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## The Athletic / Fight night never materializes, but Blue Jackets' bad habits return in loss to Devils

**By Aaron Portzline – January 1, 2026**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It was billed by the Columbus Blue Jackets as “Knockout New Year’s Eve,” but that didn’t go quite as planned. Not only was the fight card shorter than expected, but the party was spoiled by the visitors.

The New Jersey Devils, who have been in a tailspin since a strong start, came off the mat to score three goals in 1 minute, 56 seconds early in the third period, stunning the Blue Jackets 3-2 before a crowd of 17,163 in Nationwide Arena on Wednesday night.

It was actually a poetic way for the Blue Jackets to end 2025, because squandered leads and tough-to-take losses have actually been the theme of this season.

The Blue Jackets dictated play for most of the first two periods: smart decisions with the puck, a physical advantage along the walls and control of the pace against a Devils club that played in Toronto only 24 hours earlier.

But the checks weren’t finished as hard — or at all — in the third period, especially after the Devils scored a power-play goal 2:49 into the period to cut the Blue Jackets’ lead to 2-1.

“I’d have to watch it through and see, but it does seem like we took our foot off the gas a little bit,” Blue Jackets center Charlie Coyle said. “I think that’s safe to say. I could be wrong, but that’s what it seemed like, and they put their foot on the gas a little bit. It’s kind of a double whammy there.

“They get a weird one there, and then they just fed off of that. And we just kind of watched it happen.”

The “weird one” was Nico Hischier’s power-play goal only four seconds — four — after the Blue Jackets went down a skater on Kirill Marchenko’s hooking penalty. The puck went through two screens and was deflected before shooting between the pads of Blue Jackets goaltender Jet Greaves.

“There was some traffic in there, for sure,” said Greaves, who stopped 30 of 33 shots. “It was a little tough to pick up, but that’s a save I have to make. At the end of the day, it’s my job to keep pucks out.”

Only 55 seconds after Hischier’s goal, the Devils made it 2-2 when Arseny Gritsyuk fired a wrister past Greaves off the rush from the right circle. The Devils took a 3-2 lead only 1:01 later when Luke Hughes, left all alone in the left circle, beat Greaves with a one-timer.

“Three minutes,” Blue Jackets right winger Mathieu Olivier said. “So, 57 minutes of good hockey, and we lose a game. I don’t know what to tell you.

“I’m not saying they didn’t play well. It was a pretty hard-fought game. I don’t want to take credit away from them, but, you know, three minutes ... two minutes, and that’s what costs us the game. So, yeah, very frustrating.”

But nothing new for the Blue Jackets.

After three straight regulation wins — each capped off with strong third-period closures — the Blue Jackets may have believed they were beyond this nasty habit. It's those third-period collapses that explain why Columbus is in last place as the calendar flips to 2026.

Coach Dean Evason said he considered taking a timeout to stop the bleeding, but he thought the Blue Jackets could make it to the next TV timeout (at the six-minute mark), and he didn't sense panic among his players, he said.

But there were some bad reads, the type of mistakes the Blue Jackets didn't make in the first two periods.

On the 2-2 goal, Evason said, the Blue Jackets got caught with three players deep in the attack zone and weren't able to get enough defenders on the right side of the puck as quickly as the Devils flew the zone.

On the 3-2 goal, the Blue Jackets were overextended on one side of the ice, leaving Hughes alone in the left circle ... never a good idea.

"We were trying to stay on the right side of them," Evason said. "They blow zones really well, and so we were just trying to pop (the puck) out of there and maybe that hurt us a little bit. I don't think we let off the gas pedal, I just think they moved it past our pressure."

The Blue Jackets got goals from Coyle and Mason Marchment, who has scored a point in all five games he's played since Columbus acquired him Dec. 19 from the Seattle Kraken for two draft picks. No other player in franchise history has tallied a point in his first five games.

Cap's entering 2026 with **4 0 0** NHL points!

Congrats, Boone!

CBJ x @drinkgaragebeer pic.twitter.com/Mx3PAOp2Jt

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) January 1, 2026

Boone Jenner's assist on Coyle's second-period goal was his 400th point with Columbus. Jenner joined Rick Nash (547), Zach Werenski (424) and Cam Atkinson (402) as the only players in franchise history to cross that milestone.

But there weren't many smiles in the postgame dressing room.

The Blue Jackets and Devils played a wild, violent game in their last meeting, a come-from-behind 5-3 win for the Jackets in a Dec. 1 game that involved four fights, 21 penalties and 74 penalty minutes between the teams.

It led many to anticipate a round two only 30 days later in Columbus, especially since Olivier, the Blue Jackets' tough guy, was back to health and in the lineup after missing the first game of December with an upper body injury.

The Blue Jackets only encouraged it. Former heavyweight boxing champion James "Buster" Douglas was invited to light the cannon that is blasted before every game. Douglas was given a hero's welcome during a third-period stoppage.

But the game didn't follow the script.

There was plenty of checking and physicality — Olivier had a game-high eight hits — and there were scrums and confrontations. But there was only one fight, and it wasn't much of a scrap between the Blue Jackets' Dmitri Voronkov and New Jersey's Cody Glass.

The Blue Jackets played most of the game without Miles Wood after a nasty wipeout into the boards late in the first period. Replays showed Ondrej Palat's stick taking out Wood's skate before he crashed, but there was no penalty.

"It's not pretty," Evason said. "You know, he definitely gets tripped. (The officials) didn't see it, I know, but it's not a good situation. It didn't look good on tape."

## The Athletic / Warming Blue Jackets brace for New Year's Eve rematch with struggling Devils

**By Aaron Portzline – December 31, 2025**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — This game has been circled on the Columbus Blue Jackets' calendar for a while now, and not because it's the (mostly) annual New Year's Eve game in Nationwide Arena.

When the Blue Jackets last faced the New Jersey Devils, an unexpectedly chaotic game played out on Dec. 1 in Newark, N.J., with the Blue Jackets coming from behind to win 5-3 and the two clubs combining for four fights, 21 penalties and 74 penalty minutes.

