

DEVELOPING GAME INTELLIGENCE IN ICE HOCKEY

The development of intellectual capacities of youth and adult hockey players is still in its infancy, largely due to the authoritarian teaching style preferred by the vast majority of trainers and coaches when they shape and coach their players. The frequent instructions and warnings that the players receive before a game and during it via the touch-line are not good enough to take our ice hockey to the highest level.

The only way to improve the standard of our ice hockey in the medium and long term is to, among other things, start a systematic development of thinking and tactical awareness from a very early age with the emphasis on a progressive stimulation of their perceptive and intellectual capacities. As the player's puck skills get better and better he should also perfect his knowledge and thinking, not only developing his muscles and tendons but also his brain.

It is well known that practicing, experimenting and observing gives any child a wide variety of different experiences. Going one step further by using and interpreting these experiences leads to a correct behavior pattern when faced with different situations both in life and in ice hockey. But if nobody guides the child and helps him to interpret these experiences he has lived he will never reach his full potential, physically or intellectually. He needs the experience of an adult, to offer words of advice and show examples. This is not only true for everything the child experiences in life in general (for example in school or with the family), but also as far as the development of his tactical thinking and performance in ice hockey is concerned.

As soon as possible, depending on the technical level of the player, all youngsters should be exposed during training to simplified games to gain first-hand knowledge and tactical experiences about the correct way to acquire tactical habits. The more knowledge the youngster acquires the better! But subjective experiences alone are not enough! The acquisition of experiences and knowledge is much better when it is a result of a well-proven pedagogical process where the coach, uses questions and example demonstrations to bring the experiences and knowledge to life, making them clearly understood. Stimulation, encouragement or advice, an explanation or demonstration by the coach, together with the appropriate number of repetitions of the same situation in the game and subsequently transferring this solution to other similar situations that also occur in a game forms a solid foundation in the young ice hockey player's mind on which he can continue building and developing his intelligence in the game. Intelligence is developed in a global way in the game of hockey using a series of technical-tactical games such as 3 v 1, 2 v 1 or 3 v 2 because in this way each player has a series of problems to resolve depending on the specific simplified game. A program of games progressing in difficulty and complexity develops the youngster's tactical thinking and awareness step by step until he has a variety of solutions for every given situation that confronts him in the game. It doesn't matter if the solution is thanks to the repetition of a similar situation in training or due to a piece of spontaneity. The important thing is that the player was able to read the situation and resolve the problem successfully.

The ability to quickly and efficiently vary a previously learned skill is only possible when the player has been exposed to a systematic development of his intellectual capacity from a very early age right through to when he reaches the highest level, thus improving his perceptive capacity, which is a vital requirement for any player who hopes to go a long way in the game.

Good perception, followed by a correct interpretation of the situation in the game and the ability to make good decisions culminating in a good technical execution of the selected move are prerequisites needed to be focused on over

a period of years in order to raise the standard of a player's game.
"Nothing has a bigger influence on how a game develops than the

ice hockey intelligence of those taking part"

What is intelligence in ice hockey?

Often, the difference between one hockey player or another is the level of intelligence he demonstrates in his game. To get intelligent players on the rink the coaches need to stimulate more and instruct less. Learning the motor skills should be complemented with a cognitive education in order to achieve a soccer-training of any note.

Intelligent players frequently ask questions and quickly learn from their mistakes. They quickly see a variety of solutions to any problem they face on the rink, not only the safe possibility but also the dangerous options. They don't usually lose focus until they have resolved the situation.

Intelligent play is:

- taking better decisions more quickly,
- knowing how to correctly perceive and understand the situation in the game thanks to knowledge and experience gained beforehand,
- associating a situation to many others like it in order to take the correct decision that mentally resolves the problem taking place in the game at that moment,
- knowing how to execute the move you have thought of to resolve the problem quickly

Apart from being able to 'read' the situation in the game, an intelligent player can anticipate how the play is likely to develop thanks to the information previously processed. The ability to anticipate, which is always the result of good perception and decision making is a significant tool for intelligent players. This skill works best when the technical skills have been learned, consolidated and automated during the training process, allowing the player to give his full concentration to the problem in hand by looking up and thinking quickly and intelligently about his next move. The development and automation of technical skills and tactical awareness is achieved via a modern training program using simplified games to help achieve both aims at the same time.

An intelligent player stands out not only because he can adapt to the ever changing situations in the game but also because he has a great deal of intellectual flexibility as he analyses and takes into account a variety of factors: his opponent, the referee and his teammates. Intelligence is acquired and learned. Nobody is born with it!

An intelligent player:

- . moves the puck at pace and when necessary is able to breathe new life into the game
- . is never rushed and feels secure and confident when performing a particular move anywhere on the rink. He controls all the space around him, in front, behind, each side and inside with his eyes and his movements. He knows how to take full advantage of both very limited space and wide-open spaces! He always appears to have plenty of time. He does not rush and do things too quickly because he knows that this tends to produce errors.
- . always tries to achieve a balance between taking risks and safety. Too big a risk could mean losing the puck or even the match, whilst playing it too safe rarely helps turn the match in your favor. He is brave enough to take risks as he does not lack courage!
- . knows that things do not always come off. This is why his performance level rarely dips after making a mistake or mistakes.

- . knows when and where to pass the puck or when it is better to keep possession himself.
 - . has good spatial awareness knowing exactly how much there is between him and his teammates and the opposition thanks to years of experience and training session with more or less simplified games that have given him a high level of visual awareness and appreciation coupled with an ability for good decision-making.
 - . keeps it simple. Only a top quality player can play it simple.
 - . uses his ability to create for the benefit of the team and he knows that his teammates benefit from it.
 - . knows what he is going to do with the puck before he even receives and controls it.
 - . knows how best to play off the puck, constantly making himself available for his teammates and offers possible solutions for all types of situations to benefit the team's play.
 - . only does what is within his capabilities.
 - . knows how to pace himself throughout a game. His experience allows him to make appropriate decisions such as when to run or when it is a waste of energy.
- . is not affected by stress, knowing that a lot of stress tends to affect perception and has a negative impact on decision making. This explains why sometimes top players do not make a positive contribution during decisive matches. The pressure nullifies their usually intelligent play!

"A varied and progressive training program with simplified games or games for a specific purpose is the best way to develop and improve intelligence in hockey step by step "