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January 28-29, 2026

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The Athletic / Sean Monahan's clutch goal keeps Blue Jackets rolling under Rick Bowness

By Aaron Portzline – January 29, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio — So maybe the Columbus Blue Jackets haven't entirely changed under coach Rick Bowness, but they're playing with enough confidence — and, suddenly, enough scoring pop — to work past their worst tendencies.

The Blue Jackets coughed up a 3-1 third-period lead on Wednesday before rallying almost immediately, taking a lead on Sean Monahan's clutch goal and pulling away from the Philadelphia Flyers to win 5-3 before 15,244 at Nationwide Arena.

"Those are the goals you need in a long season, just a huge moment for our group," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said of Monahan's goal with 3:28 remaining. "We definitely bent there and probably made it harder on ourselves than it had to be.

"But we found a way to get it back and win it in regulation. That's big."

It was a crucial win for the Blue Jackets, who have given away double-digit points this season with their third-period collapses. That they rallied to beat the Flyers in regulation was of utmost importance, too.

The Eastern Conference standings are a volatile landscape, but with this one win, the Blue Jackets leapfrogged the New Jersey Devils, Washington Capitals and Toronto Maple Leafs, moving from 14th to 11th in the overall conference standings.

They matched the 10th-place Flyers in points (57), but Philadelphia remained ahead on the "regulation wins" tiebreaker.

Mathieu Olivier and Charlie Coyle, the latter of whom was honored in a pregame ceremony for playing his 1,000th NHL game last week, each had a goal and an assist for the Blue Jackets, now 6-1-0 under Bowness, who was hired on Jan. 12.

Erik Gudbranson and Kirill Marchenko scored goals, while Werenski and Cole Sillinger each had two assists. Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins had 10 of his 22 saves in the third period, when the Flyers used three Blue Jackets' penalties to gain momentum.

There was an audible groan in Nationwide Arena when Travis Konecny, who scored all three Flyers goals for his third career hat trick, deflected a puck past Merzlikins with 4:46 remaining to make it 3-3.

In one-third of the Blue Jackets' losses this season — nine of 27 — they've let a third-period lead slip away to either lose in regulation, overtime or a shootout. It's a big reason Bowness was lured off his boat to replace coach Dean Evason.

What was Bowness' message amid the groans?

“Get ready for your next shift,” he said. “Control what you can control. You can’t do anything about that. Give them credit. They made a couple of good plays on those goals. Just get ready for your next shift.

“Put it behind you and let’s get back on our toes. We’re an aggressive team; we’re not sitting back. They tied it up. We’ve got a five-minute hockey game. That’s what we put the focus on.”

It wasn’t literally the next shift when the Blue Jackets scored, but it was just two shifts later. Defenseman Damon Severson found Monahan on the doorstep of the Flyers’ goal with a crisp pass from the right circle.

Monahan waited for a half-second before lifting the puck over the right pad of Philadelphia goaltender Dan Vladar to put the Blue Jackets back in the lead.

Vladar had made two stellar glove saves earlier in the third period, robbing Blue Jackets center Adam Fantilli and winger Boone Jenner from the right post. The save on Fantilli was so dramatic that it went to replay to make sure Vladar’s glove didn’t cross the goal line when it snapped back with the puck.

“(Vladar) kind of had me at the start,” Monahan said, noting that the veteran goaltender was in position at the post to make a save. But he could tell that Vladar’s momentum was causing him to tip forward, and so he waited momentarily.

“I just wanted him to fall forward a little bit, to be able to get the puck over him. He’s a good goalie, and I was just trying to get a read on his play.”

Was he happy to have his scoring chance be on Vladar’s stick side?

“After seeing those two saves, yeah,” Monahan said.

Olivier’s empty-net goal with 1:06 remaining capped the scoring for the Blue Jackets.

NHL players don’t always admit to scoreboard watching or keeping an eye on the standings, but Werenski freely admits his own weakness.

“I check it daily,” Werenski said. “Even if it’s 2 in the afternoon and I already checked it, I’ll check it again, you know? I’m always looking at it.

“I think it’s important to know where you’re at in the standings, what needs to happen. I think it gives you extra motivation when you’re kind of climbing and catching teams and you know what’s at stake. We’re all aware in here.

“We still have a great chance to do something special here. And it’s been exciting, we’re taking care of business, and that’s all we can do.”

It was about 20 minutes after the game when Werenski met with the media. Had he already checked the updated standings?

“I did,” Werenski said, smiling. “Yeah.”

[The Athletic / Rick Bowness opens up about his family, classic rock and the power of communication](#)

By Aaron Portzline – January 28, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Two and a half weeks ago, Rick Bowness was on a boat with his wife, Judy, in the Intracoastal Waterway of Florida. It was 75 degrees and partly cloudy, with a gentle, salty breeze coming in off the Atlantic Ocean.

Bowness, who took over as coach of the Columbus Blue Jackets on Jan. 12, has spent the past three days digging out from a winter storm that dropped more than a foot of snow and brought plunging temperatures to central Ohio.

What was he thinking?

“I guess it just shows how much I missed it,” Bowness said with a smile.

