Four years ago, the Los Angeles Kings' net minding situation was a mess. They used six different goaltenders in the 2007/08 season: Jason LaBarbera, Jean Sebastien Aubin, Erik Ersberg, Dan Cloutier, Jonathan Bernier, Jonathan Quick and Daniel Taylor. Even though Quick was handed the starting job the following season and posted respectable numbers (21-18-2, 2.46 GAA and .914 SV%), it seemed that Bernier was considered the franchise's goalie of the future.

The Kings' front office wanted both Jonathans to play as much as possible for the 09/10 season. The team decided that Quick would be their starting goaltender, with Erik Ersberg penciled in as his back-up, and Bernier would return to Manchester. Bernier was disappointed to be sent back down to the AHL, but the team challenged him to "be the best goalie in the American league". The common belief was that Bernier was being groomed for the eventual number one role, but that Quick was a serviceable option for the time being.

Both goaltenders had a fantastic year. Even though Quick's peripheral numbers dropped a bit, he recorded a franchise record 39 wins. However, playing 72 games, participating in the Olympics, immediately followed by the birth of his first child, proved to be a recipe for fatigue. He definitely needed more rest down the stretch, yet coach Terry Murray didn't have enough confidence in Ersberg to play him during such a critical point in the season. Meanwhile, Bernier dominated the AHL (30-21-6, 2.03 GAA, .936 SV%, nine shutouts) and even came up to NHL to spell Quick for a few games. He won all three contests, including one by shutout.

Last summer, the pundits were predicting that the 2010/11 season was Bernier's chance to overtake the other Jonathan. However, Quick jumped out to a great start, winning ten of his first eleven decisions. Bernier lost five of his first seven starts, and it was clear who was the team's number one goalie for the time being. However, Murray trusted Bernier more than Ersberg the previous year. This extra rest made a huge difference in Quick's performance. With his workload reduced to 60 games, Quick accumulated 35 wins. His 2.24 GAA was fourth in the NHL and his 10-0 record in shootouts was the league's best.

Los Angeles has been slowly building their roster around a core of young talent in net and on the blue line. At some point they will have to choose which Jonathan will be their main man between the pipes. Quick has been viewed as the temporary stop-gap goalie while Bernier matures. Yet, he has turned himself into a top ten goaltender over the past two years.

With the recent acquisitions of Mike Richards and Simon Gagne, the Kings have moved into a "win now" era. This is not the time to ship off an Olympic goaltender that has set franchise records for wins in a season, simply to hand the keys to the car to the hot shot prospect waiting in the wings.

Although teams in need of goaltending have been asking about Bernier's availability, he is an excellent insurance policy in case Quick falters or gets injured. Plus, his incredible talent provides a sense of competition that pushes Quick to stay at the top of his game. The problem is, there is only one crease. At some point, a choice will be have to be made.

So let's see what Los Angeles has in each Jonathan:

Quick:

He has accumulated 95 wins over the past three seasons. He is excellent in shootouts, which provided ten extra W's for the Kings last year. Unfortunately, there are no shootouts in the playoffs. Not only have the Kings been eliminated in the first round each of those years, Quick is a dismal 1-4 in games that have gone to overtime. He is extremely active in net, sometimes to a fault. At times he over-commits, yet relies on his reflexes and athletic ability to make saves. His save percentage may not be the best, but he finds a way to win.

STATS LAST THREE SEASONS

2008/09 21-18-2 2.48 GAA .914 SV% 4 SO

2009/10 39-24-7 2.54 GAA .907 SV% 4 SO

2010/11 35-22-3 2.24 GAA .918 SV% 6 SO

Bernier:

He is the golden child goaltender with amazing technique. After putting up unbelievable numbers in the AHL, Bernier now has a complete season of NHL experience. He has shown moments of brilliance with the Kings, but is still looking for consistency. His style of goaltending relies on efficiency and positioning. He seems to makes no unnecessary movements in the crease. He is universally considered to be a star in the making, but he hasn't accomplished anything yet. The general opinion of Kings fans is that Bernier is too good to let go. Then again, they said that about Brayden Schenn too.

STATS LAST THREE SEASON (AHL/NHL)

2008/09 23-24-4 2.40 GAA .914 SV% 5 SO (AHL)

2009/10 30-21-6 2.03 GAA .936 SV% 9 SO (AHL)

2009/10 3-0-0 1.33 GAA .957 SV% 1 SO (NHL)

2010/11 11-8-3 2.48 GAA .913 SV% 3 SO (NHL)

Until the Mike Richards deal, I was certain that LA would wait at least one more year, possibly two before moving one of these two goalies. Based on the aggressive manner which Dean Lombardi sent this franchise from Building Mode to Win Now Mode, anything is possible. The common thought today is that as Quick continues to establish himself as a force in the NHL, Bernier could be traded for a much needed scoring winger.

Aside from the stats, and pedigree of each player, the other issue that may factor into this equation is money. Both Jonathans are signed thru 12/13 at affordable rates. Quick's cap hit is $1.8 million; Bernier's is $1.25 million. Since the contracts of both goalies will expire during the same off-season, the biggest difference between these two players is one simple letter. Quick will be an unrestricted free agent (UFA), Bernier will be a restricted free agent (RFA). Perhaps that will be the deciding factor.

Assuming Quick continues at this pace, he will command a hefty raise. If both players are still

with the team during that off-season, will they pay to keep Quick or hand over the job to Bernier moving forward? I would think the team's playoff success (or failure) will make that choice simpler. If the team continues its first round exits, they will need to make a change in net. If Quick takes them to the Conference Finals or beyond, he will have earned that raise.

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