



## **Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips October 26-28, 2024**

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## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets notes: Voronkov practices, Merzlikins supporting Tarasov

**By Brian Hedger- October 26, 2024**

Two days after their team Halloween party, the Blue Jackets got an oversized treat at practice.

They were joined Friday by power forward Dmitri Voronkov, who's been out since late in the preseason with a left shoulder injury. Voronkov, who avoided surgery, was a partial participant and appears to be ahead of schedule in his return to the Blue Jackets' lineup. Initially, the hope was for the second-year Russian forward to make it back in late November at the soonest.

Partially re-joining practice this quickly is an indication that Voronkov's rehab is working.

"He didn't do any of the (defensive) zone, contact drills, but it's a positive that he's in practice and he's able to get up and down the ice with the guys," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "I'm sure he felt real good."

Sep 19, 2024; Columbus, OH, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets forward Dmitri Voronkov (10) skates during the first day of training camp at the OhioHealth Ice Haus.

Voronkov has progressed from working with skating instructor Lee Harris to individual work with skills coach Jared Boll to a conditioning test administered by the coaching staff to rejoining practice Friday for the first time since his injury — which happened seconds into his first shift in the Jackets' seventh preseason game.

After scoring 18 goals as a rookie, Voronkov had a strong second training camp and locked down a spot at left wing on the third line with the regular season approaching. He was supposed to skate with center Cole Sillinger and Kent Johnson, who also went down with a shoulder injury in the fourth game of the regular season.

Oct 3, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets left wing Dmitri Voronkov (10) collides with Pittsburgh Penguins right wing Sam Poulin (22) early during the first period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena. Voronkov did not return to action after the collision.

Johnson is about to start rehab for that injury, which the Blue Jackets hope will also get him back in the lineup without needing surgery.

"Anytime we can get guys that are big parts of our hockey team back in our lineup sooner than maybe we anticipated, it's exciting," Evason said. "Hopefully (Voronkov) can get back sooner than later. Obviously, Ronny's probably ahead of schedule, depending on what he was, but we'll just go through the process, and he'll just keep working on getting into the lineup."

Sep 30, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins (90) watches goaltender Daniil Tarasov (40) in net during warm-ups prior to the NHL hockey game against the Washington Capitals at Nationwide Arena.

Going into the Blue Jackets' game Saturday in Nashville, Daniil Tarasov could make his fourth straight start in net.

If not, it'll be Elvis Merzlikins making his first start since sustaining a hand injury Oct. 10 in the Jackets' home-opening loss to the Florida Panthers. Either way, the backup will be on the bench supporting his teammate between the pipes. Despite a new slogan about earning ice time posted inside the Blue

Jackets' locker room, at least one of the two goalies is trying to see the situation in net with a slightly different take.

"From my side, I don't feel any competition," Merzlikins said. "Right now, it's just supporting (Tarasov) while he's playing. You want to do the best possible, as a personal goal, but in the last three years, we've lost so much that right now, the most important feeling is that we win as a team, not individuals. It's not fun losing."

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

Merzlikins and Tarasov could become one of the NHL's stingiest tandems, but they must stay healthier than in recent seasons and both need to improve in consistency. Within those goals, though, there is built-in competition for starts. Like their non-goalie teammates, the Jackets' net-minders need to earn their ice time too.

"That's how it's supposed to be," Merzlikins said. "It doesn't matter who you are, how much you earn or how many games you have played in this league. Nobody's guaranteed anything. You have to earn your spot and work your (butt) off to get it. There's going to be bad moments, bad nights, but we're all human. We're all going to mess up and we're all going to shine, but we also have to find that consistency."

Sep 30, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins (90) wears a new mask featuring the No. 13 on the front between a bottle of Coors Light and a plate of spaghetti for teammate Johnny Gaudreau during warm-ups prior to the NHL hockey game against the Washington Capitals at Nationwide Arena.

The Blue Jackets took advantage of a three-day span between games, holding the team's Halloween party on Wednesday. A lot of great costume ideas were put on display, as usual, but two stood out for a humorous reason.

That was not the case.

"We didn't even talk about it," Merzlikins said. "That was just a coincidence that he was 'Cheetos' with his wife, and I was 'Cheetos' with my wife. So, when we walked in and he was 'Cheetos,' we just started laughing. We are really goalies, I guess, and we just think the same way. Both couples were shocked when we saw each other, and we just started laughing. It was funny."

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets: 6 takeaways from CBJ's first 6 games

**By Brian Hedger- October 26, 2024**

It's still a tiny sample size, but a lot has happened in the Blue Jackets' six games.

They're down four lineup regulars with shoulder injuries, including captain Boone Jenner and playmaking winger Kent Johnson, but the Jackets are a solid 3-3-0 heading into a road tilt Saturday against the Nashville Predators.

Here are six notes about the Blue Jackets six games into the season:

Jan 2, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Kent Johnson (91) celebrates scoring a goal with defenseman Jake Christiansen (23), left wing Dmitri Voronkov (10) and right wing Kirill Marchenko (86) during the second period of the NHL hockey game against the Boston Bruins at Nationwide Arena.

Surgery not expected for Dmitri Vorokov, Kent Johnson

Those looking for optimism on the injury front can find it. Forwards Dmitri Voronkov and Kent Johnson are both expected to return this season without surgical intervention. Voronkov, who injured his left shoulder in the preseason, could return by the end of November, and Johnson might not be far behind.

"We're waiting to hear more, but we don't think it's surgery at this point," general manager Don Waddell said of Johnson. "It's rehab, so we don't have any kind of timetable yet because he hasn't started his rehab. He's seen two specialists and, as of right now, it's recommended just to rehab and not have surgery."

Voronkov is also rehabbing and already skating on his own in full gear. Getting both back this season, without surgical procedures, would be a giant sigh of relief, especially after Johnson already had surgery last March to repair his left shoulder.

"I'm not just worried about this year, but also his future," Waddell said. "He's already had one shoulder worked on already. So, it's good news that he didn't need surgery, and hopefully, the rehab does what it's supposed to do to get him back, and he doesn't have any issues going forward."

Scoring goals and racking up points wasn't a problem for Adam Fantilli at the University of Michigan or with the Chicago Steel of the United States Hockey League. Fantilli, however, is an NHL top-six center now. He's also, essentially, still a rookie after missing the bulk of his rookie season with a severe calf laceration.

Goals and points are a lot harder to generate in the NHL, so he's going through a mental adjustment required of all young players – regardless of talent. Having a "good game" isn't only about goals or assists, which are still important but not an end-all, be-all measurement.

Oct 22, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli (19) hits Toronto Maple Leafs left wing Max Pacioretty (67) during the first period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena.

Fantilli has two goals, no assists and two points in the first six games, but nobody is fretting about a slow start – including him. He's playing well overall.

“I’m not trying to change anything because I haven’t had a point in two games or whatever it is,” Fantilli said. “If I keep playing the way I play, eventually (goals and points) going to fall with the way I’ve learned to play the game.”

Fantilli has two new wingers in Yegor Chinakhov and Mikael Pyyhtia, who were put with him during coach Dean Evason’s recent line juggling. The goal was to give Fantilli a couple of linemates who might help spark a hot streak for their entire line.

Oct 17, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan (23) passes the puck against the Buffalo Sabres in the first period at Nationwide Arena on Thursday.

Columbus Blue Jackets have increased puck possession

It’s still too early to make sweeping statements based on statistics, but there is an interesting trend developing for the Blue Jackets.

They’ve had the puck more frequently than in the past few years, which is a main tenet of Evason’s systems and structure. The only time the Jackets struggled with possession was during an ugly 3-1 loss Saturday to the Minnesota Wild. Otherwise, the Blue Jackets have successfully gained and retained possession in their five other games, including a season-opening loss to the Wild on Oct. 10 in St. Paul, Minnesota.

According to Natural Stat Trick, the Blue Jackets rank 15th in the NHL in 5-on-5 shot-attempts percentage (50.5%), 13th in unblocked shot attempts (51.7%), ninth in shots-on-goal (51.8%) and eighth in goals-for (57.6%). Their scoring chance percentage is under 50% at even-strength, but in 73:47 they’ve been tied, the Jackets are almost at the top.

They rank sixth in shot attempt percentage while tied (56.3%), second in shots on goal (58.3%), third in scoring chances (58.7%) and tied for second in high-danger chances (63.6%). Those numbers help explain how the Blue Jackets, despite their injuries, have set a franchise record for goals (24) in the first six games of a season.

Sep 30, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets head coach Dean Evason watches from the bench during the second period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena. The Blue Jackets lost 3-2.

Dean Evason wants Columbus Blue Jackets to stay aggressive

One of the biggest changes since Evason took over this season is how the Blue Jackets have played with leads. Under previous coach Pascal Vincent, they tended to shift into a defensive shell when ahead, which gave opposing teams the puck for long stretches.

Evason prefers more aggression.

“As long as you’re on the right side of pucks and people, then you can be as aggressive as you want,” he said. “If you’re on the wrong side and try to be aggressive, then you’re going to start having odd-man rushes and what have you. So, we’ve asked our group, even when we’ve had leads here, early in the year, just to stay as aggressive as we possibly can to put pressure on people.”

Jul 2, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA.; Forward Cayden Lindstrom (28) fights for a puck with forward Luca Pinelli (53) during Blue Jackets development camp at the OhioHealth Ice Haus.

What’s going on with Columbus Blue Jackets prospect Cayden Lindstrom?

The Blue Jackets’ first pick in last summer’s draft, fourth overall, is still in Columbus. Cayden Lindstrom is working in the gym, skating on his own and rehabbing a back injury that sidelined him most of last season with the Medicine Hat Tigers of the Western Hockey League.

Lindstrom is tentatively expected to remain in Columbus until mid-November after the Blue Jackets return from a West Coast trip. The goal is to make sure Lindstrom's back is fully recovered by utilizing the Blue Jackets' NHL training staff and facilities.

"We're going to get to a point, probably, when we get back from that West Coast trip where we'll need to make a decision about sending him back to juniors," Waddell said. "The junior team agrees. They travel so much, so they don't have the rehab (ability) we have. It's best to keep him here until he's ready to go."

Once Lindstrom is cleared, he'll return to practice with Medicine Hat prior to rejoining the Tigers' lineup. Waddell said back surgery isn't necessary and that contract discussions will pick up after his rehab is complete.

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

Columbus Blue Jackets not using set goaltending rotation

Some NHL teams use defined goaltending roles and set workload shares. That doesn't apply to the Blue Jackets, as Evason and goaltending coach Niklas Backstrom apply the same mantra to goalies Elvis Merzlikins and Daniil Tarasov that skaters face.

Playing time is earned.

"I don't change my philosophy because it's the goalies," Evason said. "It's game-by-game and it's earned. There's no long-term plan."

Tarasov has started the past three games, including the first two in that stretch while Merzlikins was out with a hand or wrist injury. Merzlikins has returned to practice and should be available to start in Nashville if chosen to play.

## Columbus Dispatch / Replay: Columbus Blue Jackets fumble multiple leads in OT loss to Nashville Predators

By Brain Hedger- October 27, 2024

Final: Nashville Predators 4, Columbus Blue Jackets 3, 1:44 OT

Brian Hedger

The Predators didn't need much time to take the second point, handing the Blue Jackets their ninth straight loss at Bridgestone Arena. Jonathan Marchessault, a player who briefly played for Columbus years ago, ended it for Nashville by scoring against Tarasov after making a quick cut that sent Severson to the ice in the Blue Jackets' zone.

"It's not just playing 'brain dead' hockey and dumping it in every time, making them come up 200 feet," Evason said. "It's just simply not turning it over in those crucial areas on the ice, where you give a team, any team in the National Hockey League, momentum to come back at you ... and we did that in tonight's hockey game."

If there's a bright side for the Blue Jackets in this one, it's leaving one of their most difficult arenas to play with an OT point in a game the Predators controlled in most ways outside of the running score.

10:38 pm ET October 26, 2024

End of regulation: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Nashville Predators 3

Brian Hedger

The Blue Jackets managed to finally get some possession time down the stretch in the end of the third, but couldn't score a go-ahead goal. They're in overtime at Bridgestone Arena.

10:22 pm ET October 26, 2024

3rd period, 12:00: Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Nashville Predators 3

Brian Hedger

The Blue Jackets have no business being in their game right now, let alone tied with less than eight minutes to play. They have their goalie, Tarasov, for making several outstanding saves to prevent the Predators from running away with a laugh.

They're being outshot by a wide margin and continue to find themselves on the wrong end of the the scoring chances.

10:12 pm ET October 26, 2024

GOAL: 3rd period, 4:09, Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Nashville Predators 3

Brian Hedger

Alexandre Carrier ties it 3-3 just 1:02 after Werenski's goal from the blue line. Zacharch L'Heureux with the assist on the equalizer. Crazy start to the third period down there in the Music City.

10:09 pm ET October 26, 2024

GOAL: 3rd period, 3:07, Columbus Blue Jackets 3, Nashville Predators 2

Brian Hedger

Zach Werenski's long shot from the point finds its way through traffic, putting the Blue Jackets up by a goal less than three minutes after Cole ties it.

10:07 pm ET October 26, 2024

GOAL: 3rd period, 0:26, Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Nashville Predators 2

Brian Hedger

Cole Smith tagged another one against Tarasov right off the hop in the third period for the Predators, knotting things up 2-2 with an early push that everybody watching this game knew was coming.

9:49 pm ET October 26, 2024

2nd intermission: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Nashville Predators 1

Brian Hedger

After getting out to a 2-0 lead less than seven minutes into the period, the Blue Jackets stumbled when given a chance to push it to a three-goal margin on a power play just before the mid-point. Marchenko's second penalty of the game negated the power play, Forsberg scored at 4-on-4 to make it 2-1 and the Predators climbed back into the game in the final 10 minutes.

Nashville wasn't able to net an equalizer against Tarasov, who's been brilliant in the Blue Jackets' net, but the Predators will continue to push opening the third. Columbus was outshot 14-10 in the second period and is being outshot 20-18 after 40 minutes.

Nashville is also solidly in control of the puck tonight, according to Natural Stat Trick. During 5-on-5, the Predators have 55.7% of the game's attempted shots (34-27), a 17-12 edge in total scoring chances (17-12) and a huge edge in high-danger chances (10-4).

9:25 pm ET October 26, 2024

GOAL, 2nd period, 10:40: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Nashville Predators 1

Brian Hedger

Nashville got a goal back thanks to a turnover by Damon Severson just outside their own blue line during 4-on-4 action midway through the period. As Marchenko sat in the penalty box for the second time tonight, serving a hooking penalty that negated a Blue Jackets power play, Severson lost control of the puck while trying to control it with one hand on his stick, sending it to Ryan O'Reilly for rush up the ice that included a drop pass to Filip Forsberg for a goal sniped with a wrist shot.

9:17 pm ET October 26, 2024

GOAL: 2nd period, 6:40: Columbus Blue Jackets 2, Nashville 0

Brian Hedger

Almost three minutes after Marchenko opened the scoring, the Blue Jackets' third forward line made it 2-0 on a goal by Zach Aston-Reese. Mathieu Olivier got the primary assist with a beautiful wraparound feed to Aston-Reese outside the right post for a snap shot past Wedgewood.

It's Aston-Reese's second goal of the season, second in as many games and the fourth goal that line has generated since being put together for a 6-2 victory over the Toronto Maple Leafs on Tuesday in Columbus.

9:13 pm ET October 26, 2024



GOAL, 2nd period, 3:53: Columbus Blue Jackets 1, Nashville Predators 0

Brian Hedger

A little more than a minute after getting out of the penalty box, Marchenko gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead by roofing a wrist shot over Wedgewood's shoulder and under the crossbar on the glove side. Marchenko's reception of a pass, wheel and shot was impressive, but the backhand feed from Adam Fantilli in the left-wing corner was even prettier. Jack Johnson gets the second assist.

9:10 pm ET October 26, 2024

2nd period: Columbus Blue Jackets survive Nashville Predators early power play

Brian Hedger

Already having defenseman Zach Werenski sitting in the penalty box to start the period, the Blue Jackets were forced to kill a power play that followed a questionable holding minor assessed to Kirill Marchenko. Most of the man-advantage was 4-on-3, but Tarasov made a couple big saves to keep it 0-0.

9:02 pm ET October 26, 2024

2nd period underway: Columbus Blue Jackets 0, Nashville Predators 0

Brian Hedger

The puck is down at Bridgestone Arena for the middle period between the Jackets and Predators, who haven't produced a goal thanks to both goalies.

8:46 pm ET October 26, 2024

1st intermission: Columbus Blue Jackets 0, Nashville Predators 0

Brian Hedger

After staving off early pressure from Nashville with several high-quality saves by the Daniil Tarasov, the Blue Jackets gained some footing and outshot the Predators by one (7-6). They also forced Predators goalie Scott Wedgewood to make some highlight worthy stops to keep it 0-0, including a desperation pad/blocker save late in the period against Adam Fantilli.

According to Natural Stat Trick, Nashville generated three more high-danger scoring chances (5-2) in the first 20 minutes for a 1.06-0.5 expected goals margin.

8:26 pm ET October 26, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets goalie Daniil Tarasov sharp early against Nashville Predators

Brian Hedger

Shots favored the Predators 5-3 with nine-plus minutes remaining, but the score was 0-0 thanks to some outstanding work in net by Blue Jackets goalie Daniil Tarasov, who's making his fourth straight start. Tarasov's biggest highlight moment thus far was a stop to deny Nashville a goal on a 2-on-1 rush for defenseman Roman Josi and center Tommy Novak.

After stopping Josi's wrist shot from the left wing, Tarasov stretched out his long left leg to deny Novak's shot off the loose rebound in the low slot.

