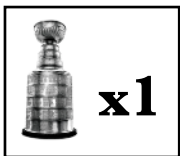




FLORIDA PANTHERS

Atlantic Division

Preseason Power Ranking **3**



1041
FRANCHISE WINS

52-24-6
110 Points
2023-24 SEASON

1st
DIVISION

Sunrise, FL - Amerant Bank Arena (19,250)
Head Coach: Paul Maurice (94-56-14, 3rd Season)

2023-24: Won Stanley Cup

Can Cats Claw Their Way to Another Cup?

The Panthers surprised everyone in '22-23 when they came into the playoffs as the 8th seed in the East, stunned top seeded Boston in the first round, and went all the way to the Stanley Cup Final, eventually falling to the Vegas Golden Knights. After the surprise success of '22-23, Florida came into the '23-24 season hungry to finish the job and they did exactly that, winning their first Stanley Cup in franchise history in 7 games over Edmonton. The Cats bring back much of their extremely talented core as they set out to defend their title.

Sergei Bobrovsky



Photo via Miami Herald

Forwards

The Panthers changed the fortunes of their franchise when they swung a blockbuster trade in 2022 for **Matthew Tkachuk**, who has led the Panthers to the Stanley Cup Final in both seasons he has spent in Florida. Tkachuk had 88 points during the regular season and is one of the most physical forwards in the league, making him a valuable two-way player. Captain **Aleksander Barkov** falls in that category as well, putting up 80 points last season while winning the Selke Trophy for best defensive forward in the league. **Sam Bennett** plays on Tkachuk's line and is another very physical forward who helps open up space for offense and can get to the net to score goals himself. Only one NHL player scored more goals last season than **Sam Reinhart**, who had 57 goals in the regular season and scored the Cup-winning goal in Game 7. Reinhart's previous career high for goals was 33 and he scored on nearly 25% of his shots (by far the highest percentage in the league), so a repeat 50+ goal performance seems unlikely, but he will remain productive. Sniper **Carter Verhaeghe** scored 34 goals last year and is able to get it done in the clutch, with 5 career playoff overtime goals (the third most in NHL history). **Evan Rodrigues** scored several big goals throughout the playoffs and is in the middle of a three-season stretch of success.

While the top of the Florida lineup is unchanged from last year, there was a lot of turnover in the bottom six forwards. The young Finnish duo of **Anton Lundell** and **Eetu Luostarinen** remains on the third line, however, with both capable of putting up points. Lundell in particular could take a big step forward in his age-23 season after playing very well in the playoffs. **Mackie Samoskevich** will get a chance at extended NHL action after a 54-point season in the minors and a 7-game NHL cameo last year. Florida's hard hitting and forechecking 4th line was a big part of their title run, but it now looks completely different after all three players moved on in the offseason. Veteran **Tomas Nosek** was brought in to fill one of the spots. He will likely be the one constant as the Panthers rotate several young players such as **Jonah Gadjovich** and **MacKenzie Entwistle**, who provide lots of physicality but not much offensive upside.

Defense/Goaltending

The Panthers' defense looks different this year as well after key pieces Brandon Montour and Oliver Ekman-Larsson left as free agents, but the top pairing of **Gustav Forsling** and **Aaron Ekblad** remains. Forsling led the league in plus-minus and scored some clutch goals in the playoffs. Ekblad has often been injured the last several seasons, but is an offensive threat and hard hitter when healthy. Offensive players have to watch themselves when **Dmitry Kulikov** and **Niko Mikkola** are on the ice together, with the duo having the most hits among Florida defenseman in '23-24. **Nate Schmidt** joins the team after several productive seasons with Vegas and Winnipeg.

Sergei Bobrovsky sealed his trip to the Hockey Hall of Fame by backstopping Florida's run to the Cup, checking the one box left off his resume. He finished third in the league in wins, led the league in shutouts (6), and had his best save percentage and GAA since the '17-18 season. "Bob" is getting up there in age a bit, but he should still have a couple productive years left in him. **Spencer Knight** has seen some limited NHL action in recent years after being a highly regarded prospect. He is the backup after an excellent minor league season.

The Bottom Line

The Panthers made two franchise changing decisions after the 2022 season which stunned the hockey world at the time. After a season that saw them finish with the best record in the league before being swept out of the playoffs in the second round, they fired coach Andrew Brunette and hired Paul Maurice, who had a reputation of never being able to get it done in the postseason. They traded star Jonathan Huberdeau (coming off a 115-point season) for Matthew Tkachuk. GM Bill Zito wanted to change the identity of his team from a freewheeling, high scoring side to a team that would play physically and grind opponents down, believing the latter was necessary to have playoff success. The Panthers have been rewarded for Zito's vision the past two seasons. While a lot of the depth of the title-winning team has been lost, that grind-it-out identity remains in the stars of the team and head coach Maurice, which makes the Panthers a threat to repeat. That lost depth, along with improvements made by other teams in the division means that Florida may not go into the postseason as Atlantic Division champs as they did last year. But, the Cats know how to win in the postseason and as their 2023 run to the Finals as the #8 seed proves, all they have to do is just make it into the tournament.

