Brodeur vs. Hasek vs. Roy: Who is the Greatest Goalie of Our Generation?

Now that the playoffs have concluded, many teams are faced with the challenge of refining, or in some cases, completely rebuilding their teams with the hopes of achieving what the Chicago Blackhawks have done thrice in the past six years: winning the Stanley Cup. Many GMs will try to improve their teams in a variety of ways, either via the NHL draft, trades, or free agency. However, for fans and analysts alike, the NHL offseason is predominantly a period for speculation on what moves will be made, how newcomers will fit into their new teams’ system, and what the next season will hold. So instead of using this time to predict what will happen in the coming months, I’d prefer to use this as a period for reflection.

The NHL has never been forgiving to its goaltenders; it is far and away the most competitive position in the league, simply because there are so few spots available and the position is so valuable. Each NHL team is allotted 20 roster spots, 12 of which will go to forwards, 6 to defensemen, and only 2 to goaltenders, leaving a mere 60 goaltenders in the league at any given time. As a result, there is an incredible amount of pressure on these players to succeed, as many of them play with very little job security, knowing that their careers are likely to end much quicker than their teammates. On a similar note, when goalies do go the distance and display long stretches of success, it is important to take note and celebrate.

A perfect example of both of the aforementioned points is none other than the incumbent Stanley Cup winning goaltender Corey Crawford, who just won his 2nd Stanley Cup after defeating the Tampa Bay Lightning in six games. Crawford now joins Jonathan Quick as the only goalies currently in the NHL to have won multiple Stanley Cups as starters, a testament to how difficult it is to repeat success in the league, especially as a goalie. Even that alarming statistic fails to take into account the fact that Crawford was benched for backup goalie Scott Darling after he struggled in Chicago’s opening series against the Nashville Predators. Meanwhile, many would argue that Henrik Lundqvist of the New York Rangers is the unofficial carrier of the “Best Goalie in the NHL” moniker, and he has only reached one Stanley Cup Final in his career, losing to the aforementioned Quick’s Los Angeles Kings in 2014. If we only take the most recent season into consideration, then Montreal Canadiens goaltender Carey Price would be the near-unanimous choice, having just been awarded the Vezina and Hart Memorial Trophies for the league’s top goalie and MVP, respectively, despite never having reached a Stanley Cup Final in his life.

The stories of Crawford, Lundqvist, Price, and countless others should help illuminate that success and longevity on their own are tough to find in NHL goaltenders, and even rarer in tandem. Thus, following the previously mentioned note of celebrating longevity and success in goaltenders, we have reached the crux of this article. Growing up as an avid hockey fan in the late 1990’s – 2000’s, I was fortunate enough to be able to watch three of the greatest goalies to ever lace up their skates in the history of the NHL: Martin Brodeur of the New Jersey Devils, Patrick Roy of the Montreal Canadiens and Colorado Avalanche, and Dominik Hasek of the Blackhawks, Buffalo Sabres, Ottawa Senators, and Detroit Red Wings.

Each goalie is a guaranteed Hall of Famer (Roy and Hasek have already been inducted) and is incredible in their own right, having accumulated their fair share of regular season hardware, Olympic Medals, and Stanley Cup rings. However, many fans have their own opinions on who was the greatest of the three – those who value Stanley Cup rings above all will likely choose Roy, those who value wins will likely choose Brodeur, and those who value dominance might be inclined to choose Hasek. As a passionate hockey fan, it is only natural that I give my opinion on the debate as well. I will compare the goalies in the following categories: regular season performance, post-season performance, international performance, awards, and legacy. When this is all said and done, I will have (hopefully) come to a definitive conclusion on who is the greatest goalie of the generation.

Before I delve into the analysis, I’d like to note that many advanced statistical categories were not kept until after the 2004-05 lockout, meaning that only Martin Brodeur has played a significant number of series with these statistics. Therefore, I will only use statistics that are applicable to all 3 goalies across their entire careers. Also, all advanced statistical terms will be defined at the end of the article in the section entitled “Glossary.”

