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[Cleveland.com/ Why firing Dean Evason was a rare bold move the Blue Jackets had to make: Tim Bielik](#)

By Time Bielik – January 12, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Dean Evason paid the price for what has been a very disappointing 2025-26 season for the Blue Jackets to this point.

Despite a 3-2 overtime win at Utah on Sunday night to prevent the Blue Jackets from going 0-4 on a Western road trip, Evason and assistant coach Steve McCarthy were fired on Monday.

In their stead, Rick Bowness will be the team's head coach starting with Tuesday night's home game against the Flames.

Things changed fast for Evason and the Blue Jackets. They had been considered an NHL darling last season after making an inspired push to finish just one point out of a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

But even though general manager Don Waddell had made multiple moves to strengthen the roster, including trading for forwards Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood, and getting solid goaltending from Jet Greaves, the Blue Jackets are in last place in the East with 45 points in 45 games.

The season was essentially on the brink after being routed in three consecutive losses to the Sharks, Golden Knights and Avalanche. It still might be over considering they enter Monday night seven points out of a playoff spot and needing to climb over eight teams, including the reigning two-time Stanley Cup Champion Florida Panthers and reigning Presidents' Trophy winning Washington Capitals among others, to get there.

Even if the Blue Jackets don't get to the playoffs, which does appear highly unlikely, this move represents a different direction for the franchise.

I wrote two years ago after they fired Jarmo Kekalainen that the team needed to operate more like the Cleveland Browns in one particular sense. When things go wrong for the Browns, they aren't afraid to make changes.

This was a team that was supposed to contend for the playoffs led by young budding stars Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko, not to mention having one of the NHL's best offensive defensemen in Zach Werenski.

To be clear, Evason wasn't the only person to blame. However, it felt like the team had not been improving throughout the season.

The magic of last season just hasn't been there, particularly on offense. They were seventh in the league in scoring last season (3.26 goals per game) and are back down to 20th this season (2.91 gpg). They have also been one of the worst teams in terms of converting offensive chances, ranking fourth worst in shooting percentage (9.6%) despite having the fourth-most shots.

According to MoneyPuck.com, the Blue Jackets rank 10th in expected goals for (142.25). So based on that metric, they are underperforming by more than 11 goals.

They were also expected to be better defensively, but they allow 3.38 goals per game, which is 28th in the league. McCarthy, who has been in charge of the defense since September of 2021, has struggled to produce a unit that can keep pucks out of the net. In his tenure, the Blue Jackets had never finished better than 25th in goals against.

The biggest problem for the Blue Jackets all season has been blowing leads in the third period. While teams are going to give up third-period leads in this compressed season due to the upcoming Olympic break, Columbus had been doing this far too regularly.

Starting with a collapse to the Islanders on Nov. 2, the Blue Jackets have lost 12 third-period leads. Most significantly came on Jan. 4 against Pittsburgh when the Blue Jackets had a 4-1 lead late in the second and gave up three unanswered goals, including two in the third, to send the game to overtime. Sidney Crosby scored in overtime to give the Penguins a stunning 5-4 win.

The Blue Jackets lost their next three by a combined score of 14-5.

The inability to fix their blown-lead problem has doomed the Blue Jackets to a season in which they have been one of the league's biggest disappointments.

This was supposed to be the season the team exited its rebuild. Both Fantilli and Werenski had said in September the season would be a "failure" if they missed the playoffs.

However, they have seen teams like the Sharks, who had the worst record in the NHL the last two seasons, pass them by. The Ducks looked like they had as well although they are in a freefall with losses in nine straight and 11 of their past 12.

The Blackhawks have 45 points this season to match the Blue Jackets despite not having Connor Bedard for 13 games.

Those had been teams that picked in the same area as Columbus the past few years, and they all have looked better for most of the season than Columbus has.

In addition, Fantilli and Marchenko haven't taken the leaps in their games they were expected to. More shockingly has been the fall of former fifth overall pick Kent Johnson, who has fewer points (12) than Ivan Provorov (18) and Damon Severson (17).

When you add all those problems together, there's no other way to put it.

This season has been a failure to this point, and they now have just a 7.4% chance to avoid that failure and make the playoffs according to MoneyPuck. Something had to change as a result.

Tuesday's game against the Flames, who have the third-fewest points in the NHL at 42, starts a stretch where Columbus plays seven of its next eight at home. If they want any shot at making the playoffs, they need to get hot and in a hurry.

That hot streak just never felt like it was coming with Evason and McCarthy.

The reality for the Blue Jackets is this season might be beyond saving. And I was actually about to write something about that for this week.

But this decision isn't about saving a season. It's about trying to get the train back on track to continue the momentum of this rebuild.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. This is definitely a desperate time for the Blue Jackets, and firing the head coach after a win is a desperate measure. However, this is the right time for the Blue Jackets to be this bold. Any hope of a miracle requires desperate measures.

[Cleveland.com / Blue Jackets make significant changes behind the bench amidst disappointing season](#)

By Tim Bielik – January 12, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Blue Jackets have fired head coach Dean Evason and assistant coach Steve McCarthy on Monday. They have also hired Rick Bowness as the team's head coach.

The firings come a day after the Blue Jackets won at Utah, 3-2, to prevent an 0-4 road trip. But Columbus sits in last place in the Eastern Conference with a record of 19-19-7 and 45 points. They are seven points out of a playoff spot.

Evason had been hired as head coach prior to the 2024-25 season and led one of the biggest surprises in the NHL. In a season that began with the tragic passing of Johnny Gaudreau, the Blue Jackets finished the season one point out of a playoff spot.

McCarthy has been an assistant with the Blue Jackets since September of 2021, running the defense. But in his five seasons, Columbus has never been higher than 25th in goals against.

"This season has been a frustrating one for all of us and the bottom line is we are not performing at a level that meets our expectations. We all share in that responsibility, me included, and while this was not a decision that was made lightly, it is one that needed to be made at this time," Blue Jackets president and general manager Don Waddell said in a release announcing the news. "Dean did a tremendous job last year under extremely difficult circumstances and I thank him for that. I also want to thank Steve for his commitment to our club over the past five years."

The 70-year-old Bowness has had multiple stops as a head coach, most recently coaching the Stars from 2019-20 to 2021-22, and the Jets from 22-23 to 23-24. He led the Stars to the 2020 Stanley Cup Final in the Edmonton bubble and had a record of 98-57-9 (205 points).

"I appreciate the opportunity to come to Columbus because it is a good organization with good people and this is a team that I think I can help improve," Bowness said in a statement. "I'm thankful to Don and (Blue Jackets President) Mike Priest and I'm really excited to work with our players and coaching staff to help get us where we want to go."

The Athletic / Time ran out for Dean Evason with Blue Jackets struggling to find their fire

By Aaron Portzline – January 12, 2026

SALT LAKE CITY — The conventional wisdom was that the Columbus Blue Jackets would wait until the NHL’s Olympic break in February to change coaches, giving Dean Evason and his staff the next three weeks to turn around what has been a disappointing season.

Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell didn’t see it that way. The next three weeks *are* the Blue Jackets’ season, and if they don’t start to make a major move up the Eastern Conference, there won’t be time for anybody to save them.