8:13 pm ET October 26, 2024

1st period: Columbus Blue Jackets, Nashville Predators underway

Brian Hedger

The Blue Jackets and Predators have the puck down there at Bridgestone Arena in Nashville and it's 0-0 in the early going.

7:49 pm ET October 26, 2024

Nashville Predators lineup vs Columbus Blue Jackets

Brian Hedger

Forwards

Filip Forsberg — Ryan O'Reilly — Jonathan Marchessault

Steven Stamkos — Colton Sissons — Gustav Nyquist

Mark Jankowski — Tommy Novak — Luke Evangelista

Zachary L'Heureux — Michael McCarron — Cole Smith

Defense pairings

Roman Josi — Dante Fabbro

Jeremy Lauzon — Alexandre Carrier

Brady Skjei — Luke Schenn

Goalies

Scott Wedgewood

Juuse Saros

Scratched: C Juuso Parssinen, C Philip Tomasino, D Marc Del Gaizo

7:47 pm ET October 26, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets lineup vs Nashville Predators

Brian Hedger

Forwards

Cole Sillinger — Sean Monahan — Kirill Marchenko

Mikael Pyyhtia — Adam Fantilli — Yegor Chinakhov

Zach Aston-Reese — Justin Danforth — Mathieu Olivier

James van Riemsdyk — Sean Kuraly — Kevin Labanc

Defense pairs

Zach Werenski — Ivan Provorov

Jake Christiansen — Damon Severson

Jack Johnson — Jordan Harris

Goalies

Daniil Tarasov

Elvis Merzlikins

Scratched: D David Jiricek

Injured: F Boone Jenner (shoulder surgery, IR), F Kent Johnson (shoulder), D Erik Gudbranson (shoulder, IR), F Dmitry Voronkov (shoulder, IR), F Gavin Brindley (broken finger, IR)

7:44 pm ET October 26, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Nashville Predators history

Brian Hedger

Oct 20, 2022; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets forward Justin Danforth (17) scores a goal against Nashville Predators goaltender Kevin Lankinen (32) during the third period of the hockey game between the Columbus Blue Jackets and the Nashville Predators at Nationwide Arena. Mandatory Credit: Joseph Scheller-The Columbus Dispatch

Series record: The Blue Jackets are 31-57-1-12 overall against Nashville and 9-36-1-6 at Bridgestone Arena, including 1-8-1 in the last 10 played in Nashville.

Last meeting: The Predators won 6-4 on April 13, 2024 in Nashville, getting two goals from defenseman Roman Josi and a 31-save goaltending win for Juusi Saros. Trey Fix -Wolansky scored two of the Blue Jackets' four goals and Jet Greaves took the loss in net.

2024 matchups: Oct. 26 in Nashville; April 1, 2025 in Columbus.

7:41 pm ET October 26, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Nashville Predators betting odds

Brian Hedger

Game lines and odds from BetMGM as of Saturday, Oct. 26

Spread:Blue Jackets (+1.5)

Over/under: 6.5

Moneyline: Blue Jackets +165, Predators -200

7:40 pm ET October 26, 2024

Who are the officials for tonight's Columbus Blue Jackets vs Nashville Predators game?

Brian Hedger

Referee: Jordan Samuels-Thomas (42)

Referee: Eric Furlatt (27)

Linesman: Ben O'Quinn (91)

Linesman: Libor Suchanek (60)

7:39 pm ET October 26, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets October 2024 schedule, record

Brian Hedger

Oct 22, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Mathieu Olivier (24) scores a goal during the first period of the NHL hockey game against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Nationwide Arena.

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

Thursday, Oct. 10: Blue Jackets at Wild (L, 3-2); Takeaways

Saturday, Oct. 12: Blue Jackets at Avalanche (W, 6-4); Takeaways

Tuesday, Oct. 15: Blue Jackets vs. Panthers (L, 4-3); Takeaways

Thursday, Oct. 17: Blue Jackets vs. Sabres (W, 6-4); Takeaways

Saturday, Oct. 19: Blue Jackets vs. Wild (L, 3-1); Takeaways

Tuesday, Oct. 22: Blue Jackets vs. Maple Leafs (W, 6-2); Takeaways

Saturday, Oct 26: Blue Jackets at Predators | 8 p.m. | Fan Duel Sports Network Ohio

Monday, Oct 28: Blue Jackets vs. Oilers | 7 p.m. | Fan Duel Sports Network Ohio

Wednesday, Oct 30: Blue Jackets at Islanders | 7 p.m. | Fan Duel Sports Network Ohio

Record: 3-3-0, in 7th place, Metropolitan Division

7:38 pm ET October 26, 2024

How can I watch/listen to Columbus Blue Jackets vs Nashville Predators?

Brian Hedger

TV channel: FanDuel Sports Network Ohio

Streaming: ESPN+; FanDuel Sports Network app

Radio: 97.1 The Fan

7:38 pm ET October 26, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Nashville Predators start time

Brian Hedger

Date: Saturday, Oct. 26 Time: 8 p.m. Location: Bridgestone Arena (Nashville, Tenn.)

7:37 pm ET October 26, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets news

Brian Hedger

Oct 22, 2024; Columbus, Ohio, USA; Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Jack Johnson (3) lines up for a face off during the second period of the NHL hockey game against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Nationwide Arena.

Dmitri Voronkov practicing with limitations

Kent Johnson hoping to return this season with rehab, no shoulder surgery

Why the Blue Jackets broke up their dominant top line

3 takeaways from the Blue Jackets' rout of the Toronto Maple Leafs

7:36 pm ET October 26, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets vs Nashville Predators records

## Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets let another one slip away in Nashville: 3 takeaways

**By Brian Hedger- October 28, 2024**

Ultimately, what happened to the Blue Jackets on Saturday night at Bridgestone Arena is what usually happens to them in that arena.

They lost to the Nashville Predators, 4-3, on a goal by Jonathan Marchessault 1:44 into overtime, making the point earned with an OT loss a side note. After leading 2-0 in the second period, the Blue Jackets (3-3-1) couldn't increase the margin before Nashville clawed back to force OT and win on the goal by Marchessault — an undersized forward whose NHL stardom didn't begin until long after his cup of coffee with the Blue Jackets ended.

It was the ninth straight loss for Columbus in Nashville, where the Jackets haven't won since 2019.

Here are three takeaways:

Jake Christiansen and Damon Severson have given the Blue Jackets a solid defensive duo thus far, but this was a night they'll erase from memory. There were bright spots, especially with Christiansen, but they combined for five of the Blue Jackets' 18 giveaways and played significant parts in three Nashville goals.

Christiansen was beaten to a loose puck moments before Alexandre Carrier scored a tying goal in the third that forced OT, while Severson was on the ice for that goal plus Nashville's first tally and Marchessault's winner. His turnover at the offensive blue line started a rush leading to Filip Forsberg cutting the Jackets' lead to 2-1 in the second, he couldn't prevent a low-to-high pass to Carrier in the third and Severson also fell in OT trying to keep up with Marchessault's sharp misdirection cut.

During his postgame comments, Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason spotlighted Severson's turnover on Forsberg's goal.

"The game should've been cleaner than it was," he said. "It wasn't clean here tonight. We, for the most part, did the right things, but when you turn the puck over at the blue line, you give a team that has the talent level of (Nashville) to come at you freely and not have to come (up) 200 feet."

Straddling the Nashville blue line with only his left hand on the stick, Severson tried sliding the puck around Adam Fantilli — who'd stopped to avoid offside. Ryan O'Reilly scooped the puck behind Fantilli, raced up the right wing and dropped a pass to Forsberg for the first shot to beat Daniil Tarasov.

Rather than pushing for a three-goal lead, the Blue Jackets faced a quick momentum swing that forced them to fend off the Predators the rest of the period.

"It's not just playing 'brain dead' hockey and dumping it in every time, making them come up 200 feet," Evason said. "It's just simply not turning it over in those crucial areas on the ice, where you give a team, any team in the National Hockey League, momentum to come back at you ... and we did that in tonight's hockey game."

Columbus Blue Jackets evade injury with Adam Fantilli

Fantilli blocked Carrier's wrist shot with 1:02 left in the second, which protected the Jackets' 2-1 lead and sent the young center off the ice in pain. He could barely put weight on his left skate, but it must've improved during the intermission.

Fantilli didn't miss a shift in the third, finishing the game with a team-high six shots in 16:12 of ice time.

According to Natural Stat Trick, the Blue Jackets got the better of play during Fantilli's 5-on-5 time (14:00), including attempts (13-12, 52%), unblocked attempts (12-6, 66.7%), shots (9-2, 81.8%), goals (1-0), expected goals (56.5%), scoring chances (6-4, 60%) and high-danger chances (3-2, 60%).

Fantilli's line, which includes Yegor Chinakhov and Mikael Pyyhtia as wingers, was Evason's best forward group to send over the boards. It didn't lead to any of them scoring, but that was only because Predators goalie Scott Wedgewood made impressive stops on Fantilli and Pyyhtia.

The Blue Jackets' coaching staff is making sure their most gifted offensive players, like Fantilli and defenseman Zach Werenski, spend enough time in the offensive zone.

They've started top skill players at least 60-65% of the time in that zone, which has contributed to Werenski having a hot start. His goal in the third briefly put the Blue Jackets up, 3-2 and was his seventh point (three goals, four assists) in seven games.

After Johnny Gaudreau's tragic offseason death, a requested trade that sent Patrik Laine to Montreal plus shoulder injuries to three other forwards, it's imperative that Werenski's offensive side flourish. Skating with Ivan Provorov as a dependable partner, he's sending more pucks to the net, has increased the flexibility of his stick and is scorching hot as a result.

That needs to continue for the Blue Jackets to remain competitive.

## The Athletic / Blue Jackets blow two leads in loss to Predators: 'The game should have been cleaner'

By Aaron Portzline- October 27, 2024

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Columbus Blue Jackets' quarter-century history in Nashville is sadder than most of the country tunes that emanate from the bars and honky-tonks that line Broadway, just a few feet away from Bridgestone Arena.

Saturday's 4-3 overtime loss to the Nashville Predators was actually one of the Blue Jackets' better efforts in Music City, and they flew back home in the overnight hours with a well-earned point. They led 2-0 and 3-2 and did well to survive a wild, back-and-forth start to the third period.

Nashville's Jonathan Marchessault, who played for the Blue Jackets organization (mostly in the minor leagues) more than a decade ago, scored the game-winner at 1:44 of overtime to end it.

MARCHESSAULT WINS IT! 🏆

The @PredsNHL pick up their third straight victory thanks to Jonathan Marchessault's @Energizer overtime winner! [pic.twitter.com/9IEhNqt0Qy](https://pic.twitter.com/9IEhNqt0Qy)

— NHL (@NHL) October 27, 2024

It marked the ninth straight loss (0-7-2) for the Blue Jackets in Nashville, dating to March 30, 2019. Since joining the NHL in 2000, Columbus is 9-36-8 on the road against the Predators, including a 17-game losing streak (0-12-5) during a five-season span that ended in 2010-11.

Kirill Marchenko, Zach Aston-Reese and Zach Werenski scored for the Blue Jackets, while goaltender Daniil Tarasov, making his fourth consecutive start, made 29 saves.

"We definitely played well enough to win," Werenski said, "but we'll take the one (point) and learn from it."

By all accounts, the Blue Jackets' first period was sloppy. But the biggest lesson, according to coach Dean Evason, is how the Blue Jackets played with a two-goal lead after scoring two quick goals at 3:53 (Marchenko) and 6:42 (Aston-Reese) in the second period.

"We were impressed (with how we held it together early in the third)," Evason said. "But we were unimpressed with how we played when we had a two-goal lead (in the second period). We turned the puck over constantly and gave them an opportunity to come back at us.

"We have to manage the game a hell of a lot better than we did in those situations. The game should have been cleaner than it was. It wasn't clean here tonight."

The Predators didn't cut into the Blue Jackets' lead until midway through the second period, when Filip Forsberg, who had 13 shot attempts, finally broke through with a wrist shot from the right circle off the rush.

The lead was gone only 26 seconds into the third when Nashville's Cole Smith scored, but the Jackets made it 3-2 just 2 1/2 minutes later on Werenski's third goal of the season.

"It would have been good to play with that lead a little bit," Werenski said.

But that lead was gone only 1:02 later when Nashville's Alexandre Carrier scored at 4:07 to tie it.

“We liked how we played for a lot of the game,” Evason said. “When we didn’t turn it over, we were a pretty good hockey team. When we did turn it over, we were pretty average.”

Adam Fantilli, who led the Blue Jackets with six shots on goal, had the Blue Jackets’ best scoring chance in overtime, a wrister from 25 feet that Predators No. 2 goaltender Scott Wedgewood denied, the last of his 25 saves in the game.

Only 44 seconds later, the game was finished.

Marchessault had the puck along the wall beside the right circle, skating it higher in the zone as Damon Severson skated beside him. When Marchessault threw on the brakes and cut back down low, Severson twisted and fell to the ice, leaving one of the NHL’s top goal-scorers in recent seasons all alone.

Tarasov didn’t have much of a chance.

Marchessault was all alone in the low slot — Blue Jackets winger Yegor Chinakhov was caught between trying to defend Marchessault and wanting to take away his passing lane to Brady Skjei — when he fired a wrister over Tarasov’s right pad.

It was a rough night for Severson, who was minus-3 and tied for the team lead in turnovers (three) with Werenski.



## The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Embrace of coach Dean Evason's system pays dividends

**By Aaron Portzline- October 28, 2024**

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

Item No. 1: Quicker, sharper

The Blue Jackets aren't exactly tearing up the NHL so far this season. After an overtime loss in Nashville on Saturday, they're 3-3-1. But when you compare this year's version of the Blue Jackets to what we've witnessed the last two seasons, the differences are startling.

And, overwhelmingly, positive.

The Jackets look faster. They look more skilled. They're more structured. And the energy with which they play, with the exception of one game, has been dramatically better than the past two seasons, even though many of the same players are still in the lineup.

So, why?

Like all NHL clubs, the Blue Jackets aren't big fans of fully explaining their systems. (Yes, other NHL coaches can watch 10 minutes of a game and figure out their approach in all three zones, but that's beside the point.) So we asked three questions from the outside into the system, not the other way around.

Here's what we learned:

1. Why do you look so much faster?

No question, some of the Blue Jackets' young forwards are noticeably quicker. Before Kent Johnson injured his shoulder, he looked significantly quicker. Yegor Chinakhov has always been able to fly, but he looks even more powerful this season.

But this observation isn't so much about individual speed as collective quickness. The Jackets are doing everything quicker this season, it seems.

Coach Dean Evason's system, which came with him from Minnesota and was tweaked slightly to better fit the Blue Jackets, is a big reason. It is simple, it is aggressive and it allows for some measured risk-taking to create offense, and it requires players to be on their toes, leaning forward.

It starts with a two-man forecheck, which, ideally, pressures the puck while opponents are just starting to make their way out of the zone. The Jackets have forced several turnovers this way.

"Two guys go hard with one guy over top," center Justin Danforth said. "It's hard for D to play against that because we try and take away their routes. If our third guy is above the middle (option), they can't give him the puck. If the D rims the pucks, our D are quick and they're closing in.

"The reads in this system are so much faster, so we're not overthinking. It's very simple and it's very aggressive, which players love. Last year was a bit ... yeah, it was different. We were thinking more, trying to overcomplicate the game."

The Blue Jackets don't retreat when defending; they're skating at the puck carrier and using heavy sticks to challenge the play. It's all over the ice. They'll take slight risks in getting caught with odd-man rushes

against — and we've seen a few of those early on — but they make opponents work to get the puck up ice.

Nobody wanted to dump on former Blue Jackets coach Pascal Vincent, so they were measured with their words when comparing this system to the one they tried to play last season. But...

"It's a clear read (now), and that's so much easier to play like that, without a gray area," Blue Jackets center Cole Sillinger said. "I don't want to talk on last year too much, but it was not as black and white."

Evason has made it clear that he's willing to live with mistakes, as long as they're based in aggression, not passivity and second-guessing.

"Who wants to sit back and defend?" Evason said. "It's an easy sell to the players. We'll correct stuff, but it's a lot easier to pull back the reins than to have to push them forward."

"Guys have set that standard of how we want to play as the Columbus Blue Jackets. They have fun with it. It's a lot of work, but it's fun."

## 2. Why is the defense so much more involved?

This may be oversimplifying things, but when the Blue Jackets have the puck, the position each player plays is irrelevant.

It's not that defensemen are allowed to join the play. It's not that they're encouraged to. No, it's a demand now by Evason and staff. That's the biggest tweak they made for the Columbus roster, a nod to the mobility on the Blue Jackets' blue line.

"To score in the NHL, you need at least four, but probably all five guys involved in the offense," Evason said. "The goalies are too good, the systems are too good, the players are too good."

"That doesn't mean we play riverboat gambler hockey. We want all of our defensemen to jump into the play. It doesn't matter who you are, if you're perceived as an offensive guy or a defensive guy or whatever. To score in the NHL, you need defensemen to get involved."

This system seems tailor-made for Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski, who has 3-4-7 and 27 shots on goal in seven games. He's top 10 in the league in scoring among blueliners and top five in shots on goal.

Damon Severson, Ivan Provorov and Jake Christiansen, a surprise member of the Blue Jackets' top four so far this season, have joined the rush and led the rush already several times this season.

Lighting the lamp, doubling the lead!

