TOTAL FEMALE HOCKEY SUCCESS SECRETS

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WHAT'S THIS "BOOK" ALL ABOUT?

For those of you that have been a part of the Total Female Hockey newsletter list for a while, you know that I love writing articles that will help players, coaches and teams take their game to the next level.

I’ve always loved writing. I wrote for the school newspaper in college and was actually a philosophy (and molecular biology) major - which means I wrote more than my fair share of essays. These days, writing the Total Female Hockey newsletters is one of the rare opportunities I have to put my thoughts about performance on paper - since I spend the rest of the week working “hands on” with players and teams on the ice & in the gym.

Some weeks, the articles focus on the ON-ICE aspects of performance with titles ranging from “How to shoot harder” and “the biggest mistakes players make when passing”, to “the secrets to better stickhandling” and “how to avoid the 5 mistakes that drive coaches crazy”.

Sometimes I focus more on the OFF-ICE aspects of performance. One week I may talk about why girls can’t do pushups or chin-ups and the next week I may focus on what to eat before a big game to make sure you perform you best. I’ve also spent a lot of time writing about how to boost your confidence and focus levels so that you can excel when the pressure is on in the playoffs and at tournaments.

I’ve always tried to answer the questions that I get asked the most by players, parents and coaches. I’m often asked:

“How can I get noticed by scouts?”
“How can I help my players to be more focused?”
“How does the scholarship process work?”
“How do we plan out when & what to eat at a tournament?”
“What can I do to be faster?”

Almost every single article I’ve ever written (and there have been over 500 since I started Total Female Hockey 4 years ago), answers a specific question that I’ve been asked along the way.

So I’ve taken the most popular articles I’ve ever written (the ones that I’ve received the most feedback about and the ones that people have passed on the most) and put them all together in one package for you. I guarantee you that there will be 10 or 12 articles in here that really speak to you and answer a specific question that’s been nagging you for a while. There might even be more. So check it out, let me know what you think and use each and every piece that you can to help you get to the next level.

Your friend and coach,

Kim
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TOTAL FEMALE HOCKEY
SUCCESS SECRETS

INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION
I first started playing hockey at the age of 13 in the hockey mad city of Toronto. Having never really skated, I wasn’t exactly a rock-star in the beginning. Quite honestly, the only reason I even made it onto a high-level team early on is because my friend’s dad was the head coach. So when I decided two years later that I wanted to play college hockey at an Ivy League university, it was understandable that people thought I was crazy. I didn’t know anyone who’d done it and had no rational reason to believe that I’d be even close to good enough to get there. But through a ridiculous amount of focus, determination and hard work, I was able to realize my dream three short years later - after only having skated and played the game for five years.

Exactly 10 years after I started my college hockey career in the Ivy League, I decided that I would start my own company. I wanted to make my living pursuing my true passion of helping young female hockey players achieve their goal of playing at the highest possible level. Again - many people told me I was crazy. It was the middle of 2008 and the recession was hitting everyone hard. Not great timing. Not to mention the fact that I was creating a brand new business model in a tiny niche market focusing entirely on female hockey. But again, three years after starting from scratch, I was able to build a successful company - doing what I love and being able to live the life I want as a result.

Let’s just say I’ve never exactly done things the easy way on or off the ice. The truth is that I never really doubted that I would achieve either of those big goals on and off the ice. I must be blessed with the perfect mixture of stubbornness and confidence. Don’t get me wrong - there were many points along the way where I doubted myself and found myself mentally, physically and emotionally exhausted en route to those goals. But I never gave up - even when everyone around me thought I was too obsessed and too driven (is there such a thing?). I know without a shadow of a doubt that I am doing EXACTLY what I was meant to be doing in this life - and it has been my experiences within women’s hockey for the past 20 years that have allowed me to realize my dreams.

I’m very fortunate to have had the opportunity to play at the highest levels of women’s hockey for over a decade, coach hundreds of teams and players on and off the ice and help thousands of members of the female hockey community take their performance to the next level. My purpose is to help empower and inspire young female hockey players to reach their full potential on and off the ice. I know how confusing it can be trying to figure out exactly what you need to do on and off the ice to get to the next level, and worrying that, despite all your time and effort, you really have no idea whether you are on the right track to realizing your dreams. It’s not your fault - I know, because I’ve been in your position.

When I finally "caught the hockey bug", I spent every minute of every day out on the rink or in the gym trying to take my game to the next level. I spent a tremendous amount of
time training on and off the ice - only to end up tired, injured and frustrated. I thought that I was doing the right thing by “doing more and going harder” than everyone else, so I continued over-training and under-preparing - all in my quest to become the best player possible, get a college hockey scholarship and tryout for the National team. The irony is that the things I did to realize my academic and athletic dreams were also the things that ultimately ruined my career!

I've made absolutely every mistake in the book when it came to training on and off the ice and my body, and my hockey career, suffered for it. I spent so much of my time and energy focusing on doing things that weren't specific to my age, my gender or my sport - it was no wonder I felt completely lost and frustrated throughout my young career. Now, after studying female hockey player development for over a decade, I know that all the things I was doing back when I was a young player were completely WRONG. I only wish that there was someone out there who could have helped me back then.

I know what it feels like to have to figure out how to get to the next level all by yourself. I didn't have anyone showing me what to do, and what not to do, to get better and get noticed. I was constantly worried that I wasn't doing enough to get ahead of the competition or doing the right things to get noticed at tryouts or tournaments. I dreamed about playing college hockey and playing for the national team, but I had no idea how I was going to get there. When I was desperately trying to figure out how to get to the next level, with no one to turn to for information or advice, I wish I had the opportunity to learn exactly what it takes to get to the next level from an expert. I didn't know anyone who had been through exactly what I was going through, who had achieved their dreams in women's hockey, and who could show me the way and let me know I was on the right track.

I had no one to show me the way - but YOU do.

That's why I created my business, Total Female Hockey, in the first place - to help girls' hockey players realize their dreams by giving them, as well as their parents and coaches, access to the information I didn't have as a young player. I've made it my personal mission to help as many players as many reach their dreams on and off the ice by sharing my experience and expertise with as many girls hockey players, parents and coaches as possible. And I want to share all that information with YOU!

If you want to know exactly what you need to do to stand out and get noticed at any level...

If you want to make sure your daughter has every opportunity to reach her full potential as a player, athlete and person on and off the ice...

If you want to get the “insider” information on how to develop the most complete player possible...

Then you’ve come to the right place.
THE BIGGEST MISTAKE I EVER MADE

When I finally “caught the hockey bug” at the age of 13, I spent every minute of every day out on the rink or in the gym trying to take my game to the next level. I spent a tremendous amount of time (and far too much of my parent’s money) on training - only to end up tired, injured and frustrated. I thought that I was doing the right thing by “doing more and going harder” than everyone else, so I continued over-training and racked up a huge physical therapy bill - all in my quest to become the best player possible and get a college hockey scholarship.

Now I know that all that training I was doing back then was COMPLETELY WRONG!

I’ve made absolutely every training mistake in the book and my body (and hockey career) suffered for it. I spent so much of my time and energy focusing on doing training programs that weren’t specific to my age, my gender or my sport.

Back in high school, I was extremely motivated to become the best female hockey player possible. If I heard that elite players ran 30 minutes for training, I would run 40 (or 50). If I heard that someone could lift 100 pounds, I would try to lift 150. I remember reading a quote saying that, “Every minute you are not working to improve, your competition is”. So I filled every minute I could spare with as much training as possible.

I trained in a start-of-the-art facility built for an NHL team and I was in there 5 days a week using what I thought were the coolest training gadgets around. I was on the skating treadmill (which were still relatively scarce back in the mid-90s) one day and on the high-speed running treadmill the next. I was using the latest workout machines and what I thought were the most advanced training programs.

In addition to training 5 days a week specifically for hockey, I was playing on 2 hockey teams, 2 soccer teams and my high school basketball team - all while studying as hard as I could and trying to have a “normal” teenage life.

Juggling all of these balls in the air seemed to be going well for a while - until my lower back started to get sore. I didn’t think much of it and figured that it was just a by-product of all the hard work I had been doing. So I kept plugging away, doing the strength and conditioning program that I hoped would help me get to the next level. A few weeks later, I pulled my groin on that skating treadmill. Later on, I sprained my ankle.

Now this is where I started to get a little confused.

Here I was training as hard as I could, at the facility where the professional players trained, and all I had to show for it was some new fitness coupled with some nagging injuries.
What's worse is that NONE of these injuries came from playing - they all came from training!

Things quickly went from bad to worse. I started seeing a physiotherapist 4 days per week for treatment. Without it, I wouldn’t have been able to stand up straight and playing hockey would have been impossible. But at $50 per visit, the costs started to add up quickly.

Was this the beginning of the end for me?

I refused to take any time off from training to let myself recover. Immediately after every treatment session, I went right back to training and playing as hard as I could, and just ended up right back where I started from.

The biggest mistake I made was thinking that ‘More is Better’.

I thought that in order to be better, I had to work harder and longer than everyone else. Both my parents and I thought that I was doing all the right things to become the best player possible. Well, I can tell you now, looking back on it all, that I had it all wrong!

When I started to get injured while training, I should have taken a step back and realized that something wasn’t right. But, I was an extremely motivated kid who wanted to do as much as possible to get better, so I stayed with the training program and the physiotherapy visits until I went to university.

My injury problems continued to plague me for the next four years. Although I was lucky to have an excellent strength and conditioning coach in university and only sustained minor game-related bumps and bruises, the injuries I suffered from in high school always prevented me from playing my best.

If my back wasn’t sore, my ankle would be bothering me. If it wasn’t my ankle, it was my groin. I was fortunate enough to be doing all the right things in my college training program - but I couldn’t undo the harm I had done as a young player! I was a talented, but constantly injured athlete, in far too much pain to perform to my full potential.

But, Instead of Waking Up, I Kept Making the Same Mistakes...

While I was still in university, I devoted myself to learning everything I possibly could about the proper development of young athletes and, specifically, young female hockey players, so that other girls wouldn’t have to suffer the same pain and frustration I felt.

But, I Didn’t Change The Way I Trained Myself!

I still thought that I had to train harder than everyone else to get ahead. I truly believed that the reason I was injured all the time was because I wasn’t strong enough. Did I mention that I was a Strength and Conditioning All- American in university? There was no reason for me to focus so much more time and suffer so much more pain to get stronger, but I just kept training with same intensity as I always had. You have probably
heard the phrase, “If you keep on doing what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you always had”. Despite all my injuries, I was still achieving a high-level of success both on and off the ice by training as hard as possible, so I just kept plugging away - even though I knew from my education and my experience that this approach was all wrong.

My body was telling me to slow down, but my mind was telling me that slowing down (and doing less) would make me fall behind the rest of the competition.

Now I realize how much time and energy I wasted training incorrectly for all those years. I was so focused on “getting an edge” on the competition by being as strong as possible, that I was caught in a constant cycle of injury.

As a result, I missed out on amazing opportunities to improve both as an athlete and player, because I wasn’t able to give my best effort during every off-ice and on-ice session.

The truth is that the more time you can spend playing the game at your highest level of intensity possible, the better player you will become. If you are injured, you can’t play your best and you can’t get better. And what’s worse is that if you are ‘injury-prone’ as a youngster (like I was), you usually stay injury-prone for your entire career (like I was).

Don’t get me wrong here - hard work is critical to hockey success, but you have to be healthy in order to perform your best. 70% of young hockey players will sustain an injury during the upcoming season. Although the majority of these injuries will not be season-ending, they are still devastating to the young player who wants nothing more than to play the sport they love at the highest level possible.

I learned my lessons the hard way, but that’s okay, because now players won’t have to make the same mistakes I did.

How I Learned My Lesson...

One day, while getting treatment for one of my many nagging injuries, I had an ‘A-HA’ moment. I had spent thousands of hours doing rehabilitation exercises for all my injuries and I finally started to see a pattern emerge.

I realized that I was doing the same exercises - to not only recover from my injuries but to prevent further damage - no matter what the ‘injury of the week’ was. What if I created a program, based around these exercises, designed to build strength and stability in the muscles and joints that support and power hockey-specific movements?

I tried the exercises and program out with my young athletes and saw amazing results. Instead of worrying about lifting a lot of weight, we were focusing on maximizing their ability to move their own body with strength and power.
But...I Still Thought That I Was the Exception to the Rule...Until My Back Exploded!

Despite getting all these great results with my young players, I kept doing too much in my own training. That is until my back exploded! I woke up one morning (after getting home at 2 a.m. from a long road trip) and sneezed. It was “the sneeze that changed my life”. Within 4 hours, my left leg went completely numb and stayed that way for 3 months.

One of the discs in my back had actually exploded! This was the culmination of years and years of doing too much of the wrong thing. I had gone too hard, too fast and too soon for too long. The ‘elite’ strength and conditioning program I was doing in high school was all wrong for me. I was excited about ‘training like a pro’, but my teenage body wasn’t prepared to sustain that kind of intensity. I didn’t have the strength and stability that I needed to perform my best both on and off the ice. That’s why I was always injured and why I rarely played (or performed) at 100%.

And then one day, my body just couldn’t take it anymore. I had to have neurosurgery to fix my back.

For the first time ever, I had to face the fact that I might not be able to play ever again. It is pretty hard to do tight turns and crossovers if you can’t feel one of your feet! Couple that with the fact that I couldn’t demonstrate exercises or participate in the drills I always did with my young athletes, and I truly felt like a shadow of my former self.

I finally had my surgery at the end of June in 2005. I still remember waking up from the surgery being so excited that I could feel my foot again. It wasn’t 100%, but it felt 100 times better than it did 3 hours before.

I Was Never Supposed To Play Hockey Again...

The surgeon advised against me playing any contact sports. He also said that if I didn’t get feeling back in my leg within 8 months, it was probably never going to come back. Of course, I still held on to the hope that I would be able to play in the season-opener, which was only 12 weeks away. Completely ridiculous, right?

But I had never missed playing a hockey game due to injury in my whole career, which is pretty amazing (and stupid) considering my injury history. I was committed to doing whatever I took to be back on the ice in time for the first game of the season. I knew that this time I had to “rehab right” or else face the consequence of no longer being able to do the work and play the game that I loved.

During my rehab, I was truly grateful for every tiny improvement and got excited every time I got to try a new exercise.

I asked all the experts I knew and scoured the Internet looking for the “miracle” program that was going to bring me back to 100%.
I finally realized that the answer had been sitting right there in my brain the whole time. I simply started doing the same exercises I was asking my young players to do to build up their strength for hockey. I was back on the ice, practicing and playing with my teammates...in only 3 months.

**But I Couldn’t Get To The Gym To Workout...**

I had grown used to doing all the training programs and exercises with both myself and my athletes in fancy gyms with all the latest training equipment. Now I couldn’t even get to the gym to do my rehab exercises, because I couldn’t even sit in my car without searing back pain.

I also realized that as much as my young players wanted to come into the gym and train with me in person, school, sports and schedules often got in the way. I had a lot of players that I worked with who went away in the summer - they were either playing a different sport, away at summer camp or spending time with their family at the cottage. They weren’t able to make it in to train with me, but they still wanted to get ready for the upcoming hockey season. I had to figure out how they could get all the benefits of training with me in a fancy facility - without having me or any bulky equipment there!

That’s when I first wrote the Total Female Hockey “Complete Training System”. No fancy gyms or equipment required. In the 5 years since creating this step-by-step manual, this program is still my starting point with every athlete I train. Every player needs to have a solid foundation of stability and strength to build on. Without it, training for speed and power is quite simply dangerous and ultimately a waste of time. I wish there was a program like this out there for me when I was growing up. I like to think that it would have stopped me from making my biggest mistake ever.
TOTAL FEMALE HOCKEY SUCCESS SECRETS

ON THE ICE
HOW TO SKATE THE GAME

If you have any desire to play at the higher/elite levels of female hockey, being a strong skater is an absolute must. The first thing that scouts and coaches from college and national team programs look for is skating ability. It is also the first thing that coaches at the younger and lower levels are looking for as well. Being a great skater will always be an asset - and being a weak skater will be a significant mark against you. Being weak in any of the other individual skills can be masked somewhat - if you’re not a great stickhandler, you can compensate by moving the puck quickly with smart passes, if you haven’t got a great slapshot, you can compensate by taking quicker wrist shots and snap shots. But weak skating skills stand out like a sore thumb - at all levels.

When I first started playing hockey at the age of 13, I was a very weak skater. To be honest, I was as slow as they come. It may have had something to do with the fact that I didn’t know how to skate and I was 25 pounds overweight. I was basically a “human pylon”. After a few embarrassing seasons as a slow, fat, defenseman, I realized that if I wanted to get to the elite level of women’s hockey, I had to get a lot faster.

Playing elite women’s hockey is all about being first. In order to be first to the puck, and be first in on the forecheck and backcheck, you have to be fast. And without full body checking, female hockey players with great speed have always had a big advantage over the competition. Since the rules changed a few years back, when every possible type of obstruction became illegal in the female game, speedy forwards have become every defenseman’s nightmare. At least in the men’s game, defensemen can slow down the forwards with a well-timed body check. However, in women’s hockey, the defensemen have to be as quick, if not quicker, than the forwards in order to gain and maintain proper positioning throughout the neutral and defensive zones.

Now, more than ever, in the world of female hockey, speed is what separates the “best” from the “rest”. Every girls’ hockey player who wants to play in college or for the national team must focus on developing speed if they want to take their game to the next level. Women’s hockey is only going to get faster and it looks like it will be the speedier players that will dominate the game for years to come. Sure, having a big slap-shot or great one-on-one moves are great skills, but they will mean very little in the female game unless they are coupled with great speed. Your skills are important, but it’s speed that kills in the female game.

Speed is not the only component of skating that is critical. Players must develop terrific balance in order to progress to higher levels of the game. You need to have great balance in order to fight off your opponent while you’re standing on one leg. You need to have great balance in order to transition effectively from skate to skate and change speeds and direction while playing in a one-on-one situation. Another critical aspect of skating that is sometimes overlooked is a player’s ability to generate power. When you are watching a game, you can easily get tricked into thinking that the player with the quickest feet is the fastest player on the ice. We’ve all seen skaters who move their feet a million miles an hour. But then there are also those players with really long strides.
who also seem to be very fast, but certainly don’t look like it. These are the players who
are able to generate a great deal of power with each stride. Because of this, they don’t
need to take as many strides and steps to cover the same distance, which makes them
a lot more economical in their movements that those “fast feet” players. Now being able
to have long powerful strides, as well as lightening quick feet, is critical, but all too often
players think the latter is more important than the former.

Remember - speed kills in the female game and every player who takes their speed to
the next level will certainly take their overall performance to the next level as well.
WHY YOU WANT TO SHOOT LIKE A GUY

Having a great shot in girls' hockey is a huge asset. It is a real compliment if someone tells you “you shoot like a guy” because most girls' hockey players don’t shoot very well at all. The biggest reason why girls don’t shoot well is that they don’t practice it nearly enough.

