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[Cleveland.com / Why Zach Werenski can't stop thinking about the 2026 Olympics and what it means for the Blue Jackets](#)

By Tim Bielik - September 15, 2025

Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski has already had quite an international career.

He's suited up for Team USA at the World Junior Championships, the Men's World Championships and the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament that took place in February.

At the team's media luncheon on Monday, Werenski was asked about trying to represent the United States at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan, Italy, which start on Feb. 6.

"Not going to sugarcoat it, but I'm going to be thinking about it every day all year," Werenski said.

These Olympics will be the first since the 2014 Games in Sochi, Russia, where National Hockey League players are allowed to play. Werenski didn't get drafted into the NHL until 2015, so this will be his first opportunity to try and earn a spot on Team USA.

Six players have already been named to the U.S. Olympic Team for the 2026 Games: Golden Knights center Jack Eichel, Maple Leafs center Auston Matthews, Canucks defenseman Quinn Hughes, Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy and the Tkachuk brothers — Senators forward Brady Tkachuk and Panthers forward Matthew Tkachuk.

The final roster spots are expected to be announced before early January 2026.

That means Werenski will spend the next few months thinking about the opportunity to represent his country on hockey's biggest international stage.

"I think for me, it's one of those things where if I am thinking about it and I am playing well enough to make that team, ultimately I'm helping the team here in Columbus," Werenski said. "That's my main goal is to do my job here. But at the end of the day, you only get so many cracks at an Olympics. It's my first chance since I've been in the league to play in an Olympic tournament and definitely not taking it for granted.

"Obviously, I want to do my best here in Columbus for team reasons, and then usually when that stuff works itself out, you end up having individual success. And, yeah, that's my goal. Obviously. I want to be on that team, and it'd be a huge honor. I think it'd be one of the greatest honors you could have to represent your country at the Olympics."

Werenski is coming off a career season for the Blue Jackets in 2024-25 with career highs in goals (23), assists (59) and points (82). He finished second in voting for the Norris Trophy, awarded to the NHL's top defenseman, behind Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche.

Werenski had six assists in four games for Team USA at the 4 Nations, helping them reach the final before losing to Canada in the championship game.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets training camp: Greaves vs. Merzlikins, and 8 other storylines to watch

By Aaron Portzline – September 17, 2025

In previous seasons, the training camp questions were significant. “Is this year’s top prospect ready to play in the NHL?” “Do they have enough center depth to build four lines?” “Are there any defensemen capable of playing on a top pair?”

As noted this week, the Columbus Blue Jackets seem as stable as they’ve been in several seasons entering this year’s training camp. But that doesn’t mean there aren’t storylines to watch between the start of camp on Thursday and the start of the regulation season on Oct. 9.

Here are nine things we’ll be monitoring:

1. Who’s the No. 1 goalie?

For the first time in three seasons, goaltender Elvis Merzlikins has a realistic challenger to his role as the Blue Jackets’ No. 1 goaltender.

Coach Dean Evason has made it clear that training camp will determine if Merzlikins or Jet Greaves will be the opening-night starter, and the regular-season performance of each goalie will determine who gets the bulk of the starts. Yes, they enter camp on even footing.

Greaves has never looked out of place in the NHL. He looked other-worldly at the end of last season, when he backstopped five of the Blue Jackets’ six straight wins to pull within two points of reaching the playoffs. This will be his biggest opportunity yet.

And it’ll be Merzlikins’ biggest challenge since he broke into the NHL in a tandem with Joonas Korpisalo. Merzlikins has enormous talent, but has struggled mightily over the last three seasons. A push could be a good thing.

2. Chinakhov’s role

GM Don Waddell and Evason both met with Yegor Chinakhov this month after his offseason trade request, and it seems they’ve reached (for now) an accord. Chinakhov wants to play, and Evason wants him to play him, but how much and where is up to the player, Evason said.

At the start of last season, Chinakhov was elevated to the No. 1 line after Boone Jenner was injured at the end of training camp. That should be proof that Evason recognizes Chinakhov’s considerable skill.

But the Blue Jackets’ top-two forward lines are now the high-rent district in Columbus. Sean Monahan and Adam Fantilli are locked as the top two centers, but Chinakhov, Boone Jenner, Kent Johnson, Kirill Marchenko and Dmitry Voronkov are all candidates to fill in those lines on the wings.

Is Chinakhov among the top four talented wingers on this roster? Absolutely. But it’ll take a healthy, thriving Chinakhov in camp and the preseason for him to land the job he wants.

3. Still the Boss

Voronkov’s teammates have taken to calling him “Big Boss,” but the Blue Jackets’ coaches and brass sent him home this summer with a request to become a slightly thinner Boss. The Jackets want him to be more aerobically fit for two reasons.

First, his offensive numbers have been strong at the start of both of his NHL seasons, but they've fallen off a cliff in the final months of each campaign.

In 2023-24, he had 16 goals and 14 assists in 51 games, one of the Blue Jackets' most consistent scorers through the end of February. In his last 24 games? Two goals and two assists. Last season, he was tied with Marchenko for the team lead in goals (17) through Jan. 17. But in the second half of the season, he had just six goals and 13 assists.

The other reason is they think Voronkov can be one of the NHL's top power forwards, but his lack of foot speed has made it hard for him to step into hits.

Training camp and the preseason schedule will reveal if there's a leaner Big Boss in town.

4. Bottom 6

The only notable change by the Blue Jackets this summer was among their bottom-six forwards. Departed players Sean Kuraly (Boston), James van Riemsdyk (Detroit) and Justin Danforth (Buffalo) have been replaced by Charlie Coyle, Miles Wood and Isac Lundestrom.

It's unclear where all the new pieces will fit, except Coyle, who will almost certainly be the new third-line center, pushing Cole Sillinger to the wing.

Who aligns next to Coyle and Sillinger? It could be Jenner or Chinakhov, whoever doesn't land among the top six forwards.

The fourth line will be centered by Lundestrom, and you can bank on rough-and-tumble Mathieu Olivier playing on the right side. It's hard to imagine Wood not playing on the left side, as he was brought in to juice up the forecheck and make the Jackets harder to play against.

5. Blue-line scramble?

The Blue Jackets' defense has remained almost unchanged from last season, which means those three pairs *still* aren't an ideal fit.

Yes, Zach Werenski and Dante Fabbro meshed well on the top pair, and Denton Mateychuk and Ivan Provorov had moments on the second pair, but having the lefty Provorov play on the right side of that pairing is something less than perfect.

Evason has said he wants to use camp and the preseason to look at different combinations, which could get interesting.

Don't be surprised if Mateychuk, coming off an impressive rookie season, gets a look on the top pair next to Werenski. Don't be stunned if Provorov, who signed a seven-year, \$59.5 million contract this summer, sees time on his natural side.

Other than Erik Gudbranson being locked in on the right side, the third pair bears watching. If Damon Severson slots in next to Gudbranson, he, too, would be playing on his off side. With six seasons remaining on his contract, finding a spot where Severson can regain his confidence is a key.

Don't forget about Jake Christiansen, who played 68 games last season.

6. Depth battles

This is nothing like it's been in recent seasons, when five or six players were fighting for the final one or two spots. But competition is the very reason for training camp, and there are still a couple of battles to watch.

On paper, Zach Aston-Reese would appear to be the 13th forward, with Mikael Pyyhtiä his top competition. You can't rule out the likes of Luca Del Bel Belluz, James Malatesta and others, but those players can all go to the AHL without waivers, meaning they'd have to significantly outplay Aston-Reese and Pyyhtiä.

