

Focus on What You Can Control to Improve Performance

Sport Psychology of Hockey

By [Patrick Cohn](#)

October 24, 2024



What Do You Do When You Fall Out of Favor with Your Coach?

Having a difference of opinion with your coach increases worry and anxiety and can change how you play the game.

Hockey is a fast game where players must trust and rely on their instincts and not worry about aspects outside of their **control**.

Focusing on factors outside of your **control** can cause you to play cautiously and slow down your reactions on the ice.

For instance, if your coach drops you down the depth chart, focusing on the "fairness" of that decision may cause you to lose motivation or lack intensity during your limited time on the ice.

When you focus on what you cannot control, several negative consequences arise:

- Stress and anxiety build, causing frustration, worry, and helplessness.
- Focus is diverted away from your play and what might happen if you play poorly.
- Confidence decreases because you feel helpless and powerless to change your situation.
- Mental and physical energy levels diminish because you invest much of your time in things you can't change.

- Pessimism builds when you feel that the outcome is out of your hands no matter what you do.
- Preparation may be lacking, causing you not to be ready to play your best hockey when you receive an opportunity to expand your role.

What can you control? You have four aspects that you can completely control:

- Effort – During practice, you can put 100% effort into every drill.
- Focus – Instead of concerning yourself with distractions, you can focus on improving your game and contributing to the team.
- Attitude – Instead of spreading negativity and divisiveness, you can show up to team events ready to go with a positive attitude.
- Preparation – You can commit to preparing thoroughly because you never know when you will be called upon.

By shifting your attention to what you can **control** you regain power, improve your performance, and maintain a positive, empowering perspective.

Toronto Maple Leaf defenseman Timothy Liljegren has been a healthy scratch in the first three games of the 2024-25 NHL season. In addition, there were rumors that the Leafs were looking to trade Liljegren.

However, Liljegren focused on what he could **control**: his attitude, mentality, focus, and effort.

LILJEGREN: "Not fun not playing but I've been trying to come in and work as hard as I can to get back in the lineup. I talked to (Toronto coach Craig Berube) and it's more like playing a little easier simple game. I think that's it, just play hard and simple."

Overthinking and worrying about things you cannot **control** is the enemy of peak performance for a hockey player. To regain a sense of **control**, you must focus on ways you can elevate your game.

First, understand that you cannot **control** the decisions and actions of others. Next, shift your mindset to what you can **control**: effort, focus, attitude, and preparation.

Before every practice or competition, identify one or two areas within your **control** that you can improve and set objectives, such as your stick-handling.

By narrowing your attention to these factors, you'll reduce distractions, boost confidence, and enhance your performance.