Evason was fired on Monday, a day after the Blue Jackets beat the Utah Mammoth 3-2 in overtime, but also after a 1-3-0 road trip that saw them continue to languish at the bottom of the standings.

It couldn’t wait.

The Blue Jackets play seven of their next eight games in Nationwide Arena, and they’ll do so under coach Rick Bowness, 70, who was hired by Waddell to coach for the rest of this season.

The team also fired assistant coach Steve McCarthy, who had spent the past 11 seasons with the organization as a minor-league player, a minor-league assistant coach and eventually as an assistant in Columbus since 2021.

Waddell on Sunday told *The Athletic* that this season was “the most frustrating” of his 25-plus years of experience as an executive in the NHL. His biggest gripe was the Blue Jackets’ maddening habit of blowing third-period leads.

In nine of their 27 losses (regulation and beyond), the Blue Jackets have held a third-period lead before collapsing and losing.

It’s possible, likely even, that the 5-4 overtime loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Jan. 4 was the beginning of Evason’s end. The Blue Jackets led 4-1 after Zach Werenski scored early in the second period, but were simply overwhelmed by the Penguins the rest of the game. The air in Nationwide was such that everybody seemed to know what was going to happen even before Sidney Crosby assisted on the tying goal late in regulation and ended it with his OT goal at 2:22 of the extra period.

Evason insisted his coaching philosophy didn’t change in the third period. He didn’t encourage reckless puck decisions, certainly, but he didn’t coach his players to retreat and simply play defense.

It just looked that way. And frankly, his post-game explanations — blaming bad bounces, incredibly talented opponents, etc. — fell flat with Blue Jackets fans, and they must have with Waddell, too.

It was clear the Blue Jackets had zero confidence playing with a lead, and there weren’t any clear explanations of how that was going to change.

When asked by *The Athletic* on Sunday for his evaluation of Evason, Waddell stopped short of giving him a public vote of confidence.

“It’s my job to keep evaluating it,” Waddell said. “I think most nights Dean puts us in a position to win. The question is always, ‘Is it the players or the coach?’ if you look at a lot of our goals against, and it’s a player making a mistake.”

But if that keeps happening ...

Werenski had an interesting quote after that loss to the Penguins. He didn’t name Evason, and it was clear he wasn’t talking specifically about the coach, but more about the way the Blue Jackets responded when the heat was dialed up on them.

“We have offensive-zone chances (all game), we’re scoring goals, and then ...” Werenski said. “I know we have a lead and you don’t want to turn pucks over, but sometimes making a play is the right play. I feel like sometimes we just chip pucks out and chip them in, and, you know, we’re just giving the other team the puck sometimes.

“I feel like that’s contagious. I don’t want to say get reckless with it, but we have a lot of guys who can make plays here, and I feel like sometimes when we get a lead, we resort to playing too simple.”

Another reason Evason’s firing was such a surprise is that he seemed like such a perfect fit for the franchise during an unspeakably difficult time last season.

Along with Waddell, Evason helped the organization and the players process and play amid the grief they suffered when Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were struck and killed by an alleged drunk driver just a few weeks before training camp was to open. The Blue Jackets went on to have one of the most impressive and emotional seasons in franchise history, winning their final six games and finishing just two points — one win — out of the playoffs.

It was about this time last season that the Blue Jackets began to string together wins and develop an identity. They never took nights off, never shied away from finishing checks, and were as hungry in front of the net — at both ends of the ice — as any club in the NHL, despite an enormous wave of injuries earlier in the season.

Other than a few nights early this season, that fire has been either missing or sporadic. The Blue Jackets played hard most nights, but they weren’t as hard to play against. And their identity was anybody’s guess.

The Blue Jackets signed Evason to a three-year contract when they hired him in the summer of 2024, so they owe him through the end of next season. There was also an option for a fourth year, but it’s unclear if that option was Evason’s, the club’s or a mutual option between the two parties.

Waddell and Evason declined to be interviewed when reached by *The Athletic* on Monday. The Blue Jackets will have a press conference at noon on Tuesday to introduce Bowness, who has spent more than 1,200 games behind an NHL bench as a head coach or an assistant. He’ll make his Columbus debut later that evening against the Calgary Flames.

Neither the Blue Jackets nor Waddell attached the word “interim” to Bowness on Monday, but Waddell confirmed in a text exchange that he’ll be the coach for the rest of the season.

Bowness stepped down as coach of the Winnipeg Jets at the end of the 2024 season, saying “it’s time,” after nearly 50 years in the NHL as a player and coach. He also cited minor medical issues, a desire to spend more time with family, and his own personal disappointment that he couldn’t guide the Jets further in the playoffs.

Considering that, it doesn’t sound as if either Waddell or Bowness expects this to be anything more than a brief relationship in Columbus.

Incredibly, Bowness becomes the Blue Jackets’ fifth head coach since John Tortorella and the club mutually parted ways after the 2020-21 season. Since then, Brad Larsen (two seasons), Mike Babcock (fired without coaching any games), Pascal Vincent (one), and Evason (barely 1 1/2 seasons) have had short stints in Columbus.

The Blue Jackets will likely be looking for yet another coach this summer. By making the change now, Waddell hopes to give Bowness enough time to spark a second-half rally toward the playoffs.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets fire Dean Evason, name Rick Bowness head coach

By The Athletic NHL Staff – January 12, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets fired coach Dean Evason on Monday and replaced him with veteran coach Rick Bowness, the team announced.

Evason was in the middle of his second season in Columbus, and after high expectations to start the season, the Blue Jackets are in last place in the Metropolitan Division with a 19-19-7 record. Evason still had one more year left on his contract, plus an option for 2027-28.

General manager Don Waddell said in a statement: “This season has been a frustrating one for all of us and the bottom line is we are not performing at a level that meets our expectations. We all share in that responsibility, me included, and while this was not a decision that was made lightly it is one that needed to be made at this time. Dean did a tremendous job last year under extremely difficult circumstances and I thank him for that. I also want to thank Steve for his commitment to our club over the past five years.”

The 70-year-old Bowness has been out of the league since leaving the Winnipeg Jets after the 2023-24 season. He previously coached Dallas to the Stanley Cup Final and had stints with Boston, Ottawa and the New York Islanders.

“Rick Bowness is a tremendous coach with invaluable experience and knowledge, and he will bring a steadiness to our team at an important juncture in our season,” Waddell said. “He is a good communicator whose teams play with structure, are sound defensively and we believe he is the right person to bring out the best in our group.”

The Blue Jackets also fired assistant coach Steve McCarthy.

In an interview with Aaron Portzline of The Athletic on Sunday, Waddell called this “the most frustrating year” of his lengthy career as an NHL executive, and was asked directly about Evason’s job status. Waddell said, “It’s my job to keep evaluating it. I think most nights Dean puts us in a position to win. The question is always, ‘Is it the players or the coach?’ If you look at a lot of our goals against, and it’s a player making a mistake.

“It’s on all of us. We should all be evaluated right now. The way things have gone, we expected to be better. I’ve talked to our leadership group (of players) and we think we’re a better team than we’ve shown. So now we have to show it.”