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It felt like a flashback to an earlier time in the NHL, when fight-filled games weren't such an anomaly.

What drew the Blue Jackets' ire, however, were postgame comments from New Jersey coach Sheldon Keefe, who accused Columbus forwards Dmitri Voronkov and Adam Fantilli of jumping Brenden Dillon and Jonas Siegenthaler, respectively, before the two Devils were expecting to fight.

"(Dillon) would never do something like that to another player, that I know for certain," Keefe said of the fight that touched off the night, when a net-front scrum at 1:01 of the second period turned into a fight between Voronkov and Dillon.

He also took issue with Fantilli a few minutes later in the game, when Siegenthaler skated after Fantilli and ended up getting punched five or six times before he started to return fire. That, too, Keefe thought, was out of line.

Evason was miffed. He read Keefe's comments as questioning the integrity of his players. Two days later, when the Blue Jackets returned to practice, Evason said: "(Keefe) has no bearing on what happens in our room." Later, he added: "We don't put a lot of stock in it."

Most who have followed the NHL for any number of years will know that tonight's game could be a Part II for these two Metropolitan Division clubs. But it could also be a big nothing, with no resemblance to the game played in Prudential Center.

What's interesting, however, is how different the Blue Jackets will align tonight, and how much better equipped they are to both instigate and participate in a game that's full of fights and scrums and finished checks, should New Jersey care to engage.

For one, right winger Mathieu Olivier, who is widely considered the reigning heavyweight fighter in the game, returned from an upper-body injury two games ago. He missed the Dec. 1 game, but should be rested and ready after fighting Ottawa's Kurtis MacDermid on Monday.

Also, the Blue Jackets acquired winger Mason Marchment earlier this month in a trade with the Seattle Kraken, adding more size (6-foot-5, 212 pounds) and sandpaper to the lineup.

Marchment has matched a franchise record with a four-game point streak to start his Blue Jackets' career, but something else has been made clear. Don Waddell has studied him closely through the years — he tried to sign him as a free agent in Carolina two years ago — and felt the Blue Jackets could use his gifts of agitation.

One of Waddell's aims since he arrived in Columbus two years ago was to make the Blue Jackets a bigger club, and he's succeeded. The ideal top nine, when healthy, averages just under 6-3, one of the biggest units in the NHL.

The Blue Jackets can stand up for themselves just fine. But they haven't dictated the pace and physicality in most games this season, and that's a major difference from last season. That's started to change since the trade to acquire Marchment.

Waddell told *The Athletic* that one of the reasons he felt Marchment would be a fit with the Blue Jackets is his ability to draw his club into the fight each night. With him on one line and Olivier on the other, opponents may get no rest, no peace.

"Yeah, (Marchment) plays hard," Waddell said. "He's got a little nastiness to him, and teams end up worrying more about him than they do about playing hockey. With our team, it's something we can use, for sure."

The Devils have lost four in a row, including a 4-0 defeat in Toronto on Tuesday. After a 13-4-1 start, New Jersey is 7-13-2 since. Only Chicago and Winnipeg have had worse records in that span.

New Jersey's motivation on Wednesday will be pretty simple: stop the bleeding. Many picked them to challenge for the Metro crown this season after finishing third behind Washington and Carolina last season.

The Blue Jackets' motivation should be much the same: two points. They haven't won four straight games since a streak in late October to early November. They can't wait much longer to make their move up the standings.

With a win tonight (regulation, overtime or shutout), the Blue Jackets can escape the basement and jump over three teams in the Eastern Conference, including the Devils.

The Blue Jackets will once again be without star defenseman Zach Werenski, who suffered a lower right leg injury when he blocked a shot vs. Anaheim before the NHL's holiday break.

Werenski's continued absence, plus the injury to defenseman Brendan Smith late on Monday — he fell to the ice and clutched a leg in pain before getting helped off the ice — prompted the emergency recall of Dysin Mayo from AHL Cleveland.

It's also unclear if the Blue Jackets will have veteran center Sean Monahan in the lineup after he was a late scratch from Monday's game.

Like the win in Los Angeles before the break, and the wins over the New York Islanders and Ottawa after the break, the Blue Jackets will need every player to have both hands on the rope and pulling tonight in Nationwide.

That likely won't be a problem

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets defy built-in excuses, finish strong again to beat Senators

By Aaron Portzline – December 30, 2025

Maybe routine is overrated. Maybe the Columbus Blue Jackets should travel day-of-game more often.

The Blue Jackets, with multiple ready-made excuses for a lousy night against the Ottawa Senators at Canadian Tire Centre, instead turned in one of their most impressive outings in a 4-1 win before a sellout crowd of 17,902.

Boone Jenner, Damon Severson, Denton Mateychuk and Kirill Marchenko each scored goals; Charlie Coyle and Cole Sillinger each had two assists; and goaltender Jet Greaves — starting both ends of a back-to-back — stopped 27 of 28 shots.

Not bad for a team that spent Sunday night and most of Monday wondering when — or if — it'd be able to get out of Columbus due to a combination of mechanical woes and weather issues with its charter airline carrier.

The Blue Jackets, who were supposed to leave Sunday after a win over the New York Islanders, didn't take off until 2:45 p.m. on Monday. They landed in Ottawa around 4 p.m., reached Canadian Tire Centre around 5 p.m. and started getting ready. Because of the time crunch, the NHL pushed the start of the game back a half-hour to 7:30 p.m.

“(The tough part) was just the uncertainty of not knowing when you're leaving,” Severson told FanDuel Sports Network after the game. “There were a bunch of different times from (Sunday night), to this morning. It just kept getting pushed back. But we ended up making it here on time. The boys had lots of time to warm up, so it's always sweeter when you can have some adversity like that and fight through it and come together as a team, get a big win on the road and then head back home.”

