



## **Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips October 15-16, 2025**

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## The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets shake things up for undefeated Colorado Avalanche

**By Brian Hedger – October 16, 2025**

The Blue Jackets might not be panicking after starting the season 1-2-0, but they're also not waiting around for their problems to fix themselves.

The Jackets' practice Oct. 15 at the Ice Haus featured a lineup with new forward lines, new combinations for power plays and further work on penalty killing after an ugly 7-for-14 (50%) short-handed start. Yegor Chinakhov is also set to make his season debut Oct. 16 against the Colorado Avalanche as a replacement for Miles Wood (facial injury) on the fourth line.

Wood was hit near his eye with a high stick and sustained a laceration that will keep him out at least a week. Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said, even without Wood's injury, changes might have been made to his forward lines.

"We've debated long on what to do, but we're not pushing any panic buttons," Evason said. "(At) 5-on-5, we've been good. I think it's more a situation of trying to get some different looks and combinations and maybe get some people going a little bit."

### **Columbus Blue Jackets skate with new forward combinations**

Part of the coaching staff's effort to "get some people going" was a reordering of all four forward lines at practice. That included Dmitri Voronkov being moved off left wing on the first line for Kent Johnson.

Voronkov skated with center Adam Fantilli and Cole Sillinger on the second line, Johnson skated with center Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko on the top line, and captain Boone Jenner moved from the second line to left wing on the third. He's now with center Charlie Coyle and Mathieu Olivier on what could become a hard-nosed, straight-ahead group that makes life difficult on opposing defensemen with a relentless forecheck.

Chinakhov draws into the lineup to make his debut at right wing on the fourth line, where he'll replace Wood.

"We debated a bunch," Evason said of his staff, "We've had some different combinations, and hopefully we've made the right choice on putting the lines together."

### **Columbus Blue Jackets focus on struggling special teams**

Evason continues to emphasize that things aren't quite as bad as the numbers suggest for the Blue Jackets' penalty-kill groups, but the NHL is results-oriented.

The results of the Jackets' first 14 attempts to kill penalties weren't pretty. Half of those situations ended with opposing power-play goals that either won games or significantly altered momentum.

"I know 5-on-5 we're (eight goals for, one against), and on special teams we're still +1 overall, but clearly our penalty kill has to get better, as far as keeping it out of the net," Evason said. "Systematically, and I know this probably sounds silly ... it's not a tactical thing. It's because we've made some mistakes and it's ended up in our net because of it."

The Jackets have also stumbled at the other end of the ice, where they're 1-for-9 (11.1%) on power plays. The biggest issues are regaining the offensive zone after the puck is cleared and winning possession battles inside the zone.

Three significant changes were made to the first power-play group, starting with power forward Dmitri Voronkov replacing Jenner in front of the net and Coyle, a veteran center, replacing Kent Johnson. Coyle's promotion also bumped Sean Monahan from the bumper spot in the middle of their 1-3-1 setup, where he's previously excelled, to Johnson's former spot along the right wall.

Jenner and Johnson skated with the second power-play group at the same spots they played with the top unit. It's not a look that's going to make most fans happy, but Evason and assistant Mike Haviland appear ready to try it out.

Adding Coyle and Voronkov to the top group might help the Blue Jackets win more possession on power plays, but it'll come at the cost of subtracting Jenner's fearlessness in front of the net and Johnson's elite offensive ability.

"The thought process is obviously to get better in an area that you don't feel you're doing well in, and the power play has struggled," Evason said. "If it doesn't score, you can't just continually do the same thing and hope that it pulls out of it, unlike our 5-on-5 game, where we've done a lot of really good things (and) we're not flipping around too much there."

## The Columbus Dispatch / Chinakhov excited for season debut with Columbus Blue Jackets after sitting out

**By Brian Hedger – October 16, 2025**

Yegor Chinakhov describe his current situation with the Blue Jackets by using a Russian proverb.

“Sometimes you have, like, a black line,” he said Oct. 15 at Nationwide Arena. “In Russia, it’s kind of like (when) something is not going how you want, it’s kind of a black line. It changes to black.”

The saying stems from life being like a zebra's stripes.

