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By Jeff Svoboda – June 04, 2026

Over 10 seasons with the Blue Jackets, there have been plenty of Zach Werenski moments.

Breathtaking end-to-end rushes and pinpoint finishes. The unforgettable image of Werenski, black eye and gauze sticking from his nose, coming back in a playoff game after taking a puck to the face. The indelible moment of his pass to Jack Hughes bringing a gold medal back to his home country – and the Columbus community – for the first time in more than four decades.

There have been hat tricks, All-Star appearances, unforgettable playoff nights, fights with his best friend, and a lot of pizzas tossed in Nationwide Arena. There have also been injuries, rehab, tough questions and more losses than he would have hoped.

He came to Columbus as a wunderkind, a franchise-changing player who energized the Blue Jackets on the way to four straight playoff appearances. He's since become a face of the franchise, an alternate captain who has laid down roots and come to love the city of Columbus.

Werenski now is also universally agreed upon as one of the elite players in the NHL. He hasn't just rewritten the CBJ record books, he's put together consecutive seasons that are among the best in league history for a defenseman.

And now he stands alone in Blue Jackets history as the first Norris Trophy winner to wear Union Blue. After finishing second a year ago, Werenski ran away with the race this season while being chosen as the best defenseman in the NHL.

There have been many great Blue Jackets, but by the time he's done, Werenski may be the best of all. Rick Nash inspired a generation as the team's first superstar. Sergei Bobrovsky won Vezina Trophies en route to the Hall of Fame. Nick Foligno and Cam Atkinson and Tyler Wright and Jody Shelley brought their lunchpails every night and became not just fan favorites but pillars of the community.

But Werenski stands alone in many ways. Drafted by the Blue Jackets, he crossed the border from Michigan to Ohio to become a homegrown star, and after signing a pair of long-term contracts with the organization, he continues to make history in a place that has become home.

"I've spent 10 years in Columbus," he said. "I got married in Columbus. I had my first kid in Columbus. It means a lot to me. It's a really special place, and I've always tried to be the best player I can be for the franchise and be the best defenseman I can be. I have great teammates, great leaders, great people along the way who have helped me get here, so it definitely means a lot to be the first Norris winner in franchise history.

"Hopefully it's not for long. Hopefully there's some great D behind me that can win Norrises as well. It's a great place to play, Columbus. I've been here for 10 years, and it does feel special to win one with the Blue Jackets."

A Long Journey

So how did Werenski get here, to the top of the mountain at his position, to a player who has made a remarkable impact on the franchise?

He always had talent; you don't get called up to the U.S. junior team as a teenager or get drafted eighth overall or place third in the Calder Trophy voting if you don't. But lots of players have talent; not all of them assist on an Olympic gold-winning goal or become Norris Trophy winners.

The ability to ascend at that next level and stay there is rare, but Werenski showed signs early on that he could be that type of player. He was a standout with the U.S. junior team and at the University of Michigan, then joined the AHL team in Cleveland in 2016 and was a key part of a squad that won a Calder Cup, posting 14 points in 17 playoff games.

He arrived in Columbus a year later at age 19 and was an impact player immediately, scoring two goals in his first three games and starting his career with a four-game point streak. By the time his first season was over, he had 11 goals and 47 points, setting a new scoring record for a CBJ rookie.

The thing CBJ fans will remember forever came in the third playoff game. Werenski's partnership with Seth Jones had helped push the Jackets to the next level during a 50-win season, and legendary head coach John Tortorella immediately took the chains off, declaring his young defenseman a "rover" who could use his skills to the best of his ability.

Werenski proved his mettle, though, when a shot midway through Game 3 against Pittsburgh ramped off his stick and went directly into his face. Bleeding, he headed down the tunnel for repairs, and it looked like his night and season might be over.

Instead, he came back, seemingly pieced together by stitches and bandages. While he eventually had to leave the game and miss the rest of the series, Werenski immediately became a cult hero; shirts with his bloody, bruised visage became a cult favorite.

