



Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips
March 7-9, 2026

Columbus Blue Jackets News

- PAGE 2 ESPN / NHL playoff standings: The Blue Jackets' path to the playoffs
- PAGE 3 The Athletic / Two Gordie Howes and a late 2-goal rally, but Blue Jackets fall to Mammoth in OT
- PAGE 6 The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets can't finish what they started in OT loss to Utah
- PAGE 8 The Columbus Dispatch / Utah Mammoth top Columbus Blue Jackets in OT to cap wild finish
- PAGE 10 The Columbus Dispatch / Conor Garland welcomes surprise trade to Columbus Blue Jackets
- PAGE 11 The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets to have Werenski, Marchment vs Utah Mammoth
- PAGE 12 The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Week Ahead: Schedule & Storylines – Garland Acquisition, Playoff Push, Injury Bug and More
- PAGE 13 The Hockey Writers / 3 Blue Jackets' Lessons Learned at the 2026 NHL Trade Deadline

Cleveland Monsters / Prospect News

NHL News

- PAGE 16 ABC7 / NHL Awards Watch: Who's leading for Hart, Norris, Calder?

Multimedia

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: The Blue Jackets' path to the playoffs

By ESPN staff - March 9, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets made a valiant effort to qualify for the 2025 Stanley Cup playoffs, falling just short but playing meaningful hockey games in April. The preseason prognosticators didn't necessarily project a similar fate this spring, as the club's preseason over/under point total was 84.5.

However, with over a month left, they are right in the mix for a spot in the Eastern Conference playoff bracket, and could eclipse that preseason over/under pretty easily.

Columbus hosts the Los Angeles Kings for a late-afternoon tilt on Monday (4 p.m. ET, ESPN+), and begins play three points behind the Boston Bruins for the second wild-card spot, five points behind the Montreal Canadiens for the first wild card, and four points behind the New York Islanders for the No. 3 position in the Metro Division.

After Monday's game against the Kings, the Blue Jackets have 19 games left on the schedule. The bad news is that 12 of those 19 are against teams currently in playoff position, making theirs one of the tougher remaining schedules. The good news is that 12 of those 19 are against teams currently in playoff position, and each of them represents a "four-point swing game" if they can win in regulation.

So far this season, the Blue Jackets have played 31 games against playoff teams, and gone 16-9-6 in those contests. So though it'll be a tough road to the postseason, there's proof of concept showing that they can get there. Stathead projects their chances at 74.1%, better than some of the teams currently ahead of them.

Every team has around 20 games left before the season concludes April 16, and we'll help you keep track of it all here on the NHL playoff watch every day. As we traverse the final stretch, we'll provide detail on all the playoff races -- along with the teams jockeying for position in the 2026 NHL draft lottery.

The Athletic / Two Gordie Howes and a late 2-goal rally, but Blue Jackets fall to Mammoth in OT

Aaron Portzline – March 8, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio — So many times this season, the Columbus Blue Jackets have played well enough to win, only to watch in frustration as they freeze up and fritter away a point or 2 with a late-game cave-in.

The opposite happened Saturday.

The Blue Jackets, surprised by the Utah Mammoth's speed, gave up the type of gonzo scoring chances that have mostly dried up since the hiring of coach Rick Bowness, and they were well on their way to a deflating loss.

But two goals 30 seconds apart late in the third period allowed the Blue Jackets to force overtime and earn a point in a 5-4 loss before a beyond-capacity crowd of 18,668 in Nationwide Arena.

"It's a good point," said Blue Jackets winger Mason Marchment, who scored the tying goal with 5:52 remaining. "It's a good comeback. You know, we really kind of turned it on there in the third.

"That's good to see. It's never easy to come back in this league, so to get that point is huge. We put ourselves down (in a tough spot), and we're better than that."

Damon Severson, Mathieu Olivier, Adam Fantilli and Marchment each had a goal and an assist for the Blue Jackets, and Charlie Coyle and Kirill Marchenko each had two assists. Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins stopped 18 of 23 shots.

"I'm proud of the way we worked our way back," said Fantilli, who started the comeback with 6:22 remaining with a nifty backhand goal from below the goal line. "Guys kept making plays. Guys stuck with it."

The game nearly went off the rails on the shift after Marchment scored to tie it at 4.

Coyle skated to a stop in the corner just after he was called for hooking. As Coyle stood there, Utah's Alex Kerfoot approached, and Coyle sent him sprawling with a two-handed shove to the chest.

That was the match on a pile of tinder.

Severson arrived on the scene just as Kerfoot got back on his feet, and they immediately wrapped up and started fighting. Meanwhile, Olivier had corralled Utah's Ian Cole as Cole tried to enter the fray from outside the gathering.

Olivier and Cole started wrestling, and Olivier aggressively ignored the linesman's directive to pull away. Sure enough, Cole and Olivier started fighting.

By the time the dust had settled, Severson was skating off to the penalty box, trying to further ignite the crowd, but fans were already there. Olivier was off to the dressing room, kicked out for instigating a fight while another fight was underway.

Ahh, hockey. The beautiful game, right? Olivier and Severson each had the first Gordie Howe hat trick of their careers. So did Kerfoot.

“It doesn’t surprise me (with Severson),” Olivier said. “Any one of my teammates could pull that off. We have a tight group in here that stays together in these moments, and that speaks a lot to the character in this room.

“The whole night was very electric. We went down 4-2, got back into it. It was 4-4 when that happened. It was really, really loud.”

The point kept the Blue Jackets within 2 points of the Boston Bruins for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference. They are in fourth place in the Metropolitan Division, 3 points behind the third-place Pittsburgh Penguins.

“We battled back,” Bowness said. “For the last 10 minutes, we had them on the run. We had more than enough scoring opportunities to win that game tonight. We got four goals, and four goals should be enough to win the game.

