

Devilution

Written by Justin Goldman

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In just nine days, Martin Brodeur has started all six games for the New Jersey Devils. That comes as no surprise to anyone. But his 1-4-1 record, 3.18 goals against average and .887 save percentage surely does. With his lone win coming by way of a 24-save shutout over the Sabres, the other five outings speak volumes to his downright dirty start. Mired in mediocrity, Brodeur's numerous weak goals against has led many analysts to consider him a thing of the past.

For the more things change, the more he stays the same. And that, my fantasy friends, is the essence of Brodeur's issues.

[FANTASY MAILBAG: OCTOBER 18](#)

The speed of the game increases, but his half-butterfly and stand-up style remains a constant. Of the 18 goals against him, I can barely count on both hands the ones that came off bad rebounds or simply leaked through him. Cody McLeod's goal to open up the scoring in Colorado's 3-2 win last Thursday was the one that encompassed Brodeur's struggle the most. A routine shot from the wing, no traffic at all, and the puck finds its way through his pads. Even I would have stopped that shot blindfolded, but Brodeur's stubbornness put his team in a hole and the result was a one-goal loss, despite out-shooting the Avalanche 43-22.

Too many times he's making the original save with a half-butterfly technique and then falling back on his rear. Because of this, he's unable to move laterally and eliminate the upper corners effectively. He's forced to scramble and stretch and contort. He's prone and ineffective as soon as he's off his feet and he no longer has the apt defense in front of him to bail him out on a consistent basis.

On top of these mechanical issues, Brodeur is never benched if he has a bad outing. He's never pushed from a young and able backup, so he feels no external pressure or motivation from other teammates or the coaching staff. Yes, I think Johan Hedberg is a great fit in a Devils

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uniform, but he's a complimentary backup, not a challenger. Every team must have two goalies capable of winning at any given moment. But if Hedberg never plays, how can he be expected to help his teammates? It's not just the allocation of salary and justifying that \$1.5 million cap hit, but the fact that in today's NHL, it is foolish and risky to think a goalie like Brodeur can still be expected to play 75 games.

If Brodeur expects to win 40 games and post a save percentage anywhere close to .910 this season, he must make changes. The question is whether or not he's willing to make them. This is something I simply can't answer, but I can say that his mental toughness, experience and leadership will allow him to bounce back and vastly improve his numbers. I don't doubt Brodeur's ability to win hockey games by using his brain, nor should any of his owners. But I do doubt the outdated technique. It has been building up to this point ever since his arm injury and it will continue to fester and grow until he retires.

Fortunately, the goalie's mind always trumps their mechanics, so hope should remain high for Brodeur's fantasy managers. The Devils don't play again until Thursday when they visit Montreal. What a perfect opportunity for him to prove he can still stop the puck in an efficient manner. But how many people were actually expecting him to be in a "prove my worth" game just two weeks into the season? And if he continues to allow weak goals, the negative vibes and feedback will keep haunting his team. Regardless of Brodeur's mental toughness, he is still prone to losing confidence, focus and motivation. He's still a human being.

At some point, the coaching culture in New Jersey needs to change when it comes to goaltending.

ANDERS LINDBACK – When Pekka Rinne went down with a minor injury due to a crease collision in the first game of the season, Lindback's first chance came suddenly. He stopped all seven shots he faced in the third period and executed well enough to get the next start four days later. If you missed it, [we posted an in-depth scouting report on his first two starts and wins](#) and were very impressed with his play. Now that Rinne is healthy again, expect a healthy competition where just about anything can happen. Both goalies will play well, as both instill a ton of confidence in their teammates. Lindback is 2-0-1 with a 2.41 GAA and .921 save percentage and is already duplicating the same script we've seen in Nashville since the lockout ended.

TOMAS VOKOUN – The elusive strong start he's been searching for since he started playing in Florida had eluded him after an opening night loss in Edmonton. The following night, he played much better but still walked away with a loss in Vancouver. But his perseverance paid off, as two straight shutouts against Calgary and Tampa Bay quickly stabbed out the losing streak. He single-handedly brought his team back to .500 and has only allowed five goals in four games. He was also voted the NHL's first Star of the Week this morning after posting a .976 save percentage and .67 goals against average in three starts. The Panthers only play twice this week – they host Dallas on Thursday and the Islanders on Saturday.

