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July 18-21, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets

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The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: What Yegor Chinakhov wants is in Columbus

By Aaron Portzline – July 20, 2025

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

Item No. 1: Chin up!

For a couple of years now, maybe longer, there have been percolating signs of discontent between the Columbus Blue Jackets and winger Yegor Chinakhov.

Early in the 2023-24 season, when Chinakhov was working his way back into the lineup on the fourth line under coach Pascal Vincent, Chinakhov's agent, Shumi Babaev, told The Columbus Dispatch that Chinakhov "doesn't feel the (Blue Jackets) trust him, and he wants to leave."

Last season, while Chinakhov was out of the lineup with a back injury, he told a group of reporters in the Blue Jackets dressing room that he and the club disagreed on the best approach to healing his back pain, which had lingered for more than a year.

This week, Chinakhov and Babaev threw it all out in public. On Thursday, Chinakhov told the Russian outlet Sport-Express that he would welcome a trade, again mentioning he felt a lack of trust from the coaching staff, now led by Dean Evason.

A day later, Babaev went a step further in an interview with The Athletic, saying: "I don't think there's any way he can stay in Columbus," and later adding, "It's all about the coach."

When this spat first surfaced, many assumed it was related to Chinakhov's back issue. And while there was behind-the-scenes drama, it appears to have been resolved. During the 4 Nations Face-Off in February, Chinakhov traveled to Moscow to have a procedure that he said wasn't an approved treatment in North America.

"In one hour, the doctors (in Moscow) fixed everything," Babaev said. "It's not a problem. It wasn't surgery. It was like a shot, like you'd get at the dentist. It took 40 minutes. He visited a lot of doctors in the U.S., and they didn't know how to fix it.

"Now he's 100 percent healthy. I explained it to (Blue Jackets general manager) Don (Waddell) and he understands me."

Babaev said Chinakhov is skating hard and pain-free this summer, training with several NHL players in Moscow, including his Blue Jackets teammate Kirill Marchenko.

If it's true that Chinakhov's back pain and any lingering resentment over his treatment are in the past, as Chinakhov and Babaev have indicated, that leaves Chinakhov's playing time, spot in the lineup and relationship with Evason in question.

Evason, understandably, didn't want to get into a back and forth with Chinakhov in the media, so he offered a comment through a club spokesman — "The lines of communication are open, and they will continue to be open" — but otherwise let Chinakhov and Babaev talk.

Waddell is not averse to trading Chinakhov, he said, but he's not simply going to accept the offer of the highest bidder. This is not the Patrik Laine situation from last summer, when the Blue Jackets were eager to unload Laine and his \$8.7 million salary.

The Blue Jackets have said that, barring a trade, they expect Chinakhov to show up for training camp healthy and ready to work. Chinakhov, through Babaev, said he plans to honor his contract, which pays him \$2.1 million this season and expires next summer, with Chinakhov a restricted free agent.

Here's what makes this situation so maddening, so silly.

Chinakhov said he wants to be a top-six winger in the NHL. When you consider the situation in Columbus — Evason's high-paced, offensively-friendly system; the Blue Jackets' impressive young forward talent; the lineup spot in the top six sitting there to be grabbed — there may be no better spot for Chinakhov than right where he is.

Last season, Evason started the season with Chinakhov on the No. 1 line with center Sean Monahan and right winger Dmitri Voronkov. (That doesn't sound like a lack of trust, eh?) That line was impressive for the first six weeks of the season, and Chinakhov was the Jackets' top forward.

He did not look the same, understandably so, when he returned after missing 40 games with the back injury, and he was in and out of the lineup with reduced ice time as a result. He played nine games after his return and totaled 0-1-1 with a minus-8 rating.

That's not an argument for more playing time, and with the Blue Jackets desperate to get into the postseason, the coaching staff had to make short-term, day-to-day decisions.

When fully healthy, there's no reason Chinakhov couldn't supplant Voronkov for a spot on the top line. There's no reason he couldn't play on the right side of a second line, with center Adam Fantilli and playmaking left winger Kent Johnson.

The two players he'd likely have to beat out for that final top-six spot — captain Boone Jenner and Cole Sillinger — do not have Chinakhov's raw skill package. If he could only stay healthy for more than a couple of months at a time, Chinakhov's career could launch like the rest of the young players in the Blue Jackets' lineup.

Waddell was looking for a top-six winger this summer, either by free agency or trade. Chinakhov is looking for a top-six opportunity to launch his career.

Maybe the answer is right there in front of them.

Item No. 2: Big change

The Donskov family has been training young hockey players across two generations and four decades at the Donskov Hockey Development training center in suburban Columbus. So the leap made last week by brothers Anthony and Matthew Donskov was a huge step forward and a natural fit.

The Blue Jackets announced they had hired the Donskov brothers as development coaches. It's now a three-man staff with Tommy Cross.

"Coaching is just a passion point for our family," Anthony Donskov said. "It started with our father (Paul), of course. To be a small part of the big journey, to see the development of individuals over time and to help them get to where they want to be ... that's what wakes you up in the morning. That's what we're passionate about."

Blue Jackets legend Rick Nash, who oversees the development staff as director of hockey operations, first brought the Donskovs to development camp last summer to be involved in the on-ice coaching. Little did they know it was a tryout.

Last December, Nash put the brothers to work on a "special project" and was impressed with their work, which led to another invitation to work at this year's development camp, which then led to an offer for full-time work in the NHL.

How much time they'll be able to commit to the family gym — at least during the season — is still to be determined.

"This was something we couldn't pass up," Matthew Donskov said. "We've absolutely loved doing what we've been doing (at the family training center), but this is such a unique opportunity. It wasn't tough in any way to make this decision. It's the NHL, right? It's an opportunity to work with Rick and others in the organization. We're beyond excited."

The Donskovs will travel quite a bit in this new role, but they'll also do a lot of scouting work and have conversations with prospects via phone and video conferencing. Modern technology is a big help when prospects are scattered across the hockey-playing world. They started to develop relationships with several of the prospects over the last two development camps.

This marks three Donskovs who have worked in the NHL.