The Athletic/ Blue Jackets Monday Gathering: GM Don Waddell calls this season his 'most frustrating'

By Aaron Portzline – January 12, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio — A collection of notes, insights, ruminations and did-you-knows gathered throughout the week that was for the Columbus Blue Jackets:

Item No. 1: Crucial point

Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell has been an NHL executive for more than 25 years, including a long run with an expansion franchise, the Atlanta Thrashers. He's also not prone to hyperbole, which is why the following quote packs such a punch.

"In all my years in the NHL," Waddell told The Athletic, "this is the most frustrating year I've been through."

"The first thing I have to do when things aren't going well is look in the mirror. Are we good enough? Forget about what everybody's going to tell me, because everybody's going to tell me what I want to hear. But when I really look at all the numbers and really break it down ... if we were a bad team, we wouldn't have the (underlying) numbers we have."

The most maddening tendency, Waddell said, is how the Blue Jackets have completely unraveled in the third period this season. The Jackets have outscored opponents 48-40 in the first period. They've been outscored 51-48 in the second period.

But the third period has been a nightmare. They've been outscored 63-39 in the final 20 minutes, which is the most goals allowed by any NHL club in the third period and the worst margin (minus-24).

"For some reason, it comes down to those third periods, and for some reason, a two-goal lead heading into the third period? It's not good for us," Waddell said. "The results aren't good for us."

"The last two were against Pittsburgh and New Jersey, too, and those are two teams we're chasing. That's the really frustrating part, not just how we've lost but how we've given up points within our division."

That begs an obvious question: Is Blue Jackets' coach Dean Evason safe, barely 1 1/2 seasons into his Columbus tenure?

"It's my job to keep evaluating it," Waddell said. "I think most nights Dean puts us in a position to win. The question is always, 'Is it the players or the coach?' If you look at a lot of our goals against, and it's a player making a mistake."

"It's on all of us. We should all be evaluated right now. The way things have gone, we expected to be better. I've talked to our leadership group (of players) and we think we're a better team than we've shown. So now we have to show it."

Waddell spoke on Sunday afternoon before the Blue Jackets came back from a 2-1 deficit to beat the Utah Mammoth 3-2 in overtime. It was a much-needed win to avoid a disastrous four-game road trip, but one win doesn't change much.

The Blue Jackets begin this week in last place in the Eastern Conference, seven points behind Washington for the final playoff spot. The bigger issue, however, is the traffic jam in front of them. They'd need to leapfrog eight clubs just to land the second wild-card spot.

Only once this season have the Blue Jackets won more than three games in a row, but they need to go streaking, and quickly. Seven of their next eight games are in Nationwide Arena, beginning with Tuesday's game vs. Calgary.

This upcoming stretch, leading up to the NHL's three-week break for the Olympics in February, will go a long way to deciding what Waddell does — buy? dump? stand pat? — before the NHL trade deadline on March 6.

Three weeks ago, Waddell was still in "buy" mode, hoping to help save this season by acquiring Mason Marchment from the Seattle Kraken. Now, he waits for Blue Jackets players and coaches to dictate his next moves.

"I don't see a lot happening from our end right now," Waddell said. "You get to the Olympic break, assess where you are. Unless something pops up that just makes too much sense, that's the position I'm in."

There is an NHL roster freeze in effect during the Olympic break, but that doesn't mean that GMs can't talk. And once the Blue Jackets return to action, they have only five games before the trade deadline.

Put another way: there's not much more time for these Blue Jackets to state their case.

"We've got a pretty good home schedule coming up, some games we should win," Waddell said.

"Doesn't mean we're going to, but we should win. And we'll go from there."

Item No. 2: Rock 'em, sock 'em

On Jan. 10, 2002, Blue Jackets winger Jody Shelley fought Chicago's Bob Probert three times, the only time in Columbus franchise history that a player has had three major penalties in the same game.

On Oct. 30, 2008, two NHL welterweights — Blue Jackets winger Derek Dorsett and Colorado's Darcy Tucker — switched from right to left to right again in their rapid-fire, rock 'em, sock 'em bout in Denver.

On Nov. 21, 2014, Blue Jackets defenseman Dalton Prout dropped Boston's Milan Lucic with one punch — a mighty uppercut right — in Nationwide Arena.

There was the night when Alexander Svitov ragdolled Chicago's Duncan Keith, and the time Brandon Dubinsky goaded Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby into a fight, and that out-of-nowhere sequence when Duvie Westcott just unloaded on Detroit's Sean Avery...

But there's no question that Mathieu Olivier's bout with San Jose's Ryan Reaves last week is on the short list of the Blue Jackets' most memorable fights. Two aspects of it really stood out.

Both Olivier and Reaves started throwing rights immediately after they had a left-hand hold on each others' sweaters. Maybe three seconds into the scrap, both fighters completely opened up and made the decision to simply trade rights.

"Once we both got our grabs, and the fact that we're of a similar size ... at that point, I just figured we were going to be trading shots," Olivier said. "I didn't think it'd be that insane. But once we get going there, I don't have time to think. It's just pretty much 'go.'"

Olivier, considered by most to be the NHL's top fighter, kept his heavyweight belt. After a series of rights, Reaves' knees buckled.

But something happened on Reaves' way to the ice. With his left hand still clutching Reaves' sweater, Olivier pulled up to help break his fall.

As strange as it might sound, it was an indication of how much respect Olivier has, not only for those who ply his trade, but for a player such as Reaves, who's in his 16th NHL season as an enforcer.

Reaves didn't have to "take" this fight. But, Reaves said, it's part of "the code," a set of unwritten rules that was pretty clear when Reaves came into the league and when every NHL club had at least one fighter.

The code has seemed to fade, along with fighting itself, in recent seasons. But it's the very reason Reaves was willing to fight right after a Blue Jackets goal cut San Jose's lead to 2-1.

"Olivier asked me (to fight)," Reaves told San Jose media after the game. "If I say no, and I need one (a fight) later, he's gonna say no. There are not a lot of guys who are willing to give guys (fights) anymore.

"I know in the future, I'm going to need one from him, and I'm sure he'll give it to me."

As for the fight...

"He's one of the toughest in the league," Reaves said. "It's the first time I've been caught (with a punch) and knocked down like that. When you go up against a guy like that ... I'm 38, I'm getting a little older.

"Eventually, I was going to get caught. Today was the day. We'll get 'em back next time."

The fight went viral online the next day. It's been posted on multiple sites, with well over a million combined clicks. The only fight of Olivier's that has drawn more attention was his lopsided win over the New York Rangers' Matt Rempe last season.

Olivier is torn by all of the attention, he said, mostly because of how it makes Reaves look.

"This one went way viral, yeah," Olivier told The Athletic. "It's a little crazy, and I'm not a big fan of that, actually. I appreciate people's interest, and they think it's awesome.

"But, and I've always said this, anyone can get caught (with a punch). You can be on the bad end of a fight at any time. Nobody is going to go unvanquished this career. I like that it gets people into going and the entertainment value of it, but it's a little weird to see it go viral like that."

