

Goalie Steals a Point

Have you ever been sleeping soundly at night only to be woken by a silly question that popped into your head? That just happened to me.

The question was: how often does a goalie steal at least one point for his team? I lay awake for a while thinking about the data that could let me answer the question, figured out how to present the results, and then settled back in for a little more sleep.

Definitions

To steal at least a point, a goalie must have given up at least 2 fewer goals than the expected goals against, his team must have won the game or have gotten it to the shootout, and his team must have scored fewer goals than their expected goals against.

Let's look at some selected games from the 2023-24 season of the Vancouver Canucks.

Selected Vancouver Canuck Games, 2023-24								
Game	GF	GA	xGF	xGA	AWSO	GoodG	WinSO	Steal
2023-10-11 - Oilers 1, Canucks 8	8	1	3.83	2.97	AW			
2023-10-17 - Canucks 0, Flyers 2	0	2	2.14	4.78		GG		
2023-11-02 - Canucks 10, Sharks 1	10	1	3.61	3.45	AW	GG	WS	
2023-12-07 - Wild 0, Canucks 2	2	0	2.13	3.38	AW	GG	WS	GS
2023-12-16 - Canucks 1, Wild 2	1	1	3.03	3.01	SO	GG	WS	GS

In the first game, the Canucks' goalie didn't have a "good game": he gave up 1.97 fewer goals than expected (2.97-1). His team won, as shown by the AW in the AWSO column. AWSO means Any Win (regulation or overtime) or Shootout.

In the second game the Canucks' goalie had a good game, giving up 2.78 fewer goals than expected. This led to "GG" in the "GoodG" column, but the Canucks lost so it wasn't a steal.

In the third game the Canucks' goalie had a good game, and his team won, but it wasn't a steal because the Canucks didn't need the goalie to have a good game to get the win. When you score double-digit goals, the play of your goalie in the game does not matter.

Game four is a steal! The Canucks' goalie had a good game, his team won, and his team wouldn't have won if the goalie had had a normal game. What could have been a 3-2 loss (based on expected goals against) became a 2-0 win.

Game five is also a steal! The Canucks' goalie had a good game, his team got to the shootout, and his team wouldn't have gotten to the shootout if the goalie had had a normal game. Interestingly, this game also counted as a steal for the Minnesota Wild. Both goalies were hot in that game.

Restrictions

I would have loved to name names, but the data (Games report from NaturalStatTrick.com) does not identify the goalies. One must accept the data one has.

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Goalie Steals, 2023-24

2023-24 Goalie Steals				
Team	AWSO	GG	WS	GS
St Louis Blues	45	17	17	10
Vancouver Canucks	52	18	16	9
San Jose Sharks	24	14	12	9
New York Rangers	58	12	12	9
Winnipeg Jets	53	17	16	8
Toronto Maple Leafs	48	12	12	7
Montreal Canadiens	38	10	9	7
Columbus Blue Jackets	29	9	8	7
New York Islanders	44	7	7	7
Washington Capitals	45	14	13	6
Arizona Coyotes	36	13	10	6
Florida Panthers	54	12	12	6
Seattle Kraken	38	12	11	6
Nashville Predators	47	10	10	6
Chicago Blackhawks	24	8	7	6
Calgary Flames	42	7	6	6
Boston Bruins	50	12	10	5
Buffalo Sabres	40	12	8	4
Carolina Hurricanes	57	11	10	4
Los Angeles Kings	49	11	11	4
Anaheim Ducks	29	11	7	4
Vegas Golden Knights	47	9	9	4
Colorado Avalanche	52	8	8	4
Minnesota Wild	42	8	8	4
Ottawa Senators	37	8	7	4
Philadelphia Flyers	41	6	6	4
Pittsburgh Penguins	41	11	9	3
New Jersey Devils	40	10	6	3
Tampa Bay Lightning	46	6	6	3
Dallas Stars	54	7	7	2
Detroit Red Wings	42	5	5	2
Edmonton Oilers	50	8	8	0

The columns in this table show: the number of times a team won in regulation or in overtime or got to a shootout (AWSO); the number of times their goalie had a good game (GG); the number of times their goalie had a good game and they won or got to the shootout (WS), and; the number of games the goalie stole at least one point for them (GS). Teams are sorted by GS and then GG.

