



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips November 16-18, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets

- PAGE 03: Columbus Dispatch: Rewind: Columbus Blue Jackets end skid with 6-2 win over Pittsburgh Penguins
- PAGE 06: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets notes: Is David Jiricek the odd man out?
- PAGE 10: Columbus Dispatch: Kent Johnson practices with Columbus Blue Jackets, won't play against Pittsburgh Penguins
- PAGE 12: Columbus Dispatch: Rewind: Columbus Blue Jackets fall apart in Montreal, split back-to-back
- PAGE 18: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets' losing streak ends impressively: 3 takeaways
- PAGE 20: Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets lose 'identity' in loss to Montreal Canadiens: 3 takeaways
- PAGE 22: The Athletic: Blue Jackets end losing streak and scoring drought with rout of Penguins
- PAGE 24: The Athletic: Blue Jackets 'went rogue' in Montreal, dashing hope of an offensive resurgence
- PAGE 26: The Athletic: Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Jody Shelley embraces second career as NHL broadcaster
- PAGE 30: BlueJackets.com: Blue Jackets defeat Penguins to get back in win column
- PAGE 32: BlueJackets.com: Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets break losing skid vs. Pens
- PAGE 34: BlueJackets.com: Canadiens pull away from Blue Jackets
- PAGE 36: BlueJackets.com: CBJ's Boston crew excited to return to their college days
- PAGE 38: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Jiricek, Fabbro & More
- PAGE 40: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets Earn First Regulation Win Over Penguins Since 2019
- PAGE 41: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets' Defense or Goaltending: Which Is Their Achilles Heel?
- PAGE 43: 1st Ohio Battery: Scoreboard Matters: But The Expected Numbers Are A Positive Barometer, At Least
- PAGE 46: 1st Ohio Battery: Sweet Dub: Blue Jackets Defeat Penguins 6-2; Pick Up First Win In November
- PAGE 49: 1st Ohio Battery: Three Things: Merzlikins Wins 200th Career Game, Rare Win Vs Pittsburgh, Another Six At Home
- PAGE 52: 1st Ohio Battery: Blue Jackets Collapse In Third; Fall 5-1 To Canadiens In Montreal
- PAGE 55: 1st Ohio Battery: Three Things: Road Trends Continue, Monahan And Harris Return, Fabbro Scores First
- PAGE 57: 1st Ohio Battery: With A Decision Looming, There's Only One Call To Make With David Jiricek: Cleveland

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/ Websites

- PAGE 59: The Athletic: NHL Power Rankings: Jets stay on top, Wild rise, plus our early MVPs

- PAGE 69: The Athletic: NHL future WATCH: Who's the fastest-rising prospect in each team's pipeline?
- PAGE 76: ESPN: Seven unexpected trends defining the NHL season so far
- PAGE 80: Sportsnet.ca: In defence of subjectivity on NHL goal reviews
- PAGE 82: Sportsnet.ca: Friday Four: Can McDavid become the second player ever to hit 2,000 points?
- PAGE 86: Sportsnet.ca: Coaches on the hot seat? Four teams that could shake things up

Columbus Dispatch / Rewind: Columbus Blue Jackets end skid with 6-2 win over Pittsburgh Penguins

By Brian Hedger- November 16, 2024

The Blue Jackets turned a one-goal lead into another six-goal victory to end a six-game winless skid with a 6-2 thumping of Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday night at Nationwide Arena.

Zach Aston-Reese, Zach Werenski and Mathieu Olivier scored the first three goals for the Blue Jackets, who got a 21-save win from Elvis Merzlikins in net.

"It was huge," Aston-Reese said. "Six losses in a row and we didn't really give 'em a sniff. A little bit on our heels in the second (period), but we managed it fine. That's going to happen. Decent damage control, so it was a really good 60-minute effort tonight."

Here's a blog roll with preview information, updates and analysis from the Dispatch:

FINAL: Columbus Blue Jackets 6, Pittsburgh Penguins 2

No meltdown in the third, no epic collapse sparked by Crosby or Malkin. The Blue Jackets dominated the Penguins in the third period, turning a 3-2 lead into a four-goal victory over their closest rival in the Metropolitan Division. Impressive way to end a six-game winless streak at 0-5-1, not allowing it to grow.

"It was important that we played how we played tonight, in particular in the third period," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "We catch some breaks to get up a couple goals and we got some pucks to go through that haven't gone in for us (lately), which was wonderful, but then after that it's how we responded. We had plenty of opportunities to score (in the third), but we didn't sacrifice anything else."

GOAL, 3rd period 15:32: Columbus Blue Jackets 6, Pittsburgh Penguins 2

Down three goals, Penguins coach Mike Sullivan pulled goalie Tristan Jarry earlier than normal and pays the price shortly after doing it. Cole Sillinger fires the puck into an empty net for his third goal of the season, eliciting a confrontation with Michael Bunting on his way back to the bench to celebrate.

"He wasn't offering me an invitation (to fight)," Sillinger said. "He just had a couple slur words for me, and I don't know, the horn was going off and I didn't really hear him. It was kind of like when someone's talking to you but a train's going by. You're just like ... standing there."

The train whizzing past the Penguins on Friday night was a Blue Jackets Express.

GOAL, 3rd period 9:49: Columbus Blue Jackets 5, Pittsburgh Penguins 2

Just like that, another Blue Jackets goal. Damon Severson nets this one off a dandy feed from Sean Monahan following a scramble that started with Kirill Marchenko taking a puck strong to the net to force Jarry to make a big stop. Voronkov kept the puck alive behind the net until Monahan spotted it in traffic and tapped it out to Severson alone in the right circle. Fourth goal of the season for Severson, as the Blue Jackets are now well on their way to ending their slide.

3rd period, 9:24: Columbus Blue Jackets 4, Pittsburgh Penguins 2

We've almost reached the mid-point of the third with the Blue Jackets maintaining their two-goal lead. Last year, this situation would've been a real problem for them. They coughed up a lot of leads like this in third periods. That hasn't been an issue yet this year. Time to see if they can make another lead stand up to end this losing skid.

GOAL, 3rd period 1:56: Columbus Blue Jackets 4, Pittsburgh Penguins 2

It's the Blue Jackets who get the first goal of the third, taking a two-goal lead on a power-forward goal by Dmitri Voronkov. Camped outside the Penguins' crease, the towering Russian second-year forward jammed the puck between Jarry's pads and over the goal line for his second goal of the season.

3rd Period start: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Pittsburgh Penguins 2

Next goal wins? The puck's back in play here at Nationwide Arena for the third period of ice hockey between the Blue Jackets and Penguins.

End of second period: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Pittsburgh 2

Elvis Merzlikins makes a dazzling save with 22.8 seconds left in the second, sprawling out in his crease and just getting his glove up enough to snag Anthony Beauvillier's point-blank backhand to keep the Jackets in front after two periods. That's quite a stop from the Jackets' top goalie, who made 13 on 15 shots through 40 minutes.

"I trusted, more, my instincts there," Merzlikins said. "There was many legs (around me), as well. There was no chance to go around (them), so I just trusted my instincts and it went really well."

GOAL, 2nd period 16:27: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Pittsburgh Penguins 2

A near disaster in the Blue Jackets' crease, where a collision left the net wide open with Sidney Crosby lurking, quickly turned into a 3-on-1 the other direction for Columbus late in the third. Werenski led the charge up ice and slid a perfect cross-ice feed to Mathieu Olivier just inside the Pittsburgh blue line for a wide open shot that beat Jarry over the glove from the right wing.

Olivier's fifth goal of the season put the Blue Jackets up by a goal and pushed them past two goals in a game for the first time since they routed the Edmonton Oilers 6-1 on Oct. 28 here in Columbus.

Chili chant commences.

GOAL, 2nd period 12:06 (PPG): Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Pittsburgh Penguins 2

And we're tied at Nationwide Arena, where Michael Bunting capped a power play for the Penguins with 12 seconds left on it. After recollecting the puck in the low slot, Bunting wheeled to send a shot that slipped through Merzlikins into the net for his third goal of the season.

2nd period, 7:43: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Pittsburgh Penguins 1

The Blue Jackets get the benefit of a goaltender interference call against Pittsburgh. Is this a new dimension? Nope, Crosby wasn't on the ice. Matt Nieto was, and he went sliding into Merzlikins in the crease before the puck was shot into the net. No goal. Blue Jackets remain in front.

2nd period start: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Pittsburgh Penguins 1

The Blue Jackets weren't able to capitalize on their carryover power-play time to start the second, which paved the way for the Penguins to draw an early penalty on Jake Christiansen to get their own man-advantage.

End of 1st period: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Pittsburgh Penguins 1

The Blue Jackets picked up a late power play in the first, but didn't do anything in the first 26 seconds of it. They'll have 1:34 of it left to start the second. As for the rest of the opening period, the Blue Jackets got off to a great start with a 2-0 lead before the Penguins clawed back on Beauvillier's goal.

Pittsburgh, however, dominated statistically.

According to Natural Stat Trick, the Penguins finished the first 20 minutes with significant 5-on-5 edges in attempts (57.6%), unblocked attempts (57.1%), shots on goal (9-5, 64.3%), scoring chances (12-5, 70.6%), high-danger chances (4-2, 66.7%) and expected goals (1.23-0.38, 76.4%).

GOAL, 1st period 11:51: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Pittsburgh Penguins 1

The Penguins strike back in only a way the Penguins could strike back against the Blue Jackets. Crosby gets his stick on a puck sent into the slot in mid-air, flips it up in the air, it lands at the right post and Anthony Beauvillier jams it inside the pipe before Elvis Merzlikins can get his skate over to it. Crosby needs two goals for 600 in his career. He'll settle for a unique assist on this one.

GOAL, 1st period 8:39: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Pittsburgh Penguins 0

There's a ... power play goal for the Blue Jackets? Yep, Zach Werenski smokes one past Jarry on the glove side from above the right circle. Nice feed across the high slot from Yegor Chinakhov, who gets the first assist. Adam Fantilli gets the secondary helper. The Jackets are scorching at the start here against the Penguins.

Columbus Blue Jackets center Sean Kuraly celebrates a goal by Zach Aston-Reese (not pictured). Aston-Reese scored the first goal of of the Blue Jackets' 6-2 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins, picking up an assist from Jake Christiansen (2) early in the first period Friday night at Nationwide Arena in Columbus, Ohio on Nov. 15, 2024. Doral Chenoweth/Columbus Dispatch

GOAL, 1st period 2:20: Columbus Blue Jackets 1, Pittsburgh Penguins 0

Aston-Reese, who had a strong game Tuesday night in Seattle, gets the Blue Jackets on the board quickly with assists going to defenseman Jake Christiansen and forward Kevin Labanc. The assist for Labanc is his eight of the season and ninth point in 12 games.

GAME START: Columbus Blue Jackets 0, Pittsburgh Penguins 0

The puck is down at Nationwide Arena, where the Blue Jackets gained an early 1-0 lead on a goal by former Penguins forward Zach Aston-Reese. More on that next post.

Columbus Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason talks to his team during the second period of the NHL hockey game against the Edmonton Oilers at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024.

Columbus Blue Jackets quote from morning skate vs Pittsburgh Penguins

Head coach Dean Evason: "You have to be as positive as you can, but you can't be, like, 'It's OK,' because it's not OK. You can still be (angry) and aggressive with that. You can still be positive, but disappointed and (mad). So, we need to turn all that energy into the start of the game tonight." — on dealing with the Blue Jackets' six-game winless skid.

Defenseman Zach Werenski: "Most guys here don't have any memories or thoughts of that, to be honest. Me and Boone a little bit, but I haven't even thought about it. I know we haven't won in Pittsburgh in a little while, but playing them at home, it hasn't crossed my mind. Obviously, it's a divisional game. They're a team that's going to play desperate tonight. They need wins and points ... and so do we. It should be a good game, but I don't think the history of it is a factor." — on the Penguins' domination of the all-time series.

Forward Cole Sillinger: "I think situationally for us, with how the last six (games) went, I think that's more important to focus on that than to worry about who you're playing. Obviously, this is a big one for us. Playing Pittsburgh maybe enhances that a little more, but we have a chance to win on a Friday night in our building and we haven't played in front of our fans in a couple weeks now. So, we're all super excited to get back here and play again at Nationwide. It makes it even better that we're playing Pittsburgh. It's

always a high energy game, and there's going to be a lot of energy in the building." — on ending the losing skid.

Oct 3, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Cole Sillinger (4) reaches for the puck against Pittsburgh Penguins left wing Joonas Koppanen (15) in the third period at Nationwide Arena.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Pittsburgh Penguins: Lineups

COLUMBUS

Forwards

(10) Dmitri Voronkov — (23) Sean Monahan — (86) Kirill Marchenko

(59) Yegor Chinakhov — (19) Adam Fantilli — (4) Cole Sillinger

(82) Mikael Pyyhtia — Justin Danforth — (24) Mathieu Olivier

(27) Zach Aston-Reese — (7) Sean Kuraly — (62) Kevin Labanc

Defense pairings

(8) Zach Werenski — (15) Dante Fabbro

(9) Ivan Provorov — (78) Damon Severson

(2) Jake Christiansen — (22) Jordan Harris

Goalies

(90) Elvis Merzlikins

(40) Daniil Tarasov

Scratched: D Jack Johnson, David Jiricek, F James van Riemsdyk

Injured: F Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery), D Erik Gudbranson (shoulder surgery), F Kent Johnson (shoulder) and F Gavin Brindley (fractured finger)

Nov 14, 2023; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins (90) watches Pittsburgh Penguins center Evgeni Malkin (71) with the puck during the second period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena.

PITTSBURGH

Forwards

(72) Anthony Beauvillier — (87) Sidney Crosby — (67) Rickard Rakell

(8) Michael Bunting — (71) Evgeni Malkin — (17) Bryan Rust

(18) Jesse Puljujarvi — (10) Drew O'Connor — (22) Sam Poulin

(83) Matthew Nieto — (55) Noel Acciari — (48) Valteri Puustinen

Defense pairings

(28) Marcus Pettersson — (65) Erik Karlsson

(24) Matt Grzelcyk — (3) Jack St. Ivany

(27) Ryan Graves — (5) Ryan Shea

Goalies

(35) Tristan Jarry

(39) Alex Nedeljkovic

Scratched: C Vasilii Ponomarev, D Owen Pickering

Injured: C Cody Glass (concussion), C Kevin Hayes (upper body), D Kris Letang (illness), C Blake Lizotte (concussion)

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Pittsburgh Penguins history

All-time record: The Blue Jackets are just 16-29-9 against the Penguins, including 12-11-4 at Nationwide Arena. The Jackets went 1-3-0 against Pittsburgh last season and are 2-7-1 in their past 10 games against "Sid The Kid" and his bunch.

Last meeting: The Blue Jackets captured their lone victory in four tries against the Penguins last season, winning 4-3 on March 30 via shootout at Nationwide Arena. Mathieu Olivier, Kirill Marchenko and Werenski scored goals in regulation for Columbus, while defenseman Damon Severson scored the deciding goal of the shootout. Merzlikins stopped 30 of 33 shots to earn the goaltending win, while Alex Nedeljkovic took the loss for Pittsburgh.

November Record: 0-5-0, 8th place, Metropolitan Division

Oct 3, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan (23) takes a face off against Pittsburgh Penguins right wing Sam Poulin (22) during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena. The Blue Jackets lost 3-1.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Pittsburgh Penguins records

Records: Blue Jackets 5-8-2, 12 points, 8th place in the Metropolitan Division; Penguins 6-9-3, 15 points, 7th place in the Metropolitan Division

Oct 3, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski (8) tries to move the puck past Pittsburgh Penguins defenseman Ryan Shea (5) during the third period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena. The Blue Jackets lost 3-1.

How can I watch or listen to Columbus Blue Jackets vs Pittsburgh Penguins?

TV channel: FanDuel Sports Network Ohio

Streaming: ESPN+; FanDuel Sports Network app

Radio: 93.3 The Bus; Blue Jackets website, Blue Jackets app

Oct 3, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Pittsburgh Penguins defenseman John Ludvig (7) hits Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Yegor Chinakhov (59) in the third period at Nationwide Arena.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Pittsburgh Penguins start time

Date: Friday, Nov. 15

Time: 7 p.m. ET

Location: Nationwide Arena (Columbus, Ohio)

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets notes: Is David Jiricek the odd man out?

By Brian Hedger- November 16, 2024

They went from seven to eight Sunday, after claiming Dante Fabbro off waivers from the Nashville Predators, which bumped Jordan Harris and David Jiricek into the seventh and eighth defense spots during his Blue Jackets debut Tuesday in Seattle. They watched the Jackets' 5-2 loss to the Kraken at Climate Pledge Arena as healthy scratches, which isn't how NHL coaching staffs or general managers prefer to help young defensemen grow into stalwarts.

Oct 3, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman David Jiricek (55) reaches for the puck against the Pittsburgh Penguins in the second period at Nationwide Arena.

Kent Johnson's pending return from injured reserve, whenever it happens, may change the equation. That will require an open roster spot, and reducing the roster by one defenseman would do the trick. The odd man out in that scenario is likely Jiricek, who's still on his entry-level contract and doesn't need to pass through waivers for an AHL assignment.

"We want everybody to play," Evason said. "Is there a decision immediately? No. We're working through that, obviously. Do we want guys sitting out every night, young or old or whoever? No, but the reality is that somebody has to sit out. But have we made a decision in that area yet? No, but we're working through that process."

Harris and Jake Christiansen do require waivers for AHL assignment, so demoting Jiricek is the no-risk option. Jiricek also hasn't solidified regular ice time in the NHL playing rotation, and he needs to start playing regularly somewhere soon. Assigning him to Cleveland would mean a third AHL season, but that's not uncommon with developing defensemen prospects — even those selected as high as Jiricek, who was taken sixth overall in 2022.

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Jordan Harris (22) skates during the second period of the NHL hockey game against the Edmonton Oilers at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024.

He's only played in five games for the Blue Jackets this season, averaging just 11:47 per game with one assist and a -2 plus/minus rating. Jiricek's ice time was also less than 10 minutes in his past two games, including a season-low 8:50 during the Jackets' 5-2 loss to the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday at Crypto.com Arena. Jiricek's structural mistake in the neutral zone led to a key goal for the Kings and probably led to limited usage.

"That's our whole thought process is earning their opportunity to play more," Evason said. "After (one of his games), we sat and watched all his shifts. (We) teach and communicate what we need from every player, but from him, in particular ... and, yeah, if you want to play, then you need to earn that right to be on the ice and play games."

All things considered, Fabbro's debut with the Blue Jackets was a good one.

He was charged with four giveaways on the final scoresheet after the Jackets' loss, but it was only his seventh game of the season and the assignment wasn't exactly an easy one. Fabbro, a right-handed shot, was slotted into the right side of the top defense pairing as Zach Werenski's partner and exceeded his highest ice time (19:17) of the season by four minutes.

He wound up skating on the right side of all three pairings in the third period, including stints with Ivan Provorov and Christiansen as his partners. By the end of the night, after flying cross-country from Nashville late Sunday, Fabbro was exhausted.

"Coming into that first game, obviously ripping the (bandage) off a little bit and playing lots of minutes, I was getting a little tired out there because I hadn't played in a couple weeks and I was getting back into game pace," Fabbro said. "I felt much better (at practice Thursday) and I'll continue to get my cardio back in game shape."

Fabbro skated with Werenski again during practice and is expected to stay there Friday against the Pittsburgh Penguins. Damon Severson, another righty, skated with Provorov again on the second pairing, while the third and fourth pairs had Christiansen working with Harris and Johnson with Jiricek.

"We really liked (Fabbro's) simplicity in the game," Evason said. "He did some really intelligent things, as far as moving the puck out of our zone. Obviously, it's one game, and they'll get some chemistry there too, but we really like the righty-lefty combination in our top four."

Columbus Blue Jackets equipment manager gives Dante Fabbro assist

Fabbro met the Blue Jackets on Monday in Seattle, bringing all his hockey gear with him from the Nashville Predators. Since they were on a road trip, the Blue Jackets' equipment staff didn't have a new set of hockey gloves to match Fabbro's new uniform, so equipment manager Jamie Healy got to work on altering Fabbro's yellow and blue gloves from the Predators.

He even colored over the Nashville yellow on the thumbs with a blue marker. Fabbro got new Blue Jackets gloves at practice Thursday, but was appreciative of Healy's handiwork on the road.

"I had my Nashville gloves, and the yellow cuff on them, so he took the yellow cuff off and put the blue on them," Fabbro said. "If you looked close enough, there were still yellow threads and everything sticking out of the glove, but he did a great job."

Columbus Dispatch / Kent Johnson practices with Columbus Blue Jackets, won't play against Pittsburgh Penguins

By Brian Hedger- November 16, 2024

Johnson's latest step toward returning from a shoulder injury arrived Thursday at Nationwide Arena, where he skated in a full team practice for the first time since sustaining the injury during a fluke fall in the fourth game of the season.

"He's just going through the process, but we've got to be very careful not to get ahead of ourselves, right?" Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "He's not cleared medically. Ultimately, the player has to make that decision, but we have to make sure that he understands the big picture."

Oct 17, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Kent Johnson (91) skates with the puck against the Buffalo Sabres in the first period at Nationwide Arena on Thursday.

Johnson wore a gray practice jersey that matched those worn by the Jackets' third line, currently comprising Mikael Pyyhtia, Justin Danforth and Mathieu Olivier. He and Pyyhtia alternated reps during line rushes and other drills, and Johnson also killed penalties during power-play practice. He didn't wear a "no contact" jersey, but also didn't participate in rougher battle drills near the end of a one-hour practice.

"It's fun just to be with the guys," Johnson said. "The last couple days, I was kind of waiting for the boys to get home, and it's definitely nice to get on the ice with all of them. It's a good step to take."

Oct 15, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Kent Johnson (91) skates on the ice in the third period during the home opener at Nationwide Arena on Tuesday.

Johnson won't play against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday at Nationwide Arena, when the Blue Jackets will again try to end a six-game winless skid (0-5-1). It will also be their third straight weekend back-to-back set of games, which concludes Saturday in Montreal.

Johnson might be out for that one, too, but it wouldn't be surprising if he joins the Blue Jackets for the short road trip that concludes Monday in Boston. That would allow him to keep skating with the team. Evason said Johnson, who tallied five points in the season's first three-plus games, is "begging" to return, but the Blue Jackets won't rush him back.

"Do we want him back in?" Evason said. "Is he hungry to get back in and help his team win and get out of this funk? Yes, but we're going to do it in an intelligent manner. So, having said that, he's not playing (Friday) night obviously. We've got to get him through practices and bumping and grinding and doing all the things to take the proper process before we put him in a game."

Oct 3, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Kent Johnson (91) skates with the puck against the Pittsburgh Penguins in the third period at Nationwide Arena.

Last season, Johnson needed surgery after tearing the labrum in his left shoulder during a meaningless faceoff at the end of a loss to the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden. This time, the issue involved a different part of the shoulder and was treatable with rest and rehab work.

Johnson doesn't have to wear a restrictive harness or brace, which means his only mobility limitation will stem solely from his shoulder injury – which specialists assessed closely before making an assessment that surgery wasn't necessary.

