



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips March 29-31, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets

- PAGE 03: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets rally, top Vancouver Canucks in shootout
- PAGE 05: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets' Cayden Lindstrom may shift from CHL to Michigan State
- PAGE 06: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets fall to Ottawa Senators, drop out of wild-card spot
- PAGE 08: Columbus Dispatch: What are the odds Ovechkin breaks Gretzky's record against the Columbus Blue Jackets?
- PAGE 09: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets reclaim playoff spot while buoyed by resilience: 5 takeaways
- PAGE 12: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets stumble against Ottawa Senators: 3 takeaways
- PAGE 14: The Athletic: Blue Jackets come back twice in wild shootout win over Vancouver
- PAGE 16: The Athletic: Blue Jackets' back-to-back woes surface again in loss to Senators
- PAGE 18: The Athletic: Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Chasing the game is no way to make the playoffs
- PAGE 23: BlueJackets.com: Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets' resiliency leads to a crazy win vs. Vancouver
- PAGE 25: BlueJackets.com: Blue Jackets rally to defeat Canucks in shootout
- PAGE 27: BlueJackets.com: CBJ rally falls short in Ottawa
- PAGE 29: BlueJackets.com: Williams feels like he's found a home in Columbus
- PAGE 31: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets' Jack Williams Discusses Process of Choosing Columbus
- PAGE 33: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets Recover From 3-0 Deficit to Outlast Canucks
- PAGE 35: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets Must Overcome Back-to-Back Struggles Down Stretch
- PAGE 37: 1st Ohio Battery: CBJ: 7, VAN: 6 (SO): Jenner's Two-Goal Night Leads Blue Jackets To Maniacal Shootout Win Over Canucks
- PAGE 41: 1st Ohio Battery: Three Things: Easy As 1-2-3, Perfect When It Matters, Going Against The Trends
- PAGE 44: 1st Ohio Battery: OTT 3, CBJ 2: Late Push Not Enough As Blue Jackets Fall To Senators
- PAGE 47: 1st Ohio Battery: Three Things: Can't Capitalize In Back-To-Back, Not Enough Punch, The Race Is On

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/ Websites

- PAGE 49: The Athletic: NHL Power Rankings: Who are the hottest (and coldest) teams since the trade deadline?
- PAGE 58: The Athletic: What are the NHL's next potential coaching hot seats? Rumbings

PAGE 61: The Athletic: NHL 2024-25 bold predictions: Which preseason picks we got right and wrong

PAGE 69: The Athletic: Meet Cameron Reid, the 2025 NHL Draft prospect with only one mode: 'Very good'

PAGE 73: ESPN: NHL playoff standings: Latest on the Eastern wild-card chaos

PAGE 86: ESPN: Six theories why penalties are down in the NHL this season

PAGE 92: ESPN: NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, remaining schedule strength

PAGE 99: ESPN: NHL playoff standings: Who will win the Atlantic Division?

PAGE 102: Sportsnet.ca: The Stanley Cup Playoffs and getting lucky with injuries

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets rally, top Vancouver Canucks in shootout

By Brian Hedger- March 29, 2025

The Blue Jackets still need work on their starts, but their finishing kick is more impressive by the game.

Despite trailing 3-0 after the first period Friday night at sold-out Nationwide Arena, the Blue Jackets pulled back into the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference after a wild 7-6 shootout victory over the Vancouver Canucks in front of 18,586 who were treated to an exhilarating third period, overtime and shootout.

Trailing 5-3 early in the third, the Blue Jackets (33-29-9) overcame that deficit and took a brief 6-5 lead on goals by Denton Mateychuk, captain Boone Jenner and Mathieu Olivier — including the last two separated by just 22 seconds. Aatu Raty tied it back up for the Canucks (34-26-13) on the shift after Olivier's goal, which forced the game into overtime and then a shootout decided by Kent Johnson's goal in the first round plus three saves from Elvis Merzlikins.

"I'm very proud of our group and the way we handled tonight," Olivier said. "After the first period, the messaging stayed the same in the sense that we were positive. We knew we out-chanced him in the first. We had a couple mistakes that we could've avoided, but, overall, it was a good first. We just kind of built on that and kept going and came back a couple times in the game. Resilience was a big thing tonight."

Earning two points pulled the Blue Jackets (32-29-10) into a tie at 75 points with the Montreal Canadiens and gave Columbus the control of the second wild-card spot via tiebreaker. The New York Rangers sat a point behind with 74 and faced the Anaheim Ducks in a West Coast game with an opportunity to supplant Columbus.

The Canadiens (33-30-9) lost 4-1 at the Carolina Hurricanes, while the New York Islanders (74 points) were idle Friday.

"I don't think it's a shock that this team handles adversity pretty well," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "I mean, we did. We got down 3-0, we got some (unfavorable) calls and whatever, and they just went about their business and kept playing hard. We were fortunate to catch a couple of breaks, a couple of bounces, but we did like our resolve a lot."

Vancouver got off to a 3-0 lead with three straight goals in the first period by Linus Karlsson, Brock Boeser and Jake DeBrusk. The Blue Jackets matched the Canucks in shots (10-10) during the first but paid for key mistakes that resulted in power play goals by Karlsson and DeBrusk.

The Jackets went to the locker room for the first intermission amid a smattering of boos, but it didn't take long to turn those into cheers. Jenner, Kirill Marchenko and Dante Fabbro scored three unanswered goals in the first 8:44 of the second to tie it 3-3 and breathe life back into the Jackets' hopes.

They found out the hard way, however, why falling behind by multiple goals in the NHL is so difficult to overcome. Vancouver scored the next two goals to build a 5-3 lead, getting an ugly short-handed goal from Tyler Myers with 8:33 left in the second and Raty's first of two in the game early in the third to make it 5-3 on a wrist shot that beat Merzlikins under the glove.

Mateychuk's fourth goal of the season, assisted by Jenner and Adam Fantilli, cut it to 5-4 on the next shift, and that's when the game took an upward tick in havoc. Justin Danforth appeared to tie it, 5-5,

with a goal off a rebound of Cole Sillinger's shot with 8:07 left, but it was overturned by a coaching challenge that showed Olivier interfered with Canucks goalie Kevin Lankinen in the crease.

About five minutes later, madness ensued.

Jenner capped a power play to tie it 5-5, Olivier gave the Jackets their only lead in regulation 22 seconds later, 6-5, and Raty re-tied it 6-6 with his second goal of the period just 23 seconds later. In overtime, Merzlikins made four saves to force a shootout where he stopped attempts from DeBrusk, Conor Garland and Jonathan Lekkerimaki to make Johnson's goal in the first round stand up.

"Elvis did an unbelievable job tonight with all the swings and everything, and he stayed completely locked in for the shootout and overtime," Fabbro said. "He just was a rock for us. We capitalized when we needed to capitalize, and it was just a lot of fun to be a part of tonight."

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' Cayden Lindstrom may shift from CHL to Michigan State

By Brian Hedger- March 29, 2025

One of the reasons the Blue Jackets haven't signed 2024 fourth overall pick Cayden Lindstrom yet might be related the next step of his development as a top prospect.

According to a source, the 19-year old power forward/center is considering a switch from junior hockey for the Medicine Hat Tigers of the Western Hockey League to playing next season at Michigan State , a top NCAA program. Starting Aug. 1, players from Canadian Hockey League junior programs such as Medicine Hat will be eligible to play for NCAA Division I schools unless it's proven they were compensated "above actual and necessary expenses" by their junior programs.

Those who have signed NHL entry-level contracts will still be barred from playing for NCAA schools. Lindstrom is one of the only prospects selected in the first round of last year's draft who hasn't signed an ELC. A back injury that required surgery in November was thought to be the primary reason, but maintaining his NCAA eligibility may now be a factor.

Lindstrom has lived in Columbus since last summer while going through workouts and rehab activities before and after the procedure, a minimally invasive microdiscectomy performed Nov. 19 in Los Angeles.

An official announcement related to Lindstrom shifting to college hockey isn't expected to happen until the summer. Daren Hermison, who represents Lindstrom, declined to comment and said the young forward's focus is currently on recovering from the back surgery.

Lindstrom, who stands 6 feet 3 and 216 pounds, offers an enticing combination of size, strength and skill that led to his being drafted so high despite teams having prior knowledge about the injury.

Should he choose Michigan State, it would make sense considering the circumstances. The Spartans have risen sharply in national prominence the past couple of years, but the school also invested \$26.2 million in renovations completed in 2022 that include a 35,000-square foot facility built specifically for training and developing hockey players.

The Spartans are also coached by Adam Nightingale, a highly regarded coach for the U.S. National Team Development Program in Plymouth, Michigan, before taking the job at his alma mater. Lindstrom would become the second 2024 draft prospect chosen with one of the top five picks to play for MSU, following Chicago Blackhawks rookie defenseman Artyom Levshunov (second overall).

Should Lindstrom pick Ohio State instead, that would also make sense.

The OSU campus and Schottenstein Center are just a few miles from the Blue Jackets' headquarters at Nationwide Arena and the Buckeyes made the NCAA Tournament field in a strong season. In fact, the Spartans and Buckeyes would have faced each other in the second round this weekend had they not each lost first-round matchups Thursday in Toledo.

Lindstrom, meanwhile, continues to live on his own in Columbus while rehabbing and training with the Blue Jackets' staff. Wherever he plays next season, Blue Jackets fans will be eager to watch his progress in becoming an NHL impact player.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets fall to Ottawa Senators, drop out of wild-card spot

By Brian Hedger- March 30, 2025

It's a good thing the Blue Jackets found a way to bank two huge points Friday night at Nationwide Arena. Otherwise, they wouldn't have gained anything out of a challenging home/road back-to-back that began with a 7-6 shootout win over the Vancouver Canucks on Friday and concluded Saturday night with a 3-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators at Canadian Tire Centre. Despite the Jackets' feverish push while seeking a tying goal late in the third, Ottawa held on for a win in regulation.

Ridly Greig, Drake Batherson and Jake Sanderson scored goals in the first two periods to give the Senators a 3-1 lead after two periods that ultimately led to the win.

Linus Ullmark, Ottawa's No. 1 goalie, earned the win in net with 28 saves — including 13 on 14 shots in the third period. Daniil Tarasov (24 saves) took the loss for the Blue Jackets (33-30-9), whose goals were scored by captain Boone Jenner in the first period and Kirill Marchenko with 8:58 left in the third to pull his team within 3-2 to create a final frenzy.

Losing in regulation kept Columbus at 75 points with 10 games remaining, which bumped them out of the second wild-card spot in the NHL's Eastern Conference. The Montreal Canadiens, who were idle Saturday, moved back into the East's final playoff spot decided by a tiebreaker. Since each team has 10 games left, Montreal gets occupies the second wild card with a slim 24-23 edge in regulation wins.

The Jackets went into the game tied at 75 points with the Canadiens and New York Rangers, who could supplant the Canadiens with a win late Saturday in San Jose. All three of those teams started the day just one point ahead of the New York Islanders, who remain stuck at 74 points after losing to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The Senators (39-28-5), meanwhile, extended their lead for the first wild card to eight points over the pack of "bubble" teams. The loss in Ottawa continued the Blue Jackets' struggles in the second half of back-to-back games. They've won only one of them in 10 tries this season (1-9-0) and have two more toughies left April 6 back in Ottawa and April 13 in Washington.

The Senators, like eight teams before them, took a 1-0 lead against the Blue Jackets in the first period. Columbus finished the opening period with more shots (12-8) but couldn't keep Ottawa from becoming the ninth straight team to score first.

The Jackets also trailed 2-1 after the first 20 minutes.

Greig put Ottawa up 1-0 at 7:24 of the first with a redirection of a shot by Thomas Chabot from the low slot, which Jenner countered for the Blue Jackets just 31 seconds later by scoring off Zach Werenski's rebound to tie it 1-1 on his fifth goal in four games to extend a four-game goal streak.

Ottawa regained the lead, 2-1, with 5:52 left in the first and maintained that lead after Batherson swatted a rebound of Dylan Cozens' shot past Tarasov from the slot for his 21st goal. The Jackets nearly tied it with a late power play that shifted momentum, which led to a sequence that forced Ullmark to make a great stop against Dmitri Voronkov's backhand from the slot with 34 seconds left in the opening period.

Ottawa made it 3-1 on Sanderson's goal 9:17 into the second, which was the lone goal of the middle period despite the Senators outshooting the Blue Jackets 12-4 with a dominant possession game.

Marchenko's team-leading 28th goal pulled the Blue Jackets within one goal at 3-2 with just under nine minutes left in the third, but that was as close as they'd get thanks to Ullmark.

Columbus Dispatch / What are the odds Ovechkin breaks Gretzky's record against the Columbus Blue Jackets?

By Brian Hedger- March 30, 2025

It's already been a memorable NHL season in Columbus, and there remains a chance that Nationwide Arena could become a historic venue during an April 12 visit from the Washington Capitals.

As the Blue Jackets continue their surprising pursuit of a playoff spot while playing for Johnny Gaudreau during a season that brought their first outdoor game and victory March 1 at Ohio Stadium, along come the Capitals and their history-chasing captain.

Going into Sunday's game against the Buffalo Sabres, Alex Ovechkin is five goals away from tying Wayne Gretzky's NHL record of 895 and six away from breaking it. The Capitals have only 10 games left in the regular season, but two will be played against the Blue Jackets on April 12 at Nationwide Arena and April 13 in Washington.

What are the odds that Gretzky, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and a traveling contingent of league dignitaries will witness a massive moment in history at a Blue Jackets game?

According to FanDuel, pretty good.

According to the odds listed Saturday afternoon, the Blue Jackets have the best chance of being on the ice for Ovechkin's record-setting goal at +380 with their home/road back-to-back matchups against the Metropolitan Division leader.

The New York Islanders, with games April 6 and April 15 in Washington, are +550. The Pittsburgh Penguins, who close out the season April 17 in Washington, are +850. The Carolina Hurricanes, who play Wednesday in Washington and host the Capitals on April 10, are +1,300. The Chicago Blackhawks, who host the Capitals on Friday, are +3,600 and the Boston Bruins are +25,000 with a home game Tuesday against Washington.

DraftKings gives the Blue Jackets +175 odds of allowing the record-breaking goal followed by the Islanders at +230, Penguins at +320, Hurricanes at +550, Blackhawks at +1,700 and Bruins at +30,000.

Alex Ovechkin has scored 26 career goals against Columbus Blue Jackets

Ovechkin has scored 889 career goals. This season he has netted 36 in 56 games, including one Nov. 15 in the Capitals' 7-2 rout of the Blue Jackets in Washington. He's scored 26 goals in 49 career games against the Jackets, including the first of his NHL career on Oct. 5, 2005, in Washington.

That one was scored against former Blue Jackets goalie Pascal Leclaire, and 20 years later you can place a prop bet on whether Elvis Merzlikins or backup Daniil Tarasov will be in the Columbus net for the goal that passes "The Great One's" mark.

Per FanDuel odds, Tarasov is +1,100 to become the goalie Ovechkin carries into history, while Merzlikins is +1,400 to give it up. New York Islanders goalie Ilya Sorokin is +1,000, Carolina's Frederik Andersen is +2,300 and Pittsburgh's Alex Nedeljkovic – who's from Cleveland – is +2,500.

During his journey to this point, Ovechkin has notched a jaw-dropping 33 career hat tricks and has scored against 182 different NHL goalies. Former Blue Jackets star Sergei Bobrovsky is among the goalies who've given up the most goals to Ovechkin, allowing 16 during his own standout career.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets reclaim playoff spot while buoyed by resilience: 5 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- March 30, 2025

It was the type of game that gives coaches gray hair, goalies sleepless nights and fans their money's worth.

The Blue Jackets' 7-6 shootout win over the Vancouver Canucks on Friday night at Nationwide Arena also gave them control of the last playoff spot in the NHL's Eastern Conference while simultaneously giving Dante Fabbro's ticker a workout.

"I almost had a heart attack a couple times," the Blue Jackets defenseman said, grinning. "But it obviously makes for an exciting game."

That's vastly underselling it.

After falling behind 3-0 in the first period, the Blue Jackets (33-29-9) played the rest of the game like a team whose entire season was at stake despite 11 games remaining. They stunned the Canucks with a three-goal outburst to start the second, overcame a two-goal deficit in the third with a second three-goal surge, lost that lead in just 23 seconds and then won in a shootout before boarding a flight to Kanata, Ontario to face the Ottawa Senators on Saturday at Canadian Tire Centre.

"You just stay resilient," captain Boone Jenner said. "You don't want to be coming back all the time, but it says a lot about our group and how we stay resilient and stay with it. It's a character win."

Here are five takeaways:

After downing the New York Islanders on the road Monday in a shootout, the Blue Jackets got three full days off to rest before hosting the Canucks.

That was also an opportunity for the teams they're competing with for the final playoff spot in the East — namely the Montreal Canadiens, New York Rangers, New York Islanders and Detroit Red Wings — to create a little breathing room ahead of the Jackets or catch-and-pass them in Detroit's case. Neither of those things happened, which kept the Blue Jackets just ahead of the Red Wings and just behind the Rangers, Islanders and Canadiens — who held the second wild card before Friday's slate of games.

The Blue Jackets passed all three Friday after Montreal lost to the Carolina Hurricanes and the Rangers coughed up a late 4-2 lead in a 5-4 overtime loss to the Anaheim Ducks.

All three are tied at 75 points, one point ahead of the Islanders and three points ahead of the Red Wings. Saturday's games include the Blue Jackets playing in Ottawa, which holds the East's first wild-card spot, the Rangers playing late in San Jose, the Islanders playing in Tampa, the Red Wings hosting the Bruins and the Canadiens idle.

Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason recently explained why he rarely replaces starting goalies, preferring instead to let them work through challenging games. This game was a perfect example with Merzlikins.

Some coaches might've yanked him after he allowed three goals on 10 shots in the first period. Others might've waited until the Canucks turned a 3-3 game into a 5-3 lead with goals late in the second and early in the third. Even more would've considered it after Vancouver countered Mathieu Olivier's thrilling go-ahead goal late in the third with Aatu Raty's equalizer on the next shift.

Not Evason, who was rewarded for sticking with Merzlikins in a six-goal game. The Jackets' No. 1 goalie reset his focus before OT to make four stops in five minutes of 3-on-3 plus three straight stops to win the shootout on Kent Johnson's leadoff goal.

"He just stays in there," Evason said. "He competes, he battles for his team, and that's what we've asked of him right from Day 1. He does that, we get to a shootout, and I feel very comfortable with him in the shootout, that's for sure."

He should, too. Merzlikins is 5-0 in shootouts this season.

The Blue Jackets' struggle to avoid trailing first in games has become more than just a passing trend.

This was the eighth straight game they've allowed the game's first goal and it's the 10th time it's happened in 11 games since they downed the Detroit Red Wings on March 1 in the 2025 NHL Stadium Series outdoor matchup at Ohio Stadium.

Despite also overcoming a 2-0 deficit to win Monday against the Islanders, losing games they trail first is far more common for the Blue Jackets — and most NHL teams. They're 9-20-4 when allowing the first goal and probably won't stay in the playoff race much longer if they don't turn that around.

Yielding the first three goals against the Canucks was even more problematic. Despite an impressive comeback from a 3-0 deficit on three straight goals to start the second, the Jackets couldn't score again before the Canucks retook the lead late in the period, 4-3, and extended it to 5-3 early in the third.

"It's definitely not the way you want to start games, getting down like that, but coming in after the first, honestly, we were like, 'We're coming back, there's no way we're losing this game,'" Fabbro said. "We had the belief and the resilience of the group, however you want to say it. It never wavered tonight. You don't want to start behind the eight ball all the time, but to know we can come back in these types of games, and these big games, is massive and a credit to everyone in this locker room sticking together and getting the job done tonight."

Denton Mateychuk played his 34th NHL game Friday against the Canucks and looked like a seasoned veteran while skating with veterans Erik Gudbranson and Zach Werenski.

Mateychuk finished with a goal, assist and two points while logging 18:17 on 21 shifts, working his way up the lineup at times to skate with Werenski on the top pairing. Mateychuk has gone through some growing pains, which almost all rookie defensemen endure, but his flashes of brilliance are impressive.

Mateychuk's shot from the left point early in the second gave captain Boone Jenner an opportunity to score with a tip-in goal 34 seconds into the period, cutting the Canucks' lead to 3-1, and the rookie's own goal with a one-timer Jenner's setup in the third pulled the Blue Jackets to within 5-4. Mateychuk also made numerous plays under pressure while showing a calm demeanor.

"He's a very young hockey player that has a mature level and elevation to his game that you don't see a lot," Evason said. "There's no question he's been real good all year, but he was exceptional tonight."

Kiefer Sherwood's breakout season for Vancouver Canucks continues in homecoming tilt against Columbus Blue Jackets

Kiefer Sherwood, who's from New Albany and played for the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets developmental program, is having quite a breakout season for the Canucks. He started the game with a whopping 404 hits as the NHL's record holder for hits in a season, and Sherwood had also contributed 32 points on 17 goals and 15 assists.

Sherwood pushed those numbers even higher against the Blue Jackets with 10 hits and three assists on six shots while skating 16:40 as the Canuck's right wing on the third forward line. Former Ohio State forward Dakota Joshua skated at left wing on that line, which was centered by Raty.

They combined to score two goals as a line and Sherwood also picked up a short-handed assist on a goal by defenseman Tyler Myers. Sherwood was also booed loudly in the same building where he used to cheer for the Blue Jackets growing up.

The reason?

Sherwood wasn't penalized in OT for tripping Merzlikins in the Columbus crease, which prompted a timeout for Blue Jackets athletic trainer Mike Vogt to check on the goalie's condition. Merzlikins stayed in the game, stonewalled the Canucks and spoiled the ending to Sherwood's latest homecoming.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets stumble against Ottawa Senators: 3 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- March 31, 2025

This is where “games in hand” come in handy.

The Blue Jackets’ 3-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators on Saturday night at Canadian Tire Centre loosened their grip on the Eastern Conference’s second wild card, but it’s still a tightly packed five-team race and they’ve got 10 games remaining.

That’s the same number as the Montreal Canadiens and New York Islanders, two more than what the New York Rangers (35-32-7) have left and one more than the Detroit Red Wings — the four teams battling with the Blue Jackets for the East’s final playoff ticket. All five teams are separated by three points from top-to-bottom, which means the Blue Jackets can still control their own destiny.

Here are three takeaways from their stumble in Ottawa:

Columbus Blue Jackets miss defenseman Dante Fabbro

After adding three points on a goal and two assists in the Blue Jackets’ resilient 7-6 shootout win over the Vancouver Canucks, defenseman Dante Fabbro was a late scratch Saturday. Not much information was shared on the FanDuel Sports Network television broadcast about Fabbro’s ailment or prognosis but losing him for any additional games would be a problem.

Without him, rookie Denton Mateychuk moved from the third defensive pairing to the first to play with star Zach Werenski and Jake Christiansen drew back into the lineup as Mateychuk’s replacement on the left side of the third pairing. Erik Gudbranson and Damon Severson also flip-flopped spots skating on the right sides of the second and third pairings in a full defensive shakeup.

Mateychuk wasn’t a problem playing “up” in the lineup, but Christiansen struggled to get back up to pace after missing six games with an undisclosed injury that happened March 13 against the Vegas Golden Knights. The other options are Jordan Harris, who missed his 16th straight game in Ottawa as a healthy scratch, and veteran Jack Johnson.

Fabbro, a right-handed shooter, gives the Blue Jackets the option of pairing lefties and righties on all three pairings and he’s adapted his playing style to fit Werenski’s offensive tendencies.

Zach Werenski soaking up ice time for Columbus Blue Jackets

There’s a reason Werenski leads all NHL skaters with an average ice time of 27:10 that’s almost two minutes longer, on average, than Colorado’s Cale Makur (25:35) – the closest to the Blue Jackets’ star defenseman.

