



When the dust settled, some of the analysts at the NHL Network called it Trade “Dudline” Day. Only 16 trades were completed, most of them minor in nature, and only three relatively big names were flying to new locales. One of those big(ger) names was the longest tenured Columbus Blue Jacket, in a move that was both unexpected and embraced.

Rostislav Klesla, the china doll made of papier-mache as I have called him before, was traded to the Phoenix Coyotes for Scott(ie) Upshall and Sami Lepisto. The move was a surprise on many levels. The Jackets had been linked to Colorado’s John-Michael Liles in the weeks leading up to the trade deadline, but Liles never even got traded anywhere. There had been no mention of a possible deal with the Coyotes.

What Upshall brings to the team is what they were lacking at the start of the season. Essentially, he gives them a right handed, slightly bigger Matt Calvert. Upshall is 6’ 190, but plays much grittier than his size and has very good speed. He has never quite lived up to his high draft selection, first round, sixth overall, but he is a very serviceable player when healthy.

Lepisto has a similar style to Jan Hejda. He is a very responsible left handed defenseman who

makes a good first pass out of the zone and plays well in his own zone. While he is an upgrade over a Marc Methot type player, he is not quite the player the Jackets needed. In my mind, the Blue Jackets needed to get a right handed defenseman, capable of quarterbacking the powerplay. This need became more evident when it was revealed that Anton Stralman will miss almost a month with a knee injury.

So, while Lepisto increases their depth on the back end, it is hard to say that he fills a need. Upshall, on the other hand, can play on any of the top three lines and gives the Blue Jackets time to let Kristian Huselius fully heal from his myriad of injuries this season.

The loss of Klesla seems to be downplayed so far. I have mentioned several times in my weekly column that this is a better team with Rusty Klesla than without him. While I think that is true, Lepisto is similar enough, and far less injury prone, that I think they sufficiently filled in for him. Lepisto may not be quite as talented, but he will not hurt you on the ice, and that is all you ask from a defenseman.

One other benefit to the trade is that the Blue Jackets will save money or have available resources to be a player in free agency. Rusty Klesla was guaranteed \$2.95M per season through 2013-14, while Upshall is an unrestricted free agent and Sami Lepisto is a restricted free agent. The move also allows Columbus to make a favorable contract offer to impending free agent Jan Hejda.

In other Blue Jackets news, the team still cannot gain any ground on the eighth and final playoff spot in the Western Conference. Despite gutting out a gritty point against the top-seeded Vancouver Canucks on Tuesday night, the Jackets fell to five points out in the West. Of the bubble teams around Columbus, only Los Angeles made a big splash for the trade deadline by adding Dustin Penner. They did so without trading away a current roster player.

Since January 14, Steve Mason has gotten the team at least one point in 12 of his 15 starts, giving up more than three goals in only two games. That stretch of play will have to continue. Mason went 7-2 in February with two shutouts. At this stage of the season, teams need to trust their goaltender to make a big, often times momentum-shifting, save. He has done that recently.

Rick Nash has gone pointless in his last two games after having a six-game point streak,

including three multi-point games. Not surprisingly, the Jackets have lost their last two games. Nash had a nine-game point streak snapped back on February 4. That gives Nash points in 16 of his last 20.

Entering play tonight, the Blue Jackets have 20 games to play. As Aaron Portzline tweeted, [the projected point total for the eighth seed](#) in the West is 96 or 97 points. As he says, the Jackets would need to go 14-6 to reach that point total. Not impossible, but a very difficult task to pull off now, especially with the overtime loss charity point. The Blue Jackets also have only one Friday/Saturday home game left in the month of March. They have been drawing meager home crowds on weeknights. There are two Sunday 5 pm home games, however.

Either way, enjoy the ride. The NHL playoff chase and the subsequent playoffs are tremendous to watch and full of passion. If you are someone who is on the fence about the game, now is the time to watch.

### **In other NHL news:**

My early-season whipping boy New Jersey Devils are 18-2-2 in their last 22 games. Since February 1<sup>st</sup>, they are 12-1-1 in one goal games. Simply unbelievable. It may be in vain as they are still nine points out with 19 games to go.

Trevor Gillies returned to the lineup for the New York Islanders after serving a nine-game suspension. He returned to do [this](#). He will be meeting with league officials this week, which usually signals a minimum five-game suspension. Based on his repeat offender status, he could be out a lot longer. There is no place for scum like that in the NHL. The NHL can send a message here and I hope that they do.

How good is the NHL's Pacific Division? There is a chance that they could get all five teams in the playoffs. Anaheim currently holds the ninth seed, one point behind Los Angeles and Dallas. If Calgary were to slip up, the Pacific could get five of the eight spots. All of the teams in the Pacific have games in hand on Calgary.

Finally, on the subject of the Pacific Division, things do not look good for the future of the Phoenix Coyotes. Yahoo's [Puck Daddy blog breaks it all down](#) better than I ever could. A sad situation for all involved, except of course for the citizens of Winnipeg who desperately want their Jets back.

This [Youtube clip of the week](#) is for the immature child still in all of us.

### **A minor league update on the Lake Erie Monsters:**

The Monsters have managed to hold on in the crowded North Division and remain in the playoffs as they currently hold the third place spot in the division. The two teams above them have three less games played. The Monsters are 7-2-1 in their last ten and have two home games this weekend against Western Conference doormat Rockford.

The Monsters are a conference-best 20-8-5 at home, but a conference-worst 11-16-3 on the road. After this weekend, they will have just five home games left to ten road games, with seven of their next eight away from home.

Upcoming schedules:

**Columbus:** 3/3 @ EDM, 3/4 @ CGY, 3/7 @ STL, 3/9 v. STL

**Lake Erie:** 3/4 v. Rockford, 3/5 v. Rockford