Is there a team more desperate for competent goaltending other than the Los Angeles Kings? Is there a worse situation for future star Ondrej Pavelec than what he's going through in Atlanta? Has there ever been another Stanley Cup winning goalie that has been forced to deal with waivers besides Nikolai Khabibulin? Is there really a goalie controversy in Ottawa after just two measly games?

The season is only three days old and there's already a ton of issues surrounding NHL goaltenders. For many teams, it's a situation that leaves GM's and their goalies feeling like they were dealt a pair of suicide kings in a crazy game of poker. What seems like a great winning hand at first quickly become an ominous sign of the future. All of a sudden, you're all in - and all out of money.

Let's start with a closer look at the hand the Los Angeles Kings are currently holding. Bullets of sweat are dripping from the organization's collective forehead as they try looking confident as they bluff with Jason LaBarbera and Erik Ersberg in goal. Be assured that no matter how good GM Dean Lombardi makes this hand look to the other teams, the Kings will once again be in the Western Conference cellar if they stick with the young tandem.

LaBarbera's game is still a mess – his positioning and lateral movement needs a ton of work. On top of that mountain to climb, he just doesn't possess the kind of quickness or agility that top NHL goalies possess. Ersberg has no real experience as a starter and although he has plenty of potential, there's no point in throwing him into a situation where he will struggle thanks to a lack of defensive support. If he was playing in Detroit or Montreal, that's one thing, but one of the worst defensive teams in the league is quite another.

What evil did Atlanta GM Don Waddell pull on Ondrej Pavelec that made the future superstar make such a drastic decision as to not report to the Chicago Wolves' training camp? Oh, that's right, he guaranteed Pavelec an opportunity in a market that has no real guarantee. Now Ondrej feels pushed aside and unworthy, and for good reason. If there was a guarantee and it was not fulfilled, that is means for Pavelec's outrage. But what the netminder fails to realize is that it won't get him any closer to being a starter in the NHL. What GM would want a goalie that is already being tagged as a Ray Emery clone? With this crazy poker hand dealt his way, Pavelec needs to suck it up and part with his ante by folding…and fast. It's the only way he'll stay in the game.

Then you have Nikolai Khabibulin, just standing around in the lobby without a table to even play a game on. While the good news is that his agent has been cleared to open up talks with other teams about a potential trade, the bad news is that he actually HAD to be cleared to begin trade talks! All of this comes after going through the agony of Cristobal Huet stealing the goalie's spot at the Blackhawks table, followed by going through the pains of waivers. At this point any resolution is a good resolution, because Khabibulin must feel like he's part of a prison rather than a pro sports league. Sometimes poker players and goalies just want to experience a hand in order to gain wisdom – but he can't even get that far without breaking the rules, so he's stuck standing around wasting valuable time.

The most outrageous hand dealt to an NHL goaltender took place just a few days ago when Martin Gerber struggled in the 4-3 OT loss to the Penguins and Alex Auld shone in the 3-1 victory just 24 hours later. Auld skated off the ice as Versus and TSN reporters were already calling the goalie situation in Ottawa a controversy. Are you kidding me?! A proven starter has one bad game and the journeyman backup has one strong game and the media everywhere has already tossed Gerber under the bus and hoisted Auld on their shoulders. It almost sickens me – imagine how Gerber must feel and think about how it will affect his game in the coming

weeks. All it takes is a few days of strong practice and things go back to normal. Expect this to be the case for Gerber, who knows how to make the adjustments necessary to rebound in this league.

REFLECTIONS ON NHL PREMIERE & OTHER PRESEASON NOTES

Mike Smith was nearly heroic and totally admirable in a 2-1 defeat at the hands of the Rangers on Saturday. After the game Smith sported a deep bruise on the left arm from a Dan Girardi slap shot and was not happy with the fact he played so well but couldn't pull out the win. That shows a lot of heart. Speaking of 'hart', Henrik Lundqvist was absolutely brilliant over the weekend. The big-time saves he made on Vincent Lecavalier in both games were MVP-caliber saves and I was a little surprised that he played so well.

Expect Ty Conklin to get plenty of starts in Detroit. Not because Chris Osgood is struggling, but because Osgood doesn't need to play 60 games in order to be the most effective for his club. Last season he literally split time with Hasek and was able to store plenty of energy for the Stanley Cup playoff run. Conklin posted a 3-0 shutout over the Buffalo Sabres on Sunday, proving he's molding well to the backup position in Detroit. Expect Conklin to play at least 30 games this season, possibly closer to 35.

The Northwest Division again is seeing strong goaltending from all five teams. Nicklas Backstrom has had an amazing pre-season, Roberto Luongo and Miikka Kiprusoff are proven winners and Peter Budaj and Mathieu Garon are doing exactly what I expect them to – prove everyone wrong with steady and stellar goaltending.

Oh, and if you want a little more insight on what Avalanche bloggers and analysts are expecting out of the team's goaltending this year, be sure to check out my brand-new website, The Avalanche Guild (www.theavalancehguild.com) tomorrow (Tuesday the 7th). I'm proudly hosting an Avalanche Blogger RoundTable question regarding Budaj and his expectations. Many fantasy owners have been snagging him over the last few days because of the faith the Avs organization is showing in the Slovak netminder. Keep an eye out for him and all of the situations above as the season gets underway later this week!