

How to Play Hockey

By

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Vice-Captain Indian Team
in New Zealand, 1935

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Team, India.

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M. N. Masud

FOREWORD.

By the President New Zealand Hockey Association.

Actually Mr. Masud requires no introduction by me to Hockey players and enthusiasts in New Zealand. His position and the active part he took in the team which toured this country last year brought him prominently before all officials and players.

At the time the Indians were here it was felt that it was impossible for coaches or players to derive anything like the full benefit to be obtained by witnessing the team in action on only one or two occasions. At that time the players were under contract which prohibited them from giving interviews or writing notes for publication, but on the team's return to India, and the expiry of the contract, Mr. C. C. Holland, Editor of the Association's "Bulletin" wrote to Mr. Masud, asking him if he would be kind enough to assist us by giving some notes on the game in general, which would add still further to the assistance rendered by the Indian Hockey Federation in sending the team to New Zealand. Mr Masud has very graciously and willingly consented, and in so doing has explained that it is his first attempt at anything of the kind, and hopes that the various points he makes will be understood.

The Management Committee of the New Zealand Hockey Association is of opinion that the article is so full of merit that it deserves a much wider distribution than the mailing list of the "Bulletin" could give, and has decided to have a limited number of copies printed and distributed.

In a covering letter Mr. Masud states that he will always be at the call of the New Zealand Association and the players of New Zealand, and advises that if any individual player should encounter difficulties, he will be pleased if that player will communicate with him direct. His address is "Private Secretary's Office, Manavadar State, Kathiawar, India."

The various theories expressed in the article have actually been put into practice, with the result that the Manavadar team is not only regarded as one of the best club sides in India, but it is also generally conceded that in team work, combination, cohesion and understanding, it has no peer.

My Association has already expressed to Mr. Masud its appreciation of the kindness he has shown and the trouble he has taken in writing such a fine article, and I am sure that every reader will agree that the same is a valuable contribution towards furthering the game of Hockey in this Dominion.

H. S. Goodman
(sd) H. S. Goodman

Christchurch, 10th March, 1936.

HOW TO PLAY HOCKEY

By M. N. MASUD

My friends in New Zealand,

Your Association has asked me to prepare some notes on hockey for you and your coaches' guidance. These are based upon my experience of the hockey players of your country and mine and on my personal observation of the game of the best players of India.

This country has neither professionals nor coaches to help the budding players in their game, and, surprising though it be, there is no book written by any Indian player on hockey. Thus our players are left to their own resources to learn the most scientific game in the world, with the result that they get into the habit of making mistakes which debar them from rising to the top flight. To what heights Indian players could rise if given proper training while yet youngsters I cannot imagine. Our climate, our grounds, and our physique are most suitable to make hockey our national game and if the players are coached on the right lines, the flag of my country in hockey will fly for many, many years.

I do not profess myself to be a master or expert at the game. I am still a student of it and try to improve with every practice and by watching other players. My notes are, therefore, open to criticism and correction, but if only one hockey player is better off by studying them I shall be quite satisfied with my humble effort.

Proper Kit.

I would advise every hockey player to dress himself for his daily or weekly game in the proper kit. Special attention must be paid to boots or shoes, which should be well fitted and very light in weight. I would recommend boots to shoes as the former give a security to ankles in swift turns of the game. On wet and slippery grounds bars or studs should be affixed to the boots. Shin-guards

re very useful and may be put on even in practice games.

Weight of Stick.

This varies generally from 19oz. to 23oz. Ordinarily, forward and a half should have lighter sticks than a back or a goal-keeper, but the weight of your stick depends on your own physique and natural ability to hold lighter or a heavier one. The balance and the form of stick depends also, in my opinion, upon one's choice and decision.

How to Hold a Stick.

A stick should be held neither too high nor too low. The former is more liable to be penalised for "sticks" and does not give sufficient force to the shots; the latter, though guarding against "sticks" gives weak shots. The grip of the stick should not be changed in hitting, dribbling, or stopping a ball. A slight shifting of the right hand is necessary only when you are making a "place" or "scoop" shot, in which case the right hand should be taken a few inches lower to give extra strength and accuracy.

How to Hit.

Much of the penalising for "sticks" will be curtailed if you are sure of the angle of your stick while hitting. If the ball is too near your feet, the stick will go naturally above your shoulders by only a slight movement of the wrist; if it is placed too far from your feet, you will have to give an extra bend to your waist and make a weeping shot which is often inaccurate and weak. I would recommend that the distance between you and the ball should be between 12 and 16 inches according to your height. The ball should invariably be on your right side and never in front.

