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Columbus Dispatch / Tampa Bay Lightning strike often to end Columbus Blue Jackets' win streak at four games

By Brian Hedger – March 5, 2025

The good vibes from the Blue Jackets' outdoor victory Saturday at Ohio Stadium didn't carry into the start of a daunting road trip in Tampa, Florida.

The Tampa Bay Lightning brought the Blue Jackets crashing back to earth despite two more goals for Zach Werenski, ending a four-game winning streak for Columbus with a 6-2 victory at Amalie Arena.

Mitchell Chaffee tipped a shot past Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins 30 seconds into the game to open the scoring, Nikita Kucherov followed 1:07 later with a breakaway goal to make it 2-0 and the Lightning (36-21-4) added two goals in the second and two more in the third. Victor Hedman and Jake Guentzel each scored two goals and added an assist for three-point games, while Kucherov added three points on a goal and two assists.

The Blue Jackets (30-23-8) retained the first wild card in the NHL's Eastern Conference with 68 points thanks to the Detroit Red Wings — whom they defeated Saturday — losing 2-1 to the Carolina Panthers at Little Caesar's Arena. The Red Wings (30-25-6) have 66 points to hold the East's second wild-card spot over the New York Rangers (31-26-4, 66 points) via tiebreaker, while the Ottawa Senators and Montreal Canadiens each have 65.

Werenski's goals were his 19th and 20th of the season. It's the second 20-goal season of his career and first since setting the Jackets' single-season record for goals by a defenseman in 2019-20. Werenski also pulled within two goals of tying Colorado Avalanche defenseman Cale Makar for most goals among NHL defensemen, but his individual performance wasn't nearly enough.

The Blue Jackets outshot 40-33 by the Lightning, including 18-8 in the second, and Mathieu Olivier's three penalties in one scrum that period — two roughing minors plus a 10-minute misconduct — made the night even more challenging. Next up is an even tougher matchup Thursday in Sunrise, Florida, where the Jackets will face the defending Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' victory in NHL Stadium Series was a smash hit for ESPN viewership

By Brian Hedger – March 5, 2025

Sorely lacking national exposure, the Blue Jackets needed their first outdoor game to be a TV ratings home run during the 2025 NHL Stadium Series at Ohio Stadium.

Well, the puck cleared the outfield wall and continued to climb Saturday at Ohio State's frozen Horseshoe despite a delayed evening start for ESPN's main channel to air the conclusion of an SEC college basketball game before the Jackets' 5-3 victory over the Detroit Red Wings in frigid, windy conditions.

A game that drew the second-largest crowd to ever attend an NHL game at 94,751 strong also set ratings records, including a viewership of 1.6 million that peaked at 1.8 million and was the most-viewed regular season game since ESPN re-acquired NHL broadcasting rights in 2021.

The game was also the most viewed cable broadcast of an NHL Stadium Series matchup, which are outdoor extravaganzas usually held a couple months after the NHL's outdoor Winter Classics are played on or around New Year's Day.

The Blue Jackets' triumph over the Red Wings, which included a theme of honoring Johnny Gaudreau and his family, was also the most watched Stadium Series matchup since 2019 regardless of broadcast platform and drew a 16% higher viewership than two 2024 Stadium Series games that were each televised by ABC rather ESPN.

In other words, it was a ratings grand slam.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets activate Yegor Chinakhov, place Cole Sillinger on injured reserve

By Brian Hedger – March 5, 2025

The Blue Jackets activated forward Yegor Chinakhov from injured reserve and he will play Tuesday night at the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Cole Sillinger, who missed Saturday's NHL Stadium Series outdoor game with an upper-body injury, was placed on IR to create a roster spot. Chinakhov missed 39 games with an unspecified back injury after contributing seven goals, seven assists and 14 points in the season's first 21 games.

Chinakhov will skate at left wing on a second line that has captain Boone Jenner at center and Kent Johnson at right wing. James van Riemsdyk, who played left wing for that line the past three games, will shift to the same side on center Sean Kuraly's fourth line.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets nearing multiyear extension with Mathieu Olivier

By Brian Hedger – March 5 , 2025

Mathieu Olivier likely won't hit the open market as a free agent.

Don Waddell, the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager, said Tuesday that he's "working on the final details" of a multiyear contract extension to keep the power forward in Columbus. Olivier, 28, has played right wing on the third line for the majority of this season, setting career highs offensively and bolstering his reputation as one of the NHL's toughest fighters.

After scoring two goals in the past three games, including one Saturday in a victory over the Detroit Red Wings, Olivier has 12 goals, nine assists, 21 points and a -6 plus/minus rating through 60 games. His previous career highs were five goals each of the past two years plus 10 assists and 15 points in 2022-23 – his first year after being acquired from the Nashville Predators on June 30, 2022, for a fourth-round pick in that year's draft.

Olivier has also served 99 penalty minutes, which ranks third in the NHL, and leads the leagues in fights (11) and hits (228). He has also filled a key leadership role after the tragic loss of Johnny Gaudreau in the offseason and shoulder surgeries that sidelined captain Boone Jenner and defenseman Erik Gudbranson in October.

Olivier had become a target for contending GMs with Friday's 3 p.m. trade deadline approaching, but the Blue Jackets are also contending. They've surged into the Eastern Conference's first wild-card spot with a four-game winning streak after the NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off and remain there with 68 points prior to facing the Tampa Bay Lightning on the road Tuesday night.

Olivier said Monday he was keeping a "day-to-day" mindset about his situation. He made it clear, however, that he wants to stay with the Blue Jackets beyond the deadline and this season.

"I love Columbus and my family loves Columbus," Olivier said. "Everything about it works well with our family and our values. The way the organization is, the direction it's going, the guys we have in this room, what we're building ... I take a lot of pride in that, and I want to see this through with the guys in here. So, there's nothing I'd like more."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets seek trade deadline help, but GM Don Waddell won't disrupt the mix

By Aaron Portzline – March 5, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Columbus Blue Jackets were still aglow on Monday, even as they got back to work in Nationwide Arena. On Saturday, they played in the NHL's Stadium Series outdoor game in Ohio Stadium, then spent most of Sunday sharing highlights and stories with family and friends.

Blue Jackets forward Justin Danforth, who scored the go-ahead goal late in the third period of a 5-3 win over the Detroit Red Wings, said he still had unanswered text messages from all over the hockey world that he needed to return.

"I had expectations, but it blew them away," Danforth said. "That's the most fun I've had playing hockey in my career. The city will never forget it. We'll never forget it."

And yet that's what has to happen now. The NHL calendar dictates it.

After Monday's practice, the Blue Jackets flew to Tampa in advance of Tuesday's game vs. the Lightning, the start of a four-game road trip which will continue against the Florida Panthers, New York Rangers and New Jersey Devils.

Tucked into the middle of the trip, on Friday, is the NHL trade deadline, Don Waddell's first as Blue Jackets general manager.

There may be big moves across the league on Friday, but the Blue Jackets are expected to be only moderate players. As he's been saying for weeks, Waddell is hoping to add a second- or third-line forward, but he's not going to trade a first-round pick or a top prospect to do it.

Waddell's pursuit of a forward has actually been dialed back from the aggressiveness he displayed before the 4 Nations Face-Off break, due mostly to the fact that leading goal-scorer Kirill Marchenko — who suffered a broken jaw just before the break — has been able to return sooner than expected.

The Blue Jackets had extensive talks with the Nashville Predators regarding winger Gustav Nyquist, but couldn't swing a deal. He was traded to the Minnesota Wild on Saturday for a 2026 second-round pick.

The greater intrigue for the Blue Jackets between now and Friday may be how they handle their own pending unrestricted free agents.

As reported by The Athletic on Monday, the Blue Jackets are close to signing tough winger Mathieu Olivier to a long-term contract extension. Olivier, a pending unrestricted free agent, has emerged as perhaps the NHL's top fighter, as well as a leader and a secondary scorer (12 goals) for Columbus this season.

But talks with veteran defenseman Ivan Provorov, also a UFA this summer, have not come close to a deal, Waddell said.

For Provorov, 29, this is his first crack at unrestricted free agency, maybe his best chance to land a seven- or eight-year contract that could set him up for the rest of his career. The Blue Jackets like having Provorov in their lineup, Waddell said, but they aren't prepared to commit to that length of term.

Waddell and Provorov's agent, Mark Gandler, are expected to talk again on Tuesday.

"We have done a lot of deals together, and we have a really good relationship," Waddell said. "We just have a difference of opinion about what the market's going to be like this summer."

"I understand that the player has played his whole career to get to this point, and there aren't going to be a lot of veteran defensemen on the market this summer. I also know the salary cap is going up. The agent is doing his job, and I understand it. I have no grudges. We'll continue to talk."

Should Provorov remain unsigned by Friday, it's still possible — likely, even — that Waddell will decide to hold onto him for the stretch drive, even with the risk that he signs elsewhere this summer with no compensation to the Blue Jackets.

The Jackets have played their way, against all expectations, into a playoff race for the first time in five seasons. Heading into play on Tuesday, the Jackets hold the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference, trailing New Jersey by only four points for third in the Metropolitan Division.

There's an emotional pull here, too, Waddell acknowledged.

The Blue Jackets have become one of the best stories in the NHL, perhaps in all of sports, in part because of the way they came together to honor the life and legacy of Johnny Gaudreau, who was killed in a tragic accident shortly before training camp.

There's also a budding love affair between the Blue Jackets' fans and this club, as seen by the recent sellouts in Nationwide Arena and the massive turnout — nearly 95,000 — for Saturday's outdoor game, the second-largest attendance in NHL history.

The last thing Waddell wants to do is trade veteran players. This group of players deserves a chance to stay together for a possible playoff run, Waddell said, and the fans deserve it, too.

"There are decisions that will have to be made (when other teams make trade offers this week), but this team has been through a lot this year," Waddell told The Athletic. "This is an abnormal year for me at the deadline.

"To pull one of your top defensemen (Provorov) out of the lineup at this time of year, without a replacement, that would not be a decision that's welcomed by anybody. If we were out of it, like some people thought we were going to be, it'd be a different story.

"I'm looking at it from every possible way, and I have great support from ownership, so we'll see how the next couple of days go."

That approach extends beyond Provorov, too. The Blue Jackets have several other pending UFAs: forwards Sean Kuraly, James van Riemsdyk and Danforth, and defensemen Dante Fabbro and Jack Johnson.

"Just to send guys away for mid-round picks doesn't make a lot of sense," Waddell said. "These guys have done it all year for us in a tough situation, so sticking with this group ... I have no problem with that."

There's something else at play here, too.

The Blue Jackets have been buoyed this year by the dramatic growth from its clutch of young, talented forwards such as Adam Fantilli, Kent Johnson, Kirill Marchenko, Dmitri Voronkov and Cole Sillinger.

Waddell does not want to significantly reshuffle the forward corps because he thinks it's important for those young players, who have already learned so much this season, to get a taste of how difficult the playoffs are, if the Blue Jackets are fortunate enough to make them.

"Right now, every game matters so much that they're almost like playoff games," Waddell said. "It's so tight. And it's going to be tight. We have a tough trip with four in a row. This (tight race) is going to go through March and into April. We just hope we can stay in the mix."

The Blue Jackets got good news on the injury front on Monday when winger Yegor Chinakhov, who has been out since late November, took part in a full practice and took line rushes with the second line, next to center Boone Jenner and right winger Johnson.

It marked the first time Chinakhov, saddled with a nagging lower-back injury, has made it through a full practice. If he awakens today without pain, he'll be activated from injured reserve and go into the lineup against the Lightning, Waddell said.

As for the other injured players, it's going to be a while.

Sillinger suffered a shoulder injury last Thursday in the Blue Jackets' 5-2 win in Detroit. He's likely to miss most of March, Waddell said.

"We know he doesn't need surgery. We've had that confirmed," Waddell said. "It's just a matter of rehabbing the shoulder, which is very sore and swollen. It's gonna be a few weeks."

Center Sean Monahan (wrist surgery) and defenseman Erik Gudbranson (shoulder surgery) have both been skating for weeks, but are still healing. Waddell said Monahan could be back in late March, but Gudbranson has been set for a return sometime in April since he had surgery.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets' groggy start costs them dearly in lopsided loss to Lightning

By Aaron Portzline – March 5, 2025

TAMPA, Fla. — It only makes sense that the Columbus Blue Jackets suffered a letdown.

The buildup to Saturday's NHL Stadium Series was massive, and the atmosphere and emotions coming out of the Blue Jackets win in Ohio Stadium were overwhelming. At least that's how players and coaches described it over the last 48 hours.

The Blue Jackets returned to reality Tuesday, and the Tampa Bay Lightning delivered a hard, cold slap in the form of a 6-2 win before 19,092 in Amalie Arena. The Lightning scored on their first two shots of the game, before Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason had made a third line change.

"Did we try to do everything to not have a hangover? Yeah," Evason said. "Were we worried about it? No. It happened, obviously.

"They score those two goals. It sucked, obviously, but we hung in there. We made it 2-1 (later in the first period), and we thought we were going to gather. That's a real good team with a lot of energy. Maybe we did have a hangover, but we can't make an excuse. We should have been better. We should have started better. We didn't."

The loss snaps a four-game winning streak by the Blue Jackets, including a rousing 5-3 win over the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday before nearly 95,000 fans, the second-largest crowd to ever watch the NHL game.

When the Blue Jackets returned to practice on Monday, players and coaches talked about how mentally and physically fried they were during an off day on Sunday. Only six players in the Blue Jackets' lineup on Saturday had played in an outdoor game, a unique experience.

Some hangovers last multiple days.

The Lightning went ahead 1-0 only 30 seconds into the game when Mitchell Chaffee redirected a shot a few feet in front of Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins. Only 1:07 later, Tampa Bay's most lethal offensive player snuck behind rookie defenseman Denton Mateychuk for a breakaway.

Two shots, two goals. It marked the fifth time in Merzlikins' career that he's allowed goals on the first two shots, but neither could be hung on him this time.

When the Blue Jackets and Lightning met for the first time this season on November 21 in Nationwide Arena, the Jackets fell behind 3-0 in the first period but came roaring back to win 7-6 in overtime. But that's not a proper game plan.

"When you start down 2-0, it's tough to come back from," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "I know we're capable of it, but you don't want to start the game that way, especially right now when you're fighting for points (in the standings) and teams are fighting for positioning in the playoffs.

"They have some players who can make you pay, and they did that tonight. We're in a spot now where we can't dwell on it."

Despite the loss, the Blue Jackets held on to the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. The New Jersey Devils and Detroit Red Wings lost, so Columbus remains four points behind the Devils for third

place in the Metropolitan Division and two points ahead of Detroit and the New York Rangers in the wild-card race.

Werenski scored both goals for the Blue Jackets, giving him 20 on the season, which matches his career high set during the 2019-20 season.

At 17:20 of the first, Werenski skated the puck out of his own zone and found very little resistance, carrying it through the left circle and beating Lightning goaltender Jonas Johansson to the far post. That pulled the Jackets to within 2-1 and sent them into the first intermission feeling OK.

But the Lightning's Jake Guentzel made it 3-1 only 1:37 into the second when he redirected a puck past Merzlikins while standing right in his kitchen. It was 4-1 at 6:36 of the second after Victor Hedman's wrist shot deflected off Yegor Chinakhov and sailed past Merzlikins.

There was a brief flicker of life when the Blue Jackets scored a short-handed goal to make it 4-2. Werenski made a break to the net front and got his stick on a perfect pass from Adam Fantilli, giving Werenski his second short-handed goal in 546 career games.

But that was it. Hedman scored again in the third, and so did Guentzel. It was an empty net by Guentzel, but him scoring against Columbus is nothing new. He now owns a 15-game point streak against the Blue Jackets, one that dates back to his days with the Pittsburgh Penguins and Carolina Hurricanes. He has 9-13-22 in those 15 games.

It's tied for the second-longest point streak by one player against a single opponent. The only player with a longer streak is Leon Draisaitl, who has a point in 22 straight against Chicago.

Werenski acknowledged last month that it was difficult to get back into an NHL rhythm after he returned from playing for Team USA at the 4 Nations Face-Off. For other players in the room, Tuesday's game may have had a similar feel.

"It definitely feels a little bit different when you're walking out for warm-ups and the start of the game and your energy isn't quite the same," Werenski said. "It's not an excuse. We're in a spot where we can't let that be an excuse.

"Once the puck drops, no matter what you have to do to get into the mindset to win a hockey game, you have to do it. Maybe we were a little slow at the start, down 2-0 and then 4-1. I don't think there's any excuses. Even if it did affect some guys, you have to simplify your game, or take shorter shifts, or block shots ... whatever it takes, you have to find a way to impact the team the right way."

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets working the 'edges' of NHL trade market with deadline looming

By Brian Hedger – March 6, 2025

The NHL's 3 p.m. Friday trade deadline is fast approaching, and the Blue Jackets have given their front office an interesting situation to manage.

Their climb from the bottom of the NHL into legitimate playoff contention despite the loss of Johnny Gaudreau and multiple key injuries has taken the league by surprise. Don Waddell, who took over as the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager in May, is no exception.

He said he has waited for the other shoe to drop all season but that his upstart team keeps finding ways to stay afloat in the postseason hunt. The Blue Jackets still have eight unrestricted free agents left after signing Mathieu Olivier to a six-year deal Wednesday, but Waddell said he isn't looking to ship out "rental" players for draft picks or prospects just to avoid losing them for nothing as free agents.

He was quick to reply when asked if there's any pressure to trade his pending UFAs.

"No, not at all," Waddell said. "Not at this point. We have lots of lots of assets and ... it's a little different year than normal, but if I rip a guy out of this locker room right now (who's) playing a role for us on this hockey club, I think that's pretty devastating to our team. I think it's the wrong message from my end. I think it's the wrong message to our fans, the coaches and the players."

So don't expect to see any significant Blue Jackets "rentals" on the move for draft picks and/or prospects. Swaps that GMs call "hockey trades" are what the Blue Jackets hope to complete, sending out established NHL talent in trades that return useful NHL players to Columbus.

Ivan Provorov, a stout two-way defenseman in his prime, is a great example. The Blue Jackets could probably get a first-round pick or more by trading the pending UFA, but that would create a void where he usually plays on the second pairing. Damon Severson, who shoots right-handed, could be a natural fit in that role, but that would leave the Jackets' third pairing with three lefties in a mix that includes veteran Jack Johnson, Jake Christiansen and Jordan Harris.

Erik Gudbranson, who usually plays the right side on the third pairing, is recovering from October shoulder surgery and might not be ready until April. Should Waddell trade Provorov, who will likely seek a long-term contract and significant pay boost as a free agent, he'll want a useful NHL player in return who has time left on his deal beyond this season.

"We're exploring as many of those (trade ideas) as we can," Waddell said. "We've got another 48 hours ... to try to come up with something that we feel good about."

Waddell said the Blue Jackets also aren't in the market for parting with valuable draft capital or prospects to acquire rental help for this season.

"If we can add around the edges, certainly we're going to try that," he said. "The other thing, though, most importantly is (culture fit). We want to bring in the best players we can, but we've also got to make sure we know their character and know how they're going to be in the locker room."

As for keeping additional UFAs with extensions, don't expect any new announcements until the season ends.

"This group has been remarkable all season with how, regardless of the adversity that's been thrown at us, they've stuck together, which I'm very proud of," Waddell said. "Instead of getting into negotiations,

sometimes where there's not a good ending, I think it might be better (to wait), and I've told agents this. Let's just wait until the end of the season. If players want to stay here and we can find a compromise between salary and term, we will keep them."

In the meantime, Waddell and his staff will keep working the "edges" of the trade market until the deadline passes.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets sign Mathieu Olivier to 6-year contract extension

By Brian Hedger – March 6, 2025

Mathieu Olivier isn't going anywhere.

Despite interest from multiple teams with Friday's 3 p.m. trade deadline approaching, the Blue Jackets power forward is no longer on the "rental" market and won't be exploring free agency July 1, agreeing to a six-year contract extension Wednesday worth \$18 million and \$3 million in annual value that will count toward the NHL's salary cap.

"It's security," Olivier said. "I have a family. We don't have careers that go into our 50s and 60s, so we have to make the most out of the time we have playing hockey. For me, being a father and a family man, that's something that was really important to me."

Staying in Columbus to help the Blue Jackets become a consistent playoff contender was another factor.

"That was part of my intention, as well, for wanting to stay here is I believe in what we're doing," Olivier said. "I started out a couple years ago and went through the trenches with these guys, and now it's starting to pay off — and to me, that's something that's really important. That's something that's very cherished, personally, but also as a team."

Olivier, 28, has played right wing on the third and fourth forward lines during three seasons in Columbus and has spent the majority of this season on the third line, setting career highs offensively while bolstering his reputation as one of the league's toughest customers.

"He's been one of our key guys who's led us through this charge (into a wild-card spot), and I've gotten to know him over the year," Blue Jackets president of hockey operations/general manager Don Waddell said. "I know I got a lot of (trade) calls on him, so I knew if this went to free agency, he would be in demand. Everybody's looking for these type of players for the most part, so we just felt that we're comfortable with the term and the AAV, and we're very happy to have him for six years."

After scoring two goals in the past four games, including his 12th of the season in the Jackets' win Saturday night at Ohio Stadium, Olivier has 12 goals, nine assists and 21 points in 61 games. His previous career highs were five goals for the Blue Jackets the past two seasons plus 10 assists and 15 points in 2022-23, Olivier's first season in Columbus.

