



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
January 1-2, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets

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[The Columbus Dispatch / How to watch Columbus Blue Jackets vs Detroit Red Wings simulcast games](#)

By Brian Hedger – January 2, 2025

The arrival of a new year brings Blue Jackets fans in Ohio, West Virginia and Kentucky a new way to watch five of the team's remaining 44 games.

Beginning with the Jackets' matchup against the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday at Nationwide Arena, five games will be shown via simulcast on the FanDuel Sports Network and local affiliates of the Sinclair Broadcast Group and Gray Media.

The select games will air locally on ABC 6 or CW Columbus (Ch. 53), which are available via antennae plus cable and streaming providers that include Spectrum, DirecTV, DirecTV Stream, YouTubeTV, Dish and Breezeline.

Thursday's game will air locally on CW 53 at 7 p.m. against the Red Wings (15-18-4), who are four points behind Columbus in the Eastern Conference. Detroit returns to play the Blue Jackets outdoors March 1 at Ohio Stadium in the NHL's 2025 Navy Federal Credit Union Stadium Series.

How can I watch Columbus Blue Jackets vs Detroit Red Wings on Thursday?

Start time: 7 p.m.

Regular broadcast: FanDuel Sports Network

Local simulcast: CW Columbus

Regional simulcasts: WKRC 12.2 CW (Cincinnati); WUAB 43.1 CW (Cleveland); WKEF 22.3 MyTV (Dayton); WQCW 30.1 CW (Charleston, WV/Huntington, WV/Portsmouth, OH); WKYT 27.2 CW (Lexington, KY)

Streaming: Spectrum, DirecTV, DirecTV Stream, YouTubeTV, Dish and Breezeline

Going into the game, the Blue Jackets are tied with the Philadelphia Flyers at 38 points after outlasting the Carolina Hurricanes in a shootout Tuesday to ring in the new year at Nationwide Arena. They're just two points behind the Ottawa Senators for the Eastern Conference's second wildcard spot and one back of the Pittsburgh Penguins for fourth place in the Metropolitan Division.

What other Columbus Blue Jackets games will be simulcast?

Thursday's matchup against the Red Wings is the first of five games that will be simulcast over free local affiliates along with the Jackets' regular FanDuel Sports Network broadcast.

Here are the other four games:

Saturday, Jan. 11: at St. Louis Blues (ABC 6)

Thursday, Jan. 23: at Carolina Hurricanes (CW 53)

Thursday, Feb. 27: at Detroit Red Wings (CW 53)

Monday, Mar. 17: New Jersey Devils (CW 53)

Here's the regional lineup for the other four games:

Saturday, Jan. 11 at St. Louis Blues:WSTR 64.1 MyTV (Cincinnati); WKEF 22.3 MyTV (Dayton); WSAZ 3.2 MeTV (Charleston, WV/Huntington, WV/Portsmouth, OH); WKYT 27.4 MeTV (Lexington, KY)

Thursday, Jan. 23 at Carolina Hurricanes: WKRC 12.2 CW (Cincinnati); WUAB 43.1 CW (Cleveland); WKEF 22.3 MyTV (Dayton); WQCW 30.1 CW (Charleston, WV/Huntington, WV/Portsmouth, OH); WKYT 27.2 CW (Lexington, KY)

Thursday, Feb. 27 at Detroit Red Wings: WKRC 12.2 CW (Cincinnati); WUAB 43.1 CW (Cleveland); WKEF 22.3 MyTV (Dayton); WQCW 30.1 CW (Charleston, WV/Huntington, WV/Portsmouth, OH); WKYT 27.2 CW (Lexington, KY)

Monday, Mar. 17 vs. New Jersey Devils: WKRC 12.2 CW (Cincinnati); WUAB 43.1 CW (Cleveland); WKEF 22.3 MyTV (Dayton); WQCW 30.1 (Charleston, WV/Huntington, WV/Portsmouth, OH); WKYT 27.2 CW (Lexington, KY)

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets sting Carolina Hurricanes with another shootout win

By Brian Hedger – January 1, 2025

The Blue Jackets ended 2024 with a bang, literally.

Following goals from Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli plus a clinching save by goalie Elvis Merzlikins, the Jackets celebrated an exciting 4-3 shootout victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday night with a cannon blast followed by fireworks on New Year's Eve at Nationwide Arena. It was the Blue Jackets' second shootout win over the Hurricanes in Columbus this season, after winning 5-4 that way on Nov. 23.

