A goalie's performance is shaped as much by the audience as by the actual goaltender. Each and every game is scrutinized in relation (or in comparison) to the demands and expectations of the viewer. Goaltending, even on a basic level, is a very difficult position to analyze. Therefore the viewer's ability to understand the goalie's state of mind will always play a major role in how that goalie's performance, and thus their fantasy value and upside, is portrayed.

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For that reason alone, I stress three things on a continual basis in the School of Block. First of

all, watch your goalies as much as humanly possible. Secondly, pay attention to the mental aspects of the position. Finally, don't let stats fully dictate your decisions. Sure, many of my articles may not seem "fantasy relevant" in a direct manner. But if I'm teaching you about aspects that reveal your goalie's state of mind, it will surely have relevancy in your fantasy realm.

No doubt about it, the world of goalie analysis is filled with tons of mixed and misinformed messages. But the more you watch, the more you know. It's that simple. A goalie's state of mind is the essence of why they perform above expectations, or the reason why they are performing below expectations. So the more you understand their attitude, mannerisms and character, the better you will be at weeding out the misinformed messages and deceptive stats.

One deceptive goaltending situation that seems to happen at least once a season is the unfortunate plague of injuries that forces a team to rely on depth to survive. When the third, fourth or fifth-string goalie get thrown into a game that is clearly out of their league, it's that much tougher to analyze their potential and fantasy value. And if you can't watch the game from start to finish, you're left to learn from beat writers and journalists that usually don't understand the mental aspects of the position. They just tell the story for what it is, not *why* it is.

Enter the New York Islanders. They've had to rely on Rick DiPietro, Dwayne Roloson, Nathan Lawson, Kevin Poulin, Mikko Koskinen, and now Al Montoya, to win games. All six have done so, in some way shape or form, and therefore have impacted their short and long-term fantasy value.

Because of this situation – one in which four of the six goalies made their Isles or NHL debut over the last two months – I wanted to assess their future fantasy value, while also shedding light on the difficult situations they have had to deal with from a mental point of view. This should help you eliminate some of the mixed messages you might be hearing or reading about these goalies and better project their value in your own mind.

AL MONTOYA – The only thing a goalie in Montoya's situation wants is a couple of routine shots in order to settle the nerves and get comfortable. But when he relieved Koskinen in Sunday's game against Buffalo, he saw anything but that. In fact, he only faced one shot in over 15 minutes of play in the second period. That's a very difficult situation to deal with, so *be sure to read my scouting report on him* to get more insight on his performance.

So despite his issues with glove-side shots in yesterday's game, and despite giving up two weak goals on 14 shots, the only thing that matters is that he notched a win. From there, the nerves will settle, he'll have time to mentally prepare and therefore better adjust to the speed of NHL action. Because of this, I think he holds decent fantasy value for the rest of the season. I see him posting around a .915 save percentage and 2.50 to 2.75 goals-against average.

Long-term, Montoya should play well enough to warrant the Islanders signing him to another two-way contract or trading him to another team. Because he has legitimate skills and good size, he'll get the exposure needed to prove he can perform at the NHL level. I don't see his value soaring, but he's capable of winning games and being a quality NHL backup that can push a starter, depending on his team and his role. He'll be a restricted free-agent on July 1.

If you were to look at just his performance in the game against Buffalo, then look at his stats from his season in San Antonio, you might be led to believe he's a major underachiever and not capable of holding any kind of fantasy value. But once you understand the very difficult situation he's had to deal with (both in his game against Buffalo and playing behind Matt Climie this year), you should realize there's much more to his fantasy value than meets the eye.

MIKKO KOSKINEN – Similar to Montoya, Koskinen was tossed into a situation in which he had no time to mentally prepare for his first Islanders appearance. *The statistical results were not pretty*, but if you watched the game, you saw some strong traits in regards to his long-term fantasy value.

In his second game, the results and the stats were much more positive. *You heard me shower him with praise* in that regard, and you also witnessed a very successful shootout performance. It was a terrific bounce-back effort for a guy that was winless in eight AHL games in January. With the facts I presented in my scouting report, that display of mental toughness is one of the most important traits in recognizing his legitimate long-term value.

