



## Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips June 2-3, 2026

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- [LISTEN](#) ESPN / Amber & Ian – Hour 1: Zach Werensky, Columbus Blue Jackets & Norris Trophy Winner

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Zach Werenski's Norris Win a Sign of Celebration & Motivation

**By Mark S. – Jun 3, 2026**

Zach Werenski had an unforgettable 2025-26 season. On Tuesday, that season was capped with his first Norris Trophy win with his family and friends there to celebrate with him.

Considering what all Werenski accomplished this season, there have been a lot of moments for him to celebrate. Not only was he among the first to win double gold for Team U.S.A. in one season, he and his wife Odette welcomed their first son.

### **Taking Time to Celebrate**

Despite the whirlwind, Werenski took time on Tuesday to reflect and celebrate the meaning of winning the Blue Jackets' first Norris Trophy in franchise history. Among the first things he did was look for Red Wings' great Nicklas Lidstrom's name on the trophy. Given his name appears seven times, it wasn't very hard to find. But it was easy to see why that was the first name he sought out.

"I grew up watching him being from Detroit," Werenski said. "I knew how special a player he was and to win it once is an incredible feeling. But to do what he did, it's insane."

While the Norris is an individual award, Werenski doesn't accomplish anything without the help and support of many people in different areas of his life. He made sure to go out of his way to acknowledge that.

"It's been an awesome year and a half for me," Werenski said. "The Four Nations. The World Championship gold medal. I got married, found out we were pregnant, the Olympic gold, my son and now obviously this (Norris Trophy.) It's been a long list of accomplishments and I wouldn't be here without a great support system and great family and friends."

"This just caps off a really great two seasons for me and I feel very honored. I feel very blessed. I know if you look around the league at how many great defensemen there are, you could've made a case for 7-8 guys to win this trophy this year. It definitely feels special and obviously it's individual recognition, but it wouldn't happen without great teammates and great people around me. I'm very happy with this and going to enjoy it a little bit and obviously thank my teammates for helping me get here."

Werenski finished second last season in the Norris voting only to Colorado's Cale Makar. This season, not only did he put up similar numbers, his team improved in the standings despite falling short of the playoffs. It was enough to win the Norris in a vote where seven players got first-place votes.

Werenski wanted to use the 2025-26 season to show everyone that being a finalist the year before wasn't a one off.

"I think the biggest thing for me last year being a finalist is I wanted to prove not only to myself but to everyone that last season wasn't a fluke and I could do it again," Werenski said. "It was kind of the first year I really broke out. I felt like I always had the talent to, but in terms of my full game, I felt like two

seasons ago was really my first breakout year. I wanted to prove to myself it wasn't just a one off. I trained for it. I prepared for it. Came back. Our team got better."

"We fell short of our ultimate goal which was making the playoffs. But we made strides and I definitely proved that it wasn't just a fluke and it wasn't just a one-year thing. I can play at that level and I can be in the conversation with those great defensemen."

Not only was winning the Norris Trophy a celebration with his friends and family, many players from around the NHL took time to recognize Werenski's accomplishment. Among them were Team U.S.A. teammates Auston Matthews and Matthew Tkachuk and several of his Blue Jackets' teammates. Also, head coach John Tortorella texted Werenski when the news became public.

Given the whirlwind that it's been, Werenski admitted trying to stay in the present. While he and his Blue Jackets' teammates will be extremely motivated in 2026-27 to get to the playoffs, he took some much-needed time to get away from the game for a bit before starting to ramp things up for next season.

"It's honestly been a pretty crazy whirlwind last two seasons for me. I really haven't thought about anything other than the present," Werenski said. "I'm definitely more motivated than ever especially with how the season ended. Between my son and the Olympics and now this and everything that's gone on, I've honestly gotten away from the game for a while now. (I'm) back in the gym. I skated a little bit but it's been nice to just kind of decompress and not really focus about the future too much and just kind of enjoy these milestones."

"I feel like you can get caught up in focusing on the next thing, you don't really get to enjoy the moment. So I've really done that this summer. I really enjoyed being present with my family and now this. My focus will start to shift a little bit and start to focus on next year in the coming weeks and days."

### **Norris Sign of Motivation**

Not that Werenski needs any more motivation as it stands, but the Norris Trophy does represent a sign of motivation that the job is far from finished. He shared that he found out on Sunday that he won the Norris. By Monday, he was back in the gym putting in more work.

That's the nature of the athlete today. They are wired in a way to be in a routine when it comes to getting ready for a season. That's why Werenski wanted to take some time to reflect and celebrate. But now that he has the Norris, it's a reminder that he still has a lot to prove.

"There's still so much else out there," Werenski said. "Every time you get in the gym or get on the ice or get ready for a season, there's still so much to prove not only (to) everyone out there, but to yourself."

"I don't want to stop here. I feel like the second you get complacent is the second you get passed up. I want to keep playing for a long time. I want to play for my son, for my family. There's so much motivation out there and I still haven't won the ultimate goal which is a Stanley Cup. I really haven't played in the playoffs or had much success in the playoffs ever. So there's more motivation than ever for me to be even better next season to try and play in the playoffs...I definitely think the Stanley Cup is the biggest (motivation) for me."

## 1<sup>st</sup> Battery / A Magical 2026 Continues: Zach Werenski Wins Norris Trophy As League's Top Defenseman

**By Ed Francis on June 2, 2026**

Zach Werenski added to his trophy case Tuesday, winning the NHL's Norris Trophy as the league's top defenseman.

What a year for Zach Werenski.

The Columbus Blue Jackets star defenseman, just a few months after winning a gold medal with Team USA at the Winter Olympics and just a few weeks after becoming a father for the first time, officially added the Norris Trophy to his 2026 resume Tuesday.

Werenski beat out Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche and Rasmus Dahlin of the Buffalo Sabres for the award, which is given annually to the league's top defenseman and recognizes the player with the greatest all-around ability at the position.

After finishing second place behind Makar last season, Werenski now becomes the first Blue Jacket to win the award.

Werenski found out Sunday, while surrounded by family at a cookout. A camera crew from NHL Productions and a writer from NHL.com had stopped by to do a Father's Day feature — or so Werenski thought.

Only Werenski's wife, Odette, and his brother, Brad, knew the real reason why they were there.

When he found out, Werenski seemed momentarily speechless. He confirmed that moments later.

"I'm at a loss for words, to be honest with you guys," Werenski said. "It's incredible."

"Thank you," he then said to his family.

Werenski scored 22 goals and added 59 assists for a total of 81 points in 75 games this season. His 26:37 of ice time per game was second in the NHL, and Werenski led all defensemen in multi-point games and was tied for the league-lead in even-strength goals amongst blueliners.

His 81 points bested Makar (20 goals, 59 assists for 79 points in 75 games) and Dahlin (19 goals, 55 assists for 74 points in 77 games).

A 28-year-old native of Grosse Point, Michigan, Werenski is the fifth U.S.-born defenseman in league history to record multiple 80-point campaigns. He's the third to accomplish the feat in consecutive seasons, joining Hall of Famers Phil Housley and Brian Leetch.

