Try as you might, there's simply no way of stopping the inevitability of a goalie's sudden failure and surprising success. Every season, nay, every month, an unsuspecting group of them spring forward, while a few of the more valuable ones fall back and almost single-handedly crush your chance of winning it all.

But as I have come to learn over the years, it's not the goalies you draft that make or break your season. Rather it is the ones you acquire through a trade, or the ones lost on the free agent wire that you are able to project correctly before everyone else.

FANTASY MAILBAG – NOVEMBER 8

I know that last week's School of Block - the Economy of Movement - was met with some criticism. And rightfully so, for there is so much I can teach you about the current performance of many goalies and what their future performances might look like. On top of this, part of being a successful goalie scout is being able to project the upside of a young talent with potential.

That being said, after careful deliberation last week, I hope this combination of the usual School of Block analysis plus some projections for the coming weeks will create an unstoppable force that makes you an even better fantasy goalie manager than ever before! Let's start with three goalies that have been springing forward at a rapid pace over the past few weeks.

Oh yeah, and speaking of projecting the upside of a young talent, be sure to check out my scouting journal on *Braden Holtby's first career start and win* from Sunday afternoon's game against the Flyers!

SERGEI BOBROVSKY – Maybe no goalie has had more of a fantasy impact than Bobrovsky. His six-game winning streak was a surprising stretch in which he was able to adjust to the smaller surface and faster pace on a save-by-save basis. His strengths in regards to foot speed and tracking ability were on display nightly and many teams have not yet realized that they have to do everything they can to shoot high on him in order to score.

In last night's loss against the Capitals, two of the three goals he allowed were right over his glove and left shoulder. As I have been saying since training camp, this is his biggest area of weakness. Because of this, be aware of it on a nightly basis. Realize that teams that have played him before, including Pittsburgh, Washington and both NY crews might have more success in the future. But if he plays some teams from the Western Conference, expect success and start him without question.

In fact, there is very little reason to ever bench him. His numbers are fantastic, as he is 8-2-1 with a 2.19 goals-against average and .926 save percentage in 657 minutes of play. During his six-game winning streak, he only allowed ten goals.

Moving forward, I expect his fantasy value to deflate a little bit. When finally losing after a six-game winning streak, most goalies experience a mental letdown that causes an exhale, or relaxation of sorts. Brian Boucher could start the next game (Thursday), so being benched until the weekend will impact Bobrovsky's focus and rhythm in his next game. If he responds well and plays at the same level as last week, it's a surefire sign of his mental toughness and that will elevate his long-term value even more.

Short-term projection: 1A goalie despite Michael Leighton's return with a 2.40 GAA and .915 save percentage.

Long-term projection: Continues to carry a 60-40 workload and effectively transition to a smaller ice surface.

ANTERO NIITTYMAKI – I had mentioned on a few occasions after Antero notched a 4-2 win here in Denver back on Oct. 21 that he was on the rise. Since that game, he has sprung forward and caught fire. Including that road win, Niitty has gone 5-0-1 and only allowed ten goals. Overall he is 5-1-1 with a 1.78 goals-against average and .932 save percentage.

A couple of things have stuck out to me when dissecting Niittymaki's game. The mental toughness that is hidden from the surface of his game is in full swing. On Oct. 24 when Antti Niemi started a game against the Flames, he was pulled after allowing three goals on just five shots. Antero was thrust into the game and didn't miss a beat, stopping 24 of 25 shots.

It proved something that I have been discussing for years – coaches kill their own team by making bad decisions. The night before, Niittymaki won a 6-1 game over Edmonton and stopped 21 of just 22 shots. That light workload should have led the coaching staff to realize that he would have plenty of energy to start both games of the back-to-back, but it didn't

happen, and Niemi failed miserably.

Last week, Niittymaki stopped 15 of 16 shots and suffered his first loss of the season at the hands of Niklas Backstrom and the Minnesota Wild. Two days later, Niemi got another chance to turn things around, but didn't get much help and lost the game. Two days after that, even after he was benched for a game, it didn't affect his momentum at all. He came back with a big 5-2 win on Saturday against his former team and stopped 33 of 35 shots.

