

NHL MORNING SKATE – FEB. 21, 2024



NHL Morning Skate

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

- Rangers extend League's longest active win streak to eight games
- Byfield submits 'Goal of the Year' candidate in Kings victory
- Matthews can reach 50-goal mark during Wednesday's five-game slate

* The Rangers and Panthers – the top teams in the Eastern Conference – extended their winning streak to eight and six games, respectively.

* **Quinton Byfield** brought the fans at Crypto.com Arena to their feet with a highlight-reel goal en route to the Kings' fourth straight victory.

* **Auston Matthews** enters Wednesday just one shy of his 50th goal of the season and is in striking distance from becoming the fastest player to reach the mark since **Mario Lemieux** in 1995-96. [Click here](#) for notes on his path to 50.

* An NHL on TNT and Max doubleheader between the Flyers and Blackhawks as well as the Bruins and Oilers highlight the rest of Wednesday's five-game slate.

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 **RESULTS** TUESDAY

	2	FINAL OT	3			1	FINAL	3	
	5	FINAL OT	4			2	FINAL	6	
	3	FINAL	6			1	FINAL	3	
	5	FINAL	3			1	FINAL	5	

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TOP TWO TEAMS IN THE EAST EXTEND WINNING STREAKS

The Panthers (37-15-4, 78 points) and Rangers (37-16-3, 77 points) both earned wins to extend the NHL's top two active winning streaks to six and eight games, respectively. In the process, both clubs moved past the idle Bruins (33-12-11, 77 points) and into the first and second place in the Eastern Conference standings.

* **Aaron Ekblad** – already the Panthers' franchise leader in [goals among defensemen](#) – opened the scoring 19 seconds into the contest to mark the fastest goal by a blueliner this season and **Matthew Tkachuk** assisted on the overtime winner to halt a multi-goal, third-period Senators rally as Florida extended its winning streak to six games for the [second time this season](#). Tkachuk is currently leading the League in [scoring since Jan. 1](#), producing at a clip of nearly two points per game (1.90; 15-23—38 in 20 GP) after starting the season with 5-22—27 through Dec. 31 (0.75 P/GP).

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EKBLAD PUTS NAME ON ANOTHER ALL-TIME LIST

Aaron Ekblad (0:19) established the second-fastest goal to begin a contest by a Panthers defenseman, trailing Robert Svehla (0:14 on Dec. 5, 1998).



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* **Adam Fox**, **Kaapo Kaako** and **Vincent Trocheck** each scored, while **Igor Shesterkin** [made 41 saves](#) to give the Rangers their eighth straight victory and match the fourth-longest winning streak in [franchise history](#). New York (37-16-3, 77 points) is now on pace to finish 2023-24 with 54 wins which would surpass 2014-15 (53) for the most in a season – the last time the club finished first in their division.

BYFIELD’S BRILLIANCE BEDAZZLES FANS WITH HIGHLIGHT-REEL GOAL FOR KINGS

Quinton Byfield (1-1—2) opened the scoring by presenting his submission for ‘Goal of the Year’ and later factored on **Pierre Luc-Dubois**’ second tally of the night to help the Kings (28-16-10, 66 points) move within one point of the Oilers (33-18-1, 67 points) for third in the Pacific Division standings.



* Byfield (18-24—42) is now two shy of his first 20-goal season and can become the third Kings player in the past 35 years to reach the plateau at age 21 or younger. He would join **Anze Kopitar** (2006-07, 2007-08, 2009-09) and **Alex Frolov** (2003-04).

CENTRAL DIVISION PLAYOFF RACE REMAINS TIGHTLY CONTESTED

The Avalanche (35-18-4, 74 points) and Jets (34-15-5, 73 points), who have been shuffling back-and-forth between second and third place in the Central Division as of late, both picked up wins to gain ground on the Stars (34-15-8, 76 points), who fell to the Rangers on Tuesday.

