

LA KINGS' BILL RANFORD ON JONATHAN QUICK: "BETTER AND BETTER WITH EACH START"

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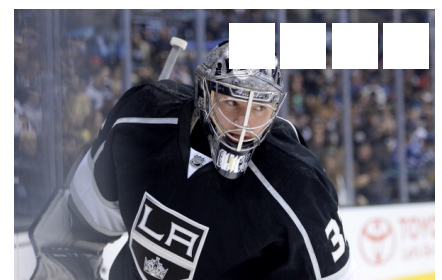


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On the morning of October 14, it felt as if the sky were falling to a unusually-exorbitant amount of loyal **Los Angeles Kings** fans – melodramatic, but loyal nonetheless. Needless to say that supporters of the silver-and-black were not happy. Through three games, the Kings were still in search of their first win. To make matters worse, the losses weren't close. Through their opening three contests, the Kings were outscored by a lopsided 12-2 margin. The forwards weren't clicking, the defensemen weren't gelling and **Jonathan Quick** looked so out-of-place in goal that some fans even wanted him traded. Seriously.

While it certainly is comprehensible for a fanbase to worry about their team losing a few games, to suggest trading a player that has been so instrumental in his team's vast success is, to say the least, ludicrous. While it is unfortunately commonplace in the world of sports, the "But what have you done for me lately?" philosophy should not be applied to the Los Angeles Kings, especially when it means just a few games into a new season.

Since being shut out by the **Vancouver Canucks** on Oct. 13, the Kings have played exponentially better. The forward lines are creating chemistry, the defensive corps is returning to championship form and Jonathan Quick is playing like the same Jonathan Quick who pushed his team into the playoffs — en route to winning hockey's Holiest prize — just a few short years ago. In fact, I spoke to Kings' goaltending coach **Bill Ranford** not only about Quick's recent play but his attitude.



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"Quick's attitude has been great," Ranford said. "He wasn't happy with his first two games but has gotten better and better with each start."



After three games to open the season, Quick had a mark of 0-3-0, a 4.00 goals-against average and a save percentage of .861. Those certainly are not numbers to write home about. However, in his five games since then, the 29-year-old backstop has gone 5-0-0 while boasting a 0.99 GAA and a .966 save percentage. What a difference a couple of weeks make. In fact, his play even earned him the **NHL's Third Star** last week.

"He is all about winning hockey games. That is all that matters to him," an unerring Ranford stated of his starting goaltender.

But Quick, while he has played in the vast majority of his team's games thus far, has not been the only King to grace the crease. While he has only played in one game thus far, **Jhonas Enroth** was solid in that one outing.



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In said game, Enroth played as if the starting job was his to lose, facing 40 shots and stopping 39 of them. Plus, with help from a two-goal output from **Jeff Carter**, earned his first win as a King in his first game, helping to beat the **San Jose Sharks** by a 4-1 count. So, while many thought head coach **Darryl Sutter** was crazy for starting his new netminder in San Jose against a resurgent Sharks team, Enroth's solid play helped prove his new coach right.

Signed as a free agent in July, Enroth was brought in on a one-year deal and was deemed by some to be an afterthought. After all, with Jonathan Quick averaging 65 games per season over the last five full campaigns (that excludes the shortened 2013 season), the chances of Enroth, or anyone else, seeing a significant amount of ice time were fairly slim. It didn't help Enroth's case that Quick played in 72 games last season – tying a career-high first set in 2009-10. But with PTO invitee **Peter Budaj** now in Ontario and the promising **J.F. Berube** having been claimed by the **New York Islanders** off waivers, Jhonas Enroth's role with the Kings is a bit more secure. In fact, Bill Ranford holds no reservations in his excitement for Enroth.

"Enroth has been a great addition to our team," Ranford told me. "He has worked very hard on and off the ice. He gave us a great game in San Jose, especially in the first period."

Despite being dominated by San Jose in said opening frame, Jhonas Enroth kept the Sharks off the scoreboard, making a total of 18 saves while the Kings made the most of their eight shots, scoring twice. Enroth's outstanding effort gave his team as auspicious start in San Jose, putting – and keeping them – on the right track for the entire contest.

It may not have been the start that the Los Angeles Kings or their fans had envisioned, but as October draws to a close, everyone associated with the silver-and-black are singing a much happier tune, and that goes



especially for Bill Ranford who knows just how integral his goaltenders have been towards said success thus far.

"I feel very good about our goaltending at this point," Ranford said. "We started slow as a group but have gotten better with timely saves in the last four or five games."

From the first three games to the next six, the Kings have shuffled their way from one end of the spectrum to the other. They have been much better overall but that is particularly the case in goal.

While Jhonas Enroth's sole appearance thus far was noteworthy to say the least, Jonathan Quick has gotten himself into a groove, regaining his vintage form by, as Ranford mentioned, making timely saves – many of which fans would have thought were sure-goals otherwise. This is nothing new for Quick, although fans sure did miss watching their team's star netminder literally steal points away from the opposition. The most recent example of this came last Sunday night in **Edmonton** when Quick made a spectacular goal-line glove save to deny wunderkind **Connor McDavid** of the game-tying goal for his **Oilers**. Quick followed that up with a 24-save performance in **Winnipeg** two nights later to earn his fifth-straight victory.

Don't expect the Kings to light the lamp so much that they are blowing out opponents, but do expect a defensive corps to keep growing as a unit. If this continues to happen, then the jobs of Jonathan Quick and Jhonas Enroth will be that much easier, which will, in turn, make the duo look even better.



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