Misha Donskov worked for the Atlanta Thrashers, Vegas Golden Knights and Dallas Stars. His first NHL job, ironically enough, was under Waddell with the Thrashers. He left the Stars this summer to accept a top job with Team Canada, but will likely make his way back to the league soon enough.

Could all three be in the NHL at the same time at some point?

"I haven't given that a lot of thought, to be honest," Matthew said. "But all three together in the NHL ... well, that would certainly be a dream."

Item No. 3: Thanks, Sid

Paul DeFazio, the Blue Jackets' new equipment manager, said a random conversation with Pittsburgh Penguins star Sidney Crosby last month prompted Crosby to make a phone call on DeFazio's behalf.

“We were just chatting, and I told him what was going on, and he said he knew Rick Nash really well and he’d reach out to him,” said DeFazio, who left the Penguins after nearly 30 years to join the Jackets. “Sid kept his word. And I’m so, so appreciative.”

DeFazio, a Pittsburgh native, said he’s been looking to “move on” from the Penguins for a while, and he wanted to run his own room after serving as the assistant with the Penguins for over two decades.

“That’s one of the things that’s most hard is the relationships I’ve had there, with the other equipment guys, with the players,” DeFazio said. “And Sid is a part of that, obviously. I’ve helped him out a lot, but he’s helped me out a ton.”

DeFazio became Crosby’s “skate guy” over the last few years, a job that comes with immense responsibility and precision. Crosby, like all the greats, treats his gear like an extension of his body. If something’s off, he’s not pleased.

“It’s a pretty big job,” DeFazio said with a chuckle. “He trusted me and he was happy with my work ... I mean, not always. We had our differences. We had times where, you know, something’s not right and he’d tell me. But we’d fix it. It was a great relationship, really.”

Before he was “allowed” to leave Pittsburgh, DeFazio said, he showed another member of the Penguins’ training staff how Crosby likes his skates to be sharpened.

DeFazio is moving on to a new organization and a new group of players, although he worked previously with Blue Jackets forward Zach Aston-Reese and defenseman Erik Gudbranson.

DeFazio said he’s already spoken to every Blue Jackets player on a one-way contract to ensure their gear has been ordered in time for training camp in mid-September, and he’s working through the list of players on two-way contracts.

The goal is simple, DeFazio said: “I want the room to be organized. I like detail. I like being on top of things. I don’t want to give the players any excuses. I want the players to be well taken care of, whether they’re first-line guys or a guy in prospect camp. I think it’s important to treat every one of them the same.”

Item No. 4: Snacks

- The most intriguing name left on the free-agent market is Columbus native Jack Roslovic, who will likely be playing with his fourth team in three seasons when he signs later this offseason. Roslovic, who can play center or wing, matched a career high with 22 goals for the Carolina Hurricanes last season. But the Canes let Roslovic, 28, walk to free agency and added Nikolaj Ehlers as one of their upgrades this summer. Roslovic had to wait for the initial wave to pass last summer before signing with the Hurricanes on July 4, but nothing like this. It’s been almost three weeks since Roslovic hit the market, and more than two-thirds of the NHL has more than \$3 million to spend under the cap.
- File this under “Did Not See This Coming”: Former Blue Jackets coach Gerard Gallant, who has been out of work as an NHL coach since being fired by the New York Rangers after the 2022-23 season, is heading to Russia to continue his coaching career, per reports, including The Athletic’s Pierre LeBrun.

Gallant will coach the KHL's Kunlun Red Star, which finished with the fifth-worst record in the league last season. The franchise is based in Beijing, China, and has played its home games in two different cities in China and one in Russia over the past few seasons. This year, the KHL announced, it will play in the 22,000-seat SKA Arena in St. Petersburg. Gallant is the latest former NHL coach to take over the Red Star bench, following Mike Keenan and Curt Fraser.

- Defenseman Sam Knazko, a third-round pick (No. 78) by the Blue Jackets in 2020, signed to play with HC Vitkovice in Czechia's top league. Knazko, who played 149 games in AHL Cleveland but only two with the Blue Jackets over the past three seasons, was a restricted free agent who was not extended a qualifying offer, making him a free agent.
- This week's Sunday Gathering trivia question: During the Blue Jackets' first 24 seasons, they've had 15 different players lead them in scoring for one or more seasons. How many can you name?
- The departure of Knazko and the signing of defenseman Dysin Mayo both happened last Wednesday, but one was not the result of the other. The Blue Jackets were interested in Mayo, who signed a one-year, two-way contract, because they wanted another right-shot defenseman who could be a call-up candidate, if necessary. Mayo has played 82 NHL games — all with Arizona — and spent the past three seasons in the Vegas Golden Knights organization, playing exclusively for AHL Henderson.
- The final decision will be made in training camp, of course, but it would appear — at least on paper — that AHL Cleveland will have several new faces on its back end. We noted last week that the Blue Jackets are looking for a goaltender who could play with Zach Sawchenko, but it doesn't stop there. There could be four new faces among the defensemen: left sider Caleb MacDonald, and right siders Christian Jaros, Luca Marrelli and Mayo.
- The Blue Jackets released their schedule for the NHL prospects tournament from Sept. 11-14 at Buffalo's Harborcenter. They play New Jersey on Sept. 11 at 7 p.m. ET, Buffalo on Sept. 13 at 7 p.m. ET and Pittsburgh on Sept. 14 at 3:30 p.m. ET. They are off on Sept. 12.
- Trivia answer: The 15 players who have led the Blue Jackets in scoring during at least one season are Cam Atkinson, Oliver Bjorkstrand, Pierre-Luc Dubois, Nick Foligno, Johnny Gaudreau, Ryan Johansen, Rick Nash, Artemi Panarin, Vinny Prospal, Brandon Saad, Geoff Sanderson, Jake Voracek, David Vyborny, Zach Werenski and Ray Whitney. (Atkinson and Saad shared the team lead in points during the 2015-16 season.)
- As the NHL settles into its summer slumber, the Sunday Gathering will hit the pause button for the next several weeks. There's no stopping the coverage — features on the way, news when it happens, etc. — but the Gathering will return in September.