Johnson's goal in the third round tied the breakaways competition at 1-1 after Andrei Svechnikov put the Hurricanes up with a goal to end the second. Fantilli took it from there, zipping the puck through Pyotr Kochetkov's pads for a go-ahead goal to start the fourth that became the decisive tally after Merzlikins stopped Sebastian Aho in the bottom half.

"I just tried not to think about it," Johnson said. "Just a normal shootout attempt is all I tried to do, so (the pressure's) not too bad. It's just sports."

Kirill Marchenko's two goals led the Blue Jackets (16-6-6) in regulation, helping them even their record before the arrival of the year 2025. Dmitri Voronkov scored the Blue Jackets' other goal, trying it 3-3 on a power play early in the third period to force an exciting overtime with three shots each way.

Merzlikins earned the goaltending win with 32 saves for the Blue Jackets. Kochetkov (25 saves) took the loss for the Hurricanes (22-14-1), whose goals were scored by defenseman Ty Smith, former Blue Jackets forward Jack Roslovic and center Jesperi Kotkaniemi.

"It's a wonderful sign, obviously moving forward," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "We've handled adversity up to this point, and you're going to have to handle a lot more. But to do it (against) that team ... that's such a good hockey club. Carolina's so good, put so much heat on us, and we didn't handle it in areas. But, at the end of the day, we get the job done."

Marchenko gave the Blue Jackets leads of 1-0 and 2-1 in the first period on his goals, which were his team-leading 15th and 16th of the season.

The first was scored with a snapshot that beat Kochetkov off a great setup from Monahan 4:48 into the game. The second broke a 1-1 tie with 4:17 left in the period, scored with a long wrister after Kochetkov fell backward into his net trying to stop a play between Voronkov and Monahan at the right post.

Smith's goal tied it 1-1 earlier in the first to cap a power play that followed a tripping penalty called on Merzlikins, which shifted the game's momentum in Carolina's favor. Marchenko's second goal gave the Blue Jackets a needed boost going into the first intermission, but the Hurricanes also dominated the second period.

Getting goals less than three minutes apart from Roslovic and Kotkaniemi, they surged ahead to lead 3-2 starting the third. Voronkov's 13th goal of the season tied it 3-3 at 4:58 of the third to cap a power play prompted by Andrei Svechnikov's slashing minor against Zach Aston-Reese — setting up the exciting finish.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' young talent tops takeaways after edging Carolina Hurricanes

By Brian Hedger – January 1, 2025

Every time it looks like the Blue Jackets' season may slide into an all-too-familiar abyss, they find a way to avoid it.

They did it again Tuesday to close out 2024 on New Year's Eve at Nationwide Arena, improving to 16-6-6 with an entertaining 4-3 shootout win over the Carolina Hurricanes. Trailing 3-2 to start the third period and struggling to gain traction against one of the NHL's top teams, the Blue Jackets forced overtime on Dmitry Voronkov's power-play goal and forced an exciting overtime.

When that didn't settle it, the Blue Jackets won by shootout after overcoming a deficit in that too. They're getting good at hanging around with the league's best, which is a step in the right direction for developing a playoff contender.

"I thought the intensity level of the game felt really good tonight," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "It felt like an important game, right? It's obviously midway (in the season), but it felt intense. Both teams were playing hard."

Here are four takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets get big contributions from young players against Carolina Hurricanes

Sean Monahan dished out three assists, Zach Werenski set a franchise record with 11 shots while extending his franchise-record home points streak to 13 games and Elvis Merzlikins was big in net.

Those three veterans played key roles in downing the Hurricanes, but the Jackets needed their core group of young players to get past the finish line — including clutch shootout goals by Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli that decided the winner.

Voronkov also tied it in the third on a power play, Kirill Marchenko scored two more goals in his breakout season, Cole Sillinger made a few impressive plays in overtime and rookie defenseman Denton Mateychuk earned two shifts in OT in the same game he'd earlier collected his first NHL assist and point. That's six young players making key contributions, and there's more maturing with the AHL's Cleveland Monsters.

Columbus Blue Jackets still sizzling on power plays

The days of the Blue Jackets sabotaging their own power plays disappeared in December, allowing them to form a legitimate man-advantage weapon. Voronkov's goal was the latest example, tying the game with a man-advantage that made Andrei Svechnikov pay for slashing Zach Aston-Reese.

