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## [Cleveland.com / Blue Jackets reportedly learn more about star player's injury; front office exec leaving for job with former Columbus GM](#)

**By Tim Bielik – December 21, 2025**

The Blue Jackets lost in Anaheim on Saturday night to the Ducks, 4-3. But the bigger worry was the status of defenseman Zach Werenski after the game.

Werenski blocked a shot from Ducks forward Troy Terry off his lower right leg and had to crawl off the ice.

According to Aaron Portzline of The Athletic, the Blue Jackets can breathe a little easier. Portzline reported that X-rays showed no broken bones in the leg and Werenski is day-to-day.

Werenski scored a goal in the loss and has five goals in the last three games. He leads the team in goals (14) and points (40).

The Blue Jackets finish up their two-game road trip on Monday night in Los Angeles against the Kings at 10 p.m. Eastern before the five-day holiday break.

The team also confirmed on Sunday morning that assistant general manager Josh Flynn will be leaving to serve the same role under former Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen in Buffalo.

Flynn had been with the Blue Jackets since 2008 and has served as assistant GM since 2019. His role involved cap management and contract negotiations, among other responsibilities.

"On behalf of our organization, I'd like to thank Josh for his many years of hard work and dedication with the Blue Jackets," Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell said in a statement via the team. "He has been a valuable member of the hockey operations department for 17 years, and I wish he and his wife, Jen, and their family all the best."

## Columbus Blue Jackets / Marchment makes excellent first impression with Blue Jackets

**By Jeff Svoboda – December 21, 2025**

Mason Marchment arrived in Northern California on Friday with the Seattle Kraken.

Little did he know he'd be leaving the Golden State as a Columbus Blue Jacket.

Marchment was in San Jose on Friday getting ready to play the Sharks as a member of the Kraken when news broke that evening that he was being traded to Columbus ahead of the league's holiday roster freeze.

That meant Saturday was a whirlwind, as Marchment woke up in San Jose, hopped a flight to Southern California where the Blue Jackets were set to face the Ducks, and then played in his first game with the CBJ less than 24 hours after the trade was made.

"It was nuts," Marchment said. "I've obviously never been through anything like that before, but it's a cool experience. Just roll with it and enjoy it."

Not only that, Marchment made an excellent first impression with the Blue Jackets, becoming the 26th player in franchise history to score a goal in his CBJ debut. Playing on a line with Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson that led the Jackets in 5-on-5 ice time, he played 19:41 with three shots on goal while also taking a penalty and notching a hit.

He may also have endeared himself to the CBJ faithful with his reaction to his first goal in union blue, as he let out a scream so forceful that his gum fell out of his mouth – prompting Marchment to quickly pick it up and put it back in.

The goal itself was the kind of goal the Blue Jackets likely can expect from Marchment, as he got to the netfront and was in position to tip a shot by Damon Severson past Anaheim goalie Lukáš Dostál.

"Just try to drive it deep and get it back up to the point, and they did a great job of getting it through," Marchment said. "I just got a little piece of her, and happy it went in."

Goal-scoring ability is one thing Marchment can bring to the table, as he's coming off consecutive 22-tally seasons with Dallas the past two years. Throughout his seven-year, 331-game career before the trade, Marchment had averaged 20 goals and 50 points per 82 games.

The 31-year-old was a power-play producer with the Stars the past two years, totaling 11 goals over that span, and has twice topped 100 hits in a season in his NHL career.

"He's just a hockey player, right?" head coach Dean Evason said after the game. "He plays hard, plays the right way, does a lot of really good things. Certainly to come into a situation like that today, getting here at noon or whenever he got here, jumping in and playing as well as he did, he's just a hockey player."

Marchment brings a physical presence at 6-5, 212 pounds, and he's not afraid to throw the body around and make life difficult in the corner for opposing players. That's what intrigued CBJ captain Boone Jenner the most, as he called Marchment "a tough guy to play against" given their battles over the years, which included a six-point game for Marchment vs. the Blue Jackets back in 2022.

"It's huge," Jenner said. "Anytime (you can add) a guy like that who's played for a while in the league and played in the playoffs, and he's an established player that plays the game the right way. He's difficult to play against. To have that on our side, it's a good boost for us."

The son of longtime NHLer Bryan Marchment, Mason was acquired for a pair of draft picks, giving the Blue Jackets immediate help as they try to work themselves back into the playoff race. It's a signal from the CBJ front office that the belief is there that the Blue Jackets can get out of a recent slide and catch the teams in front of them.

"I think it's important," Evason said. "I think it's important for the guys to see that we're doing everything we can to have success. ... It's important that the guys see that (general manager) Don (Waddell) and his crew are trying to make us a better hockey team."

So what's next for Marchment? He'll play in game No. 2 with the Blue Jackets on Monday night, then get ready for the holidays as well as the process of moving to Columbus for the rest of the season.

"Honestly, I don't even know what happens from here, but luckily I get to go home – well, not home, but back to Seattle," he said. "Family is all there, so I get to spend some time with them, which is awesome."

