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Multimedia

The Athletic / Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness sees 'lack of respect' in lack of power plays

By Aaron Portzline – March 16, 2026

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

Item No. 1: All eyes

Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness was extolling his club's penalty kill after a 2-1 shootout win over Philadelphia on Saturday when he simply stopped talking and shrugged. Then, like other coaches before him in Columbus, he went *there*.

Bowness has been frustrated by the Blue Jackets' lack of power-play opportunities since he took over on Jan. 12, noting that his club has mostly carried play and set the pace in going 15-2-4 under his guidance.

The Blue Jackets have been awarded the fewest power plays (159) in the league this season, or 2.41 per game. The Florida Panthers, who won the last two Stanley Cup championships, lead the league and have had 75 more power plays than Columbus.

Further, the Blue Jackets have been short-handed 183 times, or 24 more times than they've been up a skater. The numbers through the years have been no less staggering.

"I don't understand why we're always the team in the league that has the least amount of power plays," Bowness told reporters in Philadelphia. "I don't understand that."

"There's a little lack of respect, in my opinion, for our hockey club, and we're going to change that. We're going to keep pushing and keep battling. We're going to, somehow. I don't understand how every game it's three to one (power plays for opponents)."

On Saturday, in a sporadically physical game, the Flyers had four power plays before the Blue Jackets finally had a man advantage in the third period.

Bowness is not the first Blue Jackets coach to lament this.

In fact, it started in the first year of the organization, when coach Dave King said he and the players, as an expansion franchise, needed to accept that as a reality for the first few years. Ken Hitchcock felt it was an uphill battle when he took over a still-young organization in 2007.

John Tortorella, some 15 years later, was not nearly as accepting.

The winningest coach in Blue Jackets history was constantly standing up for any real or perceived slight against Columbus, and, yes, he was convinced that it extended to officiating, especially against big-market clubs.

And now there's Bowness, who has mentioned the lack of power plays for his club repeatedly in recent weeks. Saturday was the first time he mentioned feeling a lack of respect.

Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell understands the frustration.

"I can't say it's a lack of respect," Waddell said. "I just know that we get the least amount of power plays in the league, and that's especially noticeable because we've been controlling the play so much.

"So that's the question: How do you control the play, dominate the zone time and outshoot teams so badly and not get power plays?"

Waddell also wants to make sure the Blue Jackets don't let their frustration get the best of them.

"You can complain, but it doesn't do you any good," Waddell said. "You just have to play over it and not get up in a circus about it."

Item No. 2: Well?

It's not just the media and fans who wonder if the 71-year-old Bowness' impressive run with the Blue Jackets might compel him to stick around for the 2026-27 season and beyond.

Bowness was lured off a Florida fishing boat by Waddell in mid-January, and the two agreed that Bowness would take over for Dean Evason and finish the season, then meet in the offseason to consider the future.

"Not one conversation about that," Waddell said. "When I hired him, we agreed to talk at the end of the season, and we've stuck to that."

But Waddell did confirm a report last week by Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman, that during meetings between Waddell and the club's pending unrestricted free agents, the players wondered what Bowness' future might be in Columbus.

Waddell confirmed that Boone Jenner, Charlie Coyle and Erik Gudbranson were all curious.

"I had the players during the break ask me," Waddell said. "And I told them the exact same thing: We'll revisit it at the end of the year."

The players have raved about Waddell, too, especially the way he communicates, the energy he brings, the application of his experience, etc.

The Blue Jackets could certainly use some stability in that position. Since Tortorella left following the 2020-21 season, the Jackets haven't had a coach last more than two seasons. Bowness is their fifth coach in five seasons.

Bowness has also brushed aside questions about his future in Columbus. But it sure looks like he's having fun. And he sure doesn't carry himself like most septuagenarians.

After the Blue Jackets' 2-1 win over the Flyers on Saturday extended their point streak to nine games, Bowness was full of admiration. It was their fourth game in six days — they went 2-0-2 — because a game against Los Angeles was wedged into the schedule on Monday.

"Once they added that on Monday (vs. the Kings), I said, 'OK, this is gonna be a tough week,'" Bowness said. "I give the guys a ton of credit. There's no quit in this group. Yeah, it was a tight game out there. There wasn't a lot of room, but they kept battling and I just love it.

"Just keep pushing. (They) keep pushing forward. We play on our toes. As soon as I see us on our heels, man, they hear about it. We're going to play on our toes, and we're going to play aggressive, and we're going to live and die being aggressive.

"I just love the way we're playing."

Item No. 3: Snacks

- Saturday was quite a night for left winger Kirill Marchenko, who scored the Blue Jackets' only goal in regulation and clinched the 2-1 win over the Flyers with his shootout goal in the third round. Marchenko's first-period goal was his 25th of the season and the 100th of his career. He is the ninth Blue Jackets player to hit triple digits in goals, and he did so in the second-fewest games. Rick Nash, still the franchise leader with 289 goals, needed 237 games for his first 100. Marchenko took 276.
- Marchenko is also the fifth player in franchise history to have back-to-back 25-goal seasons, joining Nash, Ryan Johansen, Artemi Panarin and Cam Atkinson. Nash scored 25 or more in eight consecutive seasons (2003-04 to 2011-12). There's a reason No. 61 hangs in Nationwide Arena.
- One more Marchenko note: He's now 6 of 7 (85.7 percent) in shootout attempts, the highest percentage (five or more attempts) in the NHL this season. Among players with 15 or more attempts in their career, Marchenko (10 of 15, 66.7 percent) is also tops, followed by Philadelphia's Trevor Zegras (19 of 32, 59.4), Los Angeles' Panarin (28 of 48, 58.3), the Blue Jackets' Kent Johnson (9 of 16, 56.3) and Dallas' Jason Robertson (21 of 38, 55.3).
- Remember when Bowness was hired, how one of the first "corrections" he wanted to make was cutting back on the number of shots on goal the Blue Jackets allowed? During this just-completed road trip through Tampa Bay, Florida and Philadelphia, the Blue Jackets allowed just 58 combined shots on goal, the fewest in a three-game stretch on the road in franchise history. The previous record (set under Hitchcock in 2008-09) was 65. That's wild, when you consider that two of the games went to overtime. When Bowness was hired on Jan. 12, the Jackets were allowing 30.9 shots per game, 30th in the NHL ahead of only San Jose (31.0) and Toronto (31.2). Since then, the Jackets are eighth-best in the league, allowing just 26.4.
- Left winger Mason Marchment was benched for the final 11:18 of the second period and the first 5:40 of the third period on Saturday, but Bowness wouldn't divulge a reason. "That's between him and me," he told reporters in Philadelphia. Marchment had been playing on the top line, but has spent much of the past two games on the third line with Charlie Coyle and Mathieu Olivier.

