

## The Comedy of Controversy

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 25 October 2010 13:46 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:46

---



A starter loses a game. The backup wins the next one. Almost instantly, the word controversy seeps into my e-mail inbox, Twitter feed and Center Ice package. The term overwhelms my brain and pushes me to the edge of insanity. Only three weeks into the season and this trend has already happened with so many teams that I'm feeling nauseous, frustrated and annoyed.

But as quickly as I'm bothered by it, I simply laugh it off. The comedy of controversy is

## The Comedy of Controversy

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 25 October 2010 13:46 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:46

---

something I'll never escape. I guess that's why I'm writing these words, for once again, the message I have for fantasy managers everywhere is that goaltending just can't be simplified. With such a subjective term, it's a joke it is used so early in the season.

### [FANTASY MAILBAG: OCTOBER 25](#)

In most cases, "controversy" is tossed around for the simple reason of creating a stir. Maybe 90-percent of the time, the word is misused by uninformed writers, bloggers and fans in a variety of inappropriate manners. But no matter how much I scream, disprove, discredit or ignore, the term is not going away anytime soon. I'll learn to deal with it over time, but I'll never agree with it. Just like there's always a reason for people to use that term, there's a two-fold amount of reasons to disprove it. As a goalie scout, that's my job – to expand and dissect situations and bring out the numerous elements that others fail to acknowledge.

The most crucial element in NHL goaltending is simply winning. It doesn't matter how you look, where you came from or how much experience you have. If you stop the puck and help your team win games, you're probably going to start the next game. If you don't, the coach is probably making a mistake. Goaltending is also, more than ever before, about using size effectively. If you are 6-foot-6 and can maneuver in an efficient manner, you are going to get more looks, more opportunities and make more saves. Just look at Anders Lindback and Pekka Rinne, who have the Predators off to a 5-0-3 start and a league-high 13 points.

## The Comedy of Controversy

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 25 October 2010 13:46 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:46

---

Nashville's goaltending has been the cream of the fantasy crop so far this season. And it's no coincidence the two European imports combine to be the tallest tandem in the NHL. Backed by the stellar coaching of Mitch Korn and the wise decisions by Barry Trotz, there's no reason why their fantasy output can't continue. By playing one off the other, the competition is healthy and in no way, shape or form is it considered a controversy. What Rinne accomplished last year means nothing this season, so expectations are simply dictated by what they do in their most recent performance. If things keep going at this rate, I expect Rinne to start close to 50 games and Lindback will get a few more than 30. But it could just as easily be flipped the other way.

But I can't discuss Rinne without commending another Finnish superstar in Miikka Kiprusoff. Once again, he has been Calgary's best player in October. He is making those huge, timely stops we've come to expect and is doing everything he possibly can to give the Flames a chance to win. He has won four out of his last five games (4-3-0) and has a 2.14 goals against average and .924 save percentage so far. More importantly, however, after years of complacency muddying his reputation and consistency, that term has been eliminated from his dictionary. Why? Henrik Karlsson.

[\*Karlsson was outstanding in his first start and win\*](#) , making 20 saves on 22 shots in a 6-2 victory over Columbus last Friday. If you watched, did you happen to see his reaction when the game ended? He counted down the final seconds with a very animated, prolonged fist pump to the sky. Although it may have seemed like a natural and jubilant reaction, it was also a bright, glaring red alert to Kiprusoff. The veteran is being challenged by a competent "rookie" for the first time in his Flames career.

So how did Kiprusoff respond? How about a 27-save shutout over the Sharks and a fist pump and visible celebration of his own. I haven't seen that kind of animated, outward response from Kiprusoff in the regular season in my entire life. But now he has a clear and present reason to shed any sense of complacency. So even if the Flames are up 3-0 and dominating a game, he's

## The Comedy of Controversy

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 25 October 2010 13:46 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:46

---

not going to let that shutout slip away. Because of this, fantasy owners should rejoice, as I see more good things coming from Kiprusoff. He's under attack from a big beast named Karlsson and he can no longer just show up and flop around. Every shot he faces is under the microscope and you'll see the focus soar to new levels. Too bad Calgary didn't do this five years ago.

On the other end of the ice in Calgary, maybe the worst coaching decision of the season came when San Jose chose to start Antti Niemi over Antero Niittymaki. Just look at their performances over the last week. Niemi dropped two in a row (Oct. 16 and 19) and then Niittymaki won two in a row (Oct. 21 and 23). His second consecutive start was a 6-1 win over Edmonton, a snooze fest in which he only faced 22 shots. But for a reason that's totally incomprehensible to me, they chose to start Niemi on Sunday. He gave up three goals on five shots and is now 1-3-0 with a 4.52 goals-against average and a .854 save percentage.

