

# I'm Ready for Junior Hockey – Now What Do I Do?

by Jason D. Power

I am Jason D. Power and over the next few weeks I will be writing a series of articles for InGoal Magazine designed to help you navigate the waters of Junior Hockey.

Over the last decade, I have had the good fortune to work with goalies from the Pros down to Mites. One of the most common issues I am approached with from High School goalies is that they and their parents for the most part are in the dark as to what the next step in their development process is. As a Junior Coach, hundreds of Potential Goalies try to market themselves to me each year and roughly 80% don't even get consideration-because they don't look after a few simple details that I can show you how to fix. Im going to present you with a carefully designed system over the next few weeks that will get you maximum attention...so stayed tuned and I'll help you get the recognition you deserve and provide you a guide for your travels.

Parents, make sure you read this too. This after all is your child. As a parent myself (of the worlds greatest two kids of course!) I personally always take the approach "What if this was my son?" In essence, your son is going to be living with a new family in the care of a Coach you may have only met once or twice. Just as your son needs to, you should do some homework on the potential program he wishes to play for. The internet knows no ends...do your research, it's free after all!

So at this point in the year, your hockey season has reached its halfway point and is starting to wind down headed for playoffs. Like most aspiring goalies, you have worked very hard over the last 4-6 years mastering your craft and feel as though the next level is calling. Last year's team captain is off in a distant city living a new life in the Junior Hockey world, he keeps you abuzz to everything via Facebook and Twitter. The goalie on his team just committed to a D1 school for the following season, and you only have a few months before your hunt begins. Keep in mind, it is rare in today's game for an athlete to go straight from High School and play College Hockey. Colleges want players to spend a year or two in Junior Hockey to develop, both physically and mentally.

But, what do you need to do? Over the next few articles, I am going to give you a guideline...and most importantly, some do's and don'ts that I see over and over year to year! What may seem common sense to you, might be the lifesaving facts someone else was unaware of. As a proud member of the Goalie Nation, I personally like to see everyone get their chance and fair shakes. Like in everything in life, take lessons from those who went before you and learn from their mistakes!

With the exception of the CHL, every junior league in North America allows you to keep your NCAA eligibility. Keep in mind, there are tons of leagues out there from the USHL and NAHL in the US, and the BCHL and Ontario Provincial in Canada, just to name a few. Many people are unaware as to why young athletes lose their Eligibility by playing in the Canadian Hockey League, or Major Junior as its commonly known. The answer is twofold: for one, the players receive a stipend to play and cover their daily costs, and

also the fact that many of the players have signed contracts after their drafts with respective NHL clubs. In the eyes of the NCAA, those particular players are considered Professionals, and thus the league gets professional status and affects all that play.

What you as a goalie need to do is sit down, and give yourself an HONEST assessment of where you feel is your best option. Remember, don't set the bar only at the top and refuse to play below it. This is the next step in your development, you may have to start a level below where you feel should be to work hard and get there. When setting your bar, be realistic. Are you the top goalie in AAA hockey? If so, then yes leagues like the USHL and NAHL are attainable. If you are a senior backing up your High School team from say somewhere like South Carolina...odds are not terribly in your



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favor for achieving that same goal. Keep in mind, there have been MANY of goalies that have started out in Junior C or Tier 3 and moved all the way up the ladder and earned Scholarships to College to play hockey. Hard work does NOT go unnoticed.

No matter what avenue you take, the entire process is about marketing, and marketing only. You are marketing YOU, so take pride in it and give it 100%...if you are putting out 50% effort, coaches take notice. Remember, as coaches, we typically see hundreds of requests yearly from goalies wanting to make one of two or three roster spots on our teams. Our jobs rely on two things, winning and moving young athletes onto College. Some programs are notorious for being a pipeline to University hockey due to their traditions and their coach's connections, while some programs are just the opposite. Do your homework and begin to figure out which programs are going to help YOU for YOUR future, and provide you with the best training to get there.

I am going to discuss over the next few articles ways of communicating with the coaching staffs of teams you are aspiring to play for. Naturally, like every great marketing plan, you need to have a path that goes step by step. To blitzkrieg a coach with lots of information

about you will drastically hurt your chances...so let's go step by step, article by article, and help you achieve your dreams.

