Over the next few weeks, I'll attempt to give you the Eastern Conference low-down on fantasy players broken down by position and team (similar to my Western counterpart's "Fantasy Indicators of Success" series). I'll begin with the goaltenders because I believe, as in real life, that it's very difficult to win your fantasy league without exceptional goaltending.

Atlanta

Back in 2005-06, Kari Lehtonen had 34 wins in 68 games. Unfortunately, he's been an injury-prone wreck ever since. Lehtonen is a restricted free agent next season, so he may not be in the Thrashers plans. Playing on the Thrashers, there needs to be some major improvements in order for any goalie to record a 30 win season in the near future.

21-year-old Ondrej Pavelec is the heir apparent in Atlanta and is getting a trial by fire right now in the NHL. He was stellar in the AHL this season prior to his call up with a 1.54 goals-against-average and an incredible 0.947 save percentage. He could be NHL ready as early as next year.

Boston

Tim Thomas (11-3-3) just doesn't get the respect that his numbers deserve. Thomas led the NHL in goals-against-average (1.90) and was second in save percentage (0.940). Manny Fernandez (8-1-1) looks like he's finally playing the way he was prior to his knee injury. Look for Tuukka Rask to play a large role next year. Rask is learning what it takes to be a pro in the AHL and has a 2.43 goals-against-average and a very respectable 0.920 save percentage.

Buffalo

Ryan Miller is 28-years-old and is a top ten fantasy goalie in any format. The Sabres have done the right thing by locking him up for the next five years. Miller will receive consideration as Team USA's top goaltender for the 2010 Olympic games.

Carolina

Cam Ward is a decent goaltender, but his fantasy numbers leave many poolies wanting more. Over the last two seasons, Ward recorded 30 and 37 wins, along with a pedestrian 2.93 and 2.75 goals-against-average. With the Canes struggling offensively this year, Ward will need to have a great second half to hit 30 wins.

Florida

Tomas Vokoun (5-10-0) has struggled to find his form this season, recording a 3.04 goals-against-average and a satisfactory 0.910 save percentage over 17 starts. The problem is that "back-up" Craig Anderson (7-2-3) has been excellent so far this season and has a goals-against average of 2.09 to go along with a league leading 0.941 save percentage in 12 starts.

Anderson has fully deserved his crease time; he's just not in there because Vokoun has stunk it up. When the 27-year-old Anderson's contract is up at the end of this season, he should get a shot at a number one job somewhere.

I still believe that Vokoun will heat up a little and Anderson will cool enough to get back to where there will be no goalie controversy. Vokoun has been one of fantasy hockey's most consistent goaltenders averaging 0.919 save percentage over the last three seasons.

Montreal

Carey Price (13-4-4) is doing pretty much what was expected. He has a 2.37 goals-against-average and a very good 0.920 save percentage. He is already one of fantasy hockey's top goaltenders at the tender age of 21. The Habs have some work to do after this season as they will have as many as 14 players scheduled to enter free agency. Price's future statistics may be somewhat affected by the number and quality of the players Montreal is able to retain/sign.

Jaroslav Halak has one more season left to play on his contract. Once that is up, it is very likely that he'll look for an opportunity to play on a more regular basis.

New Jersey

The Devils are getting an early preview of life without Martin Brodeur and are realizing it's not the end of the world. We'll have to wait and see how he rebounds from this injury. I think he could still have another two to three productive years left in him.

Scott Clemmensen (2.32, 0.922) has outplayed Kevin Weekes, but at 31 years of age, Clemmensen isn't going to succeed Brodeur. The Devils may be marking time until Jeff Frazee matures. His record in the AHL is 5-1-1 and he has a 1.98 goals-against-average along with a sparkling 0.940 save percentage.

New York Islanders

Franchise goalie Rick DiPietro is a fantasy hockey train wreck. He's had surgery on both hips and his knee and combined with the fact that he's on a bad team; I would avoid him in all but the deepest of leagues.

