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The Athletic / Blue Jackets report card: Marchenko and Werenski get As, but others are struggling

By Aaron Portzline – Nov. 20, 2025

The blistering finish to last season gave the Columbus Blue Jackets hope that 2025-26 might start in the same fashion: a relentless forecheck, a surprisingly lethal offensive attack and a jet-setting goaltender.

Yet, every year we're reminded that each season is its own beast.

As the Blue Jackets cross the 20-game mark — No. 21 is Thursday in Toronto — we felt the need to issue first-quarter grades. Though we should make it clear that the club is being held to a new standard this season.

Kirill Marchenko and Zach Werenski have picked up where they left off. That jet-setting goaltender, Jet Greaves, may have grabbed the Blue Jackets' No. 1 job with his early play. And the two main newcomers — Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood — have made an impact.

However, other players have dipped. Sean Monahan, Kent Johnson and whoever else fills out that No. 2 line have been a struggle, which is surprising, because Monahan and Johnson were among the Blue Jackets' offensive impact players one season ago.

The good news: The Blue Jackets (10-8-2) are slightly ahead of last year's pace (9-9-2), and they enter Thursday in a virtual tie with Tampa Bay for the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. Their goal of returning to the playoffs is well within reach.

The bad news: Every other team in the East is right there, too. There are eight teams — eight! — with 20, 21 or 22 points.

You may notice that the grading is a little more difficult this year. That's by design. The Blue Jackets, a season after being everybody's favorite NHL story, are being held to a higher standard. Only players with 10 or more games played were graded.

We gave 4 As, 9 Bs, 6 Cs and 2 Ds. That's a 2.7 grade-point average, or a solid B. That sounds about right.

A

Kirill Marchenko, RW: 20 games, 8-14-22, plus-8

Not only has Marchenko elevated his game in all facets this season — he's even harder on pucks, and more dangerous than ever offensively — but he's been remarkably consistent. After breaking out with 31 goals and 74 points last season, both career highs, he's playing at a point-a-game pace and has become the Blue Jackets' offensive driver at forward.

Zach Werenski, D: 20 games, 6-10-16, plus-7

It would have been difficult for Werenski to match his start to last season, but, after a bumpy start, he's come pretty close. He's second in the NHL in playing 26:40 per game, and it's worth noting that his performance hasn't waned even as the player beside him keeps changing. Dante Fabbro, Damon Severson, Denton Mateychuk and now Ivan Provorov have shared the top pair, but Werenski keeps humming along.

A-minus

Dmitri Voronkov, LW: 20 games, 8-8-16, plus-8

The Blue Jackets have recognized that Voronkov — much like Sean Monahan and Marchenko — elevates any line he plays on. He continues to impress with his deft hands and sharp hand-eye coordination, which, along with his massive size, makes him a dominating force at the net-front. The only ding on his grade? We'd like to see him use that size more menacingly.

Jet Greaves, G: 6-4-2, .904 save percentage, 2.79 goals-against

In recent weeks, it appears Greaves has emerged as the Blue Jackets' ... how should we say this? ... leading goaltender? Not sure he could be crowned a true No. 1 just yet, because it's hard to predict Dean Evason's usage going forward. Greaves hasn't had a stinker yet, and he's proven to be very good in shootouts, too. He might play 50 games, eh?

B-plus

Charlie Coyle, C: 20 games, 3-11-14, plus-1

The Blue Jackets can finally point to center ice as one of their strengths, and Coyle's arrival is a big reason. He's a third-line center, yes, but he's so much more than that. He's drawing as much ice time as second-line pivot Adam Fantilli, but also playing on the power play and penalty kill. His faceoff skills have been a boon, too, and he's on pace to challenge his career-high of 60 points.

Ivan Provorov, D: 20 games, 3-3-6, plus-4

There was much consternation about Provorov's contract extension this summer, and we get it. That's a big bill. But imagine this Blue Jackets team without him. Provorov anchored the second pair for the first 15 games, and is now playing on the top pair with Werenski, albeit on his off side. Never misses a game. Never makes a peep. You know what you're getting. There is value in consistency.

