GOALIE	NABOKOV	HILLER	OSGOOD	MASON	LUONGO	MASON	KIPRUSOFF	KHABIBULIN
W-L	0-2	2-0 1 so	2-0 1 so	0-2	3-0 1 so	0-3	0-2	2-0
GAA	2.50 5 ga	1.00 2 ga	.50 1 ga	4.00 8 ga	1.00 3 ga	2.37 7 ga	3.03 6 ga	2.00 4 ga
SV%	.884 38/43	.974 77/79	.978 45/46	.890 65/73	.963 79/82	.915 76/83	.902 55/61	.930 53/57
RSV%	n/a	.974 77/79	n/a	.890 65/73	.923 24/26	.929 53/57	.901 55/61	n/a
SHSV%	.866 13/15	1.000 25/25	1.000 12/12	.777 14/18	.952 20/21	.750 12/16	.875 7/8	.900 9/10
TPSV%	.733 11/15	.960 24/25	1.000 12/12	.875 14/16	1.000 27/27	.935 29/31	.952 20/21	.928 13/14
OTMP	0	0	0	0	0	0	:12 0/1	:12 0/0
+1 SV%	n/a	.965 28/29	.800 4/5	n/a	.966 29/30	.888 8/9	.906 29/32	1.000 10/10
-1 SV%	.769 10/13	n/a	n/a	.875 14/16	1.000 12/12	.975 39/40	1.000 9/9	1.000 14/14

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GOALIE	THOMAS	PRICE	THEODORE	VARLAMOV	LUNDQVIST	BRODEUR	WARD	FLEURY	BIRON
W-L	2-0	0-2	0-1	0-1	2-0 1 so	2-1	1-2	2-1	1-2
GAA	1.50 3 ga	4.80 8 ga	4.07 4 ga	1.02 1 ga	1.50 3 ga	1.60 5 ga	2.57 8 ga	2.42 8 ga	3.05 10 ga
SV%	.949 56/59	.875 56/64	.810 17/21	.958 23/24	.957 67/70	.938 76/81	.926 100/108	.917 88/96	.910 101/111
RSV%	n/a	.875 56/64	n/a	n/a	.957 67/70	.933 28/30	.932 68/73	.827 24/29	.915 75/82
SHSV%	1.000 7/7	.714 10/14	.600 3/5	1.000 6/6	.882 15/17	.750 3/4	.952 20/21	.884 23/26	.863 19/22
TPSV%	1.000 16/16	.857 12/14	.833 5/6	1.000 8/8	.964 27/28	.958 23/24	.947 36/38	.900 18/20	.880 22/25
OTMP	0	0	0	0	0	7:38 6/7	7:38 4/5	18:29 10/10	18:29 10/11
+1 SV%	.950 19/20	n/a	.000 0/1	n/a	1.000 38/38	.857 18/21	n/a	1.000 8/8	.926 25/27
-1 SV%	n/a	.928 26/28	1.000 2/2	1.000 22/22	1.000 1/1	n/a	.947 18/19	.933 28/30	.910 10/11

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It's a routine of mine to fall out of bed every morning, stumble into the kitchen like a drugged zombie and swipe an over-sized muffin from the kitchen cupboard. Sometimes I snag blueberry, sometimes banana nut and sometimes I forget to close the plastic lid correctly the day before and they all end up stale. That invokes a nasty rage that can only be suppressed with…well, more sleep...and lots of Cocoa Puffs cereal.

This morning was no different. I went through my usual routine of nonchalantly grabbing a muffin and then removing that annoying doily wrapper. I closed my eyes and cherished that first

bite, only to cringe in horror at the taste of paper. Whatinthe...oh wait…there's a second doily hidden underneath the first one. Bargh! This happens to all of us - with homemade cupcakes and those wonderful Reese's Peanut Butter Cups - and it's enough to drive a mildly obsessive person like myself totally nuts.

But as I rested my elbows on the kitchen table and picked this cinnamon muffin apart like an isolated vulture, I realized you just have to be aware of your surroundings at all times in order to see what's really going on. It's easy to overlook things when you're in a familiar environment, but there are always inherently one or two instances that deviate from the norm and leave you wondering where the hell it came from and how long it's actually been there.

That makes me think of the two goalies in the Stanley Cup Playoffs that came out of nowhere, even though we've been mentioning their names for most of the season. I'm speaking about Jonas Hiller and Simeon Varlamov, of course. Neither of them experienced playoff hockey before last week but they both played extremely well in their first outings. And this leads me to believe that youthful enthusiasm in the net can be a very good thing for many teams.

Now I've said for years that playing the "backup" or rookie goalie in the playoffs ultimately does more good than bad. It's not only a way to elevate the defensive play, it's a way to ignite the entire team's morale. They want to win for the young kid and do everything they can to make his life easier.

