

Importance of Rotating Goalies in Youth Ice Hockey

Rotating your starting goalie at the youth hockey level is a controversial topic. As the head coach you obviously want to give your team the best chance to win, and when you have two goalies who are at different stages of their development it makes sense to play the goalie who you have confidence in. In saying that we also need to remember the bigger picture. The only league in North America considered NOT a developmental league is the NHL. All other leagues should be geared towards development, especially at the youth levels.

Having a consistent rotation (game to game) with your goalies will give each of them the opportunity to get the best practice of all, playing the game. Practice is great for development, but in order to really develop your goaltenders a coach needs to put them in an uncontrolled environment like a hockey game. This is where the goalies make reads on their own, based on what they see, not what they are told to look for. Only in a hockey game can a goalie truly feel the flow of a hockey game and pick up on patterns that occur constantly. Game experience is crucial.

When your goalies know they will have a chance to start games it motivates them to work hard in practice and maintain a positive attitude. It boosts their confidence and encourages them to support their team mates. You do not want your goalies hoping the team or other goalie will fail in order for them to get an opportunity. With the assurance of playing time you create a healthy competitive environment.

Alternating your goalies can also help your team adapt to different game strategies. Different goalies will have varying strengths and weaknesses. Based on the opponent, taking advantage of each goalie's skill set can be advantageous on how your team defends game to game. It gives your team a reason to listen to their coach that isn't based off X's and O's.

Most importantly rotating your goalies will negate all possible problems you could face with parents. Parents can be very sensitive when their kid is not playing based off the opinion of a coach. To avoid this issue, rotate the goalies every game, regardless of the importance.

