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The Athletic / Blue Jackets outclassed, outplayed in 4-1 home loss to Avalanche: 'We were soft'

By Aaron Portzline – October 17, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — They looked awed. They look flawed. They didn't finish many checks, perhaps because it's hard to hit what you can't catch. Frankly, the Columbus Blue Jackets looked totally out of place on Thursday while trying to keep pace with the Colorado Avalanche.

Two years ago, you might have understood as the rebuild churned along. Now, there's no excuse.

The Blue Jackets lost 4-1 before 17,249 in Nationwide Arena, spoiling a night on which they honored the career of franchise standout Cam Atkinson, who announced his retirement earlier in the day. It wasn't really that close, though, not after the Avalanche blitzed the Jackets with three second-period goals.

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason wondered aloud if his players showed Colorado's collection of Stanley Cup winners and NHL award winners too much respect.

"Sure, (the Avs have) some good players," Evason said. "But so do we, and that's not how we play, right? Like, we were passive. We were soft."

"We've got to play hard. If we're going to win hockey games, we've got to play hard. And we didn't play hard enough tonight in order to win. Forget about playing against *that* team, against any team in the National Hockey League."

The Blue Jackets lost two of their first three games, but they were mostly pleased with the way they'd played, especially at even strength. (The penalty kill was a different story.) But on Thursday, their whole game unraveled, and the Avs dictated play until well into the third period, when the game was no longer in doubt.

Ivan Provorov scored the only goal for the Blue Jackets. It came early in the second period, giving Columbus a 1-0 lead. It was long gone by the end of the second period, however, when the Avs' dominance finally took its toll. It was 3-1 at the second intermission.

"It was like we were sitting back and waiting for them to collect speed and come after us," Evason said. "We wanted to play way more aggressive, and normally we are that team. We get up. We get into it. We get after it. We're physical."

"Was it because they were moving it before we were getting there, or our willingness to get there? Our work ethic has to be way higher."

The Blue Jackets had only 12 hits, a number that glares brighter when you realize how little they had the puck. The Avs had 43 scoring chances just at 5-on-5 play.

Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins was out of his mind in the first period, stopping several golden scoring chances by the Avs. He was done in during the second period by a mighty screen on Colorado's

first goal, and two deflections, which skipped past him. He was awarded the game's third star, and deservedly so.

The Avs capped the scoring with an empty-net goal with 1:53 remaining.

It was an all-around tough night for the Blue Jackets. They had more goals disallowed than counted. Twice, NHL officials took a goal off the board because it was scored after an illegal hand pass.

Dimitri Voronkov had a puck go off his hand, off his chest and into the net in the second period. In the third, a gloved swat by Cole Sillinger sent the puck skidding across the Avalanche's goal mouth to the stick of Damon Severson. Both goals were waved off immediately.

A popular topic after the game was whether or not the Blue Jackets should simply tip their cap to one of the NHL's bona fide Stanley Cup contenders. The Avs have arguably the league's best forward (Nathan MacKinnon) and best defenseman (Cale Makar), not to mention a top-heavy supporting cast.

The Blue Jackets weren't buying it, though.

"We've had enough learning experiences with this group," Evason said. "We shouldn't be in a position to learn that we have to work hard, or that, you know, respect level. We should care who the heck we're playing, right? We talk about that all the time ... who, what, where ... play hard. We didn't do it tonight. We've got to get back to that."

They're at a point now in this rebuild — or whatever you'd like to call it — where they should expect to go toe-to-toe with anybody. Yes, it's the NHL. Yes, it's hockey, which can be a goofy game. There are times when your best isn't good enough, and times when the better team doesn't win.

By now, though, the Blue Jackets should never be totally overwhelmed.

"I don't think we are different than they are," said Merzlikins, who finished with 33 saves. "We have different names, last names. Our guys here, this room is amazing. The work, what we are putting in, is completely different than in the past five years.

"Maybe we didn't play hard enough, which can happen. I mean, we are human beings here, you know? We are not giving up. We are gonna stick all together and we're gonna move on together."

The Blue Jackets came into this season buoyed by their finish last season. Not just the end result — they missed the playoffs by two points — but by the six-game winning streak down the homestretch, in which they really felt they burnished their identity. That seems like a long way away right now.

