



## **Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips**

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## The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Dean Evason ready to add wrinkles to late-game looks

**By Aaron Portzline – October 12, 2025**

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

### **Item No. 1: In-game strategy**

Coach Dean Evason vowed before the start of training camp that he would juggle his forward lines and switch up his defensive pairs more often this season, not just between games based on performance, but also in-game based on the situation.

This weekend provided a first glimpse of how this might look.

On Thursday in Nashville, the Blue Jackets trailed by a goal for most of the third period. Evason's call was to play veteran Damon Severson on the right side of the top pair with Zach Werenski — Dante Fabbro's typical spot — when the Blue Jackets had an offensive-zone start in the final five minutes.

Ultimately, the Blue Jackets didn't get the rally they wanted. They lost 2-1. But Evason plans to take this approach all season, he said, involving both forwards and defensemen, and in situations when they're leading or trailing late in games.

"We have a thought process and a game plan, what we want to do at the end of games if we're up or if we're down, and who we feel is going (on a certain night)," Evason said. "Obviously, it switches around. If a guy is playing well, or the guy's having a night offensively, he might get another opportunity to be out there."

Severson has had two rough seasons in Columbus, but he's played very well in the first two games of the season. After the loss in Nashville, the Blue Jackets routed the Minnesota Wild 7-4 on Saturday in St. Paul. Severson has an assist, a plus-4 rating and has averaged 18 minutes, 53 seconds, of ice time in the first two games.

"We thought Sevo played great the other night," Evason said before Saturday's game.

Evason said he told the club before last season that players would have a well-defined sense of their role with the club, but that those roles are fluid based on their performance. But those roles were more difficult to define a year ago, when virtually all of the players were unknown to Evason.

That's obviously different now one year later. He knows these players' strengths, weaknesses and tendencies.

"You want to play on the penalty kill? You play real good defensive hockey and you get an opportunity," Evason said. "You start scoring goals or what have you, and you play on the power play. In those situations, if you're reliable, you'll be out there at the end of the game. If you're offensive and scoring goals, you'll be out there at the end of the game if we're down. Yeah, guys' roles can change all the time."

It was easy to see what was happening in Nashville. But it was harder to read on Saturday in St. Paul, because the game was so disjointed with penalties — the Wild had eight power plays — and the Jackets had five defensemen for most of the third period.

All of this, of course, is dependent on players accepting Evason's in-game challenges. Severson, as expected, was thrilled by the extra ice time and offensive opportunities.

"That's kind of my game, getting the chance to pop out there," he said. "I feel like I get my swagger back, get my game going in the right direction."

The tougher part of this could have been with Fabbro. But he took no issue with it, perhaps because he knows it will almost certainly come around to him getting extra chances at times this season.

"Certain guys are feeling it in different areas of the ice each night, and that's up to the coach's discretion," Fabbro said. "Look, I'm all for it if guys are, you know, producing a bit more offensively in that game. If we need goals, that's the coach's decision."

"I've always said this: I want our team to win. I want our team to succeed. You've got to put the guys out there that are going each night and put them in spots to help the team."

#### **Item No. 2: For Quinn**

On a night when the Blue Jackets won their first game of the season, and Boone Jenner scored his 200th career goal, Kirill Marchenko had his fourth career hat trick and goaltender Elvis Merzlikins made 48 saves ... a touching and unexpected moment happened in the postgame dressing room.

The Blue Jackets have been awarding a "donkey hat" to a player after every win, a tribute to the late Johnny Gaudreau, who was known to affectionately call his closest friends "donkey." But after Saturday's win, despite all of those superlatives, the "donkey" didn't go to a player.

Quinn Halstead, the 12-year-old daughter of Blue Jackets assistant equipment manager Dustin Halstead, was diagnosed in August with a brain tumor and has since endured several surgeries and multiple stays in a Columbus hospital.

Jenner, the captain, walked to the middle of the visitors' dressing room in Grand Casino Arena, and choked back emotions as he delivered a message to the Halstead family back in Columbus.

"That's a team effort, first of all," Jenner said. "Elvis, the penalty kill, the power play ... everyone chipped in. We're going to need that the rest of the year."

"But we talk about being a team, being a family ... somebody's battled harder than us for two-plus months now, someone who's in our family. Dusty is back with her right now. This is for Quinn and all that she's been through. We played for her tonight. This is going to her. We wish you the best of luck. Keep recovering, keep battling. We love you guys. This is for you."

This group of Blue Jackets, who have faced more than their share of tough times and tragedy in recent years, applauded as Jenner held the cap high in the air with his final words.

It's been an emotional time for Jenner, too.

In April 2024, he and his wife, Maggie, shared on social media that the couple's first child, Dawson, was stillborn one month before his due date.

Just last month, the couple welcomed Tommy Pavol Jenner into the world, and Jenner has been beaming ever since, calling it “the best thing in the world.”

When asked after Saturday’s game about scoring his 200th career goal, Jenner said: “It feels good. It’s more important that we got the win tonight than the 200. But this is goal No. 1 for my son, so that’s how I look at it.”

Jenner joined Rick Nash (289) and Cam Atkinson (213) as the Blue Jackets’ only members of the 200-goal club.

### **Item No. 3: Take 5, Jody Shelley**

“Take 5” is our weekly brief and (mostly) non-hockey conversation with a Blue Jackets player, coach, broadcaster or staffer. This week, it’s former NHL tough guy turned local and national TV broadcaster Jody Shelley:

Favorite place to get away?

Alberta. That’s where my parents live, just outside Edmonton in an area called Sherwood Park. My family is there. My mom always makes me my favorite meal. Lasagna. Steak. Nanaimo bars. It’s a dessert. It’s a Canadian delicacy. The best.

Favorite restaurant in Columbus?

I’ve always been a big fan of Lindey’s. Great spot. You can go about it in several different ways. You sit on the patio, which is pretty relaxed. You can sit at the bar. Or a nice, formal dinner. For casual ... there used to be a great sandwich shop in the (North) Market called Two Guys From New York, but that’s not there anymore. What’s the famous place in German Village? Katzinger’s. You can’t go wrong. If you want two meals in one sit-down, get one of those sandwiches. I’m usually starving when I get there, so ... pickle while you wait.

Any hidden talents?

I played the saxophone and the tuba in school. I switched to tuba because it was too big to carry it home, and I didn’t like carrying (the sax) home. Here’s one: I can play tennis. I’m pretty good. I can serve. I can hunt balls down. Anyone who has a net game would give me trouble. I hit with (former Blue Jackets GM) Jarmo (Kekalainen) a while back, but we didn’t keep score. We just hit. He’s a level up. Him and Freddy Modin are up there.

Any unpopular opinions?

I believe dessert is an important part of any dinner. I get there’s a big health kick and everybody has their own thing, but for me it works. Chocolate cookies or ice cream. If it’s not both, it’s one or the other after every dinner. It’s starting to catch up with me, I think.

Any guilty pleasures or odd habits?