“I got to a point, almost, where I was hoping for the best but expecting the worst, that kind of thing,” Johnson said. “But in the back of my head, it just didn’t feel as bad at all (as a torn labrum). It was nice to get that (reassurance), and it was a clear decision. It wasn’t a tough decision in the end (to rehab it). It was very clear, so that was nice. I feel at peace with the decision we made.”

Columbus Dispatch / Rewind: Columbus Blue Jackets fall apart in Montreal, split back-to-back

By Brian Hedger- November 17, 2024

The Blue Jackets settled for a split of their third straight weekend back-to-back with an ugly finish to a 5-1 loss Saturday night in Montreal.

One night after ending a six-game winless skid Friday with a 6-2 romp over the Pittsburgh Penguins at Nationwide Arena, the Jackets had the wheels come off yet again in a back-to-back finale.

Here's how it all unfolded, along with preview information, lineups and analysis:

FINAL: Montreal Canadiens 5, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

Just like the Jackets did Friday to the Penguins at home, the Canadiens turned a slim one-goal lead starting the third period into a blowout over Columbus with three goals in the third period. It's Montreal's sixth straight win over the Blue Jackets in the all-time series.

The Jackets fall to 6-9-2 and split their third back-to-back of the season.

"We talked continually about simplifying and getting pucks deep and gettin' after it (all game)," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said during postgame comments shown by FanDuel Sports Network. "We were having some success there. We just didn't stay with the game plan. We kinda went rogue a little bit, and they capitalized on a few mistakes ... and then the game was over."

GOAL, 3rd period 15:55: Montreal Canadiens 5, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

It always seems like former Blue Jackets find ways to get on the scoresheet against Columbus, doesn't it? Alexander Wennberg beat them in overtime for the San Jose Sharks on the West Coast, Oliver Bjorkstrand set up a goal for the Seattle Kraken to end that trip and now Josh Anderson tacks one on late in the third period for the Canadiens, who scored during 4-on-4 after Adam Fantilli negated a Blue Jackets power play by attempting a stick lift in the slot that knocked a stick free.

He was sitting in the penalty box for interference when Anderson deflected a puck past Tarasov from the low slot.

GOAL, 3rd period 12:52: Montreal Canadiens 4, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

The Blue Jackets' mistakes are making the worst team in the NHL look like one of the best. Evans gets the fourth of the game for Montreal off a nice feed from Cole Caufield, and the Canadiens are making this look easy. The Jackets' newly reworked third line of Cole Sillinger, Justin Danforth and Kirill Marchenko plus the third defense pairing of Jake Christiansen and Jordan Harris were on the ice for this one.

GOAL, 3rd period 11:04: Montreal Canadiens 3, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

The Blue Jackets' second defensive pairing is having a tough night. This time, Ivan Provorov and Damon Severson committed back-to-back turnovers that led directly to a goal by Luca Condotta to give the Canadiens a two-goal margin.

Provorov's exit diagonal exit pass attempt was picked off cleanly just outside the Blue Jackets' blue line and carried back in for a shot that Tarasov stopped with a leg pad. Severson got the rebound and sent a no-look clearing pass off the end boards that kicked right out to Armia for a pass to Condotta that he snapped past Tarasov.

Ugly sequence.

3rd period, 1:19: Columbus Blue Jackets get early power play

Joel Armia got his stick into Zach Werenski's feet in the corner of the Blue Jackets' zone and tripped him, putting the Blue Jackets on a power play here trailing by a goal. Columbus generates a couple decent looks, but doesn't convert it into a power-play equalizer.

THIRD PERIOD START: Montreal Canadiens 2, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

The puck is down for the start of the third period at Belle Centre, where the Jackets need to get an equalizer before the Canadiens can increase their lead.

SECOND PERIOD END: Montreal Canadiens 2, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

It was a "low event" period in terms of shots in the second, which favored Columbus 7-5, but there was a lot going in that period. Dante Fabbro scored his first goal as a Blue Jacket, tying it 1-1, Mathieu Olivier handled himself impressively in a fight against Arber Xhekaj, one of the league's toughest customers, and yet another defensive breakdown allowed Nick Suzuki to give the Canadiens' a one-goal lead after 40 minutes.

One more frame of 20 left for the Jackets to see if they can sneak out a win or point.

GOAL, 2nd period 15:49: Montreal Canadiens 2, Columbus Blue Jackets 1

Montreal's Nick Suzuki got the puck in a great position after Damon Severson's pinch in the neutral zone was unsuccessful and rifled it past Tarasov on the glove side to put the Canadiens back up by a goal with 4:11 left in the period.

2nd period, 8:09: Columbus Blue Jackets' Mathieu Olivier squares off with Montreal Canadiens' Arber Xhekaj

Less than a minute after Fabbro's goal, the game's temperature got turned up even more with an spirited heavyweight scrap between Olivier for the Blue Jackets and Xhekaj (pronounced 'Jacke Eye') for the Canadiens.

If there were judges scoring it, the decision had to be for Olivier, who landed multiple jabs to Xhekaj's chops with his left hand to set up at least two big overhand rights that landed somewhere on the Canadiens defenseman's head.

Xhekaj, who has the size advantage by three inches at 6 foot 4, also landed some shots against Olivier — who's from Montreal, has family in the building and gave the Jackets an emotional jolt by shouting toward his stick-clacking teammates afterward.

Xhekaj went to the Canadiens' dressing room after the fight. Might be an injury there. He took some heavy punches.

GOAL, 2nd period 7:40: Columbus Blue Jackets 1, Montreal Canadiens 1

Dante Fabbro on the board with his first goal as a Blue Jacket in just his third game since being claimed off waivers last Sunday from the Nashville Predators. Reverse, no-look feed from Zach Werenski above the circles, Fabbro steps into a one-timer with his right-handed shot and fires the puck through traffic into the the Canadiens' net.

Traffic in front provided by Kevin Labanc at the net-front and Zach Aston-Reese in the slot, along with the two Montreal players battling with them. Montembeault never saw it.

SECOND PERIOD START: Montreal Canadiens 1, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

They're back to playing ice hockey in Montreal, as the Blue Jackets try to regroup while trailing by a goal following a challenging first period.

FIRST PERIOD END: Montreal Canadiens 1, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

The horn to end the opening period couldn't have sounded soon enough for the Blue Jackets, who were hounded for almost the duration of the 20 minutes. It's a minor miracle they're only down a goal and somehow got 11 shots on goal to the Canadiens' 16 in the frame.

Turnovers galore. Inaccurate passes in bunches. A terrible power play that led to Montreal scoring the lone goal of the period on its own power play. The Blue Jackets look like a team with tired legs coming into the second game of a back-to-back following a late night flight Friday, and that's something they need to figure out along their long-term path to consistently competing at a high level.

The lone good news of the first period for Columbus was the play of goalie Daniil Tarasov, who stopped 15 of 16 shots despite not playing for a week as Elvis Merzlikins' backup.

GOAL, 1st period 4:59 (PPG): Montreal Canadiens 1, Columbus Blue Jackets 0

One area the Blue Jackets still haven't corrected, and it dates back years, is their power play. More specifically, they still have issues toting pucks up ice after they've been cleared. At best, it leads to discombobulated shifts that result in nothing dangerous. At worst, it leads to shorthanded scoring chances like the one Jake Evans got for the Canadiens during the Jackets' first power play early in the game.

Damon Severson was forced to take a slashing penalty while defending it, which led to the Canadiens striking first on defenseman Mike Matheson's goal to cap the ensuing power play. Montreal also drew another slashing penalty on Kevin Labanc shortly thereafter, but the Blue Jackets killed it thanks to Tarasov's work in net to keep it 1-0 Canadiens in the first.

GAME START: Columbus Blue Jackets 0, Montreal Canadiens 0

After a pregame ceremony to induct former Canadiens defenseman Shea Weber into the team's Ring of Honor and recognize his recent induction into the Hockey Hall of Fame, the puck is in play for the Blue Jackets and Les Habitants (Canadiens/Habs) out there in Montreal.

Oct 22, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Daniil Tarasov (40) stands in net during the second period of the NHL hockey game against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Nationwide Arena.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Montreal Canadiens: Lineup changes

The only lineup change for the Blue Jackets is in net, where Daniil Tarasov is getting another start on the second half of a back-to-back. The difference this time is the Jackets won the front half, so he's trying to help them sweep one. The Canadiens announced during pregame warmup that former Blue Jackets defenseman David Savard wouldn't play due to an upper-body injury. Savard, who participated in the Canadiens' morning skate, will be replaced in the lineup by Jayden Struble.

Nov 29, 2023; Columbus, Ohio, USA;

Columbus Blue Jackets left wing Kirill Marchenko (86) fights for the puck against Montreal Canadiens defenseman Kaiden Guhle (21) during the third period of their game on Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023 at Nationwide Arena.

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Pittsburgh Penguins: Lineups

COLUMBUS

Forwards

(10) Dmitri Voronkov — (23) Sean Monahan — (86) Kirill Marchenko

(59) Yegor Chinakhov — (19) Adam Fantilli — (4) Cole Sillinger

(82) Mikael Pyyhtia — Justin Danforth — (24) Mathieu Olivier

(27) Zach Aston-Reese — (7) Sean Kuraly — (62) Kevin Labanc

Defense pairings

(8) Zach Werenski — (15) Dante Fabbro

(9) Ivan Provorov — (78) Damon Severson

(2) Jake Christiansen — (22) Jordan Harris

Goalies

(40) Daniil Tarasov

(90) Elvis Merzlikins

Scratched: D Jack Johnson, D David Jiricek, F James van Riemsdyk

Injured: F Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery), D Erik Gudbranson (shoulder surgery) and F Kent Johnson (shoulder)

Nov 17, 2022; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Mathieu Olivier (24) fights Montreal Canadiens defenseman Arber Xhekaj (72) during the second period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena. Mandatory Credit: Adam Cairns-The Columbus Dispatch

MONTREAL

Forwards

(20) Juraj Slafkovsky — (14) Nick Suzuki — (77) Kirby Dach

(15) Alex Newhook — (71) Jake Evans — (13) Cole Caufield

(17) Josh Anderson — (28) Christian Dvorak — (11) Brendan Gallagher

(51) Emil Heineman — (82) Lucas Condotta — (40) Joel Armia

Defense pairings

(48) Lane Hutson — (8) Mike Matheson

(21) Kaiden Guhle— (52) Justin Barron

(72) Arber Xhekaj — (47) Jayden Struble

Goalies

(35) Samuel Montembeault

(30) Cayden Primeau

Scratched: LW Michael Pezzeta

Injured: D David Savard (upper body), C Rafael Harvey-Pinard (fractured leg), RW Patrik Laine (knee), D David Reinbacher (knee)

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Montreal Canadiens history

All-time record: The Blue Jackets are just 20-16-5 in 41 games against the Canadiens, including 10-9-4 at Bell Centre in Montreal. Columbus has dropped five straight games in the all-time series (0-4-1), including 0-2-1 last season.

Last meeting: The Blue Jackets were shut out, 3-0, on March 12, 2024 to complete the Canadiens' series sweep last season. Brendan Gallagher, Juraj Slavkovsky and Joshua Roy scored goals for Montreal, which got a 41-save goose egg performance from goalie Cayden Primeau.

2024 matchups: Nov. 16 in Montreal (7 p.m.); Nov. 27 in Columbus (7:30 p.m.) and Dec. 23 in Columbus (7 p.m.)

Columbus Blue Jackets news

Blue Jackets 6, Penguins 2: takeaways

Rewind: Blue Jackets end skid by routing Pittsburgh

Blue Jackets notes: Will Jiricek be the odd man out?

Injury update: Kent Johnson making strides in return effort

Kraken 5, Blue Jackets 2: Takeaways

Rewind: Strong start in Seattle fizzles, Blue Jackets drop sixth straight

Dante Fabbro joins the Blue Jackets' blue line via waivers

Apr 13, 2022; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski (8) looks to pass as Montreal Canadiens goaltender Sam Montembeault (35) defends the net during Wednesday's NHL game between at Nationwide Arena. Mandatory Credit: Barbara Perenic/Columbus Dispatch

Columbus Blue Jackets November 2024 schedule, record

Here's a look at the Blue Jackets' schedule for November, along with start times, television, and radio information of upcoming games:

Friday, Nov. 1: Blue Jackets vs Winnipeg Jets (L, 6-2); Takeaways; Photos

Saturday, Nov. 2: Blue Jackets at Capitals (L, 7-2); Takeaways

Tuesday, Nov. 5: Blue Jackets at Sharks (OTL, 2-1); Takeaways

Saturday, Nov. 9: Blue Jackets at Kings (L, 5-2); Takeaways

Sunday, Nov. 10: Blue Jackets at Ducks (L, 4-2); Takeaways

Tuesday, Nov. 12: Blue Jackets at Kraken (L, 5-2); Takeaways

Friday, Nov. 15: Blue Jackets vs Penguins (W, 6-2); Takeaways

Saturday, Nov. 16: Blue Jackets at Canadiens | 7 p.m. | FanDuel Sports Network Ohio | 97.1 The Fan

Monday, Nov. 18: Blue Jackets at Boston Bruins | 7 p.m. | FanDuel Sports Network Ohio | 97.1 The Fan

Thursday, Nov. 21: Blue Jackets vs Lightning | 7 p.m. | FanDuel Sports Network Ohio | 97.1 The Fan

Saturday, Nov. 23: Blue Jackets vs Hurricanes | 7 p.m. | FanDuel Sports Network Ohio | 97.1 The Fan

Wednesday, Nov. 27: Blue Jackets vs Canadiens | 7:30 p.m. | FanDuel Sports Network Ohio | 97.1 The Fan

Friday, Nov. 29: Blue Jackets vs Calgary Flames | 3 p.m. | FanDuel Sports Network Ohio | 93.3 The Bus

November Record: 1-5-1, 8th place, Metropolitan Division

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Montreal Canadiens records

Records: Blue Jackets 6-8-2, 14 points, 8th place in the Metropolitan Division; Canadiens 5-10-2, 12 points, 8th place in the Atlantic Division

Nov 29, 2023; Columbus, Ohio, USA;

Columbus Blue Jackets center Cole Sillinger (4) reaches for the puck against Montreal Canadiens defenseman Mike Matheson (8) during the third period of their game on Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023 at Nationwide Arena.

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' losing streak ends impressively: 3 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- November 17, 2024

Late in the third period, there was a rare sight with the Pittsburgh Penguins visiting Nationwide Arena. A steady stream of black-and-gold jerseys, and the Penguins fans wearing them, trudged for the exits. The Blue Jackets hadn't even tacked on Cole Sillinger's empty-net goal with 4:28 left, which he buried from 110 feet away for the final tally in a 6-2 thumping of Sidney Crosby's reeling team.

It was an emphatic way for the Blue Jackets (6-8-2) to end a six-game winless streak, and "yinz" almost couldn't believe it. As a large visiting portion of a sellout crowd of 18,348 lefty early, they were serenaded by Blue Jackets fans who gleefully stayed. One of the chants grew from the upper tank, where a brave few chided Pittsburgh as a city, while the more familiar "C-B-J!" chant caught the attention of first year Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason on the bench.

"Have they always chanted (C-B-J) at the end of games?" Evason asked, "because that was fantastic. I liked their energy."

The Blue Jackets' "5th Line" enjoyed leaving Nationwide Arena after the home team finally owned a third period against the Penguins, who've historically caused angst in Columbus. Next up is another game Saturday in Montreal (7 p.m.) to conclude a back-to-back.

Here are three takeaways from the front end:

Columbus Blue Jackets left wing Dmitri Voronkov (10) celebrates with his teammates after scoring a key goal during the third period of his team's 6-2 victory Friday night at Nationwide Arena in Columbus, Ohio, Nov. 15, 2024. Surrounding Voronkov are teammates Kirill Marchenko (86), Ivan Provorov (9) and Sean Monahan (23). Doral Chenoweth/Columbus Dispatch

Columbus Blue Jackets overwhelm Pittsburgh Penguins

The Blue Jackets seized control in the third period on goals by Dmitri Voronkov and Damon Severson, which turned their one-goal lead into a comfortable 5-2 margin. That hasn't been part of the Jackets' DNA for quite a while, so those looking for reasons to be optimistic about the future in Columbus can start there.

That's how good NHL teams finish games, even when the opponent has Crosby and Evgeni Malkin. Rather than sitting back on their heels, the Blue Jackets locked down their end and set up shop in Pittsburgh's — racking up a 19-4 edge in shots during the period for a 39-23 overall edge. According to Natural Stat Trick, Columbus also built lopsided advantages in 5-on-5 attempts (24-12), shots (13-1), scoring chances (14-6) and high-danger chances (8-3) in the third.

"That's what (Evason) asked us to do," forward Zach Aston-Reese said. "He said, 'You didn't open it up at the end of the game,' but (he meant) open it up for them to get back in it. There were no turnovers in high-danger areas, and there's no secret that leads to offense."

Columbus Blue Jackets left wing Dmitri Voronkov (10) skates through Pittsburgh pressure during the first period in Nationwide Arena in Columbus Nov 15, 2024. Columbus beat Pittsburgh 6-2.

Columbus Blue Jackets force Pittsburgh Penguins to unravel

Aston-Reese started his NHL career with the Penguins and even had a stint as one of Crosby's wingers. He also skated with Malkin, knows others in Pittsburgh's core group and learned things about them that are now valuable when playing against them.

"I thought we did a good job with the game plan," Aston-Reese said. "It was staying patient. Good defense leads to offense. I'm full of clichés. That's a big one, but it's true. It's a team that I know well, and they get frustrated when they get shut down and when you play stingy against them. So, we did just that."

Columbus Blue Jackets center Cole Sillinger (4) and Pittsburgh Penguins right wing Rickard Rakell (67) skate during the second period in Nationwide Arena in Columbus Nov 15, 2024. Columbus beat Pittsburgh 6-2.

The Penguins also showed frustration with Sillinger, who drew the ire of Crosby and Michael Bunting in the third period. Crosby gave him a couple whacks with his stick after an uncalled late hit, while Bunting cross-checked Sillinger as a response to something prior to the empty-net goal. He also gave Sillinger an earful, but the goal horn blared as his chirps flew.

"He just had a couple slur words for me, and I don't know, the horn was going off and I didn't really hear him," Sillinger said, smiling. "It was kind of like when someone's talking to you, but a train's going by? You're just like ... standing there."

Columbus Blue Jackets center Sean Kuraly (7) and Pittsburgh Penguins left wing Michael Bunting (8) battle for the puck during the third period in Nationwide Arena in Columbus Nov 15, 2024. Columbus beat Pittsburgh 6-2.

Columbus Blue Jackets' fourth line gains trust with 'simple' approach

Aston-Reese scored the game's first goal early in the first period by tipping Jake Christiansen's shot from the left wing past goalie Tristan Jarry and just inside the right post.

It was his second game in a row scoring a goal, but also a signal that Evason might have a new weapon forming in a fourth line with Aston-Reese at left wing, Sean Kuraly at center and Kevin Labanc on the right. Those three combined for three goals, five assists and eight points in the last two games, but their overall play is what earned more usage by the coaching staff.

"It's not just the goals," Evason said. "They're earning opportunities to play the game because they are playing hard, they're working, they're finishing all their checks. When you've got depth like that, and you can play four (forward) lines and six (defensemen) regularly ... that's exciting for us as a team."

Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets lose 'identity' in loss to Montreal Canadiens: 3 takeaways

By Brian Hedger- November 18, 2024

Dean Evason and his coaching staff have an identity they want the Blue Jackets to play with this season, but it's taking a lot of painful "lessons" to fully adopt.

It's fast paced, aggressive and more than anything else, the Blue Jackets' preferred identity is rooted in simplicity. They've been highly effective when sticking to it, while struggling badly without it — including an ugly finish in a 5-1 loss to the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday at Bell Centre. The loss was the Jackets' sixth straight to the Canadiens, dating back to Nov. 17, 2022 at Nationwide Arena, and it was their seventh straight winless road tilt this season (0-5-2).

"We've had enough learning experiences at this point to understand how we need to play to have success," Evason said afterward. "We saw it (Friday against Pittsburgh), with what we did in the third period, and we just can't repeat it. We've just got to keep staying on it, continually harping and trying to emphasize that this is the right way for the Columbus Blue Jackets to play. We believe that at some point it'll click, and we'll have a little more consistency than we've had so far."

Buckle up until it happens. Another tough road game awaits Monday in Boston. Here three takeaways from the Blue Jackets' stumble in Montreal:

Columbus Blue Jackets can't keep it 'simple'

It's not just younger players making costly mistakes while playing "hero hockey."

One of the Blue Jackets' biggest unresolved issues thus far is having veterans break from the Jackets' simplistic identity while trying to force plays in bad spots. It often leads to turnovers, scoring chances and goals allowed, which the Blue Jackets' staff now has new examples to show in their next video session.

Columbus played right into the Canadiens' hands with impatience, including a rough night for the second defense pairing of Ivan Provorov and Damon Severson along with a third line centered by Justin Danforth. Puck management was a problem all night, including Provorov and Severson committing back-to-back turnovers in the third prior to Lucas Condotta's goal that extended the Canadiens' lead to 3-1.

Provorov's exit pass was picked off outside the blue line, while Severson compounded that mistake with one of his own. Getting to the rebound of Emil Heineman's shot, he sent the puck to Montreal's Joel Armia with a no-look clearing attempt that bounced strangely off the end boards.

Armia found Condotta for the goal.

"We're just trying to make too many plays that aren't there," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "It's a 2-1 game. We're really not out of it, and then turnovers, a couple goals for them, and the next thing you know, it's a lopsided score. ... You're going to lose a lot of games in this league if you're not playing your style, and tonight we didn't."

Columbus Blue Jackets hurt by 'terrible' penalties in Montreal

It wasn't just the turnovers that hindered the Blue Jackets at Bell Centre.

They also committed four stick penalties that ended their own power plays and gave the Canadiens momentum. Severson and Kevin Labanc were called for slashing in the first period, leading to Mike

Matheson's power-play goal for a 1-0 lead, and Sean Monahan was called for interference after grabbing an opposing stick later in the period.

In the third, Adam Fantilli was called for interference to nix a Blue Jackets power play after his forceful attempt to lift Kaiden Guhle's stick sent it flying into the air.

"Every penalty's a bad penalty," Evason said. "Two slashes for absolutely no reason, we grab a guy's stick, and then, you know, we've got a chance with a power play (in the third) and we know that's getting called all around the league. If you hammer a guy's stick up like that, it's going to get called. So, all four penalties were terrible penalties."

Columbus Blue Jackets goalie Daniil Tarasov gets another raw deal

Playing time has become sparse for Daniil Tarasov, who has split starts almost evenly with Elvis Merzlikins but is currently the backup.

Merzlikins has seized control of the No. 1 goalie role with solid play, while Tarasov has allowed 15 goals in his past three outings. Those games were all in the back halves of back-to-back games, and the Blue Jackets didn't play well in front of him at all. They've committed quite a few turnovers leading to high-danger scoring chances with Tarasov in net, and even NHL goalies can only keep so many of those out of the net.

It happened again in Montreal, where Tarasov allowed five goals despite shining with 19 saves on 21 shots in the first two periods. He was the biggest reason the Blue Jackets only trailed 2-1 starting the third, and his reward for it was allowing three goals following numerous mistakes by his teammates.