I would guarantee that every young aspiring male hockey player willingly goes out in the driveway and will gladly shoot hundreds of pucks by themselves. Most girls' hockey players won’t do this. But to be honest, the ones who end up playing at the next level always do. One of the major reasons they get to the next level is their willingness to do things that their teammates and opponents aren’t willing to do. And going out in driveway and practicing their shots for hours is one of those things most girls won’t do. I believe that one reason for this is that working on your shot is far from being social. It is a very solitary pursuit. Many girls’ hockey players are particularly drawn to the sport because of the social aspects of the game. This is not a knock against girls at all - it’s just a very different focus that the boys have. The focus on the social side of the game is very useful in terms of developing a cohesive team - but it is quite often something that costs girls in terms of individual skill development. Since working on the other individual skills, especially skating, passing and checking can only really be done effectively on the ice, coaches have a tendency to spend time on developing these skills as opposed to focusing on teaching the basics of stickhandling and shooting - which can be practiced quite effectively away from the ice. For players looking to get an advantage over the competition, spending time away from the rink working on shooting (and stickhandling) makes a huge difference.

This doesn’t mean heading outside and working solely on your slapshot (although to be honest, having a great slapshot in girls' hockey is such a rarity that it isn’t a waste of your time by any means). Players must develop all of their shots in order to be most effective in games - this includes: wrist shots, slapshots, backhands and snap shots.

The second layer of shooting development includes learning how to execute these shots at full speed. This means learning how to shoot in stride, how to adjust your body position in space so as to get off an effective shot and understanding which shot to use in different situations. One other part of shooting that is often neglected is tipping the puck. While this isn’t a direct shooting skill per se, it is a critical aspect of scoring goals that most players don’t do very effectively. Players must be taught how to screen a goalie effectively and how to position their body and stick so as to tip the puck effectively. Players often stand too close to the goalie, or even worse, just off to the side, making it easy for the goalie to see the puck or tipping it so close to the net that the puck doesn’t have time to change direction significantly and making it virtually impossible for the player to score off the rebound if there is one. This may seem like a minor skill - but in the world of girls’ hockey, where not nearly enough goals are scored, the ability to tip the puck effectively and finish rebounds can be the difference between winning a close game and coming up short. I always tell my players that it never says on the score sheet how the goal went in the net - it just says “goal”. So not every shot
has to be into the top corner and not every breakaway has to end in a beautiful deke. A goal is a goal and into to score effectively, players must develop their entire arsenal of shooting abilities. Being able to score goals consistently is a hot commodity in girls’ hockey and will make players very valuable and very much sought after at the next level.
THE CHECKING MYTH IN GIRLS HOCKEY
There is no body checking in girls' hockey. But there is body contact. Checking is an essential skill for all hockey players - girls' included. The bone-crushing body checks you see in NHL games are the highest and most aggressive level of checking. But there are 4 stages of checking below that all players must perfect - angling, containing, pressuring, contact, and then body checking.

Boys are taught the essential aspects of contact very early on. Most boys practices I watch incorporate checking during their drills. But these skills are rarely addressed in the girls' game at all. I believe that this is because we don’t have full body checking. Since we don’t have that high level of contact, most coaches neglect to teach the lower levels - and that is a very dangerous mistake. Girls must be comfortable giving and taking contact in order to be effective players - no matter what competitive level they are playing at. To be honest, most of the concussions and head injuries I have seen over the past 15 years in the female game have been as a result of players not knowing how to protect themselves properly in contact situations. This is not just about the player being checked - it is often the person giving contact who ends up injured as well.

Most fundamentally, girls' hockey players need to learn how to get low and stay low on the ice. This includes when they have and don't have the puck. Players must learn how to keep their heads up at all times so that they are aware of what's going on around them. This is a particular problem in girls' hockey as players tend to handle the puck with their head down because they aren’t as worried about getting hit as boys are. This is about being conscious of what's going on out on the ice. You can ask any guy who has played hockey with body checking and he will say that he is always conscious of the fact that he could get hit at any time. Girls simply don't think about this. Often times it seems as though they are skating around with blinders on - oblivious to all the aspects of the game going on around them.

Once players are able to stay low and play heads up hockey, then we must get them comfortable with both giving and receiving contact. Most importantly, players must learn how to check effectively in four areas: open ice, along the boards, in the corners and in front of the net. It is essential for coaches of all age groups to incorporate drills into their practices that address these areas. Girls are simply not as naturally aggressive as guys are and are not as “excited” about the physical aspects of hockey as the boys are. They need to understand what it is they are doing, want to know why they are doing it and then have to be given ample time to practice it before they feel fully confident in a game to try it.

The other interesting part about checking as it relates to girls' hockey is that girls are very worried about taking penalties. It’s not because they don’t want to be in the penalty box - that’s certainly part of it though. It is mainly that they don’t want to let down their team and put them at a disadvantage. Quite often, your more naturally physical and aggressive players get more penalties at the younger levels and then start to back off the physical side of their game. This is very common - and not ideal. Being a naturally aggressive player in girls' hockey is a GREAT asset. When college coaches
talk to me about players they are recruiting, they always talk about how much they love naturally aggressive players. Why? Because it is much harder to teach a passive player how to be aggressive than it is to show an aggressive player how to keep the physical aspects of their game without taking penalties. This can be taught - but again, it helps tremendously if players are taught checking skills from a very early age and continue to develop those skills as the game gets faster and the players get bigger and stronger.
WHAT THE BEST STICKHANDLERS DO

Your ability to stickhandle effectively is another skill that can really make you stand out in girls’ hockey. It is important to note that stickhandling isn’t all about having the fanciest moves on the ice. It’s about being able to beat people 1-on-1 while maintaining control of the puck. It’s about maximizing the distance between the player defending you and the puck so that you can beat them with speed and strength. I tell the players I coach that puck protection is the most important stickhandling skill. The ability to put your body between the defender and the puck is how to control the puck most effectively. This doesn’t require fancy “dangles” - it requires the ability to control your body in space and to know how to protect the puck from the defender using your body and stick. This is especially critical in the female game since there is no full body checking. In the men’s game, if a player is handling the puck, they can be hit. This is not the case in the female game. Therefore players can feel a little bit “safer” carrying the puck - not having to worry about being run over with a bone-crushing check.

There is certainly nothing wrong with having great hands and being able to stickhandle with fancy moves. But the reality is that those moves have their time and place in the game - and that’s not every time you touch the puck. Players with great hands tend to want to showcase that ability every single time they touch the puck and quite often that strength actually becomes a shortcoming of their game. Players must learn when it is appropriate to try a fancy move or whether it’s better to just lean into the defender with your shoulder and try to beat them with speed and strength. The vast majority of times in girls’ hockey, the second option is your better one. Think of it in the same way that a basketball player will protect the ball from a defender. In basketball, you don’t just dribble the ball in front of you and leave it vulnerable to the hands of the defender. You put your body in between the defender and the ball so to protect it. This is a concept and skill that hockey players must embrace so that they can protect the puck effectively and maintain puck possession.

Three critical aspects of stickhandling for young players to learn are: head up, soft hands, feet moving. You can have the fanciest moves in the world, but if you can only execute them with your head down, you aren’t going to be very effective on the ice. This goes back to the idea of making the best decision possible with the puck. In hockey, you constantly need to be aware of what’s going on around you. When you keep your head down, you are only aware of the puck. With your head up, you can decide whether making your fancy move is most appropriate, or whether you should simply protect the puck, make a pass or shoot the puck. It is absolutely critical that players become comfortable with handling the puck with their head up from a very early age.

The concept of having soft hands is another one that players must embrace from a very early age. Far too many young female hockey players stickhandle like they are chopping wood. When it comes to having soft hands, it is absolutely essential that players get their hands out in front of them and away from their body. For some strange reason I haven’t quite figured out just yet, girls’ hockey players tend to stickhandle with
their top hand glued to or next to their hip. This makes it very difficult to have soft hands as your top wrist has no room to roll back and forth. It also makes it nearly impossible to handle to puck on either side of your body - it limits your range of motion around your body. Players must get their hands out in front of them and allow the top hand to roll side to side and allow the bottom hand to slide up and down the stick as needed. Your hands cannot be surgically glued to your stick. They must move and adjust to the puck in order to stickhandle effectively.

Keeping your feet moving while stickhandling is another skill that players tend to struggle with and must be embraced in order to progress on to higher levels of women’s hockey. For some reason, when girls get the puck on their stick, they tend to stop their feet moving. It sometimes seems that handling the puck quickly and moving your feet quickly are mutually exclusive. Once players have become comfortable handling the puck at slower more controlled speeds, they must get their feet and hands moving at higher speeds. My college coach used the analogy of the puck being an energy pill. When you receive the puck, it should make you move faster, not slow you down. Players must practice handling the puck with their head up, hands away from their body and at high speeds in order to truly have effective stickhandling skills.
HOW TO FIX THE PASSING PROBLEM IN GIRLS HOCKEY

High level girls' hockey, just as in boys hockey, is all about quick and effective puck movement. It is rare - and usually very ineffective - to have one player carry the puck all the way down the ice. Passing the puck down the ice is always faster than having a player skate the puck down the ice. The puck always moves faster than a player can skate. Girls tend to either pass one time too many or wait until the last possible second to pass the puck, both of which lead to frustrating turnovers.

Players must learn how to give a pass when moving on both their forehand and backhand. They must understand when it is right time to make the pass and how strong to make the pass. There are times when it makes sense to make a tape to tape pass and when it is more effective to make an indirect pass off the boards or to simply put the puck into space so that your teammate can skate into it. This is not an easy concept to learn and takes years of practice to perfect. Many players do a great job of giving passes in practice when there is little pressure, but as soon as they get in the game, they struggle to understand when and where to move the puck.

It is equally important that players understand how to take a pass effectively. There is nothing more frustrating for a coach that to see one of your players get a great pass given to them and to see them “flub” it, resulting in a turnover. Effective pass reception is all about adjusting your body and stick so as to give the best possible target to the passer and to give yourself the greatest chance to receive the puck with your feet moving and head up. The general rule of thumb is that you want to position the blade of your stick so that it is perpendicular to the path that the pass is traveling on. That way, you are giving the biggest target possible to the passer and giving yourself the greatest chance of success for receiving it with soft hands. It is also important with pass reception to have your hands positioned away from your body (not tight to your hips) in the same way we discussed previously with stickhandling. When your hands are out in front of you, it is much easier to adjust the position of your stick and much easier to cushion the puck when you receive it.

I was a very skilled passer as a player. And I attribute that to playing a lot of pickup hockey. When you are out on the ice with an assortment of players with varying skill levels, and no team systems at all, making effective passes can be a huge challenge. You learn very quickly how to be creative and how to give the passer and receiver the greatest chance of success. One of the hardest concepts to teach and master for young players is learning how to create and find open space so that they are a good passing option. When your team has a set system, this is a little bit easier to do. But when you are out playing pickup hockey, you’ve got to figure it out without any sort of system in place. So moving into open space and calling for the puck become that much more critical in this more free-flowing type of game. It was out on the outdoor rink where I learned how to pass effectively by finding open space as the receiver and moving the puck into open space (and away from pressure) as the passer.
Passing is a two way street. It doesn’t matter if the giver makes a terrific pass if the receiver isn’t ready. And it makes no difference if the receiver is in the perfect position if they get a bad pass. Passing is the only individual skill that really transfers over into more of a team concept. And for that reason, players must take tremendous pride in how they give and receive passes in order to help their team succeed. Being a great pass giver and receiver is a tremendous asset that coaches will notice and value, but only shows up on the game sheet when the receiver scores a goal.
THE 3 HARDEST SKILLS IN GIRLS HOCKEY

Every player has one thing they struggle with more than anything else on the ice. Same thing goes for each position on the ice. There are certain position-specific skills that are more challenging than others for goalies, defensemen and forwards.

Over the past 20 years of playing, teaching and coaching the game, I’ve noticed that there seems to be ONE skill that is hardest for players in each of these three positions. So here are the hardest things for goalies, defense and forwards to do.

FOR GOALIES: Playing the puck

Let me preface this by saying that I’m not a goalie coach. But with all the teams I’ve worked with and watched, it seems that many goalies struggle with playing the puck. The issue seems to be a mixture of technical ability (not knowing how and when to play the puck effectively) and confidence (not wanting to “screw up” and fearing making a mistake that costs the team).

Having your goaltender play the puck is a HUGE advantage in girls' hockey. This doesn’t mean that your goalie needs to be able to make a saucer pass to the far blueline (although that’s never a bad thing). Simply coming out of the crease to redirect a dump-in to your defensemen or stopping a rim behind the net are critical for gaining puck possession and giving your team a serious advantage in terms of breaking out and attacking with speed.

FOR DEFENSE: Closing the gap

I’m fairly certain that the defensemen I’ve coached over the years have heard me yell “Gap Up” more than anything else. Easier said than done of course. Defensemen leave a big gap because they don’t want to get beat, which is totally understood.

But in my mind, to be effective in girls' hockey, you’ve got to pressure the other team at every possible opportunity. Being able to close the gap isn’t just something that happens in your own zone. It starts at the the opponent’s blueline and works it’s way back to your own defensive zone. That means that your defensemen have to hold the opposing team’s blueline as long as possible, force turnovers in the neutral zone and make it very difficult for your opponents to gain the blueline and enter the attacking zone.

FOR FORWARDS: Picking the puck up off the boards

Every winger hates having to pick up the puck off the boards on the breakout. Unless you get a perfect pass on the tape without pressure, breaking the puck out effectively off the wall is a very challenging skill.
In an ideal world, the defense would get the puck in-zone, make a hard tape to tape pass to a forward, who gave them a perfect passing target and already had their feet moving up the ice. This rarely happens. Usually the winger is under pressure from a forward or a pinching defenseman on the opposition’s initial forecheck or your team has been stuck in your end for a while and they are struggling with transitioning from playing the defensive in-zone coverage to breaking out. It’s all about timing and battling to gain possession of the puck.

To become effective at these skills requires lots of repetition in practice and there will be many mistakes made. There will be times that the goalie messes up while trying to play the puck, times when a defenseman gets beat badly trying to step up in the neutral zone, and times when a forward ices the puck trying to gain possession along the boards on the breakout.

It is unreasonable to expect players to be able to execute these skills at high speeds and under pressure in a game if we haven’t given them ample time to perfect them in practice. Confidence is king in girls’ hockey, and we must get players comfortable with these challenging skills in practice if we want them to perform them effectively in games.
#1 WEAKEST SKILLS OF GIRLS HOCKEY PLAYERS

If you had to guess what the #1 weakest skill is of girls’ hockey players...

... what would it be?

A few weeks back, I was sitting in a classroom, alongside elite level coaches from all over Canada, listening to a presentation given by a national expert in skill development of female players. One of the coaches asked the presenter what he thought was the single biggest skill deficiency in female players. And I thought to myself, it’s got to be shooting, or the mental game, or the ability to see and use open ice. But that’s not what he said.

Without hesitation, he said “giving and receiving passes”.

And when I really thought about it, it totally made sense. I can picture myself out on the ice telling my players to “pass it like they mean it”. I also remember going to my first national team tryout and being blown away at how quick, hard and accurately the best players in the country passed the puck.

When we run our Total Female Hockey camps, we often pay extra attention to the passing skills of the incoming players. We made it a primary focus of the week to teach them how to give and receive passes effectively. They could all pass, but very very few of them were able to make and receive effective passes on both their forehand and backhand while moving. They could get the puck in the general vicinity of their target, but they didn’t move the puck with authority.

Quite often, girls try to push the puck and place it on their teammates stick, instead of sweeping it and snapping their passes. One of the main reasons for this is that when they start the passing motion, the puck is already in front of them. This causes them to “flick” the puck and push it towards the receiver. Girls must get comfortable starting the passing motion from behind their body. The challenge is that when the puck is behind you, you can’t see it. Players who don’t have high level stickhandling and passing skills will be very uncomfortable having the puck outside their field of view while it’s on their stick. This is a skill that can be practiced off ice and must be reinforced on the ice.

Similarly, girls tend to stop the puck out in front of them when they receive a pass. This usually leads to the puck bouncing off their stick, instead of being cushioned and caught to the side of the body. When players receive the puck out in front of them, they have no choice but to push a weak pass to the next receiver, or to have to stickhandle the puck to get it into a proper passing position - which is ineffective because it wastes time. When players cushion and catch the puck out to the side of their body, and allow the puck to move outside their field of view, they can immediately sweep and snap the puck again for a quick and hard pass. Again, this is a critical aspect of the skill of passing that must be taught explicitly and practiced constantly.
IN GRETZKY’S OFFICE

For those of you who weren't rabid hockey fans during the 80s and 90s, “Gretzky’s office” refers to the area behind the net where Wayne used to set-up a lot of his goals and assists. The area behind the net is a critical offensive tool that isn’t used nearly enough in girls' hockey.

Let’s look at the breakout first - after all, you’ve got to take care of the defensive end before you can worry about creating offense. Defensemen must learn to use the area behind the net as a safe haven. For example, if you are being chased by a forechecker, and you carry the puck behind the net while staying as close to the net as possible, the odds are that forechecker is going to get stuck behind you with no where to fit in between you and the net or, even better, they are going to get caught reaching with their stick to try to stop you, and will get called for a stick penalty (holding, slashing etc). Moving the puck behind the net on the breakout with a D to D pass or with a reverse allows players to move the puck away from pressure instead of banging the puck back into traffic - which is always frustrating for coaches to watch. In some ways, the net can act as a 3rd defenseman in the defensive zone and players must be taught how to use it effectively to relieve pressure.

In the offensive zone, using the back of the net to your advantage is critical when it comes to setting up scoring chances. If you decide to set up behind the net with the puck (one of Gretzky’s favorite maneuvers), it forces the defensive team to chase you out with pressure which may open up seams to make a pass in front or to walk out in front of the net for a scoring chance. If they let you stand there, they must continue to watch you, which means that your teammates have the opportunity to find holes and seams in front of the net while the opposition is focused on the puck, instead of on them.

I like to use the area behind the net to change the point of attack with my teams. For example, if you have a player carrying the puck into the attacking zone but her teammates still have to catch up to the play, having her carry the puck behind the net allows for her teammates to jump in to support the puck. Again, this causes the other team to have to face their own net and become “puck focused” which should open up opportunities for the players on the weak side or for the defenseman to jump in behind the opposition for a scoring chance. Even just having a player drop below the goal-line off the far post when her teammates are cycling in the opposite corner gives them a good passing outlet and allows her to sneak in behind the play, which forces the defensive team to adjust if she gets the puck. There are many ways to use the back of the net to help create offense off face-offs, powerplays and in 5-on-5 situations, but it is something that must be taught and practiced. Since many young players today never had the chance to watch Gretzky set-up behind the net in his “office”, coaches must teach them how to use the net to be creative and generate scoring chances.
3 SLAP-SHOT SINS OF GIRLS HOCKEY PLAYERS

I was watching the provincial under-18 team tryouts recently, and while the skill level was high and the competition was fierce, there was one glaring weakness in almost all of the girls’ games that I noticed most during the pre-game warm-ups.

Of all of the players who lined up at the tops of the circles and started to fire pucks at the goalie, there were only a handful who had what I would consider an elite-level slap-shot. While most hit the net consistently, very few had the power and precision in their shots that they need to stand-out and excel at the elite level.

The truth is that most girls hockey players don’t practice their shot enough. Male hockey players with heavy shots are a dime a dozen, but having a powerful and precise slap-shot in the female game really puts you in an elite class of players. Taking the time to work on your shot every day from now until the fall will put you far ahead of the competition in September. But before you go and shoot 100+ shots per day out, you need to make sure you are focusing on QUALITY instead of quantity.

