

= 2011 ? 12 Washington Capitals season =

The 2011 ? 12 Washington Capitals season was the franchise 's 38th season in the National Hockey League (NHL) . Washington finished the year as the seventh place team in the Eastern Conference . In the opening round of the playoffs , they matched up with the defending Stanley Cup champion Boston Bruins . Due to injuries , the Capitals were forced to play rookie goaltender Braden Holtby . Washington 's defeat of the Bruins marked the first time in NHL history in which all seven games of a series were decided by one goal . Facing the East 's top seed in the Conference Semifinals , Washington was defeated in seven games by the New York Rangers . Holtby was lauded for his playoff performance , where he recorded a .935 save percentage and was credited with putting Washington in a position to win each game .

Washington won their first seven games , setting a franchise record for consecutive victories to start a season . Shortly after , however , an early season slump prompted the benching of offensive star players Alexander Ovechkin and Alexander Semin in separate games . The moves failed to produce results , and Head Coach Bruce Boudreau was eventually replaced by Dale Hunter . Boudreau 's firing came seven days after he won his 200th game as an NHL head coach , achieving the feat faster anyone in NHL history . Under Hunter , the Capitals battled the Florida Panthers for the Southeast Division title , ultimately losing out on their fifth @-@ straight division title on the final day of the season . Two days after Washington 's playoff elimination , Hunter stepped down as head coach ; Adam Oates was hired as his replacement .

Individually , Alexander Ovechkin and Dennis Wideman were named to the All @-@ Star Game . Due to a suspension for a reckless hit , however , Ovechkin elected not to attend the game to avoid being a distraction . Four Capitals were named one of the NHL 's weekly three stars ? a total of five times throughout the season . Three players made their NHL debut , while Mike Knuble played in his 1,000th game .

= = Off @-@ season = =

During the off @-@ season , the Capitals made several player changes . One of the players that was not retained by the team , Matt Bradley , started a controversy with his comments from a radio interview in Ottawa . In the interview , Bradley said his former team was " a little bit too nonchalant and guys weren ' t disciplined the way they should have been , " which he claimed were the two biggest reasons why the team was not able to advance past the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs . He later stated that Head Coach Bruce Boudreau did not give the most ice time to players who were playing well , but went with his star players . He further noted that Boudreau was a " great coach " who had been put in a tough position . When asked to point out examples , Bradley stated that Alexander Semin " could easily be the best player in the league , " but he " just doesn ' t care , " further noting , " When you 've got a guy like that , you need him to be your best player , or one of your best players , and when he doesn 't show up , you almost get the sense that he wants to be back in Russia . " Semin 's agent came to his client 's defense , stating he " always cares . " Teammate Mike Knuble noted that because Semin speaks limited English , the language barrier affects the way that he is perceived , further noting that the interview comments were something Bradley regretted . When asked about the comments , former Capitals forward David Steckel stated that , " It 's not like he went out and told lies . " Bradley later apologized for his comments in an interview with the Sun Sentinel .

Including Bradley , the Capitals lost six players who played for them in the playoffs , as well as back @-@ up goaltender Semyon Varlamov . [note 1] To replace some of the departed players , Washington traded its 2011 first round draft pick to the Chicago Blackhawks for veteran winger Troy Brouwer , who was a member of the Blackhawks ' Stanley Cup championship team in 2010 . They then signed Joel Ward as a free agent , adding grit and the hopes that he could duplicate his 2011 playoff success . Ward scored seven goals and 13 points in 12 playoff games with the Nashville Predators , after scoring 10 goals and 29 points in 80 regular season games . In net , they added veteran Tomas Vokoun , who was considered to be one of the top goaltenders in the 2011 free

agent class . He signed a one @-@ year , \$ 1 @.@ 5 million contract , well below his believed market value , to have a chance at winning the Stanley Cup . After making these and other off @-@ season moves , the Capitals were over the NHL salary cap . The expectation was that defenseman Tom Poti would not be able to play due to injury and Washington would be forced to place him on long @-@ term injured reserve , where his \$ 2 @.@ 9 million salary would not count against the cap total . Unexpectedly , Poti told the Capitals that he would be ready to play by training camp . Poti , however , failed his medical exam prior to training camp and was placed on long @-@ term injured reserve .

