



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING

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Incorporating Goaltenders in Practice and Warm-ups

Most practices and pre game warm-ups involve too much stationary puck stopping by the goaltender. While shots are nice, it is paramount to the coach and goaltender that they understand how the goaltender gets into the position to face the shot. This is actually a very important aspect of goaltending. Very seldom in a game does the goaltender not have to move to get into the proper position to face the shot.

The goaltender and coach that restricts goaltender movement before the shot will also restrict the goaltender's development and performance.

Sure, it is nice to have great flowing drills, all players seem to be in motion, the puck moves about rapidly, shots are coming from all directions and at a great pace. From the stands it looks lovely. Very impressive that the players are in motion. All, that is, but the goaltender!

In order to face the rapid shots and make saves the goaltender is often compelled to feel that they must stop all the pucks shot their way. This puts them in a stationary position for the first shot then in a constant state of desperation for all the other shots that follow; never learning to make a proper controlled save, let alone use proper movement mechanics to get into the FSP (Fundamental Save Position). If they try and use game like movement during the drills this will result in some shots going into the net uncontested by the goaltender. The goaltender then may seem lazy or to be lacking fitness to the coach or their teammates because they are not there to face the shot. This is a no win situation for the poor goaltender.

Pre-shot movement and preparation is almost non-existent in most goaltender warm-ups. So, now, when the game comes the goaltender is put into situations they have barely faced in practice or warm-ups.

When at all possible, the goaltender's starting position should dictate the start of the drill. An example would be if the puck starts from the corner, behind the goal line, the goaltender should be on the proper post with a visual attachment to the puck. Once the goaltender is in position, the drill starts, with the goaltender then tracking the puck (visually and physically at the same time) and learn to get into the proper position to reinforce the three components of the:

Save Sequence

1. Getting to the proper save position.
2. Preparing for the shot.
3. Reacting to the rebound.

After reacting to the rebound the goaltender should quickly get back to the starting position for the drill and the next sequence can happen. While this may slow the drill down, slightly, it benefits both the goaltender and their team in the long run.

Next time you go to a game watch the pre-game shooting rituals. Watch to see if the goaltender gets to, or even knows how to, follow the:

Vision Sequence

1. Watching the release of the puck off the stick blade.
2. Watching the puck as it approaches and hits their body.
3. Watching and following the puck off their body.

Often, during most pre-game drills the goaltender's head and eyes do not track the puck. The goaltender just moves aimlessly left or right to the next shot while their head is stuck facing forward like a robot.

Now the game starts and, oops, an early goal is scored! Could this be because the goaltender did nothing to prepare their eyes or body for the game situations they now face?

Take an example from baseball. During batting practice the batters never face 80 to 90 mph; basically, game speed pitches. They see about 60 to 70 mph pitches. This enables them to focus on the release point of the pitch from the hand, track the ball to the plate and try to watch the ball make contact with the bat. Often hitters will practice placement of the hit ball into certain areas of the field. Left field. Center field. Right field. Also, is the batter ever surrounded by a semi-circle of pitchers that will throw one ball right after another, not allowing the batter time to establish proper mechanics, possibly pitching when the batter is not even looking or, worse yet, beaming the batter? Hopefully, not! Proper PRE-GAME preparation is key.

To further drive home the point, how many pucks are there in a game? One. How many times, during a game, does a goaltender make a save and the rebound goes to the left, but they have to move right? This is not a common game realistic situation, yet one that happens regularly in a team semi-circle shooting drill. When broken down in this manner the reality of the situation seems laughable; until someone sees how harmful those habits may be for the goaltender.

Now, watch the goaltenders warm-up, see what the goalie is allowed to see and react to. Constant shots coming rapidly and at full speed with very little time allowed for working through the three steps of the vision or save sequences.

The goaltender and or coach that does not adjust their practice and pre-game drills to suit the needs of their anchor not only hinder the goaltender's success but the team's success as well.