“But you give up a breakaway, you give up a two-on-one against that team ... that’s not part of the game plan — trust me on that one. But they’re fast. That’s the fastest team we’ve played in a while. They were really, really on top of their game tonight.”

The Blue Jackets came back three times but never led. They trailed 1-0 and 2-0 before the Mammoth scored twice, only 1:54 apart, early in the third to take a 4-2 lead.

On the fourth goal, Utah’s Logan Cooley sneaked behind the Blue Jackets defense — Zach Werenski and Severson were on the ice — for a breakaway he buried off his backhand past Merzlikins.

Earlier, the Mammoth scored on a two-on-zero when Dylan Guenther and Clayton Keller got behind the Blue Jackets and Guenther finished past Merzlikins.

“I would say (those mistakes are) pretty easy (to correct), to be honest with you,” Bowness said. “That’s just guys just making the wrong reads. They’re very correctible.”

Werenski returned after missing three games with what he called a “stomach bug,” saying it was “the worst he’s ever had, by far.” Werenski played 26:53 and had 13 shot attempts but only two shots on goal.

Marchment (lower body) was also able to play after sitting out the third period of Thursday’s win over the Florida Panthers.

The game marked the Blue Jackets debut of winger Conor Garland, who was acquired in a trade with the Vancouver Canucks on Friday. Garland, playing with center Sean Monahan and winger Kent Johnson on the second line, played 16:40 and had one shot on goal and three hits.

The Blue Jackets’ third-period collapses mostly pre-date the hiring of Bowness, although they coughed up a 4-0 lead to the New York Rangers earlier in the week before rallying to win in overtime.

Saturday would have had a more triumphant feel if the Blue Jackets had managed to cap the comeback with an overtime or shootout win. But there’s something reassuring about pulling off a third-period comeback.

The Blue Jackets have 20 games remaining. There are many nerve-racking moments to follow if they keep earning points and pushing for a playoff spot.

“Since I’ve been here, listening (to the players), I find it a very confident group,” Bowness said. “Like, we went into the third, and I said, ‘We’ve been here many times since I’ve been here, and we’re going to be here a lot more in the next 20.’”

“That’s the reality of the situation and the reality of hockey at this time of year. You just have to get comfortable playing it.”

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets can't finish what they started in OT loss to Utah

By Brian Hedger – March 8, 2026

The only thing missing was the big finish.

That would've capped a memorable night March 7 at sold-out Nationwide Arena, but perfect endings haven't come often at the building. Thus, it wasn't too surprising when the roar of 18,668 Blue Jackets fans gave way to pained silence after Logan Cooley's winning goal 2:08 into 3-on-3 overtime lifted the Utah Mammoth to a 5-4 victory.

It was deflating, but also fitting for Conor Garland's Jackets debut. In fact, it was Garland and defenseman Ivan Provorov getting crossed up in their assignments that led to Cooley's goal and taunting celebration.

Adam Fantilli and Mason Marchment scored goals 30 seconds apart to erase a 4-2 deficit with 5:52 left in the third period. Charlie Coyle's line was next over the boards.

The Jackets sent the arena's decibel level skyrocketing by engaging in a melee that began with Coyle's impassioned response to a questionable hooking penalty. Despite Utah's Nick DeSimone clutching Coyle's stick and pulling it from his grip, it was the Blue Jackets center who drew a penalty.

Coyle threw his arms in the air, began carping at referee Michael Markovic and pushed away Mammoth forward Alex Kerfoot, who immediately flopped onto the ice. That caused former Blue Jackets center Kevin Stenlund to respond by giving Coyle a shove, which caught Matthieu Olivier's attention.

Olivier, the NHL's top enforcer, tried to go after Kerfoot before another former Blue Jacket, Ian Cole, got in his way. Those two squared off, twice, and Olivier was tossed from the game after he racked up 27 minutes in penalties.

Damon Severson dropped his gloves to fight Kerfoot and eventually skated to the penalty box, pumping both arms. It was madness, pure and simple, as a packed house worked itself into a loud crescendo.

"The whole night was electric," Olivier said. "We went down 4-2 and came back into it, and when we made it 4-4, that was really, really loud. I didn't have time to pay attention to it [while fighting], but it was fun to get the fans into it, that's for sure."

As brutish as bare-knuckle fights are in pro hockey, nothing quite matches them for the ability to turn a large crowd of mostly adults into a horde of overgrown children.

They scream at players and officials, smack the glass windows surrounding the rink and delight in watching the chaos. That's what it was like in those final five minutes of regulation, as the Jackets filled the barn full of hopeful energy.

Cooley deflated it in OT and then mocked the crowd with a shushing gesture. It was a humbling way to finish a breathtaking game. The good news is the Blue Jackets skated off with a point, which mitigated the sting, but they sure could've used a fourth straight win.

“The fans were fantastic tonight,” Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness said. “Our crowd is loud. It’s been like that for 25 years that I’ve been coming in here, so I just needed ... we needed to hear that [goal] cannon one more time.”

Columbus Blue Jackets playoff picture

The Blue Jackets are now at 73 points, just two shy of the Boston Bruins for the second of two wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference. The Bruins defeated the Washington Capitals in regulation March 7 before the Jackets hosted the Mammoth.

Gaining a point in overtime also kept the Blue Jackets within three points of the Pittsburgh Penguins for third in the Metropolitan Division. The Penguins lost in OT to the Philadelphia Flyers, allowing the New York Islanders to climb past them into the Metro's second spot with a road shootout win against the San Jose Sharks.

What's left for the Columbus Blue Jackets?

The Columbus Dispatch / Utah Mammoth top Columbus Blue Jackets in OT to cap wild finish

By Brian Hedger – March 7, 2026

Plagued all season by late leads that slipped away, the Blue Jackets flipped the script against the Utah Mammoth on March 7 at Nationwide Arena to salvage a standings point.