= = Regular season = =

= = = October ? November = = =

In the season opener against the Carolina Hurricanes , Boudreau made a " surprise " decision to start goaltender Michal Neuvirth . Boudreau stated that the reason behind his decision was a reward for Neuvirth 's hard work in training camp . Prior to the Capitals ' second game , Neuvirth sustained a bruised foot and was unable to play . In his Capitals debut , Vokoun struggled , allowing five goals on 28 shots , but nevertheless Washington won the game 6 ? 5 in a shootout . In the post @-@ game interview , Vokoun blamed himself for the high number of goals and thanked his teammates for getting him the win in a game he should have lost . Vokoun rebounded in his second game , making 39 saves in a 3 ? 2 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins . He continued his strong play and was named the NHL 's third star of the week ending October 23 and helped the Capitals to a franchise @-@ record seven game winning streak to start a season .

After losing two straight games , Washington was down 4 ? 3 to the Anaheim Ducks in the final minutes of the game . With the goaltender pulled , Boudreau decided to play the third line of Joel Ward , Brooks Laich and Jason Chimera with Nicklas Backstrom as the extra attacker . Boudreau stated that he was " playing a hunch " by leaving star forward Alexander Ovechkin on the bench . The move paid off , however , as Backstrom scored to force overtime . He also scored the game winner in overtime assisted by Ovechkin . When asked about being left on the bench in a post @-@ game interview , Ovechkin stated that Laich 's line deserved to be on the ice ? though the video showed Ovechkin visibly upset about being left on the bench . The following day , Ovechkin stated that he was upset about not being on the ice in the final minutes , but that he understood Boudreau 's decision . The Hockey News ' Ken Campbell applauded the benching of Ovechkin stating that in the past Boudreau had shown a willingness to continually put his star players out on the ice despite how they were playing and accepted the consequences . Campbell noted the move was Boudreau " addressing his most glaring problem as a coach " .

Following the benching incident , the Capitals went 2 ? 5 ? 0 leading up to their November 21 game against the Phoenix Coyotes . [note 2] For the game , Boudreau again made headlines for not playing one of his star players , this time making Alexander Semin a healthy scratch (a non @-@ dressing player) . Semin led the team in penalties @-@ in @-@ minutes (PIMs) , as well as being tied for second in the NHL with 14 minor penalties . Boudreau previously benched Semin for the second half of a game against the New Jersey Devils after the winger had taken two minor penalties and was deemed not focused . Washington defeated Phoenix in the game 4 ? 3 . NBC 's Mike Halford echoed Campbell 's statement when discussing the benching of Semin , commenting that it was a " bold move " and the latest in a series of messages sent by Boudreau . Halford further questioned if the new stance would eventually cost Boudreau his job .

The benchings did not produce the desired results , however , as the Capitals lost six of eight games , with Ovechkin scoring only one goal during the same stretch . As a result , Washington fired Boudreau on November 28 and replaced him with former Capitals captain Dale Hunter . Hunter was the head coach of the Ontario Hockey League 's (OHL) London Knights when he was hired . During his time with London , he set an OHL record for fastest coach to 300 and 400 career wins . The Capitals lost Hunter 's coaching debut 2 ? 1 to the St. Louis Blues . The following day ,

Boudreau spoke to the media about being fired , stating that General Manager George McPhee made the " right decision at the time " and that despite speculation , he did not feel that Ovechkin was a problem , stating that he " worked as hard and tried as hard as he could . "