The goal was the Jackets' 11th power-play goal in their past 36 opportunities (30.5%), and they've now scored on a power play in nine of the past 12 games. Their success rate for the season is now 21.4% and ranks 17th in the league. Voronkov has become a key component filling Boone Jenner's role at the net-front as a massive 6-foot-5 goalie screen who has great hands, vision and skill.

It will be interesting to see what role Jenner plays on power plays whenever he's cleared to return from shoulder surgery.

Kirill Marchenko's hard work is paying off for Columbus Blue Jackets

After his career-high point streak stopped at seven games Saturday in Boston, Marchenko got right back on the scoresheet against Carolina. Netting two goals in the first, he extended his team-leading goal total to 16 through the first 38 games to go with his career-high 26 assists and a team-high 42 points.

Marchenko, who signed a three-year contract extension in July, has tallied points in 11 of the past 13 games for a 6-12-18 scoring line and has added 10-16-26 in 20 games since Nov. 21 against the Tampa Bay Lightning. He's now scored eight goals in nine career games against Carolina, but Marchenko's scoring prowess isn't all that has stood out to Evason.

"We've seen the competitive level really high this year," Evason said. "He's competing, he's winning his puck battles, he's winning races to pucks, he's been sound defensively, and just playing the game the right way. Obviously, the numbers are there. That's great, but we need him to play in all three zones and he's done that."

Jack Roslovic, Eric Robinson nearly helped Carolina Hurricanes overcome Columbus Blue Jackets

Another game in his hometown against his former Blue Jackets teammates brought another goal for Jack Roslovic, who tied it 2-2 early in the second period with his 17th goal of the season.

Since the Blue Jackets dealt him to the New York Rangers at last season's trade deadline, Roslovic has become a revelation for the Hurricanes, who are skating him at left wing on their top forward line after signing with Carolina last summer. Roslovic also scored a goal against the Blue Jackets in Carolina's first trip to Columbus in November, and he's on pace to score 38 goals over a full 82-game slate.

That's easily the best scoring pace of his NHL career. Prior to being traded, Roslovic scored 51 goals for the Blue Jackets over four seasons — including 22 in 81 games in 2021-22 as his career-high. He followed that in 2022-23 with 11 goals in 77 games and netted just nine goals between Columbus and New York in 59 games last season.

Eric Robinson joined Roslovic in getting on the scoresheet against his former team, assisting on Jesperi Kotkaniemi's go-ahead goal to put the Hurricanes up, 3-2, less than three minutes after Roslovic netted the equalizer.

The Athletic / Optimism abounds in Blue Jackets' come-from-behind shootout win over Hurricanes

By Aaron Portzline – January 1, 2025

It was fitting that this Columbus Blue Jackets' win happened on New Year's Eve, ending just an hour or so before the ball was dropped on 2025.

There was an obvious reason to celebrate: The Blue Jackets rallied from a third-period deficit to force overtime, then won a four-round shootout to beat the Carolina Hurricanes 4-3 before a crowd of 17,712 in Nationwide Arena. The Jackets are 4-1-1 in their last six.

But there was also hope for the new year, and well beyond. You couldn't miss it.

Two 24-year-old forwards — Kirill Marchenko (two goals) and Dmitri Voronkov (one) — did the damage in regulation. Adam Fantilli, 20, had the shootout winner to open the fourth round, the first of his NHL career. Kent Johnson, 22, scored a do-or-die goal in the third round of the shootout to keep the game alive.

And yes, that was 20-year-old defenseman Denton Mateychuk drawing two shifts during three-on-three overtime, a major show of confidence from coach Dean Evason.

But above all, Evason was most pleased by the way the Blue Jackets comported themselves in the face of one of the NHL's fastest, most relentless and most structured clubs. The Hurricanes carried play for long stretches, especially in the first two periods, but the Blue Jackets absorbed blows without getting knocked out.

What would the score have been last season? The year before?

"Hopefully, it's a wonderful sign moving forward," Evason said. "We've handled adversity up to this point (this season), and you're going to have to handle a lot more.

"To do it against that team ... such a good hockey team. They put so much heat on us. We didn't handle it in areas, but at the end of the day, we get the job done. We were resilient. We stayed the course. There was no panic for us on the bench, and that's exciting for us."

