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March 17-18, 2026

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The Athletic / Blue Jackets' confidence soaring after win over Hurricanes: 'We can beat anybody'

By Aaron Portzline – March 18, 2026

Columbus Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness was asked Tuesday morning if he was interested in seeing how his club matched up with the pace and pressure set by the Carolina Hurricanes, the top club in the Eastern Conference.

Bowness smiled, as he often does, but this was an ornery grin.

"We know how (the Hurricanes) play," Bowness said. "How will they do against *us*? That's the way I look at it, too. How are they going to do against *our* pressure?"

"They're a great hockey club, there's no question. (Coach Rod Brind'Amour) does a phenomenal job with that group. But they have to handle our pressure, too."

Charlie Coyle had a goal and three assists to lead the way, and the Blue Jackets — who may have played their best game of the season — out-Hurricaned the Hurricanes, winning 5-1 before 16,156 in Nationwide Arena.

Mason Marchment, Danton Heinen, Denton Mateychuk and Mathieu Olivier added goals, while goaltender Jet Greaves continued his stellar play by stopping 27 of 28 saves.

The Blue Jackets have now earned a point their past 10 games since a loss in Boston on Feb. 26.

"Yeah, (Carolina) is up in the standings; they're above us," Coyle said. "They're a really good team. But the way we've been playing of late, we can't forget that we're a really, really good team, too. Sometimes that can get overlooked, maybe because we're not in a playoff position.

"I think (Bowness), with that comment, it kind of switches gears, like, 'Why wait to see what (Carolina's) bringing?' We know what we bring, so let's go do it and see what happens."

Only eight seconds into the game, Blue Jackets third-line left winger Cole Sillinger had a huge check on Carolina's Jalen Chatfield along the end boards that surely signaled how Columbus planned to play.

The Blue Jackets handled Carolina's all-over-the-ice pressure by playing quicker, maybe sometimes quicker than they wanted to, but they have the skill to handle that now. On the other end, their forecheck really seemed to rattle the Hurricanes.

These are not the Blue Jackets they've known from the past few seasons, or even earlier this season.

"I keep telling them there's not a team in this league we can't beat, no matter where they are in the standings," Bowness said after Tuesday's win. "There's not. There isn't. So that's how we go into every game. We got into every game thinking we're the better team, right?"

“(Our confidence) is there because they know what we look like when we’re playing well. And I hear it on the bench, and I hear it in the locker room. We have great leadership in that room, but the confidence comes from knowing how good we can be when we’re on top of our game. We can beat anybody.”

The Blue Jackets scored two power-play goals in the first period — Coyle set up the first to Marchment (5:25) and scored the second off a set-up from Adam Fantilli (19:05) — for a 2-0 lead.

The Hurricanes pulled to 2-1 with 5:55 left in the second period, and that started a stretch of the middle period when Carolina started to apply itself. But the Blue Jackets added a pair of goals 34 seconds apart late in the second to pull away.

At 17:29 of the second period, fourth-line winger Heinen went behind the net to play a puck right beside Hurricanes goaltender Brandon Bussi. It appeared that Heinen’s right skate glanced against Bussi’s left skate, and the goaltender went down in a heap.

Bussi tried to make it back to his crease, and he was able to lunge forward and swat at the puck. But before he could recover, Heinen was back out in front of the net and fired it home to give the Jackets a 3-1 lead.

Brind’Amour was furious on the Carolina bench, but he opted not to challenge. And then, just 34 seconds later, it was 4-1 when Mateychuk sailed in a wrist shot from the high slot after skating away from a faceoff.

The Jackets made it 5-1 at 7:38 of the third period when Coyle fought off two Carolina skaters and managed to shovel the puck out to Olivier off the rush for a clean look, and the 5-1 goal, on Bussi.

“Charlie ... this was one of the best games he’s played,” Bowness said. “Both ends of the ice, he was outstanding.. You see him on those goals, beating guys ... those are one-on-one battles you need to win. He won them all.

“I give him a tip of the cap.”

