



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING

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Developing and Managing a Productive Mental Game

Throughout hockey circles a strong mental game is a must for all elite goaltenders. When looking at the top NHL goaltenders, especially during playoff time, commentators always discuss the mental toughness of goaltenders like Martin Brodeur, Miikka Kiprusoff and Dominik Hasek.

Mental toughness refers to a goaltender's ability to perform at optimal or close to optimal level at all times including the high pressure situations of playoff games or late in a 2-1 game. Another aspect of mental toughness is the ability to stay calm when faced with adversity or to bounce back from a rough outing or a slump. In order to become a mentally tough goaltender the goaltender must work on all aspects of their mental game/approach. Over the next few sections MTN will provide some activities and resources that can help the goaltender develop and manage a productive mental game. This mental training package will be broken down into several steps/categories for you to progress through to find what works best for you and your game.

Understand The Three “Rights”

Dr. Saul Miller, author of *Hockey Tough*, talks about the three basic “rights” needed to begin training the mind. Without these basic “rights” a goaltender will not have a basis for a strong mental or physical game. The three “rights” are as follows:

1. Right focus. This is self-explanatory. This “right” requires that you stay focused on what you want to accomplish on and off the ice and doing what is required to accomplish the game you want to achieve.
2. Right feeling. Understand what feelings will help you to play your best. When you have played an excellent game how did you feel before, during and after that game. Right feelings may require you to feel energized and pumped, while for others the right feelings require you to clam down and stay relaxed. Learn what you need to find the right feeling for your game.
3. Right attitude. You will need to be passionate about the game, have an excellent work ethic, commitment to your goals, confidence in your game and the perseverance to pursue your dreams.

Once you have found all three of the “rights” you are ready to move forward with your mental training and your hockey career. You must ask yourself do I have all three “rights” as part of my existing mental game? If you are missing any one of the three “rights” then you must evaluate why and work to correct those wrongs. Turn them into “rights”.

Getting Ready for a New Challenge

As you work towards the next stage in the development of your game and your hockey career you will need to understand two aspects to improving your mental game:

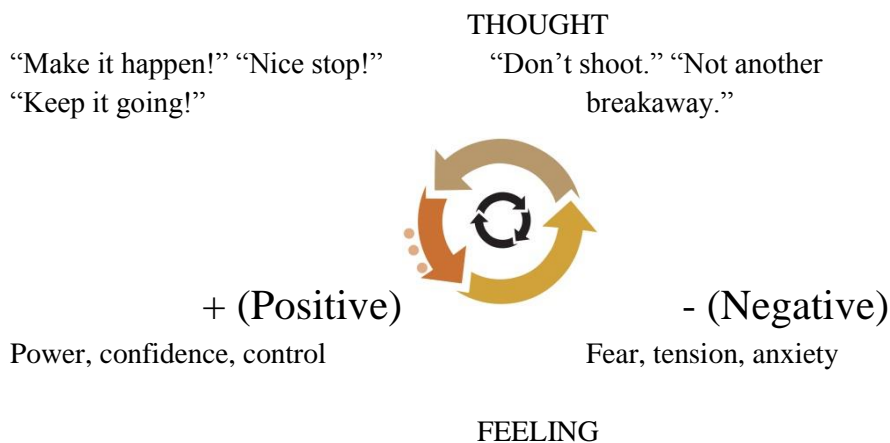
1. Maintain a productive and positive mindset from summer training through the championship game and at all points in between. Patrick Roy talked about this idea throughout his hockey career.

- Keep a calm demeanor. The goaltenders that become the best in the world are able to keep themselves calm and focused no matter the circumstances they are in i.e. Miikka Kiprusoff. Basically, you must learn to stay calm because a frustrated or upset mind will have negative effects on the body creating a vicious cycle that is hard to break.

When you understand the need to stay focused, everyday, on staying positive and productive as well as maintaining a calm demeanor you will find that your game will begin to improve for the better.

Your Thoughts and Feelings Dictate How You Perform

What goes on in your head has a lot to do with how you perform. In order to understand how the mind, body and self talk are related you will learn about the Thought-Feeling Cycle`.



