

VSIN PRO

NHL BETTING GUIDE

PRO EDITION



SHOUT AT THE DEVILS

STRATEGIES FOR BETTING THE NHL

OUR PRO GUIDE INCLUDES

- PREVIEWS OF ALL 32 TEAMS
- STANLEY CUP ODDS & PREDICTIONS
- BEST BETS FROM VSIN EXPERTS

VSIN

CONTENTS

ODDS WITHIN GUIDE
ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

FEATURES

- 3**
2024 NHL Betting Guide
- 4**
NHL Stats Glossary
- 5**
Hurricane Season
- 7**
Adam Burke's Best Bets
- 9**
Steve Makinen's Power Ratings

VSIN STAFF/CONTRIBUTORS

COVER: James Coleman
LAYOUT AND DESIGN: Matt Devine
SENIOR EDITOR: Zachary Cohen
MANAGING EDITOR: Adam Burke

TEAM INDEX

Atlantic Preview	10
Boston Bruins.....	11
Buffalo Sabres.....	11
Detroit Red Wings	12
Florida Panthers	12
Montreal Canadiens	13
Ottawa Senators	13
Tampa Bay Lightning.....	14
Toronto Maple Leafs.....	14
Metropolitan Preview	15
Carolina Hurricanes.....	16
Columbus Blue Jackets	16
New Jersey Devils.....	17
New York Islanders.....	17
New York Rangers.....	18
Philadelphia Flyers	18
Pittsburgh Penguins.....	19
Washington Capitals	19
Central Preview	20
Chicago Blackhawks.....	21
Colorado Avalanche.....	21
Dallas Stars	22
Minnesota Wild	22
Nashville Predators	23
St. Louis Blues	23
Utah Hockey Club.....	24
Winnipeg Jets.....	24
Pacific Preview	25
Anaheim Ducks	26
Calgary Flames	26
Edmonton Oilers	27
Los Angeles Kings.....	27
San Jose Sharks	28
Seattle Kraken	28
Vancouver Canucks	29
Vegas Golden Knights.....	29

TERMS TO KNOW

All situations: All play during regulation and overtime.
Even strength: Play when both teams have the same number of players on the ice.
5-on-5: Play when both teams have five skaters and a goalie on the ice.
5-on-5 score adjusted: The metric but adjusted for score effects.
GP: Games played.
TOI: Total amount of time played.
Corsi: Any shot attempt (goals, shots on net, misses and blocks) outside of the shootout. Referred to as SAT by the NHL.
CF: Count of Corsi for that team.
CA: Count of Corsi against that team.
CF/60: Rate of Corsi for that team per 60 minutes of play.
CA/60: Rate of Corsi against that team per 60 minutes of play.
CF%: Percentage of total Corsi in games that team played that are for that team.
Fenwick: Any unblocked shot attempt (goals, shots on net and misses) outside of the shootout. Referred to as USAT by the NHL.
FF: Count of Fenwick for that team.
FA: Count of Fenwick against that team.
FF/60: Rate of Fenwick for that team per 60 minutes of play.
FA/60: Rate of Fenwick against that team per 60 minutes of play.

FF%: Percentage of total Fenwick in games that team played that are for that team.
Shots: Any shot attempt on net (goals and shots on net) outside of the shootout.
SF: Count of shots for that team.
SA: Count of shots against that team.
SF/60: Rate of shots for that team per 60 minutes of play.
SA/60: Rate of shots against that team per 60 minutes of play.
SF%: Percentage of total shots in games that team played that are for that team.
Goals: Any goal outside of the shootout.
GF: Count of goals for that team.
GA: Count of goals against that team.
GF/60: Rate of goals for that team per 60 minutes of play.
GA/60: Rate of goals against that team per 60 minutes of play.
GF%: Percentage of total goals in that game that are for that team.
xGF: Count of expected goals for that team.
xGA: Count of expected goals against that team.
xGF60: Rate of expected goals for that team.
xGA60: Rate of expected goals against that team.
xGF%: Percentage of expected goals in that game that are for that team.

Hello, everybody.

As part of our commitment to leave no stone unturned and no sport uncovered, I present to you the 2024-25 NHL Betting Guide.

This was a solo write from front to back, with a glossary of NHL stats I use to handicap, a look at the Stanley Cup futures odds and some suggested wagers, including best bets on Division Winners, Over/Under point totals, and player props. I also previewed all 32 teams. Welcome to the NHL, Utah Hockey Club!

Special shout-outs to Senior Editor Zachary Cohen for checking my work, Director of Creative Services James Coleman for the slick cover, and Guide Editor and Designer Extraordinaire Matt Devine for putting it all together.

Keep it locked in right here at VSiN. This is the busiest time of year and our experts and analysts are providing tons of picks and content for college football and the NFL, plus our 2024-25 NBA Betting Guide from Zach and Jonathan Von Tobel will be out on October 10.

Cashin' tickets is what it's all about and that remains our goal today, tomorrow, and forever at VSiN.

Adam Burke
Managing Editor, VSiN.com
aburke@vsin.com
[@SkatingTripods](https://twitter.com/SkatingTripods) on X



NHL STATS GLOSSARY

By Adam Burke

Advanced stats are here to stay. They are the fabric of high-level analysis across all sports and that includes the NHL, where the analytics movement has been gaining steam for a long time now.

Our 2024-25 NHL Betting Guide will include some stats and abbreviations that you may not be all that familiar with, but they are stats that you will want to keep in mind as you read and as you bet on games throughout the season.

To illustrate why these stats are important, let's use shots on goal as an example. A shot on goal is any puck shot towards the net that would go in if there was not a goalie standing there. Not all shots are created equal, though. A dump-in on net from the red line is not nearly the same as a rebound chance right in front of the goal. A cross-crease one-timer is not the same as a puck flipped on net by a forward during a 1-on-2 rush so that his team can get a whistle and a stoppage of play.

To take it a step further, let's talk about scoring chances. Is a shot a bad shot because it hit the post or because it missed the net by a couple of inches? It's not a shot on goal because it wouldn't have gone into an empty net, but it is a way more dangerous scoring chance than a run-of-the-mill shot on net. That's why stats like "high-danger chances" or "scoring chances" exist.

To borrow an example from baseball, a line drive hit 100 mph has a better chance of becoming a hit than a ground ball hit at 80 mph. Sometimes that line drive goes right at a fielder. Sometimes that ground ball squeaks through and finds a hole. The line drive was a better form of contact, but the outcome was unlucky. The ground ball was a weaker form of contact, but the outcome was lucky.

Similarly, hockey has stats like "Expected Goals" to showcase the quality of scoring chances based on a variety of factors, including where the shot came from and the likelihood of scoring in that situation.

Game state is also important in the NHL. Of the six major North American sports, hockey is the only one where a team can be forced to play with fewer people than the other team. As a result, it is important to differentiate statistics based on how many people are on the ice for each team.

With that primer in mind, let's look at some of the stats you may see this NHL season and explain what they mean.

BASIC STATS

G, A, P: G is short for goals, A is short for assists, and P is short for points. All goals and assists are "points".

GOALS AGAINST AVERAGE

Think of Goals Against Average (GAA) like ERA (think I'm a baseball guy?!). In baseball, ERA is (earned runs * 9) / innings pitched. In hockey, GAA is (goals against * 60) / minutes played. It is meant to show the average number of goals allowed per game played, assuming the goalie plays all 60 minutes. That stat is displayed to two decimal places, so 3.00, 2.50, etc.

SAVE PERCENTAGE

Save Percentage (SV%) is straightforward. Saves / Shots Against. If a goalie stops 27 out of 30 shots in a game, his SV% is 90%, but the stat is displayed as a decimal, so .900. The league average SV% last season was .898.

POWER PLAY PERCENTAGE

A power play is a period of time in which one team has more players on the ice than the other. Teams scored an average of 20.98% of the time on the power play last season.

PENALTY KILL PERCENTAGE

A penalty kill is when a team has fewer players on the ice than the other. Teams killed off an average of 79.02% of penalties last season.

SCORING CHANCES

A scoring chance is different from a shot on goal. Shot attempts are assigned values based on a variety of factors and scoring chances have a higher than normal likelihood of becoming goals than regular shots.

ADVANCED STATS

EVEN STRENGTH

Even strength means both teams have the same number of skaters on the ice, so 5-on-5, 4-on-4, or 3-on-3, with the exception of pulling the goaltender to add an extra player. That is still considered even strength since a skater replaces a goalie, but the same number of players are still on the ice for each team.

5-V-5/5-ON-5

This is the most common state of an NHL game. This is different from even strength because that can happen at 4-v-4 or 3-v-3. Most advanced stats websites will have filters for 5-v-5, 5-v-4, 5-v-3, 4-v-4, etc. Another term for this is "game state". 5-v-4 would be a power play, for example.

ALL SITUATIONS

"In all situations" encompasses all game states throughout regulation and overtime, so 5-v-5, 5-v-4, 5-v-3, 4-v-5, 3-v-5, 4-v-4, and 3-v-3.

EXPECTED GOALS (OR XG)

Without diving too deep into the weeds, this is a stat composed of a lot of pieces of information including where the shot was taken (including distance and angle), what kind of shot it was, how quickly the shot was taken after another (rebound; less time for the goalie to get into position), and several other variables to calculate a "goal probability".

Shots in the middle of the ice are going to have a higher goal probability than a shot taken from the side of the net or from far away. Only unblocked shot attempts are calculated, so if a shot is blocked by a forward or a defenseman on the way to the net, it is not tracked.

Modifications of this stat like xGF (Expected Goals For) or xGA (Expected Goals Against) add a team-specific element.

Individual players or goalies with higher or lower xG marks may be either getting lucky or unlucky and that could be a sign of some positive or negative regression.

GOALS SAVED ABOVE AVERAGE (GSAA)

GSAA is a really popular metric for goalies that sounds complicated, but it isn't. Take the league average save percentage and adjust for the number of shots that a goaltender has faced. If a goalie has a .925 save percentage, which is well above the league average of .898, then you can calculate how many goals saved above an average goaltender he is based on the number of shots that he has faced.

HIGH-DANGER SCORING CHANCES (HDSC)

As mentioned above with scoring chances, each "chance" is assigned a value. High-danger scoring chances have the highest expected value, so think about a rebound chance right in front of the net or a shot in the middle of the ice between the faceoff circles. These are the worst for a team to give up on defense and the best for a team to generate on offense.

Offshoots of this stat include HDSH% (High-Danger Shooting Percentage) and HDSV% (High-Danger Save Percentage). You can look for positive or negative regression based on those two stats with how lucky or unlucky a team has gotten in either category.

Last season at 5-v-5, the Sharks had the lowest HDSH% at 14.21%, while the Canucks led the league at 22.65%.

The Islanders were the best at HDSV% at 85.20%, while the Flyers were the worst at 77.83%.