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets Monday Gathering: Zach Werenski's injury scare part of intense 48 hours

**By Aaron Portzline – December 22, 2025**

A collection of notes, insights, ruminations and did-you-knows gathered throughout the week that was for the Columbus Blue Jackets:

### **Item No. 1: Whew, and whoa**

The Blue Jackets were mighty relieved late Saturday when tests revealed no broken bones in Zach Werenski's right ankle or foot. The Jackets have played their way out of the playoff picture for now, but losing Werenski would have extinguished all hope this season.

It was quite the 48 hours for Werenski.

After the Blue Jackets collapsed late in a 5-2 loss to the Minnesota Wild on Thursday in Nationwide Arena, Werenski stepped into a postgame media scrum and said what fans have wanted to hear for a couple of weeks now.

He challenged the entire dressing room to start playing at a higher, more competitive level. He implored players to stop making stupid mistakes.

The Blue Jackets have one regulation win in December and just three wins all month, drifting to last place in the Eastern Conference. And they've done so, in large part, by wilting quicker than sautéed spinach when games are on the line.

"Enough is enough," Werenski said.

When a team is underperforming as badly as the Blue Jackets are — they have said that missing the playoffs would represent a "failure" — a veteran player needs to step forward. You can bet nothing Werenski said in public on Thursday hasn't been addressed in private at least once or twice.

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell said he doesn't like the fact that Werenski's vent was necessary. But he appreciated it when he heard it later Thursday.

"I actually thought it was good," Waddell said. "I hope the guys listen to him. He was pretty direct. Zach wants to win, like I hope everybody else does.

"Sometimes we do stupid things. Almost every goal (in the loss to the Wild) was a stupid mistake. Some would call them mental mistakes, some would say they were lazy mistakes. Well, he's tired of it. He didn't call out anybody by name or anything like that, but guys should get that message."

It's always impressive when a player's comments are so well expressed and so on point that it pushes others in the organization to act.

Waddell had been trying to make a move in recent weeks, and kept coming up empty. But when Seattle Kraken GM Jason Botterill called around 8 p.m. on Friday — just four hours before the NHL holiday roster freeze — he had a taker.

The Blue Jackets acquired winger Mason Marchment from the Kraken for two draft picks, bolstering their forward corps and, they hope, giving them a power forward who won't shy away from battles in front of the net.

Did Waddell make the trade in direct response to Werenski's words? Not necessarily, but it no doubt increased his desire to jolt the room.

Meanwhile, before the Blue Jackets played in Anaheim on Saturday, coach Dean Evason radically changed his forward lines, putting newcomer Marchment on the top line with center Adam Fantilli and right winger Kent Johnson, who had been on the fourth line. The other lines were just as different, including winger Kirill Marchenko landing on the third line.

Did Evason make radical changes in response to Werenski speaking out? Not necessarily, but the timing sure seemed right.

The Blue Jackets played hard and mostly well on Saturday in Anaheim. Werenski's goal at 12:44 of the third period tied it 3-3. But the Ducks scored with 3:29 remaining to take the lead, thanks in part to a rough giveaway by defenseman Dante Fabbro behind his own net.

Werenski's scary injury late in the game made the Blue Jackets' latest loss a secondary concern. But an off day on Sunday in Los Angeles brought an end to a emotional, eventful week for the 28-year-old.

## **Item No. 2: Wait and see**

Marchment is due to become an unrestricted free agent on July 1. But both Waddell and Marchment are in wait-and-see mode, perfectly content with pushing any talk of an extension far down the road.

"I talked to the agent (Paul Capizzano) right after we did the deal," Waddell said. "We agreed: let's find out if the player likes it (in Columbus). And if he likes it and he fits in here really well, then we can talk about it."

That sounded good to Marchment, who had back-to-back 22-goal seasons with the Dallas Stars before running aground with the Kraken this season. He had only 4-9-13 in 29 games with Seattle.

"I'm just kind of going day-by-day right now, honestly," Marchment told *The Athletic* on Sunday. "I really don't have a plan or anything like that. I mean, I just had a kid, so taking care of them is really all I'm worried about right now."

Marchment gives the Blue Jackets three prominent unrestricted free agents at forward. The others are Boone Jenner and Charlie Coyle.

When the Blue Jackets fly home to Columbus after Monday's game in Los Angeles to start the Christmas break, Marchment will fly back to Seattle to spend the holidays with wife Alexis and son Banks, who was born in September.

His son's middle name, Bryan, honors Marchment's late father, former NHL defenseman Bryan Marchment.

Marchment celebrated his first game with the Blue Jackets by scoring a goal early in the second period that tied the score at two. He also had a huge hit on Anaheim's Jacob Trouba in his first shift of the game.

“It was good, yeah,” Marchment said. “It felt a lot more flow-ey to me than what I was used to the last couple of months. It just seemed like everyone was kind of on the same page and it was easy to step in and just play my game. Everything else just kind of fell into place.”

