

Increasing scoring opportunities

By Tony Diritto



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For some hockey players, putting the puck in the net comes very naturally. But for others it can be a frustrating and difficult task. While there are no sure-fire procedures for becoming a 50-goal scorer, there are certain things you can do to improve your chances of scoring.

Preparation

Start by assessing your offensive tendencies. Some questions that you should ask yourself if you are having a hard time scoring or want to score more are: Is my shot hard enough? Am I creating chances or just standing around? Am I in the right position to score? Attention to these questions will help you improve.

Shooting Power and Accuracy

As long as you play, these are areas that always need to be worked on. The best part about improving your shooting power and accuracy is that you don't need to be on the ice. In fact, practicing your shot off the ice is actually better because you aren't wasting precious ice time. When it's time for shooting practice, take at least 150 shots. And, make sure you try different types of shots, including the backhand shot, which is often neglected but can be very effective.

Even though you may be off the ice, don't forget to concentrate on body positioning and balance. Shooting power comes from several areas of your body, including your lower back, forearms and hands. It is important when you are shooting that you concentrate on keeping a tight grip on your stick so that you are in total control and can feel every movement. If your shot seems to flutter or drift off course, this usually means you're not holding your stick tight enough. By continually practicing your shots, you will increase your physical strength—as well as your confidence.

When you practice your shots, make sure you are aiming at different areas of the net. Don't just settle for coming close; continue to shoot at a certain spot until you can actually hit it. Always look at the target. Don't develop the bad habit of looking at the puck to see if it is on your stick. You should be able to feel it there without looking.

Game Goals

By using the word "goals," I am not referring to scoring, but to objectives. Before you start play, you should set objectives for yourself that will enable you to become more involved in the game. One of your goals should be to make sure that you are getting a certain amount of shots per period. For instance, at first, try to get at least three shots on net per period. Once you have obtained this standard then you can raise it. And you can also assess how successful these shots were. Do you need to work on your accuracy? Your power? Your ability to capitalize on rebounds?

Another game goal is generating scoring confidence. Don't let the thought of scoring overwhelm you to the point of frustration. Have faith in your ability. Let the scoring chances come to you. By this I mean don't forget about your own style of play and sacrifice a team victory for personal glory. Remember, hockey is a team sport, and scoring goals should be a team effort and not an individual one.

Positioning

Your on-ice positioning can greatly affect your ability to score. There are certain areas of the offensive zone that are "hot," which means they are prime scoring areas. If you find yourself in one of the "hot zones," don't be satisfied and just stand there, keep your feet constantly moving and your stick on the ice so that you can shoot quickly. By constantly moving, you are making it harder to be defended and also making it easier for a teammate to pass to you. Once you gain possession of the puck, no matter where you are in the offensive zone, you must focus on driving to the net. I am not suggesting that you don't pass the puck, but by driving to the net you are forcing the defensive player to either play you or allow you to get to the net uncontested. If the defensive player does decide to play you, then you want to look for an open teammate; if not continue to drive to the net for a shot.

Closer isn't always better. You don't want to be right on top of the goaltender since that will eliminate your shooting angle. It is better to shoot from further out for numerous reasons: you have more areas of the net to shoot at; you may be able to catch the goalie off-balance; and the chance of a rebound or tip-in is greater from further out.

Variety

Changing your shot selection will keep your opponents guessing and will allow you to maintain the upper hand in the offensive zone. Your shot selection should include the backhand shot and wrist shot, which are two shots that are often neglected. These two shots have the capability, if performed properly, of surprising the goalie because of the quickness of and the difficulty in tracking each shot.

Quick Release

While you are in the offensive zone and in scoring position, you should be constantly prepared to shoot and shoot quickly. This is done by keeping your head up so that you are aware of the goalie's position in the net and all possible shooting angles. As soon as the puck reaches your stick you should be ready to shoot. It doesn't mean that you have to shoot right away. This is where you must use judgment in deciding if the opportunity calls for a quick shot or if you have time to carry the puck in for a better shooting angle.

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