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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets sweep a back-to-back on stunning OT comeback victory in Utah

By Brian Hedger- February 1, 2025

The Blue Jackets are working a lot of overtime and getting quite a payoff from it.

Forcing a third straight game beyond the third period late Friday in their inaugural visit to Salt Lake City, Utah, the Jackets edged the Utah Hockey Club, 3-2, on by a goal Zach Werenski 1:01 into OT.

After swiping the puck from Utah center Barrett Hayton with a slick poke check, Werenski carried up the ice for a 2-on-0 rush with Cole Sillinger against UHC goalie Karel Vejmelka. After sliding a cross-ice pass to Sillinger, Werenski stayed ready for a return feed and tapped the puck into the net when it arrived for his 17th goal of the season to end it with Vejmelka caught out of position.

"We just stuck with it," Werenski told FanDuel Sports Network after the game. "It wasn't our best game by any means. I felt like we were a little bit tired, but we were just resilient, played our game, kept going and found a way to win. So, it was awesome."

The OT win was the third straight victory in that fashion for the Blue Jackets (26-19-7), who also downed the Vegas Golden Knights in OT on Thursday night at T-Mobile Arena and the Los Angeles Kings last Saturday in Columbus. Winning in Utah also pushed the Blue Jackets (59 points) past the Tampa Bay Lightning (57 points) into the first wild card of the Eastern Conference.

Kirill Marchenko and Kent Johnson scored in regulation for the Jackets, who trailed 2-0 early in the third period before they tallied 5:17 apart to tie it. Goalie Daniil Tarasov earned the win with 34 saves on 36 shots to continue a string of strong goaltending performances for the Blue Jackets through the month of January.

Vejmelka made 20 saves on 23 shots for Utah (21-21-9), which got its goals from Nick Schmaltz on a power play early in the second period and Alexander Kerfoot early in the third. Next for the Blue Jackets is a daunting road matchup Sunday at the Dallas Stars, who are second in the Central Division, followed by the conclusion of the trip Tuesday in Buffalo.

"We had a slow start," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said during his postgame interview broadcast by FanDuel Sports Network. "They're a really good first period team and we knew that, but we maybe didn't have our legs quite early enough. ... They were winning the races, the puck battles, the 'compete' game and certainly in the third period, we brought our 'compete' up."

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets deliver in OT again: 5 takeaways from a thriller in Vegas

By Brian Hedger- February 1, 2025

Another night, another rabbit pulled out of a hat by the Blue Jackets in a 2-1 overtime victory late Thursday against the Vegas Golden Knights.

Despite another game mostly spent defending, the Blue Jackets pushed a second straight game to overtime before notching their second straight OT win on a goal by Cole Sillinger 52 seconds into 3-on-3 play at T-Mobile Arena.

A goal late in the first period by Adam Fantilli plus stellar work from goalie Elvis Merzlikins and his defensive-minded teammates were all the Jackets needed to force the game beyond regulation. From there, Sillinger cleaned up a juicy rebound in the low slot for the winning goal in his first game back after missing the previous three with an upper-body injury.

They lose a lot of faceoffs, their possession has nosedived without Sean Monahan and the Jackets spend far too much time defending inside their own blue line, which makes them seem like a pushover from a statistical analysis standpoint. Not so fast.

They're also highly skilled, don't need a ton of scoring chances to score key goals, and they've now got a hot goalie. The Jackets have also started blocking shots at a high rate, taking away shooting lanes, and their defensive stickwork has improved quite a bit. Add it all up and it leads to an effective counterpunching team that either prefers fighting off the ropes or has become good at it by necessity.

Either way, they're finding ways to win and keep pace in the tight Eastern Conference playoff race. The Jackets' win in Las Vegas moved them back into the East's second wild-card spot, one point ahead of the Boston Bruins.

'Boring' hockey worked for Columbus Blue Jackets in Las Vegas

The Blue Jackets are capable of scoring goals in bunches, but that wasn't the plan designed by coach Dean Evason and his assistants. Their plan was a three-word directive.

Muck it up.

The game might've been played just off the flashy Vegas Strip, but there was nothing shiny about the Blue Jackets' playing style. They didn't succumb to a wide open, "fast break" brand of hockey that could've favored the high-powered Golden Knights, instead choosing to annoy Vegas players with well-timed poke checks and blocked shots that led to fruitless Vegas possessions.

"One of our keys was to try to be a frustrating group tonight," Evason said during his postgame press conference shown by FanDuel Sports Network. "That meant not opening things up and that meant not giving them any life and then making it a boring game. So, if that makes it look like it's a little bit of a 'slow start,' fine. We're OK with that. If we can stick around in games like this, in buildings like this and teams like this, then it says some good things."

Sillinger missed the three previous games with an upper-body injury, so his return was a welcome sight for the Blue Jackets. The fourth-year center slotted back into the middle of a second line with James van Riemsdyk and Kent Johnson as wingers, but they struggled most of the game chasing the puck around without establishing much significant possession time.

That was mainly due to Sillinger winning just 4 of 17 faceoffs (24%), but he also made several unheralded plays in the third period to force OT before winning it by cleaning up Zach Werenski's rebound after Johnson was stopped on a breakaway.

In all, Sillinger skated 15:54 on 21 shifts and finished with the winning goal on his only one of three attempts that hit the net. He also was assessed two giveaways and blocked two shots. Aside from his goal, Sillinger's biggest contribution was his presence for a lineup that returned to a standard setup with six defensemen and 12 forwards.

Having four full forward lines allowed Evason and assistant Mike Haviland to "roll" through their lines rather than picking spots to double shift select forwards on lines other than their own with seven defensemen and only 11 forwards. Ice times for all four lines were fairly even, which could've stored energy in the Blue Jackets' legs for their game Friday in Salt Lake City, Utah to finish a challenging road back-to-back set.

Merzlikins has become a lot more consistent and confident for the Blue Jackets between the pipes, which showed again with 25 saves on 26 shots against Vegas.

Wearing his Elvis Presley themed mask, the Jackets' enigmatic goalie recovered impressively from allowing an early goal by Tomas Hertl that gave the Golden Knights a 1-0 lead. Merzlikins, as he usually does against Vegas, shined in the shadows of the Vegas Strip.

He improved to 3-1-0 with a 2.01 goals-against average, .930 save percentage and one shutout in four career appearances against the Golden Knights. The shutout was the first of his NHL career and happened during Merzlikins' rookie year in 2019-20.

Daniil Tarasov is expected to start Friday in Utah, drawing another challenging road matchup to close out a back-to-back set.

Adam Fantilli was selected third overall in 2023 for the specific role of centering the Blue Jackets' top line for a long time. It took some time plus Sean Monahan's long-term wrist injury for that opportunity to arise, but Fantilli is meeting the challenge.

His tying goal late in the first period against the Golden Knights wasn't pretty, capping a scramble in the Vegas crease, but it was his 15th goal of the season and seventh in 11 games since taking over mid-game for Monahan on Jan. 7 in Pittsburgh. Fantilli, who played his 100th NHL game, has contributed 7-5-12 with a +9 plus/minus rating as Monahan's replacement on a line featuring Dmitry Voronkov and Kirill Marchenko as wingers.

The second-year center has 15-14-29 in 51 games for the season, which is impressive considering an extended scoring slump starting out. Fantilli also won 9 of 17 draws against Vegas for a 53% success rate that included 7 of 13 (54%) against Golden Knights top center Jack Eichel.

Columbus Dispatch / Zach Werenski's OT heroics cap Columbus Blue Jackets' mammoth win in Utah: 4 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- February 2, 2025

The Blue Jackets keep rolling along as the NHL's most inspiring team.

Despite a sea of doubters anticipating their freefall, the Blue Jackets (26-19-7) are climbing the Eastern Conference standings while defying recent statistical trends that might become problematic soon. Once again, though, the Jackets pulled off another magic trick Friday night with a 3-2 overtime win in their inaugural visit to the Delta Center in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Outshot 36-23 and outplayed through two periods by the Utah Hockey Club (UHC), the Blue Jackets roared back from a 2-0 deficit with some help from fortunate bounces on goals 5:17 apart by Kirill Marchenko and Kent Johnson, pushing a third straight game to overtime for Zach Werenski's winner.

The Blue Jackets now occupy the first wild card in the Eastern Conference by two points over the Tampa Bay Lightning after finally notching their first victory in eight tries in the second game of a back-to-back set.

Here are four takeaways:

Zach Werenski continues to lift Columbus Blue Jackets with OT victory

The Blue Jackets have scored a lot of goals this season while displaying elite skills, so Werenski's winner joins a lengthy list of memorable tallies.

Werenski's instincts started it, prompting him to tap the puck off a nearby wall past Utah's Barrett Hayton after noticing it dribble away from the forward in the Blue Jackets zone. From there, Werenski collected it and used a stunning burst of speed to create separation for a 2-on-0 rush at the Utah net with Sillinger.

Each sent two passes to each other to get Vejmelka out of position before Werenski finished with a tap-in goal while gliding past the far post. It was executed to perfection and left the UHC goalie very little chance to stop it. It was the Jackets' second straight game decided by a poke check in OT, and again it involved Werenski and Sillinger. Sillinger scored Thursday in Las Vegas after Johnson's breakaway.

"(Johnson) took advantage last night," Werenski said. "I'm not sure who had the puck tonight, but he fumbles it for a second. I feel like if you're close enough, you can strike. Once you beat your guy in overtime, it seems like you have a lot of ice, so try to get skating. (Sillinger) beat his guy up the ice. Pretty fun play there."

Werenski finished with two points on a goal and assist, tying Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche for second in scoring among NHL defensemen at 57 points. Makar leads all defensemen with 19 goals, two ahead of Werenski, while Quinn Hughes of the Vancouver Canucks holds the NHL's scoring lead among blueliners with 14-45-59 in 47 games.

Columbus Blue Jackets are vastly improved in 3-on-3 overtime

After starting the season 1-6 in games that ended prior to a shootout in 3-on-3 overtimes, the Blue Jackets have won three straight games with OT goals and haven't lost that way since Dec. 21 in Philadelphia.

Since that OT loss to the Flyers, the Blue Jackets are 6-1 in games decided after the third period with three shootout wins and the past three victories in overtime. Three shootout wins on Dec. 31 against the Carolina Hurricanes, Jan. 7 in Pittsburgh and Jan. 14 against the Flyers at Nationwide Arena sparked the turnaround.

Separating their shootout and OT winning streaks was a 1-0 shootout loss to the New York Rangers on Jan. 18 at Madison Square Garden – when it took Igor Shesterkin to top Blue Jackets goalie Daniil Tarasov in his first NHL shutout performance.

Columbus Blue Jackets add gritty goals to scoring repertoire

At this point of the season, teams are buttoning up their defensive zones for the best chance to prevent goals and win games. Even teams that are outside of a playoff spot, like Utah, can make life difficult for goal-scorers. It's not pretty, but it's how good teams win games when it's hard to generate offense.

The Blue Jackets' first back-to-back sweep of the season wouldn't have happened without ugly goals that forced overtimes Thursday against the Vegas Golden Knights and Friday in Utah.

In Vegas, Adam Fantilli's persistence tied it 1-1 late in the first period during a scramble in the Golden Knights' crease. In Utah, Marchenko and Johnson each scored goals that erased a 2-0 deficit in the third with simple shots and luck – including Johnson's tying goal bouncing off goalie Karel Vejmelka and UHC defenseman Nick DiSimone before trickling into the net.

"We really weren't making any plays tonight," Werenski said. "(Marchenko) chips one in, and then (Johnson) just fires from a bad angle and got a lucky bounce. Sometimes you need those bounces. Tonight, we got them."

Columbus Blue Jackets' James van Riemsdyk helped create tying goal after returning from ugly facial laceration

James van Riemsdyk missed most of the first two periods after leaving 8:10 into the game. He caught a stick blade in the mouth during a puck battle with former Blue Jackets defenseman Ian Cole and immediately left the ice bleeding.

Van Riemsdyk missed the rest of the first period and the entire second before returning to the Blue Jackets' bench wearing a protective plastic jaw shield. His lip was stitched and swollen, so the veteran power forward couldn't talk to his teammates on the bench.

Playing through facial injuries is nothing new for NHL players, but it's always impressive when one of them endures an experience like Van Riemsdyk's Friday night. He played the third period, got the primary assist on Johnson's tying goal and screened Vejmelka while tying up DiSimone prior to the Jackets' fortunate bounce off the Utah defender's left skate.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets banged up: Marchenko, Fabbro injured in loss to Dallas Stars

By Brian Hedger- February 3, 2025

The Blue Jackets have one game remaining on what's been a productive and costly road trip.

Despite regaining a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference by sweeping a back-to-back against the Vegas Golden Knights and Utah Hockey Club, they're nursing multiple new injuries after a brutal game Sunday at American Airlines Center in Dallas, a 5-3 loss to the Stars that hurt figuratively and literally.

Kirill Marchenko and Dante Fabbro, the Blue Jackets' leading scorer and Zach Werenski's partner on the top defensive pairing, respectively, left with upper-body injuries and didn't return. After the game, Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason didn't provide an update on Marchenko and said Fabbro could miss "some time."

The Blue Jackets (26-20-7) are already missing key forwards Sean Monahan (wrist), Boone Jenner (shoulder) and Yegor Chinakhov (back) along with defenseman Erik Gudbranson (shoulder).

Fabbro will likely miss the final game of the trip Tuesday in Buffalo, while Marchenko's absence length is yet to be determined. Werenski, meanwhile, left late in the second period Sunday night for medical reasons before returning for the third. Rookie forward Mikael Pyhtia was struck in the face by a puck in the second and played the remainder of the game after getting medical attention on the bench.

Marchenko was struck by a puck in the second period, too, but was seated on the bench. It's the second straight season the Blue Jackets have lost a player that way. Last year in Calgary, former defenseman Adam Boqvist was struck in the mouth by teammate Cole Sillinger's clearing attempt, which knocked him backward off the bench as he spoke with Werenski.

Boqvist had his upper rack of teeth on the right side of his mouth knocked out from the force.

Marchenko's damage is unknown at this point, but it caused him to miss the third period. Going into the game, the Jackets forward James van Riemsdyk was already wearing a protective shield on his helmet due to mouth trauma sustained Friday in a 3-2 overtime win in Utah.

During the first period of that game, Van Riemsdyk was struck in the mouth by former Blue Jackets defenseman Ian Cole's stick blade during a battle in the offensive zone.

He missed the rest of that period, the entire second and returned for the third with a plastic jaw guard. Van Riemsdyk told traveling reporters Sunday that he lost four teeth, needed 30 stitches and had one of the teeth accidentally stitched into his lip. He wasn't the only player wearing facial protection in Dallas, though. The Stars also had two players, forward Mason Marchment and defenseman Mathew Dumba, wearing similar devices after returning from facial injuries.

The Stars also lost one of their young centers, Maverick Bourque, to a puck in the face in the third period. Despite losing in Dallas, the Blue Jackets remain in a playoff spot by occupying the second of two wild cards in the Eastern Conference with 59 points.

Columbus Dispatch / Dallas Stars' tipping point ends Columbus Blue Jackets' three-game win streak

By Brian Hedger- February 3, 2025

Evgenii Dadonov's two goals in the third period lifted the Dallas Stars to a 5-3 victory over the Blue Jackets on Sunday night at American Airlines Center.

After breaking a 3-3 tie with a controversial goal scored at 11:22 of the third with a high stick that was upheld after a video review that appeared to show an illegal point of contact, Dadonov gave the Stars a two-goal cushion with a backhand wraparound tally at 15:47 of the third to seal it.

The loss ended a three-game winning streak for the Blue Jackets (26-20-7), who lost defenseman Dante Fabbro and top scorer Kirill Marchenko to upper-body injuries and had star defenseman Zach Werenski miss time in the second period for a medical assessment.

Cole Sillinger, Adam Fantilli and Ivan Provorov scored the goals for the Blue Jackets, who started Elvis Merzlikins (34 saves) in net. Mason Marchment, Logan Stankoven, and Wyatt Johnson also scored goals for the Stars (34-17-1), who played backup goalie Casey DeSmith (27 saves).

Both teams scored twice in the second period, sending the game to the third tied 3-3, but the Blue Jackets got the worst of it with a slew of injuries. After losing Fabbro from their top defense pairing with an upper-body injury late in the first, the Jackets lost Werenski and Marchenko in the second.

Werenski returned at the start of the third, but Marchenko didn't play again after taking a puck to the face while seated on the bench late in the second. Fabbro, who was likely injured with an unpenalized elbow to the face by Marchment late in the first, didn't return to start the second and stayed out.

Mikael Pyyhtia, part of the Blue Jackets' fourth line, also took a puck to the face in the second that required stitches but didn't force him out of the game. As for scoring prior to Dadonov's goals in the third, Fantilli and Provorov tallied for the Blue Jackets in the second while Stankoven and Johnston countered for the Stars, sending it to the third tied 3-3.

In the first, Sillinger and Marchment traded goals to make it 1-1 starting the second.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets rally with 2 third-period goals before beating Utah in overtime

By Aaron Portzline- February 1, 2025

SALT LAKE CITY — Nothing was working for the Columbus Blue Jackets on Friday. Not their forecheck, not their offensive creativity, and certainly not their legs after playing — and going to overtime — only 24 hours earlier in a momentous win in Las Vegas.

Through two periods in the franchise's first-ever game in Utah, the Blue Jackets were going down without much of a fight against the Utah Hockey Club.

"They scored early in the third to make it 2-0," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "And there's one of two ways you can go with that. We chose to keep digging, keep playing."

Did they ever.

The Blue Jackets scored two ugly goals in the span of 5:17 midway through the third period, rallying from a two-goal deficit to force overtime. Werenski then finished a two-on-none rush with Cole Sillinger only 1:01 into overtime to end a 3-2 victory before a crowd of 11,131 spectators in Delta Center.

Nights like this only strengthen the feeling that this is shaping up to be a magical season for the Blue Jackets and Werenski.

They've improved to 5-2-1 in their last eight road games and have been on a 14-4-2 run since Dec. 17. Friday's win pushed them into the first wild-card position in the Eastern Conference, and they sit just 5 points behind the New Jersey Devils for third place in the Metropolitan Division.

The Jackets also conquered one of their biggest challenges this season: They won a second game in a back-to-back after losing their first seven such games this season. If you go back to last season, they had lost 12 straight games in the second half of back-to-backs.

"They're hard, right? Back-to-backs are tough, especially when the other team is rested," Werenski said. "Everybody in the league goes through them, though, and it's one of those things, if we're going to get to where we want to go, these are the games we have to win.

"You can't win them all, but you can't be 0-7, right? This is a huge step forward for our group."

Kirill Marchenko and Kent Johnson scored the third-period goals to tie it up, and goaltender Daniil Tarasov had 31 saves.

There were gutsy performances all over the ice, but none more impressive than by Blue Jackets winger James van Riemsdyk, who took a nasty high-stick to the face in the first period and skated slowly off the ice, a trail of blood leading to the bench until teammate Dmitri Voronkov met him in the neutral zone with a towel.

Van Riemsdyk missed the rest of the first period and all of the second to get repairs in the dressing room, but he was back on the bench for the third period, wearing a bubble guard around his face to protect the area from contact or further damage.

"He's a hockey player, right?" coach Dean Evason said.

Through two periods, Utah had an 18-2 edge in five-on-five scoring chances and an 8-0 edge in high-danger scoring chances. The Jackets had no oomph, no spark, no energy.

But here's what's changed for Columbus from previous seasons and even earlier this season: When the Jackets have bad periods, it's not 3-0 or 4-0. Friday was a great example. It was scoreless after a less-than-enthusiastic first period and only 1-0 after a dull second.

Utah scored only 29 seconds into the third period to make it 2-0, and you wondered if that might be enough.

But at 6:25 of the third period, Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli fired a puck on net from high in the zone, and it was deflected into traffic. The puck appeared to glance off Marchenko's stick — which is why he was credited for the goal — but it went into the net off Michael Kesselring's stick to make it 2-1.

The score was tied on a similarly greasy goal at 11:42.

Van Riemsdyk, bubble and all, went hard to the net just as Johnson was firing from the left circle, an odd-angle shot that Utah goaltender Karel Vejmelka couldn't quite glove. The rebound glided into the net off the skate of defenseman Nick DeSimone as he was backed into the cage by van Riemsdyk.

These goals might not have been aesthetically pleasing, but they're exactly how the Blue Jackets needed to score on a night when nothing seemed to click.

"Those are the goals we needed to score because it wasn't coming naturally," Evason said. "It wasn't coming in tic-tac-toes. They play a stingy game through the neutral zone. It's tough to get in on the forecheck.

"What was exciting is we go to the net, we catch a couple of breaks — a bounce, two bounces — and then that last goal was a pretty goal."

That "last goal" was Werenski's in overtime.

Werenski made a strong play to strip Barrett Hayton of the puck, swatting it off the wall and gathering it behind Hayton before taking off down the ice. Sillinger, on the opposite side of the ice, blew past his man at three-on-three and joined Werenski all alone behind Utah's skaters.

Between the blue line and Vejmelka, Werenski and Sillinger passed it back and forth four times. The fourth pass had Werenski reaching back to score it past a scrambling Vejmelka.

It was Werenski's seventh career overtime winner, his second this season.

"I thought when I gave it back to him, he was going to shoot it," Werenski said. "I was almost below the goal line (on the winning shot). He made a good pass to me. It would have looked pretty dumb if we missed it."

The Athletic / Cole Sillinger's first career OT goal ends Blue Jackets' 'boring' win in Vegas

By Aaron Portzline- February 1, 2025

LAS VEGAS — In a city known for its glitz and glamour, the Columbus Blue Jackets wanted nothing more than to dim the lights, quiet the crowd and turn a game between two of the NHL's highest-scoring clubs into a chess match Thursday.

