



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
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PAGE 02: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets' Top Priorities in the 2025 Offseason

PAGE 05: The Hockey News: Canada's Adam Fantilli Sets Sights On The Olympics: 'Maybe Not Next Year But Five Years From Now'

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

PAGE 06: The Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets' Cayden Lindstrom has charley horse after hit in WHL championship

NHL/ Websites

PAGE 07: IIHF.com: U.S. wins despite German rally

PAGE 09: Olympics.ca: Team Canada undefeated at Men's Hockey World Championship after beating Slovakia

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Top Priorities in the 2025 Offseason

By Nicholas Arnold – May 18, 2025

While some teams are still working towards winning hockey's ultimate prize in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Columbus Blue Jackets are about a month into their offseason. Despite missing the playoffs for the fourth consecutive season, Ohio's team took leaps forward in 2024-25. General manager Don Waddell and his staff have a lot of work to do between now and opening night in October. Let's look at those tasks that should take priority, aside from all things related to the draft — that will be saved for another piece.

Make Decisions on Ivan Provorov & Other Veterans

There are some real opportunities to completely remake the Blue Jackets' roster with a ton of cap space and a lot of expiring veteran contracts. With the steps forward that they took this season, there's a lot worth keeping, and so Waddell has some difficult decisions to make.

Right at the top of that list is Russian defender Ivan Provorov. He very well could be the team's best defensive defenseman. Steady, seasoned, and a real commitment to defending is exactly what the team's back-end needs. He plays both sides of the blue line, and if he made it to free agency, he would be the top defender on the market. They're going to have to be careful not to overpay him, particularly when it comes to term.

If they sign the 28-year-old to a maximum term eight-year deal, he'd be 37 years old when that contract expired. They'll also have Damon Severson signed into his late 30s, and Zach Werenski will need to be re-signed in a few years to a contract that'll have him up in age as well. Just some future planning that they've got to consider, if Provorov is interested in re-signing.

Other veterans on expiring contracts include Columbus native Sean Kuraly, who has been exactly what they need in a fourth-line center. Justin Danforth has been a valuable depth piece when not dealing with injury and James van Riemsdyk was a popular veteran presence in the locker room. Players less likely to re-up, but could provide value, include trade deadline additions Luke Kunin and Christian Fischer, along with depth piece Kevin Labanc.

Re-Sign Dante Fabbro & Dmitri Voronkov

There are a couple of players who should take priority to be re-signed before July 1. Dante Fabbro has been the yin to Werenski's yang. A more so defensive defender, Fabbro was claimed off of waivers from the Nashville Predators and got an opportunity to play on the top pairing. Werenski was already having a great start to the season, but being paired with Fabbro brought him from great to elite. In Fabbro, the Blue Jackets have a guy who can be that long-term top pairing partner for number eight. He's only 26 and AFP Analytics projects Fabbro's next contract at four years and at a \$4,528,519 cap hit. If they can get him for that price, they should jump at the opportunity.

Dmitri Voronkov is the other player who's up for a new contract this summer and should be a priority. His 6-foot-5 frame and physical presence, combined with a scoring touch in front of the net, add a different dynamic to the team. We've seen Zach Hyman with the Edmonton Oilers be incredibly productive from within a couple of feet of the net, and Voronkov is trending towards success in that same niche. He was also a part of one of the best lines in hockey from an advanced stats perspective this season with Kirill Marchenko and Sean Monahan. AFP Analytics projects his next contract at six years and \$6,334,883, a reasonable price if he stays in the top-six and continues to score like he has.

Blue Jackets Must Find a Way to Revamp Their Goaltending

The Blue Jackets' playoff chances came down to the final day of the regular season — a stark contrast from the past several seasons. Their scoring was light years ahead of what was expected. Their team defense took leaps forward with the guidance of new head coach Dean Evason. However, their goaltending was once again among the worst in the NHL. If they had some improvement there, it's reasonable to believe the Blue Jackets would have made the postseason.