This week I am going to discuss Step 1, the Email. Emails are a fantastic way to reach out to coaches and introduce YOU. Remember, an email needs to be a lot like a Mini Skirt; short, grabs attention, and most importantly leaves the coach desiring more. Here is a list of things to include in your email and some helpful hints:

Your name and all of your contact info. You would be amazed how many people forget this, no joke. I get emails from aspiring goalies almost hourly towards the end of the season, and it never amazes me how many I move to the delete box because of this. One time, I had a parent ask me why I don't spend a few more of my precious seconds to email back and ask for the info...I simply asked why they didn't spend more of their precious seconds and send it to begin with? Also, remember, it is an email...as in a letter. You are not tweeting another kid with acne...use proper English and punctuation for heaven's sake.

Keep it short. No one will read anything over 2-3 paragraphs...a wall of text does not correlate to stopping pucks! Keep in mind this email is all about introduction and touching base. Your email should not read like you are scared, when writing it pretend you know the coach or he knows you. If you make the team, you have to virtually live in each other's lives daily for the next 9 months...make friends early!

Highlights. Go ahead and attach a few YouTube clips...those are always fun to watch and take up only 30 seconds of our time. Make sure there is no Rap music...100% of the coaching staffs out there are over the age of 28, I myself am in my early 30s...many are much older. If it is something that would offend your parents or school, it will offend me too.

Stats-Keep your stats honest. If your team is one of those that keeps stats separate from what Pointstreak says, good luck. And remember, goalie coaches know how to read through stats...we understand that the historical misrepresentations of goalies known as GAA and Save % are indicative of the 5 players' mistakes in front. Don't be afraid to attach other stats like your bounce back win percentage, penalty shot/shootout percentage, and off-ice stats as well.

GRADES!!! If you don't have solid grades...then what are you even hoping for? Colleges want athletes with good grades (sorry boys, a 21 on your ACT is not great). Keep in mind GPA is nice, but not the whole story. Kids from the worst public school in the country taking remedial classes and 5th grade level math can still get a 4.0.

References. ALWAYS add 1-3 powerful references in your email. If possible, use your goalie coach from summer camp...this has helped me the most. This past year I called Joe Messina from Bandits, Robb Stauber, and Jim Johnson from the University of Minnesota about kids that emailed me. What is nice about talking to guys like that is we all know each other and can compare you to others. In essence, it gives someone like me a solid foundation to know what I am looking at...love you or hate you, no one is willing to risk their reputation to one another by lying.

Camps. I like to know where you train, if even at all! It amazes me that some kids do ZERO training over the summer. By letting me know what camps you attend, it gives me a solid idea as to your style of training and shows me your level of dedication. Also, don't forget to put down anything prestigious too! District and National camps are GREAT EXPOSURE, and it also lets a coach know you



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have gone through the refinement process and been identified amongst your peers.

PICTURE! Just remember, is the picture you are sending magazine worthy? Would you see it featured on InGoalMag.com? If not, then go get another one. You are trying to sell yourself! Include both an action shot and a head shot. Kids that are clean cut and serious get the correct attention. Having a mop for a hair cut hanging in front of your eyes with a goofy look on your face makes the delete button all that much easier.

This may be the most important of all - be personal! Each week, I get an email from a goalie that says along the lines "Dear Coach, I want to play for you." Great lead-in right? Problem is he sent it to me and 60 other coaches CC'd in the same email. Will this lead me to believe that you really want to play for me? NOT so much! Again, you want me to spend a solid minute or two with my undivided attention on you and your email...do the same when crafting it! If you have to send 300 separate emails, so be it...turn off your cell phone, turn off Facebook, and focus on your future!

Stay tuned for my next article, I will be going over the recruiting DVDs and Showcases. Trust me, there are some major do's and don'ts when we get to those!

As always, follow your rebounds and keep your stick on the ice!

