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## **Blue Jackets' Analyst Jody Shelley Showing Well on National Stage**

**By Mark Scheig – May 19, 2025**

Columbus Blue Jackets' fans have long known how good color analyst Jody Shelley has been in the broadcast booth. Whether it's been with radio voice Bob McElligott, former TV voice Jeff Rimer or current TV voice Steve Mears, Shelley brings a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to the broadcast.

In the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs, viewers got to see firsthand how good Shelley is at his job. While his appearances on national TV are nothing new, he earned a more prominent role as these playoffs have gone on.

Shelley was between the benches on TNT for Game 6 of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Florida Panthers series with Kenny Albert and Eddie Olczyk. Earlier in the playoffs, Shelley was with Olczyk and John Forslund as well as with Alex Faust and Brian Boucher. He has seen numerous assignments on TNT in these playoffs.

Shelley and Forslund worked together in the inaugural season of Prime Monday Night Hockey in Canada. Shelley is quickly gaining a reputation around the NHL as one of the best analysts on TV given the extra exposure he's getting in big games.

How does one rise up the ranks like Shelley has? With passion, hard work and preparation for each game.

### **Shelley's Preparedness**

At the start of the 2024-25 season, the Hockey Writers did a Q&A with new Blue Jackets' TV voice Mears. In that conversation, Mears had nothing but glowing praise for Shelley when asked what makes him stand out.

"Just very diligent with his preparation," Mears said of Shelley. "I knew that for a long time, but then to now see it firsthand, the way he prepares for this season, the way he prepares for a game, and the conversations, the notetaking that he's getting done right now just to prep for that opening night. That's what makes him one of the best in the business."

Just because Shelley has played the game and knows the ins and outs of it, it doesn't stop him from doing his homework. It's that diligence that comes through the broadcast when you watch a game with him as an analyst. He has a way of explaining what's going on in a way that's easily understandable. Here's Mears.

"It's not a case where I played, so I don't need to do the homework. He does the above and beyond level of homework, and then that's what makes him one of the best. I love that approach. I'm kind of the same way when it comes to doing the homework and the preparation. I take a lot of pride in that. I think when you have two people who are making that type of commitment, it should all add up to a great show."

"If I ever had a question about the Blue Jackets, I knew I could reach out to him, whether as a player, what's really going on with the team, what's the vibe with the team right now. I knew I could always tap into him because he knew exactly what was going on. And he was almost a 100% accurate with any type of an assessment when I had those conversations with him at morning skates or at 5:00 before a game. I think that's what makes him one of the best."

### **Future is Bright**

Shelley currently works as both the Blue Jackets' TV Color Analyst as well as the team ambassador. It's fair to wonder what his future holds given how prominent his presence has become throughout the hockey world.

Shelley loves it in Columbus and with the Blue Jackets. When we say we wonder what his future holds, we wonder if it's only a matter of time before he is one of the premier national game analysts on a more full-time basis?

Shelley has become a trusted voice within the Blue Jackets. It's that trust and respect that is starting to make him a more prominent national presence.

It wouldn't be surprising to see Shelley be part of the call of a Stanley Cup Final sooner rather than later. The way he cares for his job makes him the perfect candidate for such a role.

For now, the nation got to see what Blue Jackets' fans already know. Shelley is really good at what he does on camera as a game analyst. His future is very bright in the booth.

## **Blue Jackets Have Potential Late-Round Gem in Oiva Keskinen**

**By Mark Scheig – May 20, 2025**

The 2023 NHL Draft will be remembered as the Adam Fantilli draft for the Columbus Blue Jackets. Once former GM Jarmo Kekalainen announced the pick from the stage in Nashville, palpable excitement could be seen and felt by the fans.

Thanks to a signing by the Blue Jackets this week, the 2023 draft will be remembered for another reason. They may have landed a late-round gem.

On Friday, the Blue Jackets announced the signing of Finnish center Oiva Keskinen to a three-year entry-level contract. He was selected in the seventh round, 194th overall, in the 2023 NHL Draft. Considering he was ranked 125th by NHL Central Scouting in 2023, being picked in the seventh round would be perceived as good value.

Thanks to his performances both in Finland and on the international stage, Keskinen has suddenly worked his way into the Blue Jackets' organizational plans. GM Don Waddell didn't draft him. But he clearly liked what he saw in Keskinen.

### **Noteworthy Performances**

Keskinen didn't wait long to start making an impact after being drafted. Playing in Finland's top professional league Liiga, he helped his team win a championship in 2023-24.

As a 19-20 year old, Keskinen recorded 36 points in 70 pro games with Tappara between the regular season and playoffs. His performance made him a finalist for the Wasama Award given to Liiga's Rookie of the Year.

