



Don Lucia Under-8 Notes From Interview

Interviewed by Paul Willett

- Players under 8 years old should not be playing 5 on 5 hockey.
- They should not be taught positional play.
- They should be playing small-ice games, 4 on 4 or 3 on 3.
- Full ice mite games are a waste of time. We've got 14 year old refs or coaches on the ice wasting time getting players into position, etc. For every two minute shift, the ref has the puck for at least 30 seconds.
- The best kids dominate full ice mite games. Most kids give up because they're 50 feet from the puck and have no chance to get it. In cross-ice games, kids are always going to be around the puck and will always have a chance to be involved in the play.
- We should have more kids on the ice at all levels. How can a youth coach possibly run a good practice with 13 or 14 players? I can't do it. By having more kids on the ice, we give players more opportunities to be on the ice and reduce the cost.
- There should be a mandatory Learn to Skate program for first year skaters. Kids shouldn't be allowed to play without passing a basic skating skills test.
- Play should be based on ability not age or levels. This should take place at the squirt level and below.
- Players should be kept in-house until Pee Wees. Having one Squirt "A" team in large associations and one Pee Wee "A" team is ridiculous.
- Ice Time = Development. If you don't make an "A" team you get less ice time.
- If you can't skate, pass and shoot, it doesn't matter what you do.
- Our coaches are far too concerned with positioning at all age levels. You can teach older kids positioning in a matter of hours. Even our team works on individual skills 75% of the time. Individual skating and stick handling drills and small games.
- Our ice utilization is horrendous. People complain about the cost of hockey but accept having only one team, 13 or 14 kids, on the ice at one time.

- Every association should have dividers to split the ice for practices and 8U games.
- We over-coach our kids today. Give kids the ice and they'll figure it out. In fact, I'm willing to bet if young kids were just given the ice to play, with no coaching, they'd progress just as much, if not more.
- Associations need to set aside rink rat hockey time and just let the kids play. Have an adult sit in the stands to supervise.
- Kids that are now on the ice only twice a week could be on the ice 4 or 5 times a week if we just shared or split the ice.
- Our youth coaches are so consumed with displaying their knowledge that they make things much more complicated than they need to be.
- It used to be that kids learned how to play hockey by skating on the pond or playing road hockey. Kids don't do that anymore...too many other options like Nintendo. We only had three stations and you watched whatever your Dad wanted to. Because they're not on the rink or playing road hockey, our kids are not developing any hockey sense.
- Coaches get caught up in winning. Who cares if your team goes 50-4? Some of these guys think that they're ready to take on Scotty Bowman because they win a few games. They win games because they've got talented kids on their team.
- We're not doing it right. Something's wrong when we're only putting one player on an Olympic team.
- It's all about keeping as many kids playing hockey as possible. We don't know who the best players are going to be when they are older. We need to do more to keep them involved.
- We need to give the game back to the kids and it needs to start with revamping mite hockey.
- We should have in-house squirts.
- High school hockey: The season is too short. It's completely asinine what we're doing. We should do like Alaska does and have midget hockey surround the high school season. The Elite league is a good concept, but we can do more.
- It's all about ice time. You don't get better unless you can skate. You can't learn to skate if you don't get enough ice time.
- Final points: At least one year of learn to skate and have to pass a test in order to play. Absolutely no 5 on 5 mite hockey. We should not teach any positional play at the Under-8 level.