



## Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips

December 18-19, 2025

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## The Athletic / 'Enough is enough': Zach Werenski vents after Blue Jackets' latest frustrating loss

By Aaron Portzline – December 19, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — What was more impressive: the way defenseman Zach Werenski single-handedly kept the Columbus Blue Jackets in the game, or the way he spoke his piece after his club's latest frustrating loss?

Werenski scored two goals for the second straight game, but the Blue Jackets once again endured an ugly third period, losing 5-2 to the Minnesota Wild on Thursday before 14,845 at Nationwide Arena.

There was a small window for excuse-making — it was a heck of a game, played at an impressive pace for 58 minutes — but Werenski wanted none of it.

"I feel like it's the same thing we've been saying," Werenski said. "Like, we're playing well enough to win, but it's getting old that we keep losing. I mean, enough is enough. It's unacceptable, and I get the whole thing where you've got to stay positive and move forward, and I agree with all of that. But this is getting outrageous. We're a good hockey team, and we're just losing games. So maybe we're not a good hockey team, I don't know."

"At the end of the day, you have to win games to be a good team. It's frustrating. It's definitely a good hockey team over there, but I don't think they're better than us. And that's what it comes down to."

The Blue Jackets have won just three of their last 13 games (3-6-4) since Nov. 20, and while they were treading water with loser's points for most of December, they have now lost five of their last six games in regulation.

Ugly math: the Blue Jackets have now been outscored by 23 goals in the third period this season, the worst differential in the NHL. It's a big reason they've settled into last place in both the Metro Division and the Eastern Conference.

This could get away from them in a hurry if they aren't careful. Maybe it already has.

"Guys just have to step up and give a little bit more," Werenski said. "Especially in crunch time and third period. Obviously, it's been a hot topic, and we just have to dig in and find ways to win."

"It's not just me. I'm the one saying this, but we're all sick of it, you know? There's nobody else that can get us out of this. It's a fine line, but we're on the wrong side of it more times than not, and like I said, that's unacceptable. Tonight, it's a greasy goal that gives them the lead. Nothing pretty about it."

Werenski, who had two goals in Tuesday's overtime win over the Anaheim Ducks, was at it again early Thursday. He scored at 15:20 of the first period when he executed an odd-man rush perfectly with Charlie Coyle and Cole Sillinger.

The Blue Jackets were thoroughly dominating the second period — shots were 12-1 in favor of Columbus through 12 minutes of play — but then two crucial mistakes helped cancel their momentum.

Zach Aston-Reese, in the lineup because Brendan Gaunce returned to Cleveland to be with his expectant wife, took a slashing penalty that put the Wild on the power play, where Ryan Hartman quickly tied the game.

Only 1:24 later, Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson chucked a pass toward center ice from the wall, serving up a turnover that sent the Wild the other way with numbers. Vladimir Tarasenko finished off the rush to give Minnesota the lead.

In a period the Blue Jackets had been dominating, suddenly they were trailing.

“We’re hanging in there, and then, you know, we make some pretty silly mistakes, right?” Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. “We’ve got to clean that up. We have games that are winnable, or that we could get to overtime or a shootout at the very least, and we haven’t done that, and we didn’t do that tonight.”

The Wild’s go-ahead goal also highlighted a Blue Jackets’ shortcoming. They aren’t nearly competitive enough in front of the net on either end of the ice, which means they allow more “greasy” goals than they score.

Minnesota’s Joel Eriksson Ek scored for a 3-2 lead at 11:50 of the third period when he was able to jam after a loose puck long enough to spin Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves around and out of position. There were bodies in the area, but Eriksson Ek paid no price to score.

“We have to get a little harder and tougher and greasier in those areas … firmer,” Evason said. “You know, it’s something, as you guys know, that we worked on (in practice) a few days ago, that exact thing, collapsing and getting the job done. We just didn’t here tonight, obviously, on that goal.”

Evason considered reviewing the goal. But after seeing a clear replay on the bench, he decided against it.