B

Adam Fantilli, C: 20 games, 6-7-13, minus-4

Well, he didn't pick up where he left off last season — he was on a serious goal-scoring burner, and finished with 31 goals — but Fantilli has been on a scoring streak lately. He's just turned 21 years old, so there's massive room for growth. But the Blue Jackets need him to be their driving force at forward, the sun around which all other planets orbit. It's coming, but it's not there yet.

Denton Mateychuk, D: 19 games, 4-3-7, plus-3

For half of the schedule so far, Mateychuk played on the right side (his offside) on the top pair with Werenski. That's quite a role for a 21-year-old defenseman with less than one NHL season on his resume. Mateychuk's skill set — never panics, more agile as a skater than speedy, smart and quick with his passes — reminds one of former Blue Jackets defenseman Ryan Murray. That's a compliment.

Mathieu Olivier, RW: 20 games, 3-6-9, plus-2

It's going to be hard to match last season's 18 goals, and that's not the measure here. Olivier has carved out a large role with the Blue Jackets. Evason loves him, even using him — say what? — during 3-on-3 overtime. Olivier and the third line have had two big nights offensively this season, but he's also picked up two major (non-fighting) penalties and two game misconducts, one of which was rescinded by the NHL.

Miles Wood, LW: 14 games, 5-0-5, minus-3

If you've watched Wood play in the first six weeks of the season, you understand why he's endured more than his share of injuries. He knows one speed, and it's above the limit. Even though he's missed six games, his five goals are fifth-most on the club and more than he scored last season in Colorado. They've been big goals, too.

B-minus

Elvis Merzlikins, G: 4-4-0, .900 save percentage, 3.37 goals-against

It sure seems as if Merzlikins has benefited from the arrival of Greaves. Not only does Greaves challenge him for ice time, but he also gives Merzlikins a much lighter workload. In theory, that should allow Merzlikins to avoid the sickness and injury that have saddled him in recent years, but he's already missed time with a sickness this season.

Damon Severson, D: 20 games, 1-5-6, plus-5

Whatever was said in the Evason-Severson heart-to-heart this past summer must have worked. Severson looks as if he's rediscovered his decision-making with and without the puck, and he's carrying it with more confidence. We're not even considering Severson's meager offensive output in this grade. That'll pick up over the course of the season if he keeps playing like this.

Cole Sillinger, LW: 19 games, 2-6-8, plus-4

The acquisition of Coyle this summer forced Sillinger to left wing, and he moved without complaint. Sillinger and Coyle, along with Olivier, have formed an impressive checking line. It might be a modest offensive role, but Sillinger has embraced it, and his efforts and energy pursuing pucks and defending have not gone unnoticed.

C

Yegor Chinakhov, LW/RW: 14 games, 2-2-4, minus-2

This was a tough grade because Chinakhov has been in an awkward spot all season. He wants more playing time; the coaches want him to do more with the playing time he's given. You'd think that Jenner's injury would create a spot in the top six. Chinakhov had a one-game trial on the second line before he was a healthy scratch again. Where/how does this end?

Boone Jenner, C: 16 games, 3-7-10, minus-7

It hasn't been an easy start for Jenner. A high-paced game is always a challenge, but he seemed to have more trouble than usual keeping up at the beginning of the season. It's not entirely his fault, obviously, but that second line with Monahan in the middle hasn't really gotten going this season. Now Jenner is out "week to week" with an upper-body injury. Tough sleddin.'

Sean Monahan, C: 20 games, 2-7-9, plus-1

This is one of the early-season surprises for Columbus. Monahan has not been the player he was last season, so much so that he lost his spot on the No. 1 line between Voronkov and Marchenko. There's still so much to like here, and Monahan can impact a game in a lot of ways, but he has not been the offensive igniter he was only a season ago. He's on pace for eight goals.

Isac Lundeström, C: 19 games, 0-2-2, even

The best you can say for Lundeström is that he doesn't make defensive mistakes, and he's been strong on draws (53.5 percent), especially in the defensive zone (54.6 percent). The Blue Jackets didn't sign him in the hopes that he'd boost them offensively, which is a good thing.

C-minus

Dante Fabbro, D: 20 games, 1-3-4, minus-5

Fabbro was a revelation last season after he was claimed off waivers from Nashville, but Evason didn't take long to pull him off the No. 1 pair next to Werenski, where he had so much success a year ago. Fabbro has mostly played on the third pair, and he's barely made an impact offensively. There's a lot of season left, but this isn't what the Jackets had in mind when they signed Fabbro to a long-term deal last summer.

