



WILL IT BE “Q” PART-II IN THE LOU?

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St. Louis

After last night’s dispiriting loss to the Los Angeles Kings at Enterprise Center, the Blues hit the reset button on this 2018-19 season.

Well, kind of.

About 90-minutes after the game ended the Blues fired head coach Mike Yeo.

Following Yeo into the fire is his assistant and one time Flyers head coach Craig Berube.

Berube now becomes the 26th head coach in franchise history but unless he possesses the magic elixir that will suddenly allow this team to score some goals and consistently play a complete game then the interim tag that he now wears should be short-lived.

Look it, after the loss last night, just like everyone else who follows the Blues, I too wondered if they would make a coaching change before they next hit the ice against the Predators in Nashville tomorrow night – but at the same time – I wondered who would replace Yeo if he were given the hook?

The current options out there right now are not all that enticing beyond the one obvious name; Joel Quenneville.

The next 3 games for the Note, are, in the words of Blues television commentator Darren Pang, 'big boy games'. True enough. Nashville tomorrow night, followed by the Preds coming to St. Louis this Friday night, followed by the very physical Winnipeg Jets the very next night at Enterprise.

Unless the Blues already have a deal in place that will bring Joel Quenneville to town in the next 24-48 hours then you would have to think that they're prepared to at least get through this weekend with Berube behind the bench calling the shots.

But then what?

To this point, the Blues have pissed away the first quarter of the season and dug themselves a bit of a hole in the always deep western conference. They're in last place in the Central division – and only the team that beat them last night – the Kings – have fewer points than the Blues do in the conference currently.

However, its still early and there's still a lot of hockey to play and the deficit the Blues face as they attempt to march back up the western conference standings is far from insurmountable. However, for a team that was looked at as a legitimate contender coming into the season, it's no secret to anyone that the Blues have been a severely underachieving bunch to this point.

They've now been shut out in back-to-back games, shut out in 3 of their last 4, and they've only scored a single goal in their last 4 games overall. This is almost impossible to do even if the Blues were trying not to score.

How snakebit is this club right now? In last night's game, they were beaten by a rookie winger playing in only his 6th NHL game, as Matt Luff, scored his first-ever NHL goal for the Kings (it turned out to be the game-winner), and they were shut out by some pretty stellar goaltending by another Kings rookie, this one being Los Angeles goalie, Calvin Petersen, who channeled his inner Jonathan Quick in turning away all 29 Note shots, with several of them being high-quality scoring chances.



The Blues power play is powerless these days – and is now on an 0-17 skid.

The Kings bottled up the Blues in the neutral zone and it was rare that St. Louis had any clean breakouts from their own zone through middle ice last night, and the Kings also played a physical brand of hockey that saw them pounding the Blues all night long, particularly on the forecheck. Actually, the Kings played probably their best defensive game of the season last night.

Yes, the Blues are obviously dealing with injuries, Alex Steen, Pat Maroon, and Jaden Schwartz were all missing from their lines up front last night, and Carl Gunnerson is still out on the Blues backline as he was replaced by Vince Dunn who didn't play badly. Gunnerson and Schwartz won't likely play in any of the next 3 games, Maroon could be back tomorrow night, Steen is day-to-day...and I haven't even yet mentioned that defenseman Robert Bortuzzo has missed 13-consecutive games and his status remains unclear at this juncture.

Their health improving will certainly help this club, and despite the fact that they've gone dry in the goal-scoring department of late, the Blues are actually not far from the top-10 in goals per game scoring as they currently sit in 13th place in the league with an average of 3.11 goals per game. They're 14th in the league in goals against allowing on average 3.17 goals per game, and I think this number will get better as the year moves along. Even one-half of the Blues special teams aren't bad, they've got the 8th best power-play in the league (hard to believe, eh?), but their penalty kill is something altogether different, they're tied for 23rd in the league in that category and obviously, improvement must be found in that area.

So the raw numbers aren't exactly awful through their first 19-games. By my count, they've lost a total of 7 one-goal games so far this season, but as I noted up the page, there's still a lot of

time to turn this around and I think the Blues are too talented not to play a much crisper brand of hockey as this season moves along.

The question is, who will be the coach?

Whoever it is, hopefully, it will be someone who will ask Colton Parayko why he was smiling and laughing by the Blues bench when they called their time out last night toward the end of the game with the team in the midst of a brutal stretch. What was so funny?

Craig Berube? Are you expecting a major shift and a significant uptick in play now that Craig Berube is in charge for as long as he'll be in command?

Did Doug Armstrong assemble what he felt was a western conference contender to be put in the hands of an interim head coach for the rest of the season who doesn't have a lot of head coaching experience to begin with and whose previous head coaching role was a mixed bag – at best?

I can't see it folks, and I can't see how the Blues management and ownership can sell Craig Berube to the fan base for the rest of this season. If the Blues were a middle of the pack team, a rebuilding team, and team with low expectations, then perhaps you could sell me Craig Berube for a stretch. But this is a team far too talented to be turned over to a guy that nobody sees as an eventual full-time and successful NHL bench boss, no disrespect to Craig Berube.

Unless Doug Armstrong is on the phone with Ken Hitchcock to come back in an attempt to rescue the season, then there's only one name that screams out, only one name with the instant credibility to steer the Blues ship back on course, and that name, of course, is Joel Quenneville.



This makes so much sense that shame on the Blues if they don't make this happen.

At the age of 60, with 3 Stanley Cup's in his back pocket, with 890 career wins on his ledger, I think its safe to assume that Quenneville wants no part of a rebuilding club to inherit. The Blues certainly don't fit the profile of a rebuilding club, instead, they're a team with some very nice pieces, a legit goaltender, and right now they need a fresh voice to shake them out of their funk, and no voice currently available comes equipped with the credibility and legitimacy of Joel Quenneville.

Quenneville certainly doesn't have to get back to work any time soon as he's making \$6 million this season and the same amount next year.

But a coach always remains a coach and unless the fire for coaching and competing has been extinguished inside of Quenneville, then it says here he's probably already chomping at the bit to find his next challenge.

The Blues – after a very busy offseason – entered the 2018-19 campaign with high expectations, high expectations not only in the minds of fans but also internally, as the Blues organization set the bar high as well.

Craig Berube is an acceptable stop-gap measure for a game or two, but if the Blues organization is truly serious about not only the rest of this season but serious about finding a way to finally win the elusive Stanley Cup that has always eluded this franchise, then owner Tom Stillman and general manager Doug Armstrong need to do everything within their power to make Joel Quenneville the next full-time head coach of the St. Louis Blues.