Tarasov's record is still a respectable 3-4-1, but his other numbers have nosedived. He has a 4.04 goals-against average and .861 save percentage that both rank last in the NHL among goalies who've made at least eight starts. Merzlikins, in nine starts, is 3-5-1 with a 2.92 GAA, .898 save percentage and one shutout.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets end losing streak and scoring drought with rout of Penguins

By Aaron Portzline- November 16, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Cole Sillinger scored an empty-net goal on a long-range lob with 4:28 remaining, putting a cap on the Columbus Blue Jackets' 6-2 rout of the Pittsburgh Penguins and blowing the lid off a simmering spat between Sillinger and most of the Penguins.

As Sillinger turned to celebrate with teammates and head back to the bench, Pittsburgh's Michael Bunting started jawing with Sillinger in front of the Penguins' bench. The two were separated by NHL officials, but Sillinger's description of the interaction was a verbal jab to Bunting's chin.

"He wasn't offering me an invitation (to fight)," Sillinger said. "He had a couple of slur words for me and, I don't know, the horn was going off. I didn't really hear him."

Forgive the Blue Jackets if the end of a six-game losing streak (0-5-1), an abundance of goals, and a rare lopsided win against their closest Metropolitan Division opponents left them a bit chesty.

Zach Werenski and Dmitri Voronkov had a goal and an assist, Zach Aston-Reese, Mathieu Olivier, Damon Severson and Sillinger scored goals, and Sean Monahan had two assists as the Blue Jackets finally broke through offensively, thanks mostly to a dominating third period.

The Blue Jackets outshot the Penguins 19-4 in the third period, scoring three goals to pull away for their first regulation win over Pittsburgh since Nov. 29, 2019, when John Tortorella was the Columbus coach.

"We had some pucks that got through that haven't gone into the net for us, which was wonderful," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "But after that, it's how we responded, especially in the third period. We had plenty of opportunities to score, but we didn't sacrifice anything."

Beautiful.

No notes. 📷@FanaticsBook | #CBJ pic.twitter.com/JB1X1fiwfh

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) November 16, 2024

Blue Jackets-Penguins games always draw large crowds in Nationwide Arena. Friday drew a standing-room-only crowd of 18,348, but by the end of the game, most of the black and yellow sweaters had left the building to begin the drive east.

They weren't around to hear the chants of "Pittsburgh Sucks!" midway through the third and "CBJ!" as the final minute ticked away.

The relief in the Blue Jackets' postgame dressing room was palpable, too. The Blue Jackets' last win was last month: Oct. 30 vs. the New York Islanders.

"It was huge. Six losses in a row," said Aston-Reese, who spent the first five seasons of his career with Pittsburgh. "We didn't really give them a sniff. A little bit on our heels in the second (period), but we managed it fine. That's going to happen. Decent damage control.

"It's a team that I know well, and they get frustrated when they get shut down, when you play stingy against them. I think we did just that."

Elvis Merzlikins, who lost six straight games to Pittsburgh to start his career, beat them for the second straight time, making 21 saves.

The Blue Jackets returned from their five-game road trip feeling snakebitten offensively. Worse, they had to be wondering just where this season was headed, especially players who have been in the organization for the last few seasons.

In each of the last two, the Blue Jackets have endured long, demoralizing losing skids early in the season, ending all hopes of a successful campaign before the first measurable snowfall.

“It’s never been easy playing against (Pittsburgh),” Merzlikins said. “The most important thing here is this was a huge win to break that losing streak. Now we have the taste of winning back.”

“The last two years, as soon as we were losing two games, the snowball was rolling bigger and bigger down the hill. It was different (this time), you could tell in guys’ faces, how they were acting. We, together, didn’t want to get in that snowball again. We wanted that win, to break the losing streak.”

Aston-Reese deflected a Jake Christiansen shot past Pittsburgh’s Tristan Jarry only 2:20 into the game, and the Blue Jackets made it 2-0 at 8:39 when Werenski scored off a slap shot only seven seconds into a Columbus power play.

OLLIE TAKES BACK THE LEAD 🏒 @FanaticsBook | #CBJ pic.twitter.com/ykz0ofu41R

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) November 16, 2024

The Penguins pulled even midway through the second, but Olivier scored off the rush coming through the right circle, set up perfectly by a Werenski pass at 16:27. It was Olivier’s fifth goal of the season, already matching his career high.

Olivier’s goal seemed to lift the Blue Jackets. They dominated the rest of the way. Voronkov made it 4-2 early in the third, while Severson pushed it to 5-2 midway through the period.

Then came Sillinger’s goal, a 110-foot launch. It was his first goal in eight games, and a fitting end to the evening.

Sillinger incensed the Penguins earlier in the game by taking an extra jab on Jarry after a puck stoppage. He had a back-and-forth with Pittsburgh captain Sidney Crosby, even enticing Crosby into a third-period slash that wasn’t called. Then came the empty-net goal and back-and-forth with Bunting.

“It’s just hockey,” Sillinger said with a smile. “I’m a guy who plays better with emotion. I like to add that to my game. I’m not afraid to ... when something’s going on, I’m just a hockey player doing my thing. It’s all part of the game. Always gonna be, too.”

The Athletic / Blue Jackets 'went rogue' in Montreal, dashing hope of an offensive resurgence

By Aaron Portzline- November 17, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets' lopsided win over Pittsburgh on Friday was believed to be the end of the club's offensive struggles, a triumphant return to them reclaiming their style of play after letting it slide during a long losing streak.

But maybe it was just an aberration.

The Blue Jackets regressed quickly and dramatically only 24 hours later, looking slow, disjointed and, at times, disinterested in a 5-1 loss to the Montreal Canadiens before 21,105 in Bell Centre. The Canadiens, who scored three times in the third period, came into the game as the last-place club in the NHL.

It was Columbus' seventh consecutive road loss (0-5-2).

"We just kind of stopped playing," Blue Jackets winger Mathieu Olivier told reporters. "We got discouraged.

"It's hard to dissect right now. Off the top of my head, I thought we lost too many battles, and when we were effective on the forecheck, we didn't have much offensive zone possession.

The Blue Jackets' only goal was scored by defenseman Dante Fabbro with the fourth line on the ice. Truth be told, that line — center Sean Kuraly with wingers Zach Aston-Reese and Kevin Labanc — may be the only line that plays with any game-to-game consistency.

It would be easy to blame the Blue Jackets' plethora of young players for the mind-numbing mistakes and glaring inconsistency — and yes, the young players have been plenty inconsistent — but that would be tremendously unfair.

On Saturday, the Blue Jackets' trailed 2-1 midway through the third period, but they were starting to gain traction with their play. But the Jackets' two most veteran defensemen basically set the table for the Canadiens to score the all-important goal for a 3-1 lead.

Ivan Provorov was skating out of his own zone with zero pressure when his angled pass across the ice was picked off in the neutral zone by Montreal's Emil Heineman, who skated forward through the left circle for a clean rip on Jackets goaltender Daniil Tarasov.

Tarasov's rebound was gathered by Jackets defenseman Damon Severson, who tried to reverse the play as he skated behind his own net, but his backward pass instead went straight to Montreal's Joel Armia.

Armia found Lucas Condotto in the slot for a one-timer that whizzed past Tarasov. It was 3-1, but the Canadiens tacked on two more in the next five minutes to pull away.

"We were playing the right way," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "For whatever reason, we tried to make plays that aren't there. We just didn't stay with the game plan. We went rogue a little bit, they capitalized on a few mistakes and the game was over."

Evason is starting to sound like a broken record early in the season. The Blue Jackets have had some stellar outings this season. In five of their six wins, they scored six goals. On Friday, they lit up the Penguins with a three-goal third period and won 6-2.

But the follow-up was a flop.

“We’ve had enough learning experience at this point to understand how we need to play to have success,” Evason said. “We saw it (Friday) night, with what we did in the third period. But we can’t repeat it.

“We have to stay on it (as coaches), continually harping and emphasizing that this is the way right way for us to play. We believe at some point it will click and we’ll have some consistency.”

Evason wasn’t pleased about four of the Blue Jackets’ penalties, three of which took place in the first period. Severson (slashing, 3:43), Labanc (slashing, 5:28) and Sean Monahan (interference, 13:04) were sent off in the first 20 minutes, and it felt as if the Jackets could never get untracked.

Adam Fantilli’s interference call late in the third — he knocked a stick out of a Montreal player’s hands — didn’t sit well either.

“All four penalties are terrible penalties,” Evason said.

There were only two highlights for the Blue Jackets.

Fabbro’s goal at 7:40 of the second, his first with the Blue Jackets, momentarily tied that game 1-1. Labanc made the goal possible by absorbing a huge hit in the corner to make a pass, then dusting himself off and heading straight to the net, where he helped provide a screen for Fabbro.

The other highlight came at 8:09 of the second, just after the faceoff after Fabbro’s 1-1 goal.

Olivier and Montreal’s Arber Xhekaj dropped their gloves in the neutral zone. Olivier landed some heavy rights and sent Xhekaj wobbly to one knee, but he bounced right back and finished the fight.

“Tons of respect going both ways in that one,” Olivier said. “It was a time in the game where it just felt kinda flat. Both sides were flat, especially us, I felt like. That’s not a dig against our team, but I felt like we could use a little jolt, so it was a good time to do it.”

Alas, it didn’t work. The Blue Jackets will fly to Boston on Sunday and play the Bruins on Monday. Who can say which team will show up?

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Jody Shelley embraces second career as NHL broadcaster

By Aaron Portzline- November 18, 2024

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

Item No. 1: On the rise

Jody Shelley worked his regular gig as the Blue Jackets color analyst for FanDuel Sports Network last Saturday in Los Angeles and Sunday in Anaheim. He was up ridiculously early the following morning to catch a flight to Calgary to help call last Monday's game between the Flames and Kings on Amazon Prime.

Have a seat, we're just getting started.

Early Tuesday, Shelley flew from Calgary to Seattle to rejoin the Blue Jackets for that night's game vs. the Kraken. After the game, he caught a red-eye flight from Seattle to Pittsburgh to join TNT's coverage of the Penguins game against the Red Wings on Wednesday.

On Thursday, he breathed. Then came a Blue Jackets home game vs. the Penguins on Friday and a late-night flight to Montreal for Saturday's Blue Jackets-Canadiens game. That brings us to today, when Shelley will remain in Montreal while the Blue Jackets fly to Boston because he's working the Edmonton-Montreal game on Monday for Amazon.

"It was great in the summer when we put this schedule together," Shelley joked. "But weeks like this ..."

All kidding aside, Shelley, 48, is having a blast. Since retiring as a player after the 2012-13 season, Shelley's second career in hockey has gone exceedingly well. In the last few years especially, he's become one of the NHL's more recognizable national voices.

Shelley has worked with NBC, TNT and NHL Network for the past several seasons, but landing the job with Amazon Prime this fall has been his biggest boost yet. And here's the best part: They went looking for him, not the other way around.

"I was at NHL Network and (the league's chief content officer) Steve Mayer mentioned Amazon to me," Shelley said, "I didn't know anything about it.

"Then, at a playoff game (last spring), I ran into a guy who was with Amazon and he asked for my email and said they were trying to get in contact with me. In May, I had an interview. They were looking for Canadian talent. It worked out well."

Shelley signed a two-year deal with Amazon. And just like that, his calendar filled up like a CEO's.

"The (television) landscape is changing so far, and nobody really knows what's next," Shelley said. "Being busy is good right now."

Shelley was one of the NHL's premiere pugilists during his 627-game, 12-year career with the Blue Jackets, San Jose Sharks, New York Rangers and Philadelphia Flyers. But he always had insights and intelligence that belied his tough guy image and made broadcasting an obvious choice to many as his second career.

It wasn't obvious to him, though.

"I always had a good relationship with (former Blue Jackets TV play-by-play voice) Jeff Rimer, and he always talked about it (for me)," Shelley said. "But I never believed it."

Shelley's last three NHL seasons were spent in Philadelphia, where two of the game's best analysts — former players Keith Jones and Bill Clement — were based. Shelley and Clement were frequent lunch buddies, and Shelley would pick his brain.

"But when I retired, I really wanted to get into hockey operations," Shelley said.

That was in 2013, one year after the Blue Jackets hired John Davidson — perhaps the best hockey analyst ever — to serve as the president of hockey operations. Shelley, a franchise legend with the Blue Jackets, arranged a meeting with Davidson after the season.

"I said hockey operations," Shelley said. "And J.D. said, 'We've got nothing for you, but you have to try broadcasting.' I wasn't interested in that, so I left J.D.'s office and he told me to come back in two weeks.

"I came back in two weeks. I said I'd love to do hockey operations, and he said 'No! Broadcasting!' He said, 'Just try it. You'll love the experience and the lifestyle.' So I said, 'All right, I'll try it.'"

Shelley started in radio with the Blue Jackets but quickly moved into the TV booth with Rimer doing play-by-play. When producer Joe Whelan came to the Blue Jackets from MSG Network in New York, Shelley started to think more nationally.

"Joe got me thinking bigger and he helped me connect with the NHL Network, and that's really where I started getting national attention," Shelley said.

Does he still harbor dreams of working in an NHL front office?

"I don't really," Shelley said. "I do think I could help. Everybody does if they're close to the game, probably. But J.D. was right. Other than being away from my family, which is tough, I do enjoy the work and I do enjoy the lifestyle."

Item No. 2: Johnson's return

While the Blue Jackets were doing contact drills at the end of practice last Thursday, winger Kent Johnson was on the other end of the ice talking with coach Dean Evason.

Evason would later say that Johnson, who has not yet been medically cleared from an early season shoulder injury, was trying to talk his way into joining the drills, which may have allowed him to return the following night against Pittsburgh.

Johnson, out since the fourth game of the season, has been begging to return, not just against Pittsburgh on Friday but in Montreal on Saturday. He's getting close and traveled with the Blue Jackets on this two-game trip through Montreal and Boston.

There's an outside chance he plays Monday against the Bruins, but it's more likely he returns on Thursday against Tampa Bay after hard practices on Tuesday and Wednesday.

"We're going to show an abundance of patience," GM Don Waddell said. "He's not playing until he's more than ready to return."

Johnson was injured on Oct. 17 vs. Buffalo when he launched himself up and over teammate Erik Gudbranson, who was barreling toward him after being knocked off his skates. Johnson landed awkwardly on his left shoulder, which was surgically repaired last spring.

You could feel the air go out of Nationwide Arena as Johnson skated off the ice clutching his left shoulder.

“I’m lucky it wasn’t as bad (as the first injury),” Johnson said. “I got to a point where I was hoping for the best but expecting the worst, but in the back of my head I had the thought that it just didn’t feel as bad as the first time it was injured.”

Another relief came a few days later after a battery of tests. Johnson wouldn’t clarify what part of the shoulder was injured this time, but it was a different area, he said, than the initial injury. And ...

“It was nice to get a clear decision,” Johnson said. “Like, it wasn’t a tough call (surgery or no surgery). It was very clear that I didn’t need surgery.”

It’s quite something when you consider the circumstances surrounding Johnson’s two shoulder injuries.

On Feb. 28, he was taking a faceoff against the Rangers’ Jonny Brodzinski with 12 seconds remaining in a game the Blue Jackets trailed 4-1. Johnson’s left arm was pulled down awkwardly by the force of the two sticks jamming for the puck.

Johnson chuckled as he walked through the Oct. 17 injury.

“It was a delayed penalty and I wanted to keep the play going,” he said. “It’s one of those things now where I’m like, ‘Why did I even go for that? We’re going to be on the power play in like two seconds.’”

“It’s hockey. It’s quick decisions, so you can’t beat yourself up over it.”

Item No. 3: Snacks

- Waddell is vowing to show great patience with Blue Jackets defense prospect Denton Mateychuk, who probably deserved an NHL roster spot out of training camp but was sent to AHL Cleveland to continue his development. Mateychuk is doing his job by testing that patience (in a good way) with his play. Heading into Sunday’s slate of games in the AHL, Mateychuk leads all AHL defensemen in scoring (5-9-14), has a plus-1 rating and has 30 shots on goal. Three of his goals have come on the power play. He’s tied with veteran AHLer Rocco Grimaldi (4-10-14) for the team lead in points.
- The Blue Jackets will need a roster spot when Johnson is activated from injured reserve this week. They’ve carried eight defensemen since claiming Dante Fabbro off waivers from Nashville last weekend, so something has to give. Jordan Harris, who would need waivers to be assigned to AHL Cleveland, has played the past two games on the third pair with Jake Christiansen. David Jiricek, who does not need waivers, has been a healthy scratch in four straight games. He’s played in only five of the club’s first 17 games.
- Every once in a while the NHL/AHL schedules collide in the best way. On Sunday, the Blue Jackets took a late morning flight from Montreal to Boston. Upon landing, Waddell and others drove an hour to Providence to catch the Sunday afternoon game between the AHL’s Cleveland Monsters and Providence Bruins. They’ll likely see Gavin Brindley’s AHL debut. Brindley, a second-round pick (No. 34) of the Blue Jackets in 2023, suffered a broken finger near the end of training camp. He was activated from injured reserve and sent to the AHL last week.
- In Friday’s 6-2 win over Pittsburgh, the Blue Jackets had 15 different players collect either a goal or an assist, the second-most point-getters in a game in franchise history. The only time more players registered a point was on Nov. 4, 2016, when the Blue Jackets beat Montreal 10-0 in Nationwide Arena with 16 players contributing offensively.
- In five of the Blue Jackets’ six wins this season, they’ve scored exactly six goals. They won 6-4 at Colorado on Oct. 12, 6-4 vs. Buffalo on Oct. 17, 6-2 vs. Toronto on Oct. 22, 6-1 vs. Edmonton on Oct. 28 and 6-2 vs. the Penguins on Friday. That’s already more games this season with six or more goals than

the Blue Jackets have had in 17 of the franchise's 23 previous seasons. The most came in 2018-19 when they scored six or more goals in 11 games. The Jackets had eight such games last season.

- Former Blue Jackets forward Josh Anderson, who was traded to Montreal before the 2020-21 season, scored the 5-1 goal against his former club in the Canadiens rout on Saturday. We found this hard to believe, but true: Anderson has already played more games with Montreal (286) than he did with Columbus (267).
- Zach Werenski's second-period assist on Fabbro's goal Saturday moves him within two points (94-221-315) of David Vyborny (113-204-317) for fifth on the Blue Jackets franchise points list. He could end up fourth before the season ends as he's currently 19 points shy of Nick Foligno (142-192-334).
- This week's Sunday Gathering trivia question: The Blue Jackets' all-time top 10 scoring leaders are Rick Nash (547), Cam Atkinson (402), Boone Jenner (364), Foligno (334), Vyborny (317), Werenski (315), R.J. Umberger (250), Oliver Bjorkstrand (234), Brandon Dubinsky (225) and Seth Jones (223). Only two of those players have a positive plus-minus rating during their Columbus careers. Name them.
- With Shelley broadcasting in Montreal on Monday, Hall of Fame broadcaster John Davidson will step back into the booth for his second game with Steve Mears on FanDuel Sports Network. Davidson, now a senior advisor with the Jackets after 12 years as president of hockey operations, has committed to broadcast at least three more Monday games this season.
- Prospect winger Jordan Dumais is traveling to Columbus this week to meet with Blue Jackets team doctors. It's anticipated Dumais will need a second hernia surgery before he's cleared to resume skating, but there's still hope he'll be able to play at some point this season. When he's medically cleared, he'll start his pro career with AHL Cleveland, but there will be plenty of rust. Dumais, a third-round pick (No. 96) of Columbus in 2022, played in only 26 games last season between his junior club (Halifax) and Team Canada in the World Junior Championship.
- Trivia answer: Atkinson had a plus-17 rating in 627 games with the Blue Jackets while Foligno had a plus-16 rating in 599 games with the franchise.

[BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets defeat Penguins to get back in win column](#)

By Craig Merz- November 16, 2024

COLUMBUS -- Zach Werenski and Dmitri Voronkov each had a goal and an assist for the Columbus Blue Jackets, who ended a six-game losing streak with a 6-2 win against the Pittsburgh Penguins at Nationwide Arena on Friday.

Zach Aston-Reese, Mathieu Olivier, Damon Severson and Cole Sillinger scored, and Sean Monahan had two assists for the Blue Jackets (6-8-2), who were 0-5-1 in their past six games. Elvis Merzlikins made 21 saves.

"Now we have that win," Merzlikins said. "We have that winning mentality back on and we have to keep going."

Anthony Beauvillier had a goal and an assist for the Penguins (6-10-3), who have lost three straight and five of six (1-3-2). Tristan Jarry, who was recalled from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League on Saturday, made 33 saves in his first start since Oct. 16.

"As a group we felt pretty good about our game after two periods," Pittsburgh coach Mike Sullivan said. "The biggest point in the third period is we didn't defend our net front. If you look at a couple of goals they scored, they are outside shots where the rebound lays there and we're either puck watching or we don't get into people. We have to be harder at the net front. We have to make them work harder for their goals."

Aston-Reese gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead at 2:20 of the first period, redirecting Jake Christiansen's shot from along the left boards.

"We didn't really give them a sniff," Aston-Reese said. "Little bit on our heels in the second, but we managed it fine. That's going to happen. Decent damage control. So, a really good 60-minute effort tonight."

Werenski scored seven seconds into a power play to extend the lead to 2-0 at 8:39. He beat Jarry glove side with a one-timer from the right point.

Beauvillier cut it to 2-1 at 11:51, batting in a puck at the right post from behind the net.

Michael Bunting tied it 2-2 with a power-play goal at 12:06 of the second period, but Olivier put the Blue Jackets back in front 3-2 at 16:27 when he roofed a shot from the right circle on a 3-on-1 rush.

"We're looking for [consistency], obviously," Penguins captain Sidney Crosby said. "We've got to commit to play the same way. That's not always easy to do. There's a lot of things that can affect that. We can't allow anything to change the way we play."

Voronkov made it 4-2 at 1:56 of the third period, jamming his own rebound five-hole after he deflected Kirill Marchenko's shot at the right post.

"It's tough," Jarry said. "Their game plan was to get a lot of pucks to the net, get a lot of bodies to the net and battle, and I think they got to a lot of pucks before we did, and it was tough to recover."

Severson pushed the lead to 5-2 at 9:49, and Sillinger scored into an empty net at 15:32 for the 6-2 final.

It was Pittsburgh's first regulation loss to Columbus since Nov. 29, 2019 (11-0-2 in previous 13 games).

“It was important that we played how we played tonight, particularly in the third period,” Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. “We catch some breaks to get up a couple of goals, we had some pucks get through that hadn’t gone in the net for us, which was wonderful.”

NOTES: Crosby had the primary assist on Beauvillier's goal. It was his 1,016th career assist, tying Joe Sakic for 13th in NHL history. ... Crosby remains two goals shy of 600. ... Olivier's goal was his fifth this season (16 games), tying an NHL career high. He scored five goals in 54 games in 2023-24, and five goals in 66 games in 2022-23. ... Beauvillier has scored in three straight games. ... Penguins forward Matt Nieto had one shot in 13:26 of ice time. It was his first game since sustaining a knee injury, which required multiple surgeries, on Nov. 30, 2023.

