



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING
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GoaliePro Mentorship Program Review

In the fall of 2011 Mind The Net Goaltending contacted renowned goalie coach Jukka Ropponen, owner of GoaliePro (Finland), about applying for the 2012 GoaliePro Goalie Coach Mentoring Program being held June 4-8, 2012. Much to our amazement we were given an indication that I, MTN Goaltending Co-director Travis Harrington, would have a very good chance of being accepted for the program. Being that applicants would need to pay their own way to Finland and pay for a few suppers our company began saving up the money for when we would be accepted. As soon as the applications were being accepted I put together his application and was soon accepted.

The application process involved:

- *[Participants will] work with Goaliepro to generate a "white paper" on topic approved by Goaliepro. This will be naturally technique / goalie training related. Work for the paper will start right away and we hope that you will have yours finished in July 2012. Goaliepro / Jukka Ropponen will be mentoring and helping you in creation of the paper.*
- *[Participants] also need to create a storyboard for the photos and videos that need to be shot for your white paper. Goaliepro will provide professional help and create the materials with you based on the approved storyboard.*
- *[Send] application to leirit(at)goaliepro.com and remember to include your hockey CV, personal information and a description why you want to be part of this program along with proposal for possible white paper topics you would like to work on.*

After 24 hours of travel, from Meadow Lake, SK to Helsinki, Finland, I arrived and quickly took part in the last on-ice session of the Veterans (Rec and Beer Leaguers) Clinic held on Sunday June 3. This was a nice way to deal with the exhaustion of travel across nine time zones. It was great to meet some goalies that I have interacted with online and have seen in pictures.



The official GoaliePro camp was run June 4-8, 2012 in Espoo. The clinic hosted 24 goalies ranging in age from 10 – 19 years old. While on the ice with the regular elite camp there were six stations set up with two instructors at each station. For the purposes of the mentorship program participants are paired with a veteran GoaliePro coach or Pro student, which allows the program participants an opportunity to interact with GoaliePro's best. The daily schedule was similar in set-up as most other goalie camps run in North America. Here was the daily schedule for the GoaliePro Mentor participants (different from the students' schedule):

- 7:45am – 8:00am – *Pre-ice Warm-up and Dynamic Stretch.*
- 8:30am – 10:00am – *On-ice Session #1.*
- 10:30am – 11:00am - *Pro Pre-ice Warm-up and Dynamic Stretch.*
- 11:30am – 1:00pm – *Pro On-ice Workout.*
- 12: 45pm – 1:15pm – *Lunch*
- 2:15pm – 2:30pm – *Pre-ice Warm-up and Dynamic Stretch*
- 3:00pm – 5:00pm – *On-ice Session #2*
- *End of day for Mentor Instructors.*

Although the daily schedule is similar to North American goalie camps the on-ice structure is largely different. Whereas most N.A. camps use the first ice session for power skating/net orientation work this was not the case during the GoaliePro Camp. Amazingly, there was really no need to start with a complete breakdown of basic goaltender skating skills as each goalie was already sufficiently or proficiently adept at basic goaltender movements. What this allows for is a direct jump to incorporating basic movement and save selections/tactics. So, in the morning sessions the goalies would work through 30 minute intervals working on three different skill sets giving the goalies the opportunity to get many, many reps in a way that each goalie can get comfortable with their bodies and the specific movement being worked on. The focus on just three different drills in the morning was surprising at first, but the students did become comfortable with each skill. As the week went on the progression from simple movement and save drills to more complex skills was there as with any other elite coaching throughout the world.

The second ice session was structured more along the lines of most other goalie schools, but not quite ours, where the goalies rotated through all six station stops for 20 minute intervals which focused on more complex/advanced progressions using the same skill sets practiced in the mornings, but integrated into different game situations. Admittedly, the last 15 minutes of On-ice session #2 felt long as two hours of instructional time, at one time, is longer than I am used to, but still a lot of fun and challenging.

What makes the structure so interesting is seeing how even the youngest goalies came into the camp with a very solid skill base. Although, they have worked with other goalie coaches with varying philosophies the Finnish goaltending development system is evident when every goalie was able to scull, shuffle, t-push, slide and recover well, and for some, exceptionally. It is evident that although there are varying degrees of proficiency among goalie coaches, even in Finland, the development system is strong.

Now, the July 4-8 week was the first week of on-ice training for the GoaliePro Pro clients: Nikke Backstrom, Bernd Bruckler, Mikko Ramo and Rasmus Tirronen and special guest, the newly retired, Finnish hockey legend Ari Sulander. The ability to observe and work with the Pro workouts is one of the greatest parts of the GoaliePro Mentorship Program. It was a pleasure to see the best Finnish goalie coaches, Jukka Ropponen and Ale Jaaskelainen help to identify weaknesses, but also enhance each goalie's strengths. It was during the Pro workouts where I was able to fully identify the biggest differences between most of the current North American goalie coaching techniques and Finnish (GoaliePro) goalie coaching techniques.