Item No. 3: Snacks

- Dmitri Voronkov's goal at 1:01 of overtime on Sunday, clinching the Blue Jackets' 3-2 win over Utah, marked the 19th time in franchise history that Columbus has won an overtime game with a power-play goal. The last time it happened was March 24, 2023, when Boone Jenner scored 40 seconds into overtime to beat goaltender Ilya Sorokin and the New York Islanders. You might be surprised by the player who, according to the NHL's stats department, scored the most overtime power-play goals for the Blue Jackets: Jaroslav Spacek, who did it three times. Artemi Panarin, R.J. Umberger and David Vyborny each did it twice.

- Blue Jackets defenseman Erik Gudbranson (lower body), out since Oct. 25, is expected to start practicing with the club this week, a big step forward toward his return. Gudbranson did not travel with the club on this just-completed road trip, but he's been skating on his own for the past couple of weeks. Meanwhile, winger Mason Marchment (upper body) is said to be approximately 10 days away from a return.
- Egor Zamula signed with the Blue Jackets last Tuesday, picking Columbus among a cluster of clubs that expressed interest after he became a free agent earlier in the day, after Pittsburgh terminated his contract. So, why Columbus? "I talked to the guys back home before I signed here," said Zamula, a native of Chelyabinsk, Russia. "A lot of Russians have played for this team for a long time. (Sergei) Bobrovsky, (Vladislav) Gavrikov, (Ivan) Provorov, (Kirill) Marchenko, (Dmitri) Voronkov They tell me all good stories about the organization, the great people working here. So I'm excited to be here."
- It would have been nice if he had scored, of course. But it was great to see Zamula stride into a pass from Kent Johnson and rip a one-timer in the second period of Saturday's 4-0 loss to Colorado. Been saying it for the past few seasons — the Blue Jackets are way too deliberate with the puck in the offensive zone, not nearly quick or reckless enough with their shots. Most former players say that's tied to confidence.
- Colorado goaltender Trent Miner had 29 saves against the Blue Jackets on Saturday, earning his first NHL win and shutout in his fifth NHL start. That got us thinking ... how many goaltenders have earned their first career shutouts vs. Columbus? So we turned to the league's master statisticians, who came back with this: Miner is the sixth goaltender to earn his first career shutout against Columbus, joining Florida's Alex Lyon (April 1, 2023), Dallas' Jake Oettinger (March 6, 2021), Pittsburgh's Jeff Zatkoff (Nov. 2, 2013), Los Angeles' Jonathan Quick (Dec. 23, 2008) and Chicago's Craig Anderson (Jan. 22, 2004). For Zatkoff, Anderson and Miner, their first shutout was also their first win.
- Tough break for defenseman Brendan Smith, who, at 36 years old, played his way back to the NHL through an early-season run with AHL Cleveland, only to suffer a season-ending knee injury in his 15th game with the Blue Jackets. Smith had surgery last week in Columbus to repair a torn meniscus in his right knee. It's a four-month recovery, Waddell said.
- Former Blue Jackets defenseman Jack Johnson, who had two stints in Columbus, officially retired last week and joined the Vancouver Canucks' pro scouting staff. The majority of his work will be in the eastern half of the U.S., meaning he'll be back in Nationwide Arena regularly. Johnson, 38, who went to training camp on a player tryout agreement with the Minnesota Wild, was doing miscellaneous front-office work for Wild GM Bill Guerin this season, with a possibility of joining the Wild's staff in an official capacity next season. But his old friend Jimmy Rutherford came calling. Rutherford, now GM in Vancouver, was the GM in Pittsburgh when Johnson played there (2018-20).
- The Blue Jackets didn't have a single prospect in this year's IIHF World Junior Championship ... but the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets had a former player, and he won gold. Defenseman Sascha Boumedienne, a first-round pick (No. 28 overall) in 2025 by Winnipeg, scored the game-winning goal for Sweden in its gold-medal win over Czechia. Boumedienne played for the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets for two seasons (2021-23), then spent a year at USHL Youngstown before attending Boston University, where he's now a sophomore. He's the fourth Ohio AAA product to win a gold at the prestigious tournament, joining current NHLers Connor Murphy (Blackhawks), Sean Kuraly (Boston) and Jack Roslovic (Edmonton).

- Waddell left the Blue Jackets' road trip on Sunday to return to Columbus ahead of this week's amateur scouting meetings. Needless to say, with the Blue Jackets last in the East and fifth-worst in the overall standings, the high-end prospects available in this year's draft are taking on more meaning than the Blue Jackets would have anticipated.

The Athletic / Dmitri Voronkov's OT winner helps Jackets beat Utah, end rough trip on high note

By Aaron Portzline – January 12, 2026

SALT LAKE CITY — Nothing came easy for the Columbus Blue Jackets on their last, long road trip of the season. Not scoring, not defending ... not even their much-needed overtime goal on Sunday in Delta Center.

Dmitri Voronkov's redirection of a Zach Werenski pass sailed into the Utah Mammoth's net at 1:01 of overtime, snapping the Blue Jackets' four-game losing streak and helping them salvage their only two points of this four-game roadie.

"We definitely needed that," said Blue Jackets' center Charlie Coyle. "End of a road trip and we had nothing to show for yet. So that's a huge two points, and it gets us feeling a little better heading home."

The Blue Jackets, playing the second half of a back-to-back, played the final 58 minutes with only five defensemen after Denton Mateychuk was hit hard by Utah's Branden Tanev and appeared to strike his head against the glass.

That put heavy minutes on the five healthy blue-liners and required the Blue Jackets' forwards to help those defensemen play with minimal physical contact, which only saps more energy.

The Blue Jackets were fried after playing four games in six days with lengthy travel in between, but Voronkov's goal — scored on a 4-on-3 power play — sent a burst of excitement through the dressing room.

"It's only a step for us, but it was important for us to get a win and come home from this road trip on a positive note, bring some positive momentum back home with us," said goaltender Jet Greaves, who made 12 of his 25 saves in the third period.

The Blue Jackets were up a skater after Utah's Daniil But tripped Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli with a leg-on-leg hit in the neutral zone.

About 50 seconds into overtime, Utah appeared to have possession with a chance to clear, but Werenski, Fantilli, Marchenko and Voronkov hounded the puck, using all means to keep it in the zone.

Werenski swatted the puck with his glove to knock it away from two Utah players low in the zone, then Fantilli redirected it down and toward the wall with his stick. Marchenko made a nifty play at the blue line to make a tight turn with the puck and sent it over to Werenski above the right circle.

As Voronkov got a step on Utah's Ian Cole toward the net, Werenski sent him a pass that Voronkov ramped up and past Vitek Vanacek, who promptly smashed his stick against one of his posts.

It turns out, however, that the goal was not a sure thing.

While the Blue Jackets celebrated and both clubs headed off to their rooms, the NHL initiated a replay of the goal. The Blue Jackets thought they were checking to see if Fantilli had used a high stick to play the puck, but the league said it was reviewing Werenski's play to determine if he had used an illegal hand pass.

The replays revealed that Utah's Mikhail Sergechev played the puck, thus negating Werenski's hand pass, before Voronkov scored.

"We talked about it this morning and last night ... just about hopefully getting rewarded for doing the right things and playing the right way," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "Although we only scored two goals (in regulation), we had tons of opportunities.