It marked the first time all season the Blue Jackets have won three consecutive games in regulation, and the third straight game in which the Blue Jackets were the better team in the third period.

These last three wins, strangely enough, have all been achieved without the Blue Jackets' top player, defenseman Zach Werenski (lower-body injury). On Monday, center Sean Monahan (undisclosed) left early in warmups and was not able to play.

“The circumstances coming in, you know, they weren't really in our favor,” said Mateychuk, who played 27:26 in Werenski's absence. “We didn't let that be an excuse. We came and we played our game for 60 minutes, and we got the two points.”

The Blue Jackets scored the all-important first goal at 15:58 of the first period, when Sillinger tracked down a puck in the Senators' zone and fed Jenner, who was camped in front of Ottawa goaltender Leevi Meriläinen. Jenner's 399th career point was a classic Jenner goal, scored from close range to make it 1-0 Blue Jackets.

Severson pushed the lead to 2-0 with a slapper off the rush early in the second, but the Senators pushed back for the rest of the period, cutting the lead to 2-1 on a Jake Sanderson goal at 8:16.

That score stood until the third period, which might have been a problem for the Blue Jackets a week ago. Suddenly, however, they've turned in three straight commanding performances in the third period.

Mateychuk scored off a shot from the slot at 1:57 of the third to make it 3-1. At 15:54, Marchenko finished a gorgeous sequence of passing with Adam Fantilli and Mason Marchment to make it 4-1 off the rush.

That's four goals in three games for Marchenko — and five points (3-2-5) and a four-game point streak for Marchment in his first four games as a Blue Jacket.

And that's three straight games in which the Blue Jackets have not allowed a third-period goal. Incredibly, before Monday, they'd allowed at least one third-period goal in 17 consecutive games, a franchise record.

"We're just trying to flip the script a bit," Severson said. "Obviously, we had a narrative there that was against us. We were blowing leads. We were doing the right things for the first two periods in a lot of games, especially early in the season. But we weren't closing out games; we were sitting on our heels. You could see tonight we were still playing our game, still playing aggressively, and just trying to change that narrative. When we're getting leads, we're trying to finish it off like that."

Greaves, who also started Sunday's win over the Islanders, did not show any signs of fatigue. His best save came in the first period, when he stonewalled Ottawa's Ridly Greig on a clean short-handed look with only 42 seconds remaining in the period. But he was stellar in the third, making 11 of his 27 stops.

"I think we piggybacked off the third period (on Sunday)," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said, referring to Columbus' three unanswered goals against the Islanders. "The guys recognized how we were able to separate, and we played that way in the third period."

The one person most affected by the Blue Jackets' travel woes on Monday was probably Monahan, and Evason hinted in his postgame comments that it probably kept him from playing. Whatever injury he's playing with, he's likely requiring hours of preparation, perhaps with the training staff, just to be able to dress. That kind of time wasn't available on Monday.

With Monahan a late scratch, the Blue Jackets elevated Cole Sillinger from fourth-line winger to second-line center, recognizing how much jump he's had in recent games. He seemed to play even faster on Monday.

"We love Silly in the middle, to be honest with you," Evason said. "It's just ... there's no room for him, right? When Monny just couldn't do it ... yeah, (Sillinger) has played a couple of super, really strong games, and we need him to continue to do that."

Buoyed by a gutsy two points, the Blue Jackets were scheduled to head back to the Ottawa airport shortly after the game, with plans to fly back to Columbus late tonight.

All in a day's work.



## The Columbus Dispatch / Blue Jackets give up two-goal lead in third period, fall to Devils

**By Lori Schmidt – January 2, 2026**

The Blue Jackets' third-period woes came back in a big way.

Columbus lost to New Jersey 3-2 at Nationwide Arena on Dec. 31 thanks to goals by Nico Hischier, Arseny Gritsyuk and Luke Hughes. All three Devils' goals came in the final 17:11 of the contest.

The Jackets, who were riding a three-game win streak, had outscored opponents a combined 6-0 in the third period of those victories. However, they reverted to the form that cost them earlier this season.

Despite their recent run, Columbus has a -20 goal differential in the third period.

Jackets forwards Mason Marchment and Charlie Coyle scored in the first and second periods, respectively. Marchment has points (four goals, two assists) in all five games since being traded by the Seattle Kraken to the Blue Jackets.

Jet Greaves had 30 saves for Columbus.

The Blue Jackets were again without Zach Werenski, who has been sidelined since Dec. 20 with what is believed to be an ankle injury, but coach Dean Evason said the defenseman could return for a Jan. 3 game against the Buffalo Sabres.

There is less clarity around the situation of center Sean Monahan, who missed a second straight game for undisclosed reasons.

"If he could play, he'd play," Evason said.

## The Hockey Writers / 2025-26 Blue Jackets' Midseason Q&A With GM Don Waddell

By Mark Scheig - January 2, 2026

The 2025-26 Columbus Blue Jackets are not where they want to be as they close in on the midpoint of their schedule. Their games this coming weekend against the Buffalo Sabres and Pittsburgh Penguins will mark games 40 and 41.

The Blue Jackets as of this writing find themselves in last place in the Eastern Conference with a record of 17-16-6. The one silver lining to their place in the standings is that they trail the second wildcard playoff spot in the East by six points.

### **Columbus Blue Jackets vs. New Jersey Devils - Game Highlights**

Given that their next game is Saturday against the Buffalo Sabres, it's an opportunity to not only get a big win on home ice, but also break the Sabres' 10-game winning streak. As of Thursday evening, the Sabres were the team holding the East's second wildcard spot.

As is our tradition at the midpoint of the season, we sat down with Blue Jackets' GM and President of Hockey Operations Don Waddell to get his thoughts on the first half of the season and where things could be heading in January and beyond. He opened up on a variety of topics including the third period struggles, trouble scoring goals, some major dips in certain performances and what he's looking for later in the season.

This was an interesting conversation. Here is our Q&A with Waddell which as always was cleaned up for readability and conversation.

