

First Impressions are Fleeting

Written by Justin Goldman

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The first week of the season was full of competitive games and some really wild results. The Blackhawks coming back to defeat the Red Wings in a shootout, Columbus shutting out Anaheim and Washington doing the same to Carolina were just three of many impressive games that transpired in the last five days.

And while some team managers are reaping the rewards of having goalies like Chris Mason, Martin Gerber and Pascal Leclaire in their lineup, others are left feeling like a homicidal maniac perched high atop a bell tower with a trembling and itchy trigger finger, just waiting to drop or trade some of their top two goalies.

I'm one of the unlucky ones, for my head-to-head team has the goaltending tandem of

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Marc-Andre Fleury and Peter Budaj. Both are slated to win at least 35 games this year, yet both have struggled in their first two starts of the season and right now their statistics make me want to puke. So much for first impressions, eh?

I'm surely not alone to see that I'm already in last place with a 2-8-2 record and relegated as the laughing stock of the fantasy league. This might perturb you greatly, but be sure not to panic. Don't do anything drastic. Let things run their course for a few more weeks and once some trends take shape, then make some confident and educated decisions. Remember that patience is a virtue in all facets of fantasy hockey; so don't go out there trying to headhunt for a trade that just doesn't make sense in the long run.

For example, I was offered Jonathan Cheechoo for Fleury. While that seems like a promising trade for my fantasy team that might lack in offense, I simply won't go through with it. Fleury is going to settle down and play with more consistency. Yes, he was horrible against Carolina and Anaheim, but there's no reason to believe he will stay that way. That goes for any other goaltender that has started off struggling. First impressions are fleeting, so take it for what it's worth. A couple of games will certainly not dictate a goalie's entire season.

There were a number of goalies that had great starts to their season, so let's look at some of the more surprising ones. But beware – first impressions are fleeting!

Martin Gerber (3-0-0, 1.64, .953, 1 so)

Gerber is the most surprising to me so far because he's more fundamentally sound than ever before. His confidence was high right from the get-go, his demeanor is positive and he's playing higher up in his crease than ever before. It's causing him to give up a lot of juicy rebounds (especially on Thursday against Toronto), but overall he's playing with a lot of determination. This opportunity to play a string of games is going to be short-lived, so he's playing like it's the playoffs. Gerber has some tough luck, for he slipped just a little bit and was out-played by a

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rising youngster in Cam Ward and now in Ottawa the same has happened with Ray Emery. At least now his trading value has shot up rather quickly.

Chris Mason (2-0-0, .50, .984, 1 so)

It's not a surprise that he is playing so well, but it's a surprise that he almost had two straight shutouts on a team that was expected to struggle on both ends of the ice. While he had no problem getting the win against Colorado in Nashville, a shutout was certainly unexpected. The Preds did an amazing job of shadowing Paul Stastny and shutting down their top two lines, but Mason was still very important in the win. Then he followed it up with another great game against Dallas, allowing only a Kris Barch breakaway goal. It may be more impressive that the Predators scored nine goals in two games, but Mason has certainly proved he is going to lead this team.

Rick DiPietro (2-0-0, 3.00, .897)

DiPietro made one of the most amazing glove saves I've seen in a long time in just the first game of the season. He is not the most fundamentally sound goaltender, but he continues to improve and battle hard. He is the pulse of the team and will see his leadership role only rise as the season goes along. DiPietro is high on my goalie rankings to start this year and after seeing the Islanders manhandle the Sabres, I really think the offense is going to help him out a lot. DiPietro really has the heart of a lion. He's developing the reputation of being a battler and on top of that, he's just fun to watch.

Pascal Leclaire (1-0-0, 0.00, 1.00)

If Leclaire stays healthy, he'll finally have the breakout season he has so badly needed. I honestly think that due to his youth, he will overcome the meniscus injury and silently put together some very solid numbers. He's off to an incredible start, as he shut out the Anaheim Ducks and did it in very fine and flashy fashion. Kudos to Ken Hitchcock for giving Leclaire another shot – but it will be up to Leclaire to stay healthy and more importantly, stay consistent.

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Now the bar is set high for the young guy, so the pressure is on to keep playing strong.

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