



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING

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Anticipation Inputs for Goaltenders: What's Happening Next?

Often you here discussions about what makes certain goalies such as Martin Brodeur, Henrik Lundqvist, Mikka Kiprusoff and Roberto Luongo, so great and those discussions would go through a number of different variables and end up discussing how the goaltenders "see" or "read" the game. Working on and teaching the "soft" skills (i.e. reading shot releases, anticipation, understanding momentum shifts, general game awareness) has been something that has often been left to the "you have to experience it" way of learning. While experience is a major component of goaltender development MTN has some suggestions for possible ways to improve the "soft" skill of anticipation.

Recognize that hockey is a series of situations and patterns

According to renowned goalie coach, Mitch Korn, goaltenders play situations, not shots. It is due to the fact that hockey is a series of situations that goaltenders need to recognize that the game is often very pattern base. If you think about it, all elite hockey teams, from Midget "AAA" up to the NHL, has in place a game plan or series of game plans to use in certain situations. Understand how offensive schemes work as well as what your team's defensive schemes may be, no matter how basic. If you know and understand different offensive and defensive systems you will know where a team will work to breakdown coverage, creating space for the glorious scoring opportunity. If you know the systems you will be able to anticipate the play. ***Video analysis is excellent for this.*** As goaltenders begin to recognize different opposition game plans they will notice patterns and plays that are familiar. Often a goaltender will face a team several times in a season, therefore they should recognize the patterns of the team and some of the specific player's tendencies.

HINT: Next time you are watching a hockey game see if you can recognize some of the ways a team will try to generate goals. Then see if you can recognize which players in different situations will receive the puck. Finally, see if you can recognize the moments when there is a very high chance of a goal being scored. See if you can predict, even for a split second, when a goal will occur then try to understand how that goal occurred.

Notice the positioning of your team and the passing lanes available. If your team has taken away the cross crease passing play you will not need to pay as much attention to that option, although you should still be aware of that option. Although most of us should simply react to the shot, there are times where we anticipate where a player will shoot; we can learn how to react by seeing how our teammates have reacted. If you watch J.S. Giguere he will rarely go down if one of his teammates went down to block a shot. He anticipated that if a shot eludes the block it will most likely be high so, why give up space? Giguere would then anticipate the need to stand up.

Remember, the game is a series of patterns and situations. For those analytical minds most of the situations faced by a goalie has been repeated numerous times thus the game can be broken down into a series of patterns. Basically, there are few situations you have not already faced before. Make sure to learn from your successes and failures.

Get the most out of your vision

MTN Goaltending has been doing more and more research about vision and how important it is to performance and it is definitely a base for elite goaltending. Goaltenders will become better at anticipation and situational reads by using their various visual tools and inputs.

Head on a swivel/barstool

The first visual tool is the cliché of using your "head on a swivel" or "head on a barstool". "Head on a swivel" is the idea that at appropriate times it is good practice to take one's eye off the puck and turn the head, for a split second, to look for open players who are available to become part of the attack. Although focusing on puck position and puck tracking is paramount goaltending can be likened to driving a car. If all you focus on, when driving, is what is ahead of you, you are in danger of what may come towards you from the rear or sides. "Head on a swivel/barstool" is like using your mirrors and checking gauges when driving.

An important aspect to maximizing vision is knowing how and when to use the "head on a swivel". Below are some situations in which it is safe to use the "head on a swivel":

- The play is developing in the neutral zone. Usually, when the play crosses the red line a goalie will have an opportunity to see what the puck carrier's options are.
- When there is battle for the puck in the corner. Be mindful to watch for the pass-out option. If your own team has strong positioning when the puck is in a less dangerous area then the goaltender can take a quick look for open players. Once the open player is spotted make sure to communicate where the danger is to teammates so they can anticipate the play as well.
- When the puck is being worked on the side wall. The sidewall is still a risk for a shot on net but if your team has strong positioning then this may be a chance to get the "head on a swivel".

