

## **What it takes to be Number One (#1)**

The old adage "In any hockey team starting line up there can only be one goalie" is true, its sometimes brutal, but that is fact. But the story doesn't end there. Far from it, it's the start and what a trip it is to becoming Number One. Here are just a few areas to consider for the journey. I have experienced a lot of these scenarios as a goalie, team manager and coach.

The road to a starting goalie position may be rocky for some and smooth for others depends upon the situation. There are definite attributes, characteristics and competencies that set apart the elite goalie from the backups. All goalies must understand how much sweat it takes to stay ahead of the competition and comprehend that they must keep learning new techniques to keep up with a changing game.

When goalies are playing in youth teams, there is often little competition for positions. If the goalie is the only one in his or her team, he can get very complacent. The goalie may have an extremely low goals-against ratio, which makes parents, coaches, or team-mates believe that he is the next coming of Ian Taylor (GB), Ronald Janssen (NL) or Simon Mason (GB). The only drawback to this situation is that the goalie may only be facing 3 shots a game and the strikers are not great hitters of a ball. The goalie thinks he is terrific and feels "entitled" to the starting place for the next season because he had great stats the season before. Once you start to believe your own press clippings, your downfall is imminent.

The first step towards earning a starting place is to realise that it must be earned. Too many people in our society/culture want sporting rewards handed to them because they feel they are entitled to them. The world does not owe us any favours. Just because you once showed some talent doesn't mean a coach will fall down and kiss your feet to beg you to play for him.

Attitude means everything!

A good work ethic may allow a less talented goalie to keep out a goalie with more raw talent or honed technique. There are hoards of talent rich, but attitude poor goalies that never see the pitch time they want and at the level they demand. These head cases are quick to blame the coach, the defenders, the positioning, and the rotation of the earth, the Spice Girls or the club members for poor performances. If you are always looking for excuses for goals against or defeats, you are not starting goalie material because you don't have the guts to look at your game honestly.

Goalies are leaders and if you are always blaming someone else for your misfortunes, you don't have the character to handle responsibility of a starting place in the line up.

Are you selfish? Do you put your needs before those of the team's? Some goalies are more concerned with their save percentage or goals-against-averages than they are about contributing to winning games. Some of the best goalies in history in all types of team games have had high goals-against-averages, but, great winning records because they made saves at key points in games without worrying about how many shots have already gone in. Would you rather win 5-4 or lose 1-0?

To stay ahead of goalies, who want your job, you must constantly be willing to learn and improve yourself in physical and mental aspects of the game.

Ask yourself the following and reflect on each point:

- If you are complacent, other goalies who aren't afraid to try and develop new things will pass you by. Do you do the same things all the time to the point that you become predictable?
- Can you accept constructive criticism without becoming defensive?
- Do you play and train as hard in practice as you do in games?
- Are you in solid athletic shape or do you spend your days as a couch potato when you could be getting real exercise? Hockey alone won't make you an elite athlete, but, if you are an elite athlete, you will have a greater chance of becoming a great goalie.
- How well do you handle adversity?
- Can you concentrate for an hour without making a save and then in the 68th minute make a corner save to win the game?
- If you have a bad game, do you sulk and go into yourself and shut the lights out?
- A starting goalie should be foaming at the mouth to get into the next game to show that it was just an off day and nothing more. In a close game, it is the one who dares the opposition to score, and not the goalie praying that no one will shoot at him who will be Number One?
- Great goalies want to be the last line of defence. They thrive on pressure and love to be in the goal with a game on the line.
- Top goalies don't even like their team-mates to beat them in practice, let alone games.

## **Summary**

1. To earn a starting place, you must expect to work hard to beat out the other goalies.
2. Once you gain the job, you must work hard to keep anyone else from gaining on you, though you have to work with them so that the team has quality goalies.
3. Be a positive influence on your team-mates, be the first on the turf and the last off, drive yourself hard in all drills and practices and expect to make the big saves against all opponents no matter how weak or strong they are.
4. Use all setbacks as temporary and strive to improve.
5. Be a Leader and a Role Model
6. Have a cool exterior with a warm interior filled with desire and good attitude.

This type of attitude and work ethics will put you in line to earn the right to be the top goalie in your team, Club or Country.