Trailing by two goals after the Mammoth scored twice in a 1:54 span early in the third period, the Jackets' top line led the comeback charge with goals 30 seconds apart scored by Adam Fantilli and Mason Marchment to tie it 4-4, setting the stage for a wild finish that included a line brawl and a sellout crowd of 18,668 roaring to life.

In overtime, however, the Mammoth controlled possession after getting the puck off a rebound and won it 5-4 on Logan Cooley's second of two goals, scored 2:08 into OT after a defensive breakdown created a deflating 2-on-1 at the net. Cooley turned, taunted fans in the first row of seats on his side of the ice and the Mammoth (34-25-4) escaped with the extra point.

The Blue Jackets needed a win to keep pace with the Boston Bruins and Pittsburgh Penguins in the Eastern Conference's playoff chase. They'll settle for a point earned with an overtime loss, which they stole with a thrilling finish to regulation.

Alexander Kerfoot and Cooley scored the Mammoth's goals in the third period, breaking a 2-2 tie within the first five minutes, and that set up the Blue Jackets' comeback.

Damon Severson and Mathieu Olivier each finished with a goal and assist to lead the Blue Jackets (32-21-9), who started Elvis Merzlikins in net. Michael Carcone and Dylan Guenther scored the first two goals for the Mammoth (34-25-4), who helped Karel Vejmelka earn the goaltending win.

The game was tied 1-1 after the first period and 2-2 after the second on goals by Carcone and Severson in the first followed by Guenther and Olivier in the second.

Carcone opened the scoring at 7:25 into the game on a shot from the left wing that beat Merzlikins over the glove and under the crossbar on the far side of the net. An accidental collision in the neutral zone between Denton Mateychuk and Mason Marchment allowed Carcone to enter the zone uncovered for a pass from Kevin Stenlund, a former Blue Jackets center.

That was the Mammoth fourth line's first of two goals in the game.

Severson responded for the Blue Jackets, tying it 1-1 with 34.6 seconds left in the first by one-timing a shot off a pass from Coyle for his fifth goal of the season.

In the second, Guenther took a stretch pass from Nick DeSimone and then finished a 2-on-0 rush with his 29th goal to put the Mammoth back up 2-1, but Olivier tied it by scoring off a rebound of his own shot with 3:57 left for his 12th goal of the season and third goal in two games.

The Blue Jackets appeared to take a 2-1 lead on Kent Johnson's power-play goal earlier in the second, but Utah coach Andre Tourigny issued a challenge for a missed offside and got it overturned.

Columbus Blue Jackets playoff picture

Losing in OT pushed the Blue Jackets' to 73 points, which moved them to within two points of the Boston Bruins for the second of two playoff wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference. Boston defeated the Washington Capitals in regulation before the Jackets hosted the Mammoth, which increased the Bruins' lead to three points before the puck dropped in Columbus.

Gaining a point in overtime also kept the Blue Jackets within three points of tying the Pittsburgh Penguins, who also lost in OT to the Philadelphia Flyers, for second place in the Metropolitan Division. The New York Islanders also held a three-point lead over the Blue Jackets for third in the Metro and played a late game at the San Jose Sharks.

The Columbus Dispatch / Conor Garland welcomes surprise trade to Columbus Blue Jackets

By Brian Hedger – March 7, 2026

Conor Garland was not expecting to be traded by the Vancouver Canucks before the NHL's trade deadline, so he packed light for a short road trip March 6-7 in Chicago and Winnipeg.

As a veteran forward who'd already signed a six-year, \$36 million contract extension that starts July 1, 2026, he didn't think much about being traded until being informed March 5 that he would soon join the Blue Jackets for a playoff chase.

"I wouldn't have talked to management because my agent did all that stuff, and I really had no clue or inkling of anything happening until I landed in Chicago," Garland said. "Had I known, I would've packed a lot more clothes. It was just a two-day trip. I had a pretty good feel for where I was going to wind up around 7 or 7:30 p.m. that night, and then I was pretty excited."

Garland's dad had flown to Chicago to watch him play. Instead, they grabbed dinner there and watched a TV broadcast of the Blue Jackets' 4-2 win over the Florida Panthers. He'll make his Blue Jackets debut in the Jackets' next game, March 7 at Nationwide Arena against the Utah Mammoth.

"Need is a strong word, but I'd say that I welcome [the change]," Garland said. "I'm very excited to be in a playoff race. I think one of the things, mentally, I was probably struggling with was trying to get through those [final] 20 games at the end with no real playoff hopes. I'm a competitive person. You want to win. You want a chance to compete for the Stanley Cup, and it's just exciting to be back in the race."

Garland's wife, Meghan, is also adjusting.

She's expecting the couple's second child in late April and has stayed in Boston with their young son and dog. The plan is for them to join Garland in Columbus after the Blue Jackets return from a three-game road trip March 10-14 against the Tampa Bay Lightning, Panthers and Philadelphia Flyers.

Garland also has a sister who lives in Indiana, who's driving to Columbus to watch his first two games.

Meanwhile, back in Vancouver, he's given former teammate Max Sasson an important chore.

"I had one of the young guys [Sasson] living in my apartment downstairs in Vancouver, so he didn't have to pay rent this year," Garland said. "So, his payment will be to pack up my house for me, and that's not fun."

Garland will start out skating at right wing on a line with Sean Monahan at center and Kent Johnson on the left. Should they develop chemistry, Garland's offensive numbers could get a quick boost. Monahan is a veteran two-way pivot, Garland hounds pucks and Johnson is a playmaker who's being encouraged by Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness to seek more offensive opportunities.

