



Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips
January 17-20, 2026

Columbus Blue Jackets News

- PAGE 2 The Athletic / Blue Jackets' Elvis Merzlikins, quirky as ever, back in good graces under Bowness
- PAGE 5 The Athletic / Blue Jackets Monday Gathering: New hire Rick Bowness exudes a contagious confidence
- PAGE 10 The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' Elvis Merzlikins takes odd in-game water break
- PAGE 11 The Hockey Writers/ Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Merzlikins, Voronkov & More
- PAGE 14 The Hockey Writers/ Blue Jackets Week Ahead: Schedule & Storylines – Bowness Era Begins, Sellers Watch, Bright Spots and More
- PAGE 15 The Athletic / Blue Jackets shrug off late blown lead, beat Penguins on Charlie Coyle's shootout goal
- PAGE 18 The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets top Pittsburgh Penguins in exciting shootout win
- PAGE 20 The Columbus Dispatch / Evason 'shocked and disappointed' by Columbus Blue Jackets' shakeup
- PAGE 23 The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Sillinger Opens Up on Coaching Change & Current Role
- PAGE 26 The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Reuniting With Artemi Panarin Makes Sense
- PAGE 28 The Athletic / Dean Evason says he was blindsided by firing, believed in Blue Jackets' turnaround

Cleveland Monsters / Prospects News

NHL News

- PAGE 31 ABC7/ What Russian NHL players are saying about the Olympic Games
- PAGE 36 The Athletic / How sensible is it for each NHL team to trade for Rangers' Artemi Panarin?
- PAGE 43 The Athletic / NHL report cards: Grading every team at the halfway mark of the season

Multimedia

The Athletic / Blue Jackets' Elvis Merzlikins, quirky as ever, back in good graces under Bowness

By Aaron Portzline – January 20, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio — An eccentric, unpredictable goaltender with an .875 save percentage is a pain in the coach's you-know-what and an annoyance in the dressing room. An eccentric, unpredictable goaltender with a .937 save percentage, though?

What a guy! What a character!

Nobody has embraced a clean slate under new Columbus Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness quite like goaltender Elvis Merzlikins, whose season has done a complete about-face in the week since Bowness was hired to replace Dean Evason.

Merzlikins has played very well, stopping 59 of 63 shots (.937 save percentage) in the Blue Jackets' wins over the Vancouver Canucks (4-1 on Thursday) and Pittsburgh Penguins (4-3 in a shootout on Saturday), part of their four-game winning streak.

He's also taken some barely disguised swipes at Evason, guaranteed the win over the Penguins, had a friendly back-and-forth during the heat of battle with an NHL legend and made an odd choice in the middle of play that had Blue Jackets personnel scratching their heads.

The Blue Jackets and Penguins, tied 3-3, were about midway through overtime when Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski gathered the puck in his own zone and skated back behind Merzlikins' net to allow for a line change.

Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin skated in Werenski's general direction before pulling up in front of Merzlikins, who decided — reminder: *with the puck in play* — that now would be a good time to drink from his water bottle.

"I saw that 'Z' was getting the puck, and I saw his body language, that he was going behind the net," Merzlikins told *The Athletic*. "I was just thirsty, and I had those two or three seconds to grab a sip of water.

"I was really thirsty. I wouldn't have done it if I wasn't. But, yeah, I trusted Z with the puck behind the net. We were doing a breakout (with the puck), so why not?"

Bowness said he hadn't noticed it from the bench during live action, but general manager Don Waddell told him about it after the game. He believed Waddell, but he went looking for a replay just to see it for himself.

"I told the guys, I've been around the league 50 years and I've never seen that," Bowness said. "We took a look at (the replay), and there he is, drinking water. We're going behind the net with the puck, and there he is, drinking. You can't make this stuff up.

“That is trust. (laughs) We talk a lot about trusting each other and being connected; well, that’s trust. You gotta love it.”

Merzlikins said he got postgame messages from people all over the league and friends all over the globe.

“Oh, I’ve seen the video,” he said. “But I don’t see any big deal. I was confident in Z and in my team. It’s a breakout. There’s nothing big going on.”

There was another peculiar scene in the third period, with the Penguins trailing 3-2. Pittsburgh great Sidney Crosby fired through traffic from the right circle, and Merzlikins appeared to find the puck at the last possible nanosecond, gloving it to preserve the lead.

Many online assumed that Crosby was chiding Merzlikins for being too showy with his save, which, truth be told, he has done many times through the years. But that’s not at all what happened, Merzlikins said.

“Sid was smiling when he looked at me, and he said, ‘You didn’t even see that shot, did you?’” Merzlikins said. “I told him he was totally right. I didn’t see it until the very last moment.”

It was important that Merzlikins played well on Saturday, beyond the fact that the Blue Jackets are desperate for wins to get back into the playoff chase.

Two nights earlier, after his sterling performance against Calgary, he did a live, post-game interview with FanDuel Sports Ohio’s Jody Shelley on the bench in Nationwide Arena for all the fans to hear.

Asked by Shelley to explain the club’s resurgence — at that point, they’d won three in a row, the last two under Bowness — Merzlikins’ said, flatly: “New coach.” Shelley’s follow-up, “That’s it?” was met with the same response: “New coach.”

Then Merzlikins ended his interview by making a bold prediction for Saturday’s game in Pittsburgh, where the Blue Jackets had won only six times in 30 games, saying, “We’re going to win, even there.”

Merzlikins made six saves in overtime, including back-to-back stops on a wide-open Evgeni Malkin, then stopped three of the Penguins’ four attempts in the shootout, including his denial of Crosby.

This has not been a great season for Merzlikins. He opened the season in a timeshare with Jet Greaves, but lost the No. 1 job to Greaves and settled into a backup role that he didn’t embrace.

Evason continually had Merzlikins’ back publicly, calling him a “great teammate” and even a leader in the dressing room. Still, he had clearly decided Greaves was the Blue Jackets’ best goaltender.

That may still be the case, but not right now. Greaves wasn’t particularly sharp in a 5-3 win over Calgary in Bowness’ debut, and Merzlikins has been among the Blue Jackets’ best players in each of the past two wins.

Bowness has not announced a starter for Tuesday’s game vs. Ottawa, but he’s been impressed by Merzlikins, he said.

“He’s been great,” Bowness said. “I love his compete. We looked at the video (from Saturday’s game in Pittsburgh), and I don’t think it’s part of a good game plan when Malkin’s all alone in front of the net in overtime. They had three chances, man. (Merzlikins) saves us a point right there.

“We hate giving up a point in a divisional game, but, man, that guy battles in the net, and I love ’em. He just competes. He’s been outstanding. I love his attitude and the way he competes. You do that, and you’re going to be OK.”

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Monday Gathering: New hire Rick Bowness exudes a contagious confidence

By Aaron Portzline – January 19, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio — A collection of notes, insights, ruminations and did-you-knows gathered throughout the week that was for the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Item No. 1: Bowness points

Life can move fast in the NHL, and it was a particularly hectic past week for the Blue Jackets.

Last weekend, they played a Saturday-Sunday set in Colorado and Utah, and flew home late Sunday from Salt Lake City. On Monday, they fired coach Dean Evason and replaced him with Rick Bowness.

On Tuesday, Bowness had an introductory press conference at noon, then coached his first game for Columbus that night. He stepped into a schedule with three games in five days before finally taking a chance to breathe on Sunday.

Amid the firehose of news and games, Blue Jackets fans may have missed a couple of important tidbits about the hiring — and about Bowness himself.

This week — this move — reminds me so much of the 2006-07 season, when the Blue Jackets fired Gerard Gallant, who seemed out of answers, and replaced him with Ken Hitchcock, who had a wealth of experience to fall back on.

Like Hitchcock, Bowness exudes confidence. Like Hitchcock, Bowness says things such as, “We can fix that,” or “We will fix that.” Fans believe him. More importantly, players seem to believe him, and the confidence is starting to swell.

Bowness delivers his message with a natural smile. We shouldn’t pretend to know what he’s like in the dressing room, but players seemed to cozy up immediately, like he’s a favorite uncle or (ducking) grandpa.

Ten tidbits worth knowing...

- Bowness, who turns 71 on Sunday, is the oldest coach in Blue Jackets history and the oldest current coach in the NHL. With age comes experience, though, right? Bowness has spent 2,729 games behind an NHL bench, either as a coach, an associate coach or an assistant coach, the most in league history. He’s spent 808 games as a head coach, 44th on the all-time list. (Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell, 67, is the third-oldest current GM after Ken Holland, 70, and Jim Nill, 67.)
- There are three players on the Blue Jackets’ roster whose fathers once played under Bowness. He coached Cole Sillinger’s father, Mike, with the Phoenix Coyotes; Miles Wood’s father, Randy, with the New York Islanders; and Mason Marchment’s father, Bryan, with the Winnipeg Jets. Bowness hasn’t yet coached Wood or Marchment — they’re out with injuries — but he’s already said that Cole Sillinger

reminds him of his father. “Hockey sense,” Bowness said. “They both have it, and I told Cole that today. I said, ‘You play like your father.’ That’s pretty good.”

- The ball started rolling on Evason’s firing when the Blue Jackets blew a 4-1 lead and lost 5-4 in overtime to Pittsburgh on Jan. 4. By the middle of the week, Waddell knew he was making a move. Waddell left the club to return to Columbus before Sunday’s game in Utah, ostensibly to be back for the start of the club’s amateur scouting meetings. But that wasn’t the only reason. Waddell said he first contacted Bowness on Monday morning and reached him on his boat near his home in Florida. We’re willing to bet that wasn’t the first contact.
- There was a memorable interaction between Bowness, then the coach of the Winnipeg Jets, and Evason, then with the Minnesota Wild, when the two clubs played the penultimate game of the regular season on April 11, 2023. Bowness was incensed that Evason sent enforcer Ryan Reaves out with less than 30 seconds to go in a game the Jets led 3-1. While it made for good conversation this past week, the two have long since made up and moved past it. Bowness, at his introductory presser, said he would have voted for Evason to win the Jack Adams Award last season. Evason, in a conversation with The Athletic five days after he was fired, called Bowness “a wonderful, wonderful person.”
- Waddell has said there was a “Plan B” in the event that Bowness wasn’t willing to come out of retirement. He wouldn’t divulge who “Plan B” was, but our guess? Waddell himself. There’s precedent. Twice during his time with the expansion Atlanta Thrashers, Waddell fired the coach and stepped behind the bench.
- Bowness has already made changes to the Blue Jackets’ day-to-day operations. First, he’s moved the Blue Jackets’ team meetings to the video room instead of the dressing room, preferring the side-by-side, stadium seats to the spread-out dressing room. He’s also moved assistant coach Jared Boll from the bench to the press box as an eye-in-the sky coach, like the role he served at the start of his career. Boll comes down to the dressing room between periods and stays on the bench during the third period. Also, Blue Jackets video coach Aron Augustitus, who had taken the ice with the club for most practices, now appears back in a more traditional role.
- After Tuesday’s win over Calgary, Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner, who had his first career “Gordie Howe hat trick” in the 5-3 win, approached Bowness in front of the entire club postgame and presented him with a game puck, recognizing his first win in Columbus. Bowness, beaming, said: “I’ll take this over the boat any day!”
- There’s a history between the Blue Jackets and Bowness family. In 2001, the Blue Jackets drafted one of Bowness’ sons, Ryan, in the eighth round (No. 236). He is now assistant general manager of the New York Islanders, working under another former Blue Jacket, Mathieu Darche. Bowness’ other son, Rick Jr., was a public relations staffer for the Blue Jackets during the 2012-13 and 2013-14 seasons.
- Bowness is among the coaches who strongly prefer his defensive pairs to have a left-handed shooter on the left side and a right-handed shooter on the right. He likes the balance it brings, and he believes defensemen see the ice better on their natural side. That could be tricky when Denton Mateychuk returns from injury, because Zach Werenski, Ivan Provorov and Mateychuk are all lefties, meaning

Mateychuk or Provorov could be headed to the third pair. (Mateychuk has spent most of the season on the right side of the top pair with Werenski.) That leaves them with Damon Severson, Erik Gudbranson and the injured Dante Fabbro on the right side. It could make Jake Christiansen, a lefty, the odd man out yet again.

