



## *Weissman Air Hockey Skills Assessment*

The Air Hockey Skills Assessment is a general measure for the overall level of ability in the sport. It is divided up in to 2 main categories: Offense and Defense. Each category is broken down in to sub-categories, where the player is given a numeric value between 1-10 for a given skill/ability. Each section has a general description, along with suggestions for values based on observed abilities.

The purpose of this measure is to provide a more objective way to assess the skill level of players so that tournament organizers can more accurately seed events and determine entry fees and/or promote local tournaments. It is also intended as an educational tool for students of the game to further develop our understanding of the sport.

As a general rule of thumb, a 10 point difference in score equates to a 1 point handicap. So, if a player with skill of 55 is competing in a handicapped event against a player with skill of 45, then the more skilled player will give a free point every game to the less skilled player. If a 55 plays a 25, then he/she must give 3 points per game as the handicap.

### **Offense:**

It is the common wisdom of the students of the sport that in Air Hockey offense is more important than defense. Players can win a great deal based purely on their offense. However, only the best of the best have both offense and defense. Because offense is typically more critical than defense, it is weighted more heavily in the Air Hockey Skills Assessment.

#### SHOTS/SHOT SPEED

The nature and variety of shots possessed by a player are a critical component to his/her success in Air Hockey. Basic shots are simply straights and banks. Advanced shots are considered either the backhand and forehand versions of cut and cross straights, as well as over and under-the-mallet banks. Some players even demonstrate the ability to consistently execute what are unconventional shots – such as a scoop or blade. For the purposes of this measure, shot speed can differentiate shots. Typically, there are only two shot speed categories – fast and medium speed. A player that has both a fast cut and a medium cut is considered to have two different shots.

Score:            1 (No repeatable shots)  
                      2-4 (One-two repeatable basic shots – typically a straight and/or bank)  
                      5-7 (Three-four repeatable basic shots – or at least 2 advanced level shots)  
                      8-10 (Over four repeatable advanced level shots, at the higher end both forehand and backhand)



## PUCK CONTROL

From Puck Control comes all things. This is a critical component to the early progression of skill in Air Hockey. Puck Control is simply the ability to make the puck do what you want.

- Score: 1 (Shows no tendency or ability to stop the puck, and typically strikes at the puck whenever it is near his/her mallet)
- 2-4 (Shows the ability to stop most slowly moving pucks but is not able to accurately hit transition shots and gives up many possessions to unsuccessful attempts to catch the puck)
- 5-7 (Shows the ability to catch and stop pucks consistently, from most areas of the table, though they still make mistakes when trying to stop a transition or fast moving puck. Higher level shows ability to perform effective transitions, though may have trouble regaining control in the midst of a fast exchange)
- 8-10 (Shows advanced ability to consistently stop and catch pucks from any position on the table, even when in mid-transition and off very fast shots. At higher levels the player almost never commits an unforced loss of puck error due to loss of control.)

## DRIFTS/ATTACKS

In Air Hockey offense the use of a drift and attack significantly increases one's potency. A drift is a controlled movement of the puck along invisible lines which are repeated and typically varied at the higher levels. The attack is executed off these drifts and is at the most basic level a counterbalance of at least two shots played off of one another (ex. Right-to-center drift followed by a straight or a bank). At the highest levels of Air Hockey, a player will vary the speed, direction and angle of their drifts, as well as which shots they execute.

- Score: 1 (Player does not drift the puck before executing shots)
- 2-4 (Player uses a basic drift before executing shots OR player has at least two shots they execute consistently which are played off one another)
- 5-7 (Player consistently uses at least two different drifts and executes at least two shots off each of these which play well off one another)
- 8-10 (Player demonstrates multiple consistent drifts with the ability to execute at least 3 different advanced shots off of them. At the highest levels, the player can consistently execute as many as six different shots off one drift)



## DECEPTIONS

Deceptions on offense include hitting complementary shots from the same setup, time delays, pump fakes and various change-ups in speed and shot setup. Frequently, players talk about “keeping it fresh.” This category assesses the player’s ability to keep it fresh.

Score: 1 (Player does not demonstrate any ability to use deceptions)

2-4 (Player uses at least 1 type of deception, albeit basic. At the upper end this deception is successful in obtaining scores)

5-7 (Player uses at least 2 forms of deception, or they have developed at least 1 deception to a more advanced level, showing intent to vary this deception)

8-10 (Player consistently uses at least 2 types of deceptions at advanced levels, varying them with intent and success)



## Defense:

Defense in Air Hockey is a supreme test of reflexes, body control and perception. To be great, a player needs strong body fundamentals and the ability to hold oneself in position without being frozen. Though offense is generally considered more important in Air Hockey, at the highest levels, a player must have BOTH offense and defense to win World Championships.