= = = December ? January = = =

The Capitals did not give Hunter his first NHL win until his third game , a 3 ? 2 win over the Ottawa Senators that broke a four @-@ game losing streak . Brooks Laich scored the game @-@ winning goal just 12 seconds into the overtime period . The goal would prove to be the fastest overtime goal scored during the 2011 ? 12 NHL regular season . In the rematch four days later , Ovechkin appeared to spear Senators forward Chris Neil . Following a Neil hit on Ovechkin , the pair skated up the ice , whereupon Neil fell to the ice following the alleged spear . Neil was given an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for diving . A spearing penalty , if called , would have resulted in a five @-@ minute major penalty and a game misconduct . Later in the game , Ovechkin scored the eventual game @-@ winning goal , his first goal in six games . When asked about the incident after the game , Neil described it as a " pitchfork in the gut , " while Ovechkin stated he was " not the type of guy who spears players . " The following day , a league spokesman stated that Ovechkin would not be suspended or fined for the incident .

The December 28 game against the New York Rangers marked the return of fourth line forward Jay Beagle , who previously missed 31 games with a concussion suffered in a fight against the Pittsburgh Penguins ' Arron Asham . The fight itself had generated a minor controversy , as Asham , an experienced fighter , made celebratory gestures after knocking out Beagle , who was in his first career NHL fight . Several Capitals expressed their displeasure with Asham after the game , while Asham himself later called his actions " classless . " Beagle 's work ethic in his return was called contagious by teammate Matt Hendricks , and he helped the Capitals to a 4 ? 1 victory .

In late December , Ovechkin went on a seven @-@ game point streak that featured the two @-@ point games in the final four games of the streak . In conjunction with the point streak , he scored eight goals in nine games . [note 3] Washington went 5 ? 1 ? 1 during the streak , which was eventually snapped in a 5 ? 2 loss to the San Jose Sharks on January 7 . In the game prior to the streak being snapped , Capitals ' defenseman Mike Green returned from a groin injury that had kept him out of the lineup for 23 games . Washington defeated the Calgary Flames 3 ? 1 in the contest , which moved their record to 9 ? 0 ? 0 with Green in the line @-@ up . However , the news coming out of the game was not all good . During the game , the Capitals ' leading scorer , Nicklas Backstrom , was elbowed in the head by the Flames ' Rene Bourque . Backstrom underwent concussion testing , which proved inconclusive ; he suffered from what was described as " concussion @-@ like symptoms " and was eventually placed on the injured reserve . For his actions , Bourque was suspended five games for delivering the elbow . Compounding the Capitals ' injury problem was the loss of Mike Green in just his second game back ; he re @-@ injured his groin during the contest and was placed on the long @-@ term injured reserve . During a game against the Pittsburgh Penguins , Ovechkin delivered a hit to Pittsburgh defenseman Zbynek Michalek . On the hit , Ovechkin launched himself into Michalek 's shoulder , where the force of the hit caused Ovechkin to make contact with Michalek 's head . Later in the game , Michalek delivered an elbow to the back of Matt Hendricks ' head , driving it into the glass . The following day , it was announced that Ovechkin was suspended for three games for the reckless hit despite not receiving a penalty on the play during the game . Vice President of Player Safety Brendan Shanahan stated the length of the suspension took into account that Ovechkin was a repeat offender , having been suspended twice before and fined twice as well . It also took into consideration that Michalek was not injured on the play . Despite his own actions , Michalek avoided a fine or suspension . Without Ovechkin , Backstrom or Green , Washington nonetheless defeated defending Stanley Cup champion Boston Bruins in the final game before the All @-@ Star break to move into first place in the Southeast Division .

Washington had two players named to the NHL All @-@ Star Game . Despite having a poor season by his standards , Alexander Ovechkin was named to the Game . However , due to his

suspension , Ovechkin announced that he did not want to be a distraction at the game ; he was " not comfortable " going , and declined to attend the All @-@ Star weekend . Dennis Wideman was the Capitals ' other All @-@ Star representative . He recorded 34 points heading into the break while averaging over 24 minutes of ice time per game .

