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## Columbus Dispatch / Werenski's streak lives, Provorov nets Columbus Blue Jackets a point: 5 takeaways

**By Brian Hedger- February 4, 2025**

Racking up wins by scoring six-plus goals has become a thing of the past for the black and Blue Jackets. They're scrappier now, by necessity, and were forced to use another patchwork lineup Thursday in a 3-2 overtime loss to Utah Hockey Club at Nationwide Arena. Six lineup regulars are out, including leading goal-scorer Kirill Marchenko and top center Sean Monahan, so the Blue Jackets are running on fumes with the NHL's winter break mercifully in sight.

It can't arrive soon enough in Columbus, where the Blue Jackets squeaked out a point against Utah while just keeping their heads above water in the push for a playoff spot.

Here are five takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets just outside a playoff spot after overtime loss to Utah Hockey Club

The good news coming out of the Jackets' OT loss Thursday is they're at 60 points and sit just one back of the Detroit Red Wings for the East's second wild card. They're two points back of the Ottawa Senators for the first wild card, and the Boston Bruins (60 points) are right there with them.

It's an exciting race amid a clogged field of teams, and that won't change regardless of what happens Saturday in the Jackets' pre-break finale on home ice against the New York Rangers.

Columbus Blue Jackets' Zach Werenski boosts record season against Utah Hockey Club

After the Jackets' morning skate, defenseman Zach Werenski told reporters Thursday that he was leaning toward playing after missing Tuesday's loss in Buffalo with an apparent arm injury.

Getting a couple of days off allowed the injury to heal enough that Werenski felt he could play. Werenski logged 29:16 on 27 shifts while extending his franchise-record home points streak to 20 games with a primary assist on partner Ivan Provorov's short-handed goal late in the second period.

The goal tied it 2-2, while the assist was Werenski's 58th point of the season to set a franchise single-season scoring record by a defenseman in 16 fewer games than it took him last year to match the prior record held by Seth Jones at 57 points. Werenski has 17 goals, 41 assists and 58 points through 55 games and his point Thursday also separated him from former Buffalo Sabres defenseman John Van Boxmeer (1981-82) for the fifth longest home point streak by a defenseman in NHL history.

Werenski is a point behind Bruins legend Bobby Orr at 21 straight home games with at least a point in 1970-71 for the league's fourth-longest home points streak by a defenseman. Orr's 25-game streak set the bar three years later (1974-75).

Ivan Provorov's goal streak gives Columbus Blue Jackets important point

Provorov's tally put some juice into the sellout crowd of 18,553, giving fans a reason to turn boos for referee Gord Dwyer into a roar as the veteran defenseman pumped his fist.

Dwyer, who incensed the Blue Jackets on Sunday in Dallas with a spate of key calls that worked against them, again put Columbus in a bad spot with an added roughing minor assessed to Damon Severson following a fight late in the second period. Severson fought Michael Kesselring following a hit on Blue Jackets rookie Michael Pyyhtia, but was given an added roughing minor to his fighting major that gave Utah a power play while holding a 2-1 lead.

The Blue Jackets weren't thrilled with the call, but they killed off Severson's extra penalty and Provorov lifted the building's energy level with his first short-handed NHL goal in 669 career games. He scored it with five seconds remaining in Utah's power play, putting a charge into a building that was largely silent for much of the game's first 37 minutes. The goal pushed Provorov's goal streak to an NHL high of three straight games, and all three were scored at key moments.

Columbus Blue Jackets' Damon Severson stands up for Mikael Pyyhtia

There used to be a time in the not-to-distant past for the Blue Jackets when hits like the one Kesselring put on Pyyhtia might've happened without a physical response.

Severson's immediate response proved that's no longer an issue. He's not an enforcer who fights regularly, but the veteran defenseman will drop the mitts when he feels it's necessary. Kesselring's hit was one of those moments.

"I'm not a huge believer in having to fight after a hit by any means, but I just felt like it was one of those plays where ... he wasn't expecting (the hit)," Severson said. "It was a bit awkward for Pyyhtia. He was just in a vulnerable spot, for sure. I just figured I had a chance to step up for a teammate type of thing there. It's a split-second decision from what you see on the ice."

Columbus Blue Jackets, Utah Hockey Club draw large scouting presence

The scouting section in the press box was packed with 18 representatives from 14 NHL teams watching a matchup of teams that could go either way prior to the March 7 trade deadline. Scouts don't attend games just for trade assessment purposes, of course, but that does fall within their purview.

Neither Utah nor the Blue Jackets held a playoff spot, but both could qualify for the postseason and have multiple pending free agents on their rosters. Those are just the type of "rentals" that could draw interest from opposing general managers.

Provorov, right wing Mathieu Olivier and center Sean Kuraly are three pending free agents for the Blue Jackets, along with forward Justin Danforth. Among the teams scouting Thursday's game live, the Carolina Hurricanes, Dallas Stars and Colorado Avalanche each sent two representatives — including Avalanche GM Chris MacFarland, a former Blue Jackets assistant GM.

## Columbus Dispatch / New York Rangers' Cuyllle sends Columbus Blue Jackets into NHL break with stinging loss

By Brian Hedger- February 9, 2025

Will Cuyllle's second goal of the night for the New York Rangers spoiled the Blue Jackets' final game before the NHL's winter break for the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament.

Pouncing on a turnover inside the Blue Jackets' zone late in the third period, Cuyllle ripped a shot past Elvis Merzlikins, lifting the Rangers to a 4-3 victory in front of a sell-out crowd of 18,755 on Saturday night at Nationwide Arena. His first goal, scored 1:57 into the third, tied it 3-3.

"We fight our (tails) off," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "We got a tough break. They had a good stick at the end. We hit a couple crossbars. We just chatted that, um, we've given ourselves an opportunity to win every single night, and when we get back off this break, we're going to do that again."

The victory moves the Rangers (27-24-4) to 58 points, which pulls them within two points of the Blue Jackets (26-22-8) in the Eastern Conference standings going into a nearly two-week pause in NHL action. They're both within a group of teams huddled just outside of the conference's two wild-card spots.

Columbus heads into the break with a four-game winless skid (0-3-1) and had six lineup regulars watching with injuries. The Blue Jackets expect to get captain Boone Jenner back after the break for his first action of the season and may get top-pairing defender Dante Fabbro back from a suspected concussion. Speedy forward Yegor Chinakhov also skated hard at the Jackets' morning skate while trying to overcome a back injury that's kept him out since late November.

"You don't make excuses, but we get some fresh bodies back (after the break), some guys who've played in the National Hockey League for a long time," Evason said. "We're excited about that too, but I don't care, right? The group that played tonight played their (tails) off and gave us a chance to win a hockey game. That's what the organization ... that's what the Columbus Blue Jackets do every night."

Zach Werenski assisted on Kent Johnson's goal in the first period to extend his franchise record home points streak to 21 straight games, tying Boston Bruins legend Bobby Orr for fourth-longest by a defenseman in NHL history. It's also the fourth-longest streak of its kind among active players regardless of position, tying Connor McDavid's 21-game streak in 2022-23 for the Edmonton Oilers.

Justin Danforth and James van Riemsdyk scored the other two goals for the Blue Jackets, who started Merzlikins for the fourth straight game. Arthur Kaliyev, Mika Zibanejad and Will Cuyllle scored the first three goals for the Rangers, who started backup goalie Jonathan Quick due to an upper-body injury that made starter Igor Shesterkin unavailable.

Kaliyev opened the scoring just 1:56 into the game to give the Rangers a 1-0 lead, but Johnson's 17th goal of the season tied it 1-1 with 5:29 left in the opening period. Werenski got the primary assist.

Danforth followed it 58 seconds later to give the Blue Jackets a 2-1 lead on his fifth goal of the season and second in as many games. It stayed that way starting the second, but Zibanejad scored the next one for the Rangers to knot the game, 2-2, at 6:38 with a snapshot off a cross-ice feed from Adam Fox.

New York used the momentum from that goal to tilt the ice their way, making Merzlikins work to keep the game tied while the Rangers set up shop inside the Blue Jackets' zone. The inability to cap those dominant shifts with a goal, however, was costly.

Van Riemsdyk pushed the Blue Jackets back in front, 3-2, by starting a precision-passing play with Cole Sillinger and Damon Severson that he also finished by tapping home his 11th goal of the season with 2:43 left in the period.

That set the stage for another nail-biting third for the Blue Jackets, who'd finished four of their previous six games in 3-on-3 overtime periods.

## Columbus Dispatch / Werenski extends streak in late loss before Columbus Blue Jackets' break: 4 takeaways

**By Brian Hedger- February 10, 2025**

Into the break they go.

The Blue Jackets did all they could to head into the NHL's lengthy pause for the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament with what could've been an uplifting win Saturday night at Nationwide Arena, but they took a gut punch instead with a 4-3 loss to the New York Rangers on a late goal by Will Cuyllle.

Cuyllle also assisted on the Rangers' tying goal early in the third before scoring with 1:39 left to break a 3-3 tie on a tally that dealt the Blue Jackets (26-22-8) a stinging loss before most head off to sun-soaked tropical locations for a desperately needed pause in games.

Here are four takeaways:

Zach Werenski extends record streak before leaving for 4 Nations Face-Off

Spotting Kent Johnson wide open out of the corner of his eye, Zach Werenski zipped a perfect cross-ice feed late in the first period that led to a tying goal that pushed his own franchise-record home points streak to 21 straight games with a primary assist.

Werenski also tied Boston Bruins legend Bobby Orr's 21-game home points streak in 1970-71 for the fourth-longest home point streak by a defenseman in NHL history, moved within four games of Orr's record 25-game streak in 1974-75 and tied Edmonton Oilers star Connor McDavid for the fourth-longest home points streak among active players regardless of position.

Werenski is the third American-born player in NHL history to string together a home points streak of 20-plus games, following Brett Hull's 26-game streak in 1989-90 and Phil Housley's 21-game streak in 1991-92. Housley, a Rangers assistant coach, is third on the all-time list of home point streaks by NHL defensemen.

Next up for Werenski is joining his U.S. teammates for the start of the 4 Nations tournament. They'll practice Monday.

"I'm excited for it," Werenski said. "A few days here (to rest) might be nice on the body, but it's one of those things where once you get there, you're going to be next to the guys and just feel the buzz of it and be around it. It'll definitely be a different feel and I'm excited for it."

It's been five years since the Blue Jackets reached this stage of a season sitting just outside of a playoff spot. They're one point behind the Detroit Red Wings for the Eastern Conference's second wild card, two points back of the Ottawa Senators for the first wild card and tied with the Bruins at 60 points each.

The Rangers moved to 58 points, while four teams behind them are jumbled within three points of New York and five points back of Columbus.

When the Jackets next play Feb. 22 against the Chicago Blackhawks, they'll be gearing up for a final push while chasing a playoff spot. Boone Jenner and Dante Fabbro could each return from injuries coming out of the break, while Yegor Chinakhov, Erik Gudbranson and Sean Monahan are expected to follow sometime in March.

The Blue Jackets will also host the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series matchup on March 1 against the Red Wings at Ohio Stadium. They'll make franchise history by playing outdoors for the first time in their lone scheduled national television appearance of the season.

"It's exactly the position we wanted to get ourselves into," center Adam Fantilli said. "We had confidence we could get here and it's going to be exciting coming back for the second half."

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason went with 11 forwards and seven defensemen for a second straight game, which requires one or two forwards to skate increased ice time by double-shifting with lines other than their own.

Fantilli got the bulk of those shifts in each game, including 28 shifts against New York to set his NHL career-high with 26:59 in a game that ended in regulation time. According to Hockey-Reference, that's the third-highest ice time for a Blue Jackets forward in franchise history for a non-overtime/shootout game.

Ray Whitney is the only Blue Jackets forward who's logged more in a regulation game, setting the high mark with 27:19 on Oct. 14, 2002 in a 4-2 loss to the former Phoenix Coyotes and the second-highest mark Dec. 31, 2002 with 27:16 in a 5-2 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins. Fantilli also skated 24:27 Thursday in the Blue Jackets' 3-2 overtime loss to Utah, gaining loads of trust from the coaching staff at just 20-years old.

"When you're midgame and bouncing around, you just go out there and play hockey," Fantilli said. "The only thing I'm maybe thinking about is keeping my shift shorter, so that I can go back out the next time. Other than that, I'm just playing hockey."

Columbus Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason shortens bench after New York Rangers' first goal

It's been a tough season for Jordan Harris, who was acquired last summer in the Blue Jackets' trade that sent Patrik Laine to the Montreal Canadiens. Harris has been a depth defenseman all season, logging his 29th game in the loss to the Rangers, and he wound up getting stapled to the bench for all but three shifts.

Harris, who played only 2:02, was caught drifting up ice in the offensive zone on the Rangers' first goal and couldn't get back in time to cut off New York's Arthur Kaliyev from skating around him and the net to score with a wraparound on the far side. Harris didn't take another shift in the first period, skating just 28 seconds, and played just two more shifts in the second.

He didn't play in the third, which meant the Blue Jackets used only 17 of their 18 skaters in the final frame despite dressing seven defensemen and 11 forwards. New York finished with a 17-4 edge in shots during the third, helping them overcome a 2-1 deficit.



## The Athletic / Late turnover sends Blue Jackets into 4 Nations break after tough loss to Rangers

**By Aaron Portzline- February 9, 2025**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Columbus Blue Jackets have been one of the NHL's best stories and biggest surprises this season, hanging in the playoff race in a way nobody could have imagined. They've earned the right to play in nerve-wracking, nail-gnawing games, such as Saturday's versus the New York Rangers.

Rookie defenseman Denton Mateychuk committed a hard-luck turnover in his own end with under two minutes to play, setting up Will Cuyllé's winning goal in the Rangers' 4-3 come-from-behind victory before an above-capacity crowd of 18,755 in Nationwide Arena.

It marked the sixth time in seven games the Blue Jackets have played in a game decided by one goal. They won the first three of those games, and have lost the last three, heading into a lengthy break so that the NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off can be staged.

The Blue Jackets, who next play Feb. 22, had a chance to go into the break in a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. Instead, they sit 1 point behind the Detroit Red Wings for the second wild card.

"It's unfortunate," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "It's sucks losing like that, but it is what it is. It's part of the game. Stuff like that is going to happen. It's tough going into the break like that, but we'll move forward and get ready for the last (26 games).

"We're going to be fine. We lost to Detroit earlier in the year in a similar fashion, and we were fine after that. We'll learn from this. It's a game of bounces and inches, and tonight it didn't go our way."

The Blue Jackets got goals from Kent Johnson, Justin Danforth and James van Riemsdyk, and goaltender Elvis Merzlikins continued his career resurgence with 36 saves, including a flurry of brilliant stops in the first period when the Rangers came out roaring.

Werenski assisted on Johnson's first-period goal, extending his home point streak to 21 games. Only three defensemen in NHL history have had a longer streak: Bobby Orr (25), Paul Coffey (23) and Phil Housley (22), who, coincidentally enough, was on the Rangers' bench Saturday as an assistant coach.

Johnson's goal was his 17th of the season, a new career high.

Saturday's game marked the first time all season the Blue Jackets lost a game in regulation after carrying a lead into the third period. They had been 15-0-3 in such games.

"Listen, we played our asses off," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "We got a tough break. They had a good stick (on the Mateychuk turnover) and we hit a couple of crossbars."

With the score tied 3-3, Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli hit the crossbar with a one-timer with 6:50 remaining. Then, with 2:25 remaining, Zach Aston-Reese's wrist shot off the rush from the left circle hit the left post behind Rangers goaltender Jonathan Quick.

"We've given ourselves a chance to win every night, but at a certain point you have to execute," Aston-Reese told FanDuel Sports Network Columbus' Dave Maetzold. "Just some touch bounces tonight. It hit the post with two minutes left and they go the other way, get a chance and put it in.

"In moments like that, you really have to bear down, especially in this last stretch of hockey, less than 30 games left. It's so tight. Every two nights the standings are changing. We have some room to work with, but it's going to come down to being on the right side of those bounces."

Mateychuk, who has been one of the Blue Jackets' most reliable blueliners since his recall from AHL Cleveland in December, had the puck in his own zone with the Rangers' forecheck coming fast. He skated across the circles before trying to clear the puck off the side wall and out of the defensive zone.

Instead, Rangers center Vincent Trocheck lunged forward with the tip of his stick blade, changing the trajectory of the puck. Instead of shooting out of the zone, it caromed right back out into the zone, right on stride for Cuyllé coming through the right circle.

Cuyllé's goal whizzed past Merzlikins for a 4-3 New York lead with only 1:39 remaining.

"(Mateychuk) tried to do the right thing," Evason said. "He kept it on his forehand, he moved it north. They get a tip of a stick on it, it hits the boards and comes right onto the tape (of Cuyllé) and the guy makes a fantastic shot. It happens."

The Blue Jackets will go separate ways for the next couple of weeks. Werenski is off to play for Team USA at the 4 Nations, and most of the others will head to warmer climes to rediscover the sun and heal from the bumps and bruises accumulated through the first five months of the season.

When the Blue Jackets return, they'll have plenty of motivation.

Not only will they be primed for their first playoff chase since 2019-20, but also they'll have lineup reinforcement waiting for them. Captain Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery) is expected to make his season debut, and top-pairing defenseman Dante Fabbro (already feeling better) is expected back from a concussion. There could be others, too.

"We just chatted," Evason said. "We've given ourselves a chance to win every single night. And when we get back off this break, we're going to do that again."

