

The Biggest Choke In NHL History

By Jesse Almeida 7/1//2023

When the Boston Bruins were fresh out of a first round exit against the Hurricanes, people were wondering if that was the last chance for the Bruins to make a run at a cup. The Bruins in that off season made minor tweaks to their roster by adding in A.J. Greer, and traded for Pavel Zacha. The biggest move for the Bruins was firing Bruce Cassidy. Fans thought that was a bad move because Bruce made the playoffs every year. Along with those moves came injuries of Charlie McAvoy, Brad Marchand, and Matt Grzelecyk. The fans were hoping to be in a good enough situation by December where those players would come back from their injuries, and the Bruins could still make a playoff push. This was the Bruins fans best case scenario.

December came along and Boston was far superior than expected. By the end of December, the Bruins were the best team in the NHL at a record of 28-4-4 at 60 points. Boston only lost 3 games at home at this point. All of those home losses were in overtime. Linus Ullmark and Jeremy Swayman were looking like two of the best goalies in the league, Jake Debrusk found a spark on the first line and rescinded his trade request, Pastrnak fit the second line with Krecji well, and Pavel Zacha was a great fit on the second line. No one expected the Boston Bruins to be at the level where they were at. Boston was the clear best team, followed by a huge gap, and then the next best team. Fast forward to the trade deadline and Boston was still on a record pace season, and still the best team in the NHL. Don Sweeney knew that he had to put all of his chips in the middle of the table, and give this team the best opportunity to win a Stanley Cup. Sweeney went out and traded multiple picks and Craig Smith to get Dmitry Orlov, Garnett Hathaway, and Tyler Bertuzzi.

The regular season ends, and the Boston Bruins made history. The Bruins set the record for most wins in a single season, and the most points in the single season. After finishing 65-12-5, this solidified the Presidents Cup to the B's and home ice advantage throughout the playoffs. Their first round matchup was against the Florida Panthers. The fans were hyped up more than normal for the playoffs. Many Bruins fans felt like this was the Bruins year to win it all. The vibes around the city for the Bruins felt like the vibes from the 2018 Red Sox. People figured no one could stop them and there was no team that could outmatch them. The Bruins without Patrice Bergeron due to injury would win games 1, 3, and 4 to go up 3-1 in the series.

Bergeron would come back in game 5 but Ullmark was dealing with injuries and was questionable. Linus would ultimately play but would lose in overtime on a turnover by Ullmark

that lead to an empty net goal. Brad Marchand had a breakaway in the final seconds of the 3rd to advance the Bruins and he takes a wrist shot from about 15 feet and Bobrovsky made the save. This was the play that started the downfall. Ullmark was in the same situation in game 6 as game 5 but still played, but this time Boston gets destroyed and Florida forces a game 7. Montgomery made the switch and put Swayman in net for the biggest game of their season. Boston had a 3-2 lead in the final minutes of the game and Sway gives up a goal to Brandon Montour with less than a minute left to tie it at 3. With around 11 minutes left in OT, Carter Verhaeghe rips a wrist shot in traffic and scores to advance Florida to the second round, and eliminate Boston. The Bruins were up 3-1 in the series and had multiple chances to advance, and they ultimately blew it and threw a great season away.

This was the worst case scenario for Boston as they pulled off the biggest choke in NHL History. Boston failed their goal to get back to being Stanley Cup champions which now leaves Don Sweeney to make tough decisions in free agency. His cap space was very limited and he now has to find a way to fill in holes for players who are going to leave in free agency. Sweeney traded Taylor Hall, and Nick Foligno to Chicago to free up 6 million in cap. He has around 12 million to spend on players that can fit what the Bruins are trying to do. Sweeney has already signed Patrick Brown (Center), Kevin Shattenkirk (Defenseman), Morgan Geekie (Forward), James Van Riemsdyk (Forward), and reunited Milan Lucic back to Boston. The Bruins already lost Connor Clifton to Buffalo and Dmitry Orlov to Carolina. The Bruins still have to wait on Bergeron and Krejci on their decisions, but Boston still has some work to do to fill out their roster with players that can help get them back to the Stanley Cup Final and help them hoist up the Stanley Cup.