

Section 3 – The Hockey and Education Journey

If a hockey player progresses and develops his game, he will likely have opportunities to play at a higher level. This is when the player and his parents must continue to set priorities and manage his time accordingly. There will emerge several competing pathways in the game of hockey. Always keep it realistic, balanced and fun. Remember, education, not hockey must be the long-term focus. Competitive hockey comes to an end early in life but the decisions you make around your education have critical consequences life long. Ignoring or neglecting this reality is the biggest mistake you can make on this journey.

“Mistakes” to Avoid:

1. **Believing the myth that you must leave home at a young age** to have any chance of progressing in the game of hockey. I am not saying this should never happen, but I do believe there are far more negatives than positives when it occurs too young. Developmentally, young boys and girls are better to have their parents, family, and support system close for as long as possible. Twelve to fourteen is too early. In general terms fifteen or even sixteen it becomes more viable. This may vary considerably when factors such as maturity, decision-making ability, social skills, educational needs, peer relationships, coaching, competitive opportunities, etc. are weighed. But then logistical factors must enter the equation as well and foremost may be the financial cost. Do your research and be realistic.
2. **Always putting hockey first** when considering priorities and managing your time. Hockey is not more important than a young person’s well-being, self-concept, mental and physical health, education, appropriate development, and overall self-awareness and esteem. Hockey is not the end it is part of the process. It can be a powerful part, a part that contributes to a person’s growth and maturity. Don’t allow it to become something that hides or buries who you are. It can be an albatross that slows or drags you down or it can be a catalyst in your journey.
3. **Using hockey as an excuse** for neglecting the real important stuff in life. Hockey should never be used as the rationale for your poor decisions. Not only is this a fallacy, but it is also a dangerous habit and has many short- and long-term consequences. Teachers and parents must see that hockey has been good for you not a factor that is negatively affecting your education and other critical developmental attributes. There may be situations when you need the understanding of these people, and they must see that you are doing everything within your control and making wise decisions.
4. **Looking for the easiest path** in school to accommodate hockey. Education is not where you should be cutting corners. The results of this mistake can have far reaching consequences. At a time in your life when you should be maximizing each opportunity, sport should support this and not hinder it. Establish a work ethic you can be proud of. Be the person who does the very best he can in everything, a person who never looks for the easiest way. Teachers, coaches, and peers admire and respect this type of person, not the person who is looking to fool people or fake their way with smoke and mirrors. Be genuine and authentic.

5. **Letting yourself be defined by what you do** as a hockey player rather than by who you are as a person. This can become the biggest mistake of your life. In the short-term if you define yourself by the success, you have as a player, you are creating a distorted reality, where in fact it works against you. You have placed your own self-esteem, self-identity, and chance of fulfillment in a no-win scenario. You have created unnecessary stress on yourself and drain on your energy. In the long-term you lose sight of who you are. When competitive hockey is over, and it will be over, you are lost, depressed and rudderless. The stories of this happening with former athletes are many and can be very difficult and even tragic.
6. **Acting as if you are better than others** because of your skills or prowess as a hockey player. There is no upside to arrogance and conceit. They are disrespectful and foolish under any microscope. They only bring the perpetrator scorn and his sport and team disrepute. In an education setting they are illogical and will lead any coach to regret his decision to have that player on his team. These actions reveal something about the character of the person that eventually will prevent him from further advancement in the sport.
7. **Expecting favors or special treatment** from teachers or others because you are a good hockey player. You are owed nothing because of the sport you play or the skills you have. This respect must be earned because of the way you treat people, conduct your life, and contribute to others. Who you are, is always more important than, what you do!
8. **Hanging around in a clique** with other hockey players. Get involved, meet other people, play other sports, and don't become a one-dimensional person. You will regret the opportunities missed, the risks not taken, and the experiences that could have been. Youth is a time to explore possibilities, try new things, and create memories. These years go by fast, don't waste them, live them.
9. **Not communicating** or keeping people informed or asking permission or clarification. One of the most significant errors we can make is not communicating. Wars are fought because of it and relationships are destroyed by a lack of it. Your life may be complicated or demanding, we don't live in a bubble so others will invariably be impacted by your lack of communication. Talk to your parents, coaches, teachers, and others who can assist you or at the very least need to know where you are coming from.
10. **Taking a year or more off from education** while you play junior hockey if you hope one day to move on in education, hockey, and life. Life doesn't pause or go on hold because it is inconvenient, and you need a break. Life keeps moving forward, whether you do or not. If you want to be left behind say it but don't fake it. That doesn't mean we don't adjust, reorganize, and set new priorities because of circumstances but use the time wisely. If you are trying to prepare yourself to be a college hockey player, what are you doing about becoming a student-athlete. Don't become a disabled junior hockey player. Disabled of good habits, work ethic, decision-making abilities, and positive character traits.

