In last week's School of Block, I discussed different elements that make up a steady and reliable backup. Then I gave hints on which of those perfect backups would have the best fantasy value for one-year leagues. And when I looked out across the NHL goalie battlefield this morning, I saw three key fights ready to ignite when training camps begin in just one more month.

In St. Louis, Brian Elliott and Ben Bishop will clash to see who plays behind Jaroslav Halak. In Chicago, it's a full-blown boxing match between Ray Emery and Alex Salak. Finally, and maybe of most importance to fantasy managers, there's chaos to contemplate in terms of who backs up Ilya Bryzgalov in Philly.

Before I get started on breaking down the battles, however, I wanted to introduce you to a very exciting project I published today called the *Periodic Table of Goaltending Elements* . This

infographic is a visual representation of how I scout and evaluate a goaltender during a game. I am revealing 2-3 elements each day as a way to celebrate the return of hockey, so feel free to follow along!

ELLIOTT VS. BISHOP

Let's start with the battle between two Blues goalies in Bishop and Elliott. I feel that Elliott has the experience and skills needed to win the job. More important to the battle, however, is the fact that his back has been against the wall many times before at the NHL level. It's a far cry from the zero times Bishop has been in this type of situation, so I think overall NHL experience is a major tipping point.

Not only that, but both goalies are at totally different stages of development. Elliott is, at the very least, a legit backup. But Bishop is still at a stage where he's taking his skills to the next level and improving in areas such as rebound control, reading plays and tracking pucks through traffic. Elliott could stand to improve a bit in those areas as well, but he has already proved he can play extremely well.

But Elliott is coming off an abysmal season, one that saw him go 13-19-8 with a 3.19 goals-against average and .894 save percentage in Ottawa, then 2-8-1 with a 3.83 GAA and .891 SP% in Colorado. Even though those stats don't even come close to reflecting what Elliott is truly capable of doing, I still don't see him having much fantasy value behind Halak. So by

playing sporadically behind a much more reliable and consistent Halak this season, Elliott will probably post a GAA just below 2.90 and right around a .905 SP%.

Overall, I feel Elliott will raise his game high enough in camp to win the job, whereas the odds are lower that Bishop plays beyond expectations and the Blues keep him in St. Louis. But regardless of who wins, neither one's fantasy value will really be worth owning.

SALAK VS. EMERY

Everyone knows I'm a big fan of Salak's skills, but even I can't go against Emery in this matchup. The Blackhawks, knowing they lack an experienced backup, clearly invited Emery to try out for a reason; they want a "for sure" thing, not a "most likely" thing. In wise fashion, not signing Emery until he proves he can play like he did in Anaheim forces both goalies to truly earn and win the backup role.

This battle is significant because Corey Crawford, for as good as he was last season, still has to prove he can handle the pressure of being a starter all season long. Many goalies ultimately struggle under this weight, so odds are good that whoever backs him up will have a significant fantasy impact. It doesn't help that Joel Quenneville is his coach, either.

Overall, I feel that, if healthy, Emery's aggressive presence will be the tipping point in landing him another one-year contract. Furthermore, he fits the mold of last week's lesson on the perfect backup, so he could handle the starting role if Crawford succumbs to the sophomore jinx. You can't say the same for Salak, so Emery's fantasy value is more reliable compared to Salak's risky status.

It's never easy to predict the fantasy value for a goalie that still has to earn a contract, but I like his odds to not only stay healthy through camp, but to have a successful season. Manage the risk that comes with potentially drafting someone like him, but do it knowing that he is capable of matching his performance in Anaheim. He could easily be the starter in Chicago by the end of the season.

BOBROVSKY VS. LEIGHTON

In terms of Bryzgalov's backup, I don't feel that Sergei Bobrovsky is the best fit for the team. He's still very much a raw-skilled talent and has a lot to learn about positioning, angles, durability and reading plays effectively, especially when the puck is behind his net.

In regards to the team, Michael Leighton is the best fit for the backup role. Not only has he been successful coming off the bench for the Flyers on numerous occasions in the past, he has great

size and a calm, confident demeanor. He also makes a much better fit for a 20-game workload compared to Bobrovsky, who needs to play as much as possible in order to keep improving.

But the crux of this battle includes Bobrovsky having to clear waivers in order to be sent down. This dynamic is only in play if he starts the season in Philadelphia, so if he makes the team out of camp, odds are good he's there for the whole year. The other force in play here is the obvious sour taste in the organization's mouth in terms of Leighton not fully disclosing some previous injuries.

I also have to make note of Jason Bacashihua, a goalie who I feel will impress a lot of Flyers fans and scouts during training camp. I know first-hand from his two stints in the Avalanche organization that he is underrated in both skills and potential. And *here's a little video evidence* .

Keep in mind this is his first or second time skating in brand new pads. He's definitely not in game shape, but you get the idea. He has been buried for the past four seasons in Hershey and Lake Erie, but I know he can play. And now that he's in a totally chaotic situation in terms of the team's goaltending, you never know what could happen.

Nobody expects him to make the team out of camp, but I bet he ends up becoming the new #3 when the Flyers ultimately move Leighton. I just feel like the clock has been ticking faster over the past few weeks and his time there is almost at an end. Otherwise the Flyers wouldn't have

acquired Bacashihua.

So even though Leighton is the better fit to be Bryzgalov's backup, I foresee the Flyers keeping Bobrovsky, and Bacashihua, at some point, takes over as the new starter in Adirondack. But knowing that Bobrovsky will most likely be the backup, I don't expect him to have nearly the type of success he had last season. And the main reason for that is because he simply won't play enough.

Bobrovsky makes a good fit if you don't need him to play a lot of games, as I do feel he will compete just fine. But it's not really the appropriate path he needs to take to really set himself up for success in future seasons.

In terms of projecting the fantasy value for these backups in terms of your own leagues, remember that the goalie that best fits the mold of the perfect backup becomes the more reliable choice. So with that in mind, I think the only guy worth fighting for in your fantasy draft is Emery. And even he will always carry the weight of having legitimate injury concerns.