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The Athletic / Blue Jackets Monday Gathering: Yegor Chinakhov remains parked in a fourth-line role

By Aaron Portzline – October 27, 2025

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

Item No. 1: “Chin” up

We’ve seen ugly trade requests before in Columbus, right? Pierre-Luc Dubois, who was just in town with the Washington Capitals on Friday, straight-up quit on the Blue Jackets five years ago after his request for a trade wasn’t met with enough urgency.

Yegor Chinakhov requested a trade at the end of last season, apparently, but you’d never know he was unhappy with his workplace — at least publicly — by the way he’s played over the last week, or from some of the tales you hear behind the scenes.

First guy at the rink most mornings? Defenseman Ivan Provorov, with Chinakhov never far behind him. First guy on the ice each morning? Often it’s Zach Werenski, but Chinakhov is always out early and always out for optional practices.

Chinakhov has continued to involve himself in off-ice events with the club, too, even when it hasn’t been mandatory for players to attend.

Yes, he’s continued to be a good soldier, even as rumors swirl and fans grumble in comment sections, even as he remains parked on the fourth line — with no special teams — because coach Dean Evason remains content with the nine players who currently comprise his top three lines.

Chinakhov scored his first goal of the season in Saturday’s 5-4 shootout win in Pittsburgh, and it would have stood as the game-winning goal if the Blue Jackets hadn’t coughed up two goals in the third period to let the Penguins force overtime.

It was a classic Chinakhov goal, too. Zach-Aston Reese found him in the right circle and Chinakhov scored with a bar-down wrist shot. It marked the third straight game in which he’s been one of the Blue Jackets’ most noticeable forwards, even without any special-teams play.

He was stopped later in the game on a breakaway.

“It feels great (to score),” Chinakhov said. “I hope I find my game. When you play a little more, you get the confidence.”

Asked if he felt he was close to getting a bigger role, Chinakhov said: “That’s not my question.”

Before Saturday’s game, Evason was asked if there was still a pathway for Chinakhov to play his way into the top-six role he wants.

“Yeah, absolutely,” Evason said. “There’s opportunity, as we’ve talked about a lot, for guys to move up, (on) special teams too. One hundred percent there is, for everybody on our team.”

Here’s the conundrum facing Evason, though.

He’s not going to mess with the top line. Wingers Dmitri Voronkov and Kirill Marchenko have worked extremely well with Sean Monahan, and Voronkov (5-4-9, plus-8) and Marchenko (5-3-8, plus-6) are off to hot starts through the first eight games.

The second-line wingers, Boone Jenner and Kent Johnson, aren’t easy to bump either. Johnson’s playmaking brings life to a line with center Adam Fantilli, and Jenner’s strength, faceoff ability and net-front presence make him a necessity on a line with a young center.

You could justify Chinakhov over wingers Cole Sillinger and Mathieu Olivier on the third line, but Evason likes to use that line as a checking line. And Chinakhov’s forte isn’t checking.

And here’s the conundrum facing Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell, who is taking frequent calls from Chinakhov’s agent and rival GMs who are interested in the 24-year-old Chinakhov: The Blue Jackets don’t want “futures.”

That is, they don’t want a trade return that is centered around a draft pick or a mid-range prospect. The Jackets endured the difficult rebuilding years before Waddell arrived, but now they’re in “today” mode, expecting to make the playoffs. But if Waddell trades Chinakhov today for another player who isn’t a lock in the top nine, how are they better?

Waddell has said before that he doesn’t mind making trades within the Eastern Conference or even the Metropolitan Division, that he’s only concerned with the return. But even with trade talks open to the entire league, it’s a pretty stagnant trade market at this point in the season.

It can change at any time, right? What if the New York Rangers continue to struggle out of the gate? What if the Calgary Flames struggle to win and score? Waddell, in his time as GM in Atlanta and Carolina, has shown a willingness to be aggressive.

So on this goes, into the fourth week of the regular season. Chinakhov has averaged almost 10 minutes per game over the last three outings. Unless something changes, he’s in for a similar role when the Blue Jackets play in Buffalo on Tuesday.

How has he stayed positive during the first month of the season?

“I love the hockey,” Chinakhov said. “I just try to be better every day. That’s it.”

Item No. 2: “Is my eye still there?”

Blue Jackets fourth-liner Miles Wood was in pain, but mostly he was in shock. He looked at the ice directly below him. Blood. He looked at his gloves. More blood. When trainer Mike Vogt arrived on the scene, Wood had a terrifying question.

“Is my eye still there?” Wood said.

It was Oct. 13, the home opener against New Jersey. Wood was charging hard at the net for a loose puck when he was welcomed by the stick of Devils defenseman Dougie Hamilton, who had assumed a firm defensive posture. The stick rode up Wood's face and under his shield, making impact at eye level.

Thankfully, Vogt answered yes — Wood's left eye was still where it should be — but Wood hasn't played yet and endured difficult days in the aftermath.

"I've been playing hockey for 30 years now, and it's the most scared I've ever been," Wood said last week, his first public comments since the incident. "I've always said to people, break whatever bone you want, just don't take one of my eyes.

"When I was down on the ice, I thought my eyeball was in my hand when I pulled it away. Really. I saw nothing out of that eye, so that's why I wondered. I couldn't see for a half-hour after that, so I was kind of scared."

Wood is expected to make a full recovery. Incredibly, he was told as much just minutes after the incident, when the Blue Jackets' medical staff (which includes a battery of specialists) determined the eye would most likely return to normal after the blood had cleared.

Wood had to sleep in a recliner for a week after the incident, he said, so that gravity would help the blood move along. He was also told to avoid elevating his heart rate, which meant no practices, no workouts, etc. He's missed five games, but has resumed skating.

He traveled with the Blue Jackets for Saturday's game in Pittsburgh, a sign that he's likely on the verge of returning to the lineup.

"I'm happy with the way it's progressed," said Wood, who still has a mark on the bridge of his nose and his left side of his head. "I'm just thankful that I have two eyes still."

Wood spent the first seven seasons of his career playing for the Devils, so he knows Hamilton and several of the players.

"They all reached out. The training staff did, too," Wood said. "It was just a freak thing. That's hockey sometimes, I guess."

Item No. 3: Take 5, Denton Mateychuk

"Take 5" is our weekly brief and (mostly) non-hockey conversation with a Blue Jackets player, coach, broadcaster or staffer. This week, second-year defenseman Denton Mateychuk:

Where in Columbus do you live?

