

TOTAL FEMALE HOCKEY SUCCESS SECRETS

Bonus Articles



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HOW TO MANAGE THE PUCK

Managing the puck is a term I use a lot with my players. In the simplest terms possible, it means understanding when to keep the puck and when to give it up. You can think of it as the sibling of puck possession.

So let's go through a few examples of how this applies in a game situation and hopefully that will help to clarify what this concept is all about.

MOVING PUCKS AWAY FROM PRESSURE:

This is a big one for both individual players and the team. How many times has your team finally regained possession of the puck after battling hard in your defensive zone - only to throw the puck right back up the wall into the opponent? Or even better, you finally win a scrum in front of the net and then you throw it right back into the slot to the other team? These are all panic plays that result from an inability to identify where the open ice is. Ideally, there would be a teammate who works hard to get open away from all the traffic and chaos and you could move the puck to them away from the pressure. But even if you can't find an open teammate, you are better off moving the puck into open ice and creating a 50/50 race and battle for the puck than you are simply giving up full possession to your opponent.

SKATING YOURSELF OUT OF TROUBLE:

This is a skill that desperately needs to be addressed. It's far too common in the girls' game that a player panics and gets rid of the puck as soon as she comes under pressure. It could be a defenseman who is under attack from a forechecker on the breakout or a forward who is being closed in on when they have the puck in the offensive zone. Girls need to spend more time working on protecting the puck when they have it and moving their feet to create space for themselves and time to move the puck to an open player. Panic plays where you give up possession simply because you're not confident enough to manage the puck under pressure are simply unacceptable. And as you move up in age groups and levels, the speed and intensity of that pressure is only going to get bigger and bigger. Spending time on winning 1 on 1 battles by moving your feet and finding time and space is critical for every player at every age group and ability level.

SKATING INTO PRESSURE & DISHING IT OFF:

This might be a 'next level' skill for you depending on where you're starting from. But it's an absolutely critical one especially when you're looking to generate more offense. Let's use the power-play as an example. Your team has clear possession of the puck in the opponent's end on the power-play and you're moving it around to your teammates

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without too much trouble. Possession is great, but the power-play is all about scoring. So how to you generate more quality scoring chances? You have to skate the puck into pressure and pass it off to an open teammate. If you are standing on the hash marks against the wall with the puck, a pass up to your D or a pass low to the player supporting you below the goal-line isn't going to cause the penalty-kill unit to have to adjust much. On the other hand, if you skate hard off the wall with the puck into the middle of the ice, you force them to have to make a decision. Either they let you walk right into the slot for a prime scoring chance, or one of the penalty killers has to come out of their defensive position to come take you. In that moment when they make that adjustment, you create a moment of confusion where you can then dish it off to an open teammate who will have a better chance of creating a scoring chance due to the chaos you created by skating the puck into pressure.

5 DEAL BREAKERS FOR SCOUTS

After spending the past 10 years coaching players who aspire to play hockey at the college level, and speaking with the scouts and coaches who ultimately decide who makes the cut at that level, I know how much the little details of the game make a BIG difference. There are huge tournaments almost every weekend here in the Toronto area which are always crawling with scouts and watching the players' every move on the ice.

If you want to play at the next level, you have to pay attention to the little details and avoid these five BIG deal-breakers.

1. Doesn't Stop On Pucks

Every player has heard their coach tell them to stop and start. There is nothing worse than watching a player do a "fly-by" on their check and then do a big circle to recover back instead of stopping and starting. Whether it is after a turnover or while trying to angle your opponent, if you miss the puck or make a mistake, you have to stop and start instead of doing the big circle. It is so frustrating when players do it - and trust me when I say that all the coaches and scouts notice the "fly-bys".

2. Disappears As Game/Tournament Goes On

Everyone is excited and energized for the first shift of the game and the first game of the tournament. But can you sustain it? It is great to be a rock-star at the start of the game and tournament, but if you are invisible in the third period or in the third game of the tournament, scouts will notice. You have to be consistent. It's one of the hardest things for young players to learn, but it is absolutely critical if you want to get to the next level. Coaches want to know that you can deliver a consistent effort from shift-to-shift and game-to-game if they are going to even consider bringing you into their college program someday.