Werenski is involved in so many facets of the games for the Blue Jackets that defensive assistant Steve McCarthy can’t help but continue sending him over the boards. After skating 29:49 in the Jackets’ shootout win Friday, Werenski logged another 29:16 against the Senators in a game that ended in regulation.

That’s almost a full game skated on back-to-back nights, which might be starting to push his upper limits. Werenski also finished with two assists and a +2 plus/minus rating while continuing his candidacy for the Norris Trophy as the NHL’s best defenseman.

Boone Jenner trying to carry Columbus Blue Jackets to the playoffs

After going 12 games without scoring a goal in his return from shoulder surgery, Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner has scored goals in four straight games. His season total is now up to five to go with 10 assists for 15 points in 16 games.

Jenner, the Blue Jackets' captain, is trying to throw his team over his shoulders and carry the load during one of the most challenging parts of an NHL season. Jenner's ability to play around the net, one of the most punishing spots on the ice, could be a key factor in the Blue Jackets' final push toward the postseason.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets come back twice in wild shootout win over Vancouver

By Aaron Portzline- March 29, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Captain Boone Jenner talked about the Columbus Blue Jackets' resilience, which was the perfect word after the Blue Jackets overcame 3-0 and 5-3 deficits to will their way into a shootout win over the Vancouver Canucks on Friday.

Coach Dean Evason spoke glowingly about the lack of panic on the Blue Jackets' bench, even as they made crucial mistakes, gave up soft goals and endured a couple of calls and non-calls by NHL officials with whom they profoundly disagreed.

But Blue Jackets defenseman Dante Fabbro summed up the wild night better than anybody, and he did it in 10 words.

"I almost had a heart attack a couple of times," Fabbro said.

The Blue Jackets prevailed 7-6 in the shootout thanks to Kent Johnson's game-deciding goal, thrilling a beyond-capacity crowd of 18,586 in Nationwide Arena, which might need to consider passing out salt pills, oxygen tanks and defibrillators if this keeps up.

Jenner had two goals and an assist, and Fabbro had a goal and two assists. Denton Mateychuk, Mathieu Olivier and Kirill Marchenko also scored goals, and goaltender Elvis Merzlikins overcame a couple of rough goals during regulation to stop four shots in overtime and all three in the shootout.

"It's one of those games you want to sit on for a few days because they're very emotional, but the challenge for our group is to reset really quickly because we have another big one tomorrow," Olivier said. "It's that time of year. It's exciting."

Yes, take a deep breath. The Blue Jackets packed up after Friday's win and flew to Ottawa, where they'll face the Senators on Saturday at Canadian Tire Centre. The season is coming to a crescendo, and the Blue Jackets appear to be living a charmed life in the standings and on the ice.

Nobody else in the mucky middle of the Eastern Conference is making a strong move for the eighth and final playoff spot (the second wild card), which is why the Blue Jackets' win Friday moved them back into that last spot (at least temporarily).

Here's how wild it's been for the Blue Jackets in recent weeks and Friday's game:

- The Jackets haven't scored a power-play goal — get this! — since the win over the Detroit Red Wings at Ohio Stadium, but the goal they scored to tie Friday's score at 5 with 3:14 remaining in regulation ended an 0-for-25 drought.
- The go-ahead goal Olivier scored only 22 seconds later gave the Blue Jackets their first lead (6-5) in a club-record 482 minutes, 37 seconds. The Jackets' last lead was a 7-3 win over the New York Rangers on March 7. (No, Monday's shootout win over the New York Islanders does not count as a lead, the NHL says).
- Columbus' first lead in "forever" lasted only 23 seconds before Vancouver tied it again, at 6.

"We've been learning from different experiences and situations all season, and you build up that memory if things go a little sideways or get a little adverse," Evason said. "I don't think it's a shock that this team handles adversity pretty well, and we did."

“We got down 3-0, we had some calls and some whatever, and they just went about their business and kept playing hard. We were fortunate to catch a couple of breaks and a couple of bounces.”

The Blue Jackets were lucky to survive after such a shoddy first. The Canucks scored two power-play goals and led 3-0 on goals from Linus Karlsson, Brock Boeser and Jake DeBrusk. After spending the first five months of the season as one of the NHL's top score-first teams, the Blue Jackets have made a habit of awful starts lately.

Olivier suggested it's more mental than physical, that the Blue Jackets, individually, need to consider changing their pregame prep to be sharper at puck drop.

“That's on us,” Jenner said. “It's happened a few games in a row here, and it's something we need to fix. It's not easy when you spot the other team a couple of goals in the first period.”

The Blue Jackets made a mighty push in the second.

Only 34 seconds into the period, Jenner deflected a Mateychuk wrister from the left circle past Vancouver goaltender Kevin Lankinen to make it 3-1. At 4:54, Marchenko scored on a wrist shot from the slot, and at 8:44, Fabbro one-timed a Cole Sillinger pass from the right circle to tie it.

It felt as if the momentum had fully shifted to the Columbus bench, especially when Vancouver's Elias Pettersson was given a double-minor for high-sticking Jenner, putting the Jackets on a four-minute power play.

But, oh, that power play. Not only has it struggled to score, but it has also been outscored by the opposing penalty kill. Yes, during that lengthy penalty drought, it allowed three short-handed goals.

Until, that is, the Canucks made it four. Vancouver's Pius Suter chipped the puck around Zach Werenski and sent it ahead for New Albany native Kiefer Sherwood, who took off on a short-handed break and saucered a perfect pass to Tyler Myers for a 4-3 lead.

The Canucks pushed the lead to 5-3 at 6:42 of the third.

“That stuff's gonna happen,” Jenner said. “It can't faze you as a group. There were a lot of momentum swings, especially with the goals.”

The Jackets responded again. Mateychuk made it 5-4 only 21 seconds after Aatu Raty gave the Canucks the lead. Then came Jenner's power-play goal for a 5-5 tie.

Olivier, who had a goal waved off earlier in the third period for goaltender interference, scored the 6-5 goal at 17:08 of the third. A fired puck struck him and fell before him, allowing him to swat it past Lankinen for his 17th goal of the season.

As the Nationwide crowd was celebrating that goal — what is this, a lead? — the Canucks scored to tie it at 6. Raty got it again from the net front with help from a Sherwood forecheck. (New Albany's finest had three assists and a run-in with Merzlikins that drew boos.)

The Blue Jackets were the only team to score in the shootout. Johnson has made a habit of shooting between the pads on goaltenders, and you could see that Lankinen was expecting it. When he flinched, Lankinen went down, and Johnson roofed it over him off his backhand.

Merzlikins stopped DeBrusk, Conor Garland and Jonathan Lekkerimaki in the shootout. A wild night, full of back and forths, finally ended.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets' back-to-back woes surface again in loss to Senators

By Aaron Portzline- March 30, 2025

One bad habit has been with the Columbus Blue Jackets since the start of the season. The other is a new, unfortunate development, especially at a time — their first playoff push in five seasons — when they should be building good habits.

The Blue Jackets once again trailed for most of the game, losing to the Ottawa Senators 3-2 before 17,758 in Canadian Tire Centre. It's the first of three meetings in 11 days between the two clubs that started the night as the two wild-card entries in the Eastern Conference.

The loss dropped the Blue Jackets to 1-9-0 in the second game of back-to-backs, one of the worst such records in the NHL this season. Only Seattle (0-11) and Philadelphia (1-10-1), whose playoff hopes faded weeks ago, have been worse in second games.

The other bad habit? The Blue Jackets allowed the game's first goal for the ninth consecutive game, a truly distressing number, and a surprising one, too. Before this run of 1-0 deficits began on March 11, the Blue Jackets were leading the league by scoring first in 38 of 63 games.

"We knew it was going to be a tight game, back and forth," Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner told reporters. "I think both ways it was tight. Not many chances. These are the type of games you're going to get this time of year.

"We battled all night. Great effort by us, but we came up one short."

Jenner and Kirill Marchenko scored goals for the Blue Jackets, while Zach Werenski had two primary assists. Goaltender Daniil Tarasov, playing his first game in two weeks, finished with 24 saves, including 11 in the second period, when the Jackets' energy started to lull.

It was Marchenko's goal midway through the third period — a slicing and dicing move through three Senators after he was sprung in the neutral zone by a Werenski feed — that appeared to energize the Blue Jackets, who turned the third period into their best period.

WHAT A RELEASE! 📢 @FanaticsBook | #CBJ pic.twitter.com/SfR7DLOLOg

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) March 30, 2025

Marchenko, who scored off a wrister in the slot, now has 28 goals this season, moving him closer to becoming the Blue Jackets' first 30-goal scorer since Cam Atkinson had 41 goals during the 2018-19 season. Marchenko has a goal in three straight.

"We had a lot of chances," Marchenko said. "We pushed really well (in the third). My goal helped, but it's not my goal. We all worked together, all five guys, to create the moment for me. It's a good game. It's a back-to-back game, but we can beat these guys, for sure."

The Blue Jackets played the final 2:30 of the game with an extra skater after sending Tarasov to the bench. They had plenty of looks, but none better than Kent Johnson's sprawling backhand whack at a puck in the low slot that Ottawa goaltender Linus Ullmark gloved.

To their credit, the Blue Jackets have created a sense in several recent games that they're on the verge of pulling off amazing comebacks. They actually did it on Friday, when they responded to 3-0 and 5-3 deficits against Vancouver to win 7-6 in a shootout in Nationwide Arena.

But chasing the game is no way to go through a playoff stretch.

The Senators took a 1-0 lead at 7:24 of the first period when Ridley Greig got his paddle on a Thomas Chabot shot and directed it past Tarasov.

The Blue Jackets quickly responded, though. Jenner, who now has five goals in his last four games, scored off a rebound from a Werenski shot only 31 seconds later to tie the score at 1. The Senators scored later in the first to reclaim the lead and again midway through the second to push it to 3-1.

That @UNDMhockey connection 🌟 #GoSensGo pic.twitter.com/naPZezgypf

— Ottawa Senators (@Senators) March 30, 2025

From there, the Blue Jackets needed a tremendous individual effort or a beneficial bounce to get back into the game. Marchenko delivered it, but they couldn't get the equalizer.

"That was a great game," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "Hey, both teams played hard, played fast. Certainly, the start was fantastic. The pace of the game. Everybody was playing their butts off. We had a lot of chances, obviously, to tie it.

"That whole third period, we pushed pretty good. It went back and forth a little bit. They're a really good hockey team, and so are we. It was a good battle."

The Blue Jackets knew they were up against it when they saw this back-to-back on the schedule. They emptied the tank on Friday versus Vancouver, then flew after the game to Ottawa. After clearing customs and busing to their hotel, it was nearly 1:30 a.m. before they arrived.

Making matters worse, defenseman Dante Fabbro, who plays on the top pair with Werenski, was unable to play because of "bumps and bruises," Evason said. That caused a wholesale switching of defensive pairs.

Werenski moved to the right side of the top pair and was joined by rookie Denton Mateychuk on his left, while Ivan Provorov and Erik Gudbranson formed the second pair. Jake Christiansen, who had missed the previous six games with an undisclosed injury, went back into the lineup on the third pair with Damon Severson.

By the end of the game, the Blue Jackets were down to five defensemen, even though Christiansen remained on the bench until the final buzzer. He didn't play after the 5:22 mark of the third period, though no explanation was provided by Evason.

The loss dropped the Blue Jackets out of the final wild-card spot in the East. The New York Rangers (77 points) passed them with a 6-1 win over San Jose. Montreal, tied with Columbus at 75 points, jumped over them because both teams have played 72 games (the first tiebreaker during the regular season) and the Canadiens have an edge (24-23) in the second tiebreaker, which is regulation wins.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Chasing the game is no way to make the playoffs

By Aaron Portzline- March 31, 2025

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

Item 1: Stop chasing

If the season ended today and the Blue Jackets barely missed qualifying for the Stanley Cup playoffs, they would still be one of the best stories in the NHL this season. Everybody loves an underdog, and the Jackets have played that role in a very inspirational way.

But with 10 games left, something has to change if they're going to keep this storybook season from ending on April 17.

The Blue Jackets' level of effort is not in question. They emptied the tank on Friday in a stirring 7-6 overtime win against the Vancouver Canucks at Nationwide Arena, then flew in the wee hours after the game to Ottawa where they played a tight game with the Senators, losing 3-2 despite a late push.

One thing is evident, though. The Blue Jackets aren't playing like they did a month ago. Since their memorable win over the Detroit Red Wings in Ohio Stadium on March 1, the Blue Jackets haven't been playing games as much as they've been chasing them.

They aren't dictating the pace of games with their skating and tenacity the way they were earlier in the season. Instead, they're waiting to see how a game will be played and then attempting to adapt and respond.

This is an opinion from high above the action, yes. But it's also a theory that's supported by numbers, and those numbers are staggering.

The Blue Jackets are 3-8-1 since the outdoor win over Detroit, which is rough enough. But what's going on beneath the surface makes it seem fortunate that they've gathered three wins and seven standings points in that stretch.

Since then, the Blue Jackets have ...

- Trailed for 66.2 percent of the playing time (483 minutes, 29 seconds) and been tied for 28.1 percent (205 minutes, 36 seconds). That means they've held the lead only 5.7 percent of the time (41 minutes, 24 seconds).
- Set a franchise record for the longest stretch of play without having a lead: 482 minutes, 37 seconds, which ended on Friday when they took a 6-5 lead on Vancouver late in the third period. They held that lead for 23 seconds.
- Been outscored 20-4 in the first period.
- Allowed the game's first goal in 11 of those 12 games, including nine straight games, tied for the fourth-longest streak in franchise history. If they fall behind against the Nashville Predators on Tuesday at Nationwide, it would mark the longest streak since early in the 2006-07 season.
- Not only fallen behind, but done so early. In seven of those 12 games, they've allowed the 1-0 goal before the midpoint of the first period.

It's probably not surprising that the Blue Jackets, one of the youngest clubs in the NHL, were taken aback by the way the league cranks up in March, especially once the trade deadline has come and gone.

The jockeying for position becomes intense, not just among the clubs battling for a spot (like Columbus) but also those at the top of the divisions trying to secure home ice advantage. It is not quite playoff pace, but it's much closer to that than early in the regular season. Even cross-conference games have a high temperature.

So many of the Blue Jackets, especially those at the top of the lineup, have never played in important games this time of season. For the most part, though, they haven't been overwhelmed. The 1-0 overtime loss to Florida on March 20 was one of the best games (tactically, at least) the Blue Jackets have played all season.

But they seem content to counterpunch, not throw the first punch. They play as if they're waiting for a bounce, not bull-rushing the net often enough to create one.

As any NHL coach or player will tell you, chasing a lead is exhausting — mentally, especially. It goes without saying the Blue Jackets' recent run of play cannot be sustained, especially since they play their final 10 games in 17 days. That includes dreaded back-to-backs in each of the next two weekends.

Only three of the Blue Jackets' remaining 10 games are against non-playoff teams, including Tuesday's game against Nashville. Historically, the Predators have done nothing but taunt and torment the Blue Jackets, but this represents a chance for Columbus to rediscover its mojo.

Like any journey, it begins with a single step. That would be a 1-0 lead on Tuesday.

Item 2: Who wants it?

In most seasons, the Blue Jackets' ongoing malaise would have bounced them out of the playoff picture entirely. Instead, they're still in the thick of things, even after Saturday's loss in Ottawa sent them tumbling from eighth place (the second wild card) to 10th place.

We should probably concede that Ottawa, with an eight-point lead over ninth-place Montreal and 10th-place Columbus, has most likely secured a postseason spot. If the Senators go 5-5-0 the rest of the way, the Canadiens and Blue Jackets (who do not have a tiebreaker advantage over Ottawa) would have to go 9-0-1 to jump them.

Possible, but not likely. And there is zero evidence recently that Columbus, Montreal or any other team in the Eastern Conference's mediocre middle is ready to sprint to the finish.

The Rangers, who currently hold the final playoff spot, are just 4-6-3 since March 3. Montreal has lost five in a row (0-3-2) heading into today's 1 p.m. game against Florida, the defending Stanley Cup champ.

You know about Columbus' 3-8-1 stretch. Just below are the Islanders, who have lost four in a row (0-2-2); Detroit, which is 4-11-0 since Feb. 25; Boston, 0-7-1 since March 12; and Pittsburgh, 1-3-1 since March 16.

The Blue Jackets have two games remaining against Ottawa and finish the season on April 17 versus the Islanders at home.

Two and a half weeks remain in the regular season. Who wants it?

Item 3: Take 5, Erik Gudbranson

Take 5 is a quick, breezy sitdown with a Blue Jackets player, coach or front-office staffer. This week's features defenseman Erik Gudbranson:

1. Biggest surprise living in Columbus?

That's an interesting question. It would have been hard for me to be surprised, honestly, because everybody I'd spoken to on my way here was like, "It's going to surprise you how good it is." So I was kind of expecting it. With a young family, the options you have are great. Our fan base here is amazing. Just overall, it's a phenomenal place to live. My neighbors (in Upper Arlington) are great people, great friends. I noticed right away how friendly and welcoming people are in Ohio and Columbus.

2. Favorite restaurant spots?

Two young kids at home, so we don't get out as much as we once did. Plus, my wife (Sarah) is a really good cook, so that's maybe the biggest reason to stay in. But ... (laughs) we do go sometimes. I've really enjoyed Cento (in German Village). Love that Japanese Village (in Upper Arlington), especially Akai Hana for sushi. Lunch spot? I'd probably go with Littleton's Market (in Upper Arlington). Great spot.

3. Best players you've played with and against?

Oh, man. Well, I've played with Sid (Sidney Crosby). Man, I could give you a list, right? Sasha (Aleksander Barkov) is something else. Zach Werenski is something else. Three guys I played with later in their careers: Hank (Henrik) and Danny (Daniel) Sedin and Ryan Getzlaf. I was a huge Getzlaf fan growing up, so that was cool. Johnny Gaudreau, of course, in Calgary and here. I've seen some great players, and I know I'm forgetting some. I just know I am.

4. Three non-hockey people you'd want to join for dinner?

First one is easy. I never met my grandfather on my mom's side. He'd be one. His name was David Leith. I've heard the stories, but it's more than he's my grandfather. He'd be No. 1. I'd put Kobe Bryant at No. 2. Can I do an "and-one" on that reservation? (laughs) My wife would want to be there. And then I'd probably go with Chris Hadfield, the famous Canadian astronaut. Can you just imagine the stories? He installed the arm (Canadarm2) on the International Space Station.

5. Which of your teammates should host a podcast?

Ha. (looks around the dressing room) Riemer (James van Riemsdyk) could definitely have a health and wellness podcast. Monny (Sean Monahan) should just because he's so damn funny. There are a lot of candidates in here. You put me, Boone (Jenner), MOnny and Z (Werenski) in a room and hit record, something is going to come out of that.

Item No. 4: Snacks

- A team source told The Athletic last week that center Cayden Lindstrom, the Blue Jackets' No. 4 selection last June, is leaning toward attending Michigan State next season after missing this season with a back injury that required surgery. Lindstrom's agent, Daren Hermiston, declined to comment. Lindstrom would be perhaps the biggest name to make the switch from the Canadian major junior ranks (he played for Medicine Hat of the Western Hockey League) since a leap to the NCAA was deemed permissible in early January. It's unclear how much NIL money Lindstrom will be getting to play for a school, but that's been part of the recruiting pitch by several schools, the source said.
- The Blue Jackets' wild win on Friday was the 800th victory in franchise history. If you divide that total into eight 100-win segments, you get a good measure of the organization's recent past. It took the Jackets 272 games (whoof!) to get from 701 to 800 wins, the most games of any segment since the first 100 wins in franchise history, which took (double whoof!) 321 games. The shortest road to 100 wins was between 501 and 600 (Dec. 6, 2016, to Dec. 22, 2018), just 175 games.

- With 10 games left in the season, Werenski has 20-52-72 in 71 games and is nearing the top of the Blue Jackets' single-season marks in two major categories. His points rank seventh-highest, with Nick Foligno (73, 2014-15), Gaudreau (74, 2022-23), Ray Whitney (76, 2002-03) and Rick Nash (79, 2008-09) within striking distance. The record is 87 by Artemi Panarin in 2018-19. As for assists, Werenski is tied with Whitney (52, 2002-03) for fifth-most in a single season. Panarin (59, 2018-19) holds that mark, too, followed by Jake Voracek (56, 2021-22), Panarin again (55, 2017-18) and Gaudreau (53, 2022-23).
- Captain Boone Jenner has five goals in his last four games, the second four-game goal streak of his career. He has acknowledged the challenge of stepping back into the lineup at this point in the season after missing the first 56 games following shoulder surgery. But he has 5-10-15 in 16 games since his return, playing 17:59 per game. He has also won 54.3 percent of his faceoffs since his return.
- Defenseman Dante Fabbro, who has played next to Werenski on the top pair since he was claimed off waivers from Nashville on Nov. 10, missed Saturday's game in Ottawa with an injury. Coach Dean Evason said earlier in the day that some lineup decisions would be made closer to puck drop because some players were fighting "bumps and bruises." Fabbro is considered day-to-day.
- The Blue Jackets signed center Jack Williams out of Northeastern University this week, landing their top target on the college free-agent market. Williams, 23, is a classic late bloomer. He was eligible but not drafted in the 2020 and 2021 NHL Drafts when he was finding his way with Muskegon of the United States Hockey League. A turning point in his career, it seems, came after the 2019-20 season when he had just 6-7-13 in 44 games with Muskegon. "I always played wing, never center," Williams told The Athletic. "But my coach, Mike Hamilton, suggested that I switch, and it's the best thing that ever happened in my hockey career." Williams said the switch made him fine-tune the finer points of his game, especially in the defensive end. He's been called a 200-foot hockey player. In 110 games with Muskegon after the switch to center, Williams had 36-61-97. "(Hamilton) was just unbelievable for me and my development. I still talk to him. He's an awesome person in my life."
- Williams' contract is a two-year entry-level deal, and because he's not 18- or 19-years-old — he's 23 as of March 2 — there's no 10-game minimum to burn the first year of his deal. The minute he signed the contract, the first year was spent. He's now a restricted free agent after the 2025-26 season.
- Peter Fish, Williams' agent, said one of the factors in choosing Columbus was the Blue Jackets' future depth chart, based on the contract status of some of the current third- and fourth-line players. Centers Sean Kuraly and Justin Danforth and wingers van Riemsdyk, Luke Kunin and Christian Fischer are all unrestricted free agents this summer, as are minor-league veterans Trey Fix-Wolansky, Dylan Gambrell and Owen Sillinger, among others. Williams is also a right-shot center, which teams covet.
- Here's your Sunday Gathering trivia question: Williams is the second player from Maine to sign with the Blue Jackets. In which U.S. state were the highest number of Blue Jackets players born (not just this season, but in the franchise's history)?
- Luca Pinelli, who finished his junior career with Ontario Hockey League's Ottawa 67's earlier this month, made his pro debut on Friday and had two assists in AHL Cleveland's 5-4 shootout loss to Texas. Pinelli was a fourth-round pick (No. 114) in the 2023 NHL Draft.
- Wild stat out of Cleveland: Denton Mateychuk hasn't played for the Monsters since he was recalled to Columbus on Dec. 27, but he's still their leading scorer among blueliners. Mateychuk had 9-16-25 in 27 games, which is still tops on Cleveland. Stanislav Svozil, with 4-20-24, is closing in.
- Trivia answer: 10 players — Foligno, Sean Kuraly, Todd Marchant, Sonny Milano, Zach Aston-Reese, Kevin Labanc, Tim Erixon, Tom Sestito, Jeremy Morin and Adam Clendening — hail from New York, which

is the leader. Ohio, Michigan and Massachusetts, with nine each, are tied for second. Players from 24 different states have worn the Columbus sweater.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets' resiliency leads to a crazy win vs. Vancouver](#)

By Garrison McDaniel- March 29, 2025

After CBJ wins, we'll give three takeaways about what stood out or what we'll remember from the Blue Jackets victory.

