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The Athletic / After morning meeting, Blue Jackets' checking line erupts to lead rout of Leafs

By Aaron Portzline – October 29, 2025

On Wednesday morning in Nationwide Arena, center Charlie Coyle and wingers Cole Sillinger and Mathieu Olivier — the Columbus Blue Jackets' third line — gathered to watch some of their recent shifts to see how they could get better as a unit.

Turns out, they couldn't find any glaring problems. The diagnosis: "Just stay with it," Olivier said.

Oh, indeed.

Sillinger (two goals) and Olivier scored their first goals of the season, and all three players had career-best nights in major offensive categories, leading the Blue Jackets to a 6-3 rout of the Toronto Maple Leafs before 16,558 in Nationwide Arena.

Defensemen Zach Werenski, Ivan Provorov and Dante Fabbro also scored for the Blue Jackets, who have won three straight and five of their last six games.

On Tuesday, the Blue Jackets relied on their fourth line to earn a comeback win in Buffalo. One night later, it was the checking line.

"I felt good about the way we were playing, and I felt like we were a couple bounces away," Olivier said. "Sometimes talking it out and looking it over, it makes a huge difference. But I don't think any of us thought it was going to pay off the way it did tonight ... but pretty grateful it did."

The line came into the game with one goal, six assists and seven points in nine games. On Wednesday alone, they had 3-8-11. Appropriately, they were the game's first three stars: 1. Sillinger, 2. Coyle, 3. Olivier.

Sillinger matched a career high with three points and set a new best with a plus-4 rating. Coyle set a career high with four assists and a plus-5 rating. Olivier set career highs with three assists, four points and a plus-4 rating. For good measure, Coyle was 11 of 15 on faceoffs.

"We know what we're capable of," Coyle said. "I think from the start of the season, we've had opportunities. The end result hasn't been there fully, so we watched some video today, talked a lot about what we're doing right, and (agreed) to just stick with it.

"There were some things we can clean up and get better at, but it's nice when it kind of pays off right away and you get those bounces. Doing the right things, we knew this was bound to happen. We're just happy to help out any way we can, but that's what we're capable of."

The Blue Jackets jumped the Leafs from the start. Sillinger opened the scoring at 6:56 of the first period, and Leafs coach Craig Berube spent his timeout before the puck was dropped again. He wanted longer to consider a challenge to Sillinger's goal for offside, but he also wanted to berate his club for lackadaisical starts.

The lead grew to 2-0 on a Werenski goal at 11:16 before the Maple Leafs began to push back. The Leafs, playing without high-scoring winger William Nylander, pulled to 2-1 early in the second period and appeared to be taking control of the game.

But Provorov's goal at 8:33 of the second shifted the momentum back to Columbus, and it started a deluge. Sillinger scored his second of the night at 13:24 to make it 4-1 and Fabbro, off assists from Olivier and Sillinger, made it 5-1 at 16:58.

Olivier, who had a career-high 18 goals last season, scored his first at 7:50 of the third to make it 6-1.

"Our line is a good mix of everything," Sillinger said. "I mean, three bigger dudes who, you know, can play really well below the dots, and when we get the cycle going, we're tough to knock off the puck. And when teams give us time and space, we can capitalize.

"We had a little conversation, you know, and no one felt like they were pressing. No one had any panic. You trust it. We know that we're all on the same page, and it was nice to execute on that tonight."

The best news for Toronto, which has lost four of its last five against Columbus, is that few fans back home were likely watching. Game 5 of the World Series between the Toronto Blue Jays and Los Angeles Dodgers started about 40 minutes after puck drop.

Leafs center John Tavares scored his 500th career goal with 4:15 remaining, but there was little to celebrate. Goaltender Cayden Primeau made 18 saves.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' back-to-back sweep shows depth additions are paying off: takeaways

By Brian Hedger – October 30, 2025

Don Waddell didn't make many changes to the Blue Jackets' roster for two main reasons.

The Blue Jackets' president/general manager couldn't get a trade done for defenseman Noah Dobson, for one thing, and the second reason was the hand he'd already been dealt. So, after making a few understated tweaks to bolster his team's depth, he called it a summer.

Critics complained that merely re-signing defensemen Ivan Provorov and Dante Fabbro after acquiring veteran forwards Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood wasn't enough. The Blue Jackets would once again fall short of making the playoffs, they said, just like they usually do.

Well, after 10 games, Waddell's quiet offseason tinkering has helped the Blue Jackets make some noise. They're 6-4-0 after a 6-3 romp over the Toronto Maple Leafs on Oct. 29 at Nationwide Arena, could've won more if not for an early glut of overturned goals, and those depth pieces?

Look no further than the past two games for their impact.