Huge sweeps of the stick will not give extra strength to your shots. The play of the wrists with perfect timing will give you the most powerful shots.

Your hits should be as accurate as possible and of exquisite strength. Much of your game depends upon

this. And, while hitting, if you are a class player, attention should be paid more to the spot where a hit is intended than to the ball; as, in the event of an opponent coming in you will be able to notice him and change direction of the ball. Surprising though it will sound I have seen very few players hitting the ball without paying most of their attention to it and still their hits would be perfectly accurate and of requisite strength if they concentrated on the destination of the ball. Dhyān Chand's strokes are a model of accuracy and necessary strength, hit always with all his attention focussed on his players and the opponents.

How to Stop a Ball.

Many a ball has been snatched from you because of the imperfect stop. The ball should always be stopped dead and never bumped back. How many players can do this? Very few, although it sounds so easy. The ball should always be stopped with the flat side of the blade of your stick a few inches in front of your legs, which should be in the position of "attention". The legs in this position will form a kind of bulwark to your stick, which should always be gripped by both hands.

Balls received on either side which cannot be stopped by standing with your two legs joined together are stopped with the grip of one hand or two hands over the stick according to facility and ease of the player. In these cases, the legs are taken as far apart as possible to give assistance to the stick.

Stopping a Ball With Hands.

On bumpy and uneven grounds hands are very useful in stopping the ball, but on good, level grounds this practice should be discouraged as much as possible as it retards to a certain extent the flow of the game, and gives a touch of dullness or slowness to a game which should be fast and exciting.

How to Push a Ball.

The "Push Shot" is very much in vogue now. Its advantages over a "hit shot" are many. Apart from the

artistic point of view it definitely gives an added strength and accuracy to a shot and causes the least possible delay in its execution. To change the direction of the ball is far easier with this shot than with a "hit shot". And then also there is less danger involved of being hooked from behind in "push shots", than in "hit shots".

The middle part of the flat side of the blade is used for these shots. Play of the wrists is more apparent here than in the other shots. The two wizard brothers can push a ball from one side of the field to the other with just a force of their very powerful elastic wrists. Play or force of the arms should be avoided in these shots as much as possible. Push or scoop or flick shots are no more than mere wrist shots.

Scoop or Flick Shots.

They are as useful as the "push" but it is up to each individual player to decide which shot is to be used under certain circumstances. When there is an opponent between me and my player I use scoop shots more frequently than others.

These are also executed by the middle part of the blade; only the blade is to be thrust in more under the ball than in "push shots". Play of the wrists is as necessary here as in the former one.

Danger of Push, Scoop or Flick Shots.

Useful and artistic as they have proved themselves they should not be employed too much as they tend to slow down the pace of the game and often result in a "close-in" of the players. A good hockey game should be as open as possible to give full run and free movements to the players.

Players who have not yet mastered "hits" should not use either of these shots. In my opinion, "scoop shots" etc., are an advanced stage in the game of hockey and should be employed when full mastery as regards requisite strength and accuracy has been obtained over "hits."

Dribbling.

This should be resorted to as little as possible. To me, dribbling does no more than open a way for a player to free himself and pass the ball to another player. So long as dribbling is employed to this end I would recommend it but when it tends to be merely spectacular, it verges on selfishness, which is a thing to be discouraged as much as possible. The two in-forwards, by virtue of their position may dribble more than the rest of the forwards. A centre forward should resort more to passes than dribbling. Dhyān Chaud has more command over "passes" than dribbling, in which Rup Singh is a past master. The former is an ideal centre forward; the latter an ideal left-in.

The two wings should be more inclined to free runs than exploitation of dribbling. They must have full control over the ball, but ball control is not synonymous with dribbling. No one in the defence should resort to dribbling except in very rare cases, although ball control is as much necessary in the defence as in the attack.

The golden rule to be observed by every player is to ask himself frankly "Am I dribbling to be spectacular and for the pleasure of it or using it as a means to free myself and pass the ball to my team?" Dribbling should always be regarded as a means to an end—passing the ball to other players—and never an end in itself.

How to Dribble.

