



Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips
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The Athletic / Blue Jackets Monday Gathering: Brad Marchand should not have gotten away with it

By Aaron Portzline – December 8, 2025

Item No. 1: Drat that rat

The Blue Jackets' decision to challenge a Florida Panthers goal in the second period of Saturday's 7-6 overtime thriller was just one of the pivot points in a wild, frustrating loss for Columbus.

Brad Marchand took his left hand off his stick in an attempt to catch a puck behind the Blue Jackets' net, but the puck instead brushed off his glove and flipped over his shoulder, coming to a rest behind him, right in the path of teammate Carter Verhaeghe.

Jackets coach Dean Evason thought it was a deliberate play by Marchand, which, by the NHL rulebook, would have ruled the play dead. The league, however, ruled the puck merely deflected off his glove, that it wasn't directed by Marchand, allowing the goal to stand.

But that wasn't the Marchand interaction that should have infuriated the Blue Jackets most.

With the game in overtime knotted 6-6, the Blue Jackets called timeout with 2:19 remaining to strategize the final 39 seconds of a four-on-three power play that could have ended the game. Assistant coach Mike Haviland was drawing on a wax board and players were gathered round.

It took a few seconds for them to notice that Marchand had left his own bench during the timeout and skated over to the Blue Jackets' bench, where he'd crept up over the shoulders of Zach Werenski and Adam Fantilli to listen in.

One Blue Jackets player, positioned just outside the scrum, reached out his stick to push Marchand away. Then Werenski noticed, and scooted to his right to cover Haviland's doodling. Then Fantilli caught on and turned and said something.

The Panthers' TV broadcast thought it was hilarious. Analyst Randy Moller, fighting back a laugh, said: "Look at the reaction of the Columbus players." Play-by-play voice Steve Goldstein followed: "Some of those young guys were like, 'Hey, that's Brad Marchand!'"

I was left with one question: how did that not start a mob scene on the ice in front of the Blue Jackets' bench? How did a player not come charging off the bench, gloves a-flyin', to confront him? How did somebody not at least give Marchand a whack on the back of the legs?

Eventually, NHL linesman Brandon Gawryletz, who probably should have prevented Marchand from heading there in the first place, guided him back to the Panthers' side of the ice, as Marchand, all smiles, appeared to say something to the Blue Jackets' bench. But there should have been a mess to clean up for Gawryletz and the rest of the crew.

Does this sound a little over the top?

Well, imagine this scenario with the script flipped. Imagine if Fantilli, Marchenko or whoever had skated over to the Panthers' bench and pulled the same stunt. You don't have to imagine, right? You know what would have happened.

Marchand would have been the first guy over the boards. Sam Bennett would have followed, with A.J. Greer close behind. And, holy smokes, if Matthew Tkachuk were healthy and on the bench, they may still be scrapping in Sunrise.

This is not an anti-Marchand screed.

He's had an amazing career. He's a sure-fire Hall of Famer when he retires. He is, by all accounts, a tremendous person and family man off the ice. Every interaction I've ever had with him in a media-player setting has been engaging, informative and professional.

But he's been one of the NHL's notorious rats for how long now?

Somewhere along the line — maybe because he won the Stanley Cup with the Panthers last spring — the response to Marchand's antics has changed, from wondering when the league or his team will crack down, to finding everything he does (even at others' expense) funny.

In the mid-2010s, Marchand began a bizarre habit of licking — yes, licking — opponents in the face. It caused quite an uproar in the NHL, but, incredibly, he was never suspended for it, even though it happened multiple times. Would that be funny now?

It's tough to imagine that the Blue Jackets' coaches laughed on Saturday. If this had happened when Evason played for the Hartford Whalers, he would have lost his mind. If it had happened when assistant coach Jared Boll played for the Blue Jackets, he would have been suspended for three games, maybe three weeks.

It was only fitting that Marchand had the primary assist on the Panthers' go-ahead goal with only 3.2 seconds remaining in overtime. The guy is a gamer, you have to give him that.

But know this: if Marchand truly respects the Blue Jackets' players, coaches and organization, there's no way he shows them up in that way.

And that's why that scene deserved a different response.

Item No. 2: Who says no?

The Blue Jackets are treading water. They're 6-3-6 in their last 15 games with only two regulation wins, only three regulation losses and no consecutive games in which they didn't get at least a point. They aren't thriving or diving, just hanging around.

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell would like to make a move. He's been trying for weeks, talking with fellow GMs just long enough to know that everybody's looking for the same thing: players that can help today, not futures in the form of prospects or draft picks.

One move that seems to be sitting there, waiting for somebody to push it over the finish line: Yegor Chinakhov to the Vancouver Canucks for winger Kiefer Sherwood, a pending unrestricted free agent who, fairly late in his career, has turned into one of the league's top power forwards.

Sherwood, a native of Columbus and a player who still returns to train here each summer, would make for a great story in central Ohio.

It's possible the Canucks would want a "sweetener" to swing the deal, and the Blue Jackets would want to know that they could sign Sherwood to a contract extension before he hits the market.

Sherwood, 29, is in the final year of a two-year, \$3 million contract. Prior to that, he's never made more than the NHL minimum (now \$775,000). This is his chance to get paid as an impact NHL player, perhaps \$5 million per season or more.