"I think numbers are tricky because there's guys that play well and it's just not going in for them or sometimes you're not playing great and it keeps going in for you, right?" Olivier said. "It's so tricky to manage that. I think the big thing for me is the way that I'm getting those goals this year is by playing the way I play every night. They're not always pretty, but the end game is to get the job done and to contribute, and that's going to be my focus and the way that I look at things from now on."

Olivier was acquired for a 2022 fourth round pick in a June 30, 2022 trade with the Nashville Predators. It turned into a great deal for the Blue Jackets, but that wasn't always how it looked. Olivier was limited to 66 games in 2022-23 due to a broken leg that ended his first season with the Blue Jackets prematurely, and the injury lapsed into the start of last season (2023-24).

Olivier's ice time and role became sporadic under former coach Pascal Vincent, and he watched quite a few games as a healthy scratch. Playing this season for new coach Dean Evason and assistant Scott Ford,

who knew Olivier from their time together with AHL Milwaukee in the Predators' system, the stout forward capitalized on his new opportunity to earn a bigger role.

Olivier's average ice time has increased by more than three minutes, contributing to his offensive bumps, and he leads the league in fighting majors (11) while ranking second in penalty minutes (113) and hits (232).

"He's our most physical player," Waddell said. "I know one thing. We don't get pushed around at all. We have a few smaller guys and we're not overly physical. Guys play hard, but Mathieu certainly has stepped up when the time is needed. As the season progresses and that, he probably doesn't have as many fights as some people think he should have, because nobody wants to fight him. Let's face it. He's, if not the (top) heavyweight of the league, he's right up there."

That includes 14 minutes of penalties during one post-whistle altercation Tuesday in a 6-2 loss at the Tampa Bay Lightning. Olivier also kills penalties, protects late leads and fills a leadership role in the locker room, which made him a popular topic of trade interest for GMs seeking "rental" players on expiring contracts. The Blue Jackets are also a contender, surprisingly, so they held onto him long-term.

It took a lengthy six-year deal to get a deal done, but Waddell said that was the team's preference to push the annual salary-cap charge to a manageable \$3 million per season. Olivier's initial ask was a minimum of four years, which at the same \$18 million value would've carried a \$4.5 million annual salary-cap hit.

"We just felt that, to bring the (cap hit) down a little bit, we could extend him out to six years," Waddell said. "I talked to Mathieu, not about numbers, but about being here. Certainly, his family loves it. The biggest thing I always want to hear is that he wants to be part of the solution. When you hear those things and you watch his actions, you know he can be part of the solution. We're the ones who extended it out to bring the AAV to a number we were comfortable with, and that's how we got there."

Olivier said Monday he was keeping a "day-to-day" approach to his situation but made it clear he'd like to remain a Blue Jacket. Soon after, Waddell revealed the Blue Jackets were on the verge of re-signing him. All that remained to determine were the length and dollars attached to the Olivier's new deal, which made sense to both sides.

"The first day I got to Columbus, I liked everything about it," Olivier said. "The guys in the room, I liked the city. A couple of guys brought me into the city for an OSU (football) game and that really opened my eyes to a bunch of stuff. Then, it just kept getting better and better as we stayed here. I couldn't be more fortunate than to stick around in a great city like Columbus for some years here."

Columbus Dispatch / Werenski not enough for Columbus Blue Jackets to shake post-outdoor lapse: 5 takeaways

By Brian Hedger – March 6, 2025

It'd been a while since the Blue Jackets were thumped.

Not even their 7-4 loss Jan. 23 to the Carolina Hurricanes fit the description of a blowout, because it went to the third period with the Jackets down by only one. They just don't get blown out much, which is why their 6-2 loss at the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday was a little jarring.

The Blue Jackets (30-23-8) allowed two goals in the first 1:37 of the game — neither the fault of goalie Elvis Merzlikins — and that was the start of a methodical beatdown by the Lightning. Not even two more goals for Blue Jackets star Zach Werenski staved off the dreaded NHL Stadium Series “hangover” that tends to make teams who've just played outdoor games a bit sluggish.

Quick, get the Jackets some aspirin and a big jug of water before they play the Florida Panthers on Thursday in Sunrise, Florida. That one could get ugly, too, if they're not ready.

Here are five takeaways from the Blue Jackets loss in Tampa, which ended a four-game winning streak:

Columbus Blue Jackets still own first wild card in playoff race

Blue Jackets still own 1st wild card

Let's start with a look at the bright side. The Blue Jackets retained the first wild card in the NHL's Eastern Conference with 68 points thanks to the Detroit Red Wings — who also dealt with the Stadium Series hangover — falling, 2-1, Tuesday to the Carolina Panthers.

The Red Wings (30-25-6) stayed at 66 points but still have the East's second wild card over the New York Rangers (31-26-4, 66 points) via tiebreaker. On their heels are the Ottawa Senators and Montreal Canadiens, each with 65 points, followed by the Boston Bruins with 64 in a tightly packed playoff hunt.

Zach Werenski still carrying Columbus Blue Jackets

A handful of Blue Jackets didn't look “hung over” and Werenski led that group with two goals on four shots, eight attempts and a game-high 29:55 ice time.

Scoring 20 goals for the second time in his career to match his own franchise record for goals in a season by a defenseman, Werenski continued boosting his candidacy for the Norris Trophy awarded to the NHL's top defenseman. Werenski would rather get the Blue Jackets back to the playoffs, if forced to choose, but there's no reason he can't accomplish both or more.

Werenski, who led all scorers at the 4 Nations Face-Off with six points on six assists, is hot on the trail of Colorado Avalanche star Cale Makar for most goals and points among NHL defensemen. He trails Makar by only two goals and two points.

Yegor Chinakhov returns from long-term injury rusty

In the NHL's version of “take a penny, leave a penny,” the Blue Jackets welcomed forward Yegor Chinakhov back from an extended stay on injured reserve while placing center Cole Sillinger on IR with a strained shoulder.

Chinakhov skated at left wing on the second line with captain Boone Jenner at center and Kent Johnson on the right. Their secondary numbers together weren't terrible, but Chinakhov needs to shake off some rust after missing 39 games with a back issue.

He finished with two shots on goal in six attempts, three hits, one takeaway and was saddled with a -2 plus/minus while skating just 13:25 on 17 shifts. There's potential for a lot more if Chinakhov can just remain in the lineup long enough for rust removal.

Columbus Blue Jackets' second defensive pair has tough night

Ivan Provorov and Denton Mateychuk, the Blue Jackets' second defensive pair, each finished -3 in plus/minus and were on the ice for the Lightning's first three goals.

Mateychuk, a talented rookie, played key roles in Tampa's second and third goals, which made it 2-0 in the first period and 3-1 in the second. The first teachable moment for Mateychuk was his attempt that sailed wide of the left post, rocketed out to Lightning star Jake Guentzel on the right wing and quickly turned into a breakaway for Nikita Kucherov that made it 2-0.

Mateychuk was too far up the wall when he fired the puck, which prompted Kucherov to exit the defensive zone while anticipating a breakaway pass from Guentzel – who also beat Mateychuk to the right post for Tampa Bay's third goal. Mateychuk has shown impressive flashes of brilliance, but there's a reason that it usually takes at least 200 NHL games before young defensemen make their biggest impact as two-way players.

Adam Fantilli, Kent Johnson extended point streaks

Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson extended individual point streaks to six games with passes that led to Werenski's short-handed goal in the second period. Johnson sent a reverse pass off the wall in the defensive zone that angled the puck to Fantilli, who carried into the Lightning zone with Werenski on a 2-on-1 rush. His pass, a perfect saucer, set Werenski up from the slot to snap a shot past goalie Jonas Johansson.

Fantilli's streak reached a new career high, while Johnson's is two short of his career-high eight – which ended just two games before this one began. Johnson has added at least a point in 14 of the past 15 games, and is third on the team in scoring with 43 points in 47 games (20 goals, 23 assists).

The Athletic / Blue Jackets sign Mathieu Olivier to 6-year extension: Why he stayed in Columbus

By Aaron Portzline – March 6, 2025

TAMPA, Fla. — Earlier this season, when the Columbus Blue Jackets and right winger Mathieu Olivier began negotiating a contract extension, Olivier's initial demand was that any new agreement include a minimum term of four years.

He certainly got his wish.

The Blue Jackets signed Olivier, 28, to a six-year, \$18 million contract on Wednesday that will keep one of the NHL's top fighters in Columbus through the 2030-31 season. The only other Blue Jackets player signed so far into the future is defenseman Damon Severson.

Olivier, who has emerged as much more than a role player for the Blue Jackets this season, cited two reasons why he wants to stick around with one of the surprise clubs in the NHL this season.

First, it's stability. Olivier struggled to find a foothold in the NHL with Nashville in his first four seasons as a pro, but now he has the security that most pro athletes can only dream about. That's especially true for players who play a physical, fighting game like he does.

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

"We don't have careers that go into our 50s and 60s, so we have to make the most of the time we have playing hockey. For me, being a father and a family man, that's something that was really important to me."

The second reason is that Olivier can see what's brewing in Columbus. Like so many other players in the dressing room, he was part of the last two miserable seasons with the Blue Jackets, when it seemed like the organization couldn't get out of its own way.

This season, though, the Blue Jackets' young players have bloomed almost simultaneously, and the veteran players have helped galvanize the group in a way rarely seen in Columbus. The Blue Jackets may or may not make the playoffs this season — they currently hold a wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference — but the future looks bright.

"We're playing meaningful hockey, which was the goal right off the hop," Olivier said. "I feel like (coach) Dean (Evason) coming in brought a new approach to our group, and we've responded really well to it. Everything about what we're doing this year is working and it's going in the right direction.

"It's great for our group ... but also for our fans who have supported us the last two years even being at the bottom of the East, just giving them something to follow and cheer as we play meaningful games here down the stretch."

Olivier's contract carries a 10-team no-trade list in all six years of the deal. The deal will pay him \$4 million next season, \$3.9 million in 2026-27, \$2.9 million in 2027-28 and \$2.4 million in the final three years of the deal. The salary cap hit is \$3 million per season.

The only players who have signed longer-term contracts with the Blue Jackets are Rick Nash, who signed an eight-year deal in 2009, and Nathan Horton (2013), Cam Atkinson (2017) and Johnny Gaudreau (2022), who signed seven-year deals.

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell said at least eight other NHL teams contacted him to see if Olivier would be available at the trade deadline.

“(Mathieu) said right off the bat that he wanted to go at least four years out, and we just felt that, to bring the (cap hit) down a little bit, we could extend him out to six years,” Waddell said.

“It talked with Mathieu, not about the numbers, but about being here. Certainly, his family loves it. The biggest thing I always want to hear is that a guy wants to be part of the solution. When you hear those things and watch his actions, you know he can be part of the solution.”

The Blue Jackets, under previous GM Jarmo Kekäläinen, acquired Olivier from the Nashville Predators in the summer of 2022 for a fourth-round draft pick. He has always been regarded as one of the NHL’s more willing fighters, but he’s elevated his status significantly this season, becoming one of the league’s most-feared fighters.

The rest of his game has elevated, too.

Olivier has never been considered anything other than a fourth-liner until this season, when he’s spent most of the season playing on the Blue Jackets’ third line. Of late, he’s skated with center Justin Danforth and left winger Zach Aston-Reese.

Before this season, Olivier averaged 11:06 in ice time per game in the NHL. But that’s ballooned to 14:25 this season, and the rest of his numbers have followed. He’s already set career highs with 12 goals, 21 points and 113 penalty minutes, which is the second-most in the NHL.

Through Tuesday’s games, there were 10 players in the NHL with 75 or more penalty minutes. The only player with more goals and points is Ottawa’s Brady Tkachuk.

Olivier was asked if this is a career year for him offensively.

“Numbers are tricky because there are guys who are playing well and it’s just not going in for them, and then, sometimes, you’re not playing great and it keeps going in, right?” Olivier said. “It’s tricky to manage that.

“The big thing for me is, the way I’m getting those goals this year is by playing the way that I play every night. They’re not always pretty, but the end game is to get the job done and contribute, and that’s going to be the way I look at things from now on.”

Waddell signaled that it was unlikely any of his other pending unrestricted free agents — forwards Justin Danforth, Sean Kuraly and James van Riemsdyk, and defensemen Dante Fabbro, Ivan Provorov and Jack Johnson — would be signing extensions before Friday’s NHL trade deadline.

The Blue Jackets’ surprising season has Waddell approaching the trade deadline as a moderate buyer. He wants to add a top-nine forward but doesn’t expect to trade any significant players on the roster.

[BlueJackets.com / PREVIEW: Blue Jackets start key road swing at Lightning](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – March 5, 2025

As Saturday turned into Sunday, Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason was still thinking about the Navy Federal Credit Union Stadium Series.

Can you blame him?

After the biggest spectacle in franchise history, one capped perfectly by a 5-3 Blue Jackets win over visiting Detroit in Ohio Stadium, Evason woke up the next morning and wanted to hear more about how the day went for those closest to him.

“Went for breakfast before they all left, family and friends, just to hear their experiences, too, right? Like what did they experience,” Evason said. “Everybody left and my youngest daughter and I, just her and I, it was like, what was your experience like? She was like, this was just incredible. So yeah, we definitely continued to talk all day about it.”

But what’s done is done, and the question now is can the Blue Jackets build off of what happened Saturday night in Ohio Stadium? Not only did Columbus show out with more than 94,000 fans in attendance, the Blue Jackets stayed perfect since the break with their fourth regulation win in a row.

The last two came against a Detroit team with which they are battling for a playoff spot, and the two victories over the Red Wings moved Columbus into the first wild card spot in the Eastern Conference. Before the Stadium Series game happened, CBJ center Sean Kuraly said momentum could be built from it because the game feels like more than just a normal regular-season game, but Evason said that was no guarantee going into tonight’s game at Tampa Bay.

“Maybe, I guess, but no, I have no experience with that,” Evason said after Monday’s practice. “The game is over. Did we reflect on it yesterday, are we going to talk about it? Sure, why not? It was fantastic, but at the end of the day, we need to play tomorrow night in Tampa Bay, and we’ll get ready for that.”

It’s a case of hot team against hot team, as the Blue Jackets have won all four games since the 4 Nations Face-Off break, while Tampa Bay has won nine of its last 11 games. Columbus is also putting the puck in the net with success, as the Blue Jackets have scored at least five goals in four consecutive games, the longest mark in franchise history.

“Obviously since the break, it’s playoffs for us,” forward Mathieu Olivier said. “We’re trying to get in the best position possible to make these playoffs and to finish the year, and since the break, the pace of play has been upped. Obviously, a lot of guys are stepping up.”

Know The Foe: Tampa Bay Lightning

Head coach: Jon Cooper (12th season)

Team stats: Goals per game: 3.52 (2nd) | Scoring defense: 2.63 (5th) | PP: 26.2 percent (5th) | PK: 80.8 percent (10th)

The narrative: The Lightning has made the playoffs in 10 of the last 11 seasons and won the 2020 and ‘21 Stanley Cups, making the squad a true NHL dynasty over more than a decade, but Tampa has made consecutive first-round playoff exits. The offseason departure of franchise icon Steven Stamkos led to an on-the-fly retooling that included the addition of veteran wing Jake Guentzel, and the Bolts are on

course for another playoff appearance. It's still a veteran team with plenty of star power that knows how to win, even if it is a little long in the tooth these days.

Team leaders: Two-time Art Ross Trophy winner Nikita Kucherov is having another great season at age 31, as the Russian wing is tied for third in the NHL with 87 points, including 27 goals. Brandon Hagel is one of the hottest players in the NHL and has a 30-38-68 line on the year and is plus-29, while CBJ killer Brayden Point leads the team with 32 goals among his 62 points. Guentzel's first season in Tampa has him posting a 27-30-57 line, and Victor Hedman leads the defense with 47 points, 38 of them assists.

In net, Andrei Vasilevskiy's streak of five straight top-five finishes in the Vezina voting ended last year, but he could be back this year, as he's 29-16-3 in an NHL-high 48 starts with a 2.18 GAA and .924 save percentage. Backup Jonas Johansson is 6-5-1 in 13 games with a 3.24 GAA and .892 save percentage and could get the nod tonight as Vasilevskiy played last night at Florida.

What's new: Tampa Bay comes into this one on a red-hot streak, going 9-1-1 in its last 11 games and outscoring foes 40-18 in that span, though the Lightning did suffer a regulation loss last night at the Panthers. The Bolts have given up a total of five goals in the last five games, and the veteran squad appears to be locking in for the postseason. Hagel leads the NHL in scoring since Jan. 30 with 10 goals and 17 assists, while Vasilevsky has a .950 save percentage in his last seven games.

Trending: Columbus won the opening game in the season series by a 7-6 score at home Nov. 21 before Tampa won a home contest Dec. 17 by a 5-3 score. Columbus has won just six of the last 26 regular-season games between the two.

Former CBJ: Now 35 years old, Cam Atkinson signed a one-year deal in Tampa Bay this offseason and has played in 36 games with three goals and five assists.

Scratches: Mikael Pyyhtia, Jordan Harris, Jack Johnson

Injured reserve, Injured/Non-Roster list: Cole Sillinger (upper body), Kevin Labanc (shoulder), Sean Monahan (upper body), Erik Gudbranson (upper body)

Roster Report: The Blue Jackets will be boosted by Chinakhov's return to the lineup, as he skated in Monday's practice and said he feels good enough to return, for the first time since Nov. 27. Sillinger was placed on IR on Tuesday to facilitate Chinakhov's return to the active roster.

The Numbers Game

Columbus tied a franchise record (2018-19) with its 11th game with at least six goals Tuesday, and the Blue Jackets have at least five in 19 of 60 games this year. The Blue Jackets are first in the NHL with 144 goals at 5-on-5, and their 3.35 goals per game are fifth in the league. ... With two assists Saturday, Zach Werenski has tied Rick Nash for the franchise career record with 258. He has a 15-39-54 line in his last 44 games and has 32 points (7-25-32) in his past 25. His average ice time of 26:53 leads all NHL players, and he's second among league defensemen in goals (18) and second in points (64) on the season. ... Kirill Marchenko has three goals in the last three games and has set a new career high with 24 goals on the season. He is tied for first in the NHL with a plus-35 rating. ... Kent Johnson has 18 points (9-9-18) in the past 16 games, including a five-game point streak, and is third in the NHL in goals scored per 60 minutes at 5-on-5. ... Adam Fantilli has an 11-11-22 line in the last 22 games and points in five straight games. ... James van Riemsdyk has notched a 10-10-20 line in the last 22 games. ... Ivan Provorov has four goals and seven points in the last eight games and notched his 200th career assist Saturday. ... Boone Jenner has seven assists in four games this season since his return from injury and notched his second career three-helper game Thursday. ... Blue Jackets defensemen have 40 goals this season, the most in the NHL, and 152 points, good for a tie for first place.

This Day in CBJ History

March 4, 2009: Columbus makes a trade to bolster the squad as it attempts to make the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time, adding forward Antoine Vermette from Ottawa for goalie Pascal Leclaire and a second-round pick in the 2009 NHL Draft.

March 4, 2011: Columbus gets a pair of penalty shot opportunities for the first time in franchise history in a game at Calgary, but both Matt Calvert and Antoine Vermette are denied by Miikka Kiprusoff as the Flames win by a 4-3 score.

March 4, 2018: The Blue Jackets defeat San Jose by a 4-2 score to close a California road trip. Columbus would go on to win 10 consecutive games, the second-longest win streak in team history.

March 4, 2020: The Blue Jackets sign Jake Christiansen to an entry-level contract. The defenseman is in the midst of an outstanding season with Everett of the WHL in which he would finish with 22 goals and 50 points in 38 games.

March 4, 2022: Patrik Laine, Oliver Bjorkstrand and Justin Danforth score the fastest three goals in CBJ history, tallying thrice in 46 seconds in the second period of a game vs. Los Angeles at Nationwide Arena. The Kings rally and win in overtime 4-3 after a CBJ goal is disallowed in the extra frame.

March 4, 2024: Alex Nylander earns his first career hat trick – the fourth hat trick of the season for Columbus – in a 6-3 win vs. Vegas at Nationwide Arena.

[BlueJackets.com / Werenski scores twice but Bolts down Blue Jackets](#)

By Corey Long – March 5, 2025

TAMPA -- Victor Hedman and Jake Guentzel each had two goals and an assist, and Nikita Kucherov had a goal and two assists for the Tampa Bay Lightning in a 6-2 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Amalie Arena on Tuesday.

Mitchell Chaffee also scored, and Brayden Point and Darren Raddysh each had two assists for the Lightning (36-21-4), who have won nine of 10 (9-1-0) and were coming off a 2-1 loss at the Florida Panthers on Monday that ended their eight-game winning streak. Jonas Johansson made 30 saves.

"It's always when a team is waiting for you in your hometown, when you're playing on the road," Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper said. "This was a big test for us against a team that was playing well, and the guys did a great job tonight"

Zach Werenski scored twice, and Elvis Merzlikins made 34 saves for the Blue Jackets (30-23-8), who had won four straight. It was Columbus' first game since defeating the Detroit Red Wings 5-3 in the 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series at Ohio Stadium on Saturday.

