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## ESPN / Reenergized Bowness, 70, leads Blue Jackets to win in debut

**January 13, 2026**

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Rick Bowness was enjoying time on his boat in Florida when he received a call from Don Waddell on Monday afternoon.

Bowness thought the call from the Columbus Blue Jackets president of hockey operations and general manager was about a player Bowness once coached. It turned out to be something else -- a head coaching offer.

Bowness was on the ice at Nationwide Arena on Tuesday morning, conducting practice after accepting Waddell's offer to take over as head coach. Bowness didn't have much time to get acquainted with his new team, but he produced results anyway, as the Blue Jackets outlasted the Calgary Flames 5-3 on Tuesday night.

"The coach's job is to give them the structure and the details. Their job is to come in and compete. And my eyes told me tonight we competed very hard," Bowness said after the win. "Now are there areas that we have to improve? Absolutely. But if you don't improve those areas until you get to compete, so that's what I was happy with."

This move marks Bowness' return behind an NHL bench. He had retired in the spring of 2024, ending a two-year stint with the Winnipeg Jets. On Tuesday, Bowness explained that he stepped down because of health issues he and his wife, Judy, were experiencing.

The 70-year-old hockey lifer has coached both iterations of the Jets, as well as Boston, Ottawa, the New York Islanders, Phoenix and Dallas. He took over the Stars during the 2019-20 season and led them to the Stanley Cup Final in the 2020 pandemic bubble.

Even though Bowness becomes the league's oldest head coach and turns 71 on Jan. 25, he says he is ready and rested for another opportunity.

"I feel a whole lot better. Judy's doing great, and so that opened the door again," Bowness said before the win. "I did want to coach again."

Bowness replaced Dean Evason, who was in his second year and became the first NHL coach fired this season. Assistant coach Steve McCarthy was also fired.

Entering Tuesday, Columbus was last in the East with a 19-19-7 record, seven points out of a playoff spot with 12 games until the Olympic break. But perhaps a corner was turned in Tuesday's victory. Boone Jenner and Charlie Coyle each scored in the final two minutes as Columbus won its second straight game.

Last season, the Blue Jackets were the feel-good story, coming within two points of the final playoff spot after the death of star forward Johnny Gaudreau in August 2024. During that emotional year, Evason was a Coach of the Year candidate as he guided the team to a 23-point improvement.

"For us, a bit of a shock, a wake-up call that we can use and hopefully use in the right way," Jenner, the team captain, said before the game.

Bowness is the 14th coach in Columbus' 25 seasons. He will try to get the Blue Jackets into the playoffs for the first time since 2019-20.

Waddell cited blowing a three-goal lead in a 5-4 overtime loss to Pittsburgh on Jan. 4 and a subsequent 1-3 trip as reasons why he felt a change was needed.

"I have all the respect in the world for Dean and Steve. I think last year they did a tremendous job in very difficult situations, but again, I think our expectations this year were higher than what we're achieving right now," Waddell said in a Tuesday news conference. "I talked to some of the younger players and some of the leaders. They weren't, by any means, bashing the coach, but I could tell they were frustrated with how things were going. So it all came to a point over the weekend."

Besides eliminating poor third periods, Bowness cited other defensive factors, including limiting odd-man rushes and shooting chances in the slot. Columbus also has the fourth-worst penalty-killing unit in the league.

"You don't score your way into the playoffs. This isn't the '80s, man," he said. "I'm going to say whatever has to be done. I'm not a 30-year-old coach worrying about my career. I'm at the end of my career. Anybody who's worried about next year is taking the wrong approach on this whole thing."

Sean Monahan, who played for Bowness in Winnipeg in 2023-24, said he was surprised by the move but that Bowness can bring structure to the team while being heavy on details.

"He can be hard on guys. He's vocal. He's fun to play for because he's motivated to be out there to coach to get the two points every night, and I think he's been through it all," Monahan said. "He's done it a long time, and he's had a lot of success at it. So, you've got a lot of respect for a guy like that."

## Sportsnet / Healthy and rested Rick Bowness ready for next challenge as Blue Jackets coach

**Associated Press - January 13, 2026**

Rick Bowness speaks after being named new head coach of the Columbus Blue Jackets, saying that he was happy in retirement, but felt like he could help the Jackets when they came calling.

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It didn't take much time for Rick Bowness to show that he was rested and ready to return behind an NHL bench.

Bowness completed a whirlwind 36 hours by leading the Columbus Blue Jackets to a 5-3 win over the Calgary Flames on Tuesday night. He accepted the job Monday afternoon and got to Columbus in time to lead Tuesday morning's game day skate.

"The coach's job is to give them the structure and the details. Their job is to come in and compete. And my eyes told me tonight we competed very hard," Bowness said. "Now are there areas that we have to improve? Absolutely. But if you don't improve those areas until you get to compete, so that's what I was happy with."

