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November 19, 2024

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Columbus Dispatch / Rewind: Merzlikins backstops Columbus Blue Jackets to road win over Boston Bruins

By Brian Hedger – November 19, 2024

Life away from Nationwide Arena hasn't been kind to the Blue Jackets, but they wrapped up a two-game road trip Monday night with a 5-1 victory over the Boston Bruins at TD Garden.

Despite being outplayed for most of the first two periods, the Blue Jackets (7-9-2) ended a seven-game winless skid in road games (0-5-2) thanks primarily to goalie Elvis Merzlikins' 28 saves for his team's first regulation win at TD Garden since Feb. 22, 2016.

"We were opportunistic (scoring three goals) in the first period," Blue Jackets forward Mathieu Olivier said. "Elvis obviously came up big in that one, and sometimes that's what you need. You need your goaltender to steal one, and all the credit goes to him in the first period."

Here's a timeline that recaps it with updates and analysis from the Dispatch:

FINAL: Columbus Blue Jackets 5, Boston Bruins 1

Hockey is great because it's such a weird sport.

The final score looks like a blow out for the Blue Jackets, but they were fending off the Bruins for most of the night and penalized eight times. Timely goals, including two shorthanded by Olivier and Justin Danforth, plus Merzlikins' goaltending paved the way for Columbus to split a two-game road trip that started with a 5-1 loss Saturday in Montreal.

Olivier, Danforth, Dmitri Voronkov, James van Riemsdyk and Yegor Chinakhov scored goals for the Blue Jackets, who had 10 players finish with at least one point. Sean Monahan's two points led all Blue Jackets in scoring with two assists.

"I'd say Elvis was the difference," Danforth said. "First period, they were on top of us for most of that period. They had four 'Grade A' chances right in the slot. Elvis has to make four big saves to start the game, and without those saves it's a different game. The momentum goes their way. So, you know, Elvis ... he really won us that game. Obviously, we scored five goals, but he was the guy to really keep us in it early and give us a chance to win tonight. It was a great game."

GOAL, 3rd period 14:10: Columbus Blue Jackets 5, Boston Bruins 1

Just like that, the Blue Jackets are one goal away from yet another victory with six goals to their credit. Regardless if they get it or not, they're going to end this losing skid in road games after Yegor Chinakhov's insurance goal off a nice feed from Sean Monahan with 5:50 left to play.

3rd period, 12:32: Columbus Blue Jackets 4, Boston Bruins 1

At a TV timeout, the Jackets are 7:28 away from ending a seven-game winless stretch in road games (0-5-2) that started last month with an overtime loss in Nashville. They've been outplayed much of the night, but timely goals, two shorthanded, and Merzlikins' play in net have them in great shape.

GOAL, 3rd period 7:19: Columbus Blue Jackets 4, Boston Bruins 1

Sillinger's anticipation as a penalty-killing forward is eerily similar to that of Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner, who has a knack for breaking up passes while shorthanded and turning them into offensive opportunities.

Sillinger has the same knack, and it led to the game's fourth goal when he stole the puck from the Bruins' point man and turned it into a 2-on-1 with Danforth. After crossing into the Boston zone, Sillinger sent Danforth a perfect feed for a redirection into the net for a three-goal lead.

"He's got his head up the whole way," Danforth said of Sillinger. I know he sees me coming (to the net). I just tapped it in. It was an open net. I went back to the left side with it, too, so it was a great play by Cole. He's such a great player. He's fun to play with on the (penalty-kill). He's a very smart player, and he makes my job easier, for sure."

THIRD PERIOD START: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Boston Bruins 1

The Blue Jackets and Bruins are back on the ice in Boston and the puck is in play with 20 minutes left or longer to see how this one plays out.

END OF SECOND PERIOD: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Boston Bruins 1

Columbus is extremely fortunate to be leading by two goals after being completely dominated from start-to-finish in the second period.

Boston got a goal back on a power play when Charlie Coyle does what he usually seems to do against the Blue Jackets, but Merzlikins came up big again with saves on nine of 10 shots for the Bruins — who had a 26-5 edge in shot attempt in the second while outshooting the Blue Jackets in shots on goal 10-4.

Columbus was penalized four times in the second and has gone to the box a whopping seven times in the game's first 40 minutes. That has to change in the third if they want to hang onto this lead for a big road win.

GOAL, 2nd period 13:06: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Boston Bruins 1

The Blue Jackets have played with fire and without the puck way too often in this game, and they finally got burned for it with Charlie Coyle's power-play goal to get the Bruins on the scoreboard against Elvis Merzlikins. Coyle, who seems to score a goal every time these teams play, scored his fourth goal of the season to pull Boston to within a two-goal margin with 5:30 left in this period.

This has been an ugly period for Columbus, which has been dominated from the start and whistled for three more penalties. They've been sent to the penalty box six times already tonight and there's still plenty of time left in the second period.

SECOND PERIOD START: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Boston Bruins 0

They're playing hockey again at TD Garden, as the middle period is underway. Can the Jackets protect their lead?

FIRST PERIOD END: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Boston Bruins 0

Three goals by power forwards have the Jackets up by three after the first 20 minutes. Dmitri Voronkov made it 1-0 early, Mathieu Olivier followed it up with a shorthanded tally to make it 2-0 about five minutes later and James van Riemsdyk scored the third with 32 seconds left in the period

Not to be outdone, Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins deserves a ton of credit for preserving that lead while making saves on all 11 shots he faced. According to Natural Stat Trick, the Bruins forged a 5-2 edge in high-danger scoring chances during all situations in the first period and Merzlikins denied them all,

including a sprawling number against Charlie McAvoy in which he ditched his stick and did the splits in his crease.

GOAL, 1st period 19:28: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Boston Bruins 0

Hey, look, another first period with the Blue Jackets ahead by multiple goals.

Fantilli, who grew up in Toronto as a Bruins fan because that was his dad's favorite team, gets his second assist of the period on a fortunate bounce goal for a 3-0 lead. After carrying into the Boston zone, Fantilli stopped up along the right-wing wall and sent a long cross-ice pass to Zach Werenski, who sent a wrist shot toward the net that bounced off former Bruins forward James van Riemsdyk into the net.

Nice job, as well, by Kevin Labanc providing additional traffic in front of Swayman's crease.

1st period, 12:53: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Boston Bruins 0

Blue Jackets defenseman David Jiricek is fortunate that he's not injured after taking a hard, dangerous hit from Boston's Jeffrey Viel on a Bruins forecheck. Viel slammed Jiricek into the corner boards of the Columbus zone at high velocity, sending the defenseman crashing into the boards shoulder first, instantly sparking a reaction from the Blue Jackets.

Olivier got involved again, pulling Viel's helmet off his head. Both were sent off with minor penalties, Viel for boarding and Olivier for roughing.

That was scary.

GOAL, 1st period 10:39: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Boston Bruins 0

Mathieu Olivier just set his NHL career high for goals in a season with a fantastic take to the net for a goal that went through the five-hole (between the pads) on Bruins goalie Jeremy Swayman. Olivier now has six goals in the season's first 18 games, surpassing his previous high of five goals in each of the past two seasons (54 games in 2023-24 and 66 games in 2022-23).

This was also a shorthanded tally assisted by Adam Fantilli, who kept himself onside for Olivier's take up the right wing toward the net. Olivier only needs an assist now for the ol' "Gordie Howe Hat Trick" of a goal, assist and fighting major in the same game.

GOAL, 1st period 5:17: Columbus Blue Jackets 1, Boston Bruins 0

Good start here for the Jackets, who take a 1-0 lead on a power take to the net by Dmitri Voronkov, who's been quickly heating up after a slow start in his return from a preseason shoulder injury. Sean Monahan and Dante Fabbro with the assists.

As TV analyst/Blue Jackets senior advisor John Davidson pointed out on the broadcast, Voronkov's pressure forced a Boston turnover inside the Columbus zone, which was scooped up by Fabbro for a quick exit pass to Monahan and then a nice dish to Voronkov for a strong solo take. One of Fabbro's biggest strengths is doing just what he did on that goal, getting pucks out of the defensive zone and starting offensive plays while doing it.

Mathieu Olivier saw the play unfold from the penalty box, where he was sent after accepting a fight invitation to dance just 2:12 into the game from Boston's Jeffrey Viel.

GAME START: Columbus Blue Jackets 0, Boston Bruins 0

They're off and skating in Boston, where the puck's on the ice.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Boston Bruins: lineup changes

COLUMBUS: Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason, just as he and assistant Mike Haviland did in the third period Saturday in Montreal, is giving his lineup a shakeup.

Up front, Cole Sillinger is moving back to center of the third line, Justin Danforth is moving to left wing on that line and Yegor Chinakhov is being bumped down another line to play right wing with those two. James van Riemsdyk is drawing back into the lineup after being scratched the past three games, and he'll play left wing Adam Fantilli's line. That's the second line, technically speaking, and Kevin Labanc will play right wing while getting a two-line promotion after a productive stint with Sean Kuraly's fourth line.

On the back end, David Jiricek is back in action after watching the past four games as a healthy scratch. He'll replace Jordan Harris on the right side of the third defensive pairing, skating with Jake Christiansen. Harris is a healthy scratch. Merzlikins gets back in net after picking up a win Friday against Pittsburgh.

BOSTON: Jeffrey Viel will make his season debut for the Bruins, skating at left wing on the fourth line after being recalled from AHL Providence on Sunday. Boston also has a former Blue Jackets defenseman to keep an eye on. Andrew Peeke is returning from an upper-body injury and will skate at right point on the third defensive pairing. Former Blue Jackets goalie Joonas Korpisalo didn't draw the start in net. He's backing up Jeremy Swayman.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Boston Bruins: lineups

COLUMBUS

Forwards

(10) Dmitri Voronkov — (23) Sean Monahan — (86) Kirill Marchenko

(21) James van Riemsdyk — (19) Adam Fantilli — (62) Kevin Labanc

(59) Yegor Chinakhov — (4) Cole Sillinger — (24) Mathieu Olivier

(27) Zach Aston-Reese — (7) Sean Kuraly — (17) Justin Danforth

Defense pairings

(8) Zach Werenski — (78) Damon Severson

(9) Ivan Provorov — (15) Dante Fabbro

(2) Jake Christiansen — (55) David Jiricek

Goalies

(90) Elvis Merzlikins

(40) Daniil Tarasov

Scratched: F Mikael Pyyhtia, D Jack Johnson, D Jordan Harris

Injured: F Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery), D Erik Gudbranson (shoulder surgery) and F Kent Johnson (shoulder)

BOSTON

Forwards

(39) Morgan Geekie — (18) Pavel Zacha — (88) David Pastrnak

(63) Brad Marchand — (28) Elias Lindholm — (55) Justin Brazeau

(42) Georgii Merkulov — (13) Charlie Coyle — (11) Trent Frederic

(48) Jeffrey Viel — (19) John Beecher — (90) Tyler Johnson

Defense pairings

(82) Jordan Oesterle — (73) Charlie McAvoy

(6) Mason Lohrei— (25) Brandon Carlo

(91) Nikita Zadorov — (52) Andrew Peeke

Goalies

(1) Jeremy Swayman

(70) Joonas Korpisalo

Scratched: F Cole Koepke, D Parker Wotherspoon, C Mark Kastelic

Injured: D Hampus Lindholm (lower body)

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Boston Bruins history

All-time record: The Blue Jackets are 15-16-10 in 41 games against the Bruins, including 6-8-5 at TD Garden in Boston. The Bruins have won four straight against Columbus in their own arena and the past two meetings regardless of location. The Jackets are also just 2-5-3 in their past 10 games against the Bruins and 3-5-2 in the past 10 played in Boston.

