



## **Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips November 29-December 1, 2025**

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## The Athletic / Columbus Blue Jackets in a rut: How three coaches would fix their habit of blowing leads

**By Aaron Portzline – December 1, 2025**

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

### **Item No. 1: Stay positive, aggressive**

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell and coach Dean Evason spent part of Saturday, an off day for the players, watching film and talking about ways the Blue Jackets can get past this ugly habit they've developed.

November couldn't end soon enough for the Blue Jackets. They let seven third-period leads get away, leading to one regulation loss, four overtime or shootout losses, and two games they managed to win beyond regulation, giving valuable points to their opponents.

On Friday, the Blue Jackets lost a 3-1 lead in the third period against the Metro Division rival Pittsburgh Penguins, losing 4-3 less than a minute into overtime. That game was emblematic of what's been happening.

It's not one mistake the Blue Jackets are making. It would be easy to fix if they were. On Friday, Ivan Provorov had a defensive breakdown on the 3-2 goal. Zach Werenski had a neutral-zone turnover that led to the tying goal.

Goaltender Jet Greaves, still a rookie, looked hesitant in playing a puck before Sidney Crosby could get to it on the tying goal. It's only fair to question Evason, who had rookie forward Luca Pinelli on the ice (with Crosby!) on the first shift of overtime, which is where the game ended.

We spoke with three veteran coaches — Bruce Boudreau, Ken Hitchcock and Todd Richards, with a combined 3,109 games behind NHL benches — to see what steps they would take to get through this rash of frustrating losses.

None of the three wanted to speak specifically about the Blue Jackets, because it wouldn't be fair without knowing the current dynamics of the players and the coaches and they didn't want to undercut Evason.

They all had a consistent theme, though. Here's what they said:

Bruce Boudreau

Coached: Washington Capitals, Minnesota Wild, Anaheim Ducks, Vancouver Canucks

*"Stay aggressive, boys"*

You asked if I'd break things and scream, or if I'd try to lift everybody up. The answer is, you try everything and see what works. I used to come into the room after two (periods), and if we had the lead, the message would be simple: don't quit playing.

Be responsible. If you're the third man, let's stay high and make sure it gets deep. But let's play for the next goal. Don't sit back and let them come at us, because you know that's what they're going to do.

*"Stay positive"*

The one thing I would absolutely not do is say, "Remember what happened last game." Those guys know what happened. I'd never bring it up. I wouldn't want to bring up a negative thought in that situation.

I liked to make them imagine the positive. I'd be saying, "Boys, we're playing so damn good. We should be winning all these games, eh? When we turn it around, we're never going to lose again. Just imagine how you're going to feel when we get past this. Imagine how much stronger and together we're going to be. It'll be amazing."

Ken Hitchcock

Coached: Dallas Stars, Philadelphia Flyers, Columbus Blue Jackets, St. Louis Blues, Edmonton Oilers

*"Foot on the pedal"*

When you have a hard time keeping a lead, it's usually one reason: you're too passive. You get into protection mode and you start playing the score and not the game.

The game has changed. You can't close down games anymore by simply defending. You protect leads by spending more time in the other team's zone than your own. Most teams have two lines with high-end skill, so they can do a lot of damage. The tendency is to pull back, but you have to fight that really hard.

*"Find a line you trust"*

You have to find a line that you know you can trust to play in the other team's zone. I'd play the whole game with it, but if you have to put it together during the game, do it. Three guys who are going to keep pushing, guys who can forecheck like hell and keep the puck down there. And when you find that line, as the game gets going, they're playing every other shift. They can find a lot of accomplishment and confidence in that, and the other team comes at it from the other direction. "Oh, no. These guys again." That's where you want to get to.

Todd Richards

Coached: Minnesota Wild, Columbus Blue Jackets

*"Read the room"*

A coach knows his group. The first couple of times it happens, maybe you're a little upset. But then you realize, if it keeps happening, well, this is something and you have to coach through it.

It's an attitude thing, I think. It keeps happening and it becomes the mental side of it, too. You sure don't want to have them back off because that sends a message to your players. I'd go the other direction and tell them, push them, to keep playing. Be smart, but stay aggressive.

*"Look to the future"*

You'd want to have something that's new or different that you can give the group that maybe helps them believe that it's gonna be different. Maybe it's different lines. Maybe it's a player coming back into the lineup.

