



**Columbus Blue Jackets Media Clips**  
**May 23-26, 2026**

**Blue Jackets News**

PAGE 2 The Hockey Writers / Are the Blue Jackets in a Rebuild or a Rerun?

PAGE 5 The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Jenner, Johnson, Merzlikins & More

**Cleveland Monsters News**

PAGE 9 Cleveland.com / Monsters eliminated from AHL playoffs by Toronto Marlies, 3-2, on goal with 11 seconds left in the game

## The Hockey Writers / Are the Blue Jackets in a Rebuild or a Rerun?

**By Wesley M. – May 25, 2026**

For the past six seasons, the Columbus Blue Jackets have struggled to get out of their own way and to finish the season in the playoffs. It has raised many questions amongst the fan base if they need to fully tank in order to join the elite of the league with premier talent.

If you look around at other teams in the league that have recently gone through a rebuild, you can visibly tell they have gone through it and have come out the other side stronger and better positioned to win both now and for the next ten years as well.

For comparison's sake, the Blue Jackets haven't picked higher than the third overall pick, which they have done twice since 2016, over the past 14 years. They picked second overall in 2012, drafting Ryan Murray. The only other time they have picked higher than that was 2002, when they drafted Rick Nash first overall.

A couple of teams have massively expedited their rebuild by finding premier talent and quickly jumping back into contention as what would be considered a Cup contender in the next few years, and for years to come.

### **How Has Columbus Missed?**

What the Blue Jackets have failed to do or do correctly that every other team has shown is their inability to fight for contention. It makes you wonder if, because the Blue Jackets have never been a team fully committed to a rebuild, they have tried season after season to make it work with a team that has been a fringe playoff team every season.

At some point, they will need to be able to fall on the sword and understand that they need to fully tear it down before trying to build it back up. Other teams that have changed their fortune recently through premier picks are the Montreal Canadiens, Anaheim Ducks, and Buffalo Sabres. It makes you wonder where the Blue Jackets might be right now if they fully committed to a rebuild.

So does this mean the Blue Jackets need to just sell off all their talent and try to lose? No, not at all; however, they have to be okay with knowing they are entering a season not in contention, and the fans have to be able to understand that not being good for a few years is much better than being stuck in the middle of the pack and having no direction either up or down.

The Blue Jackets have a good young core, but the unfortunate part is that the talent surrounding that young core is not young, and they also aren't cheap. If the Blue Jackets can find a way to switch up this roster or trade for a big star, then a massive shift is not needed.

However, being a team that has never made it further than the second round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, and with only one first-overall pick in their 25-year history, doesn't bode well for their ability to compete with the best of the best.

### **What Could Flip the Script?**

With the lack of success for the Blue Jackets both on the ice and in the draft lottery, there are a few things they can do to manually insert themselves back into a spot of serious contention. A trade is on the table for a team like Columbus, which doesn't really need the 14th overall pick again this year, and would rather package that and take a shot at a star.

Could an offer sheet make sense for the Blue Jackets? They could take a chance at a restricted free agent who may be stuck in a salary cap nightmare with their current team, and match up to \$4.775 million per year without suffering a first-round pick in the 2027 NHL Draft. The Blue Jackets just signed one of their most important pieces in Charlie Coyle to a six-year \$6 million average annual value deal.

Could the Blue Jackets try to swing their way up the 2026 NHL Draft board as well? That is another option, a draft day trade to jump up the board, which is something this organization has done before, jumping up to first-overall to draft Rick Nash in 2002.

Would a trade-up make sense for the Blue Jackets this season, however? They have been a team looking to make a splash ever since Don Waddell took over as the general manager in May 2024. Could this be the year?

He has his coach settled in coming off the back of an extension signed by Rick Bowness, but now, how does he get his team ready to change the fortune of the past six seasons?

### **How Close Are They?**

Unfortunately for the Blue Jackets, they are not nearly as close as they may think or as fans may think, either. They struggle to consistently score goals, and defensively, they struggle to keep the opposing team out of the slot and opportunities to a minimum.

