



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
December 11-13, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets

- PAGE 02: The Columbus Dispatch: Jet Greaves shines for Columbus Blue Jackets in OT loss to Washington Capitals
- PAGE 03: The Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets goaltending a focus after OT loss to Washington Capitals: takeaways
- PAGE 05: The Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets seek spark in net with Jet Greaves recall
- PAGE 07: The Columbus Dispatch: Columbus Blue Jackets outworked in loss to Philadelphia Flyers: 3 takeaways
- PAGE 09: The Athletic: Is Jet Greaves laying claim to the Blue Jackets' goaltending job?
- PAGE 11: The Athletic: Fatigued Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins gets a break, cedes starter's net to Jet Greaves
- PAGE 13: The Athletic: Up-and-down Blue Jackets outworked, outplayed by Flyers: 'We got what we deserved
- PAGE 15: The Hockey Writers: Blue Jackets' Sillinger Embraces Community By Hosting Q&A With Fans

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/ Websites

- PAGE 17: ESPN: 2024-25 NHL trade tiers Big Board: Who could be on the move?
- PAGE 25: ESPN: NHL Awards WATCH: Who's leading for Hart, Norris, Calder?
- PAGE 31: Sports Illustrated: Blue Jackets, Jets Defensemen Staking Claim in Norris Trophy Race

[The Columbus Dispatch / Jet Greaves shines for Columbus Blue Jackets in OT loss to Washington Capitals](#)

By Brian Hedger – December 13, 2024

It was another ugly hockey game Thursday night at Nationwide Arena, but the Blue Jackets stayed competitive enough to get a point against the Washington Capitals.

Despite being outshot and struggling to possess the puck for a second straight game — issues that derailed them Tuesday against the Philadelphia Flyers — the Jackets did just enough against the Capitals to keep it tight in a 2-1 overtime loss.

They also got a sterling performance from rookie goalie Jet Greaves, who made 35 saves against the Metropolitan Division's leading team a day after being recalled from AHL Cleveland. Greaves, who bailed the Jackets out multiple times, was a driving force in getting the game to OT for a standings point in a game they easily could've lost in regulation.

"Obviously, it's a team game but I'd argue that he won a point for us," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "For us to get a point in that game, yeah, we're fortunate."

The Capitals (20-6-2) benefited from their own outstanding goaltending performance after Charlie Lindgren stopped 32 of 33 shots for the win. Washington also outshot the Blue Jackets (12-14-3) by a 37-33 margin, winning Aliaksei Protas' second goal of the game scored 2:23 into OT.

Protas also tied it 1-1 just 31 seconds into the third period, one-timing a pass from former Blue Jackets center Pierre-Luc Dubois past Greaves. His tally in OT clanked off the left post and into the net off a wrister from the high slot.

"I saw it a little bit," Greaves said. "I'd like to have that one for the guys, but it is what it is. There were a lot of positives that I'll take going forward. There's also some things I'll look at, try to learn from and get better at moving forward."

Zach Werenski's 10th goal of the season gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead at 14:12 of the second period, capping a power-play with a laser from the high slot. It stayed that score after two periods, but the Capitals tied it quickly on Protas' goal to start the third.

His latest daggers against the Blue Jackets were the fourth and fifth goals of his career against Columbus in just nine games. They were also the 10th and 11th points of his career against the Blue Jackets, lifting the Capitals to their 10th straight road victory.

"That's a tough one," Werenski said. "You're up 1-0 going into the third, you'd like to hold that lead as long as you can. They come out kind of buzzing on that first shift, score a goal to tie it up ... but then I even felt we had some chances in the rest of the period there in the third to take back the lead. We didn't. It would've been nice to play that third period out up 1-0 for a little bit longer."

[The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets goaltending a focus after OT loss to Washington Capitals: takeaways](#)

By Brian Hedger – December 13, 2024

Jet Greaves didn't have a definitive answer.

After helping the Blue Jackets get a point Thursday at Nationwide Arena with 35 saves in a 2-1 overtime loss to the Washington Capitals, the rookie goalie was stumped when asked if he knew where he'd spend Friday — Columbus or back in Cleveland with the AHL's Monsters?

"We'll see," he said, smiling. "Hopefully here."

A short while later, Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason provided a slightly more informative answer after watching Greaves make numerous key saves against the Metropolitan Division's leading team.

"He's earned the right to be here," Evason said. "He's earned it ... and he earned it again tonight."

Here are the game's takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets may give Jet Greaves clearance to take off

Evason's closing comments on Greaves after the game were vague but telling.

Saying he's "earned the right to be here," didn't provide a timeframe on how long Greaves' latest NHL stint might last, address how far he could climb up the depth chart or explain all the circumstances that prompted the rookie's surprising recall Wednesday.

All that's been said thus far, publicly, is that Greaves' excellence in the AHL was a factor along with something else that happened in Columbus — which neither Evason nor Don Waddell, the Jackets' president of hockey operations/general manager, care to discuss.

Waddell told the Dispatch that No. 1 goalie Elvis Merzlikins had "played a lot and looked tired," in the Jackets' sluggish 5-3 loss Tuesday to the Philadelphia Flyers, and Greaves was a deserving relief option.

Evason, meanwhile, declined to say whether Greaves can turn this opportunity into a stretch as the Blue Jackets' new No. 1 option. Stay tuned. Friday's practice was called off, so Evason likely won't reveal his starter against the Anaheim Ducks until Saturday at Nationwide Arena.

Columbus Blue Jackets sticking with three goalies ... for now

The main questions about the Blue Jackets' goaltending situation are now about how long they'll carry three NHL goalies and how they'd return to two if needed. Greaves' spot was created by adding Yegor Chinakhov (upper body) to injured reserve, which left them with a forward shortage after Justin Danforth (lower body) also missed the Washington game.

Will the Jackets eventually return Greaves to Cleveland, since he doesn't require NHL waivers for that move? Will the front office keep him in Columbus and risk losing backup Daniil Tarasov — a healthy scratch Thursday — via waivers? How will Greaves' latest NHL tryout impact Merzlikins, who's making \$5.4 million per season and has two additional years left?

Also, could Greaves actually render Merzlikins a well-paid NHL backup?

Those are all questions the Blue Jackets must answer at some point, but all we currently know is that Greaves is sticking around longer. His start against the Capitals felt like an audition, which the undersized rookie with a quick catching glove crushed.

"I don't think he cares," Evason said. "He (doesn't) care. He's a perfect example of not caring about who, where or when you play. You just play, and he just goes about his business. There's nothing flashy. It's just simple, sound and effective. So, yeah, that was impressive."

Care to read between the lines there?

Greaves, meanwhile, is saying all the right things during a potentially awkward situation. “My attention is where my feet are,” he said. “(It’s) just kind of ‘one day at a time’ and control what I can control ... and we’ll see what happens (Friday).”

Columbus Blue Jackets struggle to 'play north' again

After Evason described his team’s approach Tuesday against the Flyers as “south and soft,” the Blue Jackets wanted to open strong against the Capitals.

Instead, they spent much of the first period, and game, chasing the puck around while defending inside their own zone. The Blue Jackets were outshot 11-6 in the first, 37-33 in the game and relied heavily on Greaves to bail them out. He did on all but two occasions against Aliaksei Protas, who won the game in OT, but that’s not how Evason wants the Jackets to play. They still didn’t get the puck moving north enough, struggled to forecheck and only closed the gap in shots thanks to five power plays.

The good news was drawing those penalties, but they've hit a rut after lighting up the scoreboard with goals galore through the first quarter of the season.

“Yeah, that’s fair,” Evason said. “We’re struggling with that a little bit too, and I guess maybe it happens, right? We’re fortunate to get a point. We’re going to take that. The negative is we didn’t get two, but the positive is we did get one. We know that our game is in there. It’s just got to be brought out, and it’s our job as coaches to get it out of them.”

Columbus Blue Jackets' penalty-kill finally ended a frustrating streak

Another positive for the Blue Jackets was the end of a dubious streak.

They didn’t allow a power-play goal to the Capitals, which ended a 14-game slide in which they had. Greaves helped end it, but the biggest reason was the Blue Jackets staying disciplined enough to give up just one power play. That’s not exactly going 5-for-5 on PKs, but it could spark a turnaround.

Prior to the streak, the Blue Jackets ranked 12th in the NHL in penalty-killing at 82.5% from the season’s start through Nov. 10 in Anaheim. The streak began two days later in Seattle and continued for more than a month. During the slide, the Jackets’ PK success was just 62.8%, which sent their season percentage hurtling off a statistical cliff at 71.4% (30th in the league).

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Jake Christiansen (2) hits Washington Capitals center Aliaksei Protas (21) during the second period of the NHL hockey game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus on Dec. 12, 2024.

According to Hockey-Reference, the Blue Jackets would've become one of only 15 teams in NHL history to have a streak last 15 games had they allowed another power-play goal. Ending it at 14 made them one of just 26 teams in league history to have one last that long.

