

## The Current State of Panthers Goaltending

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 21 June 2010 06:25 - Last Updated Monday, 21 June 2010 18:39

---



Who amongst us can resist the lazy days of summer? And who doesn't love the feeling you get when first arriving at a friend's BBQ? You're instantly hit with the mouth-watering aroma of freshly cooked meat and proceed to eat like a starved pig until you can't see straight. To be honest, the current state of Florida's goaltending is...yeah...a lot like that. From top to bottom, their goalie grill is loaded with plenty of succulent talent just bursting with fantasy flavor.

Tomas Vokoun is the team's Grade-A elite netminder. With some of the fastest feet in the league, he is rarely caught out of position or beat on a clean shot. His overall quickness allows him to play a perfect and patient hybrid butterfly style. His palate for the balance of athletic and positional saves is as refined as you will find. Any fantasy owner will love his ability to post great stats, log workhorse minutes and still give Florida a chance to win on a consistent basis.

## The Current State of Panthers Goaltending

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 21 June 2010 06:25 - Last Updated Monday, 21 June 2010 18:39

---

Scott Clemmensen is the team's slow-roasted veteran backup. He provides stability when called upon and instills a strong work ethic and confidence in his teammates. He's a great teammate and is competitive enough to keep Vokoun from getting complacent. Clemmensen's future with Florida might be shaky due to rumors, but his tenure in the NHL should last at least a few more seasons.

Although there are also many rumors roaming the countryside regarding Vokoun's future in Florida as well, until something happens, consider them all bunk. No team this close to making the playoffs would ever trade an elite starter like Vokoun, especially when you consider his awesome performance in the 2010 Winter Olympics.

At the top of the prospects list is Jacob Markstrom, whose arrival in North America has finally come to fruition. Currently ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> overall in our Top-100 Prospects Rankings, he will spend next season in the AHL with Rochester and have plenty of opportunities to get acquainted with the smaller ice and faster pace. Markstrom's upside and long-term potential is already well-documented, and I still didn't even mention Alex Salak, Tyler Plante or Mark Cheverie yet! So enjoy this installment of [The Current State...](#) series and don't forget to vote for next week's team right now!

**What makes Florida so successful at identifying top notch goalie prospects?**

It all comes down to a well-guided scouting staff and intelligent moves at the draft table. Scott

## The Current State of Panthers Goaltending

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 21 June 2010 06:25 - Last Updated Monday, 21 June 2010 18:39

---

Luce, Florida's Director of Amateur Scouting, happened to play both junior and collegiate hockey, which says a lot about his well-rounded approach. They obviously scout hard in Europe and at the collegiate ranks. And while there's no mistaking the potential of prospects like Markstrom, Cheverie and Salak, a team still has to develop a structured process for acquiring goalies. Then it's just a matter of making magic happen on draft day, or through free-agent signings.

What really impresses me about Florida's depth chart is their effective goalie drafting. Not once in franchise history has the team chosen a goalie in the first round. In fact, 33% of their drafted goalies came in the second round (six of 18). The team found a gem in Mark Cheverie in the 7<sup>th</sup> round (193<sup>rd</sup> overall in 2006) and they did plenty of homework by plucking Markstrom 31<sup>st</sup> overall in 2008.

To give you an idea of their work at the draft table, Kevin Weekes was their first goalie chosen in 1993 at 41<sup>st</sup> overall. Alex Auld was drafted 40<sup>th</sup> overall in 1999, David Shantz was taken 37<sup>th</sup> overall in 2004 and Tyler Plante was chosen 32<sup>nd</sup> overall in 2005. So history shows that Florida likes to take goalies in the second round, or they wait patiently until the 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> rounds, which is much more effective and a lot less risky.

Florida has drafted zero goalies in Round 1, six in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, just one each in Rounds 3 and 4,

## The Current State of Panthers Goaltending

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 21 June 2010 06:25 - Last Updated Monday, 21 June 2010 18:39

---

three in Round 5 and two each in Rounds 6, 7 and 8. Thanks to their strong AHL and ECHL affiliations and great scouting scope, Florida's goalie depth chart is one of the best in the NHL and should continue to be a strong force for the foreseeable future.

**At what point does Florida having so many capable goaltenders in their system become redundant?**

I don't think any NHL team can ever have too many capable goaltenders. If spots run out with affiliated teams, Rochester and the Everblades, the Panthers could always loan a goalie to another pro team. Just like all other teams, their younger prospects could be sent back to juniors, Europe or Russia as well. If there's no fit or chemistry between goalie and team, then they are shed, sent back into the draft or used as trade bait.

Stockpiling assets in goal is never a bad thing, as quality goalie prospects are always in high demand. The tricky part is finding the ones with a reputation or propensity for future success. Otherwise they turn into big fat question marks that rarely get the opportunities needed to develop. Remember, for every legitimate prospect, there's at least four or five that will never make it past the AHL. Of course there's a redundancy to having too many goalies under contract, but shedding excess weight is a relatively easy process and can bring in other assets.