With the Blue Jackets trailing 3-2 after a difficult second period, Evason said the coaches huddled and contemplated tweaks to the Jackets' approach, something that might help them get through the Hurricanes' thicket-like neutral zone alignment, maybe even with the puck occasionally on their sticks.

"We talked after the second. ... 'Should we ... not change but just flip something around a bit?'" Evason said. "We decided to just stay the course and not change our philosophy or thought process. We got the power-play goal (by Voronkov), and that helped us, obviously."

Marchenko scored his 15th and 16th goals of the season in the first period. At 4:48, Marchenko was found by Sean Monahan in the lower left circle for a one-timer that beat Carolina goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov. At 15:43, Marchenko fired from the right wall just as Kochetkov tumbled backward in his crease, the puck sailing over him into the net.

After that, scoring chances were hard to come by for the Blue Jackets. Getting to the neutral zone was its own challenge, much less gaining the red line. The Blue Jackets were called for icing 10 times in the first two periods.

It felt like Carolina might pull away in the second when former Jackets forward Jack Roslovic scored at 5:47 to make it 2-2, and Jesperi Kotkaniemi followed at 8:18 to give the Hurricanes their first lead of the night, 3-2. But the Jackets managed to drag it into the second intermission without further damage.

Voronkov was looking for Marchenko with a pass across the Royal Road early in the third period, but his pass instead deflected off Carolina's Seth Jarvis and into the net.

"It's always super satisfying to get any win," Johnson said. "But it's especially fun when you're one down to win like this. That was fun."

The Blue Jackets' first two shooters in the shootout were denied. Monahan was stoned by Kochetkov's right pad, and Damon Severson's entire body was blocked by Kochetkov when the goalie came roaring out of his net for a pokecheck that was closer to a bodycheck.

After Carolina's Andrei Svechnikov scored in the second round, Johnson had to score in the third to keep it alive. No pressure there, right? Johnson made a dizzying series of moves before rifling the puck between Kochetkov's pads.

"I tried not to think about it," Johnson said. "Just a normal shootout attempt is all I tried to do.

"(We saw) in our pre-scout, and Marchy reminded me on the bench, that this guy likes to pokecheck. It was good to have that in the back of my mind. I thought he wouldn't do it back-to-back (after Severson). It wasn't as hard as he tried on Sevo, but I think he tried it on me, too."

Fantilli took good notes, too. He fired through Kochetkov's five-hole to put the Jackets ahead in the shootout. When Elvis Merzlikins stopped Carolina's Sebastian Aho — no small feat there — the win was clinched.

If you want more reason to look ahead with optimism, there's this: With Tuesday's win, the Jackets are just 2 points behind the Ottawa Senators, who hold the final wild-card playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets need veteran defenseman Damon Severson to clean up his mistakes

By Aaron Portzline – December 31, 2024

Damon Severson was under pressure deep in the Columbus Blue Jackets' defensive zone, the puck on the backhand side of his stick and his back to the blue line as Boston Bruins star David Pastrnak closed quickly.

In the NHL, players have about a half-second, if they're lucky, to make a play. Severson could have held onto the puck and waited for support to arrive. Or he could have relied on the age-old adage: "When in doubt, glass and out."

But that's not what he did.

Severson tried to make a backhand pass to Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli, who was wide open a few feet away and had a clear path out of the zone. Instead, Severson's pass was out of reach for Fantilli and right in stride for Bruins forward Morgan Geekie, who scored a pivotal 2-0 goal.

"I see Fantilli is wide open and I make a play," Severson said. "It's almost like it happens in slow motion. You want it to go on (Fantilli's) stick, obviously, and it goes by his stick and you're like 'Oh, no.'"

"You're praying it's not the worst-case scenario, which is what happened, unfortunately."

This wouldn't be a story if that were Severson's only flub in recent weeks. But his inconsistent play, and his propensity for coughing up pucks at the worst times and in the worst locations, has clearly drawn the ire of coach Dean Evason and his staff.

"Any puck that ends up in the (defensive-zone) slot, right down Broadway ... it's not good, regardless of how it happened," Evason said.

If former Blue Jackets forward Patrik Laine hadn't assailed his former teammates and organization when the Montreal Canadiens were in Columbus on Dec. 23, the fact that the veteran Severson was made a healthy scratch would have been a bigger story. It was a particularly bold move because the Jackets dressed seven defensemen in that game.

