The biggest news of the month for the Blue Jackets has to be the demotion of Nikita Filatov to Springfield of the American Hockey League. For a team that has been in a decade-long scramble to surround their top player with on-par, sufficient talent, Filatov looks like he may be yet another draft bust for the Blue Jackets.

Quite simply, Nikita Filatov doesn't get it. There's a fine line in sports between the top players in the league and the rest. Keep in mind that each and every player you see at the professional, or even AHL level, probably dominated their teams growing up. Whether playing mite or squirt in the United States or atom hockey in Canada, these players had it from a young age and their talent was instantly recognizable. There comes a level of hockey, usually major junior or college, where the talent gaps between players are nominal.

Players like Nikita Filatov get to where they are because of their God-given or vigorously-practiced talent. His hands are lightning-quick, his skating is effortless, his shot is deadly accurate and his coordination is off the charts. There are players who wish they had his talent. And then, there are players with hands of stone, have to expend large amounts of energy to skate, shoot the puck right in to the goalie's chest more often than not, and could not knock a puck out of mid-air with any level of frequency. But they play upwards of 15 or 16 minutes a night in the NHL. Why? Because they work their ass off and have a tremendous hockey IQ.

Superstars like Rick Nash, Alex Ovechkin, Sidney Crosby, and others have a combination of all of those things. Nikita Filatov simply does not have the work ethic or enough hockey intelligence to be a factor every night in the NHL. The Blue Jackets are really caught in between. I would not

be shocked to see Filatov get traded at the deadline to get a piece of the playoff run and secure part of the fan base for next year. But, they may not want the egg on their face of a busted draft pick.

Having seen Filatov during his stint in Syracuse last year, he looked uninspired, despite having more talent than nearly everyone else on the ice. He did not appear to work on the things he needed to work on, specifically, playing defense in his own zone. If this occurs again, the Blue Jackets may opt to completely cut the cord with him.

In other Blue Jackets news:

How does five games in eightdays, in four different time zones sound? That's the stretch that the Blue Jackets finish up on Thursday in Edmonton. They were in St. Louis on the 9th, hosted the Rangers on the 11th, went to Calgary on the 13th, played in Vancouver on the 15th, in finish up in Edmonton on the 16th. Though they lost both games in Calgary and Vancouver, both were overtime defeats, so the team has gathered points in four of five since snapping their losing streak.

Goaltender Steve Mason has been pulled in two of his last three games. Both Mason and Garon have started four games in the month of December, with Garon's numbers falling off and Mason playing poorly. The Jackets have struggled all year offensively. Bad goaltending cannot be tolerated. One of the two need to step up immediately.

Left winger Kristian Huselius returned to the ice after missing 22 games with a high ankle sprain. His return will help if he simplified his game during the time off. Huselius has a history of being one of the more frustrating players on the team for trying to make the pretty play. Arniel, familiar with his play from watching tape, may give him a fresh chance during his first year as coach.

In other NHL news:

If you missed the 24/7 Road to the Winter Classic special on HBO, it is must-see TV for any hockey fan. You may want to use the Vince Vaughn earmuffs on the kids for a majority of the show, but it is a very candid look at the two teams. All-access is an understatement. It was highly entertaining and should only get better as the Winter Classic approaches and is played on January 1 at Heinz Field in Pittsburgh.

The Phoenix Coyotes may be staying in Glendale until 2040 under a proposed lease agreement with the city and the arena. Matthew Hulsizer is the new prospective owner and the city council voted 5-2 in favor of the issue.

Former San Jose Sharks goaltender Evgeni Nabakov is heading back stateside , leaving the four-year deal he signed last summer to play in the Kontinental Hockey League. He cites family reasons as the cause and should be able to latch on with a NHL team with goaltending issues.

A minor league update on the Lake Erie Monsters:

The Monsters continue to hold strong in the North Division where the top six teams are separated by just six points in the standings. The team faces a big four-game road trip before coming home on December 29.

Upcoming schedules:

Columbus: 12/18 v. DAL; 12/21 v. CGY; 12/23 v. VAN

Lake Erie: 12/17 @ Milwaukee; 12/18 @ Rockford; 12/19 @ Peoria