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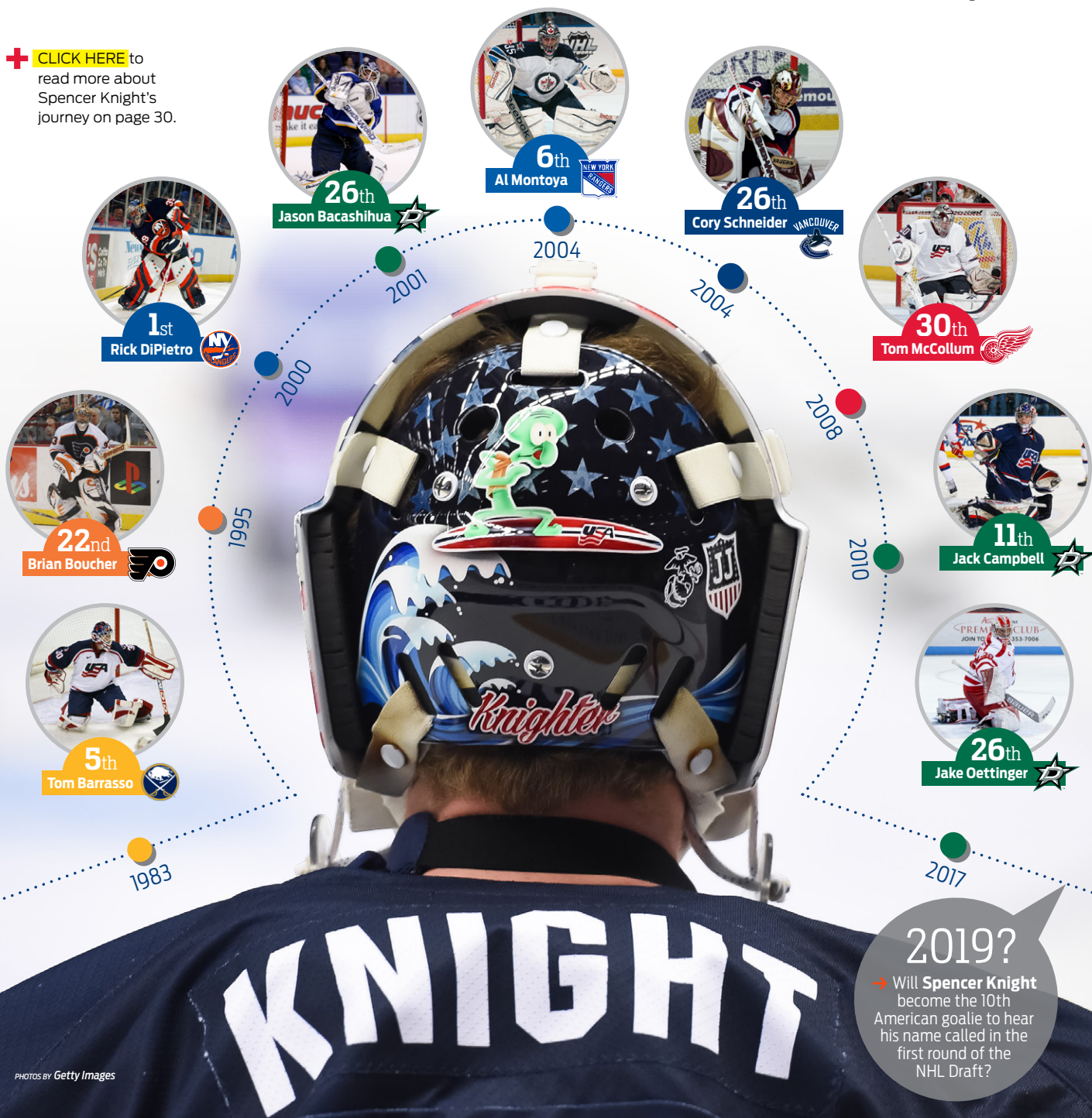


GOAL RUSH

American Goalies Picked In The First Round

SPENCER KNIGHT will look to become only the 10th American-born goaltender selected in the first round when the 2019 NHL Draft takes place in Vancouver, British Columbia, on June 21-22. Here are the other Americans to hear their name called in the first round, along with where they were selected and the team that picked them.

+ [CLICK HERE](#) to read more about Spencer Knight's journey on page 20.



2019?

→ Will **Spencer Knight** become the 10th American goalie to hear his name called in the first round of the NHL Draft?



AHL By JEFF CARPENTER

Nedeljkovic Playing Big Between The Pipes

"I think Ned's an NHL goaltender ... He's working extremely hard to get there and I don't think anything is going to stop him."

— MIKE VELLUCCI,
Carolina Checkers
head coach

It's no secret that larger goaltenders are currently en vogue. Look no further than the trio of this year's Vezina Trophy finalists, including 6-foot-4 netminders Robin Lehner and Andrei Vasilevski, and 6-foot-7 behemoth Ben Bishop.

One level below the NHL sits the American Hockey League, and for now, Alex Nedeljkovic. The Carolina Hurricanes' "goalie of the future" won the Aldege "Baz" Bastien Memorial Award this season as the Most Outstanding Goaltender. Despite being just a shade over 6-foot-0, Nedeljkovic proved his value on a consistent basis.

"The bigger the game, the better he plays," said Carolina Checkers head coach Mike Vellucci. "I have the utmost confidence in him."

Nedeljkovic is among a subset of smaller goaltenders that have been able to carve out a path in professional hockey due to their exceptional athleticism. What the Parma, Ohio, native lacks in size he makes up for in his athleticism, aggressive playing style and hockey IQ.

Those traits help him stand out in what has become a big man's game. Of the 65 goaltenders to play more than 15 games in the NHL this season, only eight of them stand at or under 6-feet-0.

The 23-year-old finished with a 34-9-5 record and a 2.26 goals-against average, which led the league as the Checkers finished with 110 points, the most of any AHL club.



→ Alex Nedeljkovic helped the Charlotte Checkers win the Calder Cup as the champions of the American Hockey League.

Joining the Hurricanes organization after being drafted in the second round in the 2014 NHL Draft, Nedeljkovic has had a profound impact in Charlotte as the franchise's

career leader in wins (73) and shutouts (10). If he continues on that path it won't be long before Nedeljkovic makes the move three hours east of Charlotte to the Hurricanes home in Raleigh.

"I think Ned's an NHL goaltender," Vellucci said. "He does so many good things from moving the puck to his hockey IQ, to being a good teammate and a good leader. He's working extremely hard to get there and I don't think anything is going to stop him." ☆



GOALIES

TAKING GOALIE DEVELOPMENT TO ANOTHER LEVEL

→ **USA HOCKEY HAS RESTRUCTURED** its approach to goaltending development and education in order to help more American goaltenders reach their maximum potential and achieve success on the international stage.

The new four-pronged approach includes a combined national junior and women's national team goaltending camp, the Warren Strelow boys goaltending camp for 15-year-olds, and separate sessions specifically for goaltenders at National Select Festivals for boys and girls each summer.

"We're excited to roll out this new program, which we feel takes a more streamlined and targeted approach to goaltending development," said Thomas Speer, USA Hockey's national goalie coach.

"With our main goal of sustaining high performance on the international stage at the forefront, we've identified areas for growth in our planning to create new programming that will be more effective for identifying and developing talent, while providing athletes with world-class resources to improve their game."

The new program kicked off at USA Hockey Arena in mid-May as several collegiate and postgraduate female goaltenders, and the top junior male goaltenders in the nation came together for four days of specialized training and mentoring to support their long-term development.

Among the 12 female attendees were the three goaltenders with the 2018 U.S. Women's Olympic Team, Nicole Hensley, Alex Rigsby and Maddie Rooney.