There are ups and downs, white lines and black, and Chinakhov's season is currently the color of night. After requesting a trade in the summer due to limited usage after a lengthy back injury last season, he showed up for training camp looking to earn a lineup spot.

Rumors about trade interest from the Edmonton Oilers arose briefly, but nothing materialized. Meanwhile, Chinakhov's hope of landing a lineup role with three points (one goal, two assists) in four preseason games fell short. He was as a healthy scratch for the first three games, watching the Blue Jackets scuffle to a 1-2-0 start while the line in his mind's eye darkened.

“It’s tough, but I try,” he said, “and my wife helps me, so that’s good. She keeps me safe (from anger).”

Zlata, whom he married in 2024, is one of the few people who can make him laugh right now. She does it daily and it has helped Chinakhov stay focused amid his disappointment. Now, following an ugly facial injury that has sidelined forward Miles Wood, an opportunity has arrived for Chinakhov to make his season debut Oct. 16 against the Colorado Avalanche.

Wood will be out at least a week, if not longer, so Chinakhov could get a few games in a row to keep stating his case. The challenge for Evason and his assistants is finding a role best suited for a forward with the raw tools to be a top six winger.

Every role on the Blue Jackets' top two lines is occupied, and that's applicable to the third lin too. That leaves the fourth line for Chinakhov, which is usually a defensive line that provides energy in short bursts through forechecking pressure. Fourth-line forwards often log 10 minutes per game or fewer, and tend to start shifts in the defensive zone.

That's not exactly a perfect fit for Chinakhov, whose provides high scoring potential with a tantalizing combo of size, speed and a wrist shot that fires rockets. Still, he'll take it. It beats not playing at all.

“(You) just try to be your best on the ice,” Chinakhov said. “If you give me eight minutes, I need to play my best in (those) eight minutes, so that’s what I want to do.”

Can things still work out in Columbus for Chinakhov, whom the Blue Jackets’ selected 21<sup>st</sup> overall in 2020?

“We’ll see,” he said. “I like the city, so I like it fine here. I like the team. We’re pretty close here, so we’ll see.”

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets make sweeping changes as they look for boost beyond ailing special teams

**By Aaron Portzline – October 16, 2025**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It was no surprise that the Columbus Blue Jackets spent most of practice Wednesday working on their special teams. But the way coach Dean Evason hit the “scramble” button on his forward lines and special-teams units was worth noting.

He’s not hitting the panic button, Evason said. He’s demanding a higher standard. The Blue Jackets, who have outscored opponents 8-1 at even strength through three games, host the high-powered Colorado Avalanche on Thursday night in Nationwide Arena.

“Five-on-five we’ve been good,” Evason said. “It’s more of a situation of trying to get some different looks and some combinations, and maybe get some people going a little bit.

“So, yeah, we debated this a bunch. We’ve had a bunch of different combinations, and hopefully we’ve made the right choices on putting the lines together.”

Kent Johnson, who is still looking for his first point of the season, has been elevated from the third line to the first line, joining center Sean Monahan and right winger Kirill Marchenko. Remarkably, Monahan is also without a point, even though his linemates in the first two games — Marchenko and Dmitri Voronkov — have combined for six goals.

Voronkov has settled onto the right side of the second line, with center Adam Fantilli and Cole Sillinger, which sets up a third line of Charlie Coyle with Boone Jenner and Mathieu Olivier on the flanks.

With forward Miles Wood expected to miss some time following an eye injury in Monday’s loss to New Jersey, Yegor Chinakhov slides into the lineup on the fourth line with center Isac Lundestrom and Zach Aston-Reese. It’ll be Chinakhov’s season debut.

Even though the Blue Jackets’ penalty kill is off to a horrific start statistically, Evason seemed more angered by the power play. The Jackets are 1 for 9 with a man advantage. But it’s the approach that’s bothered him, especially a lackadaisical power play on Monday vs. New Jersey when the game hung in the balance.

The Jackets trailed 2-1 when New Jersey’s Simon Nemec went to the box for hooking. The Blue Jackets created zero scoring chances and had no shots on net. They had only one shot attempt (by Johnson) and it was blocked. Mostly, they struggled to hang on to the puck.

“We didn’t like it at all,” Evason said. “The bottom line is, we didn’t win a lot of puck battles on our power play, right? We had opportunities to fish some pucks out and win some of those puck battles and we didn’t.”

