



Multi Tasking – It’s All About Good Training By Chuck Grillo

Note from Jack Blatherwick: The skill of multi-tasking — doing several things at once — is typical of the very best offensive players in the world. Combining quick hands, quick feet, creative moves, and a quick mind is the key to dominating with the puck at any level. In the old days we just called these awesome skills “uncoachable.”

However, the good news is: multi-tasking is trainable. The Russian coaches do it all the time using a combination of on-ice and off-ice activities to program the mind and body. Because Chuck Grillo has spent countless hours in Moscow, watching their training and competition, I asked him to comment on how the Russians develop multi-tasking abilities.

How do they develop teen-agers like Alexander Ovechkin who attack the defense at high speed while looking around for creative options — all the while moving their hands and shoulders just as quickly as their feet? Below are Grillo’s thoughts on coaching these “uncoachable” skills. (Jack Blatherwick).



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Funny thing. When we see a player doing all those subtle moves, feints, dekes, hand drops, head and shoulder moves — we say, “He looks like a hockey player.”

Not all players inherit skills or are born to be there. I believe they either inherit things in the gene pool, develop them by emulating their peers or mentors, or they simply program their mind through practice.

I watched Coach Yurizinov of Dynamo Moscow for several years. He would take all the young guys after practice, have them skate through the neutral zone at full speed and give the same head and shoulder moves over and over again. Then they would alter it to include a change of direction.

Multi-tasking skills — as well as feints, dekes and deceptive moves — are entirely trainable. Sergei Makarov had that unique ability to freeze people with his moves. He could give a head and shoulder fake and beat an opponent without even needing to skate fast. Igor Larionov could thread a puck through bodies and sticks to the weak side of the net for a tap-in goal. His feints, hand drops and head-and-shoulder moves froze the opposing goalie and everyone defending against him before he made the pass.

Actually, I learned as much about this from an old iron-ranger named Slim Troumbly, who played the game like Larionov.

This guy could have played in the NHL when there were only six teams. Slim said, “Chuck, most players are worried about catching the puck and handling it. That should be a given if they’ve practiced it over and over. Why, when they can make the game simple, wouldn’t they think about giving it to someone else before it hits their stick, go to a hole and get it back? That’s how simple the game is.”

Simple? Only if it has been practiced thousands of times.

Bottom line, the human mind only likes to do one thing at a time — unless you train it to do more. One example would be juggling more than one ball, but the best example is keeping your feet moving while handling, receiving or passing a puck. Your feet want to stop because your mind only wants to do one thing at a time. If you don’t practice it — program your mind — your mind isn’t interested in doing it. As soon as players and coaches understand how the human mind works, they have no problem programming it.

This is why feet stop when we’re about to receive a puck going down the wing. The lesser player’s mind is thinking about catching it. For the great players, catching it is a given. They have that unique ability to keep their feet moving to catch it while they are thinking about who they are going to give it to well before it gets there.

The average players just pass the puck. The great ones give a little hand drop, feint, head and shoulder move prior to passing. This freezes the opponent and makes passes easier to complete. I’ve seen great players skate through the neutral-zone giving head and shoulder moves — and there was no one around them — even in a game. After years of practice, they do it automatically. It’s part of their rink presence.

Training prepares the mind, the mind tells your feet and hands what they have to do to make you a great player, and your coordination comes from doing it over and over and over again.

When it comes to training in our camp (Minnesota Hockey Camps), if it’s not demanding, tough, hard, complicated, with overly sophisticated practices — tiring and a tough price to pay — the camp isn’t worth it. No one gets better taking short cuts, and certainly no one gets better with games, games, and more games.

Great camps and training experiences expose you to difficult new challenges, and build your foundation as a person and as an athlete. Then, if the player is determined to succeed, he/she will build from that foundation.

Being a quality athlete is all about quality training, training that exposes and builds your character. Each player ultimately determines their character. It is one thing that cannot be bought.

Coaching is really about teaching young people that hard work is gratifying and fun when you do it with people you care about and who believe in you.

The next time you see a defenseman fail to move laterally, while handling the puck — delaying for a second to create a passing angle for the teammate coming through the middle, then passing it while keeping his feet moving — tell him, “It is human nature for the mind to do one thing at a time — unless you program the mind to do multiple things.”