

## Mental Preparation

I have personally watched hundreds of goaltenders with exceptional skills in practice, even at lower levels of hockey. However, when these goaltenders play in a big game or attempt to play for the first time at a higher level things sometimes go terribly wrong. What possible explanations are there for such fluctuations in performance?

For the most part, goaltenders all have similar physical skills as they progress through the hockey ranks. Reaction times and objective observations would surely bear this out. So why do some rise to the occasion when it counts and others struggle?

Many goaltenders and athletes in general really struggle with the mental side of the game. In fact this area of sport is the subject of many books and can't adequately be covered in a short article but the premise itself can be discussed.

When an athlete delivers a peak performance it is remarkable how the factors are similar across the varying sport lines. A volleyball player will talk of how easily everything happened for them that game. A baseball player may not recall how they made that miraculous catch. A quarterback may only remember, "knowing" the comeback would happen without a doubt. Pros to amateurs all can recall a game where they had a performance that was effortless, successful and automatic. It is precisely this ability to call up these peak performances on a 95% basis that allows the athlete to make the big \$\$.

Many athletes and goaltenders feel their performance is a result of external factors beyond their control. This mindset is characterized as an **"external locus of control"**. A goaltender who feels that how well they play is contingent upon factors like how strong their opponents are that night, which star players are out of their line up or whether they have played well in that arena before are typical examples of an external locus of control. These types of athletes NEVER get out of minor hockey.

The top athletes have an **"internal locus of control"**. They believe they control their destiny and performance. Regardless of factors around them they know they will do well. An athlete with this approach will routinely rise above challenges like sickness, bad starts and other potentially negative

factors. I would argue that all top athletes could be typified as having an internal locus of control.

When I played professionally I used to watch a 30 - 45 minute highlight tape of some amazing and routine saves I had made so far that season. While watching this tape I would throw on some very loud tunes and watch this video I had seen dozens of times.

When the video ended and the tunes wound down I wasn't concerned about any external factors. I KNEW I was God's gift to goaltending that night (at least I truly believed it!).

I would have goose bumps and an excitement because I knew I was able to stop anything from anybody and didn't have a worry about anything else externally.

If you are struggling, ask yourself: " Am I concerned about outside factors controlling my performance or do I truly have an internal locus of control like an NHL goaltender.