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Hockey Shooting Basics

(reprinted in part from "Lifetime Hockey" and "Texas Hockey")

This page was designed to help inexperienced and even some more experienced players gain some or refresh knowledge about shooting, how to do it successfully and some common statistics that surround shooting. Hopefully, most players will benefit at least a small amount, from reading this page.

Making a great hockey shot is one of the joys of the game - especially if you score. A well placed, hard shot has the same feel as a 3000 foot golf drive or the baseball hit out of the park. Shooting well requires a complete understanding of the principles of each type of shot and practice, practice, practice. NHL players make shooting look easy, but it is really a complicated art. Fortunately, improving your shooting skill is a lot of fun.

Shoot To Score

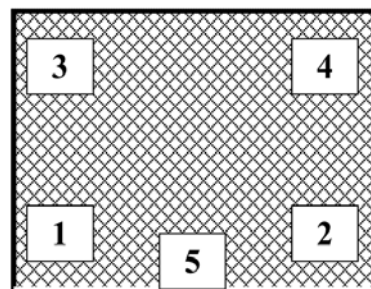
A hockey team will get about 30 to 40 shots on net in a game. This means the average player will only get between 2 to 5 shots on net. Therefore, every shot should be as good as you can make it. The three keys to a scoring shot are:

- Quickness
- Speed
- Accuracy

Quickness: Good goalies watch the puck carefully and set up to take each shot. If you shoot quickly before the goalie gets set, your chance of scoring improves immeasurably. A *quick* shot is one that comes quickly off a pass, a rebound, or a scramble in front of the net. Many players have a tendency to hold the puck on their stick too long in order to get ready to make a "really good shot." This extra time is all a goalie needs to set up to make the save or have a defensive player block the shot. Even marginal shots should be made quickly. As Wayne Gretsky once said "**the shot not taken will not score 100% of the time.**"

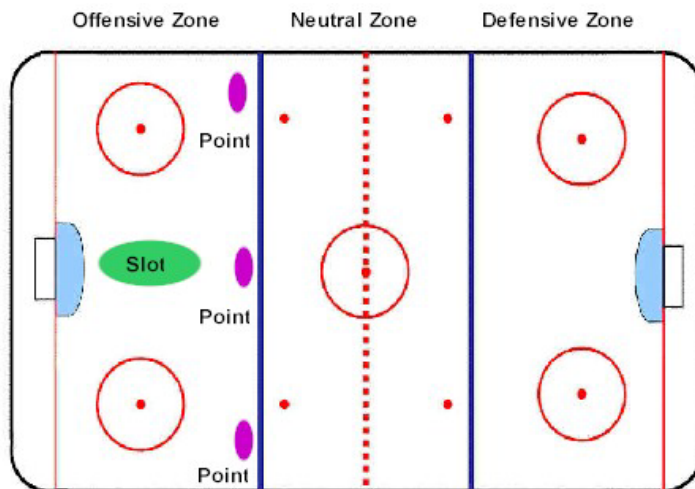
Speed: The hard shot that has a lot of *speed* is a combination of good body mechanics and conditioning. Good body mechanics (see below) will allow most players to hit a shot that is fast enough to score. However a shot that is hard enough to score even when a goalie sees it requires good mechanics and a conditioned body. Upper body strength and grip strength are critical.

Accuracy: Shooting *accurately* needs to be developed by practice. You should always practice shooting at a target, never just blasting away. There are five target areas in the goal, (see diagram). They are numbered in order of their probability of scoring. Low shots are harder for goalies to stop as the goalie must use their feet alone. In addition, a low shot can be more easily tipped by a team mate or deflect off a player's skate into the goal. High shots (3 and 4) can be effective if the goalie has a tendency to go down unnecessarily especially late in the game when they are tired. The "5 hole" should only be attempted if the goalie has a propensity to keep their legs apart.



The best place to shoot from is from the slot. The further off center the shooter gets, the more difficult the shot because the amount of open net decreases.