The New Jersey Devils set the record at 22 in 1985-86, while the most recent before the Blue Jackets to have one span at least 14 games were the Edmonton Oilers in 2003-04.

[The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets seek spark in net with Jet Greaves recall](#)

By Brian Hedger – December 12, 2024

Jet Greaves is back with the Blue Jackets.

This time, however, it's not an emergency recall from the AHL's Cleveland Monsters and isn't due to injuries or illness sidelining NHL goalies Elvis Merzlikins or Daniil Tarasov. It's about Greaves' play with the Monsters, plus the other two scuffling.

Greaves, 23, joined Merzlikins and Tarasov for practice Wednesday at Nationwide Arena and will start Thursday against the Washington Capitals — the Metropolitan Division's surprising leaders.

"Earned," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said of Greaves being recalled. "(You can) see the record, I'm sure, down there. He's earned the right to be here. That's why he's here."

Greaves, an NHL rookie who's played 10 games for the Blue Jackets over the past two seasons, has backstopped Cleveland to the top of the AHL North Division. He's 8-4-2 with a 3.21 goals-against average and .902 save percentage in 15 appearances, including 7-1-0 with a 2.37 GAA and .927 save percentage in November that made Greaves the AHL's Goaltender of the Month.

Hastily returning to the Blue Jackets, however, isn't entirely about Greaves. It's also tied to the ongoing struggles of Merzlikins and Tarasov.

"When you call a guy up, there's something that's happened, right?" Evason said. "It's earned, sure, but there's an opportunity for (Greaves) that's been created somehow. (You) can read whatever you want into it. I'm not going to get into all of that, but, yeah, he's played extremely well down there."

Merzlikins, who has two years left on a contract that carries a \$5.4 million charge against the NHL's annual salary cap, took a tough loss Tuesday against the Philadelphia Flyers. The Blue Jackets performed poorly as a team, but Merzlikins allowed five goals on 25 shots.

Merzlikins' 3.06 GAA ranks 39th among NHL goaltenders with at least 10 games this season, while his .888 save percentage ranks 40th within that same filter. He's also 9-8-2 in 19 games as the Jackets' No. 1 goalie, which is a role he's handled while Tarasov struggles in a backup role.

Tarasov is 3-5-1 with a 4.26 GAA and .857 save percentage in nine games, including three times allowing five or more goals in a game. The Blue Jackets' play in the neutral and defensive zones has, at times, put both goalies into difficult spots, and their struggles killing penalties has contributed to both goalies' issues. Still, in comparison to the rest of the NHL, the goaltending needs to improve for the Blue Jackets to remain in the playoff chase.

They've now allowed a power-play goal in 14 straight games, which is an astounding number for a team that's still within reach of a playoff spot. It's not entirely on the goalies, but there's a reason one of hockey's most uttered cliches is that goalies are a team's top penalty-killers. Merzlikins' struggle while the Blue Jackets are short-handed as compared to his success at even strength is striking.

He's been one of the NHL's top netminders at even-strength and the opposite while killing penalties. Tarasov has struggled in all situations. He's 6 feet 5, athletic and young by goaltending standards, so the Blue Jackets don't want to risk losing Tarasov via waivers while trying to get him to Cleveland. That's why they slid forward Yegor Chinakhov to injured reserve with an upper-body injury and recalled Greaves, who was informed Tuesday night as he prepared for bed.

Greaves is looking forward to his next NHL opportunity while staying grounded.

"You dream about playing in the NHL," Greaves said. "It's where you want to be, but at the same time it's important to just be where your feet are. So, for me ... when I'm in Cleveland, I just want to be fully present and help the team win games there and just enjoy everything there because it's a fun part of the process. The same thing goes for when I'm here. I'm just trying to be present here and help the team win here."

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets outworked in loss to Philadelphia Flyers: 3 takeaways

By Brian Hedger – December 12, 2024

No matter how many times they checked it, the Blue Jackets' fuel gauge kept reading "empty" against the Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday night at Nationwide Arena.

Outworked in a 5-3 loss that was worse than the final margin indicated, the Jackets learned a hard lesson about what can happen if they don't match or exceed their opponents' effort.

"We weren't good enough at the start," Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan said. "We got outcompeted and tried to chase the game the rest of the way, so that's not the way we want to play or should be playing."

Here are three takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets picked a bad time for their worst game

The Blue Jackets dominated the Vancouver Canucks so thoroughly in a first period last week at Rogers Arena that coach Dean Evason called it their best 20 minutes of the season. He's doubled and tripled down on that despite losing that game, but Tuesday's performance was arguably the Jackets' worst of the season.

Former Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella brought his Flyers to Columbus with motivation to end a frustrating three-game winless skid, which they did impressively. While the Blue Jackets flailed at pucks and slogged up and down the ice with tired legs, the Flyers put on a clinic in "hard work" hockey.

They won the vast majority of puck battles, got to loose pucks first, drew penalties and controlled possession with relative ease. The Flyers also extended the Blue Jackets' streak of allowing at least one power-play goal to 14 straight games.

It was easily the worst the Blue Jackets have played for Evason in a full game, and he wasn't buying any excuses tied to a mental or physical letdown following a taxing five-game trip that lasted eight days and included stops in Chicago, Western Canada and Winnipeg.

"You come home, I don't care how many games we played or whatever (people) call it, the 'trap' game or whatever the hell it's called ... it's ridiculous," Evason said. "We knew they were going to work, and in order for us to have success we needed to at least match their work. We got caught from behind, we lost our puck battles. Everybody. ... I'm not even going to mention a guy because I think the entire group gets lumped together."

Philadelphia Flyers beat Columbus Blue Jackets at their own game

The Blue Jackets and Flyers are similar, including head coaches who share the same belief about how to play hockey.

Evason and Tortorella want their teams to play with aggression and force opposing players into a frustrating night skating mostly in their own zone.

Only one team, the Flyers, accomplished that goal Tuesday. They pinned the Blue Jackets into their own zone for two-plus periods, building a 5-1 lead before finally backing off the gas pedal a bit. The underlying stats tracked by Natural Stat Trick were lopsided in Philly's favor during the first 40 minutes.

"We turned the puck back more tonight than we ever have, which tells us that we're getting caught from behind," Evason said. "So, you don't feel comfortable going forward (and) you automatically turn back, or you move the puck back, and all you do is invite a forecheck and invite them to be more aggressive with an aggressive team, and we just fed into that because of what we didn't do."

It was one of the few times that's happened in the first 28 games of Evason's tenure with the Blue Jackets.

“For the most part, we don’t do that,” he said. “Even in the games we lost out on the road, we were still playing right, going north, playing hard. Tonight, we played south and played soft.”

Columbus Blue Jackets’ next practice could be a leg burner

Coming off an impressive performance Sunday in Winnipeg, Evason scrapped the Blue Jackets’ practice Monday. The day off didn’t recharge any batteries, so Evason and his coaching staff plan to push the team’s collective heart rate up a few notches in a Wednesday practice at Nationwide Arena.

They host the Washington Capitals on Thursday in a tough matchup against the leaders of the Metropolitan Division, who’ve already routed the Blue Jackets once this season.

“It’s tough because you try (to correct things) in between periods, when the whole group’s there, and it’s difficult when you don’t have even a line or some guys that are pushing forward to go in the right direction,” Evason said. “We’ve got to throw (Tuesday’s game) out. Obviously, we haven’t skated for a bit, so we’ll get a good burn (Wednesday) and get our legs going again.”

[The Athletic / Is Jet Greaves laying claim to the Blue Jackets’ goaltending job?](#)

By Aaron Portzline – December 13, 2024

There’s no waiting your turn in professional sports. Earning a roster spot in the NHL isn’t a matter of biding your time, it’s a result of one player taking another player’s job. The door is never held open for you; you have to blow it off the hinges.

We might be in the nascent stages of such a transformation with the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Goaltender Jet Greaves, called up from AHL Cleveland a day earlier to start for the Blue Jackets on Thursday, was the best player on the ice for the home club, making 35 saves in a tight game that ended with a 2-1 overtime loss to the NHL-leading Washington Capitals.

Aliaksei Protas scored his second goal of the game at 2:23 of the extra period to end it before 15,962 in Nationwide Arena.

“Fantastic. Yeah, fantastic,” Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. “I’d argue he — obviously it’s a team game, but I’d argue that he won a point for us. For us to get a point in that game, we’re fortunate.

“There’s nothing flashy. It’s simple and sound and effective. I was impressed.”

This is not Greaves’ first taste of the NHL. It’s the third straight season he’s played his way out of the AHL and into an NHL sweater, but it’s the first time he’s done so under the watchful eye of a new general manager (Don Waddell) and a new coach (Evason).

Greaves’ biggest cheers on the night came with 6:34 remaining in regulation when he made a flurry of saves to keep the score tied 1-1 and after the game when he was named the game’s third star.

