



*This is part one of my Columbus Blue Jackets' All-Decade Team. I will be writing about my selections for top goaltender, top two defensemen, top three forwards, and best overall player. The first installment begins with the top goaltender of the decade.*

Building a hockey team starts from the blue paint out. The heavily-padded man is the last line of defense. Playing goaltender is often a thankless job. If the team in front of you plays poorly, your stats suffer and some fans pile on their criticisms, ignoring the fact that you had next to no help. If you play well, you are supposed to. More often than not, the goaltender is one of the highest-paid players on the team and one of the most recognizable names.

As any hockey player will tell you, goaltenders are very quirky individuals. They are highly entertaining to be around. But, when the puck is dropped and the 200' x 85' surface is occupied, a goaltender has to be the most focused man on the ice. A millisecond-long lack of concentration can result in the difference between a win and a loss. Goaltenders often have to find the puck through more sets of legs than a Rockettes' performance. It is a very technical position to play, with a plethora of objectives. Maintaining the proper angles, directing rebounds to safe zones of the ice, and communicating with the defensemen to cover the opposing players are just some of the tasks.

Goaltenders are paramount in the momentum game. Hockey is a game with enormous momentum swings, and there are usually several in a game. A big save on a penalty kill can

lead to a shift in tempo for the goaltender's team. A bad goal can cripple a team's morale. All of this while trying to stop a frozen rubber projectile flying at upwards of 100 miles per hour.

Fourteen brave men have suited up in net for the Columbus Blue Jackets. Just three of them have played over 100 games, so the sample sizes are somewhat thin for the position. Perhaps a little by default, the best goaltender of the first decade of Blue Jackets hockey is **Marc Denis**.

Marc Denis was a member of the inaugural Blue Jackets team back in 2000-01 and won six of the 32 games that he played that season. Denis would wind up playing 266 games with the franchise, winning 84 of them. His best season, statistically, was the 2003-04 campaign, where he finished the year with a 2.56 goals-against-average and a .915 save-percentage. Denis is the all-time leader in wins for the Blue Jackets with the aforementioned 84 victories, however, Steve Mason will likely pass him later this season or early in 2011-12.

Denis was a former 25<sup>th</sup> overall pick by the Colorado Avalanche in the 1995 NHL Entry Draft. He appeared in just 28 games, backing up legendary goaltender Patrick Roy most of the time. The Blue Jackets acquired Denis in June of 2000 in exchange for a second round draft pick. He set the then-NHL record for minutes played in a season during the 2002-03 season with 4,511, playing in 77 games.

Some readers may ask why I did not pick Steve Mason. He led the Blue Jackets to their only playoff berth, as well as, won the Calder Trophy for Rookie of the Year in 2009. However, I wanted to span as much of the decade as possible and Denis has five seasons to Mason's three and is a better indicator of the decade as a whole.

Honorable mention: Steve Mason, Pascal Leclaire, Fredrik Norrena

**In current Blue Jackets news**, the Blue Jackets are 7-3-0 over their last ten games and are allowing just 2.6 goals per game. Unfortunately, they are scoring just 2.45 per game. Through 11 games this season, only Columbus and the New Jersey Devils have failed to score more

than three goals in a game.

Derick Brassard enters Thursday's game riding a five-game point streak (4G, 1A). Rick Nash scored his fourth goal of the year against Montreal on Tuesday night.

From the biggest surprise of the year so far department, Kyle Wilson has three goals and an assist in six games with the team. Wilson signed as a free agent in the offseason after leaving the Washington Capitals. He has seen mostly fourth line duty, but has shown a knack for scoring goals. His ice time may increase over the coming weeks.

As mentioned in last week's column, Mathieu Garon is continuing to play well. He recorded his third win in three starts on Tuesday in a shutout victory over Montreal. He is expected to get the nod again on Thursday in Atlanta. Garon has allowed just four goals over his three games played.

Steve Mason struggled in a road loss to Colorado on October 30, being pulled midway through the second period. Couple that with Garon getting a back-to-back starting nod and there could be a platoon situation in net.

### **Other news from around the NHL:**

**The Boston Bruins** have allowed just 11 goals in eight games this season. US Olympian Tim Thomas, who lost his starting job last season to Finnish youngster Tuukka Rask, has allowed just three goals in six games, posting three shutouts. He is 6-0 on the season.

**Another US Olympian**, Zach Parise will miss the next three months after undergoing surgery to repair a torn meniscus. The Devils are already the league's worst team and losing Parise is a severe blow. The Devils have scored just 20 goals in 13 games. The team's struggles are a

disappointing blow to Martin Brodeur, the surefire Hall of Fame goaltender, whose career is winding down. He is at risk of his first sub-.500 season of his 20-year career. Two of Brodeur's three wins this season have come from shutouts.

**The NHL's Central Division** was a doormat in the Western Conference for a while, but now, the division is booming. Entering play on Wednesday night, each team had 13 points or more. Collectively, teams of the Central Division have gathered 65% of the possible 106 points available in their games.

**And finally, in this week's cut-by-a-skate news item**, Toronto Maple Leafs defenseman Dion Phaneuf is out for 4-6 weeks after having his leg cut by the skate of Ottawa's Peter Regin. The cut was deep enough to nick Phaneuf's medial collateral ligament.

**A minor league update on the Lake Erie Monsters**, as the team won two out of three on their ridiculously-scheduled weekend of games. The Monsters lost 6-2 on Friday night, won 4-1 in Toronto on Saturday afternoon, and then put together a solid, albeit sluggish, performance on Halloween winning 2-0 over Manitoba. All in all, a good showing for playing three games in 44 hours.

Two newcomers, Julian Talbot and Greg Mauldin are pacing the team in points with nine and eight, respectively. Talbot was acquired in the trade that sent TJ Hensick to St. Louis, while Mauldin was signed as a free agent by the Avalanche and then assigned to Lake Erie. Mauldin was recently appointed captain after veterans David van der Gulik and David Liffiton were recalled to Colorado. Liffiton scored his first NHL goal in the Avs' 5-1 win over Columbus on October 30.

**Upcoming schedules:**

Columbus: 11/4: @ ATL; 11/6 v. MIN; 11/10 v. STL

Lake Erie: 11/5 v. Chicago; 11/7 v. Grand Rapids; 11/10 v. Hamilton @ 10:45 am