

A Different Breed

Written by Justin Goldman

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In order to better project the fantasy value of an NCAA goaltender, one thing you must realize is that they're a totally different breed. When I scout a college goalie, I have to recognize elements such as their daily class and practice schedule, the college culture and lifestyle, the intense rivalries, and most importantly, the game's style differences. Ultimately, I think of the NCAA as a parallel universe to that of the NHL. It's the same sport, just in a different world.

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As such, the purpose of today's School of Block is to present you with five key scouting elements of the NCAA goalie, and why those elements reveal long-term fantasy value. I'll follow

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that up with a handful of names you'll want to put on your fantasy radar – I consider these guys as hidden gems. Let this act as a guide for when you're looking at a particular NCAA goalie and want to figure out their odds for becoming a legit NHL netminder.

When looking at the new update for my [NHL Depth Charts](#), you can sense NCAA products are getting more chances due to the success of some current young stars. Yes, it really helps when guys like Cory Schneider and Jonathan Quick continue to perform well, as it raises the reputation of all NCAA prospects. People talk. And the next thing you know, guys like Kieran Millan, Kent Patterson, Joe Cannata Allen York and Martin Oullette get drafted year after year.

In fact, my [Top-100 Prospects Rankings](#) update for February welcomed two new collegians in Aaron Dell and Scott Greenham, and I just watched former CC Tigers

[goalie Curtis McElhinney shut out the Avs on Saturday](#)

. I also spent time on

[The Pipeline Show on Saturday morning](#)

talking about a number of college standouts. What does it all mean? NCAA goalies are getting more looks from pro teams, scouts and analysts than ever before.

But before I drop a few names, let's look at those five key scouting elements to keep in mind when projecting the fantasy value of an NCAA goalie. Yes, all of these elements are also crucial to the success of a goalie at the NHL level, but they have much more bearing during the "developmental" years for these potential prospects.

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BOUNCING BACK – One of the most important traits an NCAA goalie can have is being able to bounce back from a bad game. Since they play back-to-back games every weekend, the ability to get over a tough loss on Friday night and reclaim their confidence on Saturday night is very influential in determining long-term value. With mental toughness such a paramount asset (at all levels), a collegian can develop a reputation as having leadership qualities and “thick skin” by bouncing back.

The same could be said for bouncing back from bad goals, but the game-to-game dynamic is more important in my opinion. A goalie has to process the loss or bad outing, asses their weaknesses, ride the bus, recover and reset for the next game in less than 24 hours. That’s not so easy when you’re 18, 19 or 20 years old.

PRACTICE WORK ETHIC – Wake up, go to class, go straight to practice, finish homework, study for tests, have a social life, get adequate sleep, wake up...and do it all over again four more times. That’s the life of an NCAA student-athlete. Having to bounce from school to hockey to leisure and back again is mentally exhausting. Influences from friends, family and needing to get good grades can lead to sheer energy drain and simply getting burned out.

I’ve experienced this lifestyle in the ACHA ranks at Colorado State University and I can tell you that it takes a lot of time management skills to be successful in all of these areas. It’s easy to emotionally “crash” during the school year, so having the astuteness to work hard in practice every day goes a long way in performing well on the weekends.

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You play like you practice, so for a young student-athlete looking to raise his reputation as a future pro, honing your skills means coming to practice focused and ready to work as hard as possible, with a mind as clear as glass.

BODY CONTROL – At 18 and 19 years of age, some bodies are still growing and some goalies are still “growing into their frame” so to speak. An NCAA goalie that spends a lot of time in the weight room building muscle will also have to work hard at controlling that size on the ice. Goalies over 6-foot-2 and around 200 pounds need to be able to stay balanced when moving suddenly or making desperate saves.

Being able to move a large frame in an accurate and precise manner goes a really long way in determining what kind of overall mobility they have. It really comes down to the development of fast-twitch muscles. And in today’s game, most college goalies are smart enough to balance their workout routine with plenty of plyometrics, isometrics and even things like hot yoga and Pilates.