BLUE JACKETS 7, CANUCKS 6, SHOOTOUT

1. The Blue Jackets again started slow but showed resiliency to erase a three-goal deficit to defeat the Canucks.

Three days after overcoming a 2-0 first-period deficit against the New York Islanders, the Blue Jackets managed to top that performance as they turned a 3-0 Canucks lead after 20 minutes into a 7-6 shootout win.

The Blue Jackets only had one win when trailing at the start of the second period before Monday's game on Long Island, but now they have found the formula for comebacks.

The first-period deficit was not the only one they needed to overcome to pull out the win, as after tying the score at 3 in the second, they were trailing 5-3 with just under 13 minutes remaining.

"It's not the way you want to start a game, going down like that," said Dante Fabbro, who tied the game with his second-period goal. "Coming in after the first, honestly, we said, 'We are coming back.' There was no way we were losing this game."

The importance of this game was not lost on the team, which led the momentum swings to mean even more.

"I almost had a heart attack a couple of times," Fabbro said jokingly.

If there is one word to sum up the Blue Jackets' 2024-25 season, it would be resilience. With all the on- and off-ice tribulations, the team has still found a way to keep positive and win hockey games.

"It has been the theme all year, resilience," Mathieu Olivier said. "Ever since August, I am very proud of our group, and the way we handled tonight after the first period."

2. The Blue Jackets' 5-on-5 success proved to be the difference, but the power-play equalized the score late.

One of the top-scoring teams all season at 5-on-5, the Blue Jackets outscored the Canucks by a 5-3 margin at even strength. However, special teams kept Vancouver in this game.

The special teams' struggles have been more evident recently as the power play has had a hard time getting on track. Since Jan. 14, Columbus has just five goals on the man-advantage while conceding five shorthanded goals.

The Blue Jackets gave up a shorthanded goal on a four-minute power play in the second, but they did make the most of their chance at redemption. As the Blue Jackets went on the power play with 3:20 left in the third, they needed one to tie it and it was the captain, Boone Jenner, that came up clutch for Columbus.

“It was get a goal,” Jenner said of the message going into the opportunity. “We did not like our power play in the second period. Those are the key moments that we want to step up as a unit. We did not panic.”

3. As the Blue Jackets pulled off the victory, they moved into a tie for the final wild card spot.

It was another night where the Blue Jackets got some help from the teams around them. Montreal lost in regulation while the New York Rangers lost in overtime, leaving all three teams tied for the second wild card spot with 75 points. The Blue Jackets have one game in hand on the Canadiens and two on the Rangers.

With Columbus playing the least number of games as any team in the Eastern Conference race, they are the team that is in the driver seat.

Some players on the team check the box scores from around the league, but for Olivier, the media shared the Canadiens’ result with him after the game.

“They lost? Perfect,” Olivier said. “That helps our cause. We control our own destiny.”

Now, they turn their focus to the next game Saturday in Ottawa, as they have done all season. The Blue Jackets have kept a focus on the mentality of one game at a time, which has helped them stay in the playoff race.

“Obviously, we have another massive test tomorrow,” Fabbro said. “Our focus now is on that Ottawa game and getting the job done there.”

“That’s one of those games you want to sit on for a couple of days, but the challenge for this group is to reset really quick because of a big one tomorrow,” Olivier said. “It’s that time of year. It’s really exciting.”

BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets rally to defeat Canucks in shootout

By Craig Merz- March 29, 2025

COLUMBUS -- Boone Jenner and Dante Fabbro each had three points, helping the Columbus Blue Jackets rally for a 7-6 shootout win against the Vancouver Canucks at Nationwide Arena on Friday.

Jenner had two goals and an assist, Fabbro had a goal and two assists, and Elvis Merzlikins made 31 saves for the Blue Jackets (33-29-9), who trailed 3-0 in the first period and fell behind 5-3 early in the third.

Kirill Marchenko, Denton Mateychuk and Mathieu Olivier each had a goal and an assist, and Kent Johnson scored the lone goal of the shootout.

The Blue Jackets tied the Montreal Canadiens for the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference and have played one fewer game.

"Obviously, you don't want to be coming back all the time," said Jenner, the Columbus captain. "But it says a lot about our group and how we stay resilient, stay with it and it's a character win."

Aatu Raty scored two goals, Brock Boeser had a goal and an assist, and Pius Suter and Kiefer Sherwood each had three assists for the Canucks (34-26-13). @quinng and Dakota Joshua each had two assists, Kevin Lankinen made 32 saves.

Vancouver moved within four points of the St. Louis Blues for the second wild card from the Western Conference with one game in hand.

"It was a high, emotional game, and we didn't quit," Boeser said, "but saying that, we let them score three goals straight twice, so that's obviously unacceptable, and we've got to clean up whatever happened."

Jenner tied it 5-5 on the power play at 16:46 of the third period, and Olivier gave Columbus a 6-5 lead at 17:08 before Raty tied it 6-6 just 23 seconds later, scoring from in front off a Joshua pass.

"I think what stood out there was the resiliency of our group, coming back from two deficits," Olivier said. "They get a quick one after we go ahead there, and we just find a way to get it done."

Linus Karlsson put Vancouver up 1-0 at 8:51 of the first with a power-play goal.

"Obviously, our starts haven't been very good lately," Olivier said of Columbus, which trailed 2-0 in the first period of its previous two games. "I think it's more mentally than physically."

Boeser increased the lead to 2-0 at 10:35 with a wrist shot from the left face-off circle, and Jake DeBrusk made it 3-0 with a power-play goal at 13:26.

"We had some great moments, and so did they and obviously we'd like to play a little bit better when we have the lead and not give it away," Raty said.

Jenner cut it to 3-1 at 34 seconds of the second period when a shot from the left point by Mateychuk deflected off Jenner's hand, giving him a three-game goal streak (four goals).

Marchenko scored from the inside edge of the left circle make it 3-2 at 4:54 before Fabbro tied it 3-3 at 8:44 with a wrist shot from the left point.

Tyler Myers put the Canucks ahead 4-3 with a short-handed goal at 11:23 off a setup by Sherwood during the first of a double-minor for high-sticking by Elias Pettersson.

Raty made it 5-3 at 6:42 of the third, scoring from above the left circle off the rush, before Mateychuk scored with a one-timer 21 seconds later to cut it to 5-4.

“When pressure hits, you’ve got to face it, Canucks coach Rick Tocchet said. “I think sometimes we're sinking but it's a learning process. That's why we learn. Some young guys, they're trying hard, but this is a good lesson for them.”

Justin Danforth appeared to tie it 5-5 at 11:53, but his goal was overturned after Vancouver challenged for goaltender interference.

“We've talked all year about learning from different experiences and situations, and you build up that memory that it's OK if things go a little sideways and get a little adverse,” Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. “I don't think it's a shock that this team handles adversity pretty well, and we did. I mean, you get down 3-0. We had some calls and some whatever, and they just went about their business and kept playing hard.”

NOTES: Prior to Jenner’s power-play goal, the Blue Jackets were 0-for-25 on the man-advantage since March 1 and had allowed three short-handed goals during that span. ... The Blue Jackets got their eighth three-goal comeback win in franchise history. ... Columbus forward Cole Sillinger had an assist and three shots on goal in 13:50 of ice time after missing 11 games with an upper-body injury. ... DeBrusk has four points (one goal, three assists) in a four-game point streak. ... Suter extended his point streak to three games (seven points; one goal, six assists).

[BlueJackets.com / CBJ rally falls short in Ottawa](#)

By Callum Fraser- March 30, 2025

OTTAWA -- Ridly Greig had a goal and an assist, and the Ottawa Senators held off a late rally from the Columbus Blue Jackets to win 3-2 at Canadian Tire Centre on Saturday.

"It was intense," Greig said of the final five minutes of the game. "I think throughout the next 10 games here there's going to be a lot of intense moments like that. We're getting used to it and it's a lot of fun to be out there."

Linus Ullmark made 29 saves, Shane Pinto had two assists, and Drake Batherson and Jake Sanderson scored for the Senators (39-28-5), who are 3-1-0 in their past four games.

"Felt close to a playoff game tonight," Ottawa coach Travis Green said. "Obviously, the crowd was awesome. It was a good effort. I thought our details were sharp, I thought our energy was good. There was a lot of loose puck battles that you have to win at this time of year."

Ullmark made 14 saves in the third period.

"I felt like in the past, we haven't played great with the lead," Sanderson said. "But we're getting better at it. And another great game from 'Ullly.'"

Boone Jenner extended his goal streak to four games, Zach Werenski had two assists and Daniil Tarasov made 24 saves for the Blue Jackets (33-30-9), who had won two straight.

"That was a great game. Both teams played hard, played fast," Columbus coach Dean Evason said.

"Certainly, the start was fantastic, the pace of the game, and everybody was playing their butts off. We had lots of chances, obviously, and certainly in the third period and at the end, to tie it. That was just a real great hockey game that we fell a little bit short [in]."

The Senators hold the first wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference, eight points ahead of the Blue Jackets, Montreal Canadiens and New York Rangers.

"I think we all know how big of a win it is," Pinto said. "'Greener' kind of emphasized in the morning that this is obviously a big one for us."

Greig gave Ottawa a 1-0 lead at 7:24 of the first period when he tipped a Thomas Chabot point shot.

Jenner responded 31 seconds later to tie it 1-1 at 7:55, scoring on a Werenski rebound in the slot. It was Jenner's fifth goal in his past four games.

"We knew it was going to be a tight game, back and forth," Jenner said. "I think both ways it was tight, not many chances. That's the type of games you're going to get at this time of year. We battled all night. Great effort by us, but we came up one short."

The Senators regained the lead 2-1 at 14:08 when Batherson kicked a Dylan Cozens rebound to his stick and slid it five-hole on Tarasov.

Sanderson extended the lead to 3-1 at 9:17 of the second period. Sanderson crashed the net on the rush and had Pinto's rebound go in off of his skate.

"You talk about a team maturing, but also a lot of individual players are maturing as we go on and he's definitely one of them," Green said of Sanderson. "He's a very good offensive defenseman, but he does a

lot of subtle things in your own zone that people don't notice, that stops momentum, stops scoring chances. He's got a great stick; he's got great hockey sense."

Kirill Marchenko cut it to 3-2 at 11:02 of the third period. He deked Greig at Ottawa's blue line and scored with a wrist shot from the slot under Ullmark's left pad on the rush.

"They played hard; they didn't give us much," Werenski said. "I thought we played hard too. I thought it was a pretty even game for the most part. Probably would like to have back some minutes in the second there; I feel like we didn't get to our game. But yeah, it's a good team. They're fighting for the playoffs as well and they didn't give us much tonight. But I liked our effort, I thought we could learn from it."

NOTES: With his 21st win of 2024-25, Ullmark tied Joonas Korpisalo for the second-most wins in a goaltender's first season with the Senators. Dominik Hasek had 28 in 2005-06. ... Chabot had a game-high six blocks. ... Ottawa is an Eastern Conference best 30-6-0 when scoring first.

BlueJackets.com / Williams feels like he's found a home in Columbus

By Garrison McDaniel- March 30, 2025

On Tuesday, the Blue Jackets signed Northeastern forward Jack Williams after his third collegiate season wrapped up.

The 23-year-old prospect has joined the team and took his first morning skate Friday as the Jackets are in the thick of trying to reach the playoffs for the first time since the 2019-20 season.

It's the culmination of a process that lasted throughout his junior year with the Huskies, during which Williams was one of the top scorers in college hockey with 16 goals and 41 points. Those numbers made him a sought-after player once Northeastern's season concluded, but in the end, his comfort in Columbus – and with CBJ director of hockey operations Rick Nash – was a major factor in Williams deciding to become a Blue Jacket.

"I thought we built a great relationship," Williams said. "Came down to talking at the end, narrowed it down to a couple teams, and Columbus just felt like home. It felt like the right spot for me."

At Northeastern, Williams was a two-year team captain, recording a stat line of 39-55-94 in 106 games played. During the 2023-24 season, Williams scored the game-tying goal in the Beanpot championship against No. 3 Boston University as the Huskies were en route to back-to-back Beanpot titles.

Although he has many on-ice accomplishments, his best memories from college were the relationships he made with his teammates for three years.

"The memories and the friendships," he said. "I mean, they tell you about it when you go in, you're gonna meet your best friends and some guys that are gonna be in your wedding."

The Biddeford, Maine, native is looking to become just the ninth player from his home state to skate in the NHL, joining a list that most notably includes former No. 1 overall pick Rick DiPietro (2000) and current New Jersey Devils defenseman Brian Dumoulin.

To get to this point in his career, he has had to learn how to put in maximum effort, which is what head coach Dean Evason and the rest of the organization is looking for out of him.

"I have to give everything I got and learn as much as I can," Williams said. "Doing what I've always done, giving 110 percent effort, and showing coaches and teammates what I can bring to the table every single day so that I can gain some trust."

He joins the Blue Jackets after a long and competitive process. However, when he got to Columbus, he knew it was where he was supposed to be.

"It's been all over the place, a little bit of a long process there," Williams said. "Great to be here. The guys have been awesome. Everything has been great."

Williams now joins Jordan Harris and Zach Aston-Reese as Northeastern alumni in the Blue Jackets' locker room. One of the top players in Northeastern history, Aston-Reese has stayed in contact with his former program and spoke to the team this season during the Hockey East playoffs.

"We had a Zoom call with them," Aston-Reese said. "We tried to give them some advice on our experience at Hockey East finals. Then, Jack Williams had a couple words at the end. Seems like a mature kid."

"I definitely want to do what I can and make him feel a little more comfortable and give him some advice on transitioning from college life to now being a pro. It's a lot of different lifestyles."

He was told to watch over Williams, giving the rookie a built-in mentor for the remainder of the season.

"The head coach of Northeastern reached out and said to keep an eye on him," Aston-Reese said.

"Maybe I'll have him over for dinner."

Evason noted that while Williams has not been promised any playing time down the stretch as the Blue Jackets are in the thick of a playoff race, he'll watch the 5-11, 185-pound center at practice and see if he deserves a look during a game. And even though Williams has been with the team for only a few days, he's already picked up a nickname.

"We started calling him Tiger, by the way," Evason said, referencing Dave "Tiger" Williams, the NHL's all-time leader in penalty minutes and a former teammate of the CBJ head coach. "He didn't know who that was."

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Jack Williams Discusses Process of Choosing Columbus

By Mark Scheig- March 29, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets are in the thick of the playoff race on the ice. But behind the scenes, they've been busy working to bring new talent into the organization.

This past week, they were able to land a top NCAA free agent.

The Blue Jackets signed Northeastern captain Jack Williams to a two-year entry-level contract. It was the culmination of a season's long desire to bring him to Columbus.

The Blue Jackets were able to beat out at least 15 NHL teams for Williams' services. He skated for the first time with the team on Friday morning at their optional skate. He opened up about the process of choosing the Blue Jackets and what made it the right move at the right time.

For Williams, he said something pretty powerful when discussing his choice.

Columbus Felt Like Home

"It was a real process throughout the year," Williams said. "Kind of talked with Rick (Nash) throughout the year and kind of a bunch of the development staff. I thought we built a great relationship. (It) came down to talking at the end to narrow it down to a couple of teams. And Columbus just it felt like home and it felt like the right spot for me."

It's been a whirlwind week for Williams. He signed his ELC on March 25. He then took his time to get to Columbus as he said he was a little under the weather.

The team welcomed Williams right from the time the news came out. Both Boone Jenner and Zach Werenski sent him a text welcoming him to the team. Upon his arrival in Columbus, he met the rest of the team including a quick, handshake meeting with head coach Dean Evason.

"Just trying to soak everything in, take in as much information and just the surroundings and the guys that I can learn as much information as I can and hopefully apply it down the road."

Williams will not be escorting the Blue Jackets on the trip to Ottawa Saturday. He will be staying back to skate. He hopes to get his legs under him after being off the ice for a little bit.

At this point, the Blue Jackets just want Williams to settle in and get comfortable with his new surroundings.

"Give everything I got and just try to learn as much as I can," Williams said of what's expected at practice. He knows that it will take hard work to crack the lineup knowing that they're in the middle of a tight playoff race.

"Just working hard, doing what I've always done," Williams said. "Giving 110% effort and showing coaching and teammates what I can bring to the table every single day so that I can gain some trust."

Reflecting on Northeastern

Williams spent three seasons at Northeastern including becoming their team captain. He had at least 15 goals and 35 points the last two seasons there.

Williams made several close friendships while at Northeastern including with alums Devon Levi and Jayden Struble. He remains close with Levi to this day.

For Williams, the memories made will be what he remembers most.

“Definitely just the memories and the friendships. You talk about it when you go in. You’re going to meet your best friends and some guys that are going to be in your wedding. And I think I did that. We had an awesome class. Cam Lund made his debut last night. That was pretty special to watch. I’m going to miss those guys a lot and stay in touch.”

Excited For What’s to Come

With the Blue Jackets in the heat of the playoff race, Williams said he’s been paying attention to their games. He understands the potential opportunity he has when his number gets called. He will wear jersey 29 for the team.

“It’s been fun to watch,” Williams said. It’s a special opportunity here and to watch and be a part of something that they’re pushing for is pretty special. So I’m excited.”

As for when Williams’s debut might be, that’s to be determined. The Blue Jackets finally have a full, healthy roster at their disposal. Evason said earlier this week that Williams will have an opportunity by merit to earn his opportunity. He will practice with the team and they’ll things day-by-day from there.

The Blue Jackets targeted Williams from the beginning. They stayed in contact throughout the process and made him feel comfortable with everything. The end result was him signing his first NHL contract. It was a win-win for everyone involved.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Recover From 3-0 Deficit to Outlast Canucks

By Mark Scheig- March 29, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets and Vancouver Canucks each entered Friday night's game at Nationwide Arena needing points in a desperate way. After many huge momentum swings, the Blue Jackets found a way to capture two points.

Kent Johnson scored the only goal of the shootout to lift the Blue Jackets to a 7-6 win over the Canucks. Boone Jenner scored two goals and added an assist while Dante Fabbro recorded a goal and two assists. That helped offset huge nights from Aatu Raty, Kiefer Sherwood and Pius Suter.

The story of this game was the roller coaster of emotions felt on both sides.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets got into early penalty trouble that ended up costing them. Sean Monahan cleared the puck into the stands for delay of game. That allowed Linus Karlsson to open the scoring 8:51 into the game.

Brock Boeser quickly made it 2-0 on a snipe from the left circle. Then with Damon Severson in the box for tripping, it was Jake DeBrusk that made it 3-0 Canucks just 13:26 into the game.

The 3-0 hold didn't stop the Blue Jackets from believing they would come back. Fabbro said postgame "We're coming back. There's no way we're losing this game." He ultimately was right.

The Blue Jackets responded with three goals of their own in a span of 8:10 to open the second. Jenner made it 3-1 just 34 seconds in. Kirill Marchenko scored his 27th to make it 3-2. Then Dante Fabbro connected from the point on a great screen on Kevin Lankinen to make it 3-3.

The Blue Jackets holding all the momentum then got a four-minute power play when defenseman Elias Pettersson sat for high-sticking. But it was the Canucks who scored while shorthanded.

Tyler Myers made it 4-3 to take the momentum back. Then 6:42 into the third, Raty scored his first of two goals to extend to 5-3. The Blue Jackets again had an answer.

Denton Mateychuk cut it to 5-4 on a bomb of a shot. He got promoted at times during the game to play with Zach Werenski. Postgame, Dean Evason called Mateychuk "exceptional" on the night.

The Blue Jackets got a late power play when Adam Fantilli was tripped. Despite an 0-for-25 slide on the man advantage, Jenner connected on his second goal of the game to make it 5-5. Mathieu Olivier then scored 22 seconds later to give the Blue Jackets a 6-5 lead. Earlier, the Blue Jackets had a goal taken away when it was ruled he hit Lankinen in the crease.

The Canucks weren't done either. It took them just 23 seconds to make it 6-6 thanks to Raty's second of the night. It was a game of last goal wins.

The rest of the third finished without another goal. Overtime had its moments including some crucial non-calls but no one was able to score. The teams needed a shootout.

In the shootout, Johnson went to the backhand to score the only goal while Elvis Merzlikins recovered from a shaky start to shut the door on all three Canucks shooters to seal the win and the massive two points.

The Blue Jackets have little time to prepare for their next game as they have to play Saturday night in Ottawa against the Senators, the first of three meetings in 11 days.

Meanwhile, the Canucks head to Winnipeg for a Sunday afternoon game with the Jets before they head home from their long roadtrip.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Must Overcome Back-to-Back Struggles Down Stretch

By Mark Scheig- March 30, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets won an exciting game on Friday night to climb back into the second wildcard spot in the Eastern Conference. This is despite just one regulation win since March 1.

The race for the last playoff spot is up for grabs. The Blue Jackets are tied with the Montreal Canadiens and New York Rangers with 75 points while the New York Islanders are just a point behind. The Detroit Red Wings are only three points back.

The holder of the final playoff spot is expected to change hands several times between now and the end of the season. The team that strings wins together will give themselves a leg up for that spot.

If the Blue Jackets want to be that last playoff team, there is one part of their game that they must fix fast. They will get a chance Saturday night in Ottawa to do just that.

Back-to-Back Struggles

The Blue Jackets have not fared well in the second game of back-to-backs all season. While the Blue Jackets are a respectable 4-3-2 in the first game in those situations, they are just 1-8-0 in the second game. Their only win came back on Jan 31, a 3-2 overtime win against the Utah Hockey Club. Only the Seattle Kraken have it worse with an 0-11-0 record on the second half of back-to-backs.

The Blue Jackets have had the strange oddity that every second game has been on the road. But that doesn't excuse them from the very poor play they've had. Here are the results of the nine second games of back-to-back this season. The numbers clearly speak for themselves.

- Nov 2: 7-2 loss to the Washington Capitals.
- Nov 10: 4-2 loss to the Anaheim Ducks.
- Nov 16: 5-1 loss to the Montreal Canadiens.
- Dec 6: 5-2 loss to the Vancouver Canucks.
- Dec 15: 4-1 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes.
- Dec 28: 4-0 loss to the Boston Bruins.
- Jan 23: 7-4 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes.
- Jan 31: 3-2 OT win over the Utah Hockey Club.
- Mar 21: 6-3 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Seven of the eight losses have been by three goals or more. The opposition has the first goal in seven of the nine games. Couple that with the Blue Jackets' recent struggles with starts and it's a tall mountain to climb. The Senators are at home waiting for the Blue Jackets.

This week, we posed the same question to both head coach Dean Evason and defenseman Ivan Provorov. How do they try to fix this disturbing trend in their game? In their own way, they each said the same thing.

Simplify

“Just to simplify in those games and not shoot ourselves early, not get down early, not have to chase the game,” Evason said. “And when we’ve had success or had chances to have success in games like that, we’ve stayed in games. We’ve hung around especially if it’s been on the road.”

“But having said that, we didn’t like our start the other night. We turn too many over early. The shot totals were very lopsided though the first period and the third period. It was real good for us but we have to start properly. That doesn’t mean scoring goals. It just means playing right and playing simple and not turning pucks over to allow teams to not only score and get up on us, but get momentum in those hockey games. Moving forward, that’s something that we’ll stress obviously every night.”

Like Evason, Provorov pointed to the need for better starts to games.

“Honestly, tough to say,” Provorov said. “I feel like for the most part this year besides the back-to-backs, we’ve been playing our game. I think in some of them, we deserve better but some of them, we definitely didn’t come out the way we should have.”