The negative thoughts that will stop you from achieving success are usually based on fear of success, failure, fear of injury, fatigue, anger, frustration and pain. Here are some examples of negative self talk that should be avoided.

FEELING	THOUGHT
-Fear of success- -----	“This is too hard.” “I can’t work that hard.”
-Fear of failure -----	“Don’t screw up!” “Don’t let in another one.”
-Fear of injury -----	“Look out!” “Don’t shoot high.”
-Anger -----	“Next time he comes around he’s gonna get it.”
-Frustration -----	“What’s the point?” “There’s no way!”
-Fatigue -----	“I’m beat!” “I’m exhausted” “I feel terrible.”
-Pain -----	“I can hardly move my arm.” “Maybe I should stay down.”

When thoughts like these pop into your head it is important to be able to replace the negative thought with a positive/productive thought immediately so you are able to feel right. Even after a goal is scored you must be able to respond in a way that will help you regain the right feelings.

What Is On Your Mental TV/Stereo?

Have you ever thought of your mind as a TV or stereo where the thoughts and ideas that go through your mind are displayed or played and observed by you? If you think about your mind as a TV/

stereo, and you have the remote, you will begin to feel more in control of what is playing. Unfortunately, the mental TV is more likely to show a negative message/image than positive which is why you must gain control of the remote control. By gaining control of the remote you gain control of the images you take in. ****Remember: You will become what your mind tells you to become.**** If your mind automatically puts negative thoughts into your head such as “don’t shoot” or “that goal was brutal” and you don’t change the channel the negative thoughts and feelings will cause a downward spiral leaving you with a restless night ahead. In order to gain control of your mental TV you need to recognize when a negative thought has occurred. Once you recognize a negative thought it is time to change the channel by replacing the negative image with a positive personal affirmation or reference to you having success. In the analysis ahead MTN will look at the how and why of personal affirmations.

In conclusion, your mind is a TV/stereo where you control what you think about. What the mind envisions is what will happen, so, gain control of the remote and do not let it go.

A Few Words About Responsibility

Both Dr. Saul Miller and Stephan Covey, author of the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, describe the first thing that comes to mind when people think about responsibility as accepting the consequences of one’s actions. Usually, the consequences associated with responsibility are negative. What Miller and Covey discuss is the idea that responsible actually means *response-able* showing that you have the ability to respond in any way you choose to anything that you have done or has happened to you. By understanding your responsibility as your ability to respond to anything, good or bad, in a way that will make you better, you will see the rigours of being a goaltender is easier to deal with.

Now, that you know you are *response-able* you will better handle the way you react after a goal against, not-so-constructive criticism, or being cut from a team. By being responsible you will take charge of your career. Besides, when one door closes a window opens. Sorry for the cliché.

Time To Do Some Goal Setting

After learning about some of the basics behind mental training it is time to do some goal setting. Take a look at the MTN article titled “Goal Setting” for information about why and how to set goals. Once you have completed your goal setting it is time to move forward in your mental training and development.

Goaltenders and Strategy Thoughts

Strategy thoughts are thoughts/ideas/sayings that are very basic to your performance. As a goaltender it is important to know what you need to do physically to be successful. In order to use a strategy thought to benefit your game the most the thoughts should be short and fairly general; possibly focusing on your fundamentals. Below are some possible examples of strategy thoughts:

“Keep your eye on the puck.”

“Fight through the screen.”

“Never give up.”

“Get into position before the player receives the puck.”

“Move with power.”

“Control the rebound at the body.”

“Keep your head on a swivel.”

Now that you have an idea of what a strategy thought is write down **five** strategy thoughts that are keys to your game. Once you have written down your strategy thoughts you will need to review them once in awhile so you can tune into them on your mental TV. When your thoughts become negative you can use your strategy thoughts to stay in the present.

Do You Know Your ABCs?