Cole Sillinger, back in the lineup after missing three games with a bruised hand, called checkmate only 52 seconds into overtime, scoring the first OT winner of his career in the Blue Jackets' 2-1 victory over the Vegas Golden Knights before 17,783 in T-Mobile Arena.

The Blue Jackets, who couldn't buy a road win in the first three months of the season, have gone 4-2-1 in their last seven games away from Nationwide Arena. They've done so by embracing a less risky, more defensively sound approach.

Adam Fantilli also scored for the Blue Jackets, while goaltender Elvis Merzlikins — playing in his favorite NHL rink — had 25 saves to improve to 10-2-1 since Dec. 19.

It all works together, right? There's no question that Merzlikins has played well over the last six weeks, maybe the best he's played since his rookie season (2019-20), but he's also been served well by how responsible the skaters are playing in front of him.

Thursday was a great example of that.

"Our thought process, one of our keys, was to try and be a frustrating group tonight," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "That meant not opening things up, not giving them any life. It meant making it a boring game.

"If we can stick around in games like this, against teams like this, in buildings like this, it says some good things."

The sequence that led to Sillinger's OT goal was anything but boring, however.

It started on the other end of the ice when Kent Johnson poked the puck off the stick of Vegas defenseman Alex Pietrangelo at the Columbus blue line and gathered it behind him, taking off for a breakaway.

Johnson tried to score between Vegas goaltender Ilya Samsonov's pad, but Samsonov denied him. Zach Werenski and Sillinger arrived to the scene as trailers, and Werenski's swat at the puck sent it off the goalie and then back into the slot.

Sillinger buried the loose puck into the open cage.

"My eyes were bigger when I saw KJ on a breakaway, to be honest," Sillinger said. "I just followed it up. Z whacked it a little bit and that puck was sitting there. It's nice to seal a game.

"We want to be able to win games like that. These are the kind of games, coming down the stretch, that we're going to have to win."

As jumbled as the Eastern Conference is, the Blue Jackets were lucky that during their four-day break — they last played Saturday, a 3-2 home win over Los Angeles — none of the other clubs in the murky middle of the conference made a move.

With Thursday's win, the Blue Jackets are back in the second wild card in the Eastern Conference, leapfrogging Boston for the final spot. Columbus plays its first game in Salt Lake City on Friday, facing the Utah Hockey Club in Delta Center.

"I'm impressed that the players don't want to open it up," Evason said. "They're saying the same things (the coaches are saying.) It's not like we're saying 'You can't try to carry the puck in,' or 'You can't try to make plays.'

"It's fun because they're coaching themselves and each other in situations. Do we want to score as many goals as we can? Sure. But we want to win games."

When Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan suffered a sprained wrist on Jan. 7 in Pittsburgh, there was great concern that one of the strengths of the lineup would become a challenge. Monahan, who had surgery last week and is expected to miss up to two months, played in all situations, most notably on the No. 1 line.

In his absence, the 20-year-old Fantilli moved up to the No. 1 line and the 21-year-old Sillinger slotted into the second line. Sillinger's recent absences further stressed the position, but the Blue Jackets have continued to win games and play with some of the NHL's top teams.

Fantilli's goal with 1:26 remaining in the first period was huge.

The Blue Jackets hadn't played a great first period, and they trailed for most of the first period, ever since Vegas' Tomas Hertl caught Merzlikins leaning away from his post and scored from the left circle.

But when Fantilli and Voronkov jabbed away at a loose puck under Samsonov, the puck squirted free and into the net. That's the type of greasy goal that can swing tight games like this.

Fantilli has 7-5-12 and a plus-9 rating in the 10-plus games since Monahan went down. He played 18:12 on Thursday, led the Blue Jackets with five shots on goal and seven shot attempts, and won 9 of 17 faceoffs despite spending most of the night against Vegas' superstar, Jack Eichel.

"Having Silly back in there was nice," Evason said. "It was nice to roll. I think we flipped off our rotation (rolling the four lines) only once in the game. Everybody was involved, and everybody felt a part of it."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets lose two crucial players, fume over officiating in loss to Stars

By Aaron Portzline- February 3, 2025

DALLAS — At one point late in the second period, the Columbus Blue Jackets were playing without both members of their top defensive pair, Zach Werenski and Dante Fabbro, as well as their top-scoring forward, right winger Kirill Marchenko.

It was a rough-and-tumble 48 hours for the Blue Jackets on the injury front, but their biggest complaint coming out of Sunday's 5-3 loss wasn't aimed at the hockey gods or the Dallas Stars but at NHL officials.

The Blue Jackets led 1-0, 2-1 and 3-2 before their grip slipped late in the third period before 18,532 in American Airlines Center. The Stars scored twice in the span of 4:25 late in the third to pull away, snapping the Jackets' three-game winning streak.

Cole Sillinger, Adam Fantilli and Ivan Provorov scored for the Blue Jackets, who finish this four-game, four-time-zone trip on Tuesday in Buffalo.

"Our guys are competing their asses off and trying to do all the right things regardless of the score, regardless of the adversity and regardless of the calls or non-calls," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said.

The Blue Jackets were furious over the Stars' first goal of the third period, scored on a redirection by forward Evgenii Dadonov at 11:22 to make it 4-3. Dadonov elevated his stick to deflect a wrist shot by Thomas Harley, sending the puck under the right arm of Columbus goaltender Elvis Merzlikins.

After a replay, the goal was allowed to stand.

"We got a really, really terrible break," Evason said. "We're hanging on with a lot of injuries and a lot of stuff going just to get a tie and maybe get it to overtime."

Then he corrected himself.

"It's not a bad break, it's a bad call," Evason said. "It's a high stick. I just don't understand it. At least from our angle, it's 100 percent a high stick. We'll have to wait and hear back (from the NHL) about what angles they don't have that maybe we do. But it's unfortunate that we grind and we battle and we compete, and we lose a hockey game on something like that."

The NHL's rule (37.5) states that contact with the puck must occur at a point on the player's stick that is below the crossbar, even if a portion of the stick is above the crossbar. The NHL situation room, in a statement to the media, said that replays showed Dadonov's "stick was at or below the height of the crossbar."

"It looked like a high stick from our end," Blue Jackets defenseman Provorov said. "From (the Stars') reaction, it even looked like they thought it was a high stick. But we're not the ones making the call."

Evason took exception to at least two other calls/non-calls.

Just before the Stars' first goal, replays showed Dallas forward Mason Marchment landing an elbow flush to Fabbro's face as they battled for the puck. The hit left Fabbro dazed, and he slammed his stick on the ice in frustration seconds later when Marchment (of all people) scored.

Fabbro finished the first period but did not return to the game. Evason indicated the Fabbro is already out for Tuesday's game in Buffalo and perhaps beyond.

“He gets elbowed square in the face and they score,” Evason said. “That’s a tough injury to ... I don’t know what to say. There were a couple of things that happened in this game that are really frustrating, but our guys kept pushing and grinding.”

The other beef was on the goal that allowed the Stars to tie the score at two at 6:03 of the second period.

Harley pressured Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson in his own zone, spinning Johnson around and turning the puck over for a two-on-one that Dallas’ Logan Stankoven finished. Johnson was just getting up off the ice when Stankoven scored.

Johnson and Merzlikins glared at officials after the goal.

Evason laughed when asked about the non-call.

“I don’t think you should be able to grab a guy’s hip and spin him around so he falls down and they get a two-on-one,” Evason said. “I don’t think that should happen, either.”

There may have been more Blue Jackets players in the training room than in the dressing room after the game.

Werenski returned to start the third period. But Marchenko, who was struck by a puck on the Blue Jackets bench, opening a nasty cut on his chin, did not return.

This, along with Fabbro’s injury, comes about 48 hours after James van Riemsdyk’s awful injury during Friday’s game in Utah.

Van Riemsdyk was crosschecked by Utah’s Ian Cole, sending him off the ice with a trail of blood and directly to the dentist’s chair in Delta Center for work. He lost four teeth and needed more than 30 stitches to close the cuts so that he could return to the game.

Then, after the game, he had more work. An X-ray revealed that one of the lost teeth was still wedged in his bottom lip, so stitches were removed, the tooth was dislodged and the lip was sewn back together. It was still badly swollen on Sunday, but he played with a protective device on his helmet.

If anything epitomized the weekend for the Blue Jackets, it was the scene in the closing seconds of the game. The Jackets trailed 5-3 and had an empty net as the clock ticked under 10 seconds.

Rather than let Dallas’ Matt Duchene get a clear shot at an empty-net goal from just inside the blue line, Provorov, who played 29:30, threw his body in front of Duchene’s shot and blocked it with his right leg. He limped off to the bench as the final buzzer sounded.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Behind Dean Evason's passionate post-win punches

By Aaron Portzline- February 3, 2025

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

Item No. 1: Winning rights

With apologies to Mathieu Olivier, some of the best punches this season have been thrown on the Blue Jackets bench as the final horn sounds on a Columbus win.

Coach Dean Evason, who spent much of his playing career with his gloves off, has a long-running tradition of throwing a right jab — or is that a rear hook? — at one of his assistant coaches in the thrill of victory, and that tradition has been kept alive in his first season with the Jackets.

When Cole Sillinger scored in overtime on Thursday in Las Vegas, Evason turned to his left to hammer assistant coach Scott Ford with a two-hand shove in the chest, then wheeled around and one-handed assistant Mike Haviland before bolting from the bench and running to the dressing room.

“I get caught up in it, right?” Evason said earlier this season. “That energy has to go somewhere, and those guys just happen to be standing there. I mean, I’m not gonna hit a player, right? You think I’m going to mix it up with Olivier or Guddy (Erik Gudbranson)?

“I try to be smart about it. There’s a reason Boller isn’t on the bench. I’m not stupid.”

‘Boller’ would be notorious NHL fighter Jared Boll, now an assistant with the Blue Jackets. He serves as an “eye-in-the-sky” coach during games, watching from press level alongside goaltending coach Niklas Bäckström.

From left to right behind the Jackets bench are Haviland, Evason, Ford and assistant Steve McCarthy. Usually it’s Ford, a prominent AHL fighter during his playing days, who takes the brunt. Evason typically targets Ford’s chest if he’s facing him, or his right arm if Ford dares to not be ready.

“He’s caught me off guard and surprised me a few times,” Ford said. “The last game at home (vs. Los Angeles on Jan. 25), he turned at me and I went to block it, and he ended up punching the remote (transmitter) of the headset.

“We got to the back room and he was like, ‘What the hell did I just hit?’ His hand was bleeding.”

McCarthy stands on the other side of Ford, so while Evason is giving Ford the business in front, McCarthy often adds a shove on the big lug from the back.

“I have the best bodyguard,” McCarthy said. “There’s no way Deano’s getting past Fordo, and I’m happy about that.

“We’ve all learned one thing here about Deano. He hits you and then he runs.”

The Minnesota Wild, Evason’s previous coaching stop, had some fun with this.

With the Wild, it was former NHL forward-turned-coach Darby Hendrickson who took most of the punches. But one particularly enthralling night, Evason was so revved up he put a trainer in a headlock and took him to the ground behind the players.

Blue Jackets players, of course, think this is hilarious, even though very few of them have seen it other than on video or social media.

"I might have to look back one time, but I'm usually on the ice or focused on the ice," Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson said. "All the guys love it. It shows how much the coaches care and how much energy they have and how close they are.

"It's hilarious. And cool."

Evason was an agitator during his playing days, racking up 1,002 penalty minutes in 802 NHL games. He was listed at 5 feet 10, 175 pounds, so he had to pick his spots on the ice.

Not so on the bench. Asked if Ford's contract stipulates that he must never return fire, Ford laughed.

"I just know better," he said. "Job security. Career sustenance.

"We put a lot of time and effort into this, too, and to see our players succeed, it's just absolutely exhilarating. It's good for the guys to see that excitement. There's a lot of pressure and stress in this line of work, but at the end of the day, it's a game."

But has he ever wanted to counterpunch?

"We have a little bit of a size discrepancy," said Ford, who is 6-3, 225 pounds. "He'd never admit it, but I don't know what would happen if me or Boller ever teed off on the guy. He keeps Boller off the bench, so he only has to worry about one meathead.

"The other night (an OT win in Salt Lake City), Dean turned and hit the other elder statesmen (Haviland) on the staff. He got Havi pretty good. We all end up in the mix. But that's good. We're getting punched a lot these days."

Item No. 2: Dumais arrives

AHL Cleveland split a weekend series vs. Providence and reached the AHL's All-Star break fourth place in the North Division with a 29-24-13-3 record. But it was a triumphant weekend for one of the Blue Jackets' prospect forwards.

Jordan Dumais, who hadn't played a competitive game in nearly 13 months, made his professional debut on Friday and earned his first point, an assist, in a 4-2 loss. Then, on Saturday, he scored the game-winning goal in the third period of a 3-2 win.

"It was exciting," Dumais told The Athletic. "It was a really long time of me not getting to do what I love to do, but my moment finally came this weekend. I'm just grateful to be in the game, but to finally get a goal ... it's just been such a long time. To get that feeling back, it means a lot."

Dumais, a third-round pick (No. 96) in 2022, hobbled through the 2024 World Junior Championship for Team Canada before reaching the point at which he could no longer play through the pain in his lower abdomen, one that barked with every skating stride.

His last game for Canada was Jan. 2, 2024. After surgery to repair a hernia, he'd hoped to return late last season for the Halifax Mooseheads of the Quebec Maritimes Junior Hockey League, but that didn't happen for multiple reasons.

Dumais was arrested and charged with driving under the influence — he'll face those charges this summer in a Halifax court — and was suspended by the league. But even after the suspension was lifted, Dumais was unable to play due to lingering discomfort in his lower abdomen.

The Blue Jackets thought he might be headed for more surgery earlier this season, but Dumais avoided it through rest and physical therapy. He joined AHL Cleveland about a month ago and slowly ramped up through practices and solo skates.

Asked if he'd ever spent 13 months off the ice, Dumais chuckled.

"Probably from the time I was born until I was 3 years old, and that's about it," he said.

His father, Patrice, made the trip from Montreal to Cleveland to see his Friday debut. When he scored on Saturday, the puck was pulled aside as a keepsake. That'll be shipped to his mother, Magali, to stash with all of Dumais' other mementos, trophies and such.

The goal he scored was classic Dumais, a quick-strike wrister off a turnover from the lower left circle. At 5-8, 173 pounds, he faces a big challenge to make the NHL, much less stick. But his best weapon is his offensive instinct and finishing ability.

Over the course of 13 months, that did not get lost.

"It feels a little different on the ice (in the AHL)," Dumais said. "Everything is faster, and it took a bit for my legs to get back into it. I definitely didn't feel in shape at the start of the game (on Friday), but it was good to get the legs going and get a little sniff at what the league is like. And Saturday was a lot better."

Item No. 3: Take 5, Scott Ford

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

1. What part of Columbus is home and why?

My wife and I are in Grandview. We live at Grandview Crossing. Great little area, lots of great restaurants and coffee shops and boutiques there. Having the little Grand Market in our backyard, overlooking the (Columbus) city skyline is pretty cool. And a fast ride to work is paramount to us. It's eight minutes to the rink, five if you hit all the lights.

2. What's your biggest surprise with Columbus?

It's been great how passionate people are about the Buckeyes. Coming from Milwaukee, where it's very much a pro town with all the teams there, and coming here where it's a college team, that's been really interesting. For me, and some of the other guys on staff have said this, the golf here is just world-class. It's a very clean city with a lot of great options and a lot of local stores that make it a really cool experience.

3. Favorite restaurant in Columbus?

We had an unbelievable experience at Jeff Ruby's (Steakhouse). The service was unbelievable. We've been to Hyde Park (Prime Steakhouse) and that was legit. Our lazy Sunday vibe is Lindey's down in German Village. We really like The Pearl, The Guild House, too. I sneak over to The Little Grand Market for some of the lunch spots.

4. Who's the best player you've played with and against?

Roman Josi has to be up there with the best players I've had as a teammate. Filip Forsberg was so good, too. Best player I've played against ... that's hard. Let me go with coaching. What I've seen from Zach Werenski is just incredible. Somebody with his size, who is able to play a 200-foot game and produce like he does, it's pretty special. You saw (Saturday in Utah) how he just decided to take the game over and put the team on his back. As a player and as a coach, having played with high-end guys in Nashville's organization ... to see what 'Z' does, I'm just like, 'Holy, moly.'

5. Which member of the coaching staff should have a podcast?

(laughs) I'm going to say Boller, and here's something he's probably going to do. ... We know the "Spittin' Chiclets" (podcast) guys and Boller's been asked a few times before. We don't want to do it while a season's going on because you know how it can get a little haywire on there. For sure, Boller with his connections and the amount of people he knows, the stories he'd have, how fun-loving he is ... if he had his own podcast there would be a lot of shenanigans, for sure.

Item No. 4: Snacks

- The Blue Jackets kept popping up in Elias Pettersson rumors in recent weeks as the turbulent Vancouver Canucks shopped two of their top forwards, Pettersson and J.T. Miller. The Canucks traded Miller back to the New York Rangers on Friday, so Pettersson is likely staying put in Vancouver. But it's worth noting the Blue Jackets were never seriously involved in trade talks for the 26-year-old Swede. Did Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell talk with his Vancouver counterpart, Jim Rutherford? Sure. But the Blue Jackets do not want to impede their young centers — 20-year-old Adam Fantilli, 21-year-old Cole Sillinger and, hopefully in the coming year or two, 18-year-old Cayden Lindstrom. Put another way: The Jackets are willing to add salary (Pettersson has an \$11.6 million salary-cap hit), but there are better ways they can spend their money, and at other positions.
- With their next win, the Blue Jackets will match last season's win total (27). The win in Utah on Friday (Jan. 31) was their 26th of the season, a number they did not achieve last season until April 6. The 2022-23 Jackets won 25 games all season.
- Not only are the Blue Jackets winning, but they're showing a flair for the dramatic. Friday's come-from-behind 3-2 win in overtime marked the third consecutive game that has ended with an OT win. A night earlier, the Jackets beat Vegas 2-1 in overtime. On Jan. 25, their last game before this road trip, the Jackets beat Los Angeles 3-2 in Nationwide Arena. It's the first time in franchise history they've had OT wins in three consecutive games. The last team to do that, per the NHL stats department, was the St. Louis Blues last January. No team has ever ended four straight games with OT wins, so something to watch on Sunday in Dallas.
- The March 1 Stadium Series game between the Blue Jackets and Detroit Red Wings in Ohio Stadium is now less than a month away. Right now, Ohio Stadium sits at rest. But NHL staff are expected to arrive for a two-and-a-half-week stay on Feb. 16. One day later, the ice trucks will arrive. On Feb. 21, they'll begin putting together the ice surface. This is happening, people.
- Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski was named the NHL's third star of the week on Saturday after totaling 6-11-17 in 14 games. He also had 52 shots on goal, a plus-9 rating, two game-winning goals and an average ice time of 28:01, tops in the NHL. It's the second time Werenski has earned a monthly award — he was rookie of the month in November 2016 — and the third time this season he's been honored by the league. He was the first star for the week of Nov. 24 and third star for the week of Dec. 29.
- Werenski had a goal, an assist and a plus-3 rating in Friday's win and is now at 17-40-57 through 52 games. He's the fifth player to record consecutive 40-assist seasons, joining Johnny Gaudreau (2022-24), Artemi Panarin (2017-19), David Vyborny (2005-07) and Ray Whitney (2001-03). Werenski is on pace to break Panarin's single-season assist record (59) and single-season points record (87), both set in 2018-19.
- More Werenski: His OT goal on Friday was the 16th game-winning goal (overall) of his career, passing R.J. Umberger for sixth-most in franchise history. Next up is Vyborny who had 17. Also, Werenski's OT winner was the seventh OT goal of his career, passing Cam Atkinson for second-most in franchise history. Only Seth Jones (eight), Werenski's old pairing partner, has more.

[The Athletic / Blue Jackets top goal scorer Kirill Marchenko suffers broken jaw in loss to Stars: Source](#)

By Aaron Portzline- February 3, 2025

DALLAS — Columbus Blue Jackets winger Kirill Marchenko, who has emerged as one of the NHL's top young forwards this season, suffered a broken jaw in Sunday's loss to the Dallas Stars, a team source has confirmed to The Athletic.

Marchenko was seated on the bench when he was struck by an errant puck late in the second period, heading directly to the Blue Jackets' dressing room with a towel pressed against his face. While the third period played out, Marchenko was taken to a Dallas-area hospital to have the jaw reset.

It's unclear how long Marchenko will be out of the lineup, but a typical timeline for a broken jaw is six to eight weeks.

While the rest of the Blue Jackets travel from Dallas to Buffalo on Monday ahead of a game against the Sabres on Tuesday, Marchenko will remain in the Dallas area, along with a member of the Columbus training staff, to see a specialist.

The injury occurred with 2:44 remaining in the second period when Blue Jackets rookie defenseman Denton Mateychuk inadvertently sailed a puck out of play and onto the Columbus bench, striking Marchenko on the side of his chin.

It opened a nasty cut on the left side of Marchenko's chin and apparently struck with enough force to displace the mandible.

It's the latest big blow for a Blue Jackets lineup that has been riddled with injuries since even before the start of the season.

Marchenko, 24, leads the Blue Jackets with 21 goals and is second on the club behind defenseman Zach Werenski in both assists (34) and points (55). His plus-31 rating leads the NHL and his overtime goal vs. Los Angeles on Jan. 25 made him the first Columbus player to start his career with three 20-goal seasons.

The Blue Jackets have now lost two-thirds of their No. 1 line, which was among the best in the league for the first three months of the season. Center Sean Monahan, who was playing at a point-per-game pace (14-27-41), suffered a wrist injury on Jan. 7 and had surgery late last month. He's expected back in mid-to-late March.