"We were playing pretty good hockey (to start the season), and tonight ... it definitely wasn't good hockey," Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan said. "At the end of the day, you've got to work. You've got to work for each other, you play for each other. That's something we're good at doing, so we've got to get back to that.

"We've got a good group in here. The mood's a lot different when you're losing games, and it's something we want to turn around quickly. We've got to get ready for the next one, because this is not a league you want to be playing catch-up in."

The Athletic / Inside Blue Jackets' decision to draft Cam Atkinson: 'Never had another player like him'

By Aaron Portzline – October 17, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — As the Columbus Blue Jackets were set to make their sixth-round pick in the 2008 NHL Draft, one of the club's former scouts, Rob Riley, heard snickering among his colleagues at their table on the draft floor. Riley had gone to bat for a 5-foot-8 forward from Connecticut, and the rest of the scouts weren't buying it.

Thankfully, then-general manager Scott Howson and director of amateur scouting Paul Castron listened to Riley's pleadings.

That player was Cam Atkinson, who signed a one-day contract with the Blue Jackets on Thursday and announced his retirement from the NHL after a 13-season, 809-game career with Columbus, the Philadelphia Flyers and the Tampa Bay Lightning.

"Scott called me over for one last chat before we made the pick, and he said, 'Rob, can this guy compete?'" Riley told The Athletic. "And I said, 'Scott, he competes to score as hard as anybody in this draft class.'

"There were three or four guys at our table who were really snickering and joking about his size, and I just sort of let them know what they'd see. I turned them and said, 'You bastards will see.' And sure enough, they saw."

When you're five inches and 30 pounds lighter than the average NHL player, you simply have to believe in yourself. But you need somebody else to believe in you, too. As Atkinson has noted multiple times throughout his career, and especially on Thursday, that person was Riley.

"Getting to play one game in the NHL is obviously a dream come true for any player," Atkinson said. "But playing 809 of them ... I'm not sure how I got so lucky."

"I honestly want to thank the Blue Jackets for believing in me and taking a chance on me, an undersized kid who went 157th overall on my second year of (draft) eligibility. I tell people that I think I went (sixth) overall, just in the sixth round."

Atkinson, seated next to Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell and flanked by his wife and kids, parents and brothers, fought back emotions repeatedly as he spoke after signing the contract.

He opened his comments by extending well wishes to his former teammate and former Blue Jackets captain Nick Foligno, who has taken a leave of absence from the Chicago Blackhawks to be with his family while his 12-year-old daughter, Milana, undergoes follow-up surgery related to her congenital heart disease.

Atkinson then thanked the NHL players he played with and against, and his family, especially his wife, Natalie, and their three kids. There was also a classic "dad" moment.

"I can't wait to be home with you now and start this next chapter ... " Atkinson started to say, before playfully scolding his son: "Put the gum back in your mouth!"

Atkinson, a fan favorite since he made his debut during the 2011-12 season, also thanked Blue Jackets fans, who have continually supported the franchise despite only once making it to the second round of the playoffs in this, their 25th season in the NHL.

He remembered a night before tickets went on sale for the 2019 Stanley Cup playoffs. Atkinson and his family were walking from their downtown Columbus condo to a restaurant and noticed a throng of Blue Jackets fans camping outside Nationwide Arena to get a jump on tickets the following day.

Atkinson, at his wife's suggestion, bought tickets for 10 or 12 fans.

"I keep harping on this, but they're the best fans in the league," Atkinson said. "You show up for this team every single night, win or lose. Your love for the city, your team, and its players is unconditional.

"I hope I inspired kids of all ages to use the doubters and the negativity as the fuel for your fire. Prove everybody wrong. You are special. Nobody else will believe unless you do. I hope our teams we had back in 2017 to 2019 inspired young players to start playing. I know we have some of the next great NHL players right here in Columbus, and I hope to be part of their story."

Played with heart. Fought for glory.

Atkinson watched from the bench while the current Blue Jackets took warmups. A few minutes before puck drop, he took the "last lap" of his career, emerging from the Blue Jackets' bench to take a slow twirl around Nationwide for the last time.

It was such a slow twirl that the Blue Jackets and Avalanche began rushing onto the ice before Atkinson had cleared. Hey, what's the hurry, right? Atkinson stopped several times along his path to fist-bump fans and members of his family through the glass.