Bowness, who turned 71 on Sunday, is here to help the Blue Jackets make a second-half push to the playoffs, but it’s unclear if he’ll simply finish the season in Columbus and get back on his boat, or if he’ll continue on with the franchise.

Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell and Bowness have said they’ll revisit the arrangement after the season ends, preferably in May or June.

So far, it’s working well. The Blue Jackets are 5-1-0 under Bowness heading into Wednesday’s game against the Philadelphia Flyers in Nationwide Arena.

The Athletic held a one-on-one interview with Bowness to discuss a more personal side of the coach, from marrying his high-school sweetheart, to his dockside chats with Sidney Crosby in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to his passion for Led Zeppelin and more.

This was the conversation:

You’ve mentioned your wife, Judy, several times since you arrived in Columbus. Sounds like she’s the rock star of the family?

One hundred percent. That’s a good way to put it. Listen, I’m only here because of her. We were high-school sweethearts. Been together since we were 16 years old. Married 48 years. All the times that we got traded or sent down as a player, or we got fired as coach, I’d say to her, “Do you want me to look for something else?” And she said, “Nope, this is what you love to do. We’re doing it.” Our whole life has been hockey, and she loves it as much as I do. She’s the driving force, man. She’s kept our family together all these years. And everywhere we go, she gets involved in a big way.

Explain that last part.

She's great with the wives and girlfriends of the players, really good at bringing people together. We've always preached family wherever we go, and that extends from me to the players but also Judy to the wives and girlfriends. You have to remember, when I got into coaching (at 28 years old), I was the same age as the players. Then I was old enough to be their fathers. Now, it's grandfather. We could be their grandparents, right? She just gets along with everybody.

Where does she sit during the game?

I'm not sure where she sits here, but she's always insisted in having a seat with a view of the bench. Keep an eye on me.

I noticed you said "When we got traded" and "When we got fired"...

Absolutely I did. That's how I see it. I remember, we got fired in Ottawa (on Nov. 20, 1995) and then got a job pretty quick with the Islanders, and it was New Year's Eve. We had everybody in the car, all the kids (two sons and one daughter) and the guilt really hit me. I mean, it hit me. I said, "Judy, what are we doing to these kids?" And (son) Rick Jr. was in the back, he was probably 14 at the time, and he overheard us. He said, 'Don't worry, Dad, we're a hockey family, right?' It's the life they know, isn't it? We're a hockey family. It's not just what we do, it's who we are.

You stepped down in Winnipeg citing health issues for both of you. How have those shaped you or changed your perspective on life?

That's the only reason I stepped away from Winnipeg. I loved my job, I loved the city, the players, the staff, everything. [What we went through with Judy](#) ... it's the scariest day (Oct. 22, 2023) of my life. I'd never seen anyone have a seizure. It happened in front of me, and I thought she was having a heart attack. I was in a mad panic, calling 911, saying get the paramedics here quick. I was screaming at the poor lady (dispatcher) on the end — "She's dying!" — and it's unreal how calm that lady was. I was holding her and thinking we were losing her. Worst moment of my life, right? It definitely changed our perspective on life. Between that and my dealing with long-term COVID ... we just had some good talks and decided, maybe we should enjoy life a little bit.

You have resting "joy face" these days? A default smile. Where does that come from?

Do you know how lucky I've been to be involved for 50 years with the National Hockey League? I tell players that all the time: "Every day in our league is a blessing, man, and don't ever take it for granted. Appreciate what we have and enjoy what we have."

You stress daily communication with players. Does that come naturally?

I tell young coaches all the time that their words and their tone are very important. You've got to know which player can handle what. But when I was a player, I always said, "When I get into coaching, I'm going to coach the way I would have wanted to be coached." When I was coaching the Bruins (1991-92), they hated the fact that I talked to the players so much, and it probably cost me my job, and that's fine. That was an era where, when you saw a coach, you shuddered in your boots. You've got to live with yourself, so you've got to do it your way. I couldn't change that if I wanted to.

You've developed a friendship with Sidney Crosby. Tell me about these "dock talks" you have in Nova Scotia a couple of times each summer.

We live on the same lake in Halifax. I live on one end of the lake — (Winnipeg's) Morgan Barron bought the house right next door — and at the far end of the lake are Sidney and Nathan (MacKinnon). It's hard for Sid and Nate to move around in public, it really is. So it's easier for me to go up there and join Sid at his place.

So you sit on the dock and talk ... hockey, or life, or both?

Oh, it's hockey. Like, it's all hockey, man. It's tremendous. I love these (conversations) we have. It's fun to talk hockey with a guy who knows the history of our game and respects the traditions of our game. I just love it. It's a couple times each summer. I get it, too. They're so busy, even in the summer. For me, summer is when you get away from all of the travel, the busy schedule. ... I get in my car, and I've got a four-minute drive to work. And that's a golf course. They're like me in the summer: Let me relax and enjoy my time.

You're a classic rock guy, yeah? Specifically one band.

Yep. I was a teenager in 1960s. The Beatles were huge, but, no, I love Led Zeppelin. The whole (catalog) of songs is on my phone.

