Remember that sweet win over Pittsburgh a few weeks ago? Erik Johnson had the game winner that night after a great pass from teammate T.J. Oshie.

Granted, Johnson's teammate is currently unavailable to feed him passes, but it would be nice to see some of that production from Johnson more consistently. Let's compare Johnson's numbers from this season to where he stood last season.

After 17 games played in 2010-11 (the Blues posting a 9-5-3 record), Johnson has but the lone goal and three assists to his credit. He also adds an even plus/minus. These numbers show a drastic drop in Johnson's statistics from where he was last season.

In the same amount of games played, Johnson posted one goal and 12 assists for the Blues in 2009-10. He also had a plus-4, which is pretty impressive considering the Blues' poor 6-7-4 record at the time.

Johnson should be more of a force this season. After all, he was coming back from a year-long injury to start last year's campaign.

So what is the problem?

Last season, head coach Andy Murray usually had Johnson on the ice with veteran Darryl Sydor. The then-37 year old defenseman was a bit more relaxed in his last NHL season, dropping back most of the time and covering Johnson's back as he moved the puck up. Was Sydor extremely reliable every moment in every game? No, but he gave Johnson a little more free-range to skate the puck and get involved in the play.

This season, Johnson has played every game with captain Eric Brewer. This plays a monumental factor in discovering why Johnson has not been such a threat. Brewer takes too many liberties when skating the puck and moving up. This means that when Brewer skates the puck into the offensive zone and loses it, Johnson either has to peddle back and stop an

odd-man rush or watch as the opposing team skates the puck in on a breakaway. This happened two-too many times against the Columbus Blue Jackets last Wednesday; Brewer and Johnson were caught in the offensive zone and two Blue Jacket goals were scored on the breakaway.

On the defensive side of the red line, Johnson has not been too reliable either. There have been many breakdowns in the Blues' zone, allowing too many good chances on goaltenders Jaroslav Halak and Ty Conklin. On the Red Wings' fifth goal Wednesday, Zetterberg completely undressed Johnson and skated in and beat Halak. While Halak could be blamed for not making the save, Johnson let the shot get taken in the first place.

Another instance of bad coverage came on the Red Wings' seventh goal, when Wings defenseman Brian Rafalski snapped a shot from the point and Tomas Holmstrom was standing in front untouched to tip the puck into the net. Brewer gave him a shove after the puck hit him, but it was too little too late.

The bottom line is that Johnson is not developing as fast as he could. If he had another defenseman playing on his line that will allow him to blossom as a player, then this problem may not be happening. Johnson always has to be the stay-at-home defenseman because Brewer does not know what his job is on the ice. Is Johnson's lack of progression completely due to the ineptitude of his line-mate? No, but having someone he can trust probably could not hurt his chances of playing a little more sound defense.

Let's look at Johnson in the Olympics. He was one of the steadiest defensemen in the entire tournament (I'm not including Team Canada, because… well, that would just not be fair). He put up just one goal, but he was a force in his own end. The Olympic Committee does not recognize plus/minus as an official stat, but he was out there for every big situation that could possibly be thrown at him: special teams, up by one goal late, down a goal late, etc. He was one of the lone reasons that Sidney Crosby was kept off the score-sheet in regulation in the Gold Medal Game. Sure is a huge difference from what Blues fans are seeing now.

Johnson needs someone else to be his defensive partner. A steady defenseman who can be relied on at opportune moments does wonders for a young player. With Brewer on the ice, Johnson has to be the reliable veteran on the ice instead of the developing youngster.

Click Here to sign the online petition for the Blues to NOT Re-Sign Eric Brewer!

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