He wore his No. 13 jersey, which was most recently worn in Columbus by the late Johnny Gaudreau. Atkinson and Gaudreau were close friends.

Waddell and Atkinson said a position with the Blue Jackets has been discussed, but nothing has been determined yet. Waddell encouraged Atkinson to enjoy the next while with his family, the first year he hasn't played competitive hockey since before he was a teenager.

Riley, now an amateur scout for the Avalanche, had hoped to be in the crowd on Thursday, he said. But duty called. He was preparing for a trip to Boston for a weekend series between Boston University and Michigan State. Yes, he's looking for the next Cam Atkinson.

What drew him to Atkinson, he said, was the "confidence, the cockiness and the arrogance" he played with, despite his humble nature off the ice. Professional arrogance, that is, that pushed Atkinson to exceed everybody's expectations ... except his own.

"He had it in spades," said Riley, who also coached Atkinson for parts of two seasons in the American Hockey League before he was established in the NHL. "I've never had another player like him."

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' Evason roiled about 'soft' play in loss to Colorado Avalanche

By Brian Hedger – October 17, 2025

This one didn't sit well with the Blue Jackets, including their coach.

After watching a buzz saw that doubles as the Colorado Avalanche shred the Jackets for the better part of three periods in a 4-1 loss Oct. 16 at Nationwide Arena, Dean Evason was candid in his postgame assessments.

"The first three (games), we liked how we played," he said. "We didn't like how we played tonight. That's a good team, but we probably gave them way too much respect and didn't get to our game (to) play the way that we play, and that's the disappointing part here tonight."

The Avalanche (4-0-1) outshot the Blue Jackets (1-3-0) by a 37-23 margin, including 26-14 through the first two periods, and overcame a 1-0 deficit in the second to lead 3-1 starting the third. Those are impressive numbers from a proven Stanley Cup contender but don't fully reflect the carnage caused by Nathan MacKinnon, Cale Makar and the rest of a stacked lineup.

According to Natural Stat Trick, Colorado finished with huge edges in attempts (77-56), scoring chances (45-27) and high danger scoring chances (18-10) for a 5.17-2.68 expected goals margin.

"At the end of the day, we've got to play harder," Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan said. "It's home ice. We lost the game before (Oct. 13 vs New Jersey). We've got to find ways to win, and that's the hard part of this league. We've got to step up and get back to work."

Another way to put it is that watching an NHL team get overmatched because they're watching their opponent too much is painful to watch.

"Sure, they've got some good players, but so do we," Evason said. "That's not how we play, right? We were passive tonight. We were soft. We've got to play hard. If we're going to win hockey games, we've got to play hard, and we didn't play hard enough tonight to win, forget about playing against that team or against any team in the National Hockey League."

"That team," just happens to be one of the two or three deepest teams in the league, but the Blue Jackets aren't willing to accept that as an excuse.

"We've had enough learning experiences with this group," Evason said. "We shouldn't be in a position to learn that we have to work or (control) the respect level. ... We shouldn't care who the heck we're playing, right? We talk about that all the time. Who, what, when, where? The puck's dropped. Play hard. We didn't do it tonight. We've got to get back to that."

Merzlikins dazzles in Columbus Blue Jackets' loss to Colorado Avalanche

Some people are going to look at the final score, see that Elvis Merzlikins allowed three of the four goals the Blue Jackets allowed and grumble about his goaltending.

They couldn't be more inaccurate.

Merzlikins was beaten three times on shots that were redirected and fired through traffic, and he was the only reason the Avalanche didn't have a much larger margin of victory. Merzlikins played most of the game under siege, made several outstanding stops to keep it 0-0 after one period and finished with 33 saves on 36 shots for an impressive .917 save percentage.

Merzlikins and Jet Greaves both look strong after splitting the first four games evenly, which is one of the few bright spots the Blue Jackets can take from their 1-3-0 start.

"The goalie was real good," Evason said of Merzlikins. "Didn't see two tips and didn't see the (other) one, so Elvis was great."

Cam Atkinson's final twirl with Columbus Blue Jackets was memorable

Prior to the game, Cam Atkinson took his final lap around the ice to an ovation at Nationwide Arena, his home building for the first 10 years of his standout NHL career.