Columbus Dispatch / Why does Yegor Chinakhov want to be traded and what can the Columbus Blue Jackets get?

By Brian Hedger – July 19, 2025

It's been almost five years since Jarmo Kekalainen stared into a television camera and said the Blue Jackets were selecting Yegor Chinakhov 21st overall.

Kekalainen's face bore a slight smirk, likely knowing that his pick caused most draft analysts to scramble looking for scouting information on a Russian winger who'd been passed over in his first eligible draft year and was already playing his rookie season in the Kontinental Hockey League.

The pick looked genius a year later, after Chinakhov helped Avangard Omsk win the KHL championship, was named the league's top rookie and started his NHL career earlier than expected. He came to Columbus in 2021 without knowing English, made a friend in fellow rookie Cole Sillinger, assimilated to life in North America and showed flashes of brilliance between multiple bouts with injuries.

Unable to stay healthy and struggling to perform with consistency, Chinakhov remains unpolished and filled with high-end potential heading into his fifth NHL season.

He'd also like a fresh start elsewhere.

According to his comments during a recent interview with a Russian reporter, followed by a Twitter post by his agent, Shumi Babaev, Chinakhov wants to be traded. It's nothing new to Blue Jackets fans who've seen this movie before with Rick Nash, Pierre-Luc Dubois, Patrik Laine and others, but Chinakhov's request is different in one key aspect.

Despite logging 175 career NHL games, he's still largely undefined as a player. He's young enough at 24 to carry the high-end potential of a gemstone, but also carries enough baggage to make him a risky acquisition.

Here's a look at how things went sideways for Chinakhov in Columbus and what to expect from the Blue Jackets now that his wish to be traded is public:

How did Yegor Chinakhov get to this point with the Columbus Blue Jackets?

After venturing to Columbus in September 2021, Chinakhov burst onto the scene with the Blue Jackets' rookie team that won the annual prospects tournament in Traverse City, Michigan. Showing a fast connection with Sillinger, the two combined for a bunch of goals in those four games before heading back to Columbus for each to experience his first NHL training camp.

Sillinger made the roster right away, while Chinakhov was initially sent to the AHL before a quick return to the Blue Jackets for most of the season. Inconsistency in his play, plus his first bouts with health issues, limited him to seven goals, seven assists and 14 points in 62 NHL games.

It was more of the same the next two years, as Chinakhov played just 30 NHL games in 2022-23 and 53 in 2023-24. Nagging back problems were the biggest issue, and they cropped up again last season. Chinakhov missed the bulk of yet another season with back pain, playing just 30 games, and coach Dean Evason sat him as a healthy scratch down the final stretch.

That was after Chinakhov returned to Russia in February during the NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off break to undergo an unspecified back procedure to alleviate his pain. Upon returning March 21 in Pittsburgh, he struggled catching up with the NHL's fast pace and was scratched in 12 of the Jackets' final 13 games, including all six of their six-game winning streak to end the season.

That's how Chinakhov went into the offseason.

What can the Columbus Blue Jackets get from trading Yegor Chinakhov?

This is the second straight offseason that Blue Jackets president/general manager Don Waddell has dealt with a trade request. He traded Laine in late August 2024 to the Montreal Canadiens for defenseman Jordan Harris and wasn't required to pick up a single penny of what was left on Laine's remaining two contract years.

Harris is now with the Boston Bruins after the Jackets decided against tendering him a qualifying offer as a restricted free agent, but salary was the biggest part of the Laine trade for Columbus. Trading Chinakhov is different because he's younger, only has a year left on a contract with an economical \$2 million salary-cap hit and will still be a restricted free agent after it expires.

Waddell will almost certainly ask for an established NHL player in return, since Chinakhov appears to have one of the Blue Jackets' 12 forward roles heading into the season. Trading him would create another hole up front for a team that didn't re-sign James van Riemsdyk (Detroit Red Wings), Sean Kuraly (Boston Bruins) and Justin Danforth (Buffalo Sabres).

The ideal swap would be something that sends Chinakhov to a team looking to move a similar young forward with upside who hasn't lived up to previous expectations. Other returns could be built around a draft pick or package of picks, but Waddell's preference is an NHL talent in/NHL talent out deal.

He isn't pressured to make a trade, either.

Chinakhov is still under contract with the Blue Jackets for one more season and could boost his trade value immensely by staying put. That could also give Chinakhov and the Jackets time to sort out their differences. Perhaps Chinakhov feels different about Columbus closer to the trade deadline on March 6, 2026.

The Athletic / Yegor Chinakhov requests trade from Blue Jackets, cites 'misunderstandings' with coach Dean Evason

By Aaron Portzline – July 17, 2025

Yegor Chinakhov, a 2020 first-round pick whose early career with the Columbus Blue Jackets has been beset by injuries, has requested a trade, the club confirmed on Thursday. The request became public after a social media post by Chinakhov's agent.

In a post on X, Chinakhov's agent, Shumi Babaev, appeared to quote the winger in writing: "I had some misunderstandings with the coach during the season. Now I would be glad to have a trade. I would like to move to a different location. Will I return to Russia? As long as I can play in the NHL, I will keep developing here."

The request was not news to Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell.

"I'm surprised (agent Shumi Babaev) went public," Waddell said to The Athletic. "But I'm not surprised (about the trade request) because we've talked about it. He got back (from the back injury last season) and didn't play well, and (Chinakhov and Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason) fell out of favor."

"I told (Babaev), he has value. I will talk to teams. I have talked to teams. But I'm not just going to trade him because you said to trade him."

Babaev declined to comment via text when contacted by The Athletic.

It's possible that Babaev was paraphrasing Chinakhov from an interview that was published in Thursday's edition of Sport-Express, a Russian sports outlet.

The interview, which The Athletic translated using Google, includes the following back and forth between Chinakhov and Sport-Express special correspondent Alexey Shevchenko:

Shevchenko: "I have a feeling that you will calmly accept a trade to another club."

Chinakhov: "I will be even happy, I guess."

Shevchenko: It is because of what has accumulated? Taking into account all the unsuccessful periods and misunderstandings with the head coach?

