

# Goalie Coach Basics

This document is intended as a base introduction to coaching goalies. The goal of having a goalie coach on each team is not to replace specialized training. Rather, it is to support that specialized training, support the goalies on the team, and ensure that team practices maximize goalie development to the extent possible. The broad topics covered here are intended to give a coach that is fresh to the position the information they need to get started, the terminology they need to communicate and search about the position, and the confidence to take on this role.

## Practice Expectations

One of the core responsibilities of the goalie coaches is to advocate for goalies during practices. This will come in many forms, but the underlying point is to ensure that goalies do not just become shooting targets in drills. Beyond working individually with goalies (e.g., warming up and skating work), work with the other coaches to meet these targets throughout practice.

- Appropriately pacing drills
  - It is vital that goalies have time to reset between shooters. If drills are going too fast, someone needs to step in and modify the drill. If not, goalies will start cheating the drill (e.g., not recovering, not tracking etc.) as it is the only way to have a chance in the drill. This will develop bad habits.
  - Slowing down a drill by spacing out starts, adding an element, or otherwise allowing the goalie to complete one save before facing a new shooter will help shooters and goalies alike develop
- Including decision-making in some drills
  - If goalies always know where the shot will come from in a drill, they will cheat. This can include not tracking at all or simply not being ready to make a save prior to the designated shooting location. Allowing the shooters to decide when to shoot (e.g., if they see a goalie cheating) will help goalies develop good habits and help shooters recognize game situations where a goalie is out of position.
  - This does not need to happen in every drill, but it should happen often
- Pegging nets
  - If the nets move, goalies cannot push off for speed, tap off to identify their positioning, or be confident of where the net is behind them. All of these create bad habits and can be minimized by making sure that nets are always pegged regardless of where they are placed on the ice.
- Draw creases
  - Depth is one of the fundamentals of goaltending, and proper depth requires ice marking to tell goalies where they are in relation to the net. Drawing a crease when moving the net for a drill takes a few extra seconds, and it makes a world of difference for goalies both in the drill and as that drill translates to gameplay.

# The Basics

We strongly recommend that all goalie coaches complete the USA Hockey Goaltending Module (available in the same place as the age-specific modules). This is a strong basis on which to build future knowledge about the position. The core components from that training are also reiterated here. Note, all image sources are linked and can be accessed by clicking the image.

## Stance

### Standing

The basic goalie stance includes an athletic posture (knees bent, feet shoulder-width apart), hands up and in front of the body, and the stick positioned in front of the goalie on a slight angle. As goalies develop, we can refine this position by ensuring that any gaps below their arms are minimized and that their gloves do not substantially overlap their pads.



This USA Hockey [page](#) has more details and a great video.

### Butterfly

Most saves (those on shots to the bottom half of the net) will be made from the butterfly position. One key that is not always apparent to those new to goaltending is that the goalie's leg pads rotate so that their kneecaps are down when in the butterfly. Goalies are very flexible, but not quite so flexible as they look if you didn't realize how their pads work. It is important that goalies develop good fundamentals of this position, including:

- Knees together (to close the 5-hole) and feet wide (to cover as much area as possible)

- Hips/butt up high (to maintain mobility and maximize net coverage)
- Hands out front (to remain active)
- Stick in front of the pads (to cover gaps) at a slight angle (to deflect the puck to the corners or chest, but not enough to ramp the puck over the body and into the goal)



This USA Hockey [page](#) has more details.

## Skating

The modern position requires strong skating, great edge control, and athleticism. These basic skating skills form the foundation for goaltender movement. However, it remains important for goaltenders to also develop their skating broadly.

## Shuffle

The shuffle is a short movement designed to keep the goaltender square to the puck and minimize holes while moving. It is essential to use whenever a shot is possible/likely.

In a shuffle, a goalie uses one leg to push (the drive leg) while leaving the other skate on the ice (the lead leg). The goaltender maintains their standing stance while moving laterally. The size of each push depends on how far the goalie needs to move. Bigger pushes move further, faster; however, they also leave larger gaps. Goalies should be encouraged to use the smallest pushes that achieve the movement they need, particularly when shots are imminent.