Last meeting: The Blue Jackets lost, 4-1, on Jan. 2 at Nationwide Arena last season, getting their only goal from forward Kent Johnson. Kevin Shattenkirk, James van Riemsdyk, Danton Heinen and Trent Frederic scored the goal for Boston, helping Linus Ullmark earn the goaltending win with 26 saves. Former Blue Jackets goalie Spencer Martin took the loss.

2024-25 matchups: Nov. 18 in Boston (7 p.m.); Dec. 27 in Columbus (7 p.m.) and Dec. 28 in Boston (7 p.m.)

Here's a look at the Blue Jackets' schedule for November, along with start times, television, and radio information of upcoming games:

Thursday, Nov. 21: Blue Jackets vs Lightning | 7 p.m. | FanDuel Sports Network Ohio | 97.1 The Fan

Saturday, Nov. 23: Blue Jackets vs Hurricanes | 7 p.m. | FanDuel Sports Network Ohio | 97.1 The Fan

Wednesday, Nov. 27: Blue Jackets vs Canadiens | 7:30 p.m. | FanDuel Sports Network Ohio | 97.1 The Fan

Friday, Nov. 29: Blue Jackets vs Calgary Flames | 3 p.m. | FanDuel Sports Network Ohio | 93.3 The Bus

November Record: 1-6-1, 8th place, Metropolitan Division

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Boston Bruins records

Records: Blue Jackets 6-9-2, 14 points, 8th place in the Metropolitan Division; Bruins 8-8-3, 19 points, 4th place in the Atlantic Division

How can I watch or listen to Columbus Blue Jackets vs Boston Bruins?

TV channel: FanDuel Sports Network Ohio

Streaming: ESPN+; FanDuel Sports Network app

Radio: 97.1 The Fan; Blue Jackets website, Blue Jackets app

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Boston Bruins start time

Date: Monday, Nov. 18

Time: 7 p.m. ET

Location: TD Garden (Boston, Mass.)

The Athletic / Elvis Merzlikins' stinginess, 2 short-handed goals key Blue Jackets' win in Boston

By Aaron Portzline – November 19, 2024

When Justin Danforth finished a two-on-one short-handed rush early in the third period for the Columbus Blue Jackets, his set-up man, Cole Sillinger, skated into a hug with Danforth behind the Boston Bruins net and kissed him on the visor.

And when the final buzzer sounded a bit later in the evening, Blue Jackets winger Yegor Chinakhov spun quickly to skate toward goaltender Elvis Merzlikins, bending his knees for a massive bear hug, the type Merzlikins used to get from long-ago captain Nick Foligno.

It was a rare night of hugs and kisses for the Blue Jackets in Boston. They took an early 3-0 lead, scored two short-handed goals and played a stingy third period to key a 5-1 win over the Bruins in TD Garden, where they hadn't won in regulation since Feb. 22, 2016.

Five Blue Jackets scored goals — including shorties by Mathieu Olivier and Danforth — and 10 players hit the scoresheet for Columbus, which hadn't won on the road (0-5-2) since an Oct. 12 win in Colorado.

But this game wasn't exactly what the score would indicate.

The final tally, and possibly the result, would have been different if Merzlikins hadn't had a stellar outing, especially in the first period. He finished with a rather ordinary 29 saves, but he denied the Bruins on three or four wide-open chances in the first that could have dramatically changed the tenor of the game.

"I'd say Elvis was the difference," Danforth told reporters in Boston. "The first period, they were on top of us for most of that period. They had four Grade-A chances right in the slot. Elvis had to make four big saves to start the game, and without those saves the momentum goes the other way.

"Elvis ... he really won us the game. Obviously, we scored five goals, but he was the guy to really keep us in it early and give us a chance tonight."

The Blue Jackets have had trouble adhering to coach Dean Evason's system this season, not just from game to game but also from period to period. That's been especially true on the road, such as Saturday in Montreal when they came unglued in the third period and lost 5-1.

The first period Monday could have easily gone that way, too. The Blue Jackets spilled the puck all over their own zone, feeding a Bruins club with wavering confidence during an uncharacteristically shaky start to their season.

When a goaltender is thriving, he can be the great eraser. So it was with Merzlikins, who won his second straight start.

"That's what we talked about after the game," Evason said. "He stood on his head, held us in, gave us an opportunity to find a way to do some right things, because we were turning pucks over and the chances they were getting ... you know, they were created by (Boston), but enhanced by what we did.

"But 100 percent, he saved our asses in the first."

The Blue Jackets also gambled by taking eight penalties, resulting in six penalty kills and nearly 10 minutes of play (9:58) spent down a skater. Even that worked out all right.

Olivier, who had a spirited fight with Boston's Jeffrey Viel only 2:12 into the game, carried the puck on a short-handed rush with Adam Fantilli to his left midway through the first period.

Though Fantilli pulled up at the blue line to stay onside, Olivier kept cruising. He carried the puck wide of Boston's Charlie Coyle through the right circle and went forehand-backhand before beating goaltender Jeremy Swayman to make it 2-0 at 10:39.

A James van Riemsdyk deflection off a Zach Werenski wrister with 31.5 seconds remaining in the first period gave the Blue Jackets a 3-0 lead.

The Bruins kept hanging around. Evason could be seen shaking his head in disgust on the bench as one Blue Jackets player after another skated to the penalty box, further amping the angst. In fact, they pulled to within 3-1 with a power-play goal midway through the second.

At 6:58 of the third, Olivier was sent off for interference. But once again, the Blue Jackets made it work, thanks to a tremendous instinctive play by Sillinger.

The Bruins had possession of the puck in the Columbus zone, but when Sillinger noticed a slight bobble at the blue line by Boston's point man Mason Lohrei, he pounced, swatting the puck behind Lohrei and starting a rush with Danforth.

"(The puck) wasn't sitting for him, so I went and tried to get my stick in there," Sillinger said. "(Danforth) has good legs, and he joined the rush. I tried to bait (Swayman) like I was going to shoot, and then I slid it over. I knew once it got over there it was in the net."

Danforth's goal at 7:19 in the third period made it 4-1 and marked only the sixth time in franchise history the Blue Jackets have scored two short-handed goals in a single game. Yegor Chinakhov scored from the slot at 14:10 to cap the scoring.

Nobody in the Blue Jackets lineup Monday was part of Columbus' last regulation win in Boston. It happened in John Tortorella's first season as coach with the Blue Jackets.

"(The short-handed goals) tell us guys were ready to go," Olivier said. "No matter what hand you're dealt, you deal with it and try to make the best of it. That's what we did tonight."

[BlueJackets.com / PREVIEW: Blue Jackets look to get back to their game in Boston](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – November 19, 2024

Friday night, the Blue Jackets entered the third period up 3-2 on visiting Pittsburgh and then ran away with the game, scoring three times in the final frame to ice a 6-2 win.

A night later in Montreal, the script was flipped on Columbus. The Jackets trailed 2-1 to the Canadiens after 40 minutes and saw the Habs pull away with three third-period goals of their own in a 5-1 final.

To head coach Dean Evason, the difference in the two third periods was clear. Against Pittsburgh, the Blue Jackets played staunch defense that led to offense; in Montreal, Columbus cheated to try to create goals and found the puck in the back of their own net instead.

"We were playing the right way," Evason said. "We weren't having success as far as shooting the puck, I guess, was the most important thing. And then for whatever reason, we wanted to go try to make some plays that weren't there.

"We talked continually about simplifying and getting pucks deep and getting after it, and we were having some success there and we just didn't stay with the game plan and kind of went rogue a little bit. They capitalized on a few mistakes and then the game is over."

So far, the secrets to success for the Blue Jackets haven't been secrets at all. Columbus is at its best when it plays a simpler game, getting pucks into the zone and forcing teams to try to get them out, then playing with aggressive pressure to force turnovers and get going on the rush.

Evason calls it "winning hockey," and for whatever reasons, the Jackets got away from it Saturday night.

"I think for us, we have to know our identity, and that's putting pucks behind teams and going down there and going to work," Zach Werenski said. "I feel like tonight we were just turning pucks over too much at their blue line and our blue line, kind of playing into their style, which is their high-flying offense. I definitely don't think we played our style tonight, and that hurt us."

The Blue Jackets will look to get back to that Monday against a Boston that's always a hard out.

"When our team's playing well and moving pucks, we get pucks in and behind the defense and get to work," Dante Fabbro said. "That's our identity right there. When you stray away from that, it's tough to win games."

Know The Foe: Boston Bruins

Head coach: Jim Montgomery (Third season)

Team stats: Goals per game: 2.47 (26th) | Scoring defense: 3.37 (24th) | PP: 11.3 percent (32nd) | PK: 75.0 percent (26th)

The narrative: The Bruins have been one of the most consistently successful franchises in the NHL, making the playoffs 15 of the last 17 years, winning the Stanley Cup in 2011 and going to the Final in 2013 and '19 as well. But it hasn't been a great start to the season, as the retirements of such core

pieces as Patrice Bergeron and David Krejci has left some holes in the lineup that the Bruins are trying to fill with younger pieces.

Team leaders: The two players at the top of the scoring chart are certainly familiar names, as David Pastrnak leads the way with eight goals and 17 points, while Brad Marchand is next with five goals among his 13 points. They're the only two Bruins in double figures, though, as Elias Lindholm is next with a 2-7-9 line, Cole Koepke follows with four goals and four assists, and then five players including defenseman Charlie McAvoy are tied with seven points.

In net, Jeremy Swayman leads the team with 13 starts and is 5-6-2 with a 3.35 GAA and .888 save percentage.

What's new: Boston acquired such pieces as Koepke, Mark Kastelic, Morgan Geekie and Nikita Zadorov to try to fill out the lineup while also turning to such youngsters as John Beecher (23 years old), former Ohio State defenseman Mason Lohrei (24) and Matthew Poitras (20) in bigger roles, but the Bruins are still trying to find their game. A recent injury to top-pair defenseman Hampus Lindholm hasn't helped, and Boston is 2-2-2 in its last six games and yet to win three straight all season.

Trending: Columbus won the first matchup of three last season by a 5-2 score in Nationwide Arena on Nov. 27, but the Bruins won the ensuing meetings in December and January. That win for the Blue Jackets was their only one the last three seasons against the Bruins (1-5-3).

Former CBJ: Joonas Korpisalo went to Boston in an offseason trade from Ottawa and is 3-2-1 in seven games with a 2.74 GAA and .901 save percentage. Defenseman Andrew Peeke has been out with an upper body injury of late and has two assists in 13 games.

Scratches: Mikael Pyyhtia, Jordan Harris, Jack Johnson

Injured reserve, Injured/Non-Roster list: Kent Johnson (upper body), Erik Gudbranson (upper body), Boone Jenner (upper body)

Roster Report: The team's morning skate made it appear Pyyhtia and Harris come out for van Riemsdyk and Jiricek, while Dean Evason did say Merzlikins gets the start against the Bruins. He also noted the lines will be shaken up some as the Jackets look to find some consistency up front.