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: GM Don Waddell shopping for a top-six forward

**By Aaron Portzline- February 10, 2025**

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

### Item No. 1: Trader Don

A month ago, it seemed as if Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell was ready to consider the return of captain Boone Jenner later this month as the equivalent of a trade deadline acquisition, a big boost as the young club tries to grab a playoff spot down the stretch.

But then center Sean Monahan needed surgery for a sprained wrist. And then Kirill Marchenko needed surgery to reset a fractured jaw. Just like that, two-thirds of the top forward line was lost, and with it went the Blue Jackets' ability to win games by outscoring opponents.

Waddell is now looking at the March 7 trade deadline through a much different lens. He was one of the NHL's more aggressive GMs last week in his search for a top-six scoring forward who can restore the Blue Jackets' margin for error in games.

"We had some irons in the fire," Waddell told The Athletic. "But no action yet."

Waddell said he'd be willing to trade one of the Blue Jackets' two first-round picks this coming summer — they also own Minnesota's after the David Jiricek trade — but only for a player who has remaining term on their contract, not a rental player.

But he also wouldn't rule out trading one of the Blue Jackets' mid-round picks — they have two fourth-round picks this year, plus two third-round and three fourth-round picks in 2026 — for a veteran player with an expiring contract after this season.

"I'd like to add somebody who can play in our top six, somebody who can score," Waddell said. "We were getting through it without (Monahan) for a while, but then Marchy happens ... you can't expect to keep scoring goals when you take those guys out of your lineup."

Meanwhile, Waddell said talks with the Blue Jackets' most prominent pending unrestricted free agents — defenseman Ivan Provorov and forward Mathieu Olivier — have remained productive and amicable.

Both players figure to garner significant interest on the trade market — the Boston Bruins have taken runs at Olivier at the past two deadlines — but Waddell said he's "100 percent" open to keeping them beyond March 7, even if contracts aren't signed.

"We've exchanged ideas and numbers on both sides," he said. "We're not there yet, but there are deals to be made, for sure."

"Now that the (NHL salary cap) is going up, and we have the numbers, it's a little bit clearer now. But the thing I want to be careful with is term."

Waddell wants to keep defenseman Dante Fabbro, too, given the way Fabbro has meshed with No. 1 defenseman Zach Werenski since he was claimed off waivers from Nashville earlier this season. Numbers have not yet been exchanged with Fabbro's camp, but there are plans to talk soon, Waddell said.

### Item No. 2: Reinforcements

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said there are two whiteboards hanging side by side in the coaches' office. The one on the right shows the current makeshift lineup, and the one on the left projects what the Blue Jackets might look like when play resumes following the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Jenner, who has missed the entire season to this point after a shoulder injury late in training camp, will return to the lineup on Feb. 22 vs. Chicago. It's expected that Fabbro, out with a concussion since Feb. 2, will be ready to resume play, too.

"He's doing much better," Waddell said.

Fabbro will slot right back in next to Werenski. Where Jenner fits into the lineup remains to be seen, and Evason wasn't saying.

During training camp, Jenner played left winger after spending several seasons at center. But with Monahan out, and the Blue Jackets struggling on faceoffs, Jenner could return to the middle, at least for the time being.

"We've talked (as coaches) about (Jenner's) play, his game, and just him as a human being, and those guys (the coaches) are very close with him," Evason said. "(Assistant coach Jared Boll), in particular, played with him plus coached him.

"So I've been given some firsthand accounts of who he is as a person and who he is as a player. So, am I excited about calling his name and having him jump over the boards? 100 percent."

Beyond Jenner and Fabbro, the reinforcements get murky.

Marchenko did not require his broken jaw to be wired shut, which means he could return sooner than the typical 6 to 8 weeks required for a jaw to heal. He was in Nationwide Arena on Saturday, working with the training staff on a protective mask that could allow him to play sooner than expected.

The Blue Jackets expect Monahan and defenseman Erik Gudbranson to return by the middle or end of March, but Monahan may return in a limited capacity. He had surgery late last month to repair sprained ligaments in his right wrist, so it's unclear if he'll be able to step right back into his role as the Blue Jackets' top faceoff man.

The biggest wild card of all is Yegor Chinakhov, who hasn't played since Nov. 27 (35 games) due to a lower-back injury that he can't seem to shake.

Chinakhov was in New York last week to see another specialist and a surgeon, and was told again that there's nothing structurally wrong with his back and nothing that could be fixed with a surgical procedure, Waddell said.

"It's all on him right now, when he feels like he can go," Waddell said. "He's seen all the doctors he can see. Everything is good in that way, he just keeps feeling some tightness (when he skates).

"You know how these things work. Doctors can say what they say and say what they see, but the individual has to feel as if he's ready to go."

Item No. 3: Take 5, Zach Werenski

Take 5 is a quick, breezy sitdown with a Blue Jackets player, coach or front-office staffer. This week's features Werenski:

1. What part of Columbus is home, and why?

I live in New Albany. Gus (Nyquist) was one of the first guys I knew who moved out that way. And then Boone was going out that way, then Elvis. I was looking at Upper Arling and Dublin, and I really like those

areas a lot, but I couldn't find anything that was newer, house-wise. There's not a lot to do, but that's OK, 'cause I really don't do anything anyways. Monahan is out there, and Meredith (Gaudreau) is there with the kids, so it's great that so many of us are so close.

## 2. Favorite restaurants.

After practice, we go to Northstar (Cafe) a lot. Healthy food, good food. We don't really go out that much (for dinner) because my fiance (Odette) likes to cook. We do like Cento in German Village. Lindey's (Restaurant and Bar) is one of our favorites there, too. We go to Ocean Prime at Easton a lot. That's closer to us than downtown.

## 3. Best recent movie or show you've streamed?

I'm not a big movie guy, to be honest. I like older movies, mostly. But streaming ... I just finished "Mayor of Kingstown." Awesome. One of my favorite shows. Monny's watching it now and he's obsessed with it. I just started watching "Lioness." Really good. I'm halfway through the first season.

## 4. Who is the best player you've played with and against?

Best I've played with would have to be the Breadman, (Artemi) Panarin. Best player against ... that's tough. I think (Nathan) MacKinnon is pretty insane. (Nikita) Kucherov is insane, too. This is hard, right? I mean, (Connor) McDavid's there. They're all different, but MacKinnon is so tough because he can beat you in so many ways. When he's on, he's pretty impressive to watch.

## 5. Which teammate should have a podcast?

If he spoke English, (Dmitri) Voronkov. He'd be hilarious on a podcast. His English is getting better. He's so funny. He knows enough words that you can tell what he's saying, but he says everything at the right time. Just his body language, too. Music comes on and he's dancing in the middle of the room. He's a goofball. Guddy (Gudbranson) would be a good podcast guy because he likes to talk. It would probably be a lot, though. He'd get too into it.

## Item No. 4: Snacks

- Adam Fantilli, who has ascended to the No. 1 center's role in Monahan's absence, played 26:59 in Saturday's loss to the New York Rangers. That's the highest in Fantilli's young career, but it's the most ice time a Blue Jackets player has drawn in a regulation game in over 22 years. Only Ray Whitney (27:19 on Oct. 14, 2002; and 27:16 on Dec. 31, 2002) has played more in a game for Columbus. Since Jan. 7, when Monahan went down, Fantilli has 7-8-15 and a plus-7 rating in 16 games, playing 20:57 (13th-most among NHL forwards) per game.

- Evason was asked this week if he'd ever in his coaching career had this much trust in a 20-year-old center. "If you would've said that to us two months ago, that 'Mo' would be playing 24 minutes at this point, I would've thought you were crazy," Evason said. "But I think it's a credit to him and what he has done, and the work that he has put in — not as a skilled hockey player, but as a pro — to be able to play in all situations. Defensive zone faceoffs, in a 2-2 game ... umm ... is it exciting for us, as an organization? Absolutely, to have somebody like that step up in the absence of a Monahan or a Boone Jenner or someone that was in that position? It's fantastic."

- Werenski extended his home point streak to 21 games with an assist on Saturday. It's the fourth-longest streak by a defenseman in NHL history, trailing only Bobby Orr (25), Paul Coffey (23) and Phil Housley (21). If Werenski keeps going after the break, he'd match Orr's record on March 1 in Ohio Stadium when the Blue Jackets play the Detroit Red Wings in the Stadium Series. We checked with the NHL on this: That game will count as a Blue Jackets home game.

- Werenski has 17-42-59 through 56 games, already surpassing his career best in points (57) set last season. But with two assists in the last two games, Werenski has 254 career assists, leaving him only four helpers behind franchise leader Rick Nash. Also, Jenner is getting back into the lineup just in time. Werenski, with 361 career points, is only three behind Jenner for third place on the franchise's all-time points list.

- Let that rumor mill churn: Nationwide Arena's press box was packed for Thursday's game vs. Utah. There were at least 21 scouts on hand, including two each for Carolina, Colorado, Dallas and New Jersey. Among the dignitaries: Avalanche GM Chris MacFarland, Buffalo's assistant GM Jason Karmanos, New Jersey's director of player personnel Al Santilli, Carolina's director of pro scouting Mark Craig, and Dallas head scout Paul McIntosh. By Saturday, the crowd had shrunk to five scouts, including MacFarland, whose son plays in the AAA Blue Jackets program. Among the Saturday group was Winnipeg director of pro scouting Peter Ratchuk.

- Kent Johnson's goal on Saturday was his 17th of the season, a new career high. But it wasn't his most impressive score of the week. On Tuesday in Buffalo, he threw the brakes on a rush near the left dot then spun away from Sabres defenseman Bowen Byram and fired backhand, beating Buffalo goaltender James Reimer to the far post. It may go down as a goal-of-the-year candidate. Yes, he was picking a spot. "If I tried to shoot blocker (near post), it would have hit (Byram's) shinpads, so you have to go glove," Johnson said. "And when a goalie doesn't know a shot's coming, their hands are down. So, yeah, the only place you've got there is high glove."

- Johnson said he lined up next to Byram later in the period for a faceoff. "I didn't know it was him (defending on that goal), and he was like, 'Why'd you have to do that?'" Johnson said, laughing. "I thought he was talking about something else. Before our power play, I was cleaning up this huge pile of snow on the half-wall. I thought he was chirping me for that, not the goal." Asked how many times he'd watched a replay of the goal, Johnson smiled. "Quite a few, I'll be honest. Double-digits."

- Sunday Gathering trivia: Provorov's short-handed goal in Thursday's OT loss to Utah was the first of his 669-game NHL career, including 137 games with the Blue Jackets. Short-handed goals are fluky, of course, and not every player has a role on the penalty kill. But which player has played the most games for the Blue Jackets without scoring a short-handed goal?

- Olivier's fight with Buffalo defenseman Dennis Gilbert last Tuesday, only three seconds into the game, is tied with two others for the earliest fight in a game by a Columbus player. You can probably guess the other two: Derek Dorsett fought Nashville's Jordan Tootoo three seconds into a game on Nov. 19, 2011, and Jared Boll fought Tootoo, then with Detroit, on Jan. 21, 2013.

- Olivier has a career-high 99 penalty minutes, good for third in the NHL behind Boston's Nikita Zadorov (117) and Ottawa's Brady Tkachuk (101). With his next infraction, Olivier will become the first Blue Jackets player in almost a decade to have 100-plus PIMs. The last time it happened was 2015-16 when both Scott Hartnell (112) and Dalton Prout (102) hit triple digits. My, how this game has changed: In both 2000-01 and 2006-07, the Jackets had four players amass 100-plus penalty minutes.

- Like every other NHL team, a collection of Blue Jackets players warm up for games with a soccer ball. It's no different than kids playing in the backyard, really. Things get broken, arguments are commonplace, and the ball gets lost. This scene was captured by the Blue Jackets social media team before Saturday's game when the ball was lodged in the ducts at event level.

Just your average hockey player warmup nothing to see here [pic.twitter.com/1oIFnM6hpe](https://pic.twitter.com/1oIFnM6hpe)

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) February 8, 2025

- The NHL this week plans to reveal the layout it will use for the ice rink, the stages, the cannon's prominent display, etc. in Ohio Stadium for the outdoor game. By the end of this week, NHL personnel will begin arriving in Columbus, with the ice trucks soon to follow.
- Saturday's loss to the Rangers marked only the fourth time in Blue Jackets history that a game was played in which neither club had a power play. It didn't happen in the franchise's first 17 seasons but has happened four times since the 2018-19 season. The previous games: Nov. 19, 2018 at Toronto (a 4-2 loss); April 6, 2019 at Ottawa (a 6-2 win); and March 13, 2021 vs. Dallas (4-3 OT win).
- Trivia answer (this one surprised us): Nick Foligno played in 599 games for Columbus and ranks among the franchise's top five in just about every major offensive category. But he never scored a short-handed goal. David Savard (597 games) is just behind him.

## [BlueJackets.com / Rangers score twice in 3rd, rally past Blue Jackets](#)

By Craig Merz- February 9, 2025

COLUMBUS -- Will Cuyllle scored the go-ahead goal at 18:21 of the third period, and the New York Rangers rallied for a 4-3 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

Cuyllle scored from the right circle on a carom off the wall after Urho Vaakanainen had tied the game 3-3 at 1:57 of the third for the Rangers.

"We knew we had to make at least get one goal trying to get to overtime, and then we were just trying to get lots of pucks to the net," Cuyllle said. "I felt like we kind of outplayed them most of the period. So that was kind of just the game plan, that desperation we really hadn't had the last couple of games."

Mika Zibanejad had a goal and an assist, and Vincent Trocheck had two assists for the Rangers (27-24-4), who have won three of four. Jonathan Quick made 22 saves.

New York lost 3-2 at home to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday.

"Huge, especially after last night," Zibanejad said. "Bounced back and again, not just getting two points, but making sure that we got it done before overtime and not getting them another point because we're chasing them."

Zach Werenski had an assist to extend his home point streak to 21 games for the Blue Jackets (26-22-8), who have lost four straight heading into the 4 Nations Face-Off from Wednesday to Feb. 20. Elvis Merzlikins made 36 saves.

"It's tough going into the break on that, our last game before the break ending that way," Werenski said. "But that stuff happens. It is what it is. We'll learn from it. We'll move forward and get ready for the last 25 games, or whatever it is."

Arthur Kaliyev made it 1-0 Rangers at 1:56 of the first period with a wraparound at the right post.

Kent Johnson tied it 1-1 at 14:31 from a low angle on the right side from a pass from Werenski.

Werenski, who will play for the United States at the 4 Nations Face-Off, tied Bobby Orr (1970-71) for the fourth-longest home streak by a defenseman in NHL history. Orr holds the record of 25 games in 1974-75.

Werenski has 38 points (13 goals, 25 assists) during the streak.

Justin Danforth scored at 15:29 to make it 2-1 with a redirect of a Jack Johnson shot.

Zibanejad, who will play for Sweden at the 4 Nations Face-Off, made it 2-2 at 6:38 of the second period during 4-on-4 play. He was at the left dot to convert a cross-ice pass from Adam Fox. Chris Kreider also assisted. Kreider, Trocheck, Fox and J.T. Miller will represent the U.S at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

James van Riemsdyk put the Blue Jackets up 3-2 at 17:17 on a backdoor tap-in at the left post from a Damon Severson pass.

"We've definitely had a lot of guys step up," van Riemsdyk said. "We've had different people go down, and that's been a strength with our team, just kind of how tight now we are. Getting some pretty good players back after the break, that's going to be, obviously, a big lift to the group."



Vaakanainen, who will play for Finland at the 4 Nations Face-Off, tipped Cuyllé's shot from above the left circle to tie it 3-3 1:57 into the third period. It was the first goal of the season for the defenseman, who missed the previous two games because of illness.

"There's games that go by that you wish you played better, and then there's been a lot of games that we won to put ourselves back up in the mix anyway," New York coach Peter Laviolette said. "Seemed to get a little bit of help earlier today, hopefully we get a little bit more. We head into the break and when we come back out of it, we've got to win games."

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason is not discouraged despite the skid.

"We played our [butts] off," he said. "We got a tough break. They had a good stick. At the end, we hit a couple of crossbars. We've given ourselves an opportunity to win every single night and when we get back off this break, we're going to do that again."

NOTES: Fox has four points (goal, three assists) during a four-game point streak. He became the fifth Rangers player and first defenseman with five straight 40-assist seasons. ... Zibanejad has eight points (two goals, six assists) in the past five games.

## The Hockey Writers / Analyzing the Blue Jackets' Position as Trade Deadline Buyers

By Mark Scheig- February 8, 2025

Times are changing within the walls of Nationwide Arena. The Columbus Blue Jackets are right in the thick of the playoff race in the Eastern Conference as they embark on the 4-Nations Faceoff break.

Many were wondering how they would handle the upcoming NHL Trade Deadline. While they're in the playoff race, they also have players on expiring deals that other teams would love to add for their playoff runs.

On Thursday night, the Blue Jackets declared their stance. They will be buyers at the trade deadline.

### Belief in the Group

GM Don Waddell joined the Blue Jackets' Radio Network on Thursday night. He made it clear to host Dylan Tyrer that they will look to add to their roster. Here's some of what Waddell said during that interview.

"We'd like to add a little bit right now especially up front because we're so banged up," Waddell said. "We're not going to give up a top pick for a rental player that's for sure. But if there's a player that either has term left or a player that we think fits into what we're trying to do here that we can reasonably get for one of our picks. The nice thing is we have a plethora of picks right now over the next three years. That's what we got them for to try and improve our hockey team."

