

Reality Check, Part 4: The Masked Men

Written by Glen Hoos

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Ed. Note: This is the fourth and final instalment in a series in which we've looked at different aspects of the NHL game and how to value them appropriately in your fantasy league scoring, with the objective of creating scoring systems that reflect real life value as closely as possible. Click here for previous entries: [The Power Game](#) ; [A Case for the Defence](#) ; [Special Agents](#) .

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As a certain segment of Vancouver Canucks fans would be more than happy to point out, goaltending is the most important position in hockey. A lights-out stopper can make a bad team competitive, a good team great and a great team unbeatable. A leaky tender, well... at the risk of dredging up painful memories for some of you, let's just say it's tough to win when your goalie's had the air let out of his tires.

In the world of fantasy hockey, placing just the right value on the masked men requires as much finesse as it takes to slip one past Tim Thomas. Choose your categories unwisely, and you risk throwing off the balance of your league. -I recall my first season as a commissioner of a points-based league, when seven of the top ten fantasy players at year's end were goalies. Oops!

But have no fear – my lesson was learned, and I'm ready to share some guidelines for effectively valuing goalies in your fantasy league.

Roto Categories

The first step in a roto (category-based) league is to decide how many goaltending categories you want. You must walk a fine line as you seek to reward the critical contribution of the elite goalie, without going overboard and over-inflating the value of the masked men. On a typical fantasy roster, goalies only account for about 10-20% of the roster slots, so you don't want 50% of your team's fantasy value tied up in 10-20% of your players.

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Take into account how many skater categories you've got, and then determine how many goalie categories are appropriate. In my primary keeper league, we've got 11 skater categories and 5 for the goalies. Generally, having goalies represent about 25-33% of your scoring seems about right, given the crucial contribution made by the stoppers.

Once you've figured out how many categories you need, you can start choosing which ones to utilize. Here are some pros and cons of the most common categories offered by many online fantasy sites.

The Go-To Categories: Wins, GAA, SV%, SO

Wins, goals against average, save percentage and shutouts are the most common goaltending stats cited when measuring the performance of a goalie, and they all work well as categories in fantasy leagues. Some may argue that wins, GAA and shutouts reflect the strength of the team more than they do the talent of the goalie, but it's almost impossible to eliminate the team factor from goalie stats. Even SV%, which seems like an individual stat, has a hidden team component, as a strong defensive team allows few Grade A scoring chances against its goaltender – giving him a better chance of racking up a high SV%. Whatever stats you choose to add to your goaltending mix, there's probably no getting around the fact that a goalie on a top team is going to be more valuable than one on a weak team, even if the latter player is more technically skilled. That being said, these four stats (W, GAA, SV% and SO) would be my go-to stats in any league, supplemented by one or two other categories to bring in added dimensions.

Games or Minutes Played

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The rationale for including goalie starts or minutes played is that a workhorse has more value than one that plays less often. A .925 save percentage is more impressive if it's achieved over the course of 70 games than 50 games. This type of stat also counteracts a popular strategy in head-to-head leagues, in which goalies are often benched late in the week if they've put up an outstanding GAA and SV% earlier in the week, thereby avoiding the possibility of these numbers being weakened by a poor game at the end of the week. Don't get me wrong - I'd use that strategy myself if my league settings made it advantageous to do so. But I'm always aiming for realism in my scoring; and in real life, Marc-Andre Fleury doesn't get benched on Saturday because his numbers were too good earlier in the week!

The downside to games or minutes played as a scoring category is that it doesn't reflect the performance of the goalie in any way. Early this season, Steve Mason led the league in games and minutes played – and we all know what a train wreck he's been the quality of play he provided in those minutes. Do we really want Steve Mason ranking at the top of any category this season? This is a major flaw in any fantasy stat that rewards ice time regardless of performance.

Saves

If you're looking to reward the workhorse, saves is a better way to do it than games or minutes played. Like those categories, saves are linked (at least partially) to minutes played. It's not a direct correlation, because the defensive strength of the team does factor in, but generally the league's saves leaders are among the leaders in minutes played as well. The advantage of using saves is that you're incorporating performance as well, not just ice time. If I'm looking for one category to complement the Big 4, this would be my choice more often than not.

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Goals Against

Some fantasy sites offer goals against as an option. In a points-based league, this could be incorporated into a scoring formula, which you can't do with GAA. That's a nice alternative to traditional goalie scoring formulas that focus just on wins and shutouts. But in a roto or head-to-head league, goals against is redundant if you're already counting GAA.

Shootout Stats

[In a previous article](#) , we considered the role that shootouts might play for fantasy skaters. If you're going to bring the gimmick into the equation for your snipers, you should probably do it for goalies too. The categories at your disposal include shootout goals against (ShGA), shootout saves (ShSV) and shootout save percentage (ShSV%). Of these three, I'd lean towards ShSV%, as the other two stats will be skewed towards goalies whose teams play more shootouts. Going with save percentage levels the playing field and gives you a truer indication of each goalie's performance.

Points-Based Scoring

This article is primarily geared towards category-based leagues (roto and head-to-head), but for those of you in points-based leagues, you'll want to ensure that goalies are valued fairly in comparison to skaters. There's a ton of variety in points-based scoring, but I'd aim to have the league's top goalies on par with a 90-point forward, with an average starting goalie valued similar to a 70-point forward. So, for example, in a straight points league, you could award 2 points for a win and 2 for a shutout. Henrik Lundqvist and Carey Price would have led the league last season with 94 and 92 points respectively, while Corey Crawford (a

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middle-of-the-pack starter) would've clocked in at 74.

However you choose to integrate goaltenders into your league scoring, there's no doubt that in fantasy – as in real life – your team's fortunes will rise or fall with the performance of your masked men. So here's wishing you more Timmy Thomases, and fewer Steve Masons!

What do you think? What are the advantages and drawbacks of these goaltending categories, and which ones do you like to employ? And who's your favourite fantasy goaltender, past or present?