



Hockey Evaluations

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Several weeks ago Hockey Talk had a very interesting and insightful article on "Evaluations - A Dirty Word?"

Based on my own personal experiences of coaching within the Calgary Minor Hockey system, being involved with Hockey Alberta's under 16 program as an evaluator and coach, training with elite hockey players from Junior A to Pro level, as well as scouting at the Junior A tier II level for Bow Valley Eagles and Langley Thunder, I offer the following viewpoint on the "controversial" topic of evaluations.

When evaluating or scouting players, hockey personnel look for a variety of hockey skills and personal traits. Each evaluator may not be on the same page with regards to the top criteria used to assess an individual player's skills or future potential, but a player "must stand out", "excel in a certain area of the game", or showcase a "special skill". During tryouts a player, needs to get noticed i.e. score a great goal, make a super pass, deke through several players, give a big hit, exhibit a hard & accurate shot, skate like the wind etc... he or she must stand out on a consistent basis... to be labeled... "A player." Whatever a player does well e.g. excellent speed it important to showcase that speed; to get noticed!

While attending the 1994 Hockey Canada Coaching Conference in Calgary, I had the pleasure to talk to Paul Henry, who had just completed the assignment of being Director of Player Personnel for the 1994 Olympic Silver Medal Winning Team Canada. Since his position with Team Canada, Paul has worked with the Florida Panthers. I asked Paul, a seasoned scout like himself "What are the 3 most important components you look for when scouting or evaluating players?" He expressed the following views which I have always remembered.

- No: 1 Skating
- No: 2 Hockey Sense
- No: 3 Character

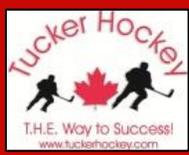
Skating is to hockey what running is to soccer. Skating is the foundation upon which all other skills are built. It is the most important skill of ice hockey. In order to advance through the hockey system from Bantam to Midget, Midget to Junior A , and Junior A to Pro etc... A player must be a great skater... especially in today's game. A player, who's game consists of great speed and skating agility, will excel to a higher level of play. As well, the level of performance attained by a player in passing, shooting, checking, and puck control are directly related to one's skating ability. The time spent improving a player's skating is a worthwhile investment due to the carry-over value to all other aspects of the game. Personally, this was reinforced now that I have taught power skating for the past 5 years in both Canada and Europe.

Hockey Sense is how you "think the game". This was the main ingredient as to why Wayne Gretzky played better than anyone else. He had the special ability to "Read and React"... to see a play develop... to anticipate where his team mates would be... or where the puck would go... on a higher level than anyone who has ever played the game. The ability to make good decisions with the puck (offensive creativity) and make good decisions without the puck (offensive support & especially defensive play) are the core of having good hockey sense.

Character is difficult to teach. It comes from within... it's a player's commitment to excellence, to want to improve on every aspect of their game, to play ever shift like it's your last shift, to have a great work ethic, to be a team player (unselfish), to have the ability to overcome adversities and to have the "will to win".

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During the month of September, hundreds of "volunteer coaches and evaluators" will spend countless hours doing their very best to place players in the proper divisions... if a player stands out ... it will excel their chances to get noticed by the evaluators... remember "you want to get noticed"!

In future editions of Hockey Talk, I will talk about the importance of skating. I will discuss such: topics as proper stick length, balance and edge control, knee bend and forward striding etc. to enhance skating performance.

Yours in Hockey
Coach Rex