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The Athletic / Conor Garland scores 2 more goals, leads Blue Jackets' strong win over Lightning

By Aaron Portzline – March 11, 2026

TAMPA, Fla. — There was so much to appreciate about the way the Columbus Blue Jackets played Tuesday. Their special teams — power play and penalty kill — were connected and dangerous. After two leaky games, they were much tighter defensively.

But the real standout of the Blue Jackets' 5-2 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning was winger Conor Garland, who joined the club just five days earlier at the NHL trade deadline and has made an impressive first impression.

Garland scored two goals, giving him four in three games with Columbus, and the Blue Jackets extended their point streak to seven games (4-0-3) — matching their season-long — before 19,092 in Benchmark International Arena.

What thrilled the Blue Jackets' bench and a surprising number of Columbus fans in the crowd was a third-period scene in which Tampa Bay defenseman Victor Hedman (6-feet-7, 245 pounds) crowded goaltender Elvis Merzlikins after a stop, and Garland (5-10, 165 pounds) went charging after him.

"Just watch him play," Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness said. "He fits right in because he's persistent. He pressures the puck; he hangs on to the puck.

"Did you see him pushing big Victor at the end? You gotta love the kid's spunk, but that's his reputation. That's why we went and got him. He's a tenacious guy. He's not going to back away from anybody. He's not afraid of any situation."

Ivan Provorov, Kirill Marchenko and Dante Fabbro also scored for the Blue Jackets, while Zach Werenski and Sean Monahan each had two assists. Merzlikins, looking calm and composed, had 16 saves.

The win allowed the Blue Jackets to sweep the three-game season series against Tampa Bay for just the second time in franchise history.

"They're one of the best teams in the league, with some of the best players in the world," Werenski said. "And we feel like when we played like that, we can play with anyone and beat anyone.

"We were all connected. It starts with the forecheck, tracking back (on pucks), our gaps, the breakouts. ... It all ties in together, and I feel like we were really connected tonight."

When the Blue Jackets acquired Garland from the Vancouver Canucks for a pair of draft picks Thursday, he was in a 23-game goal-scoring drought, the longest of his career. He didn't score in his Blue Jackets debut Saturday, either.

But the floodgates have opened. He's the first Blue Jackets player to score four goals in his first three games, and his seamless fit alongside Monahan and winger Kent Johnson has given Columbus a second scoring line.

Incredibly, Garland had just seven goals in 50 games with Vancouver before the trade.

It's similar to the impact Mason Marchment had earlier this season after the Blue Jackets acquired him in December from Seattle, where his offensive game had fizzled.

"Just the way he plays ... he plays the right way," Werenski said. "He competes. He works extremely hard in battles. He's a smaller guy, but he doesn't play like that, and I think that brings everyone else into the fight.

"He's added a jolt to that line. Obviously, the goals, but just the way he plays. He's all over the place, making plays, playing hard, and you can never have enough of that."

Garland insisted he wasn't bothered by his lack of goals in Vancouver or his scoring slump when he arrived in Columbus. He was playing the right way, he said, and goals aren't the only measure of his game.

That message hasn't changed.

"My confidence doesn't change," Garland said. "I mean, I was confident then, as well. I like winning, and I like competing. And, you know, we're in every game here, so it's fun to be a part of."

The win allowed the Blue Jackets to keep pace in the wild Eastern Conference. They sit 2 points behind the Boston Bruins for the second wild-card spot and 3 points behind both Pittsburgh and the New York Islanders for second and third place, respectively, in the Metropolitan Division.

The Blue Jackets took a 3-1 lead with a three-goal flurry in the second period.

Provorov started it with a slap shot through traffic at 5:57 of the second, and Garland gave the Jackets a 2-1 lead when he buried a shot from the slot off a pass from Johnson 30 seconds later.

The 3-1 goal was a nifty power-play goal scored by Marchenko on a one-timer from the left circle. It was his second power-play goal in two nights, his 24th goal on the season and the 99th of his career.