3. No Second Effort

This one is just painful to watch. We all make mistakes on the ice. We miss the puck, miss our check, miss the net and mishandle the puck. How do you react when you make that mistake? Some players give up when they mess up. And that's a serious 'red flag' for every coach. It's inevitable that you are going to make mistakes on the ice - but how will you recover from that mistake? A player who is unwilling to make the 2nd effort will not see the ice at the college level - if they even make it there in the first place.

4. Lazy Changes

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This one is easy. You need to skate hard to the bench at the end of your shift and come off the bench like you've been shot out of a rocket to start your next shift. Lazy changes stick out like a sore thumb. Come out flying at the start of your shift and then work as hard as you can to change quickly so that your teammate can go out and get their job done.

5. Bad Body Language

Body language doesn't lie. As I said above, you're going to screw up out there. And so are your teammates. What will your body language say about the mistake you just made? Will you slam your stick on the ice? Will you shake your head or drop your shoulders? Will you slow down or speed up? Will you keep going full-out as if nothing ever happened? Bad body language is selfish and distracting. And it is a huge red flag for every coach and scout out there.

These 5 deal-breakers have NOTHING to do with elite level skill. These are all CHOICES. You simply DECIDE that you are going to pay attention to these details. Differentiate yourself from the crowd by deciding to always be the hardest working player on the ice. Period. Don't give a scout a reason to cross your name off the list.

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HOW OFTEN DO YOU TOUCH THE PUCK

Puck possession stats have become all the rage in hockey. The amount of time your team has the puck seems to correlate pretty well with the chance of your team winning the game... except, of course, when it doesn't.

We can debate the importance of keeping this team stat until we're blue in the face, but today I'd like to touch on it as an individual statistic. Do you know how much time you actually spend touching the puck in a game? Most girls hockey games range from having 30 to 60 minutes of actual playing time. How much of that time do you have the puck on your stick?

In a typical 60 minute NHL game, a superstar player, one who gets a lot of minutes and is a consistent contributor on the offensive side of the puck, only has the puck on their stick for 45 seconds total. A more defensively minded player or one that gets limited minutes, will have it far less than that.

Think about how that translates over to your game. Even if you're a rockstar out there, odds are you've only got the puck on your stick for less than a minute.

Now you know why they say "defense wins championships" and why your coaches are constantly harping on you about the importance of your play without the puck.

With the teams I coach, we focus a lot of time early in the season on our play without the puck and I narrow this down even further to focus on defending in 1 on 1 situations.

This is a critical skill for both forwards and defensemen. Being able to judge your opponent's speed, angle of attack, degree of puck control and their options to share or shoot the puck isn't easy. Forwards need to do this while forechecking and backchecking and Ds can't reach an elite level without being able to dominate 1 on 1s. And for the goalies, you're always 1 on 1 with your shooter so this is something you're constantly focused on.

The first and most important skill needed for defending 1 on 1s is skating. You need to have "good feet" to be able to read and react to what the puck carrier is doing. If you struggle with pivoting in one direction or in transitioning from backwards to forwards, your ability to defend will suffer. All players, regardless of position, must be proficient at all skating skills - forward and backward stride, tight turns, pivots, stops on two feet and one foot using both inside and outside edges, edge work etc etc etc. If you struggle at any of these skills, you will get exposed while defending.

The next most critical skill is timing. You have to learn how to read the speed, angle of attack, degree of possession and options to move the puck of your opponent. That's a lot to ask when there are 8 other skaters on the ice and you're trying to pick up on everyone's cues. This is something that can only be learned and perfected with experience. Whether you are 8 or 18, angling drills should be a part of your team &

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individual training. The basic techniques of angling can be taught off the ice (hand positioning, how to make safe and effective contact etc) but there is no substitute to practicing these skills on the ice. Players have to progress from slow speeds to game speeds, and from defending one player to reading the entire play. This isn't something that can be glazed over in a single practice. Since most of the game is played without the puck, this has to be a mainstay of your on-ice training no matter what point you're at in the season.