- It's that time of season again ... college free agents are eligible to sign as soon as their schools are eliminated, and the transactions have already begun across the NHL. "There are a few guys we're chasing," Waddell said. "I don't want to get into any names, but they're guys we've been on top of since the start of the season, and we've had some calls with them and met with them. We'll see where it goes." The Blue Jackets signed center Jack Williams out of Northeastern a year ago, and he made his season debut in the season finale. He's had a solid first pro season in Cleveland, with 12-16-28 in 58 games.
- The Blue Jackets would prefer any signed college free agent head to AHL Cleveland, get some pro experience and play in the AHL playoffs. That's what Zach Werenski did in the spring of 2016, playing under a PTO and then signing his entry-level deal with Columbus shortly after the season ended. It's a competitive market out there, though. "You can have 20 teams chasing a player and some of the teams are talking about burning the first year of the entry-level contract," Waddell said. If you want the player badly enough, you may have to match. Waddell, though, said he'd be very concerned about bringing a new player into the dressing room at such an important time of the season.
- Defenseman Erik Gudbranson (upper-body injury) joined the Blue Jackets in Philadelphia and took a morning skate on Saturday, but ultimately missed his third straight game. Waddell said he's about "95 percent" healed. Initially, the Jackets had ruled out Gudbranson for the entire trip, saying they'd evaluate him when they returned. Gudbranson, the Jackets' most physical defender, will try again on Tuesday when the Blue Jackets host Carolina.
- There was an ugly scene in Toronto last week when star forward Auston Matthews suffered a knee injury after an ugly hit by Anaheim's Radko Gudas. Afterward, no Maple Leafs stepped up to Gudas in defense of their captain. That situation with the Leafs came to mind on Saturday, when Damon Severson was boarded by Philadelphia's Carl Grundstrom in the second period. Adam Fantilli's gloves were off before he even reached Grundstrom. Truth be told, Fantilli's second NHL fight wasn't much of a fight. But it was a hell of a statement.
- Lost in a 5-2 win over Tampa Bay last Tuesday was that Lightning forward Jake Guentzel, a modern-day Jackets killer, was finally held off the scoresheet. Guentzel came into the game with a 17-game point streak (11-15-26) against the Blue Jackets, one that started early in the 2019-20 season when Guentzel played for Pittsburgh. That's the longest point streak ever against the Blue Jackets, surpassing Keith Tkachuk's 15-game streak in the early days of the franchise. Another Tkachuk now has the longest active streak. Florida's Matthew Tkachuk has at least a point in 14 straight games vs. Columbus.
- The Blue Jackets have assigned goaltender Nolan LaLonde from ECHL Toledo to AHL Cleveland after Monsters backup Zach Sawchenko was forced to leave a game on Friday with an upper-body injury. Blue Jackets assistant GM Chris Clark said Sawchenko is day-to-day, but Lalonde will serve as starter Ivan Fedotov's backup until further notice.
- The Monsters, by the way, are 15-5-2 since Jan. 21, and have a firm grip on a playoff spot in the AHL North Division. The last time both the Blue Jackets and their AHL affiliate made the playoffs was the 2018-19 season.

- A sad note to pass along: Hannah Larsen, the wife of former Blue Jackets coach Brad Larsen, died on Thursday after an extended battle with cancer. In December 2024, Brad Larsen, who has survived two cancer bouts himself, took an indefinite leave of absence as assistant coach with the Calgary Flames after Hannah's diagnosis. A private funeral service will be held in Columbus, the family said. Larsen worked in the Blue Jackets' organization from 2010-23 as an AHL coach, an NHL assistant coach and head coach.

The Athletic / Kirill Marchenko, with a friend's help, sends Blue Jackets to shootout win vs. Flyers

By Aaron Portzline – March 15, 2026

Egor Zamula played only nine shifts for the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday, but the Jackets' decision to claim Zamula on waivers earlier this season paid major dividends ... in the most peculiar way, and at the most important time.

Kirill Marchenko, who scored the Blue Jackets' only goal in regulation, added the game-deciding goal in the shootout — his third shootout winner this season — to settle a 2-1 win over the Philadelphia Flyers before 19,645 in Xfinity Mobile Arena.

The win extended the Blue Jackets' point streak to a season-best nine games (5-0-4) and allowed them to keep pace in the Eastern Conference playoff race. They now trail Detroit by only one point for the second wild-card spot after a busy, exhausting week.

"We've played a lot of hockey this week, we really have," Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness told reporters in Philadelphia. His club played four games in the past six days, including three on the road, earning points in all four (2-0-2).

"This was gonna be a tough week," Bowness said. "We just played three road games where we didn't give up 20 shots in any of the games. We out-chanced the opposition two to one, so the guys were playing their hearts out. There's no quit in this group."

Marchenko improved to 6 of 7 in shootouts this season, but his patented move has become a quick-snap wrister through the goaltender's pads. On Saturday, he switched it up, instead beating Flyers goaltender Dan Vladar with a nasty, close-range backhand that was scored just underneath the crossbar.

And how did Marchenko know to change it up?

Zamula spent parts of the last six seasons with the Flyers. The Jackets signed him as a free agent in early January, and though he's seldom played, it was good to have him in the lineup on Saturday.

"When overtime was over, I had a quick conversation with Mula," Marchenko told FanDuel Sports Network. "He told me that they would be prepared for me. 'They watch all your shootouts, he said.' So I (told myself) I need to find something new. I worked in practice on the backhand move, so I just do that."

As Marchenko spun around following his shot to celebrate with the rest of the Blue Jackets, he pointed down the ice toward goaltender Jet Greaves, who may have had the most impressive shootout.

Greaves denied the Flyers' Matvei Michkov (right pad), Trevor Zegras (glove) and Travis Konecny (glove) and made it look easy, allowing Marchenko an opportunity to win it in the third round.

“Those are three super talented guys on their side, just super skilled in the shootout,” Greaves said. “I just tried to do what I could to keep them out, so I’m fortunate to have it go that way tonight.”

The Blue Jackets’ other unheralded hero was the penalty kill, which ended up busier than usual thanks to a game that was sporadically nasty.

Midway through the second period, Fantilli didn’t hesitate to jump in when Philadelphia’s Carl Grundström hit Severson from behind. Fantilli and Grundström fought briefly before heading off to the box.

Yet, the penalties started piling up for Columbus after that. With 2:22 remaining in the second period, Blue Jackets forward Cole Sillinger was sent off for cross-checking. With just three seconds remaining on that penalty, Columbus defenseman Damon Severson was given two minor penalties for cross-checking after he took exception to a hit from Philadelphia’s Denver Barkey.

The Blue Jackets, in a 1-1 game, spent 5:57 between the late second period and early third period short-handed.

“The penalty killers won the game for us, really,” Bowness said. “Especially that four-minute (to start the third). The penalties threw us out of whack for a little bit, but we were doing so many good things. We just had to keep doing what we were doing and putting pressure on them.”

