



SHANE BOWLER

# "You Miss 100% of the Shots You Never Take!"

Wayne Gretzky

Scoring goals is a skill like any other that can be developed through practice & having the right tools is important too.

"Burying the Biscuit"... "Lighting the Lamp"... "Putting it Top Shelf"... and "Going Five Hole" are all terms to describe scoring a goal. There is no greater feeling for a hockey player than scoring a goal. This is why we play the great game of hockey; unless, of course, you are a goaltender. With the 2006-2007 season well underway and the new standard of officiating is in full effect, scoring opportunities have definitely increased. Although players are getting more scoring chances, it does not necessarily mean that more goals are being scored. Individual players are still responsible for getting the puck past the goalie and across the goal line. There are several skills a player can develop to become a better scorer. Scoring is like any other skill in hockey that can be developed through effective practice. Understanding how to create goals, and where most goals are scored, will enable players to increase their goal total significantly.

The first priority a scorer should consider is the hockey stick. Is the proper stick being used? When deciding on a stick, a player should make sure that the weight, curve, length and thickness of the shaft are best suited for the individual player. The weight of the stick should be of personal preference as you get older, but for youngsters just learning, I would recommend a heavier stick so the young player can use it as a balancing tool when learning to skate. The curve of the stick is also of great importance when trying to improve scoring. There are so many different patterns of blades, I would suggest trying as many as possible to see what best works for you. There are basically three different types of curves to choose from: the heel-curve, the mid-curve, and the toe-curve. Whichever curve you choose, make certain that you can use the curve effectively to place your shots and make sure you can pass and shoot on your backhand. I have noticed that the bigger the curve, the weaker the backhand. Also important is the length of the stick. The



rule of thumb, when cutting a stick, is to cut the shaft at the height of a player's nose when standing without skates or the equivalent height of a player's chin when in skates. Also, it is believed that a shorter stick is beneficial for stick-handling while a longer stick is thought to be beneficial while taking a shot. A final concern when deciding on a stick, especially for young players, or all players with small hands is the thickness of the stick. Make sure the player can wrap their hand around the stick completely for proper development of such skills as passing and stick-handling.

Once the proper stick is chosen and the player is on the ice and getting ready to score, he or she should start to think like scorers. I was taught at a young age that when going in on net, it was often beneficial to take the point of view from the puck on my stick at ice level rather than my eyes, which were 5 feet above ice level. One must understand as a scorer that what might appear possible from your eyes may not be possible from your stick and vice-versa. To best score goals a player must understand angles and capitalize on opportunities.

Another way to increase your scoring is by being unpredictable when you are attacking the net with the puck. Change what you do every time you get around the net. If you took a shot last time, this time try a deke and maybe next time go to your backhand. Goalies are smart and are

taught to learn players' tendencies so change what you do and don't become predictable and ineffective.

Now let's look at some on-ice movements to improve a player's scoring total. A general guideline when shooting is that the closer you are to the net the higher the shots should be. The further away, the lower the shot should be. The further away you are as a shooter, the less likely you will beat the goalie. So as the shooter, you are shooting more to produce a rebound and a scoring chance for yourself or another attacking team mate rather than trying to score.

Most goalies are skilled enough that if they can see the puck chances are they will stop the puck. So if you can't beat the goalie with your shot get into the habit of creating chances through rebounds. Remember, it's a team game and helping to set up a goal can be just as rewarding as scoring.

Another way to create goals and improve your scoring chances is to improve what you do as a player without the puck. Do you put yourself in the best passing lane to receive the puck? Proper body positioning will increase your scoring. Many players just stand in front of the net hoping the puck will come to them while being covered easily by the opposing defenseman. Get in the proper passing lanes while still maintaining proper body positioning to get the puck to the net. While in front of the opposing net, an attacking player should never let a defenseman tie up their stick. Allow the defenseman to control your body, but never your stick. Always work to put yourself in a shooting position.

Probably the quickest way to help improve individual and team scoring when you don't have the puck is to go hard to the net. The player without the puck while going hard to the far post is accomplishing a few steps in creating a goal. First by going to the net, you are breaking down the defense because a defender must stay

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with the forward going to the net. As this is happening, space and time are being created for the shooter's advantage. Also, by going to the net, you are in the best position for a rebound or a chance for a so called "garbage goal." As the level of hockey advances in both age and talent "garbage goals" are more often the determining factor in outcomes of games.

A final suggestion to all players who truly wish to improve their scoring is to practice your shot daily. Work on all shots, especially your backhand every day possible. Try to take 500-1000 practice shots a week during the season and double that total in the off-season. Work on hitting the net with every shot and developing a quick release and positive results will follow. Scoring is

something we all love as hockey players and like other hockey skills is something we all can improve.

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