The men's side included the duo of Spencer Knight and Cameron Rowe that backstopped the U.S. Under-18 Men's National Team to a bronze medal at the 2019 IIHF Under-18 Men's World Championship, along with Drew DeRidder, Isaiah Saville and Dustin Wolf, who participated in the USA Hockey All-American Prospects Game.

A number of high-level coaches will join the coaching staffs working various camps, including Bob Corkum, head coach of the U.S. Women's National Team; David Lassonde, an assistant coach for the 2020 U.S. National Junior Team; Jared Waimon, goaltending coach for Quinnipiac University; and Jeff Salajko, goaltending coach for the Detroit Red Wings. ★

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COLLEGE By JEFF CARPENTER

Prime Time Primeau Wins Richter Award

The honors keep rolling in for Cayden Primeau, who capped off his prolific season at Northeastern University by taking home the Mike Richter Award, which is given to the most outstanding goaltender in NCAA Division I Men's Ice Hockey.

"It was great to meet [Richter] and a really huge and humbling honor," said Primeau, who posted a 2.09 goals-against average and .933 save percentage in his sophomore campaign.

His 25 wins were third most in the NCAA and tied for the most in a season in program history. In addition, he backstopped the Huskies to the Beanpot and Hockey East Tournament titles. Primeau took home MVP honors from both tournaments.

Not only did Primeau's performance in the biggest moments of the season turn heads on the college circuit, but also on the international stage as well.

A seventh-round pick by the Montreal Canadiens in the 2017 NHL Draft, Primeau

represented the U.S. National Junior Team, culminating in a silver medal in Vancouver. The Voorhees, N.J., native emerged as the starting goaltender of the team and finished with a 4-0-0-1 record, 1.61 goals-against average and .936 save percentage.

His 25 wins were third most in the NCAA and tied for the most in a season in program history.

The 6-foot-3 netminder capped off the year with the U.S. Men's National Team for the IIHF World Championship. Although he didn't play, Primeau enjoyed the opportunity to soak in the experience and learn from a pair of former Boston College goalies, New Jersey Devils goaltender Cory Schneider and Vancouver Canucks backstop Thatcher Demko.

"Being able to learn from Thatcher and Cory is something special," Primeau said. "I want to use that as motivation going into the summer, getting ready for next year. They're at the level I want to get to, so I just want to figure out how they prepare, take all of that in and do the little things that make them get to that level." ★

COMMUNITY

Decker Offers Big Assist To Grow Girls' Game

► **Brianna Decker** wowed the crowd at the NHL All-Star Skills Competition when she demonstrated the Premier Passing drill in a faster time than the eventual winner, Leon Draisaitl of the Edmonton Oilers.

And what she did afterward was even more impressive. Decker, a member of the 2018 U.S. Women's Olympic Team that struck gold in PyeongChang, South Korea, parlayed the \$25,000 in prize money she was given by the NHL to create the Brianna Decker Endowment for Girls Hockey.

The fund, which will be administered through the USA Hockey Foundation, will provide grants to 8 & Under and 10 & Under female hockey programs within the Wisconsin Amateur Hockey Association. The goal in the future is to extend the program into other parts of the country.

Funds will be used exclusively to develop programs focused on increasing female youth participation in hockey by alleviating costs around ice and equipment, advertising and marketing, and overall development.

The first grant will be awarded to the Waukesha County Youth Hockey Association, the organization where Decker grew up playing.

"I'm so excited to be able to create a fund that will help give more girls access to the sport that has given me so much," said the Dousman, Wis., native. "Growing up a Waukesha Warhawk, I'm especially proud to be able to give back to the organization that helped foster my love of the game. I can't wait to see the impact it will have for the next generation."



Brianna Decker



Five Ideas To Improve Your Goaltending

→ By Keith Allain

A goaltender in hockey is the single most important position in all of team sports. Still, many coaches are uncomfortable working with their goalies. We have all been to clinics and listened to great discussions regarding the technical aspects of goaltending.

Hopefully this discussion will give you some concrete practical applications to improve the skills of goaltenders of all ages and skill levels.

1 Skating

Skating is the single most important skill for playing goal. While you may not log as many miles around the rink as a forward or defenseman, a goaltender's skating skills are essential in playing well between the pipes.

Coaches need to help their goaltenders with their skating every day. That can be done through drills or through exercises that improve movement around the crease.

A goalie must be able to move well while maintaining a good "ready position," minimizing any holes for a shooter to aim at.

Concentrate on quality repetitions to create proper muscle memory.

2 Positioning

A sliding two-pad save or lunging glove save may look flashier than a shot that is drilled into a goaltender's midsection, but it's likely caused by poor positioning. A well-positioned goalie has a better chance of being hit by a shot.

You want your goalie to be centered, square and out on an angle.

You must be constantly aware of your goalie's positioning during games and practices, and create drills that work on staying square to the shooter.



Develop measurable standards or goals for each game to see where progress is made and what are the greatest areas that need improvement.

3 Make Practice "Goalie Friendly"

A proper warm up is important. Start games and practices with drills that help a goaltender get loose and gain confidence. Remember, warm up drills are meant to warm up the goaltender, not to practice goal scoring. Tell your skaters to get their shots on net.

Make shooting drills as game like as possible. Provide traffic, rebound opportunities, shooters under pressure with options, and competition. Your whole team will benefit from practicing in this manner.

4 Help Your Goalie Evaluate His/Her Performance

Believe it or not, there are valuable lessons to be learned when giving up a goal. Take advantage of them by talking with your goaltenders about what they did right and wrong on the play. A goaltender may have executed all the right moves, put herself in the proper position to make the save and then forgot to close the five-hole. It's important to stress the positives as well as point out the negatives.

Encourage an honest dialogue to get your goalie thinking about and questioning her thought process. Analyze situations that arose in the game. What did the goalie see? What, if anything, might she have done differently?

Develop measurable standards or goals for each game to see where progress is made and what the greatest areas are that need improvement.

5 Develop A Work Ethic

Goaltenders' work ethic is often overlooked. Many times coaches allow their goalies to be lazy. It's your responsibility to demand consistency in terms of effort.

Your goalie must be the team leader in setting the work standards for the team. By competing hard for every shot, your goalie challenges his or her teammates to be better every day, and also improves his or her own skills. ☆

Keith Allain is a former goaltender at Yale University who is now in his 19th season as the head coach at his alma mater.

ROCS



*
Craig Anderson
has been the
model of class and
consistency during
some trying times
as the Ottawa
Senators continue a
rebuilding process.

K OLID



In Both His Personal And Professional Life, Craig Anderson Stands Tall In The Face Of Adversity By JEFF CARPENTER

THE QUIET AND FIERCELY INTENSE COMPETITOR silently stood alone in the corridors of Rogers Place in Edmonton. Hunched over and leaning on his stick for support, Craig Anderson waited for the announcement of first star of the game after posting a 37-save shutout.

The Park Ridge, Ill., native emerged from the tunnel and received a rare congratulatory ovation for a visiting goaltender, including an embrace from then-Oilers netminder Cam Talbot. Despite the Oilers loss, there was still a buzz in the building several minutes after the October 30, 2016, contest ended.

The post-game accolades notwithstanding, Anderson's mind was elsewhere, with his wife and mother of his two children, Nicholle, who days earlier had been diagnosed with late stage nasopharyngeal carcinoma, a rare throat cancer. Anderson left the team for a few days to be with her before she prompted him to return.

"Any moment that holds an emotional bond, I think sticks with you," Anderson recalled. "That Edmonton game, Nicholle told me to fly back, 'the team needs you.' You go there and have a game like that, Cam Talbot goes out there on the ice and is clapping for you. It's stuff like that that you remember."