Wood, in his return from a scary eye injury, sparked a thrilling comeback in a 4-3 overtime win on Oct. 28 in Buffalo, and Coyle's line keyed the Jackets' rout of the Maple Leafs. Matched up against Toronto's second line, which features star center John Tavares and high-scoring Matthew Knies, the Blue Jackets' third line dominated.

Coyle, who has eight points in nine games with a goal and seven assists, set a career high with four assists. Mathieu Olivier scored his first goal of the season that counted and set career highs with three assists and four points. Cole Sillinger, a center who's struggled on the wing, nearly notched his third career hat trick with two goals, one assist and three points.

Throw in Isac Lundeström's assist on Wood's OT winner in Buffalo plus goals from Provorov and Fabbro against Toronto and every single piece of Waddell's lowkey summer contributed to an impressive back-to-back sweep.

"We have a pretty solid lineup all the way up, and it's four lines who are reliable and can chip in," Coyle said. "Some nights, it's going to be one line. Some nights, it's going to be two lines. Some nights, it's going to be all the lines. When we play that way, the credit is going to be shared, and I think that's such a good thing that we have in this room, just unselfish people who don't mind that, if that's the case, and are willing to abide by that."

Coyle, it should be noted, knows a thing or two about playoff teams. This is his 14th NHL season, his fourth team, and he's never missed the postseason. It's still early, but the Blue Jackets are showing some hallmarks of a serious playoff contender.

Here are four more takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets' goaltending tandem flourishing

The Blue Jackets' alternating goalie deployment might be a bit unorthodox compared to how most NHL teams do it, but it's working for both Elvis Merzlikins and Jet Greaves.

There'll likely be a point where one of the two gets a run of consecutive starts, but that's down the road in a long season ahead. Right now, they're a tandem, and both are thriving.

Merzlikins allowed three goals on 36 shots against the Maple Leafs, but one of them was scored with a tremendous effort from Sammy Blais to keep his stick below the height of the crossbar while the other two were scored late with the game already decided.

Merzlikins improved to 4-1-0 with a 2.97 goals-against average and .915 save percentage a day after Greaves upped his numbers to 2-3-0 with a 2.81 GAA and .907 save percentage.

They've quickly become one of the NHL's top tandems starting out.

Zach Werenski off to another strong start for Columbus Blue Jackets

Zach Werenski added a goal and assist against the Maple Leafs to bring his season scoring totals to three goals, five assists and eight points. He's again seated among the top offensive defensemen in the NHL, tied for second in goals and seventh in points.

After finishing runner-up for the Norris Trophy last season, the Blue Jackets' star defenseman is off to another strong start. He might be approaching a hot streak, too, with 2-2-4 in the past two games.

Werenski sat out a few shifts in the third period against Toronto, but coach Dean Evason indicated that it was an effort to avoid overusing him in a blowout.

Columbus Blue Jackets improving in back-to-back games

After missing the playoffs by two points last season, the Blue Jackets identified some key areas of improvement to avoid the same fate this time around.

One was winning more away from Nationwide Arena, which they've done with a 4-1-0 record in their first five road games. Another was winning more back-to-backs after going 8-14-2 overall last year in 12 back-to-backs, including 2-10-0 in second games.

They're 3-1-0 overall after playing their first two of 15 back-to-backs this season, including 2-0-0 in second games.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets rout Toronto Maple Leafs, 6-3, for third straight win

By Brian Hedger – October 29, 2025

Make it three straight wins for the Blue Jackets plus something else that'd become a rarity around Columbus.

After downing the Toronto Maple Leafs 6-3 on Oct. 29 at Nationwide Arena, the Jackets entertained a crowd of 16,558 by sweeping their second of 15 back-to-back sets on this season's schedule. That might not sound like a big, but the Blue Jackets (6-4-0) had done six times in the previous five years.

After pulling off an exciting 4-3 overtime win with a late comeback Oct. 28 in Buffalo, the Blue Jackets returned home looking for the sweep against the Leafs, who were looking for the same outcome after downing the Calgary Flames Oct. 28 in Toronto.

The Jackets found the broom closet first.

"Sometimes, maybe it's just the way you approach it, knowing the year prior it hasn't gone your way (in back-to-backs)," said forward Mathieu Olivier, who scored his first goal of the season and added a career-high three assists. "Maybe you bring a more ready and focused attitude towards it. ... it just feels like this year we know how to stay composed and handle ourselves in those situations."

Paced by an outstanding performance from the checking line of center Charlie Coyle, left wing Cole Sillinger and Olivier on right wing, Columbus cruised to a third straight win.

Coyle dished out a career-high four assists, Olivier added his four points with a goal and three assists, and Sillinger tacked on three points with two goals and one assist. They were also on the ice in the first period when the puck stopped within less than an inch of fully crossing the Maple Leafs' goal line. That would've been the first of five goals the Jackets' third line instead of their four that counted.