**Regular Season Performance**

Here are the career regular season stat lines of the 3 goaltenders:

M. Brodeur: 22 years, 1266 GP, 691-397-154 W-L-T/OTL, .912 SV%, 2.24 GAA, 125 SO, 8 40-win seasons, 14 30-win seasons

D. Hasek: 16 years, 735 GP, 389-223-95 W-L-T/OTL, .922 SV%, 2.20 GAA, 81 SO, 1 40-win season, 7 30-win seasons

P. Roy: 20 years, 1029 GP, 551-315-131 W-L-T/OTL, .910 SV%, 2.54 GAA, 66 SO, 1 40-win season, 13 30-win seasons

When looking exclusively at the numbers, Brodeur leads Hasek, Roy, and every other goaltender in NHL history in the following regular season statistics: games played, minutes played, wins, shutouts, 30-win seasons, and 40-win seasons. However, much of Brodeur’s success in these categories has been the result of his unparalleled durability as the uncontested #1 goalie for the Devils for nearly 20 straight seasons. While I am not criticizing Brodeur for longevity, I’m simply stating that his numbers, while spectacular, are larger due to his extended career, and with this extended career comes more losses. Thus, quite unsurprisingly, Brodeur also leads all NHL goaltenders in losses and goals surrendered. Still, Brodeur (54.5%) has a higher win percentage than Roy (53.5%) and Hasek (52.9%), so even if the 3 played a similar amount of games, one would expect Brodeur to come out on top in the wins department. Also, at Brodeur’s peak, no one could win the way he did; for 12 out of 13 straight seasons from ’96-’97 to ’09-’10, he posted the most or 2nd-most regular season wins in the league (the lone season in which he didn’t was in ’08-’09, which he missed the majority of due to a torn biceps tendon).

When looking into the more advanced analytics, Brodeur has 206.97-point shares, best among goalies in NHL history and 5th all-time, trailing only Gretzky, Bourque, Howe, and Lidstrom, which is some pretty exclusive company. The only knock against Brodeur is that he played nearly half of his career (10/22 seasons) in the post-lockout, shootout era, while Hasek only played 3 seasons and Roy had retired at that point. With the institution of the shootout, ties were no longer a part of the league, meaning games were more likely to end in wins. Still, even if Brodeur lost every single shootout in his career, he would remain several dozen wins ahead of Roy on the leader board.

Meanwhile, Hasek gets the nod over Brodeur and Roy in two incredibly important goaltending categories, posting a better career regular season save percentage (currently 2nd best all time, trailing current Bruins’ goaltender Tuukka Rask) and goals against average (8th best). These two statistics are the main points of argument used by fervent Hasek supporters who argue that both Brodeur and Roy were the beneficiaries of notoriously strong defensive systems that helped inflate their career statistics. This point is substantiated when looking at each goalie’s adjusted goals against average (GAA/A); Hasek has a career GAA/A of 2.367 (3rd all time), Roy sits 8th all time with a GAA/A of 2.497, and Brodeur is right behind him at 9th all time with a 2.504 GAA/A.

Although Brodeur reigns supreme in the total shutout category, he only achieved a shutout in 9.9% of his games, compared to Hasek’s 11% and Roy’s 6.4%. So, to continue on an aforementioned point, if each goalie played the same amount of games, Hasek would likely post the most shutouts of the three. Finally, for 6 straight seasons from ’93-’94 to ’98-’99, Hasek led the league in save percentage, an absolutely absurd accomplishment.

When compared to Brodeur, Roy’s 1029 games played and 551 regular season wins look diminutive, when in reality, he is second all time in both categories. Furthermore, Roy is second all time in goalie point shares with 198.34 (Hasek sits 10th all time with 156.81), and 7th all time among skaters (Jagr is in 6th place, and remarkably still climbing the ladder). Finally, according to hockey-reference.com’s Elo Player Ratings (explained in greater detail in the Glossary), Roy ranks as the greatest goalie in NHL history, with Hasek and Brodeur as the 5th and 7th greatest ever, respectively. This is likely a product of Roy’s stellar performance in the playoffs throughout his career.