That night is one of the fondest memories of Anderson's career, one that has spanned 16 seasons with four NHL teams. He's spent the last nine in Canada's capital of Ottawa, playing in 401 games with the Senators and is the franchise leader with 191 wins.

The acknowledgement of the Oilers faithful also provided a glimpse of the support from the hockey community and how it resembles one big family that looks out for one another when times are tough.

"When you break it down, it's such a small community," Anderson said. "There's lots of players that have come and gone that reached out. Players that I never even knew they knew who I was, reached out. You get gift baskets from the wives and girlfriends. The community is so close and with a moment like that, that's when you realize we're all looking out for each other, even though we're battling each other on a nightly basis."

In addition to the support of her family, Nicholle felt equally blessed to have the hockey community backing her as she began the process of chemotherapy.

"The support was amazing," she said. "Getting through it to where I am now, I don't think people really understand that hockey is a big family. Everybody is connected to each other and people really care about each other, even on the inside, on the outside."

Anderson took one more leave of absence in December and January to be with his wife. When he returned to the ice on Feb. 11, over two months between games, he posted another shutout in a 33-save performance against the New York Islanders.

"When he took the leave of absence, I personally was worried for him," Nicholle said. "You know the guys in hockey, they all live it and breathe it since they were young. So, when he left, I knew where his heart was at and it was so big for him to even do that."

"I think I personally struggled because I was in treatment and I'd see him watching the hockey game, and he's like 'No Nicholle, I'm fine, I'm fine.' But I could see it in his eyes that he was doing the right thing because he loves our family and he loves me. But I think for me, him leaving the game was so much deeper."

After backstopping the Senators to within a goal of reaching the Stanley Cup Final—Ottawa lost in double overtime of Game 7 of the Eastern Conference Final against Pittsburgh—Anderson was

awarded the Bill Masterton Trophy as the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to ice hockey.

* * *

FAST FORWARD TO PRESENT DAY and Nicholle is two years cancer free. Craig is still with the Senators, putting his competitive fire to the test every night as he tends the twine for a team deep in the midst of rebuilding process. Their mindsets and perspective forever changed from what they've been through as Anderson completes the latter stages of his NHL career.

"[Nicholle's battle] was the moment when I was like, stop stressing over it. Good game, bad game, doesn't matter. You go home, hug your wife, hug your kids and the sun comes up the next day."

CRAIG ANDERSON

"Maybe the purpose was for him to learn how to step back from it all and appreciate the game even more in a deeper purpose," Nicholle said. "After I was diagnosed and he did come back, he told me that 'Nicholle, I'm learning how to leave it on the ice and not let it affect me anymore.'"

"In the bigger picture, that's great because I know Craig as a goalie. When we first got married and he'd lose, he'd stay up all night replaying that goal in his head. Mentally it would bother him. When the team loses, the fans all blame the goalie."

Anderson doesn't deserve to shoulder the blame in Ottawa. This past season, he finished with a 3.51 goals-against average and .903 save percentage. His numbers are inflated from the number of chances he would have to turn aside, as Ottawa allowed a league-high 35.7 shots per game.

"I certainly learned how he was able to handle adversity this season at times," said NHL veteran goalie Mike McKenna, who was Anderson's running mate for part of the year in Ottawa.

"There were moments where he was seeing 40 to 45 shots a game. He'd stand in there after every game, talk to the media and face the music. He'd play an unbelievable game and still allow three or four goals, a scenario which is incredibly frustrating as a goalie. Outwardly to the media, he never let that be a storyline. It was always positive and always trying to get the team in a better place. He's someone that we can all learn from."

* * *

NOW 38, ANDERSON HAS BUILT an impressive NHL resume. He's played in more than 600 games, and should he grab 24 wins next season, would pass Mike Richter with the fifth-most wins by an American-born goaltender.

As the 6-foot-2, 185-pound goaltender has gotten older, his training regime has changed to best equip him for the grind of a starting goaltender's workload over the course of an NHL season.

"I would say my training has changed drastically over the start to the finish of my career," Anderson said. "My first three or four years in the offseason were a big learning curve in how hard you need to train. The next eight or nine years were hard offseasons where you were training really hard and trying to get stronger."

"Now, once you get to my age, you just don't recover like you used to. It's more of just maintaining, staying healthy and making sure you don't get hurt."

A large portion of that offseason training occurs at home in Coral Springs, Fla., with Nicholle, Jake, 7, and Levi, 5. Anderson enjoys the family time and is currently coaching his son's baseball team. He also continues to run a goaltending camp in his native Illinois.

"Giving back to the community and giving back to the kids is something that I really enjoy doing, seeing the kids learn and seeing them smile," Anderson said.

"Something clicks in their head when you tell them something and all of a sudden it alters their game completely just from a one-week goalie camp. It's like man, I can give back to the hockey world. Hockey in general has given me so much, that you feel like you owe it back."

* * *

NICHOLLE RECENTLY SURPRISED CRAIG with a trip to the Indy 500 for his birthday. It was the perfect gift for a track rat who grew up watching his father race Corvettes. He enjoys simula-



tion car racing, stays close with his brother through racing together and has an Anderson41 Motorsports partnership.

"I want to pursue it after hockey," Anderson said. "It's the next stage after hockey and is one of those things that I'm passionate with and it's where my heart is, along with hockey. You follow your heart at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what it is."

With one year left on his deal with Ottawa and still showing that he can play at a high level, it might be a few years time before the checkered flag waves on his NHL career. It's well worth the wait for an Ottawa squad filled of up-and-coming young players who lean on Anderson for his veteran leadership.

* * *

ONE SENATORS PLAYER who has appreciated the mentorship is defenseman Christian Wolanin, who represented the U.S. at the 2019 IIHF Men's World Championship.

"From the moment I got [to Ottawa] last season, he was one of the first vets to really welcome me with open arms. And he's been a great guy to me ever since," Wolanin said.

"On the ice, he's a terrific goalie. For him to be as good as he has been for so many years, especially with a tough year like this one. For him to still be that good and still continue to come to the rink every day with a good attitude says a lot about his character and the type of person that he is."



That good attitude has been put to the test over the years. He's been through a lot, from professionally, playing a full season in Chicago and then being traded to Florida and playing for their AHL team, as well as personally with helping Nicholle overcome her illness.

It's made him stronger and he's learned from it, embracing the notion of living in the moment. That can be extremely useful for a goaltender, as any mistake is magnified, especially at the NHL level.

"I wish as a younger player you'd realize it is a game and you have to let go," Anderson said. "Enjoy the moment instead of taking things home with you, over-analyzing and getting pissed off. With what Nicholle had, sometimes it takes big emotional moments to have life-changing thoughts."

While Anderson is hesitant to divulge his future plans, for now he is content to enjoy every moment. And he's happy to have Nicholle and his two sons right beside him.

"I think it's a matter of focusing on one year and seeing where things go," Anderson said "It's in the back of your mind, how far do you push it? Do you want to end with them kicking you out or do you want to end on your own terms, knowing you gave it your all and you can't give anymore?"

"You realize that 'hey, I have an opportunity to do something here that I enjoy doing and I'm going to enjoy it while I can and not have any regrets.' Just leave everything out there.

"[Nicholle's battle] was the moment when I was like, stop stressing over it. Good game, bad game, doesn't matter. You go home, hug your wife, hug your kids and the sun comes up the next day." ☆

"Getting through it to where I am now, I don't think people really understand that hockey is a big family."