Chinkahov: All together, in total, yes. I want to change my location.

Shevchenko: It makes absolutely no difference which team?

Chinakhov: No, of course not. There is a difference, but the main thing is that everything works out.

Chinakhov has played in 175 games during his first four NHL seasons, missing 109 games due to injuries, including 40 games last season with a back injury. After he returned to the lineup March 4, he was a healthy scratch in 12 of the final 17 games.

He finished with seven goals, eight assists, 15 points and a minus-6 rating in 30 games.

“When he came back, he was not the Chinakhov we were hoping he was, and he got healthy scratched at the end (of the season),” Waddell said. “That’s what happens with guys. He couldn’t handle that.”

Waddell said Babaev going public doesn’t change his position, or add more urgency to his efforts to trade Chinakhov. He declined to disclose the asking price, but it has been clear all summer that the Blue Jackets are seeking immediate roster help, not future assets.

“I ignore it,” Waddell said of the post. “I’ll talk to teams. I’ll continue to talk to teams. But him (going public) isn’t going to change my thinking on it.

“I have to have the right value. It depends on how many teams are interested and what teams are willing to pay. I can ask for whatever I want, but what’s the market? And if the market’s not good enough, he’ll be a Blue Jacket.”

The expectation, Waddell said, is that Chinakhov — if he remains with the Blue Jackets — will show up for training camp in two months and be ready to play. He had a procedure on his lingering back injury last season during the 4 Nations Face-Off and went into the offseason with a clean bill of health, Waddell said.

“One hundred percent he’ll be (at camp),” Waddell said. “He’s under contract, making (over) \$2 million.

“I’ve been through this before. If he comes back and says, ‘My agent tried to find me a different place, but I’m here and I’m going to play as hard as I can.’ ... I’ve seen it a number of times, and usually it’s not an issue if the player shows up with the right attitude.”

The Hockey Writers / 3 Returns the Blue Jackets Should Look for in a Yegor Chinakhov Trade

By Matthew Buhrmann – July 18, 2025

News broke Thursday morning that Yegor Chinakhov has requested a trade from the Columbus Blue Jackets. The request was made public in a post on X (formerly Twitter) by his agent Shumi Babaev, later confirmed by general manager (GM) Don Waddell in a conversation with Aaron Portzline of The Athletic.

In the post, Babaev quoted Chinakhov directly:

“I had some misunderstandings with the coach during the season. Now I would be glad to have a trade. I would like to move to a different location. Will I return to Russia? As long as I can play in the NHL, I will keep developing here.”

Chinakhov is still expected to report to training camp if a good offer isn't made by then, Waddell told Portzline of The Athletic (From 'Yegor Chinakhov requests trade from Blue Jackets, cites 'misunderstandings' with coach Dean Evason' – The Athletic, 7/17/2025). He signed a two-year, \$4.2 million extension on June 21, 2024, carrying a \$2.1 million annual average value through 2025-26, and will be a restricted free agent (RFA) at the end of the deal.

Injuries have been a recurring issue for Chinakhov. He was limited to just 30 games this past season, missing 39 due to a back issue that came with multiple setbacks. He returned in March and played nine games down the stretch, but was ultimately scratched late in the season, a common theme in his time in Columbus.

He's had injury problems in every season since debuting in the NHL, which has made it hard for him to find any kind of rhythm.

When healthy, Chinakhov does bring some value. He's got a heavy shot and could maybe work on a second power-play unit with his dangerous one-timer. But for a first-round pick in 2020, the overall returns have been underwhelming. He's struggled to produce consistent offense and hasn't made strides in his two-way game, struggling plenty on the back-check.

At this point, a fresh start feels like the best option for everyone involved. Still, don't rule out Chinakhov staying in Columbus if the trade market doesn't meet Waddell's liking. This won't be a giveaway deal; it'll have to be the right match, or Columbus may just keep him for now. That's going to make for an interesting storyline heading into training camp.

Now, here are three trade candidates that could make sense:

Nicholas Robertson (Toronto Maple Leafs)

Nicholas Robertson is one of the many names being floated around, and it actually makes a lot of sense for both sides.

The Maple Leafs still have about \$2.08 million in cap space with the recent Dakota Joshua acquisition, and could take a shot on Chinakhov, who clearly wants out and still has some potential. He's got a legitimate NHL shot and maybe some power-play value. If he can stay healthy, there's upside there.

Robertson's in a similar boat. He's shown flashes, has a strong release like Chinakhov, but just hasn't been able to fully break through in Toronto. He's had injury trouble in the past and hasn't consistently stuck in their top nine. However, he's been healthy since the 2023-24 season, unlike Chinakhov.

Over the last two seasons, Robertson put up 27 points in 56 games in 2023–24 and followed that with 22 points in 69 games in 2024–25. Those are not huge numbers, but decent depth scoring. He added two points in three playoff games this past spring, too, which is valuable experience for Columbus, a franchise that hasn't made the playoffs since 2020. He has skill, but he just hasn't had a full opportunity yet at the NHL level.

In Columbus, Robertson could land on the fourth line to start, but there's room to climb the lineup. He fits the age group and would probably get more leash than he has in Toronto.

From Columbus's side, Waddell might want a little more than just Robertson, especially with Chinakhov showing some top-nine potential when healthy. A third or fourth-round pick or prospect also going Columbus's way could even things out.

It's not a flashy trade, but it's a realistic one. Two guys who could use a fresh start, and two teams who might be willing to roll the dice.

Jonatan Berggren (Detroit Red Wings)

Berggren's another guy who could benefit from a change of scenery. He's around the same age as Chinakhov — a bit younger actually — and plays a more complete two-way game. He's not a sniper like Chinakhov, but he's a smart playmaker who could be a better fit in a bottom-six role for Columbus.

He scored a big late-game winner against the Jackets in January, so Columbus fans might remember the name.

Berggren has been productive in the American Hockey League (AHL). In 2023–24, he put up 56 points in 53 games with the Grand Rapids Griffins and added 10 points in nine playoff games. He also chipped in six points in 12 NHL games that season. Then in 2024–25, he stuck in Detroit's lineup more regularly, posting 12 goals and 24 points in 75 games. He's not a top-line guy, but he's shown he can play at the NHL level when given a role.

