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Coaching a better goalie

In almost any sport, your goalie can make or break the game. Hockey goaltenders are no exceptions. Balancing fun with skill, we wanted to know some tips to coach a better hockey goaltender. For expert answers, ScotiaHockey.com spoke with Joe Bertagna, former Boston Bruins and Olympic goal coach and current Commissioner of the Hockey East Association. With over 35 years of directing goalie schools and coaching from the NHL level to youth hockey, Joe's experience makes his insight even more valuable.

Joe's school, "Bertagna Goaltending", succeeds he thinks not only due to the appropriate training and expertise, but also because they remember that the school hasn't forgotten that playing games should be fun. The curriculum covers mental and physical skills, strategies, and how "the person" affects the goalie.

Q: (ScotiaHockey.com) What do you think of hockey training specifically for hockey goaltenders?

A: (Joe Bertagna) One of hockey's great ironies is that coaches will tell you that the goaltender is the most important player on the team but they will also admit that they don't give them the attention they need. That has resulted in a cottage industry of goalie coaches like myself and others who have moved into the vacuum.

Q: Are there trends in hockey training?

A: In places like Montreal or Boston or Minneapolis, there are a number of private goalie coaches. This may still be a luxury outside of such hockey centers. In these areas, summer goaltending schools are still popular but not as much as they used to be. That was where goalies received the bulk of their training.

Now, the model has changed. Parents want such position-specific training all-year round. And the increase in the number of small-area surfaces, some of them real ice and some synthetic, makes this more readily available.

Q: Where should the focus of training remain, on the actual goaltender or on the coach?

A: While training opportunities improve for the goalie, there is still a need to "coach the coaches." The average volunteer hockey coach does not feel qualified to coach goalies. While that's great for the private goalie coach, it represents, in my opinion, a cop-out by the everyday coach. They should take the time to educate themselves on basic goaltending fundamentals.

Here are a few of those fundamental tips from Joe, to try with your own goalie:

- Don't train your goalie by the "guilt and volume method" of coaching. That is, the coach feels guilty he has ignored his goalie so he decides to pepper the goalie with tons of shots for the next 20 minutes of practice. Then he goes back to ignoring the goalie. Spread out the work.
- Simulate the confusion and variety of game play at practice. Don't have all the drills coming straight at the goalie. Don't have just shooters and no defenders; i.e., no screens. Allow rebounds. Don't have drills with lots of pucks, each for a second. The game is played with one puck and the goalie has to learn to find it and stay with it.
- Respect the value of how practice drills are paced. Let the goalie have time to work on the entire sequence of action in a scoring situation. That is, how to deal with what happens BEFORE and AFTER the shot, not just "the shot."
- Learn some basics. Like how a goalie stands in a comfortable basic stance. How he should maintain that stance in basic goalie movement. If nothing else, understand the importance of playing angles and sound positional play. Where you are and how you control rebounds are the two basics for any goalie.

Using these easy fundamentals can help you best coach a confident, successful goaltender while remembering to have fun in the game.

ScotiaHockey.com does not manage or support content on these links; you can find some information about goaltending schools both locally and internationally. We always welcome your insight and tips about this and any subjects relating to minor league hockey—info@scotiahockey.com. [WC: 671]

Joe Bertagna's Bertagna Goaltending School
<http://www.bertagna-goaltending.com>

International list of goalie schools
<http://www.boni.com/classic/links/links.html>