

So you're stuck with the goalie...

Introduction to the Voluntold Goalie Coach

So you drew the short straw and are tasked with keeping the goalie busy during practice, however you wouldn't consider yourself a "goalie person". First of all, I'd like to give a really subtle nod to the head coach who is at least thinking about the goalies, even if it's probably an afterthought, but hey, it's something. Either way, on behalf of the goalie union, thanks for stepping up and trying to help your goalies, whether you've been voluntold or not.

"I'm not a goalie guy, all that reverse-vh and head trajectory and stuff"

You need to know that we goalie people are also marketing experts in that we do a good job of keeping ourselves in business by sometimes making the position appear more complicated than it is. The result of this is a non-goalie person hearing some of the terminology and thinking it's akin to rocket science, and not even bothering to learn about it.

I've also heard coaches say they don't want to mess the goalies up, which I used to think was a non-issue but I have actually seen some instances where working with a non-goalie coach has created some... confusion. Where this can become an issue is when the goalie is a bit older, and receives regular instruction from a goalie coach and a non-goalie coach gives feedback that's contradictory, especially when it's about positioning or something more tactical. Remember, there's a power imbalance between young athletes and coaches so athletes will often do what they're asked, even if it doesn't totally make sense, because they want to impress. If you are a competent adult able to think logically, I'd go so far as to say it'd be hard to do a lot of damage to a young goalie by giving them *some* wrong technical feedback. Just think about how hard it is to get good at a skill and learn something new, even with really *good* feedback. Our brains require a lot of reps to generate those new neural connections for "good" technique, and those connections are always being hijacked by other cognitive demands and require a lot of constant refining, so don't think that by giving one drill's worth of sub-optimal feedback that you'll permanently wreck a goalie's technique.

While there is a lot to know about developing goaltenders, much of it is just like developing any other position. Tactically, do what makes sense in the context of a game and technically, do what makes sense athletically. You'll learn a lot as you go, a lot of which will still be just as important at the highest levels as it is in youth hockey. Remember, even position-specific coaches aren't perfect and the game is always evolving, which means a lot of what we teach has a half-life anyway, so something that was generally agreed to be the correct technique 20 years ago isn't even being taught at all today. (cough* skate saves, pad stacks, diving poke checks*). If you as a non-goalie person can be at least more effective than if that goalie were to get no coaching at all, honestly I'd call that a success.

Don't let your idea of "perfect" be the enemy of "good". You won't be anywhere near perfect with running a goalie drill as a non-goalie person, but show the goalies you care, try to pick things up and learn as you go, build in an element of compete and fun, and honestly, become a bit of an actor and fake if you need to.

With a lot of 1 on 1 goalie coaching you'll often see a mobility drill, a tracking drill, and an options drill that includes some crease movement. Remember, you're not looking to replicate the work of a professional goalie coach here, you're looking to have *some* positive impact. Your eye for technique will evolve as you get to know the position and your goalies tendencies but for now let's get the goalie moving with some good habits. Remember, you're not looking to build technical elements of the goalies game, like the best angle to point the fingertips of the catcher or how they connect with the post in a post-integration. As far as you're concerned right now, that level of detail doesn't even exist. There are goalies that have playing the position for 10 years that have had some success that probably haven't been exposed to that feedback either, so don't worry about missing those details with your 10-year olds. You are looking to get the goalie some reps, enforce some good habits, and warm them up with the intent of preventing injury.

Mobility Elements

There are countless patterns and movement combinations you can do with your goalies, which can actually make it more difficult without a clear framework to start with. Future videos in this series will outline simple drills to do as well as progressions, but for now let's unpack some simple coachable features for you as a fearless new member of the goalie union.

Skating drills are best kept simple, because you want the goalie thinking about the habits of their skating rather than the pattern in the ice you want them to draw out. As goalies get familiar with a pattern and it becomes more automatic, you can start to add to it, but don't worry about any of that yet.

- Before any movement, the goalie should be squared up and in an athletic-looking stance. Squared-up means everything is pointed at the same angle, hands are at the same height and out a little bit in front of the body, good athletic bend to the knees, and strong ankles that aren't collapsing inward. If the stick isn't *perfectly* on the ice while they're in their stance, it's actually okay. The reason is they won't be making a standing stick save for a shot to their 5-hole, and it tends to sink the blocker down and point the face up at a weird angle, and that doesn't address any stick sizing issues. Comfortable hands first, with the stick still in a good orientation and ready to activate for a butterfly stick save. This is how each rep, whatever it is, should start, and stop.
- That brings me to the next point, which is getting the goalie to stop with their leading foot, which will mean a single foot stop. Goalies will have one foot that stops better than the other, usually their dominant foot that they would kick a ball with, so make sure the reps are evened out or even add a set to their bad foot side to try and shore up their form. I can't stress this enough- you don't need to get a million reps done in

as short a time as possible, meaning get your goalies to come to a full stop, then square up, after each and every push. In a game when they use these movements, they aren't pushing to an angle just so they can do another push, they push to a new angle so they can make a save.

