



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
January 19-21, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets

- PAGE 02: Columbus Dispatch: New York Islanders use stifling style to snuff Columbus Blue Jackets' point streak
- PAGE 03: The Athletic: Blue Jackets 'stuck in a bit of mud' in loss to Islanders as streak ends
- PAGE 05: BlueJackets.com: Rangers top Blue Jackets in double shutout
- PAGE 07: BlueJackets.com: PREVIEW: Blue Jackets continue road trip on Long Island
- PAGE 10: BlueJackets.com: Blue Jackets see point streak end vs. Islanders
- PAGE 12: The Hockey News: Daniil Tarasov Shuts Out Rangers In Regulation But Loses In A Shootout To End The Blue Jackets Six Game Winning Streak
- PAGE 13: The Hockey News: Daniil Tarasov Looks Refreshed And Ready To Contribute
- PAGE 14: The Hockey News: Columbus Blue Jackets (51 pts) vs. New York Islanders (43 pts) Game Preview
- PAGE 16: The Hockey News: Columbus Activates Justin Danforth From IR
- PAGE 17: The Hockey News: Blue Jackets Goalie Prospect Nolan Lalonde Has Perfect Week; Wins OHL Goaltender of the Week
- PAGE 18: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets Points Streak Ends at 7 at Hands of Islanders
- PAGE 19: 1st Ohio Battery: Game Day #46: Tarasov Starts As Blue Jackets Look For Longest Winning Streak In Nearly Seven Years
- PAGE 20: 1st Ohio Battery: NYR 1, CBJ 0 (SO): Tarasov Shines, But Blue Jackets Fall To Rangers In Shootout Loss To Snap Six-Game Win Streak
- PAGE 22: 1st Ohio Battery: Three Things: Tarasov Shines In SO Loss, Trocheck Wins It, Close But No Cigar
- PAGE 23: 1st Ohio Battery: Game Day #47: Playoff-Minded Blue Jackets Wrap Up Big Apple Portion Of Road Trip Against Sorokin, Islanders

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/ Websites

- PAGE 24: The Athletic: Weekend NHL rankings: Connor McDavid's cross-check, an imminent trade and a goalie goal
- PAGE 28: Sportsnet.ca: Slumping Devils might need to shake up roster

Columbus Dispatch / New York Islanders use stifling style to snuff Columbus Blue Jackets' point streak

By Brian Hedger – January 21, 2025

The Blue Jackets' streak has become a losing variety.

It's only back-to-back losses to start a four-game road trip, after falling 3-1 to the New York Islanders on Monday night at UBS Arena, but the Jackets lost their seven-game point streak one game after losing a season-high, six-game winning streak.

Despite taking a 1-0 lead on a goal by Kent Johnson to cap a power play in the first period, the Blue Jackets were dominated by the bigger, older Islanders (19-20-7). New York didn't score in the first period but scored three goals in the second and made their 3-1 cushion stand up in the third.

"Team are playing good," Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli said on the FanDuel Sports Network postgame broadcast. "We're coming into these games after being on a six-game win streak/seven-game point streak, and they're maybe playing a little bit extra hard against us. They know we've been rolling recently and they're doing everything to tighten it up, but we have been getting opportunities. We've just got to capitalize on them."

Shots favored Columbus, 26-25, but scoring chances in the first two periods belonged almost exclusively to New York. That's ultimately what decided the game for the Islanders, who got two goals from Bo Horvat and another from Simon Holmstrom to break the game open in the second. Mathew Barzal had two assists for the Islanders, who dominated faceoffs with a 68% success rate.

Ilya Sorokin made 25 saves for New York, improving to 6-0-2 in his career against the Blue Jackets. Elvis Merzlikins (22 saves) took the goaltending loss for the Blue Jackets (22-18-7).

Columbus longer occupies one of the two wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference, falling behind the Ottawa Senators and Boston Bruins with a challenging back-to-back coming up Wednesday in Toronto and Thursday in Raleigh, North Carolina to finish a four-game trip.

The loss to the Isles was the first regulation defeat for the Blue Jackets since Jan. 2 at Nationwide Arena, when they coughed up a late goal against the Detroit Red Wings in a stinging 5-4 loss that could've gotten them at least one point in overtime or a shootout.

"Sure, they played hard, but we didn't have any 'pop' in tonight's hockey game," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said on the postgame television broadcast. "We were slow in all areas. We skated slow, we passed slow and we haven't done that lately. We've played the game fast, we've 'thought' it fast. We got pucks going, so that we could move our feet, and tonight it looked like we were stuck in a bit of mud — and consequently we got the result that we did not want."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets 'stuck in a bit of mud' in loss to Islanders as streak ends

By Aaron Portzline – January 21, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason was blunt in his assessment of his club's performance in a 3-1 loss Monday: "We were slow in all areas: We thought slow, we skated slow, we passed slow. And we haven't done that lately."

Evason could have saved himself a few words. The Blue Jackets were all of those things, but their biggest mistake was getting lulled into playing the New York Islanders' brand of hockey.

The Islanders, under general manager Lou Lamoriello, have refused to step into the NHL's wave of younger, faster players, instead dressing one of the oldest and heaviest lineups in the league. But that doesn't mean it can't be effective some nights.

The only highlight for the Blue Jackets came less than five minutes into the game when Kent Johnson scored a power-play goal. Actually, the only two times the Blue Jackets carried play for any sustained stretch occurred when they had an extra skater on the ice.

The Jackets couldn't (or wouldn't) get inside on the Islanders in the offensive zone, and they couldn't get the puck back in the defensive zone. A big part of the latter issue is that they rarely started with the puck, winning only 16 of 50 faceoffs.

And so the Blue Jackets' seven-game point streak (6-0-1), their longest in five years, was snapped.

"We've played the game fast (lately)," Evason told reporters in UBS Arena. "We've thought it fast and got pucks going so that we could move our feet. It looked like we were stuck in a bit of mud."

The Blue Jackets were coming off a 1-0 shootout loss to the New York Rangers on Saturday. Truth be told, that game was extremely competitive, but it wasn't exactly played at breakneck speed.

But Monday was a step backward.

At 4:52 of the first period, with the Blue Jackets up a skater after a tripping penalty on New York's Anders Lee, Johnson leaned his body into a wrister from the left circle. With Dmitri Voronkov providing a barn-door-sized screen on Islanders goalie Ilya Sorokin, the shot sailed clean to the far corner.

But it was clear by the middle of the first period that the game was shifting toward the Islanders' style. They dominated Blue Jackets players at times, generating 40 hits — eight by forward Marc Gatcomb — despite carrying the puck most of the night.

"We're coming into these games after being on a six-game win streak, a seven-game point streak. ... Teams are playing us extra hard," Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli said. "They know we've been rolling lately, and they're tightening up."

The Islanders cashed in early in the second period, scoring three goals in just 5:04. Bo Horvat scored an even-strength goal only 43 seconds into the period, Simon Holmstrom added one short-handed at 2:57, and Horvat scored again on the power play at 5:47.

The short-handed goal, which gave the Islanders a 2-1 lead, was indicative of how the night went for the Blue Jackets.

Zach Werenski, who has been one of the NHL's elite performers this season, simply tripped while all alone carrying the puck up the ice on the power play. New York's Jean-Gabriel Pageau scooped it up and embarked on a two-on-one with Holmstrom, who beat Elvis Merzlikins for the lead.

The Blue Jackets tried to make a push in the third period, but they couldn't get out of the quicksand. They didn't get their first shot on goal until 8:47 was off the clock, and that was a 45-foot wrister from Mikael Pyyhtiä that Sorokin swallowed with ease.