Those two join captain Boone Jenner, who has been out all season following shoulder surgery, and Erik Gudbranson, who was hurt in the third game of the season and had shoulder surgery. Jenner is expected back later this month after the 4 Nations Face-Off, but Gudbranson won't likely return until mid-to-late March.

The Blue Jackets also lost defenseman Dante Fabbro to an upper-body injury during Sunday's game after he was elbowed in the face by Stars forward Mason Marchment. Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said after Sunday's game that Fabbro, who has played next to Zach Werenski on the top pair since early this season, had already been ruled out of Tuesday's game in Buffalo.

It's unclear if the Blue Jackets will make a call to AHL Cleveland before they face the Sabres. Forward Kevin Labanc, who has been a healthy game in seven straight games, could go into the lineup for the first time since Jan. 18 to take Marchenko's spot.

The Jackets also have two extra defensemen — Jack Johnson and Jordan Harris — with them on the road trip to step in for Fabbro. Johnson has been a healthy scratch the past three games, while Harris has missed the last four games.

The Blue Jackets are trending toward missing 300-plus man-games to injury for the fourth straight season and fifth time in six seasons. Through Sunday's game in Dallas, they've missed 222 man-games.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets shut down Golden Knights](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- February 1, 2025

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

BLUE JACKETS 2, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 1, OT

1. The Blue Jackets went into one of the toughest buildings in the NHL to play and held their own.

Much has been made over the years about the so-called Vegas flu – the propensity for Sin City's visitors to not have their best games while playing in a city with, shall we say, so much to do – that has allowed the Golden Knights to be one of the best teams in the NHL on home ice.

It also could just be that the Golden Knights always have had good teams, and that the loud, rowdy, Las Vegas-themed atmosphere makes it tough on opposing squads. Whatever it is, it's never easy to win in Vegas, as the Golden Knights entered Thursday night with a 19-6-2 record at home this season while scoring 3.56 goals per game.

Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason knew going in that trying to run and gun with the Knights on their home ice was a fool's errand, so his team had a clear directive.

"Our thought process, or one of our keys, was to try to be a frustrating group tonight," Evason said. "That meant not opening things up. It means not giving them any life. It meant making it a boring game. ... If we can stick around in games like this and buildings like this, then it says some good things."

The Blue Jackets did exactly that, allowing the Golden Knights to score less than five minutes into the game and then shutting them out from there. There were some frantic early shifts for the Jackets as Vegas was buzzing coming out of the gate, but Columbus played defensively sound hockey over the last two periods and overtime to shut down the Golden Knights.

In general, it was a game where every inch of ice was fought for, and the Blue Jackets did a better job of winning those battles as the game went on. According to Natural Stat Trick, Vegas had six high-danger scoring chances at 5-on-5 in the first period, two in the second and zero in the third.

"We just talked about not giving them anything for free," said Cole Sillinger, who scored the overtime goal. "If they do create something, make sure they earn it."

2. Elvis Merzlikins turned in a performance befitting of his name in Vegas.

The CBJ netminder has always seemed to feel at home in T-Mobile Arena, and he delivered another excellent performance on Thursday night. He posted his first career shutout in Vegas back in 2020 and stopped 25 of 26 shots this time around, upping his career save percentage to .954 in three games in Sin City.

Whether it's because of his name – Elvis Presley, after all, is a Vegas icon – or his love of the energy in the building, Merzlikins has been The King in T-Mobile Arena.

"This is my absolute No. 1 (building) of the NHL," Merzlikins said afterward. "I'm gonna be honest. It's a huge building. It's loud. It's awesome. There is a big energy here, and it's fun to play here."

That being said, the way Merzlikins is locked in right now, the game could have been on Mars and he probably would have been pretty good, too. He's now 10-2-1 in his last 13 starts and has been

particularly sharp in his last six games, allowing just 10 goals and posting a save percentage of .939 in that span.

“He’s playing his best hockey right now for us in a very key time and certainly a reason why we’re able to win games like this,” Sillinger said.

Merzlikins’ best save may have come in the early moments when he went right-to-left to stop Jack Eichel at the back door, and he was calm, cool and composed as the night went on. He made a couple nice glove stops on Alex Pietrangelo in the second and was on his game in the third as the Jackets held the Golden Knights at bay.

The only goal he gave up came on a wrist shot by Tomas Hertl from the left dot in the first period, and Merzlikins admitted that was one he could have had.

“I did my own mistake on the first goal,” he said. “I cheated, so I got punished right away there because I saw the player on the back door. I was more hoping that he’s gonna pass it there, but he saw me cheating, and you get punished. But then during the game, yeah, I felt pretty good. Guys did an amazing job blocking the shots and clearing my vision in front of the net.”

3. Sillinger and Adam Fantilli not only scored, they did excellent jobs against two of the toughest lines in the NHL to defend.

With Sean Monahan on the shelf with a wrist injury, the Blue Jackets top-line center is Fantilli, who is 20 years old and played in NHL game No. 100 in Las Vegas. The No. 2 center is Sillinger, who has in his fourth season in the league but is still just 21 years old.

Their challenge on this night was slowing down two lines with plenty of offense in them, with Jack Eichel centering the Golden Knights’ top trio and Hertl in the middle of the No. 2 unit.

A look at the scoreboard and the fact the Golden Knights got just one goal on the night will tell you how well that went for the Blue Jackets, and the cherry on top was that Fantilli and Sillinger got the goals for Columbus as well.

Fantilli drew the job of matching up against Eichel and not only helped keep that line off the scoreboard, he tied the game late in the first period as he crashed the net and put home the puck in a scramble.

“It was cool,” he said of the matchup with Eichel. “He’s a great player and he’s done a lot in this league. He’s a guy I watched a lot, especially him going through the college route and doing what he did in college and then coming in.”

With his tally, Fantilli notched his 27th career goal, good for fourth all-time among CBJ players in their first 100 NHL games.

Sillinger, meanwhile, had missed the last three games with an upper-body injury but didn’t miss a beat in his return, spending most of the night going up against Hertl. He notched his first career overtime goal in this one, going the net after goalie Ilya Samsonov denied a breakaway from Kent Johnson and a follow-up shot from Zach Werenski and slamming the puck into the open net.

“It’s nice to seal the game,” he said.

[BlueJackets.com / Werenski OT goal lifts Blue Jackets to comeback win against Utah](#)

By Matt Komma- February 1, 2025

SALT LAKE CITY -- Zach Werenski scored 61 seconds into overtime, and the Columbus Blue Jackets defeated the Utah Hockey Club 3-2 at Delta Center on Friday.

"We chose to just keep digging and keep playing," said Werenski. "Guys stepped up, made a couple nice plays, some fluky goals, but we just stuck with it and kept playing our game, and good things happen, so we'll take it."

Kirill Marchenko and Kent Johnson scored for the Blue Jackets (26-19-7), who have won three games in a row -- all in overtime -- and four of their past five. Daniil Tarasov made 31 saves.

"We won some puck battles after the first period. That's what we tried to concentrate on," said Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason. "They were winning the races, the puck battles... And certainly in the third period, we brought our [competition level] up."

Clayton Keller had two assists while Nick Schmaltz and Alex Kerfoot scored for Utah (21-21-9), which has now lost four games in a row (0-2-2). Karel Vejmelka made 20 saves.

"It's frustrating for sure," said Keller. "I think we've talked about it. We've had the right mindset. We've just got to keep going, learn from it. Having confidence, believing you can make the play in the [third period]. I think that's the next step."

"Today we had seven scoring chances in the third period," said Utah head coach Andre Tourigny. "We need to finish more. We need to find ways to take quality shots. We need to find ways to get on the rebound and hit nets and stuff like that. But there's stuff we can do better."

Schmaltz opened the scoring on the power play 41 seconds into the second period, as he took a pass from Barrett Hayton and beat Tarasov glove side to give Utah a 1-0 lead.

Kerfoot made it 2-0 Utah 29 seconds into the third period as he put in the rebound off a shot from John Marino.

"I think that last game we took a step, this game was all right," said Kerfoot. "They got a couple bounces, and then that put us on our heels a bit, but we were still pushing. We controlled the majority of the game. We've got to find a way to get two points."

Marchenko scored at 6:25 to cut the lead to 2-1, firing in a loose puck in the slot for the goal.

Johnson tied the game at 11:42 as he fired a shot that bounced off Vejmelka and then went in off the skate of Utah defenseman Nick DeSimone to tie it 2-2.

"Honestly, we're one game at a time," said Evason. "We're playing every night to see where we sit competing. We're not scoreboard watching. We're not standings watching. We're just playing hopefully the best hockey that the Columbus Blue Jackets can play, and we'll give ourselves a chance to win."

NOTES: James van Riemsdyk left the game at 8:10 of the first period after taking a high stick to the face. The forward returned to start the third period and wore a bubble mask for the remainder of the game. ... Werenski's overtime goal was his 17th point of the month of January, which is a new Columbus record for points by a defenseman in a calendar month. He now has 57 points on the season, which ties the Columbus single-season record for defensemen. ... Johnson's goal extended his point streak to six games

(seven points; three goals, four assists). ... Kerfoot's goal in the third period was the second fastest to start a period in team history. Michael Kesselring scored 18 seconds into the first period on Nov. 7, 2024.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Werenski leads the charge in a comeback victory](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- February 1, 2025

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

BLUE JACKETS 3, UTAH HOCKEY CLUB 2, OT

1. Zach Werenski continues to prove why he's one of the NHL's elite defensemen.

Let's be honest – for much of this game, the Blue Jackets simply didn't have their mojo. After a war of attrition Thursday in Vegas, Friday night's game at Utah was the second half of a back-to-back thousands of miles from home – at altitude, no less – and it was clear throughout that Columbus just didn't have its best stuff.

"We didn't play great," Werenski acknowledged. "We were slow."

But when you have one of the game's best players on your team, anything is possible, and it felt like Werenski took over the game in the third once the Blue Jackets fell into a 2-0 hole. Not that he'd want credit – Werenski would surely tip his hat to Kirill Marchenko and Kent Johnson for scoring the goals in regulation that tied things up, and to Daniil Tarasov for keeping the Blue Jackets in the game with 31 saves.

Make no mistake, though – Werenski's fingerprints were all over the comeback for the never-say-die Blue Jackets. The Norris Trophy candidate looked like a man on a mission in the third period and ended up factoring in all three CBJ goals that earned the win.

On the first, Werenski took the puck behind his own net, skated the length of the ice and put a shot on net that goalie Karel Vejmelka could only fight off. Adam Fantilli put the rebound back to the netfront, and Marchenko was there to shovel a backhand into the net to make it a 2-1 game.

On the tying goal, Werenski again was a piece of the puzzle, disrupting an attempted breakout by Utah and allowing Dante Fabbro to collect the puck. As Werenski rushed up the ice, Fabbro pushed it ahead to James van Riemsdyk, who set up Kent Johnson for a shot from the left side that ended up in the net.

Then, of course, came Werenski's OT winner, and the defenseman made the play happen by dispossessing Barrett Hayton to set up a 2-on-0 rush. Werenski and Cole Sillinger passed the puck back and forth before Werenski put the final pass into the net to call game.

"(Hayton) kind of fumbles it for a second, and I feel like right then, if you're close enough, you can strike," Werenski said. "Once you can beat your guy in overtime, it seems like you have a lot of ice, so try to get skating. Pretty fun play there."

"I thought when I gave it back to (Sillinger), maybe he was gonna shoot it, and then I was almost below the goal line. He makes a good pass back to me. It would have looked pretty dumb if we missed it or something, but no, it's a great play all around."

Werenski's seventh career OT winner was one for the record books as well. It was his 17th point of January, a CBJ record for a defenseman, breaking the previous mark of 16 he set in November then equaled in December. It also moved him to 57 points on the year, tying the CBJ single-season record set by Seth Jones and tied by Werenski a season ago for scoring by a defenseman.

With a full 30 games left, it seems likely he breaks that record, doesn't it?

2. The return of van Riemsdyk to the game was also a spark for the Blue Jackets.

You never want to see it, but taking a stick or puck to the face is an occupational hazard for a hockey player, a reality that was reinforced to JVR in the first period.

Former CBJ defenseman Ian Cole caught van Riemsdyk with a high stick eight minutes into the game, opening up a gash on his face that immediately started pouring blood. The veteran forward missed not just the rest of the first but also all of the second as he was stitched up, and he returned to the game in the third with a facemask attached to his helmet.

Without van Riemsdyk on the ice, the CBJ forward lines were askew, another factor in a game where the Blue Jackets struggled to gain traction throughout. But it didn't seem to be a mistake that they were a better team with the veteran on the ice in the final period, and van Riemsdyk had the primary assist on the game-tying goal. He not only passed Johnson the puck, he drove Nick DeSimone to the net and watched as the rebound of Johnson's shot went off the Utah defenseman's skate and in.

"Obviously it's pretty tough for him to come back," Johnson said. "It's an unfortunate play, but yeah, it's funny to see him come back. He couldn't really talk and he had the bubble on, big lips. But that's hockey, so you love it."

With the assist, van Riemsdyk finished January with 13 points in 14 games, and he's become a key piece of the CBJ offensive attack with Sean Monahan on the shelf. With more than 1,000 games to his credit, van Riemsdyk is a calming, veteran presence on the CBJ bench, too.

And, as he showed on this night, a tough customer.

"He's a hockey player, right?" head coach Dean Evason said. "That's what hockey players do."

3. The Blue Jackets put talks that they can't win a back-to-back to rest.

Columbus entered the game with an 0-7 record in the second half of back-to-back games, a bugaboo that was putting a serious drain on the team's playoff push.

As the Blue Jackets arrived at the Delta Center and were preparing for the game, that fact was a big focus of media availability, so if they didn't know the stat, they certainly became aware.

"Once you told us, we had to bring it into the group and talk about it," Evason quipped postgame.

"I didn't even know it was a problem until today when we talked about it," Johnson said.

Now, that monkey is off their back, even if it didn't come easy. Again, this was a tough travel ask – the Blue Jackets have had their fair share of those this season – with Columbus tripping to the Pacific time zone Wednesday, playing a tight, physical game against Vegas on Thursday and then flying back to Mountain time to take on Utah on Friday.

Columbus didn't arrive at its Salt Lake City hotel until 2 a.m., and the impact of the travel seemed to show throughout as the Blue Jackets were a step behind for much of the game. In the end, they were able to battle back and played their strongest period in the third for their first back-to-back win of the season.

Just how long had it been since the Blue Jackets won games on consecutive day on the road? All the way back to Jan. 6-7, 2020, when Columbus beat Los Angeles and Anaheim on back-to-back nights.

"Back-to-backs are really tough, especially when the team is rested," Werenski said. "Everyone goes through them, and it's one of those things where if we want to get where we want to go and take steps

forward, those are the types of games you have to win at some point. You don't have to win them all, but you can't be 0-7, right? So I think this is a huge step forward for our group."

[BlueJackets.com / Excitement builds as NHL Stadium Series game is one month away](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- February 1, 2025

The longest tenured player in Blue Jackets history, Boone Jenner has seen and done a lot in his 11 seasons with the club.

But one thing the CBJ captain is yet to experience is playing in an outdoor game, and his excitement was palpable when it was announced last year that the Blue Jackets would take part in the Navy Federal Credit Union NHL Stadium Series game March 1 against the Detroit Red Wings at Ohio Stadium.

NHL STADIUM SERIES: Get ticket info, enter to win a coaches jacket and more

Jenner is yet to play this season as he rehabs a preseason shoulder injury, but he's traveling with the team and appears on track to return in time for the marquee event that is now exactly one month away.

As Jenner has rehabbed since suffering the October injury, the prospect of playing in The Horseshoe is one of many things that's driven him to get back into the lineup.

"That's definitely one you want to play in," he said recently. "I've been waiting a while for it. It's big."

Jenner is far from the only Blue Jacket who's excited for the event. Head coach Dean Evason has been behind the bench before for an outdoor game, skipping the Minnesota Wild during the 2022 Winter Classic at Target Field in Minneapolis. That game was notable as the coldest outdoor NHL game on record, but the below-zero temperatures were likely nothing compared to what Evason experienced as a kid growing up in Thompson, Manitoba.

"These guys likely have never played outdoors, but for me personally growing up, my youth was we were lucky to play indoors," Evason said. "When we went inside, it was for tournaments or for big games.

"It takes you back for sure, and it's a very exciting time."

While the game itself promises to bring plenty of fireworks with both the Blue Jackets and Red Wings battling for playoff positioning inside the iconic, century-old venue on the banks of the Olentangy River, the NHL has announced some Columbus-themed entertainment as well. Ohio State alums O.A.R. will stage a pregame performance, while Columbus natives Twenty One Pilots will perform during intermission.

Dante Fabbro has played in two outdoor games as an NHL player when he was with Nashville, and the defenseman said the experience combining hockey, family and pageantry makes the events stand out.

"Any time you get to play in an outdoor game, it's a special one, and it'll be a cool one in Ohio Stadium," Fabbro said. "I'm definitely excited for that one. Having the opportunity to play in a couple before, it's pretty special. I think overall, it's just the experience of it all and having your family in town and getting to play in front of a bunch of fans. Obviously having it outdoors is pretty special, and all the guest acts – it's a really cool event that they throw on, and I'm excited to be part of it again."

The Blue Jackets, the NHL and Fanatics released the specially designed jerseys that the Blue Jackets and Red Wings will be wearing for the event on Jan. 16. Columbus will take to the ice in blue jerseys that draw inspiration from the uniforms worn by the Union Army, with the sweater featuring several military-like details including a chevron sleeve stripe, a new CBJ wordmark patch and a front crest featuring the iconic cannon fired after goals.

Fans can pre-order the jerseys through The Blue Line online through Tuesday as well as at locations inside Nationwide Arena and Polaris Fashion Place.

“I like it,” Central Ohio native Sean Kuraly said of the jersey design. “We have the cannon back into it. These outdoor games, everything becomes a little larger because of the scope of people there. I’m excited to get them on and see what they look like at the ‘Shoe in front of 100,000 people.

“I think it’s gonna look sharp with all the blue. I like our all-blue look, so I’m excited about the continuity of all the blue.”

At the end of the day, the experience is about taking the sport of hockey back to its roots and providing everyone involved with a memory that lasts a lifetime. CBJ rookie defenseman Denton Mateychuk grew up skating outdoors in his hometown of Dominion City, Manitoba, whether it be on frozen rivers or in a backyard rink his grandfather would put together each winter.

Skating at the NHL level in one of the biggest stadiums in North America will be a totally new experience, though – and one he’s looking forward to.

“I think it’s one of those things that you have to experience it to know what it’s going to feel like,” Mateychuk said. “You skated on outdoor rinks sometimes as a kid, but going out there in front of 100,000 people and playing a hockey game outdoors, it’s something else. It’s gonna be awesome.”

[BlueJackets.com / Stars top Blue Jackets with two third-period goals](#)

By Taylor Baird- February 2, 2025

DALLAS -- Evgenii Dadonov scored twice in the third period to rally the Dallas Stars past the Columbus Blue Jackets 5-3 at American Airlines Center on Sunday.

His first goal came at 11:22 on a deflection in the slot to give the Stars a 4-3 lead. Video review confirmed his stick was at or below the crossbar.

Dadonov scored again at 15:47 on a wraparound that deflected in off the stick of Columbus defenseman Damon Severson for the 5-3 final.

Wyatt Johnston had a goal and an assist, and Thomas Harley had two assists for Dallas (34-17-1), which has won five straight. Casey DeSmith made 27 saves.

"First off, I thought [Columbus] played a really solid game. You can tell why they have the record they have," Dallas coach Pete DeBoer said. "They make you earn your offense. They're direct, they're fast, they have some good young players there. I thought we grinded and battled and, a lot like the streak we've been on, we didn't beat ourselves. We found a way to weather the storm when we needed to and found a big goal when we needed to."

Cole Sillinger, Adam Fantilli, and Ivan Provorov scored for Columbus (26-20-7), which had won its previous three games. Elvis Merzlikins made 34 saves.

Sillinger gave Columbus a 1-0 lead at 6:43 when he banked a shot from the bottom of the right face-off circle in off the skate of DeSmith.

Mason Marchment tied it 1-1 at 13:36 when he deflected a point shot from Lian Bichsel. The forward had missed the previous 17 games after having surgery following an injury sustained on Dec. 27 when a puck hit him in the face.

"The legs felt pretty good. I mean sometimes it can take a little bit to get into the timing of things but for the most part I felt pretty good and like I said it's nice to be back out there playing," Marchment said. "[I saw] how hard we work and how much we want to win. I think there were games while I was out watching that easily could've [gone] the other way and the guys really bared down and found a way. I think good teams find a way to win when you don't have your best and I thought we did that quite a bit."

Fantilli gave Columbus a 2-1 lead at 4:58 of the second period when his shot deflected off of Dallas defenseman Esa Lindell's skate.

Logan Stankoven tied it at 6:03 when he finished off a cross-ice pass from Mikael Granlund, who was acquired in a trade along with defenseman Cody Ceci on Saturday from the San Jose Sharks for a first-round pick and a conditional third-round pick in the 2025 NHL Draft.

Granlund will represent Finland in the 4 Nations Face-Off from Feb. 12-20 along with new teammates Roope Hintz and Lindell.

"It was nice to get a win in our first game here. This is a really good hockey team. It's fun to be a part of, it's fun to win games," Ceci said. "It was kind of nice to come over with [Granlund]. We flew together and we had each other today to get to the rink and what not, so that was nice. We both played with [Matt] Duchene earlier on in our careers, so he was good, and [Matt] Dumba picked us up for lunch. So, everyone kind of reached out and helped us out today, and it was great."

Provorov gave Columbus a 3-2 lead at 12:02 on a shot from the high slot.

