



Permission to fail in female hockey

By Kim McCullough, MSc, YCS

Earlier this week, my high school players were working on full-ice one-on-one drills and I had to admit I was frustrated at their lack of gap control. To be fair, one of the hardest things for all hockey players to do, especially for defensemen, is to keep a tight gap in a one-on-one open-ice situation.

It takes great timing, quick feet and guts to get a tight gap and keep it when just a little mistake could result in a breakout. It's much easier to keep a larger gap – but then you are giving the offensive player complete control of the play. Although playing defense is a much more reactive position than playing forward, girls' hockey defensemen tend to be far too passive through the neutral zone and into the defensive zone.

So how do you get better at gap control? You have to be willing to fail. You have to get over the fear of getting beat.

When I first moved out to Calgary in 2003, I was playing defense against some of the best women's hockey players in the world – Wickenheiser, Goyette, Campbell. I was scared that they were going to make me look ridiculous in the one-on-one full-ice drills – and to be honest, they did.

For the first few weeks of practice, I looked like a human turnstile. I was really trying to tighten the gap because I knew that was what I had to do as a defenseman to stand-out and show that I could play with the best in the world.

I had to put my ego aside and allow myself to learn from my mistakes. By the second month of the season, I was still losing some one-on-one battles, but not nearly as often as I was in the beginning.

In order to take your game to the next level, you have to be willing to fail. You have to be willing to get beat nine times out of 10 on the one-on-one, and realize that the one time you didn't get beat because of your tight gap is the true confidence builder. Every time you lose the battle, you learn what to change for the next battle. You have to be willing to get outside of your comfort zone and do what other players aren't willing to do.

Most girls' hockey players just play with the big (safe) gap and never try to tighten it up. They just play passive defense, backing in on their own goalie and giving control to the attacking players.

If you want to be like everyone else, do whatever everyone else does. If you want to be different, you have to be willing to step outside your comfort zone. If you want to make significant improvements, you have to be willing to fail. Because it is those short-term failures will lead to your long-term success.

To get complete access to articles, videos and secrets that address the specific needs of female hockey players, visit www.totalfemalehockeyclub.com. Kim McCullough, MSc, YCS, is an expert in the development of aspiring female hockey players. She is a former NCAA Division I captain at Dartmouth and played in the National Women's Hockey League for six years. She is currently the Girls Hockey Director at the PEAC School for Elite Athletes in Toronto and is the Founder of Total Female Hockey.

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