- It was interesting to hear Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan, who played under Bowness in Winnipeg, mention multiple times that Bowness will “coach to win games” and “coach for two points every night.” We’ve seen such adjustments from Bowness already. In his Columbus debut vs. Calgary, Bowness “shortened” his bench to three lines to help the Blue Jackets pull away from a 3-3 tie and win 5-3. “We’re trying to win,” Bowness said.

Item No. 2: Mr. Milestone

Blue Jackets center Charlie Coyle is on quite the burner. He’s scored four goals in his last four games, and on Saturday he had his 12th career game-deciding goal in a 4-3 shootout win over Pittsburgh.

He’s coming up on another big week, too.

Coyle is sitting at 998 games played and 199 goals scored. His 1,000th game is set for Thursday, when the Blue Jackets host the Dallas Stars in Nationwide Arena. At this rate, his 200th goal won’t take long, either.

We asked Coyle which of those impending milestones means the most to him. He pondered for a moment.

“I’ve never really thought about it, but you asking me right now ... I’d say the games,” Coyle said. “If you’re still playing in the game at 1,000 games, that means you’re still making an impact. I wish that goal total were way higher.

“I’d rather play that many games, because I think that’s a testament to your longevity and playing when you’re not all the way healthy or feeling great — you’re still going. I pride myself on not missing games. If you’re in the lineup, you’re there for a reason.”

The Blue Jackets have not had a player dress in 1,000 games entirely for their organization. Boone Jenner, with 775 games played for Columbus, is still a few seasons away.

But Coyle will become the fifth NHL player to play his 1,000th career game during his time as a Blue Jacket, joining Sergei Fedorov (2005), Vaclav “Vinnie” Prospal (2011), Scott Hartnell (2015) and Jake Voracek (2022).

Coyle said he has a bunch of family descending on Columbus this week in advance of Thursday’s game, and some of them might stick around a few days for the ceremony. The Blue Jackets plan to honor Coyle on Jan. 26, when they host the Los Angeles Kings.

“We’re trying to figure out when people should come into town,” Coyle said. “Do they come for the actual game, do they come for the ceremony, do they come in ahead of the ceremony for the weekend? My sisters are coming in on Saturday.

“Honestly, it’s this big to-do, and half of me can’t wait for it to be over, right? But it’s one of those moments where I’ll look back on it and be, like, ‘That was really cool.’”

Item No. 3: Snacks

- Waddell made an interesting comment on the “100% Hockey” podcast with Daren Millard and John Shannon. After Waddell said that some of the club’s leadership had come to him to discuss their frustration ahead of Evason’s firing, Shannon pressed him: “Was that you soliciting that from them or were they being proactive?”

“A little bit of both,” Waddell said, “but in the end it was more proactive. I’ve been around a long time ... and I could read between the lines of what they were telling me.” Waddell made it clear that he also consulted with director of player personnel Chris Clark and director of hockey operations Rick Nash. “I don’t sit on an island when I make these decisions,” Waddell said.

- Monday marks one week since Bowness was hired to take over the Blue Jackets, and it also marks the first true practice he would be able to run with his new charges. Bowness stepped into a busy schedule, allowing the Jackets only short (20-to-30-minute) practices between Thursday’s game vs. Vancouver and Saturday’s game vs. Pittsburgh. Now, after an off day on Sunday, the Blue Jackets can go a bit longer on Monday and get into some of the changes he wants to make and some of the bad habits and mistakes he wants to correct.

- Bowness is the Blue Jackets’ 14th coach — if you count Mike Babcock and interim coaches Gary Agnew and Claude Noel — in not-quite 25 seasons. Only five of the coaches have lasted two seasons or more. But, believe it or not, that’s not the most coaches for a single franchise since the start of the 2000-01 season. The Florida Panthers have had 15 different coaches, while New Jersey and Philadelphia (14 each) are tied with Columbus.

- Kirill Marchenko, with a chance to end Saturday’s game in Pittsburgh, tried to go five-hole on Penguins goaltender Arturs Silovs in the third round of the shootout, only to be denied by Silovs’ pads. It marked the first time all season (six attempts) that Marchenko had failed to score in a shootout. He still leads the NHL with five successful attempts. Kent Johnson, who scored in the opening round, is among the players tied for second with four shootout scores.

- Coyle’s shootout goal was the 12th game-deciding goal of his career, tying him with Dallas’ Tyler Seguin, Florida’s Aleksander Barkov and the New York Rangers’ Artemi Panarin for 12th place among active players. Detroit’s Patrick Kane leads with 23, which ties him for the all-time mark with Frans Nielsen (yep, Frans Nielsen), who played for the New York Islanders and Red Wings.

- The Blue Jackets and Penguins can’t do anything quickly. All four meetings this season went beyond regulation, with the Blue Jackets winning two shootouts in Pittsburgh and the Penguins winning two overtime games in Columbus. But it goes beyond that. Five of the last six, six of the last eight, and eight of the last 13 meetings — dating to March 7, 2023 — have required overtime or a shootout to settle. The Blue Jackets are 5-0-3 in those games. Still, Columbus hasn’t won a regulation game in the ‘Burgh since Nov. 13, 2015, which was John Tortorella’s 10th game behind the bench.

- Look for the Blue Jackets to recall a defenseman from AHL Cleveland on Monday after Fabbro left Saturday's game midway through the first period with a lower-body injury. He was on crutches after the game. The Blue Jackets have the minimum six — Christiansen was a healthy scratch on Saturday — but they may want an extra blueliner on hand for next couple of games. The hope is that Mateychuk, out since a Jan. 11 win in Utah, could be ready to return near the end of this week, Waddell said.
- The Blue Jackets have three forwards out of the lineup with injury: center Isac Lundeström (lower body) and wingers Marchment (upper body) and Wood (upper body). Waddell said Lundeström is probably the closest to a return, but Marchment and Wood are still week to week.
- Defenseman Luca Marrelli, a third-round pick (No. 86) in 2024, made his pro debut for AHL Cleveland and recorded his first point, an assist, on Sunday in a 6-2 loss to Providence. Marrelli had a breakout season in 2024-25 for Oshawa of the Ontario Hockey League, but needed offseason shoulder surgery that delayed the start of his pro career. He played Sunday's game on the Monsters' third pair with Stanislav Svozil.
- The Blue Jackets have been bringing back former players to help celebrate the 25th year of the franchise, and the fourth installment will take place on Saturday. Goaltender Pascal Leclaire, and forwards Cam Atkinson, Derek Dorsett and R.J. Umberger will be honored before that night's game vs. the Tampa Bay Lightning.
- Former Ohio State forward Tate Singleton signed a minor-league contract with AHL Cleveland for the rest of the season after impressing during a pair of professional tryout contracts with the club. In 24 games with the Monsters, he has 5-3-8 with 19 penalty minutes.
- The Blue Jackets begin the longest homestand of the season on Tuesday, when they host Ottawa. After that, it's an every-other-day schedule vs. Dallas (Thursday), Tampa Bay (Saturday), Los Angeles (Jan. 26) and Philadelphia (Jan. 28). After this stretch at home, the Jackets have only four games — a pair of back-to-backs — before the Olympic break.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' Elvis Merzlikins takes odd in-game water break

By Brian Hedger – January 19, 2026

Just when Rick Bowness felt he had seen everything in the NHL, the veteran coach inherited goalie Elvis Merzlikins with the Blue Jackets.

Merzlikins has a unique personality, even when compared to his oft-enigmatic goaltending peers, and an unorthodox decision during an intense 3-on-3 overtime Jan. 17 in Pittsburgh was a first for both Bowness and Blue Jackets president/general manager Don Waddell.

Seconds after calmly making his fifth of six saves in overtime, Merzlikins stood up, saw Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski circling with the puck and reached for his water bottle. As Werenski looped behind his net to start a breakout, Merzlikins squeezed the bottle for refreshment.

“Don pointed that out to me,” Bowness said after practice Jan. 19 at Nationwide Arena. “I said that to the guys today ... I said, ‘I’ve been around the league 50 years. I have never seen that. So, we took a look at it, and there he is drinking water as Z’s going behind the net with the puck.”

The sight made some broadcasters chuckle, but Merzlikins didn’t think it was a big deal. He was calm and confident, not to mention parched, after stopping Penguins forward Brett Kulak on a rush up the right wing with 2:50 left in overtime.

“I saw Z with the puck, going to the back of the net,” he said. “I knew there was going to be a breakout. Yes, I was really thirsty, but I just felt confident. There’s nothing that can happen. They are breaking out. (Kirill Marchenko), I saw he was (gaining) speed, so I had those two or three seconds time of drinking quick two sips and that’s it. No big deal.

“Trust your teammates. I completely trusted my teammates, and all good.”

Trust was a two-way street.

Merzlikins made 29 saves before stopping three of four Pittsburgh shootout attempts to help the Jackets push their winning streak to four games with a 4-3 shootout victory, and overtime work included two saves against Penguins star Evgeni Malkin from close range.

He earned a couple squirts of water.

“Honestly, you can’t make that stuff up, right?” Bowness said. “That’s trust. We’ve talked a lot about trusting each other and being connected? That’s trust. Gotta love it.”

[The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Merzlikins, Voronkov & More](#)

By Mark Scheig – January 19, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets enter the new week riding a four-game winning streak. The team is 3-0 under new head coach Rick Bowness.

The Blue Jackets are playing the game with confidence. They are clearly getting the bump that many talk about when there is a coaching change.

What's been an interesting development since Bowness took over for Dean Evason has been the play in net. Jet Greaves won his last start, a 5-3 win over the Calgary Flames last Tuesday.

It's been Elvis Merzlikins in net since. He's won his last two starts, a 4-1 win over the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday and a 4-3 shootout win over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday. Based on practice Monday, he's in line to get a third consecutive start Tuesday night when the Blue Jackets host the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday night.

If there's been anyone that has loved what they've seen from Merzlikins in the early going, it's been Bowness. He reiterated that on Monday.

Bowness Talks Merzlikins

"Obviously, he's been great. I love his compete in there," Bowness said.

The score was 3-3 in overtime Saturday night. The Penguins had a decided edge in shots on goal 6-2 in the extra session.

One of the Penguins' best and most dangerous players had multiple chances to score. Merzlikins made sure nothing got by him.

"We looked at that video today," Bowness said. "I don't think it's part of a good game plan when Malkin's all alone in front of the net in overtime. He had three chances. The wrong guy now. Put somebody else there, you're not as worried. Put Malkin there, say "Well, that shouldn't happen."

"He saved us a point right there," Bowness said of Merzlikins. "And we hate giving up a point to a divisional game. But man, that guys battles in the net. I love him. I mean, he just competes. He's been outstanding. But yeah, he's making the saves and everything. I love his attitude and I love the way he competes. You do that, we're going to be okay."

Bowness also had the chance to see the video of Merzlikins take a drink of water in overtime while the play was going on. Zach Werenski had the puck behind the net and had time. Merzlikins admitted Monday he was thirsty after making those saves on Malkin right before.

GM Don Waddell pointed the video out to Bowness. Each of them had a laugh. Both Waddell and Bowness said they've never seen anything like this before between them.

"And I said to the guys today. I said I've been around the league 50 years. I've never seen that," Bowness said. "So we took a look at it. There he is drinking water...You can't make that stuff up, right? He said he trusts his teammates. We talked a lot about trust each other and being connected. That's trust."

One of the key areas Waddell identified as a need in the second half of the season was finding a way to get Merzlikins going. So far under Bowness, it has worked. Bowness is clearly a fan of Merzlikins and his approach. While previous coaches, such as Evason, have praised Merzlikins in the past, these are some of the most positive comments to come from a Blue Jackets' head coach about the goaltender.

Under Bowness, it is both a fresh start and a new lease on hockey life for Merzlikins. He has earned this opportunity to play. As long as he performs well, he'll keep playing too.

Voronkov Demoted

Then there is the other side of the new coach bump. Some players get a new lease on life like Merzlikins has. Others don't get that as quickly. That is certainly the case for Dmitri Voronkov.

After playing 13:22 Thursday against the Canucks, Voronkov was limited to just 8:57 Saturday night in Pittsburgh. He played just two shifts in the third period.

On Monday, Voronkov skated on the fourth line with Brendan Gaunce and Zach Aston-Reese. Danton Heinen moved up to the third line where Voronkov was to play with Charlie Coyle and Mathieu Olivier.