“Our thought process was that whenever the puck’s available and you’re going for the puck … and even though (Eriksson Ek) spins him, the puck’s there,” Evason said. “(The NHL review), we think, is going to side on the fact that he was fishing, or he’s allowed to go in there and try to dig at the puck.”

The Wild added two empty-net goals in the final two minutes to cap the scoring.

“That’s just a good hockey team that knows how to win,” Werenski said. “There was no panic in their game. It’s just them coming up, playing their game in the third period, playing hard, getting back on track. They did nothing out of the ordinary except just stick to their game plan and keep coming and keep coming. That’s what happens. Good teams find ways to win and they don’t stray from the game plan. They don’t turn the puck over at the blue (line) or whatever. They play a direct, simple game, and at the end of the day, their skill will take over and they’ll make plays and score.”

“I hope we can learn from that, and learn from watching a team like that, who’s won six straight and are on a bit of a heater right now. But like I said, enough is enough of this losing.”

## The Athletic / Zach Werenski's wondrous play, leadership not taken for granted by Blue Jackets

By Aaron Portzline – December 18, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Columbus Blue Jackets' 4-3 overtime win on Tuesday was rich with talking points. The Blue Jackets lost another third-period lead, but Adam Fantilli's explosive OT winner helped them snap a season-long five-game losing streak.

The fact that defenseman Zach Werenski had once again led the Blue Jackets toward victory almost seemed forgotten. Or is Werenski's consistent greatness just taken for granted by now?

Werenski had his fourth three-point game and 12th multi-point game of the season, all while playing in his 600th career NHL game.

"We talked about him (in the coaches' office)," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said on Wednesday. "We talked about him, and not because of his goals, but because of his leadership, his ... he *willed* the team last night.

"I know a lot has been made about his production and his play at 4 Nations, the Norris Trophy and all that. I don't think people give him enough credit for the leader that he is in our dressing room. He doesn't give two you-know-whats about his production, his points, his ice time."

Fans are in for a treat on Thursday, when the Minnesota Wild play in Nationwide Arena at 7 p.m. Two of the NHL's top defensemen — the Wild just acquired Quinn Hughes in a blockbuster trade with Vancouver — will be on display.

The Blue Jackets are biased, of course, but they'd put Werenski up against Hughes, Cale Makar ... anybody.

While several players on the Blue Jackets roster have struggled to match last season's production — Sean Monahan, Kent Johnson, etc. — Werenski has, after a slow start, picked up where he left off from his career-best season in 2024-25.

With 11 goals, 25 assists and 36 points in 33 games this season, Werenski's on pace to put up 27 goals, 62 assists and 89 points, which would represent career-highs in all three categories and would break Artemi Panarin's club record (87) for points in a season.

Most importantly, when the Blue Jackets hit the skids beginning in late November — they were 2-5-4 before Tuesday's win — Werenski didn't let his play fluctuate. In his last 12 games, he has five goals, 12 assists and 17 points.

"I'm at a point where I'm a veteran guy and I think it's important to lead by example," Werenski said. "And doing that means doing what you're capable of, and, for me, I feel like that's driving the offense and bringing our team into that way. That's all I try to do. I don't try and do anything out of the ordinary or something that's not in my game."

"You don't want to change things because you're losing. You want to kind of approach it the same way, and I feel like that's leadership, too. When you're trying to do too much or trying to be selfish because you're losing games, that's when it gets harder."

Werenski scored the game's first goal Tuesday, a wrister off the rush from the left circle at 8:21 of the first. When the Ducks tied it 1-1 at 3:35 of the second, Werenski scored on the ensuing shift just 24 seconds later to put the Jackets ahead 2-1.

He also played 29:31 and had eight shot attempts, including four on net. Only Hughes (27:29) has averaged more ice time than Werenski (26:43) this season, but no defenseman — and only four forwards — have more shots on goal (120).

It's not the rah-rah speeches in the dressing room or on the bench. Werenski has that capacity, but it's not a natural setting, and so he can't go to the well too often or it's not sincere, he's said. Being a leader is not how you act; it's who you are.

Blue Jackets center Cole Sillinger has been a teammate of Werenski's for five seasons, and their locker stalls are in the same corner of the dressing room.

