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**December 11-12, 2025**

**Columbus Blue Jackets News**

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## The Athletic / Elvis Merzlikins yanked early, Blue Jackets can't quite recover in loss to Senators

**By Aaron Portzline – December 11, 2025**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Columbus Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason does not like to pull a struggling goaltender from a start. That was true in his previous NHL stop with the Minnesota Wild, and it's been true since he joined the Jackets last season.

But at 14:55 of the first period Thursday at Nationwide Arena, Evason had seen enough.

Elvis Merzlikins, who had stopped only three of five shots, was replaced by Jet Greaves in the hope that Greaves could provide the struggling Blue Jackets with some kind of spark after trailing 3-0.

It worked, but only to a point. The Ottawa Senators allowed the Blue Jackets to get back within a goal before pulling away for a 6-3 win before a crowd of 15,059, who mostly cheered when Merzlikins left for Greaves and softly booed at the end of the first period.

"Whenever you pull a goalie, there are a couple of reasons, right?" Evason said. "You think maybe there's a momentum shift that you can (help) with the guys, and then maybe there's some that you don't think should go into the net. I think it was a little bit of both here tonight."

Evason pulled his goaltender only twice last season — Merzlikins once and Daniil Tarasov once — and he avoided doing it until early April, when just three weeks remained in the season. He was the last coach in 2024-25 to make the move. Keep in mind, Merzlikins was once again one of the NHL's worst-rated goaltenders, and the Jackets were near the bottom of the league until Greaves came to the rescue late last season.

After Thursday's game, the Blue Jackets were quick to rally around Merzlikins again, just as they've always done. But it's only fair to wonder how much longer the Jackets can expect to stay in the race with a struggling veteran (Merzlikins, with an .879 save percentage) and a solid rookie (Greaves, .907) behind a defensively soft team.

Since Evason went away from the back-and-forth goaltending rotation, Merzlikins has an .843 save percentage. That covers his last six starts, including Thursday.

The Blue Jackets spoke after their morning skate about wanting to dial up their pace and competitiveness after a three-game winless trip (0-2-1). Ottawa, it should be noted, had lost four in a row. But there was only one desperate club Thursday.

A shot from the left circle was initially stopped by Merzlikins, but Senators veteran David Perron swatted one-handed at the puck before Merzlikins could find it. Only 1:13 later, it was 2-0, as Ottawa's Drake Batherson beat Merzlikins' glove. At 14:55, Tim Stützle beat Merzlikins from the left circle.

It was 3-0, and Greaves was hopping off the bench.

As usual, the Blue Jackets came quickly to Merzlikins' defense. Defenseman Zach Werenski offered full-throated support.

"It's tough," Werenski said. "I know how people probably look at it from the outside, but some of those chances ... if we had guys in those positions, I would expect us to score, you know? Like, we have the talent in here where, when they're shooting from the slot, one-on-one with the goalie, I would expect we're going to score those."

"So it's definitely not on Elvis. We're allowing guys to get to these areas to have clean looks, and guys are so talented in this league that they're going to score. And they have talent on that team, right? (Batherson's) in the slot, untouched. Goal. Stützle on the power play coming on the far side with speed. Elvis has to go east-west, and it's a good player. I mean, it's definitely not on him."

Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner, in his first game back after missing a month with an injury, scored with just 1:56 remaining in the first to make it 3-1. But Ottawa restored the three-goal lead with just 34 seconds remaining on Michael Amadio's goal.

The Blue Jackets got goals from Dante Fabbro and Dmitri Voronkov (power play) during a dominating second to cut the lead to 4-3. But the Senators struck late in the third, too, pushing the lead back to 5-3.

Ottawa played an authoritative third period — the type the Blue Jackets can't seem to pull off — and salted it away.

The Blue Jackets have lost three straight in regulation for just the second time this season. They keep insisting the season is still young, that there's still "a lot of hockey to play," but the Blue Jackets are 31 games into the season and barely hovering above .500 (13-12-6).

Put another way, the Blue Jackets have just seven regulation wins in 31 outings. That's tied with the Seattle Kraken and Vancouver Canucks for the fewest in the NHL.

"I don't know if I'm crazy or what, but I genuinely still feel like we're fine in there, we're going to be OK," Werenski said. "We're going to start winning hockey games and pull ourselves out of this. It's frustrating, the ways that we're losing."

"I don't want to keep going back to last year, but I think last year we did that. We'd win games we were not supposed to, and the games we were supposed to win, we would. Right now, it just seems like we're finding ways to lose even when we play well. It's just about finding a way to win."

## The Columbus Dispatch / Senators chase Merzlikins, deal Blue Jackets a fourth straight loss

**By Brian Hedger – December 11, 2025**

Elvis Merzlikins's rough start plus two momentum-changing defensive lapses were too much for the Blue Jackets to overcome in a frustrating 6-3 loss to the Ottawa Senators on Dec. 11 at Nationwide Arena, sending them to their fourth straight loss.

Despite making "commitment" a central theme of their morning meeting, things fell apart quickly for the Jackets after they failed to score during a solid start in the game's opening five-plus minutes. Merzlikins allowed three goals on just five shots, putting the Jackets in a 3-0 hole, and was replaced by Jet Greaves with 5:05 left in the first period.

Greaves also allowed a goal with 34 seconds left in the first after a defensive breakdown by his teammates, putting the Blue Jackets down by three goals, 4-1, after captain Boone Jenner scored late in the first in his return from a 14-game injury absence. Goals by Dante Fabbro and Dmitri Voronkov pulled Columbus within 4-3 in the second, but another defensive breakdown late in the period led to the Senators extending their lead to 5-3 on Tim Stutzle's goal with 2:01 left.