He just signed a one-year deal at \$1.825 million, a little lower than Chinakhov's. It's the kind of trade that could be a straight swap without any cap issues.

Berggren's not as much of a shooter as Chinakhov, but he's probably a safer bet in a bottom-six role. He makes smart plays, chips in offensively, doesn't take a ton of risks, and is a hard forechecker, something Columbus could definitely use.

From Detroit's side, GM Steve Yzerman could take a shot on Chinakhov's top-nine upside. If he stays healthy, he brings more of a scoring threat. Plus, this would be an interesting divisional trade between two teams that could both use a bit of a shakeup. Nothing flashy, but it could work out for both sides.

One thing I could see is Waddell wanting a little more back, maybe a mid-to-late round pick added on to even things out. Chinakhov still has that first-round pedigree and plenty of upside, so it's likely not a clean one-for-one.

Either way, this feels like a possible move that makes sense for both sides.

Philip Tomasino (Pittsburgh Penguins)

This isn't a name flying around in trade rumors, but the Penguins have been one of the teams linked to Chinakhov recently. They're in a bit of a rebuild right now and could be in a position to take a risk on a player with upside. Chinakhov fits that mold, and Tomasino could be a return that makes some sense. Also, Tomasino and Chinakhov are both former late first-round picks who haven't quite panned out yet.

Tomasino hasn't fully broken through yet in the NHL, but there's a lot to like about his game. He plays both center and wing, which would be a nice boost for Columbus' depth, and plays with more pace and edge than Chinakhov. He's a hard forechecker, gets back on the backcheck, and goes to the net, areas where Chinakhov has struggled.

Tomasino also played on the second power-play unit in Pittsburgh and has shown he can contribute in that role, something Chinakhov hasn't consistently done in Columbus.

Stat-wise, Tomasino started last season with the Nashville Predators but didn't produce much there, just one assist in 11 games. After landing in Pittsburgh, he played 50 games and put up 11 goals and 23 points. Not eye-popping numbers, but respectable. He's currently on a \$1.75 million deal that runs through the end of this season, almost identical in price to Chinakhov's \$2.1 million salary, so the contracts line up pretty well for two teams with plenty of cap space.

I could actually see this one being a one-for-one swap, given both of their upside. It's the kind of deal that could work well for both sides if done.

There's always the chance nothing comes together and Chinakhov is still with the Blue Jackets this season. But if a deal does happen, these are the three returns that make the most sense to me for Columbus.

[The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Chinakhov, 2025 Schedule & More](#)

By Mark Sheig – July 18, 2025

The prevailing thought was that it would be a quiet summer within the walls inside Nationwide Arena. But on Thursday, some news broke that awakened the hockey world to a small degree.

According to Shumi Babaev, the agent for Blue Jackets' forward Yegor Chinakhov, the player has made it known he would be open to a trade.

We are going to try to look at this situation from a slightly different lens. We are going to focus on a question that seems to be floating around as a result of this trade request becoming public. Ultimately, is this just a one-off or a sign of something deeper?

Setting the Scene

On Thursday morning, Babaev posted his client's trade request on X.

Within the statement, Babaev made clear that Chinakhov would not return to Russia as long as he could play in the NHL. Soon after this initial post, the agent released some more detail. Here is what was said.

"In this situation, the player's opinion is the most important to me. However, we are fully aware that there is an active contract in place, and if Yegor's request for a trade does not materialize, he will continue to give 120 percent in fulfilling his responsibilities."

"I always stand by the player—especially in this case—and I understand that Yegor's desire to be traded did not come out of nowhere."

"I am in close and productive communication with the Columbus management. I am grateful to the "CBJ" leadership for their cooperation and understanding, but I fully support my player and will continue to act in his best interest."

The phrase "I had some misunderstandings with the coach during the season" was cited as a key reason for this request. Chinakhov was limited to 30 games in 2024-25 and was not seen during the Blue Jackets' attempted run to the playoffs at the end of the season.

Chinakhov found himself in a tough spot. He was recovering from a back injury in which there were setbacks. After missing all of December, January and February due to this injury, he was able to return in the game after the Stadium Series.

It was clear Chinakhov was getting back to speed. He appeared in eight games starting on March 4 while recording just one assist. Coach Dean Evason elected to take him out of the lineup looking for a spark.

Chinakhov appeared in just one game after March 21, the second of a back-to-back situation against Ottawa on April 6. He was immediately benched after that game and wasn't seen on the ice again the rest of the season.

From this perspective, it is not surprising to see frustration boil over. Chinakhov felt he deserved to play but fell behind the depth chart.

Evason is consistent in this regard. If a player doesn't perform well or suffers an injury and then has to work his way back, there's a chance that player is waiting their turn. Ask the likes of Jordan Harris and Damon Severson about that. Once trust is lost or broken, it will take time to earn it back.

Evason elected to play what he thought was his best lineup down the stretch. It didn't include Chinakhov. This kind of thing happens all the time in the NHL.

Sign of Bigger Problem?

One of the questions that seems to be floating around is if Chinakhov's trade request is a sign of a deeper-rooted problem? In other words, are we seeing a trend of players asking out or are there other current players potentially thinking they want out too?

While there has been a pattern of players asking out (Pierre-Luc Dubois and Patrik Laine come to mind), this doesn't appear to be a major situation pointing to a deeper problem. This is a player in Chinakhov expressing frustration over misunderstanding and lack of playing time.

Let's remember too that the Blue Jackets have new leadership in the front office and behind the bench. It shouldn't come as a surprise to see situations arise like this when new people are in charge. They are trying to get to know their team. Sometimes, they see a player's situation different than the leadership before them.

At the time Dubois and Laine expressed their intentions, there was a bigger problem. There was a narrative about the team and players wanting to leave.

Now however? As a collective, this group is as tight as ever. Chinakhov's frustrations are a result of his individual circumstances over his time in the NHL.