It's also the only way teams can truly see what they have. It's the same type of situation as a team bringing up a goalie from the minors - the opportunity to evaluate talent is necessary and vital to figuring out what prospects and draft picks are the most valuable and useful. And while all of that is happening, you could also end up winning a playoff game or two, while uncovering a true winner and a future franchise leader at the same time.

The Anaheim Ducks are experiencing this first-hand right now. Give all of the credit in the world to Randy Carlyle for taking a chance and looking at his goaltending situation with more depth and deliberation than usual. It's easy to fall back on a failsafe goalie like J.S. Giguere for the playoffs because he's a proven winner and most of the time he's consistent and confident. And while he's been in an emotional valley this season due to his father's death, everyone in the locker room knew it wouldn't be an excuse, because Giguere is still a quality playoff goalie of the highest order.

But when it comes to Hiller, you're showing off a big fluffy muffin with two wrappers around it. Tossing him into a bunch of crucial regular season games is one thing, but to remove that second paper wrapper and take a bite out of him by seeing what he's really made of is quite another. Starting him in the playoffs against the #1 seed is a necessary step that must be taken in order to find out if you have a quality, tasty treat or not.

And hot damn, if that isn't the best muffin I've ever tasted. Just check out the BEAST TRACKER to get an idea of how efficient he has been against San Jose. How about making all 25 saves while short-handed, including 12 last night in Game 2? Or how about stopping 28 of 29 shots while holding onto a one-goal lead? Are you kidding me?! These are Brodeur-like numbers for

the playoffs and if you think I'm crazy for saying that, just scroll to the right and look at how Brodeur has already allowed three goals while maintaining the same one-goal lead. Enough said.

There are a few ways to break down the successful rookie goalie in the playoffs. Either they are too ignorant to realize the amount of pressure they are actually facing, or they just don't care because they have nothing to lose. Hiller is a little different because he's played in big playoff games overseas, but there's still no comparison to the Stanley Cup Playoffs. But fighting for a championship is fighting for a championship, so there is at least some understanding of expectations in a post-season run.

Speaking of expectations, there's really none for a goalie like Varlamov. That's because the onus is on Jose Theodore to perform up to standards. But once Theodore fails, Varlamov will embrace the opportunity to just get the exposure and experience, regardless of winning or losing.

And there you have it – rookie goalies just don't face the same amount of pressure as the starter or veteran. Hiller played exceptional down the stretch for Anaheim in the regular season, and while many fans labeled him the "#1 goalie" heading into the playoffs, there's no way they would have blamed him for struggling in his first-ever playoff game because it's natural and quite commonplace. Most goalies are expected to succumb to pressure in their first playoff game, but it's when they flip the script and post a shutout that the shock value hits like a ton of bricks.

Simply put, coaches like Carlyle have been in this situation many times before. But making the decision to roll with an un-tested playoff goalie takes guts. Bruce Boudreau had a lot of guts sticking Varlamov in the pipes for Game 2. That roll of the dice had much bigger stakes behind it because Theodore had already tanked and there was nobody else to turn to (unlike Anaheim that can still turn to Giguere). And even though the Capitals still lost the game 1-0, mainly because Henrik Lundqvist was a BEAST, Varlamov proved his worth and raised his fantasy stock significantly.

He stopped all eight shots he faced in the third period and made 22 straight saves after allowing the only goal of the game on just his third shot on goal. That's almost TOUGHER than pitching a shutout because things can unravel very quickly on a rookie goalie when that first goal against comes early. Now Varlamov has a taste of playoff action and knows he can elevate his play much higher if he happens to get the call for Game 3.

One last thing I'd like to stress about rookie goalies in the playoffs; the importance of positive reinforcement. Yes, Varlamov suffered the loss in Game 2, but young goalies thrive on anything that boost confidence. But Boudreau would be better off playing Varlamov in Game 3 as opposed to going back to Theodore because sending a positive message to Varlamov for his valiant and valuable performance in Game 2 breeds winning and confident goaltending.

To bench him would be to shatter his confidence and negatively reinforce the fact the one goal he allowed cost the Capitals the game. Plus, why go back to Theodore when he was so lazy in

Game 1? Theodore has done nothing to prove he deserves the start in Game 3, while Varlamov pulled off something very few rookie goalies can do. And yes, Varlamov was visibly nervous and shaky and tense throughout the game, but the only way to remove that fragility is to give him another 60 minutes to find that elusive comfort level.

In an era of playoff hockey, where nothing is really what it seems and anyone is capable of anything, there's just no more time for the cynical. Positive reinforcement promotes successful goalie performances always and forever.

Be sure to check out The Goalie Guild's updated BEAST TRACKER throughout the playoffs by clicking the link!