To develop a “boomer” that people will notice, first you have to avoid the 3 biggest slap-shot sins in girls hockey.

1. The BIG Wind-Up:

I never understood why players think that having a big wind-up is necessary to have an effective shot. While it’s true that generating speed through a bigger range of motion will help you to generate more power by the time you get to the puck, the big wind-up is the last part of the slap-shot that players should be worried about. I always start with getting my players to perfect the stick motion from the hip down first. Once they have maximized the power and accuracy of their shot with this shortened wind-up, we work on opening up the range of motion.

2. Poor Puck Placement:

Most girls hockey players could benefit from bringing the puck in tighter to their body before shooting their slap-shot. Players will have their individual preference as to whether they prefer shoot with the puck closer to their back foot, front foot or in the middle of their stance. But most have the puck too far away from them body when they go to shoot. The further away the puck is from your body, the less force you will be able to put down into the ice with your stick, and the weaker your shot will be. It takes some practice to get accustomed to having the puck in tighter, but you’ll be able to generate a lot more power that way in the long run.
3. Not Closing The Blade:

The single biggest slap-shot sin I see girls making is that they don’t close the blade on their follow-through. Even those who start with the blade turned over and closed before they make contact with the puck tend to open it up right after and then keep it that way throughout the entire follow-through. To be honest, girls tend to leave the blade of the stick open on their wrist and snap-shots as well. Instead of using a higher follow-through after contact to get the puck up off the ice, they try to achieve that same height by using the stick like a golf club with an open face. To get power and accuracy, you need to keep the blade closed. Period.

Avoid these three slap-shot sins, focus on the quality of the shots you are taking instead of the quantity and you will start to develop the laser-like shot that will get noticed and help you on your way to the elite levels of women’s hockey.
#1 REASON YOUR BACKHAND IS BAD

The backhand is one of the most feared shots in the world of girls hockey. Goalies hate backhands because they can be very unpredictable when done well and players tend to hate them because they aren’t very good at them.

The main reason that girls struggle with their backhand shot is that they keep their top hand too close to their hip. In order to shoot an effective backhand, and make hard and accurate backhand passes, you need to get your top hand away from your hip.

What do I mean by that? If you are a right-handed shot, your left hand is your top hand. Most female hockey players (for some strange reason I still can’t quite figure out) hold their top hand very close to their hip. In this case of the righty, it would be on their left hip. This means that both hands and the stick are being carried very close to the body and that the stick is most likely no where close to the ice (but that’s another topic entirely). When your hands are that close to your body, it restricts your ability to stickhandle, shoot and pass effectively. The reason is that you lose a significant range of motion with your arms and your stick when you carry your hands close to your body.

So why is this important for your backhand? Because you need to be able to cup and sweep the puck the same way you do on your wrist shot in order for your backhand to be effective (as a side note, having your top hand glued to your hip has devastating effects on your wrist shot too).

Most young players shoot what I like to call a “pitchfork backhand”. Their blade never cups the puck at all, they don’t start with the puck behind their back foot and they basically try to lift the puck into the air by flinging their stick as high and hard into the air as they can. Shooting like this gives you zero control and very little power. Not to mention the fact that it just looks so wrong. Once you get your top hand away from your hip, you give yourself a much greater range of motion with your arms and stick. That allows you to cup the puck, sweep the puck like you would in a wrist shot and follow through at the end pointing your stick at the target.

Getting your top hand away from your hip is something that I am constantly telling my players to do to help their passing, stickhandling and shooting. Sometimes I feel like a broken record out there, repeating myself over and over again. It’s one of those little details that makes a huge difference in the way you play the game. So as you are practicing and playing in your games this weekend, I want you to think about making this little adjustment to your game. It may feel a little awkward at first if you aren’t used to it, but I can guarantee you that it will have a positive impact on your performance.
THE 360 DEGREE RULE

What’s the first skill that starts to deteriorate when players haven’t been on the ice for a few days? I believe it’s passing. When players are used to skating daily or every other day, it’s pretty amazing how “off” the timing, strength and accuracy of their passes can get. I remember back to when I played in university and we took a 5 day break over Christmas. Even though most of us still skated when we went home, we couldn’t string 2 or 3 good passes together when we returned from holidays.

Effective passing is a two-way street. The player giving the pass must make it hard enough and accurate enough that the receiver has a good chance of receiving it safely and effectively in the flow of the game. The player receiving the pass must give a good target where they show as much of their stick blade as possible to the passer and put themselves in the best possible body position to receive the pass.

When it comes to effective passing, I believe in the “360 Degree Rule”.

Players are taught from a very early age that they need to make sure their passes go “tape to tape”. And I think that’s a great guidepost for young players who are just starting to develop their skills. However, I think it can also breed bad behavior in the pass receiver. The pass receiver starts to expect that the incoming pass should be “perfect” and if it is behind them, in their feet or out ahead of them, it isn’t their fault that they can’t control it. Wrong. I believe it is the pass receiver’s job to be able to control any pass that is within 360 degrees of them.

The 360 degrees refers to the space surrounds a player in an imaginary circle that would be drawn around them when they are standing on the ice holding their stick out in front of them in their top hand.

I truly believe that it is the pass receiver’s responsibility to control ANY puck that is inside that 360 degree circle. That includes passes in their feet, wobbly passes, slapshot passes and those really annoying passes that dribble a few feet behind you as you head up the ice.

Being able to control those kind of passes, as well as the ones of the laser-like tape-to-tape variety, is an absolutely essential skill for players who aspire to play at the elite level. And it is a skill that coaches must constantly teach and reinforce on the ice during skill sessions, practices and games.
5 MISTAKES THAT DRIVE COACHES CRAZY

Now that we are deep into the regular season, I have to admit that I’m finding myself getting frustrated by the fact that some of my players consistently make the same mistakes over and over again. I’m sure there are more than a few coaches out there who are feeling the same frustrations. Players - we don’t mind if you make mistakes every once in a while, but when you continue to repeat those same mistakes over time, we start to question your coachability and consistency. Being coachable and consistent are two critical qualities for all players especially when you are looking to play at the elite levels of girls’ hockey.

So to help you avoid getting on your coach’s bad side at the midpoint of the season, here are the top 5 mistakes that drive me crazy as a coach:

1. **Making mistakes at half-speed**

I don’t mind if players make mistakes - in fact, I expect them to. Hockey is a game of mistakes after all. Plays rarely work out perfectly and more often than not, scoring chances and goals result from a bad bounce or a miscue by a player. I tell all my players at the start of the season that I expect they will make mistakes, but I will not tolerate them making mistakes at half-speed. When you make a play at half-speed (or even worse, without your feet moving) you take away your ability to recover if you make a mistake. Aggressiveness and confidence are extremely valuable qualities for girls hockey players to have - so go full-out all the time and use your speed and determination to recover if you do make a mistake.

Also - when you do make a mistake, play it off as if nothing happened. Instead of banging your stick, rolling your eyes or yelling, just keep going. Pretend as if nothing happened. This is a huge thing for scouts from the college and university level - they don’t want you wasting your time or energy dwelling on mistakes, they need you to get right back in the play immediately.

2. **Turn-overs within 5 feet of the blue-lines**

This is the biggest one for me. It drives me crazy when a forward makes a move right outside the blue-line that throws their teammates off-side. Similarly, turning the puck over on the breakout just 5 feet inside the blue-line is infuriating. Defensemen are equally as guilty here too - they back off the blue-line in the offensive zone and keep their team from maintain puck possession on the attack. The rule of thumb is to keep things simple within 5 feet of the blue-line. No cute drop passes and no trying to make a fancy move. Carry the puck in deep or chip it off the wall to get it out of the zone. Simple.
3. **Throwing the puck back into traffic**

Puck possession is a very hard thing to maintain in boys’ hockey because of body checking, but it is much easier to maintain in girls’ hockey and is absolutely critical to a team’s success. Finding open space when you don’t have the puck and moving the puck to an open player when you do have the puck are two very important skills for players to master - and they are also quite hard to teach. Too often players panic when they get the puck and are under pressure and simply throw it back in the direction it came from. This is when your ability to know where you want to put the puck before it even gets to you and your teammates’ ability to provide good close support is critical. Be patient, keep your feet moving and remember that the puck doesn’t always need to move forwards down the ice. Don’t be afraid to pull the puck back and regroup it back in towards your own zone so that you can maintain control and wait for space to open up.

4. **Over-passing the puck**

This is a big difference between boys’ and girls’ hockey. On a 2-on-1 rush in boys’ hockey, the player who carries the puck in over the blue-line is more often than not the shooter. In girls’ hockey, the players usually make one or two too many passes as they come in on the net, which results in a shot from too tight or no shot at all. Over-passing the puck takes away space and control which lessens the chance you will score. I have heard players say that they pass on the 2-on-1 because they don’t want their teammate to get mad at them if they don’t. Trust me - your teammate will not be mad at you if you score. One or two smartly placed and timed passes are OK - but trying to make 4 or 5 passes once you get over the blue-line is very unlikely to work. The closer you get to the net, the less options you have to move the puck. So shoot more, and pass less.

5. **Taking everything too literally**

This is another huge difference between the boys’ and girls’ game. Girls’ tend to get very focused on executing the system exactly as the coach teaches it. This is not bad thing - but quite often it results in “paralysis by analysis”. You get so focused on being exactly where you are supposed to be that you miss out on chances to create turnovers or capitalize on the other team’s mistakes. You need learn the system, be a responsible player in both ends of the ice, and then look for opportunities to play “outside the box”.

Those five mistakes aren’t huge by themselves - but they add up over the course of the game and the season. So focus on these details to help your team have a very successful second half of the season.
3 MORE MISTAKES THAT DRIVE COACHES CRAZY

This is for all you coaches out there who are frustrated by these mistakes and for you players who want to stay on your coaches’ good side for the rest of the season. There’s no room for these mistakes especially with holiday tournaments and playoffs just around the corner.

1. **NOT Stopping and Starting**

This drives EVERY coach crazy. I must yell out “stop and start” at least 10 times in every single practice and game. And yet no matter how many times I yell it, players still commit this cardinal sin over and over again.

It’s true that doing a tight turn or making a big circle is not nearly as tiring, or as hard on your legs, as stopping and starting. But circling means that you are turning your back to the play and giving your opponent more space and time. This is especially dangerous in the defensive zone where losing your player for a second can lead directly to the puck ending up in the back of your net. But it is also critical out in the neutral zone and the offensive zone. An effective forecheck and penalty kill also rely heavily on your ability to stop and start effectively. It is hard and it is tiring - but you have to do it.

This is especially critical if you want to play at the university level. An inability, or unwillingness, of a player to stop and start sets off alarm bells for scouts. Stopping and starting shows that you are defensively responsible and are willing to work a little harder than a player who takes the easy way out and circles. These are two qualities that don’t show up on the score sheet but are things that elite coaches are always looking for.

2. **Giving Up On A Play**

This might even be worse than not stopping and starting. Watching a player give up on a play drives me crazy. It is one of the biggest things that separates the elite players from the rest. You see when you make a mistake and stop moving your feet (or even worse, shrug your shoulders or bang your stick), you eliminate your ability to recover and get back into the play. When I watch the best young players here in Toronto, I always notice how they never give up on a play. They are the forwards who don’t just back-check to the centre line and coast into their zone - they skate as hard as they can all the way back into their own zone, even if they think there is no way they are actually going to catch the player from the other team. They are the defensemen who chase down the opposing team’s forward when she has a breakaway and makes that spectacular diving play to stop them, knocking the puck off their stick just as they go to shoot. They are the goalies who make that last-ditch effort to dive across the net when they are completely
out of the play and happen to save the puck with the knob of their stick right before it crosses the goal-line. That’s what it means to NEVER give up on a play.

That level of effort and hustle isn’t something that can be taught - it’s just something you do because of that small chance that you might be able to recover and do something spectacular.

3. Trying To Be Too Fancy

OK - I have to admit, out of all the mistakes I’ve mentioned, this is probably the one that makes me the most mad. I watch so many games where I see girls try to be spectacular instead of keeping things simple. My two biggest pet peeves in this regard are the slap-shot and the toe-drag.

Let me first say, that I have no problem with slap-shots or toe-drags - when they are used at the right time. It makes me cringe every single time I see a player do a toe-drag right at the blue-line and turn over the puck, instead of taking an extra stride or two to gain the zone. I hate seeing a defenseman fire a “boomer” off the opponents shin-pads on the power-play, when a simple wrist shot from the point would have done the trick. Fancy moves are fine - but you’ve got to do them at the right time and be able to execute them at full speed.

I always tell my players that it doesn’t say on the scoresheet what the goal looked like - it just says “Goal”. It’s nice to score a pretty one every once in a while, but every coach would agree that they just want the puck in the back of the net.
#1 HOCKEY PET PEEVE

Anyone who has ever seen the movie “Miracle”, remembers the “Again” skating scene. After a lacklustre game, Coach Herb Brooks lines his team up on the goal-line and has them skate lengths of the ice until the players can barely move. I have to admit - I love the movie, but I hate that scene. That memorable moment glorifies my biggest hockey pet peeve - "bag skating".

The truth is that skating players into the ground isn't going to cut it if you want to ensure that your players are as energetic and explosive in the second overtime period as they were in the second period. Players are definitely working “hard” when they have to drag themselves off the ice after a skating session, but they should be working "smart" instead.

It is important for players to learn to push themselves when they are already fatigued, but there needs to be a plan. Your on-ice conditioning sessions must be as well planned as your skill sessions if you want your players to perform their best and peak in time for the playoff run. The last 10 minutes of each practice session present a perfect opportunity for coaches to focus on improving the conditioning levels of their players, as long as they adhere to the most fundamental principle of hockey-specific conditioning - interval training.

Interval training is the key to developing game-winning conditioning and understanding the concept of the work-to-rest ratio is critical to developing a proper program. The game of hockey is characterized by high-intensity efforts (“work”) interspersed with periods of sitting or standing on the bench (“rest”). For example, if a shift is 45 seconds in length, and the player rests for 1 minute and 30 seconds between shifts, the work-to-rest interval is 1:2 - the rest period is twice as long as the work period.

The problem with traditional “bag skating” is that this type of conditioning workout rarely resembles the work-to-rest ratios players encounter on the ice. Two groups of players typically alternate 'working' and 'resting' until the coach stops the drill - which means that the work-to-rest interval is 1:1. These rest intervals are too short - especially when used at the beginning of the season. Proper interval-based conditioning relies on using the appropriate work-to-rest ratios at the appropriate times.

Most minor hockey teams have very little time on the ice prior to playing their first games of the season. As a result, coaches try to “whip” their players into shape by using high-intensity conditioning sessions. By doing too much too soon, players don’t develop a solid base of conditioning and are at risk for injury.

You should start your season-long conditioning program with ‘higher’ ratios (such as 1:3) and work your way back to the 'lower' ratios (1:1) as the season progresses. This ‘top-down’ approach allows players to develop their conditioning in a safe and effective way and helps the team to peak in time for crucial late-season games.
7 SKILLS EVERY PLAYER CAN IMPROVE ON

I recently had the opportunity to watch two of the top-ranked women's college hockey teams in the country, University of Wisconsin and the University of Minnesota-Duluth, face-off against each other in a double-header. As someone who used to play against these teams years ago, it is always amazing to see how the level of speed, skill and strength shown by the players has improved overall. But by far the most impressive thing I noticed while watching these two teams play was the extremely high degree of execution. In fact, when someone made a pass that was slightly less than perfect or missed their responsibility on the back-check, it stuck out like a sore thumb. The truly amazing thing was that both teams were missing a few players who are currently getting ready to play for their respective Olympic teams. I can only imagine how much more impressive the game would have been if those players had been in the line-up as well.

For these two games, I sat way up at the top of the stands with the simple goal of figuring out what these players and teams were doing that really separated them from the level of play I watch on a daily basis, which range from U12 all the way up to U19 and high school hockey.

So I created a list of “The Top 7 Things That Every Player Can Improve On” on my observations during these two games.

1. **TALK!**: The first thing that struck me is how much the players communicated with each other out on the ice. Most of the time when I watch games the players are virtually silent out on the ice. During these games, the players called for every pass, defensemen communicated with their partners and the goalies helped the defense out on the in-zone. Talking out on the ice only makes everyone’s job easier.

2. **Stick On The Ice**: This is another big one that I am constantly reminding my players about. Not only did these elite players have their stick on the ice right when they knew the pass or shot was coming, they had it there even earlier. The game was moving so fast that many of the passes would have been missed if the players were holding the stick up by their waist - but they were always ready.

3. **Follow Shots To The Net**: Quite often when I am watching girls’ games, players will take a shot and then fade off to the corner or end up below the goal-line afterwards. These women took their shots, crashed the net with speed and stopped right in the crease. They didn’t stand around and stare at their shot - they kept their feet moving and went to the net.

4. **Feet Always Moving Along Boards**: Whether it was a winger opening up on the boards on the breakout or a defensemen battling for the puck along the wall, these elite players always kept their feet moving. Standing still or gliding along the boards really only ever works in the power-play - most of the time you want to keep your feet moving to avoid a check or avoid getting a penalty.
5. **Lateral Movement On Attack:** I am constantly reinforcing the concept of moving laterally in the neutral zone and offensive zone with my forwards. While being fast in a straight line is important, it’s your ability to move laterally with speed and power that will allow you to separate yourself from your check and get more opportunities to score. These players were constantly skating on the diagonal, looking for shorter passes and creating time and space with their lateral movement.

6. **Defense Get Feet Moving With Puck:** This is another one that I am constantly reminding my defensemen about. The defense in these women’s game always had their feet moving up ice when they made a pass. Sometimes it seems like young players over-think their decisions on defense and stop their feet moving before making a pass. This leaves them no opportunity to recover quickly if the pass is off target. And it is always easier to pass to a moving target when you are moving as well.

7. **Patience With The Puck:** This was the one thing that really separated these elite players from the younger players I watch everyday. When they had the puck on their stick, they never panicked. Even when they were under pressure, they kept their head up and their feet moving and looked for their best option. This is a skill that all players who aspire to get to the next level much cultivate.

By improving in these 7 areas and focusing on executing every skill to the best of your ability, you will take a step closer to becoming an elite player one day too.
HOCKEY SENSE 101

I read an amazing article recently that explained in great deal why hockey is the smartest game in the world. It basically talks about 2 of the key components of what we typically call “GAME SENSE” and how they are more important in hockey than in any other sport.

Those components are:
::: Spatial intelligence
::: Situational awareness

Spatial intelligence is the ability to take in all the things that are happening in a particular time and space on the ice and anticipate what might happen next. This kind of split-second decision making is made at every position. We see it in defensemen trying to read what the opponents are going to do in a 2-on-1. We see it with goalies trying to stop a breakaway and with forwards trying to read what the goalie is giving them on said breakaway. Those are just a few basic examples of spatial intelligence. Keep in mind that these decisions are being made in reference to all the other players on the ice, where they are and what they are doing. Not to mention the fact that you’re standing on knife blades, people are probably yelling at you and someone is likely trying to hit you.

The best example of a player who excelled at spatial intelligence would be Wayne Gretzky. He seemed to have eyes in the back of his head and knew where he wanted to put the puck before he even got it. He had an amazing ability to read the game and make decisions that no one else on the ice had even dreamed of making.

Situational awareness is very closely related to spatial intelligence. While spatial intelligence boils down to knowing everything that’s going on around you, situational awareness centers more on being conscious of all that’s going on in the context of the what the other players intend to do and anticipating their next move.

