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I was at game one of the second round series between the Blues and Kings last May. Coming off a convincing series win over the Sharks, the Blues were now the top seed in the West taking on the number 8 seed Kings. The playoff atmosphere was insane, the crowd was as jacked as any Blues crowd since the perennial playoff years under Joel Quenneville. It was there for the taking.

The Blues got off to a great start, swarming the Kings zone but were thwarted time and again by Jonathan Quick. But the Blues persisted, finally scoring the first goal on a Petro shot through a screen that was tipped by David Perron. The Kings tied it after a Blues give away when Dustin Penner found Slava Voynov sneaking down the backside beating Brian Elliott with a one-timer. The game settled into a tight checking affair just as many pundits had predicted. The Blues got a late second period power play and appeared to be in great position to take a lead.

And then it happened. That moment that changed the game, changed the series. Dwight King boards Alex Pietrangelo. For Blues fans, it was an obvious major penalty. King should have been tossed. Petro laying on the ice, dazed. Unknown at the time, his knee was injured. Incredulous at the lack of a major and game misconduct, the Blues get a five on three and have the opportunity to take the game over. After a brief rest, Petro comes out to quarterback the powerplay. But instead of the Blues

taking advantage, they get blindsided by a five-on-three goal scored by defenseman Matt Greene, who followed an aggressive forecheck by Kings captain Dustin Brown, creating an oddman rush by beating a slowed down Petro down the slot for a virtual empty net goal on a rebound.

The Blues never recovered. Not in the game, not in the series. Without Petro, in game 2, the Blues were easily dismissed. LA took game three just as easily. The Blues finally showed some life after getting down early in game four, but it was too late. Their season was done. The Kings go on to complete the never before accomplished feat of being an 8 seed to take out the top three in the conference and then win the Cup.

So why relive the agony now? We all know what happened. The Kings were the team that came together at the right time. No one was going to beat them. Regardless of seeding, they were the best team at the time that mattered.

As Blues fans had plenty of time to accept what happened and get stoked for the new season thanks to the extended lockout, many fans took solace in the thought that many of the Stanley Cup Champions of the late 90s and early 00s had to lose once before making it through. Maybe this is the year.

As the Blues started off hot, I found myself mulling over Jeff Marek's question about the Blues going into the season: Did they learn enough from their second round trouncing at the hands of the Kings. As most Blues fans, I felt cautiously optimistic that the team had put last season in perspective and were building towards a deep run this season, back amongst the Western Conference elite.

But then the Blues faced their first real adversity of the season. Deadlocked in another tie, this time with the now-mortal Detroit Red Wings, captain David Backes gets a match penalty on a phantom hit-to-the-head call. The Blues kill off the first two minutes, but then Pavel Datsyuk scores what turns out to be the game winner on the power play. Jaroslav Halak tweaks his groin.

The Blues season has since spiraled out of control. Blown out by Nashville who hadn't scored a goal at the Scottrade Center in three games. Picked apart by an injury decimated Wings squad with a third- string goalie making his NHL debut. Maybe someday we will mention Petr Mrazek in the same breath as Dominik Hasek. But not today.

This Blues team is proving that it cannot handle adversity. What's worse, it is providing the wrong answer to the question about what they learned from last season.

The fans are left to wonder: what is this team? Right now, this team appears lost. The hard working forecheck has been replaced by a team that is constantly chasing and reaching and missing. The dynamic offense has been replaced with tentative shots and blind drop passes. Hitchcock says that team play has been replaced by individual effort.

Yes, part of it lies with the loss of Halak and the re-emergence of the Colorado version of Brian Elliott. The guy is fighting, but his confidence may have been destroyed in that LA series.

The current definition of this team is a team that cannot handle adversity. Blown calls happen. So far they haven’t learned how to deal with them. A good team wins in spite of officiating. Until this team learns that, they will not go far. Let’s hope Hitchcock has some Jack Adams magic to right this ship. Otherwise, GM-of-the-year Doug Armstrong is going to be a in a bad position.