Whenever Dobber wants to discuss a goalie prospect, I listen to what he's saying. And after he came to me last week to discuss Sea Dogs starter and 2011 Memorial Cup Champion Jacob DeSerres, well, let's just say you'll probably want to listen as well.

FANTASY MAILBAG – MAY 30

Having not seen DeSerres play in a meaningful game since last year's Memorial Cup Finals, I told Dobber I had to catch him on NHL Network during this year's tournament before I could effectively assess his fantasy future. But over the last year, DeSerres was absent from my *Top -100 Prospects Rankings*
after the Flyers passed on signing him last summer.

Their decision came shortly after DeSerres allowed nine goals on 53 shots for the Brandon Wheat Kings against the destined Windsor Spitfires in the 2010 Memorial Cup Finals. One year later, however, DeSerres had a chance to re-write the unsettling storyline after posting a 12-3-0 record, a 2.00 goals-against average and a .916 save percentage in the QMJHL playoffs.

That playoff run culminated with a hard-fought Game 6 victory over Gatineau in the QMJHL Finals, one that presented DeSerres with a chance at sweet redemption. And to think, there was actually a time last summer when Jacob was forced to contemplate his goaltending future.

And what came of that, exactly? A new, refocused approach through an entire summer spent in Vancouver training with his goalie coach, Paul Fricker. Well known for working with and developing Calvin and Chet Pickard, Fricker is one of the most recognized goalie coaches in the Pacific Northwest region.

And as you'll see from my scouting notes below, DeSerres' style has a lot of similarities to Calvin's.

JACOB DESERRES: *Very aggressive positioning in regards to depth … His heels rest on the*

tip of the crease on faceoffs … Balance point is up on his toes, giving him an active appearance … Plays a patient and calm butterfly style with a very straight back … Quiet and confident demeanor in the net … Very loose Reebok pads do not always seal the ice effectively … Does not have a deep crouch and stays very upright … Does not move or execute very consistently … Has a lot of minor and excess foot movements, but a very calm and steady upper body … Likes to challenge shooters outside of the crease whenever possible … Keeps both hands very tight to his hips and back near his body … Showed numerous visible signs of quality puck-tracking skills … Read plays very well and is finding pucks through traffic … Great job killing penalties and absorbing shots that arrived on goal from waist-high through traffic … Was way too aggressive on the goal scored by Riley Brace in the second period … Displayed a lot of maturity through controlled emotions and stick-to-itiveness during a late push in the second period by St. Michael's … Will remind you of another Fricker student, Calvin Pickard, in regards to stance, glove placement and calm butterfly … Made three timely, momentum-crushing saves on Chris DeSousa … Appeared tense and less controlled early in the third period … Calmed his nerves and made a handful of timely, razor-sharp saves in the final minutes of the third period to claim the Memorial Cup Trophy

With last year's Memorial Cup nightmare still in the back of his mind, I knew DeSerres would play with plenty of urgency and alertness. He displayed exactly that in the first period when he made a highlight-reel right-toe save on Chris DeSousa's rebound chance to keep the Sea Dogs' 1-0 lead intact.

DeSerres' save on DeSousa, plus two more sequences in which he stoned DeSousa, will be remembered as the exact moments that proved he's capable of making the big saves on the big stage. I'll also remember the unique nature of his calm body language and butterfly, one combined with very aggressive positioning and great reactions.

Technically speaking, I think DeSerres still has a lot to learn before he's ready to really succeed

at the professional level. Without getting into too much detail, I didn't see much consistency in his style and his hands are also held far back and tight to his hips. This is not a bad thing per say, but I feel it restricts his movements at times.

Overall, I took from this performance that, in one gigantic game, DeSerres proved he's a mentally tough goalie that came up with a number of timely saves. A lot of the inconsistencies I saw in his game could easily be eliminated during an entry-level contract.

DISCUSSING DESERRES' PATH

When I think about DeSerres' path and potential, I'm instantly reminded of two other raw-skilled prospects I've scouted over the past three years - Peter Delmas and Jason Missiaen. Both goalies were drafted by one team, released before signed, passed over in a future draft, then signed as free agents by totally different NHL clubs.

