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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets down Edmonton Oilers in 6-1 blowout: 3 takeaways

By Brian Hedger – October 31, 2024

This is becoming a trend.

After each of the Blue Jackets' three losses, they've responded with impressive victories the next game while scoring six goals to prevent a second straight loss. The Edmonton Oilers were latest overwhelmed by a Columbus rebound Monday at Nationwide Arena, leaving town after a 6-1 shellacking by the Blue Jackets with an injury to captain Connor McDavid and the sound of cannon blasts still in their ears.

The Blue Jackets (4-3-1) scored three goals in the first period, again, just like they did a week ago in a 6-2 rout of the Toronto Maple Leafs. That one was a rebound effort following a humbling 3-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild. This one was a strong response to the Jackets' 4-3 overtime loss Saturday in Nashville, which they fumbled away with sloppy play.

Columbus Blue Jackets center Cole Sillinger (4) races to the puck between Edmonton Oilers right wing Connor Brown (28) and Edmonton Oilers center Jeff Skinner (53) during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024. The Blue Jackets won 6-1.

As a result, they're impressing early in the season while still missing four injured regulars, including Boone Jenner and Kent Johnson.

"You want to play with the lead, but what I liked tonight was that we stayed on the hunt," forward Cole Sillinger said. "We were on the Jackets' side (of the puck). We weren't cheating for extra goals or anything like that. It's clichè, but we played the right way most of the night and it showed. We got rewarded."

Here are three takeaways from another fun night for Blue Jackets fans:

Teammates celebrate a goal by Columbus Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan (23) during the first period of the NHL hockey game against the Edmonton Oilers at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024.

It's raining goals for the Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets have scored six goals in their four wins, which appears to be their key to victory.

That's six goals in each win, not total, in case you're wondering. That won't last all season, but it's a noteworthy accomplishment, especially this early. They've already scored six goals in half of their games, totaling 33 goals for a blistering 4.1 goals per game average. That's a franchise high for goals through the first eight games of a season, which might shock the rest of the NHL if anybody outside of Columbus ever paid attention to them.

Columbus Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli (19) and defenseman Zach Werenski (8) celebrate a goal by center Cole Sillinger (4) during the first period of the NHL hockey game against the Edmonton Oilers at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024.

Edmonton was the fifth of the Jackets' eight opponents to conclude a back-to-back set that started with a game just 24 hours earlier, but that isn't the only reason Columbus has lit goal lamps so much. It could also be that opposing teams are looking past the Blue Jackets, a lottery team in the past four drafts.

“I hope not,” Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said of being overlooked. “I hope that we’re playing the way that we play, the standard that we set. We’re trying to meet that every night, regardless of who we play and what their mentality is. We’re going to play hard every night, and we’ll see where we sit.”

Pyyhtia’s first NHL goal caps exciting night for Columbus Blue Jackets

Scoring goals is fun. Scoring them in bunches is even more enjoyable. Helping an unheralded, friendly Finnish rookie like Mikael Pyyhtia score his first NHL goal, however, was the perfect capper for the Blue Jackets on their latest blowout of a playoff team.

After nearly scoring on Sillinger’s goal late in the first to make it 3-0, Pyyhtia netted his first career goal for a 5-0 lead late in the third off Adam Fantilli’s fantastic feed from the left wing.

“It feels awesome,” Pyyhtia said. “First goal, you’ll remember that all your life.”

Columbus Blue Jackets left wing Mikael Pyyhtia (82) fires a shot past Edmonton Oilers defenseman Darnell Nurse (25) during the first period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024.

Sillinger got the second assist, giving him and Fantilli three points each with a goal and two assists. Both had encouraging words for Pyyhtia before the game.

“I was pumped about it,” Fantilli said. “I walked in before the game and I told him I was thinking about it all day, like, he had to get one tonight. And he was like, ‘I’m actually feeling it too.’ As soon as he tucked it in, I was pumped behind the net. I was pointing at the net, making sure someone picked (the puck) up. I’m pumped for him. You never forget your first goal.”

Columbus Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan (23) celebrates scoring a goal with right wing Kirill Marchenko (86) during the third period of the NHL hockey game against the Edmonton Oilers at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024. The Blue Jackets won 6-1.

Columbus Blue Jackets might have found their best forward setup

The Blue Jackets’ coaching staff discussed the composition of forward lines at the morning skate, and Evason eventually made a tweak.

Sillinger was flipped from left wing on the top line to the same side of Fantilli’s second line, moving Yegor Chinakhov back to the top line with Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko. The moves worked out great, reuniting a dominant top group that produced Monahan’s team-leading fourth and fifth goals while sparking the second three-point game of Fantilli’s young career.

“That (top) line’s been so good with Chinny, Monny and Marchy, so it’s to put them back together, and honestly, if you put Cole Sillinger with anybody, it’s a pretty good line,” Evason said. “We felt very comfortable that would work.”

Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Yegor Chinakhov (59) takes a shot during the first period of the NHL hockey game against the Edmonton Oilers at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024.

It did with Monahan’s line returning to its earlier effectiveness while Sillinger, Fantilli and Pyyhtia showed chemistry as the second line. Should that continue, the Blue Jackets could have two relentless “top six” lines plus two effective checking lines to round out the forwards.

“Coaches are such nerds,” Evason said. “You get in there and we’re fiddling with our (player) magnets all morning, right? We get in there, in our meeting, and you start with the lineup, and you go through a process ... and we had magnets all over the place. Then, we settled on that.”

Columbus Dispatch / Ohio boy celebrates Columbus Blue Jackets, honors Johnny Gaudreau with Halloween costume

By Nathan Hart – October 31, 2024

An 11-year-old Columbus boy's Blue Jackets penalty box costume is garnering national attention.

Blake Mompher, 11, who uses a wheelchair due to his spina bifida, is going as a mobile Columbus Blue Jackets penalty box for Halloween this year, thanks to help from his parents and community members.

His costume, which weighs around 30 pounds, is complete with plexiglass, a working door so he can get candy, a hook for his trick-or-treating bag, a Johnny Gaudreau memorial sticker, and a description of the penalty that got Blake in the box: fighting with his brother.

Blake, with the help of his parents Aric and Megan Mompher, has been transforming his wheelchair into elaborate Halloween costumes since 2017.

He's gone as a school bus, McDonald's French fries, a box of Kraft macaroni and cheese, a firetruck, a local TV meteorologist and a Zamboni. His French fry costume in 2022 earned him a year's supply of McDonald's Fries, and his mac and cheese costume got him a year's supply of noodles.

His old Halloween costumes aren't just thrown away. His father said they're kept in the family's basement as mementos.

"It's just a memory. You know, some of them are falling apart, the staples and paint's coming off, but it's memories. It's part of his childhood," his dad said.

Every year, the idea for the costume has to come from Blake, and he has the final say. He initially planned to be a Nationwide Children's Hospital ambulance this year, but that changed when he visited a Blue Jackets practice at the OhioHealth Ice Haus.

A CBJ spokesperson, Lindy Noel, suggested the penalty box idea to the family. A few weeks of work from his parents and community members later, and Blake's costume was complete.

Blake Mompher and the Columbus Blue Jackets

A large part of Blake's love for the team comes from The Columbus Blue Jackets Family Resource Center at Nationwide Children's Hospital, where he's spent "quite a bit of time" for around 40 surgeries in just 11 years of life, Aric said.

Spina bifida is a rare congenital disability where the neural tube, a narrow channel that typically develops during pregnancy and helps form the skull, brain, spinal cord, and back bones, doesn't form or close properly. The condition damages a baby's spinal cord and nerves. Around 1 in 2,875 babies in the U.S. are born with spina bifida each year, according to the CDC.

Two surgeries in 2017 landed Blake in the ICU.

His parents took turns staying with him 24 hours a day, mom during the day while dad was at work and dad at night while mom went home. When Blake couldn't sleep, Aric would take him to the Blue Jackets family resource room.

"He feels like the Blue Jackets are in his corner, and he loves ... whoever he loves, whatever he loves. He's all in. There's no path, and he's just all in," Aric said.

Blake had a kindred spirit in Johnny Gaudreau, the upbeat star forward for the Blue Jackets. Gaudreau died in August when he was struck by a suspected drunk driver while biking in New Jersey, The Dispatch previously reported.

"That's kind of what Blake loved, that (Gaudreau) was always the fun spirit, and that's exactly what Blake is in our life," his dad said. "He's just the fun spirit, always the one to recognize somebody else, or if he's having a hard time, or somebody else is to come over and rub your back or rub your neck, or just always being the one to encourage."

Blake has even managed to convert his younger brother, Chance, who is 6, into a Blue Jackets diehard.

On the morning after the Blue Jackets' recent 6-1 victory over the Edmonton Oilers, Blake recruited Chance to go into the parents' room to ask what the score was. After getting it, Chance dutifully went back to report to Blake.