**Post-Season Performance**

Here are the career post-season stat lines of the 3 goaltenders:

M. Brodeur: 17 postseasons, 205 GP, 113-91 W-L, .919 SV%, 2.02 GAA, 24 SO, 5 Stanley Cup Finals appearances, 3 Stanley Cups

D. Hasek: 13 postseasons, 119 GP, 65-49 W-L, .925 SV%, 2.02 GAA, 14 SO, 4 Stanley Cup Finals appearances, 2 Stanley Cups

P. Roy: 17 postseasons, 247 GP, 151-94 W-L, .918 SV%, 2.30 GAA, 23 SO, 5 Stanley Cup Finals appearances, 4 Stanley Cups

An essential part of what makes an athlete great is their ability to step up in high-pressure situations like the playoffs. As a result, it isn’t surprising that all 3 goaltenders showed tremendous statistical improvements between their regular and post-season statistics. All three goalies saw improvements in save percentage, goals against average, playoff win percentage (Brodeur: 55.1%, Hasek: 54.6%, Roy: 61.1%) and shutout percentage (Brodeur: 11.7%, Hasek: 11.8%, Roy: 9.3%).

What distinguishes these incredible athletes even further is that they were each able to capitalize on their improvements by winning the Stanley Cup multiple times. Roy showed the most overall playoff success, winning 4 cups in 17 post-seasons (23.5%), while Brodeur won 3 in 17 (17.6%) and Hasek won 2 in 13 (15.4%). Still, these are all incredible percentages given how difficult it is to win multiple championships due to expansion and the institution of a salary cap that have combined to prevent teams from stockpiling superstars for extended periods of time.

In terms of all time greatness, Roy sits atop the upper echelon of playoff goaltenders, holding the record among goaltenders for most games played, wins, and most Conn Smythe trophies won for playoff MVP (discussed later). However, Brodeur sits close behind Roy in second place in playoff games played and wins. Additionally, although he did not win the Conn Smythe that year, his 2003-playoff campaign was historic as he posted the most shutouts in a single playoff campaign (7) and the most shutouts in a Stanley Cup final (3, tied with Frank McCool of the Maple Leafs). Lastly, like the regular season, although Hasek did not play in or win nearly as many games as Brodeur or Roy, he still had the highest save percentage of the 3, and was tied with Brodeur for the lowest goals against average.

Still, Hasek possesses the least impressive postseason résumé of the group, and this is further hindered by the fact that he won his second ring (2008 with the Red Wings) on the back of Chris Osgood, who replaced Hasek after a poor outing in Detroit’s first round series against the Nashville Predators. Contrarily, Brodeur and Roy each won all of their Stanley Cups as the clear starter.

**International Performance**

Here are the career Olympic stat lines of the 3 goaltenders:

M. Brodeur: 11 GP, 7-3-1 W-L-T, .915 SV%, 2.08 GAA, 0 SO, 2 Medals (Gold – 2002, 2010)

D. Hasek: 16 GP, 9-5-1 W-L-T, .930 SV%, 2.30 GAA, 3 SO, 2 Medals (Gold – 1998, Bronze – 2006)

P. Roy: 6 GP, 4-1-1 W-L-T, .935 SV%, 1.46 GAA, 1 SO, 0 Medals

Many players will say that representing their countries and competing for a gold medal is on par with competing for Stanley Cup, and it is therefore an important component of their career to consider. Additionally, the 1998 Nagano Olympics were the first to allow NHL players to participate, meaning that Patrick Roy played the majority of his career unable to compete in the Olympics, thereby restricting him to participate in only one tournament. Because of this, I decided to only compare each goalies’ top Olympic performances, which were the 1998 Nagano Olympics for Hasek and Roy and the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics for Brodeur. Their stat lines for those Olympics are as follows:

