



New General Manager Jarmo Kekäläinen is expected to join the Blue Jackets on Wednesday, just in time for Thursday night's game in Detroit, and maybe he'll be able to put the team at ease. Since Kekäläinen's hire, the Jackets are winless and have scored just six goals. Injuries and slumps have been the theme of the season thus far and the players, and coach Todd Richards, appear to be feeling the pressure of Kekäläinen's hire.

Since opening the season with a shootout win and a shootout loss, the Blue Jackets have managed just seven out of 28 possible points. With their three-game losing streak, the Jackets are now the worst team in the NHL, one point behind Washington, who has a game in hand. For Jackets fans, the saving grace has been the team's 3-4-2 home record, where they have played competitively. They have just one win in seven tries on the road, with all six losses in regulation. The Jackets have three road games left on this six-game road trip. Those three games are against Detroit, St. Louis, and Chicago, so the gap in the Central Division standings is likely to grow.

Sixteen games into the season, Fedor Tyutin remains the Jackets' leading scorer. The Blue Jackets are tied for 22nd in goals scored, yet are 14th in shots on goal. The team simply lacks the forward talent to compete on a nightly basis, an issue that has plagued the team since its inception.

That's the problem facing Kekäläinen now that his work visa issues are out of the way. It will have been almost a week since he was hired, so it's safe to say that he has evaluated the team's salary cap situation, the current roster, and watched a lot of film on the players in the professional and junior ranks. Getting a look in person will help make a case for each player to stay, but it would be a good assumption that Kekäläinen and President of Hockey Operations John Davidson are looking at a full-scale rebuild with this roster.

With a little under a month and a half until the trade deadline, look for Kekäläinen to stockpile draft picks in whatever trade he can make. He is extremely comfortable with scouting, having been St. Louis's director of pro scouting for the better part of the 2000s, and he also has a lot of familiarity with European hockey. The Los Angeles Kings are struggling so far, so their first round pick, which the Jackets received in the Jeff Carter trade, could lead to a better player than the team initially thought. With two good assets likely coming from those picks, the Jackets' prospect pool should look more promising after this year's draft.

Unfortunately, for Kekäläinen and the Jackets, there are some very hard to move contracts on the books. RJ Umberger, who has really struggled this season, will make \$4.6M per season through the 2016-17 season. James Wisniewski, who has helped the team offensively, but has hurt the team defensively, will make \$5.5M through the 2016-17 season. The new collective bargaining agreement has a provision that allows teams to buy out a bad contract called an amnesty buyout. Two amnesty buyouts are available for each team following the season. Umberger and Wisniewski would appear to be candidates. What's unfortunate is that the Jackets are unlikely to be able to trade these players to get draft picks or prospects.

The other long-term contracts belong to Jack Johnson and Fedor Tyutin. Both of them have played very well and their contracts run through the 2017-18 season. Brandon Dubinsky and Nick Foligno are signed for two more seasons after this one. Beyond that, the Blue Jackets don't have too many albatrosses financially. Derick Brassard is only signed through next season at \$3.2M, so the team could pay his full buyout or just allow him to play out his contract.

All in all, Kekäläinen doesn't inherit a terrible situation, despite the fact that the team is terrible in the standings. There are some good young players, including Ryan Johansen, John Moore, Cam Atkinson, Tim Erixon, 2012 first round pick Ryan Murray, 2011 second round pick Boone Jenner, and goaltenders Oscar Dansk and Joonas Korpisalo. Korpisalo, in fact, was part of the Jokerit junior club, so Kekäläinen is extremely familiar with him. What the Jackets organization lacks above all else is top flight, superstar-type talent, and that's what they will try to acquire in this year's draft.

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An update on the Lake Erie Monsters....the Monsters have lost a lot of talent of late, both with injuries in Cleveland and injuries in Colorado, so the roster looks a little bare. The team was also without starting goaltender Calvin Pickard, who was recalled to Colorado last weekend.

As a result, the Monsters are riding an eight-game losing streak into the start of an eight-game homestand. Four of those losses came in shootouts. Overall, the Monsters have lost nine of their last 10 games, five of them in shootouts.

The Monsters return home on Thursday to battle the Milwaukee Admirals.