I'm right here in the Arena District. Two minutes from the arena. I love the walk in the morning. Instead of having a 15-minute drive, or whatever, you're outside, and I love that. Don't even think about traffic, you know? It's quiet in the morning, too, not as busy as it is after a game.

Any "welcome to the NHL" moment?

We were in Pittsburgh last season (Jan. 7, 2025, Mateychuk's seventh NHL game) when (Sidney) Crosby kind of put his butt into me and knocked me over — just hit me and I went flat on my back. The announcers were like, "Crosby's his idol!" and they're right. Here's Crosby, this guy you've watched score huge goals and win Stanley Cups and gold medals ... My friends give it to me about that all the time.

Favorite sport outside hockey?

Baseball. I love the Blue Jays, so I'm loving it right now (with the World Series). I've been nervous the whole postseason, but it's been an incredible run. I like the (Los Angeles) Lakers in the NBA. But I don't follow basketball as much anymore. I went to some (Cleveland) Cavaliers games when I played in Cleveland, and that was incredible. It's one of those sports events that, in person, is just insane. My brothers and I will go to one or two CFL games a year. Winnipeg Blue Bombers. But I've never been a big football guy.

What do you miss about living in Canada?

Winters. During the winter (in Manitoba) with my brothers, we go play shinny (pick-up hockey) at the rink, we'd go snowmobiling, that kind of stuff. I miss that stuff, ya know. There's winter here in Columbus, too, which I'm really happy about. It's still winter and we get snow and cold, so I get a taste of it. But it's different than the winters I've been used to.

What's your recreational passion?

I love fishing. In the summer, on the weekend, I love to be on a boat for five, six hours a day, just go chase walleye. I like all the work behind the scenes, just getting on drops (immediate bites on bait), finding flats (shallow, broad areas) ... there's all that that goes into it, and then you find them, and slab them, and it's the best thing ever. Fishing is something that I'll ... I'll probably do it for the rest of my life.

Item No. 4: Snacks

- Johnson, Fantilli and Marchenko went 3-for-3 in the shootout on Saturday, making winners of the Blue Jackets when Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin fired wide in a third-round attempt to keep the game alive. It marked only the fourth time in franchise history — and the first time on the road — that all three of the Blue Jackets' shooters scored. The last time it happened was Dec. 13, 2011, when Mark Letestu, Rick Nash and James Wisniewski scored to beat Vancouver. The other two times were Dec. 27, 2010 vs. Minnesota, and Nov. 24, 2007 vs. Detroit.
- The Blue Jackets are 3-1 on the road to start the season, the first time they've won three of their first four away from Nationwide Arena since 2018-19. The Jackets didn't win their third road game last season until Dec. 1, a 6-3 win in Chicago.
- Boone Jenner took exception to a hit from Pittsburgh's Matt Dumba in the first period on Saturday, charging after Dumba and dropping his gloves.

"Obviously, he hits me. That's how it kinda started," Jenner said. "It's part of the game. That's how you get going, get the team going. I just wanted to stand up for us after the hit ... it is what it is."

It was the seventh fighting major of Jenner's NHL career, and his first since March 30, 2023, when he fought Brandon Carlo, who then played for the Boston Bruins. Other fight opponents for Jenner: Steven Oleksy, Radko Gudas, Antoine Roussel, Scott Wilson and Troy Brouwer.

- Barely five minutes after the shootout win over Pittsburgh on Saturday, Penguins goaltender Artūrs Šilovs was waiting outside the Blue Jackets' dressing room for his counterpart and fellow Latvian, Elvis Merzlikins. While few may have noticed in North America, their head-to-head meeting was a big story back in Riga. It marked the first time two Latvian goaltenders had squared off since Jan. 21, 2002, when Vancouver's Petr Skudra and Carolina's Arturs Irbe squared off in a 7-5 Canucks win. Saturday's game may have been the first time two Latvian goaltenders *started* against each other. In that game back in 2002, Vancouver's Dan Cloutier started but left at 10:18 of the first period with an ankle injury.
- Pittsburgh's Rickard Rakell left Saturday's game after being struck in the hand with a puck fired by Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson at 4:30 of the third period. The Penguins announced on Sunday Rakell had surgery and would miss 6-8 weeks. That's a big blow for Pittsburgh: Rakell led the Penguins with 35 goals last season and had been playing on Sidney Crosby's line.
- Here's your Blue Jackets Monday Gathering trivia question: Marchenko's shootout winner on Saturday was the second game-deciding shootout goal of his career. Which current Blue Jackets player has scored the most game-deciding goals for Columbus?
- Winger Mathieu Olivier's major penalty for elbowing with 7:25 remaining on Friday helped Washington pull away for a 5-1 win in Nationwide after they scored twice on the ensuing five-minute power play. Olivier didn't take issue with a penalty being called, he said on Saturday. It wasn't an intentional blow to the head on Capitals' Declan Chisholm, he noted, but there was contact with Chisholm's head. But the reason it was called a major, Olivier surmised, is because Chisholm left the ice holding his head and appeared to be headed directly to the Capitals' dressing room. If officials had known Chisholm was OK, the penalty might not have been so severe.
- Here's Olivier: "I just didn't agree with the call, especially when you see the other player come right back out there. Was there contact with the head? Sure. I don't think anybody is denying that. But I don't think my elbow goes up. I stay grounded, just trying to finish through the hit. (Chisholm) kind of jumps out of the way, and the first thing they teach us in hockey is to protect yourself. So ... no ill intent, just an unfortunate play."
- More Olivier: "Maybe a minor penalty. I could live with a minor. That's what I think now. But it didn't happen. The refs were just doing their jobs (when they saw Chisholm go to the dressing room). Nothing else to say, really."
- AHL Cleveland lost 4-3 in overtime to Rochester on Saturday, their only game of the weekend. Luca Pinelli had his first professional goal and added an assist for the Monsters, while Luca Del Bel Belluz and Jack Williams also scored and Dysin Mayo had two assists. Goaltender Ivan Fedotov stopped 18 of 22 shots he faced.

- Cleveland forwards Owen Sillinger (knee) and Jordan Dumais (hip) are back to health and playing after missing all of training camp and the start of the season.
- Prospect goaltender Melvin Strahl, a fifth-round pick (No. 156) by the Blue Jackets in 2023, got his first NCAA start and win in Michigan State's 6-2 victory over Northern Michigan on Saturday in East Lansing. Strahl, a 20-year-old Swede who spent last season at USHL Youngstown, made 22 saves.
- Trivia answer: Kent Johnson has scored four game-deciding shootout goals for the Blue Jackets, good for fifth on the franchise list and most among active players. In fact, Johnson's 54.6 percent shootout success rate is fourth-best among current NHL players with 10 or more attempts, trailing only Anaheim's Trevor Zegras (14 of 22, 63.6 percent), the Rangers' Artemi Panarin (27 of 46, 58.7), and Dallas' Jason Robertson (18 of 31, 58.1).