### **Waddell Midseason Q&A**

**THW:** Don, thanks for doing this as always. I'll start off with the game Wednesday night. It looked great for 40 minutes. [Then a couple of minutes in the third where the Devils scored three and were able to get the victory](#). With Game 41 coming on Sunday, what are your overall thoughts of the team? Are you surprised at the position they're in right now? Just where is Don Waddell at with the Blue Jackets at the halfway point of this season?

**Waddell:** "We're disappointed where we are position wise. But if you look at it, the last 8-9 games even some of those games we lost, they were all one goal games not counting the empty net goals. And I actually thought probably 90% of those games, we were the better team. Last year we seemed to find a way to score goals. Now, we're not scoring those timely goals. Even Wednesday night, we had three power plays. You don't score. You score one on the power play when it's 2-0, then it's probably a different game."

**THW:** That leads into some of these third periods. Your team can get leads. But they've also let a lot of third period leads slip away. What are you seeing here? Why does this seem to be happening as much as it has?

**Waddell:** "Yes, we got to be better in the third. Every game, I break down all the goals. Wednesday night, I think it was just not a smart penalty by (Kirill Marchenko). And then it wasn't a good goal. Jet

(Greaves) never saw it. So you give up that one and then we turn around, make a mistake on the second goal, give them a third goal. We make a terrible mistake, terrible read.

I can tell I've been around teams that get tight because they start just flipping the puck all the time off the glass, not making those plays. I didn't see that at all. In a lot of those games, it's the mistakes that we make and the timing of mistakes. A lot of times you make them in the first and second period, but the goalie bails you out and you say, "Okay, no problem." When the goalie doesn't bail you out, that's when it all comes to a head and it makes the third period look even worse. When you give up the goals, then you forget about all the good saves that were made.

You're going to give up chances. We all know that. Every team does. And when the goalie makes those saves, it's huge. And then for whatever reason in the third period with the same mistake, it ends up in the net and you start blaming the goalie and everybody else. It's an interesting concept, that's for sure. But I watch every goal. I watch every goal multiple times every night. We make some dumb mental mistakes. That's what it was (Wednesday) on the third goal for sure."

### **Offensive Struggles**

**THW:** Offensively, your team is able to generate chances. But they haven't been able to finish as much. They're 4th in shots on goal and 20th in goals per game. What do you attribute that to?

**Waddell:** "Well, if I had that answer, I would be fixing it. We're generating offense. Last year for some guys, the puck was going in for them. Obviously guys like (Kent Johnson), (Cole Sillinger), they're way behind where they were last year. Because you can't look at our defense, I think we're number one in scoring goals by defenseman. So it's not the defense. (Adam Fantilli) had a slow start, but he's doing pretty good right now. Olivier hit 18 last year. He was hurt but we knew he probably wasn't going to get 18 again. Guys like Jenner, Coyle, Sillinger, they're going to need more scoring chances to score. Olivier, same thing. Coyle's line always gets the best (opposition) lines, so it's not so much what they score, it's what they give up.

You need those top 6-7 guys. The Marchenko's, Fantilli's, Marchment right now, Voronkov. Having Monahan, he's been so beat up, and that's why we're holding him up right now. He's obviously not having the year offensively he had last year. It just takes those one or two guys, and it's amazing how your goals drop. We're getting chances for sure but some guys just aren't natural goal scorers."

**THW:** You mentioned Kent Johnson. This year hasn't worked out for him so far. I know you've said in the past he's still a big part of your team. He's on the fourth line now and not on the power play anymore. What has to happen for him to get back to the Kent Johnson that we all know?

**Waddell:** "We've talked to him about it. Then we've talked to him multiple times about 'Just go back to your game.' Don't worry about where you're playing. Don't worry about the power play right now. Just find your game. The game before (Wednesday), I know he hit the crossbar. He needs some of those to go in for him. We forget these kids because they are still young. So much of it is confidence. He just turned 24 in October. You forget how young they are and confidence is such a big thing in this league for young players.

(Fantilli) went through it last year at the start of the year. Then the second half of the year, he tore it up. And so with KJ, he's just got to stick with his game and do what he does. He's got to play at a little bit

more pace, of course. We've talked to him about that. But I still think he's going to be a 20-goal plus scorer every year as the future moves on."

### **Defense/Goaltending**

**THW:** Lately, the defense has started to trend in the right direction. The Islanders' and Senators' games come to mind. Shots against and goals against, there is still certainly plenty of room for improvement. Where are you at with how the defense is playing and what do you want to see moving forward?

**Waddell:** "I think going back the last 7-8 games, I think we've done a better job of, we'll give up maybe that first shot, but not that second shot. And focusing more on the front of the net. If you're not a physical guy, make sure you get the guy's stick. Make sure the body position is correct. I've seen a lot of improvement in that way. We're a team that's going to give up chances. It's just the way we play offensively obviously with Werenski and Mateychuk and Severson. These guys are all offensive players, so you're going to give up a few chances. You hope the offense outweighs the defense. But I think right now, especially with Werenski out, we said let's focus more on our defensive play and hopefully, the rest of the offense will take care of itself."

**THW:** And now the goaltending. Jet has had a few starts in a row here. It seems like that he's earning more ice time. His play has dictated that. You obviously have Elvis, who had a great start to the year and maybe not as good of late. Ivan Fedotov's done pretty good in Cleveland. Where are you at with the goaltending? And just how much are you watching that situation overall for your team as we approach the second half of the year?

**Waddell:** "Yeah. Eyes are on it I'd say hourly, but probably even more than that. Because we have to find a way to get Elvis going. I think it all started back at the Islander game (in New York.) He gave up those late goals. He's played a couple of pretty good games since, but probably other games that weren't as good. We know we need a two-goalie system. And at some point maybe we have to give the big Russian a chance here. He started off really good, went through a little bit like everybody does. Lately, he's been very good. We're keeping an eye on it for sure. Right now with the other roster and juggling because of the injuries and stuff, we haven't felt the opportunity is there yet. But I wouldn't say it's never going to happen, that's for sure."

