Being a solid fantasy goalie manager stems from your ability to understand and evaluate three different elements: circumstance, situation and statistical probability. Goaltending is a game of inches both on and off the ice, yet things happen so fast that you have to make informed decisions even faster when goalie news hits the almighty interwebs.

That's especially true during and following your league's draft. Someone snags a goalie you wanted? Everything changes. All of a sudden you're re-strategizing and playing out a myriad of different situations in your head. But you have to focus on what you can control – goalies that are still available – and evaluate your choices in an informed and quick manner. It's not an easy thing to do.

When October finally hits, 60 goaltenders will be on a mission to meet certain fantasy expectations. But since they're all prone to getting picked off by different forms of unfortunate, unforeseen circumstances, many will fail. For those that are afflicted, they will emit either a positive or negative charge on the goalies around them, thus potentially changing the state of your specific fantasy team's situation.

Simply put, when something happens to a goalie, it might change your approach and shift your original expectations. You either choose to act on the change, or you play through it. Either way, when it happens, you have to not only recognize it, but be ready for it. This seems like a simple formula on the surface, but you can imagine just how many factors come into play. It's an unstable, chaotic, maddening world, which is the precise reason why consistent fantasy performers like Henrik Lundqvist or Carey Price are so valuable.

Knowing this, the worst mistake you could possibly make on draft day is to not expect the unexpected. You need to have a plan.

Now I'm not one to nag, but if you don't already have some predictions in place for who might be this year's James Reimer or Sergei Bobrovsky, you're slacking. Need to catch up? Ask yourself exactly what NHL teams have the most unstable goalie situations right now. What kind of impact will certain guys have if injuries hit? More importantly, when might it happen, and how will you act (if you need to)?

Well, hopefully after seeing how I evaluate two unstable situations and came up with two "not-so-bold" predictions, you will be able to make better decisions on your own. Just remember the laws of circumstance and situation and you'll be more successful than ever before with your goalies!

I'd also like to finish my intro by pointing you to *a couple of choice tweets* by Mike McKenna, *who knows all about these laws*
. I hope he can help further reinforce some of the main things I've tried to teach fantasy managers about goaltending over the past three years.

SEE YA SOON, CEDRICK…?

No NHL goaltending tandem has more to prove than the new netminders in Colorado. Will Semyon Varlamov be durable on a team defense that was (in my opinion) the league's worst last year? How will he continue to develop and refine without a goalie coach that speaks Russian? How will J-S Giguere handle his dehydration and tender groin issues in such extreme altitudes? More importantly, how will he perform without his mentor Francois Allaire around?

Those are significant questions that are lurking in my hometown, and I have no confidence-building answers for you. It may seem impossible that Varlamov will miss a significant amount of time again this season, but it's not out of the question. There's no way of knowing for sure until training camp gets here.

If you want to draft Varlamov, first replay what happened in Toronto last year. It wasn't so much that Giguere's injuries opened the door for Reimer, but it was another circumstance - the inconsistent play of Jonas Gustavsson - that truly set the stage for Reimer to shine.

Now apply that situation to Colorado and gauge how confident you are in one of two things happening. One, Varlamov gets hurt and J-S Giguere plays well enough to keep Cedrick Desjardins on the bench. Or two, Giguere gets hurt and Varlamov is consistent and durable enough to keep Desjardins on the bench. What do you feel like the odds of us seeing Desjardins this season?

For me personally, I feel like it's only a matter of time before one of the Avs' two goalies struggles, and it's only a matter of time before Desjardins continues what he started back in January with the Lightning. Those two wins against the Canadiens and Rangers proved he's capable of being a full-time NHL goaltender.

So if Desjardins does get a chance to play in Colorado, he will compete hard and play well. I've even gone so far to already say that he will have the best goalie performance during Avalanche training camp, maybe even in the pre-season as well.

I'll be honest. This is the first time since I've covered the team (2005-06) that I feel like they have three solid goalies. But all of them are coming off significant injuries last season. So I advise you to treat this situation like a three-headed monster. You're looking at two NHL goalies that very few people expect to stay healthy all year long and an AHL All-Star just waiting for his chance. Proceed with caution.

Bold Prediction: Desjardins plays a role in putting together what could very well be a fight for the 8th spot in the West, and he has a fairly significant fantasy impact during one month of the regular season…quite possibly even the first one.