To simplify it even further: Spatial intelligence is knowing what’s going on all around you. Situational awareness is understanding how the intentions and actions of those around you effect what’s going on around you. The players with the best “game sense” excel at both of these. When you couple these high-level mental components with tremendous individual skill, you get a fantastic all-around player who can both skate and think the game at high speeds.

Now to the untrained eye, hockey can sometimes seem like a brutal series of random collisions in which the puck somehow sporadically ends up in the net. To some, hockey appears to be a game of wild improvisation. We know better. That’s why coaches put systems and tactics in place. To bring some degree of order to the chaos. We put these in place not because we want players to do everything “to the letter” every time. The systems and tactics are simply a framework for the game - a starting point for
execution of a game plan and something to come back to when things get messy out there.

What every coach wants are players who can take what they’ve learned about systems and tactics in practice, couple that with their individual skills, and also be able to “think” the game at high speeds. Spatial intelligence and situational awareness are two of the toughest things to teach players. That’s why those who posses those traits are so valuable out on the ice.

Needless to say, to have a group of players with great spatial intelligence and situational awareness, along with great skill, attitude and work ethic, would be a coach’s dream.
3 KEYS TO DEVELOPING YOUR MENTAL GAME

Hockey experts agree that 80% of hockey performance is mental and 20% is physical. We often focus all of our efforts towards building the physical side of the game, instead of taking the time to develop the mental game. And it is this lack of attention to the mental side of the game that is preventing so many teams and players from taking their performance to the next level.

Figuring out how to improve the mental side of the game presents a huge challenge to coaches, parents and players alike. To ensure that you are 100% prepared for every game, and you can perform your best, you need to have strategies on hand that address the 3 critical aspects of mental performance.

The ability to stay set & get goals, and to get & stay focused and confident, are critical skills that you need to master and use constantly in order to have a successful season and hockey career.

Goal Setting & Goal Getting
Most of us do a decent job of setting goals and not much in the way of ensuring that we “get” them. Every high school aged player I’ve presented to over the last 3 years (that’s well over 4000 players) has told me that they want to play college hockey and represent their national team. Those are great goals to set - but how are you going to get from where you are now to where you want to be? What are you going to do today to bring yourself closer to your dreams? You need a plan - and you’ll learn how to put together your personal plan in the pages that follow.

Focus
You must learn to focus only on the things that are under your control. While it is impossible to control what everyone else in the rink is doing, you always have complete control over your thoughts and your actions. Learning how to focus on your own performance, while maintaining a positive attitude and tireless work ethic, will positively influence your game and help you take your performance to the next level.

Confidence
In order for you to be confident, you have to believe in your ability to perform on the ice and know that you are contributing positively to the team. You to identify your strengths, define your role on the team and set realistic expectations for your performance. But, most importantly, you must realize that you are largely responsible for your own confidence. If you constantly look to others to boost your confidence, you become reliant on them, instead of on yourself. By taking control of your own confidence, you empower yourself to be your best both on and off the ice.
THE CONFIDENCE RULES

The biggest issue when it comes to the mental side of the game with girls is confidence. It doesn’t matter if a player is the best one on the ice or among the worst, almost every single girl I’ve worked with who aspires to reach a high level of performance struggles with confidence issues at some point. But there is a pervasive lack of confidence across the board with girls’ hockey players that drives me, and coaches like me, crazy.

I have to admit, confidence was not something I lacked as a young athlete. Which is quite ironic given the fact that I wasn’t a very good player at all. I suppose credit must be given to my parents, teachers and coaches for some of that. But I truly believe that confidence is something that comes from inside of you, not something that someone else can bestow upon you. Players often tell me that their coaches don't give them confidence. I think that’s an unfair statement to make. Your coaches make act in way that makes you think that they are less than completely confident in you, but that doesn’t automatically take away your confidence. You must make a conscious decision to either have confidence or not - it is NOT a passive process at all. I’m reminded of the Eleanor Roosevelt quote - “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent”.

The world of girls’ hockey has it’s fair share of people who are plagued by jealousy and will do and say anything to tear other people down in order to make themselves feel better about themselves. I believe this is one of the ugliest character traits human beings can have - but the truth is, it only really affects you if you choose to let it bother you. Just because someone says something mean, doesn’t mean that you have to believe them. If you choose to let people take your confidence away from you, there will be mean spirited people lurking in every corner eager to snatch your self-esteem away. But you have to actively let that happen.

Similarly, there are plenty of players out there who are given compliments and told how good of players they are, and they make a conscious decision to doubt the person giving them that feedback. I will continually be frustrated by young players who are simply unable to take a compliment. I believe that teenage girls are scared to take compliments. They are worried about looking “full of themselves”. This is even more true for young female athletes who are constantly worried about how they are being judged by their teammates. If they are always being given compliments, and are welcoming them, are they being stuck up? Does it mean that they think they are better than everyone else? Is it better just to dismiss the compliments instead and make some sort of self-depricating remark instead? In every season that I coach, I would estimate that less than 10% of the players I work with have a decent level of self-confidence and less than 5% of them are openly confident players who will take a compliment without worrying about how they are being judged.

I have to admit, I was one of those 5% of players. I’m not entirely sure where my level of self-confidence came from, but I had it very early on in my hockey career. Given my lack of experience and ability, it certainly wasn’t due to the copious amount of compliments I was getting because of my spectacular performances.
So where did that confidence come from?

If your coaches, parents and teammates can’t really give you confidence, how exactly do you build confidence?

It has to come from within you.

It comes from setting goals for yourself and meeting them. When you achieve goals you set for yourself on a consistent basis, your confidence grows. And as your confidence grows, you are able to set larger more meaningful goals. And once you achieve those, you confidence grows further and you reach for even more lofty goals.

Confidence comes from goal getting. Goal setting is something that many people do - whether for their school work, jobs or life in general. But we don’t do a very good job of goal getting. Goal setting gives us focus, but it is goal getting that gives us confidence.

I set small meaningful goals for myself every time I hit the ice or hit the gym as a young athlete. I did it whether I was at soccer practice, on the basketball court or playing hockey. I also had one or two things I was focusing on for that day, and would work as hard as I could to achieve that goal. I’m pretty sure it was something I started to do naturally, and then as I got older and started to read books on the mental side of athletic performance, I realized that I was on the right track in terms of goal setting and getting already. And once I knew that I was ahead of the game, I continued to make this daily goal setting, and dogged determination to get those goals, a main staple of my personal performance plan.

I know it sounds cheesy. I do seminars with young athletes all the time and teach them about the importance of goal setting and getting, and most tune me out. After all, they’ve heard about goal setting before and they either tried it and didn’t stick with it, or never even gave it a shot. But the ones who take the message to heart, and stick with the process (even when it doesn’t seem to moving in the right direction) are the ones who get ahead. There’s a reason that there are so many books out there about goal setting - it’s because it works. It’s just that most people are determined enough to see it through. If they hit a setback or don’t achieve their goals for a few consecutive days or weeks, they give up. Goal achievement is the key to building confidence in all areas of life - and it is those who buy in wholeheartedly that achieve amazing things that most people consider to be “amazing”.

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By far the biggest difference between boys and girls hockey players is confidence. Boys tend to be over-confident in their abilities. When a boy goes out and scores a goal, he walks around the next day thinking he is a bit of a “hot-shot”. This isn’t a bad thing at all - it’s great to have a lot of confidence. On the other hand, girls tend to be very under-confident in their abilities. They tend to downplay their accomplishments. I know this first-hand because I was guilty of putting myself down throughout my entire high school career and I have worked with hundreds of young players who do the same thing.

A few seasons ago, there was a young player on my peewee team that scored her first ever goal in a game and actually went on to score a hat-trick. I was so excited to congratulate her after the game. But instead of being happy with her performance and proud of her accomplishment, all she could focus on was the one stupid pass she made in the second period that resulted in a breakaway and goal by the other team. There she was after scoring her first ever hat-trick and she was focusing on her mistakes instead of her successes. The sad thing is that I wasn’t surprised by her reaction at all. It is an all-too-common characteristic among young female hockey players. We don’t do it because we are fishing for compliments or don’t think we are any good. The truth is that many players downplay their accomplishments because they are scared of being good. If they push themselves to be the best and aspire to play at the highest level possible, they are scared of how they are going to be judged.

To give you an idea of how “true” this is, I’ve spoken to thousands of aspiring players at workshops this past season, and all of them acknowledged that this is something they worry about once they start taking the action necessary to achieve their goals. Once they start pushing harder in practice, finishing every drill to the end (even when many of their teammates ease up), and doing all the “little” things like stretching after every game and doing extra off-ice training throughout the season, she starts to worry that her teammates might think that she thinks she is better than them because she is trying so hard to be her best. As strange as it might sound, girls hockey players are sometimes scared of standing out from the crowd. Girls don’t necessarily want to be praised in the front of the team for doing something well because they don’t want to people to think that they aren’t part of the group. The truth is that it takes a tremendous amount of strength to be set apart from the crowd. It is a challenge to set lofty goals and passionately pursue them every day when the rest of your teammates don’t have the same aspirations as you. It is scary to think that people might judge you as a result of your actions and that you might not reach your ultimate goals. It takes a tremendous amount of strength and confidence to go after your dreams when there is a chance you won’t be completely supported or completely successful.

Coaches and parents - we must work with our young athletes and help them to build the confidence they need to move closer to their dreams. Girls - own your accomplishments and realize that even if not everyone else shares your passion, the only person you really need to answer to at the end of the day is yourself. And if you are proud of what you’ve accomplished, that’s what really counts.
PERFORMING UNDER PRESSURE

It’s that time of year. When every game, every shift, every shot, every save and every battle counts. And the last thing any of us want to do is to fold up like a cheap tent under these intense circumstances.

I’m gonna let you in on a little secret. The pressure and stress is all inside of you. There is absolutely NOTHING that says a particular situation HAS to be stressful. As the US and Canadian Olympic teams lined up for the gold medal game in the Olympics, the TV commentators talked about how this was a pressure-packed moment. The expectations were higher than ever for both teams and it would have been easy for the players to crack under pressure.

“Pressure” only exists inside your head. That’s why some players are able to step up and play their best even under the most intense conditions and why others seem to crumble. Nothing that happens to you or any situation you are in is stressful. It’s your reaction to what happens that causes stress.

I was coaching at the Ontario Winter Games last week, and for most of these young 13-15 year old players, this was the most intense competition they had ever been a part of. Scouts were watching their every move, coaches were evaluating their performance on and off the ice and their parents were sitting up in the stands hoping for elite performance.

Some players looked like they were paralyzed by fear, stress, and pressure and could barely play up to their normal level, never mind exceeding their own expectations or that of anyone in the stands. A handful of players stepped up to the plate and knocked the ball out of the park with their performance (sorry for the baseball analogy).

Each and every player had to deal with the same level of pressure and stress. They were all on an even playing field going into the camp and tournament. But some came out on top while others moved down the depth chart.

Why were some players able to rise up to the occasion while others suffered? Because they didn’t allow themselves to get stressed out. They didn’t let the “pressure” of performance get to them. They understood that performing your best is about focusing on the things you’ve got control over and blocking out distractions that you can’t control.

Whether you are playing in the late stages of the playoffs, getting ready for your biggest tournament of the season or heading into tryout season, you have to understand that the stress and pressure you might feel isn’t real.

And you don’t have to let it get to you. It’s the same for each and every player - whether you are getting ready for the gold-medal Olympic final, going into your first ever provincial evaluation tournament or heading into tryout season. Some players will rise up to the challenge and some will crack under pressure. How will you respond?
THE PERFECT MISTAKE GIRLS HOCKEY PLAYERS MAKE

There is one trait that girls' hockey players possess that is both a blessing and a curse. It allows them to be great team players, but often prevents them from truly excelling on the ice and reaching their highest level of performance. The greatest thing about coaching girls' hockey players, whether on or off the ice, is that they are always trying to do the drill or exercise as perfectly as possible. The problem is that when the coach draws up a drill on the board, the girls are so scared of make a mistake, that they memorize how to do the drill perfectly, and forget to think about how to do the same drill creatively.

The main reason girls' become laser-focused on doing the drill exactly as it was shown is because they don't want to mess-up for fear of being embarrassed in front of their teammates or being yelled at by the coach. And while it's important to be able to understand and execute the drill perfectly, players really need to be able to think "outside the box" in order to really excel out on the ice. I am not advocating that players "freestyle" on every single drill, but girls' hockey players are way too "robotic" out on the ice. They follow the plan to the letter because in their mind the consequences of failure far outweigh possibility of success. We need to tip the balance the other way.

This fear of failure in female hockey players ultimately boils down to a lack of confidence. As a coach, I would prefer that my players push themselves to get outside their comfort zone instead of always playing it safe - especially in practice. Girls need to understand that it is not only OK to take chances, but it is the only way to get significantly better and really stand-out from the crowd. Since most players are going to play it safe, your willingness to take a chance and push the envelope will put you ahead of the competition.

Here are some ideas on how to promote more creativity among girls hockey players:

1. **Tell Them It's OK To Make Mistakes.** Girls' hockey players should not be afraid of failure - especially in practice. There is a difference between being in the completely wrong position on the breakout and trying a brand-new move on a 1-on-1. Encourage players to try things out on the ice.

2. **Help Them Find Holes.** Great players know how to find open space out on the ice in all situations. They don't follow a prescribed path - they go where they need to be in order to support their teammates or surprise their competition. When players are constantly worried about being in the right place at the right time, they tend not to look for these golden opportunities.

3. **Don't Tell Them What To Do:** One strategy I have found that works particularly well with my players is to explain the drill in very basic terms, instead of being overly focused on the details. For example, if we are working on a breakout drill that has a pretty set pattern, and I want them to regroup at the far end before attacking the net, I will only...
give the specific instructions on the breakout part of the drill and tell them just to regroup in the middle. In this case, the part of the drill that I need them to perfect is the breakout and I would prefer they improvise on the regroup.

Getting to and excelling at the next level is all about being creative. There are always going to be different fore-checking, power-play and penalty kill systems to learn. But it is the players who are able to be creative within the context of those systems that really standout on the ice. If you want to give yourself an unfair advantage over the competition this season, you can't just follow the pattern and go through the motions. To stand-out, you need to think outside the box. Learn the drills, patterns and systems - and then start being creative.
No two players are the same. So why do we constantly compare ourselves to others? Comparisons are the number #1 confidence killer in girls’ hockey. Here’s the problem: When girls compare themselves to other, they generally focus on what makes others better than they are. That makes them concentrate on their own weaknesses, which hurts their confidence. I’m not saying that you shouldn’t look up to players who are more talented than you are and strive to get up to their level of performance. You absolutely must have that kind of drive to get to the next level.

But I’m not talking about those players who are your role models and signposts for your improvement as an athlete. I’m talking about comparing yourself to your teammates and the players you play against regularly.

There is always going to be someone you play against who skates better than you, or has a better slap-shot, or has more points, or more shut-outs, or more fancy moves, or more coaches & scouts recruiting them. The truth is that you shouldn’t be wasting your time, energy and focus worrying about how much better another player is than you or how you should be the one that is the favorite because you are really the best at skill X, Y and Z.

And I’m not just talking to the players here either. As a coach, I sometimes catch myself doing this too. When I am helping a player on a skill or with a concept during the game, I sometimes slip into mentioning how another player does it really well. And while I might think it is a great that they can watch that player execute that skill and learn from it, I also realize that the player I am talking to is probably thinking to herself, “Coach thinks that player is better than me.” It’s not what I am trying to say at all of course - but perception is reality.

I can’t let the parents off the hook on this one either. I think we sometimes forget that we can be doing more harm than good by comparing our player’s performance directly to someone else. You will certainly never help your daughter’s confidence by putting another player down in order to make her feel better about her own performance. Not every parent does this - but I’ve seen it being done far too many times. I can guarantee you that you are sending a poor message to your daughter - namely that it’s OK to put someone else down to make you feel better about yourself. Whether you are legitimately better than that player or not, it is not a constructive comparison.

Directly comparing player to player is unfair and unrealistic. Every single player brings something unique and valuable to the table. We must recognize that as coaches and parents, and communicate that to our daughters and players on a regular basis. Because as we all know, confidence is king in hockey and in life. If a player is constantly comparing herself to others, she loses her ability to focus on what she does well and what she needs to do to play her best. To be confident, she must own her strengths and know that delivering on those strengths are what make her and her team perform at the highest level. Stop comparing yourself and focus on your strengths.
ARE YOU DISTRACTED?

One of the biggest challenges for all hockey players is being able to stay focused throughout an entire season, game or even practice. Distractions are everywhere and with playoffs and season-ending tournaments upon us, the amount and intensity of these distractions seems to be multiplying. Every player will get distracted by different things and that’s why each player must come up with their own strategy for combatting their distractions.

There are 2 main types of distractions: internal and external. External distractions are the ones that are happening outside of you: bad ice, bad refs, being late, the fans, coaches’ decisions, and your teammates’ actions. These are very different from the internal distractions, which are the ones happening inside of you: over-thinking, doubting yourself, comparing yourself, worrying about your mistakes, wanting to impress and worrying about things happening off the ice. With all of these distractions, it is easy to see why you sometimes lose your focus and take your eyes off the task at hand.

The first step to combatting distractions is to identify the 3 that are your biggest. Are you more affected by external or internal distractions? Are you your own worst enemy or do you focus too much energy on what’s going on outside of you? It is important to figure out what your most common distractions are so that you can start to create strategies that will allow you to deal with these distractions and stay focused, especially at this critical time of the season.

To deal with external distractions, you must learn to focus only on the things that are under your own control. It is impossible to control the actions of everyone else in the rink - you can’t control what the referee calls, what the fans are yelling or what system the other team is playing. You also can’t control what your coach decides to do or whether your teammates chose to pass you the puck. What you always have complete control over your thoughts and your actions. If you find yourself getting distracted by your own thoughts, you need to choose some key focus words that you can use to get you back on track. I was one of those players that was my own worst enemy, and so I would always come back to the basics when I found I was getting down on myself. I used phrases like, “Feet Moving”, “Simple Passes” and “Confident Decisions” to refocus during the game. Again, these were all things I had complete control over in the context of the game.

Learning how to avoid distractions and focus on your own performance, while maintaining a positive attitude and tireless work ethic, will positively influence your whole game and help you take your game to the next level, especially at this critical time of the season.
EXPECT IT

Here’s what determines the level of success a player achieves

It’s NOT...

:: The team you play for
:: The camps you go to
:: Or the coaches you listen to

And it’s NOT...

:: How hard you shoot
:: How fast you skate
:: How fit you are

What truly separates good players from the great ones is the mental side of their game. I’ve talked a lot about confidence and focus in the past, but today I want to talk about something even bigger than that...

Your EXPECTATIONS.

A great player doesn’t wish, hope, want or strive for success. She EXPECTS it. She 100% believes in her ability to successfully achieve her goals. This doesn’t happen overnight - it is a process. Success breeds success. It is the accumulation of small victories over time in practice, in the gym and in games that lead to bigger victories and help you to believe that you can achieve any goal you set your mind to.

When I think back to my final year of high school, I realize that I expected to be the best player every time I hit the ice. Whether I always succeeded in being the best player or not, I expected that I would be and that’s what drove my success. I didn’t just want to be the best - I expected it.