**How does Sergei Gayduchenko stack up against some of their other prospects? And how does seeing very little ice time as a backup goaltender in KHL affect his chances of**

## The Current State of Panthers Goaltending

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 21 June 2010 06:25 - Last Updated Monday, 21 June 2010 18:39

---

### **developing as a prospect?**

Gayduchenko was drafted 202<sup>nd</sup> overall in 2007 and is considered nothing more than a long-term project with very little NHL upside. He's listed at 222 pounds, which is too bulky, even at 6-foot-5. At 21 years of age, he's already way behind the learning curve compared to top prospects at his age playing in North America. It may seem a little harsh, but maybe if he was still 17, I would be singing a different tune. Not so much at 21.

His little ice time is probably the most significant issue when discussing his NHL potential. He also has very little international experience, which is due to the fact that he has only held a Russian passport for four years. He was born in Ukraine, but has refused to play with them (for unknown reasons). So since he chooses to represent Russia, he lacks opportunity, playing in only a few non-IIHF tournaments since being allowed to participate with the team.

### **I've read that Alex Salak's style is "unorthodox" ... could you elaborate on that?**

This is by far the most common question regarding Salak. And to be honest, it's by far my favorite to answer. I have to be extremely careful with the terms and words I use when describing him though, mainly because it plays a role in explaining why I currently consider him one of the top long-term fantasy prospects.

## The Current State of Panthers Goaltending

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 21 June 2010 06:25 - Last Updated Monday, 21 June 2010 18:39

---

I would say that Salak's style is not necessarily unorthodox, but rather it is his stance in certain situations that is very unique. He crouches extremely low to the ice while looking around bodies and when a low shot is coming through traffic. This is not uncommon for Euro goalies, but the severity of his crouch and the manner in which he does it is different. Adding to his unique style is his extremely active hands. Just like goalies Pekka Rinne and Miikka Kiprusoff, Salak will catch and control a lot of pucks in front of his body.

Just [watch him play for a few minutes](#) and you'll see all of this in action. While it is unorthodox, it is still very effective. This is due to one of Salak's main strengths, which is his explosive lateral movement and great balance. When he's upright, the more he bends his knees and crouches, the more balance he has. And since that balance means his body is in perfect alignment in relation to the angle, he generates very strong side-to-side and front-to-back pushes.

When focused and rested, Salak covers a lot of space very effectively. As such, he's very fun for fans to watch, which creates an aura of flair in his game. Combined with his lively off-ice personality, Salak displays a lot of confidence through an emotion-filled attitude, and as a result, is often considered "cocky" by his adversaries and critics.

Because his style is labeled "unorthodox" and his demeanor is considered "eccentric" by many, Salak is usually reprimanded for relying too much on his reflexes. In the second half of the season, Salak was caught scrambling, over-committing, or simply diving around with little control. His growing pains were well-documented and he experienced visible energy drain due to the lack of pro hockey experience.

## The Current State of Panthers Goaltending

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 21 June 2010 06:25 - Last Updated Monday, 21 June 2010 18:39

---

For fantasy managers, the key is to realize the issues he had in the second half of the season were nothing out of the ordinary. Just like any skilled AHL rookie, he needs to learn how to manage energy and sustain energy for longer periods of time. He was still adjusting in the second half and his skills will surely improve over the summer.

In order for Salak's style to be most effective, and in order for him to keep improving, he will need to make key mental adjustments, both technically and emotionally. But Salak is a quick-witted and intelligent hybrid goalie, so I have plenty of faith that he will not only adjust in a timely manner, but have many opportunities to be a long-term keeper.

### **Does Brian Foster have any chance of developing into an NHL goaltender?**

I believe he has a good chance at developing into an NHL-caliber goaltender. I say "caliber" as a way of separating the skills needed to play in the NHL from the fact that he probably won't have great opportunities with the Panthers. They could service him in 3-4 more years in a limited backup role, but as long as Markstrom, Cheverie and Salak are around, Foster could linger as an ECHL or AHL goalie. If he's traded, however, things could change for the better.

Not only is he already 23 years old, he only played 86 games with the University of New Hampshire in four seasons. Before that, he only played 26 games with Des Moines in the USHL

## The Current State of Panthers Goaltending

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 21 June 2010 06:25 - Last Updated Monday, 21 June 2010 18:39

---

before signing a letter of intent with the Wildcats. Foster had a quality NCAA career, but there are 17 and 18-year olds playing two times as many games at a higher level. I would not be surprised if he made it to the NHL as a backup in his early-to-mid 30's.

It should also be pointed out that Both Tyler Plante and Chris Beckford-Tseu are unrestricted free agents come July 1. If Markstrom and Salak handle the AHL duties, that leaves Cheverie with a spot in the AHL and either Foster, Beckford-Tseu or Plante taking the other spot with the Everblades.