



The Columbus Blue Jackets are celebrating their tenth anniversary season this year, yet they are striving to erase most of the decade from the minds of their fans. With one playoff appearance, a sweep by the hated Detroit Red Wings, the start of a new decade of Blue Jackets hockey may provide a spark for the franchise.

This past offseason, the Jackets tabbed Scott Arniel as the new bench boss.

Arniel, a one-time Buffalo Sabres assistant, and most recently, the head coach of the American Hockey League's Manitoba Moose, brings an up-tempo style and a winning attitude to a fan base desperate for both. Arniel's Moose participated in the AHL's Calder Cup Playoffs in each of his four seasons, winning at least forty games each year. With his best Manitoba team, back in 2008-09, Arniel took them to the Calder Cup Finals. Arniel brings 730 games of NHL playing experience to the table as well.

Arniel filled out his coaching staff with battle-tested NHL veterans. Assistant coach Brad Berry played 241 games in the NHL, while assistant coach Bob Boughner was a stalwart blueliner in

630 contests. Dan Hinote recently retired from the NHL after playing 503 NHL games. He also played his collegiate hockey at Army.

Looking at the Columbus Blue Jackets roster, the team is built on young talented forwards and the development of their young goaltender, former rookie of the year Steve Mason. Under former coach Ken Hitchcock, the team struggled to find an identity. Speedy, young forwards like Derick Brassard and Jake Voracek were instructed to abandon some of their playmaking skills and creativity in lieu of defensive awareness. The result was a string of disappointing seasons and one playoff experience while riding Steve Mason like he was a prized stallion.

Much like baseball, it is important to wait until about one-fourth of the season is complete before starting to evaluate the team's progress and project the rest of the season. So far, the Blue Jackets, who opened the season in Sweden against the San Jose Sharks, have three victories and two defeats on the young season.

The biggest offseason addition to the Blue Jackets was not a free agent signing, nor was it via a trade. It was enticing Nikita Filatov to come back from Russia and be a part of the team. Filatov, who drew the ire of Ken Hitchcock for his lack of defensive play, was granted a release to play for CSKA Moscow of the Kontinental Hockey League last year. The team felt it best for him to be playing seventeen or eighteen minutes a night in the KHL than be in Hitchcock's dog house or be sent to the AHL again.

This is a big year for the Columbus Blue Jackets. The team saw substantial losses in terms of the season ticket base, with some media outlets reporting that [the season ticket sales were down 24.5 percent.](#) The city of

Columbus

is used to supporting winners. The Buckeyes have been excellent under Jim Tressel and the Columbus Crew, who have three regular season titles and one MLS Cup championship over the last five years.

Columbus

had an all-time Nationwide Arena low for attendance with 9,802 on Wednesday v. Anaheim

With a new voice and a different, more suitable style of play, the Blue Jackets have the opportunity to overcome the hardships of the NHL Western Conference Central Division and put themselves in a position to make just their second postseason in franchise history.

Other news from around the NHL:

The New Jersey Devils attempted to circumvent some of the NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement's salary cap regulations with their contract offer to star right winger Ilya Kovalchuk and it produced an investigation by the NHL. The league found the contract invalid and the Devils were forced to submit another. This second contract was approved, but it came at a high cost. The Devils, battling injury issues and serious salary cap restraints, aside from surrendering first-round draft picks as a compromise, had to dress just 15 skaters in their October 11th

game against the Pittsburgh Penguins. Regularly, teams dress 20 skaters for each game. The Devils lost 3-1 in a valiant effort.

Teams can get salary cap relief for injuries if the player is placed on LTIR, long-term injured reserve. The Devils were battling nagging injuries and illness, so no player was eligible for LTIR. The Devils have five losses to their lone victory so far.

Through four games, the Florida Panthers have surrendered a total of five goals. Despite that, the team is just 2-2 on the season, with both of their wins being shutout victories.

Some quirky stats to start the year: The Carolina Hurricanes have won just 37 percent of the faceoffs taken in their first five games. The Hurricanes were fourth-worst last year in faceoff percentage. Through seven games, the Pittsburgh Penguins have already drawn 40 powerplay opportunities. They have scored on 20 percent of them. The league's worst powerplay belongs to Montreal who is 1-for-17. Through their first four games, the Anaheim Ducks were allowing 42.5 shots on goal per game. Columbus managed just 21 against them on Wednesday night.

A minor league update, on the hometown Lake Erie Monsters. The Monsters have started the season 2-2-1, with a home opening win over the Syracuse Crunch and three road games since. With the circus in town, the Monsters are on a seven-game road trip. Four of their five games have been decided by one goal.

Two players to watch for the Lake Erie Monsters are defensemen Kevin Shattenkirk and Colby Cohen. Shattenkirk was Colorado's 1st round pick, 14th overall, in the 2007 NHL Entry Draft. He finished his collegiate eligibility at Boston University before appearing in three games for the Monsters last year. Cohen, Colorado's 2nd round pick at 47th overall, was Shattenkirk's teammate at Boston University. The two players project to be solid NHL contributors.

The Monsters will return home on October 29, playing that night against the aforementioned Manitoba Moose. In a strange schedule setup, the Monsters travel to Toronto on the 30th, while

Manitoba
goes to
Grand Rapids
. The two teams come back to
Cleveland
and play again at the Q on Halloween at 5 pm.