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GOALTENDING

Essentials

Modern
Comprehensive
Technical Goaltending
Instruction



THE MOST DIFFICULT POSITION IN ALL OF SPORT.....

The game has changed dramatically in the last decade, even the last 5 years. Goalies and their coaches are on a constant quest to find better ways to keep the puck out of the net. This is Essential Goaltending.

It has been said that goaltending is the most difficult position in any sport to learn. The actual task of the goaltender is quite simple: Keep the puck out of the net. As anyone who has ever played goal knows, it is in reality frustrating, painful and routinely embarrassing.

Why would anyone in their right mind subject themselves to this physical, emotional and psychological abuse? Is it the cool equipment? Is it some chemical imbalance? Is there some sadistic urge to place sensitive parts of your anatomy in front of frozen projectiles? I don't think anyone will truly ever know. I can tell you, however, that when you actually make the save of the game, there is no better feeling in the world. All that pain vanishes.

I guess we sort of touched on why someone plays goal but the purpose of this book deals with the "how to play" question. It is designed for those individuals who have made the mistake (I mean choice) to play goal.

Everyone knows that goaltenders are neglected in most practices, are seldom given accurate useful feedback from their coaches and usually have to learn from trial and error.

Ideally this book will allow goaltenders to take advantage of the experience of others who have already learned the hard way.

Hockey great, Pat Stapleton, once told me,

"To be successful, study success."

Find someone who you think is successful at what they do. It could be an NHL goalie or it could be the local junior goaltender.

Study everything they do. Develop your own style and always continue to study the position. You'll never reach a point where you stop learning!

GOOD LUCK!



Author Stephen McKichan B.S.Ed
Demonstrating proper stick
involvement and blade angle.

FORWARD

I realized a childhood dream when I played a regular season game in the NHL against the New Jersey Devils. December 5th, 1990 was the highlight of years of work, dedication and dreams.

However, I wouldn't have been able to make it to that level without the help and support of many people.

Without the love, support and undying faith in my abilities that my wife Tracey displayed, I never would have reached the big leagues. She definitely is my 1st round draft choice and fortunately is on a lifetime contract with a no-trade clause!

As a goaltender I have to thank the person that molded me into an NHL caliber athlete. Mitch Korn, now goaltending coach with the Nashville Predators, scouted me out of Strathroy Jr. " B " and taught me ever thing I know about the position.

As an NHL goaltending coach I again have to defer to the knowledge Mitch passed on to me. It speaks of his influence when he creates not only NHL goalies, but fellow NHL goalie coaches as well.

In the song ' Big League ' by Tom Cochrane the main line says,

“ My boy is going to play in the Big Leagues, my boy is going to turn some heads.”

I was such a late bloomer I don't think my parents ever had that thought go through their minds. However, like millions of parents across Canada they took me to those early practices, traveled to all the small towns, sent me to summer camps and spent all their money on my hockey endeavors. For this, I owe them a great deal and I think the only way to repay them is to do the same for my children and grand children.

Enjoy the book!

Keeks

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THE BASICS - BASIC STANCE

The most important fundamental that a goaltender must possess is the basic stance. This is also referred to as the crouch or the ready position. All saves and movements start from the basic stance.



The skates should be shoulder width apart with the weight slightly on the balls of the feet. The skates should be tilted slightly inward so the weight is distributed on the inside edges a little more than the outside edge. The typical stance should be just a little higher than if you were sitting in an imaginary chair. This deep crouch will allow you to explode when you move sideways and will help you reach low shots with your feet. Whenever a goaltender anticipates any lateral play the stance should deepen slightly to assist in explosiveness. When viewed from the side a straight line should be formed from the shoulders to the knees to the balls of the feet.



Here we see Mike in a nice balanced stance with a vertical straight line through his shoulders, knees and the balls of his feet.

I would prefer to see his gloves moved forward closer to the red dotted line. This will get the stick more vertical and cover more net with the gloves.

He does have a proper 12 - 16" gap between his stick and toes.

STICK POSITIONING

The stick should be firmly held with the blade flat on the ice about a foot in front of the skates to help cushion rebounds. The stick should be centered between the skates to cover the opening between the legs on the ice.



Hold the stick with a trigger grip to help prevent the stick from spinning on a hard shot. Your index finger should be extended down the face of the paddle.



Stick Issues

As you move around the crease in your Movement Ready Stance your stick needs to be flush to the ice. The entire bottom edge of your stick should be in contact with the ice.



Just like with your glove, you should meticulously keep your stick blade square to the puck as it moves around your zone. In addition to being flush and square, your stick should be centered in your stance filling your 5 hole.

The stick should slightly lead your movements around the crease but should not be flung way out ahead of your movements or slashed around rapidly. The movement of your stick should be precise, incremental and very disciplined.



Glove Position

Within our stances, the most dramatic changes we see, decade to decade, involve the position of the glove. In the early 80's goalies would claw their glove in front of their body or carry it like it was ready to catch a puck dropped from the ceiling.

Of course everyone has a glove position they feel comfortable with and have had success with. By all means use what works and what you are comfortable with. But bear in mind that as the shooters get better you may need to adjust your glove position accordingly if you start to get lit up.

The glove needs to be held in a position that allows you the easiest path to make saves.

This starts with the concept of palm squareness. The palm of your glove needs to be square to the upward trajectory of the puck.

Holding the glove forward in your stance simply covers more net as well.



Jeff Lerg - NCAA Champion

An open glove will often catch a puck that just hits it. I can't tell you how many times I've had 'garbage' end up in my glove just because it was there and open.



Glove Issues

In these examples we see clear examples of palms that are facing anywhere but at the puck.



We call this glove position the “yo – yo” as it looks like the goalie is just about to fire off a few reps with a yo – yo. A quick shot from a smart player and you will never get this gun out of the holster in time.

We have even seen goalies using a glove position where the palm is actually facing the side boards. It appears like the goalie is waving at their mother in the crowd!



Many European goalies have displayed some “funky” glove positions.

Here a Russian goalie from the KHL demonstrates a common glove position error.

Which way the fingers point is really an individual preference as long as your palm is square to the puck and your glove is actually held low enough to fill the net.



In some cases, goalies hold the glove so high when they use the finger up position that from the elbow up is actually filling space ABOVE the crossbar.



Blocker Issue - “Blocker Lock”

The blocker, like the trapper, is a better weapon if it is held on a plane in front of the body for two reasons. It covers more of the net in a forward position and it prevents a common error we see frequently with your stick. When a goalie rests or locks their blocker to the side of the pad they make it next to impossible to get stick involvement on shots low to the glove side as the blocker is “attached” to the blocker side pad.



Modern Stances

If you have ever seen the way goalies in the 1960's stood in the net I'm sure you would chuckle. Their legs were close together, the stick flush to the pads and the trapper was hanging down right beside their leg pad.



Mike Palmateer - Steve McKichan's Idol

The goaltender's stance in the modern game has undergone dramatic changes, some for the better and predictably some that are ill advised.

In this segment we are going to explore some of the trends in goaltending stances today and break them down from a technical point of view.

Stance Depth

Many factors go in to deciding the type of stance depth a goalie chooses. Clearly, if you are diminutive you don't want to have a super deep crouch that might expose the top shelf. Conversely, a 6 foot 6 inch goalie would be wise not to have a significantly upright stance, as they would be blocking more room above the crossbar.

Besides the obvious physiological reasons for depth of stance choices, there is another key area that we want to get into related to your stance selection.

Every goalie should have three basic stance depths, which they can transition between in an instant depending on the game situation.

Relaxed Concentration Stance – As the puck moves around in a non-threatening position, a smart, mature goalie will use a stance that is very upright and relaxed, which allows you to both concentrate and conserve energy. Of course, you must have a keen understanding of threat levels before you can practice relaxed concentration. A novice goalie often gets caught relaxing when the danger level is too high. Goals often go in during the early stages of development because the goalie wasn't shot ready.



Some goalies have taken this upright stance position and applied it in the wrong context. Just as a shooter is about to release the puck, the goalie will be almost be standing straight up in the net. They claim this visually discourages the shooter from going high. Once the shot looks like it is coming, these goalies will begin their powerful knee drive into a butterfly block.

This may work on amateur shooters but pros quickly have the answer to this strategy. They will easily get the upright goalie to start their butterfly drop with a vicious, irresistible open stick fake. It will truly look like a shot is in progress. Once they have the goalie heading down the real shot comes a split second later, right by the goalie's ear into the top shelf!

Avoid this strategy as it is proven to be highly ineffective against elite goal scorers.

Movement Ready Stance – As the threat level increases the goaltender now drops lower into a stance that allows strong movement abilities and the ability to react accordingly to a perimeter shot. This stance requires more energy to use. The deepened stance loads the thighs and powerful core muscles in preparation for any required explosive movements. You should keep your torso fairly upright so that your crest is visible to the shooter.



Razor Ready Stance - Now we are in a supreme ready position with our stance down at its deepest point. We have arrived at our target position and the shooter is in the process of releasing the puck. Ideally we are set and not moving in full visual shot tracking mode. This depth level requires the utmost in energy and can't be held for long periods of time. All of our appendages are cocked and ready to reactively explode in the save process.



Back to Basics - Understanding the Basic Stance - Self Test

An important trait of a goaltender looking to improve involves the study of other successful goalies. You need to understand what they are doing well and even identifying things they are perhaps doing incorrectly. A good case in point is the evaluation of goaltender's stances. We have just went through several pages of the the do's and dont's. I have selected a photo for you to assess. DON'T SKIP AHEAD and peek at the next page where I break down the stance. Make some notes on the good and the bad of this stance in the photo.....and then look at the next page to compare your notes to my notes.



My notes:

- 1) There are several stance depths you can use depending on the threat level of the attack but for our discussions this is a good example of a "Movement Ready" stance.
- 2) He is actually a tad wide in his foot placement for pristine lateral movement but it is strong and balanced.
- 3) His blocker is in a perfect, ideal position and is NOT touching his pad which is a common flaw in modern goaltending.
- 4) His glove is available and visually discouraging to a shooter. It may be a tad high but well within tolerances.
- 5) His stick is flat on the ice and not in a "Fleury toe-only" on the ice position.
- 6) He has an acceptable knee bend which will allow explosive movement and explosive knee drive.
- 7) His stick is not resting under his knees. There is a proper gapped stick which leaves a space for his knees to drive to the ice and a forward stick position cuts down the angle.
He has a solid "3-iron" stick position as opposed to a "9 iron" stick position. This simply means he doesn't show an exaggerated ramped up stick position.
- 8) Everyone's stances will vary and my suggestion is to not mimic anyone but pull details out of goalies you like and incorporate them in your stance if they make bio-mechanical and technical sense.
- 9) This stance has almost zero double coverage, which simply means that pieces of equipment that overlap and fill the same space twice, minimize the net you actually cover. I will make the argument that this really is less important today. Why? Goalies rarely make a save from their stance position so double coverage in your down positions penalize you more than your upright stance position. If you are getting hit with hard pucks when you are on your feet you might be sleeping..
- 10) Choose a stance that allows you to get there quickly and be the most efficient in making a save.

THE BASICS - MOVEMENT

MOVEMENT - Up on your skates

A goaltender spends more time moving to get into position than he does stopping the puck itself. If you stop 30 shots in a game you have spent less than 30 seconds stopping pucks! The most important job is moving to get into good position early.

LATERAL MOVEMENT

How do you get from one side of the net to the other? There are really two ways and they are the shuffle and the T-push. These two motions allow you to face the play or stay 'square' while exploding sideways. The shuffle is used to move short distances quickly without opening up a big hole between your legs. The toes should face the puck and your stick should stay flat on the ice. Keep a good crouch ready at all times.



TO PERFORM A T-PUSH, POINT YOUR TOE AND EXPLODE OFF THE OTHER FOOT WHILE YOU KEEP THE STICK PROPERLY IN PLACE.

The T-push is used to move bigger distances quickly. A pass between point men or a two on one with a rink wide pass would be two examples of where the T-push is commonly used. To execute a proper T-push you place your feet in a T-shape with the toe of one skate pointing in the direction you want to go.

As with the shuffle, you forcefully explode with the back leg, pushing in the direction you want to go. As soon as you push off you should quickly bring the back leg in to close the 5-hole.

One draw back to the T-push is the fact that it does actually open up the 5-hole and if you are not careful a smart shooter will beat you. Again, your stance should remain in the proper ready position; butt down and gloves out and open.

ADVANCED TIP

Sometimes you are pushing across with a quick pass that might be one-timed. It is a good idea to lead with your stick and gloves in this situation. By this I mean, get your glove and stick over as you start to push off and bring in the rest of your body as soon as possible. You may be able to rob someone of a sure goal. Too many goalies move across with the glove down and out of position and don't get it up into position until the puck is already in the net.

It is the same story with the stick. Try to get that stick over and flat a split second earlier than the rest of your body. It is common for the young goaltender to be over properly on this play but because they were slow getting that stick into position, the red light is on again. Focus on this and you will save yourself 5 - 10 goals a year easily!

Hyper Stick Error

This error can be seen when a goalie moves or slides laterally. The stick is "whipped" across in a sliding motion with great velocity. It appears like a backhanded fly swatter type motion. I'm sure who ever taught this wants the goalie to lead with the stick and fill the 5 hole during lateral moves. OF COURSE.

However, the stick should slightly lead the lateral movement BUT be almost stationary and controlled in relation to the slide. That is to say, it

should maintain, with a slight lead, the 5 hole. *IT SHOULDN'T BE SOME WILD SNAPPING TYPE MOTION.....*

TELESCOPING AND RETREATING

The other basic motion involves moving out away from the net and back in towards the net. As you probably can figure out these movements are called telescoping and retreating. When these movements are performed you must remain in that perfect stance.

To telescope out of your net you make C-shaped cuts with your skates digging in with the heel portion of your skates. It looks and feels very much like skiing and in fact to stop, you do a modified snowplow stop. When you want to stop your forward motion you take one skate and turn the toe inwards and dig in with the edge of your skate. Now to get back to your net quickly, you make the identical C-shaped cuts and wiggle your way backwards. The only difference with retreating is that now you dig in with the toes of your skates.

To stop you use one skate again except that you turn the toe out and dig in your edge.

You would use these two movements in many game situations. For instance, you would telescope out to cut down the angle on a shot from the point, you would telescope out to challenge on a breakaway and then you would retreat when the shooter came in close. Experienced goaltenders don't even think about movement, it just occurs without thinking. They have practiced their skating to the point where it happens automatically and properly. This should be your goal so use every free moment in practice working on these movements, changing directions suddenly and stopping precisely where you want.

Great skating ability is more important than fast reflexes.

Movement While Down - Shimmying (aka as Down pushing)

Shimmying by definition is readjusting your position while down in a butterfly, half pad or paddle down position.

Goaltenders have learned through trial and error that shimmying works well on tight imminent rebounds, wraparounds and general plays in tight.

If done properly shimmying can be a great tool in your save arsenal. In fact most pro goalies can move laterally with precise changes of direction while down in this shimmy position faster than many goalies can on their feet!



Glove to Blocker Shimmy

The glove to blocker shimmy can be done from the paddle down position or the more upright blade flat position and is the easiest to master.

The weight is partially over the blocker side knee and the glove side skate is dug crisply into the ice. You must get this leg as vertical as possible to get a powerful push. I have seen goalies with very strong pushes using the toe of the skate and the heel of the skate. Theoretically, you would get the strongest push if your toe was the last part of the equation.

If your skates are dull or your pads are worn too tight you will probably get weak pushes and slip out when your edge leaves the ice prematurely.



Blocker to Glove Shimmy

Traveling blocker to glove side in a shimmy is one of the toughest things for a developing goalie to learn.

You can use a paddle down stick position but I get better results when the goalie uses a standard half pad save position with the stick blade flat instead of the paddle.

In practice use some free time to have shimmy races with your goalie partner.

Shimmy Step by Step

Shimmys are used appropriately when rebounds are left in dangerous positions close to the goaltender.

Here I am demonstrating a greasy weak side rebound to my right, in the heart of the “kill zone”. Time will be a factor so I will not have time to fully recover to my feet.

Step # 1 - Using strong visual attachment I maintain an intense focus on the rebound.



Step # 2 - Using a violent hip pivot and left knee lift I plant my push skate as vertically as possible out in front of my butterfly. By throwing the leg up and forward it assists in the quality of the pivot.



Step # 3 - The explosive push now occurs, with the left knee snapping down to fill the 5 hole as the arms press tightly. The glove seals down forming a nice closed wall so the imminent rebound attempt can not get through me or under me.



Shimmy Transition

When down in a shimmy position the developing goalie may get locked in able to only go one way. If a smart player tries to cut back in this situation you must be able to quickly transition between shimmying left to right and vice versa.

On a shimmy where you need to reverse direction you must quickly dig in the lead skate and reverses the momentum in the other direction.

The stick must maintain solid contact with the ice.



Here I am executing a shimmy to my right to handle a tight, greasy kill zone rebound.



Once I arrive in position square to the rebound I may be faced with a player who attempts to pull it back to my blocker side instead of just jamming it in to me.

Goaltenders with strong shimmy transition skills may have a chance here to reverse flow and use a quick shimmy transition to foil the attack.

THE BASICS

TRADITIONAL RECOVERIES

RECOVERY



In an ideal world the goaltender would always have perfect balance, never fall down, never have to sprawl to make a save; in other words - be just like a table hockey goaltender. He never ever ends up on his butt!

This just isn't the case and the goaltender spends some part of the game either failing or getting knocked down. This happens sometimes because of poor skating skills and many goaltenders are called floppers because they can't skate well enough or perhaps they have poor balance.

I am often asked by coaches what can they do to stop their goaltenders from flopping so much. Working on the goaltender's skating is definitely the best way to help the flopper and you know that this can't happen over night.

If you show me a goaltender with great skating ability, I'll bet you that he seldom has problems with flopping too much.

There are three basic positions that goaltenders end up in when they are on the ice.

Knees



The first position happens when the goaltender has dropped to their knees. If the goaltender is very agile this isn't that bad of a position to be in because the advanced goaltender can recover in an instant and the lower portion of the net is taken away. This position is called the **butterfly** and to recover you can choose from two ways.



The first way is the **one-leg recovery**. The goaltender lifts the knee that is farthest from the puck and puts that skate flat on the ice. Getting up with the correct foot is crucial for the modern goalie and is termed **backside recovery**. We will go into great detail about the proper mechanics in a later section.

By exploding upwards and using core and leg muscles, the other leg is snapped up back into a perfect stance. The stick should always stay on with the ice and the upper body should remain frozen with the gloves out and open.

An NHL goaltender could do five knee drops using perfect form in under three seconds ! WOW!

The **two leg recovery** involves some great strength and coordination which is usually impossible for the young goaltender. From the butterfly position, the goaltender rocks backwards strongly throwing their body weight up and backwards. As this happens the goaltender digs in both toes of the skates and snaps the legs back into the perfect stance. I don't recommend practicing this method until you have developed enough lower body strength. However, experiment with both the one and two-leg method to see what works best for you. NHL goaltenders rarely use the two leg recovery because it does open up a nice five hole.

Belly



The next position occurs when the goaltender ends up flat on the ice with his belly polishing the ice. After a diving poke check the goaltender would end up in this position, which can be hard on your teeth if you can't recover quickly. The recovery is really very simple and can be done in an instant if the goaltender has enough upper body strength. (Look at the off ice training chapter to see how to improve your strength.)

The best way to recover from your belly is to keep your eyes on the puck and bring your gloves in underneath your chest. Explode in push up fashion and snap your legs towards your chin and you are quickly back in your stance, with your stick flat.

A method that would be easier for a young goaltender would just involve one more step. Instead of pushing right up to your stance, which is tough for someone with limited upper body strength, stop at the butterfly position and recover as you would from your knees. This method takes a little longer but is ideal for the young goaltender.

Butt



The most awkward position to end up in is on your rump. Many goaltenders mistakenly turn their back to the puck and roll around like a seal having a seizure. This recovery also requires a great deal of strength is by far the hardest recovery to master. When you are in this position, keep your stick flat protecting the jock area and follow the puck with your eyes.

If the puck is in your blocker side corner, shift your weight onto your blocker, which you should place by your hip. Roll your body onto this arm and forcefully push yourself up to your knee and snap into your stance.

If the puck is out front or in your glove side corner use your glove hand to push up to your knee, then to your stance. If you are strong enough you can push all the way up without your knee touching.

There is nothing more tiring and boring that working on your recoveries. I agree they are hard but if you want to be the best you will decide to pay the price.

How bad do you want it? No one should have to remind you or beg you to do them. A free moment in practice is a great time to punch off 20 or 30 knee, butt or belly drops.



THE BASICS

MODERN RECOVERY

Backside Recovery in Detail

Over a decade ago goalies were never taught which leg to get up with. They also never imagined that they would be able to move explosively across the crease while down on their knees.

Without question, one of the most important technical advances in the modern game is the introduction of backside recoveries. In simple terms, backside recovery means selecting the leg that is farthest away from the puck to initiate your recovery as we touched on earlier.

It is so simple in theory that it is surprising that it wasn't discovered earlier. By using the correct leg you can get an edge on the ice and reposition without a wasted step. If you select the incorrect leg to get up, the recovery time is slowed, as the push leg isn't available initially.

The Three P's

From a technical point of view, Backside Recovery can be boiled down to the three P's, Pivot, Plant and Push

These three components must happen explosively, one right after the other with no apparent hesitation between steps.

Frequently, goalies get preoccupied with each of the steps and their backside recoveries look staggered and full of steps. This must be avoided. The three P's should happen almost like one smooth motion without hitches.

The Pivot



From the butterfly position you must fire a violent hip pivot to square your shoulders to the new target and ending.....



with a good foot plant. The goalie can now finish the backside recovery with a t push to their new target up on their feet or as we learned earlier remain down using a down push or shimmy if necessary.

From the butterfly position, the first step in a proper backside recovery is a violent hip pivot that squares the body up to the new position target. It takes great core strength to muscle this part of the recovery. Young goalies frequently have less than powerful hip pivots and it affects the remaining components, plant and push.

The Plant

Once the hip pivot has fired the knee must be thrust forward and upward as if it was going to strike the chin. The skate now can land out in front of the body with the skate blade perfectly perpendicular to the target line. Try to get this skate as vertical as possible and load significant body weight on it. There should be some pre-load pressure on the ankle, which indicates the pivot and load are solid.

If this skate is extended too far without enough weight on it, a push out will occur.

The most common mistake younger goalies make here is when they place the skate blade in a biomechanically inefficient position.





Here is where the horsepower hits the ground. Using full blade contact on the inside edge, aggressively drive the back leg out and either recover to your stance or push across while remaining down.

Many goalies have had success pushing with their heels but the most biomechanically correct method is to push so that your toe puts the final push on the ice.

Sharp skates with an aggressive hollow will really improve your backside recovery skills.

THE BASICS - HUGGING THE POST

HUGGING THE POSTS

You should always hug your posts because they are your best friends. That crazy Patrick Roy even used to talk to them! When you hear the phrase "hug the post" it really has nothing to do with showing love for them. Instead it is a basic position that goaltenders need to master as soon as they begin to play goal.

Every year dozens of goals are given up because of poor positioning when the goaltender is hugging the post. Even goaltenders in the NHL get caught napping and let in a goal from behind the goal line. If the goaltender hugs the post properly, a goal can NEVER be scored. It is that simple. For a goal to happen in this situation, something had to be off with the goaltender's position.





Glove side post

Place the skate up against the post with the boot of your skate jammed against the post. The leg pad should be flush to the post without any gaps, especially at the knee. Smart shooters try to hit that little hole so don't get surprised.

Your skates should point towards centre ice and your glove arm should be outside the post so you can anchor yourself to the post. The glove can be used to catch quick little flip passes in the air. The stick is held flat on the ice square to the puck. Notice that the stick is placed with the heel just off of the glove side skate. This is very important because you can accidentally score on yourself if that stick is out in front of your body.

On a traditional glove side post hug you have two basic stick position choices which are dictated on reading the play.

In the first one we have our stick set in a position to cut the pass.



Notice the stick blade is square to the puck carrier and NOT in front of my 5 hole. This prevents an embarrassing "own goal".

Do not leave a big gap between the heel of your stick and the skate. This shows your poke check limits and gives the passer three options. 1) between your stick / skate, 2) saucer, 3) outside the toe of your stick.

By closing this hole you limit his options to 2 instead of three.

An advanced trick is used when you pull the stick blade entirely out of the passing lane. This can entice a player to side it through tight and flat. Once the pass is in progress a careful insertion of the stick blade into the vacated passing lane can now easily intercept this.

They won't sauce it if they think it can be passed flat.

In the second photo you the stick position you can use if there is a tight centering pass potential on the strong side and you read there is no back door threat.



Too many goalies get caught in this position when BD danger exists and easily tapped in crease passes are allowed that could easily prevented.

The one benefit to this stick position is that you save a split second on getting your stick into 5 hole coverage on a strong side tight centering pass.



Blocker side post hug

The foot and pad position are the same on this post but the stick and glove position are slightly different. On this side the blocker arm locks on the post and the trapper is held facing the puck to try to catch any aerial passes (passes that lift off the ice). Again the stick is held with the blade facing the puck. Remember the closer you hold your stick to the puck the more area you cover, so you can even cut down angles when you are trying to break up passes.

THE BASICS - POST LEG UP

Post Leg Up



The Post Leg Up is a strategy goalies are using today pervasively. Just like when the paddle down came into the goaltending world, the Post Leg Up save selection is now used with mixed success. The Post Leg Up save selection works beautifully when deployed in the correct situations and with correct technique.

Like the paddle down, it will however make you look foolish, if mis-used. The Miami Redhawks lost a NCAA Championship when a last minute goal slipped through the goalie's armpit while attempting a post leg up save!

Currently, it is actually causing NHL goalies to fill the evening high light reels with stoppable goals because of Post Leg Up misuse.

Static Post Leg Up

The Static Post Leg Up by definition is used as a way to hug the post. The Post Leg is vertical and the pad face is square to the puck. The inside pad is placed flush to the ice on a slight angle off the goal line.



On the blocker side, the blocker pad seals the post, and the stick is placed flat on the ice centered properly. The glove side knee firmly presses against the blocker side skate sealing the 5 hole. The glove itself is positioned with the palm square to the puck, stacked on top of the pad or slightly forward. This a classic block position so there should be no holes anywhere in the wall.



On the glove side, the glove pad seals the post and the trapper is placed directly on top of the pad to fill the short side shelf. If it isn't placed there, crafty players can hit this spot. The inside pad is placed as it was on the other side. The stick can be placed in the paddle down position, which is effective on strong tight wrap plays or with the stick blade flush if the attacker has some separation.

The Static Post Leg Up works well on pressured wraps and low walkouts with limited time and space. Your ability to drive off the post as the attacker cuts in front, is a key benefit to this position. The Post Leg Up presents a nice blocking surface that seals the low ice but still allows for rapid repositioning.

As a general rule you should only attempt this save selection when the attacker is within a stick length. Once they get more depth on you, they will be able to easily open up the net with puck adjustment.

Other common errors are holes in the coverage and pulling off the post too soon.



Mike deploys the post leg up position appropriately here. The attacker is within a stick length and has limited time and space.



Here is the classic error in the use of the Post Leg Up position. The attacker is 10 - 15 feet away and has too much separation from the goalie.

DO NOT USE THIS POSITION IF THE MAN IS OUTSIDE A STICK LENGTH AWAY!

Dynamic Post Leg Up

The Dynamic Post Leg Up works well on poor angle cut ins and shallow net drives. As the player approaches the goalie begins to do a properly timed retreat back to the top of the crease. Near the end of the retreat the inside pad is placed in a post leg up position.

This closes the 5 hole option and covers the short side completely leaving the attacker with really only one option, a cut in across the crease. With a proper momentum build the goalie can now drive laterally using a butterfly slide. This will ensure minimal net is available along the ice.

Ideally, the attacker must be under serious pressure for this strategy to work well.

A smart goalie will also protect the immediate area in front of them with a half poke check if the attacker chooses to come that close.

Cut back issue PLU

In my private work I see goalies with exceptional results using the post leg up on tight walk outs with pressure. There are several technical issues and time and space reads that are required to be successful.

The one issue I want to address is the walk out cut back. Several times I have watched as my elite shooters were getting frustrated as they walk across in front on the wrap. The goalie would be in post leg up and simple fire off the post and seal the bottom of the net as the player went east to west across the crease.

Quickly they adapted to the goalies approach and a weakness to the power slide off the post in the post leg up position appears if the shooter has time and space.

They will bait the goalie into the explosive push off the post in a post leg up slide. Once the goalie fires into this the shooter quickly pulls it back to the short side and slides it in the vacated short side.

To counter this the goalie, if time and space is read to be available, must bait the man to cut across in front my slightly, if not imperceptibly holding the short side a hair longer.

This should force him into a far side attack exclusively which if your timing and approach is correct will be a nice jam save.



When a goaltender has used a butterfly at the top of the crease they typically will have to reposition post save if they have not executed a possession save. In the event the puck has bounded out a long way from the goaltender he should execute a powerful backside recovery fully to their deep stance and reposition accordingly on their skates.

A goaltender should NOT use a down sliding butterfly to reposition on shots that are clearly not in imminent danger. I see a lot of Western Canadian goalies sliding to and fro post save when their is no immediate 2nd attack coming. Get up!

If the resulting play is a dangerous 8 - 10 foot put-back you may need to slide over across the top of the crease using a down push in a diagonal direction.

However, if the puck has ended up below the goalie line in tight the attacker might attempt a quick tight wrap / jam play.

The lively end boards in rinks like Joe Louis are well known to feed this type of play.

The appropriate save response here is the post leg up.

In the following photo series, I want to illustrate the key teaching concept involved so that a common error is avoided.

Once you read you have the tight wrap / jam potential you need to properly target your slide.

You should be sliding directly back to the post. Mitch Korn and the Nashville Predators work on this a ton.

You need perfect ankle targeting skills.

The little bone sticking out the side of your heel needs to land precisely on the post for a proper seal.

In these photos Luc isn't watching out at the play as he would in a real game situation.

You need to have perfect kinesthetic awareness so that your landings on the post are perfect every time. I see many goalies miss their slide here and they get poor attachment to the post.

Luc has made a butterfly save at the top of the crease on a shot that ultimately just missed the net. He recognizes a quick put back may happen as this puck could quickly return back out in front off the end boards.



By being keenly aware of the opponents' location he knows he needs to get back to the post in a hurry. He targets his slide directly back to the post in this instance after his powerful hip pivot and backside recovery.



Here we see Luc mid slide almost ready to land on and then attach to the post.



Luc's right ankle bone and skate land perfectly on the post and.....



.... he uses the momentum of his slide to compress his body up onto the post in a technically perfect post leg up position. He is now ready to handle the side net attack of the tight point shot miss.



A great drill to perfect this is as follows.

- 1) At the top of the crease drive to a hard butterfly, pivot, plant and push while down back to the post, finishing on the post in a perfect sealed post leg up position.
- 2) Hold the PLU position for a 2 count and then slide directly from the PLU out to the top of the crease and once there snap up to your feet.
- 3) Repeat the other way.

Hit this drill over and over again until you can achieve perfect post integration in the PLU EVERY time. Your game counts on it.

THE BASICS - ANGLES

PLAYING THE ANGLES



Playing the angles is the phrase to describe what a goaltender can do to lessen the available net to shoot at. We know that a standard net is 4' x 6' which means that without a goaltender there are 24 square feet to shoot at.

When an average size goaltender places themselves in the middle of the net and stands back on the goal line there is a great deal of room still open to the sides of the net.

By telescoping out to the top of the crease, a significant amount of net is taken away forcing the shooter to make a tough shot if they want to score. This is the first basic principle when you are learning about playing the angles. **Challenge out from the goal line to the top of the crease** or higher depending on the situation. This is referred to as depth gain.

Square to the Puck



Square Line

The second basic principle involves being square to the puck. Being square to the puck actually means *square to the puck, not the shooter's body* and by definition means having your feet, pads, shoulders and stick facing directly at the puck. This ability is crucial to maximize how much net you cover. As you lose squareness to the puck you cover less net. This is exactly why a goaltender looks wider when viewed from the front.

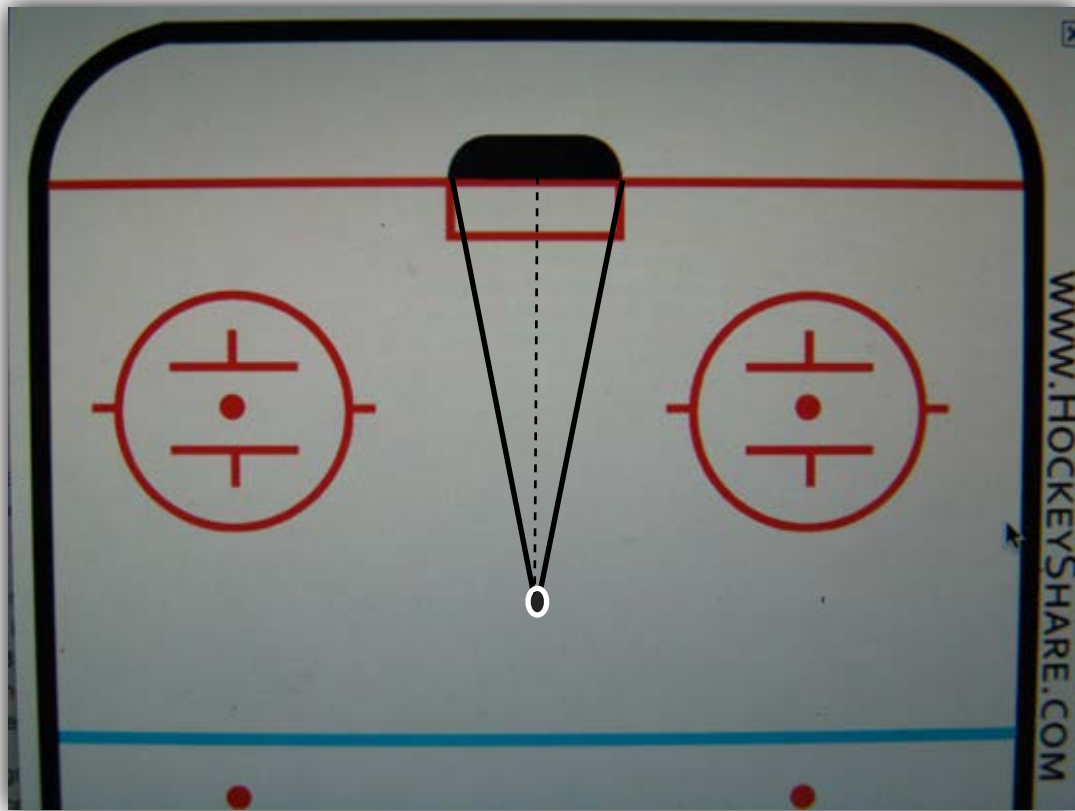
The Square Line

The Square Line is an imaginary line that extends from the middle of the goal line directly to the puck. We now have you out challenging at the top of the crease and you are square to the puck. There is one important fact missing.

You must be centered in the net with equal space available for the shooter on both sides. As the play moves around your zone the square line is rapidly swinging around. **You must try at all times to straddle this imaginary line with your feet parallel, which will put you dead square on the angle.** Can you imagine a poor skating goaltender trying to keep up with this moving square line?

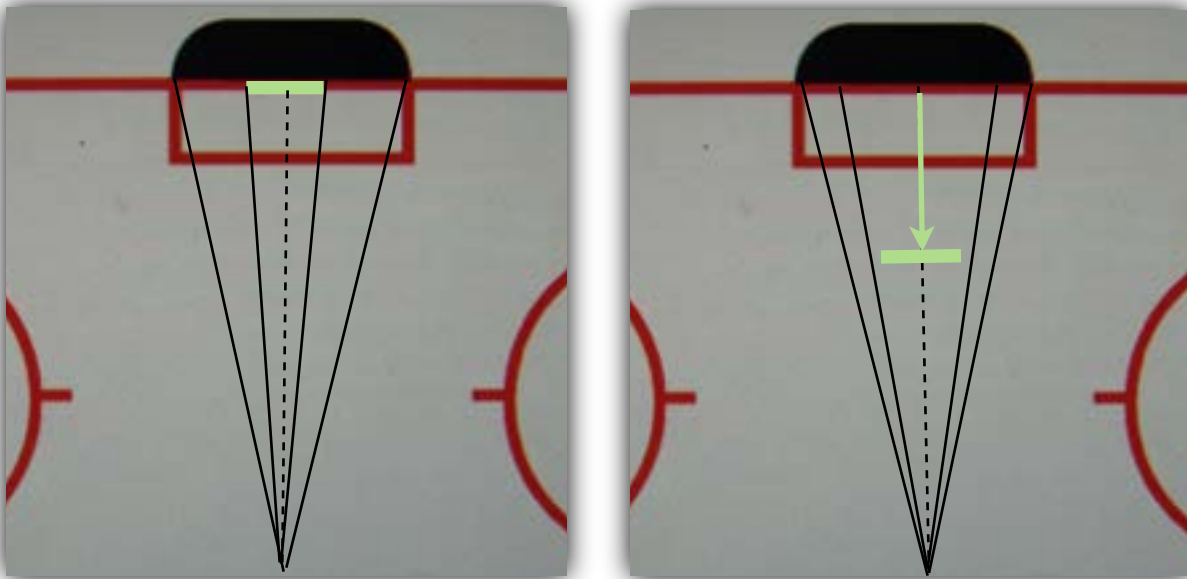
The Shooting Triangle

Lets take a look at a stationary puck dead in the middle of the slot. If you extend lines from the puck to both posts you have created a shooting triangle.



Any puck shot between these two solid lines will enter the net.

Obviously, any puck shot outside these lines will miss the net. You can see the dotted square line going directly from the puck-to the middle of the goal line.



Imagine that our demonstration goalie is 2' wide (light green line). If our goaltender stands back on the goal line he will leave 2' of shooting space available on each side.

As the goaltender challenges out we can see that the available shooting space is now less than 6" which is very important on 100 mph shots.

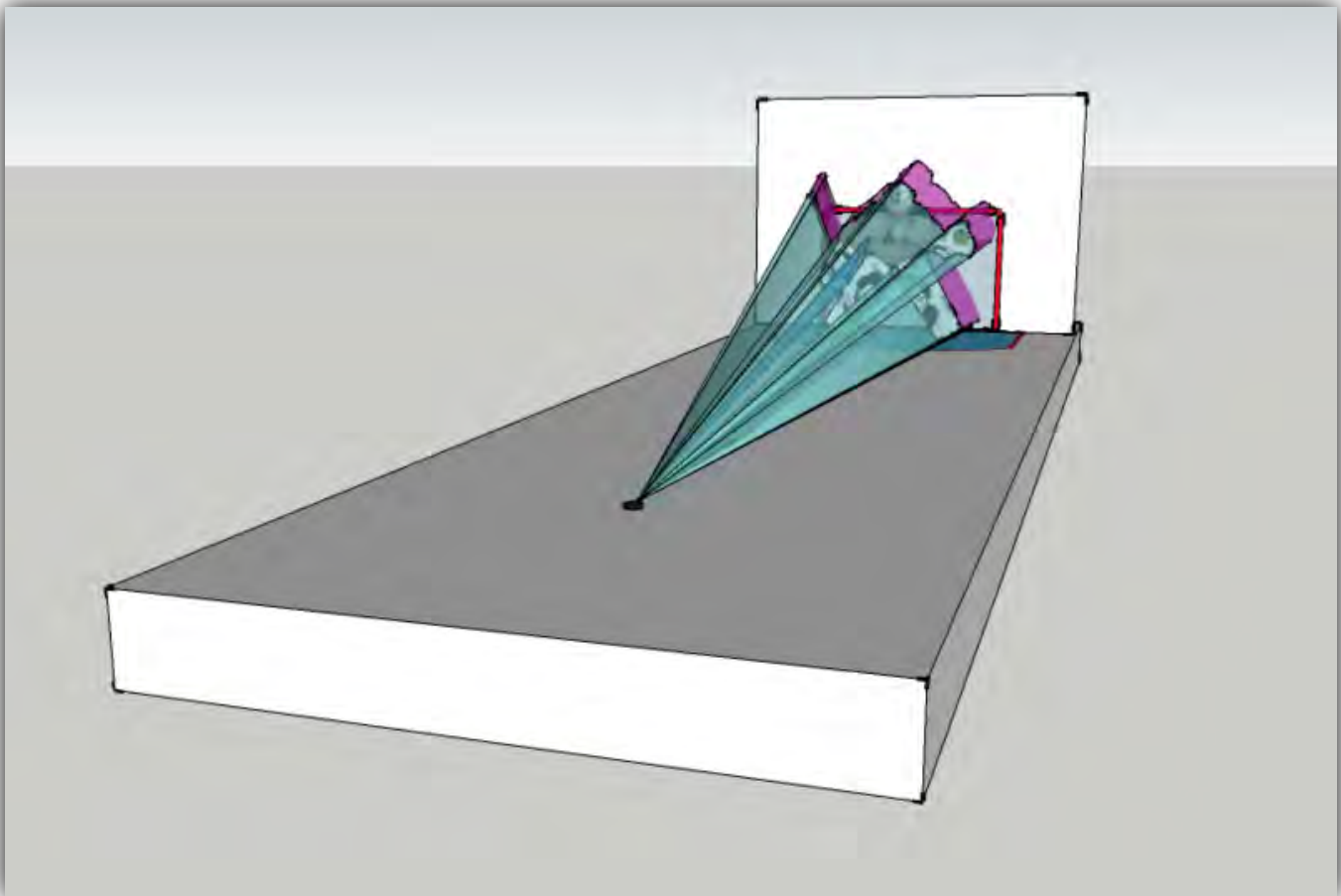
Some have said that if they challenge out they get closer to the puck so they have less time to react. While it is true that you will have a little less time to react if you are 5 feet closer to the puck, the overwhelming benefit of covering that much more net is crucial.

The law of marginal returns applies here however. If you get too aggressive in your depth selection you will be easily passed around and you will end up getting across late on crisp lateral feeds.

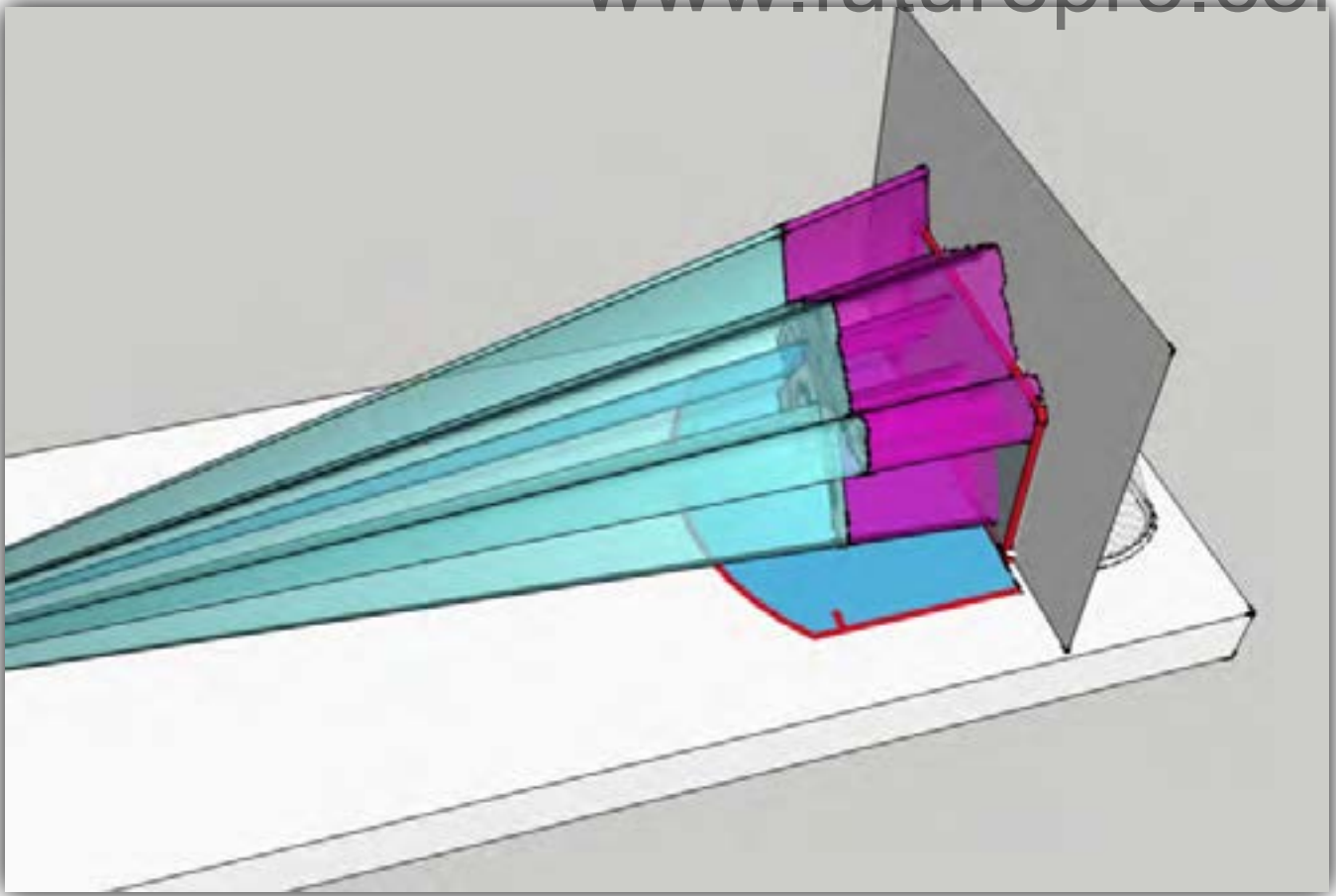
Understanding Your Net Coverage

I have spent years using video, diagrams and on ice props like ropes to help goalies visualize how much net they cover on various angles using various depths. Clearly, with the net behind you where you can't see it, getting a clear read on how much net your covering and how much net you are revealing is tough.

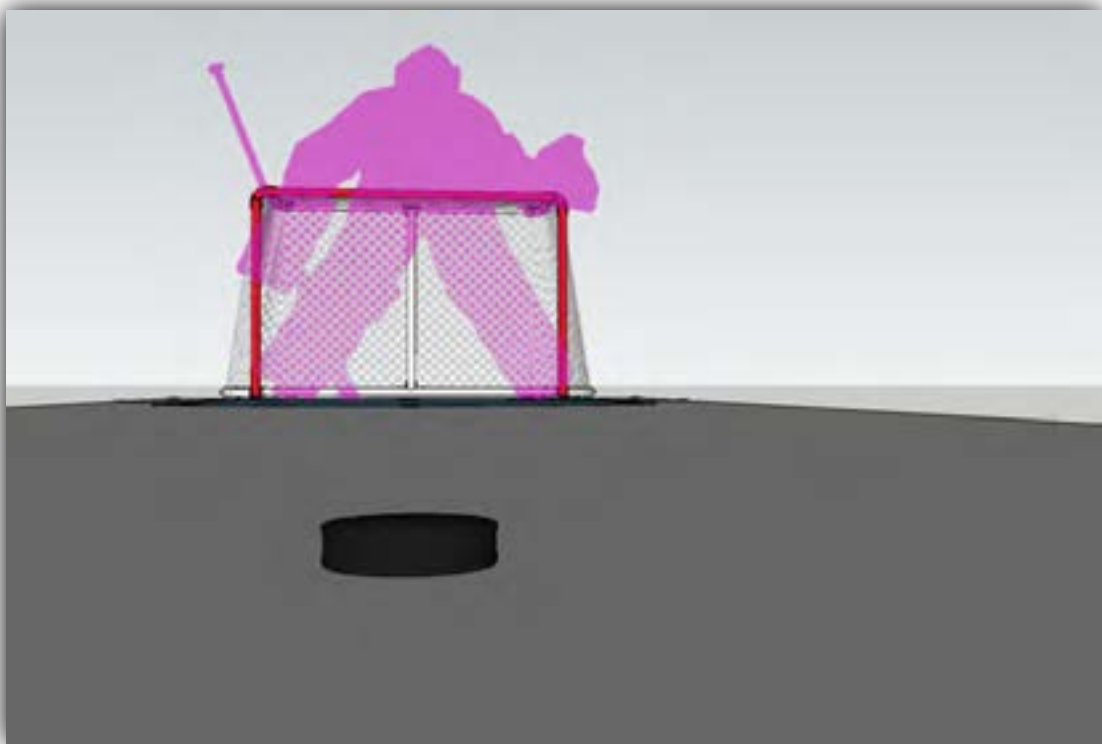
I did extensive lab work using shadows and light to literally shed light on how these variables come into play and how a goalie can maximize their net coverage. These various detailed graphic representations below will truly help you understand in a concrete way how your positioning and angle play can help you.

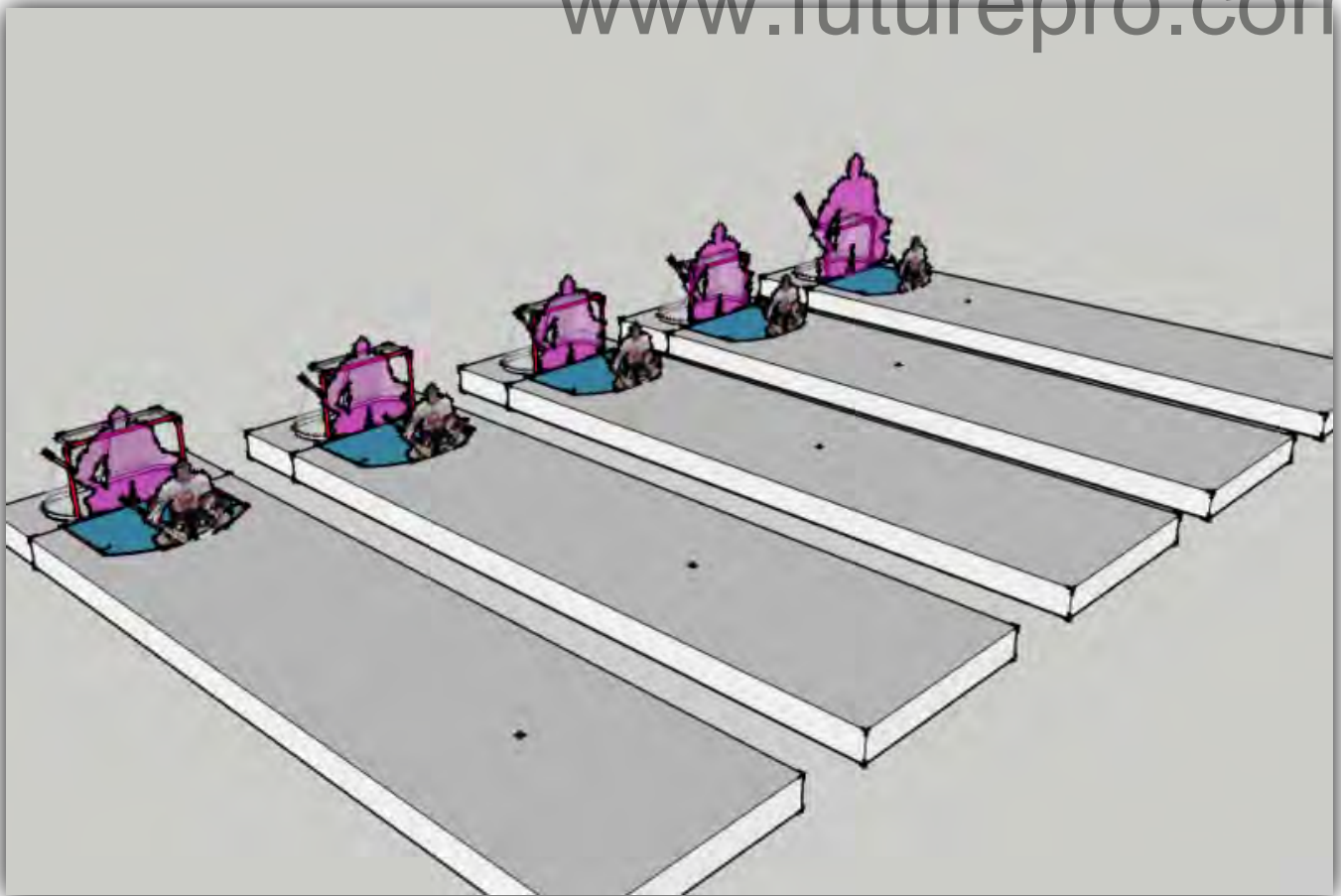


Like light, **pucks at high velocities basically travel in straight lines.** In this graphic we can clearly see in 3-D how the puck would travel if shot in various directions and elevations. You should note as well that our 2-D goalie actually casts a shadow of net coverage larger than he is because he is not directly back on the goal line. In simple terms, the farther you are off the goal line, the bigger the shadow created and the amount of net coverage increases.