The injured list has grown of late. While captain Boone Jenner is expected back after the 4-Nations Faceoff, Sean Monahan, Yegor Chinakhov and Kirill Marchenko are out. They could remain out past the trade deadline also. That highlights the need for a forward.

There are a couple of things to consider in this situation with the Blue Jackets declaring themselves buyers. First, what does this mean for some of the pending UFA's the team has such as Ivan Provorov, Sean Kuraly, Justin Danforth, Kevin Labanc, Matthew Olivier, Dante Fabbro and Jack Johnson?

By being buyers and believing in this team, it strongly points to most of this group staying put. The Blue Jackets would love to extend both Olivier and Fabbro as each have provided big contributions. But now the possibility of others re-signing with the team is higher.

Provorov's situation remains interesting. He'd get a great return at the deadline if he was dealt. He's also played well of late scoring goals in three straight games. When Zach Werenski couldn't play in Buffalo, it was Provorov who got the big minutes. He's proven to be an integral part of this team. He's also said he's open to an extension in Columbus.

Kuraly and Danforth each provide depth down the lineup and stability in the bottom-six. Both can also play center which one can never have enough of in a playoff race.

What was once thought of as academic that the Blue Jackets would be sellers, they have turned the tables and are looking to add. The list of sellers is starting to become clearer by the day. Who would the Blue Jackets consider in this kind of situation?

### Example of Forward Target

There are obviously several candidates up front the Blue Jackets could target. In this space, we will highlight one example that would appear to fit the mold.

The Nashville Predators are in a very tough spot. They got hammered by the Chicago Blackhawks 6-2 on Friday night. The selloff should begin swiftly and soon.

There is one Predator that the Blue Jackets should look into. He's 35. He's a pending UFA. He's also coming off a career-high 75 points in 2023-24. As a former Blue Jacket himself, some players will be familiar with him. He's the kind of veteran presence that would be welcomed in the room and doesn't have a huge cap hit.

The Blue Jackets should see if they can acquire Gustav Nyquist. He's the kind of player that fits the need up front. Acquiring him shouldn't require a top pick despite him being a rental. There's always the chance of the player signing on beyond this season too.

It's worth noting that Waddell was recently in Nashville at the Senators/Predators game. Of all the higher-end forwards on the Predators, only Nyquist is a pending UFA.

We'll see if things ramp up here. If not Nyquist, the Blue Jackets would look for someone like him who can do a lot of things and has vast experience in the league.

Don't expect the Blue Jackets to give up top picks, top prospects or anything like that. They'll be selective buyers looking to add to a group who deserves every part of being in this playoff race.

Once the injured get back, they in a sense are like a trade deadline acquisition. The Blue Jackets host the New York Rangers on Saturday night. That roster will look much different than the one we'll see later in March.

Who saw the Blue Jackets become buyers in the preseason? Waddell even admitted he would have called bull if someone told him that. That's credit to the guys in the locker room for putting in the work to be in this position.

Waddell's declaration of being a buyer answers some questions but opens other ones up too. Who will they eventually acquire? And how will they handle their own UFAs? That's what we'll be watching as we quickly head towards March 7.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Enter 4-Nations Break With Tough Loss to Rangers

By Mark Scheig- February 9, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets needed a win on Saturday night to enter the 4-Nations break in a wildcard playoff spot. A poor third period ultimately was too much to overcome.

Will Cuyllé scored twice in the third period to lift the Rangers to a big 4-3 win over the Blue Jackets on Saturday night in front of a sellout crowd at Nationwide Arena. Mika Zibanejad added a goal and an assist while Vincent Trocheck tallied two assists.

The story of this game came down to a good play at the end that decided a tight hockey game.

### Game Recap

The Rangers looked to get the bad taste out of their mouth from their performance Friday night against the Pittsburgh Penguins. It took them less than two minutes to get on the scoreboard.

Coming off of being healthy scratched, Arthur Kaliyev converted on a wraparound to make it 1-0. That sparked the Rangers to a much better start that saw them dominate possession.

This caused Dean Evason to have a chat with his team at the bench during the first TV timeout. The Blue Jackets responded by taking the lead.

First it was Kent Johnson who beat Jonathan Quick to make it 1-1. Zach Werenski's pass made the play happen. It also extended Werenski's home-point streak to 21 in a row moving him into a tie for fourth all-time for points in consecutive home games by a defenseman. Only Bobby Orr, Paul Coffey and Phil Housley are above him.

Then Justin Danforth made it 2-1 just 58 seconds later. Jack Johnson's shot was deflected by Danforth who had all the room in the slot to setup and make the goal happen. It seemed momentum would stay with the Blue Jackets.

But seven minutes into the second on a 4-on-4 situation, Zibanejad scored off a feed from Adam Fox. The two teams then went back and forth until a pretty tic-tac-toe goal from Cole Sillinger to Damon Severson to James van Riemsdyk made the score 3-2 Blue Jackets after 40 minutes. Win one period, win the game. The Rangers had other ideas.

On a delayed penalty, Cuyllé scored his first of the night on a shot from the point in which Elvis Merzlikins didn't see. This started the Rangers on their way to dominating the third period. They outshot the Blue Jackets 17-4. But it was still 3-3 with two minutes to go.

Then the play that decided the game happened. Denton Mateychuk tried to play the puck to the boards. It was deflected by Trocheck and landed in Cuyllé's possession. He immediately unleashed the game winner with just 1:39 on the clock to give the Rangers the win.

Postgame, the Blue Jackets expressed optimism that they're in the playoff race and have guys coming back after the two weeks off. Although it was a frustrating result for them, they're still right where they want to be.

Quick in the win made 22 saves. Merzlikins stopped 36 in the loss.

Both the Blue Jackets and Rangers enter the 4-Nations break. The Blue Jackets will return Feb 22 hosting the Chicago Blackhawks. The Rangers return that same day in Buffalo against the Sabres to start the countdown to the NHL Trade Deadline.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Find Friendly Competition & Team Bonding Through Fantasy Football

By Mark Scheig- February 9, 2025

Meet Roger Werenski.

No, this isn't a relative of Blue Jackets' defenseman Zach Werenski. This is actually one of Werenski's nicknames in the locker room.

Roger Werenski is a leader in a much different sense. In the palm of his hands, he holds the ultimate power. Named after NFL Commissioner Roger Goddell, Werenski is the commissioner of the Blue Jackets' Fantasy Football league. Any and all trade requests go straight to Werenski's phone. He has the power to veto any trade.

On this Super Bowl Sunday, we tell you the story about this fantasy football league and how things like this have helped bring the team closer together. Come for the team bonding. Stay for the funny stories of how one prominent Blue Jacket almost got kicked out of the league.

In Case You Are New

Before we dive in, let's set the scene for those that aren't familiar or haven't played fantasy football with a quick explainer. It is a game in which a set number of teams draft NFL players. Each player is their own manager as they are responsible for drafting their teams, making trades and setting their lineups.

In order to play, there is a buy-in fee that each team pays. Those funds then get paid out based on an agreed structure. In this case, the top-three teams won money.

Each week, two teams squared off against each other hoping to outscore the other with their lineup. For the players involved, it's a fun way to be their own general manager while trying to win bragging rights and hopefully some cash too.

This happens over the course of the NFL season. The best records then meet in the playoffs. Eventually there is just one champion who outlasts all the other teams. The goal was to simply win each week. That meant having the best roster of players who earned the most points in a given week.

Managers can also add and drop players as they see fit. They have to account for bye weeks when their player is off. They also have to account for injuries. As you will soon see, the injury factor was a big part of the Blue Jackets' fantasy football season.

Now that you have a basic idea of how fantasy football works, let's dive into what I am calling "the trade."

The Trade

Prior to this season, Kent Johnson wasn't familiar with football. While he knew some of the stars in the game, the sport was still new to him.

But all Johnson heard in the locker room was talk about fantasy football. It was a constant conversation that piqued his interest. He wanted in on the fun and competition. Now he is hooked.

"That's the reason I played because I didn't know anything about football," Johnson said. "I just heard the guys talking about it every week. I was like this is awesome. I have to play. So I played this year and got hooked. And wow, this is fun."

There is no question Johnson had fun in his first season in the Blue Jackets fantasy football league. However, it almost all came crashing down on him thanks to as Roger Werenski admitted “because he’s so bad at what he does.”

“(Johnson) made a terrible trade, and I just couldn’t push it through,” Werenski said. “It was going to help (Justin Danforth’s) team way too much and guys were fighting for playoff positioning. It sucks because Danforth kind of got screwed on it. But he was also kind of dealing in bad faith. It was interesting. There was a lot that went into it. I feel like KJ has some punishment in order to stay in the league. I felt bad for Danny.”

Of course, we had to go to the source to confirm this revelation. Johnson opened up about his brutal trade request.

“It is true. I made a brutal trade,” Johnson said. “I wanted Stefon Diggs for a while. I had requested some trades for him. A couple with Danforth. And then one day I just sent another offer for Diggs. I really liked him and I didn’t see the news. I sent the trade. And then two hours after I sent the offer, (Diggs) is out for the year. And Danforth accepted the offer right after so then it was a whole big thing and the league was pissed. They actually vetoed the trade, but then I had to pay Danforth’s buy in as a punishment. So yeah it was hard. Definitely Werenski’s a pretty stern commissioner. It was a bad move by me obviously, but a little unlucky. I’m not following on the injury reports too hard and watching all the games. I liked Diggs. I liked Houston, CJ Stroud, so that’s too bad.”

Diggs tore his ACL in Week 8 against the Indianapolis Colts. Therefore, punishment was levied on Johnson. It went beyond just paying for Danforth’s buy-in.

“He’s well aware (of his punishment),” Werenski said. “He’s got to pay half of Danforth’s buy in, and then he’s got to take all the fantasy guys out to dinner. That’ll be a steak dinner of course. Somewhere nice. A bottle of wine. He screwed up big time, and he wants to stay in the league. So that’s the price he’s got to pay.”

#### It Gets Funnier

Johnson once again became a central focus of another funny story that happened during the season. According to several well-placed sources in the locker room, Johnson loved making multiple trade offers. It was sometimes two or three at a time. He was an aggressive general manager trying to make his team better.

While Johnson was injured, he was in the press box watching a game. It was intermission. He sent Mathieu Olivier a trade request at the intermission. Here’s Johnson.

“I think the game when I was hurt I was sending a few trade offers,” Johnson recalled. “The guys said Kent, you got to stop. You’re sending too many offers. And I sent an offer midgame to Olivier during the intermission. I was thinking I hope he gets back to me. I was realizing it’s the intermission of their game. I’m watching their game. He’s not getting back to me. I guess he said right after the game he looked at his phone. He’s like, Kent sent me an offer midgame? What is he doing? I was like well, from my perspective, it’s fair. It’s the intermission. It’s the perfect time. That was funny.”

Olivier didn’t hesitate to confirm this story.

“I confirm that (Johnson) sent me a trade request midgame,” Olivier said. “I was like what are you doing? And he said, I just thought of a trade. I didn’t want to forget it, so I sent it and I knew you’d see it after the game. And I said, yeah. We just won a game. And I walk into a fantasy trade. I’m like, don’t. I’m talking about the game. What happened? Don’t talk to me about fantasy football. Anyways, that was fun.”

Those involved in the league had a lot of fun with this. In the end, the more important takeaway was how the league helped bring the Blue Jackets closer together.

#### Importance of Team Bonding

No matter what the activity is, whether it's fantasy football or watching another sport, being able to enjoy things together as a team helps with team bonding. For the Blue Jackets, they are closer than ever especially given how the season started.

Anything the team can do to help build that camaraderie is a good thing. Werenski and Olivier all agreed that this fantasy football league helped bring them closer together.

"It's fun. I think it's just something to talk about on weekends, Thursday Night football, Monday Night football, whatever it is," Werenski said. "It's whoever you're playing against or you have side bets going on, it's just something else to kind of keep your mind off just hockey. It's just a lot of fun to have something separate going on besides hockey."

"I think any opportunity any sporting event that's not hockey," Olivier said. "We're all competitive, so we enjoy watching and seeing other sports doing their thing. And even Saturday night, you get a UFC fight. Everyone likes to go watch that. You get some guys that bond over soccer. You watch the Premier League. The Super Bowl's one, World Series, everything. Golf's a big one. It's all about the team bonding. Guys got some side bets going stuff like that and it's really fun."

For Johnson, he paid his dues. But the bigger story for him is being able to share these funny stories and moments with his teammates even if he was the target of everyone in the league.

"I got to pay for a dinner with all the fantasy football guys. That I'm not as mad about because it's nice just dinner with the guys. That's generally the attitude I'm trying to go about it. But yeah, (the trade) was unfortunate. But it honestly makes me more excited for fantasy football next year. Now I've got a lot of talk about it and everyone knows next year I'm under the microscope. I've got to win next year."

#### Who Won?

Commissioner Roger Werenski came in third this season. He fell short of the top-two teams. Captain Boone Jenner won the league. And as it turned out, Johnny Gaudreau's team finished in second.

The Blue Jackets have always said they will do everything to keep Johnny and Matthew's memory alive. They kept Johnny's team in tact and it finished in second place.

According to Olivier, the prize money from Johnny's team was donated to charity. It was the perfect way to end this particular fantasy football season.

These Blue Jackets found a way to have fun while enjoying some friendly competition thanks in part to fantasy football. This story will resume again next season.

Until then, just know that the Blue Jackets are doing exactly what Johnny would have wanted. They are having fun and are now closer than ever to each other. They truly are making the best of the situation they were put in.



## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Three Things: Werenski Sets Franchise Record, Extends Streak, Provorov Stays Hot, Jackets Lose, Gain Critical Point

By Will Chase- February 8, 2025

It's a tough loss but the Blue Jackets get a point.

Dylan Guenther scored in overtime as the Utah Hockey Club defeated the Columbus Blue Jackets 3-2 on Thursday night at Nationwide Arena.

The loss snaps Columbus' five-game home winning streak but the point keeps alive their six-game point streak at Nationwide Arena.

Guenther has three goals and four points in his last two games including consecutive overtime game-winners.

Connor Ingram played in his 100th career NHL game and made 20 saves. He assisted on the game-winning goal. Elvis Merzlikins made 30 stops.

### Werenski Sets Franchise Record, Extends Streak

Zach Werenski extended his home point streak to 20 games (13 goals, 24 assists) with a second-period assist.

Werenski's assist is his team-leading 41st, and his point is his team-leading 58th of the season, setting a Blue Jackets franchise record for defensemen. He tied Seth Jones' mark for points in a season just last year.

Right before the goal at 17:26, Damon Severson dropped the gloves with Michael Kesselring following a hit on Mikael Pyyhtia.

Severson was also assessed two minutes for roughing but Ivan Provorov and the Jackets fed off the energy.

### Provorov Stays Hot

Provorov scored his sixth of the season, his third in as many games, and his first career short-handed tally. Werenski picked up the assist on this tally.

Provorov's goal at 19:21 tied the game 2-2 in the second period, following Severson's fight and ensuing penalty.

### Jackets Lose, Gain Critical Point

The Blue Jackets have enjoyed home cooking all season long and while they suffered a rare defeat on home ice Thursday night, they still gained a key point.

They are one point on the outside of the final wild-card spot, trailing Detroit by one point and Ottawa by two points for the top spot.

Justin Danforth got the scoring started with his fourth at 5:51 of the first period. Jordan Harris picked up his third assist.

The Jackets are now 11-0-2 when leading after the first period.

Kent Johnson did not record a point, ending his eight-game point streak. He's the third player in Blue Jackets history with multiple eight-plus game point streaks in the same season. Cam Atkinson (2018-19) and Ryan Johansen (2014-15) also did it.

The Jackets have gone eight straight games without a power-play goal (0-for-12).

One More Before Break

The Blue Jackets will face the New York Rangers on Saturday, Feb. 8, at 7 p.m. ET from Nationwide Arena in the last game before the Four Nations Face-Off. Columbus will resume action on Feb. 22.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Trade Market: The Blue Jackets Have Called Themselves Buyers At The Trade Deadline; Here's What That Could Look Like

By Ed Francis- February 8, 2025

Deadline buyers.

That's what the Columbus Blue Jackets intend to be as the NHL trade deadline creeps closer.

President of Hockey Operations and General Manager Don Waddell spoke to Dylan Tyrer of the Blue Jackets Radio Network on Thursday night and said the Blue Jackets will be looking to add to their roster before the March 7th deadline.

"We'd like to add a little bit right now, especially up front because we're so banged up," said Waddell. "We're not going to give up a top pick for a rental player, that's for sure, but if there's a player that's either got term left or a player that just fits into what we're trying to do here that we can reasonably get for one of our picks ... we're looking at it."

Based on the above comments, it's not a stretch to say that the club is most interested in adding a forward. Waddell references the injuries to the forward unit: Sean Monahan, Kirill Marchenko, Yegor Chinakhov, and Boone Jenner are all out right now, though Jenner appears on track to come back after the 4 Nations Face-Off break.

As for the others, signs point to it being longer. It sounds like all three will come back at some point in March, but whether or not that's early March or late March is a significant difference. And as the season grinds on, new injuries are always a threat to spoil any team's potential playoff hopes.