All teams are shown so the reader can see how their favourite team did compared to the rest of the league.

Florida and Winnipeg had the best defense in the league in 2023-24, each giving up 198 goals, yet they aren't at the top of the table. That's because they do a good job of scoring. They had games where the goalie had a good game, but the team would have won had the goalie been average.

San Jose had the worst defense in the league, giving up 326 goals, but are tied for second in the table with 9 goalie steals: this is an unexpected result. The Sharks took advantage of their goalies' good games. If it wasn't for those stolen points, the Sharks would have finished even lower in the standings.

Edmonton goalies did not steal a single point for their team. In the eight games in which their goalie played well, the total score was 37-4.

I do not see the performance of Edmonton's goalies as "lacking". The Oilers' goalies happened to have all their good games at the same time as their offense was having a good game. Had the offense had average outputs in those games, the Oilers still would have won them all, but the goalies would have been given credit for several saves (four, by my estimation).

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Goalie Steals, 2024-25

2024-25 Goalie Steals				
Team	AWSO	GG	WS	GS
Vegas Golden Knights	36	8	8	7
Winnipeg Jets	40	11	11	6
Montreal Canadiens	28	10	10	6
Los Angeles Kings	32	7	6	6
New York Rangers	27	14	12	5
Washington Capitals	40	9	8	5
Seattle Kraken	28	9	8	5
Dallas Stars	37	8	7	5
Anaheim Ducks	27	8	7	5
San Jose Sharks	19	7	5	5
Detroit Red Wings	28	7	7	5
Boston Bruins	28	6	6	5
Carolina Hurricanes	35	9	9	4
Colorado Avalanche	34	8	7	4
Ottawa Senators	30	8	7	4
Vancouver Canucks	27	7	6	4
Chicago Blackhawks	19	6	6	4
Toronto Maple Leafs	34	9	8	3
Columbus Blue Jackets	28	6	6	3
Florida Panthers	34	6	6	3
Calgary Flames	27	5	5	3
Edmonton Oilers	35	5	5	3
Minnesota Wild	36	5	5	2
Buffalo Sabres	24	5	5	2
St Louis Blues	26	4	3	2
Pittsburgh Penguins	28	2	2	2
Philadelphia Flyers	28	2	2	2
Tampa Bay Lightning	32	11	10	1
New Jersey Devils	32	9	9	1
Utah Hockey Club	26	6	3	1
Nashville Predators	20	6	5	1
New York Islanders	26	3	3	1

The data for this season is partial, including all games up to and including games played on February 22, 2025.

It is reasonable to think that the league leader, when the season has been put to bed, will be one of the top four teams in this table.

The Knights and Kings have greatly benefited from their good goalie games, stealing points in 13 of 15. As a point of contrast, the Jets and the Habitants have had 21 good games from goalies, but only 12 of those games were steals.

Ottawa, with a new goalie in town, has moved up the table and has as many good goalie games (8) and stolen point games (4) as they did last season.

Boston, having lost one of their stud goaltenders to Ottawa, has as many stolen point games as they did last year (5). Boston is unlikely to have as many good goalie games as they did last season (12 last season, 6 so far this season).

T.B. and N.J have 20 good goalie games between them, yet have only 2 stolen games. Their total score in those 20 games was 82-13. Those games were an embarrassment of riches for them, getting both good goaltending and good offense.

Summary

Some articles have taken months to publish. Most articles take a couple of weeks. This article is the fastest one I have ever written.

I had the idea at 2 AM on the morning of February 23, 2025. I got up at 6 AM, had the data analysis done by 7:30 AM, finished my first pass at the article text by 8:30 AM, and had it ready for review by 9:00 AM.

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