk gives them a 3-0 lead on a perfectly-timed deflection from a Damon Severson shot. For JVR, it's his 7th goal of the season — and, for whatever it's worth — his first goal in the second period all season long.

3rd Period

(7:32 — SJ Goal): Tyler Toffoli kills the bid for Elvis' second shutout of the season with his team-leading 17th goal to trim the Columbus lead to 3-1. He's right in front of Merzlikins and puts it home after picking up a rebound of a Macklin Celebrini shot.

(17:59 — CBJ EN Goal): van Riemsdyk gets his second of the night via an empty-net goal to reestablish Columbus' three goal lead and put the foil on another two-point night.

Stat Chat:

- The Blue Jackets killed off all three of the Sharks penalties, making it 10/11 successful penalty kills for Columbus over their last four games.
- Don't let the shot attempts fool you. The Blue Jackets ended with a small 61-57 advantage, but it was 31-14 in the Sharks advantage over the final period with Columbus up two or three goals for the duration of the period and San Jose in desperation mode.
- Columbus suffocated San Jose in the second frame, giving the Sharks just two shots on goal for the period.

Up Next:

The Blue Jackets hit the road for a four-game road trip that begins Saturday night against the New York Rangers. Puck-drop at Madison Square Garden is set for 7 p.m.

[The Athletic / The top 50 NHL players and prospects under 23 drafted outside the first round](#)

By Corey Pronman – January 17, 2025

When I do my semi-annual look at the best NHL players and prospects under the age of 23, as I did a few days ago, I'm trying to give an overview of the best young players in the NHL and who could be the true impact players of tomorrow. Readers will notice this list tends to overwhelmingly be full of first-round picks and especially high first-round picks. That's to be expected; NHL teams take the obvious talents high in the draft and most NHL players come from the first round. However, we know there will be some hits outside the first round, and those hits tend to end up being major difference-makers for top NHL teams. Today, we take a look at the top 50 young players (under the age of 23 as of Jan. 1, 2025) who weren't selected in the first round.

1. Logan Stankoven, RW, Dallas (No. 47 in 2021)

Stankoven has become a notable part of a top NHL team in Dallas. He's small, but everything else about his game is a major positive. He's a great skater who competes very hard and brings a ton of energy to his shifts. He makes a ton of highly skilled and creative plays with the puck at full pace. He has a lot of courage and makes these plays in traffic. He's a natural finisher who can see the ice at a high level as well. As one scout said about Stankoven, "Most small guys need to prove they can play. With him he's so good he needs to prove he can't." He projects as a legit top-line winger.

2. Matthew Knies, LW, Toronto (No. 57 in 2021)

Knies has quickly become a critical component of Toronto's lineup, playing all situations. Knies is a big, strong winger with a great motor and a high skill level. He can create a lot of offense in the high-traffic areas and shows courage to get to the net. He's not the most natural playmaker in the world, but he has excellent hands and can generate plenty of chances inside the offensive zone. Knies' skating has always been an issue, but he's a big guy who plays hard so he's shown he can overcome it. He looks like a player who's going to have a long and successful NHL career in the top six.

3. Lane Hutson, LHD, Montreal (No. 62 in 2022)

Hutson has had a highly successful start to his NHL career, playing a ton of minutes for Montreal in his rookie season. He's a dynamo with the puck on his stick. Hutson has high-end poise, touch and sense with the puck, often walking the blue line using his great edge work to create time to make plays. He sees the ice at a high level and can run an NHL power play. There's no doubting Hutson's offense — the doubt comes down to his defense. He's a small defenseman with good but not great feet, and he's not very physical. He has so much offense that he could still be a top-four defenseman, but he may give back a lot of goals, too.

4. Will Cuyllle, LW, New York Rangers (No. 60 in 2020)

Cuyllle broke out this season for the Rangers, becoming an important part of their lineup. Cuyllle's always been intriguing due to his combination of size, skill and physicality. The scoring in his game wasn't always consistent though, and he didn't always fully embrace being a pain to play against. He's done both in the first half of this NHL season. He has good enough hands and vision with the puck. He's also been a hyper-physical winger who can create at the net front. His skating isn't the best, but everything else in his game is an asset. He looks like a top-six winger coaches will love on their team.

5. Yegor Zavragin, G, Philadelphia (No. 87 in 2023)

Zavragin has had a monster season in the KHL, becoming an important player and a leaned-on goalie for SKA as a teenager. He's a super athletic goalie who can make a lot of difficult saves. He has the lateral quickness to make NHL saves. He's also an aggressive player who cuts off angles well. He can be a little over-aggressive and chaotic in net but his reads tend to be good and he squares up a lot of pucks. He has a loud toolkit and looks like a player with the potential to be a starting goalie in the NHL.

6. Gavin Brindley, C, Columbus (No. 34 in 2023)

Brindley has been hurt for a large portion of the season. When healthy, he's been good in the AHL, although not as dominant as he was in college the prior year. Brindley is an excellent skater with a great compete level. He buzzes around the ice, playing with a ton of pace and giving his best effort consistently. He's able to make highly skilled plays at full speed and plays with courage, going to the net and engaging along the walls. He's a creative offensive player. His pure finishing touch is a minor question, though. The odds are usually against someone his size, but given how many major positives are in his game, I can see Brindley becoming a middle-six winger.

7. Roman Kantserov, RW, Chicago (No. 44 in 2023)

Kantserov has been a top player for Magnitogorsk this season, scoring at a near-point-per-game rate. Kantserov isn't that big, but everything else about his game is a plus. He's a very quick skater with high-end skills who projects to be able to create offense at high levels. He gives a good effort, creates in hard areas, and is a responsible two-way player. He has the tools to score and make plays versus men and will earn a coach's trust. He projects as a middle-six winger with a chance to put up legit points in the NHL.

8. Danny Nelson, C, New York Islanders (No. 49 in 2023)

Nelson was a top player for USA in their gold-medal effort at the recent World Juniors and has been a very good college player too. He's a big, fast center with good speed and hands who shows a strong two-way game. He brings a great effort level to all his shifts, using his big body to win pucks and always being around the play. He isn't a super flashy offensive player by any means, but he has enough offense to go with his athleticism and compete to carve out an NHL career.

9. Julius Miettinen, C, Seattle (No. 40 in 2024)

Miettinen isn't going to land on a ton of highlight reels, but he checks a lot of boxes you want in an NHL player. He skates well, he has good hands, he sees the ice well, he can play both ways, and doesn't shy from going to the net to create offense. He's not a standout at either end of the ice, but when you're 6-3, talented and can play both ways there will be a space for you in the league.

10. Harrison Brunicke, RHD, Pittsburgh (No. 44 in 2024)

Brunicke is a highly intriguing pro prospect. He's a tall right-shot who is quite mobile, has legit offensive skills and plays hard. His compete level is very good and he can be trusted to make a lot of stops at higher levels. I wouldn't describe him as a natural puck-mover, and his decisions can be questionable at times, but he shows he has the touch to create chances too. In the right role, I think he could have a legit NHL career and would appeal to coaches.