Don't get me wrong here. I know we all love having the puck on our stick. We want to impact the game every time we hit the ice. But you'll play many many shifts in your hockey career where you never even come close to touching the puck. And your effectiveness in those shifts is as important as what you do when you do have the chance to touch the puck. Players who are great when they don't have the puck don't always stand out on the ice at first. But all good coaches, and certainly all the scouts for the next level, value this ability greatly and will look for players who know exactly where to be and what to do when they don't have puck possession.

Becoming an expert in this area takes lots of experience learning the skills in practice and executing in games. It is also a skill that you can learn a great deal about by watching game footage. The next time you watch a game, pick one player on the ice that you're going to focus on the whole time and make special note of what they do when they don't have the puck.

BE YOUR OWN BEST FRIEND

I have to admit...

... I used to be one of those players who would bang their stick on their ice after missing an open net. I'd roll my eyes when someone missed a pass that I thought she should get. I'd mutter something under my breath when I was annoyed. I would let my frustrations get to me on the ice. And I didn't think it was having an effect on my performance. It was just "what I did".

It wasn't until a few weeks into my freshman season at university that I was set straight. My college coach let me know that it was unacceptable behavior to bang my stick, roll my eyes or show any kind of frustration on the ice. She told me that I had to learn to play as if nothing bothered me. Before we had this chat, everyone on the rink would not only know that I made a mistake, but I would show them that I let it rattle me by the way I reacted.

It was hard to break a bad habit. I wasn't able to stop cold-turkey. In fact, I actually learned to how to shake off my mistakes and hold myself accountable in the strangest of places...

... the racquetball court.

One of my teammates and I used to play racquetball as a warm-up before off-ice workouts during the season. We didn't have any real idea of what the rules were or what we were doing, but we ran around like mad-women and competed as hard as we could to win our strange version of the game. I'm sure that people who walked by the courts when we played were wondering why we were playing the game with full body contact.

The teammate I was playing with was a great athlete. She played for Team Canada and was a superstar on our college team. Being able to beat her on the ice wasn't exactly easy. But I thought I had a shot at beating her on the racquetball court. So I decided I would try out this new technique of staying positive all the time and not showing my frustrations in our one-on-one racquetball games. If I hit a bad shot, I'd smile. If she made a great shot, I'd just smile. I didn't let anything get to me one way or the other. I just played my game and stayed positive. I developed a great poker face.

And here's the funny thing...

... after practicing this new habit for a few weeks, I started to win. And I didn't just win some of the time - I won every match. I wasn't a superior racquetball player and I was certainly not a superior athlete. But I decided that I would stay positive no matter what happened and that 'winning' mindset translated directly into me winning more games.

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Once I had the first-hand experience of my new attitude getting me great performance results, all I had to do was transfer it over to the ice. And, it worked there too. I'd smile to myself when I missed an open net. I wouldn't react at all when a teammate missed a pass - other than working hard to help them fix the mistake right then and there. I played the game as if no mistake ever rattled me - and it made me a significantly better player. It was like night and day. All of a sudden, more pucks would go in the net, I was getting more ice time and I was playing on special teams regularly. Don't get me wrong - I was still frustrated - I just never let it show. It wasn't easy to change my mindset and attitude on the ice. The habit of letting my frustrations to show was hard to break. But once I made the change, it completely transformed my on-ice performance.

And always remember to talk to yourself like you would talk to your best friend. You wouldn't tell your best friend that "you suck" or "you can't do anything right" after they made one little mistake. So you shouldn't say that to yourself. So if you find yourself getting frustrated out on the ice, try your best to never let it show. I promise that changing your mindset and developing a great poker face will make you a better player.

#1 REASON YOUR SNAPSHOT SUCKS

Sometimes the truth hurts. But if you play girls hockey, odds are that your snapshot sucks. At every camp and training session I've run over the past 6 months, we've worked on the snapshot.