On Saturday, in the 4-0 loss to Boston, he was benched for the rest of the second period after the turnover that led to Geekie's goal.

To his credit, Severson, 30, sat at his stall in the Blue Jackets dressing room after Monday's practice in Nationwide Arena and took full ownership of Saturday's gaffe and his recent struggles.

"I'm putting it on my shoulders," Severson said. "I'm not looking to blame anybody else. It's little things. You watch me play my entire game, it's not like I'm bad. I've made two plays in the last three or four games, a couple of plays where ... I just have to be simpler on the defensive side of the puck and not force things.

"It's not even having to battle through it. I'm not playing bad, I've just made a couple of mistakes that have been amplified, and I can't make (those) if we're going to win hockey games."

Evason left open the possibility that the Blue Jackets will dress seven defensemen again at 8 p.m. Tuesday when they host the Carolina Hurricanes in a New Year's Eve game. Severson took practice drills Monday on the right side of a pair with Jake Christiansen.

The veteran coach didn't want to make Severson a healthy scratch, and he didn't want to bench him during Saturday's game. (Severson returned for the third period,) And he concurred with Severson that it's not his overall play that's an issue, just one or two decisions a game that are unnecessarily risky.

"We're trying to find a way to get those (turnovers) out of his game," Evason said. "I'll tell you this: For the majority of the game, it's really good. It's just we have to eliminate those major mistakes that end up in our net.

"When I say that, everybody makes mistakes. That's what this game is about, right? But if they continue to happen, then we have to make, in some way, the player accountable. And Sevvu understands that. He's a pro. He gets it. Did he like being sat out? No, of course not. But we're on the same page, and we're moving forward in a positive manner."

Any conversation about Severson inevitably circles back to the contract he signed with the New Jersey Devils before he was traded to the Blue Jackets in the summer of 2023 when the Jackets added two veterans — Ivan Provorov was the other — to help lure coach Mike Babcock into taking the job.

Severson is in the second year of an eight-year, \$50 million contract (through 2030-31), the kind of long-term, big-dollar contract that can hamstring a small-market club. Put nicely: This has to work out for the Blue Jackets.

When Severson first arrived in Columbus, he assigned his struggles to trying to live up to the contract. "I was trying to prove myself right away and win the Norris (Trophy) in, like, two games," he said.

That hasn't been the case this season, he said. Mostly, he's been a solid contributor.

Severson has six goals, 11 assists and 17 points in 36 games this season, ranking second among Blue Jackets defensemen (after Zach Werenski) in all three categories. He's also playing 21:56 per game, trailing only Werenski and Provorov.

Further, he's the type of mobile defenseman who should excel in the modern NHL, especially in Evason's system, which encourages defensemen to join the rush and be aggressive offensively when the situation is right.

But there's no system that can abide the type of mistakes that Severson has made.

"I've made a couple of plays when the puck is on my stick recently where I've just got to be a little more simple," Severson said. "There's a time and a place for the nice plays I can make, but it was in the wrong zone (Saturday), unfortunately.

"If that happens in the offensive zone, it's not a big deal. When it's in our defensive zone, it's amplified."

The Athletic / Canada lacks discipline, USA's secondary scoring continues on New Year's Eve at World Juniors

By Corey Pronman and Scott Wheeler – January 1, 2025

The preliminary round wrapped up on New Year's Eve with the two biggest games of the tournament so far here in Ottawa, with both Canada-USA and Sweden-Czechia deciding first place in the two groups.

Here are the day's standouts and group play analysis from The Athletic's prospects writers Corey Pronman and Scott Wheeler as we get ready for the quarterfinals.

- Switzerland defeated Kazakhstan 3-1 to secure their place in the quarterfinals and set up a Germany-Kazakhstan relegation game on Jan. 2 at 11 a.m. ET at the Canadian Tire Centre. Sharks goalie prospect Christian Kirsch stopped 11 of 12 shots for Switzerland.
- Finland defeated Latvia 3-0. Kasper Halttunen (San Jose) and Jesse Kiiskinen (Detroit) each scored on one-timers for the Finns. Undrafted goalie Petteri Rimpinen, who has been excellent all tournament, pitched a 28-save shutout.
- Sweden defeated Czechia 4-2 to win Group B and secure the top seed for the elimination round as the only team with a perfect 4-0 record.
- USA defeated Canada 4-1. Cole Hutson (Washington) and Cole Eiserman (NY Islanders) both had a goal and an assist.