The Athletic / Blue Jackets beat Penguins in shootout — and they might be rewriting the script

By Aaron Portzline – October 26, 2025

It wasn't easy. It never is for the Columbus Blue Jackets in the Steel City, but Saturday's 5-4 shootout win in PPG Paints Arena is the type of game the Blue Jackets have historically found a way to lose.

Instead, the Blue Jackets overcame two early deficits, a blown two-goal lead late — and, frankly, their own history — to achieve two things they struggled with most of last season: win on the road, and win in the second half of back-to-back games. They also won in Pittsburgh for only the second time in their past 18 games there.

Kent Johnson, Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko — average age 23 — all beat Penguins goaltender Arturs Silovs in the three-round shootout. When Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin sailed his shot wide past Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins, the Jackets poured off the bench to celebrate.

Marchenko's game-deciding shootout goal was the second of his career.

The Jackets are now 3-1-0 on the road. And, after the first of 15 back-to-backs on the schedule this season, they've already matched last year's total for wins in the second game. The Jackets lost at home to Washington on Friday.

"We've talked about it enough," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "And you can talk until you're blue in the face, but they (the players) get it. They understand it. They know it, and we've talked a lot about our leadership and our preparation."

Dmitri Voronkov scored twice for the Blue Jackets, who also got goals from Yegor Chinakhov and Charlie Coyle. Ten different players hit the scoresheet, while Merzlikins, who improved to 3-0 on the road, stopped 26 shots in regulation and overtime.

The Blue Jackets were just 14-23-4 away from Nationwide Arena last season. They were 8-14-2 in back-to-back games, including 2-10 in the second game.

"Look, we want to be a team that's hard to play against on the road or at home," Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner said. "We're not going to change the way we play. Back to back, or not, we have lots of energy."

"You saw it tonight. I don't think playing last night affected us at all. We didn't talk about it. Nothing. We just wanted to come out with a good effort, and I think we did that."

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The Penguins took a 1-0 lead only 59 seconds into the game, an ominous start. And with Pittsburgh honoring four of the Hall of Famers — players Ron Francis and Kevin Stevens, and coaches/managers Scotty Bowman and Eddie Johnston — there was extra juice in the building.

At 11:45 of the first period, Jenner, who rarely drops the gloves, responded with anger to a hard hit by Pittsburgh's Matt Dumba, by jumping back to his skates, throwing his gloves down and fighting with Dumba. He handled himself well.

"Fantastic," Evason said. "It's awesome. Captain, you know. It shows that he's prepared to do anything it takes to help this team win."

The Blue Jackets have endured a rash of overturned goals lately, including one versus Washington on Friday. They've had so many goals put under the NHL's microscope that Mathieu Olivier admitted pre-game to wondering every time the Blue Jackets score if it's going to be reviewed.

And wouldn't you know ...

Coyle skated hard to the net and scored at 15:44 of the first period and was in the crease when his right skate bumped the pad of Silovs ever so slightly. The Penguins asked for a review, but after less than a minute, the league stamped Coyle's first goal of the season — his first with the Blue Jackets — made it 1-1.

"I'll tell you, the feeling on the bench is like 'Here we go!'" Evason said. "I'm speaking personally and with the coaches. I think the players are fine. But it's nice, too, (that it counted).

"It's nice to get reinforced with some goals. It's nice to get reinforced with wins. And it's nice to get reinforced with a challenge, you know, kind of going our way."

The Blue Jackets also "won" a review by the league at 4:45 of the second period when Penguins' star Sidney Crosby jabbed at a puck under Merzlikins' pads and the Penguins celebrated a goal that would have given Pittsburgh a 3-1 lead.

That, too, was denied, because there was no visual proof that the puck crossed the line. For a night anyway, Blue Jackets fans are OK with the league's review booth in Toronto.

The Blue Jackets threatened to pull away once their many scoring chances started getting past Silovs. Voronkov scored late in the second, then Yegor Chinakhov and Voronkov scored early in the third to give Columbus a 4-2 lead.

But the lead slipped away when the Penguins had two successive power plays (with only a 44-second even-strength gap in between) in the third period.

Pittsburgh scored to make it 4-3 with only eight seconds left on the power play, then added another goal with 3:06 remaining to tie the score at 4.

"It's tough to kill a back-to-back power play," Evason said. "It just gives all the momentum to their side. Even if they don't score, they're going to get some momentum from their touches and handling the puck. You know, all their big guys are out there. It's tough.

"We tried to use as many people as we could. I don't think we lost our edge, or whatever. It's just the circumstances with back-to-back penalties."

The highlight of overtime was Blue Jackets defenseman Ivan Provorov launching himself over and behind Merzlikins to bat away a puck with his stick after Merzlikins had sent up and over himself with his glove.

The Blue Jackets dragged the game into the shootout, then let their young players take over. Johnson went first and slid the puck through Silovs' pads. Fantilli followed and used a swirl of sorcery and stick moves before beating Silovs.

Through two rounds, both clubs had scored twice. Marchenko kept the heat on by stealing a page from Johnson's book of tricks, sliding it through Silovs' pads. Malikin missed the puck to the left, and the the Blue Jackets could celebrate.

The Blue Jackets are now 6-19-5 all-time in Pittsburgh, but they've won two of their last three games here.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets locate escape hatch in Pittsburgh: takeaways

By Brian Hedger – October 26, 2025

The other shoe has dropped so many times on the Blue Jackets at PPG Paints Arena that everybody watching their latest implosion there Oct. 25 waited for the inevitable thud.

Surely, it was bound to happen, right?

After blowing a 4-2 lead in the last 5:06 of the third period, the Jackets could barely get out of their own zone and gave Sidney Crosby ample time to work inside their blue line. Blue Jackets and Penguins fans awaited the other shoe (skate?) to hit the ice, but it never did.

The Blue Jackets (4-4-0) pulled the rip cord in a surprising 5-4 shootout victory they almost certainly would have lost in past years, and they headed home with a 3-1-0 road record thanks largely to three forwards who excel in shootouts: Kent Johnson, Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko, whose goal in the third round decided the winner.