### **Looking Ahead**

**THW:** We're going to start hearing more and more about the potential trade market. The Olympic break is coming soon. Do you feel we could see more trades before the Olympics? And how are you viewing the developing trade market from your team's perspective?

**Waddell:** "Yeah I think you're right. I think there's going to be a lot of teams that are going to try to be active in January before the break. But the bad thing is you look at the East, who's selling players right now? Everybody's looking to add players. The West is starting to separate a little bit more than the East, so there might be a couple teams there that might look to do something. But right now, there's going to be a lot more buyers than there are sellers. Maybe two weeks from now as the standings in both conferences look different than they do now (we'll see something.) So there'll be lots of talk I think in January. I just don't know how many deals can get done."

**THW:** As we get into the second half, what gives you the confidence that you're team can start to limit their mistakes, stay in this race and eventually get the job done of qualifying for the playoffs?

**Waddell:** "Well, I think it's the overall play when I look at it. I know I try to be very subjective as far as lost games, games I felt that we could have won. We're a pretty good team on the road which is always a good sign that you can win away from home. (Blue Jackets 9-9-3 on the road as of this writing.) If you're winning playing .500 on the road, that's a good thing. We have to be better at home. We got (these two at home then four out west.) I think it's seven of eight at home afterwards. So if we're going to make hay, it's going to have to be in the month of January. And January last year was great for us. I'm the optimist looking at that. We can get this thing going and by the time we get to the Olympic break. We could be in a much better spot."

## **The Hockey Writers / 3 New Year's Resolutions for the Blue Jackets to Stay Hot in 2026**

**By Wesley Mike - January 1, 2026**

The Columbus Blue Jackets have shown great signs of growth as a team, and a resolve to find ways to win recently that they didn't have even two short weeks ago.

Two very strong third periods in back-to-back games have given this team a silver lining headed into 2026 that this season could be different from others. However, there is also a striking reality that stares them in the face: they are currently dead last in the Eastern Conference, yet also being just five points out of a playoff spot.

There are still a few things this team has to get in order if they want to compete in the most jam-packed Eastern Conference in recent memory. This team needs a defining trait to help them stand out above the rest and make a matchup in Columbus, Ohio a nightmare for teams.

So, what are some New Year's Resolutions for this team heading into 2026?

### **Have to Finish Games in the Third Period**

A problem that was growing more and more worrisome down the stretch in the month of December was the Blue Jackets' inability to put teams away in the third period. They may have quietly ended that trend with back-to-back games in which the Blue Jackets owned the third period and forcefully put the game out of reach. In their recent game against the Islanders, they even came from behind to win in the third period.

The Blue Jackets' top priority has to be locking down and shutting down the opposition with a lead in the third period. Far too often the same song and dance has played in 2025, and it only leads to the Blue Jackets missing out on an extra point, which has become all the more critical in the playoff race.

If the Blue Jackets have a lead late in games in 2026, they will need to make sure they walk away from the game with two points and the opposition leaves with nothing. They can't afford to give away a point anymore with where they currently sit. It has to be full steam ahead for this team; no more pity points.

According to the current state of the playoff race, via a playoff prediction model by Dom Luszczyszyn, the Blue Jackets are certainly on the outskirts of the playoff race. With a projected 11 overtime or shootout losses, the Blue Jackets have to find a way to finish games with wins in regulation.

This is not an overnight fix, and as we have heard from coach Dean Evason multiple times before, there is nothing imminent that the team believes sticks out as an issue or an outstanding problem. The Blue Jackets brass believes they need to just play through this rut and the results will come.

### **Lean Into the Pest Identity**

I think one of the problems the Blue Jackets have struggled with for a while is a lack of identity. Are they a team that will outscore you? Are they a team that will sit back and wait for you to make a mistake first? Are they a team that will try to outwork you? Are they a team that will outskate you? What are they?

I think the identity of this team has recently become crystal clear. They are a team that is going to push you around, make you uncomfortable, annoy you, and then when you fight back, they will beat you with skill. This team has finally leaned into what their team reflects: a bunch of 200-foot skating pests.

The recent addition of Mason Marchment made that identity clearer than ever, and he has really been the catalyst alongside Mathieu Olivier in being that annoying presence on the ice who is consistently under the skin of the opponent.

They have found a great balance with guys like Marchment and Olivier, as well as players who are a little more tame in Boone Jenner and Dmitri Voronkov. All in all, this team has found an identity in making teams earn every inch of the 200-foot game. It gives them an edge, and Don Waddell is giving his team the best chance to make a run being built for the playoffs.

However, it is a new year, which means this team has to be different. They have to do things that haven't been done in this city before, and they need to take that next step as a franchise.

### **Leave the Past in 2025**

This team needs to stop allowing people to define them by what they once were, or by their past shortcomings and inability to hold onto stars.

This upcoming offseason will be one of the biggest in Blue Jackets history with some of their top talent looking for extensions and attempting to turn this good young core into something the Blue Jackets can really build around.

They have to find a way to make this new identity one that sticks and allows them to build on. However, they also need to find a way to leave the shortcomings of this season in 2025. That refers to a lot of things, but mostly their inability to close out opponents in games that can be seen later as a potential must-win game.

After last season, when the Blue Jackets fell two points shy of a postseason berth, they want to have the answer they didn't have last year. They do not want to have to rely on rattling off five consecutive wins to end the season and praying on someone else's downfall in order to get in. They want to control their own destiny.

That can start right now. It needs to be a mission early on in 2026, and they need to start stringing wins together as quickly as they can. This team is built to be a threat in the postseason, and after comments that the team made early this season and in the preseason, they set it as the expectation. Now, they need to ring in the new year with some fireworks to work their way back up the standings.

## The Hockey Writers / 3 Takeaways from Devils' Gutsy 3-2 Victory Over Blue Jackets

By Daniel Amoia - December 31, 2025

The New Jersey Devils finished their road trip with a New Year's Eve contest against the Columbus Blue Jackets. A fiery third period surge propelled them to a gutsy 3-2 victory, sending them into 2026 on a high note.