- Finally, from the goalie's set and square stance, their movement should initiate from the top of their body and cascade downward, all starting with the eyes looking ahead to where they need to go. Young goalies tend to get excited once they're familiar with a drill and try to draw out the pattern in the ice, rather than imagine the play in front of them that would cause them to move in that way. They get fluent with the drill, rather than understand the required movement sequence. A trick here is to stand behind the goalie and see if you can tell where they are pushing to just by watching the back of their head. It should look like they are watching a play unfold in front of them. You want their entire head to look ahead to the new angle, which will serve to wind up the rest of their body with a proper rotation.

Tracking Elements

Eyes are governed by extra-ocular muscles that have to get worked just the same as a goalies arms or legs. The least surprising thing you'll hear today is that goalies should be striving to watch pucks from the moment of wind-up, through the flight of the puck, AND after the shot whether it's a clean catch to the glove, a shot off the post or a blocker save to the corner. Tracking is actually very much tied to goalie skating, as it's the puck that determines the angle the goalie has to get to.

- There are times where the goalie can rep out some shots without a full recovery which is perfectly acceptable. You'll see goalies of all ages do a catcher and blocker warm-up that has them down in their butterfly making 10-20-30 saves in quick succession. That's not to say we're abandoning all that is good here, and the best thing you can do is get the goalie to follow each shot with their eyes, head, and hands, which reinforces the crucial precursor to something called the save cycle. Essentially, we don't think of a save as a linear process of starting point, watch the shot, end of save. Instead we look at each save as a cycle, which includes a set and square before the shot, tracking the shot in, tracking the shot out, and moving to the new angle. The reason you don't see the outward expression of a full save cycle in some drills is 1) for the sake of time and repping some shots to the hands, and 2) to avoid some wear and tear of repeated butterfly and butterfly recovery. Likewise the save cycle may naturally conclude if a puck is caught or smothered. What you as the non-goalie-goalie-coach are looking to do is encourage the cognitive part of the save cycle, by coaching the goalie to watch every puck in and out. I'd shout this part from the mountains if I could- take your time between shots. It's almost NEVER a rapid fire scenario, so make sure your goalie has tracked each puck all the way in and out, whether it's a catch, a goal, off the post, off the blocker, to the gut, to the corner, whatever.

- Loose puck off the body just sitting there? Your goalie needs to cover those up, that's a habit. This is a great opportunity to bury a rebound with authority if they serve it up on a platter for you.

Crease movement elements

Think of a crease movement drill as a drill that has some movement and leads to a shot. Again, you don't need to get a hundred reps in here. Simple is still best, and keep it symmetrical with movement done going both ways, either by alternating sides each rep or 5 shots from one side, then move your pile to the other side.

- Same idea with the skating drill, your goalie has to start with good posture, positioning, and look like an athlete ready to act. Check that their stance is square to whatever the starting angle is if you have them off their posts. For you as the non-goalie coach, something simple like having your goalie start in their stance at the top of the crease and T-push over to you for a shot from the faceoff dot is perfectly acceptable. There will be some demands from you as the shooter to get the timing right as well as your shot placement, so be sure you're performing as well.
- You'll see a lot of goalie drills start with the goalie on the post, pushing to some angle for a shot. This is perfectly acceptable as well! There's a lot of little details here too, but for anything starting on the post just check that the goalie has physical contact with their skate on the post, they look first before they push with that same top-down rotation, and they do a hard stop with the leading foot and square up to the shot.
- There are a million different patterns and variations you can do with crease movement drills, but please just keep it simple with a single push that resembles something they'd see in a game, the shot-ready stance is on-angle and square, and they goalie executes the full save-cycle watching a puck in and out.

I hope this helps, and if you are a non-goalie person just looking to survive your new role as a designated non-goalie-goalie coach, sincerely, thank you for your effort. There's all kinds of technical advice you can give your athletes but you'll have an enormous impact just showing them that you care about their development. Keep that notifications on for future videos of simple non-goalie-coach drill templates.

Mobility.

Presumably you'll be given the blue line or top of the circles in to work with your goalie. Sometimes you'll be offered the neutral zone which is workable but you can get a lot more done with a crease or even top of the circles down. As much as the drills should represent the playing environment, sometimes there is a place for taking an element of the position and hyperbolizing it- if it makes sense. I'd argue there are a lot of elements that this doesn't work great for, like positioning, but goalie mobility is a popular element to get some reps with outside the crease.

Let's use the circle first in a pattern called the diamond. The goalie starts about 1 stick length away from the center dot with their back to it, and they will create a diamond using a series of discrete pushes with a definitive beginning and end of the movement. The goalie will complete 4 pushes which will bring them around the dot and back to where they started. Let's have a look:

There's only a few things to keep in mind when watching this.