Here are 4 reasons why we've been focusing on the snapshot recently:

1. Surprisingly, quite a few of the players have never even heard of a snapshot or have never been taught how to do one. This is fine if it's a player in novice or atom, but a little bit shocking when I'm working with players who are in peewee, bantam and midget.
2. Most players think a snapshot is a mini-slapshot with a shorter backswing. It isn't.
3. 70% or more of the goals in girls hockey are scored from the slot. To be able to score effectively in that area, you need a quick and hard snapshot. Wristshots and slapshots won't help you in tight and in traffic.
4. And even if they have been taught one before, odds are it isn't good.

The #1 reason their snapshot sucks is that the positioning of their hands on the stick and the force their applying on the stick isn't right.

The major cue we use to take the snapshot to the next level is: TRY TO BREAK YOUR STICK IN HALF (without smashing it on the ground)

When you go to the hockey store to test out new sticks, you always flex it to see how you like it. When you do that test, you do a few things that are critical to shooting a better snapshot (even if you're not aware of them):

- :: You slide your bottom hand further down the stick.
- :: You rotate the stick forward 1/8th of the way to close the blade.
- :: You get your hands away from your body.
- :: You lean in and push hard through your bottom hand.

When you do those 4 things, you'll get to see how the stick flexes. You're also doing 4 things that you need to do to shoot a good snapshot: slide your bottom hand, rotate the stick, get your hands away and push hard through the bottom hand. There's more to it than that obviously, but that's a key starting point.

To see some pictures of how to take your snapshot to the next level, visit:

<http://totalfemalehockey.com/this-will-make-or-break-your-snapshot/>

DON'T OVERPAY FOR A LOSS

A coaching mentor of mine used this phrase yesterday and I thought it was pure gold - so I had to share it with you.

We "overpay" for mistakes and losses all the time.

You make one bad pass that leads to a goal and all of a sudden, you're a horrible hockey player, you can't do anything right and you don't want to go back on the ice. All because of one bad pass in a game of mistakes. Hockey is all about mistakes - capitalizing on the ones your opponents make and minimizing the consequences of the ones you make. It's amazing that we can let our mental game go south so quickly - but I see it happen all the time with my players and I have to admit it used to happen to me when I was a young player too.

And sometimes we do the same thing when we lose a game. We beat ourselves up for days. How did we play so badly? How come our execution was so off? Where did we go wrong??? All because of one loss in a long season.

We overpay when we lose - and we undervalue our successes. Success is never final and failure is never fatal in hockey. In fact, sometimes making those mistakes or losing that game teaches us a lot more about ourselves as a player and as a team that success does.

Now don't get me wrong, I love winning as much as the next person. But I don't let my happiness or my sense of self-worth be dictated by whether we won or lost our last game. This is not easy to do but it is an absolutely critical mental skill to have when we play such a long season in our "game of mistakes".

So as we head into the intensity of playoff season, remember to be your own best friend. Don't overpay for mistakes or losses. Think about how some key areas where you need to improve, make a plan of what you need to do to be better next time, and then move on. Life is too short to dwell on the past. And you're only one shift or one game away from being back at the top of your game.

YOUR #1 CHALLENGE IN BIG GAMES

With playoff games, provincial and state tournaments just around the corner, there are no shortage of BIG games coming up in our hockey schedules. When it comes to performing well in big games, there are really 3 KEY areas that you need to learn to manage in order to succeed. They all happen to start with the letter E, so we'll call them "The 3 Es".

1. EFFORT

It is very rare that any player or coach who gets into the BIG game will do anything less than give their best effort. You've put in a lot of time and energy just to get to where you are, and you certainly are going to leave it all on the table in the final push through the playoffs. You know you need to step it up and you want to step it up - so giving your best effort isn't the biggest challenge you face in the BIG game.

2. EXECUTION

A bigger challenge in the BIG game is execution on both an individual and team level. A lot of players get nervous in big games which can lead to shaky hands, questionable passes and poor judgement under pressure. If players struggle to execute their individual skills or the team system in these BIG games, this can have a very negative effect of performance. It is challenging to put nerves aside and be able to step up your execution when the season is on the line. But with proper preparation in practices, a clear outline of expectations for that game and the right mindset, execution shouldn't be your biggest challenge in the BIG games.