“We could’ve (gone) sideways again,” Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said, “but they held their composure, and we were able to get the job done.”

Considering the Jackets' history in Pittsburgh, that's major progress.

Here are more takeaways:

Dmitri Voronkov leading Columbus Blue Jackets in more ways than scoring

Just as he was a year ago, Dmitri Voronkov is off to a great start.

After scoring two goals in Pittsburgh, the Russian power forward leads the team in overall scoring with nine points on five goals and four assists. Standing 6 feet 5, 234 pounds, he’s also co-leading the team in goals with linemate Marchenko, has a four-game point streak going and has at least one point in seven of the Jackets’ first eight games.

Voronkov would be co-leading the NHL in goals with Ottawa’s Shane Pinto if he hadn’t had three overturned already, including a kicked puck Oct. 24 against Washington that resembled a soccer goal.

“Next goal,” forward Yegor Chinakhov said as Voronkov’s translator, “he’ll score with the head.”

That was Voronkov’s way of answering a question about soccer playing a role in his latest overturned goal, and it drew laughs. His grasp of English remains limited, but he communicates just fine with teammates, coaches and even reporters.

“I don’t know if a lot of people will believe me, because I’ve said it to some people and they’re like, ‘Not a chance,’ but he’s a leader in our dressing room,” Evason said. “He doesn’t speak a lot of English, but he

speaks hockey very well and he speaks team very well. And I think that has given him great confidence to come in and play the way he's playing right now."

Columbus Blue Jackets finally get a challenged goal to stick

All the elements appeared to be there for the NHL to overturn yet another Blue Jackets goal on a Penguins challenge for goaltender interference in the first period.

Charlie Coyle, who scored while standing in Pittsburgh's crease, tapped the puck into the net after his right skate barely brushed goalie Arturs Silovs' right skate in the blue paint.

Considering the Blue Jackets' fortunes on coaching challenges and other NHL reviews in their first seven games (0 for 5), it initially felt like Coyle's goal would be erased. It was a relief on the Jackets' bench after it was upheld, tied the game 1-1 and gave the Blue Jackets a power play on a delay-of-game penalty for a failed coaching challenge.

"I'll tell ya, the feeling on the bench is like, 'Here we go,' right?" Evason said. "I'm just speaking personally, and with the coaches. I think the players are fine, but ... same as it's nice to get reinforced with goals and nice to get reinforced with wins, it's nice to get reinforced with a challenge kind of going our way."

It wasn't the only one, either.

he Blue Jackets also came out on top of an NHL initiated review 4:45 into the second, when the league ruled the puck never crossed the goal line after Crosby took two whacks at it during a scramble near the left goal post.

Columbus Blue Jackets forward Mathieu Olivier laments 'timing' of elbowing major vs Washington Capitals

After taking a day to let his emotions cool, Mathieu Olivier addressed a controversial call that sent him to the penalty box with a major penalty for elbowing in the third period of a 5-1 loss Oct. 24 to Washington.

The Capitals scored two goals to turn a 3-1 lead into a four-goal margin that prematurely ended all hopes for the Blue Jackets of pushing for a late comeback to tie it. Evason called it "baffling" that Olivier was assessed a major for a hit on defenseman Declan Chisholm, whose face was struck by Olivier's left arm in what the Blue Jackets felt was incidental contact.

Chisholm left the ice holding his chin but didn't miss a shift and logged time during the ensuing power play.

The timing of it wasn't great," Olivier said. "I just didn't agree with the call, especially when you see the other player come right back out there."

Olivier said he did make contact with Chisholm's face and felt a minor penalty might've been warranted, not a major.

“Was there contact with the head? Sure,” he said. “I don’t think anyone’s denying that, but I don’t think my elbow goes up. I stay grounded, just trying to finish through, and he kind of jumps out of the way ... and the first thing they teach us in hockey is (to) protect yourself. So, elbow doesn’t come up, no ill intent, obviously, so it’s just an unfortunate play.”

The NHL did not issue supplemental disciplinary measures against Olivier for the hit or Evason for criticizing the call in his postgame press conference.

Columbus Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner gets feisty in Pittsburgh

Boone Jenner wasn’t a fan of a big hit by Pittsburgh defenseman Mathew Dumba with 8:15 left in the first period.

After getting to his feet in the Penguins’ zone, Jenner located Dumba and the gloves came off quickly. According to HockeyFights.com, it was Jenner’s second fight since getting the captain’s ‘C’ in 2021 and first since fighting former Boston Bruins defenseman Brandon Carlo on March 30, 2023.

Jenner plays a physical game but doesn’t fight much. This was only his 14th fight as a professional.

“Obviously, he hits me to kind of start it,” Jenner said. “That’s part of the game. You try to get going, you try to get the team going, whatever it may be. I just wanted to stand up for us after the hit and that’s just what it is.”

Chinakhov stands out with limited ice time for Columbus Blue Jackets

Earlier in the week, a report by The Athletic stated that Chinakhov still hopes the Blue Jackets comply with his request for a trade that would give him a fresh start elsewhere.

That went public during the summer, but Blue Jackets president/general manager Don Waddell made it clear he wasn’t interested in moving Chinakhov just to grant his request. The asking price is likely a deal that gives the Blue Jackets an NHL roster player to replace Chinakhov, whose play has noticeably improved since the latest trade report was published.

After nearly scoring goals in the previous two games, Chinakhov netted his first goal of the season early in the third period to put the Jackets up 4-2 against the Penguins. He remained at right wing on the fourth line in Pittsburgh, skating just 10:26, and it’s unclear whether Chinakhov will stay in the Blue Jackets’ lineup after Miles Wood is cleared to return from an eye injury.

Scouts from numerous NHL teams have attended multiple Blue Jackets games at Nationwide Arena already, and Chinakhov’s trade wish is likely the biggest reason. Those who have sent multiple scouts include the Edmonton Oilers and Vegas Golden Knights, and former Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen has watched multiple games.

Kekalainen, a senior advisor for the Buffalo Sabres, selected Chinakhov 21st overall in 2020.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets overcome late surge from Pittsburgh Penguins with 5-4 shootout win

By Brian Hedger – October 25, 2025

The Penguins almost did it to the Blue Jackets again Oct. 25 at PPG Paints Arena, but a 5-4 shootout victory saved the day for Columbus.

Pittsburgh extended a home point streak over the Blue Jackets to 18 straight games with a point in the loss, overcoming a 4-2 deficit in the final 5:06 of regulation to force overtime, but Kirill Marchenko's goal and Evgeni Malkin's miss in the third round of the shootout saved the Blue Jackets from taking another gut punch from the Penguins (6-2-1).