On defense, the Blue Jackets have little mystery. You'd have to consider Jake Christiansen the No. 7 as of today, but Waddell and Evason have talked up the crew at AHL Cleveland as being a threat. That includes Christian Jaros and Daemon Hunt, along with veteran Brendan Smith, who is in camp on a tryout agreement.

7. Waiver wire

The Blue Jackets were active on the waiver wire last season, claiming Fabbro from Nashville and Aston-Reese from Vegas. They'll be active in the other direction by the end of camp, with several players needing to clear to join AHL Cleveland.

Aston-Reese and Pyyhtiä — whoever doesn't claim that 13th forward spot — would each need waivers to be sent to Cleveland. Other forwards who would need to be exposed to the rest of the league are Hunter McKown, Brendan Gaunce, Hudson Fasching and Owen Sillinger.

Among defensemen, Dysin Mayo, Jaros and Hunt would all need to clear, as would goaltenders Ivan Fedotov and Zach Sawchenko.

That'll be a nervy day for AHL Cleveland coach Trent Vogelhuber and his staff, who open training camp on Sept. 29 in suburban Cleveland.

8. OK go?

One player not mentioned above as battling for a forward spot is Oiva Keskinen, who has a chance to be a steal of a draft pick for the Blue Jackets.

Keskinen, a 21-year-old center from Finland, was a seventh-round pick (No. 194 overall) in the 2023 draft, but has really elevated over the past two seasons playing in Finland's top league, Liiga. The Blue Jackets were excited to sign him to an entry-level deal, which indicates they believe he has NHL potential.

Is that this year? That would seem a reach. Keskinen was a standout player at the NHL prospects showcase in Buffalo last weekend, and he's over-the-moon excited for his first NHL training camp.

There's a clause in his contract that will allow him to return to Finland if he doesn't make the Blue Jackets' final roster. Quite frankly, that seems likely. But Keskinen, talking with *The Athletic* in Buffalo, said he'd consider joining AHL Cleveland if the Blue Jackets thought he was a likely recall during the season.

9. Injuries

Injuries have wrecked so many recent seasons that Blue Jackets fans have taken to watching games — heck, even practices — through their fingers, fearing the worst. Last season, at the end of training camp, Boone Jenner slammed into a wall and suffered a shoulder injury.

There are already some bumps and bruises at the start of this year's camp.

Mateychuk will miss the first couple of days of camp with a groin injury, but Waddell indicated he could join camp by the weekend.

AHL Cleveland-bound forwards Jordan Dumais (lower body) and Max McCue (undisclosed) are day to day, and Sillinger (knee) will take part in practices, but be held out of contact drills and preseason games.

Defenseman Luca Marrelli had shoulder surgery at the end of last season, so his pro debut is on hold. He's expected to be cleared to return in mid-December.

The Athletic / If Blue Jackets don't end five-year playoff drought, season will be a 'failure'

By Aaron Portzline – September 16, 2025

As the Columbus Blue Jackets prepare for their 25th season, it's hard to recall many previous training camps — in recent seasons, absolutely — that held so little drama and so few questions regarding who would make the club and where they'd play in the lineup.

That is almost certainly a good thing.

When the Blue Jackets have their first on-ice session of camp on Thursday in Nationwide Arena, there will be 56 players vying for a maximum of 23 roster spots. But even a novice fan could take a stab at the forward lines and defensive pairs and be fairly confident heading into the Oct. 9 regular-season opener.

That's not to say the Blue Jackets are the class of the Eastern Conference or even the Metropolitan Division. The first step, of course, is to end a five-year playoff drought, the franchise's longest since it missed the postseason in its first seven seasons of existence.

But the Blue Jackets are an intriguing mix of high-end young talent, sturdy veterans and toughness, and most of the players know their roles and linemates. In fact, second-year coach Dean Evason has had his ideal lines and pairs hanging on the wall of his office for weeks now.

"Our team is in a good spot right now," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "I feel like we kind of have an idea of who we're going to be at the start of the season, how we want to play. Sometimes you figure that out in training camp, but we already know what that is. That's a positive for us.

"It's kind of the same every year, but this year I genuinely feel ... if we're not a playoff team, it's a failure with this group. And I think everybody believes that in our locker room."

It is a stark difference from last season, too, when the Blue Jackets opened training camp with a new coach, general manager (Don Waddell) and No. 1 center (Sean Monahan), and a score of returning players who wondered what role they might fill under the new regime.

The Blue Jackets went on to be one of the NHL's best stories and biggest surprises, missing the playoffs by one win (two points) after a furious six-game winning streak to end the season.

"When the season ended, it was disappointing but also encouraging," Monahan said. "I've been here for a couple of weeks now and you feel the excitement around the rink from the guys and the staff. We have a mix of just about everything on our team."

Over the course of last season, they learned that Monahan worked very well between Russian wingers Dmitry Voronkov and Kirill Marchenko to give the Blue Jackets a long-awaited legitimate first line. (Voronkov, by the way, is said to look "fantastic," per Evason, after a fitness-focused offseason.)

The Blue Jackets also learned that 20-year-old center Adam Fantilli (30 goals) was ready to produce offensively, and that he worked particularly well with dazzling winger Kent Johnson. It may be captain Boone Jenner or Yegor Chinakhov on the left side of that line, but, either way, the Blue Jackets have two scoring lines.

On the back end, the numbers don't lie: when Dante Fabbro was claimed off waivers from Nashville early in the season and Denton Mateychuk was recalled from AHL Cleveland in December, the Blue Jackets' defense began to steady and the wins followed.

When Fabbro paired with Norris Trophy runner-up Werenski on the top pair, and Mateychuk and Provorov shared the second pair, the Jackets went 26-13-2 and allowed 2.95 goals per game. When those four weren't together in the lineup, the Jackets were 14-20-7 and allowed 3.56 goals per game.

The Blue Jackets made an offseason trade with Colorado to acquire veteran center Charlie Coyle and winger Miles Wood, hoping that Coyle's presence and his right-side faceoffs, along with Wood's crash-and-bang forecheck, will make a difference.

The expectation is that Jet Greaves and Elvis Merzlikins will be the Blue Jackets' two goaltenders, but Evason has said the playing time will be doled out by performance, and that Greaves will have a chance — just like Merzlikins, the incumbent — to earn the No. 1 job.

How the goalies will perform this season is no small question. Merzlikins has been, statistically, one of the NHL's worst goaltenders over the past three seasons. Greaves, who has never looked out of place in Columbus, was the star of the Blue Jackets' late-season kick, but he's never before been a full-time NHLer.

That's a question for the start of the regular season, though.

When camp breaks on Thursday, the Blue Jackets will be full of enthusiasm. That was the message from players on Monday.

"The other day, I was saying how grateful I am to have come to this team at the time I did," said Fantilli, who is heading into his third season. "I feel like as I've gotten here it's been a progression, and that's been really good to see. We kinda proved a lot of people wrong last year, especially without Johnny (Gaudreau) and with all of the injuries we had. But we were extremely disappointed to miss the playoffs.

"I couldn't be more excited (for the season to start). I mean ... I don't know the best way to say it, but we're a confident team right now. We expect to make the playoffs. If we don't, it's going to feel like a failure, and that does change the way you go into a season.

"You go in with a little more swagger, expecting to win games."