## Part II - The DVD

Welcome to the second article in a series, helping to maximize your exposure, for those of you out there trying to make JR teams this summer. Last article, we took an in depth look at the initial email you use to introduce yourself to prospective coaches for next season. A second step and growing trend in Player Based Scouting to Coaches is the DVD. This week, we will again dive into the Do's and Don'ts when it comes to this stage. Again, our end goal after these articles is for YOU to get the honest look you deserve.

Unlike the email with YouTube clips attached, the DVD can be a FANTASTIC tool for a coach. For one, the nice thing about the DVD, it can be played on a TV and not just via a laptop... this is where the quality can play a major factor. Another thing about the DVD that is to your advantage, is that you can completely cater it to you...weather its entire game footage, broken down to chapters which can include things like shootouts, power plays, and goals al-

lowed, or even some locker room footage and interviews. Whatever it is you put on the DVD, make sure it sells YOU. Keep in mind aside from having you as a goalie on the ice, I have to deal with you as a person off the ice...showcase that side as well.

Probably the biggest factor, for me, about the DVD is that it shows you are serious about trying out for me (Or whatever team you are going for). To simply fire off emails is one thing, but to put forth the time and effort involved in making something says you care about your future. Here is a little secret...I can check an email and youtube clip from my phone, Ipad, Computer and so forth. In today's society, we are constantly multitasking...heck, it's not uncommon for me to be on my phone and running 7 sites simultaneously on my Ipad all at the same time. BUT, when you send me that DVD? I have to stop everything and put aside time focused to watching that and that only. In the end, that means more exposure for you!

Guess what I have here on my desk in Springfield...two stacks of DVDs. One stack, not as tall but all are very nicely packaged and have some computer printed readable labels...the other stack, burned blank disks with Sharpie'd names. Imagine I am that music fan walking out of the concert venue...which one of the DVDs am I going to go home and watch? In theory, the greatest band in the world was never discovered because of Poor marketing...same can be said for hockey players. Remember, when you walk into Best Buy and purchase a movie, they do not just simply hand you a disk. The disk comes in a case with a booklet and a fancy cover. Sometimes you even buy the deluxe edition of the movie...you need to pretend that your DVD should be the deluxe version compared to others. Make ME want to read every page and view every video you have, literally make it to the point I want to watch yours before any others. Your "Packaging" should include a Folder containing a couple pictures of you, copies of any articles from Papers or Magazines you might have been featured in, and a letter written to that team's coach. Other items might include reference letters from Scouts and Coaches you might have worked with as well. What ever is in there, be sure it makes the DVD even more enticing to watch.

So now that I am going through the stack...I need to identify the best goalies for me to invite to our tryouts. Despite what some might feel, I personally can say that not every kid that wants to try-out gets the nod. Having 75 goalies at a tryout is not going to help me whatsoever. Being able to whittle it down ahead of time is part of my job...and my job is to make sure we go into the season with the BEST Goalies available to us.

This past Saturday morning, I am here at the office a solid 12 hours before our game going through some DVDs. We have a nice 50" plasma in the office so my eyes with the horrible vision (The glasses aren't just a cool factor) don't have to squint so hard. Much to my amazement, I pop a particular Goalies' DVD from stack one in and the only reaction was for my head to tilt. This particular video was shot with a camera being held in what seems to me a mother's hand. Naturally, she was caught up in the game; the camera followed the puck, the footage was shaky, she either forgot she was recording or she REALLY wanted me to know her feelings for the other players, but the best part...and I do mean the best part...was it was shot from the last row of the bleachers at center ice in full screen mode, not zoomed in.

Remember that 50" plasma I mentioned earlier? I literally pulled out a ruler to make sure my eyes were not deceiving me...the goalie, thanks to Momma Spielberg, was less than 2" tall. I mean, people tell me I am good and can recognize talent...but a little assistance

on your part certainly helps. Ever seen the movie My Cousin Vinnie? Great scene where in the courtroom, Joe Pesci asked the witness if he was positive his clients were in fact the murders. The gentleman explains which window he saw them through, and Joe goes on to show pictures of the fact the windows were dirty, the screens were closed and never cleaned, the trees and bushes obstructed the view, and so forth. Any scramble on Mamma Spielberg's son and I am trying to see what a 6' tall goalie reduced to 2" behind a wall of 5-8 players scrambling for a puck has in terms of talents.