That’s why the power play units were reshuffled Wednesday, too.

The top unit still has Zach Werenski running the point, with Marchenko to his left on the half-wall. But Coyle has supplanted Monahan from the “bumper” spot between the hashes, moving Monahan to the right side, where Johnson once played. Voronkov has replaced Jenner at the net front.

The second unit still has Ivan Provorov running the point, Damon Severson on the left half-wall, and Fantilli on the bumper. Johnson is on the right side, while Jenner is net-front.

After the Blue Jackets spent about 20 minutes on the power play, they moved to the penalty kill, which has already allowed seven goals. The personnel: Jenner and Monahan, and Aston-Reese and Coyle were the top forward units, followed by Provorov and Dante Fabbro, and Denton Mateychuk and Werenski.

Erik Gudbranson, who suffered an upper-body injury last Saturday vs. Minnesota, is a top penalty killer.

“We’re doing a lot of good things (on the kill), as funny as that sounds with how many goals we have (allowed),” Jenner said. “A couple of bounces and breaks here and there, but structurally we’re OK. It’s a couple of errors, and it’s not the first one but the second one that’s costing us.”

Evason is insistent that the penalty kill not dial back its aggressive stance.

On Monday, the Blue Jackets took off on a rare three-on-one short-handed rush with Johnson carrying the puck and Fantilli and Werenski supporting him to his left. But a three-on-one *short-handed* rush means the barn door is left wide open behind the play, and sure enough ...

The Devils had a two-on-one the other direction and scored, taking a 2-1 lead midway through the second.

“We (coaches) debated, ‘Should they have taken that (three-on-one) opportunity?’” Evason said. “Well, sure they should, right? I mean, if they score, that would have been 2-1 (Blue Jackets) at the time, and maybe it’s a different game. We talk all the time about being aggressive and making aggressive mistakes.

“(That’s an example) of circumstances we’ve gone over with our penalty kill. It’s situational stuff, not a tactical thing.”

That play, two days later, was on Jenner’s mind, too.

“We have that three-on-one once chance ...” Jenner said. “We’re going to take that. We’re going to play hockey. It doesn’t go (in) and, unfortunately, they get a break the other way. But we’ve got to stay with it.”

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets' penalty kill is killing them. Minor speed bump or reason to worry?

By Aaron Portzline - Oct. 15, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Perhaps the Columbus Blue Jackets will look back in a month or so and see their three-game start to the season as nothing more than an early speed bump. Maybe by the end of the season, it'll barely be a blip on the radar.

But for now, the Blue Jackets' penalty kill is a five-alarm fire, one that must be extinguished — or at least contained — quickly. It's been historically bad, and it's cost them dearly with two losses in their first three games, including a 3-2 loss to New Jersey in the home opener in Nationwide Arena on Monday.

The Blue Jackets were off Tuesday ahead of Thursday's game versus the Colorado Avalanche at Nationwide. But when they return to practice Wednesday, it's a safe bet special teams will dominate their morning session.

The power play hasn't been great, but it's the penalty kill that has wasted the Blue Jackets' fast starts, high-energy play, solid goaltending and a sold-out crowd in Nationwide Arena on Monday that was ready to explode but fizzled along with the Jackets in the final two periods.

How bad is the penalty kill?

- It's allowed seven power-play goals, the most a Blue Jackets team has ever allowed in their first three games of a season.
- At 7 of 14, the Blue Jackets' penalty kill is (by far) the worst in the league. Four teams — Boston, Buffalo, Florida and the New York Rangers — have yet to allow a single power-play goal this season.
- This is the first Blue Jackets team since 2019-20 to allow a power-play goal in each of the first three games, and just the fifth Columbus team ever. (The inaugural club, 2000-01, allowed a power-play goal in the first seven games in franchise history.)
- Before the Devils' empty-net goal late in Monday's win, each of the previous seven goals allowed by the Blue Jackets came against their penalty kill, a franchise record and two short of matching an NHL record from the 1950s.

Put another way: only one of the nine goals allowed by the Blue Jackets so far this season got past a goaltender at even strength.

