

Puck Handling And Puck Protection

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Next to skating, puck handling may be the most important skill you need. The ability to maneuver with a puck in the open ice or in traffic is a skill that everyone can improve upon.



Tip #1

Keep your hands away from your body when handling the puck. This will allow you a full range of motion. If you keep your hands in tight, your head is likely to be down looking at the puck. It also limits your reach.

Tip #2

Keep your head up and use your peripheral vision to watch the puck and what's happening around you. If you're constantly looking down at the puck, you're not likely to have it long. You'll lose it to an opponent, or you could get your bell rung. Keep your head up to survey the ice for teammates, open ice and opponents.



Tip #3

Less is more when it comes to skating through the neutral zone with the puck. When you're skating in open ice, push the puck ahead on your forehand. This will allow you to skate faster and be ready to pass or shoot quicker. You don't need to over-handle the puck; it could slow you down.

Tip #4

Use your body to protect the puck. This is especially important in tight areas, such as in the corners or in front of the net where there's a lot of traffic.



Tip #5

Some of the best drills to improve your puck handling and puck protection skills are games we've all played on the pond, blacktop or rink. Playing 1-on-1 or 1-on-2 keep away will help you learn to maneuver in tight spaces with the puck while keeping your body between the puck and your opponent.

Another good game is musical pucks, which is similar to musical chairs. Start out with 10 skaters and eight pucks. On the first whistle, eight players skate around with a puck, practicing puck handling and puck protection while the other two try to take the puck away. On the second whistle play stops. Anyone without a puck is out. Take two more pucks away and keep going until there's only one puck left.

Remember This ...

Did you ever wonder why so many soccer players have good hockey skills? It's because they use their feet as an extension of their stick. Don't get happy feet when a pass is in your skates. Learn to deaden the puck as it hits your skate blade and guide it up to your stick. This is a great skill to work on in practice.

photo by Dave Sandford