Down, but not Out

Most goalies today play the 'Butterfly' or V-style. Dropping to the ice on the inside edges of the goal pads — knees together — and fanning their legs post-to-post to take away as much of the lower net as possible isn't a new concept in goaltending. From Glenn Hall to Tony Esposito and Vladislav Tretiak, some of the best goalies ever have relied on the leg-V as a practical and effective way to stop pucks. The difference is that those Hall-of Famers were the exception, whereas today the V-style is the method most employed.

The base relies on many of the same positioning fundamentals as the stand-up style, particularly hand and stick positioning. They remain in almost the same location, whether the netminder is in a normal stance, or in the ready 'V'. The static hand and stick positioning is essential to 'playing big' with the upper body – a key component for today's V-style practitioners. The combination of denying the lower corners with the leg spread and eliminating as much of the upper net as possible with an upright upper body means the goalie's odds of success are greatly increased. The offensive player sees less net and therefore has to be finer with the shot, while the goalie is playing the percentages as much as he is the shooter. Today's refined butterfly stylist lets the puck find him instead of turning each scoring bid into a one-on-one confrontation.

Additionally, the current crop of V-style netminders ply their trade under full control, with economy of motion being hallmark – borrowing from the philosophy of stand-up traditionalist Jacques Plante. Just like Plante, they get to the spot and hold their ground – solidly set — patiently dictating the attacker's options. The sole difference being Plante's propensity for making the save while on his skates instead of dropping down once square to the puck. Patrick Roy has melded these techniques to an art form, copied by younger NHL 'tenders Patrick Lalime in Ottawa, Roberto Luongo in Florida and J.S. Giguere in Anaheim. The only variation on today's patented 'V' is how aggressively the goalie wants to challenge the shot. The stand-up style evolved based on linear attack styles of the era – skaters shooting off the wings and driving hard to the net — so the netminder boldly moved towards the shooter to cut down the angle. Today, cross-ice passing on offense is more prevalent, meaning netminders have become more mindful of protecting against the wide play by staying a little deeper in the net. Olaf Kolzig in Washington is a prototypical V-styler who still challenges shots by taking up position outside his crease, while Felix Potvin for the Kings spends much of his time deep in his crease, just above the goal line.

As the game has evolved, so to have puck-stopping methodologies Today's goaltenders are more effective and efficient than ever as shot-blockers, largely due to advanced 'V'-style techniques. Nevertheless, throughout the ages, the position has always had room for those who defy categorization – the guy who just finds a way to make the save. Acrobatic. Unorthadox. Athletic. Ad-libbers. The Scramblers. We'll look at their tendencies next time.

As the game has evolved, so to have puck-stopping methodologies Today's goaltenders are more effective and efficient than ever as shot-blockers, largely due to advanced 'V'-style techniques.

A graduate of Cornell University and a member of the 1984 Canadian Olympic Team, Darren Eliot enjoyed a six-year professional playing career. He is currently a radio commentator for the Atlanta Thrashers.