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason doesn't think his club needs to make dramatic changes, or at least he didn't before Monday's loss. But there are explanations as to why this group has struggled so profoundly coming out of the starting gate.

### **Breakdowns**

In the season opener, Nashville's Ryan O'Reilly found a wide-open gap in front of Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves when defenseman Erik Gudbranson followed the movement of the puck by moving up between the hashes.

Predators Filip Forsberg fed the puck through the Blue Jackets' alignment and onto O'Reilly's stick, leaving him way too much time to lift the puck under the crossbar with a tight-angle shot off his backhand.

On the Wild's fourth power-play goal on Saturday, the Blue Jackets overloaded all four penalty killers — Sean Monahan, Boone Jenner, Zach Werenski and Ivan Provorov — into a tight cluster in the corner of the ice below the left circle.

That allowed Minnesota's Marco Rossi to have nothing but acreage around him in the right circle, and sure enough, the puck shot out of the crowd (a Zeev Buium pass) to Rossi. He had plenty of time to pick his spot, but instead waited for Kirill Kaprizov to race to the net for a redirection.

The Devils' go-ahead goal Monday was more overzealousness than a breakdown. The Blue Jackets had a rare short-handed three-on-one breakaway, with Kent Johnson carrying the puck and Adam Fantilli and Zach Werenski to his left.

New Jersey goaltender Jake Allen stopped the shot, and it came out fast enough to start a two-on-one for the Devils the other direction. They took advantage, with Dawson Mercer's goal at 11:09 of the second giving Jersey a 2-1 lead.

### **Unfamiliarity**

The Blue Jackets have not used this excuse, and they likely won't. But one of the reasons they were excited to add bottom-six forwards Charlie Coyle, Miles Wood and Isac Lundestrom over the summer was the help they could provide on the penalty kill.

Well, that takes time.

The Blue Jackets had grown used to relying on Justin Danforth and Sean Kuraly to log heavy penalty-kill minutes in recent seasons, but Kuraly signed with the Boston Bruins and Danforth signed with the Buffalo Sabres via free agency.

Coyle has been the first center over the boards when the Blue Jackets are short-handed, with Lundestrom and Monahan getting second-unit duties as needed.

It's often the small-touch, tight-area passes that help elevate pressure and allow a penalty-kill unit to clear the zone. Perhaps as the season moves along, the quick-reaction instincts of Coyle and Lundestrom will become predictable to their fellow PKers.

### **Respect**

Sometimes you have to tip your cap.

Ryan O'Reilly has played more than 1,100 games and scored more than 300 goals, almost 100 of those (97) on the power play. He knows how to "get lost" in the offensive zone, and he darn sure knows how to beat a goaltender when given enough time.

Kirill Kaprizov, among many other talents, is a dead-eye shooter when left alone in the right circle, as he was on Minnesota's second power-play goal on Saturday. The Wild, to their credit, followed hard to the net after pucks and won goal-mouth battles that led to scores.

The Devils may not overwhelm with size and physicality, but they can dazzle with their skill. The two-on-one rush that led to New Jersey's 2-1 lead on Monday was textbook.

The point is, if you play with fire in the NHL, expect scorch marks.

### **Stay even**

If you're not shorthanded, you can't give up a power-play goal. Check back for more advice tomorrow!

But seriously, the Blue Jackets need to dial way back on their trips to the penalty box. Not only does being shorthanded affect the club for the next two minutes of play, but it can also affect the rest of the period or even the game.

The Blue Jackets have been shorthanded 15 times in three games, including eight times in the win over the Wild alone. That's five penalty kills per night, or half of an entire period (10 minutes). It's tiring. It messes up line rotations. It kills momentum.

It was clear Monday that the Blue Jackets' early jump — they did everything but score in the first 15 minutes of the game — went away late in the first period after Columbus muffed the power plays and New Jersey scored with a man advantage.

The Blue Jackets have touched just about every page of the NHL rulebook. They've been called for four delay of game penalties, three hookings, two trippings, and one each of interference, high-sticking, slashing, holding, closing a hand on the puck and too many men on the ice. Charging, elbowing and clipping are still on the to-do list.

In fairness, the Blue Jackets were called for only two penalties against the Devils. It's just that New Jersey scored power-play goals on both of them.

