

MAD SKILL

Everything You Need
To Be At Your Best
This Season

OVER THE YEARS, *USA Hockey Magazine* has been able to tap into the knowledge of some of the best and brightest hockey minds around, from American-born NHL players to high-level coaches across the country, to create a series of instructional pieces to help every player reach his or her full potential.

From NHL superstars Bryan Trottier, Zach Parise, Shelley Looney and Bill Guerin, we have compiled tips to help you skate faster, shoot quicker, check harder and win more faceoffs.

As the puck is set to drop on another season, we have taken some of the most popular tips and put them together to help you have your best season yet. ★

Pick Your Spot

► GREAT GOAL SCORERS have a knack for putting the puck in the net. The rest of us have to work at it.

Seriously, the great goal scorers work just as hard on their shots. They just make it look easy.

You can't stand still and shoot a puck. You need to get your body moving forward to get momentum behind your shot. That means getting your legs into the act. It's kind of like throwing a ball. If you have no forward motion, you won't be able to throw a ball as fast and as far.

You may not have time to tee up the puck the way you'd like. A lot of great goal scorers move the puck in toward their bodies as they get ready to shoot. This changes the release point and generates more power.

It's important to be able to shoot

off both feet, and practice a quick release. But before you start cranking shots that way, it's best to learn how to properly transfer your weight from your back foot to your front as you follow through on a shot.

To practice your release and accuracy, line up 10 feet from the boards and aim at a spot. As you improve, pick a smaller spot. Soon you can progress to a net, picking a corner and trying to put the puck there.

You shoot to score goals and to do that you have to get the puck on net. It doesn't matter how hard you shoot if you're off target. ♦

Mike Mottau played at Boston College where he won the Hobey Baker Award in 2002. He went on to a 9-year NHL career.

RELEASE
& ACCURACY

By
Mike Mottau



BACKWARDS THINKING

SKATING BACKWARDS

By
Mark Tabrum

EVERY PLAYER, no matter what position they play, needs to know how to skate backwards. If you can't skate backwards, the opposition will go by you like you're a pylon.

As in the forward stride, it is important to emphasize power, which is achieved by using your skate edges, leg muscles and body weight.

Start in the ready position, head up, knees and ankles bent, with your back fairly straight. Skate with one hand on your stick, keep the top hand on the end of the stick, with your elbow tucked inward. Start by pointing the heel of your front foot out to the side. Dig in and push off from the heel to the toe, making half circles (C-Cuts) on the surface. After creating a full stride, bring your leg back under your hip and repeat with the other leg. Keep the knee of the glide leg bent while the other leg is striding.

The keys to a good stride are power, length and

recovery—players with poor strides don't often recover their stride, causing poor balance.

Finally, stay low while skating backward. This will help maintain a long stride, which generates speed. ♦

Mark Tabrum is the director of USA Hockey's Coaching Education Program.

Playing In The Corners

► You've heard the old football saying, "The game is won in the trenches." The same thing holds true for hockey.

Win the battles for the puck along the boards and in the corners and you'll likely win the game.

It's not the biggest or strongest player that wins that battle for the puck, it's the player who wants it more. The player who goes into the corner with the most desire will likely come out with the puck.

When you're in a scrum for the puck along the boards, keep your feet moving, your knees bent and maintain a low center of gravity. If you're standing straight up you're likely to get knocked off the puck.

Use your body as a shield to keep your opponent away from the puck, and practice using your feet to move it. If you're

