After the much needed All-Star Break, the Blue Jackets opened the month of February as they ended the month of January, with a loss. The Jackets quickly changed their fortunes, shutting out the rival Red Wings for the first time at Joe Louis Arena, beating Edmonton the following night, and securing a 4-1 win over the Crosby and Malkin-less Penguins at Consol Energy Center on Tuesday night for their first win in Pittsburgh since March 2002. The boys in blue lost a tough 3-2 decision to the white hot San Jose Sharks the following night. The Sharks have not lost in February and have not lost in regulation since January 13.

But, the Blue Jackets fired 44 shots at Antti Niemi in that game and played like a confident team. They will need to maintain that intensity as the chase for the playoffs is officially on. Beginning Sunday afternoon, the Blue Jackets play eight of their next nine games against teams ahead of them in the Western Conference standings. Two other games against the St. Louis Blues, who are currently one point behind the Jackets, follow that stretch. With the charity point for an overtime loss in play every night, these games are crucial if the Blue Jackets want to make it to the playoffs for the second time in franchise history.

Steve Mason was pulled yet again in the Chicago game, the first game back after the break. He rebounded nicely for the Red Wings shutout. If anything can be taken from Mason over these first five games of February, it is that Scott Arniel has given him a large vote of confidence. Mason has played two back-to-backs already and went right back in net after being pulled against the ‘Hawks. He will be the man going forward.

Kristian Huselius was a healthy scratch against the Red Wings back on February 4. That makes the team 13-15-2 with Huselius in the lineup and 13-8-3 without him. Unfortunately for the Blue Jackets, his hefty salary and inconsistent play give him little value on the trade market, even if

the team goes in to a tailspin prior to the trade deadline.

The buzz surrounding the Blue Jackets for the last week has been Matt Cooke's dirty cheap shot on Fedor Tyutin. The hit can be seen here . This hit came just days after Cooke had another embarrassing cheap shot on Alexander Ovechkin, clipping his skates and taking out his legs in a very dangerous play.

Cooke got a five minute major for the hit, but was able to stay in the game mostly because Tyutin was not hurt. The NHL usually only doles out post-game discipline when players are hurt, but they bucked the trend this time and Cooke received a four-game suspension for the hit. Most likely because Matt Cooke is a repeat offender.

Cooke is no doubt a dirty player. Jeremy Roenick, never short on words, spoke with XM's Home Ice show about the hit. Yahoo's Puck Daddy has transcripts of the interview in which Roenick calls Cooke "chickenshit" and says he "should have gotten 20 games". Bravo, Mr. Roenick.

Long-time ironman defenseman Ken Daneyko, formerly of the Devils, also chimed in on Cooke. In a Sirius interview, again transcribed a bit on Puck Daddy, Daneyko said that the NHL should declare "open season on Matt Cooke for one week".

In non-on-ice Blue Jackets news, the Sports Business Journal is reporting that the Blue Jackets TV viewership has gone down 41%
this season and their 10,000 viewers on average is the fourth-worst in the NHL. The three teams below the Blue Jackets, the Phoenix Coyotes, the Florida Panthers, and the Atlanta Thrashers, have all been subject to relocation talks this year. Make no mistake, the Blue Jackets are in a dire financial situation. Perennial underachievement, a bad arena lease agreement, and a highly skeptical fan base that will not even watch the Jackets when the Cleveland Cavaliers are downright awful makes the situation that much more grim.

The next seven games are crucial for the Blue Jackets, as they are for most of the league's teams. The trade deadline is February 28. With so many teams in play in the Western Conference, sellers will be at a premium. Teams will have to make difficult decisions regarding players who will be free agents this year if they are on the bubble. The Jackets will have to make up ground over the last two and a half weeks of February.

In other NHL and hockey news:

Carrie Underwood is one happy gal. Not just because she's stunningly beautiful, very wealthy, extremely talented, and married to a hockey player (because we are incredible people), but her husband Mike Fisher was traded to Nashville this week. The Senators received a 2011 first round pick and a conditional pick. This signals a rebuild for the Senators. It also probably signals a pregnancy for Carrie Underwood considering they may actually see each other once in a while now.

Parity was officially on display during February 10th's slate of games. Four went to overtime, the other was a one goal regulation decision. With every single point meaning more and more during the playoff chase, expect this scenario more and more.

While I was on hiatus in Las Vegas, there was a goaltender fight. Brent Johnson of the Penguins took down china doll made out of papier-mache and Jenga blocks goaltender Rick DiPietro of the Islanders. Not surprisingly, the "fight" knocked DiPietro out for 4-6 weeks with concussion symptoms.

Peter Forsberg is making yet another return to the NHL, expected to suit up against Columbus on Friday night. He is the Brett Favre of the NHL, though he has never been alleged to send cock-shots to any reporters.

Valentine's Day hockey jerseys will never be in style .

And finally, this week's Youtube clip comes from the Norfolk Admirals and eight-year-old Elizabeth Hughes singing the national anthem. In a previous post, I added the video where Hughes's microphone stopped working during the anthem and the fans finished it for her, while she sang along not noticing her mic quit. The team invited her back and she did not disappoint. Take that, Christina.

A minor league update on the Lake Erie Monsters

Greg Mauldin, Jonos Holos, and Ben Walter are all out with injuries, leaving a patchwork lineup to try and keep the team's grasp on a playoff spot. The Monsters have been scorching over the last month, playing most of their games (12 of 13) on home ice.

Unfortunately, their slim one point lead is in danger because they have more games played than the teams below them. The Monsters have 25 games left to play on the season.

Upcoming schedules:

Columbus: 2/11 v. COL, 2/13 @ DAL, 2/16 v. LA

Lake Erie: 2/12 v. Grand Rapids, 2/14 v. Texas