"Not enough throughout the night of getting [the puck] there and using our strengths down in their zone," Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner said. "Going into the third we're down two, but we know we can score, get one and we're right back in it. They were just able to get that one before us."

Chaffee gave Tampa Bay a 1-0 lead 30 seconds into the first period when he redirected a shot from Emil Lilleberg past Merzlikins five-hole.

Kucherov's goal 1:07 later extended it 2-0, scoring on a breakaway at 1:37 after Guentzel sent him a stretch pass from the defensive zone.

"We wanted to get off to a good start and get our legs going with the back-to-back here," Raddysh said. "We did that, scored on the first two shots and we just kind of went from there."

Werenski cut it to 2-1 at 17:20 with a shot from outside the left circle that beat Johansson to the far post.

"When you start down 2-0, it's definitely tough to come back from," Werenski said. "I know we're capable of doing it, but you don't want to start the game that way, especially right now when you're fighting for points."

Guentzel pushed it to 3-1 at 1:27 of the second period on a tip after Hedman found him open backdoor.

Hedman made it 4-1 at 6:36 on a shot from the left circle that went above Merzlikins' glove.

"Scoring two in the first minute and a half was big for us," Hedman said. "We got the puck in the zone and got close to the net. We wanted to do the same thing in the second and we got two quick ones and we're able to hem them in. If you can do that, good things will happen."

Werenski scored a short-handed goal at 10:49 to cut it to 4-2, finishing a 2-on-1 rush with a chip-in off a centering pass from Adam Fantilli.

"It was 4-1, that goal makes it 4-2, but it's just hard to come back from those big leads," Werenski said. "We put in some good minutes, I thought we worked hard for a lot of the game, definitely had some mistakes in front of Elvis that cost us tonight."

Hedman's second goal of the game made it 5-2 on the power play at 9:44, a one-timer from the point off a pass from Point.

Guentzel scored his second goal into an empty net at 17:53 for the 6-2 final.

"We wanted to stay close to them on defense, don't give them time and space," Hedman said. "They are a great team and they're in a playoff spot for a reason. They have great speed and guys that can make a difference. Once we got into a lead, we had to focus on keeping them from using their speed and skill.

NOTES: Hedman moved past Rob Blake for 20th in points by a defenseman in NHL history (778).

Kucherov reached the 90-point mark (28 goals, 62 assists) for the third consecutive season and fifth time in his career. ... Fantilli had an assist to extend his point streak to six games (three goals, four assists). ...

Blue Jackets forward Yegor Chinakhov was minus-2 with two shots on goal in 13:25 in his return after missing 39 games with an upper-body injury.

BlueJackets.com / With Olivier signed, Blue Jackets turn attention to trade deadline

By Jeff Svoboda – March 6, 2025

As Blue Jackets president of hockey operations and general manager Don Waddell approaches his first NHL trade deadline as general manager of the Blue Jackets, he appears to be taking a piece of advice from the medical field.

First, do no harm.

The Blue Jackets are in the midst of an incredible run, posting an 18-8-3 record since Dec. 19 to tie for fourth in the NHL in wins and place fourth in points percentage during that span.

You can point to a number of reasons for the success – All-Star-level performances from Zach Werenski and Kirill Marchenko, the emergence of such youngsters as Kent Johnson, Dmitri Voronkov and Adam Fantilli, increased production out of veteran hand James van Riemsdyk, and steady play out of Elvis Merzlikins – but one of the biggest is team chemistry.

Bonded by factors both on and off the ice, it's clear members of this Blue Jackets team feed off one another, so as Waddell looks at Friday's 3 p.m. deadline, chemistry is one of the biggest things he has to take into account.

"The belief in our group and in that room and within us as teammates is really high, and it's a special group to be a part of," captain Boone Jenner said Tuesday. "We've battled for each other all year, and we'll continue to do that. That's what being a team is, and we definitely have that in our group. It's fun to be a part of."

The good news is Waddell recognizes that fact. While he wants to try to show faith in the Blue Jackets and what they've accomplished so far this season, he knows if he's going to make a deal, it has to be the right one.

"We want to bring in obviously the best players we can, but we also have to make sure we know their character and we know how they're going to be in the locker room," Waddell said Wednesday. "If I rip a guy out of this locker room right now that's playing a role for us on this hockey club, I think that's pretty devastating to our team. I think it's the wrong message from my end. I think it's the wrong message to the fans, the coaches and the players."

Olivier Deal Adds Stability

To that end, Blue Jackets players were excited Wednesday to find out that negotiations with Mathieu Olivier yielded a six-year, \$18 million contract extension for the pugnacious wing.

Olivier had been set to hit free agency this summer but has become an indispensable part of the team, scoring a career-high 12 goals, leading the NHL with 11 fighting majors and wearing an alternate captain's "A" for much of the season after injuries to Jenner, forward Sean Monahan and defenseman Erik Gudbranson.

The Quebec native's direct, physical style on the ice, increased offensive output, leadership capabilities, and hard work and dedication all added up to make Waddell prioritize signing Olivier to a long-term extension.

"I wasn't going to react initially with any of our free agents," said Waddell, who is in his first season with the club. "I wanted to get to know these guys not only as players but as people. We want to make sure

we have the right personnel here on and off the ice. As the season went on and I paid attention to how Mathieu operated, I got comfortable with getting to a point with calling his agent. We worked on this for a long time to get us to this point, so I'm very pleased to have it done."

Olivier was all smiles Wednesday when talking about the contract extension, as he's made no bones about wanting to stay with the Blue Jackets and see through what the team has started to build here.

Mathieu Olivier speaks with the media after signing a six-year contract extension.

He's also accomplished his goal this season of bringing more than just physicality, as he's one of just two players this season along with Ottawa's Brady Tkachuk with 10-plus goals and 70 or more penalty minutes.

"I think I've developed a lot of stuff around my identity as a hockey player," he said. "Everyone knows I'm a physical guy that can stand up for my teammates, add hits and blocked shots, but I feel like the biggest growth I've had as a hockey player is developing everything else around that and trying to make myself as valuable to my team as I can."

While Waddell was able to get Olivier to put pen to paper, he said he doesn't anticipate any further signings of the team's unrestricted free agents-to-be before Friday's deadline. Forwards Sean Kuraly, James van Riemsdyk and Justin Danforth as well as defensemen Ivan Provorov, Dante Fabbro and Jack Johnson are among the players in that mix, but as the general manager noted above, he doesn't plan to move a player out for future assets given the team chemistry and success this season.

Instead, he'll circle back with the UFAs-to-be in the offseason while keeping them on the roster to help the team's playoff push.

"Instead of getting into negotiations sometimes where there's not a good ending, I've told agents, let's just wait to the end of the season," Waddell said, "and if players want to stay here and we can find a compromise between salary and term, we will keep them."

The Next 48 Hours

Indeed, a team that no one on the outside expected to be in playoff contention holds the first wild card spot with 21 games to go, leaving Waddell in a spot where not only does he plan to keep his UFAs-to-be, he's looking to add as well.

The most likely place to do so is up front, where Waddell has said he'd like to bring in some more depth at the forward position. But considering just how bright the future of the organization is and how many young players are filling key roles, it'll have to be the right deal to get the general manager to act.

"If we're in it and we can add pieces that we think are things that are going to help us continue down this path – I've said all along, we're not in a position to trade first-round picks and trade top prospects for rental players," Waddell said. "That's just not where we are in this process. Saying that, if we can make our team better at the cost that we're willing to pay, we're willing to do that."

In the end, some of the biggest additions may come from injured reserve. Waddell said during the 4 Nations break that injuries to such players as Monahan and Marchenko may push him to be more active in seeking a forward on the market, but the team's situation has brightened since then.

Marchenko, Jenner and Yegor Chinakhov all have come off injured reserve since the break, while Monahan and Gudbranson are also working their way back. The Blue Jackets hope to stay healthy otherwise – the upper body injury to Cole Sillinger notwithstanding, as the young center hit injured reserve Tuesday – but the relative return to health could be the biggest boost that the team gets down the stretch.

“With the team that we have here currently, we’ve had a lot of injuries this year, so I think our biggest additions have been the guys coming back that are regulars in our lineup,” defenseman Damon Severson said. “I think we have more guys that are about to come back here in the next week to two weeks or three weeks. That’s part of the game.

“That’s the biggest thing I’ve realized this year is when you have so many guys that are key players that have been injured and you’re still going through and winning some hockey games, when they come back, that can only help.”

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Weekly Injury Report: Week 20

By Jason Newland – March 5, 2025

The Blue Jackets got some very good news over the last week when Captain Boone Jenner, Kirill Marchenko, and Dante Fabbro were able to return to the lineup.

But just as players come back, players get hurt.

In the February 27th game against the Detroit Red Wings, Cole Sillinger would take a hit that would force him from the game. It's listed as an upper-body injury at this time. He left early in the first and did not return. The injury also forced him to miss the Stadium Series Game this past Saturday.

The Blue Jackets seemed to have escaped any injuries during Saturday's win against Detroit at the Horseshoe. As of Monday, everyone was practicing who played.

Yegor Chinakhov also practiced on Monday, which is a very good sign. Not only did he practice, but he practiced on the second line with Jenner and Johnson - A sign that his return could be soon.

Erik Gudbranson is also skating more and more and looks to come back sometime this month.

Now, on to the injury report:

Injuries

- Erik Gudbranson (upper body) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 16 (57 Games)
- Yegor Chinakhov (upper body) is on Injured Reserve retroactive to Nov. 27 (39 Games)
- Sean Monahan (upper body) is on Injured Reserve retroactive to Jan. 7 (19 Games)
- Kevin Labanc (shoulder) is on Injured Reserve on Feb. 21 (4 Games)
- Cole Sillinger is day-to-day with an upper body injury (1 Game)

TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 258

The Hockey News / Could The Blue Jackets Be Suitors For Anaheim's Trevor Zegras?

By Spencer Lazary – March 5, 2025

NHL insider Elliott Friedman hosted his Trade Deadline Preview episode on his 32 Thoughts podcast. In this episode, he goes over all 32 teams and what he has heard and believes each team will do.

One team that was interesting was the Anaheim Ducks, who have to decide on the future of Trevor Zegras. There could be a path where he is dealt, which is where the Columbus Blue Jackets should come calling.

If they add Zegras, it would be low risk, high reward. At just 23 years old, he would fit into the Blue Jackets' plans for the future.

Unfortunately, it hasn't worked out during his time in Anaheim, and a change of scenery may be welcomed. The only challenge for Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell would be the asking price.

Historically, Ducks GM Pat Verbeek drives a harder bargain and usually doesn't lower the asking price on his players.

One thing is clear: the Ducks aren't in need of defensemen but could benefit from some help up front.

Prospects like Luca Pinelli or Jordan Dumais could be the centerpiece of a trade package, along with a potential first- or second-round pick in 2027.

Waddell wouldn't be tinkering with the immediate future of the team while also adding someone like Zegras, who could fit in well with the core of the Blue Jackets.

The Hockey News / 3 Columbus Blue Jackets Trade Targets For The Buffalo Sabres

By Spencer Lazary – March 6, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets currently occupy the first wild card spot in the East with a chance to catch the New Jersey Devils. They have 68 points, while the Devils have 72, but the Blue Jackets have two games in hand.

At this point, they seem to control their own destiny. If that's the case, it would be wise for Columbus to look at a team like the Buffalo Sabres and see which players make the most sense for them to try and acquire.

Jordan Greenway

Jordan Greenway is the type of player who would fit in well with the Blue Jackets' bottom six. He plays a hard game and is a big-bodied forward. Although he doesn't score a ton, his style of play is built for the playoffs. If Greenway is made available, the asking price would likely be a draft pick or a roster player, which is doable for Columbus.

Jason Zucker

The next name is veteran Jason Zucker. If the Sabres can't extend him and opt to trade him, the Blue Jackets should look to acquire him. He would fit into the middle-six alongside Boone Jenner or Sean Monahan (when he's healthy) and has a ton of playoff experience from his time with the Pittsburgh Penguins. He would more than likely be a rental, but he's someone who could provide big goals when needed. The asking price for Zucker would be higher than Greenway, but still reasonable.

Alex Tuch

Lastly, Alex Tuch should be the main target on the Sabres for the Blue Jackets. Not only would he be a great addition, but he's also signed beyond this season, giving him more time to gel with the team. The asking price would be higher than for Zucker or Greenway, but Tuch is a skilled forward who brings leadership and intensity to the Blue Jackets' roster. It may cost a high draft pick, a prospect, and potentially a roster player, but it likely wouldn't require giving up a key piece of the future.

Considering how the Sabres are playing this season, they will need to make changes if they want to improve. The Blue Jackets and GM Don Waddell should capitalize on that.

The Hockey News / Zach Werenski Scores Two Goals; Blue Jackets Get Thumped By Lightning In Tampa

By Jason Newland – March 6, 2025

Columbus falls to Tampa Bay 6-2 at Amalie Arena.

Zach Werenski (19,20) scored the only goals for Columbus, and Elvis Merzljikins stopped 34 of 39 Lightning shots in a convincing Tampa win.

Tampa Bay scored twice in the first 1:37 of the game to put this one away quickly. It was clear they were upset about losing their 8-game win streak to Florida the night before, and they took it out on the Jackets.

Zach Werenski was the best player on the ice for the CBJ, and he showed it, scoring once at even strength and once shorthanded. He's now just one point behind Cale Makar for most points by a defenseman.

Other than that, nothing really went right for Columbus.

The Blue Jackets must write this game off quickly, as they go against reigning Cup Champion Florida.

Final Stats

Player Stats

- Zach Werenski scored his 19th and 20th goals of the season. His 20 goals and 66 points are second in each category among all NHL defensemen. He also had 4 shots on the night.
- Adam Fantilli tallied his 20th assist of the season.
- Kent Johnson recorded his 23rd assist.
- Joseph LaBate had 6 blocked shots and 3 hits.
- Yegor Chinakhov played his first game since November. He played 13:25, had 2 shots, and 3 hits.
- Elvis Merzljikins stopped 34 shots. He's now 22-15-4 on the year.

Team Stats

The Jackets power play went 0/2 on the night.

- The Jackets power play went 0/2 on the night.
- The Columbus PK stopped 2 of 3 Tampa Bay man advantages.
- Columbus won 47% of the faceoffs.

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

The Hockey News / Report: Blue Jackets Express Interest In Krakens' Forwards

By Spencer Lazary – March 6, 2025

According to David Pagnotta, the Columbus Blue Jackets have expressed interest in the Seattle Kraken's pending UFA's. He also noted that multiple teams have thrown their names in the mix for the Kraken's forwards.

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell has been rumored to be searching for a forward ahead of the deadline. Now that Seattle has officially positioned itself as a seller, Columbus can zero in on potential targets.

Two names reportedly on the market are Brandon Tanev and Yanni Gourde. The Blue Jackets have shown interest in both, but Tanev appears to be the better fit.

Both players would be rentals, but Tanev aligns more naturally with Columbus' needs. He can slot into the middle six and bring playoff-style intensity to the lineup. While Gourde is also a strong addition, his injury history this season and the fact that he would push someone out of the top six make him a less ideal target.

In a perfect scenario, if Waddell could land both, the Blue Jackets would significantly improve their forward depth. However, based on Waddell's public comments and the expected asking price, Tanev seems like the more realistic and logical move for Columbus.

The Hockey News / Former Blue Jackets Forward Cam Atkinson Clears Waivers

By Jason Newland – March 6, 2025

Former Columbus forward Cam Atkinson, who was put on waivers by Tampa Bay yesterday, has cleared.

This season, Atkinson played 37 games for the Lightning and had 8 points, including three goals. He signed as a free agent in Tampa Bay on July 2, 2024.

Atkinson is a former 6th round pick of Columbus in the 2008 NHL Entry Draft.

Cam Atkinson played in 627 games for Columbus before being traded to Philadelphia in the summer of 2021. He scored 213 goals and totaled 402 points for the Blue Jackets.

His 627 games played rank 3rd all-time in CBJ history. The 402 points he amassed are 2nd all-time, his 213 goals are the 2nd-highest, and the 189 assists are 5th in CBJ history. Atkinson is #1 in franchise history with 16 shorthanded goals and second with 42 power-play goals. He's also the franchise leader with 6 career hat tricks.

Atkinson also had a 40-goal season in 2018-19 and made two All-Star games for the Jackets.

As of now, his future is uncertain.

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

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets May Benefit From Acquiring Depth Forwards Over Top End Talent

By Jason Newland – March 6, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets sit in the first wild card spot with two days to go until the 2025 trade deadline. Their GM, Don Waddell, has spoken openly about their plan to reward the team by adding at the deadline.

He made a point to mention that he doesn't want to mess with the future to add but would likely reward the team with some help. The fact that Waddell has that attitude and sees the future of the team being very good is exactly what an organization like Columbus needs.

They are at a critical point in their rebuild. They could sell the farm and go for it to get a big-name talent to help, or they can get a depth piece or two and let the young nucleus of the team learn from playing in the big moments.

The Blue Jackets this season remind me a lot of the 2016-17 Toronto Maple Leafs. They established a young core of Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, and William Nylander and had a good amount of veterans surrounding them, including James van Riemsdyk. At that trade deadline, management didn't sell the farm to bring in players to bump the young stars out of the lineup. They acquired depth pieces that could help log heavy minutes and serve as a voice when the going gets tough.

In fact, during that season, they brought in Brian Boyle and Eric Fehr as depth pieces who could help. That is going to be very similar to what Waddell does. If he can bring in Tanev and another veteran depth player who has been there before, it can go a long way in helping build a successful young core.

If Waddell sticks to what he said—and if you know Waddell, he will—there are a few other names that could work for the Blue Jackets. They aren't the flashiest names, but they can step in and take some of the pressure off Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson.

Players like Brandon Tanev of the Seattle Kraken, Justin Brazeau of the Boston Bruins, Pat Maroon of the Chicago Blackhawks, or even Joel Armia of the Montreal Canadiens could be interesting names for the Blue Jackets to add.

With only two days until the trade deadline, keep it locked here for all things Blue Jackets.

The Hockey News / Former Blue Jackets' Forward Dealt To Tampa Bay in Massive Trade

By Spencer Lazary – March 6, 2025

According to multiple reports, the Seattle Kraken have traded former Columbus Blue Jackets forward Olivier Bjorkstrand along with Yanni Gourde to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The full trade package:

Tampa Bay Lightning: Yanni Gourde, Olivier Bjorkstrand & 2026 5th Round Pick

Seattle Kraken: Michael Eyssimont, First Round Pick in 2026, First Round Pick in 2027 and a 2025-Second Round Pick (TOR)

There was some thought of a potential reunion between the Blue Jackets and Bjorkstrand. However, now that it is off the table, GM Don Waddell will need to look elsewhere.

The Lightning are looking to add to try and push themselves into first in the Atlantic and if they fail to do so, they will still be a playoff threat after this trade.

The Hockey Writers / Lightning Get Back on Track With 6-2 Win Over Blue Jackets

By Harrison Smajovits – March 5, 2025

The Tampa Bay Lightning's offense bounced back to take down the Columbus Blue Jackets, 6-2. Lightning captain Victor Hedman and reigning Art Ross winner Nikita Kucherov highlighted the night with three points each. Blue Jackets' defenseman Zach Werenski had a multi-goal night, scoring both of the team's goals. He was the only player on Columbus to get onto the scoresheet twice in the game.

The Lightning were coming off an eight-game winning streak being snapped. They snap the Blue Jackets' four-game winning streak to return to the win column.

Game Recap

It took nearly no time at all for the Lightning to get on the board. Mitchell Chaffee (12) scored just 30 seconds into the first period, with a goal by Kucherov (28) coming 67 seconds later.

Werenski (19) cut the lead in half to end scoring for the first period.

A similar series of events came in the second period. The Lightning scored early on with a goal by Jake Guentzel (28) coming 1:27 into the period. Hedman (10) scored a few minutes later for another Lightning goal. Werenski (20) scored another goal for Columbus to conclude scoring for a period of play.

Hedman (11) and Guentzel (29) both scored again in the final period of play in reverse order to get the game to its final score.

The Lightning went 1-for-3 on the power play, while the Blue Jackets went scoreless on two opportunities with the man advantage. Lightning goalie Jonas Johansson saved 30 of 32 shots on goal (.938), and Elvis Merzlikins stopped 34 of 39 (.872).

Both teams return to action on Thursday. The Lightning stay put at home and will host the Buffalo Sabres. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m. EST. The Blue Jackets head south to Sunrise to take on the Florida Panthers. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m. as well.

Three Stars of the Game

1. Victor Hedman (two goals, one assist)
2. Nikita Kucherov (one goal, two assists)
3. Zach Werenski (two goals)

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Sign Mathieu Olivier to 6-Year Extension

By Christopher Babos – March 6, 2025

On Wednesday morning, the Columbus Blue Jackets announced a six-year, \$18M contract extension through 2031 for forward Mathieu Olivier. The 28-year-old has spent the last three seasons in Columbus developing into a critical piece for the Blue Jackets lineup. The NHL veteran will receive a raise next season from \$1.1 million this season to \$3 million per season through 2031.

“Mathieu Olivier has emerged as a key contributor on and off the ice thanks to his work ethic, dedication, leadership and other intangibles that are critical to a team’s success,” Columbus general manager Dom Waddell said. “Ensuring that Mathieu remains a Blue Jacket was a priority for us and we are ecstatic that he and his family will be part of our Blue Jackets family for many years.”