The win improved the Blue Jackets to 17-2-4 since Jan. 11, the highest points percentage in the league since that date. It hasn’t been enough to get them up and over into a playoff spot, but it’s drawn them oh-so close.

The Jackets are just 1 point behind the Detroit Red Wings and Boston Bruins for the two wild-card spots, and they’re 2 points behind the Pittsburgh Penguins and New York Islanders for second and third place, respectively, in the Metropolitan Division.

“We get a result like that (Tuesday’s win), and it only feeds the confidence we have in this room right now,” Coyle said.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets are still fighting for a playoff spot. Here's what they're up against

By Aaron Portzline – March 17, 2026

The NHL standings can make you dizzy this time of season.

A month ago, the Columbus Blue Jackets had the New York Islanders in their sights for the eighth and final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. Then Boston settled into that spot, and now Detroit has backslid into the picture.

Oh, right. And then there's the Metropolitan Division, which is just as close for the Blue Jackets as the wild card.

The Blue Jackets host the Carolina Hurricanes at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, trailing Boston by two points for the final wild-card spot and the New York Islanders by two points for third place in the Metro.

"We have one month left and every game is huge," Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner said. "It's just going to get bigger and bigger. The games are going to get harder and harder. We're scoreboard watching, but we're taking care of our business first, and it's a lot of fun.

"It's that time of year where you're constantly checking the scores and the standings. I'm definitely one of those guys. But, at the end of the day, we can only control what we do here, but I always keep tabs on the other teams, for sure."

Since Jan. 11, the Blue Jackets (16-2-4, .818 points percentage) have been the hottest club in the NHL, just ahead of Buffalo (17-5-2, .750), Dallas (16-5-1, .750), Anaheim (16-6-0, .727) and Ottawa (14-4-4, .727).

However, their two-month tear hasn't yet put them in a playoff spot, as the teams on the horizon haven't slowed down much.

In that same timeframe (since Jan. 11), Pittsburgh (13-5-6), Boston (13-4-5), the New York Islanders (13-9-0), Montreal (11-6-4) and Detroit (10-8-4) have done enough to avoid getting caught.

The Blue Jackets haven't been in a playoff spot since Nov. 17.

Four weeks remain in the season. Only once the rest of the way will the Blue Jackets go two consecutive days without a game.

Take a deep breath. Keep your calculator near. Study the NHL tiebreakers. Now take another deep breath.

Here's a look at what the Blue Jackets and the five clubs immediately ahead of them are facing the rest of the season. While Montreal is currently third in the Atlantic, we have them listed as a wild-card pursuit of Columbus, since that is the only path for the Blue Jackets to catch the Canadiens.

Metro

2. Pittsburgh (83)

Games remaining: 15 (home eight; away seven)

Regulation wins: 29

versus Blue Jackets: None remaining

Need to know: Reports of the Penguins' demise were quite overstated. On Monday, they scored four first-period goals and routed host Colorado 7-2 in Evgeni Malkin's return from a five-game suspension. ... Pittsburgh had lost five out of six (1-3-2) before winning its last two. ... The big question now: When will captain Sidney Crosby (knee sprain) return from injury? Crosby has been out since getting injured while playing for Team Canada in the Olympics, but the Pens are 5-3-3 without him in the lineup. ... Pittsburgh finishes a season-long five-game road trip on Wednesday at Carolina.

3. NY Islanders (81)

Games remaining: 15 (home 10; away five)

Regulation wins: 24

versus Blue Jackets: 1 (@ New York, March 23)

Need to know: It's been a high-wire act all season for the Islanders. Remarkably, they're 10-0 in overtime this season, which includes five of their last eight wins. Will their three-on-three luck ever run out? ... The one drawback of all those OT wins is that the Isles' regulation win total makes them vulnerable to Columbus if they're tied at the end of the season. ... The Islanders open a three-game road trip Tuesday in Toronto. When this trip is finished, they'll have 10 of their remaining 12 games at home, including the final four. ... The Blue Jackets lost a heartbreaker on Long Island on Nov. 2 when they allowed two goals in the final 1:07 of regulation, falling 3-2. They also blew a 2-0 lead and lost 4-3 in overtime to New York on Feb. 28. Those losses may loom large next month.

