

2022-23 NHL BETTING GUIDE

**VSIN EXPERTS
PREVIEW YOUR
LOCAL TEAMS:**

- BOSTON
- NY RANGERS
- NY ISLANDERS



Welcome to VSiN's Third Annual 2022-23 NHL Betting Guide.

The 2022 Stanley Cup Playoffs were incredible theater, but the regular season is the best time to bet on hockey. While just about everyone is focused on football, I go to work on hockey, the sport that I know best. For a lot of you, your best bet is to make futures wagers before the puck drops on the 2022-23 regular season. You'd be hard pressed to find more value at any other point in the season. As you can see below, my projections are among the most accurate in the industry dating back to when I first released them in 2018-19.

Average error of season
long predictions:

My process is fairly simple:
I build projections using
modern hockey statistics
and then I simulate the
season thousands of times.

The average results (down
to one decimal place) are what you will find in various tables throughout this guide. I don't anchor my predictions to the betting market in any way, and I try my best to be as objective as possible. It doesn't do me any good to be biased toward a team or players for petty reasons. If I did that, I might make bad predictions ... and that's not good for my career. I want you to win even if you're a fan of the (insert team). Good luck.

FORECASTER	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Andy MacNeil	7.74	7.37	7.56	12.42
The Athletic	7.85	7.05	7.46	12.75
Money Puck	9.49	8.72	9.11	13.65
Hockey Viz	10.7	9.05	9.88	14.51
Betting Market	8.08	7.34	7.71	12.34

All odds listed in the guide are courtesy of DraftKings Sportsbook. All statistics via Evolving Hockey and Natural Stat Trick.

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Three Things New NHL Bettors Should Know Before Getting Started

By Andy MacNeil

Handicapping and betting on NHL hockey on a nightly basis over the course of several months and 82 regular-season games (not to mention a lengthy Stanley Cup Playoffs) can be exhausting.

Here are three things for new NHL bettors to know before the season begins:



THINGS AREN'T ALWAYS AS THEY SEEM

Hockey is a chaotic sport that is heavily influenced by luck. In fact, some studies suggest that if placed on the luck-skill continuum, hockey would be somewhere in the middle. The sport doesn't do a good job of rewarding skill. Betting on hockey will test you, and how easily you're fooled by variance. Remember: Shots and scoring chances matter more than goals in a small sample size, so don't be quick to judge a team until you look under the hood. More about this subject later in the guide.

HOCKEY IS EVOLVING

Favorites won 64% of the games last season, up a couple of percentage points from the year prior, which makes sense given the rise of analytics. Teams seem to be playing in a more optimal way than ever before, and scoring is up as a result. It's only natural that the better teams would win more often under these circumstances. It remains to be seen whether this is the new norm or not, though. The number of favorites with an implied win probability of 70% or higher has risen a lot over the last three seasons.

In 2019-20, less than 5% of games featured a favorite that big, but that number jumped to around 10% in 2021-22 and to more than 15% last season. The games are more lopsided than they've ever been, so don't be shocked to see a -500 favorite occasionally. The gap between the NHL's best and worst teams is huge.

-500

50%

THE REGULAR SEASON IS A GRIND

The 1,312-game regular season stretches across eight months and only breaks twice: Three days during the holidays and four days around the All-Star Game. Teams play every other day and frequently play on short rest. If you want an example of how that plays into the results, here it is: Over the last five seasons, home teams have won 55% of the games, but their win rate dropped to 50% in the second half of back-to-back games. The schedule can be just as taxing on bettors, so take care of yourself and your mental health.

Learn the Basics: Study Hockey Stats 101

By Andy MacNeil

Consider this your crash course in hockey analytics. It won't explore particularly complex topics, but it will provide you with a solid foundation that will make it easier to follow the game and find value in the betting market.

Here are a some explanations for stats you should know as a hockey bettor:

SHOT ATTEMPTS

Corsi is the foundation on which hockey analytics were built. While it's sometimes referred to as an advanced statistic, there's nothing advanced about it. At its core, Corsi is just plus-minus for shot attempts. It's useful because the shot-attempt differential actually does a better job of predicting future goal differential than past goal differential does.