The Blue Jackets (4-4-0) got a needed win to split their first of 15 back-to-backs and moved to 3-1-0 in four road games after struggling away from Nationwide Arena last season.

"It was a gutsy win," Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner said. "We just stuck with it, and I'm proud of us for that. We were focused on one thing, getting the two points, so overtime was good and to get it done in the shootout feels good."

They certainly didn't make it easy on themselves, despite Yegor Chinakhov and Dmitri Voronkov providing a 4-2 lead on goals 2:59 apart to start the third. Pittsburgh staged a feverish push around the midway point of the period, aided by back-to-back power plays.

The Penguins tied it, 4-4, on goals two minutes apart from Kris Letang and Bryan Rust in the final 5:06 of regulation.

In overtime, the Blue Jackets outshot the Penguins 3-1 during an exciting five minutes of 3-on-3 before the game went to the shootout. Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli each scored goals for the Blue Jackets in the first two rounds, which Rust and Sidney Crosby countered for Pittsburgh.

That set up Marchenko against Malkin in the third frame.

Marchenko led it off with a goal through the pads to beat Arturs Silovs before Malkin missed the net to give the Blue Jackets the win. Elvis Merzlikins made 24 saves for the goaltending win, while Silovs made 36 stops in a rare matchup of Latvian goalies.

The Blue Jackets stumbled out of the gate, having to overcome early deficits of 1-0 and 2-1 on goals by Charlie Coyle in the first and Voronkov, whose first of two goals tied it 2-2 late in the second.

Chinakhov and Voronkov then put the Jackets in position to notch their first regulation win in Pittsburgh since Dec. 21, 2015, almost a full decade earlier, but they couldn't hold off the Penguins' late pressure ignited by power plays just 44 seconds apart.

The game was similar to the Blue Jackets' 4-3 shootout win Jan. 7 of last season, which nixed Pittsburgh's marathon winning streak against Columbus at PPG Paints Arena that lasted nearly the same length as their active point streak.

"I think it was just some perseverance by the group," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "Our commitment was fantastic (and) obviously our composure was good. It could've gone sideways again, but they held their composure and we were able to get the job done."

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Outlast Penguins Thanks to Dmitri Voronkov's Big Night

By Mark Scheig – October 25, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets came to Pittsburgh hoping to salvage a split in their set of Metropolitan Division games over the last two nights. After a back and forth game, the Blue Jackets found a way to prevail.

It took a shootout to decide this one. All three Blue Jackets shooters beat goaltender Arturs Silovs to lift them to a 5-4 win over the Penguins.

The story of this game was the Blue Jackets finding a way to salvage a win in a tough situation.

Game Recap

It took the Penguins just 59 seconds into the game to open the scoring. Ryan Shea got a pass from Anthony Mantha and had a lot of room to close in on Elvis Merzlikins. Shea made no mistake to give the Penguins a 1-0 lead.

Then looking for a spark, captain Boone Jenner stepped up. After taking a hit from Matt Dumba in the offensive zone, Jenner went and challenged Dumba to a fight. The fight marked Jenner's first since March 2023 when he dropped gloves with Brandon Carlo.

It only took the Blue Jackets a few minutes to tie the game after that. Although it went through a review before it was confirmed.

Charlie Coyle scored his first goal as a Blue Jacket. Dante Fabbro got the puck on net. Coyle crashing the net put the rebound in. The Penguins tried to challenge for goalie interference. The goal stood which gave the Blue Jackets a power play.

But after a listless power play, Mantha then scored off an Evgeni Malkin pass to make it 2-1 Penguins. This goal came 17 seconds after they killed the delay of game penalty.

The Blue Jackets were down 2-1 after the first but held a 16-7 shot advantage. They scored the only goal of the second when Dmitri Voronkov beat Silovs off a Kent Johnson feed.

The Blue Jackets opened the third with two goals in the first five minutes to open a 4-2 lead. Yegor Chinakhov scored his first goal of the season while Voronkov added his second of the game from in front of the net.

Then in the span of less than three minutes, the Blue Jackets took two penalties. The second came back to bite them.

Kris Letang's power-play goal cut it to 4-3. Exactly two minutes later, Bryan Rust scored his first of the season. It was 4-4 after regulation.

Overtime solved nothing despite the Blue Jackets having the better of the chances. Then Kent Johnson, Adam Fantilli and Kirill Marchenko all scored in the shootout. Despite Rust and Sidney Crosby scoring, Evgeni Malkin's attempt missed the net to finish the game.

Postgame, Penguins coach Dan Muse said Rickard Rakell was still being evaluated for an upper-body injury. He left the game in the third period after blocking a shot.

The Blue Jackets will get Sunday off before returning to practice Monday in advance of Tuesday night's game in Buffalo. The Penguins meanwhile will next play Monday night at home when the St. Louis Blues come to town.

1st Ohio Battery / Three Things: Marchenko's Shootout Tally The Difference As Blue Jackets Edge Penguins 5-4, Voronkov Scores Twice

By Will Chase – October 26, 2025

That's a way to win a hockey game.

Kirill Marchenko's goal in the shootout was the difference on Saturday night at PPG Paints Arena as the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 5-4. Columbus has won three of its last four games.

Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli also scored in the shootout.

Dmitri Voronkov had two goals in regulation and was one of 10 point-getters for the Jackets. Charlie Coyle and Yegor Chinakhov added goals for Columbus. Elvis Merzlikins made 26 saves and picked up his 97th career win to pass Steve Mason for the second-most wins in franchise history.

Riley Shea, Anthony Mantha, Kris Letang, and Bryan Rust scored for Pittsburgh. Arturs Silovs made 37 saves. The loss snaps Pittsburgh's four-game winning streak.

"Our commitment was fantastic," head coach Dean Evason said. "Obviously, our composure was good when it could have went sideways again."

Here are the three takeaways from Saturday's win.

Thing One: Turning The Page

Last season, the Blue Jackets were a paltry 2-10-0 in the second half of back-to-back games.

In their first of 15 back-to-back sets this season, Columbus was eager to turn the page from Friday's 5-1 defeat at the hands of the Washington Capitals. Evason believes his group will start getting the winning results if they keep playing the way they are.

"We're very mature in that room," Evason said before Saturday's game. "They will handle it the right way. They have handled it the right way."

Well, the start didn't go exactly as planned, but consider it a slight hiccup.

