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The Athletic / As Blue Jackets blow another lead, their margin for error is getting thinner

By Aaron Portzline – November 27, 2025

It happened again on Wednesday. The Columbus Blue Jackets, trying to close out a tight game against the Toronto Maple Leafs, gave up the tying goal late in the third period and lost on another late goal in overtime.

By now, the Blue Jackets' propensity for blowing leads and throwing away valuable points has become the theme of the early season.

Easton Cowan's goal with 3:17 remaining in regulation forced overtime, and William Nylander's goal with 20 seconds remaining in OT sent the Leafs to a 2-1 win before 16,632 in Nationwide Arena.

It happened only six days after the Blue Jackets coughed up a late lead in Toronto, but pulled out an overtime win. And it happened only four days after they blew a two-goal lead to Detroit and lost in overtime. And it happened ... we could go on here.

"I'm sure everyone's probably sick of it and sick of hearing about it, but at the end of the day, we played really good hockey," said defenseman Zach Werenski, who scored the Blue Jackets' only goal. "We can't feel sorry for ourselves or be down about it.

"Obviously, we don't want that to happen, but we've addressed it and talked about it. But, in saying that, we're leading in almost every game and late in games. Now it's just finishing it and getting two points. But, yeah, it definitely stings, but we move forward."

The Blue Jackets have lost three in a row and four of their last five games, and they have just one regulation win since Nov. 1. They haven't outscored an opponent in the third period since an Oct. 21 win in Dallas.

There are better examples of a late-game collapse than Wednesday's game, certainly. The Blue Jackets did well to smother the Maple Leafs, who were buoyed by the return of offensive stars Auston Matthews and Matthew Knies.

The Blue Jackets, meanwhile, played without their own offensive star, Kirill Marchenko, who missed a second straight game with a lower-body injury. Third-line winger Mathieu Olivier was also out of the lineup, and the Leafs were noticeably more physical than they've been in previous games vs. Columbus.

But the Jackets were lifted by the fact that Werenski, who left Monday's loss in Washington early with an injury, was able to play. And they got a big lift from forward Luca Pinelli, who was called up from minor-league Cleveland to make his NHL debut, and earned a big role from Evason almost immediately.

Pinelli, a fourth-round pick two years ago, played on the Blue Jackets' second line with Cole Sillinger and Sean Monahan, drawing 16:20 in ice time and a role on the Jackets' second power-play unit. He was on the ice for overtime before Blue Jackets' leading scorer Adam Fantilli had a three-on-three shift.

But this has been the Blue Jackets' reality too often this season: they have oh-so-many scoring chances, but only so many goals.

That's something to consider with all of these blown leads. The Blue Jackets aren't creating much margin for error, certainly not as much as they did last season when they became, surprisingly, one of the NHL's top offensive clubs.

The Blue Jackets averaged 3.26 goals per game last season, tied (with Toronto) for seventh-best in the NHL. This season? They're at 2.79 goals per game, almost a half-goal per game. That's 25th in the NHL.

Through 24 games, the Blue Jackets have scored 17 fewer goals than they did at this point last season (84-67).

"It goes like that, you know?" Evason said. "We just believe that it's going to turn. When? I don't know. But we're going to keep playing the right way until it does.

"Listen, we're not happy we lost the game. But we're definitely, you know, very happy with how we played the game."

The two glaring examples of players who have taken a step back from last season are Monahan and winger Kent Johnson, who had played on the same line together before Evason split them up on Wednesday amid the injuries.

Monahan and Johnson have each scored only two goals all season. Monahan has gone nine games without a goal, and he has only one point (an assist) in his last seven. Johnson, meanwhile, has one point (an assist) in November. He hasn't scored since that Oct. 21 game in Dallas.

"We scored very easily last year and now, you know, it's a bit of a struggle," Evason said. "But it's early in the season. We'll just keep pushing and believe that the goals will go in the net."

The struggle also calls into question some of Evason's decisions.

In the third period on Wednesday, with the score tied at zero, the Blue Jackets came out of a media timeout with an offensive-zone faceoff. The fourth line — center Brendan Gaunce, with winger Zach Aston-Reese and Yegor Chinakhov — took the draw.

In overtime, Evason opened with center Charlie Coyle and Sillinger as his forwards. Monahan and Pinelli were the second set of forwards, followed by Fantilli and Johnson. The fourth set was Miles Wood and center Isac Lundeström, who hasn't had a goal all season (23 games) or a point in November.

