

Player Assessments

A Hockey Coaching Tool from Greg Siller of Pro Learning Systems

As the name implies, the *Player Assessment* is a tool used to objectively evaluate the skills and abilities of individual players, player units (defensive pairings, offensive pairings), and even lines. The basic player assessment focuses on individual skills (skating, stickhandling, passing, and shooting); however, expanded assessments can take into account positional, team, physical and mental elements as well.

One of the values of the assessment tool is that it can be used by coaches at any point during the season. Many coaches only use the player assessment during tryouts or initial player evaluation periods to get a snapshot of a players' abilities (to determine if the player should make the team or identify the appropriate skill level a player should be placed into—beginner, intermediate or advanced). The assessment tool can, and should, also be used at other times during the season to get a second (or third) snapshot of the players' abilities; to compare against the original and subsequent assessments. This helps coaches determine player trends (improvement, degradation, unchanged status) and can help the coach with additional player feedback and future practice planning. The player assessment activity should consist of 5 major steps:

- 1) Developing or tailoring the assessment tool
- 2) Performing the assessment
- 3) Evaluating players, player units, or lines
- 4) Providing feedback
- 5) Using the information gained in 2 and 3 above to feed into the practice planning process to set a future course of action.

1) Developing the Assessment Tool

Developing your assessment tool is a relatively straight-forward task. First, you need to determine what you want to assess. For this assessment example, I have chosen the individual skills of skating, stickhandling, passing, and shooting. Other assessment areas can be built from the Individual Skills, Positional Tactics, and Team Strategies Checklists, defined on my web site.

There are generally three ways to quantify the assessments of players; using skill tests, timed skill tests, or a combination of the two.

Skill tests assess the player's ability to perform specific player tasks. For skating assessments, you could assess the players' ability to start, stop, turn, as well as their overall skating technique. For shooting assessments, you could assess the accuracy of each shooter (number of targets hit) in addition to their shooting technique.

Timed skill tests assess the players' quickness and speed in performing a task or series of tasks within a specific drill. For skating tests, you would use a stopwatch to calculate the players' time (in seconds) through a specific course. For shooting assessments, for example, you could assess the number of shots executed in a 10 second interval or use a radar gun to assess the speed of their shots.

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Combined skill tests assess the players' skill and speed in a combined manner. For shooting assessments, you should assess the accuracy of the shooter and the number of shots executed in a 10 second interval; as well as the shooting technique.

Additional examples of individual skill assessment are shown below, for skill-based, timed-skill and combined skill assessments.

Skating Assessments

- **Skill**—starts, stride, stops, turns, and transitions (forward-to-backward and backward-to-forward). Skating should be done both forward and backward. You should consider both skaters and goaltenders for this assessment. Proper technique is assessed during this skill activity.
- **Timed Skill**—timing wind sprints (face-off circle to centerline, around rink, with and without puck) are examples of this timed assessment.

Stickhandling Assessments

- **Skill—Stickhandling**—push, side-to-side, diagonal, front-to-back, one-handed, and puck protection techniques can be used; both stationary and while skating. This assessment would typically be for skaters and not for goaltenders. Proper technique is assessed during this activity.
- **Timed Skill**—timed stickhandling (through a course or the number of times a player stickhandles back and forth, while stationary, during 20 seconds) are examples of this timed assessment.

Passing & Receiving Assessments

- **Skill—Passing & Receiving**—sweep pass, saucer, snap, around-the-boards, give-and-go, bank, touch, and using the skates. This assessment should be considered for skaters and advanced goaltenders. Forehand and backhand passing and receiving, both while stationary and skating should be assessed. Proper technique is assessed during this activity.
- **Combined Skill Test**—this assessment involves assessing 2 players passing and receiving, while stationary or skating, during a 20 second timeframe. This involves timing, accuracy and technique assessment.

