



Making Mistakes is OK

A friend of mine who works with young players as a skills coach relates a story about a 11 year old defenseman that has learned to reverse the play behind the net in the d zone and drag the blue line in the offensive zone to open up more passing options and improve his shot opportunities. The problem is that the boy's team coach insists that he simply dump the puck down the wall into the corner and that he never reverse the play in the d zone. The coach reportedly tells the boy to throw the puck up to the wings without looking because it is the wings responsibility to get there. The player is very frustrated. This situation is systematic of coaching to win games rather than allowing players to use their skills and experiment with moves that will make them better players when the skills are mastered. Even at the squirt level players should be taught these basic fundamentals and be encouraged to use them in games. They will not always be successful but over time the players will improve.

Frequently I see a player attempt a play that shows that he or she is trying to make a play and is looking at opportunities on the ice. If the play does not work however I am discouraged to see the player get disapproving comments from the coaches when he gets to the bench.

The good news for this youngster above is that the season is soon over and he will hopefully have a more enlightened coach next year. Great coaches encourage players to make plays and advance their skills regardless of the win loss record of the team. In the long run, skills win games.

The next piece is an excerpt from Barry Sanders speech when he was inducted into the Football Hall Of Fame.

Barry Sanders

"So I guess that takes me to my dad. (applause) Yes. My dad is truly the reason why I am here. He's a lifelong fan of the game and I can assure you that he's as familiar with the statistics of everyone up here as they are. The only downfall is that he was an Oklahoma Sooner fan and even when I went to the arch-rival, you'd be surprised to know that he still rooted for the Sooners! (laughs) If you know my dad long enough, you know it's not often he changes his mind about stuff, and I forgive him for that.

I can think of the day where I learned a precious lesson from him. My sophomore year in high school, I was fortunate enough to be on the junior varsity and I played a little bit of cornerback and I was sort of the kick return guy, I returned punts and kickoffs. We were just a little bit outside of our town, Wichita, playing against a team. And it was a very

close game and the fourth quarter came, and I don't remember whether we were up a little bit or down. But the fourth quarter came and it was close and I was in there catching the kicks, and I wouldn't run up and catch the ball. I wouldn't run up and catch the punts. I don't remember whether we won or lost.

But after the game on the ride home, my dad asked me... because it was sort of unusual, he never really said anything about what I should do on the field, he saved his advice for off the field, and trust me, he had plenty of advice for that. He asked me, "Barry, why weren't you catching the punts?" And I was like, "Well, daddy, it was a close game, and I didn't want to run up and drop the punt and cause us to lose the game." He said, **"Son, you can play the game the way it's supposed to be played. Don't be scared to make mistakes. In life you're going to make some mistakes. Even if you wanted to stay in bed all day and avoid the whole world, that's not the answer, especially in the game of football. You're going to make some mistakes. Go out and play the way you're capable of, the coach has you in there for a reason, he has confidence in you."** That was some of the best advice I think I've ever gotten, because as a young player you want to do everything right and it doesn't always happen that way. As Mr. Berman pointed out, sometimes I did lose yards on a run, but it wasn't for a lack of trying. And I can credit William Sanders for that great lesson that allowed me to be a great player, to be here today."

Thanks to Barry Sanders for sharing his story.

Hal Tearse

Minnesota Hockey Coach in Chief

March, 2007