No, we are not talking about the alphabet. We already know that as a goaltender you are highly intelligent. The ABCs are, once again, an idea for mental training from Dr. Miller that act as an extension to the strategy thoughts you have just finished writing out. What makes the ABCs an extension of strategy thoughts is that the ABCs are the basics you keep in mind when facing different game situations. For different types of situations you will list three keys for you to have success in different situations you will face during a game. Again, some examples to illustrate before you examine your own ABCs

Game Situation

ABCs

The puck is in the opposition zone.

A. Watch the puck from the top of the crease.

B. Get ready to set up for the oncoming attack.

C. Watch for icing, keep eye on linesman.

There is a pass out from the corner to an open player in the slot.

A. Gain depth with power.

B. Get set on angle before player receives pass.

C. Be aware which hand the pass receive shoots.

As you can see your ABCs are not complicated but do give you a baseline for the strategies you will employ throughout the game. Of course, there will always be something that requires a response other than your ABCs, but you already knew that. Now it is time to write down your ABCs for the following game situations. You may want to sit down with your defensemen to develop a strong understanding of roles and responsibilities.

- The puck is in the opposition end.
- The attack has just crossed your side of center.
- A shot from the point.
- A shot through traffic.
- A possible deflection.
- Setting up for a defensive zone faceoff.
- Playing a breakaway.
- Playing a 2-on-1, 3-on-1, 3-on-2.
- Defending a penalty.
- Defending a two man disadvantage.
- The puck is behind the net.
- Wraparounds.
- Your team has the powerplay.

Try to mesh your ABCs with what your team philosophies are for playing the different game situations. If you do not know what your future team's philosophies and playing styles will be do your ABCs so they help you compete at optimal levels. ****You can enhance your understanding of your ABCs by doing an illustration on a picture of a rink or coach's whiteboard.****

Time To Re-affirm Your Beliefs With Some Affirmations

Just like the section on goal setting MTN has written an essay about the why and how of personal affirmations called "Mental Training and Preparation". Do not underestimate the power of productive/positive thinking through the use of affirmations. Be sure to do each step to ensure maximal benefit and understanding. ****Notice the reference from "Mental Training and Preparation" is from www.thegoaliesmind.com which has an excellent audio program to help goaltenders develop confidence. Highly recommended.****

A Quick Transition: Turning Affirmations Into Power Statements

Once you have completed the affirmation program from MTN's article "Mental Training and Preparation" you are ready for the next step in addressing the positive/productive self-talk issues. You can start by selecting some, if not all, of your affirmations and turn them into power statements. Power statements are a combination of the power thoughts and affirmations that best exemplify your game. The power statements you choose should exemplify the best of your game as well as the best game you aspire towards. The key to a power statement is to make sure the statement matches the realities of your game. For example, if you are not good at performing a two pad stack you should not use a power thought related to performing a good pad stack. A couple examples of power statements are:

"I keep my feet moving when I handle the puck."

"I play my best when my head is up and my mind is clear."

Again, use a power statement as a program for viewing on your mental TV for when there is a program on your TV that is counter-productive.

Creating Your Own Highlight Reel : Mental Rehearsal and Imagery

Over the last twenty years or so, there has been an increasing discussion about the importance for elite athletes of being able to mentally rehearse peak performance through imagery. With the use of your mental TV it is time to develop a way that you may mentally rehearse. Many times goaltenders will watch a "Rock'em Sock'em" video on a game day as a reference for the types of saves they would like to make. Often goaltenders will envision themselves making the game saver/show stopper. By imagining the big save goaltenders are employing the use of imagery/mental rehearsal. You will be encouraged to continue doing that same type of mental rehearsal but with some different ideas mixed in to help you perform "in the zone" more consistently.

Why should you do mental imagery, you may ask? Simple, there is ample evidence that shows the best athletes in the world use some sort of mental rehearsal. In the past a formal use of imagery was preached with many goaltenders feeling the formality of the mental imagery made the game less fun and the pre-game routine too structured. In this section MTN will walk you through some key concepts related to mental rehearsal.