In other words, if halfway through a season a team has a shot differential of +75 but has been outscored by five goals, research has shown that it is more likely to have a positive goal differential in the second half. Scoring goals requires skill, but it's also heavily influenced by luck. Routinely outshooting your opponents, however, is a more repeatable skill – and one that can be relied on.

Fenwick is nearly identical in definition except for one difference. Corsi counts shots that hit the net, missed shots and blocked shots; Fenwick does not count blocked shots. Corsi is generally more predictive than Fenwick, but the latter is still useful when analyzing certain situations.

EXPECTED GOALS

The previous metrics have flaws that might have become apparent when you read their definitions. When it comes to shot attempts, a shot from the far offensive zone that somehow makes its way to the goaltender for an easy save is counted the same as a shot from 5 feet in front of the net that would require great skill – or luck – to stop. These are the issues that expected-goals models aim to address.

Expected-goals models, like the one found at the stats website Evolving Hockey, weigh each unblocked shot attempt based on a number of variables to determine the likelihood of a shot finding the back of the net. Shot location is a big one, but shot type and angle are also taken into account. Some models even factor in things like rebounds and whether a shot was off a rush.

The debate is ongoing on whether expected-goals models are more predictive of future goals than Corsi. Using both metrics is common, as Corsi sort of tells us who had the territorial advantage, while expected goals lets us know if they also won the shot-quality battle. Most expected goals do not take an individual shooter's talent into account.

GOALS ABOVE REPLACEMENT (GAR)

A WAR (Wins Above Replacement) model attempts to assign a total value for every player, which represents how much that player contributed to his team in a single number. Evolving Hockey's GAR is a metric that assigns

a number to players based on how much value they have contributed compared with what we would expect from a replacement-level player. WAR and GAR are interchangeable, as goals are just the currency used to obtain wins. A win is worth about 5.5 goals.

MAKING USE OF METRICS

Whether talking about Corsi, Fenwick or expected goals, these metrics are best expressed in ratio (percentage) or rate (per 60 minutes). For example, if a team registered six shot attempts and allowed four, we would say it owned 60% of the shot share.

Rate stats allow us to measure efficiency. Goals per 60 minutes, for example, is pretty self-explanatory. It tells us how many goals a team scores per 60 minutes of play, which could come in handy when pricing games and period totals.

STRENGTH STATES

Five players and a goalie take the ice for each team at the start of a game. But because of penalties, teams sometimes play up or down a man. Teams can play at even strength (5-on-5, 4-on-4, 3-on-3), on the power play (5-on-4, 5-on-3, 4-on-3) or on the penalty kill (4-on-5, 3-on-5, 3-on-4). The strategy will change depending on the situation, however, which is why it's important to isolate each area of the game and analyze it on its own.

Most of the time, we should be talking about 5-on-5 play because it is the most frequent situation. Another reason for mainly focusing on 5-on-5 is that both teams have a chance to drive play. At both the team and player level, it's important to separate performance analysis based on individual situations. However, one exception to the rule exists. Sports bettors reference expected goals during all situations to judge whether or not the teams they bet on should have won.

BEWARE OF BOX-SCORE BIAS

It's easy to look at the box score and jump to the conclusion that whoever had more shots on goal was the better team, but that isn't necessarily the case. Score effects are a well-researched phenomenon across all sports, especially in the NHL. Teams with a lead, particularly late in games, will often sacrifice offensive opportunities in an effort to protect a lead. Teams that are trailing will see this opening and somewhat abandon their defensive structure to try to tie the game.

Consider the following scenarios:

- Team A was outshot 40-20 and outchanced 15-7. Team A won the game 1-0, scoring in the final couple of minutes.
- Team B was outshot 40-20 and outchanced 15-7. Team B won the game 4-3 but led 4-0 after the first period.

At first blush, these performances may seem similar. The goal, shot and scoring-chance differentials were the same, but Team A won a close game,

meaning both teams were incentivized to drive play and create scoring opportunities.