I sing in the shower and I love Taylor Swift. Some of her songs get me going. I listen to a lot of country. I’ve realized because of Spotify — you can see the lyrics with every song, right? — that I don’t know any of the words when I’m singing. None of ’em. My words are completely wrong, but I go with the feeling. I’ll even laugh at myself. Way out of tune, wrong lyrics ... but I love it.

#### Item No. 4: Snacks

- Blue Jackets defenseman Erik Gudbranson played only one shift in the third period before heading to the dressing room. Gudbranson and Minnesota's Marcus Foligno had been going at it all night, and Foligno landed a huge hit on Gudbranson along the wall only 1:16 into the third. Evason called it an upper-body injury and said Gudbranson would need further testing before the severity of the injury was known. If he can't play in Monday's home opener, Jake Christiansen, a healthy scratch in the first two games, would likely draw into the lineup.
- The Blue Jackets have now allowed four or more power-play goals in a single game on 10 occasions during their 25 seasons. Saturday's win was the first time they've ever won such a game on the road. They have one home win in such games, too: On Nov. 12, 2016, they gave up four power-play goals but still beat the St. Louis Blues 8-4 in Nationwide.
- The 48 saves by Merzlikins on Saturday vs. the Wild were the second-most saves in a game in his NHL career. He had a franchise-record (regular season) 56 saves in a 6-0 loss to Calgary on Jan. 26, 2022, in Nationwide Arena. Yes, the Flames had 62 shots on goal that night. The 48 saves are also tied with three others — Marc Denis (Feb. 14, 2004), Pascal Leclaire (Jan. 14, 2006) and Curtis McElhinney (April 11, 2015) — for the third-most saves in a single game.
- Here's Evason on Merzlikins' performance: "It was a really solid (outing) when we needed him. You all are trying to create some kind of controversy (with fellow goaltender Jet Greaves), but there's no controversy. They're both competing their butts off. Elvis did it (on Saturday); Jet did it in Game 1. Now we have some decisions to make (about Monday's home opener)."
- Think you had a busy week? Ivan Fedotov, acquired in a trade with Philadelphia on Sept. 14, was assigned to the AHL at the end of training camp to be Cleveland's No. 1 goaltender. On Wednesday, he was in Philadelphia with his wife when she gave birth to the couple's first child, a boy. On Thursday, he flew back to Cleveland. On Friday, he made his AHL debut and had a 21-save shutout in the Monsters' 1-0 win in Utica, N.Y., the season opener. It was Fedotov's first shutout in North America. Cleveland doesn't play again until their home opener next Friday vs. Lehigh Valley, so Fedotov is expected to travel to Philadelphia again this week for a visit. He has said that his wife will join him in Ohio when she's able to travel.
- The Monsters won again on Saturday in Utica. Mikael Pyyhtiä scored 23 seconds into overtime, while Brendan Gaunce and Riley Bezeau also scored goals. Goaltender Zach Sawchenko had 21 saves. Before the season started, Gaunce was named AHL Cleveland's captain, with forwards Hudson Fasching and Owen Sillinger and defenseman Dysin Mayo serving as alternates.
- The Blue Jackets traded David Jiricek to the Minnesota Wild last November for defenseman Daemon Hunt and a slew of draft picks, including a first-round pick (No. 20) spent on goaltender Pyotr Andreyanov in June. At the end of training camp, the Wild claimed Hunt off waivers when the Blue Jackets tried to send him to AHL Cleveland. On Saturday, both Jiricek and Hunt were healthy scratches for the Wild after veteran Jonas Brodin was cleared to join the lineup.
- Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering trivia: Marchenko's hat trick on Saturday was the fourth of his career, placing him third on the franchise's all-time list. Which player has the most hat tricks in franchise history?

- Ever heard of a 27-team no-trade list? That's what Jack Roslovic, the Columbus native and former Blue Jackets forward, requested — and received — as part of the one-year, \$1.5 million contract he signed with the Edmonton Oilers last week. The 28-year-old, who had been an unrestricted free agent, has a no-move clause between now and Nov. 1, at which time he is to provide the Oilers with four clubs that are approved as destinations should the Oilers decide to trade him. Roslovic, who reportedly turned down a three-year contract from Edmonton early in the summer, could get a tremendous opportunity with the Oilers, especially while top-line forward Zach Hyman is out of the lineup. Roslovic missed the Oilers' first two games of the season, but is expected to debut this week. The Jackets and Oilers play twice in a four-day span next month: Nov. 10 in Edmonton and Nov. 13 at Nationwide.
- The season opener in Nashville marked Fabbro's first game there since the Blue Jackets claimed him off waivers from the Predators on Nov. 10, 2024. He played parts of seven seasons with Nashville, so you knew a "welcome back" video would be part of the evening. The timing couldn't have been worse, or more hilarious. At 10:08 of the first period, Fabbro and Nashville's Michael Bunting got tangled up away from the play and began abusing each other. Fabbro was called for interference and Bunting for slashing, so they both headed off to the penalty box — still screaming at each other — when the game paused for a TV timeout. Fabbro, then, sat in the penalty box while his tribute played on the scoreboard in Bridgestone Arena.
- Here's Fabbro: "I honestly didn't even realize it was (playing) until it was like halfway through it, because Bunting and I were going back and forth a little bit. I just stopped saying a few cuss words and then I was waving to the crowd and then I think we went back at it again. It was kind of a funny situation. It took me by surprise a little bit. It was nice of them to do that."
- The goal that glanced off Adam Fantilli's leg before zipping past Wild goaltender Filip Gustavsson at 10:47 of the third period on Saturday was the 5,000th goal scored by the Blue Jackets organization. Strange fact? A Blue Jackets draft pick has scored each of the "thousandth" goals. Rostislav Klesla scored the 1,000th (Nov. 22, 2006), followed by Derick Brassard (2,000 on Oct. 18, 2011), Josh Anderson (3,000 on Nov. 5, 2016), Oliver Bjorkstrand (4,000 on April 19, 2021) and now Fantilli.
- Trivia answer: Atkinson, who is set to sign a one-day contract with Columbus this week and retire a Blue Jacket, had six hat tricks for the Jackets. Rick Nash had five.

## The Athletic / Kirill Marchenko breaks through with fourth career hat trick in Blue Jackets' win over Wild

**By Aaron Portzline – October 12, 2025**

Two nights earlier, Columbus Blue Jackets winger Kirill Marchenko had eight shots on goal and at least five prime scoring chances against the Nashville Predators. If this were any other player, you might question his ability to finish.

With Marchenko, you only wonder when the floodgates will open.

Marchenko scored the fourth hat trick of his career on Saturday, including a clutch goal late in the second period, and the penalty-ridden Blue Jackets pulled away in a truly bizarre game to beat the Minnesota Wild 7-4 before 18,836 fans in Grand Casino Arena.

"He's gonna score," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "He's that guy."