Kind of tough to do isn't it? I am proud to admit I want to thank publicly Mamma Spielberg, remember how I mentioned that video followed the puck the entire game? I found, no lie, two forwards and defenseman that we are trying to obtain. Literally, as a coaching staff we fell in love with one forward we are willing to bet the bank on.

So the question to you, is the intent of YOUR DVD to sell me OTHER kids? I certainly hope not. Have Mom (or Dad, don't want to leave you guys out) purchase a tripod. They are as cheap as \$20 at Best Buy...plant the thing close to your end, but where the line of vision isn't entirely obstructed from traffic in front, and have it zoomed in to where you fill up the majority of the screen. ALWAYS remember my 50" plasma...try to make yourself a sold 12" tall or more, after all my TV is roughly 44" wide by 24". As a goalie Coach I also like to see what you are doing away from the puck. If you are a scanning the crowd for Dad's constant approval...send that DVD to another team, for 9 months, you officially join the Power family and I am the ONLY person you need to please. If you are searching the crowd for puck bunnies after the game...you can save yourself a lot of time and just attend our games for \$8 and get a better look.

Remember, don't send me a highlight reel, and send me everything. I could put the pads on, practice with an NHL team and make you a DVD with 12 saves and you would be lead to believe I am an NHL caliber goalie...when truth of the fact is, those 12 shots are the only ones I saved out of 4000. Video editing is a beautiful tool, show me the whole picture. Being scored on happens, how do you bounce back? How do you react? Are your shoulders slumping and you swinging your stick at the post or are you squirting water in your face, skating a figure 8 and challenging off the next face off? You are human after all...and if you pitched nothing but shutouts game after game, you wouldn't be sending me your DVD; I would be attending your games along with every other coach in the country. Believe it or not, I actually like to see the goals you are letting in, they tell me a lot. For instance, when I look at a score sheet and see you won 5-3, I have no idea how those goals went in. Were they all break aways? Did you get screened in front and two of those goals were tips? Were you beat on direct shots and you missed judged the puck? The BIGGEST thing myself and any other coach look for... is did you battle to try and stop that puck? Did YOU do EVERYTHING possible within your physical structure to make that save? So let's break it down:

- Make sure your DVD is labeled cleanly and all writing is completely legible. If you can, print the labels
- Package them nicely. Just throwing them into a plastic case isn't enough. Spend some time making a nice Case cover with your picture and name.
- Attach a letter, written directly to the coach you are sending the DVDs to. Don't just send random DVDs in envelopes hoping the coaches figure out who you are. Use the informa-

tion from your initial email contact to reiterate those facts to the coach.

- Film YOU, not the game. It's nice to have a game footage, but keep the camera on you.
- Fill the screen with YOU, not zoomed way out...remember my plasma story!
- Don't just make a highlight reel, not every save needs to be flashy.
- Do your homework...like last article, be honest with yourself and send to the teams you aspire to play for and have a shot at.

It's your future...make an investment in it!

Good luck as your seasons are rolling into playoffs, and remember as always...stay square to the puck and keep your stick on the ice!

## Showcasing yourself at showcases!

It's springtime and hockey seasons are finally over. You have already begun emailing coaches making initial points of contact... but you are always looking for more exposure. In the last five years or so, showcases have fermented to become the new norm. Essentially, a showcase aspires to have roughly 200-300 young men show up to be scouted by multiple teams, all in one house. The concept being that instead of attending 12-30 tryouts over the summer, why not just show up to one showcase and be seen by them all at once?

Regardless of which showcase you choose, there are some things I have noticed over the years and want you to be aware of. First off, do your research and find out exactly who will be there and from what teams. Granted, most coaching staffs cannot attend every showcase out there; so many times they send a scout to do some bird dogging for them. While this is great and so forth, in MY opinion, having an actual coach from a team there carries more weight. The coach will have a better idea in terms of talent as to what he is looking for. As a bonus to you, they are there to communicate with. YOU can ask them any question you want and actually get a feel for them to help you decide if it's the best choice for you (nothing is worse than playing for someone you have a personality conflict with). Granted, in defense of the teams that do send scouts, depending upon the time frame of the showcase the team may be in playoffs and coaches are unable to attend in person.

