



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING

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Eliminating Predictability: Adding Patience to Your Game

Ask any elite hockey or goalie coach to break down goaltender tendencies, either on their own teams or opposing teams, they will often point to a goaltender's tendency to go down on every, or close to every shot. Now, one of the most important breakthroughs in goaltending is understanding how to play a strong down game and the benefits of the techniques involved with that down game. Despite the importance of a strong down game there is still a place for a standup save. Developing the patience to make 3-5 stand up saves a game helps to eliminate some of the predictability that opposing teams are looking to expose.

It is extremely important for goalies to be able to move powerfully, smoothly and efficiently while both up or down. It is also extremely important for goalies to be able to track the puck while on their feet as much as possible. In order to strengthen one's game by taking away tendencies the goalie must develop the skills that will allow them to track the puck while on their feet, without committing to a down play automatically on every passing play or shot. It is beneficial if a goalie has a strong down game that frustrates the opposition enough they believe they should shoot high only to find their shots high are being easily snuffed out by a patient goalie that reads different situations and shot releases properly, not automatically going down unless necessary. That's right, making a few standup saves per game can add unpredictability to a goalie's game, frustrating the opposition enough that they will revert back to just shooting anywhere which often results in low shots. Basically, the opposition will go full circle in a game to playing to the patient goalie's strengths.

First, goalies need to work on being patient during practice so they do not have to think about it during a game. For the majority of goaltenders as soon as they start thinking in a game they are in deep trouble. Next, a goaltender needs to understand the times where a standup save would be an asset. Some examples can be:

1. Shots taken from a bad angle (from the outside hash marks down to the goalline).
2. Shots from the top of the circles and further out as long as there is no threat of traffic or deflections. You should have time to read the shot appropriately.
3. If a teammate makes a low shot block attempt(sliding block). Chances are the shot will go over top of a low block, if the shot gets through.
4. Dump-ins from outside the blueline.

Goalies, try this in your next practice; anytime you get a shot from the top of the circles or further out try to watch the trajectory of the puck very closely. If the shot is flying below the height of your belly

button, while in your stance, make a down save selection. If the shot has a trajectory above your belly button, while in your stance, you must try to stand up to make the save. Another way to develop tremendous shot release and puck tracking skills (which leads to more patience) is to try to centre-shift on as many shots as possible. A centre-shift does not have to transition into a down save. A centre-shift can be done while standing as it is simply an attempt to get as much of the body unit in front of the puck as possible. Even if a shot is taken inside the top of the circles any goalie that can centre-shift on these shots in tighter is developing tremendous patience and quickness.

*** Even in warm-ups it is a good idea to work on properly reading the release on shots from further so the opposing coaches, who are watching the pre-game skate, see that you do not go down on every shot. Now the scouting report to shoot high on the goalie comes into question and might be abandoned at the last minute. ***

The benefits of working on a system such as the one described above are as follows:

1. Goalies will gain a stronger control of their puck focus and ability to read the shot release off of the stick. By really focusing in on reading the release properly the goaltender will develop a better sense of angles as they are less likely to plant or set their feet if a player is just winding up for the shot as opposed to staying on angle with the puck until it is being released.
2. If goalies work on this system, in practice and warmups, on shots from further out it will be easier to think through the task. MTN has found that goaltenders build a lot of skills such as rebound control and reading the release from working on plays from further out and progressing closer as skills get stronger.. If a goalie cannot read a shot or control a rebound on a situation from further out they will be in a lot of trouble.
3. Goalies will start to notice in games that they make more patient, standup saves as well and will become more patient in general; also adding to a strong down game as well. The best goalies in the world, with the best down games often have tremendous patience in their game afforded them through practicing on that patience. Once teams see that a goalie is able to be patient it throws a seed of doubt into the opposing team's attempt to steal the fruits of your garden.

The final way to increase a goaltender's unpredictability is to have a never say die, never give up, attitude and developing the tools and skills it takes to compete to the bitter end on every play. Make sure that there are some "street hockey moves" that can be pulled out of the toolbox when needed. Hopefully, a properly trained goalie should not need their "street hockey moves" any more than once or twice per game, but things happen and goalies must expect the unexpected at all times.

To conclude, goalies need to play games instinctually with no thinking involved which means in almost all games a goalie plays in the goaltender will make 95+% of their saves on their knees. We already know the benefits of playing a strong down game we just need to recognize the benefits that come with the development of patience to read situations properly with a proper read and tracking of the shot being released. There is only one way a goalie can actively work on specific skills such as patience and that is during practice. By focusing on great practice skills on a daily basis it is very likely that patience

will become a much more automatic response during games. That is the key for most goalies work on the skill in practice until it becomes instinctual during games.