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets open 2025-26 training camp: 5 storylines

By Brian Hedger – September 18, 2025

The puck officially dropped Sept. 17 at Nationwide Arena to open the Blue Jackets' on-ice work at training camp.

They've undergone slight changes in their five months away, but remain mostly the same team that finished last season (2024-25) on a six-game tear to fall just shy of a spot in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

A handful of depth players are gone, including forwards Sean Kuraly, James van Riemsdyk and Justin Danforth, replaced by Charlie Coyle, Miles Wood and Isac Lundestrom. Goalie Daniil Tarasov, now with the Florida Panthers, will be replaced by Jet Greaves. Winger Yegor Chinakhov made a trade request that wasn't granted. Several support staff were replaced, but the Blue Jackets' coaching staff returns intact for a second year together.

Now, it's time to see how it all comes together for the 25th season in Blue Jackets history. Here are five storylines to watch:

Zach Werenski aims to match or exceed his best NHL season

After finishing runner-up to Colorado's Cale Makar for last season's Norris Trophy, which goes to the NHL's top defenseman, Zach Werenski heads into camp with one big question mark looming overhead.

Can he do it again?

Werenski went into 2024-25 with the mindset that he'd take more shots if given the opportunities, and it sparked the best offensive season of his entire career. He set franchise scoring highs by a defenseman with 23 goals, 59 assists and 82 points while posting a +12 plus/minus rating, launching a career-high 298 shots and leading the NHL in average ice time at a whopping 26:45 per game.

He missed only one game, too, logging the most games (81) since appearing in all 82 of the 2018-19 campaign, his third season. Should the Blue Jackets get anything close to these numbers again, they will almost certainly stay in the chase for a playoff spot all the way to the end again.

Jet Greaves should push Elvis Merzlikins for Columbus Blue Jackets' top goaltending spot

Consistency between the pipes has been an ongoing issue for the Blue Jackets, primarily because Elvis Merzlikins is the team's highest-paid option, and he's struggled at times. For several years, Merzlikins has run either scorching hot or ice cold, taking the Blue Jackets with him on the rollercoaster ride.

A couple of those seasons, the Jackets' lineup was so riddled with injuries, it wouldn't have mattered who played goalie, but finishing two points short of the playoffs last season put a spotlight on the issue. So did Greaves, a rookie, who excelled in a starter's role for the final five games while Merzlikins was concussed.

Greaves posted jaw-dropping numbers during a five-game stretch when Columbus' playoff hopes rode on winning games in regulation. He'll start 2025-26 as Merzlikins' backup and could provide an internal push that finally gives the Blue Jackets their strongest goalie tandem since Joonas Korpisalo was around.

Columbus Blue Jackets need youngsters to climb another rung

The Blue Jackets have a tantalizing blend of productive veterans and emerging young stars who can all handle leadership roles.

The youngsters include center Adam Fantilli and right wing Kirill Marchenko. The roster also features talented right wing Kent Johnson and three power forwards with potential in Dmitri Voronkov, Cole Sillinger and Yegor Chinakhov. Denton Mateychuk, a highly skilled defenseman, joined the scoring mix as a rookie, and he wasn't recalled from the AHL until December.

The Blue Jackets are loaded with impressive young talent, which is how they set a franchise record with 267 goals last season despite trading Patrik Laine in August 2024 and losing star left wing Johnny Gaudreau to a tragedy before camp. Almost every young player the Jackets brought up met or exceeded their expectations, and they'll need to do it again to reach the postseason.

Development in the NHL, however, is rarely linear. Any backward slides by young players must be countered by somebody else exceeding expectations.

Yegor Chinakhov can still boost Columbus Blue Jackets lineup

Despite making a trade request public through his agent this summer, Chinakhov remains a Blue Jackets forward. In fact, he's a big X factor up front after a fourth straight season with a limited role due to injury.

A nagging back injury last season limited him to 30 games after an impressive start that included a stint at left wing for each of the top two lines. Chinakhov has shown flashes of immense skill when healthy, but he's also been limited by multiple injuries and inconsistency.

The best way to force a trade, assuming he still wants one, is to iron out those two areas. His shot, skating, size and strength will take care of the rest.

Columbus Blue Jackets have questions to answer on defense

Speaking of X factors, a big one resides among the defensemen.

Damon Severson, a right-handed shooting veteran who's well paid, must regain the coaching staff's trust and earn one of the top four defensive spots. The Blue Jackets' top two pairs should probably be filled out by veterans, starting with Werenski (left) and Dante Fabbro (right) followed by Ivan Provorov (left) and Severson (right).

That would give the Jackets two solid veteran pairings and push Mateychuk, who's still essentially a rookie, into a more realistic everyday role working the left side of the third pairing with hulking veteran Erik Gudbranson on the right.

Consistency has been Severson's issue, too, so nothing is set in stone.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets taking playoffs or 'failure' mindset into new NHL season

By Brian Hedger – September 1, 2025

After finishing one win shy of the NHL's postseason field last season, the Columbus Blue Jackets are returning for the start of a new campaign with loftier expectations.

Barring another swath of key injuries, they've got an impressive roster comprised of driven veterans and emerging youngsters plus a coaching staff heading into its second season under Dean Evason's leadership. Making the playoffs has become the Jackets' baseline now, and they've narrowed their focus to obtaining that goal based on comments at the team's opening media luncheon Sept. 15 at Nationwide Arena.

"This year, I genuinely feel like if we're not a playoff team, it's a failure for this group," defenseman Zach Werenski said. "I think everyone believes that in our locker room, so I'm excited just to get to work with the guys here in a couple days."

He wasn't alone in that assessment.

"We're a confident team now," third-year center Adam Fantilli said. "We expect to make the playoffs, and if we don't it's going to feel like a failure. And that does change a little bit the way you go into a season. You go in with a little more swagger and just expecting to win games."

Others gave more nuanced responses, including captain Boone Jenner, Evason and president/general manager Don Waddell, but nobody stepped back from it. As Fantilli said, this is a confident team with the start of training camp looming and evidence abounds to back it up.

Two 30-goal scorers return with forwards Kirill Marchenko and Fantilli. Monahan produced at a point-per-game pace in his first season with the Blue Jackets. Jenner is healthy. And a sizable group of additional young forwards led by Kent Johnson and Dmitri Voronkov should provide ample scoring depth. Also, the Jackets return their top seven defensemen from a solid group that improved as last season progressed, led by Werenski as a Norris trophy candidate.

Consistency in goal remains an issue with Elvis Merzlikins, but the addition of Jet Greaves in his first extended NHL action could spark an internal battle that helps both become a strong tandem. As for coaching, Evason and his staff return for a second season feeling miles ahead of where they were a year ago. Their systems and strategies are installed, the team's identity is forged and the Blue Jackets are intent on continuing to honor the memory of Johnny Gaudreau with their play.

There's also a new wall of doubters already writing off last season as a "fluke" sparked by Gaudreau's tragic death.

"A lot of guys had great years last year," Werenski said. "The hardest part is consistency and doing it again, year after year, and I think that's our biggest challenge this year. I think we have the team, and I think we had the team last year to make the playoffs, but we fell just short. Now, it's doing it again and doing it even better. We had a good year, but it wasn't good enough."

That's why expectations have changed, which is something that should be welcomed in Columbus after five rough years since the Blue Jackets' last postseason appearance. They should be a playoff team now. That should be their next goal on a path that ultimately leads to the NHL's biggest payoff.

