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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets acquire Charlie Coyle, Miles Wood from Colorado Avalanche

By Brian Hedger – June 27, 2025

After missing out on New York Islanders defenseman Noah Dobson during trade talks, the Blue Jackets acquired forwards Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood on June 27 in a trade with the Colorado Avalanche hours before the 2025 NHL Draft.

The Blue Jackets sent forward prospect Gavin Brindley, selected in the second round of the 2023 draft (34th overall), plus their 2025 third-round pick (77th overall) and a conditional 2027 second-round pick to the Avalanche for the two veterans. Columbus has two second-round picks in 2027, so they'll get their pick of which one the Avalanche can use to satisfy the trade condition.

"We are very excited to welcome Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood to the Columbus Blue Jackets family," Blue Jackets president of hockey operations/general manager Don Waddell said. "Charlie is an experienced, two-way player that adds size and versatility to our group, while Miles is one of the fastest skaters in the NHL, who provides great energy and physicality. Beyond being outstanding players, both are high-character people who will fit in perfectly with our group and what we are building here in Columbus."

Prior to acquiring Coyle and Wood, The Athletic reported that trade talks for the Islanders' Dobson had whittled down to the Blue Jackets and Montreal Canadiens. Montreal won the bidding by sending bottom-six forward Emil Heineman plus the 16th and 17th overall picks in the 2025 NHL Draft to New York.

Waddell also owns two first-round picks, 14th and 20th overall, in a draft that starts June 27th with the first round and concludes June 28 with rounds 2-7. Barring a trade to add picks in the second or third rounds, the Blue Jackets now won't pick on the second day until the fourth round (109th overall). They also have two picks in the fifth, sixth and two in the seventh rounds.

Coyle has been one of the NHL's upper-echelon third-line centers for quite awhile, mainly for the Boston Bruins before they dealt him to Colorado at the league's trade deadline in March 2025. He's played as high as the second line, but would slide perfectly into the middle of the Jackets' third or fourth lines depending on the coaching staff's preference.

Wood is a winger who's one of the NHL's fastest skaters. His skating should mesh perfectly on either the third or fourth lines, giving the Blue Jackets an instant forechecking force whose speed allows him to hound pucks and get on defensemen in the offensive zone in a blink.

Coyle, 33, finished the 2024-25 season with 17 goals, 18 assists and 35 points in 83 games split between the Bruins and Avalanche, adding one goal in seven games during the playoffs. Wood, 29, had 4-4-8 in 37 games for the Avalanche in 2024-25 before playing one playoff game.

Colorado Avalanche left wing Miles Wood (28) reaches for the puck against the Columbus Blue Jackets in the third period at Nationwide Arena on Thursday, April 3, 2025 in Columbus, Ohio.

Sean Kuraly, a veteran center, and Justin Danforth, a speedy veteran winger, are among nine unsigned, unrestricted free agents for the Blue Jackets — who might've just acquired their replacements. Kuraly, who's from Dublin, spent the past four years centering the fourth line — after leaving the Bruins to sign with Columbus as a free agent — and Danforth has played between the third and fourth lines at all three forward positions during his four seasons with the Blue Jackets.

Wood has played 10 years in the NHL, including his first eight with the New Jersey Devils, where he was teammates with Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson. Coyle has played 950 career games for three teams, including parts of seven seasons with both the Bruins and Minnesota Wild.

Sep 30, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Gavin Brindley (45) tries to fight between Washington Capitals defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk (57) and defenseman Rasmus Sandin (38) to get to the puck during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena. The Blue Jackets lost 3-2.

Brindley, 20, has played one NHL game for the Blue Jackets and spent the entirety of 2024-25 playing with the AHL's Cleveland Monsters. He played in 52 games and contributed 6-11-17 before playing four playoff games without scoring a point. Brindley is a friend of Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli, playing together as teammates for one season (2022-23) at the University of Michigan.

Fantilli was then selected third overall in 2023 by the Blue Jackets, who took Brindley 34th overall to start the second round of the same draft in Nashville.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets GM Waddell to open talks on Fantilli's next contract this summer

By Brian Hedger – June 27, 2025

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell plans to discuss a new contract with Adam Fantilli this summer.

Fantilli's entry-level contract expires after the 2025-26 season.

Waddell said long-term deals are difficult for players with limited NHL experience, so a short-term 'bridge' deal might be necessary.

Fantilli's agent, Pat Brisson, also represents Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson.

It won't happen the minute the clock strikes noon July 1 to open the NHL's window for free agency, but the Blue Jackets will contact Adam Fantilli's agent this summer.

The topic will be the young star center's next contract after his entry-level deal expires following the upcoming 2025-26 season. Don Waddell, the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager, said it's on his list of to-dos.

The league's July 1 start of free agency is the first official opportunity Waddell gets to discuss Fantilli's next deal, which will give the third overall pick from the 2023 NHL Draft a big pay bump.

"I can't tell you it's going to be July 1, but we'll talk this summer for sure," Waddell said. "These are the hardest deals to get done for long term, because, obviously, the short (playing) window the player's had. The good thing is ... I've done a lot of deals with (his agent) and he'll see the market probably the same way we are."

Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli has one year left on an entry-level contract that has a base salary of \$950,000, plus \$3.2 million he can add via performance bonuses.

Fantilli is represented by CAA's Pat Brisson, who represents many of the NHL's star players. Brisson also represents Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson, the fifth overall pick of the 2021 draft, who had his first big NHL breakout effort in 2024-25.

Fantilli had a huge breakout season of his own during his second NHL campaign, finishing with 31 goals, 23 assists and 54 points while playing all 82 games. After his rookie season ended roughly halfway through due to a severe calf laceration, Fantilli looked ready to handle the role of a No.1 center.

He filled in admirably as the top center for nearly two months while veteran Sean Monahan was out with a wrist injury and finished on a tear with 9-1-10 in the Jackets' final 10 games to help them nearly qualify for the playoffs.

In 131 career NHL games, Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli's scoring line is 42-38-81.

After compiling a scoring line of 12-15-27 in 49 games as a rookie in 2023-24, Fantilli has a career line of 42-38-81 in 131 games with one year left on an entry-level contract that has a base salary of \$950,000, plus \$3.2 million he can add via performance bonuses.

Waddell doesn't sound ready to approach Fantilli's next deal with the goal of locking him up long-term.

"We may have to do a short-term bridge deal in the meantime, but it'll get done," Waddell said. "Time is not that important just yet, but it'll come this summer."

The Athletic / Busy NHL Draft day for Blue Jackets as trade talks fizzle before Smith, Andreyanov picks

By Aaron Portzline – June 28, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets were hoping to use their two first-round draft picks on Friday to acquire immediate roster help: impactful veteran players who could help push the organization forward after five straight years out of the playoffs.

But general manager Don Waddell expressed no regrets or disappointment after one trade fell through and several others fizzled out before gaining any traction.

“I would have said (there’s disappointment in that) maybe before the draft,” Waddell said. “But after we’ve gone through these selections and ended up with these players, we’re pretty happy.”

The Blue Jackets, who added veteran forwards Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood earlier in the day, selected defenseman Jackson Smith with the No. 14 overall pick and — in a surprise to many — goaltender Pyotr Andreyanov with the No. 20 overall pick.

The picks were made by Meredith Gaudreau, the widow of former Blue Jackets forward Johnny Gaudreau, who was greeted with a standing ovation by the crowd at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles.

“It’s truly an honor to be here,” she told the crowd, as chants of “John-ny! John-ny!” rang out. “And from the bottom of my heart, I thank you.”

The Blue Jackets were delighted that Smith was still on the board. They had him ranked among the top 10 players on the board, including among the top two or three defensemen.

Smith, who turned 18 last month, is 6-foot-4, 200 pounds. But his skating belies his size. He’s played the last two seasons with the Tri-City Americans in the Western Hockey League — totaling 11-43-54 in 68 games this past season — but has already committed to Penn State in the fall.

“We actually tried to move up to a spot (to draft Smith) and that didn’t work,” Waddell said. “We had a lot of calls to move around, especially on the 14th pick. But I really believe if there’s a player you really want, don’t pass them up. Take ‘em.

“We really like the way he transports the puck. His skating ... some of our scouts who’ve watched him all the time rated his skating at a 10 (out of 10), and that happens very rarely.”

The Blue Jackets went way off the board to select Andreyanov with the No. 20 pick. Andreyanov, who was the No. 1 goaltender ranked by the NHL’s Central Scouting service, was seen by most as a late second- or early third-round selection.

Last week, Waddell and two goaltending coaches — Brad Thiessen and Jim Viers — traveled to Florida for a special camp for Russian players arranged by agent Dan Milstein. They met with Andreyov and spoke to several of his fellow Russian players about him and came away impressed.

Goaltending coach Nicklas Backstrom put it like this: “He reminds of a young Bob.” That would be former Blue Jackets goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky, of course, now a two-time Stanley Cup winner with the Florida Panthers.

Andreyanov, who is 6-2, 207 pounds, played last season with the CSKA Red Army minor-league club, going 23-6-6 with a .942 save percentage. Waddell said he probably won’t be clear of contractual obligations in Russia until he’s 22 or 23 years old.

“The hope is that the development path he’s on leads right to the NHL,” Waddell said.

It’ll likely be two or three years before Smith makes an NHL impact. Andreyanov is probably four or five seasons away. If they turn out to be difference-making pros, this will be seen as an impressive draft for the Blue Jackets at two key positions.

But about the 2025-26 roster ...

Earlier Friday, the Blue Jackets traded minor-league forward Gavin Brindley, a third-round pick in this year’s draft (No. 77 overall) and a conditional second-round pick in 2027 to the Colorado Avalanche for Coyle and Wood. The Blue Jackets, who own two second-round picks in that draft, can decide which one they want to keep.

Coyle, 33, is the right-shot center the Blue Jackets were seeking this summer, a counterbalance to the three left-handed centers — Sean Monahan, Adam Fantilli and Cole Sillinger — already in the Columbus lineup.

The Jackets will use Coyle frequently in the faceoff circle this coming season, and he teams with Monahan and Boone Jenner to give the club three exceptional players on draws. It’s possible, maybe even likely, that Sillinger and Jenner will switch permanently to the wing.

Wood was a perennial 10- to 15-goal scorer at the start of his career with the New Jersey Devils, but his game fell off sharply in Colorado. The Blue Jackets hope he gets back to being the ferocious forechecker he was in New Jersey, with a solid spot on the fourth line.

“Both big bodies,” Waddell said. “Wood skates like the wind, is a forechecker, creates opportunities with his speed and finishing checks. Coyle plays a 200-foot game, is very responsible on both ends of the ice. We’ve been looking for a right-shot guy all summer, and when that opportunity came up, we had to jump.”

It was one of the rare picks-for-players trades so far this offseason, Waddell noted. With the added salary cap space around the league, NHL teams are hanging onto more players and less willing to move out established players for the hope of draft picks, he said.

That, and the fact that the NHL Draft was “decentralized” this season as opposed to the usual central gathering of all 32 clubs, had an impact on trade talks, Waddell said. He and his scouts were set up in the Blue Jackets dressing room in Nationwide Arena while the league staged the annual sweater parade of prospects in Los Angeles.

“You can’t walk around the (draft floor), tap people on the shoulder and talk to them,” Waddell lamented. “When you’re face-to-face, things always seem to happen better than when you’re on the phone. There were lots of conversations, but not nearly as much as usually goes on when you’re together.”

The Blue Jackets were deep in trade talks with the New York Islanders earlier in the day to acquire defenseman Noah Dobson, but the asking price — both first-round draft picks, a roster player and a prospect — was too rich for Waddell’s blood.

Dobson was traded to the Montreal Canadiens instead, signing an eight-year, \$76 million contract with the Islanders just before the trade.

“It got to a point for us where it was not only the assets we had to give up, but also the price tag on the player,” Waddell said. “We just made a decision. You look at our team and some of our guys who will be coming off contracts in the next few years. We did like the player, but there comes a point where you have to keep yourselves open to keep your team together.”

The Athletic / Columbus Blue Jackets NHL Draft guide: Picks, best fits and analysis

By Corey Pronman – June 27, 2025

2025 Draft Grade: B-

I like Jackson Smith, and I think he can be a quality top-four defenseman for Columbus. The Blue Jackets' pick at 20 of Pyotr Andreyanov, frankly, is one I have a hard time understanding, even giving them all the benefit of the doubt. He's very quick, intelligent and competitive, but at that size, at the 20th slot, I just thought it was too high. Time will tell; he has five more years to play in Russia, so we will see how he develops in the KHL. As of now, though, I think Smith is the only likely NHL player from this class, and he could be a really good one.

Draft Class

14. Jackson Smith, LHD, Tri-City Americans (WHL)

May 13, 2007 | 6' 3" | 190 pounds

Tier: Bubble top and middle of the lineup player

Skating: NHL average

Puck skills: Above NHL average

Hockey sense: Below NHL average

Compete: Above NHL average

Shot: Above NHL average

Player comparable: Brian Dumoulin

Analysis: Smith has generated a lot of NHL interest due to his combination of tools and production. He's a 6-foot-3 defenseman who skates quite well. He's funky-looking at times, going 10-2 with his edges a bit too much, but he's a powerful, fluid skater who can easily get by checkers and skate pucks up ice. Smith often tries to attack with his skill and can break down players one-on-one easily. Smith's decision-making isn't the best at times, and I wouldn't call him a natural playmaker, but he creates a lot of offense and has a good point shot. Defensively, he's decent due to his frame and feet, and when he's leaning into checks, he can be a two-way force. His defensive play is inconsistent, in part because he's often up in the attack, but he has the potential to be a top-four defenseman who can play on both special teams.

Thoughts on the pick: In Smith, Columbus gets a defenseman with size, mobility and legit offense. He projects as a top-four defenseman and helps the Blue Jackets at the position they need the most depth at in their system. He is the second-most purely talented defenseman in the draft after Schaefer.