The Blue Jackets were frustrated by a 2-1 overtime loss to the Florida Panthers on Thursday when they had numerous chances early to open up a multi-goal lead. They let the injury-riddled Panthers hang around long enough to steal an overtime win.

Saturday’s game seemed hauntingly familiar. Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski, forward Danton Heinen and Kent Johnson beat Vladar with various shots, only to watch the puck carom off a post or the crossbar and out of harm’s way.

Only Marchenko could beat Vladar, and that was on a busted play only 4:21 into the game. From a scramble in front of the net, Fantilli took a hit to pass the puck across to Marchenko in the left circle for the goal.

It was Marchenko’s team-leading 25th goal of the season and 100th career goal, the ninth player in Columbus franchise history to reach triple digits.

“I think more about the standings right now,” Marchenko said. “This was an important win for us. I’m happy to have two points right now. To beat these guys in a shootout ... it’s awesome.”

The Athletic / Is the Blue Jackets' power play, long a liability, finally becoming a strength?

By Aaron Portzline – March 14, 2026

During his first intermission talk with players Tuesday, Columbus Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness went over the good and bad from the first 20 minutes against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

But, as usual, the veteran coach and master communicator worked in a little levity.

"I told them, 'OK, that first power play was really good, but that second power play was *terrible*,'" Bowness said. "I said, 'You guys go get a goal, and we'll call it even. They went out and got a goal, and (laughs) we called it even.'"

The Blue Jackets' power play scored twice the rest of the way, a huge part of the Blue Jackets' 5-2 win that allowed them to sweep the three-game season series from the Lightning and keep pace in the Eastern Conference playoff chase.

They followed that up Thursday with a 2-1 overtime loss to the Florida Panthers, earning a single point that pulled them within 1 point of the Boston Bruins for the second and final wild-card spot.

If you've followed the Blue Jackets closely over the last decade, it might be difficult to comprehend a Columbus power play that converts under pressure or responds to a coach's challenge, much less a man-advantage unit that can hang among the NHL's best.

The Blue Jackets' power play, after all, has ranked in the bottom-third of the NHL dating all the way back to the 2017-18 season. In five of those eight seasons, they've been one of the league's five worst power-play units.

Former coach John Tortorella grew so tired of answering questions about the power play during the 2018-19 season that he tried to make the topic off-limits to reporters.

These days, it's no longer a sore subject.

Since Jan. 7, a span of 23 games, the Blue Jackets' power play is clicking at 25 percent, tied for 10th-best in the league. That includes four power-play goals in the last five games, including the two Tuesday.

"I feel like both (power-play) units have been going pretty good for a while now, but it's such a unique part of the game," said Charlie Coyle, who joined the top unit in early January when the power play really took off.

"We had a game recently (Monday vs. Los Angeles) where we had that early four-minute power play, and we had so many chances. That's probably the best it's ever looked, right, and we didn't score. It can be weird that way."

Later in that same game, however, Kirill Marchenko scored a power-play goal with just 1:56 remaining in regulation to force overtime. The Jackets eventually lost 5-4 in overtime, but Marchenko's goal earned them a valuable point in the standings.

"It's scored some really big goals for us lately, some timely goals," defenseman Zach Werenski said. "Those are huge goals, and I feel like this is the time of the season where a power play can really make a big difference."

Even though the Blue Jackets get the second-fewest power-play opportunities in the NHL — just 2.43 per game — they've been steadily climbing the rankings all season and sit 17th in the NHL.

If that trend continues, they'll finish in the top half of the league for the first time since they were 12th in 2016-17.

On point

Werenski, who has run the point on the Blue Jackets' top unit for most of his 10-year career, said he started to see improvement last season, and he attributes that partly to familiarity among the players.

The Blue Jackets' top players — Werenski, Marchenko, Sean Monahan, Adam Fantilli, Kent Johnson, Dmitri Voronkov — have played together for multiple seasons, which has allowed them to learn each other's tendencies and to play more instinctively.

That's especially useful for the quick plays under duress or the tic-tac-toe plays that show up on highlight reels.

"It's definitely rolling right now, and it feels like every time we go out there we can score," Werenski said. "But I feel like it's been two years now of a similar unit, and I feel like we're all on the same page after all that time together."

"Whether it goes in or not is one thing. But I can definitely feel it when it comes to breakouts, to our in-zone plays, to the plays we want to run and the things we want to accomplish ... we're together on it."

The Blue Jackets have also added three players to that mix this season, and they've blended into the two units seamlessly.

Coyle was acquired in a trade with Colorado last summer, and Mason Marchment was acquired in a trade with Seattle just before Christmas. Both have since joined the No. 1 unit.

Conor Garland, acquired in a trade deadline deal with Vancouver earlier this month, has joined the second power-play unit.

That added depth has spurred a level of competition for spots on the top unit that didn't exist last season. And the difference between playing on the top unit and the second unit is significant, as the top unit routinely gets 90 seconds or more of the two minutes.

Monahan has had a difficult season due primarily to injuries. Johnson and Voronkov, who had breakout seasons in 2024-25, have slumped this season, each earning healthy scratches recently.

They were top-unit fixtures a year ago, but now find themselves on the second unit. Fantilli, Coyle and Marchment have joined Werenski and Marchenko on the top unit, and it's been fairly static for a few weeks.

The 'right' stuff

The Blue Jackets have raved about Coyle all season, and it's easy to understand. One of the NHL's most consistent and underappreciated players has had one of the best seasons of his career and made a big impact in the dressing room.

There's a small element of his game that has made a big impact: he's right-handed.

That's been a big help in the faceoff circle — every other Blue Jackets center is a lefty shooter — but it's also unlocked an element of the power play that was missing.

From Werenski's perspective, he's got Marchenko, a right shot, to his left and Fantilli, a left shot, to his right. That allows a Werenski pass in either direction to be on their stick blade quickly for one-timers and not have to travel across their bodies before they shoot.

But, most importantly, when either Marchenko or Fantilli has the puck on either side of the zone, they have options.

"We had a lefty bumper and lefty at the net with (Monahan and Voronkov)," said Blue Jackets assistant coach Mike Haviland, who runs the power play. "Now (with Coyle, a righty) in there, the penalty kill has to look at it and realize, 'OK, now they have a righty at the bumper.'"

Put another way: When Marchenko had the puck in the left circle, with Voronkov and Monahan stacked in the middle, passing to either one of them meant feeding their backhands, a less natural way to handle the puck.

"It gives us options, and the more options you have, the harder it is to defend," Haviland said. "Coyle can be utilized for a one-timer or a touch pass. Mush (Marchment) can switch spots with Coyle for a different look, and whoever has the puck has an option with the two of them."

It's also why the Blue Jackets are showing a lot more movement with the power play. There are times when Marchment ends up behind the net and Coyle at the front, or Marchment in the right circle and Fantilli down low.

Werenski described it as having the "right hands" on each unit.

