



**COACH  
TODD  
KOSA**



**Hometown:**  
Commerce Township

**Level:** Farmington Hills Fire '00

**Years coaching:** 3

**Why do you coach?:** I love being involved with the kids and see them develop. It's a great game.

**Most memorable moment:** Last spring we played a game with seven skaters and we had the kids play different positions and they really bought in.

**Coaching philosophy:** Focus on player development, make the game fun and wins don't matter.

**Coach you admire:** He wasn't a coach, but I always liked Steve Yzerman. He was all business on the ice and he did whatever he could to make the team better.

**One thing you would change:** Maybe split the season into two halves. Play the first half and then restack everyone and play a second half. Already this season there are teams that have scored 40 goals and given up one in their division.



To recognize and promote the commitment of youth coaches in the state, Michigan Hockey would like youth coaches to tell us a few things about yourself and why you coach youth hockey.

**800-667-5141**  
**www.coachmate.com**



by Lyle Phair

**RECOGNIZING  
GOOD  
COACHING**

The horseshoe that is the youth hockey season is just reaching the quarter pole. Some teams have jumped out into an early lead. Others have settled back into the pack. And some have stumbled out of the gate and fallen well back, which might be cause to wonder if they were entered in the right race to begin with.

But at the quarter pole, there is still plenty of race left, plenty of time. A lot can happen between now and the finish line. Depending on the horses and, maybe more importantly, how the jockeys handle those horses.

As the quarter pole is the first unit of measure, now is when coaches start to assess and analyze their teams. It is also a time when parents will begin to assess and analyze the coaches of those teams. And that can sometimes be a little dangerous and misguided depending on the approach.

How exactly does a parent recognize what is good and what might not be so good about what the coaches are doing with a team? Are we that attentive at practices and games to watch what is happening on the ice and on the bench in terms of interaction between players and coaches?

Are we even capable as parents of recognizing good coaching and what might not be good coaching based on our experience (or lack of) with the game? Or do we simply measure good coaching based on the win-loss record and the position in the standings?

There are plenty of excellent youth hockey coaches on the ice and behind the bench at all levels of play. Some of them have very little experience playing hockey. But they might have an infectious personality and be great working with and communicating with kids to create a positive experience.

Others might look like they could be great coaches and actually may have been or still are great players, wheeling around the ice in practice firing pucks off the glass and impressing the parents with their serious skills. But are they doing any coaching?

**A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS**

As we know, perception can very easily be confused with reality. If you want to be perceived as a good coach, here is your recipe for success. Spend a lot of time recruiting all of the best players to your team so you have the best team in your age group. Or if you are coaching in a house league, make sure you do whatever you can to pick all of the best players to stack your team.

In some cases at the travel level, you won't even have to spend any time recruiting. Once you have a good team, the best players will come to you. Then all you will need to do is cut the players who have played for you previously because they aren't as good as the new players.

Once you have a stacked team, be sure to play your better players way more than the weaker players (even on a stacked team there will be players weaker than the better players). Understand that the players really do matter. Well, the better players do anyway. Ride those horses into the ground. They will make or break you. Don't risk your reputation and put the weaker players on the ice at an important juncture in the game. Don't worry about giving them experience and opportunity to see what they can do in the event that you might really need them at some point in the season.

Put your top dogs out whenever you can, especially on power plays, penalty killing, and the first and last minute of each period. Fill in wherever needed with the other players, but only to give the best players a quick break. Never give the weaker players the chance to let you down.

Be sure to get the most mileage you can from your top players. Don't spend any time teaching them how to interact with their teammates. Tell them not to pass the puck. The weaker players will just lose it anyway. Exploit your stars and make sure they play an individual game and go end-to-end whenever they can. If they don't actually learn how to play hockey as a team game it doesn't matter.

Once you have earned your reputation as a winning coach the better players from other teams will come to your team. There is no shortage of players and parents who want to be part of a winning team with great coaching. Don't worry about coaching any of your players. Use them as needed until you can replace them.

**A DIFFERENT APPROACH**

Unfortunately, there are some coaches who operate that way. Sadly, there are some parents who actually think they are good coaches.

If you want to actually be a good youth hockey coach you will need to take a different approach. The journey might be a little bumpier but it will be a lot more enjoyable.

First of all you will need to detach yourself from your ego. If you want to make it all about you, then you should definitely not coach kids. Go and play in an adult league where you can be the star or play in a fantasy league where you can get satisfaction in making all of the right moves that the NHL coaches and GM's just can't seem to make.

If you can park your ego, you might be ready to coach kids. But you have to be willing to accept that your role is to coach the kids, all of the kids, and not take advantage of them. As John F. Kennedy (I think he was the first coach of the Capitals) once said, "Ask not what your players can do for you, but what you can do for your players." Or something along those lines.

A good coach strives for improvement in all of the players on the team. A good coach takes pride in the improvement in all players on the team. Good coaches provide the opportunity for all players to play in all situations. How would you know how a player will react in a situation if they are never given the chance? How do players have a chance to learn and improve from experience if never given the opportunity?

Good coaches don't wait for the opportunity to replace their weaker players at the next tryout. They coach those players to give them the chance to improve so they are not longer a "weaker player".

Good coaches don't exploit the advantages that the early maturing kids enjoy, being bigger and stronger and faster than most of the others. Good coaches know that at some point, nature evens the playing field and the others catch up. If the early maturing players aren't taught how to play the game properly and rely solely on the early physical gifts they received, they will quickly be passed by. How is allowing that to happen considered good coaching?

But most of all, good coaches know and understand that an approach that allows for harmony in the short-term (what is best for the team) and in the long-term (what is best for individual players) is much, much, more important than coach-term (what is best for the coach's reputation).