Columbus acquired Olivier from the Nashville Predators for a fourth-round pick (#122) at the 2022 NHL Draft. The depth forward has contributed 48 points, 573 hits, and 264 penalty minutes in 181 games for the Blue Jackets. While he is still looking for his first postseason experience with Columbus, Olivier experienced five NHL playoff games with the Predators between two playoff runs in 2021 and 2022. Both seasons ended in the opening round to the Carolina Hurricanes and Colorado Avalanche, respectively.

This season, the undrafted winger has 12 goals and nine assists for 21 points in 61 games. His 232 hits are second in the NHL behind Kiefer Sherwood’s mind-numbing 323 hits. Olivier also holds the silver medal position with 113 penalty minutes (PIM) behind 11 fighting majors this season. He trails Boston Bruins’ Nikita Zadorov’s 119 minutes of hockey jail time. The first Mississippi-born player in the NHL used the same style of play to earn his previous contract extension with the Ohio-based franchise in the 2023 offseason.

The Blue Jackets are 30-23-8 with 68 points, which tops a tightly paced Eastern Conference wild card race. Columbus returns to action tomorrow night with a game against the Florida Panthers at Amerant Bank Arena in Sunrise, Florida.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Mathieu Olivier Well-Deserving of New Contract

By William Espy – March 6, 2025

When the Columbus Blue Jackets acquired Mathieu Olivier from the Nashville Predators during the summer of 2022, nobody truly thought much of it. Less than three years later, things have drastically changed — on Wednesday morning, it was announced that the Blue Jackets had signed the forward to a six-year contract extension worth \$3 million per season.

Becoming an NHL Regular

When Olivier came to Columbus, he didn't have much experience at the NHL level under his belt. He had already made history, becoming the first Mississippi born player to make it to the top tier of hockey, yet he struggled to stick in the NHL. He played a total of 48 games over the course of three seasons with the Predators, but spent most of his time with their American Hockey League affiliate, the Milwaukee Admirals. In his first season in Columbus, Olivier eclipsed that figure, playing 66 games with the Blue Jackets and set a new career-high in points and penalty minutes.

With Nashville, Olivier's best season came during the 2020-21 season when he played 30 games, recorded five points and had 70 penalty minutes (PIMs). During the 2022-23 season with the Blue Jackets, he doubled the number of games played, tripled his career-high in points and kept all of his aggression, still posting 81 PIMs.

Olivier's contributions with the Blue Jackets have been consistent and he's quickly become a big part of the organization. While enforcers often fly under the radar league wide, they're some of the most beloved players in their organization. Fans will often adore a player who is willing to put their body on the line to help their team win. One great example of that is current Blue Jackets assistant coach Jared Boll, who filled the same role Olivier now holds for nearly a decade. Fans loved him, and as a result it wasn't a surprise to see Boll return to the organization when his playing career came to an end. With his new contract extension, Olivier could easily see his career follow a similar path.

Continuing to Thrive in Columbus

The news that Olivier may be staying in Columbus was first shared last week, when Darren Dreger of TSN reported that Olivier and the Blue Jackets were making progress on a contract extension and there was "virtually no chance he's traded" at the upcoming 2025 Trade Deadline.

While Olivier will never be a household name around the NHL, nor will he be a star player for the Blue Jackets, he's thriving in Columbus and the extension will allow him to build a legacy with the organization. Olivier has become one of the NHL's most-feared players while keeping his game clean for the most part. His physical playstyle fits the definition of what it meant to be a Blue Jacket when the team was hitting its highest points of success.

Players like Nick Foligno, Brandon Dubinsky, and Scott Hartnell made the Blue Jackets a difficult team to play against a decade ago. Since then, the Blue Jackets lost their identity but players like Olivier are helping bring it back. While the roster former general manager (GM) Jarmo Kekalainen built early in his tenure were never able to accomplish much in terms of postseason success, it was more than the organization had ever seen. This season, GM Don Waddell and head coach Dean Evason have helped the team get back on their feet and brought them back into the playoff fight.

This season, Olivier's value to the organization has only continued to grow. He's hit double-digits in goals for the first time in his career, and recorded a career-high 21 points through 61 games. Most notably, he scored a goal in the Stadium Series matchup against the Detroit Red Wings.

Although Olivier isn't on the scoresheet on a nightly basis, he's a big part of the reason behind the team's success this season and he could be a part of the group that takes the Blue Jackets to heights they've never experienced.

1st Ohio Battery / TB 6, CBJ 2: Werenski Scores Twice, But Blue Jackets Start Road Trip With Loss To Lightning

By Ed Francis – March 5, 2025

Zach Werenski scored twice but it wasn't nearly enough for the Columbus Blue Jackets on Tuesday night, as they fall to the Tampa Bay Lightning 6-2 to kick off a four-game road trip.

The Lightning struck on their first two shots of the game, taking a 2-0 lead less than two minutes in. Columbus improved as the opening frame went on, with Werenski's first goal of the night coming late in the period to give the Blue Jackets a boost heading into the intermission.

Tampa Bay would take the boost back early in the second, when they made it 3-1 just 1:27 into the middle period and then 4-1 just five minutes after that.

"They get those two quick ones, it's tough to come back from that" said captain Boone Jenner. "Those two in the second hurt us even more."

Werenski would take some of that hurt away with a short-handed goal in the middle of the second period, cutting the Lightning lead to 4-2. It was his 20th goal of the season, tying a career high and also tying his club record for most goals in a season by a defenseman.

Tampa would regain their three-goal lead with a power play goal at the 9:44 mark of the third before an empty-netter in the final minutes put the finishing touches on the 6-2 final.

"We'll learn from it, we'll move forward," said Werenski. "We're in a spot right now where we can't dwell on things for too long."

Here's how the night went down in central Florida:

1st Period:

(0:30 — TB Goal): One shot, one goal. The Lightning pass it from point to point and Emil Lilleberg's shot from the left point is deflected by Mitchell Chaffee for his 12th goal of the season to make it 1-0 Tampa.

(1:37 — TB Goal): Two shots, two goals. Denton Mateychuk's hard shot on the Tampa net results in a breakaway for Nikita Kucherov. He beats Merzlikins to make it 2-0 Lightning less than two minutes in.

(17:20 — CBJ Goal): Werenski makes a fantastic individual effort to cut Tampa's lead to 2-1 with his 19th goal of the season. He forces a turnover and quickly moves up the ice, seeing that he's only got Brandon Hagel — a forward — to beat up the ice. Werenski then gets just enough separation from Hagel and beats Bolts goalie Jonas Johansson to cut the Tampa lead to 2-1.

2nd Period:

(1:27 — TB Goal): Another early-period goal, this one to help the Lightning regain their two-goal lead. It's Jake Guentzel, now with points against the Blue Jackets in 15 straight games. He gets behind Merzlikins and tips in a shot from Victor Hedman to make it 3-1 Bolts.

(6:36 — TB Goal): The Lightning extend their lead to 4-1. This time it's Hedman who gets the goal. Excellent puck movement from Tampa here to get Columbus out of sorts defensively, then Hedman slaps it home from just outside the left dot.

(10:49 — CBJ Goal): The Blue Jackets get their eighth short-handed goal of the season and Werenski gets the second shorty of his career to bring Columbus to within two, at 4-2. Kent Johnson gets the puck

away from Tampa while they're in the Columbus zone and pushes the puck towards Fantilli, who skates into the Lightning zone and waits on Werenski to arrive into the low slot. Fantilli then makes a perfect pass and Werenski gets his 20th goal of the season.

3rd Period:

(9:44 — TB Goal): Hedman's second goal of the night comes via the power play and puts the Lightning in front 5-2. It's more good puck movement from Tampa, and Hedman fires from the slot to put the game out of reach.

(17:53 — TB Goal): Empty-netter makes it 6-2.

Stat Chat:

- The assists from Fantilli and Johnson on Werenski's second goal of the night extended both of their point streaks to six games. Jenner, who had assists in his first four games back, was held scoreless for the first time this season,
- Nearly half (16) of Columbus' 33 shots for the game came in the final period, including eight high-danger chances, as they tried to work their way back into the game after entering the final frame down 4-2. They couldn't get one past Johansson, though, who saved his best work for the final twenty minutes.
- Werenski's two-goal night gives him 66 points in 60 games, putting him on pace for 89. That would best Artemi Panarin's club record of 87.

Up Next:

The Sunshine State portion of the road trip concludes Thursday with a 7 p.m. puck-drop against the Florida Panthers.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Not Their Night, Chinakhov Returns, Werenski Matches Career High

By Will Chase – March 6, 2025

Not an easy one.

Jake Guentzel and Victor Hedman each scored twice and had an assist, and Jonas Johansson made 30 of 32 saves as the [Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 6-2](#) on Tuesday at Amalie Arena. The loss snaps Columbus' four-game winning streak.

Not Their Night

The Lightning's eight-game winning streak ended in a 2-1 loss at the Florida Panthers on Monday. If you thought they might be tired, think again.

Two goals on two shots by Mitchell Chaffee (12, 0:30) and Kucherov (28, 1:37) inside the first 1:37 set the tone early. It's the fastest two goals by a team all season.

Emil Lilleberg (14) and Darren Raddysh (22) assisted on Chaffee's goal. Guentzel (31) assisted on Kucherov's goal as part of a three-point night.

Guentzel (28) scored 1:27 into the second period to regain the Tampa two-goal lead. He's scored in 15 consecutive games against Columbus. Victor Hedman (39) and Brayden Point (31) picked up the assists. Point is on a three-game point streak (one goal, three assists).

Hedman (10) added another goal at 6:36. Kucherov (61) and Raddysh (23) added on with the assists.

Columbus tried pulling closer but could not solve Johansson. Hedman (11) scored his second on the power play at 9:44 of the third period (Point (32) and Kucherov (62), and Guentzel added his second goal with the empty-netter (unassisted) at 17:53.

Elvis Merzlikins made 34 saves on 39 shots. The Jackets are 1-9-2 in their last 12 games at Amalie Arena.

Chinakhov Returns

Yegor Chinakhov returned to the lineup on Tuesday, having last played on Nov. 27 against the Montreal Canadiens and missing 39 games. In a corresponding move, Cole Sillinger was placed on IR retroactively to Feb. 27 and is expected to miss a few weeks.

Chinakhov played 13:25 and had two shots and three hits.

Former Blue Jacket Cam Atkinson was placed on waivers by the Lightning on Tuesday but did play against his old club.

Werenski Matches Career High

Zach Werenski's home point streak came to an end one week ago against the Dallas Stars. Following a two-game stretch with no points, he's now gone two straight games with a point, scoring his 19th goal (unassisted) at 17:20 to cut the deficit to one goal.

Werenski matched his career high with his second goal of the game, a short-handed second-period tally, his 20th of the season to make it 4-2 at 10:49. Adam Fantilli (20) and Kent Johnson (23) assisted on the goal. Johnson is on a six-game point streak (four goals, four assists) and has points in 14 of his last 15 games. Fantilli is also on a six-game point streak (three goals, four assists).

Matching his career high, Werenski last scored 20 goals in 2019-20. The goal came just after a Lightning goal was nullified due to a successful offside challenge by Columbus.

Sunrise Part Two

The Blue Jackets continue their four-game road trip with a date against the Florida Panthers on Thursday, Mar. 6 at 7 p.m. ET.

1st Ohio Battery / Extended: Blue Jackets Lock Up Mathieu Olivier With With Six-Year Contract

By Ed Francis – March 6, 2025

Mathieu Olivier is a Columbus Blue Jacket for the foreseeable future.

The Blue Jackets have signed Olivier to a six-year, \$18M contract, according to multiple reports.

The deal is worth a total of \$18M, carrying an average annual value of \$3M. This extension keeps Olivier with the Blue Jackets through the 2030-31 season.

Olivier, who just turned 28, is in the midst of a career year. His 12 goals through 61 games have more than double his previous career high of five, and his 21 points on the season are also career bests.

His 228 hits rank second-most in the league and leads the team by a wide margin. Zach Aston-Reese is second with 137 and Sean Kuraly, with 128, is the only other Blue Jacket in triple digits in the category.

With 113 minutes in the box, Olivier also leads the league in penalty minutes — 55 of which have come via 11 fighting majors. Olivier has gained a reputation as one of the premier fighters in the league.

But as a career-high 12 goals would allude to, Olivier has developed a bit of a scoring touch this season. In Saturday's win over the Detroit Red Wings at Ohio Stadium, Olivier scored one of the most memorable goals in his career when he put the Blue Jackets up 3-1 with a second-period goal.

Columbus originally acquired Olivier in 2022 from the Nashville Predators in exchange for a fourth-round pick.

From the official release from GM Don Waddell: "Ensuring that Mathieu remains a Blue Jacket was a priority for us and we are ecstatic that he and his family will be part of our Blue Jackets family for many years."

For his career, Olivier has played in a total of 229 games over six seasons, 181 with the Blue Jackets. In that time, he has 25 goals (22 with Columbus) and 30 assists (26 with Columbus).

Quick Thoughts:

"Earned, not given" has been a motto of the Blue Jackets this season under head coach Dean Evason. This contract extension is the epitome of that. Olivier's evolution since coming over from the Predators has been remarkable. His on-ice play has improved dramatically, but more than that it's the leadership and the physical play that he brings to the club that makes keeping him here long-term the right move. Olivier's time on ice averages 14:29 this season, an increase of almost exactly three minutes over his average ice time in his first two seasons in Columbus.

The Athletic / NHL Playoff Report: Blue Jackets and Panthers on the rise, Canucks and Oilers falling

By Dom Luszczyzyn – March 5, 2025

Welcome back to another edition of the NHL Playoff Report, a monthly look at the league through the eyes of each team's chances of making the playoffs: who's up, who's down and why.

After each night's slate of games, our playoff projections page is updated, taking into account the results from those games and fresh new data to feed into the model. Every night, everything changes and those changes add up quickly, especially if a team goes on a heater (or cooler). Those changes can also be difficult to view at a glance and it's good practice to take stock regularly of what's been happening.

We missed a month thanks to the 4 Nations break, but here's what has happened since January.

The East bubble

Five spots are essentially locked up and while the Devils should be fairly safe, a potentially lengthy injury to Jack Hughes does leave some room for error. Assuming they still make it, that leaves two spots up for grabs.

Ottawa and Columbus are in the driver's seat at the moment with odds just a little over 50 percent. The model still views the Senators as a stronger team than the Red Wings, with a massive schedule advantage in Ottawa's favor. The Senators play 13 of their remaining 22 games at home with an average opponent Net Rating of minus-6, the sixth-easiest schedule in the league. In contrast, Detroit has the hardest schedule with 13 of 22 games on the road and an average opponent Net Rating of plus-19. Columbus, at plus-11, is second, which is partly why its chances aren't quite as safe yet despite a four-point cushion on Ottawa.

The Rangers are still hanging around and could make things interesting, but a lot depends on the severity of Adam Fox's injury status, which is still unknown. They have the strongest priors of any team in the running given they were a contender as recently as last season — but their weak showing this season has obviously lowered their standing. Monday's game against the Islanders was a big one and is part of the reason for the current 16-percentage-point gap between the two teams. The win arguably kept the Rangers in the race and pushed the Islanders out of it.

The Bruins, Flyers and Canadiens could make a surprise run, but the current belief in their respective rosters and tough schedules (especially for Montreal) work against them.

The West bubble

Seven spots in the West are essentially safe, but the race for the final spot has become a lot more intriguing of late due to the Vancouver Canucks' increased ineptitude. The spot should be theirs for the taking in a weak West, but the Canucks have done everything in their power to make things as interesting as possible.

Vancouver holds all the cards as the best team in the race with the easiest remaining schedule (13 of 22 at home, average opponent Net Rating of minus-7) on top of that. But Utah is finally healthy and looking better lately, and the Flames have managed to hang around all season despite significant roster deficiencies. The Blues have also turned things around under Jim Montgomery; their presence should not be discounted. St. Louis' schedule down the stretch is also among the easiest.

Vancouver has the personnel to make the playoffs, but they have to live up to their usual standard to be worthy of the team's current 63 percent odds. They haven't all season, and if that continues, it's not hard to envision Vancouver's hold on the last playoff spot slipping away.

On the rise

Detroit Red Wings

Two months ago, no part of me thought the Red Wings were a credible playoff threat. Maybe they'd get a new coach bump from Todd McLellan, but they seemed too far gone with too tough a path ahead and too weak a roster.

Boy, was I wrong — now look at them.

Since the last Playoff Report, the Red Wings are one of the hottest teams in the league, mustering a 12-6-2 record backed by a scorching hot power play that has scored 13.3 goals per 60. There may still be issues at five-on-five (47 percent xG) and on the penalty kill (11.3 goals against per 60), but their power play has given them enough of an edge to propel them into a playoff spot. It's the driving force of the team's Offensive Rating, which has improved from minus-31 to minus-11 over the last two months. In terms of Net Rating, only one team has improved its standing more than Detroit.

McLellan has made an obvious impact that has helped this roster show what it's capable of, and while there are still flaws, the core group looks effective enough to be playoff caliber. That's a massive improvement over where they were trending with Derek Lalonde: back to the lottery.

The coaching change saved Detroit's season and put the Red Wings in the thick of the playoff race, but there's still an uphill battle ahead of them — especially after two regulation losses to Columbus. Those losses cut Detroit's chances in half from 42 percent to 20 percent.

That may seem harsh for a team currently in a playoff spot, but the model is still being cautious, given the team's priors and that its five-on-five numbers still look weak. Combine that with an incredibly difficult upcoming schedule and the Red Wings still have a lot to prove.

That'll be the real test for McLellan's team — one that, at the very least, Detroit looks much better equipped to handle.

Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets might actually do it. They might actually make the playoffs in what would be one of the greatest recent stories in sport. After back-to-back regulation wins over Detroit, the Blue Jackets are officially more likely to make the playoffs than miss with a 53 percent chance. That's up 34 percentage points from where they were two months ago thanks to an inspired 11-5-2 run.

At 30-22-8, the Blue Jackets have banked a lot of points here and that's the main thing contributing to the team's currently high chances. While the model believes in Columbus' roster significantly more than it did at the start of the season, the team's Net Rating didn't improve much over the last two months despite all the wins.

The reason for that is simple: Columbus' underlying numbers remain questionable. Over the last two months, the Blue Jackets earned just 47 percent of the expected goals, yet still enjoyed 59 percent of the actual goals. Essentially, they've been getting all the bounces.

Usually that's a red flag that suggests a pullback might be in order, and Columbus' upcoming schedule only furthers the possibility that the Blue Jackets might be in tough.

With just 22 games left, regression is a possibility — not an inevitability. Maybe the team's Cinderella run ends, but the Blue Jackets are in full control of their destiny. It's impossible not to root for the magic to continue.

But while a 53 percent shot is exciting, it's important to pair the current optimism with a small dose of caution. There's still work to do — time to finish the job and make the playoffs.

Winnipeg Jets

Somehow, it doesn't feel like the league's best team this season is getting enough respect. No team saw a bigger improvement to their Stanley Cup chances over the last two months than Winnipeg, going from 7.4 percent to 11.9 percent. That jump makes the Jets the second-most likely team to win after Edmonton.

Winnipeg is not just Connor Hellebuyck and friends. The Jets look deep and when a team can earn 54 percent of the expected goals in front of the league's best goalie, great things can happen. Add an elite power play on top of that and the Jets have a clear recipe for success going into this year's playoffs. There's been no slowing down for Winnipeg, which has gone 14-3-2 since the last Playoff Report.

One other key change since then: the return of Dylan Samberg. I'm not sure many people outside of Winnipeg realize how impactful he's been this season. Since returning from injury, he's been Winnipeg's clear No. 2 defenseman. His Net Rating saw the biggest jump of any Jet over the last two months, going from plus-1.5 to plus-4.1 — that's top-pair territory. Samberg has helped elevate Neal Pionk's game to the point that the second pair is rocking a 55 percent xG rate on the season while taking on much tougher assignments over the last two months. Combine that with Josh Morrissey's pair and the Jets' top four looks rock solid.

The Jets aren't a perfect team and can still shore up some holes around the lineup, but what they've managed to accomplish this season is no fluke. The Jets are the real deal and look like a real threat to go deep this season.

Florida Panthers

After the Jets, the Panthers have seen the second-biggest jump in Stanley Cup chances over the last two months, going from a dark horse at 6 percent to one of the teams to beat at 10 percent.

There are two parts to that jump.

The first is the team ramping up their play. Call it regular-season fatigue after winning it all, but the Panthers were looking a little stale in the season's first half. Florida was still controlling play with a 53 percent expected goal rate but was break-even on the scoreboard. All that has changed; the Panthers have been the league's top five-on-five team over their last 20 games, earning 59 percent of the expected goals and 65 percent of the actual goals. They are extremely back.

The other part is the big news from Saturday night: Seth Jones is a Panther. His acquisition is huge, pushing Florida from 8 percent to 10 percent in Cup odds. Jones is still a top-pair defenseman and has the exact offensive skill set that the Panthers needed on the back end. He's a strong puck-mover who should make for a substantial improvement to the team's top four.

With Jones replacing one of its third-pair defenders, Florida's Net Rating jumped from plus-40 to plus-48. Once again, the Panthers are the team to beat in the East (assuming Matthew Tkachuk comes back for the playoffs, that is).