"His work ethic ... at the end of shifts, he's tired, and we're yelling at him (from the bench) to get the heck off the ice because he's gassed. That's good because you know he's working his butt off ... not to score goals, but to get after it, get after the puck. When he does that, he gets rewarded."

Zach Werenski and Boone Jenner each had one goal and two assists, and Adam Fantilli (one goal, one assist) and Dmitri Voronkov (two assists) had multi-point games. Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins finished with 48 saves, including 34 in the final two periods.

Jenner's empty net goal with 1:26 remaining was the 200th of his career. Fantilli's goal earlier in the third period was the Blue Jackets' 5,000th as an organization.

But one other milestone speaks to the strange nature of the Blue Jackets' first win of the season.

Saturday marked the first time in Blue Jackets franchise history — 1,898 games, half of them on the road — that Columbus won on the road despite allowing four power-play goals. Yes, all of Minnesota's four goals were scored with a man advantage after the Jackets were whistled for eight minor penalties.

The Blue Jackets' penalties were peculiar, too. There were the regular misdeeds — a slashing, a holding — but the other six were not aggressive in nature.

The Jackets were whistled three times for delay of game after throwing the puck over the glass from the defensive zone. They had another delay of game after a failed attempt to get a Wild goal overturned in the second period on goaltender interference. They had one penalty each for too many men on the ice and closing a hand on the puck.

"We kind of shot ourselves in the foot a little bit," Werenski said. "But I like how we handled it. I like how we battled."

"We're one of the five youngest teams in the league, but our young guys are three or four years in now, so we're not really young in that way. I feel like we just kept playing our game, and if we play the way we know how to play, we're going to give ourselves the best chances to win. No matter what happened, we just got right back to it."

Marchenko's first goal gave the Blue Jackets a 2-0 lead only seven seconds into the second period. The Wild made a major push back, though, and it was aided by Columbus penalties. Minnesota scored two power-play goals only 2:06 apart to pull even, and the momentum was clearly tilting to the Wild in their home opener.

"When you give them that many chances, they're going to get momentum," Jenner said.

The game turned feisty in the second period, too. Big hits, net-front scrums and cross-checks abounded. At one point, Blue Jackets defenseman Erik Gudbranson tripped and sailed the puck up over the glass for a delay of game, and Minnesota's Ryan Hartman started chirping at him before he could get up, including a jab with the stick.

Gudbranson rose to his skates and gave Hartman a lumberjack cross-check into the back. Incredibly, a penalty wasn't called for cross-checking, just delay of game.

The bigger issue is that the Blue Jackets didn't completely unravel when the Wild made a push and the penalties started accumulating.

"We really liked our composure," said Evason, who could be seen fuming on the bench. "Maybe I didn't hold it as good as the players did."

Marchenko's second goal, at 18:48 of the second, steadied the Blue Jackets and gave them a 3-2 lead. Werenski's goal at 1:11 of the third, followed by Marchenko's third, a power-play goal at 3:01, pushed the lead to 5-2.

"I don't really (get) frustrated," Marchenko said of Thursday's season opener. "I will score if I have a lot of shots. They're supposed to be going in, like, (on) average, right? I work in practice a little bit, and I go on to my next game and try to do my best."

Marchenko now has 12 shots on goal in two games.

"He's too talented," Werenski said. "I mean, you saw what he did last year (31 goals) and, obviously, how hard he works in practice. You know it's coming, but it's nice that it came the next night for him.

"It's one of those things where maybe if you had a ton of chances tonight and you didn't score, maybe it gets in your head a little bit. But he's too good a player to not put the puck in the net."

Fantilli and Jenner scored later in the third period to cap the scoring. The Blue Jackets scored six or more goals in 16 games last season. It took them until Game 2 this season to get going.

After an off day Sunday, the Blue Jackets open their home season Monday against the New Jersey Devils.



## The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner picks 'family' for first donkey hat of 2025-26

**By Brian Hedger – October 12, 2025**

Boone Jenner, the Blue Jackets' captain, had decided to change the team's postgame locker room award before last season and prior to Johnny Gaudreau's tragic death.

Getting a new head coach, Dean Evason, provided a natural transition to something other than the Civil War era Kepi hat the Jackets passed around, but Jenner needed a replacement. His light bulb moment arrived in the days after Gaudreau's death, when a conversation with assistant equipment manager Dustin "Dusty" Halstead became the genesis of the donkey hat.

Jenner and the Blue Jackets' leadership group suggested Gaudreau's workout shoes be used somehow, but Halstead's plan for Erik Gudbranson's gear prompted a different idea.

"Dusty was joking about maybe putting a donkey on one of Goody's pieces of equipment or something, just because John always called everybody a 'donkey' ... but especially Goody," Jenner said. "He was saying that, and we were talking about the player of the game award, and then me and Dusty were just sitting there, and he said, 'We should get a hat.' I was like, 'Boom, there it is. Donkey hat for player of the game.' "

Jenner wasn't around to give out the first one last season in Denver. He was recovering from shoulder surgery, so Zach Werenski presented it to Sean Monahan, one of Gaudreau's closest friends. It was a touching moment, and humorous enough that even Monahan cracked a joke about Gaudreau probably laughing at him.

That was the Blue Jackets' first win of the season, splitting a tough two-game opening trip. One year later, they did it again. After losing a tough-luck opener Oct. 9 in Nashville 2-1. The Jackets earned their first victory by lighting up the scoreboard on Oct. 11 with a 7-4 victory over the Minnesota Wild.

Jenner scored his 200<sup>th</sup> career goal into an empty net to seal it, his first as a dad, and then stood before his teammates to hand out the first donkey hat. Lauding goalie Elvis Merzlikins (48 saves) and both special-teams units, the Blue Jackets' captain shifted to family.

"We talk about being a team, being a family," he said. "Somebody's battled harder than us for two-plus months now that's in our family, and Dusty ... is back with her right now."

The first donkey hat of 2025-26 was remotely issued to 12-year old Quinn Halstead, the 12-year old daughter of the same Blue Jackets equipment manager, Dusty, who helped Jenner come up with it.

Quinn Halstead, who plays for the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets girls program, was diagnosed in August 2025 with a rare brain tumor. According to a GoFundMe page created by her relatives, she has undergone 10 surgeries, including the most recent this month.

Quinn's recovery could keep her out for the entire season, but there's hope she will eventually return to ice with full health. As she heals, the Blue Jackets are keeping the Halsteads in their thoughts. Multiple players made donations to the Go Fund Me drive, Merzlikins has a "Quinn" sticker on his mask, and Jenner almost choked up while awarding her the donkey hat.

“This is for Quinn, all that she’s been through, and we played for her tonight,” Jenner said. “This is going to her. We wish you the best of luck. Keep recovering, keep battling. We love you guys. This is for you!”

The Blue Jackets have talked a lot already about unity and sticking together like family. They mourned the loss of Gaudreau together, several mourned goalie Matiss Kivlenieks’ tragic death together in July 2021 and now they’re rallying around the Halstead family.