I'd stress that there's gonna be an end to this. You're going to get over this hump, guys. You know that. You are. And, strange as it sounds, it can be a really good thing. It's some adversity, and once you overcome that, it can be really powerful to the group. It's just that: "We've gotten through this together. We can do this."

## **Item No. 2: Take 5, Charlie Coyle**

"Take 5" is our weekly, brief and (mostly) non-hockey conversation with a Blue Jackets player, coach, broadcaster or staffer. This week, veteran center Charlie Coyle:

What part of Columbus do you call home?

We're in Upper Arlington. We looked at a couple of places and signed up within a day or two. It was quick and easy. I had no clue when I was traded here what it was like, but so many people reached out to say how nice it is. You know what? They were right. It's a great place, and it's easy living. I'm from Boston, and Boston is a little different than that. I guess it's less of a grind here, if that makes sense.

Guilty pleasure song?

It's probably a little-kid song that my (2-year-old) daughter listens to over and over. We listen to her stuff in the car, right, but I'll drop her off at home or someplace with my wife, and I'll be locked it, singing it for like 10 minutes before I realize that, oh, I'm singing it and nobody else is in the car with me. People wouldn't know it unless they have little kids. There's a female singer, Charlie Hope, and there are a few by her we listen (to). Great voice, really relaxing. It makes you feel good.

Guilty pleasure snack?

I have to be really careful about what I eat, 'cause I'll gain weight in a hurry. But, saying that ... Dairy Queen. Whew. Reese's peanut butter cup blizzard, with extra Reese's. When I was growing up, we had a Dairy Queen and we knew a girl who worked the counter. She would hook us up. (laughs) That's where the problem began.

Go-to restaurants, casual or otherwise?

TownHall for brunch. Really good. We went yesterday. That's a casual spot, but it's really good food. I had a nice bone broth there. We don't go out a whole lot, honestly. There's a place near us called Littleton's (Market Cafe), and we live right near it. We've gone a handful of times. Really nice spot.

Best Christmas gift you ever received?

I remember writing out my Christmas list. I think I was 12 years old. I asked for a yellow Easton Synergy Stick with a Steve Yzerman curve. I specified that. I'd been using wood sticks, but I put it on the list and I didn't expect to get it. We opened all of our presents, and my dad was like, "Hey, Charlie. What's under

the couch? I think I see something.” And under the couch, there it was. I was so pumped. Did not expect it, but so excited.

Charlie Coyle has 15 points in 25 games in his first season with the Blue Jackets. Russell LaBounty / Imagin Images

### **Item No. 3: Snacks**

- The Blue Jackets are among the clubs that have spoken to the Vancouver Canucks about trade scenarios, including a trade that could bring forward Kiefer Sherwood home to Columbus. Sherwood, 30, has emerged as one of the NHL’s top power forwards over the past few seasons and is an unrestricted free agent this summer. He leads Vancouver with 12 goals after scoring a career-high 19 last season. The Canucks, who notified all 31 clubs last week that they are open for business, are looking at major changes this offseason. One other club to watch here is Boston, and the Bruins have a big fan of Sherwood already in their dressing room: Sean Kuraly, another Columbus native, has been friends with him for years.

- Evason acknowledged this week that center Sean Monahan is playing through at least one injury, though he wouldn’t specify. It’s been clear Monahan doesn’t have the same zip on pucks, either passing or shooting, as he’s had in the past. He has 3-8-11 in 25 games, but he ended a nine-game streak without a goal by scoring on Friday vs. Pittsburgh. Monahan, whose career has been beset by injuries, said he hasn’t considered sitting out games. “You go through different things and different times of the year, and you’ve just got to try and work through it,” Monahan said.

- Evason was asked if the coaching staff has considered forcing Monahan to sit for a few games. He smiled. “Sure. You go tell him that,” he said.

“Listen, he’s a hockey player. And he wants too play hockey, and he’ll continue to play hockey and play very well. He does a lot of things for our hockey club. If he can play — and he’s not injured, he’s just banged up — he’s gonna play.”

- New Pacific Airlines, the U.S.-based charter carrier that has been responsible for flying the Blue Jackets and other NHL clubs to and from road games, ceased operations without warning last Wednesday. The Blue Jackets used Sun Country Airlines for their trip on Sunday to Newark, N.J. Their departure was delayed by more than two hours.