There are also Medium-Danger Scoring Chances and Low-Danger Scoring Chances. The better a team plays defensively, the more low-danger chances they will allow compared to other types of chances.

Sites like Natural Stat Trick, Evolving Hockey, MoneyPuck, and others are good places to get these stats and work them into your handicapping.

HURRICANE SEASON

CAROLINA ONE OF MY FAVORITES TO LIFT THE CUP

By Adam Burke



Lord Stanley's Cup is one of the recognizable trophies in all of sport. It is the ultimate prize after the 82-game regular season and it takes 16 playoff victories to lift in a postgame celebration, where every player takes a turn carrying the symbol of hard work and determination around the rink. Every player also gets a day with the Stanley Cup in the summertime.

For players on Canadian teams, the Cup has been elusive. You have to go back to the 1993 Montreal Canadiens to find the last champion from north of the border. This season, the Edmonton Oilers are favored to break that drought. The Toronto Maple Leafs are also lined among the favorites.

The reigning champion and 2023 runner-up Florida Panthers are also among the likeliest teams to lift the trophy, as well as other usual suspects like the Dallas Stars, Colorado Avalanche, and Carolina Hurricanes. The New Jersey Devils are probably the biggest surprise team near the top of the board after finishing 10 points out of a playoff spot and 33 points behind the Metropolitan Division champion Rangers, but an upgrade in goal and a terrific group of stars are enough to line them among the league's elites.

Like any sport, injuries will play a huge part. The teams that have the best depth are usually the best equipped for the grind and it is a grind in a hugely physical sport with a lot of games and a lot of travel. What most of the top teams have in common is superstar talent paired with strong goaltending. The separator is having the cap space, depth, and front office to also provide depth in the event of injury or to keep the top guys from having to be used in every game situation.

Here are my favorite Stanley Cup Champion picks up to +2000; up to +4000; and the longshots +4500 and up.

STANLEY CUP ODDS UP TO +2000

CAROLINA HURRICANES (+1300)

The Hurricanes finished with the second-most points in the Eastern Conference, trailing only the division rival Rangers. This team is always a puck possession monster under head coach Rod Brind'Amour and I believe that they should have been even better last season.

Carolina was second-best in the EC in goal differential at +63, trailing only the eventual champion Panthers. As great as they were, Natural Stat Trick metrics have them down for 194.12 expected goals for at 5-v-5. They were second in that department to the Oilers. In actuality, the 'Canes only scored 169 goals at 5-v-5. They were elite on special teams and had 12 players with at least 10 goals.

Goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov ranked 20th in goals saved above average and finished second in GAA and 13th in SV% in his first season as a starter. Veteran Frederik Andersen was awesome in March and April, but I do think it will be Kochetkov's team come playoff time this season, which elevates the ceiling for Carolina.

STANLEY CUP ODDS UP TO +4000

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING (+2500)

The next tier of teams is pretty small, but Tampa Bay is the easy choice here. They are one of the most obvious positive regression teams because the odds are good that Andrei Vasilevskiy returns to form. Vasy missed the early part of the season with an injury and never fully seemed comfortable.

For Vasilevskiy to finish 33rd out of qualified goalies in SV% and 28th in GAA is crazy. His .900 SV% was easily the lowest of his career and his 2.90 GAA was easily the highest. Tampa Bay scored the second-most goals among Eastern Conference teams. While they lost Steven Stamkos and have some other pieces to replace, Jon Cooper is a terrific head coach and this is a very smart front office.

Jake Guentzel should fit right in and other productive players may thrive with more ice time.

TEAM	ODDS TO WIN
EDMONTON OILERS	+800
FLORIDA PANTHERS	10-1
DALLAS STARS	11-1
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS	13-1
NEW YORK RANGERS	13-1
NEW JERSEY DEVILS	13-1
COLORADO AVALANCHE	13-1
CAROLINA HURRICANES	13-1
VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS	18-1
VANCOUVER CANUCKS	18-1
NASHVILLE PREDATORS	18-1
BOSTON BRUINS	18-1
LOS ANGELES KINGS	22-1
TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING	25-1
WINNIPEG JETS	25-1
MINNESOTA WILD	35-1
OTTAWA SENATORS	40-1
DETROIT RED WINGS	40-1
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS	45-1
NEW YORK ISLANDERS	45-1
BUFFALO SABRES	50-1
ST. LOUIS BLUES	55-1
SEATTLE KRACKEN	55-1
UTAH HOCKEY CLUB	55-1
WASHINGTON CAPITALS	60-1
PHILADELPHIA FLYERS	60-1
CALGARY FLAMES	75-1
MONTREAL CANADIENS	120-1
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS	150-1
COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS	200-1
ANAHEIM DUCKS	200-1
SAN JOSE SHARKS	400-1

STANLEY CUP LONGSHOTS (+4500 AND UP)

BUFFALO SABRES (+5000)

The reunion with Lindy Ruff should be a good thing for the Sabres, who will improve their defensive zone coverage and play an all-around tighter game in front of Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen and Devon Levi. If Levi can take a step forward, this will be one of the best goaltending tandems in the league, as UPL ranked 16th in GSAA in all situations out of 98 tracked goaltenders by Natural Stat Trick.

The ceiling is very high for the Sabres if Ruff can squeeze more production and development out of youngsters like Dylan Cozens (47 pts in 79 G), Zach Benson (30 pts in 71 games), and Jack Quinn (19 pts in 27 G). All of them are recent first-round picks for the Sabres that have been learning on the fly.

This team has the makings of an elite defensive corps with Rasmus Dahlin, Owen Power, and Trade Deadline acquisition Bowen Byram. This should be a much improved team with Ruff and a lot of young talent.

ADAM BURKE'S

BEST BETS

The start of a new season is always exciting. It gets even more exciting when you start looking at all of the betting options available. The usual staples are all there - Stanley Cup odds, conference and division futures, Over/Under points, Yes/No to Make The Playoffs, and Awards markets. But there are a ton of player season-long props to examine as well.

With so many options, it can be tricky to narrow down your focus and figure out just how much of your bankroll to allocate to these bet types. Remember, the NHL season is a long one. Opening Night is October 4 and the final day of the regular season is April 17. That is a long year and a long time to tie up money, especially if you have Stanley Cup futures that run deep into June.

DIVISION WINNERS

I have a few suggestions spread across the different betting markets that are out there. I already tackled the Stanley Cup futures separately and I don't do conference winners, so let's look at some division winner markets first.

LOS ANGELES KINGS TO WIN THE PACIFIC DIVISION (+600)

The Oilers are the only odds-on favorite in the NHL division futures market. Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, and Zach Hyman is quite a Big Three, but the Oilers have goaltending issues. Stuart Skinner was a little above average in the regular season, but he did not play well statistically in the postseason. I'm not sure how good he truly is.

Edmonton also had a long year and a short offseason, which tends to affect teams. The Kings, meanwhile, made the playoffs and actually got bounced by the Oilers, but they have a solid goaltender in David Rittich and a potential bounce back candidate in Darcy Kuemper, who was terrible for the Capitals last season, but was a top-25 netminder the previous year.

The Kings have some young, emerging forwards and the same, productive grizzled vets. They also seemed to respond well to new head coach Jim Hiller as the interim last season. Not as well as the Oilers responded to Kris Knoblauch, but hey, I think the Kings are worth a look at +600.

The regular season points market is the NHL's version of a win total market. You can bet on wins as well, but with the points system in the NHL (2 for a win, 1 for an OT/SO loss, 0 for a regulation loss), it needs to be a little bit different.

I like this market because you can isolate some teams in line for positive or negative regression or some teams where the depth is a bit of a question.

POINTS OVER/UNDERS

Here are a couple regular season points Over/Unders that I like.

ANAHEIM DUCKS UNDER 70.5 POINTS

The Ducks have some exciting young players, a byproduct of picking high in the draft with high frequency. What they still don't really have is a goalie. John Gibson is an old 31 and Lukas Dostal has not been very impressive to begin his NHL career. Gibson was actually one of the three worst goalies in the NHL last season by goals saved above average (GSAA).

I think the Kraken will improve and the Sharks are at least going to be more dangerous offensively. Add in four pretty clear playoff teams that will be very aware of the importance of beating up on the bottom-feeders and I can't see how Anaheim improves by 12 or more points after being -46 in 5-v-5 goal differential last season.



PHILADELPHIA FLYERS UNDER 85.5 POINTS

Carter Hart's legal problems are a problem for the Flyers. Samuel Ersson looks to be in line to start the majority of games and he was a bottom-five netminder by GSAA last season. Philadelphia was -21 in goal differential at 5-v-5 last season and outshot the opposition by over 300 shots on goal and had 100 more high-danger chances in that game state.

So, they don't have enough finishers and they have bad goaltending. Rookie of the Year co-favorite Matvei Michkov could help in that department, but he's a 19-year-old kid playing in the NHL for the first time and GM Daniel Briere already downplayed expecting too much from him.

Head coach John Tortorella is a curmudgeon, to put it nicely, and I'm not sure he loves the roster or the situation that he's in. I would argue that the Flyers had as good of a season as they could at 5-v-5 and still managed just 87 points last year.

Awards markets are a bit of a crapshoot because they are predicated on opportunity and health. Players aren't wholly interchangeable when you compare their stats, but the stars will put up numbers so long as they stay healthy.

VEZINA TROPHY

Here are a couple Vezina Trophy picks I like.

PYOTR KOCHETKOV (CAR) TO WIN THE VEZINA TROPHY (+5000)

Carolina is a team I'm extremely high on for this season and Kochetkov is a big reason why. He's played well at every stop in his career and I think he's ready to take the next step. He already has eight shutouts in 65 NHL starts with a 2.37 GAA and a .910 SV%. The Hurricanes are a terrific puck possession team, so the concern here is that he won't stand out as much as a Connor Hellebuyck type, who steals games on the regular.

But, this is more of an Andrei Vasilevskiy type situation where he has a really good team, but is also a really good goalie. It does take some really special numbers to win this award, but it can be done, as Kochetkov plays for a good team and is only 25, so he's still learning on the job.

I think the 50/1 price is a little bit extreme. I guess we'll have to see how much he shares the net with Frederik Andersen, because, like I said, awards are about opportunity, but I think Andersen's health limits how much he plays. He only played 16 games last season and 34 the year before.

JOEY DACCORD (SEA) TO WIN THE VEZINA TROPHY (+10000)

The Kraken would need to exceed expectations for this to have a chance at happening, but I think Seattle upgraded with head coach Dan Bylsma, who led the AHL Coachella Valley Firebirds to back-to-back Calder Cup Finals. Bylsma, of course, won the Stanley Cup with the Penguins in 2009 when he took over on an interim basis and took the Penguins to the playoffs in six straight seasons.

