



In the condensed NHL schedule, every point is critical, especially considering that every game is played against a conference foe. The Columbus Blue Jackets started to get healthy last week and now have put together an eight-game point streak. The team had a shot to tie the franchise record with six straight wins on Tuesday night, but fell in a shootout to the Vancouver Canucks. After securing 12 of 14 possible points this month, the Blue Jackets are now three points out of a playoff spot.

The one thing that observers of the Blue Jackets have taken notice of, pretty much since the first week of the season, is that the Jackets work hard night in and night out. They're finally starting to see that hard work pay off in the win column. Seven of the last eight games for the Blue Jackets have gone to overtime, so they have played a lot of hockey and have battled through a lot of adversity during this stretch.

If anything, this latest stretch has allowed the Blue Jackets to climb out of the hole they put themselves in to start the season and possibly be relevant in the playoff chase. It's unlikely that they can keep playing this well and jump the five teams ahead of them for a playoff spot with the number of three-point games and more than half of the season complete, but it could be a fun ride nonetheless.

The Blue Jackets are a very, very young team. There are a lot of guys on the ice who need to learn how to win at this level and they have done that of late. Since February 15, the Jackets have played 12 one-goal games. In those games, they're 5-4-3. With the point for an overtime loss, NHL games are played very close to the vest in the third period and the Blue Jackets have done a good job of holding onto leads and climbing back into games. That's big for a young team.

The play of Sergei Bobrovsky has been a big part of this late run. Young teams make mistakes. It's just the nature of the game. Bobrovsky has stood tall and provided a safety net for the team. Unlike Steve Mason, who can no longer be relied on to make a big save, Bobrovsky has been an integral part of this season and has shown the ability to make the big save. In March, Bobrovsky is 5-0-1 with an 0.83 goals against average and a .970 save percentage.

Vinny Prospal, at 38 years old, continues to lead the charge. His nine goals are a team-best, as are his 15 points. Grinder turned offensive contributor Mark Letestu is tied for second on the team with 14 points. Ryan Johansen had a four-game assist streak snapped on Tuesday night against Vancouver. Youngster Dalton Prout has been a terrific addition to the blue line, posting a +4 rating in his seven games.

On paper, the Blue Jackets still lack the big names and the big talent, but they're playing a tremendous team game and their effort levels are off the charts. Add in a hot goaltender like Bobrovsky and the Jackets could continue to play this way as that locker room starts to believe more. The next four games are at home for the Blue Jackets, where they've played well.

With the #3-10 seeds in the Western Conference separated by two points, anything could happen in the playoff picture. The Blue Jackets are three points out and even last place Calgary is only six points out. A lot of tiebreakers are going to come into play to determine playoff spots. It'll be a race to the end of the season and one that the Blue Jackets will hopefully be a part of.

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A brief update on the Lake Erie Monsters...

The Monsters are continuing to struggle and have fallen out of the top eight in the Western Conference. The Monsters are currently 10th, two points out of the final playoff spot. With just 15 games left in the season, it will be an uphill climb for them to get back into the playoff picture.