"I think we have battled all year and today was another example of us sticking together no matter what and battling through adversity," Provorov said. "It was an unfortunate call on the fourth goal, but as a team, we keep proving to ourselves that we are a great team and we are going to move forward."

Johnston tied it 3-3 at 15:49 on a tip-in from the slot on the power play.

"You can tell right away that this team has been doing good. Everybody knows exactly what to do out there, so it is kind of nice to jump in on that one," Granlund said. "I am sure my game will get better as the time goes on and I get more comfortable and learn other guys' tendencies and all that. It's good to get the win in the first game and just move on from here."

Columbus defenseman Dante Fabbro left after he sustained an upper-body injury late in the first period, and forward Kirill Marchenko left after he was hit by a puck into the bench near the end of the second period.

"We lost our top pairing [defenseman] and our leading scorer, our top right winger," Fantilli said. "That'll be rough for any team, but ... I think we responded well, and did what we could. In the end it wasn't enough, but we responded well. I'm really hoping they are all good for next game, but we'll see what the word is."

NOTES: Dallas forward Mavrik Bourque took a point shot from Columbus defenseman Zach Werenski off his own stick and to the face and was helped off the ice at 12:37 in the third period. ... Jason Robertson assisted on Johnston's goal to extend his point streak to five games (eight points; four goals, four assists). ... Kent Johnson assisted on Sillinger's goal to push his point streak to seven games (eight points; three goals, five assists). ... Ceci had one shot on goal in 22:16 of ice time.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Open Western Trip With OT Win Over Golden Knights

By Mark Scheig- February 1, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets embarked on their last road trip to the west this season hoping to continue their winning ways. Thanks to an important contributor back from injury, they started on the right foot.

After missing three games due to an upper-body injury, Cole Sillinger returned to the lineup and scored the game winner in overtime to lift the Blue Jackets to a 2-1 win over the Vegas Golden Knights at T-Mobile Arena. Adam Fantilli scored again while playing in his 100th NHL game.

The story of this game was two good defensive teams not allowing the other much in the way of scoring chances.

Game Recap

The Golden Knights did have their way early with a push on home ice. Their hottest goal scorer Tomas Hertl beat Elvis Merzlikins just 4:58 into the game. Hertl had the left wing all to himself and made no mistake.

Then just under 30 seconds later, Mathieu Olivier went to the box for tripping. The Blue Jackets rose to the occasion to kill that penalty off. That helped settle them into the game.

Late in the first period, their persistence paid off. Golden Knights' goalie Ilya Samsonov thought he had the puck covered. Adam Fantilli was able to knock it loose. The puck hit the skate of defenseman Nic Hague and went in to tie the game. That was Fantilli's 15th goal of the season. He continues to shine as the top center. He did well in a tough matchup against Jack Eichel all night.

The second and third periods can each be best summed up as two good defensive teams going toe-to-toe and no one giving an inch. Both teams hit posts along the way. But there were very few if any second and third chances.

With no scoring in the final 40 minutes, overtime was required. The Blue Jackets were able to finish the job in less than a minute.

Kent Johnson got a breakaway after a Golden Knights' turnover. Although Samsonov stopped Johnson's attempt, the puck was touched by Zach Werenski and eventually laid in front for Sillinger to finish into an open net. That secured an all-important second point to start the road trip on the right foot.

Both goalies played well in this one. Merzlikins made 25 saves to continue his hot streak. He's now 10-2-1 in his last 13 starts. Samsonov made 22 saves to help the Golden Knights earn a point.

It will be a quick turnaround for the Blue Jackets with a trip up I-15 for their first game in Salt Lake City against the Utah Hockey Club on Friday night. The Golden Knights' homestand is now over. They will travel east to play the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Sunday night.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Use Third Period Rally to Stun Utah HC in Overtime

By Mark Scheig- February 2, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets went into Friday night's game against the Utah Hockey Club looking to finally win on the second night of back-to-back. They hadn't done it all season, until Friday night.

Zach Werenski scored the game-winning goal in overtime on a 2-on-0 rush while Kirill Marchenko and Kent Johnson scored just over five minutes apart in the third to rally past Utah HC 3-2. Clayton Keller assisted on both Utah goals.

This game was all Utah, until one crucial shift in the third gave the Blue Jackets all the momentum they would need.

Game Recap

The first period was a little crazy for ending 0-0. It included three penalties including a double minor to Ian Cole for high sticking James van Riemsdyk. JVR had to leave the game to get repairs. When he eventually returned, he was wearing a bubble.

The first period also saw a different sort of challenge initiated by the Blue Jackets. It appeared Daniil Tarasov batted the puck out of midair directly out of play. There was going to be a penalty for delay of game. Dean Evason took full advantage of the TV timeout to look at replays. They ultimately challenged it saying the puck hit Lawson Crouse before going out of play. The puck did hit Crouse making it a successful challenge and no power play for Utah.

Utah did have the better of the play in the first while outshooting the Blue Jackets 13-9. Then just 41 seconds into the second, Nick Schmaltz beat Tarasov to make it 1-0.

The Blue Jackets had a difficult time getting anything going in the first 40 minutes. Utah played hard and fast and seemed to be in control of the game. One had to wonder if the altitude of Salt Lake City was a factor given the energy spent in Vegas on Thursday.

Utah opened the third the same way they opened the second with a goal within the first minute. This time it was new first-line center Alexander Kerfoot who beat Tarasov just 29 seconds into the third.

The game tilted the Blue Jackets way thanks to a shift by Luca Del Belluz's line with Mathieu Olivier and Zach Aston-Reese. They generated energy by cycling the puck. That seemed to wake the bench up.

Soon after, Kirill Marchenko beat Karel Vejmelka to make it 2-1. It was all Blue Jackets from there. It only felt like a matter of time before they'd tie the game given Utah's struggles to hold leads.

Kent Johnson was able to tie the game with 8:18 left in regulation. His shot was ultimately deflected in off of Nick DeSimone's skate.

Advertisement: 0:26

With no more scoring in regulation, overtime was once again required to settle things. The Blue Jackets got a 2-on-0 rush with Werenski and Cole Sillinger. Vejmelka played Sillinger which left Werenski wide open for the easy tap in. That marked three consecutive OT wins with Marchenko, Sillinger and now Werenski scoring in 3-on-3.

Tarasov finished with 31 saves and was outstanding all night. Vejmelka finished with 20 saves. The Blue Jackets won on the second half of back-to-back for the first time all season in their first ever trip to Salt

Lake City and the Delta Center. They now get a well deserved day off Saturday before playing the Dallas Stars on Sunday. Utah will host the St. Louis Blues on home ice Sunday night.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Fall to Stars Behind Dadonov's Two Third Period Goals

By Mark Scheig- February 3, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets and Dallas Stars each came into Sunday's game on winning streaks. It was the Stars who found a way to extend their winning streak to five.

Evgenii Dadonov scored twice in the third period to help lift the Stars to a 5-3 win on home ice against the resilient Blue Jackets. Their resiliency was tested throughout the game thanks to a weird sequence of different events throughout the game.

In the end, the Stars push was too much for the Blue Jackets to overcome.

Game Recap

Before we jump into the game recap, we're going to recap the Blue Jackets' injury situation from the night. They lost their top-two defensemen and a member of their top line for different parts of the game.

Dante Fabbro took an elbow up high and had to leave the game. Zach Werenski appeared to get chopped in the offensive zone. He left for a bit but came back in the third period. Kirill Marchenko took a puck in the face while sitting on the bench. He was unable to return. That doesn't even count a high stick to Zach Aston-Reese or a puck in the face to Mikael Pyyhtia.

Despite it being an extremely painful game, the Blue Jackets held three separate leads. Cole Sillinger opened the scoring before Mason Marchment responded seven minutes later. It was 1-1 after the first.

The two teams then alternated goals twice in the second. Adam Fantilli scored his 16th of the season giving him five goals in his last six games. Logan Stankoven tied it just over a minute later.

Then Ivan Provorov was able to give the Blue Jackets a 3-2 lead from a shot in the slot. He was perhaps their best skater on both ends of the ice reinforcing his importance to the team given the injuries. Wyatt Johnston then on a power play made a nice deflection to make it 3-3.

The Blue Jackets escaped from that second period tied. The level of resiliency they are showing has been off the charts in recent games. However, it wasn't enough to take down one of the Western Conference's powerhouses.

Dadonov scored a goal that will be talked about for some time. Replay appeared to show the puck going in due to a high stick. After review, the officials confirmed the call on the ice of goal. Head coach Dean Evason said postgame to reporters in Dallas that it was a bad call. That became the game-winning goal.

Dadonov then added his second of the night to get to the final score of 5-3. He had just one goal in his last nine games before the two on Sunday.

The main concern for the Blue Jackets is the injury situation. The team has Monday off as they travel to Buffalo to take on the Sabres on Tuesday night to end their road trip. The Stars will now hit the road for a Tuesday clash in Anaheim against the Ducks.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Celebrating 100 In Style, Cole Returns And Delivers, Merzlikins Continues Roll

By Will Chase- February 1, 2025

What a win in Sin City.

Cole Sillinger returned to the lineup and scored in overtime as the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the Vegas Golden Knights 2-1 in overtime on Thursday night at T-Mobile Arena.

Celebrating 100 In Style

Thursday was Adam Fantilli's 100th career game in the NHL, and Vegas is a good place to celebrate that milestone.

Scoring only makes it sweeter.

The Jackets trailing 1-0 late in the first period, Fantilli, unassisted, sent home the greasiest of greasy goals to tie the game 1-1 on his 15th of the season at 18:34.

Fantilli leads Columbus with eight goals in January. He had a game-high five shots on net in 18:12 and was 9-8 in the face-off circle.

Cole Returns And Delivers

Sillinger missed the previous three games entering play with an upper-body injury so it was a welcome sight to have him back against the Golden Knights.

The First Star of the Night, Sillinger scored the winner in overtime at 0:52 for his eighth goal of the season.

Zach Werenski picked up his team-leading 39th assist and 55th point and Kent Johnson added his 18th assist. Werenski is on a four-game point streak (one goal, three assists). Johnson is on a five-game point streak (two goals, four assists).

Merzlikins Continues Roll

Elvis Merzlikins made 25 saves and picked up his 19th win of the season as he stayed hot and picked up Third Star of the Night honors.

He's won seven of his last nine January starts and has a 2.42 goals against average and a .910 save percentage for the month. The victory is career No. 87 for Merzlikins, tying Joonas Korpi for third in Blue Jackets history.

Merzlikins is now 3-1-0 in his career against the Golden Knights with a .930 save percentage and 2.01 GAA.

Vegas scored the first goal of the game at 4:58 when Thomas Hertl scored his 20th to continue an 11-game point streak (nine goals, six assists). Pavel Dorofeyev (12) and Nicolas Hague (4) picked up the assists.

Ilya Samsonov made 22 saves for Vegas.

Back-To-Back

Columbus heads east to take on the Utah Hockey Club from Delta Center on Friday, Jan. 31 at 9:00 p.m. ET.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Overcoming Slow Start To Win Again, Oh Baby, Zach Werenski, Another Road Dub

By Will Chase- February 2, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets win another road game.

Zach Werenski scored in overtime to lift the Columbus Blue Jackets past the Utah Hockey Club 3-2 on Friday night at Delta Center. Columbus has won three straight.

Overcoming Slow Start To Win Again

The Blue Jackets improved to 1-7 in the second half of back-to-backs this season.

Following Thursday's stellar 2-1 overtime win over the Vegas Golden Knights, the Jackets were up for a challenge for their first trip to Utah.

Utah struck first in the second period with Nick Schmaltz's (11) power-play goal — Barrett Hayton (15) and Clayton Keller (37) — 41 seconds into the frame.

Alex Kerfoot (7) scored 29 seconds into the third period to extend the 2-0 Utah lead. John Marino (5) had an assist to extend his four-game point streak (zero goals, four assists) and Keller picked up his second assist (38). Keller leads Utah in assists and points with 56.

Columbus struggled to generate many scoring chances and only had 15 shots on goal when Kirill Marchenko scored his 21st and third in four games at 6:25 of the third period to cut the deficit in half. Adam Fantilli (15) had an assist and Werenski picked up his team-leading 40th helper to add to his five-game point streak (two goals, four assists).

If you've watched this team lately, you must have believed a comeback was brewing. This team sure did.

Kent Johnson's 15th tied the game 2-2 at 11:42. He's on a six-game point streak (three goals, four assists). James van Riemsdyk (12) and Dante Fabbro (9) assisted.

Securing the overtime point, Cole Sillinger and Werenski connected on a beautiful 2-on-0 that left Utah goaltender Karel Vejmelka guessing as Werenski scored the winner at 1:01 for his 17th. Sillinger added his 17th assist.

The goal is Werenski's seventh overtime game-winner, passing Rick Nash and Cam Atkinson (six) for second in Blue Jackets history and trailing Seth Jones (eight) by one.

Oh Baby, Zach Werenski

Norris Consideration. Votes for the Hart. That's Werenski at this point.

It was just another ho-hum two-point night for Werenski, the First Star of the Night, with a goal and an assist who is anything but ho-hum with his MVP-level play.

Following 16-point months each in November and December, he waited until the last day of January to one-up himself with his 17th point in January.

Werenski leads Columbus with 57 points and 40 assists and is third with 17 goals. He's second in the league among all defensemen with 1.10 points per game.

Another Road Dub

Following a third consecutive overtime win, and two straight in 48 hours on the road, the Blue Jackets are 9-14-4 away from Nationwide Arena. They've won three of their past four on the road starting with the impressive 5-1 win at the Toronto Maple Leafs on Jan. 22.

The challenge increases when they continue their four-game road trip with a stop in Dallas to battle the Stars on Sunday. Dallas is 33-17-1 and second in the Central Division.

The Jackets wrapped up a 10-3-1 month of January, tied for the fourth-best mark in the league for the month.

Columbus moved into the first wild card spot in the Eastern Conference, leading the Tampa Bay Lightning by two points.



Daniil Tarasov made 31 saves while Vejmelka made 20 saves.

Star-Studden Showdown

The red-hot Blue Jackets battle one of the best in the west when they take on the Dallas Stars on Sunday, Feb. 2 at 6:00 p.m. ET.

1st Ohio Battery / DAL 5, CBJ 3: Blue Jackets Survive Werenski Scare, But Not Stars — Or Stripes — In 5-3 Loss To Dallas

By Ed Francis- February 3, 2025

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	1	2	2	5

CBJ GOALS:
Sillinger (1st, 6:43)
Fantilli (2nd, 4:58)
Provorov (2nd, 12:02)

Some losses are more frustrating than others.

The Columbus Blue Jackets lost to the Dallas Stars 5-3 Sunday night, but not without questionable officiating overshadowing the game.

Cole Sillinger got the scoring started with his 9th of the game on Columbus' (eventual) first shot of the game. Dallas would tie the game later in the first, in part because of the first questionable non-call of the night.

"(Dante Fabbro) gets elbowed square in the face, and then they score," said head coach Dean Evason.

Fabbro left the game and did not return, with Evason having no update on his status after the game beyond saying Fabbro "would not be available."

Evason also did not have an update on Kirill Marchenko, who left the game late in the second period and did not return following a puck to the upper-body while he was on the bench.

The Blue Jackets would regain their lead in the opening minutes of the second period on Adam Fantilli's 16th goal of the night before the Stars would answer just over a minute later as a result of another questionable non-call, this time with Kent Johnson being hauled down without a whistle.

"I don't think you should be able to grab a guy's hip and spin him around so he falls down and they get a 2-on-1," said Evason of the non-call on Johnson.

Columbus would again take a lead, this time at 3-2, before Dallas would tie it again to make it a 3-3 game entering the third period. The Stars would then take a 4-3 lead in the middle of the third period on an Evgeni Dadonov goal in which he appears to have used a high-stick, resulting in the non-call that got the most buzz of the game.

After a league-initiated review, the goal was confirmed as a good goal and Dallas got their first lead of the game, 4-3.

"I was watching it from behind and I don't know what angle they have or what they see, but I disagree with it," said Adam Fantilli, who was on the bench when the goal was scored.

Evason was less couth.

"It's a bad call. It's a high-stick. I just don't understand it," said Evason. "I guess we'll have to wait and hear back and see what angles they don't have maybe that we do."

Ivan Provorov, who had scored the third goal of the game for Columbus, said that Dallas' reaction was telling.

"It looked like a high stick from our end," said Provorov. "By (Dallas') reaction it even looked like they thought it was a high stick, but we're not the ones making the calls."

"We're a great team and we're just going to move forward," said Provorov.

Evason echoed a similar sentiment, saying that despite the loss, the team did play well.

"There's a couple things that happened in this game that are very frustrating, but they've happened, and our guys just kept pushing and grinding and we didn't get the job done — but we did set ourselves up to get the job done."

Here's how the Blue Jackets left Dallas empty-handed:

1st Period:

(6:43 — CBJ Goal): It takes nearly seven minutes, but the Blue Jackets get a goal on their first shot of the game. James van Riemsdyk makes a good entry into the Dallas zone and then gets a goal-mouth pass over to Kent Johnson. His attempt is blocked by Stars defenseman Matt Dumba but it bounces right to Sillinger, who gets a shot off that pings around a bit off Dallas goalie Casey DeSmith before finding the back of the net to make it 1-0 Columbus.

(13:36 — DAL Goal): The Stars had 40 seconds of zone time after winning a face-off before tying the game at 1-1 as Lian Bishel's shot from just inside the blueline deflects perfectly off Mason Marchment and past Merzlikins. There wasn't much Elvis could do about this one.

2nd Period

(4:58 — CBJ Goal): A lot of good puck movement throughout the Dallas zone by Columbus leads to the Blue Jackets' restoring their lead. Eventually, Kirill Marchenko finds Dmitri Voronkov just outside the crease and while Voronkov can't put it away, his shot attempt generates a rebound that goes right to Fantilli. He puts it in the back of the net by just a hair to give the Blue Jackets a 2-1 lead.

(6:03 — DAL Goal): Johnson is hauled down right in middle of the Columbus zone but no penalty is called, much to the chagrin of the Blue Jackets. That allows Mikael Granlund to pick up the puck and dish

it over to Logan Stankoven, who beats Merzlikins to knot it back up at 2-2 just over one minute after the Blue Jackets had regained a lead.

(11:28 — Zach Werenski Injury): In a scary moment, Werenski was in obvious pain after an awkward collision with Dumba at the 8:32 mark of the second period. He would leave the bench shortly thereafter but returned for the third period and appeared fine.

(12:02 — CBJ Goal): Columbus takes their third lead of the game on Provorov's fourth goal of the season after some good work between Justin Danforth and Mikael Pyyhtia, the latter of which finds Provorov by himself in the high slot. He fires it through a crowd of Dallas skaters, and it pings off the post and in to give the Blue Jackets a 3-2 lead.

(15:49 — DAL Goal): Dallas answers again, this time with a power-play goal from Wyatt Johnston. It takes the Stars just 14 seconds to officially get the goal, but they had skated with an extra man for exactly one minute on the delayed call just before tying the game at 3-3.

3rd Period

(11:22 & 15:47 — DAL Goals): After the controversial goal at 11:22 gives the Stars a 4-3 lead, Dadonov gets another goal just over four minutes later to put the game out of reach for the Blue Jackets, despite a late Columbus power-play opportunity.

CBJ	GAME STATS	DAL
30	SHOTS	39
42%	FACEOFFS	58%
0/3	POWER PLAY	1/3
2/3	PENALTY KILL	3/3
31	HITS	22
15	GIVEAWAYS	17
3	TAKEAWAYS	3
17	BLOCKED SHOTS	15

CBJ	GAME STATS	DAL
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
3.66	EXPECTED GOALS	3.44
64	SHOT ATTEMPTS	72
33	SCORING CHANCES	32
15	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	15
Data via NHL.com & NaturalStatTrick.com		

Stat Chat:

- Dallas' 39 shots on goal is the fourth-most allowed by the Blue Jackets this season.
- Columbus' power play continues to struggle. They were 0/3 tonight, their sixth straight game without a man-advantage goal. They had just three scoring chances (and gave up two) in their six minutes of power-play action in the loss.
- Werenski was held off the scoreboard for the first time in five games, but did miss the final eight minutes and change of the second period with the injury.

Up Next:

The four-game road trip concludes Tuesday night when the Blue Jackets visit Buffalo for a date with the Sabres. Puck-drop is scheduled for 7 p.m.

The Athletic / LeBrun: Will skyrocketing NHL salary cap lead to a new era of haves and have-nots?

By Pierre LeBrun- February 1, 2025

A recent conversation with an NHL team executive gave me pause.

We were chatting about the rising salary cap and how the NHL landscape might change because of it.

And he asked me this question: How many NHL teams will actually have the financial budget to max out at a salary cap over \$100 million?

He didn't know the answer. I didn't know the answer.

But we're about to find out in the next three years.

As announced Friday, the NHL and NHL Players' Association have negotiated cap numbers through the 2027-28 season — the upper limit of the cap going from \$88 million this season to \$95.5 million next season, \$104 million the season after that and \$113.5 million in 2027-28.

It is unprecedented in the history of the cap era to have this kind of multiyear certainty on the cap. It's normally a year-by-year exercise, although it's something both sides have contemplated doing for a few years.

Why did they finally do it?

"Both clubs and players have sought a certain level of predictability with respect to payroll ranges from year to year and over time for advance planning capabilities," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told The Athletic on Friday. "In reviewing our numbers with the Players' Association as part of our collective bargaining, we finally felt like we were in a position to give them that. It's not 'absolute certainty,' but maybe it's the next best thing."

The league and NHLPA have been working on this for the past six weeks, Daly added. And I think it was a smart thing to do for everyone involved.

As an aside, see how Daly dropped in there the confirmation that there has indeed been some advanced collective bargaining going on at the highest levels in advance of the full-fledged, official bargaining with the larger negotiating groups still scheduled to get going sometime over the next couple months?