[BlueJackets.com / Winning Thoughts: Blue Jackets break losing skid vs. Pens](#)

By Jeff Svoboda- November 16, 2024

BLUE JACKETS 6, PENGUINS 2

1. It was a party for just about everyone on the Blue Jackets on this night.

It wasn't quite Oprah Winfrey shouting "You get a car! And you get a car!", but if you suited up in a CBJ jersey on Friday night, you probably left with a point or two.

In all, 15 of the 18 Blue Jackets to skate in the win over the Pens had a goal or an assist, highlighted by two-point nights from Zach Werenski (one goal, one assist), Dmitri Voronkov (one goal, one assist) and Sean Monahan (two assists).

Sorry, Mikael Pyyhtia, Jordan Harris and Sean Kuraly. They were the only ones to not get on the score sheet, but it seems fair to say they'll take the win and the end of a six-game losing streak as parting gifts.

It's obvious to say that if you get scoring from up and down the lineup, you'll win games, but Friday night was more proof of that. Whereas the Blue Jackets were kept to just 13 goals in the last seven contests, the team's depth of scoring vs. the Pens meant a member of every line plus two defensemen tallied in the team's fifth six-goal outburst of the season.

"Any time you get depth scoring, it's huge," said Zach Aston-Reese, who began the party with a goal just 2:20 into the game.

The everybody contributes mantra didn't just stop with scoring. At 5-on-5, the biggest difference in forward ice time ranged from Aston-Reese (11:07) to Yegor Chinakhov (8:52), while on defense Zach Werenski led the way with 14:16, but Jordan Harris' 12:31 wasn't far behind despite having the least ice time.

In other words, head coach Dean Evason just kept rolling his lines and pairs without seeing any noticeable dip in effectiveness.

"When you have depth like that and can play four lines and six D regularly, just keep rolling, that's exciting for us as a team," Evason said.

2. The Blue Jackets saved their best for last on this night.

Columbus took a 2-0 lead in the first period on tallies from Aston-Reese and Werenski (power play), but Pittsburgh battled back to tie things just after the midway point of the game. Mathieu Olivier's odd-man rush goal late in the second restored the CBJ lead, and Columbus went to the locker room up 3-2 after 40 minutes.

In recent years, that would have meant there was no guarantee that the Blue Jackets would come out on top. That's especially true against a Pittsburgh team that has seemingly had the Jackets' number, with an ability to seemingly escape any situation and leave the Blue Jackets on the losing side of things.

Add in the Pens' desperation level amid a rough start to the season, and you could have forgiven CBJ fans if there was some nervousness when DMX played and the puck dropped to start the third.

But on this night, there was no reason to worry. The Blue Jackets controlled the final frame, not just scoring all three goals but posting a major edge in shots on goal (19-4). Pittsburgh had a little flurry late during a power play, but other than that, it was one-way traffic toward netminder Tristan Jarry.

“Obviously on the road we had some games where we had the lead and maybe blew it and gave up a little too much,” Cole Sillinger said postgame. “When we had the lead tonight, that’s something that we recognized and played with a little more clock awareness, playing smart hockey.”

Evason has preached that the Blue Jackets can create offense by playing sturdy defense, that staying on the right side of the puck will not only keep it out of the CBJ net but allow the Jackets to get on the attack.

The way Columbus played the final 20-plus minutes was proof of that.

“In the third period, we had plenty of opportunities to score, but we didn’t sacrifice anything else,” Evason said.

3. Elvis Merzlikins turned in an excellent performance in his 200th career game.

First off, credit where credit is due. Sticks taps are in order for Merzlikins, who became just the fifth CBJ goalie to reach that milestone following Sergei Bobrovsky, Marc Denis, Steve Mason and Joonas Korpisalo.

He celebrated in style Friday night, making stops on 21 of 23 shots against. More than that, though, he exorcised some demons against the Pens, against whom he entered with a career 1-6-0 record, 4.02 GAA and .895 save percentage.

“It’s never been easy to play against them,” Merzlikins said. “They are a great team. They are fast. They have really skilled players, and they’re physical as well – always in the crease, provoking and all that stuff. But I like that stuff.”

While the save total wasn’t astronomical, he was at his best throughout the night, playing calm, composed and with confidence. There were stretches of the game where the Penguins had the puck for extended sequences, but Merzlikins was up to the challenge.

His biggest stop came in the final seconds of the second period, as Anthony Beauvillier fished a rebound out of a mess of bodies in front and seemingly had an open net to shoot at.

But Merzlikins stretched out his pad and his glove to his left, snagging Beauvillier’s shot out of the air with his trapper with one of the best saves of the season.

“I just trusted my instincts and it went really well,” he said.

[BlueJackets.com / Canadiens pull away from Blue Jackets](#)

By Sean Farrell- November 17, 2024

MONTREAL -- Mike Matheson had a goal and an assist, and the Montreal Canadiens scored three straight goals in the third period to pull away for a 5-1 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Bell Centre on Saturday.

Nick Suzuki and Josh Anderson also scored, and Joel Armia and Cole Caufield each had two assists for the Canadiens (6-10-2), who have won two of three after losing six in a row. Sam Montembeault made 25 saves.

"I think we kept things simple and we put more pucks on the net," Matheson said. "I know it's a bit of a cliché to say that, but it works too."

Dante Fabbro scored for the Blue Jackets (6-9-2), who have lost seven of their past eight (1-6-1). Daniil Tarasov made 25 saves.

"We just didn't stay with the game plan and kind of went rogue a little bit," Columbus coach Dean Evason said. "And they capitalized on a few mistakes and the game was over."

Matheson gave Montreal a 1-0 lead with a power-play goal at 4:59 of the first period. He one-timed a pass from Caufield and drove a slap shot past Tarasov stick side from the top of the slot for his first goal of the season.

"His shot's really good," Suzuki said. "We're trying to find him in spots to shoot it. I think that will give him a lot of confidence moving forward to keep shooting."

Fabbro tied it 1-1 at 7:40 of the second period on a low slap shot from the point past Montembeault's left pad. It was his first goal in three games for Columbus since he was claimed off waivers from the Nashville Predators on Sunday.

Suzuki put the Canadiens up 2-1 at 15:49 with a wrist shot under Tarasov's glove as he cut across the top of the slot after taking a pass from Armia.

"I thought we were hard to play against for most of the game, minus probably the first nine minutes of the second period," Montreal coach Martin St. Louis said. "We were hard on the forecheck."

Lucas Condotta made it 3-1 at 11:04 of the third period when he snapped a one-timer from the inside edge of the left face-off circle on a pass from Armia. It was his first goal in five games since he was recalled from Laval of the American Hockey League on Nov. 6.

Jake Evans pushed it to 4-1 at 12:52, scoring off Caufield's pass from the left side for his 100th NHL point.

"We lost our game a little in the second period, for sure, but overall we were much more solid of not giving them too much," Matheson said. "We knew that they played last night, and I feel like we had our legs, so we were able to take advantage of that."

Anderson scored a power-play goal at 15:55 for the 5-1 final when Matheson's slap shot from the point deflected in off him.

"Coming through the neutral zone, I think costly turnovers at blue lines is dangerous in this league," Fabbro said. "When you look at the top teams, the best thing that they do is manage the puck through the neutral zone and get things in. So, I think if we just can clean up a couple of areas we're going to put ourselves in good positions every night to win games."

NOTES: Fabbro's goal was his first in nine games this season, and first since March 30 of last season when he scored for Nashville in a 7-4 loss at the Colorado Avalanche. ... Montreal has won six straight games against the Blue Jackets. ... Suzuki has 16 points (five goals, 11 assists) in 13 games against Columbus. ... Canadiens defenseman David Savard did not play because of an upper-body injury.

[BlueJackets.com / CBJ's Boston crew excited to return to their college days](https://www.bluejackets.com/cbj-boston-crew-excited-to-return-to-their-college-days)

By Jeff Svoboda- November 18, 2024

Almost five years ago, Jordan Harris scored a goal he'll remember the rest of his life.

Now a Blue Jackets defenseman, back in 2020, Harris wore the college colors of Northeastern University. More than fourteen minutes into the second overtime of the Beanpot championship game and with the Huskies on the power play, Harris let loose a wrist shot from the top of the zone that sailed through traffic and kept on going until it hit the net behind Boston University goalie Sam Tucker.

Pandemonium inside TD Garden ensued, with the red-and-black clad Husky fans among the record crowd of 17,850 going nuts as Harris raced to embrace goalie Craig Pantano and his teammates streamed off the bench. The victory in the Beanpot – contested each year for bragging rights between the four Division I hockey schools in Boston – was Northeastern's third in a row for the first time in school history.

"I feel like in the moment, it was like deep into overtime, and I was just so tired," Harris said this week while reminiscing about the goal. "I think I was more relieved the game was over. Looking back and seeing the replay and seeing the student section, that's something I'll cherish forever."

Harris is one of three Blue Jackets – joined by fellow Northeastern product Zach Aston-Reese and Boston University's Dante Fabbro – to have taken part in one of the more unique college hockey environments in the country.

The three hail from different corners of North America, but they got to spend their college years not just living in a special city but adding to the history of the rivalries between schools – including Boston College and Harvard – that have endured for decades.

As the Blue Jackets get ready to take on the Bruins in Boston tomorrow night, all three had smiles on their faces as they relived what it was like to take part.

"I wish I could have done 10 years, honestly," Aston-Reese said when looking back at his college career.

He's as good a place to jump off as any, as the wing was the first of the CBJ Bostonians to arrive in New England. A native of Staten Island, N.Y., he began his college career at Northeastern in 2013-14 when the Huskies were going through a rough patch, as the Huskies had won just nine of 34 games the year before his arrival and hadn't won the Hockey East conference or the Beanpot since 1988.

Slowly but surely, the Huskies worked their way back up the food chain, winning the Hockey East title and making an NCAA tournament appearance in 2015-16 before Aston-Reese led the nation in scoring a year later, leading to Harris calling ZAR a "Husky legend."

They never captured the Beanpot during Aston-Reese's tenure, falling in the title game in '14 and '15, but they did put Northeastern hockey back on the map.

"We were the forgotten Boston school that sucked, and we all had a chip on our shoulder to prove everybody wrong," Aston-Reese said. "We never won a Beanpot when I was there, but we never finished last. I always say that. We won Hockey East my junior year, so that was cool. We worked so hard."

Harris didn't arrive at Northeastern until the 2018-19 season, but the Haverhill, Mass., native grew up steeped in the traditions of one of hockey's American hotbeds. He committed a week after visiting the campus and was on teams that won the 2019 and '20 Beanpot, captured the Hockey East regular season title in 2022 and made a pair of NCAA tournament appearances.

“It’s so historic,” he said of taking part in the rivalries. “Especially being from Mass, growing up watching the Beanpot. I feel like Northeastern is a little overshadowed by the other schools, so to be able to get the big wins we got when I was there to really put it on the map – we made two NCAA tournaments, two Beanpots, Hockey East regular season – that’s so cool. Especially when you know the history of BU, BC and Harvard.”

The Blue Jackets’ newest acquisition saw the rivalry from the other side of things. Despite growing up in Coquitlam, British Columbia, an entire continent away from Beantown, Fabbro attended Boston University for three seasons and captained the team his final year.

With five national championships and 24 Frozen Four appearances, BU is one of college hockey’s traditional powers, and Fabbro played in such big games as the Beanpot and outdoors games at Fenway Park throughout his tenure from 2017-19.

“I got to play in the Beanpot every year, a bunch of outdoor games at Frozen Fenway,” he said. “Just being in that college atmosphere, it’s definitely a college city for sure. It was a really unique experience for me. Obviously it was more of a city campus and living that way, but it was just a lot of fun. I really enjoyed my teammates I had there and the coaches.”

The cherry on the top of being part of such a competitive hockey culture was living in one of the most historic cities in the country, with no lack of things to do. From an active social scene to landmark spots in American history to great shopping to all four major sports, the guys said living in Boston provided plenty of opportunities for fun.

“We got to go to Fenway quite a bit actually,” Fabbro said. “I think it was a 10-minute drive to the heart of Boston. You’d get to go see Boston Common and everything. It was just a great city to explore, lots of history. I’m grateful I got the opportunity to go there.”

Added Aston-Reese: “It was a great city, honestly. There are so many cool little areas that are so unique and so many people that are college aged. There was always something to do.”

All three players acknowledged they were part of something bigger than themselves when they attended college in The Hub.

“Getting to experience the tradition of everything and just how much it means to the city and each university, it was a pretty special moment for myself,” Fabbro said. “I never got to win a Beanpot, which was obviously one of the biggest regrets for sure, but just playing in that atmosphere was pretty surreal. It’s cool to see the university camaraderie and the spirit coming out at games.”

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Jiricek, Fabbro & More

By Mark Scheig- November 16, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets had a road trip to forget.

With a chance to go out west and play in some winnable games, the Blue Jackets came home from California and Seattle with one out of a possible eight points. The result of that left them with tied for the fewest points in the NHL with 12.

Friday night at Nationwide Arena, they host their division rival Pittsburgh Penguins for the only time this season. After that game, the teams play twice more both in Pittsburgh.

It's a game somebody has to win. The Blue Jackets have lost six in a row while the Penguins are just 3-5-2 in their last 10 including a 7-1 crushing loss at the hands of the Dallas Stars.

On this gameday edition of Blue Jackets News & Rumors, we check in on the situation with one of their prominent young players.

Jiricek's Situation Worth Monitoring

Defenseman David Jiricek started the new season with a fresh start under a new manager in Don Waddell and a new head coach in Dean Evason. This appeared to finally be the time for Jiricek to win a spot out of camp and play an important role on their blue line.

Camp started out that way. Jiricek was skating with Ivan Provorov on the second pair. But then the preseason started. It was far from his best on the ice.

While Jiricek made the team, he got into a rotation on the bottom pair with Jack Johnson and Jordan Harris. With the Blue Jackets struggling with goals against, they went to the waiver wire and were able to get Dante Fabbro from the Nashville Predators.

Fabbro goes immediately to the top pair to play with Zach Werenski. Meanwhile Jordan Harris re-enters the lineup on Friday night. Jack Johnson was a healthy scratch. And so was Jiricek.

It was a fall from grace from the start of camp. Now questions are surfacing wondering what could be next for the Blue Jackets and Jiricek.

While it's understandable why the questions are being asked, at least for now, Jiricek's demotion to being a healthy scratch is about his play on the ice.

Coach Dean Evason admitted that Jiricek needs to earn his way back on the ice. The team is helping him with that process.

"That's our whole thought process is earning the opportunity to play more," Evason said. "After the game (on the last road trip), we sat, watched all his shifts and teach and communicate of what we need from every player, but from him in particular after. If you want to play, then you need to earn that right to be on the ice and play games."

Jiricek's minutes were cut from 16 minutes to under nine minutes due to performance. He made a mistake in Los Angeles when he made a pinch that created a 2-on-1 against which led to a goal against. It's clear the team needs to see more from him before trusting him with more minutes.

The decision now in which the team is still pondering is what to do next. Kent Johnson is close to returning from injury. His return would require a roster move.

The Blue Jackets still think highly of Jiricek. But they will need to decide what the best course of action is. Sitting for long stretches of time is not in the interest of the player or the team. Would he accept going to Cleveland and playing big minutes?

It is a new regime with the Blue Jackets. They see Jiricek has things to work on in his game including his skating and his decision-making. They might ultimately decide the AHL is the best thing for him. He doesn't need waivers so it would be the easiest move to make barring an injury.

Let's see what develops in this next stretch. If he's going to remain out of the NHL lineup for long stretches, then they will have to consider assigning him to Cleveland. Then we'll see how he reacts to that situation.

It's possible too he continues to rotate in and out of the lineup. This will be a good test for Waddell to see how he views a player he didn't draft and what he thinks the best course of action is. Keep an eye on this one.

From Waivers to Top Pair

Life can come at you fast. For Fabbro, he was placed on waivers one day. He was claimed by the Blue Jackets the next day. Now he's playing on the top pair with Werenski.

Fabbro clearly needed a fresh start. He's grateful for the opportunity the Blue Jackets have presented him. He still believes he has a lot to offer now over 300 games into his NHL career.

"It was obviously a bit frustrating," Fabbro said. "This new opportunity is awesome and I'm grateful for that. I think this is a great spot for me. I love the guys so far. As long as I put my best foot forward and work everyday, I'm not going to worry about contracts right now. I'm going to worry about winning games. I think that's the most important part. All that other stuff comes after."

Fabbro won't feel out of place playing alongside Werenski. He spent time with the Predators playing with another top defenseman in Roman Josi.

Fabbro saw Josi as a fourth forward out there, similar to how Werenski likes to play. The key for Fabbro is learning the details.

"Just knowing where (Josi) was at all the time and how he wanted to play and got up in the rush, it's the same thing with Werenski," Fabbro said. "He's got all the attributes to do that. I just want to make sure I'm putting myself in the right positions to distribute the puck and grow. Josi helped me out a lot. He's a great leader and a great person off the ice. He taught me early on how to be fearless and make plays."

"I'm just trying to get back to my true self as a player. It takes work, but I'm willing to put the work in. I want to be here and try to help this team win."

Side Dishes

- Elvis Merzlikins starting Friday night marks his 200th game in the NHL.
- The Blue Jackets haven't defeated the Penguins in regulation since 2019. That's staggering to think about for a division rival.
- Given the circumstances, Friday against Pittsburgh and Saturday against Montreal are two winnable games. The Blue Jackets have created chances and like what they've done in that regard. But they need to finish. They know it. The Penguins are one of the worst teams at quality chances against. We'll see if they can take advantage of that and finally break three goals in a game.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Earn First Regulation Win Over Penguins Since 2019

By Mark Scheig- November 16, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets came home from a long road trip hoping to finally right the ship and break their losing streak. After a back and forth start, the Blue Jackets won going away.

Zach Werenski and Dmitri Voronkov each had a goal and an assist. Sean Monahan had two assists including his 300th NHL assist to help lift the Blue Jackets to a convincing 6-2 win over the floundering Pittsburgh Penguins.

In the process, the Blue Jackets defeated the Penguins in regulation for the first time since 2019. They also broke their six-game losing streak overall.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets needed to get off to a quick start. Thanks to former Penguin Zach Aston-Reese, they were able to do just that. He scored just 2:20 into the game to get them off and running. Werenski added a power-play goal to extend to 2-0.

The Penguins then were able to gain a possession edge. They climbed back into the game just over three minutes later thanks to Anthony Beauvillier. The Blue Jackets held the lead after one but needed to find an answer.

The Penguins were able to tie the game 12 minutes into the second thanks to Michael Bunting's third goal of the season. That's when the Blue Jackets started to take over the game. They scored a massive goal thanks to Mathieu Olivier.

Olivier received a pass from Werenski and finished to make it 3-2. Coach Dean Evason said postgame this goal "certainly jacked our group up. You could feel it on the bench."

The Blue Jackets added three goals in the third from Voronkov, Damon Severson and a Cole Sillinger empty-netter. Elvis Merzlikins earned just his second career win against the Penguins making 21 saves. Meanwhile Tristan Jarry stopped 33 of 38.

Evason made it a point to acknowledge the crowd for their influence on the game. "You could feel it with our crowd. And by the way, the crowd at the end. Have they always chanted that at the end of games? Because that was fantastic."

The crowd erupted in a CBJ chant. They also had some "endearing words" for Pittsburgh.

With the win, the Blue Jackets improved to 6-8-2 on the season with a game Saturday night in Montreal. The Penguins dropped to 6-10-3 and have a game Saturday night against the San Jose Sharks.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Defense or Goaltending: Which Is Their Achilles Heel?

By Nicholas Arnold- November 16, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets continue another tough start to the NHL season. After a decent month of October in which the team sat in a wild card spot with a 5-4-1 record, they have absolutely plummeted in November. In six games, they've only secured one of a possible 12 standings points and allowed 29 goals against. That's almost five goals against per game.

A tough question to answer over the last several seasons has been around the Blue Jackets' leaky defense and goaltending. It's something that's been discussed ad nauseum. Are the team's remarkable goals against statistics due to a lack of a structured defensive system, or is it a personnel issue – be it on defense or between the pipes? Let's discuss.

Blue Jackets' Defensive System & Sample Size

Blue Jackets' new head coach Dean Evason was hired due to his work with the Minnesota Wild. In each of his three full seasons leading Minnesota, he led them to the playoffs as a surprise team. They never had an abundance of high-end skill and were significantly handicapped from a salary cap perspective, but he found a way to get more than the sum of parts out of his team. Part of the reason was his commitment to structured defense and blue-collar, hard-working approach to getting things done.

We've seen glimpses of that approach executed from the Blue Jackets early this season. It's manifested in the team playing in far more competitive games than previous seasons. We've seen it in the timely goals scored from unlikely players like Mathieu Olivier and Zach Aston-Reese. However, this new normal for the team hasn't fully taken hold – hence the losing record.

A new system to a hockey team takes time to implement. We saw this clearly with the Winnipeg Jets when Rick Bowness took over as their head coach. In the first season under his tutelage, the team made the playoffs by the skin of their teeth as the last seed in the Western Conference. The second season is where they really came together fully understanding the expectations from day one, and they had a huge bump to the fourth best team in the NHL. This season they've continued that success to become the best team in hockey following similar systems, with new head coach Scott Arniel who took over after being an associate coach under Bowness.

All of that is to say that 15 games in, the Blue Jackets haven't laced the skates enough times to fully be able to tell if the defensive system has improved that much. In our most recent Union Junction Podcast, my colleague Mark Scheig posits that we'll have a better idea in another 15 games or beyond to the halfway point of the season.

Blue Jackets' Goalie and Defense Personnel

While we don't quite have the sample size to determine if Evason's new system is making enough of a dent on the team's overall defensive play, the returns are not favorable when looking at the state of the goaltending. Of the goalies who have played at least five games in the NHL this season, Elvis Merzlikins' .896 save percentage (SV%) ranks 36th and Daniil Tarasov's .865 SV% ranks 50th. Certainly not the start to the season that Columbus was hoping for from their netminders.

Despite being an Achilles heel to the team, the Blue Jackets' goaltending has been relatively gridlocked. Merzlikins, the incumbent starter, and Daniil Tarasov, the touted goalie of the future. The question that needs to be asked here is that since Tarasov was brought into the organization by the previous Jarmo

Kekalainen-led regime, is current general manager Don Waddell quite as enthusiastic that Tarasov is the goalie of the future? If not, that would be a possible trade chip to make a change in the crease to try to improve things – especially considering the difficulty in moving Merzlikins' mammoth contract.

It should be noted that at the end of October, Merzlikins looked like as electric as he did when he burst on the NHL scene in 2020. In his games against the New York Islanders and the Edmonton Oilers he looked rejuvenated and as if he still could be an impact player. Those games showed promise to the hopes that a strong defensive system could return him to being an above average NHL starter.

On defense, not many of their current lineup are particularly well renowned for defensive play. Zach Werenski, Ivan Provorov, and Damon Severson have their moments defensively, but are mostly lauded for their offensive and puck moving ability. None are keeping opposing players up at night in fear of going into the corners with them the next night. David Jiricek is still young and working on his defensive deficiencies. Jack Johnson is in the twilight of his career and while effective in a limited role is a far cry from the player he was during his first stint in the Buckeye State.