= = = February ? April = = =

Washington started the second half of the season with a 2 ? 2 ? 1 record . In their next game , against the Winnipeg Jets , the Capitals lost a two @-@ goal lead late in the game , eventually losing in a shootout . The loss knocked the Capitals out of first place in their division and they dropped from third to ninth in the conference . Washington lost their next two games before defeating the Southeast Division @-@ leading Florida Panthers 2 ? 1 . The game marked goaltender Tomas Vokoun 's first game in Florida after leaving the team as a free agent in the off @-@ season . With the win , Washington moved two points behind the Panthers . Despite being close , however , Washington could not build any momentum , later losing their next three games before closing out the month of February on a three @-@ game win streak .

Washington continued its inconsistent play into the month of March , losing three games before going on a four @-@ game winning streak leading up to another game against the Winnipeg Jets . During the loss to the Jets , Vokoun re @-@ aggravated a reoccurring groin injury ; he had been dealing with the injury since late February , and it forced him out of the lineup . Braden Holtby was recalled to serve as the team 's back @-@ up . During Vokoun 's absence , Ovechkin began a goal @-@ scoring streak , notching nine goals in seven games , culminating in a two @-@ goal performance during a 3 ? 0 victory over the Minnesota Wild . The scoring streak helped Ovechkin to be named NHL 's third star of the week . The win moved the Capitals into the eighth and final playoff spot . They did not remain there long , however , as their next game was a lost 5 ? 1 to the Buffalo Sabres , who passed Washington for eighth place . The following game , against the Boston Bruins , Vokoun returned to action , but played only 18 : 25 before the same injury forced him from the game . Although the Capitals won the game , it was Vokoun 's final game of the season as well as his last as a Capital , with Vokoun later describing the injury as a " pretty severe [groin] tear . " Washington 's final game of March marked the return of Nicklas Backstrom , who had missed 40 games with a concussion . The Capitals won the game 3 ? 2 in a shootout , moving them back into eighth place .

Entering April , the Capitals had a chance to clinch a playoff spot against the Tampa Bay Lightning . The game was tied 2 ? 2 with 1 : 03 remaining when Steven Stamkos scored , leading Tampa to the eventual 4 ? 2 victory . Facing the Division @-@ leading Panthers in their next game , Washington succeeded in clinching a playoff spot with a 4 ? 2 win of their own . The victory also gave the Capitals a chance at winning their Division in their final game . During the game , Neuvirth was hurt when former Capital Marco Sturm fell on top of him while he was making a save . Neuvirth left after the incident and did not return . Neuvirth suffered a lower body injury and was not ready to return for the final game or the start of the playoffs . Washington won its final game of the year behind a 35 @-@ save performance from Holtby , clinching at least the seventh seed in the Eastern Conference pending the outcome of Florida 's game . A win by the Panthers in their final game , however , prevented Washington from winning their fifth @-@ straight Division title and moving into the third playoff seed .

= = Playoffs = =

Finishing the regular season as the seventh seed , Washington was matched up with the defending champion Boston Bruins . As Tomas Vokoun and Michal Neuvirth were still injured , the Capitals were forced to start Braden Holtby in Game 1 . Through the first two periods , Boston was in control of the game , out @-@ shooting Washington 26 ? 7 . Despite the disparity in shots , the game remained tied 0 ? 0 after regulation . Washington lost the game shortly into overtime . They rebounded to tie the series when Nicklas Backstrom scored in double overtime of game two . Through the first two games of the series , Holtby stopped 72 of 74 Bruins ' shots . In Game 3 , the

