

The Train to Nowhere

Written by Justin Goldman

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When you think of rookie goalies with legitimate fantasy value, you instantly think of Steve Mason and Pekka Rinne. For those in a really deep league (or a keeper), feel free to toss Erik Ersberg, Justin Pogge and Jeff Deslauriers in the mix as well. But now there's a second Kings rookie coming on strong in a hurry – Jonathan Quick. Has lightning seriously struck twice, or is this just another grave waiting to be dug in the Los Angeles goaltending cemetery?

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Let's start with the facts. Quick has started six straight games since Dec. 20 and has gone just 3-3-0. In those six games, Quick posted two shutouts in four starts and has allowed just 11 goals total. He has played so well (and Vancouver needed a goalie so bad thanks to Curtis Sanford going on the IR) that Los Angeles finally was able to move Jason LaBarbera in exchange for a seventh round draft pick.

All of a sudden Quick's adjustment from the AHL speed to the NHL speed literally happened overnight. His first action in the NHL came in relief of LaBarbera against the Sabres on Dec. 19 and then the next night came his first-ever start - against the Red Wings. And even though the Kings lost to the Wings 6-4, he showed tons of promise, he didn't buckle under the pressure of such a big game and he made some very nice saves on some very good players.

Quick followed up the loss to Detroit with a 3-0 shutout against the Blue Jackets just a few days later. He out-dueled another rookie goalie in Mason, the one who was getting all of the accolades. But Quick stole the show and totally dominated with 24 huge saves including a few on the red-hot Rick Nash. Even when the Christmas break rolled around zapping many goalies' momentum, he was able to show some of that all-too-elusive consistency.

In a back-to-back series with the Coyotes, Quick made 24 saves in a 2-1 loss on the 26th on home ice and then pitched a 26-save shutout on the 27th on the road. Then he followed that up by allowing just one goal on 24 shots in a 2-1 loss to Columbus until he allowed just one goal against the Flyers in a huge 2-1 shootout win on Saturday.

Beyond this recent stint, Quick's game got a big kick in the rear thanks to assistant GM Ron Hextall. Quick had shown up late to a pair of practices last year and was banished to Reading of the ECHL because of it. While this soured the youngster at first, Hextall decided to have some talks with Quick in order to motivate what he saw as a capable #1 netminder. Ultimately, Quick came back to Manchester with a much better work ethic in practices and his re-dedication to working hard has totally paid off.

So Quick had turned his demeanor around and thanks to an emergency recall, the Kings decided to pluck him from Manchester instead of future phenom Jonathan Bernier. It made sense because the thought was that Quick would get a few games of experience as LaBarbera played well in relief of Ersberg. Well with LaBarbera out of the picture, the Kings will have to decide whether or not to make Quick an actual player. That would mean making a roster move, so this decision will greatly impact his fantasy value.

Technically speaking, Quick has very square, broad shoulders and does a good job of staying upright in the butterfly. He can read plays at high speeds and his feet are quick around the net have been quite impressive. The real determining factor in Quick's value will come over the next couple of months as he battles with Ersberg for games and continues adjusting to the speed of the NHL. But considering the Kings needed a franchise-high seven goalies last year, it makes this year seem like a gold rush.

But what can separate Quick from his predecessors like LaBarbera, Barry Brust or Jean-Sebastien Aubin? Unfortunately it's too soon to really tell. So while it can be very tempting

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to snag Quick because of his hot start and demeanor in the net, realize also that the Kings have had a long string of “somewhat-capable” starting goalies come in and play well for short stretches and then fade into the night. It’s hard to argue that Quick is any different from the others, but he’s sure making a case for himself.

Finally, realize that Ersberg is back on the ice and will certainly play a few games before the All-Star Break. Currently he has a 2.38 goals-against average and a .903 save percentage in 18 games this season and should retain the “starter” tag through January. How Quick responds to some friendly competition from Ersberg will also be another indication of what type of fantasy value he has.

Ultimately you have to weigh the trends against the facts. Either you feel Quick is on a ghost train to nowhere in the Kings organization and will only see his value rise if he’s traded. Or you feel that Quick is the newest conductor and along with Ersberg and company, he will help steer this train onto the right tracks needed to get to the Stanley Cup Playoffs.