The Leafs had Nylander and Matthews out for the final shift of overtime. Nylander tried to pass the puck across the slot to Matthews, but it struck Monahan and kicked right back to Nylander, who gathered it and took aim.

The Columbus Dispatch / Blue Jackets let another late lead vanish vs Maple Leafs: takeaways

By Brian Hedger – November 27, 2025

Warning signs are flashing on the dashboard for the Blue Jackets, but all they've done to stop them through 24 games is repeatedly tap the gauges.

Perhaps it's time to find a trustworthy repair shop.

After gaining and quickly losing another late lead in a 2-1 overtime loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs on Nov. 26 at Nationwide Arena, all is not well with the Blue Jackets (11-9-4) right now, and yes, there is definitely something to see here.

The Jackets play good hockey most nights, including their OT loss to the Leafs, but they're struggling to finish scoring chances and games. They've played long stretches of good defense, often 50-plus minutes per game, but a rut of blown leads late in games has vaporized points they could've had.

The blown 1-0 lead star defenseman Zach Werenski provided against the Maple Leafs with 6:30 left in regulation vanished just 3:43 later, after Toronto rookie forward Easton Cowan tied it 1-1.

Salvaging a point by getting the game into overtime, the Jackets lost their third straight game when William Nylander scored for Toronto with 20 seconds left in OT.

Two losses in their current slide were in OT after blowing late leads, including a 4-3 loss Nov. 22 in Detroit. They also blew a 2-1 lead late in the third against the Maple Leafs on Nov. 20 at Scotiabank Arena, but Adam Fantilli bailed them out with an OT winner in that one.

Over their past 10 games, the Blue Jackets have gone past regulation seven times and have blown leads while doing it five times. They've gone 3-0-4 in those games, including 1-0-2 while coughing up two-goal leads late in three of those games.

The bright side is that factoring in six games they've won in regulation while leading late, their overall record is 9-1-3 in games they've led in third periods. Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason was quick to point that out when asked about another potential win slipping away.

"Someone brought me a number a couple games ago ... that when we've had a lead in the third period, we were 9-1-2, so what do you mean?" Evason said. "Do we want two points? Yeah, but we'll take those three that we didn't (get) and maybe those turn around. (Reporters) have probably asked me every single day, the same thing, and if the numbers don't (indicate) that's true, then it's not true. Right?"

Yes, sort of, but also ... no.

While 9-1-3 looks great, a closer look shows that three of those nine wins required the Jackets winning in overtime or a shootout after first blowing a lead in the third period. Not winning in regulation gives

opposing teams a point, and those points all loom large in the tightly packed Eastern Conference standings.

The good news is it's early, and the Jackets (26 points) are just one point behind the Pittsburgh Penguins for the second of two wild-card spots in the East. The Penguins also pay a visit to Nationwide Arena on Nov. 28, so the Jackets get a chance to catch them coming out of Thanksgiving.

Their issues closing out games aren't entirely exclusive, either, since roughly 28% of all NHL games thus far have gone past regulation time. What stings most for the Blue Jackets is how close everything is right now in the conference and Metropolitan Division.

They're also one point behind the Philadelphia Flyers, tied in points with the New York Rangers and Ottawa Senators, and just four points ahead of the last place Buffalo Sabres. Meanwhile, the Blue Jackets have fumbled away at least five points they could've had with regulation wins, which would have them tied at 31 points with the New Jersey Devils atop of the Metro.

"I'm sure everyone's probably sick of it and sick of hearing it, but at the end of the day, we played really good hockey," Werenski said. "We can't feel sorry for ourselves or be down about it. Obviously, we don't want that to happen, and we've addressed it and talked about it, but in saying that, we're leading in almost every game and late in games. So, now it's just finishing it and getting two points."

Here are two more takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets rookie Luca Pinelli impresses in NHL debut

He didn't score a goal or earn his first point, but rookie forward Luca Pinelli left a strong impression on the Blue Jackets' coaching staff and teammates in his NHL debut.

Skating on a line with veteran center Sean Monahan and Cole Sillinger, Pinelli logged 16:20 on 21 solid shifts while finishing with two shots on three attempts. He was also credited with a hit and a blocked shot, and played 2:07 with the second power-play unit plus an OT shift that ended with him forcing Maple Leafs goalie Joseph Woll to make a glove save.

"I thought he was great," Sillinger said. "He definitely brought some jam, made a lot of good plays and he was confident when he had the puck on his stick, seeing him out there in overtime and seeing him out there on special teams. I'm excited for him."