From this elevated side view, our 2-D goalie standing in the mid crease area covers a good portion of the net. If he gains another 2 feet of additional depth, he can virtually cover the entire available shooting space. An additional factor to consider is wasted coverage. A 6'6" goalie who comes out too far actually will have much of their upper body covering space above the cross bar. (as seen below)





Holding your ground - Many goalies drop back into their crease too deeply as the attackers approach. By doing so you actually open up a ton of available net.

In the above graphic, notice how our goalie has used a butterfly at the top of the crease. As the puck moves closer to him notice how big the shadow created is!

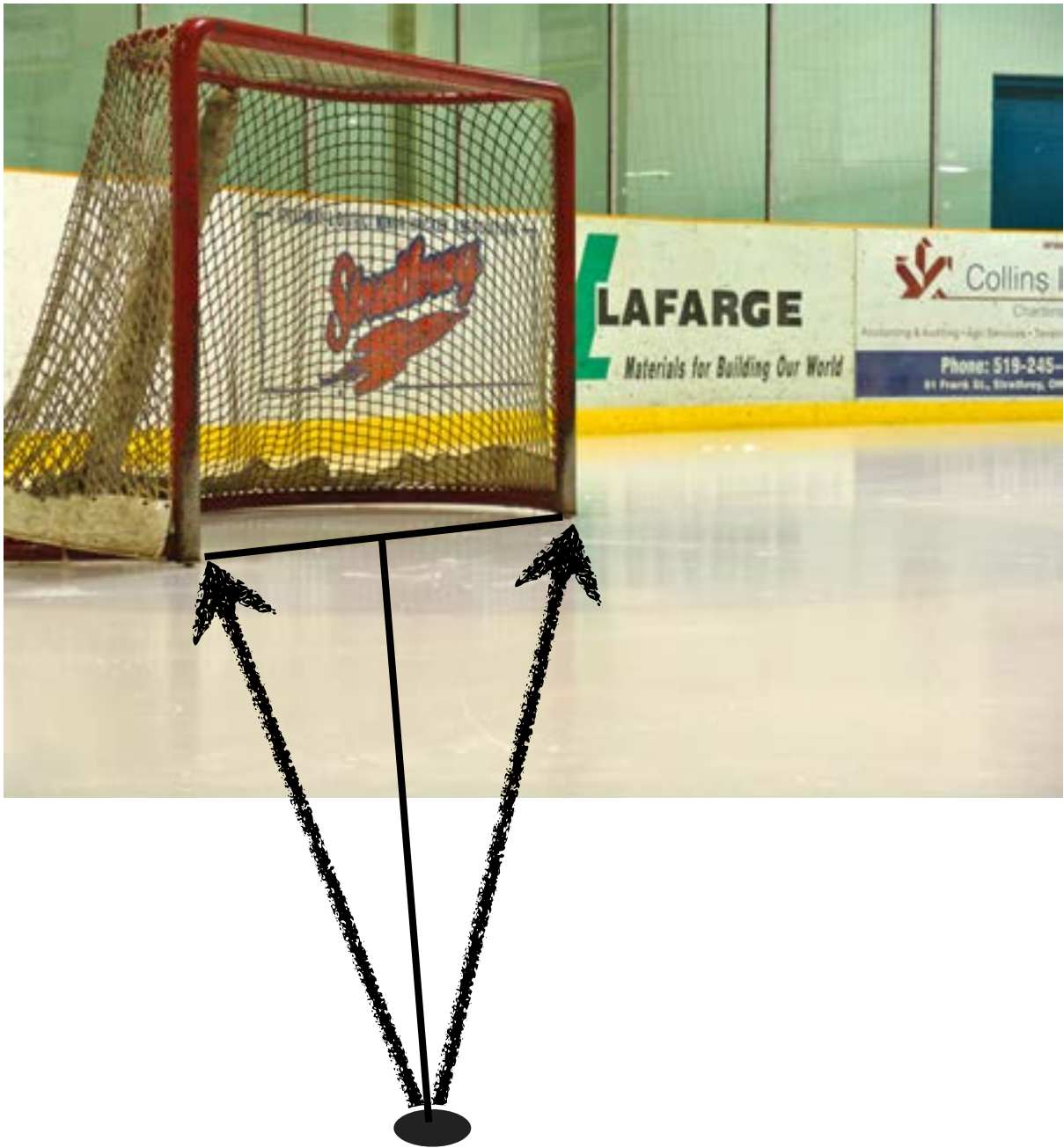
Our goalie is actually covering more net by doing nothing! Patience with your depth and confidence to play out at the top of the crease will dramatically increase the number of pucks staying out of your net.

Eyes of the Puck

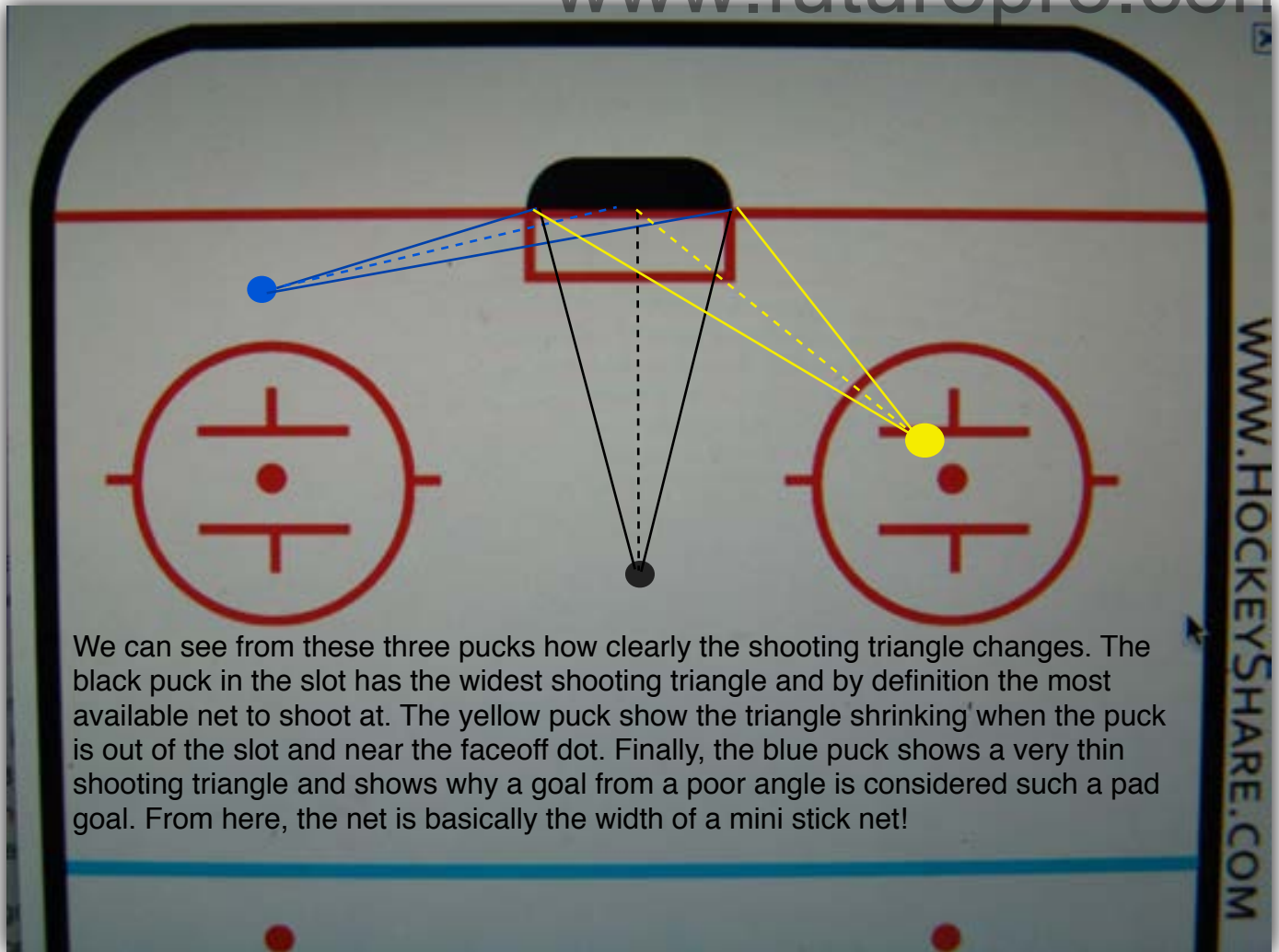
Remember that you have to understand what net the puck sees as if it had eyes. In this graphic you get the bird's eye (puck view) of the net and your coverage. If you are square to the puck and on angle here, the puck should see equal openings on either side of you.



We have looked at angles from a puck dead in the middle of the slot but what happens when you have a puck over near the face off dot?



You can see from the diagram that we still have a shooting triangle and we still have the square line. Now the angle is much smaller and the shooter has less room to shoot at. This is the exact reason why the slot is such a deadly place for the puck to be. The moment the puck moves away from the middle the angle begins to work to the goaltender's advantage. As we discuss in our chapter on poor angle shots the shooting triangle is now razor thin and the only way to score is through the goalie.

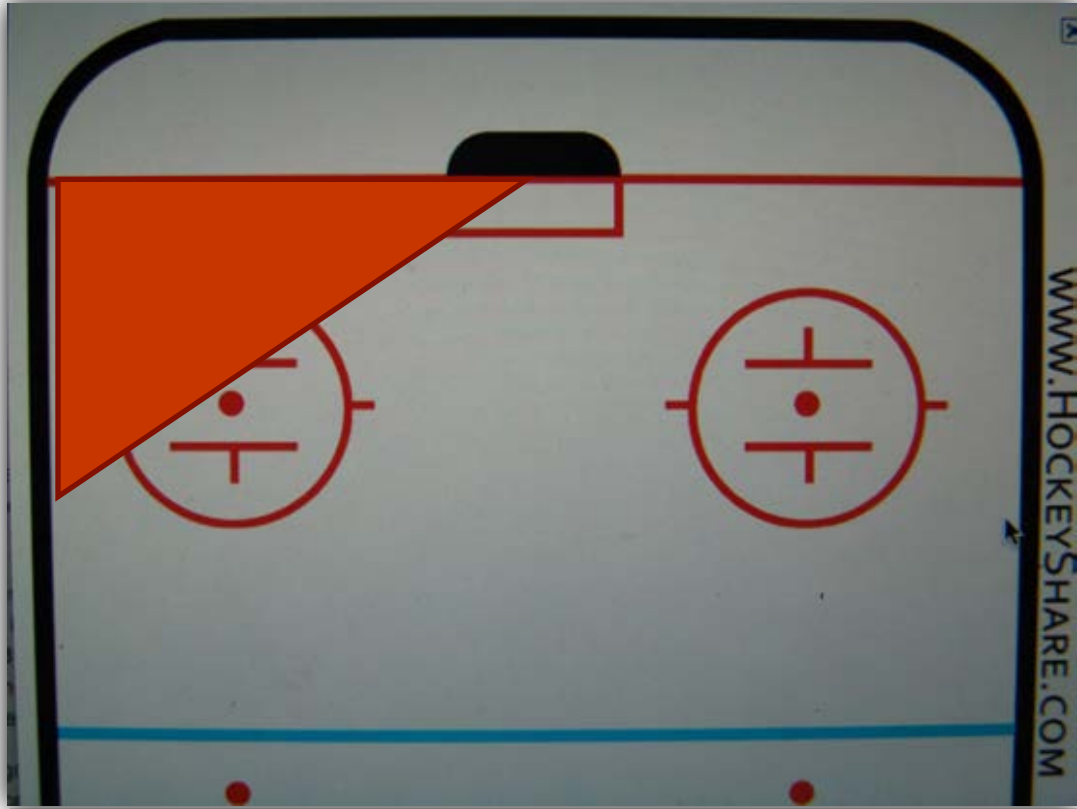


We can see from these three pucks how clearly the shooting triangle changes. The black puck in the slot has the widest shooting triangle and by definition the most available net to shoot at. The yellow puck show the triangle shrinking when the puck is out of the slot and near the faceoff dot. Finally, the blue puck shows a very thin shooting triangle and shows why a goal from a poor angle is considered such a pad goal. From here, the net is basically the width of a mini stick net!

Common Error: Lining up on the body, not the puck!



Here Mike demonstrates a common error a developing goalie makes. When your body squares up to the man instead of the puck you leave a very inviting easily hit target.



POOR ANGLE SHOTS

Normally, a poor angle shot is any shot that originates from below the face off dots on either side. Although this save is a simple one to make, many goalies mishandle this situation and cause themselves a great deal of embarrassment.

You should be at the top of the crease and you must modify your stance so that you tighten up into a more closed stance.

This is where goaltenders run into problems. They try to overplay this puck making lunging pad saves on shots headed wide of the net, choking out dangerous rebounds in to the kill zone for empty net goals. Have confidence that there is actually no available net to shoot and tighten up your stance. If you use a butterfly save, constrain the flare so you aren't letting the attacker use you as a passer for his hard charging center lane driving teammate. The rebound here has to be possessed or kept on the short side.



Ozzie closes up well and keeps his butterfly narrow to help keep pucks from striking his pads and getting out into the kill zone.



As does Emery!

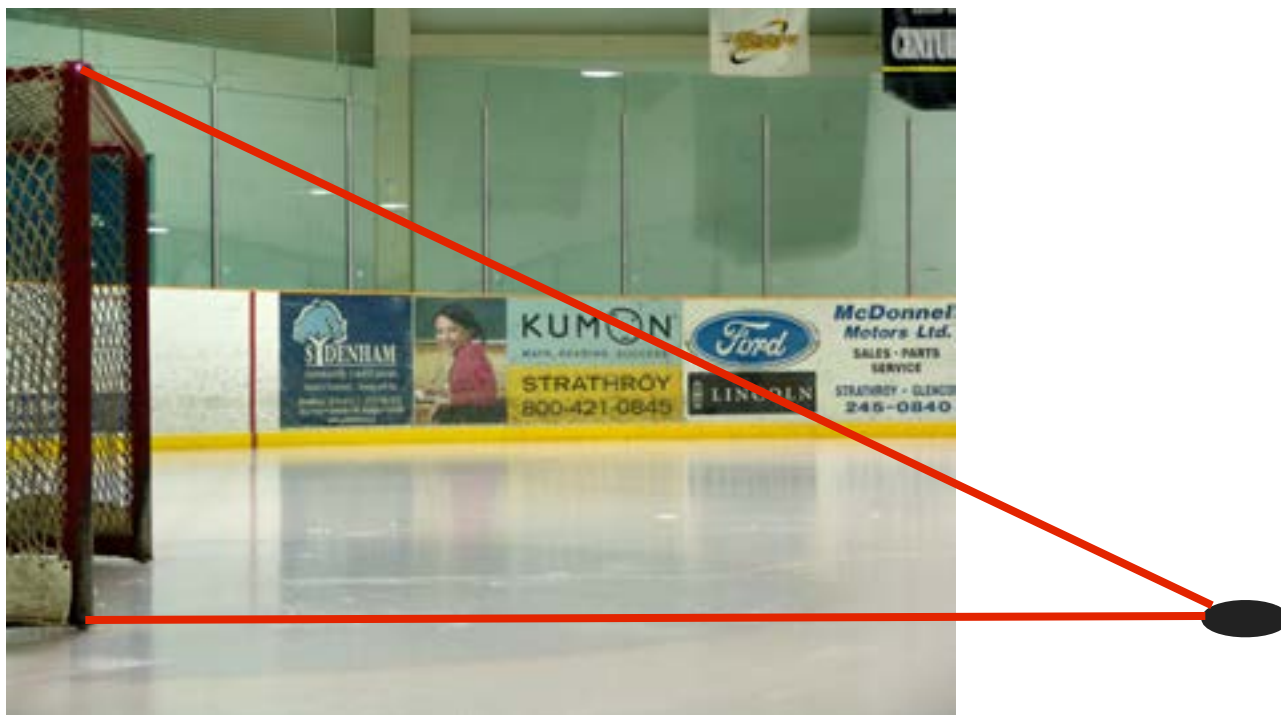


Nabokov gets out to the top of the paint and matches the width of his butterfly to the angle.



Backstrom locks on a poor angle attempt relying on his great reflexes and active hand butterfly.

The Aerial Angle



I touched on the aerial angle in our chapter on breakaways. It is an important concept for goaltenders to understand because you can always cover more top shelf when you leave your feet if you do so at the top of the crease or higher.

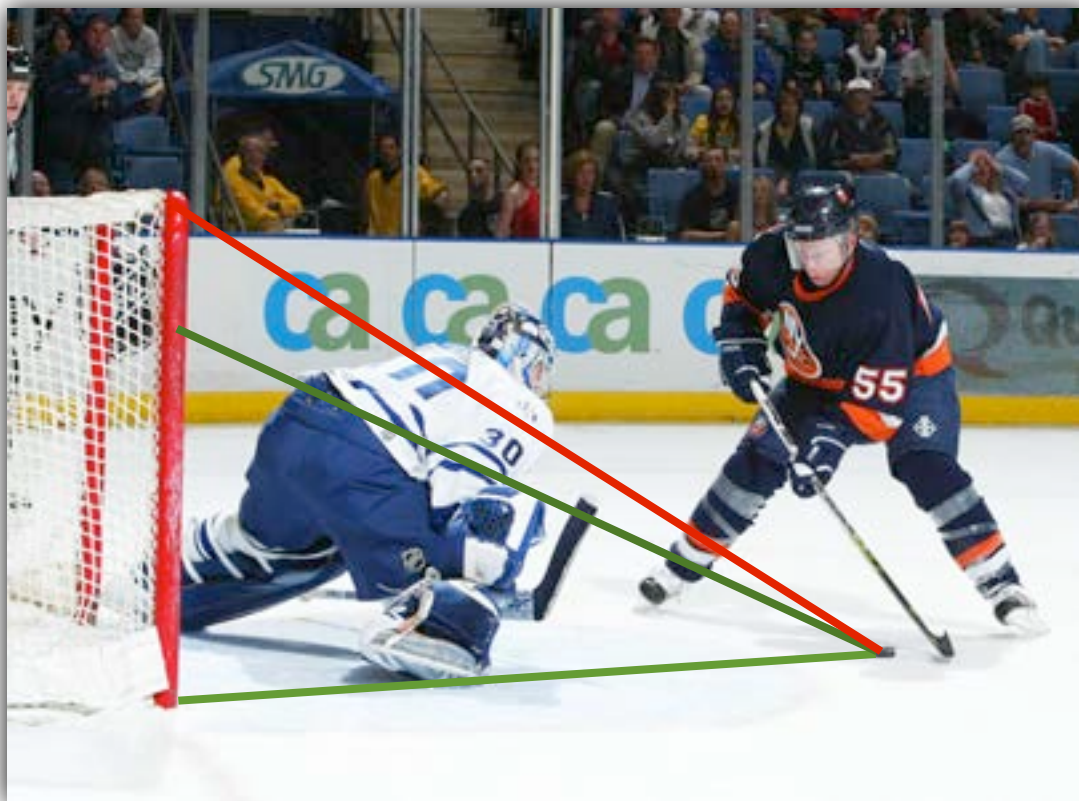
I was taught about the aerial angle by Mitch Korn who is now the goaltending coach of the Nashville Predators after a successful stint coaching multi Vezina and multi Hart Trophy winner Dominic Hasek.

The angles we have discussed up until now looked at the ice from above focusing on the topic from one perspective. Besides side to side angles, the puck also makes a different angle in relation to the net when it is viewed from the side.

The aerial angle is the space available for the puck below the crossbar and directly on the ice. Like the top view angles we discussed before, the aerial angle has a shooting triangle goaltenders need to visualize. Since the puck can't go in under the ice it must only remain lower than the crossbar to enter the net.

If you make a pad save back on the goal line you will be giving the shooter available aerial angle above your pad but below the crossbar. By

executing the same save at the top of the crease you have taken away the aerial angle and forced any puck that does make it over your pad to fly harmlessly over the net as well. This is the reason why you try to stay out of your crease on breakaways and deflections on low shots. Even if the shooter does get the puck up high on you in a hurry they will have little chance of scoring if you take away the aerial angle.



HERE WE SEE A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF THE AERIAL ANGLE IN EFFECT. BLAKE HAS PULLED THE PUCK TO HIS FOREHAND ON THE DEKE. AUBIN HAS STACKED HIS GLOVE ON TOP OF HIS PAD TO BUILD A NICE WALL OF COVERAGE FROM THE ICE UP. YOU CAN SEE BY THE GREEN ANGLE INDICATORS HE AS A GOOD CHUNK OF THE AERIAL ANGLE COVERED. BLAKE WILL HAVE TO GET THIS PUCK UP IN A HURRY IF HE WANTS TO TURN ON THE RED LIGHT. IF AUBIN IS DEEPER IN THE NET HE MAKES THE AVAILABLE AERIAL ANGLE GREATER.

THIS IS THE EXACT REASON YOU SHOULD NEVER SLIDE BACK TO THE POST UNLESS YOU ARE IN A COMPLETE EMERGENCY SITUATION. YOU SIMPLY REVEAL TOO MUCH AERIAL ANGLE!



Game Situation Analysis

I want to challenge you to start critically analyzing every scoring chance you see live or on TV. Describe the scoring chance in detail and the outcome. Try to breakdown from a positional point of view, whether the goalie choose the right depth and angle on each example.

Take a look at these core areas:

It is quite evident that a goalie in the right spot at the right time has a great chance to make a save. Being in perfect positional control will result in saves that just hit you and pucks that miss the net frequently. These pucks miss the net when the shooter has to get cute and attempt to hit the small targets that are left available by a strong positional goaltender.

Clearly skating ability and cognitive abilities are the keys to attaining these optimum positions.

One could argue that even a goalie with mediocre reflexes and save selections would experience great success if they were always in the right spot early enough.

1) Depth Selection

In simple terms, depth refers to the distance a goaltender is out off the goal line. When stationed at the goal line the goalie takes up the least amount of shooting space, yet has the most time to react to the flight of the puck.

When the goalie challenges several feet off the goal line, he has covered significantly more shooting space but has decreased the available reaction time slightly.

Situations, abilities, angles and a variety of factors affect the depth of challenge a goalie obtains. The clear goal is to achieve optimum depth in every situation.

2) Time and Space

Every decision a goaltender makes on the ice requires the consideration of the time and space available to the attacker.

The less time and space an attacker has the more predictable your reads will be.

For instance, we have a man attacking down the wing who feeds a player charging to the net. The pass recipient in our first situation is wide open and gets a perfect pass 8 feet out in front of the goalie. In this situation he has both time and space on his hands. He knows he can't be laid out with a hit and he has separation from the goalie. It will take an amazing save to prevent a goal here.

If we slightly alter the above scenario, we will observe a dramatic increase in the success rate for the goalie as the attacker's options decrease. On a centering pass, with heavy defensive pressure, the man will quickly get rid of this shot. The pass recipient has lost his time and space. Alex makes a huge glove save because he read this play with intelligent anticipation or in other words, by connecting the dots. This bing-bang play can consistently be stopped and looks great to all the fans in attendance.

Another example to help understand this discussion, would be an off centre breakaway where the man cuts in from the wall under the face off dot on a mini breakaway. His offensive flair will vary depending on the impending arrival of the weak side defenceman. In the event he has great time and

space, as he does here, the goaltender must have great patience and expect something difficult. This guy has many embarrassment options at his disposal.

It is also very important to understand that as the level of play goes up, time and space minimizes and great players become apparent. The great players are the ones who seem impervious to time and space. In the face of violent immediate duress these players somehow manage to show an incredibly low panic point and will frequently throw in a very creative unpredictable attack. The observation of these rare but special players must be at the front of the goalie's mind. By knowing when and where they are on the ice we can modify our reads with the understanding that time and space will not affect them to the same degree it does their teammates.

There are hundreds of variations of attacks that can be brought to your net, all of them influenced by the available time and space the attacker possesses. Your approach is dictated by your ability to recognize this and to make quality reads. This ability takes much time and study and of course the ultimate painful barometer – the red light.



Where should the goaltender position themselves when the play begins to approach them from the other end?

Playing the Rush - Outside - In

Some goaltenders lounge around out in the slot and as the play approaches back up in their stance relying on the arena markings to tell them where they are positioned. As the speed of the players increase and as the players become more adept at quick rink wide passes, the goaltender will really struggle to move laterally and still be properly positioned. It is also common to see goaltenders backing over to play a wing shot (leading with their butt), which is definitely not staying square to the shooter.

I highly discourage any goalie who is playing the rush in this manner. It will lead to many preventable goals because of poor angle play.

You simply can't rely on the rink markings, like the blue line or the face off dots. This can be risky because no two arenas are measured exactly the same and every arena is slightly different in size. You may be dead on your angle in Montreal and way off in Vancouver.

Playing the Rush - Inside - Out

Others wait back on the goal line with their shoulders touching the crossbar, centered in the middle of the net. As the play approaches, they tap off on the proper post and challenge out to the top of the crease.

Every goaltender in the NHL plays the rush by waiting in the crease and tapping off to challenge when the play becomes dangerous. Why is this?

When you begin back in the net, centered, you can feel with your glove, stick and shoulders that you are properly positioned. As you read the play and challenge out to the top of the crease you have a lot better chance of staying dead on your angle without looking behind you or relying on the arena markings. If you don't want to lose your net and let in stoppable goals then this technique is the best?

By the way you still haven't said what 'tapping off' means.



MIKE TAPS OFF HIS GLOVE SIDE POST TO HELP CENTER HIMSELF AS THE RUSH DEVELOPS IN THE NEUTRAL ZONE.



LIGHTLY TAPPING WITH HIS STICK'S SHAFT HELPS HIM CENTER AS WELL IF THE RUSH IS APPROACHING FROM THAT WING.

By quickly touching the post with your glove or stick you locate exactly where the net is without looking. By keeping your focus on the oncoming attack and with the knowledge that the net is where it should be, you can really shut down the snipers.



Great Drill

Stand back, centered as we just mentioned and then tap off and explode out on either left, right or middle angle. Stop precisely and quickly retreat back to the post in your stance. Use your sense of touch when you find the net and have a coach check your angles when you challenge out. You will be surprised how accurate you are!

SAVE SELECTIONS

THE BUTTERFLY SAVE

As we constantly hear on the television, the butterfly style is now used more than the classical, now defunct stand up style. I really don't like to refer to the butterfly as a style per se, but rather a fundamental save selection.

The save itself covers the lower portion of the net when it is executed properly and with precise timing, can result in huge saves. All of the top goaltenders have great feet and the ability to snap out their pads in the perfect butterfly.

Your butterfly save will either be a closed / block butterfly or an open / reactive butterfly. Knowing when to use each one is a key requirement for proper goaltending.



CLOSED / BLOCK BUTTERFLY - VERY FEW HOLES FOR THE PUCK TO SNEAK THROUGH. YOU SHOULD TRY TO CLOSE KNEES AND ARMPITS TIGHTLY, WHILE KEEPING THE STICK AS VERTICAL AS POSSIBLE.

The closed / block butterfly is used frequently when the goaltender reads that they will not get time to react to the flight of the puck. So, for example, if the goaltender reads a back door one timer is about to occur, they know they must get over quickly on the pass and throw up a nice square, block butterfly at the top of the crease. The one likely side effect of a block butterfly save will be a rebound as there is little rebound precision possible while in a block butterfly.



The goaltender explosively drops to their knees fanning both feet out to the side, just as the shooter releases the puck. Too many goaltenders use this save as a crutch to hide poor feet or reflexes. *It is nothing more than a guessing save if you drop too early before the shot is released.* The stick remains constantly in contact with the ice throughout the save and the recovery back to the stance. The feet fan out to the side as the drop happens and the gloves stay out and open, but tightly pressed to your sides and the top of the pads. When deploying a closed / block butterfly you must do so without any holes between your body and your arms.

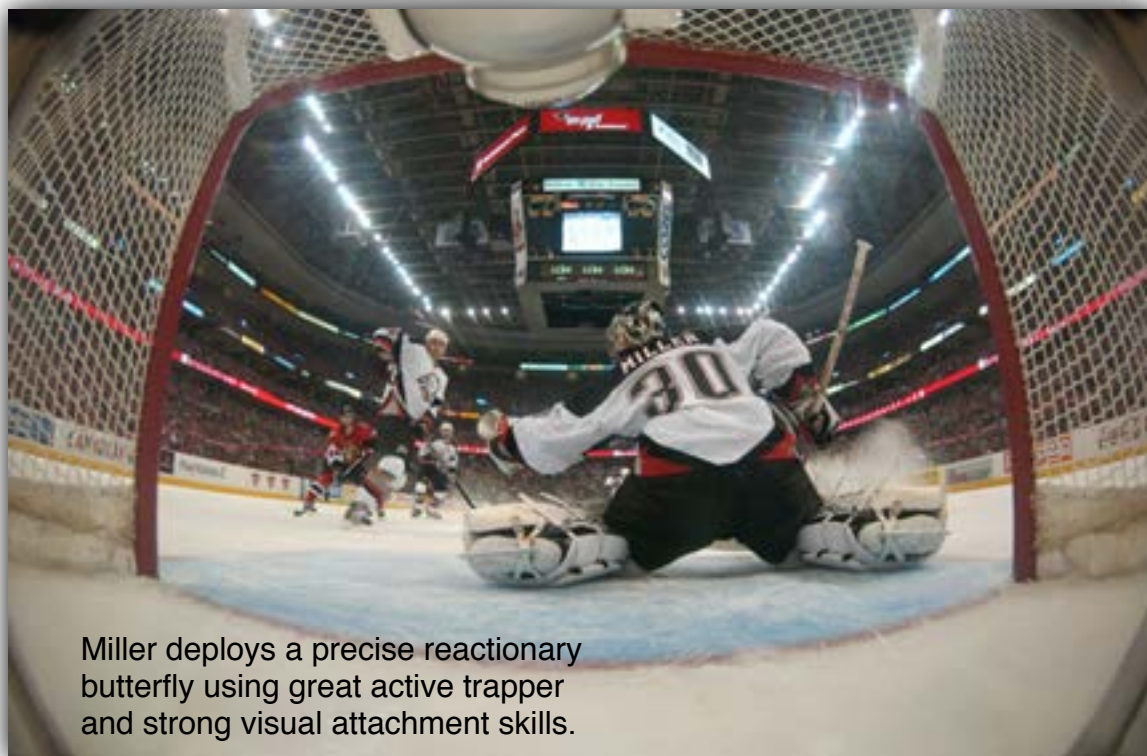
I've watched hundreds of goals where a tip snuck through a goaltender after they made a brilliant read and used a near perfect butterfly. If you execute a tight butterfly at the top of the crease, lined up property on the puck it will have to be an amazing shot to beat you.

I will never forget Mitch Korn constantly reminding me to prevent the shots that go through me or underneath me. It is basic advice but it one of the most important principles of goaltending. When it is used properly the closed / block butterfly works well on tips, deflections, breakaways, screen shots and any hard shots from in tight.

OPEN / REACTIVE BUTTERFLY



Mason keeps his blocker active in this nice example of a reactionary butterfly save.



Miller deploys a precise reactionary butterfly using great active trapper and strong visual attachment skills.

OPEN / REACTIVE BUTTERFLY

The more often you can use reactive, precise saves the better your rebound control will be. The reactive butterfly allows you to keep your hands active and available to catch pucks cleanly or get your blocker on lower pucks.

The reactive butterfly also allows you to use great stick involvement and ramp pucks up and into the corners out of danger. Remember, if there is no danger of a tip you **MUST** get your stick involved with the save. If a hard shot is stopped with the leg pad, it usually rebounds out into dangerous areas. (kill zone) Use your stick to deflect the puck to the corners. You will also notice that while you are in the butterfly position your stick saves have greater range.



Here we see a pristine example of a reactionary butterfly save. The goalie reacts by selecting one pad to extend, increasing its flare. He gets stick involvement and has proper visual attachment to the puck headed safely out of the kill zone.

The Quebec style "block butterfly guys" rarely make a save like this. Their butterfly is always equal flared with respect to both legs. They never have to make a save determination left or right. They simply drop to a standard butterfly for any low shot.

The best goalies resist a pure balanced block butterfly when reactionary time is available.



Handling pucks shot 3" - 11" of the ice is an elite skill, but one goalies of all skill levels can start to integrate into their games.

In reactionary situations, with no traffic goalies should not allow pucks to hit their shin areas if at all possible.

By using precise trapper and blocker mechanics we can intercept these pucks that will be above any stick involvement potential but under the top edge of our pads in the butterfly.

Many purely block butterfly guys never allow their gloves to do anything except stack on top of the pads. This is an error if reactionary time is available. This potentially dangerous kill zone rebound is now safely managed.

If necessary, the puck can be held for a change of troops or continued on to a solid teammate for an easy zone exit.

Lets strive to be more active with our glove and blocker on these 3- 11" shots.

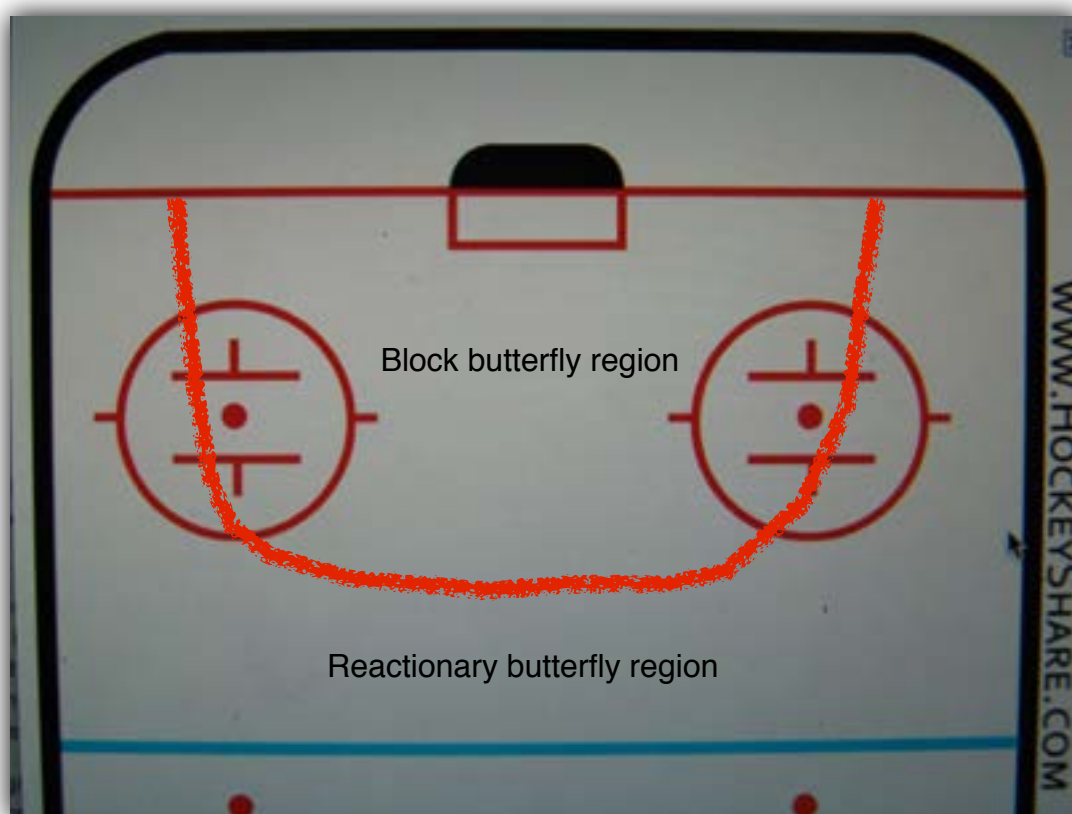
WHEN TO USE:

OPEN / REACTIVE BUTTERFLY VS CLOSED / BLOCK BUTTERFLY

Many factors will affect your decision making when deciding which butterfly to use. Your reaction times and the speed of your knee drive are factors, as is the speed and calibre of the players you are playing against.

Clearly, playing against NHL attackers will give you little time to track the puck's flight and react accordingly, so you will likely have to rely upon intelligent anticipation and block butterfly saves more often. Lower calibre of play and lower shot velocities should be handled more often with reactionary, precise butterfly saves.

In the diagram below I have created a rough outline where an NHL goalie will likely be able to use reaction butterfly saves vs. blocking saves.



Shots from the point and outside the red semi - circle above, will allow the goalie to make precise reactionary butterfly saves. Remember however, if there is traffic or tip potential the closed butterfly should still be used, even on shots beyond this reactionary guideline.

The half pad save is executed by dropping into a butterfly position with one leg extended further than the other. One leg remains under your body, which gives the other leg more range. By definition, a half pad save has to be reactionary.





SLIDING BUTTERFLY

The **sliding butterfly** is executed by exploding laterally as you drop to a full or half butterfly save. The actual save you use is performed as we have taught except that you are moving sideways into the shot as you drop. Many game situations you face where you need a butterfly save will require some lateral motion.

GAME SITUATIONS

Pass for a one timer

If you were just to drop into a butterfly as the pass happened you wouldn't get across to cover the other side of the net. If you use a sliding butterfly you would be exploding across in a perfect butterfly so that when the puck arrived you would just be getting there an instant before. If you are quick enough it would be better to get there standing but a hard pass sometimes makes this impossible. If you get a great push and execute a nice sliding butterfly at the top of the crease the puck will usually hit you or miss the net.

Breakaway

We discuss this in detail in the breakaway chapter but I will touch on the basics. When a player dekes you must move laterally as you drop or they will have the whole net to shoot at.

Tips and Deflections

By using a sliding butterfly you can jam the tip which means arriving close to the point of contact just as the puck arrives. Again, if you just drop in place the tip will play you instead of you playing the tip.

Advanced Tip

Staying square is crucial when you use this save. Many goaltenders keep their chest square to centre ice instead of making a little shoulder turn and squaring up as you slide. If you don't get square up you really reduce the amount of net you cover.

It would be a very simple life for the goalie if they always had enough time to attain their position early and then execute a save from a stationary position. Hockey is clearly too fast for this to happen frequently enough so the goaltender must be able to throw out explosive sliding butterfly saves while moving in different directions.

1) Stationary - As indicated, this is ideal. The goaltender would establish a position, get their feet set and make the butterfly save.

2) Moving forward - In the process of challenging out a quick shot may be attempted. The goaltender needs to be able to use butterfly saves while moving forward.

3) Moving backward - As we will see in our chapter on breakaways, the goaltender needs to retreat as the shooter approaches. If the shooter elects to shoot while the goaltender is retreating he must not be caught stone footed. The goaltender needs to be able to snap down with the half pad saves or full butterfly saves while moving back towards the net.

4) Laterally - Sometimes a goaltender will be moving laterally with a player and he may elect to shoot to either low corner. The goaltender must be able to use either left or right half pad saves while moving left or right themselves. The shooters often shoot *back against the grain* because this is one of the most difficult saves for the goalie to make.

5) 1/4 turn diagonally - As a player dekes one way or the other a goaltender must turn their shoulders to square up while simultaneously executing a sliding half pad save.

To develop an elite caliber goaltender, all of the above save situations must be practiced frequently.

A trend I notice is that many goalies will use a butterfly save where both pads are flared equally to the side when stopping a shot from a distance.

On a shot where there is clearly reactionary time, using an extended flare in one pad while using a minimal flare in the bilateral pad will create few advantages.

- 1) When you attempt to use full flare with one leg priority you will have significantly more flare than if you use a balanced butterfly with equal leg flare.
- 2) You also may have an easier time getting into your backside recovery because a full flare butterfly really puts both pads into an awkward position recovery wise.
- 3) You are less likely to have the puck hit your boot break with one pad flared more than the other.

If there is no reaction time use a balanced block butterfly with equal flare.

Some goalies will resist this as they like the feeling of not having to react to a puck left or right.

Try this approach and see how it works for you.



The stick is a great weapon to deflect, stop, control and direct an incoming puck. Sizing, proper grip and the correct position in your stance are all important factors to consider. If you have already read the chapters on equipment and basic stance you should already know the fundamentals. Now that you have the right stick and you are holding it properly how do you use it to stop the puck?

First of all, we need to understand that the stand up stick save is now dead. All low shots should be stopped down in the butterfly position with stick involvement wherever possible.



Keep the blade fairly upright so you don't deflect one up in the breadbasket. As the shot comes in, follow the puck with your eyes and move your stick sideways in an arc in front of the puck. Lean your body over towards the save and back your stick up with a pad. A hard shot to a low corner should be angled out of danger into the corner or up into the stands.

Use the speed and force of the shot to control it. You don't need to jab or stab at the puck. Small, precise motions are the best and if you have ever watched an NHL warm up you know what I am talking about.



By keeping the stick **slightly** tilted back and flush to the ice, I can easily use the speed of the puck to angle the puck up and out of danger to the corner.



The yellow arrow indicates a key technical requirement. You **MUST** keep the stick away from the pad here.

If you don't you will often ramp this puck up into your own pad and then back out into the kill zone.



Also notice the yellow star clearly showing the blocker is active and not locked. A goalie with a blocker lock will frequently have stick involvement rebound control issues.



COMMON ERRORS



I often see goalies making this tragic stick error as a direct result of ignorance or poor goalie coaching. When you need to execute a block butterfly it can sometimes compromise perfect stick orientation but, too many goalies default to this stick position on EVERY shot. Pucks ramp up unpredictably into the goalie's gut, frequently from the stick to the pad and then out into the kill zone or often up in the air straight over the goalie and into the net. In the photos above you can see the error clearly. The stick is angled back like a 9 - iron.

As a rule of thumb, an intelligent goalie knows that pucks that hit your stick should never hit any other part of your body afterwards. Purposely ramping pucks up into your gut area is foolhardy.

Here are some more photo examples of flawed stick use on low shots:



I constantly preach to my goalies that if a puck strikes your stick here it MUST only strike the stick and no other piece of gear.

The ability of a goaltender to use their stick effectively is crucial. Many goaltenders lack confidence or skill when an opportunity arises to use a poke check. Often scoring chances can be negated before they actually occur if the goaltender has developed the ability to anticipate and respond effectively with their stick.

Poke checking is one area that is often neglected and is now rarely used. When was the last time you saw an NHL goalie poke check someone? Goaltenders like that put themselves in the position of having to make heroic saves that could have been prevented beforehand. There are still goaltenders that use this vanishing skill effectively.

There are three main types of poke checks that can be used depending on the situation: standing, knee and diving.

THE STANDING POKE CHECK



The standing poke check is the least risky poke check because you remain standing throughout the whole process. If you fail to contact the puck with your poke here, you will still be in reasonably good position to make a second effort save.

As with all poke checks, the first element is surprise. If the shooter "reads" you then he has a great advantage over you and will probably score. To hide your intentions you must appear to be in a normal stance. To be specific, do not begin to slide your hand up the shaft in preparation for the poke check. Heads up shooters will easily see this and you will have "telegraphed" your intentions.

To be successful you want to poke check someone at the last possible moment when they are not in a shooting position. For example, if a shooter has the puck in front of his body he is in the classic deke position, which makes him more vulnerable to a poke check than, if he has the puck to the side in a shooting position.

Good times to try poke checks occur when the shooter is pressured. In these situations he could have a defenseman hooking him or someone about to flatten him. Due to the split in his focus between you and the defenseman he is a prime candidate for a poke check.

You should avoid trying a poke check when a shooter has the puck in a shooting position, has his head up and is under little pressure. You will have minimal success.

Execution:

Explosively thrust your stick towards the puck as you would in shuffleboard. If you are tentative or slow your attempt will fail. Visualize a cobra about to bite. This is exactly the way a poke check should work: no warning and no chance to react. Ensure that you use the whole shaft when you poke check. If your hand doesn't snap all the way up to the knob you are really limiting your range and chances for success. You pay for the whole shaft - Use It!

Advanced Tip

Smart goaltenders always get at least one of three things when they poke check. They are : skates, puck or legs. It is very difficult to score when you are on your back without the puck. Try to get something with your stick if you miss the puck and quickly snap your stick back where it should be in your normal stance.

When to use the standing poke check

Some specific times when standing poke checks are effective are: loose pucks close to the net, when a player skates along the goal line trying to jam it in, or anytime a player is in tight with pressure on them.

THE BUTTERFLY POKE CHECK



The butterfly poke check has a greater range than the standing poke check but it can be a little more risky because you leave your feet. If your timing is off you will be in a poor position to attempt a second effort save.

This save works well on pucks that are just out of the range where you could use a standing poke check. As with the standing poke checks the visual cues and the form itself is identical except that you drop to one knee or two as you thrust the stick at the puck. This poke check is ideal to use in a race for a loose puck, when a forward cuts in to the net on an angle with pressure or anytime a player is within striking distance and has his head down.



The diving poke check is rarely attempted and I think only a few NHL goalies still risk trying it. The risk of an embarrassing goal against and the risk of injury are the two main reasons this is a vanishing art.

If the timing is off even a tad, the shooter will be left with a wide open net. Goaltenders can be successful with the diving poke check for that very reason. It is almost never done so that when the perfect one is executed the shooter is bewildered !

I once saw Mike Palmateer, of the mid-seventies Toronto Maple Leafs, charge out on a breakaway and throw a diving poke check just inside the blue line ! You couldn't believe how loud the cheer was or the astonished took on that nameless Blackhawk.

Palmateer was usually successful because of great anticipation, awesome skating ability and sheer nerve.

A big concern with a diving poke check is the risk of injury. When this check is done, your head, neck and shoulders are exposed to violent contact as well as perilously close contact with razor sharp skate blades.

With these problems, why would anyone in their right mind even attempt it? To be truthful, it is a thing of beauty when successful and most goalies aren't in their right mind anyway.

Execution

To execute the diving poke check you can use two approaches:



1) **The ' 20 foot pylon '** - This is similar to a two pad slide, except that you violently lunge forward at the shooter sliding forwards on your hip as pictured. This sets up a huge obstacle for a surprised shooter to avoid.



2) **Straight ahead** - Instead of setting up a big obstacle you dive straight at the puck as pictured. This obviously requires incredible timing and luck to be successful if a player has the puck on their stick.

THE SWEEP CHECK (AKA AS THE MARTY BRODEUR POKE CHECK)



To execute a sweep check you slide your stick forwards as in a standing poke check. Just before your blocker reaches the knob you explosively snap the stick towards the blocker side with the help of your trapper. This sweep check works well on players who are holding the puck to the blocker side of your net, near the goal line.

Advanced Tip

The sliding sweep check was perfected by Billy Smith and is still used today by NHL goalies. When a player travels behind the net starting from your glove side post you can catch them sleeping.

Instead of shuffling over to your blocker side post, slide on your blocker side knee jamming your pad into the post. As you are sliding, slide the stick to the knob and violently sweep the stick with the blade flush to the ice. With proper timing and execution you can whack the puck off their stick and likely upend the player before they even get into position to try a centering pass.

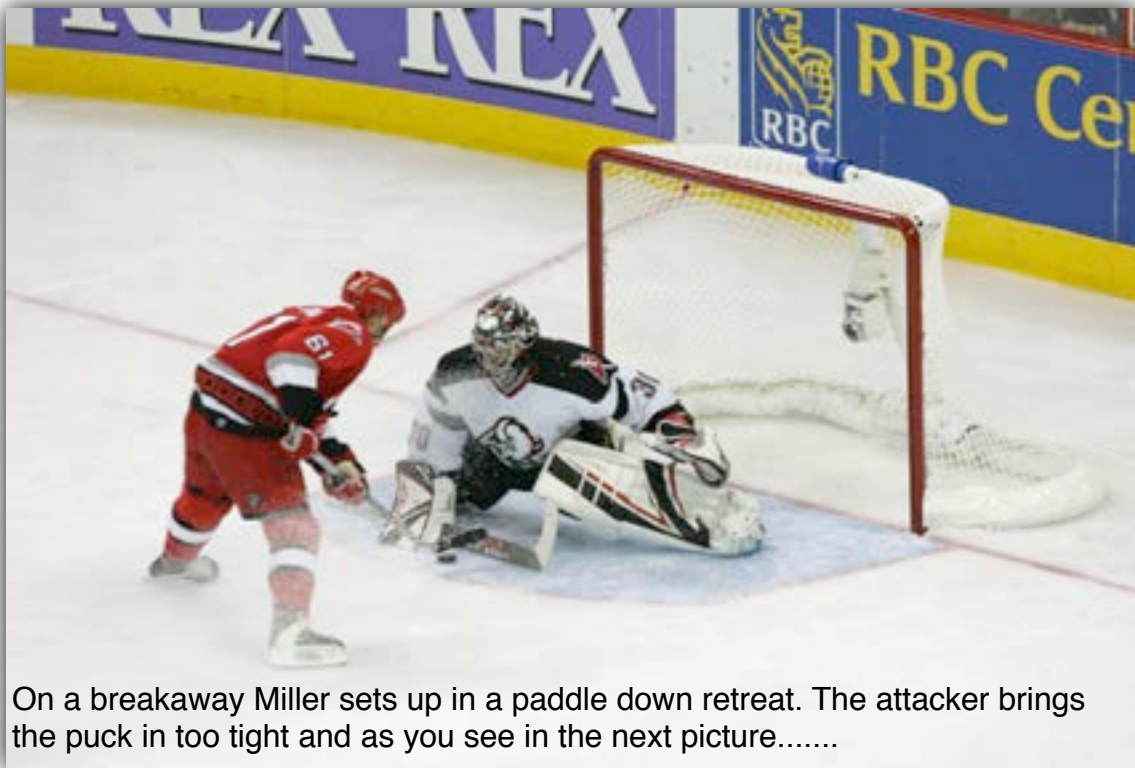
This skill without doubt is the ***most effective yet, least used tool***. A fake poke check by definition is a deceptive movement of a goaltender's stick, shoulder or body that fools an attacker into believing a full blown poke check is imminent.