“I think it’s just getting into it right away from the first minutes. A lot of those I think were on the road. It’s just us being able to make sure that the game on the road has to be a little bit more simpler. It’s nice at home scoring a lot and winning those, 6-2, 6-1 games. But I think on the road, our mentality has to be more going in there and trying to win a 2-1, 3-2 game. So I think that’s the biggest takeaway from what didn’t work for us in other (back-to-backs.)”

Not only have turnovers wrecked the Blue Jackets, it’s been where the turnovers have happened. They’ve been big enough that it’s led to goals against. Trying to chase the game when physical and mental fatigue is present makes it that much harder to win.

For the Blue Jackets to get a big win Saturday night, they need to simplify. Get pucks deep when they can. Complete passes to get out of their zone. Then let their system take over from there but not overcomplicating anything.

1st Ohio Battery / CBJ: 7, VAN: 6 (SO): Jenner's Two-Goal Night Leads Blue Jackets To Maniacal Shootout Win Over Canucks

By Ed Francis- March 29, 2025

	1	2	3 (OT) (SO)	F
	3	1	2 (0) (0-0-0)	6
	0	3	3 (0) (1-0-0)	7

CBJ GOALS:

Jenner (P2, 0:34)

Marchenko (P2, 4:54)

Fabbro (P2, 8:42)

Mateychuk (P3, 7:03)

Jenner (2) (P3, 16:46)

Olivier (P3, 17:08)

(Shootout Goal: K. Johnson)

It was a game that had everything.

In the end, it had two points for the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Boone Jenner scored twice and the Blue Jackets overcame a 3-0, first-period deficit Friday night to defeat the Vancouver Canucks 7-6 in a shootout.

The first of Jenner's goals came just 34 seconds into the second period, and was the first of three Columbus would score in the first 8:44 of the middle frame to tie the game.

Kirill Marchenko would pull Columbus closer at the 4:54 mark of the second with his team-leading 27th goal of the season and Dante Fabbro would tie it at 8:44, picking up his sixth of the campaign.

Vancouver would bring momentum back to their side with a short-handed goal less than four minutes after Fabbro tied it.

The Canucks expanded their lead to 5-3 early in the third period before the Blue Jackets would again strike for three goals, this time to take their first lead of the night.

Denton Mateychuk would cut the lead to 5-4 before Jenner's power-play goal would tie the game at 5-5 with just over three minutes left in regulation. Just 22 seconds later, the Blue Jackets would go up 6-5 on a rebound goal from Mathieu Olivier — but that lead would last just 23 seconds before the Canucks would respond right back, tying the game at 6-6.

With nothing doing for either team in overtime, the game would go into a shootout.

Kent Johnson scored the lone goal there, as Elvis Merzlikins turned away all three shots in the shootout in what was otherwise a rough night for the goaltender. He finished with 31 saves on 37 shots.

"I don't think it's a shock that this team handles adversity well," said head coach Dean Evason.

The win helps Columbus keep pace in an ever-evolving Eastern Conference wild card picture.

Here's how the Blue Jackets picked up two points in delirious fashion:

1st Period:

(8:51 — VAN Goal): The Canucks go up 1-0 on a power play goal. Vancouver uses good puck movement to get the Columbus penalty kill out of position, and Linus Karlsson takes the goalmouth pass from Kiefer Sherwood and tips it in to give the Canucks an early lead.

(10:35 — VAN Goal): Vancouver gets the puck in their own end and quickly move up ice. Quinn Hughes leaves the puck for Brock Boeser, who skates in untouched and fires a shot from the left dot. It beats Elvis on his glove side with ease to make it 2-0 Vancouver. There's a scrum after the goal that results in a Columbus power play, but they come up empty.

(13:26 — VAN Goal): Another power play goal for the Canucks, this one to extend their lead to 3-0. Jake DeBrusk scores on a rebound following a Boeser shot that took an odd bounce off Dante Fabbro. Elvis makes the save on the deflection, but DeBrusk gets his 24th of the season on the put-back.

2nd Period:

(0:34 — CBJ Goal): Just what the Blue Jackets needed to get back in the game: a goal in the opening minute. Denton Mateychuk takes a D-to-D pass from Erik Gudbranson and fires from the left point. Right in front of Vancouver goalie Kevin Lankinen is Jenner, who uses his body to deflect it at the last moment and into the net, cutting Vancouver's lead to 3-1.

(4:54 — CBJ Goal): Marchenko brings the Blue Jackets to within one. Monahan plays the puck perfectly behind the net and slips over to the left circle, where he's drawn the attention of three Canuck skaters. He threads the needle perfectly and gets a pass over to Marchenko, who glides into the right circle and fires a shot through traffic and past Lankinen to trim it to a 3-2 game.

(8:42 — CBJ Goal): The third goal in a span of 8:08 for the Blue Jackets ties the game at 3-3. In his first game back, Cole Sillinger picks up a clutch assist. He plays gritty along the boards and gains control of the puck, then sees Fabbro at the left point with no one near him. Fabbro then fires it past Lankinen, whose view is obstructed by players on both sides, to tie the game.

(11:23 — VAN Goal): The Blue Jackets have all the momentum in the world and are on a four-minute power play — but it's the Canucks who break the tie and take a 4-3 lead with a short-handed goal. A really good chip from the boards by Sherwood lands perfectly on the stick of Tyler Myers and the puck trickles past Elvis to regain Vancouver's lead.

3rd Period:

(6:42 — VAN Goal): Not Elvis' best moment. Vancouver makes it a 5-3 game on Aatu Raty's fourth goal of the season. There's no extraordinary effort here — he skates into the zone with one defender in front of him, fires from distance, and it beats Merzlikins.

(7:03 — CBJ Goal): The Blue Jackets need a quick response to stay in the game — and they get it. Just 21 seconds after the Canucks score, Mateychuk skates into the zone and takes Jenner's pass from the corner, firing a slapper past Lankinen to again make it a one-goal game; this time 5-4.

(11:53 — CBJ Goal Overturned): Another game, another big goaltender interference challenge. Justin Danforth scores to tie the game at 5-5, but the Canucks challenge for goalie interference and the officials rule that Olivier's contact with Lankinen was enough (and not caused by Vancouver's Marcus Pettersson) to take the goal away. After the game, Olivier confirms that the right call was made, saying he was pushed into Lankinen but also made contact with the goalie on his own.

(16:46 — CBJ Goal): They can't take this one away — and there's no better time to end an 0-for-25 streak on the power play than right here. The Blue Jackets win the faceoff, and Marchenko gets the puck near the boards. He fires from an unusual angle but the puck — for the second time in the game — deflects off Jenner and into the net, tying the game at 5-5.

(17:08 — CBJ Goal): From down to 3-0 to up 6-5, the Blue Jackets take their first lead of the game just 22 seconds after knotting it up at 5-5. Fabbro fires a shot from the high slot. Lankinen makes the initial save but gives up a rebound that goes right to an awaiting Olivier, who cleans it up to put Columbus in front.

(17:31 — VAN Goal): Raty gets his second goal of the period and temporarily deflates the energy inside the building, tying the game at 6-6 just 23 seconds after Columbus had taken a lead. He's right in front of the net and takes a feed from Dakota Joshua, slipping it past Elvis to bring the game back even.

Overtime + Shootout:

Columbus is outshot 4-1 in the extra five minutes, with Merzlikins — who struggled throughout the night — coming up large. Elvis stops all three shots in the shootout as well, meaning that this Johnson goal was all the Blue Jackets would need to grab the all-important victory:

VAN	GAME STATS	CBJ
37	SHOTS	38
32%	FACEOFFS	68%
2/2	POWER PLAY	1/4
3/4	PENALTY KILL	0/2
23	HITS	22

VAN	GAME STATS	CBJ
13	GIVEAWAYS	15
4	TAKEAWAYS	6
14	BLOCKED SHOTS	12
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
2.51	EXPECTED GOALS	3.36
58	SHOT ATTEMPTS	68
25	SCORING CHANCES	28
10	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	15
Data via NHL.com & NaturalStatTrick.com		

Stat Chat:

- Erik Gudbranson got the secondary assist on Boone Jenner's second-period goal, the 100th assist of his NHL career.
- The Blue Jackets dominated the fourth-ranked Canucks at the faceoff dot. They won 68% for the game, headlined by Monahan winning 20 of 24.
- Zach Werenski ended a six-game drought without a point with a secondary assist on Jenner's power play goal.

Up Next:

Columbus heads north of the border for a Saturday night battle against the surging Ottawa Senators. The Blue Jackets are 1-8-0 this season on the second half of back-to-backs. Puck-drop is slated for 7 p.m.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Easy As 1-2-3, Perfect When It Matters, Going Against The Trends

By Will Chase- March 29, 2025

Don't count them out.

Kent Johnson scored the only shootout goal and Elvis Merzlikins stopped all three shooters as the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the Vancouver Canucks 7-6 on Friday night at Nationwide Arena.

The win snaps the Blue Jackets' four-game home losing streak.

Easy As 1-2-3

Like Monday's game against the New York Islanders, the opposition scored first. This time, Vancouver took a 3-0 lead, scoring three first-period goals in 4:35, before the comeback of all comebacks.

Linus Karlsson scored his second of the year with a power-play goal at 8:51. Kiefer Sherwood (16) and Conor Garland (26) assisted. Garland is on a three-game point streak (one goal, two assists).

Brock Boeser picked up his 24th at 10:35, and just as fast as the goal occurred, a scrum broke out, resulting in penalties to both clubs. Karlsson was assessed two minutes for unsportsmanlike conduct, served by Jonathan Lekkerimaki. Karlsson was also assessed a minor for roughing. Dante Fabbro received a roughing minor.

Quinn Hughes (53) and Pius Suter (18) picked up the assists. Suter is on a three-game point streak (one goal, six assists).

Down 2-0 and on the power play, the Jackets did not score and instead received another two-minute minor as Damon Severson went to the box for tripping at 12:43.

This set up Jake DeBrusk's 24th goal of the season on the power play to give the Canucks the 3-0 lead at 13:26. Boeser (22) and Suter (19) assisted. DeBrusk is on a four-game point streak (one goal, three assists).

If you thought this one was over, well, we saw this episode on Monday.

Head coach Dean Evason must have flipped over a table or something during the intermission.

In the second period, the Jackets scored three goals in 8:10 to tie things up 3-3.

Boone Jenner scored his third of the year at 0:34. Denton Mateychuk (5) and Erik Gudbranson (1) added the helpers. Jenner is on a three-game goal streak and three-game point streak (four goals, one assist). Gudbranson's assist is the 100th of his NHL career.

Kirill Marchenko scored his team-leading 27th at 4:54. Sean Monahan (30) and Fabbro (13) assisted. Monahan is on a six-game point streak (one goal, 10 assists) going back to Dec. 31.

Fabbro added another point with his sixth goal at 8:44. Cole Sillinger (21) and Matthieu Olivier (12) picked up the helpers. The game was Sillinger's first since Feb. 27 (upper body).

Both teams continued to trade goals with Tyler Myers (6) getting a short-handed goal on a double minor penalty at 11:23 to give the Canucks a 4-3 lead into the second period intermission. Sherwood (17) and Suter (20) grabbed the assists.

Perfect When It Matters

This game wasn't a highlight reel for goalies, but Merzlikins stepped up once again when it mattered. We ran the credits after Monday's win, and it was a carbon copy on Friday.

Both goaltenders struggled to keep the opposing offense at bay, but Merzlikins was perfect when it mattered most, doing just enough to backstop his team into overtime and beyond to get his team the crucial win.

Making 31 saves on 37 shots for the game, Merzlikins kept Vancouver off the board in overtime and then stifled the three shootout shooters to improve to 5-0 in shootouts this season. He's only allowed one shootout goal all year. Columbus is 6-1 in the shootout this season.

Friday's win is the second of its kind this season in which Columbus overcame a 3-0 first-period deficit to win 7-6. They also did it on Nov. 21 when they beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 7-6 in overtime.

Kevin Lankinen made 32 saves on 38 shots.

Going Against The Trends

Attributing to the Blue Jackets' success this season has been strong play at home and relatively fast starts.

It's no secret the Jackets have slumped over the past month, going 4-7-1, but have won consecutive games for the first time since Feb. 27-March 1. They're 3-6-1 in their last 10 games but have benefited with luck as the rest of the Eastern Conference has struggled in trying to nail down the final wild card spot.

With one of the better home records at 21-9-5, it was surprising to see Columbus struggle to win at home with Friday's win being their first at Nationwide Arena since Feb. 25, a 6-4 win over the Dallas Stars, breaking a stretch of four straight losses in the friendly confines.

Columbus is also one of the better teams in the league when it comes to scoring first, which they've done 38 times, good for 12th in the NHL. They've gone eight straight games in which the opponent has scored first, and haven't scored first since their 7-3 win at Madison Square Garden on March 9.

If they can't score first, maybe Columbus has found its offense, at least. Down but not out in the third period, the Jackets battled back to tie it.

Twice.

Vancouver held a 5-3 lead after Aatu Raty (4) scored the fifth goal at 6:42 of the third period. Dakota Joshua (5) and Hughes (54) picked up the assists. Columbus then got goals from Mateychuk (4, 7:03) and Jenner (4, 16:46, PPG) to make it 5-5. It's Jenner's first multi-goal game this season, and the goal snapped a 0-for-25 power play goal drought. The last power-play goal before this was by Dmitri Voronkov at the Stadium Series on March 1.

Marchenko (38) and Zach Werenski (50) assisted on Marchenko's goal. The point was Werenski's first since March 11, breaking a season-long six-game scoring drought. He has career highs in points (70), assists (50), and tied his career high with 20 goals. Fabbro (14) and Justin Danforth (10) assisted on Jenner's goal.

Before the Jenner goal, Mathieu Olivier had what would have been the game-tying goal to make it 5-5, but the goal was taken off the board after Vancouver won their challenge for goaltender interference.



Moments after Jenner's game-tying goal, the Blue Jackets had their first lead of the night after Olivier scored a goal that no one could dispute for his 17th this season at 17:08. Only 23 seconds later at 17:31, Raty had his second goal of the period to make it 6-6.

Right Back At It

The Blue Jackets battle the Ottawa Senators for the first time all season on Saturday, March 29, at 7 p.m. ET from Canadian Tire Centre. Occupying the first Eastern Conference wild card spot, Ottawa has a six-point lead over the second spot, which the Blue Jackets (75 points) currently possess. The Montreal Canadiens and New York Rangers also have 75 points, but Columbus holds down the second wild-card spot due to playing fewer games.

1st Ohio Battery / OTT 3, CBJ 2: Late Push Not Enough As Blue Jackets Fall To Senators

By Ed Francis- March 29, 2025

	1	2	3	F
	1	0	1	2
	2	1	0	3

CBJ GOALS:
Jenner (P1, 7:55)
Marchenko (P3, 11:02)

Goals from Boone Jenner and Kirill Marchenko weren't enough for the Columbus Blue Jackets in a 3-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators on Saturday night.

Ottawa took a lead just over seven minutes into the game, putting the Blue Jackets in an early hole. Jenner would answer just 31 seconds later, tying the game at 1-1 and giving the captain a goal in his fourth consecutive game.

The Senators would score again before the period was up to take a 2-1 lead into the first intermission. They extended their lead to 3-1 in the middle of the second period and would hold a two-goal lead through forty minutes as a result of some stingy defense. Columbus had just four shots on goal in the second, going the last 11:19 of the period without a shot on Ullmark.

Marchenko brought the Blue Jackets to within one with near the midway point of the third period on a great individual effort for his 28th goal of the season, but it was as close as Columbus would get despite several good scoring opportunities in the closing minutes.

"We had some looks, had some chances, just weren't able to get one by him," said Jenner, referring to Ottawa goalie Linus Ullmark. He finished with 29 saves on 31 shots, including several key saves late.

The loss dropped the Blue Jackets out of the second wild card spot based on a tiebreaker, a testament to how close the Eastern Conference playoff picture is.

The Blue Jackets and Senators, who solidified their positioning in the first wild card spot with the win, will meet two more times over the next eleven days: in Ottawa next Sunday and then in Columbus two nights later.

"We can beat this team, for sure," said Marchenko.

Here's how the Blue Jackets came up empty north of the border:

1st Period:

(7:24 — OTT Goal): For the ninth consecutive game, the Blue Jackets give up the first goal of the game. Ridly Grieg is in the low slot and tips a shot from defenseman Thomas Chabot, which gets by Tarasov's stick-side to give the Senators a 1-0 lead.

(7:55 — CBJ Goal): The Blue Jackets win a faceoff in the Ottawa zone and push the puck over to Denton Mateychuk, who immediately goes D-to-D with Werenski. He fires from a distance and Ullmark makes the save through traffic but the rebound goes right into the slot, where Jenner is waiting and puts it home to tie the game at 1-1. (Goal: Jenner [5]; Assists: Werenski [51], Mateychuk [6])

(14:08 — OTT Goal): Ottawa goes up again, 2-1 this time, with a goal from Drake Batherson. Dylan Cozens skates the puck from the high slot over to the board, then goes across the ice and fires from inside the blue line. The initial save on the shot through traffic is made, but Batherson gets the rebound under Tarasov for the goal.

2nd Period:

(9:17 — OTT Goal): Jake Sanderson pushes Ottawa's lead to 3-1 by crashing the net for his eighth goal of the season. A nice play by Greig to chip it off the boards, then a great effort from Shane Pinto to find Sanderson at the net for the goal.

3rd Period:

(11:02 — CBJ Goal): Marchenko has a lot of highlight-reel goals this season and this one is just that. He enters the zone after taking a pass from Werenski and makes a phenomenal individual effort, cutting through three Senators, ending with a curl-and-drag move that beats Ullmark to cut Ottawa's lead to 3-2. (Goal: Marchenko [28]; Assists: Werenski [52])

CBJ	GAME STATS	OTT
31	SHOTS	27
39%	FACEOFFS	61%
0/1	POWER PLAY	0/2
2/2	PENALTY KILL	1/1
22	HITS	23
11	GIVEAWAYS	15

CBJ	GAME STATS	OTT
2	TAKEAWAYS	3
16	BLOCKED SHOTS	18
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
2.45	EXPECTED GOALS	3.79
62	SHOT ATTEMPTS	64
26	SCORING CHANCES	35
10	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	17
Data via NHL.com & NaturalStatTrick.com		

Stat Chat:

- Daniil Tarasov made 24 saves on 27 shots in a losing effort, allowing three goals or less for his fifth consecutive start dating back to the end of January.
- With two assists, Werenski had his first multi-point night since March 9th against the New York Rangers. He now has 52 assists for the season, and this was his 19th multi-point game of the campaign.
- In 5-on-5 play, the Blue Jackets were extremely balanced in using their top nine. The line of Fantilli-Jenner-Johnson were on ice for 13:00, Voronkov-Monahan-Marchenko 12:46, and Sillinger-Danforth-Olivier were there for 11:19.

Up Next:

The Blue Jackets are back home for their next two, the first of which comes Tuesday night against the Nashville Predators. Puck-drop is scheduled for 7 p.m.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Can't Capitalize In Back-To-Back, Not Enough Punch, The Race Is On

By Will Chase- March 30, 2025

They could have used that one.

Ridly Greig had a goal and an assist, and Jake Sanderson scored the game-winner as the Ottawa Senators beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 3-2 on Saturday at Canadian Tire Centre.

Can't Capitalize In Back-To-Back

The Blue Jackets came into their matchup with the Senators seeking their first three-game winning streak since winning four straight out of the 4 Nations Face-Off break.

Instead, Ottawa held off a late push by Columbus to claim its second straight victory and firm its grasp on the first Eastern Conference wild card spot.

Greig (12) opened the scoring to give Ottawa the early 1-0 lead at 7:24 of the first period. Thomas Chabot (29) and Shane Pinto (13) assisted on the goal.

It's the ninth straight game the Blue Jackets have allowed the first goal.

Drake Batherson (21) added on at 14:08 to give the Senators a 2-1 lead. Dylan Cozens (26) and Artem Zub (9) got the assists.

Sanderson (8) scored at 9:17 of the second period to extend the lead to 3-1. The goal wound up being the game-winner as Pinto (14) picked up his second assist and Greig (16) added his second point of the game.

Columbus falls to 1-9 in the second of back-to-backs this season.

Tarasov started for the first time since March 15 and made 24 saves on 27 shots. He's 7-9-2 this season with a .882 save percentage and 3.49 goals against average. Since Jan. 14, Tarasov is 4-3-1, .913, 2.59. Linus Ullmark made 29 saves on 31 shots.

Not Enough Punch

It was only a matter of time before the captain, Boone Jenner, got hot in the goal-scoring department.

His first-period goal at 7:55 tied the score 1-1 and came 31 seconds after Greig's tally to open the game's scoring. Jenner is on a four-game goal streak and point streak (five goals, one assist). Assists went to Zach Werenski (51) and Denton Mateychuk (6).

Werenski has points in consecutive games (three assists) for the first time since March 9-11. The 7-3 win on March 9 over the New York Rangers was his most recent multi-point game before tonight when he had two assists. Then he had an assist in the 5-3 loss to the New Jersey Devils.

Kirill Marchenko tallied his team-leading 28th in the third period at 11:02 to make it a 3-2 game and extend his three-game point streak (three goals, one assist). Werenski added his second helper for 52 on the season.

While the Jackets didn't have enough offensive punch for this one, Marchenko showed some of that energy against Brady Tkachuk after Tkachuk gave Sean Monahan a slight hit into the boards. Tkachuk got a roughing minor against Marchenko.

In the end, the Jackets just couldn't get one more for the tie as they came up short 3-2.

The Race Is On

The loss, coupled with wins from those around them in the race for the second wild-card spot, has dropped the Blue Jackets outside the playoff picture.

The Rangers beat the San Jose Sharks 6-1 to move two points ahead of Columbus and back into the second wild card. The Montreal Canadiens have the same number of points as Columbus (75) but sit ahead of the Jackets.

With 10 games in April left in the season, Columbus faces the Nashville Predators on Tuesday and the Colorado Avalanche next Thursday at Nationwide Arena. Then they travel to Toronto on Saturday and Ottawa on Sunday, April 6.

Take Care Of Business

Columbus will host the Predators, who are already eliminated from playoff contention, on Tuesday, April 1 at 7 p.m. ET.

The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: Who are the hottest (and coldest) teams since the trade deadline?

By Harman Dayal and James Mirtle- March 29, 2025

This year's busy NHL trade deadline transformed the outlook for many Stanley Cup contenders. It was an all-out arms race, with big names on the move and many buyers pushing all of their chips in.

Which contenders have caught fire with their upgraded rosters? Who's lagging behind the competition and limping into the playoffs? Let's dive into each team's performance since the March 7 deadline in this week's edition of the power rankings.

1. Winnipeg Jets, 49-19-4

Last week: 1

Mirtle rank: 1

Dayal rank: 1

The Jets became the first team in the West to clinch a playoff spot when they beat the league-leading Capitals on Tuesday. Winnipeg has been a clear notch above the rest of the Central Division this season, but the gap has tightened since the deadline when many of its rivals loaded up.

Colorado and Dallas' rosters look significantly deeper post-deadline, which has paid off with scorching results, while the Blues, a potential round one matchup for Winnipeg, are the hottest team in the NHL right now.

Winnipeg has kept pace, having won seven of its last 10, though Gabriel Vilardi's recent week-to-week injury is a big blow to the first line and top power-play unit. Mark Scheifele also needs to snap out of his nine-game goal drought, but it's otherwise hard to find blemishes in a team that has lost just five games in regulation since late January.

2. Dallas Stars, 47-21-4

Last week: 2

Mirtle rank: 3

Dayal rank: 2

Well, they won again, their fourth in a row, and their seventh straight game getting at least a point (5-0-2). So credit for the results. But they allowed 48 shots against the Flames on Thursday, continuing a trend of fairly underwhelming play post-deadline. They certainly miss Miro Heiskanen lately, and news he might not be back for Round 1 is a blow to their chances against an Avalanche team that's looking rather powerful.