Bowness was asked about Voronkov and what the team wants to see from him. The head coach said he's already talked with the player about the situation.

"The other night, he had some good reads defensively," Bowness said of Voronkov. "We'd like to see a little bit more offense from him. I put Danton (Heinen) up there because Danton has not only scored, but he was also creating a little bit more. Actually, I talked to (Voronkov) this morning. Very clear with what we need from him. He's going to be on the power play, but I'd like a little more offense from him. But he's a big guy. He's a big powerful guy that works, right? So tweak the game a little bit here and there and hopefully he can get on track offensively. Do we want him going to the net and winning puck battles? Absolutely."

Voronkov will play on the second power play unit despite his demotion to the fourth line. What will be interesting to watch is the minutes in upcoming games and if he's able to create in those limited minutes.

Side Dishes

- Let's talk the latest on the defense. Dante Fabbro had to leave Saturday night's game in Pittsburgh with a lower-body injury. Watching back the play, he got tied up with Sidney Crosby and was seen leaving the ice flexing his leg. Bowness said "I don't think it's as bad as we

originally feared, but he's hobbling around the locker room." The head coach said Fabbro will be out "a week or so."

- As for Denton Mateychuk, he did not practice on Monday. He was observed in the locker room after practice which means he was able to do some work on his own. He is considered day-to-day at this point. He will not play Tuesday against Ottawa. His timeline will be based on when he re-joins his teammates for practice. Expectation here is that it shouldn't be long.
- The defensive pairs looked like this on Monday. Werenski/Severson. Provorov/Gudbranson. Zamula/Christiansen.
- Up front, Mikael Pyyhtia was assigned to the Cleveland Monsters. Isac Lundestrom practiced with the main group. He didn't take line rushes so it appears he will need a couple practices before a potential return to the lineup. The Blue Jackets have 22 on their roster as of this writing with Pyyhtia being sent down. We'll see if they elect to keep 12 forwards until Lundestrom is ready or if they call someone up as insurance with a five-game homestand up next.
- Mason Marchment continues to work on his own. Expectation is he won't play this week at least. Wonder if the team will give him through the Olympic break. That remains to be seen.
- Here's how the forward lines looked on Monday at practice. Sillinger/Fantilli/Marchenko. Jenner/Monahan/Johnson. Heinen/Coyle/Olivier. Voronkov/Gaunce/Aston Reese.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Week Ahead: Schedule & Storylines – Bowness Era Begins, Sellers Watch, Bright Spots and More

By THW Staff – January 19, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets are in a period of significant transition and evaluation. Following a major coaching change earlier this month, the team is trying to find its footing at home while facing critical decisions ahead of the trade deadline. Here are the key storylines and upcoming schedule for the week of Jan 19-26, 2026.

The Rick Bowness Era Begins

The biggest story in Columbus is the recent firing of head coach Dean Evason on Jan. 12. Veteran coach Rick Bowness has taken over behind the bench. Bowness is tasked with stabilizing a team that has struggled with consistency and defensive structure. Early returns have shown a spark, particularly in the performance of the defense under his system.

Goaltending Controversy

A clear battle for the crease has emerged. Young netminder Jet Greaves has arguably outplayed veteran Elvis Merzlikins this season. Greaves has posted superior numbers, leading to speculation that the team may look to move Merzlikins to clear the way for Greaves as the undisputed starter. Despite the speculation, Merzlikins has won two in a row since Coach Bowness has taken over and seems to be reinvigorated with the change at the top.

Trade Deadline “Sellers” Watch

With the team sitting near the bottom of the Metropolitan Division, the Blue Jackets are widely expected to be sellers at the upcoming trade deadline. Captain Boone Jenner is surfacing in rumors as a high-value trade chip for contending teams. Conversely, there is some chatter about “buying” specific pieces to help the retool, but selling veteran assets seems more likely.

Defensive Bright Spots

Despite the team’s struggles, the blue line has provided optimism. Zach Werenski is playing at a Norris Trophy-caliber level with elite advanced stats. Meanwhile, young defenseman Denton Mateychuk has been a revelation, cementing himself as a core piece of the future.

Injury Ward

The team is navigating several injuries. Mason Marchment, Miles Wood, and Isac Lundestrom are currently on Injured Reserve. Mateychuk and Dante Fabbro are listed as day-to-day, and Erik Gudbranson recently returned to the lineup after a long absence.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets shrug off late blown lead, beat Penguins on Charlie Coyle's shootout goal

By Aaron Portzline – January 18, 2026

PITTSBURGH — The movie had a familiar plot. The Columbus Blue Jackets are delighted it had a different ending.

Charlie Coyle's goal in the fourth round of a shootout led the Blue Jackets to a 4-3 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins before 18,296 in PPG Paints Arena, allowing the joy of a fourth straight win to wash away any frustration from another late blown lead.

This is wild: The Blue Jackets and Penguins, Metropolitan rivals, have already finished their four-game season series, and all four games required overtime to settle, including two games that went into shootouts.

"We know each other really well," Blue Jackets winger Kirill Marchenko said.

Shootouts happen to be the Blue Jackets' bailiwick. They're 5-1 in the NHL's skills competition, including both wins over the Penguins this season. Those five shootout wins are tied with those of the Anaheim Ducks and the Philadelphia Flyers for most in the NHL.

Zach Aston-Reese, Marchenko and Danton Heinen each scored for the Blue Jackets, and Elvis Merzlikins — starting consecutive games for the first time since early December — made 29 saves, including six in overtime.

That's three straight wins under coach Rick Bowness, who was hired to replace Dean Evason on Monday, in part, because the Blue Jackets have had a nightmarish time trying to protect leads this season.

Saturday marked the fourth time this season — yes, every game — the Blue Jackets have had a third-period lead over the Penguins. It also marked the fourth time this season they failed to hold the lead.

A wide-open Sidney Crosby (who else?) scored on a redirected puck with 1:01 remaining, tying the score at 3. Bowness keeps a running commentary on the bench, giving players corrections and points as they come on and off the ice.

"I said, 'Listen, they made a great play. They have elite players over there, man,'" Bowness said. "They know how to win, so give them credit. They made a good play.

"Now, did we cover that well? No. No. We're supposed to have two defensemen down by the net, and we didn't. But those are things that we have to keep harping on and keep working on."

The Blue Jackets and Penguins both end the season series with 6 points. But with the Blue Jackets sitting 4 points behind Pittsburgh for third place in the Metro, it's difficult not to lament where they'd be if they'd closed out these games.

Still, with Saturday's win, the Blue Jackets jumped over the Ottawa Senators and the New Jersey Devils in the Eastern Conference.

"There are things we can work on and go over," Coyle said, "but, like, they're a good team. They're in the position they're in for a reason. It doesn't matter how we get to overtime, you know? It's just, 'We're there, now let's take care of business.' We had a few chances (to win) that we didn't bury, but we finished in the shootout.

"You go into every game wanting two points for you and zero for them, but it's a hard league, and we got the two. They get one at the end of the day. We'll take that and learn from and fine-tune some stuff and just keep getting better."

The Blue Jackets played with five defensemen beginning with the eight-minute mark of the first period when Dante Fabbro, who had played with Zach Werenski on the top pair, went down with a lower-body injury. He was on crutches after the game.

Fabbro's absence put heavy minutes on three of the Blue Jackets' other blueliners: Werenski played 29:18, Damon Severson 28:06 and Ivan Provorov 27:07.

Ex-Penguins had a particularly big night.

Aston-Reese, who played parts of five seasons with the Penguins, scored his first goal of the season at 2:42 of the first period. That was the Blue Jackets' highlight of the first period, as the Penguins came back to score two goals and mostly carry play.

"I like how we responded after a bad first period," Bowness said. "We weren't very good. Give them credit. They came out hard, and they were really all over us. But I really liked how we adjusted, and we played a lot better in the second and third.

"It was just getting the legs going, man, put the passion back in the game. There wasn't nearly enough passion in the game. So, we talked about that."

Marchenko made it 2-2 with a dazzling individual effort at 7:32 of the second period. He was first to a puck between two sluggish Penguins defensemen in the neutral zone, then scored with a bar-down wrister from the slot off the rush.

The Blue Jackets took a 3-2 lead with a goal scored and assisted by every former Penguin.

Heinen, who has played parts of three seasons with Pittsburgh (including earlier this year), redirected an Erik Gudbranson shot to beat goaltender Arturs Silovs. The secondary assist was credited to Egor Zamula, who was signed by Columbus after Pittsburgh terminated his contract earlier this month.

Bowness said he relied heavily on his assistant coaches to help craft the Blue Jackets' shootout lineup.

Kent Johnson, who has had surging confidence and playing time since Bowness took over, scored off a tight backhand shot in the first round. Fantilli and Marchenko were stopped in the second and third rounds before Coyle scored.

It was Coyle's 12th game-deciding shootout goal.

Merzlikins has not played well this season, but he seems to be enjoying a fresh start under Bowness. His win Thursday versus the Vancouver Canucks was his first since Dec. 4, and he's won consecutive starts for the third time this season.

He made six saves in overtime, including two on Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin, who was alone in the slot from only 10 feet away.

In the shootout, he stopped Rickard Rakell and Crosby in the first two rounds before allowing a goal by Yegor Chinakhov, who was his teammate earlier this season before he was traded to the Pens.

Merzlikins' stop in the fourth round on Bryan Rust set the stage for Coyle's game-ender. The Blue Jackets jumped off the bench to celebrate.

"That's a good feeling," Coyle said. "Yeah, that's one of those you'll probably miss one day when you don't play anymore."

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets top Pittsburgh Penguins in exciting shootout win

By Brian Hedger – January 17, 2026

Welcome to the Blue Jackets season the rest of us know, Rick Bowness.

After watching his new team take care of two downtrodden Western Conference teams on home ice at Nationwide Arena, the Jackets' head coach has now experienced what his predecessor, Dean Evason, felt far too often before he was replaced along with assistant Steve McCarthy.

Clinging to a one-goal lead against the Pittsburgh Penguins with time running out in the third period Jan. 17 at PPG Paints Arena, the Jackets allowed a tying goal by Sidney Crosby with 1:01 left in regulation to force a wild 3-on-3 overtime followed by a shootout Charlie Coyle won for Columbus in the fourth round.

Mirroring a 5-4 OT win over the Blue Jackets on Jan. 5 at Nationwide Arena, Crosby tied it 3-3 with 1:01 left by redirecting a shot/pass from Kris Letang on a play they've completed numerous times for the Penguins (22-14-11), often at the behest of the Blue Jackets (22-19-7).

"They made a great play," Bowness told reporters who covered the game in Pittsburgh. "They've got elite players over there, and they know how to win. So, give them credit. They made a good play. Did we cover that well? No. No, we're supposed to have two (defensemen) down by the net and we didn't, but those are the things that we have to keep harping on and keep working on."

The Blue Jackets' 4-3 shootout win was their fourth win in a row and second via shootout this season after losing a late lead to the Penguins at PPG Paints Arena. The Penguins also overcame deficits in third periods of all four games in the season series, stealing points each time.

Overtime was a non-stop thrill ride thanks to Merzlikins, who made six OT saves among his 29 stops to force a shootout. At the other end, Penguins goalie Arturs Silovs made two huge stops to keep the game going.

Kent Johnson opened the shootout with a goal to give the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead, but Silovs then stopped Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko on the next two Columbus attempts. Yegor Chinakhov, whom the Blue Jackets recently traded to Pittsburgh, beat Merzlikins in the top of the third round to tie it 1-1.

Merzlikins stopped Bryan Rust in the top of the fourth, setting up Coyle's winner in the bottom half.

Zach Aston-Reese, Kirill Marchenko and Danton Heinen scored the first three goals for the Jackets. Connor Clifton and Rickard Rakell scored the first two goals for the Penguins, who started Arturs Silovs (22 saves) in a matchup of Latvian goalies who'll represent their country at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milano-Cortina, Italy.

Aston-Reese, whose NHL career began in Pittsburgh, was the first former Penguins player to score for the Blue Jackets. His first goal of the season made it 1-0 just 2:42 into the game, but that was the extent of the Jacket's success in the first period.

The Penguins quickly took control of the puck and dominated the remainder of the period, building a 10-4 edge in shots and 2-1 lead on back-to-back goals by Clifton and Rakell. It could've been a bigger lead, but Merzlikins made several key stops to thwart Pittsburgh scoring chances.

