



INTRO:

I often get asked what makes a great hockey player so I wanted to put together a short presentation of the things you need to be thinking about if you are looking to improve your game.

In this document I will share with you the **“8 steps to becoming a better hockey player”** which will help you to reach the next level in your hockey.

If you follow my advice I guarantee it will help take your performance to another level just like it has helped all the hockey players that I have worked with around the world. You will start to get you noticed by coaches and selectors and you will take a step closer to achieving your hockey dreams.

The one defining factor between those that will benefit from this and those that won't is that... only a small percentage of people will **TAKE ACTION** on the advice that I give (i.e. only 3%) so don't let that be you!

There is no point going through this if you don't have an open mind and are not prepared to make some shifts to your training to improve as a player.

Who is this for? Hockey players that:

- really want to improve their game
- aspire to be the best that they can be
- want to be noticed by others or prove to themselves what they can do
- hope to be selected for a particular team
- maybe have dreams of being an international one day

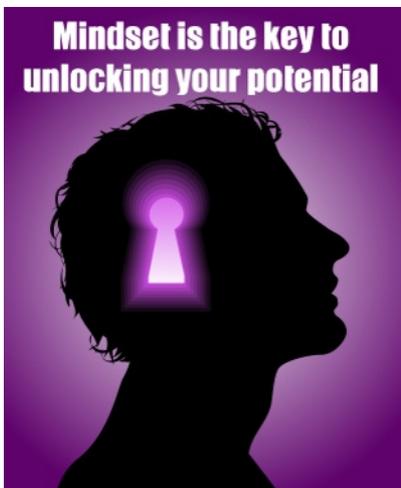
Now I have cleared that up, let's get straight into it...

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There is often not a major difference between international players and those that could have made it - we are all human, we all have one brain, one set of lungs and a couple of eyes. Often the biggest difference is **what is happening in the mind**.

Most people don't realise that we all have what it takes to get to 4th place, just short of success but most people will give up just before they are about to reach their goals. It is those that realise that when things start to get tough then that is the time to really dig deep and find that extra bit of effort as most people will start to fall away and it is those that hang on that will make it to the next level.



There are a lot of factors in being a good sports person but mindset is probably the single most important one of them all. You may be the most skilful player in the world but if you don't know how to **control your mind, manage your thoughts and stay calm under pressure** then how can you expect to be able to perform when it really counts. The **fear of making mistakes** is huge for most people as well as knowing how to deal with **frustration**, setbacks, injury and how to stay focused.

I remember when I was young super star sports people always said on the tv - my advice to young people is to "**Believe in yourself**" and I never really fully understood what they meant by this until I started studying the brain and learn't **how to believe in yourself**. It is the thing we need most but yet hardly anyone knows how to do it.

Confidence is another major part of having the right mindset. It has been shown in studies that it could be the single most important factor of any sport. Have you ever heard the saying that someone is a confidence player; they play well when they have confidence and they are poor when they lack confidence?

We are actually all like that and if you can learn how to **control your confidence through the power of your mind** it will help you to deal with the negative thoughts that we all get.



This is a very important point because even if you think you are mentally tough, you can always be better. If you feel like things are going your way and **if you don't feel pressure or fear then you are likely stuck in a comfort zone**. Being in your comfort zone means you are *limiting your growth*. If you are playing in a team and you are the best player and you are not improving then you need to find a better team to play in so that you can continue to grow as a player.

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If you don't know where you are going then how can you firstly, keep yourself motivated and secondly, monitor your progress?

Having clear cut goals is not something we all do, in fact most people hate setting goals in the **fear of not achieving them** or you can't be bothered to. But if you don't set goals you are not committing to anything and you are not giving yourself something to work towards.

Not only that but you want to make sure that the goals you set are **slightly beyond what you think you may be able to do**, not that they are impossible but you will have to work hard to get there.

If you don't do this then you will never grow into the player that you are probably hoping to be.