He took some time to get the defensive side of his game to the same level as his offense – after all, he was Zach Werenski; the pressure to produce was enormous – and kept turning in excellent performances. He stepped in for Jones because of illness at the All-Star Game in 2019 and led NHL defensemen in goals in 2020; when he had three multigoal games in a five-game span, including a memorable New Year's Eve hat trick, he became the third defenseman to do it since 1967, joining Paul Coffey and Bobby Orr.

Then came the injuries. In 2021, he missed 21 games, including the last 14 because of a sports hernia. In 2022, he made the All-Star team but missed 14 games with a variety of maladies. Then, 13 games into the 2023 season, he went to make a check along the wall and went shoulder-first into the glass, suffering a torn labrum and separated shoulder that ended his campaign.

He filled his time with charitable endeavors and rehab, opening the Z Suite in Nationwide Arena that hosts children fighting cancer, military members, first responders and underprivileged youth each game on the way to becoming a three-time CBJ Community MVP. He tried not to let the injuries wear on him; you can only imagine how much it did.

Then, finally, the breakthrough came. After shaking off the rust, he finished the 2024 season on a tear, notching 17 points in the last 14 games to tie the CBJ defenseman scoring record. He started the 2024-25 season hot and never looked back, posting 23 goals and 59 assists; the latter total tied Artemi Panarin's franchise record, and his 82 points tied Panarin for second overall in franchise history.

This past season, he nearly posted the same numbers, finishing with 22 goals and 59 assists for 81 points. The result was also the same for the team – the Blue Jackets were eliminated from playoff contention the night before the final game.

It's been frustrating, yes, but Werenski sees a young core featuring such players as Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko and sees better days ahead. He also feels he's in the right place at the right time, where he's supposed to be to play at a high level and take the Blue Jackets to the next step.

"I feel like I've been surrounded by great players, and more importantly, great people – the training staff, the medical guys," he said of his success the past two years. "It's an awesome place to go every day, and I've just been in a good headspace. I've enjoyed going to the rink. I've enjoyed battling with the guys, and I feel like when you're enjoying what you're doing, you're going to play better."

"I feel like for me, I'm just having fun playing my game and doing my thing, and that's the best way to play hockey and that's the most enjoyable way. I feel like it's all been fun for me and I'm enjoying doing it, and that's a big reason why I've had success."

NHL history is full of good players who have one great season and never quite get there again. For Werenski, that was motivation. He let us into his preseason preparation last August; a typical Monday included a gym session followed by a lengthy on-ice practice against some of the best players in the world, players named Hughes and Caufield and Zegras.

"I think the biggest thing for me last year, being a finalist, I wanted to prove to not only myself but to everyone that last season wasn't a fluke and I could do it again," Werenski said. "It was kind of the first year I really broke out. Obviously I felt like I always had the talent to, but in terms of my full game I felt like two seasons ago was really my breakout year, and I wanted to prove to myself it wasn't just a one-off."

"I trained for it. I prepared for it. I came back, our team got better. Obviously we fell short of our ultimate goal of making the playoffs, but we made strides. And I definitely proved that it wasn't just a fluke and it wasn't just a one-year thing and I can play at that level and I can be in the conversation with those great defensemen."

Zach Werenski speaks to the media after being named the James Norris Memorial Trophy winner for the 2025-26 NHL season!

Among The Best

Let's put some of Werenski's accomplishments into historical context.

His career totals of 135 goals, 330 assists and 465 points are far and away franchise records for a defenseman. He also is the Jackets' all-time leader in assists, second in points behind only Nash and fifth in goals.

Not only is he the only NHL defenseman to top 20 goals and 80 points in each of the last two seasons, he and Colorado's Cale Makar (2024, '25) are the only blueliners this century to pass the 80-point mark in consecutive seasons and just two of nine in league history. He's also one of just four active D in the league with three 20-goal seasons, and he became just the fifth American-born defenseman to win the Norris.

Seeing his name on the trophy with the greats of the game is a humbling moment, but what stands out most to Werenski is being judged as the best of his peers.

