A prospect can improve at an incredibly fast rate when someone that mastered the position at the NHL level is constantly providing that prospect with feedback. Especially with a position like goaltending, one that relies on non-stop progression and refinement, having a goalie consultant that understands the nature of the game (especially in 2009) and can relate to today's elite puck stoppers is the most important factor in developing the goalie depth chart.

Jocelyn Thibault, just one full season removed from his 14-year NHL career, was quietly named the new goalie consultant for the Colorado Avalanche last week. Sure enough, Thibault was on the ice Sunday morning for the first day of Avs Training Camp and did some remarkable work that I'm proud to share with you today. It was a beneficial morning for me in a number of ways, none more important than learning what kind of an instant impact Thibault had on some of the Avalanche goalie prospects.

But before we dig into the nitty-gritty, let's go through a few other notes I had from the first day of Avs training camp:

PETER BUDAJ – Budaj was extremely rusty throughout the first hour of camp. He simply never got into much of a rhythm. He was playing a half-step deeper than usual and struggled with his rebound control. He never seemed comfortable and his upper body seemed tight. His body language reflected a lot of tense frustration as he reacted late to some shots and dropped early on others.

It was fairly obvious to me that Budaj was feeling the heat in a number of ways. In fact, one could argue that he's facing more pressure than any other Avalanche player. Not only is he set to be dethroned by Craig Anderson, but he's also constantly being pushed by a confident Tyler Weiman.

From a fantasy perspective, I wouldn't put much value in Budaj's stock heading into the season. Between Weiman and Anderson, Budaj has the least amount of confidence and is also under the most scrutiny from the media and fans. Unfortunately, the biggest enemy Budaj will face all season will be himself. And until he comes to an internal realization that he has to show more composure, Budaj will struggle to play consistently and run hot and cold.

TYLER WEIMAN – With even better footwork than before, Weiman is still consistently progressing. Even on a horrible Lake Erie team last year, Weiman was one of the steadiest performers in the AHL. He looks sharper than usual and skated with a lot of confidence, like he was totally bulletproof. He's no longer fazed by anything or anyone, nor should he, for this is his seventh consecutive Avs training camp. His mindset and body language was terrific.

To be blunt, Weiman is so solid that Budaj seems to be hanging on by a thread. I don't mean to take away from Budaj's game, but it's getting to the point where even the casual Avs fan is wondering why Weiman has only played half a period in the NHL. This is a question that has to be asked over and over again because there's simply no excuse for not giving him at least one opportunity this season.

So it's my conviction that Weiman will be called up at least once and play extremely well in his limited chances. In the meantime, at least we know he'll get plenty of work and minutes in the AHL.

BILLY SAUER AND PETER DELMAS - It's amazing what a young goalie can do when they actually take a little time to think about what they're doing. It also helps when the team's goalie consultant is on the ice to make adjustments. Most skaters are there to battle against one another for a spot on a roster, but for some goalies, it's more about impressing the coaching staff and absorbing every little piece of information that comes from the goalie coach.

Sauer, a big goalie with great coverage down low in his own right, does not have the best mobility or quickness. In fact *I worked up a scouting chart on him* back on Wednesday, which was the first day of Rookie Training Camp. It's not hard to see that Sauer is a good step slower than Weiman, Budaj and Peter Delmas.

But all Thibault had to do was run two drills, make one minor adjustment to Sauer's footwork and everything totally clicked. This not only turned a pressure-filled training camp experience into a mini semi-private lesson, but it also improved the organization's depth while at the same time allowing the scouts to do their job. Overall, it was a great display of pure development straight from Thibault's mind, something every GM wants to see on a daily basis.

{youtube}tFFVxsJH8oA{/youtube}

In the first video, Thibault uses four pucks to explain a basic system for tracking the puck around the crease. It splits the ice up into six zones - four behind the net split up from end board to end board and two out front, one on either side of the ice. David Marcoux, the former goalie coach in Calgary, actually taught Kiprusoff and many other pro goalies this exact system (It's also the one I was taught five years ago). The drill Thibault runs with Sauer is just about setting your feet quick enough so that you can control your body's movement and therefore the rebound.

