



Hockey Homework

Some research studies suggest that nearly 48% of youth players have the potential to become “elite level” players and yet less than 1 percent achieve elite status in the United States. These numbers suggest that something is going on that prevents many players with potential from achieving success at the top levels.

If you visit to any rink in the state or country for that matter, you will find the bulletin boards and walls covered with posters for “hockey development programs” designed to take your player, any player, to the next level. All it takes is a little time and a lot of money.

In Minnesota, AAA off-season teams are put together to advance player skills on the assumption that more games are better for development. In fact youth players in Minnesota play way to many games already so more is not better.

The real truth of the matter is that like any pursuit in life, excellence is achieved through hard work, repetition, persistence and a passion to excel. These are things a parent cannot provide to a youngster. Parents and coaches can organize more teams and sign up for more programs but without passion a player will not make the elite level status.

This is not a representation that all off season programs are bad or unnecessary but rather to recognize them for what they are. Most off season programs are run for profit and not necessarily for the benefit of the players. Three day skills camps for a few hours have little benefit. If the coach to player ratio exceeds 1 to 6 the effective use of the time is lessened.

The best programs for kids are their own. What does that mean? Ask a kid. Buy a few hours of ice as Jack Blatherwick suggests in his recent column in *Let's Play Hockey*, and let the kids figure it out. No coaches, no drills, no scoreboards, no parents. Players who want to score goals will find a way to shoot thousands of pucks in the off season. Players who want to excel will find the weight rooms by themselves and play other sports to develop their athleticism. The one percent always seem to find away to get there.

Hockey Homework? Well, if a kid wants to be in the one percent he or she is already doing the homework. Try the approach of not signing up for so many camps and programs. Help provided unstructured sessions for the kids to get together. Then listen to your kids and watch what they do when you do not provide non stop camps and programs. You might be surprised at what happens.

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