3. Washington Capitals, 47-16-9

Last week: 3

Mirtle rank: 2

Dayal rank: 3

A hard-fought OT loss this week to the Jets stings and they dropped Thursday's contest against the Wild despite mostly controlling play too, but the Caps still have the best points percentage in the East since

the trade deadline. Washington has been a wagon offensively all year, with contributions coming from every part of the lineup. The only asterisk is that their recent wins have mostly come against inferior opponents – Washington’s record is only 3-4-1 against teams in a playoff spot since the 4 Nations Face-Off.

4. Vegas Golden Knights, 43-20-8

Last week: 6

Mirtle rank: 4

Dayal rank: 4

The Golden Knights didn’t do anything overly exciting at the deadline – unusual for them – but it hasn’t mattered, as a 6-2-2 record since then stands as one of the NHL’s best. Convincing wins over the Lightning and Wild this week helped bump them up our rankings, and they should have no problem with a nice little Blackhawks-Predators bottom-feeder double header this weekend. They’ve established a nice lead in the division, too, which would be their fourth title in eight seasons of existence. Must be nice to be a VGK fan.

5. Colorado Avalanche, 45-25-3

Last week: 7

Mirtle rank: 6

Dayal rank: 5

This once top-heavy Avs forward group looks far deeper and more dangerous since the deadline.

Brock Nelson and Charlie Coyle have bolstered Colorado down the middle, but the club is also significantly healthier on the wings compared to the start of the season. Valeri Nichushkin (7 goals in his last 10 games) and Jonathan Drouin are on absolute tears, Martin Necas has been a terrific fit and the depth wingers are pitching in too.

The Avs are 8-1-1 since the deadline and picked up an impressive 4-0 victory over an equally hot Kings team on Thursday.

6. Carolina Hurricanes, 43-24-4

Last week: 5

Mirtle rank: 5

Dayal rank: 7

They rattled off five straight wins after the Mikko Rantanen firestorm of the deadline had the entire league’s attention focused on the Corsicanes, but it’s been a bit bumpier ride since. A lopsided loss to the Kings and a puzzling one against the Predators drop them a spot in our rankings, even though they’re still scoring and dominating possession, as always. Of note: Old man Taylor Hall has been heating up of late, with six goals and nine points in his last seven games.

7. Florida Panthers, 43-25-3

Last week: 4

Mirtle rank: 7

Dayal rank: 6

The Panthers' secondary offense has gone a bit cold and they're only 4-4-0 since the deadline, but there is some good news on the horizon. Brad Marchand is poised to make his Panthers debut soon, potentially on Friday against Utah. And after a rocky start on the top pair in Aaron Ekblad's spot, Seth Jones is beginning to stabilize his game. Jones has helped the Panthers control about 60 percent of shots during his five-on-five shifts in three consecutive games.

8. Los Angeles Kings, 40-22-9

Last week: 11

Mirtle rank: 8

Dayal rank: 8

Even with the loss to the Avs, we wanted to give the Kings some more love than the rankings have most of the year. LA is 9-2-0 since the deadline and has been a dominant even strength team all year, ranking among the leaders in 5-on-5 goal differential and expected goals share. A lot is riding on Darcy Kuemper's .919 save percentage being the real thing in the playoffs, but let's give the Kings their due: They've had a surprisingly good season and gone under the radar while doing it. Maybe this is the year they finally beat the Oilers?

9. Tampa Bay Lightning, 42-25-5

Last week: 9

Mirtle rank: 9

Dayal rank: 10

The Lightning have been a bit uneven since the deadline (5-4-1), but they obliterated the Hockey Clubbers 8-0 on Thursday, with almost everyone getting on the scoresheet. Leading the way were deadline pickups Oliver Bjorkstrand (two goals) and Yanni Gourde (two assists) as they continue to round out Tampa's offense nicely. It's been interesting to watch Gourde, in particular, pick up heavy minutes after his role had diminished in Seattle.

10. Toronto Maple Leafs, 43-25-3

Last week: 8

Mirtle rank: 10

Dayal rank: 9

They lost to the Sharks. Again. San Jose has just two wins against playoff-bound teams in its last 29 games; both of those are against Toronto. And with the Atlantic Division title sitting right there for them, the Leafs have dropped three games in March against the Sharks and Predators. We would call it hard to believe, except it's been that kind of a weird up-and-down year for Toronto. Next up, the Kings and Ducks as they try to rescue the California road trip.

11. Edmonton Oilers, 41-26-5

Last week: 10

Mirtle rank: 11

Dayal rank: 11

Things aren't so rosy in Edmonton right now. And it's about more than the club's struggles this past week without Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Mattias Ekholm in the lineup. The Oilers' 5-4-1 record since

the deadline is fine, but zoom out, and they have the 25th-best points percentage in the NHL since Feb 1. There are question marks and flaws with this roster, even though Jake Walman's immediate impact and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins' recent surge provide some optimism.

12. St. Louis Blues, 39-28-7

Last week: 15

Mirtle rank: 12

Dayal rank: 12

A come-from-behind win in Nashville pushed the Blues' win streak to eight in a row, making them the hottest team in the NHL since the deadline. What's most impressive about their run lately is they've done it without both Colton Parayko and Pavel Buchnevich. Dylan Holloway, Jordan Kyrou and Robert Thomas have been three of the NHL's top scorers in that span, helping propel St. Louis to a heady 4.1 goals per game. Good thing they didn't sell at the deadline as they're potentially going to be a handful for someone in Round 1.

13. Ottawa Senators, 38-28-5

Last week: 12

Mirtle rank: 13

Dayal rank: 13

Ottawa had a brief scare in February when it lost five consecutive games, but Travis Green's side has been able to convincingly right the ship over the last month with a 9-3-1 heater.

The biggest difference? Their once-struggling offense is suddenly red-hot thanks to strong secondary contributions from Dylan Cozens, David Perron, Drake Batherson and Michael Amadio, among others. It feels cruel to drop the Sens a spot in the rankings compared to last week, but the Blues deserved the promotion.

14. Minnesota Wild, 41-27-5

Last week: 14

Mirtle rank: 14

Dayal rank: 14

The importance of Thursday's 4-2 win over the Capitals can't be overstated. Minnesota's grip on the first wild card spot has been loosening because of St. Louis' wicked run, the club is banged up without Kirill Kaprizov and Joel Eriksson-Ek, and the team's performance has been up-and-down for a while. The two points they secured against Washington and a favorable schedule down the stretch (24th easiest according to Tankathon) should have the Wild feeling more comfortable about their handle on a playoff spot.

15. New Jersey Devils, 38-28-7

Last week: 13

Mirtle rank: 15

Dayal rank: 15

They brought a stretch of four losses in five games into Wednesday's not-entirely-decisive win over the Blackhawks, so things aren't all rosy. Not having Jack Hughes, Dougie Hamilton and defensive stalwart Jonas Siegenthaler appears to be wearing on coach Sheldon Keefe as well, given his odd blowup about Johnathan Kovacevic. "Kovacevic just needs to play better. That would help," Keefe said when told his defenseman suggested that they needed to have a playoff mentality. We know many aren't expecting much of the battered Devils if they hold on to get into the postseason, but we don't recommend suggesting that around them right now.

16. Vancouver Canucks, 34-26-12

Last week: 16

Mirtle rank: 17

Dayal rank: 16

At the start of this week, Canucks fans were getting ready to fire up the old draft lottery simulator again. Their playoff hopes looked dead after two devastating losses to the Blues and Rangers, not to mention the injuries to Elias Pettersson, Nils Högländer and Filip Chytil.

The undermanned Canucks are still alive, however, thanks in large part to Thatcher Demko's return from IR. Vancouver's star netminder has been limited to just 19 games this season due to multiple injuries, but he returned on Monday against the Devils and has backstopped the club to two massive victories. The odds are still stacked against the Canucks, but a Demko heater could be exactly what the doctor ordered.

17. Calgary Flames, 34-26-11

Last week: 19

Mirtle rank: 16

Dayal rank: 17

The Flames had won four in a row going into Thursday's loss against the Stars, and they gave Dallas a good push in piling up 48 shots. Is that enough to bump them up two spots? Apparently! Dustin Wolf has shown his first signs of a little wear lately, and Calgary smartly went to backup Dan Vladar for two wins in New York as part of a first-ever franchise sweep of the three teams there. The Flames have two games left against the Sharks and two more against the Ducks, so there's a path here for them to still sneak in. But St. Louis' red-hot run has certainly made that much more daunting.

18. Montreal Canadiens, 33-29-9

Last week: 17

Mirtle rank: 18

Dayal rank: 18

A tough loss to sad-sack Philadelphia on Thursday hurts. But the Flyers had the new coach bounce (and were absolutely pounded in Toronto earlier in the week) so perhaps we can call that one an anomaly. Once the hottest team in the league, the plucky Canadiens have now lost four straight, which is going to make their path to the postseason far more tricky. Their next three against the Hurricanes and then the Panthers twice could make or break them.

19. New York Islanders, 32-29-10

Last week: 18

Mirtle rank: 19

Dayal rank: 19

The Isles lack high-end offensive firepower with Mathew Barzal injured and Nelson now in Colorado, but they've mustered a respectable 6-4-3 record since the deadline to stay alive in the playoff race.

This past week, however, hasn't been kind to them. They've dropped three straight games, which included Kyle Palmieri's apparent game-winner with 9.6 seconds left in regulation against the Blue Jackets getting bizarrely overturned for an extremely questionable goaltender interference call. Ilya Sorokin has been forced to start 14 of the club's 16 games since the 4 Nations Face-Off, and the fatigue is beginning to show, particularly in the last game against Vancouver. Things don't look great for New York right now but all the wild card contenders around them are struggling too, so they're still in it.

20. Columbus Blue Jackets, 32-29-9

Last week: 22

Mirtle rank: 20

Dayal rank: 20

It's been hard to watch the best story of the season fade out as of late, with six consecutive losses (and eight in nine) before finally getting a shootout W against the Islanders on Monday. Goals have been incredibly hard to come by on the C-Bus, with just seven in their last six games. Two positives? Sean Monahan is back as 1C, which will help. And a big goal from Kirill Marchenko in that win was significant given how quiet he's been in March. They're going to need a lot more from him, however, if they're going to claw into a wild-card spot.

21. Utah HC, 32-29-11

Last week: 20

Mirtle rank: 21

Dayal rank: 22

Utah didn't sell any of its pending free agents at the deadline, which signalled that the organization wanted its young, exciting core to have a chance to stay competitive in the playoff race and play meaningful games. Their post-deadline run started decently, but it's all come crumbling down recently. Utah has suffered three blowout losses over the last week and a half: a 7-1 shellacking against the Oilers, a 5-1 home ice defeat to the slumping Red Wings and an embarrassing 8-0 defeat against the Lightning on Thursday. The playoff push has disappointingly fizzled out.

22. New York Rangers, 34-32-6

Last week: 21

Mirtle rank: 22

Dayal rank: 21

Things are not good at MSG lately. The Rangers dropped to 3-6-1 since the deadline with a loss to the Kings on Tuesday, which isn't great. But it's the way they've been losing that has been particularly dispiriting. Heck, the way they've been winning has, too. Their only W in the last two weeks included getting outshot 39-12 by the typically punchless Canucks. Perhaps the ugliest stat for New York is the fact they're sitting in 22nd in the standings despite Igor Shesterkin putting up the second-highest goals saved above expected in the NHL. Now that's hard to do.

23. Detroit Red Wings, 33-33-6

Last week: 23

Mirtle rank: 23

Dayal rank: 23

The Red Wings entered the 4 Nations Face-Off break clinging to the final playoff spot in the East. It's been an absolute free-fall for them since, with an ugly 5-11-1 stretch sabotaging any hopes of breaking a nearly decade-long playoff drought. Detroit has had a brutally difficult schedule down the stretch, so it's not entirely surprising to see them slip below the playoff bar, but it's the dramatic way they've crashed and burned out of the race entirely that's so disappointing.

24. Anaheim Ducks, 31-32-8

Last week: 25

Mirtle rank: 25

Dayal rank: 24

Anaheim is on pace to hit 81 points, which would mark a 22-point improvement from last year's miserable campaign. The Ducks' sturdy goaltending is probably the biggest driver behind that progress, but it's encouraging that blue-chip forwards Mason McTavish, Leo Carlsson and Trevor Zegras have upped their point production pace significantly since the deadline. They need to build on that momentum because outside of Jackson LaCombe, their young forwards and defensemen haven't progressed enough this season.

25. Pittsburgh Penguins, 29-34-11

Last week: 26

Mirtle rank: 24

Dayal rank: 25

We're really into the dregs here, where it's hard to separate the various tanking clubs from one another. The Penguins are somehow 5-4-1 since the deadline, with a makeshift lineup that includes Connor Dewar on the second line and Conor Timmins in the top four minutes. But after a beatdown in Buffalo on Thursday, they've now lost three in a row. They have a tough schedule coming up, too, with games against the Senators, Blues and Stars, so the chase for a top five pick could, uh, pick up soon.

26. Buffalo Sabres, 30-35-6

Last week: 30

Mirtle rank: 27

Dayal rank: 26

We're not quite sure what got into the Sabres against the Penguins on Thursday. But scoring seven – even against depleted Pittsburgh – was enough to vault them up the rankings... all the way to seventh last. Buffalo has actually won three in a row, scoring 15 goals in those games, and five of seven, prompting a disgruntled fan base to begin promoting this classic on social media. Even when they win, the Sabres lose these days.

pic.twitter.com/IKdE3niPiK

— BleedBlackAndRed🇺🇸 (@RockTheRed89243) March 28, 2025

27. Seattle Kraken, 31-36-6

Last week: 28

Mirtle rank: 26

Dayal rank: 27

The Kraken netted lucrative hauls for Oliver Bjorkstrand, Yanni Gourde and Brandon Tanev at the deadline, but their underpowered roster has amassed the 12th-best points percentage in the NHL since the deadline. On one hand, it's not ideal that they're potentially playing themselves out of a top-five draft pick, but on the flip side, it's been positive to see Matty Beniers up his production lately, plus the emergence of talented 20-year-old sniper Yani Nyman, who's scored six points in eight games since his AHL recall.

28. Boston Bruins, 30-34-9

Last week: 24

Mirtle rank: 29

Dayal rank: 28

For some reason, we stayed up late Wednesday night to watch Boston get absolutely throttled by the fledgling Ducks. And it really felt like watching the end of an era. The Bruins have been a good team for most of the past 20 years, but they're perfecting the tank this season, having lost seven in a row now and 15 of their last 18. Maybe there's some way to build around David Pastrnak and turn this around on the fly in the next couple years, but it sure looks unlikely at the moment.

pic.twitter.com/ed6UAHYw5u

— James Mirtle (@mirtle) March 27, 2025

29. Nashville Predators, 27-37-8

Last week: 29

Mirtle rank: 28

Dayal rank: 29

There's no sugarcoating the fact that it's been a nightmare season on Broadway. The Preds have been slightly more competitive post-trade-deadline, which included a couple of quality wins recently over the Hurricanes and Leafs. Luke Evangelista and Fedor Svechikov are finding their groove, which bodes well for the future. But they blew a third period lead on Thursday against the Blues and it's still been really challenging to manufacture goals.

30. Philadelphia Flyers, 29-36-9

Last week: 27

Mirtle rank: 30

Dayal rank: 30

The Flyers have been in absolute freefall lately. In fact, their win over Montreal on Thursday was their first regulation or overtime victory since Feb. 25, a span of 14 games without a single ROW. In tribute to

John Tortorella, we're going to confess we're not really interested in learning how to write about this type of season.

31. San Jose Sharks, 20-42-9

Last week: 32

Mirtle rank: 31

Dayal rank: 32

Beating the Leafs on Thursday was enough to bump them up, and the race for dead last is certainly heating up with the Blackhawks. The Sharks now have six points in seven games since the deadline selloff; Chicago has only five in 10 (2-7-1). San Jose sits two points back on the season, and they have a game in hand. If you're the kind of hockey fan who likes watching the worst teams in the league in April, get your popcorn.

32. Chicago Blackhawks, 21-42-9

Last week: 31

Mirtle rank: 32

Dayal rank: 31

The vibes have been rough in Chicago, with the club losing eight of its last nine games. Connor Bedard hasn't had the monster breakout campaign that many were hoping for, but more importantly, the roster around him is just so bleak and deprived of proven, high-end contributors. 19-year-old Artyom Levshunov's exciting play down the stretch has been a silver lining.

The Athletic / What are the NHL's next potential coaching hot seats? Rumblings

By Pierre LeBrun- March 29, 2025

John Tortorella's firing Thursday kicked off the annual end-of-season coaching watch around the NHL.

His firing, by the way, was surprising as far as timing. The indication from the Philadelphia Flyers earlier this week was that they wanted to sit down after the season with the 66-year-old coach, who had another year on his deal, to see where he was at, mentally and physically. His postgame comments Tuesday night helped seal an earlier fate. He also made some comments within the organization over the past few days, according to league sources. In the end, things escalated quickly.

All of which now, of course, will invite speculation on who Flyers general manager Daniel Briere's next head coach will be. Respected veteran Brad Shaw is the interim for the rest of the season, but you can bet there will be hot and heavy Rick Tocchet speculation given his Flyers ties. (More on him below.) I would imagine University of Denver coach David Carle will also be a hot name, among other candidates. Three-time Stanley Cup champion coach Joel Quenneville was cleared by the league last July to coach again. Does he surface as a candidate? Jay Woodcroft and Gerard Gallant are other prominent free-agent coaches.

The Flyers will take their time and eventually commence a thorough search, so I wouldn't expect anything anytime soon. This will be an offseason hire. I do expect Shaw to be included as an in-house candidate, but my sense is he isn't a front-runner.

Where does this leave the NHL coaching market as a whole? Let's take a whirl around the league.

Coaches on interim tag

Joe Sacco, Bruins

Anders Sorensen, Blackhawks

Brad Shaw, Flyers

The Boston Bruins and Chicago Blackhawks will need to decide if they're removing the interim tag on their respective coaches, and in both situations, the front office publicly stated back when they were named that the interim had a real shot of getting the job full-time. But with the Bruins, in particular, fading out of the playoff picture, obviously you wonder about that. Both teams have indicated that they will evaluate things after the season.

The Flyers had a chance to cut Tortorella loose two years ago but stayed with him.

Coaches on expiring deals

It's actually just the one:

Rick Tocchet, Canucks

I asked Canucks GM Patrik Allvin last week at the GM meetings in Florida about Tocchet's future, and he said: "Rick Tocchet has done an impressive job under the circumstances here (this season). He's well-liked by the players. He's a great communicator and also (has the) ability to hold guys accountable. We have a club option (on Tocchet's contract).

"I sure hope that he's going to be part of this organization moving forward. That's a conversation that I hope we'll get to the finish line here sooner rather than later."

So Allvin was clear that the team wants to extend the reigning Jack Adams Award winner.

Tocchet told veteran columnist Iain MacIntyre of Sportsnet last week he wanted to focus on the playoff chase and wait until after the season to deal with his contract situation, which is understandable from his perspective given how big every game is right now for the Canucks.

So TBD on this one. I can see both scenarios playing out: Tocchet deciding to sign an extension with Vancouver, or deciding to move on after a drama-filled year. Obviously, the Flyers' opening would be a natural fit given his roots with the team, but the reality is that he would be an attractive brand for several clubs. And there's always the chance he decides to go back to TV for a year before deciding his next coaching gig, too. So, to sum it up, it's a fluid situation with Tocchet at the moment.

Coaches with one more year

Greg Cronin, Ducks

Lindy Ruff, Sabres

Ryan Huska, Flames

Peter DeBoer, Stars

Kris Knoblauch, Oilers

Peter Laviolette, Rangers

Jon Cooper, Lightning

It's natural to ask about Ruff, given the Buffalo Sabres' season. He said this week he'd like to come back.

"I really want to get this right," Ruff was quoted in colleague Matthew Fairburn's story Tuesday when asked about the possibility of returning.

Obviously, that's not totally up to him. Kevyn Adams has the final say on it, and my understanding is that the Sabres GM wants to bring Ruff back.

What about Laviolette? Does he pay the price if the New York Rangers miss the playoffs after a drama-filled season? I don't have any intel suggesting that's the case, but one has to at least ponder the possibility.

The Anaheim Ducks have improved in Cronin's second season, and he seems to have eased up a bit after being a bit of a taskmaster in Year 1, which grated on some players. All things being equal, I think Ducks GM Pat Verbeek is good with Cronin coming back next season.

Very few people coming into the season had the Calgary Flames fighting for a playoff spot, and Huska is fondly regarded by management. They've seen real growth from last season to this one in how Huska has handled different situations.

Knoblauch coached the Oilers to Game 7 of the Cup Final last season, so one assumes that's a pretty good insurance policy at least for next season. It's easy to point out as a potential red flag that Stan Bowman inherited the coach and didn't hire him, but my understanding is that the Oilers GM is very high on Knoblauch and they have a very good working relationship.

Cooper signed a one-year extension last year, which was never announced (sneaky Tampa Bay Lightning!), so his deal now runs through 2025-26. (And he's believed to be the highest-paid coach in the NHL.) I mean, the Team Canada head coach probably has the best job security in the NHL. It's more a question with Cooper about whether he wakes up one day and wants a different challenge. He absolutely loves his life in Tampa, that's for sure.

DeBoer has been such a great fit with the Dallas Stars, who keep taking swings at it. Obviously, these playoffs are huge (again), but I would envision that marriage continuing past next season.

Other situations worth monitoring

Mike Sullivan, Penguins

Andrew Brunette, Predators

Sullivan is wrapping up Year 1 of a three-year extension he signed with the Pittsburgh Penguins in August 2022. It takes him through the 2026-27 season. He's believed to be the second-highest-paid coach in the league behind Cooper. If another team wanted the Team USA coach, could there be a mutually agreed-upon exit scenario? It may not be likely, but it's possible.

Brunette has two more years left after this season, plus an option year. My understanding of the situation with the Nashville Predators is that if GM Barry Trotz had wanted to make a change, it would have already happened. He believes in Brunette and thinks the adversity this season will serve him well. The expectation is that Brunette will be back behind the bench next season.

The Athletic / NHL 2024-25 bold predictions: Which preseason picks we got right and wrong

By The Athletic NHL Staff- March 30, 2025

We can admit it. We were wrong.

Well, mostly wrong. When The Athletic first asked its NHL staff for their bold predictions, it was a different time. One week into the season, we heard about everything from breakout players to trades to offer sheets to 40-goal scorers.

Two months later when we revisited our preseason prognostications, some writers were ready to take a victory lap, while others needed a mulligan.

Now, with less than three weeks of the regular season remaining, some are holding up well, while others look to have been a bit too bold.

This week, our staff revisited their 2024-25 NHL season bold predictions for a final time. Which ones get a pass, fail or incomplete?

Here's what they said.