Honorable mentions: Vegas Golden Knights, New York Rangers

Falling off

Vancouver Canucks

In a sense, the Canucks are lucky there aren't many legitimate threats to the playoff spot they currently occupy. The Flames are a rebuilding team, Utah might not be there yet, and the Blues are still digging out of an early season hole.

Because of that, Vancouver's playoff chances have only dropped 11 percentage points despite the team's projected point total dropping by five. The Canucks are 11-10-1 since the last Playoff Report and it barely mattered — that's how weak their competition has also been.

That weakness is what makes Vancouver's current position so disappointing, as the team simply isn't what many thought they were.

The Canucks have failed to build on last season in any meaningful way outside of Quinn Hughes and it's left the team looking painfully mid. While it was fair to expect some PDO regression for the club, the drop in expected goals feels almost inexcusable. Over the last two months, the model has finally come around to the fact the Canucks simply aren't that good. Their 16-goal drop in Net Rating is the largest non-injury-related drop for any team during that time frame.

There's still time to turn things around, and that ultimately comes down to the team's core forwards. Over the last two months, the biggest drops in Net Rating have come from Conor Garland (seven points in 20 games), Elias Pettersson (seven points in 20 games) and Brock Boeser (10 points in 20 games). The latter two have gotten absolutely crushed at five-on-five on top of that. If the top guys aren't going, what hope does the team have of any relevancy?

Naturally, it's Pettersson at the top of the blame list, and it's fair to say this is an entirely different season if he plays anywhere close to expectations. Going into the year, his projected Net Rating was plus-17. Through 54 games, he's at plus-2.8 — second-line-forward caliber. Part of the reason there's still a 63 percent hope of Vancouver salvaging this season is that the model expects Pettersson to bounce back in some capacity, even if it's not quite to the same level expected at the start of the season.

With how Pettersson has looked over the last month, that hope might be misplaced.

For almost the entire season, the Oilers were the Stanley Cup favorite. Was the model too high on them at certain points? Certainly, but because of how strong the team's core looked, it felt fair to put the Oilers in a higher echelon. While anything above 20 percent was probably too high, it was still Edmonton and then everybody else. With all their flaws in mind, the Oilers looked like the team to beat.

That's changed over the last month, as the Oilers have looked vulnerable and their flaws have been exposed. Edmonton has just one regulation win over its last 10 games and had a five-game losing streak after the 4 Nations break in which the team looked completely out of sync. Since Feb. 1, the Oilers have a 47 percent xG rate, one of the worst marks in the league — and they've paid the price for it with a 40 percent goal rate. That's not just bad goaltending either, as the team has been especially porous defensively while struggling to finish.

This recent stretch has erased any assumed separation the Oilers have built against the rest of the pack. They may still be the favorites, but their lead over the next best teams has narrowed to the point that the top of the league feels wide open again.

One reason to stay calm: The Oilers go as Connor McDavid goes, and he's going through one of the worst stretches of his career. Once he gets back on track — and he will — the wins will return.

One reason to panic: Mattias Ekholm was the primary catalyst for Edmonton ascending into the contention tier, and it's not as certain he will get back on track. He's looked rough over the last month, including at the 4 Nations Face-Off where he slid down Sweden's depth chart after struggling against the best in the world. If that's a sign of things to come for the 34-year-old, the Oilers may be in even more trouble than some already believe.

New Jersey Devils

Losing Jack Hughes is a big deal, one that dropped New Jersey's playoff chances by 5 percentage points and Stanley Cup odds by 1.1 percentage points. The latter is the chief cause for concern here as it put a stamp on a difficult trend, one that's seen the Devils' Cup odds fall from as high as 10.4 percent in mid-January to 3.5 percent now. As it stands, the Devils are not a serious contender. No team saw a bigger drop in Cup odds over the last two months.

This is partly because of the strengthening of the two teams above them in the Metropolitan Division. The Capitals continue to prove themselves as a force and the Hurricanes made a huge splash by adding Mikko Rantanen. That pushed the Devils firmly into the Metro 3-spot, where they would likely be sizeable first-round underdogs to Carolina.

It's also partly due to the team's own play. Over the last 19 games, the Devils have a 45 percent xG share at five-on-five, the fourth-lowest mark in the league. They've struggled mightily to dominate play to their usual degree and have been saved only by stellar goaltending. The Devils are 8-8-3 since the last Playoff Report for good reason.

The Devils need to find a way back on track — a tall task without Hughes in the fold for the foreseeable future.

Boston Bruins

The writing has been on the wall for a while, but the last month has confirmed it: This might be it for these Bruins.

Going into the deadline, Boston has dropped eight of its last 11 games and has seen its playoff odds crash all the way down to 13 percent. Over the last two months, no team's playoff chances have dropped more than Boston's 26 percentage point loss. The Bruins aren't totally cooked, but if they needed the hockey gods to give them a sign regarding what path to take on deadline day, they just got one.

The frustrating part is that this has all happened while David Pastrnak has played his best hockey of the season. Since the last Playoff Report, he has 15 goals and 33 points in 19 games — and it hasn't even mattered as the rest of the team has struggled. Boston's defense has really felt the burn without Hampus Lindholm, and Charlie McAvoy's recent absence has only hampered things further.

The Athletic / NHL rumblings: Devils scouring the market, Oilers' next priority, Kraken ready to deal and more

By Pierre LeBrun – March 5, 2025

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

The Florida Panthers have Mathew Tkachuk's long-term-injured-reserve cap hit to use ahead of Friday's trade deadline if they choose to dip into it.

Now let's see where the New Jersey Devils end up when it comes to Jack Hughes and his \$8 million cap hit.

Let's be real: The Devils would much rather have Hughes back in their lineup as soon as possible than use his \$8 million cap hit on anyone else.

Officially, they don't have a timeline yet for Hughes, but it does not sound good. As colleague Peter Baugh reported Tuesday, more medical tests are on tap for Hughes, and the Devils are hoping to get enough clarity in the next day or two to know whether he'll be out for the rest of the regular season and his cap hit can be used at the deadline. Obviously, time is of the essence.

Even before his injury, the Devils were scouring the trade market for centers. They had interest in Jake Evans before he extended with the Montreal Canadiens on Tuesday. From Brock Nelson to Scott Laughton to every other center on the market, general manager Tom Fitzgerald will look around at what's available. My sense is New Jersey will expand its positional search, too, not just to centers but to any forward who can add offense.

I believe the Devils advised the Carolina Hurricanes before the Hughes injury that if the Canes were going to look at flipping Mikko Rantanen, they would be interested in getting into that conversation. I'm not convinced that Carolina would want to deal him to a team it might end up playing in the opening round of the playoffs, but stranger things have happened.

And I mean, it doesn't hurt to ask.

The Devils, by the way, are also looking for a depth piece on defense. So Fitzgerald is a busy man on the phone right now.

Oilers make their first move

There's reason to be excited if you're an Edmonton Oilers fan after Tuesday's trade for Trent Frederic and Max Jones. First of all, the cost wasn't exorbitant in my mind, especially given that there was double salary retention between the Boston Bruins and New Jersey on Frederic.

Frederic, who can play both center and wing, brings a physical element that the Oilers were sorely lacking. I believe the Oilers were also interested in Jordan Greenway from the Sabres for similar reasons but they get a player in Frederic who can play two positions. He's injured right now, but he'll be fine when it matters: the playoffs.

The underrated part of the deal is Jones. He should provide energy and physicality on the fourth line. It's an element, again, that the Oilers didn't have a lot of up front. They get more physical with both additions, and I'm all for it.

Now they need to add a defenseman and that'll be the priority for the Oil between now and Friday.

Canadiens' patience pays off

An example yet again of how deadlines reveal true intentions is how Jake Evans ended up extending with the Montreal Canadiens despite what was for the longest time a sizeable gap in talks.

The Habs showed great patience in pretty much sticking to their guns on the \$2.85 million average annual value they were willing to pay Evans in a new deal — a raise from his current \$1.7 million. Talks finally resumed Sunday between after a cold spell, but this ultimately came down to the player making the call on not wanting to leave Montreal.

Which in itself says something. The Canadiens under Jeff Gorton and Kent Hughes seem to have built a culture players want to be part of. Evans absolutely would have gotten more July 1 on the open market. But he couldn't see himself in another uniform.

His signing wasn't good news for the long list of teams that had kept tabs with Montreal, including the likes of the Toronto Maple Leafs, the Winnipeg Jets and the Devils.

The center trade market wasn't that deep to begin with.

Kraken willing to retain

The Seattle Kraken, I'm told, are willing to eat 50 percent of winger Brandon Tanev's \$3.5 million cap hit to help facilitate a trade, which makes sense as it should help improve the return and also widen the field of teams.

There are both high-end Cup contenders and bubble teams interested in the pending unrestricted free agent, and he's got some level of control with a modified no-trade. It screams the Vegas Golden Knights, to me — the type of player they love adding — but the Ottawa Senators are an example of a bubble team that also has interest.

Avs looking forward

Colorado Avalanche GM Chris MacFarland met with local media earlier this week and hinted captain Gabriel Landeskog likely wasn't coming back before the end of the regular season.

It's a safe assumption.

A reminder that Landeskog hasn't played since lifting the Stanley Cup over his head back in June 2022. He's attempting to come back from the type of knee surgery that no other NHLer has. So there's no guarantee when or if that will be. But there's finally some clarity at least on the rest of this regular season.

Having said that, the Avs have already been operating in LTIR all season.

What doesn't change is Colorado's intention to add at forward. That's the priority between now and Friday's deadline. The home-run swing would be Brock Nelson, but if that can't be done, I would expect a forward addition of some kind, even if it's more on the depth side.

The Athletic / The greatest hockey game ever? They were on the TV call

By Richard Deitsch – March 5, 2025

Chris Cuthbert and Sean McDonough shared an experience last month that they'll never forget as play-by-play announcers:

They called one of the greatest hockey games ever played.

Cuthbert, a Sportsnet (Canada) broadcaster, and McDonough, who works for ESPN, were on the mic for the Canadian and American broadcasts of Canada's 3-2 overtime victory over the United States in the 4 Nations Face-Off championship game on Feb. 20 in Boston.

The final drew an astonishing 9.3 million viewers on ESPN, per Nielsen. To put that in perspective: The viewership topped Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final between Boston and St. Louis in 2019, which drew 8.9 million viewers on NBC and was the most-watched NHL game since the league returned to broadcast TV in 1995.

In Canada, the game averaged 5.7 million viewers on Sportsnet and 1.2 million viewers on French-speaking TVA.

Viewership was unquestionably juiced by the political backdrop: U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly said Canada should be the "51st U.S. state," a suggestion about sovereignty that has understandably angered Canadians across its 5,525-mile-long border. Trump also has repeatedly threatened tariffs on Canada since coming into office.

I recently interviewed Cuthbert and McDonough separately about each broadcaster's 4 Nations experience. I think you'll find it interesting how the two broadcasters processed the same event.

Answers have been edited for length and clarity.

Where does calling the final rank for you as far as a career highlight?

Cuthbert: I'm always asked where the Sidney Crosby goal call (to win the men's hockey tournament at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver) ranks in my career. My answer has always been if there's something else that comes along that can be close, I'm all for it. I've answered that thinking that's not going to happen.

I won't say Connor McDavid's (game-winning) goal was as big as the Crosby goal, but in the moment, it was in the conversation and that surprised me.

It resonated louder than I ever expected it might. ... For a whole generation, the Crosby goal was their moment, and I think in some ways for anybody that's 25- or 30-years-old and under, the goal by McDavid was another semi-generations moment.

McDonough: It's right there with anything I have called.

It was a remarkable tournament from start to finish, and particularly the championship game. As an American, most of the people that I talked to said, "Wow, that was great, I just wish the result was different."

The game was tremendous and even more special for me because it was in Boston. The morning of the game, I was sitting there in the TD Garden "Will McDonough Press Room," named after my Dad.

I asked (U.S. coach) Mike Sullivan, who grew up a couple of towns away from me in the south suburbs of Boston, “Is it more meaningful for you that it’s in Boston?” He got choked up and he said, yes, it really is and there’ll be a lot of Sullivans here tonight. There’s always a lot of Sullivans at any game in Boston, by the way (laughs).

The atmosphere was like a World Series game, a Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final. Obviously, the rating was enormous. Everything about it was awesome. The passion, the intensity and most of all for me as a hockey fan, the caliber of play.

How did you process the political element surrounding the event as it related to your broadcast?

Cuthbert: I certainly felt the weight of it, but when the puck is dropped I always think that the most important thing is what’s happening on the ice.

I referenced the Canadian anthem, which was controversial, contentious. I’m against anybody changing the words of the anthem. Except in the case of (singer) Chantal Kreviazuk, I think I actually supported it and referenced it because I think she was speaking for the country in a sense and feeling that she was in a hostile environment.

I said, “She understood the assignment.” A lot of people didn’t like it — and I get it. Ninety-nine percent of the time if somebody changes the words to my anthem, I’m usually offended. But I kind of thought, you know what, she should be on the bench here tonight because she’s ready to play for her country ... I will say that Canadians are always at their most patriotic when the puck is dropped. ...

I talked to a colleague during the tournament who was out in B.C. (British Columbia), and he said you would not believe how upset people are out there. We’re always in a bit of a vacuum when you get into an Olympics or a world championship because the hockey is all encompassing in the moment. But you could feel it from the outside.

Maybe I didn’t have a full feeling of it, but if you’re Canadian and if you’re a hockey fan and if you read the newspaper or follow the news at all, you knew that the stakes were higher.

McDonough: We had those conversations as a group. Linda Schulz now oversees our (ESPN’s) hockey coverage, and I was asking her, how are we going to cover this? You have to wait to see what actually happens. Particularly talking about the game in Boston, would there be a response from the American fans to the Canadian folks booing the U.S. national anthem in Montreal?

One of the problems that you have, and I talked about this with Linda, is they sing the Canadian national anthem first, then they sing the U.S. anthem, then it’s basically show the goalies and puck drop. You don’t want to miss the buildup. On the talk-back to our (production) truck, I said this needs at least a little ribbon wrapped around it. So I said there was a smattering of boos when this woman started to sing and then that ended pretty quickly.

It was very noticeable that some people in the crowd started singing along with her and clearly there were many Americans doing that. I acknowledged that and then kind of let it go because there really wasn’t much more time. ...

What I wish — and I didn’t know this at the time — was the woman who sang the national anthem, Chantal Kreviazuk, she changed the words to say “that only us command.”

I had a headset on, but I turned to our stage manager and said, “She botched the words.” I thought she’d just screwed up. I didn’t realize this was intentional at the time.

How did you feel about your call of McDavid’s game-winner?

Cuthbert: I'll take you back to 2010, and this will surprise some people who listened to the game in Canada: I wasn't 100 percent pleased with my Crosby call. I think most people associate if it's a great moment they love, then of course the call was great. But there were little things about the call I didn't like.

The Crosby goal happened quick, and I always thought if I get another chance at calling a goal as important as that, I'm going to handle it a little different.

It was like I almost knew that puck was going into the net from the time it hit McDavid's stick. It was such a clear picture compared to the Crosby goal which happened in a flash.

The McDavid call was probably 15 years in the making, and I like it a lot more than I did the one in 2010.

McDonough: You kind of have to be prepared for all possibilities.

I said a couple of times, who's going to be Sidney Crosby? Who is going to be Paul Henderson? Who's going to be Mike Eruzione? Someone is going to score one of the big international goals in the history of their country.

I was proud of our group. A lot of times you do a game and you feel like that was a great game, but I was a little off or whatever. Sometimes the game's not very good, but every word came out flawlessly and you told great stories.

I watched the tape flying back from Pittsburgh, and it's one of the few times where I said to myself if you had a chance to do that over again, would you do it differently — and the answer was no.

For people who don't think I'm a good hockey announcer, I would say please watch that and if you still feel that way, explain to me why.

The Athletic / NHL Stanley Cup 2024-25 contender checklist: Western Conference edition

By Shayna Goldman – March 5, 2025

The NHL trade deadline is an in-season opportunity for playoff hopefuls to accent their rosters — not completely reinvent them.

What should those teams be in the market for? That's what the Stanley Cup Checklist can help outline.

After looking at the Eastern Conference playoff picture, we are shifting West today.

As a quick review, the Cup Checklist was created by The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn in 2020 to find common elements essential to a team's success between a decade of champions. The checklist has an average value for each element — from the 2010 Blackhawks, now updated through the 2024 Panthers — with a range of one standard deviation in each direction.

The checklist uses two sets of numbers — a player's actual Game Score Value Added based on this season, and their projected value, which uses three years of data weighed for recency and adjusted for age (read more on GSVA [here](#)). All data was collected before the games on March 1, and Western Conference teams with at least 15 percent playoff odds are featured.

The Cup Checklist is not the be-all and end-all. It does not account for playing style, coaching or chemistry. The expectation should not be gold checks across the board; even the best teams can't check off every box and fall below average in one area or another. The strongest teams usually make up for those gaps in other ways.

There are different ways to build and analyze a contender. The Checklist is just a jumping off point for that analysis. It's a vibe check for the teams in the playoff picture today.

Stanley Cup Checklist Legend

Red X: Falls below the range entirely

Gray checkmark: Passable, but below the average champion

Black checkmark: Above average relative to the average Cup winner

Gold checkmark: Exceeds the range entirely

Winnipeg Jets

The league-leading Jets have checks across the board this year. Winnipeg is the most complete Western Conference team; the only other team with 12 checks for their 2024-25 values is the Hurricanes.

The Jets have hammered out some of last season's weaknesses, which shows on a team-wide and individual level, with numerous players exceeding their projected values. That's true at the top of the lineup with Kyle Connor and Josh Morrissey and with important parts of the supporting cast like Dylan Samberg.

Still, it's easy to pinpoint their biggest area of need: center depth. Vladislav Namestnikov may be passable as a 2C, but an upgrade would elevate the team's one-two center punch. Ideally, the Jets will find someone proven in the postseason to take on that role since that has been a shortcoming for some, like Nikolaj Ehlers. That conversation has surrounded Connor Hellebuyck as well. He is one of the best

goalies in the world, until the postseason. But if 4 Nations is indicative of how he truly handles high-pressure situations, then maybe his playoff struggles are due to his regular-season workload.

Dallas Stars

Player placements are based on role and average time on the ice. In Dallas, this is tricky because Matt Duchene and Wyatt Johnston play a lot more than Roope Hintz and Jason Robertson, despite the latter two being deployed as first-liners. However, the results are similar in terms of checks and balances, no matter how this group is slotted.

Questions in Dallas revolve around their injured stars. The timelines for Miro Heiskanen and Tyler Seguin to return aren't clear yet. If Seguin can return and regain his form, the Stars will get a major boost up front. The team already made an addition upfront in Mikael Granlund to deepen the forward group in his absence.

On the back end, Thomas Harley has been excellent. But the depth behind him (and Heiskanen when healthy) is a lot more suspect. Cody Ceci's defensive struggles are a concern, but his workload should ease when Heiskanen is back. Still, the team may want to find a bit more help on defense.

Minnesota Wild

There is good and bad in Minnesota. The bad is that this roster has legitimate holes, even with injured players still being featured on the checklist. The team is still without its most valuable player, Kirill Kaprizov. And the center position is a lot weaker with Joel Eriksson Ek sidelined.

The good is that a lot of players have stepped up. Marco Rossi has emerged as the top-six center this team has been missing. Matt Boldy is the franchise winger this team needs behind Kaprizov. Brock Faber's numbers don't look particularly inspiring, but there is a lot more to his game than a red 'X' — he plays heavy minutes and has had to shoulder a lot with so many injuries this season.

Despite the Wild's playoff standing, the real question is how much the team should invest at the deadline. Low-key moves like adding Gustav Nyquist are fine, but big swings may need to be a bit more forward-thinking for next year.

Vegas Golden Knights

The Golden Knights lineup does not have many holes when at full strength. There are two key injuries right now. Shea Theodore is an elite two-way defenseman, and luckily for the Golden Knights, he is only out week-to-week. So that should keep their defensive depth in great shape for the playoffs.

Vegas has worked on building up its center depth around original misfit William Karlsson. His shutdown ability and penalty-killing help round out this roster. His timeline isn't clear yet, but he is skating. As long as he is back for the playoffs, the team should not need to swing for another center.

Instead, the focus will likely be on a winger. That's the biggest weakness. It's the one area that has suffered as Vegas built up their defensive and center depth. Brandon Saad has been a fine, low-key addition to the top nine, but based on past tendencies, the team will likely hunt for someone who is a bit more impactful.

Edmonton Oilers

It is easy to point to goaltending as the biggest weakness for the Oilers. Stuart Skinner is not the picture of consistency. Last year, Skinner saved 0.233 goals above expected per 60 minutes of play. This season, his rate has dropped down to 0.098 per 60. The problem is that his consistency isn't just an issue from season to season but game to game.

While goaltending should be on the Oilers' radar at the deadline, the most pressing needs are in front of the blue paint.

Edmonton's offseason signings seemed like strong fits on paper, but few have lived up to the hype. Vasily Podkolzin is a hard-working winger for the middle six, but Viktor Arvidsson and Jeff Skinner aren't playing at the level this team needs. And that's even more glaring with both Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Zach Hyman regressing this year. The team could use more support on defense, too.