The Blue Jackets' situation with Chinakhov has been awkward all season. He's played mostly on the fourth line, which is not his proper usage, but there have been opportunities for him to play up in the lineup, and he hasn't seized them.

Chinakhov's frustration hasn't become "Pierre-Luc Dubois" ugly, but his play has not been inspired most nights, other than a couple of bursts of speed.

On paper, it may be difficult to trade a 24-year-old (Chinakhov) with tremendous upside for a 29-year-old (Sherwood). But on the ice right now it makes sense.

Item No. 3: Take 5, Chris Clark

"Take 5" is our weekly, brief and (mostly) non-hockey conversation with a Blue Jackets player, coach, broadcaster or staffer. This week, Blue Jackets assistant general manager Chris Clark:

In what part of Columbus do you live?

We settled in Upper Arlington. The kids were young when I was playing (for the Blue Jackets), and that's where we stayed. It was easy for me to get to games — not that there's much traffic in Columbus — but I could get there in 10 minutes. And the kids when they were little could come to the game, watch the first period, and still be in bed by 8 or 8:30 p.m. When I first got here, we lived in Antoine Vermette's place, then Anton Stralman's. My wife absolutely loved it here. Our neighbors, our friends ... we weren't leaving.

Any hidden talents?

I've had a guitar for 20 years now. When I first got it, I took lessons and got to a point in a couple of months where I was feeling all right. And then I put it down again, didn't touch it again until I retired. Took lessons again for three months and it was awesome. I've let it go again, though. The last time I touched it was to have Adam Sandler sign it. It's a talent I'd *like* to have, but I haven't put in the work.

Best Christmas gift, given / received?

The best gift we ever did ... probably Disney World with the kids when they were 6, 8 and 10. We surprised them on Christmas and told them we were going the next morning. The bags were already packed. I think that was the big one. They were the perfect age, and so excited. For me, as a kid, it was a bike. A BMX freestyle. I came downstairs and it was sitting there, shiny. It had the pegs and everything. I was probably 9 or 10 years old. My friends and I were all doing tricks back in those days. I put a rotor on the handlebars so it wouldn't tangle the brake cables. I could do some of that stuff, but the half-pipe wasn't for me.

Favorite vacation spot?

We have a cottage in upstate New York. I've had it since I was a player. The season was so long, and I never liked traveling, but I was always happy back there. I'd get invited to go here or there, and I'd always tell people, 'That's my spot, if anybody wants to come visit, come visit.' It probably drives my wife and kids nuts because they want to go places, but that was my safe place.

Favorite sandwich?

Leftover turkey. The best. And, yes, I've had a couple recently. I might even put the stuffing on it and the cranberry. No gravy. Maybe a little cheese, some mustard or mayo. My father used to rave about leftover turkey sandwiches when I was a kid, and I never got it. Now I get it.

Item No. 4: Snacks

- Nothing's come easy for the Blue Jackets this season. After Sunday's game in D.C., the Blue Jackets were scheduled to fly to Raleigh, N.C., ahead of Tuesday's game vs. the Carolina Hurricanes. But non-mechanical issues with the flight grounded them, forcing them to check back into hotels in Washington D.C. and reschedule a flight to 2 p.m. on Monday. This comes just a couple of weeks after the charter carrier they had been using, New Pacific Airlines, ceased operations, forcing a switch to Sun Country Airlines.
- Since Nov. 10, the Blue Jackets have played beyond regulation — overtime or a shootout — on 10 occasions. Like every team in the NHL this season — with the Olympics squeezing the schedule — the Blue Jackets have been dog-tired. But this hasn't helped. The extra hockey amounts to an extra 37 minutes, 43 seconds, of play, nearly two periods.
- Fantilli had his first NHL fight last Monday vs. New Jersey, scrapping with Devils defenseman Jonas Siegenthaler. He handled himself quite well, actually, landing a series of right before Siegenthaler started to return fire. Asked if Mathieu Olivier has taught him how to work the speedbag, Fantilli laughed. "My rookie year, I asked him to help with some grips and stuff like that. He helped me, but he was like, 'I'll help you with this stuff, but if I ever see you fighting, I'll kill ya. That's not your job,'"
- Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins has a notoriously volatile temper, and he nearly blew his cool in last week's game against the Devils. Merzlikins felt he was interfered with on a goal that was initially allowed to stand, giving New Jersey a 3-1 lead. Merzlikins, unaware that the Blue Jackets had challenged and the play was being reviewed, left his net and started skating toward NHL referee Chris Schlenker when a linesman stepped in his path and gently turned him away.

"The linesman was saying, 'Your team is challenging!'" Merzlikins said. "And then the bench was telling me that they were challenging. That's when I zipped it and went back (to my net). I thought he had already made the decision and that was it." Merzlikins and Schlenker had a laugh about it later. "He told me that I sounded like his wife," Merzlikins said. "He apologized, as well. He said he didn't see it in the moment, but then on video it was clear that this was interference. When he told me I sounded like his wife, I started laughing and I told him, I get it. I get that, too."
- Among the top dramatic moments in the Blue Jackets' 6-5 shootout win over Detroit last Thursday, happened before puck drop. ESPN's John Buccigross, a proud native of Steubenville, Ohio, was given the honor of blasting the cannon ahead of faceoff, but then had to sprint back to the press box to make it

time for the game to start. No problem. Buccigross hasn't run this fast since he aced the par-4 No. 11 (296 yards) at Newport Country Club back in 2007. (True story.)