The Lightning pulled to 3-2 before the end of the second, but Garland's power-play goal, off a slick drop pass from Monahan in tight quarters, restored the two-goal lead (4-2) only 4:00 into the third period.

Fabbro's 185-foot empty net goal with 4:32 remaining capped the scoring.

Bowness wasn't too pleased with how the Blue Jackets have defended since play resumed after the Olympic break, he said. But he was thrilled with the way the Blue Jackets played Tuesday.

He highlighted first-line center Adam Fantilli's hustling backcheck to strip Lightning star Nikita Kucherov of the puck before a two-on-one could be executed. It likely saved a goal, keeping Tampa Bay's lead at 1-0.

“Making a great defensive play is every bit as important as scoring the goal,” Bowness said. “And he made some good plays, obviously, and he had some really good looks. So that’s the 200-foot game we need from him. That’s the role we want from him. He stood up tonight.”

The Columbus Dispatch / Conor Garland igniting Columbus Blue Jackets: 'Just watch him play'

By Brian Hedger – March 11, 2026

It's only been three games, but the Blue Jackets might be holding a winning lottery ticket after a March 6 trade to acquire Conor Garland.

Thus far, Garland is a perfect match for the Jackets, who've watched their scrappy new forward become the first player in franchise history to score his first four goals with the team in just three games. He recorded back-to-back, two-goal games on March 9-10 against the Los Angeles Kings and Tampa Bay Lightning.

It's not just his goal-scoring the Blue Jackets have benefited from, though.

Coach Rick Bowness has enjoyed watching Garland put the puck in the net, sure, but there are other reasons the new guy's transition has been so seamless.

"Just watch him play," Bowness told reporters in his postgame press conference shown on the Blue Jackets' YouTube channel. "He fits right in because he's persistent, he pressures the puck, he hangs onto the puck. ... Did you see him pushing big Victor Hedman? You've got to love the kid's spunk, but that's the reputation. That's why we went out and got him."

Bowness couldn't help but laugh recalling that moment in the game, which happened with 9:13 left and the Blue Jackets leading the Lightning 4-2 at Benchmark International Arena. After giving the Jackets that two-goal lead on a power play early in the third, Garland stayed aggressive.

The tussle with Hedman began with a board battle behind the Blue Jackets' net, which spilled out to the net-front for Garland, who's 5 feet 10 and 165 pounds, to push the 6-7, 244-pound defenseman away from goalie Elvis Merzlikins. Hedman smiled while smushing Garland's face using gloved hands and telephone pole arms, but the Blue Jackets' fireplug gave it right back.

"He's a tenacious guy and he's not going to back up from anybody," Bowness said. "He's not afraid of any situation, and I do love the way he hangs onto the puck."

Garland's teammates do, too, including Sean Monahan and Kent Johnson. Monahan centers the second line, skating between Johnson and Garland, and their instant chemistry has looked supercharged at times.

Monahan has assisted on three of Garland's four goals, including both against the Lightning, while Johnson set up the first in Tampa with a pretty backhand feed to Garland in the slot.

"He's a smaller guy, but he doesn't play like it, and I think that brings everyone else into the fight," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "I think he's added a jolt to that line that he's on. Obviously,

the goals, but just the way he plays ... the sticks, the backchecks, the forecheck. I mean, he's all over the place making plays and playing hard, and you can never have enough of that."

The Blue Jackets entered March 11 within two points of a wild-card playoff spot, and Garland is exactly what they need for the final 18 games of the regular season. He isn't a rental addition, either, despite creating that vibe by keeping his commentary about the trade focused only on this season.

Garland has a six-year, \$36 million contract extension that kicks in July 1, and the Blue Jackets expect him to become a long-term pillar of the organization.

Thinking the Vancouver Canucks likely wouldn't shop him at the deadline after signing that extension July 1, 2025, Garland packed light for a two-game road trip March 6-7 in Chicago and Winnipeg. Shortly after landing in Chicago on March 5, he was told that multiple teams had sent trade proposals, including the Blue Jackets.

