

High Performance Hockey core skills:

1. Maximize your Vision/Possession ratio: In average, a hockey player is in contact with the ball (has the ball in possession) around 2 minutes per game. Out of these two minutes, you should spend as many time as possible with your vision enabled. That means, putting your attention to the environment instead of to the ball. We can split this attention into two types: full vision (where the focus of the attention is “there” and the ball is controlled through intuition/expertise) or peripheral vision (where the focus of the attention is around the ball, but with a full field of vision-enabled). Good players are always able to put the attention “out there”, increasing the time ratio vision/possession. Lesser players live “down there”, where the ball is spotted. Players like Hauke, Kemperman, Oliva, Mazzili, Van Doren or Stanzl, Archibald, Aymar, are good examples of this mastery of vision.

**Question: Are you a head down or head up player?**

2. Kill your opponent with acceleration: Every defender faces a fundamental dilemma: Watch the ball or the man? 95% of defenders decide to follow the ball -and lose the presence of the attacker- If this omission is exploited by the attacker with the use of proper acceleration, that will generate an advantage in numbers for a while. This is the base of the “give and go”, or how to gain an advantage with the use of a teammate. Accelerations can be also used for “third-man” combinations, overlaps or just in 1v1 duels. But there is no possible generation of advantage without acceleration in contemporary hockey. Teun de Nooijer was the first master in this skill. And after him players Aymar and Rob van der Horst. Further before this players like Shab haz Ahmed. Nowadays this is a common denominator of most of the top players in the world.

**Question: Can you accelerate with the ball and do you believe you are doing this at the right moment to advantage a teammate?**

3. Be an expert in the art of deception: wise, shrewd, bold, elusive. These “alternative” skills are mostly (but not only) learned through experience. If you want to perform above others, you should be able to deceive or mislead if needed. Body fakes, vision fakes, verbal fakes, the wise use of the rules of the game, how to frustrate your rivals or how to seduce umpires are some of the fields where these “powerful” players tend to act. In this matter, the greatest master ever is Carlos Retegui, the current Argentina mens coach. When he was playing he was able to control his teammates, the opponents, the umpires, both benches, the spectators (both sides) and even the ball-boys! What a genius!

**Question: As a first step are body, stick and vision feints part of your current game?**

4. Being Aggressive in the circle is not negotiable: hockey is becoming -and it will become- more and more physical. That means that the physical contact will be more and more accepted and tolerated by the umpires. In hockey, goals can only be scored inside circles. That creates a “highly transcendent” field of battle for both attackers and defenders. Inside the circles, every inch and every instant has an enormous value. It’s worthy to fight hard for it. Don’t be violent, be aggressive, but remain at the margin of the rules. Don’t refuse the contact. Examples? I love how Mirco Pruyser bravely uses his body inside the D. There are other super aggressive players like Teun Rohof, Sergi Enrique, Juan Martin Lopez or Glenn Turner. These players are always welcome in your team, but most of the times are hated by your enemies.

**Question: what is your circle mindset?**

5. All good defenders have done a Master in Risk Assessment: In field hockey, where stick contact is too often penalized, to steal a ball without committing a fault is a mastery. It's about risk management. The distance from where to put pressure, not too far, not too close; the speed in your stick for interceptions and jabs; the intuition in choosing when and how to tackle; the wisdom in shaving; the precise footwork that allows you to keep defending against a full speed attacker; how to modify your defence inside the circle; how to use "smooth collision" faults to ban circle penetrations. Etc. There is a fine line between being a classy master in defence and being a ruthless fault machine. In my opinion, the best defender in risk assessment is Matias Rey: elegance, intelligence, and effortless efficiency.

**Question: Are you an efficient defender?**

6. Be a versatile player: In contemporary hockey, we don't have "specialized" players anymore. We need players that can understand the fundamentals of the game and then, be able to play in any part of the field. No more defenders, midfielders or strikers. This Cartesian scheme is becoming obsolete. Do you want to know who's more multifunctional? Imagine 11 Mats Grambusch playing against 11 Tom Grambusch. Both super players, right? The question is, which team wins? (That would be a nice family contest) In the long run, multifunctional players will dominate the world. It is already happening.

**Question: how many layers can you play in?**

7. "Give me the ball": When things become ugly during a game, top players make a step forward and try to change the course of events by themselves. They automatically enhance their presence in the field. They start to radiate energy, encourage teammates, manage the tempo of the game and participate more and more. They want to bring back the game under their rule, and they do it while having the ball on their stick. I've seen this "heroic" capacity in very few players, but Santi Freixa and Moritz Fürste are good examples.

**Question: when the heat is on in a game do you want the ball or do you shy away from the ball?**

8. Develop your tactical sense: There is nothing worse than a motivated fool. Most of the top players are smart in interpreting the game. Like coaches inside the field. Your tactical sense will be your criteria for decision making. The decisions you take should be the right ones according to the tactical principles of your team. Is it time to launch a fast break or is it better to keep control? Should I play a quick restart after this free hit or should I wait? Is it better to play long or short? These are all small-micro tactical decisions that must be taken by players. If you fail in your choices, your talent will be under-utilised and your performance will be affected.

**Question: Do you watch high level games of hockey or other codes to observe and develop your tactical sense?**

9. Top players lead. As Machiavelli said, to have power is a balance between love & fear. Love? Yes, be admired, inspire others, make them better, take care of teammates, be able to create joy within the group, etc. But also be respected. Demand excellence of teammates. Show discipline and fight hard against toxicity. In the Spanish national team, we had Rodrigo Garza having this role. I'd say Martin Häner of Germany as well.

**Question: do you aim for continuous improvement at training and games?**

10. Kaizen Attitude: It may sound a cliché, but it's never too late to learn new things and improve your performance. Try new things, benchmark others, learn from different athletes, from other sports, be critiqued by your coach, demand more of yourself, take care of your health, have your head in the stars, but your feet on the ground. When I see players like Paredes, Gilardi, Vivaldi, Quemada, Cortès, Knowles, etc. what I see is not the triumph of talent, what I see is the success of humility and hard work.