So what are your expectations for yourself when you hit the ice?

Are you holding yourself to a high enough standard? Or are you letting yourself off the hook?

Are you stepping outside your comfort zone? Or are just playing up to your potential?

Are you consistently making the hard choice to be great? Or are you making the easy choice and just going along with the crowd?

As we head into the second half of the season, a new year and new decade, you need to start setting higher expectations for yourself and holding yourself accountable to meeting and exceeding your goals. You’ll be amazed at what can happen when you believe in your ability to achieve all the success you’ve dreamed of.
THE MOST DANGEROUS 4-LETTER WORD IN GIRLS HOCKEY

I’m already seeing a disturbing pattern emerge with many of the girls hockey players I am working with this season - and the regular season hasn’t even started yet. Whether during practices, games or off-ice training, every single day I hear players saying the most dangerous four-letter word in girls hockey…CAN’T.

“I can’t crossover that way”.
“I can’t shoot a backhand”.
“I can’t do that move.”
“I can’t do push-ups”.

To be honest, “can’t” is one of the most frustrating words to a coach. It’s not that the players can’t do the skills at all - they just can’t do them as well as they would like to be able to quite yet. As soon as a player uses the word “can’t”, they are giving themselves permission to underachieve. After all, if they already know they can’t do it, why even try?

I always ask my players to think back to when they first starting playing hockey. Back then, they really couldn’t do much of anything. But they didn’t put themselves down constantly by saying that they couldn’t do anything. They kept trying to skate, stop and shoot until they could do it. But now that they have been playing for a while, they expect much more from themselves and get frustrated that they aren’t as good as they would like to be and often get stuck in the negative state of mind. Lack of confidence is by far the biggest problem among girls hockey players. And I simply won’t allow players to chip away at their confidence by using negative language. Ideally, they wouldn’t use the word “can’t” at all. But I know, having been a young female hockey player who held myself to a very high standard, that the journey towards positive thinking can be a long one.

That’s why I start off small with my players. Every time I hear them use the word “can’t”, I make them to add a very powerful word to the end of the sentence…”YET”.

I can’t do push-ups….YET.
I can’t shoot a backhand…YET.
I can’t do that move…YET.
I can’t do crossovers that way…YET.

It’s a small step in the right direction, but it will make a huge difference in the long run. After all, confidence and self-esteem aren’t built in a day.

If you are a girls hockey coach or parent, please try this strategy out with your players. Remember - every little bit of positivity helps.
9 QUOTES OF CONFIDENCE

I usually wait until playoff or tryout time to send out a message about confidence. But I see this as one of the biggest barriers to both individual and team success with all 3 teams that I’m coaching this season, so I figured now is as good of a time as any to send out some inspirational quotes.

Before we get into the quotes though, I want to point out one quick thing.

And this might be most important part of all... Confidence comes from inside you.

It doesn't come from your parents, coaches, teammates or friends. You may think it does - but the truth is you have complete control over your own confidence. You're the one who builds it AND you are also the one that takes it away.

My first favorite quote about CONFIDENCE illustrates that point:

:: Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent.

(Meaning: There is NO reason anything anyone says or does has to make you feel bad about yourself. You choose the way you interpret what happens to you.)

:: Confidence is preparation. Everything else is beyond your control.

:: It's not who you are that holds you back, it's who you think you're not.

:: We have to learn to be our own best friends because we fall too easily into the trap of being our own worst enemies.

:: The way you treat yourself sets the standard for others.

(Meaning: If you put yourself down or think you aren't good enough, you are opening the door for others to treat you the same way).

:: Other people's opinion of you does not have to become your reality.

:: Confidence is contagious. So is lack of confidence. (This is especially important for your whole team to realize).

:: Whether you think you can or think you can't - you are right.

:: Don't let anyone steal your dream. It's your dream, not theirs.

Remember to stay focused on the 2 things you've got control over - your attitude and your work ethic.
WHY GIRLS NEED STRENGTH MORE THAN BOYS

Being strong is essential for all hockey players. But it is even more important for girls. The female game has become much faster and much more physical, and the speed and strength that girls will need to compete is only going to increase. Many parents and coaches are concerned about getting their girls involved in any kind of strength training. Sure, you want to do everything you can to help your players get better, but you don’t want to risk them getting injured in the process. The reality is that the injury rate in the girls’ game is already alarmingly high and is only going to get higher if girls don’t develop the strength needed to keep up with the physical demands of the sport.

There are four common myths about strength training for girls’ hockey players. I am going to set the record straight on each one of them and show you why girls need strength training as much, if not more, than the boys.

Myth #1:  Without body checking, strength training isn’t necessary. Anyone who has ever watched a girls’ hockey game knows that “no body checking” does not mean “no body contact”. Girls may not be allowed to line each other up across the blue-line, but they are going to get hit and they need to be able to protect themselves. And the easiest way to do this is by getting stronger. That increased strength is also handy for winning battles in front of the net and races for the puck.

Myth #2:  Strength training at a young age leads to injury. Quite often, it’s the safety concerns of parents and coaches that keep girls’ hockey players from getting involved in a strength training program. Most strength training injuries happen when players try to lift too much weight or do the exercises incorrectly. But using a simple body-weight strength training program will prevent injuries and not cause them.

Myth #3:  Strength training makes girls “muscle bound”. When the words “strength training” are mentioned to girls hockey players, they immediately think of lifting heavy weights and looking like Arnold Schwarzenegger. The truth is that it is virtually impossible for a young female player to become “muscle-bound” from strength training. A properly designed strength training program will not cause girls to become “muscle-bound” and it will make them stronger, faster and better players.

Myth #4:  Boys strength train. Girls don’t. Most male hockey players desperately want to be 6’2” and 200 pounds and will do anything and everything to get there. Girls’ hockey players, on the other hand, are constantly being told by the popular media that “thin is in” and that being strong is “not feminine”. The result is that girls involved in a strength and power sport, like hockey, end up conflicted - they want to get stronger to increase their hockey performance, but they still want to fit into the feminine “ideal”. Just take a second and imagine one of those “ideal” girls from the fashion magazine trying to win a battle for the puck along the boards against someone like Hayley Wickenheiser or Angela Ruggerio. Now do you see
why it is so important to get the message out to girls that they need to be strong to perform better and prevent injury?

The truth about strength training for girls’ hockey players is that it doesn’t require them to touch any weights, it’s not going to lead them to develop huge muscles and, when done properly, it will prevent injuries and not cause them. Building strength through body-weight strength training is one of the easiest and most effective ways for girls hockey players to increase their performance and decrease their chance of injury. Girls don’t need to look like a bodybuilders, but they’ve got to be strong. The strength of the female game, and the safety of its players, depends on it.
WHY GIRLS’ HOCKEY PLAYERS CAN’T DO PUSH-UPS

Most girls’ hockey players hate push-ups. And most of them aren’t very good at them either. When I tell the players I train that we are going to do push-ups in our workout, I usually get eye rolls, groans and excuses in return. Most girls struggle to do proper push-ups. And it’s not their fault. When it comes to being able to do perfect push-ups, the odds are stacked against girls’ hockey players.

The #1 Enemy of Push-Ups is Poor Posture.
The main reason girls’ hockey players struggle with push-ups is poor posture. Before we get to how you are going to fix that problem, you have to realize that in order to be able to play hockey well, you actually need to have bad posture. Think about it - you would never be able to handle to puck or catch bad passes if you were always standing up perfectly straight with your shoulders pulled back. Players have to let their shoulder rolls forward slightly in order to be able to reach for loose pucks and stickhandle outside the frame of their body. Players may need to have bad posture on the ice, but they need to work on improving their posture off the ice so that they can avoid shoulder injuries and back pain. And push-ups are actually a great exercise for improving posture - when they are done properly.

In order to do the perfect push-up, your body must be in a perfectly straight line throughout the entire movement. In order to maintain this position, players must be able to keep their core tight (I tell them to think about tightening up as though I was going to punch them in the stomach), squeeze their butts (that one usually gets a few giggles) and squeeze their shoulder blades together as they lower themselves down towards the ground. If you can keep your body in this perfect straight position throughout the movement, you take the load off of your arms and rely more on your stronger chest and core muscles to perform the movement.

This is the main reason that girls hockey players struggle to do proper push-ups. They rely too much on their arm strength, and not enough on their core strength and stability. Their lack of core strength and stability can be easily seen by the position of their body throughout the push-up movement. Players either let their butts come way up into the air or they let their hips sag down to the ground - both indicate that the core muscles of the player are weak. You may need to have slightly poor posture in order to play the game effectively, but you also need to counteract that bad posture by practicing basic strength building movements, like push-ups.

So now that you know what you are up against, here’s what you have to do. Practice your push-ups. It doesn’t matter if you can only do 2 perfect push-ups or 20. The point is to get better at them as the season continues. This increased strength will help you prevent shoulder injuries, win battles in the corner, and shoot harder.

How many perfect push-ups can you do right now? Figure out where you are starting from, keep track of your improvements over the course of the off-season and practice, practice, practice. Who knows, you may even start to enjoy them.
HOW GIRLS HOCKEY PLAYERS CAN DO 29 CHIN-UPS

I once watched an elite women’s hockey player do 29 chin-ups during fitness testing. I don’t care who you are - male or female, hockey player or not - that is just plain impressive. So if you want to make it to the elite level of women’s hockey, and you can’t even do one chin-up yet, how do you get to 29?

First off all, the average number of chin-ups (palms face you) or pull-ups (palms face away) for women playing in the national team programs in North America is 10. That’s a lot more manageable than 29, but still a lot if you are starting from zero.

Here are some ways that you can increase your chin-up scores:

1) Perfect Form Counts:
Every time I go to the gym, I see people doing chin-ups completely wrong (if I see anyone doing them at all). The biggest mistake people make is that they don’t lower themselves down into complete extension on each chin-up. This means that each time you lower yourself down, your arms need to be straight. Most people I see at the gym just bring themselves down until their arms are at 90 degrees and go back up. That may pad your chin-up stats in your own head, but those won’t count when you are getting tested at the elite level of women’s hockey. All the way down or it doesn’t count.

2) Learn By Jumping:
One of the most common ways to start building the upper body strength necessary to do chin-ups is by doing “negative” chin-ups. This means that instead of starting from a full hang and pulling yourself up to the bar, you start at the top (with your chin over the bar) and then slowly lower yourself down until your arms are fully extended under control. I usually start my young players off with 2 sets of 5 “negatives” with a 5 second lower. It is really important not to let your body drop down from the top position quickly - you need to lower under control for 5 seconds (or more) in order to get the strength building effects.

3) Start With One:
If you have never done 1 chin-up or pull-up before, the idea of doing 10 (or 29!) is really daunting. These elite women’s hockey players didn’t just wake up one morning being able to do double-digit chin-ups. It took years and years of work to be able to get there. You need to set a goal of being able to do one chin-up. You may not believe me now, but once you can do 1 chin-up, doing 5 is easy. Do the “negative” chin-ups described above for a month or so, and then give full chin-up from a full hanging position a shot. You might just surprise yourself. If you get your first chin-up, please share your success with everyone you know as well as all of us at Total Female Hockey Club. Doing your first chin-up is a huge accomplishment and should not be taken lightly. I even sent one of my athletes a present when she did her first one.

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Remember - Rome wasn’t built in a day. No one can do 10 chin-ups the first time they try. But if you put in the work and dedicate yourself to getting better everyday, you will achieve your fitness goals faster than you ever thought possible.

What’s your chin-up goal? Remember to give yourself a specific deadline and then get to work.
HOW TO DEVELOP SPEED: THE #1 WEAPON IN GIRLS HOCKEY

I have to admit that when I first started playing hockey at the age of 13, I was the slowest player on the ice by far. It may have had something to do with the fact that I didn’t know how to skate and I was 25 pounds overweight. I was basically a “human pylon”. After a few embarrassing seasons as a slow, fat, defenseman, I realized that if I wanted to get to the elite level of women’s hockey, I had to get a lot faster.

Playing elite women’s hockey is all about being first. In order to be first to the puck, make the first save and be first in on the forecheck and backcheck, you have to be fast. And without full body checking, female hockey players with great speed have always had a big advantage over the competition. Since the rules changed a few years back, when every possible type of obstruction became illegal in the female game, speedy forwards have become every defenseman’s nightmare. At least in the men’s game, defensemen can slow down the forwards with a well-timed body check. However, in women’s hockey, the defensemen have to be as quick, if not quicker, than the forwards in order to gain and maintain proper positioning throughout the neutral and defensive zones.

Now, more than ever, in the world of female hockey, speed is what separates the “best” from the “rest”. Every girls’ hockey player who want to play in college or for the national team must focus on developing speed if they want to take their game to the next level. Women’s hockey is only going to get faster and it looks like it will be the speedier players that will dominate the game for years to come. Sure, having a big slap-shot or great one-on-one moves are great skills, but they will mean very little in the female game unless they are coupled with great speed. Your skills are important, but it’s speed that kills in the female game.

You can increase your on-ice speed by taking power skating lessons, but nothing is as effective as off-ice training. Players who aspire to take their game to the next level on the ice should use this off-season to get stronger, quicker, more powerful, and more fit, by participating in a properly designed off-ice training program. Speed is by far the #1 weapon in girls’ hockey and off-ice training is the best way to develop this critical ability.

It is critical to note that being a fast player in female hockey has very little to do with how fast you can skate in a straight line. The reality is that when most girls hockey players of the same age and ability level get up to their full speed, they are all pretty much equally fast. There are of course some exceptions to the rule, but for the most part, everyone is moving at the same relative speed once after their first 4 or 5 strides.

It’s how fast you can get up to full speed, your ability to change direction and your ability to react quickly to the puck and your opponents, that really make you fast.
Speed is about being fast in every direction you move and being fast with every decision you make. Being able to read and react to the play instantaneously is what separates the best female hockey players from the rest. You can be the fastest skater with the fastest shot, but if you can’t react to the play quickly enough to capitalize on your speed, you aren’t going to be able to gain an advantage over your competition.

**So how do you develop multi-directional speed and the ability to read and react off the ice?**

**It is all starts with your solid foundation of:**
- your single-leg balance
- your ability to control and generate power off of one leg
- your foot quickness.

Developing each one of these components of speed is critical, but single-leg balance is the most fundamental. If girls don’t have the ability to stay low to the ice, they lose their ability to generate power, fight off checks and win battles. Your power and quickness will always be limited unless you have a great foundation of single-leg balance. Once that foundation is in place, the sky is the limit.

**Here’s how to perform a proper single-leg balance drill:**
The most important concepts to remember are:
1. The knee of your back leg (which is not touching the ground) must touch the calf of your front leg (the leg you are balancing on). This is going to seem very low at first and after 10 seconds, your leg may already be burning. 2. Also note that you have to keep your chest up at all times which in this position and must sit your hips back like you are sitting in a chair.

You must be able to hold this position perfectly for between 30-60 seconds on each leg without losing your balance in order to have a strong foundation of single-leg stability in place.

Once the three pillars of speed are set, players can start to develop the multi-directional speed that will allow them to quick and explosive in every situation out on the ice. Integrating these skills into drills that challenge the athletes from a physical and mental perspective is really the key.

**My favorite drill of all time that addresses multi-directional speed and the ability to read and react on a physical and mental level is called “ABCD/1234”.** And the reason why I like it so much is because it is all about reaction time, quick feet and and change of direction.
Here’s how the drill works: Set up five squares marked by cones that are 3 feet by 3 feet apart. There should be 3 or 4 players assigned to each square. Have one player from each group stand in the middle of a square with all players facing in the same direction. The cones are labeled in a clockwise direction (starting at the bottom left) as “A”, “B”, “C” and “D”. The A cone is also named 1, B is 2, C is 3 and D is 4. A coach, trainer or leader will call out a letter or number and all of the players who are inside the squares must run to touch the corresponding cone and get back to the middle of their square as quickly as possible so that they can react to the next call from the leader. Players will perform the drill for approximately 10-15 seconds and then the next players will jump in.

When I first start using this drill with my athletes, they usually complain that it is too hard and they are getting confused. It just happens to be a drill that requires players to think while they’re moving, which also happens to be what they have to do every shift out on the ice.

Developing multi-directional speed and the ability to read and react instantaneously are the keys to become the fastest female hockey player possible. Once girls hockey players develop single-leg balance, ability to generate and control power and foot quickness through proper off-ice speed training, they will have the foundation they need to take their speed and performance to the next level.
WHY YOU CAN’T SHOOT A CANNON FROM A CANOE

All hockey players, no matter their age, gender and ability level, must be strong. However, getting stronger doesn’t guarantee that you are going to be a better player. In order to use their increased strength effectively, players must also develop increased stability. Trying to develop strength without stability is like trying to shoot a cannon from a canoe.

Cannons are extremely strong and powerful, while canoes are unstable and unsteady. It really doesn’t matter how powerful the cannon is if it is being shot from a canoe with an unstable base of support. Even if the cannon were able to fire a shot from the canoe, the shot would be very inaccurate and would probably cause damage to the structural integrity of the boat. The strength of the cannon, while impressive, might actually sink the ship. In order for the cannon to use its full power, the canoe would need to be reinforced and stabilized.

Unfortunately, many young hockey players end up like “cannons in canoes”. They focus on becoming as strong and powerful as possible, without ever developing the stability needed to control that power. The problem is that many of the strength training programs being used by young players focus entirely on building the muscles that power hockey-specific movements, and completely neglect the stabilizing muscles that support these movements. Without properly reinforcing the body, players will lack the stability to adequately control their powerful movements and are much more prone to injury.

Let’s look at the example of young player taking a slap-shot. In most cases, a player’s slap-shot is their most powerful weapon. By starting from a strong base of support and transferring their weight effectively, a player should be able to deliver an accurate and powerful shot every time. However, if they lack adequate stability in their core, shoulders, hips and knees, they will not be able to transfer their power effectively, and the strength and accuracy of their shot will suffer.

In order for a young player to use the power of their “cannon” effectively, they must reinforce the structural integrity of their “canoe”. If a young player focuses solely on getting as strong as possible, without first developing a stable foundation, their newfound strength will be ineffective. Instead of making them better, this lack of stability can compromise their performance and predispose them to injury. By focusing on developing strength and stability simultaneously, young hockey players will maximize the effectiveness of their off-ice training and see a much bigger increase in their on-ice performance.
4 WAYS YOUR STRETCHING ROUTINE CAN RUIN YOUR ON-ICE PERFORMANCE

In order for a hockey-specific stretching routine to be effective, the right muscles must be stretched, in the right way, at the right time. Young hockey players typically fall short in one of four ways when it comes to their stretching routines and are actually making themselves tighter and more injury prone.

Problem #1: They don't stretch at all.

Most players never worry about flexibility until they pull a muscle or get hurt. In over a decade of working with young players, I have only met a handful who didn't need to stretch more. Flexibility is a critical component of all-around fitness and neglecting it can lead to both short-term and long-term injuries.

Problem #2: They do the stretches wrong.

Most young players are never taught how to stretch properly. Holding a stretch for only 10 or 15 seconds doesn't relax the muscle - it actually makes it tighter! You should be focusing on relaxing into a comfortable stretch for 30 to 60 seconds, instead of trying to force yourself into an uncomfortable position for a short period of time. If you are straining and struggling after 20 seconds, you have gone too far and need to back off the stretch.