It could be that the loss of No. 1 center Sean Monahan (sprained wrist) is catching up with the Blue Jackets. In the last five games, the high-scoring Jackets have cooled off, scoring just 10 goals. They haven't scored an even-strength goal in two games.

"We've been getting some good opportunities lately; we just have to capitalize on them," said Fantilli, who has moved up in the lineup in Monahan's absence. "I know it's the NHL, but you can't get those opportunities, not score and then just say, 'Oh, well, next time.' Eventually, you have to bear down on them.

"I'm staring right in the mirror at myself on that one, too. I had a couple of opportunities I should have been bearing down on."

The Blue Jackets welcomed fourth-line winger Justin Danforth back to the lineup. He'd been out since Dec. 10 with a lower-body injury. But defenseman Denton Mateychuk was a late scratch due to an illness, allowing veteran Jack Johnson to draw into the lineup after a five-game break.

But the Blue Jackets are hoping to stay afloat in the Eastern Conference long enough for reinforcements to join the lineup, including captain Boone Jenner, rugged defenseman Erik Gudbranson and speedy winger Yegor Chinakhov.

Monday's loss, coupled with the Boston Bruins' win, bumped the Blue Jackets out of a playoff spot for the first time since Jan. 7. They sit in ninth place in the conference.

They sure could have used Jenner and Gudbranson on Monday.

[BlueJackets.com / Rangers top Blue Jackets in double shutout](#)

By Dan Rosen – January 19, 2025

NEW YORK -- Igor Shesterkin made 27 saves and stopped all three shooters in the shootout to lift the New York Rangers to a 1-0 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Madison Square Garden on Saturday.

"We played awesome," Shesterkin said about the Rangers defensive effort.

It's Shesterkin's first shutout since opening night, Oct. 9. He has allowed nine goals in five games since returning from an upper-body injury that kept him out of the lineup for four games.

He stopped Kent Johnson, Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko in the shootout.

Vincent Trocheck scored the lone goal in the shootout, in the second round.

The Rangers (22-20-3) have won two games in a row, four of five and have points in seven straight (5-0-2).

"Goaltending is huge," Rangers coach Peter Laviolette said. "From a 5-on-5 standpoint, a penalty kill standpoint, from the confidence of your team, you play a game when you can get 0-0 to overtime you know he's done his job. He's played really well for us, and we need that. We're in a position where we've got to win games, win points. He had to be sharp with his game tonight because we weren't able to get the run support he needed to get out ahead."

Daniil Tarasov made 26 saves, including stopping Mika Zibanejad twice on breakaways in overtime, at 1:25 and again with 17 seconds left, but the Blue Jackets (22-17-4) lost for the first time since Jan. 2, ending their six-game winning streak.

"It was a great hockey game," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "Both teams played hard. It might not have been exciting as far as scoring goals, but the effort was there by both teams, the desperation was there by both teams, the patience. I really liked how our hockey club stayed within ourselves. We didn't panic, didn't open it up. We gave up some stuff, but we got some stuff as well. Just comes down to a shootout and they find one, we don't."

Laviolette said the Rangers didn't like how they played in the first period, when they were outshot 15-4.

They outshot the Blue Jackets 22-12 the rest of the game.

"The first period for me was a little bit off, probably gave up eight or nine chances," Laviolette said, "and then maybe didn't give up eight or nine for the rest of the game."

There were chances, though, but neither team could capitalize despite a combined 35 shots on goal (20-15 Blue Jackets) through the first two periods. They combined for only 10 shots on goal in the third period (6-4 New York).

Mikael Pyyhtia had a would-be scoring chance on a semi breakaway with a minute remaining in the second period taken away from him thanks to a strong defensive play by Reilly Smith, who stripped the puck away from the Blue Jackets forward on a backcheck.

Smith set up Adam Fox for a tip-in attempt as the Rangers defenseman came across the crease, but Tarasov held his ground for the save and cover at 14:25 of the second.

Earlier in the second period, K'Andre Miller had an open look from the slot off a rebound of Zibanejad's shot, but Tarasov moved across in time to make the save at 4:19.

In the first period, Shesterkin went post to post to stop Cole Sillinger on a redirect with his right pad at 4:40.

Chris Kreider deflected Fox's wrist shot off the right post during a Rangers power play at 11:14.

"They've got skilled guys that are going to get chances, but after the first 10 [minutes] we settled in, had some looks ourselves," Fox said. "Sometimes a boring game instead of a track meet is good. We did a good job of that today."

Credit Tarasov's saves on Zibanejad's breakaways in overtime for the game getting to a shootout.

"He made some great saves on the breakaways that we gave up, that we've got to obviously look after a little bit," Evason said. "He played a strong game, and I think everybody was committed in front of him as well."

But when it got to the shootout, Shesterkin remained on point. Trocheck, though, said Tarasov gave him blocker side so he took it and scored in the second round of the shootout.

"I was just going down to see what I can do," Trocheck said.

Shesterkin stopped Fantilli after Trocheck scored and his save on Marchenko in the bottom of the third round sealed the win for New York.

"I just saw he did a step right and I know righty players like to do high glove," Shesterkin said, "but the puck a little bit jumped in front of his stick, and I took the chance."

NOTES: Shesterkin's shutout was the 17th of his career. He passed John Vanbiesbrouck (16) to move into ninth place all-time among Rangers goalies.

[BlueJackets.com / PREVIEW: Blue Jackets continue road trip on Long Island](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – January 21, 2025

All things considered, the Blue Jackets certainly would have preferred to get two points rather than just one in Saturday's 1-0 shootout loss vs. the Rangers, but you couldn't find too many disappointed faces in the locker room after the game.

Yes, it was unfortunate to see the team's six-game winning streak come to an end in just the 15th game in team history to end regulation without a goal, but the Blue Jackets were encouraged by the way they played throughout the 65 minutes in Madison Square Garden.

The Blue Jackets could have lost concentration and opened things up to try to push for a goal, but instead they stuck with their game for the most part. When they did make a mistake, goaltender Daniil Tarasov was there in earning his first career shutout.

"It was a great hockey game," head coach Dean Evason said. "Both teams played hard. It might not have been exciting as far as scoring goals, but the effort was there by both teams. The desperation was there by both teams. The patience, I really, really liked how our hockey club stayed within ourselves. We didn't panic, didn't open it up. We gave up some stuff, but we got some stuff as well."

Of late, Evason has preached defensive effort and tightening things up in that realm, as goals are going to be harder and harder to come by as teams tighten up amid the playoff race. That's especially true on the road, where the Blue Jackets struggled early in the season but have now earned five points out of six in the last three contests away from home.

Over the last five games, Columbus has given up just six goals, their best defensive stretch since January 2020.

"I think it's a combination of being sharp defensively, but also making sure we're being smart when we have the puck to not give up any of those exposed situations," James van Riemsdyk said. "I think we've been doing a great job with that."

The game against the Rangers kicked off a stretch of eight games out of nine away from home, which continues tonight just a little to the east as the Blue Jackets take on the Islanders. Defenseman Damon Severson said the team wants to keep playing that tighter style on the road as the Jackets try to rack up points.

"Obviously we've been good at home, and we're trying to get our road record where we want it to be to help us be successful down the line," Severson said. "We'll take the overtime point for sure, but it's a step in the right direction for where we need our road game to go if we're going to be successful."

