After six games played, the St. Louis Blues have posted a 2-4-0 record, placing them in 13th in the Western Conference standings.
Many Blues fans have already hit the “panic button” and have sent the women and children into the lifeboats.
Many of those fans are already pointing fingers at Jaroslav Halak for his sub-par goaltending efforts.

I’m here to tell those people that he is not the only one that deserves a finger pointed his way.

There are many other contributing factors to the Blues’ failing performance. There are four components of the Blues’ game, including goaltending, that have been the biggest reasons for the poor record.

4. Quality of Shots

Yes, the Blues have been outshooting their opponents. In fact, the Blues have averaged 7.2 more shots per game than their opponent.
That can never be deemed a bad thing.

The problem has been the Blues’ unwillingness to get great shots. This may seem nitpicky but we see opposing teams working to get great scoring chances after cycling the puck around the Blues’ defense. The Blues then skate the puck down to the other end and take a few shots before losing control again.
The quality of these shots have to improve.

How do you do that?

The Blues have a few top-notch passers on their roster. Players like Patrik Berglund, T.J. Oshie and Vladimir Sobotka have proven in the past that they can pass at high levels; this type of game needs to return to the Blues.

Shooting is never a bad option. The old cliché of any shot is a good shot is true to a certain extent. If a good passing option is available, the Blues need to start looking in that direction.

3. Face-offs

While face-offs have improved from last season, it could still improve just a little bit more. Currently, the Blues are right in the middle of the NHL in face-off percentage, placing in 15th with a 49.7%.

That is pretty close to an even percent of wins and losses. That really does not speak to some of the problems.

Let's look at the Blues' loss to the Anaheim Ducks Sunday, shall we? While the Blues were only beaten by four face-off wins overall (Ducks advantage: 29-25), the Blues had trouble with face-offs in the defensive and offensive zones all night long.
The Ducks won 10 face-offs in the Blues' zone while the St. Louis team could only muster 3 wins.
On the other end of the ice, the Blues were beaten in the Ducks' zone, 9-6.

It seems the majority of those Blues face-off wins were in the neutral zone. While it is always important to take possession of the puck no matter where the face-off takes place, the Blues simply have to be better at winning draws in either offensive zone.

2. Goaltending

Yes, I mentioned that fans are already aware of this problem, but I cannot write something about the Blues' problems without mentioning the atrocity in the crease.

Halak has not been the shutdown goalie that fans saw in the 2010 playoffs. He has had many holes in his game, figuratively and literally.
His save percentage is below .850 (currently .835).
His GAA sits at 3.47.

The defense has not exactly been helpful the past few games, either. Loui Eriksson (Dallas) and Bobby Ryan (Anaheim) have both scored breakaway goals, while Francois Beauchemin (Anaheim) has also scored on a puck that was foolishly deflected by Blues defenseman Nikita Nikitin. These are direct problems with team defense.

On the flipside, Halak is the Blues' #1 guy. He needs to come up with the saves that most would not expect him to make. He needs to cover rebounds. He has to close his legs and stop those shots along the ground.

There is one step that the coaching staff can take to try and fix this problem. Put Halak on the bench all weekend and let Brian Elliott play the back-to-back games with Carolina and Philadelphia. Not only are the Blues going with the hotter goaltender, but this may be a wake-up call to Halak that will hopefully pull him out of this slump and let him see that he could be playing himself out of the starting role.

1. Special Teams

Yes, there is something worse than the Blues' goaltending.

Here are the current Blues' penalty-kill and power-play numbers. You may want to make your children step out of the room before viewing this:

Power-play: 1-24; 4.2%; 28th in NHL.

Penalty-kill: 15-22; 68.2%; 29th in NHL.

With percentages like these, it is easy to see why this team cannot close out games.

This will not be an easy fix. The power-play is missing Andy McDonald while the penalty-kill is still without B.J. Crombeen. The two top guys for each unit are MIA but this is still not an excuse to be as dreadful as what they are.

The same idea for Halak may be used for each of these problems. If Head Coach Davis Payne starts taking away minutes from guys that are the normal special teams guys, maybe that would motivate these players to step up their game and start getting the job done.
It is a little harder to do this with skaters than it is with goaltenders, but it still could be done.

Maybe the top power-play unit could start as this for Friday:

D'Agostini – Arnott – Sobotka – Huskins – Polak

Will this be an immediate help? Not likely, but if Berglund – Stewart – Oshie – Pietrangelo – Shattenkirk are kept off the power-play Friday, maybe that would motivate them to get it done on Saturday against the Flyers.

The penalty-kill units could look like this:

Grachev – Porter – Pietrangelo – Huskins

D'Agostini – Backes – Shattenkirk – Chorney

Once again, this may not be an immediate improvement, but you have to figure that some of these guys will be energized to be given the opportunity on the penalty-kill (Grachev, Porter, Chorney). Maybe you run this against the Hurricanes and see how they look; if they go perfect, give them the opportunity against the Flyers.

You have to figure, it really can't get any worse than what we are already seeing. The only way to go is up.

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