The most punishing defensive player, Erik Gudbranson, is out of the lineup for a significant amount of time following a collision with his teammate Sean Monahan. Filling in as lead defensive stalwart in the interim is fresh faced waiver pickup Dante Fabbro. He spent the early part of his career occasionally partnered with Norris Trophy winner Roman Josi on the Nashville Predators. Despite falling out of favor in Tennessee, Fabbro is still young, 26, and it is well within the realm of possibilities that he's able to meet or exceed his previous ceiling. His defensive-first play style complements that of Werenski and Provorov, which should add some form of stability to the back end overall.

As of right now, the jury is still out on if the team's woes are personnel or systems-related. Once the sample size with a new head coach grows and a structured defensive system is able to be put in place, we'll get a true test of if the goalies simply need to be better. What is promising is that now with Evason leading the way, a system is on its way so the team will get a more definitive answer one way or the other soon enough.

1st Ohio Battery / Scoreboard Matters: But The Expected Numbers Are A Positive Barometer, At Least

By Will Chase- November 16, 2024

Stating the obvious, the Columbus Blue Jackets need a win.

At November's midway point, they're still searching for their first victory in the month. The latest blow is the 0-4-1 road trip, which the team was in nearly every game and was probably due a better fate.

During October, the team scored at will. Now, those shots aren't getting past the opposing goaltender. The Jackets are outshooting opponents and, as the expected numbers have displayed, have probably been the better team of late, at least throughout major spurts and portions of games without a result to show.

But, the scoreboard is the true measure of success regarding wins and losses. Columbus might have outplayed the San Jose Sharks last week but they couldn't get more than a single goal past Vitek Vanecek.

Funny enough, the Blue Jackets made a habit of scoring six goals apiece in their first four wins. Now, they've gone seven straight games with two or fewer goals.

Per Natural Stat Trick, the below displays a snapshot of how the Blue Jackets performed on their road trip, holding edges in shot attempts, shot totals, and expected goals in every game at 5v5, even including the 7-2 loss to the Capitals on Nov. 2.

Blue Jackets vs Capitals	CF	CA	SF	SA	GF	GA	xGF	xGA
5v5	74	44	28	20	2	7	3.75	2.49

Nov. 2

The Capitals buried the Jackets with a five-goal first period so it's probably expected the Blue Jackets would come out aggressive and blast the goaltender with shots.

Blue Jackets vs Sharks	CF	CA	SF	SA	GF	GA	xGF	xGA
5v5	65	40	37	22	1	1	4.02	1.21

Nov. 5

Vanecek set a career-high with 49 saves in a 2-1 overtime win for San Jose, improving to 7-0-0 lifetime against Columbus.

Blue Jackets vs Kings CF CA SF SA GF GA xGF xGA

5v5	46	34	20	15	1	3	2.0	1.27
-----	----	----	----	----	---	---	-----	------

Nov. 9

The Jackets scored first again but a three-goal third by L.A. was the undoing.

Blue Jackets vs Ducks CF CA SF SA GF GA xGF xGA

5v5	71	49	30	22	1	3	3.31	2.11
-----	----	----	----	----	---	---	------	------

Nov.10

Once again, a hot goaltender in John Gibson stonewalled Columbus with 38 saves. It was his first start since emergency appendectomy surgery in September.

Blue Jackets vs Kraken CF CA SF SA GF GA xGF xGA

5v5	66	52	33	28	2	3	3.45	1.90
-----	----	----	----	----	---	---	------	------

Nov. 12

The Jackets had one of their best periods of the season in Seattle, taking a 2-0 lead into the first-period intermission. But a four-goal second-period knockout punch by the Kraken undid the goodwill Columbus built up.

For the trip, the only number that matters is 0-4-1 and the positive trends we pointed to inside each game didn't lead to victories.

That's sports.

At the same time, the numbers inside each game point to strong indicators that if the Blue Jackets keep shooting and holding edges in expected goals, they should get those goals provided they keep with the process.

It's frustrating when the team is outplaying its opponent in key metrics but gets beaten in two or three areas that directly lead to goals, such as turnovers that led to Kings goals last Saturday night.

Despite a collective good effort on most nights, including having the better of the 5v5 scoring chances in their last four games, it hasn't been enough to keep the team from its longest losing streak since last season when they dropped nine straight from Nov. 4-19.

Columbus will look to change that tonight against a team they've had little success against when they host the Pittsburgh Penguins at 7:00 p.m. ET.

1st Ohio Battery / Sweet Dub: Blue Jackets Defeat Penguins 6-2; Pick Up First Win In November

By Ed Francis- November 16, 2024

Streaks: snapped.

The Columbus Blue Jackets ended a six-game losing streak Friday night with a dominant 6-2 victory over the free-falling Pittsburgh Penguins.

The win, which came in front of a sellout crowd, also gave the Blue Jackets their first regulation home win over the Pittsburgh Penguins since November, 29th, 2019 — nearly a half-decade.

Six different Jackets scored and fifteen (!) had at least a point in the win, with Zach Werenski, Dmitri Voronkov, and Sean Monahan picking up multiple points. Elvis Merzlikins stopped 21 of 23 shots on goal from the Penguins, who lost their third straight game.

Here's how the streak came to an end:

1st Period:

(2:20 — CBJ Goal): Zach Aston-Reese gets the scoring started just over two minutes in. The MVP of the play though could've been Kevin Labanc. He does some good work behind the boards and wraps it around to Jake Christiansen, who shoots it on net. That's where it's deflected by Aston-Reese, who gets credit for the goal.

(8:39 — CBJ Goal): The Blue Jackets improving power play strikes again, this time just six seconds in with Werenski's fourth goal of the season. Simple stuff here: Monahan wins the faceoff as the Blue Jackets begin a power play, the first of four Blue Jackets to touch the puck in a five second span. Werenski rips it from just inside the blue line and it's 2-0 Columbus just like that.

(11:51 — PIT Goal): Anthony Beauvillier cuts into the Blue Jackets lead with a goal in his third straight game. He bats the puck as it comes back to the ice before Merzlikins can see it, making it a 2-1 Columbus lead.

2nd Period:

(12:06 — PIT Goal): The Penguins tie it at 2-2 late in a power play; Werenski's clearing attempt is kept in by a skate blade in front of Merzlikins and it sticks around just long enough for Michael Bunting to get his third tally of the season.

(16:27 — CBJ Goal): Mathieu Olivier's fifth goal of the season ties a career high for the only Mississippi native in NHL history — and it comes in just his 16th game of the season. It was a big one, too, giving Columbus a 3-2 lead that they would take into the third period. Dante Fabbro gets the secondary assist for his point as a member of the Blue Jackets.

3rd Period:

(1:56 — CBJ Goal): Voronkov expands the Blue Jackets to 4-2 lead less than two minutes into the third and it's fair to say that he's all the way back after missing the beginning of the season with an injury sustained late in the preseason. This was his third game on the top line and not the only goal he's going to score this way: gets in front of the goalie and uses his size to block his view, then takes a rebound and puts it away for the goal.

(9:49 — CBJ Goal): Plenty of options to choose from for Damon Severson as Pittsburgh goaltender Tristan Jarry has no idea where the puck is (a recurring theme for his night). Sevo takes the hard route but still finds the back of the net to make it a 5-2 Blue Jackets lead.

(15:32 — CBJ Goal): Cole Sillinger, empty net, 6-2. Michael Bunting a tad angry at the end of the clip below. When asked about what the conversation was like between the two, Sillinger said he wasn't sure what Bunting had said to him. "The horn was going off, I didn't really hear him. It was kind of like when someone's talking to you but a train's going by and you're just like... standing there."

PIT	GAME STATS	CBJ
23	SHOTS	39
47%	FACEOFFS	53%
1/4	POWER PLAY	1/5
4/5	PENALTY KILL	3/4
18	HITS	26
14	GIVEAWAYS	17
5	TAKEAWAYS	3
20	BLOCKED SHOTS	25
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
4.04	EXPECTED GOALS	4.04
70	SHOT ATTEMPTS	75
37	SCORING CHANCES	30

PIT

GAME STATS

CBJ

14

HIGH-DANGER CHANCES

14

DATA VIA:

NHL.COM

NATURALSTATTRICK.COM

Stat Talk:

- After seven straight games with two goals or less, the Blue Jackets offense came to life again and scored six goals for the fifth time this season.
- Only Sean Kuraly, Mikael Pyyhtia, and Jordan Harris were left off the scoresheet. The fifteen players who did pick up at least a point was a season-high for the Blue Jackets.
- This was the fifth time in the last six games that the Blue Jackets had at least 36 shots on goal. They're not afraid to shoot the puck.

Up Next:

It's the third straight weekend of back-to-back games as the Blue Jackets go north of the border to face the Montreal Canadiens. Puck drop is scheduled for 7:00 p.m.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Merzlikins Wins 200th Career Game, Rare Win Vs Pittsburgh, Another Six At Home

By Will Chase- November 16, 2024

That's how you break out offensively and end a losing streak.

Elvis Merzlikins made 21 saves in his 200th career game and 15 players registered a point as the Columbus Blue Jackets won decidedly, 6-2, over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday night at Nationwide Arena to end a six-game losing streak.

The Blue Jackets have won five straight at home.

Merzlikins Wins 200th Career Game

With Merzlikins winning his 200th career game, he improves to 3-5-1 in nine starts on the year with a .898 save percentage and a 2.92 goals-against average. In nine career starts against the Penguins, Merzlikins is 2-6-0, .896, 3.78.

"It's never been easy playing against them," Merzlikins said. "They're a great team. They're fast. They have really skilled players. They're physical.

"The most important thing here is this was a huge win to break that losing streak that we had."

Rare Win Vs Pittsburgh

For the first time since 2019, the Blue Jackets beat the Penguins at home in regulation. The four-goal margin of victory was the Jackets' largest over Pittsburgh since that 5-2 win at Nationwide Arena on Nov. 29, 2019.

Columbus beat Pittsburgh 4-3 at home in a shootout on Mar. 30, 2024, and has beaten Pittsburgh in consecutive games for the first time since 2015 when they won 2-1 in Pittsburgh on Nov. 13, 2015, 2-1 in overtime at Columbus on Nov. 27, 2015, and 5-3 at Nationwide on Apr. 4, 2015.

Date	Opponent	Result
Nov. 27, 2015	Pittsburgh	W, 2-1 OT
Nov. 27, 2015	Pittsburgh	W, 2-1
Nov. 27, 2015	Pittsburgh	W, 5-3
Nov. 27, 2015	Pittsburgh	L, 5-3
Nov. 27, 2015	Pittsburgh	W, 2-1

Nov. 27, 2015 Pittsburgh W, 4-3 SO

Another Six At Home

The Blue Jackets needed a win in the worst of ways and they ended a six-game losing streak with a boom — six cannon booms for those counting.

With Friday's win, the Jackets improved to 6-8-2. Among their five victories, they scored exactly six goals in five games. The Jackets also beat the New York Islanders 2-0 on Oct. 30.

Mathieu Olivier tied a career-high with his fifth goal of the season at 16:27 of the second period, making it a 3-2 game. It goes down as the game-winner, his second of the year, and sets a personal best.

Sean Monahan had two assists to notch career No. 300 and 301.

Blue Jackets Scorers	Goals	Assists
Zach Aston-Reese	1	0
Yegor Chinakhov	0	1
Justin Danforth	0	1
Adam Fantilli	0	1
Kevin Labanc	0	1
Kirill Marchenko	0	1
Sean Monahan	0	2
Mathieu Olivier	1	0
Cole Sillinger	1	0
Dmitri Voronkov	1	1

Jake Christiansen	0	1
Dante Fabbro	0	1
Ivan Provorov	0	1
Damon Severson	1	0
Zach Werenski	1	1

We wrote about the Jackets' tough 0-4-1 road trip on Friday and their inability to score goals but highlighted the good things the team had been doing, indicating that the goals wouldn't be far behind. Friday's game broke a streak of seven straight games of two or fewer goals.

As the final score indicates, the Jackets continued their recent road trip trend of outshooting their opponent and having the 5v5 advantage in shot attempts (64-50) and scoring chances (28-26) per Natural Stat Trick. Pittsburgh had the 5v5 edge in expected goals.

Columbus outshot Pittsburgh 39-23 and 19-4 in the third period. Tristan Jarry made 33 saves.

Back On The Road

The Blue Jackets head back on the road for a tilt with the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday, Nov. 16 at 7:00 p.m. ET from Bell Centre.

1st Ohio Battery / Blue Jackets Collapse In Third; Fall 5-1 To Canadiens In Montreal

By Ed Francis- November 17, 2024

	1	2	3	F
	0	1	0	1
	1	1	3	5

CBJ GOALS:
Fabbro (P2, 7:40)

On the second night of a back-to-back, the Columbus Blue Jackets ran out of gas in the third period as they fall 5-1 to the Montreal Canadiens.

The game was tied with under five minutes left in the second period. That's when Montreal captain Nick Suzuki scored to give the Canadiens a 2-1 lead they would take into the final period.

Montreal would score three more times in the third, all in a span of less than five minutes, to hand Columbus their second-largest defeat of the season.

When asked what happened in the third, forward Mathieu Olivier gave an honest assessment. "They got a good goal, a fortunate bounce, and we just kind of stopped playing," said Olivier, who had a heavyweight bout with Montreal's Arber Xhejak in the second period. "We kind of got discouraged."

Dante Fabbro scored the only goal for the Blue Jackets; his first in a Columbus sweater. Goaltender Daniil Tarasov made 25 saves in the losing effort.

Here's a breakdown of the breakdown north of the border:

1st Period:

(4:59 — MTL Goal): The Canadiens season-long struggles apply to most aspects of their game — but not the power play, and they take a 1-0 lead on the man-advantage just under five minutes in. Mike Matheson gets his first of the season on a 90mph slapper from the high slot. Tarasov was perfectly screened by the 6'2", 220lb frame of Montreal's Lucas Condotta.

2nd Period:

(7:40 — CBJ Goal): Fabbro pulls the game square. After an out of sorts opening frame for the Blue Jackets, momentum had been shifting in Columbus' favor before this goal ties it at 1-1. The play starts with Zach Aston-Reese getting a takeaway as Montreal works to clear the puck. It gets chipped into the corner and Kevin Labanc — always seemingly in the right spot at the right time — uses the boards to get it to Zach Werenski. He swaps sides of the ice with Fabbro, who takes the shot and rips it past Montreal goalie Sam Montembeault for the Blue Jackets first goal of the evening.

(8:09): Olivier and Xhekaj provides one of the best heavyweight battles of the season so far in the NHL. Right hook after right hook exchanged by the two, but it seems like Olivier landed the best couple of jabs. In either event, this was a classic.

(15:49 — MTL Goal): Tarasov made numerous great saves throughout the first couple of periods, but Nick Suzuki's goal to regain Montreal's lead came on what looked like it should've been a routine save. The Canadiens captain is in the high slot with Ivan Provorov near him and gets just enough separation from the Blue Jackets defenseman to fire it at Tarasov's glove side. He reacts late and Montreal goes up 2-1.

3rd Period:

(11:04, 12:52, 15:55 — MTL Goals): Needing a goal to tie the game, the Blue Jackets are completely unable to get any sustained play near the Montreal net for the first several minutes of the period. It goes from bad to worse after the midway point of the period, with the Canadiens scoring three times in less than five minutes on a series of misplays, misreads, and mistakes.

CBJ	GAME STATS	MTL
26	SHOTS	30
50%	FACEOFFS	50%
0/4	POWER PLAY	1/4
3/4	PENALTY KILL	4/4
18	HITS	21
18	GIVEAWAYS	7
5	TAKEAWAYS	4

CBJ	GAME STATS	MTL
11	BLOCKED SHOTS	17
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
2.45	EXPECTED GOALS	2.55
54	SHOT ATTEMPTS	47
19	SCORING CHANCES	20
8	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	8
Data Via NHL.com & NaturalStatTrick.com		

Stat Talk:

- With just 26 shots on goal, the Blue Jackets were outshot for the first time in seven games in the loss. Montreal, who picked up 30 shots, entered the game averaging a league-low 24.2.
- Columbus' best period was the second: they doubled up Montreal 22-11 in shot attempts, the only period in which the Blue Jackets led the category. In 13:16 of 5v5 in the third period, Columbus managed just six total shot attempts and four shots on goal.
- Werenski and Labanc's assist on Fabbro's goal were the 9th assist of the season for both players, trailing only Kirill Marchenko (10).

Up Next:

Another road game for the Blue Jackets, this time to Boston for a Monday night battle with the Bruins. Puck is set to drop at 7:00 p.m.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Road Trends Continue, Monahan And Harris Return, Fabbro Scores First

By Will Chase- November 17, 2024

That one got out of hand fast.

The Montreal Canadiens scored three third-period goals to come away with a 5-1 win over the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday night from Bell Centre.

Sam Montembeault made 25 saves and Nick Suzuki scored his seventh goal of the season. Cole Caufield had two assists.

Road Trends Continue

Columbus broke a six-game losing streak on Friday against the Pittsburgh Penguins but on Saturday their road losing streak stretched to seven games.

With a 2-1 lead heading into the final frame, Montreal got goals from Lucas Condotta, Jake Evans, and former Blue Jacket Josh Anderson. Conduit's tally at 11:04 was the first of the season and second of his career.

"We were playing the right way," head coach Dean Evason said about his team's play through 40 minutes. "We weren't having success as far as shooting the puck and for whatever reason we wanted to try to make plays that weren't there."

"We just didn't stay with the game plan and went rogue a little bit. They capitalized on a few mistakes and the game was over."

In addition to the loss, the continued a streak of six straight road games with two or fewer goals.

Despite the wheels falling off over the final 20 minutes, the Jackets continued another trend of holding 5v5 advantages in shot attempts (42-37) and expected goals (2.14-2.1) per Natural Stat Trick.

Little consolation, of course, as the Jackets have dropped another game and fall to 0-3-0 in the second of back-to-backs this season.

Monahan And Harris Return

On the night the Canadiens honored recent Hall of Fame inductee, Shea Weber, it was a welcome-back reunion for Sean Monahan and Jordan Harris.

Monahan played in 74 games over parts of two seasons for Montreal, scoring 52 points (19 goals, 33 assists). Harris spent his first four seasons with the Habs, playing 140 games upon breaking into the league in 2021-22, and scoring 32 points (eight goals, 24 assists).

Monahan had one shot in 20:50 in Saturday's game. Harris played 13:25.

Fabbro Scores First

Dante Fabbro scored the lone Blue Jackets goal — his first as a Blue Jacket — at 7:40 of the second period to tie the game at 1-1. Zach Werenski and Kevin Labanc each picked up their ninth assists of the year.

Labanc is on a three-game point streak (four assists) and has 10 points (one goal, nine assists), surpassing last season's point total of nine points (two goals, seven assists) in 46 games with the San Jose Sharks.

Bear Of A Matchup

The Blue Jackets travel to Boston to play the Bruins from TD Garden on Monday, Nov. 18 at 7:00 p.m. ET.

1st Ohio Battery / With A Decision Looming, There's Only One Call To Make With David Jiricek: Cleveland

By Ed Francis- November 18, 2024

President of Hockey Operations and General Manager Don Waddell has done nearly everything right in his first campaign with the Columbus Blue Jackets.

But if David Jiricek is still in Columbus by the time this week is over, Waddell will have made his first misstep with the club.

Before Saturday night's game, Waddell spoke with Jody Shelley and Steve Mears on FanDuel Sports Network to talk about the first month and change of the 2024-25 season. When asked about Jiricek, Waddell did not mince words.

"We haven't seen enough to keep him in (the lineup) on a regular basis," said Waddell.

To Jiricek's case, Waddell did admit that the soon-to-be 21-year-old (his birthday is November 28th) hasn't been given much of an opportunity. His five games played and average of just 11:47 per game in those games have worked against him, but for a franchise that is preaching everything must be earned and not given, the limited action is a clear indication that the coaching staff doesn't feel that Jiricek has earned more of a chance.

In answering the question about Jiricek, Waddell mentioned that forward Kent Johnson was likely going to be coming back from injured reserve in the coming week.

"We're going to have to make some decisions here in the upcoming week about what we do."

For Johnson to be activated, the Blue Jackets would need to deactivate someone and, pending (another) injury, that would mean either waiving someone or sending someone down to AHL Cleveland.

That player must be Jiricek.

It seems like Jiricek has been around forever, but as the sixth overall pick in 2022, he's the second-youngest player in Columbus at the present time, behind Adam Fantilli. Forwards typically make their NHL debuts much earlier and with much less of a learning curve than defensemen, so that's not much of a surprise.

In fact, there are only four players — Pavel Mintyukov (ANA), Kevin Korchinski (CHI), Simon Nemec (NJ), and Lane Hutson (MTL) — who have played at least 15 NHL games younger than Jiricek.

It's not "too late" for Jiricek to become an impactful, shutdown defenseman in the NHL. The expectations were perhaps too gaudy in that department and that has played into what seems to be a manufactured rush for Jiricek to become a top guy right away. With a few rare exceptions, most NHL defensemen aren't impact players at age 20 (or even 21, or 22 for that matter). If Jiricek were to not play another NHL game until opening night next season, he would still be a 21-year-old regular NHL defenseman — still ahead of the curve.

There's also not going to be an opportunity for Jiricek to get quality NHL minutes anytime soon. The Blue Jackets have rolled with eight defensemen most of the season and with the recent addition of Dante Fabbro, the ceiling for Jiricek in 2024-25 appears to be scattered appearances on the third pairing. In other words: not enough for him to develop, but more than enough to stunt his growth.

For the continued development of Jiricek, ice time is vital. He would get that in Cleveland, likely alongside Denton Mateychuk, and there's still an excellent chance the two of them see years of ice time together at Nationwide Arena. Building that chemistry in Cleveland wouldn't be the worst thing in the world, and he could do that while fixing the holes in his game that the organization sees as liabilities.

More than any of this, it gives the new Blue Jackets brass time and space to gain the trust in him that the last regime had. When he was hired, Waddell said that he didn't ask any of the current coaches or other management folks for their opinions on the current players; he wanted to form his own. We don't truly know how he (and head coach Dean Evason) feel about Jiricek beyond the fact that they don't feel he's ready to be a contributor to the big-league defense in 2024-25.

One option that's been circulated is trading him. It's come up several times over the last number of months, including last week on Elliotte Friedman's 32 Thoughts podcast:

Trading him doesn't seem like the right thing to do at this point. The return would not be equal — nowhere near it, probably — and again, we're not talking about a 26-year-old who has. Jiricek is still not old enough to drink. Moving him via trade is much more likely to bite the organization than it is help.

So move him to Cleveland, let him sort out what the club feels is holding him back, let the trust be rebuilt, and give him the ice time that he needs to grow as a player.

There's a caveat to all of this: once he goes to the Monsters, he can't come back this season. The previous Blue Jackets administration fumbled Jiricek's handling, telling him to "get a place in Columbus" when they really should've told him to get familiar with I-71. A team can only recall a player (only to demote him again) so many times before that player is, for lack of a better term, over it.

The Blue Jackets are likely nearing that point, but if they handle the situation right from here out, there's no reason the relationship — and a great career for Jiricek in Columbus — can't be saved.

The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: Jets stay on top, Wild rise, plus our early MVPs

By Sean Gentile and Dom Luszczyszyn- November 16, 2024

The NHL's quarter mark is just about here, which gives us a good opportunity to take stock and deliver some kudos to the best around the league.

