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Multimedia

The Athletic / Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: Rostislav Klesla, franchise's first pick, nearly landed elsewhere

By Aaron Portzline – October 19, 2025

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

Item No. 1: Almost Atlanta's

The Blue Jackets celebrated five members of their inaugural club this weekend, hosting coach Dave King and players Kevin Dineen, Jean-Luc Grand-Pierre, Rostislav Klesla and Ron Tugnutt in a series of events to help commemorate the 25th anniversary of the franchise.

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell, who was president and GM of the Atlanta Thrashers when the Blue Jackets arrived in 2000, spent time with all five of them Friday and again Saturday before the Jackets hosted the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Klesla was the one he chatted with the longest, though. It wasn't the first time they'd met.

Back in 2000, Waddell was hoping to draft Klesla with the No. 2 pick in that summer's draft. The Thrashers had Klesla, a two-way defenseman with size and skill, ranked after only forward Dany Heatley on their list, but they were certain Heatley would go off the board at No. 1 to the New York Islanders.

"We spent a lot of time with Rusty, actually," Waddell said. "I went to see him play (for the Ontario Hockey League's Brampton Battalion) a bunch of times that season. We brought him to Atlanta (after the combine), talked to him before the draft ... I thought he'd be an offensive defenseman, but also a guy who could really defend. I thought he had everything."

The Thrashers, like everybody else, were stunned when the Islanders, under always-unpredictable GM Mike Milbury, selected goaltender Rick DiPietro with the first pick. It was stunning because the Islanders had just selected goaltender Roberto Luongo with the No. 4 pick in 1997.

That allowed Heatley to fall to the Thrashers at No. 2. And when the Minnesota Wild took forward Marian Gaborik at No. 3, Klesla landed with the Blue Jackets, becoming the franchise's first draft pick. He went on to play 515 games for Columbus — 10th on the franchise's all-time list — and 659 games overall with the Blue Jackets and Phoenix Coyotes.

"It turned out this way, and it's always, you know, the way it was supposed to be," Klesla said Saturday. "I don't consider myself a flashy guy, so maybe the situation and the slide of the pick was good for life, not just as a sport. I loved being in Columbus."

"I just take it the way it was, and I'm happy about that. It's a good feeling. No hard feelings. It's all good, all positive things."

Dineen, Grand-Pierre, Klesla and Tugnutt, who did several events with season ticket holders and fans over the weekend, dropped the ceremonial puck before Saturday's 3-2 win over Tampa Bay. King had the honor of lighting the cannon for its initial blast of the evening.

Klesla has returned to his native Czechia, where he has two sons. One of them, Rusty Jr., traveled with him to Columbus earlier this month. Klesla operated a hotel in his hometown, Nový Jičín, but sold it several years ago. He was a development coach and assistant coach for a club in the Czech Extraliga.

Item No. 2: 'He was very lucky'

Blue Jackets forward Miles Wood knows only one gear — overdrive — and it's taken its toll through the seasons. Latest example: Wood was charging hard toward the New Jersey Devils' net when Devils defenseman Dougie Hamilton high-sticked him inadvertently in the face.

Wood was bleeding and in obvious pain as trainer Mike Vogt trotted onto the ice to treat him. He's missed both games since and is already ruled out of Tuesday's game in Dallas.

"(Wood) was very lucky," Waddell said. "They don't think there's any eye damage. There's still some blood in there, and they didn't want to disturb the eye (by doing tests) right after the injury. They want the blood to clear out so they can get a full view of it.

"The doctor came in (to the dressing room) that night and didn't see any other damage. (Wood) can see now, so we think he's going to be OK."

Waddell said Wood could return by the end of the month as long as the testing doesn't reveal any damage.

Meanwhile, defenseman Erik Gudbranson, out since absorbing a hit from the Minnesota Wild's Marcus Foligno in the second game of the season, has resumed light skating, Waddell said. He's not likely to play Tuesday in Dallas, but could be back by next weekend.

The Blue Jackets played the last two games with no extra healthy skates to scratch, but it's hard to imagine them taking that risk on the road. With AHL Cleveland off until the weekend, the Jackets could recall a forward and a defenseman to make sure they're covered for Tuesday's game in Dallas.

Item No. 3, Take 5: Boone Jenner

"Take 5" is our weekly brief and (mostly) non-hockey conversation with a Blue Jackets player, coach, broadcaster or staffer. This week, it's captain Boone Jenner, the longest-tenured player in franchise history:

What part of the city do you call home?

New Albany. We looked all over — Upper Arlington, Dublin — and landed on New Albany. We've got a good crew of guys out there now, seven or eight of us, and we're very close to each other. That makes for a lot of fun. I lived in Grandview Heights my first year, then lived right across from the arena for four or five years. I lived with (former Blue Jackets defenseman) Ryan Murray for a couple of seasons.

Funniest moment on the ice?

I mean, (Jackets forward Dmitri) Voronkov getting a 10-minute misconduct and then coming out for the power play last season was pretty hilarious. There are so many. I don't know if this story has ever been told. But it was like my third or fourth game, and I was playing with Matt Calvert. And Calvy from the bench starts chirping Jaromir Jagr (then with the Philadelphia Flyers), asking Jagr if that was his training camp number (No. 68). I was like, 'Wow. That's Jaromir Jagr. And Matty's giving it to him.'

Favorite sports teams ... other than the obvious?

Since I've come to Columbus, I've definitely been a Browns and Bengals fan. Yeah, both of them. I was Browns for a while, but now the last five or six years it's been more the Bengals, but I root for both of them. My favorite team growing up was the Dallas Stars. Mike Modano was my favorite player. Everybody where I'm from (Dorchester, Ontario) was either Maple Leafs or Montreal Canadiens, but for me, when they won the (Stanley) Cup in 1999, that's when I really started to get into hockey. I had posters of Mike Modano all over my room. (laughs) When I met him, no, that didn't come up.

Guilty pleasure ... a song and a snack

The snack has to be ice cream. Cookies and cream or chocolate chip cookie dough. Ben & Jerry's is at the top of my head, but any brand works. As for a song ... I don't think there's one song, but I like classic rock. Springsteen, Metallica, AC/DC. Still love all that stuff.

Biggest adjustment to living in the U.S.?

My first day! I was in Springfield (Mass.) right after my junior season ended (2011-12) and I turned pro. I was going to finish in the AHL. I checked into the hotel and then went to find a bank, and my (ATM) card wouldn't work. I didn't know that TD Canada and the TD banks here are two separate banks. I couldn't get to my money. I was 18. It sent me into a little bit of a panic. (laughs) I also remember liking that the gas was cheaper.

