Ilya Bryzgalov, Ilya Bryzgalov, everyone's talking about Ilya Bryzgalov. The world's favorite character on HBO's hit show 24/7 is giving us plenty to laugh about, and for good reason. His quips on tigers and outlook on life and the universe are a perfect example of what makes goalies so dynamic. I've seen the, "Bryzgalov is proof that all goalies are crazy…" line more in the past three weeks than I can handle, and I was just in Costa Rica for seven days.

It is my contention and opinion, however, that the show is negatively affecting his game right now, which is an issue fantasy managers need to understand. I feel his inflating ego is distracting him from playing with a clear and focused mind, mainly because way too much of the spotlight is shining in his direction.

And the brighter the light shines on a goalie in Bryzgalov's current situation, the darker the shadow.

Since the first episode of 24/7 aired on Dec. 14, Bryzgalov has gone 0-3-1, allowing 16 goals on 87 shots, which equals a brutal .816 save percentage. As he has shown over the past few seasons, when his rhythm is off, he's really bad. Even a blind man can see that he's way too passive, inattentive, unsure of his positioning, and lacking the focus to make early saves or the timely saves. And that's a pretty good reflection of his game over the past two weeks.

It is not traditional fantasy analysis to say a goalie's ego is the root of his current struggles, but it is because most analysts fail to realize the importance of the mental element that it is considered untraditional. But you all know me by now, and you all know I personally won't buy in to the fact that the reason he's so bad right now is another one of those scary Bryzgalov weak streaks.

At the start of the season, I attributed his struggles to the fact that he was getting acclimated to a new team, a new conference, new pressures, and new surroundings. That was valid. That was fair.

But in the middle of December, especially considering how well he played leading up to Dec. 14, getting acclimated is no longer an excuse. That ship sailed way back in November, so there is absolutely no excuse for his struggles right now. I won't even take the loss of Chris Pronger as an excuse. Elite goalies know how to step up their game when a top player goes down, and Bryzgalov already had to play without Pronger once before.

All of the statistical analysis you need to evaluate Bryzgalov's current struggles can be found in *this post by Broad Street Hockey*
. There are many fantasy tidbits to be extrapolated from the graphs included, and they'll help you draw your own conclusions. I've done this for myself, and it didn't really sway me. I firmly believe that the cameras, the buzz from the media, and the sheer fandom he's getting right now is distracting him straight up, plain and simple.

Moving forward, the true invariable here is Sergei Bobrovsky. He's starting tonight's final Winter Classic tune-up game against the Penguins – a team he holds a 3-1-1 personal record against, along with a 2.17 goals-against average and .926 SP%. If he plays well tonight, Peter Laviolette will have to answer numerous questions from the media on who will start in the Winter Classic, and the answer may not come so easily.

I'm sure Bryzgalov will start on Jan. 2, but I still feel that he's likely to struggle for another 7-10 days due to the distractions caused by 24/7. But once the cameras are finally out of the way and his day-to-day routine gets back to normal, his full focus on stopping pucks will return. Then it will only be a matter of time (making the right saves at the right time) before his game gets back on track.

Until then, take a good look at Bryzgalov's current situation. Realize that a goalie's ego, and how they handle being the center of attention and the talk of the town, plays a major role in how they are able to focus on stopping pucks.

Time for More Tuukka

Tuukka Rask is back at the top of the goalie stats mountain, right where he belongs. I wish this had happened last year, when I ranked him #1 in my Top-10 Fantasy Goalies ranking (one-year leagues). Oh well, it's a moot point now, because he's being touted by analysts as something I knew he would be for the past three years; *one of the finest young goalies in the world* . Everything about his game screams "elite" and it's more obvious now than ever before.

I think Rask could play more than half of Boston's games over the next two months. Why? He's a restricted free agent this summer, and he's playing well enough for Claude Julien to keep riding him. Upper management needs to see Rask play a larger body of work in order to evaluate his future with the organization, and the only way to do that is to give him games right now, while he's hot.

Also, it is important for fantasy managers to realize that Tim Thomas is a constant. His game's not going to fall off the face of the earth, and this additional rest is way more valuable for him and the Bruins down the stretch, as they'll hope to have both goalies rolling when the playoffs begin.

Reimer Entering Sophomore Slump?

I have stated many times that numerous elements of James Reimer's technique and style need more work. After his rough outing against Florida last week, my notion continues to be reinforced. Tonight's game against the Hurricanes will mark his fifth straight start, and the pressure will start to rise as the fans and media expect him to play like he did last January. For statistical analysis, *check out how his numbers would look* if Toronto wasn't so terrible on the PK.

As the expectations rise, it becomes tougher to focus, and to play as a dynamic entity. As I explained with Corey Crawford, *losing the dynamic entity label is something no sophomore goalie can escape* , and only few have the skills and the will to battle through it. Therefore I feel the next 7-10 days are paramount in terms of understanding where Reimer's true fantasy value lies for the second half of the season. This could be his stretch of the sophomore slump.

Heading into tonight's game, *Leafs reporter Jonas Seigel points out* that Reimer is a perfect 3-0-0 against Carolina, with a .66 GAA and .976 SP%. But on the road, he's just 1-3-0 with a 4.26 GAA and .851 SP%. So what type of Reimer will we see tonight? Furthermore, if he does stay perfect against Carolina, will the Leafs win because of his effort, or despite one or two weak goals?

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