Zach Werenski gets a turnover and slips a pass to Justin Danforth for the @BlueJacketsNHL's second goal against the Maple Leafs.#CBJ | 📺 FanDuel Sports Network 📱 [pic.twitter.com/BYsF3kUqLJ](https://pic.twitter.com/BYsF3kUqLJ)

— FanDuel Sports Network Columbus (@FanDuelSN\_CBUS) October 22, 2024

"We have a lot of guys who can hang onto pucks and find guys late," Werenski said. "That's a big one, that's an area where we've taken a big step this year. That fits in with our system, but it's also just our team having more confidence this year."

"We know we can make plays, and it's making us hard to defend."

## 3. Why are you quicker out of the defensive zone?

So many times last season, especially when they were protecting a lead, the Blue Jackets would get stuck in their own zone long enough to pitch a tent.

That still happens on occasion, even to good teams. That's hockey. But the Blue Jackets have been far more structured in moving the puck quickly out of harm's way and up the ice so far this season.

Again, the Blue Jackets' system is getting much of the credit. They are not as passive in the defensive zone under Evason, instead confronting the puck-carrier and taking away time and space. That sounds obvious enough, right? But it's new.

"In years past, we were kind of packing it in around the net and allowing teams to have zone time," Werenski said. "Guys are too good. They're going to get scoring chances that way. They're going to score.

"This system has us pressuring guys and forcing them to make a play, and I think that's the right way to play."

The Blue Jackets seemed confused in their own zone last season, like they struggled to pick up the hybrid system they were instructed to play. They'd play man-to-man low in the zone and a zone defense when the puck went out high again, and they often seemed flustered.

They're still doing a form of that now, but the transition has been more seamless. There haven't been nearly as many blown assignments. Remember the game last season against Pittsburgh when Sidney Crosby (of all players) was allowed to stand wide open at net-front?

Now, it seems, when a Blue Jackets player gathers the puck in the defensive zone, he has options. A quick read, a quick pass, and the puck is on its way out, often with speed.

"It's our structure. It's guys knowing what their job is," Danforth said. "If you're the first guy back as a forward, you know where guys are going to be, and hopefully as the season gets going, we'll just get better and better with it."

Item No. 2: Tarasov takes charge

Evason works closely with goaltending coach Niklas Backstrom but said the two have not put together even a tentative schedule for goaltenders Elvis Merzlikins and Daniil Tarasov.

Merzlikins and Tarasov are both going to play, obviously, but Evason plans to ride the hot hand, which means an open competition for playing time throughout the season. Right now, Tarasov has grabbed the net, starting the last four games.

"I don't change my philosophy for the goaltenders," Evason said. "It's the same for the forwards and the defense. It's game by game, and it's earned. There's no long-term plan.

"We'll evaluate after every game how a player has played — and, again, that's goalie, defensemen or forward — and we'll make a decision, hopefully the right one, with everybody's input. It's not just Nicky and I deciding, it's our whole entire staff having input."

Tarasov's recent run of play is tied for his longest string of consecutive starts in his career. If he starts on Monday vs. Edmonton, he'll match the five straight starts he made as a rookie from Dec. 15-23, 2002.

So far this season, he's 3-1-1 with an .886 save percentage and 3.42 goals-against average, but he's made some crucial stops on breakaways and odd-man rushes.

DENIED  #CBJ pic.twitter.com/ofirt54JAW

— Columbus Blue Jackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) October 27, 2024

Merzlikins started the season opener on Oct. 10 in Minnesota and the home opener on Oct. 15 against Florida, suggesting he had the first crack at holding down the No. 1 job at the season's start. He did not

play particularly well vs. the Panthers, and it was learned the following day that he had an upper-body injury.

For the past two games, Merzlikins has backed up Tarasov. The Blue Jackets were off on Sunday, so the starter vs. the Oilers won't be known until Monday's morning skate.

#### Item No. 3: Snacks

- Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell confirmed to The Athletic late last week that winger Kent Johnson, out with a left shoulder injury the past three games, will not require surgery. Johnson, who was off to a dynamic start in his third NHL season, is still expected to miss considerable time, but it's good news that the shoulder he had surgically repaired last season won't need further work. Johnson is already well into rehabbing the injury.
- Before the season opener in Minnesota, Waddell told reporters that injured winger Dmitri Voronkov would likely return from his shoulder injury by the end of November, but it looks like the big fella is ahead of schedule. Voronkov skated with the Blue Jackets on Friday before the team left for Nashville, and he took several line rushes with fourth-liners Sean Kuraly and James van Riemsdyk. Voronkov did not take part in contact drills, so that may be the next hurdle for him to clear. But he's past several tests already and is on the horizon to return.
- Here's Evason on Voronkov: "Yeah, it's a positive that he's in practice and he's able to get up and down the ice with the guys. I'm sure that felt good. He's probably ahead of schedule."
- Late last month, it was announced that Blue Jackets broadcaster Jody Shelley had been chosen to serve as an analyst for the NHL's new media partner, Amazon Prime, which will stream an NHL game each Monday through the end of the season. It's another big stride forward for Shelley, who has been doing NHL national broadcasts for several seasons. The Jackets only have six Monday games all season, so while Shelley's schedule will be intense — twice already this season he's had to race back to Columbus across the Canadian border to be in place for a Tuesday broadcast — there shouldn't be too many scheduling conflicts.
- One of those scheduling conflicts occurs this week, however, when the Blue Jackets will play host to the Oilers and Shelley will be in Winnipeg to handle the call between the Toronto Maple Leafs and Jets. Who will take Shelley's spot next to Steve Mears in the FanDuel Sports Network booth? Blue Jackets senior adviser John Davidson, who, of course, was a Hall of Fame broadcaster for many seasons with the New York Rangers on Madison Square Garden Network and on national platforms before moving into an executive role with the St. Louis Blues in 2006. This will be the first of at least a couple of games he fills in for Shelley this season.
- Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering trivia question: Defenseman Zach Werenski is playing a team-high 25:34 per game this season, including a whopping 27:46 on Saturday in Nashville. It's the second-highest ice time per game of his career — he drew 25:40 in 2021-22 — and it's on pace to be the fifth-highest in franchise history. Name the player who has the two highest time-on-ice season averages for the Blue Jackets.
- The Blue Jackets have had a very friendly schedule so far this season. They haven't yet had to play a back-to-back, but that's only half of it. Four of their first seven opponents — Florida on Oct. 15, Buffalo on Oct. 17, Toronto last Tuesday and Nashville on Saturday — were playing the second half of back-to-backs when they faced the Jackets. That's true, too, for the Blue Jackets' next two opponents. Edmonton plays at Detroit on Sunday before facing Columbus in Nationwide Arena on Tuesday, and the New York Islanders host Anaheim on Tuesday before playing the Jackets in Nationwide on Wednesday. The

schedule gets much tougher next month, with 29 games scheduled for November (13) and December (16), including six back-to-backs.

- We're all still waiting on Mikael Pyyhtiä's first NHL goal — he's played 25 games dating to 2022-23 — but a more hard-to-believe stat was taking root until Saturday's game. Through six games this season, during which he's played a regular shift on a top-three line, Pyyhtiä had yet to register a shot on goal. In fact, he'd had only six shot attempts — three that were blocked and three that missed the net. The dam finally broke on Saturday. With 44 seconds remaining in the first period vs. Nashville, Pyyhtiä took his first shot on goal after having played 96 minutes, 37 seconds on the season. He finished with three shots on goal in the game.
- The only current Blue Jackets players who were in the lineup when Columbus last won in Nashville — March 30, 2019 — are Zach Werenski and Boone Jenner. They won 5-2 that night, thanks to two goals from Cam Atkinson and four assists from Artemi Panarin. After Saturday's loss, the Jackets are 0-7-2 since then in Music City.
- AHL Cleveland overcame deficits of 1-0, 2-1 and 4-3 before losing in a shootout to Rochester in Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse on Saturday. Luca Del Bel Belluz, who is off to a strong start this season, scored the third-period goal that forced overtime, then had the only successful shootout attempt for Cleveland. Del Bel Belluz, one of the last cuts of training camp, has 4-4-8, a plus-2 rating and two power-play goals in six games this season.
- Goaltender Jet Greaves struggled in his first two AHL starts of the season, allowing 11 goals on 66 shots in losses to Hershey and Rochester. He was pulled in the first meeting with Rochester last Wednesday, but looked much sharper on Saturday, stopping 40 of 44 shots.
- Trivia answer: It's Jack Johnson. In 2011-12, after he was traded from the Los Angeles Kings to the Blue Jackets, Johnson averaged 27:25 in the final 21 games of the season. The following season, he averaged 25:58 in 44 games.

## [BlueJackets.com / Blue Jackets get a point against the Predators](#)

By Robby Stanley- October 26, 2024

NASHVILLE -- Jonathan Marchessault scored 1:44 into overtime to give the Nashville Predators their third straight win, 4-3 against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Bridgestone Arena on Saturday.

Marchessault got the puck, spun around Blue Jackets defenseman Damon Severson, toe-dragged through the bottom of the right circle, and beat goalie Daniil Tarasov in front.

"At the end of the day you've got to help your team win a hockey game," Marchessault said. "I've not done a lot of that right now I would say. New environment, new team, new linemates and everything. There's a period of adjustment, but I mean right now we're almost 10 games in. It's time for me to step up and help my team win hockey games. Maybe tonight that's something that can translate to my 5-on-5 game next game."

Alexandre Carrier scored the tying goal early in the third period, Filip Forsberg also scored, and Brady Skjei had two assists for the Predators (3-5-0), who began the season 0-5-0. Scott Wedgewood made 25 saves.

"I think we're realizing that 'hurts so good' sort of thing," Nashville coach Andrew Brunette said. "It's going to be hard, but the joy is in the hurt. The joy is in the work. I thought we had joy through pain tonight."

Kirill Marchenko and Zach Werenski scored for the Blue Jackets (3-3-1), who have alternated wins and losses over their first seven games. Tarasov made 29 saves.

"Sure, we were impressed (responding after giving up leads), but we were unimpressed with how we played when we had a two-goal lead," Columbus coach Dean Evason said. "We turned the puck over constantly, gave them an opportunity to come back at us. We have to manage the game a [heck] of a lot better than we did in those situations. The game should've been cleaner than it was."

Marchenko gave Columbus a 1-0 lead at 3:53 of the second period on a wrist shot from the slot off a backhand pass from the corner by Adam Fantilli.

"For the most part, to be honest with you, we liked our game," Evason said. "We liked how we played. We limited a lot of their opportunities. When we didn't turn it over, we were a really good hockey club. When we did, we were very, very average."

Zach Aston-Reese extended it to 2-0 at 6:42 on a wrap-around pass from Mathieu Olivier.

"It was kind of a back-and-forth game," Olivier said. "A little sloppy, I thought. But it wasn't for a lack of effort. It was just the way the game was going. They probably had the better first period, but it was kind of swinging back and forth. We had some stretches where we were putting them under pressure, and then they kind of came back the other way. I think as a team it's not a bad effort, per se, but you want to be more consistent throughout the game."

Forsberg cut it to 2-1 at 10:40 on a wrist shot from the right circle.

"Obviously, we had a slow start," Marchessault said. "But at the end of the day, beginning of the season or end of the season, you've got to find a way to win some hockey games. I think right now we're doing that, and that's the positive of it."

Cole Smith scored 26 seconds into the third period to tie it 2-2 on a one-timer.

“Going into the third period down one, to get a first shift like that and kind of propel the team a little bit, it feels good,” Smith said. “That’s our role, is to kind of try to generate some energy and generate momentum. If we score, that helps a lot. We were happy with that one.”

Werenski put Columbus back ahead 3-2 at 3:07 with a slap shot from the top of the right circle that went in off of Wedgewood’s glove.

Carrier tied it 3-3 at 4:09 of the third period on a wrist shot from the point.

NOTES: The Predators will play at the Tampa Bay Lightning on Monday (7:30 p.m. ET; ESPN+, HULU, TVAS). It will be the first time Predators forward Steven Stamkos plays against the Lightning since signing a four-year, \$32 million contract with the Predators on July 1. Stamkos spent 16 seasons with the Lightning and had 1,138 points (555 goals, 582 assists) in 1,089 games. ... After rallying from down 2-0 to defeat the Chicago Blackhawks 3-2 on Friday, Nashville has consecutive multigoal comeback wins for the fourth time in its history (three games from Feb. 27-March 2, 2018, two games from April 4-6, 2019, and two games from April 12-13, 2014).

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Reveal Weirdest Nicknames Ever Given to Them

By Mark Scheig- October 26, 2024

In hockey, nicknames for players are commonplace. Whether it's just an easier way to call someone's name or there's a funny story behind it, nicknames bring teammates closer together.

That's no different for the Columbus Blue Jackets. Players have common nicknames that they are affectionately known by both their teammates and the fans. For example, most everyone knows that Zach Werenski is called "Z" and Adam Fantilli is called "Mo."

Today, we decided to do something a little different. We went around the locker room to a few different players and asked them a question. What is the weirdest nickname that anyone has ever called them either now or in the past and is there a quick story behind it?

The purpose of this is to try to show a different, funny side to them. While a couple guys admitted they haven't had a weird nickname thrown their way, some very interesting responses came from this. Then at the end as a bonus, you will see weird nicknames of the Blue Jackets' beat writers Aaron Portzline, Brian Hedger and then yours truly.

Sit back, enjoy and prepare to laugh at some of these nicknames.

Weird Nicknames Revealed

Sean Kuraly – "Nightmare"

Kuraly: "What do you call something that's the opposite of what it means?"

Me: "An oxymoron?"

Kuraly: "Yeah! So I had my first fight in juniors. And it didn't go very well. And they started calling me nightmare. I think I got beat up pretty good. One of the Russians, Daniil Tarasov is his name, not this one. He started calling me "Sean Nightmare Kuraly."

You can in fact view the Elite Prospects profile of that Daniil Tarasov here. It's a small world, after all.

Jet Greaves – "Cheddar Bob"

Greaves: "Cheddar Bob! So that's probably the most random one. And it's from 8 Mile. There's another buddy who I played with he called me Cheddar Bob all the time. That is one I don't know where that one came from."

Anyone who has seen the movie knows that "Cheddar Bob" is goofy but also is remembered for his heart and loyalty in his character. Greaves very much fits that description.

Mathieu Olivier – "The Biloxi Bull"

Olivier: "In Nashville, the television staff, Chris Mason, Willy Daunic. They nicknamed me the Biloxi Bull. Because I was born in Biloxi and the way I played so that kind of stuck. And then our line was Yakov Trenin and Colton Sissons at the start. Yakov was the Yak and Colton was the Colts so we became the Herd Line. And that was fun. But I mean, (Werenski) has about six different nicknames for me. I can't even start to go over all of that."

Oh yes we can, Mathieu. Yes we can.



According to Werenski, Olivier is known as both “I train hockey” and “I train Driscoll”. These apparently are Fantasy Football team names. Stay tuned later in the season as we will have a feature on the Blue Jackets’ Fantasy Football League. Speaking of Werenski...

Zach Werenski – “Ted Yasso”

Most everyone knows who Ted Lasso is. But we have a “Ted Yasso” on our hands. Yasso are the Greek Yogurt bars you can find in the frozen section of the grocery store. Let’s just say Werenski got the team hooked on the bars.

“I kind of got everyone on them because we all have a sweet tooth. I was pretty much saying it’s a great replacement for sweets. It still has some sugar in it. So (Olivier) started calling me Ted Yasso which is good.”

As a bonus, some of his teammates called Werenski “snowman.” He does wear jersey number 8 after all. Snowman. Fantilli once told Werenski “Hope you have a good game, snowman.”

Adam Fantilli – “Hot Dogs”

In response to “snowman”, Werenski would wish Fantilli good luck as well. “Good luck out there, hot dogs.” Before his number change, Fantilli wore 11. Hence hot dogs.

But even with the change to 19, Werenski still calls Fantilli “hot dogs.” It appears this will stick with him now.

Jordan Harris – “Huncho”

Harris: “In high school, just because we listened to the Migos. My buddies used to call me Huncho just because they say it all the time in their songs.”

James van Riemsdyk – “Vansy”

JVR: “Michael Raffl would call me Vansy. There was a guy in Philadelphia before I was there. But we were just saying I have the worst nickname ever. So then I started calling him Raffsy. We just did it as a joke. We always refer to each other as that still to this day.”

Cole Sillinger – “Meatball”

Sillinger started by declaring the number-one rule when it comes to the nickname. “The one thing is I know you can’t choose your nickname. So whatever the boys are calling you, the boys are calling you.”

Now that the rules are settled, Sillinger got straight to the matter at hand.

“I’ve been called meatball my first year by some of the guys because I’m a pretty big eater, I guess. Just in general, my portions of food are always pretty big. I always like to go up for seconds and stuff like that. Guys always say I need energy. I don’t want to feel hungry. I guess that’s where meatball comes from.

I guess this means the next time Sillinger has a great game, he’ll be referred to as the “spicy meatball.”

Sean Monahan – “Monahanov”

Monahan: “I’ve had tons of nicknames for sure. Mony’s the go-to one. Guys are starting to call me Monahanov this year.”

Me: “They teaching you Russian?”

Monahan: “Yeah. I got a few songs now down. They’re good. A lot of communication with those guys (Chinakhov and Marchenko). Both are a lot of fun to be around.”

Zach Aston-Reese – “Aston 3:16”

There is Stone Cold Steve Austin and Austin 3:16. But then there’s Aston 3:16.

“My brother and his friends did WWE wrestling. My wrestling name was Zachary Banks. I’ve never gotten to see it live.”

Even with all the shows that came through Pittsburgh, Aston-Reese never got to see a show live. It was then he revealed he had a T-shirt that said “Aston 3:16”. That’s true dedication right there.

Damon Severson – “Army”

Severson: “A couple guys in New Jersey called me Army for a for a couple months. It’s a running joke. Because my name is Severson, they were like Seven Nation Army and then they ran with it. They started calling me Army from the song.”

