



**Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips**  
**July 24-28, 2025**

**Columbus Blue Jackets**

- PAGE 02: The Athletic: Blue Jackets' lineup outlook: Elvis Merzlikins a backup? Yegor Chinakhov a third-liner?
- PAGE 08: The Hockey Writers: 2025-26 Blue Jackets Roster Projection 3.0: Navigating a Trade Request
- PAGE 12: The Hockey Writers: Jet Greaves Deserves to Be the Blue Jackets' Starting Goaltender
- PAGE 15: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets Must Learn Important Lessons From Capitals
- PAGE 20: TSN.ca: Gudbranson: Blue Jackets 'still bitter' about missing playoffs
- PAGE 22: Bleacher Report: 8 NHL Trade Landing Spots for Yegor Chinakhov Amid Rumors

**Cleveland Monsters/Prospects**

- PAGE 25: NHL.com: Schaefer, McKenna headline Canada roster at World Junior Summer Showcase

**NHL/ Websites**

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets' lineup outlook: Elvis Merzlikins a backup? Yegor Chinakhov a third-liner?

By Aaron Portzline – July 25, 2025

It's still two months until the Columbus Blue Jackets open training camp, and GM Don Waddell remains willing (hoping?) to make moves that will push his young roster forward after a pleasantly surprising finish last season.

But with each passing day, it's less likely that any such move would be substantial enough to shake up the foundation of the roster, so what you see — after an offseason of only moderate upgrades — may well be what you get when the puck drops on the season opener on Oct. 9 in Nashville.

Let's pass the day with a time-tested offseason exercise: bold, moderately informed speculation.

As Blue Jackets fans know all too well, forward lines and defensive pairs are moving targets, but it was clear under first-year Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason last season that if something works, he's not going to mess with it. That has given us insights into where these players will slot going forward, so there shouldn't be quite as much guesswork.

Here goes:

### **F1**

Dmitri Voronkov — Sean Monahan — Kirill Marchenko

In his first three NHL seasons, Marchenko has scored 21, 23 and 31 goals, a mark last season that tied him with Adam Fantilli for the Blue Jackets' lead. He benefited from Monahan's presence at center, but Marchenko took steps to improve his own game, too, most notably his increased drive in battling for pucks. It's not a stretch to think he could be a 40-goal scorer soon.

Monahan is a "lift all boats" player who turned in the second point-per-game season of his career, but his 1.055 points per game (19 goals, 38 assists and 57 points in 54 games) was a career high. The Blue Jackets were a different club with him in the lineup.

Monahan and Marchenko had instant chemistry last season, and Evason rarely tinkered with that combo. It was on the left side of the line where it took a while to settle on Voronkov, but it quickly became one of the best lines in the NHL.

We can say with certainty that Voronkov's spot on that line is not guaranteed. When he signed a two-year extension this summer, it was made clear by Waddell that Voronkov has been challenged to show up in September in the best shape of his career.

It's not a good sign when two different coaches in two years — first Pascal Vincent, then Evason — say that Voronkov "ran out of gas" in the final months of the season, and the numbers have proved it.

If Voronkov's not ready at the start of camp or the start of the season, look for Yegor Chinakhov (despite his trade request) and Kent Johnson getting a shot in that spot.

## **F2**

Boone Jenner — Adam Fantilli — Kent Johnson

Yes, Jenner is on the left side here, for multiple reasons. For me, putting Chinakhov in that spot makes the second line way too inexperienced and not stiff enough on the wings to play defensively. I'm not saying I wouldn't try it, but it looks risky as a mix of players.

The other issue is faceoffs. As you'd expect with a young player, Fantilli has struggled early in his career (41.9 percent). He still needs to take them to get better, of course, but having Jenner on his line will allow a much more aggressive approach.

This needs to be a puck possession line, with Jenner's sturdiness along the wall, Fantilli's strength down low and Johnson's ability to dangle and elude.

You could see the light flicker on early last season for Fantilli, who had three goals in his first 21 games and 28 in his final 61.

If Fantilli continues to rise — he's so driven, that's not much of a question — it won't be long before he starts to draw as much or more ice time than Monahan. For now, he gives the Blue Jackets the best 1-2 punch they've ever had at center ice, and potentially a top-10 combo in the league.

It started to come together for Johnson last season, with career highs in goals (24), assists (33), points (57) and, finally, ice time (17:18). He is a sublime playmaker, and he started to make adjustments last season when it was clear opponents were starting to take a more physical tack with him. That's a good sign.

## **F3**

Yegor Chinakhov — Charlie Coyle — Cole Sillinger

A new-look line, with offseason acquisition Coyle in the middle. After years of waiting on prospects or trying to shape wingers into centers, the Blue Jackets have center depth that is the envy of most teams in the NHL. Coyle may not have the jump of his youth, but he's a steady, competitive third-line center.

We can assume that Chinakhov, given his trade request, would not be pleased with this assignment. But if he's healthy and full of a good attitude, as his agent has insisted, he could easily supplant Voronkov or Jenner on the lines above him. If this is the season he realizes his potential, he could rearrange those top two lines. Yes, he's that talented.

Expect to see Coyle take a ton of situational faceoffs on the right side of the ice, meaning he could step off this line for spot-shifts with others. The Jackets targeted him because they needed a right shot down the middle.

Sillinger has been a jack-of-all-trades for the Blue Jackets so far in his career, and that may be the plan in 2025-26 as well. This represents a move from center to the wing, which is not ideal for him, but he won't complain. He's been a double-digit goal scorer in three of his first four seasons, and at 22 years old, he's nearing 300 games (286) already in his career.

#### **F4**

Miles Wood — Isac Lundestrom — Mathieu Olivier

Another new-look line. Wood came over (with Coyle) in a trade with Colorado, while Lundestrom was signed as a free agent after Justin Danforth signed with Buffalo.

Lundestrom had better be ready for some smoke. If this line plays as expected, with Wood rattling bones on the forecheck and Olivier lording over the league as the top heavyweight, there could be plenty of combative shifts.

Wood needs a rebound year in the worst way. He missed two months with a back injury and played only 37 games, scoring a career-low four goals. The Blue Jackets aren't expecting him to score double-digit goals, though. They want him to drive the forecheck to a physical level it hasn't been in years.

Olivier was highly regarded as a fighter already, but took his game to new heights with 18 goals, 32 points and 139 penalty minutes, all career highs. It will be hard to replicate the offensive production in this spot, but don't rule out him playing higher in the lineup.

Lundestrom has played under the radar in Anaheim the last five seasons, but he's a positionally sound center who offers more consistency than flash. He scored 16 goals in his first full NHL season (2021-22), but has scored 13 goals in 186 games (over three seasons) since.

#### **Extras**

Zach Aston-Reese, Mykael Pyyhtiä

How smart does Aston-Reese look now? After playing with Pittsburgh, Anaheim, Toronto and Detroit, and spending much of the 2023-24 season in the AHL, Aston-Reese recognized the situation in Columbus and pushed to sign an extension early last season. He and Wood will likely go toe-to-toe for that fourth-line spot. ...

Pyyhtiä remains a restricted free agent. He might be looking for a one-way deal, while the club would prefer flexibility.

#### **D1**

Zach Werenski — Dante Fabbro

Blue Jackets fans have seen Werenski's high level of play for several seasons, but he went next-level last season and was finally recognized on a national scene. Werenski finished second in Norris Trophy voting as the league's best defenseman. He had his first point-a-game season (23 goals, 59 assists and 82 points in 81 games) and became the first blueliner to lead the Blue Jackets in scoring.

What could he possibly do as an encore? Last season, Werenski was motivated to represent Team USA in the 4 Nations Face-Off. This season, he's expected to represent the red, white and blue at the Olympics, so there's another carrot before him.

The spot to the right of Werenski was a revolving door ever since Seth Jones was traded after the 2020-21 season. That changed in early November when Fabbro was claimed off waivers from Nashville. They played together from Fabbro's first game and seemed to have immediate chemistry.