Know The Foe: New York Islanders

Head coach: Patrick Roy (Second season)

Team stats: Goals per game: 2.64 (27th) | Scoring defense: 3.02 (17th) | PP: 11.8 percent (32nd) | PK: 67.4 percent (32nd)

The narrative: Lou Lamoriello has built a team that has made the Stanley Cup Playoffs five of the last six seasons, but after back-to-back runs to the NHL's final four in 2020 and '21, the Isles have lost in the first round each of the past two seasons. Getting over the hump has proven difficult, as the Islanders just haven't had the firepower to match up with some of the top teams in the league. This season, special

teams have killed the Islanders, who are actually outscoring teams at 5-on-5 but are in last place in the Metropolitan because of the power play and penalty kill.

Team leaders: Anders Lee leads the charge, as the 34-year-old team captain tops the charts for the Islanders in both goals (20) and points (36). Bo Horvat follows with a 14-19-33 line, while Kyle Palmieri has 12 goals among his 29 points. Brock Nelson has 13 goals and 28 points, while Noah Dobson has followed a 70-point season on the blue line with a 6-17-23 line.

With longtime CBJ killer Semyon Varlamov on injured reserve, Ilya Sorokin is expected to get the start and is 13-14-4 in 31 games with a 2.87 GAA and .900 save percentage.

What's new: It's the Islanders, so as usual, not much. They've built a core that has been together for a while, but the special teams struggles have reached almost epic proportions. The penalty kill percentage is the worst in NHL history, while the power play isn't much better, ranking 14th-worst in NHL annals. The PK has improved some of late – the Islanders haven't allowed a power-play goal in the last six games – while the power play scored twice Thursday vs. Philadelphia to end a 14-game scoreless streak.

Trending: The Islanders swept the three-game season series a year ago had won 14 of 18 coming into the season, but the Blue Jackets took a 2-0 win Oct. 30 in Nationwide Arena behind goals from Damon Severson and Justin Danforth.

Former CBJ: Forward Anthony Duclair missed a large chunk of the season with a lower body injury and has 3-4-7 in 17 games, while Liam Foudy played two games with the team earlier this year before being returned to the AHL.

Scratches: Kevin Labanc, Jordan Harris, Jack Johnson

Injured reserve, Injured/Non-Roster list: Sean Monahan (upper body), Yegor Chinakhov (upper body), Erik Gudbranson (upper body), Boone Jenner (upper body)

Roster Report: Danforth was activated off injured reserve today and will return to the lineup for the first time since Dec. 10, going in for Labanc, while Merzlikins gets the start against the Islanders.

The Numbers Game

CBJ netminders Jet Greaves, Elvis Merzlikins and Daniil Tarasov have combined for a .955 save percentage over the last five games. ... With 51 points, Zach Werenski has the second-most ever for a CBJ player through the team's first 46 games of a season, while Kirill Marchenko (49) is third. Artemi Panarin holds the franchise record with 52 in 2018-19. ... Werenski has a 12-29-41 line in the last 31 games to place fifth in the NHL in scoring in that span and has 19 points (4-15-19) in the past 12 games. His average ice time of 26:44 leads all NHL players, and he's tied for first among league defensemen in goals (15) and second in points on the season. ... Marchenko has an 8-14-22 line in the last 17 games and 33 points in the last 27 (12-21-33). ... Dmitri Voronkov has 18 points (10-8-18) in the last 16 games and is tied for second in the NHL with nine goals since Dec. 19. ... Adam Fantilli and James van Riemsdyk have matching 4-4-8 lines in the last eight games. ... Columbus is tied for first in the NHL with 107 goals at 5-on-5, and their 3.30 goals per game are tied for sixth in the league. In addition, Columbus has scored at least six goals 10 times in just 46 games this season, one shy of a franchise record (2018-19). ... Columbus has scored on 16 of 50 power plays (32.0 percent) in the last 20 games and is now 12th in the NHL for the season in power-play percentage at 23.1. ... Blue Jackets defensemen have 30 goals this season, most in the NHL. ... Cole Sillinger is three points from 100 in his NHL career.

This Day in CBJ History

Jan. 20, 2006: Rick Nash notches the first shootout winner of his career, scoring the only goal of the skills competition in a 4-3 victory at St. Louis. Nikolai Zherdev, David Vyborny and Jan Hrdina score in regulation while Marc Denis makes 41 saves.

[BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets see point streak end vs. Islanders](#)

By Stefen Rosner – January 21, 2025

ELMONT, N.Y. -- Bo Horvat scored twice for the New York Islanders in a 3-1 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at UBS Arena on Monday.

Simon Holmstrom also scored, and Mathew Barzal had two assists for the Islanders (19-20-7), who have won two straight. Ilya Sorokin made 25 saves.

"I thought we were outstanding," New York coach Patrick Roy said. "I think we dominated that puck possession battle, no doubt in my mind. I mean, Barzal and Horvat were so good with it. They were controlling the puck very well. They were dangerous. It was a solid performance by these two guys."

Kent Johnson scored for the Blue Jackets (22-18-7), who had their seven-game point streak end (6-0-1). Elvis Merzlikins made 22 saves.

"They played hard," Columbus coach Dean Evason said. "We didn't have any positives in tonight's hockey game. We were slow in all areas. We thought slow, we skated slow, we passed slow. We haven't done that lately. We've played the game fast, we got pucks going so we could move our feet, and tonight, it looked like we were stuck in a bit of mud."

Johnson gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead on a power play at 4:52 of the first period. After receiving a pass from Kirill Marchenko at the left point, Johnson skated into the circle and beat a screened Sorokin over his glove.

"Teams are playing good against us. We're coming into these games after being on a six-game winning streak and a seven-game point streak," Blue Jackets forward Adam Fantilli said. "Teams are going to be playing extra hard against us now that we've been rolling recently. They've really been tightening it up. We have been getting some opportunities, we've just got to capitalize on them."

Horvat scored 43 seconds into the second period to tie the game 1-1. Adam Pelech kept the puck in at the left point and passed down behind the net to Barzal, who found Horvat for a one-timer from the low slot.

"It's just a matter of getting open for Barzal, and he finds me. And thankfully they were hitting the back of the net for me tonight," Horvat said. "In previous games where we've been together they haven't been. He's been great all year. They're finally starting to go in."

Holmstrom gave the Islanders a 2-1 lead with a short-handed goal at 2:57. He beat Merzlikins blocker side from the left circle off a pass from Jean-Gabriel Pageau on a 2-on-1.

The odd-man rush started after Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski tripped at his defensive blue line and lost control of the puck.

Horvat scored his second goal of the game on a power play to extend the lead to 3-1 at 5:47 of the second. Barzal skated through the offensive zone and around the net before finding Horvat, who beat Merzlikins glove side with a one-timer from the right circle.

"It's just one of those desperate times of the year where we've got to win," Barzal said. "You see that everyone is playing hard."

NOTES: Islanders defenseman Noah Dobson left at 1:16 of the third period after he was hit by Blue Jackets forward Cole Sillinger in the neutral zone. There was no update on his status after the game. ...

Blue Jackets forward Justin Danforth played 7:26 in his return after missing 18 games because of a lower-body injury. ... It was Holmstrom's first short-handed goal this season. He was tied for second in the NHL last season with five short-handed goals. ... The Islanders have won consecutive home games for the first time this season.

