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February 25, 2026

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ABC 6 / Nationwide Arena's \$400M Renovation: Stadium seeks \$100M in state grants for upgrades

By Joe Durbin & Rocky Walker – February 24, 2026

Nationwide Arena is starting to show its age, and the folks who run it say it's time for a massive, \$400 million midlife correction to keep the Blue Jackets and world-class concerts from passing Ohio's capital by.

The Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority (FCCFA) is asking the state for a \$100 million grant to kickstart a multi-year renovation. According to the authority's executive director, Ken Paul, the goal is simple: ensure the 26-year-old barn remains "competitive, safe, and capable" of hosting premier events through 2030 and beyond.

Moving beyond "the basics"

While crews already spent \$60 million in 2025 on unglamorous essentials like a new roof, the eight-page report submitted by the FCCFA reveals a plan that it says fans will notice.

If the funding comes through, the arena's "guts" will get a \$31 million overhaul for elevators and escalators, but the real headlines are in the fan experience, according to the plan. The authority is proposing a new upper concourse food hall and a terrace with a covered entrance, creating a more open, modern feel.

"Critical infrastructure is nearing the end of its useful life," the FCCFA noted in a 2020 assessment included in the report. To fix that, they're looking at a \$27 million technology package that includes a brand-new scoreboard, sound system, and digital wayfinding to help fans navigate the halls.

Expanding the footprint

The plan isn't just about what's inside the current walls. The FCCFA said it wants to acquire the office building at 375 North Front Street, allowing it to move its team offices out of the arena and repurpose that space for fans.

Other major changes detailed in the proposal include:

- **Better Access:** A new pedestrian bridge would link the arena directly to the McConnell parking garage, saving fans from dodging traffic on rainy nights.
- **Speedier Entry:** The Front Street entrance would be expanded to get people through security faster.
- **Outdoor Energy:** A new plaza bar and a massive "watch party" digital display are planned for the outdoor space to keep the energy going during playoff runs or big events.

The \$400 million question: Who pays?

The FCCFA's financial plan describes a "public-private partnership" where everyone chips in. According to the report, the \$400 million would be cobbled together from four main buckets:

- State of Ohio: A \$100 million grant (representing 25% of the total).
- Local Government: \$50 million in direct support from the City of Columbus and Franklin County.
- Loans: \$110 million in bonds, which the FCCFA says will be paid back via the recent hike in arena admission fees and casino tax revenues.
- Private Money: Between \$100 million and \$140 million from Blue Jackets ownership and arena vendors.

In exchange for this public investment, the FCCFA is looking to lock the Blue Jackets into a new, non-relocation agreement that would match the 30-year term of the bonds.

Legal Pushback

The biggest hurdle isn't public opinion—it's a courtroom battle. Former Ohio Attorney General Marc Dann has filed a lawsuit to stop the state from using "unclaimed funds" to pay for stadium upgrades. This is the same pot of money the FCCFA is counting on for its \$100 million grant.

Dann argues that using forgotten bank accounts and utility deposits to fund sports venues is an "unconstitutional taking" of private property. "The state has defended this case extremely aggressively," Dann previously told reporters, promising to appeal the case all the way to the Ohio Supreme Court if necessary. For now, a Franklin County judge has halted the transfer of these funds, leaving the arena's \$100 million request in limbo.

Nathaniel Fouch, an assistant law professor at Capital University focusing on Ohio constitutional law said he anticipates for there to be a bumpy road before Nationwide Arena gets a penny of this funding.

"This is certainly going to be challenged, and I think there's a pretty strong case that there's going to be another temporary restraining order while this one likewise works its way through the court," Fouch said. "So to the extent that Nationwide Arena is able to receive the funds, it's going to be after, I imagine, a lengthy legal battle."

FCCFA Executive Director Ken Paul confirmed to ABC 6 that this litigation would need to be resolved first before his team's grant request can be fulfilled by the state.

The plan to renovate and modernize Nationwide Arena relies on new private investment and support from state and local partners. The Ohio Sports Facility Performance Grant is a critical part of the funding strategy," he said. "If awarded, resolution of the pending litigation will be required before state funds can be released.

What's at stake?