11. Cole Hutson, LHD, Washington (No. 43 in 2024)

12. Vincent Iorio, RHD, Washington (No. 55 in 2021)

13. Emil Pieniniemi, LHD, Pittsburgh (No. 91 in 2023)

14. Nikita Artamonov, RW, Carolina (No. 50 in 2024)

15. Anton Wahlberg, LW, Buffalo (No. 39 in 2023)

16. Carson Rehkopf, LW, Seattle (No. 50 in 2023)
17. Igor Chernyshov, RW, San Jose (No. 33 in 2024)
18. Fraser Minten, C, Toronto (No. 38 in 2022)
19. Olen Zellweger, LHD, Anaheim (No. 34 in 2021)
20. Seamus Casey, RHD, New Jersey (No. 46 in 2022)
21. Vojtech Hradec, C, Utah (No. 167 in 2024)
22. Leo Sahlin Wallenius, LHD, San Jose (No. 53 in 2024)
23. Tristan Luneau, RHD, Anaheim (No. 53 in 2022)
24. Adam Kleber, RHD, Buffalo (No. 42 in 2024)
25. Kasper Halttunen, RW, San Jose (No. 36 in 2023)
26. Jani Nyman, LW, Seattle (No. 49 in 2022)
27. Colton Dach, C, Chicago (No. 62 in 2021)
28. Adam Jecho, RW, St. Louis (No. 95 in 2024)
29. Michael Hrabal, G, Utah (No. 38 in 2023)
30. Marcus Gidlof, G, New York Islanders (No. 147 in 2024)
31. Mikhail Yegorov, G, New Jersey (No. 49 in 2024)
32. Oscar Fisker Molgaard, C, Seattle (No. 52 in 2023)
33. Elias Pettersson, LHD, Vancouver (No. 80 in 2022)
34. Zack Ostapchuk, C, Ottawa (No. 39 in 2021)
35. Jackson Blake, RW, Carolina (No. 109 in 2021)
36. Matt Rempe, RW, New York Rangers (No. 165 in 2020)
37. Maxim Strbak, RHD, Buffalo (No. 45 in 2023)
38. Andrew Gibson, RHD, Nashville (No. 42 in 2023)
39. Carey Terrance, C, Anaheim (No. 59 in 2023)
40. Linus Eriksson, C, Florida (No. 58 in 2024)
41. Dans Locmelis, C, Boston (No. 119 in 2022)
42. Owen Beck, C, Montreal (No. 33 in 2022)
43. Caedan Bankier, C, Minnesota (No. 86 in 2021)
44. Hunter Brzustewicz, RHD, Calgary (No. 75 in 2023)
45. Henry Mews, RHD, Calgary (No. 74 in 2024)
46. Caden Price, LHD, Seattle (No. 84 in 2023)
47. Luca Marrelli, RHD, Columbus (No. 86 in 2024)
48. Adam Engstrom, LHD, Montreal (No. 92 in 2022)

49. Ethan Gauthier, RW, Tampa Bay (No. 37 in 2023)

50. Jagger Firkus, RW, Seattle (No. 35 in 2022)

ESPN / Wyshynski Awards at midseason: Best team, player, goal, feud

By Greg Wyshynski – January 17, 2025

The 2024-25 NHL season has been a little difficult to get a read on. Some teams that were expected to be very good aren't very good. Some teams that were expected to be mediocre are anything but. As teams pass the midpoint of the campaign, there's still time for either of those fortunes to be reserved.

What we do know about this regular season so far: a lot of goals have been scored, and not just by Leon Draisaitl and Alex Ovechkin. Through 649 games, the NHL averaged 6.1 goals per game, making its fourth straight season above the six-goal pace. This scoring spike has added to unpredictability: The NHL reports that 44% of those games had comeback wins, tied for the second-highest rate in history.

So what the season has lacked in clarity of contenders it has made up for with goal horns and scoreboard volatility. Which is nice.

That established, here are 20 NHL awards and superlatives for the midpoint of the season:

Best team: Winnipeg Jets

This could have been the Capitals, who led the NHL standings after 44 games and weathered their best goal scorer missing 16 games. This could have been the Edmonton Oilers, who have in fact been the best team in the NHL since Oct. 31 and a 10-game Stanley Cup Final hangover to begin the season.

But it's the Jets for a few reasons. They had the best start in NHL history with 15 wins in their first 16 games. While they couldn't keep that sprint going, they've settled into a solid split, leading the Central Division by a good margin while being in the top three teams offensively and defensively.

Do we wish they were a little better at 5-on-5 and less reliant on the league's best power play? Sure. But Connor Hellebuyck papers over a lot of deficiencies when he's this dominant, looking very much like the first back-to-back Vezina Trophy winner since Martin Brodeur (2006-07 and 2007-08).

Most disappointing team: Nashville Predators

There have certainly been other disappointing teams in the NHL this season. But we knew the Chicago Blackhawks would be bad. We knew the Pittsburgh Penguins were a deeply flawed team holding onto a dream that was past its expiration date. If anyone has discerned the organizational plan for the Seattle Kraken in Year 4, please let us know.

But true disappointment is epically failing to meet expectations. Like the Boston Bruins teetering on the playoff bubble after having already fired a coach and two seasons removed from an NHL-record 135-point campaign. Like the New York Rangers, who went from Cup contention to core reconstruction in a matter of months. The Rangers earned an F in ESPN's midseason report cards. The other team that did that was the Predators.

It's not just that Nashville has been an utter disaster in the standings -- .407 points percentage, even with a slight uptick in quality recently -- it's how bad they've been where we all expected they'd be great. They added Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault to a team that was 10th in the NHL in goals per game last season (3.24) and somehow became one of the NHL's worst offensive teams (2.47). Players like Tommy Novak saw their production fall off a cliff. Nashville is last in the NHL in 5-on-5 goals after 43 games by a margin of 12 (!) tallies.

And yet they're just one canceled trip to see U2 at Sphere in Las Vegas from rallying for playoff spot, as we saw last season ...

Most valuable player: Leon Draisaitl

Kirill Kaprizov had this thing locked up before his injury, as he was the Minnesota Wild offense.

In his absence, the Hart Trophy favorite has to be Draisaitl. His current goal pace (31 in 43 games) would rank in the top 10 scoring seasons since 2005. Evolving Hockey has him leading the NHL in expected goals above replacement (25.9) while adding 4.3 wins to the Oilers in the standings. This is while skating with the likes of Vasily Podkolzin, Viktor Arvidsson and Kasper Kapanen.

Shoutout to Nathan MacKinnon of the Colorado Avalanche, whose torrid December positioned him to potentially become the first back-to-back Hart winner since Alex Ovechkin (2007-09); and Vancouver Canucks defenseman Quinn Hughes, whose team either looks like a Cup contender or lottery fodder depending on whether he's on the ice; and also Hellebuyck, who probably wishes goalies won league MVP at a higher rate than once in the past 21 seasons.

Least valuable player: Jeff Skinner

On the other side of the coin in Edmonton is Skinner. The 32-year-old winger was a heralded value signing for the Oil after getting a buyout in Buffalo. Three years removed from a 35-goal season, fans were salivating at the idea of him potting pucks with Draisaitl and Connor McDavid.

Alas, he hasn't earned that time with them: Skinner has seven goals and eight assists in 40 games, skating 12:36 per game while having been a healthy scratch on occasion. He's been a defensive liability, and he's deep in the negative in goals scored above replacement. Probably not a great sign when your offensive free agent coup has one point more than Corey Perry halfway through the season.

Greatest on-ice achievement: Alex Ovechkin

The Washington Capitals captain decided not to prolong the inevitable, turning his chase of Wayne Gretzky's career goals record (894) into a full-on dash to the finish line this season.

Through Wednesday, Ovechkin has 873 career goals thanks to 20 goals in 27 games -- an unprecedented scoring clip for a 39-year-old player. Then again, Alex Ovechkin has been doing unprecedented things for Alex Ovechkin, too: His 17 goals in 20 games was by far the hottest goal-scoring start he has had at any age. This is his 20th straight 20-goal season, trailing only Gordie Howe (22 seasons) all time. If he continues his goal-scoring pace, Ovechkin could shatter the record by the end of March, and that's despite missing time to injury this season.

