

Consider the Source: Dealing With Non-Goalie Coaches

Jacques Plante once said, "Only a goalie can appreciate what a goalie goes through." Goaltending is a unique position for a variety of reasons, one of the most apparent being that, despite being the single most important position on the ice, it is the position that most hockey coaches and others who are the most familiar with the game know the least about. While this can be a frustrating fact for both younger and older goalies alike, it is understandable. The vast majority of coaches at all levels spend their whole playing careers as forwards or defensemen. The skills that they have learned through a lifetime of playing the game are extremely valuable to those players whose jobs it is to run effective breakouts, forechecks, powerplays, penalty kills, ect. For goaltenders however, whose role in the sport is entirely different from every other players, this presents an issue. Despite having minimal knowledge of the goaltending position, head and assistant coaches on most teams are still tasked with managing their goalies throughout the season. Different coaches, when faced with this dilemma, deal with it differently. In this article, I'll touch on how to navigate these interactions with coaches in order to help keep these relationships positive while helping to ensure that they are less likely to have a negative impact on the goalie's ability to perform and have fun while being a part of the team.

Some coaches are able to acknowledge their deficiency when it comes to their ability to adequately analyze and offer sound advice to their goalies. I once heard of a high level college lacrosse coach who, knowing he had little positive advice to add about the position, would not even speak to his goalies about anything that they did in the crease. In regards to positioning and save making, he kept his mouth shut. While this particular coach had an advantage in this situation, namely a goalie coach on his staff, I personally believe this is the right idea that coaches who are not well versed in goalie matters should have. Coaches who allow their goalies to play their position to the best of their ability while avoiding clouding their judgement with ill-informed advice will benefit all parties involved. Instead of blindly telling a goalie that he should be more aggressive on a breakaway, for example, that coach should use his particular experience and expertise to inform his defensemen how to prevent that breakaway from happening in the first place. These coaches, almost always, are the easiest for goalies to deal with. This is not to say, however, that advice offered by coaches, when not in the form of overly harsh criticism, should be ignored. All coaches should recommend that a struggling goalie find a different way to approach situations that they are having trouble with, but offering advice to fix these problems when offered with little understanding of what the problem is not beneficial. Ideally, these problems should be brought to a qualified goalie coach who will be able to use their own expertise to offer informed solutions.

Other coaches, however, have the tendency to constantly offer unsolicited advice regardless of their experience with the position. For these coaches, every goal seems to be the fault of the goalie's positioning or style and they feel that they know precisely what the solution should be. Coincidentally, I have also discovered that these are also most frequently the types of coaches that tend to use goalies as their scapegoat for problems that arise with the team's performance. For these types of coaches, I ask that goalies always consider the source of the advice they are receiving. It can be frustrating to be sure, but it is important to take the advice with a grain of salt. Try to do what the coach is asking, but be prepared to defend your own

performance. If you think that the way you approach a situation is better, tell the coach why. It is possible to toe the line between continuing to be a player that is receptive to a coach's feedback while not allowing yourself to be pushed into playing a way you know is not right for you, and the right way to do this is different for every coach. It is important not to brush off or be entirely dismissive of the coach, even if you believe what they are saying is wrong. Like all things in youth hockey, use it as a learning experience. It will likely not be the last time in your hockey career or your life where you are asked by a superior to do something that you disagree with. Learn how to better navigate these waters and you will be better off for it in the long run, as frustrating as it might be at the time. And again, the best way to help is to get yourself a good goalie coach who knows exactly how to solve the problems you are facing. If you inform your coach that your goalie coach told you something different than what they recommended, they are usually pretty accepting of that solution.