- It sounds as if Mathieu Olivier, who suffered an upper-body injury last Monday in Washington, is going to be out of the lineup for a while longer. The Blue Jackets have offered no timetable other than to say it will be “weeks” before he dresses in a game.

The same goes for defenseman Erik Gudbranson, who has had a setback in his recovery from a hip injury. The Blue Jackets hoped he would return by the end of November, but it’s taking longer than expected, and he hasn’t yet skated with the group.

- Captain Boone Jenner skated with the Blue Jackets on Sunday, the first time he's joined the group for practice since he was injured on Nov. 11 in Seattle. He's not traveling with the club to New Jersey for Monday's game, but there's an outside chance he plays on Tuesday vs. Detroit.

- Right winger Kirill Marchenko, who has missed three games with a lower-body injury, is said to be close to a return. He did not skate with the club on Sunday, but he has skated twice on his own, a good sign that he's improving. Like Jenner, there's an outside chance he plays against the Red Wings.

- When Adam Fantilli joined the Blue Jackets for his first NHL training camp in 2023, it was veteran winger Patrik Laine who took him under his wing, inviting Fantilli to move in with him until he could find a place. Fantilli, who hadn't yet turned 19, spent about two weeks with Laine before moving into a downtown hotel room, an experience he found just genuinely miserable, he said. That's why Fantilli was quick to invite Pinelli to stay in his downtown condo when Pinelli was recalled from AHL Cleveland last week. It helps that Fantilli grew up in Toronto playing with Francesco Pinelli, Luca's older brother.

- Pinelli played 16:20 in his NHL debut on Wednesday vs. Toronto and played 18:00 on Friday vs. Pittsburgh. That total ice time (34:20) is the second-most ever for a Blue Jackets forward in his first two NHL games. Cam Atkinson played 17:36 and 16:52 (34:28) on Oct. 7 and Oct. 8, 2011 against Nashville and Minnesota.

- GM Don Waddell has taken note of the ice time, as well as the fact that Pinelli (along with Monahan) was the first player sent out for overtime on Friday against the Penguins.

"He's given us exactly what we thought ... he can skate, he hustles, all of that," Waddell said. "I worry that, for a 20-year-old, that it's a lot for a young kid. We have to manage him. Because of Marchenko and Jenner being out, we've inserted him into one of the top lines, and that's a lot. He was averaging 15:30 in the AHL."

It bears watching what becomes of Pinelli when Marchenko and/or Jenner return. Has he been one of the Blue Jackets' best forwards the past two games? Yes. But do the Blue Jackets want him playing in a third- or fourth-line role when the veterans are back? Hmm. This much we know: Pinelli was recalled and got a shot high in the lineup because Yegor Chinakhov did not seize the role when given the opportunity.

- Defenseman Zach Werenski has at least a point in eight of his last nine games, putting up 5-8-13 in that span. With his goal in Wednesday's 2-1 overtime loss to Toronto, Werenski passed R.J. Umberger (120 goals) for fifth on the franchise's all-time list. He's now at 122 goals, leaving him 20 behind Nick Foligno (142) for fourth on the list. One other milestone nearing: Werenski, who will play his 593rd NHL game on Monday in New Jersey, is closing in on David Savard (597) for fifth on the franchise list and tops among defensemen.

- Keep inaugural Blue Jackets forward Kevin Dineen in your thoughts. Dineen said via social media this weekend that he'd been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

- Trey Fix-Wolansky, whose name dots the AHL Cleveland record book — most goals (112), assists (147), and points (259), and third-most games (289) — returned to Cleveland on Friday with AHL Hartford, the

top affiliate of the New York Rangers. It was his first game back since he signed with the Rangers this summer as a free agent. As expected, Fix-Wolansky received quite the ovation from a crowd of 13,029 in Rocket Arena. And, as expected, he scored twice, including the empty-net goal to cap Hartford's 6-4 win. He added another goal in Saturday's 3-2 win.

- After missing five games with groin and ankle injuries, center Cayden Lindstrom, the Blue Jackets' No. 4 overall pick in 2024, returned for Michigan State on Friday for a non-conference game vs. Colgate. Lindstrom had four shots on goal, won 10 of 18 faceoffs and had two penalties (boarding, roughing) in the Spartans' 4-1 win. Lindstrom has just two points (1-1-2) in nine games this season.

