Five Goalies with Everything to Prove: The *School of Block turned three years old on Saturday*, so I thought a fitting way to celebrate was to repeat the very first session ever held. That first article did one thing - analyze situation. And since that is of utmost importance heading into the week of training camp, let's look at five goalies with a ton of their fantasy future hanging in the balance of how they start.

Carey Price – No goalie has a shorter leash with their fans and media than Price. He not only needs to show a higher level of consistency than last year, but the elite skills must be there as well. Even if he won his first five games, one or two weak goals would result in that momentum falling apart fast. There's no margin for error – every move he makes is in the spotlight. Not many goalies at his age can fulfill such lofty expectations, so some nurturing support from the fans and his teammates would go a long way in helping his cause. He won his first two starts last season, but lost his next seven. Aside from a 2-1 win in Buffalo, he allowed three or more goals in every game last October. A more consistent start will help him develop a thicker skin in what will be a very long season. So the bottom line is this - better preparation in camp is the key to higher confidence in October.

Jimmy Howard – He has nowhere near the pressure or the skill upside as Price, but still has lofty expectations. The coaching staff also expects to see continual improvement, while also securing wins on a consistent basis. His situation is clearly more comfortable than most goalies under pressure to prove their worth. But after such a successful rookie season, at his age, he can't afford to lose games in a row or fall into the dreaded sophomore slump. Like all second-year goalies, the book is now out on him. Shooters know better than ever how they can exploit his overzealous positioning. Howard actually lost his first three starts last season, but quickly turned things around and went 6-2 in November. That's proof of mental toughness and that will have to be on display again this season if he expects to break through the mold of a sophomore starter.

Kari Lehtonen – His career clock only has a few ticks left, so the pressure is on to prove his merit. Lehtonen has taken all of the steps needed to ensure health and durability heading into this season. He had a personal trainer in Atlanta and worked with one of the best goalie coaches in the NHL in Mike Valley. He's stronger physically and mentally. He's mature, evolved

and has a clear-cut starting role with little pressure from Andrew Raycroft. What does this mean? The heat is on to succeed. Aside from the questionable defense in front of him, can he embrace a much-needed “less is more” philosophy with his style? It’s quite clear that when he’s healthy, he’s one of the best, so that’s the expectation he has to fulfill now. It’s his big chance to drop the band-aid boy status and make things happen. He didn’t return from injury until March last season and lost his first two games.

Dan Ellis – Tampa Bay knew they would be dealing with injury-prone Mike Smith, so they didn’t sign Ellis to be a backup. They already have two brilliant prospects in Dustin Tokarski and Cedrick Desjardins, so Ellis has to prove he’s a number one goalie. Think about how his arrival closes the door and clogs up the development situation in Norfolk. The competition is fierce, and now they have a brilliant goalie coach in Frantz Jean to further evaluate and develop their wealth of goaltending talent. So if Ellis does not perform well early, the pressure from a tumultuous off-season with his fans could be harmful on his future in the NHL. At the same time, these things can fire a goalie up. I won’t be surprised if Ellis turns it all into a motivational tool and excels.

Pascal Leclaire – It’s one thing if you’re a veteran like Chris Osgood and you lose fantasy value because of a guy like Jimmy Howard, who goes on a rookie tear. It’s quite another if you are a skilled elite talent like Leclaire losing games because of nagging injuries to a slightly above-average goalie like Brian Elliott. Not to take anything away from the more steady and consistent Elliott, but Leclaire has the ability to be one of the elite starters in the NHL. But it’s hard to accomplish that when you’re covered in band aids. Pascal has to re-establish his presence in the league and he has to do it right here, right now. He has a hefty contract, hefty expectations and a pretty good team in front of him. There are simply no more excuses. Stay healthy, get on a roll and win some games.

I realize there are maybe 10-15 more goalies that have “everything to prove,” including Michael

Leighton, Antti Niemi, Marty Turco, Ondrej Pavelec, Marc-Andre Fleury, Steve Mason and Antero Niittymaki. In fact, just about every starter is fighting to maintain their role and prove something, even guys like Roberto Luongo and Martin Brodeur. But the five above were covered because their situations could result in a massive increase or decrease in their projected fantasy value.

Speaking of Luongo, *we should know in a few days whether or not he's giving up the captaincy* . This shouldn't be a difficult decision for him at all. If GM Mike Gillis publicly called it an issue, it's an issue. I expect little hesitation from Luongo to give it up. I think Gillis did the right thing by giving Luongo a say in the decision. That allows him to internally swallow his pride and realize he's clearly better off without it. Why would he want it, anyways? If he's truly confident, he won't need a little letter proving his worth to his teammates and fans. To me, it's a no-brainer.

Ironically, as I was writing the paragraph above, James Mirtle tweeted that Luongo had indeed given up the captaincy. What a smart move, a nice and easy decision. I really think Luongo is going to rock it this year, and yes, he has vastly improved his fantasy value because of this. It will clearly reflect in his ability to play with more focus and consistency.

Prospect Tournaments Weekend Recap

Thanks to *Hockey Streams* and the *Young Stars tournament in Penticton* , I was able to watch some key prospects play in some key exposure games. For many, this is their first true shot

playing against pro-level players. Many are vying for better positioning in the team's depth chart, so the competitive spirit was rather high. Below is a recap of the goalies I scouted over the weekend. You can follow along with me all week, as I'll continually update my *Prospects Tournament Scouting Journal* after each game.