It was a different story in the second, which the Blue Jackets controlled with a 13-8 edge in shots. They also reclaimed the lead, 3-2, with goals by Marchenko and Heinen, who scored the Jackets' second goal by a former Penguin. That's how it stayed to start the third, giving the Blue Jackets a lead to start a third period with a lead over Pittsburgh for the fourth time in four games.

The Blue Jackets, who have four players out with injuries, played most of the game with just five defensemen after losing Dante Fabbro to a lower-body injury with 8:03 left in the first period. Fabbro, who was paired with Zach Werenski on the top pairing, appeared to sustain the injury while taking a hit from Crosby on his last shift.

The Columbus Dispatch / Evason 'shocked and disappointed' by Columbus Blue Jackets' shakeup

By Brian Hedger – January 17, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets fired head coach Dean Evason and assistant coach Steve McCarthy.

President/GM Don Waddell replaced Evason with veteran coach Rick Bowness.

McCarthy reportedly had a "bad feeling" about a coaching change just before it happened.

Evason expressed shock and disappointment over the decision, feeling he wasn't given enough time.

Steve McCarthy knew first.

The former Blue Jackets assistant coach told others of an ominous feeling that president/general manager Don Waddell was planning a coaching change. Days later, it happened.

"When we were in Colorado [on Jan. 10], Steve said to our whole group, 'Guys, I got a bad feeling that we're going to get fired,'" former Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason said. "We were all like, 'Come on, Mac.' Like, you know, 'Obviously, Don's going to be patient,' and what have you."

Waddell wasn't patient, though, and McCarthy's instinct was nearly spot-on.

On Jan. 12, the Blue Jackets' GM fired McCarthy and Evason following a 1-3-0 road trip out West. Waddell replaced Evason with Rick Bowness, 70, and has opted against filling McCarthy's position, noting that perhaps too many cooks had occupied the Blue Jackets' kitchen during games.

Most teams have three coaches, not four, on the bench for games, so it's not a shock that one of Evason's three bench assistants – McCarthy, Scott Ford and Mike Haviland – was included in the shakeup. However, Evason said he was surprised it was McCarthy.

"I get the head coach, you know, whatever, but I don't understand that one," Evason said. "I still don't, and I'm still talking to people and racking my brain."

McCarthy ran defensive pairings but wasn't primarily in charge of coordinating the team's penalty-kill units. That was mainly Ford's responsibility. Evason, like three Blue Jackets coaches before him, inherited McCarthy and added Ford to the mix as his lone external assistant hire.

"They all have head coaching aspirations," Evason said, "but Steve McCarthy is going to be a head coach. He is good, his attention to detail, his teaching, his calmness on the bench. ... He's going to be a head coach, so it's still baffling to me."

Evason, who went 59-52-16 in 127 games for the Blue Jackets, is just as confounded about his own fate.

After a masterful job of coaching the Blue Jackets last season, guiding them within two points of the playoffs amid the shock and devastation of Johnny Gaudreau's passing, Evason was replaced a little more than halfway into season two.

He still has one more season left to be paid, and the team had an option for a fourth year included in the deal Evason signed July 22, 2024. Even by NHL standards for replacing coaches, which are far more volatile than, say, five years ago, firing Evason required a quick trigger.

Waddell said he first began thinking a change was necessary after a late meltdown Jan. 5 against Pittsburgh that led to a 5-4 overtime loss, another gut-punch defeat during a season filled with similar collapses.

Evason had previously been fired as a head coach of the Minnesota Wild and at the junior level in the Western Hockey League. His stint with the Wild included four playoff appearances that all ended in the first round.

His tenure ended with an extended skid early in his fifth season, and then he had a gut feeling the axe might fall.

“You get an idea, right?” Evason said. “ ... But here? No.”

With Columbus, Evason feels like things were left unfinished.

“Obviously, we thought that we had success last year, as far as almost making the playoffs with what we went through as a franchise,” he said. “So, for sure, I thought that we’d have a little more patience and allow us to work through this, especially after coming home from the road trip, when we beat Utah and the guys played great.”

Instead, he got a text message from Waddell around noon on a day off.

“He asked me if I was around,” Evason said. “I said no, I was at home, but I could come in if he wanted, and he said, ‘Yeah, why don’t you come in?’ ”

The first signal it wouldn’t be a typical meeting was the sight of McCarthy sitting in his office. It was mid-afternoon, around 3 p.m.

“I said, ‘What are you doing here?’” Evason said. “Obviously, it’s late. Some guys will come in and work out, the coaches and stuff, but that’s usually earlier in the day. Steve said, ‘Don saw me this morning in the gym and asked me if I could meet him at 3:30 this afternoon.’ And then, he just goes, ‘I’m getting fired.’ ”

Not long after, Waddell arrived.

“At that moment, Don walked through the door, and I just said, ‘Steve’s right here,’” Evason said. “And he goes, ‘Yeah, I’m going to talk to you first.’ So, then we went into my office, and he told me that he was making a coaching change and firing me and Mac.”

Evason asked for a reason and was told the team’s record wasn’t good enough, which is what Waddell told reporters at Bowness’ introduction Jan. 13 at Nationwide Arena.

The two also discussed personnel usage and the Jackets’ tendency to give up third-period leads before Evason said he decided to end his argument.

“I just said, ‘I don’t think it’s right, and I don’t think we had an opportunity to work out of this,’” Evason said. “We talked about a few different things ... I just said, ‘There’s been a lot of distractions that are out of our control that I think should have been handled better,’ and then, you know, I just stopped myself. I said to him, ‘I’m not going to burn a bridge. Obviously, I’m shocked and disappointed and (angry), clearly, but there’s nothing I can do about it,’ and that was it.”

Evason didn’t get into specifics regarding the “distractions” he mentioned, but said they were “well documented.”

He was likely referencing travel issues the Blue Jackets had after a charter airline ceased operations, leaving multiple NHL teams scrambling. The Blue Jackets also experienced problems with their new charter service, including on Dec. 28, when they couldn't fly to Ottawa, Canada, following a 4-2 win over the New York Islanders at Nationwide Arena.

The flight departed the next day, arriving just a few hours before the Jackets played the Ottawa Senators in a 4-1 victory at Canadian Tire Centre.

Dean Evason mulls what went wrong with Columbus Blue Jackets

The suddenness was the shocking part for Evason, who's still waking up in the middle of the night thinking about what he could've done differently. As a staff, they'd tweaked a lot strategically in response to losing so many leads in third periods, including their forecheck and neutral zone setups.

They held meetings with players, trying to boost confidence, and even highlighted a quote from star defenseman Zach Werenski after a 4-0 road loss against the Avalanche. Werenski told reporters they'd played how they wanted to play and just didn't score a goal.

Reviewing video the next day, Evason went over a detailed breakdown of the game, showing his players all the scoring chances they'd created while still playing strong defensively, and the Jackets responded with a 3-2 overtime win to end a four-game winless skid.

"We just said, 'Guys, we're playing right and you're doing the right things. ... Just stay the course, be patient, keep doing what we're doing, and we'll have success,'" Evason said. "And then, obviously, we go out and we play a hell of a game in all areas [in Utah]. So, we're excited, right? We come back, we get in at [3 a.m.], we're excited, jacked up, and then, obviously [the coaching change] happens."

Evason, 61, made it clear that he doesn't want this to be his final coaching stop. He'll likely be contacted for multiple head coaching jobs at lower levels, but staying in the NHL is his goal.

"I'm not going to just run out and grab the first job," he said. "I want to work. There's no question. I'm still a very good coach. I know what I'm doing. I've been around. I've added the experience, all that kind of stuff, but I want to stay in the National Hockey League, clearly. It's the best league in the world, so, I'm ready, right now, to go back to coaching. But it has to be the right situation."

In the meantime, he'll watch to see how the Blue Jackets finish the season.

"Right now, like, there's nothing that's changed," Evason said. "The lines haven't changed. The system hasn't changed. Nothing's changed, and yet they won two hockey games, which is great for the guys. I'm jacked for the coaches, and I'm jacked for the players, but nothing's changed yet. So, it's hard because you don't get that opportunity to finish the job."

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Sillinger Opens Up on Coaching Change & Current Role

By Mark Scheig – January 17, 2026

Cole Sillinger has already played in 332 NHL games coming into Saturday night's big Metropolitan Division game against the Pittsburgh Penguins. He will already be on his fifth NHL head coach.

Sillinger made his debut to start the 2021-22 season when Brad Larsen took over the head coaching duties from John Tortorella. Since then, the coaching cycle has gone Larsen, Mike Babcock, Pascal Vincent, Dean Evason and now Rick Bowness.

As we recently talked about with Adam Fantilli, going through multiple coaching changes can be a lot. While Fantilli has remained positive throughout all the change, it still takes time to learn the coach and their systems.

For a player like Sillinger, who has a role in multiple positions in the lineup as needed, it's another chance for him to make an impression on a new coach. The Hockey Writers caught up with Sillinger on Saturday morning to get his thoughts on the coaching change, how he views his role and much more. Bowness also spoke on how he sees Sillinger in the early going.

Sillinger will have every opportunity to fill an important role.

Sillinger Discusses Recent Change

"I just think from a player's perspective, any time there's a switch made like there was, you treat it as kind of a new opportunity, a new kind of day one of work so to say," Sillinger said. "The change happening goes to show the management believing in our group and believing that there's still a lot of opportunity with the amount of remaining games and where we are in the standings. That's uplifting for sure."

"Now it's up to us players to dig a little bit deeper and look in the mirror a little bit more and bring more out from each other. Bring more from yourself and continue to keep this thing going that we have. Just with a guy like Bones coming in and his attitude, his resume and everything aside, he gains respect of us players right away and his philosophies on how he wants us to play, I think fits really well in the structure of who we have on our team."

As for Sillinger's role, many thought he would be among the center depth the Blue Jackets would have. While he still might eventually do that, he's being asked to play on the wing all over the lineup.

Sillinger played with Charlie Coyle and Mathieu Olivier on their third line, one trusted to play against the opposition's best. Of late though, Sillinger has been given a chance to play on the top line with Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko.

Sillinger believes his game can fit a variety of roles, no matter what he's asked to do.

"I believe I'm the type of player that can complement anyone," Sillinger said. "Whether it's Fants (Fantilli) and Marchy (Kirill Marchenko) tonight or whoever that may be, I see myself as a guy that can play against other team's top lines who can produce and be hard to play against. I think that's every time I get on my skates, I don't want to make it easy on their team."

"I believe I have the skills to play with top players and to complement their games but also have the hardiness and drive on my game to play a little bit more simple and shut down the game. It's nice for me personally. I feel like I have a role on the team and I know my role whether it looks like that or not, I'm not really too concerned about that."

Coach Bowness sees the early potential in what kind of player Sillinger can become. What does he think that is right now?

"I think he can be a very effective player," Bowness said. "He's played in the league long enough now. I've got to get to know his strengths and where I have to push him on. But he's a very reliable player. I think there's another level there where I can help him get to. But he's certainly not doing anything to hurt the team. He's doing a lot of good things."

"It's only two games so I'm still trying to figure some of these guys out exactly. You get into a 10-game stretch, after 10-15 games you get a really good feel of each individual player. But I haven't seen anything negative about Cole at all. I thought he's been very solid."

First Big Test Under Bowness

It might be only Bowness' third game as the Blue Jackets' head coach. But Saturday night against the Penguins is a huge game in the division. Considering what happened the last time these two teams met, there was no shortage of drama.

The Penguins recovered from a 4-1 deficit to win in overtime at Nationwide Arena. That game was cited as part of the reason that Evason was fired.

With the Blue Jackets now playing a different system under Bowness plus their recent bump from the coaching change, it makes for an interesting matchup against a team that has dominated the Blue Jackets especially in Pittsburgh.

What is the key from Sillinger's point of view against the Penguins?

"I think for us, when they have the puck, they want to have time and space to be able to make plays especially with their top guys," Sillinger said. "It's putting pressure on them and making sure they don't have time whether it's in the defensive zone, through the neutral zone, protecting the middle of the ice, early box outs in the D-zone and just making sure it's harder on them to make those little plays that they can make. The more we do that, the more we're going to turn the puck over and have the puck on our stick and be able to make plays on the other end."

