Cristobal Huet seemingly took a giant step forward last summer when he signed a deal with the Blackhawks that is set to pay him 5.625 million each of the next three seasons. That led many of us to draft him higher than usual, and for good reason. He was a late-season stud in Washington butting heads for ice time against a feeble, somewhat banged up Russian. Expecting Huet to win 25 games and start close to 50 was completely realistic.

But it was Nikolai Khabibulin that came through with the consistency needed for the young team to stay alive in the playoff hunt. Khabibulin, who was actually waived by Chicago before the season, played well enough to completely seal Huet off from playoff action. And that made Huet's entire season feel like a step away from his ultimate dreams.

Along comes Game 3 of the Western Conference Finals and Huet was thrown into the fire after the Bulin Wall finally crumbled with apparent groin problems in the second period. It was an unexpected occurrence and a monumental task to accomplish against the Red Wings, but Huet handled it extremely well.

“I didn’t have time to think really,” Huet said to reporters. “I’ve been practicing a long time for that moment. I was anxious but at the same time ready to help the team in any way I could.”

Thanks to a perfect third period plus overtime, Huet was destined to shake off the frustrating regular season and provide the goods in the most crucial game of the year (Game 4). Let’s just say things didn’t work out. And if it were not for his 44 saves on 46 shots in Game 5, the pain would still be his and his alone. It still hurts like hell because it was a season in which he ended up losing ground from last season. And all of it was capped by a disastrous Game 4.

If you watched the moments when he was pulled go down on Versus, you noticed two things. One, Huet’s departure was Corey Crawford’s gain and Antti Niemi’s loss in the fantasy value department. Secondly, you saw the look of indifference on Huet’s face, like he wanted to scream out, “What do you expect me to do in a situation like this?!”

Internally, the answer was obvious. “How about anything other than what transpired. How about just coming up with the big save when nobody expects it? How about being clutch, being ready, being something!”

I feel bad for Huet. I know what it’s like to take one step forward, only to end up two steps away. We all do. But that is Huet’s season in a nutshell. There’s nothing left for him to do except work even harder for next year. So where does Chicago’s goaltending situation go from here and who steps in? Is it Crawford, Niemi or someone else?

To answer the latter, it should definitely be Crawford. He not only got the edge in the Western Finals emergency call-up, but everyone should know by now that Finnish goalies need to develop their game a little longer compared to that of most North American goaltenders of the same age. Because of this, I feel Niemi is destined to be Rockford’s #1 goalie. That allows him to soak up plenty of AHL action while Crawford gets the edge in NHL experience.

To answer the former, it makes a lot of sense to save money by not re-signing Khabibulin and evaluate depth at every quarter of the season. If Crawford plays some games early while Huet slowly rounds into form by the trade deadline, it becomes both a cost-efficient and effective way to keep developing talent.

I have to guess that the KHL will be the final pit stop in Khabibulin’s career, unless another team feels like they can sign him to a cheap one-year, incentive-laden deal. But as much as I say experience counts, he’s one year older and even more banged up than before…and his numbers were pretty terrible in the playoffs.

One step closer, two steps away. The beat goes on, for this is a theme seen all over the league…north and south, east and west, young and old.

Marty Turco barely survived what I’d call a Texas-sized tornado this year. It was a disastrous start with hardly any warning whatsoever. His early-season struggles quickly forced sirens to permeate the thick, humid Texas air and echo in the sky. A state of panic took place from there, with fans expressing their hysteria in the only way Texans know how - by screaming and yelling

at the top of their lungs.

After Turco was torn apart by the prevailing winds, nobody was there to pick up the pieces. Tobias Stephan and Johan Holmqvist were not even close to answering the call. But with just a few games left in the regular season, a relatively unknown goalie named Matt Climie traversed from Boise of the ECHL to Dallas in less than a week.

Climie played admirably well and ultimately stayed in the AHL, filling in when Houston's goalies ran into injury problems. That resulted in a few more admirable outings, which leads to this post-game audio clip posted here at Andrew’s Dallas Stars Page .

The clip details Climie's crazy season as well as his role on the newest AHL team, aptly named the Texas Stars. Along with Richard Bachman, their value becomes even more promising, regardless of who wins Turco's backup job next year. But despite the sudden rise in Climie's value, I still expect Bachman to win it. Not only is Bachman flat-out more talented, he's going to be counted on to push Turco to play well. Climie (still talented in his own right) is full of confidence and still developing at a torrid pace, so he's better suited to start a ton of games in the AHL than play sparingly in the NHL. Plus when you let in goals like this, you're going to have to deal with bad stigmas.

[youtube:http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcC5A4gfcsY]

Ultimately, Turco and the Stars will do what so many other quaint Texas towns have done before; dig in and pick up the pieces. Their co-GM disaster is already cleaned up with the naming of Joe Nieuwendyk as the new GM, Brett Hull the Executive Vice President and Les Jackson (once again) the Director of Player Development and Scouting.

The new AHL team solely dedicated to developing Dallas prospects along with new management structure and a few new goalies (and forwards) in the fold and it's no wonder that Tom Hicks would rather give up his majority interest in the Texas Rangers than the Stars. That's another telling sign that the Stars will be just fine next season…so long as the key components stay healthy.

One step forward, two steps back. It happened to Huet. It happened to Turco. It happens to just about every single goalie at some point or another in their career. Just ask Chris Osgood. The key for fantasy owners is to remember that coincidentally, with every goalie's struggle, the

chance for another goalie to succeed and surpass is sitting there like a hot pie on a windowsill. See Pascal Leclaire and Steve Mason, Manny Legace and Chris Mason, and then Dan Ellis and Pekka Rinne for more examples.

Then you have good ol' Craig Anderson.

He took a giant step forward thanks to a great regular season. Labeled the #1 goalie at times, Anderson verbally expressed his desire to play more. Yet the regular season ended and the Panthers were on the outside looking in. It was a big step back for him because any goalie looking for more responsibility has to prove themselves in the playoffs. Yet at the end of the season, Anderson was nothing more than an unrestricted free agent (starting July 1).

Team USA comes along a few weeks later and congratulates him on a great season by sending an invitation to play in the World Championships – one he actually denied. My thoughts on that are posted here .

Then fate rolls along and slaps me in the face. I say that because I actually met him over the weekend through an event I play in every year called 24 Hours of Hockey. It's a well-run charity hockey marathon here in Denver, created by one of the Florida Panthers' equipment manager and his brother. Anderson heard about the event and couldn't pass up supporting the cause.

And the rest of this extremely interesting story can be found *right here in the Dobber Forums, so feel free to have a look.*

Remember that you can post any type of goalie-related question imaginable (keeper or one-year included) in the SCHOOL OF BLOCK forum!