- The Blue Jackets will welcome back their third batch of alumni this week as part of their 25th anniversary celebration. Tyler Wright, who was the first Blue Jackets fan favorite, will be honored, along with stalwart defenseman David Savard, tough guy turned broadcaster Jody Shelley and the aforementioned Clark. They'll be honored before Saturday's game vs. Vegas.
- One of the bright spots with AHL Cleveland this season has been the return to health and the continued improvement of defenseman Corson Ceulemans, who was a Blue Jackets first-round pick (No. 25) in 2021. The Jackets knew Ceulemans was a project when they drafted him, but he began to pop early last season before he suffered a shoulder injury that ended his season in early January after only 33 games. Ceulemans, on a Monsters blue line that has lost Daemon Hunt and Brendan Smith to the NHL this season, is beginning to thrive, with 3-4-7 in his last 11 games, including a goal in Saturday's 3-2 win over Syracuse. He's one of only six first-round picks from that draft who haven't yet played in the NHL. But he's getting closer and closer to a chance.
- Blue Jackets Monday Gathering trivia question: Nobody has dominated the Blue Jackets quite like goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky, who, since leaving the Jackets as a free agent following the 2018-19 season, is 14-2-1 with a .922 save percentage vs. Columbus. What NHL goaltender has earned the most career wins against the Blue Jackets?
- The Blue Jackets were impressed by forward Luca Pinelli during his first taste of the NHL. He didn't score a point in any of the three games, but he was in the middle of a bunch of plays and probably enhanced his standing as a prospect. Here's Evason: "A lot of huge positives. First time in the NHL. He did everything hard, and that's what he has to do, just continue to do everything aggressively. He has a skill set that we believe is going to produce (offense), even at this level. His passes were hard. His skating was hard. His forecheck was hard. His intensity was really good. He has to work on some stuff down there as a young player, getting pucks out and getting them in, all those things. He needs to get stronger. But he competes his butt off."
- Pinelli has scored in each of his two games since being sent back to AHL Cleveland. He had the overtime game winner with just 13 seconds left before the shootout. Clark, who handles the Cleveland roster, said the organization always watches closely to see how a player handles being sent back to the AHL after time in Columbus. Late this week, he raved about Pinelli's attitude, as well as that of Luca Del Bel Belluz earlier this season.
- Trivia answer: Pekka Rinne, who spent his entire career with the Nashville Predators, went 22-8-3 all-time against the Blue Jackets, making him the winningest goaltender against Columbus. Others in the top five: Evgeni Nabokov (21), Jonathan Quick (20), Tomáš Vokoun (20) and Manny Legace (18).

The Athletic / Blue Jackets can't solve Washington's Logan Thompson, suffer first shutout loss

By Aaron Portzline – December 8, 2025

The only positive coming out of Sunday's game for the Columbus Blue Jackets is that they don't have to play the Washington Capitals — or face goaltender Logan Thompson — until the last game of the regular season in mid-April.

That may still be too soon.

Thompson had 39 saves in the Capitals' 2-0 win before 17,312 in Capital One Arena, handing the Blue Jackets their first shutout loss of the season and continuing to torment them with his right-catching glove, a rarity in the NHL.

In three games this season, the Capitals are 3-0 vs. Columbus, with wins of 5-1, 5-1 and now 2-0. Thompson has been in the cage for all three games against the Blue Jackets, stopping 95 of 97 shots, a sterling .979 save percentage. Sunday's win was the 100th of his career.

"I don't know if (Washington's success vs. Columbus) is structural," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "I mean, they're a good team, obviously. But when you get 40 shots — didn't we get almost 40 shots? — you've got 40 opportunities to score on net. We had some really good quality chances. I think more than anything, the goaltender was real good."

This game had no resemblance to the Blue Jackets' game in Florida on Saturday. That game, a 7-6 overtime loss to the Panthers, was proof that half-hearted checking and chaotic goaltending is a blast to watch unless you're a coach.

On Sunday, facing yet another back-to-back, the Blue Jackets played a much more structured style, and it helped that goaltender Jet Greaves — as reliable as they come — was back in net after an unexpected and mostly unsuccessful run by Elvis Merzljikins.

Greaves, playing his first game in nine days, made 36 saves, including 18 in the second period, and deserved a better fate. That's been the case in many of his outings this season. He hasn't won a game since Nov. 20 in Toronto.

He kept the game at 0-0 until the first minute of the second period and it stayed 1-0 until the Capitals scored an empty-net goal with 1:26 remaining to end it.

"Yeah, Jet was real good, real calm," Evason said. "He made smothering type of saves, where, you know, things don't compound into second and third opportunities. Yeah, he looked real good."