20. Pyotr Andreyanov, G, Krasnaya Armiya Moskva (MHL)

January 22, 2007 | 6' 2" | 207 pounds

Tier: Has a chance to play games

Skating: Above NHL average

Hockey sense: NHL average

Analysis: Andreyanov has outstanding quickness in his lower half. He makes a ton of highlight reel-type saves due to his athleticism, plus his compete level. He never seems like he's out of a play due to his effort. Andreyanov is also a good technical goalie who can make smooth, efficient saves with good reads. NHL teams' only concern with him will be his size. He's a very small goalie by NHL standards, and will need to prove he's just not very talented, but especially talented to be an NHL goalie. I've seen enough flashes of special to think he has a chance to make it.

Thoughts on the pick: Andreyanov was great in Russia this season as the leader of their national team and posting great numbers. He has legit NHL athleticism and hockey sense, but he is also a 6-foot-0 goalie, and there are some concerns about how his game will translate to the NHL at that frame. Columbus doesn't shy away from small goalies, though, taking Evan Gardner last season. But this is high for me based on what I saw of Andreyanov. He's a talented goalie, but I didn't see a Juuse Saros level of athletic talent.

76. Malte Vass, LHD, Färjestad BK J20 (J20 Nationell)

March 28, 2007 | 6' 2" | 194 pounds

Tier: Has a chance to play games

Skating: NHL average

Puck skills: Below NHL average

Hockey sense: Below NHL average

Compete: High-end

Analysis: Vass was up and down this season, but when he had his good games, he played in a way that will highly appeal to pro coaches. Vass is a tall defender who skates well and is quite physical. On his best shifts, where he can make a skilled play and is competing hard, he makes a real impact. However, his puck play is quite inconsistent and his hockey sense in general is questionable. He's so competitive, though, that he projects to make a lot of stops at higher levels even if he never generates much offense.

160. Owen Griffin, C, Oshawa Generals (OHL)

April 8, 2007 | 5' 10" | 172 pounds

Analysis: Griffin's game got better as the year went along, ending his season with a huge OHL playoffs performance. Griffin is an excellent skater who can play at an NHL pace. He has solid puck skills and

vision and creates offense on the move. Despite his huge playoff performance, I have mild questions on how dynamic he is, especially for a 5-10 forward. I think he will have success as a pro, but I don't see a clear NHL role for him.

173. Victor Hedin Raftheim, LHD, Brynäs IF J20 (J20 Nationell)

August 19, 2007 | 6' 4" | 190 pounds

198. Jérémy Loranger, C, Sherwood Park Crusaders (BCHL)

June 15, 2007 | 5' 10" | 165 pounds

Beat writer analysis

The Blue Jackets entered Saturday without a second- or third-round pick, but once they saw Swedish defenseman Malte Vass continuing to slide down the draft board, GM Don Waddell took action.

Waddell traded a fourth-round pick this year (No. 109) and a fourth-round pick in 2026 to the Detroit Red Wings for the No. 76 pick in the third round, using it to select Vass, a physical, defensive defenseman.

After his day was done, Waddell made a bold assertion. He said — and later confirmed — that the Blue Jackets' first three players taken, including first-rounders Jackson Smith (No. 14) and Pyotr Andreyanov (No. 20) on Friday — were among the Blue Jackets' top 14 players in the entire draft.

"That is correct," Waddell said. "I can say, probably, it's never happened in my history."

They added three other players on Day 2: center Owen Griffin of the Oshawa Generals (OHL) in the fifth round (No. 160), defenseman Victor Raftheim of Sweden in the sixth round (No. 173), and center Jeremy Loranger of Sherwood Park in the BC juniors in the seventh round (No. 198).

To acquire the pick for Loranger, the Blue Jackets traded two seventh-round picks — Nos. 205 and 218 — to the Seattle Kraken.

Columbus Dispatch / Blue Jackets have Meredith Gaudreau announce their picks in the 2025 NHL draft

By Lori Schmidt – June 27, 2025

The NHL is in Los Angeles for the 2025 draft, and thus thought it appropriate to introduce some star power into the event by having celebrities announce the picks.

Actor Adam Sandler, musicians the Goo Goo Dolls, and Hollywood producer Jerry Bruckheimer have all made selections tonight.

Meredith Gaudreau announces the 14th overall pick for the Columbus Blue Jackets in the first round of the 2025 NHL Draft at Peacock Theater.

And when the Columbus Blue Jackets made their choice, they had the widow of Johnny Gaudreau share it. Meredith Gaudreau was greeted with a chant of her late husband's name and responded by thanking them and all the NHL teams that have supported her in the time since Johnny and Johnny's brother Matthew were killed last August by a suspected drunk driver.

Defenseman Jackson Smith went No. 14 and joins the Jackets organization out of the WHL's Tri-City.

Gaudreau later returned to the podium and revealed the Blue Jackets' second pick of the first round. Columbus took goaltender Pyotr Andreyanov with selection No. 20.

[TSN.ca / Blue Jackets acquire Coyle, Wood from Avalanche](#)

By TSN.ca Staff – June 27, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets have acquired forwards Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood from the Colorado Avalanche in exchange for prospect Gavin Brindley, a 2025 third-round draft pick, and a conditional 2027 second-round draft pick.

Coyle, 33, finished last season with the Avalanche after being acquired from the Boston Bruins in exchange for forward Casey Mittelstadt, prospect William Zellers, and a draft pick prior to the trade deadline.

The 6-foot-3 centre recorded 17 goals and 35 points in 83 games last season split between the Bruins and Avalanche. He added a goal in seven playoff games before his team was eliminated by the Dallas Stars in the first round.

He is entering the final season of a six-year, \$31.5 million contract that carries an annual cap hit of \$5.25 million. He is scheduled to become an unrestricted free agent at the end of the 2025-26 campaign.

Drafted 28th overall by the San Jose Sharks in 2010, Coyle has 189 goals and 485 points in 950 career games split between the Minnesota Wild, Bruins, and Avalanche.

The East Weymouth, Mass., native represented the United States at the 2015 World Championship, taking home a bronze medal.

Wood, 29, only appeared in 37 games last season while dealing with an upper-body injury and recorded four goals and eight points.

The 6-foot-2 winger is entering the third season of a six-year, \$15 million contract with an annual cap hit of \$2.5 million. He is scheduled to become an unrestricted free agent at the end of the 2028-29 campaign.

Drafted 100th overall by the New Jersey Devils in 2013, Wood has 91 goals and 182 points in 513 games split between the Devils and Avalanche.

The Buffalo native represented the United States at the 2016 World Championship in a fourth-place finish.

Brindley, 20, was drafted 34th overall by the Blue Jackets in 2023 and appeared in one game with the team this season.

The 5-foot-8 centre recorded six goals and 17 points in 52 games with the AHL's Cleveland Monsters last season.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets select defenseman Jackson Smith 14th overall in 2025 NHL Draft

By Brian Hedger – June 27, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets selected defenseman Jackson Smith with the 14th overall pick in the 2025 NHL Draft.

The announcement was made by Meredith Gaudreau, widow of former Blue Jackets player Johnny Gaudreau.

The Blue Jackets also hold the 20th overall pick in the draft.

After declining trade interest in the first of two picks in the first round, the Blue Jackets used their 14th overall selection June 27 at the 2025 NHL Draft to select Jackson Smith, a two-way defenseman from the Tri-City Americans.

The pick was announced by Meredith Gaudreau, the widow of former Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau. She announced the pick after drawing loud applause at both the draft headquarters in Los Angeles and from about 3,000 fans who attended the Blue Jackets' watch party at Nationwide Arena.

Smith, 18, is listed at 6-feet-4, 198 pounds and draws comparisons to Dallas Stars star defenseman Miro Heiskanen. Smith said Heiskanen is one of the NHL defensemen he's watched closely to shape his game, but has also enjoyed watching Blue Jackets star Zach Werenski play.

"I think I've grown a lot as a player these past two years from being coachable," Smith told reporters in Columbus via teleconference. "I have quite a bit of natural skill, but it's also just the hard work I put into it throughout the season and throughout the offseason, as well. It just made me that much better going into (my draft) year and throughout the whole year. I kept getting better throughout the year, and I thought at the end of the year I was playing my best hockey."

Smith is a left-handed shooter who's committed to play collegiately next season at Penn State and finished the 2024-25 campaign for Tri-City with 11 goals, 43 assists and 54 points in 68 games during the regular season. He added 1-2-3 in five games during the playoffs.

"I think I have a lot of offensive upside to my game," Smith said. "I move on the blue line really well. I can find lanes, get pucks through (traffic) and score goals, but I can also defend the rush incredibly well. I have a really good stick, knocking pucks off of players' sticks defending the rush and while defending in my own zone, as well. I kind of feel like I'm a 'full package' kind of guy."

Smith was ranked as a Top 10 prospect by Elite Prospects (No. 6), McKeen's Hockey (No. 7) and The Hockey News (No. 8). He wasn't ranked any lower than No. 17 by Dobber Prospects and most commonly slotted into the 11-15 range of other rankings.

Smith joins a Blue Jackets developmental system filled with defensemen prospects, including four added in 2024. The Jackets also had the 20th overall pick and surprised many by using it to select undersized Russian goalie Pyotr Andreyanov (6-0, 207) of CSKA Moscow's junior program (Krasnaya).

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets select goalie Pyotr Andreyanov with 20th pick in 2025 NHL Draft

By Brian Hedger – June 27, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets drafted Russian goaltender Pyotr Andreyanov with the 20th overall pick in the 2025 NHL Draft.

The Blue Jackets' scouting staff, including goaltending coach Niklas Backstrom, highly regarded Andreyanov's skills and athleticism.

Andreyanov's playing style has been compared to former Blue Jackets goalie Sergei Bobrovsky.

Although under contract in Russia for several years, the Blue Jackets hope Andreyanov will join the team when he is 22 or 23.

Using their second of two first-round picks in the 2025 NHL Draft, the Blue Jackets pulled a stunner by selecting Pyotr Andreyanov with the 20th overall pick, a goalie from Krasnaya Armiya Moskova, the junior program within Russia's CSKA Moscow system.

Andreyanov, ranked by NHL Central Scouting as the No.1 international goalie in the draft class, was selected six picks after the Blue Jackets used the 14th overall selection to pick defenseman Jackson Smith of the Western Hockey League's Tri-City Americans.

"I can interview people and watch them in practice, but our goalie guys all said, by far, they thought this was the best guy," Blue Jackets president of hockey operations/general manager Don Waddell said. "It's interesting because he's our No. 1 goalie (ranked), but he was actually the next guy on our (draft) list, so we didn't have to delete anybody. He's very athletic."

The "goalie guys" Waddell consults with are Blue Jackets goaltending coach Niklas Backstrom, a former NHL starter for the Minnesota Wild, Cleveland Monsters goaltending coach Brad Thiessen, a former AHL goalie, and Jim Viers, the Jackets' scouting coordinator.

Backstrom video scouted 20-plus games of Andreyanov while Thiessen, Viers and Waddell added live viewings recently at agent Dan Milstein's Gold Star Hockey event in Fort Lauderdale, Florida — where a lot of Russian prospects who don't get seen live by NHL scouts participated.

"Down in Florida, they were able to see him live and meet him as a person, and he seems to be a great teammate," Backstrom said. "He has a little aura, like, a little swagger. So, we're really excited."

Waddell tried dealing one or both of his first-round picks for NHL-ready talent, but no teams were interested in meeting his price for acquiring one or both. So, the Blue Jackets' GM had guest announcer Meredith Gaudreau — Johnny Gaudreau's widow — officially welcome two new prospects into the Columbus system to bolster the team's future on the defensive side of the puck.

After adding Smith, a mobile defenseman listed at 6 feet 4, Andreyanov was selected 20th despite being undersized as a goalie at a listed height of 6-feet, 207 pounds. Andreyanov, who will attend the Blue Jackets' prospect development camp July 2-5, has a playing style similar to Sergei Bobrovsky, who left Columbus as a free agent in 2019 and has backstopped the Florida Panthers to repeat Stanley Cup titles.

"I think you'll see he reminds (us) a lot of Bob," Backstrom said. "Really technical goalie, reads the game well, moves well ... explosive. He's closer to playing at this level than a lot of other goalies that we looked at."

Andreyanov might be the closest to NHL ready, but hasn't played professionally yet. He's under contract with CSKA Moscow for either "four or five" years, according to Waddell, and likely won't be part of the Jackets' plans until he's age 22 or 23.

"These goalies that come out, they bounce around a little bit, and usually it's their second team — as we well know here — before they really hit their stride," Waddell said. "So, drafting him at 18, and if he's coming over at 22, 23 ... the hope is the development path brings him straight to the National Hockey League."

The Hockey Writers / Grading the Blue Jackets' 2 First-Round Picks

By Matthew Buhrmann – June 29, 2025

General manager Don Waddell's second draft in charge of the Columbus Blue Jackets saw a couple of interesting swings in the first round. I thought the opening round moves were solid overall, one pick that felt perfect for the Blue Jackets' blue line depth, and another that caught a few off guard.

Below are my grades for the two picks made Friday night.

14. Jackson Smith, LD, Tri-City Americans – A

A guy I projected in my Blue Jackets Mock Draft 1.0 for The Hockey Writers at No. 14, I love this pick for Waddell and the Blue Jackets. Smith plays a well-rounded game, thriving in all three zones and making an impact with his skating, puck movement, and defensive awareness.

Smith had a strong season with the Tri-City Americans, tallying 11 goals and 43 assists for 54 points across 68 regular-season games. When the WHL playoffs rolled around, he continued producing, adding a goal and two assists in five games despite some tough competition.

He also represented Team Canada at the U18 World Championship, where he played a key role. He netted four goals and an assist over seven games, finished with a plus-7 rating, and helped Canada capture gold against Sweden.

One of Smith's biggest strengths is his ability to transition the puck efficiently. He consistently controls zone exits and entries, helping his team maintain possession and generate chances. He's not the flashiest player offensively, but he makes smart, timely decisions with the puck and knows how to support the attack when needed.