Toronto Maple Leafs raise physicality while Columbus Blue Jackets were without Olivier, Gudbranson

The Maple Leafs weren't shy about cross-checking the Blue Jackets at the tail end of plays around the net and several happened after the whistle.

The most egregious wasn't even called a penalty when Toronto defenseman Simon Benoit laid a vicious cross-check to Monahan's mid-section in the second period, after the Blue Jackets center reached up to swat at a floating puck.

Benoit, Jake McCabe and Oliver Ekman-Larsson took full advantage of the Blue Jackets playing without injured power forward Mathieu Olivier and imposing defenseman Erik Gudbranson, two fearsome enforcers. Miles Wood, Zach Aston-Reese and Adam Fantilli did an admirable job of pushing back, but this could become an issue if Olivier and/or Gudbranson don't return soon.

The Hockey Writers / 3 Reasons Blue Jackets Fans Should Be Thankful This Season

By Wesley Minke – November 28, 2025

This season has been quite a rollercoaster for the Columbus Blue Jackets but with any rollercoaster ride there are very high highs and very low lows. This team has given fans a chance to believe they could be a force to be reckoned with come playoff time, but they have also led fans to believe they could be back in the Draft Lottery again, aiming and primed for a top pick.

Recent play and results have given this Blue Jackets team and fans a heightened sense of fear regarding whether the team has the ability to make a push. The flip side of that argument is how close the Blue Jackets truly are as a team, and the number of tight results they have had only begin to tell the story of a team that could make a big run.

So, let's take a look three reasons Blue Jackets fans should be thankful at this point in the season.

The Blue Jackets Have Been Stacking Points

Now, I know that the first rebuttal to this will be that the Blue Jackets only have six regulation wins through 24 games. That is absolutely not something that any coach, player, or fan wants to write home about. However, this team indeed has done quite a fantastic job of getting points in a vast majority of their games.

The Blue Jackets have gained at least a point in 62.5% of games this season, which is a statistic that would make fans believe this team is performing far above expectations. However, they only have 11 wins, which in turn is the third-worst mark in the entire Eastern Conference.

There are also some positives to the negative connotation that the team cannot finish games. Blue Jackets teams of the past have struggled to even keep games alive to the final whistle. This season however, has brought upon a new struggle.

The Blue Jackets now have the problem and struggle of not being able to finish games. They have created a pattern of getting games to overtime, which should make fans beyond excited that their club keeps getting points. However, they have struggled to win games before the final horn in regulation which allows their competition to keep stacking points as well.

Staying Afloat in the Playoff Race Despite Injuries

The Blue Jackets have been bitten extremely hard with the injury bug this season, and it has been extremely difficult to keep their heads around the playoff line. However, with their health starting to get a little better, the Blue Jackets can begin to getting back to some semblance of normal.

They are currently without captain Boone Jenner, Erik Gudbranson, Kirill Marchenko, and Mathieu Olivier. Those players are massive pieces of each phase of their game, and they have still found a way to come away with at least a point in a majority of their contests. That is a positive.

However, they are now to the point where just getting one point a night is not enough to keep them in the chase for a Metropolitan Division crown. Let it be known that division is still wide open as well.

However, the problem is their record has not accurately indicated what this team has done in many of their games. They have either played a very tight game, and in most cases snuck away with a point, or they have struggled and been blown out.

If they can get healthy again, and start to right the ship, this team has given these injured stars a chance to comeback and make a real impact with fresh legs. Jenner and Marchenko are two of the biggest impact players the team has, and they badly need them to return to make a run before the season is out of hand.

Jet Greaves Emergence as a Stout Goaltender

One of the big question marks for the Blue Jackets entering the season was goaltending, and they were unsure if they had anything figured out long-term with either of the options. As it turns out, Jet Greaves has been quite the answer.

Elvis Merzlikins has had moments where he appears to be a shutdown goaltender and top-option caliber. He has also had moments where he has looked like a rough option in relief of Greaves.

Greaves has single-handedly kept the Blue Jackets in some games this season, and has given them a chance to go into overtime by bailing them out at the end of regulation in others. He has been a big factor for this young team, and should be a building block moving forward.

If Greaves can continue to be the lockdown number-one option in the crease, Columbus looks primed and ready for not only a push this season, but for the future as well. Being in the hunt this far in this season should be reason enough for the Blue Jackets to be thankful.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Find Overtime Again But Fall to Maple Leafs

By Mark Scheig – November 26, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets wanted to erase the bad taste out of Monday's loss to the Washington Capitals. They again went to overtime. However, they couldn't get the second point.