Well, mostly. Right after his goal, Marchment had a wad of chewing gum fall out of his mouth. Before his linemates could get to him to celebrate, Marchment leaned down, grabbed the gum and (wince!) put it right back in his mouth.

“Five-second rule,” Marchment said. “It’s OK.”

### **Item No. 3: Who’s shufflin’ off?**

On Saturday, the Buffalo Sabres asked for permission to speak with Blue Jackets assistant GM Josh Flynn.

By Sunday morning, Flynn was officially off to Buffalo, reunited with new Sabres GM Jarmo Kekäläinen, who was GM in Columbus for 11 seasons before he was fired after the 2023-24 season.

Flynn has worked for the Blue Jackets since 2008, when he made the leap from working with a sports agent to joining an NHL front office. He worked for three different GMs in Columbus — Scott Howson, Kekäläinen and Waddell — and had been AGM since 2019.

*The Athletic* asked Flynn for a statement upon his departure. He wrote:

“I truly loved my time in Columbus. It’s a great organization with ownership that has treated me well for almost 18 years. But, more importantly, the city became my home and always will have a huge piece of my heart.

“I’ve spent the majority of my adult life here. I met my wife and started a family here. It’s not easy to move on, but we’re really excited for the next chapter in Buffalo, to work with great people in another great organization and another passionate hockey city.”

Flynn will have the same title in Buffalo.

Waddell said the Blue Jackets would not move immediately to replace Flynn, who negotiated contracts, managed the club’s salary cap and interpreted the NHL’s collective bargaining agreement, along with other duties.

The top two Blue Jackets executives under Waddell are director of player personnel Chris Clark and director of hockey operations Rick Nash.

The question now becomes ... who else might join Kekäläinen in Buffalo? Kekäläinen is close friends with Basil McRae, the head of pro scouting, and Ville Siren, the head of amateur scouting, along with goaltending coach Niklas Backstrom, among others.

Something to keep an eye on.

### **Item No. 4: Snacks**

- This is incredible: the Blue Jackets have allowed a third-period goal (one or more) in 17 consecutive games, the longest streak in franchise history. The last time the Jackets played a third period without

allowing a goal was Nov. 15 vs. the New York Rangers. The previous franchise mark was 15 games during both the 2014-15 and 2023-24 seasons. The Jackets are nowhere near an NHL record, though. According to the NHL, the Quebec Nordiques allowed third-period goals in 33 consecutive games late in the 1981-82 season.

- Marchment's goal, a deflection of a Damon Severson shot at 3:39 of the second period, made him the 26th player to score in his Blue Jackets debut. The last to do it was Luca Del Bel Belluz, who scored in Nationwide Arena on April 16, 2024 against the Carolina Hurricanes.

- In the Blue Jackets' 4-3 overtime win over the Ducks last Tuesday, Anaheim scored the tying goal with 3:16 remaining in the third period when defenseman Jackson Lacombe fired the puck off the back of goaltender Jet Greaves' head from behind the net. It was the second time the Ducks tried to score by using Greaves' head for a deflection.

"I don't know if that's something they looked at with me, personally, I think it's just the way the game is played now," Greaves told *The Athletic*. "The players are very skilled and they're very smart."

Greaves was out early for practice the following morning, working with goaltending coach Backstrom on being aware of a possible trend. "They scored off of it, so it's something to be aware of and learn from."

- What does it sound like when a sharply-fired puck slams into a goaltender's mask? "It's loud and it hurts a little bit," Greaves said, smiling. "It hurts less if it doesn't go in."

- Right winger Mathieu Olivier did not travel with the Blue Jackets on their two-game, pre-Christmas trip, but he's continuing to skate and will likely join the club for a full practice on Dec. 27. It's not clear if Olivier will be cleared for contact in that practice, but it will represent a step forward, either way. He's been skating mostly on his own, other than to join optional morning skates. Can't wait to see Evason's forward lines when Olivier's back to health.

- Veteran defenseman Brendan Smith has watched Werenski from afar for several seasons, but he's gained a deeper appreciation since joining the Blue Jackets from AHL Cleveland earlier this month.

"He's world-class with his stick," Smith said. "When he defends, he's very good at first touches, just flicking the puck off the other guy's stick. That's how he defends. It's really impressive, and it's efficient. I think it helps him save energy because he doesn't have to get into a physical battle every time. He just whips it off your stick, takes it and goes the other way. It's like a chameleon's tongue. Just, there. That's been impressive. I knew he could skate and shoot, the vision, all that stuff. I didn't know how efficient he is at defending."

- Center Adam Fantilli won 43.6 percent of face-offs during his rookie season of 2023-24. He backpedaled slightly last season when he won just 41.2 percent of draws. This season? Big jump up to 51.4 percent (205 of 399), which puts him third on the club behind Sean Monahan and Charlie Coyle. He's at 54.3 percent in the month of December. That's a big step for any young center.

- This week's Blue Jackets Monday Gathering trivia question: Marchment is wearing No. 17, the 10th different player to wear the sweater number for the Blue Jackets. Which sweater number has been worn by the highest number of players?