This [video](#) demonstrates the core technique. This [video](#) has a longer demonstration.

## C-cuts

C-cuts are the core skating technique goalies use to move forward and backward. This is similar to the “bubbles” or C’s that we often use to teach new skaters to find their inside edge. It allows goalies to move quickly while maintaining their stance without opening the holes that would emerge with a normal skating stride.

This [video](#) shows some examples. This [video](#) explains the mechanics more directly.

## T-pushes

A T-push is used when a goalie needs to move quickly and/or a long distance and a shot is unlikely to come while they are moving (e.g., to move with a pass). The name comes from the fact that the two skates will form a “T” shape as the goalie pushes. [USA Hockey](#) describes the technique as:

- Turn head / eyes towards the intended direction and lead with stick and gloves.
- Heel of “lead” leg is brought slightly back towards “drive” leg then pivots in desired direction.
- Weight is placed on the inside edge of the balls of the “drive” leg skate.
- Lift “drive” leg skate slightly off the ice after initial push.
- To stop turn inside edge of the lead leg skate and resist momentum.
- Set feet in stance square to potential shot angle.

This [video](#) walks through some basics. This [video](#) focuses on some common problems.

## Positioning

### Angle/Square

The concepts of angle and squareness are intrinsically linked, often used interchangeably, and I failed multiple times to write them separately. So, here they are together.

A goalie is “on angle” when a line from the puck to the middle of the net passes right through the goalie’s belly button. They are “square” when they are facing the puck such that their body creates a right angle to the line from the puck to the middle of the net.

The wording here is key: goalies should be square and on angle to the *puck* not to the shooter. Too often, goalies track the shooter instead of the puck. When they do this, they are often far enough off of their angle to leave part of the net available to the shooter.

This [video](#) shows a goalie staying square/on-angle. This [video](#) talks through a lot of examples.

## Depth

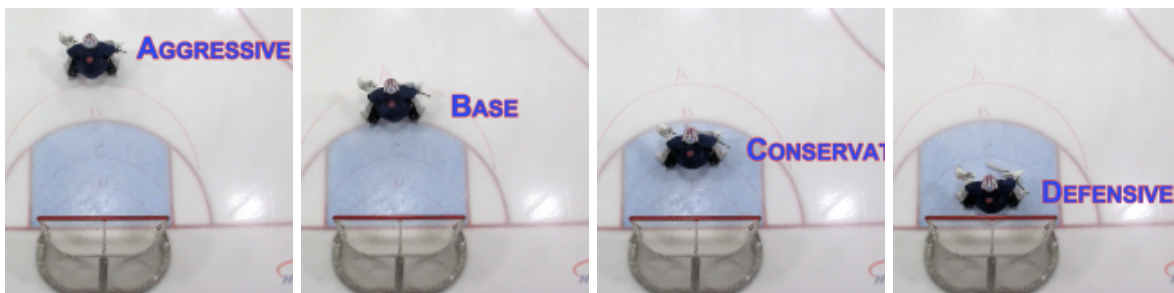
One of the most common mistakes for young goalies is staying too close to their net (or even inside it). Here is one of my favorite examples posted in a goalie parents' group comparing their kids' positioning when he first started with when he was older.



Obviously, that is an extreme example, but it is common for young goalies to be more comfortable closer to their net. However, it is important that they maintain appropriate depth (how far they are from the goal) in order to maximize net coverage, maintain mobility, and ultimately make saves. USA Hockey teaches the [ABC's of depth](#) (check out their video). The four depths are:

- Aggressive: beyond the crease, used when the puck is far from the net, particularly when there is little opportunity for a pass, and early in the process of defending a breakaway
- Base: feet on the edge of the crease; where goalies should be most of the time
- Conservative: midway in the crease; used when the puck is close to the net
- Defensive: On the goalline, usually on a post, used when the puck is behind the net or near the goalline

