



In a week mired with more losses, the Blue Jackets got a big win economically. This past week, Franklin County Commissioners approved a measure to make Nationwide Arena a publically-owned venue and the move will stabilize the Blue Jackets' future in Columbus. If only the deal helped stabilize the hockey team.

The arena agreement will use a series of loans and casino tax revenue to acquire the funds necessary to make the \$42.5M purchase of Nationwide Arena. The proposed agreement would keep the Blue Jackets in Columbus until at least 2039. The arena was formerly owned by Nationwide and the Dispatch Printing Company.

As someone from a city where a sports team up and moved, regardless of the Jackets' franchise success or results this season, this is a really important development for the city's fan base. The team has faced uncertain economic times for the majority of its existence and there's a chance that a more stable financial foundation will help the team with signing free agents or signing current players to contract extensions.

While government entities and private companies are deciding the future of the Blue Jackets

beyond 2012, the team has decided its 2011 future. That future consists of acquiring draft picks at the trade deadline and setting up mid-April tee times. With 33 of 82 games in the books, the Blue Jackets are 16 points out of fourth place in the Central Division and 15 points out of a playoff spot.

After yet another collapse on Sunday in St. Louis to former coach Ken Hitchcock, the team's fifth blown lead after two periods resulting in a loss, the Jackets became the first team to reach 20 losses this season. They have won just three of 15 games on the road.

There are no answers. Firing the coach won't change the makeup of the roster. The Anaheim Ducks fired Randy Carlyle to hire Bruce Boudreau and the Ducks have responded by winning just two of nine games in December. The Carolina Hurricanes canned Paul Maurice and hired Kirk Muller around the same time and they also have won just two of eight. At this point, firing Scott Arniel will be a mere drop in the bucket.

For the 2011 calendar year, the Blue Jackets record is 23-40-14 with five games left to play. Winning 23 of 77 would account for a 29.8% winning percentage. That is clearly an unacceptable figure.

From a personal standpoint, one of my favorite parts of the hockey season is on the horizon. The World Junior Championships begin on Monday in Alberta, Canada. With the emergence of the USA Hockey National Development Team, the United States Hockey League, various high school prep teams, and the collegiate game, the United States team is very strong and has a great shot at contending for a medal.

Amateur/junior hockey in the US has really bloomed over the last few years and our country's results in international competition are proof. Several of the players on this year's Under-20 team have won international gold, either with the Under-20 team or with the Under-18 team. The 2011 Under-20 team won bronze and the 2010 U-20 team took home the gold. The 2011 Under-18 team won its third consecutive gold medal.

Many of the tournament games can be watched online or on NHL Network. The preliminary roster is comprised of plenty of high draft picks and a couple highly-touted 2012 draft-eligible players. The strength of the team should be in net with goaltenders Jack Campbell and John Gibson. Both were first round picks and Campbell was a member of 2010's gold medal winning team.

The United States schedule is as follows:

Dec. 26, 8 pm v. Denmark

Dec. 28, 3:30 pm v. Finland

Dec. 30, 3:30 pm v. Czech Republic

Dec. 31, 8 pm v. Canada

Jan. 2 TBD Quarterfinals

Jan. 3 TBD Semifinals

Jan. 5 TBD Medal Round

It looks like a tough draw for the Americans playing Finland, the Czechs, and Canada in the span of four days. The best part about watching this tournament is to notice the different schools of thought by country. If you thoroughly enjoyed the Olympic tournament in 2010, you will definitely enjoy the World Junior Championships.

Finally, a Merry Christmas to you and yours this holiday season.