Donning his Blue Jackets uniform for the first time since being traded in June 2021, Atkinson soaked up every moment of his last official skate wearing his No. 13 jersey. He stayed out to join the Blue Jackets as they filed onto the ice, stood on the blue line for the anthem one last time and then joined his wife Natalie and their three kids to watch the game from the stands.

NHL rules deny two Columbus Blue Jackets goals

Nearing the end of the second period, Blue Jackets forward Dmitri Voronkov appeared to tie it 2-2 on a charge to the Avalanche net.

Referees Carter Sandlak and Chris Lee waved it off because Voronkov's left hand batted the puck out of mid-air off his own chest and into the net, which the NHL considers a hand pass. It was announced that Columbus issued a coach's challenge, but the review came from the league's video review center in Toronto.

That's why no penalty was assessed for delay of game following a failed challenge. According to the NHL, rule 78.5 (i) pertaining to pucks batted into the net with anything other than a stick. The league ruled that Voronkov illegally batted the puck with his left hand before it caromed off his chest into the net.

Late in the third, it happened again. Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson was denied a goal after a teammate batted a puck out of mid-air into the Avs' crease, where he smacked it into the net. The play was ruled a hand pass between teammates, which isn't allowed.

It was the third time in the Blue Jackets' first four games that an apparent goal was either waved off or overturned by video review.

Yegor Chinakhov attracts scouting attention

A packed scouting list doesn't always mean there's a player or players on the trading block, but that might have been the case in this game.

Yegor Chinakhov, who requested a trade from Blue Jackets president/general manager Don Waddell in the summer, skated in his regular season debut. He didn't skate much, logging nine minutes on 12 shifts with the fourth line, but the scouting section inside the press box was packed.

The game drew credential requests from 25 scouts representing 21 teams, including three from the Edmonton Oilers. Edmonton was linked to interest in Chinakhov during the preseason, but nothing materialized.

Chinakhov sat out the Blue Jackets' first three games as a healthy scratch but played his first game of 2025-26 as a replacement for Miles Wood (upper body/face). Wood will miss at least a week with a facial injury near his left eye, so Chinakhov is expected to remain in the lineup Oct. 18 against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets celebrate Cam Atkinson's retirement, fall to Colorado Avalanche

By Brian Hedger – October 16, 2025

The Blue Jackets tried to put a bow on Cam Atkinson's retirement celebration, but the Colorado Avalanche weren't in the mood to play along Oct. 16 at Nationwide Arena.

Despite Ivan Provorov putting the Blue Jackets up 1-0 early in the second period with his first goal of the season, the Avalanche stormed back for a 4-1 victory to spoil a night that began with Atkinson suiting up for one final lap around his NHL home rink for the first 10 years of his career.

Cale Makar, Brock Nelson and Valeri Nichushkin scored three unanswered goals in the second to build a 3-1 lead starting the third and Nichushkin added a second into an empty net late in the third to seal a win that kept the Avalanche (4-0-1) undefeated in regulation.

The Blue Jackets appeared to score late in the second and third periods, but both goals were called off for violations of the NHL's hand pass rules. The first would've tied the game 2-2 and then second would've pulled the Jackets within 3-2 late in the third.

Elvis Merzlikins was one of the few bright spots for the Blue Jackets (1-3-0), making several dazzling stops among 33 saves to keep the score respectable with his team outshot 37-23 for the game and outplayed most of the way.

It doesn't get any easier for the Jackets, either.

Their next game is Oct. 18 when the Tampa Bay Lightning, another Stanley Cup contender, visits Nationwide Arena after playing Oct. 17 in Detroit.

The Columbus Dispatch / Highlights from Cam Atkinson's final day with the Columbus Blue Jackets

By Brian Hedger – October 16, 2025

During his final day as a Columbus Blue Jacket, after signing a one-day contract Oct. 16 in front of his family and a roomful of media, Cam Atkinson was engulfed in Union Blue.

Wearing a Blue Jackets polo shirt and flashing the smile that made him a recognizable face in Columbus, Atkinson held court to begin a day that will finish with him skating one final lap around Nationwide Arena wearing his No. 13 jersey that fans still wear to games four years since he was traded.

Years before Atkinson, 36, finished his playing career with the Philadelphia Flyers and Tampa Bay Lightning, he and his wife, Natalie, made the decision that Columbus would be home for their family, which includes two young sons and a daughter all born at Riverside Hospital.