The Numbers Game

Dante Fabbro notched his first CBJ goal in Saturday's game at Montreal, one night after earning his first point in Blue Jackets colors. ... Kevin Labanc has four assists in the last three games, while Zach Aston-Reese has two goals and an assist. ... Mathieu Olivier tied a career high with his fifth goal of the season Friday. ... Marchenko has a 6-10-16 line in the last 16 games. ... Damon Severson is one point away from 300 in his NHL career. ... With 315 career points, Zach Werenski sits two points shy of tying David Vyborny for fifth on the CBJ's all-time points list. With four goals on the season, he's tied for fourth among NHL blueliners in tallies, and his 25:40 of average ice time per game is second in the NHL.

This Day in CBJ History

Nov. 18, 2021: Yegor Chinakhov scores the deciding goal in a shootout as the Blue Jackets take a 5-4 win at Arizona. Justin Danforth also notched his first career goal in the game.

Nov. 18, 2023: Boone Jenner skates in his 675th career game at Washington, passing Rick Nash for the most games played in franchise history.

BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets score early, late to down Bruins

By Joe Pohoryles – November 19, 2024

BOSTON -- The Columbus Blue Jackets scored two short-handed goals in a 5-1 win against the Boston Bruins at TD Garden on Monday.

Mathieu Olivier and Justin Danforth each scored on the penalty kill, and Elvis Merzlikins made 28 saves for Columbus (7-9-2), which has won two of its past three (2-1-0). Sean Monahan had two assists.

“There’s no question that you get those two [short-handed] goals, it’s like it gives you a boost forward,” Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. “Certainly helped us in that area, no question. But we liked how we killed all night, besides scoring, obviously.”

Charlie Coyle scored, and Jeremy Swayman made 24 saves for Boston (8-9-3), which has lost three straight (0-2-1).

“We just keep building,” Bruins coach Jim Montgomery said. “We just keep demanding that we get to the level that we need to get to.”

Dmitri Voronkov gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead at 5:17 of the first period. He took a lead pass from Monahan and scored on a breakaway as he was tripped from behind by Brandon Carlo, who bundled the puck into the net while trying to make a defensive play.

“It’s not acceptable to have the same mistakes and same things over and over,” Bruins captain Brad Marchand said. “It starts with our compete level. We have it throughout periods, but then we have other moments where we think we’re a skill team, and that’s not us. We have to understand our identity.”

Olivier made it 2-0 with a short-handed goal at 10:39, skating through the right side of the offensive zone before cutting in and slipping a backhand through Swayman’s five-hole.

“It just tells us that guys were ready to go,” Olivier said. “And no matter what kind of hand you’re dealt, just deal with it and try to make the best of it. And that’s what we did tonight.”

James van Riemsdyk pushed it to 3-0 at 19:28, redirecting Zach Werenski’s wrist shot from the left circle past Swayman.

“I think there’s habits that I could be better at,” Swayman said. “There’s experiences that I could use to my advantage, but you know, tough times don’t last, tough people do. So that’s my mindset. Tomorrow’s a new day, I’m [going to] win it.”

Coyle cut it to 3-1 at 14:30 of the second period with Boston’s first power-play goal since Nov. 3, taking a pass from Justin Brazeau from behind the net and beating Merzlikins with a snap shot in front.

“I need to do my part, hold myself accountable, be responsible and be better,” Coyle said. “As a leader, as a player, we can all be better. ... We’re not winning games. You got to look in the mirror, first and foremost, and that’s definitely what I’m doing because I know I can be better.”

Danforth extended it to 4-1 at 7:19 of the third period. Bruins defenseman Mason Lohrei mishandled a pass at the blue line, which Cole Sillinger picked up and took the other way before centering it to Danforth for a tap-in at the right post off a short-handed 2-on-1 rush.

“Cole, he’s got his head up the whole way. I know he sees me coming,” Danforth said. “I just tapped it in, it was an open net. I went back to the left side with it too, so it was a great play by Cole. He’s obviously such a great player. He’s fun to play with on the [penalty kill]. He’s a smart player, so he makes my job easier.”

Monahan set up Yegor Chinakhov for a one-timer at the bottom of the left circle after a battle in the left corner for the 5-1 final at 14:10.

“After [the] first save, you start feeling the game,” Merzlikins said. “And then comes the second one, which was big as well, and we just start feeling. This is a great building to play [in]. I love it here. It’s nice to be here and play, and they’re a good team: fast, physical. It’s a great win here.”

NOTES: Columbus scored multiple short-handed goals in a game for the sixth time in franchise history and first since Dec. 31, 2022. ... Werenski (316 points in 504 games) had an assist and moved within one point of David Vyborny (317 in 543 games) for fifth on the Blue Jackets’ all-time points list. ... Coyle’s power-play goal ended a 0-for-24 drought for Boston on the man-advantage.

The Hockey News / Friedman Believes Jiříček's Future Will Be Sorted Out Over The Next Few Days

By Spencer Lazary – November 19, 2024

On Saturday night, during the second intermission of the Columbus Blue Jackets and Montreal Canadiens game. NHL insider Elliott Friedman talked about the David Jiříček situation and said that he believes that Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell "hopes to sort this out over the next few days."

It is no secret that the Jiříček situation is playing out poorly; the Blue Jackets have a young blue liner who is growing extremely frustrated with his lack of playing time.

It is now apparent that Waddell will need to make a very challenging decision regarding Jiříček's future with the team. If they send him down to the Cleveland Monsters of the AHL, he will likely be unhappy but will still be playing.

The best solution for both sides is that they work out a trade and move Jiříček out of his current situation and into a new organization, where he can be an active member of their blue line.

[The Hockey News / Columbus Blue Jackets \(14 pts\) vs. Boston Bruins \(19 pts\)](#) [Game Preview](#)

By Jason Newland – November 19, 2024

Columbus is in Boston to play the Bruins tonight at TD Garden, and the Jackets need a win badly.

Boston comes into this game losers of three out of the last five games, including two in a row. The Jackets must take advantage of a slumping Bruins team while they can.

The key stats for Boston are shocking to look at. They are 32nd on the power play and 26th on the PK. Meanwhile, they're 24th in goals scored, and 28th in goals against. They're also dead last in PIMs. They're only ahead of the Canadiens in terms of goal differential in the Atlantic Division with a -17.

What is happening to the once mighty Bruins? They're starting to remind people of the 23-24 Washington Capitals - Play poorly and not up to their standard and could still make the playoffs.

With all that said, the Bruins are 4th in the Atlantic, 8th in the East, and 17th in the NHL, and hold the second Wild Card spot.

Series History vs. The Bruins

- Columbus is 6-8-5 in Boston and 15-16-10 in all meetings.
- The Blue Jackets are 0-3-1 in the last four games in Boston.
- The Jackets are 2-3-2 in the seven at TD Garden.
- David Pastrnak has 8 goals and 17 points this season.
- Brad Marchand has 13 points this season.
- Jeremy Swayman is 5-6 with a .888 save %.
- Joonas Korpi is 3-2 with a .901 save %.

CBJ Player Notes vs. The Bruins

- Sean Monahan has 13 points in 18 games against Boston.
- James van Riemsdyk has 37 points in 49 career games vs. The Bruins.
- Elvis Merzljikins is 2-2-2 with a .924 SV% in 6 games.

Injuries

- **Boone Jenner** (shoulder) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 7; (17 Games)
- **Erik Gudbranson** (upper body) is on Injured Reserve on Oct. 16; (14 Games)
- **Kent Johnson** (upper body) is on Injured Reserve on Nov. 10; (13 Games)

TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 73

How to Watch & Listen: Tonight's game will be on FanDuel Sports Network. Steve Mears will be on the play-by-play. The radio broadcast will be on 97.1 The Fan with Bob McElligott behind the mic doing the play-by-play.

[BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets' Weekly Injury Report: Week 6](#)

By Spencer Lazary – November 19, 2024

Welcome to a new series where we will look at the Columbus Blue Jackets' weekly injury report.

The weekly injury report will come out every Monday morning for those diehard fans as well as fantasy hockey general managers.

Blue Jackets Injury Report:

- Boone Jenner – C, Columbus Blue Jackets (Shoulder)
 - Expected to be out until at least Mar. 1, 2025
- Kent Johnson – C, Columbus Blue Jackets (Shoulder)
 - Expected to be out until at least Nov. 23, 2024
- Erik Gudbranson – D, Columbus Blue Jackets (Unspecified Shoulder Injury)
 - Expected to be an unknown amount of time

TOTAL MAN GAMES LOST: 73

Unfortunately, the Blue Jackets are without their captain and one of their most grizzled veterans in Gudbranson. Both who would have had a large impact on and off the ice. This is the time in young player's careers when they need to step up and help take over the leadership group.

As for Johnson, he is out for the next few weeks, but when he returns, the hope is that he can find his footing and start to take over as the Blue Jackets' most bona fide goal scorer on the roster.

The Hockey News / Former Columbus Blue Jackets Second-Round Pick Cody Goloubeff Lands Back In Canada

By Jason Newland – November 19, 2024

Former second-round pick of the Columbus Blue Jackets Cody Goloubeff is back playing hockey in Canada.

Goloubeff, 34, is playing for the Dundas Real McCoys of the Allan Cup Hockey, better known as the OHA Senior "AAA" Hockey League. The Real McCoys play in Dundas, Ontario.

Goloubeff played 96 games for the Blue Jackets in parts of five seasons. He scored 2 goals and totaled 18 points as a Blue Jacket. He also played for the Ottawa Senators, Colorado Avalanche, and Detroit Red Wings.

He also has 353 games of AHL experience, mostly playing for the Springfield Falcons, when they were Columbus' AHL team. He also had a stint with the Cleveland Monsters. In total, he had 129 points in the AHL.

He spent 21-23 playing in Switzerland and did not play anywhere last season.

What's Next - The Blue Jackets are in Boston to face the Bruins on Monday night.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Cruise to Convincing 5-1 Win Over Bruins

By Mark Scheig – November 19, 2024

Monday night's game between the Columbus Blue Jackets and the Boston Bruins was important for both teams. The Blue Jackets had struggled on the road all season and wanted to end the trip on a high note. The Bruins meanwhile were hoping this would be the start of a rebound.

The Blue Jackets were able to do something that hadn't done in eight years. They defeated the Bruins in regulation in Boston.

Mathieu Olivier and Justin Danforth each scored shorthanded goals while Elvis Merzlikins made 29 saves to lift the Blue Jackets to a convincing 5-1 win over the Bruins.

The story of this game was how the Blue Jackets were able to jump out quickly before eventually sucking the life out of the Bruins and the fans in TD Garden. It earned them just their second road win of the season.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets didn't waste any time jumping on the Bruins. Just over five minutes into the game, Dmitri Voronkov opened the scoring. He was able to get ahead and take a Sean Monahan pass to the net. He was able to score despite Brandon Carlo running into Jeremy Swayman knocking the net off. The puck crossed the line even before the net came off.

The Blue Jackets then added a pair of goals to extend to 3-0 thanks to Olivier's shorthanded goal and then a late-period goal from the former Bruin James van Riemsdyk. Loud boos were coming down as the Bruins left the ice.

The second period got choppy thanks to six penalties called. The Bruins got extra power-play time but were only able to beat Merzlikins once. Charlie Coyle scored with 5:30 left in the second to make it 3-1. That was eventually all the Bruins would be able to get on this night.