Our favorite Ovechkin stat, courtesy of Mike Callow of ESPN Radio in D.C.: The Capitals star scored 848 goals in between playoff victories by Washington's NFL team (from 2006 to 2025). OK, that might speak more to the struggles of Washington football than Ovechkin's generational scoring prowess, but still impressive.

Best trend: The rarity of shootouts

Shootouts remain a pox on the NHL, an inferior mechanism for determining the victor from the previous 65 minutes of team effort in which not a single pass is attempted nor is there a defending skater on the ice. But that's a discussion for another day.

The good news is that shootouts were a rarity in the first half of the season. According to the NHL, 76.5% of games that went beyond regulation were ended in the 3-on-3 overtime, the highest rate of OT goals in NHL history. Let's keep that energy going!

Worst trend: Deferred money

Toronto Maple Leafs defenseman Jake McCabe, Carolina Hurricanes forward Seth Jarvis and Anaheim Ducks forward Frank Vatrano signed contract extensions that featured a significant amount of money being deferred until after their playing days are done. That allowed teams to massage their salary cap numbers. All of this is allowed under the CBA and has been done before, as when Arizona re-signed Shane Doan in 2016.

But let's be real: The NHL generally frowns upon creative accounting that allows teams to wiggle under the salary cap in the name of competitive balance. From someone who watched the draconian response by the NHL to marathon contract extensions with declining salary at the end: Enjoy this while you can, GMs.

Most inspirational story: Columbus Blue Jackets

The tragic death of Johnny Gaudreau is still being felt around the hockey world. His memory continues to be honored, like when the USHL Dubuque Fighting Saints -- where he played and was a minority owner -- recently retired his jersey. But perhaps the greatest tribute to his spirit as a player has been the resiliency of his Columbus teammates.

The Blue Jackets entered the season with a new GM, a new coach and the heaviest of hearts. They finished the first half of the season as a legitimate playoff contender in the Eastern Conference, buoyed by a Norris Trophy-worthy performance by Zach Werenski and a point-per-game season from Gaudreau's close friend Sean Monahan.

Memories of Johnny Hockey are found around Nationwide Arena, from his picture on the outside of the barn to his stall preserved in the locker room. His teammates continue to process their grief, using some of it to inspire this successful season. As GM Don Waddell told NHL.com, the team had lots of meetings to discuss how to do that.

"We've got to take the words that [Gaudreau's widow] Meredith used at the funeral: 'Johnny would want you guys to go play hockey. I want you to go play hockey. Go play hockey.' And we kept echoing those things over and over. 'This is what the Gaudreaus would want us to do,'" he said.

Most important rookie: Dustin Wolf

Center Macklin Celebrini of the San Jose Sharks and defenseman Lane Hutson of the Montreal Canadiens have moved into their own tier in the Calder Trophy race for the class of 2024-25.

Celebrini's 0.91 points per game in 34 games would rank him in the top 10 for rookies since 2005, and he market-corrected Matvei Michkov as the charismatic highlight-reel rookie. Hutson is currently leading all rookie scorers in points, is getting better every game and is within range of what Cale Makar (0.88 points per game) and Quinn Hughes (0.78) accomplished in points per game as freshmen.

The Calder is given for the best rookie performance, and I think Celebrini and Hutson are putting on a show. It's not necessarily given for the most important rookie performance; although if it did, there would be a clear winner: Dustin Wolf of the Calgary Flames.

Wolf was 15-6-2 in his first 23 games, with a .916 save percentage and a 2.50 goals-against average, including two shutouts. (With three assists, no less!) He's just outside the top 10 in goals saved above expected, via Stathletes. The Flames would be calculating their draft lottery odds right now without him. As is, they're right in the wild-card mix.

Most forsaken player: Connor Bedard

The last thing you want to see from your franchise player in his second NHL season is the kind of vacant stare that Bedard has when discussing the trajectory of the Blackhawks, which at this point is akin to a

malfunctioning bottle rocket. Even in those moments when he should be able to celebrate personal achievement -- like reaching 100 career points faster than any other teenaged player in NHL history -- his thoughts circle back to how bad the Blackhawks have been.

Chicago stripped the roster down to the foundation so it could acquire a player like Bedard in the draft, and yet the landscape remains barren. Celebrini joined a team with William Eklund, Will Smith and now Yaroslav Askarov in the mix. Bedard doesn't have nearly that.

Where's the Evgeni Malkin to his Sidney Crosby? The Nicklas Backstrom to his Ovechkin? The answer is "in future drafts," which probably isn't what Bedard wants to hear.

Goal of the (half) year: Nazem Kadri

The 1992 romantic comedy "The Cutting Edge" -- written by "Andor" show runner Tony Gilroy! -- asks what would happen if a hockey player became an Olympic figure skater.

Well, this Kadri goal from December is what it might look like if a figure skater became a hockey player: the Calgary Flames center leaping over a sprawled-out J.J. Moser, keeping his balance when hitting the ice, doing a 360-degree turn, dragging the puck back and then somehow beating Tampa Bay Lightning goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy.

Maybe not the highest technical score from the judges, but Kadri aced the presentation score.

Save of the (half) year: Jacob Markstrom

It's not often you get two save-of-the-year candidates in the same game, but that was the kind of night Markstrom had against the Seattle Kraken on Jan. 6.

He even had a third save in the game that would have been the best of the night for most goalies. But not for this goalie on this night.

Coach of the (half) year: Spencer Carbery

In his first 125 games as a head coach, Carbery has a .608 points percentage. He coached the Capitals to an unlikely playoff spot last season, and has had them at or near the top of the NHL this season. While last season was impressive, this season established him as a coaching star. He has kept the ship steady despite not having Ovechkin for 16 games due to injury, gotten the most out of young players and integrated veteran additions to the lineup seamlessly.

Capitals GM Chris Patrick told me recently that Carbery's open-mindedness as a head coach has impressed him. Take Pierre-Luc Dubois, who is resurrecting his career with the Caps. Other coaches might have been reticent to take on a guy who's on his third team in three years. Carbery didn't flinch, recognized the talent and was motivated to get him back on track.

Almost everything Carbery is doing has worked, and it might add up to a Jack Adams Award by season's end -- if not more for Washington.

Best glow-up: Colorado Avalanche goaltending

The Avalanche began the season with a specious goaltending trio: Alexandar Georgiev, Justus Annunen and Kaapo Kahkonen, the latter of whom they claimed off waivers after the other two were both lit up on opening night. Rather than watch his talented team dragged down by mediocre goaltending, general manager Chris MacFarland got aggressive and nuked the crease.

Annenen was traded to the Nashville Predators for veteran Scott Wedgewood, who had a rough start in his first season with the franchise. Then came the biggest swing: Shipping out Georgiev, in his third year as the team's primary starter, in a package to the San Jose Sharks for goalie Mackenzie Blackwood.

So far, MacFarland looks like a genius: Blackwood has played so well for the Avalanche (9-2-1, .938 save percentage, 1.89 goals-against average) that they already awarded the 28-year-old with a five-year contract extension worth \$5.25 million per season.

Most shocking move: The Jim Montgomery migration

The Boston Bruins firing Jim Montgomery was something I called before the season, considering he was in the last year of his contract and the team had diminishing returns. That it happened 20 games into the season was a surprise, but what occurred after that was the real stunner.

The St. Louis Blues fired head coach Drew Bannister -- last season's interim coach who was elevated to the big job in the offseason -- after 22 games to quickly scoop up Montgomery, who had previously been an assistant coach with the team.

"I was willing to go through the peaks and the valleys with Drew," Blues GM Doug Armstrong said, "until Monty became available."

Most ruthless front office: New York Rangers

For all the obituaries written about the Rangers this season, they remain within spitting distance of the last wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference, among a nine-team pileup of middling contenders.