M. Brodeur (2002): 5 GP, 4-0-1 W-L-T, .918 SV%, 1.80 GAA, 0 SO, Gold Medal

D. Hasek (1998): 6 GP, 5-1-0 W-L-T, .961 SV%, 0.97 GAA, 2 SO, Gold Medal

P. Roy (1998): 6 GP, 4-1-1 W-L-T, .935 SV%, 1.46 GAA, 1 SO, 4th place

I’d first like to make one thing clear: Hasek undoubtedly wins this category. Many have regarded his 6 games in Japan as the greatest performance in Olympic history, regardless of position. He only allowed 6 goals for the entire Olympics, and only 2 of them came in the medal round. Furthermore, he defeated Roy and Team Canada in the semifinals in a shootout, in which he stopped three Hall of Famers (Ray Bourque, Joe Nieuwendyk, and Brendan Shanahan) and two more all-time greats (Theoren Fleury and Eric Lindros). Finally, he was able to clinch the gold medal in a storybook ending by shutting out the Russian National Team 1-0. In fact, Wayne Gretzky was so impressed with Hasek’s performance that he called him “the best player in the game” following the Olympics (in case you needed further convincing that Hasek was superb).

Meanwhile, Hasek’s incredible performance overshadowed a strong showing by Roy as he put up more-than-respectable numbers in the only Olympics of his career. Still, after losing to the Czechs in the semi-finals, Roy struggled in the bronze medal game and lost 3-2 to Finland, preventing him from winning a medal in his only opportunity. Finally, Brodeur initially began the 2002 Olympics as Canada’s backup behind Curtis Joseph, but was promoted to the starting role after Joseph struggled in the first game (a common theme amongst Canadian goaltenders, as we’ll shortly see). Brodeur thrived for the rest of the competition, posting the best goals against average of the tournament and never losing a game.

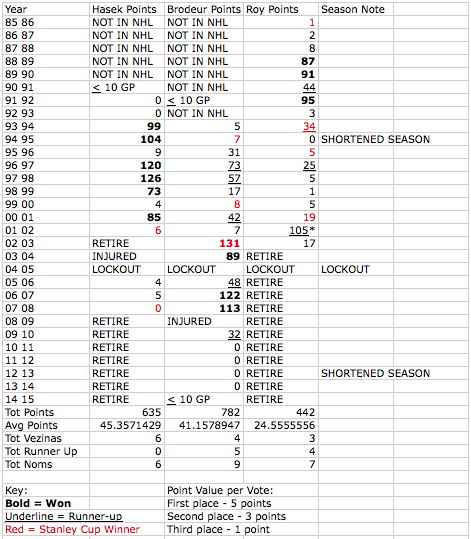
As for a bit of extra hockey history, here’s a brief summary on Brodeur and Hasek’s other Olympics performances: in 1998, Brodeur served as Roy’s backup, but did not play a game. In the 2006 Turin Olympics, Brodeur started for Team Canada, but only played 4 of 6 games as Canada lost in the quarterfinals. Finally, Brodeur was a member of the 2010 gold-medal winning team and started the first 2 games, the second of which he lost to the US. However, due to the high expectations of the Olympics and pressure of being the host country (the 2010 Olympics were held in Vancouver), Brodeur was benched in favor of Roberto Luongo, who started for the remainder of the tournament.

As for Hasek, he was a member of the 1988 Czech Olympic team as an amateur, but did not see much playing time. He then followed his historic performance in Nagano rather poorly in 2002, finishing in 7th place in the tournament. Many expected Hasek to have a bounce-back performance in Turin, but it was not meant to be – he injured his right adductor muscle 9 minutes into the opening game and was sidelined for the remainder of the competition. Thomas Vokoun, Hasek’s replacement, subsequently led the Czechs to the bronze medal.

Interestingly enough, many believe that Roy would have been offered a spot on the 2002 Canadian team as a backup. However, Roy declined to participate before the selection process even began, preventing him from acquiring the one glaring accomplishment from an otherwise sterling career.