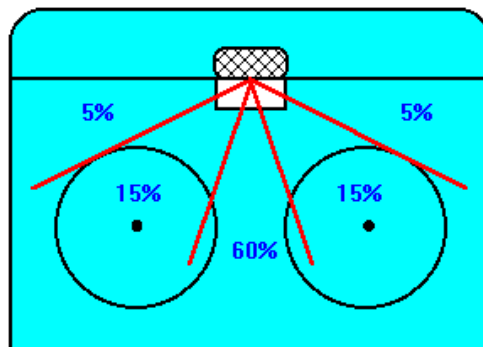
Shots can score from the high slot, but they must have *quickness, accuracy and speed*. After taking the shot, an offensive player needs to continue to skate toward the net to be in position to take another shot if the goalie allows a rebound or drops the puck.



Where Players Score From – Some Useful Statistics

70% of goals are scored on the stick side. 20% of goals are scored on the glove side. 10% of goals are scored between the feet, rebounds, deflections, etc.

Over 66% of all goals scored are below the goalie's knees. This is because these shots are easier to tip/deflect, they are hard work for the goalie and they create the most rebounds. 20% of goals are scored shoulder high or above. %10 of goals are scored between the knee and the shoulder.



It is very tempting to shoot at the goalie, instead of the corners because the goalie seems to become the target. This happens to the best of players but must be resisted. Although a shot needs to be on the net to score, a shot that misses the goal is still in play and may rebound in front of the net for a teammate to shoot. By practicing hitting the corners you will make an accurate, high potential shot in the heat of game without consciously thinking about it.

Some players have a tendency to get too close to the goalie before they shoot. Even if you have beaten the defense and have a clear shot, closer is not necessarily better. If you get within 5 feet of the goalie the amount of open net decreases. A good goalie will also come out and attack if a shooter gets too close by poke checking or sliding into the shooter and tangling them up (with the puck in the goalie's pads)

A key to increasing scoring productivity is to make the goalie move. Players should always be aware of the position of the goalie and try to shoot if they see the goalie move. You should discipline yourself to pass to teammate rather than shooting if this causes the goalie to move across the crease. Your teammate will then have a much higher percentage shot.

Shooting Mechanics

There are four primary types of shots. You should be able to use them all and should not rely on just one or two. Being able to execute each shot even if you are not in perfect position or if you are off balance will give you a scoring edge.

These shots are all executed in the same manner for in-line hockey players. If you are playing with an in-line ball instead of a puck, you will find it easier to get it off the playing surface but it may be somewhat harder to control. If you play both in-line and ice hockey you will find your shooting skills will transfer easily between each surface.

A) Weight Transfer

The key to all good hockey shots is appropriate weight transfer. Just as in golf or baseball you must transfer your weight from your back leg to your front as illustrated this below.



Weight on back foot



Weight Moves to Middle of Body



Weight Moves to Front Foot

B) Wrist Shot

The wrist shot is the most common shot used in hockey games because it scores the most goals. It is a fast and accurate shot that is used most effectively from middle distances (10 to 40 ft). Because it comes off the stick without the stick being lifted, it is difficult for the goalie to see. Unless you have a very hard forehand shot, it is difficult to score with this shot from the point. However, a low forehand shot from the point is very effective as a setup to a tip in from a teammate.

To make the wrist shot position the puck on the heel of the stick as the stick is extended in front of you. The stick is then cupped over the puck as the stick is drawn back, away from the goal. The lower hand should slide down the stick which causes more of your weight to be on the stick. The shot is executed by bringing the stick forward across the body and transferring your weight from the leg closest to the goal to the other leg. A strong grip and a fluid and quick transfer of weight gives the forehand shot its power. The follow through determines the height of the shot.

One of the great advantages of the wrist shot is that you do not need to look at the puck to take this shot. Experienced players will feel the puck on their stick and take this shot while looking at the goalie. This is the key to making a very accurate shot. You should always practice the forehand shot by looking at your target, never the puck.

C) Snap Shot

The snap shot is a shorter version of the forehand shot and is used close to the goal. It has the advantage of a quick release and may surprise a goalie. It is also a good shot to use when skating at top speed and maneuvering in front of the net.

The snap shot is begun by drawing the puck to your side, but it is not drawn back as in the forehand shot. You next need to cock your wrist and bring your arms forward, snap your wrists

and follow through. The snap shot is dependent on your wrists and arms and does not require that you shift your weight as you shoot.