On the other hand, Team B was in a game in which it dominated the first period, jumping to a sizable lead. Because of strategic and behavioral tendencies, however, Team B sat on the lead and let the opponent get back into the game. It's because of score effects that score adjustments must be made.

Score adjustments are simply a method of weighting events. Teams get more credit for generating shots and chances with a lead and less credit for doing so when trailing. Failing to understand score effects can lead inexperienced hockey bettors to believe that a trailing team offers in-game value simply because it is outshooting and outchancing the team with the lead. However, even the worst teams typically outshoot their opponents when they're trailing.

GOALTENDING METRICS

For decades, the two most commonly cited statistics when talking about goaltenders have been goals-against average and save percentage. Goals-against average (GAA) is the number of goals a goaltender allows per

60 minutes of playing time. It is calculated by taking the number of goals against, multiplying that by 60 and then dividing by the number of minutes played.

GAA is a team statistic, though, and should not be applied to an individual goaltender because it is altered by factors completely out of a goaltender's control. They don't control how many shots they face or where the shots are coming from. They definitely can't control how many penalties their team takes. All these things influence a goaltender's GAA, so let's throw it out.

Save percentage (Sv%) is pretty self-explanatory. It's flawed, but it's definitely the better of the two. It is calculated by dividing the number of saves by the number of shots on goal. Although goaltenders can't control how many shots they face, at least save percentage tells you something, unlike goals-against average.

Goals saved above average (GSAA) tells us how good or bad a goaltender is relative to league average, but since shot quality isn't taken into account, Evolving Hockey's goals saved above expected (GSAX) is better. GSAX is calculated by taking the number of goals a goaltender allows and subtracting it from his expected goals against. Wins are not a goaltender stat.



Igor Shesterkin led the NHL last season with 37.18 GSAX.



BOSTON BRUINS

ATLANTIC DIVISION

ANDY MACNEIL PROJECTIONS

WIN DIVISION: +502 (16.6%)

MAKE PLAYOFFS: -567 (85.0%)

POINTS: 101.7

MISS PLAYOFFS: +567 (15.0%)

WINS: 46.5

WIN STANLEY CUP: +2028 (4.7%)

Few teams have been a contender as long as the Bruins, but Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand aren't going to be around forever, and general manager Don Sweeney has apparently seen the writing on the wall. Changes have been made, and more are coming, but in the short term, the team looks stronger than it has in years. However, so does the Atlantic Division, and that makes it hard for the Bruins to stand out.

OFFENSE

Sweeney fired coach Bruce Cassidy following the Bruins' early exit from the playoffs, citing a need for a new voice in the room. According to Sweeney, the players claimed they haven't been able to drive the bus as far as decision-making goes, which they felt held them back from reaching their full potential on offense. The Bruins were never among the top offensive teams under Cassidy, and they're hoping that will change under new coach Jim Montgomery, who, by his own admission, likes to let his horses run.

Marchand, Charlie McAvoy and Matt Grzelcyk are all expected to miss the first couple of months while they recover from offseason surgeries, so we won't get a good look at this team until sometime in December. Boston was average offensively in 2021-22, ranking 15th in goals and 13th in expected goals. Maybe Montgomery can get more out of them, but it would be naive to think they won't struggle a bit without three of their best players. The return of Bergeron and David Krejci will soften the blow, but the Bruins will need big seasons from the likes of David Pastrnak, Taylor Hall, Jake DeBrusk and newly acquired Pavel Zacha.

DEFENSE

The hallmark of the Bruins is defense, as they've been a top-five team in goals against for five seasons in a row, but injuries are going to test the team's defensive depth this season. The Bruins had the ninth-best penalty-kill percentage in 2021-22, but they probably don't have any players good enough to replace Marchand and McAvoy on special teams. Hampus Lindholm, who was acquired at last season's trade deadline, will have a chance to prove his worth. Boston's ceiling on defense will be a little lower to start, but the group should be able to tread water until they're back at full strength.

