



It might be too little, too late for the Blue Jackets as they have created an eleven-point deficit in the Western Conference after just 20 games, but they at least look like a competent hockey team right now. They have secured seven out of a possible ten points in their last five games after securing five out of a possible 30 points in their first 15 games.

In the team's defense, they are finally playing with a full complement of players and it has been the team's new faces who are leading the charge. Jeff Carter has scored three goals in the last two games, James Wisniewski fired home the game winner in Columbus's first win in Nashville since the nation's bicentennial, and Curtis Sanford has been brilliant in net.

One of my biggest concerns heading into this season was that the Blue Jackets did not really address the backup goaltender position. Given Steve Mason's struggles over the last two years, the position had to be filled with an experienced veteran with the ability to play multiple games in a row and take some pressure off Mason. Because of the injury in training camp to Mark Dekanich, the Blue Jackets goaltending situation looked even bleaker.

Enter Curtis Sanford. Sanford, who I generously called a journeyman on TheClevelandFan message boards earlier this year, has been a saving grace for the Blue Jackets. Now, with Steve Mason out due to a mild concussion suffered during practice from a shot off the mask, Sanford will assume every day goaltending duties.

Thus far, Sanford has been outstanding, stopping 83 of 88 shots. It's been quite a start for him considering that he had last played in the NHL in 2009 as a member of the Vancouver Canucks.

Sanford has provided a momentary lift for the Jackets, but there is no evidence to support that this trend will continue. No knock on Sanford's ability, but looking at the facts, this latest run of success should be taken with many grains of salt.

Consider that Sanford has spent parts of 10 seasons at the NHL level and has started just 91 games. He is writing a great story for himself, including winning his first NHL game since January 13, 2009, but it's hard to expect anything other than an abrupt ending to his manuscript.

Beyond the goaltending situation, if you want to look at why the team has struggled, look no further than the individual player stats. Beyond leading scorer Vinny Prospal and second-leading scorer Rick Nash, three of the next four players are defensemen. One is essentially a rookie, Grant Clitsome, and the other is not known for his scoring prowess, Fedor Tyutin. The other is James Wisniewski who has played just 12 of the team's 20 games.

One big development in Columbus right now is the future of Derick Brassard. A talented playmaker and good skater, Brassard has found himself playing the role of Fido as Scott Arniel seems to have placed him in the doghouse. Brassard has just four points in 16 games with an ugly minus-11. With each passing day, Brassard looks more and more like a busted first round pick. The Brassard pick, coincidentally, was made when the draft was at Nationwide Arena in 2006.

The Blue Jackets traded up to draft Rick Nash in the 2002 NHL Entry Draft. Their first round picks since?

2003: Nikolai Zherdev – In what has been the absolute best draft in the NHL in a really long time, Zherdev was the Blue Jackets pick fourth overall.

2004: Alexandre Picard – You're well within reason to say "Who?" when looking at this pick. Picard has played 67 NHL games, notching two assists. This was one of the least talented

drafts of the decade. Picard was taken eighth overall.

2005: Gilbert Brule – Brule tallied 32 points in 146 games for the Blue Jackets. He was taken sixth overall.

2006: Derick Brassard – Brassard was the last of five straight centers to be taken from the second pick to the sixth pick. The other four: Jordan Staal, Jonathan Toews, Nicklas Backstrom, and Phil Kessel. Ouch. Should have lost a few more games.

2007: Jakub Voracek – I can't fault the Jackets for this pick. Outside of Patrick Kane, Voracek has had the best success of any forward taken in the first round. It was a defenseman-heavy draft when Voracek was plucked seventh.

2008: Nikita Filatov – The Blue Jackets pick that will live in infamy. When the Jackets took Filatov sixth overall, they bypassed a lot of defensemen who have become good players, including Tyler Myers, Erik Karlsson, Michael del Zotto, and John Carlson.

2009: John Moore – The Blue Jackets traded down and took Moore 19th overall. With such small sample sizes on the 2009 draft class, the success of this pick remains to be seen.

2010: Ryan Johansen – Still a work in progress but the tools are there for the fourth overall pick.

2011: No first round pick; traded for Jeff Carter (Sean Couturier)

With any team and any draft, you can look at the players taken after your team's pick and want to shake your head, wondering aloud why they didn't take Player X. Projecting NHL talent is a difficult thing to do. But, with the Jackets, we can shake our collective heads multiple times at their drafting record. It speaks for itself. In the form of their record in the 2011-12 standings.