"I feel like for me, being up there with the guys I play against, seeing Cale, seeing Quinn (Hughes), seeing Adam Fox, Roman Josi – those are guys that have pushed me to be a better hockey player, especially Quinn," he said. "I have a ton of respect for him, and we're pretty close in the offseason. At the Olympics, we got even closer.

"He just kept telling me all year, 'This is yours to lose, and go for it,' and it gave me a ton of confidence. I thought that was cool that I'm going to be up there with my peers and guys have played against and guys that have pushed me to be better."

The praise started to flow late last season, as people around the league took notice. Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman told BlueJackets.com that "he's one of the best players in the league," while ESPN's Mark Messier said "his game is just so beautiful to watch."

Speaking on a podcast this week, analyst Colby Armstrong noted, "What a year for him. He always looks like he's in a rocking chair, he's so smooth. He's like the smoothest defenseman."

The hallmark of Werenski's ability is just how easy he makes it look. He famously runs the same temperature – never too high or low – at all times, and his game has the same characteristics. He never seems out of control or panicked. His game is less about substance than style; the substance is the style. He plays upwards of 30 minutes when he has to and drives play without ever looking like he's breaking a sweat.

His stride never looks fast until he's dusted his opponent; the wrist shot never looks that hard until it's by the goalie.

If that reminds astute observers of anyone in particular, there might be a reason. Growing up in the Detroit area, Werenski went to Red Wings games as a kid and had the treat of watching Hall of Fame defenseman Nicklas Lidstrom on a nightly basis. The four-time Stanley Cup winner and seven-time Norris Trophy recipient dominated games in a similar fashion, and Werenski modeled his game after one of the best to do it.

So when he received the Norris Trophy, his eyes immediately went to one name.

"One of the first things I looked for was Nick Lidstrom, and it's not hard to find because he's on there seven times," Werenski said. "That's probably the one that I really looked for right away. I grew up watching him, obviously, being from Detroit. I knew how special a player he was. To win it once is an incredible feeling, but to do what he did, it's insane."

Staying On Top

Rick Bowness has spent more games behind an NHL bench than anyone in league history, helping lead a team as a head or assistant coach for more than 2,750 games over four-plus decades.

He's mentored Raymond Bourque and Victor Hedman, and the Blue Jackets' head coach sees some of their games in the way Werenski plays.

"The elite players see the game in slow motion," Bowness said. "Some guys see the game, it's 100 miles per hour. Some guys see it at 10 mph, and then you can see everything, what's going on, and he has that ability. You watch when things are getting a little scambly, he'll just take the puck back and he settles things down. Then when we need to go, you see him up the ice.

"He has great hockey IQ, he has a great feel for the game. I knew he was a good player; I didn't know he was this good. He is elite, and he's just a wonderful, wonderful guy."

So much has come together for Werenski over the past few years. His game has reached a new level, as he's universally recognized as one of the best players in the sport. He's become a fixture with the national team and was part of one of the most iconic moments in American hockey history. He got married last summer and welcomed a son this spring.

Who could have looked back a decade ago and known all of this was coming?

"He's done so much in 10 years," his father, Ken, said. "Every year when his season ends, Kristen and I are like, 'Well, how can you top this year?' He has certainly made the most of his career. There are a lot of things on that bucket list (he's achieved), for sure."

But the biggest accomplishments still remain. He's won gold medals and individual trophies, but the spot on the mantel for a Stanley Cup ring remains. The Blue Jackets have missed the playoffs for six straight seasons, and while things appear on the upswing in Columbus, the burning desire to win and bring playoff hockey to the capital city remains.

So when Werenski was presented with the Norris Trophy on May 24, he was back at the rink on May 25. He was inspired to chase the Norris after finishing second a year ago; the motivation isn't going anywhere now that he won it.

"It's actually funny," Werenski said. "Last Sunday, I found out I won the Norris, and you enjoy it for a bit, and then Monday you're right back in the gym and right back on the ice. I feel like as competitors and as athletes, especially in hockey, that's just how you are programmed. ... There's still so much else out there. Every time you get in the gym or get on the ice to get ready for a season, there's still so much to prove to not only everyone out there, but to yourself.