In parts of four seasons in the NHL, Chinakhov has had his share of injuries. He hasn't played more than 62 games in a season. That was in his rookie season of 2021-22. His season game totals have been 62, 30, 53 and 30.

Among the known injuries Chinakhov has suffered include an ankle injury, a lower-body injury, a back injury and various upper-body injuries dating back to 2022. Add in that he's had three different head coaches in his four seasons (Brad Larsen, Pascal Vincent and Evason) and you see the picture.

Chinakhov's road in the NHL has been a bumpy one. But when he's been available, he's been more than a serviceable player. That's why there will be interest in him. That's also why the Blue Jackets need to be patient on how to handle his situation. But to say this is a sign of a bigger team-wide problem doesn't fit this description.

The Road Ahead

The best-case scenario for everyone involved is simple. Chinakhov needs to come to camp ready to go. He needs to show the team he's ready for action. He also has to earn his role and ice time. If a trade is going to come through, he puts himself in the best position by proving it on the ice.

For the Blue Jackets, as we said above, they need to be patient. Finding the right value in a potential trade could be tricky given the injury history involved.

The Blue Jackets need to put Chinakhov in the best position to succeed. There is a chance he will come to camp without a trade. He does have one season left on his contract before becoming a restricted free agent. He has to show everyone he's healthy and ready to perform.

A trade could happen before the season if the Blue Jackets get the right value in return. That would be in the form of now help and not futures.

Otherwise, expect Chinakhov to still wear the Blue Jackets' colors come October. He is actively preparing for the new season and is expected to report to camp should a trade not materialize.

Chinakhov still has a lot of promise. But this far into his career, he has a lot to prove too. Given it's a contract year, there should be no shortage of motivation to show he has a lot more to give.

2025-26 Schedule Highlights

The 2025-26 NHL schedule was finally released leaguewide. The Blue Jackets will open with a pair of road games against the Western Conference. They are the opposition for both the Nashville Predators and Minnesota Wild's home openers on Oct 9 and Oct 11. The Blue Jackets will host the New Jersey Devils at Nationwide Arena on Columbus Day Monday Oct 13.

Here are a couple of highlights from the schedule.

Their longest homestand is five games from Jan 20-Jan 28.

Their longest road trip is five games from Nov 2-Nov 11.

They have 15 back-to-back games which is not the most in the NHL. The Olympics are a big reason why there are so many condensed games.

They play the Rangers and Flyers three times each while they play the rest of the Metro four times each.

They have two separate trips to California with San Jose on a different trip than Los Angeles and Anaheim.

Their 21st home game of the season is on Jan 13 against the Calgary Flames. My goodness.

Their last regular-season game of the season is against the Washington Capitals in what could be Alex Ovechkin's last regular-season game if he decides this is his final year.

TSN.ca / Waddell 'surprised' Chinakhov made trade request public, says he 'couldn't handle' being scratched

By TSN.ca Staff – July 17, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell responded Thursday after forward Yegor Chinakhov announced his desire to be traded in a post by his agent, Shumi Babaev.

Chinakhov, a first-round pick in 2020, cited a dispute with head coach Dean Evason as his reasoning for wanting a change of scenery.

"I'm surprised (agent Shumi Babaev) went public," Waddell told Aaron Portzline of The Athletic. "But I'm not surprised (about the trade request) because we've talked about it. He got back (from the back injury last season) and didn't play well, and (Chinakhov and Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason) fell out of favour.

"I told (Babaev), he has value. I will talk to teams. I have talked to teams. But I'm not just going to trade him because you said to trade him."

The 24-year-old winger had seven goals and 15 points in 30 games with the Blue Jackets last season, missing significant time with a back injury before being a healthy scratch at times after he returned.

"When he came back, he was not the Chinakhov we were hoping he was, and he got healthy scratched at the end (of the season)," Waddell said. "That's what happens with guys. He couldn't handle that."

His stats last season were a drop-off from finishing with 16 goals and 29 points in 53 games the previous year.

"I had some misunderstandings with the coach during the season. Now I would be glad to have a trade. I would like to move to a different location," Chinakhov said earlier in the day, via Babaev on X. "Will I return to Russia? As long as I can play in the NHL, I will keep developing here."

Chinakhov made his NHL debut with Columbus during the 2021-22 season, posting seven goals and 14 points in 62 games, which remains his career-high for games played in a season.

"In this situation, the player's opinion is the most important to me," Babaev said in a later post.

"However, we are fully aware that there is an active contract in place, and if Yegor's request for a trade does not materialize, he will continue to give 120 per cent in fulfilling his responsibilities.

"I am in close and productive communication with the Columbus management. I am grateful to the 'CBJ' leadership for their cooperation and understanding, but I fully support my player and will continue to act in his best interest," he added.

He remains signed through next season at a cap hit of \$2.1 million.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Have Significant Ground to Make Up Against the Devils

By Mark Scheig – July 17, 2025

As we saw in Part 1 of our 2025 Blue Jackets' Summer Series, the team has made progress against the Carolina Hurricanes. But as we turn our attention to another formidable Metropolitan Division foe in the New Jersey Devils, the Blue Jackets have significant ground to make up.

One look at last season's standings tells a story but not the full story. The Blue Jackets finished just two points behind the Devils in the Metro. The gap is wider when you consider the Devils won the first tiebreaker (regulation wins) going away 36-30.

But even more importantly than that, the Devils lost their best player in Jack Hughes due to a significant injury. He was limited to just 62 games in 2024-25. He scored 27 goals in those 62 games. He likely pushes toward 40 had he stayed healthy.

The Devils had to adjust to life without Hughes. Without the elite offense he brought, they had to try to win with a more defensive approach. While their finish to the season was up and down including 5-5-0 in their last 10 games, it was good enough to make the postseason.

The Devils' playoff run however lasted just five games before being dispatched by the Hurricanes. Not having Hughes was simply too much to overcome against one of the best teams in the Eastern Conference.

Hughes will be back. He is expected to be ready for training camp. It will have been over six months since he sustained the shoulder injury that forced him into surgery.

With Hughes added to a formidable roster, the Devils are aiming high in 2025-26. Could they make a serious run at winning the Metro? And how do the Blue Jackets stack up?