Daccord was masterful last season for the Kraken. He finished fourth in goals saved above average behind Sergei Bobrovsky, Thatcher Demko, and winner Connor Hellebuyck. Daccord was sixth in GAA and tied for fifth in SV%. And he did that with just 15 previous starts under his belt.

You can question the sustainability of that performance from Daccord, but if the Kraken are a playoff contender or even make it, it will likely be because he was able to maintain or even surpass last season's play.

SEASON-LONG PLAYER PROPS

Lastly, let's look at a few season-long player props. These can be found at DraftKings Sportsbook at time of print.

TYLER TOFFOLI (SJ) OVER 30.5 GOALS

Toffoli is going to get more ice time than ever for a bad Sharks bunch. Obviously he won't be surrounded by as much talent, but he should get some good power play time with guys like William Eklund, Mikael Granlund, and Macklin Celebrini.

Toffoli has three 30-goal seasons to his name, scoring 33 last season across stops with New Jersey and Winnipeg and 34 two years ago with Calgary. He's played at least 74 games the last three seasons, so he should be able to stay healthy and has even played all 82 games four times in his career.

Rookie head coach Ryan Warsofsky should tighten the Sharks up a bit on defense, creating a few more turnovers and a bit of a transition game. That should benefit all of the forwards, including Toffoli.

WILLIAM KARLSSON (VGK) OVER 23.5 GOALS

Again, opportunity is the most important factor in any player prop and Karlsson's opportunities should go up for the Golden Knights this season. Vegas let Jonathan Marchessault walk and also William Carrier. As it is, Karlsson had seven power play goals last season, but I would expect Wild Bill to get more ice time on the man advantage now.

Karlsson also had the second-most shots of his career last season and only played 70 games. His 30 goals were second and he missed 12 games. He's also a really good faceoff guy, so he's able to help his line establish possession while he's on the ice. I think there are a lot of positives for him and a good season is in store.

STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING
EDMONTON	3.90
DALLAS	3.87
FLORIDA	3.76
NY RANGERS	3.75
COLORADO	3.68
NEW JERSEY	3.64
VANCOUVER	3.63
TORONTO	3.45
BOSTON	3.33
VEGAS	3.18
TAMPA BAY	3.03
CAROLINA	3.02
NASHVILLE	3.01
WINNIPEG	2.92
LOS ANGELES	2.87
DETROIT	2.83
WASHINGTON	2.83
NY ISLANDERS	2.79
OTTAWA	2.78
MINNESOTA	2.75
UTAH	2.68
PITTSBURGH	2.56
BUFFALO	2.51
ST LOUIS	2.42
PHILADELPHIA	2.29
MONTREAL	2.19
SEATTLE	2.18
ANAHEIM	2.01
CALGARY	1.81
CHICAGO	1.77
COLUMBUS	1.70
SAN JOSE	1.63

ATLANTIC DIVISION

BETTING PREVIEW

The reigning Stanley Cup champion Panthers stand out as the favorites (+235) in what should be an improved division. The Bruins (+500) do have some roster turnover to navigate, hence the 5/1 price to win the division after finishing just one point behind the Panthers, who won four straight to end the regular season.

The Maple Leafs (+275) suffered another disappointing playoff exit in the first round, but hopes are high with new head coach Craig Berube, who won the Stanley Cup with the Blues in 2019 after taking over about 20 games into the season.

With the Lightning (+550) coming off of a bad year by their insane standards with 98 points, the Senators (+1200) on a major upswing as a young team, and a much improved Red Wings (+1200) club, it'll be a fight to the finish in this division in terms of the final guaranteed postseason spot and the Wild Card berths. Hey, even the Sabres (+1400) might get in the mix.

DIVISION POWER RATINGS (BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	POWER RATING
FLORIDA	3.76
TORONTO	3.45
BOSTON	3.33
TAMPA BAY	3.03
DETROIT	2.83
OTTAWA	2.78
BUFFALO	2.51
MONTREAL	2.19
AVERAGE PR	2.99
TOP TO BOTTOM PR SPREAD	1.57



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.33

BOSTON BRUINS

The Bruins lost to the eventual Cup champion Panthers in the second round of the Eastern Conference Playoffs last season. Goaltending carried Boston throughout the season, as their expected goals for and expected goals against at 5-v-5 were completely even per Natural Stat Trick at 166.65. However, Boston outscored opponents 174-135 during that game state and they had the fourth-highest high-danger save percentage.

We'll see if their goaltending fortunes change, as the superstar tandem of Jeremy Swayman and Linus Ullmark was split up with Ullmark sent to division rival Ottawa. Joonas Korpisalo now backs up Swayman. Swayman was fifth in GSAA in all situations at 16.43, with Ullmark 11th at 13.8 and Korpisalo 97th out of 98 goalies.

So, it'll be interesting to see if Swayman can be a 55+ game starter for Boston and if he can be as effective in that role as he was in the timeshare. The Bruins also enter the season with health questions for veteran pest Brad Marchand, who was second on the team with 67 points and looked like the guy from the Operation! board game in the offseason with three surgeries.

Leading scorer David Pastrnak will have to develop some chemistry with new center Elias Lindholm. Lindholm's addition could spark a power play that finished 14th in efficiency last season, though he only had 12 power play points and just 44 points total for the Flames and Canucks last season.

Second-year player Matthew Poitras had 15 points in 33 games in his rookie season after being a 2022 second-round pick. Secondary scoring is a big deal for the Bruins, who got 110 points from Pastrnak, but only two other players had at least 60 points and only three other players had at least 20 goals.

Defenseman Charlie McAvoy was the other player at that position with more than 30 points and he only had one power play goal. Generating more offense from the back end will be another focal point for the Bruins if they want to reach this season's expectations.

STANLEY CUP
18-1

DIVISION
+500

POINTS
99.5

PLAYOFFS
YES -240; NO +195



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.51

BUFFALO SABRES

The Sabres are a team with a wide range of outcomes. They spent the offseason prioritizing speed and may lack in the toughness department, but they're going to try to play a fast, finesse game this upcoming season. That may put a little bit of pressure on top defensemen Rasmus Dahlin, Bowen Byram, and Owen Power, but that is the strength of this team.

Buffalo will need leaps from a lot of young players and better health from Tage Thompson, who had 29 goals in 71 games, but couldn't repeat the 47 tucks he had in 78 games in 2022-23 or the 38 tallies in 78 games in 2021-22. The growth of secondary scorers like Zach Benson and Dylan Cozens may be what ultimately sets the ceiling for the season. Cozens, 23, and Benson, 19, along with Jack Quinn, 22, were all first-round picks and they need to play up to their potential.

Speaking of playing up to potential, Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen and Devon Levi need to do just that. By GSAA, UPL was 16th among netminders in all situations, but Levi was 61st. Levi's stats were underwhelming with a 3.10 GAA and an .899 SV%, but the Sabres hung him out to dry a lot. UPL had a 2.57 GAA and a .910 SV% and another year of maturity from the skaters in front of him can only help.

The Sabres are a tough team to gauge because they're likely to be very exciting and interesting, but that doesn't always translate to winning. That said, mild improvements on the power play will be enough to help, as they finished 29th in PP%. They were also fortunate to be +15 in 5-v-5 scoring, while their expected goal differential was -11.

Buffalo gave up way too many high-danger chances, but they should play a tighter defensive game thanks to a reunion with former bench boss Lindy Ruff, who spent 16 years from 1997-2013 as the head coach.

STANLEY CUP
50-1

DIVISION
14-1

POINTS
88.5

PLAYOFFS
YES +170; NO -210



DETROIT RED WINGS

A mix of new and old might be the cure that the Red Wings need to end their eight-season playoff drought. You have to go back to the 2015-16 season to find the last time that Detroit made the postseason and back to 2012-13 to find the last time they won a playoff series. For such a storied franchise, this kind of drought borders on unacceptable. However, the team just had its first .500 or better season since 2015-16 and may be on an upswing.

Detroit got terrible goaltending across the board last season. Every netminder had a GAA over 3.00 and the team had a 3.33 GAA overall. Detroit allowed the sixth-most 5-v-5 goals and finished -12 in that department, though it could have been worse, as they were outshot by nearly 300 shots on goal in that game state and had the fewest high-danger scoring chances.

To help generate more offense, the Red Wings landed a big free agent fish in Vladimir Tarasenko. The 32-year-old Tarasenko had 55 points in 76 games last season for the Senators and Panthers, as he had 14 points in 19 games after being acquired by Florida. With core forwards Lucas Raymond, Dylan Larkin, and a full season of Patrick Kane, this could be a much more dangerous group up front.

This was a top-10 power play unit, but the Red Wings were below 80% on the penalty kill. In all situations, Alex Lyon, Michael Hutchinson (1 game), and James Reimer all graded just slightly above average in GSAA, but nobody had better than a 0.91 mark. Newcomer Cam Talbot did, as he was 10th in all situations at 13.95. He could be a huge upgrade in the blue paint for a team that added veteran depth all over the lineup.

This does look like an upgraded Red Wings roster overall with a good mix of youthful exuberance and veteran knowhow.

STANLEY CUP
40-1

DIVISION
12-1

POINTS
90.5

PLAYOFFS
YES +130; NO -160



FLORIDA PANTHERS

The Panthers are a 10/1 shot to run it back after the first Stanley Cup championship in franchise history. This was an excellent team in every facet, as they were among the league's best at 5-v-5, were the league's best defensive team at 5-v-5, and have a deep roster with an outstanding head coach with Paul Maurice. Maurice finally got over the hump and his graciousness and impressive comments in postgame interviews and press conferences really endeared him to hockey fans everywhere.

The elephant in the room is the championship hangover, which impacts each team differently. The Panthers played 82 regular season games and 24 more playoff games, including a decisive Game 7 in the Finals after blowing a 3-0 lead. That is a lot of hockey to play and the offseason really only goes from mid-to-late June to September, so there isn't a lot of time to rest ailments and get the body back in shape.

As is often the case after winning a title, players get paid in the free agent markets for what they were able to accomplish. Brandon Montour and Oliver Ekman-Larsson are among the departures on the blue line and Vladimir Tarasenko, Nick Cousins, and Kyle Okposo are among the losses at forward.

But, the core remains intact, with Aleksandr Barkow, Sam Reinhart, and Matthew Tkachuk all still calling Sunrise home. Aaron Ekblad is an impending free agent, so the Panthers' brass will have to make a decision there, but Sergei Bobrovsky was third in GSAA in all situations and he's back for another run at it. Anthony Stolarz is gone, but Chris Driedger and Spencer Knight are capable backups.

Florida's suffocating defensive system that limits high-danger chances and scoring opportunities at 5-v-5 leaves this team a very high floor and an elite core creates a high ceiling. They should be very, very good again this season.

