How important is the first five games for starting goaltender these days? Maybe not so important when it comes to their technical game, but thanks to the tight races in all six divisions in the NHL, it's almost vital to their overall success and their mental game. Think about the momentum gained by winning their first five games. Think about how it can set the tone for a career-setting season. Mentally, coming out of the gates on a tear will raise their confidence level and their abilities to make the big-time saves at big-time moments. So yes, with a great start to the season comes truly great reward for fantasy owners.

Not only does a good start create a positive mindset for the goalie, it also makes their team much more dynamic on the other end of the ice. We all know that big saves consistently turn into big goals, and there have been more than a handful of examples of that over the weekend. So let's take a look at the league's hottest fire starters and flameouts for the season so far…those that have started with a bang and those that have struggled just to wake up.

My ultimate fire starter is Ilya Bryzgalov. His first two games were nearly flawless. He made 33 saves against the Ducks on Sunday and only allowed one goal against Columbus on 29 shots the previous night. It doesn't take a genius to see what's behind his incredible start - his positioning and technical play is bar-none. Within his positioning, there's something very

noticeable about his stance and leg pads that I have never seen before in an NHL goalie.

This is hard to explain without a visual representation (unless Dobber found an image at the top), but I notice that his stance and his butterfly is squared off more than any other I've ever seen. His right leg is angled off to the side more than his left so that his right pad buckles up underneath his left pad. So the left pad rests perfectly on top of the right. His left leg is more upright - giving him more power to push laterally along with a perfectly squared off butterfly when he drops. It also looks like his right pad might be an inch shorter than his left as well. Again I have no proof of this – it's something that I notice is different from last season.

Another obvious pair of fire starters is Henrik Lundqvist and to a lesser degree, Marc-Andre Fleury. Fleury was on the wrong side of a couple of bounces against New Jersey when he made a career-high 47 saves and still lost a heartbreaker, 2-1 in OT. I'm surprised Fleury didn't attack Hal Gill and wring him by the neck, because that was an absolutely heroic game for Fleury and something that he will remember for the rest of his life – but now it will be a negative memory because of the loss. Imagine the confidence he would have gained had Zach Parise not thrown that puck off Gill's foot and Fleury ended up with a shutout. Sad day.

On the other side of the swinging pendulum, there are a number of goalies that have totally struggled to start the season. One flameout comes from down south in Dallas with Marty Turco's five goals allowed on 27 Blue Jackets shots, followed up by a lowly 2-1 loss to Nashville just a day later. Mentally, he is not focused whatsoever and his timing is simply off right now. Turco has developed a reputation for going into sleep mode at unforeseen moments in a season. How long do they last? That's something only he decides. With the unproven Tobias Stephan waiting in the shadows, it could be tough to stop the bleeding if this continues.

Peter Budaj in Colorado is another flame out that may have been expected by many, but still comes as a surprise just because of the fashion. Allowing five goals against Boston on only 20 shots in a 5-4 loss in Colorado's home opener, including the game-winner by the unknown David Krejci with just a few minutes left, is pretty much the last way Budaj wanted to start his season. He followed that up by allowing two soft Dustin Penner goals in the third period of a 3-2 Oilers win in their home opener on Sunday night. Many are already throwing Budaj under the bus, even though he's a very capable goalie. Unfortunately, Budaj has dug himself a giant, gaping hole that will be very hard to pull out of. It has to happen on Tuesday against Calgary or else Colorado might be calling up Dale Tallon in Chicago and inquiring about the Bulin Wall.

Another flameout would have to be Jose Theodore in Washington as well. Pulled in his first game after allowing four goals on just 17 shots, and only a mediocre showing in a 4-2 win the following game, Theodore couldn't hold onto the puck if his life depended on it. Numerous rebounds kicked into bad areas raises the question of his timing and focus and preparation through preseason. He seemed to calm down as his second game went along, but nevertheless fans and coaches alike are anxious at the moment.

Maybe the worst flame out ironically comes from Calgary Flames' Miikka Kiprusoff. His 11 goals allowed in just two games against the surprisingly potent and dynamic Vancouver Canucks is reason to sound the alarm. Even though Calgary's defense totally caved in on him in the second

period of Vancouver's home opener on Friday night, Miikka still did not play with nearly the same intensity and ability as last season. He was actually uncharacteristic at times, giving up rebounds that he would normally swallow up whole. Things don't get easier for him this week as Colorado comes to town on Tuesday, so keep an eye on his play early in that game and if he can control his rebounds, it is a good sign that he is finally turning on the switch.

A LOOK BACK AND A LOOK AHEAD

I hate to say I told you so, but to those that passed up Jaroslav Halak and Mathieu Garon in their drafts…I told you so. Halak was brilliant in a 6-1 win against Toronto and even though it came against a weaker team, he made saves that proved why Montreal doesn't want him playing in the AHL too much longer. Garon was also brilliant in the 3-2 win over Colorado on Sunday night, making big rebound saves and showing mental toughness after allowing Milan Hejduk's penalty shot goal with just 10 minutes left in the game.

I'm actually quite impressed with Jason LaBarbera's dedication to fitness over the summer and how he got leaner and quicker. Oh, how some things change, but others stay the same. He's quicker, but his positioning still leaves me shaking my head. He's stronger, but he still struggles with pucks around his feet and plays in tight to the net. If anything, it will take LaBarbera LONGER to adjust to his lighter frame, but I foresee him putting up much better numbers statistically. Unfortunately, he won't be good enough to save the Kings.

Ty Conklin is getting his first start of the season on Monday against Carolina. And those who listened to Dobber and drafted both him and Osgood can start celebrating. Osgood was iffy at best against Toronto but did a much better job against Ottawa, so this start isn't due to Osgood's unsettling play. This is part of the master plan to give Osgood plenty of rest and you have to expect it will pay off come March and April. Expect Conklin to battle hard against the *Hurricanes – but this game is totally up for grabs.

Joey MacDonald is quite a pleasant surprise in an Islanders uniform right now. He has done admirably well in replace of Rick DiPietro and so expect him to get a few more starts as they allow DiPi to take all the time he needs to get better...that is a luxury the team has since they are publicly in a rebuilding mode.

What does Mike Smith have to do to get a win in Tampa Bay? Frustration hits him harder than a ton of bricks because of his youth and inexperience. If he can stay cool and focused, the big save that secures a win will come. The more he swings his stick and visibly shows signs of being upset, the harder it will be to focus when it comes time for that big save. Budaj should take note of this in Colorado.