There are a couple of key indicators to look for in terms of predicting success for a goaltender. There's your basic goals against average (GAA), save percentage (SP) along with overall win/loss record. Of the three mentioned, GAA and overall record could be directly influenced by the skill of the team in front of them. For example, if a team is highly offensive (Washington, Detroit, or San Jose), their goalie is going to pick up more wins than a team that struggles offensively (Minnesota or Columbus). On a similar scale, GAA could also be affected by the team's selected style of play (St. Louis, Phoenix, or Nashville), versus the run-and-gun style of Washington/Tampa Bay. One true indicator to determine how well a goalie is playing is to examine their save percentage. If a goalie stops nine shots in every 10, he owns a .900 save percentage. If he stops 27 in every 30 he also maintains a .900 save percentage. In the end, save percentage rarely lies about how well a goalie is playing.

I generally like to draw an arbitrary line at .905. If they are above that line they're generally helping your fantasy team, if they're below it they're a detriment. However, looking at just the three stats mentioned above won't reveal the entire story. Another vital, and possibly the most important indicator, that isn't as well known to the general public, is how defensively a team plays in front of their goalie. The easiest way to examine that indicator is by looking at the amount of shots a team allows to the opposition per contest. Obviously, the lower the amount of shots the team allows to the opposition, then the lower the chance a team is going to be fishing the puck out of the back of their own net. The opposite is also true, the more shots they allow their opponents, the higher the chance of puck going in. With these four indicators, it should paint you a pretty clear picture to give you a better outlook at all of the fantasy worthy goalies from the Western Conference.

NOTE: These ramblings are based on one-year leagues, and not meant for keeper/dynasty leagues.

Anaheim

Name

GS

GAA

SP

Record

Status

Jonas Hiller

9

2.55

.904

4-4-1

Buy

Dan Ellis

2

2.01

.938

1-1-0

WW

Hiller has started 2011-12 in slow fashion, but if you look at his career numbers, they're pretty in line with his typical seasonal numbers. He has career October numbers of 2.97 GAA and .909 SP compared to 2.43 GAA and .923 SP during the rest of the months. So if you're a smart poolie, you might want to use his slow start to parlay that into a great "buy low" opportunity, as the Ducks are just too talented to play 500 hockey all season long. Ellis might have dazzling stats at the moment, but I don't think he'll steal enough starts away from Hiller to be of any fantasy relevance this campaign, unless an injury occurs.

Calgary

Name
Miikka Kiprusoff

GS
7

GAA
2.02

SP
.930

Record
4-3-0

Status
Buy

Henrik Karlsson

2

3.84

.875

0-1-1

WW

Statistically speaking, this October is the best starting month that Kipper has ever had. If you look at his splits they are very similar to those of Hiller's, he has career October numbers of 2.86 GAA and .900 SP compared to 2.39 GAA and 0.915 SP during the rest of the months. So far this year, he has allowed more than three goals only once this campaign. If Kipper can maintain similar numbers for the rest of this campaign, he could be a great number one option to carry your goalie stats this season. Consider him another strong buy candidate much like Hiller. Similar to Ellis, Karlsson probably won't receive enough starts to warrant being fantasy roster worthy. Leave him on the waiver wire where he belongs.

Chicago

Name	GS	GAA	SP	Record	Status
Corey Crawford	9	2.38			

.914

5-2-2

Stand Pat

Ray Emery

2

2.50

.915

2-0-0

Stand Pat

I’m generally not a big fan of investing heavily on a young goalie based on having just one “hot” year, but so far so good, as Crawford is proving that last year was not just a fluke. The save percentage probably could be a bit better in order to push Crawford up amongst the elite, but the GAA and overall record are more than serviceable as a number two fantasy option. Remain

status quo on his situation. When Emery has his head screwed on right, his play is amongst the league's best. He'll have to settle for second fiddle unless Crawford has a tumble during the season. If there is any negative news regarding Crawford, I'd be ready to pounce on Emery.

