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The Columbus Dispatch / How to watch Columbus Blue Jackets' Zach Werenski play in men's world championship semis

By Brian Hedger – May 22, 2025

The Blue Jackets nearly had a semifinal matchup pitting teammates and coaches against each other at the 2025 men's world championships.

Instead, Canada lost 2-1 to Denmark in a shocking quarterfinal defeat May 22 in Herning, Denmark, leaving only U.S. star defenseman Zach Werenski to represent the Blue Jackets in a semifinal matchup against host Sweden on May 24 in Stockholm. Werenski assisted on two goals to help the U.S. advance past the quarterfinals with a 5-2 victory over Finland in Stockholm.

The U.S. has only won gold once at the men's world championships (1933) and has only played in the gold medal game five times — most recently in 1950. Canada has world championship gold 22 times and played in gold medal games 36 times — most recently in 2023, a 5-2 victory over Germany in Tampere, Finland.

This year's Canadian roster included Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason running the bench, assistant coach Steve McCarthy plus young forwards Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson. Canada was expected to defeat Denmark in a quarterfinals game played at Jyske Bank Boxen in Herning, Denmark, which would've set up a U.S. vs Canada rivalry matchup in the semifinal round.

Instead, Denmark overcame a 1-0 lead with two goals in the final 2:17 of the third period to stun a Canadian team led by star centers Sidney Crosby (Pittsburgh Penguins) and Nathan MacKinnon (Colorado Avalanche). Win or lose in the semifinals, Werenski will play for a medal on May 25.

How to watch the IIHF 2025 Men's World Championships semifinals

Livestream: IIHF.tv plus all streaming services that include NHL Network, which is picking up Canadian network TSN's broadcasts.

Semifinals (all times ET): Both games May 24 plus the May 25 medal round matchups are at Avicii Arena in Stockholm. Sweden hosts the U.S. at 8 a.m. in the first semifinal; Switzerland faces Denmark at 12:20 p.m. in the second semifinal. Winners play for the gold at 2:20 p.m. May 25, while the losing semifinal teams play at 9:20 a.m. May 25 for the bronze, which the U.S. has won eight times — most recently 2021 in Riga, Latvia.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell Talks 2025 NHL Combine & Offseason Updates

By Mark Scheig – May 22, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets are in full offseason mode. For GM Don Waddell, it means early mornings and some potentially late nights.

Given what all the team wants to do between the upcoming NHL Combine, NHL Draft and free agency, the Blue Jackets are putting in long days and nights to ensure they are as ready as possible to tackle everything about to come.

For Waddell, he gets to his office at Nationwide Arena at 4:30 every morning. Given that the Blue Jackets will be holding their amateur scouting meetings next week and then their pro meetings the week after, every moment of time is precious to cover as much ground as possible.

One person currently absent from the proceedings within Nationwide Arena is head coach Dean Evason. He's with Team Canada at the Men's World Championships. They're about to play in the quarterfinals on Thursday.

Thanks to their schedules, Waddell and Evason haven't met or seen each other since the start of the World Championships. When the news came down that Evason would be the head coach for Team Canada, Waddell was in Frisco, TX at the U-18 tournament scouting. Some talks and discussions on pending free agents among other things will take place when Evason returns from the tournament.

Meanwhile, Waddell is busy not only preparing for the meat of the offseason, he's in the midst of starting the process of deciding who to hire for certain positions including a Strength & Conditioning Coach, a Video Coach and perhaps an Assistant Athletic Trainer.

"I probably have 300 resumes for the different positions we have opened downstairs," Waddell said. "How I handle these things is just like I did last year. I talked to a lot of people, try to get all the background I can. Because once I start the process, I don't want the process to be a month long. I want the process to be a week long. Then I'll narrow down the people I want to talk to after I've done all my homework on them and then interview people either by phone or by Zoom. And then, if we find the right candidate, we'll move forward."

NHL Combine

The 2025 NHL Combine starts on June 1 at Buffalo's Harborcenter and will last through June 7 when the prospects complete the bulk of their fitness testing. The Blue Jackets already know their daily schedule for the week and who will be in the room helping interview the prospects.

Waddell said they will meet with prospects on Tuesday that week from 9:10 A.M. until 5:00 P.M. with just one 45 minute lunch break built in. On that Wednesday, they'll go from 10:00 A.M. until 5:25 P.M. Besides Waddell, Rick Nash, Trevor Timmins and Ville Siren will be in the room talking with the prospects at different points.