I've written before that Elvis Merzlikins isn't a lost cause, as many on social media might suggest. He simply needs support. If they can get Merzlikins a partner who can generate 35 to 45 quality starts, then Elvis should be able to handle the rest.

The goalie market is weak in the free agent class, but it wouldn't hurt to explore the trade market. The ideal trade candidate is a goalie with more than 150 games played who has proven capable of playing well in 30 to 40 NHL games in a few different seasons. Coming from a winning environment would be a plus. They're looking for the next Logan Thompson, who the Washington Capitals got off of the Vegas Golden Knights for pennies on the dollar.

If they're not able to find a candidate on the market, the very least they could do is admit that the Daniil Tarasov experiment is not working and clear the path for Jet Greaves to earn a full-time NHL gig. He's shown really well in limited call-ups and was a big reason they remained in playoff contention at the end of the season.

Blue Jackets Should Add Without Overspending in Free Agency

The Blue Jackets are among the teams with the most salary cap space this offseason. CapWages projects them as having over \$42 million in cap space this summer. There are a lot of names out in the free agent market that could add value to the Blue Jackets organization, but it's key that the Jackets don't significantly impede their future salary cap situation with overpayments. Here's a list of the top unrestricted free agents this summer and their projected contracts from AFP Analytics.

Player	Current Team	Position	AFP Analytics Next Contract Projection (Years x Cap hit)
Mitch Marner	Toronto Maple Leafs	RW	7 x \$12,952,529
Brock Boeser	Vancouver Canucks	RW	6 x \$8,459,390
Nikolaj Ehlers	Winnipeg Jets	LW, RW	6 x \$8,106,756
John Tavares	Toronto Maple Leafs	C	3 x \$7,939,870
Aaron Ekblad	Florida Panthers	RD	7 x \$7,802,350
Vladislav Gavrikov	Los Angeles Kings	LD	7 x \$7,608,621
Matt Duchene	Dallas Stars	C, RW	3 x \$7,170,140
Brock Nelson	Colorado Avalanche	C	3 x \$7,060,633
Sam Bennett	Florida Panthers	C	6 x \$6,637,250
Dmitri Orlov	Carolina Hurricanes	LD	3 x \$5,806,400

While most of those numbers actually look palatable, it's reasonable to expect that the volatility of the open market will push those terms and cap-hits up. It's also hard to believe that some of the more valuable pieces, looking at Mitch Marner and Sam Bennett, will actually make it to market. Nikolaj Ehlers, Brock Boeser, and Aaron Ekblad have their drawbacks, which might deter a team from giving them term, and most of the others are already in the twilight of their careers. To put it simply, there are

no real slam dunks among the players that will make less than \$10 million per season on the free agent market.

Over the next three seasons, here are the core Blue Jackets that will need a raise on their current contract:

Expiring after 2025-26	Current Cap Hit	AFP Analytics Next Contract Projection (Years x Cap hit)
Boone Jenner	\$3,750,000	3 x \$4,247,363
Cole Sillinger	\$2,250,000	4 x \$4,625,873
Yegor Chinakhov	\$2,100,000	2 x \$2,791,783
Adam Fantilli	\$950,000	7 x \$8,722,970
Expiring after 2026-27	Current Cap Hit	(No AFP projection for 2 seasons out)
Kirill Marchenko	\$3,850,000	—
Kent Johnson	\$1,800,000	—
Denton Mateychuk	\$886,667	—

That's seven players right there whose salaries will most definitely grow. They can't jam up too many overpriced free agents without risking the loss of one of these players that will be a big part of their future. If you bring in one of those top wingers, it's likely to impede the development of one of those youngsters who took a big step forward this season, taking a top-six forward spot away.