The flinching movement of a fake poke check is designed to pressure a forward into a bad decision, without negatively affecting the goaltenders solid positioning.

When done properly, your stance is maintained, you haven't left your feet and if for some reason the shooter hasn't "bought" what you are selling you are still in great shape.

The fake poke check must not be over-used and must be realistic in timing and appearance.

The Paddle Poke Check



On a breakaway Miller sets up in a paddle down retreat. The attacker brings the puck in too tight and as you see in the next picture.....



.....he thrusts the paddle forward in a classic paddle poke check, cleanly removing the puck from the attacker's stick before he can complete his deke.



Here is another example of a paddle poke on a blocker side deke. Never let an attacker bring that puck within your poke check range!



The save itself

The paddle down is executed by instantly driving your blocker down as you drop to a butterfly - like position. Since it is a classic blocking save there should be no holes in the wall you are creating. As the blocker is driven to the ice the paddle is positioned firmly on the ice with no holes under it. The glove side leg pad doesn't have to be flush to the ice but it shouldn't leave a hole over the paddle. In this position the lower part of the net is covered and because the arms are tightly stacked to the side there are no holes for the puck to get through.

Positioning

To take away the **aerial angle**, the paddle down must be done at the top of the crease. If you have your butt in the net when you try this save, shooters will eat you alive. If you are using the paddle down on wraparound attempts then the requirement to get to the top of the crease obviously does not apply.

In our section on wrap arounds the use of the paddle down position is discussed in detail.

Advanced Tip

It goes without saying that you must be able to explode back to your stance if you are going to use the paddle down.

There is another skill you can practice while you are still in the paddle down position. In some cases you will make a save and the puck will squirt a few feet away to the side of you. You need to be able to move sideways without getting on your feet because you won't have the time. Practice sliding on your knees, which is very difficult.

When to use it?

This save works on dekes, tight little tips and deflections, scrambles in front and wrap arounds. The one thing you must remember is that you can't rely on this save all the time and it must be done with perfect timing and positioning. Avoid using it on long shots, point shots and poor angle attempts. Use mostly on plays in tight.



Caution!!

A common problem goaltenders experience when trying to use the paddle down is the "Tweener". This is my term for the puck that goes in through the goaltender, flat on the ice after the blade has moved and before the paddle has hit the ice. You either keep the blade flat or get the paddle down. No TWEENERS!



The glove save is without a doubt the most beautiful and difficult thing to execute in all sport. To catch a 100 mph shot released as close as ten feet away is truly amazing. When you add in traffic in front of you the save becomes miraculous! Ask any one who had played goal at any level about this next fantasy.

There is no better feeling in the world than what follows:

You are in a deep crouch killing a late penalty, leading by a goal in front of 21,000 fans. A quick pass is centered to the slot through your defensemen's legs. As you follow the pass you challenge out noticing an opponent creeping into the slot with their stick cocked. Time slows and you notice the stick bending almost to the point of breaking, as the one timer is launched high and hard. The puck seems to swell to the size of a grapefruit as it slams into your glove. The sheer force of the shot thrusts your glove behind your head in a huge arc while the puck remains sealed in your mitt.

For what seems like a small eternity there is no cheering only the mistaken joy of your opponent raising his arms in eventually embarrassing fashion. For this brief goose bump moment you are the only person who realizes the gravity of what just happened.



Throngs of fans leave their seats and a deafening roar begins in the lower bowl, as they disbelievably see no red light. The roar becomes thunderous as the upper deck finally is let in on the situation below. You have just made the save of the game; a glove save that is barely visible even on the large video monitors which strain in slow motion replay to follow that blur; that glove hand!

In our chapter on stance we talked about glove positioning and how important it is for the glove to be out and open. Lets go into a little more detail here. Your glove should be held about knee height facing out towards the play. Make sure you hold the glove wide open keeping it to the side but in front of the body. If you leave the glove to your side it prevents you from following the puck into your glove with your eyes. As well you will have problems swiping your glove in front of your knee to prevent a costly rebound off the top portion of your leg pad.

Surprisingly, you will seldom have to move your glove more than a foot in any direction to cover the whole corner.

The save itself

As the shot approaches follow it with a visual laser lock completely into your glove, firmly closing the mitt as your arm gives a little to help cushion the shot. Try to get the puck in the pocket so that it doesn't end up causing a juicy rebound.



Your eyes should be riveted on your glove as you see Rick DiPietro doing above.

Advanced Tip

When you get to the midget or junior B level you should try using two different trappers; one for games and one for practice. Your practice glove should have extra padding in the palm, which will protect you, but slightly hinder your feel for the stick when you handle the puck. Your game glove should have less protection in the palm so you can really get a good grip when you handle the puck. The use of a golf glove and / or tape on the fingers can also give you additional protection.

Did you know!

With the new super slow motion cameras a goaltender's secret is beginning to be revealed. If you watch a replay of most glove saves on hard shots you will see the puck hitting the glove, before the goaltender actually reacts! The flashy arm movement is just for the fans and our egos.

A word on Glove Position



1) I don't really have an issue with any finger orientation as long as it is working for the goalie and the palm is square to the puck's trajectory.

2) The glove position you use right now may have to be adjusted as the level of play and the quality of the shooter improves.

3) The high glove position can be a visual deterrent for the same reason players rarely shoot blocker high when they are on a break in. It is counter-intuitive to shoot at occupied space.

4) I had a kid in Toronto named Todd Ford (6'3") who was a Clark disciple and used the fingers up, erect elevated stance in his pre shot approach. In junior he would suck guys into shooting into his strengths which were low net coverage. However when he got to the AHL the players might get caught by this once, then subsequent attempts would riddle him. They would simply execute a realistic open stick fake shot with the stick puck relationship during the fake appearing like a low shot. Once the fake shot got Todd driving arms and pads down into butterfly the crafty players would simply pump a tuning fork* shot about 2 inches from his ear, bar and down.

Point number 4 illustrates the point that just because some approach works at some level you must accept the fact that as you rise up successful approaches always meet successful counters.

* A tuning fork shot for those uninitiated is a non visible puck with great velocity that only reveals itself as it goes by you due to the vibrational sound similar to that of a doctor's tuning fork that tests hearing.





The blocker save commonly takes a back seat to the flashy glove save but it is probably more important in terms of rebound control. Like your trapper the blocker should be held to the side but moved forwards slightly towards the shooter. Again, this cuts down the area open to the shooter and it allows you to see the puck strike your blocker with more ease.



The save itself

Use the speed of the puck to angle shots off your blocker into the corner. Use precise little movements and try not to punch at the puck. Simply let the puck's speed send it to the corner. Your arm will barely need to move as you rotate your wrist outward.

Advanced Tip

Be very careful if you bring your trapper across to trap the puck on the face of the blocker. If your timing is off the puck will drop to your feet for an easy tap in goal. If the incoming puck is slow enough it would be better to turn your trapper over like a first baseman and catch it clean using a kipper catch that we discuss in the rebound control section.. If you are just a beginner keep it simple. Angle the puck into the corner.



This photo illustrates a biomechanically INCORRECT blocker position.



When you "blocker lock" as illustrated you create the following issues.

1) Impossible on a hard drive to the low glove side to get stick involvement. The blocker has to move forward and THEN sideways to get stick involvement here. Anyone here able to execute that on a 85 mph snapper?

2) By holding the blocker back on a plane with the body the blocker face covers less surface area. You guys know who "PHIL SPACE" is don't you?

It is a clear fundamental error.



The two pad slide is almost extinct but can still be observed once in while in the NHL. This save has also been called "stacking the pads" or other similar variations and is very flashy when it is successful, but quite risky if there are any tight rebounds left around.

Usually, smart goalies reserve this save for desperation situations because it does fill a lot of space quickly but it does leave you out of position for any second chances.

Footwork

You must use an explosive T push to transport you to the ideal position for this save. As we mentioned in the section on skate sharpening, your effectiveness on a two pad slide will be minimal with dull skates. It is frankly impossible to explode laterally on dull blades.

Execution

As you are moving, your bottom leg snaps through underneath staying flush to the ice at all times. Your stick must also stay flat on the ice until your hip hits the ice so a quick shot can't squeak in under you.



You must end up in a nice wall without any holes as pictured. To take away the **aerial angle**, get out to the top of the crease. Notice how Marty has ended up in a position that is still square to the puck even though he isn't on his feet. Watch that you don't end up on your back, stomach or square to center ice instead of to the puck.

Gut traps



A gut trap save is a fundamental save selection that we use to handle midline shots. These are shots right at our waist, thigh or stomach area. Clearly, shots right at us should be stopped, but that is not enough. They can't just be stopped, they must be controlled with possession.

To be successful with your gut traps you have to deaden the velocity of the puck by creating a concave area so the puck can rattle around and lose its momentum. By quickly covering the concave area with your gloves you can seal the puck safely gaining the all important puck possession.

Lateral Gut Trap

Many times we don't have the luxury of being set for a stationary gut trap, so we have to use a lateral gut trap. This can be used effectively when we slide over up or down. The key is to see the puck off the stick and get a great visual lock on it all the way in.

GAME SITUATIONS

BACKDOOR PASSES



The backdoor pass occurs when a hard pass is sent off to the side of the net typically near the goal line. The goaltender has to play the shot and when the pass happens the backdoor guy is left staring at an open net.

The backdoor pass is almost impossible to stop if the play is executed properly. Take a look at when Mario Lemieux played on the Pittsburgh Penguins power play. He lived on the back door goal and probably scored half of his goals into empty nets because of nice backdoor passes.

You can increase your chances on this play by mostly being aware that a man is on the backdoor wide open. Some goaltenders get blinders on and when the pass actually happens they are shocked that the pass went to an opponent. Use your peripheral vision and let your defense know he is there.

Make a mental note on what hand he is when you notice him. This will make a big difference on what he can do to you when he gets the puck.

6" Rule

Reading this situation just before it occurs gives you a chance for a huge save on these back door plays. This is where my 6" rule comes in.

Clearly you don't want to get caught leaning and moving early or the shooter will make you pay by catching you cheating. That being said, you can't afford to wait until the pass is half way to the back door guy.

Strive to fire your lateral explosion early in the pass. You need to already be arriving at your target as the pass arrives so, in the first 6" after the pass leaves his stick you had better be on your horse!

Another strategy you can use involves preventing the pass from making it through to the open man in the first place. This will be easier on a pass to your glove hand side, so use your stick to ramp the puck up. If you get your hand locked in at the paddle your range will be really limited.

Anything close to you must be deflected away or you are dead in the water.



Backdoor Pass Strategy decision

When faced with a quick tight lateral backdoor pass (as you commonly see on a down low PP attack) you have a couple of options.

I have photos for two of these options and the pros and cons of each strategy.

Option # 1 : Post Leg up.



Here we see Mike (with his eyes closed!) set in the post leg up. He has a nice closed wall and likely has the net sealed from the passer. There is however a HUGE passing lane. Although he can likely launch over to play the pass across it would be a rare save if the attack is executed properly. In high level, hockey this pass will get to this man and it will get there hard and in the right place. This will be a sure goal.

Option # 2: Square and Challenge



Here we see Mike has read the back door threat and stepped out and squared up. The passing lane is smaller and perhaps could be broken up with a small stick movement or pad. He does expose the 5 hole if his knee drive is soft BUT an intelligent player would rarely if EVER selfishly try to 5 hole here with a man that wide open on the back door.



Here we see Mike respond to the pass with a butterfly or half pad save and we can see the corresponding diminishing of the passing lane. Clearly, when you step out like this you will have 0 % chance if the pass gets through.

However, you make the pass tough to make by shrinking the passing lane and odds wise you may fare better with the square and challenge approach. With that being said, be your own boss and see what works. Perhaps use both depending on the situation.

For me, I would prefer to see the step out approach but again remember that you must do what is working for you. The one out of 10 high lite back door saves you make by staying back here will be memorable and "the poor goalie" won't be blamed for the open net back door goal on the other 9. However, a screwed up pass because you closed the passing lane isn't pretty but I would argue will generate a higher success rate on this exact scenario then staying

STOPPING BACKHANDERS



The difficulty in stopping a backhander is the fact that they are relatively rare and when they do happen they usually catch the goaltender by surprise. The release of the backhand also makes the height of the shot difficult to judge. You may have heard in the past Howie Meeker would constantly complain about the fact that players today can't execute a decent backhander because of the curves on those newfangled sticks.

If you really take a look at NHL player's sticks you will notice they usually have very small curves and therefore have deadly backhands. Two retired guys to look at are Wayne Gretzky and Doug Gilmour. Their sticks were very straight and that gave them great control on both the forehand and backhand.

Sidney Crosby has a mid 70 mph backhand with a VERY straight blade.

This brings up a great point: **Study the sticks of your teammates and opponents. Make mental notes of how pucks jump off certain sticks and how it reacts off of others.**

Little things like this can surprisingly result in saves later on.

My advice on backhanders is fairly straight forward. Close up your stance and be sure to be lined up dead on the puck. So many goals on the backhand go in through the goaltender or go in because the goaltender was back in the crease. I challenge you to find a high lite of a backhand goal that was scored when the goaltender used a closed stance and challenged out to the top of the crease!

Advanced Tip

Smart goaltenders can force a shooter to shoot where you want especially on the backhand. Experiment with this in practice. Instead of lining up dead on the puck, shade in and line up closer to the shooter's body. Keep your closed stance and as the shot is released you probably will see nine out of ten aimed at the area you left open.

This really works well on backhands because most shooters, even NHL players look back down at the puck just before they release it. Watch NHL games especially when they use slow motion replays. Are the shooter's eyes on the puck or the open net?

One situation that causes problems for goaltenders of all levels is when an opponent has possession of the puck behind the net. It should be rather easy to handle but it is a very dangerous time for the goaltender.

Wayne Gretzky, Doug Gilmour and others routinely made goaltenders look foolish on this exact play. Why is this?

Since no human, (excluding teachers) have eyes in the back of their head, you simply can't watch both the man behind the net and open men in the slot. As well, you know you can't turn and face the man the man behind the net so how can you play this?

To learn how to handle this play lets look at what they normally are trying to do.

The cute pass out - The player will try a pass right through the crease for an easy tap in goal. Smart players have even been known to try to bank it off someone in front usually your own defenseman.

The head spinner - The player will start moving back and forth hoping the goaltender will move with them. Once they get the goalie moving with them you will see the goaltender's head start spinning side to side. They know they got you when that head starts moving.

The Houdini - The Houdini is what follows once the goaltender gets caught moving their head back and forth. The player gets you looking and or moving one way and then instantly reverses direction either walking out or passing the puck out the side you just left.

What the goaltender should do.

1) Always face your chest towards center ice. The man behind the net can't technically score from back there so chances are that the shot will eventually come from out in front.

2) Stay down low and look through the net. Assume a deep crouch and look through the net, not over it. Most goaltenders find it easier to look over their glove side shoulder, which I will talk about next.



3) Head switches. We have all seen the hapless goaltender in a panic turning their head side to side in a vain attempt to find the man behind the net who is quickly moving back and forth playing the goaltender like a fiddle. You must not get caught turning to look over the other shoulder or the man will reverse his direction and have an open side to shoot at or pass through.

4) Lead the shooter using your 'good' side. That is, took over your glove side shoulder and move slightly closer to the blocker side post. This will leave more room open on your glove side post and he will be more likely to try something on this side. You are much better exploding over to this side to break up a wraparound or a pass out.

5) Be patient. Set up like we mentioned either near or right on the blocker side post. Wait out fakes and break up any pass that is attempted close through your crease. Remember that usually they aren't going to be patient like they are in the NHL so stand up and wait them out.



Stay down low and look through the net.
This is also known as looking through your windows.



Advanced Tip

The base of the net is rounded and smart players have been known to bank one off the base of the net so the puck glances off out in front of the net. This is obviously very dangerous and you must keep your stick tight to the post side skate. Also don't be afraid to shovel some snow up against the outside of the net. This will deaden any of these passes and sometimes prevent a wraparound.



The first key to stopping a breakaway is to be prepared for them beforehand and to be keenly aware of certain situations where they normally happen.

When to be ready

1) On your power play - How many times have you seen a shorthanded goal scored on a breakaway? All the time! Breakaways frequently happen when point shots are blocked or when your defense tries to make risky D to D passes.

2) Rink wide Passes - When one of your defensemen tries to fire a rink wide pass you must be ready for a breakaway. These passes are fairly easy to pick off and some defense try to get cute by trying these passes over sticks or through legs. **Be Ready!**

3) Bad Line changes - If your team makes a lazy line change a smart team can catch you with a long breakaway pass.

4) **Last man heroics** - When the last man back on your team tries to deke around fore checkers be ready. One little poke check and their best player is off to the races.

Understanding The Shooter's Options

In the section on puck positioning I touch on the basic dekes you might encounter on a breakaway. The shooter can, and often does, try to shoot on a breakaway. It is our job to prevent a shot if at all possible. The reasoning behind this is simple. If you give a shooter too many options on a breakaway they will make you look like a fool.

When we know a deke is the only probable option our job becomes much easier.

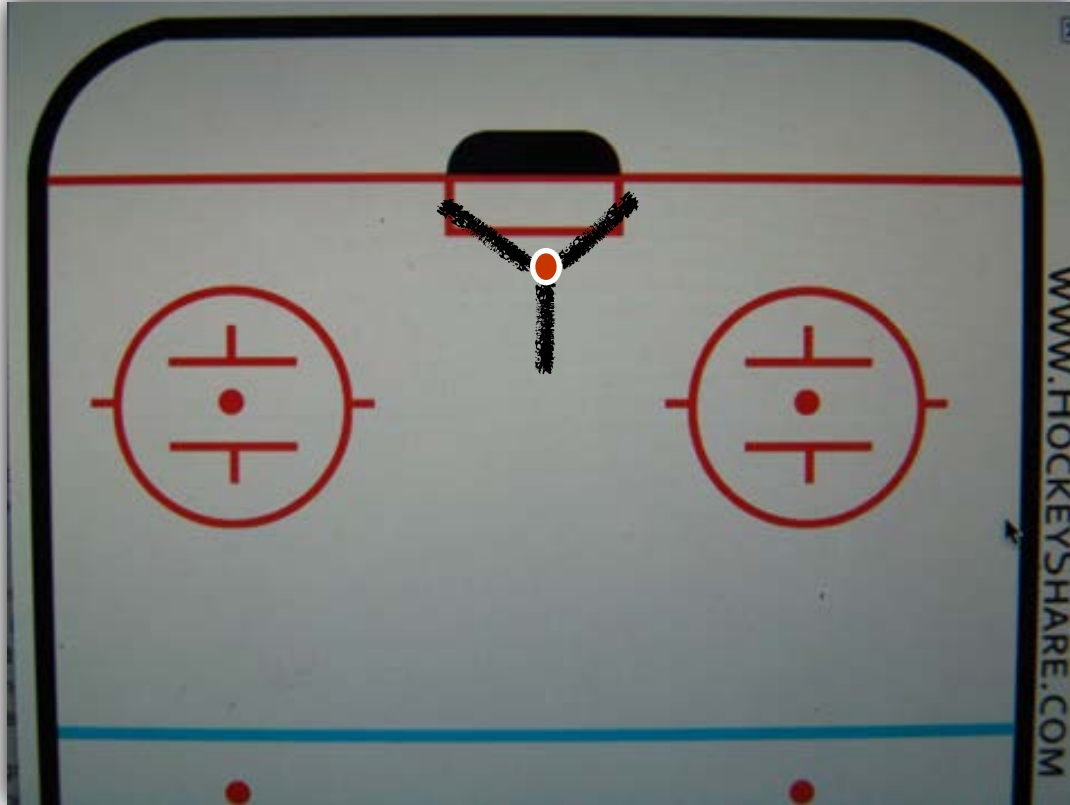


How to force the deke

Once you realize a breakaway is in progress you must challenge out 5 to 10 feet out of the blue crease. Your skating ability will determine how far you can challenge. You want to challenge for two reasons and the first is net coverage.

When you are out this far you have taken away most of the available net and to the shooter, a shot here would be risky.

The second reason you challenge is to give yourself some momentum space. This basically means that you now have 5 to 10 feet of space that you can use to back up in so that you will have 'MO" (MOmentum) on your side when the deke happens.



THE PATH YOU FOLLOW ON A BREAKAWAY RESEMBLES AN INVERTED Y. AT THE TOP OF THE CREASE YOU CAN SEE THE " MAGIC SPOT " .

Closed Stance

When you challenge out on this initial angle you must use a relatively closed stance as the shooter approaches. If you have a big five hole and your trapper is resting on your knee you will be surprised with a quick shot. Think about this from a shooter's point of view. In the split second that they have to make a decision, they will take a look at you to determine if you can be beaten with a shot.

If your gloves are in proper position and your 5 hole is not HUGE, they can't risk wasting the opportunity on a shot. They are now firmly stuck in the web you have spun with them.

Advanced Tip

Shooters who try to freeze you with a fake shot. NHL goaltenders are frustratingly patient and very adept at waiting out these little fake shots. They have developed this ability to sift through these fakes after years of falling for them and years of study.

Another point to consider.

If you are challenging properly anything that looks like a shot is probably a fake so try not to bite on it. How do you know? They aren't going to risk a missed opportunity with a pin point shot as I mentioned above so no matter how cute they get, it is likely just window dressing.

Angle Hesitation and The Retreat

Once you have established position at the top of the initial angle you must hold it ALMOST too long using something we call angle hesitation. By staying out there as long as possible you greatly increase the odds of a deke.

The timing of this backwards movement is difficult to master but there are some cues to use. When they get within a stick length you must begin to back up maintaining a fairly tight stance. If they have a great deal of speed built up you will have to adjust your retreat speed accordingly.

Remember, if you back in too soon you will open up net to shoot at and if you are too slow backing up then they will easily deke around you. The perfection of this timing takes years of practice and careful study of the shooters.

The Magic Spot

When your backwards motion takes you to the top of the blue crease it must be transferred in a lateral , diagonal direction as illustrated above. (The inverted 'Y') If you fail to explode laterally at this magic point you will cause several problems:

1) You open up the aerial angle - Even if you make a nice lateral push, it will be easy for the snipers to roof it on you. Some goaltenders try to explode diagonally back to the post but this leaves lots of room over your pad and gloves.



Kipper gets beat over the pad. He may have had better luck sliding across the top of the crease instead of reaching back to the post. There are no more lay ups in the NHL here. This puck can be elevated quite easily.

2) You open up the whole net - When the deke happens some goaltenders fall into the trap of sliding straight back into the net with obvious dire results. Ideally, you should be at the top of the blue crease when you execute a save on a breakaway. Lundqvist is a great goaltender to study for his approach to the breakaway. **Textbook!**



The most common save you will use on the breakaway is the sliding butterfly. When you reach the magic spot your backwards motion is explosively transferred in a lateral, diagonal direction as you drop to a perfect half pad save.

You MUST keep your stick on the ice and in the five hole at all times. The snipers live by the five hole goal and they will try to catch you with a lazy stick. Lead with your stick and quickly get the knee on the ice. There is nothing more frustrating than being in perfect position and having the puck go through you or underneath you. You should move in a tight controlled package.

Poke checks

Poke checks on dead on breakaways are very risky and should be used very sparingly. For each of the saves I made with poke checks on dead on breakaways, I probably gave up two goals on missed poke checks. They really are an all or nothing attempt and hugely embarrassing if you miss. If you are foolish enough to try a poke check on a dead on breakaway here are a few tips.

- 1) Start your retreat and make it look like you are going to play the breakaway properly.
- 2) You have to hide your intentions Don't telegraph the poke.
- 3) You will have more success If his stick is closed and if you can quickly stop your retreat and lunge explosively forward. Expect a poke check to work about one time out of five on a dead on breakaway. You have to ask yourself that famous question Clint Eastwood muttered, "Do you feel lucky? "

Advanced Tip

A good fake poke works almost as well because you don't commit yourself. If your fake is realistic enough the shooter will flinch and go to their deke early. Look at my article about fake poke checks in this book.

Breakaways off the wing are handled virtually the identical way as a dead on breakaway.

Challenge - Retreat - Read - Explode on the inverted Y

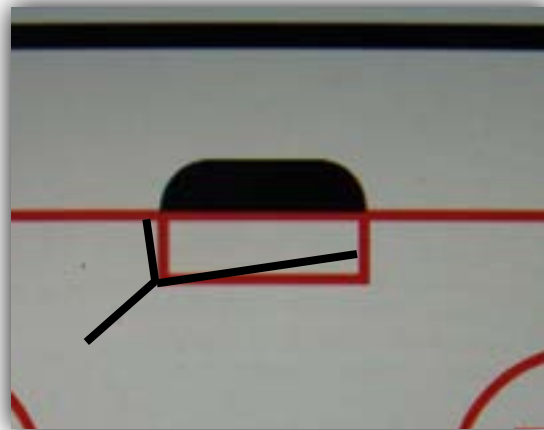
There are a few notable differences however.

1) You can force them to cut in front to the far side which will buy you some time and give the back checker a chance to help out. To force them to cut in front, simply shade over to the short side a little as you retreat. This fools them into thinking you lost the angle.

The Dynamic Post Leg up will work well in this situation. As the player approaches the goalie begins to do a properly timed retreat back to the top of the crease. Near the end of the retreat the inside pad is placed in a post leg up position. This closes the 5 hole option and covers the short side completely leaving the attacker with really only one option, a cut in across the crease. With a proper momentum build the goalie can now drive laterally using a butterfly slide. This will ensure minimal net is available along the ice.

Ideally, the attacker must be under serious pressure for this strategy to work well. A smart goalie will also protect the immediate area in front of them with a half poke check if the attacker chooses to come that close.

2) The inverted 'Y' shape is still the path to follow but it has slightly changed in shape.



THE INVERTED Y PATTERN SHIFTS ON A BREAKAWAY OFF THE WING.

HOW ARE YOUR NERVES? (Use this at your own risk!)

I have taught you the proper way to play a breakaway but you must never underestimate the power of surprise. Shooters know that goaltenders are taught to challenge out and retreat so they are comfortable when they see the goaltender come out.

This next tip is EXTREMELY risky but oh so amazing if it is successful. It takes nerves of steel and the approach of a gunfighter. Who will blink first?

I tried this on the 5th shooter of a tied THL shootout in front of 15,000 fans. Instead of coming out, I stood right on the goal line in a perfect stance. As the shooter approached I could tell he was panicking. He probably had a plan beforehand and now all he could think was, "What the &%\$* is this goaltender trying to do? "

As he got closer, he saw a lot of net as I patiently stood right on the goal line perfectly still. As he began to shoot I dropped to the perfect two pad slide. The gamble paid off as his shot sailed a foot over the net. Surprise is a goaltenders best friend! (Besides his jock)



There are three main areas where shooters position the puck while they are stick handling.

A zone (forehand)



The A zone is a very dangerous goal scoring position. The shooter positions the puck directly to their side with the stick blade open facing the net. When a shooter is stick handling with the puck in the A zone or forehand side you must realize a shot can happen in an instant.

B zone (dekeing position)



The B zone is also called the deke position because the puck is positioned directly in front of the shooter with the stick closed, meaning that the blade isn't facing the net rather it is perpendicular to the net. It is almost impossible for a shooter to actually shoot with the puck directly in front of them.

This in reality is a set up position. By this I mean that the shooter gets you to line up on the puck in B zone and then quickly pulls the puck to the forehand or A zone which quickly gives the shooter open area to shoot at. At the higher levels not only do they pull the puck to A zone but they could pull it to C zone for a surprise backhand shot.



The C zone as I just mentioned is to the shooter's backhand side. Good goal scorers are just as dangerous shooting from here as on their forehand or A zone.

Another way to describe what the shooter is attempting to do to the goaltender by altering which zone the puck is in, is called "beating you with their hands". NHL snipers can easily use any of these zones as a set up and then pull the puck to another zone for an easy goal.

This ability gives the top snipers many options and this is why you rarely see NHLers miss when they are in alone on the goaltender. Did I mention that all this puck wizardry occurs even as the snipers are approaching you at full speed ? Yikes !!!!!

COVERING LOOSE PUCKS



Many goaltenders give up cheesy goals because they weren't hungry or aggressive enough to smother a loose puck. This comes back to practice habits and you must treat these loose pucks in practice as you would in a game.

The first thing a young goaltender must do is to actually stop the puck as it comes to the net. We have all seen the tyke goalie try to smother the puck and have it scoot under them. Stop it first.

If the shot has some speed you will have to cushion the puck with your stick so the puck is deadened by your feet. Drop to your glove side knee, slamming your trapper on the puck. Place your stick in front of your glove to protect it from incoming skates and sticks.

Keep your head up away from the ice so you can see what is coming and keep your head and neck away from skates and "accidental" knees to the head.

If the puck has squirted out of the reach of your glove carefully, but quickly pass the puck back to a smothering position with your goal stick.

Advanced Tip

What should you do when some guy gets cute and gives you a snow shower? Ignore it! If you react, you will be playing into their hands as well as the fans, if it is a road game. This snowing is only done for one reason, to try to get you off your game. Ignore it and they will likely give up trying to fire you up.

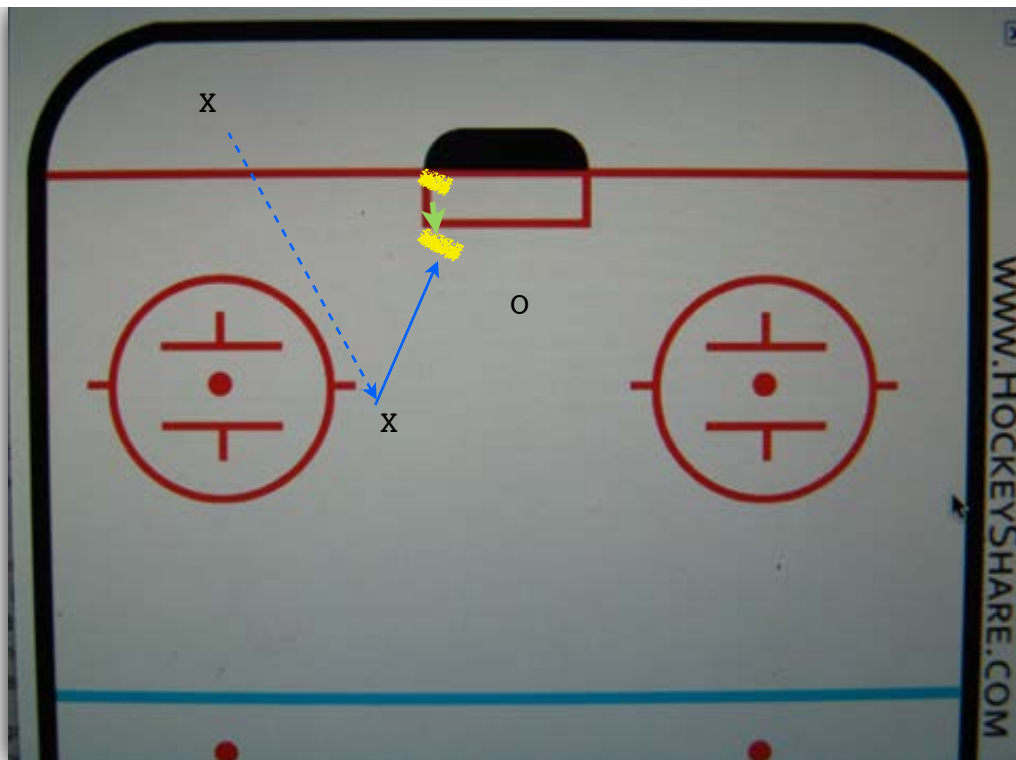
Before you even attempt to break up centering passes you must know how to hug the post perfectly or you may end up scoring on yourself, which we all agree can shorten your career.

I have watched hundreds of goals scored on bang - bang plays that could have been prevented. The classic example is the pass from the corner that some stiff spansks in the open net. The announcer states, " The poor goaltender didn't have a chance". This type of goal is almost as bad as letting one in from center and here is why. If you are hugging the post properly, a player in the corner can fire 500 pucks at you and you will stop 500 even if your eyes are closed! So why give 100% of your concentration to a player who has 0 % chance of scoring?

Many goaltenders get so fixated on these players that they develop blinders and can't anticipate the play that is about to-happen. We all have watched Gretzky mesmerize everyone and then lay one right on the stick for an easy tap in goal. The solution is easy. Protect your limits and deny access to close pucks without being crazy, lunging and too aggressive.



NEVER LET A PUCK PASS THROUGH YOUR LIMITS, WHICH MIKE IS DEMONSTRATING HERE. (he has flipped stick over for demo purposes only)



In our last chapter we covered breaking up centering passes in depth. If the pass does get through, you have to EXPLODE to the top of the crease. If you stay back in the net you will never have a prayer.

In the case of a one-timer this save will usually be a "hit me " save. This simply means that there is no way to physically react so your positioning has to be correct to make the save.

You need to know what hand the open man is and where he is BEFORE he gets the pass. Our section on "looking off the puck" explains this in great detail.

If the player holds the pass and walks in with the puck you have to react. You must get set when you get to the top of the crease or a sniper will give you the old " how's she-going " (deke around you!)

It is crucial that this explosive movement is done with a proper stance. Stay down in your crouch with your stick on the ice and be sure to keep your gloves out and open. A quick one-timer can result in an unbelievable accidental save if you keep this in mind.

The drop slapper typically happens on odd man rushes like a 2 on 1 or a 3 on 2. Usually the puck carrier will be off on the wing in a poor shooting position looking to pass to a teammate. Once he sees an open teammate he will drop the puck back and then bust for the net looking for the rebound.

The trailing player probably will let a slapper go without stopping it trying to keep the puck low. He wants it low so his teammates can pounce on the puck if the goaltender chokes out a cheesy rebound.

Well that's what they are trying to do, so what should the goaltender do to handle this situation?

As the play develops in the neutral zone take a quick look to see if any trailers are following up the rush. You must keep razor sharp focus on the puck carrier staying square in case he brings a quick one at the net. Even though you are really focused on the puck carrier you must use a quick look to see where the slapper may come from and if you're really alert, what hand the trailer is.

Once the drop pass happens take a quick step out to the trailer staying low preparing for the rocket that is about arrive. Use your stick blade or paddle to deflect the puck out of danger or if the shot is above the knees get a glove or blocker on it.

All those hours of rebound practice now really pay off, If you leave a juicy rebound in the kill zone here it will be in the back of the net before you know it.

Advanced Tip

Make sure you get your stick on any low shot here. A butterfly save that hits a pad instead of the stick will always corm out into danger.



If an NHL goaltender wants to get on the nightly high lites all he has to do is let in a long shot. Every goalie has let a long one in and some have let in more than their share. Your career will be very short if you make this a habit so lets talk about how to prevent the embarrassment.

The long bouncer

This situation usually occurs when a team needs a line change and flips a puck up over everyone's head from center in the general direction of the net or the corner. The problem in playing this type of shot is the fact that the puck is a lot like a football; it bounces in unpredictable ways often changing directions in a split second.

The best option on this play is to skate out and try to catch the puck cleanly before it bounces if possible. This eliminates rebounds for the eager forechecker and prevents the puck from taking an awkward bounce.

The second option involves closing your stance and dropping to one knee challenging the bounce. By arriving as close to the bounce as possible, you can really take away all the available net even if the puck bounces weirdly. The closed stance prevents the puck from squeaking through you.

Be aware that the puck can jump off you forcing a dangerous rebound so prepare for it.

Never drop to one knee and try to catch a bouncing puck if you have stayed back in the net. I have seen several great NHL goaltenders let in cheapies doing just that. Don't let the bounce play you!

The Long Drifter

The sight of Al McInnis winding up at centre ice with his sights on the goaltender was a scary scene. These long drifters are not routine saves and are often misplayed with tragic results. These shots differ from bouncers obviously because they stay in the air.

This doesn't mean the puck travels in straight predictable ways however. Besides the fact that the puck can approach 100 mph, it also dips, drops, rises and sometimes blends in with the background crowd. Imagine the sheer panic you feel as the missile approaches that fast, possibly at your head, without being able to see it.

You must be mentally alert and focused before this shot is released to play it properly. The reason why I say something so obvious is the fact that goaltenders sometimes aren't as prepared when the puck is in the neutral zone. That being said, you must challenge out at the top of the crease and try to get your trapper on the puck. A long shot like this can really hem a team in their zone if the goaltender carelessly deflects the shot into the corner. Catch it clean and set the puck up for a quick break out. Try not to be tempted to reach up and trap a puck above your eye level. This type of shot can easily be deflected down into your own net. In that case let your defense pound the puck out of your zone.

Advanced Tip Be very careful on routine dump-ins that appear like they are going around the boards. Smart opponents can adjust their downswing at the last second forcing the over-eager goaltender behind the net while the puck easily sails into the empty net. Wait until the puck is released before you dart behind the net.

Looking Off the Puck / Advanced Centering Passes

Fundamental level goaltenders are very puck focused and rarely look around at other players. Full concentration on the puck is crucial for the developing goalie but as the game quickens the Elite goalie must learn to implement this advanced technique.

"Looking Off the Puck" simply means taking in various important visual cues away from the puck in brief non-dangerous moments. These glimpses allow the goaltender to intelligently anticipate potential attacks and identify dangerous players.

A prime example of "looking off the puck" occurs when the line rush develops in the neutral zone. The pro goaltender will quickly glance at all the players involved and assess whether threats like drop passes, back door passes or cut ins are likely. Once the play has set up in the defensive zone there are key situations when a goaltender should look off the puck. Sideboard or corner puck battles allow the goaltender a chance to see if some crafty player is open out front.

Most saves on centering pass one timers are the result of fore knowledge on the part of the elite goaltender. Knowing generally where the man is and what hand he is can be learned with these quick looks to the slot. On a penalty kill subtly looking off the puck as it moves around the perimeter will allow accurate prediction of cross crease or cross box passes.

Almost every game played at the pro level will provide an example of a goal scored as a result of a centering pass. They are dangerous plays to be sure, but if a few key tactics are employed we can shift the margin of success to the goalie.

A) Quick looks

Knowing who is open, where he is and what hand he is allows the goaltender to get a mental jump on the save. If these quick looks indicate a centering pass is imminent bring your close post arm inside the post in preparation for your explosive challenge.

B) Which Hand?

Your explosive challenge off the post needs to be targeted at the stick side of the opponent otherwise you'll leave massive amounts of net available.

C) **Pass Prevention**

If the puck never makes it to the man in front he can't score. Break up all tight passes and every once and a while try to suck the man in by pulling your stick out of the passing lane. A flat pass can now be easily intercepted.

D) **Angle Hesitation**

Only the best goalies in the world exhibit this strategy effectively. Instead of exploding out dead in the middle of the angle, explode out holding to the short side of the angle. In the instant the shooter assesses the open space he won't realize you are baiting him into that open side. When done correctly, it won't occur to him that you purposely did it and you'll be able to slam the door upon release.

E) **Assessing the pass**

The quality of the centering pass will dictate what the man in front will likely attempt. If the pass is bouncing or deflected slightly the man in front will need to corral it first before he can hammer it. On a pass in his feet or closer to his backhand, a one timer is highly unlikely. Of course, a firm flat pass in his wheelhouse will be pounded on net with contempt.



This is a common game situation at all levels of hockey. Take a close look at the following items:

- 1) The attacker has significant backside pressure
- 2) His head is down with a split focus on the puck
- 3) His stick is "closed" meaning that his stick blade is square to the side boards, not the goalie.
- 4) There is a really small "gate" for the attacker to pull the puck through to the other side.

Strategies to play this and things to avoid:

- a) This is a classic place where you will see stick shyness. Many modern goalies will not use their stick here in a classic, high success place.
- b) Many goalies will lose depth and allow the gate to the far side of the net to open.
- c) If the blocker gets locked on the pad a quick lateral puck adjustment towards the far side we see the attacker able to slide the "excuse -me" slider back through the 5 hole.

Be aggressive in this situation with a standing or butterfly poke check. If he somehow gets across, missing your poke check rely on your knee drive and strong butterfly slide to seal off the player. As well, be sure you don't play this passive depth wise and open up a gate that doesn't need to be there.

ONE TIMERS



The one timer is a deadly scoring attempt that results when a player blasts a pass without stopping it. It causes many problems for the goaltender because the play happens so quickly and because the goaltender is frequently caught my surprise.

There are certain situations in the game when you might expect to see the one timer. The most common situation occurs when you are killing a penalty and the other team passes between their defensemen. When their trigger man gets the soft pass they like they will 'tee' it up.

Another common time for the one timer to rear its ugly head is on a 2 on 1 where the wide guy lays it back for the trailer to blast. The goaltender who has great lateral movement and a keen sense of anticipation will turn the one timer into another routine save.

There are some clues or triggers that will give this play away.

1) Look for open players who have their sticks half- cocked. Sometimes a player will "ask" for a one timer pass by holding their stick back in a pre slap shot position. You need good off-puck awareness to make this read.

2) They also can call for the one time pass by raising their stick over their head to signal a teammate or by tapping their stick on the ice. Be very aware of the danger man and get an idea before the pass occurs where approximately it will be released from when he drills it.

Challenge at the top of the crease and especially on a one timer be sure to use a closed stance.

This is frequently a "hit me" save because if it is executed properly you physically can not react to the puck. You must rely on great positioning and allow the puck to hit you.

A tight butterfly will work well on this if you challenge at the top of the crease. If you can prevent the puck from going through any holes and you made a good read on the play, then it is going to take a big time shot to beat you.

Advanced Tip

These one timers are frequently practiced at the higher levels and are very accurate. Since people in front don't like pucks in the face most shots should be low. Many one timers come gift wrapped with a screen so use this tendency to your advantage.



When you are playing one or two men short you are trying to kill the penalty and this happens several times a game. This is an odd man situation, which means that there will always be someone open somewhere so be careful that you don't over challenge or they will pass around you for an easy goal.

Chances are the puck will be in your zone for most of time so you must be in great condition physically to handle this situation properly.

Usually there are two types of goals scored in this situation so lets look at them and then we can learn how to stop them.

Pass-pass-pass-open net-goal

Talented teams will try to move the puck around quickly until they spot an opening and then they try to set someone up for an easy tap in. In some cases perfect execution will result in a goal every time but here are some tips that will help you. Use your peripheral vision and try to take quick looks to see where everyone is and try to anticipate the play. Try to see what the puck carrier sees and who is open and where they are. Talk to you defensemen and let them know if someone has snuck in without being noticed.

Advanced goalies can use relaxed concentration here waiting until just before the final attack comes. This conserves energy but is a skill reserved for the very elite. Otherwise, move explosively, stay in your crouch and smoother anything that comes near you. When you are shorthanded, get as many whistles as possible.

Point-point-point-blaster-crash the net

Another common strategy is to place a big dummy in front of the net and pound the goalie with shots from the point. The intention is to screen the goaltender and crash the net looking for rebounds if the goaltender does stop the first shot.

The best way to handle this situation is to stay out at the top of the crease and play it like a standard screen shot. Remember that there is an extra man or two floating around so rebounds must be controlled or someone is going to get a wide open net. Try to get your glove on everything and use your stick to ramp low shots up into the stands to give your team a breather.

When the man is placed in front of you to screen remember not to get too wound up with chopping him, just focus on the pack.

Advanced Tips

In the later stages of a game or when your guys are tired this is a great time to use some time delay strategies. They are discussed in more detail later, but some that come to mind are the "loose strap", the "accidental net off of the moorings", the "my water bottle is empty " and of course the "I got something in my eye/ lost my contact lens" strategies.

On lazy dumpins the puck can be cleared the length of the ice by a goaltender with good puck handling skills. Unless your name starts with 'Hex' and ends with 'tall' never go up the middle with it. Use the glass or boards and try to make contact just inside the blue line so the puck is hard to trap in your zone.

POINT SHOTS



A point shot originates out near the blue line and commonly involves screens, tips and often leaves juicy rebounds if it is not handled properly. The shot will either be a missile designed to beat you cleanly or an off speed shot that is designed to be tipped or screened.

Each situation is very dangerous and many stoppable goals occur from point shots.

How to handle it

- 1) Challenge to the top of the crease without getting tied up with people in front of the net.
- 2) Stay low and fight to find the puck if an early screen is set up.
- 3) Use your vision to see if late screens are coming or if tip men are set tip to the side.
- 4) A low shot must be angled out of danger with your stick and try to get a glove on anything off the ice. Remember you will be at their mercy if a rebound is thrown out to the slot.
- 5) If a potential rebound is likely try not to commit yourself by leaving your feet. It is far better to give out a rebound if you are on your feet if it is unavoidable. If you butterfly or paddle down you have to realize you may be hung out to dry.

Advanced Tip

Try not to over challenge or run out at the point shot. Watch that a shot wide of the net doesn't quickly rebound back out in front or even worse off you and in the net. Know the boards!

When your team gains a man advantage or receives a power play there are many things you should watch out for as a goaltender. Too many goaltenders and players for that matter relax just a little in this situation. It isn't surprising that so many teams give up short-handed goals.

A good thing to do when you are in this situation is to constantly remind yourself to watch out for a giveaway. It is actually one of the best times in a game to be ready for a clear breakaway. How many times have you seen a point man fire one off of someone's shin pads or make a risky pass to their defense partner?

Anyway, be very aware that a breakaway might happen and take a look at their penalty killers. When the other team eventually clears the zone, quickly set up the puck for your defensemen. Some goaltenders try to force the play by firing a rocket pass up to one of their teammates. This should be avoided because more often than not the play is turned over. Let your defense bring the puck up under control because you will be more successful in the long run.

If you do see the other team making a lazy line change you might want to try to catch them asleep with a pass up, but use your puck handling abilities wisely.

If the other team gets a rush together you should really challenge outside your crease. There is very little chance for a cute pass to a teammate so try not to get caught back in your net sleeping.

Advanced Tip

When I was faced with this situation in the game I would really try to psyche myself up because I knew how much it deflates a team to give up a shorthanded goal. I would say things to myself out loud to help me focus. I said things like, " watch out, here it comes! ", " He is going to give it away, be ready! " etc. It may sound weird but by saying these things out loud actually brings your focus to the situation and keeps your mind from wandering. It worked for me.

Goaltending and rebound control is comparable to golfing and the short game. Rebound control skills are similar to putting and chipping in that they never can be perfected yet require constant vigilance to maintain or improve.

We often hear about the poor goalie being scored on after the 3rd or 4th whack at the puck. The implication here is that he was left exposed by his defence. The responsibility for rebounds lies with the goaltender not the defenseman ! Don't allow your goaltending future to be dictated by the quality of your defense.

In "Goaltending Fundamentals" we introduced rebound control and here we want to step it up by looking at some advanced techniques and by understanding the cognitive side to rebound control.

Advanced Techniques & Tactics

A) Paddle / Blocker Use

On shots just above the pad we have to be able to get down with the blocker or use the paddle of the stick to angle the puck to the corner

When using the blocker, you must be careful to maintain stick position because a deflection here will probably drive back under you. The purposeful use of the paddle on these shots is a vanishing skill. As long as the pad backs up the save the goaltender can get some very precise results.

B) Gut Trap Shift

As we have learned in our previous discussions, the "L" theory can be very helpful in understanding basic rebound control. We learned that shots inside the "L" should be controlled with possession and shots outside the "L" should be directed to the closest corner.

Pro goaltenders also develop the ability to shift laterally as they drive into a gut trap. In doing so, they move the "L" sideways which allows them to get puck possession of shots that otherwise would have to have been directed to the corner.

As we will learn shortly this is clearly a superior approach anytime a goaltender can get puck possession.

C) Active Glove

The best goaltenders in the world have incredible active gloves. Shots that are destined for the knees, the hip and the low corners are routinely snagged.

The use of the glove on these shots is clearly a decision. You will stop it just as well with your pad or your goal pants but - will you really control it?

Your job is not to stop the puck.....rather control it!

Have one of your accurate teammates place hard shots in this quadrant. In your mind, visualize that you are only wearing your trapper and your skates. With that as your mindset you'll be surprised how active your glove becomes.



Kipper Catch

What used to be forbidden is now a successful rebound control technique. Turning the glove over like a first baseman is a great skill to have to add precision in your rebound control game. Turn the glove over and follow all the way into your glove with a visual lock. Try not to chase pucks across your midline. You can also use your kipper catch from your butterfly to snag these dangerous pucks with precision.

D) Over square

All goaltenders are taught the importance of being square to the puck. As you may recall, being square can be simply defined as keeping your belly button always facing at the puck.

An exception exists for elite goaltenders when playing poor angle shots.

By slightly shifting to an "over square" position as the puck is released we can increase the likelihood of the rebound staying out of danger in the slot.

Many goaltenders make the mistake of being what we call "under square" and in doing so provide a nice backboard for the crafty shooters. Now, dangerous slot rebounds can be easily generated.

E) Shin vs. Boot Break

A puck striking a leg pad during a butterfly or half pad save will respond differently depending on the point of contact.

If the puck strikes in this area, known as the shin, it will typically bound to the nearest corner.

However, if a goaltender permits the puck to strike in this area, known as the boot break, a dangerous rebound will result.

Because of the somewhat unpredictable nature of the pad, wherever possible we must get the stick involved.

Potential tips and partial screens are examples of common situations where the goaltender should leave their stick in the five-hole area. There is too great a risk of a shot through the goalie.

F) Rebound Control Priorities

All rebounds generated by a goaltender can be classified. By assigning a priority to this classification we can learn to be a better rebound control goalie.

#1) Possession

The ultimate result of any shot on goal from a goaltender's point of view is puck possession. Now the goaltender can dictate whether the play continues or not. If your team is tired after killing a long penalty you can hold it. If you don't want a defensive zone face off you can keep the play going. The opposition can never score when your team has puck possession.

#2) Corners with Elevation

In the event that you can't achieve puck possession, the next best outcome would be for the puck to be directed neatly to the corner. This keeps the puck out of danger and allows your team a moment to regroup and assess their defensive zone responsibilities. Wherever possible elevate the puck here to buy you extra time. The only drawback to this result is that you don't maintain puck possession and you can't manage the clock. Your team may lose the battle for this puck and it might end up behind you.

