

Don't Mess With Chemistry

Written by Justin Goldman

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In what has to be one of the most interesting goalie dilemmas of the season, the Philadelphia Flyers are currently stuck with three goalies on their active roster. Russian rookie Sergei Bobrovsky, wily veteran Brian Boucher and the rehabbing Michael Leighton all have something to prove right now, which makes for quite the interesting fantasy predicament.

FANTASY MAILBAG: DECEMBER 20

When it comes to the evil three-headed goalie monster, it's almost always a situation where one goalie's fantasy value surges and the other two suffer a serious drop. But every situation is different, so let's take a look at where each goalie's fantasy value stands and where each goalie is headed.

LEIGHTON – In my experience, lightning rarely strikes twice for an average goaltender. Last year, Leighton saw first-hand just how suddenly an opportunity can fall into his lap. But since he's the odd man out right now, what kind of work ethic and exposure can he possibly generate after being out of the lineup for so long? Not too much.

Truth be told, the entire fate of his fantasy value will come down to how he performs in his first start. If he plays well and gets the win, the door for more minutes will open accordingly to how strong of a game he has. If he struggles and suffers a loss, the door could slam shut...and it might never be pried open again.

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Be sure to read this excellent piece with insight and quotes on [Leighton's current situation by Sam Carchidi](#)

I won't speculate or project when Leighton's first start will take place. That's not really the issue at hand. What matters is his overall fantasy value in the coming weeks and months. And in my opinion, I don't see many positives outweighing the numerous negatives surrounding his game. He's coming off a back injury, he hasn't played an NHL game in months, the team in front of him is not used to or comfortable with him in net and he's considered rusty.

Short-Term Projection – Loses his first start and has to wait patiently for a second shot

Long-Term Projection – Does not have a positive or successful future in Philadelphia

BOBROVSKY – You couldn't ask for much more from a Russian rookie that literally exploded onto the scene in October. He was nowhere to be found on my Top-100 Prospects Rankings until June and he's already set to graduate somewhere in the teens or low 20's. As a result of his amazing play to start the season, there's no turning back now. The Flyers need to keep him in Philadelphia if they expect him to continue improving.

Of the three Flyers goalies, Bobrovsky currently faces the most internal and external pressure.

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He hears the pitter patter of Leighton's footsteps behind him. He has to continue learning the NHL game, adjusting to a smaller surface and dealing with all of the different elements that come from a cross-ocean journey.

When you look at the pros and cons in the same light as Leighton, it is the complete opposite situation. The organization has invested more money in Bobrovsky. Jeff Reese has invested more time over the past few weeks with him before and after practices. Peter Laviolette has been quoted as giving him plenty of positive praise. Bobrovsky has a tremendous work ethic, he's extremely mature for a 22-year-old and his work ethic has been a driving force in his successful campaign so far.

Be sure to read this insightful piece with quotes from Reese on [*Bobrovsky's current situation by Frank Seravalli*](#)

Bobrovsky's play tonight against Florida will be another page written in his story, but it's too late to send him back to Adirondack. He has created a reputation in the NHL. He's already writing his own book on NHL shooters, just as opposing teams are developing their scouting report on him. And I think all of these current elements in regards to his continued progression are positive signs.

At the end of the day, his mental toughness will pull him through this difficult situation. He's working hard, he's staying focused, and because of Boucher's solid play, he's getting rest and

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being challenged. This all leads to what I consider a slow and steady rise in long-term value. For the next 3-4 weeks, I expect Bobrovsky's fantasy value to fluctuate up and down just slightly. He'll post some wins, he'll post some losses, but you'll see a gradual incline when it comes to his technique, mechanics, positioning and rebound control.

Short-Term Projection – He'll compete with more energy and focus but his value will remain the same.

Long-Term Projection – This experience will only make him stronger and he'll remain with the Flyers.

BOUCHER – Could you imagine a coherent NHL head coach messing with a streak like the one Boucher is currently riding? Not a chance in hell. The veteran netminder has gone on a tear lately, posting a 6-0-1 record with a 1.66 goals-against average and a sparkling .943 save percentage. Those are numbers that, once again, come as a surprise for the casual fantasy manager.

At this point in his career, Boucher has taken the necessary steps to refine his game in order to be a legitimate fantasy value for the entire season. He's not only a tremendous asset in mentoring and cheering on Bobrovsky from the bench and in the locker room, but he brings stability and a high comfort level to his teammates and coaching staff. He's a necessary, valuable asset and moving forward he should be regarded as such.

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In regards to Philly's three-headed monster, Boucher is the goalie least influenced or affected by the situation. He's seen it all before, his confidence is not impacted and he won't change his routine or the way he plays due to Leighton being in the lineup. He can still perform at a high level if he sees fewer shots in practice and his silent leadership in the locker room will be counted upon as time goes on.

Steady as she goes, Boucher, steady as she goes.

Can you expect this winning streak to continue? It would be a little silly to expect his numbers to improve from where they are right now. But I don't see his execution weakening. He's motivated just as much as the other two goalies and he'll compete at the highest level possible. Therefore it's safe to say that his fantasy value will slightly decline due to natural circumstances of having such a hot streak on the line, but his value in regards to the team has improved.

Short-Term Projection – The winning streak will come to an end, but his compete level and focus will remain steady.

Long-Term Projection – Continues to play the 1B role with Bobrovsky all season long and sees time in the playoffs.

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In conclusion, a team in Philadelphia's current situation is a fairly easy read. The team, especially without Chris Pronger in the lineup, needs their dynamic tandem now more than ever. Boucher has responded to the call with a terrific streak that no coach in their right mind would mess with. Bobrovsky has done everything asked of him and then some and deserves to be rewarded with more opportunities when they should naturally be handed to him.

Leighton, as of today, will continue to remain the odd man out. In a world of what have you done for me lately, he has done nothing to warrant opportunities. He will get a chance to start a game in the near future, but unless he walks away with a stellar performance at the same time Boucher and Bobrovsky struggle, the window of opportunity will slam shut...possibly forever.

It is not easy to develop a winning tandem with a rookie and a veteran that play totally different styles. The Flyers have created something that few teams are able to do. They would be wise to leave it alone and let it be. Give Leighton a chance to play a game, but the time has come for him to move on. A very solid on and off-ice relationship has been established with Bobrovsky and Boucher as the team's tandem. The rest of the lineup, as well as the entire coaching staff, are familiar with these two goalies.

As you have come to learn from reading my analysis over the years, you know that chemistry is simply something a team does not mess with. Boucher and Bobrovsky will be fine, but don't expect much out of Leighton. The odds are greatly stacked against him. I'll be here to track the progress of all three goalies this week and if things start to change, we'll discuss it in the School of Block forums!