3. EMOTION

In my experiences as a player and coach, I think the most challenging thing to manage in the BIG game is EMOTION. It is very easy to be over-excited and over-stimulated going into the big game. The key to having success in the BIG game is to avoid the emotional roller coaster. One saying I like to use with my players to help them manage the highs and lows of a game is: No Parades. No Funerals.

This means that you never want to get too high or too low during BIG games. You have to be able to control your reactions to any situation to keep an even keel. When you let your emotions get the best of you, you risk them spilling over to the other 2 Es of execution and effort. If your team goes down by a goal late in the game, you may actually find yourself being too overstimulated that you can't think clearly and can't execute even the most basic plays. If your team gets up by a few goals early in the game, you might start to take your foot off the gas slightly or try to do too much with the puck. These changes to your game are due to a change in your emotion - or more specifically, your emotional reaction to what is happening in the game at that moment.

So as you get into bigger games in the coming weeks, remember that managing your emotions is the biggest challenge you'll need to overcome to achieve success.

8 SECRETS FOR SCORING MORE GOALS

"Natural" goal scorers are rare in girls' hockey. On most teams, you might be lucky to have one or two. To make sure that you're not relying on a few players to carry the load, you've got to find ways to manufacture scoring chances and goals.

So here are some basic tips for goal scoring that will help you and your players put more pucks in the net this season.

1) Finish Every Puck - In practice, finish all your rebounds in the back of the net or at least get a follow up shot. It might make the goalies a little mad - but it will definitely help you score more goals in games.

2) Be Willing To Pay The Price - Games are won and lost in the battles in front of the net. Drive the net and create traffic. I often tell my players to "snow" the goalie's pads every time they drive the net. Make sure not to do this after the whistle though. I also teach them to be a "leaky" goalie which means that when they are trying to screen the goalie and tips pucks, they need to square up to the shot as if they are playing goalie and take away the goalie's ability to see the first shot - which we call taking away the goalie's eyes.

3) Shoot Like You Mean It - Stop trying to feather the puck into a small little corner of the net. I tell my players to try to break their stick in half every time they shoot. Fire it like you're trying to shoot it through the back of the net & a lot more pucks will start to go in.

4) Show Your Blade - Whenever you are in the scoring area, move yourself into a position where the passer can see your stick blade. You want your blade to be perpendicular to the direction the puck is traveling so that it's easier to see and easier to get a quick shot off. Ideally, you should try to show your forehand in order to get off the most effective shot possible. In order to do that, you must practice adjusting your feet, body and blade to get shots off no matter where you are in the scoring area.

5) Be Patient - Let's be clear...you want to shoot when you are in the scoring area. But remember that goalies can usually make the first save if there isn't traffic. So if you're driving wide and no one is coming with you on the rush, don't just wire the puck on net. Be patient - delay, carry it behind the net - and make sure that your shot has a net drive going after the rebound. In this case, you want to be shooting for the far pad or 5 hole so that the puck either sneaks in or lands on the backdoor for your teammate to put in the back of the net.

6) Have A Sense of Urgency - I know...I just told you to be patient. But when you're in tight and you get the puck in the slot, you don't have time. You need to get your body and stick in a position where you can fire the puck quickly. Make sure you are over top of the puck and shoot it as hard as you can.

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7) Get Your Head Up - it always helps to know where you are shooting :) Once you are a good enough shooter to pick your spots, you need to get your head up and focus on being more deceptive. Look at spot you want to shoot - and pass it to the back door instead. Look at the person you want to pass to - and snipe it off the far post and in instead. Girls hockey players need to be a lot more deceptive - which means that every player on the ice needs to be ready to receive the puck at ALL times. Your stick should ALWAYS be on the ice, ready to receive a pass, anytime you are below the tops of the circles.

8) Believe It - Everyone is a goal scorer. Scoring goals is a mindset. They don't need to be pretty, they just have to go in. When you start to think you are a goal scorer, you act like one and then all of a sudden, you are one.