Blake let out a triumphant "woo!" from the other room.

The Athletic / After nearly 20 years, Blue Jackets' John Davidson returns to the broadcast booth

By Aaron Portzline – October 31, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — John Davidson moved about the Columbus Blue Jackets' dressing room on Monday, cozying up next to players at their dressing room stalls and settling into conversations after a morning skate. The papers curled in his left hand were covered in jotted-down notes.

It was like a scene from the 1980s and 90s, when Davidson was well on his way to becoming a Hockey Hall of Fame broadcaster with the New York Rangers and on national broadcasts for various networks. The only thing missing were his famous play-by-play partners, Sam Rosen and Doc Emrick.

Davidson is now a senior advisor with the Blue Jackets, and he spends most of his time in St. Louis with his daughters and their families.

But last month, when FanDuel Sports Network analyst Jody Shelley landed a national gig with Amazon Prime's Monday night coverage, the Blue Jackets needed somebody to fill in on conflicted dates. They turned to the Hall of Famer.

"It's such a great opportunity for Shelley, and he really deserves it," Davidson said. "But they were kicking around ways to cover for him. (Club president) Mike Priest called me. I think I knew right away what I wanted to do, but I asked for a couple of days to think about it.

"I'll do whatever I can to help the Blue Jackets. And it sounded like a heck of a lot of fun, too. So here I am."

Davidson joined new Blue Jackets play-by-play voice Steve Mears for Monday's 6-1 win over the Edmonton Oilers, and he'll do at least a couple of more games this season.

He did not step into the booth as the Blue Jackets' former president of hockey operations. He did not step in as a senior advisor.

No, Davidson worked the gig like he always did, gathering insights and tidbits that he could later work into the broadcast. His gift, in addition to a comforting but authoritative voice, was always the ability to inform viewers so succinctly and effortlessly.

Keep in mind, he had a significant hand in building this Blue Jackets roster. He only stepped aside five months ago, when Don Waddell joined the Blue Jackets as the president and general manager. Davidson could have easily shown up 15 minutes before faceoff and had plenty to share.

"You have to be in there talking to guys, you just have to," Davidson said of being an analyst. "It doesn't matter how good you are, or how much you think you know. You think Cris Collinsworth doesn't work like that? I remember when Ron Darling started with the Mets and now he's doing the World Series.

"It's a great job, but you have to work and find things out and let people know what's going on. Jody's great at that, too. You can tell by his work that he really cares about it."

John Davidson did his homework, talking to players before returning to the broadcast booth. (Aaron Portzline / The Athletic)

There are only a few players in the Blue Jackets' dressing room old enough to remember Davidson's prominence as a broadcaster. Davidson stopped calling games in 2006, when he became team president

of the St. Louis Blues. Columbus defenseman Jack Johnson, 37, remembered watching him call national games and playing video games with Davidson's voice calling the action.

James van Riemsdyk, 35, grew up a Rangers fan in New Jersey. He was thoroughly excited on Monday when he learned Davidson was stepping back into the booth.

"Oh, my God," van Riemsdyk said. "I have to call my dad and tell him. He'll love that.

"That's the voice of my youth, right? I watched hundreds, maybe thousands of Rangers games growing up, and J.D. just ... he had that engaging voice, and he knew so much that you were just on the edge of your seats, hanging on every word.

"He's the voice I still here when I think about all the big moments and big games when I was a kid."

Mears, who left the Pittsburgh Penguins to join the Blue Jackets this past summer, grew up a passionate hockey fan in suburban Pittsburgh before attending Bowling Green State University. His heroes were players, sure, but also broadcasters.

Being so close to the Canadian border in Bowling Green, Ohio, he could watch Davidson's broadcasts on Fox and ESPN, but also when Davidson would join Hockey Night in Canada. He was pinching himself on Monday, both in watching Davidson work the room at the morning skate and, of course, when the broadcast started.

"Just to watch a game beside him, right? But then to hear his voice going over the airwaves with yours," Mears said. "That's a bucket-list moment.

"And, of course, he did a fabulous job. Just so good, so effortless. He was helping me throughout the game with his hand signals and gestures. It was great. I tried to let him shine and tap into his knowledge of the game and the team, and it all shone through."

The way the game played out was helpful, too. There wasn't much drama after the Blue Jackets' three-goal first period. It gave Davidson plenty of windows to step in with anecdotes and tidbits gleaned from his time at the top of the club's hockey operations and from his work in the dressing room earlier in the day.

"It's one of those games that was really fun to do," Davidson said. "I wasn't nervous at all, and Steve is a real pro, so it was good, and the team helped. It's great to see them playing like they are, with so much energy, so much drive.

"It exceeded my expectations, if I'm being honest. It flew by, that game. We were showing a hundred replays because there was so much going on."

One of the highlights for Mears, and for FanDuel Sports Network viewers of a certain age, was when Davidson reflexively let loose his signature call — "Oh, baby!" — when Adam Fantilli scored to make it 2-0 midway through the first period and when Mathieu Olivier made it 4-0 in the second.

"We got an 'Oh, baby!'" Mears said, adding his own exclamation point. "We also got a 'That's hockey, baby!' And, yeah, I have to say ... that was amazing."

Davidson chuckled when reached on Tuesday morning before he flew back to St. Louis.

"That wasn't planned," Davidson said. "It really wasn't. But it was still right back there (in my memory).

"You have to understand. This was exciting for me. It was great to be back. But also, you feel like a father up there watching the kids play such a great game like that."

Mears said he heard from broadcasters and producers all over the NHL and beyond on early Tuesday, saying how much they thrilled in hearing Davidson on the broadcast. It didn't surprise him, either.

"There was a lot of nostalgia to hear that voice again," Mears said. He's the best to ever do it, and it had been almost 20 years since he was in the booth. There's so much fondness for him and his voice. I mean, it's like comfort food for hockey fans."

"That was for Johnny, for Johnny Gaudreau."

The next game that Davidson is scheduled to work in Shelley's absence is Nov. 18 at Boston.

Until then, Davidson will settle back into the rhythm of life surrounded by family in St. Louis. Between his two daughters, Lindsay and Ashley, he has five grandchildren under the age of 5.

He's not completely retired — he still checks in with the club almost daily, and he still represents the club on the NHL's board of governors — but his day-to-day schedule, at least professionally, isn't nearly as busy.

"Whatever the Blue Jackets need me to do, I'm happy to do it," Davidson said. "I'm not in the (president's) chair anymore, so I don't want to be in the way. But I'm in touch with the organization all the time.

"My days now? I'm watching my grandkids play a lot of hockey and a lot of soccer, and I'm loving it."

[BlueJackets.com / PREVIEW: Blue Jackets host Islanders on Hockey Halloween](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – October 31, 2024

Are the Blue Jackets catching teams by surprise?

It's a fair question to ask after Monday night's 6-1 drubbing of reigning Western Conference champion Edmonton. The Blue Jackets played with pace, took advantage of their opportunities and pulled away from the Oilers in a relatively stress-free victory.

The hard work and aggressive forecheck are the staples of CBJ hockey that head coach Dean Evason is trying to implement after four straight seasons without playoff games in Columbus, and his reaction is that if teams are surprised by the Jackets' style of play, they shouldn't be.

"I hope not," he said when asked the question after the Oilers game. "I hope that we're playing the way that we play. The standard that we've set, we're trying to meet that every night regardless of who we play and what their mentality is. We're going to play hard every night, and we'll see where we sit. We've talked to the group about that from day one, that we're going to play hard and that teams are going to have to match our work ethic."

If there was a strategic part of the win over Edmonton that Evason was particularly happy with, it was how the Blue Jackets played with a lead. In his mind, the Blue Jackets got sloppy with the puck after taking a 2-0 advantage Saturday in Nashville, and they paid for it as the Predators came back to post an overtime victory.

On Monday night, the Blue Jackets were much smarter with the puck after taking a 3-0 first-period lead and never let the Oilers back into the game.

"We were really happy with the start, and then even more happy when we got up the three goals after the first period," Evason said. "We went in and talked to the group about (how) the game puts you back in the same spot. We're 2-0 up in Nashville and we're turning pucks over and maybe think we're gonna just score a lot of points, and the important part is the two points.

"We played the proper way (Monday) and were able to score some more goals, but we didn't turn the puck over as much."

They'll have to play another full 60 against an Islanders team already looking for points, but Cole Sillinger sounded like his coach in the locker room after the win over the Oilers. If the Blue Jackets are catching people by surprise, so be it.

"You're going to have to ask the other 31 teams that," Sillinger said. "But you know what? What we want to make sure when teams are playing the Blue Jackets, it's not going to be easy. We're going to be in your face, we're going to be playing fast, we're going to be tenacious, we're going to be relentless, and we're going to execute."