It had to be jolting, initially, but Garland quickly warmed to the idea of leaving the struggling Canucks to join a new team in a playoff push. Once the Jackets' offer was accepted, he looked closer at the roster and liked what he saw.

"On paper, when I was looking at possible teams I would go to, [the Blue Jackets] were definitely a team that looked appealing to me, and so far, I've felt the transition's been pretty smooth," Garland told reporters in Tampa. "I'm not just saying that because of goals. I just feel like the way they play, you know, these guys play hard. They compete, they're very serious about their craft and it's just a fun group to be a part of."

The feeling is mutual.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets complete sweep of Tampa Bay Lightning: takeaways

By Brian Hedger – March 11, 2026

Most of the names on the Blue Jackets' jerseys were different, but watching them frustrate and dominate the Tampa Bay Lightning to polish off a sweep sure looked familiar.

The name of Tampa Bay's building has changed from Amalie Arena to the phonetically frustrating Benchmark International Arena, but the Jackets' 5-2 romp there March 10 looked at times like their stunning sweep of the Lightning in the first round of the 2019 playoffs.

Despite allowing the game's first goal and trailing 1-0 after the first period, the Blue Jackets were aggressors from start to finish. The Lightning dropped their sixth of seven games (1-6-0) since returning from the Olympic break, including an 8-7 loss March 8 in Buffalo, but they're still one of the NHL's best teams.

Those waiting for the other shoe to drop on the Jackets after they built a 3-1 lead, just like it has dropped most of the season, never heard a thud. The Jackets steadily gained steam, outworked the Lightning despite finishing a home/road back-to-back, until they seized control late in the third.

As a result, the Blue Jackets kept pace with the Boston Bruins and New York Islanders while gaining a point on the Pittsburgh Penguins in their quest to land a playoff spot. The knowledge and confidence they added by dominating the Lightning might be worth more.

"They now know what we look like when we're playing well, and just as important, they know what we look like when we're not," coach Rick Bowness said in postgame comments

Published by the Blue Jackets. "We went into that third period determined that, 'We're playing on our toes, we're not playing on our heels.' "

Here are three takeaways:

Conor Garland showing catalytic chemistry for Columbus Blue Jackets

Conor Garland wasn't expecting to be traded, especially after signing a six-year contract extension with the Vancouver Canucks last summer worth \$36 million. It doesn't start until July 1, so it's understandable if Garland was a little upset by a March 6 trade that sent him to the Blue Jackets.

He sure looks happy now after jumping into a tight playoff chase with his new teammates. He has provided an instant spark to a forward line with Sean Monahan at center and Kent Johnson at left wing, and they're already hot. Garland's skills match his linemates' talents, and their sparks have led to him scoring two goals in consecutive games for a total of four in three games following the trade.

Garland had a goal drought stretching back to Dec. 16 with the Canucks, and it lasted just one game in Columbus. The Blue Jackets were already one of the NHL's hottest teams prior to Garland's arrival, but he might be exactly a catalyst that gets that line roaring.

Special teams were special for Columbus Blue Jackets

The longest-running joke among Blue Jackets fans includes the phrase, "Decline it!" being shouted when a power play is awarded rather than a penalty shot. The Jackets' power play has struggled for most of their 25-year existence, especially the past few, and the penalty kill got off to an ice-cold start to this season.

Both were needed against the Lightning, who went 0-3 on power plays and allowed two goals on four Blue Jackets' power plays. Marchenko's goal to cap a man-advantage was his second 5-on-4 advantage in two days, but Marchenko's most encouraging traits are the Jackets' improved re-entries, and their puck movement and puck hounding to maintain possession.

Elvis Merzlikins rebounds for Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets went with Elvis Merzlikins in net against the Lightning after Jet Greaves absorbed a 5-4 overtime loss to the Los Angeles Kings on March 9 at Nationwide Arena.