two teams again looked to be heading to overtime tied 3 : 3 late in the third when Backstrom took a penalty . Zdeno Chara scored on the man advantage with under two minutes remaining , giving Boston the win . After the game ended , Backstrom was given a match penalty for intent to injure following a cross @-@ check to Rich Peverley . Backstrom received a one @-@ game suspension for his actions . Without Backstrom in Game 4 , the Capitals evened the series with a 2 : 1 victory that featured a 44 @-@ save performance from Holtby . The Capitals took their first lead in the series thanks to a Troy Brouwer power @-@ play goal with 1 : 27 left in regulation of game five . Facing elimination , Boston did not trail throughout Game 6 and was in position to win late in the third . However , an Alexander Ovechkin goal led to overtime , where Tyler Seguin scored to force a seventh and deciding game . Game 7 went to overtime , where a dump @-@ in attempt was blocked by Mike Knuble , giving him a breakaway . He took a backhand that was stopped by Boston 's Tim Thomas . Joel Ward followed the play and scored the game @-@ winning goal on the rebound . With Washington 's victory in the series , Holtby became just the third rookie goaltender in NHL history to defeat the reigning Stanley Cup champions . It was also the first playoff series in NHL history which all seven games were decided by one goal .

In the second round , Washington was matched up with the top @-@ seeded New York Rangers . After losing Game 1 by giving up two goals in a 1 : 30 span , Washington took a 2 : 0 lead in Game 2 , only to have the Rangers come back and tie the score in the third period . The Capitals , however , won the game on an Ovechkin power @-@ play goal late in the third . Game 3 was a triple @-@ overtime contest that ended when Marian Gaborik scored to give New York a 2 : 1 win . The 114 : 41 game was the 20th longest game in NHL history , and Washington 's third @-@ longest game in franchise history . Washington evened the series in Game 4 with a one @-@ goal win . In the win , Ovechkin was benched for the majority of the third period , where after the tilt , he noted that the most important thing was that the Capitals won the game . Washington looked to be heading for their first series lead as Game 5 was coming to an end . The Capitals were leading 2 : 1 with 21 @-@ 3 seconds remaining when Joel Ward took a double minor penalty for high @-@ sticking . On the ensuing power play , Brad Richards scored with 6 @-@ 6 seconds left in regulation to tie the game . The Rangers remained on the power play to start the overtime period , with Ward serving the second half of his double minor when Marc Staal scored to give New York the win . Facing elimination in Game 6 , Washington took the lead 1 : 28 into the game on an Ovechkin power play tally . They did not trail in the game and won 2 : 1 to force Game 7 . Ovechkin 's goal was the 30th of his post @-@ season career , which tied him for the Capitals all @-@ time franchise record with Peter Bondra . In the deciding game , Brad Richards scored 1 : 32 into the first period helping New York to the eventual 2 : 1 victory and the series win . Holtby finished the playoffs with a 1 @-@ 95 goals against average , a .935 save percentage and was praised for his " breakout " performance while being credited with giving the Capitals a " chance to win every game . "

= = Post @-@ season = =

Two days after the loss , Head Coach Dale Hunter stepped down for personal reasons . General Manager George McPhee announced that he would take his time considering candidates to replace Hunter . The search lasted a month @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half before the team hired former NHL and Capitals star , Adam Oates . The intention was to have a coach that combined the up @-@ tempo style implored by Bruce Boudreau and the " defense first " system of Hunter . McPhee said of the hiring " you try to get the smartest guy in the room " and he believed Oates was that person . Ovechkin noted that he was excited to play under a coach he believed would bring more offense back to Washington 's system . Oates ' hiring came on the same day that he was elected to the Hockey Hall of Fame as a player .

= = Standings = =

= = = Divisional standings = = =

== Conference standings ==

Divisions : AT ? Atlantic , NE ? Northeast , SE ? Southeast

x ? Qualified for playoffs , y ? Clinched division , z ? Clinched conference (and division)

== Schedule and results ==

== Pre @-@ season ==

== Regular season ==

== Playoffs ==

Key : Win Loss Clinch Playoff Series Eliminated from playoffs

== Player statistics ==

== Skaters ==