Item No. 4: Snacks

- It was hard to get a cup of Tim Horton's in the press box Thursday. There were 26 scouts in Nationwide Arena — three representing Edmonton (including a goaltending coach), and two each from Vegas and Utah — crowding the upper reaches of the press box. It was Yegor Chinakhov's season debut for the Blue Jackets, so that brought a few scouts to town. By Saturday's game vs. Tampa Bay, "only" nine scouts were in the house. Good thing: Chinakhov played only 11 shifts and drew 6:47 in ice time.

- Former Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella had intended to travel to Columbus this weekend to take part in Cam Atkinson's retirement celebration, Atkinson said, but Tortorella's job as a broadcaster with ESPN prevented his attendance. Tortorella coached Atkinson in seven of his 13 NHL seasons, including six in Columbus.

"I owe a lot of my success to him, not only as a player, but as a person," Atkinson said Thursday, when he signed a one-day contract with the Blue Jackets. "(It's) how he got me to play the game on a nightly basis, but also how you practice and how you go about your business on and off the ice." Then Atkinson grinned. "Don't get me wrong. We had plenty of "eff you!" matches. I'm gonna miss those, but I told him I think we should still have a couple here or there, just to get the juices going."

- Here's inaugural coach Dave King, who helped guide a rag-tag roster to a surprisingly strong finish, playing a style of hockey that captured the city's attention: "When you're an expansion franchise in that era ... the rules have changed a great deal for expansion. Now they can get a real good jump out of the gate. Our guys faced a big task. But the one thing people don't realize is ... you get a lot of players, in that era, who come from a background where they had to earn everything. They had lots of bumps in the road. Took nothing for granted. Had to deal with disappointment at times. These guys had a really good inventory of mental skills that made them strong and probably still serve them well today in whatever they're doing."

- During the 2000 U.S. presidential election, as the inaugural team was just getting started, the Blue Jackets began a cheeky campaign in which Tugnutt (a Canadian, by the way) was running for president. When the polling was done, local election officials reported that Tugnutt actually received write-in votes. A reporter asked Tugnutt on Saturday about the “six write-in votes” he received, and Tugnutt, humorously, corrected him: “It was 11.”
 - Blue Jackets players still looking for their first points this season: Dante Fabbro and Sean Monahan, the club’s top-pairing defenseman and top center. Those still looking for their first goals: Charlie Coyle, Mathieu Olivier and Cole Sillinger.
 - One of the quirks of the early days of the franchise was Klesla, who was just learning English, ending his in-game interviews with rinkside reporter Jim Day with a signature sign-off: “Thank you, Jim Day!” It became a catchphrase among Blue Jackets fans, and something fans looked forward to every time Klesla was in front of a camera. Day, who now works in baseball with the Cincinnati Reds, wasn’t around Columbus this weekend, but Klesla happily obliged:
 - Evason made radical changes to his forward group before Thursday’s loss. He also made a significant change on defense before Saturday’s game, moving Denton Mateychuk up from the third pair to the first pair next to Zach Werenski and dropping Fabbro to the third pair with Jake Christiansen. Mateychuk played 21:22, the fourth-most minutes in his career, and was plus-1 with three shots on goal and three blocked shots.
 - Through five games, the Blue Jackets are tied for fourth in the league with a 54.8 percent success rate on faceoffs. Small sample size, to be sure, but quite a change from last season (47.1 percent), when they were ranked 27th in the league. Monahan (64 of 110, 58.2 percent) and Coyle (41 of 79, 51.9 percent) are Evason’s top two guys on the dot. Jenner is playing wing, but has the highest percentage on the club (23 of 36, 63.9 percent).
 - This week’s Sunday Gathering trivia question: Kirill Marchenko’s game-winning goal Saturday was his 80th career goal, moving him into 10th place on the franchise’s all-time list. He’s one of three non-North American players on the list. Name the other two.
 - The Blue Jackets have made a change to their cannon-blasting in Nationwide. They still let it rip after every goal and after every win, but it no longer blasts when the Blue Jackets take the ice. Instead, the lighting of the cannon has become a ceremonial start of each game, in the same manner as the warning siren with the Carolina Hurricanes or the “Let’s play hockey!” chant with the Minnesota Wild. (P.S. Don’t tell visiting fans.)
 - Strange one here from the Blue Jackets’ public relations crew: Kent Johnson scored on Saturday, his 23rd birthday. He’s the third player since the start of last season to celebrate their birthday by lighting a lamp. Sean Monahan (Oct. 12 at Colorado) and Mikael Pyrytiä (Dec. 17 at Tampa Bay) were the others.
- Isac Lundestrom was born Nov. 6. Just saying.
- The Blue Jackets’ top picks in each of the last two drafts scored their first collegiate goals Friday. Center Cayden Lindstrom, taken No. 4 in 2024, pounced on a turnover and scored on a breakaway in the first period of Michigan State’s 4-2 upset of No. 1-ranked Boston U. in Boston. Meanwhile, defenseman Jackson Smith, selected No. 14 this past June, scored a second-period power-play goal in Penn State’s 5-4 overtime win at home vs. Long Island U. Smith also assisted on the OT game-winner.

- After opening the season with two road wins, AHL Cleveland returned home and lost both games to Lehigh Valley over the weekend, 3-0 on Friday and 3-2 in a shootout Saturday. Goaltender Ivan Fedotov started both games and stopped 49 of 54 shots combined. They're back in action Saturday in Cleveland vs. Rochester.
- Trivia answer: Other than Marchenko, the two non-North Americans in the Blue Jackets' top-10 goal-scoring list are David Vyborny (Czechia), who is seventh with 113 goals, and Oliver Bjorkstrand (Denmark), who is eighth with 111.

The Athletic / Blue Jackets get back to basics, find relief in much-needed win over Lightning

By Aaron Portzline – October 19, 2025

On the wax board in the Columbus Blue Jackets' dressing room was a word written in capital letters: COMPETE.

The Blue Jackets have goal-scorers and playmakers. They have speed and size. They can dazzle and score goals on the right night. But they aren't skilled enough — nobody is in the NHL — to put all of those fancy traits ahead of hard work and dogged competitiveness.

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Coach Dean Evason watched Thursday's loss to the Colorado Avalanche with disgust. He put them through a tougher-than-usual practice on Friday, at one point putting two nets within 30 feet of each other in the far end of the rink to start running battle drills for pucks.

On Saturday, they rearranged their priorities.

Kent Johnson, Damon Severson and Kirill Marchenko scored goals, while goaltender Jet Greaves had 22 saves in a [3-2 come-from-behind win](#) over the Tampa Bay Lightning before 15,822 in Nationwide Arena. It was the Blue Jackets' first home win of the season.

