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COACH'S CORNER—ADVANCED SKILLS

Everyone should work advanced skills into their game, but these are vital to Team 2016. I expect you to have good control and consistency with all of these by our training event in Nov 2014, because they will be important in our team strategies. Six months later, you need to be excellent at these!!

Advanced skills are those that you use when there are other people in the play with you. It's great to have those individual skills, but once you have to play against someone, you have to modify what you do based on what's happening around you.

HEAD UP

To know how to react to others around you, you must have your head up, taking in the dynamics of the people around you. You can't be looking at the puck. Individual skills become more difficult to master if you can't look at the puck, so once you have the basics of the individual skills, try it again with your eyes up, looking forward, back and to the other side while you perform your skills.

STRING-IT-TOGETHER

Again, the dynamics of the people around you will require you to go from one individual skill to another, and often quickly. String your individual skills together. Anyone remember the Scorpion drill we did at the second women's tournament clinic (2010)? Other examples of stringing individual skills together- 1) curl, reverse curl, figure 6, figure 8- sprint out, 2) 2 tic-tac, sprint kick forward 6 kicks, the V, sprint out, 3) front-back, figure 8 under shoulders, figure 8 under hips, sprint kick forward 6 kicks, curl, sprint kick out of curl 6 kicks, shoot, chase! As you can see, advanced moves often are a string of simpler skills. Practice!

FINISH

Did you notice that each of Sting-It-Together example included a sprint in the end? Strive for finishing each play. This means that you should plan to stay down long enough to be sure your pass connected with your teammate or to even be there for the next pass. No curl and die, no throwing to a hole where no one is, no shooting as you're coming up. Finish!

READING THE PLAY

Have you ever noticed that when you ask a question about how to handle certain situations, the answer is often "it depends"? Your teammate is not trying to avoid your question; the answer is a matter of many factors. There are 12 people playing in the game all at once, so each of them has an affect on what will happen next. The answer lies in what just happened, where everyone is lined up, and what everyone is planning to do. If you were paying attention, you know what just happened. If you are aware of where your teammates and opponents

are, you know who's lined up where. The hardest part is anticipating what everyone is planning to do and then deciding how you can make a difference in your favor. It's very hard to teach Reading the Play, but start becoming aware of what is going on around you. Learn the habits (positive and negative) of your teammates. You will also need to understand the strategy of your formation and what each position is supposed to cover. Experience how you affect the play by how you approach the play.

BODY POSITION

How you approach the play will affect your impact on the play. In these examples I use the term "defender" as those positions that usually come down behind the line of the puck (usually mids and backs), and "offender" as those positions that usually come down in front of the puck (forwards and occasionally mids):

1) If you face into the play, you are playing a defensive position. If you are a defender, you want to be in a position where you can make a quick impact on the play. For example, if you are behind the opponent, when they turn around, you want to be close and hit quickly before she knows you are there. Think **STEALTH**. If you are the last man back, you need to be more conservative, so place yourself in a position where you can steer the opponent to the outside wall, and can still adjust to any change in the situation. If you are an offender facing the play, you want to be close enough to the opponent to PINCH them. That is, you want the opponent to either turn into your defender (who is also pinching), or you want to steal the puck from them as you squeeze them between you and your defender. Remember that your back is a great defender of your puck (if you stay low enough), but not to both sides.

2) If you face in a direction not directly into the play, you are in an offensive position. You are expecting the puck to come to you (whether from your teammate or by it popping out of a scrum) and you plan to take the puck and run forward with it. This can be done from either a defensive position or an offensive position. As a defender, you are setting up directly behind the play or at a 45 right or left behind the play. This is an excellent position to be in to take a pass and maneuver around the scrum (in this usage, a tight bunch of players vying to get the puck) to a more forward-moving play. As an offender, you want to come down in front of or at a 45 degree right or left forward of the play, ready to run with a pass. Learning to time it so that you are arriving at MIDWATER, and ready to sprint to where the puck lands is ideal for a quick getaway and race to the goal.

Notice that nowhere do I mention passing laterally. **The 45 DEGREE PASS** forward or back is much safer and more effective. Opponent defenders love to knock down a lateral pass and take both players out of the play. Get out of the habit of sending lateral passes or setting up to receive one.

Remember that all positions have defensive and offensive components to their

job description. Whether you are playing offensively or defensively can change in an instant. While you are in the head up position, you can read your teammate's body position and anticipate her intentions. Use that information to help create the next play.

SECOND EFFORT

If you are fit, you will have enough energy and oxygen left to help create the next play. If you find the need to curl away from an opponent (first effort), kick out of your curl and then send the perfect pass forward to your teammate (second effort) as you follow it up to be sure it made it's mark. Make a pass 45 to a teammate (first effort) and then stay down and set up in the perfect 45 degree spot for your teammate to return a pass to you (second effort), which you run forward. When you come upon an opponent, pass over her stick as you race forward (first effort), and pick up the puck yourself so you can race forward to set up the next play (second effort) which goes into the goal.

SECOND OPTION

You only need one teammate to pass to, but ideally you want 2 options. It's much harder for opponents to control the play if they see more than one option developing. Be the second option rather than waiting on the surface to see what happens. To set up for the second option, think in triangles. If you teammate has an option to pass to a 45 right forward, go down and be the 45 left forward option (if you are a offender) or a 45 right back option (if you are a defender). As a defender, I get really nervous when I see an opponent coming right at me and I see that she has options to her right and left forward. It's really hard to defend that!! Of course an even better plan would be to have one obvious pass setting up and another stealth pass option coming in at midwater at a 45 behind the opponent. Take notice of Ms. Stealth, but don't look at her or you'll give it away!!!

SET UP THE NEXT PLAY

Let's say that you're a forward and you see that your back busted through a scrum, is on her second effort, and is racing up the middle of the pool. You check out the body position of your other forward and mid and determine that they are setting up a beautiful triangle first and second option for the teammate with the puck. You read the play, anticipate that your other forward will get the puck but will only have a split second to work with since the opponent's last man back is setting up to try to steer her to the wall. You decide that if you get midwater (facing forward) just barely behind the opponent, your forward, who has an awesome shot that she can send off a dime, will land the puck at the opponent's feet, where you will drop as she launches the puck. You'll be at top speed when you make contact with the puck and there's no way anyone can stop you as you confidently launch a perfect lob shot into the goal from 5' out, over the arm of the other opponent defender who saw it coming but was too slow to get there to stop you. And that's how you set up one example of the next play!! =D

Whew!!

NOTE: All words in CAPS are specific skills to be practiced over and over again (notice that headings are also in caps).