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Being a better coach for your goaltenders

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Not all coaches are experienced when it comes to goaltending. In fact, very few have a deep understanding of either the nuances of the position or the psyche of the unique individuals that guard the net.

It is every coach's responsibility to educate themselves on today's goaltending techniques and philosophies. They don't have to be experts, but they need to study the position to become the best coach possible for the benefit of all players on the team. Many competitive organizations enlist the services of a specialized goaltending coach to help with this process. However, it is still in the best interest of the Head Coach to tag along for the education as they ultimately will be responsible for all strategic decisions including goaltender starts, and at times, pulls.

If you are the kind of coach who believes that goalies should stay on their feet as often as possible, it's probably time for a refresher.

Here are some quick ideas to get yourself on the right track:

1. Enlist a professional goaltending coach who is current in their philosophies and teachings. Gain a level of understanding of what they are preaching to your goalies and pick their brain often about style, technique and what your goalies are thinking. Actively participate in goaltending drills when possible to soak up as much information as you can.
2. Read an instructional goaltending book or watch a specialized DVD. Easier still, pay close attention to the goaltenders while watching NHL games. Notice how often today's goaltenders drop to the ice to make saves and control rebounds and the situations in which they do so.
3. Attend coaching clinics or seminars which often make goaltending part of the curriculum.
4. Communicate with your goaltenders. Ask them lots of questions, and show that you are interested in (and are) expanding your knowledge of the position. Ensure that you are clear with them as to your expectations and how you will play them if in tandem.

5. Find out when they like to be notified of an upcoming start. Some goalies like to know well in advance while others prefer finding out last minute. If you have two goaltenders, make sure they are both aware of who is starting.
6. Always make the back-up goaltender feel part of the team and give them a job during games to keep them sharp, focused and included. This can be as simple as opening the gate or doing some stat-keeping.
7. When pulling a goaltender, let them know your reasons. Was it due to their performance, to send a message to the rest of the team, or simply to give them a break or the back-up some time in the net.
8. Understand their often unique character, but avoid coddling or treating them differently than the rest of the team. Hold them accountable in the same way that you would the other positional players.
9. Include them in skating drills and encourage them to handle pucks and work on their shot as often as possible. This can be accomplished in practice drills by dumping pucks in on net or around the boards and making the goalie a part of setting up or starting a breakout.
10. Recognize that technically sound goaltenders, when on their game, make saves look easy. A constant need to make spectacular, acrobatic saves may be cause for concern rather than celebration. That said, consistency in stopping pucks trumps all, regardless of style or technique.

These are some basic ideas that will make you a better coach for your goaltenders. Understanding them may take some additional effort, but it will be well worth your time!

All the best for a safe and enjoyable off-season!

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