

## Fantasy Goalie Mailbag: Six Burning Topics

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 23 August 2010 14:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 25 August 2010 08:36

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To be short and sweet, it's time for another School of Block fantasy mailbag! [So head on over to the forums](#) and drop us your burning and most pertinent fantasy goalie questions. And even though I didn't have a full-blown diatribe for this week, there were five interesting fantasy topics that caught my eye last week, as I continue to wait with great anticipation for August to expire.

1. Clint Malarchuk is now the goalie consultant (not coach) for the Atlanta Thrashers, so he's working with their goalies at all levels. [I suggest reading this story](#) that discusses his influence on two former students – Roberto Luongo and Pascal Leclaire. Both of those goalies are nothing like Ondrej Pavelec. But the development paths for all of them, in relation to being coached by Malarchuk, have interesting timing. He helped Luongo reach that "elite" status in Florida, he helped Leclaire establish himself as a legitimate workhorse starter in Columbus, and now he's poised to put Pavelec on the map as a starter as well. What makes Malarchuk successful is his ability to understand those goalies, his timing on when to convince them to make changes, suggest and implement changes. Will he be able to get through to Pavelec and make changes to his game in this manner? How will Pavelec take the pending critiques and potential changes? The talent ceiling is high, but the floor is also very low. Either way, I love the move to bring in Malarchuk and I think it draws a pretty nice picture for Pavelec's fantasy value to start this season.

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2. [Check out this highlight video](#) of recently drafted New Jersey Devils goalie Scott Wedgewood. Taken in the third round, the current Plymouth Whalers goalie surprised a lot of scouts around the league with his small size but big heart. Now search some video or scouting reports on Jeff Frazee. Both are considered “smaller” goalies. Both are clearly skilled. But the manner in which Wedgewood stops the puck is, in my opinion, much more refined and effective for today’s NHL. Wedgewood will be developing at a faster rate than Frazee due to playing juniors as opposed to NCAA hockey. And although this is merely a hypothetical, if you were the Devils’ director of player development, who would you see as a more potent prospect in a few more years? Things are already difficult for Frazee thanks to Mike McKenna, but if he doesn’t separate himself from the pack soon, there might be another goalie devouring some of his playing time in the AHL.

3. Every journalist and hockey fan will tell you that cliché answers during an interview are frustrating. But in my opinion, it’s a fun challenge to pay close attention and decipher the ones that have more substance behind it. For example, [my interview with Florida Panthers prospect Marc Cheverie](#) last week at the DU Pro Alumni Camp. When asked about the impact Alex Salak’s move to Sweden had on him (around 2:30), he responded with a very solid and professional answer and said it didn’t really matter. But the competitive goaltender, especially one in his situation, will always feel a big boost of confidence from such a move. It not only opens up a spot for him to win in training camp, but it means the organization feels strongly enough in his abilities that he could handle Salak’s role behind Jacob Markstrom. This is part of being a goalie scout – knowing when an answer is just “professional” and when you know there’s something more under the surface. Salak to Sweden is exciting news for Cheverie, so realize the positive mental influence it will have on his play heading into training camp. Just when his fantasy value was starting to take a hit, it goes back in the right direction. Just another example of how randomly things can change.

4. Another week went by with no answers for Antti Niemi. It’s just perpetuating the trend in a new marketplace, as even junior-aged goalies passed over by other teams are getting invited to training camps. Peter Delmas will attend Montreal’s training camp, while Jason Missiaen is now attending Columbus’ camp. Add to that the number of teams passing on all those UFA veterans like Jose Theodore and Manny Legace and the market for goalies is getting more saturated and

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foggy. But Niemi could still sign with a couple of teams. The Islanders are the only team that makes true logical sense, but remember, it relies solely on Rick DiPietro's health. That's the true issue, for there's a big difference between being "ready in time for camp" and actually playing well enough to win close games in October. I could be wrong about Niemi ending up in Europe, but sooner or later, if things stay this way, it will be the only option. No matter how much he doesn't want to play in Europe, it's better than nothing.

5. I'm starting to wonder about the impact Twitter could have on an NHL goaltender heading into training camp. I can only imagine what it's like to get that big chance, get swept up in the chaos of being acquired by a team that needs a starting goalie and then be rewarded with a nice contract because of it. At the end of the day, pro goalies are humans – they want more glory, more followers and more interest in their game. They want to interact with fans, they want to say things to the world. Believe me when I say that Twitter can be very time consuming. It's a place to speak your mind and get things off your mind in a matter that draws more people to you. But like everything else, people can get under your skin or pique your interest in a hurry. It may not be a subject worth writing about, but Twitter plays a role in the pro hockey player's social life and ultimately leads to moments where it can negatively (or positively) influence focus, work ethic and mental clarity. For example, if a pro goalie is talking about "blocking" someone, that means he's being annoyed by that person more than once. And if a goalie is being annoyed, he's being criticized and distracted from hockey. No matter how professional a goalie happens to be, everything he reads on Twitter directed his way will emotionally influence him in some way, shape or form. It's just something to keep in the back of your mind as more and more players join the Twittersphere.

6. Another week has gone by and still nothing official from the NHL regarding the new leg pad and chest protector "form fitting" measurements. So to keep this interesting topic afloat, remember that more than half of the current NHL goalies are going to have the liberty to wear even bigger pads, while all of the smaller ones will be forced to trim in all areas. Remember that the new measurements no longer measure the length of the leg pad, but the distance and space a leg pad can take up depending on the size of that goalie's legs. It's a totally new system of measurement and a totally different way of looking at pad restrictions. Here come more behemoth monsters, there go the smaller guys. Dan Ellis tweeted this morning that his new pads are only a half-inch shorter, so even a 6-foot-0, 188-pound goalie is barely being affected.

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