

Between the Pipes

Written by Jeff Angus

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The goalie talent has spread across the league over the past few seasons, with the majority of teams moving their strong backups to clubs where they now start. Goalies like Toskala, Bryzgalov, Garon and Smith have all been handed the reigns between the pipes. There are a few teams this off-season with some questions to answer with regards to their respective goaltender situations, and here are the five most interesting.

Los Angeles

The Kings had a goalie carousel going last year, with the likes of Cloutier, Ersberg, and so on.

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They still have high hopes for stud prospect Jonathan Bernier, but he will most likely start (and continue) the season with their AHL affiliate in Manchester. It is doubtful that the Kings are comfortable giving Labarbera the opportunity to start, he was incredibly inconsistent last season. Look for them to make a move to get a short-term fix until Bernier is ready. The much-maligned Ray Emery is a potential fit, but him and the LA lifestyle might get along too well. They could stand pat with Ersberg and Labarbera, and hope that either Bernier steps up, or that Tavares likes the color purple.

Tampa Bay

The Lightning hoped to end their goaltending woes by picking up the unproven Mike Smith at the deadline, but Karri Ramo outperformed him down the stretch. It looks like the Bolts will go with those two next season, and expect the games to be split pretty evenly. Smith put up terrific numbers in Dallas, but the Lightning are not even close to being as strong defensively. Smith did not really get enough time to settle in, and Tampa was already completely out of the race. He is young and considering how hard the Lightning worked to land him, there might be something there.

St. Louis

Legace appears to be the Blues go-to-guy for at least one more season, but they need to address their situation down the road. Prospect Marek Schwarz has been a huge bust so far, and Toivonen has not fared much better since coming over from the Bruins. They may make a splash and go after Huet or Theodore, as the team has lacked a stable 'tender since Curtis Joseph left in the 90's. Another avenue for them to pursue would be to target a prospect goalie. There are three studs who may be available: Cory Schneider, Jhonas Enroth, and Riku Helenius.

Washington

Getting a top goalie is the number one priority in Washington this summer. The Caps would love to re-sign Huet, but it looks like he wants to test the market. Kolzig is by all accounts done as a Capital as well, and may even be done as a professional goalie. They have enough cap space to overpay for Huet, but do they feel he is the guy to move forward with? They also have lots of young assets to use as trade bait, as well as Simeon Varlemov, the Russian goalie prospect.

Nashville

The Preds would obviously like to have Dan Ellis back, but he appears to be the cream of the crop this summer, and could potentially cash in big time. They also have Mason's contract to deal with. Pekka Rinne is ready to be a back up next season, and is on a one-way contract, but who will be the starter? If Ellis does not take a discount, expect them to roll with a Mason/Rinne tandem.