“The Stanley Cup’s our expectation ... that’s what we want, right?” Evason said. “We have to take steps to get there, and that first step is obviously to make the playoffs, and then (take) each round after that. So, yeah, our expectation is to have a great season, make the playoffs and then we want to win the first round and move forward.”

The Columbus Dispatch / 5 takeaways from the Columbus Blue Jackets at the Buffalo NHL Prospects Challenge

By Brian Hedger – September 16, 2025

The days of the Blue Jackets taking a team stacked with high draft picks to a prospects showcase are shrinking in the rearview mirror.

They still have highly regarded prospects, but the top two weren't available for the Jackets' three-game slate Sept. 11-14 at the 2025 NHL Prospects Challenge in Buffalo, New York. Top prospect Cayden Lindstrom, picked fourth overall in 2024, is getting ready for his first collegiate season at Michigan State and 2025 first-round pick Jackson Smith (15th overall) is at Penn State.

Despite their lack of star power, though, the Blue Jackets put together a competitive team of drafted prospects and free agents that went 2-1-0 after downing the Pittsburgh Penguins 5-4 in overtime to conclude the showcase Sept. 14.

Nicholas Sima, a free agent, took a pass from Owen Griffin (2025 fifth-round pick) in 3-on-3 OT and slid the puck between the goalie's pads to end it with his second goal of the game. The Blue Jackets won their final two games against the Buffalo Sabres and Penguins by a combined margin of 12-9 after opening the weekend Sept. 11 with an 8-2 loss to the New Jersey Devils.

Here are five takeaways from the Blue Jackets' time in Buffalo:

Finding quality NHL contributors in the mid-to-late rounds can feel a bit like drawing lottery tickets, only they're not randomly chosen. Many hours and travel miles teams put into scouting amateur players can pay off with picks made beyond the first two rounds, and this Blue Jackets prospect team showed promise.

Luca Pinelli, selected 114th overall in 2023 (fourth round), led the Jackets in scoring with five points on a goal and four assists. He led the way in the second game with a goal and three assists in the victory over the Sabres and now looks to carry that success into the preseason leading into his first full professional season. Pinelli may be one of AHL Cleveland's top scoring forwards, and a strong effort there could lead to his NHL debut at some point this season.

Keskinen, a seventh-round pick in 2023, finished the showcase with four points on a goal and three assists. He centered the top line and first power-play group, showing impressive skills, skating and poise with the puck. Keskinen has steadily improved with Tappara in Finland's top circuit, Liiga, and will continue that climb if he doesn't make the NHL roster in his first Blue Jackets training camp.

Griffin, an undersized center from the OHL's Oshawa Generals selected in the fifth round of the 2025 draft, joined Pinelli and Keskinen by standing out offensively. Centering the Blue Jackets' third line, he added four points on two goals and two assists in the showcase, which was his first action in a Blue Jackets' uniform.

After skating in warmups for the Blue Jackets' final game, forward Jordan Dumais was scratched for precautionary reasons related to lower body tightness.

The issue isn't considered a concern heading into the start of training camp, which starts Sept. 17 with medical testing and evaluations before on-ice work starts Sept. 18 at Nationwide Arena. Anything related to the lower body with Dumais, however, raises slight concern after two sports hernia surgeries

delayed the undersized scoring winger's development since he was taken 96th overall (third round) in 2022.

Sima's two-goal game to lift the Blue Jackets to victory over the Penguins in the finale wasn't the only time he drew notice for producing offensively. He scored three goals to lead the team in goals at the showcase, displaying a scoring knack to go with a rugged style and big body at 6 feet 3, 194 pounds.

Sima, 20, is out of eligibility at the junior level after playing in the OHL with the North Bay Battalion and Saginaw Spirit. He'll look to start his professional next and took an impressive stride forward in this showcase event with the Blue Jackets.

Twelve of the Blue Jackets' players in Buffalo (52%) were there on amateur tryout offers. That included forward Tyler Peddle, whom they selected in 2023 (seventh round) and opted not to sign prior to losing their exclusive negotiating rights with him.

That's a large percentage of a prospects roster dedicated to prospects who aren't affiliated to their showcase team, but that's a trend that likely will continue with more drafted prospects opting to play collegiately. Lindstrom and Smith weren't the only missing prospects for the Blue Jackets, who have a contingent of mid-to-late round picks from the past two drafts playing for NCAA teams.

Tyler Peddle gets new memory with Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets were a part of another special memory for Peddle, who faced his younger brother, Brady, in the finale against Pittsburgh.

Under the direction of former general manager Jarmo Kekalainen, the Blue Jackets made a trade in 2023 to select Tyler Peddle with the final pick in the draft. His brother, a defenseman, was selected 91st overall by the Penguins 91st in 2025 (third round).

Tyler is a power forward who stands 6 feet 1, 209 while Brady is a physical defenseman who's 6-3, 203. They didn't square off in a brotherly scrap, but Tyler did drop the gloves in the second period against Penguins defenseman Quinn Beaudesne. Adding to the family's Blue Jackets ties is their father, Brad Peddle, an amateur scouting consultant while also holding his full-time position as head coach for St. Francis Xavier University's hockey team in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada.

The Hockey Writers / 4 Blue Jackets' Training Camp Storylines to Watch

By Mark Scheig – September 18, 2025

As the Columbus Blue Jackets get their Training Camp underway for the 2025-26 season, one thing is noticeable right off the bat. On top of the excitement we talked about in our Media Day takeaways piece, something else is noticeably absent at this point as compared to past seasons.

The Blue Jackets have less drama entering camp.

Yes, Yegor Chinakhov's trade request remains on the table. However, both GM Don Waddell and head coach Dean Evason talked with Chinakhov to clear the air. He will have every opportunity to find significant playing time this season with the Blue Jackets.

But we're not talking about a new general manager coming in. We're not talking about a new coach coming in. The core from last season remains in tact with some changes made in other spots. All things considered, things are tame and quiet at Nationwide Arena as they hit the ice for the first time Thursday.

What storylines will we be watching at the outset of this camp? Here are four things we will be watching starting on Thursday and going through the end of the preseason. It may be quiet but there are important questions that need to be answered.

Number-One Goalie, Anyone?

Evason flat out admitted in our recent Q&A that he isn't sure who will be the Blue Jackets' opening-night starter against the Nashville Predators. Camp and the preseason will tell that story.

Elvis Merzlikins is back and healthy. Jet Greaves is now in position to not only be the number-two, he will have every opportunity to win the starting job.

Although the Blue Jackets did acquire Ivan Fedotov from the Flyers, unless the team elects to keep three goalies on their roster, Merzlikins and Greaves will be the tandem in some order.

What will be interesting to see is how Evason elects to play the goalies in the preseason. There are seven games to play. Teams that have an established starter will play many of their other guys while the starter gets a game or two to get into game action.

That won't be the case for the Blue Jackets. It's an open competition. Every game matters for Merzlikins and Greaves with the opening-night spot up for grabs.

Merzlikins was better last season but does need to elevate his game. Greaves was great at the end of last season but has to prove it in a bigger sample size.

It's the biggest question the Blue Jackets face in 2025-26. How will the goaltending shake out and can they be good enough to get them to the playoffs?

For now though, who will perform well enough in the preseason to earn the start in Nashville?

Top-Six Questions

The Blue Jackets' core is back that was one of the best offensive teams in the NHL in 2024-25. But that doesn't mean they don't have questions as camp opens.