What I noticed in this drill (starting at 1:30) is that Sauer covers the lower portion of the net in impressive fashion due to his great size. But his feet aren't the quickest and because of that, he doesn't have very good body control. He hunches over and leans forward when he drops into the butterfly, which causes some bad rebounds and takes away from an efficient recovery. His body is not in great alignment and that causes him to lose speed and not generate as much power getting back to his feet. He also doesn't take up as much space up high because his shoulders are hunched and his back isn't completely straight. Overall his inefficient footwork leads to some juicy rebounds and you can see Thibault most likely explaining some of these

aspects to him at the end of the video.

{youtube}_3Px9YOXK8U{/youtube}

This second video hits home the importance of a quality goalie coach to the prospects in this system. On Sauer's first three shots, he's still leaning forward like before. He flies out towards the shooter because his body's momentum carries him forward. He was a little sharper going to his right, but his shoulders were still hunched over.

But at 1:05, Thibault does a remarkable job of giving Sauer some great feedback about the path his skates travel. Instead of sliding out towards the shooter to cut down the angle, Sauer is better off setting his feet sooner and cutting off the angle deeper in his crease. This is a luxury a big goalie can afford, as this adjustment will allow him to drop into the butterfly in a faster manner and control the rebound with more ease.

At 1:10, you see Thibault show Sauer exactly how to adjust his movement. To paraphrase, stopping on a dime instead of sliding out past the top of his crease will come from setting his feet sooner. The result will be better body control, better balance and then an ability to recover just a little bit quicker than before.

At 1:50, Delmas steps in and shows Sauer how it's done. Delmas is flat out a terrific skater. He moves in a more efficient manner when it comes to shots in tight and his feet are very quick and get set sooner than Sauer's. Even though Delmas doesn't have the big body (listed 11 pounds lighter than Sauer), he's much quicker going post to post.

Delmas doesn't exert nearly as much energy even though he might need to travel a further distance because he's a smaller goalie, which allows him to get the knees down quickly and have better rebound control. Another positive to Delmas' game is that he has a very straight back and takes away a large portion of the top of the net. That straight back means a lot, because it allows for better alignment and quicker recovery time.

Then everything clicks when Sauer goes back in the net at 2:40. The first shot to his right, he's in a little more control of his body. The second one was excellent and the third one was even better. As my comments point out, he was set sooner and was in much better control of his body. The fourth and fifth shot to his left were a little off-balanced but he finishes with a strong one. And did you notice his rebounds were placed in much better areas?

Now this is all pretty straightforward stuff for a goalie to absorb in a few hours, but what happens when Thibault isn't around to keep providing Sauer with that feedback? This is where goalies must show a lot of mental strength. Sauer has to train his mind to be consistent with what he just learned. He's a bigger goalie – he doesn't need to come out as far as a smaller goalie does. So there's more advantageous things he could be doing with his feet that end up saving time, energy and most importantly, bad rebounds.

In conclusion, this was just a few minutes of basic goalie drills, but as you can see, a good goalie coach can turn it into something beyond valuable. Every moment a prospect gets that type of feedback, the stock of that goalie rises by leaps and bounds. But without the constant feedback, goalies have to work even harder at being mentally tough enough to retain the information and execute correctly on a consistent basis.

Thirty goalie coaches in the league work on hundreds of prospects in an effort to improve the organization's depth. But as I'm often found saying, goaltending is 90% mental. So no matter how much a goalie learns in a single day, if they don't apply themselves and stay focused, it's all for naught. This barely scratches the surface of the goalie consultant's impact, but as you can see, it's a vital and invaluable aspect of developing players at that position.

What impact does a goalie coach have on your fantasy team's goalies? What kind of adjustments to a goalie's game did you see or hear about over the summer? And most importantly – how consistent is the goalie playing? These are questions you should be asking in order to not only understand the position better, but to give you an edge from a fantasy perspective. Having the answers will make drafting goalies less of a headache and more of an opportunity.

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