

EQUIPMENT SELECTION

Goaltenders have unique equipment and many myths abound concerning sizing, selection and purchasing. The first thing I need to mention is the fact that a goaltender that develops a fear of the puck is almost impossible to "cure". Usually, improperly sized equipment and poor protection are the causes of this problem. The situation is difficult to discuss because equipment is so expensive and no one can afford to spend thousands of dollars every year. The goal is to find equipment, either new or used, that balances cost without sacrificing protection. I'll discuss more specifics as I talk about the different equipment.

UNDERGARMENTS

Most pro goaltenders wear pajama-like T-shirts and pants underneath their equipment. This is because they are comfortable, absorb sweat, permit free movement and keep the goaltender warm during lulls in the play. You should use clean clothing every game and practice to prevent the dreaded hockey rash. Not to mention the fact that you will have more friends!

JOCKS AND JILLS

Without a doubt the most important piece of equipment a goaltender wears is the jock (Female goaltenders have a corresponding piece usually called a "jill"). The jock should be worn tightly without restricting movement. The goaltender's jock is larger and more thickly padded than a forward's jock because of the obvious trauma it is designed to prevent. Sometimes you can't totally protect yourself; you can only minimize the pain. Many pro goalies wear a forward's jock and a goaltender's jock over *that*.

GARTERBELT

The best way to keep the hockey socks in place is to use a garter belt to securely hold them. There are hockey shorts now that have Velcro straps that are used to hold socks in place. Whichever the player is comfortable with.

INNER KNEE PADS

I strongly recommend that all goaltenders wear an inner kneepad that is usually worn under the hockey socks. Some goal pad manufacturers have even begun to add special inner pads to their leg pads. This inner kneepad is important. Some older goalie pads do not offer a lot of inner protection; so when a goalie drops to his knees, it's sometimes directly to the ice.

Also, accidents do happen, and sometimes a puck will find its way to an exposed area. Extra knee pads underneath goalie pads are great extra layer of protection.



SKATES

Goaltenders use special skates that have additional protective shells surrounding the foot and a flat blade that helps in keeping your balance. I often get asked when a young goaltender is ready for goal skates. There is no set age, but I advice that once a young goaltender seems reasonably committed to playing goal, start looking for a used pair of goal skates. They are usually fairly affordable until you are ready to buy new skates.

Sizing - Proper sizing is crucial when selecting goal skates. When you go to try on skates bring the socks that you plan to wear when you play. The next step is to seat your heel in the skates, so lightly bump the blade against the floor with your foot loosely in the skate. Tighten the skates and go for a walk around the store. Your toes shouldn't touch the ends but also shouldn't form a big gap.

Sharpening - One of the biggest myths is that goaltenders should use dull skates. People say this allows the goaltender to move sideways better. This is false. Goalies should play with a sharp skates. The level of sharpness will vary by individual player.

Sharp skates will allow goalies to move quickly, change direction rapidly, and be generally more confident in skating. Ask a veteran skate sharpener what type of cut would be best.



LEG PADS

There are currently dozens of companies making leg pads in every size and color. Each one promotes some new feature or the fact that some goaltender in the N.H.L. is wearing their pad. How do you decide what pad is the best bearing in mind that some models cost over \$1000?

The first mistake is buying pads that come too high up the leg. Not only does this slow a goalie's movements around the net, but it also makes it very hard to recover when you fall to the ice. Bring your skates to the store. This allows you to get a good idea of where the pads will rest when they are strapped to your skates. Once you have the pads strapped to your

legs, they should be between 4-6 inches above your kneecap.

Besides height, you must look at the width. With all the different makers and designs for goalie pads, you do not want a goalie in pads that are too wide for the player. This restricts their skating ability, as well as their ability to get up from the ice. The best width is one that covers net and lets you move normally. Move around in the store and try to get a feel for the size. Most stores want repeat business and if your pads aren't right after you use them, take them back. Ask beforehand what their policy is on returns.

On a personal note, I would avoid buying goalie pads online until you are familiar with the equipment and are absolutely sure of the pads/gloves/helmet you are looking to purchase. Reason 1: You can't try on equipment over the internet. Reason 2: Some online stores have very restrictive return/exchange policies. Reason 3: A measure according to one manufacturer may be different from that of another maker. Be absolutely sure you know what you are purchasing when ordering gear online.

STRAPPING THEM ON

Most pads have several straps running from the toe to the top of the pad. What is the best way to strap the pad to your leg? Everyone has their own way but I have a few thoughts that might be helpful.

Toe strap vs. Laces – Today's goalie pads typically come with skate laces. Some older pads (or smaller kids pads) will still have toe straps. These are designed to keep the front of the leg pads tethered down to the toe of the skate. Either one is fine.

Heel Strap - The heel strap is the other strap that holds your pad directly to the skate and should be worn fairly tight. This strap slides through the last space in your skate blade and can be wrapped around that post if you desire. Some pads have another strap that is designed to also go under the skate.

