

Tucker Hockey Tips

Hockey IQ Development

Hockey players of all ages and skills need to work on their hockey fundamentals i.e. skating, puck control, passing, shooting and checking. Sidney Crosby, arguably the best all round player today, spends time each day on the fundamentals of his game. However, fundamentals are not enough. A player will not become a great player if he or she can't apply these skills effectively in a game. Hockey sense separates the very best from the rest. Hockey sense is the tactical thinking part of the game. Hockey sense is a learned skill and players are not born with this trait. Over the years the term hockey sense has evolved into "Think Hockey" and "Hockey IQ".

Playing the game is the best way for players to train hockey their sense. The more a player plays under game like conditions, making decisions under pressure, the better prepared that he or she will be to handle the stresses of real competition. Therefore, every coach needs to spend a portion of their practice doing drills or games that will teach Hockey IQ.

When instructing 1 on 1 sessions with atom players and higher ages, besides working to improve on their technical skills, I will often teach them better Hockey IQ. For example, after developing their technical skills of skating and puck control we will often practice ways to improve the "thinking part / understanding of their game" - within the drills and skills they are doing on the ice.

An Example: Evasive Skating & Evasive Puck Control Drill

Set Up: 1 vs. 1 or 1 vs. 2 players – where the emphasize is to keep the puck away from opponents in a small area such as below the goal line, or within a circle etc.

While doing this drill on the ice, I will question players on the purpose of the drill.

- ***What are you doing?***

What is being evasive? It's being unpredictable, shifty with

one's skating and puck control skills. The puck carrier is trying to keep the puck away from one player, two players, or multiple players etc.

- ***How are you doing it?***

A player is performing evasive skating - by changing direction via (stopping, turning, pivoting, crossovers, 3 & 9 skating moves etc.) and getting away from their opponents. Creating time and space. A player is performing evasive puck control

by using good body position, protecting the puck i.e. keeping his or her body between the puck and their opponents, showing lots of moves, fakes, toe drags etc. in a small area of space on the ice.

- ***Why are you doing it?***

To avoid being checked i.e. losing control of the puck and enhance your ability to maintain possession of the puck and make good plays on the ice. The ability to create more time and space and get away from your opponents is a very valuable skill. If you control

the puck you control the game. A good offense is the best defence indeed!

- ***When are you doing it?***

Any time during a game a player may be forced to do evasive skating and puck control. Sidney Crosby is probably the best in the game doing this in his offensive zone; down low below the opponent's goal line or near the half boards to maintain possession of the puck, to make a play and create offense for his team. It's extremely difficult for opponents to take the puck away from Crosby. He's a beast with the puck!

- ***Where are you doing it?***

For example, a defenseman can be doing evasive skating and puck control when an opponent pressures him or her in a game. In the defensive zone - below the hash marks or

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or goal line, in the neutral zone when trying to create a play to advance the puck into the offensive zone or from the point area while in the offensive zone to keep the puck deeper in the zone, make a pass or take a shot on net.

- *Are you doing it?*

Assess your individual game. How confident and effective are you at protecting the puck and keeping the puck away from opponents? Are you just a north – south player who just likes to go wide on an opponent? If you are often turning over the puck then this is an area of your game that you certainly need to work on. Due to the increased speed and size of players, the playing area is getting smaller and being

able to effectively evade your opponents is more critical than ever to have success in today's game.

Final Thoughts:

Players with strong Hockey IQ play the game with their head up, and make good decisions on the ice with speed while under pressure. Even while in a state of fatigue. Players are consistent each shift, period, and game throughout the season in making good decisions with the puck and when they don't have the puck. If you are not doing it - start making it more a part of your game - develop into a "complete" hockey player.

Think Hockey - develop your Hockey IQ.