Smith was one of the top defensemen out of the Canadian Hockey League (CHL) in this year's draft and will be taking his talents to Penn State University of the Big Ten Conference for the 2025–26 season. I love the upside of his development at a high-level program like Penn State, and with its proximity to Columbus, the Blue Jackets' staff will be able to keep solid tabs on him, especially when the Nittany Lions come to town to play the Ohio State Buckeyes. Notre Dame, Michigan, and Michigan State are also nearby, all Big Ten teams.

This was my ideal pick at No. 14, and I love it. I give Waddell and the Blue Jackets staff an A. Also, Smith grew up watching Johnny Gaudreau as a Flames fan in Calgary, which makes this story even better. Love that connection already.

20. Pyotr Andreyanov, G, Krasnaya Armiya Moscow (MHL) – B

It was a surprising move for a goalie in the first round by Waddell and the Blue Jackets' staff, but it was Russian Pyotr Andreyanov rather than Joshua Ravensbergen. Ravensbergen was mocked as the only goalie to go in the first round, but Andreyanov flew under the radar, projected more in the second-to-

third round range. Still, he ended up ranked No. 1 by NHL Central Scouting on their Final Rankings for international goaltenders.

In the 2024–25 season, the left-handed catching goalie didn't see any action with CSKA Moskva in the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL), but he was dialed in with Krasnaya Armiya Moskva in the MHL, posting a 1.75 goals-against average (GAA), .942 save percentage (SV%), and three shutouts through 37 games with a 23-6-6 record. He added six playoff games with a 2.36 GAA, .929 SV%, and one shutout.

At 6-foot-2 and 207 pounds, Andreyanov isn't the biggest goalie in the draft class, and that might've dinged his stock a little, but he somehow went 20th overall. Taller netminders tend to run the show in today's NHL, but what he lacks in size, he makes up for in agility, sharp puck-tracking, and solid rebound control. His pad work and post play are tight, and he's quick to seal off low shots. Still, his game isn't without a few flaws, as he can get a little too aggressive around the crease and occasionally tries to do too much with his stick, which could cost him later on at the pro level. The tools are clearly there, but he's still young and needs time to round out his game into a Russian star, potentially even like Sergei Bobrovsky.

It has been noted that Andreyanov will be at the Blue Jackets Development Camp and will be heading to Columbus Saturday, according to Jeff Svoboda (@JacketsInsider) on X.

I trust Waddell and the staff, especially with the goalie depth not being all that deep right now. But Andreyanov is under contract in Russia for three to four more years, quite a long time, and that definitely is a little bit of a risk. He's not someone who'll make an impact at the NHL level anytime soon. Goaltending is still a question mark at the moment. I think Jet Greaves is the guy going forward, with Elvis Merzlikins more in a backup role now that Daniil Tarasov is gone. I wouldn't be surprised if there's a move this offseason either.

Maybe a little high for where I thought he'd go, but I like the long-term upside. I'll give the pick a solid B.

Columbus still has six more picks heading into Day 2. We'll see what Waddell and the staff do on Saturday, still a good chance to add depth and maybe grab a sleeper or two in the mid-to-late rounds.

[NBC4i.com / Columbus Blue Jackets celebrate 2025 NHL Draft at Nationwide Arena](#)

By Jackie Gillis – June 27, 2025

Night one of the 2025 NHL Draft has come to an end. To celebrate, the Columbus Blue Jackets had their very own draft party at Nationwide Arena.

Many of the fans we spoke with have high expectations for the team this season. Hundreds of fans showed up to support their team.

“The support tonight was overwhelming, honestly. It’s just, you know, I never expected that many people just to show up and support the team,” said Mathieu Olivier with the Columbus Blue Jackets. “It’s very humbling for my teammates and I. Obviously, we’re excited to get going here at the end of summer.”

The 2025 NHL Draft may be over 2,000 miles away, but that didn’t stop fans from celebrating.

“I think it’s a really cool opportunity to be at Nationwide and have the opportunity to watch it,” said Blue Jackets fan Caden Flores.

Nationwide Arena knows how to throw a draft party, from a meet and greet with Olivier to taking pictures with Stinger. It brought fans from across the state.

“Olivier is my favorite player, and I just love the Blue Jackets,” said Macy Cotsamire.

When we asked fans what they’d love to see this season, all the answers were the same.

“We need to win the cup,” said fan Knox Johnson.

“Just playing closer together like they have been and just continuing to win and get us to the Stanley Cup,” said Kyle Dynes.

“I think they should definitely make it to the playoffs this year, because of how good they did last year. They can only get better,” said Cotsamire.

We told Olivier that fans want to see the Stanley Cup brought to Columbus next season, and he said that’s the ultimate goal.

“Last year was a step in the right direction. But I think everyone kind of went home with a sour taste in their mouth, you know, missing the playoffs by one point. So, you know, that’s something that we kind of carry a little chip on our shoulder with it, and we will use it for motivation for the summer and get ready for the start of the year.”

It was also a bit of an emotional night when Johnny Gaudreau’s wife, Meredith, was brought out to announce the Blue Jackets’ 14th-round pick. Everyone at Nationwide Arena stood up to cheer her.

ESPN / Avalanche trade Coyle, Wood to Blue Jackets for picks, prospect

By Greg Wyshynski – June 27, 2025

The Colorado Avalanche traded forwards Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood to the Columbus Blue Jackets on Friday, freeing up much-needed salary cap space hours before the NHL draft.

The Jackets sent forward Gavin Brindley, the 77th overall pick in this year's draft and a conditional 2027 second-round pick to Colorado.

Coyle, 33, was acquired by the Avalanche from Boston at the NHL trade deadline for a package that included center Casey Mittelstadt and the 61st overall pick. Coyle had two goals and 11 assists in 19 regular-season games and then one goal in 7 games in Colorado's first-round loss to the Dallas Stars. Coyle, whose natural position is at center, was a minus-4 in the series. He's entering the last year of a six-year contract with a \$5.25 million cap hit and becomes an unrestricted free agent next summer.

Wood had four goals and four assists in 37 games with Colorado, averaging a career-low 11:21 per game in ice time. He missed a chunk of the season with a back injury. Wood is signed through 2029 with a \$2.5 million cap hit.

"Charlie is an experienced, two-way player that adds size and versatility to our group, while Miles is one of the fastest skaters in the NHL who provides great energy and physicality," said Columbus GM Don Waddell. "Beyond being outstanding players, both are high-character people who will fit in perfectly with our group and what we are building here in Columbus."

Brindley, 20, was drafted 34th overall in 2023 out of the University of Michigan. After playing one game with Columbus in 2023-24, he spent the entirety of last season with the AHL Cleveland Monsters. Brindley won a gold medal with the United States at the 2024 IIHF World Junior Championship after finishing second on the team with 10 points in seven games.

The Avalanche now have just under \$9 million in salary cap space following the trade.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Draft Pyotr Andreyanov 20th Overall

By Eugene Helfrick – June 27, 2025

With the 20th overall pick in the 2025 NHL Entry Draft, the Columbus Blue Jackets have selected Pyotr Andreyanov from Krasnaya Armiya Moscow of the MHL (Russian Junior League).

While it is rare to see a goaltender selected in Round 1 of the NHL draft, the 2025 NHL Draft class is a unique one. With few standout star players available, teams may be willing to take a swing on a potential starting goaltender like Pyotr Andreyanov.

Andreyanov is a very attractive goaltending prospect, as he has the size and athleticism to take over as a 1A option in the NHL. Yes, he needs to learn how to stay calm, cool, and collected while tracking the puck, but this is the kind of experience he can gain over the next three to five years as he develops his game. If he hits, he easily has the toolkit to become a starter for the team that decides to draft him.

THW Prospect Profile Excerpt

Always considered a highly-talented netminder in his native Russia, Pyotr Andreyanov just ended his second year in the juniors with Krasnaya Armiya of the MHL, CSKA's junior team. He played well throughout the season, winning the competition for the starting goalie position over Toronto Maple Leafs' prospect Timofei Obvintsev, a fifth-round pick in 2024. Andreyanov posted an impressive 23-6-6 record this season, but the team had a short life in the playoffs, despite the goalie being probably the best player for Krasnaya Armiya.

However, Andreyanov has yet to taste pro season experience. He exclusively played in the MHL, without stints in the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) or at least the VHL. While in the big league, CSKA is pretty stacked with goalies, with Ivan Prosvetov and New York Islanders' draftee Dmitri Gamzin getting most of the games, a call-up to the VHL would have been beneficial for Andreyanov. However, he is expected to make his KHL debut next season, even though the mentioned goalies will both be under contract with CSKA.

Andreyanov isn't the biggest goalie around, standing at 6-foot-2 and weighing 207 pounds, and that will most likely hurt his stock during the selections. However, while modern successful goalies tend to be taller, he's not small by any means and can compensate with agility and quickness. His post play is very strong, like his pad control on low shots, but he needs to work on his consistency and his slight tendency to overdo it when the puck gets closer to the crease. He likes to be adventurous with his stick, and that can backfire sometimes.

How This Affects the Blue Jackets' Plans

Leave it to the Blue Jackets to go off the board in the first round of the NHL Draft. Who can forget when they selected Ygor Chinakov 21st overall back in 2020, despite many seeing him as a mid-round pick at

best? However, that selection has worked out well for the franchise, and they are certainly hoping to have another hit with the surprise pick of Andreyanov.

There's a lot of risk in a pick like this, of course, but many saw Andreyanov as one of the top two goalies in the 2025 Draft Class, so Columbus clearly believes in his high-end potential. If he hits, he can be a starter, but this pick will be scrutinized for years until we can see the full picture of this player's career.

The Athletic / NHL trade grades: Blue Jackets pay high price, let Avalanche off the hook in Charlie Coyle deal

By The Athletic NHL Staff – June 27, 2025

The trade

Columbus Blue Jackets get: F Charlie Coyle and F Miles Wood

Colorado Avalanche: F Gavin Brindley, 2025 third-round pick (No. 77) and 2027 conditional second-round pick

Gavin Brindley was just OK as a rookie pro, but he was also a very young player at the AHL level. He's a highly likable player with a great track record, though at the college and international levels. With excellent skating and work ethic, Brindley buzzes around the ice, playing with a ton of pace and giving his best effort nightly. He's able to make highly skilled plays at full speed and plays with courage, going to the net and engaging along the walls. Brindley is a creative playmaker as well, although for a tiny forward, I wouldn't call him a dynamic offensive player. His energy could make him a middle-six wing, but he will need to score more versus men than he showed this past season.

I understand Colorado wanting to target a player such as Brindley over a high draft pick as well. Brindley could realistically play in the NHL within a year or two. — Corey Pronman

This one is some nice Houdini-like salary magic for the Avs, who were projected to be over the cap going into this deal. Instead, they free up \$7.75 million that will allow Colorado to be an unexpected player in free agency on Tuesday. Plus, they get a little draft and prospect capital sprinkled in, too.

It's been a weird year for contract dumps already, as Mason Marchment and others have been shipped out for what feels like very little. Here, two overpriced forwards fetch two decent picks and a young player who put up huge numbers in college.

I can see what Columbus is thinking, as the Blue Jackets are drowning in cap space (more than \$35 million before this deal), and it's going to be a challenge in this free-agent landscape to bring in one of the few big names. They also have an exciting young team that made a huge step last year, so trying to spend that money on reinforcements and depth makes sense.

Both players are rebound candidates and will likely play down the lineup for Columbus, where they'll bring OK value. If it doesn't work out, Coyle is signed for only one more year anyway. Wood, meanwhile, has had a lot of injuries, and the term on his deal — with four more years to go — could hurt, even though the cash is closer to \$2 million than his \$2.5 million AAV. (And Columbus is still working on getting to the floor.)

All in all, it's not all that exciting for either party, but it could be setting the table for bigger things to come for both teams. — James Mirtle

Avalanche grade: B+

Blue Jackets grade: C+

This is a telling deal about where the NHL market currently stands in two ways. One, the center market must be dry as a bone. Two, cap growth has led to some cap-hit blindness.

Firstly, Coyle is the focal point of the deal, and the Blue Jackets are a better team with him on it. He gives Columbus a lot of versatility in the middle six as a plug-and-play center who can play wing if needed. While there isn't much about Coyle's game that stands out, there aren't a lot of holes either. He's by almost any account — scoring, play-driving, puck possession, offense, defense — an average player. That's a helpful addition to a team that had a lot of sub-standard players in the bottom six.

Coyle is also 33 and will probably fall a bit below average — third-line calibre — next season as a result. At \$5.25 million, that's a pricey ticket for what he likely brings to the table. And between Sean Monahan, Adam Fantilli and Cole Sillinger, a top-nine center wasn't exactly the most pressing need either. Columbus has a lot of cap space, which makes the price not too concerning, and you can never have enough centers. Still, the cost of acquisition shouldn't have been this high for what is effectively a cap dump.

Which brings us to the cap-hit blindness and the Miles Wood of it all.

It's possible Wood reignites his game with the Blue Jackets, but he's been a below-replacement-level player for two years in Colorado. Wood played in just one of seven playoff games for the Avalanche, and at 29, there's a big question of how much he has left to offer at the NHL level. With four years left at \$2.5 million, it's unfathomable that the Avalanche were able to rid themselves of Wood's deal without any consequences.

This is a deal that teams used to have to pay a heavy price to get out of — the Avalanche seemingly got an asset out of it. Even if Columbus was really enamoured with Wood (for whatever reason), the Blue Jackets completely let Colorado off the hook here. Just because the cap is going up doesn't mean that cap efficiency no longer matters. A bad deal is still a bad deal.

This is an unbelievably good move for the Avalanche, who clear \$7.75 million in cap space while getting a second, a third and a prospect for two players that aren't worth their current cap hits by a substantial degree. With that money freed up, the Avalanche can seriously load up. And while Columbus got a decent center for its trouble, the cost of doing so looks obscenely high. — Dom Luszczyszyn

Avalanche grade: A

Blue Jackets grade: D

The Hockey Writers / 3 Blue Jackets' Takeaways From Day 1 of the 2025 NHL Draft

By Mark Scheig – June 28, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets entered Day 1 of the 2025 NHL Draft as one of the most interesting teams in the NHL. They had a lot of assets and cap space available to improve their team.

