



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING

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Goaltending Quick Hit #5 – Four Underrated Keys to Puckhandling

Below you will find four aspects of goaltender puckhandling that are often underrated and under discussed in training:

Whenever a goaltender goes out to handle the puck they need to first know where the puck is located and then safely and effectively control it, which requires the goaltender to focus almost solely on the puck. Despite the initial puck focus when stopping dump-ins, rims or long distance shots on net it is important that the goalie takes a look around at their surroundings to see what their best option for making a play might be. Too often when goalies go back to stop rims or look to set up a play they neglect to take a quick look around, check their mirrors so to say, which then causes them to misplay the puck or gives the other team a chance to forecheck the goaltender into making a bad play. Checking the mirrors in hockey is often described as looking around and knowing what threats are coming from various directions, much the same way drivers are taught to use rear view mirrors to promote proactive/safe driving. By taking a moment to scan the defensive zone, and beyond, the goaltender has now given themselves a strong chance to make a well informed play. In order to ensure a proper checking of the mirror occurs the goaltender must try to avoid turning their back to the play. If the goalie's back is turned to the play up ice, particularly when stopping rims on the blocker side, the goalie has become predictable as to their options which is easy for the opposition to neutralize.

Next, when handling the puck outside the net goaltenders need to grasp an idea we all expect from our d-men or forwards...to keep the feet moving when making a play. This makes sense because we would be livid if we had a defenseman trying to make a play from a standstill during the game or if there is a forward that doesn't get their feet moving before receiving a pass. Whenever a goalie goes outside the confines of the crease to handle the puck they become part of the transition and so must keep the feet moving to allow time for teammates to open up as passing options. The moment a goalie stands in one spot to play the puck the other team will recognize that moment of weakness and take away passing options which forces the goaltender to make a bad play/choice. One way a goaltender can keep their feet moving when handling the puck is, when time permits, take any pucks collected below the goalline and skate with the puck until getting above the goalline before making a pass. This makes sense because the goalie is able to get away from the obstacle of the net, change plays if needed, and if the goalie or teammate mess up the pass the goaltender is already above the goalline allowing for a much easier scramble back to the net. Also, if a goaltender retrieves a puck from high in the defensive zone they can drag the puck back towards the net (the middle of the ice) forcing the forecheckers deep into the zone and opening up passing/clearing options on both sides of the ice. Again, if the goalie drags to the middle they are in a better position to cover up for any mistakes/turnovers.

Basically, if we expect our d-men to keep their feet moving when making plays we should do the same, ourselves, for the same reasons as why they must keep moving.

One last underrated and often under discussed aspect of goaltender puckhandling is the amount of time a goaltender can take when handling the puck because they are not allowed to be hit. No matter what happens, when a goalie is outside the net puckhandling, the goaltender is not allowed to be hit or else there is a penalty assessed for goaltender interference. Yes, the forechecker can get close to the goaltender, maybe even try to lift or slash the goalie's stick, but they still have to peel away before making contact with the goalie. Knowing the other team cannot engage the goalie should allow the goalie a chance to be more patient with the puck, out wait forecheckers when a need arises, in order to make better plays. Just knowing there is an extra instant that can be utilized effectively is one way of making a poor puckhandler into an effective puckhandler. Combine the extra time goalies get to make a play, although small, while properly checking the mirrors and moving with the puck when puckhandling the goalie will become a far more effective puckhandler and will then be loved by any d-man that is used to doing all the work and paying a physical price for their work deep in the zone.

Addendum:

One other addition to puck handling is that too often the goalie, after setting the puck up for the defenseman, returns too quickly and in too much of a direct path back to the net. The quick scan we use just before we go after the puck can also give us information as to where the forecheck pressure will be coming from and then the route that our defenseman will probably take to move the puck up ice. Knowing these two pieces of information we can then place a convenient body (ours) somewhat in the way to delay the forechecker and forcing them to take a wider, less direct path to pressure our defenseman. After the set up behind the net the goalie can take their first step towards the fore checker by using the edge of the crease as your guide. Little things can create gaps of fractions of seconds. These fractions of seconds can be the difference between getting the puck out of the zone or having the puck turned over in our zone, where now the goalie may be required to make a save.