Showcases virtually contact every team on the planet to attend, because in the end it makes them look good in your eyes and offers exposure to you. Last year, I attended four showcases. At one of which I had the most clout in the building, another I was low man on the totem pole. Please keep in mind, they are a business and depend on the amount of kids that attend. Now, in all fairness to them, they also depend on the level of talent that attends. If the Showcase is a dud one year, the odds of many high level coaches showing back up are slim to none. You also need to remember, showcases provide you with an opportunity for exposure.

As a coach attending a Showcase, it gives me a healthy sample of talent out there. But you need to remember I am also competing against every other team in the building for the top talent. The one thing I consistently see with showcases is that goalies (along with everyone else) get bombarded with tryout offers and from teams. I hear people actually complain about this and think teams are just

blind mailing everyone to attend their tryouts. Essentially, in the end, that is the reason you attended the showcase to begin with isn't it? Let's be honest...had I or other teams not been there, how would we have been able to contact you about our tryouts to begin with? At the very least, you now know the team has seen you play and not just some open mystery invite. That fact alone makes Showcases worth it!

At one particular showcase, I had a particular goalie that I really liked ask me why I didn't flat out offer him a spot on the team or at least a tender. He was curious as to why I wanted him to attend my tryout after just watching him for a weekend. His father questioned my motives and wondered if it was purely a "fundraiser" invites and if I was just trying to fill our camps. A legitimate question, and one that I gave an honest answer to, "for one, I need to see you come in a battle for the spot, at the end of the day we cut kids we tendered for those that work harder and play better. Second, I literally just saw you stop pucks from the Sisters of the Broken and Poor. I need to see you face consistent actual talent from our level



Coaches at last year's Under-Armour showcase eyeing the prospects. Will you make the right impression this year?

of play." For those wondering what I meant by that last sentence, at the showcase the goalie was facing kids who were aspiring to play at our level (and many of them have no chance). I need to see him against our veteran returning players to truly gauge his talent. After all you are trying to prove to me that you can play on my team. In my eyes, the only way to actually verify that is to throw you to the wolves so to speak and have you face my actual team!

The first part of that answer is simple to understand as well. I have the ability to invite 24 goalies to tryouts...I am refining the system (considering I probably met and scouted over 150 at various showcases on top of the 60+ I saw over the season). Once you get to my barn, the system will continue to refine from that point until I get down to 3 or 4 for our training camp. I need to see you compete against others of your level to get a side-by-side comparison and make the best decisions. Granted, I am aware my tryouts are a little different than most as we do 4 hours of goalie only training, two of which are purely skating. Call it bag skating, call it endurance testing...I am going to push you to the limits to determine who is going to give me the best odds on the season. I will find the best-conditioned athlete and more importantly, the hungriest wolf in the pack. (More on this in coming in May's article!)

So again, do your research (remember we talked about being honest with your talent level and where you want to play?) and figure out which showcases will give you the best odds for exposure. Also,

keep in minds that because a certain person is advertised as being there, don't forget to contact them directly and confirm they will be there. Many times, coaches commit to a showcase back in December, and then playoff schedules are released and their attendance becomes unlikely. Another nice thing about contacting that coach ahead of time is more often than not he will remember your name and pay extra attention to you; after all you did just tip him off before the show began. Figure out which coaches at the showcase are on the top of your list, email them directly and make sure to establish contact with them. Nine out of ten times any coach worth his salt is going to take advantage of this because you are essentially making his job easier.

Here is a list of 10 rules you should follow when participating in a showcase:

**BE PROFESIONAL!** From the time you get out of the car to hitting the ice to going home. Guys like me are notorious for hanging around the check-in table seeing you walk in the door. Ahead of time, coaches get lists from the Showcases, and begin our refinement process. Believe it or not, but the minute you walk in the doors you are being scouted!

**DRESS APPOPRIATELY!** Seriously, nothing makes me scratch names faster than seeing some kid with goofy hair in his face, flat brimmed hat on sideways, and his boxers showing. I'm not saying you have to walk in with a suit, but at check in a polo and khakis sends one heck of an impression at first glance. The rest of the weekend, rock your gym shorts and Under Armour...I realize you are an athlete. First impressions are lasting ones, dress as if you were on a campus visit and meeting the coaching staff of the Division 1 School you aspire to play for (Truth be told, they may be at that showcase!).