Outside of Jet Greaves, they do not have a consistent number two to help in the crease, and unfortunately, outside of a top line that can produce, the team is full of overpriced forwards who have struggled to score for their worth. They have to find a way to retool their forward group and add more young talent.

The coaching staff will be rebuilt under Bowness, and who he chooses to be captain of the team if Boone Jenner does leave this offseason will be his first defining move. How he and Waddell handle the prospects they have in the system as a retool of talent can also be a massive decision maker for the Blue Jackets.

How they attack the offseason can completely change the outlook of this franchise moving forward. From a team struggling to find their way, looking for direction, and looking for their stars to

build around moving forward, they need a defining offseason to change the culture and franchise outlook.

Maybe a real rebuild is what this team is missing, or will they continue to rerun the same misfortune this franchise has been going through for the past 25 years? They have to change something; they cannot be content with not being a contender.

## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Jenner, Johnson, Merzlikins & More

By Mark Scheig – May 23, 2026

### Side Dishes

The offseason might be over a month old, but it continues to be a busy one for the Columbus Blue Jackets. With it being Memorial Day weekend in the United States, it marks an important time on the hockey calendar.

The NHL is down to its Final Four. The Memorial Cup is underway in Kelowna. The Calder Cup Playoffs in the AHL is about to get down to its Final Four. The NHL Combine gets underway in less than 10 days in Buffalo where all teams will be together for a few days interviewing the next round of draft prospects.

Things are starting to pick up around the league. The Blue Jackets are in the midst of planning for the NHL Draft next month while working their way through several important decisions they need to make as a franchise.

We begin today's News & Rumors with the future of their captain.

### Jenner's Future

Have we seen the last of Boone Jenner with the Blue Jackets? That possibility cannot be ruled out.

Elliott Friedman also weighed in on the Jenner situation during a recent episode of 32 Thoughts the Podcast. Here is in part what the insider had to say:

"You don't hire Pat Morris when you're looking for a discount." Friedman went on to say that Jenner reportedly feels that whatever the team is offering is not something he's willing to accept.

Add in the comments from head coach Rick Bowness about a culture change needed in Columbus and you could see a scenario where the longest-tenured Blue Jacket will be on a new team in 2026-27.

It is worth noting that during exit interviews, GM Don Waddell didn't exactly say Jenner would absolutely be back. Here is what was said when asked about how leadership handled things especially down the stretch of last season.

"I think things will progress in the summertime and see which players we re-sign and bring back. In time, everything will get figured out."

Now this doesn't mean Jenner won't be back. But the chances of him not returning are much higher now than before. A closer look at the situation reveals why there would be a difference of opinion on a potential contract.

Under Rick Bowness, Jenner's role was as a fourth-line center. At times when there were injuries, the captain would play higher in the lineup.

If this is how the Blue Jackets view Jenner's role moving forward, their offer is going to represent that. It also wouldn't be surprising to anyone if injury concern was part of this discussion.

In the last five full seasons, Jenner has played in 59, 68, 58, 26, and 67 games. That's 278 out of a possible 410 games. While the captain has worked his way back from different situations, his availability in 67.8% of the games will get management's attention.

On the other side, Jenner has three 20-goal seasons in his last five despite the missed games. He also had a career-high in assists in 2025-26 with 25. He can play in any situation and is still a good faceoff option. He will feel he has plenty to give.

No one will question the way Jenner plays the game. They also won't question the kind of leader he is. He's the kind of player that brings his teammates into the fight when on the ice.

The other question that must be considered is if the Blue Jackets are contemplating leadership changes. While Bowness insisted that it's not just about who wears a letter, it's still an important conversation.

If Jenner does return, will he keep the 'C'? Would he be willing to relinquish it if asked?

My analysis: The feeling I get is while the door isn't closed on a Jenner return, all signs point to him hitting market on July 1. While there is no question both sides have expressed a desire in wanting to sign an extension at different points, their perceived difference of opinion now is something that cannot be ignored.