Keskinen also played for Team Finland at the World Junior Championships in 2023-24 recording two goals and five points in his seven appearances there.

Keskinen followed that up by more than doubling his goal scoring in 2024-25. He scored 15 goals in 59 games as a 20-21 year old after scoring seven in his rookie season. His 15 goals was second on the team in helping Tappara to another playoff appearance.

It's Keskinen's goal scoring, motor and overall skill that has seemed to catch the attention of the Blue Jackets in landing this contract. He's listed at 6-foot and 181 pounds. It was his goal against the United States at the World Juniors that gave us a snapshot of what's he's about.

Keskinen won a battle against two defenders. Then after a turnover, he won a race to the front of the net and opened the scoring for Team Finland. His battle and compete was on display.

Earlier in the tournament, Keskinen showed off his shot by going bar down from the right circle on a wide angle. He's got an intriguing set of skills that the Blue Jackets hope will translate to future success.

### **Immediate Future**

As for what's next, we'll see what the Blue Jackets decide. The most likely destinations are the AHL with the Cleveland Monsters or back with his current team in Tappara.

Teams can never have enough depth down the middle within their organization. The Blue Jackets believe they have a late-round gem with Keskinen.

There is certainly some development work ahead for Keskinen and the Blue Jackets. But for a team to sign a seventh rounder is good work and a sign that the scouting staff is on point with their evaluations.

## **Blue Jackets Signing Mitch Marner Wouldn't Be the Best Use of Cap Space**

**By William Espy – May 21, 2025**

As one of the top pending free agents on the market, eyes are certainly going to gravitate toward Mitch Marner this summer. One team that he'll seemingly fit on paper would be the Columbus Blue Jackets, however, it wouldn't be the first time they've reportedly tried to bring the forward into their organization.

### **Marner's History With Columbus**

During the summer of 2019, a 22-year-old Marner was on the market as a restricted free agent, and the Blue Jackets were apparently interested in signing him to an offer sheet at that point in time. Of course, a lot has changed since then.

The Blue Jackets have a new general manager in Don Waddell, who has some experience with offer sheets himself, as he pulled the uncommon tool out of his belt during his time with the Carolina Hurricanes, signing Jesperi Kotkaniemi from the Montreal Canadiens.

Eventually, Marner opted to sign a six-year contract extension with the Toronto Maple Leafs and declined to sign an offer sheet with the Blue Jackets.

### **Marner's Career Year in a Contract Year**

It's now been six seasons, and Marner is once again on the market. This time around, though, he is 28 years old and will become an unrestricted free agent for the first time in his career. This season, the Markham, Ontario native had multiple career-highs in offensive production. He narrowly missed out on reaching the 30-goal mark for the third time in his career, but instead set career-highs in assists (75), game-winning goals (seven), and points (102).

By all accounts, Marner had a career year for the Maple Leafs, even by his own high standards. It couldn't have happened at a worse time for teams looking to inquire about his services this summer, though, as an already astronomical market value has skyrocketed even further as a result.

Marner's next contract, especially if it comes on the open market rather than re-signing with Toronto, will be one of the richest in the NHL. While it's hard to imagine he'll eclipse the current largest average annual value (AAV), which belongs to his Maple Leafs teammate Auston Matthews, it's not impossible. It's likely, at the very least, he could very well become the fourth player in the league to demand upwards of \$12 million. It's also important to note, the majority of the ten largest contracts in the NHL are seven or eight-year deals. Signing Marner for seven years would take him until 35 years of age, which could make a potential contract age very poorly.

### **Options for the Blue Jackets**

Cap space certainly isn't an issue for the Blue Jackets, who are projected to have more than \$40 million of available space this July, however, they also can't be spending it wildly either. Signing a long-term contract for a player like Marner could help elevate the team to the next level if Waddell feels they're ready to be a consistent playoff team. However, it could just as easily anchor the team down as he approaches the wrong side of 30 and beyond.

On the positive side of things, signing Marner would undoubtedly give the Blue Jackets two very dangerous lines at the top of their lineup. If Dmitri Voronkov and Kirill Marchenko were slotted back in alongside Sean Monahan on the first line, it would allow Marner to play alongside the two up-and-

comers, Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli. While that seems great on paper, it could present an issue when those two forwards are due for pay raises of their own in the near future.

One important thing to note, though, is that offense was far from an issue for the Blue Jackets this season. They finished eighth in the league in goals for; as a result, it's easy to question whether or not that cap space would be better allocated by bringing in someone to help keep the puck out of their own net.

Ivan Provorov and Dante Fabbro still need to be signed to extensions on the blue line, while they could also look to add someone like Aaron Ekblad or Dmitri Orlov to help solidify things defensively.