"He's not shy," Sillinger said. When there's something to be said, or something that's on his mind and he feels it needs to be addressed, he addresses it. So his voice is definitely a presence, I would say.

"But him dominating games and producing and being a key player for us in every situation ... that's become the norm, and he doesn't need praise for that. It's all wins and losses for him, but the play that he sustains ... it draws all of us in to become the best versions of ourselves."

Werenski was different last season. Everybody saw it on the ice, but it was hard to miss in the room, too. He was more business-like, more direct, more protective of his time. Not unfriendly, mind you, but more serious.

It is true that Werenski had no choice but to step up as a leader last season, especially after the tragic death of Johnny Gaudreau. But Werenski's elevation into a different strata was already underway.

"Just so focused," Sillinger said. "Not that he wasn't focused before, but you can just clearly tell what matters to him and the importance of what he's doing on a daily basis. Games, practices, workouts, team functions ... all of it."

"When I'm talking to him, he's just so clear about everything. There's no fog in his brain. He's dialed in whenever he's doing something, whatever it is."

In October, Werenski went through a six-game span with only one point, an assist. A few seasons back, Werenski acknowledged, he might not have handled that well.

"I'll use the word selfish, but selfish for the right reasons," Werenski said. "I probably would have been trying to create more offense, probably a little selfishly, cheating the game a little bit. I'd be doing it to help the team, but I thought that's what I was here for."

"Now I'm at a point in my career where I understand that you just play the game and take what's given and every night's different. I was actually playing pretty good hockey and just wasn't getting rewarded

and I stuck with it. You know, you'll have no points in two or three games, you'll have a random three-point game, and it all evens out."

Yes, a random three-point game.

Werenski scored the Blue Jackets' first two goals on Tuesday. He didn't realize he'd been given a secondary assist on Fantilli's OT game-winner until he was announced as the game's first star.

Fantilli did all of the work on the goal, skating from his own end of the rink and taking on three Ducks players before scoring off the rush.

"When they said it during the three stars, I was like, 'They got that one wrong,'" Werenski said. "And then I came back in here and K.J. was like, 'Hey, Z, you got a greasy apple on Fantilli's goal!'

"I was standing by the bench (when Fantilli scored). I didn't move. He goes down and scores, so I got a greasy plus-1 and a greasy apple."

## The Columbus Dispatch / Zach Werenski scores 2 goals in Columbus Blue Jackets' 5-2 loss to Wild

By Dan Aulbach – December 19, 2025

Zach Werenski led the Blue Jackets with two goals on 15 shots and eight shots on goal, but defensive mistakes around the net cost Columbus in a 5-2 loss on Dec. 18 against the Minnesota Wild.

Fresh off their blockbuster acquisition of star defenseman Quinn Hughes via trade and riding a five-game winning streak, the Wild overwhelmed the Blue Jackets in the third period at Nationwide Arena.

Though not credited for an assist, Hughes skated around the Jackets' defense to get the puck in deep for the Wild's top line. Joel Eriksson Ek scored right around the blue area with 9:50 remaining to make it 3-2 Minnesota.

"We can't allow people just to skate freely to the net," said Eason. "We have to get a little harder and tougher and greasier in those areas, and firmer."

That would prove the game-winner, because with under two minutes to go, the Wild sent most of the Blue Jackets' crowd home early with two goals on Columbus' empty net.

"We're playing well enough to win, but it's getting old and we keep losing," said Werenski. "I mean, enough is enough. It's unacceptable... at the end of the day, this is getting outrageous. I mean, we're a good hockey team and we're just losing games. So maybe we're not a good hockey team; I don't know."

The loss marked the first time in Werenski's 10-year NHL career that he recorded multiple goals in back-to-back games. His first goal came at the end of a quiet first period, when the Jackets took advantage of a giveaway low in the Wild's offensive zone. With the third line on the ice, Miles Wood swiped the puck away from Wild defenseman Brock Faber and found Cole Sillinger skating down the center of the ice with Werenski behind him.

Charlie Coyle received the puck and sent a perfect lateral pass to Werenski on the right side for a rocketing shot and score.