These screen captures from the USA Hockey [video](#) show the various depths:

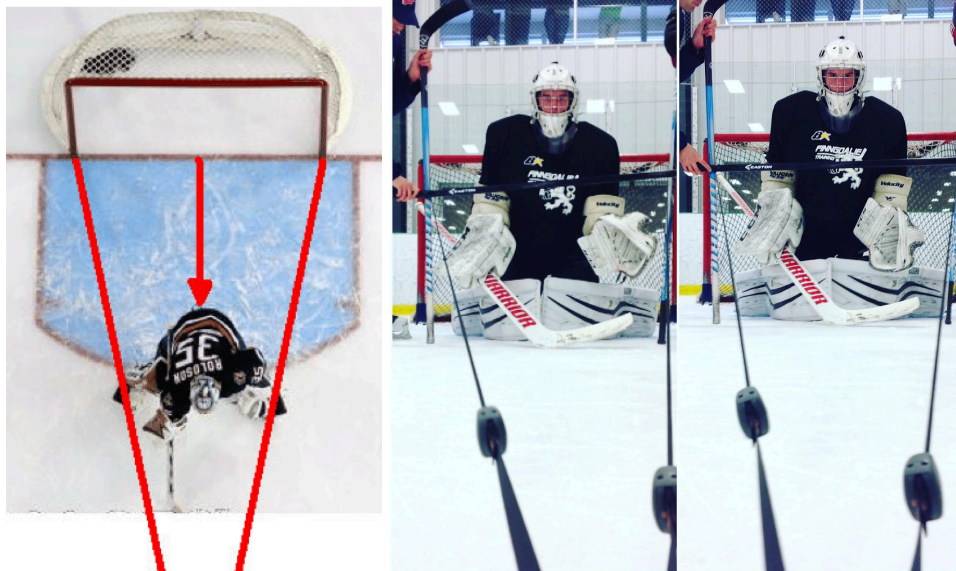


This [video](#) shows some real-game examples of exceptions to the call to play at base depth most of the time. This is a [cool drill](#) to emphasize maintaining depth.

## Box control

Box control is just a fancy term for the result of angles, squareness, and depth. The idea is for the goalie to take up as much of the net as possible. The “box” is the view of the net from the perspective of the puck. Imagine four lines drawn from the puck to the four corners of the net. For a goal to be scored, it has to stay inside the box that is created by those four lines. The more of that area the goalie blocks, the fewer paths there are for a goal to be scored.

This first image shows the effect of depth on box control. The second shows the impact of projecting your hands to fill more space.



This [page](#) has several videos that demonstrate the concept thoroughly.

## Some Deeper Cuts

If you are completely new to coaching goalies and just reading this for the first time, feel free to stop here for a while. Come back after your first few ice sessions and pick through these then. This section includes topics and terminology that you will want, but it can wait until you have solid confidence in the basics.

Items here are slightly more advanced. In several, the topics are covered because goalies on TV will be using these tools. It is important to know about them to help young goalies know when to use them and when not to.

## Post Integration

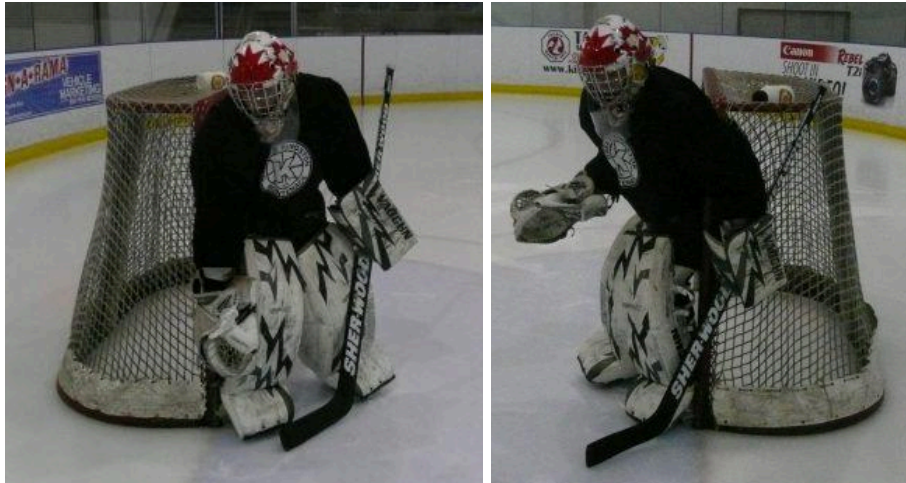
How a goalie connects to the post to “seal” it and prevent any shots from going between them and the post is called post integration. There are lots of options, nuances, and personal styles. If your goalie has developed a particular personal flare with a specialized goalie coach, you don’t need to change them. Instead, find out what they are trying to do and support it (as long as it is reasonable; if not, talk to parents and/or the goalie coach to confirm that the goalie is understanding correctly).

