



**MIND THE NET GOALTENDING**  
www.mtngoaltending.com

## Important Vision Habits for Elite Goaltenders

While MTN was evaluating goalies in the spring of 2008 there was some interesting observations that were recorded about young goaltenders. We were doing written evaluations on all 12 goalies in attendance. As part of our evaluation process we take as many opportunities to watch the goaltenders as possible both before, during and after the scrimmages and goaltender sessions. While there were some very strong goaltenders we noticed a disturbing trend, which was the lack of puck tracking skills for some of the goaltenders. It seemed some of the goalies were, too often, losing track of the puck especially with regards to when a shot missed the net or after a save was made. Just to clarify, a lot of these shots did not have heavy traffic in front. So, after seeing this problem occurring a little too often with a few of the goalies we started to wonder, **why is puck tracking a dying art?** Then another question needed to be answered; **what are the vision habits required to be an elite level goaltender?**

It has become increasingly evident to Mind The Net, through research and real game experience, that vision is the most important physical tool that is required in goaltending. Don't take this wrong, goaltenders still need to train with passion and dedication the other physical aspects of the game but vision starts the whole process for goaltenders. If a goaltender cannot read a situation, see the puck at the point of release, watch the puck into the body or see the consequences of a shot that goaltender will be weak. It is with this understanding about the importance of vision that MTN would like to address the visual habits that are required for elite goaltenders by looking at four main areas:

- Off-ice Warmups (pre-practice and pre-game preparation)
- On-ice Warmups (pre-game)
- Puck Tracking (during game, both in and out of zone)
- Battles for Sightlines

### **Habits for Off-Ice Preparation and Training**

In previous articles MTN has discussed the importance of pre-game preparation and routines that involve warming up the body. One of the most under trained physical tools of goaltenders is their vision. Goaltenders need to embrace the importance of warming up their eyes before hitting the ice. Right from the first shot of warmups puck velocity is high so it is important that the eyes were warmed up before stepping on the ice. MTN has several vision drills that could be incorporated into pre-game routines. Any goaltenders who warm up their vision as part of their physical preparation is setting themselves up to be better prepared for dealing with a fast start to a hockey game thus decreasing the number of goals allowed early in games.

## Habits during On-ice Warmups

Although, there are usually a number of issues stemming back to practice habits and structures there was one major problem occurring during the on-ice warmups...

The goaltenders, when watching them closely, seemed to be looking past the puck when making saves. We have all seen it (even at the NHL level), the goalie is in the net taking shot after shot but only looking straight ahead no matter where the shot was heading. The goaltender did not have visual attachment with the puck which includes the movement of the eyes, then head, then shoulders and then the rest of the body. These goaltenders were not using the **EYES LEAD THE HEAD, THE HEAD LEADS THE SHOULDERS and THE SHOULDERS LEAD THE REST OF THE BODY** mentality.



Even if the goaltender is doing a rapid fire drill in warmups or the dreaded semi-circle shooting, it is important to watch the body all the way into the body and then off the body before moving to the next puck. *\*\*Make sure to watch the pucks that are shot along the ice very closely as they can be the hardest to track. Watch the puck all the way to the boot of the pads and off.\*\** If teammates lack understanding and just shoot as soon as the last puck was fired then do not worry if they score. It is better to be in control and focusing on strong habits, visual or otherwise, right from the get go.



In a game there is only one puck. Why go rushing around trying to stop everything like a goalie on the fritz if it will lead to loss of puck tracking skills in the game? Goaltenders, make sure warmups prepare you to be your best which does not necessarily mean wasting all energy to stop pucks out of control or like a robot with no neck mobility.

### **In-game Puck Tracking Habits**

Puck tracking is the very basic concept, in theory, of being able to **keep an eye on the puck as much as humanly possible while moving with the puck** from situation to situation. Most situations faced by goaltenders actually starts when the puck is at the other end of the ice. When the puck is at the other end the goaltender, while standing at the top of the crease, needs to follow every movement of the puck in order to understand how a play will develop and to possibly aid the defense to make critical plays. *\*\*HINT: A scout or evaluator should be able to tell approximately where the puck is in the offensive zone according to the movement of the head of the goalie. Remember the eyes and head need to be used to follow the puck.\*\** A goaltender can better understand the game by making sure they track the puck at all times when the puck is in play even if the puck seems to be out of danger.

Puck tracking is crucial in the three steps of the save process. Without proper puck tracking goaltenders will not be able to get into proper position based on the situation they are facing. Puck tracking is extremely important once the goalie is in position and now faces a shot. Reading the release of the shot, gauging its speed and trajectory and making the proper save selection are all based on puck tracking. Of course, the last step of the save process is reacting to the rebound. Without strong rebound tracking the goaltender may get themselves in trouble if they are unaware of where a rebound has gone. Even if a shot misses the net it is still important for the goalie to track the puck as an unpredictable bounce off the glass/boards can result in a goal against. Basically, goaltenders need to realize that puck tracking is the first step towards a strong performance in practices or games.

### **The Habit of Battling for Sightlines**

The final vision habit goaltenders need engrained is the ability and drive to try to track the puck at all times no matter how much traffic is in front of the goaltender. Goaltenders are much more likely to be successful in a screen situation if they do anything to try to catch a glimpse of the puck. Doing whatever is necessary to track the puck may include: looking around the side of a player, looking through the legs, looking over the shoulder of the screener or a combination of all three. Although it may happen in a game goaltenders should try to use a blind butterfly or paddle down as little as possible. Using a blind drop 2-3 times in a game is fairly normal if a goaltender is dropping blindly more than that there is a lack of battling for vision skills. Just like trying to make a save, goaltenders must do everything possible to try to keep track of the puck.