The first step to using mental rehearsal is to only envision successful, efficient outcomes. If you want to be successful at stopping a star player on a breakaway you must imagine yourself making the save look easy. If you want to stop a screen shot with a well controlled rebound you must see that happening on your mental TV. Unfortunately, many goaltenders will rehearse the big save but forget to rehearse the play from a bad angle with dire consequences. Many goaltenders who only imagine the big saves discuss how they made some “huge” saves but let in a softy or two. When doing mental rehearsal you need to watch or feel yourself making the best of as many different situations you may find in a game from playing the dump-in to stopping a two-on-zero.

Here are Dr. Miller’s tips on creating a winning mental rehearsal:

1. Visualize your ABCs. Imagine yourself making the plays you chose to focus on with your ABCs.
2. Relax and then image. You need to breathe normally or with deep breaths to allow yourself to be more focused. If you do not perform better when you are relaxed then only do the mental imagery.
3. Stay positive/productive. Imagine yourself playing at your best. Remember whatever pops onto your mental TV will become reality. Make sure to use positive images.
4. Go easy at first. It is important for you to imagine the simple plays first and then progress to the harder situations and to the game savers. ***In order to eliminate weak goals you must imagine yourself making sure the easy plays stay easy.***
5. Be dynamic. Some goaltenders like to visualize everything from the same perspective as if they were playing. Others like to see themselves perform as though they are a fan in the stands, or you can see a situation in slow motion. Basically, try many different approaches to see what works best for you.
6. Be brief. Each image/clip should only be 5-10 seconds long at the most. If the images are brief you can move through them quicker. ***If you like to listen to music before a game try to do mental rehearsal to the beat of the music while progressing from easy to harder plays.***
7. Use all your senses. Make sure you allow yourself to feel the images on your mental TV. What does the play look like, how does your body feel, What does the crowd sound like after a good play, well...you get the point.

One of the best tools to help you mentally rehearse is to watch video of yourself making the plays that you expect to make. Yes, make a highlight reel of yourself, again, view yourself making the easy plays and then progress into the harder plays. By using videos of yourself you will have a reference for something you have done before. There is nothing thrown at you in a game that you cannot handle.

Essentially, you will benefit from some mental imagery work. How intense or how formal you are while doing the rehearsing is completely up to you. ***Make sure to visualize a wide range of plays from easy to extra hard.***

Emotional Control

One of the most important aspects of mental training for a goaltender is the understanding and development of emotional control. When you think of emotional control you should picture Miikka Kiprusoff calmly shrugging off a goal against or staying composed after making a huge save. Many times teammates of Kipper can be heard saying that he is so calm and steady and that they feel confident when he is “back there”. Part of the reason Kiprusoff instills confidence is his ability to keep the puck out of the net and the fact that they know he will not get rattled; he will not show the other team that he is upset. A goalie who flies off the handle is a goalie that will be inconsistent with poor self-confidence.

Emotional control involves making sure the mind and body does not create or hold tension. Tension will cause you to have tunnel vision, where you become more vulnerable to passing plays, and

causes tension throughout the shoulders and the lower abdomen. If your shoulders are tight and your lower torso is tight you have effectively eliminated the chance that you can move smoothly and efficiently.

The best way to control tension is to begin by being able to recognize and stop when you are beginning to feel anger, usually from anger or worry. Once you have recognized the need to stay in control it is time to focus on your breathing. Proper breathing is the absolute best and quickest way to bring you back down to earth so you can continue to give your team a chance to win. In order to begin to learn proper breathing technique you must understand the process.

1. Feel the rhythm. The most important part of breathing is to focus on the rhythm of each breath. As you breathe, feel the breath come in...and feel the breath flow out. Take a moment to feel the breathing in...and the breath flowing out. You need to experience proper breathing. The key to rhythm is time. You must allow for a full breath to come in and a full breath to flow out. Compare your breath to an ocean wave. Waves always take their time.
2. Inspiration. If breathing is respiration then you must focus on the in-breath; the inspiration. While breathing in you must realize that each breath in brings energy. Energy is all around you whether you are at home or on the road. Since the in-breath is energy learn to use it, in fact, tap it out. First focus on the breathing and then draw in the power to help you be your best.
3. Direction. After feeling the rhythm and the inspiration it is time to direct your breathing. If you are a goalie who has slow starts to each game or period or are tired, but must play, you can direct your energy to any and all parts of your body. With every out-breath you can imagine yourself sending energy to all points of the body. Imagine yourself as ...