WIN MORE CORNER BATTLES

By
Bill Guerin

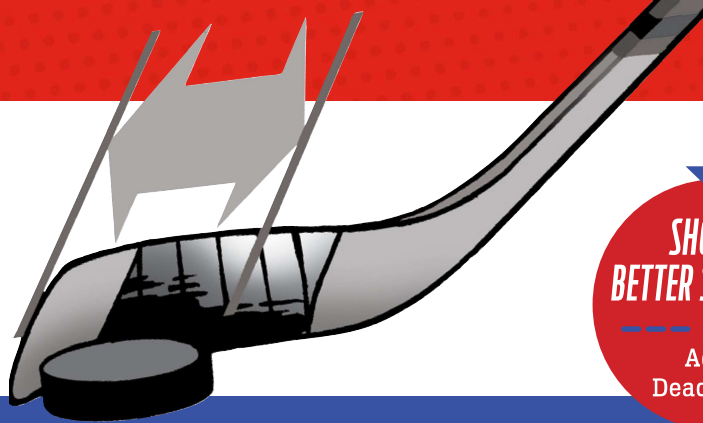


too close to the boards you want to control the puck using your feet until you're in a position where you can use your stick and make a pass or skate into open ice.

As you head into the corner, take a peak over your shoulder to see where your opponent is. Don't go straight toward the

boards. Take an angle so that you can pick up the puck and move on. You have to be ready for physical contact, even if it's a little bump. ♦

Hall of Famer Bill Guerin played 16 years in the NHL and was a member of three U.S. Olympic Teams. He is now the general manager of the Minnesota Wild.



SHOOT A BETTER SNAP SHOT

By
Adam
Deadmarsh

Make It Snappy

► The snap shot is quicker than a wrist shot and more accurate than a slap shot. The most important attribute of a good snap shot is the speed with which you can release the puck.

A lot of times kids tend to bury their heads

before they shoot and guess where they're shooting. I like to take a look and see where the goaltender's at and take aim at my target.

Sometimes it's not possible to get a good look at the net before you shoot. That's why

you should know where you are on the ice in relation to the net. Get the puck on net and good things happen.

The snap shot is released from the middle to the tip of the blade. Pull the puck into a position that feels comfortable with the toe of your stick blade. Then shoot the puck off the outer half of the blade.

It's important to practice shooting in awkward positions. You're not always going to be in perfect position when you find the puck on your stick. That's why I practice shooting off of both feet. It's good to switch it up. In drills, try skating around pylons and practice shooting from different angles.

And if you have a net at home and 10 pucks you can fire away all day. ♦

Adam Deadmarsh played nine seasons in the NHL and on two U.S. Olympic Teams.



Protect & Serve

IMPROVE PUCK HANDLING

By
Zach Parise

► The ability to handle and maneuver with a puck in the open ice or in traffic is a skill that everyone can always improve upon.

Keep your hands away from your body when handling the puck. This will allow you a full range of motion. If you keep your hands in tight, your head is likely to be down looking at the puck. It also limits your reach.

Keep your head up and use your peripheral vision to watch the puck and what's happening around you. If you're constantly looking down at the puck you're not likely to have it long. You'll lose it to an opponent, or get your bell rung.

Less is more when it comes to skating through the neutral zone with the puck. When you're skating

in open ice, push the puck ahead on your forehand. This will allow you to skate faster and be ready to pass or shoot quicker. Over handling the puck will only slow you down.

Use your body to protect the puck. This is important in tight areas, such as in the corners or in front of the net where there's a lot of traffic.

Some of the best drills to improve your puck handling and puck protection skills are games we've all played on the pond, blacktop or rink. Playing 1-on-1 or 1-on-2 keep away will help you learn to control in tight spaces with the puck while keeping your body between the puck and your opponent. ♦

Zach Parise is a 16-year NHL veteran and a two-time U.S. Olympian.

FREAK ON THE DEKE

► Breakaways don't come along every day, but if you practice a few simple techniques, you'll be ready the next time you're one-on-one with a goalie.

Both the shooter and the goalie are trying to make the other make the first move. When you're the shooter you're at an advantage because the goalie can't really fake you out. Be patient and look for an opening.

Sometimes players make the mistake of carrying the puck in front of them so the goalie knows what they're going to do because you can't shoot the puck from that position. As you get close to the net, bring the puck to

your side so you can either take the quick shot or make a move.

Make your move far enough out so you can get the goalie moving and you still have time to adjust. If you get in too tight by the time you're ready to shoot you're already past the net or the goalie's taken away any angle you had.