To some, the arena is more than just a hockey rink; it's the heart of the Arena District. The report claims the facility acts as a "catalyst," hosting 1 million guests a year and driving nearly \$200 million in visitor spending.

"Disinvestment would result in diminishing economic impact over time," the FCCFA warned in the request, arguing that the \$1.5 billion in taxes the arena is expected to generate over the next 30 years makes the renovation a smart bet.

If the state signs off on the grant, the FCCFA plans to dive into engineering and design work later this year, with heavy construction beginning in 2027.

[BlueJackets.com / Grand-Pierre has never been one to turn down a challenge](#)

From player to coach to broadcaster and more, the original Blue Jacket has lived a full life in hockey and outside of it

By Jeff Svoboda – February 24, 2026

February is Black History Month, and nine Black players have suited up for the Blue Jackets over a quarter-century of hockey, a list that includes Fred Brathwaite, Anson Carter, Anthony Duclair, Jean-Luc Grand-Pierre, Jet Greaves, Jordan Harris, Seth Jones, Greg Mauldin and Malcolm Subban. With the Blue Jackets in their 25th season, we're featuring select journeys and stories from those who have donned the CBJ sweater.

In some ways, it feels like Jean-Luc Grand-Pierre can do it all.

He spent 16 seasons playing pro hockey all around the world, including four in Columbus. He became a successful real estate agent after his career, then began a second act in hockey as a coach and broadcaster.

Grand-Pierre also now dabbles as a goaltender after a career as a defenseman, was invited to Team Canada soccer camps as a kid and even became a U.S. citizen two years ago.

It seems like any time Grand-Pierre puts his mind and energy into something, he's able to master it.

"Everything but golf," Grand-Pierre said with a laugh.

Truthfully, he's not half bad at that, either. Grand-Pierre has seemingly always found a new passion or a new way to reinvent himself over his 49 years, and he's not about to stop.

"I still want to do more," Grand-Pierre said. "I just don't know exactly what it is, but I always thought life is too short to really define yourself into one thing. A lot of times, you get stuck in life where you just know one thing and you think that's all you can do and all that you want to do, until you try something new.

"I always tell people – don't be afraid to fail, because you're going to fail plenty of times, but those experiences will make you grow stronger and bigger and gives you more appreciation for what you have and what you've accomplished."

Learning The Game

Grand-Pierre grew up in Montreal, the son of a doctor, his father Allaix, and a nurse, his mother Michelene. The two were both born in Haiti but moved to Canada to pursue their careers, and Jean-Luc was born in February 1977.

In the same manner that someone moving to Columbus would naturally become an Ohio State football fan, the family took an interest in hockey – Allaix rooting for the Quebec Nordiques and Michelene cheering for the local Montreal Canadiens.

Jean-Luc grew up watching the local teams, and when he was around 7 years old, his parents signed him for skating lessons. It just didn't go exactly, perhaps, as planned.

“They decided we need to get this kid into a sport, and (my father) basically told my mom to put me in skating lessons, which is the start for hockey,” Grand-Pierre said. “And my mom went in and I think secretly didn't really like hockey and the fighting and the violence and whatever, so she went to the arena and signed me up for skating lessons. About halfway through the year, my dad had the day off and took me to practice and realized I was figure skating and not playing hockey.”

In the end, though, that turned out to be a blessing, as Grand-Pierre's natural athleticism combined with that early edgework made him a gifted skater. A move to the suburb of Laval also helped build his passion in the sport of hockey, as street hockey games with neighbor kids were common, and as he got older it seemed he might have a future in the sport.

But he also excelled at soccer, putting the skates away and playing the sport all through the summer before going back to hockey in the winter. He loved both sports, but a decision had to be made when he was a teenager when he was invited a camp for Canada's U-15 soccer team.

The problem? Hockey tryouts for the local AAA squad were at the same time.

“That's when I had to make a decision, like, hey, am I going to the hockey training camp or the soccer training camp?” Grand-Pierre said. “I basically chose the hockey training camp. I didn't make the team, which sucked! I never had any regrets, but soccer was definitely something I was pretty competitive at.