We know this much for now. Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko will be together. So will Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson. But who will be the third member of each line?

Boone Jenner is expected to take one of those spots. He played well at the end of last season after returning from injury.

Dmitri Voronkov could get a spot in the top-six. The Blue Jackets challenged him this offseason. Will it be enough to start up top? He did have success with Monahan and Marchenko.

But so did Chinakhov at the start of last season. If he's able to play like that again, he could get the nod up top.

Don't be surprised if you see Evason tinker around with the lines to see who has chemistry. Chinakhov is the wildcard in this conversation. Armed with one of the best shots on the team, a healthy Chinakhov could push one of Jenner or Voronkov to the bottom-six.

Of note on the groups, Voronkov is in Group 1 with Marchenko and Monahan. Jenner and Chinakhov are with Fantilli and Johnson in Group 2. It's a fluid situation but it's worth watching.

Bottom-Six Alignment

This is the area where the Blue Jackets saw some change. Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood were acquired from the Colorado Avalanche. Isac Lundestrom was signed to replace Sean Kuraly.

How will the bottom-six shake out with these changes? Coyle is a center but can play anywhere. Cole Sillinger could end up on the wing if Coyle plays center. Will they play together on a third line? They are in separate groups to start camp.

Is Wood, Lundestrom and Olivier a lock to play together? Lundestrom is in Group 2 to start with the wingers Wood and Olivier in Group 1.

There is a more veteran presence in the bottom six that the Blue Jackets hope gives their team a boost in key areas. Then there are plenty of others who want to impress at this camp who want one of those spots too. Jack Williams? Zach Aston-Reese? Luca Del Bel Belluz? Mikael Pyyhtia? Hudson Fasching? James Malatesta? Maybe someone else not called out here?

If a Chinakhov trade does happen, then it potentially opens up a spot for one of these players. The 13th forward could also be in play and a spot on the opening-night roster. There is no shortage of competition.

Defense, Defense

The Blue Jackets' defense is a veteran group that on the surface doesn't appear to have too many questions. Not so fast.

Denton Mateychuk is day-to-day and will miss the start of camp. Depending on the length of his absence, someone could benefit from the extra exposure of the preseason.

If we assume the defense looks something like this come opening night:

- Zach Werenski – Dante Fabbro
- Denton Mateychuk – Ivan Provorov
- Damon Severson – Erik Gudbranson

Who is the 7th and 8th defensemen? Jake Christiansen you'd expect would be in there. Will Daemon Hunt take the next step? Could we see guys like Dysin Mayo or Christian Jaros have good camps and make an impression? Brendan Smith is at camp on a PTO and has plenty to prove.

Another factor is how the 23-man roster will be allocated. If the Blue Jackets elect to keep three goalies, that eliminates a spot for a skater. There would only be one extra forward and defenseman in that case.

Then consider the deployment of the defensemen. Provorov is a lefty playing on the right. Severson and Gudbranson are both righties. While this alignment could be what we see at the start, game flow could change how the pairs look at any given time. Watch for how Evason elects to use pairs in certain situations.

Camp gets underway Thursday morning. It may be quieter than recent seasons but the number of questions the Blue Jackets need to answer remains consistent.

The Hockey Writers / 3 Blue Jackets' Storylines to Watch in 2025-26

By Nicholas Arnold – September 17, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets took a monumental step forward last season. They had career years from several of their younger guys that propelled them to a near-miss of the playoffs. For a team that's missed the postseason the last five years in a row, you can bet they are hungry to take that next step to bring an 83rd game to the schedule in 2025-26. There are a few Blue Jackets' players with important storylines to watch which will have an impact on that goal. Let's take a look.

Yegor Chinakhov: Will He Stay or Will He Go?

One of the Blue Jackets' young players, Yegor Chinakhov, made it clear he was unhappy and looking for a trade out of the Buckeye State. This reportedly was because of a clash between him and head coach Dean Evason, which was evident at the end of last season after he had once again been riddled with injury and, upon returning, was often a healthy scratch. Reportedly, that has been a strain on their relationship.

The trade request was made public by his agent Shumi Babaev at the beginning of the summer, but there has been no movement on that front. Aaron Portzline of *The Athletic's* latest report on Chinakhov says that player and team have not yet reached the point of no return. Chinakhov has also made his way into Columbus early to get ready for the season (from 'Updates on Blue Jackets' Yegor Chinakhov and Adam Fantilli as training camp nears,' *The Athletic*, Sept. 7, 2025).

If Chinakhov's wish is granted and he finds a new home, or if things are able to be turned around, it will be a major storyline to watch. The young Russian is still only 24 and has an elite skating ability with a cannon of a shot. If he is able to stay healthy and starts to put it all together this season, it could change his relationship with Evason, and he could decide to stay. Or this could be a repeat of the Jonathan Drouin trade request to the Tampa Bay Lightning a decade ago, which had no immediate action, and it was eventually fulfilled a season later.

Adam Fantilli: Will Sophomore Slump Bump Back to His Third Season?

Most NHL players suffer through some form of a sophomore slump; that wasn't the case for Adam Fantilli in 2024-25. He missed 33 games in his first campaign with a lacerated calf, but overall showed well. With 12 goals and 27 points in 49 games, he was on pace for 20 goals and 45 points. That would have made him tied for third in goals and fourth in points among first-year players. With that production, he certainly would have been in the running for the Calder Trophy as rookie of the year had he not taken that skate blade to the calf.

When many would take a step back, Fantilli's second season was a step forward. 31 goals and 54 points are about as far from a sophomore slump as you can get. We often hear from scouts and general managers that NHL development is seldom a straight and upward trajectory. Generally, there are some ebbs and flows in the process. That has me wondering if Fantilli's sophomore slump will be delayed a season, since this will be his second full season. If he's able to buck the trend altogether and still continue to grow, he could really take a leap and become one of the better young centers in the league. Whichever way he goes will be a real story to watch.

Jet Greaves: Is He Capable of Being a Full-Time NHLer?

The Blue Jackets have had a persisting problem since goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky left them in 2019's free agent frenzy: a lack of quality netminding. After trying to shove square pegs Elvis Merzlikins, Joonas

Korpisalo, and Daniil Tarasov into the round hole of their starting goalie position to no avail, a new name has entered the chat.

Jet Greaves was a free agent signing who appeared seemingly out of nowhere after a lost COVID season. He's been around the organization for a while, playing American Hockey League (AHL) games with the Cleveland Monsters as far back as 2020-21, and 21 NHL games with the Blue Jackets going back to 2022-23. He's shown quite well over that stretch with a .924 save percentage (SV%). His most recent season with the team was his most impressive, with a .934 SV% in 11 games, of which he won seven and posted his first two career shutouts. He single-handedly kept the team in the playoff picture through April.

Whether or not he can sustain those numbers over a full season is to be determined. He will not be the team's starting goalie yet, unless he can steal the job from Merzlikins. Most reasonably, the team can hope that Greaves at least lightens the load for the Latvian, who is not as much of a lost cause as many would have you believe. If the two are able to split starts, the team's overall goaltending should be better, which could be enough to get them into the playoffs.

The Blue Jackets will be an interesting team to watch this season. For the first time in several years, there is a tangible source of optimism around this squad. There are many storylines leading into the fresh campaign that will be huge factors in converting that optimism into results. We'll see how the Chinakhov, Fantilli, and Greaves stories progress as they hope to make their way back into the postseason for the first time since 2020.