Wild card

Montreal (82)

Games remaining: 16 (home eight; away eight)

Regulation wins: 25

versus Blue Jackets: 2 (@ Montreal, March 26; @ Montreal, April 11)

Need to know: The Canadiens have dropped two straight in regulation heading into Tuesday's game in Boston. They haven't gone two games without earning a point since late January. ... Montreal has a five-game road trip — Nashville, Carolina, Tampa Bay, New York Rangers, New Jersey — beginning March 28 that could determine its fate. ... The goaltending situation here bears watching. Jakub Dobeš and Sam Montembeault have struggled since the Olympic break, and there will be a public cry for rookie Jacob

Fowler. Is he the answer? ... Former Blue Jackets forward Patrik Laine has played only five games this season due to an early-season abdominal injury. He's been practicing for weeks now, but it's unclear what Montreal has planned for the pending free agent.

1. Detroit (82)

Games remaining: 14 (home eight; away six)

Regulation wins: 26

versus Blue Jackets: 1 (@ Detroit, April 7)

Need to know: On Jan. 21, the Red Wings were a playoff lock. They were actually tied with Tampa Bay for first in the East. Since then, they've gone 6-7-4 to slide into a wild-card spot. ... Monday's 5-2 win over Calgary was a huge relief in Detroit. The Red Wings had lost five straight (0-3-2) at Little Caesars Arena. ... The Red Wings are without two of their top centers, captain Dylan Larkin and Andrew Copp, and it's unclear when they'll return. The club has said it'll reevaluate them toward the end of the month. ... On Nov. 22, the Blue Jackets had a 3-1 lead midway through the third period before blowing it late in the third period and losing in OT on an Alex DeBrincat goal. Eleven days later, Columbus let a 3-1 lead slide before eventually winning in a shootout. Those three points by Detroit are the difference in the standings.

2. Boston (81)

Games remaining: 15 (home six; away nine)

Regulation wins: 27

versus Blue Jackets: 2 (versus Boston, March 29; versus Boston, April 12)

Need to know: The Bruins haven't won two games in a row since Jan. 29, putting up a 5-3-4 mark during that span. Monday, they lost an early 2-0 lead and fell to New Jersey 4-3 in overtime. ... Boston won a hard-fought game 3-2 on Feb. 26 at TD Garden, the first game back from the Olympic break for both clubs. The final two matchups this season, both in Nationwide Arena, could be massive, especially the April 12 meeting. That's the penultimate game of the season for both clubs. ... The Bruins will play five of their final seven games on the road, including a four-game trip through Florida, Tampa Bay, Philadelphia and Carolina beginning in early April. They're just 12-14-6 on the road this season, tied with Toronto for the second-fewest road wins in the East.

9. Columbus (79)

Games remaining: 16 (home nine; away seven)

Regulation wins: 23

Need to know: A 16-2-4 run, beginning with a Jan. 11 win in Utah, has moved the Blue Jackets from 28th to 12th in the NHL standings, 16th to ninth in the conference, and eighth to fourth in the Metro. However, they aren't over the bar yet. ... The two-month run has brought Columbus right to the end of a

playoff spot. It has been one or two points out of the second wild-card since March 5. ... The Blue Jackets have one regulation win in their last five games. They've earned points in four of those games (2-0-3), but they're back in a spot in which the first end-of-season tiebreaker (regulation wins) won't be in their favor. And as jam-packed as this conference is, that's a concern. ... Columbus plays six games against the clubs listed here, including two each against Montreal (both at the Bell Centre) and Boston (both in Nationwide). Buckle up.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets down Canes in 'measuring stick' game](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – Mar. 18, 2026

1. Mathieu Olivier called this a “measuring stick” game, and the Blue Jackets responded.

Columbus returned home to face Carolina from a successful three-game road trip in which it had dominated the puck, shots on goal and scoring chances against Tampa Bay, Florida and Philadelphia.