"We added an important piece to our team that can play in the top six and do a lot of different things," Bowness said. "He's going to fit right in because he plays with the same pressure that we want our team to play with. He's a dog when he's on the puck and he's on the puck all the time ... so he's going to fit right in."

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets to have Werenski, Marchment vs Utah Mammoth

By Brian Hedger – March 7, 2026

It's taken longer than Zach Werenski and the Blue Jackets had hoped, but he's recovered enough from an illness to return against the Utah Mammoth on March 7 at Nationwide Arena.

Mason Marchment (lower body) is also expected to play after leaving in the second period of the Jackets' most recent game, a 4-2 victory over the Florida Panthers on March 5, which marked their third straight win. Defenseman Dante Fabbro (lower body) will miss his second straight game and newly acquired forward Conor Garland will make his Blue Jackets debut on the second line.

Werenski played in the Blue Jackets' first two games coming off the NHL's 2026 Winter Olympics break, logging 28+ minutes in each, and missed the next three games with a lingering stomach virus. The Blue Jackets (32-21-8) won all three to climb within one point of the Boston Bruins for the second wild-card playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

"It kept being day-to-day, or a game-time decision because usually [being sick] lasts 24 hours," Werenski said. "I kept having the hope that the next day I'd feel better, and I just wasn't. I'm proud of the guys and how they played. It definitely made it easier out and watching the guys win."

Werenski said he felt good during the morning skate and that he's put back most of the 10 pounds he lost fighting the infection. The Mammoth (33-25-4) currently hold the first wild-card spot in the West and have a game-time lineup decision of their own with top defenseman Mikhail Sergachev (lower body).

Elvis Merzlikins will start in net for the Blue Jackets, while the Mammoth didn't make their starter public. Karel Vejmelka was the first goalie to leave the ice at Utah's morning skate, which is typically an indicator of a team's starter for that game.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Week Ahead: Schedule & Storylines – Garland Acquisition, Playoff Push, Injury Bug and More

By THW Staff - March 8, 2026

The biggest buzz around Columbus right now focuses on the team's massive mid-season turnaround and the front office's moves to bolster a potential playoff run. Here are this week's key storylines and upcoming schedule.

The Conor Garland Trade

General manager Don Waddell made a major splash right at the 2026 NHL Trade Deadline (March 6), acquiring veteran forward Conor Garland from the Vancouver Canucks. In exchange, Columbus sent a 2026 third-round pick and a 2028 second-round pick.

Garland is locked into a six-year extension that begins next season, making this both a win-now move and a long-term investment. He is expected to provide much-needed stability and scoring to the second line alongside Sean Monahan and Kent Johnson.

A Legitimate Playoff Push

The Blue Jackets are looking to snap a five-year postseason drought. They have been one of the hottest teams in the NHL since mid-January, recently riding a dominant 14-2-1 stretch. Sitting at a 32-21-8 record (72 points) as of the deadline, the locker room is highly motivated, and the front office's deadline additions signal serious belief in this roster's ability to lock down a wild card spot in the tightly contested Eastern Conference.

Managing the Injury Bug

As the schedule intensifies, health is a trending topic. Forward Mason Marchment recently sustained a lower-body injury but returned to the lineup quickly, while defenseman Dante Fabbro and star blueliner Zach Werenski (illness) have missed recent ice time. Keeping the core healthy will be a major storyline as they navigate a heavy March schedule.

The Hockey Writers / 3 Blue Jackets' Lessons Learned at the 2026 NHL Trade Deadline

By Mark Scheig - March 7, 2026

The 2026 NHL Trade Deadline has come and gone for the Columbus Blue Jackets. Although many expected not too much action to take place, the team did make one major move in the wee hours of Friday morning.

The Blue Jackets acquired Conor Garland from the Vancouver Canucks in exchange for a pair of draft picks, a 2028 second-round pick and a 2026 third-round pick. Garland has arrived in Columbus and will make his team debut Saturday night against the Utah Mammoth.

The time has come to reflect on what we saw at this trade deadline. The Blue Jackets remain one of the hottest teams in the NHL and are on a 14-2-1 run to put them on the cusp of the playoff race.

Garland turned out to be the only move GM Don Waddell made. What lessons did we learn about the Blue Jackets at this deadline?

Forward Was Always the Priority

Waddell spoke on Friday afternoon after the trade deadline passed. He admitted knowing during the Olympic break that he was focused on being a buyer no matter how the games right after the break went.

Waddell identified forward as their key area of need. In Garland, they get a player that checks off all the boxes they were looking for.

“We went in, started weeks ago, but Monday talking about what we feel like we needed for our team to take that next step,” Waddell said. “We didn’t come up with a lot of things that we felt we needed. Except we wanted to add a forward, someone that could score and help the top-six, the top two lines. So we went in with that thinking.”

“As it progressed through Wednesday (and) Thursday, we talked about a few players. We really focused on Conor and were able to continue through dialogues with Vancouver for multiple days Wednesday, Thursday and then finally got it to the finish line...We’ve studied him hard. We’ve scouted him hard. We think in our environment with the players he’s going to have that opportunity to play with, that he will come back to be that 20-goal scorer that he’s been in the past.”

The one issue for the Blue Jackets has been finding a consistent second line. Garland will play on the right Saturday night on a line with Sean Monahan and Kent Johnson. Assuming Mason Marchment is able to play Saturday night, all indications are pointing to yes, that would leave Dmitri Voronkov as a healthy scratch.

The Blue Jackets hope this bump in the top-six will be enough to finish the job. Waddell spoke on why he didn’t need to do anything on the blue line or in net.

“We just won three games without our best player in Werenski and that’s pretty impressive,” Waddell said. “That means other guys have stepped up in those three games. Yes, we gave up four in New York

but we gave up two with Florida and the game before. So the goaltending and defense have done a good job. We've been comfortable with them all year when we're healthy."