Merzlikins was 1-1-1 with a bloated 3.79 goals-against average and clunky .850 save percentage in four games (three starts) since the Olympic break. He was sharp in Tampa despite allowing the first goal off a deflection. He stopped 16 of 18 shots, including five shot during three unsuccessful Tampa Bay power plays.

Merzlikins also tacked on a primary assist for his second helper of the season, giving the puck to Dante Fabbro for a long-distance goal into Tampa's empty net in the third.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Getting Major Boost From New-Look Second Line

By Mark Scheig – March 11, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets spent most of their season getting good efforts from most of their forward lines. The one notable exception to that was their second line.

Sean Monahan played through health issues most of the season. Kent Johnson's numbers were not to the level that he nor the team expected. Different players rotated through that line hoping to spark some chemistry that just didn't come.

That was until Conor Garland arrived on the scene. My how the tables have turned.

Garland was acquired by the Blue Jackets the day before the trade deadline in exchange for two draft picks. He was the top-six right-winger the team identified as a priority. He has not disappointed in the least so far.

In the Blue Jackets' 5-2 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday night, Garland scored twice. That marked his second consecutive game with two goals. He became the first player in team history to score four goals in his first three games.

Garland's goals are getting the spotlight which is well deserved. But those goals don't happen if not for the work of his linemates. That's where his early impact can really be felt. The entire line of Johnson, Monahan and Garland have quickly found chemistry.

Especially in the game against the Lightning, you can see they are elevating each other's play. If they are able to maintain this down the stretch, the Blue Jackets become a more dangerous team given what their top line continues to do on a nightly basis.

Second-Line Boost

The theme here will be positioning and little plays. The 2-1 goal by Garland on Tuesday night was assisted by Johnson and Monahan. Everyone did their thing to make this goal happen on different fronts.

Monahan is able to achieve a zone entry despite having three Lightning players near him. He makes a pass back to Johnson that ends up missing him and the Lightning player Brayden Point. With the puck up for grabs at the top of the zone, it's a battle between Garland and Gage Goncalves for possession.

Garland wins that battle causing the puck to stay in the zone. With the puck now available in the circle to the right of Andrei Vasilevskiy, Declan Carlile has a chance to make a play. Instead, the puck bounces on him.

That opening allowed Johnson to make a play of his own to poke the puck to Monahan who was in front of Vasilevskiy. The positioning here of everyone involved allowed what looked like a nothing play to

become a prime scoring chance. It went from Monahan seemingly being surrounded to Garland being wide open to score.

Monahan creates chaos in front of the net by getting a shot on goal that Vasilevskiy has to save. Here's where the awareness and skill of Johnson really comes out. After poking the puck to Monahan, he skates over to where the puck could be if there's a rebound. He gets there and is on his backhand. Instead of taking a low percentage shot, he dishes the puck to the slot where Garland could receive the pass.

This is where Johnson really shines when he gets opportunities to make plays. Although he didn't turn to see where Garland was, he was focused on getting the puck. He centered the puck believing Garland would be in the neighborhood to receive it. It got there. That goal gave the Blue Jackets a lead they wouldn't give up again for the rest of the night.

This is a case of all members of the line doing their part both with and without the puck. It's also a case of being in positions to make aggressive plays when needed. Monahan gained zone entry then went to the net. Garland won a puck battle and stayed ready afterwards. Johnson made two great plays with the puck to keep it alive while being positionally ready to do so.

Two Lightning defenders went at Monahan after the puck got to the front of the net. This is where he is at his best. His presence allowed his wingers Johnson and Garland to utilize time and space. Monahan did everything right on the play that caused the defense to react to him. The playmakers did their job as a result.

Up until this point, time and space was tough to come by especially for Johnson. On this line, he's getting more of those things. It's no wonder his play has vastly improved in recent games.