But it's clear the team has issues, just as it's clear that ownership and management will seek to address those issues by any means necessary. Like using the pressure of waivers to force trades for Barclay Goodrow in the summer and captain Jacob Trouba during the season -- after trying and failing to trade the latter during the offseason, undercutting his captaincy. Like listing beloved 13-year veteran Chris Kreider's name in an email to other general managers about being "open for business" for trades.

Whether or not the Rangers rally for a playoff spot, there are very few players on the roster whose safety is guaranteed from future moves.

Best feud: J.T. Miller vs. Elias Pettersson

This season hasn't lacked for locker room drama. Boston Bruins stars Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak recently had to shut down a Boston radio report about a rift between them, with Marchand dumping a dozen photos on Instagram to show how tight they are, which is very "celebrity tabloid scandal" of him.

But that alleged Boston tension was sunshine and unicorns compared with what's playing out across the continent.

Canucks star forwards Elias Pettersson and J.T. Miller have had heat for years, according to former Vancouver coach Bruce Boudreau, who told TSN that it predated his time with the team and had something to do with quality of linemates.

This season, it manifested in a brief outburst at practice in which Miller allegedly called Pettersson a baby. Captain Quinn Hughes has acknowledged an issue between the two. Miller and Pettersson denied they're feuding, with Miller saying, "You guys are just wasting your time. I don't care." But all of this has led to a cottage industry of trade speculation, with weekly reports about the Canucks fielding offers for both players to alleviate the tension in the room.

Complicating matters: Miller has a full no-movement clause, while Pettersson doesn't have trade protection on a contract that runs through 2031-32. Also complicating matters: general manager Patrik Allvin having recently put Pettersson on blast. "He needs to mature and understand that there are certain expectations and it does not get easier. And you need to face the music when things don't go well," Allvin told reporters.

Best comeback: Patrik Laine

For the first time in a long time, Patrik Laine is healthy. Not necessarily on the ice, where a knee injury and an illness have limited him to 15 games this season, but off the ice. Laine went through the NHL/NHLPA player assistance program last summer before being traded to the Montreal Canadiens, prioritizing his health and well-being. In August, he and fiancée Jordan Leigh launched From Us to You, a mental health initiative inspired by the many people who shared their stories with Laine.

When he has played, Laine has been productive: 10 goals in those 15 games, with nine of them coming on the power play. He remains one of the NHL's most unfiltered star players ... although sometimes that can mean giving bulletin board material to opponents, as he did prior to his first game back in Columbus.

The Utah Hockey Club started strong, fell off, dealt with some unfortunate injuries and is now hanging tough in a wild-card race.

There have been some highlights in the former Coyotes' first season in Salt Lake City, from the unexpected heroics of goalie Karel Vejmelka to the expected dominance of star forward (and Team USA snub) Clayton Keller.

But people aren't talking enough about Logan Cooley, the 20-year-old dynamo. He has 37 points in 43 games, including 12 goals. He's second behind Keller in goals and wins above replacement according to Evolving Hockey. Given their roster and resources, it won't be long until Utah is a force in the West. Cooley's season is a taste of what's to come.

Most likely to continue an NHL record playoff drought: Buffalo Sabres

Unless something dramatic happens in the second half, the Sabres will miss the playoffs for a 14th consecutive season, extending their NHL record. They haven't made the playoffs since 2010-11. Not to put too fine a point on this, but that was the rookie season for Sergei Bobrovsky, Taylor Hall and Ryan McDonagh.

Through 43 games, Stathead gave the Sabres a 0.4% chance of making the playoffs despite Buffalo bringing back coach Lindy Ruff and looking like a team that could break out in the East. What a perpetual bummer this is.

What's next?

Finally, let's look ahead three of the biggest storylines for the season's second half:

1. 4 Nations Face-Off

This first-of-its-kind event replaces the All-Star Game and pits star players from the U.S., Canada, Sweden and Finland against each other in an exhibition tournament that's meant to serve as an appetizer for both the 2026 Olympics and future World Cups of Hockey.

The expectation is that an in-season tournament combined with national pride will result in a hugely competitive event with pride on the line. But in talking to players, everything from injuries to the length of the season break -- Feb. 9-21 -- is on their minds. Do you really want to be the team that wins six of seven games, only to have the season pause for a two-week exhibition tournament? All that said: USA vs. Canada is going to rule.

2. The East wild-card chaos

The top three teams in the Metro Division appear set. Same goes for the top two teams in the Atlantic, and the Tampa Bay Lightning appear in good shape for that third spot ahead of the Boston Bruins. As of

Wednesday, that means nine teams within seven points of the two wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference.

They include last season's playoff qualifiers seeking to find their footing again (Boston, the Rangers and Islanders), teams trying break through (Ottawa, Detroit, Montreal) or recapture previous glory (Pittsburgh, Philadelphia). And then there are the Blue Jackets, a team that might have the rest of the NHL pulling for them if they remain near the bubble, given the circumstances. What a race.

3. The trade deadline

The March 7 deadline might be the biggest boom-or-bust moment in a while. If teams such as the Rangers, Bruins, Predators and Canucks decide to move significant players, it could upend the power balance in the Stanley Cup race.

But even if the fireworks are a little more muted, the top contenders are still going to add what they hope are final championship puzzle pieces. Or it could just be 20 defensive defensemen on expiring contracts getting moved for fifth-round picks. Such is the trade deadline.

ESPN / Prospects who could be included in NHL trade deadline deals

By Rachel Doerrie – January 17, 2025

The NHL trade deadline is less than two months away on March 7, and the 4 Nations Face-Off (Feb. 12-20) probably will kick-start the festivities, with every NHL general manager expected to attend.

Teams have their midterm scouting meetings in January, when they set the course for the trade deadline, discuss which players they are willing to move and who they are most interested in acquiring. This is another opportunity for development staff to provide updates on organizational prospects and scouts to provide analysis on prospects in other organizations. Once the meetings are done and scouts are dispatched with players to monitor, the trade talks really pick up.

With that in mind, it's time to evaluate the prospect cupboard of each contender. Who is untouchable? Is it the right time to go all-in? In which prospects will teams be most interested? How close is each prospect to playing NHL games on a regular basis and what impact could they have?

All of these are questions that teams and their fans will be asking over the next two months. Not every playoff team is a true Stanley Cup contender, and not every team we'll discuss here is on the same level of contention. Four teams are positioned as contenders with a significant prospect surplus that can be leveraged to improve the current roster: the Carolina Hurricanes, Minnesota Wild, New Jersey Devils and Washington Capitals.

Here's a detailed look at the prospect situation for 13 likely playoff-bound teams -- players whose names might be popping up in trade chatter in the coming weeks:

Note: Teams are listed in alphabetical order by conference.

Eastern Conference

Carolina Hurricanes

Team overview: The Canes are perennially listed as contenders and are one of the few prospect-rich contending teams. That's directly related to their continued draft success. Carolina is consistently viewed as a draft winner because it extracts tremendous value every year. It's well known that owner Tom Dundon is not keen on moving first-round picks or high-end prospects, making it difficult for Carolina to acquire stars. That tune probably would change if a superstar signed to a long-term deal were to become available.

Prospect pool: Alexander Nikishin is the best defenseman outside of the NHL, and has been an untouchable for quite some time. The projected top-four defender plays a well-rounded game, and should be an impact player for the Canes in the near future. Scott Morrow and Aleksi Heimosalmi are two defenders teams would be keen to acquire in trades with Carolina, as both are impact players in the AHL. Though it's unlikely Carolina moves Morrow, perhaps Heimosalmi is a player the Canes would use as a trade option to acquire a player who can help them in their current contention window, given Dominik Badinka in the pipeline.