“I don't think I was great at it, but also I wasn't that great at hockey at that age, but after I focused solely on hockey, that's when I really saw a big growth because I went out and played all winter and then that following summer as well, and that's when I really started opening eyes.”

Indeed, once he committed himself to hockey, Grand-Pierre quickly started to turn heads. That AAA team realized its mistake, inviting him for a couple of call-ups that season, but Grand-Pierre only went once because he was enjoying his time with his buddies in bantam hockey.

Not only was he having fun, he was succeeding, and Grand-Pierre was chosen by Beaufort in the second round of the QMJHL draft in 1993. He was just 16 years old and reported to camp figuring he was a longshot to make the team that year in a league where players can skate until age 20, but lo and behold, he did.

“It was one of those things where I just went for training camp to have fun,” Grand-Pierre said. “I was like, ‘Hey, I'm gonna go play AAA this year anyway, so what's the big deal?’ It kind of just shows you when you don't put any pressure on yourself and just want to have fun, you never know what's going to happen, and I ended up making the team.”

Grand-Pierre spent four years in the QMJHL, playing one for Beaufort and three more with Val-d'Or, and he grew into a 6-3 defenseman with enough ability that St. Louis chose him in the seventh round of the 1995 draft. He also learned to use his size to his advantage, a lesson delivered during his draft year when the Foreurs made a coaching change.

"It's funny, so I remember my second year in junior, and the season was not going well for the team at all," Grand-Pierre said. "We got a new head coach that came in halfway through the season, and he's like, 'Dude, if you want to get drafted, you need to be a little more mean.' I was like, 'What do you mean?' He was like, 'I need you to be physical and just hit people.' And I was like, 'OK.'"

Naturally boasting an easygoing disposition, Grand-Pierre nonetheless embraced the role, topping 200 penalty minutes in two of his last three years in juniors, including a Sept. 22, 1995, fight with a young enforcer over in Halifax by the name of Jody Shelley.

Grand-Pierre turned pro after the 1996-97 season, and by then he had been traded by the Blues to Buffalo. His agent told him to show up on the scoresheet any way he could each night, and he totaled four goals, 10 points and 211 penalty minutes that season with Rochester of the AHL.

The next year, he made his NHL debut playing 16 games on a Sabres team that went to the Stanley Cup Final, then skated in 11 regular-season contests and four playoff games the next year with Buffalo.

Discovering Columbus

The next offseason, two new teams entered the NHL in Minnesota and Columbus, and the expansion draft proved to be a risky proposition for a Buffalo team that wanted to keep a pair of goaltenders in Dominik Hasek and Martin Biron.

The Sabres worked out a deal with Columbus in which Grand-Pierre was traded to the Blue Jackets, who also selected Geoff Sanderson in the expansion draft while leaving the goaltenders alone.

Little did Grand-Pierre know that the move would have a significant impact on his life.

"Looking back 25 years later, if you would have asked me in full honesty in September of 2000 as I was driving down (Interstate) 71 from Buffalo if I would ever see myself living in Columbus, I would have said, 'Absolutely not,' because I knew nothing about Columbus," Grand-Pierre said.

"I didn't know where it was on the map. People were telling me, 'Hey, you're going to Buckeye country.' I didn't know what a Buckeye was. That's how clueless I was about everything. I fell in love with the place, and here I am 25 years later and here I am in Columbus and loving it."

Grand-Pierre quickly became one of the early mainstays of the Blue Jackets as well as the franchise's first Black player, skating in 64 games the inaugural season, scoring his first NHL goal and adding four assists while racking up 73 penalty minutes. He'd go on to skate in 202 games with Columbus, totaling four goals – including an incredible tally vs. New Jersey in which he dangled past Scott Stevens and scored past Martin Brodeur in 2002 – with 14 points and 239 penalty minutes.

He was claimed on waivers by Atlanta on Dec. 31, 2003, but by then, his love of the capital city was cemented. Grand-Pierre met his eventual wife, Jennifer, an Ohio native, during his time with the Blue Jackets, but it was staying in Columbus during his first offseason that truly made him want to make Central Ohio his home.