Bowness had retired in the spring of 2024, ending a two-year stint with the Winnipeg Jets. Bowness explained before Tuesday's game that he stepped down because of health issues he and his wife, Judy, were experiencing.

Bowness was on his boat in Florida when he received a call from President of Hockey Operations and General Manager Don Waddell on Monday afternoon.

The 70-year-old hockey-lifer has coached both iterations of the Jets, as well as Boston, Ottawa, the New York Islanders, Phoenix, and Dallas. He took over the Stars during the 2019-20 season and led them to the Stanley Cup Final in the 2020 pandemic bubble.

Why Johnson and Fantilli are top 'bump from coaching change' candidates

Columbus reporter Aaron Portzline joins FAN Hockey Show to weigh in on the Rick Bowness hiring as interim head coach, and why Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli could be the top candidates for a bump and could benefit most from a new voice.

Even though Bowness becomes the league's oldest head coach and turns 71 on Jan. 25, he says he is ready and rested for another opportunity.

The only thing that might need help is his voice since he sounded a little hoarse after the game.

"I just love it. That's why I came back. The one thing I missed was the interaction with the players. I loved that part of coaching, working with the players and talking to players and help them get better," he said.

Bowness replaces Dean Evason, who was in his second year and became the first NHL coach fired this season. Assistant coach Steve McCarthy was also fired.

With Tuesday's win over Calgary, Columbus (20-19-7) is tied with Ottawa for next-to-last in the East with 47 points. The Blue Jackets are five points out of a playoff spot with 11 games until the Olympic break.

Last season, the Blue Jackets were the feel-good story, coming within two points of the final playoff spot after the death of star forward Johnny Gaudreau in August 2024. During that emotional year, Evason was a Coach of the Year candidate as he guided the team to a 23-point improvement.

'You don't score your way in': Bowness wants to improve Jackets' defence

New coach Rick Bowness discusses what he's seen from the Columbus Blue Jackets so far this season, saying that the team's defensive woes is what's been holding them back.

Team captain Boone Jenner, who had the go-ahead goal with 1:34 remaining, also had an assist and got into a fight in the second period, giving him the Gordie Howe hat trick.

"It's a new voice, different chatter on the bench. I think we just wanted to home in with some details, and I just like our energy on the bench," Jenner said. "We obviously stuck to most of our system. There's a few tweaks here and there and I'm sure there'll be a couple more moving forward, but tonight was more of the compete and the details."

Bowness is the 14th coach in Columbus' 25 seasons. He will try to get the Blue Jackets into the playoffs for the first time since 2019-20.

Waddell cited blowing a three-goal lead in a 5-4 overtime loss to Pittsburgh on Jan. 4 and a subsequent 1-3 road trip as reasons why he felt a change was needed.

"I have all the respect in the world for Dean and Steve. I think last year they did a tremendous job in very difficult situations, but again, I think our expectations this year were higher than what we're achieving right now," Waddell said. "I talked to some of the younger players and some of the leaders. They weren't, by any means, bashing the coach, but I could tell they were frustrated with how things were going. So it all came to a point over the weekend."

Besides eliminating poor third periods, Bowness cited other defensive factors, including limiting odd-man rushes and shooting chances in the slot. Columbus also has the fourth-worst penalty-killing unit in the league and gave up three goals while being a skater down on Tuesday.

"You don't score your way into the playoffs. This isn't the '80s, man," he said. "I'm going to say whatever has to be done. I'm not a 30-year-old coach worrying about my career. I'm at the end of my career. Anybody who's worried about next year is taking the wrong approach on this whole thing."

Sean Monahan, who played for Bowness in Winnipeg in 2023-24, said he was surprised by the move but that Bowness can bring structure to the team while being heavy on details.

"He can be hard on guys. He's vocal. He's fun to play for because he's motivated to be out there to coach to get the two points every night, and I think he's been through it all," Monahan said. "He's done it a long time, and he's had a lot of success at it. So, you've got a lot of respect for a guy like that."

## The Athletic / Boone Jenner's big night helps Blue Jackets deliver a win in Rick Bowness' debut

**By Aaron Portzline - January 14, 2026**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Rick Bowness hadn't completely lost his voice, but he was hoarse after making his debut with the Columbus Blue Jackets, a 5-3 win over the Calgary Flames on Tuesday in Nationwide Arena.

It had been almost two years since Bowness had worked behind an NHL bench before he came out of retirement Monday in the hope of guiding the Blue Jackets to a second-half surge and a playoff berth.

He did not ease into the job. Blue Jackets players said Bowness had something to say — mostly positive, but also some straightforward critiques — after almost every shift, often shouting to an end of the bench about pushing the pace or finishing checks.

"It was good stuff that we need," Blue Jackets center Charlie Coyle said. "Any team needs that. So, yeah, he was talking all the time. I think it was almost rare when he wasn't talking, to be honest, but it's a good thing, and we need it. Someone who has that much experience, you trust right away. So, it's been a good first day of work."

