

Most Important Player TO His Team

As I was listening to a radio show's hockey panel talking about the Senators, one of the panelists (as I recall it was Gord Wilson) said, "Jake Sanderson is the most important player to the Senators."

Not "on the Senators", but "to the Senators". There is a rich semantic difference between those two phrases. This article will delve into the issue of a player being the most important "to his team."

When This Article Was Written

I started working on this article in March 2026, after the big snow melt, after an ice-storm, after a bout of warm weather, during a snowstorm. So, typical March weather in Ottawa.

Rich Semantic Difference

What do we mean when we say, "Bobby Clobber is the most important player on his team"? It means that, compared to the other players on his team, he is the most important. To me, that means he is the best player on his team. With 32 teams, there are 32 players who are the most important players on their team (MIPOT).

"Reggie Dunlop is the most important player to his team" changes who is being compared to whom. The 32 MIPOT are evaluated against each other as well as against their teammates. We want to identify the team that can least afford to lose it's MIPOT, which identifies the Most Important Player To His Team (MIP2T).

Further Notes on the Panel Discussion

As the panel discussion progressed, Gord Wilson explained his position. Ottawa had only two candidates for most important player this season: the recently injured Jake Sanderson and Tim Stutzle. Montreal had five candidates: Nick Suzuki, Lane Hutson, Noah Dobson, Cole Caufield and Mike Matheson.

Wilson said that Ottawa would feel Sanderson's loss more keenly than Montreal would feel the loss of any of their top players because Ottawa had only two higher-level players while Montreal had five.

Wilson's use of the phrase "to the Senators" was purposeful. Sanderson wasn't the most valuable player in the league, he might not have been better than any of the Canadiens (he was better than all five of them, in fact), but his absence is going to hurt the Ottawa Senators more than the Canadiens would be hurt if they lost, for example, Lane Hutson.

How MIP2T will be determined has been based on Gord Wilson's comments. It will be the player who is the most above the next four best players on his team.

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Explaining The Methodology

Throughout this section I will use the 2024-25 Detroit Red Wings as an example.

The first step is to identify each team’s MIPOT. That’s the team’s best player, which is the player with the highest PR-Score.

By using PR-Score, the MIPOT is the player who had the best season of all his teammates. As a result, players who have a history of excellence but have had an off season may not be recognized as their team’s MIPOT. For example, Connor McDavid was not Edmonton’s MIPOT, as he missed 16 games during the season.

All of the players on every team were ranked within their team, so not only was the MIPOT identified, the next four best players were also identified. The MIPOT of every team is in the table below.

2024-25 Most Important Players On Their Teams							
Team	Player	Pos	PR-Scr	Team	Player	Pos	PR-Scr
COL	Cale Makar	D	11.61	BUF	Rasmus Dahlin	D	8.70
CBJ	Zach Werenski	D	10.75	DAL	Wyatt Johnston	F	8.48
EDM	Leon Draisaitl	F	10.13	VAN	Quinn Hughes	D	8.33
T.B	Nikita Kucherov	F	10.04	L.A	Vladislav Gavrikov	D	8.33
TOR	Mitch Marner	F	9.94	NYR	Vincent Trocheck	F	8.32
OTT	Jake Sanderson	D	9.76	MIN	Matt Boldy	F	8.24
WPG	Kyle Connor	F	9.39	WSH	John Carlson	D	8.17
DET	Moritz Seider	D	9.36	CAR	Sebastian Aho	F	8.11
FLA	Sam Reinhart	F	9.27	PHI	Travis Sanheim	D	8.01
BOS	David Pastrnak	F	9.26	STL	Robert Thomas	F	7.98
VGK	Jack Eichel	F	9.25	ANA	Jackson LaCombe	D	7.80
MTL	Nick Suzuki	F	9.07	CHI	Alex Vlasic	D	7.65
N.J	Nico Hischier	F	8.99	SEA	Brandon Montour	D	7.52
PIT	Sidney Crosby	F	8.98	NYI	Bo Horvat	F	7.44
UTA	Mikhail Sergachev	D	8.85	NSH	Filip Forsberg	F	7.28
CGY	MacKenzie Weegar	D	8.80	S.J	Macklin Celebrini	F	6.67

There is one technical detail that needs mentioning. Traded players are ineligible for MIPOT (with apologies to Mikko Rantanen and his 8.69 PR-Score, who played for three teams in 2024-25). See ASIDE – TRADED PLAYERS for an explanation.

Detroit’s 2024-25 MIPOT was Mortiz Seider (PR-Score 9.36).

To determine which player is MIP2T, the MIPOT must be compared to his four best teammates. Why four? Because Gord Wilson noted Montreal had five candidates for MIPOT, and if that’s good enough for Gordie, it’s good enough for me.

The top five Red Wings are shown in the following table.