Zach Aston-Reese, LW/RW: 13 games, 0-3-3, even

It's pretty impressive that Aston-Reese — despite being a healthy scratch seven times in 20 games — is still third on the club (behind only Olivier and Voronkov) with 34 hits. That's his primary role on that fourth line: be hard to play against and forecheck like the puck is yours. However, the fact that coaches have made him the odd man out so many times ...

D

Kent Johnson, LW/RW: 19 games, 2-3-5, minus-11

Johnson played at a point-a-game pace well into last season, enjoying a breakout year with 24-33-57 in only 68 games. He lost his way early this season, which led to a healthy scratch by Evason on the Blue

Jackets' recent road trip. Johnson, who just turned 23, is the Blue Jackets' most talented playmaker, but coaches always want to make him a north-south driver of play. He's the best they've got at establishing the zone on the power play. Being honest, his shootout skills almost moved him higher.

Jake Christiansen, D: 16 games, 0-0-0, minus-7

Life isn't easy on the third pair, especially on the road, when opponents can target certain lines and pairs. Christiansen has played with Erik Gudbranson and Fabbro back there, requiring him to play on his offside. You wonder what his playing time might look like when Gudbranson returns later this month from an injury.

The Athletic / Travel-weary Blue Jackets don't have the jam to hang with Jets

By Aaron Portzline – November 19, 2025

There's a fine line between excuses and explanations.

No NHL team wants to use its schedule as an excuse, but there are certain games — especially in a season constricted by the league's participation in the Olympics — when you can almost see a rough night coming.

Sure enough, the fresh-legged Winnipeg Jets had enough juice to pull away every time the Columbus Blue Jackets threatened to make it interesting, scoring two quick-fire third-period goals to take a 5-2 win before 13,847 fans in Canadian Life Centre.

"It just seemed like every time we had a little push, you know, it sagged again on us a little bit," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason told reporters in Winnipeg. "We were in the hockey game early, for the most part, but it got away from us at the end of it."

Miles Wood and Zach Werenski scored the only goals for the Blue Jackets, who had their five-game point streak (3-0-2) snapped. Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins, back in the net after five straight starts for Jet Greaves, stopped 25 of 30 shots.

Werenski's goal, at 4:04 of the third period, was the 400th point of his career. Only Rick Nash (547) and Cam Atkinson (402) have scored more points for the Blue Jackets franchise, which is celebrating its 25th season in the NHL.

Kirill Marchenko, who struggled playing the puck all night, had his career-long point streak halted at 12 games, one short of a franchise record. His only shot on goal came midway through the third period, when the Jets already led 5-2.

Let's deconstruct the last 24 hours for the Blue Jackets:

Monday, they played beyond regulation and beyond overtime before beating the Montreal Canadiens in a shootout at Nationwide Arena. That's their third beyond-regulation game in their last four outings, too.

After the game, they packed their bags, took a 2 1/2-hour flight to Winnipeg, cleared customs in the wee hours of Tuesday, and arrived at the team hotel around 2 a.m. CT, or 3 a.m. by their body clocks.

The challenge before the Blue Jackets on Tuesday, then, was Winnipeg, one of the NHL's biggest, strongest and most physical teams, not to mention wildly talented. Plus, the Jets had two days off since playing in Calgary on Saturday.

The Blue Jackets have been much better on the road (they're now 5-5-1) and much better in the second game of back-to-backs (now 3-2-0) this season, but this was a big ask.

“You’d get that little burst of energy, and then something would happen, and it kind of, you know, sagged a little bit,” Evason said. “Our desire and our work ethic was real good. That’s a hard team to play against, a veteran team.”

The Blue Jackets got a late first-period goal from Wood to send them into the first intermission with a tie at 1. Wood fought off a hook by Winnipeg’s Dylan Demelo to skate past him and grab a loose puck for a clean look at Jets goaltender Eric Comrie.

Wood, who had a penalty shot late last week, likely would have had another if he hadn’t scored on the play.

But the Jets took over in the second period, scoring only 1:12 in to take the lead. A power-play goal later in the period made it 3-1.