The Hockey Writers / 7 Takeaways from Blue Jackets' Media Day

By Mark Scheig – September 16, 2025

What a difference a year can make.

Last year at this time, the Columbus Blue Jackets were dealing with the absolute unimaginable. Tragedy struck just a couple weeks before Training Camp.

The feeling was somber and heavy. Not only did the Blue Jackets have to process what happened to Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, they had to try and focus on the upcoming hockey season.

NHL Rumours for Sept. 14: Stolarz & Eichel Extension Talks & Chinakhov Trade Request Update

Thanks to the words of Meredith Gaudreau telling the Blue Jackets to play hockey because that's what Johnny would have wanted, the team played their hearts out. The result was both exciting for what happened but disappointing they fell just short.

Now as the Blue Jackets embark on the 2025-26 season, the feeling is much different. There is an excitement and anticipation for what's to come. With a full offseason behind them, they are ready to show everyone that the playoffs are a real possibility.

The Blue Jackets held their annual media day on Monday at Nationwide Arena in advance of the start of training camp. GM Don Waddell, head coach Dean Evason, Boone Jenner, Sean Monahan, Zach Werenski and Adam Fantilli all spoke about the upcoming season.

There is a certain level of excitement around them that is clear when you hear the players speak. That's where we start our takeaways from the day. Even "playoffs" was mentioned.

Excitement Over This Season

Jenner described the feelings of the new season in one word on Monday. "Excitement," the Blue Jackets captain said.

"It's just being back here with the guys. Just getting excited to get going here. It's been a fun couple weeks having everyone back to town, skating together and getting ready to go. That's just what I'm looking forward to is getting back and competing with that group."

Given the way last season ended, the team is hungry to get over the playoff hurdle. Jenner expressed how pleased he was with the work his teammates put in over the summer.

"I think you can tell right away the guys were prepared to come in," Jenner said. "The guys put the work in this summer. I know last year with the way it ended, we were a hungry group. We wanted to take that this summer. I trust everybody in that room that they go and do the right things and come back in great shape. And that's what I noticed."

Jenner's teammates expressed the same excitement.

"Been here for a couple of weeks now and you feel the excitement around the rink from the guys, the staff," Monahan said. "I think expectation wise, we got to every time we step on the ice for a game, we got to be ready to get two points."

"I'm just excited to be back," Werenski said. "It's been a long offseason. I feel good. I feel like our team's in a good spot right now. The last few weeks here have been really good for our group. I think guys are

working hard. Guys are pushing each other. I feel like we have an idea of what we want to be to start the season and how we want to play.”

“I was saying how grateful I am to have come to this team at the time that I did,” Fantilli said. “Obviously in my rookie year, we weren’t in a best position possible. A year before that, it was kind of similar. I feel like since I’ve gotten here, it’s been a progression. It’s been really great to see and be able to build that confidence in ourselves and our locker room and kind of prove a lot of people wrong with how we performed last year especially not having Johnny and the injuries that we did. We’re all extremely disappointed we didn’t make the playoffs.

But it’s great. I couldn’t be more excited. I don’t even know the best way to put it into words but we’re a confident team now. We expect to make the playoffs.”

Every team is excited coming into training camp. These Blue Jackets are no different. But after how last season ended coupled with the work they put in, they come into the 2025-26 season with belief and confidence. As Werenski said, “I think we’re in a good spot, but the hardest part’s doing it again. So we’ll see what happens.”

Six Other Takeaways

- GM Don Waddell gave some injury updates. Denton Mateychuk will not skate this week and is considered day-to-day. Jordan Dumais suffered an injury in Buffalo at the Prospect’s Tournament and is day-to-day.
- Waddell completed the trade with the Philadelphia Flyers to acquire Ivan Fedotov. Why make this trade now and why Fedotov? “We really liked Ivan. He’s a young NHL player but an older player. (He) had great numbers in Russia. We just felt that because his contract with his cap hit that he was a guy that if he doesn’t make our club, then it will be a great insurance policy for us.”
- Waddell said that he doesn’t anticipate adding to the team right now as he’s happy with where they are. This was in response to if the team would consider adding any of the five players recently acquitted in London. “We haven’t talked at great length about it...We’re very happy where we are with our team right now. So I don’t see any changes at this point. And again we haven’t internally even discussed whether we’d even have interest in the players.”
- Werenski talked about his experience and the Men’s World Championships and how that could help boost him and his teammates this season. “It was super important for me to be there. The US hasn’t won that tournament in 92 years so that was super special. It’s something I’ll always remember. In terms of a boost, it’s a different team, different teammates, different situation. But I think individually, it reminded me speaking of winning on the first question, how fun it is to win. It definitely makes me hungrier in areas like that where I kind of have missed that feeling of winning, haven’t had enough of it and just want to bring that here and be part of the solution here and be part of the reason why we bring a Cup to Columbus.”
- Fantilli got to the chance to play with several superstars at the Men’s Worlds. What will he take most from that experience? “That is something I’ll remember forever even with the disappointing result. Being in a locker room with guys like Sid, Nate, Fleury, O’Reilly is something that’ll probably never happen again for me with Fleury retiring and guys moving on. I just took everyday as a gift and I was super excited to be there, super grateful. You’ll learn so much watching Sid and Nate. These guys go through their everyday routines and watch them in practice and games, the way they interact with each other, the way they work and make sure

their bodies are ready to go. It teaches you a lot about being a pro. Those are two guys that I think anybody in the league would want to follow. So seeing them up close was great.”

- With seven preseason games, Evason confirmed that everyone will play at least three games with some playing more if they are fighting for a roster spot. They have a template already made out and will adjust based on certain factors. This will be the last season of this many preseason games before it reduces to four starting in 2026-27.

The Athletic / NHL rookie camp roundup: The biggest standouts from tournaments across the league

By The Athletic NHL Staff – September 16, 2025

NHL rookie tournaments marked the start of the league's 2025-26 calendar over the weekend.

The Athletic's team of writers attended tournaments and games in Buffalo, Montreal, Edmonton, St. Paul, Minn., Wesley Chapel, Fla., Irvine, Calif. and more.

These tournaments are an important kickoff of training camps and an opportunity for prospects — from top draft picks to potential free agents — to make lasting impressions.

All told, we had eyes on 27 of the league's 32 teams. Here are our biggest standouts for each.