The Blue Jackets added two in the third thanks to yet another shorthanded goal this time by Danforth. He drove the net and finished Cole Sillinger's pass with authority. Then Yegor Chinakhov put the finishing touches on scoring his fifth of the season to get to the final score of 5-1.

Merzlikins was the star of the night. Although the Blue Jackets were comfortably ahead, he held off the Bruins' push while bailing his teammates out of mistakes and turnovers. He made at least five 10-bell saves on the night.

The Blue Jackets now get two days off before hosting the Tampa Bay Lightning at home. Meanwhile, the Bruins get two days off also before hosting the Utah Hockey Club. One has to wonder how much longer the Bruins' current situation will last.

1st Ohio Battery / Game #18: Van Riemsdyk, Jiricek Enter Lineup As Blue Jackets Seek Spark Monday Night Versus Bruins

By Ed Francis – November 19, 2024

There are a pair of lineup changes for the Columbus Blue Jackets when they face the Boston Bruins on Monday night.

One is innocuous enough: James van Riemsdyk, after three straight games as a healthy scratch, draws back into the lineup.

The other is the reinsertion of David Jiricek into the defensive pairing, and that change is sure to have a lot of eyes on it.

Jiricek has been a healthy scratch in 12 of the team's first 17 games, playing less than ten minutes in his last two games (9:15 on November 5th and even less on November 9th).

In speaking to the FanDuel Sports Network broadcast team of Jody Shelley and Steve Mears before Saturday's loss to the Montreal Canadiens, President of Hockey of Operations and General Manager Don Waddell explained Jiricek's absence with little coating.

"We haven't seen enough to keep him in (the lineup) on a regular basis."

Waddell added that a decision will need to be made on Jiricek "this week", particularly with Kent Johnson ready to be activated from injured reserve. Johnson is with the team but will not play Monday. "He's really close to playing," head coach Dean Evason said Monday.

For Jiricek, this could be his last chance to stick with the Blue Jackets this season and even an above-average game could be all for not, as Columbus has eight defensemen on the roster and five players locked into the lineup on an everyday basis.

- Dmitri Voronkov will again be on the Blue Jackets top line with Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko, and that line is matching the chemistry that Yegor Chinakhov had with Monahan and Marchenko to start the season. It's a small, four-game sample size, but 10-23-86 have a 4.54 expected goals per 60 in their brief time together, a 1.20 increase from Chinakhov's time with M&M. They also haven't been on the ice when the opposition scored in 5v5 play.
- The Blue Jackets penalty kill has allowed a goal in four of the last five games, including in three straight games. Boston's power play is last in the league at 11.3% and is 0-for-17 over the last six games. They're desperate, so Columbus will need to be careful here.
- Monday's goalie matchup is Elvis Merzlikins versus Jeremy Swayman. Former Blue Jacket netminder Joonas Korpi will serve as the Boston backup. Swayman has struggled this season, posting a 3.35 goals against average and .888 save percentage in 13 starts.

- With Jiricek and van Riemsdyk in the lineup, Jordan Harris and Mikael Pyyhtia are scratched. For Pyyhtia, it's his first healthy scratch of the season. Kevin Labanc has been elevated to the second line, where he'll play with JVR and Adam Fantilli. Cole Sillinger centers the third line, with Yegor Chinakhov to his right and Justin Danforth on his left.

1st Ohio Battery / Merzlikins Dazzles As Blue Jackets KO Bruins With Two Short-Handed Goals In 5-1 Victory

By Ed Francis – November 19, 2024

Mathieu Olivier and Justin Danforth scored short-handed goals and Elvis Merzlikins stopped 29 of the Boston Bruins' 30 shots as the Columbus Blue Jackets picked up a 5-1 win Monday night in one of their best games of the season.

Olivier's short-handed goal came in the first period and made it a 2-0 game after Dmitri Voronkov started the scoring just minutes earlier. Columbus would add a third goal in the final minute of the period, this one from James van Riemsdyk.

After a quiet second period in which the Blue Jackets registered just four shots on goal, Danforth put the game out of reach with his third goal of the season and Columbus' second short-handed tally of the night.

Five different Blue Jackets scored and ten different skaters picked up at least a point, including Sean Monahan, who had two assists, and Zach Werenski, who picked up his team-leading 10th apple on the van Riemsdyk goal.

Here's how it all went down in Beantown:

1st Period:

(2:20): For the second time in three nights, Mathieu Olivier was in a heavyweight tilt. This one came just two minutes into the game and was against the 6'2", 210lb Jeffrey Viel. It wasn't quite as good as Olivier's battle with Montreal's Arber Xhekaj from Saturday, but a good battle and one that only the most biased Boston fans would score against Olivier.

(5:17 — CBJ Goal): A terrific play from Dmitri Voronkov makes its 1-0 in favor of the Blue Jackets just over five minutes in. Sean Monahan springs him and the Bruins defense can't catch up, despite hooking Voronkov. There was a delayed penalty incoming, but the puck ends up in the back of the net before Columbus could go on the man-advantage. Dante Fabbro got the secondary assist on the goal, giving him a point in three straight games.

(10:39 — CBJ Goal): Columbus doubles the lead to 2-0 on their second short-handed goal of the season. This one comes unassisted on a great individual effort from Olivier and is his sixth of the season, a new career best. He had five goals in each of the last two seasons, playing 66 and 54 games in those two campaigns. This was Olivier's 18th game.

(15:15): Elvis Merzlikins with one of his better saves of the young season. The Bruins had five high-danger chances to Columbus' two in the first period, and saves like these sucked the life out of the TD Garden for the home team and their fans.

(19:28 — CBJ Goal): The perfect example of what a secondary assist can be far more impactful than its name suggests. James van Riemsdyk makes it 3-0 game in the final minute of the first period but the goal comes only after a shot from Zach Werenski deflects off JVR, and *that* only comes after Werenski was the recipient of a beautiful pass from Adam Fantilli. He gets the secondary assist but it was the catalyst of the Blue Jackets lead expanding.

2nd Period:

(14:30 — BOS Goal): The Blue Jackets give up a power play goal in a fourth consecutive game, this time helping the Bruins end a streak of 24 consecutive man-advantages without a goal and cut the lead to 3-1 in favor of Columbus.

(19:45): With the Bruins about halfway through a power play, Zach Aston-Reese and Monahan do some excellent work to keep the puck near Bruins goalie Jeremy Swayman. ZAR maintained it for several seconds despite being outmanned 3-1 and then Monahan steals it and immediately draws a penalty. A great sequence by the two players to help push momentum back to Columbus when it was clearly slipping away, as evident by the 26-5 Bruins advantage in shot attempts in the middle frame.

3rd Period:

(7:19 — CBJ Goal): The second short-handed goal of the game for the Blue Jackets makes it a 4-1 game. Boston's Mason Lohrei has some trouble handling the puck at the top of the zone and Cole Sillinger bounces on it. He's quickly joined by Danforth to create a 2-on-1 and Sillinger waits until the last moment to make the pass to Danforth, who beats Swayman.

(14:09 — CBJ Goal): A snipe from Yegor Chinakhov to seal the deal on a quick pass from Monahan. The pass was good. The shot was better. For Chinakhov, it was just his second goal in the last 13 games after he tallied three in his first five.

Stat Talk:

- The second period was one of serious woe for the Blue Jackets. They had just five shot attempts, compared to the Bruins 26, and generated only two scoring chances to Boston's 13. With a 3-0 lead, it was the strong play of Merzlikins to keep the Bruins at bay and allow just one goal in the frame.
- The two short-handed goals from the Blue Jackets is something they haven't done on the road since March 19th, 2017. They've only done it six times in franchise history, most recently December 31st, 2022.
- Olivier's sixth goal set his new career-high in just 18 games. He had five in each of the last two seasons, in which he played 66 games (2022-23) and 54 games (2023-24).

Up Next:

The Blue Jackets return to Columbus for a Thursday night tilt against the Tampa Bay Lightning. It's Hockey Fights Cancer night at Nationwide Arena, with the puck drop set for 7:00 p.m.

[The Athletic / NHL referee taken to hospital after on-ice collision with Avalanche player](#)

By Kevin Kurz – November 19, 2024

PHILADELPHIA — Referee Mitch Dunning was taken off the ice on a stretcher after a collision with a player during the first period of the game between the Philadelphia Flyers and the Colorado Avalanche game at Wells Fargo Center on Monday night.

Dunning, gliding slightly backward, collided with Avalanche defenseman Josh Manson near Colorado's offensive zone blue line and immediately fell backward onto the ice a little more than six minutes into the game. Flyers trainer Tommy Alva immediately tended to Dunning, who lay motionless for several moments before he was eventually lifted onto a stretcher, resulting in an approximately eight-minute delay.

Dunning, who had been taken to a hospital for precautionary reasons, is fully communicative and can move all his extremities after further evaluation, according to a post by NHL Public Relations on X.

Both head coaches commented on the frightening incident after the game, a 3-2 Avalanche win.

"Manson ran into him," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. "He kind of pivoted backwards into the middle, he ran into him. Took a tumble, but I heard he's doing OK, so that's positive sign."

Said Flyers coach John Tortorella: "We were concerned he was struggling, didn't have any feeling in his arms — that's what was told to me. But I think he's OK."

A former OHL defenseman, Dunning worked his first NHL game in 2019 and has been a full-time referee since 2022.

The Athletic / Why the NHL's salary cap could skyrocket in the next 2 years

By James Mirtle – November 19, 2024

Let's face it, the NHL's salary-cap situation has not been very interesting over the past handful of years.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 crushed league revenues to the point that they dropped close to 20 percent in 2019-20 and then a further 40-plus percent in 2020-21. The NHL had to create a pandemic agreement to handle player pay, which meant severely curtailing cap growth in order to make up for that sudden and unexpected revenue deficit.

That meant that in the five seasons between 2019-20 and 2023-24, the salary cap rose a measly \$2 million, causing headaches for team executives and player agents alike. Even when the considerable COVID-19 debt was paid off, cap growth was limited to a maximum of 5 percent per season, which was roughly the bump the NHL experienced this season (from \$83.5 million to \$88 million).

That era, however, is almost over. And it could end with a bang.

Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman reported during the Hockey Night in Canada broadcast Saturday night that the NHL may need to negotiate a much higher cap than what the 2020 agreement calls for beginning as soon as this coming summer. The reason is that, with the players' escrow debt paid off and a new CBA set to be implemented in 2026, the salary cap will return to being linked to league revenues, the way it was between 2005-06 and 2019-20.

And those revenues are way up.

NHL revenues were up last season by more than 20 percent from pre-pandemic levels. The cap, however, has risen by just 8 percent, most of which occurred this past offseason.

In the past (2006 to '19), the NHL's salary cap was set directly based on the previous season's revenue, using a complex formula that divided the players' 50 percent share by the number of teams in the league.

Using those calculations, based on last season's estimated revenues of \$6.2 billion, the math says they could have pushed this season's salary cap to at least \$95 million.

Next season, assuming revenues take a similar jump of more than 8 percent, the "old style" cap calculations project a roughly \$105 million cap.

Based on the 2020 Memorandum of Understanding negotiated with the NHLPA, those figures aren't attainable due to the 5 percent limit on cap growth. However, there is a provision that the two sides can negotiate a higher salary cap, which is what Friedman is talking about.

Friedman's report detailed that those pending negotiations could mean a cap of \$95 to \$97 million next season, or a \$7 to \$9 million bump — potentially double the \$4.4 million we've been expecting for 2025-26.