In the end, thanks in part to the decentralized draft format, some potential trades they were hoping would develop during the night never materialized. However, the Blue Jackets still made the best of their situation by adding two talented prospects to their organization.

Earlier in the day on Friday, the Blue Jackets were heavily involved in multiple trade talks. They eventually dropped out of one but closed on the other. That's where we begin our three Blue Jackets' takeaways from Friday night.

Adding Coyle/Wood & Missing Out on Dobson

Before the Blue Jackets settled in for the start of the draft, they were busy on multiple fronts. First, they were reported to be in on New York Islanders' defenseman Noah Dobson.

The Blue Jackets along with the Montreal Canadiens were neck and neck in the running. The prevailing feeling as time went on was that the Canadiens were the team to beat. That proved to be true.

The Canadiens sent both of their first-round picks long with Emil Heineman to the Islanders in exchange for Dobson. The Canadiens then signed him to an eight-year extension carrying a cap hit of \$9.5 million per season.

Blue Jackets' GM Don Waddell confirmed they were in on Dobson. But there was a certain point in which it wasn't wise to go any further.

"We got to a point for us it was a combination of not only the assets we had to give up, but also the price tag for the player," Waddell said. "And we just made a decision that you look at our team and some of the guys that are gonna be coming off contracts the next few years, the Fantilli's and Johnson's, (Kirill Marchenko), Voronkov and Mateychuk. The young players, they're gonna get paid. And we did like the player but it comes to a point where you say okay. You gotta make sure you leave yourself open to be able to keep your team together."

While the Blue Jackets missed out on Dobson, they immediately turned their attention to addressing their bottom-six. They made a trade with the Colorado Avalanche to acquire both Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood. The Blue Jackets sent a third-round pick this year, a conditional second-round pick in 2027 and prospect Gavin Brindley to the Avalanche while taking on all of Coyle's and Wood's salaries. Here's Waddell on that trade.

“Both big bodies. Wood skates like the wind as a forechecker. (He) creates a lot of opportunities with the speed and finishing checks. Has scored 17 goals the one year not that we’re expecting him to score a lot of goals. He brings a lot of energy to our fourth line and can play up into the third line.”

“Then with Coyle, we wanted to get a righty. Big body who plays a 200-foot game. Both ends of the ice very responsible. We’ve been looking for that right-shot guy all summer. When that opportunity came up, we had to jump on it.”

The Blue Jackets have several pending UFA’s who could have filled bottom-six roles. In Wood and Coyle, the team added size and speed to that group which was one of the things they needed to address.

Waddell is expected to continue exploring different possibilities. After missing out on Dobson, they will see what blueline options they have. Also watch to see if they bring in another goaltender after trading Daniil Tarasov earlier this week.

Blue Jackets Make Their Two Picks

Although there were calls for potential trades around the 14th and 20th picks, the Blue Jackets elected to use them to draft two players both very high on their master lists. Waddell said they could have moved up or moved around in different scenarios. But it was apparent the team valued who was available.

“We had a lot of calls,” Waddell said. “We actually tried to move up and to a spot and that didn’t work. And we had a lot of calls to move around especially on the 14th pick. I really believe if there’s a player there that you really want, don’t pass it up. Take them. To go pick up a second and late third round or late second or third-round pick and lose your opportunity for the player you want, I don’t think it’s worth it.”

The way the draft played out after the top-seven, things fell favorably for the Blue Jackets. With the 14th pick, they drafted Tri-City defenseman Jackson Smith. His name was announced by Meredith Gaudreau in a very emotional moment in Los Angeles when she received a standing ovation. Chants of John-ny then broke out in Peacock Theater.

Waddell didn’t anticipate Smith being available at 14.

“We had him really high on our list,” Waddell said. “(We) like the way he transports the puck. Some of our scouts that watched him all the time rated (his skating) as a 10 and that happens very rarely. He’s a good sized kid.”

Smith got the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hear his name called by Meredith. Being from Calgary, Johnny Gaudreau was someone Smith got to watch growing up.

“Just to see the support in the stands and the crowd for the Gaudreau family, it was an incredible moment,” Smith said. “So to be picked right after that felt even extra special for me. And getting to meet her and talking to her was really cool.”

Smith called him “a full package kind of guy.” He brings the size and speed the Blue Jackets want on their blue line. He is off to play at Penn State after playing his junior hockey at Tri-City. Why Penn State?

“My biggest thing with going to school was I want to go to a place where I’m going to play,” Smith said. “There, I felt that I’m going to get a good opportunity and become an NHL’er as fast as I can. I think that’s the place where I can do it with their facilities and their staff and how they work with me. I think it’s going to be incredible there.”

The Blue Jackets did take a goalie with the 20th pick but perhaps one many didn’t expect. They took Pyotr Andreyanov who was rated as the top international goalie available according to NHL Central Scouting.

Waddell and others went to the Gold Star Camp in Florida in which Andreyanov took part in. They team talked with him in an effort to get to know him. They also figured out he has 4-5 years of commitments in Russia before he will come over.

The Blue Jackets felt Andreyanov was one of the best goaltending prospects they’ve seen in the last couple of years. They were so high on him he was the next name on their master list after Smith.

“Both our goalie guys (Niklas Backstrom and Brad Thiessen) and Jimmy Viers all said they thought this was the best guy,” Waddell said. “We came into the draft saying that we’d like to draft a goalie. So when we put our list together, it worked out in two ways. It’s kind of interesting because he’s our number-one goalie but he was actually the next guy on our list.”

Waddell then admitted he asked prospects at the Gold Star Camp a question. If you could take one player from here that you could take with you to our next team, who would that be?

“90% of the players said Pyotr,” Waddell said.

Goaltending coach Backstrom said Andreyanov reminded him of a young Sergei Bobrovsky. Despite the 4-5 year wait, Backstrom is confident of what Andreyanov could become.

“The hope is that the development path he’s on leads right to the NHL,” Backstrom said.

Impact of Decentralized Draft on Trades

Another first round, another in which no player trades were announced. It was curious to see how the decentralized draft would affect things.

Waddell admitted thinking the decentralized draft put a hold to a lot of trades.

“This decentralized draft I think plays a big part of it,” Waddell said. “When you can’t walk around the rink & just tap people on their shoulder and talk to them. When you’re face to face, things always seem to happen better than on the phone.”

Perhaps trades will pick up on Saturday and then in the lead up to the start of free agency. But it was very clear that a lot of people think the decentralized draft will be one and done.

The first round lasted four and a half hours. There were technical difficulties. James Hagens wasn't able to communicate with the Bruins' staff in the "Draft Room." While some may like the extra quiet of being in their own war room, there is momentum to return to a centralized draft.

Commissioner Gary Bettman said they will poll the teams to see about changing back to the old way. Given how Friday night went, it's a safe bet to think there will be overwhelming support to be in one place again.

If we learned anything about the NHL Draft, there is still a lot of value in face-to-face interactions. Let's hope it stays that way for good.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets delight in their fortune, add 4 more on NHL Draft's second day

By Aaron Portzline – June 28, 2025

NHL general managers and scouts have been known to make grandiose comments when draft weekend is complete and a new batch of prospects has landed in their pool. That sixth-round draft pick? He was way higher on their board. That seventh-round pick? Yeah, he reminds them of (insert generational talent here) ... yeah, Patrice Bergeron!

That's why Don Waddell's comments on Saturday afternoon demanded confirmation. Did the Columbus Blue Jackets GM just say that? Yes. Yes, he did.

The Blue Jackets drafted highly touted defenseman Jackson Smith with the No. 14 pick on Friday, surprising exactly nobody. They selected goaltender Pyotr Andreyanov at No. 20, surprising many, as Andreyanov was predicted to go late in the second round or early in the third.

On Saturday, the Blue Jackets traded back into the third round to select Swedish defenseman Malte Vass with the No. 76 pick. And then Waddell said ...

"We drafted right, identically, as our list was laid out," he said. "The first three guys (Smith, Andreyanov and Vass) were all in the top 14 on our list."

Come again?

"Correct. That is correct," Waddell said. "I can say, probably, it's never happened in my history (in hockey). It's our board, so we'll see in a few years if we're right or not. Our guys put a lot of work into it. We had midseason meetings, end-of-season meetings and meetings this week, and the list was unanimous. When you're sitting there at 76 and you're able to get a guy who is still on your top 15 list, there's only one decision to make and that's what we did."

The Blue Jackets bolstered their forward corps with a trade with Colorado on Friday for Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood, but so far this offseason their defense and goaltending have not been improved.

On Friday, the Blue Jackets were deep in trade talks with the New York Islanders for defenseman Noah Dobson, but they backed out when the asking price, in Waddell's opinion, got too steep. On Saturday, the Anaheim Ducks traded goaltender John Gibson to the Detroit Red Wings for goaltender Peter Mrazek and two draft picks. The Blue Jackets, according to sources, were not involved in trade talks with Anaheim for Gibson.

The Blue Jackets did make two trades: a fourth-round pick this year (No. 109) and a fourth-round pick next year to the Detroit Red Wings to move up to No. 76 and draft Vass, and two seventh-round picks (Nos. 205, 218) to the Seattle Kraken to move up higher in the round (No. 198).

They had other trade offers, too, Waddell said, but they were only pick-for-pick trades, not offers involving players that could boost a roster immediately.

By now, you should probably realize Waddell is going to follow his scouts' advice and his own eyes — he saw his share of these amateur players — without caring if that matches “conventional” wisdom or a wide array of mock drafts.

Vass, a highly physical defensive defenseman, was projected by most to be a third-round pick, which is exactly where the Blue Jackets drafted him. But Waddell confirmed he would have taken Vass with the 20th pick in the first round if all other players on the Jackets' master list were taken.

“In Vass' case, when he starts to fall, you say, ‘OK, let's think about teams we could make a deal with,’” Waddell said. “We had already started down that road and made a deal (to get back into the third round).

“I read a lot of stuff — and heard a lot of stuff — about ‘Oh, we took a goalie early.’ But we wanted to take a goalie and we thought (Andreyanov) was the best goalie. We just felt that, instead of taking a chance — yeah, maybe I could have moved back a few spots — but the worst case scenario is somebody takes him in front of you and you're saying, ‘What kind of strategy was that?’ I'm a huge believer that if you really like a guy and your number is up, just take the player.”

Vass (6 feet 2, 194 pounds) is headed to Boston University next season. He spent most of last season (40 games) playing for Färjestad in Sweden's second league, but did draw in for five games with the top club.

Other Blue Jackets picks:

Fifth round, No. 160: C Owen Griffin — A smallish center (5 feet 10, 160 pounds), Griffin played his way into greater prominence in the second half of his season, especially in the playoffs. He had 22-29-51 in 62 games for Oshawa of the Ontario Hockey League, but led the OHL in playoff goals (16) and was sixth in points (29). The Blue Jackets saw him play extensively this season, in part because they were checking in on defenseman Luca Marrelli, a third-rounder from last year's draft.

Sixth round, No. 173: LHD Victor Hedin Raftheim — He doesn't turn 18 until August, so Raftheim (already 6 feet 3, 181 pounds) has some filling out to do. In 34 games with Brynäs in Sweden's under-20 league, he had 1-3-4 and 22 penalty minutes.

Seventh round, No. 198: C Jeremy Loranger — The Blue Jackets like Loranger enough to trade two later seventh-round picks to move up the board and grab him. He's a small center — 5 feet 9, 161 pounds — but he lit up the British Columbia Hockey League for Sherwood Park with 40-65-105 in only 54 games. He's committed to play at the University of Nebraska-Omaha next season.

The Blue Jackets expect all six players drafted this weekend — among others, including last year's No. 4 pick Cayden Lindstrom — to attend their summer development camp, which runs July 2-5 in the practice rink attached to Nationwide Arena.

“We’re happy with the haul we had here,” Blue Jackets assistant director of amateur scouting Trevor Timmins said. “Now, these are prospects. I mean, we hand them over now to our development team, our development coaches, to help them develop.

“They’re young men. They’re prospects. Hopefully, they become NHL players for the Blue Jackets.”

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets: 5 takeaways from the 2025 NHL Draft

By Brian Hedger – June 29, 2025

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell made two trades during the 2025 NHL draft's second day, moving up to select players his staff prioritized.

Waddell defended his selection of Pyotr Andreyanov 20th overall, saying he was the highest ranked goalie on the Blue Jackets' list.

The Blue Jackets focused heavily on defense in another draft, adding three more blueliners plus another goalie to their pipeline.

Waddell expressed confidence in the team's prospect rankings, saying the first three picks were all ranked within their organizational top 14.

The decentralized format of the draft drew criticism for its length, with Waddell noting the second day 'dragged' along.

Don Waddell is decisive.

That's something the Blue Jackets and fans are learning about the team's second-year president of hockey operations/general manager following rounds 2-7 of the 2025 NHL Draft on June 28. After a surprising decision to take Russian goalie Pyotr Andreyanov 20th overall on June 27, Waddell completed two trades on the draft's second day, using a stash of his own picks to move up for players his staff coveted.

Waddell gained a third-round pick to select Swedish defenseman Malte Vass 76th overall, sending two fourth-round picks to Detroit, and traded up in the seventh round to take center Jeremy Loranger 198th after sending Seattle two picks later in that round.

"If you want a player, you do what you can," Waddell said. "When you start looking at your list ... in Vass' case, when he starts to fall, you say, 'OK, let's think about what teams we could make a deal with.' We had already started down that road and made a deal. ... I'm a huge believer that if you really like a guy and your number is up, just take that player."

So, that's what the Blue Jackets did to add more talent into their pipeline. Here are five other takeaways from the 2025 NHL Draft:

Columbus Blue Jackets have no regrets about taking Andreyanov 20th overall

Waddell hasn't drawn much criticism since taking over the Blue Jackets' hockey side in late May 2024, but that changed a bit after Meredith Gaudreau — the team's designated pick announcer in the first round — revealed the 20th overall pick to be 6-foot, 207-pound unheralded Russian goalie Pyotr Andreyanov.