This will potentially be Jenner's last chance to sign a bigger NHL deal. From his perspective, if the market will present bigger and better deals than what the Blue Jackets are willing to offer, they will explore those options. An agent change speaks volumes about where things could be headed.

The Blue Jackets aren't going to invest a significant portion of the cap to who they perceive to be a bottom-six option. Unless one of the sides dramatically changes their tune in the weeks to come, we could be looking at the end of the line for the longest-tenured Blue Jacket in franchise history.

If that does come to pass, it'll speak volumes about the kind of change the Blue Jackets would be going through. Notice how quickly the Charlie Coyle extension came together.

If nothing else, the rest of the offseason will show what the Blue Jackets are prioritizing. The fact that their captain is still without a new contract shows that loyalty isn't the only factor in play when making important decisions.

We could be seeing a changing of the guard unfolding before our eyes in Columbus.

### **Johnson & Merzlikins Rumors**

Both Kent Johnson and Elvis Merzlikins have been rumored at different points to be available for trade. Those rumors spiked when both players appeared on the same trade board this week.

As of this writing, there is nothing to indicate that a trade is imminent on either player. With that said, the chances of either playing being dealt is also not 0% either.

Johnson did not have a good season in 2025-26. Many on the outside will look at him as a potential candidate for a change of scenery.

The Blue Jackets still value Johnson and believe his best is yet to come. Bowness said he'd like to see the winger with some weight added on.

At his best, Johnson is a playmaker who has the ability to get the puck to his teammates for dangerous chances. One of the issues was that he couldn't find a consistent place in the Blue Jackets' lineup. This led to him being scratched on multiple occasions.

It was those scratches that prompted rumors of a trade. It didn't happen then. And unless the Blue Jackets are involved in a larger trade in the offseason to acquire a bigger name, it appears likely Johnson will remain a Blue Jacket going into 2026-27.

No player is truly untouchable. But given what has been said by management about Johnson and his potential, the chances of trade are low. But it can't be ruled out either.

My analysis: Short of a big name coming to the Blue Jackets, expect Johnson to be back in 2026-27.

As for Merzlikins, he's an annual discussion point when it comes to rumors. He's got one year left on his contract at an AAV of \$5.4 million.

While that appears to be a tough contract to trade, it's also not impossible either. The cap has gone up. There could be situations out there where a team could look at him for one season. Teams that want futures as part of the deal could see about attaching a draft pick for incentive purposes.

Bowness at exits made it sound like he thinks Merzlikins will be back. The head coach said that Merzlikins expressed his desire to be a number-one goalie. In response, Bowness said come to camp ready and prove it.

Where this becomes interesting is if Sergei Ivanov signs with the Blue Jackets when his contract expires on May 31. Is there a path to an NHL job right away? While it would seem most likely Ivanov starts in the AHL, his numbers in the KHL have popped. Regardless of timing whether it be in 2026-27 or 2027-28, Ivanov is primed to come over and make his case to play in Columbus.

The other question to consider is do the Blue Jackets need the cap space immediately given all the business they hope to handle? While they have plenty of space even after signing Coyle, they have several big contracts to finish not to mention if they acquire any bigger names.

My analysis: As of this writing, I am under the impression Merzlikins is back. It's hard to gauge which teams would be interested in making a trade now with just one more season left on his deal.

Jet Greaves is the perceived number-one going into 2026-27. Remember too that Bowness had nothing but good things to say about Merzlikins at different points during the 2025-26 season. So unless the exact, right opportunity comes up, signs point to Merzlikins coming back.

## **Side Dishes**

Portzline also reported this week that goaltender Ivan Fedotov returned to Russia to deal with an injury. He appeared in one playoff game for the Monsters before being pulled. Evan Gardner has been the backup to Zach Sawchenko in the AHL playoffs.

The Monsters lost Game 4 to the Toronto Marlies 5-2 on Friday night setting up a winner-take-all Game 5 Sunday afternoon in Cleveland. The winner advances to the Eastern Conference Final. Special teams doomed the Monsters Friday night going just 1 for 6 on their power play and allowing two power-play goals against.