Shooting Assessments

- **Skill—Shooting**—wrist shot, snap, flip, slap, screen, one-timer, deflections, rebounds, and breakaways. This assessment is for skaters/shooters and for goaltenders (using the positional assessment for this activity). Forehand and backhand shots, both stationary and while skating should be assessed. Proper shooting technique is assessed during this activity.
- **Combined Skill Test**—this assessment involves evaluating individual players skating with the puck, from the center line, and shooting at the top of the circle or at the face-off dot. This involves timing, accuracy, and technique assessment.

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2) Performing the Assessment

Once you have your assessment tool defined, you will need to conduct the actual assessment. Figures 1 and 2 provide examples of both basic player (skater) and basic goaltender assessments, respectively.

Figure 1 provides an example of a combined skill test for skaters, in that it has both *skill* and *timed* assessments. Details within the assessment objectively define the players' specific abilities for the four individual skill areas of skating, stickhandling, passing, and shooting. Specific areas of focus include players keeping their head up, rink awareness, puck control, speed, accuracy, and overall skill technique.

A scale of 0-to-3 was used (3 = performs the skill with high proficiency, 2 = performs the skill with medium proficiency, 1 = performs the skill with low proficiency, and 0 = did not perform the skill during this assessment. The use of + and – is encouraged to determine gradation points within the scale. Timed assessments will need to have relative times established by the coach to use as benchmarks (i.e., what are good, average, and poor times?) so that the appropriate scale values are used.

Assessment information was obtained for drills involving the player performing skills while skating as well as while stationary. For this specific assessment, as shown in Figure 1, this individual scored a 2 (medium proficiency).

Figure 2 provides an example of a combined skill test for goaltenders, in that it has both skill and timed assessments.

Details within the assessment objectively define the goaltender's specific abilities for five positional skill areas of skating, crease movement, positioning, saves/rebounds, and a goaltender style assessment. Specific areas of focus include the goaltenders' rink awareness, crease and post awareness, shooter awareness, puck awareness, keeping their head up, and overall skill assessment. The same 0-3 scale is used as defined in the section above for Figure 1.

Assessment information was obtained for drills involving the goaltender performing skills while shooters were both skating and stationary. For this specific assessment, this goaltender scored a 2+ (medium-to-high proficiency), as shown in Figure 2. The assessment also identified the goaltender as using primarily a butterfly goaltending technique.

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Player (Skater) Assessment	Points/Time
Player: Gordie Howe	Date: December 3, 2012
Evaluated by: Greg Siller	Location: Iceoplex, Escondido, CA
Skating	Focus on head-up, rink awareness, technique
Starting technique	3
Forward skating	3
Backward skating	1
Stopping technique	2
Turning technique	2
Speed (time from goal line to center red line)	10 seconds (2 rating)
Stick-handling (while skating)	Focus on head-up, control of puck, rink awareness, technique
Open area course	2
Around cones course	1+
Passing and Receiving (stationary + skating)	Focus on head-up, control of puck, rink awareness, technique (stationary / skating)
Forehand	2 / 1
Backhand	1 / 1
Give-n-Go (skating only)	0
Shooting (stationary + skating)	Focus on speed, accuracy, technique (stationary / skating)
Wrist shot	3 / 3
Snap shot	2 / 2
Slap shot	1 / 1
Backhand shot	1 / 2
Rebounds	1 / 1
Comments	Comments
Scale is 0-3	Overall Rating = 2
3 = High Proficiency 2 = Medium Proficiency	1 = Low Proficiency 0 = Not Performed