When Evason was asked if he saw the competitive approach he wanted, he responded: "Honestly, *they* were looking for it," meaning the players.

"Did we do some stuff (on Friday) to engage them in that or make them aware of it? Yeah. But I think they were accountable, which is what you want, you know? It's one thing for coaches to talk and yell and point out things, but it's another for them to understand it and be accountable for what happened (on Thursday). And they did that."

Before the game, members of the Blue Jackets' inaugural season were honored in this, the franchise's 25th season. Former players Kevin Dineen, Jean-Luc Grand-Pierre, Rostislav Klesla and Ron Tugnutt dropped the ceremonial puck, and former coach Dave King lit the cannon.

It was important that the current-day Blue Jackets tried to emulate that hardscrabble inaugural club, which had no choice but to put energy and effort ahead of skill.

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The Blue Jackets held Tampa Bay to just nine shots on goal through two periods.

"It was way better than the other night, and we got results because of it," Severson said. "I thought we were hard on pucks. We played a solid game. We got rewarded early in the third and then competed our butts off from there, all the way through to the buzzer."

Despite their 25-9 edge in shots on goal and 14-4 edge in scoring chances, the Blue Jackets trailed 2-1 from the late stages of the first period until well into the second period. They had another goal disallowed, this time because the play was offside seconds earlier.

It was starting to have the feel of early-season losses to Nashville and New Jersey, in which the Blue Jackets felt as if they'd played well enough to win, but didn't get rewarded.

It wasn't until Severson scored his first of the year — a sharp, bar-down wrister through the slot off a Mathieu Olivier set-up — that the Blue Jackets tied the score at 2 with 6:01 remaining in the second period.

"They knew they didn't compete the other night and they did tonight," Evason said. "And it's nice to get that reinforced, right? That if you do the right things ... it was still tight, and we had to grind, but that's good, right? It's good for us to go through that."

The Blue Jackets took a 3-2 lead at 1:15 of the third period on Marchenko's fifth goal of the season, a wrister from the right circle off a Voronkov pass.

It was Marchenko's 80th career goal, surpassing Ryan Johansen for 10th on the franchise's all-time goal list. He's also the first Blue Jackets player to have five goals in the first five games of the season.

Greaves had a sleepy first two periods, facing six shots in the first and only three in the second. He needed to make 15 saves in the third period, including one sequence in which he lost his stick, lost his feet and made a snow angel in his net with two other Blue Jackets players sprawled beside him.

"The guys were so good tonight," Greaves said. "We kind of had some talks for the last couple of days just about how we wanted to play, and the guys did such a good job of that, right from the start, sticking together."

"It was a great response from the group. I thought it was a great 60 minutes, a lot of energy, and I think we put together."

Mathieu Olivier had a first-period fight with Tampa Bay's 6-foot-9 right winger Curtis Douglas. He also had a team-high four blocked shots.

Just after the final buzzer, Tampa Bay's Brandon Hagel fired the puck into the Blue Jackets' net out of frustration. That's a no-no in hockey, the type of act that can turn things messy.

Blue Jackets defenseman Ivan Provorov, standing behind Hagel, took exception and gave Hagel a forceful cross-check in the back, sending him lunging forward and drawing both teams into a fracas in the corner of the ice.

There was none of this in Thursday's loss to the Avalanche. The Blue Jackets were outpaced and outclassed, and took their lopsided loss graciously. That, too, is a no-no in hockey, or at least it should be.

The Blue Jackets needed Saturday's win badly.

It's hard to call the fifth game of a season a must-win, but there is no reservoir of faith among long-time fans, nor should there be. The organization hasn't earned it. The Blue Jackets have disappointed more times than they've delighted through the years, and so every rough patch seems like a harbinger of hazards and misfortune ahead.

The Blue Jackets didn't seem to celebrate Saturday's win so much as they were relieved by it. It might have been the same in the stands.

"We needed it bad, for sure," Severson said.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' resilience shines after losing early lead vs Tampa Bay Lightning

By Brian Hedger – October 18, 2025

The way things were going for the Blue Jackets, nobody could be blamed for thinking, “Here we go again,” late in the first period Oct. 18 at Nationwide Arena.

After jumping out to a 1-0 lead on a goal by Kent Johnson, the Jackets coughed it up later in the first period on goals 3:40 apart. The second one, scored by Anthony Cirelli, was the eighth goal the Blue Jackets have allowed while killing penalties in just their fifth game.

Here we go again, right?

Nope.

Keeping it 2-1 into the second, they faced another form of adversity that’s bitten them in their first four games. Dmitri Voronkov had an apparent goal overturned for the second straight game that would have tied it 2-2, this time for a missed offsides call instead of him illegally directing the puck into the net with his chest.

Here we go again, right?

Wrong.

A short while later, Damon Severson tied it 2-2, and early in the third period the Blue Jackets went up 3-2 on Kirill Marchenko’s winner. They won by that same score on his fifth goal in five games, putting an end to a two-game skid while reinforcing what the Jackets had preached for a week.

Don’t panic. Work harder. Win.

“Of course it’s important,” Marchenko said of winning. “We had a good practice (Oct. 17) and our team played really hard. We had a lot of (scoring) opportunities and it’s a good (outcome) for us. We just need to grow up and take this confidence (into) the future.”

Here are five more takeaways:

Kirill Marchenko makes Columbus Blue Jackets history vs Tampa Bay Lightning

Marchenko’s goal made him the first player in franchise history to have five goals in a season’s first five games. That’s an impressive feat for a team that has deployed Rick Nash, Johnny Gaudreau, Cam Atkinson, Artemi Panarin and other gifted scorers in its 25 years of existence.

The goal also moved Marchenko into 10th place on the franchise’s all-time rankings of goal scorers with 80 goals in his first 221 NHL games.

“He was on the ice to defend (late), and we need him to use his skill set in all different areas defensively,” Evason said. “We want him to score goals, which he does, but we need him to continue to have that competitiveness, that two-way game (so) he can be on the ice in all situations, and he’s done that and he’s getting rewarded with goals, as well.”

Columbus Blue Jackets have another goal overturned

Voronkov's apparent tying goal in the second period was the Blue Jackets' fourth overturned goal in their first five games, and one they challenged for goaltender interference Oct. 11 in Minnesota was unsuccessful.

So, it's fair to say they're looking for a little more luck when it comes to disputed goals. All four would-be Blue Jackets goals were overturned with correct decisions, including Voronkov's against the Lightning.

The culprit this time was a puck that left the offensive zone before defenseman Jake Christiansen could corral it at the left point, which Tampa Bay's video coaches caught. It would have been nice for lines official Travis Gawryletz to see it, too. Replays showed Gawryletz positioned close to the play, where he should have been, looking directly at it without blowing it dead.

