With all of the great young goaltending talent in the league right now, it's no surprise that some of the wise and durable veterans get lost in the fantasy mix. Once you look past the popular guys like Martin Brodeur and Tim Thomas, there stands one 40-year-old man fully capable of playing consistent, quality stretches of good hockey.

Dwayne Roloson has performed beyond the expectations of most analysts out there and has become a perfect fit for the New York Islanders. On a team loaded with so much young and up-and-coming talent, Roloson is the perfect type of goalie for these players – one that instills confidence in his teammates simply due to his unyielding work ethic.

As a veteran, Roloson understands that he doesn't have to stop every shot that comes his way or win games single-handedly, so his focus lies on simply playing a full 60-minute game. His goal is singular in essence, but it runs the gamut of the competitive goalie's mission - work harder than the opponent's goaltender and make timely saves. This not only brings a steadying

influence to the team on the ice but also provides strong leadership values in the locker room. For any general manager out there, these assets are worth their weight in gold.

Without any type of true recognition, Roloson only suffered two regulation losses in his first 16 games (Oct. 16 and Nov. 21) on a team that struggled mightily to score. Most recently, his last two games (Dec. 23 and Dec. 26) were incredible winning performances and in the game before that against the Lightning, *he made a pair of saves* in a loss that condensed everything he encompasses into a single moment in time – he never, ever gives up on a puck.

But what makes Roloson worthy of being on your fantasy team, despite being on a team outside of the playoff race?

It's his mental toughness. Roloson never gets too high or too low within a game. He's even-keeled and his focus never wavers. He's rarely rattled by a weak goal against and he rarely gives up the bad or weak-angle goal. If these are the types of goals a young stud gives up, you can bet it will affect their confidence, timing and rhythm. But with Roloson, they don't bother him and the team in front of him doesn't lose confidence. His work ethic rubs off on all his teammates because they know he's not the most athletic goalie, but sans a select few, he works the hardest.

Another facet of Roloson's continued success in the NHL is his adaptability. He used to play a completely different style of butterfly only 3-4 years ago. But thanks to his excellent work ethic,

he has been able to adjust his style on the fly and refine his game to be as effective as possible. Again, this is another aspect you won't see with rookies, sophomores or third-year goalies. Not because they don't want to learn, but because their focus lies elsewhere.

Roloson's season is actually very similar to Chris Osgood's impact on the Islanders back in the 2001-02 season. Osgood was let go on waivers by the Red Wings and relied on his experiences to put together an astonishing season with 32 wins (his 32-25-6 record was good enough to tie the great Billy Smith for most wins in a season). But more importantly, Osgood won enough games down the stretch to lift the team back into the Stanley Cup playoffs. He finished with a spectacular (for that team) 2.50 goals against average and .910 save percentage.

Roloson also currently has a 13-7-5 record with a .910 save percentage and 2.83 goals against average. That's not the best stat-line out for a goalie that has only played 25 games, but it's one of the most admirable. Just think what could happen if he starts to get some goal support and the Islanders start to play at a higher level. Last January, Roloson went 7-4-0 with the Oilers and started to elevate his game as the second half of the season began, so that's something to keep an eye out for.

I said since the moment Marty Biron was acquired that Roloson would win this battle for starts, but even Roloson's biggest believers did not expect him to perform with such admiration and grit this early in the season. But the rugged netminder from Simcoe knows what it takes to sustain a career in the NHL and it is these experiences that give him an edge right now.

Roloson may not be the best choice out there for your team, but he's worth a strong look. If you have some flexibility on your roster, sign him and you'll at least benefit from the saves and shots against totals. And it never hurts to look for all of these traits Roloson has in the many young goalies around the league - it could easily be the difference in you finding the next long-term fantasy star.

ANTTI NIEMI

On the other end of the NHL experience spectrum we have Blackhawks rookie goalie Antti Niemi, another goalie that is a seemingly perfect fit for his team. With a 9-1-1 record, a .927 save percentage and 1.81 goals against average, the Vantaa, Finland native has been a quality fantasy gem and arguably the biggest goalie surprise of the season.

Although he's only 11 games into his NHL career, Niemi's stock as a perfect backup is on the rise. Why? Because at 26 years of age, he has the mental toughness needed to provide results in limited action. How has he been able to develop this trait so quickly? Because the Blackhawks gave him some minutes early in the season (including the chance to play in his home country, which had positive results) and they allow a very low average of shots against. Finally, Niemi has been able to gain confidence and momentum on a strong team in his limited NHL experience.

You all know my thoughts on his style – it's extremely raw and needs a lot of "work" when it comes to the dominant butterfly style seen in today's game. But on this Blackhawks team, at this very moment, a mentally tough goalie is more primed for success than a technically solid goalie. But why is this the case?

Because it's all about the timely save. For the Blackhawks, it's not how you make the saves, but when you make it. And when Niemi needs to make a big save, he's there, ready and focused. Just look at his game-by-game stats and you can see it right away.

It doesn't matter if it's a 5-4 victory in which he makes 16 saves on 20 shots (like last night in the 5-4 win over Nashville) or a 33-save shutout against the always-dangerous Red Wings. For a goalie that only plays once every four or five games, there's no need for a style that screams elite efficiency. He just needs to make the save when it matters most…and that's Antti's game to a T.

MICHAEL LEIGHTON

It's amazing what happens when a head coach instills some confidence in a goalie by giving him two starts in a row. With Brian Boucher's finger laceration, Leighton was the benefactor with two starts in two nights over the weekend. Although Saturday night's win against the Hurricanes wasn't pretty (gave up a three-goal lead in the third), he was able to come away with the shootout victory. The following night he was much more solid and composed in the 2-1 win over

the Islanders.

And just like I hoped for a few weeks ago when he was with Carolina, Leighton now has the momentum, the confidence, the rhythm and the timing all right there, staring him in the face. Let’s hope he gets a third consecutive start on Wednesday against the struggling Rangers.