The Blue Jackets weren't perfect. Far from it. The Jackets allowed three power-play goals and lost leads of 2-0 and 3-2. And there were times in the third period when they allowed Calgary to dictate the pace and carry the puck a bit too long.

But there was much to like, too.

Captain Boone Jenner had the first Gordie Howe hat trick of his career — a second-period fight with Calgary's Rasmus Andersson, a third-period goal that gave the Blue Jackets a 4-3 lead with 1:34 to play, and a primary assist on Coyle's empty net goal with 2.6 seconds left that capped the score.

"Myself and a lot of the guys, the leaders on the team, we have to drive play and drag guys into the fight and be an example," Jenner said. "We want to turn this around, too, and we want to lead the way. I think a lot of guys stepped up tonight."

Coyle had his first two-goal game of the season, Zach Werenski had a goal and two assists, and Dante Fabbro had a goal. Goaltender Jet Greaves wasn't his usual sure-handed self, but he had 16 of his 29 saves in the third period.

"We asked them to compete, and we did," Bowness said. "We competed. We played very well. Through the first 40 minutes, we weren't giving up anything five-on-five. Clearly, the penalty kill is the one (thing) that really set us back, so we'll work on that. We can fix that.

"The one thing we've told them is, the coach's job is to give them structure, give them details. Their job is to come and compete. And my eyes told me tonight that we competed very hard. That's how you have to win in this league, and so I was very happy with that."

On nights like Tuesday, the day after the Blue Jackets made a bold decision to fire coach Dean Evason in an attempt to save the season, it's important for the veteran players, the leaders, to play like it. Jenner wasn't the only one who delivered, but he was the loudest.

He handled himself well in the fight against Andersson, and it served to turn up the temperature on a game that was starting to lag. His goal, which gave the Blue Jackets their third and final lead of the game, could not have been timed better. Jenner was forechecking when a deflected puck kicked his way above the left circle. He skated into it and beat Flames goaltender Dustin Wolf with a rocket of a shot to the far post.

“That’s the Boone Jenner I remember coaching against for a long time,” Bowness said, smiling. “We talk about competing — well, usually your veterans have to lead the way, and guys like Coyle and (Sean) Monahan and Boone, they did a great job of that.

“Boone, yeah ... I love watching him play. I’m glad I’m coaching him because he’s a hard guy to play against. He doesn’t quit.”

The other opportunity provided by a coaching change is for players who might have felt slighted or not used properly to state their case to a new boss.

Fabbro, who has been diminished to a third-pairing role this season after playing so well on the top pair with Werenski last season, was back up top Tuesday after an injury to Denton Mateychuk (upper body) and a late scratch for Damon Severson (illness). Defenseman Jake Christiansen, who fell out of favor — and out of the lineup — under Evason, was a noticeable player too, especially on a penalty kill when he blocked three shots in the span of about six seconds. (Too bad for him, the Flames scored just seconds later.)

But the most noticeable player under Bowness was winger Kent Johnson, who didn’t get on the scoresheet but had the puck all night and played a season-high 20:55 in ice time, more than any other forward.

“He deserved the minutes,” Bowness said. “He played hard. He’s not the biggest guy, but he competed. Again, it’s what we said before the game. We’ll give you the details. We’ll give you some structure. Your job, as a pro athlete, is to come and compete. And he did that, and he deserved those minutes, and he’ll keep getting those minutes as long as he plays like that.”

Johnson said he appreciated Bowness’ constant commentary on the bench, even when the message wasn’t necessarily flattering. He said he was looking forward to practice Wednesday, when the Blue Jackets will likely get their first full exposure to the system Bowness wants them to play.

Although they might have gotten a fair amount of it during live action Tuesday. On the penalty kill, he wants more shots blocked from getting to the net. And for the pucks that do get to the net, he wants the Blue Jackets to do a better job of clearing the pucks or clearing the bodies out quickly, “knocking people down.”

Broadly, he wants the puck to move faster, too.

“It’s what has to be said at the right time,” Bowness said. “We were getting after them (at one point) because I hate playing slow. I hate playing slow, and there were times that I thought we could have moved the puck a lot quicker. You can’t play fast if you’re hanging on to the puck. That puck’s got to move. That guy has to move his feet or he’s got to move (the puck). When you can play fast, you’re putting pressure on the opposition. I hate playing slow. Hate it. And when I got after them, it was about that.”

## The Athletic / New coach Rick Bowness sees glaring areas where he can help struggling Blue Jackets

**By Aaron Portzline – January 13, 2026**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Rick Bowness was on a boat with his wife in the middle of Florida’s Intracoastal Waterway when the late-morning call came from Columbus Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell on Monday.

So long, boat. So long, Florida. And so long, retirement.

Bowness, who turns 71 later this month, became the 11th full-time head coach in the Blue Jackets’ not-quite 25 seasons, taking over a club that was hovering around .500 and languishing in last place of the Eastern Conference under previous coach Dean Evason.