Maintaining a better pace and offensive pressure than the Wild in the second period, the Jackets' momentum was halted on the penalty kill when Kiril Kaprizov found Ryan Hartman next to goalie Jet Greaves for an easy push-in goal to tie the game. Greaves finished with 23 saves.

Three minutes later, the Wild broke down the top of the Blue Jackets' offensive zone with a textbook triangle of passes from the second line, resulting in a Vladimir Tarasenko goal.

Werenski countered by stealing the puck from Tyler Pitlick near the center line and turned on the afterburners to even the score before the end of the second period.

The Blue Jackets now own a -23 goal differential in the third period.

"We wish we had a little more intensity in that area, but our try is there," said Eason. "We're not questioning that."

Because of their most recent collapse, the Jackets are back in the loss column, unable to string together wins after breaking their five-game losing streak Dec. 16.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Unable to Find Enough Offense in Loss to Wild

By Mark Scheig - December 18, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets were looking to end their four-game homestand on a high note. A win against the Minnesota Wild would have ensured splitting their four games. Instead, it was the same old recent story playing out again.

Joel Eriksson Ek scored the game winning goal with 8:50 left in regulation to help lift the Wild to a 5-2 win over the Blue Jackets on Thursday night. Zach Werenski scored two more goals but it was not enough. Jesper Wallstedt shined again making 27 saves.

The story of this game was a more somber room postgame after another undesired result.

### **Game Recap**

Recent Blue Jackets' games have played out in a certain way. They're good enough to get a lead. They're not good enough to hold on to those leads. It happened again on Thursday night.

Werenski opened the scoring on a great backhanded pass by Charlie Coyle. That was Werenski's 12th goal of the season. The Blue Jackets went into the room up 1-0.

The Blue Jackets came out in the second and dominated most of the play. They however failed to extend their lead. That ultimately cost them on this night.

The Blue Jackets took a single minor penalty in the game. The Wild converted it to tie the game at one. Kirill Kaprizov found Ryan Hartman in front of Jet Greaves.

Right before this, Wild coach John Hynes during a timeout yelled at his players for the way the second period started. They responded with two goals in 2:45 to take the lead. Vladimir Tarasenko scored on a pretty passing goal for the 2-1 lead.

Werenski then connected on his second of the night to keep the Blue Jackets right in it. That was his 13th of the season. He has scored four of the last five Blue Jackets' goals. At 2-2 going into the third, they had another chance to break their third-period misery. Wallstedt ensured that didn't happen.

Eriksson Ek got in front of Greaves and was able to power a rebound home. The Blue Jackets looked at it to see if they'd challenge for goalie interference. They decided not to. The Wild added a pair of empty netters from Kaprizov and Boldy to seal away the 5-2 win.

Postgame, the Bluer Jackets were more somber than usual. Werenski said "it's unacceptable" twice during his availability. He even admitted he wasn't sure if they were a good hockey team right now saying good teams win hockey games.

The Blue Jackets now go to California and will play a return match with the Anaheim Ducks on Saturday night. Meanwhile, the Wild return home to host the Edmonton Oilers on Saturday afternoon.

## Bleacher Report / NHL Power Rankings After League-Changing Quinn Hughes Trade

By Lyle Fitzsimmons - December 18, 2025

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the new NHL.

OK, maybe it's not quite that drastic, but the paradigm shifted a bit with the blockbuster early-season trade that sent former Norris Trophy winner Quinn Hughes from **Vancouver to Minnesota** for three players and a first-round draft pick.

The Wild were already playing well thanks to timely scoring and a stingy defense, but the addition of the former Canucks captain puts them on the list of teams with legit title aspirations this season, which is reflected in this week's Power Rankings.

They ticked up five spots from No. 8 to No. 3 after voting by the B/R staff, including two ballots on which they were second only to the front-running Colorado Avalanche.

The Dallas Stars got the rest of the No. 2 votes and wound up second behind Colorado and a spot ahead of Minnesota, setting up what could be a Central Division free-for-all in the spring. The Carolina Hurricanes are the first non-Central team on our list, taking No. 4 for the third straight week.

