



## Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips

January 6-7, 2026

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## [Cleveland.com / Blue Jackets sign former Flyers defenseman following brief and controversial tenure with another Metropolitan Division rival](#)

By Tim Bielik – January 6, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The bizarre saga involving former Flyers defenseman Egor Zamula now includes a stop in Columbus.

The Blue Jackets signed Zamula for the rest of the season on Tuesday. Gold Star Group agent Dan Milstein, who represents Zamula, posted on X that the deal is worth \$1 million.

The 6-3, 200-pound Zamula has played his entire NHL career with the Flyers since making his debut in 2020-21. He has appeared in 168 games and recorded eight goals, 41 points and a minus-12 plus-minus rating.

He is known more for his defensive metrics as Benchrates posted.

Zamula had split time this season between the Flyers and their AHL affiliate in Lehigh Valley. On New Year's Eve, the Flyers traded him to the Penguins for forward Philip Tomasino.

Within days of the trade, the Penguins assigned Zamula to their AHL affiliate in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton — but he never reported. That failure to report constituted a contractual violation and prompted the team to suspend him before he ever played a game for the organization.

Puckpedia reported on Monday that the Penguins placed Zamula on waivers for the purpose of terminating the final year of a two-year contract worth \$1.7 million AAV.

Earlier in the day, Milstein posted a statement saying that Zamula had selected a club with which to return to NHL action. That club is the Blue Jackets.

Zamula also posted a farewell message to Philadelphia on his Instagram account.

Columbus starts a four-game road trip on Tuesday night at San Jose.

## Sports Illustrated / Blue Jackets' Elvis Merzlikins Set to Lead Team Latvia

By Deepanjan Mitra – January 6, 2026

Latvia has announced its roster for the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milano Cortina, featuring Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins.

Latvia unveiled its Olympic hockey roster for the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milano Cortina, and the team will be anchored by Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins. The veteran netminder headlines a roster that includes multiple NHL players and experienced European league contributors.

Merzlikins brings legitimate NHL starting experience to the Latvian crease and gives the team a chance to compete with anyone when he's playing at his best. His ability to steal games will be crucial for a Latvia team that won't match the depth of hockey powerhouses like Canada, the USA, Sweden and Finland.

The goaltending depth continues with Arturs Silovs and Kristers Gudlevskis, giving Latvia three capable netminders. Silovs has NHL experience with the Vancouver Canucks, while Gudlevskis has been a national team stalwart for years and provides veteran leadership between the pipes.

### NHL Experience Throughout

Latvia's forward group features notable NHL names, including Tampa Bay Lightning's Zemgus Girgensons, Canucks' Teodors Blugers, and Rudolfs Balcers. Girgensons brings leadership and two-way play honed through years with the Buffalo Sabres.

Meanwhile, Blueger brings with him the responsible center ice play and penalty-killing ability developed during his time with Pittsburgh and Seattle. Balcers adds offensive skill and scoring touch from his NHL experience with the Senators. But that's not all.

Latvia's forward line also includes names like Rodrigo Abols, who has been making his mark with the Flyers. Their roster also includes some up-and-coming talent, such as Dans Locmelis from the Providence Bruins and Eriks Mateiko from the Hershey Bears.

Eduards Tralmaks and Sandis Vilmanis are other prominent names from the AHL who will represent Team Latvia at Milan. The unique mix of talent from the NHL, AHL and Europe presents the national team with competitive depth across its lineup.

### Defensive Corps

On defense, Latvia features eight blueliners led by Uvis Janis Balinskis, who has NHL experience. The defensive group includes Oskars Cibulskis, Ralfs Freibergs, Janis Jaks, Roberts Mamcics, Kristians Rubins, Alberts Smits and Kristaps Zile. This unit will need to be disciplined and structured to give Merzlikins and the other goaltenders a chance to keep games close.

### Olympic Hopes

Latvia isn't expected to medal at the Olympics, but the combination of Merzlikins' goaltending and the team's collection of NHL-caliber forwards gives them a chance to pull off upsets. In short tournament formats with single-elimination games, strong goaltending can be the great equalizer.