Yet no one does that to the Hurricanes. Since Rod Brind’Amour became head coach eight years ago, the Canes are the Corsi Kings of the NHL – they forecheck and pressure you into oblivion, they throw every puck they can at the net to create chaos and usually, by the end, they’ve won the game.

Carolina appears well on its way to a fourth Metropolitan Division title in the last six years, and the way Rick Bowness talks about his CBJ team – he wants pressure, he wants forechecking and he wants the puck going north as quickly as possible – sounds a lot like what the Hurricanes do.

So perhaps it was no surprise when Bowness got his back up a little bit when asked about how his team would match up against the Hurricanes’ suffocating style at his pregame media conference.

“They have to handle our pressure, too,” he said, in part.

On Tuesday night in Nationwide Arena, the Blue Jackets showed they were ready for that challenge, posting a 5-1 victory over the division leaders. The win was the team’s 17th in the last 23 games (17-2-4), ran the Jackets’ point streak to 10 (6-0-4) and improved their home point streak to double digits (7-0-3) as well.

It’s starting to feel like big things are brewing in Columbus, and the nearly wire-to-wire win over one of the best teams in the Eastern Conference was just a continuation of what the Blue Jackets have been doing.

“I felt like it was a good measuring stick for our group after the success we’ve had recently and the way we’ve been playing for the last two months,” Olivier said after a very Mathieu Olivier night (one goal, one fight). “They’re the best team at that style of play and they’ve proven it year after year.

“For our group to come out and have that kind of game and take that pressure to them and really just pull basically a perfect game at home, that’s a good step forward for our group for sure.”

And as much as Bowness was eager to deliver the message to the media pregame that, hey, the Blue Jackets are pretty good at this too, he had the same words for his team Tuesday morning. It’s fair to say the Blue Jackets took them to heart.

“Bones mentioned it this morning about not worrying about their pressure, but us throwing it back at them, seeing our pressure and seeing if they could handle it,” Charlie Coyle said after a very Charlie Coyle night (one goal, three assists). “And of course it worked out for us. ... There wasn’t a lot of

room out there for them. I think if you asked them, they'd probably say that, and that fed right into our game."

2. Coyle showed yet again why he's become such an integral part of the squad in his first season in Columbus.

Let's think of this as a question – where would the Blue Jackets be without him?

The veteran has pretty much done it all for Columbus, centering the team's shutdown line, nearing a career high in points (with 55, he's five away), turning the team's No. 1 power play unit into a dynamic force and occasionally delivering an epic performance.

Tuesday was one of those nights. Coyle didn't just post his third four-point night of the season, he scored a power-play goal with a nifty finish, delivered three primary assists, and helped shut down Carolina's powerful trio of Andrei Svechnikov, Sebastian Aho and Seth Jarvis.

"That's probably one of the best games he's played," Bowness said. "Both ends of the ice, he was outstanding. You see him on those goals beating guys, those are one-on-one battles you need to win. He won them all and he set up those goals."

While you could run down the list of Coyle's excellent plays – his setup of Mason Marchment for the team's opening goal on the power play, or his excellent hands at the net to make it 2-0 – the best might have come on the dagger tally that made it 5-1.

After Damon Severson stole the puck with a poke check and Cole Sillinger advanced the puck to Coyle, he engaged in hand-to-hand combat with K'Andre Miller from center ice all the way into the left circle. With his right hand shielding off Miller and his left on the stick, Coyle saw Jordan Martinook coming over to help and slid the puck to the slot to the onrushing Olivier, who beat goalie Brandon Bussi with a silky deke.

"He might be the best puck protection guy in the league," Olivier said. "Just on my goal, I don't score that if it's not for him, and honestly everyone on the ice just leading up to that play. But he was outstanding tonight. He led the way in every category and made my goal super easy. He's been doing it every game. It's not even a surprise at this point."

Coyle said he embraced the challenge of going up against Carolina's top line, and he was happy to be back with Sillinger on his left, as Bowness said he reunited his top checking line with the Blue Jackets having last change in Nationwide Arena.

But maybe the biggest reason he had a big night? It was March 17, after all.

