The true test of a warrior's valor is not if his skin gets pierced, but how he fights when the blood flows from his body.

So far this season, goaltending has been nothing short of a battle for sheer survival. Heavy traffic in front of the net, blatant crease-crashing, bad bounces, even elusive factors like the H1N1 virus, a skate blade to the inner thigh, a cracked rib and more are turning positive performances into terrible outings in an instant.

Any goalie can fall victim to these things at any given moment, so playing well, and thus being a valuable fantasy asset, is all about bouncing back quickly. But what does it take for goalies to overcome these battle wounds? It takes an ability to blot out the many factors that can cause mental distractions (noise) by being as focused as possible.

Another term for this could be called rebound control. But not the kind where pucks are strategically relocated to low-traffic areas – the kind where bad memories of the previous game are erased and a strong work ethic, responsibility and extreme focus carries a goalie forward in a positive manner.

JAROSLAV HALAK AND CAREY PRICE

As if there already wasn't enough drama surrounding Carey Price and Jaroslav Halak, there's someone else stirring up a controversy without either goalie having a say in the situation. Yes, I said it. Controversy. The one term I despise more than any other when it comes to goaltending now truly exists in the most heated hockey market in the world.

Allan Walsh is the player agent that currently represents Halak. The Slovakian goalie is 5-2-0 with a mediocre 2.85 GAA and .893 save percentage and has stepped in nicely when called upon. Price is 3-7-0 with a sour 3.30 GAA and .894 save percentage, but recently made 42 saves in a 2-1 win over Boston last Thursday. These are not numbers any fantasy manager enjoys seeing, but at the same time the team hasn't lived up to expectations offensively.

Now I won't waste time explaining what Walsh said that caused this controversy, but rather point you in the right direction. Just ***check out All Habs' blog*** and you'll be in the know. As you can see, Walsh's weak, unnecessary comment directed towards Price's struggles has opened Pandora's Box. Without asking for any of this, both Price and Halak will have to answer annoying questions the media has no right asking.

Many fans are furious because an agent for one goalie pointed a finger at the other, which in turn created an unnecessary distraction that could perpetuate the struggles in goal. His trite comment created more mental clutter for two goalies that already face more pressure than most other NHL goalies.

But in my humble opinion, I see this situation having the reverse effect. Why? Well, to be honest, both goalies were not nearly as bad as their numbers seem. And neither goalie has out-performed the other to a degree that's more than slightly noticeable. I would place most of the team's struggles on weak defense and weak secondary scoring.

Please take a few minutes to read Chris Boyle's statistical analysis and breakdown of Price and Halak's October on ***Habs Eyes on the Prize*** . This is brilliant work that I use in part to make my own judgments for fantasy advice and it's a must-read for owners of either goalie. And everything he states is 100% dead on. They're both playing well but unable to make the timely save on a consistent basis. From a fantasy perspective, they haven't been that valuable, but it will improve if the team can play better in front of them.

Both goalies have fallen victim to some tough games, which takes nothing away from their overall talent. When I toss the off-ice drama induced by Walsh into the mix, I'm confident that Halak and Price will ultimately become closer teammates and better players. Away from all eyes and ears, they'll probably have a good laugh about it, brush it off and hone their focus on one thing and one thing only – stopping more pucks.

And that's exactly what it takes to go from survival to revival. When all the off-ice drama and finger-pointing by the fans is eliminated, all that's left is two teammates pushing each other to play their best on every single shot. All they have to do is shut their mouth and open their eyes and things will improve. If I owned Halak or Price, I would be starting them in every single game this week, which comes against Calgary, Phoenix and Nashville.

TALK IS CHEAP – VOKOUN & CLEMMENSEN

If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. Someone please tell that to Tomas Vokoun and Scott Clemmensen, two goalies that have had the audacity to publicly state their distaste (in varying degrees) for the defense in front of them. Most recently, ***Clemmensen had some choice words***
following a disastrous 7-4 loss.

For a veteran goalie that is struggling to survive, these things just cannot be said, at least not out loud to someone who will make them public. It's another example of adding unnecessary mental clutter to a situation already in dire straits. It's a negative vibe sent throughout the locker room. Players will read it. Coaches will see it. The media will ask follow-up questions about it. And the goalie will suffer the consequences.

Again, the best thing a goalie can do in this situation is shut their mouths and open their eyes. The onus should always be on themselves to stop every single puck that comes their way because that's what they're paid to do. If they're complaining or discussing another aspect of the team's play, regardless of whether they're asked about it or not, it's a sign the goalie is not focused. All answers should revert back to their own play and how it can improve.

"One thing we need to work on is our coverage down low and behind the net. I'm not sure how it gets so bad at times. It's just a matter of knowing your responsibilities. We've got to work on things in practice. Unless we do that, so guys know what they're doing, then we're not going to get any better at it." -Clemmensen

Oh really? How about stating the need to work on foot-speed on plays in tight and better rebound control? That quote above is just asking for trouble - it shows a lack of responsibility. Especially for a goalie that has allowed 12 goals in the last two games, saying anything not related to his own terrible play is just not smart.