William Nylander scored late in overtime to give the Toronto Maple Leafs a 2-1 win over the Blue Jackets on Wednesday night. Despite the Blue Jackets being in control most of the game, they allowed another third period lead to slip away.

The story of this game was the chess match throughout and the performance of both goaltenders.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets ultimately had the better of the play in a feisty first period. That was helped in large part by three power play chances including one that slightly carried over into the second. They were unable to convert on any of them.

Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Dakota Mermis and Nicolas Roy all took penalties setting up the Blue Jackets' power-play chances. Without Mathieu Olivier in the lineup, the Maple Leafs seemed primed to make this one as physical as possible.

In the second, the Blue Jackets continued to carry most of the play at 5-on-5. They were unable to beat Maple Leafs' starter Joseph Woll, who was making his first start since being pulled Saturday night in Montreal.

The Blue Jackets thought they opened the scoring on a great shot by Zach Werenski off the far post and in. However, it was challenged for offside. The officials reviewed and determined that Kent Johnson was inside the zone before the puck. It went back to 0-0.

Miles Wood eventually took a hooking penalty late in the second period to give the Maple Leafs their first power play chance of the night. Thanks to a great effort by Brendan Gaunce, they failed to score on it. Blue Jackets' starter Jet Greaves made sure the kill was successful.

After two periods, Woll stopped all 18 Blue Jackets' shots. Greaves stopped all 14 shots he faced from the Maple Leafs.

The Blue Jackets took control in the third period. They were finally able to solve Woll with just 6:30 left in regulation. From the same spot on the ice from the opposite end, Werenski scored from the left circle to make it 1-0 Blue Jackets.

Could the Blue Jackets hold this third period lead? Thanks to a great pass by Nylander, they weren't able to hold the lead.

Easton Cowan scored his second goal of the season, both against the Blue Jackets. He roofed a shot past Greaves top make it 1-1.

Regulation saw no more scoring. Both teams had some chances in the overtime. The game ended when Nylander had the puck in front of Greaves and fired it past him to give the Maple Leafs the second point.

On a positive note, the Blue Jackets have points in eight of their last 10 games to help keep them in the massive pack on the edge of the playoff race. For the Maple Leafs, they got a boost from the return of Roy, Auston Matthews and Matthew Knies to their lineup.

Woll made 35 saves to help the Maple Leafs get the win. Greaves stopped 22 in the overtime loss.

The Blue Jackets have Thanksgiving Day off and play next Friday against the Pittsburgh Penguins. The Maple Leafs will head to DC to play the Capitals on Friday.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Injury Fallout, Pending Contracts & More

By Mark Scheig – November 26, 2025

We have reached an important benchmark in the NHL. Wednesday night's games are the last ones until U.S Thanksgiving, the place in the schedule when most teams have an idea of who they are and what they might need moving forward.

For the Columbus Blue Jackets, they're home after a four-game road trip that saw them only get three of a possible eight points. They're coming off a 5-1 clunker against the Washington Capitals, a game that was more about potential injuries than the final score itself.

That's where we start this edition of Blue Jackets' News & Rumors. Where do things stand with the injured?

Injury Rundown

The Blue Jackets lost both Mathieu Olivier and Zach Werenski in the game Monday night against the Capitals. Both were unable to return due to upper-body injuries.

Kirill Marchenko didn't play in the game Monday as he's dealing with his own injury. He is not playing Wednesday night against the Toronto Maple Leafs. He left the morning skate in Washington on Monday due to this injury. His status is day-to-day.

In the midst of this adversity, the Blue Jackets got some good news. Although Werenski didn't practice Tuesday, he skated Wednesday morning and deemed himself good to go for the game.

As for Olivier, the news wasn't as good. He is out of Wednesday night's game against the Maple Leafs. It is unknown as of this writing what his status is moving forward. The Blue Jackets will have Thursday off for Thanksgiving. They next play on Black Friday against the Pittsburgh Penguins. We'll see if Olivier or Marchenko are able to return then.

The Blue Jackets still have captain Boone Jenner and Erik Gudbranson on injured reserve. Both are progressing. GM Don Waddell told The Hockey Writers this week that a more firm timeline on Gudbranson would be determined once they got home from the road trip. It sounds like both aren't too far away from a potential return although an exact timeline is not known as of yet.

Because of the Olivier and Marchenko injuries, we will have a Blue Jackets' NHL debut on Wednesday night. Luca Pinelli, former captain of the Ottawa 67s, will make his awaited debut. The Stoney Creek, ON native hopes to become the latest example of a Blue Jacket who enjoys their debut against the team they grew up near.