Upgrades around Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl should help the Oilers outscore some of their goalie issues. Reinforcements on defense should limit some of the chaos Skinner is expected to calm.

Los Angeles Kings

The Kings' star power can't compete with a team like the Oilers, who they may be destined to face once again in Round 1. But their strength is in their depth.

Between Anze Kopitar, Quinton Byfield and Phillip Danault, the Kings have three centers of similar value who can all handle matchup minutes. Drew Doughty's actual value isn't too concerning right now because it's based on a small sample of regular season play this year, and his projected value provides a bubble of the caliber he can reach. Behind him, Vladislav Gavrikov and Mikey Anderson have stepped up in the top four.

While the Kings have a solid core of wingers — Adrian Kempe is great, Kevin Fiala has finally gotten back on track, and Alex Laferriere has been a real bright spot — there is room for improvement here. The team should target another top-nine winger to add some pop to this group. Not only would it deepen their approach, but it would likely have a ripple effect on their centers and overall elevate this forward group.

Colorado Avalanche

Martin Necas' value may not stack up to Mikko Rantanen's over the last three years or this season alone. But that doesn't change what a fit he has been in Colorado. He is a zone-entry machine who not only benefits from playing alongside Nathan MacKinnon but also legitimately complements him.

MacKinnon's value can make up a lot of ground, but there is still a hole down the middle of the second line. Casey Mittelstadt hasn't found the form that made him such a strong fit post-deadline last season. Maybe he can turn it around now that he has more support on the wings — Necas, Jonathan Drouin, Artturi Lehkonen, and a healthy Valeri Nichushkin make up a solid top-six winger core. But the team could consider an upgrade at center, or bolster their depth below the top-six.

The team already has addressed their blue line with the Ryan Lindgren trade. While his value seriously declined in New York, a change in usage and systems could benefit him in Colorado. The Avs have to bet on that, since their second pair isn't perfect (or completely healthy).

Calgary Flames

After the Avalanche, the Western Conference playoff picture opens up. The Flames sit in the second wild card seed right now, but only have a 15 percent chance of actually making it. The roster strength has something to do with it.

As currently constructed, the Flames do not look like a real playoff contender. But it isn't that worrisome with the long-term plan in mind. Calgary took a step back, moved out a lot of their NHL-caliber talent, and leaned on more up-and-coming players this season. The most noteworthy is back in net; Dustin Wolf should be on many Calder ballots this spring and could even get some recognition behind Connor Hellebuyck in the Vezina conversation.

The Flames may not be a true contender, but can operate with those playoff hopes in mind. Maybe the team won't move Rasmus Andersson at the deadline. After selling last year, management can afford to look for a younger NHL-caliber center to help improve their chances now and in the future.

Vancouver Canucks

It has been a really tumultuous year in Vancouver. Elias Pettersson has not been playing at the level a playoff team needs from their first-line center. Conor Garland, who has the highest average ice time of their wingers, is better suited for a middle-six role. Brock Boeser, whose future is uncertain in Vancouver, isn't playing at last year's heights. And Jake DeBrusk has been streaky in his first season with the team. Issues down the middle only amplify those concerns on the wing.

There have been a few bright spots, though. Quinn Hughes has been otherworldly again this season, but the team is overly reliant on him to be a game-breaker on a nightly basis. Kevin Lankinen has stepped up since Thatcher Demko's durability has been such an issue. And Filip Chytil has fit in well with the Canucks so far.

Of the teams in the wild card race, the Canucks have the best odds. But this roster can only go so far as currently constructed, especially if Hughes is sidelined for any extended period. It could be in their best interest to start reloading for next year.

Utah Hockey Club

On paper, Utah doesn't quite look playoff-caliber... not yet at least. There has been a lot of progression this season in Utah. Logan Cooley isn't the 1C of a contender's dreams just yet, but is becoming a real top-six threat. Even Barrett Hayton has gotten on track to show he has the chops to play at a high level in the NHL. Clayton Keller and Dylan Guenther are a dangerous one-two punch on the wings, and some blue line additions from last summer have helped solidify this group.

After years of collecting future assets in Arizona, Utah is stocked with draft picks and prospects. So this team can make some noise in the trade market — especially if the Canucks end up taking a step back. Even if Utah moves on from pending unrestricted free agents such as Nick Bjugstad, management could still pursue another top-nine center and winger to better their short- and long-term outlook. Ownership's willingness to take big swings could help this team stay in the playoff race, and the team can afford to take that risk even if it falls short.

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

By Ryan S. Clark & Greg Wyshynski – March 5, 2025

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

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

March 1 featured three big trades, with Ryan Lindgren headed to the Colorado Avalanche, the Minnesota Wild adding Gustav Nyquist, and Seth Jones joining the Florida Panthers.

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

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

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

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

Edmonton Oilers

Grade: B+

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Boston Bruins

Grade: A-

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

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

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

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

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

New Jersey Devils

Grade: B+

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

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

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

March 1: Panthers land Jones, send Knight to Blackhawks

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

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

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

Florida Panthers

Grade: A-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chicago Blackhawks

Grade: A+

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

March 1: Predators trade Nyquist to the Wild

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

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

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

Minnesota Wild

Grade: B

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nashville Predators

Grade: B

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Colorado Avalanche

Grade: B+

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

Getting Lindgren accomplishes a few items for the Avs:

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

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

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

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

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

New York Rangers

Grade: B+

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

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

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

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

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

That made it important for the Rangers to get something of value in return. They did so by adding draft capital for 2025, plus two players in de Haan and Parssinen who provide depth to a lineup that's still

trying to make the playoffs. The Rangers came into Saturday four points behind the Detroit Red Wings and Columbus Blue Jackets for the two Eastern Conference wild-card spots.

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

Feb. 1: Stars get Granlund, Ceci from Sharks

It's been a week for the Dallas Stars.

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

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

Dallas Stars

Grade: A-

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

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

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

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

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

San Jose Sharks

Grade: A+

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New York Rangers

Grade: A-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vancouver Canucks

Grade: B-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let's look at how both front offices fared.

Vancouver Canucks

Grade: B

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pittsburgh Penguins

Grade: B

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Calgary Flames

Grade: B+

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Philadelphia Flyers

Grade: B+

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Carolina Hurricanes

Grade: A+

Quite simply, the Hurricanes are coming for everyone.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Can he re-sign Rantanen?

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

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

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

Colorado Avalanche

Grade: B+

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

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

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

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

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

Until it wasn't.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chicago Blackhawks

Grade: C-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New York Rangers

Grade: C-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Seattle Kraken

Grade: B

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

The key word being potential.

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

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

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

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

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

Again, the key word here being, potentially.

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

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

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

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

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

Dec. 14: Fowler traded to St. Louis

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

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

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

St. Louis Blues

Grade: B+

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This could be a win-win deal. Fowler gives the Ducks someone with experience operating a power play. The Blues provide Fowler with the ice time he wasn't receiving on the man advantage, as he had just 10:07 in power-play ice time this season after reaching the 100-minute mark in all but one season since making his debut in 2010-11.

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

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

Anaheim Ducks

Grade: B

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

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

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

There's that word. Future.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Colorado Avalanche**Grade: B**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

San Jose Sharks

Grade: B+

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kovalenko is another player who could also help the Sharks this season and possibly beyond. He gives the Sharks a ninth player younger than 25 on the roster, in a group that includes Macklin Celebrini,

William Eklund, Mario Ferraro and Will Smith, among others. Kovalenko, who has four goals and eight points in 28 games, could possibly challenge for a top-nine role. He's also a pending restricted free agent, which means the Sharks could look to sign him to a new deal or move on from him via another trade.

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

Dec. 6: Trouba to the Ducks

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

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

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

New York Rangers

Grade: A

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part of this grade goes to the Rangers' front office in 2019, when Drury was an assistant GM, for having the foresight to create this pressure point. And part of it goes to Drury, who exerted that pressure to

move Trouba's cap hit off the books, remove an ineffective defenseman from his blue line and send a shock to the system of a struggling team.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anaheim Ducks

Grade: B

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

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

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

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

It's safe to say that Trouba is in decline at 30 years old. He might have been a liability with the Rangers, but the bar is set rather lower in Anaheim. This is an atrocious defensive team. The Ducks are giving up

3.14 expected goals against per 60 minutes at 5-on-5, last in the league and the only NHL team over three expected goals against on average this season. They earn only 45% of the shot attempts in a game, 31st in the NHL. No one gives up more high-danger shot attempts (13.5 per 60 minutes) than Anaheim -- although please note that the Rangers were right behind them (13.1).

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

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

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

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

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

Nov. 30: Jiricek traded to the Wild

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

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

Minnesota Wild

Grade: B+

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

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

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

As for what this all means for this season?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Columbus Blue Jackets

Grade: B+

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They also have youth in their system. They used one of their three first-round picks in 2021 to draft Corson Ceulemans. A year later, they used one of their two first-rounders to take Denton Mateychuk. Of course, the other player they drafted in the first round that year was Jiricek. They also used four of their

six picks to draft defensemen in 2024, with the most notable being Charlie Elick, who went in the second round.

[Sportsnet.ca / Real Kyper's Trade Board 5.0: 25 names to watch this week](#)

By Nick Kypreos – March 5, 2025

Even though we saw three trades with playoff ramifications over the weekend, we enter the final week before the NHL's trade deadline with plenty of teams still weighing the market, their outlook, and contemplating how aggressive they want to be by Friday at 3 p.m. ET / noon PT.

While just over a week ago I had the St. Louis Blues hanging up the 'for sale' sign and writing that Doug Armstrong was open for business, they did manage to follow that by stringing four wins together and putting themselves back to within a whisker of the Canucks and Flames for the last wild card spot in the west.

Armstrong always says he lets the players tell him with their play what he should do at the trade deadline, so their situation is not so clear again. Is it possible that Wednesday's game in Los Angeles — St. Louis' last before the trade deadline — will dictate how aggressive, or not, Armstrong plays his hand?

Meanwhile in the East, leave it to the reigning Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers to set the tone on the trade market and reset expectations by going big and acquiring Seth Jones over the weekend.

In the wake of that deal, Dallas' low bid to Chicago to try and get Jones leaves them going back to the drawing board, but don't expect them to be idle. Stars GM Jim Nill may now turn his attention towards other defencemen, such as Rasmus Ristolainen, as a possible solution.

Toronto is also feeling the squeeze of Jones going to Florida, a direct competitor in the tight Atlantic Division. The Maple Leafs would love to finish first in the division to likely avoid a first-round matchup against Florida or Tampa Bay, but lead the Panthers by just a single point despite winning five games in a row. Look for the Leafs to respond to Florida's move in some way.

Despite GM Brad Treliving's public plea for a centre, I'm hearing there is a focus on acquiring more depth for the blue line.

There is another big question around Toronto as we head to this important week: where does the team stand with Mitch Marner now less than four months until his contract expires and he becomes eligible for unrestricted free agency?

The fact is, Marner's no-movement clause makes this situation rather easy to understand. After many failed spring playoff attempts, only a deep post-season run can give management a shot at re-signing him this off-season. Another early playoff exit and Marner is as good as gone. If that comes to pass, Toronto would be looking to reinvest cap dollars in other big ways.

Believe it or not with as many as 23 teams still waiting out results from their next game, we might have to wait another 72 hours before the floodgates really open up on the trade market.

Detroit and Columbus are also in buyer positions, but both remain reluctant to overspend now when their rosters are not quite ready for deep runs. Ottawa, on the other hand, is in cap hell and much like the Winnipeg Jets, they are working around many players having them on their 'no-trade' lists. Meantime the New York Rangers and Boston Bruins, right on the heels of those three, are thinking about selling.

As we head into what's always a wild week of NHL transactions, here's my latest trade board, which we'll update as the games unfold.

In 11 games with the Hurricanes, Mikko Rantanen has two goals and six points while Carolina sits 4-6-1, not pulling away from the pack behind them as GM Eric Tulsky may have hoped when he traded for the player in January.

It hasn't been an easy time for Rantanen to get acclimated to his new surroundings, with six of those games being on the road and the schedule interrupted by the 4 Nations Face-Off.

For now, Rantanen's status remains status quo and the Hurricanes have a big decision to make. Word is he won't sign an extension this week, so the ball is in ownership's hand to keep him and push ahead into the playoffs with a top 10 player in the league who could leave via free agency, or trade him again.

Whichever team has Rantanen on the roster after the deadline has passed is the only one that can offer him an eight-year deal, but can only do so until the market opens on July 1.

I was so tempted to take Brad Marchand off my trade board because he's hurt and not expected to play again until after the deadline. He publicly remains adamant that he wants to remain a Bruin, but I keep hearing teams like Vegas and Colorado won't go away.

Marchand, who doesn't have a complete no-trade clause, has made it clear around the league he doesn't want to be traded. Boston also has made it clear that if he does open up to the possibility of being traded, the 36-year-old winger will return GM Don Sweeney some much-needed assets back. This could also leave the door open to Marchand re-signing with the Bruins again in the off-season as a free agent.

After a great performance at the 4 Nations Face-Off, Erik Karlsson has returned to NHL action with seven points in six games, but a minus-7 rating overall.

Making \$10 million against the cap for another two seasons beyond this one, it won't be too punishing if the Penguins retain a little money, especially if it increases Karlsson's trade value. Seth Jones, though a younger defenceman, was moved over the weekend for a young, future hopeful No. 1 netminder and a first-round pick and the Blackhawks had to retain \$2.5 million of his cap hit to get that return.

Could the Penguins take a similar approach with Karlsson? The team has one more salary retention slot remaining, with Reilly Smith and Jeff Petry on the books through the end of this season.

Coming out of a tough weekend in a tie for the second wild card with Calgary at 65 points and just 1-4-0 since returning from the international tournament break, it's believed the Canucks don't want to wave the white flag on the season and are still trying to find ways to improve their group.

Unfortunately, no new meaningful talks on a contract have happened with Brock Boeser recently, so an \$8 million AAV remains out there on a short-term deal from earlier in the season. A 40-goal scorer last season, Boeser has scored just four times in 24 games since the calendar turned to 2025 and didn't record a shot in Saturday's 6-3 loss to Seattle.

Vancouver remains open to any avenue with Boeser, whether to re-sign him by Friday, trade him as a rental, or possibly even move ahead with him on the roster unsigned.

With the Canucks not setting up to be an outright seller, I've taken Elias Pettersson back off the trade board this time, though he will remain a player to watch after the season ends.

The Sabres are set up to sell again, but with so many options of how to approach this week in front of him, the question is how big and bold will GM Kevyn Adams get in the trade market?

Dylan Cozens remains a name to watch, two seasons removed from a 31-goal output, making \$7.1 million against the cap through 2029-30, still just 24 years old and with big upside as a top-six centre.

But his value is perhaps not as high as it should be right now, facing back-to-back seasons of declining production.

It's a situation for the Sabres to be cautious about. They've extended a rebuild before when they traded Jack Eichel and have seen several players moved go on to have much more success elsewhere. Making the same mistake again with such a young player at an important position is a risk the Sabres would be taking by trading Cozens.

Bowen Byram will be an RFA at the end of the season and a valued asset -- he's equalled his career high in points already and is 13th among all NHL blueliners with 27 even strength points, tied with Victor Hedman and John Carlson

As the Sabres explore their options, they're listening to teams on the 23-year-old Byram, but also on 24-year-old blueliner Mattias Samuelsson who is already under contract at a \$4.285 million cap hit through 2029-30. It's unlikely the Sabres would trade both of these players, but one could be in play.

Alex Tuch could be another option for the Sabres to move, a 28-year-old power winger who's third on the team in scoring and tied for 20th among all NHL forwards with 18 even strength goals. He has the size (6-foot-4, 220 pounds), goal scoring acumen, penalty killing ability and willingness to block shots that will all be valued by rival GMs.

As Adams considers his options, trading Tuch may not be as eyebrow-raising as a Cozens or Byram move, but it surely would make for an exciting hockey trade. Tuch is not a rental, still under contract for one more season at \$4.75 million and in his prime at 28 years of age.

A four-game winning streak was snapped with Sunday's 6-3 loss in Dallas and, outside of that game, Jordan Binnington has been excellent since returning from the 4 Nations Face-Off. Suddenly the Blues are in the thick of the Western wild card race again, just one point behind Vancouver and Calgary, though with two more games played than both.

GM Doug Armstrong could take all of his decisions right down to the wire, with a road game in Los Angeles Wednesday night their last before Friday's trade deadline.

Binnington remains a name to watch as he would be the top goaltender available, still under contract at \$6 million for another two seasons. The issue for Armstrong is a very weak goalie market that may need to wait until the off-season. Edmonton remains the only bonafide partner at this point. The Oilers are on Binnington's no-trade list, but he could change his mind for the possibility of chasing a Stanley Cup with Connor McDavid. Binnington would have Carolina on his no-trade list as well, and Detroit seems an unlikely candidate at this point in their team's development.

Whatever happens, Armstrong still wants to shed some money and turn over some of this roster before next season, so many possibilities are on the table. Brayden Schenn, 33, is making \$6.5 million for another three seasons and though he's the captain of this team, might be a candidate for the GM to attain that change.

Schenn is having a down season overall in 2024-25, but has been something of a leader in this charge back into the playoff race for St. Louis, with six points in his past five games. That may yet convince Armstrong to keep his captain around, but if many teams get involved and drum up a competitive market, St. Louis may be presented with an offer they can't refuse. The idea of uniting Brayden Schenn with his brother Luke in separate deals remains a target for a couple teams.

If it's not Schenn that gets a deal done, Armstrong is believed to still be taking calls on the likes of Pavel Buchnevich and Jordan Kyrou, two younger players signed long-term who have appeared on my list in the past.

As for defencemen, the Blues have been looking into trading one of their top paid blueliners for some time, but four of them have no-trade clauses. That possibility remains true this week.

Colton Parayko has gone from someone deemed untouchable to suddenly a player garnering a lot of attention around the league. His trade value has never been higher, which is forcing the team to consider him in trade talks. Parayko has already scored a career high in goals and is tied for fourth among all defencemen in the league with 15. He's also 6-foot-6, 228 pounds, can kill penalties, and is signed through 2029-30 at \$6.5 million.

Justin Faulk has appeared on my list before and is a name that's still on the table as well. Armstrong won't trade all of these players, and isn't looking to tear down the roster to rebuild, but is taking Washington's lead in how to consider re-tooling a team on the fly to get a better result.

With a two-goal, three-point effort on Saturday, Brock Nelson helped lead the Islanders to their second consecutive win, but they still trail the playoffs by five points and will have to get over six other teams to get there. Still, it's close enough that it's not clear what GM Lou Lamoriello will decide to do or, if he does sell, how far he decides to go with it.

Nelson might be the player who moves the needle most for contenders looking at New York's roster, a middle-six centre who has scored 37, 36 and 34 goals over the past three seasons and with 19 goals in 59 games this season. The market for centres is deep and diverse, but the Islanders could come away with a nice return for the 33-year-old.

The Islanders will also have to consider what to do with another rental, winger Kyle Palmieri, who has scored three times in four games since teams returned from the 4 Nations.

A pending UFA making just \$3.75 million against the Rangers' cap (thanks to previous salary retention by the Penguins), Reilly Smith hasn't fit in so cleanly with New York this season, scoring just 10 goals in 58 games and none since Jan. 23.

Smith was held out of Saunday's game (a 4-0 win over Nashville) for "roster management purposes" which clearly increases the likelihood that he'll be moved by Friday. New York plays again at home Monday vs. the Islanders and Wednesday against Washington before a call has to be made.

Meantime, the Rangers are just two points out of the East's second wild card spot, with three wins in their past four games.

Colorado got the weekend off and play again on Tuesday at home to Pittsburgh and Thursday against San Jose before the trade deadline. The Avs have already traded for Martin Necas and Jack Drury earlier this season, then acquired defenceman Ryan Lindgren from the Rangers over the weekend, but may not be done yet.

Colorado has \$3.286 million in projected deadline day cap space, per PuckPedia, but may also explore moving Casey Mittelstadt one year after acquiring him from the Sabres. Mittelstadt, a 26-year-old centre, makes \$5.75 million on the cap for another two seasons, but hasn't been the seamless answer as Colorado's second line pivot, a role they've been trying to fill since Nazem Kadri left in free agency.

It's an area Avs GM Chris MacFarland may still be looking to address by Friday.

Six points out of the playoffs, the Ducks' charge may not be enough to finish the job this season, but they're starting to make progress. Still, GM Pat Verbeek will be looking for ways to set his team up to take another step next season, and Trevor Zegras' name remains out there.

No longer a highly productive player on the rise, Zegras has dealt with various injuries the past two seasons, which have slowed him to 31 points in his past 65 games played. There is no chance the Ducks

will be able to get the same return in trade on Zegras today than if they had decided to move him two years ago, but Verbeek has been looking into finding the player a new home all season.

Still just 24 years old next week, making \$5.75 million through next season, someone may yet be willing to step up and take the chance on Zegras while he can be had. He will return from a three-game suspension this week, when the Ducks will face Edmonton and Vancouver in Tuesday and Wednesday night road games.

When John Gibson was forced to leave a game early last week, the first question was 'what did that mean for his trade candidacy?' With so few quality netminders available in trade, Gibson was seen as an attractive target having a bounce back season -- .911 save percentage, 2.76 GAA, and eighth in the league in Goals Saved Above Expected, per MoneyPuck.