No matter what the schedule dictates, if a goalie wins two games in a row, he has to be started in the third game. If not, it is a major momentum killer for your fantasy goalie, but the team in front of them. Niittymaki did an excellent job in relief of Niemi on Sunday, but the team was bound and weakened by their own head coach. It was a brutal decision that proved the organization is not too sure how to handle these situations. Because of this, proceed with caution if you own either Sharks goalie. Niittymaki should start the next game and should play well, but if he suffers a loss, Niemi will be back in the net and will probably struggle.

For Niemi owners, this is a tough pill to swallow, but one you should have expected. Like all high-risk, high-reward fantasy goalies, lightning rarely strikes in the same place twice. He's not going to thrive in the same fashion as last year and the gaudy stats he posted can't be expected. Scouts do their homework and NHL players learn a goalie's tendencies quicker than one would think. If you want another perfect example of this situation, just look at Craig Anderson's performances so far this month. Anderson, as I expected, has been much weaker

## The Comedy of Controversy

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 25 October 2010 13:46 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:46

---

this October compared to last. The issues could run much deeper, however.

Similar to Niemi, this is a contract season and the pressure is on to not only duplicate last year's success, but establish an even higher value for next season. Will Anderson be able to start winning games single-handedly for the Avs again? It's a true Rocky Mountain to climb and I don't expect him to capture last season's glorious run. He is never one to lack effort and vicious attitude, but he does lack quality skating ability. If he tries to do too much, he will fail. And unfortunately he might feel that, even in a loss, he deserves the next start. If that culture continues and Anderson starts on Tuesday in Vancouver, things will only get worse.

Speaking of Vancouver, after Roberto Luongo's brutal outing against the Wild in a building he has struggled in for years, fans were already calling the Canucks goaltending situation a controversy. But when you look beyond the basic statistics, it becomes quite clear that this is just a matter of a workhorse adjusting to style changes while a capable backup is starting as expected. Luongo was very strong in his first two games and then allowed four goals in each of the next two games on the road. Cory Schneider got his first start in the fifth game (Oct. 17 vs. CAR) and had a brilliant outing, making 31 saves in a 5-1 win.

Schneider's play is not surprising at all. He's a capable goalie ranked very high in my [Top-100 Prospects Rankings](#)

and has tremendous size and a great ability to read plays. And since the following game was Luongo's dud in Minnesota, things only looked worse for Luongo. But he bounced back in the 2-1 shootout loss to Chicago and proved that he'll be fine over the course of the season. But the drama that comes from getting beat three times in a shootout lends a hand to a "controversy," so the fans roasted him alive because of the loss. The stats don't help, as Luongo is 1-3-2 with a 2.92 GAA and .903 save percentage while Schneider is 2-0 with a .68 GAA and .968 save percentage. Either way, this is no controversy.

## The Comedy of Controversy

Written by Justin Goldman

Monday, 25 October 2010 13:46 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:46

---

Finally, over in Ottawa, Brian Elliott has some sub-par statistics. He's 2-3-0 with a 3.65 GAA and .893 save percentage. That's not exactly fantasy-worthy. But I'm not afraid to say he's played very well, aside from a loss against the Penguins. What should a fantasy manager take from this? Only that he's close to snapping into a rhythm. He has stopped 65 of the last 70 shots in back-to-back starts last Friday and Saturday and the Senators host Phoenix, Florida and Boston this week. Those are tough matchups, but after being shut out 3-0 by Montreal, the Senators should come out flying on Tuesday.

Elliott's situation is perfect proof of why it's so important to pay attention to a goalie's confidence and performance. If you just look at their stats, you're missing the point. Whether it is Pittsburgh, Chicago, New Jersey, Boston or Tampa Bay, rarely is there a true goalie controversy. Wins and losses are a result of a million different elements and stats don't even reflect one percent of those elements. Dig deeper, look at video replays of goals, understand matchups and dissect a goalie's confidence and focus. That is what will make you a better fantasy manager when it comes to making daily lineup decisions.

**WAIVER WIRE** – Ondrej Pavelec has been activated off the IR and will see a start this week, as the Thrashers play Wednesday, then Friday and Saturday. Either Jeff Deslauriers or Devan Dubnyk should get a start this week, as the Oilers play their first back-to-back on Thursday and Friday, both on the road. Nikolai Khabibulin has played every minute for Edmonton and has lost four straight after two wins to start the season. And even though there's no back-to-back for the Avs this week, I expect Peter Budaj to start on Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday. Finally, Braden Holtby was recalled by Washington this morning and they play back-to-back road games on Wednesday and Thursday.