Waddell likes to keep the number of staff in the room down during those interviews. He doesn't believe in having a large crowd. He wants to make the prospects as comfortable as possible.

"Some teams will have 8-10 guys there and I just don't believe in that," Waddell said. "We'll have three or four. Actually, we'll have four for a couple of days but only three for a few of the days. You walk into a large group, it's a little intimidating. I can remember when I first started, we'd have 7-8 guys here. I

learned real quickly that you don't need that many people there. I think you want to make the players, these are young men, make them feel comfortable, not intimidated."

You will likely see the Blue Jackets interview prospects even if they're projected to go before their range. Waddell admitted there is some purpose behind that.

"All these guys you're interviewing, you're only going to draft a few of them. A lot of players are going to become available throughout your career. So the more you get to know guys, the better. I'm a big believer if we're going to do dinner, we should do that not at the Combine. Last year was different. We picked fourth. And this year, we're picking 14th and 20th so who knows who's all going to be there."

For Waddell, the Combine can have an impact on a prospect and where they fall on the Blue Jackets' final list. But as he explains, a prospect is more likely to go down than up at this stage.

"It can certainly move a guy I think more down than up. There's some red flags that come up in an interview and then it gives us the time then to do more research of what we found out about an individual, talking to coaches and things like that. I've seen it move up maybe a spot or something like that. But I've seen guys move down further because of interviews."

The Blue Jackets will start the process of creating their list and then fine tuning it as we get closer to the draft. The Combine will help fill in the gaps and answer last minute questions to set their order in case they make both picks at 14 and 20.

Offseason Updates

We say in case they make both picks on purpose. The Columbus Blue Jackets are open for business. Perhaps players they like will be available at 14 and 20 in which they make both picks. But Waddell made one thing clear. When asked if the 14th and 20th picks are available in the right deals, he didn't hesitate.

"Yes, 100%," Waddell said. The Blue Jackets want to get over the hump into the playoffs. If they can acquire players to help that cause with both first-round picks, they are available in a potential deal.

As for their slew of free agents, Waddell shared a few updates.

Waddell said he was planning on meeting with Ivan Provorov's agent at the Combine. Both the team and the player are interested in getting a deal done.

Waddell said he also had some talks with Dante Fabbro. "They are both willing to talk and both want to stay here," Waddell said of Provorov and Fabbro. "Both players told me at the exit interviews that they want to be Blue Jackets. So we're going to see everything possibly that makes sense for both sides."

James van Riemsdyk recently said on Spittin' Chiclets that he'd be interested in staying with the Blue Jackets also. "I talked with JVR and told him just to hang tight. Let's see how things transpire again. I told him the same thing I told you. I haven't had a good chance to sit down with Dean and go through all the guys. I can't tell you for sure it's going to happen but we'll certainly talk about it for sure."

Waddell reiterated he doesn't anticipate using any buyouts this offseason. That's a good sign Elvis Merzlikins will be back with the Blue Jackets barring a trade.

On offer sheets, Waddell believes there will be some league wide. But he is not worried at all about anyone presenting him with an offer sheet on one of his players. "We have a ton of cap space."

On the goaltending, Waddell said he is still interested in potentially bringing Daniil Tarasov back. However, it's still up in the air. "I actually called his agent, the same as Fabbro's, the other day. Just said let's just put it on hold for right now and there's no rush to get that done. He's got arbitration rights but

I don't think that makes much of a difference right now. I said let's get through the next month here and we'll talk more about him. So I haven't made a final decision either direction on that yet."

Waddell believes that Damon Severson can get back on track after a rough end to 2024-25. When asked if he's still a key part of the team moving forward, "He has to be. He had some good periods this year and some periods that didn't go so well. He's a guy we need to get back on track and I fully believe we can. We're going to take the summer to make sure that the communication is good and that he prepares himself for camp that he could prove that he can be a top-four guy."

Yegor Chinakhov has one year left on his deal. With some rumors out there that he could be included in a potential trade, it seems like Waddell's priority is to make sure the player stays healthy. "He's got the skill. He skates. He shoots the puck. The last few years, he's had some injuries so that's a concern obviously. He's got another year left so we got to try to figure out the best way to keep him healthy and get the most out of him for sure."

The Blue Jackets will have captain Boone Jenner and Erik Gudbranson up after next season as UFAs while Cole Sillinger and Adam Fantilli up after next season as RFAs. Waddell said talks haven't started with any of them given how much they have going on right now. "All the guys at some point will have conversations to see if it makes sense to move forward right now or work on it throughout the summer."