The Blue Jackets took leaps forward in 2024-25. They've got a real opportunity to continue that growth next season if they play their cards right. Keeping the right veteran personnel, re-signing key pieces to their long-term core at a reasonable cap hit, revamping their goaltending and not overspending in free agency are some key priorities. Waddell has the experience and has shown the ability to make hard, short-term decisions to benefit the team in the long run. He certainly has the ability to draw a road map to success through this summer, we'll just have to wait and see what that path looks like.

The Hockey News / Canada's Adam Fantilli Sets Sights On The Olympics: 'Maybe Not Next Year But Five Years From Now'

By Remy Mastey – May 14, 2025

Adam Fantilli's goals for international hockey go far beyond just the 2025 IIHF men's World Championship.

Fantilli took a big step in his sophomore season as he became a 30-goal scorer for the first time in his NHL career and helped the Columbus Blue Jackets resurge from the bottom of the league to nearly making the playoffs.

The 20-year-old seems to be just as good as advertised, and he now looks to take another step in his career by playing for Team Canada at the World Championship.

Given the talent that comes out of Canada, making the 2026 Canadian Olympic team may be a challenge for Fantilli, but he has his sights set on playing at the Winter Games one day. He views the World Championship as a stepping stone for his overall future with the Canadian national team.

"Every time I get a chance, I want to be able to represent my country," Fantilli said Tuesday. "It's something I take a lot of pride in. With the Olympics coming up, obviously that's something I want to be a part of, maybe not next year but five years from now. That's been a goal of mine for a long time. I grew up watching guys play in these tournaments, so I want to be one of those guys at some point, too."

While the center anticipated enjoying this tournament in Stockholm, Sweden, there was one thing that surprised him – and everybody, for that matter.

Some of Canada's best and most legendary players came to play at the World Championship, such as Sidney Crosby, Nathan MacKinnon and Marc-Andre Fleury.

Being a part of this star-studded roster has been a worthwhile learning experience for Fantilli, who also gets to play with his hockey idol, MacKinnon.

"When I came over here, I wasn't expecting the roster that we have right now," Fantilli said. "A lot of those guys are leaders on their team and leaders among the top point-getters in the NHL. It's great to learn from those guys."

"Nate (MacKinnon) is a guy that I grew up wanting to be like and wanting to emulate. Sid (Crosby) is a player who every young Canadian loves, so it's really cool to have both those guys on the same team."

There is a new generation of young and hungry Canadian hockey players who are ready to take on the torch of representing Canada on an international stage.

Fantilli is one of the players at the top of that list, and he's joined in Sweden by a couple of others, including NHLers Macklin Celebrini and Kent Johnson.

"We're all learning together. We're on the same team right now, which is great," Fantilli said. "It's made for a pretty good team on the ice, too, and it's awesome."

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' Cayden Lindstrom has charley horse after hit in WHL championship

By Brian Hedger – May 14, 2025

Cayden Lindstrom has a new injury to manage just three games into his return for the Medicine Hat Tigers from a back injury that kept him out all season.

That's the bad news for the Blue Jackets' first pick in the 2024 NHL Draft (fourth overall).

The good news is that a left leg injury sustained by the Jackets' top prospect May 13 in Spokane, Washington, is said to not be a major issue. According to a source, Lindstrom left the game with a charley horse bruise after leg-on-leg contact by Spokane defenseman Saige Weinstein during the Tigers' 6-0 victory.

Lindstrom's status for Game 4 on May 14 and the remainder of the Western Hockey League's championship series wasn't discussed after the game, but Lindstrom participated in a postgame press conference and said he's "feeling good."

Lindstrom is coming off a back injury that required surgery in November and kept him out for the entire WHL season plus the first two rounds of the playoffs. His return to the Tigers' lineup this past weekend to open the championship round with a 6-2 win in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada, ended a stretch of 399 days without playing due to the injury. At one point, the Blue Jackets thought Lindstrom would miss the Tigers' entire season and focus instead on starting his offseason training for what's expected to be his freshman year playing for Michigan State next season.