**COMPANY:** Ever heard the phrase "don't bring your kids to an interview"? Same applies to your girlfriend and family. If you are getting a ride to the event have your parents' drop you off at the door and walk in. Let them come in afterwards. I am all about meeting the family, but junior hockey is essentially about independence, tell Mom to let the chain loose for that weekend.

**YOU talk to coaches:** Please please please do NOT have your mother work the room figuring out who the coaches and scouts are. There is no quicker way to get the snip than having Mommy do the damage. Think about it, if she is doing it there, what is to make me believe she won't be calling me after every game inquiring about your playing time?

**BATTLE!:** Wise words posted in every locker room at our tryouts, "You have no friends here, you are competing against each other for very few spots on our team...battle." Don't just float through the motions. As a goalie, I want to see you playing pucks, literally attacking rebounds and covering them, barking to your Dmen, cast that Poke Check like a fly fisherman, do it all baby. Remember, it's your time to shine, don't let someone else steal that light.

**YES SIR:** Not dude, bro, boss, chief, pops, or anything else of the sort. Show respect to coaches when they address you. And for that matter, YES not yeah...nothing sounds more insulting to a question than hearing a kid pipe off "Yeah". And when asked a question, please do not respond "Uh-huh", use yes's and no's.

**CONFIDENCE:** Truth is every coach there will at least look at EVERY player and goalie once. And the first day or two the issue isn't

so much as figuring out who the best is but rather figuring out who the worst are. From that point, if our list is weeded down from 250 to 25 (or in the case of goalies, 24 to 4) it makes life easier for us. How do you stay on that list? Confidence. Do you shake your head when scored on? Do you just breathe moxy and intimidation? Are you walking around scared in the halls or do you have that determined look that could make a lion hide behind a rock at the zoo?

**RESPECT:** This is a big one and I mean big one. In #7 we talked about the Sir effect and what not, but teams you may not be interested in at showcases will approach you. Still, take the time and listen to them and say thank you. If you are a little egotistical snot to that coach, he is going to walk back into the Green Room where the rest of us sit and just throw you under a bus. Simultaneously, 20-30 pens will make the same two inch scratch on the same piece of paper and you will have just wasted a weekend. A lot of times, lower teams feed off others (Tier 3 off Tier 2, and so forth) so relationships are there. We know each other and trust one another. They might be the guy that hypes you up the ladder so to speak. Something to keep in mind, don't be insulted by teams talking to you that are not the level you are shooting for, if they are the only ones talking to you, it says something doesn't it?

**TALK to coaches:** Do not be afraid of them, ask them anything you want. In theory, if you make their team they are in your life for the next 6-9 months. From a goaltending perspective, find out who they have moved on and who is returning. Who have they tendered or drafted? Do not be scared off by this either. Remember if anything, you get a ball park idea of what they have. Maybe, it's a kid in your league and you know you are better than-so battle him for that spot. Do not think just because they have someone all bets are off. Put it this way, and I will use out skaters as an example, last year of the 11 players we tendered and drafted only 3 made the team. All other spots were filled with kids from tryouts including one of my goalies (who played over 20 games this season and had two NHL scouts come to watch him exclusively). Anything can happen!

**PROMOTE yourself:** Take the a few copies of the DVD from last article with you. If you went ahead and made a folder with your information, pictures, and articles bring some of those with you as well. When you figure out whom the coaches attending are the ones from teams you aspire to play for, give them copies! Also, try to arrange a time when you can sit down and talk with them ask for feedback. Always keep in mind, just because one particular coach/team cannot use your services does not mean they won't pass your information along.

At the end of the day, remember it's all about you and your future. Ten years from now you do not want to be sitting there thinking, "if only I had done this better" while watching someone you used to play against playing in the NHL. Make sure you take a positive professional approach to marketing yourself!

*Good luck this spring, and as always...keep your chest square to the puck and stick on the ice!*

—Coach Power