There are three basic post integration techniques. Goalies should master the techniques from the top down. Young goalies likely do not have the physical ability to correctly utilize the more advanced techniques, and they should primarily stick with the standing technique until their bodies mature. Trying to jump right to methods used by NHL goalies will likely be unsuccessful and raises the risk of injury to the goalie. The techniques are:

- Standing
  - Heel of the skate should be on the post with the leg pad sealed all the way up
  - On the stick side, the post-side arm is placed outside the post to keep the stick active (available to deflect passes, etc.)
  - On the glove side, different goalies like their arms in different places.
    - Some like the elbow outside the post so they keep the glove free
    - Some like their arm flat along the front of the post to seal
    - Some like their arm inside the post to use as an extra push on release
- VH (Vertical Horizontal; also called “loading the post”)
  - Post-side leg remains vertical and sealed to the post
  - Back-side leg is put flat on the ice and pulled close to the post-side leg to close the 5-hole
  - It is important to be “compact” and keep the arms in to eliminate holes
  - This should only be used when the puck is very low and close to the net
- RVH (Reverse Vertical Horizontal)
  - The post-side leg is laid flat on the ice with the skate against the post
  - The back-side leg remains vertical
  - The goalie must lean their body across their post-side leg to seal the post with their torso; this is difficult and strains hips and knees
  - This should only be used when the puck is very low and close to the net
  - It can be difficult to recover from the RVH, particularly for less athletic goalies
  - Overuse of the RVH is common, even in the [NHL](#) — be mindful not to use it except when it is appropriate

In all cases the goalie should be ready to move quickly on a pass or as the puck comes out from behind the net. Focus on getting on angle and then gaining depth for where the puck ends up.

Here are some examples of the various techniques:  
Standing:



VH:



RVH:



Some great articles:

- [Very thorough](#) analysis of RVH and appropriate use cases
- [Discussion](#) of the VH and when to use (and not)
- [Discussion](#) of options for where to place the trapper when integrated
- [Discussion](#) of options for where to place the stick when integrated
- [Compilation](#) of examples of bad decisions to use the RVH
- [Video](#) on the VH

## Tracking behind the net

A difficult area for many young goalies is tracking the puck behind the net. At a young age, they have a tendency to turn and face the puck, leaving their backs facing where a shot may ultimately come from. Once they learn to always stay facing out from the net, it takes time and practice to get comfortable with when to move from one post to the other. Move too early, and they are wasting energy, losing track of the puck, and creating opportunities for shooters by bouncing back and forth. Move too late, and they won't reach the other post in time to stop a wrap-around.

There are a number of strategies here, and they must be tailored to each goalie. A quick goalie can afford to wait longer. An athletic goalie can change direction if the player reverses. The important factor is to work with your goalie so they *decide* when they should move. Having a plan will go a long way toward helping in this area.

One useful approach is the three-window plan for moving between posts.

