I often find myself frustrated and confused by many of the coaching decisions related to starting certain goaltenders. It would help if I had more insight on every coach's motives and decision-making process, or if I had more access to their pre and post-game comments, but I don't. Nevertheless, there are too many others that still leave me perplexed.

I'll use Toronto as my main example, where Ron Wilson has been splitting minutes in an aggravating fashion since March started. J-S Giguere was extremely rusty in a 5-1 loss to Carolina, but started the next game two days later (March 4) and rebounded well, but still dropped a 2-1 contest to the Bruins. Jonas Gustavsson got the call two nights later, and in the first game of a back-to-back, made 22 saves for a 2-1 victory over Ottawa.

That game may have been a mini-turning point in his season, as it was only his fifth win in 15 total one-goal games. In fact, of Gustavsson's 13 losses this year, a whopping 10 of them were

one-goal games. Eight of those came in OT. Sure enough, the win over Ottawa was crucial in terms of Gustavsson gaining some confidence late in the season. In fact, I noticed a few positive adjustments from what his stance, style and angles revealed prior to the Olympic break.

That's why I was shocked to see Giguere back in net the next night. Gustavsson had played a set of back-to-back games twice earlier in the season (Nov. and Jan.) and was a combined 3-1 in those games. So why does Wilson choose to delineate from Gustavsson's strong night at this point in the season?

Surely he would realize that Gustavsson has a perfect chance to gain some monumental momentum heading into the final stretch and would therefore try to play him more consistently, yes? At least that was my thinking. There's nothing to lose. The playoffs are out of sight. And since Gustavsson is still labeled as the future, what could be better than giving him plenty of chances to obtain a few more of those elusive one-goal victories?

Every minute counts for a goalie that has clearly struggled with angles, sightlines and depth in the net, especially European imports. All of those aspects of his game are "fixable" if he has enough chances to play more and work them out. Practices help, but games legitimately seal the deal. And since there's no urgency to win, I don't see the point in alternating starts. But Wilson alternated and Giguere ended up suffering a 3-1 loss to the Flyers.

Amazingly, the same exact thing happens again. Gustavsson hangs on for a rare one-goal win

by making 26 saves on March 9 against the Bruins. For the first time all season, Jonas had notched two one-goal victories in a row (with a Giguere loss in between)! Surely he would start the next game against the Lightning, right? Nope. Wilson goes back to Giguere, who is just barely good enough to pull off another 4-3 win.

Gustavsson does return for the next game, however, and secures a sloppy 6-4 win over the Oilers, notching his third win in a row for the first time all season. A third time has to be a charm, I thought. There's no way Wilson would bench him three times in a row, after three different kinds of wins, when the focus is clearly on playing for next year. But sure enough, as shocking as it sounds, Gustavsson was once again benched. Giguere started against the Islanders last night and failed miserably, making 28 saves on 32 shots in a 4-1 loss.

It's madness, I tell you. And unless someone has a legitimate reason for how this rotation could possibly be a positive thing for both goalies, I will say that this is the worst possible thing you could do to Gustavsson.

I see the same kind of issues taking place in Chicago, but they don't surprise me as much. Joel Quenneville doesn't have a strong history when it comes to managing goaltenders and their minutes. This leads me to believe that the only hope the Blackhawks have is if they roll with one or the other. Play Cristobal Huet for five straight. Play Antti Niemi for five straight. Just choose one and let it be already. Otherwise their ship will slowly continue to sink.

Many people wonder why Huet runs so hot and so cold. Why does he have these brilliant flashes, but then struggles just as suddenly? Well, the essence of Huet's game was revealed against the Flyers over the weekend. Replay the game in your head. He saw a ton of shots, including 12 in the first period, which allowed him to get into a rhythm.

In fact, in the very first shift of that game, you saw that Huet was forced to move a ton in his crease and had to make a couple of nice saves right off the bat. The blood was flowing and he was locked in from the get-go. He was in a bloody rhythm!! Hallelujah. Then the late-game collapse stabs him like a dagger straight through his heart and for some reason, Quenneville's decision is to bench him again? Try making sense of that one – I sure can't.

Huet was one of the best players on the ice for the first two periods in that game, so I don't get how a coach would allow Huet's frustrations to fester on the bench after his teammates collapsed around him. Get him back in the net and let him play through that Flyers loss as quickly as possible. Don't let him sit on the bench and think about it. Tough losses are like battle wounds. They need to be closed up before they get infected. Huet was like a loaded gun after that game. The rhythm was right there. All Quenneville had to do was pull the trigger by starting Huet again.

But he didn't. And the Blackhawks paid dearly, as Niemi followed up Huet's loss with his own third-period collapse. But boy, were they quite different. Like I've been saying all year long, Niemi is still an extremely raw goalie. He has a lot to learn. He might have the mental toughness to make a lot of saves in low-shot games, but when the playoffs roll around there's no way the Blackhawks should depend on Niemi in the first round of the playoffs.

At this point, it's simply up to Quenneville to recognize what kind of goalies he's dealing with. One needs consistent minutes if he's going to tear it up late in the season, the other one is a raw prospect with no big-game NHL experience. This really isn't a tough decision to make if you actually understand what your goalies are made of.

Everything presented above becomes an extremely valuable lessons in fantasy goaltending. As managers, we are asked to make some of the same decisions as head coaches. Please don't treat goalies like Marionettes. They have feelings. Recognize them, understand them and sympathize every once in a while. Pro goalies feed off of positive reinforcement. They are put under more pressure when negatively reinforced. These are not puppets on strings. They are human beings that sometimes need to be nurtured in order to reach their full potential. It's that simple.

Fantasy managers need to pay closer attention to how a coach manages a goalie's minutes. If you can learn to know when a situation is positive or negative, and whether the coach is making solid or somewhat awkward choices, you'll get more mileage out of your netminders and have a stronger sense of your team's collective goaltending efforts.

ROBERTO LUONGO

Roberto Luongo is quickly shaping up into playoff form. The return of Kevin Bieksa has really helped, as the big presence in front of the net has been clearing away bodies, which allows Luongo to step up higher in his crease. He was close to a shutout against the Flames last night, but the only goal he allowed was a direct result of a Flames player skating directly across his crease, thus pushing him into the blue paint. Keep an eye on this dynamic when it comes to other NHL goalies, as it directly impacts their timing and focus.

THE CURRENT STATE OF…

I'm well underway with *a brand new Guild feature* that incorporates prospects and overall depth chart analysis of every NHL team. Please check it out and leave any questions regarding the Edmonton Oilers and check for the next article later this week! The first of 30 team profiles *appeared on Silver Sevens* and included my breakdown of the current state of Ottawa Senators goaltending.