Fears of an injury dissipated quickly, however, and Gibson returned to Anaheim's net Saturday, though in a rough 6-3 loss to Chicago in which the netminder made just 18 saves on 24 shots.

The Ducks acquired another goalie, Ville Husso, last week, which gives them organizational depth and an option behind Lukas Dostal if Gibson is traded, but the move itself doesn't indicate something is definitively coming down the pipe.

Gibson is signed at \$6.4 million for another two years and will turn 32 in July.

Ryan Donato continues to appeal to contending teams and scored twice in Saturday's win over Anaheim.

Donato is having a career season, now with 21 goals and 22 assists and the team leader in even strength goals and points. If there is one thing to be aware of, it's that Donato's shooting percentage is also at a career high, so this level of production may yet slow down, but he's a feisty player and one of Chicago's team leaders in hits. He wins just over 45 per cent of his draws, but also can be used on the wing.

By trading Seth Jones to Florida over the weekend for Spencer Knight and a first-round pick, Blackhawks GM Kyle Davidson signalled that this team was still in the thick of a rebuild and was able to get a good return for a player seeking a way out. While Donato could be a useful player for the Hawks going forward, the fact is he's a pending UFA making just \$2 million against the cap, so the team will likely sell high on him in this moment.

The Blackhawks have now used up all three of their retention slots, however, meaning a buyer will have to take on Donato at full value or else find a third team to get involved.

Sharks GM Mike Grier is still seeking the right return for Mario Ferraro, a left shot blueliner under contract for \$3.25 million and signed for another season at that attractive number.

Ferraro can play physical and is not shy about blocking shots. He can kill penalties (third on the Sharks in PK ice time per game) and play reliable minutes in the top four. Ferraro does a good job tipping the ice more than most other San Jose defencemen and has gotten a lower percentage of offensive zone starts than any of them as well. He's drawn tough assignments and has done well enough with them, considering the Sharks are the NHL's worst team with a horrendous minus-73 goal differential.

Still just 26 years old, he's on the fringe of being young enough that he could be a useful piece for the Sharks when they come out of this rebuild, so it's still possible the team keeps him and looks at re-signing him before he hits the open market in a year. But by moving him now, a year before he becomes UFA eligible, the Sharks may try and acquire more future assets instead.

With four wins in their past five games -- and at least one point in each -- the Flyers are hanging on to playoff hope, four back of the wild card Monday morning. Management may be cautious in how it

approaches the deadline overall, not wanting to give up on the roster yet -- especially when the team is delivering results -- and making sure to not sell low on any players under contract.

That brings us to Rasmus Ristolainen, who is enjoying something of a bounceback season with 19 points, a team-leading 90 hits, 88 blocked shots and an important presence on Philadelphia's penalty kill. Big, right shot, physical defencemen are common targets this time of year and the Flyers could be enticed to move him for the right price.

But Ristolainen still has another season remaining on his deal, so the Flyers won't be rushed into making a move if the price isn't right. They're by no means out of the race yet.

Scott Laughton stirred the trade rumour mill over the weekend with a 'last supper' photo that made it seem like he knew something was up. It turns out that Laughton, a mainstay on trade lists for the past year, was trying to have fun with the ongoing speculation.

"We were joking around, I think you kinda got to keep it light at this time of year," he said Saturday.

"Joking around that it was my last time (with the Flyers) on the road. (Teammate Erik Johnson) was kind of poking fun at me, so we re-created a little picture.

"I think when you're in (trade) rumours for five years straight, it's nice to get some people back with a little bit of trolling."

Like Ristolainen, Laughton is not in a situation where he has to be traded now but if it is a sellers' market for centres, the Flyers might entertain a move if someone meets their price, which is thought to be for at least a first-round pick.

Making just \$3 million against the cap for another season, Laughton leads all Flyers forwards in penalty kill time per game, wins just shy of 50 per cent of his draws, and is one of the more physical players on the roster. He has the ability to play centre or wing, so allows a coach some flexibility with how he lines up the players. Laughton is a best fit in a bottom-six role.

It remains to be seen what happens with Laughton, who was in a similar situation a year ago. But he's well-liked in the dressing room and by head coach John Tortorella, who certainly won't be satisfied to give up when the team is on a little bit of a roll, beating Winnipeg on Saturday. The Flyers play Calgary and Winnipeg again before Friday's deadline.

Just 4-5-1 in their past 10, Seattle has slipped to nine points out of the wild card and now GM Ron Francis will be considering a wide variety of moves. But one player who could bring the team back a sneaky good return is Brandon Tanev, one of the more physical players on the team who also leads all Seattle forwards in shot blocks.

Tanev is the Kraken's PK minutes leader per game and plays with the sort of intensity that translates to playoff hockey and is targeted by GMs around the deadline. He's not a big point scorer, though does have nine goals this season, so will be a load to handle in a depth winger role. A playoff rental type, through and through.

Since having surgery to repair a sports hernia, Yanni Gourde hasn't played a game since Jan. 5, with an initial timeline that he was expected to miss five-to-seven weeks. We're right near the end of that window now, though with just two games left before the trade deadline, Seattle may be careful with how it handles Gourde.

Before the injury, there was a long list of suitors for Gourde, an interesting and feisty third line centre who could greatly complement a contender's top two options and can kill penalties as well. Gourde has

the experience of winning two Stanley Cups with Tampa Bay, during which he scored a combined 13 goals in 48 games.

The injury introduces a bit more risk into acquiring the player, but it's still believed there will be a market for the pending UFA.

Saturday's loss to New Jersey ended a three-game winning streak for Utah, but they are very much alive again, just two points out of a wild card position. While they could look to leverage some assets to find improvement and upgrade the roster, it's still believed Utah's bigger trades will come in the off-season.

The fact is GM Bill Armstrong has lots to consider on this roster. Nick Bjugstad is a big forward on an expiring contract who could be sent out as a rental player. It's also been suggested that Utah thinks it needs to size up its forwards, meaning some smaller players such as Alexander Kerfoot (another pending UFA) or Matias Maccelli (scratched since Feb. 8, one year removed from recording 57 points) could also be had.

But if the Hockey Club seeks out a more intriguing return, Lawson Crouse will draw interest from around the league. Though Crouse, 27, is having a down season on offence (13 points in 60 games), he's a unique sort of player who can be used in all situations, and play physically (130 hits) at 6-foot-4, 214 pounds. Prior to this season, he scored at least 20 goals three years in a row.

Crouse is also under contract for another two years at \$4.3 million, a reasonable number that someone might want to jump all over.

With so many big things going on in Vancouver this season, depth defenceman Carson Soucy has come in under the radar, but is believed to be available. Not that he's a replacement for Quinn Hughes, but the injury to the team's captain over the weekend will put further pressure on the defence corps so, if management does not want to give up on the playoff push, moving Soucy becomes a little tougher to do.

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. He also has a full no-trade clause.

With 28 goals and 52 points in 62 games, Rickard Rakell is having one of the better offensive seasons of his career at age 31. And, if traded, it wouldn't be as a rental -- he is signed through the 2027-28 season at a \$5 million AAV. He has only partial no-trade protection.

I have to think he's really the only one that could bring back a nice package for Kyle Dubas to really start working on building something for the future in Pittsburgh. But it's not such an easy trade to make. The dilemma is this: Dubas cannot simply hang Sidney Crosby out to dry here. Rakell plays on Crosby's win, he's a good player and Crosby likes him.

If Rakell is traded, you're not sure where that could leave Crosby and Dubas' relationship.

I do believe the Islanders have to sell, and not just Brock Nelson.

Jean-Gabriel Pageau would be an interesting player for other teams, making \$5 million against the cap for one additional season past 2024-25. And I could see the Islanders eating a little of that on retention to make a trade work.

Pageau is a good penalty-killer, averaging more shorthanded minutes than any other Islanders forward. He's feisty, second on the team in hits, and he's good on the draw, winning nearly 60 per cent of his face-offs. He's a good depth player who has added 11 goals this season, already equalling what he put up in 82 games last season.

[Sportsnet.ca / What the past five Stanley Cup winners did at NHL trade deadline](#)

By Kristina Rutherford – March 5, 2025

The clock is ticking down to the NHL Trade Deadline on March 7, and with teams working until the dying minutes to address needs and find the last pieces to help them make a deep playoff run, major deals may well be cooking.

But does it actually pay off to make monster moves this time of year?

To answer that question, we looked at the last five winners of the Stanley Cup, examining the deals they struck in the final days, weeks and minutes before the deadline to gauge their ultimate impact.

The Lightning won their second Stanley Cup in franchise history one year after leading the regular season only to be swept in the first round by the Columbus Blue Jackets — upset city.

Since the Lightning won the 2018-19 Presidents' Trophy, the team obviously had key pieces in place already. As the Feb. 24 deadline neared in 2020, Tampa added some forward depth and grit to their lineup.

On February 16, they picked up forward Blake Coleman from the New Jersey Devils, sending prospect Nolan Foote and a 2020 first-rounder the other way.

Coleman went on to post five goals, eight assists and 31 penalty minutes in 25 playoff games. That ranked sixth overall in team scoring, solid secondary offence for a team led by Nikita Kucherov (34 points in 25 games), Brayden Point (33 points) and defender Victor Hedman (22 points).

On deadline day, Tampa Bay picked up forward Barclay Goodrow plus a third-round pick in 2020 from San Jose in exchange for a 2020 first-rounder and fellow forward, Anthony Greco, who they'd acquired days earlier after sending Danick Martel to the Florida Panthers.

Goodrow's stats with Tampa Bay during that playoff run: one goal, five assists and 16 penalty minutes in 25 games. That ranked the Canadian 13th overall in points, but one of his assists was clutch, coming on Anthony Cirelli's series-clinching overtime goal in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference Final. Goodrow was also an impressive plus-5 in the post-season.

Conclusion: Neither move shook the NHL landscape, but the Lightning got some key supporting players and added offence to an already deep and deadly core. Probably more importantly, they got some grit, adding players who could help wear down other teams. And both were still with the team when they repeated the following season.

2021: Tampa Bay Lightning (again)

The defending Stanley Cup champions were obviously stacked already, but they made a few moves on and ahead of the April 12 deadline. Only one was truly impactful.

On April 10, Tampa acquired defender David Savard from Columbus, part of a three-team trade with Detroit. The Lightning gave up a first-round and fourth-round pick in the 2021 draft and a third-rounder in 2022, focusing on defensive depth to try to win (again) now.

Savard, then 30, was in his last of a five-year contract, and Tampa Bay decided a top-four, right-shot defender was their priority at the deadline. In Savard they acquired a dependable and tough 10-year vet who played hard minutes and blocked shots. Savard played all but three games in the post-season, had five assists, and averaged just over 14 minutes per game.

Conclusion: The defending champions had a lot of key pieces in place already, and Savard was brought in to fill a need and play mainly on the second back-end pairing. He brought hard work and dependability. Mostly, Tampa relied on its existing lineup to pull off the repeat, and it worked.

The Avalanche won their third Stanley Cup in franchise history, denying Tampa the three-peat with a 4-2 series win. Led by stars like Nathan MacKinnon, Mikko Rantanen, Cale Makar and Gabriel Landeskog, Colorado was stacked, and then president of hockey operations, Joe Sakic, made a few moves ahead of the March 21 deadline, with one in particular signalling his team was all-in.

On March 14, the Avalanche picked up defenceman Josh Manson from Anaheim, giving up prospect Drew Helleson and a second-rounder in 2023. Manson was an alternate captain in Anaheim and brought leadership and stability to the back end. He played the fifth-most minutes in the playoffs among Avalanche D and scored three goals, the biggest being an overtime winner in Colorado's second-round opener against St. Louis.

The next day, they added forward Nico Sturm and sent Tyson Jost to Minnesota. Sturm's contract was expiring and the faceoff specialist didn't produce a ton during the playoffs — just two points in 13 games.

On deadline day, the Avs added forward Andrew Cogliano from the Sharks in exchange for a fifth-round pick in 2024. Cogliano fit on the team's fourth line, and on the PK. He had six points in 16 games.

They also made their biggest move of all on deadline day, bringing Artturi Lehkonen over from Montreal in exchange for defender Justin Barron and a second-round pick in the 2024 draft. Lehkonen slotted in as a middle-six winger and ranked eighth on the team in playoff scoring, with eight goals and six assists in 20 games. He scored the overtime series-winner in the Western Conference Final against Edmonton, and added a go-ahead goal in Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Final.

Conclusion: Adding Lehkonen to an already potent offensive corps brought depth, while Manson provided the same at the back end. Both players were key in meaningful moments during the run and are still with the team today. The big moves paid off.

The Golden Knights won their first Stanley Cup in 2023 after securing Ivan Barbashev, who played on their No. 1 line, just before the deadline.

Vegas acquired Barbashev from St. Louis, sending Zach Dean the other way. Barbashev played on the left wing alongside Jack Eichel and Jonathan Marchessault, and ranked fifth on the Golden Knights in post-season scoring, with seven goals and 11 assists.

The Knights also added forward Teddy Blueger from Pittsburgh on March 1, for defenceman Peter DiLiberatore plus a 2024 third-round pick. Blueger had two points in six playoff games.

Finally, they acquired Jonathan Quick for Michael Hutchinson and a 2025 seventh-round pick. Quick was needed to back up Adin Hill after both Logan Thompson and Laurent Brossoit went down with injuries. Quick didn't play in the post-season, but went 5-2-2 in the regular season with Vegas, helping them clinch top position in the Pacific Division.

Conclusion: The Barbashev deal was a big one, and he proved to be a great complement to Eichel and Marchessault on that top line. The Golden Knights were lucky in that Barbashev found chemistry with the team's top producers when it mattered most.

2024: Florida Panthers

After losing to Vegas in the final a year earlier, the Panthers were still looking for their first Stanley Cup in franchise history. To that end, the team that was leading the NHL in early March was one of the most

aggressive in the leadup to the March 8 deadline. That included picking up one of the best rental players available, in pending unrestricted free agent forward, Vladimir Tarasenko.

The Panthers got Tarasenko, who'd already won a Cup with the Blues, from Ottawa on March 6 for a pair of conditional picks. Captain Aleksander Barkov and fellow forward Matthew Tkachuk continued to pace the team offensively in the post-season, and Tarasenko added secondary scoring, with five goals and four assists, ranking 10th on the team in points.

On March 8, Florida picked up Kyle Okposo and sent defender Calle Sjalín to Buffalo, along with a conditional seventh-round pick in 2024. Okposo, then 35, played 17 playoff games, and had a pair of assists.

Conclusion: The Panthers addressed some needs — adding offence up front and depth to their top-nine forwards. A case for the aggressive approach, which can really work.

The Athletic / NHL rumblings: Lightning go all in, Devils' injuries create Metro power shift and John Gibson market

By Pierre LeBrun – March 6, 2025

No first-round pick until 2028?

"Draft schmaft," Hockey Hall of Fame executive Cliff Fletcher once famously said as general manager of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Today's Cliff Fletcher is undoubtedly Julien BriseBois.

No GM in the NHL is more comfortable going for it than the Tampa Bay Lightning's BriseBois, who now doesn't have a first-round pick for the next three drafts. From Blake Coleman to Barclay Goodrow to Brandon Hagel to Tanner Jeannot to Wednesday's trade for Yanni Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand, BriseBois has dealt away seven first-round draft picks. Not to mention other picks.

When you've won two Stanley Cups and gone to another Cup Final in that span and you're in a position to chase another championship? It all seems worth it through that lens.

"Winning the Stanley Cup is hard, and it is what drives us and guides us in our decision-making," BriseBois told The Athletic on Wednesday after his blockbuster trade with the Seattle Kraken. "You need good players to win a championship. The more good players you have, the better your odds are. I am trying to assemble as many good players on our team as possible and using our draft picks to do so.

"The value in having draft picks lies in our ability to convert them into players that can help us win NHL hockey games. We used some draft capital to add two good players that will help us win more games this season and beyond. Ultimately, the calculation is that trying and failing will yield less regret than failing to try."

I love that last part. The biggest regret is not taking a swing, win or lose.

The Jeannot trade was a bust. But Hagel has blossomed into a star who just helped Team Canada win 4 Nations, and Coleman and Goodrow won two Cups with Tampa Bay. BriseBois' record on these is pretty good.

Is it an overpay for Gourde — a player the Lightning know well — and Bjorkstrand? Maybe.

But the Lightning once again zeroed in on what they wanted and got it done.

Draft schmaft indeed.

Metro shift?

Could a shifting playoff picture in the Metro Division affect Friday's trade deadline? Or rather, vice-versa?

The New Jersey Devils have been whacked with injuries to their franchise center Jack Hughes and now to top blueliner Dougie Hamilton in the past week. It's ridiculous bad luck, and losing Hughes for the entire season is just brutal news.

Devils GM Tom Fitzgerald is working the phones and is intent on finding help before Friday's deadline. There's no white flag there despite the key injuries.

But it unfortunately begs the question: Is third place in the Metro suddenly in play for the Columbus Blue Jackets or the New York Rangers?

Columbus on Wednesday morning woke up four points behind New Jersey with two games in hand. The Rangers have actually been sellers, but the defending Presidents' Trophy winners still have a decent shot to make the playoffs.

And where does that leave the Islanders? Could Tuesday's win over the league-leading Winnipeg Jets embolden GM Lou Lamoriello to stay in the fight? I still think it's more likely he trades pending UFA Brock Nelson if he can't re-sign him, but as of Wednesday evening, one league source said it could still go a number of different ways. Which is wild in itself, this late in the proceedings.

As for the Blue Jackets, it's extremely likely they're keeping hold of pending unrestricted free agent Ivan Provorov. I believe for sure the defenseman would fetch a first-round pick if they did move him. There were more talks this week between GM Don Waddell and Provorov's agent, Mark Gandler, and the gap remains fairly wide in what an extension looks like for each side. But part of that conversation, I believe, was agreeing that they could resume that contract discussion after the season and that he most likely wasn't going anywhere now.

I won't say 100 percent Provorov won't get moved because I think Waddell has kept open the possibility that a team might lose its mind in an offer he can't refuse. But all things being equal, I think Provorov will stay put.

My sense is the Jackets would like to add a forward before Friday's deadline and preferably a forward signed past this season — not a rental.

And finally, there's the Carolina Hurricanes in second place in the Metro — a veritable Cup contender every year. But what do the Canes look like if they flip pending UFA Mikko Rantanen before Friday's deadline? League sources Wednesday said Carolina had stepped up its talks with teams regarding what they might be willing to do in a Rantanen trade. It doesn't mean he's for sure getting dealt, but man, he sure could be.

How does Carolina look like a better team after that? Depends on the return, obviously.

But between a potential Rantanen trade and the Devils' loss of Jack Hughes for the season, I truly wonder how the standings end up in the Metro and how much of it is also a result of the moves we see before Friday's 3 p.m. ET deadline.

John Gibson staying put?

Likely. Never say never, but the two most logical destinations for the Anaheim Ducks netminder don't appear to be fits ahead of the deadline.

The Edmonton Oilers, despite Stuart Skinner's struggles, don't appear to see Gibson as a true upgrade and aren't keen on his contract, which has two remaining years after this one at a \$6.4 million average annual value. I don't think the Oilers see a realistic upgrade on the market at the moment.

The Carolina Hurricanes, who had advanced trade talks with the Ducks last summer on Gibson, have had on-again, off-again dialogue with Anaheim again this season, but I don't sense it's likely happening before Friday's deadline for a couple of reasons.

First, Frederik Andersen has been solid since returning, with a .911 save percentage on the season and a 6.6 goals saved above expected, according to MoneyPuck. And of course, the Canes are high on No. 1 Pyotr Kochetkov. So there isn't the urgency that might have been there had Andersen stunk out the joint or got hurt again, at least not yet.

Secondly, I believe there's a very different view between the Ducks and Canes on what a Gibson trade return should be. I think Anaheim believes that if it's retaining salary on Gibson for the remainder of his

contract — plus the fact that the 31-year-old goalie has played well this year (14.7 goals saved above expected) — they should be able to get a first-round pick. That opinion is not shared, clearly, by the Canes.

Obviously a lot can change in the next two days before the deadline, but as it stood on Wednesday, it didn't look like Gibson was going anywhere.

The Athletic / Who wins, a roster of players an NHL GM traded for or traded away?

By Sean McIndoe – March 6, 2025

Your favorite NHL GM probably has his hands full this week, so let's do him a favor and put him in a position where he can't lose. Specifically, let's put him in a contest against ... himself.

Yeah, this is going to get weird, but stick with it. Today's post will be all about one question: Who'd win, a starting six made up of the players a GM has acquired in his career, or one of the players he's traded away?

But first, a few ground rules™:

- We need three forwards, two defensemen and a goalie, with no other concern for position. And to be clear, we're only looking at players acquired in trades. No waivers, draft picks, UFA signings or anything else. We're focused on the lost art of the trade.
- **The Sam Pollock Rule is in effect:** Trading draft picks doesn't count. We all love to point and laugh when a team trades away a distant pick that gets used on a Hall of Famer, but there's way too much randomness in dealing future picks to give GMs credit or blame for how they turn out. Also, we won't be counting any salary dump trades of players who were essentially already retired. Sorry, Coyotes fans.
- **This one's important:** If a GM has both traded for and traded away a player, that guy can't be on either roster. I've seen enough sci-fi to know what happens if two Chris Prongers end up lining up across from each other.