Kirill Marchenko – “Arbozneik”

You’re guess is as good as mine as to the meaning. But Marchenko said this was his weirdest nickname and provided that spelling of it.

Elvis Merzlikins – “Elvis Merzly Boy”

Merzlikins: “Because in Switzerland, they couldn’t really pronounce my last name. So it just became Merzly Boy.

Mikael Pyyhtia – “Tuna”

Pyyhtia admitted Tuna was the weirdest one he’s heard. He didn’t remember who started it but it started in Cleveland with the Monsters. The boys in the room have made sure that it sticks around so no one forgets.

David Jiricek – “The Czech Mob”

Jiricek: “The last 2-3 years in Cleveland, we were like 3-4 guys together. So we were Czech Mob. It was fun. They were always saying Czech Mob’s coming.”

This consisted of Jiricek, Stanislav Svozil, Samuel Knazko and someone else he referred to as “Taf.”

Beat Writer’s Nicknames

Aaron Portzline – “sportzline”

Portzline: “In high school, I was sportzline. Little s before the last name. I think we used that in the high school newspaper, the Jacket Journal, for columns and such. There are probably nicknames behind the scenes that have not been revealed to me. I assume that’s gone on in the past.”

I’m sure we all have those nicknames somewhere. Maybe.

Brian Hedger – “Butter”

Hedger shared a story about being at a friend’s house and trying to get a piece of chocolate. He found a butter knife which happened to be sharper than expected. He attempted to cut off a piece of chocolate that was in the freezer and the knife cut his hand so deep it went to the bone.

To those that know the story, they call him Butter or Butter Knife.

Mark Scheig – “Shaggy”

One question followed me my entire childhood. “Hey Shaggy, where’s Scooby?”

I gave the same answer every time. "Why getting a Scooby snack, of course."  
What else would Scooby be doing anyway?

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Seeking More Consistency in Their Game

By Mark Scheig- October 27, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets played one of the best games in recent memory Tuesday night against the Toronto Maple Leafs. They dominated the game from start to finish in all aspects while taking advantage of a team in the Maple Leafs who had to play in a back-to-back situation.

On Saturday night, the Blue Jackets find themselves again playing against an opponent in the Nashville Predators who played a game the night before. The Predators came back from a 2-0 deficit to grind out a 3-2 win against the Chicago Blackhawks for just their second win of the season.

The Blue Jackets have had three days off in advance of Saturday night's game while having the luxury of arriving in Nashville before the Predators did.

Winning in the manner the Blue Jackets did Tuesday was nice. However, the big thing they're focused on now is consistency. While every team strives for consistency, it is hard to find. They want consistency in their game, their effort and their approach. Saturday will provide a good test for the Blue Jackets to see if they can build off such an impressive performance in a city where they haven't enjoyed much historic success.

### Talking Consistency

It doesn't matter if you're a new player in the NHL or a 10+ year veteran, every player says they want consistency in their game. But what is that exactly?

Over the course of a season, there are so many highs and lows that make consistency so fleeting. But if these Blue Jackets want to take the next step, they are going to have to find as much consistency as possible. Sean Monahan says that means being able to handle momentum swings in games.

"If there's momentum swings in games and it's not going your way, you can get away from the good habits of winning hockey," Monahan said. "When you (handle momentum swings) consistently, you give yourself and the team a good chance to have success."

"There's different emotions throughout a game. There's different emotions throughout seasons and a lot of momentum swings, shift-to-shift and period-to-period. You have to manage it and stick within your structure and stick together as a team."

Head coach Dean Evason not only wants consistency from his team, he wants to see one thing in particular be consistent in every game.

"All we're looking for is consistent work," Evason said. "And consistent effort. The start of the Minnesota game, we didn't have the same effort in the first period and it showed. We didn't have success in that game. So that's the consistency. It's not consistently never making a mistake. It's consistently, predictably being a team that works every single game. Teams know when they play against us that we're going to work every night and for them to have success, they're going to have to work. That's the consistency we want as a team."

### Third Defensive Pair

So far in the first six games, the Blue Jackets have enjoyed good results from their top-two defensive pairs. Those are Zach Werenski with Ivan Provorov and Jake Christiansen with Damon Severson.

The third defensive pair however remains in a rotation.

Evason admitted that all of Jiricek, Harris and Johnson are vying for playing time on that third pair. In particular, Jiricek and Harris are each vying for playing time while still learning the daily grind of the NHL.

It will be Harris' turn to play Saturday night alongside Johnson. Jiricek will be a healthy scratch. Evason said Thursday that there is not a long term plan when it comes to who plays on that third pair.

"It's day-by-day," Evason said. "It's game-by-game and it's an earned culture that we've tried to implement. As far as those two guys (Harris and Jiricek), they've been in and out a little bit. Jack's been in and out too. So we want them to have a healthy competition to see who the guy is that stays in the lineup."

Harris knows what he has to do now that he has another opportunity on Saturday. He also says he knows he can be better too. What does he want to show?

"(That) I can play the way that I know I can play and be reliable out there," Harris said. "It's two main things. I feel like from a player's and coach's perspective, I just want to be reliable out there, be trusted and add to the team however you can. That's my goal out there."

"I think I can definitely be better. I could play better and have more in me. I think that there's some good things within me. There's also some stuff to work on for sure."

Evason wants to see Harris play his game more and play up to what he is capable of.

"Just to play a firm, straight-forward game," Evason said of Harris. "Just getting the puck going, play good defensively, good box outs, just steady. We've seen it. He's capable of doing it. We're expecting him to do it here tonight."

#### Projected Lineup/Notes

Here is how the Blue Jackets looked at practice this week. They skated an optional on Saturday morning.

Cole Sillinger-Sean Monahan-Kirill Marchenko

Yegor Chinakhov-Adam Fantilli-Mikael Pyhtia

Zach Aston Reese-Justin Danforth-Mathieu Olivier

James van Riemsdyk-Sean Kuraly-Kevin Labanc

Zach Werenski-Ivan Provorov

Jake Christiansen-Damon Severson

Jack Johnson-Jordan Harris

Daniil Tarasov will make his fourth consecutive start in net. Elvis Merzlikins backs up.

Olivier returns to Nashville tonight. He has fond memories of the Predators as that was his first NHL team as well as the place where his second son was born. He says the game will mean a little extra something.

"It does, but in a positive way," Olivier said. "I think it's just very near and dear to my heart. This is where I started and lived here for a couple of years. It's always special coming back. I'm a very big country fan as well. Coming to Nashville is always great. It's just really fun to come back."

Olivier has turned into an important part of the Blue Jackets. While he will step up and fight when needed, he plays most every important situation too.

“I think a lot of people from the outside looking in think he’s a tough guy and can drop the gloves and look after himself, but he’s a great skater and gets up and down the ice,” Evason said. “He finishes his checks. He’s a wonderful teammate and he’s able to play in all situations, kills penalties, scored a couple of goals last game. So to have a guy like that on your hockey club that well rounded is awesome.”

The Predators didn’t hold a morning skate on Saturday but the Friday scratches in Chicago all skated which implies the same 18 skaters. Per Nick Kieser of Predators radio, they are projecting Scott Wedgewood to start against the Blue Jackets with Juuse Saros getting the win on Friday. Check back at warmups for an official word.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Show Growth Despite Messy Loss to Predators

By Mark Scheig- October 27, 2024

In year's past, the Columbus Blue Jackets would have lost games like they did on Saturday night in Nashville in regulation. But on this occasion, they were able to get a point despite playing an unclean game on multiple levels.

Jonathan Marchessault scored in overtime to lift the Predators to a 4-3 win. In what proved to be a sign of how the night for the Blue Jackets went, Damon Severson lost his footing which allowed the winning goal to be scored.

The night was full of different kinds of mistakes for the Blue Jackets. Puck management was an issue all night. Big turnovers stopped any kind of momentum they were hoping to gain later in the game.

Ultimately, those mistakes caught up to them. Even despite all of that, the Blue Jackets still made some strides that should help them later on.

### Unclean Game

After a first period in which the Blue Jackets held an edge in shots in goal, they were able to build a 2-0 lead thanks to goals by Kirill Marchenko and Zach Aston-Reese. Marchenko's goal gave him nine points on the season in seven games which leads the team.

Both goals were setup on beautiful passing plays. Marchenko's was setup by Adam Fantilli while Aston Reese's was setup by Mathieu Olivier.

It was at 2-0 when things started to get messy for the Blue Jackets. Puck management became a major issue for them throughout the rest of the game.

"We were impressed there," coach Dean Evason said when discussing being able to get back into the game later. "But we were unimpressed with how we played when we had a two-goal lead. The game should have been cleaner than it was. It wasn't. It wasn't clean."

The Blue Jackets still did some good things on the night even despite all the mistakes.

"For the most part, (we) did the right things," Evason said. "But when you turn the puck over at the blue line, you give a team that has the talent level of theirs to have momentum freely and not have to come 200 feet. We're turning over at our blue line in our D-zone. They're getting second or third opportunities or we're going on the offensive and we're turning over. Now they only got to go three quarters of the ice instead of the entire ice to make a play on us."

"So it's not just playing brain dead hockey, dumping it in every time making them come through our feet. It's just simply not turning it over in those crucial areas of the ice where you give any team in the National Hockey League and yet it will come back at you. But for the most part to be honest with you, we liked our game play."

Zach Werenski scored in the third period to give the Blue Jackets the lead back temporarily. Although he liked the effort, he said he didn't like the start. He also alluded to the puck management.

"I thought we played hard all night," Werenski said. "I thought our first period wasn't great in terms of turnovers but we played hard. Second period, everything goes up. Had a good second. Third period is kind of back and forth. So it could have been anyone's game tonight."

### Strides Still Made

The Blue Jackets were up 2-0 in the second, 2-1 going to the third and held a 3-2 lead in the third. They weren't able to hold onto those leads. Puck management and turnovers allowed the Predators to climb back into the game and they took full advantage.

Where the Blue Jackets took an important step however was after the Predators made it 3-3. They were starting to win the possession battle. They pushed the Blue Jackets back but couldn't get a fourth goal in regulation.

The way the Blue Jackets locked it back down after 3-3 is a sign of growth. They could have easily given in and allowed the Predators to score two or three more times. Instead, they went back to their structure and didn't allow anything. Not only didn't they allow anything, they made a push on their own.

They had multiple chances to take the lead. Predators goalie Scott Wedgewood made some key saves down the stretch to keep it 3-3.

On a night in which the Blue Jackets probably didn't deserve to win, they scratched out a point and could have had two. It's a sign of belief by the players in what the coaching staff is teaching them.

The offense is still clicking seven games into the season. With 27 goals in those seven games, the Blue Jackets are showing they can fill the net. On Saturday night, they got a goal from a defenseman (Werenski), a bottom-six forward (Aston-Reese) and a top-six forward (Marchenko.) They're showing they can get scoring from all lines.

"We have no issues how we're playing the game up the ice and how we're generating offensive opportunities, how we're generating chances and how we're scoring goals," Evason said. "But we hope we'll get more if we do the right things in those crucial areas that we talked about. But honestly in our defensive end, we've been solid. We've been doing the right things, taking the right approach in that area to keep the puck out of our net. But we just need to clean a little bit up."

#### Side Dishes

- Fantilli had that great assist to Marchenko and also led the Blue Jackets with six shots on goal. His breakthrough is a matter of when and not if.
- Saturday night was a very physical game. The Blue Jackets knew this was a calling card of the Predators. They matched them in that regard. Aston-Reese and Jordan Harris had some thunderous hits. Harris' hit on Colton Sissons created a retaliation penalty on Sissons.
- Coming into Saturday night's game, the Blue Jackets according to Nat Stat Trick had an adjusted CF% of 51.92%. If you needed a sign that things were starting to turn, this shows that. This means they're holding an advantage on their opponents in shot attempts when adjusted for score and venue at 5-on-5. The foundation continues to be laid.
- The Blue Jackets have Sunday off and will hold a morning skate Monday in advance of their game against the Edmonton Oilers.



## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Blue Jackets Lose A Pair Of Third Period Leads, Fall Short In Overtime Against Predators

By Ed Francis- October 27, 2024

	1	2	3	OT	F
CBJ	0	2	1	0	3
NSH	0	1	2	1	4

### CBJ GOALS:

Marchenko

Aston-Reese

Werenski

### CBJ ASSISTS:

Fantilli, Johnson, Kuraly,

Labanc, Olivier

The Columbus Blue Jackets picked up a point but fell short of a win Saturday night in Nashville against the Predators, falling 4-3 in overtime.

"We'll take the one (point) and learn from it," said Zach Werenski, who scored his third goal of the season early in the third period to briefly give the Blue Jackets a lead.

It would be a lead they would hold for only 62 seconds before the Predators would make it a 3-3 game. Nashville would then win it less than two minutes into overtime.

Here's how it all went down in central Tennessee:

### 1st Period

(8:13): Daniil Tarasov makes his best save of the period on Thomas Novak just over eight minutes into the period. This starts with Roman Josi getting a relatively clean look on Tarasov from the left dot. He gives up a rebound and Novak was right there for the put back, but the Blue Jackets goalie gets just enough of it on a kick save to keep the puck out of the net. Good work here by Zach Aston-Reese, too, to make the look for Novak a little less clean.

(19:14): Not to be outdone, Nashville netminder Scott Wedgewood makes an equally impressive save to rob Adam Fantilli of a goal in the final minute of the frame. This was some good stuff from the Blue Jackets, though. It starts with a crisp, clean exit from deep in their own zone led by Yegor Chinakhov. The puck ends up on the stick of Mikael Pyyhtia near Columbus' own blue line, who finds a streaking Chinakhov near the Nashville blue line. The pass is a little wide but Chinny does good work to play it off the boards and find Fantilli right in front of Wedgewood. Great work here, just a better stop.

### 2nd Period

(3:53 — 1-0 CBJ): Kirill Marchenko gets the goal, but Fantilli makes it happen. Great chemistry here to make this happen from two guys who have scarcely played together this season in 5-on-5 play. Marchenko sees an opportunity and taps his stick, which is noticed by Fantilli and he gets it right to his stick on a back-handed pass.

(6:42 — 2-0 CBJ): Another goal on another fantastic pass to double the Columbus lead just three minutes after Marchenko found the back of the net. This time the pass comes from Mathieu Olivier, who shows some fancy puck work behind the net and slips it backdoor to Zach Aston-Reese. The goal — and the assist — make it points in three out of the last four games for both Olivier and ZAR.

(10:40 — 2-1 CBJ): Just over halfway through the game and Filip Forsberg gets his fourth goal of the season to cut the lead in half.

### 3rd Period + Overtime

(0:26 — Tied 2-2): It would take less than 30 seconds into the third period for Nashville to tie the game. The Predators would win the face-off and Cole Smith would eventually get the puck and really just push it towards the net, but a little bit of puck luck and it gets past Tarasov to make it a 2-2 game.

CBJ	GAME STATS	NSH
28	SHOTS	33
49%	FACEOFFS	51%
0/2	POWER PLAY	0/2
2/2	PENALTY KILL	2/2
25	HITS	39
19	GIVEAWAYS	18
6	TAKEAWAYS	8
15	BLOCKED SHOTS	14
ALL SITUATIONS ADVANCED STATS		
1.92	EXPECTED GOALS	3.02
54	SHOT ATTEMPTS	68
26	SCORING CHANCES	29
8	HIGH-DANGER CHANCES	13

DATA VIA:

NHL.COM

NATURALSTATTRICK.COM

(3:07 — 3-2 CBJ): What's the difference between this season and the past few? There's more than two answers, but two answers are undoubtedly (1) freedom and (2) confidence. Werenski leans into this one and rips it, giving the Blue Jackets a (brief) 3-2 lead. Kevin Labanc picks up the primary apple on the goal, the fourth straight game he's played in which he's picked up an assist.

(4:09 — Tied 3-3): With tons of traffic in front of the net, Alex Carrier gets one through and past Tarasov to tie the game at 3-3.

(OT 1:44 — 4-3 NSH): Nashville wins it. Jonathan Marchessault one-ups Damon Severson near the corner and leaves only Chinakhov between him and Tarasov. Chinakhov dips a little too early and Marchessault has no problem burying it to give the Predators the 4-3 victory. The Blue Jackets had a couple of good-to-great chances to win it, including one from Fantilli, but couldn't get it in.

Up Next:

Columbus' early season dose of heavy home games continues when they return to Nationwide Arena to battle the always-dangerous Edmonton Oilers. Puck drop is scheduled for 7:00 p.m.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / John Davidson To Fill In For Jody Shelley In The Broadcast Booth For Monday's Game Against The Edmonton Oilers

**By Ed Francis- October 27, 2024**

John Davidson will turn back the clocks of time Monday — for one night only.

During Saturday's broadcast between the Columbus Blue Jackets and Nashville Predators on FanDuel Sports Network, the announce team of Steve Mears and Jody Shelley shared news that the latter will be out for Monday night's game against the Edmonton Oilers.

In his place: Davidson.

The 71-year-old former President of Hockey Operations and current senior advisor for the Blue Jackets is no stranger to the broadcast booth and in fact, has a Hall of Fame career with the headset on.

After his playing career ended in the early 1980's, Davidson joined the MSG Network in 1983 and took over as the color commentator for the New York Rangers in 1986.

He worked alongside the legendary broadcaster Sam Rosen until 2005-06, and in those 20+ years became a broadcasting legend in his own.

During his broadcast career, Davidson also contributed to NHL coverage on ESPN/ABC, NBC, Fox, and the CBC.

For his contributions to the booth, Davidson was honored by the Hockey Hall of Fame with the 2009 Foster Hewitt Memorial Award.