Some people say that when you're coming in on a breakaway you should have a strategy of what you want to do before you get to the goalie. Just take what the goalie gives

FINISHING THE BREAKAWAY

By
Shelley
Looney

you. If the goalie comes out to cut down the angle, try to deke. If the goalie is back in the net, pick your spot and shoot it.

A breakaway is part of the game.

Just go with the flow. Don't think 'Oh wow, I'm on a breakaway.' And if you miss, just get the puck. Don't sulk about a missed opportunity. ♦

Shelley Looney is a two-time Olympian and long-time coach.

Find Your Mark

► As you move up the hockey ladder, the importance of a tape-to-tape pass becomes critical as the pace of the game picks up.

When it comes to effectively passing the puck, accuracy is the key. You want to look at your intended target and take your time to make a good, hard, accurate pass. It's all in the follow through.

Never slap at the puck. You want it to roll off the blade from the heel toward the toe in a sweeping motion as you transfer your weight from your back foot to front foot. As the puck leaves your stick, make sure to follow through and point the toe of your stick at the target.

A flip or saucer pass is the most effective pass when you have someone between you and your target. A good saucer pass floats eight to 10

inches off the ice and lands flat close to the blade of your teammate's stick.

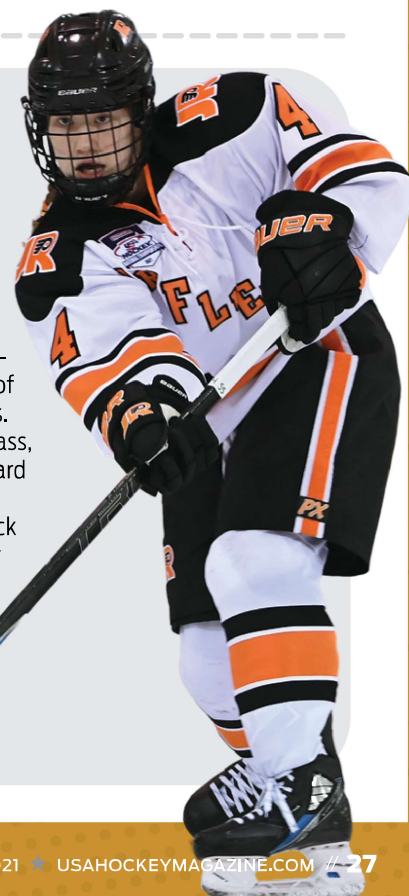
It's important to keep your head up when passing the puck. Most bad passes are caused by not looking up to spot your target. Blind cross-ice passes are the leading cause of grey hairs among hockey coaches.

When it comes to receiving a pass, turn your stick blade slightly toward the ice to form a pocket. Keep the angle of the blade so it takes the puck squarely. Don't hold the stick too tightly when you are receiving a hard pass or the puck will "explode" off your stick. ♦

Erik Cole was a 15-year NHL player and a member of the 2006 U.S. Olympic Team.

MAKE BETTER PASSES

By
Erik Cole





Quick On The Draw

► IT TAKES MORE than quick reflexes to be good on face offs. Being quick on the draw is important, but the proper mental preparation is the key.

You have to be aware of the situation, take in a lot of information quickly, process it and formulate your game plan before the puck is dropped.

What you're going to do with the draw depends on several factors, including which way your opponent shoots, where the faceoff is taking place on which side the official is dropping the puck, and where your opponent places his stick.

Being good on the face off is an acquired skill, just like developing your wrist shot or backhand. You can always practice faceoffs. Try to win 10 face offs on your forehand, 10

on your backhand and another 10 where you try to tie up your opponent's stick with your stick and use your feet to control the draw.

When it comes to being in position to take the draw, find a stance that is comfortable for you. Be ready with your

stick down, your skates in the cross hairs and don't fidget.

A player who takes pride in winning faceoffs and works hard on them in practice will likely

be on the ice during

a key point in the game. Even though it may not end up in the stat sheet, winning a key faceoff is as important as a goal or an assist. ♦

Bryan Trottier is a Hall of Famer who won six Stanley Cups over the course of his 18-year NHL career.