The Hockey News / Daniil Tarasov Shuts Out Rangers In Regulation But Loses In A Shootout To End The Blue Jackets Six Game Winning Streak

By Jason Newland – January 20, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets and New York Rangers played 65 minutes and couldn't score a goal, so it went to a shootout. Vincent Trocheck would score the only goal for either team, sending the Jackets home with a 1-0 shootout loss. The loss halts a 6-game winning streak, but they now have a seven-game points streak and continue to hold the first wild card spot by one point over the Ottawa Senators.

Daniil Tarasov and Igor Shesterkin put on a master goaltending class on Saturday night. Both goalies made some highlight saves and frustrated the opposing team's shooters all night. Tarasov made a pair of breakaway saves on Mika Zibanejad in OT and stopped him in the shootout as well.

Dean Evason said after the game, "Both teams played hard. It might not have been exciting as far as scoring goals, but the effort was there by both teams, the desperation was there by both teams, the patience. I really liked how our hockey club stayed within ourselves. We didn't panic, didn't open it up. We gave up some stuff, but we got some stuff as well. Just comes down to a shootout and they find one, we don't."

Crazy Stat Of The Game: Daniil Tarasov becomes the first goalie in NHL history to record his first career shutout and lose that same game.

Final Stats

Player Stats

- James van Riemsdyk led all forwards with 4 shots on goal.
- Zach Aston-Reese led the team with 3 hits.
- Daniil Tarasov stopped on 26 shots he faced in regulation and overtime.

Team Stats

- The CBJ PP went scoreless on two tries.
- The Jackets PK stopped the only Rangers man advantage they faced.
- The Blue Jackets only won 39.5% of the faceoffs.

What's Next - The Blue Jackets travel to Long Island to play the New York Islanders on Monday.

The Hockey News / Daniil Tarasov Looks Refreshed And Ready To Contribute

By Jason Newland – January 20, 2025

Is Daniil Tarasov back? It sure has looked like it in the last two games.

Tarry, as he is affectionately known, has played out of his mind the last two games, going 1-0-1 in the process. In those two games against the Philadelphia Flyers and New York Rangers, without him those two games are losses and I don't think anyone could argue that.

Against Philly, he allowed two goals and made 23 shots for a final SV% of .920% in 65 minutes of gameplay. The CBJ would win in a shootout.

Last night at MSG, Tarasov became the first goalie ever to record his first career shutout, and lose that game. He stopped all 26 Ranger shots in regulation and overtime but would give up the loan shootout goal to lose to the Rangers.

He made a few highlight-reel saves which you can see below.

Is Tarasov back? Only time will tell as he needs more starts to answer that. One thing's for certain though - If he continues to play like this, the Jackets playoff push could become even more real. With Elvis and Tarry locked in, and if the team can continue their historic goal-scoring pace, they may just shock the entire hockey world and make the playoffs.

With 36 games left in the season, the Jackets currently sit in the first wild card spot and are making some noise.

What's Next - The Blue Jackets travel to Long Island to play the New York Islanders on Monday.

The Hockey News / Columbus Blue Jackets (51 pts) vs. New York Islanders (43 pts) Game Preview

By Jason Newland – January 21, 2025

The Blue Jackets continue a four-game road trip as they visit Long Island tonight to play the last-place Islanders.

The Blue Jackets did something against the Rangers that they've only done one other time this entire season - Failed to score a goal. They did however get an all-important point against the Blue Shirts. Columbus will be looking to score five tonight, there's no doubt about that.

The Isles come into this game 5-5 in their last 10 games and have won 3 of the last 5. Those three games include wins over Vegas, Utah, and San Jose. The two losses were against Ottawa and Philadelphia, so it's a mixed bag when it comes to New York.

Some of the numbers for NYI are downright bad. They're currently 32nd on both the power play and the penalty kill. They're 15th in goals against and can't seem to score goals at all, sitting 28th in the league. They do give up the fewest amount of PIMs in the league, however, so there's that.

The Blue Jackets are on game two of a wicked four-game roadie that includes two more stops after tonight. Those stops are Toronto and Carolina, so they must get two points at UBS.

Series History vs. The Islanders

- Columbus is 8-14-3 on the road and 25-21-8 in 54 all-time games against the Islanders.
- The Blue Jackets beat the Isles in their only meeting this season. Elvis Merzljikins had a shutout.

Who To Watch For The Islanders

- Anders Lee leads the Isles with 20 goals and 36 points.
- Bo Horvat leads NYI with 19 assists.
- Ilya Sorokin is 13-14 with a .900 SV%. He will start

CBJ Player Notes vs. The Islanders

- Elvis Merzljikins is 2-3 with a .922 SV% against the Islanders.
- James van Riemsdyk has 40 points in 55 games.
- Zach Werenski has 13 points in 21 games vs. New York.

Injuries

- **Boone Jenner** (shoulder) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 7; (46 Games)
- **Erik Gudbranson** (upper body) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 16; (43 Games)
- **Yegor Chinakhov** (upper body) is on Injured Reserve (25 Games)
- **Justin Danforth** (lower body) is on Injured Reserve on Dec.10; (18 Games)
- **Sean Monahan** (upper body); is on Injured Reserve retroactive to Dec. 7 (5 Games)

TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 188

How to Watch & Listen: Tonight's game will be on FanDuel Sports Network. Steve Mears will be on the play-by-play. The radio broadcast will be on 97.1 The Fan with Bob McElligott behind the mic doing the play-by-play.

[The Hockey News / Columbus Activates Justin Danforth From IR](#)

By Jason Newland – January 21, 2025

Columbus has activated forward Justin Danforth from IR today. He was injured back on December 10 vs. Philadelphia

Danforth has 8 points in 25 games played this season. The Jackets did not need a corresponding roster move to activate Danforth.

Danforth will play tonight against the NYI.

The Hockey News / Blue Jackets Goalie Prospect Nolan Lalonde Has Perfect Week; Wins OHL Goaltender of the Week

By Jason Newland – January 21, 2025

The OHL has named CBJ goalie prospect Nolan Lalonde of the Soo Greyhounds Goaltender of the Week. Lalonde played in two games and went 2-0 with a SV% of 1.000 and a GAA of Zero. He made a total of 60 saves as well. The wins came over the Peterborough Petes and Ottawa 67's.

For the season, he's a 11-8-5 with the Kingston Frontenacs and Soo Greyhounds. He also has 3 shutouts on the season.

The soon to be 21 year old will complete his fourth CHL season at the conclusion of this year. Many think he will turn pro at the end of the season, and could join the Cleveland Monsters to help bolster their goalie depth. They already have Jet Greaves, Zach Sawchenko, and Pavel Čajan however.

Congrats to the young Greyhounds goalie.

What's Next - The Blue Jackets travel to Long Island to play the New York Islanders on Monday.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Points Streak Ends at 7 at Hands of Islanders

By Mark Scheig – January 21, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets were hoping to leave New York with a split. The Islanders ensured that things didn't go according to plan.

Bo Horvat scored two goals and Ilya Sorokin made 25 saves to lift the Islanders to an important 3-1 win over the Blue Jackets on Monday night at UBS Arena. Mathew Barzal assisted on both Horvat goals.

It was ultimately special teams that decided the outcome of this one.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets got some unfortunate news right before the game. Defenseman Denton Mateychuk came down with an illness and was unable to play. Jack Johnson came into the lineup in his place.

The game itself started well for the Blue Jackets. On an early power play, Kent Johnson was able to beat Sorokin to give the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead. Johnson took a pass from Marchenko and attacked the left wing. His well-placed shot found the back of the net.

The Blue Jackets went to the room up 1-0 after the first. Although they had the lead, the Islanders were starting to impose themselves on the game in the form of their forecheck. It took less than three minutes in the second for the Blue Jackets to lose the lead for good.