“I bought a house at the end of the season, so I ended up spending my offseason in Columbus,” Grand-Pierre said. “I remember at the time I was literally the only player that stayed back, so I got to really learn about the city. I trained here all summer, I got to meet a lot of people, and that’s probably when I really started saying, Columbus is pretty cool.”

“I don’t want to say I was a trend setter, but that summer, during the season all you know is your teammates and then all of a sudden I was in the offseason all by myself, so I got to integrate myself more in the community and that’s when I really started loving the city of Columbus.”

New Adventures

Grand-Pierre played 27 games with the Trashers that season and 13 more with Washington, then went to Sweden to play during the 2004-05 NHL lockout season. The league returned a year later, but an orbital bone fracture suffered during his time in Columbus left him with bouts of double vision and considering his NHL future.

After the year in Europe, he decided to stay overseas for a variety of reasons.

“During the lockout, I went over to Europe and, one, I really, really liked the experience, and two, there’s no fighting over there, so it’s like a little less risk,” Grand-Pierre said, noting the impact of the injury. “There’s less contact, less games. It was one of those things where the injuries take a toll, and that was one that was always on my mind.”

“I was like, I could be one punch away or one big hit away from my career being done, so after the lockout, I said, ‘You know what? I’m staying over in Europe and I’m going to take advantage of the opportunity and bring my kids and my wife,’ and we absolutely loved it.”

Grand-Pierre two years in Germany, then returned to the U.S. for the 2007-08 season with the AHL affiliate of the New Jersey Devils, simply because the family was building a home in New Albany and wanted to be closer. He then went back overseas, playing the next five seasons for teams in Germany, Norway, Sweden and Finland before retiring after the 2012-13 season.

From there, Grand-Pierre returned to Central Ohio, even fielding a call from Fox Sports Ohio about potentially getting into broadcasting. But after spending the previous two decades dedicating his life to hockey, he decided it was time for a break.

“I kind of thought about it, but at that point, I was kind of burned out on hockey,” he said. “It was like, I want to establish myself at something else, and I always loved real estate. I just wanted to focus on my real estate business and stuff like that and didn’t really want to get into covering hockey anymore. At that point, I’m 33, 34 years old, and it’s almost like that’s all I’ve known for the last 20 years of my life.”

“I needed a break. It sounds crazy, but when you’re around people that have a normal job and you’re an athlete, it sounds appealing because you never got to do it.”

A Return To The Ice

Grand-Pierre started working in real estate during hockey offseasons starting in 2009, and he spent his first couple of years of retirement focused on the job, finding a passion for helping his clients find the perfect home.

In 2015, though, the New Albany hockey program was going to the varsity level, and a friend approached him about joining the coaching staff. At first, Grand-Pierre hesitated, but after taking the job, he fell in love with hockey again over five years with the Eagles program. Grand-Pierre also has coached a number of youth organizations and development squads in Central Ohio.

“As much as I love the hockey part of it and the coaching, to me, watching these kids in high school from being freshmen to seniors, it’s just to see what kind of men they’ve become, right?” Grand-Pierre said. “It’s so fun, I’ll be at the desk during the game and so many of my former players will stop by. To see where they were when they started to where they are now, now they’re getting married, some of them have kids, they have real jobs and they’re still connected to the game.

“It’s more about the growth of the sport, the growth of the human than just the hockey part itself. That’s really what drew me to coaching, to be honest with you.”

Along the way, Grand-Pierre also got a second chance at broadcasting. He was looking to step away from the New Albany program right around the same time longtime CBJ analyst Bill Davidge announced his retirement, and Davidge approached Grand-Pierre and told him he should look into the opening.

In the summer of 2019, Grand-Pierre was offered the job and has been on the team’s television broadcasts as an intermission analyst ever since. He brings levity and a sense of fun to the broadcasts but also isn’t afraid to offer direct analysis when the situation calls for it.

“After talking to my wife, she was like, ‘You know what? It keeps you involved in the game and it’s something you passed on in the past. This time maybe you’re ready for it,’” Grand-Pierre said. “I think that was probably the best thing for me was to step away for that five years or so and just come back with a fresh perspective.

“As a player, you look at the game and you critique everything, but as a fan, you have a completely different point of view, so now I have kind of both perspectives because I stepped away for a few years. I felt like I was more ready for it.”

