There's an interesting dynamic in the Anaheim crease this year, which presents us with a perfect topic for today's class. What makes this situation so different from other NHL teams is not only the rise and fall of the two goalies over the last two years, but more importantly, their style. As is the case with any two goalies, there are some similarities, but with Jonas Hiller and J.S. Giguere, I see two goalies with different styles heading in opposite directions.

I'm confident Hiller will play many more games than Giguere this season and I know what kind of rotation the coaching staff will implement as well. I love to go off on tangents related to technique and mental toughness, but my goal this week is to do that, but keep it focused and to the point. It's a very easy prognosis to make, but only after you understand Hiller's outstanding technique and why Giguere's technique has caused his game to slowly decline.

HILLER – Jonas is already one of the best butterfly goalies in the NHL because of his AGILITY. By agility, I mean his ability to move in and out of the butterfly in all different areas with ease. The main source for his amazing agility stems from two things- his foot speed and his core strength. He doesn't make saves or move around with just his legs, he actually moves with his core muscles and the legs follow. Powerful lateral pushes stem from a strong core.

So the stronger stomach and hips a goalie has, the more powerful that push becomes. In fact, more pro goalies are quickly learning that the hips and stomach area is where they MUST generate more power in order to move even faster and stronger side to side. Nothing else needs to be said about this … it's an absolute fact. Therefore, when you combine Hiller's hand

and foot speed along with his ability to recover in a sharp, quick and balanced manner, it gives him that “smooth as glass” look that only the most elite NHL goalies have (Fleury, Luongo, etc.)

What does his technique tell me? Well, Hiller is much more mobile and efficient after making the first save. He doesn’t dive and flop around like Tim Thomas or Peter Budaj, he actually pushes laterally in the butterfly and slides to either side with his shoulders square to the shooter. He takes away the top portion of the net in a fashion that allows him to stay on his knees, ready to bounce up into a normal stance or stay in the tight butterfly at the top of his crease. There is very little desperation in his game and his movements make him appear extremely confident in all areas.

GIGUERE – J.S. is the type of goaltender that thrives on body positioning and very little movement. He will rarely combine a string of movements like Hiller to make a save and control the rebound. Instead, Giguere will find a spot at the top of his crease, make one strong push, and then plant himself there like a giant brick. Then it’s just a matter of taking away holes and tightening up. Unfortunately, this blocking style doesn’t allow the goalie to have a reactionary aspect to his game. So once a rebound is left there for the taking, Giguere is not as smooth or quick to get in position for the second or third save. His feet are slower and don’t move as easily, whereas Hiller seems “lighter” on his toes.

Giguere is still a very solid goaltender who knows how to read plays better than most goalies in the league. He is experienced and has been through a lot in his career, especially in Anaheim. There is not another goalie out there that has a style like Giguere’s, which makes him unique and entertaining and successful and valuable to all teams.

But the game changes on an annual basis and a goalie must constantly refine his game in order to be one of the best. Giguere’s blocking style doesn’t allow him to move as easily after making the first save, which means he has to apply more energy in different areas in order to have the type of secondary movements or agility that Hiller can accomplish with ease.*

And now for the simplification and application of it all:

Giguere’s style is out-dated. Hiller’s is more advanced and more suited for 2010 hockey. Giguere’s rebound control has suffered over the last two seasons as a direct result of his strict “blocking” style and his inability to adjust or refine that style over the last two years. But Hiller’s style has blossomed in just a few short seasons because there is more efficiency in the technique that must be used to succeed at this level.

Looking just at their stats, you’ll never be able to prove what I just explained. I’ve already tried. Giguere’s statistics were very solid two seasons ago, but that won’t show us anything about his rebound control problems over the last two years. Ultimately, all you can do is trust me when I say Hiller has improved over the last two years and Giguere has significantly slowed down as a direct result of technique, not talent.

This brings us to the meat of the class; the fantasy diagnosis. There is considerable evidence to support me when I say Hiller will easily be the starting goalie on Opening Night. Not only was

his playoff run more than enough to warrant this, but Anaheim is known to ride the hot goaltender. And since Hiller has been “hot” since about mid-March, the off-season won’t act as a penalty towards him and he will deservingly be considered the starter.

Now everyone knows Giguere’s beefy contract forces the Ducks to play him as much as possible. I don’t need to discuss those reasons here. Therefore, expect Randy Carlyle to use the code phrases “the best goalie will play…” and that they will be “riding the hot goalie…” all season long. This is a smart move for a number of reasons.

First of all, there’s now a “healthy competition” between the two goalies. Secondly, there are no guarantees for either one of them, so neither will become complacent by expecting to play every game. Both know that they are only a string of two or three wins before they get handed the reins for a longer stretch of time. Finally, this forces both goalies to compete at the highest level, game in and game out. Regardless of their personal friendship, both will want to out-perform the other and prove they should be the go-to guy on a team that can go deep in the playoffs.

There are a few things I want to point out before revealing the bottom line. First of all, remember that they both turned into excellent netminders because of their hard work with Francois Allaire. Now that Allaire is gone, they both have to help each other out by working on the butterfly aspects that they developed with Allaire. I’m not sure who their new goalie coach will be, but that will have a direct impact on their overall numbers. Will Giguere be open to refining or changing some aspects of his blocking style? Will he embrace a new coach and have a good attitude? These are important questions to ask and ones that I wish I had the answer for.

Secondly, Hiller’s age is important to discuss. At 27 years old, he’s far from a “youngster” in the league. Even though he’s only been playing for two seasons, he has more experience than most goalies his age. His experiences playing in Switzerland were a major reason why his performance in the playoffs seemed so impressive. So don’t treat Hiller like a 22 or 23-year old superstar. He is a legitimate elite goalie rounding into top form at the right time.

Finally, and probably of least importance by a mile, is the type of leg pads they wear. Giguere likes those beyond-stiff Reebok Premiere III pads, whereas Hiller wears the new Koho 700 pads. Why in the world would I bring this up? Rebound control! Reebok pads give up juicy rebounds, traditional pads deaden shots. Just watch this video to see what makes Hiller’s pads a lot more beneficial to his hybrid butterfly style:

{youtube}uqVFDVTtkLI{/youtube}

So the bottom line from a fantasy perspective is this: Hiller will start close to 55 games and perform admirably well and post great stats. He’ll have some shutouts along the way and should remain fairly consistent in front of a solid defense. Giguere will play close to 30 games and post solid statistics, but will post a save percentage around .912 and at no point will he be able to re-claim the starting job from Hiller. I see a lot of issues coming up with Giguere’s focus, his rebound control and his overall ability.

*Keep an eye on their save percentage while shorthanded. This will prove a lot about their

ability to make saves by using solid secondary movements.