

DEFENDING THE REVERSE STICK SHOT

By Justin King

I did toy with the idea of writing this column myself but I thought that the fat boy tactics of trampling all over the attacker may not seem appropriate, nor would comments like 'I slept with your mother last night' be seen as legitimate ways to win the ball back. So what do we do-well we get one of the best defenders in the world, Jabba - Justin King of South Africa, to give you a virtual coaching session. He was only their player of the year in 1999 and is far too modest to talk about some of his other achievements - only the best for you!

There has been a lot of talk and debate on this topic and here is one more idea.

When the player goes to hit the shot, there is a time when the foot gets planted and the back swing is being taken. This gives the defender a chance to make a tackle. By placing the stick in the right hand and jabbing the ball away the attacker will then miss the ball.

You can also try to lead with the left leg as this gives you more extension with the right arm. The most important thing is to get as close to the attacker as possible, as this will save you from being hit. Try this idea and see?

The closer you get the less chance you have of being hit, try this slowly at first and then get it up to match speed. Remember often the player taking the shot is off balance and if you get in close and help them with a little nudge I'm sure the umpire will not blow a foul against you. That doesn't mean you can charge in and up end them into the grandstand like the great Joost Van der Westhuizen tackle, it means timing your tackle to perfection.

It does take some getting used to but I have seen it done with a fair amount of success. Another issue to consider is the attackers are normally allowed to take this shot with no pressure and normally take a long time to set themselves up to take the shot. If you are making the tackle when they least expect it, it would be to your advantage.

A point to ponder "Have you ever seen a striker hit themselves on the back or head whilst shooting at goal?" In other words get closer.

Another idea is to force the attacker onto the reverse stick and as they are about to have a shot a defender from the opposite side makes a sweep tackle on the reverse stick to clear the ball. This takes good timing from both players and also good communication. This is what we would call a "double defense", with two players involved in defending the shot; this

also should be practiced if you are to do it successfully.

Seeing that I am a defender, it would only seem fair that I give more coaching tips to the defenders, not that forwards don't defend but they certainly don't put a priority on it.

Something that forwards and midfielders can help us defenders do is a method I referred to as "double defense". This is when instead of making a bad tackle as forwards often do, they run with the ball carrier and allow the defender or midfielder to step up and make an over tackle on the front stick side. The timing of this is critical as you don't want both players eliminated in a bad double tackle.

The back player is the player who is in charge of the tackle as they have a full view and are also going to be making the first tackle. If the ball carrier sees the defender stepping up to make the tackle and tries to pull the ball down their reverse stick or left foot it is the job of the channeller to protect that side and make the tackle.

Patience and timing are very important factors when executing the tackle, at worst the play should be broken down and all players take up better positions in the field. The majority of the double defenses should be done moving onto the front stick side but can also be done on the reverse stick side and is a bit more difficult because of the fear of getting hit with the stick. The closer you get the less chance of you getting caught with the stick.

Hockey is a numbers game, if you can have more attackers or defenders in an area then you should have the upper hand. That is what we are trying to create here. There is also a saying that goes "Attack in large areas and defend in small areas". If I was in a position where I knew that I had another defender helping me I would be a lot more confident than if I was a straight one versus one.

A good drill to practice this is to first of all practice going through the technique in 3s. A more advanced drill would be to have two tackle boxes set up next to each other. There would be one defender in each box and a spare defender who can help defend in either box. The attacking players can then attack through the tackle boxes in a one versus one and try to score a goal at the end of the box. The third and covering defender has to make up their mind as to which defender they are going to help at any one time. This goes a long way to helping out communication and the ability of the initial defender to slow the play down and then receive help from the third defender. It also helps the attacker identify when to eliminate with speed and put the one defender who is isolated under pressure.

Tackling has developed over the past year or two, but more emphasis has been put on slowing down the attack and forcing the ball carrier or ball into a position on the field where the defending side is then comfortable to make a play at winning the ball. Far too often defenders and midfielders try and win the ball too early and are easily eliminated with either a pass or by the dribble. We must realize that with no off-sides it makes the field very large and more difficult to defend. This means that there is more running involved and is essential that we are fitter to help compete better.

As a defender I would like to see fewer goals scored, especially against defenses that I am part of, so here's to the increased defense of the reverse stick shot.