Carey Price had to be the only one who truly believed he was talented enough to be the go-to guy for the Montreal Canadiens by the end of the regular season. Sure enough, the trade deadline came and went and it has become more than just some silly pipe dream come true.

The 5th overall draft pick in 2005 has actually been leading the Canadiens in the battle for the Eastern Conference championship since the trade deadline, and he's doing it in fine fashion.

The trade that sent Cristobal Huet to Washington was surely a shocker, but when all was said and done, even more surprising was that Montreal's coaching staff and front office trusted Price enough to let Huet go for mere pennies on the dollar. Add to the fact that Jaroslav Halak bided his time with solid play in the AHL while waiting for a chance to get called up, and you have developed quite an interesting story for the two rookies to see what other dreams could come true for the Canadiens.

One visible indicator that Price has the capability to lead Montreal deep into the playoffs is how he reacted after allowing six goals on 39 shots against the high-flying Sharks. He stormed into Phoenix and faced the same amount of rubber, but this time only allowed two goals as he out-dueled Ilya Bryzgalov. Then it was Halak's turn to raise eyebrows, as his first game turned out to be a tremendous success. He was pinned up against Swedish rookie Erik Ersberg and thrived by making 35 saves for the win against the Kings. Suddenly, he can (and will) be counted on to provide stability when Price starts to slip.

If this becomes a situation where Montreal has the luxury of throwing either goaltender in the net on any given night, then look for a very interesting end to the regular season in the East. Sure, Price and Halak will show signs of youth and inexperience, but in the long run if they can be successful, they will become a prized goalie tandem worth keeping together for many years.

Give Credit Where Credit is Due

While I realize the defense in front of Jose Theodore has doubled in strength with the acquisitions of Ruslan Salei and Adam Foote, that doesn't even account for half of what he did to lead the Avs on their seven-game winning streak, which ended last night in Dallas. He has been nothing less than a giant rock in the net, putting together big games and making big saves when his team needed it most. Shutting out the Ducks and then holding Dallas to one goal is real proof of his unbelievable turnaround season.

The 3-1 win against Dallas on Saturday was more impressive than the shutout against the Ducks on Thursday, mainly because of the high-flying Brad Richards and the fact that Theodore had an ugly 1-8-1 record against the Stars coming into the game. It was merely a coincidence, though, that the two teams happened to be ranked #2 and #7, thus imbibing the gods of fate to resurface old memories of the last two first-round playoff matches in the Western Conference.

Overall it paints an interesting picture in the West, because Colorado went from a mangled team with no real identity to one of the toughest and most potent offensive teams in the entire league. All you had to do was watch Peter Forsberg net two assists in the three-goal third period on Saturday afternoon to realize what this team is now capable of doing. So if Theodore can continue to be on the winning end of low-scoring one-goal games, be wary of whichever

team faces them in the first round of the playoffs.

The Silent Assassins

You've heard me talk about them before. The silent assassins are the goalies that put up big performances under the radar. Even though all eyes are focused on the fantasy hockey favorites like Luongo, Brodeur and Turco, there's still plenty of young, exciting talent to keep an eye on. Below is a list of goalies that have been completely silent all year, but when it matters most is coming up with big wins for their team.

1. Erik Ersberg – A 40-save shutout is a good way to earn a solid roster spot – and he picked the best team to do it with. His stock should soar as Dan Cloutier continues to waste cap space.
2. Craig Anderson – Not many goalies can make 93 saves and pot back to back shutouts for the Florida Panthers, but sure enough Anderson did it and added another win over Pittsburgh just a few days later.
3. Corey Crawford – Twenty-three year old Hawks rookie shuts out Ducks in fine fashion with 19 saves and looks like a seasoned veteran doing it.

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