Most goals scored today in the National Hockey League are snap shots.

D) Slap Shot

The slap shot has moved from a controversial shot to the mainstream of hockey. It is clearly the most dramatic shot in hockey due to its speed. A well hit slap shot can approach 100 mph. Today, most scoring from the point is with a slap shot.

There are two big disadvantages to the slap shot. The first is its accuracy. In order to hit a slap shot you must look at the puck and therefore it is much more difficult to be accurate than the forehand shot. Some very good players can hit this shot without looking but they are the exception. However, you can work on slap shot accuracy by looking at where you want to shoot, taking your shot, and then adjusting to be able to hit your target in your next shot.

The second problem with the slap shot is the time it takes to get off. The high back swing allows the goalie to get set or for a defensive player to block the shot. Occasionally, an embarrassed shooter will have the puck stolen from them as they take their back-swing for the "really big slap shot."

The slap shot begins with the puck directly in front of you and with your left side facing the goal (if you are a right hand shot). You should move your right hand down the stick about 12 inches and grip the stick tightly. Your stick should be brought back off the ice in an arc. The height of the arc will determine the power of your shot. However a high arc also makes hitting the puck squarely more difficult. Your weight should be on your left leg (leg closest to the goal.)

As you bring the stick down you should focus on the puck and strike approximately 2 inches behind it. The stick will then flex and strike the puck with the power of your swing and the stored flex in your stick. As you strike the puck you should shift your weight from your left leg to your right. The follow through will determine how high the shot rises.

A low slap is the best shot for tip ins from your teammates. Your windup also telegraphs the shot so they can break for the net for the tip.

For the beginner, hitting a slap shot behind the puck is hard to understand. This is why its called a "slap" shot. The best way to get over the feeling that it is not possible for a slap shot to work is to hit short slap shots toward a target with a limited back-swing. You should hit the ice very close to the puck. As you get comfortable with this shot, increase the height of your back-swing and the distance behind the puck that you strike the ice.

A hard slap shot is dependent on good body mechanics and weight transfer, a strong lower hand grip, and a strong upper body. Good players are also adept at a modified slap shot taken in full skating stride. In this situation, weight transfers are not possible, and the slap shot is hit with upper body strength only.

The slap shot can be hit quickly from a pass or as it comes out to the point on a rebound. This requires the shooter to time the slap shot to hit the moving puck. This type of shot is known as a "one timer" because you only get to swing at it one time. One timers are very effective because it is a very quick shot.

E) Backhand Shots

The backhand shot is effective for two reasons. First it may be the only shot possible due to the alignment of players in front of the net. An accurate backhand that has some speed can be as effective as a forehand shot. A second advantage of the backhand is surprise. Many a goal has been scored by a player that skates in front of the net and quickly releases a backhand as the

goalie is moving the wrong direction in preparation for a forehand shot. It can also be a confusing shot for a goalie to follow because there is no logical or natural release point like a forehand shot. If you can only shoot from your forehand side you have lost the potential for many scoring opportunities. Because the backhand shot is not as elegant or powerful as the forehand shot, many players do not practice it enough. High scorers on any team have an effective backhand shot.

The backhand shot starts with the puck on the back hand side of the stick. The puck should rest in the middle or heel of the stick. If you have a very curved stick it is easier to cradle the puck near the heel. You then lower your bottom hand on the stick about 12 inches. Next drop your lead shoulder down and toward the target. The puck is drawn toward the goal as rapidly as possible. The length of the sweep will determine the power of the shot and the follow through will determine its height.

Other Scoring Basics

A) Deflections and Rebounds

Good goalies are hard to score on when they can see the puck. Shots off of deflections or rebounds can beat even the best goalie.

The deflection is a unique part of the game of hockey. No other sport, other than soccer, considers this technique to be a normal part of the game. The deflection requires good cooperation between the initial shooter and the "deflector." The shot should be made from some distance (high slot or the point) and should come into the net area hard and low. The deflector needs to be looking at the shooter. As the puck comes toward the net it is deflected slightly to change its trajectory. This makes the puck almost impossible to stop as the goalie has already set up for the original shot. The deflection requires intense concentration and must be practiced as a team.