Davidson left the broadcast booth in 2006 to become President of the St. Louis Blues. He was in that role until accepting the same role with the Blue Jackets, which he resigned from in 2019 to return to the Rangers organization, this time as their President and Alternate Governor.

He rejoined the Blue Jackets in 2021.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Blue Jackets Have Things To Clean Up After Tough Overtime Loss To Nashville

**By Will Chase- October 27, 2024**

One that got away.

Daniil Tarasov made 29 saves including several big stops early. Still, despite a 2-0 second-period lead, the Columbus Blue Jackets couldn't overcome the typical demons that appear when playing the Nashville Predators, as Nashville won 4-3 in overtime on Saturday night at Bridgestone Arena.

Columbus, which hasn't defeated the Predators in Nashville since Mar. 30, 2019, a 5-2 win, has lost nine-straight games on Broadway and fell to 9-36-1-7 in 53 lifetime trips to Bridgestone Arena.

Columbus scored twice in 6:42 to lead the Predators 2-0 in the second period, getting goals from Kirill Marchenko and Zach Aston-Reese.

Tarasov limited Nashville to one goal through 40 minutes, making 19 saves. Filip Forsberg, the Predators' all-time leader with 291 career goals, beat Tarasov at 10:40 of the second period to cut the Jackets' lead to one. Forsberg leads Nashville with four goals and eight points this season and led the game with seven shots on goal.

Off since Tuesday's 6-2 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs, the Blue Jackets entered Saturday's game rested. The Predators played Friday night at the Chicago Blackhawks, winning their second game of the season 3-2. Nashville started the year 0-5-0.

This was Columbus' fourth game this season in which their opponent played the second of a back-to-back stretch.

Cole Smith scored 26 seconds into the third period to tie the game 2-2. Zach Werenski scored to get the Jackets the 3-2 lead at 3:07 but Alexandre Carrier tied the game 3-3 at 4:09.

Huge free agent acquisition Jonathan Marchessault scored the overtime winner at 1:44. Steven Stamkos was kept off the scoreboard.

"We were unimpressed with how we played when we had a two-goal lead," head coach Dean Evason said after Saturday's loss. "We turned the puck over constantly. (We) gave them an opportunity to come back at us, and we have to manage the game a hell of a lot better than we did in those situations.

"The game should have been cleaner than it was and it wasn't clean here tonight."

As the Jackets fall to 3-3-1, they'll take the point but want to get back on track and play the right way for the full 60 minutes.

"We, for the most part, did the right things," Evason said. "When you turn the puck over at the blue line ... you give a team that has the talent level of theirs to have momentum and come at you freely, and not have to come 200 feet, now they only got to go three-quarters of the ice instead of the entire ice to make a play on us.

"It's not just playing brain-dead hockey and dumping it in every time. It's just simply not turning it over in those crucial areas on the ice where you give a team, any team in the National Hockey League, momentum to come back at you.

"For the most part, we liked our game. We liked how we played. When we didn't turn it over, we were a really good hockey club. When we did, we were very, very average."

Elvis Merzlikins, who had been out with an upper-body injury, served as the backup on Tuesday and again on Saturday.

Perhaps Merzlikins will be back in the net on Monday night when the Blue Jackets start a three-game homestand with the defending Western Conference Champion Edmonton Oilers.

Continuing the trend of Blue Jackets opponents playing back-to-back games, the Oilers will play the Detroit Red Wings on Sunday night before heading to Columbus for Monday's game.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Prospect Ivanov Developing Nicely in Second KHL Loan

**By Alessandro Seren Rosso- October 27, 2024**

Sergei Ivanov continues to guard HC Sochi's crease in the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL), while his former teammate, Philadelphia Flyers prospect Yegor Zavrugin has returned to SKA St. Petersburg from his loan spell. Ivanov moved from the Metallurg Magnitogorsk youth program to SKA at 16 and progressed through all levels of the system in St. Petersburg — from the junior team to the youth and Supreme Hockey League (VHL), and even played a few games for the main squad. However, a year ago, he was sent on loan to Admiral Vladivostok. In May, he went out on loan again, this time to Sochi, and shortly afterward, another young goaltender from SKA's system, Zavrugin, joined the Black Sea franchise as well.

When SKA's main goaltender, Nikita Serebryakov, began increasingly yielding the net to Artemy Pleshkov early this season, rumors circulated that the Petersburg club might soon recall one of their goalies from loan. That turned out to be the 19-year-old Zavrugin, while Ivanov remained Sochi's number-one goalie. Following Sochi's game against HC Vityaz (2:3 OT), where the club celebrated its 10th anniversary, Ivanov talked about the team's results, his conversations with SKA's bench boss Roman Rotenberg, his outlook on loan moves, the positive example of Ilya Nabokov, and the Columbus Blue Jackets, who selected Sergei in the 2022 NHL Draft at 138th overall.

**\*\*You can enjoy the original article in Russian language by Yelena Kuznetsova at Championat.ru here\*\***

It was a special game for Sochi, with the franchise celebrating its tenth anniversary. The team lost the game, but the celebration atmosphere was evident. "It was a special celebration today, and a lot of people showed up," Ivanov says. "All the guys were pumped up, but honestly, we're fired up for every game. I'm not sure what went wrong today." Sochi had a nice comeback in the game, rallying back from a 0:2 deficit, but ultimately lost. A comeback always brings great emotions for the fans, even if it ends in an OT loss. "Definitely, it's entertaining for the fans. But we really shouldn't be starting games like that." With that being said, Ivanov has excellent numbers with Sochi, with a .913 save percentage (SV%) and a goals-against average (GAA) of 2.68. He also has two shutouts with his team being second-last in the Western Conference standings.

Last season, Ivanov played three games for SKA and another one for SKA's farm team in the Russian second-tier league (VHL) before getting loaned to Admiral. There, he had a breakout season, playing 33 games for the Sailors with an SV% of .928 and a GAA of 2.63, with one shutout. Admiral was one of the worst teams in the league. In May, Ivanov was loaned to another team again, this time to Sochi.

"I was mostly fine with this decision," the goalie says. "I pretty much knew I'd be going on loan, it was just a matter of where. In the end, it was Sochi. I took it in stride. I spoke with SKA's head coach, the goaltending coach, and my agent, so it was no big mystery that I'd be loaned out. They made their decision, and that's that—I had no control over it."

### KHL Loan Spells

"Roman Rotenberg [SKA's head coach] and I had a chat. He told me to keep working hard, play my game, and we'd see what happens." Given how tough it is for any goalie to secure a spot with SKA, maybe this isn't the worst situation for the young goalie. "Everything happens for a reason. My loan to Admiral turned out to be a good year, with valuable experience. Now here in Sochi, all the conditions are in place too. This is the KHL, and playing here is a dream. I go out there every game and try to give it my all."

At the start of the season, Nikita Serebryakov was SKA's number-one goalie. He won the Goalie of the Year award with Admiral in 2022-23 before moving to St. Petersburg the next season. After a good 2023-24 campaign, however, he lost the favor of the coach after a few subpar performances, and he hasn't played for almost a month. With Zavrugin and Ivanov loaned to Sochi, it became evident that SKA was about to recall one of them, but the choice fell on the former. Club management makes the decisions; Ivanov is not disappointed. "For me, it's just about playing; whatever happens, happens. I'll do whatever they tell me. My job is simple—play hockey. I didn't even think about it. Time will tell if it was for the good or not."

Ivanov: Starting Between the Pipes at Just 20

Aged 20, Ivanov is still young for being a KHL starting goalie. It's a rare case. "There's still daily competition," Ivanov explains. "Whether you're the first or second goalie, games and practices determine everything. Of course, they trust me here, and that's what matters most for a netminder. Now it's just about living up to that trust." He could enjoy that trust last season as well. "Things didn't really change," he admits. "Admiral trusted me, too; I played as many as ten games in a row there. I've had that experience, so I don't overthink it—I just go out and play."

One can wonder what's it like to be the most experienced goalie on a senior team at only 20. "On one hand, it's nice," the goalie smiles. "On the other, it's a big responsibility. It's a huge responsibility, so I have to go out there, show up, and deliver. Here, you don't think about whether you're young or old. Look at Metallurg's Ilya Nabokov—he's young but won the Gagarin Cup. It doesn't matter if you're young or old; if you go out and stop the puck, you'll always stand out, and things will go well."

Nabokov, the Colorado Avalanche's draftee, can be considered a good role model. It's a great story, and any young goalie would want to follow in his footsteps. "Definitely, he's a good example. You'd want to, but that kind of success is partly fate. They had a strong year, and I know Ilya—he's disciplined and has good instincts. All those factors led them to success." The two aren't unknown to each other. They played together for a long time in Magnitogorsk. "We played on the same team. We'll have stories to share after our careers. No hidden issues—everything is easygoing, always with a smile."

Playing Under Sergei Zubov

Ivanov's head coach in Sochi is long-time NHL defenseman Sergei Zubov, who also worked at SKA. He doesn't seem to have changed since those days. "Naturally, the role of head coach is a huge responsibility; you're the main person on the team and accountable for everything. So, yes, there's a difference. But otherwise, he's the same. He'll come over here to encourage you, or sometimes, he might do the opposite. He's a legend, and we all understand and respect that. It makes you want to play for him, which adds responsibility and confidence in your actions."

Admiral was mostly a conservative team, with the team playing a defense-first style trying to leave as little space as possible to the opposition. In Sochi, it's much more about attacking, and it poses a challenge to a team's goalie. "Definitely, there are differences," Ivanov explains. "Playing for Admiral I had more shots from set positions and the perimeter, while here, it's more counterattacks, breakaways, and 2-on-1s. It's obviously tougher for a goalie when you're standing most of the game and then suddenly have to switch on." Tougher, but on the other hand, more interesting too. "For sure, it's exciting hockey for everyone, and for me, it's an interesting experience as well."

Ivanov's contract with SKA runs through the 2024-25 season and in May, he'll be free. "I haven't thought about moving to Columbus yet," he says. "I keep in touch with the club; they ask about my health, how I'm playing. They're keeping track and know everything. But I haven't given it any real thought." Ivanov



doesn't feel pressed by the Jackets. "Everyone understands I have a contract here, and how things work out, we'll see later."

With his progress and experience, it's legit to think that Ivanov has NHL potential. Now it's up to him to fulfill it.

## The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: The wait for our first edition is over

By Sean Gentile and Dom Luszczyszyn- October 26, 2024

A new season called for a fresh approach at Power Rankings HQ.

Sure, we could've assembled our little list last week — but there were teams that had only played three games. It felt wrong. Integrity counts, professionally and personally, and some sample sizes are simply too small.

So, we decided to hold out a bit longer. And folks, seven days made all the difference. For our first installment of the 2024-25 season, we included one bit about each team that's piquing our interest. Good, bad, important, irrelevant — we've got plenty of time to see how things shake out. That's the fun part.

1. New York Rangers, 5-1-1

Sean's ranking: 1

Dom's ranking: 1

Jacob Trouba has a 60 percent expected goals rate so far this season and is showing he still has game as a second-pair defender. We're going to guess that's pure spite-fuel after almost being traded this past summer; whatever it is, it's clearly working. The Rangers look unreal so far this season and Trouba stepping up is a big reason why.

2. Dallas Stars, 6-2-0

Sean's ranking: 2

Dom's ranking: 2

Dallas' power play truly stunk through the team's first seven games, scoring just 3.44 goals per 60 and generating 6.49 expected goals per 60, both 28th in the league. The solution? Throw it all in the blender and spread the wealth through two even units. It worked like magic against the Bruins as the team went 3-for-5 with the man advantage — with both units scoring. Good thing for Miro Heiskanen, who got his first point of the season.

3. Minnesota Wild, 5-0-2

Sean's ranking: 3

Dom's ranking: 5

The Wild look like a wagon right now, finding the perfect early balance between stout defense and electric offense. Well, from their stars anyway.

While everyone on the Wild has a positive Defensive Rating to start the season, only five have a positive Offensive Rating. Kirill Kaprizov, Matt Boldy, Mats Zuccarello, Joel Eriksson Ek and Marco Rossi are the five and have combined for 18 goals through seven games. The rest of the team? Six. And that includes a goalie goal! For this wagon to keep rolling, the depth needs to step up.

4. Winnipeg Jets, 7-0-0

Sean's ranking: 5

Dom's ranking: 4

The Jets remain perfect and there are a lot of things that'll catch your eye with a record like that. The most intriguing for now might be Neal Pionk, a frequent lightning rod amongst Jets fans who has silenced many critics with his play so far this season. Through seven games Pionk has nine points and has been the team's most consistent defenseman at five-on-five. One of the key concerns for Winnipeg entering the season was its depth after the top pair. If this is the Pionk the Jets can expect, they'll continue to be a force.

#### 5. Florida Panthers, 5-3-1

Sean's ranking: 6

Dom's ranking: 3

Baby Barky has been red hot with Real Barky out. Anton Lundell has stepped right in on the top line and hasn't missed a beat, scoring nine points in nine games to start the season — with some dominant possession numbers to boot. That's a really nice breakout to see after Lundell just signed an extension, one that will once again be a bargain for the Panthers. Just like the rest of them.

#### 6. Tampa Bay Lightning, 4-3-0

Sean's ranking: 4

Dom's ranking: 8

Tampa Bay's top line is electric with the addition of Jake Guentzel, but an underrated byproduct of that addition was Brandon Hagel sliding down. That's given the Lightning a second powerhouse line. Hagel and Anthony Cirelli each have nine points in seven games and have dominated together at five-on-five, earning 69 percent of the expected goals — while soaking up the toughest assignments, too. The Lightning may not be deep, but the top six is stacked.

#### 7. Carolina Hurricanes, 4-2-0

Sean's ranking: 7

Dom's ranking: 6

The Corsi Canes know their brand and execute it to perfection. It doesn't matter if they lost their second pair and a star winger in the offseason, they're still going to do what they do best, which is to dominate the shot clock. Through six games they have a 61.9 percent Corsi, nearly six percentage points on the next-best team. Classic Canes!

#### 8. Colorado Avalanche, 4-4-0

Sean's ranking: 9

Dom's ranking: 7

From 0-4-0 to 4-4-0 — the Avs are back. And so is Cale Makar with 15 points in eight games to lead the league. Perhaps 'back' is unfair, but even with 90 points last season, Makar didn't quite look like himself for much of the second half. Through the first eight games, he looks a lot closer to his usual self, especially in terms of out-chancing the other team. Right now he's rocking a 68 percent expected goals rate. Yeah, he's back — and maybe even better than ever.

#### 9. Washington Capitals, 5-1-0

Sean's ranking: 8

Dom's ranking: 9

It's too early to pencil the Capitals in for another playoff appearance, but it also seems clear that this is a better team than the one we saw last season. Two big reasons for that: Their new forwards look pretty good.

They rolled the dice on Pierre-Luc Dubois bouncing back as a top-six point producer, and he's done just that, clicking with Connor McMichael and a rejuvenated Tom Wilson. With them on the ice, Washington has outscored opponents 6-3. Andrew Mangiapane, meanwhile, has been a quality play-driver on the bottom six, with the Caps controlling nearly 70 percent of the expected goals in his minutes.

10. Vancouver Canucks, 3-1-2

Sean's ranking: 10

Dom's ranking: 10

We said it in the Canucks' season preview: It was possible — likely, even — for J.T. Miller to regress as a point producer while also adding substance to his game. That's what we've seen thus far. Vancouver's shooting percentage with him on the ice has dropped from about 13 percent to 8.1 percent, but their actual and expected goals percentage are both up significantly. That bodes well for the Canucks moving forward.

11. Vegas Golden Knights, 4-2-1

Sean's ranking: 12

Dom's ranking: 11

Shea Theodore is \$50 million richer after signing a massive extension Thursday and while he is crushing it on the scoresheet (seven points in six games), he's curiously struggling at five-on-five. His 37 percent xG rate is ahead of only Nicolas Hague this season among Vegas defensemen, and would be a massive departure from his usual greatness on that front. That's something to watch going forward — especially with the entire team looking rough on that front.

12. Edmonton Oilers, 2-4-1

Sean's ranking: 11

Dom's ranking: 12

The Oilers, off to a slow start? Imagine that. Given how things worked out for them in 2023-24, it doesn't make sense to sound any alarm bells. It's worth pointing out, though, that one of their big offseason acquisitions has been abysmal. Victor Arvidsson, expected to score 30 goals or so in the top six this season, has zero through seven games. His shot rate at five-on-five is way down, too, to 6.5 per 60 from nearly 11 the past three seasons.

13. Toronto Maple Leafs, 4-4-0

Sean's ranking: 13

Dom's ranking: 13

The Leafs are 4-4-0 to start the season — nothing new there, they always look mid in October (and April, hey-ooooo). What is concerning, though, is an extremely tepid power play that has just 3.7 goals per 60 this season. It would be reassuring if the team was at least getting looks with the man advantage, but right now the Leafs are struggling to even generate chances to their usual degree with just 7.3 expected goals per 60, good for 15th in the league. Last year they were fifth at 9.7.

14. New Jersey Devils, 5-4-1

Sean's ranking: 15

Dom's ranking: 14

It's possible that the goaltending is not fixed after all! Through 10 games Jacob Markstrom and Jake Allen have combined for an .824 save percentage with their last two games being especially egregious.

Then again, it's possible that goaltending wasn't the team's only problem. The duo may have allowed 2.8 goals above expected collectively, but that puts their expected save percentage at .841 on the season. That's a massive red flag for their defense. The Devils desperately need to clean things up without the puck.

15. Los Angeles Kings, 4-2-2

Sean's ranking: 14

Dom's ranking: 16

Alex Turcotte may not be playing difficult minutes, but he's absolutely crushing the minutes he's getting to the tune of a 69 percent xG rate while outscoring opponents 6-2. That's a really encouraging start for the fifth pick from 2019 and this could be a sign that he's ready to turn into an NHL difference-maker. Development is different for every player, and at 23 he's still young enough to have legit upside.