Garland (net-front) joining the second unit has given them two right-handed shots along with Damon Severson (left circle). As of Thursday, the rest of the unit is defenseman Ivan Provorov (point), Johnson (right circle) and Monahan (number).

Severson, a second defenseman, may seem an odd choice on a power play, but he fills two needs for the coaching staff. First, he's a right shot for the left side of the ice. Second, since the second unit comes on late in the power play, he gives it a second defender when five-on-five play resumes.

None of this would work, and none of the right-shot, left-shot minutiae would matter if something else weren't in place, and it's something Haviland said the coaches have harped on since early in the season.

The Blue Jackets' puck retrievals on the power play have been much more ferocious in recent weeks, allowing them to keep the puck in the attack zone instead of wasting time tracking it down and regrouping.

"I showed three or four clips (from Tuesday's game) just on faceoffs alone," Haviland said. "We lost a faceoff, but we got the puck right back. 'Z' had an incredible keep-in at the blue line. He batted it out of the air. There were other plays where we battled to keep it in and ended up scoring a goal we might not otherwise have scored.

"Those are the things that make a big difference. You can't just go out with the mentality that you have the extra skater. The best units are always the ones that battle hardest for the puck, and we're doing really well with that now."

The Athletic / Adam Fantilli accuses Matthew Tkachuk of diving, fumes after Blue Jackets' 2-1 OT loss

By Aaron Portzline – March 13, 2026

Adam Fantilli closed a huge gap in his desperate pursuit of Florida Panthers forward Matthew Tkachuk, getting near enough to dive forward and reach his stick toward the puck in an attempt to disrupt him.

Fantilli, the Columbus Blue Jackets' 21-year-old No. 1 center, thought he'd pulled off the backcheck of all backchecks. NHL officials disagreed.

The Panthers scored a power-play goal at 2:20 of overtime to beat the Blue Jackets 2-1 on Thursday before an announced crowd of 18,686 in Amerant Bank Arena. It's the Jackets' third OT loss in their last four games.

"You're happy to get a point," Fantilli said. "But, I mean, this is the third time I'm standing here saying we're happy to get a point. Eventually, it's not good enough. We want to ... we *need 2* to get into the playoffs."

Fantilli, who scored the Blue Jackets' goal midway through the second period, did not hold back in his anger at Tkachuk, whom he accused of "diving" to deceive officials into believing a penalty had been committed.

"I don't even think I touched him, to be honest with you," Fantilli said. "I dove on the left side of him just to get my stick in front of him so he had to take a backhand and kind of make (goaltender Elvis Merzlikins') job easier.

"(NHL referees) know that's what he does. He does that type of stuff, and the fact that they fall for it is disappointing. He did the same thing in front of our net when we were in Columbus (on March 5). He took a crosscheck and just dove.

"I mean, there's nothing I can do now. They won. We should have scored more goals."

Fantilli was sent to the penalty box for tripping 48 seconds into three-on-three. With 28 seconds left in the man advantage, Florida's Sam Reinhart buried a puck into a mostly open net to Merzlikins' right after the puck slid all the way through traffic to find Reinhart.

"I don't think it was a penalty," Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness said. "Simple as that. I mean, we have the benefit of looking at it. The referees don't, so ... but to me, it's not a penalty."

With the loser's point, the Blue Jackets (77 points) crept within one point of the Boston Bruins for the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. Columbus is 14-2-4 since Bowness was hired as coach Jan. 12.

The reason the Blue Jackets had such trouble scoring was a familiar name: goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky, who stopped 30 of 31 shots and improved to 15-2-1 against Columbus since he left the Blue Jackets as a free agent after the 2018-19 season.

Bobrovsky had highlight-reel saves on Blue Jackets forwards Kent Johnson, Kirill Marchenko and Cole Sillinger, among others.

“(I was) very happy with the way we played,” Bowness said. “Look, we gave up 16 shots (in regulation). We dominated the game. Give Bob credit. He was the difference in the game, as simple as that.”

Fantilli finally broke through for the Jackets at 13:01 of the second period. He carried the puck on an odd-man rush, opening his stride as if to pass to Marchenko, who was streaking through the other side (left) of the zone.

Instead of passing, Fantilli rifled a shot between Bobrovsky’s legs to make it 1-0.

The Blue Jackets were clearly the better club for the first two periods, but the Panthers made a push in the third period, mostly carrying the play. Keep in mind, they did this without standout regulars Aleksander Barkov, Brad Marchand, Seth Jones, Carter Verhaeghe and Anton Lundell.

At 1:28 of the third period, with the Blue Jackets on the penalty kill, Florida’s Sam Bennett fired home a rebound off a Reinhart shot to tie the score. The teams played chess the rest of the way, dragging the game in overtime.

That hasn’t always been good news for the Jackets, especially lately. The Blue Jackets are 10-11 overall now in games decided past regulation. That includes a 5-10 record in games settled in overtime, but that includes three straight losses and four losses in the last five.

In their previous two OT games — Saturday against Utah and Monday against Los Angeles — the Blue Jackets barely had the puck.

On Thursday, Fantilli lost the opening faceoff, but the Blue Jackets ended up with a decent scoring chance by their best player, defenseman Zach Werenski. Werenski’s wrist shot from 30 feet sailed over the crossbar, bounced hard off the end boards and helped spring Tkachuk on the breakaway.

Then came Fantilli’s penalty, and soon thereafter Reinhart’s power-play game-winning goal.

“We had the puck, we went down (the ice), and we had our look,” Bowness said. “We had a great chance, and we just missed by inches, and all of a sudden the puck bounces to them, and they get a breakaway. I mean, there’s not much more you can do.”

The Columbus Dispatch / Why the Columbus Blue Jackets' playoff odds fell despite big win

By Brian Hedger – Mar. 15, 2026

The Blue Jackets had a big win March 14 in Philadelphia but inched just a little closer toward a playoff spot after a nail-biting finish in a 2-1 shootout victory over the Flyers.

Jet Greaves stayed calm while stopping three straight Flyers attempts in the shootout, but Kirill Marchenko's winning backhand in the third round didn't provide much more than an emotional lift for the Jackets at Xfinity Mobile Arena.

They avoided losing ground in a tight playoff race with 16 games remaining, which was critical, but the Jackets absorbed a few body blows on the out-of-town scoreboard. Gaining just one point on the Detroit Red Wings, who added a point with an overtime loss in Dallas, the Blue Jackets remain on the postseason bubble.

The Blue Jackets (34-21-11, 79 points) are one point behind the Red Wings (36-23-8, 80 points) and Boston Bruins (37-23-6, 81 points) for a wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. Boston has the first via tiebreaker over Detroit, and the Jackets are three points away from overtaking the Pittsburgh Penguins or New York Islanders for either second or third in the Metropolitan Division.

Despite the Blue Jackets pushing a season-high points streak to nine straight games and going 2-0-1 in a tough road trip, MoneyPuck dropped the Jackets' playoff odds to 68.3% waking up March 15 after rising near 71% following their win in Philly. They're still in solid position, but Tankathon ranks the Jackets' final 16 games as the NHL's third hardest remaining schedule.