“Taking my final lap will be one of the most humbling moments of my career,” Atkinson said. “Getting to finish my career where it all started in a city that became home, with the fans and people that took me in as one of their own, and with my family and friends watching, is nothing short of a dream come true. Thank you to the Blue Jackets organization for welcoming me back.”

The Blue Jackets, under former general manager Scott Howson, selected Atkinson in the sixth round of the 2008 NHL Draft. It was his second draft eligible year, and he went 157th overall. His version is a slicker sales pitch: He refers to himself the third overall pick of the sixth round in 2008.

Either way, he far exceeded expectations for an undersized forward coming off a bad leg fracture in prep school. Blue Jackets president/GM Don Waddell read off an abbreviated list of Atkinson’s NHL accomplishments before each put their signatures on a contract, and it drove home why Atkinson became a shining star for Columbus.

Atkinson, however, hopes he’s remembered for things he’s done and continues to do for Columbus. He co-founded The Battery Hockey Academy, which has become a developmental gem for youth hockey players, and his Force Fund Network has supported first responders and military members for years.

“When I think about my legacy in hockey, I want it to be that I made a difference, whether it was through my philanthropic work with the Force Network Fund or The Battery Hockey Academy,” Atkinson said. “I just hope that when people think of me, they think of me not only for the things I accomplished as a hockey player but the things I’m passionate about as a person.”

Here are highlights of Atkinson’s retirement press conference:

Cam Atkinson starts retirement press conference supporting Nick Foligno

Cam Atkinson and Nick Foligno, and their families, became close when both were members of the Blue Jackets. It was no surprise that before Atkinson started his prepared thoughts on retiring, he said he and his family were thinking of the Foligno family as their oldest child, Milana, went into her third corrective heart surgery in Boston.

“We love you,” Atkinson said. “We’re thinking of you, and you’ve got this ... our little princess warrior.”

Columbus Blue Jackets star Cam Atkinson issues many thanks for NHL career

Atkinson's prepared comments included thanks to every group he could remember, from teammates to opponents to coaches to his parents, brothers, wife, kids, brothers' families, in-laws and last, but not least, fans.

"To the fans, you are the heartbeat of this league," Atkinson said. "The Blue Jackets, Lightning and Flyers fans ... you're the best fans in the world, but especially the Blue Jackets and The 5th Line. You show up for this team every single night, win or lose. Your love for this city, your team and its players is unconditional."

Columbus Blue Jackets star Cam Atkinson acknowledges Johnny Gaudreau

Atkinson will wear his No. 13 jersey while he takes his final lap because that's what he wore for almost his entire 10 seasons with the Blue Jackets. There was a brief stretch where he gave No. 89 a try after wearing it for the U.S. at the 2018 men's world championships, but that was short-lived.

The reason Atkinson switched to No. 89 in that tournament was because No. 13 was taken by Johnny Gaudreau, a star with the Calgary Flames who'd committed to play for the U.S. before Atkinson. Three years later, the Blue Jackets traded Atkinson to the Flyers, and in 2022 Gaudreau shocked the NHL by signing with Columbus as a free agent.

Atkinson told Gaudreau and his wife, Meredith, they'd love Columbus and even hand delivered the Blue Jackets' prized addition a No. 13 jersey. So, Atkinson knows No. 13 is now associated with Gaudreau, who was tragically killed along with his brother, Matthew, when they were struck by a vehicle biking together Aug. 29, 2024, in Oldmans Township, New Jersey.

"It is obviously not lost on me that tonight I will be the first player since Johnny Hockey and maybe the last, to wear the No. 13 for the Blue Jackets on the ice," Atkinson said. "Johnny and I were really good friends, as well as Meredith and their kids. I'll think about him and his family as I take my final lap tonight."

Columbus Blue Jackets star Cam Atkinson can't escape Tony Mazza prank

There were moments Atkinson paused to keep from melting into a puddle of tears, but mostly he kept the mood light with his usual candor.

That's part of what made him so popular with Blue Jackets fans.

One of his most epic moments in Columbus, which still gets viewed on YouTube, was the time he was targeted by Foligno with a practice joke. The prank involved Atkinson calling season-ticket holders to thank them for their loyalty, but one guy in particular really tested his limits.