STANLEY CUP
10-1

DIVISION
+235

POINTS
102.5

PLAYOFFS
YES -500; NO +370



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.19

MONTREAL CANADIENS

The Canadiens finished 15th in points out of 16 Eastern Conference teams. Bright spots were few and far between. Juraj Slafkovsky, the first overall pick in the 2022 NHL Draft, had a 20-goal season and added 30 assists, but he, like so many forwards, was a defensive liability. Cole Caufield had a nice season with career-highs in games played, goals, and assists, though he did have 26 goals in 46 games in the 2022-23 season and had 28 in a full 82-game campaign last year.

To Montreal's credit, they somehow only finished -4 in 5-v-5 goal differential, despite getting badly outshot and out-chanced in those even-strength situations. Only San Jose and Chicago had a worse percentage discrepancy between scoring chances for and against. And, the craziest part is that the Canadiens didn't really get good goaltending from anybody, though 25-year-old Cayden Primeau was serviceable in his 23 games played.

Even though this was a bad team, the Canadiens tied with the Islanders for the most overtime losses with 16, so things could have swung a little bit differently. The return of Kirby Dach from season-ending knee surgery and the acquisition of Patrik Laine from the Blue Jackets should add a little bit more offensive punch.

Primeau and Sam Montembault are still the tending tandem and they finished 27th and 51st, respectively, in GSAA in all situations. Primeau has spent parts of five seasons with the Habs and most of those seasons with Laval in the AHL. This is a potential make-or-break year for him with nobody standing in the way for playing time. Montembault is a below average goaltender, so Primeau will get his chance to shine.

It would help both Primeau and the team as a whole to improve on special teams. Montreal was 27th in PP% and 24th in PK%. Something for fourth-year head coach Martin St. Louis to prioritize.

STANLEY CUP

120-1

DIVISION

75-1

POINTS

76.5

PLAYOFFS

YES +750; NO -1400



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.78

OTTAWA SENATORS

All eyes will be on the Senators this season. A big upgrade in net with Linus Ullmark and a young core comprised of Tim Stutzle and Brady Tkachuk are important pieces to build around. We're still waiting for some guys to break out, but that's why the front office surrounded them with veterans like Claude Giroux, David Perron, and recent Stanley Cup champ Nick Cousins.

Ullmark's presence will help in a big way for a team that allowed the fourth-most 5-v-5 goals last season. Ullmark was 11th in GSAA in all situations last season. Of course some of that had to do with Boston's structure and a much more accomplished and established roster, but the Senators got very little from Anton Forsberg and even less from Joonas Korpisalo, who was the second-worst goalie by GSAA out of 98 that played last season. Forsberg was 86th.

Defensive depth remains a question and the Sens may opt to let 19-year-old first-round pick Carter Yakemchuk stick around because they simply don't have enough upside back there. Jakob Chychrun was a team-worst -30 and he was sent off to Washington. Travis Hamonic only played 48 games, but was -10 and had six points. The veterans on this defense are subpar at best.

So, it'll fall on the shoulders of guys like Jake Sanderson, who was taken fifth overall in the 2020 NHL Draft, and youngster Tyler Kleven, who played just nine NHL games last season to maintain a year on his contract. If Thomas Chabot can somehow stay healthy, the defense looks a little bit better, but this was the 29th-ranked penalty kill so big strides are needed.

Ullmark ups the ceiling for this team, but somebody needs to emerge on defense for the Senators to reach what are some lofty goals. They've surpassed 90.5 points just once since the 2014-15 season. New head coach Travis Green will try to get them there.

STANLEY CUP

40-1

DIVISION

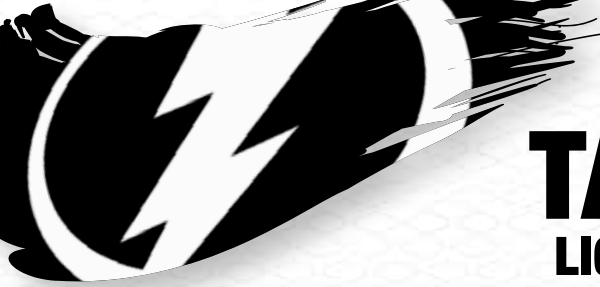
12-1

POINTS

90.5

PLAYOFFS

YES +125; NO -155



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.03

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING

Since Tampa Bay's Eastern Conference reign of terror ended with a loss to the Avalanche in the 2022 Stanley Cup Finals, they've had two first-round exits. This is one of the best-run organizations in the NHL (and also one of the best at manipulating the salary cap), but the financial constraints of the league make it hard to keep everybody together and some roster turnover has taken a toll on the Lightning over the last two seasons.

Nikita Kucherov had 144 points to lead the league and finished 54 points clear of any of his teammates. He assisted on 100 of Tampa's 291 goals and scored 44 of them. The Bolts had three 40-goal scorers, with Kucherov, Brayden Point, and Steven Stamkos, who is now with Nashville.

Tampa has something of a new look up front with Jake Guentzel as the headliner. But, this team needs more than that to get back to where they were just a few short years ago. The Lightning allowed 190 goals at 5-v-5 and finished -19 in that department. The silver lining is that they had more scoring chances and more high-danger chances than their opponents in that game state.

So what happened? Andrei Vasilevskiy happened. Vasy was bad by league standards and positively awful by his own standards. He finished 69th with a -5.21 GSAA last season in all situations. His 2.90 GAA and .900 SV% were easily career-worst. Here's what bettors need to remember - Vasilevskiy was hurt in the preseason and didn't make his debut until November 24. He wasn't able to prepare for the season as he usually does and maybe rushed a bit to get back.

As bad as Vasy was, Jonas Johansson was decidedly worse, so that didn't help matters. A bounce back season from the 30-year-old and continued contributions from the secondary scorers should help the Bolts make the postseason again. What they do when they get there is up for debate, but three players - Brandon Hagel, Nicholas Paul, and Anthony Cirelli - had 20-goal seasons, so replacing Stamkos's offense won't be an issue.

STANLEY CUP
25-1

DIVISION
+550

POINTS
98.5

PLAYOFFS
YES -230; NO +185



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.45

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

Sheldon Keefe couldn't get it done. Mike Babcock couldn't get it done. Maybe Craig Berube can.

After another excellent regular season, Toronto's third straight with at least 100 points and fifth in a row for a full 82-game season, the Maple Leafs bowed out of the playoffs early. In their last eight playoff appearances, the Leafs have won one playoff round. They've won one playoff round since 2004 and missed the playoffs for a stretch of 11 of 12 seasons from 2004-17. Keefe's Leafs were 212-97-40 in the regular season and 16-21 in the playoffs.

The switch to Berube is only one of the noteworthy developments for this season. Toronto might also have a goaltender now in Anthony Stolarz. Perhaps Joseph Woll starts at first after posting a 2.94 GAA and a .907 SV%, but Stolarz was terrific in a part-time role for the Panthers last season, going 16-7-2 with a 2.03 GAA and a .925 SV% in 27 games. He was good as a part-time starter for the Ducks during the 2021-22 season as well.

Auston Matthews led the league in goals with 69. Michael Nylander had a 40-goal season. Toronto had the most 5-v-5 goals scored in the league with 200. They were +32 in 5-v-5 goal differential. They were second in high-danger scoring chances. There were so many things to like about this team, but they fell short under the bright lights and have never quite figured out the goaltender position.

If it's Stolarz, Woll, or NHL vets Matt Murray and Martin Jones looking to show that they still have some chops, somebody has to step up. Mitch Marner and John Tavares are still there and Matthew Knies is an exciting young player. The defense is still anchored by Morgan Rielly. But the heavily-padded guy in the crease is the most important player for the Leafs again, regardless of who it is.

STANLEY CUP
13-1

DIVISION
+270

POINTS
102.5

PLAYOFFS
YES -475; NO +350

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

BETTING PREVIEW

The Rangers won the Presidents Trophy for the most regular season points with 114. They would go on to blow a 2-1 series lead to the Panthers in the Eastern Conference Finals, but it was a thoroughly impressive showing over the first 82 games to get to that point. They held off the Hurricanes by three points, as Carolina was 17 points clear of the Islanders.

To call the Metro top-heavy last season is an understatement. Will it be the same way again? The Rangers (+250) are not even the division favorite and neither are the Hurricanes (+250). The Devils (+230), who finished with just 81 points last season, hold that distinction. While we know that betting odds are not wholly trustworthy predictors of future outcomes, it is staggering to see a team that finished 33 points behind the champ as the favorite.

But, that is the reality and the implication is that the division will be top-heavy again, with the Islanders (+1200), Penguins (+1400), Capitals (+1800), Flyers (+2000), and Blue Jackets (+15000) varying levels of long shots.

DIVISION POWER RATINGS (BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	POWER RATING
NY RANGERS	3.75
NEW JERSEY	3.64
CAROLINA	3.02
WASHINGTON	2.83
NY ISLANDERS	2.79
PITTSBURGH	2.56
PHILADELPHIA	2.29
COLUMBUS	1.70
AVERAGE PR	2.82
TOP TO BOTTOM PR SPREAD	2.05



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.02

CAROLINA HURRICANES

While they aren't the division favorite, the Hurricanes have one of the heaviest "Yes" prices to make the playoffs in the Eastern Conference. Rod Brind'Amour's team has been as consistent as they come over the last three seasons with 111, 113, and 116 points. However, they haven't gotten over the playoff hump, with their last Stanley Cup Finals appearance coming back in 2006.

The departures are more noteworthy than the arrivals, as the Canes bid adieu to Jake Guentzel, Teuvo Teravainen, Evgeny Kuznetsov, and Antti Raanta, among others. The newcomers maybe aren't household names all the same, but William Carrier, Jack Roslovic, and Tyson Jost are all good players.

Frederik Andersen only played 16 games for Carolina, but he was +11.61 GSAA, so he was outstanding while he was out there. He had a 1.84 GAA and a .932 SV% to go with his 13-2 record. Pyotr Kochetkov had a 2.33 GAA and a .911 SV% in 42 games and ranked 20th in GSAA. As long as both guys stay healthy and can handle the workload, this looks like a top-tier tandem. It isn't quite Jeremy Swayman-Linus Ullmark in Boston, but Brind'Amour should be able to spread out the playing time.

Carolina actually underperformed at 5-v-5 relative to the expected stats. They were +23 in goal differential, but their expected metrics projected more like +48 in that split, as they were second in 5-v-5 scoring chances for and allowed the fewest against. Only Minnesota allowed fewer high-danger chances and the Canes were one of five teams with at least 800 such scoring chances.

This team also had the league's top PK and second-best PP. Even with a reshuffling of the lineup, I see no reason to believe Carolina drops off much, if at all.

STANLEY CUP

13-1

DIVISION

+250

POINTS

100.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -350; NO +270



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

1.70

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS

The futures odds are missing zeroes for the Blue Jackets, who are destined for another year at or near the bottom in the Metropolitan Division. This season has nothing to do with wins and losses for Columbus. This is all about letting the kids play for new head coach Dean Evason. Those kids, specifically, are Adam Fantilli and Cayden Lindstrom, as the Blue Jackets took Fantilli third in the 2023 NHL Draft and Lindstrom fourth this past summer.