Play of the wrists is required as much with dribbling as with "push shots" etc. Suppleness of the wrists and perfect control over the ball will make you a class dribbler. Dribbling is only a term for carrying the ball with your stick through a maze of players. The ball should always be put before you as if glued to the stick while dribbling. The whole body should respond to the play of the wrists and be in rhythm with the movements of the stick. This may sound a bit strange, but a stiff body with only the play of the wrists will not make a good dribbler.

Carrying the Ball on a Stick.

Formerly this was considered brilliant work on the part of a good player when there used to be more show of individual play than team work. Carrying the ball on a stick is never useful to a team but is certainly spectacular. It is full of risks to the player, as he stands a good chance of being hit on the face. Even if you are very quick and active and an adept in doing this funny trick it will carry you nowhere. Certainly not to the scoring of a goal, which is ultimately the object. When a player is carrying the ball on a stick what are the other players expected to do—stand and admire? According to the basic principle of team-work each and every player is expected to anticipate the movements of the other and clearly this is not possible in this one-man-trick.

Back or Reverse Shots.

These should be resorted to very infrequently and in rare circumstances, as they lack the finish and the sting of the "right shots". Even a first class left wing is expected to make a turn and hit or pass the ball on the "right shots". Every shot of a good player should be well thought out and accurate; with back or reverse shots however good, can not be sure of these two essentials.

A tap with the reverse stick proves as effective as a fine dribble, but a player should practice it well before he uses it. Dhyan Chand is master of this. His tap to his right-in with the stick reversed very frequently passes a defender unchecked and proves very effective in changing the direction of the game.

Back Pass.

This is given by the right or reverse stroke and is very effective in freeing a player and in changing direction of the game. The execution and effectiveness of the pass depends upon perfect understanding and anticipation between the two players, giving and receiving it. It should, however, be resorted to only at intervals and on suitable occasions. Too much indulgence robs the game of its

speed and forward play. A left-in nearing the edge of the striking area and finding no opening for his dribbling or forward play can very well pass to his half back or centre half. The principle to be observed in using this pass is that if you find no opening for forward play it is better to pass the ball back than give it to an opponent. "Back pass" is a fine tactical move if employed suitably and opportunely by the player concerned.

Cross Passes.

These are very effective in changing the complexion of a game at any moment. They also make the game open and give full scope to the movements of every player. By "cross passes" I mean passes from right full-back to left wing; from left full-back to right wing; similarly from the two side half-backs to the opposite wing forwards. A clever half-back or full-back watching a game concentrated on one side for a considerable time will take it to the other side by a "cross pass" to his opposite forward and will thus catch the opposing defence on that side less active and attentive. Full advantage can be secured from "cross pass" only when such passes are executed with the least possible delay; otherwise, if some time is taken the opposing defence will anticipate your movement. Care should also be taken to see that the passes are not intercepted by the opponents in which case the danger, instead of being in their zone, will be on your side, as your defence will be caught unawares by a sudden change in the game.

Through Passes.

This is another form of variation in tactical moves. Instead of giving passes on the place where players are expected to be, "through passes" are given in the space between an attacker and a defender. Requisite strength and accuracy form necessary adjuncts to these passes, otherwise they will not prove effective. A fast nimble set of forwards, if resolutely opposed by a heavy defence may leave the same defence at sixes and sevens if given "through passes" by the forwards themselves or the half-

backs. Fast wingers will prove more useful to a side if fed by "through passes" than otherwise, as these passes will give them full scope for their speedy runs.

These passes are made generally by "place" or "scoop" shots. Hits can easily be anticipated by the opposing defence.

Changing the Game.

I am a great believer in this tactical move of the game, duties of which fall very naturally more upon a centre-forward or a centre-half than upon others, by virtue of their playing in the central positions, and thus giving passes on both sides more easily than the rest of the team. A ball coming to a centre-forward from his right side, if passed back to the same side, would find the opposing defence fully alive to the situation, while, if passed to the left side there is a possibility of finding the defence on this side not so alert as in the former case. It may not be inferred that a centre-forward or a centre-half should invariably pass a ball received from right side to left side or vice versa, but is up to him to decide the change under the circumstances.

Attacks should be as varied in their nature as possible, and changing the game is only one of the variations. No rules can be laid down for its observance or non-observance, except a hint that this move as well as all tactical moves in hockey depends on the way it is executed and the time taken in the execution.

Variations in Attack.