Delmas was drafted by the Colorado Avalanche 61st overall in 2008, played one more year in the QMJHL, then was cut loose for reasons that still elude and bother me to this day. In numerous past articles, *I have mentioned how Delmas had quality upside*, but needed an opportunity to play.

That opportunity to turn pro never came with the Avs – they let him go after two seasons of owning his rights. He was placed back in the 2010 Entry Draft, passed up, then played two games as an over-age goalie for Halifax to start this season. Then, after attending Montreal's training camp, he was signed as a free agent and given a second chance.

The result of this second chance? Delmas had a solid rookie pro season that included short stints in the AHL (Hamilton) and Central Hockey League (Wichita), and then a very productive run in the ECHL. In 24 regular season games with Wheeling, Delmas went 15-6-2 with a .928 save percentage and 2.03 goals-against average. In the ECHL playoffs, he went 8-5-1 with a .903 save percentage and 3.13 GAA.

Now that Delmas has proved he's a serviceable prospect in Montreal's relatively shallow depth chart (aside from Carey Price and the re-energized Drew MacIntyre), Montreal has an asset worth developing. And it cost them absolutely nothing.

One man's trash is another…well, you get what I'm saying.

In Missiaen's case, he was originally drafted by Montreal, released a few years later and then re-signed just a few months ago by the New York Rangers. This came after Jason had a deceivingly strong season on a very weak Baie-Comeau Drakkar team.

So as we have seen with a few other goalies in a position similar to DeSerres, the ghosts of past failures can teach lessons that lead to future success. And because of that, I can decipher the amount of success a goalie might have by finding out how willing they are to turn and face those ghosts that haunted their past.

Those ghosts are exercised with weapons known as a strong work ethic, determination and a positive attitude, a set of character traits known as mental toughness. Do I think DeSerres is mentally tough enough to thrive at the higher levels? After witnessing his play in the biggest game of his life, I most certainly do.

And as his goalie coach explains, it wasn't just one game that proved DeSerres persevered through the tough times:

"Jake faced himself rather than running from himself," *Fricker said in an interview with NHL.com*. "By facing his weaknesses he no longer needed to hope for the best or hope that all would work out. He took control of his life and as a byproduct his game as a goalie. It was one of the bravest things I have seen a (young man) do."

ASSESSING DESERRES' FANTASY FUTURE

More important than impressing his goalie coach, however, DeSerres impressed the hockey world by learning from his mistakes in a most impressive way. So regardless of whether or not you consider his tantalizing stats to be a mirage due to being on strong teams or not, he still had the power to slay his ghosts from last year's Memorial Cup.

It's a great story for the tabloids and the motivational speakers, no doubt. And I love it because it emphasizes the importance of mental toughness. But, as a fantasy goalie analyst, aside from shedding light on potential, I want to know his odds of being a legit starter in the big bad NHL. That's quite a different hill to climb than that of the CHL.

Right now, I don't see much NHL upside in regards to his technique and fundamentals. But he does have the mental toughness and foundation to be successful at the pro levels over the next 2-3 years. And he deserves that chance.

In most instances, when a 20-year-old goalie gets lambasted in the Memorial Cup Finals, you rarely hear their name again. The fact Dobber and I are even discussing DeSerres' fantasy value is a pair of key notches in his "potential hidden gem" belt.

It's also important to remember that it takes most goalies much longer to learn the kind of life lessons that DeSerres has already learned. And for those that don't think undrafted or raw-skilled goalies can be successful at the pro level, just take a gander at Cedrick Desjardins' junior career.

Simply put, it's not a matter of if DeSerres gets a chance, it's a matter of who signs him and how much longer until the inevitable happens. If he can continue to work with Fricker, or potentially an NHL goalie coach, a few years of steady minutes in the ECHL and AHL could be more than enough to push his potential to that of an NHL goaltender.

DeSerres already proved he has the mental toughness, and now he has the honor of being a CHL Champion. All that's left now is to get that second chance and then keep on working.