



No. 1 Hockey Pet Peeve

By Kim McCullough, M.Sc, YCS

Anyone who has ever seen the movie "Miracle" remembers the "again" skating scene. After a lackluster game, Coach Herb Brooks lines his team up on the goal-line and has them skate lengths of the ice until the players can barely move. I have to admit – I love the movie, but I hate that scene. That memorable moment glorifies my biggest hockey pet peeve – "bag skating."

The truth is that skating players into the ground isn't going to cut it if you want to ensure that your players are as energetic and explosive in the second overtime period as they were in the second period. Players are definitely working "hard" when they have to drag themselves off the ice after a skating session, but they should be working "smart" instead.

It is important for players to learn to push themselves when they are already fatigued, but there needs to be a plan. Your on-ice conditioning sessions must be as well planned as your skill sessions if you want your players to perform their best and peak in time for the playoff run. The last 10 minutes of each practice session present a perfect opportunity for coaches to focus on improving the conditioning levels of their players, as long as they adhere to the most fundamental principle of hockey-specific conditioning – interval training.

Interval training is the key to developing game-winning conditioning and understanding the concept of the work-to-rest ratio is critical to developing a proper program. The game of hockey is characterized by high-intensity efforts ("work") interspersed with periods of sitting or standing on the bench ("rest"). For example, if a shift is 45 seconds in length, and the player rests for 1 minute and 30 seconds between shifts, the work-to-rest interval is 1:2 - the rest period is twice as long as the work period.

The problem with traditional "bag skating" is that this type of conditioning workout rarely resembles the work-to-rest ratios players encounter on the ice. Two groups of players typically alternate 'working' and 'resting' until the coach stops the drill - which means that the work-to-rest interval is 1:1. These rest intervals are too short - especially when used at the beginning of the season. Proper interval-based conditioning relies on using the appropriate work-to-rest ratios at the appropriate times.

Most minor hockey teams have very little time on the ice prior to playing their first games of the season. As a result, coaches try to "whip" their players into shape by using high-intensity conditioning sessions. By doing too much too soon, players don't develop a solid base of conditioning and are at risk for injury.

You should start your season-long conditioning program with 'higher' ratios (such as 1:3) and work your way back to the 'lower' ratios (1:1) as the season progresses. This 'top-down' approach allows players to develop their conditioning in a safe and effective way and helps the team to peak in time for crucial late-season games.

About the author

Kim McCullough, M.Sc., YCS is a highly sought-after expert in the development of aspiring hockey players and has played at the highest level of women's hockey in the world for the last decade. Her player development websites give coaches and parents of aspiring young players access to programs, articles and advice on how to help their players take their game to the next level. To learn more about how to have your best season ever, get your FREE report: The 6 Secrets of In-Season Success at <http://www.besthockeyseasonever.com>.

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