#3) Keep it in front

If you mess up and can't get puck possession or can't direct it to the corner, the next best outcome is to keep the puck in front of you. Don't get me wrong. We are not advocating the purposeful booting of pucks back out in front as a strategy. What we are saying is that if better options don't occur at the very least keep the puck in front of you. Ideally, you should already have decent initial shot position and although a dangerous rebound is available you give yourself a chance here because you are already squared up to the puck.

#4) Weak side

You won't be playing for money if you routinely allow weak side rebounds.

A weak side rebound lays off to the side of the goaltender and typically the opponent will be left staring at a yawning cage.

No one purposely plans to allow these weak side rebounds and granted many situations do occur where you are lucky to even get a piece of the first shot.

A goaltender with a tendency to allow too many weak side rebounds must address this area with diligence in practice.

#5) Goal

Of course the worst outcome of all is a goal. Although technically no rebound occurred, for our classification system we need to track this area.

Rebound Control Evaluation

Now that we understand how rebounds are prioritized we can apply this system to analyze our game performance. Have someone track every shot on goal during a game and record the appropriate score for the resulting rebound.

For a possession save - Score 1
a puck put in the corners - Score 2
a puck back in front - Score 3
a puck left on the weak side - Score 4
a goal against - Score 5

By tallying these scores and dividing by the total number of shots against you will generate a rebound control efficiency average.

An average closer to one is an outstanding performance. An average closer to five is regrettable and sends the message that your practice focus must improve.

G) Cognitive skills

Once a goaltender has a keen understanding of rebound control priority and all the various rebound control strategies and techniques, he must learn the thinking part. The application of this knowledge at the appropriate time requires elite cognitive skills.

Shot placement, shot velocity, reaction time and the specific game situation dictate the goaltender's ability to prioritize rebound control.

For example, when faced with a hard one timer in tight, the goaltender will be most concerned with the initial save at the expense of precise rebound control. Because of the high shot velocity and proximity of the attack the goaltender instinctively prepares to battle for a post save loose puck.

On a hard, clear point shot the goaltender's approach is different. The goaltender understands that not only must the initial save be made but also there must be precise rebound control.

The final area to address here is peripheral awareness in the fractional moments before a shot is released. By keenly understanding where the opponents are lurking, the elite goaltender can either target the rebound to soft areas where their teammates are or make sure the puck isn't left in danger zones near the opposition.

H) Save % in Practice



Practice is where rebound control improvements occur. A conscious focus and a burning hatred for rebounds in practice will result in dramatic improvements. To quantify this improvement select a knowledgeable, impartial observer to track your save percentage in practice. Record all shots on goal and all the goals you give up. The save percentage generated will be quite illuminating and knowing that each shot in practice is being tallied will result in more attention to tidy rebound control.



In hockey today players are bigger and faster. The screen shot is a large part of hockey and this increase in size is a problem. Many goalies complain to anyone who will listen that they were screened and that a particular goal was not their fault. In my books this excuse shouldn't be used. A goaltender by definition is supposed to stop every shot from entering the net.

We all know this is impossible but this is the goal: TO FIND THE PUCK

To play a screen shot the goalie must do everything in their power not to be screened in the first place. Sounds difficult doesn't it? Use your peripheral vision to see opponents who are potential screens and be aware before the screen is set that one is coming.

Look over shoulders or get down low and try to look through legs and armpits for the puck. Bob and weave like a boxer, looking everywhere until you find it. Keep your stick flat on the ice and your gloves open in case a shot is already on its way.

If you sense that the shot has been released drop into a perfect butterfly. (Stick flat, knees close, feet fanned out and gloves open) Attempt to do this move as far away from the goal line as possible with out getting tangled up in traffic. You must be prepared for a juicy rebound here, if you are fortunate to have the puck hit you in the first place.

SCREEN SHOTS - ADVANCED TIPS

There are several tricks that you can use to encourage opponents to move away from your crease. First, remember that your primary objective is to stop the puck so do not get preoccupied with the man in front.

#1) Pushing or hitting a man above the waist who is screening you, will usually result in a costly penalty. A forceful push with your trapper below the waist can work well. For instance, place your trapper on the opponent's butt and as the pointman releases the shot, push him into the coming heater.

Don't push so hard that he falls down, just enough to get him out of the area. Usually, the opponent will lift his stick off the ice to maintain balance (makes tips difficult) and his focus shifts from tong to screen you to protecting vital parts of his anatomy from an incoming projectile.

#2) This trick is similar to #1. **Place the blade of your stick against the heel** of your opponents skate. Select the skate on his stick side. As the incoming shot is released push against his skate by prying your stick across the front of your leg pad. This push causes the opponent to momentarily lose their balance and their stick will leave the ice as they fight to regain their balance. You now can make the save without worrying about a tip.

Stick on Stick

Recently I have noticed a disturbing trend that is appearing all too frequently at all levels of hockey. This trend has caused many bad goals, bad rebounds and many needless losses. As a result of this approach that is currently being taught to position players, low percentage scoring chances are being turned into high percentage scoring chances. Why then would head coaches teach this defensive zone approach if it creates more problems than it solves? What exactly are we talking about and why is this cancer creeping in the game?



“Stick on stick” is a defensive zone strategy where ill-informed coaches stress the importance of ALWAYS trying to block the offensive players shots by placing their sticks in the shooting lane.

Please don't get me wrong, if this strategy is employed with intelligence and in the proper situations it can be very effective. As a blanket, all encompassing approach to every shot on net you get in to trouble. This strategy should only be used when the defender is very tight to the attacker (ie. Stick length or less) and only on shots in very dangerous locations like the slot. A shot from above the circles or near the boards on the poor angle should NEVER be interfered with. The goalie must be given a clean look at these pucks. Any decent goalie will stop these perimeter shots at an amazingly high percentage if things aren't complicated with unnecessary, ill advised sticks in the shooting lane.

In a pro game last season I watched in mock horror as 6 of 7 goals entered the net after slightly deflecting off a defender's stick making the goalie look foolish. Uninitiated, but experienced announcers opined that the goalie would "like that one back", as if it was the goalies fault.

Let me begin by breaking down why coaches mistakenly believe that stick on stick is the way to go. They will recall anecdotally several shots being deflected harmlessly off the defender's stick up into the netting. These few examples resonate in their brains and they think that these cases are the rule, not the exception. In fact, a vast percentage of recent shots on net in a random game I evaluated did not go harmlessly out of play as a result of eager beavers with their floundering sticks in the shooting lane.

Many of these half-hearted attempts to block the puck with their sticks managed to still make it dangerously to the net.

What is specifically wrong with trying to block these shots on net with the defender's sticks?

1) When a stick is placed in a shooting lane the goalie many times does not get a clear look at the most important part of a shot. The exact stick / puck relationship at the moment of release allows the goalie to assess direction, elevation and velocity. Many times the defender's stick masks this critical moment and the goalie now becomes somewhat of a spectator, guessing at the crucial factors mentioned above. The tangible results are that surprising goals go in EVEN if the puck isn't deflected and if the puck is stopped, precision is unlikely and needless rebounds result. We all realize that dangerous rebounds cause immediate goals or delayed goals when the opposition scores on a power play caused by preventing the earlier rebound chance.

2) When a defender is several feet away from the attacker and still decides to put the stick in the lane the puck may slightly change directions and the goalie will have zero chance to respond on these pucks. Even if the change of direction happens 20 feet away, from a physiology standpoint, a human cannot physically respond with their innate reaction times.

3) When your goalie hears that their teammates have to attempt to block every shot with their sticks it sends the message to them that the goalie can't be trusted and they need to do his job for him. If your goalie hears this enough his confidence

will suffer. Add on a couple of cheesy goals on self induced tipped shots and your goalie is well on his way to a confidence meltdown. It would be a similar situation if you asked your goalies to play EVERY loose puck instead of the defence because they can't be trusted to do their job and make a simple zone exit themselves.

I'm all for blocked shots and stern efforts to prevent goals. By definition that is what goalies do. I do however have some very simple, well-reasoned pieces of advice regarding the proper deployment of shot blocking strategies with the "stick on stick" approach.

A) Keep your sticks well out of the way on all shots from the perimeter and poor angles. Trust your goalie to do their job!

B) Only get your stick in the shooting lane if you are right in the opponents face AND they are in a very dangerous shooting area.

In simple terms we need to stop this madness of making low percentage scoring chances unnecessarily high percentage scoring chances.



TIPS AND DEFLECTIONS



Tips cause goaltenders more headaches than anything else they face because not only will opponents tip pucks on you, your own players often do as well. The quick surprising changes of direction make this save almost impossible to react on so you must rely on anticipation and positioning to snuff this out.

Anticipation

Point shots are often designed to be deflected so this would be a great situation to use when I talk about anticipation. Normally a player will be stationed to the side of you waiting for the puck to deflect it. Before the pointman releases the puck you must be aware that a man is in a position where a tip might happen. Some goaltenders get blinders on and are never even aware that the man was even there. Anticipate the tip but don't cheat before the shot is released. It may end being a straight on boomer.

As the puck comes in you must challenge the tip, which requires that

you know generally where the tip man is going to touch the puck. Experience will teach you where this will typically happen but take a quick look what the tip man is for a little more information.

Positioning (Jamming the tip)

When a 100 mph shot is tipped you can't physically react. This is therefore a "hit me" save as opposed to a "reaction" save. You must explode out as close as possible to where you think the tip will be made. This must be done at the top of the crease or you will have pucks jumping up over your shoulders. A good tight half pad save or a paddle down save will work well here. Be prepared to bounce back on your feet to handle any rebounds.

The Aerial Tip

An aerial tip occurs when a puck is tipped from the air, unlike most tips that happen from low shots. More times than not an aerial tip will be tipped down on you which is just good stuff to know. Avoid straightening up out of your stance because of this fact.



When a pointman is pressured they often just float one at the net so you have all these sticks waving at it as it drifts in. Ignore the waving sticks and focus on the puck. Close up your stance keeping your stick flat and challenge out to meet the puck.



In this situation a player sees that he can make a quick rush out of the corner. He knows he is going to get flattened the longer he holds the puck so they often let quick shots go hoping for a squeaker or a bad rebound in front.

You need to be well aware of your help out in front. If you don't have the help you need in front of the net, this attacker will be more likely to try something fancy. If you are solid in front with some big D that won't happen.

Since the shot is coming from a poor angle close up your stance and stand at the top of the crease. Ramp up any low shots out of danger and break up any backdoor passes they might try to slide through close to your crease.

If they have the puck behind the goal line you should be hugging the post with your pads facing centre ice. You only turn to face the shooter if he brings it out in front of the net. If they try to bring the puck in tight to jam it *a fake poke check works* well and often cause them to seize up with the puck. Never let the player bring the puck through your poke check range. If they come close they get the stick EVERY time. Don't lunge just use a cobra-like poke check.



This is a very dangerous situation and if you have poor lateral motion you will have problems. As the player moves the goaltender is forced to move as well, which causes the legs to open and balance to shift to the trailing leg. When you have your weight on the trailing leg it can be very difficult to snap your foot out. This is precisely why shooters will commonly try to shoot back at the post you are now moving away from. They will also try to snap the puck through your legs as you move with them.

How to handle it

First of all you must get out to the top of the crease and take small, rapid shuffles, which will keep the 5 hole small and hopefully scare them away from that area. You must make sure you stay lined up square on the puck, not the body. Try to stay on your feet because shooters love to see the goaltender drop so they can hesitate a split second longer and then drill it over you.

Advanced Tip

After perfecting this next tip in practice you can force a player to shoot exactly where you want on this play. As the player cuts across delay your movement a little which will give the shooter area on the far side to shoot at. Keep shuffling with him just slightly off where you should be and they will think they can beat you. Since you know what they are looking at, you can make the save just after they release it.

Wing slappers are hard shots that are driven at the net as a player skates down the boards. The difficulty with this situation arises because not only is the shot itself traveling very fast but the man is skating forwards rapidly. What does this mean to the goaltender?

Lets say that the player we are talking about can take a stationary puck and fire it 100 mph. Ouch! If he is skating with that puck at 20 mph, then that shot is now coming at you 120 mph. His skating speed plus the speed of his shot combine to make a tough save even tougher. I found that many of these shots also end up squeaking through the goaltender so I tried to close up my stance as much as possible and be sure I was lined up properly.

I should mention that many goals are also scored on this play because the goaltender loses his angle. As we talk about in our chapter on playing rush, tap off on the short side post and challenge out at least one or two feet outside the blue crease. Remember that you only need to take small shuffles as the skater travels parallel to the sideboards. If you take big shuffles you will be opening up your stance and losing your angle.

You must try to get set in position before the shot is released. If your feet are still moving as the puck is shot you may run into problems. To sum this situation up. Tap off, challenge, get set, close up, react.

Advanced Tip

Simple geometry tells us that the short side post is closer to the shooter so the puck will reach that post sooner than if it was aimed at the far side. Try shifting over a little and give the shooter a little far side to shoot at. This accomplishes two things. Number one, it gives you a strong idea where they are probably aiming beforehand. Number two, some shooters get so excited seeing that open side they choke up and blast the puck a mile wide.

Watch out for this !!!!!

In some rare cases a sniper will give you the big, hard, realistic wind up and then out of the blue stop the slapper from happening at the last second. If this looks real enough the goaltender will be frozen and the shooter will have you at his mercy. This is especially common if you overchallenge or "run" at the shooter.

WRAPAROUNDS / LOW WALKOUTS

In our chapter on "Behind the Net", we talked about how to handle a player when they set up behind the net. With a wraparound situation the play is complicated by the fact that the player usually has some speed because they have been skating around the net, not camped out back there.

Numerous offensive attacks in the modern game are generated from below the goal line. Goalies have to travel post to post in a hurry to beat the opposition on a full speed wrap around attack.

Historically, goalies played a quick wrap around attack by driving to the post up on their feet. This is still an effective approach at times but using a paddle wrap really seals the lower net well. If you have solid front net support, using a paddle wrap properly is a high percentage play.



Once you recognize that the player is definitely driving to the other post you should explode over, arriving at the post in a classic paddle down position.



On the glove side, get the paddle down flush to the ice early in the slide and stack your glove on the pad. You should land on the post with your lead pad somewhere on the shin area near your knee. If you end up striking the post too close to your boot break, you will risk a rotation around the post that will get you out of a controlled position.



On a blocker side paddle wrap the mechanics are the same except that you have to get the shaft out around the post while still keeping the paddle flat.

Make sure when you arrive at either post you are sealing the post with your body. Prepare to snap out of the paddle wrap position and back to your feet if the puck skips out in front.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Controlling the pace of the game

There are many actions a goaltender can take that can control the pace of the game. Sometimes your team is reeling, tired and in need of a rest or some instruction from your coach. Long penalty kills, last minute leads and quick goals against are examples of situations where you must take charge and help your team get rested and organized.



1) Ramping pucks into the crowd - If you need a whistle you should smoother anything near the net, ice the puck or ramp up a hard low shot into the crowd. Pro goaltenders are very slick in this area.

2) **Force a whistle** - If you have covered a puck and the referee wants you to play it carry it in your glove towards an opponent who is close by. You shouldn't get a delay of game call if the opponent is close by.



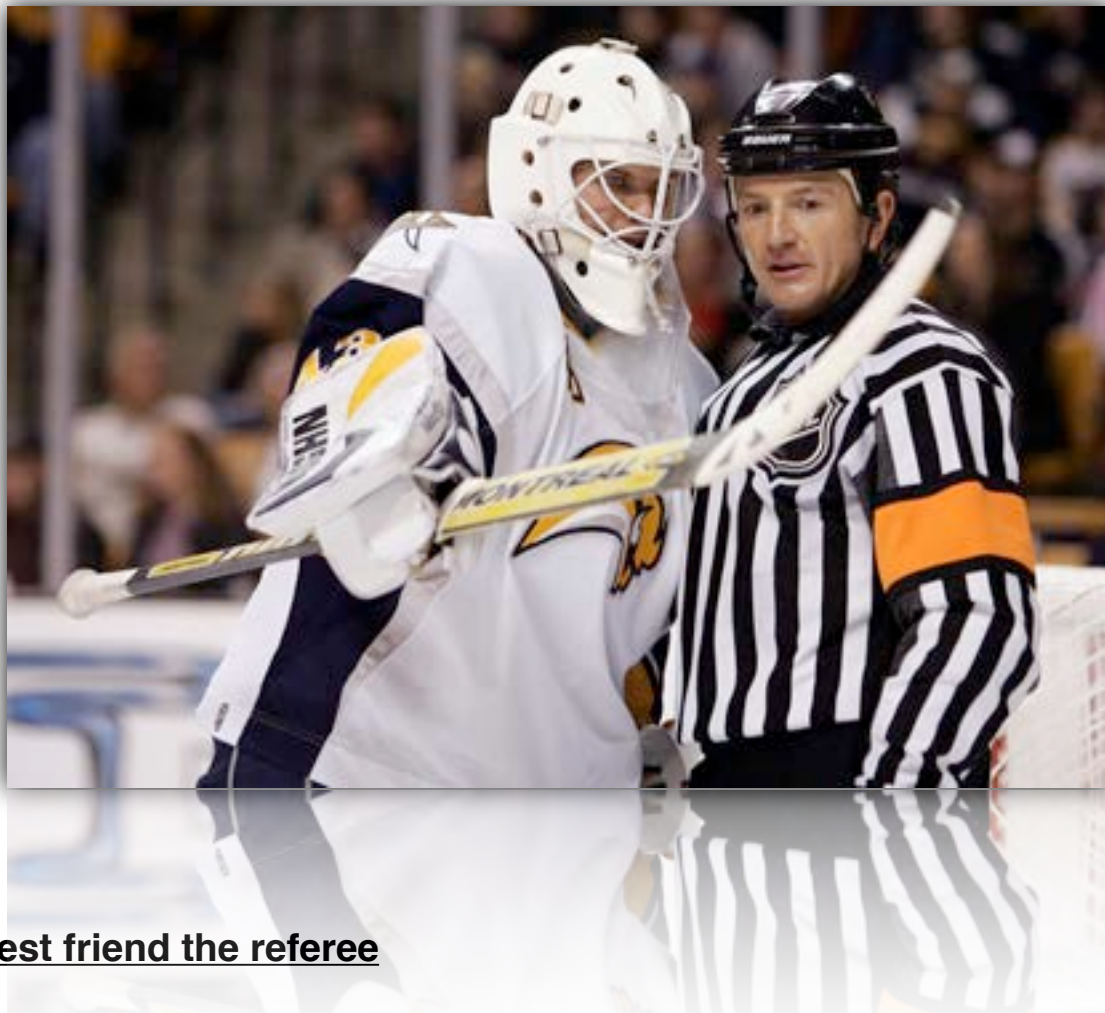
3) **Loose strap** - During a stoppage of play you can get a few extra seconds rest by calling over one of your players. Start fiddling with a strap and only begin to really try to fix it when the referee begins to get impatient.



4) **Net off the moorings** - On scrambles in front, be prepared to "accidentally" knock the net off the moorings. A good time is when an opponent is pushed into your net or when you are moving back to hug your post. Watch that it isn't blatant and be very careful in the last two minutes of the game. If you get a delay of game penalty in the last two minutes a penalty shot is awarded.

5) Hole in the ice - When the play is at the other end use the heel of your skate and take a big chunk out of the ice. Do this just to the side of the net so it won't trip you up later. During the next stoppage of play scream at the referee or one of your teammates to advise them of the problem. This will give your team a good 5-minute breather while the linesman fixes up the hole.

6) The Missing Contact - Unless the referee is on your Christmas list he will probably have no idea that you don't wear contacts. By the same token if you do wear contacts, they probably won't check your eye to see if it still in there. Again, get one of your teammates over to help you in your search for the elusive missing contact. With any of these tricks they must be used sparingly and convincingly. I've personally seen many one goal leads preserved, tough penalties killed off and playoff games won using these concepts.



Your best friend the referee

I am a firm believer that a good relationship with the referee will save your team dozens of goals against every year and give your team the edge

when it comes to questionable calls. We have all seen Ron Hextall go ballistic when he thinks a goal shouldn't have counted. Do you think this helps anything? Have you ever seen a referee change their mind after being abused like that? In reality the referees will likely try to call a penalty on Ronny later because he tried to show up the referee.

My Advice

There is no one on your team, including the captain, who will have the same opportunity to talk to the referee as you do. Every defensive zone face off he will be standing with in ten feet of you and every puck you smoother will bring him nearby. This is a great opportunity. Referees are supposed to be impartial, but they are human. If the referee likes you he will be less likely to call a penalty or a questionable goal against you. Early in the game start with the small talk and even though the game is incredibly intense stay low key and relaxed with him. Ask him if he is going out after the game. Ask him if his kids play hockey. Thank him for a helpful call. This advice may sound cheesy but it works. Screaming at the referee will never help you.

I can give you many examples of how this worked for me but what follows is the best example. My approach to the referee in this case didn't help during the current game but later in the year I was rewarded. During the last minute of a game in the IHL I had a shut out going and our team had a safe three-goal lead. NHL referee, Don Van Massenhoven, was standing against the boards as my defense tried to clear the puck around the boards. The harmless clear glanced off Don's big skates right on to the stick of a Muskegeon Lumberjack. My shut out vanished and I skated over to Donny to thank him. I had a big smile on my face and he knew I wasn't that steamed.

Don refereed another 4 or 5 of my games the rest of the year and on at least 4 occasions gave me quick whistles that saved me front a goal against. **The point is clear: if you treat them right chances are they will help you later.**

If you have ever watched an NHL game you have seen a goaltender use the bait and hook, probably without even noticing it. That in itself is the key to the success of this technique; how sneaky it is.

When a goaltender baits and hooks a shooter he is giving a shooter something to shoot at that he can't resist. Just like a fish that sees a juicy worm, they can't stop themselves from predictably eating the worm. There are really only a few basic ways to execute the bait and hook and here are the biggies:



THE LAZY / LOW GLOVE

When the shooter looks at the goalie in the millisecond before he shoots it he sees a goaltender perfectly placed on the angle but the stupid goalie doesn't have his glove hand out and open. BANG!

As the shot is released the goaltender reels the poor sap in, probably making a highlight save. Remember that most glove saves you see on TV were the result of some degree of baiting and hooking whether the goaltender realized it or not.



THE 5 HOLE

The shooter sees a nice hole between the goaltender's legs and can't resist driving one there. As the shot is released the goaltender quickly drops to a butterfly sealing off the opening with an explosive knee drive.

ANGLE SHIFT

Good shooters like to take advantage of goaltenders that are off their angle. Good goalies can shift slightly off their angle on purpose which gives them an idea where the shot is probably going.

In our section on wing slappers, I talked a little about this because I found this is where an angle shift works best. If you shift over and cover the short side and close up your stance the puck can only go in on the far side. If timed properly this will save many goals over your career.

I want to really stress that this is an advanced skill and only works after years of trial and error and only on shooters who can hit where they are aiming. If you give a guy glove side high and he can't raise the puck then it obviously won't work.

Before I get into the specifics of when to bait and hook I want to explain why goaltenders use this skill. Lets look at a player like an NHL player who can shoot the lights out of the puck. Suppose you position yourself perfectly on the angle and challenge out properly. Also suppose he only has 6 inches to aim at each of the corners which is a really small amount. Guess what?

That's right, more times than not great shooters like him will hit these holes consistently. That's why they get paid millions of dollars. **When good shooters are presented with several shooting options they have a huge advantage and will make you look foolish.** This is where the question of why comes in. A smart goaltender learns how to force a shooter to aim where they want which limits their options and of course gives the goaltender the advantage back.

I bet I could take any major A or US college goalie and stand them at the top of the crease facing a top NHLer in the slot and, knowing he had to go high glove, stop him consistently. The point is that if you know where they are probably shooting beforehand even sharpshooters will have problems.

There are many things you must understand before you even begin to try this, so lets talk about the question of how and when.

HOW and WHEN

1) **Like the poke check this skill must not be telegraphed or used too often.** If a shooter gets an idea that you are playing with him he will make you pay. Think back to the fish and the worm on the hook. If they sense danger they will never bite. This is the key; it must be done at the proper time with proper timing.

2) **The size of the opening you give.** The better the shooter is the less room you give them. Think of a man screaming down the wing in Jr. B ready to let the big slapper go. If you shift over and give him 2 feet to shoot at on the far side he probably will bite and think nothing is up. They are used to seeing goalies off their angle in Jr.B. In the NHL you might only need to give them 6 inches on the far side to shoot at.

Any more than that and they will smell a rat.

A perfect bait and hook will leave the shooter stunned. They will honestly have no idea how you stopped it and if you were sneaky enough they won't know you used the bait and hook.

Remember this, if you do stone them but they realized afterwards what you did they will file it away for future use. The goal is to stone them leaving them unaware. Don't be obvious!

3) Only use your strengths.

If you have problems blocker side low don't give them that to shoot at! Of course if you have that amazing glove hand use it when you bait and hook.

Final Thoughts

This skill works well when shooters are in alone on you and have some degree of pressure on them. You have to have nerves of steel and incredible patience to wait. If you flinch early you are toast. Imagine yourself as a western gunfighter with your hand poised near the handle. The instant you sense the release, and not instant before, your gun is drawn and the loser will be the Bad Guy.





The advent of video analysis has greatly improved the performances of athletes in every discipline. Imagine in the not too distant past, athletes relying on memory of performance or crude film review to study their performances or that of the competition.

A while back, I was hanging out with the Nashville Predators down in the land of country music. While there I had the chance to see how the modern day NHL operates their video analysis systems.

The Predators have 12 digital satellite receivers set up, 4 - 5 monitors, a half dozen high speed - high memory computers, digital PVRs and a library of stuff that would make your head spin.

How does every save made by the Flyer's goalies for the past year catalogued by type or situation sound? What about every goal against a given goalie in the last year?

The NHL has taken video to the cutting edge. In fact, all of this information is stored on hard drives. There is no use for the ancient thing called videotape.

Importance of Pump Video

One of the elements of a goalie's success relates directly to their belief in their abilities. A key way to keep developing goalies confident and performing well is to assemble simple to create hilite packages.

In fact Ed Belfour had never seen himself in a hilite package before and requested these frequently.

The technology today is very easy to use and with a Mac effortless.

I suggest goalies of all levels grab some basic video and cut together some saves, add some cool tunes and you got a great pre game tool to get the goalie going in the right direction.



HANDLING THE PUCK

Puckhandling



Puckhandling in its purest sense is all about possession. Good puckhandling occurs when a team maintains puck possession a high percentage of time after a goalie involves himself in a puckhandling environment.

Many misguided pundits assume a goalie is a great puckhandler because they can make amazing clears off the blueline glass, they can attempt to score on empty nets and they can frequently fire the puck up to a teammate at the far blueline. For me, that isn't the heart of puckhandling.

In reality some of the best puckhandling is subtle and very under the radar. In many respects it is comparable to officiating. The best refs are complimented when they are hardly noticed and the lightning rod refs seem to be at the centre of drama and negative attention. The best puckhandling goalies are smooth, subtle, controlled, safe and intelligent and can be described like a Fergie song from the Black-eyed Peas. "No drama.....No, No drama.....".

Puckhandling can be broken down into two core areas: technical and cognitive.



Technical Puckhandling

In this area we must develop the actual physical skills a goaltender must possess to be a proficient handler of the puck. Technical puckhandling skill development is a prerequisite before intelligent cognitive puckhandling can be developed. Stickhandling, passing, forehand and backhand clears, handling rims and cross corner dumps are specific examples.

These technical skills themselves would take a full textbook to address appropriately but for our purposes we only require an overview and an approach. A developing goalie must systematically address skill perfection in all of the listed technical areas daily before they can graduate to the Cognitive level.

1) **Stickhandling** - The first step in becoming a solid puckhandler is to have a well broken in trapper that will allow you to easily control the stick. You must be able to immediately snap from your stance into a shooting position. You can use a normal or overhand grip on the stick depending on your preference.

You should be able to have “heads up” control of the puck as you stickhandle and be able to protect the puck and open up passing lanes even when faced with

real pressure. This puck confidence should be present whether you are stationary or dynamically moving around the net.

Confidence in your stickhandling skills will allow you, in certain situations, to hold onto the puck a split second longer. By using this puck patience, you can suck a forechecker in to you, trapping him after you make a smart outlet pass. You now will have an odd man rush the other way.



2) Passing Priorities

a) **Direct** – The ultimate passing priority is to pass a puck from your stick directly to your teammate's stick flat on the ice.

b) **Indirect** – When time becomes a factor, the next best passing option is an indirect pass to your teammate's stick. When the boards come into play some unpredictable rebounds occur, especially if you get the puck up above the yellow dasher so an indirect pass will never be as reliable as a direct pass.

c) **Rim** – Using a rim pass to a teammate is your last option and should be avoided at all costs. Pass reception is more difficult, a turnover more likely and in many cases this puck won't get out of your zone easily. The pass

receiver will likely have to turn their back to the forechecker and look down at his feet to dig out this puck.

3) Passing Attributes

The best goalies in the NHL use hard, flat passes directly to their teammate's forehands.

By getting the puck there rapidly, the receiver will have more time with it to make a smart play.

When you keep a puck flat on the ice it will be less likely to rattle around, making it easier to receive. However, saucer passes can be effective if forecheck pressure is right on you. Otherwise, keep the puck down on the ice.

Hitting the forehand is another way to make your teammate's life easier. Passes from NHL goalies will actually sting your hands due to the velocity!



Cognitive Puckhandling

Once you have a prospect with outstanding technical puckhandling skills, we need to develop the goalie's ability to make the right puckhandling decision at the right time with one goal in mind – maintain puck possession.

Contested vs Uncontested Dump ins

The first step in achieving a successful puckhandling result is to determine immediately whether the dump in will be contested or uncontested. Looking up ice in preparation for a puckhandling event is called a “forecheck snapshot”. Once you make a proper read with your forecheck snapshot, the appropriate intelligent puck handling play can be made.

A **contested dump in** is one where the forechecker is likely going to cause havoc because he will be arriving around the same time as the first D man back.

In this scenario it is important for the first D man back, to go to space, instead of directly to the goalie. When the D heads back to the goalie in a contested dump in they are bring gasoline to the fire. By skating to an open corner, they create a safe passing lane and force the forecheck to choose whom they will pressure.

An **uncontested dump in** is when the D man will have safe time and space as they come back for puck retrieval.

In this scenario the goaltender should quickly leave the puck in an accessible place for the D man. They should verbalize the forecheck pressure and let the D man know his options.



There are 2 core approaches to develop this cognitive or decision making attribute:

1) **Consistent regular attention to this area in team practices.** Prudent coaches will work systematically in practice on goalie to defend puck transitions for a minimal 5 – 10 minutes every practice. Ramping up difficulty by reducing time and space with increasing pressure will really make the real in-game transitions second nature.

2) **Video Study** - A goaltender needs to critically analyze NHL games to assess the cause and effect on numerous puckhandling exchanges each game. Evaluate whether the transition was successful and why it did or didn't work.

Take ownership of your puckhandling development. Your ability to move up in hockey depends on it.

HANDLING THE PUCK - More Details!



If you have two great goaltenders and one really handles the puck well, who do you think is more valuable to the team? Who do you think the coach will pick to make the team? In the game of hockey today it is crucial to the team's success to have a goaltender that can really handle the puck. Your team will get out of the zone with ease, penalties can be killed off, your defense can avoid getting plastered into the boards and you will face fewer shots; therefore fewer goals against if you are a decent puck handier.

There are several different skills that come into play. They include: **setting the puck up for your defense** to easily pick up, stopping pucks that are **dumped around the boards**, making safe, intelligent **passes to teammates** and when necessary **firing that biscuit out of the zone** yourself.



Setting the puck up for your Defense.

The exchange of the puck between a goaltender and the defenseman is similar to the exchange between a running back and the quarterback. It appears smooth and effortless and rarely screws up. However, when either of these exchanges is messed up the result is a fumble or a face-off at center.

In football, the running back wants the ball in the **same spot every time** so he can start running without trying to get a handle on the ball. It is the same with your defense. Find out where your defense likes to pick up the puck and practice this exchange often until it becomes routine.

As in football, you have to quickly get out of the way so your teammate doesn't bump into you, which will cause obvious problems. Try not to get cute and too precise about this. Simply place the puck and get out of the way. Defensemen will go to war for goaltenders that help them out in these areas.

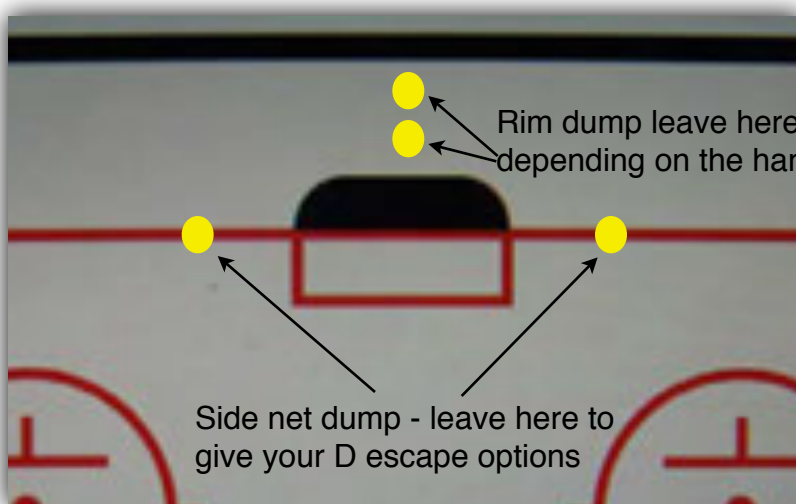
Where should I actually leave the puck?

This will vary depending on the situation but generally you should place the puck away from the boards and net so the defense can easily pick it up on the forehand without impaling themselves with their stick. Keep the puck within stick's length from you in case you need to step over and clear it or smoother it yourself.

If you have stopped the puck on a dump around leave it about a foot away from the end boards centered in the middle of the net.



AFTER STOPPING A DUMP IN, LEAVE IT AWAY FROM THE BOARDS AND GET OUT OF THE WAY.



This is the best place to leave the puck for the defense because they have several escape options. If you slide it into the corner they will probably get crushed into the glass and if you throw it behind the net an aggressive fore checker can still get a good shot at them.

What are the defenseman's options when I leave the puck off to the side like you described in the above photo? Don't forget that your buddy is probably going to have someone breathing down his neck so he will try to do something quickly.

His first two options involve simply **drilling the puck around the boards either way**. If your wingers are doing their job and back checking they should be on the boards to control it and exit the zone. If you see your defense in this situation you can yell at him to 'ring it' since his back is to the fore checker.

If your defense has a little more time they can carry the puck around the net using the net as a shield or make a quick turn and carry the puck out away from the net the opposite direction.

You can advise your defense that he either has a 'man on' or "lots of time". If your defense has their head up and takes a quick peek at the fore check they can also execute a 'quick up' which simply means turning and firing the puck up to an open teammate as soon as they get the puck. If you had set a side net dump puck behind the net this wouldn't have been an option.

The final two options involve the defense calling for you to 'Move it'. In this case he wants you to make the smart play, either passing to a teammate or firing it out of the zone. When practiced enough and with settled players this exchange can make the fore checkers job frustrating if not impossible.

Remember: *Your defencemen would rather have you stop the puck and get out of the way early, if they are picking it up, as opposed to you playing with it too long, trying to get it perfectly positioned for them. Stop it using a one count and get out of the way!*

How to stop pucks dumped in around the boards.

What technique you decide to use depends on the speed of the puck and your skill level. I will begin by discussing a dump in to your blocker side. Since you are a great skater and you were smart enough not to be playing way out in the slot you will have a good chance to get this puck. Skate in a direct way as quickly as possible to a spot right behind the net jamming your stick into the boards. As this happens your body will be just off the boards with your shoulders square to the oncoming puck.



MIKE HAS JAMMED HIS BODY AGAINST THE BOARDS AND HAS PLACED HIS STICK PERPENDICULAR TO THE BOARDS TO TRAP THE PUCK WHERE HE WANTS TO LEAVE IT.



MIKE STOPS A BLOCKER SIDE DUMP IN USING THE SHOOTING POSITION, WHICH WILL ALLOW HIM MORE TIME TO PASS IT, IF HE CHOOSES.



MIKE STOPS A GLOVE SIDE DUMP IN KEEPING HIS STICK POSITIONED SO THE PUCK CAN'T JUMP OUT IN FRONT.



MIKE USES THE ONE HAND TECHNIQUE BACKING UP HIS STICK WITH HIS PAD WHEN THE BOARDS ARE UNRELIABLE. BY STARTING WITH THIS STICK POSITION HE CAN QUICKLY MAKE A PASS OR A CLEAR.

Angle your stick slightly so that if the puck does bounce off your stick it ends up going towards the boards not the back of the net. When the puck is released you need to make a quick decision on the method you will use to stop the puck behind the net. In reality you will not even think about this. You must have practiced this enough that it becomes an automatic skill.



Smart goaltenders will stop the puck behind the net with the **two hand method** because this allows you to play the puck once you stop it. If you watch NHLers you will notice that they slide their blocker up to the top of the shaft and firmly grasp the shaft just above the paddle with their trapper. This two handed method is also know as the **shooting position**.

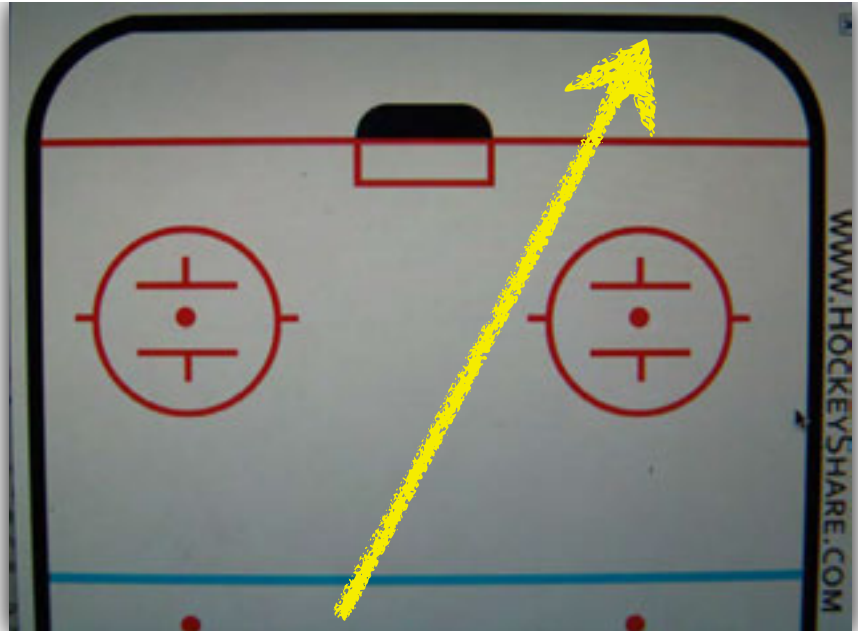
When you stop the puck in this position you can immediately fire the puck if necessary. When you stop the puck using one hand you can't get much steam into a shot if you need to. If the dump in is slow enough you should always use the shooting position to stop the puck.

You will notice in the photo of Marty Turco above, the so named "*Turco grip*", where the glove hand is held in an inverted position creating a super strong attachment to the stick.

1) NHL goaltenders sometimes use a variation of these two techniques because they have a great deal of strength in their forearms. On a hard dump they will immediately slide their blocker hand to the knob and explode towards the back of the net. By raising their blocker elbow up they keep their stick blade flush as they jam it into the boards to trap the puck. If you keep your elbow down at your side as you extend your stick the blade will not stay flat. With this "**one hand at the knob**" method they can reach pucks that are harder and further out of reach. There is 'give' in the stick because of grip being so high. This deadens the puck so the goaltender can grab the stick in the shooting position and make the smart clear or just leave it for their defense.

2) As soon as the dump in occurs, NHL goalies take a "visual snapshot" of the impending forecheck with a quick panoramic scan of the neutral zone. This lets them know whether it is likely a contested or uncontested dump in as we discussed before and which side will be the strong side vs. the weak side.

DIAGONAL DUMPS (A.K.A. CROSS CORNER DUMPS)



When a puck gets dumped in diagonally just out of your reach to the side of the net, you can snap the stick out to the knob and lay the paddle flush to the ice. Once the puck is controlled the goaltender can straighten up and make an intelligent play.



KEEP THE STICK 90 DEGREES TO THE PUCK'S PATH OF TRAVEL SO THE PUCK "DIES" WHERE YOU WANT IT TO.

When the puck is dumped diagonally to the blocker side corner you can also use the paddle to stop the puck from dying in the corner and getting your D killed. If the dump is slow enough try to swing your body around quickly so you can accept the diagonal dump on the forehand.

Read the boards

Do you remember that math class that you fell asleep in ? You know the one where you vaguely remember the teacher say something about angles, **angle of incidence and angle of reflection**. It turns out that this information Mr. Math was giving you really applies to goaltending. In our chapter on Angles you will learn more about this but here we want to talk about reflection.

One thing that goaltenders have in their favour is the fact that most dump ins will end up behind the net because of the rounded corners. However we have all seen the goaltender patiently waiting behind the net for a puck that somehow ended up in front of the empty net. This could be because of funny bounces which we will look at next section, or because the goaltender misread

the angle of incidence (angle the puck hit into the boards) or the angle of reflection (angle the puck took after hitting the boards).

You need to understand that when a puck hits a flat surface at a certain angle it leaves that surface at the same angle. Think about a pool table and how the balls glance off the rails. Next time you are near a pool table bounce a few balls at different angles and study how they react. Try to predict where they will hit before you release them.

Test Dumps

Smart players are trained to **play the boards** which means they know how the boards in a certain arenas react. They know how to make the puck "die" in the corner which your defensemen hate. They also know how to make that puck bounce directly out in front of the net.

Whenever you play in a new arena you should spend 10 or 15 minutes with a teammate practicing dump ins. Check the following things:

- 1) **How quickly does a dump in get around?** Some rinks are faster than others.
- 2) **How fast does the puck jump off the boards on a shot just wide ?** Believe it or not, NHL players occasionally just miss the net on purpose knowing the puck will bank out back in front of the net !
- 3) **Are there bumps of snow that make the puck jump up as it is shot around?**
- 4) **Are the boards joined together flush?** In many rinks the boards are removed and then reinstalled after some other event. It is common for funny bounces to result at these joints if they are not replaced properly. I remember in Salt lake City this always happened at our end. I think the arena employees were up to something!
- 5) **Study the comers and how the pucks react off of the curves.**
- 6) **What about shots up around the glass?** Some new arenas have glass with small connectors (seamless glass). Most shots here are very predictable and rarely catch the goaltender by surprise. In most other arenas the puck can,

and often does, take awkward bounces when it is up on the glass. My advice on a shot up on the glass is to stay in your net and let the defense battle for the puck. It is not worth it to get caught.

Shooting

Back in the original six days it was unheard of to have a goaltender actual shoot the puck. Today, the goaltender not only can shoot the puck but must be able to shoot it. Most people would agree that Ron Hextall carried the art to its highest level. He has scored two - three goals with direct shots.

Scoring goals isn't the reason goaltenders must learn to shoot the puck however. The goaltender can turn dangerous loose pucks into routine dump outs. In fact the goaltender can become a third defenseman.

The actual skill of shooting is the product of repetition and strength. You could be as strong as a body builder yet not be able to lift the puck off the ice. Likewise you could have fired 1,000 pucks yet not have much mustard on your shot because of poor strength. Later I will discuss how to improve you shot but first the actual techniques.

As we mentioned earlier, good puckhandling is about possession so once your do get the rocket, don't fall in love with yourself. Use this skill appropriately and judiciously.

The Forehand

Grasp the stick in the shooting position. (Blocker hand on the knob, trapper grabbing the shaft above the paddle). It is right here that many shots fail before they are even attempted. In most cases the blocker hand is used to slide the top two fingers around the knob. Have you noticed that players rarely have large amounts of tape on the knob? When the knob is too large you hinder the range of motion in the wrist which limits the amount of force you can give the puck.

With the trapper you must grab the shaft with a great deal of force. If your glove is too large, has too much padding or you are too weak to get a firm hold, you won't be able to let the missile go. **Read in the equipment section on trappers to see if your glove is broken in and fitted properly.**

Place your stick behind the puck so that the stick is vertical and the puck is positioned in front of the heel. Lean your head over the puck while you bend your legs. Shift your body weight on the puck side leg and forcefully snap the puck rolling the puck across the blade towards the toe as you release it. Your top hand should pull back and your bottom hand should snap forward.

Remember that most of the force in your shots comes from your legs and abdominals (core) so avoid trying to wrist the puck only using your arms.

Advanced Tip

By pulling the puck in towards your body then quickly snapping it you can sometimes get better results.

What About?

What about goaltenders that **catch with their left hand yet shoot the puck right-handed or visa-versa?**

A goaltender in this situation must learn how to shoot with the proper hand, which happens to be very difficult for someone who naturally shoots the other way. Here is why. In the game their are situations that will happen so fast that you won't have enough time to switch your hands over. This doesn't mean you can never use your "strong" hand however. In my case, I always had to turn my hands over when I handled a puck. Once I got to college Mitch Korn force me to learn the proper way and I was a better goalie for it. When I had the time I could launch a missile with my strong hand and if time was scarce, I could let a decent shot go left-handed. This was great on dump arounds because no matter which side I went, I was always able to handle the puck on my forehand.

The Backhand

The basics of the backhand are identical to the forehand as far as getting a proper grip and using your legs. With the backhand, you place the puck on the heel and slightly tip the top of the blade away from the puck. Point your puck side toe in the direction you want the puck to go and explode with a good follow through.

Both the forehand and backhand shots take years to develop and frustration is common in the young goaltender. They should be encouraged to fire every loose puck they see in practice using both the forehand and backhand equally. Most young goalies spend more time practicing the forehand and unfortunately never develop much of a backhand.

It is a good idea for the goaltender to start in the basic stance and snap up to a shooting position before firing the puck. It will greatly improve the quickness when shooting the puck in a game situation.

Goaltenders should always have their gloves on when they are handling pucks in practice, unless of course they plan on removing them during the game!

One Hand Method

This method is usually used when the puck is just off to the blocker side. Using wrist strength the goaltender shoots the puck with one hand on the stick at the paddle. I don't recommend using this very often because you can never get much steam on your shot and you can only really fire the puck one direction, which is easy to read and intercept for a smart fore checker.

Shooting Options

Once you have developed the ability to let the cannon go you have to learn your shooting options.

Assuming there is no safe passing option:

The first option is to **shoot the puck around the boards**. This is a relatively safe play because by the time the puck is knocked down, if it is intercepted, you should be back in your net. When you shoot it around the boards you should take a quick look to see where it would go beforehand. **Don't just blindly wire it around the boards**. Try to get it up on the glass. This makes it really difficult for an opponent to control if they happen to flag it down.

Be careful that you don't needlessly fire it up into the crowd without hitting the glass first. A delay of game penalty in this situation usually ends with a goal against.

Advanced Tip

Smart goaltenders get very precise in their puck control. Practice banking the puck on the high glass so that it carries around into the crowd over the low glass. You can really give your team a nice breather without getting a penalty. As well, remember you get also shoot into the benches or off the ceiling without incurring a penalty.

Fakes

Once you have developed confidence in both your forehand and backhand you can use fakes to assist your team. As a fore checker approaches you they will usually curl away from you in the direction they think you are going to clear it. If you are known to have a good shot they sometimes curl to avoid getting a puck in the chicklets (teeth). By stopping your clear at the last second and clearing it the opposite direction you can fool the fore checker.

If you have never developed your backhand you can't do this. You are a predictable goalie that can easily be intercepted.

Off the glass

The best option for clearing the zone is to fire the puck off the glass just inside your blue line. This type of clear is difficult to flag down and it leaves the zone very quickly. When you bank the puck in this location it comes off the glass face high which means a defenseman is going to have to be pretty brave to try to keep it in the zone. If he does, it is difficult to get under control quickly and he will probably be flattened.



Be careful that you don't waste one into the crowd or hit the glass too far back in your zone. This will result in a puck that can more easily be played by your opponents.

With any puckhandling that you do, hustle back to your net immediately. Assume that it will be intercepted and that you won't have time to admire your work.

Sucking the forechecker in

Once you have developed advanced skills handling the puck you can practice a play called sucking the fore checker in. If you were to rush out and clear a puck as soon as you got to it, a fore checker might be able to anticipate its direction and intercept it or at least get back to the neutral zone to help out.

By sucking the forechecker in you can give your team an important advantage. To execute this play you must quickly pounce out and get the puck under control with your hands in a shooting position. Begin pulling the puck back towards the goal line at the side of your net. As you pull the puck back you should read the fore check and see where you want to play the puck when you eventually get rid of it .

Note *This whole process must take place in a split second. As the forechecker approaches you wait until the last second and then make the smart pass or clear.

Why would I want to risk losing the puck?

If you are skilled enough you take the forechecker out of the play your team will break out against 4 men instead of 5. That 5th dummy is standing by you, a mile away from the odd man rush going the other way.

The Middle Floater

If you watch goaltenders at the higher levels you may have watched them float a puck up the middle 10 - 20 ' off the ice. In fact Ron Hextall, Marty Brodeur and Chris Osgood have each scored on plays like this. This play is normally attempted when the puck is dumped in and the fore check is slow

putting the pressure on. It is **EXTREMELY risky** because if it is intercepted it will be jammed into the net in about 2 seconds. After thousands of attempts in practice you might consider using it in a game when your team is killing a penalty or in an empty net situation.

Remember that if you try this type of clear in the later stages of a game you must have at least a two goal lead. An icing call against you will come back to haunt you and your coach will want to strangle you.

Quick ups on the power play

Some teams will make lazy line changes when they are killing a penalty because they are tired. Watch for this early in a game and file the information for later use. Later in the game you can try to catch them. Since you have routinely handed the puck off to your defense the last dozen times the other team may become lazy. If you and a winger sense this you can fire a frozen rope right up to your teammate at centre ice or the other blue line in college hockey. Remember this play works only with surprise and some set up work before hand.