**Awards**

Vezina Trophy  
When comparing goaltenders, the main award that I will be looking at is the Vezina Trophy. Per NHL.com, this trophy “is an annual award given to the goalkeeper adjudged to be the best at this position as voted by the general managers of all NHL clubs. The voting [for the trophy] is conducted at the end of the regular season, and each individual voter ranks his top three candidates on a 5-3-1 points system.” With this in mind, I’ve compiled a table that tracks how many Vezina points each goalie received in every year they were eligible. For the sake of parity, I did not count years in which a goalie played 10 games or fewer (marked < 10 GP) or in which a goalie was injured for a significant portion of the season. However, I did include seasons in which the goalie was a backup (i.e: Hasek’s first 2 seasons in Chicago backing up Ed Belfour) or in which a goalie split time (i.e: Brodeur’s final season in New Jersey splitting time with Corey Schneider), as they still received significant playing time in those seasons. Also, in order to be nominated for the Vezina you must finish in the top 3 in voting. Therefore, any year marked with an underline as a runner-up indicates that the goalie finished either 2nd or 3rd in voting.



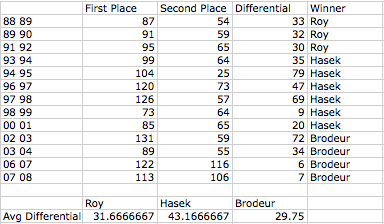
\*In 2001-02, Patrick Roy and Jose Theodore tied for first place in Vezina voting as they each received 105 points. However, Theodore was named the winner as he won the tiebreaker, having received 15 first-place votes compared to Roy’s 12.

When looking at this table, several things should jump out at first glance. Firstly, we see that each goalie had their own extended reign of dominance in their careers. In a 4-season span (‘88-‘92), Roy won all 3 of his Vezinas and was a runner-up once. Shortly after Roy’s reign came Hasek’s, which appears to be the most impressive streak of the 3, winning 6 Vezinas in 8 seasons (’93-’01), one of which was at Brodeur and Roy’s expense (’97), and another one solely at Brodeur’s expense (’98). Finally, Brodeur ruled the league for 5 seasons (’02-’04, 05-’08), winning all 4 of his Vezinas and finishing as a runner-up once in that span. Had the league avoided the lockout in 2004-05 and if Brodeur avoided injury in 2008, it’s plausible that he could have approached Hasek’s record of 6 Vezinas.

Next, it’s important to take into consideration that both Roy and Brodeur’s periods of dominance were when they played largely without their other two counterparts in the league. However, when all three goalies were playing at the same time, Hasek reigned supreme with respect to Vezina voting (although Brodeur was not far behind). The most fascinating statistic to me was that Brodeur was the only one to have won the Vezina and the Stanley Cup in the same season, accomplishing this feat in ’02-’03.

Another important statistic to take into consideration are the “Total Points” and “Average Points” rows. Although Brodeur accumulated far more total Vezina voting points in his career than Hasek and Roy, he also played 1 more season than Roy and 4 more than Hasek, thereby inflating his statistic. Therefore, I took the average of each goalie’s total points across their eligible seasons to find out how they would perform in the voting in an average season. From this, I discovered that Hasek has a slight edge of about 4 voting points over Brodeur, with Roy falling behind in a distant third place.

Finally, I was curious to see how dominant each goalie was when they won their respective Vezinas. I was able to do this by measuring the difference in voting points received by the Vezina winner and runner-up for each year one of the 3 goalies won the award, as shown in the table below. As you can see, Hasek was far and away the most dominant when he won his Vezinas, posting the strongest average differential of the 3 goalies and the largest individual differential (79 points in the lockout-shortened ‘94-‘95 season). The next highest differential of 72 points was posted by Brodeur in his Stanley Cup winning season in ‘02-‘03. Thus, we can conclude that Hasek was most dominant when he won his Vezinas, as shown by the greater average voting point differential.