Here are our picks for each team's MVP from the season's first quarter. Most of them are players — most of them.

1. Winnipeg Jets, 15-2-0

Last week: 1

Sean's ranking: 1

Dom's ranking: 1

First-quarter MVP: Connor Hellebuyck

Thursday's loss to Tampa Bay was a bit of a dud for Winnipeg, but hey, Hellebuyck wasn't in net for it. He's the best goalie on earth and the single biggest reason for the Jets' record-breaking start.

A save percentage around .930, one of the highest workloads in the league, more goals saved above average than almost everyone else — none of that is surprising, but that doesn't make it any less impressive. There's work left to do, especially come April, but Hellebuyck is on track to be in the real Hart Trophy conversation, and he'll deserve it.

2. Carolina Hurricanes, 11-4-0

Last week: 2

Sean's ranking: 2

Dom's ranking: 2

First-quarter MVP: Eric Tulsy

The King of the Nerds had what looked like a tough first GM summer ahead of him. He had to extend Seth Jarvis, trade or re-sign Martin Necas and then plug some big holes (Jake Guentzel, Brady Skjei, Brett Pesce) without a whole lot of money to plug them. Safe to say he aced his first test.

The defense looks better than ever with Dmitry Orlov and Jalen Chatfield elevated to the second pair while newcomers Shayne Gostisbehere and Sean Walker crush sheltered minutes. Up front, Jack Roslovic has been a nice addition (nine goals in 14 games), while William Carrier has offered defensive punch. The extensions given out to Jarvis and Necas already look like bargains, and the decision not to trade Necas looks especially savvy given his scorching start.

Sure, we could give MVP to someone on the ice or to Rod Brind'Amour for making the vision come to life. But given the cap constraints, it's hard not to bang our fists on the table and chant.

me: TULSKY, TULSKY, TULSKY

nerds in the computer lab all look up from their spreadsheets: ... TULSKY, TULSKY, TULSKY

deafening sound of Tulsy chants echo across continent

bloggers standing up in unison in their basements: TULSKY, TULSKY, TULSKY

— Mike Pfeil (@mikeFAIL) March 8, 2018

3. Florida Panthers, 11-5-1

Last week: 3

Sean's ranking: 3

Dom's ranking: 3

First-quarter MVP: Sam Reinhart

Reinhart hasn't followed up on his 2023-24 season — he's improved upon it. His goal against New Jersey on Thursday was his league-leading 13th, and he's now working on a nine-game point streak. With him on the ice at five-on-five, the Panthers have out-scored their opponents 18-7, with a big chunk of that play coming while Aleksander Barkov was on the shelf.

Maybe most impressively, Reinhart has been held off the scoresheet a grand total of two times. Tons of production and tons of consistency for a player who's become one of the game's best few snipers.

4. Dallas Stars, 10-5-0

Last week: 4

Sean's ranking: 4

Dom's ranking: 5

First-quarter MVP: Jake Oettinger

Dallas can beat you in a ton of different ways. Whether it's offensive power, defensive might, or strong goaltending, the Stars find a way and it's why they've been a popular Stanley Cup pick the last few seasons.

The Stars aren't scoring as much as expected (3.3 goals per 60, 13th), aren't defending as well as expected (3.3 expected goals against per 60, 23rd) — and it hasn't really mattered. The third pillar, goaltending, has stepped in. Oettinger has been the team's best player.

That's a nice change from last season; credit to Oettinger for bouncing back. So far he's saved 6.9 goals above expected through 10 games, good for seventh in the league.

5. Minnesota Wild, 11-2-2

Last week: 6

Sean's ranking: 5

Dom's ranking: 4

First-quarter MVP: Kirill Kaprizov

Kaprizov may be the league MVP over the first quarter. He's been that good.

Kaprizov has long been on the periphery of the MVP-caliber player conversation and has been perhaps unfairly punished for the system he's in and the lack of weapons around him. Put him anywhere else and he'd probably already have been a Hart contender.

This year, it hasn't mattered. He's putting up gaudy scoring totals while maintaining his underrated defensive game. It helps that other Wild players have stepped up, too, but it's still Kaprizov driving the bus.

6. New York Rangers, 10-4-1

Last week: 5

Sean's ranking: 6

Dom's ranking: 8

First-quarter MVP: Igor Shesterkin

Have we seen vintage Shesterkin this season? Not quite — he tends to save that for the spring. Still, as tends to be the case, the Rangers are asking a lot of him, and he's rising to the occasion.

Aside from a .913 save percentage, Shesterkin is top five in goals saved above expected, and the only two starters who face more high-danger shots (Lukas Dostal and Mackenzie Blackwood) are on bottom-feeding teams. The Rangers are too talented to be the Ducks or the Sharks, obviously, but Shesterkin still bumps them up a few levels.

7. Vegas Golden Knights, 10-4-2

Last week: 8

Sean's ranking: 8

Dom's ranking: 7

First-quarter MVP: Jack Eichel

We gassed up Eichel's dialed-up point production last week, and he took it a step further in the ensuing three games, putting up a goal and five assists. A 128-point pace is serious business, and it's helped make the Golden Knights the No. 2 offensive team in the league. If that continues, he's a lock to show up on some ballots. Vegas needed to make up for lost offense along the wings, and Eichel is coming through.

8. Vancouver Canucks, 8-3-3

Last week: 10

Sean's ranking: 10

Dom's ranking: 6

First-quarter MVP: Quinn Hughes

We talked about this last week, but it bears repeating from the dastardly East Coast Media: Hughes has been amazing — again. There's a solid case to be made that he's right there with Cale Makar as the best defenseman in hockey. His plus-5.4 Net Rating leads all defenders and is tied for second in the league, all thanks to his otherworldly impacts at five-on-five. Few if any players are pushing play like Hughes.

No other Canucks player comes close to Hughes' impact. He's been by far the biggest reason for Vancouver's success and at this point it's not #HughesNorrisWatch that Canucks fans should be shouting from west coast rooftops — it's #HughesHartWatch.

9. New Jersey Devils, 12-6-2

Last week: 9

Sean's ranking: 7

Dom's ranking: 9

First-quarter MVPs: The shutdown pair

Last season, Jonas Siegenthaler looked washed as a top-four option. Jonathan Kovacevic looked like a typical sheltered defenseman. Neither seemed like they would be big needle-movers. And yet the Devils are 12-6-2, and the team's unlikely shutdown duo is leading them to that mark.

It's been that pair taking on the toughest minutes most nights and they have crushed that assignment outscoring teams 16-6 while earning 62 percent of the expected goals. Most of that effect has come via elite defense.

10. Washington Capitals, 10-4-1

Last week: 7

Sean's ranking: 9

Dom's ranking: 11

First-quarter MVP: Spencer Carbery

Credit to Brian MacLellan, Chris Patrick and Co. for adding a bunch of solid players — a wild idea that somehow has worked out — but Carbery deserves an even bigger share for the buttons he's pushed, which have made the Capitals, it seems, sustainably good. We'll zero in on two.

The first: sticking winger Aliaksei Protas with Alex Ovechkin and Dylan Strome. Thanks in part to Protas' playmaking, size, defensive chops and (surprising) finishing ability, the Caps have won their minutes 15-1. The second: moving Connor McMichael full-time to the wing, where he's second in the league with nine five-on-five goals.

11. Toronto Maple Leafs, 10-6-2

Last week: 12

Sean's ranking: 11

Dom's ranking: 10

First-quarter MVP: Anthony Stolarz

The Core Four hasn't played up to their usual level and the Leafs have had a meh start by their standards. It's a start that could've been a lot worse, though, if not for the heroics of Stolarz. He looks like the real deal, the best goalie the Leafs have had since prime Frederik Andersen — at least. Stolarz has a .930 on the season so far and has saved 10.6 goals above expected, good for third in the league.

Stolarz has flashed that ability in a backup role, but there were questions regarding how he'd handle a bigger workload. Those questions feel emphatically answered early. Now the Leafs need the guys in front of him to step it up.

12. Tampa Bay Lightning, 8-6-1

Last week: 13

Sean's ranking: 12

Dom's ranking: 14

First-quarter MVPs: Nikita Kucherov and Victor Hedman

As long as their biggest guns are playing at their current level, the Lightning will be relevant. Kucherov is having yet another hyper-productive season (24 points in 15 games) and seems to have added an even nastier finishing touch to his bag. Hedman, meanwhile, is back to his dominant ways — the Lightning are outscoring opponents 15-6 with him on the ice and controlling 60 percent of the expected goals.

As for the power play — yep, they've still got the juice. Ask Eric Comrie about that one.

Dave Mishkin calls Cirelli's power play goal, career goal #100 pic.twitter.com/zvm5Wck0AC

— Bucs Rays Bolts (@BucsRaysBoltsYT) November 15, 2024

13. Colorado Avalanche, 9-8-0

Last week: 17

Sean's ranking: 13

Dom's ranking: 13

First-quarter MVP: Nathan MacKinnon

The Avalanche managed to keep their heads above water without Valeri Nichushkin and Artturi Lehkonen, and a huge chunk of that is because of MacKinnon. "Huge" might actually be an understatement; the man is on pace for nearly 160 points. He'd be third in the NHL in scoring if you took away all his goals. Without his work at five-on-five, or on the league's second-most productive power play, Colorado would be in serious trouble. He's delivered, though, and has got to be viewed as the overall favorite. Again.

14. Edmonton Oilers, 9-7-1

Last week: 16

Sean's ranking: 14

Dom's ranking: 12

First-quarter MVP: Leon Draisaitl

Those who checked in on Friend Of The Rankings Greg Wyshynski's Awards Watch earlier this week were met with a shocking twist when reading up on the current Selke shortlist: Leon Draisaitl. The superstar scorer synonymous with annually poor defensive results? That Draisaitl? The very same — and it was an absolutely correct call (for now).

Right now, the 'D' in Draisaitl stands for defense. His plus-1.9 Defensive Rating currently ranks second (!) among all forwards thanks to the Oilers giving up just 2.0 xGA/60 with him on the ice. That's 0.37 better than when he's on the bench. Couple that with 12 goals and 20 points in 16 games and Draisaitl has been easily playing the best hockey of his career.

15. Los Angeles Kings, 9-6-3

Last week: 11

Sean's ranking: 15

Dom's ranking: 15

First-quarter MVP: Vladislav Gavrikov

Eric Stephens wrote a story earlier this week about how the Kings have gotten by without Drew Doughty, and there's nothing left to say about Gavrikov that he didn't cover, so we'll say it again. Gavrikov is crushing top-pair duties (on his off side) to the right of Mikey Anderson; the Kings are winning his minutes 14-7 and allowing a team-best 1.54 goals against/60 with him on the ice.

16. New York Islanders, 7-6-4

Last week: 15

Sean's ranking: 16

Dom's ranking: 16

First-quarter MVP: Kyle Palmieri

Palmieri leads the Islanders in points and goals overall — and in terms of his per/60 production (1.43 goals, 2.86 points), he's having the best season of his career. The Isles will need more production from other players if they want to make a postseason return, but Palmieri is doing his part.

17. Ottawa Senators, 8-7-1

Last week: 20

Sean's ranking: 17

Dom's ranking: 17

First-quarter MVP: Tim Stützle

Two years ago, Stützle looked on track to being a superstar in Ottawa after a 90-point season. It's what made last year's drop-off so disappointing. Good news — he is back and looking ready to power Ottawa into a playoff spot. His 20 points in 15 games is obviously great, but it's his detail elsewhere that's putting Stützle on the fast track toward franchise status. The Senators are significantly winning their minutes with him on the ice and that's a big deal.

18. Utah HC, 7-6-3

Last week: 18

Sean's ranking: 19

Dom's ranking: 18

First-quarter MVP: Mikhail Sergachev

Utah may be reeling a bit after a hot start, but at the very least the team's big summer splash does look like a win so far. Sergachev has been as good as advertised, playing like the legit No. 1 he was long expected to be. He may not be enough to get Utah into the playoffs, but he's been their best player so far.

19. Buffalo Sabres, 8-8-1

Last week: 19

Sean's ranking: 18

Dom's ranking: 20

First-quarter MVP: Tage Thompson

It took the Sabres until Nov. 14 to win a game in which Thompson didn't score — and actually, against the Blues, he didn't play at all. While we wait and see whether he misses more time, we'll say it again: Thompson is back and probably better than ever. He's scored a league-leading 10 goals at five-on-five — compared to 16 in all of 2023-24 — and Buffalo is dominating his minutes in terms of actual goals (15-4) and expected goals (61 percent).

20. Boston Bruins, 8-8-2

Last week: 14

Sean's ranking: 20

Dom's ranking: 19

First-quarter MVP: David Pastrnak

For a second we were going to put "the fans" as Boston's MVP for having to endure the Bruins' mess of a start (poor Boston sports fans, they just never catch a break). And then Pastrnak did Pastrnak things on Tuesday against the Blues, scoring a late go-ahead goal to complete a third-period comeback that felt season-saving. After a rough start, Pasta looks like he's back.

Are the Bruins back too? Maybe, maybe not. We're not going to get ahead of ourselves, especially after a messy loss to Dallas on Thursday, but as he goes, the Bruins usually follow. That Pastrnak is the team's most valuable player through a cold-ish stretch speaks volumes about both him and the team.

21. Detroit Red Wings, 7-7-1

Last week: 21

Sean's ranking: 21

Dom's ranking: 21

First-quarter MVP: Moritz Seider

Seider's minutes have gone from "comically unfair" to "really difficult," and his results have improved accordingly. Imagine that! With him on the ice, Detroit is allowing 1.82 goals per 60 — that's top-50 in the league among regular defensemen and, hopefully for the Wings, a sign of things to come.

22. Calgary Flames, 8-6-3

Last week: 22

Sean's ranking: 22

Dom's ranking: 22

First-quarter MVP: Rasmus Andersson

Andersson has cooled off a bit after an explosive start, going pointless in his last six games. Still, that start was enough to make him Calgary's most impactful player from the first quarter, where he still leads the team in points. That probably doesn't bode well for the Flames, though.

23. Seattle Kraken, 8-8-1

Last week: 25

Sean's ranking: 23

Dom's ranking: 25

First-quarter MVP: Jared McCann

Is it a great sign for the Kraken that McCann is in this spot? Probably not — the franchise's future might depend on Matty Beniers eventually figuring it out. Still, McCann deserves credit for having yet another productive season. He's actually scoring more (4.22 points/60) than he did during his breakout 2022-23.

24. St. Louis Blues, 7-9-1

Last week: 23

Sean's ranking: 25

Dom's ranking: 23

First-quarter MVP: Jordan Kyrou

With Robert Thomas out, no Blue is more capable of shouldering the offensive load than Kyrou, and he's basically done his part — especially lately. Kyrou has a six-game point streak and the Blues are winning his minutes, though it should be noted that they've now lost four straight.

25. Nashville Predators, 5-9-3

Last week: 28

Sean's ranking: 26

Dom's ranking: 24

First-quarter MVP: Juuse Saros

What makes Nashville's plummet even more surprising is that Saros has been pretty great. Usually, when a decent team goes through a rough stretch, it's weak goaltending to blame, but that's not the case here where Saros has arguably been the team's best player. He's sixth in goals saved at 7.3 with a respectable .910 save percentage. That the Predators are 5-9-3 anyway is a really bad sign.

26. Philadelphia Flyers, 7-8-2

Last week: 29

Sean's ranking: 24

Dom's ranking: 27

First-quarter MVP: Travis Konecny

We decided on this before Thursday night's game — and then Konecny provided a prime example of the reliable offensive production he adds to a Flyers lineup that can be, uh, a little thin in spots. Late in the second period against Ottawa, he tied the game on a breakaway goal. It was Philly's seventh shot of the game against 28 for the Sens in a game they wound up winning 5-4 in overtime.

27. Pittsburgh Penguins, 6-9-3

Last week: 27

Sean's ranking: 27

Dom's ranking: 26

First-quarter MVP: Evgeni Malkin

Say what you will about what's gone on with the Penguins, but Malkin is to blame for exactly none of it. He's been a point-per-game player so far this season, Pittsburgh is winning his minutes overall and his

defensive results are some of the strongest on the team. Expecting more from a 38-year-old with a \$6.1 million cap hit would be ridiculous.

28. Chicago Blackhawks, 6-9-1

Last week: 30

Sean's ranking: 29

Dom's ranking: 28

First-quarter MVP: Seth Jones

Jones has played tough minutes pretty evenly for a poor Blackhawks team, and we'll count that as a win. Scoring at a 51-point pace isn't bad either. He may not be playing up to the price Chicago paid for him, but he's doing his part as the team's top defenseman. The Blackhawks just need the rest of the group to get into shape.

29. Columbus Blue Jackets, 5-8-2

Last week: 24

Sean's ranking: 28

Dom's ranking: 29

First-quarter MVP: Zach Werenski

The Blue Jackets have risen to the occasion under Dean Evason, looking like a significantly more competitive team on a nightly basis. Werenski leads the way, as he's arguably playing some of the best hockey of his career so far, putting up 10 points in 15 games while winning tough minutes by a significant margin.

30. Anaheim Ducks, 5-8-2

Last week: 26

Sean's ranking: 30

Dom's ranking: 30

First-quarter MVP: Lukas Dostal

The Ducks aren't the league's worst team in the standings, but they sure look like it on a nightly basis. Worse than usual, too, which is impressive given how bad they've been the last few seasons. Dostal has saved as many goals above expected as Hellebuyck with 13.3. If not for him, the Ducks might not have 10 points.

31. San Jose Sharks, 5-10-3

Last week: 32

Sean's ranking: 31

Dom's ranking: 31

First-quarter MVP: The goalies

MacKenzie Blackwood and Vitek Vanecek are playing pretty well for two unwanted goalies. Blackwood has a .910 save percentage and has saved 4.5 goals above expected. Vanecek has a .907 with 3.7 goals saved. That puts San Jose's goaltending tandem among the league's best.

32. Montreal Canadiens, 5-10-2

Last week: 31

Sean's ranking: 32

Dom's ranking: 32

First-quarter MVP: Nick Suzuki

All due respect to Cole Caufield and his 12 goals, but Suzuki leads the Canadiens in points and is the only forward on the team with a positive on-ice goal differential. It's not much, but it's something.

The Athletic / NHL future WATCH: Who's the fastest-rising prospect in each team's pipeline?

By The Athletic NHL Staff- November 17, 2024

It's what every NHL organization wants to see in its prospect pipeline: the player who takes the next step and shows they're ready for more responsibility and a look at a higher level. Now, a month-plus into the 2024-25 hockey season, these rising-stock prospects have started to emerge.

Who's rising the fastest for each team?

The Athletic posed that question to its NHL staff, stipulating that while very recent call-ups are eligible, the prospects should not be current full-time NHLers.

In response, we heard about top picks ready to make the leap, hidden gems earning bigger opportunities and players on the precipice of making an NHL impact. Here are the picks.

Anaheim Ducks

Sam Colangelo, RW: Beckett Sennecke, the No. 3 draft pick this year, is their top prospect and he's off to another good start with the OHL's Oshawa Generals. But it's been nothing but an upward trajectory for Colangelo, a second-round pick in 2020 whose development at Northeastern appeared to stall. The 22-year-old transferred to Western Michigan for his senior season and had a terrific year in helping lead the Broncos to the NCAA tournament. Colangelo has built on that. He scored in his NHL debut at the end of last season and lasted until the final week of training camp before being sent to the AHL. While the San Diego Gulls are struggling to win games like their NHL parent club, Colangelo is leading them in goals (eight) and is second in points (12). — Eric Stephens

Boston Bruins

Georgii Merkulov, C: The left-shot center was leading AHL Providence with two goals and nine assists for 11 points through Thursday. This is not out of the ordinary. Merkulov was Providence's No. 1 scorer in 2023-24 with 65 points in 67 games. But so far, Merkulov has not transferred his AHL results up top. His accelerated trajectory comes more from the NHL team's struggles. The Bruins are desperate for offensive punch, so perhaps the 24-year-old's moment is coming. — Fluto Shinzawa

Buffalo Sabres

Prokhor Poltapov, LW: Poltapov, the No. 33 pick in the 2021 draft, is developing into an NHL-level player who can blend skill with a tenacious playing style. The 21-year-old has seven goals and nine assists in 24 games playing for CSKA Moscow in the KHL. He recently signed a two-year contract extension that will keep him there through the 2026-27 season, but he'll be 24 years old and NHL-ready when that contract ends. The Sabres should be excited about what he's becoming. — Matthew Fairburn

Calgary Flames

Jacob Battaglia, LW: The Flames' recent second-round pick is off to a hot start in the OHL with the Kingston Frontenacs. His 14 goals and 30 points have him in the top five in goals and top 10 in points among OHL scorers. The Flames loved his size and ability to play in the corners when they had the chance to draft him this summer. Scouting director Tod Button likened him to a junkyard dog. And now he's looking like an intriguing riser in the Flames' prospect pipeline. By the way, we're not sure if that spiritual healer he visited before being drafted told him he'd be doing so well in the OHL. — Julian McKenzie

Favourite draft story today: Jacob Battaglia visited a spiritual healer at Christmas who told him they saw the city of Calgary in his future.