Calf Straps - These straps should be worn snugly but not as tight as those straps lower on the pad.

Knee Straps - These straps are worn fairly loose to allow freedom of movement. A rule of thumb is that the straps should be tighter as you go down towards the bottom.

Pads should be fastened from the bottom (skate) up to the top (knees) starting with your toe strap.



GOAL PANTS

Goal pants have more padding than players' pants and are important to avoid the fear of the puck. The thigh pads are thicker and wider, the inner thigh also is protected and the pants are worn a lot larger which are all important differences from players' pants.

First, the size allows more freedom to move. Secondly, large pants will allow you to insert your chest pad inside the front of your pants. This is usually the way most goalies wear their chest pads.

Suspenders and belts are the way your pants are held up and sometimes a clip is used to keep your suspenders together, so they don't fall off of your shoulders. Usually the suspenders are worn over your chest pad. Some players prefer them under the chest pad.



CHEST AND ARM PADS / CHEST ARMOR

Today goaltenders have some of the best upper body protection in the history of goaltending. As your goalie gets older, this is definitely an area you want to invest the money in. Some goaltenders will flinch on a slap shot and 90 % of the time it's because he has poor upper body protection.

When you buy these pads sizing is fairly simple. You want the sleeves to come to within 1-2" of the wrist and the belly pad to just touch the top of your goalie jock. Remember that when you enter your crouch all your equipment will bunch up and you don't want your equipment to be in the way, yet you do not want any gaps in your armor.

As far as features to look for, here are a few hints. Check to see that the elbows and shoulders are covered in plastic with foam underneath. Look for protection on the inner portions of the arms and thick protection around the collarbone.



NECK PROTECTION

In most youth hockey leagues a neck protector is mandatory to prevent cuts which may be potentially life threatening. Former NHL goaltender Clint Malarchuk almost died from a nasty neck cut. When buying a neck guard, find one that isn't too tight.

There is also a device called "dangler". This is a piece of high impact plastic that hangs (dangles) from the bottom of the goalie mask and protects the neck area from puck shots. Most are clear, but there are some that are colored or tinted. Be careful that the guard doesn't hinder vision or movement in your neck.



BLOCKER

The blocker is used to hold the stick and is made of rigid foam covered with hard plastic. As with the trapper try not to fall into the "bigger is better" thinking. Get a glove that fits the hand, and covers enough room to protect. The glove portion should also protect the fingers from rising pucks that may strike the fingers. Usually, extra flaps of padded plastic will cover the fingers underneath the blocking board. Several companies are now selling blockers that are shaped differently than the normal rectangular style. At youth level,

this is not an important feature.



TRAPPER / CATCH GLOVE

The catch glove is an important piece of equipment and is often improperly fitted. The first area to discuss is protection. A good hard shot will sting with any glove, but a young goaltender must have confidence in their glove's protection. Make sure the palm has some plastic in it and give the glove a couple of taps with a hockey stick. You

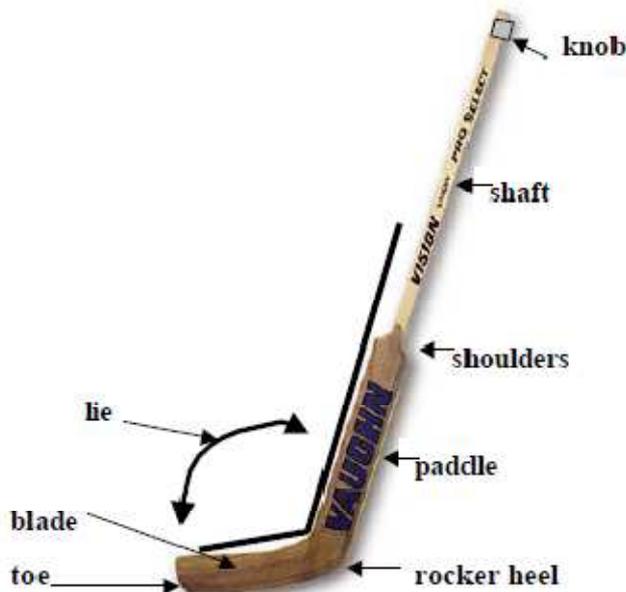
should get an idea how it would hold up when that hard shot eventually happens.

The glove should open and close properly and be flexible enough that a young player can open and close his hand easily without having to "squeeze" the glove shut.

What if it is too stiff? The best way to break in any piece of equipment is to bend them forcefully in directions they are not supposed to go. For example, take your glove and bend it so it looks flat like a 'Charlie Brown' glove. Reshape it and then open and close it hundreds of times. You can't hurt your glove and this is a good way to increase your hand strength. Be patient it takes many hours of hard work to get that equipment just right. **AVOID BUYING GLOVES THAT ARE TOO LARGE.**

STICKS

In choosing the proper goal stick, you must consider size, weight and the stick's lie. The stick often causes problems with stance, low shots, rebound control and puck handling. Before we discuss sizing etc. there are some terms that are important to understand when we are talking about goaltender's sticks.