That's the state of Columbus' game right now.

## [Cleveland.com / Cleveland Monsters 2025: Key prospects, schedule and what to know for Friday's home opener](#)

**By Sports Staff – October 16, 2025**

CLEVELAND, Ohio — The Cleveland Monsters will make their 2025-26 Rocket Arena debut on Friday night when they host the Lehigh Valley Phantoms. Puck drop is at 7 p.m. Eastern.

Here is what you need to know about the Monsters, who are the American Hockey League affiliate of the Columbus Blue Jackets.

### **Strong start on the road**

Cleveland opened the season with back-to-back wins in Utica, including a 1-0 shutout on Friday night and a 3-2 overtime victory on Saturday. James Malatesta scored the lone goal in the opener, and goaltender Ivan Fedotov stopped all 21 shots for a shutout in his AHL debut.

In Game 2, the Monsters rallied for an OT win to sweep the Comets and start 2-0. Mikael Pytytiä netted the OT winner just 23 seconds into the extra period, and Brendan Gaunce and Riley Bezeau each scored as well. Luca Del Bel Belluz and Dysin Mayo assisted on Pytytiä's game-winner. Goalie Zach Sawchenko made 21 saves for the win.

### **CBJ prospects to watch**

This season's roster features several top Columbus Blue Jackets prospects expected to play key roles:

**Luca Del Bel Belluz:** A skilled center who posted 53 points last season and nearly cracked the NHL roster out of camp. He'll anchor Cleveland's top line and is considered one of the organization's most promising forwards. Del Bel Belluz has some NHL experience, particularly last season when he had two goals and eight points in 15 games with the Blue Jackets.

**James Malatesta:** The speedy winger already made an impact with the season-opening goal.

**Corson Ceulemans:** A first-round pick in 2021, the defenseman brings size and mobility to the blue line. This is Ceulemans' third full season with the Monsters.

**Stanislav Svozil:** Known for his puck-moving ability and vision, Svozil is entering his third season in Cleveland.

**Luca Pinelli:** A fourth-round pick in 2023, Pinelli joined the Monsters late last season after his season in the OHL ended. He played in six playoff games, recording two goals and four points.

**Guillaume Richard:** A steady presence on defense who made his pro debut late last season after four seasons at Providence.

**Mikael Pytytiä:** A fourth-round pick in 2020, Pytytiä plays with speed and has a responsible two-way game. He already has 64 games of NHL experience.

## [The Athletic / What we saw from the NHL's first week: 10 too-early takes on Rangers, Calder race, more](#)

**By Harman Dayal and Shayna Goldman – October 16, 2025**

In the first week-plus of NHL action, there is only so much to learn. Samples are small, with teams only approaching the six-percent mark of an 82-game season. But where is the fun in that?

The first month of the season is the prime time to spot trends and spew half-baked takes. So, let's add to the drama of the early goings of the 2025-26 season and look at 10 way-too-early takes developing around the league.

### **Tampa Bay's lack of speed on the blue line could be a problem**

An aging, slowing blue line is one of the biggest reasons the Tampa Bay Lightning have suffered three consecutive first-round playoff defeats. The lackluster puck-moving from Tampa Bay's D was exposed by the Panthers' ferocious forecheck last spring in the playoffs. Three games into the 2025-26 regular season, Tampa's lack of foot speed on the backend has also been an Achilles heel in defending the rush.

The Bolts completely left Andrei Vasilevskiy out to dry in their season-opener against the Senators, surrendering a constant barrage of dangerous rush chances. Tampa Bay was also outshot 17-2 at one point during its loss to the Devils. By our count, the Lightning have already given up eight rush goals against this year (an average of two per game).

Tampa's defensemen have been beaten in multiple ways in transition – they've been caught out of position pinching, they've been beaten with speed wide, and their slot passing coverage has been poor. Victor Hedman appears to have possibly lost a step, depth defenders like Darren Raddysh and Emil Lilleberg have been exposed defensively, not to mention that Erik Cernak and Ryan McDonagh aren't exactly fleet of foot, either.

The Lightning are so skilled up front that we aren't worried about their odds of making the playoffs. However, their blue line clearly needs an upgrade if they have designs on a deep postseason run.

