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Understanding Goaltender Self-Analysis

One of the toughest parts of being a goaltender is the fact that most of the learning experiences are "on the job". By "on the job" we mean that most of the time goaltenders have to learn through experience and usually the experience is gained the hard way, a goal against. The best goaltenders are ultimately self-developers who can analyze in order to decide the best way to continue in their development.

Although the position is the most pressure filled and analyzed position in hockey it is also important that goaltenders are able to know what the strengths are in their game. No matter whom the goaltender is they should be able to pick out more positives in a game or practice than negatives or, at least, try very hard to find the good side to every performance. When self-analyzing, use the sandwich approach for every performance/workout; start with 4 positives, next add 2-3 things to work on and finish with another 4 positives. The goaltender who only focuses on negatives is usually in the wrong frame of mind for improvement and will put too much pressure on themselves, thus stunting improvement.

There have been a number of the best goaltenders in the NHL past and present who have made major overhauls in their game. Sure, many goaltenders now have goalie coaches or attend camps in the summer, but usually they seek out that help when they realize something needs to be changed to further success. Looking at some classic examples we have:

- Patrick Roy - Roy did not begin his career as the butterfly master he was recognized for at the end of his career. It was not until just prior to his 1993 Stanley Cup winning season that Roy really began to develop the modern hybrid style. With the help of famous goaltending coach Francois Allaire these two analytical minds proceeded to change goaltending in ways thought impossible. Even until his retirement Roy was adapting his recoveries, constantly improving his footwork, puckhandling skills and team play understanding.

- Ed Belfour - Early in Belfour's career he was known for being a big proponent of the paddle down movement of the early 1990's along with Felix Potvin and Kelly Hrudey. Belfour was an aggressive, down almost all the time, goaltender with a very deep and wide crouch until his back problems began. Not only did Belfour change his stance to a more balanced upright position, but he began to incorporate a more patient game with modern butterfly elements. We even began to see a calmer goaltender who was more in control of his emotions. Belfour changed as the game changed and is considered one of the all-time greats. Most recently being inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2011.

- Grant Fuhr - Fuhr was always known for his outstanding athleticism and reflexes but many of his explosive movements would open holes. It was when Fuhr was in Buffalo that he learned a more patient, compact, positional and precise game after working with esteemed goalie coach Mitch Korn. Fuhr was able to keep evolving and played much longer than many expected; right up to his last season in the NHL.

-Sean Burke – Burke, although not as impressive as Roy, Belfour and Fuhr, still had a very productive career. In the late 1990's early 2000's Burke became an experienced rent-a-goalie and was on his way out of the NHL. For years the 6'4" Burke tried to play an aggressive standup style despite the changes in the game. During his time in Phoenix, while working with Benoit Allaire, Burke learned to play in and at the top of his crease comfortably, while taking advantage of his size, by adding modern butterfly elements. These changes effectively prolonged his career and was still evident until his retirement.

Some contemporary examples include:

- Marc-Andre Fleury - There has been a significant difference in Fleury's patience and his angles are much improved after a return from injury this season(2007-2008). Tireless work on his game, while rehabbing injuries, paid off in spades with a terrific playoff run to Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Finals in 2008 and winning the Stanley Cup, over the Detroit Red Wings in seven games, in the spring of 2009.

- Curtis Joseph - Over his last few seasons CuJo added many modern butterfly elements to his game including proper leg recoveries and some down recovery use as well.

- Chris Osgood - It is well documented that during the NHL lockout Osgood went looking for outside help to tear apart and totally rebuild his game. Osgood as well is more patient with strong footwork and a more modern butterfly element to go with his outstanding athleticism and experience.

-Other current examples include: Dwayne Roloson, Miika Kiprusoff, Henrik Lundqvist, Marty Turco and the list goes on and on.

As you can see, even though many of the goalies described above have had some outside help they were the ones who recognized the need for change and were ready to accept the possibilities for improvement. Just recognizing and being able to add new skills sets is a form of self-analysis which MTN believes is a cornerstone for goaltender development.

What should goalies be self-analyzing?

There are many different things goaltenders need to analyze but they can usually fit under three common categories:

1. Technical Self-analysis

Goaltenders may recognize the need to improve the technical or physical elements of their game. This type of self-analysis is usually the easiest of the three categories to analyze. Basically, the goaltender recognizes the need to improve overall physical elements of their game such as puck tracking/vision, specific save selections, foot work, basic angle play, butterfly and recoveries, and puckhandling/transition skills . The goaltender may also become more in-depth with the physical analysis of their game by looking at specific body positions such as glove and blocker placements, stick use, butterfly width and so on.

