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Traits of Great Playoff Goalies

We all know that the playoffs is that time of year when goaltending greatness is truly measured; where legends and reputations are born. As we move into that exciting and nerve-racking, wonderful time of the hockey season it is time to look at what makes a great playoff goalie or, at minimum, a strong playoff goalie that takes their teams past the first couple of rounds consistently.

Calmness in all game situations and from game to game is a hall mark of great playoff goalies. A great playoff goalie never gets too high and never gets too low. Some of the best examples of goaltenders being emotionally steady are the goalies who have had tons of experience going long into a series and playing their best hockey in the last couple of games. Remember Martin Brodeur's goal stick gaff in the 2003 Stanley Cup Finals? In a situation that could have and has sunk the psyche of goalies around the world, Brodeur laughed off the miscue and then came back the next day to record the shutout. Great performers such as Brodeur know the playoffs can be an emotional time and as such they understand how to keep on an even keel through a constant hold on the task at hand. It is key to understand the importance of being in the moment; never looking ahead to possible final results and never looking back at mistakes or losses.

Playoff goalies are focused throughout the entire game, no matter how they are feeling physically or mentally and no matter how long. In the grand scheme of things if a goalie cannot provide 100% focus for the entire time the clock is running then there are some major issues. Everyone has had to stay focused on some task for long periods of time, goalies must realize they will get a chance to rest when the game is over.

Steady playoff goalies make timely saves by being ready and always staying focused. One of the best ways to ensure timely saves is to be consistent with physical readiness which forces the mind to stay sharp. The rule of thumb MTN discusses at length in the summer and during in-season consults is based on gaining initial depth as the opposition is about to cross the red line they should be gaining their initial depth and angle and being in full stance. In the playoffs, especially in elite hockey, players understand the need to put the puck on the net even if it is a wrister from just inside the blueline. The goalie that is not getting fully prepared as the opposition is about to cross the redline run the risk that they will not be ready for surprise plays if they are not even set in stance as the play crosses the blueline.

Timely saves also start with the understanding of team dynamics and the fact that forwards do not understand mental preparation and control as well as goalies, because of this goalies must be ready to bail out nervous or overexcited teammates who make poor decisions early in a game or series. In order to bail out those teammates it is important that the goalie does not always trust their defence 100% (even though the goalie would like to). If a goalie understands their teammates will mess up the goalie should track the puck physically, in full ready stance, as their own teammates move the puck out of the zone. If the goalie stays on angle and physically tracks the puck while their teammates are trying to leave the zone they will be ready and on-angle if a turnover occurs in the zone. By already being ready the goalie will not have to

scramble to be ready which usually leads to a goal against because the goalie often worries too much about being aggressive than staying calm and cool on the turnover. ***Goalies, it is not safe to relax until your team is out past your own blueline.*** Alert ready goalies make timely game and series winning saves.

Steady playoff goalies are confident in their abilities and never apologize because they are always giving their best effort. Patrick Roy, in the Goalies Unmasked discussion at the 2002 All-star Game discussed how he never apologized for goals against because it would show his teammates doubt and weakness, both being traits detrimental to goaltender playoff success. All goalies have bad moments but they are always giving their all!

Great playoff goalies understand and can combat the changes in playoff games, but don't change what made them successful in the first place. There are several differences in the way a regular season game is played and the way a playoff game is played. Just because the intensity of the playoffs increases does not mean the goaltenders pre-game preparation/routine and attitude needs to become more intense. Goalies should understand the importance of season tested routines in the playoffs and that those routines should not change. The only changes that need to be made is the understanding of the way the playoff games are different and be ready to combat those different situations All great playoff goalies are focused on what is going on right now. NEVER LOOKING AHEAD, NEVER LOOKING BEHIND, TAKING EACH MOMENT ONE SITUATION AT A TIME. During J.S. Giguere's two spectacular runs to the finals, including his Stanley Cup win, he was often heard as saying that he tries to always be in the moment by taking the game one save at a time.

Steady playoff goalies understand the ebb and flow of the game, how momentum works and tries to slow the game down whenever necessary. It is important for goalies to notice changes in team dynamics as they can be predictable. Now, goalies that are not usually vocal dressing room leaders should NOT suddenly become more vocal leaders. Maybe these goalies can mention changes in team mentality/preparation to a captain or coach and then ready themselves to hold back the tides of momentum swings. For example, a goalie's team is up 3-0 at the end of the first period in the final game of a 5 game series. How do you think the opposition may react to the verbal beating they probably received between periods? How might the goalie's own team react to such a strong lead? You know what we're talking about, we've all seen it before. Basically, any chance a goalie gets to slow opposition momentum down to a crawl, they should take it.

EVERY goaltender must look forward to all challenges and want all challenges that come with playoffs. This is what we live for and why we became goalies to be the difference maker in winning championships.

Playoff goalies must HAVE FUN and "Be A Warrior!" No matter what great playoff goalies never give up on a play no matter what might happen to them in the process of trying to keep the puck out of the net.