Pinelli's recall was on an emergency basis, meaning there was a chance the Blue Jackets would have under 12 forwards. Once some of the injured get healthy, he will return to the Cleveland Monsters where he was off to a good start this season.

Contract Updates

It's been a while since we've heard anything on potential contract extensions for RFA Adam Fantilli and UFA Jenner. Waddell joined the DFO Rundown this week and opened up on that topic.

As of now, there are no active negotiations taking place with either player. However, it was agreed upon that the two sides will connect during the Olympic Break. That time seems to be turning into an important part of the calendar.

With no games happening in the league, that will give teams and players time to connect and see where things stand.

In both Fantilli and Jenner's cases, it was agreed upon to table conversations until later. Both sides wanted to see how things played out.

Fantilli again is playing the 1C role and has been on a roll of late. He should get a contract similar to the one Logan Cooley just got in Utah.

Meanwhile, nothing has changed with Jenner. The Blue Jackets would like to keep him. He loves Columbus and is open to staying. It's just a matter of finding what works for both sides.

For now, we don't have to wonder if anything is going on now. That will pick up in February while the whole world is focused on Milan.

Side Dishes

- Another thing Waddell said on the DFO Rundown that was interesting was his thoughts on the state of the trade market. Teams now want roster players in his mind. He also said on the state of the trade market: "it hasn't heated up let's just say that. It's investigation calls both ways." With reports of teams making certain players available potentially (e.g. Nashville or Vancouver), there's always the chance of something developing. Waddell said he'll lean on his scouts to see if there's anyone they need to keep their eyes on. They'll act accordingly based on reports.
- For as sporadic as the Blue Jackets have played, they have points in seven of their last nine games (4-2-3 record in that span.) They've had six overtime games in their last 10 overall. They're banking the points. But they're also letting points slip away too.
- Charlie Coyle's next point will be his 500th point in the NHL. He's also 27 games away from 1000 in his NHL career. That'll happen later in January at Nationwide assuming he doesn't miss any time.
- The Blue Jackets have a lot to improve on as any team would. But they are in the playoff race at Thanksgiving. The standings are packed that every point matters. Four other teams entered Wednesday with 25 points along with the Blue Jackets.

- Brendan Smith will make his season debut with the Blue Jackets on Wednesday. He was in AHL Cleveland on a PTO but signed a two-way contract for the rest of the season. He is expected to play with Dante Fabbro on the third pair.

1st Ohio Battery / Thanksgiving Checkpoint: Opportunity Awaits — Late-Game Execution Will Make or Break Columbus

By Will Chase – November 27, 2025

What's the barometer on the Columbus Blue Jackets?

Thanksgiving is the annual checkpoint to assess and take stock of where teams are with a quarter of the season already completed.

The Blue Jackets haven't played a perfect brand of hockey. Outside of elite teams like the Colorado Avalanche (17-1-5), few teams have.

Columbus (11-9-4) is in 12th place out of 16 teams in the Eastern Conference, and only one point outside of the playoff dividing line with 26 points. They're tied for points with the New York Rangers, with five points separating Columbus from the conference-leading New Jersey Devils.

That's the reality of the NHL this season: everyone is in it.

That's great news for a Blue Jackets team trying to get on track with consistency and grab a firm hold of playoff positioning in the East. With so many teams clumped together, a few good or bad days can drastically alter the outlook for a team.

Through the Blue Jackets' first quarter, they've been streaky. Following a season-high four-game winning streak, they followed that up with a season-worst four-game losing streak. Columbus went 4-1-1 before dropping their last three games, two in overtime, and relinquishing third-period leads in two of those three losses. In 16 one-goal games, Columbus is 8-4-4.

As the team looks to reposition itself, they're down two more regulars.

Kirill Marchenko co-leads the Jackets with 22 points, eight goals, and 14 assists — along with Zach Werenski — but missed his consecutive game, Wednesday's 2-1 overtime loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs, with an upper-body injury after missing Monday's 5-1 loss to the Washington Capitals. Mathieu Olivier also missed Wednesday's game after leaving Monday's contest early.

Columbus did get some good news as Werenski, another player to leave Monday's game early, scored a goal in Wednesday's loss.

That loss to the Leafs, in which the Jackets came away with one point but lost out on the crucial second point, is the latest in a troubling trend for the club through the first 24 games, as Columbus has seen far too many third-period leads evaporate with alarming regularity.

