



## MIND THE NET GOALTENDING

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### Game Management: A must for successful goaltending

Watch an elite hockey game closely, especially in person, and you can see that there is more to the position of goaltending than meets the eye.

Watch closely and you will see, opportunity after opportunity, when, what and how the goaltender competes during a sequence can have a direct outcome to not only the tempo of the game, but in the quantity and quality of the shots that they will face.

Once again, as is a major theme with Mind The Net, the goaltender must understand that their main focus should be the “Keep the puck out of the net!” mentality, not just the “stop the puck” mentality. Keeping the puck out of the net will consist of many varied aspects of the position.

The below skills are all very simple, but essential, in the game management skills that every goaltender must utilize:

#### **Strong Visual Skills**

As usual every aspect of goaltending begins with proper attention being paid to the visual inputs used in goaltending. We must always remember that our vision, as goalies, directs everything we do in a given situation. Understanding the save and vision sequences is a great place to start when addressing issues with puck tracking, positioning, save selection, rebound control and reacting to the consequences of the rebound instinctually. By focusing on the last step of the vision and save sequences, respectively the goalie can then eliminate post save delay. Post save delay refers to when there is a delay between a goalie making a save and then reacting to the rebound. *\*\*\*By the time the puck is within one foot away from the goalie that goaltender should be reacting to the rebound appropriate to the situation.\*\*\**

Strong visual skills does not always refer to dealing with shots on goal as there are other visual skills that contribute to strong game management. Pattern recognition is a key visual skill as this allows the goaltender to recognize, early in a play’s development as to what the goalie will most likely face. Rarely is an experienced goalie truly surprised by the various situations they face in a game, even on goals against. As part of pattern recognition the goaltender must determine where potential threats occur, screens, odd man rushes and so on.

#### **Strong Game Awareness/Knowledge**

Game awareness, or a general knowledge of how hockey works, will allow the goaltender to be able understand the ebb and flow, momentum swings and different emotions a team may face in a game. Knowing when to stop a play with a whistle through strong rebound control, whether control at the body or sent over the glass is an *extremely* important element of game management as this can kill momentum generated by the other team and give the goalie’s own team a chance for a break and a chance to start from scratch. *Realistically, a goalie can never control too many shots for a whistle!*

On the flip side a strong game manager will also understand the proper times to keep a play moving by knowing where to place the puck, either by passing or setting it up, to a team mate, who not only gets the puck but can pick it up better. This will get the puck out of the zone with speed. Also, understanding when is the time to head man the puck or just set it up for a transition breakout can have a dramatic impact on the pace of a game.

Proper positioning, also known as finding the Fundamental Save Position(FSP), with proper angle and depth no matter what the puck position may be is possibly the biggest contributor to strong rebound control. If a goalie is properly positioned they will cause the other team to shoot, basically, “right at the goalie” for a simple controlled first save or even a shot that misses the net which can actually kickstart a breakout.

Even rebound recoveries, can have an effect on game management as this can effect second save situations. Knowing what types of recoveries, either onto the feet or staying down with a backside push or knee crawl, and which leg to get up on can contribute to proper control.

### **Mobility**

The base of strong game management, even goaltending in general, is centred in strong mobility. Strong skating skills, both player specific and goaltender specific will assist the goaltender to not only get into the proper position for a save but proper position to get to loose pucks to be part of the transition game. Because the modern game is so much more East-West, rather than just North-South, lateral mobility on both the goaltender’s feet and when in a down save or recovery position is much more important, as well. Once again, lateral mobility, and mobility in general, is a key to proper positioning and proper body and save control.

Strong mobility is key to good puck handling skills. By becoming part of the transition the goalie, whom may handle the puck more than most of their teammates, can have increasing control over the pace of the game.

### **Strong Rebound Control**

Once strong mobility and positioning is in place the goaltender can add the powerful weapon of rebound control. The strong goaltender, one that properly manages a game, will understand and be able to use different rebound control tactics based on the rebound control priorities:

1. Strong puck retention at the body.
2. The ability to get the rebound elevated, preferably over the glass, and not flat. Even if the puck does not clear the glass an elevated rebound is far harder to play, for a shooter, than a flat/low rebound.
3. Sending pucks to the corner or knowing where the safe areas are and putting the puck there.
4. Kicking rebounds right back to the original shooter to a teammate backchecking.
5. Kicking a big rebound away from the shooter to either a back checker or clearing the zone by themselves.

Regardless of goaltender ability the most important rebound control priority is to control the puck at the body as much as possible as this will guarantee the goaltender’s own team can regain control of the puck and the pace of the game.

### **Active Stick Skills**

Crease control through the use of active stick skills often has an effect on whether a goaltender may face awesome scoring chances or if they can keep more shots to the periphery. Crease control is as

simple as deflecting opposition passes through the crease or around the net, knowing when to poke/sweep check and having strong passing and shooting skills(on the forehand, backhand, two hands or one hand). Basically, the most multi-purpose tool, and possibly most important for game control, is the goaltender's stick.

### **Transition**

Several times in a game the puck is dumped in and rimmed. In most situations, who starts with the puck on most breakouts?

THE GOALTENDER. When the transition game starts in the defensive end it is safe to say that a good majority of the time it starts with the goaltender. Whether it is on the power play or the penalty kill, a strong transitional goaltender can create positive results by simply shooting it out, head manning the puck or just setting it up.

In order to be involved in game control in a meaningful way the goalie must be actively pursuing loose pucks by:

1. Establishing good readiness and depth as the puck crosses the redline will create better pursuit angles which contributes to...
2. Handling rims.
3. Skating to dump-ins, or beating a forechecker anywhere in front of the net.

One last idea that goalies must embrace when handling the puck is that they must keep their feet moving until the play is completed and the goalie has returned to the net. The goalie that handles the puck from a standstill eliminates play options much the same way a defenseman who stands still with the puck is a dead duck.

### **Communication**

Communication is a great tool to assist the goaltender in helping teammates not only execute smarter, but faster. A strong communicating goaltender can help alleviate forecheck pressure and have a very strong impact on the length of time the puck stays in the defensive zone. By communicating, through strong verbal and body communication, the puck spends less time in the defensive zone which makes the opposition's attempts at scoring a lot harder.

### **Emotional Control**

In order to accomplish everything listed above the goaltender must maintain emotional control at all times during training, practice, game preparation, during and after competition. The goaltender that is in control of their mental game and emotions is able to recognize when a game needs to slow down or speed up or even understand when their own team is struggling with energy level, both energy level too high or too low and what to do about each situation. By staying composed the goaltender can control their own team's psyche and the psyche of the opposition which is the ultimate form of game management.

### **Conclusion**

Although the list of what makes up the idea of game management/control seems long it is really just a series of small skills combined into a very important part of goaltending. Understanding how important goalkeepers are in game management and control is a way to take a look at hockey and goaltending in a more holistic perspective.

This can create more successful goaltenders, coaches, players, scouts or anyone that has a stake in hockey.