The Five-Pointed Star



If you imagine yourself as a five-pointed star you can take energy from your core (lungs) and send energy to any, if not all, points of the star. If you are feeling tired send energy to your brain so you can stay focused and refreshed. If you are going into the fourth overtime period of a championship game you may want to send energy to all points of the star. ****Remember – You are the five-pointed star and you are capable of controlling your energy levels. If the mind can see it the body will do it!****

To conclude, proper breathing is the best and quickest way to maintain emotional control. Focus on breathing in fully through the nose, to your lung's capacity, and breathing out until the lungs are empty. **By focusing on breathing you have stopped yourself from dwelling on past mistakes or worrying about something that might happen in the future.** Proper breathing allows you to stay in the present thus helping you to stay in better control leading to more consistent awesomeness.

Game-Day Preparation Chart

Goaltenders are known for developing strong game day routines. As mentioned in the “Developing Routines” article it is important to have a routine that helps trigger your mental and physical actions for each practice and game. In order to understand the importance and proper development you should know your routine and understand why you do what you do. To best learn about your game-day preparation you should fill out the following:

Game-Day Preparation

Name:

Game:

Date/Time:

Home/Away

Before Game

Bedtime:

Hours of sleep:

Wake-up time:

Daily activity: Morning

Breakfast food:

Time:

School or work:

Pre-game Skate:

Focus:

Treatment/rehab, yes or no:

If yes, what:

Daily activity: Afternoon

Lunch food:

Time:

School or work:

Rest time:

From:

to:

Relaxation/breathing:

Hydration:

Self-talk:

Dinner/snack food:

Time:

Before leaving for the game

Check equipment, telephone for messages:

Departure time:

Ride:

Arrive at rink:

Pre-game activity

Check equipment (is it there? Straps? Buckles? Tape?):

Physical treatment:

Mental Preparation

Relaxation breathing:

Imagery/mental rehearsal (ABCs):

Self-talk (power thoughts and words for the game):

On-ice warm-up focus:

In the room focus:

During Game

Things to do/remember:

Work hard:

Stay positive/productive:

Hydrate:

Between shifts, remember to:

Between periods, relax/recharge:

Think positive:

Hydrate:

After game

Evaluate performance: 3 (excellent), 2 (average), 1 (poor)

Energy level:

How legs felt:

Mental sharpness:

Pat yourself on the back. What I did well and will continue to do well:

Things to work on and improve in practice/warm-ups are:

The game day preparation chart can be used to help you find a game-day routine that works best for you, is easy to follow and flexible in case of complications. You can use this chart to understand what makes you perform at your best. ***Try filling out the chart for the best game(s) you have played and the worst game. Was there any significant differences? If so, what were they and how can you change your routine to trigger optimal performance?**

Three Mental Keys to Being an Elite Goaltender

To finish this extensive mental training activity you must possess the following three mental keys to being an elite goaltender.

1. Focus. Focusing on what is coming at you, seeing and battling for the puck at all times, understanding the forecheck, defensive zone coverage, positive self-talk, proper breathing, and knowing your ABCs are part of what a goaltender can, nay, must focus on.
2. Maintain emotional control. This can be practiced daily in practice and gives your team confidence and deflates the other team's confidence. You need to stay in control in all aspects of goaltending to be consistently great.
3. Attitude. You need to be committed, positive/productive and confident. Remember – “I am...” and “I can...”

The End

So ends this mental training package. If you are a mentally and physically sharp goaltender you are ready to take on hockey challenges at even the highest levels. **IF THE MIND CAN SEE IT, THE BODY WILL DO IT!**

HAVE FUN AND BE A WARRIOR!

References

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Covey, S.R. (2004). *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. Free Press: New York