



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING

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Perfect Practice Makes Perfect

One of the greatest myths in goaltending is that practice makes perfect. This is a myth because a goaltender may practice something improperly and become really good at doing something really poorly. It sounds harsh but...only perfect practice makes perfect. Realistically, no person will ever be able to practice perfectly (if someone has, we're not worthy!). Despite the fact perfection is hardly ever achieved this does not mean that goaltenders should just try to stop everything no matter how it is done. Goaltenders need to realize that there is always a smart way to work hard. There are always fundamentals that need constant improvement. Goaltending involves knowledge and practice of little details; focusing on doing little things properly is the way to practice perfect.

In order to practice perfect the goaltender needs to realize that there are some fundamentals that constantly need work/improvement. The biggest fundamental to work on is proper shot preparation. If the goaltender cannot get into the Fundamental Save Position (FSP) efficiently, powerfully and in control then the game is going to be very hard to play. Shot preparation involves goaltender specific skating (while in the basic stance), understanding of depth, precise angles, and being set for the shot no matter what the situation. Save selection and reading the shot is another fundamental that must always be improved. Practice is a good time to work on being patient as well.

Aside from the fundamentals of the body the goaltender needs to work on the fundamentals of the mind and vision. Goaltenders need to try to make practices as game like as possible. In order to make practice as game like as possible it is very important to remember that there is only one puck in a game on which you place all of your attention. Goalies need to ensure that they play one puck at a time. Do all of the proper shot preparation that you would in a game on as many pucks as possible. ***Even in a rapid fire drill it is important to play each puck entirely.***

Playing the puck entirely means that you concentrate on skating efficiently, finding the proper depth and position, maintaining visual contact through the save movement, and reacting to the result of the save selection. Visual contact needs to be focused on one puck at a time. Keeping visual contact involves watching the puck as it moves from player to player, from the stick to the body, from the body to the rebound destination. ***Keeping an eye on the puck means that your eyes and head turn with the puck. Do not stare straight ahead when a puck is coming your way. Even if you get scored on you should know exactly how it went in.*** There are times where you will let in goals because you have focused on finishing one puck at a time. Do not be discouraged; you are only trying to make the drill more game like.

Aside from the increased focus and concentration that you will gain from maintaining visual contact with the puck in play, you will gain "puck sense" as well. "Puck sense" dictates that you will develop a sense of what the puck will do when it hits different parts of your body/equipment through strong visual and kinetic connections. By improving your "puck sense" you will be able to react better to the saves you make through traffic. If you do not see the puck hit you, there will be an automatic

recognition of where the puck has most likely gone and you can react accordingly. Although “puck sense” comes in handy, during high traffic plays, it can only be developed by strong visual contact/tracking of each situation faced in practice.

Many goalies playing high level hockey try to stop everything regardless of how out of position they are at the end of the drill. By the end of these drills the ‘tender is exhausted and frustrated. Goaltenders need to understand they should focus on the puck in front of them, you know, be in the moment. Aside from the proper physical practice habits MTN has developed some ways to improve mental toughness and concentration in practice.

The first thing to do is to work on keeping calm after disappointment. Goalies can get really mad in practice if they let in too many goals or let in a softy. Most goalies find getting mad only makes their practice worse and less fun. To combat this frustration a goalie can decide to NOT show any negative emotions after making a bad play. Even if teammates taunt you about a soft goal you need to make a point to treat each goal against the same way that you want to respond in a game, only at an accelerated rate. Being able to make calmness a routine, on a daily basis, will really help when it comes to game time.

Really focusing on playing angles properly, every practice, also has a positive effect on concentration. When you concentrate on making every little angle adjustment in practice your in-game angles are easier. The key to this is to be aware of all the little adjustments players make to get you off angle. If the forward winds up, but is still moving down the wing, you should work to stay on the angle. This concentration on angles give practices a daily purpose. Staying on angle as much as humanly possible also teaches patience.



Concentration on trying to arrive at a passing destination before or on time helps with focus. This also forces the goaltender to notice which hand the pass receiver is and make the proper positional adjustments. Patience, again, is improved. This should be done, especially, if the pass is made above the hash marks. Any passes made lower than the hash marks should use an instinctive, blocking, sliding stop.

Goalies can work on concentration and focus by trying to read the release of the shots before making a move. If the puck was shot between the high slot and the blueline it helps to read the release of the shot by standing up on shots above the belly button and going down on shots at or lower than the belly button. This is hard to do at first, but there are still times where a standup save is an asset.

Make rebound control on all shots between the high slot and blueline a priority. If you can control shots from further out you will be better at controlling shots from closer in. If the rebound goes into the air or in the corner try to be on your feet before the puck lands or hits the side boards.

The last thing a goalie can do to improve concentration is to move the eyes and head to follow every shot. Even in the semi-circle rapid fire drills the goalie should watch every puck that hits them, even the ones around the feet. Do not just stare ahead and wave arms. Monkeys can wave their arms as well, but a true elite goaltender will follow as many shots as possible to completion.

Basically, if you focus on a few concepts, every practice, the mental concentration and preparedness required to play better will be improved. In reality, it is not practice making perfect.

PERFECT PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT.

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act but a habit.” – Aristotle

References

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