“He was awesome,” said defenseman Zach Werenski, who scored the Blue Jackets’ only goal. “So steady in net, so sound. He made all the big saves. It was fun watching him.

“He obviously has worked hard for this. We would have liked to get the win for him, but he played a hell of a game.”

Greaves, who looked particularly sharp with his glove, has an underwhelming record at the start of his NHL career: 3-7-1. But many of the games have been similar to Thursday’s, when he deserved a better fate. Greaves’ NHL save percentage (.915) is dramatically better than other Blue Jackets goaltenders.

And it should be noted that the Blue Jackets have scored only 16 goals in his eight losses. On Thursday, Greaves held the Capitals off the board until Protas scored off a one-timer from the slot only 31 seconds into the third period.

“There are a lot of positives I’ll take going forward, but also some things that I’ll learn from and get better at,” Greaves said. “We’ll watch it (the film) and learn and go from there.

“I saw (the OT goal) a little bit. I would have liked to have that one for the guys, but it is what it is.”

So where does this go from here?

The Blue Jackets have said that starter Elvis Merzlikins, who served as Greaves’ backup on Thursday, was fatigued and needed a break. That makes sense given Merzlikins’ workload in starting 12 of the 13 games prior to Thursday. But then why not turn to Merzlikins’ backup all season, Daniil Tarasov?

Evason was clear on Wednesday that Greaves had earned this chance with his play in Cleveland, but he also allowed that an opportunity had been “created somehow.”

The Blue Jackets can carry three goaltenders on the roster, sure, but that’s not an ideal situation for any of the three. Greaves is the only one who can be sent to Cleveland without needing to clear waivers, but after Thursday’s performance, it’s hard to see him leaving anytime soon.

Asked if Greaves’ outing will earn him a chance to stay, Evason smiled: “Yup. Sure does.” He declined to elaborate.

Greaves said he has not been told what the Blue Jackets' plans are for him. He was called up after Tuesday's 5-3 loss to Philadelphia and raced to Columbus the next morning for practice. He hasn't asked any questions, either, he said, just focused on getting ready to play.

"For me, my attention is where my feet are, just kind of one day at a time and control what I control and we'll see what happens tomorrow," Greaves said.

Asked if he was even sure where he'd be Friday, Greaves chuckled. "We'll see. Hopefully here."

The Blue Jackets are off Friday ahead of Saturday's game versus Anaheim. It doesn't sound like Greaves is going anywhere for now.

"He's earned the right to be here," Evason said. "He's earned it. And he earned it again tonight."

[The Athletic / Fatigued Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzlikins gets a break, cedes starter's net to Jet Greaves](#)

By Aaron Portzline – December 13, 2024

One year later, Elvis Merzlikins is back to being a No. 3 goaltender for the Columbus Blue Jackets, at least for now.

The Blue Jackets on Wednesday recalled Jet Greaves from AHL Cleveland, and coach Dean Evason said Greaves will start on Thursday when Columbus hosts the Eastern Conference-leading Washington Capitals in Nationwide Arena.

“(It’s) earned,” Evason said. “You guys see the record, I’m sure, down (in the AHL). He’s earned the right to be here, that’s why he’s here.”

Greaves is 8-4-2 with a .902 save percentage in the AHL this season. He actually got the call late Tuesday after the Blue Jackets’ listless 5-3 loss to Philadelphia, allowing him to be at the rink in time for Wednesday’s practice, during which the club’s goaltending plans for at least the next game became clear.

Greaves and Daniil Tarasov took almost all of the practice reps, while Merzlikins worked off to the side before spending the final minutes of practice sitting on the bench.

Merzlikins isn’t injured, or he would not have been skating. Asked if Greaves’ recall entirely about his play in Cleveland, or if the Blue Jackets’ struggles in net were a contributing factor, Evason’s answer was rather cryptic.

“When you call a guy up, there’s something that has happened,” Evason said. “It’s earned (by Greaves), but there’s an opportunity that’s been created somehow. Read whatever you want into it, I’m not going to get into all of that.”

A club source, reached after practice, said a determination was made by Merzlikins’ play on Tuesday — he allowed five goals on 25 shots — that he is fatigued and “needs a break” after starting 17 of the Blue Jackets’ last 21 games, including seven starts in a row before he had a night off early last week in Edmonton.

Merzlikins did not play well against the Flyers, with at least two goals getting past him that he’d probably be expected to save.

At 19:00 of the second period, just after the Blue Jackets had scored to pull within 3-1, the Flyers’ Travis Konecny scored on a wide-open wrister from low in the right circle that sneaked through Merzlikins’ pads.

Early in the third, Merzlikins ended up way out in his crease after making an initial save, allowing Morgan Frost to score an easy goal into a wide-open cage behind him. It was 5-1, and Nationwide Arena started clearing out of fans.

In fairness, the entire Blue Jackets lineup played at about 60 percent of their normal pace on Thursday. The forecheck, which has been a relentless part of their attack on their best nights, was nonexistent. Obviously, leaving Konecny wide open with a clear path toward any goaltender is not ideal.

Merzlikins has been better this year by some measures. He’s 9-8-2, on pace for his first winning record since 2021-22. Over the previous two seasons, he won just 20 of 67 starts. Merzlikins didn’t win his ninth game last season until Jan. 30.

But other numbers are not so hot. His save percentage (.888) is ranked 32nd in the league among goaltenders with 12 or more starts, while his goals saved above expected (-5.0) is 33rd and his goals saved above expected on the penalty kill (-7.7) is dead last at 38th.

Tarasov, who has a 3-5-1 record and an .881 save percentage, has fared even worse.

The Blue Jackets are giving Merzlikins his latest “break” less than one year since he was demoted to a No. 3 role by then-coach Pascal Vincent after a tough start to the season. That time, in mid-January, it erupted into a public mess with Merzlikins asking for a “change of scenery” while insisting he hadn’t requested a trade.

Later that month, when he returned to action, Merzlikins told reporters he had in fact requested a trade. Then, after a conversation with his agent Gerry Johansson, the agent told reporters that Merzlikins had not requested a trade, that he simply misspoke.

The Blue Jackets, under a new GM (Don Waddell) and coach (Evason), have demanded from Merzlikins first and foremost that he be a good teammate. Evason has raved about his efforts and performance to that end, and it’s been clear that veteran players in the dressing room have tried to embrace him.

Last Friday in Vancouver, Merzlikins made a dreadful decision to come way out of his net to play a play a puck late in the second period of a game the Blue Jackets led 2-1. When the Canucks scored to tie it before Merzlikins could scramble back in position, veteran defenseman Zach Werenski circled back and gave Merzlikins a hug in the net.

Who can say how long this current break will last? It could be up to Merzlikins. It could also be up to Greaves, who will be making his first NHL start this season and the 11th of his career. He was an AHL All-Star last season, and this summer signed a two-year contract with Columbus that includes a one-way salary next season. Greaves has probably deserved a better fate, on the whole, so far in his NHL career. He has a 3-7-0 record despite a .912 save percentage.

[The Athletic / Up-and-down Blue Jackets outworked, outplayed by Flyers: ‘We got what we deserved’](#)

By Aaron Portzline – December 12, 2024

Don't let the score fool you. NHL coaches often demand their clubs skate north with the puck, eschewing a more leisurely east and west approach. If the Columbus Blue Jackets skated in a predominant direction on Tuesday, it was south. Yeah, backward.

The first two periods of the Blue Jackets' 5-3 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers were particularly ugly, but even the third period was not enough to gloss over this steaming pile.

"We turned the puck back more tonight than we ever have," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "That tells you that we're getting caught from behind, so we don't feel comfortable going forward. You automatically turn back, or you move the puck back. All you do is invite a forecheck and invite them to be more aggressive. We just fed into that, because of what we didn't do.

"For the most part, we don't do that. We haven't done that. Even in the games we lost out on the road, we were still playing hard, going north, playing the right way. Tonight we played south and we played soft."

Just down the hallway, Flyers coach John Tortorella had to be beaming. His club is still in the growing pains stages of a roster rebuild, but the Flyers do play hard under the firebrand coach, who once pushed this Columbus franchise to new heights in the late 2010s.

The Flyers led 3-0 on the scoreboard, 17-6 on the shot counter and 47-14 in shot attempts until the final five minutes of the second period. For a Blue Jackets club that beat NHL-leading Winnipeg 4-1 on the road Sunday, this was a significant crash back to Earth.

"We started slow and we never really found ourselves," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "It's tough to come out like that after a good win in Winnipeg. (The Flyers) are structured. They played hard. They don't give you much. You have to work for it. I don't think we worked for it tonight. We kinda got what we deserved, I guess."

Kent Johnson had a goal and an assist, while Werenski and Sean Monahan also scored. Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins stopped only 19 of 24 shots, allowing at least two goals from distance that brought groans from the Nationwide Arena crowd.

The only glimmer of hope came at 16:56 of the second period when Werenski scored a power-play goal to cut the Flyers' lead to 3-1. But before the end of the second, with 1:00 remaining, the Flyers restored their three-goal margin with Travis Konecny's second goal of the game.