"I just liked how they stuck together and competed their asses off, and we got rewarded."

The Blue Jackets started the road trip with losses in San Jose, Vegas and Colorado before flying to Utah. The last time they went pointless on a road trip of four games or longer was late in the 2023-24 season.

They took a 1-0 lead on a goal by fourth-line winger Mikael Pyyhtiä only 2:47 into the game, but by the early part of the second period, it was gone. Utah got a late first-period goal from Jack McBain and a goal from Mikhael Sergachev only 1:01 into the second for a 2-1 lead.

The Blue Jackets' power play has been the butt of many jokes through the years, but it saved their bacon with two goals on Sunday. In addition to Voronkov's OT goal, Coyle swept home a power play goal at 18:31 of the second period to tie the score at 2.

"We held on to some pucks," Evason said. "We won a lot of puck battles. You know, we didn't get frustrated with it, and we came up with loose pucks to give us those second and third chances."

The Blue Jackets play seven of their next eight games in Nationwide Arena. The exception is a road game in nearby Pittsburgh next Saturday.

Even with Sunday's win, the Blue Jackets are last in the Eastern Conference. This upcoming string of home games might just be their best chance to crawl back into contention, and the players have talked about making that happen before the league pauses for a three-week Olympic break in February.

The Columbus Dispatch / Why was Columbus Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason fired?

By Dan Aulbach – January 12, 2026

The Blue Jackets fired coach Dean Evason, about halfway into his second season with the team.

Evason was let go along with assistant coach Steve McCarthy, Blue Jackets president and general manager Don Waddell announced on Jan. 12. The team also announced the hiring of veteran NHL coach Rick Bowness to replace Evason.

The Blue Jackets sit at the bottom of the Metropolitan Division and Eastern Conference standings with a 19-19-7 record.

Why was Columbus Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason fired?

Waddell made the move after the Blue Jackets returned from a 1-3-0 road trip. He explained the decision in a statement issued by the team.

“This season has been a frustrating one for all of us and the bottom line is we are not performing at a level that meets our expectations,” he said. “We all share in that responsibility, me included, and while this was not a decision that was made lightly, it is one that needed to be made at this time.”

Evason was hired by Waddell to replace Pascal Vincent on July 22, 2024. Waddell went with Evason after failing to reach an agreement with coaching free agent Todd McLellan.

Evason’s first season in Columbus was considered a success despite the Blue Jackets finishing two points shy of the playoffs. A little more than a month after accepting the job, star left wing Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were killed by a motorist while biking together in Oldmans Township, New Jersey. Evason and his mostly inherited staff did a remarkable job allowing players to grieve while also preparing for a new season.

“Dean did a tremendous job last year under extremely difficult circumstances, and I thank him for that,” Waddell said in his statement.

During the 2025-26 campaign, the Blue Jackets have stumbled into a season-high, five-game winless skid Dec. 6-13, plus two other winless streaks that each lasted four games.

Losing late leads has been a serious problem for Evason's group. The Jackets have the most overtime losses in the NHL when leading after the second period (5) and are tied for the most losses entering the third period with a tie game (6, tied with the Washington Capitals).

Third-period scoring stats stick out like a sore thumb; the Blue Jackets own a staggering -24 goal differential in the third period, eight goals worse than any other team.

2025-26 NHL Eastern Conference Standings

Below are the Eastern Conference standings as of Dec. 12.

Carolina Hurricanes, 45-28-14, 59 points

Detroit Red Wings, 27-15-4, 58 points

Tampa Bay Lightning, 27-13-3, 57 points
Montreal Canadiens, 25-14-6, 56 points
New York Islanders, 25-15-5, 55 points
Buffalo Sabres, 24-15-4, 52 points
Philadelphia Flyers, 22-13-8, 52 points
Washington Capitals, 23-17-6, 52 points
Boston Bruins, 25-19-2, 52 points
Toronto Maple Leafs, 22-15-7, 51 points
Pittsburgh Penguins, 21-14-9, 51 points
Florida Panthers, 23-18-3, 49 points
New Jersey Devils, 22-21-2, 46 points
New York Rangers, 20-20-6, 46 points
Ottawa Senators, 20-19-5, 45 points
Columbus Blue Jackets, 19-19-7, 45 points

[The Columbus Dispatch / Who is Rick Bowness? Read about new Columbus Blue Jackets head coach](#)

By Dan Aulbach – January 12, 2026

The Blue Jackets fired head coach Dean Evason and already have found a replacement in veteran NHL coach Rick Bowness.

The Jackets announced the firing of Evason in tandem with the hiring of Bowness via a press release Jan. 12, with general manager Don Waddell citing performance below expectations in the 2025-26 season.

With 37 games remaining, the Blue Jackets sit at the bottom of the NHL standings with a 19-19-7 record.

Who is new Columbus Blue Jackets head coach Rick Bowness?

Bowness, 70, spent 38 seasons coaching professional hockey, including 14 seasons as a head coach in the NHL. He most recently coached the Winnipeg Jets during the 2023-24 season and retired after the Jets' first-round playoff loss to the Colorado Avalanche. He's one of three coaches to work in the NHL during five different decades.

His first job as a head coach was with the Jets' original franchise after Dan Maloney was fired in the 1988-89 season. After 28 games, he joined the Boston Bruins' organization as the head coach of the AHL Maine Mariners and was promoted to head coach in the 1991-92 season.

Bowness was not brought back by the Bruins after his first season and instead became the first head coach of the Ottawa Senators, finishing with a 39-178 (and 18 ties) record in four seasons with the new expansion club.

After short head coaching stints with the New York Islanders and the Phoenix Coyotes, he spent years as an assistant coach for the Vancouver Canucks, the Tampa Bay Lightning and the Dallas Stars. In 2019, he was promoted as interim head coach to replace Jim Montgomery, who was fired due to unprofessional conduct.

He led the Stars into the playoffs and a Western Conference Championship over the Vegas Golden Knights. The Stars lost in the Stanley Cup finals to the Tampa Bay Lightning in six games. He left the Stars after coaching them back to the playoffs in the 2022 season.

Before coaching, Bowness played in the NHL for six seasons, playing in 173 games and registering 55 points as a right winger.

After coaching, Bowness appeared as a studio personality for hockey broadcasts on TNT. He was born in Moncton, New Brunswick, and is in the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame.

What is Rick Bowness' NHL coaching record?

Bowness has an NHL head coaching record of 310-408, with 37 overtime losses and 48 ties in 803 games. His best record as a head coach was with the Jets in his retirement year, posting a 52-24-6 record in the 2023-24 season. Bowness has been to the playoffs five times in his head coaching career.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets fire coach Dean Evason, hire Rick Bowness

By Brian Hedger – January 12, 2026

Prodded by urgency to keep their fading playoff hopes alive, the Blue Jackets are now grasping at a new straw to stir the drink.

Following a miserable 1-3-0 road trip that kept them mired in last place of the Metropolitan Division and Eastern Conference, head coach Dean Evason and assistant Steve McCarthy were fired and Rick Bowness was hired as head coach Jan. 12. No other changes were made, so McCarthy's replacement may be promoted from within or picked by Bowness.