Hard to pick, I know, but is there an album or a song that stand out?

"Kashmir." That's still the one, for me. "Immigrant Song" ... that's right there, too. But there are too many. One of my biggest disappointments is that I never got to see them play live.

One son (Ryan Bowness) was drafted by the Blue Jackets (in 2001), the other worked in the public relations department (2012-13). Have you always felt some kind of connection to the organization?

Absolutely, I have, yes. But I've always loved coming here. It's a great rink, the downtown is safe, everything you need as a visiting team is just kind of right here. Can I tell you about that draft back in 2001?

Of course.

It was in Florida that year, and Dougie (MacLean) was the GM here. I've known Dougie forever. But it got to the eighth round. When you're a parent and you're sitting beside your child and he's not getting drafted, it's just ... I had sweat all over me and I'm just about in tears, feeling so bad for (Ryan). And finally he said, "Dad, if I'm not drafted in this round, I want to leave." I said, "Kay." Thankfully he went in that eighth round. He's now assistant general manger in New York (Islanders).

And your other kids have NHL connections, right?

Yes. Rick Jr., who used to work here and loved it. He never played other than house league one year, but he didn't want to play, and that was fine with me. He got his Master's degree in sports management. It got to the point where he was tired of dealing with hockey players (laughs), so now he's working 9 to 5 and playing in two bands, and he loves it. His wife (Jodee) is vice president of ticket sales for the

Avalanche. And my daughter, Kristen, is the youth program director for the Utah Mammoth, which is a big job for a new franchise in a new area.

I should probably say happy birthday ...

Shhh.

Most would say you look good and have good energy for a 71-year-old. What's the secret?

No secret, really. I've always looked after myself. I played in the league, so you had to look after yourself and I've always done it. Long story...

Of course.

I turned 50 during the 2004-05 lockout, OK? I was in Phoenix, and I said to myself, "What am I going to do all winter?" So I started to train for a half-marathon, and ran it. Well, I was with the kids and I said something like, "Maybe when I turned 70, I'll run another half-marathon." Well, I completely forgot about it, and my daughter signed both me and her up for the Disney Half Marathon last February. I trained quickly, and we got through it. It was good. She's run a few half-marathons, I've run four or five. But now I've made the mistake of telling here I'll run another when I turn 75. I might forget. She won't.

Were your parents athletes?

My mom was a speed skater growing up in Nova Scotia. My dad was born in Montreal, and in that era you became the property of the Montreal Canadiens. They signed him when he was 20 years old, and he would go to training camp with (Bernie) "Boom Boom" Geoffrion, Jean Beliveau, Maurice Richard ... he told me all those stories. He played pro for five seasons, and back then there were only six teams. They'd send him back to the Maritime Senior Hockey League, but it could have been the NHL if there were more teams. In that era, they gave them day jobs and he played hockey at night. I remember him playing. I remember going into the locker room with him.

What are your plans during the Olympic break?

We'll go down to Florida, spend some time together, play some golf and recharge. But we've got some games to get ready for here in the meantime.

It was sunny and warm in Florida. It is not that here. Have you looked outside? What were you thinking?

I am thrilled to be here, thrilled to be back, and thrilled to be part of the NHL. This is my 50th year. Not one regret. Not one. That was the problem at the end of Winnipeg. I wasn't feeling good. I didn't think I had the energy to do the job the way I wanted to do it. I was worn out, by all of it, especially what Judy went through. That's why we had to step away. Now that we've got our health back, we're good to go. Excited.

I have to ask: What's the name of the boat?

Ready for this? (laughs) "Offseason."

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets overcome late collapse on Sean Monahan's winner

By Brian Hedger – January 28, 2026

The Blue Jackets still have a troubling habit of coughing up late leads, but they're also showing a new ability to overcome them with late goals of their own.

It happened again Jan. 28 at Nationwide Arena, where a 3-1 lead to start the third period disappeared before Sean Monahan scored the deciding goal with 3:28 left to play in the Jackets' 5-3 win over the Philadelphia Flyers. Monahan scored just 1:18 after Travis Konecny's third goal of the game tied it 3-3 for the Flyers on his third career hat trick.

Mathieu Olivier added an insurance goal into an empty net with 1:06 left to seal the win for the Blue Jackets (25-20-7), who caught the Flyers (24-19-9) in the Metropolitan Division standings at 57 points each.

Charlie Coyle, Kirill Marchenko, Erik Gudbranson scored the first three goals for the Blue Jackets, who got 21 saves from goalie Elvis Merzlikins. Coyle finished with two points on a goal and assist after receiving his silver stick for 1,000 games played during a pregame ceremony.

Konecny did all the scoring for the Flyers, including his second goal to cut the Jackets' two-goal cushion to 3-2 at 4:08 of the third period. Dan Vladar, who was activated off injured reserve earlier in the day, made 27 saves for the Flyers.

The Blue Jackets led 2-1 after the first period on goals by Coyle and Marchenko. They led 3-1 starting the third after Gudbranson scored his first of the season with a blast from the right point 1:58 into the second.