From behind the net, Barzal had multiple options in front. He found a wide-open Horvat to tie the game. The Blue Jackets had a chance to gain momentum back with another power play.

Instead, Simon Holmstrom scored shorthanded to make it 2-1 Islanders. Zach Werenski fell which opened the door for the play to happen.

Then Barzal and Horvat connected again just under three minutes later to make it 3-1. Barzal went around the world and forced Sean Kuraly to lose his stick. In the process, Horvat was open and buried the pass.

The Islanders came into the game Monday having statistically both the worst power play and penalty kill in the NHL. However they went 1 for 2 on their power play and scored shorthanded which ultimately decided the game.

One thing to monitor is the status of Islanders' defenseman Noah Dobson. He and Cole Sillinger got tangled up in the third period. Dobson went down with his leg bending in a way that shouldn't happen. He limped on his own to the dressing room and didn't return. The Islanders were able to shut the game down playing five defensemen for the balance of the final period.

The Blue Jackets were able to get a little bit of a push in the third trailing by two but could never solve Sorokin. With the win, the Islander climb to within seven of the second wildcard spot. It was a huge win to stay within striking distance of the race. The Blue Jackets will end Monday one point behind both Boston and Ottawa for a playoff spot.

Elvis Merzlikins started and made 22 saves on the night.

The Blue Jackets will now head to Toronto for a Wednesday date with the Maple Leafs. The Islanders get a few days off before continuing their home stand against the Philadelphia Flyers on Friday.

1st Ohio Battery / Game Day #46: Tarasov Starts As Blue Jackets Look For Longest Winning Streak In Nearly Seven Years

By Ed Francis – January 19, 2025

Can the Columbus Blue Jackets find themselves in seventh heaven?

A win Saturday night over the New York Rangers would make it seven straight victories for the Jackets, which would be the club's longest winning streak since March 2018, when they won ten in a row.

More than just continuing the streak, this is a game that will help shape the wild card race in the Eastern Conference. Columbus is currently in the top wild card spot, but the Rangers are just five points behind with one game in hand. There are six teams between the Blue Jackets' 50 points and the Rangers 45, making all of these bouts imperative — even in January.

For Columbus, they'll turn to Daniil Tarasov in net. After extremely limited action over the last two months, Tarasov won his first start since October when the Blue Jackets defeated the Philadelphia Flyers in a shootout Tuesday night. Tarasov was a key part of that victory and will look to repeat that performance Saturday night.

Here's what else to know Columbus makes their first trip of the season to the Big Apple:

- **RE: BLUESHIRTS**

Igor Shesterkin is the Rangers starter Saturday night. He's won three of his last four games in net while allowing three or less goals in all four starts. For the season, Shesterkin is 14-15-2 — but that's more reflective of the Rangers offensive struggles. The 29-year-old netminder has a .907 save percentage and 2.97 goals against average this season. ... The Rangers have been in close games night and in night out over the last week and change, having played overtime in three of their last five games. Another game was a one-goal game and the fifth — their 5-3 victory in Utah on Thursday night — needed an empty-netter in the final minute to make it a two-goal lead.

- **SHOULD BE SOME OPPS**

The Rangers are near the bottom of the league in shots allowed, at 31.2 per game. They're also near the bottom in allowing high-danger shots (27th, at 103), so there should be chances for Columbus' offense to get the puck in the net. The Blue Jackets rank 5th in high-danger shots on goal, at 105.

- **LINEUPS & PROJECTIONS**

A nearly identical lineup to the one from Thursday, but the Blue Jackets official X (formerly Twitter) account flipped Cole Sillinger and Luca Del Bel Belluz at the middle six center position, putting Sillinger back on the "second" line with James van Riemsdyk and Kent Johnson.

1st Ohio Battery / NYR 1, CBJ 0 (SO): Tarasov Shines, But Blue Jackets Fall To Rangers In Shootout Loss To Snap Six-Game Win Streak

By Ed Francis – January 19, 2025

The win streak is over, but the point streak is not.

Daniil Tarasov and Igor Shesterkin put on a show at Madison Square Garden but the Columbus Blue Jackets came up short Saturday night, losing 1-0 in a shootout to the New York Rangers.

Despite the loss, Tarasov is credited with his first career shutout. He made 26 saves in regulation and overtime and allowed just one of three to slip by him in the shootout.

Unfortunately, Shesterkin made 27 saves and stopped all three in the three-round shootout competition.

The two goalies were the First and Second Stars of the Game, with Shesterkin getting the nod for number one.

"(Tarasov) played a strong game and I think everybody was committed in front of him, as well," said head coach Dean Evason. The Blue Jackets had 16 blocked shots for the game, their fifth straight in which they've given up two or less goals.

The overtime point continues Columbus' point streak, which is now at seven games. Their 51st point of the season was enough to keep them in the first wild card spot in the Eastern Conference.

Here's how the unique game came to be in the Big Apple:

1st Period:

There was no scoring in the first period, but not for a lack of trying. The Rangers hit a goalpost minutes after getting one within a few inches from crossing the line to go in, but the proverbial puck-luck did not go their way. For the Blue Jackets, they were stymied several times by Shesterkin. Expected goals in the opening twenty minutes per *Natural Stat Trick* were 1.31 to 0.70 in favor of Columbus.

2nd Period

Another scoreless period, but this one saw the Rangers even things up a bit in the analytics department. They out-attempted the Blue Jackets 21-14, had a 12-5 advantage in shots on goal, and had all five of the high-danger chances for the middle twenty minutes. Expected goals were 1.02 to 0.18 in favor of New York. This was a fast-moving, penalty-free second period of hockey in which perhaps the best scoring chance came for the Rangers with just under five minutes remaining. The Blue Jackets have a spot of trouble trying to get the puck out of their own zone and the puck ends up on the stick of Artemi Panarin, but his shot to Tarasov's right is denied by Tarry.

3rd Period / Overtime / Shootout

For just the second in the 2024-25 season, the Blue Jackets went go into the third period of a game with neither team on the board — and for the first time since April 2021, they would go to overtime in a 0-0 game.

Tarasov played brilliantly in overtime, including a pair of stops on Mika Zibanejad that came with the All-Star on a breakaway.

In the shootout, Vincent Trocheck of the Rangers had the only goal. Kent Johnson, Adam Fantilli, and Kirill Marchenko had their attempts saved by Shesterkin.

Stat Chat:

- The Blue Jackets had more scoring chances by a 27-25 margin, but it was the Rangers who dominated in the high-danger chances: they doubled up Columbus, 14-7.
- Columbus' offense sputtered more as the game went along: they had 21 attempts in the first, 14 in the second, and just 12 in the third period. Shesterkin was hot, but wasn't tested frequently enough.
- It was another heavy dose of Zach Werenski, to no surprise. He skated 28:31 and led all Blue Jacket skaters in ice time by nearly five minutes. Ivan Provorov was second, at 24:13.

Up Next:

Columbus will stay in New York for one more game: they face the Islanders at the UBS Arena on Monday, with puck-drop slated for 7:30 p.m.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Tarasov Shines In SO Loss, Trocheck Wins It, Close But No Cigar

By Will Chase – January 20, 2025

It's a tough way to end the winning streak.

Vincent Trocheck scored the lone shootout goal and Igor Shesterkin made 27 saves as the New York Rangers shut out the Columbus Blue Jackets 1-0 on Saturday night at Madison Square Garden.