If this were a rare occurrence, it wouldn't be worth mentioning the lines official, but it happens too often. Since the addition of replay challenges for offside in the NHL, lines officials have become much too lax with actually calling offside in real time.

They let close plays go, figuring video coaches will catch any violations, and the end result is often lost momentum for the team that has a goal removed after their celebration. The effect is even more dramatic for teams playing in their own arena, like the Blue Jackets. The building roared to life after Voronkov scored, the cannon went off and the game appeared to be tied ... until it wasn't.

All of that should've been avoided had the play just been blown dead when the puck exited the Lightning zone with a nearby lines official looking right at it.

Columbus Blue Jackets forward Kent Johnson scores another beauty

Johnson celebrated his 23rd birthday by adding another jaw-dropper to his career highlight mixtape, putting the Blue Jackets up 1-0 4:58 into the game.

After scoring a lacrosse-style "Michigan" goal in 2022 against the New York Islanders and scoring last season with a no-look Spin-O-Rama shot in Buffalo, Johnson's latest work of art was done with incredible hand-eye coordination.

Going to the net, he scooped a puck that skittered through a defender's legs in front of the net and quickly lifted it over goalie Jonas Johansson's pad with a backhand. It was a beautiful goal, but more importantly it gave the Jackets an early lead on Johnson's first goal and point of the season.

Columbus Blue Jackets enforcer Mathieu Olivier logs first 2025-26 scrap

Mathieu Olivier, who is one of the NHL's toughest fighters, dropped his gloves for the first time this season at 3:10 of the first period. Olivier, who's 6 feet 1 and 232 pounds, squared off with Lightning forward Curtis Douglas, who's 6-9, 242 and has a long reach he used to hold Olivier off most of the bout.

Olivier took a couple right hands to his helmet but landed a couple punches of his own before toppling his much taller opponent with an impressive takedown.

Score it a draw as a fight, but a win for the Blue Jackets in setting the right tone early in a game that ended in a melee after Lightning forward Brandon Hagel fired a puck at the Columbus net after the final horn.

Jet Greaves gives Columbus Blue Jackets another strong night

Blue Jackets goalie Jet Greaves has allowed just two goals in all three of his starts. He picked up his first win thanks to Marchenko's winner, and the Jackets helped him get it with a determined defensive effort all game.

Greaves stopped 22 of 24 shots for a .917 save percentage, and his season numbers are even better.

After three games, he's sporting a 2.04 goals-against average and .928 save percentage with 77 saves on 83 shots. Among goalies who've played more than one game, Greaves ranks 13th in GAA and ninth in save percentage. The Blue Jackets will happily take those numbers to start Greaves' first full NHL season.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets edge Tampa Bay Lightning with resilient performance

By Brian Hedger – October 18, 2025

It started to look like another game that might get away from the Blue Jackets on Oct. 18 at Nationwide Arena, but they found a way to push back against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

After losing a 1-0 lead provided by Kent Johnson's goal early in the first period, the Blue Jackets (2-3-0) overcame a 2-1 deficit on goals from Damon Severson in the second and Kirill Marchenko in the third for a 3-2 victory in their first of five 25th Anniversary nights.

"We need it bad for sure, and a lot of people are saying 'must win' game," Severson said. "It gets our record in a better spot than what it was 24 hours ago, but it definitely was as close to a 'must win' game, so far, that we've had."

Jet Greaves made 22 saves for his first win of the season, not allowing a goal after Ryan McDonagh and Anthony Cirelli scored against him in the first, including the latter capping a power play.

Jonas Johansson made 28 saves for the Lightning (1-3-2), who didn't have star right wing Nikita Kucherov (illness) and started their backup goalie to conclude a back-to-back that began with a 2-1 overtime loss Oct. 17 in Detroit.

Johnson gave the Blue Jackets a 1-0 lead 4:58 into the game with a tremendous individual effort for his first goal and point of the season. Nearly 12 minutes later, the Lightning led 2-1 after goals 3:40 apart by McDonagh to tie it 1-1 and Cirelli to cap a power play.

That's how it stayed until Severson tied it 2-2 with 6:01 left in the second on his first goal. The only other goal in the second was scored by Dmitri Voronkov, but it was wiped out by a coaching challenge that caught a missed offside prior to it.

That remained the score at the end of the second period, which the Blue Jackets dominated with a 14-3 edge in shots.

"We've talked about our team's composure," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said. "It probably would've been easy for them to go, 'Aww ... again?' We get another negative situation go against us or turn negative, but they didn't. So, that's a lot of leadership qualities, I think."

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets alums honored to return for 25th anniversary celebration

By Brian Hedger – October 18, 2025

A couple of them hadn't seen Nationwide Arena and the surrounding Arena District in years.

How it's grown into a thriving area of Columbus was impressive considering how things began for the Blue Jackets when Dave King, Kevin Dineen, Ron Tugnutt, Rostislav Klesla and Jean-Luc Grand-Pierre were all part of the city's first NHL team a quarter century ago.

More: Columbus Blue Jackets celebrate 25th anniversary amid national obscurity challenges

Grand-Pierre, now a FanDuel Sports Network studio analyst for the team, lives in Columbus and has watched the team grow, but the rest have kept their eyes on the Jackets from afar. Their return Oct. 18 for the first of five Blue Jackets 25th Anniversary celebration games gave each a chance to see what they helped start in 2000-01 as an NHL expansion team.

All are impressed.

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King, the first head coach in franchise history, attended the Blue Jackets' 4-1 loss Oct. 16 and was impressed by how many families packed into Nationwide Arena. Dineen was thrilled to walk his family around to see how the area's grown, and Klesla spent a week in town visiting with former teammates.

All four players were honored on the ice during a pregame ceremony prior to Blue Jackets hosting the Tampa Bay Lightning, and King fired off the cannon before the first draw.

"It's a beautiful facility," King said of the game Oct. 16. "Boy, the energy in the building is immense, and I was really impressed ... it was a very good crowd, very energetic and I was just impressed with how many kids were there. I saw families that last game and I was impressed because you're growing the game still. Even after 25 years, you're trying to grow your base and get stronger at it, and that's important stuff."

Dineen was happy to attend after having to turn down prior invitations due to obligations as coach elsewhere.

"This one's a little special for me," he said. "My kids were old enough to watch me play (for the Blue Jackets). I was not a young buck. I was 36 when I came here. I definitely had some maturity to me, so it was a great experience for myself and my family."

