

A Series of Unfortunate Events

Written by Justin Goldman

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Amidst the intoxicating highs of Colorado's arduous 12-round shootout win in Phoenix on Friday night was a scathing low for Jose Theodore. It happened when Paul Stastny accidentally tipped a shot past him with only 2.8 seconds left in what should have been a regulation win. This series of unfortunate events was just one of many experienced by goalies over the weekend, proving that the level of intensity in games and their overall importance truly elevates right before the trade deadline.

Antero Niittymaki fell victim to the Panthers after Jay Bouwmeester scored with only four ticks left in regulation and then Olli Jokinen won it in OT. Ty Conklin relinquished a four goal lead to

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the Senators and then suffered the OT loss when Daniel Alfredsson scored with four seconds left. Brent Johnston was scored on in the first minute of the third period and then again in the final minute of OT to the Devils.

These last-second letdowns followed by incredible overtimes and chaotic shootouts are moments that act as explosive morsels of momentum. On the winning end it's the source for an inconsistent goalie going on a hot streak. On the other end, a goalie can fall apart – and that can include the team as well. But in some cases, a goalie can actually use these terrible moments of defeat as a chance to create what ultimately turns out to be a positive result.

For example, Theodore responded to the last-second goal against by stopping all seven of Phoenix's chances to win the game in the shootout. Looking beyond that game, Theodore has faced so many of these moments in his career that it just adds up. For all the bad bounces and bad moments he's faced, the experiences have molded him into one of the most resilient goalies in the league.

The former Hart Trophy winner quickly climbed to the top of the mountain early in his career with Montreal and just as quickly tumbled down the other side, only to be staring at the top again wondering if he'll ever have the strength to make it back. Lo and behold, with the help of former-teammate-turned-goalie-coach Jeff Hackett, Jose's well on his way back to the top. It's no secret that Hackett has helped to turn Theodore into a more consistent and confident decision-maker, yet his strength to continue improving as the games gain importance for the Avalanche has come strictly from within.

Overall, those crucial moments that transpire within a game's final seconds builds up over the course of a career and molds a young star into a veteran leader. This is how rookies evolve into legends. And this is how a goalie can bring 20 players together to make a real team. And this is how that team plays great down the stretch. And this is how that goalie leads the team to the promise land. And now you will see why the best clutch goalies of all are the ones that get better as the season progresses.

The Best Are Getting Better

All around the league right now, the proven winners are playing at the top of their game. While question marks surrounded guys like Miikka Kiprusoff, Martin Brodeur, Marty Turco, Roberto Luongo and J.S. Giguere in the first half of the season, right now they are simply the hottest in

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the league.

Brodeur has led the Devils to sole possession of the Eastern Conference lead for the first time in more than six years, Luongo has pulled the Canucks into a solid playoff spot, Turco has led the Stars to within striking range of the Red Wings and Kiprusoff has put the Flames atop the Northwest Division.

There's a reason why the best goalies are the best in February and March – it's the experience gained by being in the pressure-filled, final-second situations numerous times. So trust your top goalie in the month of March and don't be afraid to put him in the lineup in a big game. Just take a look at how the goalies mentioned above have improved their play in the last two months.

Roberto Luongo

4-5-1 in January with 26 GA and a 2.6 GAA

6-1-3 in February with 24 GA and a 2.4 GAA

STREAK: 2-0-0 with a 1.44 AA and .962 SV%

Miikka Kiprusoff

7-3-1 in January with 29 GA and a 2.64 GAA

6-4-0 in February with 23 GA and a 2.35 GAA

STREAK: 3-0-0 with a .67 GAA and .971 SV%

Martin Brodeur

7-4-0 in January with 23 GA and a 2.09 GAA

9-2-2 in February with 25 GA and a 1.92 GAA

STREAK: 2-0-0 with a 1.45 GAA and .949 SV%

Marty Turco

5-3-1 in January with 25 GA and a 2.5 GAA

7-2-0 in February with 16 GA and a 1.78 GAA

STREAK: N/A

J.S. Giguere

6-4-1 in January with 23 GA and a 2.09 GAA

8-1-1 in February with 12 GA and a 1.20 GAA

STREAK: 7-1-1 with a 1.31 GAA and .948 SV%

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