Know The Foe: New York Islanders

Head coach: Patrick Roy (Second season)

Team stats: Goals per game: 2.33 (29th) | Scoring defense: 3.00 (9th) | PP: 13.3 percent (29th) | PK: 62.5 percent (31st)

The narrative: Lou Lamoriello has built a team that has made the Stanley Cup Playoffs five of the last six seasons, but after back-to-back runs to the NHL's final four in 2020 and '21, the Isles have lost in the first

round each of the past two seasons. Getting over the hump has proven difficult, as the Islanders just haven't had the firepower to match up with some of the top teams in the league. It's been a bit of the slow start, with the team sitting 3-4-2 after last night's 3-1 loss vs. Anaheim on Long Island.

Team leaders: Scoring is up across the NHL but the Isles haven't reaped the benefits yet. Kyle Palmieri and longtime Blue Jackets killer Brock Nelson are tied for the team lead with four goals, with Palmieri's seven points atop the chart and Nelson right behind with six. Coming off a 70-point season that showed he's one of the top offensive defensemen in the NHL, Noah Dobson has six assists, while new winger Maxim Tsyplov has a goal and four assists. Mat Barzal (2-3-5) and Bo Horvat (3-2-5) are also among those with five points.

Veteran Semyon Varlamov is set to get the start against the Blue Jackets between the pipes, and the 36-year-old is 1-2-1 with a 3.72 GAA and .854 save percentage.

What's new: It's the Islanders, so as usual, not much. They've built a core that has been together for a while, though Tsyplov has been a nice addition after scoring 31 goals in the KHL a season ago. Of the team's top 10 scorers so far this season, he's the only one who wasn't with the Isles last year.

Trending: The Islanders swept the three-game season series a year ago and have generally had the better of things the past six seasons, as Columbus is just 4-12-2 since in 2018-19.

Former CBJ: Anthony Duclair notched two goals and an assist in the five games but went on long-term injured reserve recently with a lower body injury, while Liam Foudy played two games with the team earlier this year before being returned to the AHL.

Projected Lineup (Subject to change)

LW 59 Yegor Chinakhov	C 23 Sean Monahan	RW 86 Kirill Marchenko
LW 4 Cole Sillinger	C 19 Adam Fantilli	RW 82 Mikael Pyhtia
LW 27 Zach Aston-Reese	C 17 Justin Danforth	RW 24 Mathieu Olivier
LW 21 James van Riemsdyk	C 7 Sean Kuraly	RW 62 Kevin Labanc
LD 8 Zach Werenski	RD 9 Ivan Provorov	G 90 Elvis Merzlikins (starter)
LD 2 Jake Christiansen	RD 78 Damon Severson	G 40 Daniil Tarasov
LD 3 Jack Johnson	RD 22 Jordan Harris	

Scratches: Kent Johnson (upper body), David Jiricek

Injured reserve, Injured/Non-Roster list: Erik Gudbranson (upper body), Boone Jenner (upper body), Dmitri Voronkov (upper body), Gavin Brindley (finger)

Roster Report: The Blue Jackets won't make any changes to the lineup after Monday's win, with Merzlikins getting the start after his near shutout vs. the Oilers.

The Numbers Game

Thirteen different Blue Jackets have a goal and 20 have points on the season. ... Columbus has scored six goals in back-to-back home games for the second time in franchise history. They have also reached the

six-goal mark in four of eight games. ... The Blue Jackets' 33 goals through eight games are a franchise record, and the team has scored in 19 of 24 regulation periods this season. ... Kirill Marchenko has a 4-7-11 line in the last seven games. ... Mathieu Olivier has a 4-2-6 line in the last five games, while Zach Werenski has a 1-5-6 line in that span. ... CBJ forward Mikael Pyyhtia scored his first career NHL goal Monday in his 27th game. ... Columbus has rotated wins and losses in eight straight games to start the campaign, marking the longest stretch to begin a season in club history. ... Sean Monahan is two assists away from 300 in his NHL career and three goals from 250, while Damon Severson is five points away from 300.

This Day in CBJ History

Oct. 30, 2003: The Blue Jackets make a trade, sending defenseman Zenith Komarniski to Vancouver for center Sean Pronger.

Oct. 30, 2017: Artemi Panarin scores the deciding goal in a shootout as the Blue Jackets earn a 4-3 win against Boston in Nationwide Arena.

[BlueJackets.com / Merzlikins makes 26 saves in shutout win against Islanders](#)

By Craig Merz – October 31, 2024

COLUMBUS -- Elvis Merzlikins made 26 saves for the Columbus Blue Jackets in a 2-0 win against the New York Islanders at Nationwide Arena on Wednesday.

It was the second straight strong outing for Merzlikins; he came within 27 seconds of his 11th NHL shutout on Monday before the Edmonton Oilers scored a power-play goal in a 6-1 win.

"It feels really good to win the game right now," he said. "We just have to keep working as hard as we are working now. Just take it game-by-game, step-by-step, and move forward.

"It's obviously a nice feeling to get the shutout. It's definitely not just me. It's the team. They are helping me a lot. They're really working hard for this. This is our shutout. It could be two in a row."

Damon Severson and Justin Danforth scored for the Blue Jackets (5-3-1), who are 3-0-1 in the past four games.

Semyon Varlamov made 24 saves for the Islanders (3-5-2), who have lost four of five (1-4-0), including 3-1 to the Anaheim Ducks on Tuesday.

"We deserve to be disappointed because we played a really good game," Islanders coach Patrick Roy said. "Back-to-back games like this, coming up with that kind of game. I thought we deserved better than that.

"I know how hard our guys are working. We're going to the net, bringing pucks to the net. The bounces just aren't going our way. There were great chances but we just couldn't finish. The guys know that."

Severson gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead at 5:43 of the third period when his wrist shot from a tight angle below the right circle deflected in off the skate of Islanders defenseman Ryan Pullock.

"I just got lucky, hitting the D-man's skate," Severson said. "We grinded our way through that one. We had chances, they had chances. It was kind of back and forth there. Both goalies played solid. It was nice to get that one late there."

Islanders forward Bo Horvat said the game is one to learn from.

"You can call it puck luck all you want or unfortunate bounce, but at the end of the day, it's the difference every night. It's on us in here to get it done, including myself," he said. "I've had so many opportunities to score and it hasn't gone in. It's up to me to fight through that and bury my opportunities."

Danforth scored an empty-net goal at 17:57 for the 2-0 final.

"It's nice to have that heat at the end and the guys come through," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "Elvis was terrific all night, made some key saves. We did a lot of right things at the end to hold a one-and-two-goal lead."

The Islanders were shut out for the fourth time this season.

"It's definitely not our goaltending," Horvat said. "It's definitely not their fault. It's on us. We've got to score goals at the end of the day."

NOTES: Adam Fantilli, Mathieu Olivier and Kirill Marchenko of the Blue Jackets each had his three-game point streak end. ... Islanders defenseman Alexander Romanov missed his third straight game due to an upper-body injury.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Merzlikins leads the way in shutout victory](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – October 31, 2024

BLUE JACKETS 2, ISLANDERS 0

1. Elvis Merzlikins has been scary good the past two games.

We'll go with the Halloween theme in this piece, and Merzlikins certainly deserves praise for his past two games. After coming less than 30 seconds from a shutout in Monday's 6-1 win over Edmonton, the netminder was able to finish it off against the Islanders, stopping all 28 shots on goal he saw.

The saves down the stretch in this one were much more consequential considering the Blue Jackets didn't have any margin for error until Justin Danforth's empty-net goal with 2:03 to go, and Merzlikins stopped everything that came at him.

It was his 11th career shutout, breaking a tie with Pascal Leclaire for fourth in CBJ history.

"It's obviously a nice feeling, the shutout," he said. "It's definitely not just me, it's the team. They helped me a lot. They really worked hard for this, so this is our shutout."

Merzlikins then paused and smiled.

"Could be two in a row," he said.

Even with the late goal ceded to the Oilers, Merzlikins has stopped 57 of 58 shots in the last two games. More than that, he's looked the part in net, staying square to shooters, playing without any wasted movements, tracking pucks well and saving the acrobatics for when they're truly necessary.

Add in a defense that's much more sound than past years – Merzlikins was aided by a defense that blocked shots, cleared the front of the net and limited grade-A opportunities – and it's a winning formula.

"The last few games, he's been unbelievable, making plays, stopping pucks, making it easy on us," defenseman Ivan Provorov said of Merzlikins. "Obviously when a goaltender is playing like that, it gives your team a lot of confidence. Any time you don't let the other team score, it's a big accomplishment for a goalie and a big accomplishment for the team. It proves that doing the right things defensively pays off."

2. The Blue Jackets had to wear a different costume tonight.

In all four of the team's wins before this, the Blue Jackets scored six goals in each game.

But playing against an Islanders team known for trying to grind the game down and play staunch defensive hockey, Columbus had to put on a much different outfit.

