

## Hitting the Ball (Stage 1)

### Philosophy

one of the most important and commonly used skills in hockey is the hit. This skill is used when maximum power is required. It is important for every position on the pitch to have a player than can hit the ball well. **(Except for the keeper of course.)**

Defenders can use the hit to un-pick teams that press very well. Defenders also need a good hitting ability to be able to execute the route one ball. **(i.e. straight to an attacker)**

Midfielders need the ability to hit the ball also to find the route one pass, but also to be able to take free-hits into the circle for example.

Attackers need the ability to hit a ball to take long corners, for crossing of the ball and obviously a lethal weapon for scoring goals.

Last but not least, at short corners the hit is a deadly weapon.

Teams that have players in the side that can hit the ball extremely well often do very well. Some examples are Karsten Fischer. He un-picked defenses of all Nations around the world. 70-80 yard passes were always a threat to any team playing against him.

One of the best goals I ever saw was in Amstelveen. A team had an attack that had gone off for a sixteen yard hit. Karsten brought the ball about a meter onto the pitch and then proceeded to hit an 80 yard pass to Becker just outside the circle. He took the ball in and scored top-left. The whole thing took about 5 seconds and the Spaniards knew nothing about it.

Bovelander was one of the main reasons for the Dutch successes over the last decade. His ability to hit corners and deliver the ball into the circle for deflection goals was world famous.

Now I am not saying that you need to only hit the ball. It is the combination of the short game combined with the long game that is the key to successful game plans.

### The Hit (Stage 1)

The hitting technique that I am going to coach below is the very same style that the Dutch, Germans, Australians, Spanish etc all use to hit the ball. The guys in the G.B. side that hit the ball extremely well also use this technique. Hitting is very overlooked by coaches in this country. Wherever

I travel and coach, when I ask the players if they have ever been coached to hit the ball, only about 2% raise their hands. The ones that have normally have been coached incorrectly. The technique that is detailed below is called the baseball technique. It is a technique that I have used since I was about 7, and I was lucky enough to have Russell Garcia teach me how to coach it to others. The way that the skill is shown here, will not only allow you to learn to hit the ball, but is also for coaches wishing to know how to teach the baseball hit.

The reason it is called the baseball hit is because the swing is similar to a baseball swing. The swing goes around the body, instead of up and down. As well as coaching you to hit the ball, I will explain why you should not use the old “**Golf swing style**” as coached by many people still.

There are three things that you must consistently achieve with your hit.

1. Flat hitting.
2. Accuracy.
3. Power.

Hitting the ball flat is one of the most important parts of the hit. In order to take free hits, long corners and general field play, the ball must not leave the ground. Swinging around your body is what will keep the ball flat. But in order to hit the ball while swinging around the body, you must get very low.

This technique is taught in stages, the first is on this page, the others are on the next page.

### Coaching Stage 1

#### Step 1



1. Kneel on the right knee, with the left leg forward. Keep the body upright. (You will only need to do this for stage 1. It is to help you adapt to getting low.)
2. Have both hands touching at the top of the stick.
3. Put the ball as far from the body as possible and level with the left foot.
4. Arms and hands should not be obstructed by the body or legs

### Back Swing



1. Take the stick back around the body, keeping the stick and the hands as low as possible.
2. Your eyes should be looking at the part of the ball that the stick is going to hit.
3. Don't rush the back swing.

### The Hit



1. Hit through the ball with a low and controlled swing. You should end up in this position.
2. To achieve the accuracy, as with all skills it is simply a matter of following through to the target with hands and stick.
3. Keep the head down until after the ball has gone.
4. Don't try to hit the ball too hard. Power will come from a good technique, not from raw muscle power.
5. You should easily be able to keep your balance. If you are unstable or fall over you are swinging too quickly.

If you top the ball or miss the ball completely, this is probably because you have lifted your head. I think everybody knows that they should keep their head down, but I am not sure that everybody understands why. Lifting the head also lifts the shoulders and arms. This in turn lifts the hands and ultimately lifts the stick, therefore producing the topped or air shot. If you find that you lift the ball, it is probably because you are swinging up and down instead of around the body. Swinging up and down means that you are very likely to lift the ball. The reasons for this are that if you swing down on the ball, you are very likely to either squeeze the ball in the air or undercut the ball. If you are lifting the ball get somebody to check your swing and make sure that are swinging around your body and not up and down

After you are satisfied that you have done stage 1 of the practice enough to see signs of improvement either as a player or as a coach, then you should move on to stage 2. Stage 1 normally takes about 10 to 15 minutes depending on how quickly people pick it up or show signs of improvement. The purpose of kneeling down is teaching players the importance of getting low.

**Stage 2 is probably the hardest part** as most players are quite “lazy” or are used to their old technique and try to hit the ball with the **baseball swing**, but without getting low. The next stage is to show the player how far from

the ball they must stand in order to hit the ball, combined with hitting from a standing position. Most players will not understand the distance that they must stand when addressing the ball. Most players will stand way to close to the ball thus end up being forced to do the dreaded up and down swing. As the next picture shows the distance is quite considerable.



### Coaching Stage 2

#### Back swing



1. Start in the kneeling position as in stage 1.
2. Keeping the right foot in exactly the same spot, stand up and away from the ball. **(This is when people will see for the first time how far they actually need to be from the ball.) (Diagram 1)**
3. To hit the ball take a large step towards the ball and bend knees in order to reach the ball.

4. As you are doing this you should be taking your low around the body baseball swing.
5. Common problems to look for.
6. Players moving their feet when they move from kneeling to standing, therefore standing to close to the ball.
7. Back swings are too high.

### The Hit



1. After you have taken your large step forward and planted your left leg, you should start your down swing into the back of the ball. Keeping the hands and stick as low as possible.
2. Hit through the back of the ball.
3. Remember to keep the head down.
4. Don't try to hit the ball too hard.
5. Common mistakes people make:
6. Players taking steps to the ball that are too small. Therefore cannot reach the ball.
7. Players taking the correct size step but don't bend their knees. Very common.
8. Although they have already admitted the benefit of the low swing, as they are not bending their knees, they will go back to up and down swings. **Extremely common.**
9. People trying to hit the ball too hard.
10. Heads come up too early.

### The Follow Through



1. Remember also that you should be able to hold the finishing position without falling over or losing your balance.
2. In order to get the accuracy that you need just simply follow your stick through to the target. Other influences that can effect the accuracy, are having the ball too far in out front of the body, or too far behind your body.
3. Common mistakes that people make:
4. Not following through to the target.
5. High follow troughs.

When you are satisfied with the progress made then move onto a practice to improve the consistency and accuracy of their hitting.

If you have enough cones to have 2 cones per player, get the players 25 yards apart with 2 cones each.

1. Put the cones one stick length apart.
2. The players must hit their ball through their partner's gate.
3. 2 points are awarded for a hit through the gate.
4. 1 point for a hit that hits a cone.
5. After you are satisfied that you or the players you are coaching have begun to do this consistently then you can move on to the final stage. The final stage is to perform the hit while moving.
6. The easiest practice is to have the players run from the 25 yard line to the top of the circle.
7. As they cross the circle line they strike the ball into the goal.

The only thing to coach here is that as they are transferring from the dribble to the hit, that they move the ball away from their body, far enough that they can take their large step into the ball.