"They've played really well for awhile now," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "They just hadn't gotten rewarded. They've been around the net and doing the right things in all three zones, so it's nice for them to get rewarded here tonight."

Elvis Merzlikins made 34 saves for the goaltending win, frustrating the Maple Leafs (5-5-1) on a night they finished with a 37-25 edge in shots, and three Blue Jackets defensemen scored goals: Zach Werenski, Dante Fabbro and Ivan Provorov.

Cayden Primeau took the loss in net for the Maple Leafs, who got goals from Sammy Blais, John Tavares and Nicholas Robertson. Tavares' goal was the 500th of his NHL career.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Crush Maple Leafs on Night John Tavares Scores 500th Goal

By Mark Scheig – October 29, 2025

Both the Columbus Blue Jackets and Toronto Maple Leafs played early on Tuesday during Hockey Frenzy. They were the main attraction on Wednesday night as the only game in the NHL. The Blue Jackets did not disappoint.

One night after the Blue Jackets' fourth line helped them to victory in Buffalo, it was the third line's turn to carry the weight. Cole Sillinger, Charlie Coyle and Mathieu Olivier combined for 3-8-11 to lift the Blue Jackets to a convincing 6-3 win over the Maple Leafs.

The Blue Jackets' dominance overshadowed some NHL history for John Tavares.

Game Recap

While both the Blue Jackets and Maple Leafs had to deal playing on a back-to-back, it was the home team that had the jump early. It resulted in an early 1-0 lead.

Sillinger scored his first goal of the season by driving the net. He took a pass from Coyle and then beat defenseman Simon Benoit to the net. Turning backhand to forehand, Sillinger beat Cayden Primeau to open the scoring.

Just over four minutes later, Coyle was at it again. This time, Olivier hit Matias Maccelli to the ice. Coyle slid the puck to Zach Werenski who led what turned into both a Flying V and a 5-on-1 rush. Werenski's third of the season made it 2-0 after one.

The Maple Leafs pushed to start the second and got a goal from Sammy Blais. He made his Maple Leafs' debut for an injured William Nylander. Blais batted the puck out of the air past Elvis Merzlikins.

The Blue Jackets then dominated for the rest of the night. Goals by Ivan Provorov, Sillinger again and Dante Fabbro turned a 2-1 game into a 5-1 game in the span of just over eight minutes.

In the third, Olivier extended to 6-1 by collecting his fourth point of the night. Coyle recorded his fourth assist of the game. This goal prompted some Leafs' fans to throw jerseys on the ice in Columbus that the officials quickly picked up.

Then NHL history was made. With 4:15 left in the game, Tavares became the 49th player in NHL history to record 500 career goals. He finished off a Matthew Knies pass. There wasn't much celebration given the score. But there was some applause when the achievement was announced.

Nick Robertson capped the scoring with 1:50 left to get to the final of 6-3. Merzlikins finished with 33 saves on the night. Meanwhile, Primeau stopped just 18 of 24. Steven Lorentz had to leave the game near the end of the second period due to an upper-body injury and wasn't able to return.

Both the Blue Jackets and Maple Leafs will get Thursday off. The Blue Jackets will host the St. Louis Blues on Saturday while the Maple Leafs travel to Philadelphia to take on the Flyers on Saturday night.

The Athletic / NHL changing of guard? Up-and-comers put pressure on Leafs, Oilers, Wild: 'Everybody is better'

By Pierre LeBrun – October 29, 2025

A unique offseason has spilled over into a fascinating opening three weeks of the NHL season.

This past summer was unlike any other in recent memory, with nearly the entire league wanting to be buyers — a sign that the NHL's recent hierarchy was in flux.

It is early, to be sure, so it's important not to overreact. But through Monday, up-and-coming teams such as the Utah Mammoth, New Jersey Devils and Montreal Canadiens were at the top of their respective divisions, and the Detroit Red Wings, Anaheim Ducks, Seattle Kraken and Chicago Blackhawks were trending up as well.

Change is in the air.

"The system is working the way it should work," three-time reigning general manager of the year Jim Nill of the Dallas Stars told *The Athletic* this week. "These teams that have been doing a great job of drafting, they've done a good job of developing players and they're getting better. And the teams that have been in the playoffs, we're just trying to keep our teams together, but the cap comes into play. So it spreads the resources around.

"You're going to have a tighter league. There's no easy points out there. Everybody is better. The competitive balance has never been tighter."

What we seem to be seeing is the overlap of rebuilding programs ready to take a step and existing programs not ready to give way yet. Something's got to give.