- Big news for AHL Cleveland this week. The American Hockey League awarded the city and the franchise the 2027 AHL All-Star Game in early February 2027. Club president Mike Ostrowski told *The Athletic* that the Monsters began the process as far back as 10 years ago, but the AHL's expansion out west — and a desire to support those markets with All-Star Games — helped push back the timeline. Also, renovations at Rocket Arena six years ago were an issue.

"Big day for sure," Ostrowski said. "We were really, really excited to get the word. Our fan support — we've led the league for the past three years — is a big part of this. They've been asking for this event, and we're thrilled to make it happen."

The Monsters averaged 11,438 fans per game last season and are over 11,000 fans again this season. Ostrowski said that according to the Monsters' data, about three percent of their ticket-buyers — or about 12,350 over the course of a season — are from Columbus or the surrounding areas.

- AHL Cleveland goaltender Ivan Fedotov is on a hot streak of late. He pitched an 18-save shutout in Saturday's 2-0 win over Laval, improving to 4-0-0 with a .953 save percentage and a 1.01 goals-against average. The longer Fedotov plays like this, and the longer Elvis Merzlikins struggles as a back-up to Greaves, you wonder if Waddell might try something radical.

"We're keeping an eye on him, for sure," Waddell said.

- The Blue Jackets were hoping defenseman Jackson Smith, their No. 14 overall selection in last summer's draft, would earn a spot on Team Canada's roster for the upcoming IIHF World Junior Championships. But Smith, who is currently a freshman at Penn State, was among the final cuts by Canada.

- Trivia answer: The No. 23 has been worn, according to Hockey-Reference, by 15 different Blue Jackets. It's currently worn by Sean Monahan. Working backward from Monahan, it's been worn by: Jake Christiansen, Brendan Gaunce, Stefan Matteau, Ian Cole, David Clarkson, Brian Gibbons, Matt Frattin, Brett Lebda, Tom Sestito, Milan Jurčina, Dick Tärnström, Derrick Walser, Alexander Selivanov and Kevin Dahl.

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets get good news after Zach Werenski injury

By Aaron Portzline – December 21, 2025

Everybody exhale.

Tests late Saturday in Anaheim, Calif., revealed no broken bones in the lower right leg of Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski, indicating that Werenski avoided a long-term injury after he blocked a shot late in a 4-3 loss to the Anaheim Ducks.

Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell confirmed to *The Athletic* Sunday morning that Werenski's prognosis for return is day to day.

It's possible — likely, even — that Werenski will miss the Blue Jackets game Monday against the Los Angeles Kings at Staples Center, their final game before the NHL pauses for its annual holiday break.

But it's plausible that he could return on the other side of the break. The Blue Jackets resume practice Dec. 27 and host the New York Islanders the following day.

This is the best possible news for the Blue Jackets, who must have seen their season pass before their eyes when Werenski crumbled to the ice in obvious distress after blocking a Troy Terry shot with 2:27 remaining.

Werenski, in obvious discomfort, started crawling to the bench as play continued. With the puck in the other end of the rink, Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins came out of his net and gave Werenski a helping push on his rear end.

As Werenski neared the bench, Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson extended his stick, allowing him to pull Werenski to the bench door. When play was blown dead, Werenski stopped at the bench door, where a trainer met him.

Unmercifully, the Blue Jackets were called for too many men on the ice after defenseman Denton Mateychuk came over the boards before an incapacitated Werenski had made it to the bench. The penalty put Anaheim on the power play with only 2:11 remaining.

The Blue Jackets are just 1-6-1 in their last eight games, falling out of the playoff picture in the Eastern Conference.

Meanwhile, Columbus is losing one of its longtime hockey operations staffers to the Buffalo Sabres in a rare mid-season move.

New Sabres GM Jarmo Kekäläinen, who spent 11 seasons with the Blue Jackets before he was fired after the 2023-24 season, asked for permission Saturday to speak with Blue Jackets assistant GM Josh Flynn.

Waddell granted permission and confirmed Sunday morning that Flynn would be joining the Sabres, also in an assistant GM capacity.

"Sometimes people feel it's a better opportunity someplace else," Waddell said. "I'm not one to hold people back, and we will continue to add the best possible people to our staff."

With the Blue Jackets, Flynn was responsible for negotiating contracts, managing the NHL's salary cap, interpreting the league's collective bargaining agreement and other tasks, including some scouting.

Waddell said the Blue Jackets will not immediately replace Flynn.

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets' star defenseman Zach Werenski injured late in 4-3 loss to Ducks

**By Aaron Portzline – December 21, 2025**

Once again, the Columbus Blue Jackets allowed a soul-crushing, third-period goal that led to a loss. But that wasn't the worst thing that happened to the Jackets in Saturday's 4-3 defeat to the Anaheim Ducks.

Zach Werenski, who has almost single-handedly carried the Blue Jackets this season, blocked a shot by Anaheim's Troy Terry with the outside of his right foot with only 2:27 remaining in the game and immediately collapsed to the ice in significant pain. Werenski, who scored his 14th goal of the season earlier in the period, started crawling toward the Blue Jackets' bench before goaltender Elvis Merzlikins, with the puck on the other end, came out of his net to give Werenski a push.