- NICHOLLE ANDERSON



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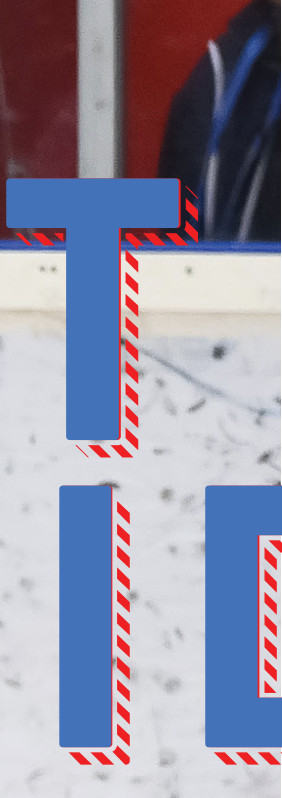
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K N I G H T



Spencer Knight's body of work in both the USHL and in international hockey has impressed scouts leading up to the NHL Draft in Vancouver.



TIDIER

Spencer Knight's Ascent Up The Ranks Of Promising American Goalies A Long Time In The Making

By CHRIS PETERS

HE'S BEEN LAUDED as the next great American goaltender, a potential first-round pick in the upcoming NHL Draft, set the career record for wins at USA Hockey's National Team Development Program, and it seems like it's only the beginning.

He is Spencer Knight, and you're going to want to remember that name.

When Jared Waimon started working with Knight at the Darien Youth Hockey Association in Connecticut, he knew there was something special about this big 10-year-old.

"It was clear as day right away," says Waimon, the founder and lead instructor for Pro Crease Goaltending and also one of USA Hockey's goaltending development coordinators in Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Eight years after their first encounter, Knight is now an 18-year-old, 6-foot-3, nearly 200-pound goaltender. He is also the No. 1 rated goaltending prospect for the NHL Draft by most publications and projected by many scouts to be a first-round draft pick, which has become increasingly rare for a goalie.

Waimon has had a front-row seat for much of the young netminder's development.

"He was always tall for his age," Waimon recalls. "The biggest thing with him growing up, he'd get taller and he never lost coordination. All these kids go through a bump somewhere in Bantam, or prep school, because of their height and their body changing. It never happened for him. It speaks to his natural athleticism."

Knight moved on from his home town association to the Mid-Fairfield youth hockey organization, which has been a breeding ground for many national champions and top-quality players. He quickly earned the call to Avon Old Farms prep school where he immediately made an impression.

"You never see someone go from a 14U goalie to starter in prep school," Waimon says. "Even Jonathan Quick played public high school before Avon."

Knight has often been compared to Quick, not because of his playing style but because many feel he is on a similar trajectory to stardom. For some, he may even be ahead of where the two-

time Stanley Cup champion was at the same age.

Knight appeared in 22 games for Avon in his first season and posted a .935 save percentage. It didn't take long for more recognition to come his way as Knight soon earned an invite to the National Team Development Program and verbally committed to Boston College.

His play at the NTDP only strengthened the belief that Knight could be unique among his peers. He, along with tandem mate Cameron Rowe, was in charge of backstopping one of the more talented teams that has come through the NTDP. That group won the World Under-17 Challenge, became the first NTDP team to clinch a play-off berth and win a series in the USHL playoffs.

Knight was with his own age group for only part of that first season as he eventually was called up to join the U18 team and ended up being the go-to goalie at the World Under-18 Championship that season.

"His hockey IQ is off the map."

—JOHN WROBLEWSKI



SPENCER KNIGHT

As always, Knight was ahead of schedule, but his success and that of his team in the early stages of that first NTDP season came as a bit of a surprise to Knight himself.

“Coming into it two years ago, we didn’t really think of this. We didn’t think we’d have this many wins,” Knight recalls following the 2019 World Under-18 Championship in April.

“Playing really well in the USHL that first year is really tough. But once we started going, our team was so tight. It was never about who was getting points and who’s not. It was a really special team.”

Knight is part of what made that team special. He was between the pipes for 59 wins over his two years there, besting the career record previously co-held by Rick DiPietro and Jeff Frazee. He went 32-4-1 in his U18 season, posting a .913 save percentage and 2.36 goals-against average. He also has three IIHF medals including silvers from the 2018 Under-18 Men’s World Championship and 2019 World Junior Championship and a bronze at the 2019 Under-18 Men’s World Championship.

His natural athleticism is matched only by his technical skills, elite skating ability and the all-important confidence in himself, especially under pressure.

“Being on the bench, there’s certainly a calming effect in a goaltender that’s confident,” said John Wroblewski, Knight’s head coach the last two seasons. “The goaltender usually has the pulse of the team. You can feed off the efficiency level he was at. His level was always quite high.”

One of the many skills that allows Knight to stand out, according to Wroblewski and just about anyone else you ask, is his incredible ability to play the puck. He was credited with three assists this season and is one of those rare goalies who can actually make plays with the puck on his stick.



Spencer Knight and Cameron Rowe teamed up to backstop one of the more talented teams to ever come through the NTDP.

“His hockey IQ is off the map,” Wroblewski says. “To feel comfortable with the forecheck and read it before it happens, he took to our breakout scheme as well as any player. He knew how to count numbers, how the ice was balanced and what the other team’s forecheck was. The confidence level that he had to trust his instincts and make the next play, it really allows your forwards to stretch out a bit more. It makes the game more exciting.

“He’s a true hockey player and what a modern-day goalie should be.”

**“He’s a true hockey player
and what a modern-day
goalie should be.”**

—JOHN WROBLEWSKI



PHOTOS BY Images on Ice

“You never see someone go from a 14U goalie to starter in prep school. Even Jonathan Quick played public high school before Avon.”

—JARED WAIMON

As much as Knight has grown as a player, Wroblewski also points to the goaltender's personal development as well.

“When he first got to the program, he was rigid,” Wroblewski recalls. “He was very regimented and of course you see the kid that’s dialed in. He is that, when it comes to preparation and meticulous nature of taking care of himself. He’s grown into a young man who now is comfortable exhibiting his joy of playing hockey and good nature away from the ice. Success allows you to be a little looser.”

With that success came all of the extra attention.

There will always be pressure of some kind on a goalie. It’s something Knight seems to relish. Given that the 2018-19 season doubled as Knight’s draft-eligible season, the pressure came with a magnifying glass. As soon as Knight was named to the U.S. National Junior Team as a 17-year-old, the attention only intensified.

Though Knight did not play in any games at the World Junior Championship, slotted behind goalies that were two years older than him in Cayden Primeau and Kyle Keyser, it was undeniable that his being given a spot on that team was yet another example of how highly regarded he is within USA Hockey. That, coupled with being ranked the No. 1 North American goalie all season from NHL Central Scouting, made Knight the most talked about netminder for the 2019 NHL Draft from then on.

That never mattered much to Knight, though. He wouldn’t allow it to take his focus away from his own priorities. It’s that attitude that may just be enough to carry him all the way to the NHL.

“From Day 1, I know where my game is at,” Knight says. “That’s a big thing, just recognizing where you are.

“I never see it as a competition between me and other [draft-eligible] goalies. It’s more about how can I better myself and make the most of my potential. For people to rank and say this guy is better than this guy, it doesn’t really mean anything. How you handle that weight that has been put on your shoulders, the expectations, really it’s more fuel for getting better.” ☆

Chris Peters is a staff writer for ESPN.com, covering the NHL, NHL Draft and prospects.

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B D

BENEFITS

Surveying The Relative Age Effect
Among High-Level Goalies

By ZACK CISEK

IN HIS BEST-SELLING BOOK *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell popularized the concept of the Relative Age Effect by using Canadian ice hockey to demonstrate a bias in youth sports toward players born earlier in the selection year.

