It's great to have hockey back and the Columbus Blue Jackets didn't disappoint with their performance in the first two games. They entered their game against Nashville with a 5-29-1 record at Nashville in franchise history. On the shoulders of Sergei Bobrovsky, they picked up their first win of the 2013 season with a 3-2 shootout victory. Two nights later, in their home opener, the Jackets and Bobrovsky managed a point for a shootout loss in a 4-3 defeat. All in all, it was an impressive display for a team who has a lot of new faces and had negative reports coming out of training camp.

The difference between players who played during the lockout and players who didn't is staggering. The ones who played, like Cam Atkinson and Matt Calvert, had a lot of jump and energy, while the ones who didn't, like RJ Umberger and James Wisniewski, fought the puck and seemed to be moving in slow motion. The Blue Jackets aren't the only team dealing with that, as most of the teams around the league appear to be having the same contrast. A lot of the games around the league have been sloppy, with a lot of missed passes and a good amount of icing calls. Growing pains are evident in the early season for all 30 teams.

Interestingly enough, the eight teams that made the conference semifinals last year are 5-12-2 in the young season. With points being so precious in the shortened season, these teams will need to get things on track quickly. It's good news for the Jackets, though, who aren't as talented as some of the other Western Conference teams, but have three points and have shown a lot of heart. The longer they are able to overcome their scoring and talent deficiencies, compared to the rest of the Western Conference, the better their chances are of staying in the hunt.

That's not a knock on the Blue Jackets, who are definitely going in the right direction. Without Rick Nash, the Jackets' returning leading scorer is Vinny Prospal, who will definitely feel the

strain of the condensed schedule and will turn 38 in February. After a 14-point drop-off, then comes Derick Brassard and RJ Umberger. Artem Anisimov, Brandon Dubinsky, and Atkinson will help offensively, but Anisimov's career high in goals is 18 and Dubinsky's is 24. Atkinson looks like a goal scorer, but he has only played 29 games at the NHL level. Finding players who can score with regularity will be a problem throughout the season for the Jackets.

We're about to find out a lot about the Blue Jackets over the next 11 days, as they play seven games over that span. After that stretch is completed, the nine games played will account for 18.75 percent of the season. If the Blue Jackets come through that period with a 3-3-1 or 2-3-2 or better record, they can definitely keep themselves in the hunt. Jumping out to a good start is mandatory in this schedule. With over 20 percent of all games last season ending as "three-point" games, where an overtime or shootout loss is involved, it would be very hard to play catch up in the standings.

One big positive from the first two games of the season is the confidence gained by Sergei Bobrovsky. The Jackets targeted him as a player that they wanted, which certainly gave Bobrovsky extra motivation to succeed. Through the first two games, he has been excellent, helping the Blue Jackets to their 1-0-1 record. With Bobrovsky being Todd Richards's number one goaltender, the pressure is on him. Steve Mason remains an enigma, and he will get his first opportunity to start on Wednesday night against Phoenix. Bobrovsky struggled last season in Philadelphia, posting a goals against average of 3.02 and a save percentage below 90 percent. He looks like a different goaltender under the tutelage of Jackets' goaltender coach Ian Clark. It's still early, but Bobrovsky is gaining much needed confidence and having a lot of success in the Kontinental Hockey League during the lockout appears to have helped. During the lockout, Bobrovsky was terrific for SKA St. Petersburg with a 1.94 goals against average and a .932 save percentage.

All in all, it was a great start for the Blue Jackets, who formed an identity as a likable, hard-working bunch that will, if nothing else, be entertaining to watch. With a very young team, there will be big momentum swings in their games, which will lead to long periods of frustration followed be long periods of energy and excitement. It's definitely great to have hockey back and a competitive hockey team will make it that much better.

A brief update on the Lake Erie Monsters who finally return home on Thursday night after a

six-game road trip. Despite losing some players to Colorado, both for training camp and for the regular season, the Monsters won five out of six on their road trip and seven out of 10 overall. They hold sole possession of sixth place in the Western Conference.

Tyson Barrie, Patrick Bordeleau, and Mark Olver stayed in Colorado, while the team sent back Stefan Elliott, David van der Gulik, and Michael Sgarbossa. Sgarbossa and Andrew Agozzino, the team's two All-Stars, lead the Monsters in scoring with 32 points. Agozzino has played all 41 with the Monsters, while Sgarbossa has done his damage in 36 games. Agozzino is also a team-best plus-13.

The Monsters will play Thursday and Saturday at home this week against divisional foes Toronto and Hamilton. Their homestand runs through February 5.