The last glimmer for the Blue Jackets came in the early part of the third.

The Jets went ahead 4-1 on Kyle Connor’s goal only 2:45 into the third. But even when the Blue Jackets seemed to come alive after Werenski scored just 1:19 later, the “burst” that Evason discussed quickly faded.

Logan Stanley beat Merzlikins from 40 feet away with a slap shot to the far corner of the net, putting Winnipeg up 5-2.

It spoiled a homecoming for the Blue Jackets’ second-year defenseman, Denton Mateychuk, who grew up in tiny Dominion City, Manitoba — population 319 — which is a little more than an hour south of Winnipeg.

He had half of Dominion City there to watch him, too. No, really. Mateychuk estimated his guest list around 150, maybe more. Most of them seemed to be decked out in Blue Jackets swag, especially No. 5 Mateychuk sweaters.

Mateychuk wouldn’t use the back-to-back as an excuse or explanation.

“It’s tough, but at the end of the day, there are really no excuses,” he said. “Our energy, I thought, was good. We had a little jump in our skates.

“But it was a little scramble. We had some pucks that should have gone in (to the offensive zone), and they didn’t, and they capitalized on that.”

Fatigue reveals itself in many ways.

There were times when the Blue Jackets just didn’t seem to have their legs, when they reached for pucks, especially defending, rather than skating into them. Marchenko, for one, had his first off night of the season.

But there were also scoring chances when the Jackets weren’t quite sharp enough to finish.

Marchenko was robbed in the third period after making a move to get to Comrie, and Johnson was denied by Comrie on a great save early in the third.

The Blue Jackets planned to fly from Winnipeg to Toronto after the game. Long day. But the good news is they're off Wednesday before playing the Maple Leafs in Scotiabank Arena on Thursday.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' scheduling challenge ends with a wallop in Winnipeg: takeaways

By Brian Hedger – November 19, 2025

Kyle Connor's goal Nov. 18 against Elvis Merzlikins perfectly summed up the night for the travel weary Blue Jackets.

His shot at Canada Life Centre came from a sharp angle outside the left post and smacked off the Blue Jackets goalie's upper back as he tried sealing off the short side. The puck plopped into the net behind Merzlikins to put the Winnipeg Jets up 4-1 in the third period.

That's a tip-your-cap goal, but also indicative of the Blue Jackets' frustrations going into the 5-2 loss, which stopped a five-game points streak. Whichever computer nightmare machine the NHL might've used to create its laughably daunting league schedule, it must've gotten a rise out of torturing the oft-ignored Blue Jackets (10-8-2).

They've now played five sets of back-to-back games in their first 20. That includes road finales Nov. 2 at the New York Islanders and this one in Winnipeg, practically guaranteed losses. The fact that they led the Islanders by a goal in New York was a minor miracle that fell apart in the final 67 seconds of the third period in a stinging loss.

What happened with weary legs and exhausted minds in Winnipeg wasn't nearly as dramatic.

Despite tying it 1-1 late in the first on a goal by Miles Wood, the Blue Jackets had circles skated around them by a fully rested playoff team in the remaining 40 minutes. That shouldn't come as a shock to anybody considering the Blue Jackets needed overtime and a shootout to down the Montreal Canadiens on Nov. 17 in Columbus before hopping on a plane for a long postgame flight to Winnipeg.

Who approves this stuff for the league?

It's not just Columbus dealing with it, but the NHL has already forced the Jackets to zigzag through five time zone changes during a five-game road trip, play the fully rested Islanders in Elmont, New York, with a 20-hour turnaround and now "have it fed to them" in Winnipeg, to steal a phrase from former Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella.

The best thing they can do now, after an exhaustion-fueled blowout loss, is rest Nov. 19 with an off day. The Jackets still have road games upcoming Nov. 20 in Toronto, Nov. 22 in Detroit and Nov. 24 in Washington, D.C., before returning to Nationwide Arena.

They've also got 10 more back-to-backs left, which could be a major factor in making or breaking playoff aspirations in Columbus.

Here are three more takeaways:

Werenski reaches milestone for Columbus Blue Jackets, Kirill Marchenko doesn't

Zach Werenski briefly cut the Jets' lead to 4-2 in the third with a goal that marked his 400th career point, all for the Blue Jackets, his only NHL team.