"Terrible," Evason said. "We had some life and then we give them a semi-breakaway and it ends up in our net. That hurt us as much as the start did."

The Blue Jackets have provided quite a few head-scratchers already this season. Before Tuesday's game, the Blue Jackets were 10-10-0 against clubs above them in the standings. Yet they're 1-2-3 against the bottom five teams in the league.

Evason tried desperately to shake the doldrums, he said.

"We were crackin' our heads in between periods trying to do what we could do as far as trying to jump-start us," Evason said. "We had nothing. Absolutely nothing, which is disappointing, obviously. We should have had more in this game. I don't care how many games we've played. You guys call it a trap game (when you come back home off the road) ... that's ridiculous. We knew they were going to work and in order for us to have success we'd have to at least match their work.

"We lost our puck battles. Everybody. There's not one guy ... I'm not going to mention a single player, because I think the entire group gets lumped together."

Evason considered line changes, a coach's age-old tactic to change his club's luck. But the reason Evason didn't change his lines is telling: everybody deserved to be dropped in the lineup, not elevated.

"We tried talking. We tried shifting some stuff," Evason said. "You talk to guys individually. It's funny ... if it's one guy or one line, you could single it out. It's difficult when you don't have even a line or guys pushing forward to go in the right direction."

Evason was already looking forward to Wednesday's practice, where he promised to "get a good burn and get our legs going." The Blue Jackets host the Eastern Conference-leading Washington Capitals on Thursday.

[The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Sillinger Embraces Community By Hosting Q&A With Fans](#)

By Mark Scheig – December 12, 2024

Second time was the charm.

The Columbus Blue Jackets originally were going to host a night with fans for an open Q&A with Cole Sillinger in November. But an injury caused the event to be postponed.

The Q&A was rescheduled for Wednesday night at the Sonesta Hotel in downtown Columbus. It was a first of its kind event in the sense that the Blue Jackets had never done something like this before.

The event was free and open to the public. Sillinger joined Blue Jackets Radio Network host Dylan Tyrer for about a 30 minutes of fun and questions about anything. After the initial few questions were answered, it was the fan's turn to ask the questions.

Sillinger answered every question thrown his way. Afterwards, he signed autographs for everyone who came and took pictures with those that wanted it.

After the event was over, Sillinger stopped by to talk with the Hockey Writers about the night and its importance. The one theme that came from the night was the importance of the fans. On multiple occasions, he not only mentioned how important the fans were, but how important connecting with them is.

Sillinger Reflects on the Event

Usually, teams like the Blue Jackets will host autograph sessions among other events to help fans connect with the players. This Q&A was different in that anyone could come into the hotel lobby and partake.

Sillinger heard the idea from the team and embraced the moment.

"Todd Sharrock (Blue Jackets VP of Communications) brought it up," Sillinger said. "We had it scheduled a different day. The day didn't work out with everything that was going on. So it changed to today. Just the idea to be more interactful with fans and just for them to hear more personal things from you. I think when they're watching the media, it's always pretty generic answers or answering questions about hockey or the game. So it's nice to talk about my family or Christmas or a holiday and just ask questions about some of the guys on the team. I think that goes a long way. And fans, you can connect with them in that way and relate with them more."

Sillinger believes nights like this are important because it does present the players in a different light than what many fans are used to seeing. Don't be surprised to see more of these kind of events with different players in the future.

"Not everyone gets to see that, and it's important for them to build a deeper connection with you. At the end of the day, we're all 'just normal people.' We have a job and our job is to play in front of 20,000 people on any given night and we're super fortunate. We're super lucky for that."

"At the end of the day, one of my favorite things to do is to go to the grocery store and hang out, be a kid as well. For me to just give off that perspective of myself as well. The connection grows deeper and hopefully they become bigger fans not only of myself but of the Blue Jackets in general knowing and appreciating that away from the rink, we're just people as well."

Sign of Leadership

Sillinger making himself available for something like this points to strides being made not only from a leadership perspective, but also embracing the community he plays in. The Blue Jackets have a young core. Seeing this kind of progress is an important step for him to be one of the faces of the team in future seasons.

“We have a great, young core and we want to take it upon ourselves and eventually, we want to help the Blue Jackets a Cup to Columbus,” Sillinger said. “That’s the goal. If that’s not the goal, then what are we doing here? We’re very fortunate to be able to play with each other. We don’t want to keep getting these first-round picks all the time because that means this season is not going good. So there’s got to be a time where we take it upon ourselves and we feel like that time is now. It’s starting to come.”

“We’re gaining more experience on the ice. We’re developing better chemistry with each other and I think it’s translating. We have more to give and more to learn and more to grow. But just recognizing the situation, for our team to have success, our young guys have to take it to the next level and we’re working towards that.”

Sillinger said the night went well. It was never about evaluating himself in the moment. It was an opportunity to have a fun night with fans in a different setting.

“I was 100% myself and I was happy with that,” Sillinger said.

It was an enjoyable night for the 25-30 people that came out to see him. Walking out of the event, I couldn’t help but notice the number of smiles from fans as they were leaving. The night meant something to them. They hope that more events like this happen in the future.

Based on talking with Sillinger, it seems these kind of things could be the start of something special in Columbus for the Blue Jackets and their fans.

ESPN / 2024-25 NHL trade tiers Big Board: Who could be on the move?

By Greg Wyshynski – December 13, 2024

It's never too early to talk trade candidates in the NHL. That's especially true this season, which has already seen a handful of significant moves:

The New York Rangers traded captain Jacob Trouba to the Anaheim Ducks.

Promising defenseman David Jiricek was sent from the Columbus Blue Jackets to the Minnesota Wild.

The Toronto Maple Leafs sent defenseman Timothy Liljegren to the San Jose Sharks.

The Colorado Avalanche revamped their entire goaltending unit by sending Justus Annunen to the Nashville Predators for Scott Wedgewood, and then Alexandar Georgiev to the Sharks for Mackenzie Blackwood. They join Miles Wood, as the Avs really embrace the Colorado alpine aesthetic.

The NHL trade deadline is March 7, 2025. Here's a way-too-early look at some of the players who could be moved before that date, from the shocking possibilities to the pending free agents to the bargain beauties who could be the difference in winning the Stanley Cup.

This list was compiled through conversations with league executives and other sources, as well as media reports. ESPN insiders Kevin Weekes and Emily Kaplan added their input in its creation. Salary figures are from Cap Wages and Puck Pedia.

For the NHL owners reading this piece: Any "soft tampering" is purely coincidental.

Let's begin with the biggest names and the true stunners, should any of them move.

Note: Players are listed alphabetically within each tier.

Shocking possibilities tier

Aaron Ekblad, D, Florida Panthers

Chris Kreider, W, New York Rangers

Brad Marchand, W, Boston Bruins

J.T. Miller, C, Vancouver Canucks

Mitch Marner, W, Toronto Maple Leafs

Mikko Rantanen, W, Colorado Avalanche

Of the players mentioned in this tier, only one is formally on the trade block: Chris Kreider of the Rangers, whose name was mentioned specifically in the now-famous memo circulated by GM Chris Drury to his 31 peers. The other player mentioned by name in that memo was Trouba.

If Kreider is moved, it would still be a shock, as many felt his inclusion in the memo was a tactic to scare a veteran core into playing better -- one that hasn't worked, for the record. Kreider has three years left on his contract, with a \$6.5 million average annual value, and a 15-team no-trade list.

An NHL executive texted me recently to ask, "Chris Kreider for Brad Marchand ... who says no?" Once you hear it, you can't stop checking boxes for why that would make sense, from the infusion of competitive tenacity onto the Rangers to the Bruins getting a younger local product under contract beyond this season. It's the kind of trade proposal that makes you fall in love with trade proposals all over again.

The Bruins trading Marchand is hard to conceive. He has worn the spoked B for 16 glorious seasons. He's captain for a team in a playoff race with 11 goals and 11 assists in 30 games. But his numbers have declined for two straight seasons, he's in the last year of a contract with a very thrifty AAV (\$6.125 million) and has just an eight-team no-trade clause. He's a beloved member of the organization, but when the Bruins decided to move on to the next phase even the most cherished veterans aren't guaranteed participation -- just ask Zdeno Chara about that.

Ekblad also has an expiring contract with the Panthers after helping them win the Stanley Cup last season. The 28-year-old defenseman has 14 points in 29 games, his ice time jumping to 23:25 per game after skating 20:52 in 51 games last season.

He's on the record as wanting to remain with Florida, telling the Miami Herald that he's not worried about the timing of a contract extension given how GM Bill Zito waited to get deals down with players like Sam Reinhart. There was a report last summer that the Panthers were "shopping" Ekblad ahead of this contract year, but it's hard to imagine a team having the season that Florida's having would want to alter the chemistry dramatically.