The current CBA doesn't expire until September 2026, but both groups, as shown by this very announcement, are eager to get going early on it.

The announcement itself is also further proof neither side wants a labor war.

As for the salary cap news, there's an appreciation from both the clubs and agents in knowing what they're dealing with moving forward. It will have a major impact on contract negotiations as far as dealing with specific cap numbers and not each side arguing over where they "believe" the cap is headed.

"It is nice to know, for sure, but I don't think there's any big surprise here," one NHL GM, who requested anonymity because the league frowns on teams commenting on CBA matters, told The Athletic. "From 2013 to 2020, the cap grew an average of 4.5 percent per year. If that had continued, we would be at \$101.5 million this year and going to \$106, \$111 and \$116 the next three years. The cap growth paused when there was a huge revenue hit in 2020, but this was where we always expected it to be once we got that behind us."

Yes, 2020 being the pandemic put NHL revenues and the cap into chaos for a bit. So things are back on track for the most part.

"The ability to know the cap and the available space going forward will bring more stability to the cap planning process and to individual negotiations," said veteran agent J.P. Barry of CAA Sports. "Both sides will have a clearer picture of the next three years. I hope it will work well enough that we can try to consistently project out two to three years going forward.

"I do expect they will make some revisions to the numbers in the final two years, and hopefully based on recent growth that will be upward."

From the official NHL/NHLPA release, there was indeed this caveat:

"The projected Team Payroll Ranges for the 2026-27 and 2027-28 seasons will be subject to potential minor adjustments (up or down)," it read.

"While today's release of salary cap projections are welcome news for the players going forward, it also reveals that the upper limit for 2024-25 was artificially suppressed by the league last summer," veteran player agent Allan Walsh of Octagon told The Athletic. "The two-year lag formula for calculating the upper limit negotiated during the 2020 pandemic pause created an enormous revenue slack within the system as (hockey-related revenue) exploded upwards with a relatively flat cap. I compare it to a reverse escrow debt of revenues that the league will now need to pay out to players each year until the upper limit reaches the appropriate level to reflect a true 50 percent share of HRR.

"The 'projections' released today still don't get us there and will likely lead to shortfalls forcing teams to top up several percentages of HRR each of the next three years. That's why I'm predicting the upper limit numbers released today will ultimately be revised higher once HRR for this season and next is further calculated."

Remember the most basic truth about this system: It's a 50-50 split of HRR, and that governs the calculation of the salary cap.

The reality, as always, is nobody knows 100 percent what the revenues will be that far out, or whether the Canadian dollar (the top four to five Canadian teams have a huge impact on league-wide HRR) will get hammered even more by political decisions in the U.S., or how U.S. regional NHL broadcast deals look like in the aftermath of the Bally Sports fallout. All the league and NHLPA can do is give their best estimate.

Andy Scott, also an agent for Octagon, represents the likes of pending unrestricted free agents Mikko Rantanen and Jakob Chychrun and pending restricted free agent Wyatt Johnston, so Friday's salary cap announcement has a direct impact on his negotiations.

"We believe these estimates will assist teams to properly plan over the next few seasons but should be viewed as minimum projections for the cap," Scott said. "There is no dispute that if the cap were reset to the full value of the lag formula as set out in the CBA, based on 2023-24 HRR, it would have increased to over \$100 million for next season (with projected escrow under 5 percent). Instead, the NHL and NHLPA opted to smooth out the increase in the salary cap over time, and we believe this will result in 'shortfall payments' for this season, next year and beyond (as opposed to escrow) to meet the 50 percent players share of revenue."

Again, players either pay escrow or owners pay shortfalls in order to thread the needle on the 50-50 HRR split.

"I feel that the cap should be at \$105 million today, but this is huge and will definitely help players and teams," said Darren Ferris, agent for pending UFA Mitch Marner.

Imagine if Walsh is right and we're actually going to get revised cap numbers that are even higher for 2026-27 and 2027-28 than what was announced Friday?

Great for the high-end players needing new contracts, especially. (Hello, Connor McDavid.)

Great for the bigger-market teams that want to find that edge.

But I go back to the first question asked — one without a firm answer. In a league that normally has two-thirds of teams at or close to the max on the salary cap, are we headed for a bigger separation between the haves and have-nots?

The league has never had greater competitive balance. The number of teams spending similarly on payrolls has truly spread the talent around.

Will these cap increases loosen that up and lead to bigger-market teams gaining more of a financial advantage? It's very possible.

I mean, we already saw last week that the Colorado Avalanche, as part of their reasoning in trading away Rantanen, were looking down the road at Cale Makar's next contract in two years and what they're already paying Nathan MacKinnon and making the calculation that having three stars eat up so much of their cap didn't make sense.

"I don't know if we can say we couldn't sign him," Avalanche general manager Chris MacFarland said. "I think it was going to be ... obviously it was a challenging contract to do. Any time you have a player of that stature, and you have a player of Nathan MacKinnon and his stature and Cale Makar and his stature and (his next contract) on the horizon ..."

What MacFarland didn't say — but I truly wonder if he was thinking it — was that even if the cap went well above \$100 million in two years ... does that necessarily mean the Avs will spend to it?

There are lots of teams we'll be asking that question about.

Another team executive told me Friday, again anonymously because of the league policy of speaking on CBA matters, that he wasn't sure yet where his team would fall but figured way more clubs would no longer be cap teams in two or three years.

All of which also invites renewed discussion of enhanced revenue sharing. We heard a bit of that chatter at the NHL's Board of Governors meeting in December, but I would suspect some owners will want NHL commissioner Gary Bettman to commit to more meaningful revenue sharing as part of the new CBA in order to help counter the potential widening of the gap between have and have not franchises based on the rocketing salary cap.

Regardless of where all this goes, we are about to enter a new era in the NHL. Friday's salary cap announcement guarantees that.

The Athletic / NHL salary cap to jump from \$88 million to \$113.5 million over next 3 seasons

By Chris Johnston- February 1, 2025

The upper limit of the NHL's salary cap is due to take significant jumps in each of the next three seasons after the league reached an agreement with the NHL Players' Association on where those numbers would be set.

The NHL circulated a memo to teams Friday informing them that the current \$88 million cap ceiling will jump to \$95.5 million in 2025-26, followed by \$104 million in 2026-27 and \$113.5 million in 2027-28.

Those numbers are essentially fixed — although the sides can agree to make minor adjustments up or down if circumstances warrant.

“Both clubs and players have sought a certain level of predictability with respect to payroll ranges from year to year and over time for advance planning capabilities,” deputy commissioner Bill Daly told The Athletic. “In reviewing our numbers with the Players' Association as part of our collective bargaining, we finally felt like we were in a position to give them that. It's not ‘absolute certainty,’ but maybe it's the next best thing.”

The increased cap numbers represent a massive shift for a league that has only recently dug itself out of the financial hole caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The year-over-year jump next season will be \$1 million more than the total increase seen across the previous six seasons — with the NHL's 2019-20 cap at \$81.5 million only having grown to \$88 million for 2024-25.

NHL salary cap rising

2025-26

Upper limit: \$95.5 million

Lower limit: \$70.6 million

2026-27

Upper limit: \$104 million

Lower limit: \$76.9 million

2027-28

Upper limit: \$113.5 million

Lower limit: \$83.9 million

Growing league revenues are driving the conditions for this level of increase on the other side of the pandemic and arrive with a new set of national Canadian TV rights deals due to take effect starting in 2026-27.

What Friday's announcement will do is bring clarity for teams and player agents as they make decisions on contact and trades.

It stands to be a great time for top players to be approaching free agency. Mikko Rantanen of the Carolina Hurricanes and Mitch Marner of the Toronto Maple Leafs are among the top players eligible to

hit the open market on July 1, with Edmonton Oilers superstar Connor McDavid, Jack Eichel of the Vegas Golden Knights and Minnesota Wild forward Kirill Kaprizov among the NHL's top free agents in 2026.

The NHL and NHLPA are due to start negotiations on other elements of the next collective bargaining agreement in February. The current deal expires in September 2026.

The Athletic / NHL trade board 5.0: Where the market stands after the Rantanen blockbuster

By Chris Johnston- February 1, 2025

The tremors from the Mikko Rantanen blockbuster were still echoing around the league when another bomb dropped in Vancouver this week, with Canucks president Jim Rutherford publicly declaring that he felt the relationship between J.T. Miller and Elias Pettersson had reached a point where it's beyond repair.

Cue more trade winds!

While we are unlikely to see another deal that matches Carolina's all-in play on Rantanen in terms of its overall scope, plenty of big names are still cycling through the rumor mill with five weeks to go before the NHL's March 7 trade deadline.

Vancouver remains at the epicenter of activity.

Here's our latest Big Board. Players are listed by how closely they demand watching, based on their potential impact and the current amount of buzz around them.

Note: Net Ratings and market values are via Dom Luszczyszyn's model and are projected for the full season based on statistics through Jan. 29. Goals saved above expected (GSAX) are via Evolving-Hockey, also through Jan. 29. Contract info is via PuckPedia.

Position

Search

1

J.T. Miller

F

2

Brock Nelson

F

3

Yanni Gourde

F

4

Marcus Pettersson

D

5

Rasmus Ristolainen

D

6

John Gibson

G

7

Trent Frederic

F

8

Ryan Donato

F

9

Ivan Provorov

D

10

Elias Pettersson

F

11

Dylan Cozens

F

12

Kyle Palmieri

F

13

Mathieu Olivier

F

14

Brandon Tanev

F

15

David Savard

D

16

Cody Ceci

D

17

Drew O'Connor

F

18

Jordan Greenway

F

19

Jake Evans

F

20

Seth Jones

D

21

Bowen Byram

D

22

Ryan O'Reilly

F

23

Scott Laughton

F

24

Nick Bjugstad

F

25

Mikael Granlund

F

26

Brian Dumoulin

D

27

Michael McCarron

F

28

Justin Brazeau

F

29

Ryan Lindgren

D

30

Mario Ferraro

D

31

Nicholas Robertson

F

32

Gustav Nyquist

[The Athletic / What are NHL players looking for in upcoming CBA talks? What we're hearing after Marty Walsh's fall tour](#)

By Joe Smith- February 1, 2025

TORONTO — Marty Walsh has always had an open-door policy for players since taking over as executive director of the NHL Players' Association.

And lately, it's literal.

Take a peek at Walsh's office at the NHLPA headquarters, and it's what you might call "open concept" due to recent renovations. A few walls were knocked down, with the plans to add a couple of offices, a players' lounge and a swag room.

Walsh, in his second full season on the job, enjoys his partial view of the water, but a little redecorating was in order.

"We've still got some work to do," Walsh said, smiling.

The most important work, however, is looming soon as the NHLPA and NHL will start getting into more serious negotiations over the next collective bargaining agreement in the next month or so. Walsh wrapped up his fall tour of the league last week, having met with players from every team for the second straight season.

The current CBA — negotiated during difficult conditions in the 2020 COVID-19 shutdown — doesn't expire until September 2026, so there's plenty of time. But there's a sense that both sides are ready to get rolling in talks. There's not nearly the acrimony the sport has seen in the past — leading to three lockouts over 30 years.

"I think the relationship is as constructive as it's ever been," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said last week.

What is there to fight about? The league's revenues hit a record \$6.2 billion last year, with a new record in attendance. Franchise values are booming, with Sportico's recent valuations having the average club worth \$1.79 billion (a 37 percent bump in just one year).

In a couple of weeks, the league will open up the first 4 Nations Face-Off tournament, a much-anticipated reintroduction of international play featuring NHLers with the United States, Canada, Finland and Sweden competing. The NHL recently canceled player escrow payments for the rest of the season.

Walsh, 57, the former Boston mayor and U.S. secretary of labor, isn't going to put a timetable on how long talks might take. He declined to get into specifics of CBA topics publicly, noting the negotiating committee still has to meet and go over its list and their plans. But there's optimism on both sides.

"When I got interviewed by the players, I told them my approach is collaborative," Walsh told The Athletic. "Not to be taken advantage of, but collaborative. Any time you go into a contract negotiation with the idea of being less than constructive, it's not the way you want to go into it. You want to go into it positive. We've worked with the league and had great success with the 4 Nations, the Olympic agreement, working on escrow, working toward a salary cap (number).

"A lot of good things are moving in the right direction. Revenues are good, that's exciting as well. You want to capitalize on the positive."

So, good vibes all around — but there's still plenty both sides will want to tackle.

To get a better sense of what's most important to the players, The Athletic chatted with around 20 of them in the past month, offering them anonymity to speak openly about union priorities.

"I don't think there are many big issues right now," said one 15-year-NHL veteran player. "I think the NHL got a lot of what they wanted the last 10 years to give them an extremely advantageous position. You see that manifest itself by the explosion of franchise values and the revenue growing substantially. That being said, I don't think they'd want to stop the league for any reason, so I can see little things here and there (tweaked), but I don't think there's anything significantly major.

"I think there has been more working together — call it 'pulling the rope' together. Realistically, right, there's a 50-50 revenue split and escrow is essentially zero. We hope the cap is growing significantly, that's a reality where both parts can be happy."

Growing the game (and cap)

The dominant issue among players continues to be increasing the salary cap, which would involve boosting hockey-related revenues in any way possible.

"We've got to get the salary cap to compete with other leagues," said a 16-year-veteran. "It's criminal how some guys in other leagues are making the money they are and guys in our league haven't jumped. A big part was COVID, but we've got to get that up."

The NHL is not going to match other leagues like the NBA (\$140 million salary cap) for the obvious difference in revenue and TV rights deals. But there is a sense from players that a significant increase from the current \$88 million is in order.

The tricky part is when that is decided. Teams — and agents — would love to have more clarity so they can make decisions with as much information as possible. Like the Minnesota Wild knowing how much they can afford to pay Kirill Kaprizov, who becomes a UFA in the summer of 2026, and the Oilers with Connor McDavid.

There is a chance the upper limits for next year and the year after are announced this season, according to a league source, which would be unusual considering there's not a new CBA yet for past the 2026 season.

That would create some questions on what escrow is estimated to be and how much that could change if revenue estimates end up being lower.

Bettman explained the balance recently in terms of advance notice on the cap.

"We know the players don't want escrow to the extent they can have it reduced," Bettman said. "So the higher you make the cap, the more likely you'll have an escrow. If you nail it just right — which is hard to do with precision because you're projecting revenues — ideally you find a place where the escrow is as little as possible and/or the clubs aren't writing a check to make up the 50/50 (split). It's a little science, but it's a lot of work."

A new Canadian TV deal will be coming for the 2026-27 season, which should provide a revenue boost. Events like the 4 Nations and 2026 Olympics should also boost the league's international profile, as do series like Amazon's "Faceoff: Inside the NHL."

"We've got to somehow keep our traditional hockey culture but also do more things to showcase the people in the game," another veteran player said. "I'm a big fan (of the Amazon series). I said if I was ever asked to do it, I'd be fully obligated to do it because it helps grow the game. I wouldn't really want to. I wouldn't want to expose my family to it. But I'd do it if it'd help."

Some players wondered if there was a way they could get a piece of future expansion fees. One thought it'd be great if the NHL took a page from the NBA's Larry Bird exception and let teams exceed the salary cap to re-sign free agents. That'd make a big difference for teams like the Avalanche, who recently traded homegrown superstar Mikko Rantanen because they didn't think they'd be able to re-sign him as an unrestricted free agent this summer.

Any exception like that would have to be collectively bargained.

Health benefits

Another issue brought up by many players was wanting to have full benefits in retirement.

In the current CBA, eligible players can enroll in the NHL Health and Benefits and get a subsidy that will help with costs. This program has been improved since the 2012 CBA, with three tiers instead of one singular policy.

"I'd love to see more medical coverage for life for guys," said a 12-year-veteran. "I'd like to help guys struggling, whether it's physically or mentally. The league should step up and protect guys. We give so much to the league. We give you everything of us — physically and mentally. It's probably in their best interest to protect us for life."

The problem, of course, is cost. Where does the money come from?

There has been encouraging participation, meanwhile, in the CTE committee, approved in an NHLPA board meeting over the summer. The idea of the initiative is to help players understand chronic traumatic encephalopathy and the damage concussions can cause. While concussions aren't a topic players typically talk about publicly, privately it's definitely on the radar.

Schedule and playoff format

The schedule is a hot topic, with players saying they'd like to see tweaks to the number of back-to-backs and also start times.

"For us, we play 9 o'clock every playoff game," one Western Conference player said. "That's unfair for us, and that's my biggest thing."

There are arguments on both sides on whether the 82-game season is too long. Some players mentioned the idea of cutting some preseason games.

"I think the latest Game 7 of the Cup Final should be is June 1," said one player.

The wrinkle with the NHL schedule is working with TV broadcasts and rights holders. There's an emphasis on aligning the season to capitalize on moments where the league can jump to the forefront versus competing with other sports. The Stanley Cup Final ending in late June last season wasn't ideal, but the NHL also got to go every other night with the NBA Final, giving it more exposure.

As much as some players would love for the league to return to the 1-8 playoff seeding format, Bettman has maintained that the league has no appetite to change the current division-based bracket.

If the playoffs started on Thursday, there would be some new matchups in the Eastern Conference, at least, with Tampa Bay Lightning–Washington Capitals, Toronto Maple Leafs–Ottawa Senators and New Jersey Devils–Carolina Hurricanes.

"I think what we have works extraordinarily well," Bettman said. "Look at our regular season: Every game matters."

Other ideas

Players had smaller tweaks they'd like to see as well, from one saying teams should be able to carry three goalies on the road — avoiding the EBUG situation — to a couple wanting changes to offside review.

“Just a time limit on it,” one veteran player said. “If (the offsides) doesn't directly result in a goal, like there's only a certain amount of passes or time in the zone, like 15-20 seconds, before it's unchallengeable.”

As much as there might be some interest by some to make some alterations to the NHL Department of Player Safety and the appeal process, it's a tough situation as the NHLPA is there to protect all players — the ones who commit the infractions on dangerous hits as well as the injured players.

A number of topics didn't come up in the player tour for Walsh as often as last season, when the tenuous situation in Arizona, the Mike Babcock saga and Pride nights were being discussed widely.

“It's a good relationship right now,” Walsh said. “There's good things happening. Revenues are up. The game is in a strong place. Escrow for players is zero. Hopefully the salary cap can be another positive. 4 Nations is coming up. We have an Olympic agreement. Utah moving (from Arizona) has been a benefit to the players.

“There's some good things happening. There's obviously different types of bumps in the road. But, for the most part, things are heading in the right direction.”

Walsh has made a good impression on players during his tours and conversations.

“He made it pretty clear he's working for the players,” one Eastern Conference player said. “Which is great. He just wants to help us.”

“We'll see,” another player said. “There's a lot of talking now and no action yet. But there's a reason he got the job.”

[The Athletic / Former host Julie Stewart-Binks sues Fox, says FS1 executive sexually assaulted her](#)

By Katie Strang- February 1, 2025

Former Fox Sports anchor and reporter Julie Stewart-Binks filed a lawsuit Friday in Los Angeles County Superior Court in which she alleges that Fox Sports executive vice president Charlie Dixon sexually assaulted her in 2016 while she was working at the network.

According to the complaint, Dixon pushed her against a wall, pinned her arms and forcibly kissed Stewart-Binks in January 2016 following a meeting to discuss an upcoming Super Bowl assignment. Stewart-Binks alleges she later reported his conduct to a Fox human resources representative but that the network “egregiously made the deliberate decision to protect Dixon and allow a sexual predator to remain an executive at Fox for nearly a decade.”

The lawsuit against Fox and Dixon follows a separate lawsuit filed earlier this month by Noushin Faraji, a former hairstylist at the network. In that complaint, Faraji alleges that Dixon groped her at a co-worker’s birthday party by “rubbing her body and groping her buttocks” in January 2017.

Dixon did not respond to multiple messages seeking comment. Fox Sports said in a statement: “These allegations are from over eight years ago. At the time, we promptly hired a third-party firm to investigate and addressed the matter based on their findings.”

Stewart-Binks worked full-time at FS1 from the network’s launch in 2013 until 2016. According to the lawsuit, she had been assigned to work as a host on Jason Whitlock’s pop-up show for the 2016 Super Bowl when Dixon invited her to a hotel bar in Marina Del Rey, Calif., to discuss that assignment.

At that meeting, “instead of discussing logistics or his vision for the show, Dixon began berating Stewart-Binks, telling her: ‘You’re not funny, interesting or talented,’” according to the complaint. After telling Stewart-Binks she was “not capable of handling big moments on TV,” Dixon allegedly gestured toward the bar and said: “The only way someone would watch you is if you got on top of this bar and took your top off.” He also allegedly told her: “You’re not hot enough to be a hot girl on TV.”

Dixon later asked Stewart-Binks to come to his hotel room for a beer and to see the view from his balcony. This set off “alerts” in Stewart-Binks’ mind, according to the complaint, but she felt she could not refuse him because he was her boss.

Once in the room, Dixon asked her to come out on the balcony and “swiftly pushed her against the wall and pinned her arms to her side,” according to the complaint. “With her arms forcefully held down and his body pressed against hers, Dixon tried to force his tongue into her mouth.” Stewart-Binks said her mouth remained shut but that Dixon “ignored her, continuing to press against her body and lick her closed mouth. While keeping one of her arms pinned, he moved his other arm from pressing her upper elbow against the wall to her body and towards her chest.”

She fled the room and, after getting in her car, called a friend to disclose what happened. The complaint does not identify that person, referring to her only as “Anonymous Friend.”

Stewart-Binks asserts in the litigation that she worried about what her rejection of Dixon’s advances would mean for her future at FS1. She decided against disclosing what allegedly happened at the hotel because she feared losing her job, particularly given that her contract was up for renewal.

