It's really come to this, Blue Jackets fans. Rick Nash, face of the franchise for nearly a decade, could be on the move prior to the February 27 trade deadline. John Shannon of Sportsnet.ca first reported that Nash was unhappy in Columbus and a report by RDS, a French Canadian sports outlet, confirmed that the Blue Jackets have made it known that Rick Nash is available. Over the next 12 days, trade talks could progress far enough to send Nash to a new destination.

Before everyone begins to panic, there are a glaring number of hurdles that would have to be overcome for any Rick Nash trade to become a possibility. First and foremost, Rick Nash is locked into a very long-term deal at a very high cap hit. Nash signed an eight-year extension through the 2018-19 season with the Blue Jackets following the team's only playoff appearance in franchise history. That contract holds an annual salary cap hit of $7.8 million.

Not to say that Rick Nash isn't worth that kind of money, but it requires a lot of maneuvering and the Blue Jackets accepting a salary dump or two in return. For an organization that would clearly be rebuilding with any Rick Nash trade, taking on bad contracts is not the greatest option. Nash would have a pro-rated salary cap hit for the remainder of this season, but the Jackets would undoubtedly have to take on a couple of multi-year salary dumps from another team.

There's also the issue of Rick Nash's no movement clause, which is going to allow #61 to dictate where he wants to play. This is likely a small list of teams and also a small list of teams who have the necessary salary cap room to acquire such a player.

In the short-term, as stated above, Nash has a pro-rated salary cap hit for the rest of this season. The NHL salary cap bylaws have numerous provisions for late season salary cap room.

Some of them include amount of money below the salary cap at midseason and injury exemptions. Several teams would have the necessary room to add Nash to finish out the season, but it's the next six years of his contract that pose an issue. With more CBA negotiations on the horizon, committing to a major contract like Nash's could be even more of a hindrance.

Finally, the return for a franchise player has to be off-the-charts good. The Blue Jackets would have at least three requirements for any Rick Nash trade. The first is to acquire a young, NHL-ready starting goaltender. The second is to acquire NHL-ready forward talent to immediately replace Nash. The third is at least one, if not two, first round draft picks. The requirements are listed in descending order of difficulty. In terms of NHL-ready starting goaltenders that aren't currently starting, the list is small. Jonathan Bernier in Los Angeles and Cory Schneider in Vancouver are the two most obvious choices. Beyond that, you would be talking about Jhonas Enroth from Buffalo or going the prospect route with somebody like Florida's Jacob Markstrom. Again, only certain teams can take on Nash's type of contract and will be on Nash's list of consideration.

It should come as no surprise that the Blue Jackets do, in fact, have Rick Nash on the trade block and are entertaining offers. The organization needs to do something earth-shattering and this would certainly qualify. The original Sportsnet.ca report (via Puck Daddy) said that Nash will not be the one to ask for a trade, but that he would entertain any the thought of any trade proposal that comes his way. The Blue Jackets certainly have to make something happen. The return for Rick Nash should improve the roster greatly and give them more options. It would also give them additional salary cap room with uncertain CBA negotiations coming.

Furthermore, as I mentioned last week, the Blue Jackets are looking to move Jeff Carter, but are not getting good offers. Darren Dreger of TSN said that the Blue Jackets received "an uncomfortably low" offer
for Carter. There's little chance that the Blue Jackets get back a package even to what they sent away to get Jeff Carter, so they may have to settle, especially if they go full fire sale mode.

Another reason for the Blue Jackets to move Rick Nash is to reward him for his loyalty. Nash has never really enjoyed success at the NHL level, though he has a Gold Medal from the 2010 Olympics. He signed the extension after the 2008-09 season expecting the team to continue building in the right direction and it never materialized. Similar to how teams in other sports will sometimes trade players to contenders to give them a shot at winning a championship, the Blue Jackets may feel an obligation to give Rick Nash a chance to hold the Cup. He has played on bad Blue Jackets teams for the duration of his career and has kept his mouth shut and

performed. It seems that this year, he has finally reached his breaking point and his stats have suffered. If the opportunity presents itself to better the roster and give Nash a chance at winning, Scott Howson has to do it.

Without question, it is hard to envision a Blue Jackets team without Rick Nash. The reaction from the fans would be interesting to see because they all understand that change needs to happen, but I believe they'd rather see the change in the front office than with the captain. Like any trade scenario, there will be some who keep the trade in perspective and look at its future value. Others will shun the team, denounce its very existence, and swear to never go to another game.

In a Blue Jackets season that's been anything but exciting, the next two weeks should be very interesting.