Since the release of Gladwell's book in 2008, the study of RAE has gained traction in youth sports, with many interested in understanding and explaining its involvement in the development of elite athletes.

WHAT IS RELATIVE AGE EFFECT?

RAE describes the potential advantages or disadvantages found between children in the same age group that results from their different birthdates throughout the year. For example, if the cut-off for a hockey age group is Dec. 31, a child born in January is 11 months older than their peer who is born in December.

Accordingly, reviews of RAE show this phenomenon creates inequalities among children that are difficult to manage.

RAE has predominately noted physical factors (i.e., size, maturity, depth of competition, experience) as major causes. This phenomenon suggests the older an athlete is when they begin their sport participation, the more likely they are to achieve success in that sport.

Like the example described above, youth athletes born at the beginning of the hockey calendar cut-off year can be up to 11 months older than the competition, resulting in more physically mature players who have an advantage when being chosen for select teams.

In comparison, younger athletes born later in the hockey calendar cut-off year are often deemed as more disadvantaged because these individuals are smaller, less developed, and consequently less successful than their older counterparts in the same age group.



Ice Age

Relative Age
more prevalent
of being a factor
dissipate as

BIRTH
MONTH



NCAA



AHL

(Jan.-Mar.)

Q1

64

(Apr.-June)

Q2

56

(July-Sept.)

Q3

33

26

(Oct.-Nov.)

Q4

35

24

Based on 519 goalies from the 2015-16 season, including the NHL, AHL, ECHL and NCAA



THE IMPACT ON GOALTENDERS

The study of RAE is particularly interesting given what we know about the typical North American sport systems, which tend to group children by chronological age for participation.

The intention of these age groups is to provide appropriate training and competition, and an equal opportunity to achieve success. However, could these differences within the same age group lead to performance inequalities among players? Moreover, are these advantages and/or disadvantages apparent beyond the youth hockey domain as athletes enter more elite levels of play (e.g., collegiate, professional)?

As a former collegiate goaltender and masters student in sport psychology as well as a graduate assistant for the Miami University men's hockey team, I was interested in exploring the answers to these questions.

Based on a review of the research in this area, I learned that while some studies have shown support for a RAE in hockey, there had been no research on the influence of RAE on goaltenders.

This position-specific gap in the literature may be due to the belief that physical maturity does not have as strong of an impact on a goaltender's ability to play the position in comparison to a forward or defenseman. A goaltender does not typically engage in physical contact with other players, therefore physical strength is not necessarily a precursor for success at this position.

STUDY METHOD

In light of this information, I conducted a study that explored how RAE influences the goaltending position in collegiate and professional hockey.

A total of 519 male goaltenders that competed in the NHL, AHL, ECHL and NCAA Div. I during the 2015-16 season were included in this study regardless of minutes played. I chose these leagues because they best represent the population of elite hockey goaltenders for the '15-16 season.

Goaltender's birthdates were collected to measure RAE according to birth month and the quadrant of calendar year. Total minutes played were also collected to objectively measure whether or not a goaltender's birth date had any correlation with minutes played during the season.

Minutes played was chosen over goals-against average and save percentage because those statistics can be a product of the entire team's performance and not necessarily indicative in comparing goaltenders' ability.

STUDY FINDINGS

Through a series of analyses, results showed there were a higher number of goaltenders born in the first six months of the year in the AHL and in Div. I college hockey, but not for the NHL or ECHL.

Given these findings, I took things a step further by comparing the RAE to the total number of minutes these goalies played in their respective leagues. Although there may be more goalies in these leagues born in the first six months of the year, did it mean that they played more than their counterparts who were born in the later half of the year?

The answer in all four of the leagues was no. This suggests that the birth month in which a goaltender was born did not impact the percentage of time he played in a season. This implies that there is a difference in being selected to a team in one of these four leagues and actually playing a percentage of time.

SO WHAT?

My purpose in sharing these results is twofold. First, I want to urge youth goalies and their parents to embrace the time it takes to develop into an elite goalie. It takes goalies at the highest level of the game years to craft their fundamentals (skating ability, tracking, flexibility, agility), and they are constantly still working on them.

A goalie at any age cannot control how tall they are—but they can control the work they put on behind the scenes drilling out the fundamentals.

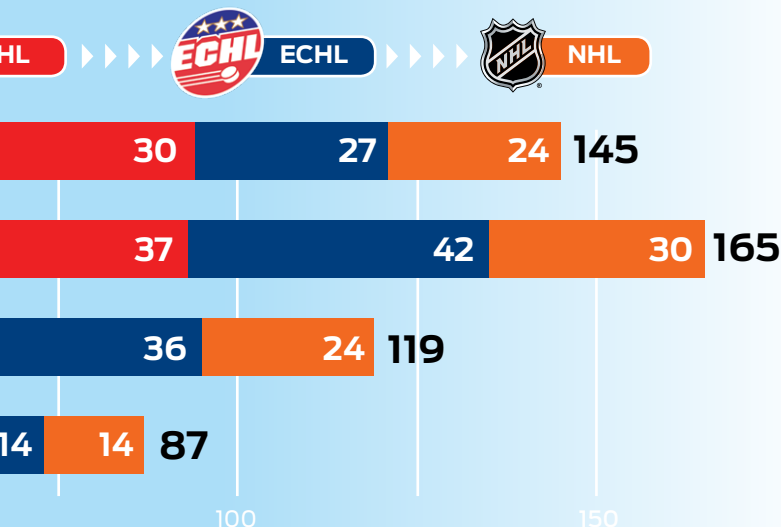
Secondly, this is important to communicate to coaches at the youth level to inform them that choosing a goalie based on size at a young age is not appropriate, but evaluating a wide variety of skills is more indicative of goaltending ability. It may be that coach selection bias at the youth level is promoting the RAE by funneling out younger, less physically developed goalies in place for the big goalie that fills up the net.

USA Hockey and its work with the American Development Model have done a tremendous job providing goalie-instruction resources for coaches of any background.

I am sure it is repetitive for youth athletes and parents to hear people tell them "it's a marathon, not a sprint," but hopefully this concrete evidence from goalies at the highest levels of hockey can help aid in that encouragement. ★

Zack Cisek is an assistant coach with Lake Superior State University.

Age Effect In Goalies: Goaltenders born in the first half of the year are different, playing through youth hockey and developing with the advantage of being a few months older than some of their peers. This advantage seems to disappear as goalies get older and advance into the higher levels of the game.





KEEP THE CHANGE

Despite Getting A Late Start In Goal, **Hunter Miska** Has Found His Rightful Place Between The Pipes

By **JEFF CARPENTER**



GROWING UP IN MINNESOTA, Hunter Miska always knew he was a goalie trapped in a forward's body.

His mother thought skating with the puck was better than having pucks shot at him, so she encouraged Hunter to follow his brother, Cal by skating out. But once given a chance to strap on the pads and slip between the pipes, he was determined to prove her wrong.

After learning that fellow Minnesotan Josh Harding followed a similar career path, the 14-year-old made the move and never looked back.

"Once I finally jumped the gun and did it, I was super happy," recalled the Stacy, Minn., native who made the North Branch High School team as a freshman.

Adding to his inspiration, Miska's father, Todd, was in the business of painting goalie masks. Among his clients was none other than Harding, who would go on to suit up for the Minnesota Wild, along with Hall of Fame netminder Ed Belfour and Miikka Kiprusoff. He was also hired to paint masks for the Mighty Ducks movie sequels.

"Having my dad be a mask painter and paint my mask, it's unbelievable. I don't think there's any other professional goalies that can say that," Miska said.

"I can always show who I am through my mask and my gear. I think that's the best part about being a goalie, you get to customize all your own stuff. The forwards have to wear the same stuff, but we get to go our own way with our masks and our gear, and I think that's pretty sweet."

