Hundreds of minor league goalies can spend their entire career in a tireless fight for the elusive opportunity to become the next diamond in the rough. Then there are others that finally reach their penultimate goal of starting an NHL game, but like a dream, it lasts just one night and dissolves in a rude awakening when they are quickly demoted back to a place they really don't want to be.

But every year there are a few call-ups that become the called-upon, and turn themselves into the main source of their team's sudden surge. So for all of the struggles that Ty Conklin has faced over the last five seasons, his sudden resurfacing with the Penguins since Marc-Andre Fleury's injury is a tremendous story in goaltending retribution.

It all started exactly one month ago when the Penguins summoned Conklin from Wilkes-Barre Scranton on emergency recall. At the time, many of the coaches and staff within the organization (and those pseudo-analysts like me) believed that he would only serve as Dany Sabourin's backup, nothing more, and would return to the baby Pens the moment Fleury was off the IR. In fact, the spotlight was mainly on Sabourin, as it was his chance to take advantage of the experience he gained playing behind Roberto Luongo in Vancouver last season. For the time being, it looked to be his team and nobody else's.
But we all know that many have tried and many have failed. Turns out, it was just not in the stars for Dany, so Conklin, the persistent Alaskan native, was given another chance to display some poise and consistency for a young team desperately in need of veteran goaltending. Rumors were already flying around that the Penguins were actively seeking a goalie to serve as a fill-in. But like many organizations, there's always an "evaluation" period of time in which they allow the goaltender to show what he's made of. This saves money and can salvage a general manager from making a capricious decision.

While it's tough to call Conklin a veteran since he's only played in 84 NHL games, the experiences he's faced since his first call-up with the Edmonton Oilers in the 2001-02 season certainly warrants it. He was tossed around like a rag doll the past two seasons, being waived by the Oilers in February 2006, then waived by the Columbus Blue Jackets and sent back down to the AHL just before the 2006-07 season started. Then he was traded to Buffalo in February 2007 at the trade deadline, left unprotected by the Sabres and then signed as a free agent by Pittsburgh at the start of this season.

So Conklin has legitimately turned into the feel-good story of the season, winning seven straight games, including two by shutout, one against Buffalo – his former team – and the second against Florida on Friday. If Ty continues playing this way, which certainly seems like that's the path he's heading down, management will face some difficult decisions when Fleury returns. But there are many reasons why Conklin has solidified his spot on the roster, despite the fact that he's only an "emergency recall."

First of all, keeping three goalies in the lineup not only ties up a roster spot, but the trio situation causes way more problems than it solves. The best and most recent example of this was with the Coyotes, as both David Aebischer and Alex Auld are no longer members of the team. Secondly, keeping him on the roster for the rest of the season allows the Penguins to send the mediocre Sabourin down to Wilkes-Barre, which would entail him going through waivers. This wouldn't be much of a problem, since he hasn't shown more than a few flashes of starter-like play.

On the other hand, returning Conklin to Wilkes-Barre before or at the same time Fleury is activated would not require him to be put on waivers. Although the Penguins would have a better goaltender in the minors, it's a safe move and allows him to continue logging minutes instead of just sitting on the bench. Fleury is well-known for inconsistent play, so it also makes a lot more sense to keep Conklin in the lineup and put a little pressure on Fleury to perform up to starter standards. Assigning Conklin to Wilkes-Barre sometime after Fleury returns is certainly out of the question, since Conklin would have to go on waivers.

The Penguins are allowed to keep Conklin on the roster when Fleury returns even though he didn't clear waivers on the way up, which is the main benefit of an emergency recall, because he is exempt from the re-entry waivers that apply to most veteran players promoted from the American Hockey League. Conklin qualified for that exemption because his two-way contract has a salary of $100,000, which is the maximum salary a player can be eligible for the re-entry exemption.

Conklin's unbelievable play in December and early-January should warrant plenty of attention from fantasy hockey managers. as he will fly under the radar in many leagues. It may only be a short-term solution to a long-term problem for many, but considering Fleury's IR status, Conklin is a steal. He has certainly silenced all critics – including myself – that said he couldn't show any consistency as the starter for an NHL team. Sign him as quickly as you can and don't think

twice, for he’s tried, tested and true.

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