The sight of Jenner’s speech and hat decision moved Evason enough to cite the moment as further evidence of the team’s bond.

“Boone Jenner’s our captain, right?” Evason said. “At the end of the game, we give out the donkey hat. He gave the hat to our trainer Dusty’s daughter, who’s going through some stuff. And to have somebody do that is absolutely incredible. Quinn is going through a battle, and for them to think about her after a big win like that? That tells you a lot about our leadership group.”

## The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets show signs of maturity to down Minnesota Wild: Takeaways

By Brian Hedger – October 12, 2025

Not long ago, the Blue Jackets would have crumbled in a game like the one they won Oct. 11 at Grand Casino Arena.

After building a 2-0 lead against the Minnesota Wild, things began unraveling in a whirlwind of penalties, shots and power-play goals. Eight penalties, to be exact, and it felt like the Blue Jackets played a man short most of the game.

The Wild (1-1-0) tied it 2-2 in the second period and stayed within striking distance most of the game, but all four of their goals were on power plays. Penalties were the biggest reason Minnesota stayed in the game, but the Blue Jackets (1-1-0) sealed their win with quick response goals of their own. Minnesota learned what other teams did last season – that Columbus can push back.

This time, however, the Blue Jackets did it on the road for an odd-yet-impressive 7-4 victory to send a packed building home unhappy.

“We’ve definitely grown,” Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. “We’re (still) a top-five youngest team in the league, but our young guys are three or four years in now. So, we’re not really young in that way. We just keep playing our game. No matter what happened tonight, it seemed like we just got right back to it.”

Coming off a strong road showing to open the season with a tough-luck 2-1 loss Oct. 9 in Nashville, the Blue Jackets (1-1-0) now head back for their own home opener against the New Jersey Devils on Oct. 13 at Nationwide Arena.

### **Columbus Blue Jackets' Marchenko edges Minnesota Wild's Kaprizov in battle of Kirills**

The Blue Jackets have the lowest payroll in the NHL at \$81.3 million and the most room to work with under the league’s \$95.5 million salary-cap ceiling.

The reason for that is a looming group of pending free agents over the next three years that could present a daunting puzzle for Don Waddell, the team’s president/general manager, to solve.

Heading the list of rising stars who are trending toward skyrocketing salaries is Kirill Marchenko, a right wing who’s only 25 and will make \$3.85 million this season and next, when he’ll be a pending restricted free agent with arbitration rights.

Why bring this up in the second game of the second year on Marchenko’s deal?

Well, it’s simple. Marchenko got the better of Wild star Kirill Kaprizov, barely, by scoring three goals for his fourth career hat trick. Kaprizov led his team with three points on two goals and one assist, all on power plays, but was also –3 in plus/minus.

Kaprizov is in the final year of a contract that pays him \$9 million per year and recently signed an eight-year extension worth \$136 million. That will send his salary skyrocketing to \$17 million next season to make him the highest paid player in the league, making more than Edmonton Oilers stars Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl and Toronto Maple Leafs captain Auston Matthews.

Marchenko's offensive progression starting his fourth NHL season compared to Kaprizov starting his sixth isn't quite apples to apples yet, but it's close. Marchenko is trending toward a gigantic pay raise in two years, whether it's from the Blue Jackets or from an offer sheet from another team, and he's just one of their burgeoning young stars bound for riches over the next three years.

Adam Fantilli, Dmitri Voronkov, Kent Johnson, Cole Sillinger and Denton Mateychuk will need new deals, too, along with pending free agent veterans Boone Jenner and Charlie Coyle.

### **Elvis Merzlikins comes up big for Columbus Blue Jackets in season debut**

Allowing four goals, all on power plays, is something that ordinarily might be looked at as a rough night for an NHL goalie.

Elvis Merzlikins gets a free pass from that logic this time, after facing eight Wild power plays and 16 of Minnesota's 52 shots during those man-advantage stretches. He came up with several clutch stops for the Blue Jackets in all situations, drawing praise from teammates and Evason alike for the effort.

According to Natural Stat Trick, Merzlikins stopped seven of nine high-danger chances, 13 of 14 medium-danger chances and 24 of 25 shots from long distance. Not bad for his first action of the season.

Merzlikins faced 52 shots, which is the third-most he's seen in a game, trailing only the New Jersey Devils' 53 shots in a 7-1 victory over the Blue Jackets on Oct. 30, 2022, and the Calgary Flames' 56 shots in a 6-0 victory Jan. 26, 2022.

Following Jet Greaves' sharp performance to open the season in Nashville, Merzlikins showed why the Blue Jackets have potential for a strong goaltending tandem.

"It was real solid when we needed him to be," Evason said. "There's no controversy (with Merzlikins and Greaves). They're competing their butts off. Elvis did it tonight, Jet did it in Game 1 and now we're going to have some decisions to make (before the home opener Oct. 13).

### **Columbus Blue Jackets commit too many penalties against Minnesota Wild**

The Blue Jackets made some history they'd like to avoid in the future. It was the first time they'd ever won on the road when their opponent scored four power-play goals. The Wild went 4 for 8 to make the Blue Jackets pay for taking eight penalties, and they know that's not a recipe for long-term success.

Four of the calls were delay-of-game infractions, including three for sending the puck out of play from their own zone. The fourth was a failed coaching challenge after the Wild's first goal, which Evason and his staff felt was similar to a play in Nashville that prompted a successful review for the Predators. That one overturned a key goal by Mathieu Olivier that would've given the Blue Jackets a 2-1 lead.

The overhead angle of Matt Boldy's goal to cut the Jackets' lead to 2-1 on a Wild power play in the second showed Merzlikins' right leg contact Blue Jackets defenseman Dante Fabbro, who was bumped into his goalie by Minnesota's Joel Eriksson Ek.

No other players appeared to contact Merzlikins, who fell backward before Zach Werenski accidentally tapped the puck to Boldy for a tap-in goal in the crease. Evason felt the play mirrored what happened in Nashville, when Olivier was ruled to have interfered with goalie Juuse Saros in the crease. The NHL's ruling on the Blue Jackets' challenge called the contact with Merzlikins incidental and stated that it occurred in the white paint outside the crease, which is allowed.

“We were pretty confident,” Evason said. “But again, we’ve got to go back to, you know, you’d better be 100% and we thought it was not 100% the other night (in Nashville) and we probably shouldn’t have called it because it probably wasn’t 100% here.”

One thing that is 100% is the need for the Blue Jackets to lower their trips to the penalty box.

#### **Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Erik Gudbranson injured**

The Blue Jackets played all but one shift of the third period without veteran defenseman Erik Gudbranson, who was injured late in the second period on a hit by Wild forward Marcus Foligno.

Gudbranson came back out for the start of the third but quickly left the game with an upper-body injury. Evason didn’t have anything further about it after the game, except to say the Blue Jackets “didn’t like the hit.”

Should Gudbranson miss upcoming games, defenseman Jake Christiansen will draw into the lineup to make his season debut.