The key for Latvia will be staying organized defensively, capitalizing on limited offensive opportunities, and hoping Merzlikins can provide the kind of goaltending performance that makes anything possible. With NHL players returning to the Olympics, Latvia has assembled its strongest possible roster and will look to represent their country with pride in Milano Cortina.

## [The Athletic / Blue Jackets haunted by a former teammate in 5-2 loss to the Sharks](#)

By Aaron Portzline – January 7, 2026

SAN JOSE, Calif. — It wasn't yet another third-period collapse that foiled the Columbus Blue Jackets on Tuesday, but they still found a way to add insult to defeat: They lost to a player who is still on their payroll.

Alex Wennberg, whose contract was bought out by the Blue Jackets after the 2020 season, had a goal and two primary assists — not to mention a crucial third-period faceoff win — in the San Jose Sharks' 5-2 win before 16,258 in SAP Center.

The Blue Jackets are paying Wennberg \$891,667 this season, the final year they're on the hook for his buyout.

It was all part of another frustrating game for the Blue Jackets, who looked completely overmatched for most of the second period, trailing 2-0, before surging to life in the final minute of the period.

Zach Werenski scored off the rush with 44.7 seconds left to make it 2-1, beating Sharks goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic with a slick wrister just inside the upper right corner of the cage.

Then, off the ensuing faceoff, Blue Jackets' tough guy Mathieu Olivier asked his San Jose counterpart, Ryan Reaves, for a fight, and Reaves obliged. It was a thunderous affair, with both fighters deciding seconds into the scrap that they'd simply trade rights.

It was Olivier who landed a heavy one to Reaves' chin that staggered him, and a follow-up punch that felled him. Olivier tried to hold onto Reaves' sweater, he said, to help break his fall, but Reaves still appeared to strike his head on the ice.

He left the ice under his own power and was right back out to start the third period.

"(Reaves) has been doing this for so long," Olivier said. "It's very impressive he's had the career he's had and has been doing it year after year after year. It was an open fight, and, you know, anyone can get caught."

"I was happy he was all right. He looked like nothing even happened."

The Jackets trailed 2-1 for much of the third, but they couldn't get the equalizer. Werenski tried to pass the puck from low-to-high in the zone, but missed his target and instead sprung the Sharks on a breakaway for a 3-1 lead.

"We thought going in (to the third period) that the momentum was on our side," Blue Jackets coach Dean Eason said. "We just couldn't find that one to give us a little more life and continue the momentum."

"Probably with a couple of the opportunities we had, we need to finish in order to gain and keep that momentum. With (Werenski's) goal and that fight (by Olivier) ... yeah, I think it's a different story if we maybe found one."

The Blue Jackets pulled to 3-2 on Sean Monahan's put-back goal off a rebound with 3:55 remaining, but the Sharks added two empty-net goals in the final 2:14 to pull away.

Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves, who made a career-high seventh consecutive start, finished with 31 saves. He had 17 in the second period when the Sharks skated circles around Columbus.

"It's a good hockey team," Werenski said. "They played hard. They have a lot of skill on that team. I felt like they were playing with a lot of pace, backing us off, making plays. They did a good job of executing our game play and playing their style at home, and I felt like it took us a while to kind of push back."

Wennberg, who signed a three-year, \$18 million contract extension with the Sharks on Sunday, had the primary assist on Pavol Regenda's breakaway goal with 48.4 seconds remaining in the first.

A power-play goal by Wennberg at 4:14 of the second period made it 2-0. And, just seconds after the Blue Jackets pulled Greaves for an extra skater when they trailed 3-2 with 2:14 to play, Wennberg won a defensive-zone faceoff that led to San Jose's first empty-net goal.

Tuesday was an eventful day for the Blue Jackets.

GM Don Waddell announced that Laurence Gilman, who has worked as an assistant general manager with Winnipeg/Phoenix, Vancouver and Toronto, has been hired by the Blue Jackets as vice president of hockey operations.

Gilman replaces Josh Flynn, who left the Blue Jackets last week to join the Buffalo Sabres' front office, now guided by former Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekäläinen. Waddell, who has known Gilman for more than 30 years, said he wanted a lawyer to fill Flynn's spot.

