

Are Your Players Making These Six Mistakes?

December 13, 2015 [Rick Traugott](#)

Again, last weekend I enjoyed watching a full day of the top Peewee girl's hockey teams in Ontario play in a tournament outside of Toronto. The skill level is high for this age group and it amazes me how much the women's game has improved in the last ten years. I also had a chance to watch a few Bantam boy's games as well and there were some things that I thought were glaringly lacking at both levels. With some work on skills and mindset development, players would not only be much more skilled but the offensive output at both levels would be drastically improved.



Here are my six general observations from last weekend:

- 1) **Player's sticks are too long.** I know there is a lot of conversation about stick length and it's relation to the flex in a stick and shot velocity. I just worry about players being able to handle the puck properly. To my mind, the longest a stick should be is to the player's nose with no skates on, and can even be as short as under the chin on skates.
- 2) **Players have difficulty keeping their head up when carrying the puck.** This can be related to the first point about stick length but as coaches, we need to be insistent that our players keep their heads up when carrying the puck. In practice, this should be a regular teaching point and players should be working on keeping their heads up in all puck handling drills. As an add on, players should also work on keeping their heads up when shooting. Design and run drills that develop the "heads up" mentality.
- 3) **Players don't know what they are going to do with the puck before they receive it.** So many players last weekend would miss great chances to move the puck to good options because they weren't playing "once step ahead". A great example would be a D to D pass in a neutral zone regroup. The receiving defenseman needs to know who to give the puck to before receiving the pass or often that opportunity to head man the puck is lost with forwards moving quickly through the passing lanes. Coaches need to develop a mindset in players that has them thinking about the next pass all of the time.
- 4) **Players don't use the width of the ice.** Especially in the neutral zone, time and again players would funnel into the ice between the dot lines instead of staying wide to the boards with the puck. Many times, the play would be broken up by defensemen who weren't being challenged by the forwards opening up more space between the boards. I tell my players "going wide" means being able to touch the boards with your stick. Wide is not down the dot line. When players go wide in the neutral zone it is much easier to gain the blue line AND create a chance to score on the offensive zone entry.

5) Players don't want to screen the goalie. I was amazed at how much the goalies in the games I saw were able to track the puck easily because no offensive players were in front of them making it difficult. And, if a player did get in front of a goalie appropriately, they tended to move to the side when a shot was coming. I don't think they moved because they were afraid of getting hit by the shot, I believe they felt there was a better chance for a rebound at the side of the net rather than in front. More offense will be created with more traffic directly in front of the goalie. Secondary chances are crucial to a team's offensive success. Screens, tips and rebounds are paramount.

6) Players don't look for easy options when they approach the net with the puck. Time and again I watched players get so net focused that they didn't see easy passes to players that were in much better scoring positions. I have written before about the far post and how teams need to exploit the easy tap in. If players can keep their heads up more then maybe that play will become more evident. In general, most players are trying to beat defensive players one on one rather than passing the puck to open teammates.

Each of these six things can be worked on in practice. Some of them are small adjustments that would be terrific habits for your players to have and will immediately improve a team's offensive ability.

What coach doesn't want a goal or two more every game?