Fantilli only had 27 points and was -21 in 49 games last season, as injury robbed him of everything after January 28. Gavin Brindley, the team's second-round pick in 2023, is another name to watch this season. And that's precisely what this season will be. Names to watch to see if Columbus can put together a robust young core that can bring the team back to being a playoff contender.

Kirill Marchenko led the team with just 23 goals and was one of two 20-goal scorers along with captain Boone Jenner. Others showed flashes, but the Blue Jackets just don't have enough finishers and traded one in Patrik Laine, who was limited to 18 games due to mental health issues.

Daniil Tarasov and Jet Greaves seem like the top options between the pipes. Greaves helped lead the Cleveland Monsters to a deep AHL playoff run and played nine games at the NHL level. Tarasov was just 8-11-3 with a 3.18 GAA and a .908 SV%, but his GSAA of 4.00 in all situations ranked 28th among 98 goalies to play this past season.

Sadly, the Blue Jackets will play this season without Johnny Gaudreau, who was tragically killed when he and his brother, Matthew, were hit by a drunk driver while riding bikes on the night before their sister's wedding. Gaudreau led the team with 60 points, but led the team more with his infectious personality. His leadership will be sorely missed in the Blue Jackets locker room, but his spirit will be missed around the league.

STANLEY CUP

200-1

DIVISION

150-1

POINTS

67.5

PLAYOFFS

YES +1700; NO -5000



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.64

NEW JERSEY DEVILS

The Devils only have three playoff appearances since the 2009-10 season. One of them happened two years ago when they finished second in the Metro Division with 112 points and bowed out in the second round. Last season, Lindy Ruff got fired and the team limped to an 8-12-1 finish under interim head coach Travis Green.

When Sheldon Keefe was fired by the Maple Leafs, the Devils pounced and made him the 31st head coach in franchise history. Keefe's Leafs were terrific in the regular season, posting a 212-97-40 record. Unfortunately, they were 16-21 in the playoffs and that's how you keep your job.

Toronto's loss may very well be New Jersey's gain, though the season is off to a rough start with Luke Hughes out for the start of the regular season with a shoulder injury suffered over the offseason. Luke, and brother Jack, are two of the building blocks for this Devils squad. Jack had 27 goals and 47 assists last season, while Luke had nine tucks and 38 apples from his defensive position. Unfortunately Quinn, their other brother, is with the Canucks and he may be the best one of the bunch.

In any event, two Hughes are better than none and the Devils have them to construct the roster around. Nico Hischier should be due for a bounce back after missing 11 games. Jack actually missed 20, which is why he finished second to Jesper Bratt in points.

Obviously a bounce back is expected, and the talent is clearly there. However, it may very well come down to the masked men, as newcomer Jacob Markstrom and holdover Jake Allen are in the spotlight. To say that the Devils got bad goaltending last season is an understatement. New Jersey had a collective 3.43 GAA and an .896 SV%. Enter Markstrom, who was 35th among goalies with a 2.23 GSAA last season. None of the Devils' tendies finished in the positive last season and Vitek Vanecek, who led the team with 32 games played, was among the worst.

STANLEY CUP

13-1

DIVISION

+230

POINTS

100.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -400; NO +300



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.79

NEW YORK ISLANDERS

Patrick Roy spent his NHL career being a stopper and not a starter, but he seemed to spark something for the Islanders last season. The Hall of Fame goaltender went 20-12-5 with New York over the final 37 games of the season, leading to a playoff berth. While the Isles were not even close to a match for the heavily-favored Hurricanes, they still gave themselves a chance and made the postseason for the fifth time in six years.

"Exciting" is not really a word used to describe Islanders hockey. They finished 22nd in goals scored and 19th in goals allowed, due in large part to the worst penalty kill in the league. The power play graded just below average, despite three 30-goal scorers on the roster in Brock Nelson, Bo Horvat, and Kyle Palmieri. There were only two other 20-goal scorers, though, as the Islanders struggled to find secondary scoring all season long.

This is also one of the oldest rosters in the NHL, so there aren't a lot of flashy speedsters in the lineup. Coming into the season, this looks like a decent team to pick against in the Metropolitan Division. New York got 16 loser points for falling short in overtime and actually finished 39-43 on the season over 82 games. They went 8-1-1 at the end of the year to make everything look better.

There are plenty of reasons to sell the team, but what makes that easier said than done is the goaltending tandem of Semyon Varlamov and Ilya Sorokin. By GSAA in all situations, Varlamov was 12th and Sorokin was 18th out of 98 goaltenders. Per Natural Stat Trick, the Islanders allowed 165 more scoring chances at 5-v-5 than they generated and allowed the fifth-most shots on goal.

But, Varlamov and Sorokin were a formidable last line of defense. Any drop-off in performance would be a bad sign for the Isles and that is certainly possible, though Sorokin was the runner-up for the Vezina Trophy in 2023 and actually regressed badly last season, as the Isles still made the postseason.

STANLEY CUP

45-1

DIVISION

12-1

POINTS

91.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -105; NO -125



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.75

NEW YORK RANGERS

The NHL's top regular season team looks pretty similar to what we saw last year. Veteran winger Reilly Smith is the only notable addition for a Rangers crew that kept the core intact and looks poised to be at or near the top of the division once again. Artemi Panarin had 120 points during a record-setting season for him and his passing skills rubbed off on four other players with at least 25 goals, including 39 from Chris Kreider.

The Rangers are a tough handicap for the 2024-25 season, though. They were extremely pedestrian at 5-v-5 to be the team that had the most regular season points with 114. In fact, they were just +1 in goal differential at the most common game state by a large margin. By their expected metrics, they actually should have been about -6. They only generated 29 more scoring chances and actually had 16 fewer high-danger chances than their opponents.

But, the Rangers were third in PP% and PK%, so that made up for their mediocre play at 5-v-5. Goaltender Igor Shesterkin is also the great equalizer, as he was ninth in GSAA in all situations at 14.25. Backup Jonathan Quick was also terrific in his somewhat limited role. Shesterkin had a 2.58 GAA and a .913 SV%, with Quick nearly identical at 2.62 and .911.

Panarin had 44 of his points on the power play. Kreider had 18 of his goals. Mika Zibanejad had 31 of his 72 points on the PP. New York's 5-v-5 play is going to turn some people off heading into the season, even though their top guys all recorded very good plus/minus numbers. Shesterkin as the last line of defense is a great safety net.

I do think some bettors will look at the Rangers as a regression candidate, though. With the Hurricanes as consistent as they come and a bounce back expected from the Devils, my guess is that data-driven hockey bettors will look at the Rangers as third on that list of teams.

STANLEY CUP

13-1

DIVISION

+250

POINTS

100.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -350; NO +270



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.29

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS

Having no affiliation or ties to the Flyers, I don't really care if they win or lose. However, winning would make head coach John Tortorella's postgame pressers a whole lot less interesting. The 66-year-old bench boss is starting his third season in a suit and tie for the Flyers and they are 69-71-24 in his two seasons. He's inarguably the most colorful of the 32 head coaches.

It is really hard to know what the Flyers are or where they are going. It will help to have 2023 first-round pick Matvei Michkov in the lineup this season, but the Flyers still need more than him. He did have 41 points in 47 games in the KHL last season playing against professionals at just 19 years of age. Given that Travis Konecny led the team in points with just 68 and only three players had at least 50 points, his impact could be significant.

This was far and away the worst power play in the league with a 12.2% success rate. That was nearly 3% worse than anybody else and nearly 9% below league average. Ironically, the Flyers led the league in shorthanded goals with 16, more than half (31) of what they had on the man advantage.

On the positive side for the Flyers, three of their four 20-goal scorers are 25 or under. Unfortunately, the Flyers also had only one defenseman with more than 30 points, an example of how atrocious the power play truly was. This is a rebuild for all intents and purposes, but the Flyers are going to need some guys to overperform relative to expectation to get some stars.

Carter Hart played well between the pipes, but his alleged involvement in a 2018 sexual assault led to his release from the team. Samuel Ersson was one of the worst regular goaltenders in the league last season with -15.58 GSAA, so the Flyers have major concerns in net entering the season.

STANLEY CUP

60-1

DIVISION

20-1

POINTS

85.5

PLAYOFFS

YES +200; NO -250



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.56

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS

The Penguins seem to have a couple more kicks at the can with their current core, especially with Sidney Crosby agreeing to a two-year extension about a week before the start of preseason games. Crosby and Evgeni Malkin are still extremely valuable players. Outside of Kris Letang, the supporting cast has been a carousel of sorts around Sid and Geno, but the Penguins still manage to be more than relevant.

Pittsburgh did fall short of the playoffs by a few points last season, but had a better goal differential than both the Islanders and Capitals. In fact, the Penguins, Red Wings, and Sabres were the only teams to miss the postseason with a positive goal differential. They were a good team at 5-v-5 with a +7 goal differential, but 241 more shots on goal than their opponents and also the third-most high-danger chances at that game state.

The power play suffered from a season-long power outage, cashing in just 15.3% of the time, better than the lowly Blue Jackets and the Flyers. Struggling on the PP with Erik Karlsson and Letang healthy for 82 games each seems rather insane, though Letang only had five power play points and zero power play goals, so that explains that.

While the forward and defense groups don't stand out a ton, this is still a team with enough talent to get by. The problem is that the netminders provided little help. Tristan Jarry and Alex Nedeljkovic were both below average by GSAA and that is one area of the team that will improve if Joel Blomqvist improves it. Blomqvist was the primary goalie for Wilkes-Barre in the AHL and had a 2.16 GAA with a .921 SV% over 45 games.

As long as the Core Four - Crosby, Malkin, Karlsson, Letang - stays healthy, Pittsburgh has a high floor, but the ceiling is pretty capped in a tough division.

STANLEY CUP

45-1

DIVISION

14-1

POINTS

90.5

PLAYOFFS

YES +120; NO -150



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.83

WASHINGTON CAPITALS

The Capitals are unlikely to be a bad team, but this season is all about "Wayne Watch". Alex Ovechkin needs 42 goals to pass Wayne Gretzky's all-time record of 894. This will be The Great 8's 20th NHL season and he had 31 goals last season, the fewest of his career outside of the 2020-21 COVID season when he was limited to 45 games. Fifteen of Ovechkin's goals came on the power play, the most he's had since 2013-14.

This was not a very good team last season. The Capitals made the playoffs, but finished -37 in goal differential. That set a record for the lowest goal differential in the salary cap era (2005-06) and the lowest since the 1990-91 season. Washington was a pathetic -32 at 5-v-5 in the goal-scoring department and while the expected metrics say they got unlucky with a projected goal diff of -17, only the Ducks had fewer 5-v-5 shots on goal.