Remember that stretching is NOT a competitive sport. You aren't trying out for the circus, trying to outdo your teammate or stretch the farthest you've ever stretched each time. The goal is to stretch as far as you need to to feel a good stretch on that given day - not to beat your previous record. You want to go to the point where you feel a comfortable stretch that you can hold for a minute or more.

Problem #3: They do the wrong stretches.

Most young players spend the majority of their stretching time focusing on muscles that are already loose. For example, a player who has excellent flexibility in their hamstrings (back of the thigh) is more likely to spend time stretching those muscles rather than focusing on their tight quadriceps muscles (front of the thigh).

Why would they do this? Because it is easier.

Most players want to avoid pain. They don't want to spend their stretching time performing more difficult and painful stretches. If they find the hamstring stretch comfortable and easy, they will likely stay away from the more painful quadriceps stretches that they desperately need.
Problem #4: They stretch at the wrong time.

Many teams and players do static (stationary) stretching as part of their warm-up routines - and this is probably the worst time to do that type of stretching! Players muscles' need to be maximally activated before heading out on the ice - and static stretching relaxes the muscles. They should be performing dynamic (moving) stretches, such as walking lunges and sumo squats, during their off-ice warm-up and leave the static stretching for after they get off the ice.

Stretching is a key component of hockey performance and cannot be neglected. Young hockey players must focus on stretching the right muscles in the right way at the right time off the ice if they want to take their on-ice performance to the next level.
THE RIGHT & WRONG WAY TO TRAIN OFF THE ICE

Fifteen years ago, as an aspiring female hockey player, I thought I had found “the secret” when it came to off-ice training. No other player I knew was working as hard off the ice as I was, and I knew that my dedication to training would give me a serious edge over the competition. These days, I truly believe that it was my willingness to push myself to be the best player possible off the ice that allowed me to take my game to the next level. But another consequence of my dedication off the ice was a career filled of injuries and frustration. I want to make sure that other aspiring female hockey players don’t make the same mistakes I did on their way to the next level, so here’s what I did right and here’s what I did wrong.

What I Did Right: I was never out-worked.

I may have been over-trained and over-tired for most of my high school and college career, but my decision to never be out-worked really paid off on and off the ice. Whether it was in a drill or in the classroom, I would never compromise on giving my best effort. This is what allowed me to go from learning to skate at the age of 13 to playing Division 1 college hockey five years later. This is also what helped me to go from being on the fourth line and buried on the bench to being the leading scorer and team captain while at college. Your willingness to out-work the competition no matter what will give you more opportunities on and off the ice than you could ever imagine.

What I Did Wrong: I thought that “More Was Better”.

Playing through injuries, training when I was completely exhausted both physically and mentally, and always pushing myself to my absolute limit. This is what I did for 11 of my 15 years playing hockey. I always had the warrior mentality that you had to play through pain no matter what. I honestly can’t remember playing a single game in college without serious back pain. I believed that you never stayed down on the ice unless there was no physical way that you could get up. I thought that having a lingering headache after sustaining a concussion was something you could play through. Miraculously, I never missed a single game in college despite the fact I had two shoulder separations, two concussions, constant back pain, and a host of other nagging injuries. I thought that the only way to get better was to play more and train more. And while my willingness to work harder took me pretty far, it ultimately cost me the ability to perform at the highest level due to all my injuries.

Off-ice training is absolutely critical for any female hockey player who wants to take her game to the next level. But there is a right way and a wrong way to go about it. Aspiring players need to be willing to work harder, but they also need to step back and think about how they can work smarter.
5 CRITICAL OFF-ICE TRAINING MISTAKES YOU MUST AVOID

Doing the wrong kind of off-ice training, starting back when I was 15 year old girls hockey player, is what caused one of the discs in my back to explode and forced me into retirement. Four years ago, I woke up, sneezed, my left leg went completely numb, and all of a sudden, the two things that I loved most - playing hockey and training young athletes - were almost taken away from me. I could barely walk, I could hardly coach and skating was completely out of the question. But it wasn’t just a sneeze that made my back explode - it was over 10 years in the making. I started training off the ice as a young player to get an edge on the competition, but I had no idea that the training I was doing was completely inappropriate for me.

Here are the 5 big mistakes I made and that girls’ hockey players need to avoid on their way to the elite levels of women’s hockey:

Mistake #1 - Lifting Too Much Weight:
When I first starting training off the ice, I was working out with guys who were already playing major junior and college hockey. I didn’t want to be seen as the “weak” girl - so I was always pushing myself to lift more weight than I should have been in a desperate attempt to “keep up with the boys”. Trying to train (and keep up) with future NHL stars and men’s college hockey players when I was 15 years old seems crazy now - especially since I had absolutely no experience with off-ice training. Lifting too much weight was especially dangerous, especially when coupled with mistake #2...

Mistake #2 - Using Poor Form When Lifting:
Lifting too much weight with bad form is a recipe for disaster for any athlete. I always thought that lifting more weight was more important than lifting the weight with perfect form. To me, higher weights meant I was stronger - when in reality, I was just cheating my way through the lifts, using completely improper form in order to try to move a bigger weight.

Mistake #3 - Using Too Many Machines:
As a young player, I remember taking great pride in how much weight I could push on the leg press machine. I would struggle and squirm trying to lift that weight, but it wasn’t pretty. I would have been much better off focusing on single-leg body-weight strength exercises, instead of huffing and puffing away on those stupid machines. Now my philosophy on machine-based training is simple: girls hockey players should NOT be training on weight training machines. Instead of having an athlete perform abdominal crunches or chest presses on a machine, we should be teaching them how to move and control their entire body in free space. Think about it - when was the last time you saw a hockey player execute a skill or movement on the ice while fully supported by some bulky machine or by using only a few muscles at a time? In order to excel on the ice, players must master fundamental movement patterns off the ice that integrate coordination, balance and strength - and that can’t happen while sitting on a machine.
Mistake #4 - Never Taking A Day Off:
I genuinely believed that every day I took off, another aspiring female hockey player would be training her hardest, and when we met up on the ice, she would beat me. It'silly I know - but that's the mentality that drove me to be my best on and off the ice each and every day. But I can also count on two hands the number of days I took off from on-ice or off-ice training the entire time I was in high school and college. Again, I was dedicated and committed. But I never gave my body the chance to recover, and that's what ultimately led to my body breaking down and my early retirement.

Mistake #5 - Not Building A Foundation of Strength and Stability First:
This is probably my biggest mistake of all. I now know that if I had built up the foundation of core stability and single-leg strength that I needed to excel at the elite levels of women's hockey, before I started throwing big heavy weights around, my career would have been much longer and more successful. But I had no clue back then. I thought strength training meant weight training. All hockey players, no matter their age or ability level, must build a solid foundation of body-weight strength and stability before they touch a weight. Period.

So there you have it - the 5 biggest off-ice training mistakes I made as an aspiring girls hockey player. I had no idea that the off-ice training I started doing to get an edge on my competition was completely inappropriate for me as an aspiring girls hockey player. Please don’t make the same mistakes I made. You need to train hard to make it to the elite levels of women’s hockey, but you also need to train smarter.
GET OFF THE ICE THIS SUMMER

Telling players to get off the ice during the summer doesn’t usually make me too popular with the hockey school instructors. To be clear, I am not recommending that you avoid skating all together this off-season. Going to the occasional power skating lesson or attending one or two summer tournaments is fine, but skating all summer long can have two major consequences on your performance next season.

The first major problem players face after skating all summer is burn-out. Back when I was a 16 year-old, I spent one summer skating nearly five days a week and I absolutely loved every minute of it. I wanted to be out on the ice more than anything and I really felt that all the extra skating paid off in September when I showed up to training camp already in “skating shape”. The problem was that by the time it was January, I was burnt-out. I hadn’t taken a break from playing after my previous season finished in March, so my season was already 16 months long by the time I got to January. That edge I thought I had on the competition back in the fall was gone and my on-ice performance started to go downhill fast.

The other problem with skating all summer long is that it dramatically increases your chances of getting injured. Skating is not exactly the most natural movement our bodies can do. Your hips are going to get incredibly tight over the course of the season from the explosive and repetitive nature of the skating stride. Your shoulders are going to be weak and unstable from being slightly rounded forward on the ice, which is only made worse by the fact that most of us have poor posture when sitting in front of the TV and computer. If you sustained any sort of injury during the season, odds are that you came back faster than you should have, and you most likely have a lingering imbalance or weakness in your muscles or movements that is only going to be made worse by skating more. What your body needs most in the off-season is to rest and recuperate and then get back into balance. You needs to loosen up your tight skating muscles and tighten up all your weak postural muscles during the early off-season if you want to be feeling and playing your best in the fall.

But getting a highly-motivated player who wants nothing more than to skate all summer long to get off the ice is a tough battle to win. And telling your son or daughter that they are going to avoid burn-out and injury if they take some time away from the ice isn’t going to do a very good job of convincing them of it either. They don’t worry about the potential long-term effects of over-training on the ice. So how do we help them to see that getting off the ice this summer is essential to making them a better player? You’ve got to sell them on it. Avoiding burn-out and preventing injury aren’t “sexy”. But building battle-winning strength, first-step quickness, explosive starts, a laser-like powerful shot and overtime-dominating conditioning are. I’ve never met a young player who doesn’t want to be stronger, faster and fitter out on the ice. And in to do that, they have to train off the ice instead of on the ice. By using a properly designed off-ice training program this summer, players will not only prevent burn-out and injury, but they will also develop the strength, speed and stamina they need to shoot harder, skate faster, and be in game-shape when the puck drops on next season.
4 CRITICAL STRETCHES FOR HOCKEY PLAYERS

At this point in the season, many players are starting to feel the effects of countless practices, games and tournaments. As we enter the most critical phase of the season in terms of performance, it is critical that players pay attention to the “little” details that have a huge effect on their performance. Things such as warming up properly, drinking enough water and eating well are critical to maintaining elite performance at this point of the year. One of the most critical things players can do at this stage of the season to ensure they perform their best is stretching. It’s neither glamorous nor exciting - but it will help to prevent injury and maximize performance.

Simply focusing on a few stretches that address players’ key flexibility issues would alleviate a great deal of pain and prevent countless injuries. There is no need for players to try and stretch every single muscle in the body. By concentrating their time and energy on a smaller number of extremely effective stretches, hockey players will be able to get the biggest ‘bang’ for their stretching ‘buck’. Below are the 4 most important stretches players should be focusing on at this point in the season to ensure they are peaking for playoffs and performing their best.

**HIP FLEXORS: Kneeling Reach**

Start out in a kneeling position with both knees at a 90 degree angle. Pull your arms straight up overhead, squeezing your biceps by your ears. Lean your weight forward slightly on your front leg and pull your hands up towards the ceiling to increase the stretch through the front of the back leg. Make sure you don’t lean back but think about making yourself as tall as possible. Hold for 1 minute on each side.

**QUADRICEPS: Side Hold**

Start lying on your side and grab on underneath the knee of the leg that is closest to the floor. Reach back and grab the shin or foot of the top leg and pull your heel towards your buttocks. Make sure that you stay on your side and aren’t pulling yourself over onto your back. To increase the stretch, squeeze the glute (butt) of your top leg and push your hips forward slightly. Hold for 1 minute each side.

**GROIN: Knees Wide Kneeling**

Start out on your hands and knees. Slowly move your knees as wide apart as possible while keeping your toes pointing out to the side. Use your hands to support yourself in this position and push your body back towards your feet slightly to increase the stretch. If
this bothers your knees, bring your feet closer together. Hold for 1 minute.

**GLUTES:**  Kneeling Figure 4

Start out in a kneeling position and use your hand to pull one leg into the bent position with the outside of your knee touching the floor. Straighten out your back leg behind you. If you are unable to position your front leg at 90 degrees, you can move your front heel closer to your hips. Make sure you don’t roll onto the side of the front leg and your hips are even relative to the floor. Hold for 1 minute on each side.
TOTAL FEMALE HOCKEY SUCCESS SECRETS

NUTRITION
HYDRATION: HOW MUCH WATER DO YOU REALLY NEED

Most of us think we are eating pretty well - but when we actually look at the fuel we are putting in our body each day, we start to make some sharp realizations. The first thing is that we are not putting the highest quality food possible into our system and the second is that we aren’t putting enough of that high quality fuel into our system. You need to take in the highest quality of fuel possible in the correct amount for your size and activity level in order to ensure that you perform your best every time you hit the ice. And by far the most important thing you can put in to your body is WATER.

Most of us are chronically dehydrated. An important indicator to keep in mind is that: as soon as you feel thirsty, you have been dehydrated for at least 30 minutes. And when you are dehydrated, your performance goes down by 10-15%. That doesn’t mean that you can’t skate, but you will only be at 85-90% of your maximum performance. The first thing to go when you are dehydrated is your ability to think clearly - which is obviously critical to performing your best during tryouts.

How To Calculate How Much Water You Need Each Day:

Step 1: Find out your weight in pounds.
Step 2: Divide your weight by 2.
Step 3: Take the new number and divide it by 8.
*** That is the number of 250ml (8oz) glasses of water you need each day ***
as a baseline to function at work etc. Add at least one more 500ml bottle of
water per day for each hour of physical activity you are doing.

Let’s say that you weigh 140 pounds. Divide that number by 2 and you get 70. Divide that number by 8 which is 8.75. That means you need about 9 glasses of water per day (or 4.5 500ml water bottles) in order to meet your basic hydration needs.

Here is that basic calculation for a variety of different weights:

100 pounds: 6 glasses (250ml each)  
110 pounds: 7 glasses  
120 pounds: 7.5 glasses  
130 pounds: 8 glasses  
140 pounds: 9 glasses  
150 pounds: 9.5 glasses  
160 pounds: 10 glasses  
170 pounds: 10.5 glasses

Remember: this is just basic water needs - it does not include the water you need to replenish after activity.
THE 3 BOATS OF NUTRITION

Take all the food you ate for one day and place it in one of 3 boats. The yacht is the high performance boat, the rowboat will get you from point A to point B and the garbage barge will get you nowhere fast. Everything you eat and everything you drink goes into either the yacht, the rowboat or the garbage barge.

**Yacht Foods:** Whole grain pasta, bread & rice, fruits, vegetables, nuts, lean protein, low-fat dairy, water, eggs

**Row Boat Foods:** White pasta, bread & rice, packaged “healthy” foods (ie. granola bars, cheese strings)

**Garbage Barge Foods:** Candy, chocolate, chips, fried food, ice cream, cookies, anything from a fast-food restaurant, soda/pop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Did You Eat Or Drink?</th>
<th>Which Boat Does It Go On?</th>
<th>How Could You Move It To A Better Boat?</th>
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When it comes to performing your best for games and practices, you want to stay on the “yacht” as much as possible and stay as far away from the garbage barge as you can.
PRE GAME NUTRITION

As you get closer to game, eat smaller portions & include less fat & less protein, so that your food digests quickly and the energy is in your muscles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Time Before Game</th>
<th>What You Need To Focus On</th>
<th>Examples (in addition to water)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3+ Hours Before</td>
<td>High in carbohydrates, moderate in protein, low to moderate in fat</td>
<td>Pasta (whole grain if possible) with meat sauce, salad and bread, yogurt and fruit, glass of milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 Hours Before</td>
<td>High in carbohydrates, moderate in protein, low in fat</td>
<td>Grilled chicken sandwich, salad and fruit</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-2 Hours Before</td>
<td>High in carbohydrates, low in protein</td>
<td>Yogurt and fruit or Smoothie or Granola bar and fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Than 1 Hour</td>
<td>High in carbohydrates</td>
<td>Fruit or small granola bar</td>
</tr>
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POST GAME NUTRITION

THE 3 Rs OF RECOVERY:

Rehydrate: Start sipping on water immediately after the game. Take in at least 500ml of water within the first two hours post-game. Remember, sports drinks and chocolate milk aren’t a substitute for water - water comes first, those other options come second.

Refuel: Your body needs sugar and a little bit of protein as soon as possible after getting off the ice to help the muscles recover quickly. In addition to your water, good choices are fruit, chocolate milk, yogurt, sports drinks, low-fat cheese strings, and nuts. You only have a 15-30 minute recovery window after you get off the ice to get your muscles the sugar and protein they need to recover their best. Bring your recovery nutrition items with you to the rink.

Rest: This is the part of recovery that most people neglect and it’s the most important. Ideally, you would get between 8-10 hours of sleep after a game to maximize recovery. Doing a 5-10 minute cool-down after your game that includes jogging and stretching will also help to speed up the recovery process and allow your muscles to rest and recover better afterwards.
3 GAME-WINNING NUTRITION TIPS FOR GIRLS HOCKEY PLAYERS

Think of your young hockey players as high-performance automobiles and food as the fuel that drives their performance. Far too often, players run out of gas during a game after having lunch at a fast-food restaurant or forgetting to eat breakfast. This would be like putting diesel fuel in your tank instead of regular gas or trying to drive on empty. You could be the most skilled player in the world, but if you aren’t putting the right fuel into your tank, you won’t have the energy to compete at the highest level. In order for players to perform their best day in and day out, they have to take in premium fuel.

Here are 3 game-winning nutrition tips for hockey players:

1) Pre-Game Tip: Prepare

Players should never step on the ice feeling hungry. They need to time their pre-game meal so that most of the food is out of their stomach, broken down by the body and ready to be used as energy, by the time they hit the ice. If the game is 3 or more hours away, they can have a larger meal that is 75% carbohydrates (ie. rice, pasta, vegetables, fruit etc.) and 25% protein (ie. chicken, eggs, beans etc.). The closer a player gets to game time, the smaller and “lighter” the meal should be, meaning that they should consume less fat and protein and focus more on high-quality carbohydrates. If they have an early morning practice or game, make sure that they at least grab a piece of fruit or granola bar so that they have some fuel in the tank before they hit the ice. The key is to make sure that they have fuel in the tank and that it is of the highest quality possible.

2) In-Game Tip: Hydrate

Proper hydration is the most important nutritional strategy a player can use. If they are thirsty, it is too late! The thirst sensation kicks in after you have lost 1 to 2 liters of water. This means that once you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated and your performance can be decreased by 15 to 20%. The solution? Make sure players always carry a water bottle with them and sip from it all day long - not just when they are at the rink.

A quick note about sports drinks: It is suggested that sports drinks with electrolytes should be consumed when athletes are participating in an intense activity lasting more than 60 minutes. Therefore, for the majority of young hockey players, sports drinks are not necessary. On the other hand, a highly competitive hockey player, who is bantam age or older, may benefit from these specialty drinks for “recovery purposes”. Consume these sports drinks during a tough practice or immediately after a tough game instead of before activity, since their high sugar content may lead to a sugar “crash”.

3) Post-Game Tip: Recover

Immediately after a player steps off the ice, they have a 30 minute window where their body is at a heightened state to recover. This means that they need to start rehydrating...
and refueling immediately. Scientific research shows that one of the best recovery drinks a player can have is 1% chocolate milk. It has the simple sugars needed to start replenishing energy stores and the protein needed to start repairing tired muscles. By drinking chocolate milk, as well as lots of water, players will be well on their way to recovering from their on-ice session and getting ready for the next one.

Premium hockey performance requires proper training, great coaching and the right equipment. But in order for athletes to perform their best day in and day out, they need to make sure that they are taking in the best fuel possible through proper nutrition.
TOTAL FEMALE HOCKEY
SUCCESS SECRETS

BONUSES
THE 3As OF COLLEGE HOCKEY SCHOLARSHIPS

One of the most common questions I get from players, parents and coaches about the whole college hockey recruiting process is: “What are the scouts looking for?” There is really no easy answer to this since a college hockey coach needs to fill their roster with players who fill a position and role, which changes year-by-year based on their team’s particular needs.