"A little extra to get going," he said with a smile. "St. Paddy's Day."

3. The Blue Jackets' power play set the tone with a pair of first-period goals.

It's a cliché at this time of the season – special teams can win and lose you games. The proof has been there of late for the Blue Jackets, though, and look no further than the team's previous game March 9 in Nationwide Arena.

Columbus received a four-minute power play in the opening seconds vs. Los Angeles, and the Blue Jackets did everything but score, peppering goalie Anton Forsberg with shots. In the end, a goal there might have made a big difference in a 5-4 OT loss to the Kings.

Against Carolina, though, the Blue Jackets took advantage of their early chance. Jarvis took a four-minute high-sticking penalty 4:23 into the game when he caught Zach Werenski up high, and Marchment buried Coyle's pass a few minutes later to make it a 1-0 game.

Near the end of the period, Dante Fabbro was tripped up to send the Jackets to the power play again, and Columbus didn't let that chance go by, either. Werenski quickly moved the puck to Adam Fantilli in the left circle, and Fantilli found Coyle at the netfront for a deft turn and finish past Bussi.

In a matchup of two of the best teams in the league at scoring first, the Blue Jackets' power play made a big impact in putting Columbus ahead.

"That's our job," Fantilli said. "Six minutes of penalties in the first period, we gotta take advantage of it. To be able to score two was great."

The Blue Jackets now have five power-play goals in the last five games, and dating back to Jan. 11, the man advantage is clicking at 27.3 percent.

"The power play came up huge tonight when we needed it to give us momentum in the first," Bowness said. "They came through."

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets are playing like a playoff team but face a tough road

Brian Hedger – March 18, 2026

The Blue Jackets look like a playoff team, sound like a playoff team and now play with the confidence of a Stanley Cup contender.

They've shown it while going 6-0-4 during a season-long 10-game points streak, including a 5-1 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on March 17 at Nationwide Arena, and it feels like the Blue Jackets (35-21-11) have officially put the NHL on notice.

"We know we're a playoff team," forward Mathieu Olivier said, shaking his head in disbelief that they're still outside the bubble. "This Eastern Conference situation is making it as hard as anybody will have it. As I understand it, the line to make the playoffs is going to be probably one of the highest in history. So, it just comes back to our job, to keep winning and keep stringing these games (together)."

That's all they can do.

The four teams clinging to postseason spots just ahead of them keep holding off the surging Jackets, whom analytic site MoneyPuck gives a 70.1% chance of making it with 15 games left. That site also predicts the East's postseason cutoff to be 97 points, which would be six higher than last season.

"The way we're playing, our process right now is really good, so that's a good thing," Olivier said. "There's some nights we might not get the results, but the way we're playing is really good for our group right now."

The good news for the Blue Jackets is they have a few games left against two teams they're chasing, the Boston Bruins and New York Islanders. The Bruins (82 points) avoided giving up the East's first wild card by adding an overtime point March 17 in Montreal, while the Islanders (83 points) won in Toronto to stay two points ahead for third in the Metropolitan Division.

The Blue Jackets also trail the Detroit Red Wings by one point for the second wild card and need three points to pass the Pittsburgh Penguins for second in the division. All four teams, however, continue to win or tack on points in overtime/shootouts at the same time the Blue Jackets are doing the same things.

It might go right to the end again, similar to last season's race in the East that left Columbus two points short.

"This is a very confident group," Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness said. "There's great leadership in that (locker) room. The confidence comes from knowing how good we can be, and that when we're on top of our game, we can beat anybody."

[The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Better Defense, Werenski, Fantilli & More](#)

By Mark Scheig – March 17, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets have played a recent stretch that saw them play 10 games in 17 days. After a much-needed two-day break, the team jumps right back into the playoff race Tuesday night starting off an important homestand.

The Blue Jackets will host the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday night in the first of three meetings between the two teams down the stretch. After that, the Blue Jackets will host the New York Rangers on Thursday, the Seattle Kraken on Saturday then immediately jump on the road to play one of their most important games of the season when they play the New York Islanders.