### **Lack of Fireworks on New Year's Eve**

When both teams previously matched up on Dec. 1, it was absolute mayhem. They combined for a whopping 74 penalty minutes. Following the match, Devils' forward Paul Cotter said, "I'm sure it's gonna be quite the match next time we play [Columbus]."

Meanwhile, the Blue Jackets advertised the night as "Knockout New Year's Eve", complete with a promo video featuring enforcer Mathieu Olivier boxing with former world heavyweight champion Buster Douglas. But despite many expecting fireworks, fans were treated to the hockey equivalent of a handful of poppers being dropped in someone's backyard. In other words, there wasn't much more physicality than the average game.

It mostly makes sense as both teams — currently out of the playoff picture — couldn't really afford to take any unnecessary penalties. However, unlike that earlier contest, it was the Devils getting the last laugh this time.

### **Finally...Positive Finishing**

Coming into the night, the Devils had astonishingly scored 23.73 goals *below* expected...in their last 15 games! That was ~10 goals worse than any other NHL team during that span. (via Natural Stat Trick)

The first two periods looked like the same story that has replayed itself time and time again. Through two, the Devils had 22 shots and nothing to show for it. But all of a sudden, they came alive.

In the span of a minute and 57 seconds, they scored three goals: Nico Hischier, Arseny Gritsyuk and Luke Hughes, giving them a 3-2 lead.

At the end of the day, fans can debate for hours about different philosophies to make a team successful. But everyone is on agreement on one thing: scoring more goals than the other team is what's most important. There's no question that the Devils still need a finisher regardless; they finish the calendar year 2025 with 32.00 goals *below* expected. With that being said, there's at least been *some* poor luck involved. How much of it is *bad luck versus poor finishing* may never be known, but a night like tonight could help restore some confidence and reverse that tough luck.

### **Special Teams Success**

Coming into the night, since Dec. 7, the Devils' special teams had been abysmal. Their power play percentage of 12.5% was the third worst in the league during that span. Their 58.3% success rate on the penalty kill was dead last.



Finally, after many games lost due to their special teams, they helped win them a game for a pleasant change. The Devils' first goal was a power play goal, just seconds into their man advantage.

Then, when they had to kill off a penalty late, they successfully did so. Now in all honesty, their special teams haven't earned the benefit of the doubt; they need to start stringing multiple successful showings together. Nonetheless, tonight was a great start.

### **Moving Forward**

The Devils — now 21-17-2 — will look to win a second straight on Saturday as they face the Utah “Mammoth” at Prudential Center for the first time ever (3:00 PM EST).

## The Hockey Writers / 3 Takeaways From the Blue Jackets' Resilient Road Win Over the Senators

**By Wesley Minke – December 30, 2025**

The Columbus Blue Jackets, amidst tons of injuries, delays, and travel issues, found a way to pull out a big road win to stay hot at the end of 2025. Everything seems to be clicking at the right time for the Blue Jackets. Following the Mason Marchment trade on Dec. 20 and the trade of Yegor Chinakhov on Monday afternoon, the Blue Jackets' roster shake-up seems to be working quite well.

The Blue Jackets had similar success and a similar game script to their win Sunday night against the New York Islanders. They started the game quick offensively, struggled mightily in the second period, and finished excellent offensively in the third period.

What big takeaways can Columbus take home with them before they host the New Jersey Devils to close out 2025 at Nationwide Arena?

### Transition Offense Was a Major Boost

The Blue Jackets scored three of their four goals last night on offensive rushes into the zone. This has not been an element of the Blue Jackets' offensive game all season long, and that could be a reason why so many times the offense has been stagnant.

They found a way last night, however, to score while on the rush, and that made all the difference for them to the tune of a 4-1 win in Ottawa.

Boone Jenner, Damon Severson, and Kirill Marchenko were the goal scorers for the Blue Jackets off the rush, and the games each of them played were vital to the win last night for Columbus.

Jenner played one of his best games of the season, and Severson and Denton Mateychuk stayed red-hot offensively in the absence of Zach Werenski.

In other forms of causing havoc, Cole Sillinger was all over the ice last night, and Charlie Coyle was a puck magnet everywhere he went as well. Those two guys played a great all-around 200-foot game and were one of the big reasons that the defensemen for Columbus had a chance to move up in the play and cause trouble in the offensive zone.

### Special Teams Success Continues

The Blue Jackets' special teams units have been finding a ton of success lately, and one of the biggest factors in their recent three-game winning streak has been their penalty kill unit.

They have successfully defended each one of their last 14 penalty kills, which has been one of the weakest points for the Blue Jackets all season. They rank 28th of 32 on the penalty kill this season, but this most recent stretch has been a rallying point for this team.

Though it is hard to justify how much of an element the power play played without scoring, it was certainly a massive factor with tons of sustained zone time, and multiple open looks for Marchenko from the left circle that he could not sneak past Leevi Merilainen.

The Blue Jackets seem to get power-play goals in a similar fashion to Marchenko's scoring outputs, in groups, and in big ones at that. When the power play for Columbus gets hot, it is red-hot, and when their top line scorer gets going, he is seemingly impossible to stop.

#### Jet Greaves Dazzles Again

Jet Greaves had every excuse in the book to have a rough showing, and it most likely would've been excused and chalked up to external factors by coach Dean Evason. However, Greaves was an absolute star in the crease for Columbus last night.

Greaves stopped 27 of 28 shots and made some one-on-one saves to shut down some of the top Senators scorers. In particular, one of the big saves that sticks out was on Brady Tkachuk in the first period to keep Ottawa off the scoresheet. He had the big, lumbering forward driving to the net, and before he could get the shot away, Greaves poked the puck away from Tkachuk's possession.

If there is one guy who has needed to step up his game more following the Werenski injury, it has been Greaves. He has answered the bell, and he has been fabulous in his most recent starts.