Seven times this season, the Jackets have allowed the equalizer when leading in the final frame. They're still 3-1-3 in those games, but a growing inability to shut down teams in the third period will be the reason the team misses the playoffs if they don't figure that out soon.

Columbus is 7-0-2 when leading after two periods, but has a -11 third-period goal differential, and has yielded the second-most goals allowed in the third period (34) this season. Their overall goal differential is -8.

Among the losses that sting the most are a 3-2 loss to the New York Islanders on Nov. 2 after allowing two goals in the final 1:07, the 5-4 overtime loss to the Edmonton Oilers on Nov. 10 after blowing a two-goal third-period lead, and the 4-3 overtime loss at the Red Wings last Saturday after leading 3-1 in the third period.

Columbus is 3-1 in the shootout and 2-3 in overtime this season.

Consider where they would be with the second point in contests lost and the frequency with which they've allowed the other team to hang around and collect a point in such a tight race.

The Blue Jackets have been burned before by losing out on the playoffs because of tie-breakers. In the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season, they tied for the final playoff spot with the Minnesota Wild, but the Wild had more regulation and overtime wins and qualified for the playoffs.

Last season, the Blue Jackets missed the playoffs by two points and would have likely qualified if they could have turned in a better March than when they went 4-8-1.

The upcoming stretch is a critical one for Columbus, with seven straight games against the Eastern Conference, and four of those within their own division.

With points at such a premium every single night, the next month will have a lot to say about where this team stands amongst so many teams that also consider themselves playoff contenders.

As the calendar is about to flip, the Blue Jackets have a great opportunity to prove they belong among those clubs vying for a playoff spot and flip their own narratives.

The Athletic / One reason to be thankful for all 32 NHL teams this Thanksgiving

By Sean McIndoe – November 27, 2025

It's Thanksgiving, at least among one of the lesser hockey countries. So today, I'm going to list a reason I'm thankful for each NHL team.

That's it. No gimmicks or clever twists. I promise I'm not even going to do the "Thanks for reminding us it could always be worse" backhanded compliment thing to anyone. Just one sincere, if slightly bizarre, reason to say a quick thanks to every team.

Anaheim Ducks

Thank you for being good this year by scoring a bunch of goals. That's a nice change from how every other team tries to be good, which is to say clamping down on defense, forcing low-event hockey, having an "identity" that is exactly the same as every other team's identity and transparently playing for overtime every single night. I'm sure all of this is making Joel Quenneville furious, and like all coaches, he'll figure out a way to strangle the entertainment value out of this team eventually. But for now, watching a team that's apparently too young to realize NHL hockey is supposed to be dull has been a real treat.

Boston Bruins

Thank you for giving the hockey world Willie O'Ree. I'm still mad it took the Hockey Hall of Fame so long to induct him, and that when they finally did, he had to share the builder spotlight with Gary Bettman. But we're staying positive in this piece, so let's just say that the man is a treasure.

Buffalo Sabres

Thank you for sacrificing your best shot at the Stanley Cup to get rid of one of the worst rules in NHL history. The skate-in-the-crease rule of the 1990s was awful, and we all knew it at the time. But this being the NHL, they refused to do anything about it until they had no choice — and the Sabres made sure that happened. It cost them their only trip to the final in the last 50 years, but it was worth it for the greater good. Don't worry, Sabres fans, I'm sure the hockey gods will reward you. *(Checks last few decades of NHL history.)* Uh, eventually.

Calgary Flames

Thank you for starting the trend of teams making weird lip sync videos in the 1980s. They've long been a staple of our Grab Bag YouTube breakdown section, and rightly so, because all of them were fantastic. Well, they were terrible. But that's what made them fantastic. And while the Capitals did a lot of the heavy lifting, the Flames were the ones who started it all.

Are we absolutely sure we don't want to bring these back? I'm guessing Nazem Kadri plays a mean air trombone.

Carolina Hurricanes

Thank you for the Mikko Rantanen trades. They didn't work out the way you hoped, because if they had, he'd still be there. And we won't know for a while whether they were actually the right moves at all, or whether future Hurricanes fans might wish you'd stood pat. But in a league where we rarely see midseason trades of any consequence anymore, one team made two in the same season involving the same guy. If you're a fan who loves to chew on this stuff, you have to respect that, whether the moves ultimately work or not.

Chicago Blackhawks

Thank you for giving us the goal horn, a now-leaguewide tradition that is very cool (and was even cooler when it was unique to just a few buildings, but that's me being a grumpy old man).