Forwards

Where the Devils have an advantage on the Blue Jackets is not only can they match the center depth, they can exceed it in the top-six. Hughes and Nico Hischier are among the best 1-2 punches down the middle.

Even without Hughes, the Devils took two games from the Blue Jackets in March during the playoff stretch run. The Blue Jackets lost 5-3 in New Jersey and then 2-1 at home when goal scoring dried up at the worst possible moment.

One player that doesn't seem to get the attention he deserves on the Devils is Jesper Bratt. He just posted a career high in points in 2024-25 with 88. He became one of the focal points of the offense with Hughes out. Now that they'll likely be reunited on a line together, that gives the Devils the all-important other line that can beat teams.

The Devils' projected top-six as of this writing appears to be:

Ondrej Palat – Jack Hughes – Jesper Bratt

Timo Meier – Nico Hischier – Stefan Noesen

We'll see how that second line shakes out. But this top-six has given the Blue Jackets fits. Remember when Hughes made a shooting gallery out of Elvis Merzlikins? Merzlikins stood on his head which helped the Blue Jackets win that game in December 4-2.

The Blue Jackets appear to be lining up their top-six in this manner.

Boone Jenner – Sean Monahan – Kirill Marchenko

Dmitri Voronkov – Adam Fantilli – Kent Johnson

An argument could be made that Yegor Chinakhov (if still on the team) and Cole Sillinger could get into the top-six on the wing. Fantilli is expected to be among the best players in the game in the coming years. But as we speak, Hughes is the best player between these two teams. The Devils hold the upper hand in the top-six given their skill and depth. Hischier is one of the best two-way centers in the game.

When looking at the bottom-six forwards, the Blue Jackets match up well with the Devils given their new acquisitions. Charlie Coyle and Isac Lundestrom down the middle compare out favorably to the Devils' projected centers in Dawson Mercer and Cody Glass.

The Devils did add Connor Brown from the Edmonton Oilers in the offseason to help the bottom six and penalty killing. Evgenii Dadanov could add some secondary scoring. It's unknown where he slots into the lineup at this point. Could he make a run at playing higher in the lineup? Don't be surprised if the Devils try to improve their team before the season especially down the middle lower in their lineup.

Hughes has to stay healthy. The most games he's played in a season coming into 2025-26 is 78. He's entering his seventh season in the NHL. His absence last season proved how vital he is to everything the Devils do.

But because the Devils can match the center depth of the Blue Jackets and exceed it in the top-six, they hold the overall edge in forwards.

Defense

The Devils and Blue Jackets both have significant questions on defense. The Blue Jackets have the best player in Zach Werenski. The depth below him will be together again but have questions to answer.

For the Devils, Dougie Hamilton has played just a total of 84 games in the last two seasons combined. Like Jack Hughes, Hamilton has to find a way to stay healthy. The defense took a major hit without him in the lineup.

While Hamilton was out, Luke Hughes stepped up. Although Luke had slightly better offensive numbers in 2023-24, he made important strides in his defensive game last season while maintaining almost the same level of offensive production. He appears primed to take the next step as being a dependable two-

way, top-four defender. Brendon Dillon and Brett Pesce are projected to round out the top-four along with Hamilton and Luke Hughes.

Perhaps the most interesting player on defense for the Devils this upcoming season will be Simon Nemec. His career didn't start off the way many thought it would. There were even some trade rumors around him.

After playing in 60 games in 2023-24, Nemec appeared in just 27 games last season with his average ice time significantly reduced. He too dealt with an injury that hampered him. But then he showed in the playoffs why there is still a lot of promise around him.

Nemec scored the game-winning goal in Game 3 against the Hurricanes in the playoffs. By Game 5, he logged just under 28 minutes of ice time. With the injury to Johnathan Kovacevic in play, Nemec appears to be in line to start the season with a significant role. Can he replicate the playoff success he had in a larger sample?

Like the forwards, the Devils hold the edge on defense. Coach Sheldon Keefe has brought a style of game that has helped lower the goals against. To put this in perspective, only the Tampa Bay Lightning (219) gave up less goals on the season than the Devils (222) in the Eastern Conference. This aspect of the Devils' game didn't get nearly enough attention.

The Blue Jackets will have a chance to show they've improved this season. But they have more significant questions facing their blue line and goaltending than the Devils do. Can the Blue Jackets stay healthy? And then can their depth take their games to another level.

Goaltending

The Devils hold the advantage in goaltending as well. They are running back the duo of Jacob Markstrom and Jake Allen, who signed a five-year extension in the offseason. Both goalies finished with save percentages at or above .900 and with goals-against averages at or below 2.66.

Compare that with Merzlikins who had a 3.18 goals-against average and an .892 save percentage. Jet Greaves will get his opportunity to play an expanded role. Can he replicate any of his success from the end of last season?

Given the experience factor, the Devils hold a pretty significant advantage on the Blue Jackets at all three phases. It makes the Devils a team that could make a run at the Metropolitan Division. They have to stay healthy and they have to get key contributions from their bottom-six. But the pieces are there.

And while the Blue Jackets do have significant ground to make up, they're in a good position to do so. The amount of progress their young stars make coupled with what their defense/goaltending do will dictate how much of that ground is made up.

Stay tuned for Part 3 of our series as we turn our attention to the Washington Capitals.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Should Try to Extend Adam Fantilli Long-Term

By William Espy – July 19, 2025

With the recent news surrounding Yegor Chinakhov, Columbus Blue Jackets general manager (GM) Don Waddell has quite a bit on his plate at this point. Once that gets resolved, though, his biggest priority should undoubtedly be getting Adam Fantilli's second NHL contract squared away.

With Fantilli's new deal, there are a couple of ways that Waddell can approach negotiations. The way that many around the league approach similar situations is short-term bridge deals that allow another contract to be signed while the player is still a restricted free agent. While it is a wise decision to get the most team control for a player, once in a while, the logical move is to commit to a player long-term out of the gate. There's more risk to that approach, but with a player of Fantilli's skill and potential, it seems like the right choice for the Blue Jackets at this point.