****

Conn Smythe Trophy

The Conn Smythe Trophy is awarded to the MVP of the playoffs, and was won by Roy three out of the four times his team won the Cup (’86, ’93, ’01). Despite both winning multiple Stanley Cups, neither Brodeur nor Hasek ever won the Conn Smythe trophy in their careers. However, there was some controversy in the 2003 Stanley Cup Finals after Anaheim Ducks goaltender Jean Sebastian-Giguere (15-6, 1.62 GAA, .945 SV%, 5 SO) was given the award despite losing to Brodeur’s Devils in 7 games. Giguere was the first player, goalie or skater, to win playoff MVP since Flyer’s goalie Ron Hextall did so in 1987, and many sports writers speculated that Brodeur (16-8, 1.65 GAA, .935 SV%, NHL record 7 SO) was more deserving than Giguere, but lost because there were multiple candidates on the Devils that postseason, resulting in a split vote among the voting writers. Nevertheless, Roy reigns supreme in this category, and his 3 Conn Smythes are an NHL-record, furthering the proof of his playoff dominance. One final piece of trivia: Roy is the only player in NHL history to have won the award with more than one team; his ’86 and ’93 trophies came with Montreal, while his ’01 trophy came with Colorado.

Hart Memorial Trophy

The Hart Memorial Trophy is awarded to the league MVP of the regular season. Neither Brodeur nor Roy were named the league MVP in their careers. However, Hasek won the award two years in a row, in ’97 and ’98, and is the only goaltender in NHL history to have won the award multiple times.

William M. Jennings Trophy

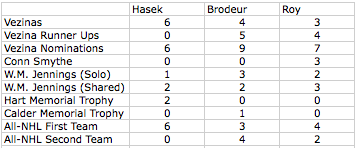
This award, per NHL.com, is given to the “goalkeeper(s) having played a minimum of 25 games for the team with the fewest goals scored against it…based on regular-season play.” Roy won the award five times in his career, the first three of which he shared with Brian Hayward in Montreal. Brodeur won the award five times, sharing the trophy in ’97 with Mike Dunham and tying with two other goalies in ’03. Hasek only won the award three times in his career, sharing two of them (with Grant Fuhr in ’94 and Chris Osgood in ’08). This information should be taken with a grain of salt, though, as this is not only a representation of the strength of play of a goaltender, but also a testament to the strength of the goaltender’s defenders. Therefore, these award totals will not be considered as influential as the Vezina, Conn Smythe, or Hart Memorial Trophies.

Additional Awards

There are several other miscellaneous awards that can be used to compare these goalies. Of the three, Brodeur was the only one to win the Calder Memorial Trophy for most outstanding rookie, which he accomplished in 1994.

At the end of each season, representatives of the Professional Hockey Writers’ Association vote for the All-NHL first and second teams to honor the best performers over the course of the season. Hasek was named to 6 First teams (2nd most by a goaltender in NHL history). Roy was named to 4 First teams (5th most) and 2 Second Teams. Finally, Brodeur was named to 3 First teams and 4 Second teams.

Below is a chart compiling all of the award wins and nominations for each goaltender.



**Legacy**

Brodeur only just retired last season, and due to the three year waiting period, won’t be eligible for the Hall of Fame until 2018. However, it is unquestionable that he will be a first ballot selection. His career and legacy will largely be defined by a few key characteristics. First, that he was the winningest goaltender in the history of the NHL, exemplified by his numerous records (most regular season games played, wins, shutouts, 40-win seasons, 30-win seasons, playoff shutouts, etc.).

Second, Brodeur is famous for being an incredible puck-handler, and for the first half of his career, he would wreak havoc on opposing teams thanks to his ability to make long, accurate stretch passes from behind his net. In fact, Brodeur was such an adept puck handler that, following the lockout, the league instituted a new rule preventing goalies from handling the puck behind the goal line. Instead, they created a trapezoid-shaped area behind the net as the only place a goalie could play the puck behind the goal line; this new rule was quickly dubbed “the Brodeur Rule.” He was also able to leverage his puck handling into a strong offensive career, scoring 3 goals (most ever for a goalie) and tallying over 45 assists during his time in the league; one of his goals famously came at the end of a Devils playoff game against the Canadiens in 1997, one of only two playoff goals scored by goalies in NHL history (the first came from Ron Hextall in 1989). Finally, Brodeur was well known for his hybrid style of goaltending; although he largely identified as a butterfly-style goaltender, he stood up much more than the average butterfly goalie (i.e: Roy).