As has often been the case this season, things began to conspire against them early in the third. First, Adam Fantilli was robbed by Vladar with a lunging glove save 1:03 into the period to keep him from extending the lead to three goals on a power play. The Flyers followed that up with Konecny's second goal of the game, cutting the Blue Jackets' lead to 3-2 at 4:08 just 11 seconds after a Philly power play expired.

Vladar made another lunging glove save to keep Boone Jenner from scoring with 9:59 left in the third to give the Flyers another momentum boost.

Columbus Blue Jackets playoff picture

The Blue Jackets caught up with the Flyers and Washington Capitals in the Metropolitan Division at 57 points for all three teams, who trail the New York Islanders by six points for third place and the division's final guaranteed ticket into the playoffs.

The Columbus Dispatch / Mateychuk, Wood return for Columbus Blue Jackets: Skate report

By Brian Hedger – January 28, 2026

After having a game against the Los Angeles Kings postponed Jan. 26 by a winter storm, the Blue Jackets can catch the Philadelphia Flyers in the Metropolitan Division standings Jan. 28 at Nationwide Arena.

Elvis Merzlikins will get the start in net for the Blue Jackets (24-20-7), who trail the fourth-place Flyers (24-18-9) by two points after 51 games. The Jackets will also get defenseman Denton Mateychuk and forward Miles Wood back from injuries that cost both multiple games. Mateychuk sustained an upper-body injury prior to Rick Bowness taking over the Jackets' bench as head coach, so he's excited to see him play.

"I've watched him on TV a little bit," Bowness said. "All the great things I hear about him, and just watching him around the locker room, watching the interactions with all the players and the respect that's there already ... he gets along with everyone and everything he does, he's 'all in,' in the workouts, practices and meetings. I watch him in the meetings and he's dialed in, and I love that."

Mateychuk missed six games with his injury, which happened when he was driven into the boards from behind by Utah Mammoth forward Brandon Tanev in the Jackets' 3-2 win Jan. 11 in Salt Lake City, Utah. Wood missed 12 games with a lower-body injury that occurred Dec. 31 against the New Jersey Devils.

It was the second time this season he was injured against the Devils, whom he played parts of eight seasons with to start his NHL career. Wood also missed five games early in the season after taking a stick blade from Devils defenseman Dougie Hamilton in one of his eyes. Wood also dealt with back issues the past couple years with the Colorado Avalanche that required surgery.

"The last couple years certainly have been frustrating," Wood said. "I guess it comes with the territory playing hockey and with age, but we have a great training staff and I can't wait to get back out there with the guys. Hopefully, I can stay healthy the rest of the year."

The Flyers will get goalie Dan Vladar (lower body) off injured reserve and he'll start against the Blue Jackets. Here are the projected lineups for the Blue Jackets and Flyers:

Columbus Blue Jackets projected lineup vs Philadelphia Flyers

FORWARDS

17 Mason Marchment – 19 Adam Fantilli – 86 Kirill Marchenko

38 Boone Jenner – 23 Sean Monahan – 91 Kent Johnson

4 Cole Sillinger – 3 Charlie Coyle – 24 Mathieu Olivier

10 Dmitri Voronkov – 21 Isac Lundestrom – 11 Miles Wood

DEFENSIVE PAIRINGS

8 Zach Werenski – 78 Damon Severson

5 Denton Mateychuk - 9 Ivan Provorov

6 Egor Zamula – 44 Erik Gudbranson

GOALIES

90 Elvis Merzlikins

73 Jet Greaves

Scratched: F Brendan Gaunce, Dante Fabbro (lower body), F Danton Heinen

Injured reserve: D Brendan Smith (ankle)

Philadelphia Flyers projected lineup vs Columbus Blue Jackets

FORWARDS

46 Trevor Zegras – 22 Christian Dvorak – 11 Travis Konecny

52 Denver Barkey – 14 Sean Couturier – 74 Owen Tippett

39 Matvei Michkov – 27 Noah Cates – 10 Bobby Brink

29 Nikita Grebenkin – 25 Lane Pederson – 91 Carl Grundstrom

DEFENSE

6 Travis Sanheim – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

8 Cam York – 9 Jamie Drysdale

24 Nick Seeler – 47 Noah Juulsen

GOALIES

80 Dan Vladar

33 Samuel Ersson

Scratched: D Emil Andrae, LW Nicolas Deslauriers, R Garnet Hathaway

Injured reserve: RW Tyson Foerster (arm), C Rodrigo Abols (lower body)

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets' game vs Philadelphia Flyers to air on TNT

By Brian Hedger – January 28, 2026

After a winter storm postponed their Jan. 26 game against Los Angeles Kings, the Blue Jackets' turned their sights toward their nationally televised Jan. 28 faceoff against the Philadelphia Flyers.

It is a rare opportunity for Blue Jackets fans. This is just the fourth time the Blue Jackets have played a nationally televised game in 2025-26, and the first three were on Hulu and ESPN+.