The Blue Jackets will rely on Gilman to handle contract negotiations and help interpret and apply the NHL's collective bargaining agreement, but Waddell said he has other tasks in mind, too.

The "VP" title would suggest that Gilman is the second in command below Waddell, but Waddell said he views Gilman, director of hockey operations Rick Nash and director of player personnel Chris Clark as equals in his front office.

Later in the day, the Blue Jackets signed defenseman Egor Zamula to a one-year, one-way contract worth \$1 million after he cleared waivers and had his contract terminated by the Pittsburgh Penguins. Zamula, 25, is expected to meet the Blue Jackets in Las Vegas ahead of Thursday's game.

## [The Athletic / Egor Zamula signs with Blue Jackets after waivers, contract termination](#)

By Aaron Portzline – January 6, 2026

With injuries mounting and their organizational depth chart stretched thin, the Columbus Blue Jackets on Tuesday signed free-agent defenseman Egor Zamula to a one-year, one-way contract worth \$1 million.

The contract is prorated, meaning the Blue Jackets will be on the hook for approximately \$500,000 for the rest of the season. That's a reasonable gamble for a 25-year-old defenseman with good size (6 feet 3) and some moderate early-career production with the Philadelphia Flyers.

The Pittsburgh Penguins put Zamula on waivers on Monday after he declined to report to AHL Wilkes-Barre/Scranton last week. The Penguins had acquired him from the Philadelphia Flyers on Dec. 31. Zamula cleared waivers at 2 p.m. ET on Tuesday and his signing with the Blue Jackets was announced almost immediately after the league confirmed that no other club put in a claim.

The Athletic's Chris Johnston reported on Monday that the Penguins weren't blindsided by Zamula's decision not to report to the AHL team, and that it was apparent he'd been promised a full-time NHL opportunity elsewhere if his contract got terminated and he accepted a lower salary.

Zamula will meet up with the Blue Jackets on Wednesday in Las Vegas and could make his debut on Thursday against the Golden Knights at T-Mobile Arena. He had 8 goals, 33 assists, 41 points and 45 penalty minutes in 168 games over parts of six seasons with the Flyers.

"Egor is a mobile defenseman with good size who sees the ice well and can move the puck very efficiently," Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "We are excited to have him join our hockey club."

The Blue Jackets have played the past 33 games without veteran defenseman Erik Gudbranson. Late last month, they lost veteran Brendan Smith to a lower-body injury that is expected to keep him out of the lineup for several weeks, the club said.

Zamula, a left shot, would make sense on the third pair with veteran Dante Fabbro if he debuts on Thursday in Las Vegas.

The Blue Jackets are currently carrying seven defensemen, with Jake Christiansen re-entering the lineup with Smith injured and Dysin Mayo joining the club for its four-game road trip as insurance.

## The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets sign defenseman Egor Zamula to one-year contract

By Brian Hedger – January 6, 2026

The Blue Jackets needed help on the blue line, so they've signed malcontent defenseman Egor Zamula, who was recently suspended by the Pittsburgh Penguins for not reporting to the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins for an AHL assignment.

Pittsburgh acquired Zamula, 25, in a Dec. 31 trade with the Philadelphia Flyers and opted to terminate the remainder of his one-year, \$1.75 million contract when he didn't report to their AHL affiliate. Zamula was also waived by the Flyers on Dec. 19 and assigned to their AHL affiliate after playing 13 NHL games and contributing one assist with a +4 plus/minus rating.

The Blue Jackets signed him for one-year, \$1 million and expect him to join the NHL team Jan. 7 during a road trip that starts Jan. 6 at the San Jose Sharks. They have a roster spot open, so no corresponding AHL assignment is necessary to make room.

Zamula stands 6 feet 3, 200 pounds and shoots left-handed. He'll likely get a look on the third defensive pairing with Dante Fabbro, a righty, as his partner. That would bump Jake Christiansen out of the lineup into a reserve role and could prompt an AHL assignment for Dysin Mayo, a journeyman with NHL experience who's played just two games this season.

Brendan Smith's lower-body injury, which is being termed as a week-to-week issue, likely factored into the addition of Zamula, who has 41 points on eight goals and 33 assists in 168 career NHL games since signing with the Flyers in 2018 from the KHL in Russia.

