



The Blue Jackets gave it all they could on Tuesday night firing 48 shots at Vancouver Canucks goaltender Cory Schneider. In the process of losing 4-1, the only goal that the Blue Jackets could muster was a shorthanded goal from Sami Pahlsson, his first of the year. This came on the heels of a 2-1 loss to Ken Hitchcock's St. Louis Blues on Sunday.

Offensive ineptitude coupled with year-long defensive zone problems have created an insurmountable deficit in the Western Conference playoff hunt and are making this season very difficult to pay attention to. There could be a silver lining if we were able to see Steve Mason's play this season and perhaps finally find out for certain if he can be the number one guy, but his recent injury, along with having to play behind a banged-up roster missing several key guys, has left more questions than answers.

The Jackets limp out of November with a 4-6-2 record, decidedly better than October's 2-9-1 fiasco but nowhere near good enough. In the 12 games in November, Rick Nash scored a goal in just two of them. Same with Jeff Carter. Same with RJ Umberger. Same with Antoine Vermette. Vinny Prospal only scored a goal in one game, though he did add eight assists.

Ryan Johansen has been the bright spot of the year. If a bad team provides any benefits, it's to give ample playing time to young players who need the development. After starting out slowly,

he has answered the call and is one of just three Blue Jackets with a positive plus-minus.

With 25 games played so far, it's a good time to breakdown some of the season's statistics and see where the Blue Jackets' biggest needs are.

First, the team has a collective shooting percentage of .072, which is second to last in the NHL. There are any number of reasons why this is a glaring problem. For one, it shows a lack of talent. For another, it shows a lack of secondary goal scoring. Rick Nash and RJ Umberger have taken a combined 160 shots. They have 10 goals. It also leads to another problem....

The Blue Jackets are third in the league in powerplay opportunities, but 23rd in powerplay efficiency. With a team that struggles to score goals and get help from secondary players, the powerplay must cash in on its opportunities.

Furthermore, the Blue Jackets penalty kill is second-last in the league, killing off just 75.6% of its penalties. Part of that is a goaltending issue, as Steve Mason was really awful early in the year on the penalty kill.

Finally, the Blue Jackets biggest issue comes on the road. They simply do not have enough talented players on the roster to compensate for the home team's last line change. When teams can matchup against Nash's line, the other forwards aren't good enough to contribute. The Blue Jackets are 5-7-1 at home. They are 1-8-2 on the road.

At home, they have 33 goals in 13 games. On the road, they have 22 goals in 11 games. Scoring just two goals per game on the road makes it exceptionally difficult to win games. Factoring into the bad road play is that the Blue Jackets penalty kill on the road is a pathetic 65.8%, the worst in the league by almost 9%.

Like I talked about in last week's column, part of the problem has been draft-related. Every first round pick needs to be a contributor in today's NHL. Not necessarily a star player, but a solid contributor. As long as a player makes an impact on the nightly 18-skater roster, he is a success. The Blue Jackets have not had enough of those guys, let alone the complete lack of

subsequent round draft picks making the team.

Here are the top 15 in scoring and their method of acquisition:

Phil Kessel (TOR) – trade

Joffrey Lupul (TOR) – trade

Claude Giroux (PHI) – drafted

Thomas Vanek (BUF) – drafted

Daniel Sedin (VAN) – drafted

Jason Pominville (BUF) – drafted

Nicklas Backstrom (WSH) – drafted

Kris Versteeg (FLA) – trade

Jonathan Toews (CHI) – drafted

Steven Stamkos (TB) – drafted

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (EDM) – drafted

James Neal (PIT) – trade

Anze Kopitar (LA) – drafted

Tomas Fleischmann (FLA) – free agent

Marian Hossa (CHI) – free agent

Of these players, one of them was taken outside the top two rounds of the NHL draft. Kris Versteeg was a fifth rounder. All but Pominville, Versteeg, Neal, and Fleischmann were first round picks at one time.

As you can see, the problems with the Blue Jackets organization run deeper than Scott Arniel, Steve Mason, or underperforming players. Seasons like this one are the culmination of a lot of bad decisions. It is a hard sell to tell fans that a team with one playoff appearance in 12 years needs to blow it up and start over again, but with the exception of Nash, Johansen, and a couple free agent signings, that's precisely what the Jackets need to do.