The Penguins and Bruins are the only teams with more difficult finishes, so buckle up for a bumpy finish.

Here are three takeaways from a nail-biter in South Philly:

Columbus Blue Jackets remain strong in shootouts

Deciding the game in a shootout was a fitting finish for the Blue Jackets and Flyers, who are two of the NHL's best teams in that department.

Columbus improved to 6-1 in shootouts for a win percentage of .857, while Philadelphia dropped .667 with an 8-4 shootout record. The Anaheim Ducks are first at 8-0, while the New Jersey Devils and Buffalo Sabres are each 4-0 for 1.000 shootout win percentages.

As for individual shooters, the Blue Jackets used shooters Kent Johnson, Adam Fantilli and Marchenko in that order. All three tried to beat Flyers goalie Dan Vladar to the blocker side, but only Marchenko was able to get the puck over the pad and inside the left post.

Marchenko's .857 shootout percentage matches the Blue Jackets' win percentage, improving to 6 for 7 this season. Johnson dropped to 4 for 6 and .667, while Fantilli continues to struggle in shootouts after dropping to .143 on 1-for-7 shooting.

Greaves improved to 3-1 in shootouts, stopping 9 of 13 attempts for a .692 save percentage. Vldar dropped to 4-2 in shootouts, stopping 15 of 18 attempts for a sizzling .833 save percentage, while Flyers shooters Matvei Michkov (3 for 11), Trevor Zegras (6 for 11) and Travis Konecny (2 for 6) all came up empty.

Columbus Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness baffled by penalty calls

After the game, Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness again stated his surprise that NHL officials continue to give Columbus little respect.

The Blue Jackets are last in the league in the league in power-play opportunities with 159 in 66 games, rank 31st out of 32 teams in power-play opportunities per game (2.41) and have ranked at or near the bottom of the NHL in those categories for the bulk of their 25-year existence.

So, for those who have watched this imbalance unfold for years, it wasn't surprising to see referees Jon Mclsaac and Mike Sullivan award four power plays to the Flyers and one to the Blue Jackets in a heated game with boarding and fighting penalties each way.

Columbus killed off all four Flyers power plays, including a four-minute advantage between the end of the second period and start of the third, but the Blue Jackets had to work hard to keep it tied at 1-1 after Damon Severson was called for two cross-checking minors at the end of one shift.

"I don't understand why we're always the least team in the league (with) the least amount of power plays," Bowness said in televised comments on FanDuel Sports Network. "I don't understand that."

He's not the first veteran Blue Jackets coach to complain about this slight.

"There's a lack of respect, in my opinion, for our hockey club, and we're going to change that, and we're going to keep pushing, and we're going to keep battling and somehow, we're going to have to draw some penalties," Bowness said. "But I don't understand how every game it's 3-1 (for opposing teams)."

Kirill Marchenko leaves Philadelphia a hero and villain

After scoring the 100th goal of his NHL career to give the Blue Jackets an early 1-0 lead against the Flyers, Marchenko became the target of booing from Flyers fans for a different reason.

Marchenko boarded Denver Barkey late in the first period, stapling him to the corner boards with a hit that left the Flyers forward lying on the ice grabbing his head. Barkey went to the locker room for assessment and returned to start the second, but Flyers fans didn't let Marchenko off the hook the rest of the game.

He got the last volley, though, with his shootout winner to give the Blue Jackets another big road victory.

The Columbus Dispatch / Sergei Bobrovsky bites Columbus Blue Jackets again in OT loss

By Brian Hedger – Mar. 14, 2026

Matthew Tkachuk embraces the role of NHL villain, so his smirk after goading referee Cody Beach into a soft tripping call on Adam Fantilli's hustle play in overtime wasn't surprising.

Neither was Sam Reinhart's goal 2:19 into OT on March 12 at Amerant Bank Arena, lifting the Florida Panthers to a 2-1 victory over the Blue Jackets on the resulting power play. The Jackets grumbled as they left the ice, but one soft call wasn't the only reason for their disappointment in Sunrise, Florida.

The main reason stood in front of the Panthers' net all night. Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 30 of 31 shots and improved to 15-2-1 against the Blue Jackets, who gained just one point on the Boston Bruins instead of tying them at 78 points in a race for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference.

"We should've scored more goals," Fantilli told reporters during a televised interview on FanDuel Sports Network. "Their goalie stood on his head, but I thought we carried the play for the majority of that game. We made a push in the third, but I thought we dominated, for the most part."

They just couldn't beat Bobrovsky, who's now 37 and a pending free agent again.

Even when Bobrovsky struggled against the Jackets on Dec. 6, allowing six goals, he still got a win. The host Panthers staged a huge comeback, aided by bad officiating and a Blue Jackets' meltdown.

Columbus should've won that game, but didn't and lost a point in overtime. The Jackets should've won this one, too, but Bobrovsky played like the guy who twice won the Vezina Trophy in Columbus as the NHL's top goalie. He was razor sharp from start to finish.

Fantilli fired the only shot that beat him, and that was a hard wrist shot off a 2-on-1 rush in the second period. Otherwise, Bobrovsky stymied the Blue Jackets, who dictated play until the third period.

"Listen, we gave up 16 shots on net for 60 minutes," Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness said during his televised press conference. "We dominated the game. Give Bob credit. He was the difference in the game; it's as simple as that. We had our chance in overtime. We miss the net by inches, and they get the power play."

During his seven seasons with the Blue Jackets, Bobrovsky backstopped them into the postseason four times (2016-2019). He struggled during the postseason, especially against the Pittsburgh Penguins, but was elite in the regular season.

Bobrovsky was 30 when his last contract with the Jackets was up in 2019, so former general manager Jarmo Kekalainen balked at paying him \$10 million a year for eight years. Bobrovsky took that as a slight, played his final season in Columbus angry at management, and bolted for South Florida to accept an offer of \$70 million over seven years.

He struggled in the first few years of it, making the Blue Jackets look wise, but Bobrovsky eventually found his second wind. He led the Panthers to the 2023 Stanley Cup Final, losing to the Vegas Golden Knights, before backstopping them to the past two Stanley Cup titles.

After struggling most of this season, he rounded into form again when facing the Blue Jackets.

"Bobby's sitting on his head all night," Panthers forward Sam Bennett said. "He was really the spark all game. He's the one that kept us fighting right to the end, and we were just fortunate to capitalize on the power [play]."

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets battle their way to a victory in Philly](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – March 15, 2026

1. The Blue Jackets deserve the chance to sleep in Sunday after a hectic week of four games in four cities, with Columbus getting points in all four.

Head coach Rick Bowness knew this was going to be perhaps the craziest week of the craziest month of the season. The Blue Jackets have a franchise-record 17 contests in March, and four of them came this week thanks to the rescheduled game from a January blizzard that meant the Kings visited Columbus on Monday.