When Bowness retired from the Winnipeg Jets after the 2023-24 season, he cited a multitude of reasons — the health of both he and his wife, a desire to spend time with grandkids, etc. — and said that after much thought and consideration, he’d realized “it’s time.”

However, with both Rick and Judy back to health and feeling good, Bowness started wondering if any NHL clubs might come calling.

“There were only a few teams that I would have come out of retirement to coach,” Bowness said, “and this is certainly one of them.”

Bowness, like Waddell, believes the Blue Jackets have seriously underperformed this season, and he highlighted three ways — each distinct, yet interconnected — he thinks the team can turn its season around over the final three months of the season.

It starts with the Blue Jackets’ defensive play, which is why assistant coach Steve McCarthy was fired along with Evason on Monday. Before Tuesday’s games, the Blue Jackets had allowed 3.38 goals per game, fifth-worst in the NHL and a touch higher (3.26) than last season.

“I look at our goals against,” Bowness said. “I look at our shots against, our penalty kill, our slot chances against, our rush chances against ... there’s the issue. That’ll take you right out of the playoffs. It will. In our league, you don’t score your way into the playoffs. This isn’t the ’80s, man. You defend your way into the playoffs, and you get your offense by playing solid team defense.

“We’re going to get everybody to buy in a lot more defensively. There are structural changes we can make, and we’re going to make them. But we have to tighten this thing up by giving them a game plan. ‘This is what we needed. Now do it.’ We’re going to be pushing hard on that.”

Bowness used the word “nastiness” at least four times, saying that’s how he wants the Blue Jackets to play. To be clear, that’s mostly play without the puck.

The Blue Jackets have let their checking slide dramatically this season. They’ve been curling away from hits rather than skating into them. The area in front of their net and the opponents’ net has been way too open and free.

How do you make a team play more nastily?

“Well, you show them (on film) when they’re not being nasty,” Bowness said. “Show them areas where you need more.

“Listen, when a guy who’s 5-11 and 180 pounds runs up against a guy who is 6-3, 220 pounds, chances are the big guy’s gonna win. It doesn’t mean you can’t give the guy a harder time. You’re not going to win every battle. You’re not going to win every race. Sometimes you get knocked over. That’s hockey.”

All of this applies to the Blue Jackets’ struggles in the third period, Bowness believes. The Jackets have allowed 63 third-period goals, most in the NHL. They’ve also lost nine games this season after leading in the third.

This was Bowness’ strongest statement of the day, as if he’s been watching the Blue Jackets’ chronic collapses this season.

Waddell acknowledged that it was a 5-4 overtime loss to Pittsburgh on Jan. 4 — a game the Blue Jackets led 4-1 in the second period — that set the ball rolling on Evason’s dismissal. The defensive breakdowns. The lack of aggressive play and offensive pressure.

“A good part of defense is puck management,” Bowness said. “And the puck management has to improve in crucial areas. Blue-line play, the neutral zone play, hanging on to the puck more (offensively).

“I’m a pressure coach. I’m not a sit-back coach at all. I don’t like what I’ve seen. We’re sitting back and that drives me absolutely nuts. We’re going to play pressure. We’re going to manage the puck better, and we’re going to make it hard for the other team to create offense.”

But, wait. There’s more.

“When you’re on your heels in this league, man, you’re going to get burnt,” Bowness said. “The league is too good. There are too many highly skilled guys. If you want to let them come at you and you want to give them time, and you don’t want to hurt them or hit them ... you’re going to pay the price.

“We gotta get nastier. We have to have a little more structure and pressure. You get to that third period and it’s all those things, playing on your toes and having the confidence to do that.”

The only player in the Blue Jackets’ room who has played for Bowness is center Sean Monahan, who spent 34 regular-season games and five playoff games at the end of the 2023-24 season with Winnipeg when Bowness was coach.

“I really enjoyed playing for him,” Monahan said. “A lot of structure, heavy on the details, and, I mean, he coached to win games.

“I mean, he can be hard on guys. He’s vocal. But he’s fun to play for because he’s motivated to coach for two points every night. He’s done it a long time, he’s seen everything, and he’s had a lot of success, so I’ve got a lot of respect for a guy like that.”

## The Columbus Dispatch / New Columbus Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness in his own words

**By Brian Hedger – January 13, 2026**

The Columbus Blue Jackets' Rick Bowness Era opened Jan. 13 at Nationwide Arena with an introductory press conference for the team's fifth head coach in the past five years.

Coming out of retirement to join the fray mid-season, Bowness, 70, said he's eager to help the Blue Jackets turn around a season that has them in last place of the Metropolitan Division and Eastern Conference after a slew of blown leads in third periods.

After accepting the job Jan. 12 while on a boat in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, with his wife, Judy, Bowness found himself back on skates at the Blue Jackets' morning skate a day later. Meeting reporters was next, and the longtime NHL coach held court while explaining why he chose to pause his retirement lifestyle for a job that might not last beyond this season.