The Blue Jackets' best chance to get back into this game came at 9:25 of the third. Fourth-line winger Brendan Gaunce got up slowly from the ice, wincing, bleeding and holding one of his teeth in his right hand. He'd been highsticked by Washington's Hendrix Lapierre, drawing a double-minor penalty and putting the Blue Jackets on the power play for four minutes.

The Blue Jackets managed four shots on goal and a couple of solid scoring chances, but the Capitals blocked four shots by four different players — including one that struck Capitals power forward Tom Wilson in the ear — to help kill it off and preserve the close lead.

Only 28 seconds after the double-minor ended, the Blue Jackets went down a skater after a penalty on Gaunce.

The Blue Jackets have spent the last month of the season treading water, but eventually they're going fall behind if this keeps up. Since Nov. 10, the Blue Jackets have only three regulation losses: two to Washington and another to the Winnipeg Jets. All of them have been on the road.

But over the same stretch, the Blue Jackets have just two regulation wins, against the Edmonton Oilers and New Jersey Devils. Their record over the last 15 games — 6-3-6 — looks like something out of Major League Soccer, and it's landed the Blue Jackets in last place in the Metropolitan Division.

That's not as bad as it sounds: the Jackets are two points out of a wild-card spot and four points behind Carolina for second place in the Metro. But that's also what the NHL's three-point games have created — not just a quagmire in the standings but the false notion that it'll be easy to climb all those clubs in front of you.

The Blue Jackets, with their tendency to blow leads, have helped boost several other clubs around them in the standings. Even the overtime and shootout wins, which are celebrated like any other win, do damage by dispersing "loser points" across the Eastern Conference.

You can't tread water forever.

"There's a lot of belief (in the room)," Greaves said. "There are not necessarily the results we want in the last two days (two games, one point for the Jackets, four for the two other Eastern clubs), but I think there were a lot of positive things in both games. They were close games against good teams that could have gone either way. There are positives to build on, and that's where our focus is."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets blow 3 leads, lose wild affair to Panthers: 'The entire game was a joke'

By Aaron Portzline – December 7, 2025

Deciding that it's better to mince words than spit venom, Dean Evason had his shortest postgame media gathering since he took over as coach of the Columbus Blue Jackets. His comments were just opaque enough to require interpretation.

The Blue Jackets, who led 1-0, 4-1, and 6-4, lost 7-6 to the defending Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers on Sam Bennett's goal with just 3.2 seconds remaining in overtime, bringing an end to a bizarre matinee before an announced crowd of 19,269 in Amerant Bank Arena.

It marked Columbus's ninth consecutive loss (0-6-3) to Florida, its longest active streak against any opponent.

The game had a little bit of everything: blown leads, wide-open chances, controversial calls by officials, a controversial review call by Evason and hair-brained goaltending decisions. There was even a scene during overtime where Panthers menace Brad Marchand was caught eavesdropping on the Blue Jackets' bench during a timeout.

"The whole game was a joke, that's what I account it to," Evason said. "In every way. The entire game was a joke."

Asked if he was referring to the Blue Jackets' decision to challenge the second-period goal by Florida, a decision that failed and helped the Panthers overcome a 4-1 deficit in a matter of minutes.

"It's a joke," Evason said. "An absolute joke. We played hard all night. We played great. ... The game was a joke."

Damon Severson, Dmitri Voronkov, Miles Wood, Kirill Marchenko, Cole Sillinger and Isac Lundeström scored for the Blue Jackets, while goaltender Elvis Merzljikins allowed seven goals on 40 shots in his third consecutive start.

The game started going off the rails at 13:44 of the first period, when the Blue Jackets thought they'd taken a 2-1 lead on a Brendan Gaunce goal. Replays showed the puck slid through traffic and caromed off the inside of Gaunce's right skate as he stopped at the net.

Florida argued that the goal was kicked into the net, and the NHL agreed that Gaunce had used a "distinct kicking motion." No goal. Gaunce seemed incredulous on the bench.

Evason, infuriated, had a long conversation with NHL official Francis Charron during the TV timeout. It was the first of many talks between the two.

The Blue Jackets got that goal back and a couple of others, too, in a hot start to the second, and it appeared they might pull away after Voronkov, Wood and Marchenko each scored in a span of less than five minutes. It was 4-1 Columbus at 10:24 of the second period.

At 11:15 of the second, Marchand tried to glove a puck off the glass from behind the Blue Jackets' net, but the puck deflected off his left glove and dropped behind him, right in the path of teammate Carter Verhaeghe.

The puck went back to Marchand, who fed Seth Jones at the top of the zone, and was deflected into the net by Verhaeghe, making it 4-2.

The Blue Jackets, however, challenged the goal, believing that Marchand was guilty of a hand pass. The NHL, after a lengthy review, ruled that the puck merely deflected off Marchand's glove and wasn't intentionally directed.

That goal stood, and it all seemed to juice the Panthers. They scored on the ensuing power play — Columbus' penalty for its failed attempt — and tied it 4-4 on Jones' power play goal at 16:12 of the second.

Evason was giving Charron and others an earful during every stoppage, it seems, until the end of the game, when Charron declined to go near the Blue Jackets' bench.

Sillinger's goal with 1:34 left in the second could have stanchd the bleeding. Same as Lundeström's goal off a 2-on-1 with Wood, his first goal of the season.