Unfortunately for Brodeur, most contemporary fans remember him more for exiting the NHL in a less-than-graceful way; many believe that he should have retired after his final season with the Devils (2013-14). However, Brodeur, still interested in playing the game, maintained his availability to the league and signed a contract with the St. Louis Blues, ultimately playing in 7 more games with the Blues before retiring, upon which he was hired as a special assistant to Blues GM Doug Armstrong. Brodeur is still a part of the Blues organization, having been recently hired as an Assistant Genera Manager. No date has been set by the Devils for retiring Brodeur’s jersey, but like his induction into the Hall of Fame, it will surely come with due time.

In his first year eligible, Dominik “The Dominator” Hasek was inducted into the Hall of Fame as a member of the Class of 2014. Hasek is most famous for his unorthodox style of goaltending, in which he dropped down on almost every shot to cover the bottom of the net; this style has been called “the flopper”, referring to how he would flail his body in the crease. A vintage Hasek quote to describe his style is: “They say I am unorthodox, I flop around the ice like some kind of fish. I say, who cares as long as I stop the puck?”

Unlike Brodeur, Hasek was a rather poor puck handler, but he made up for it with his tremendous flexibility and excellent concentration. Meanwhile, Hasek is often regarded as one of the most dominant players, goalie or skater, in the history of the league, and his 9-year run from ’94-’02, in which he won 6 Vezinas, 2 consecutive Harts, and a Cup, ranks as one of the greatest in NHL history.

And for one final story to add to his mantle: Hasek is the owner of arguably the greatest single-game performance in NHL history, posting a **70 save** shutout on April 27, 1994 that the Buffalo Sabres won 1-0 in 4 overtimes. And who was the rookie goaltender that Hasek defeated? None other than the Devils’ own Martin Brodeur, who made 49 saves in that playoff game before surrendering the game-winning goal to Dave Hannan. The Sabres retired Hasek’s jersey number 39 this past season.

“Saint” Patrick Roy was inducted to the Hall of Fame back in 2006, also his first year eligible. Roy is credited with popularizing the “butterfly” style of goaltending, which is the most commonly used style in the modern NHL. This style is characterized by the goalie guarding the lower half of the net by dropping to his knees quickly to block shots, and has replaced the “stand-up” style which dominated the high-goal scoring era of the late-70’s and 80’s. Roy is also hailed as one of the greatest post-season goalies in league history thanks to his league-leading 3 Conn Smythe Trophies and his post-season records for most playoff games played and won by a goaltender.

Out of the 3 goalies, Roy has certainly had the busiest post-NHL career; in 2005 he became the owner, GM, VP of hockey operations, and head coach of the Quebec Remparts of the QMJHL, and won the Memorial Cup (the champion of the Canadian Hockey League, a junior hockey league) in his rookie season. Roy eventually left the Remparts, and in 2013 he was hired as the head coach and VP of hockey operations of the Colorado Avalanche, his former team. Roy has shown great success as a coach, winning the Jack Adams Award for the league’s top coach in his rookie season. Both the Canadiens and Avalanche have retired his jersey number 33.

**Verdict**

As I stated in the introduction, there is no right way to answer this question, and it all depends on what you value most when considering who is the “best” goaltender. If I had to pick one of these goalies in their primes to win one game for me, I would probably take Hasek; at his peak, Hasek’s save percentages and goals against averages are notably better than Brodeur and Roy’s, and peak Hasek simply could not be stopped.

However, Hasek did not enjoy the same extended career that Brodeur and Roy did, and this hurts him when answering my next question: if I was a GM and could pick from the 3, which goalie would I want to build my team around? For that question, I would likely take Brodeur, who had a longer career and won more games than Roy. Brodeur was a spectacular teammate who was incredibly loyal to his franchise and never experienced any public contract disputes with the Devils’ front office. He had an incredibly close relationship with New Jersey GM Lou Lamoriello, and took a salary cut more than once in his career to facilitate New Jersey signing some key free agents to help put them in a position to win. Roy, on the other hand, was notoriously competitive, and by the end of his career in Montreal, he had developed a strained relationship with head coach Mario Tremblay. This culminated in Roy demanding a trade after allowing 9 goals during Montreal’s worst home loss in franchise history, which Roy believed was a way for Tremblay to humiliate him in front of the Montreal fans.