Here's a sampling of his comments on a number of topics:

On why he's returning to the bench after retiring from the Winnipeg Jets in 2024:

Honestly, the answer to that is that both my wife, Judy, and I ... we had some health issues that year. And when you have health issues, it kind of put things in perspective, right?

So, without the health issues, I would not have stepped down. The passion was still there, but we had to overcome some issues, and I'm not going to get into detail on those things. They've been addressed over the last year and a half. I feel a whole lot better, Judy's doing great and, so, that opened the door again, because I did want to coach again.

On his first order of business with the Blue Jackets:

I talked to the players this morning, and I look at that goals-against, I look the shots against, I look at the penalty kill, I look at the slot changes against, the rush chances against ... there's the issue. Those issues will take you right out of the playoffs. They will. In our league, you don't score your way into the (playoffs). This isn't the '80s, man. You don't score your way in. You defend your way into the playoffs, and you get your offense by playing some good, solid team defense, but that's team defense. That's everyone committed.

So, we're just going to try to get everyone to 'buy in' a lot more defensively. Are there some structural changes we can make? Absolutely, and we're going to make them, but we have to tighten this thing up, and you tighten it up by giving them a gameplan, and then the onus is on them. 'This is what we need, now do it.' So, we're going to be pushing them hard on that. We're going into these games, and every team in the league says, 'We want to be hard (to play) against.' Well, the way you're 'hard against,' is the way you play away from the puck, and you defend, and you're hard, and we're going to do that.

On the Blue Jackets coughing up leads:

The good part of defense is puck management. It is. You have to control the puck, so the puck management has to improve in crucial areas: blue line play, neutral zone, hanging onto the puck more in

the O-zone instead of throwing it into the slot or over to them. I'm a pressure coach. I'm not going to sit back at all, and I don't like what I'm seeing now. We're sitting back. That drives me absolutely nuts.

So, the answer is we're going to play pressure, we're going to manage the puck better, and we're going to make it hard for the other team to create any offense. That has to be done. When you're on your heels in this league, man, you're gonna get burnt. The league is too good. There's too many highly skilled guys, and if you want to let them come at you, and you want to give them time, and you don't want to hurt them or hit them, then you're going to pay the price.

We've got to get a little nastier, and we have to have a little bit more structure and a little bit more pressure, and just as important, we have to manage the puck. In that third period, man, it's all those things, and it's playing on your toes, and the confidence to do that.

On his initial message to Blue Jackets players:

I've taken over teams in the middle of the season a couple times. The last one was in Dallas, when Jim Montgomery stepped down, so the difference there, in Dallas, is we were playing well. So, my message to the team? We're going to keep doing what we're doing. We're playing well. I know the voice behind the bench has changed, and I'm not the smartest guy in the world, but I know we're playing well and I'm not going to change anything.

This team is not playing well. This team is giving up too many chances. This team is giving up too many goals, as I mentioned earlier, so we do have to make some changes. It's not only the Xs and Os changes. It's the nastiness, the heart and soul. That needs to change a little bit. That's what the players have to give, and then when we talk about a full 'buy in' and a full commitment, it starts with that physical commitment to the team, and the mental commitment that you're ready to play.

Listen, their responsibility as pro athletes? Show up, ready to work, ready to compete. We'll give you the structure to win, but the rest is on you. Our job as coaches? Give you the necessary systems and Xs and Os to win games. Your job, as a pro, when you sign the contract to play, your job is to come ready to play and complete and do everything you can do help the team win.

On getting the Jan. 12 call from Waddell on his boat:

We were on the boat, and Don sends me this text. He says, 'Give me call' and I say, 'OK,' and then I say, 'Judy, I think he wants to talk to me about a player that I coached, and he wants to trade for.' So, when he threw (the job offer) at me, I gave her a quick look, like, 'Wait until you hear this one.'

On getting the best out of the Blue Jackets' core of young players:

Spend a lot of time with them. Work with them, talk to them, get to know them, right? I have to know what makes them tick. I need to spend time with them, so those things, they do take time. I've got to talk to every one of the players. I've got to get to know them, I've got to watch them play. I don't know them that well, and honestly, some of the guys in that room probably never heard of me before either, so it's even. But I've got to spend a lot of time with those guys, watch them play and see what they do well.

On the Blue Jackets' future beyond this season:

Anybody who's worried about next year is taking the wrong approach on this whole thing. All that matters right now is this year. All that matters is this game tonight, not what's going on next. Next year

will take care of itself. It will, and I'm not worried about next year one bit. I came in here to come in and get the mentality ... we've got to get dialed in today and then we've got to get dialed in tomorrow. I have the energy to do that, and that's my total focus.

On dealing with the challenge of the NHL's Olympic pause in February:

Actually, when we come back, we'll have a few quality practices. The schedule is what it is, and you don't have practice time or quality practice time, but we're going to practice and then we'll see where we are. Listen, we'll play tonight, and we'll evaluate what we like, what we didn't like, and then we'll fix it.