MICHAL NEUVIRTH – The first Capitals goalie to play every minute of the team's first five games since Olaf Kolzig is off to a terrific start. And it's not just the great statistics and big wins that impress me, but how he's coming up with the key stops at the right time. Whether it's right after he gives up an early goal or when the Capitals are on their heels and giving up a lot of shots, Neuvirth is instilling confidence in his teammates at a rapid rate. The Great Deceiver is here, and he could take the entire fantasy goalie world by storm. His 4-1-0 record with a 2.16 GAA and .930 save percentage has led head coach Bruce Boudreau to hint at Semyon Varlamov having to wait to get his first start of the season. The Caps play Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday this week, so if Neuvirth continues to play well, he'll continue to start.

BRENT JOHNSON – Wherever he goes and whatever situation he's in, Johnson always seems to play extremely well under the radar. One thing fantasy owners must know about his mechanics is that he's much more athletic and flexible than his age and size lead you to believe. He has a technically sound butterfly and long legs, so whether he's forced to scramble or make a positionally-sound save through traffic, Johnson can win games in today's NHL. This is an interesting story in Pittsburgh, but he definitely deserves to continue playing. And he will, as reports indicate he's starting against the Senators tonight. Johnson is 3-0-0 with a 1.32 GAA and .953 save percentage and has allowed just four goals in 120 minutes. On the flip side, Marc-Andre Fleury is 0-3-0 with a 3.41 GAA and .853 save percentage with 10 goals against.

CRAIG ANDERSON – It has been an up and down start to Anderson's season. He allowed three goals in an OT win on Opening Night against Chicago. Then he was victimized for three tough goals in Philadelphia. He was rightfully rested in Detroit and then had a brilliant game against the Devils in which he stopped 41 of 43 shots. But Sacco failed to show consistency in his actions by playing Anderson on back-to-back nights and the result was a very rough 5-2 loss to the Islanders. Like I said all summer long, it was going to be difficult for Anderson to match the October he had last year. And his 2-2-0 record with a 2.99 GAA and .915 save percentage is proof that he'll post slightly weaker stats compared to last year. Tonight's game against the Rangers and Thursday's tilt against the Sharks are now crucial for his fantasy owners as far as expectations are concerned.

WAIVER WIRE – First and foremost, keep your eyes on Robin Lehner. He was recalled on an emergency basis on Saturday, but with no timetable on Pascal Leclaire's return, there's a very good chance Lehner gets a start. His three saves put him on the radar and the Senators already feel he's NHL-ready. Johnson is another goalie that is hardly owned but it might be too late to jump on his bandwagon. Cory Schneider was outstanding in his first start of the season on Sunday night and might get a few more looks from AV in Vancouver. Henrik Karlsson could get his first start this week, as the Flames play in Detroit on Thursday and then Columbus on Friday. Justin Peters is also slated to get his first start on Tuesday in San Jose or Wednesday in Los Angeles. Jason LaBarbera was solid on Sunday night in his first start, but gave up a weak goal late in the game to give the Ducks a 3-2 win. And expect Joel "Quick Hook" Quenneville to give Corey Crawford another start this week as well.

PROSPECTS ROUNDUP – AHL rookie Cameron Talbot had a 41-save shutout in his first appearance of the season for the Hartford Wolfpack on Sunday night. Former QMJHL stud Jake Allen won his first pro game with a 3-2 win over the Aeros. Tyler Beskorowany started off his pro career with a shutout in the ECHL and Timo Pielmeier impressed a lot of Syracuse fans with a win in his first AHL start as well. And maybe the most surprising play of all prospects is Ed Pasquale - he won three straight games for the Chicago Wolves thanks to an opportunity that arose after Ondrej Pavelec's fainting spell. Nathan Lawson was waived by the Islanders in order to make room for Kevin Poulin in the AHL and Jaroslav Janus was re-assigned to the ECHL's Florida Everblades.