## The Columbus Dispatch / Marchenko hat trick helps Columbus Blue Jackets spoil Minnesota Wild home opener

**By Brian Hedger – October 11, 2025**

Playing their second straight game against a team hosting its home opener, the Blue Jackets skated off with a 7-4 victory on a wild night Oct. 11 at Grand Casino Arena.

Facing the Minnesota Wild, their NHL expansion cousin that's also celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Jackets brushed off a blown 2-0 lead to even their record at 1-1-0 heading back to Columbus for their own home opener Oct. 13 at Nationwide Arena.

Kirill Marchenko led the way with three goals for his fourth career hat trick, Zach Werenski and Boone Jenner each added three points with a goal and two assists, including Jenner's 200th career goal, and goalie Elvis Merzlikins made 48 saves on 52 shots to win his season debut.

The only thing that kept the Wild in the game were power plays. They got eight of them on eight Blue Jackets penalties and scored all four of their goals with a man-advantage. According to Hockey-Reference, it's the first time the Blue Jackets have ever won a road game while allowing four power-play goals and only the second time they've ever won under that scenario.

"We shoot ourselves in the foot a little bit, but I like how we handled it," Werenski said. "I like how we battled. Our power play scored a goal, we got efforts from everybody and Elvis played great. I feel like when you can have nights like that and still come out with two points, it's a successful night."

Miles Wood, acquired in a summer trade along with Charlie Coyle, scored his first goal as a Blue Jacket early in the first to give Columbus a 1-0 lead. Coyle notched his first assist and point on Jenner's goal into an empty net, and was one of five Blue Jackets who notched points with assists.

Unlike their 2-1 loss Oct. 9 in Nashville to open the season, the Blue Jackets scrapped through the first two periods to prevent the Wild from breaking the game open.

Minnesota got five power plays in the first two periods, three more in the third and on 50% of their eight man-advantages. The Wild (1-1-0) added two more power-play goals in the third, including rookie defenseman Zeev Buium's first career goal to make it 5-3 with 10:06 left.

Jenner shot a puck off Fantilli and into the net to make it 6-3 on Fantilli's goal with 9:13 left in the third, Minnesota cut it to 6-4 with Kirill Kaprizov's second power-play goal of the game and Jenner scored the game's final goal into the Wild's vacated net with 1:26 left to seal the win.

"It was different, obviously," Jenner said. "A lot of momentum swings, and we want to stay out of the (penalty box). We gave them way too many chances on their power play, but in the second I think we kept our composure pretty good when a lot of things were happening that were not good for us. I just really liked our response."

## The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner scores 200th goal

**By Brian Hedger – October 11, 2025**

Boone Jenner has joined Rick Nash and Cam Atkinson in the Blue Jackets' 200 goal club.

The Blue Jackets' captain joined the exclusive group Oct. 11 to help the Blue Jackets down the Minnesota Wild 7-4 in their home opener at Grand Casino Arena. His first goal of the 2025-26 season made Jenner the third player to score 200 goals for the franchise, which is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

"Whenever you get those milestones, it's cool to get there," Jenner said. "Just looking back, you're never thinking about it ... trying to get to that spot. You're not really thinking about it. You're just trying to play. So, I don't put too much thought into it, but it'll be cool to look back on hopefully."

Jenner scored into an empty net with 1:26 left to play, sealing a high-scoring game against the Wild. Charlie Coyle assisted on the goal to lift Jenner into elite company with Nash and Atkinson. He was happier that it was his first goal as a new father.

"It feels good," Jenner said. "More important, we got the win tonight than 200, but it's No. 1 for my son, so that's how I'll think of it."

Nash, now the Blue Jackets' director of hockey operations, holds the top spot on the franchise's all-time goals rankings with 289. Atkinson, who will sign a one-day contract on Oct. 16 to retire with the Blue Jackets, is second at 213.

The Blue Jackets selected Jenner in the second round of the 2011 NHL Draft (37<sup>th</sup> overall) and he's now starting his 13<sup>th</sup> season playing in Columbus. He's steadily climbing multiple all-time statistical rankings for the Blue Jackets and succeeded Nick Foligno as captain prior to the 2021-22 season.

Aside from ranking third in goals, Jenner began the season first in games played (742), first in hits (1,662), fourth in points (384) — one behind Zach Werenski (385) — sixth in assists (184), second in power-play goals (44), third in winning goals (28), third in shots (1,860), fifth in blocked shots (717), second in takeaways (33) and tied for fifth in hat tricks (two) with eight others.

"He's obviously been here his whole career and he's our leader, and it was his first goal as a dad for him, so that's exciting," Werenski said. "It's a testament to how much he loves being a Blue Jacket and how much time he's spent here, and we love having him. I'm so happy for him."

## The Hockey Writers / 3 Takeaways From the Blue Jackets' 7-4 Win Over the Wild

**By Matthew Buhrmann – October 12, 2025**

It was a “wild” one Saturday night in St. Paul, Minnesota, as the Columbus Blue Jackets earned their first win of the season with a 7-4 victory over the Minnesota Wild, despite being outshot 52 to 32.

Captain Boone Jenner joined Rick Nash and Cam Atkinson as one of only three Blue Jackets to score 200 goals with the franchise with his empty-net goal late in the third. It took him 743 games to reach that milestone.

Elvis Merzlikins had his work cut out for him in his season debut, stopping 48 of 52 shots. Kirill Marchenko led the way with a hat trick, Jenner added a goal and two assists, and Zach Werenski matched that with a goal and two assists of his own. Werenski logged 25:20 of ice time, second highest on the team behind Ivan Provorov.

Below are three takeaways from the wild 7-4 win.

### **Way Too Many Trips to the Box**

The Blue Jackets went just 4-for-8 on the penalty kill and gave up far too many chances. A team with offensive firepower like the Wild will capitalize, and they did, but the Blue Jackets made up for it offensively.

Merzlikins bailed the team out with several clutch saves, but you cannot give up that many chances in tight, especially from the slot, as seen below in a visual scoring chances image via moneypuck.com.

The Blue Jackets were solid defensively at five-on-five, but all four of the Wild's goals came on the power play. Two were scored by Kirill Kaprizov, who also assisted on the Matt Boldy second-period goal.

The Blue Jackets had trouble clearing the puck while shorthanded. The penalty kill was overworked, with two kills in the first period and three in both the second and third. Eight total penalties are a recipe for disaster. Three of the infractions were delay-of-game, puck-over-glass calls. Erik Gudbranson and Dmitri Voronkov each took two penalties.

Honestly, with the number of power plays they gave up, the Blue Jackets deserved to lose this game. But they made up for it, considering they deserved to win Thursday against the Nashville Predators. Even the Deserve to Win O'Meter on moneypuck.com gave the Blue Jackets just a 14.9% chance of winning in 1,000 simulated games.

That's just how it sometimes goes in the game of hockey.

### **Merzlikins Up to the Task**

Merzlikins, often scrutinized by the fan base, proved himself Saturday. He made timely saves, tracked the puck well with his glove, and moved confidently across the crease, especially when under siege on the penalty kill. He has earned another start this week, whichever day it may be.