Quarterfinal matchups set

Here are the Jan. 2 quarterfinal matchups, times and locations:

Sweden vs. Latvia, 12 p.m. ET/9 a.m. PT (TD Place)

USA vs. Switzerland, 2:30 p.m. ET/11:30 a.m. PT (Canadian Tire Centre)

Finland vs. Slovakia, 5 p.m. ET/2 p.m. PT (TD Place)

Canada vs. Czechia, 7:30 p.m. ET/4:30 p.m. PT (Canadian Tire Centre)

Here's the medal round seeding for the purposes of reseeding in the semifinals as well:

1. Sweden
2. USA
3. Czechia
4. Finland
5. Canada
6. Slovakia
7. Latvia
8. Switzerland

Canada's most likely opponent if — and that's a big if — they're to move on now becomes the Swedes. And the Czechs will have last change as the higher seed and have looked good in this tournament. — Scott Wheeler

Discipline undoes Canada

There has been something (or a combination of things) in each of Canada's last three games in this tournament that has undone them. And in two of those three games now it has been their team discipline. I thought Canada's New Year's Eve game was actually their best of the tournament so far at five-on-five. They controlled play. Whereas in earlier games I felt they just talked about their looks, on Tuesday they actually got to the inside more and were at the net more. Trey Augustine (Detroit) actually had to make several huge stops (I didn't feel the 57 shots they had on Linards Feldbergs had as much quality as the 39 they had on Augustine). Gavin McKenna (2026 draft eligible) hit a crossbar. Their penalty kill was excellent; I thought Jett Luchanko (Philadelphia), in particular, was really good short-handed. But they couldn't stay out of the box. Sam Dickinson (San Jose) took two minors. Luca Pinelli (Columbus) took two minors, both of which boiled down to him boiling over. Carson Rehkopf (Seattle) was having a great game and had worked his way from 13th forward duty onto the first line before taking two penalties. And Easton Cowan (Toronto) took an awful boarding penalty in the third period which the Americans scored on, after he looked on the precipice of it all game.

When it was over, they'd taken 11 minor penalties.

I think Canada can beat this USA squad, but they got in their own way on Tuesday night. And they're still searching for someone who can make that finishing play. They either don't have that player or they need to play the guys who give them the most potency more. It's one or the other. And they've got to cool it. — Scott Wheeler

USA's offense comes from unexpected places

Coming into this tournament we expected USA's top line of James Hagens (2025 draft eligible) in between Gabe Perreault (NY Rangers) and Ryan Leonard (Washington) to dominate the tournament. They haven't, and quite frankly haven't come close to. They've played well, and have been very snake-bitten at times. The top USA power-play unit with those three and Zeev Buium (Minnesota) has underwhelmed, though. They've lacked creativity and deception and for all the offense those four have shown in college their lack of production here has been a surprise. We wondered pre-tournament where USA's secondary scoring would come from. It turns out their secondary scorers have become their primary scorers. Danny Nelson (NY Islanders) and Hutson in particular have been drivers for this USA team and Eiserman contributed an important goal and assist tonight despite being listed as the 13th forward. — Corey Pronman

Sweden's depth shines

In a crucial win over Czechia to secure top spot in Group B, Sweden displayed the depth of their lineup. Their 13th forward Herman Traff (New Jersey) scored two huge goals to start the game. Top forward Felix Unger Sorum (Carolina) had the puck a ton and scored. Anton Wahlberg (Buffalo) was constantly around the play, getting multiple points and being named Sweden's best player of the game. Their big 3 defensemen of Theo Lindstein (St. Louis), Tom Willander (Vancouver) and Axel Sandin-Pellikka (Detroit) all played north of 22 minutes and suffocated Czechia's offense. — Corey Pronman

The Athletic / How the NHL's American Sign Language TV broadcasts bring the game to a 'marginalized' audience

By Scott Powers – December 30, 2024

Would Matthew Tkachuk get there?