What was Nashville thinking? Fabbro set career highs in goals (nine), points (26) and plus-minus (+23).

It may seem like playing next to Werenski would be easy, but it's not for everybody. Fabbro reads the play quickly enough to keep up with Werenski, and he's an excellent passer out of the defensive zone. The key to their success — being able to play heavy minutes, producing, possessing — is that they don't spend much time defending.

## **D2**

Denton Mateychuk — Ivan Provorov

When the Blue Jackets swung and missed on finding a top-four, right-side defenseman via trade or free agency, they circled back and re-signed Provorov, a lefty who is comfortable on the right side, to a seven-year, \$59.5 million contract.

With Provorov's durability and the NHL's soaring salary cap, it's a deal that could look entirely appropriate in a couple of seasons. But there was clearly a cost (term, dollars) to the Blue Jackets for shopping around.

This doesn't always happen, but Mateychuk was exactly as expected when he hit the NHL: quick, decisive, smart and responsible. It was clear in training camp that Mateychuk was among their best six defensemen, but he didn't arrive until late December. The Blue Jackets were a better team with him in the lineup.

It will be interesting to see what Mateychuk looks like in his Year 2. He may never be considered a purely offensive defenseman, but most expect he'll start showing more aggressive creativity with the puck.

Dug this up earlier this summer: the Blue Jackets, when Werenski-Fabbro, Mateychuk-Provorov were in the lineup, went 26-13-2 and allowed 2.95 goals-against. When they weren't, the Jackets were 14-20-7 and allowed 3.56 per game. This is not the substandard top four many would have you believe.

## **D3**

Damon Severson — Erik Gudbranson

The prevailing opinion was that Severson would be much more comfortable in his second season in Columbus, that the pressure to live up to his big-ticket contract would have faded. But he was no better — maybe worse — than in his first season.

This is a situation that has to be fixed. With six (!) years remaining on his contract, at \$6.25 million per season, Severson is virtually untradeable and buyout-proof for at least two or three more years. There's a good player in there, and he's shown it in Columbus. Just not consistently enough.

We're guessing nobody was more relieved by Provorov's big contract than Severson, who is now the third-highest-paid defenseman on the club. Now, if he can play the left side (he's a right shot) and find comfort in lower minutes and expectations, maybe he can get his confidence back.

Gudbranson gives the Blue Jackets some snarl along the blue line and at net front, and he's an excellent penalty killer. This is not a physical group of defensemen, so Gudbranson's presence is key. Olivier handles most of the fisticuffs, but Gudbranson is one heck of a second option.

Don't expect Gudbranson to skate with the puck much, and he'll try to get it off his stick as quickly as possible. That's going to put pressure on Severson to be the mobile skater who can help get them out of trouble.

## **Extra**

Jake Christiansen

Not many would be surprised if Christiansen played his way into a regular role, just as he did last season. He's a do-no-harm defender who gained Evason's trust during training camp last season and spent a lot of time (68 games) on the left side of the third pair. Severson's contract may give him first dibs on that spot, but it's very much up for grabs.

## **G1**

Jet Greaves

Obviously, this is a speculation. But it says here that if Greaves has a solid training camp and preseason — nothing more than he's done before, by the way — we'll predict that he'll get every chance to be the Blue Jackets starting goaltender in his first NHL season. The safest bet, probably, is that it'll be a 50/50 split, but we'll see.

It remains a mystery why the Blue Jackets waited so long to recall Greaves from AHL Cleveland, but he stated his case in the final weeks of the season. Greaves would have been part of the organization's lore had they made the playoffs. He won his final five starts, allowing only four goals total, as the Blue Jackets fell just two points short of a top-eight finish.

It is clear from his teammates' words how much they enjoy playing with Greaves in net.

Elvis Merzlikins

It's in there. If you've watched Merzlikins through the years, you know there's an athletic, quick-twitch goaltender inside the 31-year-old Latvian. And there were times last season, including the Stadium Series outdoor game, where he was excellent. But whenever you think Merzlikins is about to launch, there's a backslide.

So it was last season, when he continued to have his unfortunate on-ice eruptions, shattering sticks, berating teammates, taunting opponents, etc. Greaves outplayed him, but he took his job for many reasons late last season.

Evason has been very supportive of Merzlikins, often referring to him as one of the club's leaders.

Good question: how would Merzlikins handle it if he's not the starter?

## The Hockey Writers / 2025-26 Blue Jackets Roster Projection 3.0: Navigating a Trade Request

**By Mark Scheig – July 27, 2025**

It would surprise no one if the Columbus Blue Jackets enter 2025 Training Camp with what they currently have. Most of their major business appears to be done.

However, one and perhaps two major questions continue to hover over the Blue Jackets as we approach the end of July. The answer to these questions could reveal what the opening day roster will look like.

When we last left this exercise, the Blue Jackets completed a trade with the Colorado Avalanche to acquire both Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood. Both players are expected to play a key role in the bottom six.

Since then, the Blue Jackets have made news on multiple fronts. On top of another signing in their forward ranks, the team now has to navigate a trade request that has gone public. Let's talk about it all.

### **Forwards**

We'll start with the trade request. Through his agent, Yegor Chinakhov has requested a trade from the Blue Jackets. As of this writing, he is still on the team.

There is a chance Chinakhov starts the 2025-26 season on the Blue Jackets if a suitable trade isn't available. Therefore, we will continue to project him in the lineup until otherwise proven.

For Chinakhov, he didn't like the way things were handled after returning from injury. While he was able to return for a handful of games, he found himself on the outside looking in down the stretch of the season.

All indications point to Chinakhov being completely behind his injury. He's in the midst of preparing for the upcoming season as he normally would.

GM Don Waddell isn't going to simply give Chinakhov away. The player does have value given what he can bring to the table. Teams are likely calling the Blue Jackets perhaps thinking the price will be lower given both the injury history and the trade request.

That's not the case. Trading Chinakhov would leave an important opening on the roster. The Blue Jackets aren't interested in futures. They would want a player that can help their roster now.

Since the market is at a standstill given numerous factors, getting now help won't be easy. That's why the potential of Chinakhov starting the season with the Blue Jackets is a strong possibility. As we've discussed before, it's in everyone's best interest to make it work for now. It's also the easiest solution available at this time.



Chinakhov was a top-six player last season before the injury. He wants to be in that position again. Should he come to camp ready to work, he could find himself in that position again.

The reality of the Chinakhov situation is that he could play a variety of roles on the team. He's now the ultimate wildcard of the rest of the offseason. Until there is final clarity, we really won't have a sense of what the opening-night roster could look like.

That's not the only unknown at this point. Rumors continue to swirl around that despite recently signing a contract, the Blue Jackets might still be interested in trading Dmitri Voronkov.

This started back when the Blue Jackets were in on trying to acquire Noah Dobson. Reports suggested the Islanders wanted Voronkov in a potential deal.

When Dobson chose the Montreal Canadiens coupled with Voronkov signing his new contract, that talk quieted down. However, his name is being reported as out there. If that is true, the question is why.

First, the Blue Jackets have already established that they're willing to listen on Voronkov. There are questions about his conditioning given the way his last couple of seasons ended. Is there enough concern that they think this will be a continuous problem?

Big, power forwards aren't often available. Teams are going to inquire if there's even a remote chance of making a deal. Voronkov has seasons of 18 and 23 goals in the NHL. At 6-foot-5 and hovering around 230 pounds, he's only scratching the surface of just how good he could be.

Potential teams who want to trade for him also have cost certainty for the next two seasons. They'd also have team control as he's an RFA after the contract expires.

The only way we feel Voronkov is traded is if an impact player comes the other way. Dobson would have fit that description. While it's highly unlikely a player of Dobson's caliber is available, you have to wonder if the Blue Jackets are still concerned about a particular area of their team that they want immediately addressed.