### **The Ducks could become one of the NHL's most entertaining offensive teams**

The Anaheim Ducks already feel like a completely different team under new head coach Joel Quenneville. Anaheim looks significantly faster, more dynamic, and creative offensively, especially through the neutral zone and attacking off the rush. Simply put, the Ducks are fun as heck to watch.

Through three games, they rank third-best in the NHL at generating five-on-five shot attempts and fifth-best at expected goals for per 60.

NHL's 5v5 Offensive xG Leaders

On top of that, the Ducks' power-play, which ranked 32nd in the NHL last year, is clicking at 36.4 percent in the early going. Both power-play units' passing is slick and decisive, and the arrival of Chris Kreider, an elite net-front finisher, has been a game-changer, as he's already scored three power-play goals individually.

Anaheim's top young players appear poised for monster breakout years – Leo Carlsson is up to five points in three games, Mason McTavish has four points, Cutter Gauthier has scored three goals, and 19-year-old rookie Beckett Sennecke, the No. 3 pick in 2024, has two goals and two assists.

It hasn't been all perfect – the Ducks are chaotic and messy in their own zone, especially defending the slot and net-front area. The club's early offensive success should be taken with a grain of salt, too, because two of their games were against the Sharks and Penguins.

However, fast, high-event hockey suits this team's high-end offensive skill very well. And if they can keep this up, they could emerge as a dark horse to contend for a wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

### **Demidov-Schaefer Calder race is going to be exciting**

Last year, we were spoiled with a battle between high-end rookies at each position: Macklin Celebrini, Dustin Wolf, and Lane Hutson. After Ivan Demidov debuted for Montreal last spring, it looked like the Canadiens could be in for back-to-back rookie of the year trophies.

Demidov's debut was highly anticipated, not just in Montreal, but around the league. He quickly showed that he was worth the hype last spring, and is already building off that in the early goings of this season with his electrifying offensive ability and poise.

It's easy to see why Demidov is the favorite for the Calder Trophy; 77 percent of our writers picked him in our early-season voting.

But he isn't the only rookie to keep an eye on. Zeev Buium, Jimmy Snuggerud, and Sam Rinzel are adding a real spark to the Central Division, but Matthew Schaefer is demanding the rest of the league's attention, too. He is already logging big minutes on Long Island, and showing why he was drafted No. 1 with his pace and offensive vision. If Schaefer can keep shining despite his surroundings, he should give Demidov some competition for the Calder Trophy this year — and that should make for yet another captivating rookie race.

### **The Canucks already look a bit shaky**

It's obviously far too early to panic, but there is already some angst in Vancouver about the Canucks' uninspiring start. More concerning than the club's 1-2-0 record is the fact that they've only played one good period of hockey through three games.

Vancouver would have been blown out against Edmonton on Saturday if it weren't for Thatcher Demko's heroics to maintain a respectable 3-1 scoreline. The Canucks again looked like they were in disarray on Thanksgiving Monday against the Blues, dropping a 5-2 game where they were outclassed in every phase of the game. Vancouver's season-opening win wasn't as dominant as the 5-1 final score

indicated, either. The Canucks were out-attempted and out-chanced through the first two periods; it was only the final 20 minutes where the floodgates opened as they took advantage of a tired, running-out-of-gas Flames team that had played a long shootout game against Edmonton the night before.

The Canucks have been turning pucks over at an alarming rate, it's been very difficult to manufacture scoring chances offensively, and Elias Pettersson has just one point and three shots in three games.

It isn't all doom and gloom – Demko looks like an elite goaltender again, and it's only a matter of time before Quinn Hughes begins singlehandedly taking over games again — but Vancouver doesn't have a ton of margin for error ahead of its upcoming five-game road trip.

### **Kirill Marchenko is the real deal**

Kirill Marchenko emerged as a difference-maker in Columbus last year, with 31 goals and 74 points. He was a consistent scoring threat, whose offense helped fuel the Blue Jackets' surprising playoff push.

Whenever a player exceeds expectations, the question becomes whether it's real and sustainable. Some signs added some doubt, like the gap between Marchenko's expected (53 percent) and actual goal (66 percent) rate. While falling somewhere in between could be reasonable for this year, it's not like the player has a strong track record to lean on, either. His xG rate was around 44 percent in his two prior seasons, and his micro-stats profile wasn't eye-catching, either. A player can grow year-to-year, but that significant of a jump isn't always sustainable.