NHL Rumours Mar. 12: Senators Get Pick Back, Bobrovsky Concern, Nylander Available & Offseason Moves

Monday's results did the Blue Jackets hardly any favors. The Detroit Red Wings handled the Calgary Flames. The Pittsburgh Penguins crushed the Colorado Avalanche in Denver. The one slight bit of help they got was when the New Jersey Devils defeated the Boston Bruins 4-3 in overtime.

The Blue Jackets will start the week two points back of both the Bruins and Islanders while holding games in hand. Given the way the teams ahead of the Blue Jackets keep finding ways to get points, they know what's at stake. They have to keep the pace or else run the risk of falling off course.

We talked on Sunday about the Blue Jackets better defense of late. Zach Werenski and Adam Fantilli spoke to the Hockey Writers on Monday about that and some other topics leading into this most important week of games.

Defense Seeing Results

The Blue Jackets held their last three road opponents, the Lightning, the Panthers and the Flyers to a combined 58 shots on goal. That's never been done in team history hold three straight opponents to 21 or fewer shots and 58 or less shots combined.

For Werenski, he sees that the whole team has bought in.

"I think whenever you can go on a road trip like that and get five of six points and not really give up much, it obviously shows that it's working," Werenski said. "I think we've all bought into it. I think that's the hardest thing is making sure everyone's on board and we're all on board. We all love the way we're playing. We love the results we're getting and I think that's the most important thing. When you start seeing actual results and you're getting wins and you're getting points and you're climbing in the standings, the proof is right there. I think it makes it a lot easier to go out there and play that style. We've enjoyed it. We're a frustrating team We're frustrating good teams and good players. That's a credit to how we played as a team. It's our team game."

For Fantilli, he knows his team is limiting the opposition's chances. The scoreboard is reflecting what they're doing as a team.

"When you look up at the scoreboard after the first period in both Tampa and Florida (shots 9-4 in Tampa and 14-3 in Florida), we're carrying the play," Fantilli said. "We're imposing our will early. I think that's something that's been important for us to get out to a strong start and then continuing to play that way throughout the game. We're limiting their chances and it's helping us create offense, so it's been great."

The Blue Jackets know this is the way they'll have to play if they hope to make the playoffs in the Eastern Conference. Since Rick Bowness took over the team, the Blue Jackets have been the third best defensive team in the NHL with only Dallas and Ottawa ahead of them. For the head coach, while the shot clock can be misleading sometimes, he's pleased that the overall scoring chances are down.

"I don't really judge that as much as the chances against. That's the biggest concern," Bowness said. "And the chances against are way down. If they get thirty shots and 20 of them are from the outside, okay. So I don't get fooled by the shot clock. I'm thrilled the chances are down and the shots on net are down which means you're spending less time in our zone."

Two of the best defensive teams in 2026 in the Hurricanes and Blue Jackets will meet. The Blue Jackets are 3-0 against the Hurricanes in their last three meetings in Columbus.

Gaining Respect

Bowness made an interesting comment to reporters in Philadelphia Saturday after the game. At one point in the game against the Flyers, the Blue Jackets controlled the play and the shot clock. But it was the Flyers who held a 4-0 advantage in power plays.

Bowness said in part: "I don't understand why we're always the team in the league that has the least amount of power plays. I don't understand that. There's a lack of respect for our hockey club, and we're going to change that."

The lack of power plays has been a thing with the Blue Jackets going back to when John Tortorella was the head coach. Werenski has been through it all in his tenure. Here's what he had to say about the perceived "lack of respect."

"It doesn't matter. We can't control it but it's pretty obvious. I've been here for 10 years and I've seen it for a long time. The refs have a tough job and the Tkachuk one in overtime, I was pretty pissed at. They don't have the luxury of replay. It's just so obvious that it's a sell job. This is me not going off on him, I love Matthew (Tkachuk). It's just so frustrating with where we're at in our season and it's a big point."