Days later, Stewart-Binks was in San Francisco working as a host on Whitlock's Super Bowl show. At a production meeting on Feb. 4, 2016, a producer told the show crew that New England Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski had revealed recently that he had once been a stripper in college. According to the complaint, that producer and others encouraged Stewart-Binks to coax Gronkowski into doing some "Magic Mike moves" for her (a reference to a 2012 movie about male exotic dancers). The hope was to create "a viral moment." One producer even handed her dollar bills as a prop.

Stewart-Binks was widely criticized for her role in the stunt, during which Gronkowski straddled her and gyrated his hips while she sat on a couch.

"Ordinarily, Ms. Stewart-Binks would have considered the implications of such a performance. However, fresh off Dixon's assault, both physical and verbal, Ms. Stewart-Binks was determined to prove that she was fun and belonged in FS1's new regime," the complaint states. "She had to show Dixon and Fox that she had what it took to be a fun, interesting personality capable of handling big moments on TV."

Dixon's sexual and verbal assault and the vitriol directed at her in the wake of the Gronkowski incident "took a profound emotional toll," according to the complaint.

Stewart-Binks was told the next month – March 2016 – that her contract would not be renewed.

According to the complaint, Stewart-Binks was contacted by a Fox human resources official in June 2017 as that official was probing allegations made against Jamie Horowitz, another FS1 executive. She told that HR representative she had nothing substantive to share about Horowitz but conveyed what allegedly happened with Dixon. Stewart-Binks states in the complaint that she provided the HR official with the names of two Fox employees with whom she disclosed her experience with Dixon. Those two employees told Stewart-Binks they corroborated her account with Fox's HR official, according to the complaint.

In July 2017, Horowitz was fired by Fox Sports, but Dixon remained at the network. Then-Fox Sports president Eric Shanks wrote to staffers when announcing Horowitz's exit: "Everyone at Fox Sports, no matter what role we play, or what business, function or show we contribute to—should act with respect and adhere to professional conduct at all times. These values are non-negotiable."

Stewart-Binks went on to work in smaller roles for ESPN, CBC and other outlets. She currently hosts a podcast with former NHL player Nate Thompson, works as a reporter for SNY and the PWHL and is a brand ambassador and host for the BetRivers Sportsbook Network.

According to the complaint: "Stewart-Binks tried to put everything about Fox behind her and move forward with her new positions within the sports industry, but each time she saw a former colleague from Fox thriving on the national stage while she remained covering smaller markets, a pang of frustration lingered. This wasn't the life she had envisioned for herself. Intrusive thoughts would enter her mind on how different her life could have been if she had just had sex with Dixon, but she would shut them down. To cope with the severe emotional toll of what Dixon had done to her, Ms. Stewart-Binks sought professional help."

The Athletic / Julie Stewart-Binks on a career derailed by alleged sexual assault: 'What could my life have been?'

By Katie Strang- February 1, 2025

Last week, Julie Stewart-Binks sat in an empty lounge on the rooftop of a hotel near her apartment in New York City. She is about to watch a clip from her time as a Fox Sports host and reporter. It is a moment that she thinks about often, but one that she has never wanted to relive in full. She hits play on the video, then her hands jerk back toward her chest, as if bracing for a blow.

In the clip, Stewart-Binks, then a 28-year-old Fox Sports 1 on-air personality, is on the set of a pop-up show – “Jason Whitlock’s House Party By the Bay” – for the 2016 Super Bowl in San Francisco. The set is meant to evoke a Super Bowl party. Red Solo cups. Beers chilling in an ice bucket on the coffee table. Whitlock and the day’s guest – New England Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski – are behind a desk; Stewart-Binks is on a gray couch flanking them.

The group is discussing Gronkowski’s disclosure that he moonlighted as a stripper in college. Stewart-Binks then says: “If you have a chance to make some more money, using maybe me as an example, do you want to show us a little ‘Magic Mike?’” (A reference to the 2012 movie about male exotic dancers.) Gronkowski, a little surprised, asks Stewart-Binks if she wants a lap dance, to which she replies: “Yeah.” Gronkowski seems to be stalling. He asks about music and remarks: “Where are your friends? I would need, like, a bachelorette party?” Stewart-Binks keeps urging him on, as does Whitlock, and Gronkowski eventually moves from behind the desk, over to the couch. He dances briefly in front of Stewart-Binks, then straddles her and thrusts his hips toward her, grinding on her as the cameras roll. Stewart-Binks, laughing, takes out some crumpled dollar bills and hands them to Gronkowski. The dancing lasts about six seconds.

As she watches the clip, Stewart-Binks’ face reddens and her chest breaks out in hives. She begins to cry. “I will spend my entire life trying to make up for this,” she says, wiping away tears with a shaking hand. “I will die trying to make up for this moment that’s clearly not who I am.”

The Gronkowski segment was the defining moment in Stewart-Binks’ four years at FS1 (2013-16). As the clip spread across the internet, FS1 was derided as a “circus act,” but Stewart-Binks took the brunt of the criticism. She was accused of setting back the efforts of women working in sports journalism and betraying feminism entirely. Some of the criticism came from friends and colleagues.

Now, she wants those critics to know why she participated in the segment, and providing that context requires sharing what she says happened to her in the days beforehand.

On Friday, Stewart-Binks, 37, filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles County Superior Court against Fox and Charlie Dixon, an executive vice president and head of content at Fox Sports and FS1, the company’s sports network. In that lawsuit, she alleges that about a week before the Gronkowski segment she was sexually assaulted by Dixon during a meeting at a hotel that he organized under the auspices of talking about her Super Bowl week duties. Dixon is also a defendant in a lawsuit filed earlier this month by former FS1 hairstylist Noushin Faraji. In Faraji’s complaint, she claimed that “executives and talent were allowed to physically and verbally abuse workers with impunity,” and she alleged that Dixon groped her at a co-worker’s birthday party in January 2017, among other allegations.

Dixon did not respond to text, voice and email messages seeking comment. Fox Sports said in a statement: “These allegations are from over eight years ago. At the time, we promptly hired a third-party firm to investigate and addressed the matter based on their findings.”

Days after the alleged assault, when producers in San Francisco told her that FS1 wanted a viral moment out of Gronkowski, she said she never considered the implications of the stunt, only what would happen if she refused with Dixon watching from the set. “I was in a really f—ed-up place that I could not tell people about,” she said.

In her complaint, Stewart-Binks said she detailed the allegations against Dixon to a Fox human resources official in 2017 but that Fox “egregiously made the deliberate decision to protect Dixon and allow a sexual predator to remain an executive at Fox for nearly a decade.”

“They knew and didn’t do anything about it,” Stewart-Binks said in an interview earlier this month. “It meant they didn’t care about the damage done to me and how it affected others.” She then added: “This has been accepted for so long. I’m sitting here wanting it to be different.”

Stewart-Binks grew up in Toronto, and her mother was a broadcast reporter and her father worked in the medical device industry. She played right wing on a boys’ house league hockey team and also trained as a figure skater and a cellist.

She attended Queen’s University and obtained degrees in both drama and physical and health education but developed a passion for broadcasting and later got a master’s degree in international broadcast journalism from what is now known as City St George’s, University of London.

Her entry into sports journalism in Canada was scrappy and unglamorous. She covered Ontario Hockey League games on a volunteer basis, staying at a friend’s house in Kingston, then taking a bus to Niagara, where she’d bunk with her grandmother in a retirement community. Later, as a reporter and anchor for CTV in Regina, Saskatchewan, she drove across the Canadian prairies shooting and editing sports television packages on curling and anchoring the nightly newscasts. To save money, she lived out of a friend’s basement.

In 2013, she was plucked out of relative obscurity by an agent at Octagon (the late John Ferriter) and flown to Los Angeles to meet with Fox Sports executives and screen test for the launch of FS1. She was hired by the fledgling network as an update anchor and went on to host “Fox Soccer Daily.” She also worked as a sideline reporter for Major League Soccer, hosted FS1’s coverage of the 2014 Winter Olympics and covered the 2015 FIFA Women’s World Cup. She spent 65 days on the road that summer and was tabbed as one of *Awful Announcing’s* “Rising Stars.”

But, according to her complaint, by early 2016, her allies within FS1 — executives like Scott Ackerson and Rick Jaffe — had departed and a new regime — Dixon and fellow executive Jamie Horowitz — were in place with a new vision for the network.

Stewart-Binks still liked her job. She got to cover soccer and hockey — sports she loved — and work as an anchor and a host. She was part of a tight-knit group that helped launch FS1. But her future was uncertain. The network had until April 1, 2016, to pick up a one-year option in her contract. If it did not, she would lose a high-profile job. She felt she needed to show the Dixon-Horowitz regime that she was a versatile and dynamic talent.

When Whitlock requested her to be a part of his show during the 2016 Super Bowl week, she felt she had an opening to do that. And then Dixon asked her to come to his hotel, writing that he wanted to “go over expectation(s)” before a group meeting the next day, according to her complaint. After receiving that text, Stewart-Binks shared her excitement with a friend about getting face time with her boss and curated her outfit for the meeting — a suede jacket and designer heels — hoping to convey style and professionalism.

The lawsuit sets out in detail how they met at the bar at a hotel in Marina del Rey, Calif. She ordered a single glass of white wine. Dixon asked what she had been told about her role on Whitlock's show during Super Bowl week. He then told her he didn't think she should be going to the Super Bowl at all and that she was ill-suited to host and wasn't funny or interesting or talented enough to draw in viewers.

In an interview, Stewart-Binks said she was shocked and confused by Dixon's remarks. Why was he denigrating her so strongly, and, just before she went on an important assignment for the network? She tried to stay calm, even when he remarked, according to the complaint, that the only way anyone would be willing to watch her was if she "got up on this bar and took your top off" and then added: "You're not hot enough to be a hot girl on TV." She said in her interview with *The Athletic* that she responded to Dixon: "I didn't get my master's degree in 'hot girl.'"

Stewart-Binks said Dixon's tone then changed. He stopped criticizing her and asked about her professional aspirations. The complaint states that Dixon then ordered two beers from the bar and urged her to come to his room and drink them, adding that he had a great view from his balcony. She didn't think it was a good idea, she said in her interview and in the complaint, but she felt she couldn't say no to her boss.

"You have autonomy over yourself to say 'no' and leave. But you don't, and you say 'yes' because he held the power to everything," Stewart-Binks told *The Athletic*.

The legal complaint describes Dixon's shirts – colorful tees with slogans and pictures – laid out on one of the beds in his room. Dixon suggested they step out on the balcony. Once outside, Dixon, according to the complaint, "swiftly pushed her against the wall of the hotel and pinned her arms to her side. With her arms forcefully held down and his body pressed against hers, Dixon tried to force his tongue into her mouth." Stewart-Binks' mouth remained shut but Dixon "ignored her, continuing to press against her body and lick her closed mouth. While keeping one of her arms pinned, he moved his other arm from pressing her upper elbow against the wall to her body and towards her chest. Stewart-Binks seized the moment of partial freedom to push him away, say 'get off of me' and rapidly leave the hotel room."

Once in her car, she called the same friend with whom she had earlier shared her excitement about meeting with Dixon. "I remember getting a very upset phone call," the friend told *The Athletic*. "It was the overall disappointment of 'I can't believe an executive did this.'" Stewart-Binks later called her mother, according to the complaint, and the two women concluded that it would imperil her career if she spoke out about what Dixon had allegedly done.

Stewart-Binks went back to work frightened about the implications of fending off Dixon and also what his remarks about her lack of talent meant for her career going forward. At a meeting the day after the alleged assault, she said Dixon ignored her. She believed her future was "very much hanging in the balance" as she arrived in San Francisco for Super Bowl week. Her anxiety was ramped up by producers there who were hell-bent to "make a moment" that would garner attention, she said.

"I was told ... that I was not capable of being able to do a moment like this on television. And that I was not interesting, funny, talented, smart. And so I felt the need to prove that I was all in, and that I was not scared to do something like (the Gronkowski stunt). Had I not (done it), I would have felt like I failed and that I would have confirmed what (Dixon) told me."

The reaction to her role in the Gronkowski segment surprised and stung her, she said in an interview. People she knew in the industry, some whom she considered friends, were among those voicing their disappointment with her choice to participate. Her co-worker and friend, Katie Nolan, told *GQ* that she disapproved of the bit. (Nolan later apologized to Stewart-Binks in a podcast and clarified her remarks.)

Stewart-Binks recalled receiving a text message from Grant Wahl, the late Sports Illustrated soccer writer she admired, that read: “That’s not who you are.”

Fox promoted the Gronkowski segment on social media and elsewhere. The network got its viral moment. But when the backlash grew strong enough, Fox stopped, and the same men in the production meeting eager to “make a moment” went largely silent. Stewart-Binks’ bosses didn’t address the incident at length until six weeks later; Horowitz said at that time that he was supportive of Stewart-Binks for doing a “fun bit” and thought Gronkowski “maybe ... took it a half step too far.”

In her lawsuit, Stewart-Binks said the network instructed her not to comment on the incident, and her agency, CAA, advised her to ride it out. Less than two months after the Super Bowl, Stewart-Binks was informed that Fox would not pick up her contract option with one executive telling her that there was “nothing for her to do here,” according to the complaint.

According to the complaint, Stewart-Binks was contacted by a Fox human resources official in June 2017 and asked about Horowitz’s behavior when Stewart-Binks worked at Fox Sports. Stewart-Binks didn’t have anything substantive to share about Horowitz, but the complaint states that she disclosed to the HR official what Dixon allegedly said to her in their January 2016 meeting and what allegedly happened in his hotel room afterward.

Horowitz was fired following the probe, but Dixon remained at the company.

After Fox, Stewart-Binks worked as a part-time soccer reporter for ESPN, a rinkside reporter for NHL on TNT, a host for BetRivers Sportsbook Network, did stand-up comedy, was a host for the CBC’s 2024 Olympic coverage, among other jobs. She’s continued to scarp to find work but believes the Gronkowski segment has impacted her ability to get other jobs.

When the Faraji lawsuit against Fox and Dixon was filed, Stewart-Binks received text messages from people she had told about her interactions with Dixon. On page eight of the 42-page complaint, there is a reference to a host who reported Dixon to the company. She believed that Faraji, with whom she worked at FS1, was referencing her. Reading about what Faraji allegedly endured was a “tipping point,” Stewart-Binks said. “I didn’t want to hold onto it anymore.”

Stewart-Binks said she has experienced bouts of self-doubt since leaving Fox Sports, Dixon’s criticism of her abilities still ringing in her ears. “I had a different view of what my life would be like than what it is. And I’m very grateful for everything I have. But sometimes I think ... well, what could my life have been had this not happened?”

[The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: The race at the top gets tighter, Senators make a charge](#)

By Sean Gentile- February 1, 2025

For the first time ever — and possibly last, given how long it took — the NHL Power Rankings are a one-person endeavor.

Indeed, Dom Luszczyszyn has the week off due to good behavior. Direct your related complaints and compliments to the appropriate party.

1. Washington Capitals, 34-11-6

Last week: 1

Last week, we wondered whether the Capitals' declining success at five-on-five could start to bite them. Naturally, they went out and took care of business, posting a plus-3 goal differential and controlling about 70 percent of the expected goals, best in the league this week. Sure, they went 1-1-1, but whatever. They did enough to hang on to the big prize.

On the Alex Ovechkin front, a goal against Ottawa on Thursday puts him 19 away from breaking Wayne Gretzky's record. Dom currently gives him a 12 percent chance to do it this season, but one big game would make that number jump quite a bit.

2. Edmonton Oilers, 36-14-3

Last week: 2

The last time the Oilers lost three games in a row was the first three games of the season. That's not to say they don't have off nights — Thursday against Detroit was one of them — but they're good at squeezing out points with their B-game, and there's too much talent for them to stay in the tank all that long.

3. Winnipeg Jets, 36-14-3

Last week: 3

On and off over the course of the season, we've wondered whether the Jets rely too much on their power play. Lately, that hasn't been the case; the Jets are 8-2-0 in their last 10 and scoring more five-on-five goals per 60 than all but two teams — the Oilers and, of course, the Kraken.

4. Carolina Hurricanes, 32-16-4

Last week: 5

In Mikko Rantanen's first three games with the Hurricanes, they've won his five-on-five minutes 3-0 — he scored against the Blackhawks on Thursday — and generated tons of chances. The reviews are in, and they are positive.

We're reaching "Rantanen does something good every shift" territory

— Cory Lavalette (@corylav) January 31, 2025

While we're sharing posts about the Canes, this blew my mind. I double-checked, and it's true.

The Carolina Hurricanes are 62-5-5 in regular season games when Seth Jarvis scores a goal.

<https://t.co/eq3iPg1kUk>

— The Canes Stats Brand™ (@CanesStats) January 31, 2025

5. Dallas Stars, 29-17-1

Last week: 6

If you kept your seat on the Wyatt Johnston hype train, congratulations. His start was ugly, but since Nov. 20, he's 21st in the league in points (35) and 25th in points per 60 (3.25). The latter is a little worse than Sidney Crosby and a little better than Jack Eichel and Sebastian Aho. All is well, Stars fans! Stop watching replays of Mark Stone going yard-sale into Miro Heiskanen's knee ligaments!

Regarding that, by the way, coach Pete DeBoer told Dallas' 96.7 KTCK that he didn't believe Heiskanen's injury was "year-ending," that he believes "there is gonna be a surgery" and that he hopes Heiskanen is back in 8-to-12 weeks. Definitely could be worse, definitely could be better.

6. Vegas Golden Knights, 31-15-6

Last week: 4

Vegas has hit the skids a bit, banking just nine of 24 possible points in its last 12 games. In that stretch, the Golden Knights have been outscored 26-17 at five-on-five for a minus-11 goal differential, third-worst in the NHL. Of those 17 goals, Tomas Hertl and Jack Eichel have combined for eight. Doesn't leave much for the rest of the team.

7. Minnesota Wild, 31-17-4

Last week: 9

It wasn't the most memorable Wild goaltending performance of the week — that honor goes to Marc-Andre Fleury — but Filip Gustavsson's 32-save win over the Maple Leafs might have been the most important. He'd been shaky, basically, since shutting out Carolina on Jan. 4. It'll be a whole lot easier for the Wild to tread water without Kirill Kaprizov if Gustavsson gives them more of the same.

8. Florida Panthers, 30-19-3

Last week: 10

We keep waiting for the Panthers to truly lock back in, and it hasn't happened — they spent another week alternating wins and losses. Good stuff is happening under the hood, though. They're fifth in the NHL in both actual and expected goals percentage since Jan. 1, and they've got a soft stretch of their schedule on the way.

9. Toronto Maple Leafs, 30-19-2

Last week: 7

Five straight wins, three straight losses, three straight wins, three straight losses — when the Leafs do something, they do it for a while. Mirtle called their recent stretch "ugly hockey," and I'm not inclined to disagree. That's life without quality forward depth.

10. Columbus Blue Jackets, 25-19-7

Last week: 15

Amazing stat from Porty after Columbus' overtime win against the Golden Knights on Thursday night.

#CBJ earn their 25th win of the season tonight, Jan. 30.

They won their 25th game last season on April 1.

— Aaron Portzline (@Aportzline) January 31, 2025

Part of the reason that's true: Elvis Merzlikins has stabilized a bit over the last month. Since Dec. 19, he's ninth in the league in goals saved above expected (9.03) with a .910 save percentage, and he was outstanding against the Golden Knights.

11. Los Angeles Kings, 26-17-6

Last week: 8

The Kings are leaking oil. They've lost four straight (with a minus-10 goal differential) and eight of 10. Not quite as bad as last January, when they went 3-7-5, but a bad sign all the same. Getting Drew Doughty is nice, but he's not driving much offense at this point in his career, and they've scored more than two goals exactly once since New Year's Day.

12. Colorado Avalanche, 29-21-2

Last week: 11

Martin Necas has four points in his first three games with Colorado, and he's looked good riding shotgun for Nathan MacKinnon; those two, along with Jonathan Drouin, have already created plenty of chances together. If nothing else, there will be mixtape goals.

Necas is going to be such a strong fit in Colorado. Already looks like he is adjusting & clicking with his new team. pic.twitter.com/VqmpazFW6f

— Shayna (@shaynagoldman_) January 29, 2025

That said, the Avs are 5-6-2 in their last 13 and haven't won consecutive games since Jan. 2, and Necas doesn't help their depth issues down the middle. Playoff team, yes. Actual contender, not right now.

13. Ottawa Senators, 27-20-4

Last week: 20

Senators owner Michael Andlauer explained his rationale for floating the idea that his team could play regular-season games in Quebec City. It made sense, as did the fan base's initial freak-out. Time to move on and focus on the fact that, after a 7-2-1 stretch and an OT win over the Capitals, Ottawa is inching up on the top two teams in the Atlantic Division. Let Spartacat enjoy himself.

14. New Jersey Devils, 29-18-6

Last week: 13

Against Philadelphia on Wednesday, the Devils' centers were Jack Hughes, Dawson Mercer, Justin Dowling and Curtis Lazar. There were extenuating circumstances — Nico Hischier is week to week with an upper-body injury and Erik Haula (ankle) hasn't played since Jan. 4 — but still, that gets real ugly in a real hurry. A legit NHL bottom-sixer would go a long way.

15. Tampa Bay Lightning, 27-20-3

Last week: 12

The Lightning beat the Kings 3-0 on Thursday. It was a necessary bit of good news because they'd been heinous in their previous five games, beating only the Blackhawks on a four-game road trip, then losing to the Blackhawks on Tuesday. Some of that was bad luck — they're too good to shoot 7 percent as a team for all that long — but they needed to get the car back on the road.

