

LARRY'S GUIDE TO VIOLENCE FREE HOCKEY



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INTRODUCTION



Skating must be mastered first

Introduction

We all know and love the game of hockey. As far as I'm concerned it's the best game in the world. But this beloved game has its problems. I see it at the highest level, in the NHL, all the way down to the youngsters just starting. All of these problems start at a young age and are undoubtedly the reason for underdeveloped skills that lead to the violence in hockey. By violence, I mean the hard hits, the fighting, the cross-checking as well as the animosity on the ice, on the bench, and in the stands.

The first problem is the **violence**. I experienced this problem first hand while I was playing hockey myself. The other teams would see that I could skate and handle the puck better than anyone else on the ice at that time. These teams would send a couple of goons to try and take me out. In some cases I over-heard the coach say to his players, "kill him". They couldn't skate as well as me so they would get angry and try to fight me since they couldn't catch me. I would laugh and skate away from them, which would make them furious. With the other team being so angry, it opened up a lot of opportunities for me to get the puck and score. Since that point I decided that keeping my cool, avoiding the hits, and taking all opportunities to score is the only way to play hockey.

The next problem is **lack of skill development**. After teaching power skating and hockey development for over 50 years I have seen the same problems develop in children time, and time again. These problems can be fixed, but it has to be done at the earliest stages of development. Hockey is one of the only sports in the world that has three separate skill sets to learn. The first



skill is skating: This is the **most important and most overlooked** step that ideally should be learned at a young age. Most coaches and minor hockey associations rush through skating resulting in underdeveloped skills that will create bad habits lasting a lifetime. A player must be able to maneuver across the ice without thinking about their skates or be **limited** to their strong side. The second skill is stick handling: At this stage a player combines their developed skating skills with stick handling, passing and shooting properly. Finally the third skill is the game: Once the previous two skill sets have been mastered, a player can focus on the plays and thinking up to three steps ahead of what's going on in the game. These skill sets must be learned separately to be able to combine them and excel to the highest potential.

Another problem is **coaching**. Parents and coaches have the best intentions but there is a huge lack of proper training on how to demonstrate and correct skating and hockey skills. The coaching certification program gets you on the bench with a team and some drills. However, there are many skills and teaching methods that each coach should possess, as well as strive to improve upon that are just not taught or known. Children learn by seeing. If the coach **can not** show the skills properly, the children will not be able to learn them properly. Correction is also a key part of teaching children these skills. Skills must be shown properly and corrected the moment it was done wrong. For instance, a child getting a sticker for trying to do a skill incorrectly will not teach them how to do it right. Rewarding a child for learning and continuing to do a skill properly is a much better way to let the child understand how to develop their skills.



Children starting skating lessons and hockey leagues/camps too young will result in developing many bad habits and the inability to learn the skills they are being asked to do. Parents and coaches don't realize that some of these bad habits are not visible until later in the child's life. Children under the age of 6 **can not** mentally process the skills they are being asked to do, they can only copy what they see someone else doing. Having those children learning too many skills at once will overwhelm them and they will not be able to learn any of the skills properly.



For example, if a 5 year old child started in a hockey league before learning how to skate properly, they will develop many bad habits that will continue on to adulthood and never disappear. There are many bad habits that can form, the typical ones are: leaning on the stick, stopping or turning in only one direction, and looking down at the puck all the time while in a game or practice.

When they learn these bad habits they begin to get frustrated with themselves and begin to take it out on players on the opposing team. It begins to breed the attitude of "if you can't beat em, kill em". Parents who have this mentality or want revenge for events on the ice should not be allowed in the rink area.

Developing skating and stick handling skills will allow the player to play defensive hockey and be able to avoid most hits and potential injuries. This also reduces the animosity that plagues the game.

Not every child can be a professional hockey player, we now know there is a genetic trait for athleticism to excel at any sport or activity they do. Having this trait does not mean that the child will have a free ride to the top, but rather that the hard work that they put into the training and maintenance of their skills will be easier for them.

The best players in the NHL only have up to 3 developed skills that they can do extremely well. This is a result of coaches not having the time or knowledge to teach skill development. Players must develop their skills by the age of 15, beyond that point there is not time to do anything but review and execute plays with whatever skills they've learned. Skating and hockey skills must be learned and maintained in addition to practices all throughout this period of time. In my experience, children will learn the most skills at age 9, 10, and 11 which makes this a crucial age to have learned most of their skating skills to be able to move on to perfecting stick handling, passing and shooting.



Being the best

To be the best should mean being the best at all skills for any situation on the ice, rather than the best at a few skills. How do you get to be the best?

Planning- Having a clear plan for proper development includes learning power skating skills as the first essential step. The next step is learning stick handling skills combined with the continued development of skating skills. Finally, the final step is learning game plays and strategies.



Motivation- Whether it's a dream to play for the Toronto Maple Leafs, Team Canada or playing like your favorite player, everyone needs something to strive for that will get them through the tough times.



Commitment- Even at a young age a player must understand that this sport is a commitment. There is a long road of skills development and it will not be easy. Hockey has more skills to learn and master than any other sport in the world.



Extra work- Doing the extra things to better themselves, such as going out on the pond to work on one skill at a time for hours and hours. Asking for advice and help from professionals, as well as working on shooting accuracy in the driveway in the off season. This extra work must come from within the player and not be forced upon them, children need to live their own dream not their parent's.



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