I hope that helps you and your team put a few more pucks in this season.

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WHY YOU NEED A NEW STICK

I apologize in advance for this. Reading this message could cost you between \$100-300. But it might be the little difference between getting to the next level or not. I have been on a little bit of a rampage with my players lately about their choice of stick, more specifically, the flex of their stick, and I thought I should relay the message on to you too.

So here it is:

=> All girls' hockey players should use sticks with an 75 flex or less. <=

No exceptions.

Girls do not need to be using sticks with flexes in the triple digits. Every time I see a 14 year-old girl with an 85 flex stick, I cringe. Not only is this way too stiff of a stick for most female players, but after she cuts it down to the right height, the stiffness of the stick actually increases and she is probably using a 100 or 110 flex stick. Keep in mind - your stick is supposed to bend when you shoot the puck. And if it doesn't, your shot and your game are going to suffer.

HOW TO FIGURE OUT WHAT FLEX TO USE:

=> Pick a stick with a flex that is roughly half your weight. Take your weight in pounds and divide it by 2.

The women's hockey players on the Canadian and American national teams weigh an average of 150 pounds - so a stick with a 75 flex would be perfect (150 divided by 2). Most of the Olympians use a stick with an intermediate flex (70-80 flex).

Save me the story on how the more flex it is going to ruin your slap-shot. It's the "whip" or bend in your stick that gives your shot speed and strength. You know that to have a good slap shot, you should make contact with the ice a few inches before the puck. That is so you can pre-load the shaft, loading it full of potential energy, then release it right before you make contact with the puck. If the stick doesn't bend, it won't get loaded up with energy and your shot speed & strength will suffer. If you can only bend the stick off the ice by leaning all of your weight into it, what do you think is going to happen on the ice?

You need to be able to bend the stick when you shoot your slap-shot, wrist-shot and snap-shot. So unless you weigh 200 pounds, stay away from the 100 flex sticks. 85 flex sticks are out of bounds too unless you are a midget or junior player who weighs considerably more than 150 lbs and you have flawless shooting technique.

Stick with a 75 flex or less.

3 TIPS FOR BETTER TIPS

Being able to tip the puck effectively is skill most goal scorers excel at. And since scoring goals is something that many girls hockey teams struggle with, I thought I'd share 3 quick tips on how to tip the puck more effectively.

TIP #1: Push out from the goalie

Many players are taught to stand directly in front of the goalie when screening. That's fine if you're simply looking to create traffic in front and take away their ability to see the puck. But if you want to tip the puck, it doesn't work too well. The most effective tips are the ones that change the most direction before going in the net. The closer you stand to the goalie, the less time and space the puck has to change direction once you've tipped it. Instead of standing in the crease, players should practice pushing out a stick length away from the goalie when screening so that pucks can change direction more before hitting the net.

TIP #2: Keep your blade pointing straight ahead.

We all love to see those tips when the forward opens their blade to ramp the puck up into the top corner past the goalie - but those goals are few and far between. First and foremost, players need to do a much better job of having their stick on the ice when battling for position in front of the net. The most effective way to tip the puck is to start from a tripod position - feet planted wide with the stick in front of you so that the toes of your skates and your stick blade are all pointed straight ahead. Having the stick pointing forward allows you to tip pucks on either side by quickly shifting the stick to that side. Think about it - if you stand with your stick on your forehand side, you'll have a very tough time getting your stick on any pucks that come through on your backhand side. If you are in the tripod position, it's easy to shift the blade over and redirect the puck off either side of your body.

TIP #3: Turn once the puck goes by.

This one is simple but rarely done. As soon as you lose sight of the puck after the shot, you want to turn and face the net. I see far too many players who are too tight to the goalie, who don't turn after they've lost sight of the puck, who watch rebounds come out 5 feet in front of them only to be facing the wrong direction with no chance of getting a 2nd shot off. When you are pushed out from the goalie, have your stick on the ice and spin as soon as the puck goes by, you'll find yourself scoring some easy goals where all you have to do is bang home a quick rebound. I used to refer to these as "gift" goals because they are just waiting for you to score. However, now I refer to them as "smart" goals because it seems that only the smartest players are in the right position and have the right timing to score these door-step goals.