Garland having term was also a big factor as expected in the Blue Jackets wanting to acquire him. They wanted the cost certainty that comes with knowing what the next six years would look like. They have to account for the eventual new contracts of Zach Werenski, Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko among others.

The lesson learned here was that the second-line issues were enough for the Blue Jackets to target a forward. In Garland, they hope that line will start producing on a more consistent basis.

A Lesson In Asset Management

This sometimes gets overlooked. However, asset management is one of the most critical things that NHL teams have to get right.

With this trade deadline, the way Waddell handled previous business helped set the Blue Jackets up to make a major move. But it started last season when the team elected to trade David Jiricek to the Minnesota Wild.

The two big parts of the trade were acquiring Daemon Hunt and a first-round pick. That first rounder went towards drafting their goalie of the future in Pyotr Andreyanov. A bigger discussion must be had about the other pieces in that trade.

The Blue Jackets also acquired a 2027 second rounder and a 2026 third rounder in that trade with the Wild. Both of those picks have been used in other trades by Waddell. They helped the team land both Marchment and Garland.

If the Blue Jackets are able to extend Marchment, it will make a great situation look even better. This is Asset Management 101 by Waddell turning assets into players when the right situation becomes available.

Remember how upset many fans were when Jiricek was traded. That move allowed the Blue Jackets the opportunity to make these two moves to help in their playoff chase this season.

The Blue Jackets got better at this trade deadline and didn't have to part with any first-round picks or top prospects. Regardless of how 2025-26 finishes out, the team is setup well for the future.

Same Approach With Pending UFAs

Ivan Provorov was kept at the 2025 Trade Deadline by the Blue Jackets as an own rental. Then before the start of free agency, the team signed him to a new deal that would keep him in Columbus long term.

Flash forward to this season. It'll be the same situation only this time, more players will be involved.

Marchment along with Boone Jenner, Charlie Coyle and Erik Gudbranson all need new contracts. Waddell spoke to all of them during the break and made one thing clear. He said that nothing would be done on those new contracts until the offseason. He offered his reasoning behind it.

"What you ask for in March, it might be different in June," Waddell said. "As I thought about it, I thought it would hurt the locker room if I signed one and not the rest or signed two and not the other. So I just decided none of them were close. Let's just put it off, call all the agents and say 'We'll talk at the end of

the year. Not going to talk during the year, (talk) when the season is over. Did it last year and I've done it for years. If a player wants to be here and we want him here, we'll find a way."

The Blue Jackets are solely focused on the rest of this season before handling any other business decisions. There is precedence that players will re-sign with the team if there is mutual interest. This way, guys know where they stand without having to worry about when the next meeting could happen.

During this run of good play, anything to keep the locker room in a good place is a top priority. Because of the way Waddell decided to handle this, he's ensured a consistent approach which should sit well with the players in that situation.

ABC7 / NHL Awards Watch: Who's leading for Hart, Norris, Calder?

By Greg Wyshynski - March 9, 2026

The NHL trade deadline has passed, and the sprint to the 2026 Stanley Cup playoffs has arrived.

Where teams finish in the standings can impact how voters select their NHL Award winners. As we see in this month's NHL Awards Watch, that's especially true for a young superstar with the San Jose Sharks.

Welcome to the NHL Awards Watch for March. We've polled a wide selection of Professional Hockey Writers Association voters anonymously to get a sense of who has the edge among the current leaders. We've made sure it's a cross-section from the entire league, trying to gain as many perspectives as possible.

Keep in mind that the PHWA votes for the Hart, Norris, Calder, Selke and Lady Byng finalists, broadcasters vote for the Jack Adams and general managers vote for the Vezina.

All stats are from Hockey-Reference.com, Natural Stat Trick and Evolving Hockey.

Hart Trophy (MVP)

Leader: Nathan MacKinnon, Colorado Avalanche

Finalists: Macklin Celebrini, San Jose Sharks; Nikita Kucherov, Tampa Bay Lightning/Connor McDavid, Edmonton Oilers (tie)

MacKinnon has led the Hart Trophy race for four straight months, and rightfully so. The Avalanche have led the league in points since October, and MacKinnon has been the engine behind that success.

MacKinnon has 104 points in 61 games, including an NHL-best 43 goals. He leads Brock Nelson by 13 goals and tops teammate Martin Necas by 28 points. MacKinnon's career high in goals is 51, and the Avalanche record is Mikko Rantanen's 55 goals in 2022-23. If we include the Quebec Nordiques -- and we might as well because the Avs sometimes dress like them -- then MacKinnon is potentially within reach of Michel Goulet's 1982-83 record of 57 goals.

MacKinnon received the most first-place votes and 47% of the total first-place votes.

"Nathan MacKinnon remains the front-runner for me. Leads the league in even-strength points and has a plus-55 rating," one voter said.

"He's the clear MVP for me with 20 or so games remaining," another MacKinnon voter said. "I hope he doesn't get dinged for the fact that his organization outthinks and out-operates everybody else."

MacKinnon is seeking his second Hart after winning in 2023-24. Kucherov is also looking for his second MVP win, having last won in 2018-19.

Despite a recent push by the Buffalo Sabres, the Lightning have been leading the Atlantic Division for a good stretch of the season. Though some credit should go to goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy, the majority of it goes to Kucherov, who is having another dominant campaign.

Kucherov is third in the league points (103), second in assists (69) and first in points-per-game average (1.78). He was 36 points ahead of the Lightning's second-leading scorer, Jake Guentzel.

Kucherov was tied with McDavid for the third-most first-place votes.