The loss snapped the Blue Jackets' six-game winning streak; however, the point extended their seven-game point streak, and they reclaimed the top wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference after the Ottawa Senators briefly took over the top spot after their win over the Boston Bruins.

Tarasov Shines In SO Loss

Coming off his best start of the season in Tuesday's 3-2 shootout win over the Philadelphia Flyers in which he was named the Second Star of the Game, Daniil Tarasov turned in another solid performance on Broadway Saturday night.

Making 26 saves, it wasn't until the shootout before Trocheck could finally beat the goaltender.

As the score indicates, neither offense could do much and the Blue Jackets helped out their goaltender with 16 blocked shots and were 1-for-1 on the penalty kill.

With the loss, Columbus falls to 4-1 in the shootout this season while New York is 1-0.

Trocheck Wins It

Trocheck, the Rangers' second shooter of the shootout scored the lone goal of the entire game to propel the Rangers to the 1-0 win.

Close But No Cigar

Saturday was one of those games that the Blue Jackets will need to grow accustomed to as the schedule gets tougher.

While Columbus looked poised to break through, especially early in the game as they outshot the Rangers 15-4 in the first period, they were obviously unable to beat Shesterkin.

The Jackets are in the middle of a stretch which includes eight out of nine on the road. That stretch includes games against teams currently in playoff spots such as the Toronto Maple Leafs, Carolina Hurricanes, Los Angeles Kings, Vegas Golden Knights, and the Dallas Stars.

One More In New York

The New York trip continues as the Blue Jackets take on the New York Islanders on Monday, Jan. 20 at 7:30 p.m. ET from UBS Arena.

1st Ohio Battery / Game Day #47: Playoff-Minded Blue Jackets Wrap Up Big Apple Portion Of Road Trip Against Sorokin, Islanders

By Ed Francis – January 21, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets six-game win streak came to an end Saturday night against the New York Rangers, but it wasn't all bad for the CBJ.

Daniil Tarasov, despite the loss, was credited with his first career shutout in the Rangers 1-0 shootout victory. It was the fifth straight game where Columbus allowed two goals or less, something they hadn't accomplished in nearly five years.

And for the seventh straight game, the Blue Jackets were able to pick up at least one point. With the season now firmly in its second half, every point is important — especially in such a close race.

Columbus' opponent tonight — the New York Islanders — are desperately trying to stay involved in said race. The Blue Jackets, at 51 points, are currently in possession of the second wild card spot. Six teams are within five points of Columbus, with the Islanders eight points behind and one game in hand.

A regulation win tonight for the Blue Jackets would create double-digit separation from the Isles, creating a monumental task for New York to overcome.

Here's what else to know as Columbus continues their four-game road trip:

- **RE: ISLES**

This is the 4th game of a remarkable seven-game homestand for the Islanders. ... Ilya Sorokin gets the start for the Isles. He's been sharp for New York this season, with a goals against average at 2.87 and a .900 save percentage. But the Islanders offense has struggled, leading to a 13-14-4 record for the NY goalie. ... Part of the reason for the Islanders struggles on offense is the worst power play in the NHL. They've converted just 11.8% of their man-advantage opportunities. They've scored a power play goal in just 11 of their 45 games. The Blue Jackets, for comparison, have scored on the PP in 24 of 46 games.

- **MAXIMIZE THE PP CHANCES**

It's not just the Isles power play that is woeful: their power play is last in the NHL, too. At just 67.4%, the Blue Jackets above-average power play must capitalize on any chances they get. After scoring on a PP goal in four straight games, Columbus has now converted just one of eight opportunities over their last five games. Special teams could be a determining factor in this one.

- **DANNY'S BACK**

Justin Danforth was activated Monday morning from Injured Reserve. In 25 games this season, Danforth had three goals and five assists for a total of eight points. The 31-year-old forward missed 18 games after suffering a lower-body injury December 10th against Philadelphia. His return to the lineup gives the Blue Jackets bottom-six veteran who can both score and play a two-way game. Indications are that Danforth's return will come as a winger, opposite of Pyyhtia and centered by Kuraly.

- **LINEUPS & PROJECTIONS**

With Danforth back in, Kevin Labanc is a healthy scratch. Elvis Merzlikins gets the start, backed up by Daniil Tarasov. Aside from that, there appear to be no changes to the lineup from recent games.

The Athletic / Weekend NHL rankings: Connor McDavid's cross-check, an imminent trade and a goalie goal

By Sean McIndoe – January 21, 2025

Yeah, you can't do that.

Connor McDavid did indeed get a hearing with the Department of Player Safety, so his second career suspension is coming. Tyler Myers will get one too, as Saturday's game between the Canucks and Oilers fell apart in the final moments.

And yes, some of that is on the referees, as Daniel points out. It also comes just days after McDavid got away with a potentially suspendable chicken wing that injured Marcus Johansson. If you're the sort of fan who loves to boo the league's best player while calling him dirty and/or a baby, it's been a good week for you.

But honestly, and this is the old-school fan in me talking, having a reputation for being selectively careless with his stick and/or elbow probably isn't the worst thing in the world for a guy like McDavid, even if it means the occasional league-mandated vacation. Thankfully, we're well past the days when stars were expected to feed a cross-check to an opponent a few times a year just as a cost of doing business in a league that couldn't keep up with them. But the occasional "accidental" foul might buy McDavid just a little bit of room out there, and that's still part of the equation in the NHL whether we like it or not.

I haven't forgotten about this week's bonus five, which we'll get to down below. For now, on to this week's rankings ...

Road to the Cup

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

Neither team is all that close to top-five contention these days, but we have to offer up a glove tap to the Bruins and Senators for giving us the game of the weekend.

I'm with Brady Tkachuk: That one had a whiff of the playoffs. The question is whether there will be room in the postseason for both of these teams. For now, we can look forward to the rematch in Boston on Thursday.

5. Dallas Stars (29-8-6, +31 true goals differential*) — The Panthers have earned a break, meaning they drop off the list for the first time all season and free up a spot. And there are more than a few teams with a decent case to make. By points percentage, the East's next team is the Maple Leafs, who spent their Saturday teaching us all a valuable lesson about not pointing at the scoreboard too early. The Devils and Hurricanes are nearby, as are the Wild despite a recent slump. And if you know this section is about projecting the eventual Cup winner and would prefer a team with a track record of playoff success, the Avs and Lightning are worth a look.

But as you can see, I went with maybe the easiest pick. The Stars got back in the win column last night against the Red Wings, opening the door for me to reinstate my preseason Cup pick to their rightful space in the top five. I'm not going so far as to call them the favorites, unlike 25.9 percent of my colleagues, but they're certainly in the mix.

They've got Carolina and Vegas up next, which means a chance to make me look smart. We know how that usually goes, so apologies in advance to Stars fans.

4. Winnipeg Jets (31-13-3, +52) — The Jets are one of the teams at the midseason mark that can skip over the whole playoff race handwringing thing and head straight to trade deadline speculation. Murat has you covered with his vision for a perfect Jets deadline.

3. Edmonton Oilers (29-14-3, +25) — By the way, the Oilers get a rematch with the Canucks on Thursday night. Each team has one game in between, so try not to act shocked when the McDavid and Myers suspensions both come in at two games.

2. Washington Capitals (31-10-5, +52) — Nice work by Shayna here on how the Capitals managed to pull off a feat that so many NHL teams aim for but very few can actually manage: retooling on the fly instead of rebuilding. Meanwhile, four straight wins featuring just two goals allowed puts a stop to any of those wobble wonders we had in recent weeks.

