The Blues' distant future looks very bright. The immediate future could use some work, though.

With the playoffs in full swing, it gives teams like the Blues time to look over their roster a little more closely and decide what is needed for the coming season.

With T.J. Oshie and David Backes leading the offense and Jaroslav Halak the goalie expected to do it all, that leaves one question; who is leading this young defense?

Alex Pietrangelo made a name for himself last year; if not for an archaic NHL rule, he would be up the Calder Trophy as NHL Rookie of the Year. But at the young age of 21, it is tough to assume that this guy can play against the top lines of opposing teams and shut them down every night. He, like Shattenkirk, Nikitin and Cole, needs a veteran defenseman who can show him a few tricks.

Roman Polak is hardly a veteran at this point in his career and Carlo Colaiacovo is steady but is not a guy that can take the reigns and steer the young defense on the ice.

At the age of 30, Barret Jackman is the obvious choice for veteran leadership. But his injury-prone nature and lack of puck control keeps him from being a top-level defenseman.

I am getting to my point. In order to assure that the young guys on the blue line bloom into one big defensive unit, this team needs a steady-veteran defenseman who can log a good amount of minutes and will take some of the load off Colaiacovo and Jackman for a veteran presence.

But one question remains. Who is available that the Blues can get for an affordable rate?

When coming up with potential free-agents for the Blues to gobble up, I have to take into consideration that this team does not have a clear owner for the future at the moment. So that

rules out Ed Jovanovski, Bryan McCabe and Tomas Kaberle at the moment. Their salaries are too high and, frankly, they do not fit this roster's current needs anyway.

Kevin Bieksa. The tough Vancouver defense will probably lose the 6'1" 198 lb. Bieksa over the summer. While affordable by most teams (currently paid $3.75 million/year), Vancouver has a lot of defensemen under contract with young guys trying to crack the roster. Love him or hate him, Bieksa does his job well. He is a nasty defenseman who will punish you for taking an extra whack at his goaltender. Bieksa may not be the fastest guy on your roster, but he never gets caught up ice and always finishes his checks. When he actually gets the opportunity to shoot, it's hard and accurate as well. Bieksa would be a good fit for any team in the NHL.

Sami Salo. Someone who has played with Bieksa a lot in Vancouver, Salo brings a different style of play than most of the Vancouver defensemen. His specialty may not be punishing opposing forwards with brutal hits or feisty play, but he does specialize in being one of the smarter defensemen on the roster. He is a key penalty-killer who can play the zone and take away passing lanes. At the age of 36 (currently earning $3.50 million/year), Salo could be seeing his salary drop as his age increases.

Brent Sopel. Another defenseman who originally made a name for himself in Vancouver, Sopel is a former Stanley Cup Champion (Chicago). Sopel hones a feisty style of play while also being disciplined in his own zone. He is known for smart-outlet passes as well as the ability to clear the crease, much like Bieksa. He would probably come even cheaper for the Blues than most available veterans (currently earning $2.33 million/year), considering he is 34 years of age.

Ian White. A former Maple Leaf, Flame, Hurricane and currently a Shark, Ian White has seen his way around the NHL locker rooms more than Cuba Gooding Jr. White may be the youngest "veteran" that I mention (26), but he has played a style since his first NHL season that reflects that of a veteran. Yet another feisty defenseman, the Sharks have used White in every situation. At season's end, White was ranked third on the Sharks roster in time-played (19:55 avg/game). He is someone who does not take a lot of penalties, but will step in when a teammate needs him. White is currently earning $3 million/season, and that number could go up or down depending on what Kaberle, Jovanovski and McCabe make this summer. My guess is he will be one of the most-sought defensemen after the three aforementioned get signed.

This summer could be very interesting for the Blues. After re-signing all of their RFAs, a veteran defenseman has to be considered to bolster this lineup. Especially if this team sees the injuries stack up as much as they did last season, a veteran blue-liner could be the difference in making the playoffs or heading to the golf course.

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