His priority instead, after gaining full clearance to take contact, was rejoining Medicine Hat for the Tigers' attempt to win the WHL championship. If that happens, they'll advance to the Canadian Hockey League's Memorial Cup tournament held May 22 to June 1 in Rimouski, Quebec, Canada.

Lindstrom, selected fourth overall by the Blue Jackets in the 2024 draft, had two goals, two assists and four points to help the Tigers take a 2-1 series lead.

"I'm feeling great," Lindstrom told reporters May 13 in Spokane. "It feels good to help my team. It's all I've been wanting to do all year is just come and help my team."

Medicine Hat was already missing its leading scorer, Gavin McKenna, who is expected to be the NHL's No. 1 pick in 2026. Tigers coach Willie DeJardins, former head coach of the NHL's Vancouver Canucks, declined to reveal much about McKenna's injury other than to say: "He thought he might be able to go, but just wasn't tonight."

Medicine Hat has a chance to take a 3-1 series lead in Game 4 at 10 p.m. Wednesday. Fans in the U.S. can watch the game for free via Victory+ streaming.

[IIHF.com / U.S. wins despite German rally](#)

By Lucas Aykroyd – May 17, 2025

The U.S. allowed Germany to rally from a 3-0 deficit but pulled away in the third period for a 6-3 win at the 2025 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship.

The U.S. squandered a three-goal first-period lead but kept on fighting to earn a 6-3 victory over Germany in Group B action at the 2025 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship. Assistant captain Conor Garland got the go-ahead power play goal early in the third period.

Giving up big leads has become an troublesome habit for this year's U.S. team. In Wednesday's 6-5 overtime win over Norway, they were up 5-1 before the Nordic underdogs fought back in stunning fashion.

Garland and captain Clayton Keller totalled a goal and two assists apiece. Tage Thompson, Frank Nazar, Drew O'Connor and Logan Cooley also scored for coach Ryan Warsofsky's Americans.

"They're a good team," Thompson said. "They work hard. They've got a lot of skill, and I think we knew that. And obviously, when we were up three, they made a solid push back and got us on our heels a little bit. I think we did a good job staying calm."

Eric Mik, Jonas Muller, and Wojciech Stachowiak replied for Germany. Coach Harald Kreis and his men have dropped two straight games, including a 5-1 loss to 2024 silver medalist Switzerland, after kicking off the tournament with three wins.

"The first period was terrible from our side," said Germany's Dominik Kahun. "We weren't ready. Somehow we have to look at what it was. The Americans came out hard, and we had no chance, to be honest. Later we talked about it, and we showed some heart and came back into the game. So maybe that's even more unfortunate that we lost the game, because we came into the third period really confident. Unfortunately we spent a lot of time in the penalty box and that changed the game."

In net, it was a duel between two goaltenders who have shared duties with the Seattle Kraken since 2021-22, with the U.S.'s Joey Daccord facing Germany's Philipp Grubauer. However, Grubauer pulled himself early in the third period after apparently straining himself and was replaced by Mathias Niederberger for about six minutes. The NHL veteran stayed in goal the rest of the way.

Final shots favoured the U.S. 44-21.

"I'm really grateful and appreciative to USA Hockey for giving me this opportunity, and I'm just trying to do my best to help the team win," said Daccord, who posted his second win of the tournament.

Despite the recent addition of Ottawa Senators star Tim Stutzle, the Germans had question marks about their offensive punch. Chicago Blackhawks forward Lukas Reichel is sidelined for the rest of the tournament with an undisclosed injury. Blueliner Lukas Kalble, an Adler Mannheim veteran who had two goals and two assists through four games in Herning, was also out versus the Americans.

The U.S. got off to a nice start at 1:42 with a power play goal with German captain Moritz Seider off for roughing. Top defenceman Zach Werenski found Thompson in the left faceoff circle, and his shot flew through the legs of German defender Fabio Wagner and beat Grubauer high to the glove side.