The Isles have made the playoffs five of the last six seasons playing that style of hockey, so it's clear it works. As a result, the Jackets went into the game knowing there would be no free passes through the neutral zone and to the net like there were in home wins against Toronto and Edmonton.

They were going to have to stay patient and play their own defensive hockey, and they did just that.

"They've been playing like that for the last five or six years, I think, so obviously you know what to expect," Provorov said. "I think everybody did a great job of battling and playing the right way. Obviously, you have to find a way to win different ways, whether it's a 1-0 game or a 6-4 game, 5-4,

whatever it is. You have to adjust your game as a team but at the same time also play the right way and the same way.”

In the end, Columbus blocked 19 shots and did a good job of clearing things in front of Merzlikins defensively. They also have become a mature enough team to know they had to play a certain way, and in the end the reward was two points.

“What was exciting for us on the bench, and we went in after the second period and stated exactly that, is that the players were saying, ‘It’s a boring game. Just stick with it. We’re not opening anything up,’” head coach Dean Evason said. “We’re not playing defensively, but we’re playing stingy, the same as they were. We just wanted to continue and go about our business.

“The exciting part again for the coaches is the players were saying that prior to us saying it, so that’s a real good sign.”

3. Damon Severson’s winning goal was perhaps a trick and certainly a treat.

Islanders goalie Semyon Varlamov entered the game with a career .937 save percentage against the Blue Jackets, so you knew it was gonna be tough to beat him. And in a game that went more than 45 minutes without a goal, you also knew the game winner might not be a highlight-reel tally that ends up leading SportsCenter.

And that’s exactly how it played out, as Severson threw a puck to the front of the net early in the third period hoping James van Riemsdyk could do something with it. Instead, the puck caromed off the skate of Islanders defenseman Ryan Pulock and deflected past Varlamov, giving the Jackets what would be the winning tally 5:43 into the frame.

“Some nights, the puck is not gonna bounce (your way),” Evason said. “Tonight, we got a bounce.”

It was perhaps poetic, though, that the goal developed in that fashion. In the first period, Severson thought he had started the scoring when his shot from the right point got through traffic and beat Varlamov. But the referees waived off the goal, saying van Riemsdyk had interfered with the goalie, and the Blue Jackets opted not to challenge what Evason described as a “50/50” call.

Two periods later, it was again Severson throwing the puck on net with van Riemsdyk in front, and this time things worked out for the Blue Jackets for the defenseman’s second goal of the year.

“I saw JVR in front just battling with a guy, and he was out of the paint that time,” Severon said with a laugh. “I figured there would be a better opportunity for him to score. I just got lucky hitting the D-man’s skate and going in.”

The Hockey News / Columbus Blue Jackets (9 pts) vs. New York Islanders (8 pts) Game Preview

By Jason Newland – October 31, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets and New York Islanders square off tonight at Nationwide Arena for the Jackets' first Metro Division game of the season.

The Jackets come into this game after ripping the Edmonton Oilers on Monday night 6-1. Meanwhile, the Islanders have lost their last two, including last night against the Anaheim Ducks.

The Islanders will get a CBJ team who seem to be able to score at will lately. The Jackets are currently tied for 11th in goals scored with 33. The Islanders on the other hand are tied for dead-last in the NHL with only 21 goals scored.

On the defensive side of things, the Islanders have given up 27 goals(11th) on the year, while the Jackets have given up 25(9th).

The Islanders' special teams haven't been good either. Their PP is 29th, and their PK is 31st.

The New York Islanders are currently 6th in the Metro, 14th in the East, and 27th in the NHL.

Series History vs. The Islanders

- The Jackets are 16-7-1-4 all-time at NWA and 24-21-1-7 in all meetings.
- Columbus was swept by NYI last season.

The Hockey News / The Columbus Blue Jackets Are Now Valued Over \$1 Billion Per Sportico

By Jason Newland – October 31, 2024

Sportico released their yearly NHL Franchise Valuations today, and the Columbus Blue Jackets are in an all too familiar spot - The bottom.

The Blue Jackets now rank 32 of 32 in terms of value. That value has come in at \$1.06 billion, an increase of 20% over their 2023 ranking, which came in at \$880 million.

The top team, of course, is the Toronto Maple Leafs at \$3.66 billion. The CBJ's expansion cousin Minnesota Wild ranks 17th, at \$1.6 billion.

In 2021, the team was valued at \$525 million, which is roughly a 50% increase.

So what does this mean for the Jackets? The simple answer is that the team is worth almost a billion more than when the McConnell Family started the team. But the next question is what happens now?

[The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Johnson, Voronkov, Fantilli & More](#)

Mark Scheig – October 31, 2024

Welcome to the last game in October for the Columbus Blue Jackets. They host the New York Islanders in their Halloween game on Wednesday night at Nationwide Arena.

With a win, the Blue Jackets would finish the month with a 5-3-1 record, something virtually nobody predicted. As for the Islanders, they enter Wednesday night's game scoring only 22 goals in their first nine games while winning just three times. They're coming off a 3-1 home loss to the Anaheim Ducks in a game which they dominated chances but had no finish.

In this gameday edition of News & Rumors, we will provide a couple of quick injury updates, some good news for once. Then we'll discuss a developing theme with one of the Blue Jackets' rising stars.

Johnson Does Not Need Surgery

The Blue Jackets got the best possible news. Kent Johnson will not need surgery on his injured shoulder. It was the same shoulder he had surgery repaired last season.

To say getting that news was a big sigh of relief for Johnson and the Blue Jackets is a major understatement. He will put in the necessary work to heal and then come back in a reasonable amount of time.

The Blue Jackets do not give specific timeframes these days. With injuries like Johnson's, it's especially hard to pinpoint a timeline anyway. The fact that his locker stall is still in the room was a good sign he got good news on his upcoming recovery. Erik Gudbranson and Boone Jenner each had surgery. Their stalls are not in the room.

It will be a while before we see Johnson in a game. But given he and the team avoided the worst-case scenario, it's possible we could see him closer to midseason than the end of the season. Given how he reacted when the injury occurred, that is very positive news for a player who was off to a hot start.

Voronkov Getting Closer

Some more good news. Dmitri Voronkov continues to get closer to game action. The Blue Jackets originally stated that he could return by the end of November. While they haven't provided a recent update, his presence at practices and the optional morning skates is encouraging.

Whether Voronkov can beat the original timeline is still to be determined. But from all indications watching him, he seems close. It will now be a matter of how he feels after the practices.

Voronkov was spotted in a non-contact jersey at Tuesday's practice. He then skated with the optional group on Wednesday. His eventual return would provide a big boost, literally, to the lineup. Once he is ready, expect him to go somewhere in the middle-six.

Fantilli Helping Shape Blue Jackets Culture

Adam Fantilli had a good night Monday against the Edmonton Oilers. He scored a goal on a great feed by Cole Sillinger. He also setup the first NHL goal of Mikael Pyyhtia.

If you saw Fantilli's postgame Monday, you saw how happy he was for Pyyhtia getting his first. This is actually a trend not only for Fantilli, but for other players on the Blue Jackets as well, specifically Johnson and Sillinger. What is that trend?

If your teammate does something great, join them in celebration even if you didn't do anything special in the game. Let me set the scene.

Postgame Monday, I ran into Johnson in the elevator. All he could talk about was just how ecstatic he was for Fantilli and Sillinger each having great games. Sillinger was the game's second star with 1-2-3 on the night.

Fantilli said that this is something that he talked about with Johnson and Sillinger. Let him explain.

"Me, Silly and KJ went out to lunch and we talked about stuff like that a few days ago," Fantilli said. "(We talked about) how big it is for us to want each other to have that type of success. When KJ has a three-point night and me and Silly don't have anything, we're still happy for KJ that he was able to go off like that. It only helps our team to have the young guys start to contribute more. I think being happy for each other is contagious and it really helps the environment. It helps the culture. Having KJ buy into that is great."

This is the Blue Jackets' young core taking the initiative to be there for each other no matter what happens good or bad. If you needed evidence of a healthy room, this is it.

Side Dishes

- The Blue Jackets will play their first back-to-back of the season upcoming on Friday against the Winnipeg Jets and then Saturday against the Washington Capitals. Head coach Dean Evason said today there are no excuses for back-to-backs. "If you can't play 25 minutes two nights in a row as a professional athlete, we've got an issue."
- The Blue Jackets are middle of the pack in shots on goal and fourth in goals per game. They need to ride the hot wave as much as possible before things cool off.
- The Blue Jackets will roll the same lineup Wednesday night with Elvis Merzlikins getting another start. Here are your expected lines and pairs.
- Yegor Chinakhov-Sean Monahan-Kirill Marchenko
- Cole Sillinger-Adam Fantilli-Mikael Pyyhtia
- Zach Aston Reese-Justin Danforth-Mathieu Olivier
- James van Riemsdyk-Sean Kuraly-Kevin Labanc
- Zach Werenski-Ivan Provorov
- Jake Christiansen-Damon Severson
- Jack Johnson-Jordan Harris
- Elvis Merzlikins/Daniil Tarasov

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Defeat Islanders Behind Elvis Merzlikins' Shutout

By Mark Scheig – October 31, 2024

Damon Severson scored in the third period. Elvis Merzlikins made it stand up stopping all 26 shots he faced Wednesday night helping the Blue Jackets to a 2-0 win over the New York Islanders.