Who cares if you don't achieve your goals, you will never achieve them if you don't set any anyway. So, have the guts to set yourself goals and just go for it, you have nothing to lose.

Once you have set yourself some goals, then you need to ask yourself **what you need to do to achieve these goals**. So you want to break them down into smaller and more achievable goals.

This could be things like I need to get stronger, improve my reaction to turnover, make better decisions on the field, be more confidence, learn how to deal with pressure, etc. These are all a few examples of only some area's you could work on to improve your game and reach your goals.



Assess to progress

The important thing here is that once you have set your goals, you need things that you can assess your progress. For example in the fitness part of my training program I use various fitness assessments to assess fitness, strength, power, speed, endurance, core strength, etc so that you can track your improvements which will also help to motivate you to keep working hard. You could assess your mental ability by asking yourself important questions.

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The most common answer I get when I ask people about any core strengthening that they do is - "I do sit-up's." The bad news for these people is that **sit-up's are not the best exercise for hockey players**. In fact some studies show that they can actually be harmful for hockey players because they not only hurt your back but they also encourage the shortening of your hip flexors which is the same as what happens when you play hockey. What is the result?



Tight muscles = lack of movement, loss of speed and even worse injury.

There are so many more effective exercises that you can be doing which are more hockey specific and will transfer better to produce better results. The plank is certainly a much better exercise than situps but still the **plank it only working one plane of movement** - i.e. in a static position.

When you think of slap shot for example or a hit which are two basic skills, you are actually rotating your body and your upper and lower body are dissociated meaning your upper body is rotating while your lower body stays in the same position.

A good example of a better core exercise for hockey would be something like a woodchop, as long as it is done with the correct technique and you are using the correct muscles.

The wood chop exercise works on the rotational movement similar to hockey



So, no more situp's... from now on I want to think of all exercises as "**how is this relevant in the game of hockey**". If you don't know why you do a certain exercise then find out. I am an expert in fitness with over 10 years experience and not only that but I understand the game of hockey.

Just because someone who may be qualified in fitness tells you that you should be doing an exercise like situp's, it doesn't mean that they are right - always get advice from a professional who understands hockey and the relative movements involved in the sport.

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Strength is the foundation of your athletic ability (after mobility), turn this into power and it gives you an advantage when it comes to speed in hockey allowing you to be explosive so that you get to the ball before your opponent and make dangerous interceptions, etc.

There are a number of ways to go about training for strength and power, however in my experience I have seen all sorts of things that are not only ineffective but also quite likely to cause more harm than good, so it is important to know this and don't just follow some free program you found online. Normally if programs are free, it is likely that they are rubbish!



Not only that, let's say it is the world's best workout program (which actually doesn't exist because everyone's body is different and we all have different needs) but let's pretend you found a great exercise plan - as soon as your body adapts you will need to change the plan (i.e. exercises, rep, sets, etc) to keep making progress.

Normally your body will take anything from 4-8 weeks to adapt so each training phase should last around 4-6 weeks and should be specific to where you are in your season. If you are not qualified and do not understand the detailed design of fitness programs and

why you do certain exercises then please do not just pick exercises that you like best because this is a recipe for muscle imbalances which are likely to lead to injury.

The next point is you may have a great plan, but you also need to understand how to do the correct technique of each exercise, making sure you are using the correct muscles to execute the movement and how the exercise is going to benefit you.

The benefit of doing strength and power training is massive and I can assure you that it will get you much closer to your goals, as long as you have a good season plan with different phases and you are executing the exercises correctly. **For example, these are the phases in my training program, which result in peak performance.**



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It is all right teaching you how to be stronger and more powerful but during a certain time of year we need to transfer this strength and power not only into being faster on the field but also being able to change direction efficiently which is very important in a sport like hockey.