WHAT'S GOING ON IN HILLER'S BRAIN?

Let me start by saying that I love everything about Jonas Hiller. He's truly an elite goaltender and it was never difficult to project his crazy high upside. He's always had the talent and the potential, and I love how he combines blocking-style saves with reaction-style saves to make a perfect hybrid Swiss beast. He's simply a sick goalie to watch, especially when he's on.

But I have absolutely no idea what to expect in terms of his durability this season. I'm just like you, weighing the odds of him not only being physically capable of playing 60 games this year, but that he's being honest when he says he's fine. I'm no doctor, but I was still correct when I

said he would feel better after staying off the ice for more than a few weeks.

An NHL season is a taxing, erosive process that wears a workhorse starter down to the nub. And every goalie is victim to different types of injuries.

Just ask Jaroslav Halak or Ryan Miller how hard it is to play more than 60 games. I'm sure they'll both have some insight on that whole situation, especially Miller. And as he proved last season, some situations turn goalies into ticking time bombs. But that's how Jhonas Enroth, who compiled a 9-2-2 record and a .907 save percentage in 14 games, was able to diffuse the Miller time bomb for the Sabres.

When looking at how Miller faded down the stretch due to pucks to the head, then the Sabres' lack of reliability on Patrick Lalime, my instincts kick in. A similar situation could arise in Anaheim where Hiller fades down the stretch and Dan Ellis is too rusty to compete at the level the Ducks need. He would play for sure, but I would enter a draft knowing the Ducks might need a solid Hiller time bomb diffuser named Jeff Deslauriers.

I know, I know. After what happened last September, you probably think I'm crazy for bringing him up again. I admit it, I was the first guy drinking the JDD kool-aid last year, and I was wrong. But even though it was Devan Dubnyk who stole the backup role and thrived last season behind Nikolai Khabibulin, it doesn't take away the fact that Deslauriers is still a solid goaltender.

More importantly, his situation in Anaheim is completely different from Edmonton. First of all, JDD is signed for two years and the second year is a friendly one-way option. Secondly, he was signed before Anaheim knew Hiller was 100-percent healthy, yet after Iiro Tarkki was signed. So what does that say about their expectations for both goalies? I have to believe the Ducks regard Deslauriers as someone who has the capability to do what Ray Emery did last season; get the job done and spark a surge.

Finally, look at the circumstance with Ducks goalie coach Pete Peeters, who worked with Deslauriers in Edmonton. Maybe Peeters felt like there was some unfinished business with JDD, who knows. Either way, they're working together again and Deslauriers has another chance. I'm not saying it's bound to happen, but the deck has been re-shuffled and he's in a different situation. So I'll stick to my guns, trust my instincts and say he'll probably play really well in a few games for the Ducks this year.

Bold Prediction: Deslauriers plays well in Syracuse despite being on a weaker team and goes 3-1-0 for the Ducks at a random point in the season, posting a .920 save percentage or above. He might even snag a shutout.

OTHER PREDICTIONS TO PONDER

What makes goalie situational analysis so important is the fact that, just by exercising your mind and projecting different outcomes with different goalies, your mindset and overall confidence is high heading into live drafts.

We all know what it's like to enter a draft totally unprepared. So do what I do. Create a list for each NHL team that maps out what might happen if havoc and chaos (or injuries) hit. Then choose one or two that make the most sense in your mind and roll with it. Believe me, your work will pay off sooner or later!

With other predictions, I wouldn't forget about Gustavsson in Toronto. For as bad as he was last year, he's still a quality talent and not far from putting all the pieces together. Also keep Evgeni Nabokov in mind. He's committed to the Islanders, so the odds are much better that he could produce some fantasy value. The point is, sooner rather than later, he will probably play in another NHL game.

The list goes on and on. To be honest, you could find an argument for every team. What about Mathieu Garon in Tampa Bay? Did you see their schedule in October? Their first two games are a back-to-back set. What if Dwayne Roloson struggles, then Garon plays lights out the following night? Isn't that what happened with Tuukka Rask and Tim Thomas in the first two games against Phoenix last year?

Many of these will be considered as “bold” predictions by others, but to you they shouldn’t. For, unlike many of your opponents, you actually took the time to think things through, and you’ve prepared a plan in case you need it. You have, in essence, accomplished one of the most important tasks of the successful fantasy hockey manager – you have executed risk management.