Tugnutt spoke about his popularity during his time in Columbus, which included a tongue-in-cheek campaign during the runup to the 2000 U.S. presidential election. He got 11 write-ins, even as a Canadian who wasn't eligible to run. A campaign video was shown during a stoppage in the first period against the Lightning, followed by an ovation for Tugnutt as he held a campaign t-shirt.

"I'd always been the guy who leads a team onto the ice, but it was something where I was trying to help people (grow in Columbus)," Tugnutt said. "It was a complete transformation for me, coming here. I was going to be more of a 'team guy' and be a part of getting this franchise off the ground."

Klesla, the team's first draft pick (fourth overall in 2000) spent the first 10 of his 13 NHL seasons in Columbus. He was eager to return for the Jackets' silver anniversary celebration.

"I've been here eight days now," Klesla said "I've had a chance to see some of the guys and it's very cool to see some of these guys, especially from the first year or two years (on) the original teams. I'm very glad I'm here and it's good to see these guys and chat with them, and see they're doing good."

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets Hold Off Lightning to End Homestand

By Mark Scheig – October 18, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets needed a win to make something of their initial three-game homestand. In the end, they held off a late charge by the Lightning.

Kirill Marchenko became the first Blue Jacket ever to score five goals in their first five games of the season. That was the game-winning goal as the Blue Jackets held off a late push by the Lightning to win 3-2. With the win, the Blue Jackets improved to 2-3-0 on the season.

The story of this game was the Blue Jackets dominating the Lightning for most of the game.

Game Recap

The Blue Jackets needed to get back to their game which involved using their work ethic to their advantage. Two key early moments helped them accomplish that task.

First, Boone Jenner stood up for a teammate. Then Mathieu Olivier dropped the gloves with 6-foot-9 Curtis Douglas which woke the arena up. Olivier ultimately took down Douglas. That energy helped the Blue Jackets open the scoring.

Advertisement: 0:05

On his 23rd birthday, Kent Johnson opened the scoring. His linemates Jenner and Adam Fantilli got the puck towards the net. Johnson followed the play and beat Jonas Johansson.

The goal was Johnson's first of the season. It gave the Blue Jackets much-needed early momentum. Then the Lightning struck back in quick order.

Ryan McDonagh tied the score on a long shot that eluded goaltender Jet Greaves. Then on a power play, Anthony Cirelli gave the Lightning a 2-1 lead. The early energy was gone. The Blue Jackets needed to find a way to get the momentum back.

Whatever was said in between periods worked. The Blue Jackets dominated the second period. They outshot the Lightning 14-3. They eventually got a huge goal from Damon Severson to make it 2-2. Olivier fed Severson in the slot to get the momentum back.

Marchenko then made it 3-2 just 1:15 into the third. That goal held up as the game winner. He took Voronkov's pass and found an opening past Johansson.

The Lightning controlled play for most of the rest of the third looking for a tying goal. Greaves stopped all 15 shots he faced and finished the night with 22 saves on 24 shots to earn his first win of the season. Johansson kept the Lightning in it all night and stopped 28 of 31.

The Blue Jackets had multiple huddles during third-period timeouts. Head coach Dean Evason said there were multiple messages given including simplify the game and be ready for the 6-on-5 the Lightning had at the end of the game.

After the horn, the puck was shot at the net which caused a scrum. Both teams were assessed minors at the 20-minute mark. Greaves postgame said "it is what it is" when asked about that moment.

The Blue Jackets will have Sunday off and return to practice Monday morning before flying to Dallas to take on the Stars Tuesday night. The Lightning get some much-needed time off. They return to action at home against the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday night.

The Athletic / When can an NHL player say no to a fight? The strategy, etiquette behind the spectacle

By Fluto Shinzawa – October 18, 2025

It was Zdeno Chara's night. On Feb. 24, 2022, Chara, playing for the New York Islanders, the franchise that drafted him in 1996, made his 1,652nd NHL appearance. By doing so, he broke Chris Chelios' record for most games played by an NHL defenseman.

On Chara's record-breaking night, the San Jose Sharks took a 2-1 lead on the Islanders into the second period. By then, Sharks fourth-liner Jeffrey Viel had laid hits on Anthony Beauvillier, Adam Pelech, Anders Lee and Jean-Gabriel Pageau.

Chara was ready to do something about it.

After a defensive-zone faceoff, Chara rode Viel into the boards, leaned over him and asked him to fight.

Seconds later, Chara sent a clearing pass up the left-side wall. Viel never turned to watch the puck. He was facing Chara, gloves ready to drop. Viel had accepted.

Viel is 6-foot-1 and 214 pounds. Chara played at 6-foot-9 and 250 pounds. Viel had to negate Chara's size and reach. He didn't arrive at a solution.

When Viel swung with his right hand, all he hit was air. Chara had locked him out.

"Obviously, I couldn't reach. He's too tall," Viel recalls. "Tried to switch to lefty. Still couldn't reach."

Chara, one of the NHL's most-feared players — one whose restraint was all that prevented him from injuring players in the NHL on a nightly basis — ended the fight with a takedown. As the two got to their skates, he tapped Viel twice on the side of his helmet with his right hand.

"I just tried to do the best I could," Viel says, smiling. "I thought I did pretty well, considering."

Viel didn't have to accept the fight. Players in the NHL regularly turn down such invitations if the situation isn't favorable. And Viel had plenty of reasons to think it wasn't. Chara had 20 years, eight inches and 36 pounds on him. The Sharks were winning and didn't need a momentum shift. When the game paused for the spectacle, they were in the offensive zone on the attack.

But Viel knew that there were also circumstances that demanded he answer the call.

He had flattened four of Chara's teammates. It was Chara's record-breaking night. A future Hall of Famer was asking an undrafted journeyman in his 28th career NHL game.

With all this in mind, Viel concluded he had no choice but to say yes to a fight he couldn't win.

Go or no go?

NHL players make rapid decisions. A defenseman who winds up for a shot changes his target mid-swing if he sees a teammate opening his blade for a deflection. A forward in the bumper on the power play pops out to create shooting lanes and passing seams the instant a defenseman carries the puck down the wall.

Fights involve similar reads and reactions. They aren't simply emotions boiling over. There's a strategy to them.

Before entering fisticuffs, a player has to execute multiple on-the-fly calculations: Whether an opponent's offense elevates to a level that demands a response. The score of the game. How much time is left. If the invited foe is an appropriate match in terms of size, experience and job description. The danger the opponent presents. Whether his team has momentum that he could halt if he gets beaten up.

A fighter cannot afford to process this the wrong way. Nor can he be so obvious with his request that he puts his team on the penalty kill by drawing an "instigator" penalty, which the NHL levies on a player looking to start a fight in addition to the five-minute major for fighting handed to both participants.

