

## Goaltending Topic: Stick Discipline

By Joe Bertagna

One of the key observations I find myself offering to goalies (usually early in the educational process) is that we are, at our core, a collection of habits. We are our habits, both the good ones and the bad ones. Hand-in-hand with this observation is another observation that is usually met by blank stares: a lot of what makes a successful goalie is the repetition of simple things. That means repeating skills over and over and over again.

A parent seeking state of the art goaltending instruction is hoping to hear some secret that no one has ever suggested to his son or daughter. They want to know how their child can move from good to great and there is an expectation that something exciting awaits them for their hard earned tuition fee. Yet in the end, it is fairly simple. Most goaltending coaches preach positioning, puck control, and a respect for basic skills. Nothing is more basic, and more deadly when not under control, than sloppy stick discipline. How many times do we see a young goalie go through the hard part: read a play and react with strong body movement to the right location, only to get beat because the stick came late? Or perhaps not at all, and an average shot finds five-hole space en route to the back of the net? There is also the scenario where the goalie reacts to a deke to his glove side. The leg pad is there, but the stick trails the play, preventing the proper rotation that allows the goalie to get more than just that pad into the play. It could even be that it's a young goalie with stick right up against the skates, setting themselves up for a kicked rebound back to the shooter or, worse yet, a toppling over as shoulders get ahead of feet due to this poor stick position.

Goalies have to understand the dual roles of basic stick positioning: to help stop pucks and to help with overall balance. The stick blade should be positioned so as to cover the space between the skates, to stop a low shot, and comfortably ahead of the feet, to cushion a shot. The goalie should be able to envision a "triangle" formed by lines connecting one skate, the other, and the stick blade. (No triangle exists when the stick is up against the feet.) This allows for the cushioning referenced above as well as good overall balance. Goalies are taught to "receive" shots, which is facilitated by the hands being out ahead of the body. We are also taught to lead with our hands and follow our hands when moving in and around the crease. The stick leads the way.

And inherent in all of this is the need to KEEP THE STICK BLADE FLAT ON THE ICE. The emphasis is provided as an acknowledgement of the many goalie coaches who scream this endlessly at young goalies who straighten up out of their stance, lifting the stick at the same time, and making themselves vulnerable to getting beat along the ice or, perhaps, falling over as they lose balance by being too erect in their stance. This doesn't even touch on the overuse of the "paddle down" technique, which further erodes stick discipline as goalies get caught between "blade down" and "paddle down" and have nothing to provide ice coverage. The more they use the paddle down technique, the more time they spend in transition.

Finally, parents and coaches have to know if a goalie's stick problems come from their having a stick that is either too big or too small. Here is where a retailer that knows their stuff can be very helpful. And parents, unless it is your child's very first adult model, do NOT cut anything off the top of the stick shaft. We hold the stick in the middle. The extra length is usually an asset for us. The one exception is when that first long stick seems to get caught in the net when a young goalie goes post-to-post to his stick side.

Repetition of good habits will lead to a young goalie's success. Go back to the basics, and you will become the goalie what you want to be.