

50 Ways To Improve Your Game!

by Greg Siller - Pro Learning Systems

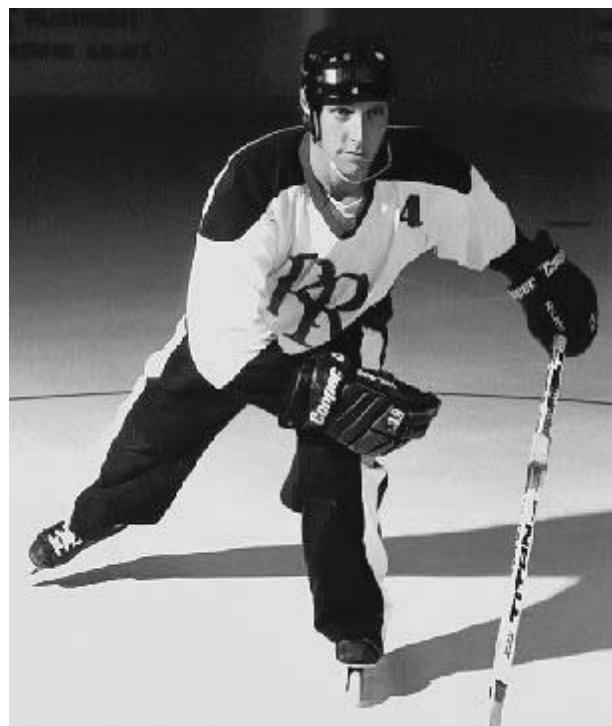
As the ability of roller hockey players improves with each passing season; it is important that you periodically evaluate your game to make sure that you are not only playing well; you're improving. I have compiled several techniques covered in my book *Roller Hockey: Skills And Strategies For Winning On Wheels* that will help you improve your game! If you don't want the competition to pass you by, put these techniques into action.

Equipment

- **Choose The Right Stick.** Choosing your stick should be based not only on how it is manufactured (wood/fiberglass, aluminum, composite) but on how it feels in your hands. It is very important to choose a stick that feels right and is correct for your skating and stickhandling style. Factors to consider when selecting your stick include weight, shaft thickness, shaft flexure, length, blade curvature, and lie. A good rule of thumb for proper stick length is to place the stick upright in front of your body with the toe of the blade resting on the floor. With skates on, an appropriate length occurs when the end of the shaft reaches just below your chin (or your nose while not on skates).
- **Select The Right Wheels.** The right wheels give you the skating control you need to maneuver around the playing surface. Your skating style will determine which wheels are best for you; but make sure that you have a harder wheel (i.e., 81A - 86A durometer) for a rougher playing surface and a softer wheel (i.e., 76A - 81A) for the smoother/slicker playing surfaces. Generally, the harder wheels are faster and the softer wheels grip the surface better.

Skating

- **Work Your Stride.** Bill Zebley, a Southern California skating instructor, believes that one skating technique every player can improve on is the stride. To become as efficient as possible and increase speed, players need to adequately bend their knees prior to each leg extension and return their skates to the center position following the leg extension. These two techniques will ensure maximum distance with each leg thrust, which is a major contributor to efficiency and speed.
- **Drive With A Mental Edge.** Extra drive or desire comes from the fact that you have developed confidence in your ability to push the skating envelope and take your skating ability further than you have before. One or two extra steps on most defenders will allow you to create many exciting scoring opportunities.



Stickhandling

- **Feel Your Way To The Net.** A player who has the ability to control and manipulate the puck quickly, accurately, and consistently by feel is said to have soft hands. All great puck handlers have soft hands. When maneuvering with the puck toward the net, feel your way while looking up and

evaluating your options.

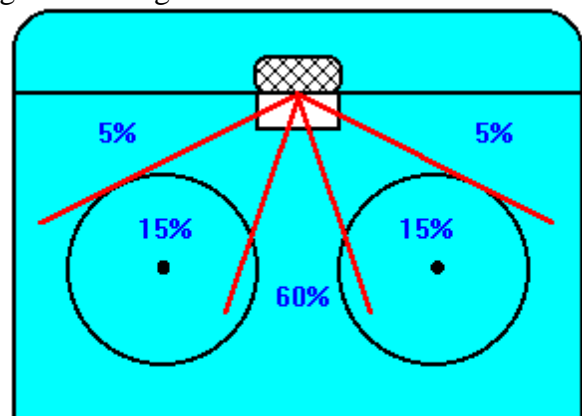
- **Improve Your Puck Control In Traffic.** Skating with the puck, in traffic, is one of the most difficult skills. By working to improve this ability, you will be able to consistently move past your opponents and in on net for scoring opportunities.