The Blue Jackets improve to 5-3-1 on the season with the win. The Islanders drop to 3-5-2 after scoring just one goal combined in their last two games.

Game Recap

The teams played to a 0-0 first period. The Blue Jackets played within their structure and held the Islanders to just five shots on goal.

The reason the first ended 0-0 was Semyon Varlamov. He made nine saves including a few from up close. The Blue Jackets did get one by him late in the period. However the officials immediately waved the goal off due to incidental contact, goaltender interference.

Merzlikins had to only make five saves but the ones he made were strong. Maxim Tsyplakov was allowed the middle of the ice and got a breakaway which Merzlikins denied.

In the second, the Islanders turned it on as the period went on. They got the only power-play chance of the period when Justin Danforth was called for interference that created a potential 2-on-1 rush. Although the Islanders were unable to convert, they gained momentum for the rest of the period.

The Islanders outshot the Blue Jackets 14-6 in the middle frame. Merzlikins stood tall all period making big save after big save. The Islanders came into the game scoring just 22 goals in their first nine games. Despite multiple chances, they still couldn't finish.

This was the kind of game in which any shot on goal was a good one. Severson shot one from almost the goal line. The pass deflected off Ryan Pullock's skate and in to make 1-0 5:43 into the third.

Justin Danforth added an empty netter to seal the game. Varlamov finished the night as the game's third star stopping 24/25 shots he faced. He suffered his first ever regulation loss in his career at Nationwide Arena as a result.

The Blue Jackets will have Thursday off and will hold a morning skate Friday in advance of their game against the Winnipeg Jets. The Islanders have Thursday off before taking on the Buffalo Sabres on Friday.

1st Ohio Battery / Game Day #9: No Changes To The Blue Jackets' Lineup Wednesday Night; Merzlikins Back In Net Versus Islanders

By Ed Francis – October 31, 2024

Following Monday's dominate 6-1 win over the Edmonton Oilers, it's a fair question to ponder: what kind of encore can the Columbus Blue Jackets deliver to the home crowd Wednesday night when they face the New York Islanders?

The Blue Jackets skated circles around the Oilers in the victory, taking a 6-0 lead into the final minute of the game before Edmonton scored a shutout-breaking goal with just 27 seconds left.

The win was Columbus' third straight game with at least a point, and they've picked up five of the last six possible points. That may not seem like too much, but it's something they haven't done in over a full calendar year, dating back to a brief streak last season that ended October 24th, 2023.

Their five-goal win was also rare air for the margin of victory: it tied a 9-4 win in December of last season against Buffalo, and the Blue Jackets didn't have a goal win in the season prior to that. The last time they won by a margin greater than Monday's 6-1 final was in January of 2022 — a span of over 1,000 days — when they shut out the Carolina Hurricanes 6-0.

But regardless of the result, head coach Dean Evason is only looking forward.

"They're preparing the right way to play that next game, regardless of what happens (in the last game)," Evason said following the win.

Here's what to know before the Blue Jackets and Islanders take the ice:

- Lineups for Wednesday night are identical to what Evason and company put out Monday. That includes Elvis Merzlikins between the pipes, following his best performance in quite some time in Monday's win. Dating back to last season, it was the first time in 15 starts Merzlikins gave up less than two goals in a start.
- The Blue Jackets have been the beneficiaries of some early-season scheduling: Wednesday's game against the Islanders is the 4th consecutive game (and 6th of the last seven) in which Columbus is catching a team on the second leg of a back-to-back. Meanwhile, the Blue Jackets are yet to play on consecutive nights. They've also had seven of their last games at home. All of that to say this: it's another game where the Blue Jackets should look to jump on their opposition early.
- After a few games away from Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko on the top line, Yegor Chinakhov rejoined his original linemates on Monday and it paid off with an assist on Monahan's second goal of the game. Chinakhov has scored a point in all six games he's played with the pair, while being held without a point in the two games he was bumped to the second line. The move was made by Evason to work towards getting two reliable scoring lines, but it appears that (at least for now), the Blue Jackets coaching staff has decided to revert back to what was working for Columbus at a best-in-the-league rate. The trio led all lines in the NHL in 5v5 expected goal percentage, with 80% of all expected goals going in Columbus' favor while they were on the ice. No other line was higher than 74%.
- Mathieu Olivier has four goals in eight games this season, just one away from tying his career high. He did that in each of the last two season's with the Blue Jackets, in 66 games (2022-23)

and 54 games (2023-24).

1st Ohio Battery / Blue Jackets Win Second Straight, Defeat New York Islanders 2-0 Behind Elvis Merzlikins' 28-Save Shutout

By 10B Staff – October 31, 2024

The Blue Jackets are making a habit of scoring first.

They're also making a habit of finding a way to win, as they did tonight against the New York Islanders. With a 2-0 win, they're 5-1-1 when scoring first and won back-to-back games for the first time in 2024-25.

Another major development? The play of Elvis Merzlikins, who was terrific in goal en route to a 28-save shutout – the 11th of his NHL career. After losing his shutout bid late in Monday's win over the Edmonton Oilers, Merzlikins got it done tonight and it was one of his best performances in a Blue Jackets sweater.

Damon Severson's second goal of the season broke the ice 5:43 into the third period, giving the Blue Jackets a much-needed 1-0 lead.

After numerous chances to beat Semyon Varlamov (sound familiar?), a bad-angle shot with James van Riemsdyk creating chaos at the net front ricocheted off an Islanders' skate and into the net.

It felt like a weight had been lifted and the Nationwide Arena crowd had something to cheer about. The Blue Jackets, in past years, may have gotten frustrated by the inability to score, but as they've done often in the early stages of this season, they stuck with it.

Justin Danforth scored into an empty net with 2:03 left in regulation to seal the deal for Columbus.

Here's how it went down:

1st Period

A First Punch from Columbus: The Blue Jackets were the better team out of the gate, playing with good pace and a four-line attack that gave the Islanders problems early. The only thing missing was a goal. Columbus had eight shots on goal in the first period, and had 57% of 5-on-5 shot attempts and 58% of scoring chances as well. Varlamov was strong – as he always seems to be against the Blue Jackets.

2nd Period

A Counter from the Visitors: Sure, the Islanders were playing their second game in as many nights. Yes, the Blue Jackets have had a slightly favorable schedule in the early going with opponents playing the night before – but as Columbus head coach Dean Evason said Wednesday morning, these are professional athletes and the schedule should not be an excuse.

Patrick Roy's team had the better of play in the second period, pinning the Blue Jackets in their own end for long stretches and creating chances shift after shift. This is where Merzlikins was at his best, making big saves on Bo Horvat, Simon Holmstrom and Brock Nelson to keep the game 0-0.

Up Next:

The Blue Jackets are back at Nationwide Arena (yes, again) for a Friday night game against the Winnipeg Jets. Former Columbus head coach Scott Arniel, some 14 years after getting his first NHL coaching job with the Blue Jackets, has his second opportunity leading a team he's quite familiar with – and the Jets are playing really good hockey. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m.

New York Post / Islanders thinking of 'special' Johnny Gaudreau before facing Blue Jackets for first time since his death

By Ethan Sears – October 31, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Johnny Gaudreau crossed Ryan Pullock's mind on the plane to Columbus on Tuesday night, and that does not make Pullock unique. It is hard not to have the former Blue Jackets superstar at front of mind on the ground here in central Ohio.

Gaudreau's face is still on the marquee outside Nationwide Arena, the Blue Jackets having left it up in tribute. His No. 13 jersey is displayed in the building's windows.

The screens outside the building display a message memorializing Johnny and his brother, Matthew, who were both killed by an alleged drunk driver while biking in Oldmans Township, N.J., on Aug. 29.

Walking into the Blue Jackets dressing room, where his locker has been left untouched, feels like intruding on someone else's grief, even as the whole hockey world shares in it.

"I was fortunate enough to play with Johnny at a few World Championships [in 2017 and 2018], had some wonderful times with him," Anders Lee said Tuesday, a day before the Islanders faced the Blue Jackets for the first time this season. "Not just on the ice, but away from it, having fun. You've heard a lot about him, but he is such a solid guy. He is a special person and special talent."

