

SHOT BLOCKING

A Lost Art

The recent retirement of Mike Ramsey of the Detroit Red Wings brings to mind the lack of good shot blocking defensemen in hockey today and the decline in the number of shots actually being blocked. Granted, players are bigger, stronger and faster today and are able to shoot the puck much harder than in the past and an argument can be made that there are less shot blocking opportunities available in today's game. The risk of injury is a major factor and with the amount of money at stake at the professional level, many players feel that it probably isn't worth it. We're here to argue against that theory. We feel that the skill of shot blocking is a very valuable asset and can be done relatively injury-free if done correctly.



How to block shots

- Timing is the key — the ability to know when and more importantly when not to go down to block a shot.
- Make sure protective equipment is positioned to receive the blow of the puck — the shin pads are the most commonly used equipment to block shots
- Stay square with the shooter — don't let your body get twisted or turned so that a vulnerable and unprotected part of the body is exposed.
- Don't leave the feet too early to tip off the shooter and allow him to fake the shot.
- Control stick so that it isn't positioned to tip the puck up into the face or into the net.
- Block the shot as close as possible to the shooter — the closer you are — the greater control you have and the greater chance of blocking the shot with the part of your body that you want to block the shot with (ie. shin pads rather than back of the leg)
- Don't play goalie — be aggressive and make the shooter shoot the puck through you to get to the net.

Why to block shots

- Can create offense on a quick transition from a blocked shot — ordinarily all opposition players are thinking offense and moving toward the net — quick transition will catch them out of position defensively.
- Shows courage and creates team unity — nothing fires up a team more than a player “putting his body on the line” for his team.
- Anybody can do it — whether it's your star players or your fourth line players and fifth and sixth defensemen — it really doesn't require a great deal of skill, just timing, practice and being willing.
- Can effect the offensive attack of the opposition — if they are aware that your team is willing and able to effectively block shots, they will tend to force shots or passes that aren't there.
- A must skill for penalty killers — is often the last resort to save a goal and the ability to know when and when not to do it when a man short is essential
- Advantage to the goaltender — not only does he have to face less shots as an end result — but he usually has a better read on the shots he does face — they are usually higher shots which have less likelihood of being deflected or screened.
- Reduces the goals against — just do the math — if your team is able to block 5 or 6 shots a game and force 3 or 4 shots wide, you will be saving about a goal a game. One shot often leads to a rebound or two as well — if you can eliminate 10 shots a game, you will eliminate one goal (most goalies stop 8 or 9 of every 10 shots).