"I think that playing them in the past, that's something that we would get up (with the score) and maybe sit back a little bit and play not to lose, so to say. I loved our pressure in the last couple of games. It's not easy to play against. You can see that on the film. I just think we have to keep relying on that tonight."

Game Lineup

The Blue Jackets will start Elvis Merzlikins for a second consecutive game after making 30 saves in a 4-1 win over the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday night.

There will be two changes. Egor Zamula will play while Jake Christiansen comes out. Meanwhile, Zach Aston-Reese will play while Danton Heinen sits. Bowness said these changes have nothing to do with performance. "We have extra bodies and we want to keep them all involved in the game."

For the Penguins, according to Josh Getzoff of Sportsnet Pittsburgh, Arturs Silovs will start against the Blue Jackets. It will be an all-Latvian affair in net.

The Penguins will be without defenseman Erik Karlsson as he continues to recover from a lower-body injury. He's on injured reserve and was expected to miss around two weeks.

Saturday's game marks the fourth and final meeting of the regular season between the Blue Jackets and Penguins. The first three games all went to overtime with the Blue Jackets winning in a shootout in Pittsburgh and the Penguins winning twice in overtime at Nationwide Arena.

If things go well on the scoreboard, the Blue Jackets could end Saturday trailing a playoff spot by just three points. They have to take care of their own business first if they hope to do that.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Reuniting With Artemi Panarin Makes Sense

By Wesley Minke – January 17, 2026

The Blue Jackets have gone through this song and dance before with the potential ability to go for it at the trade deadline, and so often we have seen Columbus pull back the reins and sit back for another season.

However, this season, general manager Don Waddell and newly acquired head coach Rick Bowness seem primed to try and make this a one-year-wonder type of season for the Blue Jackets.

Bowness has talked about how good this team really is and how much he wants to give them a chance to really compete this season.

You have to wonder if just a few more additions could bring that chance some real life.

Arturs Silovs - Save from Pittsburgh Penguins vs. Columbus Blue Jackets

Why Panarin Should Come Back

I think Columbus has a very real argument to try to be a part of the discussions with New York Rangers general manager Chris Drury for star forward Artemi Panarin. The Blue Jackets will have the salary cap space to try and make it happen, with roughly \$19 million in cap space on the current roster, according to PuckPedia.

Panarin also makes sense because he fills a huge immediate need for the Blue Jackets: more top-six scoring. Their top scorer right now is defenseman Zach Werenski, who, in his own right, deserves definite hype for the Norris Trophy, but the forwards for Columbus just haven't produced enough.

Panarin would come to Columbus and immediately solidify a top-line spot, and comes in tied with Werenski in the points race with 51 points. The Blue Jackets have not had a point-per-game forward since Panarin left Columbus in 2019. Panarin has done it every season since 2017.

The Blue Jackets badly need a shot of life and a top-end player on offense to elevate this team, and Panarin fits the bill. Just two seasons ago, he had 120 points with 49 goals and 71 assists, and at 34 years old, Panarin is in the back end of his prime years.

This would be a big splash for Waddell and Bowness, and one that could show the fans in Columbus that they are for real.

Why Panarin Will Likely Land Elsewhere

It is going to be tough to convince Panarin to leave New York, the current last-place team in the Eastern Conference, for the team just one spot ahead of them in the standings. He will have his pick of the litter for whatever trade he would like, considering his full no-movement clause.

Panarin is one of the premier talents in the league, and leaving a market like New York is going to require him to head somewhere with status that is close to it.

Also, don't forget, the reason that Panarin left Columbus the first time was that he wanted an extension that Columbus couldn't afford, to be in the spotlight of a big market, and to chase a Stanley Cup. Now with the Rangers essentially out of the Cup race, and Drury conceding the season, Panarin will likely want to chase it elsewhere.

It may seem to some as a long shot in the odds, but the Blue Jackets could land their former star. Don't rule out a possible reunion until he is headed elsewhere.

Waddell has wanted to make a splash, and here is his chance. Give the man they call "Bones" a chance to chase a Cup with some big-time pieces and a team hungry to prove who they are.

The Athletic / Dean Evason says he was blindsided by firing, believed in Blue Jackets' turnaround

By Aaron Portzline – January 16, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Dean Evason never saw it coming.

On Monday, an off day for the Columbus Blue Jackets after flying back from Salt Lake City the night before, Evason was summoned to Nationwide Arena via text message by general manager Don Waddell.

“I walked in, and (assistant coach) Steve McCarthy was there,” Evason told *The Athletic*. “I said, ‘What are you doing here?’ Don had texted him, too. I met with Don in my office, and he told me the news. Told me I was fired.

“I was blindsided. Yeah, of course. Usually, when you go through this as a coach, you can feel it coming. But I’ll be honest with you: I didn’t. (Waddell) talked to me, then he talked to Steve, and it was time to pack our s— and get out of Dodge.”

Evason, who had been on the job for barely 1 1/2 seasons, was replaced by veteran coach Rick Bowness, who has guided the Blue Jackets to wins in his first two games heading into Saturday’s matchup in Pittsburgh.

It was the first head coach firing in the NHL this season.

“At the end of the day, do you take it personally?” Evason said. “You have to, a little bit. But you have to be accountable, too. I get that we lost leads in the third period, and that was frustrating for everybody.

“But without sounding like a whiny or petty little whatever, I don’t think (the firing) should have happened. I think it was too soon, and I think there was more to it than losing leads in the third period. What that is, I don’t know.”

The Blue Jackets lost 26 games this season under Evason’s watch, 19 in regulation and seven in overtime or a shootout. In nine of those losses, they held a lead in the third period.

In a tightly-packed Eastern Conference — the Blue Jackets are 15th in the conference, but only 7 points behind a wild-card spot before Friday’s games — it’s easy to see how devastating those lost points have been.

“We were as upset by the (third-period collapses) as anybody,” Evason said. “We were trying to figure it out. We changed our forecheck. We changed our neutral zone. In the defensive zone, we talked constantly about the end of games and being on the right side of the puck, take care of that good ice and protecting the house.

“We worked on it and worked on it. For whatever reason, a different situation would happen. It was really eerie, to be honest with you. Were we tired in the third period? Maybe. When you get physically tired, you’re mentally tired. Maybe with the lack of practice time (due to the compacted schedule), we needed to be in the gym more.”

Evason signed a three-year contract with the Blue Jackets in the summer of 2024. The deal included a club option for a fourth year. Without getting into details, Evason said the two sides are working out the specifics of his departure.

It's the second time Evason has been fired in the NHL. The Minnesota Wild fired him on Nov. 27, 2023, after a slow start to the season. He was also fired once as a coach in the Western Hockey League.

"You start thinking about all these things now, and I keep writing stuff down in my phone," Evason said. "I've got a whole page of notes, just everything I would do differently and everything I would change.

"You go to bed with a clear mind and everything's good, and then you wake up at 3 in the morning and all of a sudden your brain just starts spinning. 'Jeez, I should have done this. I should have done that. Why did this happen? I'm pissed off at this guy! This guy's pissed off at me!'

"You have to work through this process, which is why I didn't want to talk right away. I didn't want to say anything stupid or anything out of anger because there's no reason for me to be angry. I can be as upset as I want, and I can disbelieve if I want, but I can't do anything about the decision. It was not my choice."

Even as the Blue Jackets lagged in the standings and suffered frustrating losses, the conventional wisdom was that Evason may get the rest of this season to turn around the Blue Jackets. Or, perhaps, he'd at least get to the NHL's Olympic break next month.

But Waddell made it clear Tuesday that he didn't think the Blue Jackets could wait. The ball started rolling on Evason's firing, he said, when the Jackets blew a 4-1 lead and lost 5-4 in overtime to Pittsburgh on Jan. 4 in Nationwide.

It was such an abrupt end to Evason's run in Columbus, one that started on such an impressive and inspirational note.

He was hired on July 22, 2024. One month and one week later — just three weeks before training camp was to start — Blue Jackets star winger Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were killed by an alleged drunk driver in New Jersey.

Evason implored the Blue Jackets to grieve, both individually and collectively, and he made the Blue Jackets dressing room an appropriate place for all of the feelings that grief can bring to the surface.

"So many people came through during that time," Evason said. "It was a very emotional time, and I think, as an organization, we did a phenomenal job. It was the entire staff, but I'm proud of my part in that, too. I learned a lot about myself. I learned a lot about other people, too.

"The first time I met (Sean) Monahan was the night of the vigil. I actually walked into the dressing room, and there he was, standing in front of Johnny's locker, all by himself, just bawling. I went over to him, and we hugged and cried.

"The first time I met (Erik) Gudbranson, I shook his hand, and we looked at each other and just started crying. It was that close to the surface, you know."

Every player in the dressing room had two hands on the rope last season, and the Blue Jackets surprised the NHL by missing the playoffs by only 2 points. More was expected this season, but that emotion and camaraderie have been difficult to match, Evason said.

“There was a letdown this season,” Evason said. “That, combined with the fact that we weren’t sneaking up on anybody ... we also had a bunch of guys have career years.”

On Thursday, Evason said members of the Blue Jackets assistant coaching staff — his former assistants — came by his Arena District apartment to help him move a large piece of furniture. They ended up talking ... just like they used to do in the coaches’ offices.

“(Bowness) is a wonderful, wonderful man,” Evason said. “I’ve just kept reiterating to the coaches that they’re going to love him and love working for him. They can learn a lot from him, so they should go about their business. That’s all they can do, and that’s all they should do.

“I don’t know what’s going to happen to this Blue Jackets team. But I believe that we should have made the playoffs this year if we were still coaching. That’s not a knock against Bones in any way, because he may do the exact same thing.”

Evason said he plans to stay in Columbus and is in the process of becoming a U.S. citizen.

“I hope I get another job,” he said. “I know I’m a good coach. I do. I know there are things I have to get better at, and every time you go through something like this, you should get better. The ones who do are the ones who keep getting jobs.”

ABC7 / What Russian NHL players are saying about the Olympic Games

By Ryan Clark – January 20, 2025

Reaching age 30 can inspire reflection. That holds true for athletes, too. It can prompt them to look back on their career -- while starting to think about how much longer they have to play.

That's where Boston Bruins defenseman Nikita Zadorov is at right now. He has played 13 NHL seasons, has become a top-four defenseman in that time and has had many experiences throughout his career.

One experience he has not had is to play for his nation, Russia, at the Olympics. He's starting to wonder if it will ever happen.

"[NHL players] have missed the last three Olympics. We were hoping for this year, but I guess not and it's tough," Zadorov said. "But from the other side, I understand where they're coming from, right? You know what I mean? The war's going on and everything, and there are the sanctions."

Being a hockey player in the best league in the world comes with certain expectations. Among them is having an opportunity to play at the Olympics and represent their nation. For some, it's on the same level or even greater than playing in the Stanley Cup Final.

That's what makes the discussion for Russian players about the upcoming Milan Cortina Olympics rather complicated. There are those who want the chance to play in what would have been the first true best-on-best Olympics in more than a decade.

Those same players also understand the dynamics behind why that won't be happening.

"I know it's tough right now. Everyone is excited about the Olympics but us," Columbus Blue Jackets winger Kirill Marchenko said. "And of course we would love to be at the Olympics. Russia would have a great team because our roster would have looked so nice."

RUSSIA'S OLYMPIC COMMITTEE remains suspended by the International Olympic Committee with the latter imposing sanctions stating that Russia violated the Olympic Charter when it invaded Ukraine in 2022. It has since led to a select group of individual Russian and Belarusian athletes that were allowed to participate at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris under a neutral flag.

The International Ice Hockey Federation, the governing body for international men's and women's ice hockey, has continued to ban Russia and Belarus, having stated in February 2025 that it "believes it is not yet safe to reintegrate" both nations.

That, in turn, is why Russia will not be sending a men's hockey team to the Olympics in what has become a complex discussion during the past four years.

Sport is competitive in nature. It's what made going through 12 years and three Olympic cycles without NHL players competing in the men's hockey tournament feel incomplete. The Olympics still had flagship

nations that have become staples on the world stage. But it came with the caveat that those same countries were also not fielding their strongest talent.

It's what led to a gradual outcry from fans and players, among others, about the need for true best-on-best international competition in men's hockey. The other senior-level international tournament -- the IIHF Men's World Championships -- is held at the same time as the Stanley Cup playoffs, which means many players opt for starting their offseason rather than delay it to represent their nation, while others are still vying for the Cup.

