Hail, hail, the furious frenzy of live drafts is upon us. Like a chaotic midnight battle inside the realm of a black forest, survival comes by hacking your way through each round, fending off the heathens and securing prized players poised to bring you glory. We are the true Fantasy Hockey Warlords and we exist everywhere at all times. We all have different drafting skills, strategies and special sleeper picks ready to provide an offensive punch that will pulverize and demolish opponents.

And just behind your frontlines of forwards and defensemen stand your prized fighters, your goalies, the Sleeping Giants, secured by chains, bound by thick ropes and carried on a plank hoisted above the heads of one thousand fighters. The beasts of the crease and the masters clad in Kevlar masks become the real force behind winning and losing and they allow your frontline to advance almost completely unharmed by whatever the opposition throws your way.

Since offensive players – both scoring machines and hidden gems – can be a dime a dozen, winning your league obviously starts with strong goaltending. Every competent fantasy manager will take a goalie with one of their first picks, so after securing your own Tier-I goalie, now it's time to crack those knuckles and fight for the best Tier-II or III goalies. Beyond the obvious

goalies available to draft, a number of low-profiled goalies exist beneath the surface and become instant X-factors in your league. Furthermore, having a strategic advantage at drafting low-profile goaltenders will make your team even more powerful and allot earlier picks for those potent wingers that have enticed you all summer long.

So while you're in the heat of a drafting battle, there's a nice little trick that might help you pull a late-round miracle. This strategy has worked for me numerous times in live drafts. It's called 'baiting' your opponents. Basically you fake managers into drafting a goalie that you have more or less persuaded them is a diamond in the rough. Next thing you know, there's all this hype surrounding a goalie you never wanted in the first place, leaving your sleeping giant untouched. Crafty? Indeed. Can it backfire? Yep. And the war rages on.

Use the chat room (like Yahoo's) to your advantage and lead people to believe that someone like Jason LaBarbera is a prized "sleeper" goalie. Hint that there's still a "ton of good goalies left" and once you get past Round 10, the other managers will start rattling off names still available in an attempt to foil your secret plot. This plants seeds of intrigue and doubt into their minds, as other managers soak up information dropped in a live-draft chat room. But at the same time be aware that any goalie you choose in the second half of a draft is almost always an inherent risk. This is mainly due to the fact that they won't see a lot of time in between the pipes, yet their output is weighed the same as others when it comes to save percentage and goals-against average. Nevertheless, their potential shouldn't be tossed aside and forgotten like a rotten corpse.

With that in mind, below are my five prized Sleeping Giants - my ultimate low-profile, yet valuable goalies for this season. These are not Tier-I (some are not even considered Tier-II) goalies, but their position in the depth charts and their individual statistics may be a major benefit for your team of fantasy warriors.

**Jaroslav Halak** will get more starts than most managers think. Carey Price isn't capable of playing every single game for Montreal, so even though he will be starting at least 55 games, there's no guarantee he will be consistent throughout his sophomore season. Since Halak is definitely talented enough to win more than 80% of his games, he turns into my ultimate sleeping giant because his statistics are extremely potent – it just comes down to the number of games he ends up playing.

**Erik Ersberg** battles the stigma of being a young and inexperienced backup on a very bad defensive team. But anyone who "backs up" Jason LaBarbera is capable of taking over the starting job in less than a week. So Ersberg actually has the potential for playing a 50-game season. The Kings are still going to be one of the worst teams in the Western Conference, but statistically they will be much more competitive. So when it comes to shots against and wins, don't be afraid to pull the trigger and draft Ersberg - he's the only goalie I've seen since Garon that's capable of solving the Kings' goaltending woes.

**Mike Smith** is not a high-profile goalie, and that's what makes him a perfect sleeping giant. Tampa Bay's stock is certainly on the rise, but many managers won't waste a mid-round pick on a goalie that has so many question marks surrounding not only his game but his defense in

front of him. Hesitant managers won't pull the trigger on him early, so watch Smith drop below the 10th round and if he's still available, you're looking at a potential 30+ win goalie with great numbers. He'll also be facing a ton of shots in the high-flying Southeast Division, so Smith is certainly a sleeper pick in my legion of masked marauders.