Anyone watching the 2024 Stanley Cup Final between the Edmonton Oilers and Florida Panthers could feel the tension and anticipation as the Panthers' Tkachuk sprinted from center ice and attempted to chase down a bouncing puck toward his team's empty net. As Tkachuk launched himself from the edge of the circles, American Sign Language (ASL) broadcasters Jason Altmann and Noah Blankenship conveyed the moment. Altmann put together his hands and leaned left as the moment unfolded. Blankenship raised both of his hands to near eye level, kept his left one still and waved the fingers on his left hand while his mouth was agape. When Altmann and Blankenship saw Tkachuk had miraculously swept the puck away from the net, they both threw their hands up and opened their mouths, nearly in unison.

Sports can tell a story without language. You can appreciate stunning athleticism without knowing the full context of what's happening. A fadeaway jumper, a diving catch, Tkachuk's desperate goal-saving lunge — all can be marveled at without knowing everything about the individual, the teams or the game. But it's that context that converts viewers into fans.

And it's that context, that Altmann and Blankenship, who are both deaf, were able to finally provide during the Stanley Cup Final to a community that has always faced barriers in embracing professional sports. The Deaf community may plan gatherings around major sporting events or participate in sports themselves, but becoming that next-level fan — the one who can recite all the stats, whose day can be made or broken by their team's result — has never been easy. When the NHL, in partnership with P-X-P, a company that seeks access, inclusion and representation in pro sports for deaf and hard of hearing fans, had Altmann and Blankenship broadcast last season's Cup Final in ASL, it was a game changer for them and their community.

On the broadcasts, a video feed of the action is shown, along with isolated shots of Altmann and Blankenship providing commentary in ASL. They also have the ability to make emojis appear on the screen for emphasis.

"For the Deaf community, they've always craved to have an ASL broadcast or ASL that's visible, that's on the screens, and to engage Deaf culture in the commentary, reference sports and tie it to the Deaf community, because sports play a pivotal role in the Deaf community," Altmann said through ASL interpreter and P-X-P founder and CEO Brice Christianson. "The Deaf community has obviously been underserved and marginalized. For us to get together and how we want to host a party, sports were always a great reason. We could enjoy the game and socialize and use our language. So, deaf softball, deaf basketball, volleyball clubs, we would always get together. Sports play such an instrumental role in our conference.

"And now, you have pro leagues where it's always been inaccessible. There are 33 million deaf and hard of hearing people that live in the United States and Canada, and we've barely ever seen any sort of representation in professional sports, especially broadcasting. And so, for us to open the door with the NHL in ASL, the Deaf community is absolutely ecstatic."

For seven games, Altmann and Blankenship made that history last June. From the Panthers building a 3-0 series lead to the Oilers responding to force Game 7 to the Panthers lifting the Cup to the all chaos in

between, Altmann and Blankenship broadcast it all. This wasn't just them interpreting what other broadcasters were saying. This was them putting hours upon hours of work into the studio on the production side, doing their homework on the players and teams and then broadcasting it all, most importantly, in their language. Christianson also is in the studio (off camera) to relay information from the control room to Altmann and Blankenship.

"American Sign Language is a legit language," said Altmann, who is the chief operating officer of P-X-P. "It has its own phonology, morphology effect, syntax, semantics. If you ever watched the NHL in ASL (during) the Stanley Cup Final, any of the broadcasts, you notice that me and Noah were very expressive showing the hits or the goals. So that's our effect. The Deaf community can't see that in closed captions, or that's usually not there.

"And so, for spoken English, how that is reflected is in tone. You don't get that in closed captions. So, for example, Vin Scully might say, 'And it's a long shot deep,' or Joe Buck or Troy Aikman might be commenting. Hearing people feel engaged because of that inflection and tone and pace. That's not in closed captions. ASL can show that. So, with me and Noah, what we do is we offer that added element and that extra value tied to the emotional feeling that we get when we watch sports. For example, the Edmonton Oilers coming back down 3-0 to force a Game 7, we wanted to show that excitement where the Oilers players were able to continue the Stanley Cup Final run after being down 3-0. We really are focusing on the Deaf community to feel engaged and inspired based off of our expressions and our commentary."

Here's how Florida's first goal was called on the 'NHL in ASL' broadcast (Jason Altmann and Noah Blankenship): pic.twitter.com/ZDf67OS0S1

— Sports TV News & Updates (@TVSportsUpdates) June 9, 2024

It was reasonable to wonder if the broadcast would be a one-off by the NHL. Was the broadcast performative or was it the start of something more significant? The NHL answered that this season by creating a weekly ASL highlight show and bringing back Altmann and Blankenship to their New York City-based studio to broadcast the Winter Classic on Dec. 31. The broadcast will air on MAX in the U.S. and Sportsnet+ in Canada. There is more to come, too.