"Egor is a mobile defenseman with good size who sees the ice well and can move the puck very efficiently," Blue Jackets president/GM Don Waddell said in a statement. "We are excited to have him join our hockey club."

Since Zamula cleared waivers on Dec. 19 with the Flyers, he won't need to clear waivers again if the Blue Jackets attempt an AHL assignment to the Cleveland Monsters. It's reasonable to assume he wouldn't report to Cleveland, either. That seems like an unlikely scenario given that the Blue Jackets' have a lack of depth on defense due to injuries, including veteran Erik Gudbranson (hip) missing all but four games thus far.

The Blue Jackets are also running low on veteran forwards after losing Miles Wood, Isac Lundstrom and Sean Monahan to injuries the past two weeks. Monahan, who has played through an undisclosed injury most of the season, is set to return to the lineup in San Jose after missing the past four games but Mason Marchment is a gametime decision after apparently re-aggravating a prior lower-body injury during the morning skate.

If he sits, it will be Marchment's first missed game since being acquired by the Blue Jackets in a Dec. 19 trade with the Seattle Kraken.

## The Columbus Dispatch / Laurence Gilman joins Blue Jackets as VP of hockey operations

By Brian Hedger – January 6, 2026

It didn't take Blue Jackets president/GM Don Waddell long to replace Josh Flynn in the team's front office.

The team announced Jan. 6 that Laurence Gilman, 61, has joined the organization as vice president of hockey operations. His hiring happened 16 days after Flynn, an assistant general manager and 17-year member of the Jackets' hockey operations staff, re-joined former Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen as an assistant GM for the Buffalo Sabres.

"I have known Laurence for many years, and I am very excited to welcome him to the Columbus Blue Jackets," Waddell said in a statement. "He is extremely knowledgeable about all facets of team and league operations, and his experience and personality will be a great addition to our hockey operations staff."

Gilman will join a front office staff that includes senior advisor/alternate governor John Davidson, director of player personnel/Cleveland Monsters GM Chris Clark, director of hockey operations Rick Nash and senior manager of hockey operations Zach Abdou.

Gilman began his NHL management career with the original Winnipeg Jets in 1994, prior to their move to Phoenix as the Phoenix Coyotes, then Arizona Coyotes before a shift to Salt Lake City as the Utah Mammoth. He worked his way up the ladder with the Coyotes until 2007 before joining the Vancouver Canucks as vice president of hockey operations/assistant GM from 2008-2015.

Vancouver had a lengthy run of success with Gilman helping shape its rosters, including five straight Pacific Division titles (2008-13), back-to-back Presidents' Trophy wins 2010-12 as the NHL's best regular season team and an appearance in the 2011 Stanley Cup Final.

Gilman, who's from Winnipeg, Manitoba in Canada, was most recently with the Toronto Maple Leafs for six seasons as assistant GM (2018-22) and senior vice president of hockey operations for the Toronto Marlies, the Maple Leafs' AHL affiliate. The Leafs qualified for the playoffs in all four seasons he worked for the NHL team's front office and the Marlies won the AHL North in 2022-23 under his stewardship.

"I'm very excited to join the Blue Jackets and want to thank Don for the opportunity," Gilman said in a statement. "Columbus is a terrific market with great fans, and I look forward to working with everyone there and doing everything I can to help this team have success on the ice."

## The Hockey Writers / 3 Takeaways From the Blue Jackets' Demoralizing Defeat Against the Sharks

By Wesley Minke – January 7, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets came into a Tuesday night tilt against the San Jose Sharks on the first leg of a four-game West Coast road trip needing to stack some wins against some very good teams.

A couple goals for the Sharks gained them a 2-0 lead before the Blue Jackets responded with a huge 5-on-3 penalty kill, a big goal, and a Mathieu Olivier fight to end the second period with a massive spark of energy. However, it was not enough, as the Sharks scored three third-period goals, including two empty-net goals, to turn the tide teal and win 5-2.

There were some definite positives in the game, but unfortunately, the Blue Jackets couldn't capitalize on opportunities when they had the chance and just couldn't catch up to the young Sharks.