2. Tactical Self-analysis

Tactical analysis is a little tougher than technical analysis. Usually tactical analysis requires the goaltender to recognize and understand situations within a game as well as the technical analysis needed to play them properly. Tactical self-analysis requires a mix of mental and physical analysis. When goaltenders analyze their tactical responses in a game they may look at how they deal with breakaways, odd man rushes, walkouts, wrap arounds, passouts, playing against/recognizing different forechecks, power plays, breakouts and defensive schemes both for the opposition and their own teams. Again, tactical analysis usually involves the goaltender re-evaluating how they play certain situations depending on how goals are scored. Tactical self-analysis is a recognition of patterns and game situations and what the best approach is to combat that situation.

3. Mental Self-analysis

Many would argue that technical and tactical self-analysis is already considered mental self-analysis. Of course, all self-analysis occurs mentally, but there is a different twist with mental self-analysis. Mental self-analysis is the toughest of the three types of analysis as it takes into account many different variables. Mental self-analysis is where a goaltender must be completely honest about: their own happiness, work ethic, drive, motivation, goal setting, self-talk, physical skill set, on-ice habits, off-ice habits, conditioning, mental toughness, ability to stay in control, team skills and general hockey knowledge. All of the above issues are the toughest to address as sometimes the truth of a situation hurts. If a goaltender was too distracted by off-ice issues such as partying or relationships the on-ice product will hurt and some goalies would rather point the finger everywhere else than really look inside themselves. What is the difference between good goalies and great goalies? Often the ability to be honest with oneself can make all the difference.

How does a goalie improve self-analysis skills?

Video Analysis

Watching oneself on video is probably one of the best visual ways to analyze one's game. When watching video a goaltender can watch very easily for technical, tactical and some body language skills that are either very strong and will help to boost confidence or will find areas that need improvement. Often when a goaltender watches themselves they find that a bad game is never as bad as it felt and a good game feels great to watch. No matter the situation video analysis gives the quickest and easiest information that a goaltender may use for self-analysis.

Outside Feedback

As much as goaltending is a very misunderstood position it is still a strong skill to seek outside feedback for help with self-analysis. Usually, it is of utmost importance for the goaltender to seek out informed feedback from a goalie coach, coach or parent that knows about goaltending, but it is OK to ask someone that may not understand the position well but may have strong hockey knowledge otherwise. If feedback from outside sources seems uninformed a goaltender can then use their self-analysis skills to decide how much of the feedback to take in. ***NOTE: It is important to seek outside feedback only occasionally. Goaltenders need to rely on themselves to keep their confidence high so only ask for feedback when it is really needed not every practice or game, unless there is a strong rapport with that outside observer.***

Ask Questions

One of the keys to any self-improvement is to ask honest questions about one's own preparation and performance. Many young people/goaltenders do not understand the idea of self-reflection so MTN has provided some reference questions the goaltender can ask themselves to aid with self-analysis. It is important that goalies ask these basic questions as well and come up with questions that are specific to themselves. Goalies must be honest with themselves and ask the hard questions as well as the ones they like the answers for. Some example questions are:

- Who do I admire in my position? Why?
- Have I made appropriate sacrifices to pursue my goals?
- Have I been eating and training properly to prepare for the upcoming season?
- Do I have excellent goalie specific skating skills?
- Am I consistent with my mental preparation? Physical preparation?
- Do I handle distractions/obstacles well? Why or why not?
- Am I the kind of goalie I can truly become? Have I reached my potential?
- Do I work on my fundamentals on a daily basis? Do I use the Four P's of Practice daily?

If the goalie has answered "NO" to any of the questions above, or do not have an answer then there is a need for improvement in that area. As always, asking questions of oneself is a form of self-talk so the goaltender must frame their questions in a positive/productive state of mind.

Do a Self-evaluation

The final suggestion for doing a quick self-analysis is to complete an evaluation of oneself on a formal goaltender evaluation such as the MTN "Goaltender Evaluation and Checklist". By completing an evaluation such as the one described before the goaltender has a quick and concise guide to self-analysis at their fingertips. Another benefit to completing a goaltender evaluation is to see what it is scouts and evaluators are looking for in elite hockey leagues.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is of utmost importance that goaltenders are able to analyze all aspects of themselves and their game. Self-analysis ensures that proper focus is maintained and the drive needed for constant self-improvement is always present. Goaltending is often learned through experience and self-analysis is the key to ensuring that mistakes are learned from in the best possible ways.