In addition to another point-a-game campaign, Werenski finished tied for 14th in even-strength points and 15th in multi-point efforts (26) amongst all positions. Amongst blueliners, Werenski led the league

in multi-point efforts, even-strength goals (tied) and shots on goal, as well as finishing second in points, points-per-game (1.08) and even-strength points, tied for third in goals, and tied for fourth in assists.

The Norris was first presented in 1953-54 by the children of the late James Norris in memory of the former Detroit Red Wings owner-president. Nominees were voted on by the Professional Hockey Writers Association at the end of the regular season.

Werenski was considered the favorite to win the award by oddsmakers, including a -270 by FanDuel in recent days. He earned 113 of the 198 (57%) first-place votes and 1,589 total points.

Makar finished second with 1,191 and Dahlin third at 657 points. Edmonton Oilers defenseman Evan Bouchard, who led all defensemen in assists and points, finished close behind in fourth with 593 points.

## Cleveland.com / Blue Jackets' Zach Werenski makes franchise history with NHL honor

**By Tim Bielik – June 2, 2026**

For the first time in franchise history, the Norris Trophy belongs to a member of the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The NHL announced that Zach Werenski was this year's winner of the Norris, which goes to the best defenseman. The other finalists were Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche and Rasmus Dahlin of the Buffalo Sabres.

The 28-year-old Werenski had 22 goals and 81 points last season, marking the first time in his career that he recorded more than a point per game.

Werenski received 113 first-place votes. Makar was second with 47 first-place votes and Dahlin (13) finished in third.

He became just the fifth American-born defenseman in NHL history to record two 80-point seasons after having a career-high 82 in 2024-25. Werenski is also just the third to do it in consecutive seasons, joining Phil Housley and Reed Larson.

Werenski's 22 goals were one short of his career high, set in 2024-25.

59 of his 81 points this season came at even strength.

Columbus selected Werenski eighth overall in the 2015 NHL Draft. In 10 seasons and 642 games for the Blue Jackets, Werenski has 135 goals and 465 points. He is second in scoring in franchise history behind only Rick Nash (547 points).

The Norris Trophy adds to the gold medal Werenski won at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan. He helped set up the golden goal by recording the primary assist on Jack Hughes' overtime goal against Canada in the final.

Werenski is the second Blue Jackets player in consecutive years to receive a major NHL award. Center Sean Monahan received the Bill Masterton Trophy, which is presented to the player who best displays perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.

## CW Columbus / Blue Jackets Werenski wins Norris Trophy, named NHL's best defenseman

**By Dylan Kerns – June 2, 2026**

Zach Werenski has become the first player in Columbus Blue Jackets history to win the James Norris Memorial Trophy, taking home the award as the NHL's top defenseman for the 2025-26 season.

The Norris Trophy is awarded annually to the NHL's "top defensive player who demonstrates throughout the season the greatest all-around ability in the position." The other finalists for 2025-26 were Colorado's Cale Makar and Buffalo's Rasmus Dahlin.

Werenski, who finished second in the voting to Makar last season, posted 22 goals and 59 assists for 81 points in 75 games in 2025-26.

The 28-year-old defenseman also led the Blue Jackets in assists, points, points per game, multi-point efforts and shots on goal, and finished third on the team in goals.

He set a single-season club record for multi-point outings and tied the franchise mark for assists for the second consecutive season.

The Norris Trophy was first presented in 1953-54 by the children of the late James Norris in memory of the former owner-president of the Detroit Red Wings. Nominees are voted on by the Professional Hockey Writers Association at the end of the regular season, with the top three vote-getters designated as finalists.

Werenski is the Blue Jackets' all-time leader in assists and ranks second in points, third in games played, fourth in shots on goal and fifth in goals.

Columbus selected him in the first round, eighth overall, of the 2015 NHL Draft.

Werenski is the seventh Blue Jacket to win a major NHL award, with the last being Sean Monahan (Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy in 2024-25).

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets star Zach Werenski wins Norris Trophy

**By Brian Hedger – June 2, 2026**

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski won the 2026 Norris Trophy, awarded to the NHL's top defenseman.

Werenski recorded 81 points in 75 games and also helped the U.S. men's hockey team win gold at the 2026 Winter Olympics.

This was Werenski's first Norris Trophy win after finishing as a finalist for the award in 2025.

The win caps a memorable year for Werenski, who also became a first-time father.

Zach Werenski is the top NHL defenseman for 2026 after putting together a season that earned him the James Norris Memorial Trophy.

A year after finishing second for the award to Colorado Avalanche star Cale Makar in 2025, Werenski put together another outstanding season for the Blue Jackets that pushed him into the top spot among voters in the Professional Hockey Writers Association over Colorado Avalanche star Cale Makar and Buffalo Sabres captain Rasmus Dahlin.

"I think the biggest thing for me last year, being a finalist, is I wanted to prove to not only myself, but to everyone, that last season wasn't a fluke and I could do it again," Werenski said. "I felt like I always had the talent, but in terms of my full game, I felt like last year was ... really my first breakout year, and I wanted to prove to myself that it wasn't just a one-off."

Mission accomplished.

"Obviously, we fell short of our ultimate goal, which was making the playoffs, but we made strides, and I definitely proved that it wasn't just a fluke, and it wasn't just a one-year thing and I can play at that level, and I can be in the conversation with those great defensemen," Werenski said. "Really proud of it."

The Norris Trophy voting tabulations were announced June 2 by the NHL, which released the news along with a video of Werenski getting the Trophy in a surprise visit from a camera crew June 24 while he and his wife, Odette, hosted a family get together with their newborn son, Hudson.

"I think the only people who knew were Odette and my brother [Brad], so just seeing my parents' reaction, everyone that was over, that's the best part about it all is how surprised they were," Werenski said. "I definitely, maybe, thought something was coming, but like I said, until you actually see that it's here, and you hear the words, 'You're the Norris winner,' it's just in your mind. It's just a thought."

Werenski is the first Blue Jackets defenseman and sixth American-born player to win the Norris Trophy, joining Rod Langway, Chris Chelios, Brian Leetch, Adam Fox and Quinn Hughes. He trains with Hughes in

Detroit during offseasons, and they became even closer while leading the U.S. to an Olympic gold medal at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan, Italy.

"He just kept telling me all year, like, 'This is yours to lose,' and, 'Go for it,' and it gave me a ton of confidence," Werenski said. "So, I thought that was cool that I'm going to be up there with my peers and guys I've played against and guys that have pushed me to be better."

Older names included on the trophy left an impression, too, including former Detroit Red Wings captain Nicklas Lidstrom, a seven-time Norris winner. Werenski, who's from the Detroit suburb of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, grew up watching Lidstrom play. Now, their names are linked forever on the same trophy.

"One of the first names I looked for was Nick Lindstrom," Werenski said. "It's not hard to find because he's on there seven times, but that's probably the one that I really looked for right away. I grew up watching him, obviously, being from Detroit. I knew how special a player he was, and to win it once is an incredible feeling, but to do what he did is ... it's insane."

Werenski may have more in his future, too.