Other NHL teams have shown interest in quite a few forward prospects, but Carolina has been unwilling to move them. Bradley Nadeau, Felix Unger Sorum and Nikita Artamonov are under 20, producing admirably at the AHL and KHL levels and are known to be untouchables. Jayden Perron, Noel Gunler, Ryan Suzuki and Justin Robidas are seeing an uptick in trade value with their performances this season, and will draw interest from potential trade partners. All of them are skilled players with middle-of-the-lineup NHL potential.

Gunler, Suzuki and Robidas are in their early 20s and could play NHL minutes as soon as next season. All are players who have been developed well and would be valuable talent for a team that is looking for young players who skate well: Gunler a scorer; Suzuki a playmaker; Robidas a reliable two-way player. All of them bring a different skill set and could be the key component in a rental trade.

Florida Panthers

Team overview: The defending Stanley Cup champions have shown the past two seasons were no fluke and they are capable of a repeat. Both Aleksander Barkov and Sam Reinhart are Selke Trophy contenders, Matthew Tkachuk is on pace for 85 points and Sam Bennett is a perennial playoff performer. Florida is one of the only teams that does not have a glaring hole in its lineup. When healthy, the Panthers are among the deepest teams in the NHL. Though Florida is unlikely to make a major acquisition at the deadline, it might acquire depth on defense.

Prospect pool: Justin Sourdif and Gracyn Sawchyn are two forward prospects drawing the most interest from other teams. Sourdif is unlikely to get a real shot in the Panthers' lineup because of its depth, and has seen his development plateau as a result. He could be a nice addition for a team looking to move pending free agents to contenders, such as San Jose, Seattle, Nashville or Pittsburgh.

Sawchyn is a player every coach loves because he has great straightaway speed, wins puck battles and makes his linemates better. He's on pace for 100 points in the WHL, and has increased his offensive production year over year. A right-handed center, Sawchyn projects to be a middle-of-the-lineup player who can contribute on special teams. Should Florida go for a big swing in the trade market, Sawchyn is a player teams covet as a hard-skill player.

Marek Alscher is turning heads on defense after skyrocketing up draft lists in 2022. The big defenseman is tough to play against, physical and owns the front of the net. He has performed admirably in the AHL this season and could be ready for a regular NHL role as soon as next season. He's defensively sound and does not get caught trying to be overly physical in transition. Teams around the league have shown interest in the 6-foot-3 defender, and he probably would net Florida a quality player should it opt to move him.

New Jersey Devils

Team overview: With the additions of Sheldon Keefe behind the bench and Jacob Markstrom in goal, the Devils are back in contention for the Metropolitan Division title and decidedly dominating the Hudson River Rivalry. The Devils are young, fast and fun, and one of the most entertaining contenders. Between Nico Hischier's Selke-worthy season and a dominant shutdown defense pair of Jonas Siegenthaler-Johnathan Kovacevic, the Devils have a lot of the ingredients for sustained success.

Prospect pool: Given their up-and-down standings finishes the past few seasons, they've been afforded the ability to draft higher than most of the other teams on this list. Having defenders such as Seamus Casey, Simon Nemec and Anton Silayev in their system is a rarity for a contender, specifically two top-10 picks. Both Nemec and Silayev would net a haul for the Devils if they wanted to acquire a top-line winger in return. The Devils are in a distinctive position in which they can afford to trade one of their blue-chip prospects on defense because they have a surplus.

Though it's unconventional, the ability to acquire a top-line scorer (Brock Boeser or J.T. Miller?) with a simple swap allows the Devils to do what other contenders can't: fill an organizational hole without creating another. If Boeser were willing to sign an extension in New Jersey, using one of the three talented defense prospects to acquire him might be a path the Devils explore.

Should the Devils feel the need to add depth up front, they have options outside of their blue-chip prospects. Arseni Gritsyuk, Cam Squires, Max Graham and Lenni Hameenaho are forward prospects with interest around the league. Gritsyuk is NHL-ready and producing well in the KHL. If the acquiring team can get him to North America, he would slide into an NHL lineup upon arrival. Squires, Graham and Hameenaho are producing at respectable rates, and have value in line with asking prices for rental players.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Team overview: Stop me if you've heard this before: The Tampa Bay Lightning are a Stanley Cup contender. Truly, the Lightning are one of the best examples of elongating a Cup window and moving on from veterans at the right time, even when it's ruthless (such as the case with Steven Stamkos). The Lightning are being led by major contributions from Nikita Kucherov, Brandon Hagel, Brayden Point, Jake Guentzel and Norris Trophy contender Victor Hedman. Anthony Cirelli is a Selke contender and producing nearly a point per game. The Lightning are a problem because their best players are performing at elite levels, and they have the requisite playoff experience to have success.

Prospect pool: The Lightning do not have a deep prospect pool, but GM Julien BriseBois has been unafraid to move players and picks to extend the contention window. The Lightning should want to keep the likes of Conor Geekie, Ethan Gauthier, Gage Goncalves, and Jack Finley because they will need younger players on cheaper contracts to fill out their lineup and extend the window. Furthermore, does the impact of a Mikael Granlund or Jason Zucker for one playoff run outweigh what any of those players can give you on a long-term basis?

Tampa Bay could use some depth on defense, and more importantly, in goal. Perhaps Jonathan Quick can be had if the Rangers don't go on a run to make the playoffs. Kevin Lankinen might be available if Vancouver slips and feels it can't extend him. Both are excellent options on cheap deals, and in Quick's case, there's Stanley Cup experience. Either of those goaltending options provides a more reliable one behind Andrei Vasilevskiy, and will allow Tampa Bay to rest its goaltender down the stretch to prevent a performance dip in the playoffs. With two first- and two fourth-round picks in the upcoming draft, it is far more likely BriseBois uses his draft capital to acquire players than giving up any of the team's prospects.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Team overview: Ah, the Toronto Maple Leafs. Anyone who has been around the block in hockey knows the Leafs can't be considered a true contender until they perform in the spring. But their defensive numbers, goaltending and style of play under coach Craig Berube have turned many into believers. The Leafs' prospect cupboard is thin after not having any second- or third-round selections in 2023 or 2024. Their pool lacks elite upside, but they have a few middle-of-the-lineup players, and two quality prospects in goal.

Prospect pool: Leafs GM Brad Treliving is on record saying the team is exploring the trade market for a center, and Yanni Gourde has been discussed since December as a fit. Easton Cowan is far too high a price to pay for Gourde. Both he and Fraser Minten are unlikely to be moved as rental players, especially given Minten's performance earlier this season. While neither is expected to be a top-line player, Cowan brings an element of "rat" to his game that other teams in the Atlantic have: the Tkachuk brothers and Brad Marchand. Minten is likely to carve out a career as a solid third-line player, and trading him for a few months of Gourde, who would play the same role, would be poor asset management.

If the Leafs were to swing for the fences on a rental, then Cowan would be the player going the other way. But given Mitch Marner is Toronto's "own rental" (he will be a free agent), it's hard to believe Toronto would find itself in that market.

On defense, Ben Danford and Topi Niemala earn interest around the league. It seems Niemala does not fit the new management or coaching archetype, but he still projects to be an NHL player. He moves the puck well, attacks space and plays a very poised game. Given that he is unlikely to fit under the current regime but has a lot of the skills required to be an effective NHL defenseman, he is most likely to be the piece moved in a deadline acquisition.

Washington Capitals

Team overview: One of the season's biggest surprises is Washington's resurgence in the standings. A turnaround that has Spencer Carbery as the odds-on favorite for Coach of the Year, Alex Ovechkin chasing Wayne Gretzky's goal record, a reformed Pierre-Luc Dubois and Jakob Chychrun, and continued success for Dylan Strome and Logan Thompson means Washington is atop the Metropolitan Division.

