They say that March comes in like a lion and out like a lamb. With the leap year calendar just three days away from March, that's exactly how the 2012 Trade Deadline played out for the Columbus Blue Jackets. After a couple weeks of speculation regarding Rick Nash and a trade that sent Jeff Carter to Los Angeles, the Blue Jackets ended up with one minor deal on deadline day, sending Sami Pahlsson to Vancouver for a couple of fourth round picks.

Since Rick Nash's availability was made public, he was the apple of every contending GM's eye. After receiving a list of five teams (San Jose, Los Angeles, Boston, New York Rangers, Toronto Maple Leafs) that Nash would waive his no-trade clause to go, the Blue Jackets went to work trying to get an acceptable package of players and/or draft picks for the face of their franchise.

As the deadline drew closer, the chances of a trade grew slimmer. Columbus GM Scott Howson had extremely high demands for #61 and was unwilling to budge off of them. With such a small list of teams, the likelihood of finding a deal was hampered by both salary cap concerns and a lack of available players that fit the Blue Jackets' needs. There was probably a short list of names among those five teams that were imperative to any deal getting done. San Jose would have to give up young center Logan Couture. The Rangers would have to trade defenseman Michael del Zotto. Boston would have to trade prized prospect Dougie Hamilton. Los Angeles

was basically out of the running once Jeff Carter was traded there. Toronto would have to give up defensive prospect Jake Gardiner and a mid-first round draft pick.

Rick Nash was not dealt on or before the trade deadline. The Rangers reportedly made one final push with what TSN's Darren Dreger called "a mammoth offer". As reports continue to come out about the offer might have been, clearly, it was not what Scott Howson envisioned. Many GMs spent the day on TSN's TradeCentre coverage complaining about the inflated value of players and the high cost to acquire them. This is due, in large part, to the amount of teams who still have a legitimate shot at the playoffs.

In his post-deadline press conference, Howson was quick to find the nearest bus and throw Nash under it. Howson openly told the media that Nash approached the Blue Jackets and asked for a trade. Yahoo Puck Daddy head blogger Greg Wyshynski made light of Howson's comments tweeting "Rick Nash requested a trade. Also, he sang the Michigan fight song and wiped his ass with the Ohio flag." – Howson". I would consider this a shot across the bow that Rick Nash is not with the Columbus Blue Jackets on opening night next year.

For now, however, Nash remains a Blue Jacket. One would imagine that Nash's mindset is in a great state of flux right now. The aforementioned Darren Dreger tweeted that Nash was "emotionally drained by this process". Nash now becomes essentially a lame duck President. He's the captain of a team whose front office will immediately look to trade him at the conclusion of the Stanley Cup playoffs and he's left to play out the final 20 games of his last year as a Columbus Blue Jacket with no certainty about where his future will take him. Nash's agent has said that the list of possible destinations will now grow or condense, but given Howson's comments to the media today, the list could definitely expand. Of course, Howson openly telling teams that Rick Nash wants out drastically reduces the leverage that he had today. He did not *have* to move Nash. Now, he does.

Enjoy #61 while you can, folks. He's gone before the 2012 NHL Entry Draft on June 22.

As far as what did happen, the Jeff Carter trade, which I addressed in this Hitting the Fan article last week, was supposed to be the pre-cursor to a very busy trade deadline for the Blue Jackets. The Carter deal, though, was a no-brainer. Jeff Carter was not happy in Columbus and was going to get traded no matter what. Rick Nash was, obviously, a different story.

Carter was traded to the Los Angeles Kings for defenseman Jack Johnson a conditional first round pick. If the Kings miss the 2012 playoffs, the pick automatically becomes LA's 2013 first round selection. If the Kings make the 2012 playoffs, Columbus will have a choice of which pick they want.

Johnson is just 25 years old but has taken his share of abuse about his play. With lofty expectations as the third overall pick in 2005, Johnson has never played up to his capability. A change of scenery may help Johnson, a former University of Michigan hockey player and Indianapolis, IN native.

The only trade that Scott Howson completed on deadline day was to send veteran center Sami Pahlsson to the Vancouver Canucks in exchange for defenseman Taylor Ellington and two fourth round picks, one from Vancouver and one from the New York Islanders, both in the 2012 draft. Pahlsson will help add depth for the Canucks and kudos to Scott Howson for finding a destination for Pahlsson, a former Stanley Cup winner in 2007, where he has a chance at winning.

Howson also traded Antoine Vermette to Phoenix last week for a second round pick and a conditional fifth round pick if the Coyotes win a round in this year's playoffs.

Trade Deadline Day Around the League

As far as trade deadlines go, this was one of the least interesting up until around 3:30 p.m. Many of the early deals were very minor in nature, as is often the case when so many teams are in the playoff picture. Veteran defensemen for mid-round draft picks, swapping depth players between teams, etc. Around 3:15 p.m., it was announced that the Buffalo Sabres finally got their lofty asking price for soon-to-be unrestricted free agent Paul Gaustad. The Nashville Predators acquired Gaustad and a fourth round draft selection for their first round pick in the 2012 NHL Entry Draft.

The big blockbuster of the day was announced well after the 3 p.m. trade deadline. The Vancouver Canucks and Buffalo Sabres swapped prospects in a deal that nearly brought the TSN TradeCentre panel to a halt. Cody Hodgson, a Toronto native, was sent to Buffalo in exchange for bruising forward prospect Zack Kassian. Two others defensemen were included in the deal. Hodgson, a skilled two-way centerman with good potential, was stuck behind Henrik Sedin and Ryan Kesler on the depth chart and doesn't fit the prototypical third line center role. Kassian, a 6'4" winger who hits like a truck, will fit the depth role far better for the Canucks than Hodgson can.

In total, 16 trades were completed today, the exact same number as the 2011 trade deadline. Here are my biggest winners and losers of the day:

Winners:

Nashville: The Predators got Hal Gill, a big defenseman with lots of experience, 10 days ago and then added Paul Gaustad to the mix at the deadline. With the best goaltender nobody talks about in Pekka Rinne, the Predators are, again, a very deadly team to face in the playoffs. They also added some skill acquiring Andrei Kostitsyn from the Montreal Canadiens. Andrei's brother Sergei is on the Predators.

Winnipeg: The Jets traded Johnny Oduya to Chicago for a second and third round pick in the 2013 draft and claimed Grant Clitsome off waivers from Columbus. They replaced Oduya with a cheaper option and got two draft picks out of it. With a chance at the playoffs, but not a great chance of going deep in the postseason, Winnipeg got better for the future at zero expense in the present. Those draft picks can also be used in trade in the 2012 draft or at next year's deadline.

Losers:

San Jose: The San Jose Sharks are big time losers today. They have lacked depth at forward and on defense all season long and did very little to address it. They got a decent grind guy in Daniel Winnik from Colorado, but this team has been in freefall mode of late. With two

defensemen out due to facial injuries from pucks, the Sharks are in bad shape.

Thus ends another trade deadline day and in comes the mad dash to make the playoffs. With really only four teams out of the playoff picture in the entire league, it should provide for an entertaining conclusion to the NHL season.