That momentum carried Werenski only so far. From the bench, Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson extended his stick so that Werenski could be pulled out of harm's way. But when a whistle blew the action dead, Werenski stopped just short of the bench and was attended to by trainers.

Moments later, FanDuel Sports Ohio cameras showed Werenski limping down the tunnel to the Blue Jackets' dressing room in Honda Center, a trainer helping him with an arm around his right shoulder.

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said he did not have an update on Werenski after the game.

Incredibly, the Blue Jackets were called for too many men on the ice with 2:11 remaining as Werenski struggled to get to the bench. That gave Anaheim a two-minute power play, and they salted away the game.

"Yeah, it's a tough call, right?" Evason said. "He can't skate, and we're a little frustrated because they blew one down where (an Anaheim) guy gets hit and can't get up. They blow it down. And then our guy gets hit, and they just let him crawl off.

"So, that's a little bit frustrating."

It's no exaggeration to say that Saturday's score is secondary.

Werenski has been the Blue Jackets' best player for several seasons now — he finished second in voting for the Norris Trophy (top defenseman) last season — but he's become the clear leader in the dressing room, even with captain Boone Jenner still on the roster.

It's hard to imagine the Blue Jackets remaining competitive if Werenski is forced to miss much time, given that he's the club's leading goal scorer, plays the second-most minutes of any player in the NHL and plays in every situation.

The Blue Jackets got goals from Dmitri Voronkov, Mason Marchment, and Werenski, while Merzlikins finished with 24 saves.

Merzlikins, who was pulled after allowing three goals on five shots in his last start on Dec. 11, allowed two goals on the first three shots he faced on Saturday. But he rallied the rest of the way, including some brilliant saves to keep it close.

Werenski's goal at 12:44 of the third period — his fifth goal in three games — pulled the Blue Jackets into a 3-3 tie. But less than four minutes later, the Ducks regained the lead when Pavel Mintyukov was left alone at the front of the net for a clean shot on Merzlikins.

The Blue Jackets are 1-6-1 in their last eight games, and they've allowed at least one goal in the third period of 17 consecutive games, a franchise record.

Marchment, who was acquired by the Blue Jackets from Seattle late Friday, just a half-hour before the NHL's holiday roster freeze went into effect, was with the Kraken in San Jose when he learned of the trade.

He took a morning flight to join his new teammates in Anaheim on Saturday and had a quick tutorial before making his debut on the left side of a line with center Adam Fantilli and right winger Kent Johnson.

If that line sounds unusual, it should.

Between the acquisition of Marchment and the ugliness of Thursday's 5-2 loss to Minnesota, Evason decided to blow up his typical forward alignments in the hope of finding four balanced lines that he could simply roll throughout the game.

Center Sean Monahan centered the second line with wingers Dmitri Voronkov and Cole Sillinger, while Charlie Coyle remained the third line center between Jenner and right winger Kirill Marchenko.

The fourth line was center Luca Del Bel Belluz between Isac Lundeström and Yegor Chinakhov, who likely lost his top-six opportunity with the arrival of Marchment.

The Blue Jackets also played without left wing Miles Wood, who was a late scratch with a lower-body injury that the club termed day-to-day.

By late Saturday, however, another injury had the Blue Jackets' attention.

One other concern for Werenski, if the injury is long-term, is his availability to play for Team USA at the Olympics in Milan this coming February.

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets hope Mason Marchment gives lineup a boost, dressing room a jolt

**By Aaron Portzline – December 20, 2025**

Columbus Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell tried to sign Mason Marchment as a free agent four years ago when he was in charge of the Carolina Hurricanes, but Marchment chose the Dallas Stars instead.

Two weeks ago, when Waddell was having a “GM chat” with Seattle Kraken GM Jason Botterill, Marchment’s name came up again. “I told Jason that if it ever gets to a point where you’re willing to move him, we would have an interest,” Waddell told *The Athletic*.

Waddell’s phone rang at 8 p.m. Friday, just four hours before the NHL’s holiday roster freeze went into effect.

“We had to move quick,” Waddell laughed.

The Blue Jackets acquired Marchment from the Kraken for a second-round pick in 2027 and a fourth-round pick in 2026 — a boost for Columbus’ forward group but, more importantly, a jolt for a club that has underperformed and grown frustrated in recent weeks.

Top defenseman Zach Werenski vented after Thursday’s home loss to the Minnesota Wild, saying that every player in the room needed to give more to the cause and that the careless mistakes that are turning close games into close losses need to stop.

Waddell has wanted Marchment for a while, but he also wanted to change the dynamic with the Blue Jackets, who are just 3-6-4 since Nov. 20.

“I had one of our top players reach me right after the trade was announced, saying, ‘Great pick-up for our group,’” Waddell said. “And I saw (injured winger Mathieu) Olivier this morning, and he was excited.

