All good things come to those who wait. That expression has been around longer than dirt, yet it mystifies and baffles the hockey philosopher in us all.

Phrases like, “Wait for the shooter to make the first move,” “Don’t over-commit,” “Let the puck come to you” and “Don’t lunge” are commonplace in the world of hockey and act as valuable morsels of feedback for coaches to analyze players at every position. You will even hear most

coaches compliment their team following a win by saying, “We played a patient game and waited for our opportunities.”

And while patience is one of the most important characteristics for a successful goaltender to have, very few are able to display it on a continual basis. In fact, it’s more of an enigmatic attribute that comes with a hot streak and disappears on the fringe of a cold streak. You can teach it to a certain degree, you can master it to a point, but ultimately it’s more of a mental quality than a technical one.

So with such an important aspect of the goaltending position, how can you gauge whether one of your goalies is being patient or not? What are the tell-tale signs of a patient goaltender and what are the signs of a goaltender that is over-committing or “lunging” as I like to call it? The importance of being able to read these signs will help you avoid a goaltending disaster, which can salvage a week, a month or even an entire season.

One of the easiest things to watch for is the glove hand activity. Goalies are taught (at all levels) to watch the puck into their glove with their eyes. They should keep their shoulders square to the shooter’s stick and turn only their head towards their glove, so their eyes are never taken off the puck. The glove will move up and down depending on the shot, but it should rarely ever move forward, unless the shot is deflected or fluttering. Hesitant or impatient goalies are those that go out and attack the puck in order to catch it. This results in pucks deflecting off the cuff or tip of the glove, which leads to bad rebounds and missed saves.

Another telltale sign is to watch a goalie on breakaways, penalty shots and 2-on-1 situations. In these situations, patience, or a lack thereof, is displayed through movement. The more his legs and feet are moving laterally, forwards and backwards and the more you notice him dipping the shoulders in and out, the less patience he is displaying. Instead of reacting, the goalie is acting first, which does nothing but show the shooter what the goalie's intentions are. The shooter is still handling the puck, so to act first is to commit suicide. "Read and react" is another common phrase that attempts to teach patience, so when a goaltender reacts first before reading the play, then you're watching classic impatience.

And yes, goalies can also be too patient. Hesitating or simply reacting slowly is a sign that the goalie is not approaching the game situations correctly and they may be dealing with a variety of issues, including everything from bad edges on their skates to a general lack of focus. A good example of this is the recent play of Martin Gerber. During the 4-2 loss to the New York Rangers on Saturday, there was numerous times where he simply looked stiff and hesitant. He expected things to happen that didn't unfold. He wasn't focused on the puck and he wasn't quite all there mentally. He wasn't reading the play correctly and he reacted to high shots by throwing his entire upper body at the puck (lunging), which resulted in him landing flat on his face.

Speaking of examples, in order to give you a quick real-life look at the patience paradigm, let's take a look at two goalies currently showing great patience and one who is not.

Carey Price and Roberto Luongo are patience monsters right now. Watch their body movement. Their shoulders are always very broad and square to the shooter. They never fall forward on their stomach, which shows you that their backs are straight and pucks are just hitting them when they drop. They use size to their advantage and they don't flinch or adjust their perfect positioning on heavy shots and they don't try to deflect pucks with their chest. Rather, they swallow the puck whole and don't allow rebounds. It's no coincidence that the most patient goalies are the ones with the best size, as this is one of the advantages of being over 6-foot-2.

The word “patience” doesn’t even exist in Dominik Hasek’s dictionary, although he’s being forced to display tons of patience on the bench right now as Chris Osgood continues to shine with a 13-1-1 record. Hasek goes after pucks like a fatty chasing the never-ending Twinkie train. He lunges, he throws his stick and blocker at pucks and he ends up on his stomach and back more than any other goalie ever to play the game. His patented “Hasek-roll” is nothing more than a classic display of futile desperation. Nobody could copy that style of play, not even the former Ottawa Senator and Czech counterpart Martin Prusek.

One last pointer: a patient goaltender is a calm one, so remember that too much movement is a sign of impatience. Watch for good positioning, square shoulders and little movement when scouting a goaltender you are interested in signing.

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