

# Coaching the Crease



By Jessi Pierce

There really is no position quite like the goaltender. Being a goalie requires a different mindset and a different set of skills from the rest of the team.

Without a doubt it takes a special player to step inside the crease.

“No other single player can have as large of an impact on the team as the goalie,” said Kevin Reiter, goaltending coach at USA Hockey’s National Team Development Program. “It’s such a unique position.”

Reiter adds that too often, he notices that a goaltender’s skill development is pushed aside. On a team of 20, there are only two or three goalies on the roster, making it difficult to set time just for them.

But it’s that uniqueness of goaltending that makes it so important to know how to train and develop their specialized skills. Reiter, along with Grand Rapids Griffins (AHL) coach Jeff Blashill, offer a few tips to ensure your goalie isn’t left unattended to this season.

**No Experience Required:** Just because you’ve never stacked the pads in the net, doesn’t mean you can’t coach your netminder. It can be intimidating to train a player in a position that you’ve never played, but it doesn’t have to be.

“A lot of reasons coaches are hesitant to coach goalies is because they aren’t familiar with the position,” Reiter said. “Most coaches feel they are implementing goalies into their practice plan by simply giving them more shots. That can be counterproductive in terms of development. Coaches need to understand the position to prepare and develop goalies more efficiently.”

Utilize your resources. Talk to your goalie, talk to former goalies in your association and check out the *USA Hockey’s Goaltending resource page*.

**Keep it Simple:** The most effective way to teach is by using simple drills.

“Obviously you’ll have to scale the drills up or down depending on your age level, but for the most part, the same simple drills can be done at every level,” Blashill said.

Easy stick-saving, glove and blocker drills instill the basic motions and ideas of goaltending. Those simple drills will make sure that goalies get a stick on the puck as much as they can to redirect rebounds. It also will help make sure they are filling as much of the net as possible with their upper body, gloves and blocker.

**Set, Then Shoot:** In a game you want your goalie to be set when the opposing team’s offense attacks him or her.

“I think what happens a lot of times, even in goalie-specific drills, is shooters shoot before the goalie is set,” said Blashill. “Every coach does it; I’ve been guilty of it, too. But I’m strong

believers that if you want your goalie to be set in games, then makes sure their feet are set before the shot comes in practice.”

Teach your shooters to have more patience, especially in a drill aimed at working the goaltender. Allow goalies a couple of seconds to get their feet set in each angle you have a shooter coming down.

**Again:** Repetition is the mother of all learning and it’s the key to your goalie’s development.

“Make sure your goaltenders have the basics down,” Blashill said. “Always be working on their angles, skating, setting their feet and so on. Those are the types of things that will carry with (goalies) through their career. Work on them over and over again.”

**Work the Rebounds:** There’s a large portion of the game that is played solely around the net. Make sure your goalie is prepared.

“(Working the rebounds) will help the goalies develop instinct on rebounds and playing difficult situations,” Reiter said. “Additionally, non-goalies will have the chance to practice finishing plays and scoring goals.”

**Crease Confidence:** A confident goalie puts their team in a better position to win. Reinforce good play and help pick his or her head up after a tough goal slips in.

“The important point is to always have patience and try to instill confidence in (your) goalies,” said Reiter. “It is as much a mental position as it a physical or technical position.

“Above all, goalies need to enjoy making saves.”

**Coach Your Goalie, Coach Your Team:** Include goalies in team drills and make sure they get the same amount of one-on-one attention as the rest of the squad. Their performance will improve and so will your team’s outcome. Give them the attention they deserve. Your whole team will thank you.

*For more drills and resources to help develop your goalies, visit [USA Hockey Goaltending](#).*