The NHL and NHLPA agreed to have its players return to the Olympics, which was then followed by the creation of the 4 Nations Face-Off 2025 and the eventual revival of the World Cup of Hockey. It creates a calendar that now allows for more frequent best-on-best international tournaments (outside of the world championships).

Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States faced each other in the 4 Nations Face-Off, in what was a precursor to the Olympics. It generated more excitement about Olympic hockey over the past year, which has led to questions about roster construction in addition to who could win.

It has also led to questions about Russia, its absence and what could have been for those who believe that the omission of one of the most successful nations in the sport is glaring.

"I feel like if the NHL would have run their own tournament like they did last February and if they invited Russia to it and told us, 'You guys can play. But you cannot use your flag or you cannot use your anthem,' I would say 99% of the guys in the league would agree. OK, sure," Zadorov said. "At the end of the day, we know who we are. We know we are Russians. We know where we come from. Our anthem is something we can sing in the [dressing] room.

"But we want to play best-on-best. You want to prove it to the world if you have that opportunity."

Zadorov said he understands that there may be Russian players whose situations would have prevented them from playing under his proposed scenario for the 4 Nations.

"But I think most of the guys I know would have done it for sure," Zadorov said.

Zadorov added that he heard there were concerns from other nations about having a Russian team at the 4 Nations. But he has also had conversations with players of different nationalities who told him they would have wanted to face a Russian team.

PLAYERS INTERVIEWED FOR THIS STORY acknowledged the complicated situation beyond their control preventing them from joining their NHL teammates in Italy.

"I mean, it's politics and sports," San Jose Sharks defenseman Dmitry Orlov said. "I cannot say anything, you know? It is just, it is what it is. It's not our decision. So we just take it how it is and keep living.

"We're lucky we're still playing in the NHL and it's important. We like our jobs and you just try not to overthink anything. You just hope that with the next Olympics that we'll have a chance to play."

Orlov, 34, is the sixth-oldest active Russian player in the NHL and part of a generation with a distinct view of the national team. He was 5 months old when the Soviet Union dissolved and the nation became Russia.

Hockey, along with sports as a whole, was part of the Soviet Union's identity. The Soviet Union's men's national team won 81% of its games, captured seven Olympic gold medals and won 22 gold medals at the IIHF Men's World Championships that included a run of nine straight tournament titles between 1963 and 1971.

While the nation was in search of a new, post-U.S.S.R. identity, more Russian players were heading to the NHL, now that they could live and play in North America with more freedom than before.

Orlov was 7 when Russia, which initially sent only its domestic players to the Olympics in 1994, used NHL players at the 1998 Games in Nagano, Japan. A group that featured stars like captain Pavel Bure, Sergei Fedorov, Sergei Gonchar and Alexei Yashin finished second.

As a teenager, Orlov was good enough to represent Russia. He would represent his nation 35 times in junior competitions and 31 times at the senior level. Orlov has won a world junior championship and a world championship. Even the Stanley Cup he won in 2018 as part of the Washington Capitals was captained by arguably the greatest Russian player of all time in Alex Ovechkin, the NHL's all-time leader in goals.

And yet? Orlov has never played in the Olympics.

"Growing up, we used to watch the Russian national team," Orlov said. "That was always fun. You used to play with each other back home when you were younger. You play against each other [in the NHL] and then you're on the same team speaking the same language. You just think about how everybody says it's great to be a part of that with the whole country cheering for you.

"That's how you felt about it when you were a kid. It's kind of tough that we're not able to play."

ADDING TO THE FRUSTRATION for the Russian players who are missing the Olympics is the belief that their team could have challenged for a medal -- and possibly even the nation's second gold medal since the Soviet Union dissolved. The team designated as "Olympic Athletes from Russia" won gold in 2018 while the Russian Olympic Committee was serving a ban for a doping scandal.

ESPN recently projected what a potential Russian men's Olympic hockey team roster would look like if it were heading to Milan Cortina. Marchenko was part of a group of forwards that featured Kirill Kaprizov, Nikita Kucherov, Evgeni Malkin, Artemi Panarin and Ovechkin.

Seeing that he made the roster made Marchenko smile, while adding he should have been on the second line in place of Colorado Avalanche winger Valeri Nichushkin (instead of the third line). Orlov and Zadorov were part of a defense group that also had Vladislav Gavrikov, Ivan Provorov and Mikhail Sergachev.

Then there's the goaltending dilemma that would have been facing Russia, knowing it would have had to choose between Sergei Bobrovsky, Igor Shesterkin, Ilya Sorokin and Andrei Vasilevskiy for its three available roster spots.

"Obviously, we would have a great team with the greatest goal scorer of all time," Sergachev said when asked about a potential Russian Olympic team roster. "We also would have had the best goalies in the league. Bobrovsky's phenomenal and probably a Hall of Famer. Shesterkin is the same thing. Sorokin. They're all great. I love them all. They're all my good friends. But, to me, Vasy's just something different.

"We'd have a great team. It'd be fun to get together again. But it's also tough to speak."

Reviewing all the reasons why Sergachev, a defenseman for the Utah Mammoth, believes that Russia would have done well at the Olympics also provides him the opportunity to stress how this was likely the last chance for fans to see players like Bobrovsky, Malkin and Ovechkin play at the Olympics.

Bobrovsky was part of the Russian Olympic team in 2014, while Malkin and Ovechkin are both three-time Olympians who have won world championships but never an Olympic medal.

"It's sad ... but it is what it is," Sergachev said. "You can't really dwell on it or really think about it too much now. We have [NHL] games every day. There's still a lot of political stuff that needs to get done. I don't, at least, think about it much. But it would be great if [a return] happened."

Speaking about that older generation of Russian players is what made Zadorov think about the possibility his generation of Russian players could possibly miss out on the chance to *ever* represent their nation at the Olympics.

Nearly half of the Russians playing in the NHL season are at least 30. That group has players such as Dmitry Kulikov and Vladimir Tarasenko, along with Panarin, Gavrikov, Kucherov, Nichushkin, Shesterkin, Sorokin and Zadorov.

"Kuch has played in the World Cup [of Hockey], but he hasn't played in the Olympics," Zadorov said of the Tampa Bay Lightning winger and two-time Ted Lindsay Award winner. "He's going to be arguably, when he retires, one of the best Russian players to ever play this game. He's in that conversation. Panarin, he's getting older too."

Zadorov acknowledged he will be 34 when the next Olympics cycle arrives, with the understanding that his age, among other factors, could see him get passed over. The hulking defenseman has been open about criticizing Russian President Vladimir Putin and his policies.

In 2019, Zadorov did an interview with The Athletic in which he spoke in opposition to Russia's internet bill and how "actual patriotic people should speak up." In 2023, he did an interview with Russian YouTuber Yury Dud in which he spoke out in opposition against the war in Ukraine and stated, "I'm sorry. Instead of raising the new generation, we sent them to die."

Zadorov has also previously said he likely wouldn't return to Russia until Putin is no longer the president or "that regime is still there."

"With my political views and political situation, I don't know if I would have even made this team," Zadorov said. "Because I'm the guy who, when I speak, I break the internet with my quotes."

EVEN WITH THE DYNAMICS that are preventing them from participating, there will be Russian players who will follow what happens at the Olympics.

"I love hockey, and it's the best-on-best," Sergachev said. "Obviously, Russia isn't there but it's still best-on-best. I still want to watch Sidney Crosby go against Auston Matthews or [Connor] McDavid and [Jack] Hughes. You want to watch them. You want to learn what that situation is about with the Olympics."

Sergachev said he was like that with the 4 Nations Face-Off, in that he wanted to watch because the tournament still featured the best players in the world and he saw it as a chance to learn even more about them.

Marchenko echoed a similar sentiment, saying he also watched the 4 Nations and will watch some of the Olympics because of how much he loves hockey -- while using it as a chance to see what he can pick up from watching the game at the fastest possible level.

He admitted that he won't watch every game. The goal is to "go to a beach somewhere" that also has a nearby rink so he can find a way to get in his workouts and stay sharp, while also finding time to disconnect before the season resumes.

There is one team he might follow more closely than others, however.

"I want to support Zach Werenski and watch all his games," Marchenko said of his Blue Jackets teammate. "He's one of my friends and he's going to be playing."

The Athletic / How sensible is it for each NHL team to trade for Rangers' Artemi Panarin?

By The Athletic NHL Staff – January 20, 2026

Artemi Panarin's future has become one of the top storylines leading into the March 6 trade deadline.

The longtime New York Rangers forward and pending unrestricted free agent is the subject of trade conversation after president and general manager Chris Drury released a statement announcing the team will "retool" and reportedly told Panarin the club will not offer him a contract extension.

Instead, New York will work with the 34-year-old winger, who has control of his situation with a full no-movement clause, to find a fit on the trade market.

How sensible is it for each team to trade for him?

This week, *The Athletic* asked its NHL staff to put teams into one of four categories: it makes a lot of sense, it makes some sense, it makes a little bit of sense and it makes no sense.

Here's what they said.

Anaheim Ducks

It makes a little bit of sense

The Ducks and Rangers have been recent trade partners, with general manager Pat Verbeek adding veterans Jacob Trouba and Chris Kreider as Drury looked to shed salary. Joel Quenneville also coached Panarin in Chicago, and there's more pressure to end a long playoff drought. Anaheim has enough cap space (if New York retains 50 percent), its high picks for the next few years and some prospect capital. But if the Ducks' forward group is healthy, there isn't much room to add him as a rental. — *Eric Stephens*

Boston Bruins

It makes some sense

The Bruins could use help up front. It would be difficult for opponents to defend Panarin on one shift and David Pastrnak on the next. However, the cost of acquisition plus the investment in an extension would be quite expensive on both fronts. The Bruins would not want Panarin as a rental. — *Fluto Shinzawa*

Buffalo Sabres

It makes some sense

Panarin would provide a boost to Buffalo's power play, and his playmaking ability would strengthen its top six. The big questions are what it would cost to acquire Panarin, whether he would waive his no-movement clause to play in Buffalo and whether the Sabres would have interest in or the ability to extend him. As a pure rental, it would be a gamble for Jarmo Kekäläinen, who had Panarin in Columbus. The Sabres are in a wild-card position and should be looking to add, though. — *Matthew Fairburn*

Calgary Flames

It makes no sense

Panarin will likely want to go to a contending team. The Flames aren't a contender and should be building toward the future. Offloading players and draft picks for an aging, yet dynamic offensive winger isn't quite right with the Flames' timeline. — *Julian McKenzie*

Carolina Hurricanes

It makes a little bit of sense

Any team would be lucky to add Panarin because he's one of the most offensively talented players in the world. That said, the pending free agent isn't a great fit for Carolina's needs, given what the acquisition cost would be. The Hurricanes are chock-full of wingers, and Panarin's defensive shortcomings would likely give coach Rod Brind'Amour fits. Carolina will dip its toe into any trade water it can find, but Panarin is an unlikely primary target. — *Cory Lavalette*

Chicago Blackhawks

It makes no sense

The Blackhawks are staying their course. They're focusing on building from within and seeing what they actually have among their many early-round picks. They're hoping to add Anton Frondell and Roman Kantserov to their NHL mix next season. There are several reasons why the Blackhawks might not seek to acquire Panarin. From a hockey standpoint, they wouldn't give up assets to acquire him, and he just doesn't fit their timeline. — *Scott Powers*

Colorado Avalanche

It makes a little bit of sense

On one hand, this move could make sense for both sides. From Panarin's side, there may not be a better opportunity to show his potential before hitting unrestricted free agency, playing on the best offense in hockey. From Colorado's side, Panarin could further bolster its already juggernaut offense and help the power play. However, the Avalanche have limited future assets to offer and would need to move pieces around to create the cap space. It's more likely they look to add a center. — *Jesse Granger*

Columbus Blue Jackets

It makes a little bit of sense

Boy, this is juicy. Panarin spent two seasons with the Blue Jackets before he signed as a free agent with the Rangers. The Blue Jackets could certainly use Panarin's incredible, lift-all-boats skills, but the idea of him returning seems like a stretch. For one, the Jackets aren't in a playoff spot. However, this needs to be made clear about Panarin: He didn't leave after the 2018-19 season because he didn't like living in central Ohio. He left because he always dreamed of playing for the Rangers. — *Aaron Portzline*