That one certainly sparked some feedback among draft analysts, reporters and fans who were all, likewise, dumbfounded by NHL Central Scouting's No.1 ranked international goalie being chosen that high. A day later, June 28, Waddell didn't back down from the decision, which he and Blue Jackets goaltending coach Niklas Backstrom each explained following the first round.

"I read a lot of stuff and heard a lot of stuff about 'Oh, we took a goalie early,' but we wanted to take a goalie, and we thought he was the best goalie," Waddell said. "If you remember, we didn't have a second or third-round pick. If we don't take him at 20, our next pick is in the fourth round. He wasn't going to be there. We just felt that instead of taking a chance — yeah, maybe I could have moved back a few spots — but the worst case is somebody takes him in front of me and you're saying, 'What kind of strategy is that?'"

So, he took a goalie the Blue Jackets had ranked inside the top 10 in their rankings.

Did Jackets get as much value as their rankings suggest?

The Blue Jackets determine their prospect rankings during scouting meetings led by amateur scouting director Ville Siren and assistant amateur scouting director Trevor Timmins. Waddell gives his seal of approval on it, and then it becomes the Blue Jackets' guiding light for two days of drafting.

Virtually every GM and scouting director in the league says the same thing about their rankings process, which tends to produce lots of comments about draft picks that begin the same: "He was the next guy on our list."

This year, Waddell said the Blue Jackets' first three picks — defenseman Jackson Smith (14th overall), Andreyanov (20th overall) and Vass (76th overall) — all ranked inside the top 15 of his staff's list. Those lists are never made public, but Waddell, Siren and Timmins swear it's true.

Vass was ranked right around where he was selected by most draft publications, but the Blue Jackets say he occupied a spot near the top of their list. In fact, Waddell said Vass would've gone 20th overall to Columbus had they not had Andreyanov ranked ahead of him.

Likewise, Waddell said Smith ranked high inside the Jackets' top 10 when they chose him 14th overall.

"I can say, probably it's never happened in my (draft) history," Waddell said of getting a top 15 player on his team's list, like Vass, in the third round. "It's our board, so we'll see in a few years if we're right or not. When you're sitting there at No. 76 and you're able to get a guy who is still in your top 15 list, there's only one decision to make ... and that's what we did."

He flipped two fourth-round picks to Detroit and took Vass, a left-handed defenseman who's leaving Sweden to play at Boston University.

Columbus Blue Jackets go heavy on defense in second straight NHL draft

Sticking to their rankings to make picks led to the Jackets going big on the defensive side of the puck for a second straight draft, selecting three more big defensemen plus a goalie after taking four defensemen and a goalie in 2024.

Almost all of the defensemen have good size and skating ability, while both goalies — Evan Gardner in 2024 and Andreyanov in 2025 — are on the smaller side in height.

That's seven young defensemen and two goalies added into a system that already had a group of rising young defensemen plus undersized Russian goalie Sergei Ivanov, who was selected in the fifth round (138th overall) in 2022. Some GMs live by the cliché, "You can never have too many defensemen," but that wasn't Waddell's logic.

The rankings list simply dictated who the Jackets took, and he doesn't think there are too many defensemen in the pipeline.

"With our prospects, we're not overloaded at any position," Waddell said. "We need every position. We always say, 'Let's draft the best player available and then work with them to make them an NHL player.'"

Columbus Blue Jackets like upside of two gritty forwards with skill

The Blue Jackets' list did offer two breaks from their two-year run on defensemen and goalies.

They took forward Owen Griffin of the OHL's Oshawa Generals in the fifth round (160th overall) and went back to the forward well by trading up in the seventh for Loranger (198th), a high-scoring center who led the BCHL in scoring for Sherwood Park as a rookie in that league.

Both are about the same size. Griffin, who led the OHL playoffs with 16 goals, is listed at 5-10, 160 pounds. Loranger stands 5-10, 165. Being listed at 5-10 could mean they're closer to 5-9, but the Blue Jackets are more concerned with each adding muscle and heft.

That's because a big part of their playing styles involves "grit" and playing in the "hard" areas of the ice that often feature bigger, stronger players.

"His stature is a little undersized, but he plays hard," Timmins said of Griffin. "He's not afraid to go to the 'hard' areas and retrieve pucks or take hits to make plays or get to the net-front. His intangibles are really strong, and hopefully that will drive him. Hopefully, he can grow a little bit and become a bigger body down the road."

Those same thoughts apply to Loranger, whose next step will be playing collegiately at Nebraska-Omaha.

"He's a skilled forward that has grit," Timmins said. "He has a grit package. He goes into the 'hard' areas, a bit like Griffin, so there's upside there."

Decentralizing the NHL draft created a two-day marathon

The second day of the NHL's new "decentralized" draft dragged on for much longer than usual with teams picking remotely rather than a draft floor. Just like the 2020 and 2021 remote drafts, which were "decentralized" by COVID-19, the NHL's 2025 offseason crown jewel became an awkward, prolonged process that morphed into a marathon for rounds 2-7.

Waddell initially voted for the change due to previous travel challenges returning from drafts in Nashville and Las Vegas with the July 1 start of free agency just a couple of days later. Now, considering how long this draft took plus a 2026 NHL calendar slotting the next draft a couple days earlier, his opinion has changed.

“I voted to go decentralized,” Waddell said. “I was one of the 26 (GMs who did). As we got to the GM meetings this year, in March, the next conversation we had (about the draft), we took a straw vote ... not a regular vote. (The vote tally) would’ve been almost completely opposite.”

Sitting through a second day that lasted four-plus hours might have culled even more support.

“The second round seemed like it took forever,” Waddell said. “The third round got faster and then it got faster the more we went along. I’m glad it picked up speed. We were on pace at one point to be done at 6:30 at night.”

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets re-sign defenseman Dante Fabbro

By Brian Hedger – June 29, 2025

Defenseman Dante Fabbro agreed to a four-year contract extension with the Columbus Blue Jackets worth \$16.5 million.

Fabbro was claimed off waivers from the Nashville Predators in November 2024 and became a key player for the Blue Jackets.

Fabbro set career highs in goals, points, plus/minus, and ice time this past season.

Fabbro helped the Blue Jackets make a surprising climb in 2024-25, finishing two points away from a playoff spot.

The Blue Jackets have placed an important piece in their summer roster puzzle.

Dante Fabbro, who skates with Zach Werenski on the top defense pairing, has agreed to a four-year contract extension worth \$16.5 million and costs an average annual amount of \$4.125 million toward the NHL's salary cap.

"Dante was a great addition to our team last season and keeping him in Columbus was a priority," Blue Jackets president of hockey operations/general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "He is a smart, versatile defenseman who moves the puck very well and can play in all situations. We are thrilled that he will continue to be an important part of our club moving forward."

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Dante Fabbro (15) hits Ottawa Senators left wing Angus Crookshank (59) during the second period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on April 8, 2025.

Waddell claimed Fabbro, 27, off waivers on Nov. 20, 2024, from the Nashville Predators.

After falling out of favor in Nashville, where he spent his first five NHL seasons, Fabbro barely played for the Predators before they placed him on waivers. Waddell, seeking to bolster the Jackets' defensive group with a right-handed defenseman selected 17th overall in 2016, scooped Fabbro up and gave him a change of scenery that sparked a return to top form.

Leaning on experience gained from playing top minutes in Nashville with Roman Josi, Fabbro stepped right into the Blue Jackets' first pairing and melded seamlessly with Werenski, forming a strong left-right combination. Werenski was already cruising in a career-best season, but adding Fabbro gave him a regular partner to free him up even more. That was something he hadn't had since the Blue Jackets traded former partner Seth Jones in July 2021.

"Being familiar with a partner is huge," Werenski said. "I don't want to say it's half the game, but it's a big part of the game — just not having to think in certain situations. You do enough thinking on the ice off your instincts. You have enough reads to make as a defenseman, where, if you can eliminate some of

those just by knowing what your partner's going to do, it just frees the game up in certain areas. It gives you more time, allows you to just play off instincts more, and I feel like I haven't had that since Jonesy."

Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves (73) stops a shot in front of defenseman Dante Fabbro (15) and defenseman Zach Werenski (8) during the second period of the NHL hockey game against the Buffalo Sabres at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on April 10, 2025.

Now that can continue.

"I really liked playing with Fabbs and having that consistency, and I think it helps having a righty over there too," Werenski said. "You can play with a lefty (on the right), but things are a little bit slower ... offensive zone 'D-to-Ds' (defenseman-to-defenseman passes) are slower, neutral zone 'D-to-Ds' are slower, and I'm a guy that likes to have the puck on my stick and make plays. He does a good job of just zipping it over, and it's quicker. We work really well together, and he's a great dude too."

Fabbro also balanced the Blue Jackets' top two defensive pairings, allowing coach Dean Evason and assistant Steve McCarthy to bolster the second unit with Ivan Provorov — another solid two-way veteran with size and strength. Provorov, like Fabbro prior to his extension, is a pending unrestricted free agent whom Waddell went into the offseason hoping to retain.

That's started to look less likely going into the draft June 27-28, but Waddell wasn't able to add a right-handed replacement for Provorov using the Blue Jackets' two first-round picks. They've got until Noon on July 1 to get Provorov re-signed before he can test the open market. Signing Fabbro, meanwhile, helps maintain some consistency at a critical position for a team that made an unexpected push up the Eastern Conference standings to finish two points shy of the playoffs.

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Dante Fabbro (15) hugs goaltender Jet Greaves (73) following the 6-1 win over the New York Islanders in the team's final NHL hockey game of the season at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on April 17, 2025.

Fabbro played a key role.

While helping free up Werenski's offensive side, Fabbro put up impressive numbers of his own. After playing six games with no points and a -3 plus/minus for the Predators, he finished with nine goals, 17 assists and 26 points over 62 games with the Blue Jackets.

For the season, including his stint with Nashville, Fabbro set career-highs in goals, points, plus/minus (+20) and ice time at 20:54 per game that included 21:39 per game for the Jackets. Now that he's signed, Waddell can focus on re-signing other "priority" players among a long list of pending free agents that includes eight additional UFAs and restricted free agent forward Dmitri Voronkov.

The NHL's window for free agency opens at Noon on July 1, which gives the Blue Jackets a deadline to reach deals with any of their unsigned UFAs. The Jackets retain signing rights for Voronkov, Mikael Pyhytia and other unsigned RFAs who played primarily at the AHL level.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Defense Remains Uncertain After 2025 NHL Draft

By Mark Scheig – June 29, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets entered NHL Draft week 2025 hoping to make some significant moves to help improve their roster. While they accomplished some things, uncertainty remains as they head into the opening of free agency.

In the process, the Blue Jackets elected to make both of their first-round picks on Friday. They also added four additional players to their organization on Saturday in the selections of Malte Vass, Owen Griffin, Victor Hedin Raftheim and Jeremy Lorange.

It's likely if they had their way, the Blue Jackets would have used one or both of their first-round picks for immediate help. However, nothing materialized that made sense to them.

While the forward ranks became somewhat clearer this week thanks to the trades for Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood, the defense remains uncertain. That is the top story to watch for the Blue Jackets as July 1 is now just two days away.

Blue Jackets Will Monitor D Market

GM Don Waddell spoke on Saturday afternoon after the conclusion of Day 2 of the 2025 NHL Draft. While his phone was very active in the days leading up to the draft, it wasn't as active on Saturday.

"It was mostly picks for picks though," Waddell said about the calls he got Saturday. "There wasn't a whole lot of players being shopped today. That's for sure. Again, probably the decentralized draft where you're not in person. There was a few hockey trades made but I think they've been brewing for a while. It was mostly a lot of pick swapping that was put out there to move up or move back."

The Blue Jackets were heavily involved in a potential trade for Noah Dobson. Ultimately, the Montreal Canadiens won out. Interestingly enough on 32 Thoughts the Podcast released on Sunday, Elliotte Friedman said that not only was Dmitri Voronkov the potential player involved, the Blue Jackets' offer to Dobson was for more money than what he got from Montreal (\$9.5 million per season.)

Clearly, the Blue Jackets still have an appetite to make moves to improve their defense. Waddell said as much on Saturday.

"I don't think that's changed," Waddell said about the appetite to add on defense. "It's been ongoing since we ended the season and we're going to continue to work with first our players that we have control with until July 1 to see which one of those (we could keep.) The players that were here that are free were players that played very good roles for our hockey team if you look at (Dante) Fabbro and (Ivan) Provorov speaking of those two guys. So you could look at that free-agent market and say, okay. Who's going to do a better job for us?"

"Our first goal is to make sure we try to follow up as much as we can with those two particular defensemen to see if we could bring one or both of them back."

At last check, negotiations with both Fabbro and Provorov appeared either slow or at a standstill. While the door isn't completely closed on them, time is running short before they can talk to other teams.

Meanwhile, Waddell is going to continue searching for help on the blue line.

"Is there more we'd like to do? Of course," Waddell said. "We got to continue to work on our defense...I feel pretty good about our forwards. We're going to explore these next few days to stay on top of the D market. It's no secret everybody looks at the same list that we're looking at. And with all the free agents out there particularly on defense, it's not like a plethora of players. There's a lot of players but not a lot of top players. My job as general manager is to make sure I stay in touch with the people that are part of the process here. And come July 1, if we have needs, we will certainly go out and try to address them."

There are several possibilities in play leaving the Blue Jackets' current situation on defense uncertain. If the Blue Jackets were willing to part with multiple first rounders and a good, young player they like in Voronkov while potentially offering Dobson \$10 million, it speaks not only about Dobson the player but how much of a need they felt they had on their blue line.

Should Fabbro and Provorov not re-sign with the Blue Jackets, the defense would look something like this.

Zach Werenski – Damon Severson

Denton Mateychuk – Erik Gudbranson

Jake Christiansen – Jordan Harris

We are assuming the Blue Jackets re-sign Harris as he's an RFA. It's clear why trying to acquire Dobson made sense here. With trade options dwindling and not too many top options available on the market, it will be interesting to see how the team chooses to address this unit.

Are the Blue Jackets able to bridge the gaps in talks with Fabbro or Provorov? Maybe. Waddell certainly didn't rule out that possibility. But at the same time, he also said they'll continue to monitor the D market.

