Every team in the NHL has 10 or fewer games to play as the standings keep getting tighter and the games become more and more significant. While some cities and fan bases enjoy playoff chases and the thought of home ice in the playoffs, the Columbus Blue Jackets are 31 points out of the final playoff spot in the Western Conference. Last year's Edmonton Oilers finished 35 points out. The 2009-10 version of the Oilers finished 33 points out and the 2008-09 New York Islanders finished 32 points out. So, the Blue Jackets aren't exactly in uncharted territory with how bad they've been this season.

The Blue Jackets, however, have kept fighting this season. In the month of March, they've beaten Colorado, Phoenix twice, Los Angeles, and Calgary, all teams fighting for the final couple of playoff spots in the Western Conference. The Blue Jackets have the opportunity to keep teams out of the playoffs or to directly affect playoff seedings over their final nine games. Only two of their final nine games are against teams who are already eliminated from playoff contention (Edmonton and New York Islanders).

For a team that has played 46 different skaters and three goaltenders, the Jackets should have plenty of information at their disposal when evaluating the future of the franchise this offseason. With James Wisniewski now suffering from concussion-related symptoms, Curtis Sanford out for the season with a leg injury, and injuries to three other defensemen – Fedor Tyutin (broken hand), Radek Martinek (concussion since October), Marc Methot (broken jaw) – the team has been able to look at its defensive depth and see if there are any real keepers among that group. Eleven of the 20 skaters from the Opening Night game against Nashville did not play for Columbus in their last game. Some were traded, some were waived, some are injured and

some have been demoted to the American Hockey League. Also gone from that night is the head coach.

One has to wonder what the final nine games of the season mean for the Blue Jackets. With injuries galore and a roster comprised of a lot of minor league call-ups, how many of the guys on the team are actually playing for jobs with the Jackets next season? Can anything be taken away from the way the team plays in games that seemingly don't matter? Has Todd Richards done enough with a depleted roster to be the team's head coach next season? Will April 7 be the final home game at Nationwide Arena for Rick Nash?

As has been the running theme of this team for several months now, there are far more questions than answers. Are the answers to those questions already known or are the next two-and-a-half weeks going to shed some light on the issues?

The calendar is inching closer to the biggest offseason in franchise history.

As the St. Louis Blues put some gap between themselves and the rest of the Central Division, four of the six division titles are still up in the air in the NHL. The Detroit Red Wings have been destroyed by injuries over the last few weeks, losing goaltender Jimmy Howard, defenseman Nicklas Lidstrom and have had Pavel Datsyuk and Johan Franzen missing games. As a result, the Nashville Predators have vaulted themselves into a tie for second in the division, and more importantly, the lead in the race for the fourth seed in the West.

The Pacific Division looks to be going down to the wire as the top four teams in the division are neck-and-neck. Currently, only the top two, the division leading Dallas Stars and the second place Los Angeles Kings would be in the playoffs if the season ended today. The other two teams, Phoenix and San Jose, are just one and two points, respectively, behind their division foes.

The Northwest Division is already decided as the Vancouver Canucks have an 11-point lead

over the Colorado Avalanche. The Avalanche are trying desperately to sneak in to the playoffs and lead the aforementioned Kings for the seventh seed by one point. The Calgary Flames remain just two points off the pace in the Western Conference chase.

In the Eastern Conference, the Pittsburgh Penguins have been white hot, closing the gap between them and the Atlantic Division-leading New York Rangers. The Rangers were the first team to clinch an Eastern Conference playoff spot, but hold just a one-point lead over the Penguins. The Philadelphia Flyers are five points behind the Rangers. New Jersey is securely in the playoff picture, currently maintaining the sixth seed.

The Boston Bruins have held on to their lead in the Northeast Division, but have not played good hockey lately. The Ottawa Senators are just three points back and the third-place Buffalo Sabres have played at a torrid pace since the All-Star Break, climbing to within two points of the eighth seed. Toronto and Montreal have fallen off the pace and will be golfing in April.

The Southeast Division remains undecided as the Florida Panthers have been able to hold off the Washington Capitals and the Winnipeg Jets. The Panthers have a five-point edge over the Caps and the Jets are four points back of the Caps. The glass slipper may have fallen off for Winnipeg, as they play seven of their final ten games on the road, where they are one of the league's worst teams. Washington holds the eighth seed by two points over Buffalo. The Carolina Hurricanes have played some spirited hockey of late and are seven points out of the eighth seed and the Lightning are nine back.

As for Cleveland's team, the Lake Erie Monsters, just 11 games remain and they are on the outside looking in at the American Hockey League playoffs. The team is tied with eighth seed Rochester with 71 points. The Monsters do hold the tiebreaker, but the Americans have two games in hand. The Monsters are two points back of the sixth seed Peoria Rivermen and one point back of the seventh seed Charlotte Checkers.

The AHL Regular Season runs through April 15.