Miller is returning from a lengthy personal leave from the Canucks, which naturally sparked speculation about his future in Vancouver. Canucks team president Jim Rutherford pushed back hard on rumors about the motivations behind that leave of absence and the team trading Miller, telling Postmedia: "Don't start making stuff up on someone in his situation. That's disrespectful."

He said the team is not trading Miller and that "we stand by him." Miller is in the second season of a seven-year contract worth \$8 million annually. He has a full no-movement clause, but Weekes reports that "teams have shown interest."

The biggest shocks would be the Toronto Maple Leafs trading Mitch Marner or the Colorado Avalanche moving Mikko Rantanen, two star wingers both needing big raises in their contracts after this season.

(Before you start playing fantasy GM, let it be known that Turner's Anson Carter already floated a one-for-one trade proposal involving these two.)

The trade talk on Marner has cooled since coach Craig Berube arrived and the winger had an outstanding run of games while Auston Matthews was out with an injury. 'Twas a time when Mitch Marner trade rumors were a daily occurrence. Now it seems plausible he'll remain with the Leafs beyond this season -- he also wields a full no-movement clause to ensure he's in Toronto through this one.

Rantanen has a nine-team no-trade list in the final campaign of his six-year contract. Again, it's hard to fathom the Avalanche dealing one-third of their holy trinity -- alongside Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar -- when they look like a contender in the West again. But Rantanen is reportedly looking to secure a Santa's sack-sized bag on his next contract, with speculation his AAV could be as high as \$14 million. Keep in mind his agent, Andy Scott, also reps Leon Draisaitl, who reset the market with a \$14 million AAV deal that starts next season.

It would take some combination of the Avalanche's season going down the tubes and an unmendable contract impasse to necessitate Colorado even considering a Rantanen trade. Even if they did, he's got a hefty \$9.25 million AAV for a suitor to handle. Buy hey, this is called the "shocking" tier for a reason.

Elite pending free agent tier

Morgan Frost, C, Philadelphia Flyers

Yanni Gourde, C, Seattle Kraken

Mikael Granlund, C, San Jose Sharks

Taylor Hall, W, Chicago Blackhawks

Kaapo Kakko, New York Rangers

Mason McTavish, C, Anaheim Ducks

K'Andre Miller, D, New York Rangers

Brock Nelson, F, New York Islanders

Gustav Nyquist, W, Nashville Predators

Kyle Palmieri, W, New York Islanders

Ivan Provorov, D, Columbus Blue Jackets

Frank Vatrano, W, Anaheim Ducks

K'Andre Miller might have deserved a place in the "shocking" tier, considering his status as a 24-year-old foundational player for the Rangers. He's a restricted free agent after this season making \$3.872 million against the cap, and thus in line for a significant raise. Weekes said that he has heard Miller's name out there as a potential trade acquisition. Where he fits in the Rangers' long-term plans, and how significant the changes are for a team that has underachieved, will determine his path forward in New York.

"I'm not saying they are or they aren't trading him," Weekes said. "I'm just saying it's a name that I've heard out there."

Weekes also heard trade buzz around another foundational player: McTavish, the 21-year-old Ducks center who is in the final season of his rookie contract ahead of restricted free agency. The No. 3 draft pick in 2021 has just two goals and eight assists in 20 games for Anaheim, missing a chunk of time due to an upper-body injury.

Kakko is another young player at a crossroads. The 23-year-old winger, who was the second overall pick in 2019, took a one-year "show me" contract from the Rangers last season. He has played well, with 14 points in 27 games and really strong defensive numbers at 5-on-5. Does that make him a valuable part of the Rangers going forward -- or increase his trade value?

The annual meeting of the Brock Nelson Appreciation Society was held when the Islanders forward was a surprise addition to the U.S. 4 Nations Face-Off roster. That put the spotlight on a unique talent who is set to hit the free agent market this summer. Nelson, 33, can play up and down the lineup, at center or on the wing, on the power play or the penalty kill. He can net 34 or more goals while winning 54% of his faceoffs, as he is this season. He's a "final puzzle piece" guy for a Cup contender, but his availability -- and potentially that of Palmieri -- depends on where the Islanders are in the playoff hunt and how GM Lou Lamoriello sees Nelson as a part of the roster going forward.

Palmieri isn't the only goal-oriented winger potentially available, with Vatrano and Nyquist both on expiring deals for teams that aren't expected to make the West playoff cut. Neither are the Blackhawks, as Hall faces free agency with a \$6 million AAV. Perhaps a change in coaches gets the 33-year-old going a bit in Chicago. The last time Hall was in the postseason, he had eight points in seven games for Boston in 2023.

Granlund and Gourde are two very different kinds of centers. With 30 points in 29 games, Granlund has either played himself into a new contract with the Sharks or into a major trade piece for them in his walk year. Gourde, who turns 33 this month, is down in ice time (15:26 per game), but slightly up in point production on a per-60 basis. His most effective days are behind him, but the two-time Stanley Cup winner could still be a bottom-six asset on a contender.

The other intriguing names here are the Flyers' Frost, the Blue Jackets' Provorov and Rossi of the Wild.

Frost, 25, has 12 points in 25 games this season in 14:56 per game, the second straight season his ice time has tumbled under coach John Tortorella. Frost has been atop many "players in need of a change of scenery" listings, and a trade for the pending restricted free agent seems inevitable for some Flyers fans.

But please note that he has found some chemistry with rookie sensation Matvei Michkov, which could certainly impact his future in Philly.

Provorov is a good skater who can play on the power play and the penalty kill while munching considerable minutes (23:16 per game). He's a very solid puck-mover who has elite puck retrieval skills. He carries a \$4.725 million cap hit thanks to the Los Angeles Kings having retained some of his salary in the three-way trade in June 2023 that sent him from the Flyers to Columbus. There are a glut of defensemen who might be on the trade block, but few have the skill set of Provorov.

Rossi is a 23-year-old center taken ninth overall in 2020. He's in his fourth NHL season, although last season was the first time he saw significant time, playing 82 games and amassing 40 points. He has 24 points through 28 games this season. He makes just \$1,713,333 against the salary cap, in the final year of his entry-level contract before becoming an RFA.

So why is he here?

Good question. His name is out there. Michael Russo of The Athletic, the best authority on all things Wild, said last month on his podcast "Worst Seats in the House" that he is "still convinced they are going to trade" Rossi, adding, "I just think that they do not feel he's the player to commit to long-term." Russo also felt the Wild would "really regret" moving such a talented young player.

Elite players with term tier

Joel Farabee, W, Philadelphia Flyers

Mario Ferraro, D, San Jose Sharks

Cam Fowler, D, Anaheim Ducks

Mike Matheson, D, Montreal Canadiens

Josh Norris, C, Ottawa Senators

Rickard Rakell, W, Pittsburgh Penguins

Rasmus Ristolainen, D, Philadelphia Flyers

Brandon Saad, W, St. Louis Blues

Trevor Zegras, C, Anaheim Ducks

The Ducks tried to put Fowler in the Trouba trade, but the Rangers said no thanks. Ironically, the two are now D partners in Anaheim. Fowler, 33, has two more years left on his contract with a \$6.5 million AAV and a four-team no-trade clause. Zegras, 23, has two years left with a \$5.75 million AAV before becoming an RFA. He had four goals and six assists in 24 games before suffering a knee injury this month, which could obviously impact any deal this season to give the dimming star a change of scenery.

Neither Farabee nor Ristolainen were signed by current Flyers GM Daniel Briere. The former is a 24-year-old signed through 2027-28 (\$5 million AAV) who hasn't developed at quite the clip the Flyers were hoping; the latter is a 30-year-old bruising blueliner signed through 2026-27 (\$5.1 million AAV). Ristolainen has size and physicality, but his defense is average at best, and he has lost the thread offensively.

Rakell is in the middle of a six-year deal that former Penguins GM Ron Hextall handed him, with a \$5 million AAV and an eight-team no-trade clause. Speaking of inherited players on teams that aren't playing well: Norris, 25, was given an eight-year deal (\$7.95 million AAV) by former Senators GM Pierre Dorion that runs through 2029-30. He doesn't have trade protection until 2026. Norris has 12 goals and

eight assists in 27 games and is three seasons removed from a 35-goal campaign. But Ottawa and GM Steve Staios need a core tweak.

Is Ferraro part of the core in San Jose? He's a 26-year-old defensive defenseman signed through 2025-26 to a very friendly \$3.25 million AAV. His underlying numbers aren't stellar with the Sharks this season: His pairing with Jan Rutta was bad, and his pairing with Cody Ceci was worse.

Saad had 10 points in his first 26 games while playing up with Brayden Schenn. He's signed through next season (\$4.5 million) and his full no-trade clause becomes a 12-team no-trade this summer. His name has been out there in the trade market, although the Blues' reversal of fortune under Jim Montgomery could change that status.

