



# Stickhandling

A player's stickhandling ability is an obvious key to their ability to beat a player one-on-one or protect the puck from a defender. As with all puck skills, young players are more likely to experience success in developing good stickhandling skills if they are good skaters.

Coaches should always remember that teaching inexperienced players the puck skills is much easier when the player has a reasonable degree of skating proficiency.

When teaching the fundamentals of stickhandling (especially to inexperienced players), we recommend that you use a progression method which takes them from a stationary position, into passive movement, and then ultimately with full speed movement up and down the ice.

Players need to be taught the importance of a properly "fitted" hockey stick. If you walk into a hockey shop today you will find numerous patterns, lengths, curve sizes, shaft thickness', blade lengths, stick composition (i.e. wood, aluminum, composite, etc.) and weights. When purchasing a stick, it is important to get a stick that has a good "feel". A professional player has the good fortune to order custom made sticks. These sticks may have certain specifications for the shaft, handle, blade length and curve. However, although a player will be shipped several dozen sticks that were designed and manufactured to be exactly the same, often times they are not. It would not be unusual for a player to examine a dozen sticks and check their "feel", only to keep five or six of them and ship the rest back. The point being, it is worth the time to check out a stick before buying it.

We recommend that players (especially beginners) should cut their sticks so that when holding it vertically with the toe of the blade on the floor, the top of the shaft is no higher than the player's chin when on skates. Tape a comfortable handle on the handle of the shaft and tape the blade of the stick to your liking (regardless of how much of the blade is covered, always tape from "heel-to-toe" to ensure proper seaming of the tape).

To stickhandle (dribble) properly, a player should place their hands when gripping the stick approximately a forearm's length apart. The top hand on the stick should be a power hand, always maintaining a relatively tight grip and rarely removing itself from the stick. The bottom hand must maintain a looser grip so it has the ability to move up and

down the shaft of the stick -- depending on the location of the puck (as the puck move away from the body, hands move closer together and visa versa).

To dribble, move the puck from the forehand side of the stick to the backhand side (either side to side in front of your body or back and forth on the side of your body). The key to controlling the puck during the dribble is a player's ability to roll their wrists. This wrist rolling technique will cause the blade of the stick to "cup", both on the forehand and backhand sides of the stick. This cupping technique "grips" the puck, and is especially important when the player is on the move. The puck should be maintained on the middle to the heel of the stick for the most part. There will be times when a more experienced stickhandler will draw the puck in with the toe of their stick, which is a more advanced technique.

Remember to emphasize to players to stickhandle with their head up and a good base of support (knees bent, shoulder-width foot base, etc.). It is also important that players understand the importance of moving their hands, as well as their arms, when dribbling the puck.

Make certain that players practice moving the puck away from their bodies, not simply back and forth in front of their bodies. Players also need to work on dribbling the puck on their backhand side of their bodies as much as their forehand.

The following is a list of progression drills that may be used to work on this technique:

## Follow the Leader

Players face the coach (or a player), and do what he does. The leader should vary what they are doing and include things such as narrow dribbles, wide dribbles, forehand dribbles, backhand dribbles, drop the puck in the skates and kick it up to the stick, etc. Be creative.

## Butt, Tip & Blade

Have the player flip their sticks over and do 100 dribbles with the butt-end of their stick, 100 dribbles with the tip of their blade (turned upside down, of course) and 100 dribbles with the blade of their stick in its proper position.

## Scramble Skate

Take a number of players and have them carry a puck in any direction (vary their speed

at the same time in a confined area. For example, you may take your entire team and tell them they must stay in the neutral zone (between the blue lines). The coach may have them speed up and slow down on the whistle. You may also use only a portion of the team and have them stay within one circle.

## Dangle the Dots

Scatter a number of pucks in a confined area (such as a circle). One or more players may stickhandle around the pucks as fast as they can for a specific time period.

## Triangle Stickhandling

Have players get with a partner. With players facing each other, one player stands in a stationary position with his stick held on the ice in front of him so that the blade of his stick and his feet form a triangle. His partner, who has the puck, will dribble the puck from side-to-side under the stick (of his stationary partner), while lifting his own stick over his partner's as the puck travels from side to side.

## Keep Away

This can be played one-on-one throughout the ice surface or in a confined area with several players competing against each other to keep the puck away from the others.

### ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ STICKHANDLING CHECKLIST

- Stick must be of proper fit -- use one with a good "feel"
- Position hands a forearm's length apart
- Top hand grips the stick tight, bottom hand should have flexibility to move about the shaft
- Hands should rest comfortably in front of the body and should move freely across the front of the body as arms are extended from side-to-side
- Roll the wrists to ensure good "grip" on the puck
- Keep head up
- Dribble the puck primarily on the middle, to the heel of the blade
- Maintain a good base of support