Anaheim Ducks

Preseason bold prediction: Trevor Zegras will not be traded this season

Pass, fail or incomplete? Pass

Yep, they're still together. Barring a one-for-one swap or his inclusion in a mega-deal, the conditions for Anaheim trading him never seemed right. Knee surgery midway through the season further lowered his value after an injury-plagued 2023-24 season and there was no sense for the Ducks to trade the talented 24-year-old at a loss when he's still under contract for another season. They're a better team with him in the lineup, but there does remain the question of whether he truly fits into GM Pat Verbeek's vision of the Ducks when they are in a position to contend. Or just how good Zegras can be with them. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

Preseason bold prediction: Jeremy Swayman will struggle early

Pass, fail or incomplete? Pass

Swayman missed all of camp because of his contract negotiations and had to adjust to being the go-to goalie after Linus Ullmark was moved, so early struggles were predictable. That said, I thought Swayman's issues would be temporary and he would regress to being a high-end goalie. An .892 save percentage over 51 appearances signals he's been below average all season. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Preseason bold prediction: Owen Power will double his previous high goal total

Pass, fail or incomplete? Incomplete

Power has seven goals, so he needs five more for this prediction to hit. That's unlikely, but Power does already have a career-high in goals and points this season. While he's still a work-in-progress in the

defensive zone, Power is showing the ability to be a difference-maker in the offensive zone. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

Preseason bold prediction: Jonathan Huberdeau will crack the 80-point plateau

Pass, fail or incomplete? Incomplete

Unless Huberdeau goes on a monster points streak, he won't reach 80 points. But he's very close to the 30-goal mark and could establish a career-high in goals by season's end. This year could still go down as a successful one for the winger, especially if he helps Calgary make the playoffs. — Julian McKenzie

27 seconds after the Islanders took the lead, Jonathan Huberdeau ties it right back up! 🏒

📺: @Sportsnet or stream on Sportsnet+ ➡ <https://t.co/4KjbdjVKjd> pic.twitter.com/gqP9jRM427

— NHL (@NHL) March 22, 2025

Carolina Hurricanes

Preseason bold prediction: Seth Jarvis will get a shot at center

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour had plenty of opportunities to give Jarvis a shot at center this season, but the coach has seemingly settled into letting the team's emerging star settle in as Sebastian Aho's running mate on the top line. It could be because of a lingering shoulder injury, but Jarvis has even taken about half as many faceoffs as he did a year ago. Jarvis has still emerged as one of the league's top defensive forwards, even if he never makes a move to the middle. — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

Preseason bold prediction: The Blackhawks will finish 25 points better than last season

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

The Blackhawks will finish with more points than they had last season, but it won't be by nearly as much as expected. The Blackhawks had 52 points last season and are at 51 points with 9 games to go this year. At best, maybe they will finish 10 points better. Still, this season has been more underwhelming than predicted. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

Preseason bold prediction: Cale Makar will have 100 points

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

This prediction still has a chance to be true, but it would take a monstrous final nine games from Makar. He currently has 84 points in 73 games, on pace for 94 on the season. That would break his previous career high of 90, but fall just short of the century mark. If Makar doesn't hit 100 points, the biggest reason will be Colorado's power play. It hasn't been terrible — ranking seventh in the league at 25.7 percent entering Friday — but it hasn't been as elite as I expected. Makar's assists with the man advantage dropped from 32 a year ago to only 23 this season. — Jesse Granger

That move from Cale Makar??? That goal from Logan O'Connor???

Here for it. #GoAvsGo pic.twitter.com/in0IZLhj9N

— Colorado Avalanche (@Avalanche) March 28, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets

Preseason bold prediction: Yegor Chinakhov will bloom as a goal scorer

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

Swing and a miss, mostly due to a nagging lower-back injury that has plagued Chinakhov for two straight seasons. Two months into the season, Chinakhov was tied for second on the Blue Jackets with seven goals in 21 games, putting him on pace for 27 goals. But the back injury knocked him out of the lineup from Nov. 28 until early March. Since his return, he has only one point (an assist) in eight games. Every other young player on the roster has bloomed for the Blue Jackets this season, but it's been a frustrating campaign for Chinakhov. — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

Preseason bold prediction: The Stars will win the Stanley Cup

Pass, fail or incomplete? Incomplete

This one needs more time to come to fruition, but the Stars are still on a good track. Adding Mikko Rantanen to a stacked forward group, without having to subtract Thomas Harley or Wyatt Johnston, solidified this team from a true contender to a legitimate favorite to win it all. There are still hurdles in their way — from the Miro Heiskanen injury to a likely first-round series against a deep Avalanche team — but this team looks ready for a deep run. — Shayna Goldman

Detroit Red Wings

Preseason bold prediction: Dylan Larkin will score 40 goals

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

There was a time when this had a fighting chance, but it looks like Larkin will most likely finish in the low 30s. Detroit's top line has been quiet to finish the season, with Larkin and Lucas Raymond both being held in check since the 4 Nations. A big part of that could be the lack of a consistent third linemate, as Detroit has cycled through options all year. The most effective was Marco Kasper, but Kasper has been needed to center the second line lately, leaving Larkin and Raymond without a consistent partner. Larkin has been among the league's leading scorers on the power play, but without dominant five-on-five scoring, 40 looks out of reach. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

Preseason bold prediction: Stuart Skinner will finish top five in Vezina voting

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

Skinner has had some excellent starts and some solid stretches this season. A save percentage below .900 and allowing more goals than expected in all situations, per Natural Stat Trick, is no one's idea of a Vezina Trophy candidate, though. With the playoffs nearing, the pressure is about to increase on the 26-year-old. He's 15 months away from being eligible for unrestricted free agency. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Florida Panthers

Preseason bold prediction: Adam Boqvist will break out

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

Boqvist was a very frequent healthy scratch for most of the first half of the season and never gained coach Paul Maurice's trust, as evidenced by his 12:51 in ice time per game. Placed on waivers at the end of January, he's found a more regular role in the Islanders' lineup as a depth defender and chipped in with seven points in 13 games so far. Not exactly a breakout considering how little he has played. — James Mirtle

Los Angeles Kings

Preseason bold prediction: Quinton Byfield will become the Kings' best player

Pass, fail or incomplete? Pass

This might be debatable at this stage — top goal scorer and point producer Adrian Kempe could make a legitimate case as the guy for the Kings through the entire season — but there is mounting evidence that Byfield is at the top right now. His 19 goals and 44 points through 71 games might seem modest, but 10 of those goals and 23 of those points have come over the last 26 contests. With a six-game goal-scoring streak thrown in, Byfield has scored eight times over his last 12 games. The 22-year-old has never been more confident as a player, and his leap during the last two months could be what turns the tide for Los Angeles in a playoff series. — Eric Stephens

QUINTON BYFIELD WE LOVE YOU pic.twitter.com/opzgXYeQ3m

— LA Kings (@LAKings) March 24, 2025

Minnesota Wild

Preseason bold prediction: Matt Boldy will score 40 goals and 40 assists

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

Well, if he scores 16 goals in his last nine games, we nailed it. That doesn't seem likely, though, with the way Boldy's production has waned as the season has gone, in large part due to injuries to Kirill Kaprizov and Joel Eriksson Ek. Opposing teams have checked him hard as one of the last dangerous Wild forwards remaining. Our prediction looked like a lock 20 games into the season when he was on pace for 45 goals and 45 assists. But he has gone through a couple of long goal-scoring droughts since and is now on pace for 27 goals and 43 assists. — Michael Russo

Matt Boldy's soft hands gives the @mnwild the lead with nine seconds left in the period! 🙌

us: @ESPNPlus [➡](https://t.co/S5tPrXCygm) <https://t.co/S5tPrXCygm>

ca: @Sportsnet or stream on Sportsnet+ [➡](https://t.co/4KjbdjVctF) <https://t.co/4KjbdjVctF> pic.twitter.com/X7ZPriIp0D

— NHL (@NHL) March 28, 2025

Montreal Canadiens

Preseason bold prediction: Juraj Slafkovský will hit 70 points

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

For a second year in a row, Slafkovský got off to a slow start. He did not pick up where he left off last season and took a lot of time to get going; he had only four goals and 21 points in 34 games on New Year's Day. Slafkovský has 14 points in 16 games since the return from the 4 Nations break and has helped the Canadiens play themselves into the playoff race, but he is way too far from 70 points to have any hope of reaching it in the final three weeks of the season. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

Preseason bold prediction: Juuse Saros will win the Vezina Trophy

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

Any optimistic prediction about the Preds has been stymied by the most disappointing season in franchise history, and Saros is no exception. The guy with the .915 career save percentage is likely to finish sub-.900, by far the worst showing of his career, and the underlying numbers speak to a big drop as well — just in time for his 8-year, \$61.92 million deal to kick in next season. This organization must hope that Saros, who turns 30 in April, was the product of a terrible team and is ready to return to form for many years to come. — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

Preseason bold prediction: The Devils will finish with the East's best record

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

If it were Dec. 31, I'd feel good about myself. The Devils were 24-13-3 at that point, good for second in the East, albeit with a few games in hand. Since then, New Jersey's season has gone off the rails. Jack Hughes, Dougie Hamilton and Jonas Siegenthaler all went down with season-ending injuries, and Jacob Markström has struggled since coming back from an injury of his own. The Devils have now dropped to sixth in the conference. They still look like a good bet to make the playoffs, but it's already mathematically impossible for them to get the No. 1 seed. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Preseason bold prediction: Noah Dobson will score 70 points again — and get a big extension

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

Well, the 70-point thing is long gone — Dobson has 34 points in 60 games, respectable enough but nowhere near another standout season. The massive extension isn't completely off the table, though. With the cap rising and the Islanders still in need of getting younger, locking up a 25-year-old right-handed defenseman who plays 23-plus minutes a night still seems like a good play. — Arthur Staple

New York Rangers

Preseason bold prediction: Igor Shesterkin will win the Vezina Trophy

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

This is a fail because the award is almost certainly going to go to Connor Hellebuyck, not because Shesterkin hasn't had an excellent season. He has a .908 save percentage, which is impressive because of the Rangers' porous defensive play. Only Hellebuyck entered Wednesday with a better goals saved above expected mark, according to Evolving-Hockey. He is deserving of being a Vezina finalist, even though his surface stats don't suggest it. This prediction will end up wrong, but I stand by the logic. — Peter Baugh

Ottawa Senators

Preseason bold prediction: Travis Green will win the Jack Adams Award

Pass, fail or incomplete? Incomplete

I have a hard time seeing Green win this award when Spencer Carbery and the Capitals exist. Winnipeg's Scott Arniel and Los Angeles' Jim Hiller are also worthy of consideration. But that doesn't mean Green should be completely left off ballots if he guides the Senators to the playoffs for the first time since 2017. — Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

Preseason bold prediction: The Flyers will have a top-15 power play

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

I didn't even think this was that bold! With players such as Matvei Michkov and a healthy Jamie Drysdale, I figured the power play would be better. Frankly, it should be better. Nope. It still stinks for the third straight season. It was mildly surprising that when the Flyers announced the firing of John Tortorella on Thursday, they didn't also relieve associate coach/power-play overseer Rocky Thompson, too, as they desperately need a different vision here. Their third-period power-play goal on Thursday against Montreal ended a 0-for-34 streak in the month of March. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

Preseason bold prediction: Marcus Pettersson will become a trade-deadline commodity

Pass, fail or incomplete? Pass

The Penguins managed to receive wonderful value for Pettersson as part of their rebuilding process, thanks to a first-round pick from Vancouver. They never entertained contract negotiations with Pettersson, knowing full well they would trade him. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

Preseason bold prediction: William Eklund will lead the team in scoring

Pass, fail or incomplete? Incomplete

There is a good battle going on to see who'll finish as the Sharks' leading scorer. Sure, it might have been easy to go with Macklin Celebrini as a choice here, and the 18-year-old has delivered on his promise as he's in the thick of the Calder Trophy race. But this prediction was a bet on Eklund taking another step toward becoming a core player for San Jose. He's done that, with 54 points, one more than Celebrini with 12 games left. More importantly for the Sharks, Eklund has set a career-high in goals and points. — Eric Stephens

Goalies beware, William Eklund is a magician 🎩 pic.twitter.com/EXQR3M3oQr

— San Jose Sharks (@SanJoseSharks) March 28, 2025

Seattle Kraken

Preseason bold prediction: Matty Beniers will score 30 goals

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

It wasn't the offensive re-breakout that I expected from Beniers. This prediction failed early as Beniers endured a nightmare start to the year, scoring just four goals in the opening 32 games. On the positive side of the ledger, Beniers has found his game in the second half. In Seattle's most recent 40 games, Beniers has scored 13 goals — tied for the team lead — and found some real chemistry with recently acquired winger Kaapo Kakko. Beniers didn't flirt with the 30-goal milestone this season, but he seemed to find his game and swagger down the stretch. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

Preseason bold prediction: Philip Broberg and Dylan Holloway's success will lead to more offer sheets

Pass, fail or incomplete? Pass

Well, I can't force NHL general managers and restricted free agents to put pen to paper and execute the offer sheets. But with the seasons Broberg and Holloway are having, there should be plenty of teams exploring that option. Broberg recently had his first-career four-point game and leads the team in plus-minus (plus-21). Holloway is second on the club in goals (26) and has a nine-game point streak. Many considered the salaries paid by the Blues — \$4.58 million annually for Broberg, \$2.29 million annually for Holloway — overpayments. Now they're saying it's time to give them large raises on long-term contracts. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

Preseason bold prediction: Andrei Vasilevskiy will be a Vezina Trophy finalist

Pass, fail or incomplete? Incomplete

Last time we checked in with these bold predictions, Vasilevskiy's level was only slightly above average. He has seriously picked it up since and looks like his usual elite self. In 57 games, he has saved 23.04 goals above expected. Is it enough to land on the ballot? Connor Hellebuyck is going to win, and Logan Thompson likely lands on the ballot behind him. That third slot could go to Dustin Wolf, Sam Montembeault or even Igor Shesterkin. But the Lightning's playoff standing and his more traditional stats work in his favor. And it wouldn't be surprising if he amps things up down the stretch, either. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Preseason bold prediction: Mitch Marner will score 40 goals

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

Big swing and a miss. Marner is going to end up right around 30 goals in all likelihood, but well short of 40. I might be ready to finally ditch this belief — that Marner will one day score 40. Why? I'm not sure he'll ever shoot the puck enough to do so. This season, Marner is averaging the fewest shots of his career, just over two per game. Not enough volume for 40. The one season Marner really shot the puck — in 2021-22, when he averaged over three shots per game — he scored 35 in only 72 games. That's what fueled my belief. Perhaps only in a world in which he leaves the Leafs (and Auston Matthews) might Marner actually threaten 40. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Hockey Club

Preseason bold prediction: Utah will finish as one of the NHL's highest-scoring teams

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

The Coyotes were tied for 16th in scoring a year ago and made some decent additions after the move to Utah, so this felt possible, especially with their promising young talent up front. But the Utahns surprisingly have fallen back to 23rd with only 2.81 goals per game, largely due to steps back from their depth players. Alexander Kerfoot, Lawson Crouse, Matias Maccelli and Nick Bjugstad are all on pace for between 22 and 35 fewer points than last season, leaving the Hockey Clubbers with only a handful of forwards producing much offense. Expect that to be their top target in the offseason. — James Mirtle

Vancouver Canucks

Preseason bold prediction: Elias Pettersson will bounce back and lead the team in scoring

Pass, fail or incomplete? Fail

Elias Pettersson did not bounce back, as Canucks fans know, and he will not lead the Canucks in scoring. Realistically, going forward, we should probably expect Quinn Hughes to lead the Canucks in scoring

every year. He's just so involved and assertive offensively. As for Pettersson, between the off-ice drama and his on-ice struggles, it's been a very difficult campaign. Just as he seemed to be turning a corner, trusting his shot and beginning to produce, he sustained an injury and has been sent home from the club's current road trip. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

Preseason bold prediction: Pavel Dorofeyev will finish second on the team in goals

Pass, fail or incomplete? Pass

We still have 10 games to go, but for now, I've nailed this one. Entering Friday, Pavel Dorofeyev was second on the Golden Knights in goals — one behind Tomas Hertl and four ahead of Jack Eichel. After scoring Friday, he tied Hertl with 31 and is five ahead of Eichel. The 24-year-old winger crushed his previous career high of 13 goals, reaching the 30-goal mark with a hat trick against Boston last Thursday. He's been particularly dangerous on the power play, where he's scored 13 times. — Jesse Granger

PAVEL DOROFYEV HAT TRICK 🏒🏒🏒 #VegasBorn pic.twitter.com/AmPXOnjRHH

— Hockey Daily 365 | NHL Highlights & News (@HockeyDaily365) March 21, 2025

Washington Capitals

Preseason bold prediction: The Pierre-Luc Dubois deal will pay off

Pass, fail or incomplete? Pass

The Dubois for Darcy Kuemper deal took a lot of heat at the time, but this trade has seriously paid off for both sides. Kuemper has been stellar in Los Angeles, and Dubois is the 2C the Capitals were missing. A change in scenery completely revitalized his game; Dubois is scoring at a career-high rate this season in all situations and is driving play on both ends of the ice at five-on-five. That second line has been a major strength for the Caps this season, and Dubois' play is a key reason why. — Shayna Goldman

Winnipeg Jets

Preseason bold prediction: Nikolaj Ehlers will play out the season and then walk as a UFA

Pass, fail or incomplete? Incomplete

Winnipeg kept Ehlers through the trade deadline, helping my preseason prediction clear its lowest available hurdle. The Jets added a defenseman without moving Ehlers, so I've cleared the second-lowest hurdle, too. What now? Will the pending UFA walk this summer? He's finally on the Jets' top power play and on pace for a career year as a result. His playoffs will also impact his price point and the Jets' willingness to pay it. Will they? And will he want to stay? Anything could happen, but I continue to believe his next steps will come elsewhere. — Murat Ates

The Athletic / Meet Cameron Reid, the 2025 NHL Draft prospect with only one mode: 'Very good'

By Scott Wheeler- March 31, 2025

The first time Shayne Stockton was on the ice with Cameron Reid, he turned to the coaches next to him and said, "This kid is one of the best skaters I've worked with."

At the time, Reid was 14 and had just arrived at Bishop Kearney High School in Rochester, N.Y. Stockton had just retired from his playing career (which included four seasons of pro in Britain and France after four years in the NCAA at Holy Cross) and joined the Bishop Kearney Selects coaching staff.

In his second of two seasons coaching Reid, he named him the captain of Bishop Kearney's U15 team.

A year and a half after that first skate, the Kitchener Rangers drafted Reid with the 10th pick in the 2023 OHL draft.

Today, three and a half years removed from that moment, Reid is a potential first-round pick in the 2025 NHL Draft. On the ice with them when Stockton first commented on Reid's skating was Jack Murtagh, who would go on to USA Hockey's NTDP, become a potential first-round pick in the 2025 class and was described by Stockton as having "breakaway speed" himself.

But Reid was different — as a skater and a kid.

The skating was "just top notch." But the kid was "so mature for his age."

Reid was the kid making protein shakes in the dining hall at 14.

In his two years at Bishop Kearney, he was a straight-A student and won academic awards. He was the kid who did homework on the road ("which you don't see very often," according to Stockton).

At the rink, Stockton could go into details with him that "other kids at his age couldn't grasp yet." Once he saw him in a game, he "knew he was a special player immediately" because of the way he "impacts the game both defensively and offensively."

The captaincy was a unanimous vote by his teammates. Even kids on the U18 team called him "Captain Reid" because he was "so well respected by everyone."

He was the kid who cleaned up after his teammates after a team meal, always made sure the bus was clean, put the nets on at the start of practices and picked up pucks at the end of them. As the Zamboni lapped the ice after practices, he'd stay out for sprints.

"I literally wouldn't have to even tell him. He was always like 'Coach, I've got it' and I'd be like 'Yeah, I know you have it, so I don't have to worry about anything.' That was just the way he is," Stockton said. "I can't say enough good things about Cam. He literally does the right thing in every single way. He did everything extra. And he had a really good personality, too. He was more on the quiet side, but once he'd open up, you could have conversations with him about anything."

In Kitchener, Reid has made the same impression. Though NHL Central Scouting gave him a "B" rating (which "indicates a 2nd/3rd round candidate") on their preliminary players to watch list in October, Rangers head coach Jussi Ahokas predicted to The Athletic last summer that Reid would be a first-rounder.

By their midseason ranking, they had slotted him No. 27 among North American skaters eligible for the draft. By year's end, the 5-foot-11.75, 193-pound left-shot D had registered 54 points in 67 games, 12

more than any other U18 defenseman in the OHL. He also finished plus-39, seventh-best among all OHL D and tops on the Rangers.

This season, Ahokas gave him an “A” as a 17-year-old (he also wore a letter at the OHL Top Prospects Game).

Under Ahokas, the Rangers break their season into 12-game “chapters.” At the end of each, the players are rewarded for a successful 12-game segment. Earlier this season, after a winning segment, the Rangers chose to ask to go to the CHL USA Prospects Challenge game in London to support Reid.

Kitchener’s general manager, Mike McKenzie, talks about Reid as “really the complete package on and off the ice.”

Off it, he describes him like Stockton does, lauding his maturity, leadership ability and character — “one of those guys that people gravitate to,” McKenzie said.

“He’s very comfortable in his own skin at an early age,” McKenzie said.

On the ice, he said Reid’s skating ability stands out most as well. But he also talked about him as “an undercover competitor.”

“You don’t notice it all the time because he does play the game with his skating and his smarts, but he’s got (an) undercover bite to his game in terms of standing up for teammates or battling and competing. He’s a competitive kid,” McKenzie said.

This season, when McKenzie fielded calls from scouts who talked about the trend that “you need to be 6-foot-2/3 to play D in the NHL,” he conceded that while there was some truth to that, when a player has the skating ability, competitiveness and smarts that Reid has, it can override it.

More than that, he also “doesn’t play bad games,” according to McKenzie.

“He’s either very, very, very good or just very good. There’s no average or above average ever, it seems,” McKenzie said. “I think he has proven a lot of people wrong, and he’s got a lot of people on his bandwagon now that maybe weren’t on it that subscribed to the fact that you need to be 6-foot-2/3 to play D in the NHL. If he just continues to play the way he is that more and more people will jump on. It’s undeniable at this point that he’s going to be a really good player. You can believe whatever view you want, but he’s a really good hockey player.”

Stockton also said he was “a beast” in workouts.

He has worked hard to become that at strength and conditioning coach Scott Paton’s gym in St. Thomas, Ontario, over the last two summers.

“He’s a kid that does everything that needs to be done exactly as it needs to be done and believes in a system. He’s full-in. That’s the difference with him and some athletes, the work he’s putting in away from the gym with nutrition, hydration, sleep — and that’s a consistent thing,” Paton said. “And when he started to see the scale moving it was that much more motivating and then it reflected in his game what he was building in the gym with his strength, his speed and his power. That stuff is through the roof and now he’s like ‘I can’t get enough food in my body.’”

Paton, who has trained Joe Thornton for nearly 25 years and has worked with other NHLers from southwest Ontario such as Jason Demers, said Reid was “very mature for his age in terms of his physique” even when he first started with him and “his growth since then has been phenomenal.”

Last summer, Reid and Demers, also a defenseman, sat around the gym exchanging ideas and phone numbers one weekend.

During Thornton's playing career, he and Paton would often spend their summers training in Switzerland. This summer, Thornton wants to go back and Paton hopes to bring Reid with him for a couple of weeks.

"(Being around and training with Thornton) has been huge for Cam, especially if you know Joe at all because he's super engaging and super excited for Cam's career now and where it's going to go," Paton said. "And him just sitting down and talking with Cam and giving him some insight is huge. Same with Jason."

On the ice, his skating started at skates his dad, Bill, would run. The Reids lived in St. Thomas, Ontario, about half an hour south of London, when Cam was born, but moved further south to the tiny community of Copenhagen (with its population of about 300) just north of Port Bruce on Lake Erie when he was 4.

Cameron Reid grew up in a few towns across southwestern Ontario. (Courtesy of Bill Reid)

Bill used to laugh when Cam was growing up about how Copenhagen "is probably one of the worst areas in all of Ontario to play AAA hockey." There used to be a AAA team called the Elgin-Middlesex Chiefs out of nearby Aylmer that players such as Bo Horvat and Boone Jenner came up with. But right before Reid started playing, they moved to Komoka, whose arena was a 55-minute drive from their home.