Columbus

Name

GS

GAA

SP

Record

Status

Steve Mason

11

3.11

.889

2-8-1

Buy

Curtis Sanford

0

0.00

1.00

0-0-0

WW

Allen York

1

3.93

.892

0-1-0

WW

I'm going to go out on a limb here and openly state that Mason is a strong "buy low" candidate. That's right you heard me, Mason is a "buy low" candidate! Before you rip me a new one, I have three reasons to justify my position. Number one, aside from the atrocious 2-8-1 record, his current numbers (3.11 and .889), are actually right in line with his career October numbers (3.29 and .888). It's just that in the past, he kind of had his offense to help bail him out for a 9-8-1 career October record. But this year the bounces just haven't gone his/the Jackets' way. Number two, much like Kipper and Hiller, Mason actually has pretty decent stats (2.69 GAA and .908 SP), outside the month of October. Finally, if you look at his home/away splits, he has stats of 2-3-1 record along with a 2.18 GAA and along with a pretty respectable .917 SP at Nationwide Arena compared to 0-5-0, 4.32 GAA and .858 SP on the road. If you were to just stream Mason for his home starts and keep him on the bench for any/all of the away matches, you'd still come out looking pretty. His value is at rock bottom at the moment and you can probably get away with a pretty "lowball" offer to acquire him for cheap. Check with your Mason owner in your league to see if you can take advantage of this situation. Sanford and York have been battling each other for the number two gig in Columbus, but I think a dark horse candidate

in Manny Legace (recently signed), is actually going to come in and claim the backup gig. I wouldn't pay too much attention to the battle between Sanford and York at the moment.

Colorado

Name

GS

GAA

SP

Record

Status

Semyon Varlamov

8

2.44

.924

5-3-0

Stand Pat

J.S. Giguere

3

2.00

.924

2-1-0

Stand Pat

One of the major reasons why the Avs have improved so much this season has been the men who have started between the pipes this campaign. They've turned around the leagues worst defense (giving up an average of 3.50 goals against per game), to being tied for 19th overall this season (giving up an average of 2.64 goals against per game). Much of that could also be attributed to the defensive corps as well. In 2009-10, the Avs utilized 15 different blue-liners throughout the season, this year the Avs have utilized only their main six, which have help kept things pretty consistent. If they remain relatively healthy, Varly should have a much easier time of knowing what to expect from his blue-liners in front of him. He has always been a good statistical goalie, but the main downfall with him has always been the injury bug. If he can stay healthy, he'll be fantasy gold, but he could just as easily be on the shelf in two weeks' time dealing with a knick knack injury. So if you aren't a big gambler, now might be a good time to cash in all of your chips on Varly and "sell high". It appears that Giggy will play more of a mentor role in the mile-high city, so don't expect consistent starts from him unless Varly ends up on the IR.

Dallas

Name

GS

GAA

SP

Record

Status

Kari Lehtonen

9

1.75

.947

8-1-0

Moderate Sell/ Moderate Buy

Andrew Raycroft

2

2.56

.907

0-2-0

WW

Much like Varly, if Lehtonen stays out of the infirmary, he's one of the best goalies in the world, which explains the very respectable numbers that he posted last season (34-24-11, 2.55 GAA and .914 SP). One thing that you have to keep in mind is that Lehtonen is playing out of his mind at the moment. His current .947 SP is well over 30 points higher than his career average (.914), so if you expect that to drop back down the norm, he's bound for a pretty harsh, rude awakening. I've kind of put a conflicting message in his current status, but here's how I would approach it. If I were a Lehtonen-owner, I would try to sell him for a top-tiered guy like Henrik Lundqvist, Tomas Vokoun, or Ryan Miller, only because Lehtonen has no hope of maintaining his current stats throughout the year and it would be crazy to think that he possibly could. On the flip side, I would try to acquire him towards the end of the year. It wouldn't surprise me the least to see a repeat of last year's numbers, which would still prove to be plenty useful in many fantasy leagues. If the current start ratio is maintained, a 15 start season wouldn't give Raycroft enough value to be owned in fantasy leagues. Leave him on the ww where belongs.

Detroit

Name	GS	GAA	SP	Record	Status
Jimmy Howard	6	1.82	.929	4-2-0	

Stand Pat

Ty Conklin

3

3.37

.882

1-2-0

Stand Pat

It appears that the Howard of 2009-10 is back. So far he's starting the season with a bang and is well on his way to repeating the numbers from two seasons ago (2.26 GAA and .924 SP), which is a strong improvement on the numbers that he posted last campaign (2.79 GAA and .908 SP). It appears that having Conklin there to push him is just what the doctor ordered. Start him with confidence at this point in time of the season. Stand pat on both of the Motor City goalies.