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets cough up two-goal lead late, lose to Penguins in OT

**By Aaron Portzline – November 29, 2025**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It's Thanksgiving weekend in the U.S., but it feels like Groundhog Day in central Ohio.

Even with the Columbus Blue Jackets holding a two-goal lead heading into the third period on Friday against the Pittsburgh Penguins, there was a "here we go again" angst hanging in the air of Nationwide Arena.

Then it happened again: another blown lead by the Blue Jackets in a season that is quickly being defined and derailed by them.

The Penguins' Bryan Rust scored only 13 seconds into the third period, Sidney Crosby tied the score at 3 later in the period and Kris Letang ended it only 58 seconds into overtime, sending Pittsburgh to a 4-3 win before a beyond-capacity crowd of 18,194.

It sent the Blue Jackets looking for answers yet again.

"We're sick of talking about it," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "I'm sure you guys (the media) are sick of talking about it, and I'm sure the fans are sick of seeing it.

"So at the end of the day, it's on us to just find a way to get a win, to close a game out. And that's in here, it's in this room, and it just comes down to us doing it now."

The Blue Jackets went into the second intermission on a high note. A Letang turnover in the Penguins' zone started an impressive sequence in which Blue Jackets veteran center Charlie Coyle won a puck battle and fed Werenski for a goal with 3.3 seconds remaining.

That goal gave the Jackets a 3-1 lead.

"We're in the driver's seat," Coyle said. "It shouldn't be that big of a deal, you know? It's a whole period left to play hockey, a great opportunity for us in a hockey game. That's got to be the mindset of it.

"Just about every team I've played on goes through stuff like this. Most teams in the league go through stuff like this. It's something I've experienced in my 14 years, and the good teams can correct it. A little bit of adversity is good for us."

When Rust scored 13 seconds into the third, you could feel the Blue Jackets recoil for at least the next five or six minutes. Crosby's goal at 8:28 of the period tied the score and brought an audible groan from the crowd.

For many, it probably seemed inevitable.

"We felt a bit of a ... not necessarily a sag," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "It's just like, when things haven't gone well, you start thinking and what have you.



“We didn’t say, ‘OK, let’s sit back.’ Or ‘Let’s be a little more aggressive.’ We just got on the wrong side of people at key times, right? They get two glorious opportunities because, for whatever reason, we were moving forward as opposed to defending, and ... you leave a couple of guys wide open like that.”

Since Nov. 2, the Blue Jackets have been outscored 21-8 in the third period, and 25-9 in the third period and overtime. They’ve blown leads and lost in regulation to the New York Islanders and Vancouver Canucks. They’ve blown leads and lost in overtime to the Edmonton Oilers, Detroit Red Wings, Toronto Maple Leafs and now Pittsburgh.

That’s just in November.

How many points has Columbus lost? Eight? Ten? How many points, like Friday, has the team gifted to opponents? The points Friday night went to the Penguins, their Metropolitan Division rivals.

## The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner nearing return

**By Brian Hedger – December 1, 2025**

There isn't a specific date set, but Boone Jenner is approaching a return to the Blue Jackets' lineup.

The Jackets' captain, who has missed nine games with an upper-body injury, practiced Nov. 30 at Nationwide Arena to check off another box in the team's return protocols. Jenner won't travel for a game Dec. 1 against the New Jersey Devils but might be available Dec. 4 against the Detroit Red Wings.

Jenner, 32, skated on his own for about two weeks before going through recent contact drills with assistant coach Jared Boll. After clearing those hurdles, he centered the second line at practice while Sean Monahan got a maintenance day to recover from issues he's playing through.

"If (we'd done) a battle drill, (Jenner) probably wouldn't have been involved in it," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said, "but he'll get (a Nov. 30 skate) and a couple more skates, and then we're optimistic that he'll play very shortly."

Zach Werenski also got a recovery day for something he's playing through, and the Blue Jackets are missing forward Kirill Marchenko, forward Mathieu Olivier and defenseman Erik Gudbranson due to injuries. Jenner is eager to play but not yet ready to put a specific date on his return.