The rebound also provides an opportunity to score. Low shots usually cannot be gloved by the goalie and must be stopped by their skates or pads. This usually results in a rebound that is playable. Offensive players must remember to "go to the net" when a teammate shoots in order to pick up a rebound and shoot. If you can shoot quickly off a rebound, you have improved your scoring chances.

Remember that you cannot kick a puck into the net or bat it with your glove - it must be shot off your stick.

B) Screening the Goalie

A related strategy is the screen shot. An offensive player must move in front of the goal with their back to goalie. As the puck moves to the high slot or point, a teammate takes a shot while the goalie's vision is blocked. You cannot be in the crease or the goal will not count.

Goalies hate to be screened and defensive players will be aggressive in moving their opponents out of way. You need to be a courageous offensive player to set up in front of the goal to screen the goalie or deflect a shot. You will get pummeled by the defense and come away with some bruises from errant slap shots. But - your team will score.

C) Fake Shot and Wraparound

The fake shot is an effective technique from the high slot or the point. The shooter raises their stick as though they are going to hit a slap shot. A defender will then stiffen or go down to block the shot. The shooter then pulls the puck back and has two options.

The first is to quickly side step the defender and move in for a closer shot. Or the shooter can quickly pass to a teammate for a one time shot. If done quickly the goalie will not be able to move from the position they choose to defend the fake shot and the scoring opportunity is increased.

A close cousin to the fake shot from the point is the wraparound from behind the net. In this case the offensive player gets control of the puck behind the net. They then start to skate out as though they were going to pass to a teammate or move into the slot. Instead they quickly push the puck into the corner of the goal between the goalie and the goal pipe. The key to the wraparound is surprise and it must be done quickly before the goalie can get set tightly against the edge of the goal. A variation is to fake the wraparound, pull the puck back and shoot it into the far side of the net as the goalie is pulled tight to the post.

D) Deking

Although deking is a technique that is normally used to get free from a defensive player it is also an important skill to be used in conjunction with shooting. It is particularly important when a player has a clean break on a goalie or is in a one on one situation.

By deking, a shooter can make the goalie commit in one direction and the shooter can shoot in the other. The shooter should never get closer than five feet to the goal before they shoot.

The easiest deke is to lower your shoulder in one direction and then quickly skate the other as you come in on net. A more complex version of this misdirection deke is to start a crossover in one direction and then quickly cross over the other direction. Obviously you need very good skating skill to pull off this move.

You can also come in from the side of the net and shift your weight to imply a shot. If the goalie goes down, you continue across the front of the goal and shoot back into the goal.

Practicing Shooting

Practicing your shooting is one of the most enjoyable parts of hockey. However, to improve you need to be disciplined and work on those parts of your shooting that are weak. It is a good idea to periodically inventory your shooting skill. Take an empty net and use all four shots to hit each of the five holes. Try this from close, medium and long distances. This will tell you which shots need work.

A common technique to improve a shot is to line up a number of pucks in front of you on the ice. You then shoot each one quickly at a target or a corner of the net. This technique allows you to work on the body mechanics of the shot so that you don't need to think about them during a game. Elements of your shot to consider as you practice are:

- weight transfer
- grip position and strength
- eye on puck or target
- follow through

You can cut a piece of plywood to hang in front of the net which has openings for each of the shooting holes to be used as targets. Another option is to hang a large can from the front of the net and move it into the position of each of the holes. This can be more fun and provide positive reinforcement because each time you shoot accurately you get to "ring the bell."

If your team has an opportunity to practice between games, you should work on some shooting drills. These include feeding the defense at the point and having them shoot while the offensive player attempts a tip in. One-timers should be a part of this practice. You should also practice one on none and one on one breaks to improve your close in shooting and deking skills.

You can also work on shooting when ice is not available. In-line nets can be purchased inexpensively and work nicely for practice. You can use either a regular hockey puck or an inline puck. We do not recommend inline balls as they have a much different feel than a puck. You need

to find a very smooth surface and if your driveway or sidewalk is not smooth enough put down a piece of plastic or some other smooth material.

No matter where or how you practice your shooting, remember to work on the three keys to successful scoring:

- Quickness
- Speed
- Accuracy