Edmonton

Name	GS	GAA	SP	Record	Status
Nikolai Khabibulin	7	1.12			

.960

5-0-2

Buy/Sell

Devan Dubnyk

4

1.98

.938

2-2-0

Stand Pat

Tom Renney has largely been considered to be a strong defensive minded coach, but to have him coach the Oilers to be league leaders in that department is certainly surprising. Most of the early season success by the Oilers can be attributed to the exceptional play of the Bulin wall. Much like the situation with Lehtonen, there's two ways that I'd approach the Khabibulin

situation. If I'm an owner, I'd try to sell him in the right situation just because his current .960 SP, is 52 points higher than his career average. So you could expect a sharp decline when the numbers return back to the norm. If I'm looking for some help between the pipes I wouldn't mind looking into the services of Khabibulin, as I wouldn't be surprised to see end of year numbers of something like 2.50 and .920 come April, which once again would be a nice total to have in your back pocket. Treat him in the same boat as Lehtonen. Dubnyk is also having a great season, it's just too bad that his stats are being dwarfed by Khabibulin's crazy numbers. Keep an eye on that situation, because if the Bulin wall begins to show some cracks, it might just provide enough of an opening for Dubnyk to come up and steal the number one gig.

Los Angeles

Name

GS

GAA

SP

Record

Status

Jon Quick

9

1.52

.947

6-1-2

Sell

Jon Bernier

2

3.56

.857

0-2-0

Buy Low

Entering the season, there was plenty of debate on who would emerge as the number one goalie in LA, but with his phenomenal start to 2011-12, Quick has quickly silenced all of his doubters. He possessed a 202 minute and 11 second shutout streak to really cement his place between the pipes. The only thing that I'm a bit wary of is that he hasn't entirely earned himself complete immunity for the number one gig just yet. Sure he's posted dazzling numbers to start the season, but what happens if he has one bad start? Does he get the next start to redeem himself, or does the ball go back into Bernier's court? With Kipper, Luongo, and Rinne, they kind of have that immunity clause, where it doesn't matter how much they suck, they'll still get their starts. I just don't know if Quick has the same in LA, which is why I listed him as a sell candidate. The only way that he'd maintain his starts is if he continues winning, and I just don't know if he can continue to win two-thirds of his starts the rest of the way. Bernier is largely considered the "goalie of the future" and is always going to get his shot. If he can string together a series of quality starts, the number one gig might end up being his. Look into seeing if you can "buy low" on Bernier.

Minnesota

Name

GS

GAA	SP	Record	Status
Niklas Backstrom	8	2.30	.912	3-3-2	Stand Pat
Josh Harding			

2

1.45

.961

1-0-1

Buy

Backstrom has started the season decently, but it hasn't been spectacular. His dazzling 2.30 GAA has probably been propped up by the stingy Wild defence that is current tied for fifth overall in the league, so expect that to return back to Earth as the season progresses. Keep an eye on Harding as he looks well rested and raring to go after spending an entire year off dealing with ACL and MCL injuries. He could be one of those backups that end up suiting up for 20-25 starts while posting decent supplementary numbers.

Nashville

Name
Pekka Rinne

GS
11

GAA
2.50

SP
.922

Record
5-4-2

Status

Stand Pat

Anders Lindback

0

1.50

.958

0-0-0

WW

On average Rinne was taken as the fourth overall goalie in Yahoo! leagues ahead of some “bigger named” producers like Ryan Miller, Tomas Vokoun or Carey Price. So far he’s had the opportunity to start in every single contest for the Preds, but the overall numbers (GAA currently ranked 25th amongst league leaders, SP currently ranked 20th amongst league leaders), haven’t really justified his initial draft position for those who gambled on him at the draft table. Another interesting note to remember is that Rinne is scheduled for unrestricted free agency at the end of this season. If Nashville continues to play him as much as they have to start the season, it might come back to haunt them when the two sides head to the contract negotiation tables later on in the year. By playing him so much, it might end up being like a Vokoun or Chris Mason type situation, where he’ll just be too overpriced for the Preds to resign which will force management to move him at the deadline for draft picks. Either way they probably should start thinking about utilizing Lindback a bit more just to see if they have a backup plan in place if

Rinne chooses not to remain in Nashville for next season.

Phoenix

Name

GS

GAA

SP

Record

Status

Mike Smith

8

2.57

.919

4-2-2

Buy

Jason LaBarbera

2

3.50

.883

1-1-0

WW

Much like Lehtonen and Varlamov, a lot of Smith's success this season will depend entirely on his health. In his six year NHL career, he has never started in more than 40 contests and injuries have always been a point of concern. So far so good, as his numbers have shown that he could possibly become a pretty under-rated number one goalie in the league. There's always the dreaded "tandem" word that looms above Smith's head, but I think he and Coach Dave Tippett have enough of a history together, that Smith has bought himself a bit of a longer leash. If he can avoid the injury bug this might be the year that he finally establishes himself as a true number one in the league. LaBarbera would make a good handcuff for Smith owners, but that's probably the extent of his fantasy worth. Don't worry about going out of your way in trying to land him.