As for the Blue Jackets at the World Championships, Denton Mateychuk and Mathieu Olivier each have two goals. Jet Greaves is 3-0-0 with a 1.67 goals-against average and a .909 save percentage.

The NHL Combine gets underway starting Sunday, May 31 and running through Saturday, June 6. The top-91 prospects are expected to attend subject to change. The Blue Jackets will have a contingent there interviewing potential prospects they'd look to draft. The Hockey Writers will be there on June 5-6 talking to the prospects after their fitness testing. This is usually when we start to get a better idea of how things could play out at the NHL Draft. The Blue Jackets hold the 14th overall pick.

## [Cleveland.com / Monsters eliminated from AHL playoffs by Toronto Marlies, 3-2, on goal with 11 seconds left in the game](#)

**By Matt Lofgren – May. 24, 2026**

After holding a lead for most of the third period, the Monsters surrendered two goals in the final 4 1/2 minutes Sunday and fell to the Toronto Marlies, 3-2, at Rocket Arena in Game 5 of their American Hockey League North Division finals series.

The loss ended the season for the Monsters, who dropped the final two games after leading the best-of-five series, 2-1.

Toronto's tying goal came with 4:30 left to play in the third, on a one-timer by Marlies captain Logan Shaw off a pass from Vinni Lettieri.

The Monsters gave up the winning goal with 11 seconds left in the game.

Toronto's Jacob Quillan was able to get possession of the puck behind the Monsters goal and pass it to an open Lettieri in front of the net, and he loaded up for a shot from about 12 feet.

Using quick hands, Cleveland's Luca Del Bel Belluz poked the puck away before the shot, but fate brought it right to the stick of a wide-open Easton Cowan, and the Marlies forward buried the game-winner with seconds left on the clock.

With more than 12,000 fans in attendance cheering the Monsters on, they killed off two big third-period penalties, which electrified the crowd and gave the players a boost in energy that was palpable.

"It's tough because I thought we played a hard game, got better as we went, and didn't feel like we were giving them much," Cleveland coach Trent Vogelhuber said after the game. "Two big kills there in the third period, then bang-bang.

"Tough (loss) is an understatement."

Enjoying a 2-1 Monsters advantage for most of the game, the crowd inside Rocket Arena could taste a return trip to the Eastern Conference finals for the second time in three seasons.

The Monsters' offense was alive and well early on, in large part due to another big outing from Zach Aston-Reese. He scored his second goal of the series since becoming a new dad last week, giving the Monsters a 1-0 lead 6 1/2 minutes into the game.

Toronto was able to tie things up headed into the first intermission by way of Lettieri's sixth goal this postseason.

Cleveland's Hudson Fasching netted his fourth goal of the playoffs five minutes into the second period to give the Monsters a 2-1 lead.

But the one-timer and unlucky roll of the puck were enough to end the Monsters' season in a game that Vogelhuber believed was his team's to win.

“I felt like we played a pretty good game and a pretty good series, and you lose, but we got to a place where we could have been there,” Vogelhuber said. “We could have been playing hockey in June, and you’re a shot away at the end of the game.”

It might be an offseason of change for the Monsters, as there are reports that Vogelhuber is a candidate for an assistant coaching position with the Columbus Blue Jackets, the Monsters’ parent team. Vogelhuber was born in suburban Columbus and played collegiately at Miami University.

“Nobody wants to be in the American Hockey League when they’re a kid. That’s nobody’s dream. I want the players that are here to be here when they’re here, be in the moment, and I want our team to be committed to each other,” Vogelhuber said.

“I’m proud of the fact that this year, our guys got there. It’s ups and downs, but at the end of the year, you get to the point where players are playing for something more than themselves, and it’s the guys next to you, and that’s all that you’re hoping for and building for over the course of a season.

“We’ve been able to get here a few times since I’ve been here. That’s what I’m proud of. It’s not rocket science; that’s what I’m asking for out of our guys. Buy in for the guys that are out there in the trenches with them.”