

The first round of the 2010 Stanley Cup Playoffs has provided me with more entertainment and topics of discussion than I ever imagined. Surprises lurk around every corner, as goalies have proven their worth in a myriad of different ways. Yes, the Playoff Beasts are emerging, and the sight is a welcome one for all of us fantasy goalie aficionados.

And thanks to the patented <u>Playoff Beast Tracker</u>, we can all follow along and chart some of these inexperienced goalies. So let's take a look at some key dynamics that have surfaced over the last two weeks and see what we've learned so far about goaltending in the playoffs!

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CRAIG ANDERSON & JON QUICK

Both Craig Anderson and Jon Quick were in similar situations heading into the first round. Neither of them had any NHL playoff experience, nor had they ever played so many games over the course of a season. They were dubbed "workhorses" for their respective teams, but neither had been through such a tough grind before. Coincidentally, both of their opponents were considered as the true workhorses. Evgeni Nabokov is one of the best at handling a heavy workload, while Roberto Luongo epitomized the term due to his recent history and Winter Olympics performance.

Therefore it came as no surprise to me when Anderson and Quick both dropped a deciding Game 6 on home ice. Although both of them traveled down very different paths in the first round, their final destination was the same. And probably the most obvious reason for that was due to simply being over-worked and playing too many games. For what it's worth, neither Anderson nor Quick should play more than 65 games behind the same defense next year.

Look, it's not hard for a goalie to play 82 games a season, but it is hard if they have to win big games down the stretch. The physical grind is easy to manage, but the mental grind takes more energy than you could imagine. Ultimately, it was a lack of mental focus for a crucial moment in Game 6 that acted as the bane of their existence. Anderson's came in the first minute of the game on a simple wraparound, while Quick's came late in the third period. Both were a result of a slight mental lapse in which their eyes did not track the puck very well. The fault does not fall



on their shoulders entirely, but both could have done things to manage the play more effectively.

Compared to Quick, Anderson was the true beast in his series. One more shot on goal and he would have faced exactly 40 shots per game (he finished with 239 in six games). His most impressive stat was stopping 59 of 64 Sharks PP shots. In every game, San Jose had quality opportunities with the man advantage and totally dominated puck possession, but Anderson battled hard, controlled his rebounds and played to the point of exhaustion on many occasions.

He was inspirational, admirable and effectively got into the head of the Sharks players. He almost pulled off one of the most amazing goaltending performances in a series and broke an NHL record with a 51-save shutout in Game 3.

EVGENI NABOKOV & ROBERTO LUONGO

On the flip side, I would be remiss if I did not mention the timeliness of Nabokov and Luongo's goaltending. Nabokov was a silent assassin in his series, showing elite mental focus, great composure and big save ability on a number of occasions in the series. He had one bad game and everything else was as close to perfect as you could be.



Most impressive for Nabokov was his perfect save percentage while down by a goal (20-20) as well as his timely play while short-handed, as the Avalanche only scored two PP goals on 24 shots in the entire series.

It was clear to see that Luongo continued to fight the puck in the first five games of his series, but when it mattered most, Luongo was there in Game 6 with some momentum-changing saves. None was more important than the wild glove save he made on Ryan Smyth in the second period, one that clearly ignited his bench and helped turn around the team's chances to eliminate a tough opponent.

Luongo's statistics in the Beast Tracker are fun to digest, because they aren't very strong, except for a few categories that prove his timeliness. His best save percentages came in the third period (95%) and while down a goal (96.3%).

TUUKKA RASK

The talent this kid possesses is blindingly clear, but nobody expected him to have the mental fortitude to go along with his elite skills. Rask, through Game 5, has not allowed the Sabres to

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score a PP goal (22-22), nor has he allowed a goal in the third period (45-45). Those just might be two of the most important situational statistics in the *Beast Tracker*, and Rask has been flawless in both categories.

What impresses me the most about Rask's playoff performance so far is how he improves with each period he plays. The first period has clearly been his weakest, allowing seven goals on 59 shots (88.1%). But he's only allowed four goals on 47 shots in the second period (91.5%) and is holding that flawless save percentage in the third. That's composed, clutch, quality playoff goaltending that cannot be denied.

BRIAN BOUCHER

Surprise, surprise, Brian Boucher's still alive. What an unbelievable story we have developing here, folks. Not only has it been eight years since his last playoff experience, which mine as well be the same length as the stone age for a well-traveled veteran like himself, but he faced the most storied and successful playoff goaltender in the game.

In fact, you can go back to the final game of the regular season as the moment the madness started for Boucher. How could you forget that massive shootout victory over Henrik Lundqvist and the New York Rangers to clinch a playoff spot?! You can't.

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Sure, Boucher wasn't slammed with shot after shot in every game, but when he was forced to exert copious amounts of energy, he executed with precision and confidence. One impressive stat to keep in mind is his save percentage while short-handed. He only allowed two Devils PP goals on 40 shots, while Brodeur allowed eight Flyers PP goals on 40 shots. And similar to the experienced playoff goalies in the Western Conference, Boucher has performed admirably while down a goal (18-for-18).

A perfect playoff nickname for Boucher would have to be *The Dethroner*. He has single-handedly eliminated two crease kings in the last 15 days and now he's eliminating the belief that an average goaltender can't win games in the playoffs. Experience is everything in a playoff series, as we learned last week the importance of composure in these emotional games.

Unfortunately there's not enough time or space to dissect every goalie's performance in the first round. As much as I would love to keep going, I'll have to pull myself away from the in-depth analysis for a week. Yes, the time has come once again to host my third-annual <u>Quest for the Crown</u> charity hockey festival.

The Beast Tracker will still be updated on a nightly basis, but there will be no *School of Block* next week. I appreciate everyone's support as I undergo another Quest to fight cancer and keep these key stats in mind while you dissect the performances of your favorite playoff goaltenders!

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