Finally, Montreal could have sold very high on Matheson after last season's stellar 62-point campaign, but kept him around. He has 15 points in 26 games this season, generating seven of them on the power play, where he continues to excel. It's only a matter of time before rookie Lane Hutson inherits that PP1 spot from Matheson. The 30-year-old has an eight-team no-trade list and an AAV of \$4.875 million. He brings scoring from the back end, which is such a coveted trait for a defenseman; do the Canadiens end up hanging on to him?

The goalie tier

Alexandar Georgiev, San Jose Sharks

John Gibson, Anaheim Ducks

Ville Husso, Detroit Red Wings

Alex Nedeljkovic, Pittsburgh Penguins

Vitek Vanecek, San Jose Sharks

Karel Vejmelka, Utah Hockey Club

Dan Vladar, Calgary Flames

Gibson has spent the majority of the past five seasons in the rumor mill thanks to the Ducks' rebuild and an increasingly reasonable cap hit of \$6.4 million. He's signed through 2027 and has a 10-team no-trade clause.

A lot of teams have inquired about the 31-year-old, but there has also been a hesitation in acquiring him. Are his unimpressive numbers part of an overall decline or the result of playing behind the Ducks' defense? Are his annual second-half fades happening because Anaheim has nothing to play for? The emergence of Lukas Dostal would seem to make Gibson even more expendable, but as the NHL goalie carousel spins every offseason, Gibson remains in SoCal.

Up in NorCal, the Sharks could have two enticing goalie options. Georgiev was just acquired from the Avalanche for Mackenzie Blackwood. He has a \$3.4 million AAV and is an unrestricted free agent after this season. Vanecek has the same contract status and cap number. Of the two, Georgiev has had the stronger season analytically.

Vejmelka has been an analytics darling this season, ranking 10th in goals saved above expected via Stathletes. His cap hit (\$2.725 million) and expiring contract make him an intriguing trade option, but Utah could also hang onto him if they're in the wild card hunt.

Vladar and Husso are veterans on teams that could be out of the playoff picture near the deadline. Husso has some trade protection. Nedeljkovic has another year on his contract at \$2.5 million AAV.

Help up front tier

Josh Anderson, F, Montreal Canadiens
Nick Bjugstad, F, Utah Hockey Club
Nick Cousins, F, Ottawa Senators
Christian Dvorak, F, Montreal Canadiens
Radek Faksa, C, St. Louis Blues
Nils Hoglander, W, Vancouver Canucks
Alexander Kerfoot, W, Utah Hockey Club
Nicolas Aube-Kubel, F, Buffalo Sabres
Scott Laughton, F, Philadelphia Flyers
Pat Maroon, W, Chicago Blackhawks
Reilly Smith, W, New York Rangers
Nico Sturm, W, San Jose Sharks
Brandon Tanev, W, Seattle Kraken

Hoglander had 24 goals last season for the Canucks but has followed that up with two goals in 27 games. Teams love a winger in their mid-20s who needs a change.

Anderson and Dvorak are no strangers to trade rumors. Anderson has 10 points in 28 games in his fifth season with Montreal. The 30-year-old is signed through 2027 (\$5.5 million AAV). Dvorak's trade to Montreal in 2021 has been called a "disaster" in hindsight. He's in the last season of a six-year deal with a \$4.45 million AAV and an eight-team no-trade list.

Some of the names here are contingent on their teams' fortunes as the season continues, like Faksa, a big-bodied center on the Blues; Smith, a pending free agent who has an eight-team no-trade list and has been getting minutes on Kreider's line; and Tanev, who's in the last season of his contract with a \$3.5 million cap hit, bringing high-energy play at forward when he's not taking hilarious yearbook photos.

Another name to watch here is Laughton, who was heavily rumored to be moved last trade deadline. He's a versatile forward who makes just \$3 million against the cap and has another year on his deal beyond this one.

Maroon is, of course, seeking his fourth Stanley Cup championship, which would equal the career total of Wayne Gretzky.

Help on the blue line tier

Will Borgen, Seattle Kraken
Robert Bortuzzo, Utah Hockey Club
Bowen Byram, Buffalo Sabres
Alexandre Carrier, Nashville Predators
Cody Ceci, San Jose Sharks
Ian Cole, Utah Hockey Club

Brian Dumoulin, Anaheim Ducks

Jeremy Lauzon, Nashville Predators

Ryan Lindgren, New York Rangers

Olli Maatta, Utah Hockey Club

Alec Martinez, Chicago Blackhawks

Marcus Pettersson, Pittsburgh Penguins

David Savard, Montreal Canadiens

As usual, the trade market does not suffer for defensive defenseman. Heck, David Savard was the most-sought-after defensive D-man in 2021, becoming an important part of a Lightning Stanley Cup win after they acquired him at the trade deadline. Now 34 and in the last year of his deal with Montreal (\$3.5 million AAV), contending teams will no doubt check in on Savard again.

Conversely, didn't we just do this with Alexandre Carrier last season? The Predators hung onto him at the deadline and signed him to a three-year deal with a \$3.75 million cap hit. With Nashville struggling, teams are likely to check in on a valuable defenseman.

This group has a handful of current or former Penguins. Pettersson, who makes just over \$4 million against the cap and has an eight-team no-trade clause, was considered next in line for a trade after Lars Eller was moved to the Capitals. Dumoulin, Cole and Maatta were all Stanley Cup winners with the Pens; Bortuzzo and Ceci were not. Ceci could be an interesting addition for a contender having played 24 games in the Oilers' playoff run last postseason.

Lindgren is beloved in the Rangers' dressing room for his physical sacrifices for the team and his partnership with Adam Fox. But the 26-year-old is in and out of the lineup with injuries and goes UFA next summer after his \$4.5 million, one-year contract is done.

Bargain beauty contracts tier

Anthony Beauvillier, F, Pittsburgh Penguins

Jake Evans, F, Montreal Canadiens

Trent Frederic, C, Boston Bruins

Jeremy Lauzon, F, Nashville Predators

Drew O'Connor, F, Pittsburgh Penguins

Mathieu Olivier, W, Columbus Blue Jackets

Daniel Sprong, W, Seattle Kraken

Frederic is a physically imposing center who saw his numbers increase year over year, but like so many other Bruins, his output is down this season. At \$2.3 million AAV, Frederic (a UFA after this season) would be a solid bottom-six addition for someone.

Lauzon is reportedly getting a lot of interest as a hard-checking defenseman. He makes \$2 million against the cap and is signed through next season.

Finally, there's Olivier. He's having a heck of a contract season, hitting a career high in goals (eight) in 28 games. The 27-year-old Blue Jackets winger brings the energy and drops the gloves when it's warranted.

Every contender wants to add some toughness before the playoffs. At \$1.1 million, the pain will be inflicted on the ice rather than on the payroll.

[ESPN / NHL Awards WATCH: Who's leading for Hart, Norris, Calder?](#)

By Greg Wyshynski – December 11, 2024

The NHL rookie of the year battle between Philadelphia Flyers sensation Matvei Michkov and San Jose Sharks first overall pick Macklin Celebrini could be one for the ages, according to awards voters.

But that's not the only intensely close race for postseason hardware just two months in the season, as previously established favorites come back to the pack and hot new contenders rise up the rankings -- although one MVP candidate continues to lap the field.

We've polled a wide selection of Professional Hockey Writers Association voters anonymously to get a sense of where the wind is blowing for the current leaders. We've made sure it's a cross-section from the entire league, trying to gain as many perspectives as possible.

Bear in mind that the PHWA votes for the Hart, Norris, Calder, Selke and Lady Byng finalists; broadcasters vote for the Jack Adams; and general managers handle the Vezina.

Kirill The Thrill still rules the Hart Trophy race, and has increased the margin over his November lead. Kaprizov earned 78% of the votes last month. He now has 88% of the first-place ballots.

He has 42 points, with 17 goals and 25 assists. He leads the Wild's next highest scorer (Matt Boldy) by 15 points after 26 games. Kaprizov has been the league's best even-strength scorer, as just 10 of his points have come on the power play. Minnesota averages 3.7 goals per 60 minutes at 5-on-5 with Kaprizov on the ice, and gives up just 1.7 goals against.

"He's got hella game-winning goals, tiebreaking points and third-period points," a voter noted.

Kaprizov was seventh for the Hart in 2021-22 when he had 108 points and 47 goals. The Wild are one of the league's biggest surprises, with a .741 points percentage in 27 games. Kaprizov has been a driving force behind that ascent to the top of the Western Conference.

"He's the biggest reason why no one can talk about the Parise and Suter buyouts crippling Minnesota's season," one voter said.

Another voter declared the Hart is "Kaprizov's to lose."

Of course, he could lose it.

"The Wild aren't at the top of the league without him or their goalie, but there are so many options right now," a voter said. "Kaprizov has been unreal to start the season, but Martin Necas is a close second."

Necas is one of only two other players to receive first-place votes for the Hart. Entering Monday night, the Carolina winger had tied Kaprizov for the league lead in points (42 in 27 games). His 14 goals means he's halfway to his career high (28 goals) well before the halfway mark of the season.