"This season has been a frustrating one for all of us and the bottom line is we are not performing at a level that meets our expectations," Blue Jackets president/general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "We all share in that responsibility, me included, and while this was not a decision that was made lightly, it is one that needed to be made at this time."

Bowness, 70, was picked from a coaching pool that includes Peter DeBoer, who has extensive NHL experience and most recently had success coaching the Stars and Vegas Golden Knights. The Dispatch has learned that Bowness was the only coach contacted by the Blue Jackets, who've now hired five head coaches since the team and former coach John Tortorella parted ways in 2021.

The Dispatch was unable to reach Evason for comment.

Evason, 61, went 59-52-16 in 127 games for the Blue Jackets, including 40-33-9 last season in his debut campaign. He was fired midway through his second season, leaving with a 19-19-7 record and the team lingering far out playoff position. Evason previously coached the Minnesota Wild (2020-2024) and was hired July 22, 2024 to replace Pascal Vincent, who coached one season as Mike Babcock's replacement following a phone privacy scandal that cut Babcock's tenure to just 78 days in the 2023 offseason.

Waddell initially showed interest in hiring coaching free agent Todd McLellan, but couldn't reach agreement on a contract. McLellan eventually landed with the Detroit Red Wings, who are now first in the Atlantic Division and second in the Eastern Conference.

Evason's first season in Columbus was successful despite the Blue Jackets finishing two points shy of the playoffs. A little more than a month into the job, star left wing Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were killed by a motorist while biking together in Oldmans Township, New Jersey.

Their shocking deaths left the Blue Jackets emotionally devastated just a couple weeks before training camp, but Evason and his mostly inherited staff did a remarkable job allowing players to grieve while preparing for a new season. Gaudreau and his family were a big part of it, including his No. 13 jersey hanging inside the locker room for every game.

"Dean did a tremendous job last year under extremely difficult circumstances, and I thank him for that," Waddell said in his statement. "I also want to thank Steve for his commitment to our club over the past five years."

Gaudreau's presence remains in the Jackets' locker room, but this season has brought more frustration and turbulence, including a significant number of wins and points eluding the Blue Jackets after leads vanished late in games.

They also stumbled into a winless skid that reached a season-high five games Dec. 6-13 plus two more winless streaks of four games, including one that ended Jan. 11 with a 3-2 victory over the Utah Mammoth to conclude a miserable 1-3-0 road trip.

Bowness, 70, is a longtime NHL assistant and head coach who last ran the Winnipeg Jets' bench from 2022-24 and held the top coaching spot for the Dallas Stars from 2019-22. Bowness went 98-57-9 with the Jets and 89-62-25 with the Stars, coaching Dallas to the 2019 Stanley Cup Final before losing to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

"Rick Bowness is a tremendous coach with invaluable experience and knowledge, and he will bring a steadiness to our team at an important juncture in our season," Waddell said in his statement. "He is a good communicator whose teams play with structure, are sound defensively and we believe he is the right person to bring out the best in our group."

Bowness has additional experience as a head coach or interim head coach with the former Phoenix Coyotes, New York Islanders, Ottawa Senators and Boston Bruins. His all-time record is 310-408-48-37 (W-L-T-OTL), including a combined 187-119-34 in 340 games for the Jets and Stars between 2019-24.

"I appreciate the opportunity to come to Columbus because it is a good organization with good people and this is a team that I think I can help improve," said Bowness. "I'm thankful to Don and (Blue Jackets President) Mike Priest and I'm really excited to work with our players and coaching staff to help get us where we want to go."

McCarthy, a former NHL defenseman, spent 10 seasons with the Blue Jackets that included five as an AHL assistant with the Cleveland Monsters prior to the past five seasons in the NHL running defensive pairings and coordinating the penalty kill.

McCarthy was promoted Sept. 13, 2021 because former assistant Sylvain Lefebvre was fired before he'd even coached in Columbus for refusing to get a COVID-19 vaccination prior to the 2021-22 season, something the NHL required. Lefebvre was then hired by the Florida Panthers and helped them make it to the Stanley Cup Final the past three years, finishing the past two seasons as champions.

Under McCarthy's guidance, the Blue Jackets' combined success rate on penalty kills in five seasons is 76.7%, which ranks 26th in the league. This season, they rank 29th at 76.4% after starting out last in the league at 55.6% through the first five games (11-for-18).

The Blue Jackets host the Calgary Flames on Jan. 13 at Nationwide Arena, where Bowness and Waddell will meet with reporters after the morning skate.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets midseason Q&A with president/GM Don Waddell

By Brian Hedger – January 12, 2026

This season isn't a lost cause just yet for the Blue Jackets, but their playoffs hopes are now on life support.

After ending a tough road trip with a 3-2 overtime win over the Utah Mammoth on Jan. 11 in Salt Lake City, they're returning to Columbus still mired in last place of the Eastern Conference and after 45 games.

They've got 45 points, have eight teams to overtake for the East's last playoff spot and only have themselves to blame for a spate of blown leads that cost them dearly. It's not where the Jackets felt they should be after missing the playoffs by two points last year, but there's no time to fret.

An upcoming stretch with seven of eight games at Nationwide Arena is likely their last chance to climb back into the postseason chase before the NHL pauses for the Olympics in February, so a make-or-break point is approaching. The Blue Jackets' front office, led by president/general manager Don Waddell, will watch how it unfolds closely and make moves at the March 6 trade deadline to either help this season's cause or sell off assets.

The Dispatch recently caught up with Waddell for a midseason chat about what has happened thus far and what may lie ahead. Here's part of that conversation, edited for length and clarity:

Q: How surprised are you to be last in the Eastern Conference?

Waddell: Well, it's disappointing for sure, and it's disappointing because of how we've played and how we've lost games, particularly in third periods. As the GM of the team, you've always got to look at yourself first and say, 'OK, are we not that good of a team or what's going on?' We wouldn't be (in the positive for goal differential) in the first period, (positive) in the second period and so negative in the third if we were a bad team. You'd have much more balance in all three periods, so that's the frustrating part.

I've said that through all my years as a GM in this league and being a part of this league, this is by far the most frustrating thing because it's not only that we give up (leads), it's like Pittsburgh on (Jan. 4). ... You're up by three goals, and then two in the third, and you get a point but you give them two. Going to the game, we're five behind them, and if we win the game outright, you're three behind them, and all of a sudden, you give them the two points and you only get one point, and you go six behind them. That's the frustrating thing.

There's so many three-point games, but when you give up those extra points to teams in your own division, that's why we are where we are in our division. New Year's Eve against New Jersey, same thing. Up by two goals and ... can't close it out.

Have you altered your approach to the March 6 trade deadline?

Waddell: Not yet. You know, we made the trade for Mason Marchment, and we're continuing to see if we can make our team better. We're going to continue to look at that. ... We're in a position where I

think we're better than our record, but we have to do it, of course. You can't just talk about it. We can continue to make our team better. We were looking for that bigger winger that can help offensively and play the harder game, and we got Marchment, so you're always looking.