“The timing for our team right now ... we needed something.”

It’s also a sign that Waddell and the Blue Jackets aren’t ready to give up on this season, despite sitting in last place in the Metro Division and the Eastern Conference and despite having the worst goal differential (-18) in the East.

Entering play on Saturday, the Blue Jackets are six points behind Philadelphia for the final wild-card spot, and that’s changed dramatically by the Jackets losing five of their last six games in regulation.

“We’re absolutely not (out of it),” Waddell said. “We’re going full bore. Full bore.”

Marchment was with the Kraken in San Jose ahead of a game on Saturday. He was expected to take a morning flight to Southern California, join the Blue Jackets for a morning skate on Saturday in Anaheim, and make his Columbus debut against the Ducks later that night. He’ll wear No. 17.

Waddell and coach Dean Evason were planning to talk before the morning skate in Anaheim, but Waddell sees Marchment as a boost to the Blue Jackets’ top nine.

“He’ll get a good chance to play in that top group,” Waddell said. “We’ll see how (Miles) Wood is today. He was a little banged up after Thursday’s game. We’ll see how (Sean) Monahan is, and there are some other guys with bumps and stuff.”

Marchment’s arrival could push winger Yegor Chinkahov out of a top-six or top-nine role again after he’s spent the past four games playing on the No. 2 line with Monahan and captain Boone Jenner.

A 6-foot-4, 215-pound winger, Marchment also tends to play in the so-called “hard areas,” and be confrontational and combative at net-front, something the Blue Jackets have been missing.

It was especially noticeable on Thursday, when Minnesota faced very little pushback at net-front on either end of the ice.

The Blue Jackets are expecting to get Mathieu Olivier, another combative winger, back in the lineup within the next couple of weeks. Olivier, out with an upper-body injury, has not yet practiced with the club and did not travel with them on this two-game road trip before Christmas break.

Those two could be a nightmare on the same line.

Marchment, 30, is in the final year of a four-year, \$18 million contract. The Blue Jackets are paying the prorated remainder of his \$2.6 million base salary this season, or about \$1.45 million. He’s an unrestricted free agent this summer.

Waddell has been burning up the phones in recent weeks, trying to swing a deal that would bolster the lineup and awaken his club from its doldrums. He was delighted when Botterill phoned him at 8 p.m.

“We went back and forth for the next three hours,” Waddell said. “The trade call (with the NHL) started at 11:22 p.m. It was done at 11:34. So, yeah, we pushed it a little bit.”

Marchment had a 10-team no-trade clause as part of his contract, but the Blue Jackets were not listed as one of the teams. So there was no delay to wait for player approval.

The second-round pick the Blue Jackets included in the trade was originally owned by Minnesota and was acquired by Columbus in the trade that sent defenseman David Jiricek to the Wild.

The fourth-round pick was originally owned by the New York Rangers. The Blue Jackets acquired that pick at the trade deadline in March 2024 in the deal that sent forward Jack Roslovic to the Rangers.

## The Columbus Dispatch / Zach Werenski scores, is hurt as Columbus Blue Jackets fall to Ducks

**By Lori Schmidt – December 21, 2025**

Forward Mason Marchment scored in his Blue Jackets debut and defenseman Zach Werenski notched his fifth goal in the past three games, but it wasn't enough for Columbus to stave off a 4-3 Ducks' win in Anaheim on Dec. 20.

Worse yet, Werenski took a shot off his lower leg and tried to crawl off the ice with 1:54 to play before hobbling down the tunnel for treatment. Word on his condition wasn't immediately known, but coach Dean Evason appeared incensed that the Jackets were whistled for too many men on the ice because Werenski couldn't make it to the bench and the officials refused to blow the play dead.

Minutes earlier, the Jackets' inability to clear their zone led to Pavel Mintyukov scoring the game-winning goal on Elvis Merzlikins, who finished with 24 saves.

It was the 53rd time Columbus (14-15-6) has given up a third-period goal this season. That's eight more third-period goals than the Nashville Predators and Detroit Red Wings, who are the second-worst in the NHL in that category.

Skating on a line with Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli, Marchment scored his fifth goal of the season during the second period, which tied the game 2-2.

However, just two days after Werenski called out the team for "unacceptable" play and Evason bemoaned the club's "silly mistakes" in a 5-2 loss at home to the Minnesota Wild, Dante Fabbro had a costly second-period giveaway. His error led to Mason McTavish's snapshot goal and a 3-2 Ducks' (21-13-2) edge.

Werenski knotted things up in the third, extending his points streak to five games.

The Blue Jackets' other goal came when Dmitri Voronkov scored on a power play 5:54 into the game. Columbus needed that to halve Anaheim's lead because the Ducks scored twice in the first three minutes.

The Blue Jackets have lost seven of their past eight games, and six of those losses have come in regulation.

### **Blue Jackets scratches**

The Blue Jackets scratched Jake Christiansen, Miles Wood and Zach Aston-Reese.