With the Isles number one out for an extended period again, Joey MacDonald is left to pick up the slack. MacDonald's numbers have been adequate considering the team he's on. His record is 10-12-2, but a 3.08 goals-against-average will hurt most fantasy teams. On a positive note, MacDonald sits third overall in saves, only five behind the leader, Henrik Lundqvist.

New York Rangers

What else can you say about Henrik Lundqvist? He led the league in wins and had allowed more than two goals in only seven of 26 games. Lundqvist is a top three goaltender in both the NHL and your fantasy league.

Ottawa

Alex Auld has been handed the number one job in the Nation's Capital and excelled. Auld's goals-against-average is a sparkling 2.06 and has a save percentage of 0.924. The jury is still out as to whether Auld can continue to put up these kinds of numbers, but I wouldn't bet against it.

Martin Gerber has lost the team's confidence and will be gone from the NHL next season.

Philadelphia

Martin Biron is no fantasy stud, but he could conceivably be a guy who could provide just enough of the good stuff to go deep into the playoffs (see last year for details).

Antero Niittymaki has shown brief flashes of brilliance, but not nearly enough on a consistent

basis to warrant being handed a shot at the starting role. If he sticks around the NHL next season, he will likely sign in a place where he will at least get consideration for the number one job.

Pittsburgh

When healthy, Marc-Andre Fleury will rack up a bushel full of wins. He had a career year last year and put up some extraordinary numbers in March and April (1.45, 0.950). Unfortunately for Fleury owners, he hasn't been as dominant as he was over the second half of season last year. He also hasn't played since November 15th.
Dany Sabourin has been excellent in his stead going 6-4-2, with a goals-against-average of 2.14 and very good save percentage of 0.923.

Tampa Bay

Even though his 5-6-7 record doesn't show it, Mike Smith has been pretty good thus far in the season. His goals-against-average is 2.55 and 0.922 save percentage is respectable on a 6-13-8 team. At 26 years of age, he'll get better once the team picks up their play.

Toronto

Vesa Toskala could be a lame duck goalie in Toronto. He's 31-years-old and if Brian Burke doesn't see him in his master plan, Toskala will be gone soon. His numbers this season have been very disappointing.

Washington

Brent Johnson (7-4-2, 2.59, 0.913) has outplayed expensive free agent Jose Theodore (8-6-2, 3.08, 0.888). The Caps will likely lose Johnson to free agency next season and Theodore is only under contract for one more season after this one, paving the way for…

Simeon Varlamov, who is destined to replace Theodore, is gaining experience in the AHL. In 11 games, the 20-year-old has a 10-2-0 record, 2.29 goals-against-average and a steady 0.908 save percentage.

Phil of the Future

Phil Kessel is smoking hot of late. He has a 13 game point streak on the go and has scored 10 goals and 17 points over that period. Kessel, who had 29 points in 70 games last season, has scored 26 points in 28 games so far this season. He won't maintain the 76-point pace this season, but 65-70 points is attainable. Just watching him play, you can see he is for real. He's got an extra gear that many players just can't match and he's now playing with confidence.

One Timers:

Nicklas Backstrom has four goals in his last five games, not bad for a guy many think of as a pass first guy… Prior to last night's game, Boston defenseman Matt Hunwick had ten points in ten games and was plus-12… David Krejci is scoring at a 70-point pace… Sticking with Boston, Journeyman defenseman Shane Hnidy has one goal, two assists and is an incredible plus-9 over his last five games… Bryan McCabe has quietly put up 11 points in 17 games and is a plus-8 this season… Jay Bouwmeester has 13 points in his last 13 games… Canadiens Matt D'Agostini has made the most of his call up with four goals and five points in five NHL games. He had 25 points in 20 AHL contests prior to the call up…Andrei Kostitsyn has six points in his last five games…Patrik Elias has 16 points in his last ten games.