



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING

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A Steep Learning Curve: Observations of Patrick Roy

After finishing Patrick Roy's biography, *Patrick Roy: Winning, Nothing Else*, this past week it got me to thinking about the impact Patrick Roy has had on my development (despite having never met him or worked with him) as a goaltender and goalie coach...

Just after my University finals finished in December of 2002 I was able to fulfill a small hockey dream; to see Patrick Roy play live. For Christmas I bought my Dad and I tickets to see the Avalanche play the Oilers. Of course, I made a point to get the best tickets I could, in Colorado's end, so I could get a good view of Roy for two full periods. So, there we were 17 rows up, in the lower level seating, on Roy's blocker side. Since this was going to be my first experience watching an NHL game in a seat other than nose bleeds, and without teammates from a minor hockey team, my Father and I made a point to be at Rexall Place before warm-ups even began. From the moment Patrick Roy lead his team confidently onto the ice I promised myself I would soak in as much as possible, and here are some of the things I learned:

From Warmups...

- How to be efficient and do everything as precisely as possible, in warmups, from strong visual attachment to the puck to being perfectly on angle with every shot. It was obvious Roy was taking the time to ensure he was focusing on what he needed to do to perform.
- Roy made sure to use both types of footwork, not just shuffles. Even in warmups he tried to make it so every play was simple.
- Net orientation was made a priority early on in warmups when the other players were going through their rituals.
- Little time was spent stretching on the ice. I am sure a lot of stretching was done prior to hitting the ice, but warmups was a time for focus not limbering up.
- Even in warmups his body language was important. When Roy would even be near the blueline he would actually straighten up and show himself to be ready to take on all challengers. The key was to keep the head up.
- Strong attention was paid to the visual aspects of warmups, especially compared to Tommy Salo for the Oilers (who I appreciated as a strong NHL goalie for a number of years and whom performed quite well that night) who seemed to look past every puck shot at him. Salo's head and eyes did not follow the puck with every shot.
- No shooting drill started until Patrick was ready. In this case the drill did not begin until Roy was in the right starting position and until he had at least had a chance to watch the rebound after he made a save.

In Game...

Once the game began, that was when I saw things that really blew me away:

- During **every** T.V. timeout Roy stayed near his net where he performed net orientation drills(as opposed to Salo that went for a drink and chat during the T.V. timeouts). Just simple things like using a t-push to move from dot to dot. Some times he would do net orientation work using his down movement and recoveries as well. Basically, to be the best a goalie must be ready to work on the fundamentals as much as possible, whenever possible.

- He tried to be on angle and set as much as possible with as many possible shot attempts as he could. The key was not just being on angle but set at the point of release enabling him to make most of his saves very simple. At one point my father, who rarely says a word while watching a game, described an incredibly hard to stop bang-bang play, from the low slot as "Absolutely incredible! Guys like CUJO would have to sprawl to make that save, but he made it look so easily. Just took it right in the gut. Wow!". I was in total agreement.

- Roy was a master of varied footwork using shuffles, t-pushes, sculls. I decided during that game that I would incorporate more t-pushes into my game, even on odd man rushes. In fact, there was one save on Anson Carter on a 2 on 1 where Roy came over in a t-push and was able to make a very simple blocker save on a very difficult play and the puck just harmlessly moved to the corner. Even when working with goalies we (MTN) truly believe goalies must use t-pushes(not stright across but with an emphasis on angle and then depth) to get into position on passing plays longer that 10-15 feet depending on the goalie and how close the pass receiver is to the net.

- For the first time I saw how important it was for a goalie to just play the puck. A lot of people criticized Roy for his puckhandling, but most of the time he was successful because he just got out and did it. Yes, mistakes can happen, and they did with Roy, but the more often this skill is performed the less likely the goalie is to make blunders. Basically, should a goalie refrain from handling the puck because of one or two mistakes in a game? What if we had the same attitude about d-men?

- Anticipation is a learned skill. Watching Roy I noticed a number of things that I believe helped him with his game reading skills; one of his greatest strengths. First, his use of head on a swivel was key. Not that it was not something I didn't do or know about I just really learned about how frequent and when it could be done. Whenever the play was at the other end Roy would watch bits and pieces of the action on the jumbotron. Between breaks in play (not T.V. timeouts) and after goals for or against Roy was doing video analysis work during the game! To be that confident in his game reading skills that he could watch the action on the scoreboard screen and stay on top of everything on the ice is a tremendous skill.

- The king of the shimmy/knee crawls was actually Patrick Roy. This amazing goaltender made a few, due to extremely good rebound control, rebound saves very easily without having to leave his knees. Again, this was nothing new except for how exceptionally quick the post save response was for both the backside recoveries and the knee crawls. At one point Roy moved probably close to six feet strictly doing a shimmy/knee crawl to get into position to make the stop. I made a promise to myself to try to incorporate more down movement into my net orientation work and make it a focus in practices.

- The importance of stick involvement on any shots along the ice was especially brought home when almost every shot that came along the ice, to the trapper and blocker sides, was sent to the corner in the air or was simply sent over the glass. Most rebounds had elevation, enough of which allowed Roy to be on his feet and in position before the puck even landed.

- When killing a 5 on 3 penalty there are times where a goalie may not need to be at the top of the crease for all puck movement. During a couple of 5 on 3's Roy sat about one foot inside his crease, fought to see the puck in whatever means possible, while moving and being on angle with each pass recipient's stick. This just seemed to be a much more efficient approach to killing a penalty against a strong puck moving team.

Of course, there have been many other things learned from observing and learning about Patrick Roy such as:

- A goalie should never apologize for goals against. There should never be a "Sorry this or sorry that". Apologizing is a sign of weakness and may appear to be a sign that the goalie is losing confidence. The only apology that is worth anything is for the goalie to come back the next game and be a wall. If a goalie is self-respecting they take a goal against hard enough as it is, so why should the goalie undermine themselves?
- His motto, written on his blocker in the 1996 season by his agent Bob Sauve, is a testament to what goaltending is all about; "Be a Warrior!" This is something I adapted many years ago to "Have Fun and Be a Warrior!" This has been a key to a moderately successful hockey career (one that I am very proud of).
- The appearance of confidence is key because teammates are always looking to the goalie as a gauge for team confidence. Goalies must be engaged in their own aura at all times.

Even though it was only one experience of seeing Patrick Roy play live in what would be a 4-3 Oilers OT win I still consider it to be a night in which I changed a lot of things in my game for the better, unfortunately a little too late, and have tried to pass onto Mind The Net students as much as possible. To this day I discuss this amazing experience of watching who I believe to be the greatest goalie of all time in our classroom sessions and where applicable during times of instruction.