"It's kind of a game-management thing," the Boston Bruins' Tanner Jeannot says. "You have a feel for the game when you're there on the ice. When maybe your team needs it. When it's not a good time. It's all about the feel of the game, being in the present moment and knowing when a team needs it."

Jeannot, who's previously done gloves-off work for the Nashville Predators, Tampa Bay Lightning and Los Angeles Kings, saw one of his new teammates proceed through this checklist. On Oct. 8, the Bruins and Washington Capitals kicked off 2025-26 at Capital One Arena.

At 7:21 of the second period, Tom Wilson walloped Mason Lohrei. Seventeen seconds later, Wilson blew up Lohrei again.

Mark Kastelic saw his skilled defenseman go down. The score was 0-0. Kastelic thought it was a good time to let Wilson know he didn't like how he dumped Lohrei. Fighting is part of the fourth-liner's resume.

"That's just part of the family here and our team," Kastelic says. "One of us has to try to stick up for each other. That's what we do. I think anybody on the team would do the same. It was just my turn. Natural instinct."

It would have been a fair fight. Kastelic is 6-foot-4 and 234 pounds. Wilson is 6-foot-4 and 225 pounds. Both know how to handle themselves. Had it been 5-foot-11, 181-pound Anthony Beauvillier putting Lohrei on his back, it would have been out of line for Kastelic to target a smaller combatant.

But Wilson said no. He is one of Washington's go-to offensive players. That game, he would score the Capitals' only goal and play 22:15. Kastelic would log 12:08.

Also, despite the ferocity of Wilson's checks on Lohrei, the right wing delivered them by the letter of the rule. Kastelic and the Bruins knew it. They understood why Wilson kept his gloves on.

"They were clean hits," Jeannot says. "Big hits, but clean hits. There's not a responsibility to fight. But I see it both ways. He's playing hard. Our guy comes in and tries to make him answer. He said no. What do you do? But it sends a message to both teams. Kasty's sticking up for his team. (Wilson) knows it's a possibility for that to happen. It shows the other guys that we're going to answer for our guys getting hit. We're going to stick up for each other."

So Kastelic turned away. He had done his job. So had Wilson.

"I like to think I can hold my own against a lot of people in the league," Kastelic says. "Obviously, there are things that come with it. I don't think I'm one to enjoy getting punched in the head. But it just comes with the territory."

In fact, Bruins coach Marco Sturm believed getting steamed twice wasn't a bad thing for Lohrei to experience. The 24-year-old is a defenseman expected to move the puck. Sturm wants Lohrei to hasten his thinking. The discomfort of getting a No. 43 tattoo on his chest may convince Lohrei to get rid of the puck quicker next time.

"If that's the way he needs to learn, then he's got to do it the hard way, and that's OK," Sturm says. "I've addressed and all of the coaching staff have addressed that we want him to play fast, want him to play simple. If not, he's going to get hit."

No, but still a go

In 2017-18, Viel scored 39 goals in the QMJHL. The left wing has been a double-digit goal scorer in each of his five full AHL seasons.

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He likes throwing punches just as much as putting pucks in nets.

"I love it. Yeah, I do," Viel says with a big laugh. "I actually enjoy it a lot. It's part of the game. I've always enjoyed it. It's not like a chore for me. It's fun. Just adrenaline."

The 28-year-old understands that not everyone feels the same way. He also knows that, depending on the situation, an opponent has a right to say no. In that case, Viel has to find a workaround.

"Some guys have been in the league forever," Viel says. "You have to earn their respect for them to say yes. They won't just say yes. Sometimes, if they say no, you just have to try to find another way. Sometimes I'll fight just because I want to bring some energy. If the guy says no, then I might have to find something else. Finish a hit or do something else if that can't be the case. I won't force the guy to fight me. If it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen."

That an ask sometimes produces a no does not mean it was a wasted appeal. In Kastelic's case, he proved to his employer that he was willing to throw down against an intimidator like Wilson. It made Lohrei feel good that a teammate had his back.

"You're going to war for each other out there," Jeannot says. "You're showing that you're willing to put your body on the line for the next guy. It definitely sends a message to the rest of the group that they're going to be willing to do it more for you."

The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: We're back and we're already wrong

By Sean Gentile and Dom Luszczyszyn – October 17, 2025

Welcome back to another season of *The Athletic's* NHL Power Rankings, brought to you by your two favorite power rankers.

We're going to spend a lot of time this year talking about how correct we are — you know, the usual — but we thought it might be best to start the year off with some humility.

Before the season started, we dug deep and wrote roughly 100,000 words previewing the season to come. Team projections, player rankings, playoff chances — the works. After just one week of hockey, we've seen enough; throw that extensive research in the trash because, boy, are we already wrong.

One week in, here's all the stuff we're already extremely wrong about.

1. Colorado Avalanche, 4-0-1

Sean: 2

Dom: 1

WRONG: The Avalanche will have a difficult time replacing Mikko Rantanen.

When Colorado traded away Rantanen it was widely panned as an odd choice, even amidst contract negotiation difficulties. Martin Necas is nice, but Rantanen is Rantanen. And the move sure bit the Avalanche in the first round last year.

When it came time to grade out the Avalanche going into the season, it seemed clear there was still a Rantanen-sized hole behind Nathan MacKinnon. Necas was good, but could he be great?

The answer is absolutely yes. Necas has nine points in five games to lead the team and his chemistry with MacKinnon continues to look electric. There, problem solved. Now to log onto PuckPedia to see how long Necas is signed for ...

2. Dallas Stars, 3-1-0

Sean: 1

Dom: 3

WRONG: Roope Hintz is a Tier 4 center.

We didn't feel great about leaving Hintz out of the upper echelon of first-line centers back in Player Tiers, and he's not helping matters. Hintz has five points in four games (1G, 4A) and leads all forwards in average Game Score (2.82).

More generally, that's the sort of thing that makes Dallas so tough to pick against; if Hintz stays remotely close to this level, they're going to have high-end pieces in a lot of important spots.

3. Carolina Hurricanes, 4-0-0

Sean: 3

Dom: 2

WRONG: Nikolaj Ehlers will bring more offensive oomph.

Things we were correct about: Sebastian Aho and Seth Jarvis being a Cup-worthy one-two punch. Jarvis has five goals and seven points in his first four games while Aho has six points.

Things we were wrong about: Ehlers being a catalyst for that. Through four games — despite spending nearly all their shifts together — Ehlers has yet to register a single point. Only one other Hurricane has yet to record a point this season and that's somehow Andrei Svechnikov. Incredible.

4. Washington Capitals, 3-1-0

Sean: 4

Dom: 5

WRONG: Repeating last season's success isn't a safe bet.