Colorado Avalanche

Thank you for bringing back the Nordiques uniforms. It's possible you overdid it by deciding to wear them (checks notes) 37 times this year. But those uniforms were top shelf back in the day, and look even better now, and it's important for younger fans to know that. Our so-called experts ranked them too low.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Thank you for Boomer, the uh, oddly shaped mascot you had for about three minutes. Real ones remember.

Dallas Stars

Thank you for Patrik Stefan's missed open net. Nearly two decades later, it remains as one of the great sports bloopers of modern times, the sort of play that will get a laugh out of anyone, whether they understand hockey or not. (OK, anyone other than Ray Ferraro, who was madder about this than I've ever been about anything in my life.)

But it's also one of the great what-ifs in NHL history, a play that inadvertently changed the outcome of the 2007 draft lottery. I get into the details here, but imagine taking Patrick Kane away from the rebuilding Blackhawks and putting him on the Oilers instead. It changes just about everything about the cap era. Given the oft-forgotten detail that the Stars still won the Stefan game, that infamous flub ended up being a low-cost way to twist the knife on multiple fan bases.

Detroit Red Wings

Thank you for the octopus thing. It's just cool, and always has been. (As long as you're not stuck next to the guy who has one crammed into his pants until just the right moment.)

Edmonton Oilers

Thank you for starting the tradition of the first Cup handoff being a thing. The Oilers are typically credited with being the first team to put much thought into who got the first skate with the Cup after

the captain, dating to their 1987 win, when they made sure Steve Smith got his moment after his notorious own goal eliminated them the year prior. It didn't fully catch on right away, and even as late as 1993, the handoffs were still pretty chaotic. But it's now one of hockey's greatest traditions, one I enjoy maybe a little bit too much, and the Oilers were a big part of it.

Florida Panthers

Thank you for the Matthew Tkachuk trade, and the lesson it should have taught every other GM. Fans forget this now, but when Tkachuk first went on the market, nobody thought the Panthers were front-runners, or even a realistic destination. But then Bill Zito elbowed his way to the front of the crowd and slapped an offer down on the table that sure seemed like an overpay. It wasn't, and we know that now. But Zito saw a player he wanted, he knew he had to be aggressive to get him, and he made it happen. No hemming and hawing, no floating "but only if the price is right" to friendly media. Just a guy ditching the excuses and making the trade that turned his contenders into champions.

(Have any other GMs learned this lesson? No, they're still all timid wimps, which is why the Panthers win every year. But it was worth a try.)

Los Angeles Kings

Thank you for trading for Wayne Gretzky, which led to American sports fans learning hockey exists, which led to a completely different economic landscape for the league for decades to come. And far more importantly than any of that, it also led to the NHL getting a piece of this commercial:

It also led to Gretzky hosting SNL, which did not go as well, because that man cannot read a line longer than two characters, but that's OK. Wayne Gretzky knows two things and only two things: hockey and how to absolutely wreck people on the sprint track. Acting is not on that list, and to this day it's a small miracle that somebody actually figured out a way to get him to look cool on camera.

Minnesota Wild

Thank you for that time you traded a third-round pick for a backup goalie in the middle of a season, and that guy randomly turned into a Vezina candidate for the next few years. The Devan Dubnyk trade was a game-changer in Minnesota, at least for a few seasons. But more importantly, at least for our purposes today, it was the ultimate "you never know" move, offering hope to any team that needs help somewhere — especially in net — that even the cheapest move might just solve the problem. Never underestimate the importance of a little hope, and of reminders that sometimes miracles can happen.

Montreal Canadiens

Thank you for the Saku Koivu ovation. Still one of the era's great moments.

Nashville Predators

Thank you for the Shea Weber-for-P.K. Subban trade, which will turn 10 years old next year and remains one of the most fascinating deals in NHL history, from *the* most fascinating hour in NHL history. It was a genuine jaw-dropper, featuring two legitimate superstars who were at least close to their prime. At the

moment, everyone had an opinion about who won and who lost. A decade later, we're still not sure. Did both teams win? Is that even allowed? It's tough to say, but it's fun to argue, and we only get to do that because two teams had the guts to make a deal they knew would be a lightning rod.

New Jersey Devils

Thank you to your fans for delivering this absolutely brutal response to Gary Bettman on a live Fox broadcast in 1995. It's the genesis for the Bettman booing tradition, absolutely fascinating television and a cathartic moment for every smallish-market fan who had to watch their beloved team get betrayed by the suits.

New York Islanders

Thank you for Matthew Schaefer. Please protect him at all costs. I'm sorry I even had the thought that you should take James Hagens because he was the local kid. I'm very dumb and you should never give my opinion any weight whatsoever.

