

The Ideal Offseason for Goalies



By Jeff Hall
Goalcrease

So your child is a goalie. The power a goalie has in the game brings great responsibility to the team. The responsibility brings pressure to keep improving. That pressure leads many families to commit their young goalies to countless hours of offseason hockey. You don't want to fall behind, so you keep them skating all year. AAA teams, training programs and shots, shots, shots.

We all know the huge load of ice time is an expensive commitment that takes time away from other activities/sports and can lead to burnout. But goalie parents should also know this important fact: All that ice time could wear out your child's body, specifically the hips.

Within the last 15 years, the medical field has defined a new hip condition called Femoralacetabular Impingement or FAI. It's an excess of bone in the ball and socket hip joint that causes restriction, pain and often torn ligaments. The causes of this condition are not clearly defined, and can happen to any athlete. But if you ask the experts, like Dr. Chris Larson at Twin Cities Orthopedics, they will tell you that playing goalie greatly increases one's chances of developing this condition.

Dozens of pro goalies have dealt with it. Most have surgery, work hard in physical therapy to rehabilitate and come back better than before. Dozens of our students and a few of our coaches have also had surgery on their impinged hip joints. Their level of recovery has varied, some experiencing the similar symptoms within a few years, others recovering completely. Some have had promising careers shortened before they reach their 20's. While Tim Thomas won a Stanley Cup less than one year removed from hip surgery, that doesn't mean he is not at risk in the long term for things like arthritis or hip replacement.

Goalcrease has always been a proponent of playing multiple sports rather than total dedication to hockey. Playing other sports has a great many benefits, including dynamic athleticism and learning from different experiences. High on the list of reasons that goalies should dedicate their time and energy into things other than summer ice time is to lengthen the life expectancy of your hips.

We always tell goalies that you don't necessarily have to play on a team or sign up for a program to be a multi-sport athlete. Just get out and play. Ride your bike. Get some friends together and play basketball, tennis, ping pong, badminton, football, soccer, ultimate Frisbee or volleyball (racket sports are great for goalies because of the short-bursting lateral movement, and the way it teaches how to control an object in your strong hand. Ever notice the grip on a ping paddle requires the exact same grip as a goalie stick?). Go waterskiing, wakeboarding, or swimming. Or take on the challenge of signing up for another year of the sport you used to play, don't like as much as hockey or just aren't as good at it as you are at hockey. Baseball, lacrosse, softball, track, wrestling ... whatever it is, have fun doing it.

Still, the pressure to keep up your goalie skills will be there. Truly, a goalie that plays 4-5 days a week through the offseason might have an advantage in a fall tryout over a goalie that played soccer and baseball without much skating. Is there a way to avoid the over-use injury risk, the burnout and time commitment of year-round hockey and still make progress as a goalie?

That is one of the many great benefits of Goalcrease training. A goalie can purchase 10-15 one-on-one lessons at Goalcrease for about the same cost as a AAA program and get 10 times more quality repetitions that develop skills and create good habits. Imagine showing great improvement in the net with only 10 hours of ice all summer and not having to give up all that time on the lakes, golf courses, and parks.

Many would argue that taking large chunks of time away from a rigid hockey schedule will actually help a player improve. It can help them lose bad habits and become more coachable. It can certainly recharge their mind and avoid burnout

so they can play with tenacity. Moreover, I believe it is crucial for their long-term physical health.

Goalcrease training is brief and to the point. It's not hours of shots, shots, shots. It's quality repetition and immediate reinforcement. Therefore it can be used in a way that skills are improved while still avoiding the mental burn out and injury risk.

Another way goalies can develop physically without getting the massive load of butterfly repetitions that tend to wear on the body is to skate out in the offseason. If you want to get on the ice more, sign up for a clinic or recreational league as a skater. Work on your stride and footspeed. Learn to pass and shoot better. Try to score some goals and remember what it feels like to be on the other end of that emotional occurrence. I can tell you after years of being a goalie, it feels good to skate out, drive the net, screen the goalie and bang home a rebound. This as much as anything, can turn a goalie into a better athlete.

Parents, rather than looking at the short term, immediate satisfaction results that might come from specializing your child in hockey, please look at the big picture. What can you do help your child become a happier, healthier goalie? What is going to make them a better person – having a slightly better chance of making the 'A' team, or having a greater variety of experiences?

As Director at Goalcrease in Edina, Jeff Hall has logged more than 1,000 hours per year coaching goalies since 2002. He has overseen the training of thousands of goalies from ages 6-50, from beginners to pros. He is committed to the skill development of Minnesota's youth and high school goalies.