The Blue Jackets are looking for a third straight win after downing the Dallas Stars 1-0 on Jan. 22 and the Tampa Bay Lightning 8-5 on Jan. 24. Both games were at home. The Blue Jackets (24-20-7) have won five of their first six games since hiring head coach Rick Bowness to replace Dean Evason.

They are scheduled to play the Flyers (24-17-9) three times this season, and the Jan. 28 matchup will be both their first meeting and the only one at Nationwide Arena. The Blue Jackets are chasing Philadelphia in a tightly packed division race.

Elvis Merzlikins is expected to start in net for the Blue Jackets after leaving his last start (Jan. 20, a 4-1 loss to the Ottawa Senators) during the first intermission due to illness. Denton Mateychuk is also expected to return for the Blue Jackets after missing six games with an upper-body injury, likely forcing Jake Christiansen out of the lineup as a healthy scratch.

When do the Columbus Blue Jackets play today?

The Blue Jackets conclude a four-game homestand (not including the postponed game vs. the Kings) against the Flyers at 7:30 p.m. Jan. 28 at Nationwide Arena.

The Blue Jackets have four more exclusive ESPN/ESPN+ and Hulu games remaining this season: March 5 vs Florida (ESPN), March 24 at Philadelphia (ESPN+/Hulu), March 31 vs Carolina (ESPN+/Hulu) and April 14 vs Washington (ESPN).

The ESPN+ and Hulu streaming services have apps that can be purchased with monthly, seasonal and annual subscription plans, and they can be purchased in bundles. The game Jan. 26 against the Flyers will be broadcast on radio at 97.1 FM The Fan, the Blue Jackets' primary radio affiliate.

The Hockey Writers / What Is the Blue Jackets' Edge in the Eastern Conference Playoff Race?

By Wesley Minke – January 28, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets are on a great stretch since the hiring of head coach Rick Bowness, and have now played themselves right back into contention in the Eastern Conference playoff race, with a 6-1-0 record under their new bench boss.

One of the biggest factors is the massive additions of Mason Marchment and Erik Gudbranson returning from injury, and they have allowed this new look Blue Jackets team to mold into the defensive structure and play style that Bowness has been made famous for employing.

So, how do these additions and play style give the Blue Jackets any sort of edge in this playoff race? Well, the ability for them to play in a structure also allows certain players to shine, though their individual skill sets are no greater than the sum of their parts.

One of the major benefactors from that, and a player who has received a ton of league-wide spotlight since his Blue Jackets debut, is Marchment. He has scored goals at will, has been an offensive superstar, and has had more success than anyone else in these forward lines.

However, right now the biggest difference is experience; something not many of these young Blue Jackets playmakers have just quite yet.

Veterans Leading By Example

Though he is not a captain or alternate captain, Charlie Coyle has been a massive difference-maker for the Blue Jackets this season. He is having his best season in quite some time and truly earning his way into consideration for the Selke Trophy, per Mark Scheig of The Hockey Writers.

On top of that, Marchment is playing the best hockey of his career now in Columbus. Both of these two guys have experienced playoff success, and have been in meaningful games late in the season.

This team feels like it has the perfect group to lead as well, because most of their top players are young, and haven't seen the playoffs just quite yet.

The biggest thing for Bowness and his leadership group will be how they blend young skill with veteran leadership. I think they have nailed it so far.

With Marchment on the top line, Boone Jenner on the second line, and Coyle heading up the third line, they are spreading out that leadership, and it has helped Bowness hold everyone accountable much more effectively.

Those guys understand defensive responsibilities and have been super effective at both ends of the ice, and that is a key factor in the Blue Jackets' turnaround of late. However, they also understand when they need a goal and who needs the puck on their stick.

Offense Has Shown Patience

As we just saw recently in the Blue Jackets' 8-5 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning, the offense has been able to score in bunches, and we have also seen they can go cold and struggle to find the back of the net at points, too.

How can that be turned around? Well, this Blue Jackets team is averaging 3.83 goals per game under Bowness. Before that, under former coach Dean Evason, they averaged 3.00 goals per game in the first 45 games this season. Clearly, the change is working.

However, they are still falling behind league average in terms of goals scored above average. You can see the turnaround coming, though, and I think that shows the patience with this team not trying to force offense when it is not there.

The Blue Jackets are well within striking distance now in the playoff race, just six points out of a playoff spot, and the offensive revival has been a big factor. However, they cannot try to force their hand when it is not there, which is something we have seen a lot of on past Blue Jackets teams, now disappear under Bowness.

Veteran leadership, a coach who has been there before with over four decades of coaching experience, and young budding stars who want to prove their preseason expectations of being a playoff team right away, are three massive reasons why this Blue Jackets team can get it done.

Not to mention, they have a guy who is playing as if the Norris Trophy belongs to him, in Zach Werenski. With these factors, the Blue Jackets have a lot of momentum that gives them the edge over quite a few teams in the mix for the Eastern Conference playoff race.

The Hockey Writers / 3 Keys to a Blue Jackets Victory Over the Flyers

By Wesley Minke – January 28, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets will look to stay hot tonight when they host the struggling Philadelphia Flyers, who seem to be backsliding their way out of the playoffs. The Blue Jackets have performed well under new head coach Rick Bowness. They are 6-1-0 since Bowness was hired on Jan. 12, and he has given the team the exact push they needed to make a run for the playoffs.