Passing/Receiving

- **Don't Give Away Your Pass.** Telegraphing your pass (looking directly at your receiver prior to passing) gives away the puck. Telegraphing a pass when your receiver is in traffic allows your teammate and your opponent to know where your pass is going. A good idea before making a pass is to read the defensive coverage and then react with a deceptive move to confuse the defenders. Use your peripheral vision to not give away your receiver (or the puck).
- **Pass To Score!** Passing the puck across the goal crease to a teammate is an excellent way to score. Since a puck can move faster than a goaltender, getting the puck quickly to the open teammate will usually leave the goaltender out of position to make a save. By the time the goaltender moves across the crease, the shot is already in the net and you've just added a notch to the scoreboard.
- **Move To Receive.** A receiver's job is to locate open space on the playing surface to receive a pass. By moving to an unoccupied location, you provide the passer with an all important option.
- **Pass To Yourself.** When you are skating with the puck near a defender (and the boards), use the bank pass to move around the defender and toward your offensive zone.

Shooting

- **Shoot The Puck!** If you don't shoot, you won't score; it's just that simple. Whatever you do during a game, make sure that your team takes at least 20 shots before the final buzzer (30 or 40 would be better).
- **Always Look For Rebounds.** Get into the habit of following in on a shot to take advantage of any rebounds. Each shot is really a potential one-two punch; the initial shot and the rebound. The average goaltender allows many rebounds, especially from low shots. If you follow in quickly, these rebounds can be turned into additional scoring opportunities.
- **Too Close For Comfort.** Many roller hockey players have a habit of moving in too close as possible to the goaltender before they shoot because they believe that they need to be as close to the net to score. This habit is probably the number one reason why scoring opportunities are missed, since it allows the goaltender added time to react. By staying out far enough from the goaltender, you can raise your goal scoring average. Most goals are scored from between 5 to 25 feet out, and directly in front of the net; with the majority of those goals coming from between 10 to 15 feet out.
- **What Location Do You Shoot From?** To improve your goal scoring stature, get into a high percentage scoring location before you shoot. The associated figure shows position and percentage information of typical goal scoring locations. Approximately sixty percent of goals are scored from the middle slot, 30% (15% on each side) of goals are scored from the area of the face-off circles, and 10% (5% on each side) of goals are scored from the extreme angles between the lower portion of the face-off circle and the goal line. The moment you get the puck and have a chance to score, you should get into a high percentage scoring position. Once in a good position, the odds start to swing in your favor and against the goaltender.
- **Just Fake It.** The fake shot is an excellent deceptive move to use on any team a couple of times a game and provides you with an opportunity to move in closer to the net for a higher percentage



scoring opportunity. The fake slap shot is the most effective due to the large wind up required. As you take your stick back and then forward, stop it just before it contacts the puck. Move the puck around the defender and toward the net for your real chance to score.

- **Study The Opposing Goaltender.** Shooters should study opposing goaltenders at every opportunity in order to determine weak and strong points. The goaltender should be watched carefully during the pre-game warm-up and as play progresses. When sitting on the bench, you can learn a lot about the opposing goaltender (and teammates) if you watch carefully. Most players just watch the game and fail to look for information they can use to their advantage the next time they are on the playing surface. When studying a goaltender, think about the following points and use the information gained to improve your scoring chances: Does he go down to the playing surface often and what moves get him down there? Is he good with his glove/blocker? Is he better to one side (stick side or glove side)? Does he give rebounds off his stick, skates, or pads? Does he stay in his goal or come out to cut off the angle? Does he keep his legs together or apart?
- **Play The Percentages.** Great scorers do more than just shoot the puck in the direction of the goal, they pick their spots. Factor in the following percentages when deciding where to shoot. On average, 70% of goals are scored below knee level, with more goals going in on the goaltenders stick side (60%) than on his glove side (30%). The top corners should not be neglected, since many times the goaltender is sprawled across the playing surface, leaving the upper corners open. Use this information during practices to hone your goal scoring prowess.