It is important that we realize there are many similarities between North American and Finnish goalie coaching, but here are the biggest areas of focus, I feel, that North American goalie coaches need to focus on as well:

- An emphasis on keeping the goaltender leaning forward while on the feet and while down in a way that promotes superior balance.

- Keeping the hands forward while in stance and during the save movement which promotes even better balance and the ability to activate the hands which allows for greater rebound control and rebound recoveries. I have never seen so many goaltenders catch more pucks than I have during my week in Finland. Absolutely incredible!
- There is a large emphasis placed on using shuffles for most lateral plays with a minimal emphasis on t-pushes. Jukka, the GoaliePro staff and Pro students feel very strongly that most North American goalie coaches over emphasize t-pushes when it is easier to suddenly change directions when shuffling. Also, they have found that it is biomechanically easier to transition from a shuffle into a down position.
- Using the outside foot to stop on plays off the post or for minor depth adjustments. This allows the goaltender to be able to move towards the middle of the ice, the direction of most passes, in a more efficient manner.
- C-cuts/sculls are an essential skill since they are an efficient and smooth way to gain depth for long and short distances.
- GoaliePro students move smoothly AND powerfully. Less t-pushing, naturally, leads to much smoother goaltenders when done properly.
- Interestingly, of all 28 goalies watched and worked with during the GoaliePro experience there were not any goalies holding their trappers in a preventive high position(shoulder height) in stance. As well, not many goalies are holding a full, locked 1 o'clock fingers up glove position. The greater emphasis is on making the hands available to make saves at almost every height, not attempt to deter high shots with exaggerated trapper position.



As a quick aside, the adjustments to incorporating some of the strengths of the GoaliePro philosophy is something that many goalie coaches could do in a way that can help to add to the strengths of their students. In our case, we will make some minor tweaks that will incorporate a little more of the GoaliePro philosophy.

Since this was my first experience travelling overseas and working with one of the top goalie schools and coaches, GoaliePro and Jukka Ropponen, there were many other highlights that must be mentioned:

- Getting to spend time with a goaltending company that we have followed and admired for many years.

- Meeting, working and visiting with Finnish goaltending legend, Ari Sulander. If you do not know who “Sulo” is you must check him out on Wikipedia. Not only was it great getting to know him on-ice and at the rink, but he was also great to visit with outside the rink. Watching him take part in the Friday Pro skate was like watching melted butter on oil!



- Working with Nikke Backstrom, of the Minnesota Wild, for a day of instruction. He is a very quiet man with a great mind for goaltending. The students gravitated to him whenever he spoke.

- Working with/meeting the other instructors/pro students Ale Jaaskelainen, Mikko Ramo, Bernd Bruckler, Christian Adami, Dave Rogalski, Rasmus Tirronen, Jari Heinimaki, Toni Ropponen(Jukka’s son) and Samu Sulander (son of Ari)

- Rooming with Bedford Goaltending Director, Jack Hartigan and Smart Goalie Director, Larry Sadler at the Scandic hotel in Espoo. We hit it off and had great discussions about hockey, goaltending and life.



- Seeing my favorite band, Metallica, with 55 000 other fans at Sonisphere with Ale. Thanks again, Ale.

- Supper at Jukka’s on Tuesday night was excellent with incredible amounts of meat(I have never eaten so much meat in a week as I did when in Finland). Jukka’s personal collection of hockey memorabilia and custom gear would leave any hockey and goalie nut excited and...jealous.

- Eating reindeer at the Jailbird Restaurant (a former prison up to 10 years ago) with Jukka, Marika and Toni Ropponen and Jack.
- Touring and shopping in Helsinki with Jack Hartigan of Bedford Goaltending (Nova Scotia) on my last full day in Finland. Thanks, Jack.
- The legendary “Coaches Appreciation Night” held on the Friday night. Tried some interesting Finnish traditions and enjoyed about 40 minutes of a real sauna (110 degrees F). Let’s just say I found out through experience that the sun does not set at night in June in Helsinki.
- The laughs with all the guys. Finns are a lot like Canadians, just a little quieter, at first.



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Overall, the GoaliePro Goalie Coach Mentorship Program was an incredible experience that I highly recommend to any goalie coach that is willing to examine goaltending and their own philosophies in a different light. I learned some very interesting things that are done differently than how we operate, but at the same time I came away feeling very good about what we do at Mind The Net Goaltending. We have far more in common with GoaliePro than differences and look forward to doing some tweaking to our program and can proudly say that Mind The Net Goaltending is now supported by GoaliePro, Finland.