



## **Practice with a Purpose**

**By Justin Johnson**

**USA Hockey/Minnesota District Associate Goalie Coach-in-Chief**

Great practice habits and dedication to skill development are indicators of one's mental approach to their position. Which means with the right mental approach you can ensure quality and efficient use of your precious time and energy for each and every hour of practice you have this season. Through out my playing career there was one constant in my locker stall. It was simply a piece of tape with the message "Get Better Today". A quick glance was all I needed to put myself into the mindset to focus on my development. It was my cue to practice with a purpose so I could make gains on the competition.

Now that I'm a coach I compare practices through out the season to riding an escalator. If you show up and put in an average effort; that is working hard enough that you won't be accused of being lazy. Then you will likely make small gains in your development at the pace of everyone else around you. Much like stepping onto an escalator and letting it take you upward. But what happens if you walk up a couple steps... or even run up an escalator? You surpass all those heading in the same direction and you reach your goals ahead of them.

Below are two ways to enhance your mental approach towards practice so that you can increase the distance on your competition.

### **Having a Plan**

Planning as skill or personality trait comes easier for some than for others. So for those of you who wince at the idea of drawn out weekly calendars applied to your practice schedule, relax and keep reading. Having a plan speaks more to the idea that you are going to spend a few moments prior to practice to establish a purpose or goal for your efforts that day. Inspiration of such a purpose may come from the type of goals let in from your last game to something you watched a pro goalie do last night on television. Your purpose for practice may be as broad as compete until the end on each play, or as specific as maintaining stick position in your butterfly. The goal to having a personal plan for practice is to resist the all too easy habit of slipping into a comfort zone. Resist becoming a mindless zombie simply showing up and becoming a padded target for the day.

For those of you who are detail oriented and planning comes easily to you. I encourage you to write down your plan for the day as well as how you felt it went or any noteworthy thoughts or tips on practice afterwards. This will enhance your development and give you a record to refer back to, through out the season and your career.

### **Become Dynamic**

Secondly if sports, or life for that matter, teach us anything it is that even the best laid plans need to be changed from time to time. As a goaltender you must adapt to the

play of the game and you must be ready to adapt in practice as well. When the initial plan of what skill you're going to work on doesn't fall in line with what the coach has planned. Rather than holding rigid to your previous plan, thus wasting a practice, see it as an opportunity to work on another part of your game. Perhaps you are planning to work on tracking the puck through traffic. The coach, however, has a practice plan full of breakout drills. Change your purpose to directing traffic through quality communication or stopping wraps around the dashers and leaving set ups for the defensemen. The ability to be dynamic allows you to develop regardless of what opportunities are presented to you in practice.

When you become dynamic then you hold the key to your development. It is your responsibility to find a purpose for practice not the coaches. The moment you adopt a purposeful mental approach to practice, is the moment you begin to run up the escalator. I challenge each of you as goaltenders looking for an edge, to leave the competition behind this year by choosing to run up the escalator!

For more information, contact Justin at [justin@mentaledgenow.com](mailto:justin@mentaledgenow.com).