1. Vegas Golden Knights (29-14-3, +29) — Well, well, look who's moved into top spot among Cup contenders in our staff predictions. Welcome to the bandwagon, everyone. Now please stop losing games to teams like the Predators and Hawks, guys, because you're making us look bad.

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

Not ranked: Vancouver Canucks — You can't say this team doesn't bring the intrigue every week. In addition to being part of that messy finish against the Oilers, it sure sounds like we were very close to a J.T. Miller trade over the weekend. Elliotte Friedman's report on Hockey Night in Canada had the Canucks close to holding Miller out of the Saturday game due to a trade that was nearing the finish line, with Friedman adding he believed the Rangers were the other team involved.

That deal is now off, or at least on hold, but you don't have to read very far between the lines to conclude that the end of this story may be imminent. It all comes in the wake of a week that saw the Miller story continue to overshadow everything, with fans and media breaking down footage of his effort on various plays and speculating over what the final straw might look like.

Meanwhile, there's still the Elias Pettersson half of the equation. You'd assume a Miller trade might mean Pettersson stays, but that's hardly guaranteed given some of the team's comments earlier in the year about listening to offers on both guys. If they do decide to move him, it will be fascinating to see how some of the teams that desperately need high-end talent to kickstart their flailing rebuilds react. Personally, I'm a hard co-sign on this Laz piece on the Hawks going all in to land him, and you could make a similar case for teams like the Red Wings and Sabres; I can see this playing out like the 2023 Matthew Tkachuk sweepstakes, where too many teams tried to lowball while the one that stepped up with a big offer reaped the rewards. Then again, if Miller is out of the picture and the Canucks are still shopping their best remaining forward, that has to make you wonder about just what's going on behind the scenes in Vancouver.

Either way, it's going to be fascinating to watch it play out, maybe even over the next few days.

The bottom five

The five teams headed toward dead last and the best lottery odds for James Hagens Matthew Schaefer.

Jeremy had a cool story about Jake Neighbours designing an ASL-inspired Blues cap.

5. Seattle Kraken (20-24-3, -12) — Credit where it's due, beating the Kings in regulation is impressive. Next up is this afternoon's trip into Buffalo, a team the Kraken blew out two weeks ago, and the quest for the first two-game win streak of the new year.

4. Buffalo Sabres (17-23-5, -16) — The Sabres were part of some history over the weekend, which we'll get to down below. But it wasn't even their most impressive historical oddity of the week.

You're reading that correctly. The Sabres scored a goal in a full period in which they had zero shots. While that doesn't seem like it should be possible, it can happen thanks to the automatic goal awarded for certain fouls with the net empty. That's what happened to Ryan McLeod, who gets credit for scoring here even though the puck didn't go near the net.

The 2024-25 Sabres: finding new ways to amuse and entertain the rest of us.

3. Nashville Predators (16-22-7, -25) — Things you don't want to see written about your team at the halfway mark: "Could the Predators be the worst team in the NHL?" Even worse, the answer basically boils down to no, they're not, and that's just going to screw up their draft position.

2. San Jose Sharks (14-28-6, -43) — I can't believe Scott and Harman let this end in a tie instead of settling it in a shootout.

1. Chicago Blackhawks (15-28-3, -38) — We are now into Day 6 of our ongoing international crisis over one person having an opinion about Lane Hutson. A reminder, if you encounter any Montreal Canadiens fans this week, do not attempt to engage or even acknowledge them. Simply turn and run, as fast as you can, preferably knocking over small children and the elderly as you go. It's your only hope.

But I actually thought the bigger news out of Corey's midseason ranking of the league's under-23 players was Connor Bedard in third spot, behind Macklin Celebrini and Tim Stütze. Remember, the rankings are based on expectations for the players' NHL careers. Have we really gone from Bedard being the next Crosby or McDavid-level generational player to only having the third-best long-term outlook among his own contemporaries? That seems harsh, but Corey knows his stuff, and I didn't see a whole ton of Hawks fans looking to push back. Where are we at with Bedard, Chicago — still the franchise savior, or at risk of being merely great instead of transformative?

Not ranked: Pittsburgh Penguins — So how about those Penguins goalies, am I right?

In what could fairly be described as an up-and-down season in Pittsburgh, the week saw a pair of goalies demonstrating either end of the spectrum. Let's start with the fun one. Alex Nedeljkovic, come on down.

Goalie goals are the best. This one deserves that bonus five that I promised you up above...

Bonus five: Cool things about the Nedeljkovic goalie goal

5. The crowd — The game was in Buffalo, but there were plenty of Penguins fans in the building. That produced a great combo; those road team interlopers mingled with bitter home fans in just the right ratio to get a fantastic crowd reaction. Is that the loudest that building has been all year? It might be.

4. The bump — Dude took a hit to get the shot off, with former Penguin Sam Lafferty dropping a shoulder into him. Sorry, Sam, you've got to be a little quicker to contact if you want to neutralize a true scoring threat.

3. The captain — If you haven't seen the shot of a delighted Sidney Crosby realizing the puck is going in, [Click here immediately](#). Find somebody who looks at you, etc.

2. The celebration — Absolute A+ here. In fact, it's quite possibly the best goalie goal celebration ever, although I might need more time to come to a final determination there. Nedeljkovic goes full Lambeau Leap into the Penguins' bench, getting completely swallowed up by overjoyed teammates in an image so perfect it needs the Art But Make it Sports treatment. It hasn't been a great year for this team, so it's genuinely cool to see them get to really enjoy a moment.

1. The history — Every goalie goal makes its own kind of history, but those of us who are nerds about this sort of thing know that nobody had ever scored one in a game in which they also had an assist. Until now, as Nedeljkovic had already banked a second-period assist. His two points by a goalie in the same

game isn't the record — Jeff Reese still holds that with three — but Nedeljkovic becomes the first player in the history of the position to put a "1" in both scoring columns.

Tragically, he didn't manage to find a sparring partner in the final three minutes to round out the first-ever goalie Gordie Howe hat trick, presumably because he's saving something for the encore.

In conclusion: Goalie goals are the best, this was one of the better ones we've ever seen, it was one of the best moments of the season so far, and we are all better people for having witnessed it.

Penguins fans can feel free to stop reading now.

Yeah, we have to get to the other piece of goalie news from the week: The stunning decision to waive and demote Tristan Jarry, which would certainly seem to spell the end of the two-time All-Star in Pittsburgh. That would be stunning as in "I can't believe they really did it," rather than "this doesn't make any sense," but that's the point — teams don't like to admit their mistakes, especially this quickly. But the 2023 extension that marked one of the first major bits of business from incoming GM Kyle Dubas has aged poorly, to put it mildly.

It was supposed to be a stabilizing move but backfired in ways that weren't hard to see coming. (Here's Laz dropping a "D" grade on the move hours after it was announced, in case you think the criticism is only coming in hindsight.) Now the Penguins are stuck with a \$5.3 million minor league goalie who was given a chance to prove he belongs and couldn't live up to his deal.

OK, so now what? The Penguins continue to be an impossible team to nail down, since every time you're ready to bury them they run off three wins in a row and you remember they have one of the greatest players of all time dragging them toward one last playoff run, but then they get close to a spot and immediately collapse. After Saturday's loss to the Caps, they're five points out of a wild card, but with six teams to pass who all have games in hand. They're still right in the Eastern mix because everyone apart from Buffalo is, but is this really the team you think is going to get red-hot in the second half to pull away?