Why would the NHL want to negotiate a higher salary cap than the agreement calls for?

The biggest reason is that at some point the cap is going to get relinked to hockey-related revenues. If the league holds firm on wanting only the 5 percent increase and a \$92.4 million cap for next season, in 2026-27 they could be dealing with a ridiculous rise in the cap — one that would cause some serious mayhem.

Revenues next season could easily exceed \$7 billion. If the 2026 cap calculation is anything like it was under the previous CBA, that could mean a salary ceiling of \$112 million or more — which would mean a staggering jump of roughly \$20 million in one offseason.

Like I said: chaos. (And just in time for Connor McDavid to be a free agent, too!)

Now, there are some big caveats here. We're projecting what revenues will be well into the future, and we're also projecting how the salary cap will function in a new agreement that the two sides haven't even begun negotiating. We're also not factoring in that those salary-cap calculations, in the past, often resulted in players paying huge amounts of escrow — quarterly salary withholdings that rose to as much as 17 percent in some years.

Players absolutely hate escrow and don't want to get back to the levels of withholding they had six or seven years ago. So pushing for as much cap growth as possible doesn't make sense for them either.

And that very well could impact how the cap calculations work in a future agreement.

While players are going to be paid the same amount in aggregate no matter what, given their salaries are hard linked to revenues, a higher salary cap does come with some upsides. More cap room each season means more teams can compete for free agents, which gives players more options. Cap room also makes it easier for teams to keep their current players and not have to resort to trades and buyouts to make tough changes.

Overall, a higher cap creates flexibility in the system.

Cap stagnation? That can create pain.

Ultimately, I think what we will see here is a happy medium, where the league attempts to project where revenues might be next season and tries to find a "bridge" cap number for 2025-26 that acts as a midpoint between this season's \$88 million and wherever the cap will be in the first year of a new CBA in 2026-27.

Based on the information we have, that's likely a higher number than \$92.4 million. Friedman's \$97 million mark seems like a reasonable landing spot.

But we'll need the NHL and NHLPA to agree on how much higher than the built-in 5 percent bump they want it to go.

The good news is, by all accounts this CBA negotiation isn't expected to be a war. The insiders are calling this a "peacetime negotiation" for a reason; there's no stomach for a lockout or strike right now when you talk to people behind the scenes, on both sides.

So it feels unlikely the owners will take a run at reducing the players' percentage of revenues from 50 percent, which means a return to something resembling the old system we know and love from before the pandemic.

And, yes, more regular cap growth, year after year, than what we've experienced since 2019.

The Athletic / Weekend NHL rankings: Pondering the Avalanche, the Blues and where we all went so wrong

By Sean McIndoe – November 19, 2024

We're over a month into the NHL season, just days away from U.S. Thanksgiving. Are you ready to admit you were wrong?

I am. When it came to predicting how the 2024-25 season would play out, I was very wrong. I almost always am. I'm bad at this, and you should not trust anything I say about anything.

But you're bad at it too, and I have proof. For the last few years, we've had the prediction contest as a permanent record of where the general preseason consensus was among hockey fans, or at least my readers. And one month into this season ... woof, you guys are looking bad.

So before we get to my rankings, which will be wrong, let's humble the howling mob with a look back at five key developments you totally whiffed on.

Bonus five: Your worst calls (so far) from the reader prediction contest

5. You were all in on the Oilers and Avalanche juggernauts — Not only were the Oilers your top pick for teams that would make the playoffs, but they were a nearly unanimous choice. Six weeks in, they've spent most of the season fighting for their wild-card lives. One of the teams they're battling with is the Avalanche, who were your fifth safest team and are currently on the outside looking in. More on them in a bit.

4. You had the Wild as the ultimate also-ran — They're sitting with one of the league's best records right now, and feel like they already have a postseason spot locked up. Not one of you — as in zero — had them as one of your playoff picks. But over half of you were happy to rank them as the most middling team in the league, leaving them as the runaway leader in that category.

3. You thought Sam Reinhart was a one-year wonder — We've mentioned this before, but it's worth repeating. When it came to the bonus question — name someone other than Auston Matthews who'll get to 50 goals — only two of you picked Reinhart, even though he was coming off a 57-goal season. Today, he's on pace for 59. In case you were wondering, those two measly votes left him tied for 15th in the league with two other guys on pace for 50: Cole Caufield and Kyle Connor.

2. You had close to zero faith in the Jets — Last year's Jets finished 52-24-6, the exact same record as the eventual champion Florida Panthers. But when it came time to stand behind them this year, only six out of roughly 1,200 of you did. I didn't have a question asking you which team would post the best 15-game start in NHL history, but I'm guessing you wouldn't have the Jets very high in that one either.

1. You didn't believe in the Capitals — The Caps, who I will remind you were a playoff team a year ago and who got better over the offseason, were still a borderline postseason pick heading into the season. So, how many of you were confident they'd be back?

Zero. No, really. Not one of you picked the Capitals as a playoff team. That put them one spot behind the Carolina Panthers, who are a long shot to make the NHL playoffs because they are a football team. More of you had confidence in the Sabres, Blues and Penguins than in slow-starting Alexander Ovechkin and crew.

We are all so dumb, and nobody can predict anything. Anyway, on to the rankings that are meant to predict things ...

Road to the Cup

The five teams with the best chances of winning the Stanley Cup.

This has the potential to be very good news for most of the teams that appear in this half of the rankings:

Elliott Friedman reporting on the broadcast tonight that next year's salary cap could actually be pushed well over the 5% growth limit up to as much as \$95 to \$97 million.

5. Vegas Golden Knights (11-5-2, +15 true goals differential*) — The Rangers have a similar record, but there seems to be more negativity coming out from fans and media in New York than you'd expect and it's spooking me a little. So I'm going to nudge the Rangers out of the Top Five for the first time this season and go back to the Knights, if only because I try to have each division represented and they're holding strong on top of the Pacific.

(Speaking of Pacific contenders, best wishes to Edmonton's Darnell Nurse as he recovers from a scary head shot from Ryan Reaves. The Leafs enforcer gets a well-deserved five games from the Department of Player Safety.)

4. Dallas Stars (11-5-0, +18) — Hard to argue with a 3-0 week that sees you hit the seven-goal mark twice. The close win was the most impressive, though, a 2-1 statement over the hard-charging Wild. They've got the Ducks and Sharks up next at home, meaning it's either an easy four points or the dreaded trap games.

3. Winnipeg Jets (15-3-0, +31) — A two-game losing streak wouldn't be especially newsworthy for many teams. But when a mini streak triples your season loss total, it's fair to wonder if the shine has come off the league's best early story. The good news is the losses came against the Lightning and Panthers, so it's not like they're dropping games to also-rans. The better news is they get an instant rematch with the Panthers tomorrow night, and a chance to nip any narratives in the bud.

2. Carolina Hurricanes (13-4-0, +27) — They mostly keep winning, even as concerns about Frederik Andersen remain. Having third-string Spencer Martin show up to shut out a high-scoring Senators team certainly helps.

1. Florida Panthers (12-5-1, +9) — Shutting out the Jets was a nice flex, but it also came after back-to-back losses to the Devils, so all in all a mixed week for the defending champs.

By the way, shout out to the Devils for ranking second in the league in points and outside the top 10 in points percentage. Nothing quite like building up a five-game cushion in the games played column before we hit Thanksgiving.

*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.

Not ranked: Colorado Avalanche — A few weeks ago I said I had zero doubt they'd eventually make the playoffs. I stand by that. Let's start there.

But yeah, I'd probably dial the confidence down just a tad. Because the team that started the season fourth in our Cup contender rankings is struggling to hold down the fourth spot in their own division. That would be a division with two of the top records in the league plus the Stars, in case you forgot. Good luck climbing that mountain.

Friday night's loss to the Capitals dropped them to .500 in a league where that's not good enough to get close to the playoffs. The loss snapped a three-game win streak that kicked off with an impressive win over the Hurricanes and had seemed to put them back on track. Now they're heading out on the road for a tough four-game trip that includes both Florida teams and a rematch with Washington.

Normally, that wouldn't be a setup for optimism. But this hasn't been a normal season in Colorado, where wins and losses have occasionally taken a back seat to just being able to fill out a roster. The list of injuries and absences went from lengthy to ridiculous for most of the first month. But that's changing now.

So they'll be fine. We think. There's still the matter of the goaltending and Alexandar Georgiev putting up 1983 Smythe Division backup numbers. And they've already dug enough of a hole in the Central that even getting home ice is going to be a long haul.

Of course, they didn't have home ice last year against the Jets, and that didn't matter much once they got rolling. That's kind of where I'm at with the Avalanche right now — they're not going to win the Presidents' Trophy, but they don't need to, because we know this core can win a Cup so the focus is on making sure they're still around when the real games start. They will be. I'm pretty sure.

Until we get a better sense of what the full-powered version of this team should look like, the rest of us can leave the game-to-game sweating to Colorado fans, and instead sit back and enjoy a team that's awfully fun to watch. Nathan MacKinnon is leading the scoring race, Cale Makar looks like the Norris favorite and Mikko Rantanen is chasing the Rocket Richard. And with goaltending that's always on the verge of giving up four or five, you're almost always in for something fun.

Diehard Avs fans who were expecting a run for top spot in the Central might be having slightly less fun. But it's all good, as long as they make the playoffs. And for now, at least, I still think that's a sure thing.

The bottom five

The five teams that are headed toward dead last and the best lottery odds for James Hagens, or maybe someone else.

Good stuff here on the fastest-rising prospect in each team's system. That's important information for any fan base, but especially so if you're used to seeing your team in consideration for one of this section's spots.

5. Columbus Blue Jackets (6-9-2, -8) — They were a nice early story, but it feels like reality is catching up with a roster that just isn't talented enough.

4. Anaheim Ducks (6-8-2, -11) — This is the single best hockey article you will read all week that includes the phrase "ketchup splat" in the headline.

3. Montreal Canadiens (6-10-2, -19) — They needed that win over the Blue Jackets, especially with the Oilers and Knights up next. The scoring remains delightfully unbalanced after Nick Suzuki, with Cole Caufield sitting with 12 goals and three assists while the next three players (Mike Matheson, Juraj Slafkovský and Lane Hutson) have combined for two goals and 32 helpers.

2. San Jose Sharks (5-10-4, -19) — It was an 0-for-3 week, although two of those losses came in the shootout so they're fake. I'm still moving them out of the top spot for the first time all season, because as bad as they've been, they don't have the all-falling-apart vibe of our next team ...

1. Chicago Blackhawks (6-11-1, -14) — I really do not get the Taylor Hall thing. The former MVP has gone from unproductive winger on a bad team, which was sad enough, to outright healthy scratch. When the Hawks signed him, I figured there was a decent chance he could be a productive option on the first line, and the worst-case scenario was that they could flip him at a deadline for picks.

They still could, but now the storyline is more about rehabbing his reputation as another season slips away. **Laz pulls no punches here:**

Not ranked: St. Louis Blues.

That seems about right. Can I get you to settle for being this week's "not ranked" team?

The Blues came into the weekend riding a four-game losing streak, including an 8-1 blowout at the hands of the Capitals (their second 8-1 loss in two weeks) and an overtime loss to the Sabres. To make matters worse, they were facing back-to-back games against the Bruins and Hurricanes, two teams expected to be very good this year, one of whom actually is. The weekend started well enough, with a comeback win over Boston that sent the Bruins even further down the spiral. But last night they were back to the usual Blues as they watched the Hurricanes pull away to a 4-1 win.