Still, it sounds like what Waddell is referring to here is a middle-six, secondary scoring addition that could give some additional oomph to the team even when they're healthy. There are plenty of options available, but it could mean a player like:

- Casey Mittelstadt: The asking price might be too high for Columbus' liking — a player would likely need to be involved — but certainly Mittelstadt checks all the boxes in what the Blue Jackets are looking for: he can play any forward position but is historically a center. He has two years left on his current contract after this year at an affordable term of \$5.75 million average annual value. He's on pace for his third consecutive 50-point season. And at 26, he's young enough to potentially be part of a nucleus for years to come. For whatever reason, Mittelstadt just hasn't meshed well with the Colorado Avalanche since being traded there last season. Frank Seravalli of Daily Faceoff reports that the Avs are willing to move him, but how motivated they would be to do so is unknown.
- Brock Boeser: Having spent his entire career so far with the Vancouver Canucks, the 27-year-old Boeser had a career high 40 goals last season and has scored 17 thus far in 2024-25. But as Vancouver ponders its future, multiple reports have stated the Boeser — a pending free agent — could be made available. While Waddell indicates that the preference is players with time left on their contracts, Boeser's status could lower the asking price while still giving the Blue Jackets a solid option at the right wing position that could fill in admirably for Marchenko if his injury is more severe than expected. Boeser is one of two Canucks that could draw the Blue Jackets' interest; more on that in a moment.
- Gus Nyquist: Another pending free agent that could still be intriguing for Waddell, Nyquist is no stranger to Columbus. He played 200 games with the Blue Jackets before being traded at the

deadline during the 2022-23 season. The 35-year-old had a career high 75-point season just last season with the Nashville Predators, though he's picked up just 20 points (9 goals, 11 assists) through 51 games this season. Unless Nashville makes a serious push over the next few weeks, the asking price for Nyquist could be ideal for Columbus to add the versatile forward.

- Oliver Bjorkstrand: After signing the late Johnny Gaudreau during the summer of 2022, the Blue Jackets were forced to deal Bjorkstrand to the Seattle Kraken to make the finances work. It was obvious Bjorkstrand enjoyed his time in Columbus, and with the Kraken making seemingly any of their veterans available this deadline season, a reunion certainly seems like a possibility. Bjorkstrand can play either side of the wing and still has one year (at \$5.4 million) left on his contract after this season. He has 15 goals with the Kraken this season.
- Yanni Gourde: Bjorkstrand's teammate in Seattle seems like a dream fit for the Blue Jackets. Like a couple of others here, Gourde isn't a "player with term left" as much as he's a player that "just fits" what Waddell and the team seem to be looking for. Gourde is out with an injury right now but is scheduled to return shortly after the 4 Nations break. Given that plus the pending free agent status, the asking price could be low for the versatile veteran with copious amounts (83 games) of playoff experience.

An addition to the middle six would make the most sense, but there is one exception: Elias Pettersson.

While the Canucks traded J.T. Miller to the New York Rangers last week to seemingly end the drama in British Columbia, reports from SportsNet's Elliott Friedman say the Canucks haven't decided for sure if Pettersson will continue to be made available.

His struggles have continued since the trade, with Pettersson scoring just one goal in 14 games since the calendar flipped. He's signed to a massive contract with an AAV of \$11.6 million through the 2031-32 season and has a no-movement clause that kicks in this summer. Should the Canucks choose to revisit moving him, the Blue Jackets would certainly be interested, as the teams had "very recent talks" regarding Pettersson as recently as last week.



Back in Columbus: one other thing to consider as the deadline approaches is the health of Dante Fabbro. No indication or timetable has been provided yet by the team, but if he is out long-term, it could potentially put the Blue Jackets in play to add on the blueline, too. Zach Werenski and Denton Mateychuk seem to be locked in as the top two on the left side and Ivan Provorov on the right, but without Fabbro there's still a hole on the right side of the defense.

A couple of names to consider here could be Rasmus Ristolainen and Connor Murphy. Both play the right side, neither are entering free agency, both could likely be had for a mid-round draft pick, and in the case of Murphy, there are ties to Columbus: the Dublin native was a 1st round draft pick in 2011, becoming the first Ohio AAA Blue Jackets player alumnus to be selected that high.

Currently with the Philadelphia Flyers and Chicago Blackhawks, respectively, Ristolainen and Murphy are both on teams in last place in their division and both clubs look to be sellers at the deadline. If the asking price is right and the health of the Blue Jackets' blueline is in question, either could be a good candidate to join Damon Severson in the battle for right side of the second defensive pairing.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / NYR 4, CBJ 3: Late Goal Pushes Rangers Past Blue Jackets In Final Game Before 4-Nations Break

By Ed Francis- February 9, 2025

	1	2	3	F
	1	1	2	4
	2	1	0	3

CBJ GOALS:  
K. Johnson (P1, 14:31)  
Danforth (P1, 15:29)  
van Riemsdyk (P2, 17:17)

That one stung.

Will Cuyllé scored two third-period goals, including the game-winner with 1:39 left in regulation, as the New York Rangers edged the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-3 on Saturday night in a gut-punch of a loss.

The Blue Jackets fell behind early, with the Rangers scoring in the first two minutes. It was an abysmal start for Columbus, who could have been behind by even more in the opening minutes if not for a couple of big saves from Elvis Merzlikins.

"We didn't start right," said head coach Dean Evason. "(We) turned pucks over, some uncharacteristic things."

Evason gathered the players during the first television timeout of the night and delivered a message.

"We thought as a staff that they needed a little kick in the ass. Just to remember how we play ... and we immediately played better," said Evason. "Not because of that, but just the reminder helped."

Columbus would take a 2-1 lead by the end of the period on goals from Justin Danforth and Kent Johnson. For Johnson, his 17th goal of the season set a new career high.

The teams would exchange goals in the second period, with the Rangers tying it at 6:38 of the middle frame and the Blue Jackets regaining a lead, this time 3-2, in the final three minutes of the period.

Cuyllé would strike for the first time in the opening two minutes of the third, tying the game at 3-3.

He would strike again — this time to deliver the Rangers a win — when Denton Mateychuk's clearing attempt was deflected and took a terrible break, going right to Cuyllé with no one between him and Merzlikins.

Columbus was outshot 17-4 unable to generate many good looks for much of the period, but came close twice: both Adam Fantilli and Zach Aston-Reese hit the crossbar just a few minutes apart, either of which could have sent the game in a completely different direction.

Instead, Columbus enters the 4-Nations Face Off break on a four-game losing streak, their longest in nearly two months.

Here's how the Blue Jackets went into the break:

1st Period:

(1:56 — NYR Goal): The Rangers get on the board early with a wrap-around goal from Arthur Kaliyev, who pushes past Jordan Harris to the right of Merzlikins, then quickly darts behind the net and gets the wrap-around just past the edge of Elvis' left skate to make it 1-0 Rangers.

(14:31 — CBJ Goal): Werenski's clean pass from the slot sets Johnson up perfectly for his 17th goal of the season but before Z touches the puck, Adam Fantilli makes a pair of quick decisions that lead to the goal. The first comes with a quick poke to stop the Rangers from getting possession, and the second is when he pulls the defender away from Werenski on a soft pass to Z, who then sees KJ alone to the left of Quick. He beats the 39-year-old goalie to tie the game at 1-1.

(15:29 — CBJ Goal): Less than a minute after the Blue Jackets tie it, they take the lead on Danforth's second goal in as many games. The unsung hero of this sequence doesn't even pick up an assist: Mathieu Olivier. He helps clear the Columbus zone and push the puck up the ice. Zach Aston-Reese enters the zone with it, who gets it to Jack Johnson. He fires from near the left dot and Danforth is right next to Quick for the tip-in goal to make it 2-1 Columbus.

2nd Period

(6:38 — NYR Goal): With Damon Severson and Vincent Trocheck in the box for offsetting minors, the Rangers tie it at 2-2 while the teams were playing 4-on-4. Adam Fox gets it to Mika Zibanejad, who gets off an intense wrister to bring New York back to even.

(17:17 — CBJ Goal): An excellent display of passing here that leads to the goal to put the Blue Jackets back in front, 3-2. van Riemsdyk enters the zone and gently pushes the puck over to Sillinger, who passes cross-ice to Severson. While that's happening, JVR charges the net and takes Severson's perfectly-placed pass and taps it home to regain Columbus' lead.

3rd Period

(1:57 — NYR Goal): Another early-period goal for the Rangers, this one from Cuyllé to bring the game even at 3-3. He gets a shot off from distance and it makes its way through plenty of traffic for his 14th of the season.

(18:21 — NYR Goal): Mateychuk's clearing attempt is tipped just enough by Trocheck and then takes the worst possible bounce of the boards, with the puck going right to Cuyllé. He beats Merzlikins for the second time in the period to put the Rangers in front 4-3, a lead they would keep.

NYR	GAME STATS	CBJ
40	SHOTS	25
60%	FACEOFFS	40%
0/0	POWER PLAY	0/0
0/0	PENALTY KILL	0/0
24	HITS	18
18	GIVEAWAYS	18
5	TAKEAWAYS	1
17	BLOCKED SHOTS	16
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
2.36	EXPECTED GOALS	2.85
74	SHOT ATTEMPTS	54
40	SCORING CHANCES	25
9	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	20
Data via NHL.com & NaturalStatTrick.com		

Stat Chat:

- After Harris was pushed off the puck in the opening minutes, he was benched for the remainder of the period and saw just two more shifts in the game — both in the second frame. He finished with 2:02 of ice time.
- Neither team had a power-play. Severson and Trocheck's minors that led to a 4-on-4 was the only whistle of the game.
- For the game, Columbus was outshot 40-25 — the eighth time in the last nine games they were outshot by the opposition.

Up Next:

The banged-up Jackets get a two-week break for the 4-Nations Face Off. Zach Werenski is the exception, as he'll represent Team USA in the tournament. Columbus' next game is Saturday, Feb. 22nd at 7 p.m. against the Chicago Blackhawks.



## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Three Things: Another Point, Another Close One, Numbers Game

**By Will Chase- February 9, 2025**

It was another tight affair for the Columbus Blue Jackets ahead of the break.

Will Cuyllle had two points with the game-winning goal and an assist as the New York Rangers got by the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-3 on Saturday night at Nationwide Arena.

The Jackets, losers of four straight, had their six-game home point streak snapped.

### Another Point

Zach Werenski picked up his team-leading 42nd assist in the first period on Kent Johnson's goal to add to his home point streak and make it 21 consecutive games with a point.

Johnson's goal tied the score 1-1 at 14:31. Adam Fantilli picked up his 17th assist on the play and played 26:59 for the game.

### Another Close One

The Eastern Conference is crowded in the playoff chase, and the Blue Jackets have played close games every night lately.

Since Jan. 25, six of the last seven Blue Jackets games have been decided by one goal. The loss to the Dallas Stars, which started the current four-game losing streak, was a close one decided by two goals.

Missing Kirill Marchenko and Dante Fabbro in the previous three games, Columbus has done well to earn two points over the past week but just hasn't been able to find the crucial goal they need.

Saturday's game appeared headed for overtime and a crucial standings point but a weird bounce off the boards went the Rangers' way.

### Numbers Game

The Blue Jackets have gone nine straight games without a power-play goal (0-for-12) but they didn't really get the chance to break that streak as neither team had a power-play opportunity in the game.

It's the second game in the stretch Columbus did not have a power play. They also didn't have a power play in the 5-1 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs on Jan. 23. There are three games in that span in which the Blue Jackets and their opponent — Buffalo Sabres, Vegas Golden Knights, Los Angeles Kings — had only one chance and were 0-for-1.

Mathieu Olivier had a career-high seven shots on goal and six hits in 20:06. Ivan Provorov's three-game goal streak came to an end. He is one of six Blue Jackets defensemen to score in three straight games. Jason Christensen played in his 100th career game.

### Next Game In Two Weeks

With the Four Nations Face-Off underway next week, the Blue Jackets are off until Saturday, Feb. 22 when they host the Chicago Blackhawks at Nationwide Arena at 7 p.m. ET.

## The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: A new No. 1 emerges just in time for haiku week

By Sean Gentile and Dom Luszczyszyn- February 8, 2025

Friends of the rankings  
It's the time of year again  
When we write haikus.  
Laziness? No chance  
Count syllables on fingers  
That's really hard work.  
Thirty-two poems  
Some good, some great, some so-so  
At least we had fun.  
Sorry if you hate  
Some whimsy with your hockey  
Leave a comment: Boo!  
At the very least  
The rankings are still perfect  
No debate, no notes.  
1. Winnipeg Jets, 38-14-3  
Last week: 3  
Sean rank: 1  
Dom rank: 1  
Legit contenders?  
Helle, power play, stars, depth  
Jets are the real deal  
2. Washington Capitals, 36-11-7  
Last week: 1  
Sean rank: 2  
Dom rank: 2  
The Great 8 goal chase  
Another one, sixteen left  
He's gonna do it

3. Edmonton Oilers, 34-16-4

Last week: 2

Sean rank: 3

Dom rank: 3

Make it 5 Nations

Because it's not best-on-best

Without the best: Drai

4. Dallas Stars, 34-18-1

Last week: 5

Sean rank: 4

Dom rank: 4

Trade shocks the nation

Don't fret, Dallas got their guy

Cody Ceci time

5. Toronto Maple Leafs, 33-19-2

Last week: 9

Sean rank: 6

Dom rank: 5

Last 76

Bobby McMann's got 30

There's your depth scoring

6. Florida Panthers, 33-20-3

Last week: 8

Sean rank: 5

Dom rank: 6

Ten games, seven dubs

Five goals, five games for Tkachuk

The champs hit the gas

7. Vegas Golden Knights, 32-17-6

Last week: 6

Sean rank: 8

Dom rank: 7

Four wins, 15 games

Blame bad luck, blame the goalies

Either way, not ideal

8. Carolina Hurricanes, 32-19-4

Last week: 4

Sean rank: 7

Dom rank: 8

Moose: Two points in six?

Yeah, but check out his Corsi

Welcome to Raleigh!

9. Minnesota Wild, 32-19-4

Last week: 7

Sean rank: 9

Dom rank: 10

“Ryan, it’s Gary

Your appeal has been denied

Better luck next time”

10. Colorado Avalanche, 31-22-2

Last week: 12

Sean rank: 11

Dom rank: 9

Did they win that trade?

Unlikely — but it’s early,

And Necas fits right in

11. Detroit Red Wings, 28-21-5

Last week: 17

Sean rank: 10

Dom rank: 12

Yzerplan: Year 6

Look what a real coach can do!

Wow! What took so long?

12. Los Angeles Kings, 28-17-6

Last week: 11

Sean rank: 12

Dom rank: 14

Drew Doughty is back

Like a Call of Duty map

Just a bit rusty

13. Tampa Bay Lightning, 29-20-4

Last week: 15

Sean rank: 15

Dom rank: 11

Power-play Hagel?

Nah, let's use Darren Raddysh

Bold strategy, Coop

14. New York Islanders, 25-21-7

Last week: 19

Sean rank: 14

Dom rank: 13

The calendar flipped

And the Isles flipped a switch

Are they good? Maybe

15. Ottawa Senators, 29-22-4

Last week: 13

Sean rank: 13

Dom rank: 16

Atlantic battle

Sens lose two against Tampa

Back to the wildcard

16. New Jersey Devils, 30-20-6

Last week: 14

Sean rank: 17

Dom rank: 15

Post-holiday skid

Devils lose 12 of 19

Only getting worse

17. Vancouver Canucks, 25-18-11

Last week: 16

Sean rank: 16

Dom rank: 17

Marcus Pettersson

Two Elias Petterssons

Good luck John Shorthouse

18. Columbus Blue Jackets, 26-21-8

Last week: 10

Sean rank: 18

Dom rank: 19

Lumbus Miracle

Playoffs? They've got a real shot

Do it for Johnny

19. New York Rangers, 26-23-4

Last week: 20

Sean rank: 20

Dom rank: 18

Kreider: Three assists

As many as Dustin Wolf

And he's a goalie

20. Calgary Flames, 26-20-7

Last week: 18

Sean rank: 19

Dom rank: 21

The wheels are wobbling

Because good as Wolf may be,

He can't do it all

21. Boston Bruins, 27-23-6

Last week: 22

Sean rank: 21

Dom rank: 20

Boston paid Swayman

Buyer's remorse was looming

But he found his game

22. Montreal Canadiens, 25-24-5

Last week: 21

Sean rank: 22

Dom rank: 23

The future is bright

But a playoff spot this year?

Too big of an ask

23. Utah HC, 22-22-9

Last week: 23

Sean rank: 23

Dom rank: 22

Utah can't Yeti

But Yeti can Stanley Cup?

League brand in shambles

24. St. Louis Blues, 24-26-5

Last week: 24

Sean rank: 24

Dom rank: 24

12 seconds left, tied

Is that Reinhart in the slot?

12 seconds left, loss

25. Anaheim Ducks, 23-24-6

Last week: 27

Sean rank: 26

Dom rank: 26

Last six games, five wins

A bigger deal — six goals for

Mason McTavish

26. Philadelphia Flyers, 23-26-7

Last week: 25

Sean rank: 25

Dom rank: 28

Least-liked coach? No shock

Torts gets the most from his guys

Haters gonna hate

27. Buffalo Sabres, 22-26-5

Last week: 30

Sean rank: 28

Dom rank: 25

Losing is one thing

It's the Sabres, after all

But they let Taje down

28. Pittsburgh Penguins, 22-24-9

Last week: 28

Sean rank: 27

Dom rank: 27

Crosby's arm is sore?