**Pekka Rinne** should have raised your eyebrows thanks to my article on Finnish goaltenders, but since many people think Ellis is poised to ride the starting position for an entire season (mainly due to a new contract), realize that Rinne is now in the exact same position that Ellis was in last year. Ellis was a rookie looking to just get some games in at the NHL level and developed into the starter when Chris Mason went down in flames. Rinne has more upside and potential than Ellis and he's not a high-profile or household name just yet, so Rinne is certainly another one of my sleeping giants.

**Manny Fernandez** is back from injury and will certainly get an opportunity to battle Tim Thomas for time between the pipes. It's an interesting story because both goalies are in the final year of their contract, so both goalies come into camp on level ground. Fernandez will certainly face different obstacles than Thomas, but if you look at both goalies from a technical standpoint, Manny certainly brings more poise and sound positioning to the Bruins. That may ultimately be the tipping point in which goalie succeeds this year, so don't let Fernandez drift out of sight just yet.

## PROSPECTS TOURNAMENT GOALIE REVIEW

I would like to applaud NHL Network for broadcasting the Traverse City Prospects Tournament's games. Everything from the camera work (they had two different angles) to the interviews with the likes of Brett Hull and John Davidson were absolute gold for fantasy hockey freaks. Especially if you are in Keeper Leagues, you better make sure to tape these games. NHL Network did a fabulous job asking the team reps to give insight on different prospects that were on the ice and I gained a ton of insight on many of these players.

### Atlanta Thrashers – Chris Carrozi – A Bacashihua Clone

Goalies didn't go early in the 2008 Entry Draft, yet all of a sudden when guys like Thomas McCollum and Jake Allen and Peter Delmas were snagged, other teams had to follow suit and get in line. Carrozi was one of those good depth goalie picks for Atlanta at #153. Carrozi was very impressive for his first game in a Thrashers jersey. He has a much more upright and narrow butterfly than normal Canadian goalies and he has a stance eerily similar to that of Jason Bacashihua. He has relatively good size in net and made 26 saves in a 1-0 shutout victory over Tampa Bay.

### Tampa Bay Lightning – Dustin Tokarski – Memorial Cup Champion

Tokarski's stock went way up after winning the Memorial Cup and this makes his start in net very interesting to say the least. Tokarski has an extremely wide, yet very tight butterfly that's similar to Marc-Andre Fleury and Roberto Luongo. He has incredible movement on his knees and executes the power slide more often than any other goalie I've ever seen. Only one goal beat him the entire night and he displayed a tremendous level of intelligent game management.

His movement is very efficient and he doesn't waste much energy. The only negative to this is the amount of time spent on his knees, making him quite vulnerable up high.

**St. Louis Blues – Ben Bishop – Six-foot-Seven is Absolutely Absurd**
I'm sorry but Bishop's size is absolutely absurd. His elbows rest on the top of the net and he's bigger than anyone else out on the ice!! He bends over and still can't fit inside the net. So how does he only go 13-18-3 with Maine? All the great benefits of his hulking size aside, he plays the puck way too much and he's very lazy with his stick. The first high shot he faced went off the post and beat him glove side and the first goal he allowed was off his glove. He certainly struggled in the second period during the Stars' comeback, proving that if you can force a hard rebound off Bishop, you have a good chance of scoring on the 2nd or 3rd chance. Get him moving laterally in tight and around his net and teams will have more success against him.

**Dallas Stars – Matt Climie – Not Much of A Prospect…Yet**
Climie didn't see a real shot until he was letting in a softie 5-hole. I watched Climie play for Bemidji State over the last few seasons and couldn't keep up. Both goals he allowed in the first period were quite lame. You could tell he was stiff and nervous. Mentally he did a great job of gaining composure as the game went along and by the time St. Louis was forced to come back and tie the game, he was into a rhythm and made much better saves. It was a moral victory for Climie but not a very good display of his technique or raw skills.

**Detroit Red Wings – Thomas McCollum – Great Start in Red* EDITED**
Not seen on TV, Thomas McCollum came in relief of Daniel Larsson and secured a 29-save shutout in his debut for Detroit. He had some offensive support in a 4-0 victory against the Rangers but his mental toughness became visible after making 25 saves in a 5-2 victory over Tampa Bay the following day. I haven't had a chance to see him play in this tournament yet but the reports out of Detroit are very positive. He is also blogging about his experience at NHL.com and providing great insight on the tournament so far.