### **Power-Play Zone Entries Need Revamp**

The seemingly patented drop pass for Blue Jackets' offensive zone entries on the power play was a nightmare Tuesday night. The Sharks seemingly waited at the blue line, turned the puck away, and effectively shut down the entire attack of the Blue Jackets with the man advantage.

Columbus' best zone entries on the power play continuously happened off a broken play and rarely on a set entry.

The Blue Jackets have to find a way to be more effective on the power play in general as well. They have not scored a power-play goal on their last 15 attempts. For any team struggling either way on special teams, something has to change, or something has to give.

Far too often in this game, the Blue Jackets were reliant on the Sharks to give them an easy zone entry, and it just didn't happen. At what point will they change it up and try something fresh that actually gives them a chance to set up in the offensive zone?

### **Olivier Is the NHL's Best Heavyweight**

This is now the second time that Olivier and Ryan Reaves have squared off in an on-ice brawl, and both times Olivier has come away with the win, dropping Reaves in both fights.

Olivier is known as one of the toughest guys in the league, but after taking down every challenger this season, no one wants to mess with him. He has been a massive factor on the third line for Columbus, and since returning from the injured reserve list, has added an element of physicality for a team that was missing it.

Olivier, standing 6-foot-1, 232 pounds, has been a problem for a lot of teams to deal with. He is getting smarter with how to use his frame, but he is also understanding when to pick the right time to get into a fight.

He does not need to fight every game, and he likely won't find a dance partner in most games, but he has to continue to use these to build energy and get his club back into games with a big scrap. Last night, right at the end of a period, right after a big PK, and following a goal to cut the lead to one, was a big moment, and Olivier delivered.

### **Werenski Solidifying His Status As Elite**

Zach Werenski scored another goal last night, his 16th of the season, which now leads the league amongst all defensemen. He has been a handful for pretty much any team, and his ability to play such a fluid game up and down the ice all night makes him a headache for opposing coaches.

He now trails only Cale Makar in the points race amongst defensemen, and has certainly opened up a case yet again to be in the mix for another Norris Trophy campaign, after finishing second in voting to Makar a season ago.

Not to mention, Werenski has been a workhorse on the ice for the Blue Jackets as well all season long. Averaging over 26 minutes of ice time, and playing at an elite level, the Blue Jackets ought to be thankful that their star player has lived up to the big contract he signed back in 2021.

The Blue Jackets seemingly have found a pairing that works on the top line, but with the recent signing of Egor Zamula, they may be trying to see what else can work for a defensive group that has sputtered as of late. They will try to get it figured out when they take on the Golden Knights on Thursday night in Vegas.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Open Last Western Trip With Loss to Sharks

By Mark Scheig – January 7, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets opened their last western trip of the season playing their third game in four nights against the San Jose Sharks. Despite a strong start, the Blue Jackets found themselves on the wrong side of the scoreboard.

Former Blue Jacket Alex Wennberg recorded a goal and two assists while goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 34 of 36 to pace the Sharks to a 5-2 win over the Blue Jackets. Zach Werenski scored his 16th goal of the season in the loss.

### **San Jose Sharks vs. Columbus Blue Jackets - Game Highlights**

The story of this game was the Sharks withstanding a strong Blue Jackets' start and then pulling away.

#### **Game Recap**

The Blue Jackets started the first period strong. They controlled the play while tilting the ice. The only problem for them was they couldn't solve Nedeljkovic early. That allowed the Sharks to find their legs and get the only goal of the first period.

Pavol Regenda, who scored a hat trick for the Sharks last time out against the Lightning, made it 1-0 with just 49 seconds left in the first. Tyler Toffoli found Wennberg for a 2-on-1 rush. Wennberg's pass found Regenda who did the rest to beat Jet Greaves.

The Sharks carried over that momentum into the second. With Zach Aston-Reese in the box for tripping, it was Wennberg who had time and space near the Blue Jackets' net. His power move created the lane for him to double the lead to 2-0.

The Blue Jackets chased for most of the second period. Greaves kept the Blue Jackets within striking distance. That finally paid off with a late goal in the period.

Werenski from the right circle found an opening over Nedeljkovic to make it 2-1. Then off the next faceoff, the gloves came off for a heavyweight tilt.

