

Are you serious about a future in hockey? Be the 1 Percent.

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Let's Play Hockey Columnist



The Janssen Sports Leadership Center has great advice for young athletes who dream of playing college sports – or perhaps even making it to the pros. The short version is found in these three sentences (paraphrased):

- One hundred percent want to be successful.
- Ten percent take the time to form a good plan.
- One percent are willing to follow through every day for years.

There are some sports where genetics play a limiting role. Basketball is just one example, because height really matters. But with all due respect to the super-talented hockey players I've observed and tested, genetics play a very small role in hockey potential. Practically anyone can play college hockey if you are passionate and start early enough.

It's not genetics, it's factors like rink sense, creativity, read-react decisions, mental toughness, poise, confidence, stick skills, skating speed, quickness and agility. ***Oh, and the most important limiting factor in future success? Do you compete for loose pucks like your life depends on it? It does.***

Included in the 10 percent group are those who seek advice and perhaps take skating or shooting lessons – learn how to do it right. And note: The smartest plans include hours of pond hockey to improve skills and rink sense, plus skating-specific strength training off-ice, sprinting, jumping and slide-board reps.

But plans and lessons are NOT enough, any more than golf lessons would get you to the PGA Tour without hours of practice. A skating instructor can only get you started, even if there are many lessons over several months. Hockey camps and schools are only a start. You have to skate and skate and skate; and when you finish skating, and leave the ice, you must train those skating muscles until you can hardly walk. Ouch. Now that separates the dreamers from the achievers.

That's why the one percent is such an elite group, and that's also why our sport allows practically anyone with enough passion, resolve and work ethic to overcome most hurdles. It happens all the time. The hardest workers pass right by talented players who fail to take advantage of their gifts.

The 10-percent group is popular. In fact, it might swell to 50 percent. This group invests money in lessons, camps, schools and leagues – all of which are valuable. Heck, you have to play this game by the hour to be any good. It's a game of experience. But to be a one-percenter, your investment starts where the 10-percenters don't go. The rest is an investment of sweat.