"There's a lot of teams like Anaheim, like us, like the Montreals of the world, that are pushing upward," Utah Mammoth GM Bill Armstrong told *The Athletic* this week. "We've all got young guys that can push the pace. And they're hungry. I think it's really interesting for the league to have those games. Like us and Colorado last week (a 4-3 OT win for Utah), that early in the season on a Tuesday night, that's the goodness of the league right now. Montreal's walking into these places. We're walking into these places. So is San Jose, even. They're an exciting team.

"There's a lot of youth excitement in the league. There's a lot of teams pushing upward. There's also a lot of teams trying to extend their windows, and they're still very good teams. So it's going to be a battle. It's exciting."

Established contenders like the Edmonton Oilers, Toronto Maple Leafs and Tampa Bay Lightning are off to middling starts. Teams with playoff aspirations like the Minnesota Wild, St. Louis Blues and the New York Rangers look sluggish.

Even the two-time-defending Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers are trying to survive with two of their top players out long-term. (Hint: They will indeed survive.)

And having said all that, last place in the Eastern Conference is just a point or two out of the last wild-card spot, depending on the day, so again, it's still early, and parity is very much at play.

But for several years now, the Tampa Bays and Dallases and Colorados of the world have used the regular season just to get their game in shape for the playoffs. That may not be a luxury this season with so many teams realistically knocking at the door.

"You have to be careful," agreed Nill, whose club has a core that appears set to contend for several more years. "You get behind now, and it's hard to make up points. One loss in October or November could cost you a playoff spot come April. That's how tight the league is.

"These teams have all gotten better. You look at the young talent in the league now, it's off the charts."

What some team executives around the league believe we could see is fewer teams hitting the established range for potential contenders of 95 to 105 points, with a larger group of clubs in the range of 90 to 95. It could be a really wild finish in that case.

But at some point in December or January, some teams will also be having more honest conversations about where this season is headed.

Just because 25-plus teams were trying to be buyers last summer doesn't mean 25-plus teams will be saying they're still in the mix come January. The math suggests that can't be the case.

The funny thing is, the team that most wanted to be sellers this past summer, the Pittsburgh Penguins, is off to a surprisingly good start. Odds are the Penguins will come back to earth at some point, although I would never bet against the ageless Sidney Crosby.

Regardless of how it all plays out, it feels like we're in a very interesting time in the NHL as longtime contenders try to keep their windows open and rebuilding programs try to take that next step.

"Some teams have been good for so long, and some teams are getting better. At some point, there has to be a give somewhere," Philadelphia Flyers GM Daniel Briere told *The Athletic* this week. "Not the whole league can be contenders. Maybe there's a little bit of a shift coming. We're in an interesting time of change."

Briere's rebuilding team is part of that, too, trying to push up.

And he could feel this moment coming.

"Absolutely," Briere said. "I said that this summer when I was talking to teams. The prior couple of years, there were many teams that were clearly in rebuild mode and weren't looking to acquire players that could help them in the moment. It was all about the future. This summer, other than maybe one or two teams, everyone was looking to get better.

"One of the things for me is that with the salary cap going up, that helps teams be more aggressive acquiring more contracts and having more space to deal with it. So I think that has something to do with it. And then, some of those teams that have been rebuilding for the last two, three, four years, at some point you want to see a little bit of an improvement. And that includes us. I'm not saying we're a contender yet, but we want to start seeing some strides from our players while also keeping in mind we're a young team and we're still being careful with our future."

The Mammoth swung a big trade for JJ Peterka but otherwise were careful in free agency, adding the likes of Brandon Tanev and Nate Schmidt but not overdoing it.

Their window is opening, and the idea is to make sure a young core takes multiple swings at it over time. The sizzling start to the season suggests the Mammoth might be ready to indeed take that next step.

"If you're a good team, or you're going to become a good team, there are these moments where you can see it earlier," Armstrong said. "That's what we're seeing right now, you know?"

"Our goal is to make the playoffs. We've got to keep that focus. Nobody remembers two years from now how good your start was, right? They only remember if you made the playoffs."

Meanwhile, the long-standing contenders remain all-in, and I would imagine the Oilers and Lightning and Maple Leafs, for instance, find their way. But it's also worth remembering all three of those perennial contenders already don't have their first-round pick next June.

They're not alone. Dallas, Florida, Vegas and Colorado are also without a first-round pick in '26. All worth it for teams trying to win it all. In the Stars' case, when it's part of getting Mikko Rantanen and getting him signed long-term to what now looks like a very, very reasonable contract in the new NHL salary landscape, you're trading those assets all day long.

But what if one of these teams' windows closes earlier than expected? The Leafs and Lightning, for example, also don't have first-round picks in '27, which is fine from their perspective because those programs intend to contend for a few more years yet.

Regardless of how it shakes out, it feels unmistakable that the 2025-26 season will be revealing in many ways about windows and ascents and descents with numerous teams around the NHL.

A changing of the guard, but some of the old guard aren't ready to give way.

It promises to be fascinating theater.