Greaves will need to continue to play well if Columbus wants a chance to make a real push at playoff positioning, as Evason chose to ride the hot hand of Greaves even though it was a back-to-back game with road travel.

Evason clearly trusts his guy, and now it is time for Greaves to take it to the next level.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Overcome Travel Nightmares to Handily Defeat Senators

**By Mark Scheig – December 29, 2025**

The Columbus Blue Jackets thought they'd have a standard turnaround for their back-to-back game against the Ottawa Senators. It was anything but a standard turnaround.

Mechanical issues created a delay in the Blue Jackets' ability to get to Ottawa until a couple hours before puck drop. After the game was pushed back to a 7:30 P.M. eastern start, the Blue Jackets went in against the odds and made a statement.

### Ottawa Senators vs. Columbus Blue Jackets - Game Highlights

Four different Blue Jackets found the back of the net while Jet Greaves shined stopping 27 shots. The Blue Jackets handily defeated the Senators 4-1 on Monday night at Canadian Tire Center.

The story of this game was just how the Blue Jackets were able to handle business without two of their best players in the lineup.

### Game Recap

The Blue Jackets had to navigate the second of a back-to-back without Zach Werenski or Sean Monahan. Werenski missed his third straight game with a lower-body injury. Meanwhile, Monahan took the warmup but left early because something didn't feel right. The team announced he was out due to maintenance related to the ongoing situation he's dealing with.

The Blue Jackets could have had every excuse in the world to not have their best. Instead, they took the lead going into the first intermission.

Captain Boone Jenner crashed the net and finished off a pass from Cole Sillinger to make it 1-0. That was Jenner's sixth goal of the season. Sillinger got elevated to second-line center in Monahan's absence and finished the night with a pair of assists including one on the 2-0 goal in the second.

Damon Severson blasted a 97 mile per hour shot past goalie Leevi Meralainen to make it 2-0 just 1:21 into the second. The Blue Jackets were able to carry the momentum until midway through the second when three of the Senators' best players gave them some life.

Jake Sanderson scored what turned out to be the Senators' only goal of the night to cut it to 2-1. Tim Stutzle and Brady Tkachuk assisted. The Blue Jackets then shut things down the rest of the night.

Greaves made several key stops to preserve the 2-1 lead after 40 minutes. The Blue Jackets wasted no time in the third to make it a two-goal lead.

Denton Mateychuk scored just 1:57 into the third to make it 3-1. That goal marked the 31st goal scored by a Blue Jackets' defenseman this season.

Then unlike most third periods this season, the Blue Jackets locked it down and kept the Senators off the board. Kirill Marchenko scored his fourth goal in the last three goals to put the dagger in a 4-1 win.

Merilainen finished with 18 saves as the Senators have now lost three games in a row. Meanwhile, the Blue Jackets are on a three-game winning streak of their own. They sit just four points out of a playoff spot in the East.

Next up for the Blue Jackets, they host the New Jersey Devils in what should be a wild game. The Senators won't play again until 2026 as they host the Washington Capitals on New Year's Day for a matinee affair.

## The Hockey Writers / What Penguins Are Getting From Blue Jackets in Yegor Chinakhov

**By Mark Scheig – December 29, 2025**

With each passing day, it appeared more and more like Yegor Chinakhov's days were numbered with the Columbus Blue Jackets. On Monday afternoon, that news became reality.

The Blue Jackets traded their former first-round pick to the Pittsburgh Penguins in exchange for two draft picks, a 2026 second rounder and a 2027 third rounder. The Blue Jackets also acquired Danton Heinen in the deal and assigned him to AHL Cleveland. The recent acquisition of Mason Marchment opened the door even further for a Chinakhov trade.

There was a lot of speculation that it would be the Buffalo Sabres who would have acquired Chinakhov given that it was Jarmo Kekalainen who drafted him in the first round back in 2020. But it was Kyle Dubas who stepped up and saw the untapped potential the winger still has.

What are the Penguins exactly getting in Chinakhov? In short, a lot of promise mixed with a well-documented injury history and long stretches of inconsistent play.

### Chinakhov's Strengths

The first thing that pops off about Chinakhov's game is his shot. Ever since he came into the Blue Jackets' organization, that was the big takeaway most everyone noticed.

When Chinakhov has time and space, he has one of the more underrated lethal shots out there. He has the ability to beat goalies clean from distance if it's on net. His hardest shot of the season was over 99 MPH in a November game against the Detroit Red Wings. He also has shown flashes of being able to do this at high speed which brings us to our next strength of his.

Chinakhov was one of the fastest skaters on the Blue Jackets including a top skating speed of 22.88 MPH and six different skating bursts of over 22 MPH. He also has had 60 occurrences of 20 MPH or more this season. He has the ability to excel on the rush and can finish when given an opportunity.

Chinakhov's other strength is something he hasn't gotten enough credit for. He's a well-rounded enough player in that he can hold his own defensively. It's especially noticeable when he reads plays and is able to disrupt passes while forcing turnovers. This aspect of his game really didn't show itself much this season given his limited opportunity. But in spurts, he's not a liability.

### Chinakhov's Weaknesses

Chinakhov has been all over the Blue Jackets' lineup this season. He's played everywhere in the top-12 while also spending quite a bit of time as a healthy scratch.

It's that inconsistency when given an opportunity that led to this trade. Chinakhov requested a trade over the summer but the two sides talked through things before the season. But as soon as the inconsistency came up, this seemed like the most anticipated outcome.

For as good as Chinakhov's skills are, he hasn't shown them enough over a larger sample size. He has yet to hit at least 63 games in a season or at least 30 points in a season. It's been a combination of not finding a stable role plus injuries.

Chinakhov missed a large chunk of the end of last season dealing with a back injury. Even when he was ready to return, he was down the depth chart enough that he didn't come back.