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DET 2024: Top Five Players			
Team Rank	Player	Pos	PR Score
1	Moritz Seider	D	9.36
2	Dylan Larkin	F	8.53
3	Lucas Raymond	F	8.12
4	Alex DeBrincat	F	7.46
5	Simon Edvinsson	D	6.77

The measure used to identify the MIP2T, the “statistic” if you will, is called M2T. M2T is calculated by dividing the MIPOT’s PR-Score by the average score of the next four best players on his team.

In this case, Seider’s M2T is $9.36/7.72$, which is 1.21. Seider tied for 16th place for MIP2T.

In the next two sections you will see the top two MIP2T players and the bottom two.

Top Two MIP2T in 2024-25

COL 2024: Top Five Players			
Team Rank	Player	Pos	PR Score
1	Cale Makar	D	11.61
2	Nathan MacKinnon	F	10.47
3	Devon Toews	D	7.91
4	Artturi Lehkonen	F	5.77
5	Samuel Girard	D	5.45

Second-place Makar’s M2T was 1.57.

CBJ 2024: Top Five Players			
Team Rank	Player	Pos	PR Score
1	Zach Werenski	D	10.75
2	Ivan Provorov	D	7.33
3	Kirill Marchenko	F	7.24
4	Adam Fantilli	F	6.34
5	Sean Monahan	F	6.06

Werenski’s M2T was 1.59, making him the MIP2T in 2024-25. On the Blue Jackets Werenski stood out like a stream of bat’s piss: he shone like a shaft of gold when all around was darkness (that’s a Monty Python reference).

Interestingly, Columbus’s fourth and fifth best players were better than Colorado’s. Lehkonen and Girard were the lowest rated #4 and #5 players in the league, and that drove Makar to second place.

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Top Two MIP2T in 2025-26 (as of February 28)

CBJ 2025: Top Five Players			
Team Rank	Player	Pos	PR Score
1	Zach Werenski	D	7.39
2	Charlie Coyle	F	5.74
3	Ivan Provorov	D	5.30
4	Kirill Marchenko	F	4.49
5	Adam Fantilli	F	4.38

Werenski was second in MIP2T with an M2T of 1.48.

S.J 2025: Top Five Players			
Team Rank	Player	Pos	PR Score
1	Macklin Celebrini	F	7.22
2	Alexander Wennberg	F	5.69
3	Mario Ferraro	D	4.59
4	Collin Graf	F	4.49
5	Dmitry Orlov	D	4.27

Celebrini was the league MIP2T at the end of February, with an M2T of 1.52.

Seeming Giants and Consistency

The MIP2T looks like a giant compared to his teammates. He is far and away better than the next four best players.

It is not necessary for the MIP2T to be the league's best player. At the end of February 2026, Celebrini was the ninth best player in the league. The top eight players were: Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon, Evan Bouchard, Leon Draisaitl, Cale Makar, Nikita Kucherov, Jake Sanderson and Zach Werenski.

It is very unlikely that the same player would be MIP2T across consecutive seasons, as that basically requires a high degree of consistency between five players. The MIPOT has to continue to put up great numbers, and the next four best players on the team have to continue to put up non-great numbers. If one of the next four best players improves, the M2T of the MIPOT would decrease.

Of course, the MIPOT doesn't want to be MIP2T. He wants his teammates to be stronger so that his team has a better chance of winning.

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Final Thoughts on the Panel Discussion

Jake Sanderson was fifth in MIP2T at the end of February this season, with an M2T of 1.37. His M2T will be lower at the end of the season because his PR-Score will not change while he is unable to play, but the PR-Scores of his teammates will increase. Indeed, if he misses enough games, Ottawa's MIPOT could become Tim Stutzle.

Montreal's MIP2T candidate, Nick Suzuki, has an M2T of 1.09: good for 30th place.

Gord Wilson was absolutely correct: Sanderson is much more important to Ottawa than Hutson is to Montreal.

Aside – Traded Players

Only untraded players are used in this process. My data source (NaturalStatTrick.com) does not provide a player's current team. It provides all the teams he player for in a season, in alphabetical order. This level of information is perfectly acceptable for most of my studies, so I'm not complaining about it.

By ignoring traded players, I don't have to figure out which team they last played for, which would be a manual operation. There were 102 traded players, meaning I'd have to determine and record the final team for 102 players. That amount of work is non-trivial and it is of little practical value, as I believe it wouldn't change the MIP2T standings much.

Only 19 traded players had PR-Scores lower than the lowest top-five player (Samuel Girard, COL, 5.45 PR-Score).

As excluding traded players from MIPOT consideration reduces my fiddly-work considerably, and as most of the time including them would make little to no differences in M2T, I thought it was reasonable to exclude them from MIPOT consideration.

Summary

It is unlikely that a player really wants to be the MIP2T. He wants to be the MIPOT, and he wants it to be a close race for MIPOT. He wants to play on a team that has a lot of top-end talent, because teams with lots of top-end talent win more frequently.

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