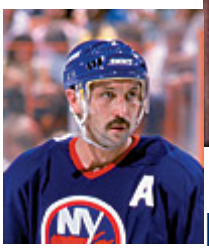

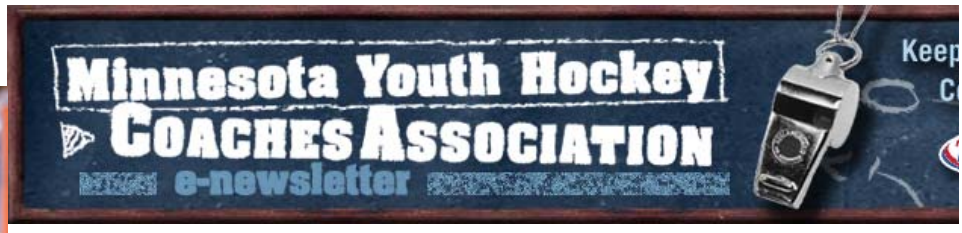

Face Offs As Much A Mental Skill As A Physical One

By Bryan Trottier

It takes more than quick reflexes to be a good face-off guy. Sure, reflexes are important, but the proper mental preparation before you take the draw is just as important.

Philosophy

A player shouldn't go into the face-off circle without having a game plan or purpose to what he is trying to do when the puck is dropped. In fact, every one of your teammates should know what you're trying to do and what their roles and responsibilities are in all three zones.

Offensive Zone Face Offs

Your No. 1 goal is to win possession of the puck. Have a scoring play set up in the offensive zone and have an idea of what you're going to do to formulate an attack so you're not chasing and trying to gain possession of the puck.

Defensive Zone Face Offs

Your No. 1 goal is to not lose the draw clean and give your opponent an opportunity to generate a good shot on goal.

Win or Lose game plans

1. Make sure your teammates are set and in the right position, especially your goaltender
2. Be aware of what the opposition is doing by how they line up for the draw and who the intended shooter is
3. Know what you're going to do if you win or lose the draw. If you lose the draw, who goes where, who has which opponent, etc.

Find Your Balance

When it comes to being in position to take the draw, find a stance that is comfortable for you. We're all different. Some of us are short and stocky, others tall and lanky. Keep these things in mind when creating your own style:

- How low does my bottom hand need to be?
- How bent are my knees?
- How far forward can I bend over without losing my balance or limiting my mobility?
- How wide apart do my legs need to be?
- Am I on the balls of my feet?
- Am I leaning on my stick?
- How close to my body should my elbows be?

Taking A Snap Shot

With the new hurry-up face-off rule, you don't have a lot of time to process all the information needed to take and win a face off. You basically have to take a mental picture, compute what's going on and what needs to happen before the linesman drops the puck. I tell kids to "mind" themselves now by taking a mental picture so that they can "remind" themselves later at a crucial point in the game. Here are some things to look for:

Know Your Opponent

- How is his team lined up?
- Is he a right or left-handed shot?
- Is he a big or small player?
- Is he strong or weak?
- Is he quick or slow?

Know Your History

• What are his tendencies?
• Does this team have a set play(s)?
• Is he telegraphing what he wants to do by the way he's approaching the dot?

"An Angel In The Ready Position"

Contrary to the old school philosophy that you should be the last player in the face-off circle, I always like to be the first. This way the linesman is focusing on your opponent. Being first means you're an angel in the ready position:

1. Stick down in the white
2. Skates in the cross hairs
3. Don't fidget
4. Be prepared

Peripheral Vision

There's a lot happening in the moments before the linesman drops the puck. It's important that you keep your eye on everything that's going on around you by using your peripheral vision:

1. Focus on the face-off dot
2. Watch the linesman/referee's hand and the puck
3. Watch the opposing centerman

Practice Makes Perfect

Most of the drills we do in practice are related to skating, shooting and passing. But practicing taking face offs can pay big dividends at a key moment in the game.

The more you practice — the better and better you will get.

Practice against:
1. Lefties
2. Righties
3. Defensemen
4. Big Guys
5. Little Guys

Practice pulling the puck back on your
1. Forehand
2. Backhand

Gaining Confidence

A player who takes pride in his face offs and works hard on them in practice will likely be on the ice during a key point in the game. Even though it may not end up in the stat sheet, winning a key face off is as important as a goal or an assist.