A professor in Fanshawe College's human relations department in London (he also developed a graduate certification in sport and event marketing), Bill started a side business through the skills development and technology firm Power Edge Pro (PEP) 12 years ago in order to fill the gap left behind locally.

Reid started doing PEP when he was 5 years old. For years, his older brother Ethan, a web designer who is now 20 and recently moved to Thailand on a five-year work visa, would help run the skates with their dad. They started working with kids from house league to AAA, but have trained pros and top juniors such as Brett Harrison and Beau Jelsma in recent years. Reid would also help out, sometimes spending five hours a day on the ice during his dad's sessions "just skating."

Before COVID, Bill was travelling to Chatham, London, Waterloo and Brantford. He has slowed the business down over the last couple of years to reduce the travel, but still runs skates in smaller nearby communities such as St. Thomas, Aylmer, Komoka and Dorchester.

Though an hour to Komoka became four hours to Rochester when Reid moved to Bishop Kearney in search of better competition as a teenager, the Rangers brought him closer to home and the drive shortened back to 1:15 to Kitchener.

The Reids have cherished that relative proximity to the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium. And whenever the Rangers play in London, Bill reserves a box and divides it up among family, friends and the parents and billet parents of his teammates. At the CHL USA Prospects Challenge game in London in November, they filled a 136-seat box to support Reid.

"It's the closest he has been to our house in four or five years," Bill said. "It has been awesome. It has been so big for us."

Left: Reid with his mom Tanya. Right: With his dad Bill and brother Ethan. (Courtesy of Bill Reid)

Bill jokes that his son didn't get his skating from his skates, though. That, he laughs, comes from his mom's side of the family. His mom, Tanya Tilton-Reid, also works in HR as the head of HR for the Catholic Diocese of London. But her cousin is Sherry Ball, a former Canadian Olympic figure skater.

Though Reid joked that he's never tried figure skates, he's quick to give them the credit instead of his dad, too.

He and Bill also give credit to New Jersey Devils player development coach Mark Voakes, who trained with Paton and started running skates for some of the locals (players such as 2026 prospect Parker Vaughan, Maple Leafs prospect Easton Cowan, and Blue Jackets prospect Max McCue) a few years ago.

In Reid, Voakes sees a player who might not need an Instagram-worthy highlight reel competition in the 2025 NHL Draft but would be “way above average” in every area of a skills competition.

That well-roundedness will serve him well when he gets to the NHL, according to Voakes, but it can also be a double-edged sword as he tries to find a niche and break into a league where most of the players “are really good at one thing and that’s their calling card.”

The skating might have to be Reid’s calling card.

“When I watch Cam, I feel that the completeness to his game over time, you start to realize the value in what he brings. And that’s certainly not discounting or shortchanging any of his natural ability or skill set,” Voakes said. “But Cam’s best asset is his ability to move. So he’s going to kill plays because he’s going to win a puck race, not because he’s going to be there at the same time and he’s going to plow over someone. You can defend in different ways. Now, you can take what Cam is doing and be 6-5 and do that and be like ‘wow, what a player’ but those guys are one in a gazillion.”

Since they began working together a couple of years ago, Voakes has told Reid that he thinks he can do more than he does.

“He’s such a coachable kid that to a fault he’ll stay in his lane,” Voakes said. “The coach says ‘Do this and we want you to go there, stop there and do it seven times in a row’ and he’ll do that and there’s no issues but sometimes I think he has enough skill to just deviate a little bit. And not where he makes the coach want to bench him but it’s almost like ‘Hey, you know you’re better than most guys out there, right? It’s OK if you do just a little bit more.’ And he’s such a good kid that he’s probably asking himself ‘Why would I do that? Coach will get mad at me and why would I want him mad at me?’ Whereas other guys will be like ‘I don’t care! This is my show, and coach can deal with it!’

“But he’s got integrity and respect to him and his aroma is he’s older than 17.”

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: Latest on the Eastern wild-card chaos

By ESPN staff- March 29, 2025

Heading into Friday's slate of six games, there are four teams within two points battling for the second Eastern Conference wild-card spot.

Three of those teams are in action Friday:

The Montreal Canadiens, who hold the playoff spot at the moment, visit the Carolina Hurricanes (7 p.m. ET, ESPN+)

Simultaneously, the Columbus Blue Jackets will host the Vancouver Canucks (7 p.m. ET, ESPN+)

In the evening's nightcap, the New York Rangers will head to Orange County to take on the Anaheim Ducks (10 p.m. ET, ESPN+)

The New York Islanders are idle, with their next game on Saturday against the Tampa Bay Lightning

Obviously, every point matters when it comes to these teams. But two specific games down the stretch will have an outsized impact: Islanders-Rangers on April 10, and Islanders-Blue Jackets on April 17 (the final day of the regular season).

Stathletes gives the Canadiens an edge right now (43.7% chance to make the playoffs), followed by the Blue Jackets (18.5%), Islanders (18.4%) and Rangers (18.1%); Montreal also has the best chance among the four to reach the second round (11.2%). Stay tuned.

There are less than three weeks left until April 17 and we'll help you track it all with the NHL playoff watch. As we traverse the final stretch, we'll provide details on all the playoff races, along with the teams jockeying for position in the 2025 NHL draft lottery.

Note: Playoff chances are via Stathletes.

Jump ahead:

Current playoff matchups

Today's schedule

Yesterday's scores

Expanded standings

Race for No. 1 pick

Current playoff matchups

Eastern Conference

A1 Toronto Maple Leafs vs. WC1 Ottawa Senators

A2 Florida Panthers vs. A3 Tampa Bay Lightning

M1 Washington Capitals vs. WC2 Montreal Canadiens

M2 Carolina Hurricanes vs. M3 New Jersey Devils

Western Conference

C1 Winnipeg Jets vs. WC2 St. Louis Blues

C2 Dallas Stars vs. C3 Colorado Avalanche

P1 Vegas Golden Knights vs. WC1 Minnesota Wild

P2 Los Angeles Kings vs. P3 Edmonton Oilers

Friday's games

Note: All times ET. All games not on TNT or NHL Network are available to stream on ESPN+ (local blackout restrictions apply).

Utah Hockey Club at Florida Panthers, 7 p.m. (NHLN)

Montreal Canadiens at Carolina Hurricanes, 7 p.m.

Vancouver Canucks at Columbus Blue Jackets, 7 p.m.

New Jersey Devils at Winnipeg Jets, 8 p.m.

Vegas Golden Knights at Chicago Blackhawks, 8:30 p.m.

New York Rangers at Anaheim Ducks, 10 p.m.

Thursday's scoreboard

Buffalo Sabres 7, Pittsburgh Penguins 3

Ottawa Senators 4, Detroit Red Wings 3

Tampa Bay Lightning 8, Utah Hockey Club 0

Philadelphia Flyers 6, Montreal Canadiens 4

Minnesota Wild 4, Washington Capitals 2

St. Louis Blues 3, Nashville Predators 2

Dallas Stars 5, Calgary Flames 2

Colorado Avalanche 4, Los Angeles Kings 0

Seattle Kraken 6, Edmonton Oilers 1

San Jose Sharks 6, Toronto Maple Leafs 5 (SO)

Expanded standings

Atlantic Division

Toronto Maple Leafs

Points: 90

Regulation wins: 35

Playoff position: A1

Games left: 10

Points pace: 102.5

Next game: @ LA (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Florida Panthers

Points: 89

Regulation wins: 35

Playoff position: A2

Games left: 11

Points pace: 102.8

Next game: vs. UTA (Friday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Tampa Bay Lightning

Points: 89

Regulation wins: 36

Playoff position: A3

Games left: 10

Points pace: 101.4

Next game: vs. NYI (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Ottawa Senators

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 29

Playoff position: WC1

Games left: 11

Points pace: 93.6

Next game: vs. CBJ (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 98.1%

Tragic number: N/A

Montreal Canadiens

Points: 75

Regulation wins: 24

Playoff position: WC2

Games left: 11

Points pace: 86.6

Next game: @ CAR (Friday)

Playoff chances: 43.7%

Tragic number: N/A

Detroit Red Wings

Points: 72

Regulation wins: 25

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 10

Points pace: 82.0

Next game: vs. BOS (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 4.5%

Tragic number: 18

Boston Bruins

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 23

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 9

Points pace: 77.5

Next game: @ DET (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 13

Buffalo Sabres

Points: 66

Regulation wins: 24

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 11

Points pace: 76.2

Next game: @ PHI (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 14

Metro Division

x - Washington Capitals

Points: 103
Regulation wins: 40
Playoff position: M1
Games left: 10
Points pace: 117.3
Next game: vs. BUF (Sunday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
Carolina Hurricanes
Points: 90
Regulation wins: 38
Playoff position: M2
Games left: 11
Points pace: 103.9
Next game: vs. MTL (Friday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
New Jersey Devils
Points: 83
Regulation wins: 34
Playoff position: M3
Games left: 9
Points pace: 93.2
Next game: @ WPG (Friday)
Playoff chances: 98.5%
Tragic number: N/A
New York Islanders
Points: 74
Regulation wins: 25
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 11
Points pace: 85.5
Next game: @ TB (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 18.4%

Tragic number: 22

New York Rangers

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 31

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 10

Points pace: 84.3

Next game: @ ANA (Friday)

Playoff chances: 18.1%

Tragic number: 20

Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 23

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 12

Points pace: 85.5

Next game: vs. VAN (Friday)

Playoff chances: 18.5%

Tragic number: 23

Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 20

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 8

Points pace: 76.5

Next game: vs. OTT (Sunday)

Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 11

Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 67

Regulation wins: 18

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 8
Points pace: 74.2
Next game: vs. BUF (Saturday)
Playoff chances: ~0%
Tragic number: 9
Central Division
x - Winnipeg Jets
Points: 102
Regulation wins: 38
Playoff position: C1
Games left: 10
Points pace: 116.2
Next game: vs. NJ (Friday)
Playoff chances: 100%
Tragic number: N/A
Dallas Stars
Points: 98
Regulation wins: 38
Playoff position: C2
Games left: 10
Points pace: 111.6
Next game: @ SEA (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A
Colorado Avalanche
Points: 93
Regulation wins: 38
Playoff position: C3
Games left: 9
Points pace: 104.5
Next game: vs. STL (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 99.9%
Tragic number: N/A

Minnesota Wild

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 33

Playoff position: WC1

Games left: 9

Points pace: 97.7

Next game: vs. NJ (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 90.2%

Tragic number: N/A

St. Louis Blues

Points: 85

Regulation wins: 29

Playoff position: WC2

Games left: 8

Points pace: 94.2

Next game: @ COL (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 80.3%

Tragic number: N/A

Utah Hockey Club

Points: 75

Regulation wins: 24

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 10

Points pace: 85.4

Next game: @ FLA (Friday)

Playoff chances: 4%

Tragic number: 11

e - Nashville Predators

Points: 62

Regulation wins: 23

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 10

Points pace: 70.6

Next game: vs. VGK (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

e - Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 51

Regulation wins: 18

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 10

Points pace: 58.1

Next game: vs. VGK (Friday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Pacific Division

Vegas Golden Knights

Points: 94

Regulation wins: 40

Playoff position: P1

Games left: 11

Points pace: 108.6

Next game: @ CHI (Friday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Los Angeles Kings

Points: 89

Regulation wins: 35

Playoff position: P3

Games left: 11

Points pace: 102.8

Next game: vs. TOR (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 99.9%

Tragic number: N/A

Edmonton Oilers

Points: 87

Regulation wins: 30
Playoff position: P2
Games left: 10
Points pace: 99.1
Next game: vs. CGY (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 98.2%
Tragic number: N/A
Vancouver Canucks
Points: 80
Regulation wins: 26
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 10
Points pace: 91.1
Next game: @ CBJ (Friday)
Playoff chances: 10.4%
Tragic number: 16
Calgary Flames
Points: 79
Regulation wins: 26
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 11
Points pace: 91.2
Next game: @ EDM (Saturday)
Playoff chances: 16.9%
Tragic number: 17
Anaheim Ducks
Points: 70
Regulation wins: 23
Playoff position: N/A
Games left: 11
Points pace: 80.9
Next game: vs. NYR (Friday)
Playoff chances: 0.1%

Tragic number: 8

Seattle Kraken

Points: 68

Regulation wins: 25

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 9

Points pace: 76.4

Next game: vs. DAL (Saturday)

Playoff chances: ~0%

Tragic number: 2

e - San Jose Sharks

Points: 49

Regulation wins: 14

Playoff position: N/A

Games left: 11

Points pace: 56.6

Next game: vs. NYR (Saturday)

Playoff chances: 0%

Tragic number: E

Note: An "x" means that the team has clinched a playoff berth. An "e" means that the team has been eliminated from playoff contention.

Race for the No. 1 pick

The NHL uses a draft lottery to determine the order of the first round, so the team that finishes in last place is not guaranteed the No. 1 selection. As of 2021, a team can move up a maximum of 10 spots if it wins the lottery, so only 11 teams are eligible for the No. 1 pick. Full details on the process are [here](#). Matthew Schaefer, a defenseman for the OHL's Erie Otters, is No. 1 on the draft board.

1. San Jose Sharks

Points: 49

Regulation wins: 14

2. Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 51

Regulation wins: 18

3. Nashville Predators

Points: 62

Regulation wins: 23

4. Buffalo Sabres

Points: 66

Regulation wins: 24

5. Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 67

Regulation wins: 18

6. Seattle Kraken

Points: 68

Regulation wins: 25

7. Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 20

8. Boston Bruins

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 23

9. Anaheim Ducks

Points: 70

Regulation wins: 23

10. Detroit Red Wings

Points: 72

Regulation wins: 25

11. Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 73

Regulation wins: 23

12. New York Rangers

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 31

13. New York Islanders

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 25

14. Utah Hockey Club

Points: 75

Regulation wins: 24

15. Calgary Flames

Points: 79

Regulation wins: 26

16. Vancouver Canucks

Points: 80

Regulation wins: 26

ESPN / Six theories why penalties are down in the NHL this season

By Greg Wyshynski- March 29, 2025

Power plays in the NHL haven't been this dominant in decades.

The average conversion rate this season was 21.6% entering Tuesday night's games, according to ESPN Research. That's the best rate since the 1985-86 season, back when Wayne Gretzky's Edmonton Oilers were scoring at will against helpless penalty kills.

This season's power-play success is part of a multi-year trend. It would be the third straight season with power-play conversion rates higher than 21%, the first time that's happened since the mid-1980s.

But there's actually another trend that undercuts that dominance: Power plays in the NHL have also never been this rare.

The 2.71 power-play chances per team per game in 2024-25 is the lowest average of any season since the stat was first tracked by the NHL in 1977-78. The previous lows were 2.89 in both 2021-22 and 2020-21. Again, it's a multi-year trend: The NHL has averaged under three power-play chances per team per game in five of the last seven seasons.

Teams can't have power plays if there aren't penalty calls. Overall, the average penalty calls per team per game are at their lowest levels for an 82-game season in the last 20 years -- 3.48 penalties on average, with just 8.15 penalty minutes.

In 2014-15, those averages were 4.03 and 9.86, respectively.

Where have all the penalties gone?

"See, I'll say something and then I'll take six penalties tonight," New Jersey Devils center Cody Glass said, with a laugh. "I have no idea, to be honest. With some games you might have none and then some games you might have seven. It's all over the map."

Many players don't even realize power plays are down.

"It was one of those things where I had no idea until I read it about it," Calgary Flames winger Blake Coleman said. "I haven't noticed a lot of difference."

In speaking with NHL players, executives, data analysts and former referees, there are a handful of theories about why penalties and power plays have dipped historically low this season.

Here's a look at six of the most compelling ones:

The perils of parity

Entering Thursday night, 14 of the 16 teams in the Eastern Conference were either in a playoff seed or within six points of one. Thanks to the St. Louis Blues' recent surge, the field has narrowed in the Western Conference, but there are still 11 teams either in a playoff spot or within a reasonable distance from the last wild card.

When that many teams believe they can gain entry to the postseason party, every point matters. Which is why the league's parity is a factor in the decrease in penalties and power plays, according to Stephen Walkom, NHL executive vice president and director of officiating.

"When you have the competitive balance that we have in this league, teams just don't want to take any penalties," Walkom said.

The threat of guilt and shame can be a heck of a motivator, too.

"Nobody wants to be the guy that's in the box," Coleman said. "I can understand the decline in penalties because of parity. So many teams are trying to get into the playoffs. It's the importance of every point."

Dave Jackson, NHL rules analyst for ESPN, has observed a palpable difference in players as the games have grown more important in the standings this season.

"You can say that a lot of teams have been already playing playoff games," said Jackson, who was an NHL referee for over four decades. "Early in the season, you get a lot of penalties that are just pure laziness and retaliation. When you're playing in a playoff game, you don't get lazy penalties. You don't get retaliation penalties anymore. All you get are desperation penalties and accidental penalties from just competing too hard."

Given how tightly the standings have been packed, teams have been in playoff mode for quite a while.

Reinforcement of rules

This is tracking to be the second straight season in which penalty calls have technically declined, although the difference between the last two seasons was negligible (3.85 to 3.84). But there's a larger trend: The number of penalties called per team per game has precipitously dropped since the 2005-06 season.

In 2005-06, the number of minor penalties per team per game was 6.49. Five years later, it was 4.05 minors per game. Five years after that, it was 3.66 per game on average. This season, it's been 3.18 on average.

From 2010-11 through 2014-15, the average number of minor penalties per team per game was 3.84. Over the last five seasons, that average is 3.34.

Why have penalties declined in the last 20 years?

"I give the players credit for it more than anyone else," Walkom said. "You would think over 15 years of being called for hooking, you don't want to hook in the hands anymore. You don't want to slash on the hands anymore. So are players more disciplined? Possibly that's a reason for it. Are they taking more care not to take penalties? Possibly."

Players are informed about standards of enforcement every preseason. Devils forward Tomas Tatar, a 14-year veteran, said points of emphasis and the repetition of those rules standards have an effect on players.

"They were harping on us to not to use your stick around the gloves, hooks. That's probably one of the biggest warnings when you play -- you might get called for it," he said. "So we try to protect the hands of the player. I notice these calls getting called immediately if it's somewhere between or if it's on a line.

"You have to adapt. You either do that or you're going to get called on it."

It's possible this emphasis on certain penalties and reinforcement of officiating standards each season has paid off in the declining numbers.

"I think the most compelling argument is that we've reached a tipping point of players who have always played the game a certain way," one NHL executive said.

One of the hypotheticals that always comes up in rules debates: How many power plays do fans really want to see during games? It's a debate the players have themselves, too. Glass said most players would prefer not to have the game decided on special teams, but at 5-on-5.

"That's where you get the best hockey," Glass said. "You want the game to keep moving and it's good to have, if there's a penalty, call it, but if it's ticky-tacky stuff, obviously let us play. That's part of hockey: how rough it is."

Letting too much go?

Given the decline in penalty calls over the last 20 years, are on-ice officials now letting too much go?

The NHL tracks every game for penalties called as well as calls the referees should have made. "We look at missed calls and that percentage isn't up," Walkom said.

Both Walkom and Jackson pushed back on the idea that on-ice officials have allowed players to get away with more lately.

"Our standard hasn't changed. In fact, all we do is reinforce to the NHL standard. We have it for really every penalty now. And so that remains the same," Walkom said. "We support our guys to call it at any point in the game. And if it's not there, we don't want them to make it up."

Jackson said he's attended numerous NHL preseason officiating camps as a referee and an analyst.

"I've watched Gary Bettman talk in front of that room. His message to the guys is, 'We've just spent thousands of dollars bringing you to training camp. We've been showing you videos. You guys know what the standard is. If it meets the standard, call the penalty and I will support you.' And that's always been his message," he said.

Jackson said that consistency doesn't come from evening-up calls or managing a game -- something critics have accused NHL officials of doing for years -- but rather from adhering to that standard.

"It's about being true to the standard. That way the players know where they stand and it's far easier to justify a penalty," he said.

Peaks and valleys

Jackson has seen a certain cycle play out every decade with penalties. "It's a wave. High, then low, then high, then low," he said.

Jackson was an on-ice official during the 2005-06 season. When the previous season was cancelled due to a lockout, the NHL used that down time to revise its rulebook and reevaluate its rules enforcement, with average scoring having reached its lowest point since 1956.

The legalization of two-line stretch passes was one way to break through the defensive systems that had muzzled offenses, but the most aggressive remedy was when the NHL instructed its referees to take a "zero tolerance" stance on all obstruction penalties, such as interference, holding and hooking.

"When we brought in the obstruction standard in 2005, the penalties were way up," Jackson recalled.

Average power plays per team per game jumped from 4.24 in 2003-04 to 5.85 in 2005-06, the highest average since 1987-88. The reeducation of players would continue through the 2008-09 season, when power plays finally settled back down to 4.16 per team per game.

Jackson said that whenever the NHL emphasizes a rule that needs to be enforced, there's a spike in power plays. He points to the 2017-18 season, when power plays rose slightly during a crackdown on slashing, and in 2021-22, when the NHL's crackdown on cross-checking helped power-play chances plateau year-over-year and then rise in 2022-23.

Peaks and valleys. NHL players learn the hard way that the league won't tolerate one nefarious act, and then eventually move on to another underhanded tactic ... until the NHL declares war on that one, too.

"It's almost like cybercrime," Jackson said. "The criminals come up with a plan, everybody's getting hacked, and then [the authorities] figure out a way to stop it. That slows them down for a while. Then they come up with a new crime and numbers spike, and then that gets figured out and numbers come down again."

One theory Jackson buys about the sharp decline in power plays and penalties: The NHL isn't "cracking down" on anything in particular right now. There's no point of emphasis like there was with obstruction or cross-checking.

"There's no teachable moment right now. The game is where they want it to be," he said. "And the players are playing within the rules."

Fear of a dominant power play

In the past 40 years of NHL power plays, one would expect to see teams like the Edmonton Oilers and Detroit Red Wings show up among the top 10 in that span.

But take a closer look. Those aren't the Gretzky Oilers: The most effective power play since 1984-95 has been Connor McDavid's 2022-23 Oilers unit that converted at an astonishing 32.4%.

And those aren't Sergei Fedorov's Red Wings: Through 71 games this season, Dylan Larkin and the 2024-25 Red Wings had the fifth-best power-play conversion rate (29.1%) in the last 40 years. In total, eight of the 10 greatest single-season power plays of the past 40 years are from 2018-19 to the current season.

As mentioned earlier, this season's conversion rate of 21.6% is the best since 1985-86 (22.2%) on a per team per game basis. There are nine teams with a power-play conversion rate above 25% this season.

All of this success comes from teams having averaged an absurd 15.1% shooting percentage with the man advantage this season. To put that in context: Since the 2005-06 season, there's been only one campaign with an average shooting power-play shooting percentage above 14% (2022-23).

At the recent general managers meetings, the NHL trumpeted "offensive trends" that included a 10.5% league-wide shooting percentage in all situations, which the league said was the highest in 30 seasons.

Conversely, penalty kill save percentages are also at a 20-year low: .850, even lower than in the chaotic 2005-06 season (.860).

During a presentation to the media at the GM meetings, the NHL emphasized that these historic conversion rates play a "large part" in the average number of power plays being down. "Teams don't want to go down a man because of the overall success teams are having on the power play," noted Gary Meagher, NHL senior vice president.

Are the referees aware of this, too? Do the on-ice officials acknowledge that power plays are so good right now that they don't want to give certain teams the man advantage in situations that could put the game out of reach?

"No," Jackson said, tersely.

Generation Fast

At the GM meetings, the NHL proudly boasted that this is the fourth straight season in which average scoring per game was at six goals or better -- the first time in the last 30 campaigns that the league has had such a stretch.

Several factors combined to create that spike in scoring. In the short term, there have been increased shooting percentages and power-play success, plus two rounds of expansion that impacted rosters. In the long term, the rules changes set forth in 2005-06 created a style of play that emphasized offense and

encouraged teams to build rosters with more overall speed. The days of hulking players with limited skating ability on the fourth line and in defense corps were waning.

