



Liverpool Canoe Club



What makes a great player?

In my opinion, the great players are always striving to improve and to play at their best. They have great individual skills and are always trying to get better. They have the ability to make the most of every opportunity whether it is a shot on goal or marking two players in defence. They read the play well and are able to react and adapt to their opponents styles of offence and defence. They make few errors themselves and are able to assist their team mates if they do. They never ever give up no matter what the score is, or how sore, tired or injured they are.

They love to compete at the highest level and will rise to the occasion in the big games. They can make average players around them shine, and force their opponents to make errors. They will give just as much praise to the assist as to the goal scored. They are a TEAM player and will put what is best for the team above all else when it matters most.

Current Skill Levels

My biggest criticism of most of the players I have seen develop in Australia in recent years is that their basic skills of passing, catching, dribbling, shooting and boat position let them down when the pressure is on. There are many players in Australia who are what I consider good State Level Players. They can hold their own against most of their opponents who play at the Domestic level in Australia, but there are few players in recent years that have developed to the stage of holding their own in International Polo. There is nothing wrong with their basic skills- they just lack the polish and edge that you need to compete at the International level!

If you want to compete internationally then you need to have GREAT basic skills and this only happens with time and effort! 1-2 sessions a week is NOT enough to give you the edge. 4-6 sessions a week will do it and is what most of Australia's best players have done at some stage for many years. It is for this reason that past players can still make comebacks, and could virtually walk into the current squad and teams- because they have made the effort to develop great basic skills. It is also the reason that teams from SA have done well in recent years- the players at all levels have better basic skills than the other states. They are not hard to develop- just the right training and setting high standards.

In recent years we have lost or drawn tight games because of one mistake when a player had poor boat position, or other players either dropped simple passes, threw poor passes or held onto the ball too long, or could not shoot 1 on 1 effectively. Basic skills win and lose games- especially the close games. Work on them, make them perfect and never lower your standards.

Below are a few basic points on each of the main skills- these are an initial starting point and will be expanded on. But get the basics right!

Catching

There are far too many players who try to catch the ball one handed too often. I would much rather everyone actually catches every ball and maintains possession than try to catch one handed. If the pass is too hard, or in slightly the wrong place, catching one handed doesn't work- so don't do it! There is NEVER any excuse for dropping a perfect pass, and you MUST be able to catch any pass in any situation, and have the ability to control and if possible catch any wayward passes as well.



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Dribbling

This is one of the most BASIC skills of our game- you must be able to do it in ANY situation, under pressure or not, in choppy waters or not. The number of people playing at the senior level who cannot dribble reliably is a JOKE.

Especially those who play at the top in attack- i.e. not inside the zone- if you stuff up a dribble it will cost the team goals. If you cannot dribble to draw a defender, or do short hesitant dribbles, the rest of the attack falls apart- get it right!

Passing

There are far too many players who hold onto the ball too long and put their passes under unnecessary pressure. And once they are under pressure they cannot reliably pass through an opponents paddle or over their opponent's head. Many players- even if they do get the ball through, pass it too hard or too low for their team mate to catch it. And then once again we have the problems with people catching the ball.

Every player MUST have the ability to pass in ANY situation. The passes must be at the appropriate speed and height to catch- passes directed downwards to the water, or at your opponents hip / knees are not acceptable. If in doubt hit the chest- water balls should only be used in the appropriate situation.

Defence

There are far too many players who lack the ability to maintain pressure on their opponent when in a 4-1 or 5-5 situation. You must be able to put maximum pressure on your player- without losing boat position to try to force a bad pass. Sitting off your player when they have the ball is not acceptable!

Basic boat position is the number one priority at all times. If in doubt hold your position. You should never go in for the big tackles at risk of losing boat position. Anyone driving at the goal with the ball must be stopped, turned and then put under pressure- once you have done this you should look for the next attacker coming in. Try to get into the habit of meeting the first drive and then pulling off at the right time to hit the next driver coming in.

Attack

Too many people just drive for the sake of driving with little thought of what they are trying to achieve, or they hesitate too much so that no one else has an opening to drive into. Drive with a purpose- either to create an opportunity for some one else on your team, or to score a goal yourself.

Remember at all time the main aim in polo is to create an overlap so attempt to draw the defender and pass off. This is most effective if done with the ball and at speed. Hesitation on a drive is not on- if in doubt do it at speed or not at all!

Maintain some depth in attack so you have time to get speed up and can use the angle of your drive to maximum benefit. Communication in attack is just as important as in defence- tell each other what you are doing, and what you want them to do.

Fitness & Speed

Speed is a high priority! Get stronger in the gym, experiment with a shorter paddle, or lose weight. The Europeans are getting faster and faster- it is not due to the boats- as our fastest players are still winning charge



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starts! Everybody must do everything they can to get better technique so you get the maximum benefit from each stroke.

You must be fit enough to be able to play 10 minutes of presswork. You cannot always rely on being able to sub and have a rest.

Shooting

Good shooting wins games. The Women's team in Germany had more than twice the number of shots the Germans did in their semi final last year- at least 5 of these were from high quality positions with little pressure and only the goalie to beat- none of these went in!!!

Everybody must have "the money shot" The shot you know YOU can get in the net when it counts. The more you have the better, but make sure you get the shots on target in any scenario.

Everyone should be able to get AT LEAST 80% of one on one shoots from all angles, moving and stationary, under pressure and not. If in doubt get the paddle moving and go for a corner.

Drills

Throw a ball against a wall for 15 minutes a day- it is great for your technique in both passing and catching.

Paddle juggling- develops the ability to slide your hands and control ANY pass.

Shooting – using the goal screen to develop accuracy and 1 on 1.

Piggy in the middle- practice passing under pressure

2 on 2 attack- one of the defenders is the goalie- draw the attacker and pass off- time your drives and make sure you score.

Increase your speed- experiment with paddle length to get a higher stroke rate and technique to ensure power of each stroke. Practice your turning, nose and tail control.

Anything other drills you like- as long as you push yourself to higher standards.