Through it all, Grand-Pierre has lived not just a full hockey career but a fulfilling life in general. He’s found success in just about everything he’s done, and he’s never been afraid to try new things.

One reason for that? As he just noted, Jennifer has been a big part of that, often encouraging him to get out of his comfort zone.

“My wife has been extremely supportive in every endeavor that I've tried, and she's definitely one that keeps pushing me, too,” Grand-Pierre said. “She's like, ‘Hey, why don't you try that?’ Sometimes I'll be like, ‘You're crazy,’ but sometimes I'm like, ‘You know what? Why not? If you don't try, you'll never know,’ and I don't want to be one of those guys that looks back at his life and is like, man, I just wish I did that and now it's too late.”

And more often than not, it's worked out.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' Zach Werenski expected to play vs Boston Bruins

By Brian Hedger – February 24, 2026

Zach Werenski is expected to play for the Blue Jackets on Feb. 26 when they restart the NHL season against the Boston Bruins at TD Garden in Boston.

Werenski has been a tough guy to reach since setting up the winning overtime goal to give the United States a 2-1 victory over Canada for the country's first Olympic gold medal in men's hockey since 1980.

After flying back from Milan, Italy, with Team USA, Werenski and most of his teammates partied with a raucous celebration at a nightclub Feb. 23 in Miami before boarding a U.S. Air Force headed for Washington, D.C. Werenski, who leads all NHL defensemen with 20 goals, made the trip to the nation's capital for a trip to the White House and to attend the president's state of the union address.

Werenski is expected to meet his Blue Jackets teammates in Boston, where coach Rick Bowness expects him to play in a key game against the Bruins, whom they trail by four points for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

"I'm not worried about (Werenski's Olympic) ice time," Bowness said. "I'm worried about the last couple days ... the celebration. That's what I'm worried about."

Bowness laughed while saying that, but the U.S. team has celebrated hard after ending a 46-year Olympic drought in men's hockey. They also had a long flight back due to a winter storm that forced their arrival location to change from New York to Miami.

Werenski, who logs a lot of ice time for the Blue Jackets, played almost 10 minutes fewer per game at the Olympics and logged just 12:10 during the gold medal win over Canada. His legs should have plenty of juice left after a six-game run in Milan, but getting through a stretch that has resembled a Stanley Cup celebration is the first hurdle.

"I've kind of left him alone since he's gotten over here," Bowness said of Werenski. "If he shows up in Boston (on Wednesday), that's great, but I'll find out later today (Feb. 24). I hope they're drinking lots of water and getting some rest, right?"

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets may hang onto free agents past trade deadline

By Brian Hedger – February 24, 2026

Don't expect the Blue Jackets to go shopping for big-ticket rentals before the NHL's trade deadline passes at 3 p.m. ET on March 6. Not in the traditional sense, anyway.

"The way I look at it right now, our UFAs are kind of like our rental players, unless something pops here in the next little bit," Blue Jackets president/general manager Don Waddell said. "One phone call can change that a little bit, but to trade a guy right now for a second-round pick ... we've got [eight] picks in this draft. We don't need any more picks. It's more important that we win games."

The Blue Jackets have six pending unrestricted free agents, including captain Boone Jenner. They also have loads of space beneath an NHL salary cap ceiling expected to jump from \$95.5 million to \$104 million in 2026-27.

That should leave plenty of room to re-sign any of the Jackets' preferred UFAs while also reaching agreements with three key restricted free agents: center Adam Fantilli, forward Cole Sillinger and goalie Jet Greaves.

Topping the UFA list are Jenner, center Charlie Coyle, forward Mason Marchment and defenseman Erik Gudbranson. All four are 30 years old or older. The Jackets also have veteran depth players like forward Danton Heinen and injured defenseman Brendan Smith as pending UFAs.

Coming out of the NHL's three-week pause for the 2026 Winter Olympics, the Jackets trail the New York Islanders by four points for third in the Metropolitan Division, a guaranteed playoff spot. Columbus trails the Boston Bruins by four points for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference, another playoff ticket.