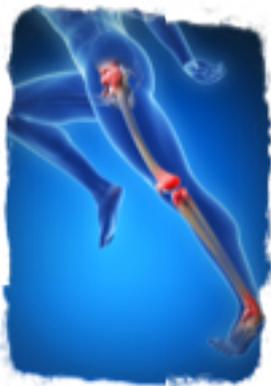
Often when I ask people if they do any fitness or speed work at all they often answer by either saying no or they will say yes I go for a jog sometimes or I do some intervals. Firstly, **going for a jog is not going to get you fitter for hockey**, because when do you ever just jog leisurely throughout a hockey game.

Doing intervals is better than just going for a jog but firstly, **do you monitor your progress**, secondly are you **“sprinting” for too long?** Even 30 seconds may be too long, think of when you go to intercept a ball. An all out 100% of our effort can only last in the region of about 6-10 seconds. If you are sprinting for 30 seconds that is not an all out effort, that is probably about 80-90%. If you give 80% effort to win a ball you probably won't get in front of your player will you?



**100% EFFORT LASTS
6-10 SECS MAX**

Before you even start sprinting to get faster there are some key things that you must do or else there is a high risk of injury which I have also seen a lot of in the past. **If you have muscle imbalances or weaknesses then you must fix these first.** Weak muscles surrounding major joints such as the ankles, knees and hips are likely to get injured if they are not strong enough.



Muscles with limited mobility (which is similar but not quite the same as flexibility) will also restrict you from being as fast as you can. This is a whole other topic on its own.

Onto my next point, if you want to get faster you can make a major improvement just by changing a few small things, it could be as simple as knowing where to place your foot or the firing the right muscles to turn away quickly, etc.

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One of the biggest things I have noticed in hockey is the ability of those who are able to change direction quickly. Most of the time it is the ability to **stop quicker than most and change into any random direction**. There are so many technical points to doing this effectively so that you can get from point A to point B in the quickest time possible.



If you are already a fast player then you can still be working to improve your speed to really maximise your genetic gift and become even faster and if you have never been fast then you should also be working on your speed too so that you don't get left behind and you have the best chance at keeping up.

Speed can be taught and as far as all the coaches I have come across, they all seem to agree that **speed is king** in sport because it poses a dangerous threat to opposition teams.

SPEED CAN BE TAUGHT
SPEED IS KING!

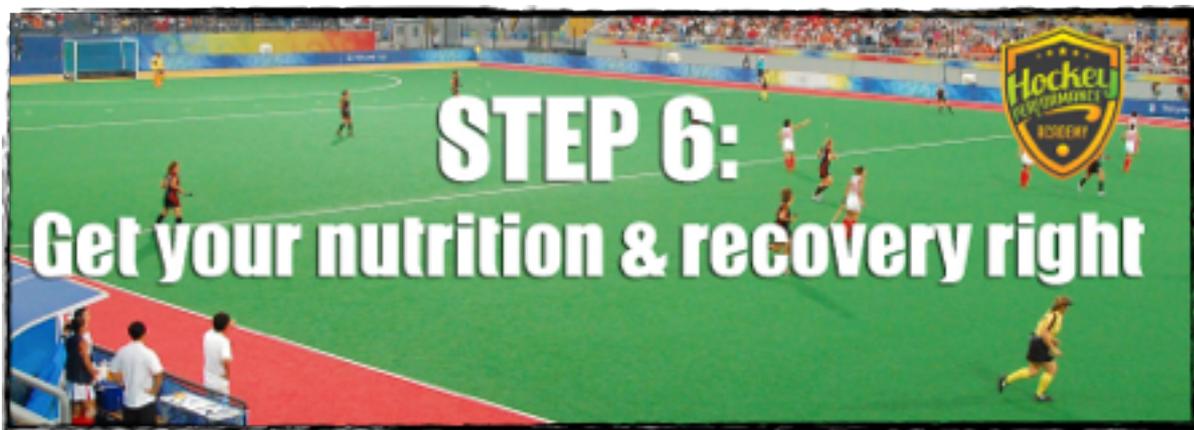
Now when I talk about speed training, **I am not talking about doing loads of sprints in a short amount of time here, that is conditioning**. Any fool can tell you how to get tired and work yourself into the ground.