Since plays develop so fast at the pro ranks compared to the NCAA, a goalie has to be able to maintain their balance when attempting back-door slides, adjusting arms and legs to deflections and tips, or stretching that extra 1-2 inches in order to snag a fast-rising shot headed for the corners. It’s even more important when the puck is in high-scoring areas like the low slot and directly around the crease area.

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HAND PLACEMENT – Most NCAA goalies already display great legs and footwork. Some are faster than others and some are more positionally sound than others. But what really matters in the NCAA is hand placement. You're seeing it evolve quickly in the NHL right now – goalies are moving their hands up and out in order to eliminate time, space and aerial angles. Therefore, it only makes sense that you want to see NCAA goalies display that same evolution.

NCAA goalies have to be extremely careful when it comes to hand placement. They can't hold them high all the time. The real apt goalies will adjust their hand placement in relation to the situation developing in front of them. This helps hone the ability to read plays and adjust according to the shooter's angle and tendencies. If you see a goalie has hands "stuck" in the same high position (usually with the fingers up), they might not understand this concept yet.

STEADY DISPOSITION – With such crazy crowds on the weekends and the influences from friends and family, maintaining a steady disposition in games is crucial to the NCAA goalie's success. This teaches them a lot of what they need to know in order to stay even-keeled in the pros. You've seen it with many DU Pioneers and CC Tigers goalies – they play in such heated rivalry games that it improves their mental toughness, composure and poise.

With those elements in mind, below are a handful of current NCAA prospects that I feel should be on your fantasy radar. I'm not saying to go out and draft these guys in a frenzied fashion, but just keep them in the back of your mind. They all seem to display a high level of the elements listed above.

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AARON DELL – The 6-foot-0, 185-pound junior from Airdrie, Alberta is already 18-6-1 with a 2.07 goals-against average and .918 save percentage. After sitting behind Sabres prospect Brad Eidsness last year, he has downright stolen the job from him this year. Dell has excellent foot speed, flexibility, hand positioning and is very durable for a smaller goalie. He clearly has all of the tools needed to be drafted or signed as a free agent.

SCOTT GREENHAM – The Addison, Ontario native is way off the radar, but he's a Hobey Baker hopeful and has terrific durability, as he has played every single minute for the Alaska Nanooks this year. He has a solid frame at 6-foot-2 and 189 pounds, a shade below what is considered "ideal," but with the mental toughness to thrive as a pro.

ALLEN YORK – Standing at 6-foot-3 and 175 pounds, the Blue Jackets prospect is clearly capable of succeeding in the pro ranks. The Wetaskiwin, Alberta native won five games in a row before going down with an injury over the weekend, is 16-6-3 on the season and ranked fourth in the NCAA in goals-against average. What makes him such a solid prospect is his body control and steady disposition. He's rarely rattled and moves very well for a lanky goalie.

JOE CANNATA – All you have to do is talk to a Merrimack fan and ask them what Cannata means to the Warriors. He's their defensive leader and consistently gives his team a chance to win. Joe stands 17-5-4 with a 2.11 goals-against average and .921 save percentage. His timely saves and steady confidence are easily his two finest traits.

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SAM BRITTAIN – Listen to [my appearance on The Pipeline Show](#) to learn more about Brittain's upside. As a freshman, he has done an amazing job stepping into some big shoes left by Marc Cheverie and Peter Mannino.

SCOTT GUDMANDSON – Listen to my appearance on The Pipeline Show to learn more about Gudmandson. He gets terrific on-ice training over the summer with Stars goalie coach Mike Valley and has terrific mental toughness.

Other goalies currently on my radar are Maine's Martin Oullette (CBJ), Minnesota's Kent Patterson (COL), freshman Will Yanakeff (Michigan State) and sophomore Joe Howe (CC). Of course there are many solid well-rounded goalies in the NCAA right now, but I feel the guys listed above are a clear step above the others.

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