

Ward: From Meltdown to Rebound

Written by Justin Goldman

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The Hurricanes have suffered a total core meltdown in November. The defense is deplorable, Eric Staal is now a league-worst -18, and Cam Ward is just 2-6 with a 4.34 goals-against average and .878 save percentage this month. Poolies know he's too valuable to drop; he's currently projected to play 76-78 games. He's also an elite talent, so we all know he could turn things around on his own, or be a major beneficiary of any potential coaching staff shakeup.

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Because of this, it's really easy for me to say "be patient" since he's widely regarded as a Top-10 fantasy goalie. Knowing it's only a matter of when, not if, I found some large-scale stats to back up Ward's inevitable rebound.

In his career, Ward's worst month is November; he's just 27-27-3 with a 3.09 GAA and .897 SP%. In no other month of the season does he post below a .900 SP% or above a 3.00 GAA. In December, he rebounds with a 2.75 GAA and .909 SP%, and those numbers slightly improve in January. There's a slight decrease in February, but Ward catches fire in March, where he holds a 35-11-4 lifetime record, with a 2.24 GAA and .924 SP%.

Furthermore, you can look at his home and road splits to help determine when the rebound might occur. At the RBC Center, Ward is 105-67-17 with a 2.71 GAA and .906 SP%. On the road, Ward is only 76-70-18 with a 2.82 GAA and .912 SP%. Coincidentally, Ward's only two wins this month have come at home, stopping 65 of 70 total shots faced.

Knowing that Ward is the type of talent that plays big when the games are big, poolies are praying he can locate his March "playoff push" mindset and duplicate it over the next few games. Fortunately, [*that could be happening right now as Carolina prepares to host Buffalo on Friday*](#), then Toronto on Sunday. Buffalo is coming off a loss to the Devils, and expected starter Jhonas Enroth was pulled in the third period of his first loss of the season.

From a technical standpoint, the only incongruence I notice in his game has to do with

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frustration and footwork. Ward is the type of goalie that always appears calm and economical in net. He moves less due to his elite positioning, he stays big and square to the shooter, and rarely gets caught moving when the shot is taken.

Over the past few weeks, I notice Ward is not as “set and ready” as usual. He’s sliding through his angles, pushing through his destination points, and moving a lot more than usual. This is due to a number of things, including a lack of confidence in – and support from – his defensemen, a lack of focus due to frustration and the internal pressure to win. Ultimately, it’s a combination of numerous mental and technical things all weighing on him at once.

My other main concern includes the volume of quality scoring chances he’s facing, combined with a trending workload that is once again way too high, potentially the highest in the NHL.

At the end of the day, poolies should recognize that Ward’s rebound is still not a guarantee right now, but inevitable in the long run. The team in front of him is making it nearly impossible to come up with a win, but he still expects to play like he did against Pittsburgh (37 saves on 40 shots in a 5-3 win), so that’s where his frustrations lie.

Frustrations and rough stretches are a part of hockey, even for the elite. I have no doubt in my mind Ward will find a way to revive the statistical trends we’ve seen over the course of his career and rebound over the next few weeks.

THE WEEKLY WARRIOR

Henrik Lundqvist: The King has been ruling over them all in November with five straight wins, a 1.78 GAA and .941 SP%. His stats are mind-blowing when he actually gets goal support, so I'm feeling good about ranking him #1 in my Top-10 Fantasy Goalies list back in early-October. I didn't like one of the goals the Islanders scored on him off the glove, so he knows he has to be better in Montreal on Saturday. It's also worth noting that he doesn't have good numbers against the Habs in his career, going just 12-8-2 with a 2.95 GAA and .896 SP% lifetime.

THE HIDDEN NINJA

Scott Clemmensen: With an easy 25-save shutout against the Stars in his season debut, Clemmensen has put himself in position to be a fantasy sleeper. Yes, Jose Theodore is doing an awesome job carrying the starter's role on a vastly improved team. But in a season full of peaks and valleys, when Theodore hits the next rough patch, Scott will thrive by earning more starts from Kevin Dineen. Furthermore, Florida has a tough schedule over the next 10 days, facing the Blues, Penguins, Devils, and Rangers, then a home-and-home with Tampa Bay. Theodore will be under pressure to maintain his high level of play, while Clemmensen is sitting there in prime pouncing mode. I projected an even split in games played for this tandem back in Dobber's Fantasy Guide, and I'm sticking by that.

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