Defense

- **Play The Percentages - Part 2.** Playing the percentages means forcing shots from an angle rather than directly in front of the net. It also means forcing shots from far out rather than close in. If a shot is going to be taken, give your goaltender a fighting chance to stop it.
- **Play Each 2-On-1 As A 2-On-2.** When playing this scenario, the defenseman should always remember two things; play the pass and utilize your goaltender as a second defenseman to play the shooter. This will increase your teams odds at stopping the attack.
- **King Of The Slot.** There is one location on the playing surface where your defensive dominance will be continuously tested throughout the game; the slot. Your opponents are trying to get into that scoring location while you try to protect that area. Become a king and play to win all battles in the slot.
- **Give Your Stick A Workout.** Use your stick to strip the puck away from opponents and prevent them from scoring. The stick is one of the most valuable assets a defenseman has to keep a defender from acquiring or maintaining control of the puck. If you have given your stick a workout each game, you know that you've done a good job.
- **Get Your Defense Involved In Your Offense.** Roller hockey requires at least one defenseman to participate in the offense to provide effective puck control (possession) and add scoring opportunities. Do this by skating the puck up the playing surface and providing options to both forwards when the play is in the offensive zone.



Forwards

- **Protect That Puck.** During many offensive attacks, it is necessary to protect the puck from a defender in order to move in on net and set up a scoring opportunity. That means using your stick or

body to keep a defender from stealing your puck.

- **Test The Goaltender.** During the beginning of the game, shoot the puck at various locations on the goaltender. This will give you information about how the goaltender handles certain shots and where he gives up rebounds. Once you know the goaltenders strong and weak areas, use that information to put plenty of quality shots on net and get any rebounds that come your way.
- **Work Behind The Net.** When the puck is behind the net, two things occur; 1) the goaltender is in an awkward position to defend his net, with his eyes focused on the puck carrier behind him and his body facing the front/side of the rink, and 2) there is a concentration of players near the net, creating traffic and confusion for the goaltender. Use that space behind the net wisely to create many unique offensive opportunities.
- **Screen The Goaltender.** If the goaltender's view of a shot is blocked, you've just reduced his overall effectiveness and increased your overall scoring chance. Utilize a moving or stationary forward as a screen to improve your teams scoring punch.
- **Defensive Forwards.** An effective forward is always going to be a two-way player. When your team loses control of the puck, forwards should position themselves to regain the puck. In your offensive zone, forechecking adds the right defensive pressure. In your defensive zone, backchecking is a must.

Goaltenders

- **Develop An Effective Stance.** Proper stance provides the foundation for a goaltender to stop any shot. By correctly positioning your body, arms, legs, and head; you will be able to maintain proper balance and cover the maximum net area.
- **Stamina And Strength Are Crucial.** Unlike other members of a roller hockey team who can rest between shifts, a goaltender is out there for the entire game. Being able to move quickly, powerfully, and efficiently, for an entire game, are essential requirements for any aspiring goaltender.
- **Know Where You Are At All Times.** If a goaltender is going to cover the maximum amount of net area, he must always know where he is in relation to the net. Use your stick or gloves to tap the goal posts when you are close to the net. When you out from the crease, use reference points on the playing surface or boards to help pinpoint your location.
- **Play The Puck Not The Shooter.** A goaltender must always align himself with the puck and the net to cover the maximum amount of net. Beginning goaltenders sometimes center themselves on the shooter's body, creating an additional scoring area for the shooter.
- **Behind The Net.** The only time a goaltender does not face the play (align the front of his body with the puck) is when the puck goes behind the net. Keep your body close to one of the posts and facing toward the boards; using your turned head to follow the puck. If the puck is passed to the slot, you are already in position to face the shooter.
- **Work The Rebound.** Prior to any shot, the goaltender must read the location of all opponents near the net. This will provide the goaltender with the information necessary to direct rebounds away from the net as well as potential scorers.