"I was fortunate enough to play with Johnny at a few World Championships [in 2017 and 2018], had some wonderful times with him," Anders Lee said Tuesday, a day before the Islanders lost, 2-0, in their first trip to Columbus this season. "Not just on the ice, but away from it, having fun. You've heard a lot about him, but he is such a solid guy. He is a special person and special talent."

Lee had the pleasure of traipsing around Cologne, Germany; Herning, Denmark; and Copenhagen — where World Championships were held in 2017 and '18 — with Gaudreau as part of Team USA, taking home bronze with a win over Canada in the latter tournament.

"We go over there and you play in the World Championships, get to meet a lot of the guys, see a lot of the guys you've played against and get to play for your country, which is pretty special," Lee said. "But you go and play hard and there's also opportunities to have some fun. Had some fun with Johnny and the team, enjoying each other's company, a few drinks and hanging out. And those are the memories that I'll be taking with me getting to know Johnny.

"Really fun away from the rink, but also played on a line with him in one of the tournaments. Just the good hockey that we played, the way he made it easy with his talent. He'll put it on your tape for you."

Brock Nelson was part of that 2017 team as well as last summer's Team USA at World Championships in Czechia, the last competition in which Gaudreau took part before the accident.

"I think he was a really happy guy. Really soft-spoken, reserved, just quiet and went about his business," Nelson said. "A great teammate and friend to many guys, meant a lot as a hockey player, but beyond that, [as a] brother, husband, father, son. And was just a good guy and comes from a good family, so it's just a horrible situation and tragedy."

In a more just world, Gaudreau would be leading a Blue Jackets team that has started a pleasant 4-3-1, and the Islanders would have been answering questions about how to slow him down on the ice.

Maybe Gaudreau would have spent Wednesday morning answering questions about the Islanders' 2022 pursuit of him in free agency, when he shocked the hockey world by signing a seven-year deal with Columbus.

Instead, like every other team that comes through Columbus, the Islanders were reflecting fondly on their memories of No. 13.

"I think for anybody that knew Johnny, I think the first time going back there, it'll bring up a lot of memories for guys and different emotions," Nelson said. "It's sad. There's not much to say beyond that and just giving the family anything you can. Support, thoughts, prayers. Just try to remember Johnny and the times you had. He was a special person."

Alexander Romanov missed a third straight game with an upper-body injury, with Patrick Roy continuing to call him day-to-day.

Romanov traveled to Columbus with the team and skated with the scratches Wednesday morning.

Columbus Dispatch / Blue Jackets, Disney unite to celebrate 'Deadpool & Wolverine' streaming debut

By Belinda M. Paschal – October 31, 2024

If the restrooms at Nationwide Arena look like you've stumbled into the Marvel Cinematic Universe during Wednesday's faceoff between the Columbus Blue Jackets and the New York Islanders, it's just a temporary makeover.

The Blue Jackets and Disney are teaming up to celebrate Marvel Studios' "Deadpool & Wolverine" making its streaming debut on Disney+ on Nov. 12. Disney has entered similar partnerships with sports venues in Philadelphia and Memphis.

Released in late July, "Deadpool & Wolverine" stars Ryan Reynolds as Wade Wilson/Deadpool and Hugh Jackman as Logan/Wolverine. Reynolds, who co-wrote and co-produced the superhero blockbuster, cheekily dubbed it "the greatest film ever made."

While Reynolds' hyperbolic review might be subjective, it's a fact that the film slaughtered other summer releases, setting numerous records.

On July 26, opening day in the U.S. and Canada, the movie brought in \$96 million, including \$38.5 million from Thursday night previews. According to Deadline Hollywood, both amounts were records for an R-rated film.

Need a break? Play the USA TODAY Daily Crossword Puzzle.

Superhero film shatters records:'Deadpool & Wolverine' pulverizes a slew of records with \$211M opening

Deadline Hollywood also noted that "Deadpool & Wolverine" became the highest-grossing R-rated Disney film three days after its release, ousting "Pretty Woman" from the top spot after 34 years.

After 23 days of release, the film outstripped 2019's "Joker" as the highest-grossing R-rated film of all time, according to People magazine.

When it comes to Disney+, "Deadpool & Wolverine" will include commentary by Reynolds and director, co-producer and co-writer Shawn Levy.

The Athletic / 'How do I boil the water?' The cooking adventures of young NHL players

By Fluto Shinzawa – October 31, 2024

Brett Harrison felt like making chicken and pasta for a pregame meal, which makes him like most professional hockey players.

But the first-year pro had a problem.

Mason Lohrei, Harrison's roommate at the time early last season with the AHL Providence Bruins, was watching TV on the couch. Harrison told Lohrei about his plan. Lohrei approved.

Then the 20-year-old Harrison had a question.

"How do I make the pasta?" Harrison asked his roommate.

"Boil the water," Lohrei answered. "Put it in the water."

"How," Harrison responded, "do I boil the water?"

Crawling to walking

NHL teams are paying attention to nutrition. The Minnesota Wild have an oatmeal bar where players can customize their bowls with berries, honey and nuts. Bruins players eat lunch at their practice rink after the morning skate and leave with takeout containers for post-nap feeding.

In particular, young players, whose caloric needs are often higher than those of veterans, cannot do without good and regular fueling. It can mean the difference between making it to the NHL or not.

"It's a huge part for every team now," Florida Panthers general manager Bill Zito said of proper nutrition for up-and-comers. "How and when and where you fuel the body is vital."

In some ways, the transition from amateur to pro hockey is seamless. Players play games, practice, train and sleep the same way for the New York Rangers, for example, as they did when they were in college or junior.

But when it comes to cooking, players can feel like they've been chucked into the deep end of the pool. Even though teams provide pre- and post-skate spreads, players are on their own when they leave the rink — sometimes for the first time in their lives.

Consider that Harrison, a 2021 third-round pick of the Boston Bruins from London, Ontario, played in the OHL for parts of three seasons. Harrison lived with billet families when he played for the Oshawa Generals and Windsor Spitfires.

"Pretty much cooking me three meals a day," Harrison said. "I didn't have to do too much there."

Fellow Bruins prospect Trevor Kuntar played at Boston College for three seasons. Kuntar, a 2020 third-round pick, was known in the BC dining halls as the guy who ate chicken and rice every day.

But unlike Harrison, Kuntar grew up as a regular cook under the watch of his father, Les. Now, as a second-year pro, Kuntar is practically on kitchen autopilot: eggs or overnight oats for breakfast, burritos for lunch, chicken and rice or salmon and mashed sweet potatoes for dinner.

Kuntar is proof that it can be done. But players who never bought groceries, prepped ingredients and cooked meals as teenagers can feel like fish out of water as first-year pros. There are only so many times you can hit Chipotle.

“A lot of young guys, it’s immaturity,” said the Panthers’ A.J. Greer. “You just have to put the effort in to cook. Because it’s easy to go pick up something and keep eating out. Some guys do it.”

“Like Jake DeBrusk,” Greer continued, busting his ex-teammate’s chops. “I don’t even know how old he is — 29, 30? I don’t know if he’s cooked a homemade meal in the last 10 years.”

With the ease of services such as DoorDash, Grubhub and Uber Eats, it’s never been simpler for players to order their favorite meals. But eating out is pricey, and it’s hard to tell what’s in food you don’t make yourself.

Consider the following ingredients: potassium lactate, sodium diacetate, tapioca dextrin and potassium sorbate, which are listed on the box of a chicken nugget meal kit. The product is made by a brand that Bruins nutritionist Julie Nicoletti once learned was a staple of a former prospect’s rotation: Lunchables.

“A lot of young kids don’t know how to do it,” said the Bruins’ Hampus Lindholm. “So they go back and order McDonald’s.”

Lindholm, who is from Helsingborg, Sweden, was drafted No. 6 by the Anaheim Ducks in 2012. In 2012-13, an 18-year-old Lindholm played for the Norfolk Admirals, Anaheim’s then-AHL affiliate. When one of his young roommates celebrated a birthday, Lindholm baked a cake.

“They were so mind-blown that I made that from scratch,” Lindholm recalled of his teammates. “It’s so normal where I grew up — cooking and baking.”

What also was normal in Sweden was the small size of the average grocery store chicken breast. When Lindholm went to the poultry section in Norfolk, the breasts were so big the Swede thought they were using different chickens.

Young players, it seems, can learn something new at the supermarket.

Cooking for others

When Harrison, Lohrei and fellow roommate Frédéric Brunet moved in to their Providence apartment last season, one of their first visits was to Target. The first-year pros needed pots, pans, utensils, plates and cups.

After some early turbulence, the roommates settled on a system. Lohrei, who grew up as mother Teri Weiss’ sous chef, was in charge of protein. Brunet assembled salads. Once Harrison mastered how to boil water, he handled pasta and rice.

