

Goaltending Newsletter

Prepared for Marblehead Youth Hockey
By Joe Bertagna, Bertagna Goaltending
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Dropping to the Ice: When and Why?

Goaltenders are frequently criticized by their coaches for leaving their feet and dropping in a butterfly or other variation. Often the criticism is too broad: “Don’t go down.” Or, “You are going down too much.”

Such criticism is incomplete. Often, when the goalie drops to the ice, it is the “right move” or “right technique.” The problem is usually more specific than the fact that he is going down. Perhaps he is going down too soon. Or maybe he is going down in the wrong place (too deep in the net).

Goalies drop for different reasons:

- **The shot is low.** They drop to make the save with their stick, backed up by their pad. In these situations, they see the puck and execute a “reaction save.”
- **They are screened.** Low shots have a better chance of getting through screens. They play the percentage by dropping behind the screen. (Preferably close to the screen.) This way, they can stop shots they don’t actually see.
- **To smother an in-close situation.** A pass near the goal results in a scoring opportunity so close to the goal that the best the goalie can do is drop and fill open net and execute a “blocking save.”
- **They lack confidence.** This sometimes manifests itself in goalies who drop on everything. Too often. Too soon. They lack the confidence to stay up and wait to see where the puck goes, fearing they won’t be quick enough to wait and react successfully. So they drop, insuring that at the least, they fill the lower half of the net. Goalies who fall into this habit can get beat a few ways: a) players wait and shoot high; b) players wait and deke; c) players wait and pass the puck. Better players will be more patient and they will give problems to goalies who drop too soon. [Note: Older goalies, whose habits are better known by opponents, are particularly vulnerable here.]
- **They mis-read the angle.** If a goalie feels his best way to react to a shot is to spread his stance a little and drop in a butterfly, then that is what they should do when challenged by a shooter. One exception to this: when the shooter has such a bad angle that the goalie needs to simply take a step out and fill the entire angle. When you can fill the angle on your feet, why risk opening up holes above or through (five-hole) by dropping? (This is particularly the case when there is no imminent lateral pass option.)

A final note on the butterfly technique and goalies who drop...and this is to coaches: don’t cling to memories of goalies who stayed up a lot. **The game is different and has been for a while. Goalies have to drop.** Rather than try to get them to stop, give them help on when, where and why to drop. Ask your goalie: Why did you go down? Could you have waited? Could you have gotten closer to the puck? This method will give you more credibility and hopefully provide better results.

Bertagna Staff for MYHA Clinics

Joe Bertagna, Director

Joe is in his 41st year of coaching goaltenders. A native of Arlington (MA) and a graduate of Harvard University, Joe played professionally in the U.S. and Europe after college. His coaching career includes six seasons with the Boston Bruins as their goalie coach, a title he also held with the 1994 U.S. Olympic Team. Joe also serves college hockey as the Commissioner of Hockey East (18th year) and the Executive Director of the American Hockey Coaches Association (23rd year). Joe, who lives in Gloucester, MA, expects to attend almost all of the MYHA sessions, along with a member of his staff.

Jay Ray

Jay has been a skills and goaltender instructor for over thirty years. A member of the 1986 Curry College ECAC champions, Jay used to practice with the Boston Bruins when the B's trained in Danvers. He has worked with players of every level, from youth hockey to the NHL including current Boston Bruin, Kevan Miller. He has worked for hallmark programs like Malden Catholic, St. Marks School and the LA Junior Kings. Jay brings advanced knowledge in both skating and goaltending.

Mike Morrison

Former NHL goaltender Mike Morrison has become Joe's right-hand man in recent years. Morrison, who attended Joe's camps as a child, went on to an outstanding career at St. Sebastian's School, the University of Maine and the National Hockey League. After playing 64 games for Maine, Morrison enjoyed an 8-year professional career where he played 243 games, 29 of them in the NHL. He has become one of the best young goalie coaches in New England in recent years.



Joe Bertagna speaks at the October 26 girls clinic at Connery Rink.



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Schedule of Clinics for 2014-15

(Subject to Change)

All clinics at:
Connery Rink in Lynn, MA
Select Sundays from 4:20-5:10 p.m.

September 28 (Done)
October 19 & 26 (Done)
November 23
December 14
January 11 & 25
February 1 & 8
March 1



Marblehead resident and former U.S. National team goalie Kelly Dyer Hayes works with a Marblehead goalie at the October 26 girls clinic.



Happy Birthday wishes to "The China Wall," Johnny Bower, born on November 8, 1924. Born John Kiszkan, he changed it to Bower to make it easier for sports-writers. He was only 5' 9", a far cry from today's average netminder.