

Goalies at the Trade Deadline: Part I

Written by Justin Goldman

Thursday, 09 February 2012 15:36 - Last Updated Friday, 10 February 2012 11:24



Whether it's in our minds or with our buddies, we all dabble in trade rumors. Even I can't deny I get weak in the knees when I pontificate potential "perfect fits" for my favorite puck-stoppers. And no matter how hard we want to ignore wild rumors that wedge their way into our daily lives, once we see one or two, we can't stop thinking about others. But for goaltenders, I think it's important to flip the traditional rumor logic upside down by looking at things in a specific order.

With that in mind, I'll be publishing a four-part series that previews and recaps all goalie movement during the 2012 NHL Trade Deadline. Part I begins "on the flip side" by discussing potential teams that truly need an upgrade. Part II will find those teams that "perfect fit" for their needs. Part III will prep us for the deadline by assessing and updating those teams and goalies,

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and Part IV will evaluate the movement by recapping what transpired on Monday, Feb. 27.

Why should we start by dissecting what teams need first? Because they are the source of movement, and without General Managers feeling the need to make an upgrade, no goalie trades will exist. When it comes to this possible movement, I feel strongly that most of it is rooted in the element of confidence.

For example, how confident is a GM in his goalies right now? How confident is the head coach in his tandem? Finally, how confidently is the team playing in front of each goalie, and how confident are the goalies in their own play?

Every GM wants to trade for a hidden gem in terms of talent, but for all of those playoff bubble teams, consistency trumps skill, and experience is the root of consistency. A stabilizing rock might not always look pretty, but they are essential and valuable when building the foundation of a winning team.

That being said, I think no team is better suited to kick off Part 1 than the Chicago Blackhawks. Corey Crawford is struggling under the weight of the sophomore slump, as he was just 3-4-1 with a 3.48 goals-against average and .894 save percentage in January. And Ray Emery is no guarantee that he can be a successful workhorse, either.

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Emery certainly has the experience to be consistent down the stretch, but the big question mark is his durability. I don't doubt that he can handle the starting role for anywhere from 5-10 games at a time, but to lean on him for close to 30 games, and then a potentially deep playoff run, is a massive risk. Furthermore, no NHL team is struggling more right now than the Blackhawks, as they are just 3-5-2 in their last 10 games and losers of three straight.

Do I think Crawford can surge in the final stretch of the season? I think maybe in short spurts, but not on a consistent basis. Part of this goes back to [my idea that Crawford is no longer a dynamic entity](#), and part of it is based on the fact that Crawford has also been publicly questioning his own performance lately – two things that erode a GM's and coach's confidence. Whether it is Crawford or Emery, there are just too many questions being asked right now.

When speaking about a lack of goaltending experience, maybe no team defines that more than the Maple Leafs. Both Jonas Gustavsson and James Reimer are considered as "inexperienced" in terms of playing well in a playoff push (yes, I do think Reimer was very solid last season), and with no veteran presence in the AHL, Brian Burke runs the risk of having to "hope" or "trust" one of them gets hot in time to make the playoffs, and then win in the first round.

Tampa Bay is another team starving for an upgrade in goal, but their time is running out. Ironically, they have too much experience, but since they're currently 10 points out of eighth place, they might be looking at solving their issues for next season. Dwayne Roloson is clearly not cutting it this year, and Mathieu Garon, despite playing much better since the All-Star Break, is not considered a threat to take the Lightning deep.

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That's not to say he doesn't have a playoff run in him, but obviously Steve Yzerman wants to make upgrades for this season and beyond. That leads me to believe they're more likely to solidify a "long-term keeper" as opposed to a short-term veteran, so unless the right deal comes along (Cory Schneider), they could stand pat at the deadline.

The Red Wings were set in goal until Jimmy Howard broke his finger in a game. There's no timetable set for his return, he's not taking shots in practice, and there's no way Ken Holland enters the playoffs with a tandem of Joey MacDonald and Ty Conklin. Furthermore, the storied franchise has a history of winning with veteran goalies (Mike Vernon, Chris Osgood, Dominik Hasek), so the odds are good they're tracking down a goalie with playoff experience.

For the bubble teams, that's pretty much it. You might look at Florida as another team that could use an upgrade for the late-season push, but they have some in-house options now that Jose Theodore and Jacob Markstrom have healthy knees and are practicing again. And if I really stretch it, maybe the Senators look to upgrade Alex Auld so that Craig Anderson is forced to play with more consistency, lest he continues to struggle.

Of course there are more teams looking to make upgrades in goal, but they would likely be focused on the future. Columbus is one example, as they look to part ways with the mess that is Steve Mason. They should find someone to package with Curtis Sanford, who truly deserves to be with the team full-time next season. But that's a totally different world, one that is even tougher to see since it can include backups, AHL goalies, even free agents in Europe like Viktor Fasth, Cristopher Nihlstrom (a total sleeper, folks) and former Flyers prospect Joakim Eriksson.

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Yes, there are plenty of potential trades out there to be made in the coming weeks, but if there's one central focus, it would be on the experienced vets. Goalies like Evgeni Nabokov and Nikolai Khabibulin could be the most coveted trade bait due to their playoff experience, while backups like Josh Harding, Cory Schneider, Jonathan Bernier, Steve Mason, Sergei Bobrovsky, Anders Lindback and more could all be moved at any given moment, if the price is right.

I'll also be watching to see if any teams go from "buyers" to "sellers" and vice versa over the next three weeks, as that could open the door for previous "untouchables" to be moved. For example, Calgary now has a hidden gem in Karri Ramo, and although he could play one more year in the KHL, it does raise questions about Miikka Kiprusoff's future.

Finally, what of Martin Brodeur's future in the league? If he elects to retire after this season, the Devils are up you-know-what without a paddle. So you have to imagine they are at least evaluating their situation heading into the home stretch, and moving forward for next season.

The Starting Goalie Rating Index

I just wanted to thank everyone for the positive feedback on the [Starting Goalie Rating Index](#) so far. The results have been way more successful than I expected, but a lot of that is due to the terrific goaltending we've seen across the league since the All-Star break ended. More

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importantly, however, is that the system works, and it is already acting as a solid free tool for fantasy managers.