“Elvis was obviously huge,” Jenner said. “Made timely save after timely save all night and kept us ahead or kept us tied when we needed it. Really happy with the response, and we can grow off it.”



Merzlikins finished with a .923 save percentage (SV%) after facing 52 shots. When a goalie gives up four goals and still posts a solid save percentage, it says a lot about how he handled the workload.

### **Marchenk-Goals Galore**

Marchenko recorded his fourth career hat trick, starting with a goal just seven seconds into the second period, the fastest goal to start a period in Blue Jackets history. He added another in the final two minutes of that frame, cashing in on a painful deflection/assist from Voronkov and cleaning it up in front.

His third came on a five-on-three power play in the third period, when he rifled a dish from Werenski home.

"I can score more. Just shoot the puck," Marchenko said. "It's not really hard work. I just work on my shot, and my partners make great passes too. And I try to do my best work."

He was due. Marchenko fired eight shots Thursday night in Nashville but couldn't solve Juuse Saros. He's looked great on the top-line right wing, with Sean Monahan centering and Voronkov on the left. Marchenko went 12-for-20 (60%) on faceoffs; many of those wins came on the penalty kill. Monahan went 14-for-25 (56%) and continues to be one of the team's best in the circle, in my opinion, right there with Charlie Coyle.

If Marchenko keeps firing like this, 12 shots in two games, surpassing his 74-point, 31-goal 2024-25 season is very much in reach.

The Blue Jackets have Sunday off to regroup before their home opener against the New Jersey Devils on Monday, Oct. 13 at 7:00 PM EDT.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Three Things: Kirill Marchenko's Hatty, Elvis Merzlikins' Solid Play In Net Lead Jackets To First Win Of Season

By Ed Francis – October 12, 2025

Kirill Marchenko scored three times for his fourth career NHL hat trick and Elvis Merzlikins made an outstanding 48 saves as the Columbus Blue Jackets defeated the Minnesota Wild 7-4 on Saturday night in St. Paul.

Here are the three things to take away from Columbus' first win of the season:

### **THING ONE: Marchenko With Another Big Night**

In Thursday's season opening loss to the Nashville Predators, Marchenko had eight shots on goal and certainly would've found the back of the net at least once if not for the phenomenal play of Preds goalie Juuse Saros.

But for as good as he was Thursday, Marchenko was even better Saturday night and this time the hard work paid off in the form of another NHL hat trick.

The first goal came just seven seconds into the second period, a franchise record for the fastest goal to start a period. He raced up the middle of the slot and fired a wrister past Wild goalie Filip Gustavsson to put the Blue Jackets up 2-0.

His second goal of the night came in the final two minutes of the middle frame to put Columbus in front 3-2.

Marchenko completed the hat trick just over three minutes into the third period while the Blue Jackets were on their first 5-on-3 advantage of the season.

"I just know I will score if I have a lot of shots," said Marchenko, putting it simply.

He finished with four shots on goal for the game.

### **THING TWO: Merzlikins Comes Up Big In Five-On-Five Play**

It's not often that a goalie gives up four goals and is still named the Second Star of the night, but that was the case for Merzlikins in the win.

The Latvian netminder faced 52 shots and his .923 save percentage is even more impressive when you consider that all four Minnesota goals came on the power play.

In fact, Merzlikins finished the night stopping all 35 shots he faced at even strength (plus one short-handed), including several big saves early to help keep a ruckus Minnesota crowd at bay.

The Wild's 14 shots in the first period was their fewest in any of the three periods, but was more than Columbus had in any single period of the night.

No final determination has been made as of Sunday morning as to who gets the start Monday night in the home opener against the New Jersey Devils, but if it's Merzlikins, it will have been well-earned.

### **THING THREE: Cool, Calm, and Collected When It Mattered**

There were a lot of penalties — Minnesota had eight total power plays and a pair of five-on-three's — but when it mattered most, the Blue Jackets were on their game in keeping the puck out of their net and not letting momentum swing to the Wild.

That was not unnoticed by head coach Dean Evason.

“We really liked our composure,” said Evason. “Maybe I didn’t hold it as well as the players did, but they did a real good job of holding their composure, certainly early in that hockey game when we could have gone sideways when they scored their first two.”

**Up Next:**

The Blue Jackets will travel back to Columbus for the Monday night home opener against the New Jersey Devils. With the pre-game festivities, look for the first puck to drop around 7:15 p.m.

## **The Athletic / Bold NHL 2025-26 season predictions, from blockbuster trades to breakout players and more**

**By The Athletic NHL Staff – October 11, 2025**

Will Canucks captain Quinn Hughes be traded to the Flyers? Will the Panthers make their own blockbuster deal after Aleksander Barkov's injury? Will players such as Zach Benson, Brandt Clarke and Shane Wright break out this season?

Those were among the responses *The Athletic* got this week when it asked its NHL staff for their bold predictions for the 2025-26 season.

Here's one prediction for each team as the early regular season continues.

### **Anaheim Ducks**

#### **They will make the playoffs**

Yes, it's the first one on the page and while many may skip right to their team, I might as well kick things off by going bold. They're going to end their seven-year, franchise-long playoff drought. Sure, they probably need another 21-point jump after going from 59 to 80 last year. But there is a decent cast of veterans supporting the young core of Leo Carlsson, Mason McTavish, Jackson LaCombe and Cutter Gauthier, and a new coach in Joel Quenneville. If they support Lukas Dostal with better defense, they can grab the final wild-card spot. — *Eric Stephens*

### **Boston Bruins**

#### **Jeremy Swayman will enter the Olympic conversation**

Swayman rebounds after a career-worst year. He proves 2024-25 was an aberration by being what he's always been: square to pucks, good at tracking shots, unpredictable with his save selection and competitive on everything. — *Fluto Shinzawa*

### **Buffalo Sabres**

#### **Zach Benson will break out with 60 points**

Benson was second on the Sabres in individual high-danger chances last season at all strengths and yet he finished the season with 10 goals. He's still only 20 years old, but in his third season in the NHL and now getting a chance to play on a line with Tage Thompson and Josh Norris. He generates so many chances due to his forechecking and playmaking that it's easy to see the breakout season coming. Sixty points might seem ambitious, but he has the talent and situation to hit that number. — *Matthew Fairburn*

### **Calgary Flames**

#### **Matthew Coronato will lead the team in goals**

Nazem Kadri held down the fort with a career-best 35 goals last year. Kadri will motivate himself to try to replicate the feat. But what about Coronato, who just signed a big-money extension this offseason? Coronato proved last season that he's a full-time NHLer while scoring 24 goals. The winger's shot is

arguably the best on the team. There's a world where he paces the team in goals if he continues his upward trajectory. — *Julian McKenzie*