He doesn't turn 29 until July, and he's become an elite offensive defenseman. His defensive play certainly factored into finishing first, but Werenski's unique offensive acumen is what put him over the top with 81 points on 22 goals and 59 assists in 75 games. Leading the Blue Jackets in scoring for the second straight season as a defenseman swayed enough voters to complete a memorable 16-month span.

Despite the Blue Jackets stumbling from playoff contention, he helped the U.S. win gold on a play he sparked in overtime of the gold medal game, stealing the puck from Canadian superstar Nathan MacKinnon and sending a pass to Hughes' brother, Jack, for the golden goal in a 2-1 victory.

Months earlier, Werenski also helped the U.S. break a long championship drought in May 2025 at the men's world championships in Stockholm, Sweden, giving him two international gold medals playing for the U.S. in less than a year's time. Prior to that, he also helped the U.S. win a silver medal at the NHL's inaugural 2025 Four Nations Face-Off.

During each gold medal celebration, Werenski made sure to honor deceased former Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau along with his U.S. teammates, displaying his No. 13 jersey each time and taking it a step further in the Olympic celebration by carrying two of Gaudreau's three young children onto the ice for the team's victory photo.

Three months later, Werenski became a father for the first time when Odette gave birth to Hudson. Now, on top of those career and life milestones, Werenski is the first Blue Jackets defenseman to win the Norris Trophy and a first-time recipient of the award, which is named after James E. Norris, a longtime Red Wings owner.

"You know, I think if you look back to [2025] world championships, even as far [back] as [Four Nations] two seasons ago, it's been an awesome year and a half for me," Werenski said. "It's a long list of accomplishments, and you know, I wouldn't be here without a great support system, and a great family

and great friends, and this just caps off a really great two seasons for me, and I feel very honored. I feel very blessed."

The Norris Trophy is one of the NHL's most prestigious awards and the only one that specifically honors defensemen. Earning a Norris has become a gold standard for inclusion into hockey's hall of fame, which is starting to feel like a probability for Werenski.

Adding a Stanley Cup championship would all but clinch his inclusion, and Werenski has only played 10 seasons, all with the Blue Jackets. There's also a chance he might gain the captain's 'C' if current captain Boone Jenner doesn't re-sign as a free agent.

Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski shoots around Red Wings center Andrew Copp on Dec. 4.

Since the Jackets selected him eighth overall in 2015, Werenski has matured into a homegrown superstar and now the NHL's top defenseman. That's why former GM Jarmo Kekalainen, who drafted him, made Werenski the Blue Jackets' top defenseman and highest-paid player July 29, 2021, by signing him to a six-year contract worth \$59.5 million.

That deal, which has two seasons left, was announced about a month after Kekalainen traded Werenski's former defense partner, Seth Jones, to the Chicago Blackhawks. The Jackets received an enticing return package that allowed them to draft forward Cole Sillinger 12th overall in 2021 and defenseman David Jiricek sixth overall in 2022, but the deal also made Werenski their top defenseman.

Aside from injuries that limited his availability for two years (2021-2023), Werenski has capitalized on the opportunity to play a huge role. In the past two seasons combined, he ranks second among all NHL defensemen in points [163], third in goals [45], fifth in assists [118], first in shots [558] and second in ice time [26:41].

Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski skates by Islanders center Mathew Barzal on Feb. 28.

He also tops every all-time defensive scoring record for the Blue Jackets by sitting first in points [465], goals [135], assists [330] and power-play goals [29] while also leading in games played [642] by defensemen.

Unlike many of his blue-line peers around the NHL, though, Werenski has skated with numerous partners on the Blue Jackets' top defensive pairing since Jones left. The past two years, it's been Dante Fabbro for most of 2024-25 followed by a combination of Damon Severson, Ivan Provorov, Denton Mateychuk and Fabbro this past season.

Unfazed by the rotation, Werenski plugged along for another remarkable campaign that finished with a coveted NHL trophy. He's not done, either. Far from it.

"I don't want to stop here," Werenski said. "I feel like the second you get complacent is the second you get passed up, and I want to keep playing for a long time. I want to play for my son, for my family. There's so much motivation out there, and I still haven't won the ultimate goal, which is the Stanley Cup. I really haven't played in the playoffs or had much success in the playoffs, ever, so there's more motivation than ever for me to be even better next season to try and play in the playoffs."

## ESPN / Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski captures Norris Trophy

By Greg Wyshynski – June 2, 2026

Zach Werenski of the Columbus Blue Jackets has won the Norris Trophy, given annually to the NHL's top all-around defenseman.

Werenski topped fellow finalists Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche and Rasmus Dahlin of the Buffalo Sabres. Makar, who won the award last season, was in the running for his third Norris Trophy. This is the first for Werenski, who was the runner-up to Makar in 2025-26.

Nominees are voted on by the Professional Hockey Writers Association at the end of the regular season, with the top three vote-getters designated as finalists. Werenski was surprised with the Norris at a recent family gathering as part of the NHL's effort to create viral moments with its award announcements.

"Winning the Norris Trophy was one of the goals I had and I've worked at it a long time and it's one of the hardest things to win," Werenski said on ESPN Radio's Amber & Ian. "There are so many great defensemen in this league and to be honored among so many great players, to be on that trophy with so many great players, guys I've looked up to, guys I've idolized, guys I've played against, that pushed me to be better, it's one of the greatest honors I could have."

Werenski, 28, had 22 goals and 59 assists for 81 points this season, skating 26:37 per game, which was the second-highest average in the NHL. He was second in the NHL in points by a defenseman and tied for third in goals by a defenseman. He was tied for the league lead among blueliners in even-strength goals (18) with Washington's Jakob Chychrun.

This was Werenski's 10th NHL season, all of them with the Blue Jackets. He is the franchise's career leader in assists (330) and ranks second in points (465).

The Norris Trophy win follows another career accomplishment for the Michigan native: winning Olympic men's hockey gold with Team USA at the Milan Cortina Games in February. Werenski is the sixth American player to be named the NHL's best defenseman.

Just missing the top three for the Norris was Evan Bouchard of the Edmonton Oilers, who led the NHL with 95 points in 82 games but finished fourth in the voting. NHL rookie of the year Matthew Schaefer of the New York Islanders appeared on eight ballots and finished 12th.

## NHL / Werenski of Blue Jackets wins Norris Trophy as top defenseman

**By NHL Public Relations – June 02, 2026**

Zach Werenski of the Columbus Blue Jackets is the 2025-26 recipient of the James Norris Memorial Trophy, awarded “to the defense player who demonstrates throughout the season the greatest all-round ability in the position,” as selected by the Professional Hockey Writers Association.

Werenski and his wife, Odette, hosted friends and family for one of their weekly family gatherings – and to introduce everyone to their new baby – when he was surprised by the trophy.

The Blue Jackets’ all-time leader in goals, assists and points by a defenseman, Werenski became the franchise’s first Norris finalist in 2024-25, finishing second in voting to Colorado’s Cale Makar. In winning this season the Grosse Pointe, Mich., native joins Rod Langway (2x), Chris Chelios (3x), Brian Leetch (2x), Adam Fox and Quinn Hughes as the sixth American player to capture the Norris Trophy.

