"It was the worst of times, it was the absolute worst of times" would be the opening line to a novel about the Columbus Blue Jackets 2011-12 season. The Blue Jackets began the season losing their first eight games, managing just one point for an overtime loss in the process. Forty-five losses later, the team has just two games left to play before setting up tee times and fulfilling vacation plans.

The team had a three-game winning streak snapped against Phoenix on Tuesday night with a Herculean performance from Coyotes goaltender Mike Smith. Smith, working on back-to-back shutouts, stopped all 54 Blue Jackets shots en route to a 2-0 victory. The 54 shots set a franchise record for shots on goal in one game, about the only positive notation in the record books from this season.

As evidenced by three straight wins over playoff teams – Florida, Detroit, St. Louis – the Blue Jackets are still playing hard. That's admirable for a team that has been out of the race since before November started. With one more game on home ice this season on Saturday against the New York Islanders, it'll be interesting to see what kind of "fan appreciation" the Jackets get.

Technically, this isn't the worst Blue Jackets team ever. The 2001-02 Jackets only managed 57 points, going 22-47-8-5. However, this was back when games still ended in a tie, so the Blue Jackets lost 52 of the 82 games. This year's club set a new record for futility with 53 losses and two games left to play. The aforementioned 54-shot effort against Phoenix, ironically, broke the team record for losses along with the record for shots on goal in a game. If we want to get really technical, the 2001-02 team is still the worst for securing the lowest percentage of available points, 34.8%, compared to this year's 38.1%, but that's mostly just splitting hairs. This year's team, in the franchise's eleventh season, would have to be viewed more negatively than the second year Jackets.

What was the cause for such a horrible record? There are plenty of directions to go in. For starters, Scott Arniel seemed to lose the team very early on in the season and he was fired after 41 games. Thirty-eight different skaters and three goaltenders were forced into the lineup due to injuries, suspensions, trades, and ineffectiveness. The team was buried from the start and played some less-than-spirited hockey in the middle months of the season, leading to an insurmountable gap between them and the other teams in the Western Conference.

Scott Howson was forced to accept a mistake, trading Jeff Carter to the Los Angeles Kings for Jack Johnson and a first round pick in either 2012 or 2013. Carter, the prized trade acquisition of last offseason, spent most of his time in Columbus injured and whining behind the scenes. Howson took a shot and missed. It was at the expense of Sean Couturier and Jake Voracek, who are key contributors of the Philadelphia Flyers playoff run.

More than an awful record, this season will be remembered as the year that the Blue Jackets tried to trade the face of the franchise. Nobody will forget the pre-trade deadline fiasco surrounding Rick Nash, the rumors, and the talk that never came to fruition. To exacerbate things, post-trade deadline comments from Nash, his agent, and General Manager Scott Howson seem to have severed any ties between the two parties and all but guarantee that Nash would be traded following the season. It remains to be seen if the two sides can smooth things over, but the damage with the fan base has already been done. After fans staged an Occupy Nationwide movement and voiced their displeasure with the organization, there's no telling what season ticket renewals and attendance will look like in 2012-13.

Rather than continue to review the season, as it's one that most fans would like to forget, let's look forward at the offseason. The Blue Jackets will have a 48.2% chance at holding on to the first overall pick in the 2012 NHL Entry Draft. Rumors were swirling about a month ago that the Blue Jackets could look to trade the pick, rather than selecting the consensus number one rated prospect Nail Yakupov from the Sarnia Sting of the Ontario Hockey League. Not much has been said about that since, with the NHL playoff chase dominating the hockey headlines.

Then, there's the larger elephant in the room of Rick Nash. What will happen this offseason? The Jackets clearly have holes all over the lineup that trading a player like Nash can help to fill. It also leaves the team without a captain, without the face of the franchise, and with a lot of disgruntled fans.

Steve Mason has done very little to prove that his 2008-09 rookie season was more than just a fluke. Since the end of that season, the only year the Jackets have made the playoffs, Mason has a record of 58-73-19, with a goals against average of 3.17 and a save percentage of .898. If the Blue Jackets want to compete, they absolutely have to get better goaltending. It's hard to see any scenario where they open the 2012-13 season with Steve Mason as the starter. That begs the question, where do they find a starting goaltender? The answer is a mystery, but a Rick Nash trade or a trade involving their first round pick seems to be the most likely scenario.

The Jackets were able to sign James Wisniewski and Vinny Prospal in free agency last offseason, after they had traded for Carter and appeared to be trending in the right direction. One would imagine that it will be very difficult for the Blue Jackets to bring solid free agents into the fold after how they've handled the Rick Nash situation and how bad the team was. Rebuilding the organization will have to be done from within or via trade, which is always a gamble.

Overall, the Blue Jackets eleventh season in franchise history was an epic failure. With expectations fairly high with some good front office moves in trading for Carter and the two free agent signings of Prospal and Wisniewski, along with other decent ones like Radek Martinek that didn't pan out because he was concussed in the first month of the season, the Blue Jackets fell flat on their faces. Injuries played a part, but everybody deals with them and they cannot be an excuse.

The team destroyed its rapport with the fans, alienated its best player and captain, and came no closer to figuring out their goaltending situation. At least, there's nowhere to go but up with this season.