They also play those two teams right off the hop, starting with the Bruins on Feb. 26 at TD Garden in Boston before hosting the Islanders on Feb. 28 at Nationwide Arena. Those games, plus the three others before the trade deadline (March 2 at the New York Rangers, March 3 against the Nashville Predators and March 5 against the Florida Panthers), could determine what Waddell ultimately does.

Dropping all five and quickly dropping out of playoff contention could prompt a UFA sell-off to acquire picks and/or prospects with the future in mind. Staying in the playoff chase will likely keep the Jackets intact with the possibility of Waddell "working around the edges," to add low-cost UFA depth rentals.

That would mirror last season's trade deadline in Columbus, when Waddell hung onto his pending UFAs while adding depth forwards Luke Kunin and Christian Fischer.

"If somebody says, 'I'm going to give you 'Player X or Y' for this guy, and it's somebody that's going to help us, who we can control and helps us down the road, you'd have to look at it," Waddell said.

“There’s not too many of those out there, though, and with the high-end UFAs, we already have a bunch of them. So, I’m not going to pay a price (to add more).”

Expect to see a patient, almost quiet, approach to the deadline for the second straight year. Waddell said he’s contacted agents who represent the Blue Jackets’ UFAs and spoken to a couple of players over the break to gauge their interest in re-signing.

Now comes the waiting period for the deadline to pass.

“We showed (patience) last year, when we went to the deadline and kept our guys,” Waddell said. “We ended up signing the guys we wanted to keep at the end of the year, so the March 6 trade deadline is not a deadline to keep your players or lose your players. Just because you keep them and they’re still UFAs doesn’t mean they’re all going to walk at the end of the year.”

[The Columbus Dispatch / Johnny Gaudreau's widow Meredith reflects on meaningful gold medal celebration](#)

By Bethany Bruner – February 24, 2026

Johnny Gaudreau's widow told ABC News on Feb. 24 that having her kids brought onto the Olympic ice after the U.S. men's hockey team won the gold medal is a reflection of the impact the Columbus Blue Jackets forward had.

Meredith Gaudreau told ABC News' Kyra Phillips that the continued support from the hockey community is heartwarming.

"It's more than I can ask for right now. It's still every day is kind of a gut punch," Meredith Gaudreau said.

Johnny Gaudreau, 31, died on Aug. 29, 2024, along with his brother, 29-year-old Matthew Gaudreau, after being struck by a vehicle while bicycling in New Jersey. The incident occurred the day before their sister was to be married.

Johnny Gaudreau would have likely made the 2026 Olympic team, many hockey players and experts have said. He represented the United States multiple times in international competition, including the IIHF World Championship in 2024. Gaudreau recorded 43 points in 40 games, the most points in USA men's IIHF history.

Gaudreau family invited to Italy by USA Hockey

USA Hockey invited members of the Gaudreau family to Italy to see the games. Meredith, Noa and Johnny Jr., who celebrated his second birthday on Feb. 22, as well as Jane and Guy Gaudreau, the brothers' parents, made the trip.

"He would've just been really happy they were there to be a part of it," Meredith Gaudreau said. "Noa never missed one of his games."

When it came time for the kids to go on the ice after the win, Noa was eager to get out there, Meredith Gaudreau said, especially with Johnny's Columbus Blue Jackets teammate, Zach Werenski, who she knows well.

"She was real excited to jump right into his arms," Meredith said. "She knows 13. I said 'They have Daddy's jersey and they want to take a picture. They're doing this because of Daddy. We get to do this because of Daddy. They love him and miss him too.'"

Meredith said her husband would have been proud of how his teammates included his memory and incorporated his kids into their celebration.

"They're really good people, really good friends of ours. I consider them really great role models," Gaudreau said. "It goes to show me how much they love John and all the respect they have for him."

Team USA kept a Gaudreau jersey in the locker room throughout the Olympic tournament, and Werenski, Auston Matthews and Matthew Tkachuk skated it around the ice after the gold medal game ended.

In speaking to Phillips, Meredith Gaudreau said the couple's youngest son, Carter, does not yet have his passport so he watched the game from home while wearing a sweater with Johnny's number 13. Meredith said Carter is already running around and playing hockey on the carpet at about 11 months old.