The fan's name was "Tony Mazza," who was played by Foligno using a disguised voice. Mazza asks if Atkinson can arrange a meeting for him after a game with Atkinson and former coach John Tortorella, and at point asked Atkinson if he's 'that little guy?'

It's a stitch.

Years later, Atkinson got even by pulling a prank on Foligno that involved Romeo's Pizza, whom he'd just teamed with for a promotional deal. Atkinson had a TV crew go to Foligno's house under the guise of an interview as a long line of pizza delivery drivers keeps showing up to his house, one after another.

Foligno's temperature started to bubble just as Atkinson called off deliveries by making the final one himself.

"Tony Mazza still haunts me to this day," Atkinson said, laughing. "I'm not a big prankster. I never have been, but I had to, obviously, get Nick back for that. You know ... I can't say the things I want to say, but I got him back pretty good with the pizzas, and I actually had to stop sending pizzas because he was going to fight everyone at his house. Hopefully I got him back, but g-- ---- ... Tony Mazza."

Cam Atkinson hopes to join Columbus Blue Jackets' front office

No spots are open in the Jackets' front office, but Atkinson and Waddell have met multiple times to discuss him possibly joining the organization down the road.

"We both have thoughts about it," Waddell said. "I've told him, 'You've missed your family for so many years. This year, your first priority is taking care of the kids and your wife and all that, because you never get those years back.' So, nothing official, but we are talking."

Atkinson didn't miss a beat.

"I told Don I'm not coming for his job," he said. "But I think he knows, and everyone knows, especially everyone in this room, how much I love being here and being part of the Blue Jackets organization. So, hopefully, one day I'll be able to come back and work for the organization."

The Columbus Blue Jackets / Merzlikins starts, Chinakhov to make season debut for Columbus Blue Jackets

By Brian Hedger – October 16, 2025

Elvis Merzlikins will make his second start in net, and Yegor Chinakhov will make his season debut for the Blue Jackets on Oct. 16 at Nationwide Arena.

Merzlikins (1-0-0) made 48 saves on 52 shots in a 7-4 victory for the Blue Jackets on Oct. 11 at the Minnesota Wild to split their first two games on the road. He'll now face the Colorado Avalanche, who are 3-0-1. Chinakhov watched the Jackets' first three games as a healthy scratch but draws into the lineup as a replacement for Miles Wood (upper body), who might be facing a long-term issue.

Wood is out for at least a week and possibly longer after sustaining a facial injury near or involving his left eye, which was struck by a stick blade Oct. 13 against the New Jersey Devils.

Prior to the game against the Avalanche, star forward Cam Atkinson will be honored with a ceremony after signing a one-day contract to officially retire with the Blue Jackets, who selected him in the sixth round (157th overall) in the 2008 NHL Draft.

Atkinson will pull on his No. 13 jersey and skate one final lap in front of Blue Jackets fans, who watched him grow into a franchise pillar during a decade he spent playing in Columbus.

"This is home for us, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else," Atkinson said, including his wife, Natalie, and three children all born at Riverside Hospital. "I'll keep harping on it. The best fans, 'The 5th Line,' are some of the most loyal fans in the league. I've been part of some other organizations, and I can tell you they're a special group. They're there through the ups and downs, and I'm just happy to be able to call this place home."

The Blue Jackets are off to a 1-2-0 start, and now have a daunting challenge facing Nathan MacKinnon, Gabriel Landeskog, Cale Makar and the Avalanche (3-0-1), who are paying their lone visit of the season to Nationwide Arena.

Miles Wood and Erik Gudbranson are injured and won't play for the Blue Jackets. Wood has a facial laceration near his left eye and Gudbranson is dealing with a suspected concussion.

It will be the first time Blue Jackets center Charlie Coyle and Avalanche rookie forward Gavin Brindley face the teams that included them in a pre-draft trade this past summer that sent Coyle and Wood to Columbus for Brindley and two draft picks.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets forward Miles Wood to miss at least week with 'scary' injury

By Brian Hedger – October 16, 2025

Miles Wood might be out of the Blue Jackets' lineup for a while.

After taking a high stick near his left eye in the Jackets' 3-2 loss Oct. 13 at Nationwide Arena, the veteran forward will be sidelined for at least a week before he's re-evaluated. That means he'll miss a game Oct. 16 against the Colorado Avalanche, who traded Wood and center Charlie Coyle to the Blue Jackets for forward prospect Gavin Brindley and two draft picks before the 2025 NHL Draft.

