

Top-10 Goalies for One-Year League

Written by Justin Goldman

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School of Block held a [fantasy forums mailbag](#) last week and the quality of questions I answered was just outstanding. The volume was even more impressive, as I gladly spent my entire day answering...well...almost all of them.

The only question left unanswered was [a request from Leafs2010](#). He asked me to list the Top-10 goalies for a one-year fantasy league using the common statistical categories. I realized automatically that a question of such magnitude and importance deserved more time and focus than the others, so I pondered it for the whole week. Lo and behold, my ranking of the 10 best goalies to own for this season, if you're playing in a one-year league that uses the common scoring categories.

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Although I rarely spend time discussing statistics, [there's no escaping it in a ranking such as this](#). So I keyed in on one stat in particular, one that I feel speaks volumes for a goalie's fantasy value. This figure is simply the ratio of games in which a goalie posts a .900 save percentage or higher. Divided by their total number of games played, this percentage is a strong indication of how consistent the goalie performed last season and how effective they may have been in helping their team win games.

Please keep in mind that the mission this week is to provide you with the Top-10 goalies we feel are poised to be the most valuable to own in a one-year, head-to-head fantasy league. We cannot predict injuries, trades, or free agency signings, so this is as of and up to July 26, 2010. We feel it is important to own a goaltender that effectively stops the puck and also fills you with confidence. This list reflects those factors and includes the best goalies most suited to lead you to a fantasy league title.

1. Tuukka Rask – Not only do I think Rask is the most technically sound European goalie currently in the NHL, I was also quite impressed with his mental toughness down the stretch last year. He was very durable in a rookie season where his minutes were all back loaded in the pressure-filled second half. An astonishing 77% of his games resulted in a .900 save percentage or higher (34 total games), which was the highest in the NHL for all starting goalies. And don't forget he posted the league's best goals-against average (1.97) and save percentage (.931) as well. Combined with great outings in his first 10 playoff games, it was a brilliant start to his NHL career. He's projected to start 60-65 games this season, making him that much more valuable.

Why is he #1? He's the best combination of all three fantasy worlds – skill, situation and stats - and he's still getting better.

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2. Ryan Miller – The 2010 Vezina Trophy winner continues to improve his ability to win behind strong mental toughness and leadership skills. He gained a ton of confidence after his run in the Olympics and clearly revealed just how good he can be when it matters most for his team. Miller is an inspired goalie, a well-oiled machine with the perfect combination of quickness and solid positioning. He rarely struggled in games last season, as he posted 41 wins in 69 outings and a .929 save percentage, which was second overall in the NHL. A whopping 76 percent of his games resulted in a .900 save percentage or higher (52 total) and he also notched five shutouts while averaging a workable 28.2 shots per game.

Why is he #2? No other goalie has improved more in the last three years. It's Miller Time more often every month.

3. Henrik Lundqvist – When you take into account his strenuous wide butterfly style, King Henrik is one of the most durable and steady goaltenders in the NHL. Those who see him most constantly rave about his big-save ability and he displayed tons of flair in a season plagued by frustrating one-goal losses. Owing Lundqvist brings managers so much confidence that they are rarely disappointed in a game that he loses. One reason I rank him higher than others is due to shot volume. He faced the third-most shots in the NHL last year at 2109, which was 28.9 per game, but still posted a .921 save percentage (5th in NHL).

Why is he #3? Imagine his value if half of his one-goal losses from last season are converted into wins this season.

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4. Martin Brodeur – Although I think the next two goalies below Brodeur play a more refined and effective style, you just can't argue against the wizard. Behind strong team defense and potent offense, especially if Ilya Kovalchuk stays put, expect more of the same from Brodeur this season. Yes he's a year older and a little more prone to aches and pains of a 75+ game schedule, but experience and genuine leadership counts more than skill. Just like Rask led the league in two key categories, Brodeur led the NHL in shutouts (9) and wins (45). But only 65% of his games (49 total) resulted in a .900 save percentage or better, giving him a .913 mark on the season, good enough for 13th overall.

Why is he #4? He's on a defensive team and the most reliable, experienced and mentally tough goalie in the NHL.

5. Ilya Bryzgalov – The razor sharp Russian is coming off a true breakout season and established a dominant presence in the Phoenix crease. Behind a strong Dave Tippett defensive system, Bryzgalov cruised to many low-scoring wins on a consistent basis and posted a .900 save percentage or better in 73% of his games (50 total). Even when he was asked to stop more than 30 shots, he was there almost every single night. That compatibility is crucial in determining his fantasy value this season, as many goalies will struggle with their rhythm when facing a low volume of shots (see Cristobal Huet). Not so for Bryzgalov, as he is able to adjust and thrive in pressure-filled situations. He should experience another season of succulent statistical success.

Why is he #5? High value comes with Tippett's territory, but he also has the elite technical skills to boot. All bases are covered.