However, the mission tonight is to shut down another playoff hopeful who is currently two points ahead of them in the Metropolitan Division standings.

Let the Flyers Pressure Early

The Flyers have struggled recently. They are 3-5-2 in their last 10 games, with just one win in their last eight, and have very quickly played their way out of what appeared to be a locked-in playoff spot. The biggest thing coming out of that locker room is frustration, and they will likely apply a ton of pressure early to gain the lead. The Blue Jackets will need to simply stay the course.

The Blue Jackets have played a very structured game in all seven contests under Bowness, and that system will be challenged tonight after three days off. They will have to stick to the plan and not try to force anything early against the Flyers.

Columbus will welcome back Denton Mateychuk, who was activated off injured reserve on Tuesday. However, his offensive game may be limited under Bowness' system. It will be his first game playing under the new coach, and he may not jump up in plays as much as fans have come to expect from him.

Blue Jackets Can Capitalize on High-Danger Chances and Special Teams

The Blue Jackets are coming off a big 8-5 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning on Saturday night, when offense came easily to both sides. Columbus has been scoring, but those chances have all come from high-danger areas on the ice.

Bowness emphasized high-danger chances when he took over, and the Blue Jackets have responded. They have created a lot of open looks and capitalized on them, particularly Mason Marchment, who has eight goals in nine games since he was acquired from the Seattle Kraken on Dec. 20.

The Flyers' special teams rank among the worst in the league, with a power play that ranks 30th with a 15.6% success rate, and a penalty kill that ranks 20th at 78%. The Blue Jackets have scored on four of their last 14 power play opportunities since Bowness took over, for a 28.5% success rate. That is very efficient, and now they have their best puck-moving defenseman back in the lineup with Mateychuk.

Blue Jackets Must Win the Goalie Rust Battle

Tonight will be a battle between two goaltenders who have not played in over a week. Flyers goaltender Dan Vladar has been battling injury and makes his return tonight after two weeks off, while Elvis

Merzlikins has been battling a sickness that took him out of a game on Jan. 20 against the Ottawa Senators, when he allowed two goals on seven shots in the first period and was pulled for Jet Greaves.

Vladar has been good for the Flyers this season, with a 16-7-4 record, a .905 save percentage, and a 2.46 goals-against average. He will be a challenge for the Blue Jackets on Wednesday. The team has struggled against him – he is 3-0-0 in his career against the Blue Jackets with a .918 save percentage, 1.64 goals-against average, and one shutout.

Merzlikins, on the other hand, has struggled against the Flyers. He is 2-4-2 in nine games against them in his career, with a .891 save percentage, and 3.47 goals-against average. He has lost four of the last five against Philadelphia.

Both goalies will be trying to find their rhythm tonight with five games left before the Olympic break to help their team climb the standings. The Blue Jackets and Flyers both need points, while this is the first of back-to-back road games for Philadelphia.

The game will air on TNT, and the puck drops at 7:30 pm at Nationwide Arena.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Mateychuk, Wood, Zamula & More

By Mark Scheig – January 28, 2026

The Columbus Blue Jackets are relatively healthy as they play games in the last week of January. As of game time Wednesday night when they host the Philadelphia Flyers on TNT, only defenseman Brendan Smith will be on injured reserve.

The Blue Jackets will get both Denton Mateychuk and Miles Wood back in their lineup. It will mark the first time that the team will have all of Mathieu Olivier, Erik Gudbranson, Mason Marchment along with the two players returning in the same game.

With the Blue Jackets mostly healthy, it will give them a chance to see the full team with a good mix of skill and grit. It also forced them into some roster decisions.

As a result of Mateychuk and Wood coming back, the Blue Jackets placed Zach Aston-Reese and Brendan Gaunce on waivers for the purpose of assignment to the AHL. Both players cleared waivers on Wednesday. With Dante Fabbro close to returning too, the team will have to make decisions on a daily basis who plays.

We will start News & Rumors this week with the returns of Mateychuk and Wood.

Mateychuk & Wood Back

Mateychuk suffered an upper-body injury in Utah and has missed six games, not counting the postponed game Monday as he was scheduled to return. He's ready to rock.

"I'm excited," Mateychuk said. "It's been a hard couple of weeks to get back and I hadn't really missed that much time before. It's tough watching. I'm excited to get back in there and go and battle with these guys."

It was originally thought Mateychuk's injury would be shorter term. He admitted he wasn't sure how long it would take for him to return.

"It's kind of tough to determine with something like this. (Got back) probably a little quicker than I thought. I was happy with how it went and now I'm back."

As for Wood, he admitted dodging a bullet with his injury. He believes he's ready to help the team.

"I'm very excited about it," Wood said. "Been out for four weeks exactly, I think. Just excited to get back and try to help the group."

"When I first went into the board, they thought it was my Achillies which was a wild sensation. But thank God it wasn't that."

Expect Mateychuk to play on the right with Ivan Provorov while Wood is expected to play on the fourth line with Dmitri Voronkov and Isac Lundestrom.

