50 years of goaltending history (in 500 words or less)

In the beginning, Jacques Plante wrote the book – literally – on goaltending: strict standup fundamentals that influenced three generations of netminders, with the Flyers Bernie Parent in the mid-seventies being the most accomplished and obvious disciple. Parent's counterpoint contemporaries were Ken Dryden and Tony Esposito – both preferring to play on their knees, taking up space, focusing on low shots. They were both descendents of the first butterfly stylist, Glen Hall, who himself borrowed the bottom-net-priority philosophy from a guy he saw in the American Hockey League.

The shootout 80's took its toll on goalies, as the offensive side of the game evolved, increasingly incorporating side-to-side plays and drop passes to defensemen jumping up and joining the attack. Goaltending techniques remained divided and still mostly self-taught, with strict stand up practitioners like Greg Millen adhering to Plante's teachings and floppers being represented best by the economical Mike Liut and the athletic and agile Grant Fuhr. These guys provided the bridge to the fully adjusted netminders of today – the generation sacrificed to arrive at what Russian-great Vladislav Tretiak already knew. Tretiak brought both styles together – playing big with his upper body, while protecting the low corners with his pads forming a 'V'. Tretiak also introduced a change in priorities – the need to consider the offensive player on the weak side, rather than zeroing in solely on the puck carrier.

Tretiak's controlled 'v-style' – playing a little deeper in the crease to protect against the cross-ice pass – is now the norm in the NHL, adopted by virtually everyone and turned into an art form by Patrick Roy. Roy has further refined Tretiak's mechanics on plays in tight by playing neither the shot nor the pass, choosing to play percentages only by spreading out and taking away as much net as possible. Tretiak influenced Ed Belfour's development as well, working with him in the early '90's in the Blackhawks organization as the team's goaltending instructor. Belfour acknowledges the impact by wearing #20 – Tretiak's number as a player in the USSR. The non-linear, free-flowing attack that emerged from Europe in the '80's really took shape in the NHL during the '90's, and now over 30% of the players in the league hail from overseas.

It makes complete sense then that European trained netminders are now making their mark on today's NHL – foreshadowed by Tretiak for the first time in North America during the historic 1972 summit series between Canada & the USSR. Look no further than Dominik Hasek, Roman Cechmanek and Evgeni Nabokov for proof that goaltending truly has gone global.

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