The fine lines separating quality long-term fantasy goalie gems from total busts become more blurred with every passing day. The position is kind of like an amorphic, shape-shifting biological entity that finds a way to mutate into a stronger, more refined being. The different genetic codes that make up every NHL goalie then leads to many different interpretations of what the future holds for said goalie. To be blunt, nobody knows for sure what will happen next.

Now more than ever, with so many seemingly solid prospects evolving at a younger age (and all over the European leagues), you need to have a much wider scope of things and see the big picture. By that, I just mean understanding what it takes for any style of goalie to compete and win in today's NHL game, both mentally and technically.

Take my advice - show some patience with the goaltending prospects in your line of sight, but at

the same time never stop learning about them. Whatever your expectations may be, don't form a hasty opinion and don't allow that opinion to be steadfast. Give yourself some time to determine how they handle adversity, pressure and some tough losses. A lot can be lost in translation, but ultimately it will be the facts that set you free from the madness of drafting prospects.

In my own personal endeavors, I know my predictions are not always right. When I am right, I don't always "call it" with total accuracy. But if you want to experience more success in the fantasy realm, then do what I do and go with what you know as a matter of fact. Don't draft goalies simply on hearsay and haphazard notions. Always be open to different interpretations and opinions from other fantasy managers and fans. Discuss, dissect, debate and research.

Did I ever expect Miikka Kiprusoff to go on a streak where he only allows 15 goals in 11 games? Not a chance. But now that he's done it, can I explain why he's playing so well? Absolutely. And to be honest, that's all that matters to fantasy managers looking for an edge. Remember, it's not how these goalies get there, but what they do once they arrive in the NHL.

MICHAL NEUVIRTH

Despite what everyone might think after Neuvirth's two NHL games and losses this season, he's ready to play in the NHL. Does he deserve a spot in Washington right now? Not yet, because there's no real rush. But once Jose Theodore's contract expires and Semyon Varlamov stays put, Neuvirth will get a real chance to shine.

There's a good debate taking place right now regarding Neuvirth in the ***School of Block forums***. This is the stuff I love to see, because there are so many different interpretations of his style and his abilities. I don't discredit anything being argued - rather I try to make managers realize what makes him such a good prospect and a great goalie.

Yes, he was admittedly terrible in the 6-3 loss to the Leafs, but from a fantasy perspective, you need to recognize the legitimacy of his puck stopping ability and realize his struggles were nothing unordinary. Although he didn't help his case or take advantage of this opportunity, it's still only two measly games. Just look to his season in Hershey, where he's 10-5-0 with a 1.99 GAA and .929 save percentage. The kid can dominate games and make timely saves.

"I was feeling good after the first period, but I let in the first goal," Neuvirth said after the loss to the Leafs. "That was kind of a bad bounce for me, and that turned everything around."

Neuvirth easily recognizes his mental lapse after the first goal against and how he allowed that goal to impact his confidence. Just the fact he realizes it and then openly discusses those

struggles is proof of his readiness. It's a much different story than what you saw from some other less-talented prospects like Jimmy Howard or Erik Ersberg. This is not a situation that should lead you to panic or drastically change your opinion of his long-term value.

JIMMY HOWARD

Speaking of which, Howard is probably on the opposite end of this prospect spectrum. To me, he's a very nice sell-high goalie right now. Howard has played pretty well over the last few weeks, but I get a strong sense that the recent media hype has been overblown. A 9-6-1 record with just a .914 save percentage does not mean he has improved technique, other than he's adjusting to NHL speed. They are decent numbers, slightly better than what I expected.

Don't be fooled by the stories you read where they already label Howard as a star, a goalie with a legitimate future as the Red Wings' starter. He still has a lot of work to do at the NHL level in order to reach that point in his career. There's the technical side, which includes improving his footwork and rebound control and then there's the mental side of it as well. Regardless of his stats or recent success, it needs to be sustained over a longer period of time.

So again, is Howard a good goalie that has improved with the increase in minutes played? Yes. But is he considered a quality skater, a proven NHL winner and elite in any one area? Not yet. Therefore, you have to see why I don't consider him a strong prospect by any means. I still question his consistency, footwork and rebound control. But at the same time, I don't negate the fact he could evolve into something better. Only time will tell.

BRIAN ELLIOTT

Elliott took longer than expected to capture his confidence and rhythm following Pascal Leclaire's jaw injury, but it all came together in a 3-0 shutout on Thursday night against the Flyers. He then followed that up with a 4-2 victory on Saturday night against the Hurricanes and now has more confidence than at any point in the season.

Although he's not in the same tier of skilled prospects like Bernier, Greiss and Markstrom, he's starting to take the next step in turning into a solid #1 goalie. Compared to where he was at this point last year, it's clear his abilities are evolving with every game he plays. If you're an Elliott owner, you can't ask for much more than that. If you show some patience, it could really pay off if Leclaire returns to the lineup and struggles early.

Let's state the facts - Elliott is not the fastest or the biggest or the most agile goalie out there. But he's not weak or does not struggle in any one area either. He is a well-rounded goaltender

with good rebound control, good mental toughness and decent experience. If he can continue to prove his ability to win games by making timely saves and play with poise, focus and confidence, it will allow him to be more and more valuable in the fantasy realm.

His value lies somewhere in the “quality third goalie” sector when he’s in a rhythm, but that depends a lot on his minutes played. From there, we can only watch and determine what happens next. But he’s like every other NHL goalie – he’s an amorphic being whose value could skyrocket or slide in an instant.

With Elliott and all goalies, don’t worry about when and if good or bad things will happen, just be ready to act when either one finally transpires.