Washington only had three 20-goal scorers and traded one of them in Anthony Mantha at the Trade Deadline. Dylan Strome led the team with 67 points. Alex was second with 65. No other forward had more than 35 points. Defenseman John Carlson had 52, with over a third of them on the power play.

The Capitals were in the bottom half of the league in both special teams areas. The play of Charlie Lindgren was a huge reason why they made the playoffs and even had a winning record. By GSAA in all situations, Lindgren was a top-15 netminder. Head coach Spencer Carbery may not have to rely as much on Lindgren, as the Capitals have a much better backup in Logan Thompson now, but he'll still be reliant on the goalies to bail out the rest of the team.

The Capitals did bring in a little upside in Jakob Chychrun on the back end and Pierre-Luc Dubois up front, but roster turnover has really taken a toll on the talent level of this team.

STANLEY CUP

60-1

DIVISION

18-1

POINTS

89.5

PLAYOFFS

YES +155; NO -190

CENTRAL DIVISION

BETTING PREVIEW

Top to almost bottom, the Central was the strongest division in the NHL last season. The Blackhawks were the second-worst team in the league and got Artyom Levshunov second overall for their troubles. Otherwise, the Central had the best division 1 through 6 and was the only division to have at least five teams with 92 points.

The Stars had the second-most points in the NHL and are favored (+240) to repeat as division champs. The Avalanche (+250) are easily the biggest contender for the throne, but the much improved Predators (+380) are in the mix as well.

The new-look Jets under head coach Scott Arniel still have Connor Hellebuyck, which makes them dangerous at +800. The Wild are a scrappy crew at 11/1 and the Utah Hockey Club makes its NHL debut at 18/1. The Blues (+2500) and Blackhawks (+10000) have a lot of ground to make up to chase down the top teams in what is a stacked division.

DIVISION POWER RATINGS (BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	POWER RATING
DALLAS	3.87
COLORADO	3.68
NASHVILLE	3.01
WINNIPEG	2.92
MINNESOTA	2.75
UTAH	2.68
ST LOUIS	2.42
CHICAGO	1.77
AVERAGE PR	2.89
TOP TO BOTTOM PR SPREAD	2.10



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

1.77

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

The Blackhawks made some moves this offseason in hopes of establishing a winning culture in the Windy City. Connor Bedard cannot do it alone, and it is unfair to expect too much from Artyom Levshunov, especially after he dealt with a foot injury over the summer. But, the front office has put some much better players around Bedard for this season in hopes of keeping the Blackhawks from being a laughingstock.

Tyler Bertuzzi, Teuvo Teravainen, and Patrick Maroon are some of the names up front and T.J. Brodie and Alec Martinez are some of the names on the back end. Those wily vets paired with some up-and-coming youngsters at least elevate the ceiling for Chicago. The division is still a beast, but this was a team that finished with a -111 goal differential and scored the fewest goals in the league with 179 last season.

Unfortunately, Bedard missed some important time with a fractured jaw and was limited to 68 games. He still led the team in points with 61. He was also -44, along with teammate Philipp Kurashev, who was second in points with 54. The Blackhawks were outscored 202 to 118 at 5-v-5. The Sharks were the only team that did worse in that game state, yet they did score one more 5-v-5 goal than Chicago.

Only the Ducks generated fewer scoring chances. Only the Sharks allowed more. Just about every metric for this team was bad last season. Arvid Soderblom was the worst goalie in GSAA out of 98 tracked netminders by Natural Stat Trick. All things considered, Petr Mrazek was really good with a 3.05 GAA, .908 SV%, and ranked 21st in GSAA at 6.65. He was one of the bright spots in an otherwise dim season.

There are some decent players on this team who were asked to play too many minutes. A lot of role guys were thrust into first and second-line or pairing minutes. This is a deeper team this season, though, and Bedard was nearly a point-per-game player with limited help and a target on his back.

STANLEY CUP

150-1

DIVISION

100-1

POINTS

73.5

PLAYOFFS

YES +900; NO -1600



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.68

COLORADO AVALANCHE

It took one season for Jared Bednar to install what he wanted and get the players to buy in. Bednar's Avalanche were 22-56-4 during the 2016-17 season, his first at the helm. Since then, the Avs have seven straight playoff appearances and one Stanley Cup. However, as great as Bednar has been in the regular season, the Avs have two first-round exits and four second-round exits aside from their title run.

But, from October to early April, this team is as good as any. Last year's crew had 196 goals at 5-v-5, the second-most in the league. However, their expected goals for suggested 22 fewer tallies, so we'll have to see if the Avs can stave off any potential regression in that department. Given that they were fourth in scoring chances and fourth in high-danger chances, they'll probably be just fine.

Colorado's Big Three with Nathan MacKinnon, Mikko Rantanen, and Cale Makar truly drives the bus. Those guys combined for 220 assists on Colorado's league-leading 304 goals. For good measure, they also combined to score 114 of them. It is as elite of a trio as you will find in the NHL. Valeri Nichushkin only played 54 games (53 points) as he spent time in the NHL/NHLPA Assistance Program, while Gabriel Landeskog missed the season due to multiple surgeries. Nichushkin is serving a six-month suspension, so he'll be out until at least mid-November.

With those concerns in mind, the front office re-signed Jonathan Drouin and inked a few other depth guys in hopes of adding some more secondary punch. The Avs may need it. They scored 304 goals, but were only +50 in goal differential due to the struggles of Alexandar Georgiev, whose -11 GSAA ranked 88th out of 98 tracked netminders by Natural Stat Trick over 63 games.

Maybe Justus Annunen can share some of the burden and he was terrific in limited time with a 10 GSAA in just 14 games. The 2018 third-round pick had only started three games for the Avs before last season. This will be another good team, but if Annunen can shine or Georgiev can improve, they'll be very tough to beat in the division.

STANLEY CUP

13-1

DIVISION

+250

POINTS

102.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -525; NO +380



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.87

DALLAS STARS

Dallas finished three points clear of Winnipeg for the top spot in the Central Division last season, but there were a lot of toss-ups that went their way. The Stars won 12 games in overtime or a shootout last season, as their 40 regulation wins were fewer than Winnipeg and Colorado and their 48 regulation + overtime wins were four fewer than the Jets.

Despite their name, the Stars don't have many of them. It was a balanced approach from Dallas with eight 20-goal scorers and a couple of 30-goal guys. Wyatt Johnston may be emerging as a star, but the rest of the team is just full of good players. All of those good players were enough to overcome something of a down year from Jake Oettinger, who was just 33rd in GSAA last season. After posting a 2.37 GAA with a .919 SV% in 2022-23, Oettinger took some steps back last year.

The Stars play their system very well. They were +32 in goal differential at 5-v-5 and could be even better if Oettinger returns to form. They were one of three teams with over 2,000 scoring chances at 5-v-5 and were among the league's best at limiting high-quality chances for the opposition. Replacing Joe Pavelski won't be easy, but this is arguably the deepest roster in the NHL up and down the depth chart.

Dallas should also get more this season from Logan Stankoven, who had 14 points in 24 games and eight points in 19 postseason games, as the Stars came up a couple games short against the Oilers after besting the Golden Knights and Avalanche.

Miro Heiskanen is one of the game's steadiest two-way defensemen and he should have more help this season with a more physical defensive corps including Matt Dumba and Brendan Smith. The Stars look like a team with minimal weaknesses yet again.

STANLEY CUP

11-1

DIVISION

+240

POINTS

103.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -600; NO +425



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.75

MINNESOTA WILD

It was a tale of two seasons for the Wild, as they started just 5-10-1 under Dean Evason before giving the keys to John Hynes. The slow start under Evason was a bit of a shocker after posting 103 points with a 46-25-11 record two seasons ago. That Wild team made the playoffs and got bounced by Dallas in the first round, but this one looked like a shell of that squad to open the season and moved on quickly.

The move nearly saved the season, as the Wild were 34-24-8 under Hynes, but the damage was already done in a division that leaves no margin for error. Minnesota played a strong defensive brand of hockey under Hynes, finishing with the fewest high-danger chances allowed at 5-v-5, but they also had the sixth-fewest high-danger chances for themselves. They also still finished -5 in 5-v-5 goal differential.

So, they'll need to find a way to open things up a little bit. Unfortunately, they couldn't do that in free agency because of a lot of dead cap money, so it'll be on the guys in-house to step up. Kirill Kaprizov did last season with 46 tucks and 50 apples for a strong 96-point season. Joel Eriksson Ek chipped in 30 tallies and Matt Boldy had a breakout season with 29 and 40 assists. But, that's pretty much where it stopped.

Minnesota got limited production from defensemen, as 22-year-old Brock Faber was the only one with more than 27 points, though Jonas Brodin would have gotten there if he wasn't limited to 62 games. Still, the Wild don't have a full-ice offensive attack, something the other teams in this division have.

Therefore, there is a lot of pressure on the guys in the crease. This will be the swan song season for Marc-Andre Fleury, who was -9.08 GSAA last season with a 2.98 GAA and an .895 SV%. None of the three goalies that played games had a .900 SV%. Filip Gustavsson wasn't quite as bad, but he was bad. We could see more of 2021 first-round pick Jesper Wallstedt and maybe that won't be a bad thing.

STANLEY CUP

35-1

DIVISION

11-1

POINTS

93.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -135; NO +105



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.01

NASHVILLE PREDATORS

Teams that “win” the offseason get a lot of respect going into the new season and that is the case for the Predators. Nashville secured commitments from Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault, as Barry Trotz started his second calendar year as a GM. The Predators snuck into the playoffs as a wild card in his first season with 99 points, but they’ll be hungry for more than a first-round exit this time around.

Second-year head coach Andrew Brunette, who played one quick season with Nashville in 1998-99, had a great first season in the Music City after what was an excellent rookie year in Florida during the 2021-22 campaign. He seems to have a good grasp of the gig and that’s all it takes to make it on Broadway.

I think the hype is warranted on the Preds. They were +15 in 5-v-5 goal differential last season with 168 goals, but their expected goals for metrics point towards being closer to 185. An extra 17 goals at 5-v-5 hardly seems like a big ask with the two dynamic additions and the puck possession that they are likely to have. Brady Skjei is also a nice addition on the back end, where depth is important because the guys logging the most minutes are on the plus side of 30, with the exception of Dante Fabbro.

That is the one big worry about Nashville. This is one of the older rosters in the NHL. But, that also means that a lot of these guys should complement each other well and Brunette can monitor ice time accordingly, especially in those back-to-back, 3-in-4, and 4-in-6 situations.

Juuse Saros led all goalies with 64 games last season, something that Trotz identified as a potential issue. He solved it by signing backup Scott Wedgewood. Saros was 25th out of 98 tracked netminders by Natural Stat Trick in GSAA. Perhaps he can elevate his numbers with a little more rest.

