It's quite simple, really. Jonas Hiller and Ryan Miller, two of my Top-10 Fantasy Goalies, have been killing poolies this past week. Miller was lit up for three goals in less than ten minutes last night against the Flyers, while Hiller suffered a meltdown against the Capitals on Tuesday in a 5-4 OT loss. Were these just ghastly "off nights" for the elite goalies, or were these games a sign of something more foreboding?

In Miller's case, I wouldn't freak out, or think about dropping him, or do anything brash. He will be fine, he's on a strong team, and he's traditionally a slow starter. And yes, I'll even back it up with some stats. Last October, Miller went 3-5-2 with a .903 save percentage and 2.71 GAA. In November, he turned it around and went 4-2-0 in six games with a .929 SP% and 2.29 GAA. But that was then, and this is now.

Since we know Miller bounced back statistically last year, what leads us to believe he'll do the same this November? For one, he's facing healthy competition for the first time in years in Jhonas Enroth. That might work against him in terms of total playing time, but Miller knows he can't get away with any more lazy or inattentive practices and games.

Secondly, the team in front of him is stronger as a whole. There's always an adjustment period with new defensemen (Regher and Ehrhoff), something that may have played a role in October's tough losses. The Sabres could stand to get more production from Ville Leino as well, but again, there's an adjustment to make in terms of his hefty contract. I don't mean it to be an excuse, but these are reasons why one shouldn't panic when it comes to Miller's fantasy value.

If Miller doesn't play a motivated game on Friday (or Saturday in Ottawa) and come up with a big performance for his inconsistent Sabres, then fans might start to look at last season's concussion as a potential lingering issue. Others will start to wonder if Enroth could push Miller for a bigger role with the team. But if you don't believe me when I say this is all premature hearsay, read the *daily debate between Pierre LeBrun and Craig Custance on the issue* .

I will say that I found it interesting how Miller said the two goals over his left shoulder were good shots. They certainly were, but that doesn't mean, especially from those angle, they shouldn't be stopped. Elite goalies make those saves and mentally tough goalies take accountability. Of course they were good shots – this is the NHL. The truth is, Miller wasn't mentally prepared when the puck dropped and he was frustrated after the first goal beat him, and it showed in his

body language. A Bronx cheer from the fans made things worse, and he just had a crappy night. It is what it is.

I only bring this up because there's simply no way a goalie of Miller's caliber can lack confidence for more than one or two more games. All he needs is a timely save or some early momentum-shifting saves, and he'll be rolling again. To be honest, a .922 SP% and 2.49 GAA with a shutout is not that bad for October. The losing streak certainly stings, but his play could be way, way worse. So just hang tight and stick it out, or just bench him for a game or two until that rhythm and swagger comes soaring back!

THE WEEKLY WARRIOR

Mike Smith: Watching Smitty's 39-save win (4-1) over the Avalanche last night was all the proof I needed to know that he'll continue to thrive in a Coyotes uniform. I could point out all the obvious factors leading to his fantasy success, like the defensive-minded system and the hidden potential, but that's not giving him the credit he deserves. What makes Smith such a good fit has a lot to do with the coaching he gets from Sean Burke. *Check out the bottom part of this article by Jim Gintonio*, where Smith mentions how much he has learned in a short amount of time. So not only is Smith confident and comfortable, but he's playing with a ton of consistency and getting even more refined. He's now 5-2-2 with a .927 SP% and 2.40 GAA, stats I expect to hold firm for what could be a 60-62 game workload.

THE HIDDEN NINJA

Jhonas Enroth: The smallest goalie in the NHL (5-foot-10) is already one of the league's most effective backups. In three appearances, Enroth is 2-0-0 with a 1.39 GAA and .955 SP%, stopping 85-of-89 shots. I have been touting him as a hidden gem for poolies due to Buffalo's numerous back-to-back games this year, so expect to see him on Saturday night in Ottawa. In fact, if you can snag him as your #3 goalie, git er' done. The Sabres play back-to-back games every weekend in November, and three of four weekends in December. This isn't to say I expect Miller to keep struggling, but Enroth has proved he deserves to start one of those two games every weekend. His value is already strong in terms of potential, but now he'll have more chances to produce.

THE UNDERACHIEVER

Jonas Hiller: This brings us to Hiller, where *all the focus is on his Movember mask right now* . Even though it builds team camaraderie, the media buzz is distracting Hiller from playing with a clear mind. Last October, Hiller went just 3-5-1 with a 3.13 GAA and .916 SP%. Through today, Hiller is just 4-4-2 with a 2.80 GAA, but a meager .899 SP%. That sub-.900 SP% is very concerning, but you have to look at his game-by-game performance to realize the number is a bit deceptive. I've watched most of Hiller's games, and I know he was way more focused during a three-game win streak from Oct. 8-16. But he only has one win since then, so clearly he's struggling with different areas of his game. No more excuses, though - he has to bounce back in a big way. Similar to Miller, Jonas is an elite talent that has a history of going through weak slides, especially early in the season. He'll bounce back, but I think overall his numbers are going to end up being weaker than last year, especially in the SP% category.

THOUGHTS ON RINNE'S NEW DEAL

Pekka Rinne's new seven-year, $49 million contract is a lot of money for a lot of goalie. I'm surprised they invested in him for seven years, especially when Mitch Korn is the wizard at developing European prospects. I'd expect Anders Lindback to be moved in one more year, as he'll continue to improve just like Rinne did a few years ago. Jeremy Smith will be the next Predators backup, while Atte Engren and Magnus Hellberg will continue to develop. Chet Pickard's long-term value is crushed by this deal, but he's better off in a different organization at this point anyways.

I'll leave you with this Audio Report and final thought : part of why an NHL team pays a full-time goalie coach is to develop prospects so that they don't have to sign behemoth contracts like this. Korn is no ordinary goalie coach – he's the king. I don't expect Lindback or Hellberg to be a Rinne 2.0, but they certainly have the potential. This deal, regardless of how it works out, changes the goaltending methodology that has been successful for so many years.

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