



Nearly two weeks into the 2011-12 season, the Blue Jackets have been able to accumulate one single point out of the twelve possible so far this season. Clearly not the start that they wanted to get off to and certainly not the kind of start you want in the ultra-competitive Western Conference. The team is averaging just two goals per game and is the only NHL squad without a win this season.

Shy of an injury to Rick Nash, any and everything that could go work has gone wrong for Columbus. Jeff Carter is on injured reserve with a fractured foot. James Wisniewski is still in the league's doghouse. Steve Mason has continued to be inconsistent and the Blue Jackets do not have an experienced backup. Salary cap constraints forced the Blue Jackets to call up Mathieu Corbeil from the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League to back up Steve Mason. Injuries to Curtis Sanford and Allen York, the team's minor league goaltending depth, were also partially to blame.

It has been a season of adversity so far and the team hasn't even played 10% of its games. Cam Atkinson and Matt Calvert have both been sent to the minors. There's a good chance Ryan Johansen will be sent back to juniors once the allotted ten-game "tryout" for junior-aged players is over (the reason for ten games is that the first year of his contract kicks in after that). David Savard has struggled mightily transitioning from the minors to everyday NHL minutes.

But, the question everybody wants answered is "Why?" What is wrong with this team that made

three really good offseason moves? A team that was said to be “undervalued”, both by NHL media types and sportsbook oddsmakers.

Here’s my take: The Blue Jackets, as we saw last season when they completely folded the tent, lack identity. The players and the front office have no idea what they are. There’s some toughness, like Jared Boll and RJ Umberger, meshed with some skill, like Derick Brassard and Kris Russell. There’s a lack of players who have both.

Looking at the opening night roster, the consensus was that the Blue Jackets lacked a physical edge, specifically on defense. Overall, the defense lacks any kind of edge. There’s not enough skill, there’s not enough toughness. There’s just a bunch of guys trying to overachieve.

When you factor that in with a lack of goal scorers and an inconsistent goaltender, it’s a recipe for a giant cluster-f.

It’s disappointing to see. The Blue Jackets have drafted better over the last two drafts and really focused on getting some quality players in via free agency and trade. Unfortunately, nobody is on the same page. Personally, I think there’s a real disconnect between the players Scott Arniel wants and those that Scott Howson wants.

We might not be talking about this if Jeff Carter had a broken foot and James Wisniewski wasn’t suspended. Then again, we might still be talking about it, but without excuses to try and point to. What we’re left to watch is a team that cannot have all 18 skaters playing within the same system because, as a whole, the team lacks the ability to play into one set system.

I genuinely feel bad for Scott Arniel here. I know he was handpicked by Howson when Guy Boucher took the Tampa Bay job, but, Arniel is in over his head. It’s not because he’s a bad coach. I don’t really know what kind of coach he is. The skill sets of each individual in that locker room are contradictory to the man sitting next to him. There’s zero continuity and very little chemistry.

Veterans like Vinny Prospal can alter their game to fit in any system. He’s been around the

block so many times that he understands his role. With the young guys, though, they have not matured enough to understand that. Ryan Johansen, Matt Calvert, and Cam Atkinson are casualties of that theory. When Atkinson and Calvert were sent down, the team called up Alexandre Giroux and Cody Bass to add an element of toughness. That sends the message that Arniel thinks his core players can thrive better with a tougher, more defensive-oriented game than the skill game Atkinson and Calvert play. I'm not sure that's the case.

Obviously, it's still early. The glass half full crowd will say that the Blue Jackets are four points out of eighth. Fine, make that case if you want, but this is an incredibly flawed team. When they have a full complement of players, with Wisniewski and Carter back, they're a very competitive team. But, from a matchup perspective, they can't slow down a skill game and they can't play with a physical team. Every win will have to be earned. This isn't a team equipped to win a lot of 4-1 games. That takes its toll every night.

It may still be early, but for the Blue Jackets, it's getting late.