STANLEY CUP

18-1

DIVISION

+350

POINTS

98.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -340; NO +260



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.42

ST. LOUIS BLUES

The Western Conference is a bear. St. Louis had 92 points and finished six points out of the postseason. There were some self-inflicted wounds by not being able to finish games in regulation, as the loser points for other teams cheapen the value of a win. The Blues were 12-6 in overtime/shootout and division rivals took advantage of those points. Also, the Blues did finish -11 in goal differential and all eight Western Conference playoff teams were in the positive.

Quite simply, St. Louis didn’t score enough goals. They were 25th in PP% and only scored 151 goals at 5-v-5. That was the sixth-fewest 5-v-5 goals in the league. All of the teams below them missed the playoffs. Florida was just ahead of them, but the Panthers allowed a league-low 119 goals at 5-v-5 and the Blues allowed 167.

To be honest, the Blues were lucky to have the performance that they did at 5-v-5. Their expected goals against of 190.61 was the fourth-highest in the league. Jordan Binnington had an outstanding season between the pipes and he covered up a lot of holes on the team. Binnington finished sixth in GSAA at 16.35 and was among the league leaders with 57 games played.

St. Louis had one 30-goal scorer (Jordan Kyrou) and the unfortunate part is that they stayed pretty healthy in the top six. Seven forwards played at least 79 games. To make matters worse this season, they lost Torey Krug to season-ending surgery and he’s one of the better puck-movers on the back end.

A somewhat stunning development of the offseason is that St. Louis’s offer sheets were successful in getting Dylan Holloway and Philip Broberg from the Oilers. Teams frequently match offer sheets, but Edmonton let those guys walk. Perhaps the Oilers’ loss is the Blues’ gain, but this team needs a lot more than that and they’re going to need another career year from Binnington to compete.

STANLEY CUP

55-1

DIVISION

25-1

POINTS

86.5

PLAYOFFS

YES +205; NO -255



UTAH HOCKEY CLUB

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.68

The inaugural season for the Utah Hockey Club is cause for all kinds of excitement in Salt Lake City. Will the roster be exciting? That's the big question because Utah did not get an expansion team. This is the remnants of the Arizona Coyotes, who finished 36-41-5 last season with 77 points.

The roster does look similar in a lot of ways. Mikhail Sergachev was the big add over the offseason and some depth signings should help on the blue line, but this is a season about learning what Utah has in-house. Head coach Andre Tourigny was retained and he's very familiar with a lot of the talent on the team because those guys played big roles last season.

Clayton Keller had 76 points in 78 games to lead the way last season as the team's lone 30-goal scorer. Lawson Crouse, Nick Schmaltz, Nick Bjugstad, Michael Carcone and 19-year-old Logan Cooley all had 20 or more tucks. Dylan Guenther fell just short with 18 in his age-20 season. Josh Doan, son of Coyotes legend Shane Doan, had nine points in 11 games. He had 46 points in 62 games for the AHL Tucson Roadrunners. Speaking of sons of legends, Utah drafted Tj Iginla, son of Flames legend Jarome Iginla, in the 2024 NHL Draft.

So, this is a full-fledged youth movement. We'll see if Iginla stays for more than a cup of coffee, as the NHL has a rule that 10 or more games played on an entry-level rookie deal enacts the first year of the contract. As a result, a lot of guys play up to nine games early in the season.

All things considered, Connor Ingram played well in net. He took the starter job over from Karel Vejmelka and had a .907 SV% with a 2.91 GAA in 50 games. He finished 26th in GSAA at 5.05, dramatically outshining Vejmelka, who was 83rd at -8.69.

The main intangible here is playing with a more excited fan base in a much better situation. How much will the team feed off of it? We will have to see.

STANLEY CUP

55-1

DIVISION

18-1

POINTS

87.5

PLAYOFFS

YES +175; NO -215



WINNIPEG JETS

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.92

One team allowed fewer than 200 goals last season. It was the Jets, who rode Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck to just their second season with over 100 points in franchise history. The other one came in 2017-18 with 114 points. That team made it to the conference finals. Last season's Jets got bounced in the first round.

Rick Bowness retired after the season at the age of 69 and Scott Arniel was promoted to be the head coach. He had served as the associate head coach and was the acting head coach as Bowness tended to some family health issues at a couple of different points during the season. So, not much should change in Winnipeg this season and not much has changed with the roster either.

The Jets made a flurry of moves at the Trade Deadline with impending free agents and let those players walk. The core remained in place, though, including leading scorer Mark Scheifele and a very good two-way defenseman in Josh Morrissey. This was not a potent offensive roster, so it will be interesting to see if Winnipeg opens up a little bit more under Arniel or if they continue to play more of an opportunistic style on offense.

To their credit, the Jets did score 178 goals at 5-v-5 and had the best goal differential at +57, as they only allowed 121 goals. Hellebuyck's season-long masterpiece was very much on display in that metric, as the expected goals for against the Jets was 164.5 per Natural Stat Trick. Hellebuyck's 31.71 GSAA in all situations was more than 10 goals better than any other goaltender. Safe to say he was easily the best tendy in the league.

It is a winning formula to have a guy like Hellebuyck and score just enough, but it would be nice to see the Jets do more with the power play, which ranked 22nd. After all, if Hellebuyck is off, as he was against the Avs in the playoffs with 24 goals allowed in five games, having the firepower to battle back really matters.

STANLEY CUP

25-1

DIVISION

+800

POINTS

95.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -200; NO +160

PACIFIC DIVISION

BETTING PREVIEW

A surprise changing of the guard was the headline in the Pacific Division last season. The Canucks took down a division crown for the first time in 11 years. The Oilers finished second, but got incredibly hot in the postseason to roll all the way to the Stanley Cup Finals before losing in a Game 7 heartbreaker. The reigning Cup champion Golden Knights finished fourth and bowed out in the first round for just the second time in franchise history out of six playoff appearances.

The Oilers (-105) are the only odds-on favorite around the league, but my belief is that there are some good betting opportunities on the other teams. The Canucks (+400) have the longest odds of any division champ looking to run it back. The Golden Knights (+450) had to make some tough roster decisions, so they'll look different.

Maybe the Kings (+650) are the team after going 21-12-1 under interim head coach Jim Hiller, who was hired as the full-time guy. The long shots are the Kraken (+1800), Flames (+3500), Ducks (+10000), and Sharks (+25000). The playoff teams in this division feel like a foregone conclusion, as this is the weakest one top to bottom.

DIVISION POWER RATINGS (BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	POWER RATING
EDMONTON	3.90
VANCOUVER	3.63
VEGAS	3.18
LOS ANGELES	2.87
SEATTLE	2.18
ANAHEIM	2.01
CALGARY	1.81
SAN JOSE	1.63
AVERAGE PR	2.65
TOP TO BOTTOM PR SPREAD	2.27



ANAHEIM DUCKS

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.01

The Ducks have fallen on some really hard times. They've finished sixth or worse in the Pacific Division each of the last six seasons. First-year head coach Greg Cronin didn't find much success with a 27-50-5 debut, with 50 losses setting a new franchise record, topping the one that was set the previous year with 47 under Dallas Eakins.

As you would expect with that record, the Ducks were awful at 5-v-5, getting outscored by 46 goals. They only scored 127, better than only the Blackhawks and Sharks. They were on the higher end of goals allowed, but it wasn't egregious like San Jose and Chicago, who allowed 226 and 202 goals, respectively. The Ducks actually deserved a little bit better of a fate by expected goals, both for and against.

The big discrepancy in high-danger chances was the culprit, but the Ducks may be more dangerous moving forward. The one advantage to being bad is that you get a high draft pick. The Ducks have gotten a lot of high draft picks. They took RW Beckett Sennecke this season and he could play right away, just like Leo Carlsson did last season after being taken second overall. Carlsson had 29 points in 55 games. The Ducks also played Pavel Mintyukov in 63 games after taking him 10th overall in 2022.

It may also be near breakout time for Mason McTavish, the team's top pick in 2021. So, it is all about development for the Ducks and they have a lot invested in their recent top selections. Veterans like Frank Vatrano, Troy Terry, and free agent signings Robby Fabbri and Brian Dumoulin set the example and also eat up some important minutes.

The one area the Ducks have neglected in the draft, like so many teams in recent years, is goaltending. Six-foot-6 netminder Darian Clara will play in the Swedish league again this season after being a second-round pick last year. He's probably the best hope moving forward, as aging John Gibson is coming off of an atrocious season as the 96th-ranked goalie in GSAA out of 98 tracked by Natural Stat Trick, and Lukas Dostal graded below average as well.

STANLEY CUP
200-1

DIVISION
100-1

POINTS
70.5

PLAYOFFS
YES +1400; NO -4000



CALGARY FLAMES

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

1.81

The last 15 seasons have been tough for Flames fans. Five playoff appearances are spread across that span and the Flames have only made it past the first round twice. Their 81-point showing last season for first-year head coach Ryan Huska was the lowest in a full 82-game season since 2015-16. That was the last season of the Bob Hartley era and the Flames have had six different full-time head coaches since.

Expectations are not high for this season either. One of the many problems for Calgary is that they've been bad, but not quite bad enough to draft high. Even last season, the Flames were only bad enough to pick ninth and they took Zayne Parekh in hopes of helping the defense. Other than that, the Flames have picked 16th, 59th, 13th, 24th, and 26th over the last five Entry Drafts.

That's not to say that this team lacks talent. It just doesn't have enough of it. Nazem Kadri led the team with 75 points, but he's 33 now. Yegor Sharangovich enters his age-26 season after leading the team with 31 goals, but 32-year-old Blake Coleman was second and just had his first 30-goal season.

One youthful bright spot may be goaltender Dustin Wolf. Wolf was terrific for the AHL Calgary Wranglers last season with a 2.45 GAA and a .922 SV%. He was the best goalie in the league during the 2022-23 season with a 2.09 GAA and a .932 SV%. He will get the first crack at replacing Jacob Markstrom, who ranked 35th in GSAA. Wolf finished his first NHL stint 7-7-1 with a 3.16 GAA and an .893 SV%, so there is still some growing to do.

Wolf is the last line of defense for a team that finished -14 in 5-v-5 goal differential and finished in the bottom 25% of the league in power play percentage. That puts a lot of pressure on the youngster because there probably won't be much margin for error.

STANLEY CUP
75-1

DIVISION
35-1

POINTS
81.5

PLAYOFFS
YES +300; NO -400



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.90

EDMONTON OILERS

The Stanley Cup favorites boast the heaviest chalk to make the playoffs and the highest point total line at DraftKings. Edmonton was one win away from making history, not only as the team to end Canada's long-standing Stanley Cup drought, but also becoming the first team to erase a 3-0 series deficit in the Finals. The Panthers were able to right the ship and won a dramatic 2-1 Game 7, but the Oilers finally met and even exceeded expectations.