They could be. Given my near-total lack of success in predicting this team for the last few years, I'm staying far away from any flag-planting pronouncements here. I still think they could finish closer to dead last than the postseason. But if you told me they go full 1992-93 Penguins on us down the stretch, probably with Jarry leading the way, I'm not sure I'd argue.

All I know is Joel Blomqvist is going to do something cool soon, because whoever's scripting this mess of a season has apparently decided to make the goalies the stars.

[Sportsnet.ca / Slumping Devils might need to shake up roster](#)

By Ryan Dixon – January 21, 2025

On a macro level, the New Jersey Devils have been on a roller-coaster ride the past few years. Zoom in and you'll see that up-and-down trajectory certainly applies to this season's Devils squad, too. And, with Jersey in the midst of another swoon, you wonder if something big might be coming down the pipes for a team that — on its best day — can hang with anybody in the Eastern Conference.

The Devils dropped two home games this weekend, scoring a total of two goals in losses to the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday and Ottawa Senators 24 hours later. New Jersey — still comfortably in the playoffs — has now lost four in a row (including extra-time defeats) for the third time this year and is 2-6-3 with just one 60-minute win since Christmas.

That's probably why first-year Devils bench boss Sheldon Keefe dusted off a frustrated-coach classic after Sunday's loss to the Sens, saying Jersey needed its best players to be its best players.

Can we respectfully suggest the Devils also consider some new players?

There's obviously a strong core in Jersey and the team has not been shy about making bold moves ahead of the trade deadline the past couple years. In the winter of 2023, GM Tom Fitzgerald took a big swing to get Timo Meier from San Jose. Last year, he got right down to the wire with the Calgary Flames in an attempt to land Jacob Markstrom. Things fell apart on the one-yard line, though, and the trade wasn't consummated until the summer.

Of course, goaltending — to say nothing of some horrible injury luck — has had a hand in the yo-yoing nature of this franchise. In 2021-22, the Devils finished with 63 points, fewer than all but four teams. The following season, New Jersey nearly doubled that total with 112 points to finish third overall and win a playoff round. Last year — when the goaltending issues and injury woes really hit — the Devils fell way off the pace and finished well outside the playoffs.

Markstrom has stabilized the crease and, Keefe's concerns about his best players notwithstanding, this is a roster with a lot of talent. It's also an organization with some intriguing prospects, especially ones trying to break through an already crowded blueline crew.

Drafting Simon Nemec second overall in 2022 was the silver lining for all the losing Jersey did that year. But nearly three years later, Nemec has yet to get full-time footing in the NHL and his story is starting to seem similar to that of David Jiricek, a fellow defenceman who was drafted four slots after Nemec in '22. Jiricek's strained relations with the club that selected him, the Columbus Blue Jackets, came to a head when he was dealt to the Minnesota Wild earlier this season. Though they play different styles, both Jiricek and Nemec are highly coveted right-shot D-men. In fact, it feels like every team in the league is looking for blue-liners who line up starboard side; with the exception of New Jersey.

The Devils already have UFA whales Dougie Hamilton and Brett Pesce in their lineup. They also made a nice on-the-margins move to land large righty Jonathan Kovacevic in the summer. At the start of this season, Seamus Casey — a 2022 second-rounder — showed some of his potential at the NHL level with three goals in eight games. He continued to produce well in the AHL before getting hurt in December. He, of course, is also a righty.

All of this is to say — whether you're talking about Nemec or Casey — the Devils have a specific piece just about every team in the league desires and Fitzgerald should be very willing to weaponize one of those assets in the name of improving this group.

Who knows; the right swap could make the next upswing one the Devils can ride deep into a wide-open Eastern Conference.

Weekend Takeaways

- Three years before Nemecek was taken at No. 2, Kaapo Kakko was 2019's second-overall pick after the Devils snagged Jack Hughes first. Now that his long-rumoured trade from the Rangers has finally happened, the big Finn is finding himself in Seattle. During the Kraken's 4-2 win over L.A. on Saturday, Kakko had just the second three-point night of his 344-game career. Kakko is now on five-game point streak, racking up three goals and eight points in that stretch. Since going pointless in his first two games with the Kraken, the 23-year-old winger has produced 13 points in a dozen games. The deal — which saw pending-UFA defenceman Will Borgen move to the Rangers — always made sense from the Seattle side and seems to be working out beautifully for Kakko and the Kraken right now.
- Speaking of upside plays, how good is that Dylan Holloway summertime offer sheet looking for the Blues right now? Holloway, who's playing left wing on the second line with Brayden Schenn and Jordan Kyrou, picked up a helper in St. Louis' 4-2 setback in Utah on Saturday night for his third point in two games. The 2020 first-rounder, who was inked away from Edmonton along with defenceman Philip Broberg, has been on a two-month tear as he thrives in a bigger role with the Blues. Holloway has 27 points in his past 25 games, putting him on nearly a 90-point pace for a sample size that's creeping up to one-third of a season. That's incredible stuff for a 23-year-old taking his game to a whole other level.

The Week Ahead

- The puck drops early for Martin Luther King Jr. Day in the U.S. on Monday. The Sharks and Bruins have a 1 p.m. ET affair in Boston, while the Wild and Avs battle in Denver at 3 p.m. ET and the Sabres visit Kakko and the Kraken (it's just fun to say) for a 4 p.m. ET tilt in Seattle.
- We're sure to get the second suspension of Connor McDavid's career early this week, so he won't be on the ice to face Alex Ovechkin when the Capitals visit Edmonton on Tuesday.
- The Rangers have three home games and no back-to-backs this week, so there's no guarantee No. 2 stopper Jonathan Quick will get a start. The veteran American does turn 39 on Tuesday, though, and if he gets in the crease this week he can become the 15th goalie in NHL history to win 400 career games.
- The Preds and Sharks have a home-and-home this week, facing off Tuesday in Tennessee and Thursday in San Jose. That means Sharks goalie Yaroslav Askarov should get at least one crack at the Preds team that drafted him 11th overall in 2020.

Red and White Power Rankings

1. Edmonton Oilers (29-14-3) When the Oilers woke up on New Year's Eve, they were third in the Pacific Division with eight points between them and the first-place Vegas Golden Knights. Today, Edmonton has pulled even with Vegas — the teams have the exact same record — atop the Pacific and the Oilers are about to begin a six-game homestand.

2. Winnipeg Jets (31-13-3) The Jets have played more home games (26) than everybody in the league except the Maple Leafs (27). Winnipeg is now about to embark on a chunk of schedule that sees it play 15 of its next 23 contests away from Manitoba.

3. Toronto Maple Leafs (29-16-2) Mitch Marner picked up two more points — a pair of assists — on Saturday as the Leafs stormed back from a 3-0 deficit to blow the Habs out 7-3 in Montreal. Marner isn't just Toronto's leading scorer; his 64 points are 16 more than his closest teammate, William Nylander (48).

4. Calgary Flames (22-16-7) Calgary earned a 3-1 road win on Saturday against a Jets team the Flames just might see in the first round of the playoffs.

5. Ottawa Senators (24-18-4) It was a massive four-point weekend for the Sens and, though still listed as day-to-day, goalie Linus Ullmark is with the team on the road, where Ottawa has two more huge contests coming up against the Rangers on Tuesday and Bruins on Thursday.

6. Montreal Canadiens (23-19-4) Full marks to the Canadiens for rebounding with a scintillating 5-4 extra-time victory over the Rangers on Sunday night, 24 hours after they gagged up a 3-0 lead to the Leafs on home ice.

7. Vancouver Canucks (20-15-10) Can we officially say we're on J.T. Miller trade watch?