On the 4-2 power-play goal, Monahan and Garland were up to their old tricks again. This time, Zach Werenski was able to keep the puck in the zone. The puck gets to Monahan with two Lightning defenders around him. Monahan is able to slip a sneaky backhand to Garland with time and space. Garland's backhand was a much-needed insurance goal.

With Monahan, the Olympic break has seemed to help him tremendously. He's back to being the two-way threat he's known to be. He was outstanding on Tuesday night creating all kinds of havoc for the Lightning while being able to make key plays.

Numbers Since Garland's Arrival

Here is a look at the numbers for the second line since Garland made his debut on Saturday night against the Utah Mammoth.

Monahan: 0-3-3 while impacting the game at both ends of the ice. Overall, Monahan has six points in his last six games.

Johnson: 0-1-1 but playing with more confidence knowing there is more time and space on the ice.

Garland: 4-0-4 with consecutive multi-goal games. His relentless and aggressive approach has also helped Monahan and Johnson be able to do their jobs better.

You'll notice the ice times of Johnson and Garland were down compared to Monahan's. The wingers are not part of the penalty kill whereas Monahan is. If the line continues to produce, it'll be hard not to give them more ice time.

As we always say in these types of situations, it's early with just three games together. But what that second line has been able to do has given a major boost to the Blue Jackets. They hadn't won a game in Tampa Bay since 2021.

There's a reason the Blue Jackets went out and acquired Garland. It was to add scoring to the top-six. And as we're seeing also, it was to send a message to the team that they're good enough to make the playoffs.

As of this writing, the Blue Jackets remain on the outside of the playoff picture. They will need more nights like Tuesday from everyone on the roster especially that new-look second line. Even though it's been just three games, the impact they've had cannot be denied.

The Hockey Writers / 3 Takeaways From the Blue Jackets' Disappointing Loss to the Kings

By Wesley Minke - March 10, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets came into the night trailing the Boston Bruins for the second wildcard spot in the Eastern Conference by just three points. With an overtime loss to the Los Angeles Kings on Monday, they gain just one point on the Bruins and stand just two points back with 18 games to play in the regular season.

The Blue Jackets started the game with a four-minute power play following a high-sticking call on Quinton Byfield that cut Mason Marchment's lip just three seconds into the game. The Blue Jackets registered seven shots on the power play but just could not sneak one past Anton Forsberg.

This would go on for much of the first period with the Blue Jackets struggling to get shots past Forsberg, and again struggling to get on the board first. Something that has plagued them in both of these back-to-back overtime losses.

Slow Start Causes Heroics

The Blue Jackets acquired Conor Garland from the Vancouver Canucks in an attempt to solidify their offense and make a real push for the playoffs. He was the main catalyst for the Blue Jackets' scoring efforts on Monday with two goals, the second of which gave them their first lead of the game at the 12-minute mark of the second period.

However, falling behind 2-0 early really proved to be a massive difference maker as the Blue Jackets battled from behind just to steal a point with a power-play goal by Kirill Marchenko to tie the game 4-4 with just under two minutes to play in the third period.

In overtime, the Blue Jackets couldn't find a way to get possession of the puck, and the Kings scored a goal off a timely line change by Adrian Kempe, as he potted number 25 on the campaign, and the Kings won a thriller in overtime.

This is also where sometimes stats can be deceiving as well. The Blue Jackets outshot the Kings 17-7 in the first period; however, they did not control the pace of the game until Garland's first goal with his new club made it 2-1, and Columbus went into the first intermission with some confidence.

They needed every bit of Garland's efforts to sneak away with a point, but they have to find a way to start faster on the road tonight against the Tampa Bay Lightning if they want a better chance to come away with a massive road win.

Defense Lacking Structure

The Blue Jackets were unable to stay attached defensively in the overtime period, which is one of the main reasons they gave up an unevaded look from Kempe just off the left circle in their defensive zone. Kempe, fresh off a line change, walked right into the zone and ripped it past Jet Greaves.