Dmitri Voronkov Columbus Blue Jackets

Dmitri Voronkov's name has been in rumors even after signing his new contract. (Amy Irvin / The Hockey Writers)

Like Chinakhov, we will project Voronkov into this lineup since he is under contract.

Away from the trade chatter for a moment, the Blue Jackets did sign Isac Lundestrom to a two-year contract. He adds experience and speed to the bottom-six. He is expected to play in the Sean Kuraly role and is \$1.2 million cheaper than what Kuraly made.

Here is how we think the Blue Jackets could look come opening night.

Yegor Chinakhov – Sean Monahan – Kirill Marchenko

Boone Jenner – Adam Fantilli – Kent Johnson

Cole Sillinger – Charlie Coyle – Dmitri Voronkov

Miles Wood – Isac Lundestrom – Mathieu Olivier

Others in the running include Zach Aston-Reese, Jack Williams, Mikael Pyyhtia and Luca Del Bel Belluz. There are a couple of assumptions here.

Chinakhov could slot in anywhere in the top-nine. He does have an opportunity to win that spot next to Monahan. His camp will obviously be a focal point.

Voronkov too could end up in a variety of roles. But that shapes up to be quite the third line if the Blue Jackets choose to go this route.

Not only is there center depth on all lines, there's center depth on the wings too. If someone gets tossed from the dot, Jenner and Fantilli could step up. The same can be said for Sillinger and Coyle.

The Blue Jackets are also better prepared to handle an injury at center should it come up. Can you honestly remember a time when the center depth was better or this deep in franchise history?

The Blue Jackets were among the highest scoring teams in the NHL in 2024-25. There's no reason to think they can't do it again. But let's see how the Chinakhov and to a lesser extent the Voronkov situations play out. Those 12 could easily be the ones in the opening night lineup come Oct 9 in Nashville.

## **Defense**

The defense has been clarified from the last time we spoke. We now know that the Blue Jackets didn't extend a qualifying offer to Jordan Harris. He has since signed with the Boston Bruins.

The Blue Jackets circled back to Ivan Provorov and gave him a seven-year contract. The market conditions forced the team into meeting the asking price here.

The Blue Jackets also made a couple of depth signings when they brought on Dysin Mayo and Christian Jaros. They fit the role of injury replacement and callup options.

Here is how the Blue Jackets' defense looks.

Zach Werenski – Dante Fabbro

Denton Mateychuk – Ivan Provorov

Damon Severson – Erik Gudbranson

Jake Christiansen

Others in the running include Mayo, Jaros and Daemon Hunt. Hunt and the Blue Jackets continue talking about a new contract. He was extended a qualifying offer as an RFA.

What is interesting about the pairs above is that the second pair is both left handed while the third pair is both right handed. How coach Dean Evason elects to deploy his defensemen will be a key storyline of camp.

This feels like a matchup and game situation kind of thing. There is some flexibility to make changes especially if the Blue Jackets need to shut things down or open things up looking for a goal.

The Blue Jackets have to get the version of Damon Severson that makes them a better team. He shouldn't be under as much pressure knowing that both Werenski and Provorov make more than him now. He has shown he can be the best player on the ice on certain nights. Now can he and the team find that more consistently?

### **Goaltending**

The Blue Jackets are in position to deploy Elvis Merzlikins and Jet Greaves this season. What remains unknown is who will come up in case of illness or injury?

Waddell said back at the draft he was looking for someone to fill that role of being on the Monsters and then coming up to the Blue Jackets. Nothing has materialized yet. Teams are reluctant to give up depth knowing how important that can be.

This is a situation where watching the waiver wire in training camp could yield the answer. With teams having to make cuts to their roster, goaltenders will be made available to everyone including the Blue Jackets. We may not know who fills this position until the middle of training camp unless something develops sooner.

As for when we'll publish Roster Projection 4.0, it depends if anything happens between now and the end of August. If not, the next projection will drop at the start of training camp.

In the end, the Blue Jackets are mostly set. Once a couple lingering questions get answered, we'll have the full picture as to what the 2025-26 Blue Jackets will look like.

## The Hockey Writers / Jet Greaves Deserves to Be the Blue Jackets' Starting Goaltender

**By Matthew Buhrmann – July 25, 2025**

The biggest question mark for the Columbus Blue Jackets heading into the 2025-26 season is goaltending. The question remains: who deserves the main starting spot, Jet Greaves or Elvis Merzlikins?

There was a logjam of three goaltenders earlier this offseason until the Blue Jackets traded Daniil Tarasov to the Florida Panthers for a fifth-round pick in the 2025 NHL Draft. That pick, No. 160 overall, became Oshawa Generals center Owen Griffin, a nice pick for Columbus.

With Tarasov gone, it looks like Greaves and Merzlikins will be the goalie tandem heading into training camp.

### **Goaltending Must Be Better**

The Blue Jackets gave up 267 goals in the 2024-25 regular season, the eighth-worst total in the NHL. While defensive lapses contributed, inconsistent goaltending was a big factor. Better netminding earlier in the season could have helped close the gap and maybe earned the team a playoff spot despite the defensive struggles.

Having a consistent goalie is very important, and Greaves showed at the end of last season that he could be that guy. Now the question is, can he do it for a full season?

If this team wants to make the playoffs for the first time since 2020, the goaltending and, of course, the overall defensive game, have to be better.

I'm here to tell you Greaves deserves the starter's role, and here's why.

### **Greaves' Unreal Run to End Last Season**

Greaves was outstanding down the stretch last season, keeping the Blue Jackets in the playoff race until the very end. Early in the season, when Merzlikins was injured, Greaves was up and down but stepped up every time he was called on, especially at the end of the season.

Between the American Hockey League's (AHL) Cleveland Monsters and the Blue Jackets, Greaves went 5-0-0 in just seven days late last season. That stretch included four games in five nights, an unreal stat that shows his durability and ability to perform in high-level moments.

Both of those qualities are of a future franchise goalie.

In 11 NHL games with Columbus, Greaves posted a 1.91 goals-against average (GAA) and a .938 save percentage (SV%), finishing 7-2-2.

In the AHL, he played 40 games for Cleveland with a 2.62 GAA and a .920 SV%, going 21-11-10. He also performed well in the AHL playoffs, posting a 2.67 GAA and .912 SV% in six games with a 3-3-0 record.

The numbers back it up, but the way the team rallied around him is what really stood out.

### **Merzlikins Can Be a Solid Backup**

I like Merzlikins, but at this point, I just don't think he's consistent enough to be a starter. Last season, he went 26–21–5 with a 3.18 GAA and a .892 SV%. He had good stretches, but there were also way too many off nights. He can still be a solid backup goalie. He has good size, plays the puck well, and has shown flashes of being a difference-maker.

When looking back at my Blue Jackets 2024–25 grades article for goaltenders, I gave Greaves an A, Merzlikins a C-, and Tarasov a D+. That about sums up the gap we saw in performance between them last season.

Off the ice, he took on more of a leadership role this past season and made progress in the locker room. He admitted that he had been more closed off in previous seasons, but that last season's chemistry helped open him up:

"When I came here for the start of the season, the training camp, the locker room was different. I saw the locker room was completely different. This locker room, what we have today, we have love going on there," said Merzlikins. "And from start of season to the end of season, it got just better and better and better. Two or three years ago, I didn't feel that, maybe it was me because I was kind of closed in, in my own world."

Merzlikins is under contract through the 2026–27 season, but this might be his last real chance to prove himself in Columbus. I hope he does, but I think Greaves is more likely to take over. Merzlikins could end up being a mid-season trade option or even a buyout candidate next summer.

### **Greaves Is Calm & Smart**

Greaves is calm and smart in net. He reads the play well, tracks pucks through screens, and stays composed under pressure. At 6-foot-0, he's a bit smaller than most goalies, but he makes up for it with great positioning, anticipation, and athleticism. He can still improve his puck-handling, but he's a smart player who understands the game well.

