

What is a GKoach and your role as one?

As hockey moves into the 21st Century, some goalies still find themselves in the Dark Ages. Most coaches ¹ are still not comfortable coaching their own goalies and are not sure where to get that level of coaching from. Some assign that task to a GKoach². The sad part about this arrangement is when a coach pays no attention to what the GKoach is teaching the goalies. Simply being a former goalie may not be enough of a credential if that coach has not been paying attention to the changing needs of today's goalies.

What exactly does the GKoach do?

He or she not only teaches techniques to the prospective goalies, but also mentors them in other aspects of their hockey lives. The GKoach helps them deal with frustration, periods of insecurity, personal problems, or advice about relationships with their peers. The GKoach is a psychologist, teacher, friend, comrade and taskmaster. A bond must be formed between the GKoach and goalies for this relationship to be successful. A coach directs the lives of twenty or so players in a practice with minimal one-on-one interaction. The GKoach deals in a one-on-one situation where communication skills are essential. Though groups will sometimes include up to 6 goalies, the focus will be with an individual in the main during that time.

How exactly does the bond of respect and camaraderie begin?

When first dealing with the goalies, the GKoach should sit down with them and go over his or her philosophy on goalieing³:

- ask the goalies how they position themselves to handle different game situations.
- ask the goalies what they expect of their GKoach.
- establish lines of communication and let them know that they can talk to you confidentially without the fear of you running to the coach and discussing the situation further.

Once you begin pre-season on-turf training, don't be heavy-handed in your coaching. Observe the goalies before you try to implement your style. At all levels your job is to troubleshoot and fine-tune their game and natural attributes, not make them into a new version of you. Always compliment them on their save attempts and offer another way of handling the same scenario. If you become combative and force the goalies to do things they don't want to do, you will alienate them. Your job is to let them see the ramifications of their actions and to open their minds to other ideas. Increased knowledge will always lead to improved goalieing. You become a facilitator at times.

By mid-season, the GKoach should have a pretty good rapport with the goalies. If someone watched you at practice, they might think all you do is stand around. What that person doesn't see is the eye contact and the body language between you and your goalies. Paragraphs of dialogue can be exchanged with a nod, look, or hand gesture. They instinctively know what you expect from them and don't need you hovering over them. Sometimes you create your own language and phrases unique to your group, which is great fun!

In the late season, the GKoach puts the goalies on a development plan, but also mustn't forget the need to ensure that there is something in place to keep the basic competencies tuned. Focus on one or two key areas of their game that needs work and correct them with drills that reinforce the correct techniques. Don't make any drastic changes in their game or kit unless absolutely necessary. You want to keep things simple so they can be confident and ready for the post-season break and when you get back to pre-season training a lot of the peripheral work has been completed.

Communication and respect for their individual personalities are two essential ingredients to being a good GKoach. Your goalies should always have objectives in the drills they do at practice. Simply blasting balls at the goalie is not acceptable. They should always control rebounds, be in position with the body under control, force attackers to make mistakes, and learn to instinctively read the plays that approach the goal.

Being a GKoach is demanding and you must be with them on a regular basis. Once a month is not enough. You must make the commitment to them if you expect them to commit to you. Take pride in being a GKoach because the rewards of mentoring athletes of all ages are many.

¹ Coach refers to Team Coach, someone responsible for performance of whole team

² GKoach™ is the **panda hockey** term for a Goalkeeping Coach

³ Goalieing is the **panda hockey** term for Goal Keeping