Shea scored 59 seconds into the first to give Pittsburgh the 1-0 lead and put Columbus behind the eight ball. Anthony Mantha and Parker Wotherspoon picked up the assists.

But then the start did improve.

Fantilli and Connor Clifton collided in the first period, and Fantilli slowly headed to the bench but returned shortly and had a nice couple of chances at the net. It was as if the early hit set him off.

Then there was Matt Dumba dumping Boone Jenner in the slot, to which Jenner went after Dumba, and the two fought. It was Jenner's first fight since March 30, 2023, when he fought Brandon Carlo.

Finally, the goals started to come.

Charlie Coyle scored his first as a Blue Jacket to tie the game 1-1 at 15:44. Pittsburgh challenged for goaltender interference, but the call on the ice would stand.

The Jackets outshot Pittsburgh 16-7 and had a 31-11 advantage in shot attempts in the first period, though the Penguins led 2-1. For the game, the Blue Jackets outshot the Penguins 41-30 and had a 75-60 advantage for shot attempts.

The Blue Jackets' second set of back-to-backs will occur when they face the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday and then return home to take on the Toronto Maple Leafs on Wednesday. Columbus has three back-to-back contests in November.

Thing Two: A Gritty Resilient Third Period

On Friday night, a one-goal deficit turned into a 3-0 hole early in the third period. It was a role reversal on Saturday.

Yegor Chinakhov scored at 1:55 of the third to break a 2-2 stalemate and give Columbus its first lead at 3-2. Zach-Aston Reese's assist on the goal gave him his 100th career point. He had 62 career points (29 goals, 33 assists) in 213 games spanning five seasons for the Penguins. Isac Lundestrom added the assist for his first point as a Blue Jacket.

At the 4:54 mark, Voronkov scored his second goal of the night. He's on a four-game point streak (three goals, two assists). Voronkov has a point in all but one game – the lone game versus Colorado on Oct. 16 — this season.

It's never easy in Pittsburgh, and the Penguins added two goals in two minutes to tie the game 4-4. Letang's power play goal made it 4-3 at 14:54 (Assists: Tommy Novak, Silovs), and Rust's game-tying goal occurred at 16:54 (Assists: Malkin, Erik Karlsson). With two assists on the night, Malkin picked up his 1,360th career point, surpassing Mike Modano for 10th all-time among players with one team, according to ESPN.

Per the FanDuel Sports Network Columbus broadcast, the Blue Jackets entered this game with no goals from players on the third or fourth line currently in their lineup. Coyle and Chinakhov ended that drought.

Thing Three: The Shootout Magic Continues

The Blue Jackets survived their first overtime of 2025-26 and then did what they did a lot last season: Win a shootout.

Columbus was 6-1 in the shootout last year, while Pittsburgh was 1-6. Merzlikins was nearly flawless in those skills competitions, and that trend continued Saturday.

Johnson started the scoring for Columbus, and Fantilli and Marchenko followed up with goals. The first two Pittsburgh shooters, Rust and Sidney Crosby, would score, but when a stop was needed in the end, Merzlikins was there to thwart Evgeni Malkin.

Merzlikins made 11 shorthanded saves on the night as the Penguins went 1-for-2 on the power play.

It's the Blue Jackets' second consecutive win in Pittsburgh since Jan. 7, 2025, when they also beat the Penguins 4-3 in a shootout. That win in January was their first in the Steel City since Nov. 13, 2015. It's their second win in the last 18 trips to Pittsburgh.

Up Next:

Columbus concludes the two-game road trip on Tuesday at Buffalo when they skate with the Sabres from KeyBank Center at 6:45 p.m.

The Athletic / NHL's biggest surprises early in 2025-26: Struggling stars and unexpected starts

By The Athletic NHL Staff – October 25, 2025

More than two weeks into the 2025-26 NHL season, things are looking *interesting*. The Dallas Stars — our preseason Stanley Cup favorites — look a little ... off, Dawson Mercer and the New Jersey Devils are off to a hot start and Connor McDavid — our preseason Hart Trophy pick — is struggling to score goals.

Even our boldest predictions are being surpassed by the surprises of a season in action.

What has been each team's biggest surprise so far, good, bad or ugly? *The Athletic* posed that question this week to its NHL staff. Here's what they said.

Anaheim Ducks

Staying out of the penalty box

No team since the 2004-05 lockout has been called for more minor penalties or totaled more penalty minutes than Anaheim. The net difference of 723 more penalties taken than drawn over 20 seasons is more than twice the next greatest disparity. Things have changed for now, as Joel Quenneville has them playing far more disciplined hockey. The Ducks have taken a league-low 18 minor penalties through seven games. Just 16 times short-handed, another NHL-low. — *Eric Stephens*

Boston Bruins

Mark Kastelic is one of the best players

Kastelic is making an impact as the No. 4 right wing. He has two goals and one assist through nine games. He fought Liam O'Brien. He is averaging 2:31 of short-handed ice time per game after averaging just 0:15 last year. — *Fluto Shinzawa*

Buffalo Sabres

Alex Lyon

When Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen went down with an injury before training camp, goaltending became the biggest question on the roster. But Lyon, the 32-year-old who signed a two-year contract with Buffalo this summer and has looked like the Sabres' best player. He's seventh in the NHL in goals saved above expected, has a 2.55 goals against average and a .924 save percentage entering Friday's game. Luukkonen's starting job may not be waiting for him when he's healthy. — *Matthew Fairburn*

Calgary Flames

Connor Zary has struggled out of the gate

The Flames didn't do much to adjust their offense this past offseason, so it's not a complete surprise to see it lag among the league's worst. But seeing Zary struggle as much as he has, with one point in nine games, has been a surprise. The Flames' rebuild is contingent on their young players progressing and taking a step forward. But it's been a very slow start for one of their more promising players. — *Julian McKenzie*

Carolina Hurricanes

Andrei Svechnikov is still looking for his first point

The Hurricanes became the last NHL team to lose a game this season after dropping a 4-1 decision Monday in Vegas, and they've done it without Svechnikov getting on the score sheet. Nikolaj Ehlers finally broke through with his first point by getting an assist against the Golden Knights and recorded another one against the Avalanche. Carolina is off to a 6-1-0 start despite being without star defenseman Jaccob Slavin since he exited Game 2. But the Hurricanes are still looking for Svechnikov, who was demoted to the fourth line, to get going. — *Cory Lavalette*