GOALTENDING

Jeremy Swayman got a taste of the NHL in 2020-21 and posted a .945 save percentage in 10 games, but he fell back down to earth in 2021-22. Earth is where his partner, Linus Ullmark, resides, and bettors shouldn't expect the 29-year-old goaltender to stray too close to the sun. He's already reached his ceiling, which is fine for a backup, but the Bruins will probably need Swayman to up his game unless they want to fight for a wild-card spot all season. The Bruins ranked 11th in on-ice save percentage last season, but given that they ranked first in expected goals against and fourth in shots against per 60 minutes, it looks like their goaltenders held the team back.

OUTLOOK

The Bruins will likely feel more pressure from behind this season, as teams in the bottom half of the Eastern Conference, specifically the Atlantic Division, have improved. That's going to make qualifying for the playoffs a little tougher this season, and the injuries to Marchand, McAvoy and Grzelcyk don't help. More than half of the Bruins' first 25 games are against teams projected to make the playoffs, but they'll play most of those games at home, so they're in a good position to weather the storm. The Bruins will likely make the playoffs, but as things stand now, they look like a wild-card team.



ODDS TO WIN STANLEY CUP

28-1

BEST BET

- WIN STANLEY CUP (28-1)
- WIN ATLANTIC DIVISION (11-1)
- MAKE PLAYOFFS (-160)
- OVER 94.5 REGULAR SEASON POINTS (-125)

ROSTER MOVES

In:

David Krejci, Pavel Zacha

Out:

Erik Haula, Curtis Lazar



NEW YORK RANGERS

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

ANDY MACNEIL PROJECTIONS

WIN DIVISION: +646 (13.4%)

MAKE PLAYOFFS: -465 (82.3%)

POINTS: 100.5

MISS PLAYOFFS: +465 (17.7%)

WINS: 45.8

WIN STANLEY CUP: +2281 (4.2%)

Last season, the Rangers were considered by many to be the best futures pick on the board at 30-1. Those bettors likely felt vindicated (albeit disappointed) when the team came two wins away from reaching the Stanley Cup Final. However, the Rangers opened a lot of eyes in the process, and with that comes lower odds (20-1) in 2022-23. Only 10 teams have better odds of winning it all. Igor Shesterkin was key to the team's playoff success, but a lot of Rangers proponents leave out some minor details, such as: Pittsburgh had to start a third-string goaltender and Carolina's Vezina Trophy candidate didn't play a single game. The Rangers had a lot go right last season, so while they look to be a better team than they were a year ago, it doesn't necessarily mean they will improve on their 110-point finish.

OFFENSE

The Rangers ranked 16th in goals per 60 minutes in all situations last season but finished 20th at even strength. Mika Zibanejad, Artemi Panarin and Adam Fox will provide the same brand of offense, but it would be surprising to see Chris Kreider stray so close to the sun again. The 31-year-old had never scored more than 28 goals in a season but he popped off for 52 in 2021-22.

The Rangers have potential to be better offensively than they were last season, but given that they ranked among the bottom half of the league in expected goals, players such as Alexis Lafreniere, Filip Chytil and Kaapo Kakko must up their game like they did in the playoffs. There's high hopes for 2018 No. 9 pick Vitali Kravtsov and newly signed Vincent Trocheck, but the buzz has been reflected in the Rangers' preseason odds.

DEFENSE

Team defense did improve over the course of the season, resulting in a top-10 finish in expected goals against, but Shesterkin was still the driving force behind the Rangers being able to keep more shots from becoming goals than any other team. The top four is well put together with four quality defenders. Fox, K'Andre Miller, Jacob Trouba and Ryan Lindgren provide a good mix of skill and snarl, but it's hard to analyze the Rangers' defense without talking about goaltending.

GOALTENDING

Shesterkin posted the best save percentage (.934) since Tim Thomas in 2010-11, and saved the Rangers 37.2 goals above expected (sixth-best in league history). The Rangers outscored teams by roughly 0.5 goals per 60 minutes last season, and a lot of that could be attributed to Shesterkin's play. He's a safe bet to be one of the best goaltenders in 2022-23, but it's not often that a goaltender produces multiple seasons like the one he had in 2021-22.