Results and statistics through games of Tuesday, Dec. 16, were considered as 32 points were awarded for first-place votes, all the way down to a single point for a No. 32 selection.

Take a look at what we came up with and drop a thought of your own in the app comments.

32. Vancouver Canucks

1 of 32

**Previous Ranking: 32**

**Overall Record:** 13-17-3

You won't find many Canucks fans thrilled with the deal that sent Hughes to Minnesota, but the team's 2-0-0 record to begin a five-game road trip without its former captain is as good a result as could be hoped for.

Vancouver won, 2-1, at New Jersey on Sunday before coming back Tuesday to blank the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden behind 23 saves from Thatcher Demko.

The 30-year-old stopped 48 of 49 shots in the two wins while boosting his season-long save percentage to .910.

31. Calgary Flames

2 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 30

**Overall Record:** 13-17-4

Going down by two goals in the first six minutes wasn't ideal for the Flames, whose 4-1-0 run was snuffed by a 6-3 loss at San Jose on Tuesday night.

Calgary returns home for seven of its next eight games through Jan. 5, 2026, after playing 20 of its first 34 games away from the Scotiabank Saddledome. Its 14 home games were tied for the fewest in the league entering Wednesday's games.

30. St. Louis Blues

3 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 28

**Overall Record:** 13-15-7

The Blues were already struggling to find offense, and it won't get any easier in the absence of forward Dylan Holloway, who'll miss six weeks after a problem with his right ankle prompted a trip to injured reserve.

The 24-year-old winger had 26 goals and 63 points in his first season with St. Louis after spending parts of two seasons with Edmonton. He has eight goals and 17 points in 2025-26 for the team, which entered Wednesday 30th in the league in scoring.

The Blues scored just one goal on Wednesday, but they made it count in a 1-0 win over the Jets.

29. Seattle Kraken

4 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 25

**Overall Record:** 12-13-6

Finding ways to lose games rather than win them has become the unfortunate M.O. for the Kraken during a 1-8-1 that's dipped them below .500 and erased any positives from an 11-5-5 start.

"I thought we played hard, like we have been," coach Lane Lambert [said](#) after a Tuesday loss to Colorado in which Seattle led entering the third period. "We just couldn't find a way to get it over the finish line."

28. Nashville Predators

5 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 31

**Overall Record:** 13-16-4

Seeing the St. Louis Blues has been a perfect tonic for the Predators lately, as evidenced by two wins against them in five days amid a 7-3-0 resurgence entering Wednesday's games.

Nashville won a 7-2 home verdict against St. Louis on Dec. 11, then traveled to beat the Blues, 5-2, on their home ice on Monday in a game that featured Filip Forsberg's first hat trick of the season and 11th of his NHL career.

The Preds suffered a setback on Wednesday night, though, losing to the Hurricanes.

27. Chicago Blackhawks

6 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 24

**Overall Record:** 13-14-6

Chicago's doomsday scenario came true on Friday when third-year star Connor Bedard, who'd produced 44 points in 31 games, sustained an upper-body injury in the final second while taking a faceoff in a loss against St. Louis.

He won't play in the team's final six games this month and will be reevaluated in January, according to coach Jeff Blashill.

"It's going to be a great test, right?" forward Frank Nazar [said](#). "We've got adversity to go through and something we have to fight against and prove we can come out on top."

26. Buffalo Sabres

7 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 29

**Overall Record:** 14-14-4

A prolonged stretch without a playoff berth and a last-place standing through the first third of this season finally cost GM Kevyn Adams his job on Monday and elevated former Columbus executive Jarmo Kekäläinen into the position.

Adams was in his sixth season as GM in Buffalo, which last made the playoffs in 2011.

Kekäläinen, who was brought in as a senior adviser in May, reached the postseason five times during his tenure as GM with the Blue Jackets.

25. Winnipeg Jets

8 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 27

**Overall Record:** 15-16-2

A loss is bad enough, but a loss in a game you led heading into the final two minutes is even more difficult to take—particularly amid a long stretch of struggle.