"I don't want to stop here. I feel like the second you get complacent is the second you get passed up. I want to keep playing for a long time. I want to play for my son and my family. There's so much motivation out there. I still haven't won the ultimate goal, which is the Stanley Cup. And I really hate that we haven't played in the playoffs (for a while) or had much success in the playoffs ever. So there's more motivation than ever for me to be even better next season and try to play in the playoffs."

The Athletic / Zach Werenski's skills coach on his Norris roadmap: Angles, efficiencies and 'surfing'

By Fluto Shinzawa – June 5, 2026

Zach Werenski won the Norris Trophy on Tuesday. Two days later, the player anointed as the NHL's best all-around defenseman was on the ice at a Detroit-area rink under the watch of Jonathan Sigalet, his skills coach.

The way Sigalet understands his client, the recognition was already an afterthought.

"He just wants to be the best," Sigalet said. "There's guys who are just perpetually chasing to be the best version of themselves, to be the best on the team, to be the best in the league. I think that's Zach."

Sigalet and Werenski have worked together for the past three seasons. The Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman was a point-per-game player in each of the past two seasons for the first time in his career.

It may not be a coincidence.

'Intimidating experience'

The 2022-23 season was one to forget for Werenski. The defenseman played a career-low 13 games because of a shoulder injury. It was not the way he wanted to start a six-year, \$57.5 million contract.

Werenski's valley, however, encouraged him to explore development options during his rehab. Upon the recommendation of a Columbus teammate, who had been working with Sigalet, Werenski got on the ice with the skills coach. He felt at ease.

Sigalet didn't necessarily feel the same way.

Sigalet, like Werenski, was an offensive defenseman. The comparison ended there. Sigalet appeared in one career game with the Boston Bruins.

"At that point, he's probably the best player I've been on the ice with," Sigalet recalled. "So it's a little bit sink or swim for me as a guy who played one game in the NHL as a player. You're trying to take a guy who's making nine-and-a-half million and trying to teach him how to do things or look at things a little differently. So it's a pretty humbling and sometimes intimidating experience."

Boston Bruins winger Morgan Geekie is another of Sigalet's clients. He hired Sigalet when he was with the Seattle Kraken, feeling unfulfilled with his career.

That was not the case with Werenski.

By the time he hired Sigalet, Werenski had 245 points in 416 games. He was averaging 23:14 of ice time per appearance. He was a top-flight defenseman because of his skating, smarts, puck touches, stickwork and poise. He needed a skills coach the way Shakespeare needed an English tutor.

Sigalet, as such, saw no purpose in reworking his game. His goal was for Werenski to be more efficient with his skating angles, which would allow Werenski to express his skill set more effectively.

“How can we just make his life a little bit easier? He makes a play, he’s ready for the next play,” Sigalet said. “Whether the original play’s successful or not, he’s set up for both outcomes to react accordingly. Nothing crazy. He could always skate. He could always shoot. He could always do all those things. Just working on those little techniques, little things, through video, little suggestions, little nudges. Just to try to make his life a little easier.”

Sigalet targeted surfing, the technique defensemen use to tighten gaps up the ice and encourage turnovers, as part of his program. It’s not easy, especially for a strong-side defenseman.

“It’s a more severe angle,” Sigalet explained. “It’s easier to get stuck going north. If you mistime it, misangle it, the guy will jump past you and you’re exposed more. When you’re coming from the weak side, it’s a little flatter angle. A little easier to pick up and get connected to that guy.”

The way Sigalet saw it, Werenski’s skating could make him an excellent strong-side surfer. If things went sideways, Werenski could recover to defend against the rush. If he succeeded, he could confront the puck carrier, force a turnover and go on the attack.

“Now he can create a turnover further up the ice,” Sigalet said. “Go spend more time in the O-zone, where he’s a pretty elite talent.”

Golden play

Sigalet was watching the Olympic gold-medal game when Werenski started a breakout deep in the defensive zone. Sigalet’s nerves spiked when Werenski made a backhand outlet pass to Jack Hughes that Cale Makar challenged.