Why Fantilli Deserves a Long-Term Deal

At just 20 years old, Fantilli is already a 30-goal scorer at the NHL level. It's not every day that a player breaks into the league and scores at such a high rate so quickly. Even Connor Bedard hasn't achieved that milestone yet, although he's certainly been stacking up points for the Chicago Blackhawks.

Fantilli has a high work ethic, he's already performing at a high level, and will only continue to improve as well. Not to mention the fact that he has the qualities of a leader, and could theoretically be a future captain of the Blue Jackets if his career goes to plan. As a result, showing him that management envisions him as the future face of the organization by offering him a long-term deal makes quite a bit of sense.

There are some negatives to signing any young player to a long-term deal; however, many of them will be overcome as long as Fantilli is able to keep developing at the current trajectory. A long-term contract will come with a higher cap hit right out of the gate, but it will be lower than it would be if he signs a bridge, scores 40 goals the next two seasons, and then is due for another new deal.

A Baseline for Negotiation

One recent example that would be somewhat comparable to Fantilli is Dylan Guenther with the Utah Mammoth; however, despite Guenther's higher point-per-game totals prior to the signing date, Fantilli is more of a proven asset than the Mammoth forward was when he signed his contract. Add in the fact that Fantilli is also a center, and his value does go up a decent amount.

Guenther's contract came in at an average annual value of \$7.14 million. Fantilli's would likely be in the range of \$8-9 million due to positional differences and defensive responsibilities; however, it is at least a baseline.

If the Blue Jackets signed Fantilli to a short-term bridge, they could likely get him signed for between \$5-6 million for the next two or three seasons, but the seasons after that could be in the eight-figure range per season, especially as the salary cap starts to rise.

Fantilli still has one more year left on his entry-level contract, but if Waddell is smart, he'll get his extension done before the price continues to rise. Committing a substantial amount of money and time to a 20-year-old player is always a risk, but based on Fantilli's work ethic and personality, he seems to be as sure a bet as any young player in the league. Considering cap space isn't an issue for the foreseeable future in Columbus, overpaying Fantilli for a few seasons would undoubtedly be worth the salary cap savings toward the end of the deal when the team is expected to be a true contender.

The Athletic / No way Yegor Chinakhov can stay in Columbus after trade request, agent says: 'It's all about the coach'

By Aaron Portzline – July 18, 2025

One day after Yegor Chinakhov's trade request was made public, the agent for the Columbus Blue Jackets' 24-year-old winger made it clear how they're thinking about the future.

"I don't think there's any way he can stay in Columbus," Shumi Babaev said. "I don't see any way."

The issue, Babaev insisted, is Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason, who, he said, did not communicate with Chinakhov at any point during last season — not when he went down with a back injury in late November, not when he returned to the lineup in early March and not when he was a healthy scratch for most of the final month of the season.

"(Chinakhov) is comfortable with this team. He's comfortable with this city," Babaev told The Athletic from Moscow. "But he's not comfortable with this coach. It's all about the coach."

"If you remember, (Chinakhov) started the season on the first line and he was fantastic. And then he's on the third line, and that's it. Third line. The coach doesn't tell him anything. Why? Why would you do this? It should be something that should be (explained) about why he did this."

"I'm not saying how a coach should work. (I'm) just saying that for my player, it's not comfortable with the coach and (he feels like) the coach doesn't trust him."

Asked if the relationship between Evason and the 2020 first-round pick could be repaired — either with an offseason phone call, or a face-to-face meeting in Columbus ahead of training camp — Babaev didn't sound optimistic.

"During the season, he didn't tell him anything," Babaev said. "'China' said he didn't talk (to) him (about) anything the whole season, he just always said the assistant coaches would tell him everything. You think in 365 days it didn't change anything, but you think it's going to change now?"

"I don't think so. Some coaches like players; some coaches like other players."

Evason initially declined to comment when reached by The Athletic, allowing GM Don Waddell's comments on Thursday to speak for the club.

But through a team spokesman, Evason indicated that there were, in fact, conversations between him and Chinakhov, as well as his assistant coaches and the player.

Further, Evason said through the spokesman, "The lines of communication are open, and they will continue to be open."

Chinakhov was arguably the Blue Jackets' best forward in the first month of the season, drawing considerable time on the No. 1 line with center Sean Monahan and right winger Kirill Marchenko.

When he went down with a back injury in late November, he had seven goals, seven assists and 14 points in 21 games and averaged just over 17 minutes of ice time per game, the highest in his career. But the back injury knocked him out of the lineup for more than three months and was a source of much frustration for the club.

It marked the fourth straight season that Chinakhov has missed considerable time with an injury. In four seasons, he's missed 121 games, mostly with back and ankle injuries.

Chinakhov had a procedure done in Russia during the NHL's break for the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament and was able to return to the lineup on March 4. He played in only nine games the rest of the way, totaling 0-1-1 and a minus-8 rating, and playing just 12:42.

When the Blue Jackets made a push toward the Stanley Cup playoffs — they won their final six games to finish two points out of the last playoff spot — Chinakhov was sitting as a healthy scratch.

"Any team in the NHL would say Chinny is a top-six player," Babaev said. "If (Evason) doesn't like him, then why not trade him. Why should you hold him? What's the reason? It's the best solution.

"China wants to play in the NHL. He wants to win. He wants to help the team. He wants to try his best. But if the coach doesn't like him, how can he do that?"

Waddell said he's open to a trade, but only if he gets the right offer for Chinakhov. Otherwise, the expectation is that Chinakhov would arrive at training camp in September ready to compete and play. Babaev confirmed to The Athletic that Chinakhov will arrive on time to camp, and he said his back injury is 100 percent healed.

"It's not good that this (story) is coming to the media," said Babaev, whose midday Thursday social media post alerted the hockey world to Chinakhov's interview with the Russian outlet Sports-Express, in which the trade request first landed.

"Yegor just said what he thinks. He talked about his emotions, and that's fine. I've already talked to (Waddell). It was a good conversation. We both understand each other, and I understand Yegor is a very good player. It's not easy (for the Blue Jackets) to trade him. (Waddell) needs to get something for him."