Rundown:

The Blues really have not changed much from last season. They go into the season with the addition of not having Paul Kariya, and they also have a new face in goal. With the obvious exception of Keith Tkachuk retiring from the game, the Blues almost have the same makeup. A plus for this team could be that the youth of the roster no longer has that veteran presence up front to rely on for goal-scoring depth and overall leadership. Why is this a good thing? It forces the young guys to be in the open and show what they can do when they are counted on as the leaders of the squad. The defense comes in with five skaters returning from last season, along with youngsters Tyson Strachan and Alex Pietrangelo in the mix. This team has the ability to be in playoff contention, but they will need to work together and be a strong team together. They don't have that one guy to rely on for goals or to be a shut-down defenseman.

Where are the goals coming from?

I could just list off every forward on the team and throw in Erik Johnson, but that would not be prudent. While it is true that the team has to see scoring from all four lines and the blue line, certain players have to step up their game from last season. First of all, David Perron will be a 30-goal scorer. He has had a great preseason and will continue to dominate when he has the puck on his stick. Improvement is also needed from Brad Boyes and David Backes. Both of these players see significant power-play time. Boyes needs to get the puck to the net, and Backes needs to bank in those rebounds or deflect in those initial shots. Another player that will absolutely have to step his game up is Patrik Berglund. Scoring just 13 goals and 26 points last season, the Swedish center disappointed his teammates and coaching staff. But he will get more minutes in to start the season in order to prove himself worthy, so he needs to take advantage of his opportunity to get some pucks in the net. Alex Steen will be relied on to score around 20 goals again this year. His shot from the point on the power-play will create many chances for his teammates. Erik Johnson will also be providing some goals this season as he is progressing into a top-offensive defenseman in the NHL. He may actually be the one to watch when the Blues take the power-play.

As a new Blues fan, who should I watch?

While Erik Johnson is one of the most fluid skaters in the league and an exciting player to watch develop, your safest bet is fan-favorite T.J. Oshie. This 5'11" 194 lb. forward is also a big key to the Blues' offense. He can score some of the prettiest goals that you will see from a Blue this season, but his game isn't just limited to that. He can hit and grind it out when needed to keep the puck in the Blues' offensive end. If only the Blues could convince him to keep those "gold-locks," he would be on every billboard in St. Louis.

Who will be the ultimate key to Blues victory this season?

Jaroslav Halak. The goalie was brought in over the summer to be the future of goaltending in St. Louis. His stellar play was one of the lone reasons that Montreal went as far as they did in last year's playoffs, and Blues General Manager Doug Armstrong is hoping that he will do the same here. While Chris Mason was not a bad goaltender for the Blues, Halak should be able to round up about 6-7 more wins this season on his play alone. If he can steal games for the Blues in key situations, this will be the most important pickup for the Blues since Mike Danton… too soon?

The Defense:

One of the stronger aspects for the Blues last season was their bottom-four defensemen. Three of them will be back this season (Carlo Colaiacovo, Erik Johnson, and Roman Polak). Alex Pietrangelo will get his chance to shine as a NHL defenseman, and Tyson Strachan has made the opening day roster. If Eric Brewer and Barret Jackman can neutralize top offensive lines, this defense could surprise a lot of teams in the West with how strong they are.

The Offense:

Already mentioning the need for goal-scoring, the Blues will send out a young offense (the oldest forward is Andy McDonald at 32). There will be a lot of line-juggling and position-shifting between these guys as Head Coach Davis Payne will be looking for the proper line combinations. McDonald goes into the season as the number one center, but rumors are circling that David Backes or T.J. Oshie could be molded into that role in a very short time. The

third and fourth lines look gritty as ever, as the Blues will send out Cam Janssen, Brad Winchester, B.J. Crombeen, Matt D'Agostini and recently-acquired Vladimir Sobotka as the alternating wings on those lines. Jay McClement will center some of those guys, and he will continue to be one of the most underrated checking centers in the NHL. Seriously, he is that comfortable in his role.

What needs to happen for the Blues to be in playoff contention?

Goals must be scored. This is the number one priority if this team is going to be taken seriously. With the financial woes in ownership, the team just could not add any scoring depth over the summer. Brad Boyes and David Backes must return to their 30-goal forms, and David Perron and Alex Steen need to dominate in the offensive zone. The scoring must come from everywhere; that means you Brad Winchester and B.J. Crombeen. Their combined ten goals last season was a joke compared to their combined 24 goals scored from the season before. The third and fourth line must contribute offensively and they have to be effective on the forecheck as well. Jaroslav Halak has to continue his brilliance from last year's playoff, and Ty Conklin has to continue to be effective in his spot-starts, as he was last season. The top defensive pairing has to be more of a sure-thing this year; while Brewer contributed eight goals and 15 points last season, he has to be more of a shut-down defenseman. The media can argue all night and day that he faces the top lines and that's why he doesn't look like a proven-NHL defenseman, but his team-worst -17 speaks that he was not as good as he needed to be last season. Jackman was a plus-3 in 2009-10, which is an improvement over the past few seasons (-17 in 2008-09 and -12 in 2007-08). If these two can be on the ice for more goals scored than goals allowed, the Blues will be very well off.

Where the Blues will finish:

Seventh place in the West. The Blues will make the playoffs, so everyone who got in on the "Every Game Counts" promotion better make sure they have the money in their bank account come season's end.

Stanley Cup Contender?

Not yet. The team still needs a sniping forward and a steadier top defensive pairing. Sending

out David Perron, T.J. Oshie, Alex Steen, David Backes and Andy McDonald as your top-six forwards is not too shabby, but they still need that extra push to get them over that scoring hump. If Erik Johnson, Alex Pietrangelo and Ian Cole (starting the season in Peoria) continue to progress, management won't need to look elsewhere for top-NHL defensemen. If all these things happen and Jaroslav Halak can continue his magic throughout his tenure with the Blues, that could mean a parade down Brett Hull Way in the near future.