



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING

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Beware the Paddle Down

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Somewhere during the early to mid-1990s, the goaltending tool known as the “paddle-down” came into the foreground thanks to goaltenders such as Ed Belfour, Felix Potvin, Trevor Kidd and Martin Brodeur. Around this time, goaltenders began to realize how often the puck was shot either along the ice or in the bottom 1/3 of the net; consequently, goaltenders devised methods for quickly covering the lower portion of the net. The paddle-down was one of these. Essentially, the technique consists of dropping the blocker-side shoulder in order to lay the paddle of the goaltender’s stick flat on the ice. It is typically done with one knee down, the other up in a half-butterfly-style position (the blocker side knee being the one on the ice), but can be done with both knees on the ice in a full butterfly position.



Here is an example of the traditional one-knee variation from Ed Belfour, who would later all but remove the paddle-down move from his repertoire.



Jimmy Howard of the Detroit Red Wings uses the two-knee variation of the paddle-down when covering the puck.

The paddle-down technique can be a useful tool for a goaltender, and all goalies should be capable of using it when necessary. Perhaps the most common use of the paddle-down is when covering the puck, as

seen above. The paddle-down is placed behind the glove hand when smothering the puck, for insurance against missed attempts at covering the puck, forwards attempting to poke at loose (or “loose”) pucks, and bouncing pucks. In these instances, the paddle-down can be very effective.

In addition, many goaltenders will use a paddle-down when in a tight, scramble situation where the puck is somewhere amongst a mass of bodies in front of the net. This is done to seal that bottom part of the ice, and in some cases so that the goaltender can gain visual connection with the puck. This should be used with caution, though, due to the vulnerability of the position. Having the blocker side shoulder dropped down decreases net coverage and throws the goaltender off-balance; moving from the paddle-down can also be difficult, especially to the glove side.

The paddle-down can also be used for in-tight plays around the goalposts. For instance, on a wraparound to the blocker side, the goaltender can slide into a paddle-down position in order to quickly get the stick on the ice, in position to “stuff” a shooter’s attempt or block centering passes. The key to doing this successfully is to lead the slide with the stick, and to wrap the butt-end of the stick around the outside of the post as quickly as possible. The reason that this technique can be successful is that the paddle and blade of the stick establish puck proximity quickly.

On the glove side, however, a goaltender should exercise caution when using the paddle-down to prevent a wraparound goal or react to a pass-out. On the blocker side, the vulnerability created by lowering one’s shoulder and throwing the body off-balance is counteracted by being able to use the stick to block passes. On the glove side, this is not the case. A rather famous goal from the 1994 Stanley Cup playoffs illustrates the potentially disastrous result of sliding to the glove side in a paddle-down:

Here, Brodeur’s attempt looks slightly awkward and the puck slides beneath him while he is dropping the paddle to the ice. Had he used a simple butterfly slide to the post, leading with the stick and using the left pad to seal the ice and the post, he likely would have made the save, and his Devils would not have been eliminated on that play.

A Stanley Cup winner due to an ill-advised paddle-down

The most recent example of an inappropriate paddle-down leading to a goal comes from Patrick Kane’s “phantom” overtime goal in game six of the 2010 Stanley Cup Finals, that eliminated the Philadelphia Flyers. This is an unfortunate circumstance, because Flyers goaltender Michael Leighton had a very good playoff and I enjoyed watching him. However, he slipped up at the wrong moment and it cost him.



The initial camera view shows that Leighton attempted a slightly hesitant paddle-down, and he was caught in the middle of it by a surprise bad-angle shot from Kane. Leighton could likely have played this situation in a couple different ways, and had it turn out differently. He could have stayed up, using his stick to deflect the shot; he could have used a vertical-horizontal (or VH) position, in which his blocker side pad would remain vertical, sealing the post, while his glove side pad would be extended horizontally along the goal line and his stick would cover any five-hole opening; or he could have taken a more aggressive stance against the sneaky Kane and used a full butterfly from halfway in his crease. Any of these, while not a guaranteed success, would have provided Leighton a better chance at stopping the shot.



These examples are just a few of many to illustrate that the paddle-down, a useful tool that a goaltender might expect to use a few times a game, should not be overused and should be used prudently, in specific situations. Again, it's one of many tools in the toolbox, but it is a specific-use tool rather than a multi-purpose one.