Werenski was a top-five pick on 194 of 198 ballots, including 113 first-place selections, for 1,589 voting points. Makar was the top choice of 47 voters in collecting 1,191 points for second place, while third-place Rasmus Dahlin of the Buffalo Sabres garnered 13 first-place votes and 657 points.

Werenski led or was near the top of several categories for NHL defensemen in 2025-26, including goals (t-3rd, 22), even-strength goals (t-1st, 18), assists (t-4th, 59), points (2nd, 81), even-strength points (2nd, 59), shots (1st, 260) and average time on ice (2nd, 26:37). He tied the single-season franchise record for assists, matching his total from last year and Artemi Panarin in 2018-19, and became the 10th blueliner in NHL history to lead his club in scoring in consecutive seasons. Werenski recorded a career-high nine-game point streak from Jan. 22-Feb. 28 (2-11—13), the longest in franchise history by a defenseman, to key a 20-3-4 run during which Columbus leapfrogged 11 Eastern Conference rivals into the thick of the playoff race.

## NHL / Werenski of Blue Jackets wins Norris Trophy in 'year that can't be topped'

By Nicholas J. Cotsonika – June 02, 2026

Zach Werenski didn't see it coming. Neither did his family members, with two notable exceptions, as they stood on the patio watching him do an interview before dinner.

Werenski gathers about a dozen members of his extended family each offseason Sunday at his house, about a 10-minute walk from where he grew up near Detroit. They barbecue, splash in the pool, play hoops and watch golf. Everyone lives within a couple of miles.

On this occasion, the Werenskis had a lot to celebrate.

Zach assisted on the golden goal for the United States at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan on Feb. 22 and had an outstanding season as a defenseman for the Columbus Blue Jackets.

He and his wife, Odette, had their first child, a son named Hudson, 2 ½ weeks before this. His brother, Brad, and his wife, Janie, had their second child, a daughter named Evelyn, the night before.

Zach thought a camera crew from NHL Productions and a writer from NHL.com had stopped by to do a Father's Day feature. Only Odette and Brad knew the secret.

As Zach stood with his back to the pool and patio, he answered questions about becoming a dad. Glenn Stants from the Hockey Hall of Fame crept up from behind holding something big and silver.

"Obviously, I wouldn't be here without her and everything she does for me," Zach said, referring to Odette. "And ..."

The family gasped as they spotted Stants and what he was holding.

"Are you kidding me?" his mom, Kristen, said on the patio, looking at Odette.

Zach didn't notice.

"I'm really looking forward to this next chapter, being a dad," Zach said.

Stants stood over Zach's right shoulder and waited.

The writer dropped hints, asking Zach if there were any moments from his hockey career he was looking forward to sharing with his family, if there were mementos he wanted to show his son.

Zach didn't catch on, so the writer dropped a stronger hint.

"Maybe show him your name engraved on a trophy?" the writer said.

"Yeah, maybe," Zach said.

The writer nodded, prompting Zach to turn around.

And there it was -- the Norris Trophy, which is awarded to the NHL's best defenseman as voted by the Professional Hockey Writers Association.

The 28-year-old, who has won it for the first time, held it up and showed it to his family as they burst into applause, then he cradled it in his hands like a baby. His dad, Ken, ran up and bear-hugged him.

"I'm at a loss for words, to be honest with you, guys," Zach said. "It's incredible."

Zach turned to his family.

"Thank you, guys," he said.

This was a special way for Zach to receive the Norris, for both him and his family.

Family is everything to Zach.

"That's what it's all about," Zach said. "I mean, I wouldn't be here without them. Obviously, in a sense, it's an individual award. But without them, without my teammates, without a great support staff and system, I wouldn't be in this position, and I know that. For them to be here today and enjoy this with me, it means everything."

Zach's family witnessed everything behind the scenes that led to this moment.

Ken remembered taking his boys to the Detroit Red Wings Stanley Cup parade in 2002, and now Zach's name will be on the same trophy with his hero, Nicklas Lidstrom, a seven-time Norris winner.

"This is something I wanted for him," Ken said as he grilled chicken for the family. "I saw how hard he worked, and this is something he wanted. I don't know. It's like the gold medal and this, you're really kind of putting your stamp on the game a little bit. It's just cool."

Kristen remembered all the ups and downs over the years -- from USA Hockey's National Team Development Program to the University of Michigan to the NHL. Zach had to overcome a lot before he set an NHL career high with 82 points (23 goals, 59 assists) in 81 games last season, when he was the runner-up for the Norris, and followed it up with 81 points (22 goals, 59 assists) in 75 games this season.

"It means the world," Kristen said. "He's an athlete. He's a competitor. He strives. He works so hard -- and through injuries. I mean, my god, the last 10 years, he's had so many injuries, and for him to have two successful seasons the last two years, injury-free, it's like, he could really show what he can do."

"But I don't even think he thinks about that. I think he just goes out and does what he does, and that's why we're so grateful as parents to see this happen for him."

Odette said Zach isn't emotional and never brings a bad game home. But she'll be in bed when he gets under the covers, and she'll hear him watching his shifts on his phone -- pausing, rewinding, analyzing to see how he can improve. She watches the offseason workouts, all the times he goes to the rink on days off.

"It's just special to see all that hard work pay off and for him to be honored in this way," Odette said. "Yeah, it means a lot to me, too, because being on the inside, it's so much more than people know and how much goes into it."

Zach carried the trophy around the pool, set it on a table on the patio and began studying the names he would join. There were guys he grew up watching, like Lidstrom, Chris Chelios and Brian Leetch. There were guys he has played with and against in the NHL and internationally, like Cale Makar and Quinn Hughes.

"You are in good company here, my friend," Ken said.

This was a particularly competitive year for the Norris. Makar (Colorado Avalanche) and Rasmus Dahlin (Buffalo Sabres) were the other finalists.

"You could name five, six, seven more 'D' that could easily be deserving of this trophy," Zach said. "It's a great time for defensemen in the NHL and in hockey, and I'm just grateful to be a part of it. I think we all push each other to be better. I know last year when I didn't win, I was excited for this year. I was excited to be better and push myself, and I feel like we all do that."

Expect Zach to do that again.

"It doesn't stop with him," Brad said. "There's plenty of times in his career where he could take a break, right? Big contract signings. Gold medals. It just fuels him for what's next. 'What can I get after and achieve next? What can I work harder for that I haven't gotten?' We're just going to see his game continue to amplify from here."

Whatever happens next, though, this will be a core memory.

The Werenskis will have the video of the big reveal. They'll have the photos of Zach, the family and the trophy. One day, Hudson will be able to look at them, see himself in them and admire his dad's name on the Norris Trophy.

"It's been a year that can't be topped, so for Hudson to be a part of it and be here for this too is awesome," Odette said. "To have the pictures and be able to show him one day, it's going to mean a lot to him. I know it means a lot to Zach to have him here too to be a part of it."

In a way, this was a Father's Day story after all.