Time to see how much he cares

About 4 Nations

29. Seattle Kraken, 23-29-4

Last week: 26

Sean rank: 29

Dom rank: 29

No starpower here

Going nowhere fast with just

Guy-Guy-Guy-Guy-Guy

30. Nashville Predators, 18-27-7

Last week: 29

Sean rank: 30

Dom rank: 30

Five-win streak: Erased

Five-game losing skid: Active

Preds: Done like dinner

31. Chicago Blackhawks, 16-31-6

Last week: 31



Sean rank: 31

Dom rank: 31

Franchise player? Check

Elite pool of prospects? Check

Wins? Check back next year

32. San Jose Sharks, 15-35-6

Last week: 32

Sean rank: 32

Dom rank: 32

## [The Athletic / NHL trade board 6.0: Latest on the top targets heading into the 4 Nations break](#)

**By Chris Johnston- February 8, 2025**

The Big Board has been decimated by a flurry of activity in recent weeks.

No sooner can we get it posted before a move — or series of moves — sends us scrambling for another update.

However, with a break for the 4 Nations Face-Off looming, there seems to be a general expectation that the trade activity will die down for a little bit here. Moves are still permitted during the Feb. 12 to 20 tournament, but there's a little less motivation to make them when your team isn't playing any games.

In many ways, the trade market is still taking shape, particularly in the Eastern Conference, where a large cluster of teams continue to jockey for wild-card positioning.

Just four weeks remain until the NHL's March 7 trade deadline.

## The Athletic / Canada defeats USA in Rivalry Series to win third consecutive title

**By Hailey Salvian- February 9, 2025**

Team Canada won the 2024-25 Rivalry Series with a 3-1 win over Team USA on Saturday night.

For the third straight year, the winner was decided in the final game of the series, this time in Game 5 in Summerside, Prince Edward Island.

Montreal Victoire forward Jennifer Gardiner scored the game winner in the third period — her first national team goal.

Brianne Jenner opened the scoring for Canada, and Laura Stacey — in her 101st game for Team Canada — scored the empty net goal to seal the win. Stacey led all players in points (5) and tied for the lead in goals (3) in the five-game series. Danielle Serdachny led all players Saturday with two assists.

Kelly Pannek — who scored the shootout winner in Game 4 on Thursday to force Saturday's deciding Game 5 — scored the lone goal for the Americans.

"It's never easy to lose a game like this. Our team played hard," said Team USA coach John Wroblewski. "We'll continue to evaluate and make sure we're ready heading into Women's Worlds in April."

Canada's starter, Emerance Maschmeyer wasn't tested heavily in the game, but stopped 28 of 29 shots she faced, including several key saves in the final few minutes, improving her Rivalry record to 2-0 in 2024-25. Aerin Frankel, who was Team USA's player of the game, made 40 saves.

Canada has won the Rivalry Series three years in a row.

Star forward Sarah Nurse did not play for Canada in Game 5 after leaving Game 4 on Thursday with a lower-body injury.

Team USA played with several top college players — Caroline Harvey, Laila Edwards, Abbey Murphy, Kirsten Simms and Tessa Janecke — not available for the February slate of games. Forwards Alex Carpenter, Grace Zumwinkle, Hayley Scamurra and Gabby Rosenthal missed the February games due to injury after initially being named to the roster.

Players for both national teams will return to their PWHL clubs and games will begin again Tuesday night, starting with the Toronto Sceptres versus the Minnesota Frost.

Saturday's game was the last between Canada and the U.S. until the two rivals face off at the 2025 women's world championships, which will begin April 9 in Czechia.

What does this mean for world championships?

It's tough to pull major takeaways from Rivalry Series when the games are spread out over several months and the rosters shake up so much. But, these are important games for player evaluation and there are a few big roster questions that come to mind.

Did Zumwinkle do enough in her two games to grab a roster spot? She had two goals and 3 points in those two appearances and is coming off a great rookie season in the PWHL, where she was named Rookie of the Year. She hasn't played since Jan. 2, but when healthy, Zumwinkle is most definitely one of the top 14 forwards in the U.S.

Is Edwards' future actually on defense? She's one of the top forwards in the NCAA but has been on the blue line for Team USA at Rivalry Series and during the December Six Nations tournament. When injuries hit during Wisconsin's 8-2 win over Minnesota on Saturday, she dropped back to the blue line.

Could Gwyneth Philips be Team USA's backup? Nicole Hensley has been the No. 2 behind Frankel, but she had a tough start to the PWHL season. And after Philips' 31-save win Thursday, maybe she can move up the depth chart.

Did Daryl Watts do enough to make Team Canada? She's incredibly skilled and registered her first point in the series Saturday. Her chemistry with Jenner while on the Ottawa Charge last season could give Canada an intriguing middle-six scoring line, especially if Canada is going to continue experimenting with other right-wing options next to Marie-Philip Poulin on the top line.

I'm also curious about Julia Gosling versus Gardiner for a depth role at worlds. Gardiner has been the better pro player, but Gosling has had a fairly consistent fourth-line role on Team Canada since last year's worlds.

I thought Gardiner played well on the third line with Emily Clark and Blayre Turnbull on Thursday but ended up as the 13th forward Saturday. Scoring the game winner while playing as the extra forward could help her chances.

The other big question for Canada is whether Chloe Primerano — who was not available to play in February like other college players, because of the proximity to playoffs in the college schedule — will be on the worlds roster after playing a few games on the third pair in November. Micah Zandee-Hart looked solid Saturday and will look to get back on the team in April. There's also Nicole Gosling and Jaime Bourbonnais to consider for the team.

The IIHF's decision to have 25-player rosters at women's worlds likely helps Canada feel safe bringing an 18-year-old to worlds, given they'll have seven other options if Primerano isn't ready for the senior international level yet.

## [The Athletic / NHL 2024-25 midseason predictions: Fan picks for Stanley Cup winner, awards and more](#)

**By Sean Gentille, Shayna Goldman, Jesse Granger and James Mirtle- February 9, 2025**

Is 2025 the year for Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and the Edmonton Oilers? Plenty of The Athletic's NHL readers seem to think so.

We asked you for your thoughts on the top contenders for the Stanley Cup, the leading candidates to win individual awards and some of the league's biggest disappointments, and more than 2,500 of you filled out a 12-question ballot.

To share and break down the results, we brought in NHL senior writers James Mirtle and Sean Gentille, analytics know-it-all Shayna Goldman and goaltending expert Jesse Granger.

You can find our staff's season predictions from October [here](#) and awards predictions [here](#). You can find our predictions from November [here](#), December [here](#) and January [here](#).

"I picked the Stars to win at the season's start, but the Mikko Rantanen trade has changed that."

"I don't think there's one team head and shoulders above anyone for Stanley Cup favorites. Could be anyone this year."

Gentille: The fact that the Panthers are stuck in the "other" group is a testament to how uneven they've been this season. I think they'll be fine, for the record.

Goldman: I feel like Colorado didn't get enough credit for revamping its entire goalie situation. But after the Rantanen trade, it makes a lot of sense to see its stock drop (despite how well Martin Necas is fitting in). It will be really interesting to see what they do in the weeks leading up to the deadline.

Granger: The Jets' reputation as playoff underperformers is showing up here in a big way. Winnipeg has inarguably been the best team in the league to this point. They're scoring the most goals, have the best goalie by a wide margin and are on another eight-game heater. Yet, it's hard to blame the 89.3 percent of fans who placed their vote elsewhere.

Mirtle: I'm with the "could be anyone" voter ... this is going to be a wild postseason.

Gentille: Given how much you folks like the Western Conference, this makes plenty of sense. Someone from the East would have to make it far enough to lose, and the Hurricanes just added a superstar to the mix.

Granger: West Coast bias for the win!

Goldman: The Canes are the one team that really fixed its (original) fatal flaw, so that separation makes sense in both categories from the other Eastern Conference teams.

Mirtle: A 51 percent chance of making the final is quite an endorsement of Carolina. Meanwhile, the Capitals have been the hottest team in the league of late and still haven't earned a lot of traction, even with Logan Thompson, who is a big advantage if he keeps playing the way he has.

Gentille: Feels like too large of a gap between Chicago and San Jose. Both teams are brutal, of course, but I think the Sharks' goaltending might give them the edge in the tank battle.

Goldman: Even with the Sharks goaltending situation, it feels like they are doing a better job of staying in some games ... I'm sticking with the Blackhawks.

Granger: If the Sharks continue to give Yaroslav Askarov a bigger share of the starts, San Jose's goalie situation might feel different in a few weeks.

Mirtle: Someone thinks the Rangers are going to concede a nearly 20-point lead with less than 30 games to go? They could play the Hartford Wolf Pack roster and that's not happening. Or are they just mad at their team? And who's under "and more" here!?

Editor: Every club in the league except the Avalanche and Lightning received at least one vote. Probably from rival fans who just hate the teams.

"Look at the struggles in Nashville after it added big pieces to its roster, only to see the team sputter."

"The Sabres continue to underperform and disappoint."

"The Rangers quit for six weeks and tried to save their season once it was too late."

Gentile: The Preds are a disappointment, for sure, but their depth issues at center were always going to be a problem. I saw a team that could make the playoffs, but beyond that, eh. The Rangers have gotten their act together, to an extent, but it's still hard to pick anyone else.

Goldman: The Predators were the trendy answer to open the season, but the two problem children of the NHL, the Canucks and Rangers, should be leading this race.

Granger: I agree with you both, and the results at the top, but at the same time I can't help but feel like in truth, no one is more disappointed than fans of the Sabres. Maybe next year?

Mirtle: Maybe if we called it the biggest perennial trainwreck the Sabres would win something?

"The best surprise is between Washington and Columbus."

"Honorable mention to the Flames, who are a big surprise too, but I don't think anyone had Washington leading the league at any point this season."

"I wanted to vote Washington for best surprise, but it's hard to beat Columbus with all it's been through and how low its expectations were for the season."

Gentile: The Caps were a playoff team that added a bunch of legitimate pieces in the offseason. The Blue Jackets, on paper, seemed like one of the few worst teams in the league. Come on.

Goldman: The least surprising part is that the Blue Jackets have morphed back into the Broken Jackets. But if they can power through all of these injuries, they're going to emerge as the true No. 1 here.

Granger: The Blue Jackets have been a revelation. It's not just that they're winning more games than we expected, but it's how they're doing it. Columbus is one of the more exciting teams to watch and can fill the net with pucks at a rate I don't think anyone saw coming.

Mirtle: How is Calgary not getting more love here? I saw a lot of folks had them bottom five coming into the season, and they have a real shot at the playoffs.

"Kirill Kaprizov would have won the Hart had he not gotten injured."

"Kaprizov would be the Hart winner if he weren't injured so much this year."

"If Draisaitl doesn't win the Hart, it'll be a travesty."

"Zach Werenski is the engine for the most surprising team in years, the Blue Jackets. ... By the truest definition of the Hart, he is the most valuable player for a team picked to finish near the bottom of the league."

"Hellebuyck should win the Hart but I don't think the writers will give it to a goalie."

"Goaltending is such an underappreciated position. If Hellebuyck keeps up this level of play and doesn't win the Hart ... I don't think a goalie will ever win it again."

Gentile: This would be as good a season as any for a defenseman to win the Hart. Unfortunately, that's illegal.

Goldman: The Kaprizov points are so true because he was leading this race earlier this season. Draisaitl is the guy, but this is Quinn Hughes erasure.

Granger: I'm encouraged to see Hellebuyck with the third-most votes, but it's still not enough. He's the best player at the most important position, and he's putting up historically great numbers.

Mirtle: Nathan MacKinnon has been a one-man show a lot of nights lately for Colorado and leads the league in scoring, so if the voters are going to stay anti-non-forwards, he makes a ton of sense — if he can keep it up without Rantanen.

Gentile: Mark Scheifele is right behind Draisaitl and William Nylander in goals and couldn't even sniff the top 10. Tough break. I don't disagree, but it's a tough break.

Goldman: The fact that Scheifele and Kyle Connor play together definitely hurts their case — it makes the line better that there are two scoring threats, but it's a lot tougher to win this race when you're not the bona fide scorer of that line.

Granger: It's hard to disagree with the voters here. It's Draisaitl's to lose.

Mirtle: Nylander is second in goals before Friday's matchups and wayyy down the list. What really stands out about his season is who he's played with: Some of his top linemates include Max Domi, Max Pacioretty and Pontus Holmberg, who have combined for 10 goals. Maybe we need some sort of award for scoring 50-plus because you have no one to pass to?

"When will the Norris be split into an offensive and defensive award?"

"NHL needs a defensive defenseman award to separate the offensive Norris winner from defensemen who are great at defense."

"A shame shutdown defenseman get overlooked."

"They need a new award for best defensive defenseman."

"I think the Norris Trophy winner is a complete toss-up. At the moment, Makar has more offensive production than Hughes, but it flip-flops depending on the night. ... Werenski is a serious dark horse here as well."

"Werenski is my runner-up candidate for the Norris, but I can't vote for him over Hughes."

"Werenski plays tougher minutes than the other Norris contenders."

Gentile: Brutal category here. Hughes is my guy, at the moment, and I would've liked to see a few more votes for Werenski, but I can't argue with any of it. Any of the three could win, and it'd be deserved.

Goldman: The top three are spot on, but Werenski deserves more credit here.

Granger: This is the most entertaining of the trophy races this season, with three superstars who appear to be neck and neck.

Mirtle: Appreciate the love for a potential Rod Langway Award. Let's keep up the complaining!

"Aleksander Barkov appears to have taken over Patrice Bergeron's crown as year-over-year Selke favorite."

"It kills me to vote for Barkov or any Panther to win ... but seems like a done deal."

"I'm not an Oilers fan but people need to realize that Draisaitl is playing amazing defensive hockey while scoring at an amazing rate ... he needs to get Selke votes."

Gentile: Barkov won this outright despite, like, 20 other plays getting votes. Sounds right.

Goldman: Even if Reinhart deserves more hype in this race, he will never get it over Barkov because he plays wing.

Granger: The fact that "other" came in second place by a good margin tells you how subjective this trophy is, and why Barkov will likely get the nod due to reputation. Not that he doesn't deserve it, but that's how this award typically goes.

Mirtle: I feel like Anze Kopitar's incredible season, as the fifth oldest forward in the league, deserves more of a shoutout. He should be right in the thick of this one. (By the way, did you know that he's 23rd in all-time scoring adjusted for era?)

"Logan Thompson deserves a better fate than second for the Vezina, but that's likely where he'll end up."

Gentile: Thompson is playing for second here, but that \$35.1 million contract is a nice consolation prize.

Goldman: It's Hellebuyck's to lose, but this isn't the only award he should be getting a lot of votes for.

Granger: Thompson has been brilliant. He's posted a save percentage of .940 or higher in more than half of his starts, which is ridiculous, but he just doesn't play enough to keep up with Hellebuyck, who is on his own planet right now.

Mirtle: Third and fourth in goals saved above expected entering Friday's matchups? Mackenzie Blackwood in Colorado and Lukas Dostal in Anaheim. Just saying!

"What Spencer Carbery is doing with the Capitals lineup is spectacular and completely deserving of recognition."

"Carbery oversaw the integration of even more pieces and it's all come together, so far, in Washington. One of the biggest reasons he deserves the Jack Adams."

"Carbery should be a lock for Jack Adams. Not sure there even needs to be a vote at this point."

"If Dean Evason doesn't get Jack Adams for what he's doing in Columbus this season, it should go to Carbery in Washington. Both are doing incredible in their respective cities."

"Love what Carbery has done in Washington this year, but if the Blue Jackets manage to squeeze in (the playoffs), how do you not give it to Evason?"

Gentile: Carbery should be the wire-to-wire pick here, and he should've gotten more votes last year, too.

Goldman: Carbery definitely could have won this last year. But I think there is a really good conversation to have about him versus Evason, considering just how well the Blue Jackets have played this season.

Granger: I agree Carbery is the pick here, but I do appreciate some fans throwing votes on Rod Brind'Amour. When it comes to this award, he's a victim of his consistency and longevity. His teams are always so good, I think we take his contributions for granted.

Mirtle: I propose we get "The Carburetor" to stick as a nickname. He's certainly found the right mix in Washington. (And Toronto's power play has yet to recover without him.)



"Lane Hutson should be a close runner-up for the Calder!"

"Hutson deserves the Calder ... amazing talent."

"If Hutson doesn't win the Calder, it will be a scandal."

"Hutson is overrated by Canadiens fans."

"Macklin Celebrini will win the Calder but Dustin Wolf SHOULD win."

"I think Wolf deserves the Calder, but Celebrini will win it."

"Celebrini is the real deal."

"Celebrini is damn impressive this year, but you can't ignore what Hutson is doing in Montreal."

"Matvei Michkov has already been going through a bit of a rookie wall which I believe Hutson and Celebrini will both hit soon and their play will fall off down the stretch, whereas Michkov will be used to dealing with it and has adapted to playing through the pain so to speak."

Gentile: Certainly seems like Hutson peaked a bit too early.

Goldman: Goalies never get the hype they deserve against forwards. I'm not disagreeing with Celebrini as the No. 1 pick, I just think Wolf is right up there with him.

Granger: Wolf has lived up to all of the hype, and then some. His 19 goals saved above expected are the fifth most by a goalie 23 years old or younger since Evolving-Hockey started tracking the stat in 2007.

Mirtle: Wolf is also sixth in the entire NHL in goals saved above expected before Friday's matchups, ahead of a bunch of the biggest names in the game. Celebrini is 56th in points per game among forwards before Friday's matchups; Hutson is 45th in ice time among D before Friday's matchups. This one should be wayyy closer than this, especially if Wolf continues to start more frequently and Calgary makes the postseason. But what a rookie class this year. They've all been so fun to watch.

