

## 5. MENTAL PREPARATION

So much of being a good goalie is related to the mental aspects of the game. Very often, especially at the higher levels where all the goalies have the same basic skills, the key separating factor among the goalies might just be how well a goalie can play consistently, and how a goalie responds in stressful or negative situations.

Here are five tips I use in games and practices to consistently try and play at the best level I can:

**1. Communication.** I play better when I am complimented and when my teammates and coaches make me feel they have confidence in me, so I try and do the same for my teammates. When my defence makes a nice check, I shout out a compliment. When my centre has the ring and has two forecheckers on her, I let her know she's got two on and to skate. The more I talk in my crease to my teammates, the more I am in the game. The more my talking is positive and encouraging, the better I feel about how the game is going as well because I'm focusing on the good things that are happening.

When I disagree with a referee's call, I tell my teammates not to worry about it and we'll kill the penalty. If a teammate makes a mistake, I tell them it's ok and we'll get the next one. How I teach myself to respond out loud to my teammates in these situations then has a direct effect on how I respond inside my head when something good or bad happens on the ice.

**2. Dealing with Frustration and Moving On.** If I let in a "bad" goal, or even a "good" goal, or if the other team is in the crease and doesn't get called, or if the referee calls another penalty and we have a 3 on 2 against us for a long time - these are all situations that are frustrating, but they are also things that have just happened and are now in the past.

It's important to recognize what has just happened and how you feel, then to quickly try your best to let these frustrations go so that you aren't thinking about them anymore and can focus on what's happening in the present. Always thinking about what has just happened is a distraction that you don't need. Learn from what happened, figure out how to improve, and move on so you're ready to go.

**3. Body Language.** As a goalie, we're generally all alone in our crease. Whenever the ring ends up in our net, or if something happens in our end, usually people on both teams and fans in the stands will be looking at us. Slamming your stick on the ice after a goal, throwing up your hands, lifting your head towards the sky, or yelling negative comments towards the refs, the other team, or even our own team will often be seen by everyone in the rink. The other team will get extra pleasure and incentive knowing they have gotten under your skin, and your own teammates might take on your negative reactions and let it affect their own play.

It's important as a goalie to be in control of not only our emotions, but also our body language so that we look like we're confident and ready for the next shot. Goalies without confidence sit back in their net, don't challenge as much, and generally look "small" in the net. You can tell when a goalie is "feeling it" and is ready to go, and that generally starts with her body language. If something bad has just happened, controlling your body language is a step towards helping you be positive, quickly move on and being ready for the next shot.

**4. Key Word to Refocus Myself.** Goalies don't get to go to the bench to sit down, take a shift to rest, then get themselves ready for the next shift. We have to be ready right away if the ring is in our end. It helps me to have a key word or two to help bring me back from a goal or frustrating situation so that I can quickly come back into the right mind frame and be ready to go.

Each person might have a different key word, but the more you use that as a refocusing tool, the better you will be at shifting gears from a negative situation to quickly be ready for what comes at you next.

**5. Remember Why I Play.** A quote from Phyllis Sadoway - "Go out there and have fun"! We play sports because we enjoy them. When I'm in a big game and feeling nervous, or when I'm frustrated with what is going on in the game, I try and remember that I'm playing Ringette because I love the sport. I love hanging out with my teammates and friends. I love going on trips and meeting new people. I love competing, and I really love doing well and being noticed.

I try to keep all that in mind when I play - to just enjoy it when the ring is in my end and I get to see what I can do in my crease to make the saves when needed. Playing Ringette is so much better than going to school or working, so I try and remember to have fun when I get the chance to step on the ice, no matter what the situation.

### **Specific Game Mental Preparation**

Depending on who we're playing, in order to prepare myself for the game, I also like to think about and prepare to deal with the following:

1. **Specific players on the team we're playing** – who are the good shooters, where do they like to shoot, how can our defence best defend what the other team likes to do, how can our forwards best exploit the other team's defence and goalies.
2. **How I did last time we played this team** – things I did that worked, things I need to keep in mind to play at my best.
3. **First 5 minutes, last 2 minutes of a period** – I like to focus on making all the saves that come my way the first 5 minutes of each period and the last 2 minutes of the period. This focuses me away from being nervous to get the first shot, and instead makes me more determined and ready to shut the door at the start. It also reminds me to not let up as a period is coming to a close in case our team has a quick, last minute break down.
4. **Distraction control** – consciously realize all the things that I am thinking about that don't relate to the game – who is in the stands, how important the game is, who is on the other team, if I'm feeling tired or sick, if I just had a game where I let in some goals, all the new things I learned at the practice before and am working on – recognize all these outside distractions, then consciously put them aside to clear your mind and be ready to just play.
5. **Building my confidence** – reminding myself of the things I've done to get ready for the game, that I'm prepared to play well, thinking of past games where I've done well and made neat saves, recognizing that I've let in goals in the past but I am still a good, solid goalie who can go out and play with confidence (even if I need to fake the confidence a bit at the beginning of a game til I get more comfortable in my net).