Advice for Successfully Navigating the Education and Hockey Journey

1. **Set goals for both your schooling and your hockey.** Always search for balance and keeping all options open for as long as you can. When you do have to make decisions or accept a certain outcome make sure you understand the consequences. Don't fall back on excuses or unrealistic future outcomes. Be honest with yourself about your goals.
2. **Anticipate where problems or challenges may arise,** and problem-solve early and often. It is unrealistic to assume that there will not be roadblocks and barriers along the way. "S...t happens" so be prepared and deal with every obstacle with the knowledge that a solution is possible. Don't become pessimistic, get bummed out or give up.
3. **Involve others, seek a team approach, and realize 1 + 1 can equal 3.** Seldom can we do it alone or should we. It is wise to seek help, advice or just a different perspective. We need to clear our minds of all the clutter, doubts, and reasons why not. Get fresh approaches, ideas, and opinions. Collaboration leads to solutions and better planning. The right answer is often different than what you could do alone. The right answer is often more than the sum of one idea and another.
4. **Build connections and relationships everywhere.** We are social beings even if we are introverts, shy, or awkward. We need others. Developing relationships is a key to success. Don't burn bridges with people as you never know when you will need to cross that bridge. This is true of teachers, coaches, teammates, friends, and acquaintances in all walks of life. Build connections and then foster them. People fondly remember those that were kind, honest, and caring. Your network of relationships will be far more important than your net worth.
5. **Disagreements and even conflict are opportunities to learn and grow.** Be open to learn in and from every situation. Don't take disagreements as an affront, take them as a chance to find a better way. Don't respond defensively, respond with appreciation and respect. You will be surprised how this one strategy can disarm and diffuse the other person to the point that they are no longer intransigent and oppositional. Their mind is opened and they become receptive.
6. **Do whatever it takes.** Absolutely, have dreams and lofty ambitions and then get concrete and establish both short and long-term goals. However, if you are not prepared to make specific plans and follow through by acting on those plans you are still dreaming. Goals have little hope of being fulfilled by chance. Deliberate and focused choices lead to goals being achieved.
7. **Never shoot for the minimum, always strive for the best you can do.** I can't count the number of times I have heard that a student has taken literally a school or university's statement that the minimum they would accept is a certain mark or percentage only to discover later that they would never get in with that mark. As an example, UBC may list the minimum accepted mark for admission as 60% in English 12. Students misinterpret that or don't fully understand that there is competition for the finite number of seats or spaces they have. If 1,000 apply for 500 spots and each year those 1,000 applicants have above average marks, by the time the 500 seats are filled, the real minimum for that year usually is considerably higher. In fact, in the case of my UBC example, that minimum is commonly 75-85%. The message is, never sell yourself short, if you are capable of higher, don't settle for less.

8. **If you aspire to play junior hockey plan accordingly**, particularly if you expect to play junior prior to graduating. Depending on where you will play junior, their schedule may not allow you to take full-time classes within a school. Plan so you don't have too many courses to complete in grade 12.
9. **Know the admission requirements for Canadian and American post-secondary schools** if college and college hockey is the goal. Sadly, many people pretend to know, or only know pieces of the puzzle and then many young players find out years later that they were given incorrect or only partially correct information. Do your research and find a variety of sources. Have your information vetted and don't take one person's word. The purpose of this guide is to provide players a reliable and accurate site, but things change so make sure everything is up to date and your interpretation of it is correct.
10. **Research what different teams do to support their players**, in education, careers, and life when evaluating where to play junior. Ask questions and do your research before you commit. Talk to or reach out to current and former players who played there or played under the coach(es) you are considering. Does the team management and coaches "Walk the Talk" or is there more smoke and mirrors to what they say and do?
11. **If you have graduated from high school take a long look at your marks** as compared to college and university entrance requirements and determine any upgrades or additional high school courses, you may need. Canadian universities accept any courses you do after high school and have no time limits. The NCAA will only accept one upgrade or one new course and only in the year immediately after you have graduated. That doesn't mean you can't or shouldn't do more, but just make sure you can get in with the high school courses you have, and the one upgrade accepted.
12. **Not every person wants to go, should go, or has the aptitude to go to college or university**. If your career ambitions or aptitude doesn't involve that level of post-secondary education don't set yourself up for frustration, wasting time and money and unnecessary failure. Know yourself and decide what route is best for you and then research if there are pathways where you could continue hockey and education. This is where some schools in the ACAC or the BCJHL could be more appropriate for you.
13. **Whatever your ambitions and goals are DON'T put them on hold while you play junior hockey**. This is ridiculous and unnecessary. You have plenty of time while playing junior to explore options such as part-time post-secondary courses, continuing or community education courses, work experience, finding a mentor to shadow, volunteer work in schools or the community etc. This is life, use it and don't fall for the misconception or trap that it must be hockey 24/7. I can tell you that college coaches don't want to recruit one dimensional people and the world isn't going to wait on you. If your junior team doesn't support and encourage this or actively refuses to allow it I would suggest you are in the wrong place.

14. **It is very common that young people are unsure or undecided** about what courses to take prior to full-time university or college or even when they get there. Again, that is what this time is all about, exploring options, trying new things, and having your eyes and mind wide open to all possibilities. In selecting courses try something new or something that interests you. If the courses, you take become transferrable to whatever school you move onto that is great, but it is a bonus. What is important is that you kept your mind active, continued to build good work habits, managed your time, used it wisely, and explored possibilities.