"A real timeline, I think, is just a day at a time here," he said. "(Practice) was big in the process, so build on it and see where it takes us. I'm just doing what I can control now, and that's taking the right steps ... to make it (back) as soon as possible."

Jenner was injured in the first period of the Blue Jackets' 2-1 shootout win Nov. 11 in Seattle, a back-to-back finale after losing 5-4 in overtime at the Edmonton Oilers. He tried to play through it but left after one shift in the second period.

"I tried to go and wasn't anywhere close to playing," Jenner said. "It's just something that happens. It's something I've never had before, so I don't think we dodged a bullet or anything. I was hoping the other way of maybe just being a couple days as opposed to weeks. It just needed a little bit of time."

## The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets watch another win evaporate: Takeaways

**Brian Hedger – November 30, 2025**

It didn't take long for Zach Werenski's goal Nov. 28 at Nationwide Arena to prompt questions the Blue Jackets are tired of answering.

Scored with four seconds left in the second period to put them up 3-1 against the Pittsburgh Penguins, the Blue Jackets got another chance to close out a game while leading in a third period. Those watching probably had the same thought: Can they make it stand up?

No, as it turned out. They couldn't. Again. The Blue Jackets dropped their fourth straight game after coughing up their eighth lead and fourth two-goal lead in a third period during their first 25 games, losing on Kris Letang's goal 59 seconds into overtime.

There they went again.

"We're sick of talking about it," Werenski said. "I'm sure (reporters) are sick of asking about it, and I'm sure fans are sick of seeing it. So, at the end of the day, it's just on us to find a way to get a win, a win in regulation, and close a game out. That's in here. It's in this (locker) room and it just comes down to doing it now."

That's become a mantra.

Two years ago, under former coach Pascal Vincent in 2023-24, the Blue Jackets lost third-period leads 15 times and went 2-2-11 in those games. They're already more than halfway to matching that number just past the quarter point of this season.

Dean Evason, hired by Blue Jackets president/GM Don Waddell to replace Vincent, appeared to fix this glitch last season. The Jackets stayed in the playoff hunt for 81 games despite dealing with grief from Johnny Gaudreau's tragic death.

Now, their tendency to lose late leads has returned.

"It comes down to compete in this league," center Sean Monahan said. "If you're not feeling it, or whatever it is, you've got to find ways to defend (leads), and that comes with working hard."

Here are four more takeaways:

Reasons for Columbus Blue Jackets collapses not easy to pinpoint

Back when the Blue Jackets began losing late leads, the common denominator was how they played. Too often, they played on their heels defending rather than attacking.

This latest stretch of vanished leads wasn't due to that. The Blue Jackets have begun playing more assertively with late leads, but they've made too many mistakes that led to goals. Goalies Jet Greaves and Elvis Merzlikins are also not free of blame, so it's harder to assign a general cause now.

Evason and his staff look closely at what leads to each collapse, but those studies have led to his adoption of a commonly used witticism about insanity being defined as doing the same things repeatedly to achieve different results.

"We've just got to keep doing the same things over and over and over again, and then it'll turn," he said.

"And ... when things turn, it turns. We need it to turn, but we still have to do our work, not only physically but mentally, to make sure that we have that thought process that, yes, it's going to get better."

Werenski boiled it down more bluntly.

"We just have to get one done, close it out, and I feel like it'll kind of resolve itself," he said. "Until that happens, everybody's going to keep talking about it."

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski is sizzling

## The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets hockey drops 3rd period lead, falls to Penguins

**By Brian Hedger – November 29, 2025**

The Blue Jackets are stuck in a maddening rut of blowing leads in third periods, but they keep giving themselves opportunities to change the narrative.

Maybe one of these days, it'll flip around. Until that happens, though, lost wins and points keep piling up, including the latest gut punch with a 4-3 overtime loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Nov. 29 at Nationwide Arena after starting the third leading 3-1.

Bryan Rust cut it to 3-2 for the Penguins (12-6-5) just 13 seconds into the third, Sidney Crosby tied it 3-3 at 8:28 and defenseman Kris Letang won it 59 seconds into overtime to hand the Blue Jackets (11-9-5) their fourth straight loss.

The good news there, for those looking for some, is the Jackets are 0-1-3 in those four defeats, earning three out of eight potential points.