If I'm a Vokoun or Clemmensen owner, I'm benching them this entire week. They don't play again until Thursday, but it's in Boston and then they play the Islanders and Kings at home. It's really not a pretty sight for the Panthers right now and as long as these things are being said by the goalies, it's only bound to get worse. Clemmensen may not have caused a rift in the locker room, but it sure doesn't make the defensemen want to play stronger in front of him.

"I'm still learning how to play for this team. It's very different from what I'm used to in the past with New Jersey. For me, at this point, it's been kind of survival." -Clemmensen

At least he's being honest. That's a baby step towards revival. And I'll be honest too - Vokoun was very impressive during his two straight shutouts last week. He must have made more glove saves in that stretch than in an entire season, but I'll still never take back my comments about his style being out-dated, because even a leprechaun stumbles across a pot of gold from time to time.

Situational awareness - it's a term for the ages. It's something to watch for when it comes to your own fantasy goalies. Don't underestimate the non-statistical factors like maturity and the ability to rebound after a bad game.

CRAIG ANDERSON IS TIRED

The main reason why Craig Anderson was so amazing in October was because he doesn't break down after one or two weak goals against. He's leading all goalies with four "rally" wins, meaning when he's down by two goals or more, he's still able to maintain the focus needed to win the game. The wins came Oct. 17 vs. DET, Oct. 23 vs. CAR, Oct. 28 at CAL and Nov. 6 vs. CHI. This is all the proof you need to understand what makes Anderson such a legitimate fantasy asset. He has mental toughness and he has great puck-stopping ability to boot.

But during last night's 5-3 loss to the Oilers, it was very noticeable that Anderson is mentally tired. Want to talk about a real tough mental obstacle? Try posting the October stats he did, then sit on the bench for a game. Then try ramping it back up again in the following game. It's extremely tough to do, no matter who you are.

It blew me away that Anderson was able to pull off an extended shootout win against his former team (4-3 win vs. CHI) after going down 2-0 in the first period, but it was only a matter of time before he allowed three goals in a period. To his defense, four of the goals he allowed last night were PP tallies for Edmonton, but he was slow to get across his crease on three of them.

I would actually make it a point to bench Anderson this week. The Avs play in Chicago on Wednesday and then play back in Denver against Vancouver on Saturday. If anything, Anderson will need a few games to hit the refresh button and get back to playing how he was in mid-October.

MANNY LEGACE IN CAROLINA

I'm horrified by the Manny Legace signing to fill the void left by Cam Ward. Not only is this a negative impact on Michael Leighton and Justin Peters, it doesn't do much for the team other than provide a veteran presence as opposed to youthful enthusiasm. If you don't think this will upset Leighton and Peters on a personal level, you're totally wrong. They know it says a lot about the organization's trust in their abilities.

Legace is going to need a few games to get his timing back at the NHL level. This is a luxury the Hurricanes cannot afford. Even if he does come in and sparks the team to end this losing streak, I still don't consider him a quality NHL goaltender anymore. He's also injury prone, meaning Carolina could end up wasting a lot of money and time. His experience might win him a few games, but I would only consider him a fantasy asset if you're extremely desperate.

I'm really frustrated with the teams that don't give their prospects a chance. They had two quality prospects already signed to contracts, so what's the point of signing another? Peters is a quality short-term prospect that has a lot of talent, but similar to Tyler Weiman's situation in Colorado, the Hurricanes might never know how good he could potentially be because they won't take a chance by giving him some games.

JONAS GUSTAVSSON IS FOR REAL

I hate to say I told you so, but I told you so. Wait, no I don't. I read this whole thing like a children's book. And it's not so much his technique or his extremely straight back and broad shoulders, but it's his mental toughness and focus. He has all the tools needed to turn into one heck of a long-term keeper and he's gaining confidence every day.

If there's one thing I didn't expect out of all of this, it was that it happened so fast. It's only November 9 and Gustavsson is already Toronto's starting goaltender.

NIITTY IS LEGIITTY

Give credit to Rick Tocchet for giving Antero Niittymaki consecutive starts in the last few weeks. Niittymaki, who was the 2006 Winter Olympics MVP for Team Finland, has played out of his mind lately. Two of his last four starts ended up as OT losses, but regardless, he's now tops in save percentage (.940) and his 1.95 GAA is third in the league.

Although I expect his numbers to level off over the next few weeks, the truth is that Tampa Bay has a new starting goalie. Niittymaki will continue to play strong throughout the first half of the season leading up to the Olympics. This is what happens when coaches instill confidence in a legit goalie by giving them consecutive starts. Tampa Bay only plays twice this week, but they host the Wild on Thursday and the Kings on Saturday. I'd ride Niittymaki for the time being, at least until he's back on the bench in favor of Mike Smith.