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6. Tomas Vokoun –With Miller stealing the show in the goalie department during the 2010 Winter Olympics, Vokoun (and Halak) was nipping at his heels the entire time. The silent assassin in the Southeast Division posted the NHL's third-best save percentage (.925) and was fifth overall in shots against (2081). That averaged out to be 33 shots per game, which is a great number to pull in every 2-3 days. So he not only faces a ton of rubber and wins games single-handedly, but he'll most likely be playing in front of a more competent team as well. I expect him to play even better in October compared to the last two seasons, as once again the elusive "strong start" is a self-proclaimed area of focus for him and his teammates.

Why is he #6? Has a very efficient shots-to-saves conversion rate and great mental toughness on a leaky defensive team.

7. Miikka Kiprusoff –Many fans might get frustrated with his nonchalant demeanor, but no matter how hard his pundits try, his fantasy value cannot be disproven. Despite Calgary's failure to make the post-season, Kiprusoff was a bright spot for most of the season. He posted a .900 save percentage or higher in an impressive 72% of his games (51 out of 72) and in only 10 games did he post something below a .850 save percentage. That's quite consistent for a team that missed the playoffs. With a .920 save percentage, 35 wins, four shutouts and a 2.31 goals against average, Kipper was very valuable across the fantasy board.

Why is he #7? His complacency could finally be eliminated thanks to Henrik Karlsson. Kipper should be on fire again this year.

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8. Roberto Luongo –Although last season was filled with frustrating nights fighting off the puck and traffic in front of his net, Luongo persevered and still found a way to win at least 40 games. He had to hack his way through a lack of rhythm and the pressure of the Olympics, so it wasn't always pretty to watch. Without the Olympics clouding his mind and Roli Melanson acting as his new full-time goalie coach, Luongo should have no problem shaving .25 off his goals-against average and improving on his .913 save percentage. He battled hard mentally and posted a .900 save percentage or higher in 65% of his games (43 total).

Why is he #8? The giant is under a lot less stress this season and will thrive in a more competitive tandem with Schneider.

9. Jaroslav Halak – Many of you will see Halak on this list and once discovering Jimmy Howard is not in the Top-10, instantly wonder why. But when you look at the likelihood of either goalie being more consistent or enduring more off-rhythm stretches, it's hard to go someone who is so cool and composed under pressure. The Olympics, combined with what he had to go through in Montreal, proves Halak has been to hell and back. Solid steel is strengthened when forged in fire, so managers should feel quite confident in his ability to play at least 60 games and still post similar (or better) stats as last season.

Why is he #9? Posted a .900 save percentage or higher in 29 of 45 games and flat out stole at least eight wins last year.

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10. Pekka Rinne – Although he's clearly an elite Finnish talent with great size, the question as to how he handles workhorse minutes will linger like stale firework smoke in the Nashville air. But Rinne's potential is untapped. He was quietly very good in the playoffs against Chicago and similar to Rask in Boston, displayed mental toughness down the stretch to keep the Predators in the playoff hunt. He only posted a .900 save percentage or higher in 58% of his games, or 33 of 58. That's well below the league average (around 65%), but 32 wins and a .911 save percentage overall can't be overlooked heading into your draft.

Why is he #10? He still has untapped potential and a very solid combination of size, durability, skill and mental toughness.

The Next Five...

Here are the next five goalies to own, but I listed them below in alphabetical order. What do YOU think the ranking should be??

Craig Anderson – It will be extremely hard to match the same break-out run he put on display last season, but he's still valuable in the workload, saves and save percentage categories. He is not a very polished goalie, but has great size and desire and plays the blocking style extremely well. He displayed awesome durability last season, but is expected to have a smaller workload

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this season. But with Brett Clark no longer blocking shots, he'll probably face more shots per game than last year.

Marc-Andre Fleury – Although he backstops one of the most potent offenses in the league, he was very inconsistent last year. Other than logging 37 wins, the stats do not warrant Top-10 status. He only posted a .900 save percentage or better in Relies too much on skill, lacks mental toughness and is prone to inconsistency on an offensive-minded team.

Jimmy Howard –The sophomore jinx is more probably with Howard compared to Halak or Rask. As mentally tough as he is, his technique has a lot of refining to undergo and therefore doesn't have the same untapped. Nevertheless, he still posted a .900 save percentage or better in a stunning 76% of his games, which tied Ryan Miller for second in the NHL.

Carey Price –Just like Halak is a legitimate young talent ready to play more NHL games than ever before, Price (still an RFA) is also quite capable of being a Top-10 one-year goalie as well. When you peel back the layers of all his frustrating losses, his record of 13-20-5 doesn't explain how 63% of his games resulted in a .900 save percentage or higher (26 of 41 games).

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Cam Ward—Never underestimate an elite talent with great size, plenty of experience and a Stanley Cup ring. It would help if he played in front of a better team, but if he stays healthy and continues to improve, it could easily be a Top-10 season for him. Despite his injury, he posted a .900 save percentage or higher in 65% of his games (30 of 47) and rarely had a weak outing.