Once again, McDavid has lifted the Oilers on his shoulders. Through 64 games, McDavid has an NHL-leading 108 points, including 35 goals, which was third behind MacKinnon and Cole Caufield. McDavid was second in the voting in January but has been outside the top 3 in consecutive months. But he's still collecting votes, while seeking his third Hart Trophy win, having last won regular-season MVP honors in 2022-23.

A solid case can be made for either of these veterans. And then there's the new superstar in town who finished with the second-most first-place votes behind MacKinnon.

Celebrini, who has played in 61 games, has 89 points, good for fifth in the NHL and well ahead of the Sharks' next-highest scorer: Celebrini led Will Smith by 45 points on San Jose. Celebrini's 32 goals were 13 more than Smith's as well -- although Smith has played just 48 games because of injury. Comparisons to Sidney Crosby will only intensify if Celebrini also wins league MVP in his second season, as Crosby did in 2006-07.

Celebrini is easily the most fascinating MVP candidate this season. He's 19 years old and was one of the best players for Team Canada in the 2026 Olympics. While the Avalanche and Lightning are playoff mainstays, Celebrini is trying to drag the Sharks out of a rebuild and into their first postseason appearance since 2019.

"You could fit an eyelash between each of them in this race. Still giving the 'No. 1-A' nod to MacKinnon because he hasn't declined in any fashion," one voter said. "Celebrini and Kucherov have just been outstanding, too, and in terms of most valuable to their team ... it's tight."

"MacKinnon has been incredible, as usual. With Celebrini and Kucherov, my thought process is, 'How different would their team be if their top player were out?'" said one voter, who had these players in the top three of their ballots. "The Sharks wouldn't be sniffing the playoffs without Celebrini. Kucherov has over 30 more points than his closest teammate."

Entering Sunday, the Sharks had a 36.5% chance of making the cut in the Western Conference, per Money Puck. The playoff race is the key to Celebrini's candidacy. At least, that's the sense we get from our voters.

"It's Celebrini if the Sharks somehow rally," one Kucherov voter said.

"If the Sharks get in, I'd consider Celebrini," one MacKinnon voter said.

"If the Sharks squeak into the postseason -- a reasonable notion given the wan state of this season's Pacific Division -- it will be because of the sophomore who has more than twice as many points as anyone else on his squad," one of the Celebrini voters said.

At least one voter doesn't agree on the playoff criteria for the Hart.

"I don't buy the notion that you have to make the playoffs to win this award," the voter said. "If your team narrowly misses but would be a lottery team without you -- like San Jose -- you provide more value than a team who would still be good without a singular player."

Finally, earning his first MVP vote in this season's awards watch is New York Islanders rookie defenseman Matthew Schaefer, who is second in points (46) on his team.

"It's time for Matthew Schaefer to get Hart buzz. There's no player in the NHL more 'valuable' to his team," the Schaefer voter said.

Another player to receive support down the ballot was Zach Werenski of the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Norris Trophy (top defenseman)

Leader: Cale Makar, Colorado Avalanche/Zach Werenski, Columbus Blue Jackets (tie)

Finalists: Quinn Hughes, Minnesota Wild

The Norris race has been fun this season. Not because any of these finalists are unexpected -- they were the official finalists for the Norris last season, with Makar winning and Werenski placing second -- but in how Werenski has steadily chipped away at Makar's once-substantial vote lead to turn the Norris into a two-defensemen race with just over a month left in the season.

In fact, it's a dead heat: Makar and Werenski finished with 41% of the first-place votes, tied for the Norris lead.

Makar had 66 points in his first 61 games, skating to a plus-33 in 25:03 of average ice time. That 1.08 points-per-game average would be a badge of honor for 99% of the NHL's defensemen, but it's slightly down by Makar's standards. But he has excelled beyond his usual offensive dominance: The Avalanche have a 67% goals-for percentage when Makar is on the ice at five-on-five, averaging 3.77 goals and just 1.86 goals against per 60 minutes.

"My ballot is on its way to being a repeat of last year," one Makar voter said.

"It's Makar up top, no question. After that, I could argue for probably close to seven or eight guys," another Makar voter said.

Werenski, who has played in 55 games, has 65 points, which led all scorers on the Blue Jackets and was 11 points clear of second-leading scorer Kirill Marchenko entering Sunday's action. That includes 20 goals, which was second on the Jackets.

Werenski is second in the NHL in average ice time (26:27) and plays in all situations. His underlying numbers don't pop like those of Makar, but are outstanding relative to his teammates. Werenski earned some spotlight in Team USA's gold medal victory in the Olympics, and will continue to do the same in the NHL if the Blue Jackets keep up their playoff push.

"Makar's play has dropped of late. Werenski is going to find himself in the Hart conversation if Columbus makes the playoffs," one voter said. "He's been incredible, all year."

Makar received 55% of the vote last month, and his lead has declined for three straight Awards Watch installments. If his recent play has opened the door for Werenski a little, it's the Columbus defenseman who has knocked it down and made this a dead heat.

"He's doing more with less around him versus Makar," one Werenski voter said.

But Werenski still needs to make his case over the defenseman many consider a generational talent.

"Zach Werenski might've picked the wrong era to win one of these," one voter said.

Hughes was the clear third choice among our voters. He leads the NHL with 27:44 in average ice time per game, and has 63 points in 58 games this season with the Wild and the Vancouver Canucks. In 32 games with the Wild, Hughes has 36 assists and 40 points -- 17 of them on the power play.

"Cale Makar would still sit in the No. 1 spot for me, but it's a narrow gap between him, Quinn Hughes and Moritz Seider filling out my top three," one Makar voter said.

Seider was the only other defenseman to receive a first-place Norris vote, but was mentioned frequently down the ballot.

Even with the two clear favorites, there's still time for the Norris race to take a few more turns.

"It's close. Zach Werenski is right there behind him. And ... have we all been sleeping on Evan Bouchard?" one voter asked.

