

Big Changes and Possibly More?

By Jesse Almeida 12/9/24

Even with a solidified first line center and a revamped defense, the Bruins have grossly failed to live up to expectations. Boston is off to a surprising slow start to the season currently 3rd in the Atlantic Division with 33 points. However despite being 3rd, they have currently played 29 games which is the most in the division. The Tampa Bay Lightning are sitting 4th in the division with 30 points but have only played 25 games. If you really wanted to break it down, Boston could easily be the 4th place team in the division right now. This season has been a roller coaster so far that could lead to some big changes even with a big change that has already happened.

On November 19th, Jim Montgomery was fired from the Boston Bruins. Monty brought the Bruins to a historic season in the 22-23 season having the most wins in a single season, and most points in a single season ever in the history of the NHL. Last season Monty coached a team that was heading towards a new era for the Bruins with no Krejci and Bergeron. Even without their former franchise first line center and even second line center for years, the Bruins made the postseason, won the first round, and took the future Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers to 6 games in the second round. However, even with early success, there have been some mistakes that he has made that may have cost the Bruins a deep run in the playoffs. The most notable one was not switching goalies when Ullmark got injured after game 4 of the first round vs Florida in 2023. Despite the fact that Linus was not at 100 percent and arguably 80 percent, Monty stuck with Ullmark for games 5 and 6. It was clear that he didn't have as much range in net which led to Florida winning games 5 and 6 forcing a game 7. Monty decided to switch goalies in game 7 and by then it was too late. Game 7 was Swayman's first game of the series and for him sitting for as long as he did, Swayman still gave them a chance to win the series. But ultimately, Florida capitalized and got the win moving onto the second round. As for this season the Bruins were staggering and didn't look like themselves. Below .500 and on the pace of missing the playoffs for the first time since 2016. With Monty losing the locker room, and the slow start, he was fired.

Jim Montgomery finished his Bruins tenure with a 120-41-23 record. The Bruins have been playing better since Monty's departure but that does not mean they are back to their normal form.

There needs to be a point in time where fans have to also factor in the players being at fault as well. Jim Montgomery was the third coach that the Bruins fired since 2017. Before Montgomery was fired, the players forced Cassidy out of town and he went on to win the Stanley

Cup the following season. This season has been more on the players than anything else. If the fans want to say that Monty's decision making was not the best, and that maybe Monty did not hold players accountable as much, that is a totally reasonable and fair criticism. However, when a head coach has a .717 win percentage in his first 2+ seasons and the team all of a sudden falls apart, that is not on the coach. That is on the players. Jeremy Swayman fought for the contract that he felt like he deserved and has grossly underperformed on that contract so far. He is on pace for his worst season of his career sitting at a .893 save percentage allowing an average of just over 3 goals per game. It is not just the goaltending that has cost the B's games, it is the offense at an all time worst. The Bruins rank 19th in goals per game at 2.59 goals for per game and have scored a total of 75 goals which is 19th in the league. Along with that, the Bruins are normally known for their "killer" power play. This year they are ranked 25th in the league in power plays this season at 12 percent. As for the defense, they have not helped the situation either. Boston ranks 15th in goals allowed per game at 3 goals per game, and have allowed a total of 87 goals which is the 10th highest in the league. Also on defense, when you are the team that commits the most penalties in the league at 133 penalties this season, you are playing down a man very often. What also does not help the penalties is the penalty kills this season where they are ranked in the middle of the pack at 17th with a 79 penalty kill percentage. The play style on the ice this season has been very mediocre at best by the player. The question is can they turn it around?

Could it be possible that this current roster does not fit together? Is this roster just simply not talented enough to make a playoff push? What is this team's ceiling? These are all reasonable questions fans should be asking themselves right now. If the answers are that this team does not fit, the roster is not talented enough, or their ceiling is a wild card at best, then this also falls on Don Sweeney. He has made some great trades in the past and has made some great decisions. Having said that, he has also made some very questionable decisions as well. Let's just focus on this past offseason. One of the biggest decisions Sweeney made this past offseason was not paying Jake DeBrusk and letting him walk. Jake DeBrusk had his downs in Boston, but when moved up to the second line then first line, he flourished in his role. DeBrusk was one of the Bruins more reliable players on the team and Sweeney let the one player go that should have been re-signed. This season, DeBrusk has 12 goals on 9 assists and he is currently on pace for having a career year. Another player that the Bruins let go that had a factor into their success last season was James Van Riemsdyk. JVR was a low risk signing that ended up being a high reward

for the Bruins. He had 11 goals, 27 assists, and was a +7 on the ice last season. Yes, Sweeney went out and got a first line center which was a glaring need, and he got Zadorov to improve the physical presence on defense. But when you have so much cap flexibility, you should be adding to what makes you successful. What happened here was that Sweeney filled needs, but created other needs that might have made the situation worse.

If this season does not turn around, and the Bruins continue this play, there could be even more big changes on top of the Monty firing. The Bruins could be in sell mode by the trade deadline. This would mean trading away pieces in order to restock on draft picks, or even younger talent that have promise in the future. Along with trades, Don Sweeney is on the hot seat especially with already firing Montgomery. If the team does not turn it around, that would mean not only did Sweeney make the wrong decision firing Montgomery, it would also mean that he did not surround the players with enough talent in the offseason while letting key players go.

More big changes might be on the horizon.