The Athletic / Should NHL teams spend their cap space now or save for 2026?

How the UFA classes compare

By Shayna Goldman – May 22, 2025

Did Mitch Marner and John Tavares play their last games in Toronto Maple Leafs sweaters? Will another team be able to land Nikolaj Ehlers? Is Mikael Granlund a pending free agent worth investing in?

With 28 of 32 NHL teams officially on the outside of the playoff picture, most of the league is already in offseason mode. And this offseason has a lot of potential, with the salary cap jumping from \$88 million to \$95.5 million on July 1 — the biggest year-to-year increase since the salary cap was introduced in 2005.

The increasing cap can be looked at in two ways. It buys a team that is up against it more breathing room — and it gives general managers more money to spend. The latter adds some intrigue to free agency.

But it's not as simple as opening up the checkbooks to any free agent this summer. Teams have to contemplate whether this is the summer to swing big or if they should wait for a potential star-studded free agent class in 2026.

The 2025 unrestricted free agent class has a number of impact players, starting with Marner. He's an elite puck-mover whose two-way game makes him an all-around threat. And that should earn him a payday this summer, even with some concerns about his play in high-pressure situations. Evolving-Hockey projects a seven-year contract worth an average annual value of \$12.7 million. But up-and-coming teams with extra cap flexibility could push the boundaries even more, up to the \$14 million range.

Marner isn't the only big-name player set to become a free agent. Barring an extension in the next couple of weeks, Ehlers — who beat some of his playoff demons this spring in Winnipeg — could be looking at a seven-year deal, worth \$8.9 million a year on average.

Teams that strike out on those wingers could explore the tier below, with players like Brock Boeser, Brock Nelson and Matt Duchene.

Boeser's goal-scoring ability is valuable, especially in a league where offense can win championships. But is he something of a passenger otherwise, which adds risk to his next contract. A seven-year extension, with a projected \$8 million cap hit, is rich for someone who doesn't drive play enough in his own right.

Brad Marchand and Sam Bennett are two other players likely to cash in this summer, if available on July 1. This may not be Prime Marchand anymore, but he is showing what he has left in the tank in Florida and how impactful he is in the playoffs. Bennett's physical, playoff-style of hockey tends to appeal to general managers, too.

On defense, Aaron Ekblad is one of the few pending free-agent defensemen in line for a long-term deal; Evolving-Hockey projects a six-year deal with a \$7.7 million AAV. Vladislav Gavrikov is also of first-pair caliber, but is more likely to sign a deal with a shorter term. Dante Fabbro, Brent Burns and Dmitry Orlov highlight the list of second-pair defenders currently set to hit the market.

All in all, it's a fine set of players, but it doesn't come close to the potential star power in 2026.

The 2026 class also has a handful of second-line caliber forwards and second-pair defensemen on expiring deals. But what separates these groups of free agents is the talent available at the top.

While the 2025 class boasts one elite player in Marner, the 2026 class is headlined by three MVP-caliber forwards: Connor McDavid, Kirill Kaprizov and Jack Eichel.

The 2026 free agent class outshines 2025's two first-line caliber players with five — Kyle Connor and Adrian Kempe, who should make eight figures on their next deals, along with Artemi Panarin, Martin Necas and Alex Tuch.

The defensive group is a bit thinner. But between Mattias Ekholm, John Carlson, Jake Walman and Ryan McDonagh, there are four true first-pair caliber defenders with expiring contracts in 2026.

So, how should general managers navigate the next couple of seasons?

The easy answer is to wait until 2026 if a team misses out on the top impact players in 2025. The salary cap is set to rise again, to \$104 million, which will provide managers with even more money to work with. But it's actually not that simple.

It all depends on who is left to sign by 2026. That's the 10-plus million dollar question every year.

The 2025 free agent class was star-studded at one point ... and then players started signing extensions early, pictured in red below.

Jacob Slavin signed on the first day he was eligible, on July 1, as did Juuse Saros. Pavel Buchnevich and Victor Hedman quickly followed.

Travis Konen, Leon Draisaitl and Sidney Crosby all extended before the puck dropped on the 2024-25 season. Carter Verhaeghe and Shea Theodore were locked up in October, then Igor Shesterkin signed his eight-year deal in December.

Few big-name pending free agents make it to the deadline without an extension in place. When that happens, general managers are faced with two options: trade the player to ensure a return, instead of letting them walk for nothing on July 1, or use them as a rental and deal with the fallout later.