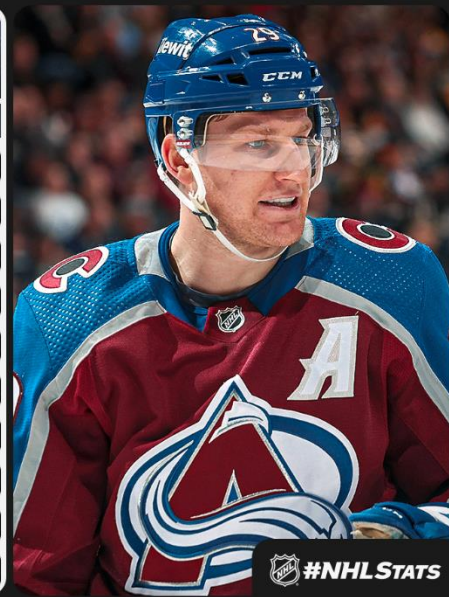
* After conceding the game's first goal to **J.T. Miller**, the Avalanche responded with two straight tallies from **Ryan Johansen** before **Nathan MacKinnon** assisted on the empty-net goal to seal the win for Colorado and extend his season-opening home point streak to 27 games.

LONGEST HOME POINT STREAKS

NHL HISTORY



PLAYER	TEAM	SEASON	GP
WAYNE GRETZKY	LAK	1988-89	40
WAYNE GRETZKY	EDM	1985-86	33
GUY LAFLEUR	MTL	1978-79	32
MARIO LEMIEUX	PIT	1995-96	31
BRYAN TROTTIER	NYI	1981-82	31
WAYNE GRETZKY	EDM	1979-80	28
NATHAN MACKINNON	COL	2023-24	27
GUY LAFLEUR	MTL	1979-80	27
BRETT HULL	STL	1989-90	26
MARIO LEMIEUX	PIT	1989-90	26



* **Kyle Connor** (1-2—3) factored on three of Winnipeg's six goals to record his seventh career 20-goal season, tied with **Blake Wheeler** for the [third most in Jets/Thrashers history](#). In the process, Connor also tied Wheeler (7 from 2013-14 to 2019-20) for the third-most consecutive 20-goal campaigns in [franchise history](#).

WILD CARD RACE SPOTLIGHTED IN #NHLSTATS: LIVE UPDATES

The latest edition of [#NHLStats: Live Updates](#) featured a number of noteworthy storylines, including the Predators (29-25-2, 60 points), Islanders (23-18-14, 60 points) and Capitals (25-21-8, 58 points) picking up wins to intensify the Wild Card race.

* **Luke Evangelista** scored one of Nashville's five goals to help his club move into a tie in terms of standings points with the Blues (29-24-2, 60 points), but St. Louis will remain in the Western Conferences' final Wild Card spot due to its game in hand. Evangelista improved his career totals to 18-22—40 (78 GP) and became the third player in franchise history to record 40 points as a rookie, joining **Filip Forsberg** (27-42—69 in 100 GP) and **Tanner Jeannot** (29-19—48 in 96 GP).

* **Mathew Barzal** scored to extend his point streak to eight games and assisted on the overtime winner to help the Islanders move within four points of the Red Wings (29-20-6, 64 points) for the Eastern Conference's final Wild Card spot. Barzal improved his overtime point total to 5-14—19, an amount that stands as the second most in franchise history behind **John Tavares** (11-12—23).

* **Alex Ovechkin** (2-1—3) factored on three of his team's six goals and extended his home goal streak to four games as Washington skated to victory against division-rival New Jersey. Ovechkin has scored eight goals over his past eight games after tallying just eight through his first 43 contests of 2023-24.