Mathieu Olivier and Ryan Reaves had one of the more epic fights in recent memory. Both players threw huge punches. In the end, Olivier was able to take Reaves down. With the score 2-1 Sharks after the second, the Blue Jackets were thought to get life from that fight.

They controlled the shot clock 18-9 in the third but were unable to make it 2-2. Instead, Zack Ostapchuk won a race to a loose puck and scored to make it 3-1.

It took the Blue Jackets just 49 seconds to respond. Sean Monahan, back in the lineup for the first time in four games, cut it to 3-2 on a rebound. That's as close as they would get.

Mario Ferraro and Macklin Celebreni iced the game away with a pair of empty goals for the 5-2 win. Greaves made 31 saves on the night and allowed the Blue Jackets every chance to win this game. But it was Nedeljkovic who shined brightest on this night as he improved to 6-1-3 all-time against the Blue Jackets.

The one piece of concerning news for the Sharks was the status of Ty Dellandrea. He was tripped into the post and had to leave the game with an injury.

The Blue Jackets are starting to run out of time this season with each passing loss. Their next chance to turn things around comes Thursday night when they take on the Vegas Golden Knights. The Sharks head down I-5 for a quick turnaround as they will play the Kings in Los Angeles Wednesday night.

## [The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Reportedly Sign D Egor Zamula to 1-Year Contract](#)

**By Mark Scheig – January 6, 2026**

The Columbus Blue Jackets have been scanning the market for help all over their roster. It started with the acquisition of Mason Marchment. It appears they have added a defenseman to the mix now.

According to his agent Dan Milstein, Egor Zamula will be signing a one-year contract with the Blue Jackets. Puckpedia is reporting that it will be for \$1 million prorated for the rest of the season.

The path that Zamula took to get to the Blue Jackets is an interesting one. But it might lead to him seeing immediate playing time once he reports to the team.

### **Summary**

Zamula was with the Philadelphia Flyers' organization when he was traded to the Pittsburgh Penguins in exchange for Philip Tomasino. Zamula fell down the Flyers' depth chart. Ultimately, he wanted a new opportunity.

However, Zamula was assigned to AHL Wilkes-Barre, the farm club of the Penguins. He never reported which prompted him to be suspended.

That led Zamula to find himself of contract termination waivers. He cleared on Tuesday afternoon paving the way for interested teams to make their pitch.

Apparently, the Blue Jackets won out and signed him to the contract. Given the current situation on the blue line in Columbus, there is opportunity to be had.

Erik Gudbranson has been out due to injury and isn't expected back at least through this western trip. Brendan Smith suffered a lower-body injury and is week-to-week.

The third pair of late has been Jake Christiansen and Dante Fabbro. That hasn't gone well for the Blue Jackets who have been seeking a bigger body to insert into the lineup.

Enter Zamula, who could see immediate playing time. Milstein released a statement on the entire process and thanked all the teams involved for the professional way everything was handled.

The Blue Jackets have not officially announced the deal as of this initial writing. We will keep you updated as this story continues to develop.

## The Hockey Writers / 3 Blue Jackets Who Need to Step up Down the Stretch

By Wesley Minke – January 5, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets have had a bumpy ride since beginning the season with expectations of competing in the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs. That dream is becoming less of a reality, especially with all the blown leads late in games.

Part of this is because the team has had some trouble getting players who were expected to take big leaps this season to step up. Despite massive contract extensions, veteran trade acquisitions, and high draft capital being spent, the Blue Jackets haven't felt the effects of spending to win. Who has not played up to expectations so far?

### **Kent Johnson**

Kent Johnson was a bright spot a year ago. With 24 goals and 57 points in just 68 games, he showed his potential. Columbus started to believe the future had arrived with Johnson and Adam Fantilli at the helm. However, through 40 games this season, Johnson has taken a major step back, with just three goals and 11 points. He has been a missing piece to the team's offensive puzzle and quickly needs to find his game.

Under previous Blue Jackets coaches, we likely would have seen Johnson benched or even sent down to the American Hockey League's Cleveland Monsters to build up his confidence before rejoining the NHL roster. However, at this point, it seems too late to do that, and Columbus has a choice to make.