"That is a game that should have been won by us," coach Scott Arniel [said](#) after the Jets dropped a 3-2 decision to visiting Ottawa on Monday. "At the end of the day, these are the games you've got to learn to win."

Winnipeg's struggles continued with a 1-0 loss to St. Louis on Wednesday.

#### 24. Utah Mammoth

9 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 22

**Overall Record:** 17-16-3

The Mammoth split the first two games of a three-game road trip that ended Wednesday night in Detroit, but coach André Tourigny seemed especially troubled by the resolve shown in a 4-1 loss at Boston that snuffed a two-game win streak.

"I want more ownership. I don't know if it's accountability or ownership," Tourigny [said](#). "We're in their building. It's one thing to say it in the room; it's another thing to buckle up, push back, and be ready for their answer."

Utah responded in the Motor City on Wednesday, beating the Red Wings, 4-1.

#### 23. Columbus Blue Jackets

10 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 21

**Overall Record:** 14-13-6

Points from seven players and a strong defensive effort were a winning combination for Columbus in an OT win over visiting Anaheim that ended a 0-4-1 skid.

The Blue Jackets had allowed four or more goals three times and scored more than two just twice in the losing streak, which included three road games and the final two at home.

The team will be home again on Thursday before a quick trip out west to visit Anaheim and Los Angeles.

"I feel like if we play like we did (Tuesday), we're going to win more games than not," defenseman Zach Werenski [said](#).

#### 22. New York Rangers

11 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 18

**Overall Record:** 16-15-4

Stop us if you've heard this before. The Rangers aren't just anemic at home this season; they're historically anemic.

A 3-0 loss to visiting Vancouver on Tuesday was the 10th time in 17 games at Madison Square Garden in which they've been held to one goal or less. That now includes six shutout losses and has predictably yielded an ugly 4-10-3 record alongside a league-best 12-5-1 mark on the road.

"I'm not concerned, I'm just (angry)," captain J.T. Miller [said](#). "You feel like you work so hard and you make a lot of plays, and a lot of nights we feel like we're outplaying the other team and we end up in here (angry) because we didn't score enough goals."

21. Ottawa Senators

12 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 23

**Overall Record:** 15-13-4

A dramatic OT win at Winnipeg allowed the Senators to end a brief road trip at 2-1-0, but more important to coach Travis Green was the way his team responded to the adversity of trailing entering the final two minutes of regulation.

"I've been saying it a lot, we've liked the way we've played as of late," he [said](#), "and it's not easy to stick with your game when you're not getting the wins."

20. San Jose Sharks

13 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 26

**Overall Record:** 17-14-3

The Sharks were 3-2-0 on a successful five-game road trip and clearly brought the mojo home with them for a 6-3 defeat of Calgary on Tuesday.

Macklin Celebrini had four points in the defeat of the Flames, and his 11 points over the past five games have him on pace for 123 for the season after he had 63 in 70 games as a rookie in 2025-26.

19. Toronto Maple Leafs

14 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 17

**Overall Record:** 15-12-5

Two goals in the final four minutes of the third period lifted the Maple Leafs to a Tuesday night win against visiting Chicago and extended a recent run that has seen them go 5-1-2 in their last eight games.

"It's more of a lesson that when we play our game, things go the right way, and when we are not on our game, it goes the wrong way," forward Dakota Joshua [said](#). "Pretty simple lesson."

18. New Jersey Devils

15 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 15

**Overall Record:** 19-14-1

An already dinged-up New Jersey defensive unit took another hit when Simon Nemec was placed on injured reserve with a lower-body problem that surfaced during a practice late last week.

His exit coincided with the imminent return of veteran Brett Pesce, who had suffered a hand injury in late October and entered this week having played just nine games.

The Devils started their Western road swing with a win, beating Vegas in a shootout on Wednesday.

17. Edmonton Oilers

16 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 20

**Overall Record:** 16-12-6

It was an enjoyable Tuesday for the Oilers, who won in Pittsburgh to improve to 5-1-1 in their last seven games, defeated former teammate Stuart Skinner in their first matchup since he was traded, and saw forward Leon Draisaitl rack up four points to surpass 1,000 points in his NHL career.

