Well, today is official Happy Hockey Talk Day . And if you've read School of Block or The Cat Eye at all over the past 12 months, you know I'm a huge advocate of the mental and emotional, the motivational and inspirational aspects of goaltending. All too often these themes are buried and lost in the daily grind of fantasy notes, injury updates and trade offers.

Therefore, I'm proud to join Kukla's new crusade by echoing his proclamation that today, December 1st, is the day to celebrate feel-good hockey stories. More specifically, it's my firm belief that these stories are a great representation of what drives all goalies to play at their best and become more and more valuable.

The talent level in the NHL is so high that it often all comes down to the non-tangible aspects of the position. Things like reading the play, work ethic in practices and holding a lead is what separates a good goalie from a great goalie. So enjoy this handful of stories that encompass the true nature of Kukla's theme, for the will to rise up victoriously can never be told the same way twice, nor will it ever die.

JOSE THEODORE

With a two-year contract fulfilled in Colorado, it was time for Jose Theodore to go after bigger

and better things. Washington provided what he truly sought – a team looking for a starting goalie. That also meant more promise in the playoffs and a better opportunity, so off he went back to the Eastern Conference.

But like a thorn still stuck in his eye, Theodore's past remained a bothersome object of affliction. In fact many pundits had come to believe that too much off-ice drama caused him to lose a grip on his game, and in a way they were totally right. But all of those things overshadowed the key factor that, back in Colorado, he was re-acquainted with old-teammate-turned-goalie-coach, Jeff Hackett.

That not only resulted in a return to top form, but a great first-round playoff series win over Minnesota, one in which Theodore was monumental. But just like in Montreal, things came crumbling down in a hurry. This time it was in the form of the Detroit Red Wings, who swept Colorado handily in the semifinals.

You could consider this season's first quarter another adjustment period for Theodore. Other than a few glimpses of brilliance peppered throughout October, he was really feeling the squeeze from Brent Johnson. But over the last week, Theodore has shown much more promise thanks to a great outing in a 4-3 loss to Minnesota followed up by an easy win against Atlanta.

With Theodore suddenly back on the rise, the stage was set for the biggest regular season game of his career, a second chance at revenge against Montreal. His first came on Oct. 21, 2006 and was a complete disaster. Just like his career in Montreal, it started off strong but ended horribly after he allowed five goals in the third period to the delight of ravenous fans and went on to suffer the 8-5 loss.

But in a Capitals uniform, his focus and sheer will to prove the pundits wrong resulted in a 28-save shutout over the Canadiens in a 3-0 win. So for Theodore to be at the culminating point of his career with a game and moment like that is to be a part of something bigger than his name. In that game, Theodore was a living glimpse of everything that makes goaltending inspirational.

To all goalies and players alike, if you get knocked down, get right back up again. The will to win and the passion to play hard will ultimately overcome all walls and fences. Maybe you have to try a few times and maybe you don't get to take the easiest road to get there. But in the end, perseverance will pay off.

CRAIG ANDERSON

What more can be said about the magnitude of Craig Anderson's 37-save shutout on the Rangers on Sunday? This was a tremendous effort that proved he's more than capable of handling a lead on the road against a strong team. The win pushed Anderson's record to 4-1-3 with a 1.87 goals-against average and .948 save percentage and the shutout was his second in just eight games this season.

An interview after the game revealed some very interesting aspects of Anderson's state of mind.

It was almost as if he was demanding more starts. It's really no secret that Tomas Vokoun is struggling right now, so Anderson had every right to let the people know he wants to be playing more. That sure does make it hard to not put him on the ice, especially since he's beaming with so much confidence.

I could tell by his intensity during interviews in the past that his time has come. Anderson has a very strong understanding of the position and he knows what's needed to win games. He's even known in the goalie community as not only being a great student, but a great teacher at many goalie camps as well.

Anderson's story is all about durability and patience. Three years with the Chicago Blackhawks gave him an opportunity to learn the game and during that whole time, he stayed positive and worked hard. He did not back down when things were rough and his will to succeed is what pushed him over the top. Sometimes when you know you're really good, you get the chance to prove it sooner rather than later.

CHRIS MASON

How about the strength and will it takes to battle back from appendicitis? I don't think many goalies could lose a vital organ and still have the will and strength and focus to come back in BETTER form than before.

But that's the exact storyline Chris Mason has written for himself. Being a star in Nashville and then being pushed out of the crease and out of town by Dan Ellis, nothing was more gratifying than coming back in time to shut them out on Versus with a remarkable 45-save performance.

To me, this is the best story of the year so far. Especially how Mason's season had started, going winless in his first five appearances, the game was monumental for the progression of his career. Now Mason has won three straight games, including a 28-save performance against the Thrashers in a 4-2 win on Sunday. Oh how things can change in a hurry when you harvest a little confidence.

I could go on and on with thousands of other stories that are taking place right now with NHL goalies. Just look at what goalies like Tim Thomas, Joey MacDonald, Jonas Hiller, Scott Clemmensen, Steve Mason and Peter Budaj have done this season and you will quickly get the picture.

There is a common theme with all of these stories, especially when you look at some goaltenders over the course of their entire career. A young man's deeds become an old man's wisdom. What they learn about the game and themselves to start their career ultimately turns into experience and success during the middle and later stages of their career. Every goalie is a part of this theme, all the way up to Patrick Roy, the greatest of this era.