## The Athletic / Drew Doughty added to Team Canada 4 Nations Face-Off roster: Where and why he fits

By Chris Johnston- February 10, 2025

Drew Doughty has secured a much-desired invitation to the 4 Nations Face-Off from Team Canada, getting added to the roster late Saturday as an injury replacement for Alex Pietrangelo.

The Los Angeles Kings defenseman missed 47 games to start the season after suffering a fractured left ankle in training camp. As a result, he was passed over when Hockey Canada finalized its roster in early December.

But the possibility of another chance to don the Maple Leaf helped push Doughty through a long rehabilitation following surgery. Before making his season debut for the Kings on Jan. 29 in Florida, the 35-year-old told reporters he hadn't given up on the dream of getting the call from Canada. He was elated when it finally came.

"Exciting, exciting day," Doughty told reporters in Los Angeles. "I had this on my mind ever since I've come back, and put a little too much pressure on myself to perform at a very high level. Game was kind of up and down. Ever since I knew I had a really good chance, in the last two games, I think I got back to (being) myself."

Pietrangelo pulled out of the 4 Nations Face-Off on Jan. 26 because of an ailment the Vegas Golden Knights defenseman is opting to rest during his team's two-week break for the tournament.

That opened up the roster spot given to Doughty.

Why did Doughty get the call?

Let's start with the obvious: His resume.

Two Stanley Cup wins, a Norris Trophy, more minutes played than any NHL skater in the 10 seasons preceding this one and a sparkling international past.

Beyond Sidney Crosby, Doughty is the only remaining tie to Team Canada's golden generation — the group that won gold medals at the 2010 and 2014 Winter Olympics plus the 2016 World Cup of Hockey. The country is 31-3-1 in games in which Doughty played. He is two-thirds of the way to joining the exclusive Triple Gold Club with only a gold medal from the IIHF World Hockey Championship missing from his trophy cabinet. Canada won silver in Doughty's only appearance at that event in 2009.

The weight of all those accomplishments factored heavily into the decision-making process and helped give Doughty an edge over the other potential right-shot, defense-first options at Canada's disposal: MacKenzie Weegar of the Calgary Flames, Chris Tanev of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Brandon Montour of the Seattle Kraken, among others.

Ultimately, Doughty had to demonstrate to the Canadian brain trust that he was healthy enough to be counted on so soon after a significant injury. The Kings certainly didn't ease him back into action as the veteran returned with three games in four nights on the road and logged 23:51, 27:43 and 24:16 in those contests. Starting with Wednesday's win over Montreal, he played another three games in four nights this week and saw even more ice time: 25:16, 29:27 and 31:09.

"That's a special player who can just come in and do that after not playing," Kings coach Jim Hiller said recently. "He's a gamer. He's a champion."

Team Canada was monitoring those games closely.

Doughty kept in contact with Canadian player relations advisor Ryan Getzlaf, telling reporters that Getzlaf was inquiring about whether he believed he would be ready to handle top-tier international competition. Returning during a stretch when the Kings were in Florida also allowed Doughty to have a face-to-face chat with Jon Cooper, the Canadian head coach, before Los Angeles and Tampa played at Amalie Arena last week.

Where does Doughty fit?

This should become clearer when Canada takes the ice for a couple practices in Montreal on Monday and Tuesday before opening the tournament against Sweden on Wednesday night at the Bell Centre.

Doughty is one of three right-shot defensemen on the roster, joining Cale Makar and Colton Parayko. The lefties are Devon Toews, Shea Theodore, Travis Sanheim and Josh Morrissey.

Only six defensemen are expected to dress for each game, but Doughty is a good bet to be one of them given the team's preference to ice balanced defensive pairs featuring players on their strong side of the ice.

Makar will almost certainly be Canada's primary power-play option on the point, but there may be some secondary minutes on that unit for Doughty. He'll also take a regular shift at five-on-five and can be used on the penalty kill.

Just getting into the tournament represents a major win after the longest injury absence of his 17-year NHL career. He went eight months between meaningful games from the end of the playoffs last spring and endured some challenging moments when he first resumed skating following ankle surgery.

"At first I had doubts because I got on the ice, my ankle didn't feel great in the beginning and I was like, 'Oh, I don't know if I'm going to be able to skate and keep up with these guys,'" said Doughty.

Those doubts have since been put to rest. It was a long road and this outcome was far from certain.

"Right away when I got injured this year, that was honestly my first thought: 'Damn it, I can't make the (4 Nations) team and play in the tournament,'" Doughty said Saturday. "And then I heard about Pietrangelo unfortunately going down, and right away I just tried to start getting back in the lineup and try to make that team. I think a lot of people had me written off, do have me written off, so I'm really proud to make this team.

"Anytime I put on that jersey means the world to me, so I'm ready to go."

## The Athletic / The 4 Nations Face-Off can't have any trades, obviously — but what if it did?

By Sean McIndoe, Mark Lazerus and more- February 10, 2025

There are no trades in the 4 Nations Face-Off.

There couldn't be. It wouldn't make any sense. Players play for their home countries, just like every other international tournament. Each team has a GM, but that guy's job is simply to assemble the best roster he can from the players available to him. Making trades with that roster? That would be dumb.

So let's be very, very clear: We acknowledge that what you're about to read is indeed dumb, and we're doing it anyway.

Four of The Athletic's hockey writers have been assigned a 4 Nations team and told to make trades to improve the roster. What exactly "improve" will mean is up to each GM, but the ground rules look like this:

- Each team has to make one trade with each other team, for a total of three trades each and six overall.
- In this very fake scenario, we assume that all trades are permanent, meaning any players acquired would remain property of that nation for the 2026 Olympics and beyond.
- Any player who is eligible for a national team can be dealt. That means we're not limited to the players who are actually on a 4 Nations roster; the various snubs and near-misses and prospects are eligible too.
- There are no draft picks in these trades. That would be unrealistic!

Julian McKenzie will be GM for Team Canada. Mark Lazerus will handle Team USA. The two Seans get Europe, with Gentile taking Sweden and McIndoe getting Finland.

This post is about fake trades that will not happen and can not happen, under any circumstances. We're hoping it will be fun and entertaining, but it's possible that it will be a complete waste of your time. The whole thing is completely ridiculous, and if you're the sort of person who'll be bothered by that, you can hit the back button right now. Nobody would think any less of you.

Still here? Yikes. OK, you've got nobody to blame but yourself. Let's do this.

### The game plans

#### Team USA

I could win this tournament with Team USA: The Oops, All Goalies edition. Goalies at every position. Goalies up front. Goalies on the back end. Goalies quarterbacking the power play. Goalies in the shootout. Yes, I have too many great goaltenders; woe is me. Let's see if I can fleece some needy, struggling, second-tier hockey nation like, oh, I don't know, Canada, by dangling one of my umpteen world-class goalies in front of them, distracting them like a little kitten and stealing all their stuff. — Lazerus

#### Team Canada

I want to improve Canada's depth in goal, not just for the present but for the future. I hope to move around some young talent to get some pieces that can help me at the 4 Nations, in 2026 and beyond. I'm pretty comfortable with my depth up and down the lineup and in my reserves, so I'm willing to listen to most offers. — McKenzie

## Team Sweden

Are we the favorites? No. Can we still win this thing? Absolutely. I've got high-end pieces and quality depth at goaltending and along the blue line, and I'm trying to use both to improve at forward. I also want guys who can help next week, next year and in 2030, so I'm going to target players in their 20s. No need to be precious about prospects here; Sweden has won gold before, and we can do it again. – Gentile

## Team Finland

With Finland already a big underdog before we found out Miro Heiskanen would miss the tournament, I'm focused on the future. I'm not throwing in the towel because we have Juuse Saros and anything can happen in a short tournament. But I'm going to try to add some younger pieces, especially on the blue line, that will help us contend for gold at next year's Olympics and (especially) beyond. With the other three GMs apparently in "win now" mode, it's possible this could shape up as a seller's market.

And no, I'm obviously not trading Aleksander Barkov. Well, unless somebody absolutely blows me away, he said, perhaps dropping some ironic foreshadowing into an intro nobody will read. – McIndoe

## The trades

It doesn't take long for Canada to address its goaltending. But it's not with the trade pairing we were expecting.

## Team Canada and Team Sweden

The trade: Sweden trades Filip Gustavsson to Canada for Seth Jarvis.

The Team Canada view: Losing Jarvis is going to hurt. But we have more than enough forward depth to make a move like this. Gustavsson is the bell cow for Minnesota and will likely see time for Sweden at this year's tournament. In this scenario, he'll be No. 2 to Jake Oettinger (stay tuned...). But if Oettinger needs to be relieved, Gustavsson can prove to be a more-than-adequate replacement. – McKenzie

The Team Sweden view: We like Gustavsson a lot. His ceiling is obvious — a .931 save percentage in 2022-23 says plenty, as does the bounce-back season he's having for Minnesota. The less said about 2023-24, the better. Down the line, though maybe not until in 2030, he'd have a shot at the permanent starting job. Right now? He's a backup. For a team with holes elsewhere, that's a luxury we can't afford. Jarvis, quite literally, could play throughout our lineup, and he's just 23 years old. Don't typecast him as an energy guy, either. He's well on pace for his second straight 30-goal season.

In net, I'm fine to roll with some combo of Linus Ullmark and Jacob Markstrom for the next year and hope someone (Wild prospect Jesper Wallstedt, perhaps) steps up in the meantime to join Ullmark in 2030. – Gentile

That's a big move, but will it be enough for Canada in the crease? We'll see about that, but for now let's move on to a smaller deal.

## Team Finland and Team Sweden

The trade: Finland trades Roope Hintz and Kaapo Kakko to Sweden for Simon Edviison and Axel Sandin Pellikka.

The Team Finland view: Like I said, we're focused on the future. We move Hintz, who's a very good player now and still will be in 2026 but might be declining by 2030, for two defensemen with elite upside who can be part of three Olympics for us. Also, after years of dumping on the Yzerplan, landing two Wings prospects will ensure that Detroit fans don't call me an idiot in the comments for once. – McIndoe

The Team Sweden view: We're cooking, folks. With William Karlsson out, my center depth chart for 4 Nations is now Elias Pettersson (an elite offensive player when he's right), Hintz (who works on scoring and matchup lines), Mika Zibanejad (give him easy minutes and watch him thrive) and Joel Eriksson Ek (a Selke-caliber player who can be thrown to the wolves). Jarvis is in the mix at center, too, and Leo Carlsson will be back for the Olympics. It's not North American-caliber depth, but it gets us close. Kakko helps solidify the bottom six and can play either left or right wing.

Down the line, sending out the Red Wings prospects will hurt. Doesn't mean they're ready to contribute, though, and neither is going to fill the Victor Hedman-sized hole that'll be in the lineup come 2030 or so. Say it with me: We're trying to win gold medals right now. – Gentile

That leaves Sweden with just one more deal to make, and they move quickly to make one more big addition. Literally.

Team Sweden and Team USA

The trade: Sweden trades Leo Carlsson to Team USA for Tage Thompson.

The Team Sweden view: Whoops. Add Thompson to that center depth chart. We believe in him and his one-of-one skill set, whether that's down the middle or on the right wing. Carlsson is going to be great, and he probably would've had a full-time spot by 2030 if Hintz, Thompson and Jarvis weren't added to the mix. They were, though. Tough luck. Also, NHL teams seem to love Anton Frondell; Scott Wheeler said in December that he's still on the periphery of the No. 1 overall discussion for the 2025 draft. That makes Carlsson even more expendable. – Gentile

The Team USA view: My original plan to spice up this tournament was to scatter the Hughes brothers to the wind. A Hughes in every pot! But while trading Luke would have been simple, trading either Quinn or Jack seemed awfully stupid. Speaking of stupid, Tage Thompson is not on my roster. He's 27, and the powers that be seem to have made up their minds about him, so I might as well get something for him. So I looked to the future and picked up my fourth-line center (Matthews, Eichel and Hughes aren't going anywhere) for 2030, 2034 and 2038 in Carlsson. We'll bring the kid along to 4 Nations to get him the experience, but he likely won't play now or in Italy. – Lazerus

We're waiting for GM Lazerus to address the media about this move, but he's delayed. It doesn't take us long to find out why, as a genuine goalie blockbuster hits the wire.

Team Canada and Team USA

The trade: Team USA trades Jake Oettinger and Jake Sanderson to Canada for Anthony Cirelli and Brandon Hagel.

The Team Canada view: I just got back from a meeting with Canada head coach Jon Cooper. He's really upset that I had to part ways with Anthony Cirelli and Brandon Hagel, his guys, to make this trade. But he understood when I told him we'd be getting a No. 1 goaltender and a talented puck-moving defenceman who can run a power-play and defend. If Sanderson somehow isn't good enough to play at the 4 Nations, he's certainly on the radar for 2026.

Also, there was a much bigger proposal on the table but the American GM wouldn't budge. I'm talking four players on each side and tons of star power, including a superstar player Lazerus wouldn't move. Would've been fun to do if ML wasn't so scared. But we settled on this one instead. I'm still content. – McKenzie

The Team USA view: The simple fact here is the Team Canada GM is a coward and didn't bite on my Connor Hellebuyck for Cale Makar proposal. The trade was one-for-one. That would have soothed my

concerns about Quinn Hughes' health considerably for 4 Nations, and would have given me perhaps the best top pairing in the history of the game for the next couple of Olympics. I've got elite goaltenders coming out of my ears, so I tried to go for broke by dealing away the best of the bunch. Alas. But if there was one minor weakness on my ridiculously stacked roster, it was in the shutdown/energy roles. Cirelli is as good as it gets, and he and Hagel can lead my penalty-killing unit. And just as important, I can scratch Chris Kreider, who's on my team instead of Tage Thompson for reasons passing understanding. – Lazerus

With fans across North America reeling from seeing Team USA help their biggest rivals address their weakest position, we quickly find out that the Americans aren't done.

#### Team Finland and Team USA

The trade: Finland sends Patrik Laine to Team USA for Dylan Larkin, Chris Kreider and Luke Hughes.

The Team Finland view: I don't need a powerplay specialist like Laine in this tournament because the refs are already going to be in the bag for Gary Bettman's pre-ordained Canada-USA final. So I keep one eye on the future by obtaining another blue-chip young defenseman, while also improving my forward depth. Is Larkin actually the best player in this three-for-one deal? He might be, and even if not, it's close enough to make this deal worth doing. – McIndoe

The Team USA view: Every team needs a little tension to keep everyone's edge, and J.T. Miller is merely one man. So throwing Patrik Laine and Zach Werenski back in the same locker room is just the jolt this roster needs. I don't want my team — which is clearly orders of magnitude better on paper than any of the other three — getting too comfortable. Complacency topples dynasties at any stage, even the first one. And while this trade might have made my team a little worse, it made it a lot funnier. That's got to count for something. Granted, this is not a deal I was eager to make, but the rules of this exercise mandated I humor Finland with a trade. I tried simply pawning off Luke Hughes for cash to cover tariff expenditures, but was rudely rebuffed by Mr. McIndoe. – Lazerus

With only one combination of teams left in play and the countdown to the 4 Nations trade deadline ticking, we figure we've already seen the biggest moves. We're wrong, because a buzzer-beater hits the wire, and it's a blockbuster.

#### Team Canada and Team Finland

The trade: Finland sends Aleksander Barkov to Canada for Connor Bedard and Evan Bouchard

The Team Canada view: Canada's strength is through the middle. If you look through their most successful tournaments, the men's team has prided itself on having strength at center. Team Canada could easily build a forward roster of players who can play center and still be competitive. We all know of the star potential Connor Bedard has and this is very much a roll of the dice. But if he doesn't get better in his own end as he develops, he'll be a winger at future tournaments. Barkov becomes a must-play at center for Team Canada and you could put him alongside Sam Bennett and Sam Reinhart at the 4 Nations and create a mega-shutdown line.

Parting ways with Bouchard may hurt, but Canada is deep enough with puck-moving defensemen to make up the difference. I'm trading for the sure thing here. – McKenzie

The Team Finland view: Look, I said it would take a ton for me to move Barkov, and Julian stepped up. In Bedard, I get a guy who could develop into my team's best forward for a decade or more. And Bouchard adds yet another blue-chip defenseman to my now completely remade blue line.

Does that add up to enough for one of the best forwards in the world right now? I hope so. Does it all but eliminate my version of Team Finland from contention in this year's 4 Nations? Probably. Could it

more than pay off down the line? That's the gamble I'm taking. Is it a blatant conflict of interest to let a Canadian GM trade Finland's best player to Team Canada? This press conference is over. – McIndoe

Mission accomplished. Skill influx complete. I still have a Vezina winner in net and the second-best defensive group in the tournament, and I now can roll these lines.

They're calling it the best Swedish chess match since "The Seventh Seal." Do not explore that comparison any further. – Gentile

Admittedly, my approach ended up feeling less like a scalpel and more like a sledgehammer. I realize that some Team Finland fans may not love that, especially if they'd already bought tickets to the championship game in two weeks. Still, these are bold moves that could pay off, and at the very least I feel like I've raised our ceiling significantly for next year and beyond, especially with the return of a healthy Heiskanen. – McIndoe

What did I lose? A goalie who wouldn't see any action, a forward and two defensemen who aren't even on my team, a good-but-replaceable fourth-liner, and a player who never should have been on my roster to begin with. What did I gain? Two playoff-tested, two-way standouts and penalty-killers, a power-play specialist who, when hot, is one of the best pure goal-scorers in the world, and a 19-year-old two-way center who'll be a fixture in my lineup for three or four Olympics to come.

