

Tips for Players & Coaches

An experienced coach and teacher of the game, Roger Neilson has spent over 20 years as either a head coach or assistant coach in the National Hockey League. He recently was hired away from the St. Louis Blues, where he had been an assistant coach for several years, to replace Wayne Cashman as the head coach of the Philadelphia Flyers as they make their stretch run in search of the Stanley Cup. He was the pioneer of video analysis and is renowned for his innovative ideas and concept which he shares at his annual Roger Neilson Coaching Clinic in Windsor, Ontario each June. This year, Roger is hoping he will have to delay it until later in June as he plans to be busy in the first half of the month.

Scoring Goals

The most exciting part of hockey is scoring goals. These days, even goaltenders are getting into the act. Certainly, skill is the key. If you have a quick release, a variety of shots and good balance, you should be able to “fill the net.” However, even a less skilled player can be a top scorer. Here are some good points to remember:

TIP-INS — Stand directly in the line of the shot. Try to deflect the puck as it goes by you rather than when it is in front of you.

REBOUNDS — Always head to the net when a teammate is shooting. Be a “garbage collector”. Be the first one to the puck on a breakaway attempt by a team-mate. Always expect a rebound even from your own shot.

SCREENS — Shoot through a defenseman, using him as a screen.

KNOW the opposing goalkeeper’s weaknesses... weaker stick-side, vulnerable high, kicks out big rebounds, drops pucks at his feet, slow on wrap-arounds, big 5-hole, etc.

FIVE-HOLE — The best place to aim is the 5-hole. If your aim is bad, you’ll probably “pick” a corner and be a hero. For sure, your shot should be on the net and may result in a rebound if it doesn’t go in.

SHOOT OFTEN — Top goal scorers such as Yzerman, LeClair, Selanne, Sakic and Fleury shoot from all angles.

TWO-ON-ONE’S — If you decide to shoot rather than pass, you’d better make sure you hit the net.

Developing a Quick Stick

It is important for young players to develop a quick stick. Players on the Blues who have quick sticks are **Brett Hull**, **Chris Pronger**, and **Darren Turcotte**.

Hull, a high-scoring offensive forward, uses his quick stick to corral passes, deflect shots, and shoot quickly.

Pronger is one of the best defensemen in the league at knocking down passes, stealing pucks along the boards, poke-checking the puck away from an opponent, and keeping his stick in the passing lane when killing penalties.

Turcotte, a defensive centre, uses his quick

stick to forecheck relentlessly, intercept passes in the neutral zone and deflect passes to the point of the defensive zone and win key face-offs.

You develop a quick stick by:

- Thinking quickness
- Playing ball hockey
- Deking through pylons (timed)
- Shooting close to a wall (ball) or boards (puck)
- Strengthening your wrists (rubber ball)

Coach’s Pep Talk

Hockey games are won by the players on the ice. However, a coach’s pep talk can play a key role. For your team to perform at their best, they must be well prepared and determined. This is your job as a coach...

To get your team ready. Here are some ideas for your consideration:

- Individual motivation is just as important as team motivation. As coaches, we can become so engrossed with the team that we overlook individual instruction.
- The key areas of team motivations are preparation and enthusiasm. You need to sense the proper emphasis for each game.
- Keep your talk short, clear and enthusiastic. Three points should be the limit.

- Be positive. Instead of saying, “We can’t keep giving the puck away at the bluelines,” try “Let’s make sure plays at the bluelines.”

Between periods, talks should be brief and to the point.

- Opposition strength and how to counteract it
- An opposition weakness and how to exploit it
- A final word of encouragement

Players should be seated when the coach is talking to them. Many coaches use a card listing the points they wish to discuss with the team. This shows your team that you are prepared and organized. It also stops you from rambling. Your team expects some strategy and inspirations from you. Be confident and enthusiastic.

10 Tips for Behind the Bench

- Be *business-like* ... call players by their surnames (eg “**Sundin** line up next”)
- Be *controlled* ... the players must feel that you are completely in charge of the situation.
- Be *positive* .. “Let’s make sure of plays at the blueline” as opposed to “Don’t give the puck away at the blueline.”
- Be *respectful of referees* .. it is one of your jobs as coach to see that your players develop a healthy respect for rules and regulations.
- Avoid *numbering your lines* ... use the Centre’s name.
- Delayed penalty ... next centre up for the goalkeeper unless coach directs otherwise.
- Have a notepad or card with you to jot down reminders.
- Always carry a rulebook with you.
- Insist on players calling out the name of the player whose place they are taking as soon as you call out the next line or defense pair.
- Be *enthusiatic* but controlled.