

The Goalie Conundrum

Written by Dobber

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More than any other year in recent memory, the goaltending picture from a fantasy standpoint has been cloudier than ever. The usual suspects – Martin Brodeur, Roberto Luongo and Miikka Kiprusoff – aren't in the top 10 in any major goaltending category (well, Kipper is tied for ninth in wins, but you catch my drift). This has turned a lot of fantasy leagues upside down.

Suddenly, owners of Pascal Leclaire and Martin Biron hold the bragging rights.

Further muddying the goaltending waters is the extraordinary amount of goalie controversies. Nashville has already dealt with a brewing Dan Ellis versus Chris Mason debate, with Mason emerging as the winner, but there are plenty of other cities where the argument rages on:

The Avs would love Jose Theodore to justify his large contract by taking the ball and running with it. So when he showed flashes of his MVP-self several weeks ago, they were hoping to give him the job full time. However, after three wins in early November, he has stumbled badly and once again the team is looking to Peter Budaj. Given Theodore's 0-3-1 record in his past

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four games, while Budaj is 3-1-0, watch the team start to ease out of their every-other-game system they currently employ and start going with the Slovak more frequently.

The Red Wings are sticking with Dominik Hasek steadfastly. Yet his save percentage has yet to appear above the .900 mark this season and he has lost three games in a row. Meanwhile, Chris Osgood is 10-1-1 this season with a save percentage of .930. He'll continue to play one of each back-to-back set this season, but don't expect more than 45 starts from either of them. This controversy will rage all season long unless one of the two sustains an injury.

Kari Lehtonen struggled before a groin injury took him out of the lineup. Now Johan Hedberg and rookie Ondrej Pavelec are proving to be a very capable 1-2 punch between the pipes in Atlanta. That being said, Lehtonen is on a conditioning stint in the AHL and he will be back next weekend. When that happens, Pavelec will go back to the minors and Hedberg will go back to being the backup. There will be no controversy.

Dwayne Roloson may have lost his job as top dog in Edmonton. Despite 50 percent more starts than backup Mathieu Garon, Roloson has four wins to Garon's five. Garon also boasts far better stats in every category. In this debate, put your money – and your waiver pick – on Garon. The transition will be slow, as it always seems to be when a backup steals the starter's role, but eventually the team will admit that he's their guy and will proceed accordingly. With 59 games left, I would expect Garon to get 35 of them.

Marc-Andre Fleury has been very inconsistent this season, but one concept that all poolies need to fully understand is that the more a team invests in a goalie they declare as the starter, the more desperately they hang onto the idea. Fleury was a No. 1 overall pick in 2003. The team may have brought him up too early, but they will never – ever – give the job to Dany Sabourin. The backup will continue to step in when Fleury gets pulled and he may get some starts after Fleury gets rocked in a prior contest, but the Pens will continue to throw their prize out there. As the team starts winning, Fleury will as well. I still think the youngster can flirt with 40 wins this season, regardless of how weak his other stats end up looking.

After giving Mike Smith three straight starts last week, it may look to poolies as if the Stars are more than willing to give Smith the starting role if Marty Turco struggles. It won't happen. Turco had a few of these spells last season, just not in the first two months, like this year. He will right the ship and put up his usual 35-40 wins.

Two quick calls on other goaltending controversies: Martin Gerber has given up eight goals in two games for Ottawa and has been pulled from one of them, but Ray Emery has had his share of struggles as well. I don't believe either goalie will be traded and I also don't believe either goalie will reach 30 wins this year. The team will go with a two-goalie system and ride the hot hand into the playoffs. Meanwhile, in Montreal rookie Carey Price will eventually steal the starting role from Cristobal Huet, although he won't have a string of starts until the stretch run.

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