Zach Werenski (two assists) and Jenner (goal and assist) led the Blue Jackets (13-12-6) with two points each, while Greaves made 21 saves on 23 shots in relief. Dylan Cozen (three assists), Drake Batherson (one goal, two assists), Michael Amadio (one goal, two assists) and Stutzle (two goals) led the Senators (14-12-4) to a win that ended a three-game losing streak.

## The Columbus Dispatch / Blue Jackets welcome Jenner back against Senators, start Merzlikins

**By Brian Hedger – Decemeber 11, 2025**

The Blue Jackets will get captain Boone Jenner and his relentless battle level back from injury when they host the Ottawa Senators on Dec. 11 at Nationwide Arena.

After missing 14 games with an upper-body injury, Jenner is returning to a spot at left wing on the second line, skating with center Adam Fantilli and right wing Kent Johnson. They got off to a slow start to the season playing together, but the hope now is that Jenner's non-stop motor will provide a lift for his line and the team as the Blue Jackets look to nix a three-game skid.

"Commitment is one of our keys here tonight," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "(Jenner's) committed to both ends ... keeping it out of the net, putting it in the net. He's committed in all areas, so we're looking forward to having him back."

Jenner was activated off injured reserve after the Blue Jackets' morning skate and rookie forward Luca Del Bel Belluz was loaned back to the AHL's Cleveland Monsters to create a roster spot.

Other lineup changes include shaking up the forward combinations plus goalie Elvis Merzlikins starting after Jet Greaves shined in defeat the previous two games. Linus Ullmark will start for the Senators (13-12-4), who've lost six of their past eight games and the last three in a row.

Merzlikins' last game, a 7-6 overtime loss Dec. 6 against the Florida Panthers, was eventful at Amerant Bank Arena in Sunrise, Florida. The goal is to make this one calmer around him, starting with a drive led by Jenner to win more puck battles.

"Just to elaborate on the 'commitment' part is that he's committed to winning those battles, he's committed to finishing checks, he's committed to keeping the puck out of the net and he's committed to go to the net," Evason said. "Regardless (of whether) he scores or not, he does the right things in all areas of the game, and he's just ... he's our leader. He's our captain. So, to have that attitude back hopefully will drag some (other) people into it, as well."

Jenner was injured Nov. 11 in Seattle and left after skating one shift in the second period. The Blue Jackets went 5-4-5 without him, including 3-0-4 in seven games where leads disappeared.

"I'm not trying to do anything special," Jenner said. "I'm just going to bring what I've always brought, compete with the guys and be back with the group. I'm really looking forward to that and I'm excited for the challenge and opportunity to get back out there with the guys."

The other big lineup change is flip-flopping the top two centers, Fantilli and Sean Monahan. Fantilli returns to the second line while Monahan heads back to the top line with left wing Dmitri Voronkov and right wing Kirill Marchenko, whom he thrived with last season.

That moves Cole Sillinger back to right wing on the third line with Miles Wood and center Charlie Coyle while Isac Lundestrom moves back to center a fourth line with Brendan Gaunce at left wing and Yegor Chinakhov on the right.

"We've lost three games in a row, right? Haven't we?" Evason said, when asked about flip-flopping Fantilli and Monahan. "That's it."

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Unable to Recover From 3-0 Hole in Loss to Senators

**By Mark Scheig – December 11, 2025**

The Columbus Blue Jackets returned to Nationwide Arena hoping to end a three-game losing streak. Before they knew what hit them, they were staring at a 3-0 hole. They were unable to recover.

Tim Stutzle scored twice while Drake Batherson, Michael Amadio and Dylan Cozens each had three points as the Ottawa Senators defeated the Blue Jackets 6-3 on Thursday night. Boone Jenner returned to the lineup and recorded a goal and an assist.

The story of this game was how the first period completely unraveled on the Blue Jackets.

### **Game Recap**

Up until the first TV timeout, the Blue Jackets actually seemed poised to have a good night. They controlled most of the play. But then when the Senators' first goal went in, the air went out of the arena.

David Perron opened the scoring. What seemed like an innocent push toward the net went between the pads of Elvis Merzlikins.

All it took was six more minutes to go from 1-0 to 3-0. Batherson scored on a rip from the slot and Tim Stutzle scored on the power play.

That was all for Merzlikins who allowed three goals and made two saves on the five SOG he faced. Jet Greaves took over with 5:05 left in the first.

Jenner was able to get one back to cut it to 3-1. But before the end of the period, Michael Amadio was wide open in front of Greaves. He made it 4-1 at the first intermission.

The Blue Jackets were able to get some momentum in the second. Goals by Dante Fabbro and Dmitri Voronkov cut the deficit to 4-3. They weren't able to convert that momentum into a tying goal.

Instead, Stutzle was at the right place at the right time late in the second period. A shot went off the post behind Jet Greaves. The puck was still loose in the crease when Stutzle saw it. He proceeded to poke the puck in to put a damper in the Blue Jackets' chances of coming back.

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The Senators did a better job of locking things down in the third period up two goals. They held the Blue Jackets to six shots with most of those coming later in the period. It took half the period for the Blue Jackets to get their first shot on goal.

With Greaves on the bench for an extra attacker, Claude Giroux hit the empty net to make it a 6-3 final. The Senators outshot the Blue Jackets 29-26.

Merzlikins faced five shots and allowed three goals. Postgame, Zach Werenski defended Merzlikins calling it "a full team thing" as to why they fell down 3-0 early. Greaves stopped 21 of 23 in relief. Linus Ullmark made 23 saves for the Senators.

The Blue Jackets will practice on Friday in advance of their game Saturday night against the Vegas Golden Knights. The Senators will now head to Minnesota for a game Saturday afternoon against the Wild.