- Goalies must have good posture, meaning a good athletic stance. For a non-goalie person there's a lot to talk about here, but what you really need to look at is before the push, does the goalie look athletic, like they're able to execute some type of athletic movement with purpose and control.
- Goalie must be square before they start to push. This is easy to spot and helps if you have a big marker or bingo dobber to draw a reference point on the ice or place some pucks. Essentially, is every body part of the goalie facing where it's supposed to be facing? In this case, straight ahead at the puck.
- Their movement should start from the top of their body with their eyes first locating the new puck and entire head looking down at it, then shoulders, hands, knees and feet following suit with the rotation to get lined up to the next angle.
- Goalie executes the push, which should resemble a straight line to the next angle, and stop with their leading foot, and immediately getting squared up to the next puck.

Do this in both directions, you might notice your goalie is stronger pushing or stopping with one foot or another, so add some extra controlled reps to shore up the bad side.

In terms of the type of movement, start with the movement on the feet first and do reps with both the T-push, and the shuffle. Obviously there's added resistance with the shuffle so younger goalies will have to push over a shorter distance or use 2 or 3 shuffles to cover the same distance they did with a T-push.

You can progress that to some butterfly work, based on what you have time for and what you're comfortable with there's 3 main options:

- Butterfly to a T-push recovery
- From stance to a butterfly slide
- Butterfly, stay down in a butterfly slide

Without getting too deep into the technical weeds, anytime there's a butterfly involved the same parameters apply in terms of squaring up, but the big thing you should enforce is imagery- the goalie should look exactly like they're making a butterfly save and kicking out a rebound. Watching this from behind the goalie, you should see their head move as if they're watching the puck, and you're still seeing that top-down rotation to a push.

Drill 2: Tracking

The earlier you can think of tracking as a circular process, rather than a linear process with defined beginning and end, the sooner you can expose your goalies to that idea as well and build in that habit. This is a very simple drill that just requires the shooter to hit either the left or right half of the net.

An important element of tracking that you'll coach in this drill is a concept called The Quiet Eye. There's actual textbooks written about it but essentially it means stopping any extra eye movement in the split-second before, and during a shot release, and have the goaltender focus on the puck & stick blade interaction. For goalies, the release is the part of the shot where most of the information about the flight of the puck is gathered, so to facilitate this instruct your goaltender to focus not just on the puck, but on some small detail of the puck, like a piece of ice or snow, a logo, a reflection, something you drew on the puck, any detail of the puck during the release.

Have the goalie start in the butterfly in good position, usually in the white paint just outside the top of the crease. Shots come from the middle of the ice between the hash marks and top of the circle, just to give the puck some more flight time for the goalie to track. Give your goalie 10-15 shots to the glove, coaching them to find a detail of the puck at every release then watch the spin of the puck during flight. Repeat on the blocker side with plenty of time between shots- remember, rapid fire shooting is useless and serves no real purpose here. You also need time between shots so the goalie can complete their visual save cycle with each shot, tracking rebounds off their gear until that puck is considered dead, without them worrying about another puck coming at them right away.

Drill 3: Crease Movement

Crease drills used to be commonly known as "letter drills" with some popular patterns resembling a letter X, letter V, or letter W. This is an acceptable place to start, especially for a young or new goalie just becoming fluent with some deliberate crease movement. My caution here is we don't necessarily want goalies thinking about their movement as a pattern they draw with their skates, in a very bottom-up process that lacks context and thus the movement sequence that comes with the save cycle. Instead, it's better to explain crease movement drills in the context of the play happening in front of the goalie that would cause them to move in that particular pattern. For example, you could get a goalie to do the triangle or letter V drill, and explaining it as such is acceptable to begin with, but it would be better to explain it as the movement of the puck, calling on that imagery element from the

goalie as they carry out the box pattern. It's another incredibly simple drill that has the goalie start on a post as if the puck is in the corner, then imagine a pass out to mid ice high in the zone. The goalie would T-push to the top of the crease, stopping with the leading foot and squaring up in a shot-ready stance. Once stopped, have them imagine that puck movement back down to the corner on the other side, where the goalie would rotate and T-push back to the opposite post.

To progress this, stand in the middle of the ice and dictate with your stick the post you want the goalie to return to. Here's what it looks like:

Of course there is plenty of nuance with the post-set-up, the push, the stop, the set, the positioning, and myriad progressions you can build off this. You as the non-goalie-goalie coach may, or may not, learn about them as you get more familiar with the position, but for this particular drill look for the elements discussed in the previous video:

Good solid physical contact with the post, looking at their target before they push, T-pushes or shuffles (just no wiggly C-cuts to move to and from the post), snappy single-foot stops, and squaring up to the shot before any further movement.