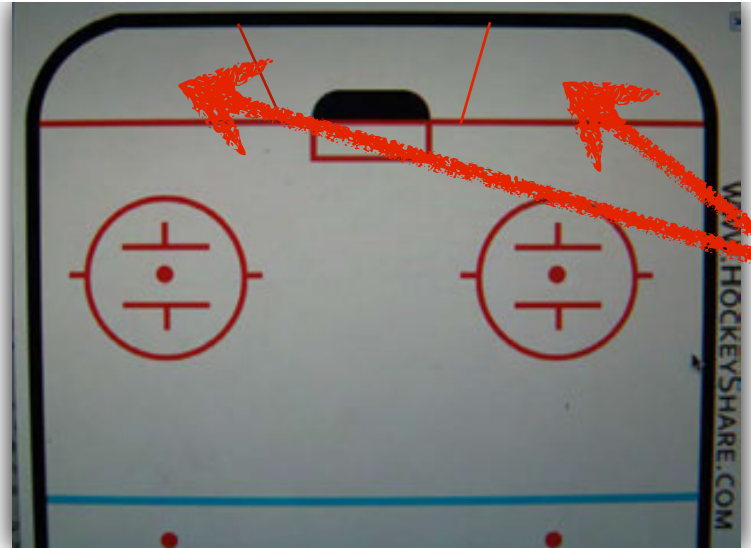
Icings

In most minor hockey leagues, a puck shot from the other side of centre is an automatic icing, which means the referee will automatically blow the whistle when the puck crosses the goal line. Again, players get lazy and cheat over to their bench when they see the linesman indicate the icing is going to happen. If you notice this early in the game you can catch them later. Instead of letting the puck cross the goal line step up, intercept it before it crosses the goal line and fire it up to an open teammate. This should only be used as a surprise and will have more success if you communicate with your players before hand in the dressing room.

Touch up icings can be very dangerous for your defense because they are in a foot race for the puck with a forechecker breathing down their neck. They have to touch the puck first or the icing is nullified, You must help your defense by warning them if they have a man right on them and if it looks like it will be close on who will arrive first, you should come out a make a safe play with the puck.

Icings are responsible for many bad goals and you should also be aware of the linesman and whether or not they are indicating an icing with their hand up. Many goaltenders have mistakenly handled a puck which negates the icing. On most of these screw ups the opposition will make you pay.

DID YOU KNOW! Jacques Plante was the first goaltender to raise his arm on an icing to let his defense know.



No Touch Zones

Corner dumps - No Touch Zone

Smart players try to dump the puck so it stays away from the goaltender and they try to learn how each arena's corners react differently. On a corner dump, the smart players use this foreknowledge to aim the puck so that it takes a dangerous bounce out into the corner no touch zone.

This refers to an area that a goalie isn't allowed to touch the puck. On a corner dump you have to use your knowledge of the corner to make a decisive attempt to play the puck or remain in the net. You have to try to get to the puck before it crosses the goal line into the no touch zone. If your defence has the onrushing player tied up, your decision becomes easier and you can more safely handle the puck.

You are allowed to stand in the no touch zone and handle the puck as long as the puck itself isn't in the zone. There is only one legal way to touch a puck in the no touch zone. If your foot is in your crease you can reach over and whack a puck that is lying in the no touch zone. Otherwise, the rule is simple. If the puck is in that zone you can't touch it.

Overplaying the Puck

When a goaltender over handles the puck they try to do too much and consequently cause more problems than they solve. There are some simple guidelines to use so you know when it is the proper time to play it and when it is someone else's job.



- 1) If your defense is the first person back and they aren't pressured you leave it for them 99% of the time.
- 2) If they call for it, you leave it for them 99% of the time, unless you recognize danger they don't..
- 3) Unless a team is trying a lazy line change, you let your defense pass or carry the puck up on your team's power play 99% of the time. A hallmark of an immature puckhandling goalie is the quick up every chance they get.
- 4) If you aren't sure if your winger is on the half boards you never blindly wire it around the boards.
- 5) If your defense tells you to play it or they are really under pressure then you must play the puck.

EQUIPMENT

EQUIPMENT SELECTION

Goaltenders have unique equipment and many myths abound concerning sizing, selection and purchasing. The first thing I need to mention is the fact that a goaltender that develops a fear of the puck is almost impossible to "cure". Usually, improperly sized equipment and poor protection are the causes of this problem. The situation is difficult to discuss because equipment is so expensive and no one can afford to spend thousands of dollars every year. The goal is to find equipment, either new or used, that balances cost without sacrificing protection. I'll discuss more specifics as I talk about the different equipment.

UNDERGARMENTS



Most pro goaltenders wear dry fit T-shirts and pants underneath their equipment. This is because they are comfortable, absorb sweat, permit free movement and keep the goaltender warm during lulls in the play. You should use clean clothing every game and practice to prevent the dreaded hockey rash. Not to mention the fact that you will have more friends! I know most pro goaltenders change their shirts between

periods to stay fresh and avoid catching a chill. I never used to wear socks but thin light socks are a good way to absorb sweat and keep your feet warm.

JOCKS AND JILLS



Without a doubt the most important piece of equipment a goaltender wears is the jock. (Female goaltenders have a corresponding piece usually called a jill). The jock should be worn tightly without restricting movement. If you have ever had one slip out of place you have a clear impression of what pain is. The goaltender's jock is larger and more thickly padded than a forward's jock because of the obvious trauma it is designed to prevent.

Personally, I've found that you can't totally protect yourself; you can only minimize the pain. I used to wear a forward's jock and a goaltender's jock overtop and this worked the best for me.

GARTERBELT

The best way to keep the hockey socks in place is to use a garterbelt to securely hold them. There isn't much to go in to beyond this but I do have a comment. I have seen some goaltenders that wear track pants without using hockey socks. While this may be more comfortable it looks bush league and sends the message that you are different than your teammates.

Imagine how it would look if everyone on the Maple Leafs decided to wear

track pants over their shin pads. If your goal is to play in the N.H.L. dress like them!

INNER KNEE PADS



I strongly recommend that all goaltenders wear an inner kneepad that is usually worn under the hockey socks. Alternatively, there are very protective knee plates that can be worn over the socks and are NHL legal as long as they tuck under the goal pants.

This inner kneepad is important because when you drop to a butterfly you open up a chink in your armor and a slapshot off the knee is very painful. I have heard a lot of excuses like: "I never get hit there so I don't need them." and " My leg pads are big enough that they cover my knees." Both of these responses are fine, but one day you will learn the hard way.

I have also have had several goalies wearing only the external knee plates. They often are flopping around hardly attached. This allows for a potential serious knee injury when the plate inadvertently slips out of the way when you least want it to. If you are using the outer knee plates you should still use some inner knee pads as well.



Goaltenders use special skates that have additional protective shells surrounding the foot and a flat blade that helps in keeping your balance.

I often get asked when a young goaltender is ready for goal skates. There is no set age, but remember what I said about getting puck-shy. Once a goaltender is puck-shy you have a huge problem. So why not solve the problem before it happens?

As soon as a young goaltender seems reasonably committed to playing goal start looking for a used pair of goal skates. They are usually fairly affordable until you are ready to buy new skates.

Sizing

Proper sizing is crucial when selecting goal skates. When you go to try on skates bring the socks that you plan to wear when you play. The next step is to seat your heel in the skates, so lightly bump the blade against the floor with your foot loosely in the skate. Tighten the skates and go for a walk around the store. Your toes shouldn't touch the ends but also shouldn't form a big gap.

Sharpening

One of the biggest myths that still continues to this day is the fact that goaltenders should use dull skates. People say this allows the goaltender to move sideways better. Let me start by saying that sharp goal skates are crucial in today's game. In the old days, a goaltender didn't need to challenge the shooter as much and tended to play back in the crease. However, goaltenders today need to move explosively to get to pucks behind the net, to race for loose pucks, to challenge shooters and to move from one side of the net to the other outside the crease. Quite simply this can't be done with dull skates.

Mitch Korn, goaltending coach of the Nashville Predators, once described goaltenders as being like New York cabbies. They constantly perform dozens of surprise rapid changes in direction, stopping and starting, darting around.

NHL goaltenders all use razor sharp skates. They get their skates *hollow ground* between 3/8" - 3/4". If the pros use sharp skates shouldn't you? If you have never used sharp skates try a 3/4" hollow and you will adjust in time. Don't get left in minor hockey because you think dull skates are the way to go!

A word about "flat bottom V". This new approach to sharpening skates is being touted as a huge improvement. I would avoid this type of sharpening for two reasons. 1) Once you lose an edge they have to fix it by taking off a ton of blade so your blades will have a super short shelf life and 2) It is difficult to get an acceptable emergency job on your skates if you lose an edge on a road trip.

LEG PADS



There are currently dozens of companies making leg pads in every size and color. Each one promotes some new feature or the fact that some goaltender in the N.H.L. is wearing their pad. How can you decide what pad is the best bearing in mind that some models cost well over \$ 1500?

The first mistake a person can make is buying pads that come too high up your leg. Not only does this slow your movements around the net it also makes it almost impossible to recover when you fall to the ice.

The trend today is to fall in love with the thigh rise and the desire to have it fill your five hole for you when they scissor shut during a butterfly. I believe in many cases the 5 goals a year it saves you, will be blown away by the 20 you give up because of the extended thigh rise. Why?

Many young goalies don't have the requisite strength and skating ability. So, with the large thigh rises they either don't get where to need to be or they get there late. They don't get to handle as many loose pucks because the thigh rises prevents cross overs and hop steps. The end result: they cause more goals then they prevent in my not so humble opinion.

The Proper Height & Width

The proper height can best be found by bringing in your skates to the store. This is important because this allows you to get a good idea of where the pads will rest when they are strapped to your skates. Once you have the pads strapped to your skates and legs, they should be between 4-6 inches above your kneecap. *The middle horizontal bar at the knee should be positioned directly in front of the kneecap.*

Knee should be located right here



Besides height you must look at the width. Today pads can be bought that are no wider than 11". Is bigger better if they fill more of the net? Not necessarily if they hinder your motion. The best width is one that covers net and lets you move normally. Move around in the store and try to get a feel for the size. Most stores want repeat business and if your pads aren't right after you use them, take them back. I would ask beforehand what their policy is on returns.

11" MAX



Most pads have several straps running from the toe to the top of the pad. What is the best way to strap the pad to your leg? Everyone has their own way but I have a few thoughts that might be helpful.

Laces - Today goaltenders use skate laces to attach the bottom of the goal pad to their skates. I used straps and never had a problem however they are no extinct. The lace keeps your pad from spinning on your leg too much but still allows the necessary rotation to get your pads vertical in the butterfly. I should mention that it is a good idea to wrap some tape around your front skate post so that your lace doesn't break every time you stop a shot there. Typically, the lace initially wraps once around the front post and then threads back to the heel of the skate and then is tied up on top of the foot where you normally tie your other skate laces.

Heel Strap - The heel strap is the other strap that holds your pad directly to the skate and should be worn fairly loose. This strap should be slid through one of the back spaces in your skate blade. It is a good idea to use a strip of tape to secure these straps so you don't get tripped up or you can thread them back through the buckle as pictures in the photo. Leave a little hanging so you can pull your strap loose to give your team a breather during important stoppages of play.



HERE WE SEE THE PROPER STRAP PLACEMENT FOR SENIOR PADS

Calf Straps - These straps should be worn relatively loose but not so loose the pad isn't controlled on the shin to some degree. Cut extra length off of the straps so they won't drag if they come undone.

Knee Straps and Upper straps - These straps are worn fairly loose to allow freedom of movement. A rule of thumb is that the straps should be more snug as you go down towards the bottom. Pads should be done from the bottom up to the top starting with your toe laces.



Goal pants have more padding than players' pants and are important to avoid the fear of the puck. The thigh pads are thicker and wider, the inner thigh also is protected and the pants are worn a lot larger which are all important differences from players' pants. If you can't afford goal pants you can add protection to your pants by sewing in pieces of foam and plastic.

You want your pants to be large for several reasons. First, the size will fill more net and result in more saves. Again, there is a happy medium and you don't want to hinder your movement. *Secondly, large pants will allow you to insert your chest pad inside the front of your pants if you desire.*

Suspenders or belts are the way your pants are held up and sometimes a clip is used to keep your suspenders together, so they don't fall off of your shoulders. Usually the suspenders are worn over your chest pad but this is an individual preference.



Today goaltenders have some of the best upper body protection in the history of goaltending. The days of the felt sleeves and thin foam pockets are gone the way of Terry Sawchuck.

When it comes to this area spend the money or take up checkers ! I have seen many goaltenders flinch on a slap shot and 90 % of the time the goaltender has poor upper body protection.

When you buy these pads sizing is fairly simple. You want the sleeves to come to within 1-2" of the wrist and the belly pad to just touch the top of your goalie jock. Remember that when you enter your crouch all your equipment will bunch up and you don't want your equipment to be in the way, yet you do not want any chinks in your armor.

As far as features to look for, here are a few hints. Check to see that the elbows and shoulders are covered in plastic with foam underneath. Look for protection on the inner portions of the arms and thick protection around the collarbone.



In most minor hockey systems a neck protector is mandatory to prevent cuts which are potentially life threatening. Former NHL goaltender Clint Malarchuk almost died from a nasty neck cut. I see almost every goaltender in the pros wearing one and since it is mandatory, find one that isn't too tight.



I also think it is important to wear a neck protector that is made to protect from the impact of the puck. Be careful that your dangler doesn't hinder vision or movement in your neck.

There are two main types of headgear and I'll tell you about the pros and cons of each. First there is the traditional birdcage, which is a combination of wire facemask and high impact plastic helmet. Advantages of these masks are cost, adjustable sizing, availability, and the ability to spread the force.

This style of mask is almost extinct with goaltenders but in reality it is just as protective for youth goalies as the cool new masks like the NHL goalies wear.



With this type of mask getting knocked out is rare but often the pressure of the impact will open up large gashes on the forehead from NHL speed shots.



The fiberglass pro style helmet has been approved for use in minor hockey and they have become a very popular if not a trendy piece of equipment. To put it simply they look cool and most of the pros wear them, so why wouldn't every young goalie want one? The theory behind these masks is the fact that they are designed to deflect pucks away from the head stopping all the force from being sent to the head.

When viewed from the front they have little area where a puck can hit square without glancing off. The mask itself is made of thick fiberglass and has almost no give to it. This prevents most cuts but causes other problems.

Most goaltenders move their heads slightly before they are struck with the puck, either turning the head slightly or tucking the chin in. When this happens the mask opens flat surfaces where the puck can really put a lot of force into the head. Imagine placing a piece of wood on your forehead and having someone strike the board with a hammer. I think you can see how this might hurt. Other disadvantages include cost, availability, head growth and sometimes vision is hindered near the goaltender's feet.

BLOCKER



The blocker is used to hold the stick and is made of rigid foam covered with hard plastic. As with the trapper try not to fall into the "bigger is better" thinking. The ability of the goaltender to poke check, puck handle and deflect pucks will be hurt.

The glove should also protect the fingers from rising pucks that may strike the fingers. Usually, extra flaps of padded plastic will cover the fingers underneath the blocking board.

TRAPPER



The trapper is an important piece of equipment and is often improperly fitted. The first area to discuss is protection. A good hard slapper will sting with any glove, but a young goaltender must have confidence in their glove's protection. If you went to work every day and your boss hit your hand with a hammer you wouldn't show up for work the next week. It is the same with the young goaltender. If they are getting stung on every shot you can bet they will be coming up with the "mystery flu" before every practice.

Make sure the palm has some plastic in it and give the glove a couple of taps with a hockey stick. You should get an idea how it would hold up when that quick slapper eventually happens.

The glove should open and close properly and be flexible enough to pass and shoot. If the glove is too large the young goaltender may not be able to control rebounds or grasp the shaft of the stick when clearing a loose puck.

Here is a trick to test whether your glove is broken in properly. Place your blocker hand at the knob end of the stick and using your trapper grab the shaft just above the paddle as if you were going to shoot a puck. Remove your blocker hand from the shaft and continue to grasp the stick with your trapper. Now hold your stick out in front of you and rotate your trapper so the palm is facing down. If your stick doesn't fall out then your glove is probably just right.

What if it is too stiff?

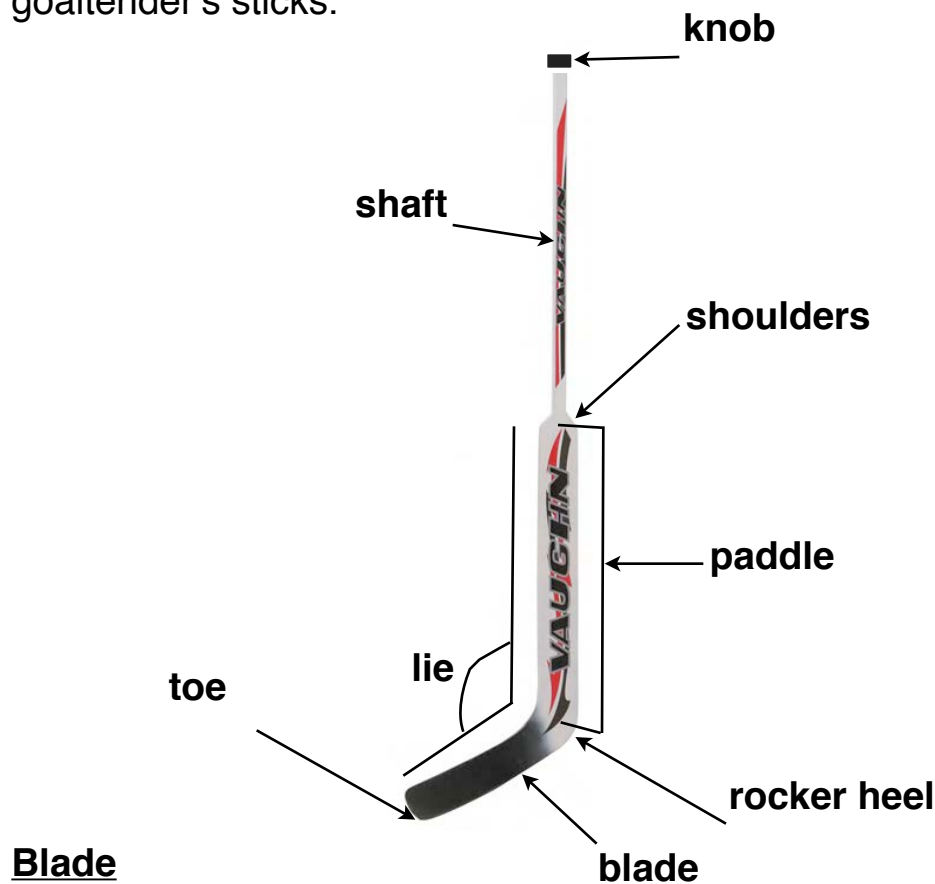
The best way to break in any piece of equipment is to bend them forcefully in directions they are not supposed to go. For example, take your trapper and bend it so it looks flat like a 'Charlie Brown' glove. Reshape it and then open and close it hundreds of times. You can't hurt your glove and this is a good way to increase your hand strength. Be patient it takes many hours of hard work to get that equipment just right.

AVOID BUYING GLOVES THAT ARE TOO LARGE. YOU WONT BE ABLE TO HANDLE THE PUCK OR CONTROL REBOUNDS.

STICKS

Sizing, weight and the stick's lie are all factors that must be considered if the goaltender wants to be successful. The stick must fit you in your upright stance and when you are down in the butterfly, so proper sizing can be tricky.

The stick often causes problems with stance, low shots, rebound control and puck handling. Before we discuss sizing etc. there are some terms that are important to understand when we are talking about goaltender's sticks.



The blade is the portion of the stick that is designed to be held flush to the ice when the goaltender is in their stance. The bottom edge of the blade can be rockered or straight. Sometimes the blade is rockered to assist in puck handling, but I suggest that you stick to the straight bottom edge until you have mastered it. As well as being rockered, a stick may also be curved and there are a variety of curve sizes available. The blade is curved because it is thought that it improves your shot.

I agree that some improvement will occur with your shot but a large curve causes more problems for the young goaltender than it solves. For

example, the ability to control rebounds is affected and the backhand shot is almost impossible for the young goaltender.

My advice on this issue is simple; develop your strength and your shot with a relatively straight blade and experiment with a larger curve later.

Sticks that are curved after they are purchased are really weakened and at today's prices this probably isn't a wise idea. In fact, composite sticks can never be re-curved.

To extend the life of your stick, keep it taped especially the heel. Use white tape so you can pick up the puck on a low shot and sprinkle baby powder or rub candle wax on your tape to help keep the moisture away from the wood. When you re-tape your stick remove all the old tape and apply the new tape to a clean surface. This is done to keep the stick light and so that any serious cracks can be detected.

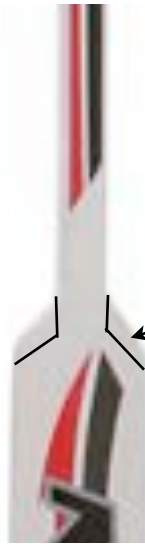
Paddle

The paddle is the portion of the stick that rises up from the ice to the shaft where it narrows. It was probably called the paddle because advanced goaltenders really use that part of the stick to deflect away pucks as well as the fact that it is traditionally held like a ping pong paddle. The length of the paddle will affect how erect the goaltender will be in their stance. If the paddle is too long it will force the goaltender's elbow up too high opening a large hole underneath the arm and making it very difficult to keep the blade flat on the ice. With a paddle that is too large you will see the goalie with the heel of the stick riding around on the ice.

Similarly, if the paddle is too short the goaltender will either be hunched over in their stance or the stick blade will make toe contact, if any, contact with the ice.

When the goaltender butterflys there will be a large hole in the blocker armpit if the paddle is too high.

Trimming the Paddle



This area can be removed to refine your paddle height and nicely sanded to remove any splinters.

One of the benefits of using a wood stick is that you can really dial in the sizing of the stick at the paddle. Since getting the perfect size paddle in a store bought stick is difficult, your wood working skills can be used to trim up the paddle of a wooden stick with out harming it

The Shaft

The shaft is the portion of the stick that starts at the paddle and ends up at the knob. This portion of the stick should be very smooth and free of tape so that the poke check will not be hindered.

As with a forwards stick, a good way to check overall length is to place the stick straight up in front of your face and mark the shaft at your chin height.

The knob of the stick is formed by wrapping tape around the very end of the shaft. It may seem like a trivial part to discuss but the is important for several reasons. I see many young goaltenders with a whole roll of tape on their knob. Not only is this a waste of tape, it also increases the weight of the stick as well as preventing a proper top handgrip when handling the puck.

Why do you think forwards and defensemen usually have a small amount of tape on the end of their stick? Quite simply, it hinders their puck handling and shooting if they put a large knob on. You really only need enough to stop the stick from flying out of your hand when you poke check as

well as being relatively easy to pick up off of the ice if you do drop it. To avoid confusing the goal judge keep the knob white so they don't mistake it for a puck.

Using black tape on your knob is actually a penalty in the NHL!

The Lie

The lie of the stick is simply the angle the blade makes with the paddle. Most sticks are lie 13, lie 14 or lie 15. The lower the number the closer the paddle comes to the ice when the blade is flat. For example, if you compare a forwards' stick, which is usually a lie 5 or 6, with a goaltenders' stick you can clearly see the difference.

What lie should I use? Generally, I would stick to a 13 or 14 but experiment to see what works best for you. If you use a lie 15 it can make shooting difficult and tends to make your stance too erect.

Selecting the proper stick at the store

Unless you bring in an old stick that was sized properly, the best way to fit a stick is as follows: Either wear a pair of skates or stand on a two by four. This is done to approximate your height when you are dressed.

Otherwise the lie and paddle height may be way off. Assume a comfortable basic stance and position the stick properly. Does it feel right? Is your stick hand about knee height? Is the blade flat on the floor? Does it feel too heavy? Too flimsy?

Next, assume a butterfly position and get into a block butterfly and an active hand butterfly. Ideally, there is a mirror there so you can also get a peek at what the puck sees.

This whole process really is a trial and error method but eventually you will be able to intelligently select the proper stick. Once you reach the NHL you have a stick made up exactly how you want and you are given a pattern. When you order your sticks they all come exactly as you want and they even have your name stamped on them. A NHL goaltender would typically go through at least 5 or 6 dozen sticks per season!

As we all know, goaltending equipment is very expensive and it makes sense to protect your investment. The first and foremost enemy of equipment is moisture. Equipment that is not properly dried will certainly fail before it is time. The simple advice is to air out all your equipment after every game and practice, even though you probably stink up your whole basement.

Avoid the temptation to just leave it in the bag. Make sure you dry off the skate blades and take caution near the blades to prevent any nasty cuts. Once they are dry, I recommend that you place the blades in soft guards so that the blades don't become nicked. Do not under any circumstances dry your equipment with hair dryers or heat registers. Although this will definitely speed up drying time it also drastically shortens your equipment's life span.

PACKING YOUR BAG

Every goaltender at one time or another forgets a piece of equipment and nine times out of ten it is either your jock or your left skate! Why is this? There is a simple way to prevent this embarrassment. Pack your bag in the order that you get dressed. Simply imagine what comes first, the undergarments. Next, the jock, then the garter belt etc. By going through this process each and every time you pack your bag you will have this problem solved.



You should always carry a spare equipment kit with you in your bag. I suggest that you include the following items:

- 1) extra toe laces
- 2) extra skate laces
- 3) tape
- 4) stone to touch up a bad edge
- 5) assorted screws and a small screwdriver
- 6) skate rag
- 7) your own personal water bottle
- 8) stick wax



I didn't know that

Not only do germs spread by placing your mouth on a water bottle but by simply touching a water bottle with your bare hand. Usually a water bottle is passed hand-to-hand and this is where germs thrive; on your hands. By simply wiping your eyes or mouth, you now have your defenseman's cold. Use your own water bottle and you won't have to worry.

Comprehensive

ARTICLE ARCHIVES



"Watch the Puck!"



Many things in life are obvious but overlooked. Many technical coaching tips are complicated and difficult to master. Many athletes master some very difficult multi-layered skills to excel in their sport. However, as in all projectile-based sports there is one simple yet universally under-valued and under-stressed requirement - watching the projectile. In our case of course we are referring to the puck.

You might assume that because goalies are playing the game and having varying degrees of success they must be watching the puck. Wrong! They are watching the puck but not WATCHING the puck. Hmmm?

In this article I will explain exactly what I mean and why there is no single more important attribute than watching the puck.



Off the Stick

In the milliseconds before the puck leaves the stick and in the milliseconds right after it leaves the stick blade, the puck reveals itself for what it is. The stick / puck relationship announces trajectory. It announces height, direction and to some degree potential velocity.

If the goaltender does not have a burning, intense visual focus on the puck in these crucial moments, they get a late read on the puck. Saves become imprecise and generators of unnecessary rebounds and sometimes the puck gets a head start before detection on its way to igniting the funny little red light.

Use every puck in practice to intensely record that mental snapshot of the exact moment the puck leaves the stick.

In Flight

Many outside factors can affect the puck during flight. The puck can be tipped, redirected or even dip on its own. So clearly maintaining a continual focus after launch through flight makes good sense. It can also reveal one aspect of puck flight that is rarely discussed. Pucks, like footballs, fly with a spiral. While the football has a horizontal spiral, pucks have a vertical spiral. New pucks with fresh knurls of rubber on the edges will fly typically in a tight spiral if struck cleanly with a well-taped stick. Conversely, old pucks and pucks struck funny with the blade tend to wobble in their spiral on the way to the net. This information is crucial because it will be a much easier puck to control rebound wise if it is spinning in a tight spiral. Wobbly pucks still can have a great degree of velocity and can be difficult to control.

Stand behind the glass at a high level game of hockey during warm ups and note the varying spirals on the pucks as they are launched.

In and Off your Body

Clearly the first two stages of the puck's flight are very important. Following the puck in the final inches before it strikes and in the first inches off your body are the most important in my mind. Many goalies lose the puck after it hits them and they spend important moments trying to locate the puck post save. The best NHL goalies see the puck into the body and if a rebound does occur they see it right off their body.

I have dozens of high-resolution photos at my disposal to do pre-scouts on NHL goalies. It is stunning to see freeze frame photos of Ed Belfour and Vesa Toskala at the exact moment a save happens. It is stunning because in the vast majority of cases there is actually photographic evidence of dual eye contact with the puck as the 100 mph puck is striking their leg pad or upper chest.

Too many goalies worry about developing complicated areas of their games. If you can head towards perfection on your puck watching abilities you will be driving a Lamborghini not a Zamboni.



Many other sports share common physical and mental requirements with that of the hockey goaltender. From a physical standpoint golf is actually quite dissimilar to the goaltender. The stance is not as deep, the use of lateral motion is non-existent and there certainly is no anaerobic requirement for golf. The mental requirements of golf are virtually identical to that of the goaltender however.

The best golfers in the world have a controlled calmness. While winning the Bell Canadian Open Tiger Woods had an unbelievably difficult shot from the sand on the final hole. He had to clear water, stop short of a bunker, fly over 200 yards and place the ball close so he could win the tournament. With thousands of people 20 feet away he calmly nailed the shot exactly where it had to go. He had no visible signs of concern or even cockiness. He simple calmly and methodically executed the shot.

This calmness or lack of visible emotion from a hockey goaltender is a huge tangible benefit. Teammates feed off this calmness and when all hell breaks loose in the defensive zone those that react properly with calmness will make better decisions. Opponents sense trepidation and nervousness like a shark notices a surfer with a bleeding toe.

Staying in the moment is another trait the great golfers have. After a poor shot or a great shot you can evaluate the body language of any top golfer as they set up for the next shot. It would be very rare for you to glean any information about how well their last shot went by studying the golfer after they leave the shot. Try this on a VCR. Tape Tiger Woods or any other top golfer. Start playing the tape somewhere in the middle of a round. Make notes on body language and facial expressions. Try to guess how they did on their previous shot. Rewind that tape to the early shot and see how they did. Great golfers compartmentalize their performance and only worry about right now.

We have all watched goalies sulking and moping around the crease when things go a little south on them. Goaltenders are notorious for having problems here. Bad starts and bad goals are truly difficult to erase from the psyche. The best goalies can put any negatives away instantly and stay in the moment.

Arnold Palmer runs short mental movies in his mind before he executes a shot. These mental movies are vibrant with colour, sound and smell. They are real. They are clear. They are filled with perfectly successful outcomes. It is not surprising that the vast majority of his shots actually follow the script of his mental movies to a T.

Great goaltenders visualize successful saves and successful approaches to all offensive situations. When the situation materializes the auto pilot takes over and a successful outcome occurs.

Hall of Fame goaltender Grant Fuhr is an exceptional golfer as are Michael Jordan, Mario Lemieux and Wayne Gretzky. The mental strengths they possess allow them to be amazing at both disciplines.

Hackin' and Whackin'



We have all witnessed goaltenders using their stick to eviscerate, lacerate and amputate visitors to their own personal space. Eddie Belfour's attempted neutering of interlopers are examples that easily comes to mind. The facial contortions that the unfortunate attackers displayed were similar to those that my five year old resorts to after being told he can't have the WHOLE can of pop.

In Ron Hextall's days before he lost his hair he frequently displayed his penchant for using his wooden implement as a modern day scythe. The question here is that, even though these antics are memorable, are they useful or are they ultimately counterproductive to successful goaltending?

Since Mr.Hextall and Eddie Belfour were the examples I used in my opening paragraph, let us look at them a little closer. Statistically, they both have had many outstanding regular seasons but in several opportunities to win the Cup they have fallen short precisely because of poor emotional control. The outbursts with their sticks are manifestations of this shortcoming. With the exception of battlin' Billy Smith, I can't recall too

many elite goalies that swing the Sherwood with such frequency and still sip from the Holy Grail.

Most young goalies model themselves after pro goalies or local junior goalies they have observed. During these formative years the young goalie thinks this is a technique of using the stick they should, and often do, incorporate into their game. Squirt goalies have cheerfully related to me how they whacked that guy in front during the first period, surprisingly forgetting a rather adept glove save that I found more noteworthy.

What are the reasons suggested for the necessity of impaling, poking, slashing and / or spearing the man in front? The future death row inmate cheerfully explains, " He was in my crease!" or another gem, " He was screening me!"

Before I give my 10 cents worth, I must in good conscience admit that I too, on occasion, have attempted to increase the membership of the soprano section of the Salt Lake City choir.

In fact, one game I even vaguely recall felling one chap named Charlie Simmer. This would be the same Charlie Simmer who played over a dozen years in the NHL. After being informed by a teammate that Mr.Simmer was married to a woman prominently featured in one of Hugh Hefner's monthly periodicals, I realized the error in my ways.

In all seriousness, allow me to argue for the use of the stick in stopping the puck not maiming opponents. Professional players and college players are extremely well protected and have the same pain tolerance as that of a NFL linebacker. Your little stick outbursts will not force them to stop screening you and definitely will stir them up. They now know they can get a reaction out of you and will probably be MORE inclined to stay in your face in the hopes of drawing a penalty. I have also on more than one occasion witnessed goalies preoccupied with the man in front, forgetting that the number one job on their duty list is to actually stop the puck.

Since this writing Eddie obviously won a cup but interestingly he was applauded for his self control this cup run. Coincidence ?

As a youth many of the experiences and life lessons you learn at summer camps stay with you for life. The actual skills you are taught are truly the smallest part of the equation. The relationships you build and the friendships you develop last much longer. I clearly remember many situations from my summer camp experiences that were both good and bad.

I attended a hockey school called Howie Meeker's Hockey camp as a 9 year old and looked forward to a week of learning from a hockey Hall of Famer. With each passing day I asked, "When is Howie coming?" Each and every time the teenaged leader would say, " He is coming tomorrow."



Well on the final day he showed up and skated once around the ice, whacking every kid on the butt and then he left. To this day I've never forgotten this brief cameo. He didn't care about me. He didn't care about the other kids. It was simply a money grab.

When you pick a summer camp be sure to ask the "name" guy or owner what their commitment level is. "Will you be on the ice every day or will you simply show up here and there and leave the actual teaching to the underlings?"

"Will you even show up at all?" Unfortunately, there are camps out there where the owner is seldom on the ice and in some cases doesn't even show up at all! As an educated consumer you must ask the potential program direct unequivocal questions.

I remember a great instructor from a London Knight's Hockey Camp named Kevin Hamlin. He took me under his wing and taught me a lot about goaltending and having fun. Ironically, years later he sat across my desk as I interviewed him as a potential coach for the junior team I was running at the time.





Goaltenders and all hockey players for that matter are known for their toughness and ability to handle pain. This is a question of pride and a question of desire. Injured players lose starting jobs. Just ask an injured starting quarterback what happened to his job when he got hurt and the fill in excelled. As tough as football players are, I would like to believe that generally speaking hockey players have a higher pain tolerance.

The example of Bobby Baun scoring a Stanley Cup winning goal on a fractured tibia AND fibula is truly amazing and unparalleled.

Besides having a keen personal understanding of pain, I have seen true grit that would make your stomach turn. I played with an academic All -American, Bowling Green graduate named Al Leggett. Al had a double major at school, one of which was pre-med. (4.00 GPA cumulative) After being high stuck in that egg head of his, he came by me and inquisitively wondered if he had been cut. His eyebrow rested BELOW his eye on his cheek! In shock I replied that he might need one or two stitches. After over 35 stitches his eyebrow returned its proper elevation and he returned to finish the third period.

NHL head coach, Pete Deboer was also a teammate of mine in the Vancouver Canucks organization. Pete Deboer, besides being almost unstoppable, was also one of the toughest players I have played with. During a play off game he was accidentally donkey kicked in the mouth pushing several teeth back and slicing his mouth open vertically." Dumb-Dumb" as we called him quickly returned to the line up. Quite simply he wanted it that bad.

These anecdotes are obviously extreme but there is a message in here. These guys are pros for a reason: mental toughness. This desire isn't as prevalent in the little leagues. It is common to see a half dozen trainer visits to the ice during a standard minor hockey game. Of all these visits 99% of the players are up and playing the next shift. Besides turning normally placid mommies apocalyptic, these tense moments are often uncalled for and contribute to the "boy who cried wolf" syndrome.

I do not want to minimize legitimate injuries or question the veracity of every incident but I have a challenge for coaches:

Institute a team rule that states: " Any player whose injury causes a trainer's visit or a stoppage in play must sit out the remainder of that period."

Not only will this make players think twice before pulling a dying swan impersonation, it will allow time for the injured to relax on the bench if they are really hurt.

As the great Don Cherry says," If don't have to go to the hospital, you ain't hurt! "

1/ Get lots of sleep the night before a game or practice

2/ Try not to eat within a few hours before the game starts.

3/ Avoid pop, candy, and greasy foods. They can affect your game.

4/ 10-15 minutes before the game should be quiet time to think about the game. Ignore your teammates

5/ Splash cold water on your face before the game and every trip to the bench.

6/ NERVOUS?

a) tense up your whole body

b) now try to relax every muscle, let it go

c) take deep slow breaths, think about something peaceful

7/ Divide the game in small periods (2 min.). Try to get a shutout in that 2 minute period'. Only worry about that period. When a new one starts forget about any goals against.

8/ Think about your best game. How did you feel? Did all the saves come easily? Convince yourself that is how you feel and will play tonight.

9/ When you feel your mind wandering try picking up snow and spray it on your face.

10/ When you feel your mind wandering look at your opponent who has the puck. What hand is he? Is his head up? What colour is his tape? What number is he? By asking yourself these questions he will automatically bring your attention back into the game.

THINK YOU'RE THE WORST AND YOU WILL BE. THINK YOU'RE THE BEST AND YOU WILL BE.



I have personally watched hundreds of goaltenders with exceptional skills in practice, even at lower levels of hockey. However, when these goaltenders play in a big game or attempt to play for the first time at a higher level things sometimes go terribly wrong. What possible explanations are there for such fluctuations in performance?

For the most part, goaltenders all have similar physical skills as they progress through the hockey ranks. Reaction times and objective observations would surely bear this out. So why do some rise to the occasion when it counts and others struggle?

Many goaltenders and athletes in general really struggle with the mental side of the game. In fact this area of sport is the subject of many books and can't adequately be covered in a short article but the premise itself can be discussed.

When an athlete delivers a peak performance it is remarkable how the factors are similar across the varying sport lines. A volleyball player will talk of how easily everything happened for them that game. A baseball player may not recall how they made that miraculous catch. A quarterback may only remember, "knowing" the comeback would happen without a doubt.

Pros to amateurs all can recall a game where they had a performance that was effortless, successful and automatic. It is precisely this ability to call up these peak performances on a 95% basis that allows the athlete to make the big \$\$.

Many athletes and goaltenders feel their performance is a result of external factors beyond their control. This mindset is characterized as an "external locus of control". A goaltender who feels that how well they play is contingent upon factors like how strong their opponents are that night, which star players are out of their line up or whether they have played well in that arena before are typical examples of an external locus of control.

These types of athletes NEVER get out of minor hockey.

The top athletes have an "internal locus of control". They believe they control their destiny and performance. Regardless of factors around them they know they will do well. An athlete with this approach will routinely rise above challenges like sickness, bad starts and other potentially negative factors. I would argue that all top athletes could be typified as having an internal locus of control.

When I played professionally I used to watch a 30 - 45 minute highlight tape of some amazing and routine saves I had made so far that season. While watching this tape I would throw on some very loud tunes and watch this video I had seen dozens of times. When the video ended and the tunes wound down I wasn't concerned about any external factors. I KNEW I was God's gift to goaltending that night (at least I truly believed it!).

I would have goose bumps and an excitement because I knew I was able to stop anything from anybody and didn't have a worry about anything else externally.

If you are struggling, ask yourself: " Am I concerned about outside factors controlling my performance or do I truly have an internal locus of control like an NHL goaltender?"



An old debate rages, arguing on the merits and relative difficulty of varying positions in all the major sports. Which position requires the most athleticism, the most concentration, the most mental toughness, the most skill and the ability to be the biggest reason for success or failure? We have quarterbacks, pitchers and catchers, point guards, golfers, home run hitters and race car drivers. Of course we also have to consider the hockey goaltender.

A goaltender, like his teammates, must develop the ability to skate, which is unique to the sport. All other ball sports allow the participants to play using a rather innate skill - running. The development of the necessary movement skills while wearing bulky equipment is unlike any other position in any sport and if you've tried it, quite strenuous and difficult. I know football players wear bulky gear but the additional element of skating makes this comparison fall favorably to the goaltender.

In football, players basically get to rest 50 % of the time while the other side of the ball is out there. Pitchers get time to rest during inning

changes and basketball players have subs to keep them fresh for late game rallies. Goaltenders aren't quite so fortunate. For good or bad they are on the ice and in the game for the duration. There are no other sports that require the athlete to play the full game time with that degree of importance directing the outcome of the game.

The physical conditioning required to play at the top level in this position is amazing. Again, advantage to the goaltender.

Reaction times for racecar drivers, quarterbacks and fastball hitters are arguably minute and this is the exact reason why so many armchair quarterbacks think they can - but can't. Although traveling up to 200 miles an hour seems fast, everyone is traveling at that speed for most of the race. The relative difference in speed between cars is small and when this gap widens accidents invariably follow.

The baseball hitter is apparently failing in his quest because he only puts the ball in play 30 % of the time even though he knows generally where the ball will be traveling.

Goaltenders have the reaction time argument won hands down. Since shots can travel between 80 - 100 mph and are seldom launched from a static position like a pitcher's mound, a save is truly amazing. The puck could hit any one of 24 square feet, be deflected at the last second and be released in an instant from anywhere on the ice.

The amazing nature of goaltending is not mere hyperbole but simply factual. I think the best way to clearly explain this would be to come up with other sport examples that are changed to reflect this level of difficulty.

How about allowing the pitcher to run in and then throw it?

How about forcing the quarterback to always be on the field AND every once in a while start pulling some of his teammates off to the penalty box.

This gives new meaning to the word blitz!



Years ago, I dropped into the Joe Louis arena to watch the morning skate. Buffalo was in town and the Wings were displaying their new additions. Back then, the Wings had just made a huge push for a third Cup by acquiring Wendell, Chelios and Ranford.

On game days the home team normally skates at 10:30am and the visiting team at 11:30am. I came to say hi to Hasek but I wasn't sure he would be there for an optional skate after a tough 1 -1 tie the night before in New Jersey. Dom was there and his legendary work ethic and skills were on full display.

I have mentioned in past articles about Dom's ability in practice but you truly have to see it to believe it. In the approximately 40 minutes that the Sabres skated he gave up only 3 goals. These weren't long floaters. These were full effort 2 on 0s, breakaways and an assortment of high quality scoring chances.

To me he seemed healthy and extremely mobile but surprisingly jetted off to Germany right after the skate to see a muscle specialist who treats his good friend, tennis star Peter Korda.

During this practice I notice a few things that were truly amazing. NHLers do have a little fun in practice, joking and chirping whenever they score a goal or the goalie makes a save. These inside relationships are what make the practices fun over the course of a long season.

What I found funny was that when the Sabres eventually did score on Dom they seemed to be truly surprised. It became a badge of honor to be one of the few who actually scored on him in practice. I've seen actual goals in NHL games where there was less external joy.

One of the scorers to victimize Hasek was head coach Lindy Ruff. He came in at a good pace for his advancing age, froze Hasek with a fake and hammered the puck through the apparently helpless goalie. Ruff was obviously puffed up by this scoring feat and made sure all the Sabres new how silky smooth his hands were. Peca and Juneau were clearly impressed and in the players eyes Ruff undoubtedly earned some tough to get bragging rights.

As Hasek skated off he gave me a wink, acknowledging he may have used less than 100 % of his skill on that shot. Dom is apparently also pretty bright. It is never a bad idea to give your aging coach a free goal in practice. (Once in a while!)





I realized a childhood dream when I made it to the NHL December 5, 1990. Between juniors, college and the minors I had a million memorable stories. Most of these I can't discuss here or anywhere for that matter! However, I have a few G-rated gems you might find interesting.

When you first get called up to the NHL everything changes. You fly by charter, you never pack your hockey bag, never touch dirty laundry and you stay in suites not normal rooms.

After the official recall paperwork is filed with the NHL, two little known details occur: an official league photographer is assigned to catch your first big league action and your parents are flown in all expenses paid, regardless of the location.

Nice touches but as you could imagine some veterans love new blood. Hazing has now thankfully gone the way of the maskless goaltender but I missed the deadline. After a morning skate in Pittsburgh, I returned to the dressing room to find the largest ball of tape I had ever seen. The tape table was straining under its girth. It was at least the size of a standard beachball.

Trevor Linden, who mysteriously knew a lot about tape ball construction, volunteered,

"If I didn't know better it looks like that tape ball has a lot tape breaks."

He of course was dead on. The ball of tape was painstakingly constructed with breaks in the tape every foot or so. The poor sap that had to undo it would have to take hours finding where each strip started. That poor sap was I and I couldn't believe my whole \$ 3000 Armani suit fit in that ball!

There are some fairly unique individuals in the NHL and I ran into two prime examples.

Gino Odjick was an enforcer for the Canucks at that time and one of best friends. On the ice he brought terror, off the ice he brought many Yogi Berra-like moments. Playing against Calgary one night, one of those unforgettable moments occurred.

After reading a banner that read, "Gino, You are as tough as Sadaam Hussein", Gino leans over towards me and inquired, "What number is this Sadaam Hussein?" Apparently he didn't realize that the man in question was the leader of Iraq, not the enforcer for the Flames!

Another quotable enforcer I remember was Kenie Baumgartner of the Islanders. Upon entering a skirmish late was heard bellowing, " Daddy's home! Who wants it?" - definitely not a man running for the PTA presidency.

Besides the humorous there were some things that made you say,"WOW".

At the beginning of the Flames morning skate I watched Al MacInnis take a few warm up slappers. As Ozzie can tell you this can either painful, embarrassing or both. On fresh ice and without pegs in the net, Mr. MacInnis let five heaters go from the blueline. Each shot struck the middle bar and lifted the posts two or three inches off the ice. After the fifth shot, the net had been pushed all the way back to the boards from the goal line. Ouch!



Several years ago, Mitch Korn and I scouted the Plymouth Whalers goaltender Rob Zepp. Mitch is the goalie coach and scout for the Nashville Predators and for seven years he had coached Dominik Hasek in Buffalo.

The Whalers rarely give up many shots and this in itself can be challenging for the young goalie. After a four hour one-way trip Mitch witnessed the unfortunate goalie being pulled after giving up two quick goals on four shots. There is a message and several questions that arise out of this situation.

What are scouts looking for in a goalie and what happens if they see a goalie on an off night? According to Mitch, he learns a great deal about a goaltender during warm ups because they see dozens of shots and get a chance to display their movement skills and rebound control skills.

The implications for goalies who "can't" try in warm up are dire. You must treat the warm up as importantly as the game itself.

Zepp had a solid warm up that night and for this reason alone Mitch decided to give him another look the following night in Sarnia. Mitch noticed his flexibility, movement skills, size and his style. Please note a point here about style. Mitch indicated that NHL teams do not plan on drafting traditional stand up goalies or the copy cat "cookie cutter" goalies anymore.

The following night in a nationally televised game Zepp had a better night and surely bumped himself up that ladder of success- the NHL entry draft.

NHL scouts always get background on a prospect by talking to the head coach. If your head coach thinks you are a goof in practice and in the dressing room what do you think he will tell the scouts about you ? If you have overbearing parents this will also come up.

The single most important scout you will ever come across is your coach. Mitch indicated that if your coach has great things to say about you he takes these positive comments with a grain of salt. Many coaches promote their players to make themselves look good so their comments are weighted accordingly.

However if they even hint at a negative about you, he gives this full consideration. If a coach is prepared to sell a kid down the river, the kid must really be earning his bad rap.

The beer leagues are full of people who were gassed before they got going precisely because of that fact!

When I speak to young goaltenders, I often discuss the path to the NHL and some of the pitfalls along the way. Like most goaltenders, I started when most young 'tenders start.

Learning to skate as a forward was crucial before I donned the "tools of ignorance" at the age of nine. Specializing too early, particularly without the requisite skating skills should be avoided.

Through minor hockey I fluctuated between house and travel hockey as the politics in place also fluctuated. Many goaltenders succumb to politics and/ or bad coaching during this journey. These negative situations WILL happen without question and the goaltender that rises above the strife will prevail. It is my position that all the politics, the poor coaching and other strife are necessary evils. As in nature a natural selection takes place. Those who can mentally handle the tough going are prepared for the mental rigors awaiting a professional athlete.

The next prerequisite to progression up the hockey ranks is junior hockey. To earn a Division 1 scholarship or to be drafted to the OHL you must be playing top level hockey and more often than not this means junior hockey.

It is at this crossroad that many fail. The ability to dominate at your current level is crucial. I often see kids who want scholarships but simply play an acceptable brand of hockey. This clearly is not enough. You must dominate objectively and subjectively. An observer [scout] must see obvious skill and dominance. Statistical dominance is typically the other factor that is required to seal a Division 1 ride or a high draft ranking.

In junior I was an All Star on a last place team. In college I broke numerous goaltending records on a last place team. In the IHL I set the team record for the lowest goals against average in a season and achieved a .650 winning percentage on a losing team.

I made it to the NHL because I dominated at each level and always provided an insane work ethic to remove any chance of failure.

Every once in a while I get questions from readers about goalie related topics. I want to address some of the more common questions here.

1) I get really nervous before I play. What should I do?

You are experiencing something every goalie goes through at some point, including NHLers. This nervousness is caused by fear of failure, embarrassment and perhaps ridicule. It manifests itself with a queasy stomach, sweaty palms, increased breathing and general feelings of dread. You undoubtedly are focused on either past failures or the fear of the unknown in the near future.

The key to rise above this and put yourself in a "peak performance" zone is to **recognize you are nervous initially**. Once it has dawned on you that you are nervous you must do what great golfers do. You must think about the present. What is happening right now? If you think in the past, bad performances may come up. If worry about the upcoming overtime you will again trigger this nervousness.

To really focus on the present try some of these ideas:

- a) Think about your breathing and try to consciously slow it down.
- b) Ask yourself questions about the present i.e./ what hand is that centerman
- c) Break the game into 2-minute mini periods. Try for success in each portion and mentally worry only about success in that little period

2) My coach keeps telling me I go down too much.

This has got to be the most common complaint I hear from coaches and parents. It is a situation that is almost universally handled incorrectly by the goalie's superiors.

Let me explain with an example.

You have problem with math tests.

Solution: Do not write any more tests. Problem solved!

This obviously a tongue in cheek example but it accurately portrays the problem with everybody telling a goalie he goes down too much.

With out writing MORE math tests and practicing observed weaknesses you will remain an idiot in small village the rest of you life.

The key to this problem is realizing what the coach is trying to say. He really is indicating that you are doing three of the following things incorrectly:

- a) going down too early
- b) going down back in the crease
- and / or c) not getting up rapidly enough.

Does anyone think Hasek went down too much?

To fix this area of your game and placate the coach practice your recoveries at home and try to be more selective when and where you leave your feet.

3) How often should I sharpen my skates?

An old myth still lives that suggests goalies should use dull skates. This is wrong.

EVERY goalie playing in the NHL uses sharp skates of various degrees. As your strength and edge control develops you can handle sharper skates. 99% of pro goalies use a hollow grind like a forward's skate and many NHL goalies sharpen their skates before every game. The legendary goalie coach Mitch Korn once answered this question by saying, " If you use dull skates, you might as well be using rubber boots. You have no edge control and an inability to play outside your crease."