Despite getting a late start between the pipes, Miska kicked his game into overdrive when he moved to Michigan to play with USA Hockey's National Team Development Program. It was quite the leap from high school hockey, especially with only a brief introduction to the position, but Miska made the most of it by starting a team-high 41 games.

"The biggest part for me was moving away from my family and being away from Minnesota because I'd never left the state before to play," he said. "That was really difficult making the transition, but I think it was really good because I realized you can't try to live in two places at once when you're playing. You need to have both feet wherever you're at and just be where you're at."

That mindset helped Miska with his ensuing journey to Penticton, British Columbia, and then the Dubuque Fighting Saints of the USHL.

The next step in his hockey odyssey came closer to home as he played one season at Minnesota Duluth, leading the Bulldogs to the national championship game.

Despite the lack of experience and technique still being refined, Miska relied on his athleticism and his passion for stopping the puck to get him through.

"It's clear to me how much he loved the position of goaltender and how he can embrace a challenge," said Don Granato, who coached Miska for two seasons at the NTDP.

"If he didn't perform well, he didn't run from it, he didn't hide from it. That was something that was very, very special at that age. There was a trait where you saw that he has a legitimate chance."

After one season in college, Miska took his talents to the next level, signing with the Arizona Coyotes organization. Like most professional athletes, it comes down to playing the waiting game to show what you can do against the best players in the world.

In the meantime, Miska continues to work on his game with the Coyotes' American Hockey League affiliate in Tucson. The condensed AHL schedule with so many back-to-back games can make it difficult for goaltenders to find their rhythm as they share time between the pipes, as Miska does with fellow NHL hopeful Adin Hill.

Despite seeing the number of games played slip from 36 in the 2017-18 campaign to 25 games this season, Miska looks at the strides he's made with the Roadrunners more in terms of quality over quantity.

"It's clear to me how much he loved the position of goaltender and how he can embrace a challenge."

—DON GRANATO

Miskalaneous Facts

WEIGHT:

174 lbs

CATCHES: Right

HEIGHT:

6' 1"

HOMETOWN:

Stacy, Minn.

COLLEGE:



University of Minnesota
Duluth

→ Undrafted, signed with the Arizona Coyotes on April 15, 2017
Silver medal at 2013 IIHF Men's Under-18 World Championship with Team USA

JUNIOR TEAM:



Dubuque
Fighting Saints
(USHL)



Throughout his early days on the ice in Minnesota, Hunter Miska played forward, but his heart was always in goal.

"You just have to come in there with a good mentality, come to win every day and show up to work," Miska said. "It starts with your practice habits. If you come to practice and don't work hard or are lazy, it'll carry over into the game."

With the Coyotes racked by injuries this year, a number of players made the trek from Tucson to Glendale to bolster the Coyotes ranks, including Miska who made his NHL debut in relief on Nov. 13 against Detroit. The 23-year-old stopped 8-of-9 shots against Detroit in a period of play.

"It's nice to get that experience, even though I didn't play a lot, I got to practice with the guys and be around the atmosphere and get to know that NHL lifestyle," he said of his 14-game call up.

"It's like a nice carrot dangling in front of your face because it makes you want to work that much harder so that hopefully you can be there in the next couple of years full-time."

Granato has been happy to see his former player's success, and has reached out to him several times along his journey. He certainly isn't surprised at how far Miska has taken his game.

"He had some of the biggest predictors of success," Granato said. "He had the athleticism. The intangibles he had, a deep love for the game. The other intangible was the ability to focus his energy and effort on improving. When he was faced with adversity, he tried to be more resourceful to resolve the challenge. Those ingredients are why he's at where he's at right now."

Looking at how far he's come in such a relatively short amount of time, it's safe to say that Miska made the right choice in switching positions.

And as he waits for the next chapter in his blossoming career, his drive, determination and continued development should result in more opportunities in the near future. And when they come, he will be ready. ☆

STICK TAP

★
GIRLS
Shannon Moran

→ Saluting Goalies Who Enjoyed Stellar Seasons Between The Pipes // By JEFF CARPENTER

AS USA HOCKEY CONTINUES its push to have American goaltenders playing 51 percent of the minutes in the NHL and NWHL by the year 2030, there are a number of outstanding goaltenders who continue to take their games to a higher level. This issue is designed to honor all those who stare down opposing shooters, but here are a few members of Goalie Nation that we would like to commend for spectacular seasons.

YOUTH GOALIE Aidan Campbell

Pittsburgh Pens Elite (Youth Tier I, 16U)

Aidan Campbell wrapped up a sensational season by starring in the 2019 Chipotle-USA Hockey National Championships. The Cranberry Township, Pa., native stopped 137-of-142 shots over the five games he played in, compiling a 5-0-0 record, a 1.47 goals-against average and .965 save percentage.

The 16-year-old had 26 saves in the Pittsburgh Pens Elite's victory over the Yale Jr. Bulldogs to help win the Tier I 16U title. His numbers this year were sparkling, picking up 17 wins in 28 games while posting a 0.69 goals-against average and .944 save percentage. He also had eight shutouts.

Campbell's consistent strong play was recognized when the 6-foot-4, 181-pound net-minder factored into a pair of games with the U.S. National Under-17 Team earlier this year. Next year he'll join the Erie Otters of the Ontario Hockey League.

"Aidan is blessed with great physical tools and combines it with an unmatched determination, which has allowed him to continue his development at a rapid pace," said Otters general manager Dave Brown. "He has succeeded at every challenge he's faced and done so in an impressive fashion."

GIRLS GOALIE Shannon Moran Vermont Shamrocks (Tier II, 16U)

When it comes down to elimination games, good goaltending is crucial to survival. Thankfully for the Vermont Shamrocks, Shannon Moran was on her game as she stopped 61-of-62 shots over three elimination games to boost her team to a Girls Tier II 16U National Championship. Moran had an exceptional showing in Amherst, N.Y., stopping 99-of-103 shots to finish with a 5-0-0 record, 0.95 goals-against average and .961 save percentage.

The Grantham, N.H., native's showcase performance came in the championship game when she shutout the Baldwin/River Falls (Wis.) BlackCats with a 27-save effort to help the Shamrocks get over the hump after falling in the championship game each of the past two years at Nationals. "It's amazing [to get the shutout]," Moran said. "I'm so happy and I'm so proud of my team. It's not just me, it's them too."

Thanks to Moran and the hard work of her teammates, the Shamrocks secured their first National Championship since claiming the 2013 title.

JUNIOR GOALIE Isaiah Saville Tri-City Storm

With this year being his first trip through the Tier I junior circuit, it could've presented quite a learning curve for Isaiah Saville. Instead, the Anchorage, Alaska, native excelled from the start, accumulating a 25-4-2-1 record for Tri-City, along with four shutouts and a .926 save percentage. Saville was the lone USHL goalie to produce a goals-against average below two, his 1.90 GAA leading the league.

★
YOUTH
Aidan Campbell



JUNIOR
Issiah Saville

In the middle of his productive season, one that included him being named the 2018-19 USHL Goaltender of the Year, the 18-year-old represented the United States in the World Junior A Challenge. The 6-foot-1, 194-pound goaltender played in three games and posted a 25-save shutout in the final against Russia as the U.S. went on to win the event.

"Isaiah is an elite goaltender who gives you a chance to win every single night in a league that's tough on first year goaltenders," said Tri-City General Manager and Head Coach Anthony Noreen. "From the beginning of the year to the last game of the regular season, he proved to be the most consistent goaltender over the course of the year in our league, and he is certainly deserving of the award."

