



Developing Grit

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In hockey, players need a hard edged approach to the game to be successful. The sport requires you to battle and overcome obstacles every second you are on the ice. Some players have a natural ability to elevate the level at which they compete. They develop a “tough as nails” attitude or “heart” so they will not be dominated or controlled on the ice and will battle as hard as they can to make a difference in the game. This is what I call grit (an indomitable spirit or an unwillingness to quit).

Now there is a difference between being a gritty player who will not quit and a fool who skates around the ice looking for someone to hit just for the sake of hitting. These players are not gritty they are hurting the team. A gritty player is a guy like Ryan Smyth of the Edmonton Oilers, Martin St. Louis of the Tampa Bay Lightning or Paul Kariya of the Nashville Predators. If you watch these guys on the ice they are smart hockey players who when they get close to the puck battle hard and do the right things at the right time to make a play. Rarely will you see them get outworked. They may lose the battle, but they are not outworked.

This is the type of player that coaches want to work with. These are the guys who put in extra time with dryland training, or in practice. They ask questions from the coaching staff and want feedback on their training and games (and then they do something to improve from this feedback). I used to work for a hockey school in Vancouver and before practice Paul Kariya and his two brothers would rent the ice before the hockey school. This was 6:30am to 8am each morning, all summer! Paul would set up the on-ice drills and then be the first to do the drill. Each of his brothers would follow and he would yell at them if they went at anything less than 100% all the time. It was amazing to see the work ethic and determination of these players. After practice I would see them in the weight room down the street and these guys would hit it hard. No days off, and no screwing around.

Now you may not have the natural ability that a Paul Kariya has but you can sure train as hard as he does. In your training I recommend the following types of training to ensure that you know how to compete and what it’s like to perform when you have something on the line:

1. Schedule some kind of competition within your training. It may be a race or two with other team-mates or it may be trying to beat your own personal best in a particular lift or exercise. Log these competitions in a notebook and watch your success grow.
2. Up the anti during training with side bets between friends or other players. I’m not talking about gambling 500 dollars on a 40 meter sprint, but I am saying you put something on the line during your competition. A cup of coffee or a dollar bet may not seem like much but you would be surprised at what you will do to win it.

3. Gritty players are not afraid of playing hockey at full speed and you can't be either. When you are skating into the corner you can't be thinking of losing the race to the puck or that the other guy is bigger than you are, or you're finished. You have to win that race, get the puck and battle hard to get out of the corner to make the play. This has to be done every shift. On-ice and dryland sessions should convey this need to battle as often as possible so it becomes a natural event on this ice during a game.

4. Radio disc jockey Howard Stern used to say that as a kid he got beaten up all the time. In conversations with other celebrities he would often say that taking a punch wasn't that bad when you knew that it didn't hurt as bad as you thought it would. The truth is that we are afraid of the unknown and when we see people get punched or hit we are uncertain about it. Now I am not suggest you go out and start a fight just for the sake of getting over your fear, but I am suggesting that maybe a boxing class or martial arts lesson wouldn't be such a bad idea. Learning that taking a punch in the face won't kill you, but you will never know it until it happens to you. Other types of combat games such as wrestling are also a good idea for hockey players as it helps develop confidence in your abilities and how to overcome another person in direct competition.

All of these suggestions will help your game but without the desire to improve your performance it's not going to happen. The bonus thing with learning to compete or develop your grit is that it will carry over into the rest of your life. Believe me, this is an asset!

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A former nationally ranked athlete in both cross country skiing and triathlon, Coach Pollitt brings a wealth of experience to clients he coaches. He holds a degree in Physical Education from the University of Manitoba and is a graduate of the Olympic Academy of Canada. David is certified with distinction from the National Strength and Conditioning Association and from the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. David has professional coaching certifications in weightlifting (both in Canada & the USA), intermediate levels in hockey and track & field, and is a master coach in cross country skiing. He has had internships at the Calgary Olympic Development Association High Altitude Camp and with the Canadian National Ski Team Development Centre. Throughout the years Coach Pollitt has won several awards such as the 3M Coaching Award for work with minor hockey in Canada and he was part of the Eastern College Coaching Staff of the Year (for work with Duquesne University). His client list ranges from all varieties of athletes from amateur to the professional ranks. He has worked with Duquesne University, The Banff Hockey Academy, The Canmore Eagles, along with a number of corporate clients such as Taco Bell and TAB Answer Network. His companies DP Hockey, OP Coaching and Optimal Performance all work with a number of clients in the pursuit of improving conditioning and sport performance. David has submitted his original research and ideas with articles in popular journals and magazines as *Training and Conditioning*, the *Strength and Conditioning Journal*, and the *Performance Training Journal*. David serves as the assistant editor for the *Performance Training Journal*, and is a peer reviewer for the *Strength and Conditioning Journal*. His first book on conditioning for junior hockey players will be published in early 2007 and he is working with Angelo Maggio of Magic Hockey and Clint Hazen from ProKinetics on a goaltender development manual and DVD. David's state of the art training facility is set to launch in mid 2007 in southern California.