I hope these tips for tipping help you score a few more goals in your next game.

THE TRUTH ABOUT SHOTS ON NET

I have to admit that when I first starting coaching, I was a little too focused on asking my teams to get more shots on net than their opponent. It was a mainstay of my pre-game speeches and often repeated the line, "There's no such thing as a bad shot" to my players. And while most of us would agree that outshooting your opponent is never really a bad thing, it isn't the most important thing.

I can count many games where we outshot our opponents 20-15 but 10 of the shots we hit their goalie square in the chest, while 10 of our opponent's shots required our goalie to fight to see the initial shot and control the rebound. So while we may have won the stat of most shots on net, half of our shots were ineffective. So I wanted to share a few ideas with you today on how to shot more effectively instead of focusing entirely on the number of shots you generate.

SHOTS FROM THE SLOT:

This is the most important stat I track for our team's shooting and defending. We track how many shots we take from our opponent's slot and how many they are able to get against us from our slot. Nine times out of ten, when we get more shots from the slot than our opponents, we play an excellent offensive game and usually end up on the winning side of the scoreboard.

SHOTS FROM THE POINT:

This is one I like to track both for and against as it tells me how involved our defense are getting in our team's offense and gives me an idea of how much offense our opponents are able to generate and from where. I like to see my Ds involved in the offense - especially when they have cannons for shots. When we are generating around 10 shots from the point in a game, it tells me that we are getting sustained puck pressure in the opposition's zone and our forwards are doing a good job of changing the point of attack by moving pucks from down low to up high. Just getting the shots off from the point is important - but more important is that they hit the net, there is traffic in front and hopefully they generate a scoring opportunity.

SHOTS ON 2 on 1s:

This is a small point but a significant one. I consistently tell my players that we **MUST** get a shot off when we have 2v1 opportunities in practices and games. There is nothing more frustrating than seeing two players head down the ice on a prime scoring opportunity and watching them make one or two too many passes instead of generating a scoring chance. When it comes to 2v1s, players must have a shot/rebound mentality and look to get the goalie moving east/west with a shot off the far pad or a pass to the backdoor for a tap in or one-timer.

TOTAL FEMALE HOCKEY SUCCESS SECRETS

SHOTS WITH A PURPOSE:

Girls hockey players tend to want to get off the "perfect shot" instead of getting a shot off quickly. This is especially frustrating to watch with players battling in the slot and Ds with a clear lane to the net. Players in the slot must fight to keep their sticks on the ice and get hard shots off as fast as possible that force the goalie to track the puck and react quickly. Instead of trying to place the puck in the net, players should try to shoot the puck through the back of the net. It doesn't matter if the goal is pretty, it matters that it goes in. With Ds at the point, the main focus should be getting the shot through on net as quickly as possible. Most of the time, this doesn't require a massive wind-up. I spend a lot of time teaching Ds to get off shots with half backswings so that they can contribute more on the offense and have less shots get blocked by shin-pads.

In girls' hockey, where effective offense is at a premium, I will still encourage players to get more shots on net whenever possible. But I will spend even more time teaching them what effective shooting is all about.

THE 7Cs THAT MAKE COACHES VERY HAPPY

Over the holiday season, I take a few days to reflect on what my teams and players have achieved (and still need to work on) in this first half of the season. I thought I would share with you the 7Cs that me and my fellow coaches are looking for (and hoping for) from players for the rest of this season.

1. **Composure:** Every coach wants to fill their roster with players that can stay calm and make smart decisions when under pressure. These are the players who don't just throw the puck away when someone is on them and players who never seem fazed by who the opponent is.

2. **Creativity:** This is a rarity in girls' hockey. Players who know when and how to be creative within the context of the team system and the game itself are extremely valuable.

