While the Conference Finals roar on, the case for relocation has been reinvigorated. One of the usual suspects is in play again, but not the one that has been in the news for the better part of three seasons. This time, the Atlanta Thrashers are at the forefront of the Bring the Jets Back to Winnipeg campaign.

This case takes an interesting turn, however. Had the Phoenix Coyotes been moved to Manitoba, only divisional re-alignment would be required. But, if the Thrashers are on the move, one team from the West would need to be shipped to the Eastern Conference and assume their spot in the Southeast Division. Enter, the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Conventional wisdom says that the Nashville Predators make the most sense, both among the league brass and the media world. Geographically, it makes sense and there's a good chance of rivalries forming with the other Southeast foes. Maybe it does make the most sense from a geographic perspective, but not for the betterment and sustainability of the National Hockey League.

The Columbus Blue Jackets need to be the team that moves to the Eastern Conference IF

re-alignment happens due to relocation. While nothing is set in stone about the Thrashers moving to Winnipeg, contingency plans are being formed at the NHL League Office. These plans must include the Blue Jackets becoming an Eastern Conference team. There are a myriad of pros, along with a handful of cons, but to try and fix the Blue Jackets, the pros outweigh the cons.

Financial troubles for the Blue Jackets have been widely publicized. The team is losing money faster than Lenny Dykstra. The responsibility of the league should be to attempt to plug the leaks for all of its teams. The Blue Jackets should be near the top of the list of the teams that are in danger.

**Pros**

**Crosby and Ovechkin**: The results have not been there for the Blue Jackets. As a result, attendance has been downright poor. One thing that can help cure what ails the Jackets can be to bring bigger draws in to the building. There are no bigger draws than these two players. Sidney Crosby was drafted in 2005. In the six years he's been in the NHL, he has visited Nationwide Arena four times. Alexander Ovechkin has played three games at Nationwide. Adding six-to-eight home dates per season featuring these two world-class talents would be enormous for attendance revenues.

**7 pm Road Games**: Let's be honest. By 9 or 10 pm, people want to lie in bed and watch their cable or network weekly TV shows and relax. The Blue Jackets play every conference road game in a different time zone, except for those against the Red Wings. If you get 7 pm road puck drops, those casual fans might get caught up in the game for the hour before their dramas and sitcoms start and then just set the DVR to record them. Instead, you have the team buried in a bad time slot, with a game that does not end until 11 pm or 12 am. With TV viewership dropping every year, this can only be beneficial.

**Saving on Travel Costs**: Shorter road trips, both in terms of mileage and length, would be a huge upgrade for the Jackets. Rather than be on the road for 10 days and watch disinterest grow in Central Ohio, the team would return in a quicker fashion and maybe be able to build off

the excitement of their previous home game. But, above that, for a team hemorrhaging money, cutting corners on travel would only help. Lengthy Western Canada or California road trips are expensive. Shorter trips to the Northeast or Atlantic seaboard would curtail some travel expenses.

**A Change of Scenery**: This is a multi-point pro. For one, the Blue Jackets would have a much better shot at a playoff berth being able to escape the cluster that is the Western Conference playoff chase. For two, the fans would get an opportunity to see teams that they really have not seen before. The Eastern Conference is rapidly catching up to the West in terms of overall talent and terrific young talent. For three, fans may get to experience more road cities. Travel to most Western Conference teams is tough. But, with the geographically-crowded East, fans might be able to catch two or three games in one shot if they are so inclined.

Overall, there are a lot of financial reasons that make a ton of sense for the league to vote to move the Blue Jackets to the Southeast Division of the Eastern Conference. On some level, the rationale behind the Predators moving is just as good, but, with the league's clear unwillingness to financially support Atlanta, a much larger market than Phoenix, the idea that the NHL would want to dump money in to yet another team is unconceivable. Columbus is heading down that road, is a much smaller market than Atlanta, and is, for all intents and purposes, a forgotten team in the scheme of things.

**Cons**

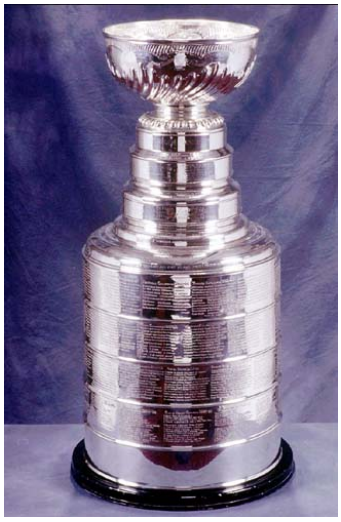
**Another financial hardship in the SE Division**: By removing the Atlanta Thrashers from the SE Division, the NHL only has one rocky franchise to deal with in the division- the Florida Panthers. The Panthers draw terribly, have had no success over the last 10-12 years, and are in about as non-traditional of a hockey market as there is. Moving the Blue Jackets there would simply replace the division's chief financial black sheep. Nashville, on the other hand, is on good financial standing and draws pretty well.

**Competitive balance**: It remains to be seen who will win the 2011 Stanley Cup. The talent and skill divide between the two conferences has been narrowing because the East continues to have more teams picking in the top ten of the NHL Draft than the West. Nashville makes more sense for the Eastern Conference because it gives them another bona fide perennial playoff contender. The Blue Jackets cannot promise that. While they should do better in the East, there are no guarantees. Nashville is a solid, solid franchise. They draft well, they develop incredibly

well, and they play a good system to match up with the East's top teams in a competitive sense.

Beyond these two reasons, in my estimation, it is hard to justify selecting the Predators to move over the Blue Jackets. Again, all of this is pure speculation based on the Thrashers relocating to Winnipeg. Winnipeg is not a financially-strong area, though preliminary research has shown that season ticket sales would do well. Long-term viability is the biggest concern here. The Jets had several good years at the start and then attendance dwindled to nothing and the team was moved to Phoenix. If the league would face another relocation dilemma in 8-10 years based on low attendance in Winnipeg, they would have to be against a move.

**2011 Stanley Cup Playoff Update**



The Bruins and Lightning have exchanged a lot of goals thus far, both games finishing with over 10 goals combined. Surprising given how good both goaltenders were playing entering the series, but certainly believable due to the amount of talent on both teams. The series heads to Florida tied at one.

The Sharks have looked completely outclassed by the Canucks in the first two games out West with the Canucks holding a 2-0 series advantage heading to San Jose. Game Two was a complete blowout and the Sharks got chippy and dirty late in the game, introducing some bad blood in to the series. Unless the Sharks can find some answers, this series will be over in a hurry and Vancouver will await the East's victor.