After that OT loss, the Blue Jackets hopped on a plane to Tampa for Tuesday night's win, then went further south to the outer reaches of Miami for the overtime loss to Florida. Then came Saturday's war of attrition against the Flyers, as what started as a relatively open game with tons of scoring chances each way turned into a physical, bitter confrontation as the night went on.

But in the end, Kirill Marchenko scored his 100th career goal in regulation – he's just the ninth CBJ player to reach that mark – and then the only goal of the shootout. The Blue Jackets finished the week 2-0-2, extended their point streak to nine games and now have points in 19 of the 21 games under Bowness (15-2-4).

"We played a lot of hockey this week, we really have," Bowness said. "But I give the guys a ton of credit. Listen, we just played three road games. We didn't give up 20 shots 5-on-5 in any of the games. We outchanced the opposition two to one.

The guys are playing their hearts out. They are. You have to give them a ton of credit because there's no quit in this group. Yeah, it was a tight game out there. There wasn't a lot of room, and they kept battling and I just love it."

As Bowness noted, the Blue Jackets turned in another solid defensive effort, keeping the Flyers without a shot on goal for an 18-minute stretch of the first and second periods and limiting Philadelphia to just 19 shots overall.

Columbus also showed some gumption, as the game turned into a physical affair that featured numerous post-whistle scums, as well as a fight when Adam Fantilli dropped the gloves in response to a hit on Damon Severson by Carl Grundstrom. There were also some major heart plays, including crucial backchecks by Conor Garland late in the third and Fantilli in overtime to prevent chances by the Flyers.

Add it all up and the Blue Jackets returned home to Columbus with two critical points.

“It’s awesome,” Marchenko said. “It’s really important for us and for the standings. It looked like a playoff game. Actually the last games, too. We play in like only one-goal (games), always in overtime and shootouts, and happy to win that because last games we lose in overtime. Now we change it. It’s nice.”

2. Marchenko and Greaves came up huge in the shootout to earn the extra point in the standings.

One got the sense the Blue Jackets were pretty tired of losing in overtime, as five of the previous eight games went past 60 minutes and Columbus won just one of them. Both teams also seemed fine with getting it to the skills competition – there was just one shot on goal in OT, by the Flyers in the dying seconds – which might be no surprise considering Columbus was 5-1 in shootouts going in and Philadelphia was 8-3.

Once they got there, though, Marchenko was the only player to score. After Flyers goalie Dan Vladar denied Kent Johnson and Fantilli in the first two rounds, Marchenko swooped in with a chance to win the game and did just that, moving the puck to his backhand and flipping it home.

Marchenko has now scored on six of seven shootout attempts this season, but this one was a little different. Throughout the season, he has mostly beaten goalies between the legs with a quick forehand shot, but a chat with former Flyers defenseman and current CBJ teammate Egor Zamula convinced him to change it up.

“I told before in media, before the game, I go five-hole,” Marchenko joked. “I just want to give confusion for Flyers. Now, yeah, just switch it up. I talked with Zamula and he has been on this team for a while, and he told me they pre-scout you, every kind of game, and they know all of our moves in the shootout and we need to find something new.”

On the other side, Jet Greaves made his stops look easy, getting a pad on Matvei Michkov’s opening try, waiting out Trevor Zegras’ backhand look and then gloving Travis Konecny’s forehand shot.

“Three super talented players on the other side, and they’re all super skilled in a shootout,” Greaves said. “Just doing what I can to keep it out. Fortunate to have the result go our way tonight.”

“He was so calm in the shootout,” Bowness added. “That was pretty good to see. Very impressive.”

3. The Blue Jackets’ penalty kill stepped up with a crucial stretch late in the second period and early in the third.

As the game turned feisty late in the second, Columbus got itself in some penalty trouble. First, Cole Sillinger took a cross-checking penalty with 2:22 on the clock, then Severson was dinged for a pair of cross-checks against Denver Barkey after the rookie hit him into the boards late on the Philly power play.

Add it all up and the Blue Jackets were shorthanded for 5:57 of continuous time, but they didn’t allow a goal and limited the Flyers’ 32nd-ranked PP to just five shots on goal in that span. Ivan Provorov led the way in the game with 5:07 of PK time, with Dante Fabbro right behind at 4:48. Charlie Coyle (3:46) and Sean Monahan (3:03) paced the forwards with Isac Lundeström (2:59) also doing important work.

“I thought the kill did a great job,” Greaves said. “Special teams is so important in these games, and I thought the guys did a good job. There were a lot of shot blocks. I think we were getting it in the neutral zone and up the ice, and that shows a positive effort from the guys. It’s such an important time in the game.”

After the game, Bowness was both pleased with how his penalty killers got the job done but also a little unhappy with the power-play imbalance – Philadelphia had four, Columbus one – in a physical game.

“The PKers won the game for us really,” Bowness said. “They did. Especially that four minutes. I don’t understand why we’re always the team in the league that has the least amount of power plays. I don’t understand that. There’s a little lack of respect for our hockey club, and we’re going to change that and we’re going to keep pushing and we’re going to keep battling. Somehow, we’re going to have to draw some penalties. I don’t understand how every game it’s 3-1. So anyways, give the penalty killers a lot of credit because they won the game for us.”

The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: A new Top 5 team, plus 'do-overs' for everyone

By Sean Gentile and Dom Luszczyszyn – March 13, 2026

This week was an unprecedented one for the “no take-backs” community. First, the NFL had a bombshell non-trade, with the Baltimore Ravens welching on a Maxx Crosby trade four days after agreeing on one with the Las Vegas Raiders. Then, the NHL decided that the Ottawa Senators could pick in the first round after all (at 32nd), meaning no more forfeited selection for the Evgenii Dadonov no-trade debacle.

It was a great week of going back in time and saying, “Actually, never mind.” So we thought to ourselves, why stop there? Every team has regrets, some more than others, so we went through each one to see what they’d like a do-over on.

1. Colorado Avalanche, 44-11-9

Last week: 1

Sean: 1

Dom: 1

We’ll start with the team that actually made their do-over dreams come true at this year’s deadline. The Avalanche should’ve never let Nazem Kadri go and they’ve finally rectified that mistake by trading for him. Not every team has the same privilege, and it cost a lot more than a straight do-over, but the important thing is that Kadri is back. He should be a big-time boost for Colorado.

2. Dallas Stars, 41-14-10

Last week: 2

Sean: 2

Dom: 2

Signing a war-horse defenseman in his mid-30s to a six-year contract is not without its risks, and the Toronto Maple Leafs are dealing with the ramifications of their choice to do just that with Chris Tanev, who had season-ending core surgery earlier this month.

