Remember when Patrick Lalime was the scorching hot starter for the Ottawa Senators and was averaging more than 30 wins for four consecutive seasons? That sure seems like ancient times to all you fantasy hockey freaks, but for him it's a vivid memory, as if it were only yesterday. The same feeling is shared with Chicago Blackhawks head coach Dennis Savard, who continues to roll with his philosophy of playing the hot goaltender and has put his trust in Lalime for the time being. Fortunately, it's paying off when the organization needs it most.

It all started on Jan. 13, when Savard rested Nikolai Khabibulin for a game (boy, did he need it) in Nashville after he had lost seven games during the Hawks' eight-game winless streak. Lalime responded by leading Chicago to a 3-2 shootout victory over the Predators, which single-handedly pulled his team out of quicksand, because the more the Hawks tried to stop sinking, the deeper they went.

That game was more than just a big win for Lalime; it was an eye-opening experience. He realized that his confidence was rising with each and every save he made, a situation that all goaltenders live for. Channeling the energy that comes with making big saves when your team needs them most into inspired play by the forwards and defenseman in front of you is something a head coach always wants to see from a goaltender but never really expects to

happen, especially after just one game. But it happened to Lalime, and out of nowhere, he's become the man again.

Even though Khabibulin had done a fairly formidable job carrying the team for most of the season, Savard could care less which goalie was winning, so long as they could win enough games to push the Hawks into the playoffs. Even Khabibulin's $6.75 million dollar salary compared to Lalime's $950,000 is just that – a salary – so it had no impact on Savard about who would be getting the brunt of the starts.

This sudden revival of Lalime's exhausting career as a "star turned sour" made a turn for the better the day he signed with Chicago, as now he's now being coined as the Hawks' veteran leader on a team of young guns. His four straight wins, including three by shootout over Nashville, Colorado and then Phoenix, were all considered goalie duels that he won. But more importantly he overshadowed great performances by two very hot goalies in Jose Theodore and Ilya Bryzgalov. This instills loads of confidence in not only Lalime but in young defensemen like Brent Seabrook, Duncan Keith and James Wisniewski. Now they had a reason to battle even harder in front of the net, for they are certainly aware of Lalime's history. They know they're fighting for more than just the puck or a win or more playing time.
But where is the source of Lalime's inspired play coming from? Look no further than Savard, who made it perfectly clear following the Nashville win that the starting job was now his to lose. Wise words from a wise leader, as Lalime responded by inspiring his team to a 6-1 rout of the St. Louis Blues on Wednesday and then followed it up with a pair of 2-1 nail-biters over the weekend against Colorado and then Phoenix. If there were any concerns that the Blackhawks couldn't compete with the big boys other than Detroit, they were certainly being answered with Lalime's great play.

For fantasy hockey managers however, the question is not how Lalime has turned his game around after being nearly non-existent for over three years, but how he was able to do it so quickly and will he be able to keep his play at this level over the course of the next few months.

The answer, my friend, is blowing in the windy city. Lalime's play on home ice will go a long way to determining what kind of momentum they can gain on the road. Road play for a young team is weighed heavily by the amount of confidence they have, and since the Hawks have five more games on the road than at home for the remainder of the season, each of those five games is a

must-win if they plan to make the playoffs. In a situation like that, what head coach wouldn't roll with the hot goalie?

Honestly, Lalime is playing way beyond a hot streak. Playing three games in four nights is no simple task, not even for Evgeni Nabokov and Martin Brodeur. Lalime has a giant bag of past experiences to draw on and he's more than capable of handling a heavy and important workload. Every game is huge for the Hawks and that's a situation where Lalime can certainly thrive. Overall, it looks like there's another hidden gem in the free agency list, as Lalime is back in the limelight.

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