GREAT Myths OF GOALTENDING

THE ISSUE OF SKATE SHARPNESS

From the beginning of time it has often been suggested that goalkeepers should have duller skates. This theory has been based on the assumption that a goaltender can move laterally more easily with the lower resistance from a dull edge.

In reality, however, a goaltender requires sharp edges. The overriding issue behind the need for sharp edges is the importance of a goalie's shot preparation. A goaltender, to be effective in a given situation, has a series of preliminary moves which must be completed prior to a shot release. First, they must make the short, powerful positional adjustments necessary to achieve their positional target. Next, they must come to an immediate, controlled and precise stop — at this target. The final step is a re-establishment of their weight onto both feet.

Now, in order to fulfill these requirements in a small space and amount of time there must be tremendous speed and precision in these starting, moving, and stopping activities. The only tool they have to accomplish this is their skate edges. Therefore, rather than avoiding the development of edge control, goaltenders must attack this development issue with the recognition of its paramount importance in their game.

Edge control is one of the fundamental skating skills any hockey player requires. With this proper edge control, a goalie can handle these sharper edges and bring much greater mobility and positional skills to the game.

credit, Ian Clark author

Before I played in the NHL I attended Miami of Ohio on a full hockey scholarship. While there my mentor, Mitch Korn, turned me from a borderline athlete into a NHL goaltender.

Mitch had many revolutionary, yet sound teaching and coaching ideas. One of his best ideas was to quantify practice performance. Besides an intrinsic sense of how you did in practice there is an easy way to know for sure.

Every practice during my career at Miami involved a detailed statistical analysis of my performance in practice. Some very stingy voluntary statisticians recorded every shot, goal and save. At the conclusion of the day I knew exactly what my save percentage was in practice.

These were accurate numbers, not cleaned up by a parent as they were recorded to make their kid look good. The benefit to doing this type of statistic is lost unless the numbers are accurate.

These numbers were posted in rank order by the time we made it to the dressing room after the practice. All three goalies were ranked for the practice and in over 300 practices I never lost the informal save percentage competition. I had an insane desire to maintain my status as the starter on a daily, shot by shot basis. I had a mortal fear that one bad practice would hasten my trip back to small town Ontario for a fulfilling career as gas station attendant. This never happened and brings us to the stage where I give you some healthy advice.

Select 3 or 4 practices this month and have an INDEPENDENT and INTELLIGENT observer perform a detailed save percentage for each practice. Remember that you get this percentage by dividing the number of saves by the total number of shots.

Are you consistent practice to practice? Are you better than your partner?

Final Thought.

According to Dominik Hasek's goalie coach, Mitch Korn, it was common for Hasek to go through a full 90 minute practice and only give up four or five goals. WOW!

Staff - Student Ratio

To simplify our discussion on the staff - student ratio I'll use the short form SSR to represent it. By definition the SSR indicates the number of staff members on the ice for a concrete number of students. Obviously the more staff a school employs the better the attention a student will receive. The SSR can range anywhere from as high as 1:6 for a general hockey camp to as low as 1:2 for a specialized program.

A true private lesson would result in a SSR of 1:1. The implications of the SSR are crucial in your selection process when choosing a program because of some obvious and some less obvious reasons.

A camp can save a great deal of money on their bottom line by using fewer high caliber staff members. Over the course of a summer this can save the camp tens of thousands of dollars.

The first questions I would have when I am shopping for a summer camp are:

- 1) What is your SSR?
- 2) How many paid staff members do you have each week? and What is your weekly staff payroll?

They seem like quite personal questions but any program that is proud of their staffing program will heartily provide that information.

I would steer clear of programs that pay one or two "name" guys and leave the actual teaching to underlings. Ask them to provide a full list of who is working the camp your child is attending, their ages, their detailed hockey experience and how often the head instructor will actually be on the ice with your child throughout the week.

There are numerous outstanding summer hockey programs in this area and you probably will have a solid experience at most but ask some clear questions about the SSR, staffing credentials and the level of sustained contact with your child

Practicing is the only way to develop your skills and hopefully land you in the NHL. Everyone knows this and every goaltender knows that this is where the men are separated from the boys and the women from the girls. Practices have always been tailored for everyone else except the goaltender. The goaltender is usually just an after thought. Why is this?

Why are unrealistic, machine gun-like drills and endless one on none, two on none drills so common?

Why are drills set up to be predictable when the game itself is anything but predictable? How often in a game does a player come screaming up on a breakaway and take a slapper from four and a half feet away ? Why does the coach go ballistic in a game when a goaltender chokes out a juicy rebound? Could it be that the goaltender is so busy stopping one shot after another in practice that they can't focus on proper rebound control? Why do players think it is funny when they let a high hard one go?

After decades of dealing with these abuses I believe some of the following information will be helpful. Coaches, please put the effort in to at least include some realistic drills into your practices. See the drill section for more information.

TIPS

When I practiced I had two basic goals: to work as hard as humanly possible and to simply survive intact. I also strived to look at the drills that we were doing and make sure I wasn't cheating or getting into bad habits-

For example, commonly drills have shots that are coming from the same area every time. **While some goaltenders line up and just wait for the next shot, I always moved around with the passes before it got to the shooter.** Even though I knew I would never be surprised, players in the NHL don't always do the same predictable thing. **Don't cheat!**

Another example is the dreaded two on none and the three on none drills that coaches seem to love. Technically, every one of these plays should be a goal if they are done property but most shooters routinely mess up. A bad habit to get into is called '**playing the middle**'. This is when the goaltender lines up close to the middle anticipating the pass before it happens. It probably will

make you more successful in practice but this creates a bad habit that carries over to the game.

The rule is this: The puck carrier NEVER scores on a shot here. Line up on the puck carrier and focus on the puck, not the pass. If there is a cute little pass you should still try to explode over to stop it. Remember, the puck is what you line up on!

Rebounds

We had shirts at our summer camp one year that said,

"Anyone can stop the puck. Few can control it!"

This is so true. There are thousands of beer leaguers that 'almost' made it to the NHL . They were pretty decent at stopping pucks but in many cases rebound control was their downfall. You can see what happens in the NHL when a sniper gets a rebound on their stick. You don't have a prayer! But you can prevent many of these rebounds. Have you ever heard a goaltender or parent brag that they or their goaltender faced 40 , 50 even 60 shots? I know you have and I realize that even with creative shot counting the goaltender probably made a ton of saves. However, how many shots happened after the goaltender made the first save? Goaltenders sounding very heroically, relate how they made the first two saves but no one cleared out the rebound.

Hello! Wake up! When I hear that story about the third rebound going in I don't feel sorry for the goaltender, I wonder what they are doing giving out that many second chances.

There are going to be situations where the rebound was unavoidable, but if you set your standards high you can strive to be perfect. This is where practice habits come into play.

In our section on rebound control we discuss the technical aspects of rebound control. Here I want to mention about rebound control in practice situations.

Have you ever said to yourself before a practice that you were really going to focus on controlling and directing rebounds?

I doubt it. In almost every drill a coach throws at you there is some time to worry about the rebound being cleared before the next shot happens. Use this brief moment to swat away any loose pucks or fire them off the glass and out of the zone.

There are basically two types of rebounds: one touch and loose puck.

The one touch is the rebound that is deflected or controlled off the initial shot using the force of the shot to speed the puck out of danger. An example would be a shot from the point that you angle to the corner off your stick.

The loose puck is the rebound that lies around dangerously close after you stop the first shot. This type of rebound must be aggressively smothered or swatted away immediately.

Ideally, you will be the type of goalie that uses the one touch method more than loose puck control.

So from now on in practice take a look around your crease after a drill is finished. How many loose pucks are lying around and how many are over in the corner? **Take pride in your rebound control.**

Approach practices with these basic thoughts in mind : Worry about every rebound, don't cheat on predictable drills and be the hardest worker on the ice. There is nothing that looks worse than a goaltender giving a halfhearted effort when the coach is skating the entire team.

Final Word

My father rarely gave me any advice about stopping pucks but I have never forgotten this one thing he told me. I know it is the reason why I made it to the NHL!

"Treat every practice and game like there is an NHL scout watching your every move. You never know what they look like or when they will come. You must treat every practice and game like that is the only time the scout will ever see you play. " quote from Stan McKichan

At Future Pro Goalie schools we use the Boni puck machine to work on a goaltender's save selections and rebound control. When you look for a top program, look for the controlled use of a puck machine because it truly is a great tool for goaltending development.



Future Pro Senior Instructor - Jeff Lerg

Our machine can fire pucks from 5 mph up to 100 mph and place them accurately on the net in specific areas to address goaltenders weaknesses. If your goaltender is weak on the stick side we can give them controlled systematic work in that area. This can clearly over time turn a weakness into a strength.

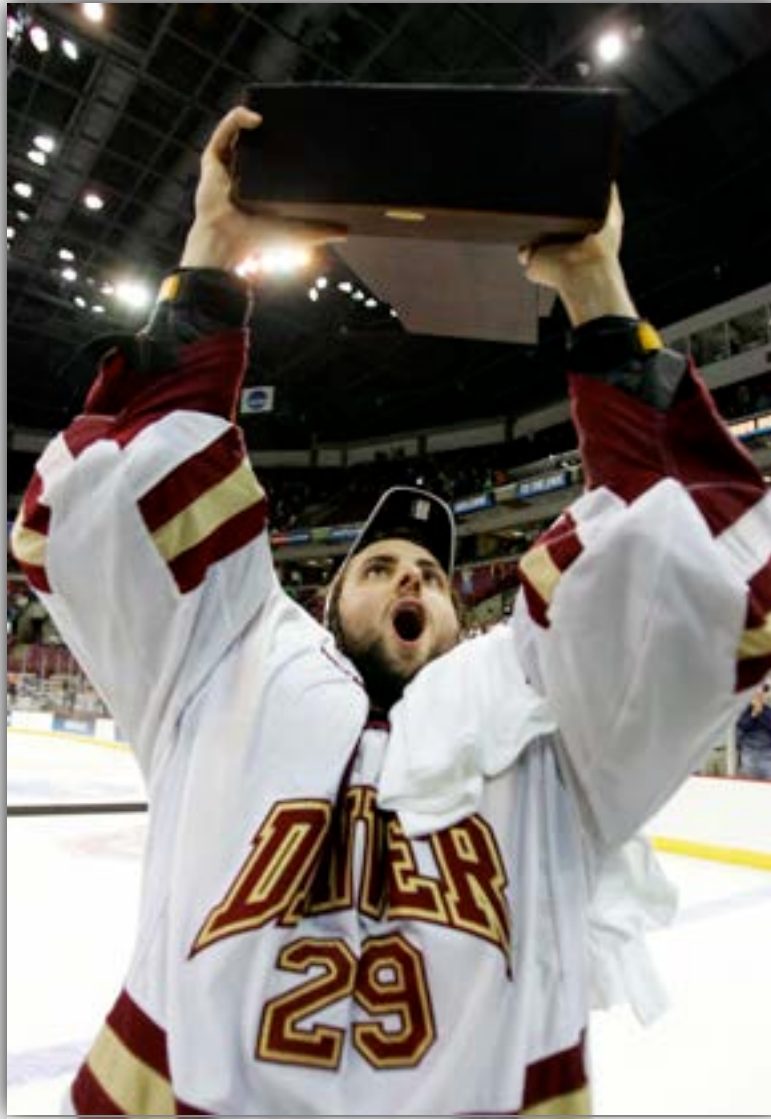
After puck machine training follow-up drills can be coordinated with live shooters to provide realistic muscle memory for that save selection.

I had a great goalie coach in when I played college hockey and I still have scar tissue from his torture with one of these puck machines. This brings up an important point when you see a puck machine in use.

I am very selective about who operates my machine and I only use age appropriate velocities and place pucks towards the outside thirds of the net to

insure the goaltender is not injured. These machines can be very dangerous if not used by a qualified person. Harder and faster is clearly not necessarily better when using a puck machine.

A final point needs to be made regarding the use of the puck machine. Many times I see a goaltender line up on the machine and just stand there waiting for the deluge of pucks to come. This should be avoided at all costs because goaltending is not a game where you have the benefit of lining up easily for each shot. There is a ton of lead up movement before any shot in hockey and when using the puck machine creativity and realism should be tantamount. The goaltender should be performing some crease movements and then challenge for the shot as opposed to just statically pining for the biscuit.



Over the years I have often pondered why hockey players and goaltenders in particular rise above and make it to the NHL. Why do so many end up driving the ice resurfacer, selling value meals at a fast food restaurant, or eternally reminding the customer, "You must pay before you pump after 11 pm Sir." (Not that those are not bad career choices!)

From the home office in Sioux City, Iowa here are the top ten Reasons for Success:

- 1) Want it more than your parents - You know who you are. Daddy hacks and whacks in the beer league. "I could've, should've, would've but..... "
- 2) Ability to recognize and study successful peers.

3) Willing to experiment.

4) Able to handle praise and attention properly and with perspective.

5) Hockey is a healthy full time obsession.

6) Able to work longer and harder than real or imagined peers. If you already work harder than anyone you know does, you must recognize that there is probably someone you don't know doing more than you. This is a powerful motivator.

7) Able to internalize confidence. Ask Brian Burke, then of the Vancouver Canucks if I was adept at this! Oh you said internalize, not externalize. Show people how good you are, don't tell them.

8) Able to handle constructive criticism. If you are already that perfect why aren't you in the NHL?

9) Continued practice on weakness. You must assess, recognize and accept weakness in certain areas. Develop and perfect weaknesses. Challenge weakness, don't ignore.

10) Continued practice on skills already mastered. I always run into goalies that don't need to work on a certain element of the game because they already have it down. Goaltenders in the NHL all continue to work on basics like movement, rebound control and recoveries.

99% of current NHL players never made it there solely on the talent they were born with. They experienced benching, political team cuts, lost parental popularity contests, bad injuries, bad timing, bad teammates, bad coaches and a litany of other potential career stoppers. They rose above doubters, they rose above jealousy, and they rose above common and uncommon excuses for failure. Simply put, they single-handedly did it.

" Strive to determine every potential excuse for failure in your current situation. Systematically, and with vigor, refuse and refute each instance, determining that your upward path is entirely self-directed not externally determined." Stephen McKichan



There are some basic fundamental characteristics that good goalies possess. Regardless of your style or ability, these tenets are universal.

- 1) Make most of your saves at the top of the blue crease. If you get caught back in the net you will be less successful.
- 2) Prevent all goals from going through you or underneath you. We have all given up a frustrating goal where we were in great position but somehow managed to let the puck get through our arms or legs.
- 3) Be "shot ready" early. Many goalies move around in a semi-ready position that almost looks like a stance. However, they aren't 100% ready and get surprised with a quick play or shot.
- 4) Rely on " intelligent guessing". A keen sense of anticipation, which is developed through experience and observation, allows the goaltender to read patterns and plays, making impossible saves look routine.
- 5) Control rebounds on all perimeter shots and most rebounds on closer shots. As I like to say, " The beer leagues are full of goalies that can stop the puck, but can't control rebounds."

Next game or practice, make a mini-mental note on any goals against you.

Did any of the basic principles apply?

There are thousands of ways to give up goals and anyone who ever saw me play would wholeheartedly agree. There are tips, deflections, screens, breakaways, one timers and the like. When you really boil down all goals they are invariably classified by the above principles.

Practice classifying goals by watching games on TV and writing down which rule or rules would apply to a given goal. In time you will find yourself easily classifying goals an instant after they occur.



Legitimate Excuses for Failure



I placed a simple but powerful quote on a whiteboard during one of my summer camps several years ago.

“To have the ultimate result of making the NHL you must systematically and with vigor identify all potential issues that could derail your career. Once each area is identified and addressed you are left with only one valid excuse for failure. You weren’t good enough.”

I want to expand on my quote because within those words one can find the elusive secret to playing in the NHL. Making the NHL is a dream that everyone who plays the game has had and quite frankly is still festering in the minds of the 30 plus age group in the beer leagues.

We all know the odds are slim but we still choose to believe that we are the chosen one; the one that will make our parents, our friends and our hometown proud. When it becomes evident that we aren’t the chosen one there are two types of people. Which are you?

I have a unique perspective on this discussion because I have made the NHL twice in two distinct disciplines, over a span of time and without the benefit of a seamless transition from player to coach. The difficulty in the coaching role was not being able to take advantage of the old boy’s network that players with long playing careers use to leapfrog into management positions.

In précis form here is a quick recap of both journeys. As a goaltender I made the NHL by stepping on the ice to play the New Jersey Devils in a NHL regular season game December 5, 1990. As a coach I made the NHL again in 2003 when I was named as the Goaltending Coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs. Each journey was fraught with figurative peril and the destination was arrived at against truly tall odds.

There are some key elements of my journey that directly apply to this exercise in determining legitimate excuses for failure. I think some of the more popular excuses I hear can serve as blueprint for us. These are the excuses you hear around the gym, the rink and at parties. All failed athletes will readily discuss which successful players they played with and against and typically let it be known they were just as good as the guy that made it. The could have, would have, should have group is a large one indeed. Indeed many of you reading this may recognize a little or a lot of these excuse traits within yourself.

My intention is not to belittle failed attempts to make the big leagues but to critically analyze why people don't make it so that those that still can make it don't fall into those same excuse pitfalls.

Excuse # 1- Injuries ended any chances I had to make it.

There are definitely legitimate cases of injuries that have certainly ended careers. Several players have broken necks and are paralyzed. This point is not about this minuscule yet tragic group. This is about players that are still able to play recreational hockey or at least function at a normal job. Every player that makes the NHL has had serious injuries and a majority of players have had surgeries of some sort. Players have overcome eye damage, concussions blown out knees and shoulders.

My example is typical in some respects. I dislocated my left shoulder 15 times and my right shoulder 17 times, each dislocation requiring an ER visit to reduce the dislocation. As a result I had both shoulders repaired in major bilateral surgery by world renowned Dr. Richard Hawkins.

I have had my left knee operated on, my left hip adductor muscle completely release from its insertion at my pelvis and coil up like a softball under my skin near my knee.

I have had over a dozen concussions, 3 distinct and lengthy losses of consciousness on the ice including a point shot one timer the burrowed in and stuck in my Chris Osgood style college helmet.

I have had floaters and retina issues but I still made it. The most convenient excuse for failure is because of injuries. It takes responsibility for the failed career out of the athlete's hands. It allows for the ego comforting thought that "I was good enough to make it."

It is an extremely rare case where a doctor would say without equivocation that it is 100% impossible for an athlete to continue playing their sport. Injuries kill the will to overcome them more often than the injury kills the career.

Excuse # 2 - Politics and Nepotism killed my career

This one is a go to excuse for many failed athletes. "The coach always picked his son for the team" and "my parents didn't have the money to buy my way on to the top teams exposure-wise".

My father never coached any of my teams, doesn't know how to skate and has been a hard working mechanic for over 40 years. We never had the resources to buy our way onto any teams and my father never had the ability to select me ahead of another kid.

I had to play house league hockey until I was 13 because the banker's son was the goalie on the travel team and in my mind I was far better. My parents didn't drink and party so all the big parties at the banker's house certainly gave me every opportunity to feel the sting of politics first hand. Many times "Fat Frankie" couldn't get up from the ice without flopping over to his belly and climbing up the post yet who starts in the Silver Sticks?

I welcomed this type of unfairness. I reveled in it. It gave me goose bumps then as it does as I write this. I was going to prove these people wrong and I make sure they heard from me when I overcame it and made the NHL. They all received calls shortly after December 5, 1990. Later I will discuss my "Doubter's Diary"

Excuse # 3 – The scouts never saw me and I was overlooked.

There are many examples of NHL players who made it in spite of being overlooked in the NHL and in some cases the Major Junior Draft. Clearly scouting is not an exact science and many athletes are overlooked. But this is not an excuse rather another can of gas to fuel your desire.

I was not drafted to the OHL when I was draft eligible because all the press fell in love with guys like Jeff Hackett and others. As a junior B player, I knew I was better than Hackett but still the scouts ignored me. I was so upset that the London Knights didn't draft me that I called their coach every day begging to let me come out to their practices to show them what I could do. They wouldn't invite me so I showed up anyway at practice at the old London Gardens and got dressed in a bathroom. I attempted to sneak out on the ice but the coach refused and man handled me out of the player's bench. That coach is now a good friend of mine and I see him frequently as we are both NHL scouts now. At the time however I was shaking with rage. I went straight home to Strathroy and began doing my hill sprints until I collapsed.

While playing Junior B in Strathroy Mitch Korn from Miami University attended one of my games and was looking at offering a full scholarship to Jeff Hackett who had left Oshawa and come back to London. In this first viewing he witnessed me allow 7 goals but he must have saw something as he spoke to me after the game.

My next game was the Western Junior B All Star game, which were not normally defensive gems in the 80's. I was scheduled to play the first half of the game and ironically at the other end was Mr.Hackett. I allowed the first shot on goal to go in and it was at this point you find out what you are made of. I proceeded to stop the next 29 shots in my half of the game and after the game I was offered a full ride to Miami University.

Scouts will see you and will hear about you if you are playing well at an appropriate level. If you dominate at the midget level you will play junior somewhere and so on up the hockey ladder.

If you aren't playing at the highest level you can be, find out what is wrong with your game and fix it. Don't succumb to the common excuses for failure. If you ask any of the guys in the beer leagues this question I firmly believe I know what the honest answer is.

“If you had it to do over again, could you have done anything differently?”

If you did everything humanly and honestly possible to make the NHL you are left with the only acceptable excuse for failure. You weren't good enough.

It is a blow to our egos when we accept this but the reality is we are not all good enough. Not being good enough is a victory at some level if it exists in your world after all measures have been taken and all excuses ignored and overcome. Now you can hold your head high and look in the mirror.

My Doubter's Diary

From this article you may begin to sense my burning hatred of those that doubted me and my abilities. I wanted to make it more to prove people wrong than to make it for the sake of making it. No one could then and no one can today tell me I wasn't good enough to play in the NHL. One of the key motivational tools I used and still have today is my Doubter's Diary. In this binder I have written down the comments and names of EVERY person who has ever indicated that I wouldn't make the NHL. It is quite ragged as you could imagine and has over a dozen pages. Everyone in this book has received a call or a visit after I made the NHL to “thank them” for motivating me. The people who doubted me ranged from coaches to GM's to teammates. I will share with you my favorite one and the one who received my first phone call at 10:48 EST on December 5, 1990.

During Second Grade we had a chance to tell Ms. McNeil what we were going to be when we grew up. This of course is common in all schools.

“I will play in the NHL with the Toronto Maple Leafs. Stevie McKichan” The original words printed out quite messily with a dull large primary pencil.

Ms. McNeil's comments appear in red pen immediately below.

“That will most likely never happen. You need to pick something possible like a firefighter, police officer or teacher.”

Oh it definitely was possible.

The Fake Poke Check

This skill without doubt is the most effective yet least used tool in a goaltender's arsenal of puck repulsion. Although this skill is fairly self-explanatory, I should clearly outline in detail what it is; when you use it and of utmost importance, why it works so well.

A fake poke check by definition is a deceptive movement of a goaltender's stick, shoulder or body that fools an attacker into believing a full blown poke check is imminent. Normally, a fake poke would involve the goaltender thrusting the stick forward at the shooter in tight but maintaining a grip on the stick at the normal stance position. The flinching movement of a fake poke check is designed to pressure a forward into a bad decision, without negatively affecting the goaltenders solid positioning.

This move works well in the following situations: when an attacker is in tight and has his head up reading the goalie, when an attacker is collapsing to the net from the corner and on a clear or pressured breakaway.

Before I go into detail about how to specifically use a fake poke check, I want to explain why this works so well. A shooter is very comfortable when they see predictable things from a goalie. They know how to beat a goalie if he/she does this and what to do if the goalie does that. Like marriages, sneaky surprises usually aren't welcomed and under the duress of a game, a sneaky fake poke check certainly is not enjoyable for the shooter. Simply put, the first reason for the success of this move is the surprise element. However, this factor is not the only reason why a goalie would use it. One could argue that a goalie could turn his/her back to the shooter and a shooter, although undoubtedly surprised, would still score. The goalie must recognize that this surprise must not involve committing themselves. Unlike a full diving poke check, where the risk sometimes doesn't justify the reward, a fake poke is as noncommittal as Serge Fedorov. When done properly, your stance is maintained, you haven't left your feet and if for some reason the shooter hasn't "bought" what you are selling you are still in great shape.

Let's discuss how this would look on a breakaway. Initially, you need to realize that a shooter normally has only 2 or 3 things they will do in a game on a breakaway. In practice they may get cute and try all these fruity moves but when their butt is on the line they aren't so brave. Feeling pressure from behind they will look up at the goalie early into the breakaway. Almost subconsciously they will make a decision based on early visual cues they are getting from the goalie. i.e./ are they leaving net for a shot or are they out challenging trying to force a deke? They are now almost mortally locked into what they will do, with only the timing up in the air. It is at this moment when they are 10 feet or so away that a realistic fake poke check works so well. They invariably go to their move early or choke up with it. The premature move shifts the chance of success back to you and unless they are an elite goalscorer almost guarantees success for you.

Remember of course, as President Clinton knows, deception is an art form and if you are sloppy you will get burned. The fake poke check must not be over used and must be realistic in timing and appearance.

Scoring Attempt Outcomes

On any given attempt to score on a goalie there are 4 fundamental outcomes of that attempt. The understanding of what these are and what they mean to the goaltender's approach is tantamount.

- 1) **A goal** - This is clearly a successful outcome for the shooter and as the old adage states, " If you don't shoot, you can't score!" . From the goaltender's point of view a goal is more often than not preventable. Clearly some shots can't be stopped because of many factors like velocity, release and possible distractions like a tip or a screen. However, a good goaltender strives to determine causative factors where possible and quickly develop a strategy if that situation occurs again.
- 2) **A puck that hits the goalie** - One outcome that happens frequently is a shot that simple strikes the goaltender. Whether positioning or poor aim by the shooter, many pucks simply hit the goaltender.
- 3) **A puck the goaltender moves to stop** - After the puck leaves the stick of the shooter the goaltender intercepts the puck on its journey using tracking and reactionary skills. The higher the level the more infrequently successful this outcome occurs.
- 4) **A shot that misses the net** - Whether poor aim, or good position by the goaltender forcing a bad shot, many pucks miss the net entirely. Although quite unglamorous, a trait of a great goaltender is that many opponents are missing the net. This speaks clearly to excellent positioning skills causing guys to get too "cute" or "fine" with their shots which causes misses.

What does the above mean when viewed in context? Any scoring attempt on a goalie has one thing that can go right for the shooter and three things that don't. If a goaltender has good position they really don't have to rely on super human reflexes.

Remember, a great goalie forces a shooter into the three poor outcomes by acquiring a proper angle and depth of challenge.



It is unheard of for a team in the modern era to have one goalie play all the games. If you have played hockey for any length of time as a goalie you have shared the net with a teammate. Sometimes you back up and sometimes you are the starter. I would also imagine that at some point you may also play 50% of the time.

The relationship you have with your partner is actually very revealing of your "athletic character". I have had numerous partners in my career and they varied from one I still consider a great friend to others who had their head fully up their hind quarters.

I have devised a simple little survey in an attempt to get you to introspectively and HONESTLY assess some indicators of your "athletic character" when it comes to your relationship with your goaltending partner.

Go through each question below and answer honestly.

- 1) Have you ever told anyone that you are better than your goalie partner?
- 2) Do you get a tinge of enjoyment when your partner allows a bad goal?
- 3) Do you hope for your partner to get injured so you can play more?

- 4) Do your parents tell you or do you tell your parents that you are better than the other goalie?
- 5) Do you have a tough time feeling good when your partner makes the save of the game and earns a big win?
- 6) If a teammate complains to you about the other goalies' play do you agree with him and perhaps even add to the conversation?
- 7) If you see a your partner making a consistent, fixable mistake do you attempt to help him in a supportive non-critical way or do you simple let the issue fester?

Clearly, you can see the point of my little Q&A. I will admit I have had less than honorable thoughts about goalie partners in the past. But as you mature and become a coach I can see how fruitless and how counter-productive this is to your game. It may temporarily make you feel better about yourself when the goalie partner struggles but this is very short-lived.

I want all my goalies to honestly support their partners verbally, silently and around teammates and parents. Strive to be that athlete that is a leader. A leader supports all their teammates and one great side effect is that over time great leaders always win. Teammates are very accurate in determining your character and this may explain why many times teams play much harder for one goalie on the team.

In all walks of life and in particular goaltending I believe in something called karma. So perhaps the next time that puck goes off the post and in on you perhaps the hockey gods are aware of your internal joy when your partner recently muffed on the flip in from center.

Qualities of a GREAT Beer League Goalie

“ You like D & D, Audrey Hepburn, Fangoria, Harry Houdini and croquet. You can’t swim, you can’t dance and you don’t know karate. Face it you’re never gonna make it.

I don’t wanna make it... I just wanna.....be the best beer league goalie on the planet.”

My Chemical Romance and Keeks

Once our competitive careers end, if indeed we had competitive careers or not , most of us maintain that hunger to play hockey for the competitiveness, the love of it and for the fun. It is great to be with the guys and sometimes act in the dressing room like we are still 14. It is awesome to at some level to fool ourselves on the ice that we could indeed still play in the NHL.

We don’t really “wanna make it” anymore we just want to be the best we can be.

In many cases, lifelong goalies become out players and vice versa when it comes to our beer league careers. With my experience in both areas I wanted to compile a list of what I believe makes a great beer league goalie.

- 1) Rarely, if ever misses a game or shinny skate. In the rare event that it must happen they ensure 100% of the time a suitable replacement is found and they militantly follow up to confirm their replacement is fully committed.
- 2) They always have extra beer for those teammates that always seem to forget.
- 3) They smile a lot and never criticize their teammates.
- 4) They don’t throw hissy fits when a player with 2 months under their belts throws up some chin music accidentally.
- 5) They show up early and properly stretch out so they don’t get hurt 5 minutes into the skate and leave the posts and crossbar as the goalie for the remaining 45 minutes.

Unless they are really seriously injured they always finish the skate.

- 6) They always check their gear before they get to the rink to make sure they didn't forget something.
- 7) They talk a lot on the ice in a supportive way to help teammates in the Defensive zone, especially the newbies.
- 8) They don't stop trying when the score gets up there and the back checking, if there ever was any, completely disappears.
- 9) They never have more than 2 beers after the game when driving. Remember, buzzed driving is as bad as drunk driving.
- 10) If the time expires in the shinny session and there is no zamboni guy, a great beer league goalie is in no rush to get right off the ice. If there are still enough guys that want to keep playing stay out there.

And the most important one:

11) Learn first aid and how to use the Defib unit, which is pretty well available in most rinks. It is shocking how many beer leaguers die of cardio vascular related issues. Many of the deaths could have been avoided with prompt first aid.

My former teammate in junior, Tim McIntyre (brother of long time NHLer and also a former teammate, Johnny McIntyre) collapsed at game in Forest, Ontario a few years back. He was in good shape and definitely not overweight.

He lost consciousness and went into cardiac arrest. With out the immediate medical care he received he would have been another statistic.

The days of us having a realistic goal of playing in the NHL are over but we should strive to be the best beer league goalie we can be.



When we see a Toronto, Montreal or Detroit jersey we can understand the pride involved as the fan supports their favorite team. Jerseys are never supposed to hit the floor and they are accorded a similar respect to that of the nation's flag.

In fact, I woke from a slapshot induced loss of consciousness to find my Miami Redskins jersey cut off me and splayed on the ER floor covered in my donated blood.

The shock of seeing the jersey on the floor outstripped the other obvious elements that should have shocked me. I immediately instructed the nurse to retrieve it off the floor and secure it for me. It now has been lovingly cleaned and stitched back together and is nicely framed along my NHL game worn jersey.

In a long-winded way, this article is about a different kind of jersey pride. It is about rebound control.

Advanced goaltenders are well versed on the importance of rebound control attributes like stick involvement and active glove use. Going further, goalies have also learned the value of gut traps on midline shots as a

rebound possession strategy. Here is where I want to take this further. We must strive to secure all pucks that strike anywhere on the jersey. Shots at the shoulder, upper arm, forearm and of course the gut area should all be possessed without allowing the puck to escape to the ice.

“Jersey rebounds” are universally dangerous as they typically die in the aptly named kill zone 5 – 10 feet in front of the net. Rebound control skills like the glove cradle, glove trap against the body, kipper catch and of course the gut trap must be perfected. This jersey pride on rebounds must be fine tuned with constant diligence on each shot faced in practice to this area and one additional key is that your visual attachment should allow you to actually see the puck striking your jersey.

Take pride in your jersey and the logo on it. With equal pride strive to be that goalie who possesses all pucks that strike anywhere on that sacred cloth.





We all have had a rocket off the mind in games and more likely in one of our team practices. Your ears ring, your head is buzzing and you may even smell the burning rubber that has shed off the puck as it tries to enter your skull.

Many goalies cause unnecessary trauma to their brains by not deploying their helmet properly. We all have had a rocket off the mind in games and more likely in one of our team practices. Your ears ring, your head is buzzing and you may even smell the burning rubber that has shed off the puck as it tries to enter your skull.

Many goalies cause unnecessary trauma to their brains by not deploying their helmet properly. The design of the new helmet causes pucks to glance off the helmet and continue on its merry way off to the corner or up into the crowd. That can only happen if you keep your mask square to the puck. If you turn your head or tuck your chin down you may get one flat on the helmet. In this case a greater degree of force goes into your head instead of away from your head in a glancing blow.

Try to condition yourself to stare down the head shot and not turn on it... your brain depends on it!



One great attribute all goalies should possess is stick involvement. To angle pucks precisely with your stick blade whenever possible is a great trait.

Many goalies allow unnecessary pucks to hit their pads when stick involvement would have been prudent.

It brings up a great story from summer camps gone by:

NHL final four goalie Michael Leighton is a former Future Pro student and staffer.

One year while filling out a report card for a kid he said in the comment section:

"Brendan, you should try to do a better job *pudding* the puck in the corners."

I got it during final checks but to this day, anytime I see Leights I remind him that it was a wise choice going to the OHL.....



I have had the privilege of learning from the best in the business Mitch Korn.

I started teaching / learning at hockey camps when I was 17. Things have changed in over two decades!

The key for young goalie coaches is to get a good mentor. Don't be THAT GUY that knows it all and learned / created infinite goalie knowledge yourself.

Learn from smart goalie coaches and give them credit.

For instance, besides Mitch I have learned from dozens of goalie coaches of all calibers.

Paul Fricker, Dave Wells and Robert Roth for instance have all taught me several things that I had never thought of. Keep an open mind and remember it is about the goalie you are teaching. It is not about you.

High Shot Count Myth



Unfortunately, many of the teams I have played on have featured poor defensive approaches and “loose” defensive zone coverage. We have all faced tough nights on these types of teams where 40, 50 and perhaps even 60 shots were placed on our net. In most cases a loss was the natural outcome but in the process some of those shots resulted in amazing hi-light reel saves.

I also often hear parents boast of how junior had 50 plus shots and only gave up 2 – 3 goals in a tough loss. The save percentage would be good for that performance, but what about the specific quality of each goal surrendered?

We can soothe our egos with the comforting memories of all the “great” saves while pushing down the memories of shots that perhaps we could have had. We also take comfort in the verbal scuttlebutt after these types of games. “If Joey didn’t stand on his head we would have lost 8 – 2 instead of 4 – 2.”

Most average goalies live in this world. We are human and to take a positive from a big negative keeps us coming back day after day. It was why those 2 – 3 golf shots per round that are PGA quality drag us back to the course the next day to try to break 80.

Is this a healthy approach for the development of our games as both goaltenders and in my example of a being a hack golfer?

I understand that goaltending can be a negative position as much as anyone who has strapped them on. I know that we must strive to pull the smallest of victories out of tough high shot losses. It is human nature.

Let's go back to the golf example for a second. If we ignore our mediocre putting because we are fixated with the memories our 3 great 275 yard drives, we are destined for continued mediocrity. Likewise a goalie who falls in love with his 2 – 3 heroic saves in a 50 shot 6 – 2 loss is clearly missing the point.

Take whatever positives you can from a tough high shot loss but at the end of the day you can identify 2 – 3 issues in your game that need to be addressed. Could your puckhandling have been better? Was your rebound control a causative effect on any of the goals?

As my coach Mike Murphy frequently said, “ I don't care how many you stop. You are going to have to answer for the ones you give up.”



Everyone who has played youth hockey has imagined the day the call will come. The day when you are officially called up to the big leagues. It is truly a weird position to be in knowing you are good enough to play in the NHL but you are still down on the top farm team.

You know you can play in the NHL because you are dominating subjectively and objectively at the minor league level.

You know you can play in the NHL because every level jump you have made since the age of 9 years old has been successful.

You know you can play in the NHL because you can stop veteran NHL players in training camp and in summer pre camp workouts. You know it.

I was freezing my butt off in a suburb apartment complex near Milwaukee, Wisconsin with my wife and newborn son.

At that time I was statistically near, or at the top of the goaltending categories in the league. My back up goalies were Steve Weeks (great guy) and Bob Mason (didn't dress much and used hand cream way too much).

I walked over to the rental TV stand and popped in a new CD to watch the sports hilites. "18 and life" , by Skid Row was cranking out at full volume on my \$84 ghetto blaster. In the NHL at that time was Kirk McLean and Troy "Oscar" Gamble. During the hilites, they mentioned that Kirk had tweaked something and had to be replaced by Oscar. Things slowed down as the gravity of what I was hearing sank in. I tired to contain myself and hollered out to Tracey, "Trace...." I was cut off in mid stream as the phone rang.

It was "FAT HEAD - RED HEAD" (Brian Burke). We lovingly called him that because back then he had a tinge of red in the huge head. (huge in a literal and figurative sense).

"You plane ticket is at the Northwest counter. See you on Long Island"

It had finally happened.

The Call had came.

A few nights later on Dec 5, 1990 I stepped on the ice and finally made it to the NHL vs. the New Jersey Devils.



Over the last two decades I have often heard parents naively make this quote, "I'm not looking for my kid to play in the NHL or anything, If he gets a scholarship we will be happy." Good Luck...

Here are a couple of facts an athlete / parent should recognize about the process.

These points relate to the main 4 Division 1 Leagues.

1) Very few Canadians earn scholarships anymore. Take a look at the rosters of the CCHA teams. Miami has 2 Canadians, University of Michigan - 4 Canadians for example. This level of Canadian input is comparable across Division 1 on average. This has changed over the last couple of decades when a majority of the rosters were Canadian.

The realistic opportunity for a scholarship is far more rare for a Canadian than it would be to make an OHL roster.

2) By far the preferred league for a stepping stone to a Division 1 ride is the USHL and the NTDP.

3) Athletes from the Ontario Provincial Junior, BCHL and NAHL do achieve scholarships here and there but they are the minority. I would suggest that playing in those leagues you had better demonstrate clear statistical and subjective dominance.

4) Scholarships aren't earned typically with a random fluke notice at some game where the scout just happens to be there. This "hollywood story" type of offer is exceedingly rare.

5) In reality, the assistants at the D1 schools scour the stat websites to notice trends, call the head coaches of the statistical dominators and begin the process. In this call to the coaches they often will ask about other kids. It is here where your work ethic and attitude become crucial. Remember your coach will have the potential to name drop in these moments. If you don't impress your coach the gas pump job will be relatively soon coming.

6) Another big way that scouting happens is when a well connect hockey person makes a call on someone's behalf. That will get the scout's butt in the seats for a direct scouting visit. That well connected hockey person typically has high end credentials.

7) Schools love in state kids over out of state kids because they can save out of state tuition and use it to get more kids.

8) At the end of the day, scholarships are for those athletes that are playing at the correct level and our dominating.

9) College scouts throw ALL promo fluff videos straight in the trash. They would only be interested in video THEY request showing a variety of games THEY request. They have no interest in video from the the game where you stopped 50 pucks.....especially when it is a game sandwiched between two yankings.

This post is not to discourage. It is to point out the process so that you don't fool yourself.

There are many opportunities at D3 and other programs.

The key to proper career planning is to set realistic goals and work your butt off to surpass them.

I would rather be shocked I got a D1 ride than to be disappointed I didn't get the starting job as a freshman at MSU.



How often have you missed out on a shutout late in a game? Many times these goals have an odor to them. Why does this happen so often? Why do announcers go out of their way to say the word shutout?

Typically, many of these late shutout crushing goals occur after we become well aware of the fact that we are pitching a shutout and the nagging awareness of it in many cases is the cause. Mental distraction, even marginal, can cause a weak goal to go in. It is also a “self-fulfilling prophecy” which means the more we fixate or contemplate something we can actually inadvertently cause it to happen.

I personally lost several shut outs in the later stages of games and never really had a good strategy as a player to handle that situation.

Well..... 20 years later in a simple discussion on the ice with a bantam female goalie the most simple solution came out.

Brooke Rolfe from London, Ontario has started the current season off with 4 straight shutouts in games where she was actually quite active and important in the result. As you know that isn't always the case in many shutouts. You are just a live body with no real impact on the outcome.

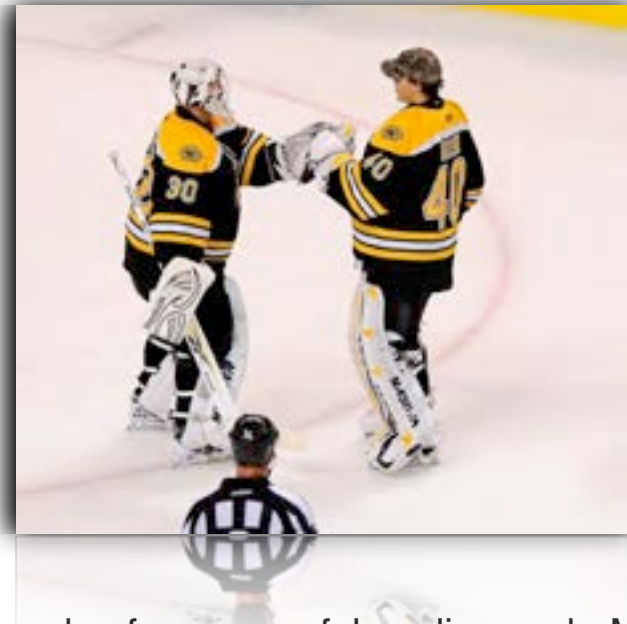
Anyways, I asked her how she keeps these shutouts going and avoids falling victim to the late game cheeser?

“I pretend like I have already given up a goal and the other goalie has the shutout.”, came the incredibly simple yet powerful tip.

Try this strategy the next time you play and see how it goes for you.....

Qualities of Excellent Goalie Coaches

I used to play against Bob Essensa back in the Michigan State days before we went to the NHL. (him for real...me for the 1/2 cup of coffee!)



Bob is a great example of a successful goalie coach. Many of you reading this forum are goalie coaches at some level and we can learn from Bob's approach.

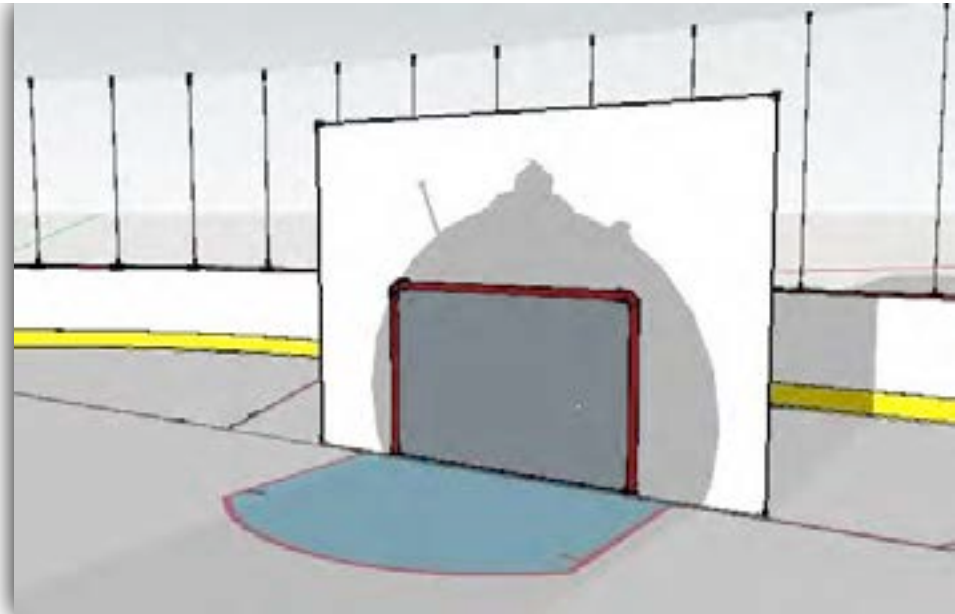
Here are the attributes that allow him to be successful:

- 1) It is about the athlete not the coach. He doesn't try to change the goalies he works with to his way. He works with their styles and history.
- 2) He doesn't get upset when one of his goalies disagrees with a coaching point. He is open to intelligent discussions on why something should or shouldn't be used and then he lets the athlete decide. Too many youth goalie coaches are insecure and immediately get stand offish if someone dares to not blindly follow their instructions without well reasoned support.
- 3) He also doesn't get upset if the goalie has a different summer time goalie coach. HE understands that there are tons of great goalie coaches out there and handles each goalie based on what he sees currently.
- 4) He has great people skills. He gets along with everyone.

In simple terms he tries to pull his goalies along with him instead of pushing.

He is a great role model for young goalie coaches.

Overweight Stand Up Goalies



I often receive inquiries from parents regarding the stand up style. Goaltending styles and approaches fall on the continuum from Stand up to Flopper with a pure patient reactive butterfly somewhere in the middle. Skills and attributes (physiology) often play a role in the style direction a goalie chooses. I don't like to pigeon hole a student into "my style" but work with their attributes.

The one HUGE problem I have is with overweight children choosing to play stand up. In rare cases there can be a serious medical or genetic issue causing childhood obesity, however in 99% of the case the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Go to any mall and jot down the percentage of humans past the point of no return with respect to obesity.

This is why the show "Honey we are killing the kids" was so illuminating. These are the kids I have seen at camps pounding down big macs etc at lunch that their "wheezing" mother shuffled in. At its face I have no issue with the weight IF it doesn't impact their effort on the ice.

However, all too often Johnny won't leave his feet when he should because it is "Too much work" and "I'm a stand up goalie. I have pasted an email today where a parent wanted an honest answer to their question, which I provided.

I am guessing I might receive a morally outraged response.

Please don't enable your kids to be overweight blobs that for the first time in history will see today's youth with a lower life expectancy than their parents..... (I have seen the kid below before so I know both he and his parents are medically obese by definition)

Good morning Steve. This is XXXXXXXX writing to you.

My question/concern is that are your instructional portions only geared towards a "butterfly" style goalie?

The reason I ask is that XXXXX is not a butterfly goalie and I am looking for training that will help him expand on his style.

He has become a better goalie this past season and has really increased his already love for the position. Thus far, all of his ability has been natural, with the exception of instruction from XXXXXXXX last summer.(due to an offer I couldn't pass up on)

I would love to place him in your camp the last week you offer it in Strathroy, however I/we do wish him to be able to further develop his "stand-up" style of goaltending.

Be honest and let me know if he would be better taught from somewhere else in this style, or if you do work with all areas/styles.

Thanks so much and I look forward to hearing from you.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

My response to the email:

We work with all styles and don't preach one over the other.

Most "Stand up goalies" are directed into that approach because they have issues with strength relative to their body weight.

If he is choosing to play a more "stand up" style because of preference that is acceptable. If he is playing that way because he is over weight then there are other issues to be more concerned with.

An athlete with "weight issues" as a goaltender will not get out of minor hockey, regardless of love and passion for the position.

You asked for honesty and there it is.

In all youth sports horror stories and sometimes criminal anecdotes pervade, related directly to the misbehavior and antics of adults. There are many great parents of young athletes and they are marginalized reporting-wise because those stories don't make good copy.

I want to stress that for every problem Dad I see 8 that are awesome! They stay positive, study the position to provide helpful feedback, support their child and bring them to places to get proper coaching. This article is not about them. It is about the other side.

These are only a few examples but I welcome more categories both good and bad. As I'm frequently inclined to do, I have put some thought and classifications into one species of adult - the goalie dad.

The premise here is for goalie dads to perform some honest introspection and see if any of these traits reside within. I have tried to perform sharp groupings here but in reality many of these traits can't be bound to one of my sub groups. In other words; leakage.

- 1) **The Politician** - This goalie dad works the parents, coaches and scouts in an attempt to position their kid for success and garner favor. The Politician can be identified by overt and sustained lobbying with the coaches for prime starts, hand selected opponents and special treatment for their goalie.
- 2) **The Statistician**- This goalie dad has never met a spreadsheet he didn't like. He will take any legitimate, favorable stat, or create one, to put forward their agenda with their kid. I actually had one dad utter this exact comment. "If you take out the three games where my son was pulled he had the second best goals against average in the league"
- 3) **Quick Trigger** - The QT dad is just looking for a reason to lose his mind, create drama, and he does so regularly. If junior gets pulled it is everyone's fault except his kid and he must confront someone to get to the bottom of it. Charles Manson will predictably show up the instant the rotation is jerked around or if Charles Junior misses a start.
- 4) **Quiet Assassin** - This goalie dad will never say anything constructive to anyone's face. They will work the back channels negatively commenting on coaches, other players and other parents. The QA dad can be recognized by his ill attempts at

concealing his perverse glee when the other goalie on the team is having a bad game.

5) **The "Marinovich"** - Named after the famed horror story football dad, this goalie dad has all the same traits. They will do everything in their power to drive their kid to the NHL. They will force their kid into the NHL come hell or highwater. They will attend every camp, get the best personal trainers and spend whatever it takes to get their kid to the NHL. The problem here is that dad wants it more than junior. The Marinovich Goalie Dad can easily be recognized by endless car coaching and frequently feigning realistic aspirations by saying things like, "I know my kid isn't going to play in the NHL but if he could at least get a DI ride I would be happy". The intrinsic and perfect irony is that he truly believes his kid will play in the NHL and ignorantly assumes their fallback position is a DI ride. As if that is an easy thing to get.

6) **The "Stan McKichan"** - I am biased because I believe I was blessed with the perfect hockey dad. This type of goalie dad shows up smiling and happy to every game and leaves that same way regardless of outcome. He rarely if ever says one word at the game and never speaks to coaches or other parents except to say hello with a smile. As bad or as well as I played he always asked if I had fun and he never car coached - ever. When I called him after my playing in my first NHL regular season game he asked me if I had fun and then said "How about that."