The Stars are dealing with that decision as well; they’re about to begin a second straight postseason with a Tanev-shaped hole on their right side, and there’s a case to be made that they should’ve bitten the bullet themselves. Ilya Lyubushkin’s AAV is only \$1.25 million less

3. Carolina Hurricanes, 41-18-6

Last week: 3

Sean: 3

Dom: 3

One extra million bucks per year and Jake Guentzel is probably still a Hurricane. All indications were that he wanted to stay, and he was a perfect fit for Carolina, but he ended up going to Tampa Bay for \$9 million per season. Given how the salary landscape has shifted since, what once looked like a relatively fair deal now looks like an extreme bargain for what Guentzel brings to the table.

The Hurricanes are doing fine, but they'd probably be the team to beat with Guentzel in the fold. And the whole Martin Necas and Mikko Rantanen sagas might have unfolded a little differently, too.

4. Buffalo Sabres, 40-20-6

Last week: 4

Sean: 4

Dom: 4

This is a new era of Sabres hockey, so we're not going to pick old scabs, like cratering their relationship with Jack Eichel over his own health-related decisions or refusing to sign Sam Reinhart to a long-term deal, even though (for whatever reason) he wanted to do just that.

No, we're going with the June 2024 trade that sent a second-round pick to Washington for fourth-line forward Beck Malenstyn. The Caps used that selection on Cole Hutson, who's become a star defenseman at Boston University and may join them for the end of the season. He'd have been, at minimum, an incredible trade piece for the Sabres.

5. Minnesota Wild, 38-16-12

Last week: 6

Sean: 5

Dom: 5

Filip Gustavsson has been the Wild's better goaltender for a decent chunk of the season, with a .919 save percentage since Dec. 1 compared to Jesper Wallstedt's .898 in that same span. Still, signing him to a five-year, \$34 million contract a few weeks before the start of Wallstedt's breakout seems like an unforced error. If he maintains his current level, everything will shake out just fine for the Wild, but that's far from a given.

6. Tampa Bay Lightning, 40-20-4

Last week: 5

Sean: 6

Dom: 6

If there's one major misstep in the last five years from Tampa Bay, it has to be trading an entire draft class for Tanner Jeannot. The deal is mind-boggling to this day, and you wonder what the Lightning could've done last year if they still had their 2025 first-round pick to dangle at the deadline.

7. Montreal Canadiens, 36-18-10

Last week: 7

Sean: 7

Dom: 7

There's still a lot of time for David Reinbacher to be an impact defender for the Canadiens, but it sure is notable that he's one of just two players from the top 16 of the 2023 draft class who have yet to play an NHL game (Brandon Yager is the other). Matvei Michkov was the player many fans hoped Montreal picked instead, and it would've been something to see him paired with Ivan Demidov for the next decade.

8. New York Islanders, 37-23-5

Last week: 14

Sean: 8

Dom: 8

Signing defenseman Alex Romanov to an eight-year deal with a \$6.25 million AAV could've been worse; capable second-pair guys cost money, and Romanov, 26, has been one of those in the recent past. Maybe he bounces back after shoulder surgery. Still, he was off to a brutal start (minus-6.5 Net Rating in 15 games) even before Mikko Rantanen shoved him into the boards in November.

9. Columbus Blue Jackets, 33-21-11

Last week: 8

Sean: 9

Dom: 9

We saw positive signs from Kent Johnson last season as a playmaking winger and potential long-term partner for Adam Fantilli. With a five-on-five scoring rate (1.36 points per 60) that trails defenseman Denton Mateychuk on the team, among plenty others, Johnston hasn't maintained that momentum, robbing a team that could use another productive top-six piece. In the 2021 draft, Columbus chose him fifth, directly ahead of Simon Edvinsson, William Eklund, Brandt Clarke and Dylan Guenther. Whoops.

10. Anaheim Ducks, 36-26-3

Last week: 12

Sean: 10

Dom: 10

In January, the Ducks and Sharks swapped AHL players. Since then, Justin Bailey has remained with Anaheim's affiliate in San Diego, and Pavol Regenda has scored eight goals in 18 NHL games with San Jose. Organization scoring depth is a nice thing to have.

11. Pittsburgh Penguins, 32-18-15

Last week: 9

Sean: 11

Dom: 11

If this season has taught us anything, it's that Pittsburgh kept Mike Sullivan around way past his expiration date. An aging Penguins team looks fresh and rejuvenated this season, enough to make you wonder what they could've been capable of from 2021 to 2024 when Sidney Crosby and company were a little younger. Given just how bad the Rangers look under Sullivan, it's possible the Penguins would've been a playoff team one or two more times under different guidance.

12. Vegas Golden Knights, 30-22-14

Last week: 10

Sean: 12

Dom: 12

In January, Vegas sent a haul back to Calgary, led by Zach Whitecloud and a first-round pick, for Rasmus Andersson. With him on the ice, the Golden Knights have been outscored 20-12. That's not what you want to see from any pending UFA, let alone an important one. Honorable mention goes to choosing Adin Hill over Logan Thompson, then watching Hill scuffle as Thompson turned into one of the best goalies in the league with Washington.

13. Utah Mammoth, 34-26-6

Last week: 11

Sean: 14

Dom: 13

It's not often that a team trades quantity for quality and ends up with the lesser player, but that sure seems to be the case in the JJ Peterka deal — henceforth known as the Josh Doan deal. That Doan ended up signing for almost \$1 million less per year is the real kicker.

14. Boston Bruins, 36-23-6

Last week: 15

Sean: 13

Dom: 14

Picture this: The 2025-26 Bruins, but with Mathew Barzal, Kyle Connor and Thomas Chabot. That would be something! Alas, Boston infamously used picks 13-15 of the 2015 draft on Jakub Zboril, Jake DeBrusk and Zach Senyshyn, only to have those three stars go 16th, 17th and 18th.

15. Detroit Red Wings, 36-23-7

Last week: 13

Sean: 15

Dom: 15

We don't really have a statute of limitations here, but for the sake of our do-overs, we did try to keep things within the last five years. This is the exception, because it's too egregious not to mention. There is perhaps no bigger do-over more yearned for in hockey than Detroit picking Quinn Hughes in 2018 instead of Filip Zadina.

It is the ultimate "what could've been" and was almost rectified this year when Hughes was available, though at a steep price. It's hard to imagine the Red Wings would still be mired in a playoff drought if they had drafted Hughes, who became one of the best defensemen in hockey.

16. Ottawa Senators, 32-23-9

Last week: 16

Sean: 16

Dom: 16

Ottawa never figured out how to effectively use Jakob Chychrun. The Capitals certainly have. In Washington, he's grown into one of the most offensively impactful defensemen in the game and a player capable of handling first-pair minutes, making Ottawa's decision to trade him for Nick Jensen and a third-round pick in the 2026 NHL Draft look even worse.

17. Edmonton Oilers, 32-26-8

Last week: 17

Sean: 17

Dom: 17

There are a lot of options here, considering the team with the best player in the world and another MVP-caliber star still haven't won anything. We can go back to one of the original sins — the Darnell Nurse contract — but there's an even bigger problem that's come up of late: the hiring of Stan Bowman.