Dobber Prospects summed it up nicely in their offseason grade for Greaves:

"Greaves has really blossomed as a pro, leapfrogging more than a few players who were more highly-touted than him. It goes to show that at 18, you just don't know what you're getting in a goaltender. In fact, even judging a goalie at 21 is hit and miss. Greaves was never drafted, and he doesn't have ideal size (just 6-0). But he's worked his way up from anonymity in the ECHL to post improving numbers for three consecutive years. He makes up for his size with positioning and anticipation, not to mention above-average agility. He has made NHL appearances in three straight seasons, culminating in 11 games last season and boasting a 0.938 SV%. What's more, he has been clutch, actually improving his SV% to 0.955 in the third period. Greaves' progress makes for a great story, and given the struggles of Elvis Merzlikins and Daniil Tarasov, he has a good chance of sneaking onto the NHL team and stealing a job."

When looking at these stats above, why not keep the story going with this young, determined netminder?

Greaves has played just over 20 career NHL games, so basing everything strictly on stats is a little tricky. But with Merzlikins still not figuring it out after five seasons, why not give Greaves the chance?

### **Greaves's Age & Upside Make Sense**

At 24 years old, Greaves is young and has more to prove. He's played only 21 NHL games so far, with a 10-9-2 record, 2.62 GAA, and .918 SV%. He's logged 177 games in the AHL and has a strong track record there.

Greaves' contract expires after this season, so this is a perfect time for him to prove he deserves to be signed again and given a bigger role. He has all the tools to succeed. His rebound control is solid; he reads plays well and stays calm under pressure. Though a bit smaller, he's very athletic and moves well in net. His calm style helps him track pucks through screens and make timely saves.

Why not give him a full chance? The Merzlikins project hasn't worked out the way Columbus hoped, and it's time to see what Greaves can do as the starter. He's younger, hungrier, and more in sync with the team's future.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Must Learn Important Lessons From Capitals

**By Mark Scheig – July 25, 2025**

We've looked at the Carolina Hurricanes. We reviewed where things stand with the New Jersey Devils. It's now time to check in with the reigning Metropolitan Division champion Washington Capitals.

Welcome to Part 3 of our 2025 Columbus Blue Jackets' Summer Series. We are comparing them to everyone in the Eastern Conference to try to get a sense of where they stand as an organization.

If the Blue Jackets hope to take the next all-important step in their journey, they would be wise to take a page out of the Capitals' handbook. The Capitals have been a model of consistency since the day Alex Ovechkin stepped into the NHL.

### **Setting the Scene**

What has Ovechkin meant to the Capitals? We would need tens of thousands of words to measure his full impact on the franchise. He will go down as one of the greatest players ever.

Besides rewriting the record book, Ovechkin has helped the Capitals win an astounding 11 division titles and three President's Trophies in his storied career. Of course they hit the jackpot in 2018 when they defeated the Vegas Golden Knights to win the franchise's first Stanley Cup.

In such a remarkable career, there are lessons that can be learned from it. Remember when the questions about Ovechkin centered around if he'd ever win the Stanley Cup? His teams saw some playoff success but also saw their fair share of complete heartbreak.

It wasn't until that unforgettable 2017-18 season that the Capitals were finally able to break through. Even in the midst of their run, they had moments in which it looked like their season would end.

The Blue Jackets had the Capitals in a 2-0 hole going back to Columbus. Game 3 at Nationwide Arena went to overtime with the Blue Jackets just one goal away from a 3-0 series lead.

Then Lars Eller happened.

That moment flipped the switch for the Capitals. They needed that moment to generate the momentum to make their run through the playoffs. Even despite all the good things they did up to that point, the Eller goal will go down as one of the biggest turning points in franchise history.

The Capitals went on to win four straight from the Blue Jackets to win the series 4-2. Then to compound their momentum, they exorcised the demon known to them as the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The series was 3-2 Capitals with Game 6 in overtime. The Penguins usually found a way to make magic in those situations. Not this time.

Evgeny Kuznetsov beat Matt Murray to help the Capitals advance to the Eastern Conference Final. In its own way, that goal will be remembered as one of their biggest goals in franchise history.

It took Ovechkin 13 seasons to get to the pinnacle. As great as he was, it was ultimately those around him that propelled the Capitals to the ultimate greatness.

This is where the Blue Jackets can learn valuable lessons from the Capitals. Not only do the Blue Jackets want to be a model of consistency like the Capitals have been, they want to eventually climb to the top.

In order for the Blue Jackets to get there, they need to build a team that can do so. How do they compare to the Capitals now? It's clear they have some lessons to learn.

## **Forwards**

How have the Capitals been able to sustain this kind of consistency in being one of the best in the Metropolitan Division for so long? They have star power. But more importantly, they showed an ability to adapt and change when it was necessary.

Look no further than the Capitals' center depth. Knowing they needed to get younger and faster, they underwent an on the fly retooling of their roster. It has captured the full attention of the NHL.

Teams normally boast their own, home-grown talent when looking at their top-six forwards. In Pierre-Luc Dubois and Dylan Strome, the Capitals went outside the organization to address two of the most important positions on the ice.

Dubois was acquired when the Capitals traded Darcy Kuemper to the Los Angeles Kings. Strome was not given a qualifying offer by the Chicago Blackhawks which opened the door for Washington to sign him as a free agent.

What makes this so fascinating is that many thought the Capitals' contention window was closing fast. Instead, not only did they extend their window, they're showing everyone they're still a force to be reckoned with.

Replacing Nicklas Backstrom would not be easy. The Capitals saw a unique opportunity in trading for Dubois given things with the Kings weren't working as expected. Coach Spencer Carbery famously said he wanted every opportunity to work with Dubois and was excited for the challenge.

Dubois responded with a 20-goal, 66-point season in the Capitals' top-six. His 46 assists and 66 points were career highs. He also enjoyed a breakout season defensively on a more structured team. At least for the first season, this gamble has paid off as he was one of the better two-way centers in the NHL.

As for Strome, he enjoyed by far his best offensive season while showing why he was the third-overall pick back in 2015. His 29 goals and 82 points helped the Capitals become the second-highest scoring team in the Eastern Conference only behind the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The Capitals were one of just a handful of teams to score more goals than the Blue Jackets' potent offense. Besides Dubois, Strome and Ovechkin, Tom Wilson secured his first 30-goal season and had a career-high 65 points. Connor McMichael broke out in a big way with 26 goals and 57 points.

Then there is big 6-foot-6 Aliaksei Protas. He personally torched the Blue Jackets in 2024-25. When the Capitals won 2-1 over the Blue Jackets in overtime in Columbus, Protas scored both goals.



Of note, the Blue Jackets couldn't handle Protas' size and skill. He went on to a 30-goal season and helped solidify the Capitals as one of the more imposing top-six groups in the NHL. He's just 24 years old and has a world of upside.

Another important aspect of the Capitals sustaining their success is finding talent in the draft who can make an impact in their lineup. The latest example of this will be Ryan Leonard. The eighth-overall pick of the 2023 NHL Draft made his debut last season. While he was clearly adjusting to the league, you could see why they think highly of him.

Given the strength of the Capitals' top-six, Leonard can settle into a bottom-six role for now while gaining needed experience. This part of the Capitals' gameplan deserves more attention. The same thing happened to McMichael and then he enjoyed his breakout.

The other members of the Capitals' bottom-six know their role and are effective in their approach. Players like Anthony Beauvillier, Brandon Duhaime, Nic Dowd and former first rounder Hendrix Lapierre balance the lineup making the forward group one of the most dangerous coming into the new season. It will be interesting to see how they plan to utilize Justin Sourdif after acquiring him in a trade.

As good as the Capitals are, the Blue Jackets have good pieces of their own. Adam Fantilli perhaps has the most upside when comparing the two teams. Sean Monahan's line was one of the best in the NHL especially when playing with Kirill Marchenko and Dmitri Voronkov. Kent Johnson is ready to take another step in his overall game.

