

Skill vs. Opportunity

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 20 July 2009 10:02 - Last Updated Tuesday, 21 July 2009 12:23



Remind me to let Dobber Nation choose the lesson plan more often. All of the requests were quite astute, so rest assured I'll be doing this more often. Now a few of you posed the same question: who will be this season's breakout goalie? You thirst for that answer because it could turn your entire season around. But alas, that question is my topic for Dobber's upcoming fantasy guide, so I chose another question that would act as a perfect prelude to the answer which so many of you seek.

How should a fantasy GM weigh skill level (talent & ability) versus opportunity? This is a great question (WTG, Sentium) and an interesting one because it's completely unique to all fantasy managers. Every goalie is different and every team has different dynamics when it comes to dishing out the minutes played. So what, exactly, should fantasy managers focus on in order to find the goalie poised to be the next Hiller or Clemmensen? Which one matters more?

The best way to break this down is to separate the question into two parts. First, we have skill level, which can be represented by everything from technique and physical features to mental strength. Then there's opportunity, which includes the infinite spectrum of situations that exist when it comes to a goalie's increased playing time and value.

But before you can compare the two parts to find your breakout goalie, you'll need to know the value of each part.

PART 1 – SKILL LEVEL

Skill vs. Opportunity

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 20 July 2009 10:02 - Last Updated Tuesday, 21 July 2009 12:23

Skill level should be further broken down into its own two parts; mental toughness and technique or talent level.

For mental toughness, first you need to discern how the goalie generally competes. Ask yourself these questions: is he a big-save goalie? Has he stolen games at the AHL or CHL level? Does he have a history of elevating his game right before the playoffs? Does he even have any playoff success at all in his entire career? Basically, you just want to find out if he's been through some pressure-filled situations before. If so, how did he perform?*

As you know, mental toughness can mean so many different things and touch on so many different psychological aspects. But for the topic at hand, you should focus mainly on confidence. That one word means so much to a pro goaltender's abilities, and if you don't know what I mean, I'll quickly explain it through a real-life example.

Peter Budaj was primed to be a break-out goalie last season. With Jose Theodore heading to Washington and Andrew Raycroft just trying to salvage his NHL career for one more season, all Budaj had to do was put together a strong training camp and then balloon into the undisputed starter by the end of October.

But that didn't even come close to happening. And the sole reason for this stemmed from a lack of confidence. Too many bad-angle goals led to really inconsistent play and his whole game, and thus the team, fell apart. When a goalie posts a 7-2 shootout record through March, but constantly allows bad-angle goals, there's a real confidence issue.**

The other part, technique and talent level, is as simple as it gets. In fact, my new scouting charts are perfect for this type of thing (check out the forums or <http://thegoalieguild.com/charts>). Skill should be more or less be weighed by status. Is there an aspect of their game that you would consider to be of elite status? Or is it just a mild strength?

PART 2 – OPPORTUNITY

Opportunity more or less means the situation a prospect or backup currently faces with their counterpart. For example, what kind of opportunity does Alex Auld have in Dallas backing up Marty Turco? Basically, you just want to analyze whether or not he is likely to receive more or less playing time than originally expected.

With the myriad of situations that present itself currently to all NHL teams, there are a number of interesting ones that could call for a break-out. Take Vancouver, for example. If Roberto Luongo were to miss a serious amount of time, do you really think the Canucks would have Andrew Raycroft carry the entire workload? Nope, Cory Schneider would come up and get a second chance to break out.

And this year, he's coming up having already been through it before. The kid is too big, too talented and too high up in the SKILL department to fail. He has a lot of confidence coming off the heels of a stellar AHL season and has a good team in front of him. That, combined with his skill, creates a perfect atmosphere for one giant breakout storm.***

Skill vs. Opportunity

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 20 July 2009 10:02 - Last Updated Tuesday, 21 July 2009 12:23

Besides injury, other situations that create wonderful opportunities include inadequate performances by a non-elite starter over the course of a few weeks or any non-elite starter that loses five or more games in a row on a team playing above .500 hockey. Don't discredit the impact of family or personal issues, either (J.S. Giguere).

Finally, just look at recent history. How many times could you weigh talent vs. situation and end up with an injury being the cause of a goalie breaking out? Chris and Steve Mason, Joey MacDonald and Scott Clemmensen all took advantage of their opportunity coming from another being injured. Very rarely does a break out come from straight up out-playing another goalie.****

So now that you know what questions you need to ask in order to figure out which of the parts be weighed more than the other, it's time to decide what that is. Unfortunately, the truth is not so simple. It honestly doesn't matter which category carries more value, because they both count for half of what is needed to succeed.

Many goaltenders have all the skill in the world, but lack situational awareness or readiness when that prime opportunity comes. They don't turn it up a notch and they fail to raise their compete level. On the flip side, how many goalies have an amazing desire to win, an incredible compete level, but lack the talent to control rebounds effectively at the NHL level, heighten their reaction times or come up with the big save at the right time? And furthermore, how many goalies fall somewhere in between the two ends of the spectrum?

Therefore, this week's lesson is simple. You can't spell Opportunity without Unity. In order for a goalie to be successful in taking advantage of an opportunity and breaking out, they must show total balance and harmony with the two parts we dissected. Without one carrying its weight, the other will falter and the goalie will ultimately fail.

* You can't look at stats alone. Sometimes it comes down to simply seeing it live or on video somewhere. Stats don't tell the whole story all the time and this is not a formula that can depend solely on looking at stats. Do some research!

** Do not be fooled by the argument that Budaj's defense was terrible. Even Andrew Raycroft had the wherewithal to slap together a sexy winning streak. Budaj's problems literally stemmed from his inability to stay focused over a long period of time. He was confident at times, but once the first goal got past him, that confidence was shot and the performance went totally sour. Don't believe otherwise...I watched every single game he played last year.

*** Raycroft is merely cheap insurance, so all Schneider has to do is win a few games early to be set on a perfect path to break out until Luongo returns. That means he'll play almost all of the games and post very solid numbers, maybe even get a few shutouts along the way.

**** Besides Pekka Rinne taking over Dan Ellis, Craig Anderson was probably the closest to overtaking a legit starter just by simply out-playing him last year. I wouldn't count Hiller because a lot of Giguere's problems were personal and mental, not technical. And if not for the end of

Skill vs. Opportunity

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 20 July 2009 10:02 - Last Updated Tuesday, 21 July 2009 12:23

the 2007-08 season, Mathieu Garon probably would have taken over Dwayne Roloson for good. Simeon Varlamov would be the next one, but he did it in the first round of the playoffs.