Sean Monahan, Brendan Gaunce and Zach Werenski scored goals for the Blue Jackets, including Werenski's with four seconds left in the second for the 3-1 lead that vanished. Jet Greaves (25 saves) started in net for the Jackets, who are last in the Metropolitan Division but only three points behind the Washington Capitals for third.

This was the eighth time in the Blue Jackets' first 25 games they've blown a lead in the third, the fourth time it was a two-goal margin and the second two-goal lead they've coughed up against the Penguins — the first ending in a shootout win for Columbus on Oct. 25 in Pittsburgh.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Overthinking Their Way Down NHL Standings

**By Mark Scheig – November 29, 2025**

You know things aren't the best for the Columbus Blue Jackets when both the head coach and their best player both admit they've never gone through anything like they're going through now. After yet another blown third-period multi-goal lead, both Dean Evason and Zach Werenski conceded that fact.

The Blue Jackets held a 3-1 lead after 40 minutes. They allowed the next three including Kris Letang's overtime winner to lift the Pittsburgh Penguins to a 4-3 win in front of a Black Friday sellout crowd at Nationwide Arena.

The topic of late blown leads is something that as Werenski said postgame, they're sick of talking about. He also said the media is sick of asking about it (he's right) and the fans are sick of seeing it (also right.)

Here's Werenski from Friday night on not going through something like this before: "I've never gone through something like this but I think after talking to him (Charlie Coyle), teams go through all different stuff, different adversity, whether it's this or maybe bad starts or whatever it is. So how many games we've won for a period it's...I've never gone through this before. But it is adversity. And if you do resolve it, you usually come out stronger on the other side. And, you know, it's tough to do this right now. I do think it'll make us a stronger, better hockey club once we figure it out."

Now here's Evason: "I'm sure there's been situations late in games that there's been spells where we squeeze it a little bit tight or we get down or whatever on ourselves as a team. I can't recall any exact comparison to this."

What the Blue Jackets are going through is more than a couple-game trend. It was their way of life in the month of November.

When all is said and done looking back at this, the Blue Jackets are truly not that far off. They are .591 in their last 11 games which is crazy to consider (4-2-5 record, 13 of possible 22 points.)

But what the Blue Jackets are doing is overthinking. That has caused them to fall down the NHL standings. They woke up Saturday morning in last place in the Metropolitan Division.

### **It's a Team Problem**

Overthinking is a team problem. While there are some individual performances that could certainly be better, both the players and the coaches are overthinking what's going on.

Let's look at the two sides of this. From the player's standpoint, the third period of the game Friday night puts this into perspective.

Werenski scores at the end of the second period to make it 3-1. More often than not, those last second goals are back breaking to the team that allowed it.

Not here though. It only took the Penguins 13 seconds to cut the deficit to one.

13 seconds.

Especially given how much of a trend this has been, that's the very last thing the Blue Jackets needed to do was to allow a goal at the start of the third. The Penguins did it in 13 seconds.

The whole dynamic of the third changed.

It wasn't the same Blue Jackets' team who played well in the first 40 minutes to build a 3-1 lead. As soon as it was 3-2, it only felt like a matter of time before the Penguins tied the game.

Thanks to a great individual play by Sidney Crosby, they did just that.

Here's what ironic too. The Blue Jackets actually weren't as bad in the third as you would think. They had more attempts and scoring chances in the period but Tristan Jarry made saves when needed.

Here's Evason on the mood after the 3-2 goal: "We felt a bit of a...not necessarily a sag. It's not like we change our game. Like tonight those two goals, they weren't systematic mistakes. We didn't say okay, let's sit back or let's be a little more aggressive. We got on the wrong side of people in key times, right? And key people. And they got two glorious opportunities because for whatever reason, we were moving forward as opposed to defending."

That's where the overthinking part comes in for the players. The Blue Jackets have had their chances to score. They haven't buried as many as they'd like.

It's natural for a player to perhaps cheat a little searching for offense. That's where even when things aren't going well, they have to stay within themselves and their systems.

Evason himself said his team was moving forward and not defending in those moments Friday. Collectively, the Blue Jackets need to stop overthinking.

The team has demonstrated they can play with anyone on most nights. Case in point? In the first 25 games this season, the Blue Jackets have really only had two games that would be considered true clunkers. The 4-1 loss to the Avalanche and the 5-1 loss to the Capitals last Monday. Every other game, the Blue Jackets had a chance to win at some point.

