Do you remember the kid in high school that was way too “book smart” for his own good, but because he was never really challenged in class, would just sit there and cause trouble in really ignorant ways? Well, despite being labeled by many as one of the smartest goalies in the world, I kind of see Marty Turco as the NHL’s troubled goalie genius.

Even though he's one of the brightest goalie minds, Turco had way too many turnovers, mistakes and goals against over the last two seasons. As a result, he quickly became one of the most frustrating goalies for managers to own. He's extremely athletic, talented and creative in the crease, but at the same time he always seems to find a way to turn the puck over, allow bad-angle goals or get stuck in a funk… and it was happening way too often.

At the end of every week I'd feel nauseous looking at his stats, just thinking of what *could have been* if not for that backhand blunder in a 2-2 game or those two bad outlet passes in a scoreless tie. Simply put, Turco's decision making process leaves a lot to be desired, which makes it very tough at times to consider him an "elite" goalie.

Yet the beat goes on for many of us, because he still shows elite SKILLS in every single game. It's very tough to let him go, even tougher to trade him for an adequate return. In the end, I just held on tight all season long in the hopes of perfect timing. You know, maybe he gets my one and only shutout for the week on a Sunday night, or somehow rattles off a pair of back-to-back wins against much stronger non-conference foes…that sort of thing.

In order to learn more about Turco's shortcomings over the years, I went back and dissected his game-by-game numbers in a month of utmost importance - October. Interestingly, Turco started every season playing very mediocre hockey, except for one season in which he went on a furious five-game winning streak and ended with a 7-2 record.

That transpired in the 2006-07 season. His backup that year was a promising young rookie named Mike Smith.

In every other season as a starter, Turco's numbers were not nearly as solid. He went 4-2-1-1 in the 2002-03 season and then 6-4-0 in the 2003-04 season back when the veteran Ron Tugnutt was his backup. Then Turco stumbled to a 4-4-1 record to start the 2005-06 season when another veteran, Johan Hedberg, was his backup. So in seven seasons as a starter, the only factor I could find (statistically) that pointed to Turco's strong 7-2-0 start was Smith.

Could Turco start off this season like he did in 2006 with Alex Auld as his backup? Does Auld have anything in common with Smith that leads me to believe this is possible? Well, I'd say that Auld is just as much of a threat based on sheer talent, and he's just as likeable to the team. Auld and Smith are both hard working goalies with great size. Therefore, it stands to reason that Turco could be presented with similar influences that Smith had back in 2007.

But to be completely honest, this dynamic of Turco being pushed by a formidable backup is legitimate only in the sense that it's an outside or mental influence on Turco as a human being. What about something a little more tangible, you know, like actual aspects of his game or the Stars as a whole? What exactly will it take for the Turco turnaround to take place and for him to go on a run like he did in 2006?

First of all, embarking on the ninth season of his NHL career at the age of 33 tells me this year is a different stage in his career. He's had some playoff experience and some adversity, so it's a good turn, one where wisdom, leadership, a stronger work ethic and good decision making can compensate for a slight decline in agility and durability. So like many 30-something goalies have done over the last few seasons, Turco is achieving this by taking some steps to refine his game with some good old fashioned on-ice coaching.

Yes, I was fortunate to exchange a few e-mails last week with a goalie coach that has been working with Turco on a few aspects of his game that should go a long way in getting him primed for a positive turnaround. What those things are specifically, I have absolutely no idea. But I can only imagine it would be things like timing, body and rebound control and maybe most importantly, decision-making with the puck.

LEAVE IT ALONE, TURCO!!

If Turco stopped handling the puck SO MANY TIMES, he would have more gas in the tank when the game is on the line and that mental toughness is needed to make the big save and rack up some points.

Let's face it, there's no arguing he's a genius when it comes to playing the puck. I even took the

time to cover this aspect of his game in what I call the ***Turco Transition*** . Please take a moment to read this and check out the diagram. It's a legitimate aspect of his game, one that's also rooted in the outdoor lacrosse goaltender's game.

Outdoor lacrosse goalies act as an option (or outlet) for their long-stick defenseman all the time. I can remember many games in high school where I would make a save, fake like I was looking for an outlet pass up the field (so my coach wouldn't yell at me), then go wide-eyed mad with adrenaline and run up the fields kamikaze style.

I scurried for dear life like a rabbit darting amongst a pack of wolves until I could hit a streaking middie with a perfect lead pass. Staying at least swinging distance away from much bigger guys with a bitter taste in their mouth from all the saves I was making was by far my main mission. But when I had the ball and wasn't about to get smeared into the dry Texas dirt, I was actually baiting an opposing player to come towards me, which took pressure off one of my defensemen. Marty Turco does a very similar thing on the ice, just without the sheer risk of breaking bones.

But sometimes, enough is enough.

Turco is so good at stickhandling that he often tries to accomplish plays that border on the line of sheer insanity. He will really push the limits of things like threading passes through two players, or drawing an attacker behind the net and twisting around for a backhanded pass up

the boards. It really seems like he thrives off making very risky plays look very pretty. They sure are fun to watch, but boy are they dangerous. And when a mistake occurs, it's glaring and ugly and leaves a bad taste in everyone's mouth.

If he would learn to play the puck more like a grizzled NFL quarterback instead of a flailing high school outdoor lacrosse goalie, I think Turco would have more energy to make sharper and quicker decisions down the stretch this season. The less effort he exerts making those fancy plays and trying to jump-start the offense on a game-to-game basis, the more focus he'll have when it comes to squandering scoring chances. It really is that simple.

THE DALLAS STARS

The loss of Sergei Zubov is going to have a direct impact on Turco's numbers for the obvious reason that his defense will not be nearly as solid - we saw that last year with Zubov missing much of it. But factor in the return of Brenden Morrow and Brad Richards, there's a good possibility that their general health and point production will help cover for the loss of Zubov. I also happen to be a fan of Stars defenseman Trevor Daley and Matt Niskanen. I have no idea what their fantasy value looks like (ask Dobber) but I can say that they will not only see increased minutes, but they will continue to increase their defensive abilities.

In conclusion, Turco has become a very frustrating goalie for fantasy managers to own because he's so talented, but makes so many mental errors and posts such inconsistent numbers. Every

season he seems to start rather mildly, except for the 2006-07 season when a competent backup was pushing him to perform more effectively.

The backup dynamic, combined with a stronger work ethic over the summer, some technical help from a couple of different goalie coaches, an increase in his goaltending wisdom and experience and the overall health of important players like Morrow and Richards, there's plenty of reasons why Turco could have quite the solid turnaround season.

SCHOOL OF BLOCK HOMEWORK

Please watch this video of Coach's Corner , where Don Cherry calls Turco the "smartest goalie" playing the game. Then join us at 3pm MST for
LIVE CLASS
at The Goalie Guild. The Turco bit starts at around 3:15, but be sure to watch the entire thing, as it also includes some video of Carey Price that we will definitely discuss as well.

Despite what Cherry says about the defensemen getting in Price's way, those pucks should still be stopped. These are certainly solid shots, but a confident Price would normally find a way to

make those saves.

The video on Turco is pretty self-explanatory and depicts what we discussed above very clearly.