San Jose

Name

GS

GAA

SP

Record

Status
Antti Niemi
6
2.65
.902
4-2-0
Stand Pat
Thomas Greiss
4
2.26
.917

2-2-0

Stand Pat

At this point in time, I'd stand pat on both of the Shark goalies. Niemi will need to play much better than a .902 SP if he is to maintain the number one gig in San Jose. Greiss has played well enough to deserve a longer leash in an attempt to steal the number one gig away from Niemi. Statistically speaking, he hasn't done anything wrong to not warrant another chance. Another goalie to keep in mind is Antero Niittymaki. He underwent hip surgery back in late September to help correct a nagging hip/groin problem, which should sideline him for 12 weeks according to the latest reports. If everything goes to plan, he should be eligible to return around Christmas. If both Niemi and Greiss can't get a solid grip on the number one gig, Niittymaki might be a great dark horse candidate to sneak in and run away with the job.

St. Louis

Name

GS

GAA	SP	Record	Status
Jaroslav Halak	6	3.58	.843	1-5-0	Sell
Brian Elliott			

5

1.67

.942

4-1-0

Buy

Last week I mentioned how Elliott is a smart pick up at the moment, and I still stand by that comment at the present moment. In the comments section of last week's column, reader "James" made a comment that because of Halak's salary it pretty much automatically guarantees that he has the number one gig solidified. I countered that it doesn't really matter if you make 600k or six million dollars, in a team that is looking to win now you have to ride the hot hand. You cannot continue to start a struggling goalie, when the backup is playing such lights out hockey. You can maybe make an exception if the entire team is playing badly, (Columbus for example), where you can cut your starter some slack, but St. Louis is leading the league in shots allowed to the opposition, so it's not like they are exactly struggling in front of Halak. With that said, I do expect Halak to bounce back as he's much better than a 3.5 GAA and sub .850 SP goalie, but I certainly wouldn't expect him to get back to the level where he'd be able to singlehandedly carry your fantasy squad. Elliott has been a very streaky goalie in the past:

Time

Win-Streak

GAA

SP

March 2009

8

2.33

.906

Jan 2010

9

1.21

.958

March 2010

6

1.79

.936

Nov 2010

5

1.40

.955

Oct 2011

3

1.30

.959

The thing with him is that when he gets on a streak, he really gets on a massive streak and having the league's stingiest defence playing in front of him is only going to help the cause. The Blues have invested so heavily on Halak that I don't think Elliott will ever run away with the number one gig despite how well he plays, but a 50/50 split, where Elliott might string together five or six quality starts is certainly plausible. If you're a smart poolie, with a free roster spot, it wouldn't be a bad idea to stash Elliott away on the bench and just activate him when he gets on another one of his hot streaks.

Vancouver

Name

GS

GAA

SP

Record

Status

Roberto Luongo

7

3.54

.869

3-3-1

Buy Low

Cory Schneider

4

1.97

.927

2-2-0

Sell

What to do with the situation in Vancouver is the question that's on many poolie's mind. Luongo has started slowly once again, but I wonder how much of that mental fragility is due to the Stanley Cup collapse of last campaign? Or is it just an extended typical blip on the radar? As mentioned earlier in the column, some goalies just have that immunity factor, and Luongo is one of those goalies. I personally dislike it and feel that goalies should earn each of their starts based on merit, but that's just not how it works in the "real world". With that said, Luongo is a "world class" goalie despite all of the negativity surrounding him at the moment, and will rebound to post much better stats as the season progresses. Now might be a great time to "buy low" on a top-tiered goalie on the down low. Schneider is heading into a contract year and he has plenty to prove with each and every start this campaign. With Eddie Lack putting up pretty decent stats in the minors (2.11 GAA and .934 SP with the Wolves), Schneider might be bait come trade deadline time. Unless Luongo completely collapses, Schenider might have limited fantasy value in one-year formats.

Questions or comments? As always I'll be ready and willing to discuss them with you in the comments section below. We'll see you next week, as we go through the Fantasy Indicators of Success 2011 for defenseman from the Western Conference.

Want to go even deeper with advice on goaltenders for your fantasy squad? Give Goalie Post a look - advice from pro scout Justin Goldman and up to the second insider goalie news.