I mean, my god, look at this lineup. Ridiculous. Of course, I could have stood pat and said the same thing. – Lazerus

I improved my goaltending without sacrificing any of my core guys, who I need to win games. I also added the heir apparent to Patrice Bergeron. Even if I sacrificed parts of my future to win, it's Canada. They still have incredible depth up and down the lineup and in their reserves. Put my centre depth against anybody at this tournament. We're winning.

Speaking of reserves, I've called on John Tavares and Carter Verhaeghe (!) to make up some losses on the left wing. Tavares can play alongside Mitch Marner on a line. And while I'm dead set on my shutdown line, Bennett and Verhaeghe are interchangeable. Canada still has a chance to win at the 4 Nations, in 2026 and beyond. – McKenzie



## [The Athletic / 4 Nations Face-Off reignites NHL players' long-delayed quest for best-on-best hockey](#)

**By Dan Robson and Chris Johnston- February 10, 2025**

After Czechia won gold at the IIHF World Championships last May, David Pastrnak posted a photo of himself grinning in his stall, clutching the championship trophy in one hand, a beer in the other, with a gold medal hanging over the crest of his home country's jersey.

Pastrnak used the celebratory moment after Czechia's 2-0 victory over Switzerland to take a shot at the NHL's latest attempt at running its own international best-on-best showdown.

"Maybe Four Nations invite now?" the Boston Bruins' four-time All-Star typed beneath the Instagram image.

Despite a proud and successful place in international hockey, Czechia was excluded from the nations chosen to compete in the NHL's newest iteration of its World Cup of Hockey, the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Only NHL players from Canada, the United States, Finland and Sweden will compete in the tournament, which begins Feb. 12 — taking the place of the league's usual All-Star event.

The limited nature of the tournament left many of the world's best players upset about sitting on the sidelines while their NHL counterparts compete for their home countries. "Of course we are sad, pissed, you know," Pastrnak said when the 4 Nations Face-Off was first announced last year. "A lot of talented guys who would love to play for their country."

The tournament — with games taking place in Montreal and Boston over a nine-day window — is meant to herald in a new era of NHL involvement in international hockey, with NHL players returning to the Winter Olympics in 2026 and a commitment to host future World Cup tournaments. But the limited scope of this year's event and the sprint to get it off the ground underscore more than a decade of struggle between players, the league, and the sport's international governing bodies.

For a generation of players who have never represented their countries in a best-on-best competition during their NHL careers, it's an imperfect solution — but it's a solution.

"This is my first opportunity playing for Team USA at the highest level," says Matthew Tkachuk, now more than 700 games into his career. "I've been pretty upset with the last few events that have been canceled, or whatever, the last few years. I've had this circled for however long it's been rumored that we'd be doing it."

Connor McDavid, arguably the world's best player, has never represented Canada at the Olympics, but has longed for it. "It's no secret that I've been vocal in terms of wanting best-on-best hockey," he says.

These pleas are nothing new from members of the NHL Players' Association.

Former players union head Donald Fehr often urged an aggressive pursuit of new international opportunities during his 13-year run. He was part of failed negotiations with the NHL on multiple potential tournaments.

When Marty Walsh succeeded Fehr in February 2023, the lack of best-on-best international competition was one of the main issues players brought up with him.

Since the Sochi Olympics in 2014, a generation of NHL players had been denied the opportunity to represent their countries at the highest level.

In that time, the IIHF's World Championship was the sport's biggest international prize. But that tournament lacked a best-on-best pedigree because it runs concurrently with the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Four years before Sochi, when McDavid was just 13 years old, he watched Sidney Crosby score his golden goal for Canada at the Vancouver Olympics. But since he's been in the league, he's never had the opportunity to experience that kind of thrill. Victor Hedman — who was 23 years old when Sweden controversially passed on taking him to the Sochi Olympics — is now a 34-year-old veteran and father of two.

"The last time I played in best-on-best was the World Cup in, I don't even know when that was ... 2016?" says Hedman.

The NHL returned to a new hybrid-version of the World Cup in 2016, when Toronto hosted a World Cup that included a hybrid of pseudo-national teams, a European team, and a team of young stars from North America.

The event took place before the NHL season. And — while entertaining — it didn't carry the stakes of past World Cup events or the Olympics. Alex Pietrangelo remembers it feeling more like a training camp tournament.

"I'm trying to think of the politically correct answer here," the Canadian defenseman says, when asked if the event felt intense to play in.

The first time NHL players competed in a best-on-best event was the 1976 Canada Cup. That grew out of the immense public interest created by the 1972 Summit Series, which pitted Canada against the Soviet Union in an eight-game series. That initial event grew into a six-team offseason tournament that was held in 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1991.

The Canada Cup was eventually succeeded by the World Cup of Hockey in 1996, which expanded to eight teams and saw Team USA beat Canada in a memorable three-game final.

While that was a high-water mark for best-on-best hockey, the new tournament failed to gain a consistent footing after NHL players participated in their first Olympics at the 1998 Nagano Games, and that quickly became the priority.

Plans for a 2000 World Cup slipped away because the NHL and NHLPA were focused on a deal to return players to the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics. And when the tournament was revived in 2004, it was played under the shadow of a looming labor dispute. Within hours of Canada beating Finland in the final, the NHL initiated a lockout that spanned 310 days and saw the entire 2004-05 season canceled.

NHL players would compete in three more Olympics — 2006 in Turin, 2010 in Vancouver and 2014 in Sochi — but the logistical challenges grew with each successive event. Some team owners began questioning the value of pausing the NHL season to loan their players to the tournament. They feared some of their greatest assets were risking injury for no direct payback, especially given the strict control the International Olympic Committee (IOC) maintained over marketing and media rights.

Further complicating matters, the NHL, IIHF and IOC came to an impasse in April 2017 over rising insurance and travel costs, which prompted the league to walk away from the 2018 Pyeongchang Games. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman told reporters that team owners weren't eager to pay for the "privilege of disrupting our season."

What it all boiled down to was control.

The NHL was seeking more say in tournaments featuring its biggest stars and hoped to generate more of a tangible payback. But without the involvement of the IOC or the IIHF it's been impossible to create an event that rivals what came before.

A planned 2020 World Cup was canceled when the NHL and NHLPA could not come to terms over extending an expiring collective-bargaining agreement between the parties. An attempt at a 2021 World Cup failed as well.

The Covid pandemic scuttled plans for NHL players to return for the 2022 Olympics in Beijing at the 11th Hour.

There were plans between the NHL and the players association to stage a World Cup in February 2024, but they fell apart amid resistance from the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) and other international bodies.

The players and the league worked jointly to negotiate a path for NHL players to be involved in the 2026 Olympics in Milano. When there was some certainty that the NHL would return to the Olympics, the league and union turned their attention to some kind of competition before the 2026 Games.

"This was something we both thought was a good idea," said Bill Daly, the NHL's deputy commissioner.

In trying to kickstart a new era in international hockey, the feedback the NHLPA received from players was that they wanted to represent their nations and move away from gimmicks of the past.

So the 4 Nations Face-Off was conceived. But which nations would be allowed to compete? The IIHF banned Russia from all international competitions following the country's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. That meant excluding superstars like Alex Ovechkin and Nikita Kucherov.

And by allowing only players currently under an NHL contract to compete, the talent pool for many European nations — like Switzerland and Germany — was constricted.

To work with the NHL schedule, the tournament would have to fall into the league's annual week-long All-Star break, which significantly limited the number of games that could be played.

So the focus shifted to a smaller scale event, leaning into traditional rivalries between countries that could fill rosters with NHL players.

Canada, the United States, Sweden and Finland were obvious choices — with 385, 278, 92 and 50 NHL players, respectively. Though Czechia has 29 NHL players, it would be a stretch to fill out each position. And there was no interest in returning to the Team Europe format used in the 2016 event.

The players' association canvassed its members, particularly regarding the exclusion of those not from one of the four nations represented.

"Is there a desire from a broader group of players to play? Absolutely," says Rob Zepp, the NHLPA's senior director of International Strategy and Growth.

The union spoke directly with players like Roman Josi, the star Swiss defenseman, who will be excluded from the tournament. "It would be great for Swiss hockey to be part of that just to have people watch in Switzerland, for young kids, and just all the other countries too, that are not in it," Josi says.

At the same time, he's not complaining about the break. "It'll be fun to watch," he says. "But I'm not too mad about getting a little vacation either."

Tomas Hertl was also aware Czechia would have trouble finding enough NHL defensemen to fill its roster. "Nothing you can do," Hertl says. "We just have to keep making a good name for the Czechs and bring in more players."

But despite that disappointment, Zepp says most players agreed it was a positive move toward more international competition.

The sprint to pull off the event included arranging logistics between the two host cities over a nine-day window.

The lead up required the negotiation of new media rights and sponsorship deals, planning game operations and game presentation, while also organizing ancillary events in Boston and Montreal. For the past several months, it's been an all-day, every-day sprint for this "massive event," Zepp says.

And it's expected to mark the NHL's consistent return to international competition.

"While this event might be the one and only 4 Nations Face-Off you see, this is really a building block to establishing that long-term international calendar that involves international best-on-best, which is something the sport hasn't seen," Zepp says. "The consensus is that this is a stepping stone to 2026, 2028, and beyond."

Daly expects the next World Cup to look much different. In 2028, the plan is a return to an eight-team World Cup event — though the specifics still need to be determined. There is some thought around creating a qualifying tournament in which countries would play for a chance to join a group of six automatically invited nations.

But even though the 4 Nations Face-Off won't be that kind of event, Daly believes players will embrace it.

"I don't think there's any concern at all that this will be the most important things that these players are focused on during that time period," Daly says. "I don't think there was any player in our league who didn't want to be selected or considered for selection in their teams."

Victor Hedman is intrigued to face his Tampa Bay Lightning coach Jon Cooper, who will be at the helm for Team Canada — while reuniting on Team Sweden with current NHL rivals like the Leafs' William Nylander, with whom he won a world championship in 2017.

"I think it's a tremendous tournament just for hockey in general," Hedman says.

Jack Eichel is excited for the opportunity to represent the United States. "Listen, when you put guys in that situation and you have your country on your chest and you're representing more than you normally do, I think there's not only a lot of pride that comes with it, but yeah, I think there's going to be a ton of competitiveness," Eichel says. "We all want to win right? We want to be the champions of that tournament. We're going there to win."

Bruins captain Brad Marchand, who will represent Canada, expects the tournament to be as intense as past Olympic clashes.

"Guys are going to be out for blood. We're not out there as an exhibition match," he says. "It doesn't matter how quick it gets thrown together, or who's involved — when you put that Canada jersey on or U.S., whatever it is, you're going to leave it all on the ice."

## ESPN / Ranking the top 32 prospects for the 2025 NHL draft

By Rachel Doerrie- February 8, 2025

### Reactions

The dog days of the season are upon us and it's time for the first edition of the 2025 NHL draft rankings. Like last season, the first edition of the rankings are solely based on outputs from the draft model. There are no adjustments made for scouting, inputs from NHL scouts or executives and any other anecdotal information.

There were some changes made to the model from last season, as the model strives to consistently improve. The model weighs scoring statistics from the current season and the past season, league strength, team strength relative to league, tracking statistics (defensive, physical and transition play), age, size and injuries. The model weights changed, with less weight on the players' size and more weight on their tracking statistics, league strength and scoring statistics. The model factors for injuries, only in the number of games played as a function of the projection volatility. Matthew Schaefer and Roger McQueen have more volatile projections than Michael Misa and Porter Martone because they have missed significant time, leading to a smaller sample size.

Each player is projected in a category, with a confidence factor of how likely they are to reach that category. The most likely outcome becomes the category, which is combined with the confidence factor for a rating. Players are ranked based on their rating, which is the first edition of this year's rankings.

The forward categories are: elite player, top-line forward, top-six forward, impact forward, middle-six forward, bottom-six forward and NHL player.

The defensemen categories are: top-pair defenseman, top-four defenseman, impact defenseman and NHL defenseman.

The goaltender categories are: starting goaltender, platoon starter, backup goaltender and NHL goaltender.

Impact forwards and defensemen are players who are not consistently expected to play top-six or top-four minutes but are capable of stepping into those roles and performing admirably. Current NHL examples are Evan Rodrigues and Ivan Provorov.

There are players projected in higher categories that rank lower because the confidence factor is significantly less than players above them. For example, Cameron Schmidt is projected to be a top-six forward, with less than 50% confidence factor. Malcolm Spence is projected to be an impact forward with a more than 70% confidence factor. When combined, Spence's rating is higher than Schmidt's. This type of projection occurs mostly for players with high upside, but one or two of the model inputs fall below NHL range.

The first edition is to serve as a foundation to build the final rankings off, ensuring players are in the appropriate range regardless of industry opinion or scouting bias. The next edition of these rankings will account for scouting and industry opinion and with the wide-open nature of this particular class, there is sure to be some movement.

## Sportsnet.ca / Real Kyper's Trade Board 3.0: Setting up for a memorable deadline

By Nick Kypreos- February 8, 2025

Here's a new one I've never experienced in 25 years that I've covered the NHL trade deadline for Sportsnet: A player who gets traded and doesn't come off the trade board.

That's exactly where I'm telling you we're at with star winger Mikko Rantanen. Presently on his second NHL team in Carolina after Colorado moved him on Jan. 25, don't sleep on this guy moving yet again on what may be one of the more memorable NHL trade deadlines in recent history.

With Rantanen and J.T. Miller already in different uniforms, we are currently experiencing a pro sports trade world that's getting more and more unpredictable by the day -- and this goes beyond the NHL. Just over the weekend we saw a blockbuster trade in the NBA that sent megastar Luka Doncic to Los Angeles. If these game-changing deals involving massive contract implications have done anything so far, it's caused every pro team to take another look in the mirror when it comes to re-evaluating their top assets.

All together, this just may end up being one of the most memorable pro sports trading seasons we've ever seen. And that's why we won't take too many players off my latest NHL trade board going into the 4 Nations break next week.

Despite so many teams still in a playoff hunt we've learned that some teams are starting to run out of patience. That includes Seattle's Ron Francis, who's constantly getting calls about his defencemen, and St. Louis' Doug Armstrong, who's thinking about accumulating more young assets for when Alex Steen takes over the GM job in 2026. We hear that multiple Blues players could be moved if Armstrong feels the time and offers are right to pull the chute this season.

In Vancouver we don't expect to hear Elias Pettersson's name in play for now, so he'll come off the board this time. But he is far from safe until his no-move clause clicks in July 1. I won't hesitate to put him back on if his consistency struggles continue long after Miller is gone.

As the 4 Nations Face-Off begins next week, let's keep in mind that there isn't a trade freeze, despite pressure to not upstage Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews and a huge event for the league.

Given what we've seen across the landscape so far, if a trade did come down during the two-week tournament, how surprised would we really be?

He appeared on last month's trade board and although Mikko Rantanen was dealt to the Carolina Hurricanes, I hear it's not a given that he won't be traded again if Carolina can't get him signed to a long term deal.

Going into the 4 Nations break, it appears Carolina is no closer to signing him than Colorado was. While Carolina is prepared to make offers they think will entice Rantanen to stay, many who are watching closely feel they will fall short at the end. Carolina can't really afford to give up Martin Necas and two draft picks for another guy who walks to UFA, after trading for Jake Guentzel only to have him leave last year.

Carolina owner Tom Dundon doesn't want to get burned that way again, so he's basically got a month to sign him. If that doesn't happen by March 7, look for potential Mikko Rantanen fireworks to start up all over again.

The Bruins have a big decision to make and it may entirely depend on where they sit in the standings as we approach March 7. Right now the team is out of a playoff spot, 11th in the East by points percentage and 13th in the conference by goal differential.

Marchand is still second on the team in goals and points and remains an intriguing name to watch. Until we have a clearer idea of Boston's legitimacy to compete, this situation will remain open-ended. Term remains a question here, with some in the organization believing the 36-year-old should be on a year-to-year contract, while Marchand seeks greater commitment. Not a lot has changed here since the last update, and it doesn't appear contract talks are heating up.

The Panthers will also have a decision to make on Sam Bennett, though unlike Boston their playoff spot is assured. Florida's calculation is different: keep the player as a potential own rental, or recoup assets for him -- possibly to flip in another deal?

For now, it's the status quo on Bennett and it's another situation we're monitoring closely. If the Rantanen trade (another pending UFA) did anything, it gave Florida more to think about through the 4 Nations, where Bennett will be competing with Team Canada.

There is no replacing exactly what Bennett brings in the playoffs and it would be tough to move him with the club eyeing another deep post-season run, but if they get an offer that can help protect a little of the future, they'll explore it.

Still a long shot trade candidate this season, the most important factor in getting a Seth Jones trade completed is figuring out how much of his contract will be retained by the Blackhawks. Jones makes \$9.5 million against the cap and is in only the third year of an eight-year deal that expires after the 2029-30 season.

That's a lot of money for Chicago to hold on to for a long period of time, but with the news last week that the salary cap will rise to \$95.5 million next season, then \$104 million in 2026-27 and \$113.5 million in 2027-28, the burden of retention becomes less significant and this factor could make Jones a more attractive trade asset for the Blackhawks.