Chicago Blackhawks

11 forwards/seven defensemen lineup

Jeff Blashill's decision to regularly go with an 11/7 lineup has worked out better than anyone could have expected. Even some of the Blackhawks players were somewhat skeptical about whether it'd be effective. But with Blashill and staff utilizing the seven defensemen, who are mostly still young, largely by situation and then giving a bit more ice time to the team's promising young forwards, the lineup has helped the Blackhawks get off to a strong start. — *Scott Powers*

Colorado Avalanche

Scott Wedgewood's hot start in net

When it was announced that Mackenzie Blackwood would miss time due to offseason surgery, it felt like Colorado would need to weather the storm in net. It has done much better than that, as Wedgewood has been one of the best goalies in the entire NHL thus far. The 33-year-old is 5-0-2 with a .910 save percentage and has allowed only one goal in five of his eight starts. His skating has looked incredibly sharp, and he has stayed ahead of the play with good reads. Once the shot arrives, he simply challenges with good depth, drops into his butterfly and closes any holes for the puck to find. — *Jesse Granger*

Columbus Blue Jackets

Top-notch goaltending

This sounds like an echo from last week's All-32. But the goaltending tandem of Jet Greaves and Elvis Merzljikins has been tremendous. Before Friday's NHL action, the duo ranked fourth in the league with a goals saved above expected of 7.16. It also has a combined save percentage of .927, third in the league. Last season, those numbers, respectively, were 10.77 (15th) and .896 (20th). Coach Dean Evason has been going back and forth between the two since the opener. Why change? — *Aaron Portzline*

Dallas Stars

They lost three straight games in regulation

Over the previous three seasons, Dallas' only three-game losing streak came at the very end of last season, when it was locked into second place in the Central Division and had literally nothing to play for. The last time Dallas went three straight games without a point was way back in March of 2022. They followed up the three-game skid with a better effort in an overtime loss to the Kings, but the squandered points are adding up. Giving up five goals on their last 10 penalty kills sure hasn't helped. Maybe they're just adapting to a new coach in Glen Gulutzan, or maybe it's just standard October wackiness, but the Stars just look a little ... off right now. — *Mark Lazerus*

Detroit Red Wings

Emmitt Finnie

How could it be anyone other than the 2023 seventh-round pick? Finnie not only made the Red Wings out of camp at age 20, but is playing on their top line and has seven points through the team's first eight games. Even if the scoring numbers were much more modest, though, the Red Wings wouldn't care because of all the little things Finnie does: killing penalties, forechecking, finishing hits and winning races and puck battles. He's been a jolt of energy on the ice and is quickly establishing himself as a legit piece of the team's future. — *Max Bultman*

Edmonton Oilers

Connor McDavid's goal total

The Oilers captain entered the season suggesting he wanted to be more assertive offensively and get back to being among the upper echelon of goal scorers. Instead, he's scored just once in eight games. It's not like McDavid hasn't been shooting — he has 25 shots on goal — but how often he's passed off when in prime areas has been noticeable. At least he still has 11 points. — *Daniel Nugent-Bowman*

Florida Panthers

Sam Reinhart's slow start

Nine games into the season, it's certainly a big surprise that one of the league's most dangerous offensive players the past two seasons has been held to just one even-strength point and only four overall. Without Aleksander Barkov and Matthew Tkachuk, the Panthers simply aren't as deep up front right now, which is a huge part of their 4-5-0 slow start. It's also clearly made life more difficult for Reinhart, who has always excelled alongside Barkov. — *James Mirtle*

Los Angeles Kings

Adrian Kempe is still without an extension

The fact that Kempe hasn't been locked in long-term is a bit of a shocker considering how much he and the Kings have expressed a common desire for him to stay in Los Angeles. Simply put, they need their

best player, and the winger's price is only going up, because he's off to the best start of his career with 11 points in eight games. The feeling is they'll get a deal done, but time's ticking on the pending UFA.

— *Eric Stephens*

Minnesota Wild

They can't score at five-on-five

Eight games into the season, the Wild have nine goals at five-on-five — the second-fewest in the NHL through Thursday. Kirill Kaprizov, fresh off signing the largest extension in NHL history at the tune of \$17 million per year starting in 2026-27, and Joel Eriksson Ek have none. Matt Boldy and Ryan Hartman have two, with the latter having none since opening night. Marcus Foligno has no points. Vladimir Tarasenko has one goal. Jared Spurgeon hasn't even been on the ice for a five-on-five goal for this season. This is why the Wild sit at the bottom of the Central Division — tied at seven points with St. Louis and Dallas.

— *Michael Russo*

Montreal Canadiens

Oliver Kapanen's hot start

Everyone expected the Canadiens to get major contributions from a rookie this season. This just wasn't the rookie most people had in mind. Ivan Demidov has lived up to the advanced billing, but it is Kapanen who entered play Friday leading NHL rookies in goals with four, and they are both in a three-way tie for third with six points. Kapanen's offense will likely slow down a bit, but it is his two-way play that has been most impressive early on. — *Arpon Basu*

Nashville Predators

Juuse Saros' fast start

Saros, typically a slow starter, has not been that this season, which is an encouraging and much-needed development for the Preds. Unfortunately, this team needs a few positive surprises to be a legit playoff contender, and early returns on its offensive punch are unsurprising — in other words, grim. — *Joe Rexrode*

New Jersey Devils

Dawson Mercer's hot start

The Devils have been one of the hottest teams out of the gate, and Mercer has played his part. He has eight points in eight games: an encouraging start after failing to reach his 2022-23 scoring heights (27 goals, 56 points). Mercer is an extremely useful player when contributing offensively. He can center the third line or move into the top six for Sheldon Keefe's club. There's a lot to like from his point-per-game start. — *Peter Baugh*

New York Islanders

Ilya Sorokin's slow start

Sorokin was one of the most talked-about goaltenders in this year's NHL Player Tiers project because of his play despite his surroundings. But his start has been underwhelming, even when considering his workload. Sorokin has a 0.873 save percentage and 0.61 GSAX, and that's concerning, given the Islanders' opponents. It's not like he hasn't been his best against the Avalanche and Golden Knights; instead, he's been iffy versus the likes of Senators, Jets and Sharks, who are all in the bottom half of the league in expected goal generation. He should bounce back; it's just something to keep an eye on.
— *Shayna Goldman*

New York Rangers

Home-ice woes

Madison Square Garden is considered a landmark as far as NHL arenas go, but the Rangers haven't had much of a home-ice advantage. Thursday's 6-5 overtime loss to the Sharks dropped them to 0-4-1 at MSG to begin the new season, including a record-breaking three straight shutout losses out of the gate. They're about to embark on a four-game road trip, so they won't have a chance to pick up their first home win until next month when the surging Hurricanes visit on Nov. 4. — *Vincent Z Mercogliano*