An extremely important, but often overlooked element of using the "head on a barstool" approach is to recognize which way the puck carrier and their support shoot. What hand a player shoots has a direct effect on the new angle the goalie must be on, as well as what type of shot you are more likely to face. For example, on a two on one the right winger, who is carrying the puck on their natural wing, has the passing option of a left handed winger, also on their natural wing. If the pass is made to the left handed support, on their natural wing, the person receiving the pass is less likely to one time the shot, will most likely shoot short side rather than across the body and may have the option to hold on and go to the backhand. If the attacker was right handed they are less likely to hold and more likely to take a one-timer with increased chance of shooting across the body.

Although, the head on a barstool may seem counter-intuitive there are times when this is the best option for visual awareness during a game and must be used and practiced.

Peripheral Vision

An often overlooked aspect of goaltender vision is the use of peripheral vision. Of course, peripheral vision is the ability to see something out of "the corner of your eye" while focusing on something ahead of you; such as the puck. Anyone with a healthy and functional pair of eyes has some degree of peripheral vision. The use of peripheral vision, usually, comes naturally but is much less acute. There are a few things one can recognize with their peripheral vision that are key to anticipation:

- The color of the opposition's jerseys/hockey socks.
- What hand the open player shoots.
- Approximately where the open player is positioned or where they will end up.
- Where your own teammates are situated.
- Whether a player is looking to make a one-timer or will receive the pass then look to release a shot or another pass.

HINT: There are drills that can be done to incorporate and train peripheral vision. See some of the articles by MTN on vision training.

Video Analysis

One of the best ways to visually learn about yourself, as a goaltender, and about the game in general is to use video analysis. It is important to watch yourself and how you react to the different patterns/situations faced during a game. Try to recognize the different types of game plans used by your team and the opposition. Often, when a goaltender reaches elite hockey, video analysis is provided by the coaching staff to facilitate quicker learning and to engrain the patterns of the opposition into your mental training toolbox.

HINT: Aside from the ability to improve situational recognition, video analysis will often help to build confidence. Often a great game looks good on video and a bad game is usually not as bad on video as it might have felt in the game.

Recognize the spaces you are giving up

Recognize what spaces you may be giving up in certain situations. The different spaces you may be giving up depend on your body positioning such as:

- up versus down (i.e. paddle down, butterfly, VH, sprawled, stacked pads)
- proximity to the puck (is the goaltender close to the puck position?)
- understanding the vertical and horizontal angles the puck would need to enter the net.

While understanding the spaces you are giving up, make sure you are aware of the spaces that are most tempting to shooters, in general, such as top corners and five hole depending on the goaltender and the game situation. Basically, if you sense or know there is a hole, anticipate the shooter is going to try to take advantage of the opening and be ready to close it.

Use your sense of hearing

Normally, goaltenders do not think about using their sense of hearing as a tool that can be used in

a game, but why not use all tools available for success? If an attacker is in an ideal scoring area they will often call for the puck. Usually, a strong communicator who is loud and commanding will receive the puck or have their command followed. This strong use of communication by an attacker may give you some idea of where that open player is located. If the situation does not allow for you to get your "head on a swivel", and you must focus on the puck, your sense of hearing can serve as your peripheral vision.

Another situation in which one's sense of hearing may come in handy is on a screen shot from the point. If all vision is lost, no matter how hard the goaltender tries, and the goaltender must go down into a blind butterfly or paddle down position they may want to delay going down early until they have heard the point man's stick make contact with the puck. Although this tactic only works if the point shot is a snap or slap shot it is another tactic/tool that may come in handy to stop a few goals during a season.

Conclusion

After analyzing some of the tools used to improve anticipation skills that MTN has come to the conclusion that the "soft" skills such as anticipation can be improved through a conscious effort. Mind The Net urges goaltenders to use any tools necessary to improve their anticipation skills rather than just waiting to learn from mistakes. Hopefully this article is a starting point for a goaltender looking to improve their all-around game.