3. **Commitment:** This doesn't just mean showing up to all the team practices, workouts and games (that should be a given at the higher levels). Players who are committed enough to consistently make smart decisions away from the rink are sometimes hard to find. For example, what will you be doing over the holiday break to keep yourself in the best shape possible? If your team doesn't have games or practices, what will you choose to do to stay at the top of your game?

4. **Coachability:** Coaches want players who do what they ask of them out on the ice. But beyond that, they want players who are going to trust the system and the decisions the coach makes. There were plenty of times when I was a player that I missed a few shifts or wasn't chosen to be one of the players to go out on the ice in the final shift of the game. When that happens to do, how do you react? What's your body language like? What do you say to and about the teammates who went out instead of you? Coachability extends beyond execution of the system - it includes being a great teammate.

5. **Communication:** Coaches want players who talk out on the ice. Period. The truth is that communicating out on the ice - whether that's yelling for the puck or instructing your teammate not to pass the puck - only makes everyone's life easier out there. If you're in a race for the puck in the corner, you want to know that you've got support and where to put the puck once you gain control. Sometimes players choose not to talk because they are afraid of making a mistake and saying the wrong thing. Get over it. Talk more.

6. **Confidence:** It is rare that you'll find a girls hockey player who is too confident in her abilities. Most girls downplay their abilities for fear of being seen as cocky. They don't want to stand out or have teammates think that they think they are better than everyone else. Confidence is king. There is a big difference between knowing what you do well and knowing that you can execute your game no matter what and being cocky. Girls need to own their strengths and know they can consistently deliver on them. Confidence is contagious.

TOTAL FEMALE HOCKEY SUCCESS SECRETS

7. Consistency: If every player on your team could play up to their potential and deliver on their strengths every game, how much easier would your life be as a coach? Players who are consistent shift-to-shift and game-to-game are a coaches' dream. Knowing that you can put a player out on the ice and you know exactly what you'll get from them each and every time is a gift. If only we could have a whole team who could deliver like that.

WHEN CONFIDENCE HITS ROCK BOTTOM

Self-doubt is a self-defense mechanism. If you don't think you're any good, then you'll be right when you have a bad shift or a not-so-great game. If you aren't confident in yourself, there is no way that someone can attack you for being "cocky" or "full of yourself". By doubting yourself, you give yourself an "out" so that you don't always have to hold yourself accountable and be the best you can be every time you hit the ice.

I wish I could just give girls hockey players confidence. I wish it was something that I could just package up and hand to them so that they'd believe in themselves and stop listening to the voices in their heads that tell them that they "aren't good enough, smart enough, pretty enough, talented enough". But I can't. No one can. Confidence has to come from within. But it's not an "all the time" thing.

Sure we all have times and areas in our lives where we feel supremely confident - and then there are times (often for no good reason) where we feel like we don't want to face the world and would rather just recede into the background. The truth is - in order to feel good, you've also got to let yourself feel bad. You don't have to feel like a million bucks all the time. And when you do feel less than fantastic, you don't have to feel bad about it and make yourself feel even worse. We've all been there.

But just because you aren't feeling like your most empowered self on any given day, it doesn't mean that you can just throw your hands up in the air and give up. In the case of confidence, sometimes you just need to fake it until you feel it.

You've got to be your own best friend instead of being your own worst enemy. Don't put yourself down - stand up and say "Thanks" when someone gives you a compliment - even if you think you played a "horrible" game and you can only focus on the negative. And when you have a bad day or make a big mistake, own it and MOVE ON. Let yourself feel "bad" about it - but only for a reasonable amount of time. And remember that a bad mistake or game doesn't make you a bad player or bad person. It's just a game - which, trust me, is something that I have to remind myself of more often than not.

Sometimes you just have to fake it until you feel it for the sake of yourself and your team. You don't have to run around with a fake smile on your face and pretend everything is "A-OK" but you've got to do your job and play your role. You've got to show up anyways - so you might as well make the most of it. And do me one more favor - stop feeling like a fraud. Stop worrying that one day they'll find out that you're really not that good. Stop underestimating yourself and judging your performance on the rink, in the classroom and in life as being worse than it really is. Turn off the self-doubt for a minute and take the darn compliment. Be your own best friend.