Tuesday was taco night. The roommates chopped and sautéed onions and peppers, then added chicken or ground turkey to the pan. They customized their dishes with guacamole and sour cream.

Harrison was especially excited when Lohrei made turkey burgers. Harrison insisted on guacamole and peppercorn dressing.

Lohrei liked chicken cutlets and penne in a spicy vodka sauce. He also looked forward to ground turkey bowls with rice, spinach, avocado and Harrison’s favorite peppercorn dressing.

It may have been harder had the players been living alone. But cooking for friends helped Brunet, Harrison and Lohrei gain their kitchen footing.

“Now he’s good,” Lohrei said of Harrison, the formerly clueless cook. “He’s got it down now. He’s making a lot more than just noodles.”

The company of others goes a long way.

Helping hands

Pavel Zacha was 12 years old when he moved to Liberec, about three hours north of his hometown of Velké Meziříčí in Czechia. His father, also named Pavel, moved with him. While Zacha trained, practiced and played, his dad was busy in the kitchen.

Father and son, however, went their separate ways when Zacha played for the OHL’s Sarnia Sting as a 17-year-old. Zacha’s billet family was Danish. They did not make the meals his father used to cook.

“I wasn’t used to eating burgers three times a week,” Zacha said.

Zacha became close with teammate Patrick White, who lived with the same family. White enjoyed being in the kitchen and eventually became in charge of breakfast.

“He was good. He actually tried to do sometimes healthy,” Zacha said. “He even showed me how to turn on a dishwasher and dryer.”

By the time the New Jersey Devils drafted Zacha at No. 6 in 2015, he was ready to live by himself. Still, the 19-year-old Zacha was no Julia Child.

One night, on mother Ilona’s counsel, Zacha put chicken and potatoes into a glass dish and popped it into his oven. Zacha then went to watch TV.

The next thing he heard was the smoke alarm.

Zacha didn’t know how to turn it off. All he could do was open the windows and wait for the smoke to exit his apartment. The chicken and potatoes could not be saved.

“It was bad. I went for dinner,” Zacha said. “It wasn’t the best. I gave up for like a week of cooking. Then I tried again.”

That season, Zacha had the good fortune of living two floors below teammate Vern Fiddler. By then, the 36-year-old Fiddler had played more than 800 NHL games. The veteran showed the rookie how to shop, cook and clean up, among other things.

“Your first year is the hardest,” Zacha said. “But if you have good influences, it makes it easier.”

Some of the same young players who know exactly where to find the puck are lost in the kitchen. But they cannot afford to be without their bearings for long.

“Definitely an adjustment I had to make and continue to learn,” said 21-year-old Bruins prospect Ryan Mast. “But hockey player or not, you’ve got to learn how to feed yourself.”

ESPN / NHL insiders debate Jets' early keys, preseason predictions

By ESPN staff – October 31, 2024

Which of your preseason predictions are you least confident in now?

Ryan S. Clark, NHL reporter: Picking Charlie McAvoy to win the Norris Trophy. The largest obstacle he faces at the moment is the one he has faced the past few years: Can he score enough points? Entering Monday, McAvoy has three points through nine games. It's a drastic comparison to other defensemen such as Cale Makar (16 points), Alex Pietrangelo (11) along with Rasmus Andersson and Neal Pionk (both have 10).

McAvoy has the all-around ability to play in every situation. But any defenseman who is looking to present a strong case to win the Norris must have the points.

Victoria Matiash, NHL analyst: While it doesn't appear as horribly misguided as it did over a week ago when they were, ahem, 0-5, my prediction that the Nashville Predators would finish top of the Central Division isn't exactly sparkling. The Jets are soaring, the Dallas Stars are dominating, the Minnesota Wild are (somewhat quietly) stringing together a bunch of wins, and the Colorado Avalanche are clearly shaking off their wobbly start.

I still believe Nashville has too strong a collection of talent to miss out on the playoffs altogether, but the strength of competition in that division is already casting a rather dark cloud on my bold prophecy.

Arda Öcal, NHL broadcaster: Before the season started I thought Connor McDavid would go Super Saiyan and collect all the hardware again, but then Kaiju Cale Makar showed up early in the season and rampaged his way to the top of the scoring tables, putting him squarely in the mix for scoring titles. I still think McDavid can end up leading in points and goals at the end of the season, but I'm less confident at the moment than I was before the season started, especially given his injury Monday night.

Kristen Shilton, NHL reporter: I put a lot of weight behind the Edmonton Oilers this season, and my confidence in that prediction ebbs and flows like the team itself. It felt like there would be more momentum from that push to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final last season, and yet Edmonton has looked more disjointed than anything.

Being a .500 team a few weeks into the campaign doesn't mean the Oilers are bad by any means, and they can certainly climb their way back to being a powerhouse in the Pacific or even make my Cup Final prediction look good, but I'm not as bullish on Edmonton now as I was in September.

Greg Wyshynski, NHL reporter: I was convinced that the Utah Hockey Club would make the playoffs in the Western Conference. I needed to find someone who made the cut last season that would not return to the postseason to make room for the newbies. The Winnipeg Jets were a 110-point team under Rick Bowness last season. I didn't see a repeat performance there, and was left somewhat unimpressed with the defense corps sandwiched between the forwards and Connor Hellebuyck.

Well, it turns out the Jets are still quite good under Scott Arniel, last season's associate coach who replaced Bowness, as were are on pace for [checks standings] 164 points through eight games -- an offensive machine built on the foundation of the league's best goaltender. Meanwhile, Utah started strong before tumbling back to .500, and injuries to defensemen Sean Durzi and John Marino might invalidate that prediction, too.

There were 28 players currently on pace to hit or eclipse 100 points this season as of Monday. How many will actually reach that mark?

Clark: Let's go with 15. The most challenging part is figuring out the "unknowns" at the top of the leaderboard.

Can Mark Stone, who has not played in more than 70 games since the 2018-19 season, stay healthy? Could Jared McCann, whose current career best is 70 points, hit the century mark for a Seattle Kraken team that entered Monday 19th in shooting percentage and 21st in goals per game? How will it work for defensemen such as Andersson and Pionk? Andersson scored 88 points over the last two seasons, while Pionk scored 98 points over the last three.

Matiash: I'll offer up a dozen. Nine skaters eclipsed the mark last season, with a couple more -- Kirill Kaprizov would have in a full season -- were left banging on the door. A few who are on pace right now - Casey Mittelstadt and Dylan Strome come to mind -- don't boast the career résumés to convince me they'll find themselves flirting with that magical plateau by season's end, although I'd be more than happy for either to show me up on that point. Injuries and games lost will also serve as an unfortunate factor for many.

Öcal: All 28. Give us a historic season. OK, in all seriousness, we had nine last season, so let's say we at least break double digits this season. And give us a couple surprise 100-point seasons. Mark Stone leads the league, with 18 points through 10 games. He's never had more than 64 points in a season, and that was in 2014-2015 with the Senators. I say he gets to 100.

Shilton: I'll say 10. The best part of this early season is that defenses are still settling in, and that gives scorers a chance to shine while taking advantage. Sustaining that sort of production for all but the elite few is usually not happening. Now, I would love to be wrong on that and see 15 or 16 guys over 100 points by April. History tells us that we're not likely to be rewarded with such an outburst.

Wyshynski: I'll take the under of all unders and say nine players, same as last season. Slumps happen. Injuries happen. The current offensive pace for this season -- 3.23 goals per team per game through 138 games -- would be the highest since the 1993-94 season. While I'd happily be wrong about fading the offensive fireworks this season, I expect the end results are more in line with 2023-24.

What was the Jets' secret sauce to starting the season 8-0-0?

Clark: There's no one player who's at the controls; it's a collective effort. The Jets are getting the contributions from top-six forwards such as Kyle Connor, Nikolaj Ehlers and Mark Scheifele that are expected. They're also seeing growth from a healthy Cole Perfetti, who has been at the vanguard for a few seasons. The third line of Mason Appleton, Adam Lowry and Nino Niederreiter have been a consistent problem all over the ice. Pionk has provided the Jets with another defenseman beyond Josh Morrissey who can provide contributions.

But what might be arguably the most important aspect of all? It's the fact that we're just now mentioning Connor Hellebuyck, the reigning Vezina Trophy winner. That's how strong they've been, and shows how well Scott Arniel and his staff have prepared to start the season.

Matiash: Balanced scoring, staunch defensive play, Vezina-caliber goaltending, ridiculous production with the extra skater, effective penalty killing, and disciplined conduct -- the Jets are one of the least penalized clubs in the league -- makes for a nearly flawless recipe. If there's an obvious weakness on this team right now, I can't spot it.

Öcal: How about that Lowry-Appleton-Niederreiter third line? It's been the identity line so far for the Jets. All three are either hovering around a point-per-game pace through eight games ... as the third line! Jets head coach Scott Arniel told reporters that this group consists of "straight-line players" who

"push the puck forward in their straight line, they get after it. They score a lot of goals in that blue paint area." A new contender for best line in hockey? They have outscored opponents 6-0 at 5-on-5 so far.