The Blue Jackets' bottom-six is better with the additions of Charlie Coyle, Isac Lundestrom and Miles Wood. Coyle and Wood each know what it's like to play against the Capitals on a consistent basis.

Where the Capitals hold the edge is the experience factor. They are a constant presence in the playoffs and have the experience to back it up. Their overall combination of star power and approach to the roster has them again in position to make a run in the East.

The Blue Jackets did win a pair of games against the Capitals by a combined score of 11-1 at the end of last season. At that time, the Capitals didn't have as much on the line. But it did give a glimpse of what the Blue Jackets hope to become over time.

The Capitals' forward group is still a major force. The Blue Jackets are building to become a force someday. They have the young talent to get there but will need to apply important lessons from the Capitals to get to the next level.

## **Defense**

Not only were the Capitals one of the better goal-scoring teams, they more than held their own defensively. Only the Devils allowed fewer goals than the Capitals in 2024-25.

The top pairing of Jakob Chychrun and John Carlson anchor the Capitals. Chychrun scored 20 goals and enjoyed the best season of his career to date. Carlson continues to be a model of consistency. In his age 35 season, he recorded his second consecutive 50-point season and has only missed three regular-season games since the start of the 2023-24 season.

The rest of the Capitals' defense could look something like this.

Rasmus Sandin – Matt Roy

Martin Fehervary – Trevor van Riemsdyk

Sandin like many others enjoyed a career season. Although Roy missed some time due to injury, he recorded a career-high 21 assists while playing his usual shutdown role.

Fehervary joined in on the career-season parade and earned a massive contract extension for his efforts. He signed a seven-year, \$42 million contract extension that won't start until 2026-27. van Riemsdyk, the brother of James, filled his role next to Fehervary nicely giving the Capitals good balance throughout their pairs.

On top of having good players, Carbery's approach deserves praise here. They utilize a fast, forechecking style. This helps them create odd-man rushes. But more importantly, it limits the amount of time the opposition has with the puck. Part of the reason why the Capitals have a strong defense is because they have the right balance of size, speed and skill all over their lineup. Once they have the puck, it's hard to get it back.

What will be interesting to see is if the Capitals can maintain the pace they set last year with so many guys having career seasons. Is some regression coming? This group will have another year together which will help with the familiarity and chemistry.

The Blue Jackets also have the familiarity part down bringing back Dante Fabbro and Ivan Provorov. The presence of Zach Werenski does elevate the defensive core.

The Capitals for now do get the nod here until the Blue Jackets can prove they can limit their goals against. Like the forward group, the experience factor plays a major role on defense. The Capitals are a model of consistency. The Blue Jackets want to follow in those footsteps. But they are right there especially given the best player between the teams is Werenski. They just have to go out and prove it now.

### **Goaltending**

The Capitals get the nod here too. They will bring back the duo of Logan Thompson and Charlie Lindgren. Thompson won 31 of his 42 starts while boasting a goals-against under 2.50 and a save percentage of .910.

While Lindgren didn't have as great of numbers as Thompson, he still started 38 games and won over half his starts. The Capitals knew what they were getting and were able to depend on both for consistent starts.

The Blue Jackets weren't able to get into a consistent rhythm in net. Their best goaltender statistically was their third goalie in Jet Greaves. While Elvis Merzlikins was better, he still has room to improve. Daniil Tarasov's inconsistency ultimately led to a trade to the Florida Panthers.

One of the Blue Jackets' biggest questions is how will the goaltending shake out. Merzlikins and Greaves appear to be the duo. Can there be enough of an overall improvement to break through to the playoffs? If the season starts slow, how long will they wait to act on anything?

### **Conclusion**

The Capitals are a model of consistency. They're deep at all areas of the ice and have success to show for it. The Blue Jackets are more than competitive but will have the task of showing everyone just how much they've improved.

The games between the two teams are usually competitive and nasty. That should continue in 2025-26.

In the end, the Capitals have the leg up overall. But the Blue Jackets potential and young talent will make this upcoming season interesting to watch. If the Blue Jackets can learn and apply some lessons from the Capitals, they'll significantly close the gap on them.

The Blue Jackets are on the way up. The Capitals will make for a good measuring stick to see how much progress has been made. Stay tuned for Part 4 of the series as we will turn our attention to the New York Rangers.

## [TSN.ca / Gudbranson: Blue Jackets 'still bitter' about missing playoffs](#)

By TSN.ca Staff – July 25, 2025

It's been three months since the end of the 2024-25 regular season and the Columbus Blue Jackets are still thinking about what could've been.

After finishing last in the Metropolitan Division the previous two seasons, the Blue Jackets were firmly in the playoff hunt last year.

They were in it until the final games of the season, but the Montreal Canadiens edged them out by two points for the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. '

Blue Jackets defenceman Erik Gudbranson missed all but 16 games last season with a shoulder injury after getting hurt in Columbus' third game against the Florida Panthers on Oct. 15 and did not return to the lineup until March 24. He made it back in time for the last push for a playoff spot but it wasn't enough.

"We're still bitter about how our season ended," Gudbranson told NHL.com on Monday. "We felt like we should have got in. We left some doors open we should have closed. From an honest way, we were looking at that as we kind of shot ourselves in the foot here and there, but that still very much burns throughout the summer. Guys are attacking their summers very purposefully this year."

Playing with heavy hearts after the tragic deaths of star forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother Matthew on Aug. 29, Gudbranson said it changed how the team treated one another.

"Within the dressing room, with everything that happened with the Gaudreaus, we were just flat-out better people to each other," Gudbranson said. "Not to say we were bad previously, but that brought in a culture of caring and just being better teammates. That obviously translated on the ice. We were just better people all around."

Centre Sean Monahan, a close friend of Gaudreau, took home the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy this season and was surprised with the award by Gaudreau's widow, Meredith.

"Winning that Bill Masterton Trophy means a lot to me," Monahan said on June 5. "It's a real big honour. It's a lot of special names on that trophy and the meaning behind it is something I take great pride in in day-to-day life being on a team, being a father, a husband. It's a special thing and obviously fresh right now, but something I'm definitely going to be reflecting on a lot."

On the ice, several Blue Jackets players took steps forward under head coach Dean Evason, who was hired last off-season.

Defenceman Zach Werenski had a career season with 23 goals and 82 points in 81 games and finished second in Norris Trophy voting while winger Kirill Marchenko finished second in team scoring with 31 goals and 74 points.

Forward Kent Johnson, the No. 5 pick in 2021, broke out with 24 goals and 57 points while centre Adam Fantilli, the No. 3 pick in the 2023 draft, had 31 goals and 54 points in 82 games.

“We played a lot better than we had in previous years and that goes to our attention to detail and just the growth of the group,” Gudbranson said. “Our new coaching staff led by Dean were not hard on us, but very direct and we were purposeful in how we attacked every single day and that made a difference. We got something out of every day this year. Me and Boone weren’t [on the ice] for a long portion of it but we were seeing it.”

## **Bleacher Report / 8 NHL Trade Landing Spots for Yegor Chinakhov Amid Rumors**

**Joe Yerdon – July 28, 2025**

When we reach the late-July/early August part of the NHL offseason, things usually quiet down pretty hard. Fortunately for us this time around, Columbus Blue Jackets forward Yegor Chinakhov decided to spice things up.

Through his agent, Chinakhov made it known that things weren't working out between Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason and himself and it would be best if he found a new team to play for.

At 24 years old, Chinakhov is a player with some upside potential still left to be unearthed and his time in Columbus has shown some upside since he entered the NHL in 2021-2022. With 71 points in 175 games including 34 goals, the raw numbers are curious given his limited minutes, but his advanced numbers last season were very strong.

If that makes Chinakhov sound like a good "buy low" candidate to you, then perhaps one of the teams we've picked out as a possible landing place for him might agree. We'll examine these teams and situations a little closer and see if there's a good fit to be found.

