



Shoot to score!

By Bill Ferguson

Don't look at the goalie -- look and shoot at the holes. ©BBS

Everyone knows you can't score without shooting. But how, and when should you shoot? Sometimes the situation will be clear and you'll just react. Other times you'll need to think and make a quick decision. The problem is, in that split-second it takes you to think and decide, your opportunity may be past. That's why you should think about shooting—how to shoot, when to shoot, and different ways of shooting—before you even step on the ice. That way, you can combine a thoughtful approach to your game with the instincts it takes to light the lamp regularly.

Here are some tips to keep in mind as you dream about leading your league in scoring. But throughout it all, perhaps the most important thing to do is think like a goal scorer. Practice your shot, and expect results.

Shoot for the holes.

See the goalie when you shoot, but don't look at him. Look at the "holes" he's leaving in his coverage of the net. You don't score on the goalie, you score on the net. Don't be too concerned with what the goalie does, look at what he's not doing. See the obvious, then decide on your shot placement.

Shoot with your head up.

Anyone who buries his or her head when shooting has no chance to adjust to what the goalie does. Once a good goalie sees you lower your eyes he knows you won't make any more changes, and he can easily adjust before you shoot. Don't be so predictable.

Shoot before you're ready.

If you wait until you have everything perfect before you shoot, you are again giving the goalie all the time he needs to adjust. Try shooting a stride early and you'll fool a lot of goalies. This takes practice, so work on it and you will find that you can get off a good shot much quicker than you ever thought possible.

Shoot from outside.

Most beginners want to carry the puck right to the goalmouth before shooting. But this reduces your angle and opportunity, and often allows the goalie to make an easy save. Eighty-five percent of all goals are

scored from 15-to-20 feet out. Force the goalie to come up with the spectacular saves by shooting when the advantage is with the shooter, not the goalie.

Pick the pipes.

The hardest shot in the world won't go through a goalie. It's better to take a little off your shot if it allows you to place it where you want it, which should be just inside the post. Likewise, learn to place your shots low and inside the pipe, as well as high and just under the crossbar. Vary your shots and drive those goalies nuts!

Get the tips.

Deflections, or tip-ins, are not glamour shots, but they're the most difficult shots for a goalie to stop. Just when he gets set to make the save you change the direction of the shot, thus changing the angle he must cover. Practice deflections with your linemates or defensemen. And remember, it's your job to "get a stick on their shot," not just watch them blast it in. Again, it may be necessary for them to take a little off their shot to make the perfect tip in.

Use your backhand.

It's the second toughest shot for a goalie to stop, because he never knows where it's going or when it's coming off the stick. You can go high, low or even from post to post with very little adjustment on your backhand. It's also a great shot for breakaways, because if you go side-to-side on the goalie, he must go with you. Once he strides to cover the other post, go backhand 5-hole and reap the rewards.

Shoot low.

Most top shooters learned long ago that a goalie can make up for a lot of bad positioning with a good glove and blocker. He can tempt you to shoot to his strong side, and it's hard to resist, but the goalie who doesn't cover well low is out of position. Try shooting low, hard, right inside the pipe and watch your totals jump!

Rip the net.

A prolific goal scorer told me years ago that his secret to scoring was to try to tear out the back of the net on every shot. It's like the martial arts philosophy: don't strike your target, strike *through* your target. If you think about it, there is only one instance when you may not want to shoot your hardest—when going for a tip-in. On every other shot, tear the twine!

Change the Angle.

The best goalies in the world anticipate your shot, get set, then make the save look easy. How do you beat them? Change the angle! Fake that shot after the goalie is set, take one more stride, and unless the goalie is one of the best you will make him look silly. Once the goalie is set for a shot, it takes at least a second or two for him to reset. That's your margin of error, and if you put your shot just inside the far pipe it should go in. |