Outside of maybe Dylan Strome of the Washington Capitals, no one among the NHL's top 15 scorers is having the breakout season that Necas is having. Few are having the impact that Necas is having on his own team, as he led star center Sebastian Aho by 12 points and posted five game-winning goals this season.

The other player to receive first-place support was Eichel of the Golden Knights. Like the other two candidates, Eichel has a sizable gap between the next highest scorer on the Knights, leading linemate Ivan Barbashev by 11 points. Vegas is averaging 4.36 goals per 60 minutes with Eichel on the ice, and 2.47 goals against. He has been the best player on a Vegas team that sits atop the Pacific Division.

Other names mentioned down the ballot for the Hart Trophy were Sam Reinhart of the Florida Panthers; Connor McDavid of the Edmonton Oilers; Nathan MacKinnon of the Colorado Avalanche, who was in the top three last month; and Winnipeg Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck. Nikita Kucherov, who made the top three last month, has curiously fallen off the radar.

McDavid is obviously one to watch. He has won NHL MVP three times and been a finalist for it six times in 10 seasons. An early-season injury cost him a couple of games, but McDavid had 37 points in 24 games for a 1.54 points-per-game average, which was fourth in the league. With 16 points in his last eight games, Connor is doing Connor things again.

Makar earned 75% of the first-place votes for the Norris, as the Colorado defenseman continues a dominant offensive season. His 35 points led all defenseman after 29 games, including an NHL-best nine goals. He has 15 power-play points and contributed a short-handed goal as well.

"Yeah, Cale Makar. Definitely," a voter concluded of the Norris race.

Makar got off to an historic start, becoming the second defenseman in NHL history to post a season-opening points streak of at least 11 games, and the second defenseman to lead the league in points for all skaters after one month. The only other guy to do that was Bobby Orr, who was a Hockey Hall of Famer before he became a dependable crossword puzzle clue.

Makar remains on pace to become the seventh defenseman in NHL history to break 100 points, and the first since Erik Karlsson tallied 101 points with the 2022-23 San Jose Sharks. But what's impressed some voters more than his point total is the role he's playing for the Avalanche this season.

"Makar is not only lapping the field offensively, he's taking on primary matchup role in Colorado, which is something that players like Quinn Hughes and Victor Hedman are not for their teams," a voter explained. "When you combine Makar's offensive impact and the fact he's doing it while in a matchup role, he has clearly been the league's best defenseman thus far."

Makar won the Norris in 2021-22 and finished third in the next two seasons. That was a bit of a surprise last season, as Makar and Hughes were in a two-player race for the award seemingly all season before Roman Josi of the Nashville Predators swooped in to take second.

It's setting up to be another Makar vs. Hughes showdown this season, as the reigning Norris winner garnered the second-most support behind the Avalanche defenseman.

"It's Makar, but Quinn Hughes is right behind him," a voter opined.

Hughes has 32 points in 26 games, and his 1.23 points-per-game average ranked him slightly ahead of Makar (1.21). He's the leading scorer on the Canucks this season, eight points ahead of Elias Pettersson through Sunday's games. Vancouver fans have sung his praises as their MVP all season.

"The points for Makar are nice, but Hughes dominates every inch of the ice when he's there, and he's on the ice a lot," one voter noted.

"It's Hughes by a hair over Makar, and something tells me this is going to the wire," another said.

The only other defenseman to receive first-place votes was Werenski, who is having a stellar season for the Blue Jackets. The 27-year-old defenseman had 28 points in his first 27 games, including eight goals. He's leading all defensemen in average ice time (26:10) and plays in all situations for Columbus.

Werenski making the Team USA 4 Nations Face-Off roster no doubt bolstered interest in the kind of season he's having.

"Shoutout to Zach Werenski. He's been unreal in all three zones this year," one Hughes voter said.

Victor Hedman of the Tampa Bay Lightning and Josh Morrissey of the Winnipeg Jets, who was in the top three last month, were other defensemen who garnered support down the ballot. Hedman, who has one Norris win, is seeking his first nomination after a streak of six seasons as a finalist ended in 2021-22.

The Dallas Stars forward led all rookies in scoring during last month's NHL Awards Watch voting, and thus led all players with first-place ballots as well. He's been in a huge funk since Nov. 15, with just two assists in 10 games. Goodbye rookie scoring lead. Goodbye spot as a Calder finalist in the Awards Watch, as Stankoven didn't receive a first-place vote, even though he was mentioned down the ballot.

"Neither Michkov nor Macklin Celebrini drive play the way that Stankoven does," a voter said.

That said, points are points and Michkov has jumped into the lead with 56% of the first-place ballots. The Flyers' rookie sensation led all first-year scorers with 25 points in 26 games, including 11 goals to top all rookies. That includes three overtime winners, tied with Leon Draisaitl for the most in the NHL through Sunday.

Michkov was one of the finalists for the Calder last month in the Awards Watch.

"That kid's pretty damn good," one Michkov voter noted succinctly.

He's been every bit as special as advertised: Hitting the highlight reel with frequency, and bringing a big personality to the NHL. Witness last weekend's chicanery, as the 20-year-old Flyers winger was ejected from their loss to Utah and stopped to sign a fan's water bottle on the way to the dressing room.

He's managed to do all of this under coach John Tortorella, who is not known for his offense but certainly is known for his tough handling of young scorers.

"Torts makes me a little nervous on this one, but this is where I'm at right now," a Michkov voter said. "Almost a point per game for him."

The "right now" is doing a lot of work here because it's clear that a lot of Michkov voters are checking how fast Celebrini is approaching, like a Jurassic Park jeep speeding away from a T-Rex. They felt that way last month and the sentiment has only grown now that Celebrini has played more games.

"Celebrini is in the rearview mirror, and objects are closer than they appear," one voter said.

"I think Celebrini will catch Michkov, but not yet," another voter predicted.

Celebrini missed time earlier this season due to injury, but has more than made up for it. The first overall pick last summer has 15 points in 18 games, including eight goals, which was second to Michkov. He's skating 19:42 per game and has three game-winning goals.

"Macklin Celebrini wasted absolutely no time making up the ground he lost in the Calder race with that injury. He has been lighting up the scoresheet since coming back and he is living up to every bit of the hype he had going into the draft," a voter explained. "Michkov has a bit of a lead on him in points, but if he keeps playing like this, he'll close that gap."

"The Sharks are a completely different team since he came back from injury," another voter said. "He will have his peaks and valleys, as will Michkov, but Celebrini's complete 200-foot game gives him the edge."

Montreal Canadiens rookie defenseman Lane Hutson was the other finalist last month, and received down-ballot mentions from our voters. He has zero goals and 18 assists in 27 games, and is easily the best rookie defenseman in a lackluster crop of them. But there was more interested from our voters in another Canadian rookie this month: Dustin Wolf of the Calgary Flames.

Wolf is 8-5-1 with a .909 save percentage and a goals-against average of 2.84. Stathletes has playing him just slightly below expected in goals saved above expected (minus-0.44) but he's been really strong for a surprising Flames team. Wolf is easily the best rookie goalie of the lot this season. Outside of Michkov and Celebrini, he's the only other rookie to have received a first-place vote.

"If we're being honest about who the best rookie is -- not the flashiest -- it's Wolf by a mile," a voter declared. "He's been outstanding and this shouldn't be particularly close."

"Dustin Wolf's numbers were very tempting and he's done a great job holding Calgary in the playoff picture, but Celebrini has a much larger sample size and had a monster November," another voter argued.

Can the Gus Bus catch a Jet?

That's the big question when it comes to the Vezina voting. Hellebuyck is the clear favorite for the award, but like Winnipeg in the standings, his dominance has faltered a bit -- perhaps not a coincidence, mind you. Especially when Gustavsson, who has the second-most support for the Vezina, is the netminder for the team that's blown past the Jets in the West.

"It is a two-horse race between Gustavsson and Hellebuyck," one voter concluded.

Hellebuyck has started the season 17-5-0 with a .925 save percentage and a 2.14 goals-against average, along with three shutouts. Despite the strong team in front of him, he is fifth in goals saved above expected per Stathletes (8.5). He won the Vezina last season for the second time in his career. He's been a finalist four times.

"This really isn't a conversation unless Hellebuyck gets hurt or starts playing dodgeball," a voter noted.

"His ridiculous head start helps," another voter quipped.

But as of Monday, Hellebuyck does not have a stronger stats case than Gustavsson does. The Wild goalie is 13-4-3 with a .931 save percentage and a 1.99 goals-against average. Stathletes has him second in goals saved above expected (9.5).

"All aboard the Gus Bus!" one voter said enthusiastically.

The only other goalie to receive a first-place vote was Dostal, who continues to play well for a Ducks team that doesn't seem all that interested in the whole "defense" thing. (Not sure if Jacob Trouba is the guy to fix that, but Dostal was no doubt happy to see the reinforcement arrive.)

The Anaheim goalie is 6-7-2 with a .921 save percentage and a 2.73 goals-against average, with a shutout. Stathletes has him fourth in the NHL, with 9.1 goals saved above average.