Blade

The blade is the portion of the stick that is designed to be held flush to the ice when the goaltender is in their stance. The bottom edge of the blade can be rockered (curved) or straight. Sometimes the blade is rockered to assist in puck handling, but we suggest that you stick to the straight bottom edge until you have mastered it. As well as being rockered, a stick may also be curved and there are a variety of curve sizes available. Do NOT try to curve a goalie stick after purchase.

You should not worry about stick curve for young goalies. The curvature only becomes important when a goalie reaches his mid-teens and starts learning how to shoot the puck.

To extend the life of your stick, keep it taped especially the heel. A hint is to use white tape so you can pick up the puck on a low shot. When you re-tape your stick, remove all of the old tape and apply the new tape to a clean surface. This is done to keep the stick light and so that any serious cracks can be detected.

Paddle

The paddle is the portion of the stick that rises up from the ice to the shaft where it narrows. It was probably called the paddle because advanced goaltenders really use that part of the stick to deflect away pucks as well as the fact that it is traditionally held like a ping pong paddle. The length of the paddle will affect how tall the goaltender will be in their stance. If the paddle is too long it will force the goaltender's elbow up too high opening a large hole underneath the arm and making it very difficult to keep the blade flat on the ice. Similarly, if the paddle is too short the goaltender will either be hunched over in their stance or the stick blade will make little, if any, contact with the ice.

The Shaft

The shaft is the portion of the stick that starts at the paddle and ends up at the knob. This portion of the stick should be very smooth and free of. As with a forwards stick, a good way to check overall length is to place the stick straight up in front of your face and mark the shaft at your chin height.

The knob of the stick is formed by wrapping tape around the very end of the shaft. It may seem like a trivial part to discuss but this is important for several reasons. Many young goaltenders use a whole roll of tape on their knob. Not only is this a waste of tape, it also increases the weight of the stick. You really only need enough to stop the stick from flying out of your hand, and to make it easier to pick up off of the ice if you do drop it. To avoid confusing the goal judge, keep the knob white so they don't mistake it for a puck.

The Lie

The lie of the stick is simply the angle the blade makes with the paddle. Most sticks are lie 13, lie 14, or lie 15. The lower the number the closer the paddle comes to the ice when the blade is flat. For example, if you compare a forward's stick, which is usually a lie 5 or 6, with a goaltenders' stick you can clearly see the difference. What lie should I use? Generally, I would stick to a 13 or 14 but experiment to see what works best for you.

Selecting the proper stick at the store

Unless you bring in an old stick that was sized properly, the best way to fit a stick is as follows: Either wear a pair of skates or stand on a two by four. This is done to approximate your height when you are dressed. Otherwise the lie and paddle height may be way off.

Assume a comfortable basic stance and position the stick properly. Does it feel right? Is your stick hand about knee height? Is the blade flat on the floor? Does it feel too heavy? Too flimsy? This whole process really is a trial and error method but eventually you will be able to intelligently select the proper stick.

Be careful about the numbers on a stick. One manufacturer's 26" could be another company's 24". Whenever possible, find a stick you like, and then stay with that brand.

CARE OF EQUIPMENT

As we all know, goaltending equipment is very expensive and it makes sense to protect your investment. The first and foremost enemy of equipment is moisture. Equipment that is not properly dried will certainly fail before its time. The simple advice is to air out all your equipment after every game and practice, even though you probably stink up your whole basement.

Avoid the temptation to just leave it in the bag. Make sure you dry off the skate blades and take caution near the blades to prevent any nasty cuts. Once they are dry, place the blades in soft guards so that the blades don't become nicked. Do not, under any circumstances, dry your equipment with hair dryers or heat registers. Although this will definitely speed up drying time it also drastically shortens your equipment's life span.

PACKING YOUR BAG

Every goaltender at one time or another forgets a piece of equipment and nine times out of ten it is either your jock or your left skate! Why is this? There is a simple way to prevent this embarrassment. Pack your bag in the reverse order that you get dressed. Simply imagine what comes first, the undergarments. Next, the jock, then the garter belt etc. By going through this process each and every time you pack your bag you will have this problem solved.

ODDS AND ENDS

You should always carry a spare equipment kit with you in your bag. I suggest that you include the following items: 1) extra toe straps or toe laces 2) extra skate laces 3) tape 4) stone to touch up a bad edge 5) assorted screws and a small screwdriver 6) skate rag 7) your own personal water bottle.

Will you need these things often? Probably not. But, you never know when you, or a teammate, may need something, and it's always good to have it. You can buy a sturdy plastic pouch and keep these items in a side pocket of your hockey bag.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US AND HAPPY PUCKSTOPPING!