## The Athletic / NHL weekend rankings: Time for another round of holiday panic

By Sean McIndoe – December 22, 2025

It's the most wonderful time of the year. Unless it isn't.

The first half of the season is filled with checkpoints for NHL teams. There's the curse of Nov. 1, when you'd better be within four points of the playoffs. By U.S. Thanksgiving, you'd better be in there, somewhere, or else you've really got your work cut out for you.

But by the holiday freeze? At this point, for most teams, you are what you are. And when some teams open up their presents at this time of year, they find a lump of coal and a handwritten note from Santa reading "you guys stink."

Yes, it's holiday crisis time for teams around the league. Let's see if we can narrow the list down to five.

### **Bonus five: Teams facing a holiday crisis**

**5. Los Angeles Kings** – They beat the slumping Tampa Bay Lightning to snap a four-game losing streak, then celebrated by trading away Phillip Danault. Wait, are they sellers now? Not necessarily, since Danault reportedly wanted out and wasn't exactly lighting it up so far this year. Still, the Kings feel like they're flat-lining and desperately need a spark. The good news is they get the Columbus Blue Jackets and Seattle Kraken before the break, so maybe that's four badly-needed points as they cling to a wild-card spot.

**4. Chicago Blackhawks** – It was fun while it lasted, right Hawks fans? See you down in the bottom-five section. You know the way.

**3. Pittsburgh Penguins** – Before last night's shootout win against the Montreal Canadiens, they'd lost three in a row according to the NHL's official standings and eight in a row according to everyone else. That might actually be good news since it should end any playoff talk and clear the deck for Kyle Dubas to get to work on some tough decisions.

**2. Toronto Maple Leafs** – They're a mess, they sure seem like they've quit on their coach, their best players aren't producing anything besides hilariously tone-deaf soundbites, and the 18-wheeler is well and truly headed off the cliff. The good news is they're not even selling out any more, which we were always told was the reason the team never won anything. Yay?

**1. Winnipeg Jets** – As bad as the vibes are in Toronto, the sub-.500 Jets have a worse record, have been colder in recent weeks, and face an even deeper hole to dig out of in their own division. And they're doing it by falling from a greater height as defending Presidents' Trophy champions. It's been so bad they've driven poor Murat mad, and the question now seems to be less about whether they should sell and more about when it should happen.

**Honorable mention: The Edmonton Oilers**, who are playing reasonably well but must be holding their breath after newly acquired goaltender Tristan Jarry was injured last week.

On to the rankings. Spoiler alert, none of the teams above made the top five this week...

## Road to the Cup

*The five teams with the best chances of winning the Stanley Cup.*

We all knew it was coming, but seeing Sidney Crosby actually pass Mario Lemieux is still a super cool moment.

**5. Vegas Golden Knights (16-8-10, +4 true goals differential\*)** – They're the fakest of fake .500, not to mention the only NHL team to hit double digits in loser points. Or are they bonus points? It's not just semantics, and your view on the question probably has a lot to do with whether you think the Knights are actually good. I think they're good ... enough, at least as far as the Pacific Division goes.

**4. Carolina Hurricanes (22-10-3, +16)** – They're still comfortably holding down the top seed in the East, but it was not a great weekend. They just lost back-to-back games on their Florida mini-trip and they lost Seth Jarvis with what appears to be long-term injury. Oh, and Jack Hughes is back in New Jersey, further complicating the Metro.

**3. Minnesota Wild (22-10-5, +17)** – To be the best, you've got to beat the best. The Wild had their shot against the Avs last night and couldn't get it done. Still, the seven straight wins that came before were a strong message that Minnesota is for real.

**2. Dallas Stars (25-7-5, +35)** – Does it make sense for a ranking that's supposed to be about who's going to win the Stanley Cup to have three teams from the same division in the top three spots? No, not really, thanks for asking. Eventually, we're going to have to look ahead to playoff matchups and start penalizing the Central, given one of these three teams is guaranteed to be going out in round one. For now, let's just enjoy how good all these teams are.

**1. Colorado Avalanche (26-2-7, +65)** – It's easy to take them for granted these days, but seeing them walk into Minnesota and roll to a win was quite possibly their most impressive performance of the season.

*\*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.*

**Not ranked: Florida Panthers** – Well, well, look who's back.

Not all the way back, mind you. But back enough, thanks to wins in seven of nine, even after Saturday's loss to the Blues. Given that their other loss came against the Avalanche in Colorado, we can say the Panthers went into the weekend undefeated against teams that play in the NHL instead of whatever galactic champions league the Avs are currently in.

In the lethargic East, that stretch has been more than enough to put the Panthers back into the playoff mix, and even back into the conversation for first in the Atlantic. The projections have their playoff chances at 67 percent, up from a 50 percent coin flip at the start of the month. And honestly, 67 percent feels low. They're back.

Who could have seen this coming? Well, everyone. I'm not sure I ran into a single fan, pundit or expert who was willing to write off the Panthers, even when they were stumbling along at fake .500 through two months. We all know the story in Florida — a Presidents' Trophy in 2023 followed by an early exit, then barely making the playoffs in 2024 only to go all the way. Last season, they went into the playoffs

as the 11-seed. They were one point ahead of the just-happy-to-be-there Senators. And then they rolled to another Cup, because the regular season doesn't matter to these guys.