We're not by any means at a point where we're saying, 'OK, we're going to start looking to trade off our (unrestricted free agents)' or something like that. We're still at the point where if we can make our team better and we think it'll help us win this year ... then we're going to make those moves, depending on the price, of course. We're not going to be stupid about it.

On the Marchment trade, we had some extra draft capital. Draft capital is great. You do two things with it. One is you can select players for four, five or six years down the road, or you're trying to make your team better now. And in this case, we made our team better. So, we're going to continue to do that as we move forward here in the next month or so.

Q: Do you need to be careful not to break up the young core group?

Waddell: Oh, 100%. I mean, I always say there's nobody who's ever off the table. Obviously, there's a few guys you wouldn't trade, but you never know who's going to be offered to you.

Stars can be offered to you, so, OK, that's different. But it's more likely that doesn't happen, so, no, we've got to continue. We've got a good nucleus of young players, and you need that mix. But moving out young players at this point to help us win right now or in the short term doesn't make sense to me.

Q: What needs to happen with goalies Jet Greaves and Elvis Merzlikins, who has struggled?

Waddell: We've got to get the most out of our guys. Jet's played good. He's played a lot more than probably we thought he'd play.

Elvis went through a tough stretch there. He also had, probably, the toughest starts, so I don't get caught up in the save percentage and all that stuff. I get caught up in how the goals go in. I keep a chart of every goal that goes in, like, is that a goal that you feel like the goalie could have made the save and did make the save? Or did he have no chance on it?

Elvis' numbers aren't great. I don't think he's played as bad as his numbers as of late, but at some point we need him to step up and win some games for us.

Q: How concerning is Kent Johnson's drop in scoring?

Waddell: I watch him along with all our young guys, but in his case ... we've tried to get him to simplify his game. I think for a while there he was trying to do too much, and then we decided to play him a little less while keeping him on the second power play, because we know he's a skilled player who can make plays.

The other thing with these guys is that when they don't score like they're used to scoring, it's the old saying about squeezing the stick a little harder. It's true. He's had some games where he's hit crossbars, and that's why I was so happy for him to get a goal (Jan. 8 in Las Vegas), because you're hoping that one goal gives him the confidence that he can score in this league.

Look at Adam (Fantilli). Adam started off a little bit slow this year, and when he got it going, he's been going pretty good. The confidence for older players is a different kind of confidence than with younger players. It's certainly a much bigger factor.

Q: Is there any concern that Zach Werenski may exit in two years?

Waddell: Well, you look at all your players, and they all want to win. He wants to win and he cares, and that's what you want out of a hockey player, especially a star player of his quality.

I've stayed in touch with him. I talk to him all the time and there's frustration, which I mentioned, with, 'How come we can't keep leads?' and so forth. But I do feel that he wants to be part of the solution. I don't think he's a guy who's going to say, 'I don't want to be here.'

Now, if we're talking about two years from now, and it's still like this, then you can't blame him (if he leaves), but I think we believe we're better than where we are in the standings. Again, it's easy to say it. You've got to go out and do it. So, I think this next period of time, not just this year but going into next year, is going to be the big factor when it comes to Z.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Fire Dean Evason, Steve McCarthy Due to Unmet Higher Expectations

By Mark Scheig – January 12, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets may have had Monday off from an on-ice perspective. They sure didn't have the day off in the front office though. They dropped a hammer late in the day.

Blue Jackets' President of Hockey Operations and GM Don Waddell announced that head coach Dean Evason and assistant coach Steve McCarthy were relieved of their duties. The team has hired Rick Bowness as Evason's replacement.

At first, the news might seem shocking to many, both in the news itself and the timing of the news. But a closer examination does reveal that changes were needed. Waddell elected to pull the trigger now.

Waddell Reacts

Here is what Waddell said on Monday afternoon after the news came down that both Evason and McCarthy were fired.

"This season has been a frustrating one for all of us and the bottom line is we are not performing at a level that meets our expectations. We all share in that responsibility, me included, and while this was not a decision that was made lightly, it is one that needed to be made at this time. Dean did a tremendous job last year under extremely difficult circumstances and I thank him for that. I also want to thank Steve for his commitment to our club over the past five years."

Now here's Waddell on new coach Bowness.

"Rick Bowness is a tremendous coach with invaluable experience and knowledge, and he will bring a steadiness to our team at an important juncture in our season. He is a good communicator whose teams play with structure, are sound defensively and we believe he is the right person to bring out the best in our group."

How did we get to this point in which the Blue Jackets elected to fire Evason and McCarthy? There's a couple of different factors to keep in mind as we look back.

Evason Was Not Their First Choice

The Blue Jackets are now on their fifth head coach in less than three years. Those being Brad Larsen, Mike Babcock, Pascal Vincent, Evason and now Bowness. We have to start at the point between Vincent and Evason.

Recall the Blue Jackets had their sights set on now Red Wings' head coach Todd McLellan. He was reportedly their first choice. The two sides couldn't come to an agreement. McLellan was still under contract with the Kings at the time.

When Waddell couldn't get McLellan, other candidates were considered. The Blue Jackets chose to hire Evason later last summer.

Looking Back

Shortly into his tenure, Evason had to deal with the unthinkable tragedy of the Gaudreau brothers. He helped guide the Blue Jackets through that. It resulted in just missing out on the playoffs.

Flash forward to this season. Expectations were higher. Everyone on the team from the GM on down said that making the playoffs was their expectation. Taking it a step further, the season would be a failure if they didn't get to the postseason.

As of this writing, the Blue Jackets are at hockey .500 with a 19-19-7 record, which was tied for last in the Eastern Conference with the Ottawa Senators, who had one game in hand.

Not only were the Blue Jackets seven points out of a playoff spot, they'd have to jump eight teams to get into that elusive playoff spot. Their season to date was nowhere near good enough to meet the lofty expectations they placed on themselves in the preseason.

Then taking a closer look at their season-to-date and some numbers, the Blue Jackets took steps back in key areas. Their offense, which was top-10 in the NHL last season, was 22th as of Monday night. More alarmingly, there weren't immediate answers as to why this was the case except to consistently say "we hope that things turn around soon."

The Blue Jackets can generate chances as they're fourth in the NHL in shots on goal per game. But their lack of finish coupled with their bone crushing late-game collapses was too much for Evason and McCarthy to overcome.

The Blue Jackets have lost nine games this season when they've had a lead in the third period. The fact that this kept happening seemingly was another factor in making this decision.

McCarthy was behind the bench for the last five seasons and part of the Blue Jackets' organization for the last 10 years. He primarily was responsible for the defense, a unit that saw no improvement from last season. They finished at 3.26 goals against per game last season. As of this writing, they've allowed 3.38 goals per game.

The team played a system that depended upon outscoring their opponents consistently. That never got into full motion this season with several key players including Adam Fantilli, Cole Sillinger and Kent Johnson each going through goal-scoring slumps of late. One must wonder if player development was also another potential factor in all this.

Add it all together and you see why Waddell chose to make this move now as opposed to waiting until the Olympic break. The Blue Jackets have seven of their next eight games at home. This is their chance to jump back into the race while hoping they get a bump from Bowness, whose experience and communication style should fit what the Blue Jackets are looking for at this point.