The biggest problem in both of their most recent overtime periods has been unchecked defenders with far too easy looks at a goaltender with no help. They have not done a great job of playing within the defensive structure that led them to back-to-back shutouts heading into the Olympic break.

The defensive efforts reach farther than just the goals per game metric that head coach Rick Bowness touched on. It is also about controlling the defensive zone and the neutral zone, which, uncoincidentally the Blue Jackets have also struggled to do.

If their defensive effort is going to turn around, it might be short one of the Blue Jackets' best defenders in Erik Gudbranson. He took an uncalled cross-check to the ribs from Artemi Panarin in the first period, and didn't return to the game the rest of the way. It may have been precautionary, but that would be a big loss for the Blue Jackets if he has to miss significant time.

The Blue Jackets need to find a way to once again limit slot chances in front of their netminder. One of the big reasons they were able to limit goals so much was the solid structure in front of the net, and lately that has been supremely lacking. They need to get back to the basics, and force shots from out wide, and at the top of the zone.

Goals Come in Bunches

The positive from this game, and the previous one against the Utah Mammoth that the Blue Jackets lost in overtime, is that when they score, they can do it in bunches. They have found a way to rally quite a bit when they are behind, and they find ways to tally goals and do it in a hurry.

Monday was nothing short of the same for Columbus, as they quickly fell behind 2-0, and rallied back to take a 3-2 lead on the back of two goals from Garland, and a goal from Denton Mateychuk on a tight window shot.

The scoring punch against the Mammoth came from the top line, but against the Kings, the depth proved worth it for the Blue Jackets yet again as they came up clutch to secure a point. Garland also proved he was worth the trade for the Blue Jackets.

As the Blue Jackets continue to score at a rate they haven't been able to capture, the defense has to be adequate enough for them to rely on the goals to get by. The defense has to improve, as the schedule doesn't get any easier, and the goal scoring they are going to face doesn't get any lighter.

The biggest thing the Blue Jackets need is consistency, because they are good enough to win with the scoring they have. If they can continue to score in bunches, they will be in a good spot to win a lot of games. However, if the offense can't keep producing at this current rate, a dry spell could mean the end of their season.

The Hockey Writers / 5 NHL Teams Set up to Make Runs After the 2026 Trade Deadline

By Alex Chauvancy – March 11, 2026

The NHL Trade Deadline has come and gone. Now the attention shifts to the playoff race over the final five weeks of the regular season and beyond. Which teams have put themselves in a position to make a run over the final few weeks of the regular season and into the postseason? Let's take a look.

Minnesota Wild

Additions:

- Quinn Hughes
- Bobby Brink
- Jeff Petry
- Nick Foligno
- Michael McCarron

The Minnesota Wild have one of the most difficult playoff paths due to the NHL's unserious playoff format. They'll likely face the Dallas Stars in Round 1, and a date with the Colorado Avalanche could follow.

Fortunately for the Wild, general manager Bill Guerin has done an excellent job building up his team for a playoff run. Even though the Quinn Hughes trade happened months ago, you can't ignore it when assessing the Wild's trades.

The Wild have been a significantly better team since acquiring Hughes, which comes as no surprise. They have an expected goals share (xG%) of 53.72 percent with Hughes on the ice at five-on-five, as well as a goal differential of +9.

Hughes is arguably the second-best defenseman in the NHL after Cale Makar, but he's not the only player Guerin has brought in for a playoff run. Nick Foligno and Michael McCarron will give them some bottom-six depth, and Bobby Brink is a solid addition for the team's middle six.

The one question mark for the Wild is down the middle, but they also have elite play-driving wingers in Matt Boldy and Kirill Kaprizov that can make up for the lack of a true 1C. It won't be easy getting past the Stars in a hypothetical first-round matchup, but the Wild have what it takes to make it a series.

Colorado Avalanche

Additions:

- Nazem Kadri
- Nicolas Roy

- Brett Kulak
- Nick Blankenburg

The Avalanche know what awaits them in the playoffs if they advance past the first round: a showdown with the Stars or Wild. That's why Chris MacFarland was one of the more active GMs at this trade deadline.