"But that one's frustrating. Then you go to Philadelphia and shots were 21-9 and power plays were 4-0. There was a stretch before the break. We played Chicago and got one power play. Then we came out of it and we had one in two games and we were dominating. So we have two power plays in three games. We had one in Philadelphia and two in Florida. It was a low number for how well we're playing and how much we have the puck."

“I’ve noticed it for a long time and in a sense, respect is earned. I feel like you have to have the puck and you have to be a good team in order to get calls. I understand there’s a few years in there where we weren’t a good hockey team and teams had the puck more and we should have less power plays than them. But right now, it’s the opposite. I feel like most games we’re in, we have the puck the majority (of the time.) We’re getting more chances and having it stick in our O-zone and creating stuff. Usually that’s when you get power plays.”

“I’m not singling out any one ref or anything like that. It’s just a theme. It for sure is a theme and it’s unfortunate especially this time of year when you’re fighting for points. Power plays are important. But in saying that, it is what is and we can’t focus on that. We have to focus on our game. You just got to do the best we can.”

Fantilli Playing Top Competition

Not only has Fantilli started filling the scoresheet again, he’s playing against some of the league’s best competition night in and night out. While he enjoys scoring goals, he enjoys it equally as much playing strong defense.

This part of the game is something Fantilli constantly looks forward to.

“I like playing against those guys,” Fantilli said. “It’s weird. You grow up and you think about all these guys and how good they are. You want to be on the ice playing against those guys. You don’t want to be on the bench watching. I think you can learn a lot from playing against them. It’s been fun. It makes the game so interesting. You can’t stop paying attention for a second or those guys will make you pay. It’s really fun. I enjoy playing against those types of guys as much as possible.”

Fantilli shadowed Nikita Kucherov against the Lightning and did a nice job. He saw time against the Flyers top players including a clutch play to disrupt a breakaway in overtime against Matvei Michkov. Bowness likes the progress he’s seeing here.

“He’s become a really, solid 200-foot player,” Bowness said of Fantilli. He really has. Sticking up for his teammate the other night. He’s the first guy in there. I love that. I tell all the guys they come after one of us, they come after all of us. We’re all out there together and he is 100% bought in. He’s bought in on that side of it. He’s bought in on playing without the puck. He’s very reliable defensively and he’s really bought into the type of 200-foot player you win with.”

Side Dishes

- Werenski admitted the first two games back after the Olympics were low energy for him. But then on the road trip, he felt much better. “I just told myself to keep it simple. I know everyone looks at me for the offense, but I was actually proud of the way I played defensively. I did a lot of good things. I didn’t give up anything. I was minus-4 in the L.A game. I don’t think I played as bad as a minus-4. I just told myself ‘Let’s just reset.’ I obviously don’t have a ton of energy and let’s focus on the defensive side of the puck and the offense, that comes easy for me and that’ll come. I didn’t want to hurt the team defensively. I felt those three games were some of my best defensively. This time of year, that’s what you need. I feel really good about my game. I just

wanted to reset and focus on the defensive side of the puck and then I'll incorporate more offense as we go here."

- You may have noticed Cole Sillinger get some time up on the top line with Fantilli and Marchenko. He may not have staggering numbers, but there is a reason Sillinger is getting the time on the top line. Here's Fantilli on what all he brings to the line.
- "He's my best buddy. We don't realize how young he is still. He's played (over) 300 games in the NHL. I think people don't realize how skilled he is. He's kind of gotten since I've watched put into a little bit of a box of being more defensive, penalty killing and stuff like that. People forget how good he was his rookie year and the scoring touch that he does have. He makes plays. He's a great skater. He knows how to create space for himself and he's predictable to play with. I love playing with him. He works hard. He's responsible as well. I think he's continuing to get better. He's 22-years old with that many games under his belt. You're going to continue to get better, continue to get smarter and the numbers are going to come for him."
- Bowness said Erik Gudbranson will be a game-time decision on Tuesday. Monday was an optional for the team given the condensed schedule. Bowness left it up to the players what was best for them whether to skate or to stay off the ice. "We've had a lot of travel, a lot of late nights so today with the two-day break we had to make sure we used it in the proper way and let their bodies decide what they need."