After signing Martin Gerber to a one-year, two-way deal on Friday, the Edmonton Oilers now have quite the interesting fantasy goalie situation heading into the season. Since it happened on an otherwise boring summer day, tons of interesting depth chart topics came bubbling to the surface from hockey writers and Oilers analysts everywhere.

The most pertinent fantasy questions included the current health and off-ice situation of Nikolai Khabibulin. Does the team know something we don't about his rehab process and pending court appearance? Then the obvious question of where Gerber was slated to play this season came into view. I also posed the question of whether or not new Oilers assistant coach and former Team Switzerland coach Ralph Krueger played a role in bringing Gerber back into the NHL.

As of now, the Gerber signing is nothing more than a veteran presence in an otherwise inexperienced and shallow, albeit quite talented, depth chart. *Jeff Deslauriers* will be entering his third NHL season, Devan Dubnyk his second and Olivier Roy is still playing juniors in the QMJHL. So Gerber goes a long way in providing the Oilers with experience and decent, streaky upside at a very flexible and cost-efficient two-way deal. Overall, it's a great move by Edmonton to fill a void they had in Oklahoma City.

What it truly means in regards to Khabibulin remains to be seen, but we can derive that Edmonton wanted to cover their bases. We already know he's going to have to work hard to shake off the rust and re-strengthen his back and stomach. Injury concerns might lead the coaching staff to limit his minutes in the first half of the season. Or maybe it will be another frustrating battle with dehydration, which has always been an issue. I can't give an exact percentage, but the odds of Khabibulin being in game shape by the preseason, shaking off the rust, adjusting to the current speed of NHL games and performing well in October are slim.

For Dubnyk, not much changes. His one-way deal leads down one of two paths. Either he out-performs Deslauriers in camp to such a clear degree that Edmonton feels a less-experienced goalie belongs behind Khabibulin, or they want him to log a ton of minutes in Oklahoma City. The latter option makes most sense to me, as Dubnyk is in the first year of a new two-year deal and clearly needs another full season of AHL conditioning before he can be set up for real success in Edmonton.

For Deslauriers, well, he was on the verge of arbitration before signing his $1.05 million, one-year deal, so the time is now. He either proves himself enough to stick around, or he becomes an UFA on July 1, 2011. Only 12 wins in 48 games last season, with a .901 save percentage and a 3.26 goals-against average does not paint a pretty picture heading into the

season.

But it is because of those bloated numbers that you should be fully aware of his true potential. It's certainly better than what any numbers from last season will show. In fact, signing Gerber instead of one of the many UFA's that played in the NHL last season goes a long way in proving how much faith the Oilers have in Deslauriers and Dubnyk – and even a little in Khabibulin.

Of the entire melee that ensued from Gerber's signing on Friday, I was captivated most by *a question posed by James Mirtle* from the Globe and Mail. He simply wondered if Deslauriers would clear waivers if placed there, which may happen due to the fact that Dubnyk has a one-way contract and is stuck in either Edmonton or Oklahoma City.

I replied with the belief that there's no way it would happen – Deslauriers is too talented and would get snagged up quickly. A very *interesting conversation ensued*, with many topics being broached regarding Deslaurier's ability to be an NHL starter. To Mirtle's credit, he made extremely logical arguments, but failed to recognize some very crucial components of pro goaltending.

His main argument was how there were so few 26-year-old goalies with "average AHL stats" developing into NHL starters. If Deslauriers was good enough to handle the starting role this season, *how is that possible* after he was so terrible last season and has

"average" stats in the minors?

I defended JDD with *the career of Dwayne Roloson* . He was considered an average goalie in his mid-20's, but ultimately proved he had the goods to be great…and he's still great at age 40. Mirtle *replied with the fact* Roloson's first solid season wasn't until he was 31, which is certainly true. But I retorted with *examples of Tyler Weiman* and Cedrick Desjardins, echoing the fact that a goalie's true value relies so much on opportunity that age doesn't really matter – most goalies fully evolve at around age 30 and mental toughness counts for a lot.

Mirtle *closed his thoughts* by saying Deslaurier's lack of dominance in the AHL is proof he's not ready. I closed by saying that most goalies capable of being NHL starters rarely get the chance to prove or post the stats that accurately reflect their skill and ability. Regardless of how many goalies like Deslauriers had failed before him, *it has little impact on my thoughts* . Every goalie is different, every situation is different and no two goalies develop the same.

With so many people and casual fans paying attention to just the losses, the bloated stats and the fact he's already 26 years old, (I obviously don't mean Mirtle) everywhere I go right now, the sentiment seems to be the same (fairly negative) in regards to Deslauriers' ability and fantasy value heading into the season.

“We don’t give a damn. He’s not good enough for us. He’s just one from the stands.”

This sentiment, along with many others out there that display displeasure with Deslaurier’s potential, might be based in plenty of statistical logic. But it also proves that he’s totally absent from many people’s radars in the fantasy hockey realm. He’s a sleeper.

It comes back to the same thing I’m always striving to teach to you all. Stats rarely tell the story of a goalie’s capability. Very few goalies at 26 years of age, with such little NHL experience, would thrive in last year’s situation. Just because JDD didn’t stand on his head every night and keep Edmonton competitive on a nightly basis doesn’t mean he’s automatically likely to fail again.

Do not lose sight of the things you can’t see in a goalie. Under the surface, Deslauriers is a resilient, hard-working and energetic goaltender. On the surface, he also has great size, great reflexes and the ability to make the big save. He learned valuable lessons last season thanks to suffering more frustrating losses than probably any other goalie in the Western Conference.

I continue to believe good things can come from Deslauriers this season. He has all of the traits of a mentally tough goalie with the ability to thrive, battle hard and bounce back from a disappointing season. Yes, his confidence was clearly torn to pieces on numerous occasions last year. And that’s not the way to win games. But his work ethic did not change and he continues to be dedicated to improving and doing whatever it takes to win. He’ll be more

focused and resilient this season than ever before.

I will be here if or when justice has been done. And I will be here if or when I am completely wrong. And if for whatever reason Deslauriers does fail again, at least you know there are many more prospects just like him…all waiting patiently in the stands.

Feel free to discuss this topic in the School of Block forums and don't forget to download your free copy of our "mock/intro" issue of our all-new monthly Scouting Journal!