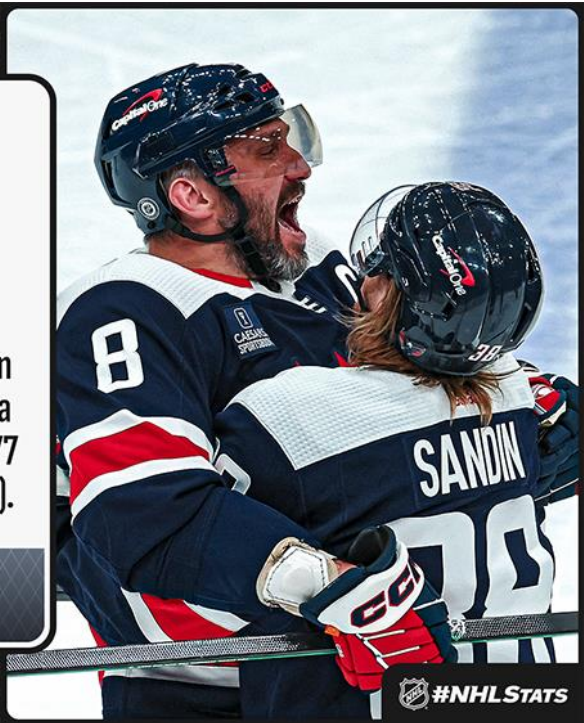
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OVECHKIN STAYS HOT AT HOME

Alex Ovechkin became the 11th player in NHL history age 38 or older to record a four-game home goal streak and the first since Joe Thornton (4 GP in 2018-19). Only two players have posted a longer such run: Johnny Bucyk (2x: 7 GP in 1976-77 & 6 GP in 1974-75) and Bill Cook (5 GP in 1934-35).



NOT ONE PATH: JEREMY SWAYMAN AND BALLET

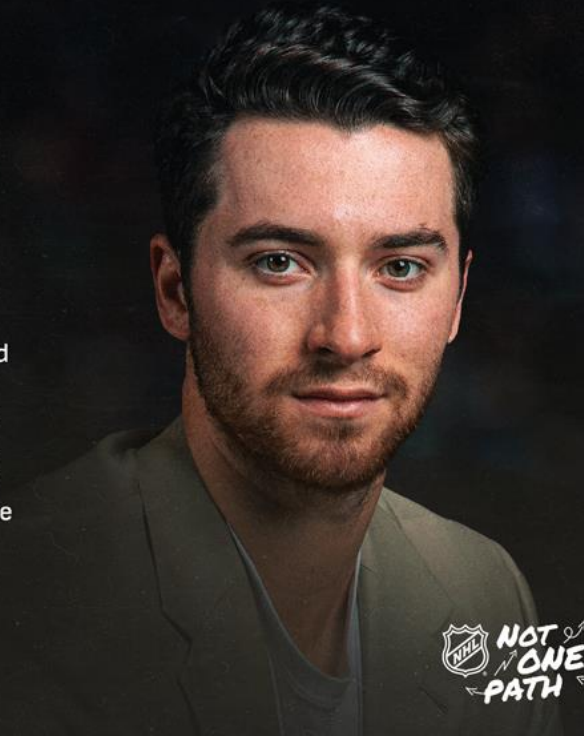
During 'Hockey Week Across America', we feature Anchorage, Alaska native **Jeremy Swayman** as part of the Not One Path series. Swayman took a ballet class at the University of Maine and described it as ["the best thing ever."](#) His biggest takeaway was the body awareness – something he uses in his goaltender training.



JEREMY SWAYMAN →

#1 | GOALTENDER

As a goalie at the University of Maine, choosing ballet as an elective course may have sounded like an odd choice but for Jeremy Swayman it was a no brainer and paid off in ways he never expected. Swayman's mom, Anne, is a barre instructor so ballet was something he was always familiar with but had never tried – that is, until he took a course on it in school. Almost instantly the Bruins netminder noticed a difference in his on-ice game and movement. He credits ballet for those improvements and to this day makes ballet a part of his daily life and training.



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QUICK CLICKS

- * [Commissioner Gary Bettman affirms five-game suspension to Morgan Rielly](#)
- * [James Cooper Smeaton talks officiating, transition from player in 1976 Q&A](#)
- * [Nikola Jokic attends Avalanche game, receives 'MVP' chants from crowd](#)
- * [Wild host 4th annual Hockey Without Limits Day](#)
- * [Connor Bedard 'pumped' to face Patrick Kane for 1st time when Blackhawks host Red Wings](#)

FIVE-GAME SLATE FEATURES PLENTY OF TALENT

A doubleheader on TNT and Max opens with rookie-scoring leader **Connor Bedard** and the Blackhawks hosting the Flyers before shifting to Edmonton, where **Connor McDavid** and **David Pastrnak** – [two of the top four players](#) in the Art Ross Trophy race – will face off in a game that will also be broadcast nationally in Canada on TVA Sports and Sportsnet.