Dom when the Caps have a 57 percent xG and start the season 3-1-0:

5. Toronto Maple Leafs, 3-2-0

Sean: 5

Dom: 6

WRONG: The Leafs will have a hard time replacing Mitch Marner.

During the season preview, we wondered whether the Leafs could replace Marner's contributions in the aggregate, mostly concluding that some combination of Matias Maccelli, Nicolas Roy and Dakota Joshua wouldn't cut it.

What we didn't consider: William Nylander simply scoring twice as many points. With nine points in five games, Nylander is on pace for 148 points this season. Yep, it's that easy.

It also helps to have this kid try to fill the void.

6. Edmonton Oilers, 2-1-1

Sean: 9

Dom: 4

WRONG: Connor McDavid is the best player in the world.

Just like every offseason, we spent a lot of it talking about how Connor McDavid is the unimpeachable best player in the world. Pfft. Zero goals in four games? An average Game Score that isn't even on the first page of Hockey Stat Cards? Some best player in the world we've got here; he's certainly no Shayne Gostisbehere.

Can the real McDavid please stand up?

7. Winnipeg Jets, 3-1-0

Sean: 7

Dom: 7

WRONG: Three replacement-level defensemen in the starting lineup will make life really tough on Connor Hellebuyck.

That's not entirely incorrect; Hellebuyck has been closer to league-average than Hart-caliber thus far. That'll change at some point in the near future.

Still, the Jets are in fine shape overall thanks to strong play from their best forwards. Mark Scheifele has five goals in his first four games, including two goals against the Flyers on Thursday. Kyle Connor is already up to seven points. And of course, Morgan Barron has three goals and a four-game point streak. It's nice to see Hellebuyck get some early help.

8. Montreal Canadiens, 4-1-0

Sean: 6

Dom: 10

WRONG: Cole Caufield is "just" a scorer.

Caufield is great at the most important part of the game, and that's always going to count for plenty. Sometimes, though, that can serve as a back-handed compliment — and Caufield is doing his part to change the discourse surrounding him. He's certainly still scoring, with five goals in his first five games, but he's doing it on a line with Nick Suzuki that's providing substantive five-on-five play, as well. If this is the new normal, the Canadiens will be in even better shape than we thought.

9. New Jersey Devils, 3-1-0

Sean: 8

Dom: 9

WRONG: The Devils need a lot more from Dawson Mercer.

Mercer has shown plenty of flashes in the past, but with Jack Hughes out of the lineup last season, he flat-lined. New Jersey needs him to be either a solid third-line center or a contributor on the bottom six, and for now, he's successfully walked through Door No. 2, putting up four points in four games. That'll work, especially if Hughes avoids another season-ending injury. Which, for the Devils, might be easier said than done.

10. Vegas Golden Knights, 3-0-2

Sean: 10

Dom: 8

WRONG: Vegas is one of the league's deepest teams.

After signing Marnier, one look at Vegas' forward group was enough to inspire genuine awe. The Golden Knights looked deep.

Which is what makes the team's top-heavy start so funny. Here's the goal breakdown.

Pavel Dorofeyev and Jack Eichel: 11 goals

Everyone else: 8 goals

It should be noted that four of those eight goals came Thursday night against Boston. Looks like Vegas is going to be a two-man show this season.

11. Tampa Bay Lightning, 1-2-1

Sean: 13

Dom: 12

WRONG: Tampa Bay's top end is unstoppable.

Everyone's washed! That's a joke. We will gently note, though, that Andrei Vasilevskiy is at .870 with a negative GSAX and missed most of training camp.

12. Florida Panthers, 3-3-0

Sean: 14

Dom: 11

WRONG: We're about to find out whether the Panthers get 53-point Bennett or Playoff Bennett with Barkov out.

Turns out there was a secret third option that we didn't even consider! Calgary Sam Bennett.

If regular-season Bennett is a \$6 million player, playoff Bennett is a \$10 million player, the Panthers were getting a pretty nice deal when it mattered. The version from the team's first six games, though? He's been bad enough — one point in six games, outscored 9-1 (!) at five-on-five — that he might owe the Panthers some money back.

13. Detroit Red Wings, 3-1-0

Sean: 11

Dom: 13

WRONG: General Albert Johansson slander.

Talk to almost any Red Wings fan and they'll swear by Johansson's upside. Talk to us before the season started and he was mostly an afterthought, projected to be one of Detroit's many below-replacement-level defenders. Looks like those Wings fans knew their stuff, as Johansson is off to a hot start, looking strong in the sheltered minutes he struggled in last season. He leads all Detroit defensemen in xG.

14. Minnesota Wild, 2-2-0

Sean: 12

Dom: 14

WRONG: Minnesota won't get enough offense from its blue line

Brock Faber, for all his gifts, isn't a dynamic offensive presence, and we thought the learning curve for Zeev Buium would count for something. It apparently does not. Buium has five points in four games and is the trigger man for a power play that, at the start of Thursday's games, was producing nearly five more goals per 60 than their closest competition.

15. Utah Mammoth, 2-2-0

Sean: 16

Dom: 16

WRONG: Utah's top layer of talent should be enough to put them in the playoff discussion.

Dylan Guenther is holding up his side of the bargain, with four points in four games and a team-leading average Game Score of 1.41. The Mammoth haven't gotten much from Clayton Keller or Logan Cooley, though; each only has one point thus far. Keller's track record and Cooley's down-the-stretch production as a 20-year-old still count for plenty, but Utah will need a lot more from both if they want to stay in the wild-card race.

16. Vancouver Canucks, 2-2-0

Sean: 15

Dom: 18

WRONG: The hips don't lie.

In a stunning turn of events, the hips do in fact lie.

All preseason — from his Player Tiers blurb to his wildcard status in Vancouver's season preview — we worried about Thatcher Demko and his lower body. Well, his lower body looks damn good to start.

Demko entered Thursday's game with a .945 save percentage and 5.2 goals saved above expected in just two starts. He then earned a big win against a high-octane Stars team. Demko is back.

17. St. Louis Blues, 2-2-0

Sean: 17

Dom: 17

WRONG: Robert Thomas is a borderline franchise player.

We had Thomas in the Franchise Tier before a handful of NHL sources told us to slow our roll. We listened, dropping him down to the All-Star group, and it seems to have been the correct call. He's got two points in four games and is getting absolutely smoked at five-on-five, with actual and expected goal shares both in the high 30s.

18. New York Rangers, 2-3-1

Sean: 19

Dom: 15

WRONG: The Rangers' fourth line has limited upside.