We thought that there would be clarity on what the Blue Jackets' defense might look like after the draft. That's not the case at all. It remains uncertain what all will happen as we roll the calendar into July.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Expect newcomer Charlie Coyle to play a big role

By Aaron Portzline – June 29, 2025

Below is a collection of notes, insights, ruminations and did-you-knows gathered throughout the week for the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Item No. 1: New forwards

Charlie Coyle's last season with the Minnesota Wild was Dean Evason's first season as a Wild assistant coach. Coyle was sent to Boston at the NHL trade deadline that season (2018-19), while Evason was elevated two seasons later to head coach in Minnesota.

But Coyle made a mark on Evason.

The Blue Jackets were hoping to upgrade their forwards this offseason, and GM Don Waddell took a big step in that direction with a trade on Friday that brought Coyle and Miles Wood from the Colorado Avalanche in exchange for prospect winger Gavin Brindley and two draft picks.

Coyle is a right-handed center who will likely anchor the Blue Jackets' third line, making Cole Sillinger a likely candidate to move to the wing. Wood will be a fourth-line regular, tasked with forechecking, finishing checks and playing hard every game.

"We got better," Evason said. "Oh, we got better."

Coyle figures to play a prominent role, both on and off the ice. Evason remembered that much from their time together with the Wild.

"We all know him as a player. We all know what he became in Boston and what he's settled into as a pretty fantastic career," Evason said. "What stands out to me is what an incredible human being he is. Just a quality, quality guy who will fit fantastically into our room."

"You combine that with his size (6-foot-3, 215 pounds), the strength, the fact that he's a right shot, his faceoff ability, the penalty killer he is, his ability as a two-way versatile player ... yeah, I'm pretty happy."

Coyle, 33, has been one of the NHL's most consistent players during his career. This upcoming season in Columbus, he's likely to play his 1,000 game (he's at 950), score his 200th goal (189), get his 300th assist (296) and get his 500th point (485).

If you've followed the Blue Jackets since their origin in 2000, you know what a struggle the center ice position has been. But it's never been stronger than today, with Sean Monahan and 20-year-old Adam Fantilli entrenched in the middle of the top two lines.

Both Sillinger and Coyle are strong third-line centers, but, as Evason noted, Boone Jenner, Dmitri Voronkov, Justin Danforth and others can play in the middle, too.

“Everybody thinks you have to build from the goalie out, and I get that,” Evason said. “But I would say the center ice position is the hardest to fill, and we’ve had that since I’ve been here. We’ve moved centers to the wall while other teams are trying to find enough centers.

“It’s exciting that we have that versatility. If you’re asking right now where I have Coyle on the magnet board (in the coaches office), it’s in the middle.”

The Blue Jackets were 27th in face-offs last season (47.8 percent), but the long injury absences of Jenner and Monahan led to that struggle. With Coyle joining those two, and with an improving Fantilli, the Blue Jackets should start with the puck more next season.

Coyle should also help them on the penalty kill, which was hot and cold all season, finishing 22nd in the NHL (77 percent).

The Blue Jackets may not be done reshaping their forwards, either.

Waddell has said he wants to acquire a top-six winger, either by trade or free agency. If Toronto’s Mitch Marner smiles in Columbus’ general direction — and isn’t already halfway to Vegas — the Blue Jackets would make a major offer. Winnipeg’s Nikolaj Ehlers is expected to hit the market, too.

First, Waddell has to decide what to do with his own unrestricted free-agent forwards, and you can correctly assume that the acquisition of Coyle and Wood will mean some of those UFAs are moving along.

Danforth, James van Riemsdyk, Sean Kuraly, Luke Kunin, Christian Fischer and Kevin Labanc are all pending UFAs as of Tuesday.

Item No. 2: Now what?

The Blue Jackets were deep into talks with the New York Islanders for defenseman Noah Dobson, but the price tag — both in what they’d have to give the Islanders and in what they’d have to pay Dobson — was too high to justify, Waddell said.

Meanwhile, on Saturday, the Anaheim Ducks traded John Gibson to the Detroit Red Wings, taking perhaps the top available goaltender off the trade market. A team source told The Athletic that the Blue Jackets were not involved in the trade discussions for Gibson.

So where do the Blue Jackets turn now for upgrades? And, perhaps just as important, what do the next 48 hours hold for Waddell’s plans to push the franchise further out of its rebuilding process?

First to the defense...

The Blue Jackets may now have to press hard to sign pending unrestricted free agents Ivan Provorov and/or Dante Fabbro, who may have picked up some leverage as the draft has now passed and the clock ticks closer to the start of free agency on Tuesday.

Unless Waddell can swing a trade — is Calgary's Rasmus Andersson the best option? — or knows he can land a right-side, top-four defender via free agency, Provorov and/or Fabbro may be the Blue Jackets' best bet. Fabbro worked well with Zach Werenski and Provorov, playing his off side, looked good at times next to rookie Denton Mateychuk.

Now to goaltending ...

The Blue Jackets said goodbye to Daniil Tarasov last week, trading him to the Florida Panthers for a fifth-round draft pick. But what about Elvis Merzlikins?

Waddell has said all along that Merzlikins could return next season, and the free-agent market for goaltenders doesn't provide a lot of options. Jake Allen will likely be the most sought-after target, while others like Vitek Vanecek, Ilya Samsonov and Alex Lyon are available.

The buyout window closes Monday, so if the Blue Jackets have plans to buy out the final two years on Merzlikins' contract, they'd have to be certain that they could land a replacement for Merzlikins via trade or free agency.

Item No. 3: Let's go back

The NHL's attempt at a decentralized draft this weekend — while well-intended — turned out to be the best argument for going back to the typical format, where the entire league, draft-eligible players, fans and media take over one host city.

There were the awkward interviews between club executives and drafted players; the lack of easy, organic conversations among GMs, which often spur trades; the slow pace of the proceedings, especially during the second and third rounds on Saturday.

The only person who seemed to like it is Detroit Red Wings GM Steve Yzerman, who acknowledged such in an interview with NHL Network. Otherwise, it seemed overwhelmingly true that most favor a return to the annual convention-style format.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman is always an easy target, but you can't blame him on this one. He responded to what his member clubs requested, and the vote was 26-6 two years ago when this decision was made.

NHL clubs were bothered by the tight turnaround from the end of the draft to the start of free agency, especially when travel woes two years ago getting out of Nashville severely hampered a few clubs' post-draft preparation and set-up back in their home offices.

Waddell was one of the 26 "yes" votes, he said. But he'd vote differently now, he said.

"I'm not embarrassed about how I voted," Waddell said. "Last year we were in Vegas on a Saturday for the draft and free agency started on a Monday. The preparation for free agency was a little tight. A year before, we were in Nashville ... and everybody was scrambling to get home a day before free agency. That's when it was on everybody's mind."

"I voted to decentralize. I was one of the 26 people. As we got to the GM meetings this year, in March, the next conversation we had ... it would have been almost completely the opposite. We looked at the calendar, too, and next year the draft is on the 26th and 27th of June. So you can travel back and still have 3-4 days to get ready."

Item No. 4: Snacks

NHL clubs must extend qualifying offers to their restricted free agents by 5 p.m. Monday to maintain their rights to the player. The Blue Jackets have two players at the NHL level who fit that criteria: forward Dmitri Voronkov and defenseman Jordan Harris. The AHL Cleveland players who need QOs are defensemen Ole Julian Bjorgvik-Holm, Cole Clayton, Daemon Hunt and Samuel Knazko. Both Harris and Voronkov have arbitration rights, as does Clayton. Forward Mikael Pyrytiä, who played 47 games in Columbus last season, was already qualified back in May so he could obtain insurance to play for Finland in the IIHF World Championships.

It was a good week for AHL Cleveland, starting with a trade that sent forward Cameron Butler to Minnesota for Brendan Gaunce, who spent three seasons in Cleveland and was the Monsters' captain in 2023-24 before signing with the Wild last summer. The Blue Jackets over the weekend extended center Hunter McKown and goaltender Zach Sawchenko with one-year, two-way contracts. Both of them had expiring contracts.

You know about the NHL UFAs. Here are the AHL Cleveland players who, barring a contract extension between now at Tuesday, will be UFAs: Trey Fix-Wolansky, Dylan Gambrell, Joe LaBate and Owen Sillinger. Fix-Wolansky, a seventh-round pick (No. 204) by the Blue Jackets in 2018, is hitting UFA status a year early because he's played so few games (26) at the NHL level. He's AHL Cleveland's all-time record holder in goals, assists and points. He's third in games played (289) behind Justin Scott (336) and Brett Gallant (307).

The Blue Jackets will play a seven-game preseason schedule beginning Sept. 21 versus St. Louis in Nationwide Arena. The full NHL schedule will be released in mid-July, a spokesman said.

The two speedy centers drafted by the Blue Jackets late in Saturday's second round — Owen Griffin in the fifth round (No. 160) and Jeremy Loranger in the seventh (No. 198) — are distinct among the 12 players Waddell has taken in his two drafts with Columbus: They're both under 6 feet. Griffin is 5-10, while Loranger is 5-9. So far, seven of the 12 players drafted by Waddell with the Blue Jackets are 6-foot-3 or taller and seven of the 12 are defensemen.

Here's Blue Jackets' assistant director of amateur scouting Trevor Timmins on the NHL Draft appearing to morph toward the NBA Draft in the past two years: "Yeah, I don't know what's in the water nowadays. They seem to be growing bigger. Maybe players who were going to be football players or basketball players are now hockey players, or it's just a coincidence. If you look at the teams that are (getting) to the (Stanley Cup) Final, they've got a big defense corps. That's probably one affinity that all 32 teams have now toward NHL defensemen."

A Blue Jackets spokesman on Saturday said that all six players selected in the draft this week will attend the club's off-season development camp, which runs July 2-5 in the Nationwide Arena practice rink. Also attending is center Cayden Lindstrom, the No. 4 overall pick in the 2024 draft. A full roster should be released soon. The camp is free and open to the public daily. Wednesday's sessions run from 11:10 a.m. to 1:40 p.m., while Thursday and Friday are from 9:40 a.m. to 12:10 p.m. On Saturday, there's a 9:30 a.m. prospects game.

Here's your Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering trivia question: After this weekend's draft, the Blue Jackets have made 203 picks across 26 drafts since they joined the league in 2000. Which Columbus draft pick has scored the most points in his NHL career?

Misha Donskov, who was born in Canada and raised in Columbus, stepped down last week after two years as an assistant coach with the Dallas Stars to become vice president of hockey operations with Team Canada. It's a massive role for Donskov, who will be head coach of Canada's entry in the World Championships, an associate coach for the World Juniors club, and an assistant coach at the Olympics this winter. Donskov, who spent seven seasons with the Vegas Golden Knights before joining the Stars, has started to draw interest from NHL clubs in their coaching searches.

Former Blue Jackets player Manny Malhotra has been an NHL assistant for seven seasons, both with Vancouver and Toronto. He returned to the Vancouver organization last summer to be head coach of their AHL franchise in Abbotsford, British Columbia, and he's off to a great start. Abbotsford won the AHL's Calder Cup this year, beating Charlotte in six games. It's the first time the AHL has had a champion from the Pacific Division since expansion in 2015. Look for Malhotra to start getting heavy consideration for NHL head-coaching jobs.

Trivia answer: Jakub Voráček, the Blue Jackets' No. 7 pick in the 2007 NHL draft, totaled 806 career points during his 1,058-game career with Columbus and Philadelphia. Rick Nash, who went No. 1 in 2002, finished with 805 points in a 1,060-game career with Columbus, the New York Rangers and Boston.

The Athletic / Dante Fabbro re-signs with Blue Jackets for 4 years, avoids free agency

By Aaron Portzline and Sean Gentile – June 29, 2025

Dante Fabbro, who found a home on the Columbus Blue Jackets' top defensive pair after he was claimed off waivers early last season, is staying put.

The Blue Jackets and Fabbro agreed to a four-year, \$16.5 million contract on Sunday, keeping Fabbro in the fold just two days before he would have become an unrestricted free agent in a market in which right-side defensemen will be in high demand.

The deal carries a \$4.125 salary cap hit. Fabbro has a full no-trade clause in the first year of the deal. Fabbro was No. 15 on The Athletic's free-agency Big Board, sandwiched between fellow defensemen Dmitry Orlov and Ryan Lindgren.

"Dante was a great addition to our team last season, and keeping him in Columbus was a priority," Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell said in a statement. "He is a smart, versatile defenseman who moves the puck well and can play in all situations. We are thrilled he will continue to be an important part of our club."

PuckPedia provided further details on the contract:

Fabbro, who turned 27 on June 20, was the Nashville Predators' first-round pick in 2016. He saw time alongside Norris Trophy winner Roman Josi but never quite broke out, which undoubtedly played a part in Nashville's decision to place him on waivers.

Fabbro was claimed by the Blue Jackets on Nov. 10. He made his debut two nights later in a 5-2 loss to the Seattle Kraken and immediately slotted next to Zach Werenski on the top pair.

He played 62 games in Columbus, setting career-highs with nine goals, 26 points and a plus-23 rating.

The Blue Jackets now face a tough decision with veteran defenseman Ivan Provorov, who was second on the Blue Jackets in ice time (23:21) and second among defensemen in scoring with 33 points (seven goals, 26 assists).

Provorov and the Blue Jackets have been discussing the framework of a contract since last spring, but haven't been able to come to terms. Provorov, 28, is looking for a long-term contract, and the Blue Jackets may be uncomfortable going past a five-year term.

The Hockey Writers / 2025-26 Blue Jackets Roster Projection 2.0: Forwards Taking Shape

By Mark Scheig – June 30, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets went into the 2025 NHL Draft hoping to get some clarity on what their roster could look like in the fall. Thanks to a trade and a contract extension, they got some clarity. However, some questions do remain.

Welcome to our 2025-26 Blue Jackets' roster projection 2.0, the before free agency edition. In our roster projection 1.0 from the end of May, the team faced significant questions.