The image shows the NHL schedule for Wednesday, February 21. It features the NHL logo and the word "SCHEDULE" in large white letters. Below this, the date "WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21" is displayed in a rounded rectangle. The schedule is presented as a list of five games, each with a time slot, team logos, and broadcast channels:

Time (ET)	Home Team	Visitor Team	Broadcast Channels
7:00 PM	Buffalo Sabres	Chicago Blackhawks	RDS, SN, MSG-B
7:30 PM	Pittsburgh Penguins	Chicago Blackhawks	MAX, TNT
10:00 PM	Washington Capitals	Edmonton Oilers	BSSD, BSOH, BSSC
10:00 PM	Toronto Maple Leafs	Montreal Canadiens	SCRIPPS, SNO
10:00 PM	Edmonton Oilers	Chicago Blackhawks	TVAS, SN1, SNE, SNW, SNP, TNT, MAX

* Bedard enters Wednesday's contest against the Flyers with 17-22—39 (42 GP) and can become the 10th 18-year-old in NHL history to reach 40 career points in 43 or fewer games – the only active player among that cohort is **Sidney Crosby**, who hit the mark in 36 contests in 2005-06.

* McDavid has a point in 19 consecutive home games (12-34—46) – the second-longest active such run behind **Nathan MacKinnon's** 27-game stretch – and can become the sixth player in NHL history to record *multiple* 20-game home point streaks. He would join **Wayne Gretzky** (8x, last two: 22 GP in 1990-91 & 22 GP in 1989-90), **Mario Lemieux** (31 GP in 1995-96 & 26 in 1989-90), **Mike Bossy** (20 GP in 1983-84 & 21 GP in 1981-82), **Guy Lafleur** (27 GP in 1979-80 & 32 GP in 1978-79) and **Bobby Orr** (25 GP in 1974-75 & 21 GP in 1970-71).

* Pastrnak (336-361—697 in 648 GP) needs three points to become the [10th player in Bruins history](#) to reach the 700-point plateau. Should he do so Wednesday, Pastrnak would become the fourth-fastest player to hit the mark with the franchise behind **Phil Esposito** (447 GP), Orr (518 GP) and **Rick Middleton** (639 GP).

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MATTHEWS EYES 50-GOAL MARK IN HOMETOWN

Auston Matthews (49-24—73 in 53 GP) will have a shot at becoming the first player to reach the 50-goal mark in 2023-24 when the Maple Leafs visit his hometown Coyotes on Wednesday (10 p.m. ET on SNO, SCRIPPS). Below are a few notes from the #NHLStats Pack: Auston Matthews' Path to 50 Goals – [click here](#) to read more.

* Matthews, who grew up in Scottsdale, Ariz., can become the first active player to reach the 50-goal mark in 54 games or fewer – **Connor McDavid** (61 GP in 2022-23) holds the standard among current skaters. He can also establish the record for fastest U.S.-born player to 50 goals in a season, a distinction he currently shares with **Kevin Stevens** (62 GP in 1992-93) after reaching the plateau in 62 games in 2021-22.



MATTHEWS CAN JOIN ELITE COMPANY

Auston Matthews (53 GP) can become the third fastest player in 30 years to reach the 50-goal mark, following Cam Neely (44 GP in 1993-94) and Mario Lemieux (50 GP in 1995-96).

NHL

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The infographic features a white text box on a dark background. To the right is a photo of Auston Matthews in a white Toronto Maple Leafs jersey and helmet. The NHL logo is at the bottom left of the text box, and the #NHLSTATS logo is at the bottom right of the photo.

* Matthews, who enters the contest with seven goals across his past three games (7-3—10 in 3 GP), can also become the fourth active player to post multiple 50-goal campaigns, in which he would join **Alex Ovechkin** (9x), **Leon Draisaitl** (3x) and **Steven Stamkos** (2x).