Jussi Rynnas – His first exhibition game in North America was a great success. Like most goalies in his situation, there were significant early jitters, as he was scored on early in the game after failing to control a sharp-angle shot. But after the first period passed, he became much more comfortable and confident. His rebound control was not the best, but he did get better as the game went on. Overall, his wide net coverage and quick feet were on display, as was his quick glove. Rynnas' game proved to me that he can compete in the AHL this year and that he has the assets needed to evolve into a quality NHL goalie. *James Mirtle did an excellent job asking pertinent questions* to Francois Allaire, who happened to be the ultimate reason Rynnas came to Toronto. Since he's willing to adapt to whatever style Allaire feels is best for him to succeed, Rynnas is on a straightforward path to establishing his presence in the NHL. It won't come easily, but it's definitely in the stars.

Robin Lehner – He really struggled in his first pro-level exhibition game. Although he has excellent fundamentals and net coverage, his rebound control was deplorable and caused him early-game jitters. It didn't get better as the game went on and he suffered because of it. That lack of rebound control cost him too many times, and by the halfway point, his timing was totally off. The Sens lacked solid defensive support, but give him credit for battling hard in the third period. Ottawa did score a few goals late in the game, so his display of a strong work ethic really helped things out. Regardless, I think Ottawa is still making a mistake by dropping him in the AHL this season. He's simply not ready for the speed and precision. And if Mike Brodeur has a starter's workload, it does Lehner no good to sit on the bench. Send him back to the minors, promote Brust and play it safe.

Brad Thiessen – I take his successful two games with a big grain of salt because he's had more AHL and ECHL experience than most of the guys he's up against. He was a tense early in the first game against Ottawa but was very impressive in both games over the weekend. He made a number of timely saves against Ottawa and did an excellent job of controlling rebounds and not allowing second opportunities. I was really impressed with his patience, as for a small guy, he showed an ability to stand up and make saves. That efficiency is an aspect of his game that sets him apart from John Curry, so I really think Brad's not only going to land a solid AHL gig, but he's really going to push Curry in camp and start to make him look quite expendable.

Alec Richards – His game against Toronto proved why he's not even close to being in the Top-100 Prospects Rankings. He is solid down low, but leaves a lot to be desired up high. I did not see anything that set him apart from other goalies at his size. Other than a solid work ethic and settling down halfway through the game, he displayed below-average skills and speed.

J.P. Anderson – The most impressive performance of the first two days came from the 18-year-old OHL standout. Passed up in the NHL Entry Draft, Anderson joined the Sharks for this tourney on a tryout basis. His game last night against Anaheim was a really instrumental game for his future career. It's unclear what San Jose will do with him over the next week, but if one game is the true test of his merit heading forward, I'd say they found a diamond in the rough. It was not only the biggest game of his life, it was the fastest. And with goalies everywhere showing tons of nerves and tense muscles, Anderson was cool, calm, composed and quietly very effective in the first period. He displayed mental toughness by making a timely breakaway save just a few minutes before the Sharks opened up the scoring at the end of the first period. When the shots came fast and furious in the second, he consistently made fundamentally sound saves. He did not give up many rebounds at all, and did a great job of controlling the puck and dealing with traffic. He has an added advantage by catching with his right hand and he was rarely caught over-amplifying his movements or missing angles. He was very square, tight, solid and sure of himself. Keep an eye out to see what San Jose decides to do with him. If I were Wayne Thomas, I'd get him locked down before it's too late.

Timo Pielmeier – Even though he gave up a late goal in the first period and then three more in the second, Timo's execution was still quite impressive. For a smaller goalie, he does a great job of challenging shooters and staying square to pucks. The style is very reminiscent of Miikka Kiprusoff, Vesa Toskala and other Finnish goalies. He can stand up and set his feet quickly enough to make saves in a traditional and efficient manner. He failed to control some rebounds, but he didn't struggle in that department. He was in control all game long and shut the door in the third period, which proved he has the ethic to keep working hard. It wasn't the result he wanted, but overall I witnessed very solid skills. Since he's only entering his second pro season, there's plenty of time and room to grow and mature. He is clearly ready and able to handle a solid AHL workload this year.

Olivier Roy – Other than Anderson, Roy had the most impressive performance of the weekend. He was also scored on early with a fluky goal off his blocker, but calmed down quickly, played his game well and ended up making a couple of highlight-reel saves that led him to become a storyline when the third period was underway. His style is very systematic for a Quebec butterfly goalie and his strong positioning is visible with every save he makes. You can tell he's very well coached and he proved that his overall draft choice at 133rd overall was a steal. He's a smaller goalie that plays a step deeper in his crease, but the quickness and positioning allows him to thrive in dicey odd-man situations. Oilers GM Steve Tambellini commented on how much he liked Roy's focus on the puck and his overall work ethic. He stopped 28 of 29 shots and brought the fans out of their seats on a few occasions. Overall, it was an excellent way to get a huge boost of confidence heading into a crucial training camp.

Eddie Lack – Although he only played half of the game against Edmonton, he was another goalie that gave up an early goal but quickly settled down and thrived. Lack is still somewhat raw, as he didn't have much structure to his positioning or intangibles. He also needs to improve his foot speed if he wants to play in the NHL. It's hard to see him getting that chance in Vancouver, but he has great size on his side and he's still only 22 years old.