16. Vancouver Canucks, 23-17-10

Last week: 23

Two options regarding the Canucks; you can either talk about the staggeringly great work we're seeing from Quinn Hughes, or you can talk about everything else. We're going with Option A. He's a defenseman who leads his team in points ... by 23; he's either scored or assisted on 16 of the Canucks' last 27 goals; he's on pace to out-produce his brother. Give him the Norris. Give him the Hart, maybe.

17. Detroit Red Wings, 25-21-5

Last week: 22

Marco Kasper's breakout (12 points in his last 10 games) makes the Red Wings a whole lot more interesting. They needed production from someone on the left wing other than Alex DeBrincat, and Kasper has given them that. He's a natural center, and Detroit is thin there, too, but they should take what they can get. Kasper sprang Dylan Larkin for a crucial goal in a comeback win over the Oilers on Thursday night.

18. Calgary Flames, 25-18-7

Last week: 16

Thursday's trade with the Flyers wasn't all that interesting, but Calgary did improve a bit — Morgan Frost and Joel Farabee are middle-six upgrades at a low cost. Now, would they be upgrades for other teams? Nope. The Flames are 29th in goals per 60 at five-on-five; they're also in a playoff spot. Might as well try to make it stick.

19. New York Islanders, 23-20-7

Last week: 25

The Islanders spent January forcing everyone to take them seriously, going 9-3-0 and finishing the month on a six-game winning streak. By Friday morning, they were four points out of a wild-card spot with games in hand on the teams they were chasing.

Ilya Sorokin, as you'd assume, has been a big part of that, putting up a .938 save percentage in January and saving nearly 10 goals above expected. That has wallpapered over some still-shaky play at five-on-five. We'll see how the next eight days go, with games against Tampa Bay, Florida, Vegas, Winnipeg and Minnesota.

20. New York Rangers, 24-22-4

Last week: 14

Igor Shesterkin dragged the Rangers back into the wild-card race, and now they're asking him to keep them in it. In two losses this week, a close one to Colorado and a blowout against Carolina, he's allowed about four goals more than expected and put up an .813 save percentage. On one hand, expecting his A-game every night is unfair; on the other, their margin for error is too slim to handle much else.

21. Montreal Canadiens, 24-22-4

Last week: 17

The Canadiens played their way into the wild-card discussion, but that's not a season-long pass. All of a sudden, they've managed one point in four games, their coach is wondering about their lack of "juice" and "swagger," and they're about to play three West Coast games, followed by two against Eastern Conference contenders. Time to figure out just how serious they are.

22. Boston Bruins, 25-22-6

Last week: 21

Brutal week for the Bruins. Losing 7-2 to the Sabres was bad, and Thursday's 6-2 meltdown against the Jets might have been worse; the game was tied 2-2 at the second intermission. They're a point out of a wild-card spot, but it doesn't feel that way.

23. Utah HC, 21-21-8

Last week: 18

Hey Utah hockey fans! We listened to your feedback and dug into all the Qualtrics data from last night's survey. For the team name, it's clear that Outlaws should be in the mix instead of Wasatch, so we're swapping it out.

Surveys will continue at the arena Friday, Sunday and...

— Utah Hockey Club (@utahhockeyclub) January 30, 2025

Have we considered naming them the Qualtrics? They've won five of their last 18, by the way.

24. St. Louis Blues, 23-24-4

Last week: 19

There's plenty to be said about Brandon Saad's choice to terminate the last one and a half seasons of his contract with the Blues — ultimately, though, it's his life, his money and his business. He's in demand, of course, because he still can bring something to the right lineup under the right circumstances. A big part of that: His shooting percentage is 9.3, which is unsustainably low for a guy who's lived in the 15-18 percent range for the last five seasons. If that ticks up, he'll help in easy minutes on a bottom six.

25. Philadelphia Flyers, 23-24-6

Last week: 24

On Thursday night, ESPN's cameras caught John Tortorella and Matvei Michkov discussing Philly's trade for Andrei Kuzmenko. Both of them were very excited.

Here's the heated exchange between John Tortorella and Matvei Michkov after the first Islanders goal. #Flyers pic.twitter.com/IDOFXC4WSc

— Flyers Nation (@FlyersNation) January 31, 2025

The exchange actually came right after Michkov failed to cover a shot from the slot that put the Islanders up 1-0 with 9:58 left in the second. He didn't take another shift. "We're going to do it the right way with this kid because we think he's that special," Tortorella said after the game. "So it's my job to do that. No matter what happens." Fair enough.

26. Seattle Kraken, 23-27-3

Last week: 28

Each week, there's a team or two that briefly looks interested in joining the Western Conference wild-card race. This time, it's the Kraken, who've won six of 11 and outscored opponents 39-34 in the process. Not bad — but five of those wins have come against Pittsburgh, Buffalo and San Jose. Seattle's remaining opponents also have the fourth-highest points percentage in the league. Do not buy.

27. Anaheim Ducks, 21-24-6

Last week: 29

We'll believe that John Gibson actually gets traded when the paperwork is filed. Either way, it's been a while since he's looked this good; he's 10th in the league in goals saved above expected per 60 with a .912 save percentage.

28. Pittsburgh Penguins, 21-24-8

Last week: 27

In his last six games, Sidney Crosby has seven points (four goals, three assists) and a five-on-five goal share of nearly 60 percent. Have the Penguins lost four of those games? Of course they have! They're bad! In that same span, nobody else on the roster has scored more than once. It's the sort of stretch that makes you understand why people continue to pretend he could be traded.

29. Nashville Predators, 18-24-7

Last week: 26

Credit the Predators for that five-game win streak. It ended, though, before they forced us to contemplate their place in the wild-card race all that seriously. Now, poof — they've lost their last two, thanks to some tough luck at five-on-five and a crummy power play (0-for-6). Easy come, easy go.

30. Buffalo Sabres, 19-26-5

Last week: 30

Matt Fairburn wrote about this a few days back, but the Sabres might have something in 20-year-old Jiri Kulich. He's been centering Tage Thompson and JJ Peterka recently and looked good in the process; in about 50 minutes together, they're outscoring opponents 7-2.

31. Chicago Blackhawks, 16-30-5

Last week: 31

Connor Bedard has points in 16 of his last 18 games. Very good. The Blackhawks have also been outscored 19-14 with him on the ice at five-on-five with an expected goals percentage to match. Very not good.

32. San Jose Sharks, 15-33-6

Last week: 32

It's been a volatile first 13 starts for Yaroslav Askarov. Six times, he's put up a .929 save percentage or better; six times, he's put up an .871 or worse. This week, he stacked a game where he was the best player on the ice (Pittsburgh) and one where he got pulled after allowing four goals on 11 shots (Seattle). He's clearly talented, and the team in front of him is awful, but more time in the AHL seems like a no-brainer.

The Athletic / NHL trade grades: Stars land Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci. Was the price too high?

By Shayna Goldman and Sean Gentile- February 2, 2025

The trade

Dallas Stars get: F Mikael Granlund, D Cody Ceci

San Jose Sharks get: 2025 first-round pick, 2025 fourth-round pick (becomes third-round pick if Dallas makes Stanley Cup Final)

Shayna Goldman: The Stars are in need of some reinforcements at forward with Tyler Seguin's injury, so adding Granlund makes a lot of sense.

If the Stars get the Granlund who has thrived on a bad Sharks team with a scoring resurgence, they are adding someone who can help retrieve puck from his own zone and transition the puck up the ice. Last year, his passing was up in San Jose and this season he seems to be emphasizing his shot volume more. His ability to tip and deflect pucks is especially helpful on the power play.

But there are a few red flags here. Granlund's defense has not been sterling in San Jose, and it's hard to isolate whether that falls on the player, the environment, his usage against top offensive competition, or a combination of the three. The Stars should have the structure to maximize his abilities, though.

The other worry is whether his game will wilt if his ice time trends down. Playing key minutes and getting a lot of power play opportunity has agreed with Granlund, compared to his third-line role in Pittsburgh in 2022-23. To his credit, he had literally no offensive help on that third line back then, and the Stars have a lot more talent.

There is going to be an element of risk to every trade. But the Stars forward group is strong and versatile, and Granlund seems like he could add something.

The Stars' fatal flaw, on the other hand? Their blue line. And Ceci only amplifies an area of weakness. Dallas may need some depth to navigate the Miro Heiskanen injury, but Ceci isn't the answer. He is a one-dimensional defensive defenseman who tends to play in roles that are above his head. Even if his time with the Sharks is not the best example, just look back to last season in Edmonton. He was outright crushed in matchup minutes with Darnell Nurse, who has since rebounded in a new-look second pair.

When Heiskanen returns, the Stars likely won't need Ceci to play as meaningful a role, so maybe there is a way to limit the damage. There weren't exactly a ton of other rental right-handed defensemen to choose from. Still, the cost is really high for someone this flawed.

Getting a first-rounder in return is a great bit of business for the Sharks, especially without any salary retention (since San Jose has all three spots filled). Granlund and Ceci both came to San Jose as salary dumps, and the Sharks managed to turn them into something that should help push their rebuilding process along.

Stars grade: C+

Sharks grade: A-

Sean Gentile: Are you an actual Stanley Cup contender? Did you just add players who seem capable of helping along the way? If the answer to both of those questions is "yes," then a trade can't be all that bad. It's simple, but it's true.

That was my thought upon hearing that Dallas acquired Granlund and Ceci. This is a team with a wide-open window, long-term answers at every important position and real-life money to spend. Not going all-out this season, especially after two consecutive losses in the Western Conference final, would be baffling. It'd be foolish. It'd be wrong. If not now, when?

So, in that regard, we should all be able appreciate GM Jim Nill's work on Saturday morning. He added two rentals who make his team incrementally better. Perfect is the enemy of good, as the saying goes. They didn't get J.T. Miller or Marcus Pettersson. The rest of the trade board is uninspiring. Do you want to get better or not?

Granlund rehabbed his value as a skilled, versatile middle-six option with the Sharks — no small task after a truly disastrous stint with the Penguins, who acquired him from Nashville in March 2023 for reasons that are still almost impossible to suss out.

(I gave the deal an "F" for Pittsburgh when it happened — Granlund's point production had cratered, he had some of the worst defensive impacts in the league and he took Pittsburgh's cap situation even further into the abyss — and wound up underestimating just how bad the fit would be. He put up five points in 21 games and looked, in a word, lost. The trade didn't get Penguins GM Ron Hextall fired; it also didn't not get him fired. But I digress.)

With Dallas, Granlund makes some amount of sense. He had 45 points for the Sharks this season, a production rate identical to Nico Hischier's, and they're playing close to break-even hockey with him on the ice. That's no small feat, given they're the worst team in the league. You'd assume Dallas slots him in as the third-line center, especially with Tyler Seguin on LTIR, but he'd also be interesting with Matt Duchene; when the two were together in Nashville, the Preds outscored opponents 72-58 and controlled play at five-on-five. Defensively, he's still not great, but I think Dallas' forward group is strong enough to get him the opportunities he needs to be a net-positive player.

Ceci is what he is: a large, chaotic depth defenseman who shouldn't play outside a third pair. He makes the right side of the Stars' blue line a bit better, but we're grading on steep curve. I'd say Dallas should use the rest of its cap space (PuckPedia projects it at \$3 million on deadline day) to add another option, but the Stars' last three attempts have been Ilya Lyubushkin, Matt Dumba and Ceci, so ... maybe not.

The Sharks' end of things is a bit closer to perfect. In two trades involving Granlund, Mike Grier managed to add two first-round picks. He turned Ceci into something useful, too. You can't expect much more from a rebuilding GM.

Stars grade: B-

Sharks grade: A

The Athletic / NHL trade grades: Canucks pay Penguins steep price for Marcus Pettersson, Drew O'Connor

By James Mirtle and Shayna Goldman- February 2, 2025

The trade

Vancouver Canucks get: D Marcus Pettersson, F Drew O'Connor

Pittsburgh Penguins get: F Danton Heinen, D Vincent Desharnais, F Melvin Fernström, 2025 first-round pick (via New York Rangers, top-13 protected)

James Mirtle: How many Petterssons do we have on this ship, anyway? I do love a good two-part trade, and Jim Rutherford has pulled off a dandy late Friday night after the Canucks' tough loss in Dallas.

After it looked like Vancouver was set to take a step back by sort of punting with the J.T. Miller trade, it flipped the Rangers' first-rounder and picked up exactly what the team needed: another top-four defender who can play significant minutes and take some of the pressure off Quinn Hughes.

The Canucks blue line had struggled all year after their odd offseason makeover didn't work; this should finally stabilize their pairings and slot the rest of their back end in the right spots.

It was a hefty price, but given they also pushed out some underperforming salary next year by including Desharnais (\$2 million) and Heinen (\$2.25 million), it stands to reason they'll take a healthy run at keeping Pettersson in the fold long term. (They now have \$27 million free this summer, albeit with some key names to re-sign.)

O'Connor, meanwhile, has been mired in a season-long slump and brings at least some potential to offer physicality and depth scoring off the wing after he had 16 goals and 33 points last season.

It's obviously a lot for the Canucks to pay for two rentals, but their need on D was so glaring that it threatened their season, even with all the focus on the Miller drama. With how soft the bottom of the West is, they're still in a very good position to make the playoffs, and this gives them a fighting chance of matching up against some of the better teams in the conference.

That wasn't realistic without an upgrade on the back end before the deadline.

Vancouver also opened up another \$2.9 million in cap space with these two deals, which will allow it to do more retooling by March 7, if necessary.

As for the Penguins, they do well to get what should be a decently high first-round pick and two roster players with terms they can look to flip, either now, in the offseason or at next year's deadline.

With so few quality defenders available before the deadline, it made sense they should be able to fetch a late first for Pettersson, but I didn't think it would be one with a chance to be in the first 16 picks in June.

And O'Connor's value had sunk to the point he wasn't the prize he might have been at the start of the season. I think this deal has the chance to be a win-win. But a lot of that on the Vancouver side hinges on if Pettersson stays a Canuck at a reasonable price.

I'm going to bet that happens.

Canucks: B

Penguins: B+

Shayna Goldman: It took, what, two hours for the Canucks to move the most valuable part of the return of the Miller trade?

The vision was there for the Canucks, because that first-rounder better serves them as a trade asset than an actual pick in the 2025 draft. And by moving out Miller's contract, management opened up cap space.

Think back to the Capitals in 2023. Washington added a Bruins' first-rounder as part of the return for Dmitry Orlov and Garnet Hathaway in late February. Days later, management flipped that 2023 first (and Erik Gustafsson) for Rasmus Sandin. And that was a major step in the right direction for the Capitals' retool on the fly.

But there's a big difference between Sandin and Pettersson. The 22-year-old was under contract for another season at \$1.4 million, and he became a restricted free agent when that deal expired the next summer. Pettersson, on the other hand, is a 28-year-old carrying a \$4 million cap hit, just months away from unrestricted free agency.

Pettersson may be a fit for a Canucks team that needs help on the back end. He isn't a play-driver, but he can keep up and complement high-end offensive defenders. He brings stability to the defensive zone. Pettersson retrieves a lot of pucks and helps his team push play out of its own end.

Is that worth a first-round pick? Sometimes the market price can rise for rental defensemen in the weeks leading up to the deadline. And that first-round payment can be worth it for a piece that really solidifies a contender. But the market price hasn't risen to that level yet, and even with Pettersson, the Canucks don't look like a contender. So this is an overpayment even if the team intends to extend him.

There are two small wins for Vancouver. The first is moving out Desharnais' contract. He brings a lot of size to a lineup but doesn't thread the needle. And O'Connor is cheaper depth than Heinen. He can help transition the puck up the ice in the bottom six and kill penalties. But those wins just don't outweigh the cost, especially not with the big picture in mind.

As for the Penguins, getting a first-rounder for Pettersson is a great bit of business. The team has stocked up on mid- and late-round picks for 2025 and 2026 but only had its own first in 2025 and 2026. So getting a first-rounder back for its best pending UFA trade chip is a win.

Heinen in return for O'Connor is fine, too — whether the Penguins flip him before the deadline or just keep him to help fill voids left by any further movement.

Canucks: C

Penguins: B+

The Athletic / NHL trade deadline 2025: 7 top prospects who could be on the move

By Corey Pronman- February 3, 2025

The trade deadline is just over a month away, although with the NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off approaching, we expect there could be a soft trade deadline in the coming days. Today I highlight some top prospects, including quite a few first-round picks in recent years, who I think contenders could move in the coming weeks.

Trevor Connelly, LW, Vegas

Vegas has traded away almost every first-round pick it's made. Connelly, who was the 19th pick last summer, would be a more complicated deal due to his background, but there would be a market. He's a high-end skater with a high skill level although his freshman season at Providence hasn't been as prolific as some would have hoped. He's a potential middle-six winger in the NHL.

Hendrix Lapierre, C, Washington


Lapierre, the 22nd pick in 2020, has been up and down as a pro, with more downs of late. He was a useful player for the Capitals last season, but as of this writing is in the AHL. He's a very skilled playmaker, but his compete level is average, he's not that big, and he's currently rocking a zero in the goal column this season. The skill is intriguing enough that someone may want to take a shot on him in a different environment, but his trade value isn't great at the moment.

Seamus Casey or Simon Nemec, RHD, New Jersey

It feels like something has to give with this situation for the Devils. They have a great team, a great blue line and too many strong power-play candidates between Dougie Hamilton, Luke Hughes, Nemec and Casey. There will be a market for both Casey and Nemec, and while having a lot of great defensemen is an envious luxury, at some point, there are diminishing returns if they can't play the role they will be maximized in. Nemec's play hasn't been great this year, but the 2022 No. 2 pick could still be a good NHL player, whereas Casey has impressed as a rookie pro elevating his trade value.

Isaac Howard, LW, Tampa Bay

Howard has progressed well of late, being a top player in college hockey this season and a current favorite to win the Hobey Baker. The 20-year-old is listed here because Tampa Bay only has so many years left to make runs with its core, and Howard is the Lightning's best trade chip. He's a good skater with great hands who can both make and finish plays. He has middle-six winger potential and the ability to score goals at the next level.

 Isaac Howard (#22 in green) fires it home for his 22nd goal of the NCAA season!#GoBolts

pic.twitter.com/cKuGokCFWV

— Future Bolts (@LightningProsp1) February 1, 2025

Mikhail Gulyayev, LHD, Colorado

Gulyayev is a talented offensive-minded defenseman. He's an excellent skater, with very good hands and vision who projects to run a pro power play. He's on the smaller side, though, and scouts have questions on how well he will defend in the NHL. He could be a legit NHL defenseman despite his size, but on a

team that already has Cale Makar and Samuel Girard, Colorado could very well look to deal Gulyayev if it finds the right deal.

Brad Lambert, C, Winnipeg

Lambert was excellent last season in the AHL, looking on the fast track to the NHL. This season he's taken a step back, with some of his old bad habits creeping in. He's a dynamic skater and puck handler who has clear NHL forward talent, but his effort is an issue at times and he often plays too much on the outside. Winnipeg is in win-now mode, and while Lambert's value is down, he could still be a valuable trade chip if someone believes he could benefit from a change in environment.

ESPN / NHL trade grades: Report cards for the Flyers-Flames swap

By Ryan S. Clark, Greg Wyshynski- February 1, 2025

The NHL trade deadline for the 2024-25 season is not until March 7, but teams have not waited until the last minute to make major moves.

Read on for grades from Ryan S. Clark and Greg Wyshynski, and check back the next time a big deal breaks.

The NHL. Where apparently Friday nights are the prime time for blockbuster trades?

Let's look at how each GM did and what the impact could be going forward.

The Rangers might be many things this season. Boring sure isn't one of them.

They traded their captain Jacob Trouba. They moved on from the one-time No. 2 pick in the draft (Kaapo Kakko) who was thought to be one of the future faces of the franchise. Now they have acquired one of the most coveted players more than a month ahead of the NHL trade deadline.

Can getting Miller be the move that helps the Rangers go from being five points out of the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference in late January to landing a playoff spot by the end of regular season?

Miller provides the Rangers with another dimension they were lacking within their top nine. He probably could find a place in the top six either as a winger or somewhere down the middle. Either way, he creates possibilities that they just didn't have before.

Miller gives them another two-way forward they could pair with Vincent Trocheck on the first line. Or he could be paired on the wing with Mika Zibanejad on the second line. But those aren't the only options. There's also the possibility the Rangers could play Miller down the middle to create a dynamic that has him, Trocheck and Zibanejad anchoring their top three lines.

That's one dimension. What he offers from an offensive consistency standpoint is another. Miller sat out games earlier this season but is still projected to finish with 57 points in 66 games. That's an average of 0.86 points per game.

Artemi Panarin is the only Ranger who's averaging more points per game this season. Miller is a candidate to play on the first-team power-play unit considering he has 14 power-play points, which would be third on the Rangers behind Panarin and Adam Fox.

Getting Miller goes well beyond what he could do for the Rangers this season. He's in the second year of a seven-year contract that provides the Rangers with cost certainty ahead of an offseason where they face looming decisions.

Having cost certainty probably played a role in why they were comfortable moving on from Mancini after signing Will Borgen, who arrived in the Kakko trade, to a five-year deal worth \$4.1 million a season.

The money the Rangers committed to Borgen plus what they've added from Miller's contract means they're going to have what PuckPedia projects is \$18.69 million available ahead of what should be a busy offseason. The Rangers have a six-player restricted free agent class led by Will Cuyllé and K'Andre Miller, while Ryan Lindgren is a pending UFA after signing a one-year deal worth \$4.5 million.

NHL front offices are not a monolith. But they all value secrecy. So, when Canucks president of hockey operations Jim Rutherford confirmed there was a rift between Elias Pettersson and Miller it made the possibility of a trade even more probable.

Of the two, Miller appeared to be the one who was going to leave. He's older by five years and his \$8 million annual cap hit was going to be easier to move than Pettersson's \$11.6 million.