Edmonton Oilers fans would certainly say so. Through 63 games, Bouchard led all defensemen with 72 points, including 45 on even strength. He plays in all situations and has skated to a plus-13 this season.

"Evan Bouchard can also still get into the mix with 25% of the season remaining," one Makar voter said.

Bouchard's problem is convincing voters that his frequently maligned defensive game has improved enough for Norris consideration.

"Evan Bouchard doesn't defend well enough to leapfrog either Cale Makar or Zach Werenski," one voter said.

Other defensemen mentioned down the ballot: Lane Hutson of the Montreal Canadiens and Matthew Schaefer of the New York Islanders.

Calder Trophy (top rookie)

Leader: Matthew Schaefer, New York Islanders

Finalists: Ivan Demidov, Montreal Canadiens; Beckett Sennecke, Anaheim Ducks

No hipster picks. No contrarianism. Just the acceptance that Schaefer is the best rookie in the NHL this season, from his play on the ice to the vibe-shift he provided the Islanders.

For the second straight month, Schaefer was the unanimous choice from our panel, earning every first-place vote. He had 46 points through 64 games, skating to a plus-12. No rookie has skated more on average (24:16) and no rookie had more power-play goals (seven) or points (15) than Schaefer. He's 23 points clear of the next-highest rookie scorer, Alexander Nikishin of the Carolina Hurricanes. As mentioned earlier, he's second on the Islanders in goal and points.

All of this at 18 years old, after playing 17 games for the OHL Erie Otters last season.

"Engrave the plaque. Write the release," one voter declared.

"He has 20 goals from the back and logs over 24 minutes a night, and has singlehandedly made the Islanders watchable," another quipped.

"Schaefer is past the Calder conversation and is now in the Norris conversation," another beamed.

"Remember how Matthew Schaefer wasn't guaranteed a roster spot with the Islanders ahead of this season? Feels like a remarkably silly notion now," another voter recalled.

This must be a bummer for Demidov and Sennecke, who are both having terrific rookie seasons but ultimately battling for the silver to Schaefer's gold. (Would it have been Canada's gold in Milan if Schaefer had been on the team? We'll never know...)

Sennecke led all rookies with 51 points and was tied with Schaefer with 20 goals entering Sunday's action. He has been a key factor in the Ducks' surge of the standings this season.

"Sennecke is going to finish with 25 goals and almost 40 assists in his first NHL season and it won't matter a lick in light of how Schaefer has dragged his club into legit playoff contention as an 18-year-old defender," one voter detailed.

Demidov was the odds-on favorite to win the Calder before the season. He hasn't disappointed with 13 goals and 35 points (48 points) in 62 games for the Canadiens, with 14 points on the power play. He just hasn't been Schaefer. Then again, no one has outside of Schaefer.

"Schaefer still has some company in Sennecke and Demidov," one voter claimed.

"Schaefer is going to win this and should win this, perhaps unanimously. I'd have Beckett Sennecke in the No. 2 followed by Ivan Demidov," another revealed.

Other rookies who received support down the ballot included Ben Kindel of the Pittsburgh Penguins; Ryan Leonard and Justin Sourdif of the Washington Capitals; Fraser Minten of the Boston Bruins; and Jesper Wallstedt of the Minnesota Wild.

Vezina Trophy (top goaltender)

Note: The NHL's general managers vote for this award.

Leader: Andrei Vasilevskiy, Tampa Bay Lightning

Finalists: Ilya Sorokin, New York Islanders; Logan Thompson, Washington Capitals

While Kucherov is understandably getting the MVP love for the Lightning this season, none of their success would be possible without Vasilevskiy. He's 29-10-3 in 42 games and fifth in the NHL in goals saved above expected per Money Puck (17.8). He returned to form last season but finished second to Connor Hellebuyck in the Vezina voting.

"Tampa probably shouldn't be as good as they are," one voter proposed. "Vasilevskiy is like human duct tape. Somehow, he just gets the job done."

"Andrei Vasilevskiy has looked back to Vezina form all season. He also gets bonus points for the goalie fight that helped get his team going," another declared, referring to Vasilevskiy's scrap with Bruins goalie Jeremy Swayman during the Lightning's 6-5 Stadium Series victory on Feb. 1.

Vasilevskiy earned 53% of the first-place votes, and Sorokin was right behind him. The Islanders goalie leads the NHL in goals saved above expected per Money Puck (28.1). He's 23-14-2 with a .914 save percentage and a 2.50 goals-against average. He was second to Vasilevskiy among our panelists last month.

Thompson dropped out of the Vezina top three last month, but his success this season has been undeniable, with 21 wins, a .913 save percentage and a 2.41 GAA. He's second to Vasilevskiy in goals

saved above expected (24.4). Thompson, who was on the Team Canada roster at the Winter Olympics, was fourth for the Vezina last season.

Thompson was the only other goalie to earn a first-place vote, but there was a ton of support down the ballot for several goalies.

One of them was the Bruins' Swayman, who is third in goals saved above expected (20.5). "Swayman is not getting nearly enough love or attention for the season he's having. He's a major reason they are in the playoff hunt," one Sorokin voter argued.

Carolina Hurricanes sensation Brandon Bussi, Igor Shesterkin of the New York Rangers and Karel Vejmelka of the Utah Mammoth also received some attention from the voters.

Selke Trophy (best defensive forward)

Leader: Nick Suzuki, Montreal Canadiens

Finalists: Nathan MacKinnon, Colorado Avalanche; Jordan Staal, Carolina Hurricanes

Sometimes it's just a player's "turn" to win an award. The buzz starts in the preseason, and if the player doesn't fumble the bag, he can remain the consensus choice.

