

Floorball Musings...News, Thoughts and Opinions about EVERYTHING Floorball

Floorball versus Hockey

Darryl Gross – 2/12/20

I LOVE HOCKEY! I grew up in New England back in the day when we shoveled snow off the ponds and played pickup hockey after school and on weekends. My favorite NHL player was Bobby Orr. I went to college at RPI in upstate New York and THE sport on campus was ice hockey. My biggest argument with my college roommate was which was the better team, the Boston Bruins or the Montreal Canadiens. Moving to Texas in 1989 put hockey on the back burner for me until the Minnesota North Stars moved to Dallas. There was always the rivalry between the Fort Worth Fire and Dallas Freeze of the old Central Hockey League to fill in the gaps. My daughter went to her first Fire game when she was three weeks old but it wasn't until my son, Alex, started skating at age 6 that hockey became a regular part of my life again. Having a child play Tier I youth hockey in North Texas meant travel – LOTS of travel. Most years we went on 8 or 9 hockey trips to Detroit, Chicago, Boston, Canada, Colorado and many other places for tournaments, playoffs and even 3 times for National Championships. And of course there were drives across town 6-7 days a week for local games, team practice and individual lessons. My son's competitive hockey came to an end last year when he graduated from college and the hole that was left is now filled by the Dallas Stars. I don't care about the Cowboys (that's sacrilege in this part of Texas). I don't care about the Mavericks. I don't care about the Rangers. But ask me about the Stars and I'm happy to talk about their season, the standings, who is playing well and what are the latest trade rumors. Yes, hockey is in my blood.

But I'm every bit as passionate about FLOORBALL. In many ways, floorball is every bit as exciting as hockey. It shares many of the characteristics that make hockey such a popular sport – speed, skill, excitement, teamwork and passion. While it lacks two features central to hockey – skating and physicality, Floorball more than compensates because it actually features more speed than ice hockey and just as much skill, excitement, teamwork and passion. Aren't we amazed at how fast the puck moves in an NHL game and how quickly the puck comes off the stick? Isn't it exciting to see a player skate coast to coast or witness a tic-tac-toe passing play that results in a pretty goal? Don't we all love the high speed duel between a skilled forward and an equally skilled goalie? Guess what – we get to see ALL of these in a floorball game and at the world cup level the game is actually FASTER! The ball is very difficult to see because it moves so quickly between experienced passers in floorball. A quick snap shot by a skilled player in floorball will actually hit the net faster than the hardest NHL slapshot. And of course it's harder to defend because you don't see it coming -- unlike the windup taken on the ice for a blistering slapshot. And of course the goalie gets to face these shots without the benefit of leg pads, a catcher, and a blocker. He/she has to rely on agility, athleticism and superior hand-eye coordination. Sure, ice hockey players zip up and down the ice and you really get an appreciation for how fast they go at ice level. But with no offside rule, plays in floorball can happen quicker and you can go from offense to defense in a millisecond. Throw in free hits when the ball goes out of play instead of faceoffs and you witness a game that hardly ever stops. Once you get used to seeing the clock count up instead of down, you realize that floorball is remarkably similar to ice hockey.

And did I mention teamwork, excitement and passion? Floorball has all of these and then some! Sure, watching a Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Finals is often the ultimate in sports competition. But guess what – same goes with Floorball. Don't believe me? Watch the last 10 minutes of the semifinal match between Switzerland and Czech Republic at this past year's Women's World Championship. It doesn't get any better than this!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZziqxcCkRTI>

As a spectator sport, floorball at the highest levels is every bit as exciting as ice hockey. But the main difference between the two sports, skating and checking, is what makes floorball so much more inclusive and better for the participants. Ice hockey is for relatively few athletes. Floorball is for EVERYBODY!

SO WHY ARE WE TRYING TO MAKE FLOORBALL SO MUCH LIKE HOCKEY? In an effort to popularize the sport in the United States, some are trying to present it as "just like hockey but without the ice". A few years ago there was an effort

to call our Americanized version “Floorball Hockey”. Some feel that we should relax some of the basic floorball rules like stick checking, high sticking or use of the hands in order to appeal to hockey players and make the game more like what they are used to playing. In my opinion, this is a huge mistake. It doesn’t help the hockey players because they will never become skilled floorball players if they don’t adhere to the rules of floorball. It certainly doesn’t help the sport of hockey. But most importantly, it is an impediment to the growth of floorball in the United States because it will be harder to develop the player base with the proper skills and respect for the game to compete at the international level. Let’s not make Floorball into Hockey-Lite.

We all know how playing floorball helps hockey players become much better hockey players. It helps with hand-eye coordination, improves agility, helps them “read” the game and most importantly helps them develop soft hands. Some of the best NHL players from Sweden, Finland and Czech Republic grew up playing floorball. We need to encourage hockey players, especially youth hockey players, to pick up a floorball stick and give it a try. Floorball is ideal for off-ice training. But you’re not going to take a serious hockey player away from hockey. What you WILL do is improve his/her skills and possibly give them an appreciation for a sport that is every bit as fun and exciting as the one on the ice. And for those hockey players who no longer play competitive hockey, they can keep the competitive juices flowing on the floorball court long after their skating days are over.

Finally, a word about our friends in the hockey world who are approaching or being approached by the floorball community. We all cheer when we hear about an NHL team using floorball sticks and balls in their hockey outreach programs. Or there’s a new floorball stick with the USA Hockey logo or a stick on the shelves with the NHL brand. When these things happen, we start to think, “Aha, Floorball has arrived...see, it’s got the support of the NHL.” More and more teams are doing this – the Dallas Stars, the NY Islanders, the Florida Panthers, the Chicago Blackhawks. It’s wonderful – floorball is getting introduced to more and more kids – the future growth of floorball is assured. I hate to throw cold water on this rosy scenario but that’s not really the case. Remember why these teams are doing outreach. Ultimately, it’s to grow their fan base and garner more interest in hockey. They use floorball sticks because they are new and lightweight – easy to control, especially in the hands of elementary kids. But in most cases, they are not really playing floorball. They’re playing a newer and safer version of street or floor hockey. In many cases, these programs are not even called “floorball” but “ball hockey” or “floor ball hockey”. While we all support these programs (and trust me, we’ve done a huge number of floorball events before hockey games and in conjunction with hockey festivals), what we really need to do is use these activities to introduce kids to floorball but then follow up with organized programs to teach Floorball, not floor hockey. It’s only by doing this at the grassroots level can we ever hope to raise a generation of American floorball players who can compete and WIN on the world stage.

I LOVE FLOORBALL AND I LOVE HOCKEY. Let’s enjoy both and not try to fuse them together!

Questions or comments? Email me at darryl@floorballplanet.com or call 817-806-5002.