Werenski is the only defenseman in franchise history to tally that many points with the Blue Jackets. He's also just the third player regardless of position to get there with Columbus. Rick Nash and Cam Atkinson were the first two.

Kirill Marchenko, however, failed to extend his career high points streak to 13 straight games, which would've tied center Ryan Johansen for longest in team history.

Charlie Coyle, Miles Wood providing exactly what Columbus Blue Jackets needed from trade with Colorado Avalanche

It took a steep price for the Blue Jackets to get veteran depth forwards Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood in a June 27 trade with the Colorado Avalanche, but the immediate returns were worth it.

First, the painful part.

The Jackets sent Gavin Brindley, a skilled forward selected in the second round (34th overall) of the 2023 NHL draft, plus their own third-round pick (77th overall) in this year's draft and a conditional second-round pick in 2027.

That's a hefty price tag, but Coyle and Wood have given the Blue Jackets exactly what they sought in the deal. They're strong depth additions, with Coyle centering the Jackets' most effective checking line and Wood helping every line he's played with by adding elite speed and underrated skill.

At the quarter point of their schedule, Wood has five goals in 14 games after returning from a scary eye injury, and Coyle is tied with Adam Fantilli for fourth on the team in scoring with 14 points on three goals and 11 assists.

Wood's speed late in the first in Winnipeg sparked a goal that tied it 1-1, and Coyle assisted on Werenski's goal in the third to cut it to 4-2. Thus far, they've each been worth the cost it took to pry them away from the Avalanche.

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Denton Mateychuk had a large audience

Denton Mateychuk is from Dominion City, Manitoba, which is located about a 90-minute drive South of Winnipeg with a population of just 319 people.

According to Mateychuk, nearly half the town's population made the drive North to watch him play the Jets at Canada Life Centre, where he'd attended NHL games. This was his first game in the arena as an NHL player.

Tough assignment for Columbus Blue goalie Elvis Merzlikins

Merzlikins has now started three games in which the Blue Jackets have wrapped up a back-to-back set with a road game. The first was a 5-4 shootout win over the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The other two were frustrating losses.

Against the Islanders, he angrily smashed his stick over the crossbar following the Jackets' late meltdown in a 3-2 defeat. Against Winnipeg, the game became a blowout thanks to some defensive breakdowns and Connor's aforementioned pinpoint shot off Merzlikins' neck. Playing for the first time since Nov. 8, Merzlikins also had a couple of moments where some rust showed.

The Blue Jackets' goaltending situation has gone from an alternating situation that pushed both Merzlikins and Jet Greaves in a healthy internal competition to something that now merits closer monitoring if the latter continues to get the lion's share of work.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets routed by Winnipeg Jets, 5-2, in taxing back-to-back finale

By Brian Hedger – November 18, 2025

As expected, given a daunting travel situation to conclude a back-to-back finale Nov. 18 at the Winnipeg Jets, the Blue Jackets had a five-game point streak come to a screeching halt.

Despite overcoming an early 1-0 deficit on Miles Wood's goal in the first period, Columbus was outskated and outplayed in a frustrating 5-2 loss to split a back-to-back that started Nov. 17 with a 4-3 shootout win over the Montreal Canadiens in Columbus.

Playing a day later after a long postgame flight that didn't get them to Winnipeg until 3 a.m. ET, the Blue Jackets (10-8-2) took a frustrating loss that was essentially handed to them by the NHL's wacky scheduling during a Winter Olympic year that has all 32 teams complaining.

The Jets (12-7-0), who played on two days' rest since their previous game, got goals from Adam Lowry, Josh Morrissey, Neal Pionk, Kyle Connor and Logan Stanley. Eric Comrie started in net for Winnipeg and made 20 saves for the goaltending win.

Zach Werenski became the only Blue Jackets defenseman to reach 400 points in his career by scoring the second goal for the Blue Jackets, who started Elvis Merzlikins for the first time since Nov. 8 against the Vancouver Canucks.

Kirill Marchenko's bid to extend his career high points streak to 13 games came up empty with a scoreless night. His streak ends at 12 games, one shy of tying the franchise record set at 13 by Ryan Johansen in 2014-15 and tied with Cam Atkinson's 12-game streak in 2018-19 for second longest.