Theoretically, it would be possible to sign both Marner and a defenseman while also retaining Provorov and Fabbro, but things would quickly become very tight to the salary cap.

While it goes without saying, Marner would be a phenomenal addition to the Blue Jackets' forward core for the foreseeable future, there is a substantial risk that comes with signing any player nearing the age of 30 to a long-term contract, which would definitely be necessary in this case. Addressing needs at a lower cost will likely be the wiser approach under these circumstances, even if it means ignoring the biggest fish in the pond.

## U.S. tops Czechs for second in Group B

**By Lucas Aykroyd – May 20, 2025**

The U.S. attacked Czech goalie Karel Vejmelka's net relentlessly in a 5-2 win to sew up second place in Group B at the 2025 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship in Herning, Denmark.

In a penalty-laden and heated affair, Frank Nazar scored two third-period power play goals to lift the U.S. to a 5-2 win over Czechia on Tuesday. The Americans finish second and the defending champion Czechs third in Group B at the 2025 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship.

Particularly dominant in the first and third periods, the U.S. outshot the Czechs by a whopping 56-27 margin on the night. Czech goalie Karel Vejmelka was strong to give his team a chance.

The result leaves Switzerland in first place in the group with 19 points ahead of Thursday's quarter-finals.

Josh Doan, Logan Cooley, and Andrew Peeke had the other goals for the Americans. The game featured three lead changes.

"I think we had some games where we let some leads get away, and there's some games we want back," said Cooley. "But obviously, playing a team like Czechia, it's an unbelievable team. They play the right way and have a lot of skilled players. Obviously to beat them like that, it gives us a lot of confidence going into the next game too."

Top Czech scorer David Pastrnak added a goal and an assist and leads the tournament with 14 points. Martin Necas also scored for the Czechs. It was a rude awakening for the defending champs as they lost their first game of this Ice Hockey World Championship.

"I think we didn't play that badly," said Czech defender David Spacek. "We had a couple chances to score, but we didn't score on them, and they went back the other way and scored on us. So that's kind of how it went today. "

This was an all-NHL affair in net. In addition to the Utah Mammoth's Vejmelka, Jeremy Swayman of the Boston Bruins made 25 saves for the Americans.

In front of a packed, heavily pro-Czech crowd at Jyske Bank Boxen, the teams came out with intensity. Scrums broke out between whistles. Pastrnak was assessed the game's first minor for roughing to the crowd's great displeasure, but Vejmelka was ready with the glove when U.S. assistant captain Conor Garland tested him from the left faceoff circle.

Coach Ryan Warsofsky's squad picked up the pace. The Czech netminder couldn't corral the rebound when Peeke wristed the puck from the right point, and Doan backhanded it home for a 1-0 U.S. lead at 9:25. Doan, a 23-year-old Utah teammate of Vejmelka's, is the son of former Canadian Olympian Shane Doan, who won two Ice Hockey World Championship gold medals (2003, 2007).

Displaying better speed and special teams in the first period, the U.S. could have had more than a one-goal lead based on chances. Even on the first Czech power play, the best chance went to Matty Beniers, who narrowly failed to convert on a 2-on-1 with Mikey Eyssimont. The champs were fortunate to trail by just a goal after being outshot 23-8 through 20 minutes.



Kicking off the second period in style, the deadly Pastrnak-Cervenka combo clicked again. The Czech captain found "Pasta" with a long stretch pass and he had all kinds of time to pick his spot before beating his Bruins teammate over the glove at 0:41.

During a Czech power play near the midpoint, Pastrnak played the set-up man, slinging a slick cross-ice pass to Necas in the left face-off circle. The Colorado Avalanche ace fired a one-timer into a wide-open net. It was a nice atonement by Necas for an error earlier in the man advantage where Zach Werenski stripped him of the puck and sped down the right side for a good shorthanded chance.

The Americans wanted an early third-period pushback, and they got it courtesy of Nazar at 1:35 on the power play, as Jakub Krejci's double-minor for high-sticking carried over from the middle frame. Zeev Buium fed the Chicago Blackhawks youngster for a one-timer that overpowered Vejmela on the blocker side.

The U.S. regained the lead as Nazar tipped in Cutter Gauthier's wrister through traffic at 7:01 with the man advantage. Nazar leads the U.S. with six goals so far.

In a Mammoth display of talent, Cooley gave the Americans some breathing room at 4-2 when he hustled to the net to tip in captain Clayton Keller's centering pass at 13:29.

"It's always fun going against guys you play with," said Cooley, who had 65 points for Utah this year. "Obviously Veggie's an unbelievable guy, unbelievable goalie. He's obviously a guy that you know is awesome to have on your team. It kind of stinks going against him because of how good he is and how he plays!"