### BODY FUNDAMENTALS

Without basic fundamentals of form, a player limits their ability to defend and react. Proper defense body fundamentals for a right-handed player include right leg forward, shoulders squared with short side of the table, upper body neither hunched forward over the goal or leaned back behind, right arm holding the mallet about 10-15 inches in front of the goal and centered, left hand planted on the rail to the left of the goal, and standing on the balls of both feet.

Score:

- 1 (Player does not show the basics of form. Player makes at least 2 gross errors in form. Examples include, but are not limited to, improper positioning of legs, not on ball of at least their back foot, off-hand not resting on rail, mallet positioned back on goal face)
- 2-4 (Player makes at least 1 gross error in form, at the higher end, this error is transient)
- 5-7 (Player shows good form. However, they make transient errors in form, typically in the midst of action after which they do not return to proper form in a timely manner)
- 8-10 (Player demonstrates excellent form, at the upper end they demonstrate controlled form during almost all of their play and quickly return to proper form during and after intense action)



## ANTICIPATORY REFLEXES

Control over anticipatory reflex is critical in a sport requiring extreme hand/eye coordination. In many ways, defense is simply a test of reflex. The quicker a person can send a signal to their arm to pull to a specific place on the table, then pull to that spot, the more successful they will be at defending. However, the signal must go to the brain at the right moment, based on perception of one's opponent and the puck. Pull too soon and you leave huge holes. Pull too late and you are essentially frozen.

Score:

1 (Player has very slow reflexes on defense. The player demonstrates no ability to snag pucks in transition.)

2-4 (Player reacts too slow most of the time, but demonstrates an ability to anticipate some basic shots. They simply get to the blocking position too slow. Players at this level also may show poor and frequent charging used to overcompensate for slow reflexes. They may deflect some pucks in transition.)

5-7 (Player can successfully anticipate basic shots, but still struggles with anticipating advanced shots. Some players at this level can anticipate advanced shots but tend to show "jumpiness" and react too soon. Players at this level may charge too frequently to overcompensate for difficulty blocking advanced shots. They likely can snag some pucks in transition.)

8-10 (Player demonstrates an ability to anticipate advanced shots and can pull to block with great success. Basic shots are very ineffective against them. At the upper end, sophisticated setups and attacks are needed to score on them. Charges are used infrequently and at the upper end primarily for strategic purposes. Transitions are strong and they frequently snag pucks moving around the table.)



## READ BLOCKING

With strong perceptive ability over the totality of the table, puck and opponent, one is able to “read” what shot is imminent. The player in essence learns what the opponent is doing, and adjusts accordingly. In doing so, a player doesn’t need reflexes to be as lightning fast because the player simply knows where to block. Read Blocking and Anticipatory Reflexes are definitely connected, but the key difference is that Read Blocking comes from being able to adjust over the course of a game/match.

Score:

1 (Player demonstrates almost no ability to adjust. Typically, an opponent can score the same shot over and over and this player makes no attempt to adjust and read what the opponent is doing.)

2-4 (The player does not naturally read his/her opponent and will be scored upon with many basic shots. However, the player will show glimmers of "reading" the opponent when the same shot is used over and over from the same setup. At lower levels, the player is quite susceptible to basic deceptions and will lose their "read" frequently.)

5-7 (Player shows the ability to routinely read basic shots, can read some advanced shots, and will adjust to overused shots/setups. At the upper level, the player is not very susceptible to basic deceptions such as exaggerated cut shots.)

8-10 (Player routinely reads basic shots and advanced shots, adjusting to shots and attacks from the opponent over the course of a match. At the higher level, the player will effectively adjust within a single game.)



# Weissman Skill Scoring Sheet

Scoring is typically done by a certified Air Hockey Skills assessor. In some areas of the world, a knowledgeable and experienced assessor is not available. In those cases, the organizer must use their best judgment and err on the side of caution when using this instrument for handicapping events.

Offense:	Score
Shots/shot speed -	_____
Puck Control -	_____
Drifts/Attacks -	_____
Deceptions -	_____
Defense:	
Body fundamentals -	_____
Anticipatory reflexes -	_____
Read Blocking -	_____
Total score -	_____