Primed to make the playoffs this season, the Columbus Blue Jackets went into the NHL trade deadline as a buyer rather than a seller for the first time .... well, ever. The Jackets traded porcelain doll backup goaltender Pascal Leclaire and his multi-year contract, along with a 2009 second-round draft pick, for two-way centerman Antoine Vermette. In Adam Burke's latest, he recaps the happenings at the NHL trade deadline, both in Columbus, and around the league.

*Author's Note: Be sure to tune in to The Cleveland Fan Hockey Insider every Wednesday night at 8 p.m. on BlogTalkRadio. The link can be accessed through TheClevelandFan.com homepage or through its permanent link at http://www.blogtalkradio.com/theclevelandfan
. Co-host Tom Kennish and I discuss the latest across the NHL and recap the Columbus Blue Jackets' games from the previous week.*

This past Wednesday, March 4, was Christmas morning for hockey fans. The NHL Trade Deadline, one of the most anticipated dates at the beginning of the season, came in like a lion, but out like a lamb for many of the teams around the league. The Columbus Blue Jackets opened the day's activity with a trade that had been heavily rumored. It was a day with some surprises as teams around the league prepare for the stretch run.

This year's trade deadline had been pushed back a week by the league so there could be more separation in the standings. General managers had a hard time determining whether to be buyers or sellers, but this year, the decisions were more clear cut. For the first time in franchise history, the Columbus Blue Jackets were buyers on deadline day. The Jackets traded porcelain doll backup goaltender Pascal Leclaire and his multi-year contract, along with a 2009 second-round draft pick, for two-way centerman Antoine Vermette.

What the Jackets get in Vermette remains to be seen. Will they get the 53-point scorer from the 2007-2008 season with the +3 or the 2008-2009 Vermette with just 28 points and a -12? One thing is for certain, the Jackets get more depth at the center ice position and a tremendous faceoff guy. Vermette currently ranks fifth in faceoff winning percentage, just .4% behind teammate Manny Malhotra.

Vermette profiles as a good two-way center that can play both the power play and the penalty kill. He will likely be slotted between R.J. Umberger and Jakub Voracek for the time being, until Ken Hitchcock shuffles the lines again and moves him up to play with Rick Nash.

The cost for Vermette was relatively low. The Jackets traded from a position of strength at the NHL level and freed up some cap space by moving Pascal Leclaire. Unfortunately, Leclaire just did not pan out after signing a three-year $11.4M contract this past offseason, after his best season. He was a restricted free agent at the time, and the Jackets overvalued his one season, as he has never played more than 54 games over his five NHL seasons. Leclaire's contract pays him $3.6M for 09-10, and $4.8M for 10-11. Meanwhile, Vermette is just on the hook for $3M next season and then becomes an unrestricted free agent.

This year's trade deadline saw 22 trades and 65 assets change hands. Far and away, the biggest trade of the day was Calgary's acquisition of Olli Jokinen. The move gives Calgary a bona fide top line center next to Jarome Iginla and makes them a more legitimate contender in the West. This trade is of significance to the Blue Jackets as the current standings have them playing Calgary in the first round of the playoffs. Edmonton acquired Ales Kotalik and Patrick O'Sullivan in a four-way trade, making them the only other team around to Columbus in the standings to make a significant move.

Analyzing the trade deadline is one of the most enjoyable things for a hockey columnist to do. It gives you a chance to play general manager and think about what was going through a given team's front office before the trade was made, and why some things weren't done.

My analysis of the trade deadline for the Jackets is this. Antoine Vermette helps them be a playoff team. He's going to contribute offensively, and defensively, and likely go into the postseason as the team's #1 center. They have another reliable faceoff winner for close games and can put him out there with Malhotra for defensive faceoffs in case one of them gets tossed from the circle.

That being said, Howson did absolutely nothing to improve the team's chances of winning a playoff series. If the Jackets can beat Calgary, San Jose, or Detroit, it will be because of Steve Mason. The playoffs are on a completely different level from a physical standpoint. The forwards for the Blue Jackets will take a beating. Opposing teams' forwards will not. In my mind, the Blue Jackets needed to acquire a thumper on defense to punish top line forwards for the other team. In a seven game series, the physical play takes a huge toll. I don't like Columbus's depth on defense, even if Klesla comes back. Howson did not answer that need.

Because nobody around Columbus did anything of huge significance, they should hold on to the #6 seed and wind up playing Calgary. The trade deadline did not do much in the West. The teams in the East were much more active.

The Jackets' stretch run looks to be pretty promising. For one thing, they control their own destiny. With consistent play, it would be very difficult for the teams below them to leapfrog them, especially to have three teams do it. Because Columbus has no shot at catching Chicago, the only team in the standings around them left to play is Nashville. The hardest stretch of their season remaining is March 5-21, where they play eight consecutive games against playoff teams. Several columnists are pointing to 92 points as the benchmark for the postseason. The Jackets would need to get 22 points in their final 18 games to reach 92. Conceivably, they could play .500 hockey, so long as they took some of their losses to overtime.

One great thing about the stretch run for the Blue Jackets is that they have only just four back-to-backs remaining. One will be March 12-13, another March 28-29, another April 4-5 and the other is the final two games of the season, April 10-11.

This means that Steve Mason will have plenty of time off for these remaining 18 games. I expect him to play all 18 remaining games, barring injury.

With any luck, the Jackets will carry the flag into the playoffs, where anything can happen.