Overall, Niittymaki has done what not many people expected – suppress Antti Niemi and carry the workload through the first five weeks of the season. In my opinion, he won't be slowing down anytime soon. The Sharks are a powerful team and even with a few offensive hurdles (Devin Setoguchi's struggles and Joe Thornton's suspension), the depth they have up front allows them to continue rolling. With games on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, the Sharks would be smart to keep Niittymaki in the net until he displays a loss of focus, timing and rhythm.

Short-term projection: Carries a starting goalie workload with a 2.20 GAA and .925 save percentage.

Long-term projection: Carries a starting goalie workload with some up and down streaks throughout the season.

PETER BUDAJ – The root of his recent surge is his completely remodeled sense of confidence and composure. He's no longer rattled after giving up a goal and even though his rebound control is still weak early in games, he stays focused and makes the necessary saves due to his terrific athleticism.

His shutout on Saturday against the Stars was clear proof of this improved mental fortitude and he has turned into one of the better backups in the league. In the five straight games he has played since Anderson hurt his knee, Budaj has gone 3-1-1 and allowed 13 goals with a shutout in his last start. Overall he is 4-1-1 with a 2.80 goals-against average and .905 save percentage.

Moving forward, despite coming off a shutout, I would not start Budaj on Tuesday against Calgary. For the past two years, games against these two teams have been completely wild. Their last battle on Oct. 28 between he and Henrik Karlsson was a 6-5 win for the Avs, but Budaj only stopped 14 of 19 shots. Combined with the fact that Miikka Kiprusoff will most likely be in goal, the odds are against Budaj in that game.

I see good things for him on Friday against the Blue Jackets, but we'll have to see how Joe Sacco manages the minutes for their quick back-to-back road trip. Depending on his decisions, old man John Grahame could get a start. They play in Detroit on Saturday and Budaj's first win of the season came at Joe Louis Arena in a shootout, so there's a chance Sacco could save Budaj's energy for the Red Wings and let Grahame go up against the Blue Jackets.

Short-term projection: Expect success until Craig Anderson returns with a 2.70 GAA and .910 save percentage.

Long-term projection: Will play more than expected, maybe a 35-65 split, and continue to display his improved composure.

Along the same lines for goalies springing forward, expect Brian Elliott, Jonas Hiller, Niklas Backstrom and Henrik Lundqvist to continue playing well for their respective teams. And now, in closing, here's a quick look at a few goalies that have fallen back in the past few weeks and what might be causing it.

RYAN MILLER – I think the injury he's currently nursing is a blessing in disguise. Nobody projected Miller to struggle like he has in October, and because he was so spectacular last year, he is clearly the most disappointing fantasy goalie to own. But regardless of previous struggles, you better not trade him yet.

When he returns, he'll be 100-percent healthy again and the team will receive a rejuvenating boost to have their defensive leader back in the lineup. When a struggling goalie is able to get away from it all, they mentally push the reset button, re-focus and usually come back strong. His experience lends a hand to his success and I think he will be a pleasant surprise upon return.

Short-term projection: Might miss another week or two, but upon return, will help the Sabres win some games.

Long-term projection: Carry an 85-15 workload and still win 30 games with a solid 2.35 GAA and .920 save percentage.

Many of you have been asking why Pekka Rinne is sliding, so check out my thoughts *in the School of Block forums*. The same goes for *Steve Mason and Marc-Andre Fleury*. You can search high and low for statistical or technical reasons why these goalies are falling back right now. But at the end of the day, it all comes down to their lack of experience and mental toughness. They simply don't know how to overcome the hurdles of their lack of preparation. Rinne's difficulties are not as bad as Mason's and Fleury's, but if you notice his negative reactions after giving up goals, you know it is a sign of an immature mental game.

Finally, pay attention to minutes played. Goalies that carried a really heavy workload in October are naturally going to experience an energy drain in November and be less inclined to post the quality stats they had to start the season. This would explain the recent fallback of goalies like Cam Ward, Ilya Bryzgalov, Michal Neuvirth and even Marty Turco. Compare that to the workload seen by Jonathan Quick, who has gotten a few games of rest thanks to Jon Bernier, and you can see this dynamic a little more clearly.

In conclusion, I hope this re-worked School of Block is more helpful when it comes to pure fantasy goalie analysis and combines the two worlds together into a successful article. I would love to hear your thoughts below and don't forget I am around all day to answer your specific

fantasy or goalie related questions in the forums!