OUTLOOK

No single player is as important to their team as Shesterkin is to the Rangers, and I don't consider that to be a good thing. Shesterkin could carry the team to a Stanley Cup, much like Thomas carried the Bruins in 2011, but they'd be hopeless without him. The Rangers will make the playoffs more than 80% of the time, but coach Gerard Gallant should think about bubble-wrapping Shesterkin.



ODDS TO WIN STANLEY CUP

20-1

BETTING TIP

• NEW YORK WAS 35-16 AT HOME LAST SEASON

ROSTER MOVES

In:

Vincent Trocheck,
Louis Domingue, Jaroslav Halak

Out:

Andrew Copp, Nils Lundqvist,
Alex Georgiev, Ryan Strome,
Frank Vatrano, Justin Braun



NEW YORK ISLANDERS

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

ANDY MACNEIL PROJECTIONS

WIN DIVISION: +11011 (0.9%)

MAKE PLAYOFFS: +265 (27.4%)

POINTS: 88.6

MISS PLAYOFFS: -265 (72.6%)

WINS: 39

WIN STANLEY CUP: +19900 (0.5%)

The Islanders had to play their first 13 games on the road in 2021-22, and after going 5-2-2 to start the trip, the team was still expected to compete for the Metropolitan Division title. However, the team went on to lose 11 in a row and missed the playoffs for the first time since 2017-18. The Islanders did have an excuse, as their season should have been shut down due to COVID-19, but that wasn't enough for general manager Lou Lamoriello, who fired arguably the best coach in hockey at the conclusion of the regular season. Letting Barry Trotz go might've carried some weight if Lamoriello had subsequently made the team better through trades and free-agent signings, but he didn't. In fact, his biggest changes were subtracting players that he added in the first place, such as Zdeno Chara and Andy Greene. Old and slow is the best way to describe this team and its general manager.

OFFENSE

Bettors shouldn't expect the Islanders' system to change a whole lot. New coach Lane Lambert was part of Trotz' staff for the last several years and there hasn't been much roster turnover. The Islanders have finished no higher than 21st on offense in any of the last four seasons, and their leading scorer, Brock Nelson, finished with just 59 points in 72 games. Mathew Barzal is a good player, but after producing points at the same rate for four seasons in a row, it seems he's on the low end of the star-player spectrum. The Islanders finished 23rd in goals and 22nd in expected goals per 60 minutes last season and didn't add a single player to their forward group. Repeat: Old and slow.

DEFENSE

The Islanders added defenseman Alexander Romanov, who has the potential to be good at just 22, but moving on from Chara, 45, and Greene, 39, helps the team more. Chara and Greene combined to play more than 2,500 minutes in 2021-22 and dragged their linemates down. Romanov rounds out a solid blue line that also includes Ryan Pulock, Noah Dobson, Adam Pelech and Scott Mayfield. Pulock, the team's best defenseman, missed 26 games last season, and having him back in the lineup improves their chances of competing in the competitive Eastern Conference. The Islanders finished ninth in goals against per 60 minutes last season, but they didn't have strong peripherals, sitting 24th in shots against and 25th in expected goals against per 60. The team projects to be better defensively in 2022-23, though, especially if their goaltending continues to be as good as it has been.

GOALTENDING

If the Islanders find a way to get into the playoffs, it will almost certainly be because of their goaltenders, Ilya Sorokin and Semyon Varlamov. Sorokin saved approximately 22 goals above expected last season and posted a whopping seven shutouts in 52 games, while Varlamov played 31 games and saved the team about four goals more than an average goaltender. Scoring on the Islanders is going to be tough, and both goaltenders are capable of putting the team on their back.

OUTLOOK

The Islanders should be better this season, but the Eastern Conference is a lot more competitive than it was last season and this organization has been passed by in many ways. They made the playoffs in approximately 25% of simulations.



ODDS TO WIN STANLEY CUP

40-1

BEST BET

- MISS PLAYOFFS (-115)
- UNDER 92.5 REGULAR SEASON POINTS (-130)

ROSTER MOVES

In:

Alex Romanov

Out:

Zdeno Chara, Andy Greene

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