1. When on the post, look over the outside shoulder to track the puck as far as you can
2. Once the puck moves out of your vision, stay on the starting post but rotate your head to look over your inside shoulder. Hold this post until there is a threat to move for a shot
3. When the puck gets close enough that it could beat you to the far post, move to the far post as quickly as possible. You will be looking over your outside shoulder (because it had been your inside shoulder), and this will now be window 1 again to hold as needed

This [video](#) shows the three windows well (the relevant section starts at 6:06, which is where the link will take you). Here are screen shots of the three windows:

Window 1



Window 2



Window 3

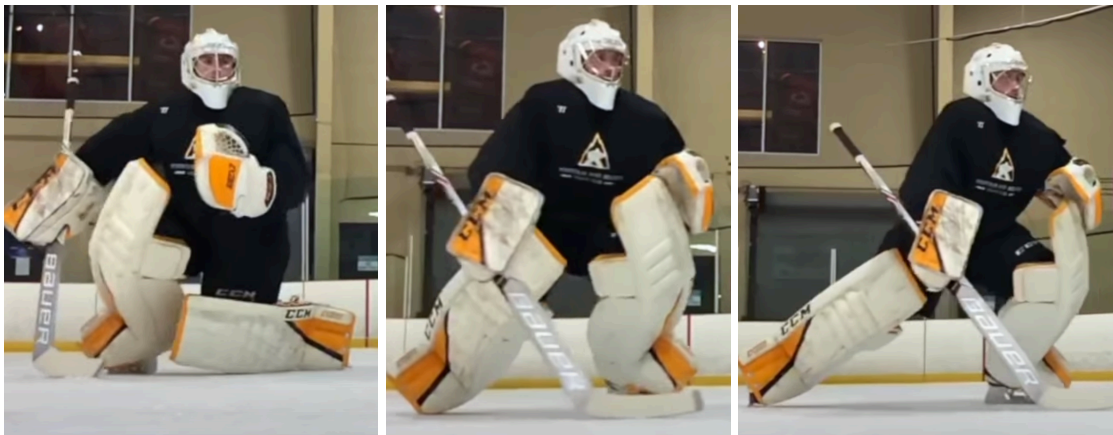


## Recovery

For a goaltender, recovery is the process of returning to their feet from the butterfly. The key component here is to move quickly from the butterfly to track the rebound or to get set for the next possible shot if there was a pass or deflection.

When a goalie is standing back up without moving, it is of relatively little importance which leg they get up first. However, if they are moving (which is common during a recovery), it is important that their “drive” leg (the leg opposite their movement) recovers first so the goalie can push as their “lead” leg (the leg in the direction they are moving) comes to the ice. So, if the goalie is moving to their right, their left leg should recover first, then, it should push as the right leg lands. If they are moving to their left, it is the right leg that should recover first.

These screen captures from this great [video](#) shows a goalie moving to his left. So, his right foot recovers first, then the left, as the push begins. The full video walks through the steps



This longer [video](#) goes through some bad and good examples.

## Save Selection

Save selection is the term used to describe the active decision by a goaltender of how they will make a save. The basic saves are butterfly, stick, glove, blocker, and body. A goaltender should watch the puck all the way in on any save, and they should be planning how they will block it. As goalies advance, they will be able to make better, faster, and more complex save selections.

## Rebound Control

Think of rebound control as analogous to cue-ball control in pool. When you are first learning pool, it is enough just to make the shot you are on without thinking about the next shot or what you want the cueball to do. As you advance, you start to think more about the next shot and

control the cueball to give yourself the best opportunity. Rebound control is the same thing. For brand-new goaltenders, focus on making the first save and then react from there. As they progress, they will start to think about how to control the rebound more and more.

When they hit this developmental step, help them to focus on getting the puck out of dangerous areas and either catching/covering or putting the puck into the corner.

This [article](#) and this [article](#) discuss several of the basic ideas.

## Butterfly Slide/Push

Butterfly slides are an advanced movement that is a key tool for any goalie to possess. Effectively, it is a push where one leg remains on the ice from the butterfly position, or if coming from standing, the leg lands on the ice as the push occurs. It allows quick movement without a full recovery and maintains low coverage throughout the movement. It also looks incredibly cool. However, it is important to remind goalies that they can still move quicker and more precisely on their feet, so a full recovery with a T-push is often a better choice.