### **Buffalo Sabres**

When Yegor Chinakhov was drafted in the first round by the Columbus Blue Jackets in 2020, their general manager at the time was Jarmo Kekäläinen and at the time, he saw a gifted offensive player with a lot of upside potential.

Kekäläinen is now a senior adviser to the Buffalo Sabres which puts Chinakhov firmly in the conversation to be acquired by them. The Sabres have had their eyes open for forward help all summer and have been heavily speculated in forward trade possibilities ever since they traded JJ Peterka to Utah.

Chinakhov fits the description for what the Sabres are looking for out of a forward (skill, speed, etc.) but if there's reason to pause, it's how Chinakhov and Evason didn't see eye to eye. Evason can be a tough coach to play for and Sabres coach Lindy Ruff is cut from the same cloth.

This isn't to say Chinakhov wouldn't be a fit with the Sabres with Ruff behind the bench, a lot of what he does would certainly help them out, but if he's looking for a coach that's maybe not as tough to deal with, maybe Buffalo isn't the right place, whether Kekäläinen is there or not.

### **Colorado Avalanche**

One doesn't necessarily have to worry about what's going on with the Colorado Avalanche, right? They've got Nathan MacKinnon, Cale Makar, Gabriel Landeskog, Martin Nečas, Brock Nelson, Devon Toews...there's a lot to really like about their entire lineup!

There is something a little interesting about their overall depth up front, though in that it raises maybe an extra question or two than it once did. They traded Charlie Coyle and Miles Wood to Columbus for

Gavin Brindley and a pair of draft picks which freed up some cap space but weakened their lineup in general.

You have to wonder if they knew Yegor Chinakhov would be asking for a trade some weeks later if maybe that phone call with Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell would've gone a bit differently. You also wonder if maybe it's worth calling him back to find out if they can work out another deal.

Although the Avalanche added Brindley to the organization, he has one NHL game of experience that came after he signed with Columbus out of the University of Michigan. He had a tough first season in the AHL last year and he'll need more development to get a shot at some NHL time. The Avs also just acquired Danil Gushchin from San Jose for Oskar Olausson in a minor league swap. Gushchin's 18 career NHL games may give him more experience than Brindley, but it's still not a lot.

Adding Chinakhov would give Colorado an instantly NHL-ready player and his \$2.1 million cap hit is not an issue. The Avs are Stanley Cup contenders and rely heavily on their top guys, but experienced depth can be a difference maker in the postseason. Going in against Dallas, Winnipeg, Vegas, Edmonton and everyone else in the West with lineup questions isn't a good plan.

### **Boston Bruins**

If the Bruins are going to get out of the Atlantic Division basement, they're going to need a lot of help to do that, especially up front. Adding Yegor Chinakhov would give them the depth they sorely need.

Boston added Viktor Arvidsson this summer to bolster their offense, but beyond David Pastrnak, Elias Lindholm and Morgan Geekie, they need a lot more. They're in need of a bounce back season from Casey Mittelstadt and a boost in offense from Pavel Zacha as well as hope their bottom six can do more than grind up opponents.

Adding a bit more skill in Chinakhov would at least provide someone capable of adding offense elsewhere in the lineup. The Bruins did a lot of work to add to their bottom six in free agency signing Tanner Jeannot, Sean Kuraly, Michael Eyssmont and Matej Blumel, but the kind of goal production you can expect from them is minimal.

Adding Chinakhov isn't a cure-all for what ails the Bruins, but he'd provide a more skilled option for their lineup than what they've got right now.

### **New Jersey Devils**

A team to keep a close eye on next season will be the New Jersey Devils and if they can add one more forward, like Yegor Chinakhov, our curiosities about them will be collectively piqued.

The Devils will have Jack Hughes and his surgically repaired shoulder back and they've already seen Luke Hughes take big steps on defense and a healthy Dougie Hamilton to go with the rest of their solid players up front like Nico Hischier, Timo Meier and Jesper Bratt make them formidable to everyone around the league. They've already added Connor Brown and Evgenii Dadonov so they've got a strong group of forwards.

But if there's a lesson the Devils learned from last season is that you can never have enough good players around. Injuries wrecked them last season and you can't help but wonder how differently things would've gone if they weren't decimated. Jacob Markström's brilliant goaltending in the playoffs against Carolina might've not gone in vain.

Adding Chinakhov to their crew on forward not only makes sense and would be a good fit, but it would also be smart business, too.

### **Pittsburgh Penguins**

We know things don't look ideal on paper for the Pittsburgh Penguins, but if they want to do right by Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Kris Letang, don't they owe it to at least bring in a guy like Yegor Chinakhov for the near future?

OK maybe that's a bit overblown, but when you look at the depth the Penguins lack up front and how they're still talking about potentially trading any one of (or all) of Bryan Rust, Rickard Rakell and Erik Karlsson, adding Chinakhov in the face of all that at least would provide them an actual NHL player to work with. The Pens' situation isn't desperate, but it's already not looking great and training camp is still more than a month and a half away.

Heck, you could argue they could add Chinakhov and not trade any of those guys and it'll still be a dire situation (and it very well could be!) but it'll at least give their veteran players another younger vet to work with as opposed to make it a season-long learn-on-the-job training session for younger guys like Rutger McGroarty and Ville Koivunen.

It's going to be a tough season in Pittsburgh but hey, at least the hope for Gavin McKenna will keep hope alive, right?

### **Nashville Predators**

The Nashville Predators' offseason this year has been quiet, especially compared to a year ago. Last summer's spending spree inspired thoughts of deep playoff runs to come, but they didn't happen, and they were buried in the standings.

A quiet summer this time around isn't helping inspire hope that things will change and the way the lineup looks on paper isn't doing much to alter that view. Adding Yegor Chinakhov to the mix would at least give them someone new to work with and an opportunity to shine.

The Predators scored the second fewest goals in the league a year ago, just four more than last place San Jose, and this summer they made two moves: traded for defenseman Nicolas Hague and signed defenseman Nick Perbix. Running it back up front with virtually the same group as last season (maybe rookie 2023 first-round pick Matthew Wood makes the team) doesn't inspire hope.

Adding Chinakhov to their forward mix would give them another player with skill (something they sorely need) and give them a fighting chance to better their league worst 8.8 percent shooting last year.

### **Vancouver Canucks**



Say whatever you will about the Canucks, they've got an interesting setup cooking for this season. Sure, they lost Pius Suter in free agency, but they brought back Brock Boeser and extended Conor Garland. They also added Evander Kane to give them a bit more grit and scoring up front and if Filip Chytil can return healthy, that's even better. They've got Elias Pettersson and Quinn Hughes to lead them, and Thatcher Demko is locked in at goalie.

That's a good start and a solid group to lead the way, but if you mix in Yegor Chinakhov to that group, they should be able to score a few more goals. It's an eclectic mix the Canucks are working with their lineup and new coach Adam Foote will have his work cut out for him to figure out what the identity will be.

For now, we know they'll have plenty of guys who can press the forecheck and be physical (Kane, Jake DeBrusk, Kiefer Sherwood) and they have plenty of defensemen who can move the puck up the ice (Hughes, Filip Hronek, Marcus Pettersson). Scorers? Elias Pettersson, Boeser, Garland and Kane are the ones. Adding Chinakhov to that mix broadens the lineup enough to give them a decent enough mix.

Can't hurt...right?

### **New York Islanders**

If there's a team in the Eastern Conference that could stand to use an influx of proven NHL talent, it's the Islanders and that's what makes them an ideal landing spot for Yegor Chinakhov.

Even though the Islanders' record isn't necessarily what landed them the No. 1 pick and Matthew Schaefer at the 2025 NHL Draft, the moves they've made the past six months or so have pared down their overall talent. Trading Brock Nelson to Colorado and Noah Dobson to Montréal stand out, and although they added Emil Heineman in the Dobson traded and signed Jonathan Drouin in free agency, the lineup is paper thin.

