



Starting off 2-9-1 would make any coach's job security an issue. The Blue Jackets are no exception as rumors have started to circulate about Scott Arniel and what his future may be. With that in mind, I'll look at a couple possible coaching candidates and explain why this is not all Scott Arniel's fault.

First off, the Jackets have been playing better, although their record does not indicate it. They finished a terrible October on a good note with a nice 3-1 victory over Anaheim, ending a very tough stretch of games. Of all the teams the Jackets played, only Minnesota is currently under .500 thanks to three overtime losses.

November looks like a slightly better month with no back-to-back games and four of the first five at home. But, will Scott Arniel make it through November? That's the million dollar question right now as he may have lost the locker room and may be in over his head.

I will preface my ideas for a replacement head coach by saying that I don't believe this is Scott Arniel's fault. The Jackets started the year with at least six players who would have been on airplanes to Springfield, Massachusetts after training camp, but injuries and the Wisniewski suspension forced a change of plans. Furthermore, two of Scott Arniel's assistant coaches, including NHL veteran Bob Boughner, resigned this past offseason, leaving Arniel scrambling to fill the voids. Those were guys he handpicked upon being hired and it would have been a very difficult task to find two guys with their experience level.

Then, there's the roster. The team is in limbo because they aren't skilled enough or physical enough to play one system. All 18 skaters need to be on the same page and all season long, it

has not appeared that way. Arniel likely had some input with who to go after in free agency and those players have played well, although Radek Martinek has been out with a concussion.

So, since you can't fire the players, the coach always takes the brunt. Who will take over?

Ken Hitchcock is a candidate. He has already coached the team and led them to their first playoff berth in franchise history. His old school style hinders creativity and forced out players like Nikita Filatov and Nik Zherdev. The Blue Jackets do not have many players who would thrive under Hitchcock's system, but his adaptable nature as a veteran coach could be exactly what the team needs. He is a more assertive coach than Arniel and would help clear up the defensive struggles the team has had. Hitchcock currently holds an advising role with the team.

Another candidate is **Marc Crawford**. Crawford was fired from the Dallas Stars after last season but is a tenured coach with a solid pedigree. Despite falling short of a playoff berth, the Stars won 42 games during the 2010-11 season. He has 549 wins and eight playoff appearances, along with a 1995 Stanley Cup win. Crawford has a lot of experience as a Western Conference coach and would be a different voice in the Blue Jackets locker room.

Craig MacTavish has been looking to get back behind a NHL bench and is currently the head coach of the AHL's Chicago Wolves. MacTavish was previously an analyst for TSN, the Canadian sports network. MacTavish was a Stanley Cup winner as a player and took an upstart Edmonton team to the Stanley Cup finals as a coach in 2006.

Two other candidates who are currently assistant coaches are **Bob Hartsburg** and **John Stevens**

Hartsburg is an assistant with Calgary and Stevens is beyond the Los Angeles bench. The problem is that getting coaches off another team during the season is very unconventional and would ruffle some feathers. These two could be candidates next offseason.

Other former head coaches like Andy Murray (Western Michigan) and Guy Carbonneau (Chicoutimi QMJHL) are locked in other jobs and would not even be available for interviews until after the season. Firing coaches during the season is difficult because only unemployed coaches and interim head coaches are the options. Howson would have to request permission from the team to interview their coach. Not only would he probably get a no, he may also

alienate a GM and future trade negotiations could be affected.

For now, the Blue Jackets are left to figure it out with Arniel or try Ken Hitchcock part deux if an unemployed coach doesn't appeal to them. I imagine that they would want to avoid a transition period of a new coach getting to know the team, so the job would appear to be Hitchcock's if Arniel is in fact fired.