Shilton: It's how balanced the Jets are that's made them special. Through nine games -- eight wins, one loss -- they had five players with 10 or more points, and consistent contributors on each line. Winnipeg is no one-man show relying on star power (although they've got it) or elite goaltending (which they have in Connor Hellebuyck) to win the day. When a team establishes that depth of attack out of the gate, it sets the tone not only for your own club but how the rest of the league views your team, too.

The Jets have swagger, and you can tell it comes from knowing they're not just a good team, but a deep one as well.

Wyshynski: How about some love for Scott Arniel? The NHL is full of head coaches who needed to faceplant in their first gig before finding success the second time around. Arniel had a 45-60-18 record in parts of two seasons with the Columbus Blue Jackets from 2010 to '12. After that, he worked under Alain Vigneault in New York, Peter Laviolette in Washington and then under Rick Bowness as an associate coach with the Jets.

His early dedication to diving into Winnipeg's analytics as a way to figure out what went wrong against the Avalanche last postseason has led to improved understanding of the roster and communication within the team. Give credit where it's due: None of us had Scott Arniel as a Jack Adams favorite before the season, but here we are.

What has been your favorite moment of the season so far?

Clark: Everything about the Utah Hockey Club's first game in franchise history. It was a chance for the league and the sport to see Salt Lake City, while giving Salt Lake City a chance to show it can be home to the NHL.

The franchise had months to get everything in order -- which says a lot given other teams get years to plan before their first season. So what stood out? The cool details like the artificial snowflakes falling during the opening, the chants -- even though there is no mascot -- down to how the game ended up having a somewhat close finish. It was a strong start for a market that has a chance to really make its mark on the NHL.

Matiash: I can't call it a favorite moment because of the devastating events that brought about the action, but John Tortorella inviting Johnny Gaudreau and Matthew Gaudreau's father, Guy Gaudreau, to help out at Philadelphia Flyers practice stands out as memorably meaningful. To offer such a personal overture to a man overcome with severe grief and overwhelming loss, someone Tortorella had never met, speaks to the coach's deep sense of empathy and the close-knit strength of the hockey community altogether.

Öcal: The classy way the entire league handled tributes to Johnny Gaudreau. But the one that hit me the hardest was at the start of the Columbus Blue Jackets' home opener, when the puck was dropped then slowly passed to an empty left wing, where Johnny Hockey would have lined up, and left there for 13 seconds. Players let the clock tick away out of respect, followed by a standing ovation. A truly special moment to remember a truly special person.

Shilton: I thought the Sidney Crosby/Evgeni Malkin milestone game against the Buffalo Sabres was pretty cool. It's rare in the modern NHL that we see teammates together long enough to where they're hitting those sorts of numbers together. For Malkin to get his 500th goal -- with a Crosby assist, after Malkin assisted on Crosby's 500th two years and -- and for Crosby to have his 1,600th point the same night was a unique feat to witness.

Pittsburgh Penguins fans haven't had much to be excited about the last couple of years, but you've got to appreciate how that duo continues to produce at a high level so late into their already illustrious careers.

Wyshynski: Steven Stamkos' return to Tampa. As Lightning coach Jon Cooper said, "Breakups are hard. It's the soap opera of sports." This breakup was no exception. It was surreal to see a franchise that basically walked away from its captain and greatest offensive player embrace his return with an emotional video tribute and scoreboards flashing "Forever 91."

It was memorable to hear Lightning fans go from booing two Nashville goals to cheering Stamkos' name for having assisted on them. It was delicious to see Jake Guentzel, Stamkos' replacement on Tampa Bay's top line, tally two assists of his own, including on Nick Paul's game-winner. Did that emotional night help Stamkos turn the page? "I dunno. We'll see. I'll let you know if that day comes, but I don't think you completely turn the page," he said.

ESPN / NHL Betting tips - Odds, picks for Rangers-Capitals and Kings-Sharks

By Sean Allen – October 31, 2024

The amount of preparation, practice and pregame work that goes into a single NHL game can go a long way to helping a team execute its plan on the ice. The ability to put in that effort ahead of time is impacted on significantly when a team is playing in a back-to-back set of games.

The Los Angeles Kings and San Jose Sharks meet in a game in which each one is on the different half of a back-to-back set. The Sharks pulled out an OT win in Utah on Monday evening, while the Kings will head home to host the Vegas Golden Knights on Wednesday after Tuesday's contest.

The Kings do come in as heavy moneyline favorites, perhaps because of some of this back-to-back history.

ESPN has saved the past three years of betting odds for us to have a look at how back-to-back teams have fared. Remembering the premise of preparation being a key component to how NHL team's approach games, you may not be surprised to note that there is a trend when it comes to the team on the second-leg of a back-to-back.

In the past three seasons overall, when the favorite is on the road, they have won 904 out of 1,439 games -- or 62.82%. But of those situations, when the home underdog is coming off a game the day before, the road favorite success rate jumps to 72.22% (130 out of 180 games). The historical data from ESPN doesn't include spread information, but, we can still do some inference. Overall road favorites have won by two or more goals in 40.93% of those 1,439 games; when the home underdog is completing a back-to-back set, that percentage climbs to 50.56%.

Having a tired team involved, as the Sharks are bound to be on Tuesday, also helps push goal totals. In the past three seasons, the overall over/under results in games with a home underdog have gone over 47.12% of the time. But exclusively in games when that home underdogs is playing for the second time in as many days, the over has hit 57.22% of the time.

The preparation and recovery between games have had clear implications on outcomes in the recent past, particularly for teams on the second half of a back-to-back. When a road team draws a home underdog on short rest, the results tend to tip in their favor -- significantly increasing their win rate and often extending the margin of victory. Additionally, whether it's the toll on a team's energy or the frequent use of backup goaltenders in these exact situations, the goal totals tend to rise.

From the world of one win of the Sharks, to the world of one regulation loss for the Rangers. New York visits the upstart (5-2-0) Capitals in the featured early contest.

It's Logan Thompson's turn in net for Washington, assuming they continue their strict rotation, while Igor Shesterkin should be back in action for the first time since last Thursday after getting Saturday's game off.

The Capitals are home underdogs, a label combination that has the lowest win total so far this season of the four (home/road, favorite/underdog) at just 13.1%, but the home dogs have fared well against the spread, beating it 26 out of 56 times this season (46.4%).

Of all the props, I like Tom Wilson for shots (Over 2.5, +107) because it has positive odds, the threshold isn't as high (Alex Ovechkin gets 3.5) and the Rangers are top 10 for shots allowed to opposing top-six forwards.

Given the above discussion, a Kings money line looks very good and, with a 5.5 total on offer, it can be parlayed with the over for plus odds (+121).

In the props department, the Sharks allow the fourth-most shots against to opposing top-six forwards so far this season. Kevin Fiala should be able to clear the Over 2.5 shots on goal threshold set for him (-130). For player points, Mikael Granlund has been a part of 13 of the Sharks total 23 goals, so you could argue that if they score, there is a better than 50-50 chance he earned a point (Over 0.5 Points, -230). However, the books know that, too, so you'll need to parlay to get decent return. Consider backing Fabian Zetterlund for a goal (Over 0.5 goals, +240), as he is coming off two on Monday.

Both teams are at the bottom of the league in penalty killing, too, both with 10 power-play goals allowed on the young season. Jake Walman (Over 0.5 total goals, +650) and Brandt Clarke (Over 0.5 power play points, +375) could make for good plays from the blue line. Walman was back as the quarterback on Monday for the Sharks after ceding time there to Jack Thompson (who was a healthy scratch).

Betting trends

On Monday, the Sharks earned their first win of the season, clawing back from a 4-1 deficit with five minutes to go in the third to beat Utah Hockey Club in overtime. Is there anything to be said for momentum in a case like this? We certainly don't have a big enough sample to look at first wins of the season as any kind of trend, but what about extending the back-to-back discussion to look at how the previous results can impact on the second leg.

With our data from the previous three seasons from ESPN, there are 391 times when a team played their second of consecutive games at home. Of those 391, the team in question won the first leg 197 times and lost 194 times.

Now the outcomes of the second leg: When a team playing at home is coming off a win the day before, they have a record of 100-97. When the home team on the second leg is coming off a loss, the record is 75-119.

This isn't unexpected; teams that win, win and teams that lose, lose. But what if we apply expectations to drill down even further?

If that second-leg home team is also an underdog on the books and they won the day before, the record is 23-52, or a win rate of 30.7%. If that underdog team is coming off a loss to play a consecutive game at home, the record is 27-78, or a win rate of 25.7%.

That is to say, the Sharks chances are improved because they won on Monday, but only marginally.