Just as a clever bowler makes variations in his deliveries by changing speed, length, and break, according to the play of a batsman, similarly a good set of forwards should change its attack by utilising several kinds of passes, according to the weak points in the opposing defence. Long passes, short passes, cross passes, through passes, back passes, dribbling too in some cases, are different forms of attack and can be applied to their full advantage if played correctly and at the right moments. Antici-

pation and full understanding between all members of the team are essential in making these tactical moves. Speed and accuracy and the time taken in their execution are the other necessary factors and if these be absent there will not be any marked improvement. To decide when a certain pass is to be used under certain circumstances depends entirely upon the individual concerned, with his hockey sense to help and guide him.

How to Run.

This sounds simple as everybody with sturdy legs can run as fast as a hare, but a hockey run is different from other runs. In it, while running, you must have full control of the ball, and the poise of the head must be such that will allow you to see the ball at your feet; the players in the field; and the whole field itself.

The weight of your body should be balanced on your toes, heels above the ground. This balance will give you a forward movement without putting your weight on the stick, which will yield to your wrist only when it is not hampered by the weight of your body.

A slight bend is necessary at the waist to enable you to see the ball at your feet, and also to give you an added balance in the swift turns of hockey. Too much bend will not help you to see the players or the field and though it may help you to become a good dribbler your passes will always be inaccurate and untimely.

In my opinion, a centre-forward and a centre-half should be less prone to speed than their team mates. The onus of being the "brains" of a side falls generally on either of these two, or both, if they are fast, naturally they would not get enough time to plan their movements. The "brain" of a side should be as fresh toward the end of a game as at its beginning to give physical and mental help to his side when it is needed most. Humanitas is so weak that freshness cannot last till the end of a game if bursts of speed are made frequently, notwithstanding the most strenuous programme of training.

Duties of Various Players.

A good player is expected to play in his position. Without this no team-work is possible. I would recommend the following positions to the various players:—

“The wings” should remain in the galleries, not necessarily on the throw-in lines, as then they would not be able to dribble or change their positions easily. When nearing the striking area they may leave the galleries and be inclined to come as near as possible to the striking area without causing too much jumble near it.

“The two In-forwards” should be more inclined to their wingers than to the centre forward before the 25 yards line, but past this they should in their turn be inclined more to the centre forward than to their “wings,” who will in turn be more inclined to their “ins” than the galleries.

“A Centre-forward” should move in the straightest possible line to the opponent’s goal.

“The two Side-halves” should watch the opponent’s “wings” always, move sufficiently up to keep feeding their forwards and covering them and fall back to help their full-backs when defence is needed.

“A Centre-half” should watch the opposing two inside forwards and the centre-forward, be more in touch with his forwards and with the attack than his side-halves, and should fall back also with the full-backs to support the defence. By virtue of his occupying the central position in the field, he would receive more passes than the rest of the side, and his own passes to any player either in defence or attack would be more opportune and effective. He must prove himself a true pivot by his being a living link between the attack and the defence.

“The two Full-backs” should form a stubborn defence by well-timed clearances, sure and sound tackling. They should cover and help their half-backs much in the same way as do the latter to their forwards. They should have their eyes more on the in-forwards and the centre-forward than on the wing-forwards.

"A Goal-keeper" is expected to take his position between the goal posts in such a way as to face the ball always. Special care should be taken to cover the goal posts when deemed necessary. His coming out to meet the attack half-way or on the edge of the circle depends upon his judgment and anticipation. Kicks should be used more frequently than hits.

Team Work.

This is the short term for understanding, combination, and cohesion amongst forwards, half-backs and full-backs; amongst forwards and half-backs; half-backs and full-backs; and full-backs and the goal-keeper. Individual brilliance is merged in the net of this combination of the various departments. Team work depends upon every individual realising that he is only a link in the chain of the team and that his own play affects it adversely or otherwise. Every player is expected to play in his position and do his piece of work thoroughly, and the resultant effect of the play of all such players combined will be harmony amongst them. Team work is such harmony amongst players which gives a flow, a touch of artistry and gracefulness to the play. Individual or selfish play hampers this flow and must always be discouraged.

Positional Play.

With every player doing his duty thoroughly and unselfishly the result is team work; the team work helped and developed by anticipation results in "positional play." You cannot reach this stage unless you do just what is anticipated of you, or in other words until the play of a team has reached a perfect combination and understanding between the players.

