



PREPARATION TO EVALUATIONS

Good Positioning: Middle / Set / Depth

With goaltending, positioning is the name of the game. There is no better way to summarize how important being in good position is for goaltenders. But in order to be in good position, goaltenders have to understand how angle coverage works. Angle coverage, is the foundation for good goaltending. Understanding angle coverage has as much to do with mathematics as with hockey.

This article will explain what good angle coverage is. We will touch on the three main concepts of angle coverage. In order of importance those are: middle, set, and depth. Only once the goaltenders understand these concepts, will they be able to move effectively in their crease to get in good position to stop the shot.

What is an Angle?

An angle has the shape of a triangle. It can be traced by drawing two lines from the puck to each post. The angle is completed when another line is drawn between the two goal posts.

When you look at an angle from the shooter's perspective, the angle starts narrow and gets wider as it gets closer to the net. For the shooters, the better place to take a shot from is dead in the middle of the ice. As far as they are concerned that's where the net looks the "biggest". However, as they start moving down towards the corners the net starts looking increasingly smaller.

Where to Position in the Angle in Order to be Efficient

Because of the shape an angle, starting thin at the shooter and becoming increasingly bigger down towards the goaltender, one could think that the best way for the goaltender to be efficient would be to get as close as possible from the shooter. One could think that a good position would be to stand 2 or 3 feet outside the crease and take away as much net as possible.

However, things are not as simple. If the goaltender gets that far out from his net, he may make the first save, however, this position will make it difficult from the goaltender to recover to stop a rebound. If he faces a smart player, the opponent will identify that the goaltender is too far out and instead of shooting on net, he will pass the puck to a teammate, or skate around the goalie and shoot in an empty net.

Actually, a good goaltender will look at angle coverage and positioning the other way around. He is going to want to take away as much net as possible away from the shooter, but it will not be the first thing he will have in mind. In order here is what he will first want to do:



Take Away the Middle of the Net

Taking the middle of the net is the most important aspect in order to achieve good angle coverage and good positioning. The middle of the net is located on the goal line, midway between the two goal posts. Every time he moves in his crease, weather to follow a pass or to recover to a rebound, taking away the middle of the net should be the very first thing that the goaltender has in mind.

What everybody has to understand is that by positioning himself in the middle of the net, the goaltender gives himself a chance to make to save on any shot. That is the case because when in the middle of the net, the goaltender can almost reach to both posts. This means that he could reach out to almost any shot. His chances of stopping the puck might not be as high as if he was in the middle and had established good depth, but still they are much higher than if he only had good depth but had not taken away the middle first.

When a goaltender has established good depth without first taking away the middle of the net, he will badly expose one side of the net to the shooter. Even though he his far out, he will not be able to fully reach out to the other side.

Being Set

The second point in importance for good positioning, after taking away the middle of the net, is being set. What we mean by being set is that the goaltender be completely square to the puck and stopped when the shot is being taken. Therefore, this means that when faced with the options of getting better depth and risk of not being completely set, or staying a little deeper in his crease and being completely set, the goaltender should always choose the later.

But why is that? Why should being set be more important than getting better depth? Well, there are two main reasons for this. First, only when he's stopped that the goaltender is in full control of his body and thus is in a position where he can fully control any movement he wants to make. Being set guarantees quicker and more controlled movements, which translate in more save and better rebound control.

The second reasons, is that it guarantees the goaltender better recoveries to rebounds if there is a shot and a save, or better skating execution in case of a pass. If the goaltender makes a save and he's not yet set, he will keep coming out as he's making the save. As a result after he has made the save the goaltender will probably find himself 1-2 feet outside the crease. This position will make it impossible for him to get across his crease (which he probably will have to do because he will not be able to well control his rebounds) to face a second or third shot. Goaltenders preferring being too aggressive with their depth will also put themselves more at risk of having the shooter decide to pass the puck to a teammate instead of shooting.



Depth

Depth comes third in importance for good positioning. Goaltenders need to be in the middle of the net and set in order to maximize their efficiency. However, a goaltender will only be able to reach his full potential once he has the ability to get optimal depth on the great majority of the plays they face. Getting optimal depth requires tremendous skating abilities. It means that the goaltender is quick enough in his movements that he barely ever places himself at risk of not being set when trying to achieve his optimal depth on a play. By achieving optimal depth, the goaltender will give very little net to the shooter. This will result in the goaltender having to make small and simple movements to make the saves and really force the shooters to execute great shots to beat the goaltender.

This leads us to say that save should be the easier part of goaltending. All the tough work is done trying to get in position, working hard to achieve the optimal depth. A good skating ability only comes with hard work and good technical execution. Skating is the part of the game that each goaltender should work the most on, no exception, beginners and elite included. We will touch on the different staking techniques in the next chapters.

But what is optimal depth? For the great majority of the plays optimal depth will mean being at the top of the crease, toes on the red crease line. That's all the goaltender needs, to get his toes on the red crease line. There is a myth out there that goaltenders should try to get outside their crease in order to take away as much net as possible. This brings on 2 big problems. First trying to get outside the crease will in a lot of cases translate into a goaltender off set to face a shot. We have already touched upon the consequences of not being set for shot. Even if he his set when he faces the shot, there is no way the goaltender will be in any position to recover to a rebound if he his 2 feet outside his crease. Therefore, while only very slightly increasing his chances on the first shot, the goaltender will dramatically reduce his chances on the rebound or on a pass. And when most goals scored at the high levels are on rebounds, this could lead to major problems for the goaltender.