The key components to a good butterfly slide include:

- Pushing with the full blade of the skate; goalies have a tendency to use their toe
- Keeping the lead pad rotated; if it falls on its face, it adds substantial friction
- Pushing hard and modify the size of the push depending on how far they have to go
- Using the lead leg to stop if you are oversliding your target

This [video](#) walks through the development of a butterfly slide from standing. This [video](#) talks through some basics. Here is a [video](#) that shows the mechanics for a goalie that gets higher on his toe for his push, though note that a substantial portion of his blade actually engages for the push itself.

## Puck Handling/Passing/Shooting

In today's game, goalies need to be able to play the puck. Give your goalies lots of time (and encouragement) to pass and puck handle during practice. It takes time to develop a feel for the puck, and that only happens if goalies are encouraged to try it. Their confidence will guide their decisions in games, but don't be any more upset with a bad pass or lost stickhandle from your goalie than you would be from any other player.

The currently recommended method for goaltender stickhandling is the Turco Grip. As with everything else, personal styles/preferences will play a substantial role. Work with your goalie to find what works for them and refine from there.

In the Turco Grip, the blocker hand moves to the top of the stick and the glove hand grips above the paddle. The defining characteristic of the Turco Grip is that the glove hand is inverted from how a player would grip their stick. The pocket of the glove faces up with the thumb/palm behind

the stick to provide power. This provides the best combination of power and control for most goalies.



Importantly: there is no secret to good puck handling or shooting as a goalie. The only way to get better is to do it and figure out what works for your goalie.

Here is Marty Turco himself [explaining](#) the grip and its advantages. Here's a good [article](#) on the history of the Turco Grip. Here is an [article](#) with more details on shooting techniques. Here is a cool [video](#) showing some goalie stickhandling (the first 4:30 is some other cool goalie footage, but not on stickhandling; the link will take you to 4:34).

## Playing time recommendations

USA Hockey's guidance is published in a number of places (e.g., [here](#) in the "Game Management" section and in [USA Hockey Magazine](#) on page 16) and is pushed hard in the Goalie clinics. Their rough guidance for how to rotate two goalies within a game is:

- 10U/Squirt: play half a period at a time
- 12U/Peewee: play a full period then switch or switch roughly halfway through each game
- 14U/Bantam: switch roughly halfway through each game

A key point here is that regularly rotating, especially at the middle of each period of 10U/Squirt, has a number of direct benefits. In addition to keeping goalies fresh and focused, it provides the opportunity to coach goalies during games.

In addition, here is a [great article](#) that talks about the importance of still giving several skaters the opportunity to play goalie through the Squirt/10U level. This includes emphasizing that other kids should be allowed to try the position, even if one skater wants to be a full-time goalie. This could mean one full-time goalie on the team that always plays goalie splitting time each game with a handful of skaters that would rotate through the position.

# Terminology/Glossary/Information

This section is intended to give some basic information and vocabulary to ensure you are ready to talk with your goalies, their specialized coaches, and their parents.

## Equipment

This USA Hockey [page](#) is a great resource for equipment terms, sizing, and use. It also has a great video of how to put the equipment on. I will try to pull some of that information into this document over time, but that is a good place to start.

## Vocabulary

There is a lot of jargon surrounding goaltending. It can sound like Latin when some one first mentions that “That full-right tendy got beat back door because he didn’t get off his landing gear and out of his RVH fast enough to get square and challenge the shooter.” Here are just a few of the terms you will likely encounter. I’ll try to add to these as time allows. Feel free to send any suggestions my way.

- Full-right: A left-handed goalie (holds the stick in their right hand, trapper on the left)
- Back door: the area behind the goalie when the goalie is out from their net that is open to a shooter if a pass gets through
- Landing gear: the padding on the inside of the leg pads where the goalie’s knees rest when in the butterfly