"Positional play" is to shift your own position or sometimes move into another player's position, as the run of the play demands. No rules can be laid down for this shifting of positions in a team; your own play brought to the very high standard of team work will produce the positional play. In this play every player knows where he will be under certain circumstances and he knows also

where the other player will move to under the same circumstances. A player shifts himself in his own position or in another's position, the other player affected by this shifting places himself, as if automatically, in another position and the exchange of passes between these two players is the result of shifting positions or "positional play."

Anticipation.

This plays a great part in the hockey of to-day. Without it a player cannot be a class player nor a game a first-class exhibition of hockey.

By "anticipation" is meant that a good player is expected to guess the movements of his side or of the opponents before such movements are executed. Interception by a half-back will be difficult if he cannot anticipate the movements of the attack. There can be no fine combination amongst the forwards if every one of them cannot anticipate the movement of the other and the opposing defence.

"Anticipation," in my opinion, can best be developed by a close observation of the play of the other players. It will be noticed that a player by a slight movement of any part of his body foretells his action or the whole movement. The eyes, the expression of the face, the twist of the wrists, or the peculiar play of the legs, etc., naturally respond to the desire of an action within, which will give to an observer a clue to the immediate action. And when you are able to guess the full action of a player by watching a very slight expression of a part of the body immediately preceding such action, you can bring your observation to help you in your own games. At first, you will find this difficult, but constant practice with concentration, patience and perseverance, will enable you to anticipate the movements of each and every player on the field. The older and more experienced a player is, the keener will be his sense of "anticipation." Correct anticipation is the key note of the sound, scientific game of hockey to-day.

Hockey Sense.

In the absence of a better word I am using it with the hope that it will not catch the eye of a psychologist, who will certainly penalise me for some infringement of his Rules. By "hockey sense" I mean that a player by his sincere efforts at learning the game and close observation of play of other players can sense exactly what to do and what not to do. It is the final development in a class player, beginning from team-work, positional play, anticipation, to this last stage. Dhyan Chand's movements are very simple analytically, but he does the right thing at the right moment and he is, therefore, called great and wizard. His "hockey sense" has been developed to such an extent that it is very seldom he chooses to do the wrong thing. Why cannot you be a Dhyan or a Rup or whoever your favourite be?

You are also born with a "hockey sense". It is within you, only you are not conscious of it. Begin thinking of it from to-day and develop it by constant practice with a cool head and observation of other players without criticising their play. No good player is without some benefit to you, and every hockey practice should add something to your knowledge of the game.

How to be a Class Player.

Constant and conscientious practice will take you by stages to your highest ideal or goal. Take every point of your game piecemeal and practice it thoroughly before you begin with another. The play of a great player is always composed of simple points, if analysed; only these points are carried to almost perfection. Do not copy his style, for that would land you nowhere. Your own physique and natural ability will give you a style of your own; you have only to watch keenly how great players do a certain thing and then after analysing the trick, take it by simple stages and practice it until you do the whole in your own style. Every practice game of yours, if played in the right spirit, will improve your game appreciably.

A Cool Head.

Hockey, a game of science, needs your physique and your mind to carry out its movements, but if you get excited or worried your mind will not help your physique, and you will not be able to make the finer movements of the game. In the beginning you may find it difficult to keep down your temper against some of the rough tactics of your opponents, bad play of your team or bad umpiring. Try to accommodate yourself to these and think only of yourself, your game and the high ideals of the game in such circumstances. And when once you are able to keep your head cool, you have achieved the basic principle upon which modern games are played, and your success is only a matter of time. I cannot lay too much emphasis on this aspect of your game, but I leave it to you to stop and ponder for a minute what you could have done if you had had a cool head on your shoulders in most of your matches. How a slight mistake on your part or on the part of your colleague through excitement or bad temper cost you a vital point in a game or even the game itself. Dhyān Chand, with all his greatness and wizardry, would lose much if he had not got a cool head and a wonderful temperament.

Do Not Think Too Much of Your Play.

Thinking too much of one's play has been the undoing of many a fine player. Even after you have played your best, been cheered enthusiastically by a crowd and applauded at a dinner table, think that you have done nothing extraordinary, and that many players have done better. There is nothing in the hockey world which you alone can do.

Try to make as few mistakes in your game as possible and let not your failures damp your spirit. Dhyān Chand must have failed many a time; there is no harm if you fare the same. But success never gives him a swollen head, let it not give you one. There is no reason, if given equal facilities, why you should not be a Dhyān or a Rup in your time. Why not greater?

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