"I appreciate the opportunity to come to Columbus because it is a good organization with good people and this is a team that I think I can help improve," Bowness said. I'm thankful to Don and Mike Priest and I'm really excited to work with our players and coaching staff to help get us where we want to go."

In the end, it was the combination of poor performance and unmet expectations that spelled the end of the Dean Evason era in Columbus. The Blue Jackets hope that Bowness can come right in and give the team the jolt it needs to finish this part of the season strong. They still think they can be good enough for the playoffs given the separation is just seven points with half the season remaining.

The Blue Jackets return to the ice for a full morning skate on Tuesday in advance of their game against the Calgary Flames. This will be the first time Bowness speaks to the cameras as the new head coach of the team.

The Hockey Writers / How the Blue Jackets Can Turn Their Season Around After Disastrous West Coast Trip

By Wesley Minke – January 12, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets have just returned from a four-game West Coast road trip, their last western trip of the season, and it could not have been much worse. They earned two points in those four games, and that was against the Utah Mammoth, a 3-2 overtime victory that the Blue Jackets had to win.

While fans are growing impatient with the team's lack of positive results, many are also starting to question if head coach Dean Evason is the answer moving forward.

Last season, many experts projected the team to land at the bottom of the league standings, but Evason had them in position to fight for a wild-card berth. But maybe his good fortune has run out in Columbus. This season, the Blue Jackets look confused, disorganized, and aren't receiving much of a push from anyone.

If anything, this recent road trip exposed the lack of fight in some games. When things aren't going their way, too often the Blue Jackets are shut down. Here are the two main takeaways from the trip out west.

Jet Greaves Owns the Net

Elvis Merzlikins has struggled to find his way this season, and his playing time has taken a major dip because of it. He has rarely manned the crease in the last month. Merzlikins got the start against the Colorado Avalanche on Saturday, a game the Blue Jackets lost 4-0. That was his first start since Dec. 20, another loss, 4-3 to the Anaheim Ducks.

His inability to find his way might be, in part, thanks to the outstanding play from Jet Greaves. If the Blue Jackets want to turn this season around, they will need Greaves to continue playing great. He has been the single reason they are not far lower in the standings than they currently are.

He has been one of the best goaltenders in the league this season, and if he had more offensive support, he would likely be in the Vezina Trophy conversation. With 30 starts already, compared to Merzlikins' 15, if the Blue Jackets want to make a major push for the playoffs, Greaves will likely end up with around 50 starts. To give Columbus their best shot, they will have to run with Greaves.

Blue Jackets' Defense Can Not Be the Offense

The one thing he has not received all season is goal support. It's been a major problem, but an even bigger problem is the fact that the defensemen are creating all the offensive chances. Even with Zach Werenski on the roster, who has been the team's best player for the past few seasons, he can not be provide all of the team's offense if they want to climb up the standings.

In the Blue Jackets' most recent game against the Mammoth on Sunday, Werenski was a massive factor and earned the primary assist on a great overtime game-winning tip-in goal by Dmitri Voronkov. However, that play was brought about by a huge effort from Werenski.

The Blue Jackets' top offensive players have been their defensemen. This is not an indictment of all the forwards, but their top forwards need to be their best offensive players. Evason has done everything from shuffling lines in practice to shuffling lines mid-game to try and get something going upfront, but to

no avail. Columbus has to find a way to get more offense, or the team will again be looking for the lottery balls to fall their way come springtime.

Evason has grown far too patient with his group, and they need a shift to wake the group up. Whether that is a change of leadership, a big roster trade, or a demotion to the American Hockey League's Cleveland Monsters, something has to give.

USA Today / Blue Jackets fire coach Dean Evason, hire veteran Rick Bowness

By Mike Brehm – January 12, 2026

Dean Evason, who nearly got the Columbus Blue Jackets into the playoffs amid tragedy in 2024-25, is out of a job after the team's slow start.

The Blue Jackets announced on Monday, Jan. 12, that they had fired Evason and were bringing in NHL veteran coach Rick Bowness to replace him. Assistant coach Steve McCarthy also was fired.

"This season has been a frustrating one for all of us, and the bottom line is we are not performing at a level that meets our expectations," general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "We all share in that responsibility, me included, and while this was not a decision that was made lightly it is one that needed to be made at this time. Dean did a tremendous job last year under extremely difficult circumstances and I thank him for that."

Evason is the first NHL head coach fired this season.

All things Blue Jackets: Latest Columbus Blue Jackets news, schedule, roster, stats, injury updates and more.

The Blue Jackets missed the playoffs by two points last season despite the death of star Johnny Gaudreau in August 2024. He and his brother Matthew were hit by a car while bicycling in New Jersey.

Bowness, 70, had announced his retirement in 2024 after spending nearly 50 years in the league as a player or coach. He had most recently coached the Winnipeg Jets and had led the Dallas Stars to the 2020 Stanley Cup Final.

"Rick Bowness is a tremendous coach with invaluable experience and knowledge, and he will bring a steadiness to our team at an important juncture in our season," said Waddell. "He is a good communicator whose teams play with structure, are sound defensively and we believe he is the right person to bring out the best in our group."

The Blue Jackets, who ended a four-game losing streak on Sunday, are last in the Metropolitan Division with a 19-19-7 record. Evason, 61, finishes his tenure in Columbus with a 59-52-16 record.

USA Today / Who is Rick Bowness? What to know about Blue Jackets' new coach

By Mike Brehm – January 12, 2026

Rick Bowness is back in coaching, a little more than one season after he had announced his retirement. The Columbus Blue Jackets hired the veteran coach on Monday, Jan. 12 after firing head coach Dean Evason.

Bowness, 70, most recently coached the Winnipeg Jets from 2022-24. He retired after a season in which he took some leave because his wife Judy had a seizure.

“I appreciate the opportunity to come to Columbus because it is a good organization with good people and this is a team that I think I can help improve,” Bowness said in a statement. “I’m thankful to (general manager Don (Waddell) and (Blue Jackets President) Mike Priest and I’m really excited to work with our players and coaching staff to help get us where we want to go.”

Here's what to know about what to know about new Columbus Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness:

Rick Bowness coaching career

Bowness first was head coach of the Jets in 1988-89, finishing out that season as an interim coach after the firing of Don Maloney. He also coached the Boston Bruins (1991-92), Ottawa Senators (1992-96), New York Islanders (1996-98), Phoenix Coyotes (2003-04), Dallas Stars (2019-21) and Jets (2022-24).

He reached the playoffs in four of his last five seasons.

He also was an assistant or associate coach with the Jets, Coyotes, Vancouver Canucks, Tampa Bay Lightning and Stars.

Rick Bowness coach record

He went 310-408 with 48 overtime/shootout losses and 37 ties as a head coach.

Did Rick Bowness win a Stanley Cup?

He took the Stars to the 2020 Stanley Cup Final, where they lost to the Lightning in six games. The Canucks lost in the 2011 final when he was an associate coach.

Rick Bowness playing career

Bowness, a forward, played for the Atlanta Flames, Detroit Red Wings, St. Louis Blues and Jets. He had 55 points in 173 career regular season games.

What had Rick Bowness done in retirement?

He was an occasional studio analyst on TNT's NHL broadcasts.