One last thing: We're looking at active GMs today, with an emphasis on the ones who've been around longest. Spoiler alert, relative newbies such as Kyle Davidson and Pat Verbeek haven't acquired a ton of All-Stars quite yet, so they'll have to wait for the sequel in a few years.

We'll do our typical 10, then hand it over to you in the comments to fill out some rosters of your own. To start with, we might as well go to the longest-serving active GM in the league ...

Lou Lamoriello

Lamoriello is one of the very few active GMs who give us three separate teams to draw from, although I'm guessing the Devils will provide most of our names. That said, he was in New Jersey for so long that he loses a lot of solid names to the both sides rule, including having traded for and traded away stars such as Alexander Mogilny, Jason Arnott and Claude Lemieux.

Team Traded For

Forwards: Joe Nieuwendyk, Ilya Kovalchuk, Bo Horvat

Defensemen: Phil Housley, Oleg Tverdovsky

Goalie: Cory Schneider

Not bad, and you've got names such as Frederik Andersen, Bobby Holik and aging veterans Peter Stastny and Doug Gilmour available as depth.

Team Traded Away

Forwards: Jaromir Jagr, Carter Verhaeghe, Kirk Muller

Defensemen: Devon Toews, Nick Leddy

Goalie: Kirk McLean

Jagr didn't have much left when the Devils sent him to Florida, but he was still Jagr. McLean narrowly beats out Sean Burke for goaltending duties. By the way, Verhaeghe is the lone representative of Lamoriello's time in Toronto here, although we considered also using future podcasting legend Frankie Corrado.

Overall, the big takeaway here is that Lamoriello doesn't make many big moves involving defensemen. I guess when you draft Scott Niedermayer and sign Scott Stevens, you're pretty much set for the next decade or two.

The winner is: Team Traded For. No big shock, especially given that Lamoriello hasn't been a seller all that often in his career. The surprise here may be the lack of big-name players in their prime. Let's see if your next GM can fix that.

Jim Rutherford

OK, yes, he's not technically an "active" GM, but he's close enough that it's OK to admit that you have trouble remembering the name of the guy who's supposed to be in charge in Vancouver. We won't count the Canucks for Rutherford, but his time in Hartford, Pittsburgh and Carolina should give us more than enough to work with.

Team Traded For

Forwards: Rod Brind'Amour, Jordan Staal, Mark Recchi

Defensemen: Ron Hainsey, John Marino

Goalie: Kevin Weekes

The both sides rule costs us a chance at big names such as Brendan Shanahan, Phil Kessel, Glen Wesley, Justin Williams and Paul Coffey, which hurts. We still manage to build a very good forward line, and could call on Jared McCann or Kevin Dineen as backup. I'm kind of stunned at how weak the back end is, though.

Team Traded Away

Forwards: Ron Francis, Pat Verbeek, James Neal

Defensemen: Chris Pronger, Jack Johnson

Goalie: Jean-Sebastien Giguere

The big name here is Pronger, who was only 20 when Rutherford dealt him to St. Louis. The forward line isn't as impressive as it first looks, since Francis was washed when Rutherford sent him to the Leafs for a draft pick. Still, it's a decent group, especially with Giguere available to replace Marc-Andre Fleury, whose eligibility for this piece is being held up in committee. (The Penguins didn't trade him to Vegas, but rather sent a pick to the Knights to take him in the expansion draft, and I'm not sure that can count.)

The winner is: Team Traded Away. Rutherford's trade targets are better up front, but goaltending evens that out. The key here is Pronger. You saw how good that guy was in his late 30s, imagine what he was like when he was fresh out of his angsty teens.

Let's pivot to a few GMs who have just one franchise to work with ...

Don Sweeney

Can I finish this section before Brad Marchand gets added to the Traded Away group? Let's see ...

Team Traded For

Forwards: Rick Nash, Charlie Coyle, Tyler Bertuzzi

Defensemen: Hampus Lindholm, Dmitri Orlov

Goalie: Joonas Korpisalo

I think Korpisalo is the only option in goal, and we lose Taylor Hall to the both sides rule. Still, it's not a bad group given that Sweeney doesn't trade as often as you might like.

Team Traded Away

Forwards: Frank Vatrano, Milan Lucic, Reilly Smith

Defensemen: Dougie Hamilton, Ryan Lindgren

Goalie: Linus Ullmark

That back end is pretty sweet, especially with Dan Vladar available as the backup.

The winner is: Team Traded Away takes another one, which is a little surprising given how the Bruins have rarely been sellers.

Jim Nill

Another one-teamer, but it's a two-time GM of the Year winner with over a decade to work with and a reputation for being willing to take big swings.

Team Traded For

Forwards: Tyler Seguin, Jason Spezza, Mikael Granlund

Defensemen: Kris Russell, Marc Methot

Goalie: Antti Niemi

The back end isn't great, and is hurt by the both sides rule taking out Chris Tanev, Ben Bishop and Sergei Gonchar, plus the Tim Thomas era only lasting six starts. As a side note, remember that weird period when Kris Russell was the deadline's most sought-after player and then like a week later nobody could remember why?

Team Traded Away

Forwards: Loui Eriksson, Patrick Eaves, Nick Paul

Defensemen: Alex Goligoski, Johnny Oduya

Goalie: Jack Campbell

It's fun to remember that Campbell was drafted by the Stars with the 11th overall pick way back in 2010.

The winner is: Team Traded For, by a mile. I think Jim Nill might be good at this.

One more one-teamer ...

Kevin Cheveldayoff

This one should be fun, because Cheveldayoff has a not-undeserved but potentially out-of-date reputation for shying away from making big trades.

Team Traded For

Forwards: Gabe Vilardi, Tyler Toffoli, Paul Stastny (twice, without ever trading him away)

Defensemen: Tyler Myers, Neal Pionk

Goalie: Peter Budaj

Lesson one: That whole “doesn’t make enough trades” thing may have some truth to it.

Team Traded Away

Forwards: Evander Kane, Patrik Laine, Joel Armia

Defensemen: Jacob Trouba, Zach Bogosian

Goalie: Steve Mason

Lesson two: When you draft Connor Hellebuyck, it apparently takes the pressure off to make any moves involving goalies ever again.

The winner loser is: Me, for spending this much time on Cheveldayoff’s trade history. You have three days to make this up to me, Kevin.

OK, back to some multi-teamers...

Doug Armstrong

He’s the longest tenured GM in the league, but did you forget that he was also the GM of the Stars back when the cap era first started? Let’s see if we can use any of those Dallas deals to supplement his work with the Blues.

Team Traded For

Forwards: Brayden Schenn, Pavel Buchnevich, Jason Arnott

Defensemen: Jay Bouwmeester, Justin Faulk

Goalie: Ryan Miller

Blues fans might want to hope that Schenn isn’t moved this week, because the options behind him are very thin.

Team Traded Away

Forwards: Joe Nieuwendyk, Tage Thompson, T.J. Oshie

Defensemen: Erik Johnson, Ian Cole

Goalie: Ben Bishop

Thompson hurts, especially since the Blues eventually traded Ryan O’Reilly away, so Armstrong can’t use him here.

The winner is: This may be the closest matchup we’ve had yet, but I’m narrowly leaning to Team Traded Away because of their edge up front.

Stan Bowman

Bowman’s really never been in charge of a rebuilding team, so you assume this will be an easy win for the Traded Fors. But let’s see how it plays out ...

Team Traded For

Forwards: Dylan Strome, Antoine Vermette, Tyler Johnson

Defensemen: Seth Jones, Kimmo Timonen

Goalie: Marc-Andre Fleury

Huh.

Team Traded Away

Forwards: Artemi Panarin, Nick Schmaltz, Teuvo Teravainen

Defensemen: Dustin Byfuglien, Duncan Keith

Goalie: Robin Lehner

Double huh.

The winner is: Yeah, this one is Team Traded Away in a blowout — and that's even with our rules meaning we don't count Marian Hossa going to Arizona. But while it's tempting to use that to argue that Bowman was overrated as a GM, I think that scanning the names here suggests that it's more about how relentlessly the hard cap will squeeze a good team.

OK, I've been working up my courage for this next one ...

Brad Treliving

I wonder if the Matthew Tkachuk trade will show up here.

Team Traded For

Forwards: Elias Lindholm, Jonathan Huberdeau, Tyler Toffoli

Defensemen: Noah Hanifin, MacKenzie Weegar

Goalie: Mike Smith

That's not a bad group, although it's obviously two trades doing most of the heavy lifting, and we'll pay a price for those deals on the next squad.

Team Traded Away

Forwards: Matthew Tkachuk, Sam Bennett, Sean Monahan

Defensemen: Adam Fox, Nikita Zadorov

Goalie: David Rittich

Yep, seeing Tkachuk and Fox land here hurts, even though you could make a solid case that Treliving did the best he could in both of those trades. I'd forgotten about the Bennett deal. Maybe last year's Panthers should have sent Treliving a thank you ring.

The winner is: It's closer than I thought, and Team Traded For has a decent goaltending edge. But the star power on Team Traded Away is too much to overcome, at least until Mikko Rantanen arrives in Toronto later this week.

(If you're wondering, I did try to make teams for Bill Zito, but while the "Traded For" team is easy, the "Traded Away" team barely ices a roster, and that whole process just made me sad.)

Don Waddell

He's on his third stint as a GM, although he hasn't had time to do much in Columbus. He did in Carolina. Atlanta too, in theory, although did they have enough good players coming and going for it to matter here?

Team Traded For

Forwards: Jake Guentzel, Marc Savard, Vincent Trocheck

Defensemen: Dougie Hamilton, Brent Burns

Goalie: James Reimer

Yeah, that's a better squad than I expected, and the Thrashers do make a mark with the underrated Savard. I thought I could also use Keith Tkachuk here, but Atlanta ended up kind of trading him back to St. Louis, so he's out. Still, goaltending aside, this isn't bad at all.

Team Traded Away

Forwards: Ilya Kovalchuk, Dany Heatley, Patrik Laine

Defensemen: Noah Hanifin, Braydon Coburn

Goalie: Kari Lehtonen

I used Laine to get the Blue Jackets into the mix, but we could also ice a second line of Elias Lindholm, Jeff Skinner and Ray Ferraro.

The winner is: It's Team Traded Away, but I think the bigger lesson here is that in terms of entertainment value, it's possible we've all underestimated Don Waddell.

OK, let's take it home with one last entry ...

Steve Yzerman

Sorry I made you wait for this one, Red Wings fans, but I figured that you're used to being patient with Yzerman.

Team Traded For

Forwards: J.T. Miller, Alex DeBrincat, Ryan Callahan

Defensemen: Ryan McDonagh, Mikhail Sergachev

Goalie: Anders Lindback

That's a solid squad, with the only weakness being in goal. Even that's a bit unfair to Yzerman, whose time in Tampa saw him acquire Ben Bishop, ride him for five years and then move him out when he was close to done and Andrei Vasilevskiy was ready to take over.

Team Traded Away

Forwards: Martin St. Louis, Tyler Bertuzzi, Vladislav Namestnikov

Defensemen: Filip Hronek, Jake Walman

Goalie: Karri Ramo

The big name here is obviously St. Louis, a Hall of Famer who forced Yzerman's hand on a deal that still worked out OK for Tampa.

The winner is: Team Traded Away has the best player, but it's not enough to overcome Team Traded For's five-skater depth.

OK, now it's your turn. Feel free to take a crack at the GMs I missed. Or maybe dip back into history for some classic names from the past.

ESPN / Big splashes, wide-open East and what's next ahead of NHL trade deadline

By Emily Kaplan – March 6, 2025

The NHL trade deadline is Friday, but a lot of business has already unfolded.

The Avalanche made the shocking decision to trade Mikko Rantanen to Carolina -- and already executed a follow-up deal to shore up depth. The Rangers began their roster reconstruction before Christmas by trading captain Jacob Trouba and 2019 No. 2 pick Kaapo Kakko before making a splash in acquiring J.T. Miller.

And when Seth Jones began voicing his displeasure, Chicago's front office moved quickly -- despite limited leverage -- and completed a deal with Florida, which brought the Blackhawks their new goalie of the future, Spencer Knight. Even the Bruins got started on their retool, trading Trent Frederic on Tuesday.

There are still moves to be made this week, but NHL executives across the league have all echoed one thing: Just wait until the summer. With salary cap projections released for the next three seasons that include sizable jumps, teams are going to feel friskier. Free agency should be a doozy. There could be multiple offer sheets. And "hockey trades" featuring high-profile players are about to be a lot more common.

Agents and front office executives say everyone is settling in to the new financial reality.

So what's in store the next few days? Here are a few trends we're tracking.

Any big splashes left?

- The big question on everyone's mind: What is going to happen with Rantanen? The Carolina Hurricanes traded for the 28-year-old on Jan. 24. Like their acquisition of Jake Guentzel last year, the Canes made a move to acquire an unrestricted free agent without an extension in place. But I think Carolina had a different approach this time. With Guentzel, the Canes were too far apart before it was too late. Plus, the Canes said they had intel that they were a team Rantanen was interested in before making the trade. So they made him a sizable contract offer over the 4 Nations break. Rantanen wasn't ready.

Now, look at the situation from Rantanen's perspective. He thought he was going to spend his entire career in Colorado and the trade left him completely shell shocked. Rantanen barely got any time with the Canes before the 4 Nations break. The winger is methodical, and he's viewing it as a two-step process: Does he want to sign in Raleigh? And if so, what does that contract look like? At the time of the offer, he was still on Step 1. And free agency is now just four months away.

Many teams are wondering whether Carolina -- never afraid to do the brash and unexpected -- would flip Rantanen, considering how much it gave up to acquire him. If Carolina double-retained, a team could have Rantanen for just over \$2 million for the rest of the season. There would be plenty of takers.

However, Rantanen hasn't told Carolina no. If the Canes get any indication he doesn't want to re-sign with them at all, they would recalculate. If it's still up in the air, my gut says the Canes keep Rantanen and bet that he'll help them get over the playoff hump and ultimately decide Carolina is where he wants to play.

- Sidney Crosby's name is going to surface in rumors as long as the Pittsburgh Penguins are out of the playoff picture. We all know Crosby cares about winning and wants a more realistic shot at the Stanley Cup. However, I also know Crosby understands what he signed up for when he inked a two-year extension in September. Pittsburgh has some retooling to do, and for now, Crosby appears committed to that journey.

- And then there is Boston Bruins captain Brad Marchand, who becomes a free agent this summer. Boston is beginning its retool, and seems to be listening on a lot of players. I'm not sure anyone outside of David Pastrnak and Charlie McAvoy is safe. Marchand has been steadfast that he wants to remain in Boston. The Bruins want that too -- just at the right price and term -- and have been negotiating with his camp all season. The sense around the league is that Marchand will stay in Boston, though it's not guaranteed.

- The wild card, as always, is the Tampa Bay Lightning. By nature, GM Julien BriseBois always wants to go for it -- and to go for the unexpected, though forwards seem to be the area of focus. Placing veteran Cam Atkinson on waivers on Tuesday could foreshadow new flexibility. The Lightning don't have a first-round pick in the 2025 draft, but the consensus among executives is that the 2026 class is deeper.

- And if there's a team that's going to make an unexpected splash, keep an eye on Vegas. The Golden Knights are always all-in.

The East is wide open

Many East teams have referred to 2025 as a sellers' market. There are eight teams within six points of the wild-card spots. Every time I talk to executives in that mix, they feel the spots are up for grabs and anyone could emerge. But that also means few feel confident about going all-in.

- As of Tuesday, New Jersey Devils center Jack Hughes was still getting second opinions on his upper-body injury and the best course of treatment. Either way, he's expected to be out for a bit. Before the injury, the Devils were buyers -- looking to shore up center and forward depth. I expect them to still look at forwards, especially ones that could help their biggest issue: 5-on-5 scoring. But given the circumstances I now think they could be in on rentals, too.

- The New York Rangers are in a gray area. They've already made a handful of trades, the latest a deal with the Avs in which they unloaded Ryan Lindgren and Jimmy Vesey in return for Juuso Parssinen, Calvin de Haan and second- and fourth-round picks in this year's draft. I'm also told there are several teams in on UFA Reilly Smith, who remains sidelined until a deal is complete. However, the Rangers refuse to wave the white towel, which is why they've brought in roster replacements as part of their deals. Even though GM Chris Drury signaled he didn't feel his opening-night roster could win it all, a spot in the postseason, and that all-important playoff revenue, is still attainable in a season of transition. New York is likely to be very active this summer. Look for the team to take big swings.

- Lou Lamoriello is extremely patient. He always has been. This season, Lamoriello waited as long as possible to make a decision on which direction the Islanders are headed. All season, other teams have told me they expect pending UFAs Brock Nelson (the top center available) and Kyle Palmieri to be available. But it's never official until Lou says it is. Nelson's postgame interview with Shannon Hogan on Tuesday -- in which he got emotional -- led me to believe he's processing the reality that his Islanders tenure could be coming to an end.

- The Detroit Red Wings and Ottawa Senators are itching to take the next step in their rebuilds. Detroit has looked at defensemen. The Senators have looked at depth forwards. I think both would like to add and give themselves a chance here.

Some teams aren't going to trade for the sake of trading

- The Capitals have been the darlings of the Eastern Conference this season. The word I got was that they weren't going to tinker for the sake of tinkering. They know they hit on some good hockey trades and are open to more. (The common theme for players Washington has brought in recently: They're all in their mid-20s.) However, there's no need to fuss with what has been a terrific season. Now that Logan Thompson and Charlie Lindgren are re-signed, Washington has seven pending UFAs. GM Chris Patrick has had conversations with all of their representatives, but even if they're not close on a contract -- sounds like there's mutual interest between Jakob Chychrun and the team, but still work to be done -- I don't expect any to get traded. There is also possible movement for Ethan Bear, who has been playing very well for Hershey of the AHL. With Dylan McIlrath and Alexander Alexeyev sitting as scratches on the big roster (the Caps have remained very healthy), Bear's path appears blocked. If there's an NHL opportunity for Bear, Washington could make a move to facilitate that.
- Every time I've talked to Philadelphia Flyers GM Danny Briere over the past two seasons, he reiterates that the team is in building mode. Once again, there has been interest in defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen and center Scott Laughton. As coach John Tortorella mentioned, if they trade Ristolainen, who is replacing the big, right-shot defenseman? Philadelphia would make a move only if the return is right. Same goes for Laughton, a heart-and-soul player who has told the Flyers that he'd like to stay. Laughton responded to the trade rumors with a cheeky photo on social media in which he used a recent team dinner to recreate "The Last Supper." There has been much more interest in Laughton, though the Flyers will make a move only if it makes sense for them. (I think a first-round pick would be enticing.)
- Chicago Blackhawks GM Kyle Davidson said he felt less pressure than in years past to get a first-round pick at this deadline, though he did pick one up in the Jones trade -- giving them nine picks across the first and second rounds over the next two years. Chicago is likely to move Ryan Donato, considering there's a ton of interest. The Blackhawks also may try to find a new home for Petr Mrazek, now that they have Knight. But other than that, the next few months are all about giving their young players the right exposure and development. Then, expect Chicago to be a big player over the summer. The Blackhawks can't have another season like this one. It's time to get going.

Plans have changed for a few teams

- When the Columbus Blue Jackets opened training camp in September, GM Don Waddell had an idea of what his trade deadline would look like: sell, sell, sell. Big picture, the team is in building mode, and this season was going to be a challenging one as they grieved the unimaginable loss of Johnny Gaudreau. The season opened, and the injury bug was relentless: Sean Monahan, Boone Jenner, Kent Johnson, Erik Gudbranson, the list goes on and on. Through it all, Columbus has persevered and finds itself in the playoff picture. And it has created a conundrum.

Waddell told me he couldn't fall asleep last week as he contemplated what to do. In any other season, he'd stick to the plan and sell, because he knows this team isn't realistically a Stanley Cup contender. But he's not sure that's the right thing to do. How could he remove any players from a locker room that has created such a special bond? The Jackets signed Mathieu Olivier, who would have been an attractive target, to an extension Wednesday morning. Ivan Provorov, a pending UFA, is the player Waddell is getting the most calls on. Waddell isn't sure he'll be able to re-sign Provorov; he'll continue to try again this week. Unless it's an offer Waddell can't refuse, there's a good chance Provorov stays. And there's a good possibility the Blue Jackets add, too. They've been scouting for forward depth.

- The Dallas Stars got going on their business early, acquiring Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci, out of necessity. They had injuries -- especially on the blueline ahead of 4 Nations -- and they had holes to fill. They're not necessarily done. Miro Heiskanen and Tyler Seguin are out long term, and their timelines

remain unclear. Dallas has room to add complementary pieces. Keep in mind, though, that this is a front office that drafts extremely well -- and it has already traded away its 2025 first-, second- and fourth-round picks.

- The Florida Panthers were poised to have a quiet trade deadline. Yes, they're going for it again, but they didn't have a ton of assets to give up. Then Seth Jones became available, and he answered their need on the right side of the blue line. And now, Matthew Tkachuk is out for the rest of the regular season with an injury he sustained at 4 Nations. With cap space to play with, everyone around the league is betting on the Panthers bringing on someone else as well.

No matter who they bring in, the question for Dallas and Florida: Will Heiskanen or Tkachuk be available for Day 1 of the playoffs?