"Now being a dad, everything revolves around my son, and it puts things into perspective," Zach said. "This is incredible to be able to share this with him even though he's only 2 ½ weeks old. It's something I'll always remember."

## Sportsnet / Blue Jackets' Zach Werenski wins first Norris Trophy

**By Sportsnet Staff – June 02, 2026**

Zach Werenski has some new hardware.

The Columbus Blue Jackets blue-liner won the Norris Trophy as the NHL's top defenceman, the league announced on Tuesday.

It's the American's first time taking the honour as well as the first Norris in Blue Jackets franchise history.

Werenski, 28, beat out fellow finalists Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche and Rasmus Dahlin of the Buffalo Sabres for the award.

Across 75 games, the Grosse Pointe, Mich., native registered 22 goals and 59 assists, placing him second among NHL defencemen in points (81) behind only Edmonton's Evan Bouchard.

Werenski, who is the Blue Jackets' all-time leader in goals, assists and points, becomes the sixth American to claim the Norris, garnering top-five placement on 194 of 198 ballots, including 113 first-place selections, for a total of 1,589 points.

He had a career-high nine-game point streak across January and February, helping key a late-season push that fell just short of the playoffs.

Werenski also won Olympic gold with the U.S. in February in Milan.

Makar finished second in voting (1,191 points), while Dahlin was third (657 points) and Bouchard placed fourth (593 points).

Montreal Canadiens defenceman Lane Hutson finished sixth with 357 points, including three first-place nods.

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets' Zach Werenski wins Norris Trophy for the first time

By Julian McKenzie – June 2, 2026

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski won this year's Norris Trophy, the NHL announced Tuesday. The annual award is given to the league's best defenseman as voted on by the Professional Hockey Writers Association.

Werenski earned 113 first-place votes, beating finalists Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche and Rasmus Dahlin of the Buffalo Sabres. This is Werenski's first Norris Trophy. Last season, he finished second behind Makar.

Werenski, 28, scored 22 goals and earned 81 points in 75 games during the 2025-26 season, leading Columbus in scoring for the second consecutive year. He finished the season tied for the third-most goals among defensemen and tied for first in even-strength goals. His 81 points ranked second among rearguards, trailing only Edmonton Oilers defenseman Evan Bouchard.

Werenski's average time on ice (26:37) ranked second in the league, behind Minnesota Wild defenseman Quinn Hughes. Werenski also tied the Blue Jackets' single-season assist record (59), set by himself last season and former Blue Jacket Artemi Panarin in 2018-19.

Werenski, a Michigan native, was surprised with the trophy at home with his family and said it was "special" to be among the group of elite defenders who've previously won the award.

"All players I grew up watching, I grew up idolizing and wanting to be like," Werenski said. "To be up there with them, it's special — more special feeling than I thought it was going to be. I just feel honored. I feel blessed.

"I feel grateful to have the family I have, the support staff I have. And I just want to enjoy it with them because they're a huge part of this."

Werenski is the sixth American defenseman to win the Norris Trophy, joining Rod Langway, Chris Chelios, Brian Leetch, Adam Fox and Hughes. Werenski is also the first Blue Jacket to win the trophy after becoming the franchise's first-ever finalist last season.

Sean Monahan was the last Blue Jackets player to win a major award, earning the 2024-25 Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy for perseverance, dedication and sportsmanship.

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets' Zach Werenski honored, awed to join elite list of names on Norris

**By Aaron Portzline – June 2, 2026**

When the shock began to fade, and Zach Werenski's eyes could fixate on the Norris Trophy in his hands, he started perusing the names listed on the NHL's hardware given annually to the league's top defenseman.

The first name that caught his eye was Nicklas Lidstrom, the great Detroit Red Wing, whom Werenski idolized as a boy growing up in Michigan.

"It's not hard to find it, 'cause it's on there seven times," Werenski joked. "To do this once is an incredible feeling. To do what (Lidstrom) did, you know ... it's insane."

On Tuesday, Werenski became just the fourth Blue Jackets player to win a major award for his on-ice play, joining goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky, who twice won the Vezina Trophy (2012, 2016) as the NHL's top goalie, forward Rick Nash, who won the Rocket Richard Trophy (most goals in 2004) and goaltender Steve Mason, who won the Calder Trophy (2013) as the top rookie.

After finishing as runner-up last season, Werenski earned 113 first-place votes among 198 ballots cast by members of the Pro Hockey Writers' Association. Colorado's Cale Makar, who won it last year, finished second, while Buffalo's Rasmus Dahlin was third.

The Blue Jackets were part of a surprise at Werenski's home, where family and close friends had gathered over Memorial Day weekend. As Werenski spoke to a reporter from NHL.com, the trophy was quietly brought behind him and presented as a surprise.

"The only two people who knew were my Odette (his wife) and my brother," Werenski said. "I was surprised. The best part about it was how surprised my family was. Just seeing their reaction, and everybody's reaction, that was the best part."

Werenski said it was surreal to hold it, but once reality set in, he placed it on the table and started reading the names of the elite club he had just joined. Lidstrom was among the "old-timers" who grabbed his attention, he said.

There were the names of his contemporaries, too: Makar has won it twice. Quinn Hughes of the Minnesota Wild, the New York Rangers' Adam Fox, the Nashville Predators' Roman Josi, and so on.

"Those are the guys who have pushed me to be a better hockey player, especially Quinn (Hughes)," Werenski said. "I have a ton of respect for him, and we're pretty close (from working out together) in the offseason. At the Olympics (this past winter), we got even closer."

“He just kept telling me all season, ‘This is yours to lose,’ and, ‘Go for it.’ And it gave me a ton of confidence. I thought it was cool that I’m going to be up there with my peers and the guys I’ve played against.”

It was among the most wide-open Norris votes ever, with seven players getting first-place votes — Makar had 47, Dahlin 13 and Edmonton Oilers’ Evan Bouchard had 12 — and 14 players receiving a top-five vote.

Not a single player appeared on all 198 ballots. Werenski, for instance, was not listed in the top five on four ballots.

Werenski, 28, finished with 22 goals, 59 assists and 81 points in 75 games. He’s led the Blue Jackets in scoring for two consecutive seasons — a rare feat for defensemen — and was among the NHL’s top five blueliners for almost every measurable stat.

Werenski has been on quite a run lately.

Midway through a breakout 2024-25 season, he put himself in a different stratosphere with his play for Team USA at the Four Nations Face-off, when the U.S. lost the gold-medal game to Canada.

At this time last year, Werenski was celebrating a gold medal with Team USA at the IIHF World Championships in Sweden, the United States’ first gold in 92 years at the tournament.

Then, this past winter, Werenski and Team USA won gold again with a stirring overtime win over Canada. Werenski outworked Canada’s Nathan MacKinnon for the puck in OT and fed Jack Hughes for the “golden” goal, a replay that is burnished into most hockey fans’ brains.

Earlier this month, he and his wife welcomed their first child, Hudson Charles, to the family. And now ... Norris stopped by, unexpectedly.

“I wouldn’t be here without a great support system, a great family and friends,” Werenski said. “I look around the league at how many great defensemen there are. You could easily make the case for seven or eight guys to win this trophy. So, it definitely feels special.