Prospect pool: Washington's mediocre performances the past few seasons have allowed it to draft higher than most contenders, and the Capitals have extracted tremendous value with their selections.

Ryan Leonard is likely to sign at the end of his NCAA season, and no one thinks the Capitals would consider moving a player expected to immediately step into their lineup. He would be quite the "acquisition" in April. Andrew Cristall and Terik Parascak are two forwards who bring quality to the prospect pool. Ivan Miroshnichenko is producing in the AHL, and is unlikely to be moved for any player without term. Should the Capitals want to add to their depth, Eriks Mateiko's stock rose significantly at the World Juniors, and Henrik Rybinski might fit nicely with a team looking to add NHL-ready offense to its lineup.

On defense, Cole Hutson looked fantastic at the World Juniors, and moved himself into the untouchables category. Cam Allen narrowly missed out on the world junior team for Canada and has been fantastic in the OHL this season, showing development on both ends of the ice. The Caps have a surplus of young D-men, and could move one of Ryan Chesley, Leon Muggli or Vincent Iorio to bring in forward depth for a playoff run. Shoring up their bottom six might cost one of those defensemen if they are unwilling to part with their first-round pick or either of their second-rounders in the 2025 draft.

Western Conference

Colorado Avalanche

Team overview: The Avalanche made a major move and addressed their biggest organizational need when they acquired Mackenzie Blackwood earlier this season. He has been the NHL's best goaltender since the trade, and has yet to give up more than two goals in a start for Colorado. Against the Rangers on Tuesday, he made a handful of grade-A saves that Colorado fans had seen get by Alexandar Georgiev with ease. Colorado has turned it around since the trade, going 8-2-1 in games Blackwood has started, with another overtime win in a relief against Buffalo.

The Avalanche are in an interesting spot in a stacked Central Division. They have an impact player who could return to the lineup and be an "own trade deadline acquisition" of sorts in Gabriel Landeskog, who has resumed skating though there is no timetable for his return. Valeri Nichushkin suffered a setback in his injury recovery, meaning the Avs are missing two of their top six forwards. If both get healthy for a playoff run, the Avs are in business. If Landeskog doesn't return, Colorado has prospects it could use to bolster the lineup.

Prospect pool: Cal Ritchie and Ivan Ivan are two forwards that earn attention around the league, and both have looked good in small stints with the NHL club. The Avs are not keen to move either of them.

Nor are they keen to move off-skilled defenseman Mikhail Gulyayev, who is producing well in the KHL. Unless the Avs acquire a Brock Nelson or J.T. Miller type, they're unlikely to move any of those three.

Maximillian Curran and William Zellers are young forwards producing admirably in junior hockey, and could be part of a deal for an impact player if Colorado feels the need to make an acquisition. Both are a few years away but have the talent to be NHL players. If the Avs want to bolster their depth, Oskar Olausson, Sampo Ranta or Jean-Luc Foudy could fit the bill in exchange for a middle-six forward or depth defenseman.

Dallas Stars

Team overview: Another elite contender in the Central Division, the Stars have been a top drafting team for some time, and it allows them to extend contention windows by years. Wyatt Johnston, Logan Stankoven and Mavrik Bourque are young players who are becoming mainstays with the Stars as Jamie Benn, Tyler Seguin and others age.

The Stars do not have as many prospects in the cupboard because of the rate they are graduating from the AHL, but they still have a few who are drawing interest. The Stars have Seguin's money to use (once he goes on long-term IR), and GM Jim Nill has proved he'll pay top dollar for a quality defenseman (such as with the Chris Tanev trade in 2024).

Prospect pool: Defenseman Lian Bichsel is considered an untouchable and with good reason -- he's expected to be a regular in the lineup as soon as next season. Teams love him, but barring a trade for a top-line player or defenseman, he's unlikely to be going anywhere.

Christian Kyrou and Aram Minnetian are young defenders with significant interest around the league. Both move the puck very well, have great mobility and project as NHL defenders. Kyrou looks solid in the AHL and is close to NHL-ready; he'd likely get a shot toward the end of the season if the opportunity arose with a new team. Minnetian is still in the NCAA, and probably will need another year of seasoning there or in the AHL before getting a look in the NHL. If the Stars want an impact defenseman, moving one of these as part of the package is the most likely scenario.

At forward, teams are high on Emil Hemming, but the Stars would prefer to keep him in the organization. Antonio Stranges is a point-per-game player in AHL, and could be a trade option Dallas uses to acquire some scoring. Ayrton Martino and Matthew Seminoff are two forwards that earn interest around the league, with both needing more seasoning and projecting to be bottom-six players in the NHL. Neither would move the needle in a big trade but could be a tidy return for a depth player on an expiring deal.

Edmonton Oilers

Team overview: Any season the Oilers have Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, they need to be all-in. That is especially true this season as it's the last one in which both players are being paid significantly less than their value (which changes next season when Draisaitl's extension kicks in).

Prospect pool: Given their position, there is only one player in their prospect pool that should be untouchable barring the acquisition of a current star, which is unlikely in their current cap situation: Matthew Savoie. He has the potential to be an all-situations, point-producing, waterbug type of player. He has the highest ceiling of any Oilers prospect by a fair margin, and the only one who is projected as even a potential second-liner.

The Oilers do have prospects who are interesting to other clubs and given their penchant for trading prospects, it wouldn't be a tremendous surprise if Beau Akey or Paul Fischer is moved to acquire some help for the current roster. Both are 19-year-olds and Akey has the higher ceiling as the better skater and the all-important right-handed attribute as a defenseman.

If the Oilers were to acquire a second-pairing defenseman for the NHL lineup, Akey or Sam O'Reilly are the two most likely players to be involved in the deal. O'Reilly has excellent off-puck play. The details of his game are nearing professional level. He's projected to be a third-line center who plays in all situations and is reliable defensively. You have to give up something to get something, and if the Oilers want that impact defender for another playoff run, it will have to be a top prospect that goes the other way.

Los Angeles Kings

Team overview: The Kings are in an enviable position: They have too many right-shot defenders. Imagine that. The Kings need to add a defender on the left side of the lineup, and would prefer he be a left shot, instead of having a righty play the off side. Generally speaking, they could probably do a straight swap with another NHL team for a lefty and come out ahead, because right-handed defenders are more valuable in the trade market.

Prospect pool: The Kings' prospect depth is clearly in one area: the goal crease. Carter George was outstanding at the World Juniors, and he's joined by Hampton Slukynsky and Erik Portillo. That is too many goaltenders, and while all of them can't play for the Kings, it's a great problem to have. Teams love a top-notch goalie prospect -- think about all the hype surrounding Yaroslav Askarov. The Predators received David Edstrom and an additional first-round pick for Askarov, when it was known that he was unhappy in their system. The Kings could get a ransom for one of their goalie prospects if they chose to do so, and surely GM Rob Blake will think long and hard about bolstering his blue line using that surplus. Each of those goalies probably would return a top-four, left-shot defenseman and more.

Outside the goal crease, the Kings have graduated many of their prospects. Liam Greentree is the lone skater with an impactful NHL projection, and is someone the Kings should keep in the organization. Koehn Zimmer and Francesco Pinelli are two other forwards who might be moved in a depth deal, but if the Kings want an impact defender, leveraging their goalie surplus is the best approach.

