

One thing you can't teach

By Kim McCullough, MSc, YCS

As a coach who works with players on and off the ice, I spend a lot of time teaching different skills and helping players develop the athleticism necessary to take their game to the highest level possible. But there is one thing that a player absolutely must have if they want to realize their hockey dreams – and it's the one thing that I, and every other coach out there, can't teach.

We can teach you all the skills, systems and strategies you need to play at the elite level. But we can't teach you passion. We can't teach you how to be committed or dedicated. That has to come from inside you. The truth is that the difference between good players and great players is very, very small. Players who can skate, shoot, pass and stickhandle are a dime-a-dozen, but players who have that uncommon level of desire to become the best are very rare. You have to be willing to do things that other players aren't willing to do in order to separate yourself from the competition. Because it's those things you choose to do when no one else is watching that will make you stand out from the crowd.

Great players choose to be excellent every day. They don't just show up for the big games. They put in the same level of effort, whether it is the championship game of a tournament or a normal weekday practice. They finish every single drill as hard as they can, even if their teammates are slacking off. They set goals for themselves before they hit the ice so that they can stay laser-focused on what they want to achieve.

They also put the same level of commitment and dedication into what they do off the ice. They train off the ice all year around and they stretch before they go to bed each night. They make healthy nutrition choices and make sure they are drinking enough water. They spend 10 extra minutes working on their stickhandling and shooting every single night.

Let's be honest – this stuff isn't exciting. It's much more fun to go to practice or play games. And it's much easier to be motivated when there are 15 other players chasing after the same goal. But great players don't make the easy choice. They make the hard choices and hold themselves to a higher standard. If making it to the next level was easy, everyone would be there. There is a huge difference between saying that you want to be the best and actually taking the action necessary to move closer to your dreams each and every day.

No one gets excited about drinking more water, doing push-ups, stretching or setting goals. But the great players choose to do these little things because it's what sets them apart from the competition. Ultimately, you don't choose to drink more water just to be hydrated. Your choice to do push-ups is not just about getting stronger. You don't just set goals to keep yourself focused. You don't do push-ups to get stronger – you do them so that you can make the varsity team. You set goals so that you can get a college scholarship. And you watch what you eat and drink so that you can make the Olympic team. The real reason you choose to do all these little things is because of the passion and commitment you have towards achieving your ultimate goal.

If you want to be the best, you have to choose to be excellent each and every day. Because that's just what elite players do. Excellence doesn't just happen when you are out on the ice. It happens as a result of all the little choices you make on and off the ice each and every day.

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