

Goaltending Newsletter

Prepared for Marblehead Youth Hockey
By Joe Bertagna, Bertagna Goaltending
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What does it mean to “know how to play goal”?

Many years ago, I walked out of a college hockey game in which the goalie made close to 50 saves in an acrobatic performance, winning the contest by a 4-3 score. An NHL scout who left the game along side of me remarked, “That goalie is pretty good. He will be even better when he learns how to play the position.”

I wasn't sure what he meant at the time. How could the guy make all those saves and not know “how to play the position”? All these years later, I think I understand the distinction. Some goalies, particularly at younger levels, can succeed on the strength of pure athleticism and reflexes. Eventually, the shooters against which we play will get better. Their shots will be harder and more accurate. Their release better disguised. Trying to succeed by waiting and simply beating the puck to an open space will prove more challenging against bantams and beyond.

Goalies in our area are fortunate to have a variety of options when it comes to finding goalie coaches. But can you find one who teaches more than technique? Learning a series of techniques is important but it is not the same as learning how to play goal. There is a mental component, a strategy component, that is key. A goalie has to know which techniques to employ and when.

And more to the point of this essay, the goalie has to see the game in such a way that he reads or anticipates what is about to happen. Where is trouble lurking? When and where will this play challenge me and come together?

I speak to youth coaches frequently at clinics run by USA Hockey. I often say at these, “For all the changes in equipment and technique, goaltending is still about three primary goals: be in the right place, control the puck, and have a sense of timing.”

Of these challenges, the third is the key to knowing how to play the position. Yes, I need to have a strategy and yes, I need to employ the right move for a given situation. And certainly, I need to do this in the right spot. But it only comes together when I time it properly. Too early, and there is a window of opportunity for the enemy to adjust accordingly. Too late, well, that's easy to understand. The puck is already behind you.

This, of course, is an oversimplification of the the topic. There is so much more. Do you factor in which players are on the ice? If they have a guy with 12 goals and 1 assist, how likely is he to pass up a shot when it is there? When your worst defenseman is facing a one-on-one, do you really play it the same way as when it is against your best? If a certain opponent beats you high glove twice in a game, are you really going to give him any chance to put a third one there? If a penalty killer is on the ice and he has been out there over a minute, how far will he push an offensive opportunity when tired, as opposed to just cranking a shot from outside? When you have a chance to tie up a puck, are you aware of the situation? With tired teammates, do you get a whistle? With the other team changing up and no one near you, do you think to advance the puck?

The most common question I get at these USA Hockey clinics is, “At what age should a young goaltender specialize as a goalie?” There really isn't a specific answer. But I favor waiting on this, so that the goalie gets more skating and, to help what I spell out above, he gets to understand the entire game of hockey better. The longer he plays like a non-goalie, the better he or she will be able to anticipate what a non-goalie is trying to do when attacking in the offensive zone. — Joe Bertagna

Bertagna Staff for MYHA Clinics

Joe Bertagna, Director

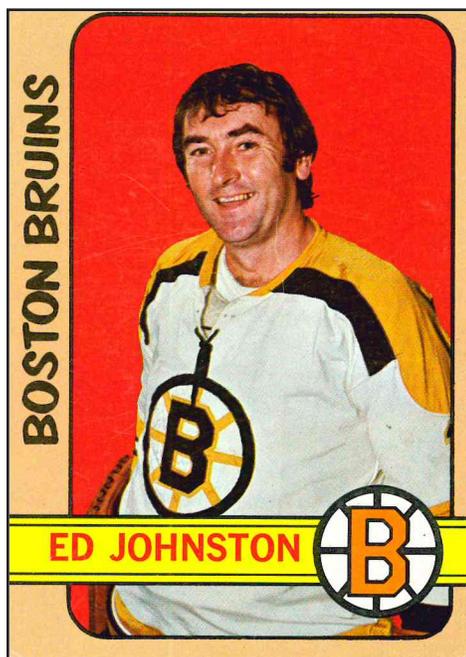
Joe is in his 41st year of coaching goaltenders. A native of Arlington (MA) and a graduate of Harvard University, Joe played professionally in the U.S. and Europe after college. His coaching career includes six seasons with the Boston Bruins as their goalie coach, a title he also held with the 1994 U.S. 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).

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 pro career where he played 243 games, 29 of them in the NHL.



Happy Birthday wishes to two popular Boston Bruins goalies of yesteryear. Reggie Lemelin, with whom I had the chance to work in the late 1980's, will celebrate his birthday on November 19. One of my favorite sports memories was being the goalie coach and traveling with the team to Montreal when they beat the Canadiens in a playoff series for the first time in 45 years, thanks in part to Reggie's play. Then there is Eddie Johnston, born on November 24, a mainstay of the B's two Stanley Cup champions in the early 1970's. He teamed with Gerry Cheevers on those colorful squads. He was also known for his bar/restaurant in Rowley, "EJ's." Later he was a successful Pittsburgh Penguins executive.



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