Zamula Faces Old Team

Newest Blue Jackets' defenseman Egor Zamula spent his entire career with the Flyers' organization before his trade to the Pittsburgh Penguins. Zamula ultimately didn't report to the AHL and had his contract terminated. He signed with the Blue Jackets as a free agent.

Zamula gets his first crack at his old team on Wednesday night. He reflected on what the game will mean as well as some of his thoughts on the Flyers.

"A little bit different," Zamula said of facing the Flyers. "But at same time, first game against them in my life, so it's going to be fun and I'm waiting for 7:30."

"I grew up with these guys from AHL to NHL," Zamula said. "I have a lot of good stories and a lot of great dinners together with these teammates and friends. So I'm pretty happy to see them today."

Although Zamula has just one assist in eight games so far with the Blue Jackets, he says he's loving his time with the team. He also knows he can play better and is eager to show that.

"I love the city and this organization," Zamula said. "Great leadership group. Great old guys and a lot of young guys as well. So it's pretty easy...I know I can play better. But at the same time, I have great partners who help me a lot. So I'm pretty happy about my game right now."

Zamula also has familiarity with a couple of the Blue Jackets' players. He played at the U-18's with Kirill Marchenko. He also played with Ivan Provorov when both were members of the Flyers. Zamula said they each helped him get comfortable with the transition to Columbus. So far, he's loving his new team.

Side Dishes

- Wednesday will mark the first time the Blue Jackets have been back on TNT since the infamous 9-4 crushing the Buffalo Sabres laid. Tage Thompson scored five goals including four in the first period. This game was originally set for 7:00 and was moved to 7:30 to accommodate national TV. The Rangers/Islanders were originally in that slot.
- Two rusty goaltenders are set to face each other. Elvis Merzlikins is making his first start since he left the game against Ottawa with an illness. Dan Vladar was activated from injured reserve and will make his first start in multiple weeks.
- Charlie Coyle will be celebrated Wednesday night when the Blue Jackets present him with his silve stick for reaching 1,000 NHL games played.

The Athletic / NHL rumblings: Landeskog's timeline, Point's status and a swing team for the trade deadline

By Pierre LeBrun – January 28, 2026

Gabriel Landeskog joined his Colorado Avalanche teammates for practice Tuesday in a rather important development as a key leader of Sweden's Olympic hockey team continues his recovery with the minutes ticking down until players head to Milan.

No. 92 had skated before on his own over the past week, and Tuesday's practice with teammates was his first since suffering an upper-body injury crashing into the boards in Florida on Jan. 4.

"Definitely making improvements," Avs coach Jared Bednar said Tuesday. "He's been on the ice for a few days now and getting better. Doing more in the gym. And that's a big sign for me. Like when you can stay out (in practice) and do the flow, non-contact drills, and be moving around and not look too uncomfortable ... so he's moving in the right direction.

"For Gabe, obviously, we're just really hoping he can get back and be part of the Olympics, and it looks like he's trending in that direction."

That's as close as the Avs have come to saying, basically, that it's going to take everything in the world to keep Landeskog out of the Olympics.

Two days earlier, Bednar had hinted as well that Landeskog was pushing hard to come back for Milan but did add this proviso:

"There's always a little bit of nervousness when you've got players going that maybe aren't fully healthy, but he'll do the right thing, and I'm really hoping that we can watch him in the Olympic tournament because it's something that he really wants to do, play for his country again," Bednar said. "He's earned that, with his season. Hopefully everything works out, but it's going to be tight."

On Tuesday, Bednar also didn't rule out Landeskog playing in a game with the Avs just before the break if all goes well in his recovery.

Landeskog wasn't available to the media on Tuesday — per NHL rules, he won't be until he's activated from injured reserve — but if a smile could communicate anything, the Avs captain walked by me Tuesday looking like a man who knows he's on a decent path to get himself to Milan.

It would be huge for Sweden, which has already lost Jonas Brodin and Leo Carlsson to injury, who will be replaced by Hampus Lindholm and Marcus Johansson.

Sweden included Landeskog last June as one of its first six players, which surprised some, given that, at the time, he had played only five games after returning from a three-year absence.

It spoke to what Landeskog means to the Olympic team.

“We wanted to send a message right away that he was one of our leaders,” Sweden Olympic head coach Sam Hallam told *The Athletic* in November.

Point’s status for Canada

It sure didn’t look good when Brayden Point couldn’t put any weight on his right leg after suffering a knee injury on Jan. 12.

But the next day, the Tampa Bay Lightning felt they had avoided the worst-case scenario, announcing Point was week to week. And league sources told *The Athletic* on Tuesday that Point continues to make progress and Team Canada is still holding out hope that he can make it to Milan.

The preference, from Team Canada’s perspective and probably the Lightning’s as well — with Jon Cooper coaching for both sides — is to see Point appear in an NHL game before the break. It’s not 100 percent he’s going to Milan, but Point’s chances are better today than they were two weeks ago.