Johnson has to step up and earn his playing time, or he must find a way to evolve his game. He is too quickly dispatched off the puck with any kind of opposing pressure. He needs to be more physical to fit with the team's identity.

I believe in his offensive playmaking upside, but without production on the ice, the Blue Jackets are not justified in playing him with top units on the ice. He must step up, and he must make a bigger impact on the game to prove he was worth being drafted fifth overall in 2021.

### **Ivan Provorov Has to Be a Bigger Factor**

Ivan Provorov signed a massive seven-year, \$59.5 million contract extension in July, and he has yet to prove that it was money well spent. He has been a non-factor in too many games this season, and the defensive pairing of him and Damon Severson hasn't lived up to their price tag.

That said, Provorov has been a big factor in the resurgence of both the Blue Jackets' special teams of late, playing valuable minutes on both the penalty kill and power play.

However, as the graphic shows, the team's defense has not been good enough, ranking 26th in expected goals against per 60 minutes. With a defensive core that costs the Blue Jackets a little over \$30 million this season, or 31.6% of the Blue Jackets' total cap space, that can't happen.

Zach Werenski has yet again played like a Norris Trophy candidate, and Severson has been solid. Provorov is the one who has to figure it out, and quickly, if the Blue Jackets want to make it out of the Eastern Conference basement.

### **Cole Sillinger Can't Rely on Former Success**

One of the team's biggest struggles this season is the drop-off in secondary scoring. A few seasons ago, depth scoring wasn't an issue, but no one really broke out into a top-line player. This season, the opposite is true. The Blue Jackets have had little production outside of their top line. [Cole Sillinger](#) has to start hitting the score sheet and making a difference each game.

In Sillinger's first season in Columbus in 2021-22, he scored 16 goals. He has yet to reach that mark again. Sillinger was expected to be a pillar of the Blue Jackets' offense after lighting the lamp at every step of his junior hockey career, leading up to the draft.

He has to find a way to become a dominant offensive player for the Blue Jackets. His two-way game has seen a major improvement this season, but the team's overall offense consists of too many middling players with no one on the rise.

If the Blue Jackets can somehow get these players to step up and become factors in the second half, as they were expected to be, the team could become competitive down the stretch in a very tight Eastern Conference race. However, if they can't figure it out, the cellar dwellers could be stuck in the mud for a while.

## WSYX / A conversation with Greg Murray, the voice of Nationwide Arena since day one

By Adam Dell – January 7, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio (WSYX) — For 25 seasons, Greg Murray's unmistakable voice has echoed through Nationwide Arena announcing goals, penalties, and player introductions for the Columbus Blue Jackets. Since the team's first season, Murray has been behind the mic every single game, and he's never missed one.

"I'm waiting to get my perfect attendance certificate," Murray joked. "There are only about 30 guys in the world who do what I do. It's a privilege."

### **From Radio Booth to Rinkside**

Murray's path to the booth started almost by accident. A longtime radio broadcaster, he worked for a Columbus station in the late 1990s when the city's new NHL team was announced. From his studio window, he could see Nationwide Arena being built — and one conversation changed everything.

"When the team was announced in '97, and they started building the arena, I was working in radio," Murray said. "My studio looked right down on Nationwide Arena as it was going up. A colleague asked if I'd tried out for the Blue Jackets announcer's job. I said, 'No.' He asked, 'Why not?' and I said, 'I never thought about it.' So I decided to try — and who knew 25 years later, I'd still be doing it."

Murray admits there was a learning curve at the start. "I didn't know anything about the sport," he said. "But I could announce, I could read scripts, and I could learn the game."

### **Moments That Stuck**

Murray has been there for every major moment in Blue Jackets history, but there are three particular memories that he is very fond of. One is sports-related, the second is organization-related, and the third is personal.

The first, just like many CBJ fans, is the night Columbus swept the number-one-seeded Tampa Bay Lightning in the 2019 playoffs. Tampa had just had a record-setting season, and the Jackets barely scraped into the playoffs as the eighth seed.

"If you think of some of the biggest sports upsets, James Buster Douglas, a guy from Columbus. This is right up there," Murray said.

After the Jackets clinched their first playoff series win in franchise history, Murray just soaked it all in.