16. Calgary Flames, 5-1-1

Sean's ranking: 19

Dom's ranking: 15

The Flames have been a nice surprise so far this season and it's hard not to notice a familiar face atop their scoring leaderboard: Jonathan Huberdeau. He's picked up right where he left off from last year's second half with seven points in seven games to start the season. Good for him!

17. Ottawa Senators, 4-2-0

Sean's ranking: 17

Dom's ranking: 18

For the past two seasons, Thomas Chabot has produced at a 50-point pace despite injuries and plenty of issues elsewhere. This season, though, he has three points in six games to go along with the worst expected goals rate (37.4) among Ottawa's defensemen and a goals against/60 of 6.58, last in the league among defensemen with at least 50 minutes played. Ugly stuff.

18. Utah HC, 4-3-1

Sean's ranking: 18

Dom's ranking: 17

Logan Cooley has yet to score this season, but one encouraging development on his end is that he's generating more dangerous chances for himself. While his shot rate hasn't moved much at five-on-five, his xG rate has gone way up from 0.67 per 60 to 1.13. If he keeps that up, the goals will come.

19. New York Islanders, 2-2-2

Sean's ranking: 16

Dom's ranking: 19

The wildest part of the Islanders' 2023-24 season is that they were playoff-caliber almost in spite of Ilya Sorokin. From Jan. 1, he put up a .905 save percentage, which is just a shade above average, allowed nearly three goals more than expected and lost his net to Semyon Varlamov.

In October, though, he's looked more like the guy who nearly won a Vezina Trophy in 2022-23, with a .947 save percentage and 2.77 goals saved above expected. He's significantly outplaying Varlamov, too. It's tough to imagine a better sign for the Isles, especially given the loss of top-line addition Anthony Duclair.

20. St. Louis Blues, 5-3-0

Sean's ranking: 20

Dom's ranking: 20

It's impossible to mention anyone but Philip Broberg here. The Blues took a calculated risk on his talent this summer with a pricey offersheet, and he's more than lived up to it so far with seven points in eight games while outscoring opponents 6-1 at five-on-five. He's the exact element this team has been missing from the back end and he's looked excellent so far.

21. Boston Bruins, 3-4-1

Sean's ranking: 21

Dom's ranking: 21

In the entire analytics era, Boston's lowest shot attempt ratio in a season was 48.2 percent last season. It was only the second time the Bruins failed to out-shoot their opponents over a full season — and maybe it was a sign of things to come. This season the Bruins are sitting at just 44.5 percent, ahead of only Anaheim, Detroit and Montreal. That's really bad company.

22. Seattle Kraken, 4-3-1

Sean's ranking: 22

Dom's ranking: 23

Brandon Montour has looked excellent so far with the Kraken and if he keeps this up he'll be worth every penny for Seattle. In the team's first eight games, he has five points — one of which helped tie the game against the Jets on Thursday — and is dominating possession while taking on the toughest minutes with Jamie Oleksiak. He's made a terrific first impression.

23. Detroit Red Wings, 4-3-0

Sean's ranking: 23

Dom's ranking: 24

The Red Wings just won three straight games averaging 18.3 shots for and 36.3 shots against in those contests. Incredible. No notes.

In that case, we have to give a lot of credit to the team's goaltending so far. A Cam Talbot and Alex Lyon duo didn't feel very inspiring to start the season, but they've done their part. Talbot is sporting a .913 save percentage and has saved 2.4 goals above expected. Lyon has been even better with a .955 save percentage and has saved seven goals above expected. They've been the team's backbone so far.

24. Nashville Predators, 1-5-0

Sean's ranking: 26

Dom's ranking: 22

Things have not gone according to plan for the Predators thus far; at five-on-five, the process has been meh (46.9 expected goals percentage) and the results have been worse (28.5 actual goals percentage). Adding Jonathan Marchessault and Steven Stamkos to a solid team raised expectations, and they haven't been met.

Still, it's worth noting that they're at least generating looks on the power play, where they're third in expected goals/60 at 12.7. They're just not finishing (6.1 actual goals/60). There's too much talent on that unit to think it'll stay cold forever.

25. Buffalo Sabres, 3-4-1

Sean's ranking: 24

Dom's ranking: 25

Tage Thompson's numbers are outstanding. Eight points in eight games, a goals percentage of about 64, an actual goals percentage of 57 — if you were hoping for a bounce-back season from the big fella, it's tough to imagine a better start.

On top of that, though, he's back to doing stuff like this:

"THAT. WAS. MAGIC." 🎯

Tage Thompson UNLOADS on a one-timer [pic.twitter.com/R3Cuf5zR9Y](https://pic.twitter.com/R3Cuf5zR9Y)

— B/R Open Ice (@BR\_OpenIce) October 23, 2024

Amazing what two healthy wrists can do.

26. Anaheim Ducks, 3-2-1

Sean's ranking: 25

Dom's ranking: 26

The Ducks' net now — and perhaps in the future — belongs to Lukáš Dostál. He has been fantastic in his first five starts, putting up a .936 save percentage and the second-most goals saved above expected (8.21) in the NHL. He started last season strong, too, with a .921 save percentage in October, but couldn't keep the train on the tracks. It'll be interesting to see how Ducks coach Greg Cronin divides labor between Dostál and John Gibson once Gibson returns from his appendectomy.

27. Columbus Blue Jackets, 3-3-0

Sean's ranking: 28

Dom's ranking: 27

Adam Fantilli has plenty of time to build on his rookie season, but it hasn't happened just yet. In 2023-24, he put up a 2.05 points/60 at five-on-five that was third on the Blue Jackets. So far this season, he's managed just two goals and zero assists in six games alongside an expected goal share of about 28 percent. Nowhere to go but up.

28. Pittsburgh Penguins, 3-4-1

Sean's ranking: 27

Dom's ranking: 28

This is not a post meant to imply that Sidney Crosby is “washed,” in the parlance of our times. Please do not interpret it as such. It’s fair to say, though, that he hasn’t been good through his first eight games. His expected goal share is second-worst on the Penguins — and it’s not because of his offense.

Pittsburgh’s defensive play with him on the ice has been brutal; 4.88 expected goals against per 60 is the third-worst mark in the league among forwards with at least 50 minutes of ice time. The only players behind him: Anaheim’s Robby Fabri and linemate Bryan Rust.

29. Chicago Blackhawks, 2-4-1

Sean’s ranking: 29

Dom’s ranking: 29

It’s crucial for the Blackhawks that a few young players other than Connor Bedard turn into true long-term pieces this season rather than just prospects, and that starts with Lukas Reichel. A first-round pick who showed some real flashes before a lost 2023-24 season, Reichel has done some good things in his first three games, putting up two primary assists and an expected goal share of about 55. It seems like it’s time for Chicago to figure out whether he can slot in as a true second-line center.

30. Montreal Canadiens, 2-4-1

Sean’s ranking: 31

Dom’s ranking: 30

What’s working for the Canadiens: their top line (Cole Caufield–Nick Suzuki–Juraj Slafkovský) was outscoring opponents 6-3 before Slafkovský’s injury.

What’s not working ... basically everything else. They’re carrying an expected goal share of 38 percent; for context, only two teams (22-23 Ducks, 14-15 Sabres) have finished a season below 40. Defensively, they’ve been heinous, with a 4.1 expected goals against per 60, 0.61 more than the worst team ever.

31. Philadelphia Flyers, 1-5-1

Sean’s ranking: 30

Dom’s ranking: 31

We couldn’t let the week pass without resharing one of the wildest stats of the season so far.

Through six games, the Flyers have started games with 18 (!) different forward line combinations. Not sure how anyone is going to develop chemistry when things are in the blender that often.

— Kevin Kurz (@KKurzNHL) October 23, 2024

Long live the Tortorella line blender. Beyond that, Matvei Michkov’s production thus far has also caught our eye, for reasons good (a team-leading seven points) and less good (only one at even strength, where the Flyers have been outscored 6-0 with him on the ice).

32. San Jose Sharks, 0-6-2

Sean’s ranking: 32

Dom’s ranking: 32

Will Smith was a healthy scratch against the Kings on Thursday night and for good reason: He does not look NHL-ready at the moment. The Sharks have done their part to shelter him with the easiest usage on



the team, but through six games he has zero points and is sporting one of the lowest xG rates on the team. Some AHL seasoning might be what's best for San Jose's prized prospect.

## The Athletic / NHL's biggest surprises early in 2024-25: Emerging stars, unexpected starts and more

By The Athletic NHL Staff- October 27, 2024

Just over three weeks into the 2024-25 NHL season, things are looking interesting. The Edmonton Oilers — our preseason Stanley Cup favorites — are struggling to score goals. The Calgary Flames and Minnesota Wild — two teams that missed the playoffs last year — are unexpectedly off to hot starts. And the Winnipeg Jets are not just good but undefeated.

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

Mason McTavish getting dropped in the lineup: There were a few candidates for this: Trevor Zegras with just 2 points in six games, Cutter Gauthier finally getting on the scoresheet earlier this week, Lukáš Dostál off to a hot start in goal. But one that raised some eyebrows was Ducks coach Greg Cronin dropping McTavish from his customary No. 2 center position to the fourth line Tuesday against the San Jose Sharks. It doesn't look like any kind of permanent sentence for McTavish, as he still played nearly 17 minutes and assisted on Leo Carlsson's decisive power-play goal. But it's another sign that Cronin has high expectations for the 21-year-old, who has only eight shots on goal along with terrible possession and defensive metrics. As he did with Zegras last season and with Gauthier, in benching him for lengthy stretches during a game, Cronin will send a message to his talented young forwards if he isn't getting what he wants out of them. — Eric Stephens

### Boston Bruins

Cole Koepke's offensive emergence: The Bruins signed Koepke, 26, as a depth wing on a one-year, \$775,000 deal. He was not guaranteed to make the team. But as the No. 4 right wing next to Johnny Beecher and Mark Kastelic, the ex-Tampa Bay Lightning forward has three goals and 6 points in his first eight games. Koepke had scored only one previous NHL goal. He's been a no-nonsense, straight-line forward who takes pucks to hard areas. — Fluto Shinzawa

Cole Koepke, ladies and gentlemen. [pic.twitter.com/VqVqSCmEgN](https://pic.twitter.com/VqVqSCmEgN)

— Boston Bruins (@NHLBruins) October 20, 2024

### Buffalo Sabres

Dylan Cozens and Jack Quinn have zero goals: Cozens and Quinn are on Buffalo's second line, get power-play time and are expected to have big seasons. But through eight games, they have combined for zero goals and three assists. Quinn was a healthy scratch for one game. Cozens leads the team in shots on net but hasn't been able to finish. And Buffalo still hasn't scored on the power play. The Sabres need these two to get going to take some pressure off the top line. — Matthew Fairburn

### Calgary Flames

Their franchise-best start: There's Jonathan Huberdeau's point-per-game production, Martin Pospisil being a viable center option and Dustin Wolf's perfect 3-0-0 record. And we can't forget about Justin Kirkland. When you add that all together, you get a Flames team that has defied expectations with its best start in franchise history. Many analysts had Calgary pegged to finish as a bottom-three team in the

standings. Now, people are wondering if the Flames should load up on assets for a playoff run. Will this hold? We'll see. But Flames fans are ready to enjoy the ride as long as it lasts. — Julian McKenzie

#### Carolina Hurricanes

Shayne Gostisbehere exceeding expectations: We all knew Gostisbehere could score. Coming into this season, Gostisbehere had 97 goals since becoming an NHL regular in 2015-16, the 10th most among defensemen. But "Ghost" has exceeded expectations to start this season with four goals in his first five games. He's just the second defenseman in franchise history (Dougie Hamilton, 2019) and the first in the NHL since Filip Hronek (Detroit Red Wings, 2022) to score in four straight, and he has fit perfectly on the top power-play unit that finished second in the league last season. — Cory Lavalette

WE BELIEVE IN GHOST 🧛 pic.twitter.com/BYcrTMFZp8

— Carolina Hurricanes (@Canes) October 23, 2024

#### Chicago Blackhawks

The added veterans haven't been impactful: The Blackhawks added eight veterans in the offseason. Aside from Teuvo Teräväinen, they haven't made much of a difference. Craig Smith has had moments, but he has also been a healthy scratch. Tyler Bertuzzi doesn't have a point in five-on-five play through eight games. T.J. Brodie has struggled defensively. Ilya Mikheyev is pointless. Patrick Maroon has the second-worst on-ice expected goals percentage on the team. Alec Martinez and Laurent Brossoit are out with injuries. — Scott Powers

#### Colorado Avalanche

Ross Colton stepping into a first-line role: With Gabriel Landeskog, Valeri Nichushkin and Jonathan Drouin out of the running to play alongside Nathan MacKinnon on Colorado's top line, coach Jared Bednar turned to Colton. All Colton has done is score seven goals, which ranks second in the NHL behind the Tampa Bay Lightning's Nikita Kucherov (eight). Colton's offensive outburst coincided with Colorado's turnaround, as he scored twice in each of the team's first two wins (including the game-winner Sunday in San Jose). He's been a pleasant and much-needed surprise early on. — Jesse Granger

Can ANYONE stop Ross Colton right now? 🧨 pic.twitter.com/358GyhZINu

— B/R Open Ice (@BR\_OpenIce) October 25, 2024

#### Columbus Blue Jackets

Mathieu Olivier ... goal scorer? The Blue Jackets' leading goal scorers so far this season are Kirill Marchenko, Sean Monahan, Yegor Chinakhov and ... Olivier? Yes, the career fourth-liner (no slight intended) has three goals, one assist, 4 points and a plus-1 rating in the first six games, including his first career two-goal game Tuesday versus the Toronto Maple Leafs. Olivier, who scored a club-high four preseason goals, said he spent the offseason working on the skills aspect of his game, including an equipment tweak, which he didn't want to discuss. Hey, why jinx it? — Aaron Portzline

#### Columbus goal!

Scored by Mathieu Olivier with 08:24 remaining in the 2nd period.

Assisted by Zachary Aston-Reese and Justin Danforth.

Columbus: 5

Toronto: 0 #TORvsCBJ #CBJ #LeafsForever pic.twitter.com/6CMDxCZPM5

— NHL Goals (@nhl\_goal\_bot) October 23, 2024

## Dallas Stars

The lack of production from the back end: If we're picking nits from an excellent start, it's how little the Stars defensemen are contributing offensively. Dallas has just one goal from the back end, a Thomas Harley tally in its seventh game, a loss to Buffalo. But it's not just goals. Miro Heiskanen's secondary assist on Jason Robertson's goal Thursday night in Boston was the first point recorded by a Dallas defenseman other than Harley. So through eight games, nearly 10 percent of the season, five defensemen — including a potential Norris Trophy contender — have combined for no goals and one secondary assist. On the bright side, the Stars are still 6-2-0. If and when Heiskanen starts chipping in more, they'll be that much more dangerous. — Mark Lazerus

## Detroit Red Wings

Simon Edvinsson's quick adjustment: Edvinsson carries big expectations long-term as a No. 6 pick, but it's been impressive how quickly he's become a core piece of the Red Wings blue line, playing major minutes and against top lines early on this season. He quickly rose to the team's top defense pairing and has held up well there — particularly in protecting a tight, 1-0 lead against the New York Islanders, showing his great defensive stick to deny entries and break up plays. Edvinsson has played in just over 30 NHL games in his young career, and he'll surely have some ups and downs as the season plays out, especially if he remains in such a tough role. But it has to be encouraging for the Red Wings to see him succeeding in that spot this early. — Max Bultman

## Edmonton Oilers

They can't score: The Oilers have been an offensive juggernaut since becoming a perennial playoff team in 2020. Including a four-goal performance Friday against Pittsburgh, they've scored just 18 times through their eight games. That's 2.25 per contest, a rate that ranks ahead of just San Jose. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins finally netted his first marker of the season Friday, but offseason signee Viktor Arvidsson has yet to find the net. Neither has Zach Hyman, the winger who racked up 54 goals in the 2023-24 regular season and added 16 more in the playoffs. The power play, led by Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, has gone from being the hallmark of the team for the past six seasons to coach Kris Knoblauch toying with the idea of personnel changes. It's all so perplexing. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

## Florida Panthers

A slow start for Carter Verhaeghe: Missing Aleksander Barkov and Matthew Tkachuk for most of the early going — though Tkachuk has since returned — wasn't in the Panthers' plans. The champs have managed to tread water, though. No harm, no foul. Maybe we're a bit surprised that Verhaeghe didn't carry the team a bit more in the meantime; he has one goal and 5 points (just 3 at even strength) in his first nine games. That feels like nitpicking, though. Expect him to find his game. — Sean Gentile

## Los Angeles Kings

The Kings' Jekyll-and-Hyde nature: Their 4-2-2 record is fine, and they're surprisingly sandwiched between Calgary and the usual Pacific Division contender Vegas Golden Knights. And it's early, with only one-tenth of the schedule having been played. But the surprising element of the Kings is how they've been either their usual stingy selves or lit up by a bunch of goals. Toronto and Vegas put six on them in their regulation defeats, and the Ottawa Senators scored eight in their wild overtime shootout. Otherwise, the Kings have given up two or fewer in their other five contests. Not having Drew Doughty in their defense can be a contributing factor. David Rittich has held down the fort in goal, but Darcy Kuemper, who was activated Thursday, should be in a position to start Saturday against the Utah Hockey Club after missing four games. Ditching their 1-3-1 neutral-zone trap and some new personnel have led

to some inconsistency, but the Kings pulled in points across a tough seven-game road slate to open the season. In the end, that's what matters. — Eric Stephens