With 5:42 remaining in the third period, and the Blue Jackets leading 6-5, Merzjkins made a strange decision to come out of his net to challenge Florida's Eetu Luostarinen, who had slipped past Columbus defenders Dante Fabbro and Severson.

Fabbro and Severson were close enough to Luostarinen that they potentially could have lifted a stick or otherwise disrupted him. Yet Merzjkins, after hesitating, came roaring out of his crease to meet Luostarinen at the puck between the circles.

Merzjkins swatted at the puck, but Luostarinen got his stick on it, too, sending the puck up in the air instead of out of the zone. It fell at the feet of Florida's Anton Lundell, who fired a shot into Merzjkins' net before he could recover.

Suddenly, the game was tied 6-6.

The Blue Jackets failed to convert a four-on-three power play in overtime, but it will be a memorable sequence if only for Marchand's antics.

Typically, NHL linesmen ensure players head to their own benches, but Marchand was allowed to skate all the way over to the Blue Jackets' side after they took a timeout at 2:19 of OT. Werenski and Adam Fantilli shooed him away, and assistant coach Mike Haviland was angry, but there were no other consequences.

As time ticked away, Marchand and Bennett executed a two-on-one perfectly, with Bennett scoring past Merzjkins just before the final buzzer to end it.

It marked the 10th time in 14 games that the Blue Jackets have played beyond regulation. They're now 4-6 in those games. They also managed to blow another two-goal, third-period lead and lose points to an Eastern Conference club that might be competing with them for a playoff spot in April.

The Blue Jackets led 6-4, but it wasn't enough, even with Florida's top two players, Matthew Tkachuk and Aleksander Barkov, out.

This one joins other losses already this season (Nov. 2 at the New York Islanders, Nov. 10 at Edmonton, Nov. 22 at Detroit ...) as the kind of tantalizing devastation that could take days to get over.

There's no time for that, though, especially not this season. The Blue Jackets flew immediately after the game to Washington, where they'll play the Washington Capitals at 7 p.m. on Sunday.

"Our guys are great," Evason said. "Our guys have no issues. They know what happened. They'll be good (Sunday) night. We'll play hard."

The Columbus Dispatch / Disputed review, blown leads mar Blue Jackets' OT loss: takeaways

By Brian Hedger – December 8, 2025

Dean Evason wasn't in the mood to break down how another game the Blue Jackets should've won got away.

Still heated from clashing with NHL referees Francis Charron and Brandon Schrader in a 7-6 overtime loss to the Florida Panthers on Dec. 6 at Amerant Bank Arena, the Jackets' head coach issued a blunt postgame commentary.

"The whole game was a joke," Evason said. "That's what I account it to."

Joke? In what ways?

"Every way," he said. "Entire game was a joke."

Evason was careful not to outright blame the officiating for his team blowing three leads for the second straight game, including a 10th blown third period edge, but that was clearly the intonation.

Blue Jackets good, refs bad, no further explanation necessary.

"It's a joke," he repeated, "an absolute joke."

Give him credit for one thing.

That's exactly what it felt like watching the repeat Stanley Cup champion Panthers erase deficits of 1-0 in the first period, 4-1 in the second and 6-4 in the third before killing a Blue Jackets power play early in overtime and winning on Sam Bennett's goal with 3.2 seconds left on the clock.

Another gut punch in a season filled with them, and next up is a back-to-back finale Dec. 7 at the Washington Capitals, who top the Metropolitan Division and won the first two games against the Jackets by identical 5-1 margins.

"Our guys are great," Evason said. "Our guys have no issues. They know what happened. They'll be good. We'll play hard. We played hard all night (against the Panthers). We played great. The game was a joke."

Here are three takeaways:

Failed challenge sends Columbus Blue Jackets into another collapse

The Blue Jackets lost coaching challenges that erased Brendan Gaunce's goal in the first that would've put them up 2-1 and upheld Carter Verhaeghe's first of two goals in the second to spark the Panthers' comeback from a 4-1 deficit.

The NHL Situation Room in Toronto called for a review of Gaunce's goal, which was taken away for a distinct kicking motion. Evason and Gaunce protested, but Panthers coach Paul Maurice could've issued a separate challenge for goaltender interference had the kicking motion review not overturned it.

Verhaeghe's upheld goal in the second was more contentious.

Evason issued a challenge for a missed hand pass by Brad Marchand after scooping his own rebound near the Blue Jackets' net, which the Blue Jackets felt was a missed play stoppage. The Blue Jackets challenged based on NHL Rule 38.1, which states the following:

"In all coach's challenge situations, the original call on the ice will be overturned if, and only if, a conclusive and irrefutable determination can be made on the basis of video evidence that the original call on the ice was clearly not correct. If a review is not conclusive and/or there is any doubt whatsoever as to whether the call on the ice was correct, the original call on the ice will be confirmed."

In other words, the guys who made the call or non-call get to watch replays and use their own judgement to determine whether they got it right or wrong. That might seem like a joke, but the NHL's rule book is filled with that jargon.

Also comical was the NHL's official ruling to uphold Verhaeghe's goal citing an additional rule about hand passes, Rule 79.1, that leaves it entirely up to the "opinion of the on-ice officials" to determine whether an illegal hand pass occurred.

