

## SECOND-YEAR KRAKEN AN EARLY SURPRISE

Break up the Kraken!

In a fashion eerily similar to Vegas Golden Knights' success in their inaugural National Hockey League season, the second-year Seattle Kraken are playing not at all like a typical 'expansion' team.

At one point starting in mid-October, the Dave Hakstol-coached Kraken rattled off five victories in a row to move into second place in the Pacific Division, and were proud owners of the fourth-best record in the entire Western Conference. Now, maintaining that elevated pace will be the challenge for the Kraken, who seem to have abandoned their ultra-defensive style of play in favour of a more open offensive concept, and it's paying off. Averaging more than 3.5 goals per game, the Kraken in mid-November were scoring at a pace exceeded only by Boston, Edmonton and Buffalo.

So what's going on out there in the Pacific Northwest?

Even the Kraken are somewhat surprised, but a bit reserved. No one is yet making plans for a Stanley Cup parade. "I think the biggest thing for us right now is to not get too high," veteran Jordan Eberle told Nashville's Tennessean after the Kraken dumped the Predators 5-1 for their fifth straight win. "I know we've won five in a row, but we have a big homestand, some really good teams that we're about to play. A lot of times you get a little bit lackadaisical and think things are too easy, and that's when this league gets you."

Seattle had only one player among the top 100 point-getters in the NHL, but they had a league-best 19 'unique' goal-scorers as of Nov. 10. Jaden Schwartz, rookie Matty Beniers and Jared McCann were tied for the team lead with five goals, but two others had four (including the pride of Strathclair, Man., Morgan Geekie) and four players had three. The Kraken are the polar opposite of the Oilers, who live and die by the offensive exploits of Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, one-two in the scoring race.

After the Kraken's inaugural season in 2021-22 resulted in a 27-49-6 record (better than only Arizona and Montreal), a big upgrade took place in the offseason. Seattle gave future star Beniers, the team's first draft pick (No. 2 overall in 2021) a major offensive role and went heavy into the free agent market, acquiring offensive stalwarts Andre Burakovsky, Oliver Bjorkstrand and defenceman Justin Schultz. The upstart Kraken have such a solid lineup that Shane Wright, projected last year to be the best player available in the draft (he ultimately went fourth overall), can't secure a spot in the lineup.

With the Seahawks having a great NFL season, the baseball Mariners a team on the rise and the Kraken a big hockey surprise, it's a great time to be a sports fan in the Emerald City.

- Humorist **Eric Stangel**, on Twitter: "Damn it. Got in a line I thought was for early voting. It was the NYC marathon. Just walked 26.2 miles FOR NOTHING."
- **Eamon Lynch** of GolfWeek.com, on rumours that **Greg Norman** will be replaced as head of the LIV golf tour by **Mark King**, currently CEO of a fast food company: "As the current CEO of Taco Bell, (King) can certainly boast relevant experience in repackaging the synthetic and unpalatable as authentic and nourishing."
- From the Beaverton: "Saskatchewan newlyweds fined for not wearing Roughriders jerseys in any of their wedding photos — fined \$500 each, but with the option of paying a portion of it directly to the Roughriders by buying 15 tubs of officially licensed Saskatchewan Roughriders windshield washer fluid."
- Comedy writer **Brad Dickson** of Omaha, lamenting the Nebraska Cornhuskers' poor season: "Nebraska has a great punter. I think it's time to start punting on second down."
- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**: "Due to warm weather in Austria, the World Cup ski races were cancelled for the third straight weekend. Now if you want to see people go downhill you have to watch the Green Bay Packers."
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "Australian jockey **Blake Shinn** stood up in a last-second bid to overtake the leader, and his pants fell down. Might be the first time a horse placed while its rider showed."
- From fark.com: "Attorney representing one of the Michigan State football players involved in the tunnel fight after the Michigan-Michigan State game releases a statement that raises serious questions on how the attorney was able to pass the bar exam."
- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "A man was arrested and hauled away after he threw eggs at Britain's **King Charles** last week. Isn't a pitcher supposed to get a warning before he's ejected?"
- Astros outfielder and Philadelphia native **Chas McCormick**, to reporters, on his clutch catch in Game 6 vs. the Phillies: "My 13-year-old self would be really mad at me."

- Columnist **Phil Mushnick** of the New York Post, on a rumoured transaction by the New York Giants: “The Giants reacquire **Odell Beckham Jr.**? That would be like paying to have your kidney stones put back.”  
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