It'll be the same approach every day, and when we get into the Olympic break, they're going to get a good rest and I can go back on my boat for a few days, and then we'll just come back into camp and we'll know exactly what needs to be done and what we need to address.

On what he wants for Blue Jackets during his tenure as head coach:

They see a team that competes, that cares for each other and is playing hard for each other and for them. Listen, I've always loved coming into this rink since the day they came into this league. It's always a great atmosphere. I love it. From the day they came into the league, I've loved coming into this rink and they do have a very passionate fanbase, which we all love, but what we want them to see is a team out there. ... We want them to see a team that's committed to each other and playing as hard as they possibly can for each other, and when you're doing that, you're playing for the fans, as well.

On his structure limiting shots and scoring chances:

First of all, you can't beat up on (worrying about) shots against. If there's 25 shots from outside, you're gladly willing to give them up. Those 14 slot chances against? That's got to improve, and that takes a commitment from everybody. That's where we have to start making some adjustments. The goals against, we won a Presidents' Trophy in Winnipeg, and it was because of defense.

The last couple years, we played good defense and had a great goalie. We have two good goalies here. We do. We just need everyone in front of them to play hard. The biggest change you have to make is the 'compete.' That's where it starts, and the rest will take care of itself.

## The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets, Rick Bowness focused solely on the present

**By Brian Hedger – January 13, 2026**

Those hoping for clarity or a new vision for the Blue Jackets' future beyond this season didn't get it during an introductory press conference for coach Rick Bowness on Jan. 13 at Nationwide Arena.

A day after Bowness, 70, was stunningly named as Dean Evason's replacement, the Jackets' new bench boss joined president/general manager Don Waddell after his first morning skate.

The only future discussed was the game on tap Jan. 13 against the Calgary Flames, which Bowness was preparing to coach after pausing his retirement in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to accept the Blue Jackets' coaching job. Just 24 hours earlier, he had been on a boat with his wife, Judy.

"This all happened very quickly," Waddell said. "It was almost [11 a.m. on Jan. 12] and I caught Rick out on the boat with his wife. I asked him how he was doing and if he was interested in coaching our team, and it took him about five seconds to say, 'I'm in, let me just run it by my wife.' So, we put this deal together very quickly."

Waddell said he first began mulling a coaching change after the Blue Jackets coughed up a two-goal, third period lead in a 5-4 overtime loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Jan. 4 at Nationwide Arena. They also lost the next three games to start Evason's final road trip, which cinched Waddell's decision.

Bowness, Waddell said, will coach the Blue Jackets for the rest of this season. Nothing further is guaranteed. He's the head coach, not interim, which means there's a chance Bowness will run training camp next season ... unless somebody else does.

The uncertainty beyond this season has to be unsettling for players and remaining assistant coaches, but Bowness and Waddell don't want them thinking about anything farther out than what's left in this schedule.

Bowness said it's similar to when he was hired by the Winnipeg Jets in 2022. He took over their top coaching position after thinking he was retired and wound up coaching in Winnipeg until 2024, when unspecified health issues for him and his wife played a role in his actual retirement.

Now, having overcome those health issues, he's back.

"I went in [there in Winnipeg], and as I told the players, 'Listen, I'm not looking for a job after this. I'm coming in here, and I'm going to do and say whatever has to be done,'" Bowness said. "I'm not a 30-year-old coach worrying about my career. I'm at the end of my career, and I know that, and it'll be the same approach here."

So, the focus for the Blue Jackets is now microscopic.

It's game-to-game, day-to-day trying to see if a new coach can spark an unlikely rise from the bottom of the Eastern Conference back into playoff contention. Seven points stand between the Jackets and the East's second wild-card spot, and they need to leapfrog eight teams.

"Anybody who's worried about next year is taking the wrong approach on this whole thing," Bowness said. "All that matters right now is this year. All that matters is this game tonight, not what's going on

next. Next year will take care of itself. It will, and I'm not worried about next year one bit. I came in here to come in and get the mentality ... we've got to get dialed in on today, and then we've got to get dialed in on tomorrow. I have the energy to do that, and that's my total focus."

Bowness, like Evason, is personable and talks a good game.

Time will tell whether he can get the Blue Jackets to back up all his bluster about getting "nastier" and defending harder while holding leads in third periods, which is the biggest reason for the coaching change. The Blue Jackets have blown what feels like countless leads in third periods this season, much like they did two years ago under Pascal Vincent.

Those unclaimed points could've spared Evason and a fired assistant, Steve McCarthy, but they took the fall for Blue Jackets' shortcomings. Waddell and Blue Jackets players know it, and they accepted responsibility for their roles in those departures. Then, they cast their focus forward, but not looking anywhere beyond what's left this season.

Eight of the next 12 games, and seven of the next eight, will be at Nationwide Arena before the NHL pauses for the Olympics in February. It's now or never, the way the Blue Jackets see it, and that's why Bowness is here.