During the play, Marchand got to his own rebound while going around the left post and used the blade to deflect the puck above his head.

That happened above the height of the crossbar, which could've been ruled an illegal touch with a high stick, but that wasn't called. Marchand then touched the puck with a swat of his left hand, dropping it to the ice for teammate Sam Bennett to collect in the corner. Bennett sent it to Marchand, who fed it to former Blue Jackets defenseman Seth Jones for a shot that Verhaeghe tipped past Merzlikins.

Here's what NHL Rule 79.1 states:

"A player shall be permitted to stop or 'bat' a puck in the air with his open hand, or push it along the ice with his hand, and the play shall not be stopped unless, in the opinion of the on-ice officials, he has directed the puck to a teammate, or has allowed his team to gain an advantage, and subsequently, possession and control of the puck is obtained by a player of the offending team, either directly or deflected off any player or official."

Charron and Schrader ruled that Marchand deflected the puck with his hand without directing it to Bennett, completely ignoring his illegal high stick touch. The Blue Jackets were assessed a delay-of-game penalty for a failed challenge, and Verhaeghe capped the ensuing power play to pull Florida within a goal at 4-3. Jones then tied it 4-4 on another power play.

Interestingly, NHL referees Wes McCauley and Corey Syvret overturned a Tampa Bay Lightning goal for a hand pass review just two days earlier, ruling Dec. 2 that forward Brandon Hagel's attempt to protect himself from being struck by the puck was instead a hand pass rather than a deflection.

Columbus Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins struggling on penalty kills

Neither goalie had an enjoyable afternoon, but Merzlikins skated away with the worse end of it.

A turnover in the neutral zone at the tail end of overtime gave the Panthers a 2-on-1 rush and Bennett scored the winner with 3.2 seconds left. It was the seventh goal Merzlikins allowed on 40 shots after allowing five in a 6-5 shootout win over the Detroit Red Wings on Dec. 4 at Nationwide Arena.

Detroit went 3-for-5 against the Blue Jackets on power plays before Florida went 2-for-4 two days later.

It's a tricky thing to assign blame for goals allowed while penalty-killing, since the NHL is filled with elite players and power plays have an inherent advantage with an extra skater or two. One of hockey's oldest mantras, however, is that good penalty-killing teams need their goalies to be the best penalty killer.

Merzlikins has allowed 15 goals on 72 shots while killing penalties for a .792 penalty-kill save percentage in 12 games, which is tied with three others for 45th among 49 goalies who've played at least 10 games. Jet Greaves has allowed seven penalty-kill goals on 57 shots for a .877 penalty-kill save percentage in 16 starts, which is tied with eight others for 10th.

Greaves has faced 15 less power-play shots while playing four more games, which could be a factor in Merzlikins' lower save percentage on PKs, but he and the Blue Jackets need to figure out how to improve while short-handed with him in net. Merzlikins' numbers in all other situations are either solid or very good.

Columbus Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins pays for risky play

Merzlikins isn't shy about leaving his net to play pucks, and he often kills developing scoring chances by doing it.

Against Florida, he broke up a potential short-handed breakaway by getting to a puck between the circles and swatting it away to keep the Jackets ahead 6-5, but the Panthers then made him pay for a similar decision on their tying goal.

A stretch pass from Sam Reinhart nearly sprung forward Eetu Luostarinen on a mini-breakaway from the Columbus blue line, but Merzlikins again ventured far out of his net to poke at the puck. The problem was that he didn't get all of it and the puck dropped in front of Anton Lundell for a quick shot before Merzlikins could get back in his crease.

That goal forced OT and gave the Jackets their 10th blown third-period lead in 28 games.

The play itself put Merzlikins in a tough spot. If he'd stayed in the net, Luostarinen would've had a breakaway against him with a full head of steam and the tying goal on his stick. Coming out to play the puck left the net open for what happened, and that decision had to be made with roughly one second to think about it.

You still want to be the goalie, kids?

The Columbus Dispatch / Blue Jackets shut out by Thompson in Capitals' 2-0 win

By Brian Hedger – December 8, 2025

Logan Thompson crossed off the only thing he hadn't done yet against the Blue Jackets, notching a 39-save shutout to lead the Washington Capitals to a 2-0 victory Dec. 7 at Capital One Arena in Washington, D.C.

Thompson improved to 3-0-0 against the Blue Jackets this season, becoming the 17th goalie in NHL history to log his 100th career victory in 170 games or fewer. In three games against Columbus, he's stopped 95 of 97 shots for a scorching .979 save percentage.

"We had a ton of opportunities to score, obviously, and their goaltender's played extremely well against us every (game) ... but he certainly did tonight," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason told reporters in Washington. "We had some quality, quality opportunities and he made some saves when he was on his backside. We certainly liked our 'compete,' our push was real good in the third period ... we just couldn't get one by him."

After earning wins over the Jackets by 5-1 scores Oct. 24 in Columbus and Nov. 24 in Washington, the Capitals' goalie was even better the third time around. As a result, the Blue Jackets (13-10-6) were swept in back-to-back games to start a three-game road trip while earning one of four possible points after losing 7-6 in overtime Dec. 6 at the Florida Panthers.

