

# Goaltender Practice Planning

By **Jeremy Kaleniecki**, BTP Director, On Ice Operations Goalie Coach - COPYRIGHT © 2009  
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With the start of every new season begins the quest for success. One thing that is often missed is goaltending. Goaltending is the foundation upon which a team is built. If you have poor goaltending then it doesn't matter how good your team is. With this much importance you would think that goaltenders should get a good portion of training, right? Wrong. Most goaltenders especially at the younger levels are almost being neglected. In S.E. Michigan I am at a rink almost every day of the week and almost every day at every rink I still to this day see it. What is it that I am talking about? "IT," is the goaltenders skating circles with the teams or even worse standing around because the coaches don't know what to do with the goaltenders.

I am a firm believer in what Todd says, "The goaltender MUST be the best skater on the ice." However, there is a big difference in what a goaltender must do and what a forward must do. This is left to the way side in most organizations leaving it up to the goaltenders parents to find training, pay for training, and all of this on top of having to pay for the most expensive position on the ice. With this in mind I'm going to run through how to plan a practice around a goaltender and the best part, *it won't inconvenience the original practice plan.*

To learn how to work with or around goaltenders, I break the practice down into a few common phases:

- Warm up skating
- Warm up shooting
- Middle practice
  - Flow drills
  - Special teams
  - *Player development*
- Cool down skating

The first segment of practice normally is warm up skating. I have found that coaches especially at the younger levels do a couple of common drills or variations of drills. These drills are:

- Full Ice on the whistle
- Circles
- Lines
- Full Ice figure 8

With each drill I always will ask coaches, where is the open ice? Generally with the Full Ice on the whistle, there is the crease, the center ice face off circle, and a straight distance such as the crease to the blue line. The circle drill gives the crease, and the center of each circle. When the team

is skating lines, straight line distance from goal line to blue line. Finally the full ice figure 8, this again leaves straight line distances available for the goaltenders. If you have our DVD series, or have been to our camps, you have probably picked up on the point I'm getting at. Each player warm up drill allows some type of goaltending warm up drill such as the Iron Cross, or any type of blue line drill. The key here is to know where the open ice is and give goaltenders drills to do in that open ice.

The second segment of practice is usually warm up shooting. This is the most difficult to get the kids to do. Generally in the younger levels of hockey the kids have either just learned to shoot the puck high or are beginning to get more accurate in shooting the puck high. Again if you are paying attention the point is that they are shooting HIGH. This is not how you warm a goaltender up. If you have followed our teaching you should also know that almost 80% of the goals are scored 18" or lower. The perfect shot and the hardest to stop is the shot placed just inside the post 12-18 inches off the ice. This puts the puck just out of reach for the arm of the goaltender and just over the pad. Knowing this, WHY ARE ALL THE KIDS SHOOTING THE TOP CORNERS? The common response to this is because they are working on accuracy. This is a fallacy because it takes more accuracy to shoot in the low corners than the top corners. The whole point I'm getting at here is regardless of the drill; Circle walk out, 3 line shooting, etc, force the kids to all shoot to one low corner, then again to the opposite low corner. Once the goaltender has seen a handful of shots to the low corners then let the kids shoot high.

The next section of practice planning is generally the middle of practice. This section incorporates everything from player development drills to special teams. With each set of drills the coach must possess an understanding of what the goaltender needs. Player development drills are the most common set of drills at the younger levels. These are the easiest to work with when trying to incorporate the goaltender. All you have to do is slow the drill down slightly to allow for goaltender set up. In any drill where the players are moving around the zone what is the goaltender doing? Generally they are sitting at the top of the crease waiting for a shot. Are they supposed to do this in a game? Of course not, so why are they in practice? The goaltenders sit at the top of the crease and wait because the coach does not allow enough time in between shooters for the goaltender to set up and follow the player around the zone. To fix this again allow the goaltender to set up and fully move around the crease on each play to make the save. Dealing with special teams and flow drills isn't difficult either. Anytime there are flow drills where only one goaltender is receiving a shot, again what is the other goaltender doing? Usually sitting on the cross bar waiting for his or her turn. Simply make the goaltender do a crease drill 3 or 4 times in between shots so they are not waiting and wasting ice. One other key point here, if

you are dumping the puck in the zone let the goaltender try to stop the puck. The goaltender is never too young to learn puck handling.

This finally brings me to the last section of practice, cool down or conditioning. This is the exact same as warm up. Find the open ice for the goaltenders and put them through drills.

Here are some key points for practice planning for goaltenders:

1. Standardization is key.
  - a. This means get them on a set standard or schedule of drills to do at the beginning and end of practice so you don't have to worry about them.
2. Fundamentals
  - a. Only work on fundamentals, T-pushes, shuffles, sliding butterflies, and proper leg recoveries, ESPECIALLY at the younger levels.
3. Don't over complicate it
  - a. Keep it simple and enjoyable
4. Bring in a professional a couple times a month.
  - a. At the younger levels of hockey it isn't cost effective to have someone like a BTP staff or instructor out at every single practice. Instead have a professional out maybe 2 times a month and increase the number of times someone comes out, as they get older.
  - b. This keeps it cost effective and gives time for the fundamental foundation to be set.

This article is a short hand version of a presentation I give at the levels 1-3 CEP clinics. For more information, pictures, or more explanation please feel free to email me.