February is projecting to be a rather interesting month for the Columbus Blue Jackets. Outside of team scouts racking up frequent flyer miles doing their due diligence on the 2012 NHL Entry Draft Class, Scott Howson is working the phones looking for trade partners for Jeff Carter and Todd Richards is trying to get a team whose fate has been sealed for months to keep playing.

Despite all of this, somebody actually wants to stay in Columbus. Vaclav “Vinny” Prospal agreed to terms on a one-year contract extension with the Blue Jackets on Wednesday. Prospal, whose trade value was believed to be a second round draft pick because of his veteran leadership and solid point totals on an awful team, also has a “gentleman’s agreement” in place with the Blue Jackets that he will remain with the organization when his playing days are over. According to Columbus Dispatch Blue Jackets beat writer Aaron Portzline, the contract extension includes a no-trade clause and the team is prepared to sign Prospal to one-year extensions every season until he feels like retiring.

It’s a decision by Howson that has to be applauded. Prospal is highly regarded around the league and the type of player who has always been described as a good teammate. For an organization that lacks people with playing experience, or hockey-related experience in general, having Prospal in the fold is a move in the right direction. Even though a second round draft pick could have developed into a good NHL player or been packaged for a first round pick, the Blue Jackets opted to keep Prospal around. Kudos to Prospal for wanting to stick around.

As for people who don’t want to stick around, the Blue Jackets are trying to find a trade partner who would be willing to give them what they gave up to acquire Jeff Carter. That would take somebody offering a top ten first round pick and a solid NHL player. If you recall, the Blue

Jackets traded for Jeff Carter prior to the 2011 NHL Entry Draft giving up the seventh overall pick, which eventually became Sean Couturier, and Jakub Voracek. The Flyers also received Columbus's third round pick which became prospect Nick Cousins.

Jeff Carter was traded from Philadelphia for both salary cap reasons and character issues. The Blue Jackets gambled on Carter, assuming that they would be a contending team this season. Because of injuries and ineffectiveness, that has not been the case and Carter has been unhappy. Some have questioned if Carter milked his injuries to not be subjected to suiting up every night for the league's worst team.

When healthy, Carter is a very talented scorer who has the ability to play with numerous types of linemates. When not healthy, or on a bad team, Carter can also be a locker room distraction and a whiner. He's the kind of player who will have to be traded to just the right scenario in order to perform. Odds are, the Blue Jackets will have to take a loss on this deal and hope to just get something of value. One possibility, albeit slim, is to reunite Jeff Carter and Mike Richards in Los Angeles in order to acquire goaltender Jonathan Bernier. The Kings are extremely close to the salary cap, so a lot of maneuvering would need to be done, including Columbus possibly taking back forward Dustin Penner. The Kings are desperate for goal scoring, currently ranking last in the league in goals per game. Carter could be a good fit, but again, it would be difficult to work a deal.

With Prospal off the market now, it's hard to see who else the Blue Jackets could trade. Fedor Tyutin, RJ Umberger, and Rick Nash are all locked into long-term deals. In the age of the salary cap, these trades are very hard to complete. One potential trade candidate, Radek Martinek, has been out since late October with a concussion. Martinek's season is over, so he is no longer tradable. Kristian Huselius is not close to returning from an ankle injury and his $4.25M price tag for next season is enough to scare everybody off.

One potential trade candidate is Curtis Sanford. Some teams have had backup goaltending issues or have injuries to starting goaltenders. Sanford has shown the ability to be a competent starter and could garner some interest. His value is minimal, probably somewhere around a fourth round pick, so the Blue Jackets may just opt to keep him.

Sami Pahlsson is about the only other obvious trade option. He will be an unrestricted free agent next year and would be a cheap option for a team's third line. His value is likely somewhere around a third round pick. Aaron Johnson could be on some teams' radars, but it

would be as a sixth or seventh defenseman and would be lucky to get the Blue Jackets a fifth round pick.

Many people, including TSN's Bob McKenzie, are not high on the depth of the 2012 NHL Entry Draft class, with the exception of the top five or six players. This could impact the trade deadline as teams will be more than willing to sacrifice mid-round draft picks for any kind of roster upgrade.

Scott Howson has openly discussed the "nuclear" option of blowing the whole thing up. The difficulty with that is that the Blue Jackets have signed players to contracts that are above their league average value. In order to keep players in Columbus, like RJ Umberger and Fedor Tyutin, the Blue Jackets had to sweeten the deal. Umberger ($4.6M) and Tyutin ($4.5M) are pretty much immovable. Only Carter, at around $5.27M is below market value.

With interim head coach Todd Richards preaching playing with pride, Scott Howson valiantly trying to improve the club any way he can, and a handful of other issues at hand, February should be a very interesting month in the state capital.