“It’s individual recognition, but it wouldn’t happen without great teammates and great people around me. I’m very happy about this, and I can enjoy it a little bit, but I have to thank my team for helping me get here.”

Werenski has an Olympic gold, a world gold and his very own Norris. He also won the Calder Cup with the Blue Jackets’ minor-league affiliate in Cleveland before he launched his NHL career in 2016.

That’s already a heck of a career, and he’s not even 30 yet, but there’s still so much to accomplish, he said.

“The second you get complacent is the second you get passed up, and I want to keep playing for a long time,” Werenski said. “I want to play for my son, for my family. There’s so much motivation out there.

“I still haven’t won the ultimate goal, which is a Stanley Cup, and I really haven’t had much success in the playoffs, ever. So, there’s more motivation than ever for me to be even better next season.”

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets mailbag, Part 1: How can Waddell make big improvements? Who's staying? Who's going?

By Aaron Portzline – June 2, 2026

The end-of-season nerves are still raw among Columbus Blue Jackets fans. That late-season collapse was so epically awful that even longtime fans who thought they'd seen it all were disheartened at a whole new level.

And yet, as we start to move toward the busy stretch of the offseason — hey, Carolina and Vegas, can we move this along quickly? — the flicker of life is returning, as seen by the copious questions and comments submitted for this mailbag.

The Blue Jackets have already had a big start to the summer. General manager Don Waddell's top two early-offseason priorities were achieved by bringing back coach Rick Bowness for at least another year, and getting veteran center Charlie Coyle signed to a long-term extension.

But there will likely be other big moves coming, and you asked about all of them. So, thanks!

We've separated this into two mailbags.

Today's collection deals mostly (but not entirely) with issues that are directly in front of the Blue Jackets this summer, such as their pending unrestricted free agents and restricted free agents, their desire to add a top-six difference maker, etc,

Part II will include questions about Zach Werenski's patience and future, the McConnell family's impact on the organization, the franchise's ability to spend to the salary cap, the future GM, etc. Enjoy!

**With a weak free agent class and cap room abundant across the NHL this summer, how do the Blue Jackets improve? — Jim R.**

1. Trades. 2. Internal growth. And, honestly, it will take both of those if the Blue Jackets are going to get where they want to go. Bowness has certainly planted the seeds for self-improvement and higher standards this summer, and leading into training camp. (Been thinking: That rant stands with John Tortorella's 2019 pre-playoffs "You stand in there!" speech as the best in Blue Jackets' history.) But nothing can goose this roster like a big move or two. No pressure, Mr. Waddell.

**What, if any, roster moves seem realistic this offseason? It feels like a "grow-from-within, let the kids mature, and add affordable veteran depth" kind of summer. — Derek L.**

I wouldn't expect much out of free agency, but we'll see, because that has, at times, been a surprise in Columbus. The more likely avenue for what I would call a disruptive move — significant player out, significant player in — is a trade. I have a sister-in-law who is a volcanologist, and she's helped me sense when the ground is rumbling with activity. It sure feels that way, with lots of cap room (re: flexibility) for actual hockey trades, not just swaps of broken pieces. It may come to pass that the best they can do is

add veteran depth, and they need to rely on their young players continuing to develop no matter who they add. But I think Waddell is willing to be aggressive, including the No. 14 draft pick. That alone isn't likely to land a top-six, impact player, but it's a start. Here's a good list to peruse from my colleague, the great Chris Johnston. There are some very interesting names here, and the Blue Jackets would be looking for a winger. They wouldn't have to pay full freight for a center.

**After Coyle signed his six year, \$36 million contract, he mentioned Waddell "getting guys in here to help." Maybe I'm too optimistic, but did that seem like Don has something up his sleeve? — Kenny C.**

It sure sounds like Coyle had assurances that Waddell is going to everything he can this summer to move this Blue Jackets roster forward, but that's nothing he hasn't said publicly, too. I don't get the sense that he's been sitting on something, but you know he's had conversations and he probably has a good idea of what's out there. I think it's going to be a wild summer. He's always in the middle of the conversations. Does he end up in the middle of the deals? Should be fun!

**I know the focus has been on the unrestricted free agents. But what about the RFAs, Adam Fantilli and Cole Sillinger? — Ryan C.**

Those don't quite have the urgency of the UFAs, of course. The Blue Jackets' right-to-match makes July 1 less of a deadline. But why push it? Waddell has said he'll speak to the RFAs' agents at the NHL scouting combine, which is this weekend in Buffalo. Add Jet Greaves to the list of prominent Columbus RFAs.

**The Blue Jackets front office seems hesitant to be as ruthless as Florida, Vegas and Colorado. Is there any word of the front office being more willing to go big-game hunting for players such as Jason Robertson (Dallas) and Pavel Dorofeyev (Vegas)? — Kyle S.**

Florida and Vegas have operated differently, sure — I wouldn't put Colorado in that group — but it's not just them wanting it more than others. There are built-in advantages in both spots — taxes, weather, lifestyle, etc. Combine that with the fact that they've won, and it's a magnet for players. The Blue Jackets can decide they want (to use your examples) Robertson and Dorofeyev this off-season, but good luck with that. They're both RFAs. The Blue Jackets could trade a pile of picks and prospects for them, sure, but I'd be shocked if either team cut loose their 30-plus goal-scorers. Seems reckless. An offer sheet isn't just a "go get 'em" act by they club; it's something that is negotiated with the RFA player and agreed upon. It takes two to tango. The Blue Jackets signed Johnny Gaudreau via free agency. They traded for Artemi Panarin, Matt Duchene, etc. They went after Noah Dobson last summer, if you recall. They've gone big-game hunting.

**Why not bring pending unrestricted free agent Boone Jenner back as a bottom-line center? Is that not of interest to the team, the player, or both? — Matt T.**

Jenner is going to want term, and he deserves that opportunity as a veteran player in the league. I don't think he fancies himself a fourth-line center, and I respect that. The other thing to consider, and this is, at this point, conjecture: If the Blue Jackets are thinking of changing captains, he may feel as if it's time to move along. It doesn't have to mean the end in Columbus, but you could understand if it came to that. There are a lot of moving parts with this one. Just hope it doesn't end painfully or awkwardly.

Jenner just feels like he's always been a part of this franchise, and he's certainly left a lot of sweat and blood on that ice for the Blue Jackets.

**What do they do with goaltender Elvis Merzlikins? — Andy J.**

Great question. Three possibilities: 1. Trade. 2. Buyout. 3. Status quo. The first one would be easier (not easy, easier) to accommodate now that there is one year remaining on the contract. The second would be easier to swallow for the same reason, although GMs (and owners) do not like contract buyouts for obvious reasons. The third, to me, would be the biggest surprise of them all. That position needs to change, probably as much for the Blue Jackets as for Merzlikins.