Figure 1 – Player (Skater) Assessment

Player Assessments

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Goaltender Assessment	Points/Time
Player: Jonathan Quick	Date: December 3, 2012
Evaluated by: Greg Siller	Location: Staples Center, Los Angeles, CA
Skating	Focus on head-up, rink awareness, technique
Starting technique	3
Forward skating	3
Backward skating	2
Stopping technique	2
Speed (time from goal crease to boards)	4 seconds (2 rating)
Crease Movement (no shooter)	Focus on head-up, crease and post awareness, technique
Lateral (Left 2 Right, Right 2 Left)	2
Up-and-down	1
Positioning	Focus on head-up, crease and player/puck awareness, technique (stationary / skating shooter)
Shooting from Left (glove) side	3 / 2
Shooting from Center	2 / 2
Shooting from Right (blocker) side	3 / 2
Saves - Rebounds	Focus on head-up, crease and player/puck awareness, technique (stationary / skating shooter)
Glove	3 / 3
Blocker	2 / 2
Pads	3 / 2
Stick	2 / 1+
Chest	3 / 2
Rebounds controlled	2
Style Assessment Options	Style Assessment
Stand-up, butterfly, combination, unique (explain).	Primarily butterfly technique
Comments	Comments
Scale is 0-3	Overall Rating = 2+
3 = High Proficiency 2 = Medium Proficiency	1 = Low Proficiency 0 = Not Performed

Figure 2 – Goaltender Assessment

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3) Evaluating Players, Player Units, and Lines

After the actual assessments have been completed, coaches need to review the information and fully evaluate the players. The player assessment should be used by coaches to evaluate the following five player parameters;

1. *Strengths* – what areas did the players perform well?
2. *Areas for improvement* – what areas need additional skill and speed enhancement?
3. *Potential* – what areas for improvement might be quickly enhanced with a small additional effort (areas that received a rating of 1+ that were close to being a 2 rating)?
4. *Comparison to self* (progress since the last assessment, if one is available) – if this is the first assessment, there is no comparison information. If, this is not the first assessment, then coaches can compare assessments to determine trends (improvement, degradation, or unchanged status).
5. *Comparison with teammates* (current assessment) – this essentially becomes a ranking of evaluations for skaters and goaltenders. This is useful in determining your top-tier, mid-tier, bottom-tier players, and the information should feed into your practice planning.

By reviewing Figure 1, we can evaluate the player's performance in the following five areas;

1. Strengths (rated a 2 or 3) – starting, skating forward, stopping, turning, skating speed (10 seconds), open-area stickhandling, forehand passing while stationary, wrist shot (while stationary and skating), snap shot (stationary and skating), and the backhand shot while skating.
2. Areas for improvement (rated 2- or 1) – backward skating, forehand pass while skating, backhand pass (both while stationary and while skating), slap shot (both while stationary and while skating), backhand shot (while stationary—this was probably an aberration since the player was rated a 2 in this area while skating), and getting rebounds (while skating).
3. Potential (1+ ratings) – stickhandling around cones could be improved with more practice.
4. Comparison to self (progress from last assessment, if one is available). Since this was the first assessment for the players, we do not have trend data (this is the first snapshot).
5. Comparison with teammates (current assessment) – since this player scored a 2 overall rating, this player would fall into the middle-tier of player abilities.

By reviewing Figure 2, we can evaluate the goaltender's performance in the following areas;

1. Strengths (rated a 2 or 3) – starting, skating forward, skating backward, stopping, skating speed, lateral crease movement, positioning while players shot from the left (glove) side of the net, center, and right (blocker) side. Glove saves, blocker saves, pad saves, stick saves while shooters were stationary, chest saves, and controlling rebounds.
2. Areas for improvement (rated 2- or 1) – up and down crease movement.
3. Potential (1+ ratings) – stick save/rebound while the shooter was skating. The goaltender needs to keep his stick down. With a little more practice, he could improve to a 2 rating in this area.
4. Comparison to self (progress from last assessment, if one is available). Since this was the first assessment for the goaltender, we do not have trend data (this is the first snapshot). When this goaltender is assessed again, the coaches should compare assessments to determine specific trends (improvement, degradation, or unchanged).
5. Comparison with teammates (current assessment) – since this goaltender scored a 2+ overall rating, this goaltender would fall into the middle-to-top-tier of goaltender abilities. This is valuable information when the team has two goaltenders or when assessing goaltenders during tryouts.