Still, Roy was the greatest post-season performer of the three, and would likely be my choice if I needed to pick someone to win a playoff series for me. For all of the greatness that Hasek displayed in his career, he also had a tendency to be inconsistent, a less-than-desirable trait when trying to win a playoff series. As for Brodeur, he was an inferior postseason performer than Roy, albeit by the thinnest of margins. Even though his 2003 playoffs might be the greatest individual postseason performance of the three goalies, it was not enough for him to win the Conn Smythe, nor is it enough to give him the edge in this category. Also, if I had to pick a goalie to stick with my franchise for a lifetime, then Roy might be the best choice given his recent success as a coach, although in a few years Brodeur the GM might have something to say about that.

So, 5,300 words later and I’m pretty much left with one overarching question: how do you define greatness? Is it being the greatest at your peak, being the greatest when it counts the most, or being the greatest for the longest? In many sports, one player serves as the answer to all 3 of those questions (see: Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky), but unfortunately, it is not that simple for this debate. I am a firm believer that the most important statistic in any sport is the wins column, so in my personal opinion, the 3rd and final definition trumps them all. This leads me to conclude that Martin Brodeur was the greater goaltender. His ability to play at a high level and win consistently for over 15 consecutive years is remarkable, and is all the more impressive given that he did it for only one team. He proved multiple times in his career that he was able to come up big in high-pressure situations, and he was able to adapt to an evolving, post-lockout league when many other goalies could not.

Despite the fact that Roy’s career was comparable to Brodeur’s in terms of length, Brodeur surpasses Roy by a wide margin in the per-year-Vezina points totals, suggesting his stronger regular season play. Furthermore, although Roy appears to be the stronger post-season performer, the difference between his and Brodeur’s postseason performances is not as great as the difference between their regular season performances. While Brodeur may have benefited from playing behind Hall of Famers like Scott Stevens and Scott Niedermayer during his Cup runs, he should not be faulted for that, as Roy (Larry Robinson/Chris Chelios in Montreal, Adam Foote/Rob Blake/Ray Bourque in Colorado) and Hasek (Chris Chelios/Nick Lidstrom in Detroit) were both given similar talent when they won.

When it comes down to it, hockey does not exist in single game contests, and while peak-Hasek may give me the best chance to win one game, I believe Brodeur gives me the best chance to win for the longest amount of time, which in my mind, makes him the greatest. Still, the margin between Brodeur, Roy, and Hasek is as thin as the newly sharpened blade of a skate, and an argument could be made for any one of these incredible athletes to be atop this list.

**Glossary**

Adjusted GAA – Goals against average that has been adjusted to take into account different schedule lengths, roster sizes, and scoring environments.

Elo Player Ratings – The overall goal of the Elo Rating System is to calculate the relative skill levels of players. The initial system was developed by Arpad Elo, a physics professor at Marquette University, and initially had its roots in chess. However, the statisticians at hockey-reference.com modified Elo’s system and used it to create a ranking system of all NHL players. In this system, each player is given an initial rating of 1500 points, and they are then placed in random, hypothetical “one-on-one” matchups that are simulated several thousand times to give a more realistic starting rating (the simulations were decided based on career statistics and probability of winning based on adjusted ratings after the initial simulation). The Elo System, however, was meant to be a community-based project; therefore, after the more realistic starting ratings were determined, the matchups were opened to the public, who then voted based on who they believed was the better player, with the ratings serving as guides. For more information on the Elo Rating System, you can go to <http://www.hockey-reference.com/friv/ratings.cgi>.

Goalie point shares – An estimate of the number of points contributed by a goaltender due to his play in goal; a statistic similar to “Win Shares” in baseball.