2024-25 Projection: 50-27-5 (105 points) - 2nd in Atlantic



Matthew Tkachuk



Photo via The Hockey Writers

PANTHERS 5-YEAR POINT TREND

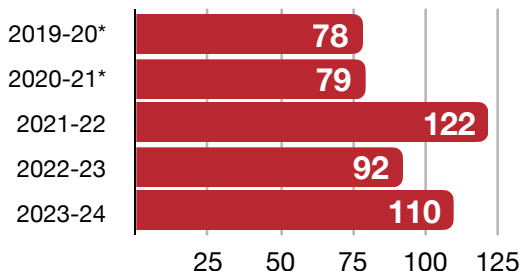


Photo via NHL.com

2024-25 Schedule

October 2024

		BOS 8 7:00		OTT 10 7:00		BUF 12 7:00
	BOS 14 1:00	CBJ 15 7:00		VAN 17 7:00		VGK 19 6:00
		MIN 22 6:30		NYR 24 7:00		NYI 26 7:30
	BUF 28 7:00					

November 2024

2024 NHL Global Series Tampere, Finland - Nov 1-2				DAL 1 1:00	DAL 2 11 AM
			NSH 7 7:00		PHI 9 6:00
	NJ 12 7:30		NJ 14 7:00		WPG 16 7:00
		WPG 19 8:00		CHI 21 8:30	COL 23 6:00
	WSH 25 7:00		TOR 27 7:30		CAR 29 3:00
				CAR 30 4:00	

December 2024

		PIT 3 7:00		PHI 5 7:00		SJ 7 6:00
		SEA 10 10:00		VAN 12 10:00		CGY 14 10:00
	EDM 16 8:30		MIN 18 9:30		STL 20 7:00	
TB 22 5:00	TB 23 7:00					MTL 28 1:00
		NYR 30 7:00				

January 2025

				CAR 2 7:00	PIT 3 7:00	
	COL 6 9:00		UTA 8 10:00			BOS 11 1:00
	PHI 13 7:00	NJ 14 7:30		DET 16 7:00		ANA 18 6:00
		ANA 21 10:00	LA 22 10:00			SJ 25 10:00
VGK 26 8:00			LA 29 7:00			

February 2025

						CHI 1 1:00
NYI 2 6:00		WSH 4 7:00		STL 6 8:00		OTT 8 7:00
2025 NHL 4 Nations Face-Off						
2025 NHL 4 Nations Face-Off						SEA 22 6:00
		NSH 25 8:00		EDM 27 7:30		

March 2025

						CGY 1 3:00
	TB 3 7:00			CBJ 6 7:00		BUF 8 6:00
		BOS 11 7:00		TOR 13 7:00		MTL 15 7:00
NYI 16 7:30				CBJ 20 7:00		WSH 22 5:00
PIT 23 6:00						UTA 28 7:00

March/April 2025

MTL 30 1:00		MTL 1 7:00	TOR 2 7:30			OTT 5 2:00
DET 6 5:30		TOR 8 7:00		DET 10 7:00		BUF 12 6:00
		NYR 14 7:00	TB 15 7:00			

Projected FLA Lineup

Forwards

	Left Wing	Center	Right Wing
Line 1	23 Carter Verhaeghe	16 Aleksander Barkov	13 Sam Reinhart
Line 2	19 Matthew Tkachuk	9 Sam Bennett	17 Evan Rodrigues
Line 3	27 Eetu Luostarinen	15 Anton Lundell	25 Mackie Samoskevich
Line 4	70 Jesper Boqvist	92 Tomas Nosek	44 MacKenzie Entwistle

Defense

Line 1	42 Gustav Forsling	5 Aaron Ekblad
Line 2	7 Dmitry Kulikov	77 Niko Mikkola
Line 3	88 Nate Schmidt	34 Adam Boqvist

Goaltenders

Starter	72 Sergei Bobrovsky
Backup	30 Spencer Knight

2023-24 NHL Ranks

POINTS - 110 (5th)
 GF - 265 (11th)
 GA - 198 (2nd)
 PP% - 23.51 (8th)
 PK% - 82.47 (6th)
 SV% - .913 (2nd)

2,348 < Number to Know

When you step onto the ice against the Panthers, you'd better prepare yourself to get hit early and often. Florida's 2,348 hits during the '23-24 season led the NHL.

PLAYER SPOTLIGHT

GUSTAV FORSLING - D



2023-24 Statistics

GP	G	A	PTS	+/-
79	10	29	39	+56

Forsling had a slow start to his career, being traded by Chicago and released by Carolina before finding a home in Florida. He has made his former teams look foolish by becoming a top-pair defenseman with the Panthers. His +56 plus-minus last year led the league by a wide margin. Plus-minus is partially a team dependent stat, so it can be deceiving when using it to evaluate defensive play, but it still speaks to his effectiveness. He will continue to be a leader on the back end for the Cats.

HOME

AWAY