Tavares, Panarin, and Johnny Gaudreau are three rare examples of the latter; Tavares left the Islanders for the Maple Leafs, Panarin from the Blue Jackets to Rangers, and Gaudreau from the Flames to Blue Jackets.

But in some cases — hello, Mikko Rantanen — general managers take a more proactive approach. The Rantanen situation had its own unique quirks, though, since he was traded twice in one season. In the end, he was signed to an eight-year extension in Dallas, which took another high-end player off the board.

And this isn't a trend exclusive to this past year.

The 2024 free-agent class was set to be headlined by Auston Matthews, William Nylander, Sebastian Aho, Jake Guentzel, Sam Reinhart, Gus Forsling, Devon Toews, Noah Hanifin, Connor Hellebuyck and Ilya Sorokin, among others. Not one of those players made it to July 1 unsigned. The closest was Guentzel, whose signing rights were traded from Carolina to Tampa Bay, where he signed an eight-year deal on June 30.

Instead, a very different caliber group headlined free agency in 2024: Elias Lindholm, Chandler Stephenson and Steven Stamkos were among the top centers on the board, which inflated their signing values. Jonathan Marchessault, Teuvo Teravainen, Sean Monahan, Alexander Wennberg, Tyler Toffoli, Jake DeBrusk and Tyler Bertuzzi were among the other available forwards. On the back end, Brady Skjei, Brandon Montour, Matt Roy, Brett Pesce, Chris Tanev and Sean Walker were some of the available defensemen.

Rewind to 2023. Nathan MacKinnon, David Pastrnak, Dylan Larkin, Bo Horvat, J.T. Miller and Mackenzie Weegar were all off the board by the time free agency opened. That left names like Alex Killorn, Ryan O'Reilly, J.T. Compher, Ryan Graves, Dmitry Orlov, Niko Mikkola and Joonas Korpi available on July 1.

Aleksander Barkov, Mika Zibanejad, Tomas Hertl, Sean Couturier, Valeri Nichushkin, Ryan Pulock, Morgan Rielly and Darnell Nurse all extended early ahead of 2022 free agency. Filip Forsberg re-signed in Nashville the day before his contract expired. So the top players available when the market opened included Nazem Kadri, Vincent Trocheck, Andrew Copp, Claude Giroux, Mason Marchment, Ben Chiarot, Darcy Kuemper and Jack Campbell.

Could these next couple of years be different in a rising cap world?

Maybe teams won't make the mistake the Avalanche did and move Rantanen too soon. Maybe they will be more willing to hold onto pending UFAs as internal rentals, even if that player is set to walk away on July 1. And maybe that opens the door to general managers signing elite talent in free agency next summer.

Or maybe players will start taking more control of their futures. If Marner can get \$14 million, what could that mean for someone like Eichel on the open market?

Then again, who knows if that even happens this summer?

Ehlers could sign an extension with the Jets tomorrow. The Panthers could lock up Bennett and Marchand sometime within the next month. That could shrink the free agent class even further, and subsequently lead to middle-class overpayments, which tends to be the case when few impact players are left on July 1.

If anything, general managers should use this summer to gauge the best way to utilize their spending power, rather than letting that extra cap burn a hole in their pockets. There is no reason to spend just for the sake of spending, especially with the 2026 class looming — unless they can land a true top-line caliber impact player.

Basically, it's a balancing act.

If Marner is available this summer, teams should try to sign him because it's rare that an elite player makes it to free agency. General managers shouldn't look past him in the hopes that Kaprizov is available next July (especially since he has already expressed that he wants to stay in Minnesota).

But when Marner, Ehlers and Tavares are off the board, whether or not that happens before or on July 1, teams shouldn't necessarily jump to sign Boeser for \$8-9 million a year, either. Instead, teams have to start taking more calculated risks and learn when to spend and when to wait.

In a perfect world, free agency is the best way to acquire top players, since it only requires cap space. But the reality is that top-tier players rarely make it to July 1, so teams have to measure the risk-reward of penciling in any 2026 free agents.

General managers should stay mindful of the list of players set to be available in 2026, but it shouldn't be at the forefront of any decision-making, either. Instead, teams have to keep exploring every other avenue to acquire high-end players, whether it's the few players set to be available this summer, offer sheets, or trades.

The Athletic / Canada shocked by Denmark in major upset at men's hockey World Championship

By Josh Yohe – May 22, 2025

Team Canada was eliminated in the quarterfinals of the World Championship in stunning fashion Thursday thanks to a dramatic 2-1 comeback victory for Denmark.

