

Top-10 Fantasy Goalies

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 26 September 2011 16:08 - Last Updated Wednesday, 28 September 2011 09:13



Before I begin, allow me to recite the Golden Rule of fantasy goalie rankings. “Explain the format, lay out the parameters and clearly state the stipulations that create every ranking.” With that in mind, this year’s Top-10 Fantasy Goalies ranking for one-year leagues is focused on volume. It includes goalies that I feel will not only play a ton of games and see tons of shots, but also make a high percentage of saves and have the best odds of playing consistently well from start to finish.

Understanding the value a ranking like this will have for many of you, I made sure to eliminate any “risky” picks and went with more of a surefire list. Last season was clearly an atrocity in terms of me having Tuukka Rask ranked first, and I have no problem admitting that.

I thought it was a risk worth taking, but obviously Tim Thomas had other plans.

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So I'll leave you with this thought: When you look at last season's unexpected surprises, like Kari Lehtonen's 69 games played, or James Reimer's second-half breakout, or Michal Neuvirth's stellar rookie season, remember that anything can happen at any given moment and be prepared for chaos to happen again this season. It has already transpired with the injuries to Mark Dekanich, Antero Niittymaki and now Scott Clemmensen!

10. Jonas Hiller: [*After watching him stop all 21 shots he faced in two periods*](#) on Saturday night, I can safely say he's well on his way to reclaiming the rhythm he had in the first half of last season. There are serious question marks on Anaheim's blueline, but other than that, you can't discredit Hiller's ability to stop the puck. Last season he won 26 games in 49 appearances and posted a .924 SP%, so projecting similar success over the course of 65-70 games means he could win close to 35. But he's listed as 10th overall due to the fact that a couple of hard shots to the noggin could force him to take a few games off for precautionary measures.

9. Jonathan Quick: If Quick had any other backup besides Jonathan Bernier, he'd be ranked much higher on this list. But Terry Murray has stated numerous times that Bernier will get more looks, so I have to temper the 35 wins in 61 games Quick played last season. The Kings have improved their team on offense, but what type of impact will Drew Doughty's contract issues have in the defensive end and in the locker room? Regardless of external influences, internally speaking, whenever Bernier seems to push Quick for starts this year, I think Quick has the skill and intensity to push back even harder.

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8. Roberto Luongo: When we talked about goalies under the most pressure to win last season, it was clearly Carey Price. This season, there's no mistaking the type of mental pressure Luongo will face to take Vancouver back to the Stanley Cup Finals. Since I also consider this to be the Cory Schneider showcase season, it won't be a cakewalk for Luongo. His workload will be lighter, making him less valuable overall. I also don't see him posting under a 2.25 GAA this season or posting more than 33 or 34 wins, either.

7. Carey Price: Last season's leader in wins (38) was also 2nd overall in total shots faced (2,147), making him the most valuable goalie to own last season. This year, despite the fact that most situational elements have maintained the status quo, there's still adjustments to be made. He's switching from Vaughn to Reebok pads, which is more of an adjustment than you think, and he has a new backup in Peter Budaj. More importantly, Price is expected to not only win 38 games again, but continue to improve his game both mentally and technically. That's quite a tall order for a goalie that is still so young and already so darn good.

6. Ilya Bryzgalov: Bryzgalov's final regular season in Phoenix was admirable. He was 3rd in shots faced (2,125) and posted 36 wins in 68 games. He notched a 2.48 GAA, a .921 SP% and seven shutouts on a team that thrives defensively but struggles on offense. With such a major shift in atmosphere, Bryzgalov will have to make a considerable mental alteration in order to post similar numbers in Philly. A goalie known for being complacent at the wrong times, Ilya will have to block out the media spotlight and quickly rebound from bad games. Sergei Bobrovsky will earn starts and the fans will demand perfection every single night. It's not going to be a cakewalk.

5. Marc-Andre Fleury: The type of nightmare Fleury experienced last October never really goes away. But the true merit of an elite goaltender is how they can manipulate past failures

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into future success. More mentally prepared than ever before, Fleury is primed to have an excellent regular season. He'll look quieter in the crease and act smarter both on and off the ice. Even with last season's early struggles, Fleury still won 36 games, posted a 2.32 GAA and was 13th in shots faced (1,742). Project a slightly higher level of success due to the team's health (Malkin and Crosby) and a much steadier start, and Fleury will have one of the better fantasy values out there.

4. Cam Ward: Last season, Ward logged more minutes than any other NHL goalie (4,317:35). He was timely, stayed healthy and was one of the most consistent goalies in the league. But even though he was such a solid fantasy value, Carolina still didn't make the playoffs. As a result, Ward will most likely be limited to 65 games, but I think that will make him even more valuable in terms of his overall SP% and GAA. It blows my mind that I still have to mention that he's an elite goaltender, but that's kind of his shtick. He gets the job done quietly and he stays totally focused on the task at hand – winning hockey games.

3. Pekka Rinne: One of the most electric goaltenders in the NHL is primed to earn even more Vezina Trophy votes this season. Similar to when Fleury broke out as a true elite star, the more Rinne plays, the more he understands how to stop pucks in an economical and consistent manner. I think that heightened sense of awareness will go a long way in eliminating some of the nagging injuries he suffered last season, thus making him just slightly more durable and more valuable. As good as he was last season, he can still be so much better in terms of controlling his movements and emotions, so I expect Pekka to be another Top-3 goalie this year.

2. Ryan Miller: Sabres owner Terry Pegula invested close to \$10 million in order to improve the team's workspace and surroundings. Combined with the addition of Christian Ehrhoff and Ville Leino, the team will be way more dynamic in terms of overall performance. Miller was already a fairly steady goalie last season with 34 wins in 66 games (he was also 6th overall in shots faced

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with 1,964). But take away the concussion issues that plagued him at the end of last season, then add in the healthy competition from Jhonas Enroth and you have one of the nicest situations for an elite NHL goalie heading into the season. Miller could probably win 40 games this year.

1. Henrik Lundqvist: Whenever I watched Lundqvist last season, I was always waiting for that one bone-headed turnover, that one unlucky bounce or that one crucial odd-man rush that he really had no chance of stopping. This season, the Rangers will be more dedicated to team defense and generate more scoring thanks to the addition of Brad Richards. So instead of Henrik being on the wrong side of a bunch of one-goal losses, I sense that he could be on the right side of them this year. Due to his skills, his positioning and his confidence, I think he has the best chance at winning 40 games, while still facing a ton of shots and playing in close to 70 games.

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+ [Scott Clemmensen had minor knee surgery today](#) and is expected to miss a month of action. Although the report lists **Jacob**

Markstrom

as the first potential backup, I feel that the Panthers would rather have him hone his game in the AHL, so I expect

Tyler Plante

to back up

Jose Theodore

until Clemmensen returns.

+ **Thomas Greiss** has looked really good in the preseason so far. I watched his game against Vancouver last night and I think he'll post good numbers as **Antti Niemi's** backup while

Antero Niittymaki

is out for the next 12 weeks. He may have really struggled in Sweden last season, but everything changes with such a drastic shift in situation.

+ Don't be fooled by **J-S Giguere's** 3-0 shutout over the Stars last night. I scouted the game live, and while he made some nice saves, he was rarely tested by an AHL-laden opponent. But he is healthy, and that's huge for this team. He's also a great communicator on the ice, which should make all of his new blueliners more efficient in their own zone.