A fourth line of Sam Carrick, Adam Edstrom and Matt Rempe appeared to be one of the league's worst on paper with three guys who couldn't do much with the puck. Jokes on us because Mike Sullivan has somehow coaxed some real wins at the margin with these three on the ice. Through 50 minutes together, they have a 62 percent xG together. Considering the Rangers' depth issues over the last few years, that's a very encouraging start.

19. Boston Bruins, 3-2-0

Sean: 18

Dom: 20

WRONG: No forwards are going to score.

The Bruins, thus far, have been more than "David Pastrnak and a bunch of guys." Through five games, nine forwards have scored at least once, and five (in addition to Pastrnak) have scored twice.

20. Anaheim Ducks, 2-2-0

Sean: 20

Dom: 19

WRONG: Beckett Sennecke does not exist.

Hit control+F in our Ducks season preview and type the words “Beckett Sennecke” and see what pops up. Nothing? Oh. Whoops! Completely forgetting about the third pick from the 2024 draft happens sometimes, okay!

Truth be told, he wasn’t on our radar in mid-September as someone who could make the jump. Anaheim’s forward group looked fairly full, but with a strong camp he earned his spot. With four points in the four games since, he’s cemented it.

21. Los Angeles Kings, 1-3-1

Sean: 21

Dom: 21

WRONG: Cody Ceci and Brian Dumoulin will substantially hurt the Kings’ defense.

Friends, if only we knew just how bad it would be.

Our projection: Ceci and Dumoulin would have a combined Net Rating of minus-13.8 this season, one of the worst marks in the league for a bottom pair. Somehow, the duo has upped the ante with a combined minus-4.6 through their first four games. That’s an 82-game pace of minus-94.3.

22. Nashville Predators, 2-1-2

Sean: 22

Dom: 23

WRONG: Juuse Saros is trending in the wrong direction.

After two decidedly meh seasons in a row, Saros is throwing up a .945 save percentage and is comfortably top 10 in GSAX. Now all Nashville needs him to do is keep it up for another 55 games, which is what they got from him when he was at his Vezina-finalist peak.

23. Ottawa Senators, 2-3-0

Sean: 23

Dom: 24

WRONG: Ottawa doesn’t have a good enough third option behind Brady Tkachuk and Tim Stützle.

Shane Pinto is tied for the league lead in goals with six. Unfortunately for the Senators, they’re going to need him to be a second option for the next 6-8 weeks due to Tkachuk’s thumb injury.

24. Pittsburgh Penguins, 3-2-0

Sean: 24

Dom: 25

WRONG: Evgeni Malkin is not one of the NHL’s top 150 players.

With six points in four games and dominant five-on-five numbers, Malkin is off to a scorching start. His best in years; he looks vintage. While a lot of today’s blurbs are tongue-in-cheek, this one unequivocally isn’t. Snubbing Malkin from this year’s top 150 players is without question the dumbest thing we did before the season started.

But hey, at least it's not the most egregious top 100 players list Malkin has been left off of during his career.

25. Buffalo Sabres, 1-3-0

Sean: 28

Dom: 22

WRONG: A vague expression of optimism.

It did not take long for a summer of optimistic Sabres' takes to dissipate after a difficult 0-3-0 start. An emphatic 8-4 win has softened the blow a bit — especially with Zach Benson and his four assists back in the lineup — and the Sabres are missing key pieces on defense. Still, the vibes in Buffalo remain rancid. It doesn't matter if things look OK on paper if that paper lives in an environment ready to make it crumble.

Sorry for getting your hopes up, Buffalo. At 1-3-0, it's obviously over.

26. Seattle Kraken, 2-0-2

Sean: 25

Dom: 26

WRONG: Matty Beniers is defense-only.

There weren't many forwards who had more impact defensively last season than Beniers, and only Aleksander Barkov, Sam Reinhart and Seth Jarvis started the season with a higher projected Defensive Rating. Beniers' point production and offensive results, though, had turned into an issue, especially given how much Seattle has riding on his development.

Early returns there have been good; Beniers has three points in his first four games, and the Kraken have been a much better offensive team with him on the ice than off.

27. Philadelphia Flyers, 1-2-1

Sean: 26

Dom: 27

WRONG: Matvei Michkov is ready for take-off.

Sometimes, take-offs get delayed. He scored his first goal on Thursday night, which will help, and he's talked about an ankle injury that messed with his offseason plans. We're holding our stock on this one, and we purchased a fair bit.

28. Columbus Blue Jackets, 1-3-0

Sean: 27

Dom: 29

WRONG: The Blue Jackets won't score on 10.5 percent of their shots at five-on-five again.

Columbus' current shooting percentage? You better believe it's exactly 10.5 percent. Checkmate, nerds.

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29. New York Islanders, 1-3-0

Sean: 30

Dom: 28

WRONG: Matthew Schaefer is the Islanders' second-best defenseman.

We sold the kid short. There are Islanders D-men with higher average Game Scores, but the No. 1 pick, all of 18 years old, has already shown signs of being a special player — like, now. Not in two years. His skating is special, and he's officially the youngest player to start his career with four points in four games.

30. Chicago Blackhawks, 2-2-1

Sean: 29

Dom: 30

WRONG: Connor Bedard won't have much help.

We probably should've accounted a bit more for the presence of Frank Nazar. It's not that we fully shorted him, either, but six points in four games deserves a shout. He's got some juice, too, as the Blues found out on Wednesday.

31. Calgary Flames, 1-4-0

Sean: 32

Dom: 31

WRONG: Dustin Wolf will make the Flames too competitive.

It'd be nice for the Flames, on some level, if Wolf solidifies his status as a franchise goaltender, but the roster around him isn't good enough to be dragged — by him or anyone else — any further than the middle of the pack. Thus far, he hasn't been great (.905 save percentage, nearly three goals saved below expected) and Calgary has only banked two points in his five starts. "Too competitive" has not been an issue.

32. San Jose Sharks, 0-1-2

Sean: 31

Dom: 32

WRONG: Macklin Celebrini is a no-questions-asked superstar.

This summer, we spent a lot of time waxing poetic about Celebrini's game, figuring a leap to superstardom was next. He debuted in Tier 3B with a hint of more to come and when it came to finding flaws in his game, we drew a blank. In our eyes, Celebrini was the next big thing — a man who could do no wrong.

One thing that did slip our minds: The dreaded sophomore slump.

Sure Celebrini has three points in three games (all assists), but man is he getting crushed in chances. And not just 'regular San Jose crushed' — we're talking 'if Bedard was getting hammered this bad there'd be four different think-pieces about his defense' crushed. Through three games, Celebrini is last on the Sharks with a 23 percent xG rate. Maybe, just maybe, the Blackhawks and Sharks should stop putting Philipp Kurashev next to their franchise star.