### **Carolina Hurricanes**

#### **Alexander Nikishin will win the Calder Trophy**

The Hurricanes have high hopes for their top prospect, and it looks like he'll be given every opportunity to thrive. Nikishin has practiced in all situations during training camp, and although he might not start on the power play, it shouldn't be long until he's a fixture on the PP and PK. He should see favorable matchups early in the season and, as he grows more comfortable, get more minutes. Double-digit goals and 40-plus points seem like a possibility, and if he's also part of a top penalty kill on a contender, he should be in position to be the NHL's top rookie. — *Cory Lavallette*

### **Chicago Blackhawks**

#### **Sam Rinzel will win the Calder Trophy**

There's a real possibility Rinzel is this season's Lane Hutson. Whether Rinzel gets to 60-plus points might depend on the team around him. Rinzel enters the season as the Blackhawks' No. 1 defenseman. He's going to play 25-plus minutes a night. He's going to be on the top power play. He's going to spend a lot of time playing with Connor Bedard and Frank Nazar. He's going to get every opportunity to have a Hutson-like season. — *Scott Powers*

### **Colorado Avalanche**

#### **Mackenzie Blackwood and Scott Wedgewood will win the William M. Jennings Trophy**

Wedgewood has looked tremendous in his first two outings. He plays a simple game, and his reads have looked razor sharp. Blackwood is still recovering from an offseason lower-body injury but should be back soon. When he does, I expect big things. Blackwood has all of the physical tools to be one of the best goalies in the NHL, and now has a strong team in front of him for things to fall into place. The two are one of the better tandems, and I'll say they allow the fewest goals in the league. — *Jesse Granger*

### **Columbus Blue Jackets**

#### **Jet Greaves will take off**

Greaves first joined the Blue Jackets as an undrafted tryout player at their rookie tournament in 2021. Since then, he's met every challenge put before him, becoming one of the AHL's best goaltenders over the past two years. Now he's a full-time NHL player. Not only will he challenge Elvis Merzlikins for playing time, but he'll win the No. 1 job and be one of the best stories in the NHL this season. — *Aaron Portzline*

### **Dallas Stars**

#### **Thomas Harley will be a Norris Trophy finalist**

Miro Heiskanen is one of the best defensemen on the planet, but Harley's blend of offensive skill and defensive savvy makes him a more likely Norris candidate. He's only 24 years old, and he proved in the second half of last season — when Heiskanen was hurt — that he is every bit a No. 1 defenseman in this league, even if he's not *the* No. 1 defenseman on his own team. The only thing standing in his way is that

Heiskanen tends to get the PP1 duties. If Harley can wrest that job away, he can make a run at not just a top-three spot, but the trophy itself. — *Mark Lazerus*

#### **Detroit Red Wings**

##### **Lucas Raymond will hit 90 points**

Only 12 players reached this lofty mark last season, but Raymond was on pace for it as of late February, before a March slump cooled him off. He still finished with 80, though, and at 23, he's at the age where he still certainly has another step in him. The big question: Will he and Dylan Larkin have a consistent LW to play off of? — *Max Bultman*

#### **Edmonton Oilers**

##### **Evan Bouchard will be a Norris Trophy finalist**

The way Bouchard has played over the last few playoffs, perhaps this should have happened already. He's certainly one of the top offensive blueliners in the league, armed with a bomb of a shot and an ability to make a stretch pass like few others. Cutting down on defensive gaffes that surely stick out in voters' minds will vault him into a group with the best rearguards in the sport. — *Daniel Nugent-Bowman*

#### **Florida Panthers**

##### **They will make a blockbuster trade to replace Aleksander Barkov**

After injuries to Barkov and Matthew Tkachuk, there are real doubts about the Panthers' ability to three-peat right now. But Barkov's absence could open up as much as \$10 million in cap room if he misses the whole year, more than enough for Bill Zito to get creative and land a big fish before the deadline. How about Artemi Panarin, if the Rangers' season goes sideways? Or even Sidney Crosby, should he decide to leave Pittsburgh? Whatever big name is available, expect Florida to be at the front of the line. — *James Mirtle*

#### **Los Angeles Kings**

##### **Brandt Clarke will break out with 50 points**

The Kings have a bit of "same old, same old" to them, but what shouldn't be the same is the 22-year-old Clarke starting to take off as a dynamic player from the blue line. His goal Wednesday against Vegas showed why he can give L.A. a component that's nonexistent on defense. Third-year coach Jim Hiller raved about Clarke's improvement in his end during camp, but he's also got to back it up with ice time. We're betting he will, or someone else if there's a change behind the bench. Clarke might need to squeeze his way onto the power-play's first unit. But it's time to take off the reins. — *Eric Stephens*

#### **Minnesota Wild**

##### **Matt Boldy will rack up 50 goals and 50 assists**

Wild president of hockey operations and GM Bill Guerin has said that Boldy has the potential to hit 50 and 50. And after Boldy's terrific playoff series against Vegas, he looks locked in to start the season. He's on a dynamic top line with Kirill Kaprizov and Marco Rossi that will get plenty of opportunities. This is obviously bold for a player whose career high is 31 goals, but Boldy has the capability. — *Joe Smith*

#### **Montreal Canadiens**

### **Juraj Slafkovský will score 30 goals**

Slafkovský is focused and better prepared for the season than he has ever been. All the tools are there, he just needs to apply them properly. And in his fourth NHL season, he will do just that. — *Arpon Basu*

### **Nashville Predators**

#### **Andrew Brunette will still be the team's coach at the end of the season**

Brunette is the obvious coach on the hot seat as the season begins — he's probably elsewhere already if anyone but Barry Trotz is his GM — but the guess here is that the Preds start better and show some fight this season, at least staying relevant and in the hunt for most of it. That, paired with Trotz's patience, gives Brunette the whole season. And gives Trotz another tough offseason decision. — *Joe Rexrode*

### **New Jersey Devils**

#### **Arseny Gritsyuk will finish top-five in Calder Trophy voting**

Gritsyuk is starting his NHL career on the fourth line, but he could move up as the season goes along. He's 24 and showed an ability to score in the KHL last season with 44 points in 49 games. He also had a nice preseason, which is an encouraging sign for New Jersey. Cutter Gauthier finished fifth last year and had 20 goals and 44 points, which would be a big ask for Gritsyuk. But I'm guessing this year's rookie class isn't quite as strong and Gritsyuk plays his way into the top five. — *Peter Baugh*

### **New York Islanders**

#### **Mathew Barzal will put up 90 points**

Barzal's 2024-25 season was condensed to only 30 games, and he didn't even score at a point-per-game pace. It's a feat he has managed only twice in his career. But he was a lot better than the scoresheet showed last year; he was slick in transition, earned a 61 percent expected goal rate, and the Islanders outscored opponents 24-11 in his five-on-five minutes. With a new voice leading the power play, plus Matthew Schaefer taking over the first unit, expect Barzal to thrive offensively back at center. — *Shayna Goldman*

