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Goaltending Quick Hit #6 – Which Hand is the Open Man?

When working with goaltenders it is important to not only work on larger technique issues, but it is a good idea to teach goalies some of the smaller details that can make a big difference at opportune times, such as knowing which hand the open player shoots:

Whenever a play develops from the opposite end of the ice or even within the defensive zone it is important for the goalie to be on the lookout for what is going on around them; get their head on a swivel. So, when the goalie is looking away from the puck what are they noticing? In most cases the goalie just looks to see where the open players are located, but is this enough? Not quite, although it is important to know where open attacking players are located on entry into, and moving around, the defensive zone it is important that the goalie recognizes which way/hand the open players shoot.

Knowing which way an open player shoots is extremely important as it gives key visual cues that are crucial to positioning and anticipation. First, hockey players have it drilled into their heads that they need to present their stick in a position for receiving the pass. Next, players are told they need to make passes “from tape to tape”. Since passes are made “tape to tape” the goaltender now has a positional target on passes to open players. It is important that goalies, when repositioning on a passing play, try to arrive on angle with the pass receiver’s stick before (preferably) or just as the receiver gets the pass on their stick which allows the goalie the time to get set early and move for the shot or reposition with the moving puck. Basically, the goalie needs to get on angle with the blade of the pass receiver’s stick to give the best indicator of the where their new angle needs to be centred and square; which is often a significantly different length of travel depending on whether the player shoots right or left. Simply by moving on angle with the body of the pass receiver the goalie will be severely off angle.



The last greatest benefit for recognizing which hand open players are going to be shooting is to have a strong indication about the type of shot or play the pass receiver will make. If the open player is on their off wing they are more likely to be taking a one timer, most often to the short side, but still has a chance to try to take advantage of a goalie that centres on the body of the shooter, thus opening the far side of the net. If the pass receiver is on their natural wing/side, they are more likely to be able to shoot far side, against the grain, but are still able to hold onto the puck for an extra stride or cut back to the middle for a quick deke in tight. Essentially, the goalie that notices which hand open players, possible pass receivers, shoot are able to better re-position on angle and square with the puck and have a better chance of anticipating/reading the type of play and the shot itself.