He's seemingly done a speed-run on dismantling this team's contention window with the offer-sheet debacle, the Trent Frederic contract and the Tristan Jarry trade. It speaks volumes that we're here longing for the days of Ken Holland.

18. Philadelphia Flyers, 31-23-11

Last week: 22

Sean: 19

Dom: 18

Travis Konecny is a nice guy to have around, and he should once again hit the 30-goal mark after last season's dip. Still, the Flyers signing him to an \$80 million contract in 2024 signaled a premature exit from their rebuild, and history has not been kind to that decision.

19. San Jose Sharks, 31-26-6

Last week: 19

Sean: 18

Dom: 19

This might be controversial, but for a rebuilding team that hasn't made many mistakes over the last few years, is the best candidate for a do-over the team's most recent move? Look, we love Kiefer Sherwood around here, but perhaps now is not quite the time for this particular team to be buying at the deadline and overpaying for a middle-six forward.

20. Washington Capitals, 33-27-7

Last week: 20

Sean: 20

Dom: 20

Washington's current lineup is built primarily on shrewd trades for players like Pierre-Luc Dubois, Jakob Chychrun and Logan Thompson. We're not going back to the "Martin Erat for Filip Forsberg" well, either. It's been long enough.

The Caps are looking for a solid top-six piece or two, though, and they missed on one in the 2020 draft by taking Hendrix Lapierre at No. 20 directly ahead of Tyson Foerster. Lapierre has 43 points in 146 NHL games; Foerster had become an elite two-way winger for the Flyers before his season-ending injury.

21. Los Angeles Kings, 26-23-15

Last week: 21

Sean: 21

Dom: 21

The Kings really looked at their defense last year and said, "We need less Jordan Spence and more Cody Ceci." It's going exactly as expected, with Spence thriving for the Senators while Ceci remains a detriment, no longer capable of playing top-four minutes. If the goal was to make a worse third pair, mission accomplished.

22. Seattle Kraken, 29-26-9

Last week: 18

Sean: 22

Dom: 23

Throughout the expansion draft process, we heard that the Kraken were “weaponizing cap space.” They eventually used a chunk of that space to sign Chandler Stephenson — who’d topped out as a 60-point player — for seven years and \$43 million. The weapon was a water pistol.

23. Florida Panthers, 33-29-3

Last week: 26

Sean: 24

Dom: 22

Brad Marchand’s season, mercifully, seems to be over. He turns 38 in May. He is signed for \$5.25 million against the salary cap until he’s 43. If there’s one keep-the-band-together contract to question, it’s his. It’s also worth noting that Florida seems to have applied the lesson about 37-year-old hockey players to Sergei Bobrovsky.

24. Nashville Predators, 29-27-9

Last week: 24

Sean: 23

Dom: 24

Committing nearly \$110 million to Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault and Brady Skjei always came with risk attached; those guys, even in 2024, were ... not young. Still, there was supposed to be some sort of short-term payoff, the Preds’ current wild-card push notwithstanding.

25. New Jersey Devils, 32-31-2

Last week: 23

Sean: 26

Dom: 25

Another week, another blurb talking about Simon Nemec, who was dangled in trade talks with the hopes of landing a young scoring forward. You know who’s a young scoring forward? Logan Cooley. Boy, would he have fit well with this team’s core.

26. St. Louis Blues, 26-29-10

Last week: 29

Sean: 25

Dom: 26

The thinking at the time was clear: The Blues had a lot of up-and-coming wingers, but not much offense from the back end. In that vein, swapping Zack Bolduc for Logan Mailloux made some sense, but it hasn’t panned out. Bolduc has continued to be a serviceable middle-six winger, while Mailloux has been, without exaggeration, one of the worst defenders without the puck we’ve ever seen. Good idea, bad execution.

27. Winnipeg Jets, 26-28-10

Last week: 25

Sean: 27

Dom: 28

Look, it was a nice story when Jonathan Toews came home to Manitoba. But the plan of playing a 37-year-old two years removed from hockey in the top six was not a sound one. The Jets probably didn't have a Plan B, but if they thought for a second this would work — and they sure used Toews like they thought it would — it speaks to a very flawed process.

28. New York Rangers, 27-30-8

Last week: 28

Sean: 28

Dom: 27

You'll be shocked to see that we had plenty to pick from here — trading for J.T. Miller, trading away K'Andre Miller, not trading Vincent Trocheck, things of that nature — so we'll go with the overarching theme: James Dolan signing Chris Drury to a multiyear contract over the summer, and committing to the person primarily responsible for the team's multi-season spiral, seems like a major "whoopsie daisy."

29. Chicago Blackhawks, 25-29-11

Last week: 30

Sean: 29

Dom: 29

Artyom Levshunov may yet turn into a high-end defenseman, but his impact in his own end this season has been disastrous, and his offensive work hasn't been much better. The result, for now, is a minus-11.4 Net Rating that's fifth-worst at the position.

Chicago, of course, took him second in the 2024 draft, rather than locking down Ivan Demidov as a long-term running mate for Connor Bedard. Early returns on that decision: not great.

30. Toronto Maple Leafs, 28-27-11

Last week: 27

Sean: 31

Dom: 30

With the way this Leafs season has spiraled, there are a lot of choices for a do-over. That there are so many, though, that it all points back to one choice: Moving on from Kyle Dubas to hire Brad Treliving. Our colleague Jonas Siegel spells a lot of it out here, and while Dubas is not without his blunders, nothing he ever did compares to the Leafs' current predicament. Put that in direct contrast with where Dubas' Penguins are, and it's easy to believe the Leafs would've been much better off

moving on from Sheldon Keefe in the summer of 2023 rather than Dubas. The grass isn't always greener on the other side.

31. Calgary Flames, 26-32-7

Last week: 31

Sean: 30

Dom: 31

At the time of the Matthew Tkachuk trade, the Flames were coming off a 111-point season and looked to be firmly in win-now mode. But the gut punch of Tkachuk asking out and Johnny Gaudreau leaving in free agency made that win-now position a lot more precarious. The writing was on the wall.

In theory, the Flames did well getting Jonathan Huberdeau and MacKenzie Weegar for Tkachuk. But without their two franchise guys, the path to contention, even with those guys, proved difficult. Imagine instead where the Flames might be if they took a more futures-forward package. Instead, they're left with four second-round picks and one of the worst contracts in hockey.

32. Vancouver Canucks, 20-37-8

Last week: 32

Sean: 32

Dom: 32

A second J.T. Miller-related decision appears on this list. Vancouver signed him to a seven-year, \$56 million contract ahead of the 2022-23 season, effectively choosing him over Bo Horvat. In a vacuum, that would've been the wrong call — and given the personal issues between Miller and Elias Pettersson, and the disaster they led to, it's even wrong-er.