"Good power play set-up, just quick puck movement, and I had some time to walk in and shoot and kind of use their D as a screen," said Thompson. "I don't think their goalie could see it."

It was the fourth goal of this Ice Hockey World Championship for the towering Buffalo Sabres forward, who scored a hat trick, including the overtime winner, in Wednesday's 6-5 victory over Norway.

The Americans doubled their lead at 9:43. Skating powerfully, Cutter Gauthier cut left around German defenders and centered the puck to Nazar, who was driving to the net and saw it deflect in off his skate.

Germany struggled to create opportunities. Justin Schutz had a near-breakaway past the 13-minute mark, but defenceman Jackson Lacombe's savvy backchecking broke it up.

A powerful Thompson shot off the rush led to the 3-0 U.S. goal at 14:17, as Grubauer gave up a juicy rebound off his blocker and O'Connor was there to slam it into the gaping cage.

The hockey gods didn't seem to be favouring Germany here. Off an early second-period faceoff in the U.S. zone, Kahun rang a shot off the iron. But things soon took a better turn for Deutschland.

At 8:31, Mik cut the deficit to 3-1. Just after a roughing penalty to Cooley had expired, the Eisbaren Berlin attacker took a backhanded pass from Joshua Samanski at the blue line and surprised the U.S. defenders with his speed, bursting in to beat Daccord high on the stick side.

The Germans scored goals 48 seconds apart to knot up the score. First, Muller was allowed to cruise down the middle of the ice after getting the puck from Kahun in the U.S. zone and made no mistake with his high shot at 14:43.

It took just 16 seconds into a Matty Beniers minor for Stachowiak to knot it up with the man advantage at 15:31. But the wind in Germany's sails wouldn't last.

At 4:50 of the third period, Garland restored the U.S./ lead on the man advantage. It started with a nice play by Werenski to keep the puck onside at the blue line. Keller stickhandled craftily before setting up Garland for a laser one-timer from the hash marks.

Of the Keller line's prowess, Thompson said: "It's great. Those guys have a lot of hockey sense, a lot of skill, and all three of them have been working really well together."

The Germans strove hard to find the equalizer, but another comeback wasn't in the cards. Off an American forecheck, Cooley finished off a slick passing play involving Keller and Garland to make it 5-3 at 16:31. Keller added an empty-netter at 18:07.

Coming up next, the U.S. faces Kazakhstan on Sunday, while Germany takes on the defending champion Czechs on Monday.

Thompson talked about the key against the Kazakhs: "Puck management. I think we've done a good job jumping out and getting leads. When we've got our foot on the gas, it's about just not letting it off, continuing to play in the same way that's getting us results."

[Olympics.ca / Team Canada undefeated at Men's Hockey World Championship after beating Slovakia](#)

By Ethan Diamandas – May 17, 2025

Team Canada dominated Slovakia 7-0 Saturday in its fifth round robin game of the IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship in Stockholm, Sweden.

Canada surged to an early lead with first-period goals from Brandon Montour and Tyson Foerster, as pro-Canada fans at Avicii Arena had plenty to cheer about as their squad locked down its fifth consecutive win to maintain an undefeated record. Team Canada now boasts tournament wins over Slovakia, Slovenia, France, and Austria.

The squad locked the game down in the second frame with goals from Nathan MacKinnon and captain Sidney Crosby, who potted two goals, with his first coming on a beautiful feed from Macklin Celebrini. Crosby won "Player of the Game" for Canada, and goaltender Jordan Binnington stood tall in net, earning the shutout.

Slovakia was overwhelmed from puck drop, and Canada exploded for two more goals in the third, widening the margin.

With Canada's dominance through five games, it's clear this team is the solid favorite to win the gold medal. The hometown Swedes are also undefeated in Group A, while undefeated Czechia leads Group B.

Team Canada plays its next game versus Finland Monday at 2:20 p.m. ET.