**Does Greaves' performance in 2026 and the Worlds put him in Elvis contract territory? If so, can the Blue Jackets stomach \$10 million for two goalies? — Richard O.**

Greaves has made himself some money, that's for sure. Earned himself some money, I should say. That guy has grinded for five years now. I don't think anybody is going to begrudge his payday. The annual salary will vary dramatically if the Blue Jackets decide to buy up some of his UFA years, which I could see. My sense is, we have a really good idea now that Greaves is not only an NHL goaltender, but a darn good one, maybe even a top-10 guy in the league based on this numbers so far in his career. Should note, too, that he's played behind some pretty below-average defensive clubs and has been dramatically better than other goaltenders with that same crew. If ever you trust a goalie on a long-term deal, I think he'd be it.

**What's with the reluctance to ink Mason Marchment to a deal? He's going to go the way of Gaborik, Duchene, Upshall and others. What's worse, he's going to sign with Pittsburgh. — Greg M.**

I don't sense reluctance. I sense a GM, like many others, who wants to see what else might be out there. As noted right after the season, you can't preach culture change and bring back the entire band. I like Marchment. I like the size, the energy and his highly off-putting style of play (ha!). But I also won't be surprised if Waddell is done signing his own UFAs. It might start and stop with Coyle. Also ... Upshall?

**How does the organization view Dmitri Voronkov at this point? — Michael B.**

There's a bit of frustration that it hasn't all come together yet for Voronkov. Once again, his conditioning has come into question, because he seems to run out of gas midway through every season. Hard to say from the outside looking in if he's not putting in the work over the summer, or if he's letting it slide during the season. But it's become a trend. This guy has 30-goal potential, as you've seen. He is a formidable body in the crease. There's so much there that has yet to be unlocked. That's why they aren't even close to giving up on him.

**Why did we want Conor Garland at \$6 million for six years? — Peter W.**

That's a fair question, especially given the way he ended the season. He looked lost. Nothing work. There's a player in there, and we've all seen it. The guy provides relentless energy and 17 to 22 goals. His \$6 million still looks big, but watch the cap over these next two to three years. That'll be a third-line salary very soon, and that's probably where he fits. I'll say this: he's a proud, motivated, very precise and

particular dude. And it sure seems like that Vancouver situation was ugly with a capital U. Put him on a list of about 8-10 Blue Jackets with a lot to prove next season and beyond.

**Among the UFAs, I don't hear nearly as much about Erik Gudbranson. How likely is it that he's re-signed? — R.S.**

As we get deeper into summer, you start to wonder about the rest of the UFAs, including Gudbranson. Could very well be a July 1-2 wait-and-see situation. The Blue Jackets have said they want to keep them. Take them at their word, but I don't think there's room for all three, or you're not really making big changes. But, boy, Gudbranson is just such a presence, on and off the ice. He reminds me so much of so many of the early Blue Jackets — Dineen and Richardson and Shelley and Sanderson and those guys — just a strong, impressive dude.

**Does the playoff drought end next season? — Gregg D.**

I thought it would end this season. I suspect it ends next season. But what you see as the Blue Jackets' lineup today may not be what you see when they take the ice in October. And, as the Jackets learned painfully this season, 82 games is a marathon, and you have to run through the tape. Next season, it's 84 games.

**Are you optimistic about the Blue Jackets' future? — John B.**

Less than I was one year ago, but still shading toward optimism. The stagnation of the youngest, most talented players this season — not all of them, but key players such as Kent Johnson and Dmitri Voronkov — is worrisome. The fact that another high pick, David Jiricek, turned out to be whiff, is not good. That's how rebuilds fail, when the high-end draft picks, paid for by the suffering and losing, aren't maximized. No way I'd give up on Voronkov, Johnson or anybody else just yet. We know it's not always a consistently upward trajectory. But it's time for them to stand and deliver. Or it's time for the club to look elsewhere.

**Why hasn't Waddell rebuilt our scouting department? The Cayden Lindstrom over Ivan Demidov pick is a fireable offense on its own. — Paul S.**

Well, I think he likes his scouts, that's why. He has added four others as "special assignment" scouts and consultants since he was hired, but the bulk of the staff remains in place. Look, it's easy now — two years later — to redraft the 2024 class. You can do this literally for every team across recent drafts. Taking Lindstrom at No. 4 was completely justifiable in the spring of 2024. A 6-foot-4 center with incredible speed and a competitive mean streak? Heck yeah! It doesn't look great as of right now because Lindstrom remains in college and Demidov is playing in the NHL. But we aren't at the finish line yet. And if it does end up that Demidov is the better player ... well, that's the draft!

**Kent Johnson's best season was with James van Riemsdyk on his line. Sillinger's best year was with Jake Voracek. We don't have that on our team up front. — Rich R.**

All due respect to those guys — damn good players, really good guys in the room, too — but those type of players aren't long-term fixes, and they weren't intended to be. You may have noticed, van Riemsdyk

had a good season for Detroit this season, but he's already moving on to another team. Waddell needed players to fill out that season's roster. Most GMs would like a more permanent solution to their goal-scoring needs than to scour the market just before camp. Voracek, of course, is long-since retired. The hope is that Johnson will get back to letting his abundant skill be the lift for other lines, with his playmaking, his ability to carry the puck, etc. Sillinger's on a pretty good line right now with Charlie Coyle and Mathieu Olivier, although every new season seems to bring a new chemistry with every line.

**Kent Johnson and the No. 14 overall pick in 2026 to New Jersey for Simon Nemec ... who says no? — Noah P.**

I would suspect the Blue Jackets scream "no!" They could use a third-pairing defender, but not at that price. Those type of assets should/would be used for an impact player up front, especially if Johnson is being taken out of the mix.

**Would a Kent Johnson-for-Shane Wright swap with Seattle make sense? — Timothy S.**

Dang. Everybody tradin' Kent Johnson. It doesn't make sense to me, but I'm not sure how they feel about Shane Wright. This club is no longer desperate for centers, I would note.

**The coaching carousel needs to stop. Should Columbus commit to Bowness' replacement and have him take that coach under his wing as an assistant? — Courtney W.**

That's already in the works, and it took a big step forward just recently. After eight seasons with AHL Cleveland, the last four as head coach, Trent Vogelhuber has been promoted to Bowness' staff, as the first of two or three assistant coach hires this offseason. All signs point to Vogelhuber being put in queue to ascend to the top job when Bowness is ready to retire, but that has not yet been clearly articulated in public by the club.

**Is it a foregone conclusion that Vogelhuber will take over for Bowness after next season? — Brock D.**

We may get more information once the move to hire Vogelhuber is official, but there may also not be a specific timeline laid out. We shall see. But it sure does seem as if Vogelhuber will be the coach in waiting, whenever that time arrives. Is it one year? Two? We don't know, and we might know until we know, if that makes sense. The plan is for Bowness to coach this coming season and then make the call, just like he did this season. And as you saw, it's a difficult thing for him to give up. The man was born to coach. It's his oxygen. I think it's really important for Vogelhuber to see the NHL for at least a season or two before he ascends to the top job. Are there exceptions? Sure. It's been done. But I really like the idea of him growing into the job in a seamless way. He's learned from some of the great minds in the game and he's a sponge, but he's also his own man. This feels very healthy to me, no matter the timeline.