The writing appeared on the wall when first, Chinakhov's ice time was down five minutes from last season. Also, when Isac Lundestrom was injured at practice Saturday, it was Brendan Gaunce and not Chinakhov who took the spot on the fourth line. When an AHL callup is higher on the depth chart, that's a sign that a fresh start was needed on both sides.

While Chinakhov's shot is lethal, his ability to find lanes and get open continues to be a work in progress. Perhaps on a Penguins' team that has some star offensive power, he will get more opportunities to score. He couldn't consistently finish enough with the Blue Jackets when he got his chances.

One of the big questions the Penguins will have to answer is where in their lineup does Chinakhov fit? He wanted a bigger role with the Blue Jackets but fell down the depth chart instead.

#### Final Thoughts

In all, this is an interesting gamble by Dubas. He sees a 24-year old winger who has plenty of upside who needs a defined role in order to find consistency. Putting him next to a Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin who could get him the puck could be the thing to unlock that untapped potential.

For the Blue Jackets and Don Waddell, they got a player in Heinen who adds depth to the organization while adding two draft picks including a second rounder in this upcoming draft. Trading him in division is something you don't always see. But both teams see value in what they're getting from the other.

The Penguins believe there's enough there with Chinakhov in which they can work out his consistency issues. Given his combination of speed, skill and ability to fire the puck, he has the potential to make an immediate impact. He's the kind of player you turn multiple mid-round picks into so that you can help your team now.

## The Hockey Writers / Grading the Penguins' Trade for Yegor Chinakhov

**By Alex Chauvancy – December 29, 2025**

It's only been a little over 24 hours since the NHL holiday roster freeze lifted, but the Pittsburgh Penguins and Columbus Blue Jackets wasted no time linking up on a trade. Earlier this afternoon, Pierre LeBrun reported that the Blue Jackets were trading Yegor Chinakhov to the Penguins in exchange for a couple of draft picks and Danton Heinen. Here are the full details:

Penguins receive:

- Chinakhov

Blue Jackets receive:

- 2026 second-round pick
- 2027 third-round pick
- Heinen

Chinakhov had requested a trade over the summer, but the Blue Jackets remained patient in finding the right deal. He has talent, but hasn't been able to produce consistently. Perhaps with a change of scenery, he can gain a second wind alongside Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin in the Steel City.

### **Penguins Take a Flier**

Chinakhov was a surprise first-round pick of the Blue Jackets in the 2020 draft. Most public scouting services had him as a sixth or seventh-round prospect as an overager. But that didn't faze former GM Jarmo Kekalainen, who took a chance on the Russian winger after he impressed in the KHL with Avangard Omsk.

It wasn't always smooth sailing for Chinakhov in Columbus, but he had shown scoring upside in the past. He finished the 2023-24 season with 16 goals and 29 points in 53 games, a 25-goal, 45-point pace over 82 games. Even last season, he was on pace for 40 points, but he only appeared in 30 games due to injuries.

One of the strengths of Chinakhov's game is his shot. His average shot speed of 62.82 mph ranks in the 96th percentile among his peers this season, and at 68.82 mph, it ranked in the 98th percentile last season. His max skating speed of 22.88 mph ranks in the 88th percentile this season, so he can turn on the jets when he needs to.

Aside from those attributes, Chinakhov has also been a fairly decent player at five-on-five. Wingers with his profile don't always have the best impacts at full strength. They may have the shot and finishing ability, but they struggle to push play the other way. That isn't the case with him:

The Penguins have been hanging around in the playoff race, although they have been fading out in recent weeks. Perhaps Chinakhov helps them stay afloat, but this seems like a move for the future rather than the 2025-26 season alone. He's 24 and is a restricted free agent with arbitration rights this coming offseason, so the Penguins are getting a player with team control.



General manager Kyle Dubas should be taking as many swings on young players with upside as he should as he continues to retool the team's roster. The Penguins have a plethora of draft picks over the next three NHL Drafts, so the cost of this trade shouldn't hurt the team down the road. There's some risk since Chinakhov has struggled with consistency and injuries, but the talent and upside are there. It's worth taking a flier if you're the Penguins.

***Penguins Grade: B+***

#### **Blue Jackets Get a Solid Return**

The Blue Jackets made out pretty well here, considering that Chinakhov asked for a trade. They did not have a second-round pick in the 2026 draft, so they recouped that in this trade, which I'm sure was a sticking point for them. Assuming the Penguins don't make the playoffs, that should end up in the first half of the second round.

Heinen was on waivers Sunday and had been struggling this season, but he's generally been a consistent bottom-six forward for most of his career. He's in the final year of his contract and has a cap hit of \$2.25 million, so there's no long-term commitment. But at the very least, he can help the Blue Jackets stay competitive in the muddled Eastern Conference.

Even though the Blue Jackets are in last place in the East, they're only four points out of a playoff spot. They acquired Mason Marchment just before the roster freeze took effect on Dec. 19, so they're clearly not giving up on the season yet. By acquiring Heinen, they at least get a little bottom-six depth for the remainder of the season. Add the draft capital they received, and this looks like a fairly solid trade for both sides.

***Blue Jackets grade: B+***

## **WSYX / Zach Werenski joins Team USA for 2026 Winter Olympics**

**By WSYX Staff – January 2, 2026**

COLUMBUS, Ohio (WSYX) — Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski has been named to Team USA's 25-player roster for the 2026 Olympic Winter Games in Milano Cortina, USA Hockey announced.

Werenski, 28, becomes the second Blue Jacket to be selected for the upcoming Olympics, joining goaltender Elvis Merzlikins, who will represent Latvia.

The Olympic men's ice hockey tournament is set for Feb. 11-22, 2026, in Italy. Werenski has had an impressive season, with 14 goals and 26 assists in 35 games, ranking second in the NHL for time on ice. He is the franchise's all-time leader among defensemen in goals, assists, and points.

Werenski has represented the U.S. in several international tournaments, including the 2024 4 Nations Face-Off and the IIHF World Championships, where he helped secure a gold medal in 2025.