Chicago doesn't have to worry about money as much as some other teams, and the most expensive salary years in Jones' deal will have passed by the end of this season. Including signing bonuses, Jones is due to earn \$10.5 million next season, \$8 million in 2026-27, and \$7.5 million for the final three years of this contract.

But, again, this isn't just a salary dump and it would require the Hawks getting a top young asset or two for them to make the deal. But, if Chicago can get off the contract and another team feels it's getting decent value on a reduced AAV for Jones, this could happen. And Jones could use a fresh start.

From everything I've gathered, Chicago has had legitimate talks with the Dallas Stars about Jones. We'll have a better understanding where it leads through the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Just like Seth Jones' contract seemed untradable, Erik Karlsson was in the same boat, but the economic conditions are changing. Retention will also have to come into play here, but Karlsson only has two more years left on his contract compared to Jones' five.

Ottawa as a potential landing spot is intriguing. They're looking to add another top four defenceman and there's some thought to bringing him home again. But it would take a big financial commitment by ownership to do it and management's belief he won't disrupt the growing chemistry led by Jake Sanderson. If those hurdles clear, the Sens would have to make the deal and retention worthwhile for the Penguins, who are seeking young and controllable assets.

Even a four-game winning streak can't turn the Sabres back into playoff hopefuls, and the team will be facing some hard decisions this summer. But first, the trade deadline, where opponents are circling around some of Buffalo's better young players, including Dylan Cozens.

He remains very much out there, with at least half a dozen teams interested in him, if not more than that. Cozens is two years removed from scoring 31 goals and though he's facing the prospect of declining offensive numbers in back-to-back seasons, the 23-year-old (turning 24 on Sunday) still oozes potential.

In the second year of a seven-year contract, Cozens also comes with cost certainty as the salary cap skyrockets to new heights. Plenty of teams are in the market for a young centre who can play on one of the top two lines and, instead of aiming at a rental, teams will be enticed by the fact Cozens is locked in at a \$7.1 million cap hit through the 2029-30 season. If he finds his production from 2022-23 again (31 goals, 68 points) Cozens will become extremely valuable on this contract. Buffalo needs to tread carefully.

A dynamic defenceman on offence, Byram is on track to surpass his career-best totals in goals and points this season -- his 25 even strength points are tied for ninth among all blueliners in the league (along with Erik Karlsson, Victor Hedman and teammate Rasmus Dahlin).

The Sabres acquired Byram just last season from Colorado, sending Casey Mittelstadt the other way and, at the moment, appear to have won that swap. But as Buffalo stares down another massively disappointing and lost season, they'll have to consider many things from here and one of them will be on Byram, who is set to be an RFA this summer.

With three years of RFA eligibility left, Byram could still double his \$3.85 million cap hit on an extension and Buffalo may not be in a position to give him that money unless they free up some room on the back end.

Byram isn't the only Sabres defenceman out there. Mattias Samuelsson, who missed Tuesday's game, is as well. He is signed at a \$4.285 million deal through 2029-30.

The Sabres have a lot on the table to consider, but the feeling is that if they could move Samuelsson, they could turn around and re-sign Byram instead of trading him. It might be a one or the other situation.

Not much has changed on Brock Boeser from the last update and the Canucks aren't in any better shape to keep him as an own-rental for the upcoming playoffs. They're in a battle with Calgary just to get the second wild card right now.

While the J.T. Miller trade means Elias Pettersson comes off our trade board this time as the Canucks give him an opportunity to show he'll thrive in the new environment, there's no indication the team has changed its mind on approaching an \$8 million AAV extension for Boeser. A 40-goal scorer just last season, Boeser has 17 in 47 games in 2024-25 and the Canucks are still far more likely to trade him out rather than keep him on. This team is looking to re-shape itself somewhat.

The Canucks will be considering many things over the next month, and the path they take will be dictated by how everyone on the team responds following the J.T. Miller trade. But if they look to sell more, defenceman Carson Soucy could be available.

A 6-foot-5, 208-pound left shot defenceman, Soucy is a physical player, second on the Canucks in blocked shots, and relied upon for key penalty kill minutes. If you're a playoff team looking for a depth defender on your third pairing, you could do worse than Soucy, who comes with the added value of having one more season left on his contract at a \$3.25 million AAV.



Of course, Vancouver is still in the playoff mix here and, even with the acquisition of Marcus Pettersson and rise of young Elias Pettersson from prospect to the big team's back end, they don't have a ton of great depth at the position. Soucy also has a full no-trade clause this season and will be in complete control. Next season that trade protection is reduced to a 12-team list.

The 29-year-old winger is in the final season of his current contract, but signed a six-year extension in July that will begin in 2025-26. At that time, Buchnevich will switch from the 12-team no-trade clause he currently has, to a full no-trade clause and an \$8 million cap hit.

But the fact is the Blues are eight points out of the playoffs after missing them by six points last season and this lack of growth means GM Doug Armstrong is not a happy camper. He's looking to change up what he can and Buchnevich won't be the only player he considers moving (more on that below).

The fact Buchnevich has a contract perhaps makes him more valuable on the trade market, but though this is a player who can score 30 goals in a season, or approach it, he's notched just 11 goals in 53 games this season. When his new contract kicks in, Buchnevich will be 30 years old.

Armstrong wants to unload an \$8 million salary and while it may be Buchnevich, Jordan Kyrou is out there, too. Making \$8.125 million through 2030-31, Kyrou doesn't have any trade protection yet, but a full no-trade clause will be introduced in July.

Kyrou is a great young player, still just 26. But Armstrong wants to change things up because this team hasn't been good enough to break through. Armstrong made a commitment to give the team to Kyrou and Robert Thomas and it just hasn't worked out.

The Blues are not taking calls on Thomas, but they are on Kyrou. There's a tough decision ahead.

Further on the Blues, a lot of eyes will be on what Armstrong does with his blue line, another area of potential upheaval. Three defencemen -- Justin Faulk, Torey Krug (injured for the season) and Colton Parayko -- are making \$6.5 million against the cap and they all have no-trade clauses. This will make it harder to make something work, but Armstrong is looking at all his options to shake up his roster.

Faulk may be the easiest to convince to waive his no-trade clause because it would give him a chance to play in the Stanley Cup Playoffs again, given he's missed them so often in his career. He reached the post-season once in eight years with Carolina, then in his first three years with St. Louis, but has only been past the first round two times. Faulk has played 38 post-season games in his career and could be looking for more.

Faulk makes \$6.5 million against the cap on a contract that through the 2026-27 season, but what could make this easier for an acquiring team is that Faulk is owed just \$4.5 million in actual salary in the final two years of his deal. Where this could get complicated is where he'd waive for, and how Armstrong and a trade partner could make the salary cap money in, money out work.

If it's not Faulk who moves, it could be Parayko. Between Faulk, Parayko and the injured Krug, though, Rutherford has to find a way to get rid of some of this money either now, or in the summer through any means necessary.

No real indication that Doug Armstrong wants to shock his fan base just yet by trading his captain, but that hasn't stopped multiple teams from calling on Brayden Schenn, particularly the past few weeks.

This name is as intriguing as it gets moving forward. As one NHL scout described to me "this guy is as close to Sam Bennett as there is potentially available."

Despite his age (33), term (three more years at \$6.5 million) and no-trade clause, if the stars align and Armstrong convinces him to move on to a contender, the Blues GM would want a king's ransom for

him. If he gets it, he'll have to weigh out the pros and cons of retaining enough salary to close out any potential deal.

Two years removed from a 65-point breakout season, injuries have slowed Zegras, who has produced at a roughly 40-point pace ever since. Zegras started this season with 10 points in his first 24 games before a knee injury sidelined him for a month and a half. Since returning to the Ducks' lineup on Jan. 21, Zegras has five points in seven games.

Signed for one more season past this one at a \$5.75 million AAV, Zegras will still be an arbitration eligible RFA when his deal expires.

At one time this 23-year-old was a star on the upswing, but with his scoring way down his trade value has sunk too and he hasn't done anything to win over GM Pat Verbeek. The most difficult part of this trade scenario is the Ducks and a partner agreeing on Zegras' worth but, if he does get moved, I don't think he'll bring in what Anaheim had hoped.

Though the Ducks are still asking for a high price to move Gibson, the 31-year-old is giving his potential suitors plenty to think about. Gibson posted a .918 save percentage in January, started February with a 26-save, 2-1 win over the Dallas Stars, and is second among all NHL starting goaltenders in Goals Saved Above Expected Per 60 Minutes Played, according to Money Puck (behind Logan Thompson, ahead of Connor Hellebuyck).

Making \$6.4 million against the salary cap for another two seasons past this one, Gibson has been the topic of trade speculation for years, but as he puts together one of his best seasons in some time, the Ducks may want to take the opportunity to sell high while they can. The most pressing question here is: how big is the buyer market for a goalie?

With \$9.5 million committed to Charlie McAvoy, \$6.5 million committed to Hampus Lindholm and \$5 million to Nikita Zadorov already, all on long-term contracts, the Bruins are heavily invested on the back end already. They'll have a tough call to make on Carlo, a 6-foot-5, 220-pound, right shot, penalty-killing defenceman.

Depending on where the Bruins are at the trade deadline, in the playoffs or chasing from distance, I don't think there's a real future for the team to hold on to Carlo. Of all the blue liners they have, he's the one vulnerable guy, with a \$4.1 million contract that runs another two seasons. Especially if a team like Edmonton can convince Boston or another team to retain some money.

As the Kraken have sunk to 11 points out of the playoffs, the lack of growth following their playoff appearance two years ago has the team thinking about restructuring the lineup and building out its base of prospects and draft picks. There are a few players who could be available here and Jamie Oleksiak is literally the biggest.

Teams are always looking for tough defencemen around this time of year and in Oleksiak you have a 6-foot-7, 252-pound blueliner who isn't even a rental -- he has another year left on his contract with a \$4.6 million AAV.

This player can be had and the Kraken would love to get a first-rounder back for him, but we're not sure if they can get it. He leads the Kraken in shot blocks and is a big part of their penalty kill.

A pending UFA, Brandon Tanev is a physical shot blocking forward and a key part of Seattle's penalty killing unit. His playoff style of game will be attractive to many teams and though the Kraken value him, the fact he's on an expiring contract makes him a likely trade rental candidate as the team tries to bring in some future assets.

With Nick Cousins' sandpaper element out of Ottawa's lineup for another month or two due to a knee injury, they're a team that could be looking at Tanev. The Senators sit fourth in the Atlantic Division right now, right on the heels of the rival Toronto Maple Leafs and Tampa Bay Lightning, and have to start thinking about what they need to add to make themselves a tougher playoff out.

A sports hernia has Gourde on the shelf for five to seven weeks, which means he could still be injured when the March 7 trade deadline arrives. There was a long list of suitors for him, and still some interested teams, but this injury means the player now comes with much more risk.

What's enticing about Gourde, however, is that when healthy he's a great third line centre for a playoff team to have. He's won two Stanley Cups, can kill penalties and is a feisty type of player.

Making \$5.1 million for another two seasons past this one, Rasmus Ristolainen is a big, right shot, penalty killing defenceman who throws his weight around and having a bit of a bounce back season. And if that cap hit is a bit rich for you at first glance, a reminder that the quickly rising salary cap makes that rate less of a concern as Ristolainen gets into his 30s.

The Flyers were still in the playoff race when the last trade board went up, and if they managed to stay in the thick of it until March 7, Philadelphia may have changed course from being a seller. But, 3-6-1 in their past 10, the Flyers are tied with the Penguins, now eight points out of the playoffs, making any climb back up a difficult task.

Not much has changed on Laughton from the last update. His name has been out there for a year, but the Flyers aren't in a rush to move off him. Laughton is valued by coach John Tortorella, well-liked in the dressing room, and has one season left on his contract paying \$3 million against the cap.

The asking price is high for the player, with a first-round pick plus the starting point. Perhaps that's too rich for the market, but third-line centres with term are valuable commodities around the deadline.

A lot of teams like Ryan Donato, and why not? He's a sneaky good player who can come in and play anywhere in your lineup.

The 28-year-old is having a great year, already matching his career best in goals (16) and surpassing his career high in points (32). He also leads the entire Hawks team in even strength points.

However, he's a pending UFA and what he would offer a playoff club may give the Hawks a good return. And besides, the Blackhawks may be in a better position to give his minutes to a younger player next season.

The real prize for Philadelphia in their trade with Calgary last week were Jakob Pelletier and the two draft picks (a second and a seventh), but Andrei Kuzmenko is not the greatest fit for the team and it's not likely they have a whole lot of use for him.

That 39-goal season is a distant memory now and the fact is the Flyers are likely to quickly flip Kuzmenko ahead of the trade deadline.

An 8-2-0 run has the Islanders back in the thick of the playoff race, just four points out of the second wild card spot. With Columbus getting slammed with injuries and Boston just trying to hang on ahead of them, the Islanders may feel they're in a good position to stay in it to and through the trade deadline. Of course, the concern in New York right now is Matt Barzal's injury and what that does to their top-six.

Right now, the sense is that Brock Nelson is less likely to move than he was before since the Islanders have reestablished themselves as a competitor. But there is still lots of time between now and the March 7 trade deadline, so if the team slumps again, the chances he gets moved will go up again. If the Islanders do look to make a trade, Nelson is the player who would return the most value.

There is a lot of news around Matt Barzal having a very bad knee injury so, at some point, you have to think somebody's going to get the bad news across to Lou Lamoriello that this team is just not going to be a threat and needs to move some pieces out to prepare for the future.

Pageau, with one more season left at a \$5 million AAV, can come in and be a really good depth player for some team. He's physical, kills penalties and has won over 58 per cent of his face-offs this season. His 10 goals and 26 points in 50 games can't be overlooked either.

Still at the bottom of the league with the NHL's worst goal differential, the Sharks may have some exciting individual young players on the roster, but the rebuild is still in the early stages. That's the reality the team faces when it considers trading Mario Ferraro or not.

With the Sharks, Ferraro is top three in hits and blocked shots, gets plenty of penalty kill time and averages over 20 minutes of ice time a game. He's an important player to their back end who is still young enough at 26 to be part of the team when it eventually comes out of the rebuilding phase it's in. He also has one more season left on his contract with a \$3.25 million cap hit.

Will the Sharks look to move him now, before he's a rental candidate, and maximize their return? Teams will love what he has to offer and the contract value he brings. But the same reasons he'll be attractive to potential suitors are what will make San Jose think long and hard about moving him at all.

We said it from the first trade board in December: while the Blue Jackets say they'd like to re-sign Mathieu Olivier -- and that may yet happen -- until he's signed an extension he will remain on our trade board because of the value he'd bring to an acquiring team as a rental and how many suitors there will be for him.

Olivier has slowed in his goal production from earlier this season and hasn't scored any since Jan. 4, posting just two assists in that time. But if you're looking at this player it's not for his offence. Olivier is third in the NHL in hits and tied for fourth in blocked shots among all forwards across the league. The soon-to-be 28-year-old brings an in-your-face style that will translate well into the playoffs. That alone will create a market for his services.

Another big hitter and physical forward from Columbus, Sean Kuraly could be had. With an expiring contract at a \$2.5 million AAV and a 10-team no-trade list, he's five years older than Olivier and has more playoff experience.

Kuraly hasn't seen playoff action since his days with the Bruins, but he always showed up in the post-season across five years with Boston. A big body at 6-foot-2, he was a reason for the success the Bruins found and there will be teams looking to bring that into their fold.

Columbus has been one of the best stories in the league this season and if they stay in the playoff race they'll have to think hard about how to approach trades. But with Kirill Marchenko going out indefinitely with a broken jaw, if the team starts faltering from here, they'll certainly look to sell off pieces and Kuraly would likely be one.

Already just two points and two goals short of career highs in those categories, the 28-year-old centre may be pricing himself out of town as it doesn't look like Montreal will be able to keep him before he hits free agency this summer.

Evans will be in that same sort of Sean Kuraly zone -- a depth guy who can kill penalties and play with edge. Evans has won 52 per cent of his face-offs this season as well.

Teams will definitely come calling on this player.

Crouse isn't having his best offensive season, with eight goals and 12 points in 53 games, but he is a unique kind of player. There aren't many players like him who can skate on the penalty kill and power play, score 20-ish goals -- a mark he reached each of the past three seasons -- and are locked in at a reasonable number. Crouse is signed for another two seasons at \$4.3 million.

He's not Tom Wilson, but Crouse is an impactful physical player and is second on Utah with 111 hits. It would take a really good offer to get him, but teams are trying. He doesn't have any trade protections in his contract, so a team like the Winnipeg Jets would be wide open to get him.

Playoff teams are always looking for centres around the trade deadline and Alexander Kerfoot will get more attention than people give him credit for, even in the midst of a 16-point season in 56 games. Given that, and the fact he's on an expiring contract (\$3.5 million AAV), he also wouldn't be all that expensive to acquire. Utah had been hoping to be in the playoff race and act as a buyer this trade deadline, but now six points out they may have to consider other options.

I believe Utah would be willing to part with Kerfoot if they can pick up a prospect or even a decent draft pick for him, giving them more ammunition to potentially acquire players in the summer. But Kerfoot is a good depth player and capable of killing penalties.

For teams that are perhaps looking to bring in a bigger centre than Kerfoot, 6-foot-5 Nick Bjugstad could be available from Utah. He's also having a down season in production, with five goals and 14 points in 45 games, but is much more physically engaging than Kerfoot and is one of Utah's leading hitters.