**Can you explain the roles of a "president of hockey operations"? How does that person affect the product on the ice? — Charles S.**

There's not one answer here, except to say that the person in that capacity is the head of all things hockey, above even the general manager. In many cases, the GM is the president of hockey operations.

But every franchise is set up differently, and every president of hockey operations has a different skill set, which gives them different roles within their front office. Waddell is the Blue Jackets' POHOP and GM, which means he oversees all, with only club president Mike Priest and majority owner John P. McConnell above him. The salary cap and CBA. Trades. Contracts. Drafting. Waivers. Team travel. Stuff you can't even imagine that pops up on a daily basis. Immigration issues. Late-night phone calls. Injuries. Hell, Waddell's trying to buy a plane for the club this summer. Most of these guys have years and years of experience (Waddell does, of course) in the league and a contact list going back decades of people they can call for guidance, conversation, etc. They also surround themselves (the good ones, anyway) with people they trust in some of the above mentioned areas that just aren't their strengths or passions, given their career paths. Many of them have law degrees.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Zach Werenski Wins 2025-26 Norris Trophy

**Mark S. – Jun 2, 2026**

Zach Werenski came oh so close to winning his first Norris Trophy in 2024-25 finishing second to Colorado's Cale Makar. In 2025-26, Werenski leveled his game up. It turned out to be enough to switch spots with Makar for this year's Norris.

On Tuesday, the NHL announced that Werenski was the winner of the James Norris Memorial Trophy given annually to the "top defensive player who demonstrates throughout the season the greatest all-around ability in the position."

Werenski was previously named a finalist along with Makar and Buffalo Sabres' defenseman Rasmus Dahlin.

Voting for the Norris is done by members of the Professional Hockey Writer's Association. Of the 198 ballots submitted, Werenski was first place on 113 of them making him the winner going away.

The NHL released a video showing Werenski winning the Norris as a surprise. As he was golfing, his family gathered at home with cameras in place. Although he thought he was speaking as part of a Father's Day piece, it was to actually present him with the Norris Trophy.

Werenski became the first Blue Jacket ever to win the Norris and the sixth American player to do so. He also became the 10th defenseman in NHL history to lead his team in scoring in consecutive seasons and the fifth U.S. born defenseman in history to record at least 80 points in multiple seasons and the third to do it in consecutive seasons joining Phil Housley and Brian Leetch. Werenski also has consecutive 20-goal seasons joining only Housley and Reed Larson as the only American blue liners to do that.

Werenski adds the Norris Trophy to an already impressive collection of accolades he's gained this season. he won gold medals at both the 2025 Men's World Championships and at the Winter Olympics in Milan.

Werenski will be speaking to the media at 1 P.M. eastern to discuss winning the Norris Trophy.

## The Hockey Writers / 4 Blue Jackets Prospects Who Could Make the Jump in 2026-27

**By Ryan W. – Jun 1, 2026**

The Columbus Blue Jackets have an interesting offseason ahead of them. They have pressing matters that must be addressed and a few names that should ultimately be allowed to leave. But where does that leave room for internal promotion?

In an offseason where roster spots will be at a premium, there are four in-house prospects who could stand a chance at making the everyday roster. Here are the four names with the best chances at being a regular part of the Blue Jackets for 2026-27.

Luca Del Bel Belluz, C

The Blue Jackets are deep at center, especially with the Charlie Coyle extension. Though there are more highly touted prospects within the organization, no one may be more ready for a full-time roster spot than Del Bel Belluz.

He has been an ace at the American Hockey League (AHL) level and there is little for him to prove there. He has all the tools to play in the middle six, but he's going to need to beat out tough competition if he's to remain at center. His path is easier on the wings but he will have to accept a bottom six role and work his way up if he hopes to stick.

Mikael Pyyhtia, C/LW

There have always been rumblings about Pyyhtia, but this seems like the season where he finally put things together. In 59 games with the Cleveland Monsters, he finished second in team scoring with 49 points (21 goals) in 59 games. He's smart and works hard, the perfect recipe for a bottom-of-the-line forward.

He's performed in spot duty for the Blue Jackets before. Now that he's flashed an improved offensive game, it may finally be his time to make the leap. As a restricted free agent this summer, it will give us an early look at just how important he is to the organization.

Corson Ceulemans, D

The Blue Jackets could opt for someone via free agency or fill one of their holes on the back end internally, starting with Ceulemans. With a hole on the right side of the lineup should Erik Gudbranson not be brought back, Ceulemans could be the man to step up.

He had a breakout offensive season with 24 points in 64 games, and it could be the case of a late-blooming defenseman finally figuring it out. He's a solid skater, he can move the puck – which fits in with the overall mindset of the defensive group – and he's still developing. He has work to do with over-committing but has the tools to be a solid bottom-pairing defenseman.

Guillaume Richard, D

Richard has been in the system since being selected in the fourth round of the 2021 NHL Draft. With one season under his belt as a top-pairing defenseman, he has the kind of underrated, steady defensive game that NHL rosters need.

The Blue Jackets have a ton of puck-moving defensemen, but Richard is the kind of shutdown defender they sorely need. Bottom pair minutes may be the perfect way to introduce him to the NHL and allow him to slide into a specific role.

### **Whoever Makes it Will Have to Earn it**

Who makes it to the roster depends on what actions the Blue Jackets take this summer. Will they take a swing for a free agent forward or essentially stand pat and promote from within? It depends on how close management thinks they are to making the playoffs.

All four could potentially become solid contributors for the big club, but this may be the toughest season yet to crack the lineup. Anyone who does will have earned it, making them better equipped to contribute on a nightly basis.

## TSN / Blue Jackets' Werenski wins Norris Trophy as NHL's top defenceman

By TSN.ca Staff – June 02, 2026

Zach Werenski was named the Norris Trophy winner on Tuesday as the NHL's defenceman "who demonstrates throughout the season the greatest all-round ability in the position."

The Columbus Blue Jackets rearguard edged out Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche with 1,589 points to 1,191. The 28-year-old Grosse Pointe, MI native led Makar in first-place votes by a considerable 113 to 47 margin. Rasmus Dahlin of the Buffalo Sabres finished third.

Three Canadian-based players finished in the top-10. Evan Bouchard of the Edmonton Oilers was fourth, trailing Dahlin by 64 points. He received 12 first-place votes. The Montreal Canadiens' Lane Hutson was sixth with 357 points and three first-place votes. Jake Sanderson of the Ottawa Senators finished 10th with 16 points.

It was a second straight season of being named a finalist for Werenski and his first victory. The Blue Jackets' all-time leader in goals and points by a defenceman appeared in 75 games in 2025-2026, recording 22 goals and adding 59 assists. His 81 points were one short of the career-high he established in 2024-2025.

Originally taken with the eighth overall selection of the 2015 NHL Entry Draft, Werenski has appeared in 642 games across 10 seasons for the team. For his career, Werenski has 135 goals and 330 assists.

Werenski, a member of the United States' gold medal-winning entry at the 2026 Milano Cortina Olympics, becomes the sixth American player to claim the Norris after Quinn Hughes, Adam Fox, Brian Leetch, Chris Chelios and Rod Langway.