With less than six minutes left in regulation time, Jakub Flek, who scored twice in the 5-0 win over Germany, got away on a breakaway, but lost control of the puck just before he could test Swayman.

Peeke added an empty-netter with 2:54 remaining.

Looking ahead to the playoffs, Spacek remained undaunted: "I feel confident in our team. I think we have a good chance of going far."

Notably, the Czechs and Americans have plenty of hard-fought playoff history between them in recent years.

With a 39-save performance by Connor Hellebuyck in net, the U.S. blanked the Czechs 3-0 for bronze in Prague in 2015, Jaromir Jagr's international swan song. The following year in Moscow, Auston Matthews got the shootout winner in a 2-1 U.S. quarter-final victory.

When this tournament first came to Denmark in 2018, Patrick Kane scored the third-period winner as the U.S. edged the Czechs 3-2 in the quarter-finals. In 2023, Czechia hammered the Americans 8-4 for bronze. And last year in Prague, before winning gold at home, the Czechs eliminated the U.S. 1-0 in the quarter-finals on Pavel Zacha's goal and Lukas Dostal's 36-save shutout.

## Canada takes first place with win

**By Andrew Podnieks – May 20, 2025**

Canada's relentless puck pursuit and finish around the goal proved too much for Jacob Markstrom and Tre Kronor tonight. The Canadians won the game, 5-3, and with it finished in first place to play Denmark in the quarter-finals on Thursday. Sweden finishes second and will play Czechia.

Both teams finished the preliminary round with six wins and a loss, but Canada's loss was in a shootout last night to Finland, which gave them the extra point and superior position in Group A.

Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and two assists; Travis Konecny has three assists; and, Sidney Crosby two helpers for Canada.

For the second night in a row Canada thrilled Avicii crowds with speed, intensity, and seemingly unlimited scoring ability.

"We came out flat the first two periods," admitted Tre Kronor captain Rasmus Andersson. "We didn't come out to our standards, and then there were too many penalties to get into any sort of rhythm. It was frustrating. If we scored a couple on the power play, it might have been different, but we had no momentum."

"We were two completely teams on our side compared to last night [against Finland, a 2-1 loss]," said Canadian defender Mackenzie Weegar. "We were better in the neutral zone tonight and attacking plays quicker. This was a big bounce back. We faced a little adversity last night. It's not going to be an easy tournament. We started on our toes tonight and went right at them, quietened the crowd down right away."

Indeed, Canada got off to an improbably quick start, scoring after just 18 seconds off their first dump-in. The puck bounced over a Sweden stick and wound up with Travis Sanheim to the side of the goal. He barged his way out front and banged the puck under Markstrom, silencing the crowd in the same moment.

Sweden came back with redoubled energy and peppered Jordan Binnington with quality shots, but the goalie was sensational in keeping the home side at bay. It looked worse for Tre Kronor when they took the game's first penalty, but the reverse happened.

Brandon Montour bobbled the puck for just a second, giving Elias Lindholm the opportunity to steal it and head down ice on a breakaway. He made no mistake on the deke at 3:47, and the crowd exploded in euphoria. Less than four minutes in, fans knew they were in for a treat.

Canada regained their lead less than four minutes later, though, on a fine effort by Tyson Foerster. He took a long pass from Jared Spurgeon, barrelled in on goal, and beat Markstrom with a deke as he fell to the ice.

The visitors made it 3-1 at 13:01 on a play the crowd was none too pleased with. Nathan MacKinnon stripped Marcus Pettersson of the puck coming out of his end in a manner which suggested a hooking penalty. There was no call, and MacKinnon got it to Travis Konecny who fed Ryan O'Reilly in front.

Sweden probably had the better of play in the first, but Canada capitalized on its chances and Binnington was letter perfect in the Canadian goal.

The pace of the second period was stunted time and again by penalties. In all, nine minors were whistled, five to Canada, but the only two that mattered were to the Canadians early on. They

overlapped, giving the Swedes a five-on-three for 62 seconds. Tre Kronor didn't need that long. Filip Forsberg threaded a pass to Marcus Johansson to the back side, and his one-timer found the net at 3:02.

But Tre Kronor couldn't build off that momentum, and Canada restored its two-goal lead midway through. Guess who? Sidney Crosby sent a torpedo pass to Macklin Celebrini, who outskated his man and beat Markstrom with a deke to make it 4-2.

The Canadians added to their tally early in the third thanks to a sensational backhand pass on one knee in the slot by Konecny, who found MacKinnon wide open. He snapped the puck in the open side at 4:11, effectively putting the game out of reach.

The Swedes made it interesting with a late goal and Markstrom on the bench, but that's as close as they came.