



The Blue Jackets have lost six in a row, so their playoff hopes have reached the “Grim Reaper” stage. Three of the losses have gotten them a point for coming in extra time, but they have also left the Blue Jackets eight points out with 16 games to play. The problem at this point is that there are simply too many teams to jump over.

But, bigger than the problems facing the Blue Jackets are the problems facing the NHL. If you have heard any hockey news over these past few days, you have definitely seen Tuesday night’s Zdeno Chara hit that result in Max Pacioretty sustaining a Grade-3 concussion and two fractured vertebrae in his neck. If you have not seen the hit, [here’s a Youtube link](#) .

What has really blown this story up is the history between the Habs and Bruins this season. [Pacioretty’s OT game-winning goal on January 8](#) really fueled the fire of a rivalry that has always been heated. For those unable to see the video, Pacioretty scored the game winner and then shoved Chara out of the way to celebrate. The move was unnecessary, but fell in line with Pacioretty’s personality as a player. He is an energy guy and a pest. There was nothing wrong with what he did, though.

In this world of instant media attention, the video went viral across the sports community and op/ed columns multiplied like rabbits. Knee-jerk reactions flew about, while the status of Pacioretty was unknown, except for the obvious that he had a major concussion. You can simply search Yahoo, TSN, CBC, ESPN or any other sports media outlet to find the wide range of thoughts on the situation.

Because this is my column, I will give you mine. My reaction on the hit has not changed since I initially saw it. This is a hockey play gone horribly wrong. In my estimation, I see no

premeditation or intent. We are talking about less than two seconds of real time. The main argument for those that want to crucify Chara is that Chara knew that the “turnbuckle” was there. Maybe he did. Maybe he did not.

This is a run-of-the-mill hockey play with an unfortunate result. Pacioretty chipped the puck past Chara and Chara’s job at that point is to try and impede the player’s progress without interfering with him. Chara did interfere with Pacioretty and was justly penalized. By no means did Chara intend to have Pacioretty’s head bash off the divider and leave him nearly paralyzed.

As a defenseman myself, I’m familiar with this play. It’s standard. Commonplace in every NHL game. Angle the man toward the boards so your defense partner or the center on your line can track down the puck. If this happens anywhere else on the ice, whether it be along the penalty box side of the ice or on the boards inside the offensive/defensive zone, we are not talking about this play.



The photo on the left has been running rampant all over the internet. Taking a split second photo on something that happened in real time is a gross oversimplification of the play. Does it prove that Chara intentionally put Pacioretty’s head into the divider? I certainly do not think so. He’s finishing off a play. If Chara had a history of highly questionable hits in his career, I think you have a case.

Others are arguing based on the aforementioned clip of Pacioretty’s shove on his game-winning goal. Look, Zdeno Chara has been in the league for 11 years. He is an imposing physical specimen at 6’9” and 260 pounds. I can guarantee that he has been the recipient of a cheap shot at least a couple hundred times. He has never responded in such a manner that produced a major injury or a suspension. So why would he start now? On something so petty? I cannot believe that argument.

The NHL reviewed the incident and chose not to suspend Zdeno Chara, citing that, along with it being an unfortunate hockey play, that Chara has not faced supplemental discipline in his 11-year career.

This unfortunate incident, regardless of who is at fault or what the disciplinary outcome is, puts yet another black eye on the NHL. In a sport marred by concussions, iffy hits from behind, and two men throwing punches at each other on a regular basis, they certainly do not need press like this. Could the NHL have made an example out of this play? Maybe, but they did not feel it was egregious enough. Not as egregious enough as, say, a hit from behind.

Now, Montreal police are [looking in to launching an investigation](#) . The immediate comparison is the [Todd Bertuzzi-Steve Moore incident](#) from February 16, 2004. The initial play that spawned the incident was [this Steve Moore hit](#) on Vancouver's Markus Naslund.

What you see in the Bertuzzi-Moore incident is far worse, in my estimation, than the Chara-Pacioretty incident. Bertuzzi stalks Moore from the faceoff dot to the neutral zone, sucker punches him from behind, jumps on his back and rides him to the ground, where he proceeds to punch him again. This is 100% premeditated and intentional. Regardless of how it got to that point, Bertuzzi's actions are disgusting.

In what may be a growing trend, one of the NHL home base's main sponsors, [Air Canada, is threatening to pull their sponsorship](#) if the league fails to crack down on headshots and focus on player safety. As I said on the message boards of a hockey simulation league I run, there are no winners in this incident. Pacioretty's career may be over. Chara will never escape this. The next meeting between these two teams is March 24. Expect a very, very ugly game with possible (premeditated) retribution on Chara.

In Blue Jackets news:

Now that I have exhausted the Chara-Pacioretti incident, we will get to some Jackets news. As I said at the top of the column, the Jackets losing streak has reached six games, effectively eliminating them from the playoff chase. It is not because of the point difference they need to make up. It is because they have to jump four teams to do it. That makes it extremely tough, especially with the amount of three-point games every night.

The Blue Jackets do have a game(s) in hand over everyone ahead of them. But, with at least ten of their 16 remaining games left against playoff teams, the climb is as imposing as looking up to the Mount Everest summit. Ten of the games are at home, where the Jackets are 16-13-3.

Look no further than Wednesday night's game against the Blues to explain the Jackets' decline. After jumping out to a 3-0 lead with 32 minutes to play, they managed 11 shots on goal in the final two periods and 54 seconds of OT. St. Louis is further out of the playoff chase, but they played more like the team in the hunt.

With Rick Nash's next goal, he will have his fourth straight 30/30 season. It is a very good achievement given who Nash generally plays with. This team desperately needs to get some of the pressure off him next season. Nash has not scored a goal since February 22. The team is 1-3-3.

A minor league update on the Lake Erie Monsters:

The games in hand that Hamilton, Manitoba, and Toronto had have caught up with the Monsters. The Monsters are now three points out of a playoff spot with 15 games to play. Unfortunately, just five of those games are at home. The Monsters are the worst road team in the AHL's Western Conference. They do, however, control their own destiny, in a sense, because four of their remaining 15 are against Toronto, with three of them on the road.

Upcoming schedules:

Columbus: 3/11 v. LA, 3/12 @ CAR, 3/15 v. BOS

Lake Erie: 3/11 @ Hamilton, 3/12 @ Toronto