New York Rangers

Thank you for letting Phil Esposito be the GM for a while in the 1980s. Was he the most qualified candidate, purely in terms of front office experience? No. But did he somehow have a sixth sense for hockey transactions that allowed him to succeed in spite of that? Also no. But it was fun to watch him go to work over the 34 months that he held the job. His NHL Trade Tracker page is a thing of beauty — apart from the post-deadline period where teams can't trade, he never went more than two months without making a significant trade involving players. He even traded for a coach, something nobody was sure was even possible until "Trader Phil" made it happen.

Ottawa Senators

Thank you for Gladiator Guy. Yes, I know it was embarrassing when it happened. But enough time has passed that we can all admit this was awesome. This guy brought so much joy to hockey fans around the world.

Gladiator guy read his lines off of his shield walked so future Golden Knights guys could fight airplanes at center ice run.

Philadelphia Flyers

Thank you for the Legion of Doom. That line ruled. But more importantly, that line nickname was fantastic. Sure, it was stolen from pro wrestling, but that's fine. In an era where nobody can come up with a line nickname that does anything other than make an acronym from a letter from each player's name, we need the Flyers to show us the way.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Thank you for the pregame ceremony before Mario Lemieux's comeback game, and the brilliant idea of actually lowering his number from the rafters. Having a player with a retired number return to the lineup was close to unprecedented in sports, and we'd all have understood if you just left it up there as a

cool reminder of how great Lemieux's first chapter had been. But somebody had a flair for the dramatic, and it made a great night even greater.

San Jose Sharks

Thank you for introducing teal to pro sports uniforms. Yes kids, believe it or not, there was a time when sports fans didn't think teal would work on a uniform. We'd only really seen it with the Miami Dolphins, and they balanced it with a lot of traditional orange. When the Sharks came along and debuted their teal jerseys, it was a controversial choice. But it was the right one, and now every league has at least a team or two ripping off that Sharks aesthetic.

Seattle Kraken

Thank you for finally bringing the "Cool S" to the world of pro sports logos. I've long been a proponent of what I call the pencil case test — the idea that a good sports logo should be simple enough that a motivated kid could successfully draw it on their pencil case. Well, nothing has ever been drawn on more pencil cases than the "Cool S."

St. Louis Blues

Thank you for Ron Caron. I miss the old professor, whether it was him wildly gesticulating in the press box or pulling off franchise-altering blockbuster trades back when GMs had the guts to actually do that.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Thank you for basically your entire 1990s history, from the Duke of Manchester to playing in the baseball stadium to the mob rumors. It might only be fun in hindsight because we know what the franchise eventually developed into, but here we are. The No. 1 goal for any team is to win, but the secondary goal should be to be interesting, and the Lightning may have had one of the most interesting decades in sports history.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Thank you for the greatest fan-made hype video of all time, even if the only surviving version on YouTube looks like it was rendered on a potato.

Utah Mammoth

Thank you for putting a merciful end to the Coyotes saga. It had to happen. That's not even a knock at Arizona fans, who'll no doubt get a fresh crack at the NHL in a few years, once some sort of acceptable arena situation is worked out. The league let the situation drag on about a decade too long, and by the end, it felt like we were doomed to have it never end. And then, just when almost all hope had been lost, Utah stepped up and saved us all.

Vancouver Canucks

Thank you for drafting Pavel Bure with the 113th pick in the 1989 draft, for two reasons. First, and most obviously, Bure rocked. But maybe more importantly, if the rumors are true that Detroit had decided on

picking Bure with the 116th pick, the Canucks saved the rest of the league from a decade-long Red Wings dynasty.

Vegas Golden Knights

Thank you for hosting the 2024 draft at Sphere, still one of the coolest hockey events in recent memory. We weren't sure it would work, but it somehow overdelivered. It also cost a fortune, and this being the NHL, ended up leading to a new way of doing things that nobody likes. But someday, we'll be back. And when we are, that "trade alert" siren had better be even louder than last time.

Washington Capitals

Thank you for Al Iafrate's jean shorts.

Winnipeg Jets

Thank you for perfecting the White Out. No, you might not have invented it or even brought it to the NHL. But it's yours now, because nobody's ever done it better. And none of the half-hearted rip-offs from other teams over the years have ever come close to matching it.

OK, now it's over to you. In the spirit of the season, let's use the comment section to offer up your (no doubt 100 percent genuine and sincere) thanks to any of those rival teams out there who've found a way to make your hockey fan life a little brighter.