It will take months to dissect the bitter ending to a spectacular 2010-11 season for the Vancouver Canucks. On the surface, Roberto Luongo hardly seems like the guy to blame for Vancouver's loss against Boston. He received only eight goals of support in the seven game series, and two of his three wins were of the shutout variety. Upon closer look,a trend that has been developing over the past few years reared its ugly head once again – Luongo's mercurial and moody off-ice personality having a negative effect on the team.

This isn't a column with a purely fantasy hockey opinion. I have been tweeting my thoughts regarding Luongo over the past few days, but 140 characters of text does not give enough space to really expand on anything.

Luongo arrived in Vancouver in 2006 to a hero's welcome. The Canucks finally had the goalie who would help them forget about Dan Cloutier, Garth Snow, Kevin Weekes, and Felix Potvin. Luongo's first season as a Canuck was nothing short of sensational. He was a finalist for both the Vezina and the Hart Trophy, and he led the Canucks into the second round of the playoffs. The future of Luongo in Vancouver was looking extremely bright.

Since 2007, Luongo has seen his share of ups (Olympic Gold on home ice, multiple playoff visits, multiple Vezina nominations), and downs (losing the Captaincy, numerous playoff blowouts, waning fan/media confidence) in a Vancouver sweater. Many believe that he was given the captain's C as a means of enticing him to take a long-term, cap-friendly contract (Luongo signed a 12 year deal that carries a cap hit of $5.33 million per season last summer). Luongo was never comfortable with the C on his mask. He seemed forced and uncomfortable in interviews with the typical responsibilites of a captain.

In a way, the 2011 playoff run was a fantastic microcosm for Luongo's career in Vancouver. Highs and lows, and controveries both on and off the ice. Players being forced to defend their faith in him, Luongo being forced to defend himself against mounting fan and media pressure. He started out great with three straight wins against Chicago. Had Luongo finally defeated the team that had embarrassed him for two straight springs? Not so fast. Chicago came back and scored 12 goals in two games, prompting Vancouver to play backup Cory Schneider in a potential series clinching game. Luongo was forced back into duty due to injury in one of the most awkward situations you will ever see.

He had a great game seven to get the Canucks past Chicago, but the Blackhawks once again showed that his weaknesses could still be exposed. Luongo had a solid second round against Nashville, but he was significantly outplayed by his counterpart, Pekka Rinne. He also let in a number of weak goals in a series that was incredibly low scoring. Against San Jose, Luongo was pretty good through four games (for the most part), and fantastic in game five – easily his best game of the spring.

Against the Bruins, Luongo had two shutouts and a game in which he allowed only two goals. In the other four games, Luongo was ventilated for 21 goals. Vancouver was missing some personnel on the back end, which didn't help things much.

After a strong game five, Luongo was speaking to the press. When questioned about the goal Tim Thomas allowed (a puck that bounced off the back boards), Luongo said, *"It's not hard if you're playing in the paint. It's an easy save for me, but if you're wandering out and aggressive like he does, that's going to happen. He might make some saves that I won't, but in a case like that, we want to take advantage of a bounce like that and make sure we're in a good position to bury those."*

In retrospect, Luongo's misguided analysis was ill-timed at best, and idiotic at worst. It gave Thomas some motivation, it gave Boston bulletin board material, and it put Luongo's game under the spotlight even more. He may have not meant what he said to sound like it did, but that is beside the point.

Luongo's off-ice demenor over the past few years has been erratic. He seems forced with his humor and friendliness at times, and at others has shown an increasingly moody and mercurial side. All good goalies have to be confident in their own abilities, sure, but Luongo at times sounds like he is trying to convince himself of what he is saying. Fans do the same thing all the time – saying something over and over again doesn't necessarily make it truth. Players on other teams always make it a point to say how Luongo is a world class goalie and how he is so hard to beat, but how long are we going to believe this? Does anyone really think Chicago (or Boston, now) is really afraid of facing Luongo, at all?

Does Luongo have a future in Vancouver? He didn't cost the Canucks the cup. Tim Thomas, Boston's offensive and defensive depth, and injuries were all probably bigger factors. But does it matter? Every loss, every season, and it seems like Luongo is questioned and analyzed under the spotlight. It can't be a comfortable situation for him.

I don't see how the team can sell him to the fans, to the media, and to his teammates for the next decade. His relationship with the previously mentioned parties has to be rocky, at best. His personality has never been one that Vancouver has embraced. His style of play has changed without improving. He seems to play his best when he is forced to make a lot of saves, and the Canucks aren't a team that gives up a lot of shots (at least they weren't during the regular season).

Are there any teams out there who would take on some baggage and an incredibly massive contract to secure one of the game's best goaltenders? Does Vancouver even consider trading its former captain, a player who is extremely close with the team owners? Yes, and they should.

Luongo may very well bounce back and win the cup next season. Look at Thomas – at this point last year, the Bruins were quietly trying to find a way to ditch him and his $5 million contract, as they had Tuukka Rask more than ready to take over. Jason Botchford sums up the Luongo situation
better very well.

“Here we go again and it's after a series in which the Canucks scored just eight goals. It's a remarkable feat, if you think about it. To get that close with the meekest seven-game goal-scoring total in Cup history. But Luongo is framed as the scapegoat and it's deja Lu. More concerning, it doesn't feel like this is ever going to change.

Instead, it feels both consuming and toxic. It's not healthy for the fans, and it can't be healthy for Luongo. He is regularly asked about things like the crowds in Rogers Arena who, it was reported, cheered when he was pulled from games in Boston. His teammates are regularly asked if they've lost faith in him.

Can he go through this year after year, playoffs after playoffs in Vancouver? Can the fans? Can his teammates? Can anyone??”

Cory Schneider is untested. He played great in a bunch of regular season games. He was the best goalie in the AHL for about two years before forcing his way up to the NHL. On the ice, he is like Luongo – big and positionally sound. He is a much better puck handler (as is the rest of the league). Off the ice, he is everything Luongo is not. Calm, steady, and genuine and confident in himself. Would it be an incredible risk to trade Luongo and give Schneider the reigns? Yes. Would it be an even greater risk to trade away a potential superstar goaltender in hopes that Luongo can find peace with himself and the city of Vancouver? You tell me.