

GOALTENDING REMAINS STRONG FOR LA KINGS UNDER BILL RANFORD'S TUTELAGE

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 2, 2015



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From **Mike Richards** to **Slava Voynov**, there has been enough off-ice drama for the **Los Angeles Kings** to create a mini-series out of. Thankfully, key acquisitions like **Milan Lucic** and **Christian Ehrhoff** have helped make the 2015-16 campaign something to get a tad more excited about for Kings fans. Yet, the Kings' goaltending situation entering the new season has flown under the radar.

While **Martin Jones** was traded to the rival **San Jose Sharks** just days after the Kings shipped him to **Boston**, few have paid attention to the silver-and-black when

it comes to what's going on between the pipes. **Jonathan Quick** is still the No. 1 man in goal — there was never any question about that — but the Kings did welcome a new face to the fold when they signed **Jhonas Enroth** to a one-year deal earlier this summer. Then, just last week, the Kings announced that they were inviting free-agent netminder **Peter Budaj** to training camp on a professional tryout.

I spoke to Kings' goaltending coach, **Bill Ranford**, about the situation in goal, beginning with Enroth.

"I think Enroth will bring a veteran presence to the team and give us some crucial starts," Ranford said. "It is important for [Quick and Enroth] to give quality starts with the tough division we play in. Enroth has the experience of being both a No. 1 and No. 2 at the NHL level.

"Peter Budaj will give us some experience if **J.F. Berube** isn't ready to go for training camp, and will push the other goalies."

While the number-one spot is not up for grabs, who will start — and even finish — the season in the backup role warrants a more interesting conversation. Even if Berube is healthy enough to participate in training camp, he would most likely start the year in **Ontario**. With that said, though, Enroth's signing doesn't necessarily mean that Berube will be staying in the **AHL** this coming season.



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"I believe J.F. will be ready for training camp but Budaj gives us veteran coverage in case he is not," Ranford continued. "I believe J.F. is ready to make the next step to the NHL after two strong AHL seasons. He has to take advantage of the opportunity when the time comes, just as

others have done in the past.

As far as those two strong AHL seasons went, Ranford was not simply being generous in saying so.

After posting a 28-17-3 record to go in hand with a 2.37 goals-against average and a .913 save percentage in 2013-14, the 24-year-old Berube only got better in 2014-15. While Berube's .913 save percentage remained intact last season, he improved on his GAA, reaching a mark of 2.18 while drastically improving his overall record to 37-9-4, followed by a stellar 13-3-0 mark in the playoffs en route to **Manchester's** first **Calder Cup** win. However, if Berube is to suit for the Kings this season, his fans will want to see him in action on at least a semi-regular basis.



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Aside from an injury which limited him to 49 games in 2013-14, Jonathan Quick has been Los Angeles's stalwart in goal for the past six seasons. Over that span — and excluding 2013-14 and the lockout-shortened 2013 campaign — Quick has averaged just under 69 games played, sitting for an average of 13 games. During said lockout season, Quick played in 37 games, missing just 11. So, with those numbers, it doesn't

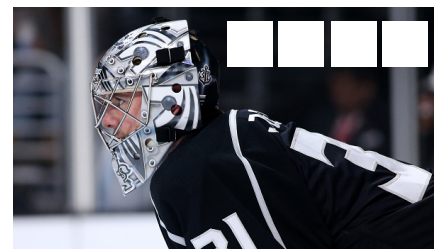
appear likely that J.F. Berube would be getting a ton of ice time if he were in Los Angeles. Of course, Berube does deserve a shot at the big club nonetheless, thanks notably to the aforementioned departure of Martin Jones.

I asked Ranford for his thoughts on Jones and how he will fare as a starter in the NHL. While skeptics are quick to point out that the 25-year-old netminder went just 8-11-2 since his historic 8-0-0 start to his career. Even so, Jones did post a very respectable 2.03 GAA in his combined time with the Kings in addition to seven shutouts in only 34 games.

"I think Martin Jones will be fine in this next stage of his career," Ranford told me. "He is a low-maintenance goalie that has worked hard to get this opportunity. I wish him luck in the upcoming season... just not against the Kings."

Fans of the silver-and-black would not likely hold any reservations in agreeing with Ranford on the latter statement.

While it should be easy for naysayers to dismiss him based on his team's playoff miss last season, Jonathan Quick has not wavered from the goaltender fans of the silver-and-black have grown to love over the past six-plus seasons. In fact, Quick's 36-win total in 2014-15 was just three short of his career-high set in 2009-10.



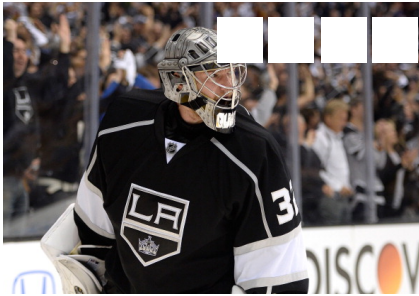
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His sparkling 2.24 GAA, six shutouts and 36-22-13 record are great, but the UMass alum should be given extra credit for putting up said numbers despite the issues on the blueline, making his job that much more difficult. Quick's 72 games was the most he played in a season since 2009-10 and while he must have been spent by season's end, no one in their wildest dreams could even think of blaming him for the Kings missing the playoffs.

"We expect the same quality goaltending that Jonathan has given us the past five years," Ranford continued. "He is a determined individual that did not take it lightly that we missed the playoffs last year."

Fans will expect the same quality goaltending as well and, like every season, will have a chip on their shoulders for their netminder's sake. After all, Jonathan Quick simply does not garner the critical attention he deserves thanks to the dreaded east-coast bias.



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On the flipside, though, Quick was ranked third among netminders in **EA Sports's NHL 16** — so, if you take much stock in video game ratings, then this is definitely good news. Overall, fans of the silver-and-black simply do not care what others think of Quick — or their entire team for that matter.

It has been an unusually-long summer for the Los Angeles Kings and their fans, but the agonizing wait is just about over.

From Quick and Enroth to Budaj and Berube, the Los Angeles Kings look just as strong in goal as they would any other year. This coming season, however, the universal hope is that the netminders will receive more support — and more assurance — from their defensive corps. As for Bill Ranford, he will be entering his 10th season as the Kings' goaltending coach. Under Ranford, the Kings' goals-against average decreased in each of his first six seasons before winning the club's first William M. Jennings award for the fewest goals against. Do not be surprised to see Ranford's tutelage help his netminders once again this season.

As for now, the excitement for the fast-approaching campaign is palpable.

"Our group is excited about getting back on the ice, ready for the long haul," Ranford closed.

You can be sure that every single fan of the Los Angeles Kings will agree.