### **New York Rangers**

#### **Their lineup will have six players who are 23 or younger by February**

For the last few years, the Rangers have leaned on veterans over youth while chasing a championship. But last season's disappointment is forcing them to recalibrate their priorities. They're entering 2025-26 with three 23-and-under players — Will Cuyll, Matt Rempe and rookie Noah Laba — but others are knocking on the door. Speedy winger Brett Berard was the final cut out of camp and should be back soon, while skilled defenseman Scott Morrow appears to be next in line on D. I'm also figuring that one of two first-round wingers, Brennan Othmann and Gabe Perreault, will break through this season. — *Vincent Z. Mercogliano*

### **Ottawa Senators**

#### **Jake Sanderson will win the Norris Trophy**

Sanderson started cropping up on most people's radars last season, thanks to his performance at the 4 Nations Face-Off. He's a No. 1 defenseman who is capable at both ends of the ice. But what if this is the

year he makes an astronomical jump forward? If the Sens make the playoffs, emerge as a top-three team in their division and Sanderson improves on a 57-point season last year, he has a real chance to be the league's best at his position. — *Julian McKenzie*

## **Philadelphia Flyers**

### **They will trade for Quinn Hughes**

Considering all of the top potential free agents in 2026 have re-signed, the Flyers probably know already they're going to have to go the trade route for top talent. If the Canucks get off to a rough start this season, speculation around Hughes is going to be deafening. The Flyers will put together a package to get him out of Vancouver sometime around late January, while hoping that a reunion with some of his good friends such as Trevor Zegras and a coach he already loves (Rick Tocchet) results in a long-term extension in the offseason. — *Kevin Kurz*

## **Pittsburgh Penguins**

### **Bryan Rust will not be traded**

There will be enormous amounts of trade speculation around the Penguins this season. Erik Karlsson and Rickard Rakell may well be traded by the deadline. Despite the good start, this is a rebuilding team. I have a feeling, though, that Rust will remain for a multitude of reasons. He's a popular man in the organization, to say the least. — *Josh Yohe*

## **San Jose Sharks**

### **They will re-sign John Klingberg**

Everything about Klingberg's acquisition screams flipping him at the 2026 deadline if he's a useful blue-line piece. The Sharks probably have one more sell-off in them, and there's a bunch of impending UFAs. But they can't trade every pickup, right? If the 33-year-old's health is sound and he's putting up points, why not have the right side of the defense covered for a couple of more years? Unless you want Rasmus Andersson. — *Eric Stephens*

## **Seattle Kraken**

### **Shane Wright will break out**

This is going to be the year a few players from the 2022 draft class pop off. Logan Cooley and Lane Hutson have already established themselves as rising stars, while Frank Nazar and Marco Kasper are generating some hype. Look out for Wright to join that group. It's easy to get impatient with players who don't live up to their top-five draft pedigree early in their careers, especially when their teams crave star power. But development isn't a straight line; Lane Lambert is going to help unlock his game more and get him back on track. — *Shayna Goldman*

## **St. Louis Blues**

### **They will give up the fewest six-on-five goals in the NHL**

I keep saying that I won't remind Blues fans about the way the postseason ended in 2024-25, and here I go again. The Blues gave up two six-on-five goals to the Winnipeg Jets, including one with 2.2 seconds left in regulation, and fell 4-3 in double overtime. But I promise, I'm bringing it up this time for a good



reason! It's because my bold prediction is that the Blues, after much work on their six-on-five defense in the preseason, will give up the fewest six-on-five goals in the league in 2025-26. — *Jeremy Rutherford*

## **Tampa Bay Lightning**

### **They will go to the Stanley Cup Final**

The Lightning will go on one last deep run before their window closes — all the way to the Stanley Cup Final. Tampa Bay's elite core fired on all cylinders last regular season, and this year, they will build on it with more support around them. Having a full season of Yanni Gourde and Oliver Bjorkstrand, plus an incoming breakout from Gage Goncalves, will give management a better snapshot of how to improve this team at the deadline and to solidify this group before the postseason. — *Shayna Goldman*

## **Toronto Maple Leafs**

### **Matthew Knies will lead the NHL in short-handed goals**

Here's the thing: Knies has never scored even one short-handed goal in his NHL career. But he's about to see his opportunity on the Leafs' penalty kill jump in Mitch Marner's absence. He'll kill penalties with Auston Matthews this season. Knies has a way of getting himself behind opposing defenses, and he's a pretty good finisher in those spots, too. It took six goals to lead in this department last season. I think Knies has a shot. — *Jonas Siegel*

## **Utah Mammoth**

### **Dylan Guenther will finish top-five in the league for goals**

Guenther is coming off a strong 27-goal season. He's widely recognized as a top up-and-coming talent, but I believe this is the year that both he and Logan Cooley establish themselves as elite stars. Guenther will hit 40-plus goals, further evolve his two-way play and perhaps even emerge as a dark horse for one of the final roster spots for Team Canada at the Olympics. — *Harman Dayal*

## **Vancouver Canucks**

### **Filip Chytil will be the team's second most valuable forward this season**

All summer, the offseason discussion in Vancouver was about the club's pursuit of a second-line center behind Elias Pettersson. The Canucks weren't able to land an upgrade, leaving Chytil to be their de facto 2C. I'm predicting that Chytil, between the breakout potential he has with his offensive production, his secondary value as a play driver and positional premium as a center, will be Vancouver's second-most-valuable forward this season, provided he can stay healthy. If anything, the conversation could shift to the Canucks targeting a 3C behind Chytil rather than a 2C ahead of him. — *Harman Dayal*

## **Vegas Golden Knights**

### **Jack Eichel will score the most goals in franchise history**

Eichel has always been more of a pass-first player, but playing alongside a playmaker such as Mitch Marner, I expect him to shoot more than ever. He has one of the best releases in the NHL, and if he shoots enough, he should pass William Karlsson's 43-goal mark from 2017-18. He does have some catching up to do, with Pavel Dorofeyev taking the early NHL lead with four goals. — *Jesse Granger*

## **Washington Capitals**

### **Tom Wilson will lead the team in goals**

In 2016-17, Alex Ovechkin and T.J. Oshie each scored 33 goals. Other than that, the last non-Ovechkin to lead the Capitals in that category was Robert Lang in 2003-04. To close last season's 11-goal gap between him and second place, we're anticipating two things: a bit of understandable regression from the old fella and even stronger chemistry between Wilson and Pierre Luc-Dubois. — *Sean Gentile*

### **Winnipeg Jets**

#### **Jonathan Toews will play exactly 57 regular-season games**

Even at his Conn Smythe Trophy-winning peak, Toews was not invulnerable. He's played 82 games in only two of his 15 seasons. It's also important to remember that a 37-year-old hockey player can be hurt for reasons that have nothing to do with his medical history. We've landed on exactly 57 games as a total by going week by week in the Jets' calendar, estimating load management, guessing at injuries and then going by feel. The truth will probably be a lot more dramatic, with a not-so-bold prediction being that we'll all overreact to every bump, bruise or "day-to-day" designation. — *Murat Ates*