#### Minnesota Wild

Riding the Gus Bus: Wild general manager Bill Guerin should consider himself lucky he didn't trade Filip Gustavsson last offseason — and many other GMs are probably kicking themselves that they didn't bite. Five starts into his season, Gustavsson might be playing better than he did even two years ago when he finished second in the NHL in save percentage and goals-against average. Not only did he become the 15th goalie in NHL history and the first in Wild history to score a goal, but he has also allowed only seven goals in five starts and is 4-0-1. Gustavsson has the league's best goals-against average (1.40) and second-best save percentage (.952). — Michael Russo

Gus Bus appreciation post  [pic.twitter.com/W1VBNbd50x](https://pic.twitter.com/W1VBNbd50x)

— Minnesota Wild (@mnwild) October 23, 2024

#### Montreal Canadiens

Lane Hutson's ice time: Though he's coming off a difficult game, Hutson's transition to the NHL has been smoother than anyone could have imagined. Through seven games, he leads the Canadiens in time on ice at 23:16 per game, and that's without seeing any time on the top power-play unit. At even strength, he is playing 20:05 per game, which is top 20 in the NHL, more than Moritz Seider gets with the Red Wings or Devon Toews gets with the Avalanche or Noah Dobson gets with the Islanders. And though there have been some defensive issues, they have not been nearly as glaring as everyone thought they would be for a 5-foot-9, 160-pound defenseman. — Arpon Basu

#### Nashville Predators

The overall lackluster play: The Preds finally recovered from the worst start in team history, five games and five regulation losses, with a desperately needed 4-0 win over the Bruins. So maybe that starts things in the other direction. But in the early stages, there isn't one aspect of this team's game that is living up to expectations. Juuse Saros always starts slow, so that's not a giant surprise. But adding Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault and Brady Skjei to a group that did so well in Andrew Brunette's system last season was supposed to be instant fire. — Joe Rexrode

#### New Jersey Devils

Johnathan Kovacevic's emergence: The Devils acquired Kovacevic for a 2026 fourth-round pick this summer, and he has fit in nicely. He was averaging 21:18 of ice time heading into Friday's game, with a goal, 5 points and a plus-3 rating. His workload will likely go down with Luke Hughes and Brett Pesce returning, but the Devils have to be happy with what they've gotten from him so far. — Peter Baugh

#### New York Islanders

Ilya Sorokin at full strength: Sorokin's mysterious offseason back surgery caused him to miss all but a few days of training camp, which made his regular-season debut and play a huge question mark. He has alleviated any concerns. He hasn't just been healthy; he's been excellent. Heading into Friday's game, he had allowed four goals in three starts. Too bad his teammates can't score any goals for him. — Arthur Staple

#### New York Rangers

The third line's brilliance: It's not shocking that the Rangers' third line of Will Cuylle, Filip Chytil and Kaapo Kakko has been good, but the trio has been a force for Peter Laviolette. Each player has at least 5

points, and the Rangers haven't allowed a five-on-five goal with them on the ice through seven games. Chytil missed most of last season with a suspected concussion, and having him healthy and effective has been huge. He can drive play. A third line with scoring abilities makes the Rangers much deeper, and it's a big reason they're off to a 5-1-1 start. — Peter Baugh

#### Ottawa Senators

Their power play: The Senators' power-play conversion rate will eventually go down. But that the Sens rank as high as they do (over 40 percent as of Thursday) and had power-play goals in four consecutive games before Friday night's game against Vegas is a promising sign. The Sens have shown they can move the puck around on the power play, and Jake Sanderson is a huge conduit of that success. Ottawa will probably need to generate more high-danger chances to remain among the league's best, but it at least has a solid head start. — Julian McKenzie

#### Philadelphia Flyers

Jett Luchanko is still on the NHL roster: Two players from the 2024 NHL Draft are on their NHL rosters at the moment: San Jose's Macklin Celebrini, the No. 1 pick, and Luchanko, who was selected at No. 13. Coach John Tortorella has been complimentary of Luchanko's game from the first time he saw him in training camp, consistently praising his speed, maturity and hockey sense. Whether Luchanko goes back to juniors or remains with the Flyers for the season is anyone's guess at the moment. — Kevin Kurz

#### Pittsburgh Penguins

Kevin Hayes is scoring goals: Bottom-six scoring hasn't existed for much of a decade in Pittsburgh. Adding Hayes didn't figure to change that, but he's been very good. Not only has he scored three goals, but Hayes' defensive play has also stood out on a revamped fourth line. He's been good around the net, showing skill and touch, and has been an overall great addition. — Rob Rossi

Kevin Hayes converts on the power play to get the Penguins on the board. 🐧  
[pic.twitter.com/Ym6wWdLeX2](https://pic.twitter.com/Ym6wWdLeX2)

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) October 20, 2024

#### San Jose Sharks

Another sizable winless start to the season: Look, the Sharks weren't going to win a bunch of games. But with a new head coach and a bunch of changes to the roster, they were expected to be much more competitive and get their first win sooner than last season, when they started 0-10-1. It should have been opening night, when they took a three-goal lead against the St. Louis Blues into the third period. A win there would not have conjured up that horrific beginning to 2023-24, but this is still a talent-starved group learning it must play a complete game to emerge victorious. The competitive aspect has mostly been there — for instance, the Sharks played a solid if not strong final 40 minutes in Thursday's loss to the Kings — and this doesn't feel like a team that will allow 331 goals or have a minus-150 goal differential. But a game at Vegas is on tap, followed by one against Utah and a rematch with Los Angeles. Winning isn't proving to be any easier. — Eric Stephens

#### Seattle Kraken

Brandon Montour's presence: If you're watching Kraken games regularly, you know Montour has been all over the ice, in the best possible way, in the early going. The marquee unrestricted free-agent signing was expected to provide a significant boost on the Kraken back end, but he has far exceeded all reasonable expectations in his first month in the Pacific Northwest. The production has been there, but the two-way impact and stylistic fit have made Montour such a good addition to the Kraken. His

presence has given Seattle a dynamic, marauding play-driving presence on the back end on both of its top-four pairs, and the extent to which the Kraken have outshot and out-chanced their opponents with Montour on the ice is incredible. It's early, but Montour looks like he has meaningfully elevated the offensive ceiling of this team. — Thomas Drance

#### St. Louis Blues

Ryan Suter playing on the top pair: Suter, 39, is the second-oldest player in the NHL, only a couple of months younger than Wild goalie Marc-Andre Fleury. He will turn 40 in January and is showing no signs of slowing down. He was bought out of his contract for the second time in his career last summer, and the Blues signed him as a depth defenseman. But he has stepped in for an injured Nick Leddy and is playing in the team's top pair with Colton Parayko. Since taking that assignment, he's averaging more than 24 minutes of ice time per game and is a plus player. — Jeremy Rutherford

#### Tampa Bay Lightning

Brandon Hagel is dominating his minutes: It's not that Hagel needs elite talent to excel. It's just that he hasn't missed a step despite getting bumped off the top line with Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point. Starting the year off the top unit hasn't dimmed his scoring, either: his 4.13 points per 60 pace is the highest of his career. A lot of that is thanks to his outstanding five-on-five play: The Lightning are generating more quality offense in his minutes, and he has one of the best impacts on their expected goal suppression despite shouldering a tough workload against top competition. — Shayna Goldman

#### Toronto Maple Leafs

The play of Anthony Stolarz: Joseph Woll went down to injury the day before the start of the regular season, and it turned out not to matter for the Leafs. That's because Stolarz came out rocking. He gave up two goals or fewer in each of his first five starts, stopping almost 94 percent of the shots he faced. The Leafs signed Stolarz to a two-year contract last summer. They hoped he would be a competent 1B to Woll. He's been more than that, establishing a clear edge on Woll, who returned to the crease Thursday night after missing the first seven games. — Jonas Siegel

#### Utah Hockey Club

Connor Ingram's struggles in goal: There have been several pleasant surprises for Utah that have contributed to its 4-3-1 start. But one troubling sign early on is that the team's No. 1 goaltender hasn't been able to make saves at the rate he did a year ago. Ingram had a breakout season in 2023-24, appearing in 50 games and posting the 10th-best goals saved above expected mark (minimum 30 starts) in the league. This season, he has an ugly .861 save percentage and has been outplayed by backup Karel Vejmelka — to the point there could be a goalie controversy already. Part of the issue is the Hockey Clubbers have been dealing with a pile of key injuries on the back end, but Ingram also simply hasn't been as sharp as we've seen. — James Mirtle

#### Vancouver Canucks

Kevin Lankinen's emergence: Signed toward the end of Canucks camp after a month of negotiation, Lankinen has quickly emerged as the club's first-choice starting goaltender during Thatcher Demko's protracted, indefinite absence. Lankinen has backstopped the Canucks to a 3-1-2 record with a ridiculous five-on-five save percentage in the .950s. His work in the blue paint has helped Vancouver pad and hold leads, which has been vital, as the Canucks have been a bit slow to retrieve their trademark lockdown defensive game from last season. — Thomas Drance

KEVIN LANKINEN 🤖 [pic.twitter.com/T8HaoBOWK](https://pic.twitter.com/T8HaoBOWK)

— Vancouver Canucks (@Canucks) October 12, 2024

#### Vegas Golden Knights

The offensive explosion: After losing the franchise's all-time leading goal scorer, Jonathan Marchessault, and key forwards Chandler Stephenson and William Carrier over the summer, it looked like the Golden Knights would have to win with defense in 2024-25. Through the first few weeks, that hasn't been the case. Heading into Friday night's game against the Senators, Vegas is the fifth-highest-scoring team in the NHL with 4.14 goals per game and has scored fewer than three goals in a game only once. The Golden Knights have a sky-high shooting percentage of 15.4, which leads the league and would be the highest since 1991, so regression is coming, but so far the team has had no issues putting pucks in the net. — Jesse Granger

#### Washington Capitals

Alex Ovechkin's defensive results: The Caps were always likely to show improvement as a five-on-five team this season versus last, but they've gotten more than they could've bargained for while Ovechkin is on the ice. After years of decline as an all-around five-on-five player, Ovechkin has sparkling goal-share numbers — over 63 percent, actual and expected — and strong defensive numbers. Opponents are producing 2.07 expected goals per 60 with him on the ice, a number he hasn't sniffed for a full decade. — Sean Gentile

#### Winnipeg Jets

The defense has been just as good: No, the Jets haven't played Stanley Cup contender after Stanley Cup contender to start the season, and the one "elite" team they did play, Edmonton, has had an awful start to its year. But I expected more growing pains from Scott Arniel's Jets — I still do when the schedule ramps up. Instead, Neal Pionk has been much better, Dylan Samberg has been very good, and the team's five-on-five play hasn't suffered under a new coach. The goaltending is great, the team has stayed disciplined, and Winnipeg has given up the fewest goals in the NHL again early in 2024-25. — Murat Ates



## The Athletic / Adam Johnson manslaughter case: Explaining the legal delays

**By Tom Burrows- October 28, 2024**

It's almost one year since Nottingham Panthers ice hockey player Adam Johnson died after he was cut in the neck by a skate worn by an opponent.

His death, which occurred on October 28 last year in a cup match against the Sheffield Steelers at the city's Utilita Arena in front of 8,000 spectators, left the ice hockey world in shock and prompted changes around the sport's safety measures, specifically on the use of neck guards.

But while the sport has tried to move on while honouring Johnson's memory, in Britain, the legal case surrounding the 29-year-old's death has made little progress.

On November 14, a man was arrested on suspicion of manslaughter and then bailed by South Yorkshire Police, who did not name him. Since then, his bail has been extended on five separate occasions by police, but he has not been charged with any offence.

As the anniversary of Johnson's death draws near, where exactly has the case got to? What could be the reason for such delays? And when might we expect a resolution?

What happened after the initial arrest?

After his initial arrest on November 14, the unnamed man — in the UK, those arrested are not normally named until they are charged — was released on police bail until February.

Speaking to The Athletic at the time, South Yorkshire Police said the man had to remain in the United Kingdom.

In a statement issued on November 15, detective chief superintendent Becs Horsfall explained the complex nature of the case and how the force had been "speaking to highly specialised experts in their field" to aid their investigation.

Meanwhile, an inquest into Johnson's death was opened on November 3 but suspended on January 26 by Sheffield coroner Tanyka Rawden as the police investigation was still active.

She said that suspension would last until July unless South Yorkshire Police decided they would not charge the man.

She did, however, call for all ice hockey players to wear neck guards in a report she wrote on the prevention of future deaths.

In the wake of the tragedy, the English Ice Hockey Association (all levels of ice hockey in the United Kingdom below the top league) made use of neck guards mandatory from January 1, 2024. The International Ice Hockey Federation (which oversees tournaments, including at the Olympics) and the Elite League (the UK's top flight) followed suit.

However, as The Athletic reported in December 2023, that does not apply to the NHL.

What came next?

Since then, the man arrested has been bailed five times by South Yorkshire Police: on February 9, April 25, May 14, June 26 and September 2. His current bail extends until November 11.

On the last bail announcement, a spokesperson for South Yorkshire Police said: "Our investigation is ongoing and our thoughts remain with Adam's family."

What could be the cause of delays? Are they common in cases of this nature?

This case is particularly unusual.

It is rare for the British police and legal authorities to get involved in sporting matters — Matt Slater looked at this question in detail for *The Athletic* in January — and that is likely to be one of the reasons for the continual delays.

“This is an unusual set of circumstances,” Patrick Maguire, a partner and head of the London office of law firm Horwich Cohen Coghlan, told *The Athletic*. “It’s not something the police will be used to dealing with and given the unusual nature of the circumstances, I suspect as part of their investigation they are seeking some sort of expert evidence on whether the incident which resulted in Adam’s death was reckless to a criminal standard.

“So I suspect that is causing the delay because getting that expert evidence won’t be straightforward.”

According to Maguire, these experts would involve people in the field of ice hockey, such as a former referee, those involved on the rules committee or someone connected to English ice hockey’s governing body.

Mark Jones, a professor of sports law at Manchester Metropolitan University, agreed with Maguire’s assessment.

“It’s a really unusual case in just about every aspect,” Jones told *The Athletic*. “The difficulty here is trying to actually find anything that could prove this beyond reasonable doubt.

“My assumption is the police are simply finding it almost impossible to get a clear-cut answer on any of this and can’t get anything approaching consistency from the experts.”

Hannah Kent, a senior associate in the dispute resolution team at Onside Law, told *The Athletic* it’s very uncommon to see cases like this within a sporting context.

“It’s quite extreme and obviously a very tragic case that someone’s actually passed away as a result of something that’s happened on the ice,” she said. “It will be a question (for the police) of reviewing footage, interpreting what happened, speaking to witnesses and consulting experts — all of that can take time. There are lots of different moving parts.”

“It is unusual for someone to be bailed on this many occasions, but that has to be balanced with the complexity of the case,” Adam Pendlebury, a senior lecturer in law at Edge Hill University, told *The Athletic*. “The key point will be around the consent (that by playing sport, participants ‘implicitly consent’ to a certain level of risk) but to understand that, you have to understand the culture of ice hockey.

“What is the point where it goes beyond consent to the point it becomes criminal?”

What is the process being followed?

Once the police have finished their investigation, they will decide whether there is sufficient evidence to hand it over to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

As a death is involved, it will normally be down to the CPS to decide whether to charge and bring a prosecution. They will look at two things — first, whether there is sufficient evidence for there to be a realistic prospect of success and, second, if the prosecution is in the public interest.

“I imagine that the public interest will be quite a big factor they will need to think through because of how rare it is in sport that something like this happens,” Kent said.

Can the arrested man be rebailed indefinitely?

No. In general, an arrested person can be bailed for three-month periods by the police for up to nine months. This can be extended to 12 months if police make an application to a magistrates' court.

Beyond that, the court can make an order for a further extension to bail.

When is a resolution most likely?

"There's no time limit on it," Maguire said. "Some of the cases that I've been involved in, non-sports related but involving fatalities, have taken three to four years to get to a final trial. And obviously they won't be able to be in a position to consider whether to pursue the manslaughter charge until such time as all the evidence is available and the investigation has been completed.

"My experience is the more complex the circumstances, the longer the criminal proceedings take to run their course."

Kent agrees a definite end date is impossible to pin down and makes the point that the UK legal system is currently facing a huge backlog of cases as a legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic. The UK's National Audit Office said in May 2024 that there were 67,573 Crown Court cases waiting to be heard.

"Without being involved in the investigation, you just can't say when, or even if, the charge will come," Kent added. "The criminal justice system is pretty much on its knees at the moment in terms of the courts so, if there is a charge, it would likely then take some time before a trial would take place."

## ESPN / NHL Power Rankings: 1-32 poll, early surprises for each team

By Arda Ocal- October 26, 2024

### Reactions

We are just over two weeks into the NHL season. Frozen Frenzy is in the books, and in the distance is the triumphant return of best-on-best international hockey at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

There's a lot of season left, but there is enough of a sample size to identify the biggest surprises of the season for all 32 teams, presented here along with an updated set of Power Rankings.

How we rank: A panel of ESPN hockey commentators, analysts, reporters and editors sends in a 1-32 poll based on the games through Wednesday, which generates our master list here.

Note: Previous ranking for each team refers to the previous edition, Published Oct. 19. Points percentages are through Thursday's games.

#### 1. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 2

Points percentage: 78.57%

Biggest surprise: Alexis is (still) on fire. The French word for brakes is freins, but it's been all gas and no freins for Alexis Lafreniere, who continues to build off of his 14 points in 16 playoff games. It's not easy being a No. 1 pick, because many will demand you be great now. It's been a marathon, not a sprint, for the Quebec native, and the improvements are tangible. You have to wonder how much Team Canada consideration he will get for February's 4 Nations Face-Off.