The Goalie's Mother



I'm sure you've seen her at a hockey game
Although you may not know her name.
She seldom sits with her friends or the crowd
Who get so excited and yell so loud.
The rest of the team, they can give and take,
It's the goalie who always makes the mistake.
"Take him out!" they holler, "He's a sieve!"
"He doesn't even deserve to live!"
But when the contest is going the other way,
They have nothing but praise and good things to
say.
"He's stopping them all. Isn't he great?"
"If he keeps this up, he'll be going to the States"
When overtime comes, she can no longer stay
But goes to the lobby and starts to pray;
And cautiously listens to hear a loud roar
She then knows that one team has now made a
score.
Her heart in her throat, she peeks at the fans,
They are joyful, screaming and clapping their
hands.
With a sigh of relief, she knows her boy's team
has won.
So for now there won't be any more criticizing
her son.
She says a quiet "Thank you God" as she starts
to the door.
Today's a happy ending but she knows there'll
be more
Times when the goalie doesn't always come
through.
There'll be days when she'll want to break down
and cry
For the player with the almost impossible task.
Oh, how she loves that little boy behind the
mask.
Yes, I'm sure you've seen this lady at one time
or another
'Cause she's a special breed, she's the Goalie's
Mother

Goalie Statistical Hat Trick

We are all well versed in the standard vanilla goalie stats like GAA, save percentage and the almighty win/loss record. For me, there are some hidden stats that are critical and truly reveal greatness or lack thereof.



Short Handed sv% -

A goaltender with a save percentage over .900 while shorthanded is money in the bank. Power play goals are such a strong predictor of winning in the NHL that how the tender does in this situation is vital. If a team earns two power play goals in any NHL game they overwhelmingly end up with a win. So the true worth of a goaltender is revealed while shorthanded.

Bounce Back Win percentage -

Every gets pulled or has a poor outing. That is not the issue for me. The true issue is the winning percentage a goalie has the NEXT game after they lay an egg. The best goaltenders with the highest degree of mental toughness will win an inordinately high percentage of their bounce back games. Over his career you could bet your house on Ed Belfour's bounce back win percentage.

Puck Handling Efficiency (PHE%) -

Every time a goaltender touches a puck in a puck handling environment one of two things happen:

A) His team maintains puck possession

or

B) they don't

As an NHL Goaltending Coach, I tracked this area in a meticulous way. At the the conclusion of every game I knew the PHE % for both goalies. Over the years I worked with Eddie his PHE% averaged 94%!

Why is this so important?

NEWS FLASH

The other team can't score if your team has the puck.....

Don't get preoccupied with the obvious everyday goalie stats. If you want to get a better sense of your worth try to chart these three stats.

1) Training goalies to ***snap their head to follow a puck and then*** have them get their body to follow. This following and repositioning post save should be milliseconds from being identical and not observable as two distinct activities. I have seen too many lunch pail goalies with a purposeful head snap to track a puck and then a week and half later get their body moving over there.

From a biomechanical point of view, breaking down a sequential derotation skill into their key parts is fine BUT should not be consistently practiced devoid of fluidity.

It would be like teaching a curve ball to a pitcher and having them stop their release at the moment the hips fire, wait a second, then fire the abs, wait a second and then fire the shoulder et etc etc.

Fluid skills required in post save responses should almost 100% of the time be done as one motion.

2) ***Hyper stick leads***. You don't need to throw, snap, launch your stick over to lead a lateral body movement in an overtly obvious way. The stick moves with your body, with precision and control slightly almost unnoticeably leading the move while maintaining the 5 hole. The stick and body move in unison. You don't throw the stick over somewhere and then drag your body behind to fill in after the stick gets to the target position WAY ahead of the body....goofy.

3) ***Elevating*** your lead skate off the ice when t pushing, powerstriding or whatever the flavor of the month name for t pushing is. This cocking of the lead leg by lifting it off the ice under your butt is biomechanically inefficient. If you want to go right the first move with an appendage shouldn't be the OPPOSITE way. In case we haven't noticed, things in high level hockey move too fast for all this cartoon like movement. It does actually remind me of a cartoon character who is getting ready to run.



Do you know the back up goalie and the referee could be square to the puck all night? Square to the puck simple means that the goaltender's shoulders are the same distance from the puck, both knees are the same distance from the puck and both feet are the same distance from the puck.

It has NO connection to the net.

A simple way to say it is that the goalie was "facing" the puck.

When a goalie stands in the middle of the shooting triangle he is straddling the square line however, he could still lack squareness.

Do you follow?

I have watched and played hockey for over thirty years and I have seen the goaltender lose his stick during the course of play hundreds of times. Chaos ensues and defensemen furiously try to get the goaltender their stick while the coach on the bench is screaming, "He's got no stick. Give him your stick!"

Conventional wisdom dictates that the defenseman should sacrifice his stick so the goaltender has something to stop the puck with. I plan on outlining my observations and suggest the reasons why perhaps we need to rethink the conventional wisdom in this case.

I believe the goaltender should not be offered the defenseman's stick and he shouldn't accept the offer if it is provided. Here is why:

In the past, goaltenders weren't as adept at covering the low net. They used their stick and their skates on the majority of low shots. In that era it made sense to give the goalie the stick from the teammate. Now the game has changed and goalies display superb low net coverage using the butterfly. There is a relatively small increase in the danger of a goalie getting scored on low when they lose their stick in today's game.

When I think back in my experience I fail to recall any time a goalie actually made a save with this loaner stick and in fact I recall many other things occurring as a result of the stick hand off.

First of all, we have a defenseman who has now taken his attention off the puck and his defensive zone responsibilities while he flutters around handing off the lumber. Secondly, we now have a defenseman with no ability to clear the puck out of the zone. His lack of a stick is far more dangerous than the goalie's lack of a stick in my mind. Thirdly, we all know what happens when a defenseman takes one hand off his stick in a battle along the boards; a holding penalty. This can't be anything but a greater penalty risk when he doesn't have either hand on a stick.

This issue brings up a summarizing issue. Goaltending and the sport in general have evolved over the years because people have gone against conventional wisdom. Former Leafs Roger Neilson and Jacques Plante are two familiar names that changed the game because of their thoughtful approach in spite of conventional wisdom. Approach the game from a logical point of a view with a critical eye. Could things be done better by doing something differently?

I wanted to briefly outline some characteristics of good and by extension regrettable goalie coaching.



- 1) **Over-coaching** - In a quest to perfect our little trolls sometimes we tend to over coach. We shouldn't ever try to correct all the flaws we see at once as this is a rookie mistake. Coach less and you will get more out of your athlete.
- 2) **Confidence** - Have confidence in your ability without arrogance. If you have prepared yourself you have every right to speak and instruct with confidence.
- 3) **Dictator** - Goalie Coaches who dictate and are repulsed by questions like "why?" tend to be underneath it all be very insecure either in their playing or coaching resumes or both.
- 4) **Ill - informed** - Makes sure you have a well reasoned explanation for why you are teaching what you are teaching and why it makes sense. A sign of being ill - informed is revealed when the goalie coach stresses that this is the only way to do something.

5) **Be Open and a Life Long Learner** - There is a great value in an experienced goalie coach who questions conventional wisdom and is open to new techniques and trends if they pass the logic and effectiveness tests.

6) **Teach them to Learn** - The greatest gift you can give a kid is to turn them into their own goalie coach. The understanding of critical analysis and cause and effect are the foundations of excellence and favorable performance trajectory.

I have a million others but these are some to gnaw on.

I will leave you with my personal fictional HALL OF FAME GOALIE COACH attributes.

1) Plays the role. Only will work with the better students and is very standoffish and defensive with anyone who questions their unquestionable greatness.

2) They themselves have created and developed great things in goaltending through their sheer brilliance.

3) They have never stolen or borrowed a drill from anyone else. Every drill they have created came from their own expansive mind.

4) No other goalie coach or school can help a goalie get better. They are the ONLY answer.

5) Refuses to let anyone take notes or video their sessions as their knowledge is proprietary and must be protected like the recipe for coke or KFC.

6) The only reason they aren't in the NHL as a Goalie Coach is because they are too young. Otherwise dozens of teams would take them in an instant.

7) When they coach their junior goalies they continually tell the junior goalie that when I worked with NHL goalie XXXXXX (5 times) he would do this and do that. All of their sessions with their current junior goalie references something they did in their brief time with the pro.

8) They pump their own tires worse than Steve McKichan.... Ha!

While driving yesterday my thoughts meandered to goalie stuff as usual. Having recently spent some time under a doctor's care and having had more than my share of contacts I have begun to observe some similarities in the professions.

I think in many ways I see commonality between the physicians of medicine and the physicians of puck repulsion. As in all professions there is a continuum of expertise real and or perceived. There is no difference in this comparative analysis.

I had my bilateral bankart repair done to my shoulders by world renowned Dr. Richard Hawkins. He is well respected in the orthopod community because of the success his athletes have had post surgery. He is published and quoted frequently in the niche journals and has been financially well rewarded. When you talk to him, he is in the moment. He knows you. He listens to you and he cares about you. He isn't in a hurry to get you in or out. He follows up during his personal time to see how you are progressing.

He is successful because of his proven results, credibility and genuine caring for the individual. He reminds me of some great goalie coaches / friends I know like Mitch Korn, Gilles Moffet and Rollie Melanson.

We also likely have had experiences with the Doctor's we would consider arrogant and likely possessing a God complex. They have poor bedside manner and seem like you are using up their valuable time. They likely are very strong doctors but this skill is squashed by overwhelming lack of people skills and genuine feeling that they are the only answer. You can imagine the response one of these doctors would display if you questioned their diagnosis and asked for a second opinion.

Their way is the right way and there are no other options. They were inoculated with greatness and they gained their knowledge on their own.

We all know this archetype goalie coach. Doesn't need to explain. Shouldn't be questioned and really believes there is no other 2nd opinion that could be valid. Puts in his time and is in an out of the "office" as soon as the meter beeps.

What type of goalie coach are you?

Rinne Lesson for Y'all



In a Nashville / Leafs game I liked many things Rinne did in a lightly tested night. One thing I think all my fellow beer leaguers should take from this game is how he handled the fairly stiff whack he took up high very late in the game.

He acted like it was nothing. Big Deal / Another day at the office. I derive great humor watching overreactors like that nut job from the Swedish Junior team and the odd B leaguer in the rec league. They take a little whack or a bump and then they react like someone pushed over your grandma.

Here is a Keek's rule of thumb for goaltender whacks, checks, hacks etc. (if I may refer to myself in the third person....)

Whether it hurts or not, if you aren't going a need a trip to the hospital please act like nothing happened. You are a goalie - not a midfielder from Madrid with plucked eyebrows.

There is NOTHING that upsets off the opposition more than when they are faced with a non reactive goalie. These snapper head goalies are likely the nut bars in the dance clubs that get a drink spilled on them and it is fin de la monde..



This article may not be addressing what you first assumed when you look at the title. I'm not talking about slashing, hitting and fighting. I'm not talking about guys trying to win the Lady Byng trophy for the most gentlemanly player.

As it relates to the goalie, the "clean game" is an easier game to play. In simple terms, a clean game is made up of plays and offensive attacks that are structured, predictable and allow the goalie a clean view of the initial shots and solid preparation time to assess the rush. Examples of "clean game" situations are long 2 – 1s, neutral zone breakaways and open wing slap shots or clear point shots.

A "dirty game" is one full of scrambles, screens, traffic, broken plays, bouncing pucks, fluky outcomes and offensive attack chaos.

Clearly any game will feature some proportion of each of these game styles. This proportion may vary by period, momentum shifts or other factors like injuries or power plays.

Over the years, I have seen many, many goalies and generally speaking the “clean game element is handled appropriately by most if they are playing at the ideal level. Once the game turns to the ugly or “dirty” game side with chaos present a goalie’s real potential is revealed. Here you find out what you are made of. Many beer leaguers could actually handle some pretty good scoring threats during the clean parts of the game but once the dirty game chances started to fill the net their upward path in hockey was stalled.

What are the requisite skills and characteristics a good “dirty game” goalie should possess? What can one do to improve in this crucial aspect of elite goaltending?

The first core element is burning puck focus and “lock on” skills. If you are good here you find the “dirty” pucks through legs, double tips, loose open net rebounds and those funny bounce pucks that no one else finds. Intensely following every puck in practice from the moment of release, in flight and off your body will truly help here. Many goalies sort of watch pucks in practice. That won’t cut it.

The ability to compete and battle on every loose puck in practice, no matter how hopeless will directly correlate to game success in this area. Just this morning I did a private lesson at 7 am and my little student quit on several pucks. It was too much work.

Try filling the water tank on a Zamboni for 30 years at 7 am. That is too much like work. If you watch most minor hockey practices you’ll frequently see less than full battle mode on loose pucks.

Athleticism has a key role here in your success in the “dirty game”. That is why as an NHL scout I place a priority on potential pros’ athleticism. Willing to battle for loose pucks will be fruitless if you have the movement skills of my grandma. You must develop power, strength and your overall athleticism in the dryland environment.

Finally, many goalies get surprised by some “dirty game” style goals and they appear to be a spectator along for the ride. You must maintain an arousal level and recognize danger before it comes to you. Expect the unexpected.

In an ideal world goalies would get nice, vanilla, clean games to play. This is not, and will never be the case. A good “dirty game” goalie is worth a high draft pick and you will recognize them when you see them driving to the arena in a Diablo.

Double Coverage Myth

I always seek to question conventional wisdom. For instance my breakdown on the dropped stick issue. Recently I have begun to look at double coverage.



Normally we show little goalies that no piece of equipment should cover space that is already occupied with other gear. This is the concept of building width and height in your coverage. In simple terms, it is taught (myself included) to little guys to help them fill available space.

Consider this fact:

1) Rarely if ever will a goalie get hit with a puck while they are standing on their feet without a chance to react. Although it is a good habit to minimize double coverage when in your basic stance is it REALLY that important if you consider that this stance isn't used in any block situations anymore?

Double coverage issues are truly only important in non-reactive, blocking situations which are currently approached typically with a butterfly block or a post leg up block.

Why bring this up?

Don't be preoccupied with getting Junior to be 100% double coverage free when they are on their feet. Although it is advisable, it is actually FAR more crucial to be double coverage free when in any down block position.

I believe in fully developing a well rounded goaltender prepared for all the situations they will face. I'm a big believer in proportional training as a concept.

As I learned from Dave Dryden at a goalie clinic in 1985 the goalie only spend 30 - 45 seconds every game actually physically making a save. The other 59:30 seconds are used moving, repositioning, concentrating, relaxing, refocussing etc.



In a nutshell, the majority of the goalie's job is not stopping the puck but actually a series of getting to the right spot movements and continual movements from relaxing to concentrating is deep stance.

Therefore doesn't it make sense that the training of the goalie should be done in that proportion?

30 seconds of a 60 minute game equates to less than 1 % of a goalies time actually stopping the puck.

My premise is that I could take an athlete and spend hours only working on movement without any pucks and have a FAR better athlete than one I put 1,000 pucks at.

Kids can't tolerate that so we compromise on that proportion in our training.

Improving your movement = \$ plus a real NHL hockey card.

Improving your save selections only = popularity with your future beer league teammates.

If you are having trouble consistently elevating the puck perhaps you need to look at a key area on your goal stick.

Lets assume a couple of things:

- 1) Your stick is properly fit for you height wise, paddle wise, lie wise and curve wise.
- 2) Lets assume you have a basic understanding of stick terminology.
- 3) That you use a stick with fresh tape and heel that isn't fat and deteriorated from use.

If you look closely at the heel of your goalie stick you will notice a couple of things. You will see it is rounded or square in the heel area. This is known as the rocker. When viewed from the front of the goalie, the stick doesn't completely sit flush as the blade "rockers" and transitions from blade to paddle. This "rockered" heel allows the goalie to handle the puck a little easier as you can cradle the puck and alter the lie of the stick as you clear it.

Young goalies commonly use a more squared heel because not keeping that stick blade flat is a common error for them. If a young guy uses a rocker heel they tend to have a tougher time "feeling" their stick flat on the ice.

This article is designed to address a little known trick that can really help you elevate the puck. It really only applies to foam core or wooden sticks as composite sticks can't be altered once created.

If you look down the line of the goalie stick, as you might when you look down the skate blade when evaluating a skate sharpening, you will notice something. Unlike a skate blade, which is concave or hollowed, a goalie stick tends to be convex or rounded along its length.

When a goalie stick elevates a puck it is crucial for the leading edge of the stick blade to get under the puck. As an extreme example, imagine trying to elevate a puck if your goalie stick used a blade fashioned from a broom handle. The roundness would never allow you to get under the puck to lift it.

If you take a file and remove the convex nature of your stick and make the blade perfectly flat with a sharp front and back edge you will find that you will be able to much more easily elevate pucks.

Remember that altering your stick will help your puckhandling game potentially BUT may shorten the life of your stick.

Anyone who has strapped the pads on has played some form of shinny hockey where hitting wasn't allowed and defensive support was minimal. In this environment the "true" puck wizards come out and dangle-itis occurs. Cute, fruity moves and composed attacks tend to make goalies look foolish. These future stars have good success in making the goalie look bad because they do not have to focus any of their attention on a defender about to kill them. Their focus is comfortably on exposing the goalie. Their joy and faux success kindles that underlying belief that they could have made the NHL.

You also see these types of efforts from players still moving up the hockey ladder. Except now they only can revel in their dangle-itis during practice where most teammates are unlikely to pancake them. In the vast majority of cases this amazing ability to bury the puck disappears once the game starts and their enemy appears – time and space.

Every decision a goaltender makes on the ice requires the consideration of the time and space available to the attacker. A real game with true time and space issues is in many respects easier for a goalie to handle on several levels.

In a nutshell, the goalies job is to take their movement and save selection skills and apply them accurately to a given situation. The correct reading of the impending offensive threat is useless without the requisite movement or save selection skills. Conversely, even great movement and save selection skills will be wasted if you can't read the play, which is a topic I speak and write about extensively.

The less time and space an attacker has the more predictable your reads will be. Visualize a man attacking down the wing who feeds a player charging to the net. The pass recipient in our first situation is wide open and gets a perfect pass 8 feet out in front of the goalie. In this situation he has both time and space on his hands. He knows he can't be laid out with a hit and he has separation from the goalie. In this environment a skilled, deceptive purposeful attack will happen. In all likelihood it will take an amazing patient save to prevent a goal here. This attacker has several options that you have to decipher.

Now, if we change the above scenario slightly a dramatic change in success rate occurs for the goalie as the attacker's option decrease. If we simply add a back-checker hanging off the man in front and have him now 4 feet in front, our read becomes pretty clear. Now the pass recipient has lost his time and space. A simple redirect with minimal accuracy is likely the only outcome and a smart goalie will

intuitively read this and apply a closed butterfly with jamming depth. This bang-bang play can consistently be stopped and looks great to all the fans in attendance.

Another example to help understand this discussion would be an off centre breakaway where the man cuts in from the wall under the face off dot on a mini breakaway. His offensive flair will vary depending on the impending arrival of the defenceman. In the event he has great time and space with no defensive help in sight, the goaltender must have great patience and expect something difficult. In this environment realistic pump fakes to gain commitment, waiting out the goalie on a far side deke, cut backs to the short side and sure hands will be present. This guy has many embarrassment options at his disposal.

As soon as we add the imminent arrival 6'3" hard charging defenceman to our scenario, things change. Forwards are very unlikely to attack across the net for fear of significant painful body contact and will more than likely take the easy road and shoot early from this angled approach. Knowing the time and space, the goalie here can get set and hold his ground with a solid depth ready to drive his knees sealing up all holes.

It is also very important to understand that as the level of play goes up, time and space minimizes but great players also become apparent. The great players are the ones who seem impervious to time and space. In the face of violent immediate duress these players somehow manage to show an incredibly low panic point and will frequently throw in a very creative unpredictable attack. The observation of these rare but special players must be at the front of the goalie's mind. By knowing when and where they are on the ice we can modify our reads with the understanding that time and space will not affect them to the same degree it does to their teammates.

There are hundreds of variations of attacks that can be brought to your net, all of them coloured by the available time and space the attacker possesses. Your approach is dictated by your ability to recognize this and to make quality reads. This ability takes much time and study and of course the ultimate painful barometer – the red light.

Every goalie is scored on at some point and by definition can not be perfect or there never would be a winner or a loser, and no one would pay to watch 82 games of 0 – 0 ties. Games couldn't be played if we ever perfected our craft. Watching a PGA tournament with no holes cut in the greens would be anarchy.

If you could describe the attributes of a perfect (near) goalie what would they be? As I commonly do, here is my top 10 list describing the "Perfect Goalie".

- 1) **Burning Puck Focus** – From the moment of release until the play is whistled dead this goalie NEVER loses burning intense focus on the puck.
- 2) **Powerful, precise movement skills** – This goalie moves effortlessly with great speed, stopping and starting on a dime like a Ferrari Enzo.
- 3) **Zero Short Term Memory** – Bad goals, like great saves are immediately discharged from the brain and by watching this goalie post-save or post-goal you would have no visible reaction.
- 4) **Even Keeled** – Our perfect goalie doesn't let anything affect him. Booing crowd, momentum swings, or standing ovations. Like a robot he has no visible emotion.
- 5) **Consistent Performance** – Game in game out 9 games out of ten you are going to get exactly what you expect from this guy- excellence.
- 6) **Patience** – Our guy lets the game come to him. He doesn't chase the puck and is very adept at waiting out fakes and reading the play.
- 7) **Positioning** – The perfect goalie gets to where they need to be with proper depth, proper angle and proper squareness. To beat this guy you need a perfectly placed shot.
- 8) **Rebound Control** – Second chances to score on this guy are rare. Almost every shot is controlled with possession or directed out of danger to the corner.
- 9) **Safe, Subtle Puckhandler** – His defence loves him because he is an asset at making zone exits seamless and safe for his D.
- 10) **Bounce Back Guy** – Whenever a rare off night happens or a bad goal is surrendered this goalie always comes back with a stellar game or a hilite reel save.

I know there is no such goalie alive....except maybe Brodeur..... but if we set standards like this for ourselves we can get closer to the ideal.

Athletes at some point recognize that their competitive athletic career is at its end. Whether through injury, lack of opportunity or other factors, it will come to an end. We all know this. However many athletes play longer than they should and are slow to accept the obvious. Listening to these ideas runs counter to what we have all been taught. Now matter how bad things look, keep pushing.

Is this the correct approach? Is switching off competitive mode and turning on the recreational mode really that negative?

I'm not advocating for all my readers to be easy quitters at the first hint of career drama - quite the opposite. Many of you have read my article called "Legitimate Excuses for Failure" which outlines the never quit and the "nothing can't be overcome" mantra.

My message is in fact a positive one.

If we all can accept that very few actually make it we need to ask ourselves why we play. We play because we love it! Too many young athletes play until they don't love it and run away from the game after the final bitter disappointment occurs. This is a tragedy because hockey is a great game and should be approached as a life long sport.

Ask anyone who has played for a living how much fun they have playing the game when they retire when it doesn't matter. You couldn't pull Ken Dryden away from his rec team floating around as a lanky defensemen.

The "continue at all costs" in the face of the obvious has concrete consequences that affect thousands of lives permanently. Look at this common example:

An overage major junior goalie is playing on his third team backing up a highly – touted young goalie. At this point the older guy is clearly better but his potential window has pretty much closed. He has a chance to be traded to a playoff team to finish the season but it would mean he must withdraw from the only University credit he has undertaken to date.

The intelligent decision here is to finish the course and look to finish his post secondary education as soon as possible, stepping away from the competitive game. Remember every year you delay completing your degree adds another year that you must work before you can retire at the end of your work life. The fact

remains that a university degree on average will generate DOUBLE the income over your working life than without it.

I want my athletes to have that never say die attitude but I want it colored with realism and intelligence. Are you going to feel like heading back to University at the age of 24? Are you going to enjoy working in a crappy job your whole life because you put all your eggs in the proverbial hockey basket?

You have x number of days until your development as a goaltender ends and you begin to decline.

If you are attempting to make college, junior or the NHL the number is still x.

If you are a beer leaguer like me now you have x number of days until it is really over.

Since none of us actually knows our personal x I have some simple advice and have created this thread to be a group record / diary of some sort.

Within this thread will be found positive peer pressure.

As our personal x factor diminishes daily we must strive to get one day better - every day.

Whether mundane or implausibly difficult post here what you did today to make yourself ONE Day better on your goaltending journey.

Be honest with the scope and sequence of your activities.

At a recent adult clinic I was chatting about goaltending with a fellow beer leaguer. He had spent a ton of time coaching a young goalie and sometimes the technical skills the youngster displayed in practice didn't appear consistently in games. He was a practice goalie not a "gamer".

This syndrome I have seen frequently so I have decided to coin the term "driving range goalies". I spend considerable time at the golf course and at the driving range. The obvious implication is something I have seen first hand. I can groove an expensive 64 degree lob wedge 6 miles in the air and land it tight to the pin.....at the range! When I bring out this lob wedge on a real course it betrays me more than it helps me. Then I watch sheepishly as a 69-year-old man with dirty old golf shoes and a \$10 used 7-iron chip his ball up from about the same spot to within 12 inches of the cup. Needless to say, this guy has seldom been to a driving range but actually plays the game 36 holes a day.

I see this in many goalies. They attend camps. They attend practices and take private lessons. However, the expensive goalie coaches and camps don't guarantee that the amazing work done in a controlled non-pressure situation will appear on demand in games.

I also see this driving range goalie mentality appear in beer leaguers. In a low pressure B division game they can make some pretty good saves and in some cases their ego whispers to them that they could do this at the pro level. At the range I can bend the ball with a draw or a fade like someone is paying me. When I get on a real course the draw and fade often turn into the banana slice and the snap hook and I end up paying the nearby homeowners for new garage windows.

Initially lets discuss why I think this happens and then continue on to formulate a strategy to make your game results mimic your best practice results.

Pressure does funny things to an athlete and this is one reason for the DRGS (driving range goalie syndrome). Lets go back to golf for an example to help illustrate this. When a player is putting on a practice green things are free and easy and there are no error consequences. The smoothness in your stroke allows you to drain tough puts on this practice green. Once you get to the 17th hole and you need a 3 footer to save par, your smaller muscles in your forearm and wrists tighten up and that smoothness and touch can leave you. This is exacerbated when people are watching and the score does matter.

As a goalie, pressure can make you lose your smoothness and it reveals itself with imprecise rebound control, imprecise puck flight tracking and fidgety puck handling.

The solution I have had great success with is actually quite simple. Once a baseline of technical skill is developed in a core area pressure must be applied in increasing doses. Practice must become harder with respect to time and space so that games are easy.

For example, Johnny can get blue line glass 9 out of ten times from his crease with stationary pucks. Once limited faux pressure is applied and the puck is moving first, this number immediately dips to under 50 % success. If this pressure is consistently applied in frequent practice sessions and then is gradually intensified, you will see this translate to improved game play.

Another reason DRGS exists is because many goalies have yet to learn “how” to play the game. What does that mean? Again I will go with the golf analogy. If you rarely watch how PGA players manage their games on the course, yet spend hours on the range you will likely still be a high handicapper. You could have a God’s gift swing at the range and be able to groove balls precisely where you want them. However if you don’t learn how to approach the green from the correct angles and you don’t learn when and when not to attack pins you will struggle to score well.

This is also clearly the case in hockey. You need to be able to connect the dots and read the play. Understand when scoring danger is present and be able to use intelligent anticipation. This is developed by years of critically analyzing games and determining cause/effect and outcomes of scoring chances. I would suggest that you should spend 2 hours critically analyzing NHL games for every hour you practice your goaltending technical skills. The game results will astound you.

In many cases you could take a goalie with very average technical skills yet elite game readability and he will win championships. In my private work with Ed Belfour, I was quite surprised how average his crease movement skills were in his 40’s. Yet once the game began his game management and ability to read the play took over.

Scoring Chance Prevention vs Save Percentage

"The best goalies are very adept at preventing scoring chances", I muttered this the other day during a mentor lesson in Sarnia.

The implications are quite clear and often undervalued.

Think about this. You could have average puck stopping skills and supreme SC prevention skills and go far further in hockey than the flip flop of that; great puck stopping skills but minimal SC prevention skills.

What do I mean?

Examples of goalies who prevent scoring chances.

- 1) Intelligently protecting your limits and breaking up passes through your area.
- 2) Leaving and playing pucks appropriately so your team exits the zone safely.
- 3) Controlling controllable rebounds.
- 4) Communicating danger to D men to allow them time to stall a dangerous play early.
- 5) Poke checking a man before he shoots.
- 6) Avoiding needless whistles when the other team has been owning the face off dots. (How many of you actually have a sense of your team's FO winning percentage as the game progresses?)
- 7) Stalling the game when necessary. ie, tired PK, Huge momentum swing, star player gassed, etc.
- 8) Using aggressive challenge depth selective and where appropriate to force guys to pass off or miss the net in lucrative scoring areas. (How often have guys over-passed pucks when playing a big timer like Brodeur because of his positional and reputational intimidation?)

The recommendation here is simple. Spend a great deal MORE time working on those elements of your games that prevent SChances than the time spent actually stopping the puck.

One key component of my job as an NHL goaltending coach is to scout upcoming talent for the entry draft or as a potential free agent signing. Over the half dozen years I have been on the road scouting I have some observations for you that may help you in your quest to one day be the name that is called from the podium at the draft.

- 1) First of all you should recognize that you likely wouldn't recognize when the scouts are actually there. Many imagine the scout wearing a big trench coat and carrying a notepad / folder with top-secret report information. For the most part NHL scouts dress casually and try to fit into the crowd so they don't have to endure endless chatter from "helpful" fans. Some junior scouts proudly announce their team affiliations by wearing team logos on their jackets. This isn't the case with big league scouts.
- 2) I go out of my way to watch potential goalies in warm ups whether they are playing or not so be sure that you treat this time accordingly.
- 3) I speak to the head coach and or the assistants to get their take on a potential goalie. If your coach isn't a fan of yours you will have a problem. You need to understand that for better or worse the guy you must impress the most is your coach. I take negative comments from coaches very seriously. They all pump their athletes and in many cases over-hype them, which is expected. However, if they are willing to reveal negatives to a scout they clearly have issues with the goalie.
- 4) Too many goalies today look the same. I call this "cookie-cutter" goaltending. They try to mimic goalie mannerisms while moving around the crease and how they pose themselves in the net. They may be technically solid but they don't adopt their "look" in the net rather they resemble robots that are slaves to fashion. I can tell which goalie coaches have trained which goalies by the way they look in the net. I'm not talking about ability to stop the puck, rather how they look bouncing around the crease. It clearly isn't a good way to set yourself apart from the crowd and the best advice in the area is that a scout shouldn't recognize whom your goalie coach is by watching you play. Everyone is different.
- 5) Be sure you have given your best at school and have been respectful to everyone around the rink. I place calls to schools so I can speak to teachers about the effort an athlete puts into his studies. I also chat with many people around the rink who likely don't know why I'm asking questions. For instance, if you have been frequently rude and disrespectful to the Zamboni driver or a volunteer goal judge I may learn about it and factor it in my character assessment.

6) I learn more from watching a potential draft in practice than I do in games. Many NHL goalie coaches / scouts will be sure to watch top end guys in practice if possible.

7) Avoid sending video and /or unsolicited information to scouts. I get 10 – 12 DVDs a week sent to me that get filed in the garbage because there isn't enough time in the day to watch them all. Most of these packages are worthless; as they typically don't reveal the goalie at their true form, rather best case scenarios filled with hi-lite saves.

8) Any contact from a parent directly or indirectly to a scout is taken with grain of salt and is almost universally dismissed. There is nothing a parent can say that will help their kids cause.

9) Don't pull the chute. I love to see how a kid responds when the game isn't going his way. After the sixth goal does your body language and approach reveal defeat? Can you keep your cool when it begins to hit the fan? Can you keep your battle and compete level up when all hope is lost? I learn a great deal on a kid with their response to adversity.

10) Wherever possible I will watch a kid play the next game after a poor outing. I need to see how they respond in "bounce back" situations. So make sure you don't string two clunkers together.

In a nutshell, it is actually pretty simple to be scouted. Work your tail off everyday in practice and in the classroom, retiring weaknesses from your game. Impress your coach on a day in day out basis in practice and in games.

A significant number of traffic fatalities are attributed to driver fatigue and acute micro sleeps. In the industry of traffic crash analysis micro sleeps are frequently the cause of devastating auto crashes causing death and destruction.

By definition, a micro sleep is what you think it is; small periods of being asleep at the wheel with the obvious dangers to life and limb.

After watching a show on this it dawned on me that this is exactly what happens to goalies during the course of a game.

Goalies obviously don't fall asleep literally but there are fluctuating periods of time where the goalie is having a micro lack of perfect concentration. They look like they are awake, they move like they are awake but in reality the concentration meter has dropped.

If a key scoring chance at this juncture the likelihood of a big save drops.

Moving forward with your games. Focus on your focus. Try to recognize your micro sleeps and pull yourself out of them by bringing your focus back to a burning level concerned with only the present.

If you have driven a car you know personally about this topic. I'm not suggesting that you all have fallen asleep at the wheel but I guarantee you that at some point in the past you have been on a long drive and had this happen.

You have obviously been keeping the car on the road but for the life of you you can't actually remember the last 3 kms.

Don't let your goaltending suffer this fate. It won't have fatal consequences with your life but it will sure kill you save percentage.

Over Goalie Coaching

The best coaches know what to say, when to say it and even more importantly when not to say it. Without using names, I have been coaching a pretty decent goalie who had a previous goalie coach who he loved to death. Unfortunately his mentor died last year.

Coming into this new relationship the tendency would be to try to prove your worth and prove that you can teach them as well or better than their previous guy. Wrong.

I have taken a big step back and have used baby steps carefully selecting when and what to say.

This is where listening and observing come to play.

There is always a tendency with a new goalie to show your "stuff" to win the kid over. Kids and adult goalies are smart and can see through selling. If you see 5 flaws correct and work on the most serious one, remaining very positive and complimentary about other aspects of the goalies game.

After really attacking an area of weakness always finish with a different drill that the kid has success with. Leave them with a taste of success.

I have written about types of feedback previously here but there is an extension to it. I won't mention anyone by name here....*Dave Wells*.... but when I first started working with him he attempted to correct everything he saw a goalie doing wrong in a drill. The drill would be stopped every other shot and he would throw out his accurate but unnecessary feedback.

He has since really improved in this area and is in my mind one of the best goalie instructors in the GTA!

Trust your drills to teach the skill more and make your verbal feedback like an extremely hot girl.....rare but an attention grabber when present.

I often hear that goalies with a tight 5 hole in their stance have difficulty moving laterally. This is 100 % myth.

Nabokov is an explosive athlete laterally.

I would argue the opposite point. Goalies who place an inordinate amount of weight on the inside edges and achieve a wide stance are typically very weak with long lateral thrusts.

Find your happy medium..

Visual Attachment

By definition goalies obviously need to watch the puck. However many times our watching skills leave something to be desired. Here we see a pro with solid visual attachment to the puck after he safely directed it to the corner.

Take personal pride in "locking" on the puck with a burning laser like focus.

Nothing Thru You or under you

We must always strive to make the goal scorers earn their goals. When we force the goalscorers to score outside of our bodies we force them to be good instead of lucky.

Teaching and coaching requires a basic understanding of how kids, teenagers and even adults learn. What works for a ten year old may not work for a teen and vice versa. Athletes learn in many ways. They learn from verbal feedback, visual learning and kinesthetic feedback.

Verbal Feedback is unquestionably the most common form of coaching we use. It can take on the form of many subgroups like: general, specific, positive and negative. In fact, these subgroups can even be broken down further into general-positive, general-negative, specific-positive and specific-negative. As a coach we need to use those forms of verbal feedback in a correct balance. Before we can fine-tune the amount we should aim for, we need to break down the basic forms.

- 1) **General** – An example of this form of feedback would be:
“ Great job out there boys!”
- 2) **Specific** - An example of this form of feedback would be:
“ Joey, I need that left knee flush to the ice”
- 3) **Positive** - An example of this form of feedback would be:
“ I like the knee drive Justin, atta boy.”
- 4) **Negative** - An example of this form of feedback would be:
“ That was a brutal attempt at a poke check.”

As a general rule I try to avoid negative feedback in 99% of the cases when dealing with a young goalie. I believe the position is negative enough and my role is to be overwhelmingly positive. Assuming you are of the same mindset, we need to really focus on the ratio of specific to general feedback. My experience with many well-intentioned coaches is that they rely on too much general feedback at the expense of the much more beneficial specific feedback.

Perhaps you can record one of your coaching sessions and chart the ratio between general and specific feedback. In teacher's college we tried to get this ratio to 1:10. Achieving this goal with your goaltender would be rewarded with great skill and confidence improvements.

Visual Learning occurs when we use demonstrations that allow the athlete to “SEE” what they need to improve on. We have all heard that certain kids are “visual learners.” I would argue that ALL athletes are visual learners, some to a greater or lesser degree.

Visual Learning can be achieved by physically demonstrating what you want them to do or correct. This can also be achieved by video study of themselves or more proficient athletes. This can also be achieved by the use of props like feedback mirrors, ice markers or angle ropes for instance.



Here I am graphically illustrating on the ice with a Big Sharpie exactly where I would like the young goalie to position themselves with appropriate depth in a given situation. We can tell an 11 year old to challenge more but when we actually “show” them what “challenge more” means we can really generate improvement. I’m a huge believer in these Big Sharpies for improving angle play, depth selection and laying out crease movement drills.

One key to feedback success is how soon after the performance it is given. If you tell your athlete on Tuesday you didn’t like his angle on the 3rd goal from Saturday’s game then it is too far removed. The more immediate the feedback the better.

I saw a golf pro at a driving range showing his pupils their swing while looking at a mirror. This real time feedback is a staple of golf instruction so why not goalie instruction?

The mirror board is great for giving real time goalie feedback. You can tell the goalie his glove is too low but when you let him see for himself you get results.

Kinesthetic feedback is defined as the feeling an athlete gets when executing a skill. Once an athlete begins to mature they can tell whether something feels correct or not. For example, if you speak to an NHL goalie during practice they can feel whether their knee drive was appropriate on a given shot or not. The young athlete has little if any kinesthetic awareness. They don't know in a precise way where their limbs are positioned and they can't really rely on this type of innate feedback to know what went right or wrong based on how it felt. This is why for the younger athlete we really need to prioritize visual learning and the proper management of our verbal feedback skills.



Goaltending is extremely stressful, dangerous, difficult and more times than not potentially embarrassing. To show up day in and day whether you are feeling your best or not is challenging. A true athlete plays through bumps and bruises and nagging minor issues. I don't advocate playing when you are legitimately injured. What is that fine line between being able to play or not to play?

The ultimate call in any situation regarding the goalie's ability to play is the goalie's and the opinion of the trainers and the doctors. If there is a chance for long term damage or if your performance will be severely hindered of course you shouldn't attempt to play. This article is designed to address the decision that is more in the grey area.

When you aren't able to play at 100% there is a fear that failure and embarrassment are much more likely. Touches of the flu, slight muscle strains and painful bruises are frequently challenges all goalies go through. How often you show up to play in these situations and play well in spite of the problems will dictate how far you go in the sport.

Why is this such an important issue? First of all, every player on your team will face the identical challenges with respect to minor injuries, illness etc. You

want your number one defenceman to play if it all possible and he feels the same about you.

In addition, to play the game at the highest level you may need to play sometimes 60 – 70 games per year. If you are constantly out of the line up with minor things your job will eventually be given to someone more reliable. You can't lose your job if you are always ready to play and are able to play through pain.

Another area to discuss is your reaction to contact and collisions around the net. Unless you are really injured, get up immediately and carry yourself as if it didn't hurt a bit. Show the other team how tough you are and your teammates will notice it as well. Again, I have no problem if you are really injured. Of course that is another situation.

The less you scare your back up, your coach and your family the better.

Take pride in your ability to play through pain and your ability to play when you don't feel your best. Toughness doesn't mean fighting. Toughness means showing up to play even when you feel like pulling the 'chute. Many times you will have great games when you show up to play in these types of games. In your mind you put less pressure on yourself for success because you have a built in excuse for failure. You feel good about yourself because you know you showed up to play. In this relaxed frame of mind many peak performances occur.



Competitiveness is one of the most oft used terms to evaluate how seriously an athlete wants to win / improve. As it relates to goaltending it is where the definition of potential should be found. We are all aware of well-schooled, well-taught, privately coached and highly touted goaltenders who have the “whole package” except for this lucrative missing potion; competitiveness.

These polished performers can execute powerful backside recoveries, can perform heroics in a given drill at the local goalie clinic put on by X, Y or Z and can look absolutely stunning in a camp video analysis session. Fast forward 5 years. Where are they?

We also see hundreds of lesser light athletes make it and make it big in the show leaving former childhood teammates lamenting that, “But I was better than Ben was in Bantam”.

You can't pay for it. You can't truly learn it. You can't receive it from parent pressure. No one can inoculate you with the competitiveness vaccine. However, you may get it from maturity in combination with well timed positive peer pressure

or successful mentoring from some one who oozes with it. If your maturity curve and your path crossing with the right mentor don't intersect you will be stalled and stonewalled.

How can you define competitiveness? How can you measure how competitive you are or you aren't?

I think real life examples can define competitiveness and perhaps you can introspectively recognize where you are on the competitiveness scale.

I have coached Ed Belfour for over 5 years and besides knowing him as a close friend I know him as perhaps the greatest goaltender in the history of the NHL when it comes to the topic at hand; competitiveness. I could write a full, heavy epic novel on the examples I have seen first hand, not counting examples that his college coaches and his first NHL goalie coach, Vladislav Tretiak could relate.

Consider the time he arrived at my first summer elite camp already possessing a Stanley Cup ring a Calder Trophy, a Vezina Trophy, and sure fire Hall of Fame credentials. He insisted to be scheduled to participate in our 45 minute ranked run with well conditioned teenaged prospects all over 20 years his junior. After I hesitatingly agreed I watched in a combination of awe and horror. (The horror at seeing my potential NHL job lost because he may have twisted his ankle)

The awe stemmed from the fact that he came from behind to win the run at the line after trailing by a full lap and by watching him beat students who ran on their local school track teams.

I walked over to him hunched over, vomiting on the track he finally straightened up and looked like he may need me to get the paddles out to start his heart again.

"There was no way that kid was going to beat me today."

Coming from a goalie who has already done it all in the big leagues this is the epitome of what we are talking about. Consider the term competitiveness defined.

Visualize the discovery channel shows where the lions eat the antelope. When they attack everyone runs before someone is singled out. This antelope is the victim because it became obvious to the lion either they lacked the strength or speed to but up much of a fight.

One aspect of cuts happens in this manner. If you are clearly unqualified it will be easy for the coach. This is called cutting from the bottom.

Using the same weak example above lets look at the hall of fame antelope. It doesn't take the lion long to figure out who the stud is. This antelope's day to die will have to wait. If you are obviously outstanding you'll be marked off early to be invited back. This is called picking from the top.

In the middle ground (remember the bell curve from high school?) rests the most of us. Antelopes in this position know they are going to get it one day but as long as you blend in you may slip through the cracks.

Unfortunately this is where many goalies fall and are subject to arbitrary cuts and what seems like unfair treatment.

To make a team you have to be clearly overwhelming awesome. To float in the middle ground leaves you open to political cuts and nepotism.

I have heard a thousand times " My son was as good as the kid they kept." That may be right but remember if your just as good they can go either way and still come out the same. Your fate becomes luck instead of skill.

There are also the following basic cuts on an individual:

- 1) **Skill Cut** - Obviously doesn't have the physical and or mental skills to play at that level.
- 2) **Attitude Cut** - May have the tools but no tool box.
- 3) **Parent Cut.** - Coaches know the parents are problems and will avoid the BS where ever possible.

I will conclude this diatribe with some actual tips.

a) Be the first on the ice and the last off the ice.

b) When shooting drills start be the first in the net and be selfish. Take way more than your share of shots. Almost make someone pull you out of the net.

c) Figure out who the front running stud is and outskate and outwork him every single second. Physically be near him all the time . This begins to put you in the thoughts of the coaches and helps them compare you directly to the stud.

d) Don't mess around with pucks. If you have a free moment work on recoveries or some goalie skill that requires hard work. They notice that stuff.

e) Keep your pie hole closed in the dressing room and on the bench. On the ice be a loud communicator or traffic and situations for your D.

Finally, one clarifier to point a) I mean stay on the ice to the zamboni is about to run you over working on skills. As the coaches are up there shooting the breeze they will notice this.



Scouting goaltenders is a difficult task especially when you are looking several years down the road. So difficult in fact that scouts overlooked a rough around the edges college goalie named Ed Belfour and one nicknamed Cujo.

Generally speaking 3 areas are normally prioritized when evaluating a goalie.

- 1) Size
- 2) Athleticism
- 3) Competitiveness

Size

Being big is an asset that can't be minimized especially if it appears in combination with athleticism. Don't be disheartened if you are on the smaller side however. Manny Legace, Fred Braithwaite and Arturs Irbe all proved they could make it.

Athleticism

Excelling at several sports is attractive to scouts because this speaks well of the individual's ability to improve and perfect multiple tasks. It also means that a multidimensional athlete will succeed in a variety of situations.

Competitiveness

To get to the NHL you must be a competitor. I think when you mention this word in combination with goaltending; the first name that comes to mind is Ed Belfour. Ed detests getting scored on in games and practices, hates losing, and never quits even when the score is getting up there.

Scouts never know where the next Ed Belfour or Vladislav Tretiak will come from. Keep in mind these three areas. If you feel you are weak in one of those areas strive to improve it or make sure the other areas are super attributes.

The goaltender's stick is a crucial tool and in many cases is under-used and quite often used in an ill-advised manner. There is typically more than one way to approach each save selection or game situation however, I have observed many issues related to stick use that need to be addressed. For some undetermined reason, goalies today refuse or resist the use of their stick in simple situations that can easily keep pucks out of their net.

- A) **Cutting Passes** – I don't want my goalies lunging and committing their body in an attempt to intercept centering passes or cross crease lateral feeds with their sticks. However, pucks passed within two feet of their body **MUST** be handled by getting their stick involved. Too many goalies allow puck access within their limits and easy tap in goals are the result. Allowing a preventable cross crease pass, for me, is as bad as allowing a floater in from centre ice.
- B) **Poke Checks** – I don't advocate a return to goaltending from the 70's, 80's or 90's when goalies overused poke checks in my opinion. The goalies in this era were commonly observed diving, lunging, and committing fully to some advised and some ill-advised poke checks. The pendulum has now swung the other way and I now rarely, if ever, see a smart poke check deployed. The actual technique and variety in poke checks can only be discussed in textbook sized chunks but I want to address the use of poke checks in general terms. Allergies to poke checking will cause a few preventable issues.
- i) Players can jump on tight loose puck rebounds and bury them as the poke-challenged goalie stares at the puck well within a stick length.
 - ii) On breakaways and shootouts, a goalie that never poke checks allows a comfort zone to appear a stick length directly in front of their stance. An attacker can bring a puck closely in this area without fear of a poke check. A quick lateral deke from this comfort zone leaves the goalie little time to react. Alternatively, if you are known to poke check an attacker will make his lateral deke **BEFORE** this area. This allows more time for you to react to the deke because he has to start the deke with greater separation from you.
- C) **Stick Involvement** – For some reason, I have begun to see goalies over the last several years misusing their sticks when they butterfly. The technical mistake occurs when the goalie places their stick blade on the ice angled back like a 9-iron. It is disconcerting to see young goalies holding their stick incorrectly when they butterfly. (Photo # 1) When the stick is used in this manner pucks needlessly

deflect up into the goaltender's waist area or into their leg pads causing rebounds that are impossible to consistently control.

The stick needs to be held with the blade close to a 3-iron angle. (photo # 2)
This is the only way to properly use your stick to control rebounds when in the butterfly position.

At the peril of joining the rec leagues sooner rather than later please begin to take advantage of a very important piece of equipment – your stick.



Scouting and Cookie Cutter Goaltending ETC.

One key component of my job as an NHL goaltending coach is to scout upcoming talent for the entry draft or as a potential free agent signing. Over the half dozen years I have been on the road scouting I have some observations for you that may help you in your quest to one day be the name that is called from the podium at the draft.

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7) Avoid sending video and /or unsolicited information to scouts. I get 10 – 12 DVDs a week sent to me that get filed in the garbage because there isn't enough time in the day to watch them all. Most of these packages are worthless; as they typically don't reveal the goalie at their true form, rather best case scenarios filled with hi-lite saves.

8) Any contact from a parent directly or indirectly to a scout is taken with grain of salt and is almost universally dismissed. There is nothing a parent can say that will help their kids cause.

9) Don't pull the chute. I love to see how a kid responds when the game isn't going his way. After the sixth goal does your body language and approach reveal defeat? Can you keep your cool when it begins to hit the fan? Can you keep your battle and compete level up when all hope is lost? I learn a great deal on a kid with their response to adversity.

10) Wherever possible I will watch a kid play the next game after a poor outing. I need to see how they respond in "bounce back" situations. So make sure you don't string two clunkers together.

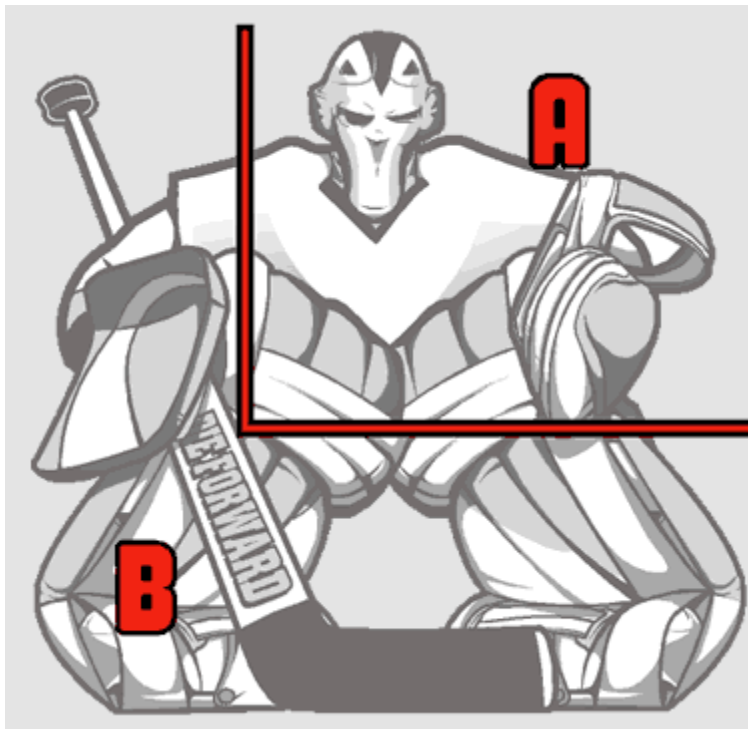
In a nutshell it is actually pretty simple to be scouted. Work your tail off everyday in practice and in the classroom, retiring weaknesses from your game. Impress your coach on a day in day out basis in practice and in games.

Understanding rebound control

Goaltending and rebound control is comparable to golfing and the short game. Rebound control skills are similar to putting and chipping in that they never can be perfected yet require constant vigilance to maintain or improve.

