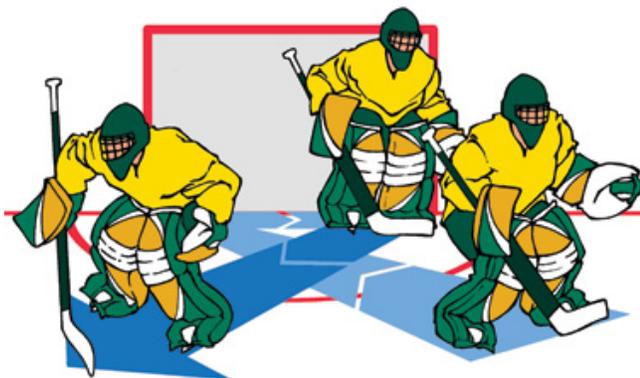


Guidelines for Goalies at Practice

By Joe Bertagna • Illustrations by Mike Curti
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One of the biggest problems in the development of goalies is how they are used at practice. Or, in some cases, not used. A visit to a typical practice will find goalies left to their own devices for long stretches followed by unrealistic drills that don't simulate game situations.

Effectively incorporating goaltenders into your practice plans will pay big dividends come game time.



1. Start Smart

The start of a practice should allow the goaltenders an opportunity to warm up appropriately. That means that goalies don't face shots right off the bat, particularly in drills that allow a shooter to walk in close.

"Starting Smart" also means that goalies don't always do skating drills designed for forwards and defensemen (edge work around circles, for example). There's nothing wrong with including the goalies in general team skating on occasion but not every skating drill. It is better to give the goalies the responsibility of walking themselves through simple goalie movement drills in one crease while the rest of the team does its own warm up. These movement drills should simulate the type of movements a goalie does in a game.

Familiarize your goalies with a half dozen simple movement drills, and at the start of each practice identify two or three for them to do on their own. The emphasis should be on doing the drills right, not necessarily doing them fast.

2. Spread the Work

More than a few youth coaches follow the old "guilt and volume" method of training goalies. That is, they ignore the goalie for long stretches of time, feel guilty about it, and then try to make up for the neglect by peppering the goalies with a concentrated 20 minutes of rapid-fire shots. Spread out "goalie time" to avoid concentrated work periods followed by long stretches of standing still.

3. Look to Include

Here's a common scenario: an opening shooting drill finds half the shooters in one corner and half the shooters at the other end of the rink in the diagonally opposite corner. A pair of coaches or teammates stands in the neutral zone. The drill that follows finds a shooter passing to the guy in mid-ice, taking a return pass, and then going in for a shot on goal. After the shot, the shooter gets in the back of the other line.

This simple drill would have more meaning and benefit for the goalie if, after the shot, the shooter camps out to be a rebounder for the next shooter. This version of the drill forces the goalie to stop each shot mindful of that rebounder lurking nearby. The absence of the rebounder frequently leads to goalies just going through the motions.

Examine your drills to see if adjustments/additions are needed to better challenge and include the goalies. "Inclusion" also means including the goalie when you go over breakouts, face-off coverage in the defensive zone, etc. The goalie can be helpful if he knows what his teammates are taught to do.

4. Pace Is Everything

The best drill plan in the world is a flop if the pace of the drills doesn't allow the goaltenders a realistic chance to compete in each drill.

Goalies should be able to follow a drill from start to finish and then recover in time to follow the start of the next attack, not just turn and face a drill already in progress. Obviously, the balance to this is making sure goalies aren't being lazy and not moving quickly to face that next play.

5. Mix It Up

A common sight at practice is an over abundance of drills coming straight at the goalie – 1-on-0, 1-on-1, 2-on-1, etc. While goalies need to face these types of situations and coordinate their positioning with all the variations inherent in these drills, plays that come out of the corner, from behind the net or across the zone are equally important and, actually, more challenging for most goalies.

6. Simulate Game Conditions

All too often at youth practices, coaches incorporate unrealistic drills that feature shooters and no defenders, no second shots and no screens. Goalies know who will shoot, and from where.

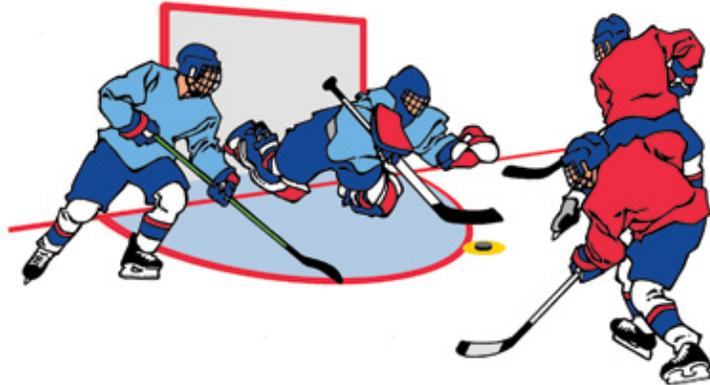
It is important to give goalies a chance to face game situations at practice.

Included in this suggestion is the understanding that in a game, the goalie must follow one puck through traffic and stay with that puck for a long time. This is the opposite of what the goalie faces in rapid-fire drills using many pucks, each on the goalie's radar for a split second.



7. Don't Ignore "Game Skills"

Understandably, the goalie time at practice tends to focus on stopping shots. But frequently, when a coach is asked how a young goalie has been playing, the answer includes such remarks as, "He really struggles handling the puck." Or, "I have noticed that he has trouble covering up pucks and getting whistles we need." Another "game skill" that is often lacking in young goalies is the habit of being vocal. Speaking up to help defensemen around the net, to call out when screened, or identify an open man in front are important.



8. Provide Structure

A coach can get more out of a goalie by providing some structure to a practice. Give the goalie some short-term goals. Here are a few:

- a) Don't allow any goals 'through you.' Nothing between arms and body and no 'five-hole' goals.
- b) On this next drill, don't let any left shots score.
- c) On each shot, care where you are and where you put the puck.

9. Its Not Just About Them

Many young goalies bring the wrong attitude to practices. They might be lazy. They might take the old, "I'm not a practice goalie, but I'm good in games" position.

Coaches may have to remind a goalie that practices aren't just about the goalie getting better. A goalie who challenges his teammates can make his teammates better, too.

Side Note: Nobody knows your goalie better than his or her teammates. They go back in line and talk about how they can beat the goalie. Don't keep this information a secret. One legendary high school coach in New England used to have each player write down strengths and weaknesses of each teammate, anonymously, and share this information with each player. Goalies quickly learned what they had to work on.

10. Be Careful With "Helpers"

As coaches feel pressure to get help and attention for their goalies, there are a couple of pitfalls to avoid.

At more than a few practices, one can find these extra adults, not exactly coaches, out there shooting on goalies during lulls in the practice. Often, they shoot too hard and too high and do little to help the goalie. (They can actually hurt the goalie.)

The other situation that can sometimes be risky is having the parent of one goalie out there working with the goalies. While this can work, especially if the parent is a former goalie, it can also be dangerous.

More than once in my time as a roving goalie coach I have come upon this scenario and been met with a dad who, in the first few minutes after introductions, heaped praise on his son and unnecessarily criticized the other goalie.

Joe Bertagna, a former NHL and Olympic goalie coach, serves amateur hockey as the commissioner of the Hockey East Association and the executive director of the American Hockey Coaches Association. Learn more about Joe and his teaching at bertagnagoaltending.com.