To keep it simple for you, I’ve broken it down into what I call the “3 As”.
:: Academics :: Athletics :: Attitude

ACADEMICS:
When it comes to academics, the better your grades and test scores, the easier it is going to be for you to get into the school. Having high marks and scores will only help you throughout this process. I’ve seen far too many players focus all their time and energy on the hockey side of things only to miss out on a great opportunity because their academics weren’t up to par. Remember, you want to use your ability to play hockey to get a better academic opportunity. You aren’t chasing million dollar NHL contracts, you are looking to get a great education that you can use for rest of your life.

ATHLETICS:
Coaches aren’t just looking for the players with the best skills. Don’t get me wrong - your skating, shooting, stickhandling, passing and checking are critical to you getting noticed, but college coaches need much more than that. They want to see competitiveness and consistency. Are you willing to do whatever it takes to win a battle on the boards or a race for the puck? Are you as good in the fourth game of the tournament as you are in the first game? Coaches and scouts are also looking for signs of your coachability, your sportsmanship, your work ethic with and without the puck, as well as your work ethic on and off the ice. These aren’t always things they can see directly from the stands, but a quick conversation with your club coach or opposing coaches will tell them a lot.

ATTITUDE:
Last, and certainly not least, is your attitude. To be honest, I’ve heard from many college coaches that a player could have great academics and athletic ability, but if they have a bad attitude, they won’t be able to go anywhere. They need to be able to visualize you being a part of their team. They want to see how you interact with your teammates, coaches and opponents. They are watching you when you walk around the rink. They see how you carry yourself away from the ice. This stuff matters. It is about much more than just your playing ability.

BOTTOM LINE: They are looking for the COMPLETE PACKAGE. That’s what the “3 As” are all about. It takes a lot of hard work, dedication and discipline to get there. But the payoff is worth it.
WHAT MOST GIRLS’ HOCKEY PLAYERS WON’T DO

Most girls’ hockey players I know don’t play pick-up hockey. Either they don’t want to or they don’t think they have time to. But those who do are developing their game sense, their confidence with the puck and their ability to create time and space on the ice - all things that are essential to success at all levels of girls’ hockey.

When I made the decision that I wanted to play hockey at the university level at the age of 15, I became laser-focused on doing whatever it took to reach that goal. In addition to focusing on my off-ice training, nutrition and mental game, I would spend every spare moment I could at the outdoor rink across the street from my house working on my skills - usually alone in the freezing cold for hours on end. I was way behind most of my teammates in terms of skill and experience, so I was determined to bridge that gap as quickly as possible.

To be honest, that outdoor rink was really the key to my success. I didn’t go to a lot of hockey camps or skills sessions, but I played a lot of pick-up hockey. I was the only girl and usually one of the few teenagers in intense games between grown men, many of whom had played junior hockey and beyond. When I first started playing in those games, I was just “filler”. I would skate up and down the ice as hard as I could, never really expecting to get the puck and trying to make the smartest and quickest play possible if I did so that I wouldn’t get run over.

When I first started playing in those pick-up games, I would say things to myself like, “Today, I’m going to make 3 good passes” as I walked over to the rink. I didn’t expect to score any goals and in those early days, all the goals I did score were from deflections off my outstretched stick or banging home someone else’s rebound. Nothing flashy, never anything worth writing home about.

At first, the guys didn’t really like having me out there. I wasn’t the worst player out there, but I certainly wasn’t even close to being the best. And because I was the only girl, I had to prove myself each and every time I hit the ice with those guys. And eventually, after months and years of playing with them, I did. I went from wanting to make a few decent passes to stealing pucks off people. Instead of scoring off ugly deflections, I was making pretty passing plays and beating people 1-on-1 to score.

I went from going home exhausted from just trying to keep up, to having to stay out on the ice for most of the game because the guys were tired while I had an endless supply of energy. I played in those shinny games from the age of 15 all the way through the end of my university career. I loved coming back to play over the holiday break when I was in university, catching up with the guys again and showing any newcomers to the game that girls can play, and even dominate, the game.

Those shinny games were what made me a smart hockey player. I challenged myself to compete in and contribute to those games. I went from being a very peripheral player...
to controlling the action. While the practicing and playing I did on my competitive team was certainly critical in my growth and development as a player, it was the weekend games with the guys and countless hours working on my individual skills all alone that made me a better player. I learned how to play with my head up, how to be confident carrying the puck, how to thread the needle with a beautifully timed pass and how to dig in the corners without having to throw a body-check. Since my teammates changed from game to game on that outdoor rink, I learned how to constantly adapt to the skill and ability level of the people I was playing with in order to maximize our team’s performance.

Looking back on my career now, I have no doubt that I wouldn’t have had a shot at playing at the college level or beyond had I not devoted so much time and energy to pushing myself to be the best I could be when no one was watching.
GETTING OVER GETTING CUT

As of today, most teams are done their tryouts for next year's squads here in Toronto. And that means there are some aspiring girls hockey players out there with broken hearts after getting cut. I've been cut my fair share of times in my hockey career and I know how much it sucks.

But one time in particular hurt more than the rest.

Ten years ago, I had what I thought was my best hockey season ever. I was playing alongside and competing with the national team players on a daily basis and not surprisingly, every single aspect of my game improved. I was pretty excited when the coach came up to me at a practice late in the year and all but "guaranteed" me a spot on the team for the next season.

You can probably guess what happened next.

Let's just say I was more than a little bit surprised when the coach called me into the office a few days after the season was done and cut me from the team.

I felt like I had been kicked in the stomach and had the wind knocked out of me. I was angry, frustrated and I felt hopeless. And the worst part was that I didn't even get a chance to fight for my spot. Even though I had played so well, and slowly worked my way up the depth chart by dedicating myself completely to become the best player possible, I wasn't even invited back for a tryout.

To say that it "stung" would be a HUGE understatement. I was devastated. I moved back to Toronto, continued to work hard and dream big, but it took me a while to get over being cut from that team.

When it comes to hockey or life, nothing is ever guaranteed. You may think you are a lock to make the team, and then get the rug pulled out from under you. Or you may just not be good enough to be on the team of your dreams...yet.

As a player, it's easy to get frustrated and wonder why you put all that effort in for nothing. As a parent, you are at a loss for how to help your daughter get through this challenging time. The truth is, whether you made the team or not, your next question has to be...

"What Do I Do Now?"

If you didn't make the team you wanted to make, it doesn't mean that you should just coast through the summer and not work hard to be your best.

I didn't make a high-level team until I was 15 years old and I was still able to realize my dream of getting a scholarship 4 years later. And if you did make the team, you aren't off
the hook either. I am sure your coach expects you to come back in September in great shape.

Great hockey players are made away from the rink in the spring and summer. If you want to reach the elite level, your dedication to becoming the best athlete possible off the ice in the summer is what will make you the best player possible on the ice in the fall. That doesn’t mean that you need to train 4+ hours a day this summer like the national team girls, but you do need to move yourself at least one step closer to your hockey dreams every day if you want to achieve them. That might mean taking 100 or 1000 shots a day in your driveway, playing another sport regularly to stay in top shape or committing to an off-ice training program for the summer. Whatever it is, keep in mind that reaching your full potential on the ice and realizing all of your hockey dreams never comes easy.

And no matter what team you are playing on next season, it’s your commitment to becoming the best player possible this summer that will make you unstoppable in September and set the stage for the rest of your hockey career.
POLITICS IN GIRLS HOCKEY

Playoffs are now underway here in Toronto, which means that tryouts for next year's teams are just around the corner. And that means that the "politics" of hockey are about to wreak havoc on all of us. The mixture of playoffs and impending tryouts takes all of our stress levels through the roof. We're all worried that we might make the wrong choice, that what people are telling us is not the truth, and that we won't end up with the team we'd hoped for. The truth is - we're all in the same boat as players, parents and coaches.

I'll be coaching a Bantam AA team next season and I've pretty much been in the rinks almost every night watching games, making sure that I know exactly what kind of player I'm looking for to fill out my roster. I want to create the best possible environment for our player's and team to succeed next season and I'm putting in a lot of work to ensure that this is the reality. This is really no different than parents and players doing their homework about different teams and organizations to make sure they find the best "fit" possible.

After all, us coaches don't want to make a mistake either. We know we are going to have make tough decisions. We will have to cut players who just don't fit as pieces in our team puzzle. We are going to have to tell some kids, "No", which is something that never gets easier to do. It's not just about reducing numbers - it's about making decisions that temporarily short-circuit the dreams of players. I know I don't take making decisions like that lightly. As coaches, we often have to cut good players because we feel there was another player that was better for a particular role or position on the team. We are looking for the 17 players that make up the best team, not necessarily the 17 best players.

Putting together a team is a game of numbers, of roles, of needs and of responsibilities. When someone doesn't make it, they initially feel hurt or even angry. There is no getting around the emptiness, rejection and even embarrassment. That's understandable. I've been there my fair share of times as a player and it never gets any easier to hear "No".

But it's not getting cut from a team that matters. It's what you do next that defines you as a player and person.

::: Do you use that as a source of motivation to drive you to become an even better player who would make that team (or an even better team) in the future?

::: Or do you make excuses and point fingers that bring other players down?

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As tough as it is as a coach to make cuts, it's a lot tougher on the player and her parents. What isn't constructive is making excuses for your child by saying it was a political decision or that the coach made the wrong decision (which might even be the case). If you make excuses, you are only teaching your daughter to deflect responsibility and discount the abilities of others.

I can assure you that as coaches, we are trying to get it right. It's very very hard to try to figure out the best combination of players. If there are 17 players on a team, odds are the practically every coach would agree on the top 8 or 9 players for the team. And most coaches will agree on the next 4 or 5 that should be on the team. But picking those last 4 or 5 players to fill out the roster is tough - and more often than not the coaches' don't all agree. That's when our job is the hardest and that's when feelings get hurt.

So as we head deeper into playoff season and the harsh reality of tryouts looms over everyone's heads, I wanted to share 8 motivational sayings that help keep me on track for success both on and off the ice. I hope that they inspire you as we head into the hardest part of the year.

1. Focus on what you can control.

2. Live your life like most people do and you're going to settle for what most people get. If you want more, you have to do more.

3. 'Trying' isn't enough. It's an excuse. Either you're doing something or you're not.

4. You never fail until you quit, make excuses or die.

5. Plan every day. Success isn't an accident.

6. Focus on getting 1% better each day. Small improvements add up.

7. Failure is part of the process. Accept it. Learn from it. Move on.

8. If you're waiting for circumstances to be different (or perfect) - you're in for a long wait. Stop waiting and start doing.
THE 5 PLAYER RULE IN GIRLS HOCKEY

The “5 Player Rule” in girls hockey has absolutely nothing to do with the number of players out on the ice. On every team, there are usually 5 players who are really dedicated and driven to get to the next level. It's not that the other players aren't trying their hardest or giving their best. It's just that they're not quite as focused on getting to the elite level. Not every player wants to play college hockey and not every player wants to play in the Olympics. It's neither good nor bad, but it is a reality in the women’s game.

This presents a serious challenge for coaches who want to help these 5 players reach their dreams, but are hesitant about forcing the less motivated players into a level of commitment that they aren’t ready for. But it's an even bigger challenge for the player who is laser-focused on doing whatever it takes to get to the elite level.

It's frustrating to know that you are putting in all this extra time and energy away from the rink in order to be your best, and the rest of your team isn't. When I was in high school. I was the kid who would do anything and everything I could do to get an edge on the competition. And I spent my entire minor hockey, college and post-college career frustrated with my teammates who weren't willing to do the extra work.

If you are one of those players who would run through a wall if it meant that it would help you get closer to your dreams, you need to understand this. Other players will say that they “want” to play at the highest level, but they don’t “choose” to take the action necessary to get there. Your teammates may not have the same goals as you. And that's fine. You can't make them decide to be great. Spending your time and energy focused on them doesn't help you at all.

You also have to realize that that some people aren't going to understand why you are so driven. The truth is that some players are going to think that you think you are better than them because you are so focused and committed. I didn’t want my teammates to think that I thought I was better than them, because I didn’t think I was. And I didn’t want them to think I was kissing up to the coach by trying so hard, because I wasn’t. The last thing I wanted was for my teammates to think I was a “bitch” because I was so motivated and dedicated to becoming the best player possible.

So here’s where the difficult decision comes in for the girls who aspire to reach the elite level. You can make the “easy” choice and let your less motivated teammates take you off your game or you can choose to stay focused on your goals no matter what and keep taking action towards your dreams. Going after your goals doesn’t make you a “bitch”. It makes you - and your teammates - better. If you’re with a team that has 18 players who are ready to do anything and everything it takes to get to the next level, this isn’t a real problem. But let’s be honest - that’s not the reality for most girls hockey teams. There are the 5 or 6 players who really want it - and there are those that don’t. Not everyone makes the choice to be great. It’s the harder choice - but it’s worth it.
4 TIPS FOR WINNING YOUR NEXT TOURNAMENT

Hockey tournaments give you a great opportunity to play against teams you normally wouldn’t play against. They are also great for team bonding and can be the highlight of your season. But when you are playing 4 or 5 games over a 3 day period, tournaments can be just plain tiring. With so much high-intensity competition crammed into such a short period of time, players need to make sure that they are doing everything they can to feel and play their best all weekend long.

Follow these 4 keys to ensure that you have your best tournament possible:

1) **Drink more water**
   This is by far the most important piece of advice I can give you about increasing performance in your next tournament. Hockey players just don’t drink enough water. While most do a decent job of sipping on their water bottles during the game, it is the amount of water that they drink in between games that is going to make the biggest difference in their performance. Once you are thirsty, you are dehydrated. And dehydration decreases performance. Make sure that players have a water bottle with them at all times and that they drink from it constantly.

2) **Warm-Up**
   In order to play your best in every game of the tournament, you have to do an off-ice warm-up. Most teams do some kind of warm-up before hitting the ice, but as the tournament wears on, it gets much more difficult to get players energized and excited for a 10 or 15 minute routine. But a proper off-ice warm-up for your hockey-specific muscles doesn’t need to be long. You can get an effective warm-up done in less than 5 minutes.

   Try this quick one minute warm-up sequence before your next tournament game: 20 jumping jacks, 10 squats, 40 high knees and 5 lunges on each leg. Instead of taking out the warm-up completely as the tournament wears on, go through that quick sequence a few times in the hallway or dressing room. It will make a huge difference on how you feel when you step out on the ice.

3) **Stay away from the snack bar**
   The rink snack bar is a “nutritional wasteland”. Typically, everything there is either deep-fried or pre-packaged. The best solution to tournament nutrition is to bring healthy options with you, but that isn’t always realistic. If you need to go through the fast-food drive-thru before or between games, make sure that you are making the healthiest choices possible. Stay away from deep-fried foods - they are hard for the body to digest and may cause an upset stomach during the game. Sugar-filled foods are going to give you an immediate shot of energy, but you’ll come crashing down minutes later and your performance will suffer. Try to avoid the “white foods” and go for the “whole grain” options that have much more nutritional value. Making the choice to eat the healthiest food possible will help you to recover quicker and play better.
4) Stretch more
Hockey players don’t stretch enough. This can be a huge problem during tournament time because of the high volume of high-intensity games. It is unrealistic to expect players to go through a complete 20 minute stretching routine in between games. Preform a few hockey-specific stretches for the hip flexors, glutes and groin will go a long way to preventing muscle soreness and maximizing on-ice performance. Spend 1 minute stretching each of these key muscle groups after each game and you will not only feel better, but you’ll dramatically decrease your chances of getting injured.

Take the time to address these 4 keys at your next tournament and you will be well on your way to raising the championship trophy overhead.
2 KEYS TO PEAKING IN THE PLAYOFFS

It's hard to believe that the playoffs are here already, isn't it? Playoff hockey may be the fastest and most exciting version of the game, but after a long season of playing, practicing and traveling, players, parents and coaches alike run the risk of getting worn-out and stressed-out.

It doesn't have to be that way. You can get through the playoffs safely and successfully if you have a plan in place that helps you to recover physically after a no-holds-barred playoff battle and stay laser-focused on your goals. I would argue that mental preparation and physical recovery are the two biggest keys to surviving and thriving this playoff season.

Playoff Performance Key #1: Mental Preparation

Let's start with the mental side of playoff preparation first. Effective mental preparation comes down to having strategies in place that help you to get focused, stay focused and re-focus on your goals. Avoiding distractions and staying focused on your game is really tough during the playoffs - especially when you are playing the same team a few days in a row.

When it comes to getting focused, we tend to worry more about the outcome (winning the game), instead of the process of how we are going to win the game. Instead of focusing on “having to win”, players and coaches need to focus on “what it takes to win”. Players should give themselves action-oriented key words to focus on like, “Keep feet moving”, “Battle for pucks”, “Head on a swivel”, “One shot at a time (goalies)”. It is critical that players stay focused on the things they have control over, instead of the outcome of the game.

Staying focused during a playoff game is easier said than done with all the potential distractions on and off the ice. Players can easily become overly focused on the other team’s players and plays, as well as the what the refs, coaches and fans are doing. All of these are external factors that they have absolutely no control over. Using the action-oriented key words they identified before the game will allow players to stay focused on what they need to do to perform their best. Remember that the key to success is playing your game and not theirs.

Playoff Performance Key #2: Physical Recovery

Depending on your playoff schedule, you may have to play games on back-to-back nights or even three days in a row. A team’s ability to physically recover between games can be the difference between an early exit and a long playoff run.

The first key component of physical recovery is the cool-down. Going for a post-game jog may not be a priority during the season, but it is essential during the playoffs. Late in the season, the cool-down becomes as important as the warm-up prior to the game.
Your body needs to “come down” after the game in the same way that your body needs to “ramp up” beforehand. Taking five minutes to go for an easy jog immediately after the game will dramatically reduce muscle stiffness, and when combined with proper stretching, will decreasing the likelihood of injuries.

Post-game stretching is like the post-game jog - most players never give it a second thought until their legs start to feel sore and tired. You stretch immediately after your cool-down jog to restore flexibility and mobility in the muscles and joints. Even if you just stretch your hip flexors, glutes, and groin for 5 minutes right after the game, and save your more complete stretching routine for later than night, you will see a huge difference in the way you felt the next day.

Take the time to prepare mentally and recover physically throughout the playoff and you will be on your way to your most successful post-season ever.
HOW TO NOT GET NOTICED

Every player wants to stand-out on the ice and get noticed by coaches and scouts so they can play on the best team possible. Whenever I am working with players who aspire to reach the elite level, I go over exactly what they needed to do in order to get noticed in tryouts and tournaments. But more importantly, I make sure to tell them exactly what NOT to do to get noticed.

The best way to make sure you DON'T stand out on the ice is by trying to be something that you're NOT. If you are a stay-at-home defenseman, then don't try to be Bobby Orr by trying to go end-to-end every time you touch the puck. It may help you to stand out - but it will be for all the wrong reasons. If you try to be something you aren't in these tryout or tournament situations, you are going to stick-out because of your weaknesses, instead of standing-out because of your strengths.