Individuals

- **Watch The Pros Do It;** that means both on television and at the rink. The pros (or a strong amateur team) can provide you with some very effective ideas. Watch and learn!
- **Develop Your Confidence.** Confidence is fundamental to playing the game of roller hockey. If you are going to excel at this game, you must have confidence in yourself and believe that you can play well against any opponent. To recognize an opportunity is one thing, but to consistently capitalize on those opportunities requires confidence.
- **Study The Sport.** Read roller hockey books such as Roller Hockey: Skills And Strategies For Winning On Wheels, watch instructional videos such as Shooting & Stickhandling, and subscribe to magazines like Roller Hockey to keep up-to-date on news, products, and skills.
- **Attend A Hockey School Or Clinic.** Give yourself a quick shot of roller hockey instruction at a hockey school or clinic. The time, effort, and money invested should pay dividends in your ability to become a better overall player.
- **Know The Rules.** Rules define the game of roller hockey. If you know the rules, you understand one major facet of the game. Use your knowledge of the rules to play within the boundaries and stay out of the penalty box.
- **Use Video Equipment.** A way for good players to become excellent players is to view their performance on video. Have a parent or coach videotape you (and your team) during the next practice or game. After you (and your coach/team) view the tape, identify specific areas for future improvement and work on those areas the next time you are on skates.

Teams

- **Know Your Opponent.** A well prepared team knows what to expect from the opposition. To progress to the next level of roller hockey, make a point of learning the various moves and play patterns of your opponents, including the forwards, defense, and goaltender(s) and exchange this information with your teammates. Use this information to exploit your opponents weaknesses to give you that edge.
- **Intensity Versus Patience.** Creating opportunities requires a balance of patience and intensity. Strive to play aggressively and intensely while maintaining discipline and control; it is a double edged sword, but it is the best way to create opportunities
- **Use Game Statistics To Increase Your Opportunities.** During a game, the coach can identify "hot" players or instruct the team to shoot more frequently or from higher percentage scoring locations. Over a period of several games, statistics can show trends which will help the team improve its overall effectiveness.
- **Improve Your Scoring While On The Bench.** Spend time after each shift talking about your effectiveness and sharing information about opposing players. Discuss what's working, what isn't, and what you should try on your next shift to improve your play. Knowing your line's strengths and weaknesses as well as your opponent's, and developing your game around them, is critical to the success of any team.
- **Improve Your Face-Off Win Percentage.** Winning face-offs equates to puck possession and puck possession equates to scoring opportunities. This is especially true in your offensive end. Techniques used to win face-offs are: 1) Be quicker than your opponent. This requires you to watch the official's hand to get the best possible jump. 2) Play the center's stick to ensure that he doesn't win the draw, and then play the puck. 3) Physically tie up the opposing center and then use your skate to move the puck to a teammate.
- **Defined Plays With Improvisation.** By practicing defined plays, your team will create a better organized attack than with just an ad-lib attack, all things being equal. By working on these plays, teams develop the confidence and ability to improvise on the defined plays when different situations arise.

- **Read, React, And Anticipate.** These three components refer to the ability of a player or players to perceive the play around them and to respond appropriately. These skills are required during all phases of the game to regain control of the puck when you are on defense and to create scoring opportunities when you are on offense. Developing these skills doesn't come from careful planning but from plenty of practice and experience.
- **Create Opportunities Without The Puck.** What you do when you don't have the puck is just as important as what you do with it. Improve your team's chances for scoring by giving the puck carrier options. That may require you to move into position to receive a pass, head to the net for a possible rebound or deflection, or force a defender away from the puck carrier.

Coaches

- **Realize That Coaching Takes Time.** Being an effective coach requires time; time to select your players and get to know them, time to shape those individuals into a team, and time to help your team perform and improve during every practice and game. Realizing, up-front, that you will be spending plenty of time with your team will help ensure that you plan for that time and make it available.
- **Talk With Your Players Frequently.** A good coach is a leader. As a leader, players (and parents) look to you for guidance and information. Provide this guidance and information through frequent exchanges of information. Let players know whether they are performing to their potential, what they are doing well, and what needs improvement. Giving your players feedback ensures that they have the opportunity to improve.
- **Plan To Win.** Just as each coach asks his or her players to be prepared during the season, you should also be prepared by properly planning out the season. For a coach to be effective, he has to plan, and many times anticipate, all activities involving the team. Plan to succeed and you will be rewarded with a smoother road to victory.

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