It certainly helps to have the best player in the world, but it turns out that hiring said player's juniors coach was the key to unlocking it all. Connor McDavid played for the Erie Otters under head coach Kris Knoblauch. Knoblauch had a couple seasons as an assistant with the Flyers and was the Hartford Wolf Pack head coach when the Oilers came calling.

Edmonton started the season 3-9-1 under Jay Woodcroft. They would finish it 46-18-5 under Knoblauch and beat the Kings, Canucks, and Stars to get to the Finals for the first time since 2006. While Canada's Stanley Cup drought extended another year, the Oilers further established themselves as one of the Western Conference's best.

The Cup run seemed to obscure the fact that this was a good team to begin with. The Oilers have finished second in the Pacific Division in five straight seasons and made the playoffs in all of them. Goaltending has always been the issue, as an offense with McDavid and Leon Draisaitl is always going to do its part. The Oilers did that last season with 193 goals at 5-v-5, the third-most in the league.

But, they also were +40 in goal differential because Stuart Skinner stopped a lot of pucks. He had a 2.62 GAA with a .905 SV%, but he did not play well in the postseason for long stretches, posting a -2.44 GSAA. The Oilers are running it back with Skinner and most of the rest of last season's key players, hence the very high benchmarks in the betting market.

STANLEY CUP

+800

DIVISION

-105

POINTS

108.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -1400; NO +800



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.87

LOS ANGELES KINGS

Defense doesn't always win championships, but it can get you into the playoffs. That was the case for the Kings, who had a pedestrian offense, but a stout defense. LA allowed the fifth-fewest goals at 5-v-5 and scored the 12th-fewest, but that was good enough for a +22 goal differential and a solid regular season record.

The Kings did make a midseason change and swapped out head coach Todd McClellan for Jim Hiller and won 21 of their 34 games after going 23-15-10 to open the year. Special teams were another huge key to the season for the Kings, as they had the second-best PK% and made up for some of their even-strength offensive troubles by finishing 11th in PP%.

Hiller has been in charge of the power play throughout his career as an assistant coach, so we could see a modest bump from that unit this season with full control. We could also see a bump because guys like Quinton Byfield and Arthur Kaliyev are a year older. Byfield had 55 points in 80 games and Kaliyev, a pure scorer coming up the ranks, had 15 points in 51 games.

The Kings still have some franchise fixtures like Anze Kopitar and Drew Doughty to show the younger players the way. Unlike some other aging veterans, Kopitar and Doughty are still producing at very high levels. The Kings only had five 20-goal scorers, but they had tremendous balance in terms of point production, as eight guys had at least 40 points, including Doughty, the only defenseman.

The main question for LA this season is how David Rittich and Darcy Kuemper perform in net. Cam Talbot was a top-10 goaltender by GSAA, but Rittich, who played 30 fewer games, ranked 15th in GSAA. Kuemper was awful for the Capitals and finished 91st of 98 tracked goalies at Natural Stat Trick in GSAA at -12.19. I guess we'll see if it's just a "system" thing in LA.

STANLEY CUP

22-1

DIVISION

+650

POINTS

96.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -240; NO +195



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

1.63

SAN JOSE SHARKS

The Stanley Cup favorites and the longest long shot both reside in the Pacific Division. It is the Sharks who are the latter. San Jose's 47-point season wasn't even the worst in franchise history. Far from it, actually, as the Sharks' first two seasons as a franchise featured 39 and 24 points, with the 24-point season coming over 84 games in 1992-93.

Nevertheless, they were awful and their prize at the end of a very long tunnel was Macklin Celebrini, who was going first overall in the 2024 NHL Draft several years ago. Celebrini was the youngest Hobey Baker Award winner in history during his freshman season at Boston University and a superstar at both Shattuck St. Mary's and with the Chicago Steel in the USHL. Adam Fantilli, Jack Eichel, and Paul Kariya are the only players to win the Hobey Baker as freshmen. That's decent company.

The cupboard is not entirely bare for the Sharks up front. Celebrini will play from Day 1, but he has a little bit of help, including recently-signed Tyler Toffoli. Most of last season's top scorers are back in the fold, including 2021 first-round pick William Eklund, who had 45 points in 80 games.

This will likely be a team that puts the puck in the net, but also digs it out of the cage under the red, circling light as well. The Sharks project to be awful on defense yet again. They took Sam Dickinson 11th overall this past June, but time will tell if he plays right away or even has an impact. San Jose gave up 226 goals at 5-v-5 last season, 24 more than any other team. They were the only team to give up over 900 high-danger chances.

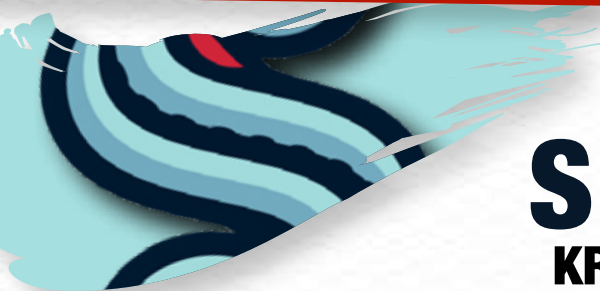
If Yaroslav Askarov, who is missing the start of training camp with an injury, is a truly special netminder, the situation looks a little less bleak. He was acquired from the Predators this offseason. Vitek Vanacek was among the worst goalies in the league and Mackenzie Blackwood was well below average as well. Sharks goalies faced the most shots in the league by a significant margin, so this group will be under duress again.

STANLEY CUP
400-1

DIVISION
250-1

POINTS
64.5

PLAYOFFS
YES +2200; NO -8000



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

2.18

SEATTLE KRAKEN

It is hard to believe that the Kraken were released three seasons ago already. This is the start of Year 4 and it is a year with new beginnings, as former Penguins head coach Dan Bylsma takes over for Dave Hakstol. Hakstol led the Kraken to a playoff berth in Year 2 and had two losing seasons otherwise before getting fired.

Bylsma is well-versed in the organizational goals, as he coached the AHL affiliate in Coachella Valley to the Calder Cup Finals last season. In fact, it was the second season in a row that his team made the finals. Now Bylsma gets another shot at the NHL level and he has a good, but not great, roster at his disposal.

Matty Beniers is probably about ready to take a leap after having 37 points in 77 games in his third NHL season. He actually had 57 points in 80 games in 2022-23, but that was a much better overall team. Shane Wright, the team's 2022 first-round pick, had seven points in 16 games at the NHL level and 47 points in 59 games for Coachella Valley. He had 14 points in 13 playoff games. Berkly Catton was drafted from the nearby Spokane Chiefs in the WHL and could make his debut in October.

As much as there are some promising players up front and some decent players on defense, last season was all about goaltender Joey Daccord. Daccord was stellar to say the least, as he ranked fourth in GSAA in all situations at 16.65. But, to illustrate what Seattle's main issue was, they were seventh in goals allowed at 5-v-5 and still finished with a negative goal differential in that split.

Special teams were a problem both ways, as the Kraken ranked 17th on the PP and 19th on the PK. Seattle is a very analytically-driven organization and many believe that they overpaid free agents Chandler Stephenson and Brandon Montour, but the problems on special teams and the problems with generating offense overall need to be solved in some way. Maybe spending is the way to do it.

STANLEY CUP
55-1

DIVISION
18-1

POINTS
87.5

PLAYOFFS
YES +170; NO -210



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.63

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

Are the reigning Pacific Division champions being disrespected? It all depends on your view with the goaltending situation. Thatcher Demko, who was spectacular last season when he was out there with a 20.76 GSAA to rank second behind Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck, suffered a knee injury in the playoffs and it seems to have been a rather severe one.

Full details have never really been shared, but some NHL insiders have hinted that Demko may never be 100% again and it could be an issue of pain tolerance throughout his career. Demko was also hurt during the season and returning may have exacerbated an ongoing issue or created another one, so the Canucks go into this season not knowing when he'll be able to return or to what degree he can shoulder an NHL workload.

Contingency plans include Jiri Patera and Arturs Silovs, as it was Silovs who took over for the remainder of the series against the Oilers. Silovs only played four regular season games and was slightly below average by GSAA. It was Casey DeSmith who primarily filled in during the season, but he was not retained. With Demko's uncertainty, looking at the 2023-24 numbers seems a little bit inconsequential, but the Canucks were +51 in goal differential at 5-v-5 and scored the fifth-most goals.

The burden on the offense will increase with the Demko situation, but the offense is really good and should continue to be. Quinn Hughes had 92 points as the best offensive defenseman not named Cale Makar in the league and J.T. Miller had 103 points. Brock Boeser had 40 goals. The offensive numbers are even more impressive when you consider that the Canucks ranked 12th in PP success.

Vancouver finished 17th on the PK and with the old adage that "the goalie is your best penalty killer", that's cause for concern. Head coach Rick Tocchet will have a lot to figure out and navigate as the season goes along, but league average goalie play will help Vancouver reach their goals.

STANLEY CUP

18-1

DIVISION

+400

POINTS

99.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -320; NO +250



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

3.18

VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS

Living in Las Vegas, I can tell you that the Golden Knights have as rabid of a fan base as it gets. Unfortunately, a lot of those who own jerseys are having to consider a new number and nameplate on the back. Teams that sustain long stretches of good play ultimately wind up with major salary cap concerns. The Golden Knights, who are the best in the business at circumventing the cap until it no longer matters come playoff time, have had to make some tough choices.

Marc-Andre Fleury was the first one, but now the team doesn't have Jonathan Marchessault, William Carrier, Chandler Stephenson, or Alec Martinez. Goalie Logan Thompson was traded mere minutes before signing autographs at a fan event. It is a bummer for a city that has embraced this team wholeheartedly and even feels personal connections with a lot of the players, but the silver lining is that the current roster is still more than capable of making noise.

The Knights still have Jack Eichel, Mark Stone, and William Karlsson. Except for the loss of Martinez, the defensive core remains intact, including Trade Deadline acquisition Noah Hanifin. Ilya Samsonov and Adin Hill could share goaltending duties. Samsonov was awful for the Maple Leafs last season with a -14.98 GSAA, but Hill was a top-25 goalie by that metric. It remains to be seen if Robin Lehner will be with the club this season.

We saw some of the roster attrition and the impact of injury last season. The Knights were only +13 in 5-v-5 goal differential and only +10 in scoring chances, as well as +12 in high-danger chances. This was previously a team that posted dominant metrics at 5-v-5. The special teams were also very pedestrian.

It may all come down to health. Eichel played 63 games last season. Stone played 56. Shea Theodore played 47. The lineup never seemed to be at full strength, except, ironically, Marchessault, who played all 82 games. This is still a team with a very high floor, but the ceiling is debatable.

STANLEY CUP

18-1

DIVISION

+450

POINTS

97.5

PLAYOFFS

YES -300; NO +235