Finding a way to add Chinakhov to their forward group makes a ton of sense so they're not leaning heavily on inexperienced younger players...unless that's the plan for the season. Even if it was, adding a 24-year-old like Chinakhov would also make sense when planning for the immediate future. They need better depth, period, and he would provide it.

Surrounding Bo Horvat and Mat Barzal with better quality players when the competition in the Metropolitan Division outside of Carolina, Washington and New Jersey is questionable could make the difference between stealing a wild card spot or packing it in early again.

## NHL.com / Schaefer, McKenna headline Canada roster at World Junior Summer Showcase

**By Mike G. Morreale – July 27, 2025**

A gathering of four countries consisting of many of the best under-20 hockey prospects in the world convene in the State of Hockey this week to officially begin the road to the 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship with the World Junior Summer Showcase at Ridder Arena.

Players from the United States, Canada, Finland and Sweden will get together for practices and games from Sunday to Aug. 2 in the first step toward selecting their teams for the 2026 WJC, to be played in Saint Paul and Minneapolis from Dec. 26-Jan 5, 2026.

Canada's roster includes 23 players chosen in the first round of the NHL draft. Additionally, left wing Gavin McKenna, who recently committed to Penn State for 2025-26, is going to be on the radar of every NHL scout and general manager in attendance as the projected No. 1 pick in the 2026 NHL Draft.

Among those invitees for Canada chosen among the top 15 in the NHL Draft: defensemen Sam Dickinson (No. 11, San Jose Sharks, 2024); Zayne Parekh (No. 9, Calgary Flames, 2024), and Matthew Schaefer (No. 1, New York Islanders, 2025), and forwards Berkly Catton (No. 8, Seattle Kraken, 2024), Braeden Cootes (No. 15, Vancouver Canucks, 2025), Benjamin Kindel (No. 11, Pittsburgh Penguins, 2025), Porter Martone (No. 6, Philadelphia Flyers, 2025), Michael Misa (No. 2, San Jose Sharks, 2025), and Jake O'Brien (No. 8, Seattle Kraken, 2025).

Schaefer, of Erie of the Ontario Hockey League, is champing at the bit for another shot to represent his country after he was injured during the first period of a 3-2 shootout loss to Latvia in the 2025 WJC on Dec. 27 after losing his balance chasing down a puck in the opponent's end before crashing into the right goal post with his left shoulder.

He had surgery Dec. 30 and did not play the remainder of the season. He was cleared for contact May 1.

Canada will have eight players returning from the team that finished fifth at the 2025 WJC: goalies Carter George (Los Angeles Kings) and Jack Ivankovic (Nashville Predators); defensemen Dickinson and Schaefer; and forwards Cole Beaudoin (Utah Mammoth), Catton, Martone and McKenna. Canada, which has placed fifth in the past two tournaments, will be coached by Dale Hunter of London (OHL).

The United States looks to win a third straight WJC gold medal for the first time. No team has won three straight tournaments since Canada won five in a row from 2005-09.

The U.S. will have 42 players at the summer showcase. Among them are nine first-round NHL draft picks, and nine from the team that won a gold medal in 2025: forwards James Hagens (Boston Bruins), Teddy Stiga (Nashville Predators), Trevor Connelly (Vegas Golden Knights), Cole Eiserman (New York Islanders), Max Plante (Detroit Red Wings) and Brodie Ziemer (Buffalo Sabres), and defensemen Cole Hutson (Washington Capitals), Logan Hensler (Ottawa Senators) and Adam Kleber (Buffalo Sabres).

Hutson led the U.S. and all defensemen at the tournament with 11 points (three goals, eight assists) in seven games. Hagens tied for the U.S. lead with five goals in seven games and Stiga, his teammate at Boston College, scored in overtime against Finland in the gold-medal game.

USA Hockey will divide the players into two teams (USA White and USA Blue) for evaluation purposes.

Bob Motzko of the University of Minnesota will coach the U.S. after David Carle of the University of Denver had coached the previous two years. Motzko coached the U.S. to the gold medal at the 2017 WJC and bronze in 2018.

"The biggest thing is being able to form our identity ... this is an evaluation, it's messaging, evaluating this talent pool and it's the first step in the process," Motzko said. "It's getting the staff together. We'll have a plan to be aggressive, of course, but it's our messaging to the group."

"The returning group is an excellent mix of talent, toughness and character. These guys going into their second year (of World Juniors) ... those are the kids that take those big steps, like when we had Colin White and Charlie McAvoy (in 2017). Those are the critical players, the second-year players who are sophomores that take that next step."

Sweden, which lost to Czechia in the bronze-medal game at the 2025 WJC, will have a roster that includes top 2026 draft-eligible forwards Viggo Bjorck (5-foot-9, 171 pounds) and Ivar Stenberg (5-10, 179). Each is expected to be chosen in the first round.

Forward Victor Eklund (No. 16, New York Islanders, 2025), who had six points (two goals, four assists) and averaged 17:24 of ice time in seven games at the 2025 WJC, and center Anton Frondell (No. 3, Chicago Blackhawks, 2025) will not participate in the Summer Showcase. Each is expected to be part of the final WJC roster in December.

Finland will have seven players back from the team that won a silver medal at the 2025 WJC, including defenseman Aron Kiviharju (Minnesota Wild), who had three assists and averaged 21:17 of ice time in seven games while serving as captain. Goalie Petteri Rimpinen (Los Angeles Kings), named the best goalie of the 2025 WJC after winning five games and finishing with a 2.34 goals-against average and .933 save percentage, also returns.

Finland forwards Konsta Helenius (Buffalo Sabres) and Emil Hemming (Dallas Stars), each of whom played a pivotal role in the 2025 WJC, will not participate in the showcase but are expected to be named to the final roster in December.

The 2026 WJC will feature 10 teams split into two groups. The U.S. will play in Group A, along with Sweden, Slovakia, Switzerland and Germany, with preliminary-round games at Xcel Energy Center. Group B consists of Finland, Czechia, Canada, Latvia and Denmark, and will play preliminary-round games at 3M Arena at Mariucci.

## **WORLD JUNIOR SUMMER SHOWCASE ROSTERS**

### **USA Team White**

Coach: Bob Motzko

GOALIES: Caleb Heil, Madison, USHL (Tampa Bay Lightning); Nicholas Kempf, Notre Dame, NCAA (Washington Capitals); Patrick Quinlan, Sarnia, OHL (2026 draft eligible)

DEFENSEMEN: Blake Fiddler, Edmonton, WHL (Seattle Kraken); Elliott Groenewold, Quinnipiac, NCAA (Boston Bruins); Tanner Henricks, St. Cloud State, NCAA (Columbus Blue Jackets); Logan Hensler, Wisconsin, NCAA (Ottawa Senators); Cole Hutson, Boston University, NCAA (Washington Capitals); Jacob Rombach, Minnesota, NCAA (Nashville Predators); Dakota Rheaume-Mullen, Michigan, NCAA (2026 draft eligible)

FORWARDS: Kristian Epperson, Denver, NCAA (Los Angeles Kings); James Hagens, Boston College, NCAA (Boston Bruins); William Horcoff, Michigan, NCAA (Pittsburgh Penguins); Jacob Kvasnicka, Penticton, WHL (New York Islanders); Ryker Lee, Michigan State, NCAA (Nashville Predators); William Moore, Boston College, NCAA (Boston Bruins); Max Plante, Minnesota Duluth, NCAA (Detroit Red Wings); Cullen Potter, Arizona State, NCAA (Calgary Flames); Teddy Stiga, Boston College, NCAA (Nashville Predators); Mac Swanson, North Dakota, NCAA (Pittsburgh Penguins); Shane Vansaghi, Michigan State, NCAA (Philadelphia Flyers); Brodie Ziemer, Minnesota, NCAA (Buffalo Sabres)

### **USA Team Blue**

Coach: Bob Motzko

GOALIES: Kambryn Hendrickson, Connecticut, NCAA (2026 draft eligible); John Parsons, Providence, NCAA (2026 draft eligible)

