

Conjuring the Inner Beast

Written by Justin Goldman

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the cup
changes
everything.

yeah... it turns
Goalenders
into **BEASTS**



And we track the **BEASTS**
in every single playoff game!

Last night while reflecting on the regular season as a whole, I realized that it was just that...a regular season. There were too many horrible outings from too many goalies, especially by Chris Osgood, Peter Budaj, Cristobal Huet and Carey Price. Yep, the list of “bad outings” includes just about everyone at some point or another.

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Even when you factor in the sweet-smelling stories of Tim Thomas, Steve Mason and Pekka Rinne, it still doesn't cover up the stink left by all that goalie meat hung out to dry. Budaj could easily be seen as one of the "worst" goalies of the year, but even on a dreadful defensive team he found a way to post the best GAA in April, along with a great shootout record. Joey MacDonald and Yan Danis were terrible last night, yet they also had stretches of brilliance.

So while the obvious stats hardly tell the total story of a goalie's true value, the fact still remains that some of them simply don't deserve to be in the playoffs this year. Osgood is the obvious "lucky" one fighting for Lord Stanley, while everyone knows full well that Niklas Backstrom, Pekka Rinne and Dwayne Roloson were totally screwed over. They played lights out all year long for their respective teams and they were all bounced in the two games.

But nobody really cares about them anymore, because Wednesday night is the start of the REAL hockey season, where NOTHING is regular. All 32 goalies must cast that secret spell in order to conjure up their inner beasts in hopes of hacking and clawing their way to the penultimate 16th victory. The starters must stop every puck that comes their way and the backups must be ready to do the same at a moment's notice, without any warning whatsoever.

What makes the playoffs so exciting to me is watching the great goalies play even greater than usual. Everyone knows that a goalie's true value is tested in the playoffs, as it seems like most veterans play with more confidence and composure in the first few minutes compared to those that have no battle scars. But after the regular season I just witnessed, I'm doubtful about it all. Anything could happen like both Mason's playing each other in the Western Conference Finals.

So in an effort to bring you some unique insight on goaltending in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, allow us to introduce the Playoff Beast Tracker, which is an-depth chart that tracks many crucial and revealing statistics for each goalie in the post-season. Here's the different stats we'll be all over starting Wednesday night:

1. Short-handed Save Percentage: Power play goals make or break teams in the playoffs

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(and the regular season). The goalie is the best penalty killer on the team. So it doesn't take a genius to see that a strong save percentage while short-handed is a major factor in having playoff success.

2. **Third Period Save Percentage:** If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen. The third period is where it matters most, no matter what the score is. Goalies would rather burn in hell than get out of the way, so let's see who makes the most saves in the third period...and how that impacts their results.
3. **Road Save Percentage:** Goalies need to be able to win on the road if they expect to drink from the Stanley Cup. It's as simple as that. We'll track road and home save percentages and win-loss records, which allows you to factor them into your decision however you'd like
4. **Overtime Heroics:** After enduring a grueling regular season, nothing is more important than staying strong and focused in a pressure-filled double or triple overtime thriller. Let's see who puts together the best performances in overtime and who plays the most OT minutes as well.
5. **Preserving A Lead:** Once a team gets a lead, it's every team's mission to be responsible defensively and not allow an opportunity for the game-tying goal. That's reason enough to track which goalies keep a lead the most minutes played.
6. **Keeping it Close:** Being able to execute while down a goal is of equal importance to being up by a goal. And while you could debate whether or not there's more pressure either way, the fact remains that keeping your team close is all that matters. If a goalie gets beat, that's life. But letting it bother you is problematic.

OTHER NON-STATISTICAL FACTORS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Rebounds: Unless there's a clear-cut breakaway or an odd-man rush or a deflection, a goalie is going to make the first save 98% of the time. But being able to make the second, third and fourth save is what really separates a good game from an amazing one in the playoffs, so keep an eye on how a goalie recovers to get in position for rebounds.

Deflections: Sometimes there's not much you can do about a huge body in front of the net or an incredible re-direction in mid-air. How about one of those pesky shots from the point that bank off the back-plate and send goalies into a full nose dive for either post? It's going to happen on Wednesday night at least once. So duly note when a goal is a result of brilliant eye-hand coordination or a mass of humanity in front of a goalie that can't see a darn thing.

Handling the Puck: Playing the puck efficiently keeps the other team from having possession and if done properly, can take pressure off the defensemen. That's important for a number of teams in the playoffs, so note any turnovers or weak plays from behind the net, as that can be a major blow to a goalie's confidence. When a goalie coughs up the puck in a playoff game, things go south in a hurry.

FIRST (ROUND) IMPRESSIONS

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A similar goaltending storyline is found in three of four series in the Western Conference; it's the young stud that has nothing to lose going up against a veteran stalwart with the burden of high expectations. First you have Steve Mason challenging the Wizard of Oz, followed by Chris Mason taking on the more experienced Roberto Luongo. Then it's also going down hard between Jonas Hiller and Evgeni Nabokov.

Both of them were actually extremely efficient in their season series. Hiller was only 1-3 in four games, but had an amazing .929 save percentage while Evgeni Nabokov was 3-2 and one-upped him with a .930 save percentage. But the intrigue in this specific "master vs. apprentice" series lies in Hiller's surprisingly strong season. His 23-15-1 record combined with a .919 save percentage and 2.39 goals against average quietly made him one of the top statistical goalies in both categories.

The other series is a war of attrition between two extremely talented Europeans in Nikolai Khabibulin and Miikka Kiprusoff. But one is rested and coming off a huge shutout while the other is tired from a long season and heading south along with his entire team. The Blackhawks absolutely dominated Calgary in the season series and Khabibulin was sensational with a .941 save percentage, so it's pretty easy to take Chicago in this series.

The Eastern Conference is all about Martin Brodeur going up against Cam Ward. It's the only series where both goalies have a Stanley Cup ring, so pride is on the line in this one. The white-hot play of Ward has been a formidable force for the entire second half of the season, while on the other hand Brodeur is "rested" in mid-April for the first time in his career. Should be a seven-game series for sure, but for some reason it's tough to brush Ward aside in this one.

Check out [The Goalie Guild's updated chart](#) throughout the playoffs. Remember that we are running a charity hockey festival April 30 - May 3rd so around those days the updates will come a little slower than usual! Also check out how you can win gift cards to HockeyGiant.com by playing in our FREE Guild Playoff Bracket Challenge. Filled out brackets are due Wednesday by 2pm MST. There is no limit to the number of players.