"The bottom line for us is that we haven't met our expectations, and it first starts with me," Waddell said. "We don't take any of this lightly. I have all the respect in the world for Dean and Steve, and I think last year they did a tremendous job in a very difficult situation, but, again, our expectations this year were higher than what we're achieving right now, and that's why we felt we'd make a change."

So, the future is now.

## The Columbus Dispatch / Noa Gaudreau sits next to Flames player Rasmus Andersson in interview

**By Dan Aulbach – January 14, 2026**

Calgary Flames defenseman Rasmus Andersson was joined by Noa Gaudreau, the daughter of the late Blue Jackets forward Johnny Gaudreau, during post-practice interviews on Jan. 12, a day ahead of the Blue Jackets-Flames meeting at Nationwide Arena.

Sporting a Johnny Gaudreau Flames jacket and two pigtails with pink ribbons, Noa Gaudreau sat quietly while Andersson answered reporters' questions before Andersson revealed that Noa had brought lollipops for his young children, Benjamin and Lucy.

"It is really special to come out here and get to see them," Andersson said of the Gaudreau family. "It fulfills your heart. Every opportunity we can get to see them, we make sure we do."

Meredith Gaudreau, Johnny's widow, attended the Flames practice at Nationwide Arena along with her children Noa, Johnny and Carter Gaudreau. At the practice, Andersson showed Noa Gaudreau his skates with "Gaudreau" written above the laces.

"He's always with me when I play," Andersson told Noa Gaudreau in video of the workout.

Andersson also spent some time with the Gaudreau family at their house before reporting to the rink.

"They put a smile on everyone's face when they're here," Andersson said.

Andersson and Johnny Gaudreau were teammates on the Flames for six seasons before Gaudreau signed with the Blue Jackets ahead of the 2022-23 NHL season.

It's been over a year since Gaudreau and his brother Matthew were killed by a motorist while biking together in Oldmans Township, New Jersey.

## The Columbus Dispatch / Blue Jackets hopeful Denton Mateychuk's injury isn't long-term issue

**By Brian Hedger – January 13, 2026**

Denton Mateychuk won't play for the Blue Jackets on Jan. 13 against the Calgary Flames in new coach Rick Bowness' debut at Nationwide Arena.

Mateychuk, who has been playing top defensive minutes as Zach Werenski's partner, skated just one shift in the Blue Jackets' 3-2 overtime victory Jan. 11 at Utah after being driven into the boards from behind by Brandon Tanev.

Blue Jackets president/general manager Don Waddell said Mateychuk had an upper-body injury that caused "a tingling in his arm," checked out by a physician Jan. 12 in Columbus and will get a second opinion Jan. 13 before a return timeline is issued.

"Assuming everything goes well today, I don't think it's going to be too long," Waddell said.

Mateychuk has eight goals, 13 assists and 21 points in 44 games during his second NHL season, doubling his goal output and nearly doubling his scoring line of 4-9-13 in 45 games last season as a rookie. Look for Jake Christiansen to draw back into the Blue Jackets' defensive pairings against the Flames, likely skating on the third pairing.

## The Hockey Writers / 3 Key Takeaways From Rick Bowness' First Blue Jackets' Press Conference

**By Mark Scheig - January 13, 2026**

It's already been an eventful week for the Columbus Blue Jackets. On Monday, the team announced the firings of head coach Dean Evason and assistant coach Steve McCarthy and the hiring of Rick Bowness. On Tuesday, Bowness held his first media availability.

Bowness alongside GM Don Waddell spent almost 30 minutes talking about how this all came to be and what fans can expect from this move. To say this happened fast would be an understatement. While the thought of making a coaching change started a week or so before, the events on Monday all happened in the span of about 4-5 hours.

Waddell said he called Bowness while he and his wife were on their boat. That was at 11 A.M. Monday. The job was offered at that moment.

Bowness admitted taking only about five seconds to say yes. With that, he's back in the NHL.

In talking to Zach Werenski on Tuesday morning, he said he found out the news of the coaching change around 4 P.M. The Blue Jackets announced the news at 4:30 P.M. eastern. Even the pregame email released at 3 P.M. eastern indicated Dean Evason was still the head coach.

It happened fast. It happened with purpose. What was going on with the Columbus Blue Jackets was not acceptable to anyone. In going over our three key takeaways from the availability, that's where we're going to start. Why did Waddell make the move to Bowness now?

### **Why The Change Was Made?**

Waddell wasted no time at the start of the press conference. His opening statement directly addressed why the coaching change was made.

"Making coaching changes in-season is never an easy decision," Waddell said. "A lot goes into those decisions. And the bottom line for us is we haven't met our expectations. And it first starts with me. We all take accountability in this, coaches, players and myself. We don't take any of this lightly. I have all the respect in the world for Dean (Evason) and Steve (McCarthy.) I think last year, they did a tremendous job in very difficult situations."

