

## The Oppressed Shall Rise Again

Written by Justin Goldman

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When it all comes crashing down, the only thing left to do is build it back up again. Such is the life of many NHL goalies dealing with their play this season and such is the life of dealing with your own fantasy goalie tandems. The combination of streaky, volatile and inconsistent play is still rampant, so regardless of whether it stems mainly from team play, bad coaching or the goaltender himself, it's not going away anytime soon.

Honestly, the best thing you can do in this chaotic landscape is to stand firm and keep your restless fingers away from the trade trigger. Don't seek a change every week and don't lose faith in your original choices. In a league laden with incredible athletes, the struggling goalies that truly have the talent and mental toughness will rise again and return to their original form.

Credit goes to all the Marty Turco owners that stuck with him, as the wretched start to his season looks more and more like a thing of the past. A big part of this is due to Sergei Zubov and Jere Lehtinen's return, as that instantly makes Dallas a more responsible team defensively. In fact, Lehtinen is known as one of the best defensive forwards in the last decade and everyone knows what value Zubov has on the blueline, so it's a confidence booster that not only Turco cherishes, but the entire team harvests.

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Turco has allowed two goals against in four of his last five games and after making 25 saves against a high-flying Kings team in a 3-2 win on Saturday, all it should take is a few more wins to regain last season's form. The same goes for the entire Stars team, as this momentum is exactly what they need to get things rolling. Turco's save at the end of the Kings game was incredible for a kick save at that angle, and with Dallas keeping their shots under 30, his 3.57 GAA and .870 save percentage has nothing left to do but improve.

Jose Theodore was buried alive in a wretched start in Washington and that led to Brent Johnson taking over the crease. But a mild injury turned it all around, as Theodore came in relief for Johnson and made 13 straight saves against the Hurricanes back on Wednesday. He carried that momentum into practice on Thursday and Friday and then made 31 saves in a 3-1 victory over the New Jersey Devils Friday night.

That led to a second consecutive start on Saturday against the Devils, but obviously he didn't have the same type of successful as Friday's game. He allowed five goals on 33 shots including the shootout goals against, but despite the letdown, he did make a number of highlight-reel saves and battled through the numerous Devils scoring chances. So even Theodore was able to rise up again in less than 40 minutes of playing time, as the Hurricanes game allowed him to develop a positive atmosphere and re-gain his confidence.

Atlanta was a team I deemed a potential goalie controversy last week and with Kari Lehtonen's 'Band-Aid Boy' status now a legitimate addition to Dobber's list, look at what has transpired over the last week. First it was the flu, now it's a sore back. His last game was way back on Oct. 30 and since then it has been the combination of Ondrej Pavelec and Johan Hedberg leading the Thrashers to an impressive five-game winning streak.

As I watched Hedberg closer than in the past, I noticed he has a skating style very similar to Turco. They are both small in stature with very strong legs and a low center of gravity, allowing them excellent lateral mobility with the strength to stay anchored in the net. Even though they are small, they're incredibly hard to beat down low, yet both have blazing fast glove hands. Hedberg has won three straight games, including the Hurricanes twice in one week, back on Sunday and then on Friday night, along with the Buffalo Sabres.

But does this great play from Pavelec and Hedberg push Lehtonen to re-claim his job, or is he possibly in jeopardy of losing it for good and moving elsewhere? Of course I have to rally behind Lehtonen coming back with a big surge; partially because I still believe he could win 40 games in a season if completely healthy and partially because perennial Finnish talent will not allow their job to be lost due to an injury. But Lehtonen's leash is getting shorter every season thanks to his wobbly body, so this could be one of the last straws.

Peter Budaj's revival made headlines after a huge 2-1 shootout win over Roberto Luongo and the Canucks. It led to another great shootout performance in a 3-2 win against the Oilers, as Colorado is back to .500 with a see-saw season that would make anyone sick to their stomach. Three straight losses, five straight wins, five straight losses and now three straight wins...who knows what's next for them, but one thing we know for certain is that Budaj is back and their focus is now completely on scoring goals.

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One thing I noticed about Budaj is that a number of goals are being scored right off of either post, so watch for teams jamming pucks at the corners and using the boards directly behind his net. But no matter what type of goals he gives up, it's a great work ethic and dedication to improving his rebound control in practice that has him at the top of his game. Three straight shootout wins (BUF, VAN, EDM) is no sweeter justice for a goalie who was pinned as really struggling when that extra point is on the line.

So as you can see, there are worse feelings other than making the wrong decision on which goalie to start or leaving a goalie benched against a stronger team only to see the goalie absolutely steal a game. No, that's not nearly as bad as trading away a proven goalie just five or six weeks into the season because he has horrible numbers to start, only to watch him totally turn it around in less than a week and end up doing better statistically than the season before.

And while there are a number of factors that result in a masked warrior crumbling to his knees, there are a million more that help them rise up again, stronger than ever. Some of these factors are improved team defense, a situation where the goalie is in major danger of losing their job for good and lastly, return from an injury while the other goalie(s) are playing very strong. Keep that in mind when you're looking to make a trade or cursing your drafting decisions, for the oppressed shall rise again!

\* For the record, Hedberg's new pads are wicked. But I couldn't see a logo on them anywhere and it was extremely frustrating. The white and red lacing style is awesome and I have to know what kind they are. The first person who can tell me what pads those are (I guess TPS or Itech), I'll give ten karma points. Post it in the School of Block forum!