GM Don Waddell had a desire to make multiple moves to improve his team. He has made a couple important moves. We expect there to be more during the summer. Things are starting to come into focus on the eve of free agency which opens on Tuesday.

Forwards

Before the draft started, the Blue Jackets acquired center Charlie Coyle and winger Miles Wood from the Colorado Avalanche in exchange for prospect Gavin Brindley and two draft picks. This helped answer what the bottom-six could look like.

In Coyle, the Blue Jackets get an experienced, right-shot center who can play in any situation. He could play on the wing if needed as well.

In Wood, the Blue Jackets get a bottom-six fixture who likes to cause chaos and disruption with his speed. He can occasionally add some offense too.

Considering none of the pending UFA's have signed since we released projection 1.0, it's a sign that most of them will end up on the market. There's always the chance Waddell revisits some of these situations such as James van Riemsdyk later on.

In addition, none of the main RFA's have signed. That group consists of Dmitri Voronkov, Mikael Pyhtia and Jordan Harris. Pyhtia was previously qualified as a result of needing insurance to play in the World Championships. Qualifying offers must be submitted by Monday at 5 P.M. eastern time.

With Coyle and Wood now in the fold, here is a look at what the potential Blue Jackets' roster might look like. We will assume Voronkov's contract gets done.

Dmitri Voronkov – Sean Monahan – Kirill Marchenko

Boone Jenner – Adam Fantilli – Kent Johnson

Cole Sillinger – Charlie Coyle – Mathieu Olivier

Miles Wood – Jack Williams – Yegor Chinakhov

Zach Aston-Reese

The forwards are starting to take shape. The Blue Jackets do have multiple options on how these lines could be arranged. Coyle fits the 3C role.

This makes where Sillinger plays interesting. He could play on the wing anywhere in the top-nine. He could also play center with Coyle on the right wing.

What is apparent is that the presence of Coyle and Wood improves the depth of the bottom-six. It also suggests that there isn't much room in that part of the lineup.

The Blue Jackets will continue to explore their options for another top-six player. With all that in mind, players like Sean Kuraly, Justin Danforth and perhaps van Riemsdyk could be moving on.

Others in the organization like Luca Del Bel Belluz could fight their way to a roster spot also. Can Williams win the 4C spot? Where does Chinakhov slot in? The questions up front mostly lie on how position battles shake out. This could look even more different if the Blue Jackets do land another impact forward.

Overall, the depth is looking good at this point in the offseason.

Defense

The Blue Jackets were able to take care of an important piece of business on Sunday when they signed defenseman Dante Fabbro to a four-year contract extension. That was needed after missing out on Noah Dobson.

Fabbro's extension solidified the right side. Here was what the projected pairs look like now.

Zach Werenski – Dante Fabbro

Denton Mateychuk – Damon Severson

Jake Christiansen – Erik Gudbranson

Jordan Harris (RFA)

Fabbro could easily outperform his cap hit of \$4.1 million over the next four seasons. He's brought a steadying presence next to Werenski.

There is room to add to this unit. Ivan Provorov is still not signed as of this writing. Waddell said he was going to revisit that situation. But unless they can bridge the sizeable gap that existed, Provorov will hit market.

Should that happen, Waddell also indicated that they'd continue exploring the D market. Their priority now would be on the left side. Bowen Byram perhaps if it's a trade? On the free agent market, players like Vladislav Gavrikov, Brian Dumoulin and Ryan Lindgren are lefties looking for a new deal.

The overarching question here is if Mateychuk is ready for the full-time role in the top-four. Or do the Blue Jackets feel they need to add a player to allow Mateychuk to play on the third pair in just his second full-time season?

In all, the Fabbro extension was a big lift to the state of the Blue Jackets' defense.

Goaltending

When last we spoke on the goaltending, the Blue Jackets had three goalies who all needed waivers. Now they have two thanks to a trade.

The Blue Jackets traded goaltender Daniil Tarasov to the Florida Panthers in exchange for a fifth rounder, pick 160 at the 2025 NHL Draft. That pick became Oshawa Generals center Owen Griffin.

For Tarasov, that was an expected outcome since he was the one without a contract coming off a tough season. With Jet Greaves' emergence showing he's ready for a more full-time role, someone had to go.

Unless something changes, we are not expecting Elvis Merzlikins to be moved or bought out. I wouldn't rule out the Blue Jackets bringing in another goalie though as depth if they feel there's a veteran out there that could help them.

It's very possible the 2025-26 season will start with a tandem of Merzlikins and Greaves in net. No matter how it shakes out, this unit has to be better if the team hopes to make the playoffs.

The Athletic / What's every NHL team's biggest need ahead of 2025 free agency?

By The Athletic NHL Staff – June 30, 2025

The 2025 NHL Draft is over, and we are just one day away from the start of free agency.

Before the free-agent frenzy begins on July 1, The Athletic asked its NHL staff to identify the biggest need for all 32 teams.

Here is what they said.

Anaheim Ducks

An offensive star

Last season, the Ducks' top scorer had 55 points to tie for 104th leaguewide. Their points leader in 2023-24 finished in a tie for 88th. Outside of one-off 37-goal seasons by Troy Terry and Frank Vatrano, Anaheim hasn't had an elite offensive player since Ryan Getzlaf and Corey Perry were in their prime. Leo Carlsson and Cutter Gauthier hold that kind of promise, but the Ducks can use one now. — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

Multiple forwards and a right-shot defenseman

The Bruins need more volume in their forward group. A play-driving center would be ideal, but the acquisition cost would be enormous. More budget-friendly plays would be on the wings. They also need someone to complement Charlie McAvoy and Andrew Peeke on the right side. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

More scoring

The Sabres have beefed up their blue line with the additions of Michael Kesselring and Conor Timmins. But trading away JJ Peterka has left Buffalo with a need for more proven scoring. General manager Kevyn Adams said he thinks some of that can come with internal growth from players on the roster, but another outside addition would be prudent. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

Goal scoring

Calgary nearly made the playoffs last year despite being among the league's worst goal-scoring teams. While the Flames want to ensure their young talents get opportunities to make the roster, the Flames could benefit from an offensive weapon to improve their scoring fortunes and make life easier for Dustin Wolf. — Julian McKenzie

Carolina Hurricanes

Top-six forward

The Hurricanes could use an upgrade at second-line center, but the market is thin. If Carolina can't get help down the middle, adding more firepower on the wing is a way to bolster the top six. Mitch Marner is an obvious target, but there are plenty of teams already angling to land the longtime Maple Leafs winger. Nikolaj Ehlers is another big name expected to hit the open market. — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

Top-six winger

The Blackhawks could really use another offensive player, especially a winger for Connor Bedard's line. It just doesn't sound like one is coming. The Blackhawks aren't expected to go all in on any free agents and probably don't have enough established players to pull off a trade. Most teams want something more than draft capital. The Blackhawks' plan continues to be to build through the draft. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

Depth at forward

Colorado made the bold decision last season to trade Mikko Rantanen rather than extend him with one of the richest contracts in the NHL, and it seemed to signal that the organization's philosophy will be to build as deep a team as possible instead of a star-studded, top-heavy one. The Avalanche have roughly \$9 million in cap space and need several players to fill the forward lineup. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

A veteran goaltender

GM Don Waddell has supported goalie Elvis Merzlikins, saying the 31-year-old won the Blue Jackets more games than he lost them until his late-season unraveling. But the Jackets would benefit from a fresh look in net. We know Jet Greaves will be in Columbus for 2025-26, and we know Daniil Tarasov — traded to Florida — will not be. But the Jackets should be looking for a veteran, either via trade or free agency. — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

A little nastiness

On paper, the Stars look like true Cup contenders, year after year. But on the ice, they've been pushed around a bit. The Panthers have shown that depth plus nastiness is the recipe for success. The Stars have the depth. Now they need some sandpaper. If they can make the math work, Florida's own Aaron Ekblad could bring both. — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings

Top-four defenseman

The Red Wings have two young defense pillars in Moritz Seider and Simon Edvinsson, but could really use another veteran in the top four to insulate them. Last year, Ben Chiarot and youngster Albert Johansson did that job most nights. While Detroit can likely get away with running it back on one of those two pairings, they should really push to upgrade at least one of those two spots. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

Middle-six wingers

Goaltending is probably the biggest positional need, but Jake Allen is the only option worth considering on the market. The Oilers will almost certainly have to address that position via trade. Instead, shopping for wingers who can complement Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl is a good idea. That's especially important with Evander Kane being traded and Viktor Arvidsson bound to follow. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Florida Panthers

Keeping the band together

GM Bill Zito said shortly after his Panthers won the Cup, he would attempt to bring everyone back. With Sam Bennett now signed but Brad Marchand and Aaron Ekblad on the verge of hitting unrestricted free agency, and only \$11 million in cap space and one goalie inked, that looks nearly impossible without another subtraction. But they're going to try to keep at least two of the three, ensuring this is a formidable roster that'll have a shot at a three-peat. — James Mirtle

Los Angeles Kings

A top-of-the-lineup marquee attraction

Anze Kopitar and Drew Doughty are sure-fire Hall of Famers. Quinton Byfield could become their most indispensable player. Adrian Kempe is damn good, period. But L.A. has lacked a superstar in the class of Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, and that has proven decisive in the playoffs. It's tough to get those for sure, but you can't imagine Ken Holland was brought in to rearrange the deck chairs. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

A faceoff-winning, penalty-killing center

For the 25th season in a row, the Wild need a center. They went into the offseason wanting to improve their depth, but actually ate into it by trading Freddy Gaudreau to Seattle for a fourth-rounder. There are plenty of centers out there who can fill the Wild's needs to win draws and kill: Christian Dvorak, Sean Kuraly, Nico Sturm, Radek Faksa and Colin Blackwell, to name a few. — Michael Russo

Montreal Canadiens

Top-six forward

That should really read top-six center, but there's a supply and demand imbalance there, so the Canadiens would gladly settle for adding a player on the wing to play on their second line with rookie Ivan Demidov and most likely Kirby Dach. That player is more likely to be available via trade as opposed to free agency, however. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

Help down the middle

Center options are thin, so it may not be easy for the Preds to address this need. Sam Bennett would have been great, but he was never leaving Florida. GM Barry Trotz took with the No. 5 pick a prospect who has been compared to Bennett, but Brady Martin will obviously take time to get close to that, if he can at all. Blue-line help is crucial this summer for Nashville as well, and acquiring defenseman Nicolas Hague from Vegas and signing him to a four-year contract helps address that need. — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

Two top-nine forwards

The Devils need to acquire a third-line center and a top-six wing. They have just over \$14 million in cap space, according to PuckPedia, but a good chunk of that will have to go to Luke Hughes, who is a restricted free agent. The team has already sent away middle-six forward Erik Haula, so Tom Fitzgerald will have to both replace him and likely add another player. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Scoring reinforcements

GM Mathieu Darche said that he wants the Islanders to play with pace, so he has to build a roster that matches that vision. If the Islanders are going to play a more up-tempo style, they need to find wingers with more foot speed and offensive ability to drive play up the ice. It would help to add another defender who can add a spark from the back end after Noah Dobson was traded to Montreal. — Shayna Goldman

New York Rangers

Defensive stability

The Rangers will have interest in Vladislav Gavrikov should he reach the open market. The team was porous defensively in 2024-25, and New York must hope to address that, both with new coaches (Mike Sullivan is taking over as head coach) and potentially added players. Someone such as Gavrikov would help with that if they are willing to meet his price in free agency. — Peter Baugh

Ottawa Senators

Goal scoring

Ottawa finished near the bottom of the league in goal scoring at five-on-five. There are trade options for the Sens to pursue, but it seems they may try to plug some holes through free agency. Notably, through

their fourth line, if Adam Gaudette, Matthew Highmore and Nick Cousins aren't coming back officially.
— Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

Goalie

The Flyers had the league's worst goaltending last season. They have Sam Ersson, who they still believe in, but no one else worthy of being in the NHL. Finding another goalie, and one who can play at least 35 to 40 games, considering Ersson's struggles when he's overused, is a must for GM Daniel Briere if he wants the club to start taking steps forward. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

Defensemen

The addition of Connor Clifton helps the Penguins' depth, but still, the left side very much remains a problem for the defense corps moving forward. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

Major upgrades for the defense

Here is what GM Mike Grier recently said on the team's needs: "You watched the games, right? We got a lot of work to do up here." Yeah, the Sharks can use more help everywhere. No place more so than the blue line and Grier knows he's got to start improving it. There is plenty of money to spend. He'll also scour the market for a goalie to pair with talented but young Yaroslav Askarov. — Eric Stephens

Seattle Kraken

More elite talent

The Kraken have speed down the middle, a solid starting goaltender and a deep, sturdy defensive group. The thing Seattle lacks is a true offensive driver. A game breaker. The type of player who can elevate the team in close games. There aren't many players that fit that description available in unrestricted free agency, but the Kraken should be jockeying to pitch the true difference-makers. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

To sign or trade for a center

The Blues have an underrated No. 1 center in Robert Thomas and a veteran who showed last year he can still fill the No. 2 hole in Brayden Schenn. If they can find someone to supplant Schenn, great, but if not, they desperately need a middle-six center who can provide quality depth. Oskar Sundqvist, last year's No. 3 center, has a lot of miles on him and had just six goals and 20 points last season. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

Replenish the supporting cast

The Lightning just need to shore up the fringes of the lineup. With another year of Oliver Bjorkstrand, plus a newly extended Yanni Gourde, Tampa Bay only needs one more top-nine forward to solidify the group. Management has to find a Nick Perbix replacement for the third pair. And it wouldn't hurt to have a steadier backup behind Andrei Vasilevskiy. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Top-nine center/top-six winger

Technically, the Leafs' biggest need is still a center. But if they can't find a way to land that player, given the limited-to-nonexistent options in free agency and lack of trade assets, next up is a winger to play in the top six and help replace the departing Mitch Marner. If Brad Marchand doesn't end up sticking around in Florida, he feels like the most obvious target. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Mammoth

Depth in goal/up front

Utah already addressed its biggest offseason need with the JJ Peterka trade. The Mammoth could shop for a backup goalie behind Karel Vejmelka if Connor Ingram, who entered the NHL/NHLPA player assistance program in March, isn't ready for the start of the season. They could also search for a depth forward with Nick Bjugstad and Michael Carcone likely to depart as free agents. — Harman Dayal

Vancouver Canucks

Top-six center

The Canucks' preference was to use the No. 15 pick in the 2025 NHL Draft to buy a top-six center, ideally a younger veteran player, to bolster their forward group. It didn't work out in the trade market, so Vancouver picked at 15th overall, leaving a significant hole in the middle of their lineup. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

Scoring on the wing

The Golden Knights are strong up the middle of the ice with Jack Eichel, William Karlsson and Tomas Hertl, but could use more scoring punch on both wings, and appear to be aggressively shopping for it. Vegas scored plenty of goals in the regular season — the most in franchise history — but that dried up in the playoffs, ending with a 127-minute goalless drought. Mitch Marner is the obvious target, and the team has already considered trading for his rights before he even hits the market on July 1, according to league sources. They also made the move to trade pending RFA defenseman Nicolas Hague to Nashville as well. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

Third-line center

Like most teams, the Capitals could use another top-six game-breaker. What's more realistic, though, is that they add a quality depth piece down the middle. Connor McMichael could well be their best option, but he broke out as a second-line winger. Hendrix Lapierre had the job out of camp but couldn't hold it. Lars Eller was ineffective after they reacquired him and Nic Dowd works best at 4C. — Sean Gentile

Winnipeg Jets

Nikolaj Ehlers, or a hard-nosed version of the same

The Jets are on track to be good again, but Ehlers' contributions to the power play and middle six should not go underappreciated. Winnipeg needs another forward — ideally a right-shooting, physical, talented winger who can step in and take right-side faceoffs when the situation calls for it. Threading that needle is a daunting task, but the Jets would be stacked if they found a way. — Murat Ates

The Athletic / What's every NHL team's toughest decision during 2025 free agency?

