

Post-goal Routine—Five R's

Whether it is the first goal or the fifteenth, you control how you respond. If you've played long enough, you've experienced a 20-1 game or games where you didn't make a save.

Creating a post-goal routine for yourself and the defensive unit helps keep everyone focused, positive, and prepared for the next possession.

This is not easy and requires practice.

A failure recovery routine, failure recovery system, or reset routine is important and can be used after any mistake. Basically, you acknowledge that a mistake has been made, connect with a teammate or coach, and then refocus on the next play. Another way to say it is to recognize the mistake, regroup, and refocus. Here, we will focus on the post-goal routine and how to prepare for the next shot.

First—REMAIN

Remain calm, level-headed, and composed. You control how you respond when you let in a goal. Getting angry because you let in a goal or someone missed a slide does not help, and getting frustrated will only hurt your reaction time on future shots.

When a goal is scored, remain calm, composed, and reflect on the situation. It's tough, no doubt, but your reaction impacts the team. Showing bad body language signals to your teammates and the opposing team that you're frustrated. Remain calm.

Second—REVIEW

Take a few seconds to think about what you could have done to prevent the goal. Do a quick mental review of the play. It's important to take only a few seconds to reflect. This can be done while you are retrieving the ball from the goal and handing it to the official. Your review should only focus on what you can control moving forward.

- Were you in a good, ready stance?
- Were you focused on the ball?
- Did you guess instead of reacting to the ball?

Sometimes you get unlucky. The most common signs of luck are when the ball hits someone's stick or body and deflects into the goal, or you make the save, but someone grabs the rebound and easily scores. There is no benefit in rethinking and reevaluating an act of bad luck. Just say "unlucky" and move on. If you have no idea what happened in the moment, that is okay.

Some goalies think way too much about all the things it could have been. "Analysis paralysis" is the inability to make a decision due to overthinking a problem. If this is you, consider using your focus word and moving on to the next play.

You can also remind yourself that you have done this a million times and you know how to save the ball.

After the game, when you're reviewing game film, you can analyze each play, each save, and each goal given up. After every goal, take a couple of seconds to consider what you could have changed to stop that shot.

Third—RELEASE

How you give the ball to the official really matters!

When you scoop the ball out of the goal, take it out of your stick with your hand, walk it over to the official, look them in the eye, and hand it to them. This intentional process does not give you time to be frustrated, and the act of handing the ball forces you to remain calm. The review happens as you scoop the ball and take it to the official.

When you release the ball, release any frustration related to the goal.

Sometimes, the official is far away after a goal is scored—especially in the girls' game. If this happens, make eye contact with the official and play lacrosse bocce by throwing the ball so that it bounces and rolls to a stop at the officials' feet. This is much better than throwing the ball directly to the official, which could result in too much power or a poor pass.

Fourth—REPLAN or REGROUP

In the same way that you must remain positive after a goal, you can help the defense remain positive, quickly review the situation, and move on to the next play.

Defensive units should hold a quick meeting after each goal to regroup. Every goal provides an opportunity to reinforce what went right, recognize what went wrong, discuss any adjustments, fess up to mistakes, encourage one another, and discuss how to do better on the next play, next possession, next shot, or next save.

Coaches can create practice scenarios to make this happen. When you huddle, make eye contact with your teammates. Some teams will connect by putting their arms around each other's shoulders. Each team will have a variety of personalities in these huddles. Some may be quick to anger or blame, while others are quiet. You need each other!

You can set a positive example by being calm and composed. Take responsibility for all shots that go in. Own the reason for each goal and respond accordingly. "I got the next one."

Strands of Three

On many of my teams, I would group players into threes or fours, forming "strands of three" or "cores of four" for the season. This idea comes from King Solomon's wisdom—"A cord of three strands is not easily broken."

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not easily broken.

—King Solomon

The core idea? Having teammates to lean on. You always have two people to encourage you. They can help you refocus after a mistake, create a handshake or high-five routine, write pre-game notes, or even bring snacks for away games.

Coaches aren't always aware when you're struggling to bounce back from a mistake or a tough play. Including teammates in your recovery system is important. It's about creating a support network where everyone looks out for each other, making the team stronger.

Fifth—REFOCUS

After the defensive huddle ends, it is time to focus on the next play. We talk to ourselves constantly, and sometimes we do so aloud. As long as you do not start answering yourself out loud, you're fine.

The words you use have meaning, are powerful, and can influence your game—and your life. Finding words or phrases that help you refocus, concentrate, dial in, lock in, reset, snap back, or reframe are all specific to you. You determine what words or phrases are best for you. Not your parents or another goalie—but you. Be creative and find something unique.

If it is something that makes you smile, that may help you more than a serious word.

Once you have a word, you can write it on the back of your goalie head or on a piece of tape and put it on your stick. Focus, breathe, lock in, stay, calm, relax, joy, love, release, energy, believe, ready, strong, steady, grit, trust, brave, composed, unstoppable, fearless, and intensity are just a few.

You can also boost your performance and refocus by practicing positive self-talk that encourages, praises, and remains optimistic. “I’ve got this.” “I can make the next save.” “I get to do this.” “I can handle this.”

Physical Refocus

Adding something physical to what you say out loud links your mind with your body. Find a word and signal that resonates with you, then share it with your coaches. Here are a few examples.

Crease—After the defensive huddle, walk over to the crease. Take a deep breath in, step over the line, and exhale. Turn around and look at your feet. Remind yourself to be present where your feet are, then look up to midfield to prepare for the next play. When you step across the crease, you can repeat your focus word.

Chest protector—Tapping your heart can help center you after a goal. Attach whatever meaning helps you refocus.

Turn Around—When you're finished with the huddle, face the goal. Then turn back to face midfield. The act of turning around to face the goal and then facing upfield when you're ready can help you refocus on the next play.

Rubber Band—A rubber band at the bottom or top of your stick serves as a simple reminder to snap back to your training, preparation, confidence, and focus.

Pipes—Many goalies hit the pipes without thinking or using them to refocus. There are three of them. What three-word phrases can you use to refocus?

- I got this.
- Let's do this.
- Find the ball.
- Stop the ball.
- Keep it simple.
- Lead by example.
- Body, mind, heart.
- Commit to contact.
- Energy creates energy.
- Control the controllables.
- Communicate with confidence.

Helmet—Gently touch your helmet or facemask, look into the distance, then bring your eyes to focus on the crossbar of your helmet.

Gloves—Your gloves are the simplest piece of equipment to remove after a goal and put back on quickly. This can serve as a reminder to release and refocus.

Water—Bring a squeeze bottle of water to the goal. After a goal, squeeze the water bottle and choose a water droplet to follow all the way down to the ground. Taking a sip of water can add even more meaning.