

Beginner Goalie Play

The goalie is the final line of defense.

At this level, temptation might be to take one of your less-skilled players and throw him in the cage. Resist it.

The goalie position requires high-level physical skills and concentration to successfully handle shots at high rates of speed. It also requires natural athletic instincts.

Though a goalie's primary responsibility is to stop the ball from going into the goal, he can help his cause with good stick skills, proper positioning and knowledge of the defense and shooters.

Take time with your goalie to develop these instincts.

Teaching the Skill: Stick Work

A goalie should take time to develop the same stick skills – passing, catching, scooping and dodging – as a position player.

Since a goalie stick comes with a wider head and shallower pocket, it can make for a tricky release.

The top hand should be lowered down the shaft for longer-distance throws and outlet passes.

His release should happen with his hands high above his head to get good leverage on passes.

Practice these passes for accuracy with players cutting away from the goalie.

Teaching the Skill: Stance and Positioning When the Ball is Up Top

Ready position for a goalie starts with a well balanced athletic stance.

His feet should be shoulder-width apart, with even distribution of weight between his right and left feet – this allows him to step in either direction to meet an oncoming shot.

His knees should be comfortably bent, while keeping his back upright.

His arms and elbows should be relaxed and away from the body.

Your goalie should hold his stick at chest to shoulder height, angled across his body to the top-hand side.

Finally, the goalie's shoulders should be square to the shooter.

Teaching the Skill: Goalie Position When Ball is Behind Goal

When the ball is behind the goal by 10 yards or more, the goalie should position himself on the opposite side pipe to allow better field vision and prevent a backdoor feed to that side.

As the ball carrier gets closer to the crease from behind, the goalie should step on the imaginary one-yard arc.

With each step the ball carrier takes, the goalie does the same, until they eventually meet on the doorstep.

When the ball carrier reaches goal line extended, the goalie should be standing right next to the nearest pipe.

If the ball is passed from behind the cage, the goalie should reset his feet and shoulders on the arc to be in position to make the save.

Teaching the Skill: Movement Like all positions, the critical, fundamental element of goalie play is footwork.

A save starts when the goalie puts his best foot forward, literally.

He should create an invisible arc that goes from pipe to pipe and extends one yard to all points from the middle of goal line extended.

The goalie should step with his lead foot in the direction of the shooter.

If the shot is coming to his right side, he should step with his right foot, and vice versa.

After each step, the goalie should bring his back foot up to the lead foot to reestablish a balanced position.

Get your goalie comfortable with this step-and-recover movement with repetitive high tosses from different angles.

Teaching the Skill: Defending Shots Once your goalie has his positioning and first step down, he's ready to see some shots.

(It is important to build the goalie's confidence. The coach should keep all shots in the air as the goalie reinforces the proper footwork)

When defending shots, the goalie should step towards the direction of the ball, leading with the top hand.

He should keep his shoulders square to the shooter.

Stick side high shots The ball is shot high to the goalie's stick side, the goalie attacks the ball by stepping with the foot nearer to the ball while moving his top hand towards the ball.

His completes the save by bringing his trailing foot up to his lead foot.

Off stick side high shots The goalie attacks the ball by stepping with the foot nearer to the ball while moving his top hand across his face towards the ball.

His completes the save by bringing his trailing foot up to his lead foot. **Low shots** The goalie's mechanics remains the same for low shots as high shots.

Stick side - low As the shot travels below waist level, the goalie attacks the ball by stepping with the foot nearer to the ball while dropping his top hand towards the ball.

His completes the save by bringing his trailing foot up to his lead foot and then returning to his athletic stance.

Off stick side- low As the shot travels below waist level to the off stick side, the goalie attacks the ball by stepping with the foot nearer to the ball while sweeping his top hand down and across his body towards the ball.

His completes the save by bringing his trailing foot up to his lead foot and then returning to his athletic stance.

Bounce Shots: The goalie attacks the ball by stepping with the foot nearer to the ball while dropping his top hand down towards the ball as it bounces leaning his head over his stick.

He completes the save by bringing his trailing foot up to his lead foot.

Error Detection and Correction

Error: A young goalie does not step to the shot, but reacts with his stick only.

Correction: Practice footwork until it is natural, removing the goalie's stick if necessary.

Remind him to get his whole body behind the shot, following his stick.

Error: The goalie steps with the wrong foot or steps across his body.

Correction: Practice correct footwork and remind him to keep his body square to the shooter.

Emphasize balance.

Error: The goalie consistently gets beat low and on bounce shots.

Correction: Stress to him that he maintains a low center of gravity, dropping low for these shots with his entire body and not just his stick.

Error: As the ball moves from behind the goal, the goalie's steps are too wide and he winds up out of position or off balance.

Correction: Remind him of the imaginary one-yard arc.

His steps should be quick and calculated in one-yard increments, his feet moving with every touch of the ball.

Error: The goalie is frequently late to return to starting position, making saves more difficult.

Correction: Control his stick.

He should not lean it on the post or wave it for a potential interception.

Rather, he should keep his stick at chest level and focus on his feet.