Speed training is about **training the key muscles to get stronger, learning the techniques of how to run faster, how to slow down and how to change direction in the most efficient way** to get you from A to B in the quickest time.

There are a lot of small things that don't take a lot of time that you can be doing to get faster because you may think you are fast compared with your team mates now but **imagine how much faster you could be** which you might just need when you start playing at a higher level.



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Let's face it, we all know what food is good and what is bad, most of the time anyway. Most of us like junk food, sweets, chocolate, crisps, biscuits, cookies, etc and I am not here to say you shouldn't be eating these because well I enjoy them too, we are all human. The important thing is recognising **when you can have them and when you really should be avoiding them.**

Nutrition is not always as simple as you think though, there are various variations of foods such as fat free, low fat, sugar free, low gi, gluten free, free range, organic, etc. **What should you be eating?** Well that depends on a number of factors.



Things you need to consider are **what to eat** before a game and **how soon before I play?** Should I have anything at half time, if so, what? What should I eat after and how soon after? What drink is best to consume during a game for optimum performance and how much should I be drinking? These are all common questions that I get all the time. Honestly, I could spend all week talking to you about nutrition because that is how complex it can be.



The important thing is that you understand **what you should be eating when based on timings**, for example if you only have 1 hour to eat before a game you shouldn't have a big meal with slow digesting foods, instead you should opt for something that has a balance of getting into your system quickly but will also give you enough energy to sustain throughout the game. For example a fresh fruit smoothie with a scoop of protein powder is a good option for an on-the-run meal before a game. But, ideally you should be eating **2-3 hours before your game** as long as you are eating the right balance of foods that will give you enough energy throughout the game.

Nutrition can affect decision making

Believe it or not but nutrition & recovery can also affect your decision making because food is a basic need for us as humans and if you are not eating enough or you eating too much then it will be affecting your performance because your brain will be using up energy instead of just your muscles. So it is a really crucial to make sure you get your nutrition right.

Recovery is also often overlooked but there are various strategies which you can implement which will help you to recover from game to game. You would be very surprised at how it could affect your next game. There is a very fine line between training hard and overtraining so it is important that you manage your schedule and allow for enough recovery in the form of rest, sleep and taking your mind off hockey too. These are the just basics.

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The next point is one that people don't always think of as performance but I will explain why it is a very important factor. Often some of the best players in teams are the ones that are able to see passes and know when to shoot and when to pass. We would sometimes call it *good decision making* but often **decisions are made in split seconds based on how much information is available to your brain at that time**. How can you make sure that your brain has enough information available to it to make the right decision?



One way is to **train your eyes**. **Your eyes are your path to your brain**, the more you can see not only in front of you but also on the corner of your eye the more information your brain has to make an unconscious decision. This will allow you to see where the defenders are, where your players are and where the space is without the need to lookup.

There are various elements of visual performance in sport and the most common ones in hockey are **peripheral vision, spacial awareness and hand eye co-ordination**.

Normally there are two options you can do for example pass or take a shot. Often when you get caught between what you should be doing and don't make any solid decision you will find you don't do anything effectively and it either goes off the back line or leads to nothing.

Anticipate what is going to happen next. You want to be as decisive as possible so that when a ball is played into the D for example you can read the situation in a matter of split seconds allowing you react to first before your opposition. This happens when you are able to read the game and anticipate what will happen next based on what you can see.

There are loads of visual exercises that you can do but an example that everyone knows is juggling. If you find normal juggling easy then there are ways to make it harder so that you can replicate that kind of distractions that are going on in a game.