Minnesota Wild

Team overview: Thanks to the masterful work of Judd Brackett and his staff, the Wild are loaded with prospect talent and young NHL players. Marco Rossi is an impact NHL player and needs a new contract that surely will be more expensive than if the Wild signed him last summer. Marat Khusnutdinov has looked good in his first season as a depth player. The Wild used their prospect surplus to acquire David Jiricek from Columbus, and he's expected to be a second-pairing defender behind Brock Faber for years to come.

The Wild have not-so-quietly said they want a non-rental player who can have an impact. They're in the last year of a gargantuan cap buyout (Zach Parise, Ryan Suter) and have tons of cap space opening up in the offseason. The two Brocks (Nelson and Boeser) make a lot of sense for the Wild, and while both need new deals, they are both believed to be interested in a long-term contract with the Wild. If the Wild opt to acquire players of that caliber who are impactful and willing to stay, they have more than enough prospects to do so.

Prospect pool: Up front, Liam Ohgren, Riley Heidt, Danila Yurov, Hunter Haight and Ryder Ritchie all hold serious value. Acquiring one or both of Boeser and Nelson might mean Rossi finds himself included in a deal as well.

If not, the five forward prospects are projected to be middle-six impact players, with Ritchie, Heidt and Ohgren skewing toward second-line players. Ohgren and Haight could find themselves in the NHL as soon as next season, given their production in the AHL. Ohgren plays a power forward type game that many teams covet. Ritchie and Heidt are producing well in the WHL, but are probably a couple of years from being impactful NHL forwards.

On defense, it is hard to imagine the Wild moving off Jiricek or Zeev Buium, who is a top defenseman in the NCAA, and has the potential to be a mainstay on a second pair with Jiricek as soon as next season. Carson Lambos, Jack Peart and Ryan O'Rourke are all steady defenders who could be NHL-ready next season. They don't produce offense, but all three defend well in transition, play the net front hard and the Wild have been hesitant to move them in the past.

If the Wild want to go big, they have the prospect cupboard to do so. They also can subtract from their roster knowing their prospects can fill the holes. The Wild can overpay in prospect surplus for a player who helps them contend now because they have been the NHL's best drafting team for the past four years.

Vegas Golden Knights

Team overview: The Golden Knights are atop the Pacific Division on the back of elite play from Jack Eichel, Mark Stone and Shea Theodore. Their approach has been the same since inception: They'll trade any player, prospect or draft pick if they believe it will help them win a Stanley Cup.

Given that credo, no player is truly untouchable, and the Golden Knights have a few who have drawn interest. The Golden Knights are loaded on defense but could use some scoring depth on the wings. Up the middle, they're set with Eichel, Tomas Hertl, William Karlsson and Nicolas Roy.

Prospect pool: A few prospects who have drawn interest around the league include Brenden Brisson, Mathieu Cataford, Tuomas Uronen, Matyas Sapovaliv and Lukas Cormier. Their first-round pick this past summer, Trevor Connelly, is a bit of a different story. Teams passed on him at the draft for off-ice reasons, and he is still considered a "no-go" for some.

Brisson is a scorer who has failed to stick with the NHL club, despite being able to play both wings. Perhaps a change of scenery could help him reach his ceiling. Cataford and Uronen are coming off appearances at the World Juniors; both are projected to be third-line energy players who produce modestly. Sapovaliv is the closest to being NHL-ready after Brisson, and brings a blend of size and playmaking skill. He's starting to find his stride in the AHL and is a player who should become a middle-six winger at the NHL level.

If the Golden Knights want to make a bold move, they are projected to have the cap space to make it happen without major subtractions from the roster. They haven't hesitated to do so in the past, and this deadline isn't expected to be different. They are a legitimate Cup contender with prospects who would enable them to acquire a middle-six winger to bolster their offense.

Winnipeg Jets

Team overview: Connor Hellebuyck for the Hart Trophy? It's hard not to have the conversation given that he's running away with the Vezina. The Jets don't have the playoff résumé to prove it, but like the Leafs, they are a real contender. Their style of play is sustainable, their goaltending is the best in the league and their star players are carrying their weight. The Jets have a clear hole in the second-line center spot, with Mark Scheifele occupying the top line and Adam Lowry holding down the third.

Prospect pool: Brayden Yager was acquired in a swap for Rutger McGroarty, and the Jets are not keen on moving him. He has all the makings of a two-way, second-line player. Kieran Walton and Kevin He are

producing at a high level in junior, and interest is growing in both. Colby Barlow is a big winger who can get a shot off in different situations and find quiet areas to pounce. His production has dropped off, but he can be a useful third-line player, with some physicality. Given the age and development curve of Walton and He, teams probably would want them to be the centerpiece of a deal to acquire a second-line center over Barlow. Barlow, Walton and He are probably two or three years from a meaningful NHL role but have trajectories to be middle-six contributors for a prolonged career.

Brad Lambert and Chaz Lucius are further along in their development and Lambert has had limited NHL action. Both are capable of producing in middle-six roles in the NHL as soon as next season, given the right opportunity. There is interest in them, and their inclusion in a package probably would decrease the need for a high draft pick to be involved. If moved on their own, a third-line winger or depth defenseman probably would be considered fair value.

Alfons Freij and Elias Salomonsson are young defenseman the Jets are keen to not move but have drawn interest around the league. If the Jets move a defenseman, it's most likely to be Ville Heinola or Simon Lundmark who are sent the other way. Neither can find a real footing with the big club but could be serviceable NHL defenders in another organization.

ESPN / The story behind Blue Jackets', Red Wings' Stadium Series jerseys

By Greg Wyshynski – January 17, 2025

When the Detroit Red Wings and Columbus Blue Jackets take the ice for the NHL Stadium Series on March 1 at the Ohio State University, it'll be difficult to locate the octopi and buckeyes on their respective jerseys.

But trust us -- they're there.

Those Easter eggs are two of the quirks on these aesthetically unique uniform sets -- designed by Fanatics with input from the NHL and the participating teams -- for the league's latest outdoor game, which will take place at Ohio Stadium.

"The Stadium Series is an opportunity to really take a leap, take a chance, try something different and celebrate local hockey culture," Dom Fillion, creative director for Fanatics, told ESPN.

It's the first outdoor game for the Blue Jackets. Their jerseys draw inspiration from Union Army soldiers' uniforms, from the chevron sleeve stripe to a new "CBJ" logo on the shoulder that Fillion said was meant to resemble a pin on a soldier's slouch cap.

Then there's the cannon. The Blue Jackets are famous for firing a cannon inside their arena after goals. While they've incorporated a cannon into a previous third jersey crest, the team has never had the cannon as its primary logo -- until the Stadium Series.

"There's wasn't a moment when the cannon had its own space on the jersey. We thought this was the perfect fit," Fillion said. "It's a stadium environment. Let's make it bold."

Tying the jerseys to the team's home state: the Ohio silhouette patches that identify the team's captain and alternate captains.

"I think that state pride element was something that really fueled our inspiration," Fillion said. "We've got the state shape, and inside the back neck we have this Buckeye pattern as well."

Inside the jersey's collar are the words "Columbus Blue Jackets" over an unofficial Ohio State Easter egg: a buckeye leaf pattern that stretches across the neck of the sweater.

As for incorporating other Ohio State iconography onto the Blue Jackets uniforms, that was a no-go. Specifically, the Jackets weren't allowed to use Buckeyes stickers on their helmets to mimic the football team, according to Fanatics and the NHL.

"That was off limits for us," Fillion lamented. "There's definitely some trademarks that you've got to navigate and be aware of."

Brian Jennings, NHL senior executive VP for marketing and chief branding officer, said the school's "initial trademark" prevented the Blue Jackets from using Buckeyes stickers on their helmets.