WIN MORE FACEOFFS

By
Bryan Trottier



Kick It Into High Gear

SKATE FASTER THAN EVER

By
Bill Guerin

► There is a difference between quickness and speed. Quickness is first gear but speed is the second, third and fourth gears that help you pull away from the competition.

Improve your skating technique and you'll improve your speed. That means learning proper use of edges, staying low with knees bent and using the proper stride for maximum power.

Keeping your knees bent will allow you to get full extension with your legs. It will also allow you to keep more of your blade in contact with the ice.

When you're doing on-ice skating drills, start slow and work your way up. Doing drills right is more important than doing them quickly. If you're using an improper technique quickly all it means is you'll go nowhere faster.

Off-ice plyometric drills like squats, jumps and sprints can help improve your speed. Once again, remember to start slow and work your way up. Don't be afraid to challenge and push yourself.

Some people think that speed is a God-given talent, and they may be right. But you can definitely improve on your speed with hard work and practice.

As pros, we try to improve on our skills each and every day, but especially in the summer months by working out with teammates or personal trainers. ♦

Hall of Famer Bill Guerin played 16 years in the NHL and was a member of three U.S. Olympic Teams. He is currently the general manager of the Minnesota Wild.

Taking It To The Streets

PLAY MORE
PICK-UP GAMES

By
Tony Amonte

► When I was a kid you could always find my friends and I playing hockey. And it wasn't just at the rink. Games of street hockey were as much a part of my neighborhood as the street signs and lamp posts. It's where we learned the game, practiced our skills, built up our stamina and had fun.

There are a lot of things to be learned playing street hockey. Players work on their stickhandling, passing and shooting skills, as well as team play. It's also a great way to work on your stamina. When I was a kid we played 'til we dropped—and we loved it.

One of the many things a child can learn playing street hockey or sandlot ballgames is leadership.

It's amazing how quickly a child's leadership traits will come out when there's no adult around to tell him or her what to do. Kids will choose up teams, create the rules, resolve conflicts and have fun when they're left to their own devices.



Let's face it, things are different today than when your mom and dad were kids. There was a lot more open space, more freedom to use ball fields, empty tennis courts, parking lots and even streets to play in. Parents are now more sensitive to knowing where our kids are at all times. But that doesn't mean you can't play street hockey in front of your house, in a friend's driveway or in a nearby cul-de-sac. All it takes is a little creativity to create your own Boston Garden.

Great players are not made by sitting on the couch or in front of the television. It takes years to create and refine the skills needed to play hockey at the highest level. Use every opportunity you have to practice, play and just have fun. That's what summertime is all about. ♦

Hall of Famer Tony Amonte was a 17-year NHL player and two-time U.S. Olympian. He also scored the winning goal in the 1996 World Cup of Hockey.

THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

A BETTER
BACKHAND SHOT

By
Brian Gionta

The backhand shot is one of the most seldom used but most effective shots in a sniper's arsenal, especially when taken in close.

This shot uses the same technique as a wrist shot, only done on the backhand. Start with the puck on the heel of the blade, and as you transfer

your weight forward roll your wrists over and release the puck while pointing at the target on your follow through.

The key to a backhand shot is the element of surprise. Since the shot is seldom used, many goalies aren't as familiar with it. They're not used to how the puck is going to come off

the stick, whether it's going to go low or high, left or right. When you don't have to waste time moving the puck to your forehand, you don't allow the goaltender time to set up.

One of the reasons the backhand shot is not used as much anymore is because so many players today have such big hooks in their blade that it's tough to take an effective and accurate backhand shot.

You can practice your backhand just like a wrist

shot. Line up near the boards with some pucks and practice hitting your target. Remember to concentrate on your weight transfer and follow through.

It's also good to set up cones near the bottom of the faceoff circle and cut around the cones, working on both your forehand and backhand shot as you shoot on net. ♦

Hall of Famer Brian Gionta played 16 NHL seasons and was a two-time U.S. Olympian.