"But again, I think our expectations this year were higher than what we're achieving right now. That's why we felt we would make a change...It's a critical point of our season with 12 games, I believe, before we go on an Olympic break. I think eight at home. That's why we felt if we're going to do something, now is the time to do it. And so, we're very fortunate to be able to hire Rick Bowness."

The bar for the Blue Jackets was set at playoffs in the preseason. Last place in the Eastern Conference meant the first part of the season was a failure. Waddell admitted when this decision really started to become a real possibility.

“It started back when, probably that Pittsburgh game, just giving up that lead,” Waddell said. “Then watching our team play in San Jose and I talked to some of the younger guys who were on the team the whole time, talked to some of the leaders on the team and they weren’t by any means bashing the coach. But I could tell that they were frustrated with how things were going. So it all came to a point kind of over the weekend and when I got back and met with necessary people including my staff and then Mike (Priest) and ownership and that’s when we made a decision that we’d make a change.”

It’s clear that frustration has been building for some time. Consider the blown leads. Consider how the Blue Jackets have played in a lot of third periods. Then consider that as time went on, there was a noticeable change in the mood of the team. Players were clearly frustrated with each passing loss. Evason didn’t have a lot of answers for why things kept happening.

Instead of waiting until the Olympic break, Waddell took decisive action and made the move now with the hopes that the Blue Jackets will get a much needed bump. In our second key takeaway, they also hope to get a lot more of another important element in their game.

### **Defensive Structure**

Firing both Evason and McCarthy was a clear indication of what the Blue Jackets saw as an unacceptable issue. Their overall team defense was not good enough. In Bowness, the team gets an experienced coach known for structure especially in their own zone.

Bowness explained a little bit of what he hopes to bring as the head coach. He already explained to the players where he wants things to go.

“I talked to the players this morning,” Bowness said. “I looked at that goals against. I looked at the shots against. I looked at the penalty kill and looked at the slot chances against. I looked at the rush chances against. There’s the issue. Those issues will take you right out of the playoffs. They will. In our league, you don’t score your way into the...this isn’t the 80’s man. You don’t score your way into the playoffs. You defend your way into the playoffs. And you get your offense and play good, solid team defense. But that’s team defense. That’s everyone committed.”

“So we’re just going to try to get everyone to buy in a lot more defensively, far more committed. There’s some structural changes we can make, absolutely and we’re going to make them. But we have to tighten this thing up. And you tighten it up by giving them a game plan and then the onus is on them. Okay, this is what we need. Now do it. Right? So we’re going to be pushing them hard on that.”

Bowness led the 2023-24 Jets to the best team goals-against in the NHL at 2.41 goals per game. That’s almost a full goal per game less than this season’s Blue Jackets.

Whether they’re able to see significant improvement in 37 games is certainly a question. But there is no question what Bowness is going to try instilling with these Blue Jackets. Goals against and team defense will be a top priority.

### **Communication**

Bowness has always been known as a great communicator. He will bring that element to the Blue Jackets no matter how long a player has been in the league.

Bowness spent the first part of the morning skate going up to players and talking with them. He was seen talking with Adam Fantilli for a minute. Bowness then gave Fantilli a tap on the shin pads in encouragement.

The Blue Jackets' young stars Fantilli, Kent Johnson and Cole Sillinger haven't finished the way they would like. While Bowness will work on team defense, he knows that finding a way to get these three in particular going will be important.

Bowness explained his stance on the way he communicates to everyone. It will be of utmost importance to get to know the players as quickly as possible because as the coach said, "I don't know these guys that well."

"Spend time with them. Work with them," Bowness said. "Do a little video with them. Talk to them. Get to know them, right? I have to know basically what makes them tick. I need to spend time with them. There are those things. They do take time. I got to talk to every one of the players. I got to get to know them. And then it starts with that. I got to watch them play. Honestly, some of those guys in that room probably never heard of me before either so it's even."

"But I've got to spend a lot of time with those guys and I've got to watch them play and I've got to see what they do well and I've got to see what we can help them with...We've got to spend a lot of one-on-one time with every player in that room, veterans included not just the young guys. Then you go to your veterans and you get them to help. But there's going to be a lot of communication with this staff and each and every players. We have to get to know them and it starts with me."

With the number of games remaining starting to count down, this aspect will go a long way in determining if the Blue Jackets can salvage this season. They have to get to know their new head coach. When there are issues, they need to be an open-door on both sides to be able to address differences. With frustration mounting before, it's fair to wonder if communication really started to break down between Evason and the players.

Overall, the Blue Jackets had to act if they wanted a new voice in the room. They didn't hesitate when Bowness was available. Given what he brings, it's easy to see the logic in bringing a more defensive-minded coach who is good at communicating with his players.

The big question now is, will the expected coach bump be enough to push the Blue Jackets back into the playoff race? If not, what will the ramifications be?

The players are now on full notice. Waddell has done everything possible to wake them up including trades, signings and coaching firings.

If that doesn't work, the players will have no choice but to look at themselves in the mirror.