"I couldn't bring myself to leave the penalty box," he said. "I was just so excited for the organization and for the fans. They had waited so long for that moment. We had completed one of the biggest sports upsets in Columbus history."

He still gets emotional thinking about the night the team honored its late founder, John H. McConnell.

"I was emceeing that evening. I distinctly remember standing at Center Ice as we were doing the moment of silence, and I was keenly aware of the HVAC system, hearing the hum of those fans. That's

how quiet it was,” Murray said. “That’s how much people honored Mr. Mac, and how much people loved him.”

And a personal memory he will always cherish is when his 96-year-old grandfather attended a game shortly before passing away.

“He stayed awake the whole time,” Murray said. “He was on the pregame show that Mike Todd and I do, and I’ve got video of it. It was just a really special moment for me personally, to see my grandfather come and get to see what I do.”

In addition to these moments, Murray fondly remembers his time with Mason on “Kids Takeover Night,” where young children play multiple roles around the arena that normally the grown-ups would do (if you’ve never been, it’s a really fun game to attend).

### Life Beyond the Ice

Away from the rink, Murray and his wife, Julie, run a radio and TV production company that works with Christian radio stations around the country.

“We do three things: imaging, which is the stuff you hear between songs that talks about the station; concert tour radio production, and commercials, mostly for Christian radio,” Murray said.

Faith plays a central role in their lives and careers. “God got a hold of my heart back in the early 2000s,” he said. “It moved me to leave the mainstream station I was working at and come across town to a Christian radio station. Not because the people were bad, but because it was the early 2000s and you could say and do whatever you wanted on the radio.”

***“I had two young kids, and I didn’t want to have to explain why they couldn’t listen to their dad’s station.”***

That move led him to 104.9 The River, where he’s worked in various roles for more than two decades. “The River had just gone to all music and needed a production director,” Murray said. “I worked there for three and a half years before going out on my own as a freelancer, but I’ve stayed connected ever since. It’s been more than 21 years now.”

### Turning Loss Into Legacy

Faith also inspired action after personal loss. In 2017, Julie’s mother passed away from Alzheimer’s disease. The experience motivated the Murrays to become advocates for the Central Ohio Alzheimer’s Association — and to launch an annual charity golf outing that has raised nearly a quarter of a million dollars.

“I caught her at a weak moment and said, ‘Hey, we ought to do a charity golf outing.’ She agreed, and five years later, we’ve done five events,” Murray said.

He added, “This year I played 76 holes of golf in one day with our co-host to honor Julie’s mom and his dad. Julie’s mom had lived to be 76 before she passed.”

Five years later, they’ve raised nearly a quarter of a million dollars through the golf outing, including contributions from sponsors, golfers, and volunteers to support the Alzheimer’s Association.

### Still Believing

After a quarter century of announcing games, Murray says his optimism for the Blue Jackets, and for Columbus, hasn't changed.

"Every year, my wife makes fun of me because every year I say, 'You know what? This could be the year we win the Cup,'" he said. "You just never know. We weren't given a chance in 2019, were we? But we came really close in that second round."

## The Columbus Dispatch / Ex-Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Jack Johnson announces retirement

By Dan Aulbach – January 6, 2026

Former Columbus Blue Jackets alternate captain and defenseman Jack Johnson is retiring after a 19-year NHL career, set to join the Vancouver Canucks as a pro scout, per NHL.com on Jan. 6.

Johnson was traded from the Los Angeles Kings to the Jackets during the 2011-12 NHL season. He played the following six seasons with Columbus, recording 36 goals, 118 assists and 154 points in his first stint with the team and helping the club reach the playoffs in 2014 and 2017.

Johnson later won a Stanley Cup in 2022 with the Colorado Avalanche. After the 2023-24 season, Johnson signed a one-year deal with the Blue Jackets for the league minimum salary. In total, he played 486 games with Columbus.

Johnson is an Indianapolis native who played college hockey at Michigan. He was part of the U.S. men's hockey team at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics and won a silver medal.

Johnson became the 19th player in NHL history to win the Stanley Cup after playing 1,000 games. Including postseason competition, he finished his career with 1,285 games played.