

The Blues have a plethora of goaltending talent. Who will emerge?

The St. Louis Blues rank third in goals against in the Western Conference. Most of this success is because of the solid contributions of St. Louis' blue liners and the defensive coaching style of Ken Hitchcock, not goaltending. The Blues are second in the league in Shots Against Per Game Average, just behind the New Jersey Devils with 24.3 SA/G.

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Coming off outstanding 2011-2012 campaigns, the goaltending tandem of Jaroslav Halak and Brian Elliott have combined for a mediocre 13-11-2, 2.51 GAA this season. However, out of the mediocrity of Halak-Elliott, a new starting goaltender has emerged. 22-year-old Jake Allen leads a crop of impressive St. Louis goaltending prospects and is immediately proving his NHL capabilities in his rookie season, leading all rookie 'tenders with nine wins in 13 games.

The future of St. Louis' goaltending lies in the tandem of Allen and 19-year-old Jordan Binnington, who was among the top goaltenders in the Ontario Hockey League this season and is currently carrying the Owen Sound Attack through the OHL playoffs.

3.) Paul Karpowich –Round 7, 185th Overall, 2008 NHL Entry Draft

As a starter for the Evansville Icemen of the East Coast Hockey League, Karpowich is 7-13-2, 3.27 GAA in 25 starts this season.

In his lone AHL start, Karpowich made 26 saves, allowing 4 goals in a loss to Toronto.

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Although is number's do not reflect it (31-66-16 in four seasons in the Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference) Karpowich is touted by scouts as a all-around solid goaltender with great puck handling skills. He signed a two-year deal with the Blues last April and will need to perform at the minor level to earn a extension. Currently on Peoria's active roster, playing backup to veteran Mike McKenna, Karpowich could prove to be a solid long-term option for the Blues.

2.) Jordan Binnington – Round 3, 88th Overall, 2011 NHL Entry Draft

In his fourth OHL campaign, Binnington is currently on a playoff run with the Owen Sound Attack, beating the Sault St. Marie Greyhounds in the opening series, allowing 15 goals in the six games.

Binnington finished the regular season an impressive 32-12-1 in 50 games, breaking the Attack's franchise record for wins in a single season and finished second behind Belleville's Malcolm Subban with 2.17 GAA. His play in the Ontario League has been nothing but stellar and should his success transition nicely to the pro-level, he has great upside as a NHL starter.

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A butterfly goalie, Binnington is touted by scouts for his solid positional play and rebound control. He uses his 6-foot-2 frame to his advantage. Binnington currently has just one pro game under his belt, suffering a loss with the Blues AHL affiliate, the Peoria Rivermen, last season. With Jake Allen getting the call to the big club, Binnington should assume the number one role in Peoria next season, should Jake Allen remain on the Blues active roster.

Like any 19-year-old goalie, Binnington will put in his time in the minors and prove himself at the pro-level. At such a young age, time is on his side. Time in the AHL will allow him to solidify his number two spot on the Blues goaltending prospect depth chart. If he stays the course and carries his junior success over to the pro level, Binnington could be a starter option for the Blues within the next three to four years.

1.) Jake Allen – Round 2, 34th Overall, 2008 NHL Entry Draft

Pulling the Blues out of the goaltending fire, Allen has been solid backing up the slumping Halak and Elliott. The two veterans have struggled for different reasons - Halak with a groin injury, Elliott with his overall play (although three straight shutouts recently has changed things for him).

Being moved up and down from St. Louis to Peoria all season, Allen is having a stellar rookie campaign, 9-3-0, 2.33 GAA in 13 starts. He posted his first career shutout March 14 at home against Phoenix. With Halak expected to be out for at least three more weeks, Allen will

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continue to get starts in the NHL this season, perhaps even the playoffs.

A second round choice in the 2008 NHL Entry Draft, Allan is the Blues undisputed number one goaltending prospect and arguably their number one prospect, period. His contract with the Blues expires this summer, however, and with both Halak and Elliott becoming UFAs after next season, it is likely the Blues will offer a extension to keep their number one prospect with the club as the long-term option in net. If he can avoid a sophomore slump, Allen could start in net as early as the 2014-2015 season.

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