Mistakes are usually the result of a missed assignment or lack of execution. If they can take overthinking a situation out of the equation, that should set them back on course.

Play the last 20 minutes like they do the first 40 minutes. The Blue Jackets are more than capable of this. In November especially, they couldn't do it consistently. They have gone 19 straight games not outscoring an opponent in the third period. Nineteen. That's completely unacceptable for a team that has the talent it has.

But the coaches can do a better job too.

### **Coaches Too**

Let's look back at the start of overtime Friday night. The Penguins deployed Crosby, Bryan Rust and Erik Karlsson. The Blue Jackets countered with Werenski, Sean Monahan and Luca Pinelli.

Wait, what?

Pinelli, playing in just his second NHL game, opened overtime. It wasn't Adam Fantilli. It wasn't Kent Johnson who would thrive with all the extra open ice. The Blue Jackets opted playing Pinelli. He got caught on a long shift and was on the ice when Letang scored the winner.

What's going on here? This is overthinking a situation. Evason was asked about this postgame. Here is what he said.

"He's got a skill set," Evason said of Pinelli. "He's got some speed. He got caught out there obviously too long and he's tired at the end clearly. There's other things that go into it. Rust and Crosby aren't the biggest guys so we start with (Monahan) and him and then we know they're going to come back with Malkin and somebody, Hayes or whatever. So we were going (Coyle) and (Sillinger) against them. So we tried to match up a little bit as well. It was the same thing the other night when we started them. It was Tavares and Nylander maybe. So anyway, that was our thought process."

Let's give Pinelli credit for putting himself in that conversation. He's been fine the first two games of his NHL career. We discussed that prior to Friday's game how impressive he was in his debut.

But under no circumstances should it get to this point where the Blue Jackets aren't sending out their most skilled players available to start overtime.

The Penguins played Crosby and Malkin. The Maple Leafs played Nylander and Auston Matthews. Meanwhile, the Blue Jackets left Fantilli and Johnson on the bench. It was multiple shifts before they saw the ice Wednesday against the Maple Leafs. They didn't see the ice Friday. The game was over before they could get out there.

Why? And we haven't even discussed the lines used during the third period. Pinelli played 1:29 more in the third than Fantilli Friday night. And Pinelli got the first crack in overtime too.

Again, why? What kind of a message does this send to your first line center who's been on a tear of late? Even if there's a trust issue in certain situations, let them play and get that experience.

Other teams are putting their best players out in key situations. The Blue Jackets haven't of late. That's coaching overthinking a situation. This time, it's costing them points.

Remember how long it took Fantilli to crack the first power play unit? This has been going on for some time.

The Blue Jackets have talent. Yes, some of that talent is out of the lineup. But they're good enough to get leads. We are not having this conversation if they can't get a lead to start with.

But at the end of the day, keeping it simple works wonders. The third-period collapses is a symptom of a bigger problem that the team has full control over.

Stop overthinking every situation, especially later in games. If they can do that, they'll be winning a lot of games again. How soon that happens is now up to them to figure out.



## The Hockey Writers / Whitelaw Quietly Becoming One of Blue Jackets' Fastest-Improving Prospects

**By Matthew Buhrmann – November 30, 2025**

William Whitelaw has quietly become one of the most improved prospects in the Columbus Blue Jackets system this season. Among their 10 NCAA prospects, including names like Jackson Smith and Cayden Lindstrom, Whitelaw has made one of the biggest jumps in development.

Drafted in the third round of the 2023 NHL Draft at 66th overall, Whitelaw was selected by the Blue Jackets during the Jarmo Kekäläinen era. Now in his third collegiate season, he's taken a noticeable step forward for the defending national champion Western Michigan Broncos, becoming an important contributor on one of college hockey's best rosters.

### **Third Season, Third School**

He is in his third season in college now and has spent time at three different schools so far. He began at the University of Wisconsin after his final season in the United States Hockey League (USHL) with the Youngstown Phantoms, where he put up 61 points. At Wisconsin, he recorded 17 points in 37 games played. After this, he transferred to the University of Michigan, where he put up 18 points in 35 games played. He then transferred yet again to Western Michigan after the 2024-25 season.

When asked what led him to choose Western Michigan after moving through two previous programs, Whitelaw said the decision was centered on development and long-term goals.