Dr Zoe Wimshurst who has helped put the vision part of my training course together always says that **training your eyes is as important as training your muscles in sport**. She has worked with some of the top sports people in the world including Cristiano Ronaldo, England rugby players and also the Great Britain mens hockey team so she really understands how the smallest difference can impact your performance in a massive way.



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Most of us want to spend all of our time practicing our hockey skills but you see all the other stuff we have spoken about, these are as important if not more important than skills alone. We can all improve our skills with enough practice as long as we are working on technique but if you ignore all the other stuff then don't expect to be the best player that you can be.

I have seen players with **great skills who haven't made it to the top level** because they didn't have mental toughness, like knowing how to deal with the pressure, fear of failure and couldn't get themselves out of the negative thinking patterns, so don't ignore every other point I have spoken about because they are all important.

Understanding tactics is also an important part of the game and growing up I never really truly understood tactics or what I should be doing, it was just a case of chase every ball and try to win. As you start to play higher up you will learn that this is not the best way to approach hockey games.



Of all the coaches that I have had growing up they never really explained **why I should do certain things which meant I didn't buy into it**. This is so common in many hockey players, even some players in the 30's don't understand tactics properly because the coach has explained it in a way that they understand.

Most coaches are very clever and very tactical but a lot of them **don't know how to explain their knowledge** to hockey players so that they understand it and can make decisions on the field based on the reasons why they play a certain way, etc.

I took it upon myself when I started playing more seriously to **ask more questions**, learn more about why the coach wants me to approach at a certain angle and when I need to step up to put my player under pressure, etc. Too often as hockey players we don't ask questions when we don't understand because we don't want to seem silly or sound stupid.

In my opinion if you don't understand and you have to ask silly questions then it is the coaches fault for not explaining it properly in the first instance.

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Then, if you want to be able to do a certain skill in a game but maybe are not comfortable with it yet then you have to just practice it. Let's say you want to be able to do a reverse stick hit for example, then you must practice it. You should not only practice it but you should understand what the important points of the skill are.



There may be 3 things that you are looking to do and each time such as **foot position, ball position and transfer of your weight**. You could start off practicing the skill just thinking about 1 thing at a time until it feels good, then think about another technical point and then you can bring them all together when you get used to how it should feel when you do it right. Build it up slowly, don't try to do it perfectly from the beginning or you will lose motivation and likely give up easily.

Don't expect to get it right perfectly straight away, it is something that you have to work on so have patience. Whenever you learn something new or something you are not comfortable with there is a learning time required.

If you practice a skill enough times with the correct technique in mind then you will improve but it will take more than just 10 minutes of practicing it. In my opinion you should be aiming to practice a skill at least 100 times a week if you want to improve it and that doesn't mean you have to be on an astroturf, you can also practice in your back garden, a local park or open space nearby.

80% FOCUS ON BASICS

You spend 80% of the your time using basic skills in games, therefore you should **spend 80% of your time training your basics**. The 20% you can spend on things like dragflicking, etc.

Choose something that you are best at in your team and make that your thing. Become so good at that skill that you could use it 10 times in a game and it would work 8 or 9 times out of 10. **Be the best at something and stand out from the crowd**, but make sure that you are also working on the other area's of your game which are mentioned in this training. The thing that you are best at is what you will use to build your confidence and get you playing at the top of your game.

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These are the areas that I think you should be working on if you want to play at a higher level and to give you a **step ahead of everyone else**. This is my personal advice based on my knowledge that I have as well as my own experience of playing at international level.

If you would like a **STEP by STEP** program showing you exactly how to go about all of these things in the right way, then head to: www.hockeyperformanceacademy.com/hockeypackage

I hope this guide has been helpful and for those that are serious about reaching a higher level, the [12 week hockey program](#) is the perfect solution to make the most use of your time and ensures that you are working smarter rather than harder.

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P.s. Don't forget to: [Click here to find out about our 12 week hockey program](#) to help you reach the next level in your hockey.

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