Dallas Stars

It makes a lot of sense

When you've come up one round short of the Stanley Cup Final in three straight postseasons, it's hard to overstate the urgency a franchise feels. Jim Nill has never been shy about going big at the trade deadline — Mikko Rantanen, anyone? — and with Tyler Seguin on LTIR, there's an obvious hole to fill. Panarin would round out a top six that already includes Rantanen, Jason Robertson, Wyatt Johnston, Roope Hintz and Matt Duchene. No team in the NHL, not even the Avs, would be able to match that. — *Mark Lazerus*

Detroit Red Wings

It makes a little bit of sense

The Red Wings could use a top-six left wing, and Panarin is a very good one. He's also quite familiar with Patrick Kane. But Detroit's top six is already a bit undersized, and if it's going to make an add there, it would likely be for a player with more jam, as opposed to a more perimeter-oriented playmaker. — *Max Bultman*

Edmonton Oilers

It makes some sense

Acquiring Panarin would be an exceptional move for the Oilers. It would require trading Adam Henrique, plus the Rangers retaining salary. Add a first-round draft pick, a top prospect or possibly more, depending on the quality of other offers. Andrew Mangiapane would need to go in a separate deal and that could happen soon (no retention would be key). The idea is a perfect fit for the team's needs. Panarin would have to waive his no-movement clause, and that's a lot of "ifs," but it's a fantastic hockey trade in theory. — *Allan Mitchell*

Florida Panthers

It makes some sense

The Panthers are almost always a preferred destination for players such as Panarin, and his no-movement clause means he has control over where he goes. Where things get complicated is with the salary cap, as Florida doesn't know for certain when Aleksander Barkov will be back and if it'll have access to some, all or none of his cap space via LTIR at the trade deadline. Even Panarin at 50 percent retention is a big hit, so the Panthers would have to get creative to make it happen. But it could happen. — *James Mirtle*

Los Angeles Kings

It makes a little bit of sense

The Kings, fighting for the playoffs with the retiring Anze Kopitar, desperately need someone of Panarin's caliber for their 31st-ranked offense. Panarin would instantly become their top scorer by a lot. But they also need to be real about what they are: an average team light on high-end skating prospects. A last-gasp move could result in lasting damage. I'd stay away, but I'm not GM Ken Holland. — *Eric Stephens*

Minnesota Wild

It makes a little bit of sense

A year ago, we were convinced the Wild would want to team up Kirill Kaprizov with Panarin if Panarin got to free agency. However, we are not so sure anymore. The scoring winger is 34, and it's hard to believe the Wild are going to want to add another Paul Theofanous client after he leveraged them into giving Kaprizov a record eight-year, \$136 million contract last September. Panarin can help as a rental, but the Wild's more pressing need is a center. — *Joe Smith*

Montreal Canadiens

It makes no sense

The Canadiens definitely have a need for a top-six right wing, ideally one who shoots left to play with the right-shooting Nick Suzuki and Cole Caufield. Panarin plays left wing, and he shoots right. He is also 34, and would become the oldest player on the Canadiens. To justify the acquisition cost, the Canadiens would much rather get a player who fits the age of their core. They are not at the stage of a rebuild at which you seek to add a finishing piece, which is what Panarin is. — *Arpon Basu*

Nashville Predators

It makes no sense

Great job by Andrew Brunette and his team to get into the thick of playoff contention — highlighted by two wins over Colorado, including a 7-3 romp that handed the Avs their first home regulation loss of the season. But GM Barry Trotz isn't going to be a buyer, and he has essentially confirmed as much with recent comments. At most, he's standing pat. More likely, he's trading Ryan O'Reilly. — *Joe Rexrode*

New Jersey Devils

It makes a little bit of sense

The Devils are certainly in need of some spark, and Tom Fitzgerald mentioned recently wanting to add at forward. There are a few key roadblocks, though. For one, Panarin has a full no-movement clause and presumably wouldn't waive it for a team out of the playoffs. Secondly, it would only make sense from the Devils' perspective if he signs an extension as part of the deal. The current team hasn't done enough to warrant trading for an expensive rental. — *Peter Baugh*

New York Islanders

It makes a little bit of sense

Adding an elite puck-moving winger would only help the Islanders on the ice; he would instantly become the team's No. 1 winger and give the team a deeper forward group. But it really doesn't make sense, despite the Isles' playoff standing, to go after a 34-year-old pending UFA (with the team's past interest aside). Instead, if this retooling team wants to make a splash up front, targets such as Jordan Kyrrou or Jason Robertson would make a lot more sense. — *Shayna Goldman*

New York Rangers

It makes a lot of sense

The Rangers have already essentially said they are moving on from Panarin. They're not offering him an extension and are working to trade him before the deadline. His time in New York is coming to a close. — *Peter Baugh*

Ottawa Senators

It makes a little bit of sense

The Senators acquiring an offensive winger for their top six makes sense. A player such as Panarin makes sense if you're taking advantage of a competitive window. Ottawa, however, might not want to part with the assets needed to make a Panarin trade work. — *Julian McKenzie*

Philadelphia Flyers

It makes no sense

The only position the Flyers are truly deep at right now is wing, and they may have one more coming at the end of the season in prospect Porter Martone. Unless the Flyers want to extend Panarin — which seems unlikely — this probably isn't even worth a phone call. — *Kevin Kurz*

Pittsburgh Penguins

It makes no sense

The Penguins would love to add star power, but not if the player is older than 30. It would make zero sense for the Penguins to add yet another player making a large amount of money on the back end of his career. Forget about it. — *Josh Yohe*

San Jose Sharks

It makes no sense

With no offense to Panarin and his vast offensive skills, the Sharks aren't one potential difference-maker away from a Stanley Cup run and don't need a 34-year-old winger to block the progress of William Eklund, Igor Chernyshov or any other oncoming prospects (Quentin Musty?), whether it's for the short-

term or the long-term picture. Some of their vast amount of cap space can be applied elsewhere, such as Macklin Celebrini's next contract. — *Eric Stephens*

Seattle Kraken

It makes a little bit of sense

The Kraken have punched well above their weight, buoyed by superlative goaltending and a solid defense-first team identity. A game breaker of Panarin's quality would improve the Kraken significantly, and give them a shot to sustain their playoff perch (and be a tougher playoff out if they get there), so it makes a bit of sense for Seattle to kick the tires. The Kraken, however, shouldn't spend on a rental player over 30 if it's not attached to a long-term commitment. — *Thomas Drance*

St. Louis Blues

It makes no sense

In what has been an offensively inept season, the Blues would love to add a point-producing winger such as Panarin. However, he's not the answer because, first, he is 34 and that does not fit the age bracket of what the team is seeking. Even if Panarin can contribute offensively for a few more years, the Blues' young core with Jake Neighbours, Jimmy Snuggerud and Dalibor Dvorsky may not be ready to compete by then. Second, Panarin will cost too much — both in a trade and on his next contract. — *Jeremy Rutherford*

Tampa Bay Lightning

It makes some sense

The Lightning stand as the strongest contender in the East, but management will likely look for ways to solidify that and set this team up for a deep run. So a Panarin trade could make some sense as it would strengthen the top six and add a right-handed shot to play the left circle on PP1. The problem is the Lightning's asset pool is depleted and they're already up against the cap, so the logistics would be tough to navigate. — *Shayna Goldman*

Toronto Maple Leafs

It makes some sense

On paper, Panarin would obviously be a great fit for the Leafs. He could give Auston Matthews the elite sidekick he's lacked since Mitch Marner's departure. But what about the assets needed to acquire him? The Leafs don't have many and already have a Chris Tanev-sized hole on defense that needs filling. If there were a path to getting both — Panarin and an upgrade on defense — that would be a home run for the Leafs. It just doesn't seem likely. — *Jonas Siegel*

Utah Mammoth

It makes no sense

Utah has a good chance of making the playoffs and certainly has the excess draft picks and deep prospect pool to make an aggressive addition if it wants. However, this is a very young core that is just beginning to rise, not a bona fide Cup contender. With that in mind, if the Mammoth take a big, expensive swing on a deadline acquisition, it should probably be for a player that has term beyond this season rather than an older rental such as Panarin. — *Harman Dayal*

Vancouver Canucks

It makes no sense

The Canucks are rebuilding. This is the opposite of the sort of trades they should and will be making. — *Thomas Drance*

Vegas Golden Knights

It makes no sense

The Golden Knights don't have the cap space to fit even half of Panarin's \$11.6 million (assuming retention), and they certainly won't have the space to sign him to an extension beyond this season. Yes, they've taken plenty of big swings for star players, but they typically only do so when they believe they'll sign them long-term, and that doesn't feel realistic with Panarin. — *Jesse Granger*

Washington Capitals

It makes a lot of sense

Ignoring for a second the whole "trading a star within the division" element, Panarin couldn't make more sense in D.C. The Capitals are openly looking for a high-end winger, have a solid crop of prospects and have all of their own first-round picks for the foreseeable future. Panarin would push them squarely back toward the top of the Metro Division, set them up for another playoff run with Alex Ovechkin and potentially fit with the rest of a win-now core for the next few years. — *Sean Gentile*

Winnipeg Jets

It makes no sense

The Jets, desperate for scoring beyond the top line, would obviously benefit from adding a dynamic game breaker such as Panarin to their lineup. However, with Winnipeg sitting 31st in the NHL standings, it'd be impossible to justify paying a lucrative package to acquire a top-flight rental. The Jets aren't one or two pieces away from contending and should use this as a year to hold onto their picks and prospects. — *Harman Dayal*

The Athletic / NHL report cards: Grading every team at the halfway mark of the season

By The Athletic NHL Staff – January 17, 2026

The NHL season has passed its midway point, with all 32 teams playing between 46 and 49 games. By now, we generally know what each team is and isn't and whether the rest of the season should be focused on title contention, short-term progress or the long-term future.

What better time to break out our red pens and hand out some grades? That's exactly what *The Athletic* did this week when it asked its NHL staff to assign a grade to every team with expectations in mind. You'll definitely want to show some of these to your parents (or general managers). Others ... maybe not.

Anaheim Ducks: C+

The Ducks were the embodiment of exciting, high-event hockey in the early weeks, but that concoction for winning games aged quickly. Opponents adapted and slowed down their rush game, forcing them to adjust, and the offense has been harder to come by. More alarming is their inability to consistently defend well and their continued tendency to allow golden scoring chances. The youngsters are still growing, but a recent nine-game losing streak showed they're not ready to lead, and the contributions from complementary veterans have been waning. — *Eric Stephens*

Boston Bruins: B+

The Bruins are fading, but they're still in the playoff hunt. It's a good spot to occupy considering how poorly they played last season. Jeremy Swayman is back, the team plays with spirit, and a handful of players are performing above expectations. — *Fluto Shinzawa*

Buffalo Sabres: B

The Sabres got off to a slow start because of injuries and inconsistent play. But a 10-game winning streak that coincided with Jarmo Kekäläinen's taking over as general manager has Buffalo right back in the wild-card mix. This is a deeper and more defensively sound Sabres team than we've seen in years past. — *Matthew Fairburn*

Calgary Flames: D

The Flames weren't a favorite to make the playoffs despite nearly accomplishing the feat last season. Especially with their offense trailing behind the rest of the league. And if they weren't on trend to do so, they needed to sell hope with their future. Fans weren't given that hope after some confusing comments about a retool and rebuild earlier this year. Their youth needs more time and opportunity. But they're in the hunt for a top pick in the draft, which is sorely needed for the franchise to take that next step in its evolution. — *Julian McKenzie*

Carolina Hurricanes: B+

The Hurricanes have settled in atop the Metropolitan Division, but injuries and inconsistency have made for some ups and downs through the first half of the season. The good news is Carolina believes it has found a hidden gem in goaltender Brandon Bussi, who is off to a 16-3-1 start to his NHL career. The

Hurricanes are also getting healthy. Seth Jarvis is back from a rib injury, and Jaccob Slavin — who played in only five games this season before getting injured — has returned. Slavin should help shore up a surprisingly mediocre penalty kill, and Carolina's power play is showing signs of life. — *Cory Lavallette*