Coming out of the Olympic break, they acquired Brett Kulak from the Pittsburgh Penguins in exchange for Samuel Girard. Kulak is a solid defensive defenseman and gives the Avalanche a different look that they needed on the back end.

The Nick Blankenburg acquisition might not seem like much, but he's one of the most underrated bottom-pair defenders in the NHL. At the time of the trade, Blankenburg had posted a goals above replacement (GAR) of 6.1 with the Nashville Predators.

Blankenburg is not a big point-producer, but he's a well-rounded two-way defender who provides great value in a third-pair role.

MacFarland made sure to shore up the team's forward depth, too. The Avalanche reunited with Nazem Kadri, who has another three years left on his deal after this one. He's still a capable top-six center and should provide a significant boost to the team up front.

Nicolas Roy is a solid center himself, but it wouldn't shock me if he plays some wing since the Avalanche added Kadri. Obviously, this is an all-in year for the Avalanche, given how their regular season has gone. They've put themselves in a great position to win the West with their deadline moves.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Additions:

- Mason Marchment
- Conor Garland
- Danton Heinen

I'm unsure the Blue Jackets can win a playoff round, but GM Don Waddell has done enough to help his team make a run to the postseason.

The Conor Garland acquisition could be a problem in a couple of years due to a six-year, \$36 million extension that kicks in on July 1, but it's fine in the short term. He's a good middle-six winger and will add some scoring pop as they try to climb their way into a wild-card position or even third place in the Metro.

Mason Marchment has also played well since the Blue Jackets acquired him just before the holiday roster freeze in December. And we can't ignore the impact Rick Bowness has had since taking over as head coach for Dean Evason. At the very least, they can make a run to get into the postseason.

Anaheim Ducks

Additions

- John Carlson

The Anaheim Ducks made only one notable addition ahead of the trade deadline, but it was a big one. They acquired long-time Washington Capital John Carlson in the most surprising deal of this deadline.

Carlson is not what he was during his peak, but he's still a legit No. 2/3 defenseman. The right side of the Ducks' blue line needed an upgrade, and he will provide that. He gives the Ducks a puck-moving threat from the back end, and he helps push Jacob Trouba and Radko Gudas down the lineup and into more suitable roles.

The Ducks are in an interesting position in the West. They could very well win the Pacific, which could give them a tough first-round draw: the Utah Mammoth. But let's say they finish second or third and face the Edmonton Oilers or Vegas Golden Knights, they could win a playoff round.

Carlson is not that type of needle-mover, but he addressed their most significant need, and the rest of the team is good enough to advance to the next round.

Utah Mammoth

Additions:

- Mackenzie Weegar

Speaking of the Mammoth, they had a similar deadline to the Ducks. They made one notable move, acquiring a right-handed defenseman in Mackenzie Weegar.

Granted, Weegar arguably plays better on his off-hand, but he shouldn't have much trouble fitting in on the right side of the Mammoth's blue line. John Marino has had an excellent season, and Sean Durzi is a capable middle-of-the-lineup defender. But like the Ducks acquiring Carlson, Weegar should push Marino and Durzi into more suitable roles that allow them to thrive even more than they already have.

The Mammoth are essentially locked into a wild-card spot if they make the playoffs, but they're a threat to advance a round, and Weegar can help. Whether it's the Ducks, Oilers or Golden Knights, they could be a sexy upset pick in the first round.

Western Teams Outdid Eastern Counterparts

If there's a theme here, it's that teams in the Western Conference were much more active than teams in the East. Even the Stars, who just missed the cut for this, added Tyler Myers and Michael Bunting ahead of a playoff run.

As for the East, contenders like the Tampa Bay Lightning and Carolina Hurricanes essentially stood pat. We'll see how that affects the playoff race in the East, but teams in the West are gearing up for what could be a grueling close to the 2025-26 NHL season.