He was also the recipient of the Dave Peterson Goaltender of the Year Award at USA Hockey's Annual Congress.

Next season Saville will get his first taste of college hockey as he is slated to suit up for the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Before that he hopes to hear his name called at the NHL Draft.

MEN'S COLLEGE GOALIE

Hunter Shepard

University of Minnesota Duluth

For all the praise head coach Scott Sandelin has rightfully earned as the architect of Minnesota Duluth's stout defensive system, goaltender Hunter Shepard has played a big role in shutting down the opposition. The Bulldogs goaltender has made 81 consecutive starts, dating back to Oct. 21, 2017, and now has a pair of national championships to his name.

This year, the Cohasset, Minn., native earned AHCA All-America First Team (West) honors for his strong season that included 29 wins, a 1.76 goals-against average and .923 save percentage. Shepard's GAA was tied for 4th best in the NCAA, while his seven shutouts were the second most in college hockey.

After back-to-back national championships, a number of Bulldogs signed professional contracts, including 2019 U.S. National Junior Team captain Mikey Anderson. Shepard won't be one of them as he's committed to returning for his senior season, much to the chagrin of the UMD's National Collegiate Hockey Conference opponents.



COLLEGE
Hunter Shepard



WOMEN'S COLLEGE GOALIE

Lindsay Reed

Harvard University

Boston area schools wage a yearly battle for the Beanpot trophy and city bragging rights. Lindsay Reed almost singlehandedly lifted the Crimson to the Beanpot title this season, posting 52 saves in a win against Boston College in the semifinals followed by 51 saves in an overtime loss against Boston University in the Beanpot final.

Those two stellar performances were just a sample of the freshman's strong start to her college career. Reed, a member of the ECAC All-Rookie Team, set a school record for single-season saves with 927 and finished with a sparkling .940 save percentage and 2.18 goals-against average. With that kind of steady play in net, the Crimson should continue to rise up the ECAC Hockey ranks.

The New Vernon, N.J., native stepped onto the Cambridge campus with an already impressive acumen. The goaltender was captain of the Hotchkiss School prep team and helped secure gold medals for the U.S. at the 2017 and 2018 IIHF Under-18 Women's World Championships.



COLLEGE
Lindsay Reed

PRO

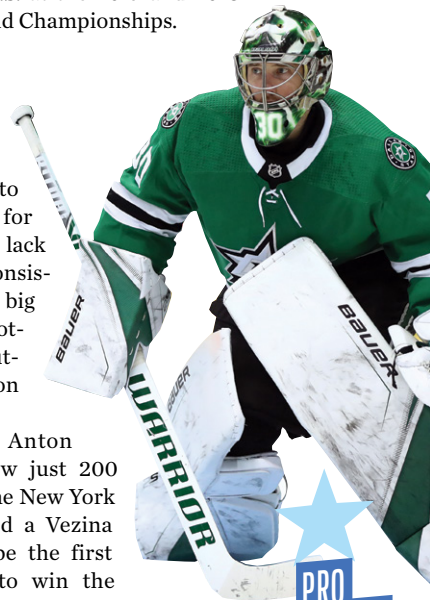
Ben Bishop

Dallas Stars

The Dallas Stars struggled to score goals this season, tied for 28th in the league. Due to the lack of offense, Ben Bishop was consistently called upon to come up big on a nightly basis and the 6-foot-7 goaltender did just that, putting together the finest season of his career at the NHL level.

Bishop and backup Anton Khudobin combined to allow just 200 goals, a total only bested by the New York Islanders. Bishop was named a Vezina Trophy finalist and would be the first American-born goaltender to win the award since Tim Thomas in 2011. Bishop posted a 1.98 goals-against average (2nd in NHL), .934 save percentage (1st) and seven shutouts (3rd).

In the second year of a six-year contract, Bishop's strong play carried over into the playoffs. The Stars made it to the second round before falling to the St. Louis Blues, a team that Bishop followed growing up in the St. Louis area. ★



PRO
Ben Bishop

SMALL GAMES,

BIG

BENEFITS

Every Drill Can Help A Goaltender Work On His Or Her Skills

S MALL AREA GAMES are a popular and effective means of working on various elements by creating a fast-paced environment that challenges players to think, act, and play at the speed of a real game.

At times, they produce more quality scoring chances that spring up in the close confines of playing in tight spaces. As a goalie and/or goalie parent these SAGs can seem unfair to the goalie trying to stop the puck because of the amount of quality chances that occur. Oftentimes that leads to the question, are goalies benefitting from these games?

The answer emphatically is "Yes."

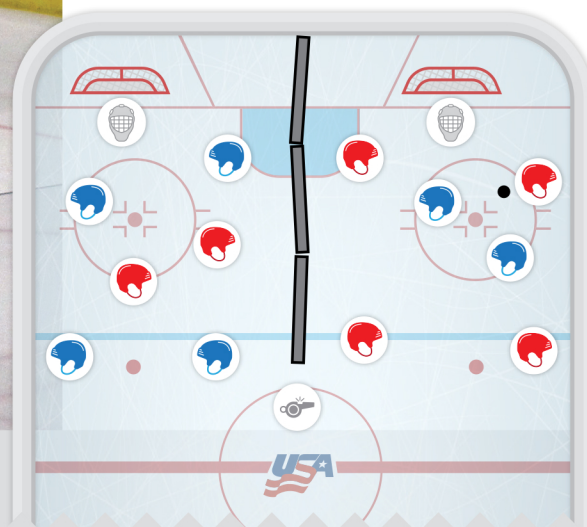
SAGs are great at transferring skills to the real games for all players. Behind the net plays, 3 on 1s, 2 on 1s, breakaways, and lateral plays occur consistently in SAGs, just as they do in real games. Properly designed SAGs replicate game scenarios that will challenge goalies during the season. They also provide goaltenders the opportunity to read and react to various scenarios that emerge in a game and challenge them in a way that will help them improve their ability to stop more pucks.

Why is this important? The best way for players and goalies to learn is by playing the game itself. Players and goalies need to be able to make decisions and execute skills that are required of them from the environment that they are part of. SAGs provide a condensed game-like environment with many opportunities for players to make (successful and unsuccessful) actions.



3-V-3 ON ANY NET

Players play 3-v-3 and are allowed to score on any net that they think provides the best scoring chance. Teams will need to read when the transition from offense to defense occurs and vice versa, as it will happen quick. This game will provide ample opportunities for the goaltender to see odd-man rushes in tight which can occur many times in a game. This game also keeps goalies to stay focused the entire time as a quick turnover or a quick shot can come at any point.

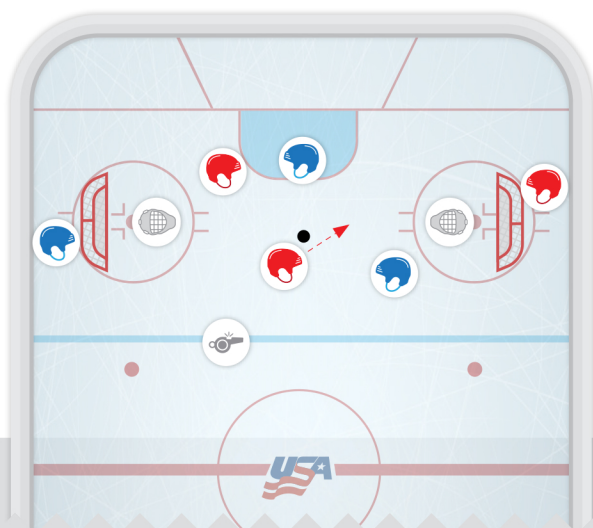


4-V-2 PP-PK GAME

In this game, the coach places dividers down the center of the zone to create a border. The offensive teams move the puck looking for scoring opportunities while the defensive pairings work to gain control of the puck and get it over the barriers to the offensive team on the other side. When one team scores the coach will spot a puck on the side of the border that scored.