Golden State Rookie Faceoff

Anaheim Ducks

Stian Solberg, LHD

Beckett Sennecke might have been the “big name” out of the Ducks' prospects to play in front of the home crowd down in Irvine as the club's No. 3 overall pick in 2024, but it was Solberg who particularly jumped out. You can see why the Ducks brass really like the Norwegian blueliner and why they moved up to take him with the 23rd pick after grabbing Sennecke. As expected, Solberg played with some edge and isn't shy about mixing it up with the opposition. What stood out more was his underrated puck skill, which he put on display at this year's World Championships. The 19-year-old plays with a lot of confidence. Perhaps a little too much at times. But he's unafraid to handle the puck or move it when under pressure, while also showing he can get it through to the net from the point. — *Eric Stephens*

San Jose Sharks

Michael Misa, C

The No. 2 pick in this year's draft was as advertised in the three-team California showcase in Irvine. Misa's hockey sense was present in his two games as he put himself in the right place for virtually every situation while repeatedly displaying his playmaking ability. The competition will ramp up for him, but the 18-year-old has an innate feel for the game, whether it's using his speed when necessary to get into open spots or slowing things down and not panicking when defenders are bearing down on him. Misa has that look of a two-way pivot that understands the pace to play at and adjusts accordingly, while having the kind of skill that should make him a point-producer at the NHL level. — *Eric Stephens*

Los Angeles Kings

Carter George, G

The 19-year-old George is highly thought of in an organization that is suddenly rich with goaltending talent. After standing out with OHL Owen Sound, George looked very good in his two games of AHL duty at the end of last season. That experience showed in the prospect setting this weekend as he excelled at tracking pucks and the play in front of him while showing a strong glove hand. Overall, he stopped 35 of 36 shots on Sunday and only allowed a power-play goal to Anaheim. — *Eric Stephens*

NHL Prospect Games

Dallas Stars

Justin Ertel, LW

The Stars had an older, less-heralded contingent for their games against the Red Wings. But among their under-23 players, the player who affected the games most may have been the 2021 third-round pick — a big-bodied winger who was a consistent presence on the forecheck and around the net. His offensive highlight of the weekend was an assist to 2023 sixth-rounder Angus MacDonell (who also had a nice weekend with a pair of goals) on which Ertel forced a turnover with his forecheck, then found MacDonell in the slot for a big goal. He was quite noticeable on the weekend. — *Max Bultman*

Detroit Red Wings

Nate Danielson, C

Danielson is such a smart player. He's constantly in the right spots defensively, where he has a strong defensive stick, and is an easy-to-notice puck transporter and distributor as well. The question with him often comes down to whether his production will match his visual impact, and this weekend it largely did. Danielson scored a pretty goal and had an assist in two exhibition games against the Stars, getting off to a nice start to his preseason. He also looked a bit thicker, which will serve him well as he looks to win a job on the Red Wings to begin the season. — *Max Bultman*

NHL Prospect Tournament

Carolina Hurricanes

Ruslan Khazheyev, G

Khazheyev was just OK in the AHL last year as a very young goalie, but looked like a seasoned pro in his camp games. Carolina listed him at 6-foot-6. I'm not quite sure he's that tall, but he is huge and moves fairly well for his size. He was aggressive, squared up a lot of pucks and made a number of difficult saves, including using his stick to break up plays. — *Corey Pronman*

Florida Panthers

Sandis Vilmanis, LW

Vilmanis is an easy player to like due to the pace and energy he brings to shifts. He got to a lot of pucks and outmuscled players often in battles. He's not the most creative forward you will ever see, but he had good flashes of skill with the puck. He looked like a player with a legit shot to become a bottom-six wing in the NHL. — *Corey Pronman*

Nashville Predators

Matthew Wood, RW

Wood is a tough evaluation. He often frustrates coaches and evaluators with his speed and lack of physicality (and did so again last weekend), but he's such a skilled big winger. He made a ton of difficult plays with the puck and despite his warts, he did what Nashville wanted him to, which was to create a lot of offense. — *Corey Pronman*

Tampa Bay Lightning

Maxim Groshev, LHD

Groshev was drafted and has been a forward for almost his entire career in high-level hockey, but late last season in the AHL, he was converted to defense by the Lightning. For a player with limited history at the position, he seemed steady. His heaviness and mobility have always been strengths and he didn't seem panicky with the puck, which was key even if he's not overly offensive. — *Corey Pronman*

Prospects Challenge

Boston Bruins

Fraser Minten, C

On paper, the Bruins were lean in talent. But I liked Minten's two games. He was held pointless in the opener but had a goal, a primary assist and a couple of other looks to the inside in the second game. He was also good on the penalty kill, the power play and at five-on-five throughout. His offense is always going to be a little vanilla, but he held onto it inside the offensive zone, worked, won a ton of battles, cut off a lot of plays, put himself in good spots and was detailed and consistent shift-to-shift. — *Scott Wheeler*

Buffalo Sabres

Radim Mrtka, RHD

The Sabres' most recent first-round pick played up to his draft status in his first rookie camp. The 6-foot-6 defenseman scored in the first game of the prospect tournament and was a noticeable physical presence throughout all three games. His skating, particularly his lateral agility, is impressive for such a tall player. Mrtka was composed with the puck, too. He looks like he has the most upside of any Sabres prospect. — *Matthew Fairburn*

Columbus Blue Jackets

Oiva Keskinen, C

Keskinen was a seventh-round pick (No. 194 overall) in 2023, but no Blue Jackets prospect has made up more ground over the past two years. The Buffalo prospects tournament marked his first trip to the United States, and one of the rare times he's played a competitive game on an NHL-sized rink. But he must be a quick learner. Keskinen had two goals, two assists and four points in three games, centering the Blue Jackets' top line — with Luca Pinelli and Jordan Dumais on his wings — in what turned out to be a strong tournament for a roster with no first-round picks. After losing the opener 8-2 to New Jersey, the Blue Jackets bounced back with wins over Buffalo and Pittsburgh. Keskinen flashed quick hands and crafty playmaking ability. He had the confidence to bring defenders into his orbit, opening the ice for his linemates. Up next is Keskinen's first NHL training camp. It's a tall order for him to make the Blue Jackets out of camp, and if he doesn't survive final cuts, his contract allows him to return to Finland for a third season in the top pro league there. But Keskinen keeps inching closer to the NHL. This weekend was further proof of that. — *Aaron Portzline*

New Jersey Devils

Shane Lachance, LW

The Devils' roster was pretty light on talent, which made Lachance and Seamus Casey jump out. The 6-foot-5 Lachance, whose rights the Devils acquired from the Oilers in March, stood out in particular. The former BU and Youngstown captain wore an 'A' with his new team and looked like a future bottom-six NHLer. He showed puck protection, physicality and detail and looked good around the net. His skating, which has at times been a question, also looked comfortable. Lachance had two goals, one primary assist and a fight in two games. Both he and Casey sat out of the Devils' Sunday finale and deservedly so. — *Scott Wheeler*

Pittsburgh Penguins

Avery Hayes, RW

Hayes wasn't drafted, primarily because he is generously listed at 5-foot-10, 175 pounds. But the fact of the matter is that he has emerged as one of the Penguins' best prospects and the 22-year-old is probably going to make his NHL debut this season. He only helped at this weekend's prospect tournament in Buffalo. Hayes scored four goals in three games, lighting the lamp at least once in all three. Hayes scored 23 goals in 60 games at the AHL level last season, and the Penguins absolutely love the edge he plays with. He isn't big in stature, but his heart clearly is. When Rutger McGroarty and Ville Koivunen were called up to the NHL last season, they constantly spoke of Hayes, how important he was to Wilkes-Barre's success and how much they loved playing with him because of his sheer tenacity. He's very much a prospect on the rise in the Penguins' organization and someone to watch when training camp opens on Thursday. — *Josh Yohe*

Prospects Showcase

Seattle Kraken

Berkly Catton, C

Catton was easily the best player on the ice for either team in the one game he played against Vancouver's prospects on Saturday night. Catton dictated play throughout the evening, dominating the puck in the offensive zone and generating at least one scoring chance per shift (sometimes two). He hit a post on a breakaway opportunity, still finished the night with two points (a goal and an assist) and you left the rink thinking it was a miracle he didn't have four or five. That the Kraken opted not to dress Catton in the second game of the back-to-back set this weekend is bullish for his chances of seeing real NHL action this fall. He certainly looked dynamic and ready this weekend. — *Thomas Drance*