Still, even if last year's leap was high, Marchenko is proving in the early goings of this season that he can perform at a true top-line level. With four goals in three games, and a 53 percent xG rate at five-on-five, he is picking up where he left off last season. While no one should expect him to score at a 109-goal pace, or convert on 24 percent of his shots all season, he should still be an elite difference-maker in Columbus this year.

### **L.A.'s blue line makeover is backfiring**

Armed with cap space and consistent regular-season success, the Kings appeared to be one or two good offseason moves away from breaking through as potential Stanley Cup contenders in the West. Instead, they moved in the wrong direction, signing Cody Ceci and Brian Dumoulin for a combined \$8.5 million. Those acquisitions were almost universally panned, and so far, the critics have been proven right.

The Kings (1-2-1) have been badly outshot, controlled less than 40 percent of expected goals, and been outscored 5-0 already during Ceci and Dumoulin's five-on-five shifts. They've been unable to move the puck out of their own zone, and Ceci's defensive coverage has been an issue.

Hopefully, Brandt Clarke's promising start can translate into a big breakout year to help offset things. A new-look pair with elite shutdown defender Mikey Anderson carrying Ceci was better last game too, but the Kings must be feeling nervous about the early returns on their backend renovation.

### **Martin Necas is about to get the bag**

With Connor McDavid, Kirill Kaprizov, Jack Eichel, and Kyle Connor recently re-signing with their respective teams, the 2026 free-agent market already looks a lot thinner on star talent. That's excellent leverage for Martin Necas, who's entering the final year of a \$6.5 million AAV contract, and it's supercharged even further with the electric start he's had to the season.

Necas already has eight points in four games, after scoring a career-high 83 points last year. The 26-year-old Czech probably deserved to score more points with the Avs, last year too – he and MacKinnon controlled a dominant 66 percent of five-on-five scoring chances together, but they scored on less than 9 percent of their shots. They deserved to have more pucks go in, which would have meant even higher production.

The Avs' five-man trio with MacKinnon, Necas, Artturi Lehkonen, Cale Makar, and Devon Toews has looked unstoppable through the first few games.

Necas, a naturally speedy, gifted puck carrier, has shown an impressive ability to adapt to MacKinnon, who's also a puck-dominant player. As an example, watch how intelligently Necas finds quiet ice to get open in the slot when the opposition is focused on MacKinnon's puck-carrying. MacKinnon finds an open Necas, who rips a nasty shot to score.

Colorado better be ready to back up the Brink's truck for Necas this summer.

### **It's getting late early in Buffalo**

Losing 4-0 on home ice to open the season was bad enough. But the real kicker was losing Josh Norris to a non-contact injury for a significant amount of time. Then came back to back 3-1 losses.

While the Sabres finally earned two points against the Senators, those first three losses were enough to shake any confidence heading into the season.

It's not just the final result raising red flags, either. The Sabres looked disjointed on both ends of the ice in their opening matchups. Through their first three games, they mustered a 40.8 percent xG rate, and were outscored 7-2 at five-on-five. The power play, which was a real weakness last year, doesn't look any more dynamic either, with the team struggling to generate dangerous chances (and any scoring) in its first few opportunities.

At the end of the day, it's only four games with some key injury situations to navigate (Owen Power missed the first game, Zach Benson and Michael Kesselring have yet to debut this season, and Mattias Samuelsson is now sidelined, along with Norris). It's impossible to get mathematically eliminated from the playoff picture after four games.

But the chances of turning such a bleak start around already feel fragile. This isn't a battle-tested team that thrives in the face of adversity. It's a group facing a 14-year playoff drought that doesn't seem any closer to ending.

### **The Rangers could struggle to score this year**

It would be dramatic to make a season-wide declaration about New York's scoring ability after just three home games — especially after outscoring opponents 10-1 on the road. It isn't for a lack of trying; the Rangers are spending time in the offensive zone, driving to the slot to generate dangerous chances, and creating looks off the cycle.