The truth is that any high-level coach or scout can watch you skate for a period or two and know exactly what kind of player you are. It only takes them a few shifts to figure out if you are a pure goal-scorer, a solid two-way forward, a rushing defenseman or a stay-at-home defenseman. By the time you are into the second practice or game, they know exactly what kind of player you are and expect that you are going to excel at what you are already good at on every shift. So if you are a great two-way forward, who all of a sudden can't find your own defensive zone because you are too busy “cherry-picking” up by the far blue-line, you are trying to be a player you aren't.

In these scouting situations, skaters think they need to be "flashy" in order to stand out. If you are always "flashy", keep being "flashy". But if you aren't, don't worry about it! Coaches don't need a team full of end-to-end rushers. They need stay-at-home defensemen and two-way forwards too.

Instead of worrying about the things you don't do well - all of us have things we don't do well out there - focus on what you are already good at. And commit yourself 100% to being the best at those things each and every time you touch the ice. That's how you are really going to stand out and get noticed.
THE BLAME GAME IN GIRLS HOCKEY

After spending the last two weekends at huge tournaments surrounded by players, parents, and coaches who are equally passionate about succeeding, I feel this needs to be said. It may push some buttons and it may make some people uncomfortable, but it is necessary.

There is one HUGE problem that is plaguing girls hockey right now that players, parents and coaches all have to take responsibility for. Not only is it destroying players’ confidence and causing infighting among team members, but it almost always backfires.

We have completely gotten away from the team first mentality. It’s all about “me”. “I’ve got to score goals so I get noticed and recruited”. “But coach - I play centre, not wing”. “If I was out there in the final minute of the game, we would have won. And I’m sure you can come up with many more examples of how you’ve seen your teammates, parents or coaching staff use negativity towards someone else in order to make themselves feel better.

We want to play the BLAME game. Players blaming their teammates for the loss. Parents blaming their daughter’s coach or teammates for a poor performance. Coaches blaming questionable calls for losses. We want to blame everyone else when things don’t go our way, instead of taking responsibility for our role in it.

You don’t lose hockey games because one player on your team doesn’t pass the puck to you on a 2-on-1. You don’t lose because the coach put the “wrong” players out on the power-play. And you don’t lose because that one kid on your team missed the last 3 practices. All those things may contribute to the loss. But they aren’t the direct cause.

Every single member of the team contributes to every win and loss. Last time I checked, hockey was still a team sport. You win together and you lose together - period. And when you start blaming certain players and coaches, or questioning decisions, here’s the message you’re sending:

When The Going Gets Tough, And You Don’t Come Out On Top, It's NOT Your Fault.

And that turns into a slippery slope very quickly. It’s always easier to blame someone else or something else for the loss. It’s a lot harder to take responsibility for your part in the loss and focus on what you need to do to prevent it from happening again. Becoming the best isn’t about making everyone else feel worse. It’s about making the harder choices, looking at yourself in the mirror and being 100% honest with yourself.

=> Parents: The next time you get in the car with your daughter and start going off about the bad decisions the coach made or the actions of the other players on your team, please think of the message that you are sending your daughter.
=> Coaches: The next time you find yourself ranting and raving about how the ref screwed up the game, or about how the other team won only because their coach “stole” all the best players from another team, please think of the message that you are sending your players, parents and staff.

=> Players: The next time you decide that saying negative things about one of your teammates will make you feel better about your own game, think about how you would feel if you found out one of your teammates was saying the same kinds of things about you.

You chose to be involved with a team sport. Which means that you’ve got to act in a way that supports and nourishes the team environment, even if you’re convinced that someone else screwed everything up. And in order to be successful, you’ve got to come together in the hard times - not pull apart. TEAM FIRST. YOU SECOND.

Thanks for reading this message - please keep it in mind as you go through this new season and pass it along to anyone else that you think might benefit from it.
BEST COACH I EVER HAD

The best coach I ever had didn’t teach me many hockey skills. But he did teach me how to be a better person. To be honest, I give him full credit for making me the coach I am today. I only wish he was still here to watch me do what I love. I know he would have been very proud. And now that I’ve moved from being a player to a coach, there are a million questions I wish I could ask him about HOW he did what he did.

Dave McMaster was a master of making players feel valued as people. Whenever Dave saw you, his first question was about your family. The second question was about your education and the third question was about hockey. Always in that order. Everyone who ever played for him would agree - he was the ultimate “people” person. I’ve never heard anyone utter a negative word about it - in fact, all I’ve ever heard is praise.

Dave was an extraordinary coach in every sense of the word. He was head coach of the National team back in the late 80s and early 90s. He coached Team Canada in the first ever World Championship - back when the team wore pink jerseys (it’s true). In addition to coaching the national team, Dave coached at the University of Toronto - starting off with the men’s program and then transitioning over to the women’s program where he won many titles and coached many phenomenal players who went on to star on the national team, and many of whom went on to become coaches themselves. I played for Dave when he was coaching for the Leaside Wildcats. He coached me for three seasons - one season of midget and two seasons of junior hockey (known back then as intermediate hockey). It was truly an honor to have a coach of Dave’s caliber working with us on and off the ice. Dave was a teacher at a local private school and he was certainly that on the ice as well. Dave wasn’t a scream and yell type of coach. But he demanded respect. And he got it from all of us. If we crossed the line, he put us back in our place. I learned this the hard way.

My most memorable learning experience in hockey came as a 16 year old playing for Dave. I was an extremely motivated and passionate player who could not always understand why all my teammates didn’t share the same level of commitment and drive that I did. In one game, I found myself on the bench in between shifts in the third period practically screaming at one of my teammates because of what I perceived to be a serious lack of effort on her part. I wasn’t doing it to be mean to her, as she was one of my close friends, it was done out of pure frustration. Dave turned to me and asked me to sit out for the rest of the game. I did of course, but I am sure everyone in the rink could see how upset I was as a result. I had never been benched before and I was used to going out on every other shift.

As soon as the game was done, Dave sat me down in private and not only explained what he did, but why he did it. He explained that I needed to understand that even though we were playing at the Midget AA level, not every player had the same level of commitment and ability that I did. He told me that I had to respect my teammates at all times on and off the ice if I wanted to help the team succeed and if I wanted to get to the
next level as a player. I had to take responsibility for my actions on and off the ice, lead by example and be the best teammate possible. I took that lesson to heart and did everything I could to be a true leader on that team for the next 2 years. Dave helped me to understand that being an elite player was much more than having the ability and the desire. It is because of this experience that I teach my players the importance of respect and responsibility as teammates, players and citizens of the game. Dave helped me become a better coach, player and person, and for that I am forever thankful.

I’m not an overly sentimental person, but one of my most prized possessions is a card that Dave sent me after watching me play for my Dartmouth team. He made the drive to Niagara Falls to watch me play at that level for the first time - and I was nervous. I remember the day well for many reasons. It was my third year at university and we were ranked #1 in the country from the start of the season. Going into that game against Niagara, we were undefeated. And we lost. I can’t remember the score or the details - all I know is that every single player on our team was furious and ready for the rematch against them the next day. I’ve never been a player (or coach) who takes loses lightly, and this was certainly no exception. I was angry - mostly at myself, wondering what I could have done differently in the game to alter our fate. I have to admit that I was so rattled after the game, that when I came out into the lobby, I had totally forgotten that Dave was even coming to watch.

And there was Dave, all smiles as always. He gave me a hug and told me how proud he was of me. He was amazed at how much better I had become since I played for him in high school. He also said that he always knew I’d be a great player at that level and that I’d be an even better coach. He must of planted a seed that day because I never really thought I’d be a hockey coach. But 10 years later, it is what I do for a living and I absolutely love every second of it. And if I can help young players in the same way that Dave helped me, I will consider my career as a coach to be a success.
PASSENGER OR DRIVER?

When parents ask me which level their daughter should play, I ask them “do you want your daughter to be a PASSENGER or DRIVER?” Some parents think that having their daughter play at the highest level possible is the only way she’ll really improve and get better. Their theory is that their daughter will have no choice but to improve while skating with the best players in practice and games. It’s a little bit like survival of the fittest.

It’s not a bad theory, but there is a big difference between being able to play at that level, and being able to make a significant impact at that level. I remember back when I went to my first Team Canada tryout. It was more than a little eye-opening. I could keep up with the play and even managed to score a “garbage” goal here and there. But I was merely along for the ride. I was surrounded by players who could pretty much dictate the pace of the game - and I was just trying to keep up. They were “drivers” and I was a “passenger”. I could hang in there and not embarrass myself, but I wasn’t having any significant impact on the game.

The flip side of this whole discussion is choosing to have your daughter be a strong impact player at the level below, instead of having her be at the bottom of the barrel at the level above. Some players and parents see playing for the lower level team as somehow being beneath them. That’s when I simply go back to the question of whether you want to be a passenger or driver. By playing at the level below, you can be one of the better players on the ice. You can control and dictate the play. You will likely be a “go to” player at critical points in big games and you’ll likely be in more of a leadership role on the team. All of these things are critical in a player’s overall development as a player and person. We all know that confidence is critical for young female athletes after all.

So when you are considering which level to play at next season, make sure you take into account whether you want your daughter to be a passenger or driver.
WHAT 97% OF GIRLS HOCKEY PLAYERS DON'T HAVE

Over the past 3 years, I have run dozens of elite player development camps with teams and players from all across North America. In these full-day camps, we go on the ice for skills sessions and on-ice testing, we do off-ice fitness testing and go through off-ice speed and strength training, as well as workshops on hockey-specific performance nutrition, goal setting and how to get noticed and recruited by women’s college hockey teams. By the end of the camp, the entire group been assessed, they know what they need to improve on and they have the resources that will help them take their performance to the next level. I truly believe every girls hockey players deserves the same level of access and the opportunity to learn exactly what it takes to become an elite female hockey player. But they don’t have it - yet.

The truth is that we are not doing a very good job of developing elite female hockey players in North America. Sure, we’ve won all the gold medals and continue to dominate on the world stage, but much of this success can be attributed to the sheer number of girls playing the game and the opportunity to compete and train against the “best” on a consistent basis. But are we really giving all girls hockey players in North America access to the opportunity to reach all of their hockey dreams?

For the most part, we rely on a very Darwinistic approach when it comes to player development. We have far more girls playing and the “cream of the crop” naturally rises to the top. When this top 3% of players between the ages of 14-18 emerge, we give them access to the resources they need to make it to the elite level. But what about everyone else? Why are only the “best” given the information and the opportunity? It is irresponsible and unfair for us to cater only the “elite” players.

I recognize that not every girls hockey player in North America aspires to play women’s college hockey or make the Olympic team. But there are many who do who don’t make the “right” team or are not from an association, team or area that has the access to development resources both on and off the ice. Are we really giving players who aren’t “elite” quite yet the opportunity to move on to the highest levels of female hockey? I always tell players to, “Work Hard and Dream BIG”, but the truth is that those 2 things are not enough to make you a great player. You need to have access to the resources that will allow you to get there and be able to put together your plan to get you where you want to be.

I am not exactly sure what the answer is to this problem. We can’t clone elite coaches, mass produce elite teams so that every girl has the chance to see what elite level girls hockey really looks like, or invite them all to selection camps that run across North America every spring and summer. But we can empower them with information. We can let them know exactly what it takes to get to that elite level and allow them to make the decision as to whether they want to pursue those dreams. That is how we will create a culture of excellence in women’s hockey - where every girl has the opportunity to fulfill her dreams. I truly believe that this type of widespread education and empowerment in girls hockey is not only possible, but absolutely necessary.
THE #1 INJURY IN GIRLS HOCKEY

The #1 injury in girls hockey is also the one that has the most devastating effects of all. Female hockey players are two times more likely to suffer from this injury than male hockey players and almost three times more likely than football players.

According to a recent study done in the NCAA, the varsity sport with the highest concussion rate is not men’s hockey or men’s football - it’s women’s ice hockey. At the university level, female hockey players are suffering 1 concussion for every 1000 "exposures" to the game - with each practice and game counting as one exposure. On a team of 20 players, that means 1 concussion for every 50 exposures. Although studies done on younger female hockey players are much harder to come by, I would guess that their concussion rate would be just as high, and maybe even higher than the women.

Girls are playing more hockey than ever. They compete on school teams, club teams, travel teams, Olympic development teams and weekend tournament teams. More exposures to the game mean a higher likelihood of sustaining a serious head injury. With most girls rep teams hitting the ice at least 100 times a season, the concussion rate of 1 for every 50 exposures means that each team will suffer from 2 concussions per season on average.

Pretty amazing for a sport that doesn't allow full body-checking, isn't it? Girls' hockey players are playing just as much as the boys - but are getting hurt twice as often. Knee, shoulder and back injuries can be devastating to a young player who wants nothing more than to play the sport they love at the highest level possible, but they rarely have the same long-term effects as a concussion. It saddens me to hear stories of 13 year-olds coping with the lingering effects of a head injury for over 6 months and 16 year-olds who have had to quit hockey after suffering from multiple concussions. One university coach even told me that her team had 12 concussions - in just one season!

There is a huge debate going on right now in the world of female hockey about WHY these injuries are happening and IF the research numbers are accurate. We can debate the statistics and the causes until we are blue in the face. But I’m not personally willing to wait for more girls to suffer serious head injuries to support the numbers before I start taking action. And you shouldn’t wait either. Something needs to be done to protect girls from the devastating effects of these injuries. The concussion problem in girls’ hockey needs a solution NOW.

Here are two suggestions on how we can help to prevent concussions in girls hockey players:

1) Girls need to be taught how to take a hit.

In every female game I have ever played in or watched, there is always at least one instance where I think, "Good thing we don't have full body-checking because that
player would have been run-over." There is no doubt that we need to teach girls how to play better heads-up hockey, but we also need to teach them how to take a hit properly. If more coaches, teams and associations start showing girls how to protect themselves along the boards and in front of the net (where the most dangerous collision happen), it will go a long way towards preventing concussions, as well as a whole slew of other injuries.

2) Girls have to be better prepared physically.

A lack of adequate strength is another big reason for the alarmingly high rate of concussions in girls' hockey. Most girls hockey players stand up "too tall" on the ice, which leaves them in an unbalanced and vulnerable position. They lack the strength and stability in their legs to stay in a low athletic position. Developing great single-leg strength and balance allows players to stay low and protect themselves from both intentional and accidental contact.

By keeping their knees bent, hips back and chest up, players will be in a much better position to protect themselves out on the ice. Once girls can hold a low balanced position on one leg for over 30 seconds off the ice, they can challenge themselves by having a partner try to push them off balance in that single-leg position. Developing this ability to fight for their balance will help players to hold their own out on the ice when facing similar physical demands.

The female game is only going to get faster and more physical in the next few years and girls have to be ready to face those demands. Building single-leg strength and balance, as well as teaching girls how to take a hit properly, are two simple and effective ways for girls hockey players to decrease their chances of sustaining concussions and other serious injuries.

It is our responsibility as coaches and parents to ensure that our girls are physically prepared each and every time they step out on the ice. Instead of debating whether or not head injuries are a problem in women's hockey, we all need to be part of the concussion solution.
THE DIFFERENCE MAKERS

I just finished reading a great book written by Mike Babcock, who is the current head coach of the Detroit Red Wings in the NHL and was the head coach of the Canadian Olympic Men’s team in 2010.

The book is called Leave No Doubt - A Credo For Chasing Your Dreams. While Babcock constantly refers to his experience coaching the team that won the gold in 2010, the book is really about how to chase your dreams in every area of life. The book is overflowing with fantastic information, and I wanted to share one great concept Mike talks about in the book with you today.

On the topic of helping players and team reach their full potential, he says that we should raise our kids to be “difference makers”.

I love the way that implies that player development is about more than just being better at skating, shooting and stopping the puck.

It’s about helping players to be better people.

Making a difference, whether on or off the ice, is all about rising to the occasion and bringing everything you have to the table each and every day.

It’s about never accepting being only “good enough”.

Babcock talks a lot about “being afraid of being average” and I think that’s a great way to approach hockey and life. Being OK with being just “good enough” means that you’ll never be a difference-maker.

Being “good enough” won't help you reach your dreams. It won't help you realize your full potential and it certainly won't get you to the top.

Being “good enough” is too comfortable. It means you’re in the middle of the pack somewhere. It means you’re standing still, which means you’re more likely to get run over.

Difference-makers are constantly working at being their best. It doesn’t matter to them what anyone else is doing, because they are laser-focused on giving their best each and every day. They definitely don’t want to be average or just “good enough”.

Strive to be a difference-maker - at the rink and in life.
NEXT GREAT PLAYER OR NEXT TOP MODEL?

Have you noticed how many of the “Next Top Model” reality shows are on TV these days? Girls can barely open a magazine or turn on the television without being bombarded by images of “super-skinny” and “size zero” celebrities. A recent university research study found that 50% of 16-year-old girls believe they are too fat, when in reality, only 25% of them are overweight. These stats and these shows raise a serious red flag about how this “ideal” body image influences girls who want to become the “Next Great Female Hockey Player”.

The powerful influence of pop culture may lead players to question whether they want to stay involved in a sport that is not only traditionally “male”, but also requires them to build physical strength. Girls' hockey players may start to question whether they can be the best player on the ice and still fit into the "skinny size zero" ideal. The truth is that girls’ hockey players CAN’T have it both ways. If a girl wants to be the next great player, she has to train like one. When a player says that she doesn’t want to strength train because she is worried about her legs getting big, what she is really saying is that she doesn’t want to play at the elite levels of women’s hockey.

This is a choice that all aspiring girls’ hockey players must make. Strength training is going to build muscle. It’s NOT going to turn you into "Quad-zilla", but your legs will get bigger and stronger. And the best female hockey players in the world are incredibly strong both on and off the ice. Despite what girls see in the fashion magazines and on TV, there aren’t many women who are 5 foot 9 and weigh 100 pounds. And there definitely aren’t any elite female players that fit this “ideal” - the average weight on the Canadian and United States National Team’s is 150 pounds.

The best female players in the world are NOT "skinny size zeroes", but they epitomize what the true “ideals” of society should be. They are both strong and feminine. This may not make them the ideal runway models, but it does make them terrific role models.

Girls hockey players can help to redefine the female ideal, but they must first make a choice.

Is it going to be...

Runway Model or Role Model?

“Next Top Model" or “Next Great Player”?
A FINAL THOUGHT

“If You Think You Can’t... You Won’t.”

This is my favorite line from a poem called “The Victor”. I always share this with my teams and players because I love the message it conveys about the mental side of performance. And I think it’s a great message for players, coaches and parents no matter what point you’re at during the year.

The Victor
by C. W. Longenecker

If you think you are beaten, you are,
If you think you dare not, you don't.
If you like to win, but you think you can't,
It is almost certain you won't.

If you think you'll lose, you're lost,
For out in the world we find,
Success begins with a fellow's will.
It's all in the state of mind.

If you think you are outclassed, you are,
You've got to think high to rise,
You've got to be sure of yourself before
You can ever win a prize.

Life's battles don't always go
To the stronger or faster man.
But soon or late the one who wins,
Is the one who thinks they can.

My second favorite line in the poem is: “You’ve got to think high to rise.” So many girls hockey players struggle with confidence and don’t genuinely believe in their ability to excel. So whether you are heading into a tough tournament, the playoff stretch or have a big game coming up, keep this in mind:

You can only go as far as your mind will let you go. You don’t always have to win. But you always have to believe that you can win.

Your friend and coach,

Kim