Isles’ busy 24 hours

When the dust cleared after a busy 24 hours for New York Islanders general manager Mathieu Darche, he had essentially acquired Carson Soucy, Ondrej Palat and a sixth-round pick in exchange for Maxim Tsyplakov.

A third-round pick was sent to the New York Rangers on Monday for Soucy, but then a third-round pick was acquired on Tuesday from the New Jersey Devils in the Palat deal.

So a tidy 24 hours of work for Darche, who wanted to reward his team for its surprising season.

The Islanders have plenty of salary cap room next season, so taking the full \$6 million cap hit that’s left on Palat’s deal this season and next was very doable, and it explains why they got two draft picks in the deal.

The Devils had been trying for a while to move Palat’s contract. Having done that might help facilitate other moves.

Darche, meanwhile, knows Palat well from their years together winning Cup titles in Tampa, and whatever version of the player remains, the Islanders have added a winner, which was part of the appeal.

As soon as the Rangers released their public letter about a new direction on Jan. 16, the Isles were on them about Soucy. Darche was aggressive on it because he’s been trying to replace the injured Alexander Romanov (who could be back late in the first round of the playoffs).

It’s important for the Islanders to make the playoffs. It’s the kind of experience they want rookie Matthew Schaefer and their other young players to have.

Blue Jackets could be swing team for trade deadline

The Blue Jackets are 5-1 since their coaching change and will determine at the Olympic break if they’re buyers or sellers. Heading into Tuesday night’s games, they were six points out of third place in the

Metro with a game in hand on the Isles. Given how wild the race is in the Atlantic Division, third place in the Metro is probably a more realistic target for the Jackets than a wild-card spot.

But if they determine during the Olympic break that they can't stay in the race, the Jackets could be a real factor in a market that doesn't have a lot of sellers yet. Pending unrestricted free agents include Boone Jenner, Mason Marchment, Charlie Coyle and Erik Gudbranson. Some of those guys could end up being extended, but calls are coming in on them.

Jenner would be a hot target as a leadership guy and his style of play come playoff time, and Coyle has already generated lots of calls — not surprising given how few centers are available.

Oilers still talking to teams on Mangiapane

It has been more than a month of Andrew Mangiapane being in and out of the Oilers lineup, and to some degree, it's surprising he hasn't been traded yet.

It's not for a lack of trying. My understanding is that the Oilers are having ongoing conversations with teams open-minded about a return. But there hasn't been a fit so far.

Mangiapane has only six goals this season, with a contract that runs through next season at a \$3.6 million cap hit, which complicates things. But Oilers GM Stan Bowman continues to have dialogue with teams because he wants to find Mangiapane a better opportunity.

My sense is that Bowman's communication with the player's agent, Allain Roy, has been as positive and constructive as it can be, given the difficult circumstances.

I wonder about teams such as the Winnipeg Jets, Ottawa Senators or St. Louis Blues as fits. The fact that Mangiapane has another year on his deal might actually be more appealing to those teams, none of whom are sitting in a playoff spot.

Habs won't force another trade

The Canadiens have slid down the standings a bit in the ultra-competitive Atlantic Division, which has made some fans in their market nervous, but management isn't going to react by forcing a short-term move. They've already traded for veteran center Phillip Danault. They continue to be receptive to taking and making calls with teams, but the keyword to describe their trade deadline approach right now is "prudent" — the word Habs GM Kent Hughes [used on a podcast Friday](#) with Arpon Basu and Marc-Antoine Godin.

That matches what I'm hearing around the league, as far as the tone of the conversations the Canadiens are having. They're not mortgaging the future to make it all about this season. They want to make the playoffs, but the bigger picture still trumps all for the youngest team in the league.

The Canadiens will continue to look at potential top-six options up front, but any move will have to make sense beyond this year. This is a creative front office. I could see a hockey trade that surprises people but makes sense in the bigger picture.

In the meantime, don't expect a goalie trade, either. They need better goaltending, but that answer must come from within. There's no starter on the trade market available to fix that situation.

Why is Colorado still struggling on PP?

Riddle me this, Batman.

How can the high-octane Avalanche offense — by far the highest-scoring team at five-on-five in the NHL — continue to sit near the bottom of the league on the power play?

Some things don't make sense.

"We've tweaked some things, it gets back on track, kind of slips away from us again — it's a work in progress," Bednar said Sunday. "Working to make sure we're in a real good support with one another and an element of patience for our team. I think we're getting impatient before the other team's penalty kill and sort of forcing plays, which ends up in clears. And then we have to go and reset it and do it all over again.

"It's a real tricky one for us because we're doing a lot of good things. We're creating some good looks. We're not scoring like we would in our five-on-five play. So we're just trying to find balance on how much to tweak it and how much to leave it alone and working with the guys to get on the same page. But it's definitely a work in progress. ... The consistency hasn't been there, so that's what we've been working on."

There's just no way a power play with Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar can stay where it is for an entire 82-game season. It defies logic.

Then again, the Avs' power-play struggled in their first-round playoff series loss to the Dallas Stars last spring (going 3-for-22), prompting the firing of assistant coach Ray Bennett, who was in charge of the power play.

It remains an enigma.