



## Hockey Talk

Q&A with the Blackhawks Director of Hockey Operations



Q: How do I know if my player is reaching his full potential?

A: At all ages, hockey is divided across multiple skill levels. The three factors that seem to best determine which tier a player will achieve are talent, training, and parental ambition. **Talent** is the genetic potential of an individual, and is traditionally only developed once – during the process of conception, where a unique genetic organism is created from a blend of maternal and paternal DNA. **Training** is the sum of all the on-ice, off-ice, multi-sport activities that allow a player to build hockey ability. And **parental ambition** is the extent to which Mom and Dad are willing to invest time, energy, fossil fuels, and other vital life resources into the development of a player.

All three are essential, but one is not like the other two! When a player reaches the upper strata of hockey, only one of these 3 factors sets the ultimate ceiling for how high a player can reach. Training and parental investment cannot determine a player's ceiling – they can only contribute towards how quickly a player reaches the ceiling. The ultimate ceiling can only be determined by natural talent.

Think of it as a series of mountain peaks, all at various heights, each peak specifically matched to an individual young hockey player. For beginning hockey parents, the rate at which your player scales his or her peak seems very important compared to how fast other kids are climbing. But no matter how fast a young player races to the top of a 5,000 foot peak, he or she will never reach the potential heights of another player scaling a 10,000 foot peak.

Even more frustrating for parents is that the height of a child's figurative "peak" doesn't begin to resolve itself until about 16 years old, and even then, that peak can change a fair amount through a player's early 20's or so. This is why there are no thorough comparisons of players at any broad level (i.e. USA Hockey) until 15 or so. Which is not to say there aren't ample opportunities out there to compare your 10 year old to the "world's best other 10 year olds". What this will do, though, is compare the rate of ascent between your child and another young hockey soul. What this won't do, though, is tell you how high your child will eventually climb since the final height of your child's peak won't show through the fog until puberty is well over and done with. Keep in mind too, that a child's genetic potential doesn't just determine skating or stickhandling skill. It

determines, height, weight, power, speed, acceleration, stamina, persistence, emotional and mental toughness, learning ability, and coachability, to name a few characteristics!

My favorite example of this puzzle is Lorenzo Cain, one of the most gifted and graceful baseball players in the major leagues who plays center field for the Kansas City Royals. Cain was cut from his school basketball team, so decided to buy a baseball glove and give baseball a try...AT AGE 16!!!!!!!!!!!!!! First time he ever tried the sport was at age 16, and 12 years later, he's among the elite players on planet Earth. This is obviously not because he played more T-ball than any other 5 year old out there. Or not because his parents paid for the best of the best and provided the best opportunities to the young Lorenzo. It's because his baseball peak is Mt. Everest! Which is even more stunning because clearly his basketball peak is only a small hill!

So players and parents can control over how quickly, or to what extent a player reaches his or her destined peak. But, post-conception, we have zero control over how high that peak will be. So if we have no control over where a player will eventually end up, why not sit back and enjoy the ride. And use the journey to good purpose. As parents of youth hockey players, you'll be bombarded with high quality opportunities to teach enormously important life lessons along the way. So don't squander those chances to teach what's important during the ride because you're too worried about where or when the ride will end.

## One Timers



- Our 4-2 **Squirts** participated in a skills relay race during the intermission of the San Jose Sharks game on 11/5, and they will be participating in the Silver Stick tournament over Thanksgiving weekend...
- Our **PeeWee B** team is off to a great start with an 8-0 record in the regular season so far. They will be playing in the Silver Stick tournament over Thanksgiving weekend...
- PeeWee AA** is taking the Thanksgiving holiday off, but have big plans to head to British Columbia for a tournament in December. The season so far has been great, with a 6-0-1 record in CAHA...
- We have **4 teams** participating in the Pacific District US Regional **Silver Stick Tournament** in San Jose over Thanksgiving weekend! Check out the schedule at <http://stats.liahl.org/display-stats.php?league=19>