



How do I get better at stickhandling?

By Lance Pitlick

I get asked all the time by parents how their player can get better at handling the puck? Generally, they say their son or daughter can skate very well, but put a puck on their stick and things change in a hurry.

If you think about NHL players, most can skate like the wind, but what truly separates the good from the great are those that can handle the puck like it's glued to their stick. To become better at stickhandling, there are a few things you have to understand.

Stickhandling is all about learning movement patterns that include dribbling, expansion of reach, toe control, cupping exercise and planned moves, fakes or dekes. What you are trying to do is create a permanent motor program in your brain so the patterns become automatic and happen naturally without much thought.

Unfortunately, the hardest thing to get players to do when learning something new is to slow down and focus on proper form and technique, resulting in a wrong permanent motor program. We live in an instant gratification society. Want a certain song, go to iTunes and you get it. Have a question about something, Google it.

Getting better at stickhandling is different. It takes years to get to the point where it becomes or looks effortless. Studies have indicated that it takes 10 years or 10,000 hours of extensive practice to excel in anything.

The problem lies in the fact that most on-ice practices focus very little on developing stickhandling skills, resulting in players having to figure it out for themselves, and in an off-ice environment. Setting up your own at-home dry-land stickhandling and shooting area in your garage or basement has never been easier. Flooring tiles, shooting tarps, off-ice stickhandling balls and pucks, SweetHands and pass returners are available at Sports World or www.sweethockey.com.

As far as stickhandling goes, I would highly recommend checking out OnlineStickhandling at sweethockeytraining.com. There are three different 10-week program offerings that teach players online, via streaming video, what to do.

Once signed up, players will have access to weekly stickhandling homework assignments or lesson plans. Each drill on the plan will have a video that explains in detail and then demonstrates the exercise. Players watch the videos, print off the plan and start practicing.

All you need is an area to practice, your gloves, stick, ball or puck and access to the internet. The programs are iTouch-, iPhone- and iPad-friendly. Practice can be done at times that work with each player's schedule. Assignments take roughly 20-25 minutes to complete and are recommended to do 3-4 times per week.

If you want to get better at stickhandling, the products and programs are available. You just have to commit to getting better. What are you doing to separate yourself from the rest?

Thanks and have a Sweet Hockey Day!

For more information on tools to help your stickhandling, Sports World USA in Eden Prairie is the place to go. Contact Sports World USA in Eden Prairie at 952-937-9341.

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