Suzuki has done nothing to dissuade the voters who have backed him all season. This is the fourth straight month in which Suzuki has led the Selke race, this time with 59% of the first-place votes, up from 53% last month. Montreal averages 2.12 goals against per 60 minutes with him on the ice. Suzuki has never been a Selke finalist, and his previous highest finish was 13th for the award. That'll change this season.

"He keeps improving," one voter stated.

"Not a clear-cut front-runner for me with this award, but if I had to vote today, it would be for him," another suggested.

Staal is another player waiting for his turn. The 20-year veteran has been considered one of the best defensive forwards in the NHL for over a decade, but has been a Selke finalist only twice, the last time in 2023-24. He's a faceoff ace (55.3%) and the Hurricanes average 2.39 goals against per 60 minutes when he's on the ice.

Staal and MacKinnon tied with 12% of the Selke first-place votes. The Colorado star and MVP favorite has never been lauded for his defensive prowess -- his highest Selke finish was 22nd in the voting -- but he has an intriguing case this season if you believe the best defense is a good offense. The Avs get 57.6% of the shot attempts with him on the ice. They average 4.87 goals per 60 minutes and 1.56 goals against per 60 minutes when he's on the ice for an astonishing 75.7% goals-for percentage. They earn 60% of the scoring chances when he's on the ice.

"He has the second-lowest GA/60 of every forward in the NHL while averaging the fourth-most minutes. He also plays the seventh-most minutes against elite competition," one MacKinnon voter explained.

The knock on MacKinnon would be that he doesn't kill penalties as Staal does (2:12 of shorthanded ice time per game) or as Suzuki does (albeit at just 50 seconds per game).

This being the Selke Trophy voting, there's always a cast of thousands getting support from the voters. Other players receiving first-place votes were Vegas Golden Knights center Jack Eichel, Avalanche center Brock Nelson and Detroit Red Wings center Dylan Larkin.

"I'm convinced that when you look at which of the NHL's most trusted defensive forwards have also been the highest-level top of the lineup players, it's Dylan Larkin and then it's everybody else," one voter opined. "I think he's the clear front-runner, but I doubt that's a commonly held opinion."

Other players receiving support down the ballot were Minnesota Wild center Joel Eriksson Ek, Dallas Stars winger Jason Robertson and Tampa Bay Lightning center Anthony Cirelli.

Dropping out as finalists and not receiving a first-place vote this month were Dallas Stars center Roope Hintz and Florida Panthers center Sam Reinhart.

Lady Byng Trophy (gentlemanly play)

This is the part where I mention that the Lady Byng Trophy for gentlemanly play should be voted on by the league's on-ice officials or by the NHL Players' Association instead of the PHWA. Traditionally, this award goes to a player with a top-20 point total and the lowest penalty minutes among those players.

Jack Eichel has 70 points in 55 games with just 10 penalty minutes, but a case could be made for Nick Suzuki, who has 74 points in 62 games and just 14 penalty minutes. If a defenseman strikes your fancy, how about Zach Werenski, who has 65 points in 55 games (averaging 26:27 in ice time) with only 12 penalty minutes?

Jack Adams Award (best coach)

Note: The NHL Broadcasters' Association votes on this award.

Leader: Jon Cooper, Tampa Bay Lightning

Finalists: Jared Bednar, Colorado Avalanche; Lindy Ruff, Buffalo Sabres

Is this the most fascinating race of the NHL Awards season?

The current finalists are all battling against their own flavors of history. Cooper, who led ballots with 53% of the first-place votes, has never won the Jack Adams despite two Stanley Cup wins and four conference titles. This season, he has guided the Lightning to near the top of the Atlantic Division despite a season filled with injuries to key players.

"It's his Martin Scorsese year," one voter quipped, in a nod to the director's inevitable 2006 win for "The Departed" after decades of snubs.

"Jon Cooper has continued to guide his team through nonstop injuries up and down the lineup. His ability to motivate different personalities is an art," another voter noted.

"It has to be Jon Cooper," another voter declared.

Unless it "has to be" Lindy Ruff, who earned 28% of the first-place votes as the coach who has the Sabres primed to break the NHL's longest playoff drought. The last time Buffalo made the postseason was 2011 under head coach ... Lindy Ruff? Well there's some delightful symmetry.

"Listen, Jon Cooper deserves this one, too. But for Ruff to have taken Buffalo from where they were to where they are is pretty special," one voter beamed. "Cooper has done tremendous work in Tampa, too, but Ruff's been through the wringer."

"Thrilled for Buffalo and the job that Ruff is doing. Everything is finally coming together and he deserves recognition," another voter argued.

"The mythical fresh GM bump is a pile of nonsense. The Sabres are a league-leading 28-5-2 since Dec. 9 in good part because of the guy calling the shots from behind the bench," another voter explained.

Ruff previously won the Jack Adams in 2005-06, the season when the Sabres lost in Game 7 of the conference finals to eventual Stanley Cup winner Carolina.

Bednar earned around 11% of the first-place votes and is pushing back against another kind of history. The Avalanche are expected to win the President's Trophy for having the league's best record. Only three coaches since 2005-06 have won the Jack Adams for having led a team to the President's Trophy.

"Jared Bednar is still a great candidate but seems to be coaching an all-star team while Cooper has dealt with a ton of injuries to key cogs," one voter opined.

Voters are more compelled by rags-to-riches than riches-to-more-riches stories -- another reason why Ruff's ascendance here can't be ignored.

"Lindy Ruff deserves to be in the conversation more! What's happening in Buffalo needs to be studied," one voter proposed.

Other coaches receiving first-place votes were Lane Lambert of the Seattle Kraken, who was a finalist in last month's Awards Watch; and Andre Tourigny of the Utah Mammoth.

Among the coaches mentioned down the ballot were Dan Muse of the Pittsburgh Penguins and Ryan Warsofsky of the San Jose Sharks.