More concerning for Wood is what coach Dean Evason said Oct. 15, when asked after practice if Wood "will be OK" over time.

"I can't answer that," Evason said. "I think it's more of an evaluation after everything gets healed up and calmed down. But he's OK ... but you never know in these types of situations."

Evason said Wood has vision in his left eye, which took the brunt of Devils defenseman Dougie Hamilton's stick blade as the Blue Jackets winger bolted for the net-front. Wood immediately dropped and started pounding the ice in pain before being led to the locker room for medical assessment.

He didn't return, which for a hockey player is a scary indicator of severity.

Hockey players pride themselves on gritting through painful injuries, often needing dental repairs and/or stitches to keep playing. Wood left with a gash under his left eye, couldn't continue and Evason said his initial week away is just to allow swelling to subside for further assessment.

"Any time, even with the (face) shields ... sticks can get up in there," Evason said. "So, yeah, 100%, when your head's involved or your eyes are involved, it's scary as hell."

This is the second straight season that a Blue Jackets player has been hit near the eye with a stick.

Last season, it was defenseman Jack Johnson catching an inadvertent stick under his visor that scratched the cornea in his right eye. He left the game, returned later for two shifts and departed again. Johnson had to wear a protective contact lens to protect the eye until it healed.

The Blue Jackets may also be without Erik Gudbranson (upper body) when they host the Colorado Avalanche on Oct. 16 at Nationwide Arena. The veteran defenseman was smashed into the boards by Minnesota Wild forward Marcus Foligno on Oct. 11 at Grand Casino Arena in St. Paul, Minnesota with a hit Evason said the Blue Jackets "didn't like."

He missed the home opener against the Devils and hasn't been assigned a recovery timeframe, which is often the case with players who have a concussion. Yegor Chinakhov is set to make his season debut to replace Wood, while Jake Christiansen could play his second straight game replacing Gudbranson on the third defensive pairing.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Outworked in 4-1 Loss to Avalanche

By Mark Scheig – October 16, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets honored one of their greatest ever in Cam Atkinson on Thursday night. That was about the only positive that came from the rest of the night.

The Colorado Avalanche fell behind early but stormed back with three second-period goals on their way to a 4-1 win over the Blue Jackets. Brock Nelson eventually scored the game winner.

The story of this game was the Blue Jackets not getting to their game.

Game Recap

The teams went scoreless through the first period. While the Avalanche controlled most of the play, goaltender Elvis Merzlikins stopped all 12 shots faced. Scott Wedgewood answered making seven saves of his own.

The Blue Jackets opened the scoring just 1:36 into the second. Kirill Marchenko took the puck behind the net and found Ivan Provorov who put it off the bar and in for his first goal of the season.

The Avalanche then took over the rest of the second period. Merzlikins stopped everything until Cale Makar scored midway through the period. He buried a Martin Necas pass in which Merzlikins had no chance.

Just 1:12 later, Nelson deflected a Brent Burns shot to make it 2-1. Then with just under four seconds left in the second, Valeri Nichushkin deflected a back-breaking goal past Merzlikins to make it 3-1 going into the second intermission.

Scott Wedgewood was excellent again on Thursday night. ([Jess Starr](#)/The Hockey Writers)

Earlier in the period, the Blue Jackets thought they got one back when it appeared Dmitri Voronkov knocked one in. It was waved off by the official. After a review, it was determined the puck was directed in as opposed to just hitting Voronkov. Head coach Dean Evason admitted this moment seemed to take the sails out of the team.

The Blue Jackets seemed a step behind most of the night. Postgame, the players felt they didn't to their game and didn't have the work ethic needed.

Things didn't get much better for the Blue Jackets in the third. Nichushkin added an empty netter for his second of the night to get to the final score of 4-1.

Merzlikins was the only positive of the game identified by Evason postgame. He finished with 32 saves. Wedgewood stopped 22 of 23 to help the Avalanche improve to 4-0-1 on the season.

The Blue Jackets will return to practice Friday morning in advance of their next game Saturday night at home against the Tampa Bay Lightning. Meanwhile, the Avalanche now head home after spending time in the East and will host the Boston Bruins on Saturday night.