Next seven days: vs. ANA (Oct. 26), @ WSH (Oct. 29)

#### 2. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 6

Points percentage: 100.00%

Biggest surprise: A perfect start. The Jets have been absolutely perfect: 7-0-0, with a plus-18 goal differential, and six players on or above a point-per-game rate out of the gates. This is the kind of dream start you remember if you fall into a slump later in the season and are still top of your division. The Central looked like a top-heavy slugfest with surprise potential before the season started, and the biggest positive surprise thus far has been Winnipeg.

Next seven days: @ CGY (Oct. 26), vs. TOR (Oct. 28), @ DET (Oct. 30)

#### 3. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 1

Points percentage: 75.00%

Biggest surprise: Logan Stankoven's carry-over rookie campaign. The threshold for an NHL player to remain at "rookie" status is 25 games. Logan Stankoven played 24 last season for Dallas, which means he's still eligible to win the Calder Trophy this season. Stankoven impressed in those 24 regular-season and 19 postseason appearances, where he averaged just over 16 minutes of ice time per game. Now, he

kicked off his official rookie season with seven assists through seven games. His energetic, fearless style has earned him top-line minutes.

Next seven days: vs. CHI (Oct. 26)

#### 4. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 12

Points percentage: 85.71%

Biggest surprise: A 5-0-2 start. The Wild are kicking off Marc-Andre Fleury's final NHL season off properly, as one of four teams without a regulation loss in the early going. Kirill Kaprizov has 13 points through seven games, and Mats Zuccarello has four goals. Maybe the Wild and Preds traded preseason projection vibes?

Next seven days: @ PHI (Oct. 26), @ PIT (Oct. 29)

#### 5. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 14

Points percentage: 78.57%

Biggest surprise: Being in first place after seven games. The Flames weren't projected to be a playoff-contending team this season, but they are off to a scorching start. They torched Edmonton in the Battle of Alberta. Defenseman Rasmus Andersson leads the team with eight points, while Andersson, Jonathan Huberdeau and Nazem Kadri each have three goals.

Next seven days: vs. WPG (Oct. 26), @ VGK (Oct. 28), @ UTA (Oct. 30)

#### 6. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 9

Points percentage: 57.14%

Biggest surprise: Guentzel picking up where Stamkos left off. Look, nobody is going to replace Steven Stamkos and his legacy with the Lightning and the city of Tampa. That guy is going straight to the Hall of Fame, having his number retired at Amalie Arena and getting a statue outside. We all know that. But looking at the first few games of this season, Bolts fans can't help but get excited seeing Jake Guentzel fit right in with Brayden Point and Nikita Kucherov, scoring seven points in six games.

Next seven days: vs. WSH (Oct. 26), vs. NSH (Oct. 28), @ COL (Oct. 30)

#### 7. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 3

Points percentage: 57.14%

Biggest surprise: Aside from a couple blips, the goaltending looks ... good? Leafs fans have long desired a long-term solution as the No. 1 goalie to help lead the Leafs to the promised land. After the departure of Ilya Samsonov, Joseph Woll was thought to be the guy to get that chance -- he looked terrific in the postseason when healthy. And there's the rub: He has a history of injuries.

Enter Anthony Stolarz, who has allowed two goals or fewer in each start this season, building his case to be the No. 1 (or at the very least, 1B in a rotation). Dennis Hildeby has also looked sharp when he has been tapped (aside from the 6-2 trouncing at the hands of the Blue Jackets). With Woll returning from

injury, the prospects look good for the Leafs in the nets (though Thursday's outing against St. Louis wasn't great for Woll).

Next seven days: @ BOS (Oct. 26), @ WPG (Oct. 28), vs. SEA (Oct. 31)

#### 8. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 7

Points percentage: 64.29%

Biggest surprise: Howdy Howden. Brett Howden enters his fourth season as a member of the Golden Knights on a contract year, and started very strong; with three goals through seven games, he's well on his way to hitting double digits for the first time in his career. A two-way player with a physical style, he has earned top-six minutes on the second line alongside Tomas Hertl and Pavel Dorofeyev, providing another scoring option for a team that lost a few of them to free agency.

Next seven days: vs. OTT (Oct. 25), vs. SJ (Oct. 26), vs. CGY (Oct. 28), @ LA (Oct. 30)

#### 9. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 5

Points percentage: 55.00%

Biggest surprise: Casey's impressive start. Seamus Casey built himself quite a name among Devils fans, scoring three goals in eight games with the club. Head coach Sheldon Keefe has said he's impressed with the 2022 second-round pick, but it's important for Casey to round out his game in the AHL. With Luke Hughes and Brett Pesce returning to the lineup on Thursday, the blue line is certainly crowded long term.

Next seven days: vs. NYI (Oct. 25), vs. ANA (Oct. 27), @ VAN (Oct. 30)

#### 10. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 23

Points percentage: 83.33%

Biggest surprise: Picking up where they left off. The Caps are 5-1 to start the season. Dylan Strome has nine points. Tom Wilson has five goals. Of course everyone is watching this team to see when Alex Ovechkin eclipses Wayne Gretzky's career goal-scoring mark, but this team is looking to make it back to the playoffs after last season's surprise appearance.

Next seven days: @ TB (Oct. 26), vs. NYR (Oct. 29), vs. MTL (Oct. 31)

#### 11. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 4

Points percentage: 61.11%

Biggest (non-)surprise: Paul Maurice signs on the dotted line. One of the greatest moments in NHL history was when Paul Maurice, mid-interview with ESPN's Emily Kaplan, was tapped on the shoulder to receive the Stanley Cup. He looked at it, talked to it, then raised it with the biggest look of 29 years' worth of relief you could possibly have. You win the Cup, people tend to want to keep you around, as the Panthers did in inking Maurice to a contract extension this week.

Next seven days: @ NYI (Oct. 26), @ BUF (Oct. 28)

#### 12. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 11

Points percentage: 66.67%

Biggest surprise: A very visible Ghost Bear. Shayne Gostisbehere returned to the Hurricanes from the Red Wings this offseason, and has contributed early, including a four-game goal streak, three of which came on the power play. The Hurricanes pulled off the only comeback of two or more goals during Frozen Frenzy night, nullifying Connor McDavid's two goals to win it in overtime. Gostisbehere had a goal and a helper in the effort.

Next seven days: @ SEA (Oct. 26), @ VAN (Oct. 28), vs. BOS (Oct. 31)

### 13. Utah Hockey Club

Previous ranking: 13

Points percentage: 56.25%

Biggest surprise: They've been terrific in a season of firsts. You couldn't write a better script for the opening game; immaculate vibes, first goal in franchise history scored by Dylan Guenther, who just signed a big contract, and the second goal by new captain Clayton Keller. Can the magic last all season and result in a playoff berth?

Next seven days: @ LA (Oct. 26), vs. SJ (Oct. 28), vs. CGY (Oct. 30)

### 14. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 16

Points percentage: 62.50%

Biggest surprise: Brandt Clarke. In last week's power rankings focusing on fantasy pickups for each team, Clarke was the choice for Los Angeles. The 21-year-old is logging big and important minutes, particularly in Drew Doughty's spot on the Kings' power play. Clarke picked up five assists through his first eight games of the season.

Next seven days: vs. UTA (Oct. 26), @ SJ (Oct. 29), vs. VGK (Oct. 30)

### 15. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 20

Points percentage: 66.67%

Biggest surprise: The power play. The Sens are second in the league, going 40.9% with the man advantage thus far, and tied for the league lead with nine power-play goals. Jake Sanderson has been dynamite with the man advantage, potting six of his seven points on the power play.

Next seven days: @ VGK (Oct. 25), @ COL (Oct. 27), vs. STL (Oct. 29)

### 16. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 19

Points percentage: 66.67%

Biggest surprise: Elias Pettersson's slow start. Pettersson has exceeded 30 goals in the past three seasons, tallying 102 points two seasons ago. So having just three assists through six games doesn't look very good, especially when he signed a massive deal just months ago. Is he ready to turn the corner?

Next seven days: vs. PIT (Oct. 26), vs. CAR (Oct. 28), vs. NJ (Oct. 30)

#### 17. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 8

Points percentage: 43.75%

Biggest surprise: Bench boss bellows at Brad. In the third period of Boston's 2-1 defeat against Utah on Oct. 19, Bruins coach Jim Montgomery was seen yelling at captain Brad Marchand on the bench following an offensive zone turnover, and also shoved the captain. Montgomery enters his third season coaching the B's, with both postseasons resulting in losses to the Panthers, and some wonder if he's on the hot seat.

For what it's worth, Marchand downplayed the incident to reporters on Thursday: "It's unfortunate how coaches are scrutinized over things like that. There's a lack of accountability nowadays because people can't handle the heat. You make a mistake like that, you deserve to hear about it."

Next seven days: vs. TOR (Oct. 26), vs. PHI (Oct. 29), @ CAR (Oct. 31)

#### 18. Seattle Kraken

Previous ranking: 22

Points percentage: 56.25%

Biggest surprise: An offensive surge. In Seattle's inaugural season, the team finished bottom five in goals (213). In its second, the Kraken scored a lot more, netting out in the top five (289). They jumped 40 points in the standings and made the playoffs. Last season, they were back in the bottom five (214) and well outside the postseason mix. So far this season, they sit right around the middle, 13th, with 23 goals through seven games. Top-liners Jared McCann and Jordan Eberle have a combined nine of those tallies, as the team pushes to get back in the playoffs.

Next seven days: vs. CAR (Oct. 26), @ MTL (Oct. 29), @ TOR (Oct. 31)

#### 19. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 17

Points percentage: 50.00%

Biggest surprise: The goaltending. The Avs started the season 0-4, and in all four of those games, their opponents scored five or more goals. They've won three straight since, averaging two goals against per game. Through five games, Alexandar Georgiev has a .810 save percentage and a 1-3 record. Justus Annunen is 2-1 with a .900 save percentage. Kaapo Kahkonen is on a conditioning assignment in the AHL, having been claimed off waivers. This team has the talent to outscore their problems on many nights (Cale Makar is on pace for 114 points), but stability between the pipes is essential if the Avs want to be a serious contender.

Next seven days: vs. OTT (Oct. 27), vs. CHI (Oct. 28), vs. TB (Oct. 30)

#### 20. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 24

Points percentage: 62.50%

Biggest surprise: Resilience. The Blues spoiled Macklin Celebrini's NHL debut; the Sharks were up 4-1 going into the third before the Blues scored three unanswered goals to send it to overtime, where



captain Brayden Schenn called game. Every game but two so far has been a one-goal game, and St. Louis has won more than it has lost.

Next seven days: @ MTL (Oct. 26), @ OTT (Oct. 29), @ PHI (Oct. 31)

#### 21. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 10

Points percentage: 35.71%

Biggest surprise: The Mirror. Mirror, mirror on the wall ... who's the most underachieving team of all? So far this season it's Edmonton, which is loathing the mention of déjà vu as much as Connor McDavid despises ketchup. Time for Edmonton to, ahem, dig in and collect some wins because this team, once again, is in Cup-or-bust mode.

Next seven days: vs. PIT (Oct. 25), @ DET (Oct. 27), @ CBJ (Oct. 28), @ NSH (Oct. 31)

#### 22. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 18

Points percentage: 50.00%

Biggest surprise: Shutout losses. Through six games, the Islanders have been shut out three times -- and two of those games were 1-0 losses. The Isles have outshot opponents (in particular the Red Wings, where the shot total was 30-11) outchanced them, and Ilya Sorokin has been great in goal. The team just isn't scoring. Anthony Duclair is injured, and nobody has more than two goals this season (Mathew Barzal has just one).

Next seven days: @ NJ (Oct. 25), vs. FLA (Oct. 26), vs. ANA (Oct. 29), @ CBJ (Oct. 30)

#### 23. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 15

Points percentage: 43.75%

Biggest surprise: How much we love nostalgia. Years ago, I went to a Bon Jovi concert. After playing a couple songs from their latest album, Jon Bon Jovi bellowed, "Now we'll play your favorites ... the hits, only hits and nothing but the hits!" That sent the crowd into a frenzy. Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin aren't on a retirement tour, but they sure are hitting lofty milestones (with Sid recently crossing 1,600 points and Geno 500 goals), and it feels as nostalgic to hockey fans as "Livin' On A Prayer."

Next seven days: @ EDM (Oct. 25), @ VAN (Oct. 26), vs. MIN (Oct. 29), vs. ANA (Oct. 31)

#### 24. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 26

Points percentage: 43.75%

Biggest surprise: Ryan McLeod. Since joining the swords in the offseason from Edmonton, McLeod has seemed to fit right in, tied for second in goals on a team that is seventh in the league in scoring. Not the best start for the team in general -- including two losses overseas to begin the campaign -- but the young core absolutely exists here for a playoff push. McLeod provides quality depth in the middle.

Next seven days: vs. DET (Oct. 26), vs. FLA (Oct. 28)

#### 25. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 29

Points percentage: 58.33%

Biggest surprise: Shots for everybody! Maybe this shouldn't be a major surprise, because this has been a trend for the Ducks for the past few seasons. They topped the league two years ago at 35.8 shots allowed per game, and this season, they sit behind only Montreal with 34.2. Despite that onslaught, Lukas Dostal has been solid in John Gibson's absence, going 2-1-1 with a .930 save percentage.

Next seven days: @ NYR (Oct. 26), @ NJ (Oct. 27), @ NYI (Oct. 29), @ PIT (Oct. 31)

#### 26. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 27

Points percentage: 57.14%

Biggest surprise: Winning a game with 11 shots on goal. Okay, this one has a little recency bias as I'm writing this less than 24 hours after Frozen Frenzy, but it will always be bonkers to me when a team logs 11 shots and wins a game. That's tied for fifth-fewest shots in a win in NHL history. Two teams (the Sharks in 1998, Maple Leafs in 1999) needed only nine shots to get the W. Alex Lyon could have also been a pick here, because he's on a great stretch (two goals against facing 84 shots in his past three games).

Next seven days: @ BUF (Oct. 26), vs. EDM (Oct. 27), vs. WPG (Oct. 30)

#### 27. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 30

Points percentage: 50.00

Biggest surprise: Scoring despite injuries. Columbus is 10th in the league in scoring, with 24 goals in a 3-3-0 start. The thing is, their usual offensive contributors are injured: captain Boone Jenner could miss six months due to shoulder surgery, Dmitri Voronkov was placed on IR after a preseason game and Kent Johnson is also sidelined. But the Blue Jackets keep finding ways to score, including a 6-2 thumping of Toronto. Sean Monahan, Mathieu Olivier, Kirill Marchenko and Yegor Chinakhov each have three goals through six games.

Next seven days: @ NSH (Oct. 26), vs. EDM (Oct. 28), vs. NYI (Oct. 30)

#### 28. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 21

Points percentage: 16.67%

Biggest surprise: Cold start after hot summer of spending. The Preds have been surprising since the offseason started. They signed Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault among others, making them the second-oldest team in the NHL, with an average age of 30.2. But they haven't been scoring, which has led to struggles; they started 0-5 before breaking out in a 4-0 win over the Bruins this week.

Next seven days: @ CHI (Oct. 25), vs. CBJ (Oct. 26), @ TB (Oct. 28), vs. EDM (Oct. 31)

#### 29. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 31

Points percentage: 35.71%

Biggest surprise: Turbo boost. Welcome back, Teuvo Teravainen. The 30-year-old began his NHL career as a Blackhawk before spending eight seasons with Carolina and now returning to Chicago. He's tied with Seth Jones and Connor Bedard atop the Hawks' scoring leaderboard and is tied with captain Nick Foligno with three goals. The Teravainen-Bedard tandem has clicked early; this looks to be a great fit through the early going.

Next seven days: vs. NSH (Oct. 25), @ DAL (Oct. 26), @ COL (Oct. 28), @ SJ (Oct. 31)

30. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 28

Points percentage: 35.71%

Biggest surprise: Lane Hutson. The Habs might not be a playoff team this season, but boy are they fun to watch. It seems like every game there is a jump-out-of-your-seat kind of moment being produced by one of their dazzling young players. It might not be as much of a surprise coming from a Cole Caufield or Nick Suzuki, but Lane Hutson has provided many of those. The analytics aren't kind to him, but coach Martin St. Louis doesn't seem fazed thus far. He is on the way to being a long-term defensive superstar for the Habs.

Next seven days: vs. STL (Oct. 26), @ PHI (Oct. 27), vs. SEA (Oct. 29), @ WSH (Oct. 31)

31. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 25

Points percentage: 21.43%

Biggest surprise: Matvei-ry good. Matvei Michkov has arrived, and Flyers fans are loving it -- especially his team-leading seven points through seven games. He has incredible puck handling, vision and shooting, and is playing top-line minutes. All of his three goals thus far have been on the power play; imagine what he will be once he unlocks his game at 5-on-5.

Next seven days: vs. MIN (Oct. 26), vs. MTL (Oct. 27), @ BOS (Oct. 29), vs. STL (Oct. 31)

32. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 32

Points percentage: 12.50%

Biggest surprise: Penalties. The Sharks are the last winless team in the NHL -- and Macklin Celebrini is out of the lineup due to injury -- but one glaring stat is that the Sharks have given up six power-play opportunities in three of their past four games. Cody Ceci mentioned it after the Sharks 3-1 loss to the Ducks on Tuesday: "Maybe stay off the refs a little bit too. Maybe they'll start to call a little more in our favor." Taking fewer trips to the sin bin may not be a cure-all, but it's a start.

Next seven days: @ VGK (Oct. 26), @ UTA (Oct. 28), vs. LA (Oct. 29), vs. CHI (Oct. 31)