Miller has finished with more than 80 points in the past three seasons and is averaging 0.88 points per game this season. Pettersson has had two seasons in the past three in which he has finished with more than 80 points and is averaging 0.72 points per game this season.

Miller's departure should hypothetically bring a resolution to the tension that was building within the Canucks' organization. Figuring out if his departure can lead to Pettersson regaining offensive consistency while also trying to make the playoffs is another matter.

The situation facing the Canucks meant there was always a possibility they wouldn't receive someone who could be a like-for-like replacement for Miller.

Now, the Canucks are in a position to trust Chytil with the demands that come with being a top-six center.

Promise has followed Chytil since he was drafted by the Rangers in the first round in 2017. There have been seasons when his potential surfaced such as when he had 22 goals and 45 points in 74 games in the 2022-23 season. But there have also been injuries that have made it hard for him to find consistency, including multiple documented concussions, one of which led to him sitting out 72 regular-season games last season.

The most ice time Chytil's received through a full season came in his second year when he was averaging 14 minutes, 50 seconds. Miller was averaging close to 18 minutes this season but has averaged more than 19 minutes in every season he has played for the Canucks since arriving in 2019-20.

Miller was an important part of the Canucks penalty kill having logged more than 93 minutes of short-handed ice time per season over the past four seasons. Chytil has logged less than 15 minutes of short-handed ice time through his career, according to Natural Stat Trick.

But the Canucks have also shown that newcomers can find success in a short time. They've seen it the past few seasons with Filip Hronek, Andrei Kuzmenko and with Jake DeBrusk, who is on pace for a career-high 28 goals this season.

What Chytil does provide the Canucks is additional cap space. He's making \$4.44 million annually, a savings of more than \$3.5 million that could prove useful before the trade deadline. Chytil has two more years left on his contract and would be eligible for free agency after the 2026-27 season.

It's also the type of savings that could aid the Canucks in the offseason given Brock Boeser is in the final season of a contract that pays him \$6.6 million annually.

As for everything else in the trade? The Canucks picking up a protected-top 13 pick means they'll have two picks in 2025. It's possible they could use one of those along with what PuckPedia projects to be \$12.198 million in deadline cap space to facilitate a deal.

Mancini, a fifth-round pick in 2022, provides the Canucks with another young defenseman in a system that already has Sawyer Mynio, Elias Pettersson and Tom Willander. Mancini had five points in 15 games for the Rangers before returning to the AHL where he has three goals and 10 points in 23 games. -- Clark Here's a look at how each GM operated and what it all means.

Even after this trade, the Flames still have more than \$17.5 million in cap space (per PuckPedia), which is the second most in the NHL behind the Columbus Blue Jackets (\$18.75 million).

Plus, the Flames still have two first-round picks for 2025 along with two first-round picks in 2026.

It's a level of asset management and financial flexibility that could prove vital in their bid to reach the playoffs. At some point, they'll have to weigh whether it's worth parting with a first-round pick to land another player who would help their quest to secure a playoff spot; currently, they hold the second wild-card position in the West.

The question of what to do next will be determined over the next few weeks. For now, they have more pressing concerns. The main one being: What kind of production can they get immediately from Farabee and Frost?

Losing three-time 20-goal scorer Anthony Mantha to season-ending knee surgery in November meant the Flames needed additional scoring help. The promise Kuzmenko showed after he was traded to the Flames last season -- with 14 goals and 25 points in 29 games -- withered away, as he's mustered only four goals and 15 points in 37 games this season.

Placing Connor Zary on injured reserve earlier this month only reinforced that need to find top-nine help. The scoring totals just don't add up if this team is fighting for the playoffs.

Farabee and Frost could potentially help the Flames address their offensive concerns. Farabee is a two-time 20-goal scorer who scored 50 points last season, while Frost could notch his third consecutive 40-point campaign.

Thus far, Farabee has scored eight goals, averaging 0.39 points per game, which has him on pace to finish with 12 goals and 29 points in 77 games. If he continues at that projection, it will result in his poorest offensive season since his rookie season in 2019-20 when he scored 21 points in 52 games.

Frost, on the other hand, has an opportunity to get back on track after spending the last two seasons coming under fire from Flyers coach John Tortorella. He's on pace for 17 goals, which would be the second most of his career, while his 39-point projection over 76 games would just fall short of the 41 points he accrued in 71 games last season.

Making the playoffs for the first time since the 2021-22 season appears to be a priority for this franchise. Another is the need to find stability, considering the Flames' many trades over the last three seasons.

Any role Farabee and Frost can play in that playoff pursuit could further justify whatever plans the Flames may have for them down the road.

Kuzmenko was in the final season of a two-year deal (\$5.5 million average annual value), while Pelletier was a pending restricted free agent. Swapping them for Farabee and Frost provides the Flames with more certainty.

Farabee has three years left on his contract carrying a \$5 million AAV. Frost is a restricted free agent who is coming off a two-year bridge deal that saw him earn \$2.1 million. The Flames would have one more year of control after this season before Frost becomes an unrestricted free agent at the end of the 2025-26 campaign.

They were able to add two players that could help them now and possibly in the future while holding only losing a minimal amount of cap space and keeping those first-round picks.

Those are the circumstances that gives Flames GM Craig Conroy the sort of options ahead of the trade deadline most in his role would covet.

Philadelphia Flyers

Grade: B+

Moving on from Farabee could play a significant role in whatever path the Flyers opt to take in the offseason.

Initially, the Flyers were slated to have \$12.88 million in available cap space heading into the summer. But the only money coming off their books was the combined \$3.4 million between Rodrigo Abols and Erik Johnson on expiring contracts, along with the Tony DeAngelo buyout at \$1.67 million.

Shedding Farabee's salary (and with Kuzmenko on an expiring deal) means they are projected to have \$17.88 million in cap space entering the offseason, according to PuckPedia.

In addition, the second-round pick they received in this deal gives them seven in the first two rounds, including three in the first.

But just how the Flyers choose to spend their money in the summer could hinge upon how Kuzmenko performs.

Part of Kuzmenko's appeal is that he has found ways to have instant success in new places. His first season with the Canucks was a breakout, with 39 goals and 74 points. His second season was a step back, with just eight goals and 21 points in 45 games before he was traded to the Flames; he got off to a hot start again, with 14 goals and 25 points in 29 games.

That trend is what makes him a possibility on the second line where he could play alongside Sean Couturier and former SKA St. Petersburg teammate Matvei Michkov. The "high-scoring newcomer" version of Kuzmenko would be highly useful, as the Flyers are five points out of the second wild-card spot.

The scoring will help, but Kuzmenko's play in the defensive zone will dictate quite a bit. Especially with the Flyers in the top five in the fewest shots allowed per 60 and ranked 12th in the fewest scoring chances allowed per 60, according to Natural Stat Trick.

As for Pelletier, the Flyers hope he can continue to build upon what has been his strongest professional season to date. He began the campaign in the AHL, where he had 19 points in 20 games, before he was called up to the Flames in early December.

He has gradually made a case for more playing time. Pelletier went from averaging a little more than 11 minutes per game in December to just under 15 minutes per game in January. It resulted in an offensive return of four goals and 11 points in 24 games, while also logging more than 33 minutes of short-handed ice time.

Like Frost, he's a pending RFA. But Pelletier's \$800,000 cap hit means that he could become a more cost-effective option compared to what Philly would have had to pay Frost. —Clark

ESPN / NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, January trends for each team

By ESPN staff- February 1, 2025

Friday marks the final night of games for the month of January in the 2024-25 NHL season. In addition to our latest updated Power Rankings, let's check in on how all 32 teams performed this month.

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

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

Published Jan. 24. Points percentages, paces and January stats are through Thursday's games.

1. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 72.55%

Alex Ovechkin or no Alex Ovechkin, this team just keeps winning, and January was no different; the Caps racked up 22 points in 14 games, extending their lead atop the Metropolitan Division.

Next eight days: vs. WPG (Feb. 1), vs. FLA (Feb. 4), @ PHI (Feb. 6)

2. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 70.75%

No, this isn't the dominant team that was setting records in the season's first weeks. But they'll take an 9-3-2 record any month, given the sizable lead they built in October and November.

Next eight days: @ WSH (Feb. 1), vs. CAR (Feb. 4)

3. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 66.67%

Some teams that lose in the Stanley Cup Final swoon in the following season. That hasn't been the case for Edmonton, and a 10-3-1 January has them atop the Pacific Division.

Next eight days: vs. TOR (Feb. 1), @ STL (Feb. 4), @ CHI (Feb. 5)

4. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 65.38%

Carolina's point percentage was the fifth highest in the league in January -- and most of those games were played without Mikko Rantanen and Taylor Hall. Are those two additions enough to finally get the Canes back to the Stanley Cup Final?

Next eight days: vs. LA (Feb. 1), @ WPG (Feb. 4), @ MIN (Feb. 6)

5. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 65.38%

Just as some other teams quietly crept up the standings in the month of January, the Knights stumbled a bit (at least in a relative sense); a 6-6-3 record isn't in line with what we've come to expect out of one of the NHL's elite contenders.

Next eight days: @ NYR (Feb. 2), @ NYI (Feb. 4), @ NJ (Feb. 6)

6. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 65.00%

An injury this week to Miro Heiskanen puts his participation in the 4 Nations Face-Off in jeopardy. What's not in jeopardy is the Stars' playoff positioning, particularly as they have gone 10-4-0 in January.

Next eight days: vs. VAN (Jan. 31), vs. CBJ (Feb. 2), @ ANA (Feb. 4)

7. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 60.58%

The Panthers started strong this season, which was good because January wasn't their best month ever: the Cats had a 7-6-1 record, despite a plus-6 goal differential.

Next eight days: vs. CHI (Feb. 1), vs. NYI (Feb. 2), @ WSH (Feb. 4), @ STL (Feb. 6)

8. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 60.78%

If the Maple Leafs are playing the long game, dropping to second in the Atlantic might make sense -- they'll likely avoid the Bruins in the first round of the playoffs. In that regard, a 7-6-0 January gets a thumbs-up?

Next eight days: @ EDM (Feb. 1), @ CGY (Feb. 4), @ SEA (Feb. 6)

9. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 63.46%

Given their negative goal differential in January, the Wild are lucky to escape with a record north of .500. And thanks to their early success, there remains a gap between Minnesota and the teams behind it.

Next eight days: @ OTT (Feb. 1), @ BOS (Feb. 4), vs. CAR (Feb. 6)

10. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 60.38%

Some nights, the Devils look as strong as any team in the league; other nights, not so much. (Just look at the two different results against the Flyers this week.) Accordingly, they'll finish January with a 5-5-3 record.

Next eight days: @ BUF (Feb. 2), @ PIT (Feb. 4), vs. VGK (Feb. 6)

11. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 10

Points percentage: 59.18%

The Kings are looking up at the Oilers and Golden Knights in the Pacific Division, as those two clubs appear to be on another tier at this point. A 5-7-1 January didn't help the cause, and they are teetering close to being caught from behind (though they have games in hand on all the teams chasing them).

Next eight days: @ CAR (Feb. 1), vs. MTL (Feb. 5)

12. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 57.69%

The Avalanche remain in the driver's seat for a wild-card spot (if not a higher position in the Central Division), although their January results leave a bit to be desired, with a 6-6-2 record.

Next eight days: vs. STL (Jan. 31), vs. PHI (Feb. 2), @ VAN (Feb. 4), @ CGY (Feb. 6)

13. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 56.86%

Is this the season the Senators make it back to the playoffs? An 8-5-2 January -- despite a minus-10 goal differential -- has kept them right in the mix.

Next eight days: vs. MIN (Feb. 1), @ NSH (Feb. 3), @ TB (Feb. 4), @ TB (Feb. 6)

14. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 57.00%

The good news for the Lightning: Racking up a bunch of points earlier this season meant they had some wiggle room. The bad news: a month of 46.90 points percentage hockey has reduced that space to the smallest of wiggles.

Next eight days: vs. NYI (Feb. 1), vs. OTT (Feb. 4), vs. OTT (Feb. 6)

15. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 14

Points percentage: 57.00%

The Flames have more or less held serve in January, with a 7-6-0 record. Thanks in large part to rookie goaltender Dustin Wolf, they remain on the wild-card bubble.

Next eight days: vs. DET (Feb. 1), @ SEA (Feb. 2), vs. TOR (Feb. 4), vs. COL (Feb. 6)

16. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 57.00%

It's unquestionable that the Blue Jackets are the best "story" of the 2024-25 season, and their quest for a playoff return was greatly aided in January: a record of 9-3-1 generated the sixth-best points percentage for the month.

Next eight days: @ UTA (Jan. 31), @ DAL (Feb. 2), @ BUF (Feb. 4), vs. UTA (Feb. 6)

17. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 56.00%

The well-reported locker room strife between Elias Pettersson and J.T. Miller was confirmed by general manager Jim Rutherford this week, lending more credence to the idea that one of the two stars will be traded. Hopefully that will spur the team to earn more wins, as a month of .500 hockey isn't a great sign looking ahead.

Next eight days: @ DAL (Jan. 31), vs. DET (Feb. 2), vs. COL (Feb. 4), @ SJ (Feb. 6)

18. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 52.83%

The Bruins have gone 5-7-2 this month and appear more in need of the 4 Nations Face-Off break than many other teams. Is there a trade in the works to shake things up?

Next eight days: vs. NYR (Feb. 1), vs. MIN (Feb. 4), @ NYR (Feb. 5)

19. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 52.00%

As the Rangers collapsed earlier this season, there was no shortage of fan frustration along with takes on how to properly fix them. Quietly, they've charged back up the standings, due in part to an 8-3-3 January.

Next eight days: @ BOS (Feb. 1), vs. VGK (Feb. 2), vs. BOS (Feb. 5)

20. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 53.92%

Detroit's 2024-25 season has been a bit of a roller coaster, including the dismissal of coach Derek Lalonde and hiring of Todd McLellan. This month has been a high point, with a 10-3-1 record that has the Red Wings back on the wild-card bubble.

Next eight days: @ CGY (Feb. 1), @ VAN (Feb. 2), @ SEA (Feb. 4)

21. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 51.96%

The fact that the Canadiens remain on the fringes of the playoff race into February is remarkable, and their 7-5-2 record in January is a big part of that. Does the front office add to the roster before the trade deadline, or keep the slow build process going?

Next eight days: @ ANA (Feb. 2), @ SJ (Feb. 4), @ LA (Feb. 5)

22. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 53.00%

Are we all sleeping on the Islanders? Patrick Roy has his team pointed back in the right direction after a rough start, going 9-3-0 in January.

Next eight days: @ TB (Feb. 1), @ FLA (Feb. 2), vs. VGK (Feb. 4)

23. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 49.06%

The Flyers' build back into a contender continues apace, though their minus-8 goal differential for the month would surely be helped if they had better goaltending on a consistent basis.

Next eight days: @ COL (Feb. 2), @ UTA (Feb. 4), vs. WSH (Feb. 6)

24. Utah Hockey Club

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 50.00%

The Hockey Club remains mathematically alive for a playoff berth but will have to reverse trends from a month in which it had fewer standings points (12) than games played (13).

Next eight days: vs. CBJ (Jan. 31), vs. STL (Feb. 2), vs. PHI (Feb. 4), @ CBJ (Feb. 6)

25. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 49.02%

Does this week's Brandon Saad contract termination mean that an addition is on the way? Something must be done if the Blues are going to make a move back into the playoff mix during a 5-7-0 January.

Next eight days: @ COL (Jan. 31), @ UTA (Feb. 2), vs. EDM (Feb. 4), vs. FLA (Feb. 6)

26. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 47.17%

How much of the Penguins' current roster will be on the team after March 7? The club's 4-7-3 record in January was better than only the "fun bad" Sharks; Pittsburgh's results seem way less fun, and simply bad.

Next eight days: vs. NSH (Feb. 1), vs. NJ (Feb. 4)

27. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 43.88%

The Predators are no strangers to wild turnarounds within the same season -- they pulled one off last season. It's not entirely out of the realm of mathematical possibility that they make the playoffs, and a 7-4-0 mark since the calendar turned to 2025 is a strong start.

Next eight days: @ BUF (Jan. 31), @ PIT (Feb. 1), vs. OTT (Feb. 3)

28. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 47.06%

Although it hasn't made a huge dent in the overall standings, the Ducks have been a middle-of-the-flock team in January -- with a 6-7-2 record despite a minus-8 goal differential. In which direction will they fly from here?

Next eight days: vs. MTL (Feb. 2), vs. DAL (Feb. 4)

29. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 46.23%

Goaltender Philipp Grubauer -- one of the Kraken's early, big free agent signings -- was put on waivers recently, and it wouldn't be shocking if the club made additional moves ahead of the trade deadline. A 6-8-1 January record has kept them well below expectations.

Next eight days: vs. CGY (Feb. 2), vs. DET (Feb. 4), vs. TOR (Feb. 6)

30. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 43.00%

A 45.83 points percentage in January has actually raised the Sabres' seasonlong mark, but it's still not good enough to get them out of the Atlantic Division basement.

Next eight days: vs. NSH (Jan. 31), vs. NJ (Feb. 2), vs. CBJ (Feb. 4)

31. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 36.27%

This hasn't been the best season in Blackhawks history. But at least for the month of January, they haven't been dead last. (Chicago's points percentage is 29th for the month.)

Next eight days: @ FLA (Feb. 1), vs. EDM (Feb. 5)

32. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 33.33%

The Sharks began the month among the NHL's basement dwellers in the standings, and that trend will continue into February.

Next eight days: vs. MTL (Feb. 4), vs. VAN (Feb. 6)

ESPN / NHL 4 Nations Face-Off uniforms -- and what each represents

By Greg Wyshynski- February 1, 2025

When the USA faces Canada in the 4 Nations Face-Off on Feb. 15, it will be the long-awaited first NHL clash between a generation of stars representing their nations.

Connor McDavid vs. Auston Matthews. Cale Makar and Nathan MacKinnon vs. Jack and Quinn Hughes. It's an incredible moment for hockey -- and it's going to look incredible, too.

The jerseys for the 4 Nations Face-Off were officially released on Friday, giving fans their best look at the sweaters yet. That included the blue USA jerseys and the red Canadians sweaters that will fill the Bell Centre with vibrant colors for their highly anticipated "best-on-best" showdown.

"We wanted to make sure that for a 10-day tournament, the machinations of the colors would work against each other because we were only going to do one set of uniforms for each nation," said Brian Jennings, NHL chief branding officer and senior executive vice president.

The 4 Nations Face-Off jerseys, which went on sale to the public on Friday, are a collaboration between the NHL, NHLPA and Fanatics, the official outfitter of the NHL's on-ice uniforms.

"The guys had the opportunity to see some prototypes before we went to mass production. The feedback that we've received after they've had a chance to put them on for various marketing promotional activities has been extraordinarily positive," said Rob Zepp, NHLPA senior director for international strategy & growth. "Obviously they're excited to put these jerseys on, some of them for the first time on this grand of a stage."

The 4 Nations Face-Off is a round-robin tournament scheduled for Feb. 12-20 in Montreal and Boston. It's the first "best-on-best" tournament for NHL players since the 2016 World Cup of Hockey and a tune-up for their return to the men's Winter Olympic tournament in 2026.

Here's a look at some of the details and inspirations for the U.S., Canada, Finland and Sweden.

Team USA

The primary color is navy blue, with red and white striping on the sleeves and the base of the jersey. Rather than harken back to the past for a crest, the designers went with a modern "USA" block wordmark.

"What we wanted to do is really create this elegant aesthetic that was celebrating the American flag," said Dom Fillion, creative director for Fanatics.

But there is a bit of hockey nostalgia on the jersey: Each shoulder features a single white star patch, a nod to the 1980 "Miracle on Ice" team that won America's last Olympic men's hockey gold.

Embossed on the sleeves of the jersey are the words "E Pluribus Unum," which appear on the Great Seal of the United States.

"We thought [it] was such a powerful statement when we talk about sports and a nation and people coming together as one," Fillion said.

Team Canada

Quite a history moment here for a Team Canada jersey: Someone finally found a way to incorporate maple into the design. "White maple," to be exact, which is used for colored accents around the sweater.

"It started with the maple leaf on the front. We wanted to build a narrative around the jersey, around the maple leaf, and then maple became the focus," Fillion said. "We talked about the maple water running through Canadians' veins, that kind of idea. Ultimately, [it] became a color narrative."

The front crest is a 13-point maple leaf with an arced "Canada" wordmark inside of it that's a reference to their gold medal team from 1924. The sleeves feature debossed maple leaf vines.

"Some historic nods to the past, but always done in this more modern progressive look," Fillion said.

Team Finland

The Finns are wearing white for the 4 Nations Face-Off, which Fillion said is meant to evoke "the vast winter landscape" of the country. The front crest features a contemporary take on the national coat of arms with its iconic crowned lion set against the backdrop of the Finnish sky. It also features the wordmark that reads "Suomi," the Finnish word for Finland.

Embossed on the sleeves are *Convallaria Majalis*, commonly known as lily-of-the-valley, the country's national flower.

"It's tough to land a white jersey in a powerful way and make a statement, but I think we really did that with Finland," Fillion said.

Team Sweden

The starting point for every Sweden jersey is the "Tre Kronor," or three crowns, and the nation's yellow and blue color scheme. There's not too much tinkering to be done here. "Sweden always have this really minimal approach and it fits within the design aesthetic of the country and their overall kind of design aesthetic," Fillion said.

But there is one big change for Sweden on these sweaters: Opting for a navy blue than the lighter blue the team has worn in the past. "Using that deeper blue was a big shift," Fillion said.

An even bigger shift: the Swedish flag being featured on the sleeve of the jersey, one of the most memorable Easter eggs among the four jerseys.

"To be able to put the Swedish flag on the forefront like this as a design element within the jersey is something that's pretty progressive and frankly something I haven't seen or done in the past," Fillion said.