DEFENSEMEN: Henry Brzustewicz, London, OHL (Los Angeles Kings); EJ Emery, North Dakota, NCAA (New York Rangers); Caeden Herrington, Vermont, NCAA (Los Angeles Kings); Adam Kleber, Minnesota Duluth, NCAA (Buffalo Sabres); Luke Osburn, Wisconsin, NCAA (Buffalo Sabres); Will Skahan, Boston College, NCAA (Utah Mammoth); John Whipple, Minnesota, NCAA (Detroit Red Wings)

FORWARDS: Kamil Bednarik, Boston University, NCAA (New York Islanders); Trevor Connelly, Henderson, AHL (Vegas Golden Knights); Cole Eiserman, Boston University, NCAA (New York Islanders); Ben Kevan, Arizona State, NCAA (New Jersey Devils); Cole McKinney, Michigan, NCAA (San Jose Sharks); Mason Moe, Minnesota, NCAA (New Jersey Devils); John Mooney, Minnesota, NCAA (Montreal Canadiens); Jack Murtagh, Boston University, NCAA (Philadelphia Flyers); Aidan Park, Michigan, NCAA (Edmonton Oilers); AJ Spellacy, Windsor, OHL (Chicago Blackhawks); William Zellers, North Dakota, NCAA (Colorado Avalanche)

### **Canada**

Coach: Dale Hunter

GOALIES: Evan Gardner, Saskatoon, WHL (Columbus Blue Jackets); Carter George, Owen Sound, OHL (Los Angeles Kings); Jack Ivankovic, Michigan, NCAA (Nashville Predators); Joshua Ravensbergen, Prince George, WHL (San Jose Sharks)

DEFENSEMEN: Kashawn Aitcheson, Barrie, OHL (New York Islanders); Harrison Brunicke, Kamloops, WHL (Pittsburgh Penguins); Ben Danford, Oshawa, OHL (Toronto Maple Leafs); Sam Dickinson, London, OHL (San Jose Sharks); Charlie Elick, Tri-City, WHL (Columbus Blue Jackets); Spencer Gill, Blainville-Boisbriand, QMJHL (Philadelphia Flyers); Henry Mews, Michigan, NCAA (Calgary Flames); Zayne Parekh, Calgary Flames; Owen Protz, Brantford, OHL (Montreal Canadiens); Cameron Reid, Kitchener, OHL (Nashville Predators); Matthew Schaefer, Erie, OHL (New York Islanders); Tarin Smith, Everett, WHL (Anaheim Ducks)

FORWARDS: Cole Beaudoin, Barrie, OHL (Utah Mammoth); Sacha Boisvert, Boston University, NCAA (Chicago Blackhawks); Justin Carbonneau, Blainville-Boisbriand, QMJHL (St. Louis Blues); Berkly Catton, Spokane, WHL (Seattle Kraken); Braeden Cootes, Seattle, WHL (Vancouver Canucks); Michael Hage, Michigan, NCAA (Montreal Canadiens); Ollie Josephson, Red Deer, WHL (Seattle Kraken); Benjamin Kindel, Calgary, WHL (Pittsburgh Penguins); Cayden Lindstrom, Michigan State, NCAA (Columbus Blue Jackets); Brady Martin, Sault Ste. Marie, OHL (Nashville Predators); Porter Martone, Michigan State, NCAA (Philadelphia Flyers); Gavin McKenna, Penn State, NCAA (2026 draft eligible); Michael Misa, Saginaw, OHL (San Jose Sharks); Jake O'Brien, Brantford, OHL (Seattle Kraken); Terik Parascak, Prince George, WHL (Washington Capitals); Cole Reschny, North Dakota, NCAA (Calgary Flames); Ryder Ritchie, Boston University, NCAA (Minnesota Wild); Malcolm Spence, Michigan, NCAA (New York Rangers); Marek Vanacker, Brantford, OHL (Chicago Blackhawks); Carson Wetsch, Kelowna, WHL (San Jose Sharks)

## **Sweden**

Coach: Magnus Havelid

GOALIES: Carl Axelsson, Austin, NAHL (2026 draft eligible); Love Harenstam, Sodertalje, SWE-2 (St. Louis Blues); Herman Liv, Almtuna, SWE-2 (2026 draft eligible);

DEFENSEMEN: Sascha Boumedienne, Boston University, NCAA (Winnipeg Jets); Gabriel Eliasson, Barrie, OHL (Ottawa Senators); Alfons Freij, Timra, SWE (Winnipeg Jets); Viggo Gustafsson, AIK, SWE-2 (Nashville Predators); Victor Johansson, Leksand, SWE (Toronto Maple Leafs); Carl-Otto Magnusson, Frolunda Jr., SWE-JR (2026 draft eligible); Felix Ohrqvist, Linkoping, SWE (2026 draft eligible); Leo Sahlin Wallenius, Vaxjo, SWE (San Jose Sharks);

FORWARDS: Jack Berglund, Farjestad, SWE (Philadelphia Flyers); Viggo Bjorck, Djurgarden Jr., SWE-Jr. (2026 draft eligible); Wilson Bjorck, Colorado College, NCAA (Vancouver Canucks); Liam Danielsson, Orebro, SWE (2026 draft eligible); Filip Ekberg, Ottawa, OHL (Carolina Hurricanes); Linus Eriksson, Timra, SWE (Florida Panthers); Melvin Fernstrom, Orebro, SWE (Pittsburgh Penguins); Eddie Genborg, Timra, SWE (Detroit Red Wings); Valter Lindberg, Skelleftea, SWE (2026 draft eligible); Eric Nilson, Michigan State, NCAA (Anaheim Ducks); Viggo Nordlund, Oskarshamn, SWE-2 (Carolina Hurricanes); Lucas Pettersson, Brynas, SWE (Anaheim Ducks); Ivar Stenberg, Frolunda, SWE (2026 draft eligible); Alexander Zetterberg, Minnesota State, NCAA (2026 draft eligible)

## **Finland**

Coach: Lauri Mikkola

GOALIES: Patrik Kerkola, KalPa, FIN (2026 draft eligible); Petteri Rimpinen, K-Espoo, FIN (Los Angeles Kings); Kim Saarinen, HPK, FIN (Seattle Kraken)

DEFENSEMEN: Lasse Boelius, Assat, FIN (Anaheim Ducks); Mitja Jokinen, TPS, FIN (2026 draft eligible); Aron Kiviharju, HIFK, FIN (Minnesota Wild); Veikka Mononen, KalPa, FIN (2026 draft eligible); Daniel Nieminen, Pelicans, FIN (Nashville Predators); Niklas Nykyri, HIFK, FIN (2026 draft eligible); Julius Saari, Erie, OHL (2026 draft eligible); Sebastian Soini, Ilves, FIN (Minnesota Wild)

FORWARDS: Atte Joki, Lukko, FIN (Dallas Stars); Onni Kalto, Oshawa, OHL (2026 draft eligible); Anton Kettunen, Pelicans Jr., FIN-JR (2026 draft eligible); Aatos Koivu, TPS, FIN (Montreal Canadiens); Jasper Kuhta, Ottawa, OHL (2026 draft eligible); Benjamin Pietila, Karpas, FIN (2026 draft eligible); Kasper Pikkariainen, TPS, FIN (New Jersey Devils); Akseli Pulkkanen, KalPa, FIN (2026 draft eligible); Veeti Rasanen, Jokerit, FIN-2 (2026 draft eligible); Heikki Ruohonen, Harvard, NCAA (Philadelphia Flyers); Joona Saarelainen, KalPa, FIN (Tampa Bay Lightning); Leo Tuuva, Lukko, FIN (2026 draft eligible); Matias Vanhanen, Everett, WHL (2026 draft eligible); Roope Vesterinen, HPK, FIN (2026 draft eligible); Max Westergard, Frolunda, SWE (Philadelphia Flyers)