ATC Article Series – Article #4

Trainers Tips

There are a lot of little ways to make sure you get the best performance from yourself and those little ways can add up to have a huge impact. So here are a few random, small tips that I've learned over the years, most of which I'll admit to having learned from others as we all try to share ideas.

The first one comes from a trainer who worked with Mikka Kiprusoff in the AHL. Apparently, like a lot of goalies, Kiprusoff has a problem staying hydrated during a game. So one of the things they explored was the fact that when we take a drink from water bottle, by squirting it into our mouths we also take in a lot of air. That air takes up space in our stomach, which means less water can be taken in. It also causes problems absorbing the water. So the solution they came up with was to use a straw in his water bottle, which eliminates almost all the air. It's a simple tip, but one that's been very valuable to Kiprusoff. Next time you watch a flames game, you'll be able to notice the sticking out from his bottle. An added tip is to use a piece of elastic tubing as the straw, as this won't break or crack if it gets hit with a puck or knocked off the net.

That tip leads me to a question I get asked all the time. How much water versus how much Gatorade to drink? The answer varies with different individuals, but here's a little grade nine science to think about. Remember osmosis? When you lose electrolytes and then drink a lot of Gatorade, your stomach in now very concentrated with electrolytes and low amounts of water while the surrounding tissues have low levels of electrolytes compared to a higher amount of water. So will that help the electrolytes pass into the tissue? Yes, but if that concentration is too high, it will also cause *water to be pulled from the tissues* and into the stomach to try and reach a balance. Water leaving the tissue and going into the stomach would be very bad. So the best answer I can give is to drink both, but never too much of just one at any time. Some players like to mix it together, some players drink water on the bench and Gatorade in between periods and others go back and forth all game long. See what works for you.

A lot of goalies can get picky about their skates, but they also don't have a good enough understanding of how a sharpening works, they just know when their skates feel good and when they don't. As goalies have been required to become better skaters and the emphasis on quickness has increased, its important to find a radius (the curve in the bottom of the blade) that suits you. A shallow radius glides better when sliding laterally, but it also digs in less on the power leg when you push off, causing you to lose power. Too deep a radius will cause the skate to dig in to the ice though, making your skates feel like they're stuck. A 1 inch radius means that the curve, if continued all the way, would draw a circle that would be 1 inch in circumference. The sharpest radius that is commonly used would be a 3/8ths inch, meaning that the circle would be 3/8ths of an inch in circumference. Obviously the smaller the circle, the deeper the curve. So why do

you need to know this? Because I'm always getting goalies who their skates feel sharp but they can't push off. Or goalies who get their skates sharpened but immediately rub them over plastic, saying that this is how they like them prepared. Or my favorite is the goalie who only gets his skates sharpened every 3 weeks. There's no way these skates can be giving a goalie the best possible performance. If you've just had your skates sharpened but they don't feel sharp on the ice, they most likely just have too shallow a hollow for you. If you don't like your skates sharpened very often, it's probably because they are being sharpened too deep. Sharpening the skates keeps the blade SMOOTH, the hollow is what determines how sharp they will be. Friction is the enemy of quickness when it comes to skates. By dulling them yourself, it can eliminate this problem, but it also marks up the blade and increases friction, which will slow you down. A good skate sharpener can sharpen a pair of skates, and then run them along the skin without cutting themselves. The skates are very smooth, without being too sharp. This is all pretty technical but it can get a lot worse! I used to spend almost an hour sharpening one goalies skates (he was picky but he simply knew every time something was off) and I know Ed Belfour used to have 5 or 6 pairs all sharpened differently so he could switch them up depending on how he felt. Good skate sharpeners can prevent knee and back injuries, can increase quickness and most importantly, add confidence to your game. What I suggest to you is to keep it simple. Understand what the hollow means, try a few different ones out and then specifically ask for your skates to be sharpened that way every time.

A simple little skate trick I do with every pair of skates that came my way is to drill holes in the bottom. Most skates come with a few already drilled but a few more can never hurt to help drain the water away. This is even more crucial when wearing dry fit material. Remember that the sweat that gets pulled away from your body has to go somewhere. Most of the time its going into your equipment and gravity will pull most of that down ward, causing it to pool in the skates. As long as you don't compromise the structure of the skate, a few more holes will help.

Now that your skates are dryer, try keeping sweat and water off your gear as much as possible as well. With pads and blockers, you can treat them a few times a year with water repellant for leather. This will help the water to bead and roll off instead of absorbing into the gear and becoming heavier and heavier as the game goes on. Just make sure to read the directions and also get help selecting the proper repellant to make sure it's suitable for use on your equipment. I've also had goalies who hated how stiff their gear got when it dried out, so they would purposefully put water on it to soften it up. This makes it less stiff, but it also makes it heavier and also breaks it down much quicker. Use a leather softener instead. The gear will soften without absorbing water and afterwards it won't stiffen as much when it dries.

Billy Smith, one of the most successful goalies ever to play, gave me this tip. A great stick handler and a pioneer of goalies playing the puck, Billy suggested finding a small 1 or 2 pound weight and taping it on to the back of the paddle. By practicing with that stick, goalies would still be able to move normally, but it added just enough resistance to

really increase your wrist strength. Poke checks, handling the puck and even your blocker saves will all benefit.

This last tip was one I found out by accident. I had a goalie who broke his hand and with his cast on, he could do everything he needed to on the ice except, obviously, catch pucks with that hand. So the choice was to sit out and do nothing but off ice conditioning for 6 weeks or find a way to practice with out shooting pucks at him. So we started some individual ice sessions with him where I shot tennis balls at him. Just so you know, we tried sponge pucks and they were terrible. The tennis balls worked great though, we even painted them black. It's great if you ever find yourself in a similar situation, but that's not the tip. What we discovered when taking slap shots with a tennis ball on ice, was that they had a tendency to knuckleball. They could drop unexpectedly, change speed and we even got good at getting the to bounce at the top of the crease. It made for great practice at tracking. The goalie had to concentrate extremely hard to track the movement of the balls and when he returned to full practices, he really noticed how much easier it was to follow shots, even through traffic. It's now something I suggest to a lot of coaches to try.