To say that the Blue Jackets are walking wounded would be a little bit of an understatement. A slow start in a shortened season is bad enough, but to exacerbate it with a rash of injuries to key players and it's a recipe for disaster. Reinforcements have been called in from the American Hockey League, much to the chagrin of the fans of the Springfield Falcons, who have the top team in the Eastern Conference. But, the Jackets, through injuries and inconsistent offense, already look like a team with a chance at Seth Jones or Nathan Mackinnon, the top two players available in the draft.

The Blue Jackets have accumulated just seven points in their 10 games, the lowest point percentage in the Western Conference. Only the Washington Capitals are worse in that department. The Jackets' minus-12 goal differential is also the worst in the Western Conference, again, second only to the Capitals for the worst in the league. The Jackets have scored just 20 goals in 10 games, which ties them with Dallas for the lowest goals-per-game average.

Frankly, the news is not all bad for the Jackets. With John Davidson now in the fold as Team President and with a bit of a restructuring in the front office, this was not viewed as a contention season, but rather, an evaluation season. Davidson and his staff will be able to evaluate a lot of the franchise's professional players with some of these injury call-ups. Another benefit, if you can call it that, is that both Steve Mason and Sergei Bobrovsky will be evaluated in a high-stress environment, facing a lot of shots and playing in what appears to be a two-man rotation at the goaltender position.

So far this season, the Blue Jackets have lost Cam Atkinson, Matt Calvert, Adrian Aucoin, Nikita Nikitin, John Moore, and James Wisniewski for an extended period of time. Only 11 players have participated in all 10 of the team's games so far. Replacing the injured have been Colton

Gillies and David Savard, who were both a healthy scratch to start the year, Jonathan Audy-Marchessault, Cody Goloubef, Nick Holden, and Tim Erixon.

Brandon Dubinsky, RJ Umberger, and Ryan Johansen are the most notable players who haven't found the back of the net yet this season. Those three players were counted on to provide offense and they have only combined for seven assists. Johansen, despite not contributing offensively, has been one of the bright spots for the Jackets. He has played well in his own zone and leads the Jackets' centermen in faceoff percentage.

The brightest spot of the season so far has been the emergence of Jack Johnson. Acquired in last season's Jeff Carter trade with the Kings, Johnson has been a rock on the blue line. He only has three points through 10 games and a minus-3 rating, but Johnson has played much better than his statistics indicate. He has developed into the team's top defenseman and has answered a lot of questions about his ability to play in his own zone. As a result of all of the defensive injuries, Johnson leads the NHL in average time on ice per game at 28:38 per contest. In the last two games, Johnson has played 34:13 and 34:59. The Blue Jackets will also have the Kings' first round pick in the 2013 draft to show for that trade.

The next three games will provide a decent measuring stick for the team in its current state. With home games against Calgary, Edmonton, and San Jose, the Blue Jackets have two winnable games and will play the Sharks as the second game of a back-to-back on Monday. After that, they go on a six-game road trip. The Jackets have looked competitive at home and pretty poor on the road outside of their opening night shootout win in Nashville. They are "only" three points out of a playoff spot, but, with all of the injuries and a brutal schedule the rest of February, that gap could widen.

Ultimately, the way the season has shaken out so far is probably in the best interest of the team for the future. Injuries have forced young guys into roles they wouldn't normally have been in, so the front office can assess the team's depth. Guys like Wisniewski and Moore are going to be on this team for the foreseeable future. Aucoin was a one-year stopgap. Guys like Savard, Erixon, and Holden are players who could fill depth roles in the future and now they will get a chance to prove that.

The unfortunate part is that the Blue Jackets are finding out that they need a ton of help offensively. There is some scoring touch in their prospect pool, but not enough. The forward group, outside of Atkinson and Calvert, has stayed healthy and has not produced. Nick Foligno,

who the Jackets traded for and signed to a three-year deal, has not adjusted well so far. As mentioned above, Umberger, Johansen, and Dubinsky have not scored. The team is, again, in the bottom 10 in powerplay percentage.

Mason and Bobrovsky have been serviceable in net, both with save percentages of 90 percent or better. The biggest problem for them is that their margin for error is incredibly small. Neither guy appears to be “the guy” going forward, though one may be kept as a backup. The Jackets will definitely have to address this issue in the offseason or hope that 2012 draft picks Joonas Korpisalo and Oscar Dansk show immense amounts of potential.

A brief update on the Lake Erie Monsters…the Monsters are currently in the fifth spot in the Western Conference standings, but the conference standings usually tighten up down the stretch. Seeds five through 10 are separated by just five points, but the Monsters trail first place Abbotsford by just two points for the third seed in the conference.

The Monsters have just 30 games left to play on the season, with 16 left at home and 14 on the road. Five of the team’s next six games are on the road and then they have an eight-game homestand. Points will be at a premium by that time, so the Monsters will have to play well during that stretch to have a shot at making the playoffs for the second time in franchise history.