That leaves the Blues sitting in the sixth spot in the Central, looking up at the Jets, Wild, Stars and Avs, among others. That's not great for a team that apparently viewed itself as a playoff contender. With Robert Thomas out and the gap growing daily, is the season already over in St. Louis?

It could be. And maybe that wouldn't even be the worst thing that could happen. Doug Armstrong didn't exactly go all in on this roster, but you don't use multiple offer sheets and sign a 39-year-old Ryan Suter because you're rebuilding. This is an older team with a middling pipeline, and just enough talent and goaltending to hang around the playoff perimeter without ever actually scaring anyone. The "stuck in the middle" warning sign on the dashboard has been flashing for a while now, and maybe falling out of the race entirely by December would be the nudge the team needs to start thinking long-term.

You have to wonder how Armstrong would feel about that, given he has this season and next left as GM before the succession plan to Alex Steen kicks in. Does he want to spend his final seasons building for the next generation, or is this all about chasing one more championship?

We might not be far from finding out. This week brings an interesting pair of games against the Wild and Sharks, which is basically both ends of the current NHL success spectrum. If you're looking to figure out which end you're closer to, that's not a bad checkpoint.

The Athletic / Have NHL players maxed out the slap shot? The science behind the speed

By Mark Lazerus – November 19, 2024

Thirty years ago, the average PGA golfer drove the ball 261.84 yards. Davis Love III was the longest hitter at 283.8 yards.

In 2024, the average distance is 300.9 yards, with Cameron Champ leading the way at a whopping 323.3 yards. Technological advances for both clubs and golf balls — combined with a greater focus on fitness — have turned 7,000-yard tracks into pitch-and-putts for the world's best golfers.

Thirty years ago, Al Iafrate won the NHL's hardest shot competition at the All-Star skills competition with a 102.7 mph blast, down from his 105.2 a year before.

At the 2024 All-Star weekend, Cale Makar won with a slap shot of 102.5 mph. Utah's Michael Kesselring and the Buffalo Sabres' Tage Thompson recently had blasts of 103.77 mph and 104.69 mph, respectively — the only two 100 mph clappers in the league this season. Last season, the 10 biggest bombers combined for 26 shots at or above 100 mph, with the Winnipeg Jets' Colin Miller topping out at 102.59.

What gives? Iafrate was using an old-school wooden stick. Makar, Kesselring, Thompson, Miller and everyone else in the league is using a custom composite stick, designed to their exact body and mechanical specifications to generate maximum force. Yet the numbers are comparable. There might be more big shooters in the league — tracking data in the NHL only dates back to the 2021-22 season, so we'll never know for sure — but they're not really raising the bar by much. Certainly not to the degree that golfers are. Or tennis players are, for that matter.

In fact, it's more akin to baseball, in which pitchers seem to have reached the limit of human capability at about 105 mph. More and more pitchers throw hard every year — 203 pitchers averaged a four-seam fastball of 95 mph or more this season, up from 123 just seven years ago — but the ceiling isn't budging. Since Aroldis Chapman hit a record 105.8 mph back in 2010, only Ben Joyce and Jordan Hicks have touched 105, and only once each (Chapman did it nine times). Of course, pitchers aren't using any equipment. It's just muscle and mechanics. The human body can only do so much, no matter how feverishly you exercise, no matter how impeccable your nutritional habits are.

Hockey's different, right? Shouldn't there be 110 mph shots by now? Or 120, for that matter? Shouldn't we be talking about scaling back the technology to preserve the integrity of the game, the way the golf world always is? Like every other sport, hockey players keep getting bigger and stronger. But the low-100s remains the gold standard for shot speed.

It begs two questions: Have we reached the ceiling of what a slap shot can be? And why?

"There's always a limit," said Detroit Red Wings defenseman Moritz Seider, who has reached 95.54 mph this season, in the league's 91st percentile. "The human factor only allows you to do so much. And there does come a point where we're not superhuman."

Alain Haché knows a thing or two about high-speed projectiles. The experimental physicist and University of Moncton professor seemed to defy the very laws of physics in 2002 when he and one of his students sent a pulse of radiation 120 meters at superluminal speed — that's faster than the speed of light. But Haché is a hockey nerd, too, the author of two books on the science behind the sport. It makes him uniquely qualified to address such an esoteric topic.

He believes the plateauing speeds of NHL slap shots means that we might have reached our technological limit when it comes to hockey sticks. Lafrate and Al MacInnis and Bobby Hull were physical freaks in the wooden-stick days. All the composites have done is let the rest of the league catch up to them.

“What it means probably is the limitation is no longer the stick itself,” Haché said. “Hockey sticks are pretty efficient already.”

A slap shot is pretty simple from a physics standpoint. When a player rears back and fires, he doesn't aim for the puck, but rather a foot or so behind the puck. When the stick hits the ice, it flexes, or bends. By flexing the stick, a player is storing potential energy into the stick. When the stick unbends and whips back around, it's turning that potential energy into kinetic energy, sending the puck on its way.

Energy is always lost in the bending and unbending of the stick, Haché said. A perfectly elastic stick would convert 100 percent of a player's potential energy into kinetic energy, but modern sticks are pretty close. Haché estimated that modern composites convert “maybe 90 percent.”

“So if you improve your stick (even further), you're not going to gain a lot,” he said. “You're not going to double the amount of energy you can transfer. So the energy becomes limited by the player.”

chart visualization

In Lafrate's and MacInnis' day, the wooden sticks could flex only so much, and there wasn't any significant variety from twig to twig.

These days, players have all sorts of options with composite sticks. A stick's flex — or “whippiness,” in the players' parlance — is assigned a number. A number above 100 is stiffer, a number below 100 is “whippier.”

Zdeno Chara, a nearly 7-foot-tall giant who holds the record for hardest shot in an NHL skills competition at 108.8 mph, used a famously stiff stick. Alex Ovechkin, on the verge of becoming the league's all-time leading goal scorer largely on the strength of his cannonading one-timer slap shot, uses an extra whippy stick, in the mid-to-upper-70s. Connor Bedard, who doesn't have the physical stature of either of those players, uses a super-whippy stick in the low-70s. Whatever suits the player's mechanics best.

Naturally, there's more to it than that, depending on how deep into the scientific weeds you want to get. There's the “bounce effect,” which means a shot will have more velocity if the puck is moving toward the player at speed when he hits it — think of big Aaron Judge squaring up a 100 mph fastball and imagine the exit velocity. Judge wouldn't be able to hit a ball off a tee nearly as far, or as fast. It's not a one-for-one factor because it's not a perfectly elastic collision; if a 60 mph pass from behind the net is one-timed back toward the net, the shooter won't get an additional 60 mph on his shot. But he will get a bump.

Now if the player is carrying the puck up the ice at speed and manages to get off a slapper on the rush, he will get all that additional speed. Let's say Connor McDavid is carrying the puck up ice at 23 mph, his top speed so far this season. If he somehow managed to rip a full slap shot at 83 mph, his top shot velocity this season, while the puck was still moving at 23 mph, his shot would go 106 mph. Easier said than done, but maybe Hall of Famer Marián Hossa was onto something when he would blast those slap shots while racing into the low slot during shootout attempts.

The stick — wood, fiberglass, carbon fiber, aluminum, whatever — is just a tool, though. Technique matters more than anything else. But a little muscle mass doesn't hurt.

“The power comes entirely from the player,” Haché said. “He will rotate his body. He will time the slap shot so that he can put as much flex as he can in the stick.”

That’s why San Jose defenseman Jake Walman says his shots are harder and heavier earlier in the season, while he still has all the muscle he added over the summer. Players typically lose much of their bulk over the course of the grueling season, as weight-lifting takes a back seat to the endless cardio they’re doing night after night. Their shots can fade along with their weight.

But while behemoths such as Chara and Shea Weber (who nearly caught Chara with a 108.5 at the 2015 All-Star weekend) and the 6-6 Thompson have an inherent advantage, size isn’t everything. Timing is crucial. Pick the puck clean instead of hitting the ice first and the stick won’t flex and the puck will flutter weakly. Hit too far behind the puck and most of the kinetic energy will be spent before the blade even gets to the puck.

“Everyone shoots different, but there are certain things you have to do in order to have a hard shot,” said Chicago’s Seth Jones, who topped out at 97.97 mph last season. “You see small guys have hard shots all the time. You don’t need to be 220 pounds and 6-3 to have a hard shot. And the flex is whatever you’re comfortable with. Some guys shoot harder with (a) 100 flex, some guys shoot even harder with a 75. There’s no one way to do it.”

Power in one sport doesn’t necessarily mean power in the other. Walman’s best golf drives go a relatively modest 270 yards down the middle.

But oh, man, can Walman spin the ball.

“I’m hitting down on it pretty hard,” he said.

The Sharks defenseman blasted a slapper 101.6 mph last year in Vancouver when he was with the Detroit Red Wings. This year, he’s topped out at 94.93 mph. And it’s the same body mechanics that allow him to put so much backspin into a 9-iron that allow him to so consistently hit a hockey puck really hard — the way he rears back and opens up his upper body, the way he transfers nearly all the weight into his front foot with vicious body torque, the way he leans into the stick to create all that flex as he hits the ice six to 12 inches behind the puck, the way he follows through with all of his weight moving forward.

“You’re leaning over way more in hockey than in golf,” he said. “I’m bent over, all my power is generating into that one spot in front. ... I’m leaning so far over the puck that all my weight is going down into the puck.”

Hardest shots by year since NHL tracking data implementation

2024-25

Tage Thompson

104.69

2023-24

Colin Miller

102.59

2022-23

Radko Gudas

101.71

2021-22

Colton Parayko

101.95

Walman's always had a big shot, even when he didn't have the right tools. He said he was pretty much the last kid in youth hockey to play with a wooden stick. His teammates chirped him for it, and his coaches "gave my mom and dad heck" for not buying him a composite stick. But even at a young age, Walman was able to bring out the flex in the wood and launch missiles all day. To this day, he still wonders which kind of stick is really more powerful when leveraged perfectly.

"I'd say the first 50 percent is everything that you do — the power you're generating, leaning into it," Walman said. "And then the stick takes over after that. The second half is the technology."

So while Haché thinks sticks might be approaching the point of perfection, players aren't so sure. Jones, for one, was skeptical when asked if the NHL had hit the ceiling.

"It depends on where the technology can go," Jones said. "Athletes are developing every year, we're getting faster and stronger and bigger, but it's not just the human body. It's a little different than pitching, where it's just you and your arm and the ball. Here, we're using equipment. Right now, it seems like it maxed out with how light and strong sticks are with the carbon fiber. But who knows in 10 years where the hell technology can be?"

There's another question that needs to be addressed here: Does any of this even matter?

While MLB teams have high-tech "pitch labs" and huge staffs devoted to squeezing every last bit of velocity and spin out of their pitchers — if a pitcher's velocity drops a single mile per hour from one start to the next, team medical staffs kick into gear and fan bases go into a panic — NHL players seem a lot less concerned with the science behind the shot.

See puck, hit puck. Puck go fast.

"I honestly have no idea" how the science works, said Edmonton's Evan Bouchard, who hit 103 in an AHL skills competition.