The 30-year-old is the first German-born player to hit 1,000 and became the fifth-fastest player born outside of North America to do so, following Peter Stastny, Jari Kurri, Jaromir Jagr, and Nikita Kucherov.

16. Montreal Canadiens

17 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 16

**Overall Record:** 17-12-4

Rookie Jacob Fowler is already the third goalie to get multiple starts for the Canadiens this season, and the 21-year-old has been all over the board in his initial three appearances with the team.

A third-round pick in the 2023 draft, Fowler made 36 saves to defeat Pittsburgh in his NHL debut last Thursday, but has since gone 0-1-1 while allowing eight goals on 49 shots (.837 save percentage) in losses to the New York Rangers and Philadelphia.

15. Los Angeles Kings

18 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 11

**Overall Record:** 14-10-9

The Kings may be without their starting goalie for a bit after Darcy Kuemper left Monday's game with an upper-body injury following a first-period goalmouth collision with Mikko Rantanen of Dallas.

Kuemper, who took a forearm to the head but eventually left the ice on his own power, was placed on injured reserve, and Los Angeles called up journeyman veteran Pheonix Copley from Ontario of the AHL.

#### 14. Pittsburgh Penguins

19 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 7

**Overall Record:** 14-9-9

To say it's been a bad stretch seems a colossal understatement for the Penguins, who lost all five games (0-2-3) of an extended homestand and have dropped six straight overall (0-2-4) after a Tuesday loss to visiting Edmonton.

The game with the Oilers was the first since Pittsburgh dealt goalie Tristan Jarry to Edmonton in exchange for Stuart Skinner.

Skinner made 17 saves on 22 shots in his debut with the team.

#### 13. Florida Panthers

20 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 19

**Overall Record:** 18-13-2

Don't look now, but the Florida Panthers are beginning to play like, well...the Florida Panthers.

The two-time defending Cup champs returned home Wednesday after a four-game road trip in which they went 3-1-0 while allowing just five goals in wins at Utah, Dallas and Tampa Bay. A loss at Colorado was the only blemish for the team, which is at Amerant Bank Arena for eight of nine games through Jan. 4, 2026.

The defending champs continued their winning ways at home with a victory over the Kings on Wednesday.

#### 12. Tampa Bay Lightning

21 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 10

**Overall Record:** 18-12-3

A stretch of five games in five cities across eight days didn't end so well for the Lightning, who dropped a 5-2 decision to visiting Florida on Monday.

Tampa Bay began the gauntlet a week earlier with a loss in Toronto before getting points in three straight games (2-0-1) at Montreal, New Jersey, and the New York Islanders.

#### 11. Boston Bruins

22 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 13

**Overall Record:** 20-14-0

Raise your hand if you had Morgan Geekie turning into a goal-scoring machine for the streaking Bruins, who've won five of their last six after a Tuesday defeat of Utah that opened a five-game homestand.

Geekie, who had 72 goals in his first 333 NHL games, has 24 in 34 games this season and entered Wednesday trailing only Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon. The 27-year-old forward's current pace would give him 58 goals in 82 games.

10. New York Islanders

23 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 12

**Overall Record:** 19-12-3

The Islanders will split the rest of the calendar year with home and away games, just as they've successfully done over their last eight games (five home, three away), going 6-2-0.

New York has a .618 points percentage through its first 17 home games of 2025-26 (10-6-1) and has been nearly as good on the road with a .594 percentage in 16 games (9-6-1). The team will host Vancouver, New Jersey, and the New York Rangers between now and Dec. 31 while visiting Buffalo, Columbus, and Chicago.

9. Detroit Red Wings

24 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 14

**Overall Record:** 19-13-3

Alex DeBrincat passed 40 goals twice and 30 once across five seasons with Chicago, and his eight goals in the last 13 games entering Wednesday with Detroit got him to 20 for the eighth time in his NHL career.

But that's not all he does, according to coach Todd McLellan.

"His ability to put the puck in the net is second to none," McLellan [said](#). "Sometimes when scorers don't score, that's it, but (he) does so many other things that he almost drags the rest of the team into the game."