The victory for the Capitals (18-9-3) kept them on top of the Metropolitan Division and kept the Jackets stuck in the division's basement. The Blue Jackets will conclude their trip with another tough division matchup Dec. 9 at the Carolina Hurricanes, playing their third road game in four days.

Jakob Chychrun scored the lone goal of the game with a goalie defending, beating Jet Greaves (36 saves) with a one-timer 50 seconds into the second period. Aliaksei Protas sealed the win for the Capitals by scoring into the Blue Jackets' empty net with 1:26 left to play.

Columbus went 0-for-3 on power plays, unable to beat Thompson despite getting a four-minute advantage in the third on Hendrix Lapierre's double-minor for high-sticking Brendan Gaunce in the mouth.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Unable to Solve Logan Thompson in Loss to Capitals

By Mark Scheig – December 7, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets wanted to use Sunday night's game against the Washington Capitals to erase the stink of how their game ended Saturday against the Florida Panthers. Although they played well, they couldn't find a win.

Logan Thompson again had his way with the Blue Jackets making 37 saves. Jakub Chychrun and Aliaksei Protas scored the goals. The Capitals defeated the Blue Jackets 2-0 on Sunday night. It's just the third regulation loss in the Blue Jackets' past 15 games.

The story of this game was the goaltending duel this turned into.

Game Recap

Although it was a back-to-back situation for the Blue Jackets, the Capitals didn't have much of an advantage in that area. This was their first home game since coming back from the West Coast. It was also their sixth game in the last 10 days.

Injuries for both teams were a factor too. The Blue Jackets were still without Boone Jenner, Erik Gudbranson and Mathieu Olivier. The Capitals were without John Carlson for a third straight game. Also rookie Ryan Leonard is expected to be out long term after taking a high hit from Anaheim's Jacob Trouba.

Despite the amount of hockey played and the injuries, both teams played an even period. No goals. No penalties taken. The Blue Jackets ended with a 12-9 shots on goal advantage in the first.

Both Greaves and Thompson made key saves. Greaves' best save came late in the period off a turnover. Dylan Strome has an open look in the slot but was unable to score.

The Capitals were able to get on the board early in the second. Chychrun blasted Tom Wilson's pass home for the opening goal. Chychrun leads all defensemen in goals with 11.

Thompson continued his dominance against the Blue Jackets by making several key saves especially later in the period. He came into Sunday night's game 2-0-0 with a 1.00 GAA against them this season.

The Blue Jackets did get into some penalty trouble. Kirill Marchenko took a pair of penalties as well as Brendan Gaunce. They were able to kill all three of them off. The Capitals held a 19-11 shot advantage in the middle period.

The Blue Jackets pushed for the tying goal in the third. They even got a four-minute power play when Gaunce was high sticked. Again, Thompson wouldn't be beaten. He stopped all 16 shots faced in the third.

With Greaves pulled, Protas iced the game away with an empty-net goal to make the final score 2-0. Greaves finished the night with 36 saves playing in his first game in nine days.

The Blue Jackets will get Monday off and will play next on Tuesday against the Carolina Hurricanes. The Capitals will get three days off and return Thursday night when they host those same Hurricanes.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Lose Wild Game to Panthers in Overtime

By Mark Scheig – December 6, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets entered their game on Saturday afternoon against the Florida Panthers hoping to start their three-game road trip on the right foot. But as has been custom in recent games, overtime was required.

Sam Bennett scored the winning goal with just under four seconds left in overtime to lift the Panthers to a wild 7-6 win over the Blue Jackets. Bennett and Brad Marchand each finished with four points. Carter Verhaeghe added three points. The Blue Jackets had points from 13 different skaters in the losing effort.

The story of this game was the defending champions showing no quit despite being down multiple goals at different points in the game.

Game Recap

The first period started tame enough. The teams each exchanged goals midway through the first period. Damon Severson deflected an Ivan Provorov shot to open the scoring. Then Evan Rodrigues tied it about two minutes later.

Then things got real crazy. The two teams scored a combined seven goals in the second period. The Blue Jackets stormed out to a 4-1 lead thanks to three goals in about five minutes from Dmitri Voronkov, Miles Wood and Kirill Marchenko.

Controversy then struck. An important call fell in favor of the Panthers.

Verhaeghe scored his first goal of the game to cut it to 4-2. Before the goal, it appeared the puck hit Marchand's glove. The Blue Jackets challenged for a missed stoppage as they felt a hand pass should have been called. The officials ruled the puck was deflected and not deemed a hand pass. That goal was allowed to stand. The Panthers then tied the game quickly after that.

Verhaeghe scored on the resulting power play from a failed challenge to make it 4-3. The three minutes later, Seth Jones scored on the power play to make it 4-4. This was not the only occurrence of the Panthers charging back from being down multiple goals.

The Panthers came back twice from being down multiple goals to win on Saturday. (Mandatory Credit: Sam Navarro-Imagn Images)

Cole Sillinger scored with 1:34 left in the second to make it 5-4. To open the third, Isac Lundestrom scored his first as a Blue Jacket off a great pass from Wood to make it 6-4.