Most of the biggest shots in the game come from defensemen, and you'll see them firing off blasts from the point at that night's starting goalie at the tail end of every morning skate. It's more of a ritual than a rigorous scientific process, though.

"I just figure the more you do it, the better you get at it," Bouchard said. "It's just practice, repetition."

When told he was in the top 10 percent in the league when it came to shot speed, Seider said: "That's obviously cool. But that's not a stat I've ever checked."

See, a 100 mph shot is a great weapon in hockey. But there are several reasons why it's not the be-all, end-all the way a 100 mph four-seam fastball is.

For one, full-bore slap shots are very difficult to get off in game situations. There's a reason most of the biggest blasts come from skills competitions with pristine conditions — a free run-up, a stationary puck (the timing is too tricky to risk playing for the aforementioned bounce effect) and no defender. In a game, time and space are often nonexistent.

"The game is just way too fast for taking the time, going all the way to the top and letting one rip," Seider said. "People are just in your way more. There's better coverage, opponents have better sticks on you. You hardly ever get off your best slap shot in an actual game."

Another reason it's not as critical: Harder isn't always better. Back when the Blackhawks were winning championships, they had big Brent Seabrook blasting shots from the point on the power play. But light-hitting Michal Rozsival would get his share of power-play time, too. And his wimpy little shots just seemed to have a knack for getting through traffic, hitting the net and creating rebounds.

"It's hard to get off a big shot nowadays," Bouchard said. "Sometimes it's better to throw a quick wrist shot on net and see what happens. It doesn't always have to be as hard as you can hit it. That's not always the best shot."

A big windup also gives a defender an extra split second to throw himself in front of the puck. That said, Jones posited that one big shot that gets very painfully blocked might lead to an open lane later in the game, as a defender thinks twice about stepping in front of the next one.

But even he acknowledged that rarely happens.

"It's a competitive sport," Jones said. "You're still going to see guys laying out in front of shots to win the Stanley Cup, whether it's 80 miles per hour or 120."

After all, physics might be able to explain how flex and torque and weight transfer and potential energy all add up to a classic clapper. But there's no explaining what drives someone to step in front of one.

"No one said we're smart," Jones said with a chuckle. "We're athletes."

ESPN / Why paying goalies is so complicated in today's NHL

By Emily Kaplan – November 19, 2024

As the New York Rangers and Igor Shesterkin's camp negotiate for a new contract, the goalie doesn't want to talk about what's at stake -- though everyone else around the league does. According to sources, Shesterkin declined an eight-year, \$88 million offer at the start of the season, which would have made him the highest paid goalie in NHL history.

"He's special," Detroit Red Wings coach Derek Lalonde said on Oct. 14, when Shesterkin stopped 31 shots in a 4-1 win. "I can see why he turned down the 88 [million dollars]. Good agent."

Five nights later, Shesterkin was even better, turning away 34 of 35 shots against the high-powered Toronto Maple Leafs.

"You can see why he's going to be the highest-paid goalie in the league," Toronto's veteran goalie, Anthony Stolarz, said after the game. "Hats off to him."

Even after Shesterkin allowed four goals through two periods against the rival Washington Capitals on Oct. 29, his opponents were feeling stymied. Said Capitals assistant Scott Allen ahead of the third period: "You see why he's asking for \$13 million, or whatever it is by now."

The entire league seems to agree that Shesterkin, 28, is among its top goalies and deserves to be paid as such. But how much should a goalie make in today's NHL? That might be one of the toughest questions to answer in the league.

JEREMY SWAYMAN AND the Boston Bruins ended a summerlong standoff when he signed an eight-year, \$66 million contract (\$8.25 million in average annual value) ahead of the season opener. Shortly after, the Dallas Stars' Jake Oettinger signed an identical deal. They both match what the New York Islanders and Ilya Sorokin agreed to in 2023, and are roughly around what the NHL's current save percentage leader Connor Hellebuyck (\$8.5 million AAV) signed for in 2023 on a seven-year deal.

Starting next season, eight goalies will make at least \$7 million. By contrast, 107 skaters will be at or above that mark -- with 11 making at least \$11 million.

"I think we're in a decent place, [goalies] are now making great money, but it's also not superstar money," one starting goaltender said. "It just shows you how the league views our position. GMs don't want to make goalies the highest-paid players, but I think lots of guys could make a good argument."

Star forwards play roughly a third of the game. Star defensemen, at best, skate for half. Their performance can vary based on linemates, matchups and a variety of other nuances. A goaltender is in net (practically) the entire 60 minutes, alone in the crease. But even as it is the most isolated position, front office executives say goaltending is the hardest to evaluate -- and therefore compensate.

"Agents want to do apples to oranges comparisons when it comes to goaltenders," one front office executive said. "We have comps for top centers. Comps for top-four defensemen. Comps for goaltenders are way more complicated."

Carolina GM Eric Tulsky, who comes from an analytics background, explained how slim the margins are.

"A lot of what makes goaltending hard is that a guy who stops 92% of shots is one of the best goalies in the world," Tulsky said. "A guy who stops 91% is kind of average. And the difference between those is not very big. You watch a guy face 500 or 1,000 shots, and he might stop 91 or 92% by chance. It takes a lot of time to know for sure that this is a guy that is going to stop 91 or 92% day after day."

The core argument for not giving goalie superstar contracts tend to center around this uncertainty, posed by one front office executive: "How many mega goalie contracts age well?"

Plus, there's proof of concept that it's not always necessary to have one goalie on a big contract.

The Florida Panthers just won a Stanley Cup with the league's highest-paid active goaltender, Sergei Bobrovsky (\$10 million cap hit). Florida spends more on goaltending than any other team. Backup Spencer Knight makes \$4.5 million while Florida boasts the league's only "Goaltending Excellence Department" -- which includes four coaches/executives dedicated to the position.

But over the past 10 years, there have also been two Stanley Cup winners with starting goaltenders making the league minimum (Jordan Binnington in 2018, Matt Murray in 2016) while the Golden Knights won in 2023 with Adin Hill earning just \$2.175 million, which represented less than 3% of their salary cap.

The theme? "There's not one right way to do it," Blackhawks GM Kyle Davidson said. "I don't think there's a hard and fast way anyone thinks about spending on goaltending. It probably just depends on what you have on your team."

IN SURVEYING 12 high-ranking team executives about philosophies in paying goaltending, a common theme emerged, summed up by one GM: "The value of a goaltender is based on how your team is built, rather than his talent."

One front office executive believed that "if you put Andrei Vasilevskiy on 10 different teams, you'd have 10 different save percentages."

Most executives deferred to team construction. One GM cited Vegas as a team that was strong down the middle and had an excellent defensive core. "They can get away with average goaltending," he said.

But poor goaltending can derail a team quickly. "Your 5-on-5 game might be good," Predators GM Barry Trotz said. "But if you have weak goaltending, that doesn't allow you to go on any streaks."

The biggest issue for most front offices is projection on goalie development. It's why a team like Philadelphia, looking for its goaltender of the future, is hedging its bets. The Flyers are carrying three goalies aged 22-27, and drafted another two in 2023.

"I think people have the idea that goalies peak really late," one GM said. "I'm not sure I believe that. I don't think it takes time for the goalie to develop; I think it takes time for teams to say, 'Wait, this goalie is really good.'"

By then, the goalie might be past his physical prime, hence the risks of a long-term deal. One front office executive who just signed a goalie to a max term said he's confident, based on that goalie's pedigree and work ethic, that years 1-5 will go great. After that, the team might need security to cover for potential decline.

Those in the goaltending union often claim their position is both misunderstood and scapegoated. Some agents said in conversation with front office executives, they've heard phrases such as "goaltending is a crapshoot," or "I don't understand goaltending."

"Confidence in a goalie from management can be fleeting," one high-profile goalie agent said. "There's not a ton of patience. If the season isn't going well, pressure is on the goalie right away."

Ray Petkau, who represents Hellebuyck and several other goalies, said he believes goaltending can be misunderstood by some in the analytics community. For example, several front office executives cited Goals Saved Above Expected as a go-to stat for evaluation. Petkau said that one doesn't tell the whole story.

"If a goal is deflected by an opposing player 2 feet in front of the net, it's assigned X amount of value. But if a shot is deflected off the goalie's defenseman, that's not considered the same way by some of the groups providing public analytics information. Some say it averages out over time, but they don't take into account that some teams have more defensemen who have a habit of blocking off their stick."

Petkau prefers performance when facing high-danger chances as a stronger stat for evaluation, but that too has variables that can't be controlled by the goalie. He also said goalies' strengths should mesh with a team's needs. For example, if a goalie isn't great with rush chances, he shouldn't go to a team that allows a lot.

THE CLIMATE ISN'T going to get any easier for goalies. League average save percentage has dipped in each of the past nine seasons, and we're trending for the lowest number (.901) since 2005-06. Tulsy sees a trend of offensive creativity, specifically with more East-West movement and an increase in backdoor plays.

"The game's getting faster, people are getting stronger, and so it all happens that much quicker," Tulsy said. "When you're in a position where your job is to react, that makes it much harder."

Another leaguewide trend: there are now fewer Shesterkins -- obvious No. 1 workhorses -- and more incidents of goaltending by committee.

From 2010-2019, the league averaged 20.4 goalies per season who started at least 50 games. Over the past three seasons, that number is now 14.3.

Consider the New Jersey Devils, who needed an upgrade in net for this season. GM Tom Fitzgerald determined it was best to get a combination of goaltenders making less than \$8 million versus having one make \$8 million and another at the league minimum. The Devils' new tandem is Jacob Markstrom and Jake Allen, both acquired via trade, with their former teams retaining salary.

"Other goalies we looked at, some were going to be free agents," Fitzgerald said. "You just don't know what they were going to be priced at with the cap going up."

Cost certainty is huge in today's NHL, where everyone knows the salary cap is going up after several stagnant years -- but nobody knows exactly by how much and how quickly.

That's what makes contracts in general difficult right now. Many agents are focused on percentage of the cap. The three highest players this season, Auston Matthews, Nathan MacKinnon and Connor McDavid, are in the 15-16% range. According to sources, the argument by Shesterkin's camp is that he is the team's most important player, so he should be the top-paid player on the team. Currently, that's winger Artemi Panarin at \$11.64 million.

The Rangers, in contrast, need to account for future contracts (winger Alexis Lafreniere just resigned at a \$7.45 million annual cap hit, and defenseman K'Andre Miller is due). New York can also offer something no other team can: an eighth year. That means if Shesterkin hit the open market, other teams would have to ante up the AAV to match New York's total value.

Only Vasilevskiy and Bobrovsky have come close to the record \$10.5 million AAV Carey Price earned on an eight-year deal, which kicked in during the 2018-19 season, when Price was 31. Price played only two full seasons on the deal. He has been on long-term injured reserve for most of the past three seasons.

Since there are only so many goalie jobs, there are fewer opportunities to reset the market. Hellebuyck could have in 2024, but instead took less to stay in Winnipeg, a place where he felt comfortable and a team he believed could win with.

That's why the entire league -- and specifically the goaltending union -- is waiting for resolution on Shterkin. He could help shape the future of the position -- resetting the market for the next generation.

Sportsnet.ca / Scout's Analysis: Looking at Blue Jackets trade candidate David Jiricek

By Jason Bukala – November 19, 2024

Late in January, in the middle of last season, I wrote an article that broke down the state of top Columbus Blue Jackets prospect David Jiricek. At that time, there seemed to be a disconnect between the player and the team, as he bounced between the AHL and NHL and struggled to earn much ice time at the higher level. So I set out to identify some of the reasons why things weren't progressing the way either party had envisioned.