“Word of a lie, I’m not making this up. She told me she says, she feels Calgary, somewhere in Canada...”
pic.twitter.com/guRKaCPpfW

— Julian McKenzie (@jkamckenzie) June 29, 2024

Carolina Hurricanes

Nikita Artamonov, LW: The Hurricanes might have the steal of the 2024 NHL Draft in Artamonov. Despite being projected as a first-round pick by several draft analysts, Artamonov fell into Carolina’s lap in the second round at pick No. 50. His start to the KHL season surely has the league’s other 31 teams wishing they’d taken a chance on the Russian winger. Artamonov, who turns 19 tomorrow, is second in the KHL in goals with 13 and tied for sixth in points with 22 for Torpedo through 27 games. — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

Sam Rinzel, RHD: When the Blackhawks selected Rinzel with the No. 25 pick in the 2022 draft, some thought it was a reach. The Blackhawks knew at the time they’d have to be patient with Rinzel’s development. He had size and could skate, but he was raw otherwise as a defenseman. Now a sophomore at Minnesota, he’s starting to put it all together. He’s gotten stronger, has a better sense of how to play position and is consistently producing. He could soon too join the Blackhawks’ young and promising defensive group. — Scott Powers

Colorado Avalanche

Calum Ritchie, C: Ritchie is Colorado’s top prospect, and I’d still argue he’s the fastest-rising in the pool. After scoring his first NHL goal in his brief, seven-game stint with the Avalanche to begin the season, Ritchie returned to the Oshawa Generals and picked up right where he left off. He’s averaging two points per game, currently on a 56-game pace of 112 points. Even after missing the first 12 games of the OHL season, he should still end up amongst the league’s scoring leaders. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

Luca Marrelli, RHD: Marrelli was a third-round pick (No. 86) last June, but he’s making that look like a steal so far this season with the OHL’s Oshawa Generals. The 6-foot-2, 190-pounder is second among blueliners in the OHL in goals (nine) and points (25), and is tied for fourth in assists (16). The defenseman leading the league with 29 points is Sam Dickinson, who was the No. 11 pick by San Jose — 75 picks higher — than Marrelli in June. The Blue Jackets have drafted 14 defensemen in the last five drafts, so the competition within the organization is intense. But Marrelli is beginning to separate. — Aaron Portzline

Dallas Stars

Lian Bichsel, LHD: With Wyatt Johnston, Logan Stankoven and Mavrik Bourque all having graduated in the past two seasons, there aren’t a lot of prospects left knocking on the door in Dallas. But Bichsel, the No. 18 pick in the 2022 draft, is easily the closest. The hulking 6-foot-6 defenseman is getting his first full season in the AHL and is adapting well to the smaller ice surface in North America. He’ll need more time to develop, but the Stars have a history of calling players up at the right time and putting them in a position to succeed, so Bichsel likely won’t get the call until he’s truly ready. — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings

Emmitt Finnie, C: Detroit’s best prospects this season have been AHL goalie Sebastian Cossa and SHL defenseman Axel Sandin-Pellikka, but since both are first-rounders with established pedigrees, let’s go

with Finnie here as the biggest riser. The 2023 seventh-round pick has been outstanding in the WHL with the Kamloops Blazers, putting up 27 points through his team's first 17 games — and wearing the captain's "C" to top it off. Finnie has been noticeable at Detroit's prospect events the last two years, a strong skater who displays two-way responsibility and a good shot as well. If he's able to keep up this kind of production, the Red Wings may have a find here. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

Noah Philp, C: It's hard to know what to expect from a player when he misses the previous season. That's why Philp's rise should be considered meteoric. Though he was making significant inroads with the organization during his rookie pro campaign in 2022-23, Philp opted to sit out last season for personal reasons. As a 26-year-old with limited experience, Philp was viewed as a long shot to make the Oilers out of camp in the eyes of coach Kris Knoblauch. Instead, he excelled in the preseason and got to the last day of cuts. Philp made a lasting impression and was recalled when Connor McDavid sustained an ankle injury last month. He even recorded an assist in his NHL debut on Oct. 31. He's gone from an unknown to a realistic depth option for the team in the second half. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Florida Panthers

Hunter St. Martin, LW: It's worth noting that the Panthers' prospect pool could be in better shape. So it goes when you spend a few years in win-now mode — and we somehow doubt Bill Zito and Co. regret any of it. St. Martin, though, has opened some eyes with Medicine Hat. A sixth-rounder in 2024 who signed an entry-level deal after a strong camp, St. Martin has 17 goals in his first 17 WHL games this season and looks great on mega-prospect Gavin McKenna's wing. — Sean Gentile

Los Angeles Kings

Liam Greentree, LW: The Kings' No. 26 pick in 2024 is powering the OHL's Windsor Spitfires with 33 points, which is among the league leaders. Brandt Clarke was their last first-round pick in 2021 so the selection of Greentree was important for Los Angeles after trading away a previous first-rounder for Kevin Fiala. A 6-foot-3 power forward with terrific hands, Greentree is more of a playmaker who can score goals as he uses his long reach to create space for himself against defenders. He's already had 11 multi-point efforts among his 18 games, including back-to-back four-point nights against the Oshawa Generals and Guelph Storm. — Eric Stephens

Minnesota Wild

Zeev Buium, LHD: There's plenty of excitement around 2022 first-round pick Danila Yurov, but his return from offseason surgery has led to a slow start in the KHL. So the pick is puck-moving defenseman Buium. The 18-year-old will be vying for a second straight gold medal for the United States at the World Junior Championship and a second straight NCAA championship with the University of Denver. The 2024 first-round pick has 10 assists in 11 games for the Pioneers and on Friday had a hat trick against North Dakota. It wouldn't be surprising if the Wild sign him immediately after his sophomore season ends. — Michael Russo

Montreal Canadiens

Sam Harris, LW: Coming off winning an NCAA championship as a freshman, University of Denver forward Harris entered the weekend leading the top-ranked team in the country with 10 goals in 10 games as a sophomore, just four fewer than he scored all of last season. He entered the weekend riding an eight-game point streak and was named the NCHC forward of the week last week. The fifth-round, No. 133 pick in 2023 is already looking like a good value pick. — Arpon Basu

🙄 Sam Harris buries the one timer! #MidcoSports | #GoPios | @DU_Hockey
pic.twitter.com/UR2iXlob8y

— Midco Sports (@MidcoSports) November 16, 2024

Nashville Predators

Matthew Wood, RW: Forward Joakim Kemell and defenseman Tanner Molendyk are rising as well and should have key roles in Nashville before too long, but Wood, the No. 15 pick in the 2023 draft, is an enticing possibility as a top-six forward in future Predators lineups. He played college hockey at UConn last season, transferred to powerhouse program Minnesota this season and has three goals and 14 points in 11 games for the Golden Gophers. He's got the size at 6-foot-4, 205 pounds and could eventually be an answer down the middle. — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

Seamus Casey, RHD: Casey, a second-round pick in 2022, had an impressive enough preseason to break camp with the NHL club, and he provided some early offense for the Devils, scoring three goals in eight NHL games. The team sent him down to AHL Utica after its defensive corps got healthier. He's continued his offensive output at the lower level. He has nine points in eight AHL games this season. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Isaiah George, LHD: In his first pro season, the fleet-skating left defenseman was headed for a developmental assignment in the AHL. After an early injury kept him to just four games at that level, the Islanders summoned George to fill in on their decimated blue line. And he has more than held his own, playing 24 minutes in two of his first four games and playing capably against Connor McDavid on Tuesday. The 20-year-old has opened many eyes in a short time. — Arthur Staple

New York Rangers

Brett Berard, LW: Berard had a solid preseason for the Rangers, sticking with the NHL club until late in camp. The 22-year-old led the AHL club with 25 goals in 2023-24 and has six in 13 games to start 2024-25. He could be in position for an NHL call-up if the Rangers have an injury in their top-nine forward group. With the team set to face a cap crunch in coming years, he and other players on entry-level contracts will likely get plenty of opportunity. — Peter Baugh

Ottawa Senators

Lucas Ellinas, C: The Senators' prospect pool is in need of a refresh, mostly because their most prominent ones have either already graduated to the big club or haven't shown enough in their development stages just yet. But Ellinas could be one to watch. The Sens' fourth-round pick from last summer's draft is already a third of the way to matching his production from last season with the OHL's Kitchener Rangers. He has some size and scoring ability in his game, too. Ottawa would certainly benefit from a jump in Ellinas' development to help improve its pipeline. — Julian McKenzie

Philadelphia Flyers

Emil Andrae, LHD: Recalled on Oct. 27 due to Cam York's upper-body injury, Andrae is making a strong case to stay on the roster even when everyone is healthy. The former second-round pick was arguably the Flyers' best player on Tuesday in their 4-3 shootout win over the Sharks skating on the top pair with Travis Sanheim, running the top power-play unit, and generating a handful of scoring chances. His play lately may help ease the concerns over Jamie Drysdale's stalled development (he's currently out too with a minor upper-body injury), because right now Andrae — also an undersized yet mobile playmaker — looks like the more well-rounded, NHL-ready defenseman. — Kevin Kurz

Pittsburgh Penguins

Tristan Broz, C: The Penguins' second-round pick in 2021 is gaining plenty of traction in the organization. He has progressed nicely over the last couple of years at the University of Denver and, in his first 12 games with Wilkes-Barre (AHL), has produced six goals and eight points. This is a prospect whom the Penguins like quite a bit. The franchise is in bad need of pure goal scorers and, in Broz, it would appear that such a player is on the way. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

Sam Dickinson, LHD: How do I not pick Yaroslav Askarov? He's torching the AHL once again with the San Jose Barracuda. But it feels like he's only an injury or trade away from being in the Sharks' net. When thinking of the rising aspect, I'm leaning toward Dickinson. Sure, the London Knights defenseman is no diamond in the rough as the 11th pick of the 2024 draft, but the smooth blueliner is the top-scoring rearguard in the OHL and the leading scorer for the league's premier franchise with 11 goals and 29 points. Dickinson is at 1.81 points per game, which is well above the 1.03 he was at in his breakout 2023-24 season. — Eric Stephens

Seattle Kraken

Eduard Sale, RW: If Sale were a North American player drafted out of the CHL, he wouldn't even be eligible to compete in the American League. As a result of the NHL-CHL transfer agreement, we very rarely see 19-year-old players like Sale become major AHL contributors. That's what makes Sale's first handful of AHL games — two goals and eight points in eight contests to begin his North American professional career — so incredible. The skilled offensive winger, a late first-round pick at the 2023 NHL Draft, is off to an astonishing start in the Coachella Valley. He's shown incredible skill and the details in his game, long a concern for scouts with Sale, have been at a high enough level to maintain a significant role at the AHL level. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

Lukas Fischer, LHD: When the 2024 draft ended last June, there was a Southwest Airlines flight from Las Vegas to St. Louis filling up with passengers, and the last one on was Fischer. A flight attendant then got on a microphone and said, "Let's hear a round of applause for the newest St. Louis Blues player!" The fellow passengers applauded, and the plane took off. After a good camp with the Blues, Fischer's young career is now taking off, too. The 6-foot-3, 184-pound defenseman, who is the son of former NHLer Jiri Fischer, was reassigned to the Sarnia Sting, where he was named captain this season. He had three goals and nine points in 10 games before being sidelined with an injury, but he's expected back soon. — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

Dylan Duke, LW: Questions follow you when you're a 5-foot-10 winger with a bit of a stocky build and without dynamic skating. Duke, with his determined, net-front style, just keeps answering them — and endearing himself to coaches. He finished fifth in the NCAA in goals last season with 26, scoring almost all of them around the crease, and he has followed it up with a very respectable start to his pro career in the AHL. Don't be surprised if he makes his NHL debut this season. — Scott Wheeler

Toronto Maple Leafs

Nikita Grebenkin, LW: There will always be questions about how players adjust to North American hockey, but the Russian winger is answering a lot of questions early in his rookie AHL season. Grebenkin

plays with pace, physicality and fearlessness that can be a blessing and a curse in his game. He leads all Marlies rookies with nine points in 11 games. What's notable is how that production is often the result of brazen confidence. He looks for opportunities many wouldn't and uses his NHL-ready frame to get to dangerous areas. He needs to learn to play within a system in the defensive zone, but there's plenty of promise for the fifth-round pick. — Joshua Kloke

Utah Hockey Club

Daniil But, LW: At 6-foot-5 and 216 pounds and only 19 years old, some of But's physical gifts are immediately obvious. Yet it was slow going for him in the KHL last season, as he played sparingly for one of the top clubs (Yaroslavl Lokomotiv) and produced only 21 points in his draft-plus-one season. This year has been a different story, however, as But already has six goals and 15 points in 23 games, putting him third in KHL scoring among under-21 players. Selected at No. 12 in 2023, But went higher than most expected and is a bit of a project. It's unknown when he'll be in North America, but his size, coordination and high-end shot offer a compelling package now that he's started to put it all together as a pro. His father, Anton, was a longtime KHLer himself and is now an assistant in Yaroslavl, so the pedigree is there. — James Mirtle

Vancouver Canucks

Jonathan Lekkerimäki, RW: Lekkerimäki had a solid training camp and showed well in the preseason, but the level he's hit over the past three weeks is something different entirely. In his draft-plus-three campaign, Lekkerimäki had made the full-time transition to playing North American professional hockey seamlessly. After the start of his American League season was delayed by illness, Lekkerimäki arrived in Abbotsford like a lightning bolt. In his seven AHL games this season the 2022 first-round pick has produced at a point-per-game clip, with five goals and nearly 40 shots — a preposterous shot rate for any player, much less a winger his age. Since being called up to Vancouver earlier this week, Lekkerimäki has played a significant role on J.T. Miller's wing and scored his first career NHL goal Thursday night in Vancouver. For a team that hasn't even been able to produce a single game played from a draft pick since 2020, Lekkerimäki's emergence as an NHL-level option could be a ceiling-raising development. — Thomas Drance

FIRST @NHL GOAL ALERT!!

A lethal Lekkerimäki shot for his first career goal. 🤖👉 pic.twitter.com/aaLUQgIMX7

— Vancouver Canucks (@Canucks) November 15, 2024

Vegas Golden Knights

Mathieu Cataford, C: The Golden Knights' third-round pick from 2023 has been tearing the QMJHL to shreds over the last two seasons. Cataford had an offensive breakout a season ago for the Halifax Mooseheads and has been even better this season with Rimouski Océanic. Cataford leads the league with 34 points (nine goals and 25 assists) through only 19 games. He's on pace for a ridiculous 115 points this season, and appears more than ready to begin his professional career next year. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

Andrew Cristall, LW: Cristall, a winger who was the 40th pick in 2023, came close to cracking the Caps' opening night roster. "He's constantly a scoring chance," coach Spencer Carbery said. And he's maintained that momentum back with WHL Kelowna. In his first 10 games, he's put up a staggering 28 points (nine goals, 19 assists) and bulldozed his way into the world juniors roster discussion for Canada. — Sean Gentile

Winnipeg Jets

Kevin He, LW: He caught my eye at training camp, earning praise in multiple reports. He played with an intriguing combination of feistiness, fearlessness and skill in high-traffic areas that instantly made the 2024 fourth-round pick a player of interest. But even his good training camp didn't prepare us for what followed: 17 goals, 12 assists and 29 points in his first 19 OHL games for Niagara. He scored 31 goals last season and could obliterate that total by Christmas at this rate. — Murat Ates

ESPN / Seven unexpected trends defining the NHL season so far

By Neil Paine- November 17, 2024

Hockey is a notoriously chaotic sport in which you need a large sample of games to know what's real versus what's just noise. For instance, it is estimated that it takes the entire 82-game NHL season to give us as much information about team quality as just 32 NBA games -- or less than half the regular season -- do.

So it's always risky to draw grand conclusions from what we see over the first month of play on the ice. But that can't stop us from finding interesting trends emerging from the early portion of the schedule.

Here are seven initial developments that have taken us by surprise in 2024-25 so far:

1. Ovechkin's comeback against Father Time

One of the biggest storylines heading into the season was Alex Ovechkin's pursuit of Wayne Gretzky's goal-scoring record, with the Great 8 starting the season trailing The Great One by 41 scores.

If the Washington Capitals star scored at his career rate of 0.60 goals per game, it would have taken him 69 games to catch Gretzky -- well within the realm of possibility this season -- but as I noted in the preseason, that production didn't look realistic for the 39-year-old Ovechkin coming off the lowest-scoring full season of his 20-year career (31 goals). If Ovi kept declining or missed time, it was no sure thing he would reach Gretzky's mark.

But instead of fading further with age, Ovechkin has made a huge comeback over Father Time.

Ovi already has 10 goals in his first 15 games of the season, the ninth time he has scored that many goals in that span of games to begin a season in his career. At his current pace, he will reach Gretzky within the next 47 games -- setting the potential record-breaking date for early March. And while that's still probably not realistic (he's shooting at a 19% clip, well beyond his career rate of 12.9%), Ovechkin will challenge the record by early April if he scores at his combined rate from the past three seasons the rest of the way.

However the chase plays out, Ovechkin has rebounded from what was probably the worst season of his career with one of his best performances in many years at the start of 2024-25, a testament to both his enduring talent and his drive to become the game's greatest scorer.

2. The Jets are on full burn

Teamwise, one of the most stunning developments of the young season has been the Winnipeg Jets' rise -- not just to the top of the 2024-25 standings but to the best 16-game start in NHL history by win-loss record (15-1).

Winnipeg was far from a bad team last season, ranking fourth in both standings points and schedule-adjusted goals-per-game differential. The Jets boasted the Vezina Trophy winner in the league's top goalie (Connor Hellebuyck) and had a trio of 25-goal scorers in Mark Scheifele, Nikolaj Ehlers and Kyle Connor. But they also continued their habit of falling off in the second half of the schedule, culminating in a five-game playoff defeat to the Colorado Avalanche, and then were one of the teams that lost the most value over the 2024 offseason.

Up against all of that, it would not have been surprising if the Jets got off to a slow start in 2024-25. But instead, Winnipeg has lost only once (against the Maple Leafs on Oct. 28) behind its customary top-ranked defense -- Hellebuyck is once again playing like the best goalie in the game -- and one of the

league's most improved offensive attacks. At that end of the ice, the Jets have risen from 15th in goals per game to first, with the league's No. 1-ranked power play (42.2% success rate) and Ehlers, Connor and Scheifele all on pace for at least 103 points.

As mentioned previously, the Jets have a history of starting hot and cooling off down the stretch, so it remains a question how much we can expect this team to maintain its sudden league-best form. That's especially true considering the Jets have a roster that hasn't changed much from last season -- but for now, coach Scott Arniel's team is off to a stellar start.

3. Older teams are flourishing early on

What do Ovechkin's ageless performance in Washington and the Jets' surprising resurgence have in common? They both involve teams that rank among the NHL's oldest and are enjoying strong starts in 2024-25.

And they're not alone.

Of the league's top 13 teams by goal differential, only two (the Dallas Stars and Ottawa Senators, tied with an average roster age of 28.2) rank among the top 10 youngest rosters, while 10 rank 15th or lower, and six -- the Jets, Maple Leafs, Lightning, Devils, Hurricanes and Capitals -- sit 20th or lower in the youth rankings, with a combined average age of 29.2.

Among the graybeards on pace for more than 20 adjusted goals above replacement are Ovechkin (age 39), goalies Jonathan Quick (39) and Cam Talbot (37), and forwards Matt Duchene (34), Artemi Panarin (33) and Mark Stone (32). Even Hellebuyck, the reigning top goalie in the sport, is 31 this season.

Not every older team is excelling: See the Penguins and Predators, the NHL's two oldest rosters (who are a combined 11-18-5), and to a lesser extent the Oilers, Islanders and Red Wings. But the blueprint for building a winning team this season involves, more often than not, assembling a bunch of veterans rather than a group of young, inexperienced talent.

4. Big names with a small impact -- so far

It's been about a month, but we're still waiting for some of the league's most prominent players and teams to make their presence known this season.

Take, for instance, Auston Matthews of the Leafs and Steven Stamkos of the Predators, two of the league's biggest stars from the past half decade-plus. In 2024-25 so far, both are producing surprisingly ordinary numbers: Matthews has never had fewer than the 50 adjusted points he's currently on pace for, while Stamkos has checked in below his current pace of 40 adjusted points only once (the 2016-17 season, which he missed most of with a torn knee ligament).

Matthews has been hurt this season -- he hasn't played since Nov. 3 -- so he will likely pick things up once he gets back to 100%, while Stamkos is a veteran still adjusting to joining a new team. But it's jarring anytime we see those two look mortal. The same goes for a handful of other players off to slow starts by their lofty standards, including Boston's David Pastrnak and Charlie Coyle, Edmonton's Zach Hyman and Connor McDavid, K'Andre Miller and Mika Zibanejad of the Rangers, Devon Toews of Colorado, and Dallas' Jason Robertson.

Some of these disappointing performances are spilling over into their teams' performance as well. Nashville, Boston, Colorado and Edmonton are all among the teams who have lost the most Stanley Cup odds since the preseason. The latter three still have better than a coin flip's chance to make the playoffs after their slow starts, but the Preds are already down to just a 21% playoff probability despite adding a handful of big names last offseason.

5. Goalies are starting off slow

Leaguewide, scoring is slightly up from last season, rising from 3.11 goals per game (GPG) to 3.12 -- which is on pace to be the third-highest scoring NHL season in the past 30 years. That's exciting news for those of us who grew up in the dead puck era (and have no interest in going back), but the reason why scoring remains high is just as intriguing.

Power-play output is roughly in line with the previous few seasons, all of which make up the league's recent scoring renaissance. But shots per game are down to 29.0, a mark that would be tied for the lowest in an NHL season since 2003-04, before the post-lockout rule changes that officially ended the low-scoring era of the late 1990s and early 2000s. At regular shooting percentages, this would have led to the league GPG dipping to its second-lowest level since 2016-17 -- not exactly a return to dead puck numbers but a noticeable downturn nonetheless.

The one thing keeping scoring high in spite of fewer shots is that goalies are stopping the puck less than they have in nearly three decades. If it holds up, their current save percentage of .901 would be tied for the lowest mark in a season since 1995-96. (Not coincidentally, 1995-96 was the last truly high-scoring season before the dead puck era set in for the next decade or more.) As part of this trend, 13 of the 35 goalies with at least eight starts this season have a SV% below .900, as Colorado's Alexandar Georgiev brings up the rear with a dreadful .863 mark.

Goalies are also a lot less successful at stopping the tough shots that often make or break a team's chances of winning: According to Natural Stat Trick, save percentages on "high-danger" chances at 5-on-5 have dropped from .825 over the previous three seasons to just .814 this season -- a much larger drop than we see even in the leaguewide data across all situations and chances.

While things might change slightly over the rest of the season, there's actually a very strong correlation (0.967) between the league's save percentage over the first 15 games per team of the season and the eventual full-season leaguewide save percentage. So the trend of reduced goaltending effectiveness will likely be a theme all season long.

6. We're (still) telling Canada there's a chance

One of last season's big narratives was the very real possibility that a Canadian team would win the Stanley Cup for the first time in over 30 years. Four playoff teams from north of the border ranked among the top 11 in the Elo power ratings heading into the postseason, the Oilers and Canucks advanced out of Round 1, and McDavid and Edmonton went all the way to Game 7 of the Cup Final before running out of gas against the Florida Panthers.

When I crunched the numbers on the eve of the playoffs, Canadian teams collectively had a 27% chance to win the Cup, which was their highest pre-playoff probability in any season since 1993-94. Things haven't changed all that much if we check on the situation now. Four Canadian teams are currently running among the top 12 in the Elo ratings, and as a whole, the league's northern-based contingent has an Elo-based Stanley Cup probability of 27%.

Chief among those are the Jets (14%), with the Oilers (6%), Leafs (3%), Canucks (3%) and Senators (1%) spaced back behind Winnipeg. (The betting odds disagree -- ESPN BET lists Edmonton as the favorite, despite its weak start, with Toronto next over Winnipeg and Vancouver.) Either way, we should see that group keep the battle going this season, and those teams might even be joined in that fight by the Flames (42% to make the playoffs).

In other words, Canada's Cup hopes are far from extinguished.

7. Makar's Bobby Orr season

We mentioned above that the Avalanche were among the preseason contenders who have lost the most from their Cup odds since opening night, and that's true even after the Avs picked up a few recent wins (including a multigoal comeback over the mighty Hurricanes on Saturday). But we can't really hold that against Cale Makar, who is off to one of the most spectacular starts to a season by a defenseman in league history.

As of Thursday, Makar led all NHL D-men in points -- 25 in 17 games -- and was tied for third in the league overall. (Josh Morrissey and Neal Pionk of the Jets are second among defensemen, all the way down at a tie for 29th with 17 points.) But that's only scratching the surface of the impressiveness of Makar's season so far. If we prorate Makar's numbers to a full season and adjust for the league's scoring environment, he is tracking for the third-most adjusted points by any full-time defenseman in a single season in NHL history:

Each of the five seasons sandwiched around Makar belongs to Boston Bruins legend Bobby Orr, who is widely regarded as the greatest to play the position, which should give us a sense of how special Makar's 2024-25 season might be.

[Sportsnet.ca](https://www.sportsnet.ca) / [In defence of subjectivity on NHL goal reviews](#)

By Justin Bourne- November 16, 2024

Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it. That's the expression attributed to an array of thinkers from generations past, and it comes up a lot given the message contains real truth.