Vancouver Canucks

Vilmer Alriksson, LW

Alriksson is a 6-foot-6, 220-pound specimen who is willing to mix it up after the whistle, throws thunderous hits and has some meaningful skill in his game, even if his CHL scoring has been pedestrian in two seasons since his draft year. Alriksson can struggle a bit with consistency and puck management, and it's clear he's still growing into his body somewhat. This is still a player that's very much a project. The project we're talking about in this case, however, is a gigantic, athletic, tough winger with puck skills, a conscientious defensive game and a high motor. It may be a year or two before we see Alriksson push for a full-time role at the NHL level, but he looked more than intriguing in the two games he played against Kraken prospects this weekend. — *Thomas Drance*

Prospect Showdown

Montreal Canadiens

Ivan Demidov, RW

The one game Demidov played against the Winnipeg Jets rookies was ridiculous and firmly demonstrated he did not belong in this event, which was only confirmed when Canadiens brass decided there was no point in Demidov playing a second game. He was involved in all three Canadiens goals, with his first assist leaving 2023 No. 14 pick Brayden Yager spinning, and that was not the only time Demidov hurt Yager's feelings in the game. His goal was borderline unfair and left his varsity Canadiens teammates laughing amongst themselves in the stands. "Every time you send him on the ice, you get the sense something's going to happen," Laval Rocket coach Pascal Vincent said. "And then, something happens." — *Arpon Basu*

Ottawa Senators

Carter Yakemchuk, RHD

The Sens' top prospect had a great performance in his team's first game of rookie camp, scoring two goals where he flashed his NHL-ready shot and smooth hands. His defense will be under the microscope when he attends main camp later this week — he used his reach and size during the rookie tourney, but can't afford to be too aggressive or out of position. But his offensive capabilities and build will also draw attention. — *Julian McKenzie*

Toronto Maple Leafs

Luke Haymes, C

The Leafs have been light on high draft picks, so it was promising to see touted NCAA free-agent signing Haymes pop. The quick and intelligent 6-foot-1 center battled for pucks and usually came out on the right side of things. Haymes took the puck to dangerous areas shift after shift. But in doing so, he never put his teammates in jeopardy. He added a goal in each game. Also, this is a guy who blocked a shot ... with his face. With a short opportunity to make a serious impression, Haymes did just that. After impressing in a late-season Toronto Marlies stint, a full AHL year could put him on his way toward a middle-six NHL center role. He certainly looks like a bona fide pro. — *Joshua Kloeke*

Advertisement

Winnipeg Jets

Domenic DiVincentiis, G

DiVincentiis was the only thing stopping Saturday's prospect showcase game against Montreal from turning into a rout, with Ivan Demidov creating scoring chances seemingly at will. DiVincentiis was swarmed early and often but made spectacular saves on Demidov, Owen Beck and Joseph Dunlap at even strength. He also put on a penalty-killing clinic, stopping multiple one-timers — including a third-period slingshot play into the center slot that gave Winnipeg a chance to pull off the win. DiVincentiis' 38-save performance made him the Jets' weekend standout, leaving Manitoba Moose head coach Mark Morrison effusive in his postgame praise. — *Murat Ates*

Next Gen Showcase

Edmonton Oilers

Viljami Marjala, C

The Oilers signed Marjala, 22, out of Finland's Liiga in June to boost their offensive prospect group. He showed he's got potential for his first North American pro season based on what he did over the weekend. On Friday against Calgary, Marjala displayed great patience to score on a breakaway, had excellent instincts in the Flames' zone and made a deft pass to send Matt Savoie in for a goal. All that earned him a promotion centering top prospects Savoie and Ike Howard. — *Daniel Nugent-Bowman*

Rookie Series

New York Rangers

Scott Morrow, RHD

The 22-year-old defenseman acquired from Carolina as part of the K'Andre Miller trade dazzled during a pair of rookie games against the Flyers over the weekend. He led the Rangers with five points (one goal and four assists) between the two contests and lived up to his reputation as a skilled playmaker when the puck is on his stick. He'll have to prove he can do it against stiffer competition once NHL camp starts Thursday, particularly on the defensive end. But there's a real chance for him to earn a spot in the

opening-night lineup if the UMass product carries this momentum through the preseason. — *Vincent Z. Mercogliano*

Philadelphia Flyers

Nikita Grebenkin, LW

Grebenkin, who could challenge for an opening-night roster spot, scored the overtime winner in the first rookie game against the Rangers and added two assists in the second game. He wasn't afraid to get his nose dirty, either, when things got chippy. "He plays with a ton of bite," said Phantoms coach John Snowden. "He's a highly skilled player, but he is not easy to play against at all." — *Kevin Kurz*

Rookie Showcase

Vegas Golden Knights

Kai Uchacz, C/RW

Last season, Uchacz finished second on the Henderson Silver Knights with 15 goals in his first season of professional hockey. He scored a ton of goals for the Red Deer Rebels in the WHL and has continued that as a pro. He started his 2025-26 campaign off on the right foot, scoring three goals in two games at the Rookie Showcase in Denver. He's certainly not ready to crack Vegas' opening-night roster, but if he continues this progression, he'll be among the names considered for in-season call-ups. — *Jesse Granger*

Tom Kurvers Prospect Showcase

Chicago Blackhawks

Sam Rinzel, RHD

The Blackhawks got a nine-game glimpse of Rinzel's potential late last season after making the jump from college. In one game at the Tom Kurvers Prospect Showcase on Saturday, Rinzel continued to excite the organization about what this season could look like for him. From retrievals to breakouts to creating in the offensive zone, Rinzel was smooth and efficient in everything he did. He finished with two assists in the Blackhawks' 3-2 win over the Blues. Heading into training camp this week, it wouldn't be surprising if Rinzel is asked to be the team's power-play quarterback and gets No. 1 defenseman minutes. — *Scott Powers*

Minnesota Wild

Adam Benák, LW/RW

No Wild prospect was as visible as Benák, the forward with first-round talent who fell to 102nd in June's draft because of his 5-7 frame. In two games, he flashed supreme skill and had four assists, including one Sunday against Chicago in which he had a steal then set up Rasmus Kumpulainen's tiebreaking winner with 62 seconds left. That followed a three-assist performance against St. Louis. "He was awesome these two games," said Kumpulainen, a 2023 second-round pick. "That goal was all him. He's really shifty out there. His hands are unreal. And even though he's so small, no one can get to him." After leading all USHL under-18 players last season with 59 points in 56 games, the Czech-born forward will play for OHL Brantford this season. "He's terrific," AHL Iowa coach Greg Cronin said. "He's got an unbelievable mindset, very coachable. He's got a history of scoring and generating points, and the other parts of his game, I think he's going to learn them over the next year or two. If I'm the Minnesota Wild, I'm really excited to watch him develop." — *Michael Russo*

St. Louis Blues

Otto Stenberg, LW

While 2025 first-round pick Justin Carbonneau showed why his combination of physicality and skill will look good in a Blues uniform, Stenberg illustrated why he shouldn't be a forgotten man among the five first-rounders the team has added in the past three years. The 20-year-old, who left Sweden for the AHL last season, led all Blues prospects with three points (one goal, two assists), including an assist on Carbonneau's game-winner in a 6-4 win over Minnesota. He made quick plays around the net, and if not for a couple of dandy saves, he could have been on the scoreboard more. — *Jeremy Rutherford*