Canada, led by the duo of NHL superstars Sidney Crosby and Nathan MacKinnon, had rolled through the tournament, suffering only a shootout loss to Finland while easily handling the field.

The Canadians, however, shockingly met their match in the quarterfinals.

Most of the game was a scoreless tie featuring a goaltending duel between Canada's Jordan Binnington and Denmark's Frederik Dichow.

Order seemed to be restored five minutes into the third period as Crosby set up Travis Sanheim for the game's initial goal and a 1-0 Canada lead.

Canada held that lead until Denmark's Nikolaj Ehlers scored with 2:17 remaining in regulation to even the score. Ehlers' shot from the left point came with Denmark's goaltender pulled.

The score didn't stay tied for long.

Nick Olesen scored what will go down as one of the most memorable goals in Denmark's hockey history when he banged a rebound past Binnington for the winner.

Dichow was the game's star, stopping 39 of Canada's 40 shots to backstop the major upset.

Canada outshot Denmark 40-33.

While Canada wasn't showcasing its Olympic roster, its team still featured the likes of Crosby, MacKinnon and the very impressive Macklin Celebrini, not to mention Binnington, who led Canada to victory in the 4 Nations Face-Off in February.

This also officially concludes Marc-André Fleury's hockey career. He was Binnington's backup in this game and confirmed last week that this tournament will mark the end of his career.

Associated Press / Canada loses, U.S. reaches semifinals at ice hockey worlds

By Associated Press – May 22, 2025

Nick Olesen scored with 49 seconds left as Denmark stunned Canada 2-1 at the ice hockey world championship Thursday to advance to the semifinals.

"I have no words, it's unbelievable," Olesen said after Denmark reached the last four for the first time. "The fans here were cheering for us the whole game and they helped us get the win. It's crazy."

Denmark, in the sold-out arena in Herning, had tied it with 2:17 remaining when Nikolaj Ehlers scored through traffic in only his second game at the tournament following his Winnipeg Jets being eliminated from the NHL playoffs.

The Danes had pulled goaltender Frederik Dichow for the extra attacker before Ehlers struck.

Canada outshot Denmark 30-11 in the first two periods but couldn't solve Dichow, who made 39 saves in all, until 5:17 into the third when captain Sidney Crosby fed Travis Sanheim to score into the roof of the net. Canada was outshot 22-10 in the final period, though.

Denmark has only two NHL players at the worlds, while Canada has only two who don't play at the NHL level.

"I'm disappointed," Crosby said. "We got better as the tournament went on. I don't think tonight was necessarily our best, but we still found a way to give ourselves a lead ... but it turned pretty quick."

Crosby returned to the worlds for the first time since 2015, when he captained Canada to gold. He was expected to do it again with teammates like Nathan MacKinnon.

Canada is the most successful nation at the tournament with 28 titles but has finished empty-handed in the past two editions after it was beaten by Sweden in the bronze medal game last year.

It was only the second win for Denmark over Canada at the worlds.

The semifinals are set for Saturday: Denmark will play Switzerland; and the United States will face Sweden.

Earlier on Thursday, the U.S. advanced by beating Finland 5-2 backed by Conor Garland's two power-play goals

Trailing 2-1 in the middle period, the Americans needed 71 seconds to turn things around when defenseman Zeev Buium put home a rebound at 23:53 before Garland's second goal restored the U.S. lead.

"I really liked how we stayed with it and built as the game wore on," U.S. head coach Ryan Warsofsky said. "We got off to a bit of a slow start but really found our game as time wore on. I give our guys a lot of credit as they beat an excellent hockey team today."

Garland had given the U.S. a 1-0 lead 4:50 into the game when he received a cross-ice pass from Logan Cooley to beat goalie Juuse Saros from the right circle.

Finland tied it at 1-1 on Eeli Tolvanen's power-play goal. Patrik Puustola scored from the slot on another power play 7:46 into the second period for Finland to take a 2-1 lead.

The Americans added two more goals in the third. Shane Pinto scored the fourth 5:52 into the final period and captain Clayton Keller finished the scoring into an empty net.

The U.S. team hasn't won a medal since taking bronze in 2021. The Finns have been waiting for a medal since they won gold in 2022.

Sweden delighted the home crowd in the Avicii Arena in Stockholm by eliminating defending champion Czechia with a 5-2 victory.

Lucas Raymond and Leo Carlsson led the co-host with two goals each.

Earlier in Herning, last year's runner-up Switzerland advanced by blanking Austria 6-0.