It crossed my mind when thinking back to the nightmare that was the NHL's "skate in the crease" reviews from my teenage years. I couldn't help but notice it was included in a recent piece by Sean McIndoe that reminded people just how bad the "skate in the crease" rule used to be for hockey fans.

I'm writing this as an appeal to regular viewers of the game because please, for the love of God, stop clamouring for a rule change you'll regret.

During those years you'd regularly see a goal scored at the side of the net, then a ref would say "well actually" and video review would show that a hint of a breath of a whiff of someone's skate had touched the blue paint on the complete other side of the crease from where the puck went in, and the goal was waved off.

Skate positions that had nothing to do with otherwise excellent hockey plays caused a frustration far more justified than these current debates over the impact of unquestioned contact with goalies.

Is that the kind of "clarity" people want because sometimes they disagree with a few subjective calls?

"Nobody understands the rule" is a thing upset players, coaches and managers have said in the media enough when they didn't like a call that went against them that now a captive audience of fans has grabbed on to it and formed some kind of movement about "fixing" goalie interference rules. "See, even the players don't get it," goes the appeal to authority.

Here's the thing: those players and coaches understand it just fine. Sometimes they purposely misunderstand it, and sometimes a call gets made that they blatantly disagree with, but on the whole they understand that if you contact a goalie in the blue paint around the time the puck is being shot in, it ain't gonna count.

If it makes those disingenuous players feel better, maybe they should pretend it's the old-fashioned skate-in-the-crease rule: never go in the paint and they'll never have this problem.

Due to hockey's unique combination of speed and aggression and its free-flowing nature, it's the hardest sport in the world to officiate. What makes it doubly hard is that with the introduction of instant replay, we can now freeze and zoom and slow down individual frames to second guess all calls, stretching a moment that happened in a tenth of a second to ten seconds.

That latter fact originally made many think "Hey maybe video review is perfect for a sport so hard to officiate." But I've since come to better understand that what we're really trying to do is let the players decide the outcomes, while using video to eliminate the more obvious mis-calls refs happened to make in real time.

What I think players and fans need to do to better understand which way a call is going to go is to view contact with a goaltender the same way they may have during the "skate in the crease" era. If in fact there was contact with the goaltender in the blue paint – like when there was a skate in the crease – prepare for the goal to be called off. In fact, it will be called off every time in those instances, except when that contact came as a result of the defensive player driving the offensive player into their own

goalie, or when the contact happens early enough that the goalie can re-set and continue playing their position.

If the contact happens outside the crease, well, the goal will stand. That one's on the goalie.

All that said, let's flip back to the point about hockey's speed and aggression: even when following those basic tenets, it can be really hard to determine if a goalie was "out of the crease" or right on the line. It can be tough to tell if a player went into the goalie by being incautious, or was pushed in. We're going to have calls that people disagree about.

But on the margins, getting 'X' number of those calls "wrong" (by someone's subjective standards) is far better than overturning bushels of goals because of some errant skate-blade that had quite literally no effect on a goal being scored. Wiping off legitimately good goals for the "clarity" of a loud minority of fans would be asinine.

Yes, the increase in video reviews is slowing down the game, and worse, it's sapping momentum right as goals are scored, when the buildings are rocking and the storylines are starting to take shape.

I know the NHL immediately reviews plays as they happen, and I would encourage more of that so they're prepared with an answer – not with the replays, but with their actual opinion of what should be called – by the time the refs go to the phones.

And further to that, if a call on the ice was made and it's not immediately something that can be overturned by the video review room, I'd be fine with capping the number of replays officials can watch on a play in the regular season.

An on-ice look and three re-watches should get us to the correct answer 90-plus per cent of the time, so if we're OK with a few blemishes along the way, we need to keep NHL regular season games going. In the playoffs, fine, let them watch more reviews and get it right, entertainment might not be the first priority there.

But even then, we still just have to live with the idea of subjectivity in how hockey is officiated because of the nature of the game. Some days it can be hard to look at NHL refs and say "they'll figure it out," but going back to the skate in the crease rule isn't close to a good solution.

If people who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it, we've got one thing going for us here: this toe-in-the-crease "history" wasn't that long ago, and many of us did learn how bad it was.

There's one other expression that's relevant when it comes to goal reviews, and we shouldn't forget that one either: don't let perfect be the enemy of good.

It definitely isn't perfect, but for hockey, it's good enough.

[Sportsnet.ca / Friday Four: Can McDavid become the second player ever to hit 2,000 points?](#)

By Michael Amato- November 16, 2024

The Friday Four is a collection of thoughts and information on some intriguing player storylines from around the NHL. On deck this week are the following:

- With 1,000 out of the way, McDavid begins the pursuit of 2,000 points.
- Binnington a risky bet for Canada.
- Is this the year Gibson finally gets traded?

It didn't take long for Connor McDavid to take care of business Thursday night. He needed just a single point to reach 1,000 against the Nashville Predators. McDavid buried a goal early in the second period to set the mark, before setting up the overtime winner for good measure. It would've been a great story if his chase for 1,000 continued into Saturday for Hockey Night in Canada against the Toronto Maple Leafs, but I'm sure the last thing McDavid wanted to do was answer questions about it for another two days. His focus this season is on a team trophy and not individual milestones.

Now that point 1,000 is in the books for McDavid, the race for 2,000 begins.

The Edmonton Oilers superstar became the fourth fastest to reach the milestone, doing so in 659 games, just a few games behind Mike Bossy. The only other players to reach 1,000 points faster than McDavid are Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux, which is some elite company. He deserves to be mentioned with those greats and even though 2,000 points seems almost unfathomable, it's actually a very realistic possibility for McDavid.

As good as McDavid is, let's make one thing perfectly clear, everyone is playing for second on the all-time scoring list. McDavid would still need another 1,856 points to catch Gretzky and would probably have to play until he's about 50 to get there. That really puts into perspective how dominant someone like Gretzky was and that he owns one of the most incredible and under-highlighted stats of all time. Even if you took away every single one of Gretzky's goals, he'd still be the league's all-time leading scorer if you just counted his assists.

Jaromir Jagr who ranks second all-time in scoring with 1,921 points is a more attainable target. McDavid is still just 27 years old, so that means even if he plays just another 10 years and averages 92 points per season, he'll catch Jagr. Certainly not easy but far from impossible. Obviously, a lot of that will depend on how McDavid ages and if he can stay healthy, but someone like Sidney Crosby, who is 37, has recorded 93 and 94 points respectively in the past two campaigns. McDavid could certainly do it.

A number like 92 points is also a very conservative estimate for someone like McDavid in the next five years or so. He's averaged 143 points over the past four seasons and totalled 513 points over that stretch. That's well over half the amount needed to pass Jagr and get to 2,000. Maybe McDavid's game will regress at some point as he gets to his mid-thirties, but it's hard to envision a massive drop-off in the foreseeable future. That means he'll probably bank enough points over the next three or four years to give him some breathing room as he ages and account for some regression.

One other important thing that will aid McDavid's pursuit of 2,000 points is that he's going to get to chase it alongside Leon Draisaitl, a top-five player in the world. Draisaitl is locked in with the Oilers long term and the pair are a duo that simply can't be stopped. Anyone who is near the top of the all-time

scoring list had elite players by their side for several years. Lemieux and Jagr, Gretzky and Mark Messier, just to name a few. McDavid is incredible all by himself, but having Draisaitl is only going to help him stockpile points.

There are a number of ways to illustrate McDavid's greatness, but one of the best is to compare him to his peers. The aforementioned Draisaitl is still well over 100 points away from the 1,000-mark despite playing 77 more games than McDavid. Nikita Kucherov is only closing in on 900 points in 740 games, while Nathan MacKinnon may very well get there this season, but he's played almost 150 more games than McDavid.

There's nothing quite as captivating in sports as watching the chase of a record or major milestone. We're witnessing Alexander Ovechkin do just that right now when it comes to Gretzky's goal record and if McDavid eventually closes in on 2,000 points it's going to be just as riveting.

To some, reaching 2,000 points may seem impossible. But with McDavid, it feels inevitable.

For the longest time, Team Canada has had an embarrassment of riches between the pipes in international play. From Dryden to Fuhr to Roy to Brodeur to Luongo to Price, it was a position Canada never had to worry about. Now it's the thinnest.

Not only is it no longer a position of strength, but they've been passed by miles by other countries heading to the 4 Nations Face-Off. Sweden will lean on Linus Ullmark and Jacob Markstrom, with Filip Gustavsson also an option. Finland can turn to Juuse Saros, and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen is developing into a solid goaltender as well. Not to mention the United States, who suddenly have a surplus of options and aren't even feeling the loss of Thatcher Demko to injury. They can comfortably take Jake Oettinger, Connor Hellebuyck and Jeremy Swayman, and someone like Anthony Stolarz, who is having a great season, won't even make the cut.

Canada, on the other hand, is going to have to wade through a bunch of options they can't realistically have much confidence in. Jordan Binnington has come to the forefront of the group, more by default than by his play on the ice. He owns an .886 save percentage this season, hasn't played a playoff game in two years and hasn't looked anything like the goalie who carried the Blues to a Stanley Cup in 2019.

That Cup run, even though it came six years ago, is what's propelling Binnington to the top of the list right now, and maybe rightfully so. The 31-year-old rescued St. Louis from the bottom of the standings that season, going 24-5-1 down the stretch with a .927 save percentage and then followed that up with a .914 in the playoffs to lead the Blues to a championship. That's not something that Blues and Team Canada general manager Doug Armstrong is going to forget.

It's not that Binnington has been dreadful since capturing the Cup, just very inconsistent. His numbers had been steadily declining until last season when he won 28 games and posted a .913 save percentage. Binnington also ranked fifth overall in goals saved above expected in 2023-24 with 16.5. It was a great season and put him on everyone's radar once again. This year, though, he's plummeted to 60th in goals saved above expected and looks like at best an average goalie right now.

However, what Binnington has going for him is a lack of other worthy options for Canada to choose from. There's fellow Cup winner Adin Hill, but he has a save percentage worse than Binnington's and hasn't even played 150 NHL games. Stuart Skinner could be an option, but after making it to within one victory of the Stanley Cup last summer, he's started slow and comes full of question marks. Maybe you see value in a talented goalie on a weaker team like MacKenzie Blackwood or Samuel Montembeault, but neither netminder has ever even played a playoff game in the NHL. Dropping them into a best-on-best scenario is fairly risky.

The biggest challenger to Binnington landing the number one job might be Logan Thompson. He's started hot out of the gates at 7-0-1 and looks great for a rejuvenated Washington Capitals squad. Going with the hot hand would make sense, but the problem is that rosters have to be submitted by December 2nd and goaltending is a very volatile position. You'd probably have an easier time tracking down D.B. Cooper than trying to figure out how well Thompson, or any goalie for that matter, is going to be playing three months from now.

Binnington has also not had a strong team in front of him for several years now and no doubt that has contributed to some of his mediocre numbers in recent campaigns. Even if they aren't as solid in goal, Canada is still going to have an incredible forward group and good defence corps to help him out. Given he has the most experience and best track record of all the legitimate options available, Binnington probably gives Canada the best chance to win.

The 4 Nations Face-Off is going to be a short tournament even for the winner. It's a three-game round-robin followed by the championship game for the two teams with the most points. Binnington doesn't need to play well for a season, several months or even a seven-game series. Canada is going to need him to catch lightning in a bottle and turn back the clock for hopefully four games.

Binnington is far from an ideal option, he's just Canada's best bet right now.

Social media was abuzz Monday night when the Dallas Stars scored six times in the first period against the Pittsburgh Penguins, en route to a 7-1 victory. One player, though, was noticeably absent on the scoresheet.

Jason Robertson finally picked up his first point in five games Thursday, hasn't scored in his past seven and is on pace for only 44 points on the season. That's a titanic drop-off for a player of Robertson's calibre, especially when you consider it was just two years ago when he easily topped 100 points.

Robertson's regression actually started last season, when he went from 109 points down to 80. That was mainly because he scored 46 times in 2022-23 and only 29 last year, and there isn't really an obvious reason as to why. His shooting percentage did drop slightly from 14.7 to 12.6 per cent, but that's not drastic enough to account for the significant fall in offence. It's down even further this year to 11.1 per cent, though again, there's no reason his numbers should be plummeting.

If you look at Robertson's ice time, it's another area that hasn't really changed. He's been between 18 and 19 minutes on average per night for the past four seasons with little fluctuation. Robertson is still getting plenty of opportunities on the top line and number one power play unit, prime spots for him to pile up points.

One thing that has been a change for Robertson is the retirement of Joe Pavelski. Robertson played mainly with Roope Hintz and Pavelski for the past few seasons and definitely got comfortable playing with the veteran. This season it's been more of a rotating door at that spot, with Robertson himself even being shuffled down the lineup here and there as well. Logan Stankoven, who has been excellent, and Evgenii Dadonov have been the two to fill Pavelski's spot most frequently and it might simply be a case of Robertson needing more time to get used to a new line combination.

Perhaps the most glaring change in Robertson's game, though, is his shot volume. When he had that 109-point campaign, Robertson posted 313 shots, 82 more than his next-best season with the Stars, which came last year at 231. He's on an even slower pace this year, trending for 213. So, even though Robertson's shooting percentages haven't changed much, the massive fall in shot volume could account for his goal and point totals dropping substantially.

The more you look at it, the more that 2022-23 season looks like an anomaly for Robertson. Unless he really increases his shot volume once again, the expectations for Robertson should be closer to 80 points than 100. He's still a great player, maybe just not an elite one.

There are very few guarantees in life, but John Gibson trade rumours at the start of every season are one of them.

It seems like Gibson's name has been on the block for the past three or four years, with a deal yet to take shape. There are a couple of obvious reasons for that, with Gibson's play being the first. The Anaheim Ducks goaltender used to be one of the league's finest, though he's failed to finish with a save percentage above .904 since 2018-19. Part of that is due to the Ducks being such a poor team over that span and not giving Gibson much help, but some other netminders have been able to overcome that. Lukas Dostal has been excellent this season with a .922 save percentage and Anthony Stolarz also posted a .917 with Anaheim a few years back.

The second issue is Gibson's \$6.4M cap hit, which becomes a little more palatable now that only two years are left after this one, and even more so if the Ducks retain some salary. Even still, that isn't easy for most teams to absorb and they would have to be reasonably confident Gibson could still play at a high level and stay healthy to take on his contract.

Let's also keep in mind Gibson has a 10-team no-trade clause, making any deal even trickier for Anaheim to navigate and the list of goalie-needy teams is slim. Any rebuilding or non-playoff team is likely out because it wouldn't make sense to give up assets for someone like Gibson at this point. That leaves only a select few teams as options where there could be a fit.

Would the Pittsburgh Penguins be interested? It's possible, but an unlucky match. The Pens continue to double down on this group and although goaltending has been an issue, they have limited cap space to make it work. They would need the Ducks to probably take Tristan Jarry back in return, something Anaheim shouldn't be interested in given his play, hefty contract and the emergence of Dostal.

Detroit could be an option, but the Red Wings don't seem that close to contending and all the while, Cam Talbot has actually been quite solid for them this season and he comes a lot cheaper than Gibson. Maybe if they could offload Ville Husso's contract in the process they'd consider it, but Detroit has more issues than just goaltending. Their blue line is thin and putting Gibson into that situation wouldn't be a wise investment.

The team that makes the most sense to me is the Colorado Avalanche. They're Cup contenders but goaltending has been a weak spot for them over the last couple of years. Alexandar Georgiev has really struggled and although he's improved a little lately, I wouldn't be comfortable potentially wasting a year of prime Nathan MacKinnon, Mikko Rantanen and Cale Makar due to bad goaltending. If the Ducks took Georgiev, who has just one year left on his contract, back in a deal and ate some money they might be able to make it work. At the very least, Gibson would be a decent upgrade on what they have and he'd probably be motivated playing on a team with legitimate Stanley Cup aspirations.

For a deal to happen, though, Gibson is going to have to string together at least a good stretch of solid play to make an acquiring team a believer. He's off to a good start with a strong first outing. Maybe he won't regain the form he had earlier in his career, but Gibson can still give hope to a team that needs rescuing between the pipes.

[Sportsnet.ca / Coaches on the hot seat? Four teams that could shake things up](#)

By Emily Sadler- November 17, 2024

We're about six weeks into the 2024-25 NHL campaign, and while this is the time we start to really figure out what teams are all about, it feels like this year features a few extra question marks thanks to some surprising underachievers.

Looking at the standings, there are teams with very real playoff expectations sitting closer to the bottom than the top and are now facing tough decisions about how to turn things around.

Unfortunately, this often means looking not just at the players, but also at the person steering the ship from behind the bench.

A coaching change can be a necessary decision to turn a losing season into a winning one, but it's still a tough one. And in the case of these four clubs, it's worth wondering whether we might see front offices do exactly that in an effort to jumpstart some production while the standings are still wide open.

Hired: July 1, 2022 | Overall record with BOS: 120-40-22

All eyes were on the Atlantic ahead of the 2024-25 campaign, with fans and prognosticators all trying to figure out how to fit more than five teams from the division into the Eastern Conference post-season picture, considering the collection of clubs in the mix and knocking on the door (spoiler alert: You can't). But the opposite has happened, with a lot of underperforming teams still figuring out who they are this year.

We just didn't expect Boston to be one of them. At a glance, things may not look so bad considering the Bruins currently sit third in the Atlantic Division — but the standings don't exactly tell the whole story.

They're scoring at a rate that ranks fifth-worst in the league (2.5 goals per game) and are giving up goals too often — their 3.39 goals against per game is seventh-worst. Boston's minus-16 goal differential looks like that of a rebuilding squad, not a Cup contender. Special teams are downright abysmal, with an underperforming penalty kill (74.3 per cent) and an even worse power play that's capitalized just 11.4 per cent of the time. We've watched as emotions have overflowed on the bench and listened as Montgomery tries to capture what, exactly, is going wrong in his third campaign with the club.

A perennial contender, the Bruins didn't miss a beat when they transitioned from winning under Bruce Cassidy to winning under Jim Montgomery — they went from great to even better, in fact, posting the best regular season in NHL history in Montgomery's first year at the helm in 2022-23. He was awarded Jack Adams honours for his efforts and has guided the club to back-to-back playoff appearances. With rumours and reports about his job security suddenly flying about, it's a harsh reminder for everyone of what a tough business coaching can be.

Hired: Dec. 12, 2015 | Overall record with PIT: 381-229-80

Nearly a decade into his Pittsburgh tenure, Mike Sullivan is about as synonymous with the Penguins' success as the franchise's biggest stars.

Brought up to the big club 28 games into the 2015-16 season, Sullivan was tasked with lighting a spark after an uninspired start under Mike Johnston and instead set the league ablaze with a revitalized Penguins squad that sprinted through the rest of the season all the way to a Stanley Cup. They successfully defended their title the following spring and returned to the playoffs five more times in the five seasons that followed their title defence. Though he never claimed the Jack Adams Award as the

league's top coach, his name is always in the conversation as he's navigated the Penguins through injuries and into contention year after year. He's coached and won more games with Pittsburgh than any other bench boss in franchise history and is the second longest-tenured head coach in the NHL right now, behind only Tampa Bay's Jon Cooper.

Unfortunately, there's also a reason he's potentially feeling the heat now. Pittsburgh has missed the last two post-seasons, and finds itself in a tough spot with a win-now core of Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Kris Letang that's aging and cap constraints making it tough to build sufficiently around for one last run. Kyle Dubas opted to keep Sullivan behind the bench when he was hired as general manager in 2023, but as the team continues to drop in the standings, it's worth wondering whether Dubas will decide to bring in his own candidate to try and light another fire.

The Penguins' problem areas are clear — with a league-high 3.83 goals allowed per game this season, they lack a true No. 1 netminder that can win them games. They've already bounced through three netminders in 18 games and none have been able to stay long. Sitting well outside the playoff picture in the basement of the Metropolitan, Pittsburgh's time to turn this season around could soon be running out.

Hired: June 30, 2022 | Overall record with DET: 83-77-20

It's been eight seasons since the Detroit Red Wings last appeared in the playoffs, their incredible 25-year run of contention coming to an end in the spring of 2017 as the franchise embarked on major organizational changes and a massive roster overhaul to go with it. As we've watched GM Steve Yzerman retool and rebuild the roster and restock his pool of prospects, we've wondered when the Red Wings would be ready to re-emerge on the playoff stage.

The team is coming close — and, in the case of last spring, incredibly close — but with those few false starts, we're still wondering. In some ways, the Red Wings feel a bit like an experiment in expectations vs. reality and whether the team we're seeing this season so far is right on schedule or already falling behind. They're second last in the Atlantic and sitting at .500 on the season.

Goaltending was a potential area of concern entering the season, with an aging Cam Talbot leading a largely unproven duo backing him up in Alex Lyon and Ville Husso — but netminding hasn't been the issue here, the Red Wings posting a 10th best goals against per game (three). Not bad. That said, it's not making up for the significant drop in offence we've seen this year. It's goal-scoring that's been harder to come by so far this fall — the team is tallying just shy of 2.5 per game through 15 contests so far, and has scored fewer even-strength markers (19) this year than any other squad. (The power play is pretty decent, ranking seventh thanks to a 25.6 per cent conversion rate.) Detroit's penalty kill is a major struggle, ranking third worst right now (66.7 per cent).

Maybe Lalonde hasn't exactly been provided all the tools, roster-wise, to win. But three seasons into his tenure, it's still hard not to view this year, so far, as a disappointment — and it's even harder to determine whether a change behind the bench would help or hurt.

Hired: May 31, 2023 | Overall record with NSH: 59-40-8

Andrew Brunette has had his term cut short before — despite guiding the Florida Panthers to the Presidents' Trophy (and himself to the list of Jack Adams finalists) as interim in 2021-22, the team released him to bring in Paul Maurice. Now in the second season of his second chance after he was handed the keys to the Nashville Predators in 2023, will Brunette have the opportunity to see this one through?

This was a franchise that looked like it was flirting with a rebuild when he was hired, but a 47-30-5 campaign last year — good for fourth in the Central and a wild card spot in the West — seemed to reroute the club. Juuse Saros signed a massive extension to stay, and a summertime shopping spree dragged the club back into the spotlight. They handed four-year and five-year deals to Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault, respectively, solidifying their situation down the middle and making a statement that the Predators are, in fact, ready to win now.

And yet, 17 games into the season, the Predators have yet to play like the star-studded club that it is. Sitting last in the Central Division, they've won just five games — same as San Jose, Columbus, Anaheim, and Montreal, all of whom are deep in the throes of a rebuild. They're tied with Chicago for the fourth-fewest goals scored per game. Only three players — Filip Forsberg, Roman Josi, and Ryan O'Reilly — have hit double-digits in points. The only thing going right is the penalty kill, which is operating at a league-best 91.5 per cent rate.

The Predators have proven themselves to be a loyal organization — they've had just four coaches since their establishment in 1998. And just as Barry Trotz went from David Poile's first coaching hire to his successor as GM, there's a connection here, too, between Trotz and Brunette. Brunette was an original member of that inaugural Predators roster under Trotz, and even scored the franchise's first-ever goal.

In any normal situation, Brunette should not be feeling the heat. But something's gotta give if this group is to hit its stride before it's too late, and most often that comes in the form of changes behind the bench. Will that be the case in Nashville?