"The bottom line is this is here to stay for us," said NHL vice president of social impact and strategic integration Rachel Segal, who helped bring the ASL broadcast to life and called it the most rewarding experience in her career. "We're constantly trying to find new ways in and new initiatives to help underserved communities feel involved and included in our game, and that means not just having it be one-off experiences, such as the Stanley Cup Final last year. So, we alongside P-X-P came up with a strategic plan (with) more to be announced shortly about how we were going to expand it for this year so that we could show the community, hey, we're here to stay, we're showing up for you and you're welcome in our sport. So, the weekly highlight shows were a way to create touch points throughout the season while we work on what additional broadcasts will be."

An ASL hockey broadcast had always been a hope for Kevin Delaney. He's known about the popularity of hockey within the Deaf and hard of hearing communities for years. Delaney, who is hard of hearing, first attended the AHIHA Stan Mikita Hockey School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing as a youth player in 1984. Now, he's the school's president, along with being a development coach for the Chicago Blackhawks. He's witnessed the game's popularity expand within the community and is humbled to carry on what Mikita and Irv Tiahnybik started in 1973.

"I just want all the players coming up now to experience what we did," Delaney said. "We had 29 new families this year. We continue to grow. ... If you have something preventing you (from) living a normal

life, you find a way to live your life. If you want to play a sport, your disability shouldn't stop you from playing a sport."

That said, Delaney also understood the limitations for the deaf and hard of hearing to become hockey fans. As much as closed captioning may assist in following a television show or a movie, it's a challenge in following sports. Delaney believes the NHL's ASL broadcasts will not only be embraced by deaf people who like hockey but also will open the game up to people who aren't familiar with the sport.

"It makes hockey more popular," Delaney said, "because it's reaching out to a whole different market of people who don't watch hockey. The Deaf community is very tight-knit and close. And so, for someone to say, 'OK, we're doing an ASL broadcast,' it just makes it inclusive for the Deaf community. It has nothing to do with hockey. It has to do with making it accessible for people who normally wouldn't watch hockey, don't know about hockey."

As Altmann said, there is money to be made from their community just as any other.

"The Deaf community has a lot of economic power," Altmann said. "They generate a lot of revenue, too. So not only it being the right thing to do, there's also an economic value — 33 million deaf and hard of hearing people. And I think sports teams and leagues are realizing (that), especially with what P-X-P is doing, because the Deaf and hard of hearing community is looking for representation and inclusion."

There may be financial reward in it all, but there's certainly value well beyond that. That comes through in all the feedback P-X-P has received from the Deaf community since the Stanley Cup Final broadcasts.

"The feedback really touched my soul," Altmann said. "It's been overwhelmingly positive. It was almost like a breath of fresh air for the Deaf community for several reasons. Sports is a huge part of the Deaf community and they see representation on a large and national platform. They see the NHL investing in the Deaf and hard of hearing community. It inspires them and makes them realize that we're here. We have a large community throughout North America that is underserved and overlooked."

"We've received some emails from deaf kids, teenagers. One kid in particular from northern rural Canada (who) watched the NHL in ASL was so over the moon that she could watch a show with her parents who are hearing that barely knew any sign language. She could get together and bring the family together to watch the NHL in ASL. Just think about it, northern rural Canada, you rarely probably see maybe one or two deaf people in that small town. For that kid to see me and Noah on the screen and go, hey, wait a minute, that's someone like me on TV to watch it any time. It's unbelievable."

Altmann and Blankenship have been busy preparing for the Winter Classic between the Chicago Blackhawks and St. Louis Blues on Tuesday. From both teams' in-season coaching changes to Connor Bedard to Robert Thomas to two franchises who are taking different paths in search of success again, Altmann and Blankenship will have plenty of information to share over their broadcast. But like any good broadcaster, Altmann knows a little help from elsewhere could make the game even more memorable.

"Unfortunately, we won't be in Chicago in Wrigley Field, we'll be in studios in New York City, but we will definitely incorporate the pulse, the atmosphere in the vibe and incorporate that to our broadcast," Altmann said. "I'm hoping that there's going to be a snow-globe atmosphere, just a little bit of an added touch to the environment."