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4) Providing Feedback

Once we have evaluated the players, there are two additional steps that need to occur to complete the assessment cycle. This fourth step ensures that coaches provide feedback to the players, player units, or the line they assessed, in the form of an initial assessment (first time assessment) or trend data (second or third assessment). The feedback that occurs should come directly from the assessment information (raw scores) as well as the evaluation information (strengths, areas for improvement, potential, comparison with self, and comparison with teammates). By communicating this information, you are enabling the players to obtain valuable data on how they are progressing and how they compare to their peers. It also allows them to compare their own self-evaluation with the coaches to see if they both observe similar results. If they do observe similar results, the player and coach have corroborated on a common outcome. Where they differ, additional communication is required to ensure that both coach and player are on the same page. Open and honest communication is the most effective way to ensure that corroboration is accomplished.

5) Using Assessments in Future Planning

The final assessment step requires coaches to use this assessment and evaluation information for future practice planning. This is a big part of what assessments are all about. It is about obtaining objective information about your players, player units, and lines, and using that information in a way that will benefit the players and the team moving forward.

Obviously, starting with the *areas for improvement* is an effective way to plan for future practices. Use this data to work on an improvement plan for your players. The *potential* areas also contain good data for future practice planning. With a little extra practice and experience, players should be able to jump from abilities that show *potential* to abilities that can be conducted effectively (first or second tier). The areas of *strength* provide information on current abilities where you may be able to work on advanced techniques, depending on the Ability, Age, Physical, and Mental Development (AAPMD) levels of the players (see more information on this topic in my book, *The Hockey Practice Playbook*). The two *comparison* sections provide the coach a way to determine if players are improving as well as how players stack up against each other. This can help with determining first or second line players, as well as those who show aptitude for playing on power plays or penalty-kill assignments.

The next two pages contain blank assessment templates for you to use in your Player Assessments.

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Player (Skater) Assessment	Points/Time
Player:	Date:
Evaluated by:	Location:
Skating	Focus on head-up, rink awareness, technique
Starting technique	
Forward skating	
Backward skating	
Stopping technique	
Turning technique	
Speed (time from goal line to center red line)	
Stick-handling (while skating)	Focus on head-up, control of puck, rink awareness, technique
Open area course	
Around cones course	
Passing and Receiving (stationary + skating)	Focus on head-up, control of puck, rink awareness, technique (stationary / skating)
Forehand	
Backhand	
Give-n-Go (skating only)	
Shooting (stationary + skating)	Focus on speed, accuracy, technique (stationary / skating)
Wrist shot	
Snap shot	
Slap shot	
Backhand shot	
Rebounds	
Comments	Comments
Scale is 0-3	Overall Rating =
3 = High Proficiency 2 = Medium Proficiency	1 = Low Proficiency 0 = Not Performed

Figure 1 – Player (Skater) Assessment

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Goaltender Assessment	Points/Time
Player:	Date:
Evaluated by:	Location:
Skating	Focus on head-up, rink awareness, technique
Starting technique	
Forward skating	
Backward skating	
Stopping technique	
Speed (time from goal crease to boards)	
Crease Movement (no shooter)	Focus on head-up, crease and post awareness, technique
Lateral (Left 2 Right, Right 2 Left)	
Up-and-down	
Positioning	Focus on head-up, crease and player/puck awareness, technique (stationary / skating shooter)
Shooting from Left (glove) side	
Shooting from Center	
Shooting from Right (blocker) side	
Saves - Rebounds	Focus on head-up, crease and player/puck awareness, technique (stationary / skating shooter)
Glove	
Blocker	
Pads	
Stick	
Chest	
Rebounds controlled	
Style Assessment Options	Style Assessment
Stand-up, butterfly, combination, unique (explain).	
Comments	Comments
Scale is 0-3	Overall Rating =
3 = High Proficiency 2 = Medium Proficiency	1 = Low Proficiency 0 = Not Performed

Figure 2 – Goaltender Assessment