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Mind Matters

What goes on in a prospect's head? Claude Giroux's sister knows

As a young blueliner growing up, Isabelle Giroux was always trying to figure out what her sneaky forward of a brother was thinking when he had a hockey stick in his hands. As an adult, she's now trying to discern what's in the mind of an assortment of young athletes.

Isabelle grew up playing hockey in Hearst, Ont., with her talented brother Claude, five years her junior. Claude Giroux is now one of the best young players in the NHL, starring with the Philadelphia Flyers, but Isabelle's connection to sports is also tight.

She lives in Ottawa and works for a company called EPSI, which has developed a test that helps uncover the inner workings of an athlete's mind. It's a four-part evaluation tool that provides insight into an athlete's decision-making abilities, their problem-solving skills, what motivates them and what kind of general values they hold.

BRAIN GAMES

The Senators looked beyond just stats and scouting reports for the 2011 draft.

Isabelle played AAA hockey with a prominent Thunder Bay-based female team called the Queens when she was 15, so in addition to the expertise she has in her field, she also has extensive experience with hockey players in general. Isabelle noted the

test, which takes a half-hour to complete, is designed so there's no "socially desirable" answer, meaning there's no completing questions based simply on what an athlete expects the coach wants to hear.

For instance, a portion of the personal values section might ask a player to pick the truer statement as it pertains to them: "The sport I compete in is one facet of my interests in life" or "The sport I compete in is the single most important aspect of my life." Better to appear obsessive or well-rounded?

"They can't really know, 'This answer is exactly what the coaches want,'" Isabelle said. "It really depends on who you are and what you think is better for you."

EPSI (in French, Evaluation Personnel Selection International) has worked with Baseball Canada's national women's team, which is managed by one of Isabelle's former instructors at the University of Ottawa, Andre Lachance. This summer, EPSI was enlisted by the Ottawa Senators to evaluate six potential first round picks one week before the draft (Confidentiality prevents the release of names).

With so much pressure to draft the correct player, teams are putting extra emphasis on factors beyond playing ability. "I think more and more it's hard to decide who you want between two players whose performance is really close," she said. "When you get this test, it's just added value."

EPSI will pitch its test to other teams and Isabelle is optimistic there will be a market. "When you're investing millions of dollars in athletes, it's important to know as much as you can." — RYAN DIXON

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