Given their injuries, most notably to Aleksander Barkov and Matthew Tkachuk, it wasn't hard to figure out the script to this season. Tread water until Tkachuk returned, then ease down on the gas to make the playoffs. Don't worry about seeding, don't worry about matchups, just get in and then welcome Barkov back at some point in the spring before rolling everyone on the way to a three-peat.

There were times when you wondered if they were falling a bit too far behind, but you never really worried. They'd figure it out. Probably right when Tkachuk was back.

If anything, they're ahead of schedule, with Tkachuk's return imminent but not quite here yet. But the Panthers are back, because they never left, because the regular season is nothing to them but a long runway before it's time to actually fly.

Good luck to Detroit and Montreal and anyone else with their eyes on top spot in the Atlantic. You might get it, but only because the Panthers didn't want it in the first place. They'll see you down the road, in April and May, if you make it that far. For now, at least, we're pretty sure we know they will.

### **The bottom five**

*The five teams headed towards dead last and the best lottery odds for the top pick in this year's draft.*

Let's start with a team that isn't in this week's rankings: After serving as the East's lone representative in the bottom five for the past five weeks, the Buffalo Sabres have found their stride. They've won six straight, with five of those coming after the firing of Kevyn Adams.

New GM Jarmo Kekäläinen has spent the week building out his new front office, which will include a familiar set of biceps face in former Habs boss Marc Bergevin.

Is it all coming too late to make a playoff push? Not in this year's East it's not.

**5. Seattle Kraken (13-14-6, -24)** – Saturday's win in San Jose snapped a four-game losing streak, which came on the heels of a six-game losing streak, and now they're selling. Ah well, it was fun while it lasted.

**4. Vancouver Canucks (15-17-3, -19)** – They've won four straight, including a three-game stretch where they only allowed two goals. The conclusion: Quinn Hughes was holding them back. Hey, the numbers don't lie.

**3. Chicago Blackhawks (13-16-6, -11)** – And they're back. And you could even make a case that they should be all the way back to the one-spot here. I'm not quite there yet, but they're certainly headed towards another bottom-five finish. And as Scott points out with an assist from Corey, that might not be the worst thing in the world.

**2. Calgary Flames (15-17-4, -11)** – Ryan Lomberg had a fun night on Saturday.

**1. Nashville Predators (15-16-4, -21)** – By beating the Rangers last night, the one-spot team in my bottom five moved ahead of last year's Presidents' Trophy winners in the standings. The NHL makes a lot of sense.

**Not ranked: Columbus Blue Jackets** – Is this a good hockey team?

I don't mean that rhetorically. And I don't even mean it in that "Who really knows anything in this weird NHL?" sort of way. I mean it as a genuine question. Maybe even an existential one. And I'm not the only one asking it: captain Zach Werenski is too.

I'm a Leafs fan, so I'm a bit of an expert in player soundbites during losing streaks. And I have to say, "We're a good hockey team, and we're losing games. So maybe we're not a good hockey team. I don't know..." is an all-timer.

So let's build the case for both sides. The argument for the Blue Jackets being a good team — not a great one, or a Cup contender, but a playoff team at least — starts with last year. That was back when we all counted them out before the season even began, only to watch them fight for a spot all year long, becoming everyone's second-favorite team in the process. Werenski was the guy leading that charge with a Norris-worthy season, and he might be even better so far this year. The goaltending is better, thanks to rookie Jet Greaves. And they've earned wins against some good teams, including Tampa, Minnesota and Dallas, three Cup favorites the Jackets had beaten in regulation before the time the season was two weeks old.

And maybe most importantly, their front office clearly thinks they're good. Or at least good enough to get some reinforcements, as the team pulled off a pre-freeze deal for Mason Marchment. Both the trade and the timing are interesting, and Portzline gets into the details here.

The argument for them not being good is ... well, everything else.

A recent five-game losing streak dropped them to fake .500 on the season, and while they beat the Ducks last week to snap that skid, they entered the weekend in dead last in the East, trailing even a Sabres team in such bad shape that they cleaned house and hired the Blue Jackets' assistant GM to join Kekäläinen in Buffalo.

Saturday saw them drop a close one in regulation to Anaheim despite a Marchment goal in his debut, marking their seventh loss in eight games. It could have been far worse, as Werenski left the game after blocking a shot. It looked bad, but early reports say the injury isn't serious and Werenski is day-to-day.

If you are what your record says you are, then the Blue Jackets are indeed not good. And as bad as the last few weeks have been, it doesn't feel like rock bottom. As Portzline writes in that link up above, "This could get away from them in a hurry if they aren't careful. Maybe it already has."

For now, I'm keeping them out of the bottom five, although I'm not completely sure if that's based on merit or just a lingering feel-good status from last year's run. Check back next week, when there's a good chance I won't have a choice.