"Yeah, I mean, obviously, I am fortunate to have gone to three schools in three years, but at the end of the day, you only get one chance to play in the NHL. Coming here was a no-brainer. The way this staff develops guys, they make everyone better, they harp on the details, that is how you end up playing in the NHL. That is ultimately why I came here. And, obviously, to win a national championship."

William Whitelaw, Western Michigan Broncos (Photo credit: WMU Athletics)

The Broncos sit at 9-5-0 overall about two months into the season. However, they didn't start the season the way they wanted, including a loss at home to Ferris State early this season that they had no business losing. But they are now 5-3-0 in National Collegiate Hockey Conference (NCHC) play and look to be back on track.

Part of this past off-season's challenges for head coach Pat Ferschweiler and his staff were replacing major offensive pieces after losing top scorers Alex Bump and Tim Washe to the NHL. While many key contributors returned from the national championship team, those departures opened some holes in the Broncos' forward group, spaces that new additions like Whitelaw were expected to help fill.

### **Top-Line Production**

Whitelaw has been playing on the Broncos' speedy top line at right wing, skating alongside center Owen Michaels and left wing Ty Henricks. Henricks was bumped up to that spot about a month into the season, and since then, the trio has developed some chemistry on a hard-forechecking line.

He has also taken on a noticeably larger workload this season. Whitelaw is averaging 17:39 of ice time, which is a significant jump from his role last season at Michigan. According to CollegeHockeyNews.com, he has the second-highest CHIP score on the Western Michigan roster at 22.9, behind only Grant Slukynsky's 24.3.

He is second on the team in scoring with 13 points, including seven goals and six assists. When I saw him play against the Miami RedHawks in Kalamazoo, he finished the weekend with three points on two goals and one assist. One of the goals came from tapping home a loose puck at the side of the net. One main thing I noticed is how he gets to the front of the net often and positions himself well on the man advantage.

Whitelaw is also on the top power-play unit and is one of the more aggressive shooters on it. His wrist shot is one of the best on the team, and he is not afraid to let it go when he has space. In the Miami series, I thought he could have put a few more pucks on goal instead of waiting for the perfect look, but he still created chances, and his passing/cycling remained a clear strength.

Whitelaw is working on becoming active in all three zones, and for a smaller forward, he backchecks decently well, using his speed and quick stick lifts to disrupt opponents at times.

Whitelaw said one of his biggest focuses this season has been rounding out his two-way game.

"I'd say my 200-foot game and being more consistent. I think consistency is the biggest thing for me. And coming here, the coaching staff is the best. They develop everyone, they make people exceed expectations, and how hard they preach the details has really helped my game. It's only going to get a lot better, so I'm pumped."

Earlier in the season, against St. Cloud State, he scored what I think is his most impressive goal of the season, showing off his hands and shiftiness at speed with the puck on his stick.

Through 14 games, he leads the Broncos in shots on goal with 69, well ahead of the next closest (Liam Valente with 52). He also has one shorthanded goal and two game-winning goals. His discipline has been solid, too, with five minor penalties for 10 minutes this season.

Having played in both the Big Ten and NCHC, Whitelaw has seen how the two leagues differ.

"Yeah, I think the checking is a little tighter in the NCHC. In the Big Ten, there is overall a little more space. The NCHC is a little heavier. But other than that, nothing crazy."

He also discussed his experience at the Blue Jackets development camp this past summer and what stood out to him about his third time around there.

"Yeah, I mean, it was really good. Meeting the new prospects and being a returner, my third year there, it was really nice seeing the same kids you have gone to camp with since being drafted, and seeing the new guys, too. Working with Donskov, their new development guy, was great. It was just really fun overall, being with the guys and working on the small details of the game. So, it was really fun."

Whitelaw is currently a 20-year-old Junior and turns 21 in the spring before the end of the season. The only real downside in his projection is his size at 5-foot-9 and 185 pounds, and how that will translate at the professional level remains to be seen. Still, plenty of smaller forwards make it and have an impact at the NHL level.

He will hopefully be signed to an entry-level contract after this season and will probably begin his professional career in the American Hockey League (AHL). I see him becoming a depth forward at the NHL level or an everyday AHLer, but his early-season development suggests he may still have another level to reach down the road.