But the fact that this team has been shutout on home ice through 180 minutes of play already this year, and outscored 6-0, is raising an early red flag. It puts attention on a potential trend this roster was already facing heading into the season: scoring talent.

Besides J.T. Miller and Artemi Panarin, Mika Zibanejad has the chops to put up 30-plus goals if he can keep embracing a shoot-first mentality that slipped over the last couple of years. If Alexis Lafrenière can rebound, and Will Cuyll can build on last season, there are a few more options.

After that, the roster thins out, especially with Vincent Trocheck sidelined. So as encouraging as it might be that the Rangers' fourth line controlled play in their minutes on Tuesday against Edmonton, with a 77.5 percent xG rate, no one has the hands to be a reliable scoring threat. So these scoring woes could become a trend moving forward, due to the limitations of the roster.

### **Jeremy Swayman bounce back season**

The Bruins trusted Swayman to be The Guy last year, and he fell short in his first season as a true starting goalie. He earned a career-low 0.892 save percentage, and minus-6.43 GSAx in 58 games.

Adjusting to that workload was likely challenging enough. Not having a real training camp to prepare only made things more difficult for Swayman, after his contract negotiations dragged out.

But that disappointing year looks to be behind Swayman. It looks like an offseason reset, and a full training camp and preseason, has helped him round into form early. He opened the season with a stellar performance against the Capitals; with 3.15 goals saved above expected, he stole the win for Boston. He followed it up with another quality start against the Sabres a couple of days later.

Realistically, Swayman has only started two games and his save percentage won't sparkle at a 0.965 forever. But the fact that he has responded this well to his workload out of the gate is already an improvement from last year; pair that with his track record and it's a strong sign that Swayman can be the franchise goalie the Bruins signed him to be.

## The Denver Post / Close friends Gavin Brindley, Adam Fantilli excited to share NHL ice for first time, under unexpected circumstances

**By Corey Masisak – October 15, 2025**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Gavin Brindley and Adam Fantilli have been waiting to share the ice in an NHL game for years, particularly since the pair were drafted by the same team after completing their freshman year of college.

The plan changed when Brindley was traded in June, but they're going to get that chance Thursday night at Nationwide Arena. Brindley's sixth career NHL game is going to come against Fantilli and the franchise that drafted him — the Columbus Blue Jackets.

"I wasn't here very long, but it's a lot of familiar faces and good to get back in the city," Brindley said after practicing Wednesday with his new team, the Colorado Avalanche, in his old town. "I liked it a lot here. Pretty cool city, passionate fans.

"I saw a couple of guys last night and will get to hang out with them a bit today. A lot of great people over there, great guys who took me under their wings. I'm really thankful for that. I know Adam really likes it over there. Happy for him."

Fantilli was the No. 3 pick in the 2023 NHL draft after a stellar freshman season at Michigan. Columbus went back to Ann Arbor for its second-round selection, choosing Brindley at No. 34.

While Fantilli has spent the past two seasons playing in the NHL, Brindley has been working to join him. He was the player of the year in the Big Ten as a sophomore after Fantilli, Luke Hughes and Mackie Samoskevich moved on to pro hockey.

Brindley made his NHL debut with the Blue Jackets at the end of that season after signing his entry-level contract, but Fantilli was injured and not in the lineup. Last year, Brindley spent his first pro season with Cleveland in the AHL.

His path to the NHL changed over the summer when the Avalanche sent Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood to Columbus for him and a pair of draft picks. Brindley and Fantilli were hanging out together when they found out about the trade.

Moving from a franchise that has missed the playoffs five straight seasons to a Stanley Cup contender might seem like a tough break for a young player trying to break into the NHL, but Brindley was a standout at his first Colorado training camp and made the team.

He's spent the first four games of the Avs' season on the fourth line, and he picked up his first NHL goal Saturday against the Dallas Stars. Brindley also had the honor of the first water bottle shower from Gabe Landeskog -- a tradition from the captain for first-time scorers -- since his return after missing nearly three full seasons with knee issues.

"I feel great," Brindley said. "Body feels good. I feel like every game the energy is good. I'm just trying to get better every game and get comfortable."

"I've got to prove myself. I've got to do the little things right, and hone in on the details. Just whatever you get, you've got to take advantage of it. That's what I'm focusing on right now."