The Blue Jackets are a two-wheel drive truck stuck in mud. Every now and then, the engine propels the truck forward a few inches, but then the wheels dig in

even deeper and mud flies out from under the back tires. The driver tries to rock the vehicle forward and backward to attempt to get out of the predicament. But, no matter what, the truck cannot seem to get over the hump and get back on the road.

The Jackets have lost in regulation just four times since January 11. They have eight wins in that span and three losses coming in overtime or a shootout. Despite the 8-4-3 record over the last month and a week, the Blue Jackets remain six points out of the final playoff spot in the Western Conference. Their stretch of play has distanced them from the lower-seeded teams behind them, but they cannot seem to gain any ground on the teams ahead of them.

The playoff push became more difficult on February 16 with the injury to Derick Brassard. Brassard will miss at least a couple weeks after taking a puck off his left hand. The Blue Jackets are not a deep team by any means, especially in the skill department. Brassard is currently third on the team in points, but leads the team in powerplay points. Historically, the Blue Jackets have lacked a bona fide center to play alongside Rick Nash. Brassard was the closest thing on the roster and now he is out.

RJ Umberger also left the same game after a scary knee-to-knee hit with Jarret Stoll, but returned later in the game. After Umberger's return to the bench, the Blue Jackets scored the game-tying goal to knot things at two. Clearly, he is the emotional leader of this team. He plays through mostly every injury and is one of the more vocal members of the team. His role will be elevated in Brassard's absence and his contributions could determine what the Blue Jackets do by the February 28 trade deadline.

Steve Mason has dealt with bronchitis and a nagging groin injury. There is no good time for a starting goaltender to go down, but especially now with the earlier trade deadline. Aaron Portzline tweeted that the Montreal Canadiens have interest in Rusty Klesla and Kristian Huselius if the Blue Jackets become sellers. Mason played through mono a couple years ago, so there is very little question of his toughness, but nagging injuries take their biggest toll at this stage of the season. Mason is 4-2 with a 2.31 GAA in the month of February.

Rick Nash picked up his 50th point of the season against the Kings. It marked his seventh straight season with 50 or more points. Only three other current players, Jarome Iginla, Martin St. Louis, and Daniel Sedin, have accomplished that feat. It speaks to a couple things. First, Rick Nash is very talented. Second, he is extremely durable.

The Blue Jackets have to finish the month of February strong. It will be no easy task with the always dangerous Blackhawks, two games against one of the Nashville Predators, one of the hottest teams in the league, and the Phoenix Coyotes who play a suffocating defensive style of play. The Jackets need at least five of eight possible points to keep from being sellers at the Trade Deadline, depending on what the other teams do.

**Other news from around the hockey world:**

Trade rumors are all over the place. It's the most wonderful time of the year for a hockey fan, save for the playoffs. The trade deadline is an all-day event, with TSN and NHL Network providing all the coverage. Usually around 25 trades are completed on deadline day with a handful of them before.

The Senators are having an estate sale, with Chris Kelly now being traded. They traded Mike Fisher last week to Nashville. More pieces and parts will be on the move, though trade candidate Sergei Gonchar left Wednesday's game with a lower body injury. One name of interest for the Blue Jackets, especially with Brassard out, is Alexei Kovalev. He's a bit of an enigma, but can be one of the game's most savvy players and would help Rick Nash immensely.

Tomas Kaberle trade rumors are flying around for the third straight year. Kaberle has been stuck in Toronto on a bad team for years, so nobody is quite sure of how good he really is. He

has had a no trade clause waived in the past and it looks like he'll be asked to waive it again.

Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville was admitted to the hospital this week and listed in stable condition. No official report on his illness was released, but a Versus analyst cited internal bleeding as the cause for the admission to the hospital. Best wishes to Quenneville with his recovery.

After bashing the New Jersey Devils for half the season, they have reversed their fortunes. On January 9, Jacques Lemaire took over for John MacLean. The team was 27 points out of the playoffs. Now, the team is just 12 points out. To top it off, Martin Brodeur has been hurt and Johan Hedberg has won four straight.

Dustin Byfuglien, Chicago Blackhawks playoff hero, was traded this past offseason to the Atlanta Thrashers. Byfuglien signed a very large five-year $26M contract. A couple days later, the Atlanta Thrashers co-owner spoke of relocation. A team desperate for good PR needed to bask in the glow of keeping one of their most familiar faces, not questioning their future.

This week's Youtube clip is a recap of Toronto's Mikhail Grabovski's night against the Boston Bruins on February 15. First, there was this . Then, there was this gem .

**A minor league update on the Lake Erie Monsters:**

The Monsters, on the strength of back-to-back wins over the Texas Stars, have tied for first place in the North Division. Though the other teams have games in hand, the Monsters have played extremely well over the last couple weeks. They have played 12 of 13 at home, however, where they are significantly better than they are on the road.

**Upcoming schedules:**

2/18 @ CHI, 2/22 v. NSH

2/18 & 2/19 @ Manitoba, 2/24 v. Hershey