We often hear about the poor goalie being scored on after the 3rd or 4th whack at the puck. The implication here is that he was left exposed by his defence. The responsibility for rebounds lays with the goaltender not the defenseman ! Don't allow your goaltending future to be dictated by the quality of your defense.

We want to look at some fundamental and advanced techniques. By understanding the cognitive side to rebound control we can minimize poor rebounds



The "L" theory can be very helpful in understanding basic rebound control. We learned that shots inside the "L" (identified by area A) should be controlled with possession and shots outside the "L" (identified by area B) should be directed to the closest corner.

The goaltender's job is not to stop the puck.....rather control it!

Rebound Control Priorities

All rebounds generated by a goaltender can be classified. By assigning a priority to this classification we can learn to be a better rebound control goalie.

#1) Possession

The ultimate result of any shot on goal from a goaltender's point of view is puck possession. Now the goaltender can dictate whether the play continues or not.

*If your team is tired after killing a long penalty you can hold it.

*If you don't want a defensive zone face off you can keep the play going.

*The opposition can never score when your team has puck possession.

#2) Corners with Elevation

In the event that you can't achieve puck possession, the next best outcome would be for the puck to be directed neatly to the corner. This keeps the puck out of danger and allows your team a moment to regroup and assess their defensive zone responsibilities. Wherever possible elevate the puck here to buy you extra time. The only drawback to this result is that you don't maintain puck possession and you can't manage the clock. Your team may lose the battle for this puck and it might end up behind you.

#3) Keep it in front

If you mess up and can't get puck possession or can't direct it to the corner, the next best outcome is to keep the puck in front of you. Don't get me wrong. We are not advocating the purposeful booting of pucks back out in front as a strategy. What we are saying is that if better options don't occur at the very least keep the puck in front of you. Ideally, you should already have decent initial shot position and although a dangerous rebound is available you give yourself a chance here because you are already squared up to the puck.

#4) Weak side

You won't be playing for money if you routinely allow weak side rebounds. A weak side rebound lies off to the side of the goaltender and typically the opponent will be left staring at a yawning cage. No one purposely plans to allow these weak side rebounds and granted many situations do occur where you are lucky to even get a piece of the first shot. A goaltender with a tendency to allow too many weak side rebounds must address this area with diligence in practice.

#5) Goal

Of course the worst outcome of all is a goal. Although technically no rebound occurred, for our classification system we need to track this area.

Rebound Control Evaluation

Now that we understand how rebounds are prioritized we can apply this system to analyze our game performance. Have someone track every shot on goal during a game and record the appropriate score for the resulting rebound.

- For a possession save - Score 1
- a puck put in the corners - Score 2
- a puck back in front - Score 3
- a puck left on the weak side - Score 4
- a goal against - Score 5

By tallying these scores and dividing by the total number of shots against you will generate a rebound control efficiency average. An average closer to one is an outstanding performance. An average closer to five is regrettable and sends the message that your practice focus must improve.

Cognitive skills

Once a goaltender has a keen understanding of rebound control priority and all the various rebound control strategies and techniques, he must learn the thinking part. The application of this knowledge at the appropriate time requires elite cognitive skills.

Shot placement, shot velocity, reaction time and the specific game situation dictate the goaltender's ability to prioritize rebound control. For example, when faced with a hard one timer in tight, the goaltender will be most concerned with the initial save at the expense of precise rebound control. Because of the high shot velocity and proximity of the attack the goaltender instinctively prepares to battle for a post save loose puck. On a hard, clear point shot the goaltender's approach is different. The goaltender understands that not only must the initial save be made but also there must be precise rebound control.

The final area to address here is peripheral awareness in the fractional moments before a shot is released.

By keenly understanding where the opponents are lurking, the elite goaltender can either target the rebound to soft areas where their teammates are or make sure the puck isn't left in danger zones near the opposition.



Patience

Without question, the most common complaint coaches' pass on to me regarding their youth goalies is the feeling that their goalies are going down too early. They go down too often. Frankly, there is a complete manual at the tip of my tongue on this very topic.

Let's examine one word related to this topic and intuitively you will know based on the title – Patience.

Patience has many definitions and nuances but to goaltenders it means only one thing. Goaltending patience is the ability of the goaltender to resist moving until the last possible moment when the trajectory of the puck can be identified. In simple terms, watch the puck, then react.

Clearly the game today has shifted to the point where there is decreasing time available to react to shots after they leave the stick. Pucks fly faster and the shooters skills have increased to the point that even mites can pick the upper corners.

For a variety of reasons like huge gear and imperfect modeling of NHL goalies, many learning goalies have resorted to learning the position somewhat backward. Now goalies learn to block first in many cases and perform sliding movements when achieving new angle set-ups.

Youngsters need to first learn target position acquisition on their feet with great skill. Mentally they need to learn where to be and physically how to get there.

When a goalie develops in this inverse manner they tend to become "guessers". It appears to be a better looking goal if the goalie moves to a butterfly position early yet yields one top shelf. In comparison, just holding your feet and waiting to react to a puck may result in a poor looking goal where the goalie appeared to not even move until a shot was past them.

Don't get me wrong. The butterfly style is clearly the most successful way to play the position and frankly is a prerequisite to play pro. The fine line is using it more as a save selection, not as a cookie cutter style. It must be used properly by understanding when to, where to and more importantly when not to.

In today's game it is not a question of if a goalie should go down but when.

For the question of when you need to understand reaction time. For a young goalie that hasn't refined their ability to read the stick-puck relationship at the moment of release, pucks seem to be coming so fast they can't react. Faced with this uncomfortable feeling, they go down and hope for the best. In this case it is just a guess.

The solution for going down too early isn't an immediate fix and comparatively it is like house breaking a puppy. We don't want to stop the goalie from going down; we just want to stop them from going down too soon and in the wrong place.

We don't want to stop the dog from going to the bathroom we just want them to do it in the right spot and at the right time.

We need patience when we teach little goalies patience.

Some Specifics

- 1) When you see your goalie leave their feet too early, your feedback should be "watch the puck then react!" not "Stand up, stand up!" Those that use the later feedback reveal their high level of goaltending ignorance.
- 2) If they are getting beat high even with improving patience, make sure they are dropping to their butterfly at the top of the crease not too deep in the blue crease.
- 3) If they are getting out of position after the initial butterfly save spend drill time working on their initial shot rebound control focusing on gut traps and stick involvement.

Screaming at a puppy or screaming a young goalie for going down too much will have about the same net positive outcome and will be unlikely to result in your puppy learning not to poop on your expensive carpet.

Likely the most common complaint I have heard from goalie parents in my 20 years of coaching has been that their goalie is being ignored in practice. While recruiting kids to play on a given team many coaches over promise and then under deliver when it comes to the proper development of their team's goaltending. The undeniable most important position on the team is either ignored or "farmed out".

The purpose of this discussion is to outline some common observations regarding this situation and to provide parents with concrete advice on how to proceed.

Almost inexplicably, otherwise intelligent head coaches will frequently offer up this chestnut. "I don't know anything about goaltending so I will get someone in here who will." With the prevalence of accessible information on the internet, it would take very little effort to delve superficially into modern goaltending instruction. It would seem wise for a head coach to understand a baseline of information on current goaltending technique and the modern approach to the position. In fact this basic knowledge would help them select an appropriate goalie coach and be able to provide appropriate, if not generic modern goaltending advice and feedback.

Quality goalie coaches are increasingly available now and in bullet form below I have some guidelines that head coaches can use to properly "farm out" their team's goalie coaching.

1) **Avoid picking a beer league teammate** who plans to teach the position how they played it during the 70's. A key test of your potential goalie coach would be something as simple as asking, "Should goalies use sharp or dull skates?" If they say dull, run away.

Remember no goalie coaching is better than ill-informed goalie coaching.

2) **Having played in the NHL, College or Major Junior** doesn't guarantee that you will have a good goalie coach but high level experiential knowledge combined with technical knowledge is preferred to someone who simply worked at few hockey schools and now has printed up some business cards.

3) **Get proper references** and check out the goalie coaches reliability and people skills in past team based situations. Any potential candidate should have their elite playing credentials vetted at www.hockeydb.com. This site has records on ANYONE and EVERYONE who has played significantly.

- 4) Make sure the guy you hire **will be the guy** that is there all the time and not one of his junior underlings.
- 5) Look for goalie coaches that have a **university background in teaching**. Teaching itself is an art form and this type of resume is preferred.
- 6) Unless there is no other option, **avoid having a well-meaning father** of one of the goalies as your goalie coach. The optics are bad and rarely is it a workable situation when things invariably go south during the season.
- 7) If the team has a budget and can't get a goalie coach in on a regular basis you should **consider sending your goalies out to clinics** and camps in-season in your area.

Thankfully goalies now have the best goalie coaching they have ever had. Which is far better than what my generation had – nothing!





Every goaltender at some point has seen the glamorous highlights of a NHL goalie fight. The crowd is going wild, your teammates are cheering and your adrenaline is pumping. You get goose bumps just thinking about it.

My purpose in this article is not to glorify and advocate goalie fighting but to offer reasons why ever goaltender should avoid this type of conflict at all costs.

The best place to start, I believe, is to describe how these things typically get started and to address some of the explanations offered for why a goaltender gets into a fight.

The most common way for this altercation to begin between goalies occurs when your team is involved in a line brawl. One goaltender sticks his nose into a scuffle and the opposing goalie is obliged to race down and "even" things up.

The first reason any goalie will give you when asked about why they go into the scuffle is predictable.

" My guy was getting killed and I had to step in to help."

I have rarely if ever saw a player getting so viciously thumped that I felt I needed to jump in. In fact most of the fighting related injuries I have seen are

caused when the goalie escalates things and gets involved. However, if your teammate is unconscious and he is getting his head dribbled, that is a different story.

Another common reply when asked why a goaltender gets into it with a player is:

" He was in my crease" or " He ran me"

Although it may feel right at the time, no player is ever intimidated to stop running a goalie especially if it is the 170 lb scrawny goalie doing it.

I need to clarify one point. Don't get me wrong. I wasn't a pacifist when I played and I'm not now. However, an intelligent goaltender looks at the big picture and can control their emotions. Let the players on your team who "specialize" in this area earn their money.

Now lets get into the reasons against getting into these types of altercations.

- 1) **Effectiveness** - In the smallest of percentages does a goaltender ever accomplish anything positive for themselves or their teammates. Typically all that happens is you get tossed out of the game.
- 2) **Lost opportunity** - Imagine if the game the NHL scouts came to see you play was the one you were suspended for. Is your career worth that risk?
- 3) **Serious injury** - We rarely see or hear of catastrophic injuries in fights but they do happen. Starting a string of concussions because you lost a fight is not a smart thing to do for someone trying to make a living at the game.
- 4) **You aren't that tough** - We all like to think we can handle ourselves and are quite tough fighting wise. In many scuffles, you don't end up fighting a 140 lb goalie. You end up fighting a 260 lb gorilla.

In conclusion, for selfish reasons and for simple intelligence reasons avoid fighting at all costs. The risk is too high for the reward.



For the past couple of years I have been contracted to be Ed Belfour's personal goaltending coach. In Ed's first year in Toronto he set a team record for victories with 37 and was a big reason the Leafs had a successful season. This past season Eddie had another stellar year finishing the season with a career win total of 435, which placed him 3rd all time for wins! In fact last season the Leafs recorded the most points in team history. During the playoffs he posted three shutouts in the opening round as the Leafs sneaked by the Ottawa Senators.

After the season ended, I accepted the position as Goaltending Coach with the Toronto Maple Leafs, which means that all of the goalies in our system will

now be under my guidance and coaching. This is a big challenge but a great honour and opportunity.

I have been very busy this fall coaching all the prospects in our system. A NHL goalie coach must develop all the goaltenders in the system and try to get them all progressing towards the mutual goal of playing in the "show". Besides the two goaltenders in the Big Leagues most teams will have two goaltenders in the AHL and one or two goalies in a third tier level like the ECHL or the Central League. In addition there are normally two or three other youngsters that have been drafted but still play in Major Junior or college hockey.

I frequently am asked what these goaltenders work on during the season and if it changes depending on what level of pro hockey they are playing.

All pro goaltenders do things really well as you would imagine but clearly they all have areas of weakness or more accurately areas the need to improve on. The fact that they are getting paid to play doesn't mean they have the position perfected. This applies to the guys on their way to the Hockey Hall of Fame and the guys trying to get their first taste of the Big Leagues.

Each individual goaltender in our system would have specific areas to address but all goaltenders need to work on three core areas. Even goaltenders still playing in youth leagues or in the recreation leagues can benefit from some of these ideas.

- 1) **Rebound control** - In practice and games all shots on net can cause rebound control issues. The best in the business focus on this area every practice trying to maintain puck possession on every shot or at least direct the pucks out of danger to the corner.
- 2) **Movement drills** - Getting where you need to be early enough means you will be able to stop over 90% of the shots you face. This requires that you have to be a great skater. All the Leaf goalies spend daily time skating around their crease working on shuffling, challenging, retreating, transition movements and sliding butterflies.
- 3) **Puckhandling** - Advanced goalies must be able to shoot and pass the puck intelligently so their team keeps possession of the puck. We spend a lot of time working on this area in practice and during video study.

If you want to reach your goals in hockey as an elite goaltender it is important to focus on these core areas.

If you are familiar with my articles over the last 20 years you will recall how often they veer into areas of athletic character. This one is no different. I had a good degree of “drama queen” in me when I played but now as an almost mature adult, I look back on it as very unproductive, unnecessary and actually embarrassing.

How do the traits of being a drama queen actually reveal themselves? Well, look at the examples below and honestly look in the mirror and see if these areas of weakness in your core athletic character need to be addressed.

The Over-reactor

This drama queen trait is frequently observed when the goalie gets light incidental or light purposeful contact from the opposition. Gloves sometimes fly off as the goalie squirms around the ice, near death. Seriously, if you do this immediately go off the ice and give up your net to someone who wants to be in it. Unless you legitimately have to make an ER visit, NEVER even react a little to this type of contact. By showing any reaction, you actually encourage more repeat visits from the opposition knowing they can get a rise out of you.

Mr. Kindling

This drama queen goalie unhinges in anger after goals, losses etc. by using full three-handed swings with their stick at the ice, posts and even the boards. Trying to break your stick and turn it in to kindling is a clear indicator of poor athletic character and questionable intelligence. Make a mental note of what went wrong and what adjustments and corrections you should make. Then move on. Get over your self. Hammering your stick embarrasses you and your teammates.

Rocket Launcher

After goals or bad penalties this drama queen can frequently be observed hammering the puck down the ice off the glass or even shooting the puck up into the stands. Besides the risk of injuries to fans and players this is an unnecessary way to upset the officials. A little more subtle brother of the rocket launcher is the goalie who simply eases the puck into a corner more softly after a stoppage making the linesman go chase the puck down.

Remember all officials talk between periods etc. and if the linesman tells the referee what a goof ball you are, you are likely not going to like the treatment the ref gives you the rest of the game. Show some maturity and restraint here.

The Bad Samaritan

This drama queen has to be near the scrums, the pushing and shoving, the face washings and the other crease area dramas after the whistle. Their faux toughness and peacocking is in full display. Skate away from all of this stuff and refocus for the next face off. There is never anything good that comes out of being near this fire. Pretend like you are wearing a gasoline suit and get away from this crease area fire. There is almost never a situation where a teammate is in actual legitimate danger that requires a savior. Let alone a drama queen savior. Let your teammates do their job.

The Snow Allergy

How often have you seen this drama queen react after receiving a snow shower from the opposition after smothering a loose puck? How dare he?... or she? I must hack them now to teach them a lesson. Grow up! Ignore it and comfort yourself that you didn't fall into their reindeer games. You don't need to put your team down a man because you received some cool precipitation. Think of the big picture – winning the game. As well let your D men know as well that they don't to protect your honor when this happens. Ignore it.

The New York Jet

I love Rex Ryan of the New York Jets and his bravado. However, it has no place in hockey, let alone goaltending. This drama queen can't resist beaking the opposition bench, the opposition goalie and even the opposition fans. This drama queen is frequently seen in back up goalies that can't resist firing up their pie hole from the safety of the bench and their teammates. Be better than that. Show your athletic character.

Again, we have all to some degree shown some drama queen in our goaltending careers. This doesn't make it right. It wasn't right when I did it and it isn't right when you do it.

Show class and athletic character. It isn't the only way to approach the game..... but it is the right way.

The key for increased game performance from your goalies is to make the practices harder than the games. By using drills that are realistic yet harder than situations they face in games, you can force improvement into all elements of the position.

Here are a few of my favourites:



A) Resistance Band Training – My personal trainer has tortured me with this type of training in a dryland environment. In effect you move in an explosive manner against resistance from various strength rubber banding. I figured this could easily be transferred to my on ice training sessions.

Here we see Justin Pogge working on his lateral-down movements against heavy resistance. This type of training really activates the core muscles and develops powerful movement skills when the resistance is removed.



- B) Screen Board – My mentor, Mitch Korn (Nashville Goalie Coach), developed this device to mask the release of the puck and to hide the stick puck relationship. There are dozens of derivative drills we use with the screen board but here we see the fundamental set up. The board is placed 8 – 10 feet out in front of the goalie and pucks are silently swept under the screen allowing the goalie enough time between pucks to reset. Because the release can't be read this drill really forces the goalie to activate a hard knee drive and truly improves foot eye coordination and butterfly mechanics. You can build difficulty into drill by moving the board in closer which minimizes reaction time, or by removing the goalies stick to detail how well they seal the ice with their pads only. Here we see Andrew Raycroft driving his knees well to stop a screen board puck.



- c) Karate Bag Screen – Here we see the karate bag in action with Mike. A man positioned in the slot fires firm pucks flat on the ice in and around the skates of the man in front. The karate bag is moved around trying to line up with the line of vision the goalie is trying to use. By increasing how rapidly you mimic his line of sight you can really make the goalies job difficult. The goalie must not accept being screened and fight to find the puck. Once the puck is released the goalie must use a wide flare butterfly and smartly seal the bottom of the net.



- D) Peekaboo Screen Board – The peekaboo screen board is a derivative device; a cousin of the full screen board that has slightly different applications.

This device simulates a man stationed in front trying to screen a goalie on point shots. Hard point shots can be fired in on the goalie without fear of hurting a live body in front. The key here again for the goalie is to not get their line of vision stick behind the board. As the drill builds you can add lateral movement from the shooter before the shot is released, trying to catch the goalie with their head stuck in a blind spot.



These are just a few of the many drills a goalie coach can use to develop their goalies in practice. As long as the drill is realistic and harder than what they may see in a game you'll have an improving athlete on your hands.

On many teams and for a variety of reasons one of the goaltenders is defined as the starter. As you progress up the hockey ladder your goal of course is to be the starter - the go to guy.

A starter by definition is the goaltender who plays the majority of the games, the big games, the tough games and the must win games. To be a starter you must relish the role, accept the responsibility and hunger for the pressure of being a crucial factor in the game's outcome.

Practically, the starter's preparation is typically different than the backup's on several levels. Proper rest, nutrition, physical conditioning and recovery must be considered extreme priorities. A starter can't be often injured, tired or unprepared. Being ready to play at a high level all the time is crucial or your starting spot will slip away.

Proper Rest

Of course proper rest is important for both goalies but as a starter you must earnestly protect your time to allow proper rest. There are many distractions on game day but you must force the proper amount of rest into your pre game routine.

After years of study you'll have learned exactly how much sleep / quiet time you need. Rooming with the back up goalie on the road should be avoided where possible, as they may not feel the need for a quiet atmosphere when they are not playing. On a side note, avoiding colds and flu is important and you surely can't have both goalies down sick so room with someone other than the back up.

Nutrition

Eating properly takes on more significance when you are a starter. Consistent long-term performance can't come from a diet that is inconsistent in schedule and quality. To play 60 - 70 games a year at a high level requires a well-fueled machine.

Physical Conditioning

Elite athletes train incredibly hard during the off-season and these gains tend to be lost as the season winds down. Clearly we can't work at that level during the season but to be as strong, flexible and explosive in Game 72 as we are in Game 1 takes in season efforts. Daily significant flexibility work is probably the priority of all the fitness components. Cardio and strength programs can be prescribed for your personal profile.

Beside the preparation issues a starting goaltender must behave differently.

You must be the hardest worker on the ice during practice without excuse. You must not take shortcuts as the starter and stay on whenever possible after practice to work on your game. You must treat every practice as if someone is trying to steal your job. (by the way - they are!)

A starter doesn't blame teammates or coaches for their performances; they take ownership of their individual and team results. In this regard and many others they are leaders. They have the very rare attribute – stage presence.

The Back Up Goalie

Every team has a starting goalie and by definition this means the other goaltender will have to fill the role and expectations of the back up position. No one wants to be a back up for more than a short period of time, if ever. I always hear about how someone would love to play in the NHL as a back up for the type of money they get. However, the true athlete longs for and hungers for the chance to be the starter. If you are currently the back up this article will outline how the situation should be handled and give you valuable advice on how to make sure it isn't a permanent designation.

The starting point in this discussion is your attitude and many back ups fall into familiar attitude traps. These traps include bitterness, jealousy, resignation and hopelessness.

To discuss this issue in detail let's focus on what positive attributes a back up should possess. You can surely infer what the negative attributes would look like. I like to look at things from this positive perspective.

At practice, attempt to outwork the starter. Be sure to be out on the ice early and stay out after practice working on your game. The back up sometimes gets the drills that aren't the most fun in the world but treat all practice drills as if your job was on the line.

In fact many times the puck seems to be shot at the higher parts of the net on the back up. Take these shots without complaint and accept it as part of your job.

On games days approach things as if you were the starter. Try not to be the loud, funny guy in the dressing room. Be as quiet as the starter and focus on the game as if you were playing. Obviously this will serve you well if you have to go in.

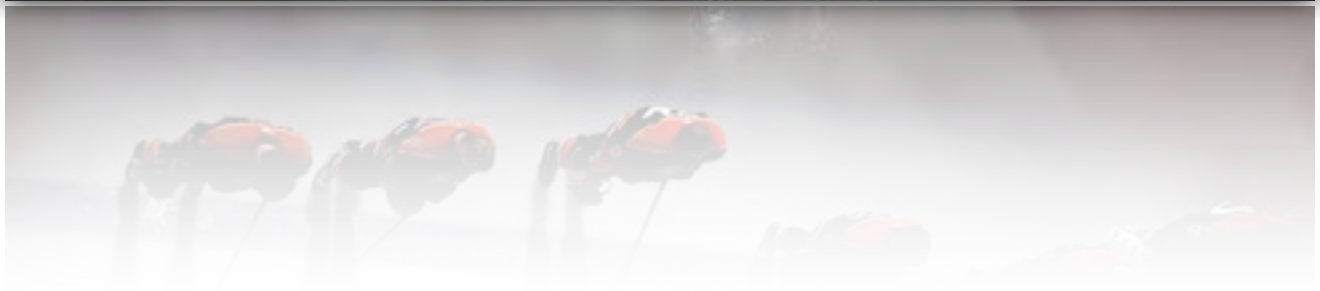
Be sure to give the starter his bigger share of shots in the warm up. He will appreciate it and will be sure to reciprocate when you are starting. On the bench be supportive of the team and try to "stay in" the game. Follow the action and in your mind try to anticipate the developing plays and which opposition players appear to be particularly dangerous that game.

Around the team and the coaches never make negative comments about the fact that you are the back up. If you have questions about the position you are in approach the coach privately and discuss your concerns. My advice is not to ask things like when you are going to get to play or why the other guy is the starter. You will have much better luck by asking him what parts of your game you can work on that he sees as weaknesses. Whether you agree with him or not make a conscious effort in every practice to address the areas he revealed to you.

A quality back up goalie is an extremely valuable thing to a team's success. You need to be able to play well after long periods of inactivity, come in to pressure packed game situations and be a genuine team player. If you follow these guidelines you'll be successful in this role and destined to become a starter sooner than later.

Chuck Thuss was forced into the role of a back up goalie for three straight years at Miami University. Since Chuck had played a little Major Junior, his first year was spent practicing only so he could regain his eligibility. The following two years he couldn't break into the line up and paid for the majority of his schooling out of his pocket. In his senior year, injuries to the other goalies gave him his chance to play. By the end of the year he was an

All-American and signed a pro contract. I can't imagine a bleaker situation with a more impressive outcome.



Toronto Maple Leaf's Shootout Memo

Gentlemen,

Clearly the shootout will have a huge impact on the final regular season standings. It is not unreasonable to anticipate a point swing of 10 points. This will undoubtedly decide home ice and even the attainment of playoff positions for many teams including ours. I believe we need to put much thought, analysis and study in this area for the obvious impact it will have on our path to the Stanley Cup.

There is something to be said for allowing elite athletes to just wing it and do what comes naturally. The thought is that over thinking and over analyzing will have a detrimental affect on certain player's success rate on a shootout. I believe that a balanced intelligent analysis will not have this effect and for the majority of players will be a requisite for consistent success.

Over the last season there have been over 200 shootouts and there are clearly patterns that have developed that in most cases result in success or failure. These points of discussion are not "sure things" and other factors like goalie errors, fantastic move etc. may occur.

All of our players need to be aware of this information because several shootouts have gone deeply into the roster.

What typically doesn't work

1. Attempting a shot without deception, puck adjustment, not in stride, on a goalie with a proper challenge or shooting too far before or after the hashmarks.
2. Coming in too slow.
3. Getting in too tight on a deke closing off the aerial angle.
4. Laying up the puck on a deke instead of using elevation.
5. Missing the net or hitting the post. Over 25% of shooters in the NHL last year missed the net or hit the post.

What typically does work.

1. Using one or more of the following when shooting.
 - A) Precede the shot with deception or puck adjustment.
 - B) Shoot in stride.
 - C) Shoot near the closest hashmark.
 - D) Approach slightly off centre
 - E) Go high glove, 16" to the blocker or 5 hole.
2. Using realistic open stick fake shots BEFORE executing a deke.
3. Maintaining enough separation between you and the goalie on dekes so you can get the puck elevated.
4. Recognizing the ability to put the puck back through a goalie on a hard glove side deke because of the goalie's lazy stick tendency.
5. Being able to react instantly to goalie's errors like telegraphed poke check, premature pad stacks and early retreats into the crease.

Basic recommendations

Have two or three moves in your shootout game and stick to them. The fact that you will be extensively pre-scouted by the opposition requires that you avoid predictability. Ideally, two of your moves should appear similar on approach to keep the goalie guessing.

SHOOTOUT GLOSSARY

1. **Knee Drive** – The speed at which a goaltender can power their pads down into a butterfly sealing the 5 hole.
2. **Open Stick** – When the shooter positions his stick so that the stick blade is perpendicular to the goaltender or facing them. A stick can be open on both the forehand and backhand.

3. **Closed Stick** – When the shooter positions the stick so that the stick blade is perpendicular to the side boards. This is also known as the deke position.
4. **Freeze the goalie** – Causing the goaltender to bite on a realistic fake.
5. **Half deke** – Moving the puck laterally as if to deke wide then rapidly putting the puck back through the goalie that has opened up in response.
6. **Aerial angle** – The angle the puck makes with the crossbar when viewed from the side.
7. **Lazy Stick** – 90 % of goalies struggle with the ability to maintain stick discipline in the 5 hole when the puck is rapidly deked to their glove side.
8. **Puck adjustment** – When a puck is rapidly adjusted laterally creating a new shooting triangle and open net.
9. **Shooting triangle** – The triangle created when you connect a line from both posts to the puck.
10. **Inverted Y** – The pattern the goalie follows on the ice when playing a breakaway.

CASE STUDIES

Shooter's Issues

1) Goaltenders will have difficulty with quick releases and with dekes that are led into with realistic fake shots. The stick puck relationship triggers the goaltender's response and allows them to display fake resistance.

Case Study: Alex Mogilny

Over the years Elmo has had great success on breakaways and the 5 hole is one of his go to shooting targets. Why has he been so successful when most NHL goalies know his tendencies?

The secret to his success is the stick puck relationship and the placement of the puck relative to his body. Alex opens his stick to the goalie quite early in the attack. An open stick by definition is when the shooter's

stick blade is facing or square to the goalie. Alternatively, a closed stick has the blade facing or square to the side boards. His stick is held open to the goalie with his arms out in front of his body. The blade is angled much like a 3 iron.

Once he gets about 8 – 10 feet from the goalie he simply wrists a 6” shot over the goalies stick and through his legs.

Why is this successful?

He doesn't provide a trigger to the goalie by loading up the stick with any type of a sweeping motion. The goaltender's reaction time to trigger a knee drive and seal the 5 hole can never match the quickness of Elmo's shot here.

Goaltender's love shooters who start their release with the puck back at their heel and then sweep the puck forward before the final release happens near the front of their foot. This minute amount of time that the shooter uses is all the time in the world a goalie needs to read the release. I can easily demonstrate this on our goalies in a practice.

2) NHL goaltenders have developed great fake resistance and are very adept at sifting through unrealistic head and shoulder fakes. For our shooters to be consistently successful we have to deliver highly realistic fake shots BEFORE executing a powerful deke. When a goalie bites on a great fake shot they become planted, lose their momentum and their ability to stay closed. Therefore great fake shots can be followed up with quick shots through the goalies as they lose their stick discipline and the puck begins to move sideways. The believability of the fake shot will dictate the likelihood of any deke success.

3) The pacing of the shootout player can really confound the goaltender. It makes it difficult for the goalie to time his retreat. Coming in fast, coming in a little slower and varying the speed somewhere in the attack process are all ways of throwing off the goaltender's timing. The rules dictate that as long as the puck progresses towards the net the play is legal.

**Case Study: Peter Sykora, circa New Jersey Devils / John Pohl
Toronto Marlies**

One of the best breakaway goals of all time was delivered by Sykora. He attacked the net straight in with great speed. The goaltender read the speed and had to retreat quite quickly. Just before he got to the goalie he came to ALMOST a complete stop, pulled the puck to his back hand and slid it into the open side. The poor goaltender slid back straight into the net and couldn't react to the quick change of pace. The key in this case was the fact that the puck didn't come to a complete stop or the play wouldn't have counted.

4) We need our shooters to have solid counter moves to go along with their favorite or go to moves. In simple terms, all teams will have a detailed "book" on all our player's favorite moves. We need to have secondary or counter moves that resemble the look and feel of the go to move. If this can be done the goaltender will be helpless. All good football teams run counter plays. These are plays that look like their standard running plays but bait the defense into over playing it.

Case Study: Jussi Jokinen, Dallas Stars

Jokinen had one of the best shootout success rates in the NHL during the 05/06 season and this was clearly the result of two basic attacks that both appeared identical until the last second.

Option # 1 – 16" off the ice to the blocker side

Jokinen attacks slightly off centre from the goalies Left to Right. Jokinen who shoots left carries the puck in front of his body and then rapidly adjusts the puck to his forehand side and executes a shot 16" off the ice over the goalies blocker side pad. The lateral puck adjustment and subsequent quick release worked on NHL goalies well over 70% of his attempts.

Jokinen attacks the net IDENTICALLY to Option number 1. Even then the goalie knows his tendencies because of prescouts he still is at Jokinen's mercy. Once Jokinen senses the goaltender is biting on Option 1 and begins to slide over he pulls the puck back in front of his body to the goalies glove side net which is now vacated allowing him to one hand it into the empty net. This move is identical to the Forsberg move that scored on Corey Hirsch in the Olympics and was featured in Sweden on postage stamps.

5) We need to vary the angle of our attack at times. Instead of approaching the net in a straight line attack from a slight angle. The off centre breakaway poses additional challenges for a goaltender as we add another lateral element.

Goaltender Issues

1) We need to understand that the quality of the ice will dictate the chances of a shot versus a deke.

2) We need to ensure that we are dead squarely lined up on the shooter's stick blade and not his body.

3) We need to gain a decent initial challenge and hold it until the last second to force a deke more often than a shot. A decent initial angle also makes a shot less likely and our ability to resist a fake shot easier.

4) We need to exhibit good fake resistance and avoid starting our retreat too soon.

5) We need to be very selective about ever using a poke check and rely on fake poke checks which limit our commitment.

Stuck in a Moment

In a U2 video called *Stuck in the Moment* we see every athlete's nightmare; a recurring dream-like sequence highlighting a monumental athletic failure with the big game on the line.

With moments remaining in a championship football game the place-kicker comes in to win the game. He is pumped, confident and ready to go. Of course he misses off the right upright and we get to see the amalgam of reactions from coaches, fans and his teammates.

In the video we see the ball hit the upright at least a dozen times. For any athlete who hasn't come through when needed I'm sure this recurring theme is psychologically accurate.

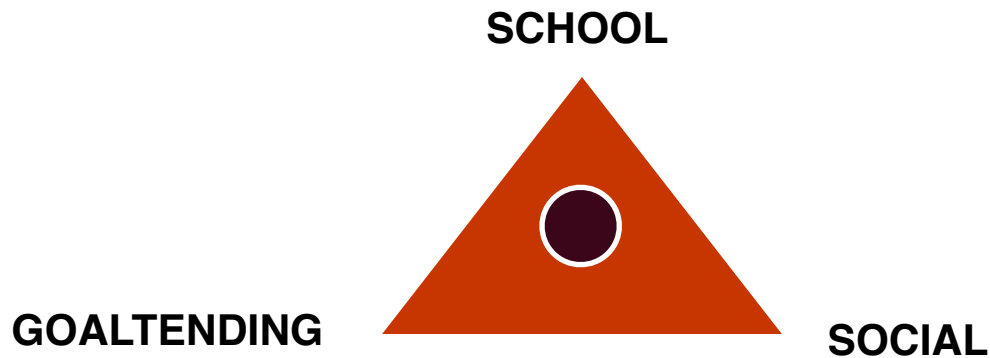
This video got me thinking about applications to goaltending. What if our preparation was perfect? What if our confidence was high? What if we were at the top of our game? What if we did everything humanely possible yet still failed in the clutch?

It has been said that Michael Jordan made a huge number of game winning baskets at the buzzer; perhaps more than anyone in history. When the game was on the line he was the guy.

However, in Michael Jordan's career with the game on the line he missed the shot more times than he made it. But why do we recall all those slow motion post shot celebrations with the score clock reading 0:00?

What we admire most about the best athletes and what we must strive for is not perfection, but to freely put ourselves in positions where we could fail. While also recognizing that we could and will be the reason for victory.

To make it to the big leagues you need to have a well balanced life. The balance that I'm describing involves three areas: school, social life and hockey. If you can visualize these three items as points on a triangle it will help understand the discussion.



If you spend all your waking moments on any single element of this triangle your life will quickly fall short of your goals. You need balance and it is important to treat each of the points as important as the other.

It could be argued that you could be successful by really throwing yourself into two of the three elements. For example, if you never go out with your buddies, never hang out with a girlfriend and never hang out on the internet you will have a ton of time to perfect your goaltending and post some pretty decent grades. But at what cost?

You need to have a social life and you need to have friends outside of hockey. What fun would it be to go through high school without going to a dance or hanging out with your buddies on the Play Station? I believe a properly balanced social life in fact helps your success in school and your hockey. By not feeling like your giving up your social life you can in fact put more into your hockey efforts and your schooling. The key is balance.

Of course we can all name athletes who had it all but spent too much time on the social part of their life. They put too much time into the parties and hanging out. The grades suffer and the hockey skills never realized their full potential.

I met a former NHL goaltender when I was 13 years old and he made a big impact on my life. Marv Edwards was a quality goaltender who played for the Toronto Maple Leafs in the 70's. He told me many valuable things but one thing really stood out. To become an elite athlete doesn't have to be drudgery. "You need to pick your spots." By that he meant that you can have a life outside of hockey. Keep the grades up, work hard at your game and spend time with your friends.

Be an Athlete First – Goalie Second



One of the key things that NHL scouts look for are multi-disciplined athletes. If an athlete can learn and excel in other sports with different skill sets and physiological requirements than it bodes well for their ability to play the current sport at the higher professional level. An argument can easily be made that multi-disciplined athletes have a far greater chance of success at the pro levels than one that doesn't.

I have been an NHL and junior scout and know first hand this is the reality.

The biggest issue I have witnessed in over 2 decades coaching goalies and running schools is the fact that too many athletes focus entirely on one sport. In this case, many goalies specialize in their position early in their athletic development, risking their future success.

We have all observed this early specialization in other sports. Amazing skills and feats are highlighted by 9 and 10 year olds on You Tube. It is cool to

see the little boy execute perfect chip shots on the golf course but where will he be in 10 years?

I have several reasons for this opinion and it is important to walk through them and understand how early specialization can cause the opposite result from the one most parents want.

The first reason early specialization should be avoided:

“Young athletes who participate in a variety of sports have fewer injuries and play sports longer than those who specialize before puberty.” (Brenner 2007)
– Journal of American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

If an athlete focuses entirely on goaltending before 15 – 16 they put themselves at a significantly higher risk of injury.

As well, *22% of athletes who specialized before high school, completely dropped ALL athletic participation once they were in high school.* So putting all you eggs in the goaltending basket will see increased risk of injury and a significant risk of athletic burnout.

The second issue that arises in this discussion is the misguided belief that parents have with their children’s “careers”. The don’t have careers...yet and too many parents see their children’s participation as financial investments hoping that specialization will see their money returned when their kid gets to the NHL. They mistakenly believe that a strict focus on their chosen position and sport will increase the success rate of becoming a pro. This is wrong.

Using goaltending as an example, here are my personal guidelines:

1) Maintain your goaltending passion and hunger by not stopping pucks year round. Play during the winter and hit a camp or two in the summer. Play other sports and meet new friends in the spring and summer.

If we can ignore his personal transgressions for the moment, Tiger Wood’s actually had the perfect father for his development. On the driving range, Tiger would beg to stay longer because he loved practicing so much. He had to stay longer. Earl Woods would have none of that. He always left well before Tiger wanted to. This always left him wanting more.

Too many parents tell me that their kid loves hockey so much they really want to play all the time. By not allowing your goalie to play as often as they want is actually helping them instead of stunting their growth and development as a goalie.

2) Diversify into other sports so there is some latent learning that translates into helping your goaltending. In the new NHL athleticism is key to get to your positional targets and in the battle for loose pucks. Sports like lacrosse, tennis, racket ball, and soccer have great physiological inputs and hand / foot eye benefits that will easily translate into a higher save percentage.

Modern goalies are now growing up addicted to process and technique. Obviously they are important areas for goalies to develop but not at the expense of athleticism and plain ugly battling.

By scrambling around in a squash court or lunging to score an amazing goal in lacrosse, we create an athletic diversity that will surely pay dividends down the road.

3) Once you reach the age of 15 – 16 than a more refined approach can begin and specialization will become a welcomed approach.

When legendary goaltending coach, Mitch Korn scouted me as a junior he was very interested in my participation in other sports. I was a starting quarterback, played soccer, baseball and golf.

To reach your goaltending goals you must maintain hunger, passion and become gifted multi-dimensional athletes. Your goaltending development should be secondary.

Did you ever notice that the Vezina trophy winners are invariably dynamic, athletic and are not rigid cookie cutter goaltending robots?

I'll apologize in advance for writing my first technical article on what can be argued is a very elite and difficult skill, displayed properly by a select few. After some consideration I realized that many Vaughn goalies fit that description and this would be a great discussion especially for those goalies that want to take advantage of the VELOCITY pad's design. These attributes are clearly low ice to pad friction ratio when sliding and their ability to be worn loosely PRO-FLY style.

Recently I had the opportunity to watch Marc Andre Fleury first hand during a morning skate at the Air Canada Centre. This rising young talent has exceptional feet and is one of the quickest goalies I have seen playing the down game. Specifically his ability to pad shuffle and drive hard sliding butterflys is amazing.

What we want to delve into here is where the push skate should be placed before the push and why it should be placed there.

When down in the butterfly and faced with a proximate rebound to your right or left you should recover with the back side leg while maintain pad position flush to the ice with the puck side leg.

Here is the new thing I learned watching Fleury.

As this back side leg snaps up placing the skate under the shoulder a powerful shimmy can be driven to the puck side.

Fleury doesn't just get this skate up under the shoulder nice and upright. He actually throws the backside knee up AND forward causing a rotation about the sagital axis where his skate lands 5 - 6 inches forward of his other knee.

This skate is vertical but the forward thrust and ice placement causes a squareness to occur as he simultaneous explodes and rotates on a 45 degree shimmy.

The rotation is now faster than the delayed rotation normally found in a slide.

The "Fleury" butterfly move turns the push and rotation into one move by planting the foot in front of the body, therefore rotating when the push is made because of the relative location of the leg.

From a bfly position, throw the knee forward and up (let's say the right knee). The body will rotate to the left generated by that knee throw, the skate blade will land flush on the ice about 5"- 6", maybe more, in front of the right shoulder and then you execute your b-slide.

Butterfly slides and shimmys are now common practice and taught as a basic fundamental for an advanced goalie.

What hasn't been taught or at least I have never heard about it is this push leg skate placement.

Ideally if flexibility permits the puck side leg should stay square and flush to the ice as long as possible while the back leg does the work.

What struck me as amazing was where his push leg skate lands on the ice and how it is oriented.

Typically most goalies land this skate with the foot pointing straight out towards center ice.

What Fluery does is simultaneous square up and explode at the same time by throwing the push skate from its starting position in the butterfly up under his body but forward slightly.

Attempt to move without having the front pad become "unflared" as this will lessen low net coverage.

In order to get a truly powerful push when in the down position it is important to get your instep of your foot facing where you want to go. This movement allows you to do just that and push directly where you want to go.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I created **Future Pro Goalie School** in 1992 after my NHL goaltending career was cut short because of injury. I had just finished my teaching degree and loved teaching the position and actually made it to the NHL in part because of my ability to be a student of the game. I had learned the position from great goalie coaches like Mitch Korn and Ted Ouimet and knew I could really impact young athletes in a positive way as my mentors had done with me. I also knew that coaching young goalies would keep me in the game and ease my transition from being a pampered NHL athlete to a normal citizen.

I also knew I didn't want to work for a living and in the decades that I have taught kids to play goal I have never once felt like I was working. It was quite the opposite. I couldn't believe I got paid to do what I would do for free. This is why over 20 years later I still personally instruct on the ice EVERY day for 6 hours!

When I first decided to run a goalie school I had to decide on a name. At the time many names were tossed around before Future Pro was selected. "The Goalie Doctor", "Big League Goaltending" and "McKichan Goalie School" were all considered.

Future Pro was selected because it hits at the desire that is in every hockey-playing kid growing up in Canada, USA and the world; the desire to play in the NHL.

I taught public school for the first three years of **Future Pro's** existence until the company really took off and became self-supporting. My classroom teaching experience was invaluable and you quickly learn in a 2nd grade classroom how lucky you have it when you get to teach kids on the ice. Teachers truly earn their paychecks.

In 1992 I held our first summer camp in Ilderton, Ontario and over a three week period 57 goalies attended. The camp has now grown to the point where I have 11 weeks of summer camp in the USA and Canada and over 800 goalies attending.

During this time I have had too many great memories and have had way too much fun. My students have gone on to be doctor's, lawyers, coaches, teachers, parents and even NHL goaltenders. I have worked with little guys who can't hold their stick and Hall of Famers who could; sometimes over the course of the same day! I really have been lucky.

I have had the privilege of playing in the NHL, coaching in the NHL and look forward to passing my knowledge along to the next generation of budding puck stoppers – the **Future Pros**.

Steve McKichan

GOALTENDING GLOSSARY

Goaltending terminology is an ever evolving process. I have included many of the top goaltending terms below. Credit to Mitch Korn and Hockey Canada with additional inputs from yours truly.

AGGRESSIVE: Playing angles and using position in relation to the net that maximizes net coverage, minimizing the gap between them and the puck.

AERIAL ANGLE: This concept has become the foundation for “paddle down”, save selections and forward arm position. Simply it is the trajectory from the puck, aurally, to the cross bar. When considering the best position and save selection, this is crucial. This also refers to the available net above the goaltender.

ANGLE (HORIZONTAL): This refers to the amount of available net to each side of the goaltender.

ANTICIPATION: The ability of the goaltender to read the play, analyzing time and space and likely attack strategies from their opponents. a.k.a. “connect the dots”

BACK DOOR: The area “behind the goalie” when challenging. The goalie must learn to balance the size of the “back door” vs. the size of the “front door” through “reading the situation”.

BLOCKING: A block save is used when a goalie will not have time to react to the flight of the puck. These saves use positions that remove holes in the coverage and use body, depth and angle to snuff out the attack.

BUTTERFLY: An overused term. It is when a goalie drops allowing both pads to extend out to the side and with the 5-hole closed (or almost closed). The majority of the lower portion of the net is covered, and the goalies holes are shut down. Just because a goalie drops to his/her knees, does not mean they are butterfly goalies.

CHALLENGING: In general, it is the goalies attempt to “cut the angle” by playing at the top of the blue crease (or above) to limit the amount of net seen by the shooter.

CUSHIONING: The ability to deaden a puck off the body, stick or pad to prevent rebounds.

CUTTING DOWN THE ANGLE: The overall use of challenging, front door, back door, being square to the puck and reading the situation so the goalie can maximize his/her position. The three steps are (1) being out...(2) being square)...(3) being set (stationary if possible).

DEPTH: Distance from the goal line.

EQUIPMENT CONFIDENCE: The mental state of a goalie that allows him/her to know that the equipment will not let him/her down. For example, the arm pads protect the goalie well on high shots and the goal pads are not “overpowered” by the puck when closing the 5-hole.

FALLING OFF THE PUCK: When a goalie makes a save selection and the majority of his/her body moves away from the puck side.

FIVE-HOLE: The area between the goalie's legs or under the goalie (during a save selection). Goalies must learn to close this space better.

FLOW: On rushes, and dekes, a goalie must have some backward motion or flow. This flow provides rhythm and momentum and eliminates being caught flat-footed. Too much or too quick flow forces the goalie too deep into the crease.

FOCUS: Simply, seeing the puck well. Too often goalies do not watch the puck to the body and beyond. Goalies often "look past" the puck, and do not follow it. When the puck "looks like a beach ball" rather than a "golf ball", the goalie has the most success.

FRONT DOOR: When a goalie challenges a shooter, that shooter is considered the "front door". The goalie must learn to balance the trade off between "front door" and "back door" through reading the situation.

HALF BUTTERFLY: Probably the most used save. A "half" is the extension of one pad, while the other pad firmly supports the body. This should be able to be accomplished while stationary, moving forward, backward, laterally, from a shuffle, and while turning to remain square using the "Y" theory.

HUGGING THE POST: The goalie's position when the puck is behind the goal line. The goalie must be ready for a wrap around or quick centering pass.

KILL ZONE: A semi circular area in front of the net where rebounds are considered to be highly dangerous.

KNEE DRIVE: The explosive downward thrust of the goaltender's knees when entering a butterfly position. When done with sufficient power the sound of the knees striking the ice is audible.

NUMBER 1 GOALIE: The go-to guy. True #1 goalies challenge themselves, they do not need competition from another. In "big" games they get "bigger". They give the team a chance to win and thrive on "making a difference".

PAD FLARE: The ability of the goaltender to create a butterfly that is significantly wide when viewed from the front. On poor angle shots the pad flare can be purposely constrained.

PADDLE DOWN: This move properly considers "aerial angle" to be used on some wrap arounds, in tight plays around the net, etc. Often overused, this is effective when the goalie has defensive pressure and is close enough to smother the shooter.

PADDLE HEIGHT: The height of the "fat" part of the goalie stick. The maximum is 26". Many young goalies use paddles which are too long and thus negatively effect their stance, and stick use, and often opens the "six-hole" when making a save selection.

PLANTING "THE BACKFOOT": If moving (for example) to the left, when the right foot pushes the goalie in that direction, yet stays stationary, forcing the goalie to open up, and ultimately end up on his/her rear end.

"READING" THE SITUATION: The goalie's ability to recognize the type of situation and make two important decisions. . . where to be positioned and what save selection to make.

SAVE SELECTION: The goalie's proper save choice in a given situation.

SHUFFLE: The goalie's skating motion when he/she moves side to side without turning the skates (T-push). This move is used to consistently stay "square" to the puck. Too often, goalies use shuffles which are too large, thus opening up the 5-hole or creating trouble in making transition. Smaller shuffles are better.

SITUATION: Playing goal is not playing a series of shots, but rather “playing situations”. Situations may, or may not, end in a shot. A situation is made up of where all players are, and the puck. It is not just the puck or the shooter. It is the situation that the goalie “reads”.

SIX-HOLE: The space created between the stick arm and body when the stick paddle is too large or when the goalie “rolls” the stick arm shoulder in a half butterfly.

SPECTATOR: When a goalie, while “reading the play” watches rather than moves with the puck on a pass or shot.

SQUARE TO THE PUCK: The ability to stay lined up with the puck and the middle of the net. The goalie, by rotating shoulders and shuffling, remains square to the puck. This is critical for success.

STICK DISCIPLINE: This refers to the process of keeping your stick perfectly positioned between your knees filling the five hole when the potential for screens or redirects is possible.

STICK INVOLVEMENT: This refers to the proper use of the stick in moving sideways, while flush to the ice to direct rebounds to the corners, out of the kill zone. This should only be attempted when there is no danger of a tip or deflection.

TELESCOPE: The goalies’ skating motion moving in and out of the crease. The motion must be brisk and explosive while always in the stance position.

T-PUSH: The goalie’s skating motion used laterally to get across the net or back to the post. The momentum is created by putting the feet into a T with the back foot pushing hard. This is also the initial motion of a 2-pad slide move.

TRANSITION: The ability to “change” from one move to another. It may be to “change” quickly left to right, or telescope to shuffle or shuffle to half butterfly. The quicker the better.

WORK ETHIC: There is no substitute for hard work. A goalie should practice as he/she plays.

Y-THEORY: The most efficient use of telescoping, staying square, and using the proper save selections. When done properly, the goalie’s motion resembles a “Y”. . . out, back, and diagonal toward the post.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Everything I have ever learned about this position, I have learned from people smarter than me. I continue to learn to this day and will until I die. The following people have been huge influences on my career as a goaltender and as goaltending coach:

- 1) **Ted Ouimet**: Ted started working with me as a kid and taught me puck handling and how to play the game. He was also the major coaching influence on a young Mitch Korn at Can Am hockey school.
- 2) **Mitch Korn**: Mitch scouted me out of Strathroy and coached me extensively while I played college hockey. He turned me into an NHL goaltender and then an NHL goaltending Coach with the Toronto Maple Leafs. Neither of these feats would be remotely possible without Mitch.

Keek's Quotes:

"It is far better to be stunned that your kid made it to the NHL than to be disappointed that he didn't. Convincingly, expect that it won't happen and enjoy the process itself."

"I always tell my students, "To be good enough is not good enough...you have to be overwhelmingly awesome to overcome politics and nepotism!""

"There are two types of people in the world and you are one of them."