But once Hughes chipped the puck past Makar, it didn’t take long for Werenski to track it down. Nathan MacKinnon may have misjudged the timing of Werenski’s arrival.

“He’s got that type of speed where sometimes you don’t appreciate how fast he’s going when you’re on the ice. It can be hard to read,” Sigalet said. “Then to get it through to Jack ... I was hoping maybe Jack could slide it back, because he was open at the other side of the net. That would have been even nicer.”

Makar, Quinn Hughes and Lane Hutson are among Werenski’s peers. They finished right behind Werenski (81 points) in blue-line scoring. They make their mark with explosive skating and whirring feet. Werenski is a Rolls-Royce compared to the Ferraris.

“Just an effortless smoothness to him,” Sigalet said. “I think a lot of players around the league, when they watch him, they appreciate how effortless things look. Their peers really admire guys that make things look easy. He has that quality where it looks like he’s never trying too hard. But he really is.”

Sigalet separates his clients into two categories. There are players like Geekie who feel like they’re capable of more. Then there’s Werenski, who does not require much to reach his peak.

“Zach’s been a fantastic player before I ever stood on the ice with him,” Sigalet said. “We’re just working on the margins and the little details around the edges just to give him an extra little tool or two to use throughout the season.”

The Hockey Writers / How Much Will the Blue Jackets Need to Pay to Re-Sign Mason Marchment?

By Ryan W. – June 4, 2026

Despite narrowly missing the playoffs, the Columbus Blue Jackets have some things to be happy about. Defenseman Zach Werenski won the Norris Trophy as the NHL's best defenseman. They locked down center Charlie Coyle after a strong season.

That said, the Blue Jackets do have some important decisions to make. Perhaps chief among them is finding a way to re-sign recent addition Mason Marchment to a new contract that works within the tight cap structure the team is working with.

A Difference-Making Trade

Marchment, acquired in a mid-season trade, became an instant difference-maker for the Blue Jackets. His story is perfect for a town like Columbus, an undrafted free agent who managed to climb the ranks and become an effective NHL forward.

After struggling to find his place with the Seattle Kraken, Marchment immediately fit in with his new club. In 29 games with the Kraken, he had just four goals and 13 points. In 39 games with Columbus, Marchment lit the lamp 15 times and contributed 32 points, easily becoming one of the team's most effective forwards. He finished the season on absolute tear, picking up points seven of his final eight games.

By the end of the season, Marchment had found a place on the top line with budding young stars Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko. Locking him up became a sudden and urgent priority for the Blue Jackets heading into the offseason.

What Will His Next Contract Look Like?

The question is, "What does his next contract look like?" Historically, he has been a guy who produces around 20 goals and somewhere in the 45-50-point range. At 31 years old, he is also on the backside of his career. Still, it's hard to ignore his performance and how well he played in Columbus.

The 6-foot-5 forward just finished four-year contract that paid him \$4.5 million annually. He's going to get a bump, but that may not be the biggest part of his contractual questions. The real questions are, "How strongly do the Blue Jackets feel about him" and "What kind of contract length are we talking about?"

Realistically, he's probably going to come in at around \$6 million per season. Surely, Marchment sees how his production shot up playing with Fantilli and Marchenko. Would that be worth a little less to stay in a spot where the chemistry is so good?

A Major Move for the Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets need to make sure that this happens. There should be competition, especially from rebuilding teams looking to add solid middle-six pieces that won't cost an exorbitant amount of money.

If the Blue Jackets could get him for \$6 million for 3-4 years, that would be a big win. Even \$6.5 million per season would be solid. They may have a little more flexibility by letting a few veteran free agents walk away, and roster spots will be at a premium this offseason.

Having Marchment back in the fold would perhaps allow them to take a swing at a bigger piece. On his own, Marchment is a hard-nosed, veteran forward capable of playing anywhere in the top nine. If he can continue to produce at the same level, it will be a deal for the Blue Jackets.