This game will provide chances for each goalie to see odd-man situations and power play puck movement over and over throughout the entire game. There will even be opportunities for the netminders to play the puck and make good plays to the offensive teammates on the other side of the barriers.

By BRENT SEIDEL



2-V-2 GRETZKY WITH REPLACEMENT

In this game, teams play 2-v-2 with a support guy (Gretzky) behind their attacking net. Before any shots are taken on net the attacking team must get the puck to their Gretzky behind the net. Defending players are allowed to pressure the Gretzky but must communicate who has the front of the net. For goalies, they will see lots of high-to-low, low-to-high, wraps, and one-timer situations that occur in every game. Being able to read these plays exceptionally well can be a big advantage for goaltenders when it comes to the real-life game.

FINALLY...

This game will provide chances for each goalie to see odd-man situations and power play puck movement over and over throughout the entire game. There will even be opportunities for the netminders to play the puck and make good plays to the offensive teammates on the other side of the barriers. ★



New Initiative
Lets Goalies
Know They're
Not Alone In
The Crease

By BRIAN LESTER

LIFTING THE MASK ON MENTAL ILLNESS



VIDEO

What is Lift The Mask?

[CLICK HERE](#) to learn more about the Lift The Mask initiative

USTIN GOLDMAN UNDERSTANDS the life of a goalie as well as anyone.

He grew up in Texas and was a standout at the position in high school and Junior hockey before moving on to play at Colorado State University.

He just finished his second season as an emergency backup goalie for the Colorado Avalanche and also runs the Goalie Guild as well out in the Rocky Mountain State.

As someone who has played between the pipes, he understands the pressures that come with it and the challenges that it presents.

"So much of the game is out of your control," Goldman said. "You can't control the puck, the coach, the defensemen. You are a product of the environment, and a lot of goalies struggle adapting to that environment."

Not every goalie can handle it.

"It takes a special individual to go with the flow, to not feel anxious, nervous or worried," Goldman said. "Worry takes place in your mind when you are preparing for the game, and that causes anxiety. It's hard to relax and play our game and feel comfortable."

For most, it's tough to find someone to lean on, to talk about those fears, those worries, the anxiety. That's where the Lift the Mask Initiative comes into play.

Goldman started the project last year to help goalies gain access to professional mental health and performance support.

To outsiders, goalies appear to be some of the toughest players in the game. Their masks hide the mental health battles they are facing day to day, week to week, during a long season where the pressure is constantly on to make plays, not mistakes.

Lift the Mask helps goalies deal with all of it. Goldman already had a large following on social media and through the Goalie Guild connection as well. It made sense to put it all to good use to help others.

"Creating an initiative for mental health and mental performance for goalies was kind of a no-brainer," Goldman said. "Something is better than nothing. It's a smaller foundation and I don't have a ton of money or sponsors, but just being able to raise awareness and give goalies a chance to

get connected with a mental health provider or ambassador, someone with experience working with athletes and their mental health, is huge."

The ambassadors have been a big part of the critical support system Lift the Mask provides, giving goalies someone they can talk to and who helps spread the awareness and works to end the stigma associated with talking about mental health.

Nicholas Longo is one of the ambassadors. The goalie coach at Marist College, Longo was invited to do a podcast called Lift the Mask and shortly after that Goldman reached out to ask him to be an ambassador.

Longo was on board with it. The Monday after Thanksgiving, Longo was on the ice with his goalies running a clinic for a youth organization with players of all ages. He said before they hit the ice, they talked mental health.

"I asked them if anyone gets anxious before games or if anyone has a hard time shutting their brains off, and one of the little guys said yes. He said sometimes

"Creating an initiative for mental health and mental performance for goalies was kind of a no-brainer."

—JUSTIN GOLDMAN

LIFTING THE MASK ON MENTAL ILLNESS

in the car,” Longo recalled. “I asked them what strategies we could do to help with it. Another kid said to dance.”

That sparked an idea. Longo told his goalies to take turns dancing away their jitters.

“I gave them 30-45 seconds to do whatever crazy dance they wanted to do, and I filmed it,” Longo said.

He sent Goldman the video and it took off on social media and served as the perfect example of an ambassador finding a creative way to help goalies overcome any mental health issues they may be dealing with on a given day.

Goalie coaches conduct Lift the Mask activities all of the time, but having an actual initiative in place formalizes everything.

“This is something in the goalie community that was untapped,” Longo said. “Now that the initiative is around, it’s opened the dialogue, which is awesome. It creates a support system.”

Kelsey Neumann is part of that support system.

A former professional goalie for the Buffalo Beauts in the National Women’s Hockey League, she also understands the mental health challenges players in her position face in the game.

“I think the biggest benefits are giving goalies a chance to share their stories and connect with others who have been in their shoes,” Neumann said. “And it also helps ease some of the financial burden associated with getting the proper services to help with their mental health.”

Neumann said it’s important for parents and coaches to understand that every player is different. She also reminds players she works with that her door is always open.

“I really try to emphasize to kids that they can come to me with any problems they are having and make sure that there is open dialogue between me and the kids,” said Neumann, who has embraced her role as an ambassador.

“I also make sure they know it’s OK to have a bad game, and that they will have ups and downs during the season, but that it’s important to stay focused and learn from the ups and downs.”

Goldman can’t count how many goaltenders have reached out to him, not to mention the coaches who have asked how they can help their players who are fighting a mental health battle.

“Ninety-five percent of goalie coaches don’t have mental health experience, but they want to help,” Goldman said. “Now they

VIDEO

How Does Lift the mask work?

“Ninety-five percent of goalie coaches don’t have mental health experience, but they want to help.”

—JUSTIN GOLDMAN

have somewhere to go, and parents do, too. We can help connect them with someone in the mental health world. The last thing we want to do is push the wrong button or say the wrong thing. That just makes things worse and adds to a goalie’s troubles.”

Goldman said he never had an opportunity to open up about his mental struggles, but he’s determined to make sure others don’t run into that same wall.

“Every drop counts. If one person opens up, it makes it easier for the next to do it,” Goldman said. “These stigmas associated with mental health for years are bogus. The script is flipped. Everything is changing and it’s saving lives and bringing the world together one drop at a time.”

Longo said not being able to talk about mental health makes an already tough position even tougher.

“We’re an athlete like everyone else, and we are humans above all else,” Longo said. “Lift the Mask has created a community. And even if the kid doesn’t want to talk hockey, I tell them we can just talk. The goalies I work with know they can talk to me, and it’s helped parents know there is an avenue for them. It puts them at ease knowing there is that added layer of support.”

Neumann said it was never easy to talk with teammates or a coach about a bad game that took a toll on her mentally, but she was fortunate to have a mother and father and a brother she could turn to when she needed to talk.

“I think as athletes, we are taught early on not to show any weakness. As a society, it is only now that mental health is becoming a topic of conversation,” Neumann said. “So as an athlete we hide the side of us that is struggling so that we don’t appear weak to others. Unfortunately, it wasn’t until I became a professional athlete that I realized how not talking openly about these struggles was affecting younger generations.”

Her views have certainly changed on mental health. The views of others have as well.

Longo hopes that through the initiative no goalie ever has to feel alone. He wants to see goalies never get to the point where they feel they have nowhere to turn for help.

“My buddy says some kids are broken toys and hopes we can fix some of them. I want to see us avoid letting them get broken in the first place,” Longo said. “There is a bigger life issue here. We want to see better goaltenders, but also want good humans, too.” ☆

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