

## Slow-Roasted Stoppers

Written by Justin Goldman

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For more than half a century the All-Star weekend has been a time for the league's best players to kick back, relax and enjoy the festivities. But for goaltenders, the experience has always been much, much different. While the skaters get to flash their sick skills to the entire world, the goaltenders have the near-impossible task of matching the level of talent displayed by the All-Star players - and they have to try and look good while doing it.

So for the goalies, the All-Star weekend can be seen as more of an intense playoff series than a laid-back game of shinny. Goalies are pretty much treated like gutless pigs being slowly roasted on the spit of the conference skaters. They're hung out to dry, exposed to the environment around them and forced to fend off the demons of possibly losing a ton of confidence. If the goalie happens to play well and make a collection of ludicrous saves, their confidence will shoot sky high. If they get shredded apart, they look like a goalie in a low-end beer league. Skaters can easily shrug off the game in an instant, but goalies will see some of the great plays and moves coming at them in their nightmares for days, weeks, even months.

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This explains why Evgeni Nabokov was poke-checking and challenging shooters in the Breakaway Competition on Saturday night. No All-Star goalie is going to allow a player to pull insane moves on them without taking away some time and space from the shooter by coming out to challenge him, even if it is a competition directed at a shooter's creativity. No goalie wants to get faked out of their jock strap and they certainly don't want to be scored on easily. To allow a shooter to do that is to lie down like a dog and admit defeat. That lowers confidence and that can take away the fire inside.

Even though this All-Star Weekend was supposed to include some of the most skilled goalies from each conference, it ended up being the first time since 1986 that no Quebec-born goalie participated. Both starters - Martin Brodeur and Roberto Luongo - had to pull out for personal reasons. There was no Pascal Leclaire, Marty Turco, Henrik Lundqvist, Miikka Kiprusoff or Dominik Hasek, either. Nevertheless, the guys who were called to action over the weekend did considerably well, especially in the All-Star Game.

And while the most exciting "competition" of Saturday night was clearly the YoungStars game, it begged the question of what's the point of a YoungStars game if you can't even bring out two rookie goaltenders to play in the game. Hello, NHL, have you even been paying attention to the tremendous rookie goalie talent in the league this year?

It was an absolute joke that Carey Price, Karri Ramo, Jonathan Bernier and Jonas Hiller were not even invited to participate. It's really not considered a YoungStars game when you stick three 35-year-old goaltenders in the crease, which is argued as the most exciting position in the game, and expect them to compete with the likes of Peter Mueller, Patrick Kane and Milan Lucic.

Over the weekend, the competent veteran Chris Osgood looked feeble and elderly and was lit up like a Christmas tree on both nights. Tim Thomas was floundering all over the place like a fish out of water during the YoungStars game but played much better on Sunday. And while Manny Legace was incredible in the YoungStars game, fun to listen to and one of the few enjoyable parts of the entire weekend, he probably shouldn't have even been a part of the weekend's events.

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Sure, it's only the All-Star celebration and the games honestly mean nothing. But the point of all this is that some goalies will gain momentum and confidence from the way they played and others will lose some confidence and momentum. Legace will certainly gain some confidence from his collection of great saves he made during the YoungStars and All-Star game, while Osgood might think twice for just a few moments next time he faces an odd-man rush. Osgood even had to mentally battle the fact that the crowd was chanting his name in both the YoungStars and All-Star games. It's easy for him to shrug it off, but it certainly makes him think twice about his reputation and performance.

Nabokov is definitely going to come out this week with his head held high after his 20-minute shutout, even if he only did make eight saves. The reaction he got out of Ilya Kovalchuk after making the tremendous glove save and then stacking the pads on the breakaway at the end of the period is going to do more for his confidence in the second half of the season than what he's been able to do in any game he's played in so far this season for the Sharks. That's the interesting aspect of the All-Star weekend for goaltenders. It's all in good fun, but there's a serious tone that cannot be overlooked or underestimated.

And if you really want to learn this lesson in real life, just keep an eye on all six All-Star goalies and see what kind of correlation you can make from how they played over the weekend to how they play in the coming weeks.

Comment on the All-Star performance of some of the goalies, and [read Justin's Blog, here...&nbsp;](#)