Ottawa Senators

The defense and goaltending have been their Achilles' heel

Ottawa's core took strides last season as a group that possessed offensive talent finally put it together defensively. It helped them reach the playoffs for the first time in eight years. But now, the Senators are near the bottom of the league in goals against. Their goaltending, penalty kill and overall defending aren't at the standard they were last year. There's time to improve, but it's certainly surprising to see the Senators take steps back in those areas early in their season. — *Julian McKenzie*

Philadelphia Flyers

Dan Vladar

Vladar has been the Flyers' early-season MVP, backstopping them to each of their first three wins this season. In his first five games, Vladar allowed two or fewer goals in each of them, with a .932 save percentage and 1.81 goals-against average. For a team that has been starved for reliable goaltending, Vladar has given the Flyers just that — and then some. — *Kevin Kurz*

Pittsburgh Penguins

Justin Brazeau

I don't think anyone had Justin Brazeau checking with eight points through eight games. I'm not sure Brazeau expected that. But here we are. He's been a revelation and has clear chemistry with Evgeni Malkin. The 6-foot-6 Brazeau has been a force for the 6-2-0 Penguins, scoring five goals and consistently producing in a top-six role. Will it continue? It's hard to say. But his soft hands have been on display and there has not been a fluky element to any of his goals so far. — *Josh Yohe*

San Jose Sharks

Macklin Celebrini joining elite company

Nothing the 19-year-old Celebrini, who powered San Jose to its first win of the season on Thursday, is terribly surprising. But a second career hat trick and five-point game — at Madison Square Garden, no less — put him in elite company. Celebrini became the fourth different teenager to record multiple five-point games. Wayne Gretzky did it five times. Bryan Trottier and Dale Hawerchuk did it twice. It's an impressive achievement for the special young star. — *Eric Stephens*

Seattle Kraken

The team's hot start and the fact that it hasn't been driven primarily by Berkly Catton

Catton was a preseason standout. The gifted young center looked ready and is the sort of talent capable of elevating this Kraken team. Then the season opened, and Catton didn't have a significant role. In fact, it took a recent run of injuries for him to earn a shot in the Seattle lineup. Over the last three games, however, Catton has been in, and he's looked the part of a spark-plug player capable of elevating this team, even if the production hasn't been there yet. That Seattle is off to a promising start, and Catton is just getting started, seems like a good sign for the Kraken. — *Thomas Drance*

St. Louis Blues

They've been brutal at home

The Blues ended the 2024-25 regular season with a franchise-record 12-game winning streak at Enterprise Center and then went 3-0 at home in the playoffs. That's 15 consecutive celebrations, and in those 15, they outscored their opponents 74-27. Tough place to play, right? Not this season, as there's absolutely been no carry-over. The Blues are 1-3-1 at home this season and have been outscored 23-11. They fell 5-0 to Minnesota, 8-3 to Chicago and 7-4 to Utah on Thursday, a night when Logan Cooley had a natural hat trick in the first period. The Blues' goals-against average at home is now up to 4.32, and their save percentage is .832. Heading out on the road has never felt better. — *Jeremy Rutherford*

Tampa Bay Lightning

How little offense the Lightning are generating

With just 2.56 goals per 60, the Lightning rank 27th in the league in all-situation scoring before Friday's NHL games. That's a major drop off from last year's pace of 3.54 goals per 60. The stars aren't producing enough, with just six combined goals from Brayden Point, Nikita Kucherov, Jake Guentzel and Brandon Hagel through seven games. The power play doesn't have enough juice below the surface, while the team is generating chances at five-on-five without enough to show for it. Since Tampa Bay can't outscore its problems, it's exposing how slow its defense looks in the early goings. — *Shayna Goldman*

Toronto Maple Leafs

Anthony Stolarz calling out the team

That it happened at all was surprising. Players, and goalies especially, almost never light up their teams the way Stolarz did. He slammed the team's competitiveness and work ethic in blistering fashion. That it

happened after the sixth game of the season made it even more surprising. But Stolarz wouldn't accept any excuse for the performance, even early in the season. He wanted more from his team and said as much. — *Jonas Siegel*

Utah Mammoth

Nick Schmaltz is tied for second in NHL scoring

Schmaltz has long been an underrated top-six producer, but he's hit a whole new level in the early going. He's already up to five goals and 13 points in eight games, which included a hat trick against the Sharks and a three-point performance last game against the Blues. Everybody knows Schmaltz is a good player, but I don't think anybody would have expected him to be tied for second in the NHL in points at this stage. — *Harman Dayal*

Vancouver Canucks

The way their five-on-five game has cratered

The Canucks have been bitten by the injury bug hard in the last week, but from puck drop this season, the Canucks have struggled enormously to generate chances or control play at five-on-five. This was a team that still controlled play reasonably well last season, even when Pius Suter and Teddy Blueger were their top-six centermen down the stretch and Quinn Hughes was playing hurt. That Vancouver is suddenly being out-attempted and out-shot by this wide a margin night in and night out is difficult to understand. — *Thomas Drance*

Vegas Golden Knights

Pavel Dorofeyev's hot start

It's not that surprising that Dorofeyev is leading the Golden Knights in goals. He did that last season, after all. What is a bit surprising is how many he has poured in over the first seven games of the season. Dorofeyev's seven goals are tied for the league lead before Friday's NHL action. He's on pace to crush his career high of 35, set last season, and while he won't score a goal-per-game all season, he should maintain a good pace as the primary weapon on Vegas' exceptional top power-play unit. — *Jesse Granger*

Washington Capitals

Power-play problems

It's been a bit since the Capitals had a reliably elite power play, but it's still a little jarring to see their conversion rate below 20 percent; at 18.2, they're 24th overall before Friday's NHL action. It's too early, though, to be a major concern — they're generating better chances than the conversion rate indicates and they've been one of the best five-on-five teams in the league. — *Sean Gentile*

Winnipeg Jets

No. 1 penalty kill

Winnipeg's penalty kill struggled badly to start last season, had a strong second half, and faltered in the playoffs. This year it's been outstanding, killing 32 of 34 penalties, while equaling opposing power plays with two short-handed goals. Scott Arniel attributes the success to assistant coach Dean Chynoweth's preparation: "There's only so many looks that come from a power play ... we have an idea of what their next plays are." The execution has been good, too, and the goaltending has been spectacular. — *Murat Ates*