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## Jackets notebook: Modin should return this week

Back spasms have kept winger off ice

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BY TOM REED  
The Columbus Dispatch

With so many healthy players on the ice and in the locker room yesterday, Blue Jackets practice had a training camp feel.

The atmosphere seemed entirely appropriate for left winger Fredrik Modin.

Modin has played just six games, none since Nov. 1 because of back spasms caused by two fractures that only recently were detected. He made it through a full practice without a setback, but said he probably won't play tonight against the Vancouver Canucks in Nationwide Arena.

Thursday's game in Phoenix sounds like a strong possibility.

"I felt like a little kid out there (in practice)," said Modin, 33. "It was just good to be out there with the guys."

The Blue Jackets are as healthy as they have been since the start of the season. They had five forward lines and four defensive pairings participating in practice.

Coach Ken Hitchcock said he will wait a few games to play Modin with forward Rick Nash, a combination that infatuates Hitchcock because of its size. The coach is just happy Modin's comeback is at hand.

Modin said yesterday he was relieved to finally learn what triggered spasms so painful he had to sleep upright for nearly two weeks. The fractures were not discovered until Los Angeles specialist Dr. Robert Watkins performed bone and CT scans on Modin two weeks ago.

Asked if he was upset that team doctors did not discover the fractures, Modin replied:

"I don't know how to answer that. I'm a player, not a doctor."

It was management's decision to seek a second opinion. General manager Scott Howson said he was fine with how the injury was handled.

Modin believes the fractures occurred in the Nov. 1 game in Anaheim when he was hit from behind along the boards in the defensive zone.

"It felt like I got hit by a truck," he said.

### Head games

Hitchcock normally talks at length about star players preparing to oppose the Jackets. Not Vancouver Canucks goalie Roberto Luongo, however.

One of the league's premier goalies, Luongo and his reputation for impenetrability sometimes become a psychological barrier for opponents. Luongo is second in the NHL behind the Blue Jackets' Pascal Leclaire with six shutouts.

"You end up talking so much about him that there becomes a mental intimidation factor," Hitchcock said.

### Beech is back

It didn't take center Kris Beech long to return to Nationwide Arena. Less than a week after



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Blue Jackets coach Ken Hitchcock would eventually like to pair Fredrik Modin, left, on a line with Rick Nash.

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being waived by the Jackets, Beech will be there tonight with the Canucks.

He is scoreless in two games with Vancouver. Beech tallied five goals and four assists in 16 games with the Jackets, but his inconsistency made him expendable in the eyes of management.

### Scouts honor

The Blue Jackets sent three scouts to Pittsburgh last night to watch the Penguins' game against the New York Rangers. Rangers personnel have been spotted in Columbus in recent weeks, including assistant general manager Jim Schoenfeld. The Penguins also had two scouts at Saturday's Blue Jackets game.

### Slap shots

Center Sergei Fedorov (hip pointer) practiced and will play against the Canucks. ... Center Andrew Murray (concussion) passed his impact test and should return to practice within a few days. ... Defenseman Ole-Kristian Tollefsen (neck) returned to practice and might be ready to play later in the week.

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