Detroit suffered a setback at home to Utah on Wednesday, but still leads the Atlantic Division.

8. Washington Capitals

25 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 3

**Overall Record:** 18-11-4

A charge into the upper tier of the rankings yielded the season's first prolonged adversity for the Capitals, whose 5-0 loss at Minnesota on Tuesday was their third in a row (0-2-1) and fourth in five games (1-2-2) since the end of a six-game win streak.

Washington scored just eight goals in those five games after averaging 4.5 per contest during the winning run. Its 3.21 goals per game are now 10th in the league, down from a second-place standing (3.5 per game) on Dec. 4.

7. Anaheim Ducks

26 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 5

**Overall Record:** 20-12-2

A deflection off a goalie mask was good enough for a goal that got the Ducks to OT and allowed them to salvage a point in Columbus in the finale of a five-game road trip in which they went 2-2-1.

Anaheim was playing the second half of a back-to-back after winning over the Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Monday.

"We've had a lot of success and (Tuesday) was one of the games that didn't go our way," coach Joel Quenneville [said](#), "but we'll take the point on the road trip and regroup when we get home."

6. Philadelphia Flyers

27 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 9

**Overall Record:** 17-9-6

The Flyers remain one of the league's early positive surprises, but they took a competitive blow on Wednesday upon disclosing forward Tyson Foerster would be out for five months after having surgery on an injured arm.

The 23-year-old's 10 goals in 21 games are second on the team, though he's not played since Dec. 1 and had also missed four games with a lower-body injury he'd sustained while blocking a shot.

5. Vegas Golden Knights

28 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 6

**Overall Record:** 16-6-10

The Golden Knights may look back at a five-game December road trip as the turnaround point of their season, given that they completed it at 4-0-1 following a 3-2 win at Columbus.

Vegas scored exactly three goals in each of the four victories while holding New Jersey, the Rangers, Philadelphia, and the Blue Jackets to six combined. Goalies Akira Schmid and Carter Hart picked up two wins apiece and are 14-2-5 for the season, each with a save percentage above .900.

Vegas had to settle for a point in their return home to Sin City, losing in a shootout to New Jersey.

4. Carolina Hurricanes

29 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 4

**Overall Record:** 22-9-2

Another week, another chance to celebrate the stunning early run compiled by unheralded waiver pickup Brandon Bussi, who's 11-1-0 in 12 starts with the Hurricanes and entered Wednesday second in the league with a 2.05 goals-against average.

The 27-year-old is also a darling of the secondary stats crowd, with a league-best .890 save percentage on high-danger chances. Carolina leads the league in offensive zone time percentage (46.2) and 5-on-5 shot attempts percentage (60.1).

3. Minnesota Wild

30 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 8

**Overall Record:** 20-9-5

The Wild leapt toward title contention with the trade that brought Hughes from Vancouver, and the two results since his arrival—defeats of Boston and Washington with a combined score of 11-2—do nothing to suggest otherwise.

The Tuesday win over the Capitals was the NHL-best seventh shutout of the season for Minnesota, which has already gotten a goal and an assist from Hughes while he's logged better than 56 minutes of ice time across 54 shifts.

2. Dallas Stars

31 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 2

**Overall Record:** 22-7-5

There has not been a lot of adversity for the Stars all season, and they kept the latest bout brief, ending a two-game skid with a three-goal third period to beat Los Angeles on Monday.

Dallas had won four straight before the lapse that led to a road loss at Minnesota and a home shutout at the hands of Florida. The win over the Kings preps the team for a quick trip out west for games in San Jose and Anaheim.

1. Colorado Avalanche

32 of 32

**Previous Ranking:** 1

**Overall Record:** 24-2-7

Nathan MacKinnon had three points to retake the league scoring lead, and the Avalanche extended yet another prolonged point streak—this time to six games (5-0-1)—with a 5-3 win in Seattle on Tuesday night.

Colorado trailed, 3-2, heading into the third period, and the three goals it scored gave the team its first winning third-period rally of the season. The Avalanche have failed to record a standings point just twice in 33 games, a stretch that had already yielded streaks of eight and 17 games before the current six-game run.