Chicago Blackhawks: B

The Blackhawks have been much better than anyone could have anticipated coming into the season. Connor Bedard is a major reason for that, but it goes beyond him. Even when he was out for a month recently, the Blackhawks remained afloat. Players such as Spencer Knight and Tyler Bertuzzi have consistently performed well, and the team's young players are coming along. Jeff Blashill deserves some of that credit, too. The Blackhawks have been much more structured and competitive under him. Odds are still likely against their making the playoffs this season, but they're in the mix. — *Scott Powers*

Advertisement

Colorado Avalanche: A+

The Avalanche are on pace to tie the 2022-23 Bruins for the best regular-season record in NHL history. Their plus-79 goal differential is nearly double the next-best team (Tampa Bay at plus-44). Colorado has the favorite to win the Art Ross (Nathan MacKinnon with 81 points), the Rocket Richard (MacKinnon again with 36 goals), the Hart (MacKinnon again) and the Norris (Cale Makar). It would be tough to grade that as anything but exemplary. — *Jesse Granger*

Columbus Blue Jackets: D

Well, the first team to fire its coach can't get a good grade, right? Dean Evason was replaced by Rick Bowness on Monday, with the Blue Jackets stuck in second-last place in the East. They've scored fewer goals and allowed more goals than a year ago, and they've coughed up way too many late leads. The Blue Jackets have a .521 points percentage, but that's not what they were expecting after nearly making the playoffs one season ago. — *Aaron Portzline*

Dallas Stars: B+

The Stars were the only team within spitting distance of the Avalanche, but a six-game losing streak pretty much ended that chase. Their underlying numbers are fair to middling, and they're being propped up to an extent by a brilliant power play. Still, they're third in the league, and their three biggest stars — Jason Robertson, Mikko Rantanen and Wyatt Johnston — are having huge seasons, and Jake Oettinger has been trending in the right direction since the start of December. Now it's just cruising to the finish line and preparing for a titanic first-round matchup with the Wild. — *Mark Lazerus*

Detroit Red Wings: B+

The Red Wings have clearly exceeded preseason expectations, battling for the top spot in the Atlantic so far. They're getting good depth contributions from players such as Andrew Copp and James van Riemsdyk, a Norris-level season from Moritz Seider, and strong goaltending as of late, too. But they still have a lot to prove, particularly as the games get harder. — *Max Bultman*

Edmonton Oilers: B+

The Oilers have a championship ceiling, led by Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Evan Bouchard. The floor (third and fourth lines, goaltending before two trades brought in Tristan Jarry and Connor Ingram)

is expansion level at five-on-five. Edmonton is in a good spot, and some of the recent auditions in those depth positions appear to be gaining traction. It's been a weird first half. — *Allan Mitchell*

Florida Panthers: B

No Aleksander Barkov and no Matthew Tkachuk could have been a lot uglier than this. The Panthers struggled mightily to start the year (7-7-1) but have been better as of late, and their 93-point pace is going to put them right in wild-card territory, which is all they need to accomplish to do damage in the postseason. They've played more hockey than anyone in the league the past few years, so we're not going to fret that they aren't in more solid playoff positioning than this at the half, especially with all the injury absences. — *James Mirtle*

Los Angeles Kings: D

The Kings brought in Ken Holland as GM to change up the dynamic after four straight first-round losses to Edmonton. Holland kept Jim Hiller as coach after a 105-point season despite his backfiring coaching maneuvers last spring. This season has shown the Kings brought in inadequate replacements to key departures, and the few successful additions have been offset by returnees not measuring up to what they did last season. Only goalie Darcy Kuemper and defenseman Brandt Clarke have excelled. The Kings, in a weak Pacific Division, have traded wins and losses throughout. They are the definition of average and underwhelming. — *Eric Stephens*

Minnesota Wild: A

After the Wild won three of their first 12 games this season, nobody in their right mind would have predicted they'd have the third-most points in the NHL (and cutthroat Central Division) at this juncture or be the team to execute a Quinn Hughes blockbuster. But here they are, on the verge of true contender status if they can add a top-six center by the deadline. They've got a great blue line, great goaltending tandem and star power with Hughes, Kirill Kaprizov and Matt Boldy. — *Michael Russo*

Montreal Canadiens: A

The Canadiens are in the thick of a race to win the Atlantic Division more than halfway through the season. They are unlikely to reach the finish line in first, but the fact that they are there as the NHL's youngest team is a very good sign. Not only that, but it is their youngest talents who have been driving the bus, players such as Juraj Slafkovský, Ivan Demidov and Lane Hutson, who are still far from hitting their ceiling, and they are doing it despite missing several key players to injury. General manager Kent Hughes said recently his team is ahead of schedule, and this grade reflects that. — *Arpon Basu*

Nashville Predators: C

This is essentially averaging the "F" for the first quarter of the season and the "A" for the second quarter, which has pulled the Predators into playoff contention — amid tremendous outside negativity, it should be noted. Predators fans are largely enamored of a true rebuild. But Roman Josi, Filip Forsberg and Steven Stamkos have no use for that. They're fighting, and coach Andrew Brunette is leading. — *Joe Rexrode*

New Jersey Devils: D

The Devils' fall has been startling after their strong start to the season. Injuries haven't helped, but the fact that the team's playoff odds have dropped so significantly speaks poorly of everyone involved. It's

been an eventful season off the ice, too, with the Quinn Hughes pursuit coming to a head (and Vancouver ultimately trading him elsewhere) and the Dougie Hamilton healthy scratch. — *Peter Baugh*

New York Islanders: B+

The Islanders' season hasn't been perfect — the defense has been shaky, the penalty kill relies heavily on goaltending, and their scoring rate is bottom-10. But this retooling team is still exceeding expectations. The vibes are different since a change in management, and the on-ice product is trending up, too. Matthew Schaefer has been phenomenal, Ilya Sorokin is Vezina worthy, Mathew Barzal and Bo Horvat are leading the way up front, and there have been highlights in the supporting cast. The team plays with a lot more pace this year and has a stronger long-term outlook. — *Shayna Goldman*

New York Rangers: F

The Rangers are the only team in the Eastern Conference under .500. They are coming off a 10-2 loss to Boston, a blown two-goal lead to Seattle and an 8-4 loss to the Senators. It's only January, and Chris Drury already sent out a letter to fans that they'll be sellers. Perhaps this shouldn't be a total surprise given the team's aging core, but it's hard to be charitable with the midseason grade. — *Peter Baugh*

Ottawa Senators: D+

It's a harsh grade for a team that's done so many things right. Its underlying metrics at five-on-five are among the league's best. The Senators' best offensive players, including Tim Stützle, have done their part. Jake Sanderson continues to emerge as one of the best two-way defenders. But goaltending has them in the Eastern Conference's basement. And with their chances of making the playoffs plummeting in recent weeks, they risk slipping in their growth trajectory with this core. — *Julian McKenzie*

Philadelphia Flyers: B+

The Flyers' being in a playoff position for much of the season can only be considered a win for a team many figured would once again be near the league basement. Their offseason additions have fueled their success, as Dan Vladar has been outstanding in net, Trevor Zegras has paced the offense and Christian Dvorak has given them solid play down the middle. But they lose points for their still abysmal power play, and because young winger Matvei Michkov, who is still so vital to the rebuild, seems to have regressed. — *Kevin Kurz*

Pittsburgh Penguins: A-

The Penguins are in a fight for a playoff spot, which surely exceeds any reasonable expectations one might have had for them. I can't give them an A because of the way they blew leads in December. It was historic, really, to blow three-goal leads twice in a 24-hour span during the same week in which they blew a lead while on the power play with 0.1 seconds remaining in regulation. It still makes you shake your head. However, it's been a magnificent season for the Penguins. Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin are still going strong, and young Ben Kindel could be a foundational player for them. — *Josh Yohe*

San Jose Sharks: A+

If this seems generous, let's remember the Sharks had an NHL-low 52 points last season and now sit in a wild-card position in the Western Conference. Expectations should be factored into this, and San Jose's was about increasing its win total and moving into an upward trajectory as a franchise. Instead, Macklin Celebrini has dragged the Sharks into a playoff push. The 19-year-old Hart Trophy candidate has been so

good that he's keeping up folks watching late at night on the East Coast. Full of flaws and fun, the Sharks are bringing big crowds back to SAP Center. — *Eric Stephens*

Seattle Kraken: B

The Kraken's goaltending has largely carried them — Philipp Grubauer, Joey Daccord and Matt Murray have been sensational — and permitted them to defy gravity despite some five-on-five struggles. Still, despite a fragile-seeming profile, the Kraken are sticking around in the Western Conference playoff race and have become a legitimately formidable defensive side in Lane Lambert's first season. It might not be meaningful or sustainable progress just yet, but the Kraken have exceeded expectations and put themselves in a position to compete for a playoff spot down the stretch. — *Thomas Drance*

St. Louis Blues: F

It's hard to fathom the Blues were viewed as a potential playoff team before the season. They are tied for last in the league in goal differential (minus-44) and averaging the fewest goals per game in the league (2.49), with a 33-year-old defenseman who had four goals last season, Justin Faulk, tied for the team lead (11). They were also allowing the fourth-most goals in the league (3.38) with the No. 24 power play (17.1 percent) and the No. 25 penalty kill (77 percent). It's an all-around, epic disaster. — *Jeremy Rutherford*

Tampa Bay Lightning: A-

The Lightning have been streaky at times, with some ups and downs. Brayden Point is the latest to join a long list of injuries to key players. Despite all that, Tampa Bay still looks like one of the strongest contenders in the Eastern Conference. It's a credit to the team's elite core, Jon Cooper's coaching and the overall development system. A lot of the supporting cast have stepped up, such as J.J. Moser and Darren Raddysh on the back end, and so have some AHL call-ups from Syracuse. So when this team finally gets healthy, it should make for a much deeper lineup. — *Shayna Goldman*

Toronto Maple Leafs: C

The last three weeks don't erase the first three months when the Leafs were an underperforming team that couldn't find answers to major problems, even firing assistant coach Marc Savard along the way. They've turned things around in a big way recently. Auston Matthews is looking like a superstar again, the power play is no longer a back hole and the team is playing a connected brand of hockey at both ends. Long a formality with this team, the playoffs are still a question mark, though, thanks to that troubling start. — *Jonas Siegel*

Utah Mammoth: C+

Boasting an impressive collection of young talent and robust analytics last season, the Mammoth were a popular pick to break out in 2025-26. Unfortunately, it hasn't come together yet — Utah is on pace for 89 points, which would tie last year's total. Utah's young players haven't taken the leap to superstar status yet, the power play is ranked 31st, and secondary scoring remains underwhelming. The good news is Utah still sits in the first wild-card spot because of how poor the West is, and the team has maintained a respectable record lately despite Logan Cooley's injury. — *Harman Dayal*

Vancouver Canucks: F

The Canucks lost their ninth consecutive game Thursday night in Columbus. One more loss would match Vancouver's longest winless streak since 1997-98, and the franchise record (13 games, 1973-74) is very much in sight. The Canucks have played uninspired hockey, traded their franchise player, have been beset by injuries and rank 32nd in the NHL by points percentage — where they're likely to stay over the balance of the season. — *Thomas Drance*

Vegas Golden Knights: B-

By every statistical measure, the Golden Knights have been middling this season. They're seventh in goals per game and 20th in goals against. Their recent five-game win streak was desperately needed after they had lost eight of their previous nine games. The only reason Vegas' grade gets bumped from a C to a B-minus is because it still somehow remains atop the Pacific Division. — *Jesse Granger*

Washington Capitals: B-

The Capitals haven't been great — there have been too many rough patches and too much reliance on Logan Thompson to say that — but they've been good enough, especially with Pierre-Luc Dubois injured for nearly the whole season. Besides, expecting a full-on replay of last season would've been unreasonable. — *Sean Gentile*

Winnipeg Jets: F

After winning the Presidents' Trophy last year, the Jets have plummeted all the way to 31st in the standings. Most people expected Winnipeg to take a step back this season because of Nikolaj Ehlers' departure and some of the club's early injuries, but nobody envisioned a fall this dramatic. The Jets are old, slow, lack secondary scoring and blow leads as if it's nothing. Winnipeg has had a couple of decisive wins lately, and the West is mediocre enough that it isn't completely out of the playoff race, but it's going to be a major uphill battle. — *Harman Dayal*