Once again, the Panthers found a way back. Marchand scored on a drive to the net to make it 6-5. Then with 5:42 left in regulation, Anton Lundell tied the game at 6.

Both teams had chances to win the game on the power play. The Panthers failed to convert at the end of regulation. The Blue Jackets failed to convert midway through the third and in overtime. Then the game was decided in the final seconds.

Marchand was able to get the puck to Bennett and he beat Elvis Merzlikins to secure the 7-6 win. The Panther came back from being down 4-1 and 6-4 to win this one.

Merzlikins made 33 saves on the 40 shots he faced. Sergei Bobrovsky finished with 25 saves on the day.

The Blue Jackets now have to fly to Washington D.C. for a Sunday night game against the Capitals. The Panthers come right back as well as they will host the New York Islanders on Sunday evening.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Need to Start Stacking Regulation Wins Together

By Mark Scheig – December 6, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets find themselves in a truly odd position in the NHL standings as they embark on an important weekend back-to-back on the East Coast. They take on the Florida Panthers Saturday afternoon and then fly up to Washington D.C. to take on the Capitals Sunday night.

Why is it an odd position in the standings for the Blue Jackets? That's because every single team in the Metropolitan Division is on pace for at least 90 points two months into the season.

Red Wings - How Has Nate Danielson Looked So Far in the NHL?

For perspective, recall it took 91 points for the Montreal Canadiens to grab the second wildcard spot last year. The team with the current lowest points percentage in the Metro, the New York Rangers, is on pace for about 91 points.

From a pure points perspective, the Blue Jackets enter play on Saturday last in the Metro with 31 points. At a .574 points percentage, they're on a 94-point pace. The issue is the six teams above them are all .589 or better with four of them at .635 or better.

My word. What a start for the division. Head coach Dean Evason said postgame Thursday he's never seen anything like this in a season parity wise.

But while the Blue Jackets only trail first place in the Metro by six, there is another factor in play that they are far behind on. While we're only about a third of the way through the season, there is time to start fixing this aspect. But if they don't fix this soon, it will make a potential path to the playoffs much harder.

What are we talking about? The Blue Jackets enter play on Saturday dead last in the Eastern Conference in regulation wins with just seven in 27 games. That's a problem.

Regulation Wins Elusive

In the regulation win department, it was a brutally cold month for the Blue Jackets in November. In 15 games last month, they managed to win just twice in the first 60 minutes.

What were those two occurrences? On Nov 1, they held on to beat the St. Louis Blues 3-2. Then in their rematch against the Edmonton Oilers at home, the Blue Jackets held on for a 5-4 win. That's it.

The Blue Jackets didn't win a single game in regulation on the road in the month of November. While their road record is much better at this point in the season compared to last 7-6-2, they've also coughed up important points thanks to that stretch where they couldn't hold a third-period lead.

The Blue Jackets did get a regulation win Monday in New Jersey. However, they needed another shootout to get the win on Thursday against the Red Wings. Overtime has been a major theme in this recent part of their schedule.

In their first 27 games, the Blue Jackets have gone past 60 minutes 11 times. They're 2-4 in the 3-on-3 part and 4-1 in the shootout. They've earned 17 of a possible 22 points in games beyond regulation. That's kept them in the race. Kent Johnson and Kirill Marchenko have had a major hand in that going 8/9 in the shootout between them.

Then there's the other side of the argument. The Blue Jackets have allowed their opponents to gain at least a point also. And with each passing non-regulation win, they're falling further behind in what the NHL uses as its first tiebreaker when determining the standings.

It's a pretty bleak picture when you look at the Metro from the aspect of regulation wins. Here is what that looks like as of Saturday morning.

- Capitals: 16
- Penguins: 13
- Hurricanes: 11
- Islanders: 11
- Rangers: 11
- Devils: 10
- Flyers: 8
- Blue Jackets 7

With the exception of the Flyers, the Blue Jackets trail every other team in their division by three regulation wins. That means they'd have to finish with more points than those teams in order to finish above them.

The Blue Jackets cannot wait. They must start stacking regulation wins together. This is especially important in their division games.

The concept of a true four-point game is going to take on greater importance when the standings are as tight as they are. The teams that can both get regulations wins while avoiding regulation losses will have the best chance to make the playoffs.

The Blue Jackets have two fewer regulation wins this season than they did in 2024-25 on this date. (Ed Mulholland-Imagn Images)

The Blue Jackets do have at least a point in 18 of 27 games this season. One year ago today, they had points in 14 of 26. That is an improvement in avoiding regulation losses. They have six more points today than they did one year ago.

However, the Blue Jackets have fewer regulation wins this season (7) than they did at this time last season (9). This must be the focus for the rest of the season.

Final Thoughts

The Blue Jackets enter this weekend with 52 more games in the 2025-26 season. That's not as much time as you'd think in terms of the regulation win aspect of this considering the ground they need to make up.

This is where the Blue Jackets' ability to get a lead in games stands out. They have done that in a majority of their games this season. But this is also why blowing those leads have proven costly.

This season, it's the difference between being last in the Metro or being near the top. The Blue Jackets can't afford to keep letting regulation wins slip away.