"It isn't Lukas Dostal's fault that his team is poor. His performance has been nothing short of outstanding this season," a voter explained.

New York Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin was in the top three last month but garnered little support among these voters. The only other goalie who did was Logan Thompson of the Washington Capitals, who is sixth in goals saved above expected via Stathletes and is 11-1-2 with a .913 save percentage for the Caps.

"It's worth pointing out that Canada left a guy in the Vezina conversation off their 4-Nations roster," one voter highlighted.

Barkov is still the default choice for most voters, earned 50% of the first-place votes in a crowded field -- although not nearly as crowded as last month's Awards Watch, no less than 11 different players receive at least one first-place vote. Barkov won the Selke for the second time last season, and many expected it would be the start of a Patrice Bergeron-esque run for the Panthers captain.

Despite missing eight games due to injury, Barkov has been outstanding. He wins 64% of his faceoffs. The Panthers have a 1.9 expected-goals against per 60 minutes at 5-on-5 with him on the ice. As is Selke

Trophy tradition, Barkov has also been offensively dominant, to the tune of 28 points in 20 games. Florida earns a strong 63.4% of the high-danger shot attempts when Barkov is on the ice.

When Reinhart is on the ice, they earn 61.7% of them. When he's on the ice, the Panthers give up only 1.9 goals per 60 minutes at 5-on-5, which is slightly better than Barkov (2.0) despite the two playing the majority of their time together.

Reinhart's defensive analytics stack up against anyone in the NHL. They might get obscured by his remarkable offensive output (19 goals and 19 assists in 28 games) and the formidable shadow cast by Barkov's reputation, but with 25% of the first-place votes for the Selke, it's clear that Reinhart's candidacy is catching on.

"Tight race goes to Reinhart right now," one voter concluded.

"He's burning the opposition at both ends of the ice," another said.

At least one voter also noted that a vote for Reinhart is a vote for a winger, as Jere Lehtinen was the last non-center to win the award, back in 2003.

Cirelli had the next-highest number of first-place votes among Selke candidates. He's averaging 2.0 expected goals against per 60 minutes this season, and the Lightning get an incredible 66% of the high-danger shot attempts when he's on the ice.

After a couple of seasons where it looked like he might break into the top three in for the Selke, Cirelli fell off the radar the last two seasons. But he's back in the conversation now, and that conversation probably got louder when Cirelli was named to Team Canada for the 4 Nations Face-Off as its defensive stopper.

"Anthony Cirelli is making a case for himself, with 11 goals and 13 assists," a voter noted.

Two other players received first-place votes: Los Angeles Kings center Anze Kopitar, who's won the Selke twice; and Carolina Hurricanes center Jordan Staal, who was the runner-up last season and continues to search for the first Selke win of his 19-year NHL career.

Other names mentioned down the ballot for the Selke were Nico Hischier of the New Jersey Devils, who was in the top three last month, and Mitch Marner of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"Hischier and Marner are within striking distance because they play significant roles on the penalty kill," one voter said.

This is the part where I mention that the Lady Byng Trophy for gentlemanly play should be voted on by the league's on-ice officials or by the NHL Players' Association instead of the PHWA.

Traditionally, this award goes to a player with a top-20 point total and the lowest penalty minutes among those players. It's early, but Toronto's Mitch Marner had just four penalty minutes in 27 games, amassing 38 points. He was fourth for the Byng in 2021-22.

And hey, maybe he's garnered sympathy since being the target of William Nylander's tough love on the NHL's Amazon Prime show.

One of the biggest stories of the first quarter of the season was Alex Ovechkin, whose 15 goals in 18 games was the hottest start of career and made catching Wayne Gretzky's goals record this season seem plausible.

When Ovechkin went down with a broken leg after 18 games, the story shifted to the rest of the Capitals and their coach Spencer Carbery, whose team has gone 6-2-1 without their star captain while climbing to the top of the league standings.

Carbery earned 75% of the first-place votes from the ballots we surveyed. He was a strong second last month.

"Sure, the Capitals are a playoff team from last year that made a few additions, but it's pretty clear the system Carbery has in place is helping the Capitals out a ton," a voter explained. "They've continued to win games even with Alex Ovechkin out of the lineup and a lot of that is due to what Carbery has in place and the work he's done in developing the young players on that roster."

As another voter said: "Spencer Carbery, and it's not close. He's gotten these Capitals to buy in, and they're still finding ways to win without Alex Ovechkin. Just wow."

Arniel, who led for the Jack Adams in the last Awards Watch, and Hynes were the only other two coaches to receive first-place votes.

The Jets have cooled off some after their historic start -- the first team in NHL history to win at least 14 of its first 15 games of a season -- but Arniel turned a good team from last season into a steamroller early on this season.

Voters love a redemption story, too: Please recall Arniel had two unsuccessful years with Columbus from 2010 to '11, paid his dues and got his second chance over a decade later. But keep in mind the voters were already impressed with the Jets: Rick Bowness was a Jack Adams finalist last season.

Hynes' Wild team moved past Winnipeg in the standings, earning him some support for the Jack Adams - - although in some cases, begrudgingly.

"I've never been a huge fan of John Hynes, but his system and overall team play make him the easy choice for the award," a voter explained.

Another voter offered no caveat: "Hynes has a roster in salary cap hell at the top of the league -- surely helped by Kaprizov, but Minnesota has been excellent."

Among the other coaches getting mentioned down the ballots were Rod Brind'Amour of the Carolina Hurricanes, who was in the top three last month, as well as two coaches who share a connection from last offseason: Sheldon Keefe of the New Jersey Devils ... who was replaced by Craig Berube with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"Berube has completely changed the identity of the Leafs, making them the best defensive team in the league," a voter said.

Meanwhile in New Jersey: "People may hate this, but Sheldon Keefe is doing well in N.J. Seems like his players are buying in."

Remember, when it comes to the Jack Adams, it's pays to be excellent but not the best: since 1973-74, only 10 winners came from teams that captured the Presidents' Trophy.

[Sports Illustrated / Blue Jackets, Jets Defensemen Staking Claim in Norris Trophy Race](#)

By Jacob Punturi – December 11, 2024

The Norris Trophy race in 2024-2025 currently belongs to Colorado Avalanche star defender Cale Makar. Arguably the most offensively gifted defenseman to enter the NHL in decades, Makar is pacing all defensemen in scoring this season with 36 points in 30 games.

While the Avalanche defender has the upper hand, the race for the league's top defenseman is still wide open. Let's take a look at three candidates who are close to unseating Makar as the Norris Trophy favorite.

Honorable Mention - Quinn Hughes, Vancouver Canucks

Last year's Norris Trophy winner is having another stunningly good campaign. The Canucks' captain trails only Makar for the scoring lead among all NHL defensemen, with seven goals and 32 points in 30 games. Hughes deserves consideration, but the NHL hasn't had the same defenseman repeat since Detroit Red Wings legend Niklas Lidstrom won it three straight times between 2006-2008. Hughes is excellent, but the NHL will likely look elsewhere for the 2025 Norris Trophy winner.

Zach Werenski, Columbus Blue Jackets

Werenski is having a career-defining campaign for the Blue Jackets. With the team needing an offensive leader, he's stepped up admirably to lead Columbus in scoring so far this season. He has nine goals and 20 assists in 28 games, putting him third on the defensive scoring list.

But Werenski has also locked in in his own end. Averaging a league-leading 26:06 minutes of ice-time per game, the Jackets are throwing him out there nearly every other shift. That means he's playing 5-on-5, power play, penalty kill, and everything in between. He's been excellent and the fact that he's doing it on such a middling Columbus team should earn him serious consideration for the Norris Trophy this season.

Josh Morrissey, Winnipeg Jets

A key part of the Jets' fantastic start was Josh Morrissey, and as the team has faltered their top defender hasn't. Morrissey is crushing it this season, with three goals and 27 points in 30 games. He's recorded at least one point in six of his last seven games.

The Jets are highly dependent on Morrissey in all situations. He has the highest average number of shifts per game, with roughly 27 shifts each game this year. He's not a penalty killing specialist, which could hurt his stock, but no one in the Norris Trophy race is a stay-at-home defender. If he keeps producing like this and the Jets finish near the top of the Central Division again, Morrissey could be a finalist for the award.

Victor Hedman, Tampa Bay Lightning

The new captain of the Lightning is having a fantastic start to his tenure. He has four goals and 25 points in 26 games while averaging 23:21 minutes of ice-time for the Atlantic Division contenders.

Of all the players on this list, Hedman brings the best defensive skillset. He averages nearly two minutes of penalty killing ice-time per game, meaning he's often the first player and defender sent over the boards in those situations. It makes sense. He's huge, outmuscles opposing forwards to keep the crease clear, has an extended reach to disrupt passes and block shots, and has incredible instincts that help him anticipate plays. All in all, Hedman is having a very Norris Trophy-worthy season.