A season's worth of goalie skill development

The hockey season can be a long one, sometimes seemingly without enough practice time. For young goaltenders this can sometimes mean a hodgepodge approach to addressing their skill development needs. Here is a general guideline to follow when thinking of what areas your netminders should be focusing on.

Be sure to address the importance of communication with teammates from the outset, insisting that the goalies be vocal and decisive in their work with the defenseman.

Training Camp / Pre-Season / First Quarter:_

Getting in position to make saves

Early season drills should focus on footwork fundamentals, with plenty of 1-on-1 situations. Also, be sure to address the importance of communication with teammates from the outset, insisting that the goalies be vocal and decisive in their work with the defenseman.

Second Quarter:_

How saves are made

This is the time to zero in on any tendencies that may be leading to stoppable goals. Look for bad habits creeping into your goaltender's game (rebound control, pattern of goal types). Without drawing too much attention to the developing deficiency, design drills that forces your 'keeper to focus on and improve upon that area.

Third Quarter:_

Refine & improve

This is the time of year to build confidence. Drills should reinforce the strengths of your goaltender. This is also the time of year when you want to make sure the intensity level remains high. Your team may be fading mentally at this point of the season, s you want to encourage your netminder to lead the way and be the difference heading into the stretch run.

Fourth Quarter / Playoffs: _

Reading, recognizing, reacting and responding

This is when goaltenders need to focus more on the game flow and tendencies of the opposition. Drills should emphasize team play, with lots of rush drills emanating from the neutral zone and plenty of defensive-zone time working on special teams.

Overall, you want to develop your goaltender's skills as your team play improves. In the same manner, you want to improve upon weaknesses, without belaboring deficiencies. The best way to avoid negative scrutiny is by incorporating goaltending skill development into your regular practice plan. There is no need to interrupt practice and tell the team that the next drill is specifically for the goaltenders. More harm than good can come from that approach. Better to think of the goaltender's needs in the context of the team's practice agenda, keeping the drills fast paced and competitive.

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.