Obviously with the game at the Horseshoe between a team from Ohio and a team from Michigan, there was some expectation that the uniforms could fit the aesthetic of the Buckeyes and Wolverines, their NCAA counterparts. Fillion said there were discussions about incorporating those designs, but the colors didn't sync up.

Columbus' primary color is blue rather than Ohio State red. The NHL asked the Jackets if they'd consider wearing white jerseys for the game, with Detroit wearing red to evoke the Buckeyes' aesthetic, but Columbus wanted to wear blue as the home team.

Meanwhile, the University of Michigan's colors (maize and blue) were too different from the Red Wings' colors to be considered.

"I think at some point there's a threshold that you cross," Fillion explained. "It doesn't feel like it's the team anymore, it's somebody else's team."

The Red Wings jerseys are meant to "celebrate the world-renowned automotive industry and hockey culture of Detroit." They incorporate elements such as debossed speed stripes on the sleeves and a front crest that features the word "Detroit" in a script font inspired by automotive insignias. Using a laser perforation technique, the crest and the numbers system on the jersey have a texture that's meant to mimic the upholstery of classic car seats.

This is the fifth outdoor game for the Red Wings. The designers had to be cognizant of previous designs but also Detroit's classic look.

"There's an element of pure minimalism that speaks to what Detroit is. So this jersey is a way to amplify that and keep it authentic to the team, to their DNA, and then just make it a little bit unique for the event," Fillion said.

Jennings said that while Stadium Series jerseys typically have "that progressive, futuristic look" in contrast to the more historic inspirations of the Winter Classic, there's "a little bit more simplicity" for Detroit's look, which was by design.

"Detroit being an Original Six team, that have very strong feelings, and [owner] Chris Ilitch and the team communicated that to us," he said.

What the jerseys lack in boldness, the Red Wings' helmets make up for it. Detroit's buckets have a large white stripe down the middle like a football helmet -- plus Red Wings logos on each side, making them look a little like Mercury when they're skating.

"It starts with the sweater, but then it's how you compliment it. In this case, it's the helmet that catches that collegiate and youthful look," Jennings said.

The Red Wings did come to the designers with one unique request: They wanted their octopus mascot represented in some small way. So on the bottom of the jersey in the back, right at the hem, there's a small loop tag with the purple octopus's eyes on it -- a cheeky new innovation for NHL outdoor game jerseys.

"We've never, never had this kind of treatment on the jersey before," Fillion noted. "It's a nice little Easter egg to discover."

The jerseys for the Red Wings and Blue Jackets are available for pre-order at their official team store locations. Columbus fans can also order them on the team's official online store.

Records set by Wayne Gretzky aren't meant to be broken. The Great One has nearly 1,000 more career points (2,857) than Jaromir Jagr (1,921 in second place) and over 1,200 more than the closest active player, Sidney Crosby (1,644). Gretzky has over 700 more assists (1,963) than second-placed Ron Francis (1,249) and almost 1,000 more than Crosby, the active leader (1,040).

For Alex Ovechkin to be just 21 goals away from tying Gretzky's record of 894 is clearly no small feat, and the chase has created a palpable buzz. As with any major moment of historical or record-setting interest, bettors are increasingly looking for a piece of the action. It hasn't hurt that the Washington Capitals captain is ahead of schedule in the goal race and his team dominates the league -- both welcome surprises.

During the 2023-24 season, the 39-year-old scored 31 goals in 79 games for a pace of 0.39 goals per game, the lowest of his career. The belief was that Father Time had finally caught up with Ovechkin and he would need at least two more seasons to catch Gretzky.

Sportsbooks still wanted to tap into the excitement of Ovechkin's record chase while acknowledging the implausibility of him getting it done during the 2024-25 campaign. BetMGM, DraftKings and FanDuel offered a special on him breaking the record this season (recording goal 895), opening at +1000 odds. Other books, like Caesars and ESPN BET, didn't begin the season with the market on the board due to its supposedly unlikely nature.

Ovechkin began the season on an absolutely torrid scoring pace, netting 15 goals in his first 18 games -- a ratio of 0.83 goals per game, which would be the best of his career over the length of an entire season. It also produced another unexpected development: the Capitals opened at 75-1 to win the Stanley Cup this season - tied for 23rd in the league -- but just over halfway through the campaign, they are leading both the Metropolitan Division and Eastern Conference. With 63 points, they are tied with the Winnipeg Jets for the most points in the NHL.

"I didn't think we'd be where we are today," Caesars Sportsbook's head of hockey Karry Shreeve told ESPN. "I certainly didn't project the Capitals as a team to be where they are and that kind of reflects where we stand right now with some of our positions. So it correlated to me that Ovechkin also wasn't going to be quite in the neighborhood [of the record]."

The team's success created some significant trouble for sportsbooks, with BetMGM reporting Washington as its second-largest liability to win the Cup behind only the always-popular New York Rangers. Shreeve says that his trading team didn't "buy in" to the hot start and didn't adjust the odds on Caps futures until it was absolutely forced to. He added that "customers will do very well" if Washington can cash tickets to win the division, conference or championship.

The Capitals' surprisingly great start has made them a profitable play on a nightly basis. A bettor wagering \$100 per game would be up a league-leading \$1,279 if they backed Washington in every contest on the money line. Still, DraftKings' sportsbook director Johnny Avello told ESPN that Ovechkin's hot hand specifically has not affected how the book sets its lines.

Despite the Caps success, this season hasn't been without drama. On Nov. 18, Ovechkin scored two goals against the Utah Hockey Club, just one night after recording his first hat trick of the season. But during that contest, he collided with Utah's Jack McBain and fractured a fibula, ultimately sidelining him for 16 games.

It temporarily stymied the momentum of his betting action and lengthened the odds of him breaking Gretzky's record this season after they rapidly shortened early on.

"Pre-injury, Ovechkin miraculously set the clock back a few years and was on pace to easily break the record this year. Everyone was all over it," BetMGM senior trader Matthew Rowe told ESPN. "Since his return, his production has slowed a bit, and now we are seeing more balanced action. ... The odds continue to drop on him achieving it this season."

Shreeve and his team at Caesars used Ovechkin's time off the ice to reevaluate how the book wanted to handle the special market. They reopened the market shortly following Ovechkin's return, and after five goals in 10 games back, Ovechkin's odds to break the record this season now stand at +140 at the book, as of Jan. 16.

"The whole point with something like this is that you want to make it very attractive to the player on the 'Yes' side," said Shreeve. "So until we're absolutely forced math-wise ... we want to keep that as plus as we can."

Assuming Ovechkin can pick the pace back up, sportsbooks will turn their attention towards other special markets related to the record chase, such as which team he will set the record against and the method of how he will do it. FanDuel reports that while the latter market doesn't have heavy of action, the most popular pick has been on the power play, where Ovechkin is already the all-time goals leader with 317.

The hype around Ovechkin's record pursuit isn't limited to just special futures markets. Whenever the Capitals play, the winger's anytime goal-scorer props have been proven to be an exceedingly popular play among NHL bettors.

On Jan. 7, Ovechkin was the most-bet anytime goal scorer across the league at ESPN BET, accumulating double the number of wagers as the next closest player. It's one of eight occasions where he's been the most popular anytime goal scorer at the sportsbook this season.

BetMGM reports that Ovechkin has received the second most total tickets and handle for anytime goal scorer in the NHL, and has been the most-bet for the market in every Capitals game since his return from injury.

Shreeve emphasizes that Caesars tries to offer appealing live odds in the market as often as it can, since bettors always seem to flock to it when they have the chance.

"We're obviously a book and we're trying to profit, of course, but it never hurts when he does score," Shreeve said. "It just keeps the momentum, keeps a happy customer, and they keep coming back. If he can just continue to give you a nice pace, it's just a win-win for everybody."