



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING
www.mtnngoaltending.com

The Belly Button Rule: Simple Reminders for Young Goaltenders

Over our six years of existence Mind The Net Goaltending has been gaining a strong reputation throughout Saskatchewan hockey circles for our high quality of instruction regardless of age group or level of the goaltenders. Part of what makes us successful is our attention to detail, strict adherence to our basic values of keeping the number of goalies on the ice at one time to a manageable level and our ability to gain a good rapport with each goalie we work with. Although the amount of intense instruction, as in the amount of time spent going over basic skills and movements, is actually higher with younger goalies we have a firm belief that we need to expose goalies as young as Atom hockey to advanced ideas like backside pushes.

We have had a number of parents over the years doubting, at first, the teaching of higher level skills to such young goalies. Our response is something that most parents have experienced...when your child was first learning to speak did you stop using harder adult terms simply because the toddler was too young? If this was the case children would never move past baby talk and four word phrases. We believe the young goalies should be exposed to some of the more advanced ideas because they may not be able to do a tougher skill now, but you never know when a child's brain will click and be able to fully grasp the concept. They may not always be able to perform the movement well, by the end of a weekend or three day camp, but you would be amazed to see how many of those young goalies are doing that advanced move a year later. The number is quite impressive.

Despite the fact that we do not try to limit what we teach the young goalies, within a specific camp duration, we still understand the need to help the goalies relate to some of the intricacies of the goaltending position through ideas, phrases and concepts that are age appropriate. So without further adieu, here are some very simple things parents and coaches can say and do to help their young goalies, and their rapport with the young goalies, on a daily basis:

Understand the Belly Button Rule (Part 1 and Part 2)

Part 1: When it comes to helping goaltenders to always be square to the puck while maintaining angle during a game they need to try to have an imaginary line or a laser go from the puck through, what part of the body? You guessed it, the belly button to the middle of the goal line until the puck is below the goal line. If the goalie is off angle just ask them "do you have a belly button on your knee?" Usually, with a smile they will make the corrections needed to be on angle.

Part 2: Dealing with the problem of young goalies going down before a shot is released can be remedied through a simple thought. If the shot is belly button height or lower, while the goalie is in their basic stance, then they **MUST** go down. If the shot is above the belly button, while in stance, then they should be staying on their feet and moving their bodies in front of the puck as much as possible. Coaches, if your goalie is going down too early and getting beat

because of it the solution is not to become a stand up goalie but help them learn to read the releases properly while using the belly button height as a reference.

Know When to Lay an Egg

When doing net orientation drills it is important that goalies work on starting from the middle of the goal line and the posts, not just the posts, in order to develop more automatic angles. We want goalies to learn how to gain angles without touching their heads, necks, shoulder blades, and sticks on the posts to find their place in the crease, so the goalie needs to take their stance far enough from the goal line that they could lay an egg that would land right on the goal line.

Help to Dispose of Floppy, Dead Fish

Another common problem amongst young goalies is when the goalie does not hold their trapper in a strong, hands forward, ready position, but allows their trapper to hang listlessly and uselessly by their side. In order to help them remember to hold their trapper in a more productive ready position ask them what they are doing with the "floppy, dead fish" on the end of their arm. Ask them how many glove saves they can make with a "floppy, dead fish" and you'll find the problem disappears.

Be Ready to Bet \$10 on Stick Placement

Many young, and elite, goalies have problems with sloppy stick placement while moving, in general, and while recovering from a down position. One thing pioneered by my business partner, Ian Robertson, who is in his late fifties, is the \$10 bet. The \$10 bet involves Ian taking his stick and placing it on the top of the goalie's stick and placing the knob of his own stick on his open hand and telling the goalie that they will owe him \$10 if the stick falls out of Ian's hand upon the goalie's recovery. Rarely, if ever, does the stick fall. Then Ian will get the goalie to do the same while Ian tells them he will pay them \$10 dollars if he makes the goalie's stick fall during a recovery from the butterfly. Ian, has never lost that bet in the 17 years I have known him and will often exclaim "if an old guy like me can do it properly, then a young person like you can do it properly".

Drive a Van (through the five-hole)

Whenever a goalie goes down into a butterfly, but does not seal the thighs and/or has poor stick placement, show them that there is space available and then exclaim "I could drive my van through that five hole". Usually the hole will begin to close quickly and more automatically.

Beware of Sharks (in the crease)

If you find your young goalies fading back into their crease, prematurely, when they should be holding their ground at the top of the crease or slightly beyond, there is a simple reminder young goalies seem to grasp easily. The simple reminder involves asking the goalie to "freeze" after they are scored on. If, when they look down, they are found in the blue paint you can tell them they are stuck in the ocean and there are hungry sharks nearby that will eat the goalie every time they are found in their crease when the puck is higher in the zone. The shooters are the sharks, ugly ones at that, and they will eat the goalie alive if the goalie is fading too quickly when the play is entering the zone.

Understand a Stick Length

A simple way to help goalies understand when to stay down and use knee crawls or backside pushes, recovering while down, is based on a stick length. If the rebound is within a stick length while the goalie is holding their stick properly, at the end of the paddle, then they are in knee crawl territory (if it is not safe to attempt a cover). If the puck is within an extended stick length, with the stick being held at the knob, then the goalie should probably use a backside push to handle the rebound. If the rebound is outside a stick length then the goalie **MUST** return/reposition on their feet.

Be Able to High Five

At the end of a training session always get the students to give all on-ice instructors and coaches a high five to end the training session on a positive.

Now, do all of these ideas work 100% of the time, of course not, but they are some little tricks of the trade that can be used to help to build rapport in order to help young goalies to get better while working hard on the fundamentals. Through the use of some interesting and vivid analogies even an all movement and skating session, without shots, can be made to be challenging and fun.