By The Athletic NHL Staff – June 29, 2025

The 2025 NHL Draft is over, and we are just two days away from the start of free agency.

Before the free-agent frenzy begins on July 1, The Athletic asked its NHL staff to identify the toughest decision for all 32 teams.

Here is what they said.

Anaheim Ducks

Spending what it takes to land Mitch Marner

General manager Pat Verbeek has \$38 million of cap space burning in his pocket. Large chunks figure to go toward re-signing Mason McTavish and Lukáš Dostál, but there is enough to land a talent such as Marner. Until they become a playoff team and contender, the Ducks may have to overpay to entice a top-shelf free agent to Anaheim. Are they willing to spend \$14 million AAV to grab a 100-point player? — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

Big splash or targeted signings?

Mitch Marner would check multiple boxes. But even if Marner becomes available, the cost would eat up too much of the Bruins' free cash. Their more efficient avenue would be to chase several less expensive alternatives. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Whether or not to trade Bowen Byram

Sabres GM Kevyn Adams said he's open to trading defenseman Bowen Byram, who is a restricted free agent after setting a career high in points. But if the trade market isn't there, the Sabres will look to sign him. He's a big piece of their blue line and could net a decent return. So this feels like the most impactful decision Adams has to make. — Matthew Fairburn

The pending RFA is a potential trade candidate who would have legitimate value around the league. Now it's decision time for the Sabres.

Calgary Flames

Rasmus Andersson's availability

Rasmus Andersson isn't a free agent this year, but he is Calgary's biggest trade chip available. And depending on how teams look at the free-agent class of available defensemen, maybe teams take that as an opportunity to make a run at Andersson via trade. — Julian McKenzie

The Flames have spent the last few seasons parting ways with key members of their core. Is Rasmus Andersson the next to go?

Carolina Hurricanes

Whether to be patient

This year's free-agent class isn't great. So while the Hurricanes are loaded with cap space, it may be wise to wait for several big names to potentially hit the market next summer, or become available during the 2025-26 season due to their impending free agency. Exploring the trade market, either this offseason or later, might be Carolina's best play. — Cory Lavarrette

Chicago Blackhawks

How much term and cap space they are willing to invest in a player

The Blackhawks will have more cap space than almost any team entering free agency. They could probably sign a few players by simply being the highest bidder. The Blackhawks won't do that, though. They're mindful of the future contracts they have ahead for Connor Bedard, Frank Nazar and so on. But maybe there's a happy medium for the Blackhawks where they can still explore free agency. We'll see. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

Choosing between depth and high-end talent

Colorado has \$9 million in cap space to work with after trading Charlie Coyle to Columbus, leaving an interesting decision when free agency opens. The Avs have space to add a top player if they choose — via signing or a trade — but that would leave little to fill out the lineup. The other option is spreading that money across several solid depth forwards to strengthen the bottom six. — Jesse Granger

This is an unbelievably good move for the Avalanche, who cleared \$7.75 million in cap space and could be unexpected players in free agency.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Reshaping the defense

The Blue Jackets have two prominent UFA defensemen in Ivan Provorov and Dante Fabbro. Talks have gone better with Fabbro than Provorov, but neither has signed, giving GM Don Waddell a bit of stress heading into July 1. He'd like to reshape his defense — they were in on Noah Dobson — but signing Provorov and Fabbro doesn't represent a change. And letting them walk is a huge risk if he can't replace them. — Aaron Portzline

Jason Robertson is due a massive raise next summer. (Sam Hodde / Getty Images)

Dallas Stars

What to do with Jason Robertson

The Stars have already made tough decisions on keeping Matt Duchene and jettisoning Mason Marchment. But if they want to make a run at Mitch Marner or another free agent, they might have to move 25-year-old star Jason Robertson to do it. It's still a long shot to happen, but Robertson is due a massive raise next summer, so it's not out of the realm of possibility. — Mark Lazerus

Dallas might feel pressure to make a change after another early playoff exit, but should it be moving one of the team's leading forwards?

Detroit Red Wings

Where to draw the line

Detroit has lingered outside the playoffs for long enough now that it's not exactly a destination. That may take the team out of the running for some top names. At that point, Steve Yzerman has to decide where the line is to just walk away. That's much easier said than done for a team that wants to improve, but the Red Wings have been burned on overpayments to middle-of-the-lineup players in recent years. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

How many pending UFA wingers to re-sign

The Oilers have retained Trent Frederic on an eight-year contract, leaving them with five forwards eligible for unrestricted free agency. Jeff Skinner and Derek Ryan won't return, but Connor Brown, Corey Perry and Kasper Kapanen were all useful contributors on cheap contracts this past season. GM Stan Bowman wants to change the forward mix. Can he accomplish that if he brings them all back? — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Florida Panthers

Do they bring back Aaron Ekblad?

Aaron Ekblad is a lifelong Panther, after being taken first overall in 2014, during the bad old days for the franchise. He's been a big part of back-to-back Cups, but with his body battered and cap space tight, can Florida compromise and find a deal to extend him? Or does he cash in on the open market, where a lot of teams are ready to pounce with huge offers? — James Mirtle

Los Angeles Kings

Paying Vladislav Gavrikov what he wants

The Kings want to re-sign their shutdown ace. Vladislav Gavrikov found a home with Los Angeles, but wants to get paid. It feels like a tough decision, but maybe it isn't so much if they determine that an AAV approaching \$8 million isn't worth spending on a 29-year-old for eight years. GM Ken Holland has

already alluded to the need to pivot and address the blue line if he and Gavrikov can't meet on an extension. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

Should they pursue Brock Boeser?

The Wild want to add scoring punch to the top six, and hometown guy Brock Boeser is sitting there waiting to be plucked. They have shown interest in him on the trade market many times, but with only \$17.7 million in cap space and the desire not to tie up too much term when they want to pursue stars in the future, they may only have interest in Boeser if the term is three or four years. — Michael Russo

Montreal Canadiens

Do they bring back Christian Dvorak?

Dvorak was the Canadiens' top faceoff guy and played on their second penalty-killing unit. He just had by far his best season in four years in a Canadiens uniform. His departure as an unrestricted free agent would leave a big hole, but the lack of centers available on the market probably means Dvorak could make more elsewhere than the Canadiens would be willing to offer to keep him off the market. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

Do they keep spending to win now?

GM Barry Trotz's public comments suggest he believes the Preds can pull off a massive reversal and be competitive next season, and there's really no other way to feel — not after last summer's spending spree, including the eight-year extension for Juuse Saros that kicks in this season. But can he add instant help while avoiding more players in their mid-30s? Aaron Ekblad is a worthy target in this regard. — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

What to do with Dawson Mercer

Mercer could be a trade candidate if the Devils want to open up more cap space. He has two years left on his deal at a \$4 million average annual value. Mercer has proven himself as an NHL regular and one of the most durable players in the league, but he has yet to replicate his 56-point 2022-23 campaign. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Finding a short-term direction

The Islanders likely already made their toughest decision of the summer by making the bold move to trade Noah Dobson to the Canadiens. With three first-rounders in 2025, there's clearly an eye on the future. Now management has to decide the direction of the rest of the roster in the near future — how

many other mainstays will get subtracted this summer, and just how much should the roster get torn down? — Shayna Goldman

New York Rangers

Whether to trade K'Andre Miller

K'Andre Miller's name has been in trade speculation. New York has to decide whether to pay him as a restricted free agent or move on. If the team signs someone such as Vladislav Gavrikov in unrestricted free agency, it likely won't have room to pay both top RFAs, Will Cuylle and Miller. — Peter Baugh

Even if the draft passed without resolution, the Rangers either have to trade Miller or find another way to clear cap space.

Ottawa Senators

Re-signing Claude Giroux

The Senators say they're waiting on Claude Giroux to respond to their latest contract offer. Depending on whatever number they re-sign him to, if he comes back, that will greatly affect the amount of money left for them to spend in free agency. As of now, the Sens have \$9.25 million according to PuckPedia. Though it could be up to \$10 million, depending on which players they have on their active roster. — Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

How much are they willing to spend?

Even after acquiring Trevor Zegras (and making it clear they're going to give him a chance to play center again), finding another pivot is still on their agenda. They also need another goalie, which, in this year's market, might not be easy. At the same time, the Flyers want to be careful not to eat too much into their cap space for 2026, when they will be prepared to spend big again. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

To be prudent financially

It must be tempting to spend money this summer for Kyle Dubas. He has cap room. But now really isn't the time to get aggressive as the Penguins wait for their prospects to marinate. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

Using cap space to make a splash or go the trade route

No team has more cap room than the Sharks, and they're up to \$44 million after the buyout of Marc-Edouard Vlasic. But with the rebuild firmly on, GM Mike Grier has signaled that he won't blow all of that to fast-track their improvement. While it's more likely they'll hand out four-year deals or shorter than a max-term contract, they could target someone such as Bowen Byram in a trade. — Eric Stephens

Seattle Kraken

Whether to go for it again

Seattle spent big on July 1 last year, breaking the bank for Chandler Stephenson and Brandon Montour in the free-agent frenzy. Montour was a great fit, but the pricey additions didn't move the needle enough. Seattle fired head coach Dan Bylsma after just one season and changed GMs following this campaign. Will the Kraken be willing to be big spenders again this summer? — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

What to do at center

The Blues don't really have a difficult decision because their only UFAs are Radek Faksa and Ryan Suter, and while they want Faksa back, they won't lose any sleep over it. If they do have a tough decision to make, it's how to fill their middle-six-center need without overpaying in a pricey free-agent market. They might've been forced to decide whether to match an offer sheet to pending RFA goalie Joel Hofer, but that's not a concern anymore after he signed a two-year, \$6.8 million extension Saturday. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

How to clear cap space

If the Lightning want to go bigger than their current financial situation, management has to once again make the tough decision to cut salary. It's a pretty familiar position for Julien BriseBois, but it's not easy. One contract to look at is Erik Cernak's; if management can find a cheaper replacement for the second pair this year (such as Rasmus Andersson). — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Paying a high price for Brad Marchand

Brad Marchand is a good fit for the Leafs in a variety of ways. The problem is going to be the contract he'll demand as an in-demand free agent who will be 38 when the next postseason rolls. The Leafs probably won't love the price (\$8 million? \$9 million?) or term (four years?), but may decide the fit makes Marchand worth the risk. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Mammoth

Should they spend on a backup goalie?

GM Bill Armstrong didn't have an update when reporters asked about the status of goaltender Connor Ingram, who entered the NHL/NHLPA player assistance program in March. Will the Mammoth enter the bidding competition in a thin, potentially expensive goaltending market? Or will they wait until closer to camp to examine options once they have more clarity on Ingram? — Harman Dayal

Vancouver Canucks

Circling back on Pius Suter

Having struck out on trading for an NHL center using their 2025 first-round pick, will the Canucks circle back to pending unrestricted free agent Pius Suter and cave to his camp's contractual demands? Now that just about every notable unrestricted free-agent center has signed with their original team, forgoing the open market, Suter's marketability is at its absolute apex. Will Vancouver go there? — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

What to do with RFA Nicolas Hague

Vegas has committed a lot of money to the blue line with Alex Pietrangelo, Brayden McNabb and Zach Whitecloud under contract for two to three more years, and Noah Hanifin, Shea Theodore signed through 2032. Hague has been a key cog in one of the best defensive groups in the NHL over the last six years, but cap space is tight. Does Vegas sign him, trade him or could he be an offer-sheet candidate? — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

Should they chase a luxury item?

Last summer will be a tough act to follow for Washington. Pierre-Luc Dubois, Logan Thompson and Jakob Chychrun — all were high-profile additions, and all performed quite well. The end result was the best record in the East. This time around, outside of third-line center, there are no glaring holes. The Caps could use another game-breaker up front, though. Is it worth messing with success? — Sean Gentile

Winnipeg Jets

Is "win now" worth paying UFAs their asking price?

Winnipeg could look to approach out-of-market UFAs such as Brock Boeser, Andrew Mangiapane and more in search of Nikolaj Ehlers' replacement. The Jets are an older team with stars Mark Scheifele, Connor Hellebuyck and Josh Morrissey all over the age of 30. Is that urgency really worth paying UFA prices, plus Winnipeg tax, with the cap going up? — Murat Ates