"The game obviously got a lot faster than what it used to be. Guys are not as big. They're more agile, faster," Tatar said. "That comes with defensemen as well. Everybody can skate."

Players we spoke with theorized that speed is a reason that penalties have dropped over the last decade. Gone are the days when the less-skilled would waterski behind star players with a stick hooked around them, according to Coleman.

"Everyone is such a good skater now. I feel like it's a little easier to defend using your feet and your legs," he said.

There's a perception that the NHL has "gotten younger" during the last 20 years, but the data doesn't necessarily back that up. Cathy Squires of Pension Plan Puppets ran the numbers in September 2024 and found the average age of a player in 2023-24 who played half the season (27.72) was higher than it was in 2013-14 (27.36). James Mirtle of The Athletic noted that the average age on opening night rosters this season (28.3) was higher than it was three years earlier (27.6).

Coleman, 33, said he "wasn't the old school, but wasn't quite the new school" either. While the kids haven't taken over the league, he believes the generations that arrived after him in the NHL have created a cleaner game.

"You don't see as many headshots, for example," he said. "I don't know if guys just have a little more awareness. It's just been drilled into our heads [not to do it]. They've probably heard it too since they were little kids."

What it means for the playoffs

Jackson likes to play myth-buster when it comes to power play opportunities in the playoffs.

"In the first round of the playoffs, there are more penalties per game than there are in the regular season," he said. "I think that's because of the discrepancy in the talent. You've got a 1-vs-8 eight or a 1 vs. the last wild-card team, and they're being outclassed, so they just take desperation penalties."

Recently, a great power play has meant great success in the postseason. Travis Yost of TSN notes that six of the last eight Stanley Cup champions had a regular-season power play that ranked in the top eight. The 2019 St. Louis Blues were ranked 11th overall; the 2023 Vegas Golden Knights were the outlier at 18th in the regular season.

Current playoff teams with a power play ranked in the top eight entering Friday night: the Golden Knights, Winnipeg Jets, Devils, Toronto Maple Leafs, Tampa Bay Lightning, and Oilers. The Colorado Avalanche were less than a percentage point outside of that group.

All this is to say that power plays do play a critical role during a portion of the playoffs, and success on the power play is a shared trait among most champions. Will the conversion rates this season, and that astounding 15.1% shooting percentage, carry over to the postseason? There's no reason to believe a multi-season trend of power-play success will not.

But will the lack of power plays in this regular season also carry over to the postseason? The answer is that it might not matter. At some point in each series, the power plays dry up anyway.

Cam Charron, now a data analyst for the Pittsburgh Penguins, noted in a 2023 article that "there are at least 0.4 power plays per game more than expected in the first four games of the first round." But he also found that the refs do eventually put away their whistles late in series and in later playoff rounds.

"The data shows that while power-play opportunities do indeed go up in the playoffs, it's not uniform across the tournament," he wrote. "There's a big spike in power plays in the first few games of the first round, and then a sharp decline later on."

In the end, the postseason might end up looking like the regular season: It doesn't matter if there are historic power-play conversion rates if there aren't any power plays to convert.

ESPN / NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, remaining schedule strength

By ESPN staff- March 29, 2025

Reactions

There are fewer than three weeks remaining in the 2024-25 NHL regular season, which ends April 17.

The races for playoff spots and seeding continue to be waged, and the opponents on each club's remaining schedule can be a differentiating factor.

This week, along with an updated set of Power Rankings, we'll also examine each team's strength of schedule, courtesy of Stathletes.

How we rank: A panel of ESPN hockey commentators, analysts, reporters and editors sends in a 1-32 poll based on the games through Wednesday, which generates our master list.

Note: Previous ranking for each team refers to the previous edition,

Published March 21. Points percentages are through Thursday's games.

1. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 71.5%

Strength of schedule: 46.2%, 29th. As Alex Ovechkin chases Wayne Gretzky's goal-scoring record, the Caps appear to be well-positioned to maintain the No. 1 seed in the Eastern Conference based on their remaining schedule.

Next seven days: vs. BUF (March 30), @ BOS (April 1), @ CAR (April 2)

2. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 70.8%

Strength of schedule: 50.6%, 14th. The Jets' spot atop the Western Conference appears reasonably secure, but there's still the matter of the Presidents' Trophy as the league's top team in the standings. And based purely on relative strength of schedule, the Capitals have the upper hand.

Next seven days: vs. NJ (March 28), vs. VAN (March 30), @ LA (April 1), @ VGK (April 3)

3. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 68.1%

Strength of schedule: 47.9%, 25th. There is a small but non-zero chance that the Stars catch the Jets for the Central Division's No. 1 seed, and they've got the strength of schedule (or lack thereof) down the stretch to pull it off.

Next seven days: @ SEA (March 29), @ SEA (March 31), vs. NSH (April 3)

4. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 66.2%

Strength of schedule: 48.1%, 23rd. Although the Golden Knights' most memorable move at the trade deadline was a social media post, they simply keep chugging along atop the division, a fact that is unlikely to change given the games remaining on the schedule.

Next seven days: @ CHI (March 28), @ NSH (March 29), vs. EDM (April 1), vs. WPG (April 3)

5. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 63.4%

Strength of schedule: 48.6%, 21st. The Canes are rolling toward another playoff berth, and it's overwhelmingly likely they'll do so as the Metro Division's No. 2 seed.

Next seven days: vs. MTL (March 28), vs. NYI (March 30), vs. WSH (April 2)

6. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 63.7%

Strength of schedule: 50.2%, 16th. A first-round matchup with the Stars -- where they'll square off with old friend Mikko Rantanen -- seems all but destined; it's just a matter of which team gets home-ice advantage.

Next seven days: vs. STL (March 29), vs. CGY (March 31), @ CHI (April 2), @ CBJ (April 3)

7. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 62.7%

Strength of schedule: 51.7%, 10th. Can the Kings catch the Knights for the division crown? Not likely, at least according to their relative strengths of schedule.

Next seven days: vs. TOR (March 29), vs. SJ (March 30), vs. WPG (April 1), @ UTA (April 3)

8. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 62.7%

Strength of schedule: 50.2%, 17th. Of the three teams battling for the Atlantic Division crown, the Panthers have the most challenging schedule down the homestretch.

Next seven days: vs. UTA (March 28), vs. MTL (March 30), @ MTL (April 1), @ TOR (April 2)

9. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 62.5%

Strength of schedule: 49.9%, 19th. Which first-round opponent would the Maple Leafs prefer? A division title likely gets them a Battle of Ontario showdown with the Senators, while slipping to second (or third) gets them one of the Florida teams.

Next seven days: @ LA (March 29), @ ANA (March 30), vs. FLA (April 2)

10. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 60.4%

Strength of schedule: 49.9%, 20th. The bad news for Oilers fans is that their chances of a division title are slipping by the day (and it doesn't help that the Golden Knights' strength of schedule is even easier than theirs). The good news is that the team appears destined for another first-round matchup against the Kings, whom the Oilers have beaten in three straight opening-round series.

Next seven days: vs. CGY (March 29), @ VGK (April 1), @ SJ (April 3)

11. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 10

Points percentage: 61.8%

Strength of schedule: 48.4%, 22nd. The top three of the Atlantic Division appear all but set; it's just a matter of seeding -- and the Lightning happen to have the easiest final stretch of the three teams involved.

Next seven days: vs. NYI (March 29), @ NYI (April 1), @ OTT (April 3)

12. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 57.4%

Strength of schedule: 52.8%, 5th. A defiant Jordan Binnington backstopped Canada to 4 Nations Face-Off glory, and his NHL club has charged into playoff position after a mushy first half. Can the Blues hold off the Canucks and Flames?

Next seven days: @ COL (March 29), vs. DET (April 1), vs. PIT (April 3)

13. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 59.6%

Strength of schedule: 47.4%, 26th. Although the Wild have been a bit wobbly in recent weeks, their strong start might have given them enough of a buffer to hold off the competition, particularly given the relative ease of their final stretch.

Next seven days: vs. NJ (March 29), @ NJ (March 31), @ NYR (April 2)

14. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 56.9%

Strength of schedule: 44.8%, 32nd. Some team had to have the easiest schedule from here on out, and the Devils get the nod. That's good, because thanks to a rash of injuries to key players, they'll take any edge they can get to hold on to a playoff spot.

Next seven days: @ WPG (March 28), @ MIN (March 29), vs. MIN (March 31)

15. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 14

Points percentage: 57.0%

Strength of schedule: 47.3%, 27th. The Senators stuck to their strategy of a slow build -- without the splashy moves of some other Ontario-based teams -- and it has resulted in the team being in playoff position as we head into April, a trend that should continue based on the club's remaining slate.

Next seven days: vs. CBJ (March 29), @ PIT (March 30), vs. BUF (April 1), vs. TB (April 3)

16. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 55.6%

Strength of schedule: 51.7%, 9th. If the Flames are going to make a run into playoff position, they're going to have to beat some very good teams to get there.

Next seven days: @ EDM (March 29), @ COL (March 31), @ UTA (April 1), vs. ANA (April 3)

17. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 55.6%

Strength of schedule: 52.6%, 6th. The reigning Pacific Division champs will need to go on a heater -- and get some help with other playoff bubble teams losing -- in order to make it back to the tournament.

Next seven days: @ CBJ (March 28), @ WPG (March 30), vs. SEA (April 2)

18. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 52.8%

Strength of schedule: 50.3%, 15th. Is playoff hockey finally coming back to la belle province? The Habs face a medium-strength schedule down the stretch, slightly more difficult than the Rangers' and Blue Jackets' but easier than the Islanders'.

Next seven days: @ CAR (March 28), @ FLA (March 30), vs. FLA (April 1), vs. BOS (April 3)

19. Utah Hockey Club

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 52.1%

Strength of schedule: 52.3%, 8th. The fact that the UHC is still alive in the playoff race this late in the season is good for the young roster and for the fans who get to see meaningful hockey. But it's definitely an uphill climb to earn a spot in the postseason.

Next seven days: @ FLA (March 28), @ CHI (March 30), vs. CGY (April 1), vs. LA (April 3)

20. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 52.1%

Strength of schedule: 54.1%, 1st. The Isles might yet overtake the field to grab one of the Eastern wild cards. But it certainly won't be an easy path, given the teams on their schedule.

Next seven days: @ TB (March 29), @ CAR (March 30), vs. TB (April 1)

21. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 51.4%

Strength of schedule: 51.6%, 13th. Uninspired play as of late has diminished the Blueshirts' chances at a playoff return (after winning the Presidents' Trophy last season). But the road to a postseason berth has not been closed completely.

Next seven days: @ ANA (March 28), @ SJ (March 29), vs. MIN (April 2)

22. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 52.1%

Strength of schedule: 51.6%, 12th. The day after the trade deadline, the Blue Jackets held the first wild-card spot in the East. They have tumbled since then, but the door to the postseason remains slightly ajar.

Next seven days: vs. VAN (March 28), @ OTT (March 29), vs. NSH (April 1), vs. COL (April 3)

23. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 50.0%

Strength of schedule: 53.5%, 4th. It would appear at this point that Hockeytown's faithful will need to wait 'til next year to see the Wings back in the postseason.

Next seven days: vs. BOS (March 29), @ STL (April 1)

24. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 46.6%

Strength of schedule: 46.1%, 30th. If only the Penguins had won a few more games earlier in the season, a strength of schedule like this would have been quite useful to author a thrilling run into a playoff spot. Alas.

Next seven days: vs. OTT (March 30), @ STL (April 3)

25. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 47.3%

Strength of schedule: 46.5%, 28th. Boston's playoff hopes weren't entirely sealed by Don Sweeney's trade deadline moves, but the team's results thereafter ensure it will be picking in (or near) the top 10 this summer.

Next seven days: @ DET (March 29), vs. WSH (April 1), @ MTL (April 3)

26. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 49.3%

Strength of schedule: 50.0%, 18th. The Ducks' youthful roster made some progress this season, but they will be in the draft lottery again.

Next seven days: vs. NYR (March 28), vs. TOR (March 30), vs. SJ (April 1), @ CGY (April 3)

27. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 46.6%

Strength of schedule: 53.5%, 3rd. The first season of the Dan Bylsma era of Kraken hockey didn't go as well as planned. Based on that opposing win percentage, it looks like a few more L's will be added before Game No. 82.

Next seven days: vs. DAL (March 29), vs. DAL (March 31), @ VAN (April 2)

28. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 43.1%

Strength of schedule: 54.1%, 2nd. Things haven't gone the Predators' way this season, and they're certainly a team to watch for changes this summer.

Next seven days: vs. VGK (March 29), @ PHI (March 31), @ CBJ (April 1), @ DAL (April 3)

29. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 45.3%

Strength of schedule: 46.0%, 31st. Interim coach Brad Shaw will have a chance to post a strong record down the stretch here given the Flyers' schedule. Will he earn a promotion to long-term status?

Next seven days: vs. BUF (March 29), vs. NSH (March 31)

30. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 46.5%

Strength of schedule: 52.5%, 7th. The Sabres did not rock the boat with any major moves this past offseason, and the trade deadline brought about one essentially lateral move. As they approach their 14th straight playoff-less spring, are more substantial changes on the way this time?

Next seven days: @ PHI (March 29), @ WSH (March 30), @ OTT (April 1)

31. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 35.4%

Strength of schedule: 51.7%, 11th. The Blackhawks and Sharks are battling it out for the NHL's worst record and the best chances at getting the No. 1 pick via the draft lottery.

Next seven days: vs. VGK (March 28), vs. UTAH (March 30), vs. COL (April 2)

32. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 34.5%

Strength of schedule: 48.0%, 24th. In the race to the bottom of the standings -- but top of the draft lottery rankings -- the Sharks' strength of schedule is quite a bit easier than the Blackhawks'.

Next seven days: vs. NYR (March 29), @ LA (March 30), @ ANA (April 1), vs. EDM (April 3)

ESPN / NHL playoff standings: Who will win the Atlantic Division?

By ESPN staff- March 31, 2025

Many playoff races are coming right down to the wire. And while the three top teams in the Atlantic Division are expected to qualify for the postseason, the order in which they'll finish remains a mystery.

What's at stake? The winner of the division draws a first-round matchup against a wild-card team -- likely the Ottawa Senators. The teams that finish second and third will square off with one another, with the No. 2 seed having home-ice advantage.

When Sunday's games begin, the Toronto Maple Leafs will be in the No. 1 spot, with 92 points in the standings. The Florida Panthers are second, having earned 91 standings points in one fewer game (72) than the Tampa Bay Lightning (73).

By season's end, if there is a tie in points, the first tiebreaker is regulation wins; currently, the Lightning hold the edge with 37, while the Leafs have 36 and the Panthers have 35.

Florida is the first of the three clubs in action next, as it will host the Montreal Canadiens on Sunday (1 p.m. ET, NHL Network). The Leafs continue their West Coast road trip by visiting the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday (8 p.m. ET, ESPN+), while the Lightning play Tuesday at the New York Islanders.

The Panthers have two games remaining against the Leafs (Wednesday in Toronto, April 8 in Sunrise) and one against the Lightning (April 15 in Tampa Bay). Toronto plays its last regular-season game against Tampa Bay on April 9 in Central Florida.

Overall, the Leafs have the toughest remaining strength of schedule of the three teams (opposing win percentage of 51.3%, 11th toughest in the league); the Panthers are next (49.5%, 21st), and the Lightning have the easiest road (47.6%, 25th).

StatHletes projects the Lightning to have the highest chances of winning the division (44.5%), followed by the Panthers (33.9%) and Leafs (21.6%).

Is that how everything will play out? Stay tuned.

There are less than three weeks left until April 17, and we'll help you track it all with the NHL playoff watch. As we traverse the final stretch, we'll provide details on all the playoff races, along with the teams jockeying for position in the 2025 NHL draft lottery.

Tragic number: E

Note: An "x" means that the team has clinched a playoff berth. An "e" means that the team has been eliminated from playoff contention.

Race for the No. 1 pick

The NHL uses a draft lottery to determine the order of the first round, so the team that finishes in last place is not guaranteed the No. 1 selection. As of 2021, a team can move up a maximum of 10 spots if it wins the lottery, so only 11 teams are eligible for the No. 1 pick. Full details on the process are [here](#). Matthew Schaefer, a defenseman for the OHL's Erie Otters, is No. 1 on the draft board.

1. San Jose Sharks

Points: 49

Regulation wins: 14

2. Chicago Blackhawks

Points: 51

Regulation wins: 18

3. Nashville Predators

Points: 62

Regulation wins: 23

4. Buffalo Sabres

Points: 66

Regulation wins: 24

5. Seattle Kraken

Points: 68

Regulation wins: 25

6. Philadelphia Flyers

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 19

7. Pittsburgh Penguins

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 20

8. Boston Bruins

Points: 69

Regulation wins: 23

9. Anaheim Ducks

Points: 72

Regulation wins: 23

10. Detroit Red Wings

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 26

11. New York Islanders

Points: 74

Regulation wins: 25

12. Columbus Blue Jackets

Points: 75

Regulation wins: 23

13. Montreal Canadiens

Points: 75

Regulation wins: 24

14. Utah Hockey Club

Points: 76

Regulation wins: 24

15. Calgary Flames

Points: 80

Regulation wins: 26

16. Vancouver Canucks

Points: 81

Regulation wins: 26

[Sportsnet.ca / The Stanley Cup Playoffs and getting lucky with injuries](#)

By Justin Bourne- March 29, 2025

Some years the NHL has a team that runs away with the standings and takes on the title of "The Team To Beat". Other years, maybe two carry a pluralized version of that mantle. But this season the Presidents' Trophy is going to be won by either Washington or Winnipeg -- two legitimately great teams who've had special years -- but they feel closer to the chase pack than some league leaders of yore.

I've got 11 teams that have a legitimate shot at this year's Cup, which is flatly absurd. I'd even be willing to stretch that to maybe 13 if a fanbase were passionate enough and felt like yelling about it.

Since you're curious, that fairly large group includes:

If you feel like you'd include another team or two, you're further proving my point. It's anyone's ballgame.

What's noteworthy, though, is that I've got New Jersey in brackets because of injuries. Very few teams could survive losing their number one centre (Jack Hughes) and number one defenceman (Dougie Hamilton) and then run through the playoffs start to finish.

And so, it feels like this is going to be the year of the injury, not just for New Jersey, but for everybody. Or, to phrase it in a far more optimistic light: the year of the healthy team. It's tough to make predictions when it doesn't seem like we're able to forecast who is and who isn't healthy on the exact days the games are played.

It was on Feb. 20 when Mark Stone suffered a back-related injury that put him on the sidelines shortly before the 2023 NHL trade deadline. That year, his injury allowed Vegas to move his cap hit to LTIR, and with that newfound cap space they added Ivan Barbashev. Stone was then okayed to skate in April, cleared from LTIR on April 18 -- after the salary cap went away for the playoffs -- and Vegas went on to win the Stanley Cup.

Barbashev had 18 points in 22 playoff games for the Golden Knights, just a handful behind Stone himself.

Two years before that, Nikita Kucherov missed all of the NHL's shortened 2021 season and recovered just in time for Game 1 of the playoffs -- allowing the Lightning to spend his LTIR'd cap space along the way -- en route to winning the Stanley Cup. He finished second in Conn Smythe voting, leading the playoffs in scoring by a whopping nine points, which led to Dougie Hamilton's light-hearted comments that his Hurricanes lost to a Lightning team that was "\$18 million over the salary cap."

That comment led to this shirt that Kucherov debuted around the time of their second Stanley Cup parade.

It's not that Kucherov or Stone weren't injured, it's that we didn't know when they would've returned if it wasn't salary cap related, and we're all fairly sure their clearance dates wouldn't have been "exactly Game 1 of the playoffs." But what's just as relevant as the cap shenanigans is that those teams got back tremendous players at the right time, suddenly healthy and rested, who were able to launch their teams through the type of series that often come down to a single goal or single play at a single moment.

You know, the times you want your best guys to be out there, and at their best.

So these two things -- that it's anyone's year, and that the timing of getting healthy is going to be so key - had me wondering: is there a team it could all come together for, health wise, at the perfect time? A

team that could go from being just “good” to “fully loaded” just as it comes time to put all your cards on the table?

Currently, the Oilers are without Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl. And while you never want your best players to be injured, it's not a terrible time to be getting a little extra rest provided these injuries can be healed up in time for the playoffs. It sounds like Draisaitl will be back soon after a little time off, and McDavid will be having a longer absence, presumably erring on the side of caution, and they'll get him back in advance of the post-season.

But for a team that's struggled with depth scoring and toughness at times, the Oilers also made a major acquisition this season in Trent Frederic, who's poised to return and should be available in Round 1. We're talking about a 6-foot-3, 220-pounder who over the past few seasons has scored every handful of games and likes to fight. I imagine they'll be excited to get him involved.

Further to that is Evander Kane, who will have missed the entire season and may be ready to go just in time for the playoffs. Kane has a track record as an excellent playoff performer, he's tough as nails, heavy, and can score goals, too.

You don't know what you're going to get from recently injured players in their return, but we're forecasting the dream scenarios here. If these players come back and get well, there are teams we'd move from a group of “those who can” to a small group of “those who probably should.”

We just watched the Oilers have a game where there was very little pushback to their goalie getting run multiple times, and everyone has collectively ruled that a problem. But add Kane and Frederic, and suddenly that part of the game is a much smaller concern. They went to Game 7 of the Cup Final last year, and haven't looked as good as that team for much of this season. But with a healthy D-corps and that forward group, Edmonton may look like a team that could be a game better than last year.

Some other thoughts:

- Dallas could get Tyler Seguin back, which would add a valued layer of scoring depth to their already dynamic team. Even more importantly is that if they could eke out a round one win, it's possible they could get Miro Heiskanen back. The prospect of a suddenly fully healthy Dallas roster, with a by-then-more-comfortable Mikko Rantanen, and I'm not sure there'd be a better roster out there in the NHL, including the Oilers.
- So...Gabriel Landeskog? Could that really be a thing? All we're going off are video clips of him skating his butt off with the team these days, and they'd presumably have to wait until after the season to activate him for cap purposes. But if Colorado could add him, and he starts to find his form as the playoffs went along, wouldn't that change the look of their core?
- The Florida Panthers are getting Brad Marchand into the lineup, which will help. But imagine their roster with not just Marchand, but also with Matthew Tkachuk, who could show up in the first round. They'd go from a little thin up front to having tough decisions to make on who to scratch. By Game 3 they'll get suspended Aaron Ekblad back too, and might suddenly they'd look as formidable as last year.
- The Toronto Maple Leafs aren't missing any massive names on this front, but it's worth noting this: Auston Matthews seems to be slowly getting back to healthy, or at least feeling better, and him at max capacity changes things. They've been down a star most of this year. When they've had all of Matthews, Chris Tanev, and Jake McCabe in the lineup this season – which has only been for about 41 games by my count – Toronto is 26-13-2, which is a pace that far outstrips their injury-riddled season. Combine that with getting Max Pacioretty back, which Craig Berube believes to be possible, and their forward core will

look deeper and more physical. Hell, they may even get Jani Hakanpaa back for a seventh defenceman, if they get a miracle.

What's crazy about all this is, just as exciting as the prospect of getting some of these teams back to full health is, there are still 8-12 games to go for most teams, and the fear of losing a body is equivalent to the excitement of gaining one.

The big advantage for teams like Washington and Winnipeg should be their ability to rest players and skip some of that fear, or at least not over-extend their best players in the games they do dress. They've earned that advantage, and would be wise to use it.

When the Stanley Cup is anybody's to win, luck is going to be a big factor, both in terms of bounces and health. That's the case every year, but with such a large group of contenders, luck is bound to have a greater influence in 2025.