With Lawson finally returning from his knee injury today, Koskinen was sent back down to Bridgeport. In four starts, Mikko went 2-1-0 with a 4.33 goals-against average and a .873 save percentage. Those stats aren't anywhere close to reflecting the kind of potential he has. So leave them be and look at the facts. He has a huge frame and really good quickness to go with his size. He also has quality full-time goalie coaches (Sudsie Maharaj and Mike Dunham) molding and mentoring him every step of the way.

Most importantly (like Montoya did on Sunday), he battled through adversity and thrived. He displayed the ability to bounce back from a rough outing and win a close game. He has the attitude and work ethic needed to succeed in the NHL. And because of those elements, where he's placed in my *Top-100 Prospects Rankings* is an accurate reflection of what he's capable of bringing your fantasy team over the course of the next four to five years.

That being said, he still needs a lot of work in the AHL. It's unclear exactly what is in store for the Islanders' depth chart heading into next season, but I expect him to split time with Poulin and be much more successful, thus leading him to evolve and improve his value even more than he did in the last two months.

NATHAN LAWSON – At his age, the knee injury he suffered was a major blow to his short and long-term value. Not because of the physical toll, but because of his loss of exposure and opportunity. Since he was hurt, so much has happened in regards to Koskinen and Montoya. Now I expect him to play 40-percent of the games behind Montoya.

Overall, I think he's a good fit as a backup in the NHL, but not the kind that brings your fantasy team added value for this season or beyond. And if you're looking at two options for the rest of this season, one being Montoya and the other being Lawson, you're better off rolling with the one that was acquired for a purpose and is getting the looks in Montoya. On July 1, Lawson becomes an unrestricted free agent. I don't expect any teams to sign him right away.

KEVIN POULIN – Kevin's knee injury is a major blow, but only to his short-term value. In no way does it impact his long-term value. He's so early in his professional career that you can chalk up the injury to a learning experience and a battle with adversity. He'll probably come back from the injury physically stronger, since he'll have the summer to incorporate strength and conditioning in with his rehab.

Poulin is a tremendous goalie to own in keeper leagues. He has a lot of clout now, as well as great momentum and all of the technical assets you want in a young goalie. He was able to display his skill set and work ethic in January and February and posted awesome statistics during his recall. He finished up 4-2-1 with a 2.44 goals-against average and a .924 save percentage. Those are truly excellent numbers for a truly excellent prospect.

Expect Poulin to start next season in Bridgeport as the starter, with Koskinen backing him up. Having just two goalies will allow both goalies to be in a much more comfortable situation. That will lead to more consistency and a better development path for both goalies. His odds to become a full-time NHL goalie next year rely a lot on Montoya's play and whether or not the Islanders re-sign him to back up DiPietro.

RICK DIPIETRO – The more things change, the more things stay the same. He is, as we all know, a major fantasy risk. The best advice I can give fantasy managers is to only secure him if you have an "extra" spot lying around, or if your management philosophy includes rolling the dice.

Maybe the toughest part of this season was the fact that he never gained any substantial confidence this year. He currently has a 7-10-4 record with a 3.36 goals-against average and .890 save percentage. In fact, the only time he shone this season was in late-November.

How many times have I explained the importance of a goalie getting three straight starts, despite results, in order to allow them to obtain a rhythm? Well, only once this season did DiPietro start three games or more. And that third start resulted in a 29-save shutout over the Devils on Nov. 26. It was his only shutout of the season. The fourth consecutive start, however, was a wild 5-6 loss to the Rangers in which he allowed six goals on 26 shots. That shattered his momentum and things went south from there.

Unfortunately, I have no more insight unless I start to speculate. I don't know if he returns to the lineup this year. I don't know how his knees, hips or legs are feeling. I don't know what kind of off-season rehab he will need. But I'll certainly do my best to stay informed and make accurate projections for next season. Because he's certainly not going anywhere…but neither is his fantasy value. It is what it has always been, and might always be.