My observations and conclusions rattled some of my former colleagues in the scouting and player development industry. Suffice to say I received phone calls from some unhappy individuals.

Fast forward to today and Jiricek is still a topic of discussion amongst Blue Jackets fans and media. Most importantly, the organization itself is still figuring out how to handle the sixth overall pick from 2022, who has played just five NHL games this season.

There are two big differences this time: Columbus is under the direction of a new president and GM in Don Waddell and a new coaching staff is headed up by Dean Evason. My past experience — especially when I was with the Florida Panthers and we went through management changes — tells me the Jackets are working through the process of gauging asset value throughout their organization.

Included in this process is establishing a standard for their developing prospects. The new leadership group wants it to be known that opportunity to play in the NHL lineup will be earned and not given.

With all of this in mind I've set out to revisit the state of Jiricek's game and his overall prospect value.

OPPORTUNITY

The Blue Jackets, like any other NHL club, value internal competition and look for ways to improve their roster when possible. Just last week they plucked defenceman Dante Fabbro off waivers from Nashville. Fabbro himself is a first-round pick, 17th overall in 2016 and, like Jiricek, a right-shot. Fabbro is still only 26 years old.

Through Fabbro's first three games with Columbus he's averaged 19:12 of ice time and is settling into a variety of roles. He's chipped in a goal and an assist and is a plus-one.

Fabbro's arrival clouds Jiricek's path to playing immediate minutes in the NHL even more than before. Jiricek had only suited up for five games this season before Fabbro's arrival and was a healthy scratch Friday against Pittsburgh and Saturday against Montreal.

Though Jiricek is expected back in the lineup Monday against Boston, he's averaged just over 11 minutes of ice time in the games he's played and hasn't sniffed out a role on either the power play or penalty kill. Jiricek has one assist and is a minus-two.

So far, adding Fabbro to the roster has been an upgrade for Columbus over Jiricek.

ANALYZING JIRICEK'S STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND RESULTS

Jiricek is a towering defenceman (six-foot-four, 209 pounds) who's at his best when active on offence. His combination of skating ability, vision, and a heavy shot that can beat pro goalies from distance are positive elements.

As much as I appreciate what Jiricek can produce offensively he also needs to provide better-than-average defensive detail to find a regular role at the NHL level.

In the following clip, also from last year's AHL playoffs, Jiricek is deployed on the penalty kill. Notice the route he takes when attempting to gap up and kill the zone entry against. His body positioning is disconnected. Hershey gains entry and possession of the puck down low in Cleveland's zone. Jiricek's "recovery" heading to protect his net is far too deliberate.

For me, this sequence identified an area that Jiricek needed to concentrate on improving. His timing and recovery are off in this clip.

Jiricek has largely proven he can play to his identity at the AHL level and, overall, had a very solid playoff last spring with Cleveland. He gained valuable experience and produced three goals and eight assists in 14 games. More impressive was the fact he was used in all situations and finished with a plus-three rating at the hardest time of the year. He certainly had momentum heading into the summer and towards training camp this fall in Columbus.

Unfortunately, reality has set in very quickly for Jiricek at the NHL level. The AHL is a fantastic development league because it provides a huge test for young defence prospects. But the NHL is a completely different animal.

Jiricek has only managed to direct six shots on goal in his five-game audition this season, and three of those came in one game versus San Jose. He's not getting the same chances to create offence at the NHL level as he got in the AHL.

One of the things Jiricek does have going for him, compared to smaller prospects, is his length. His reach provides him the opportunity to extend plays that come around the boards in the offensive zone. Some smaller players would have a more difficult time extending plays and directing pucks on net.

Here's an example of Jiricek extending a play in a recent game versus Washington. By keeping the puck in the offensive zone, and directing it quickly toward the net, he created some chaos in front of the Capitals' crease and a potential scoring chance for Columbus:

Conversely, here's an example of Jiricek pressing up in the neutral zone to potentially interrupt the breakout against Washington. However, he flies past Alex Ovechkin (of all people) and his inability to gap up to keep with his check in the defensive zone leads to a one-time goal against off Ovechkin's stick. Jiricek needed to be more assertive at the outset of this play and more aggressive identifying how the play was developing in his zone. He essentially checked nobody in this sequence.

Jiricek last played an NHL game on Nov. 9 against the LA Kings in Los Angeles. NHL coaches, especially in tight contests on the road, expect their team to identify when to take risks and when to keep the game simple. Grinding out valuable standings points away from home is difficult in the NHL.

The following sequence speaks volumes about the current state of Jiricek's game and why the Jackets' coaching staff has little trust in his defensive awareness at the NHL level right now.

Instead of keeping things simple and the play in front of him, Jiricek runs out of place to chase the play into the neutral zone. He's entirely out of position as the puck ends up in the back of the Blue Jackets net.

WHERE WILL JIRICEK AND THE BLUE JACKETS GO FROM HERE?

David Jiricek is a solid prospect. Big, right-shot defencemen with the offensive upside that he has are worth waiting on as they take their time to develop.

Jiricek produced one goal and nine assists in 43 games with the Blue Jackets last season and averaged 14 minutes of ice time, all of which came at even strength. He finished with a respectable minus-four ranking.

This season hasn't gone to plan, but Jiricek turns just 21 at the end of the month and has plenty of runway ahead of him. Although he spent most of last season in the NHL, Jiricek isn't ready for full-time duty this year. He requires a reset at the AHL level and needs to get back to playing to his strengths.

I wouldn't recommend Columbus panicking and throwing Jiricek out there for trade. He has far too much upside. Conversely, if I'm a team that has an opportunity to acquire Jiricek in a trade, I'm making that call.

I still believe Jiricek has the ability to land on an NHL power play and provide secondary offence. His small area defending and details can be coached up in the right situation.

Daily Faceoff / Rick Nash sponging up front office experience with Blue Jackets, 'not in any rush' to be a GM yet

By Anthony Di Marco – November 19, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets began an organizational facelift during the winter of last season when they relieved general manager Jarmo Kekalainen from his duties. The changes in the front office continued in the spring, when president of hockey operations John Davidson stepped aside into an advisor role, paving the way for Don Waddell's arrival. Assuming the roles of president of hockey ops and GM, he was ushering in of a new era for the Blue Jackets.

Among the changes that followed Waddell's arrival to Columbus' front office was the elevation of Rick Nash. After serving as director of player development for three seasons, Nash was promoted to director of hockey operations this past September. Overall, Nash has been working in the Columbus' front office since 2019, beginning his executive career as a special assistant to the GM.

It is no secret that there is, very possibly, a future for Nash as a GM in the league some day down the line. While in discussion with Daily Faceoff's Matt Larkin last spring, Nash admitted to wanting to be a GM; it is no secret that Columbus' upper management is giving him the opportunity to obtain such a goal, with added responsibilities coming with his new title.

"Everything has kind of stayed the same working with our development," Nash told Daily Faceoff. "Following our prospects, helping management. As day to day goes, be around the NHL team and be more involved. But for now it's still more on the prospects side."

The Blue Jackets have been on the outside looking in of the playoff picture since 2020. Under a new leader of hockey ops in Waddell and a new head coach in Dean Evason – the fourth hire, if we're counting Mike Babcock, since the dismissal of John Tortorella in 2021 – Columbus has entered an unofficial rebuild. The plan of every organization is to ultimately get back into the playoffs, but it's important to do it in a manner that can result in being more than just a "playoff team." The timeline to get the Jackets back to the postseason can't be rushed. The Jackets have drafted inside the top 10 of the NHL Draft in four consecutive seasons, adding to the pipeline and, theoretically, helping to expedite the trajectory.

"We need to grow within; we've had some high draft picks the past couple of years," said Nash. "It's important that they develop properly and that we're patient with them. They'll have a huge impact at the NHL level eventually.

"We want to pick up big pieces along the way and hopefully that contributes to us getting back on track to competing every single year."

After a better than expected start to the year, Columbus has regressed to last in the Metropolitan Division. After winning just three of their last 10 and having just one win on the road this season, the Blue Jackets find themselves tied for last in the Eastern Conference with the Montreal Canadiens at 14 points.

Despite the recent negatives, there is reason for optimism in Columbus – especially offensively. And with the long term outlook being paramount, there are signs that some positives are sustainable beyond this season. We know the big names like Adam Fantilli, Cole Sillinger and Zach Werenski and their impacts (both in the present and future) to the organization, but there are other names that have emerged as bright spots.

“I think Dean Evason and his coaching staff have done a great job of getting the players to buy into his system and the work ethic he brings everyday,” said Nash. “Our young guys like Yegor Chinakhov and Kirill Marchenko have had a great start to the season. It’s exciting for us with prospects coming; I feel like our young guys have really taken steps.”

Nash’s role elevation came under Waddell almost instantly, and it certainly seems like it was by design. No disrespect to Davidson and Kekalainen, but Waddell’s resume speaks for itself; there is a reason that he is regarded as one of the best hockey executives around. An opportunity to work under Waddell is something that not many up and coming executives get to see through.

“It has been great working under Waddell,” said Nash. “I’ve been lucky to work under guys like John Davidson and Jarmo Kekalainen, even Bill Zito who was here – it was nice to learn off of those guys when I first got my feet wet. Even working with Kyle Dubas at Hockey Canada along with Shane Doan. But then you had to do that with Waddell coming in here, getting to learn off him with his legendary career and how respected he is. It has been an eye opener how hard he works.

“Learning how deep he watches the game, how he handles the business side – it has all been great.”

As Nash alluded to, he has already had the chance to work with Hockey Canada as a GM. Having had a taste of what it has been like sitting in the big chair, there is a sense of what responsibilities and tasks that come with the job.

But being a GM is so much more than any of us can truly know. The ins and outs of the day-to-day operations, personnel decisions, dealing with other GMs, negotiating contracts – it really is never ending. That is why when an executive assumes this type of role for the first time, you need to be prepared for what you’re getting into, making sure you’ve learned everything you wanted to shore up before taking it on.

“You’ve got to try and always grow,” Nash said. “I learned so many great things from Jarmo Kekalainen. Going and scouting with him; going to tournaments and many different games. Being around him in the office, seeing how he handles himself – on both the hockey and business side as well. Now getting the chance to learn off of Don Waddell is invaluable. I’m not in any rush, I want to go through all of the different positions.

“At this time it’s going to be about gaining experience. Everyone is going to have a different style on how they lead an organization. I can relate it to being a captain and playing with a bunch of different captains; there are different ways of handling yourself. Getting all of this great knowledge from Don, Jarmo and all the others I previously mentioned. If the opportunity ever comes up I’d love to have my chance, but in the meantime I’m going to be a sponge and learn.”

The sky is definitely the limit for Nash as an executive, and he is just getting started. He has had the opportunity to work under great executives already and will get to continue that under Waddell. The elevation in role just a few months after Waddell’s hiring is indicative of the organization’s view of Nash long term; just think of where he can go in several years.

The Blue Jackets are in the process of steering out of a precarious rebuilding stage and back into relevance in the NHL. As they continue to grow and develop the on ice talent, we may be seeing a similar path for Nash as one of the league’s fastest rising executives overseeing the team’s stars of tomorrow.

