



You are Responsible for Safety

As we enter the holiday tournament season it is important to remind coaches that they are obligated to insure the safety of their players on and off the ice at all times during the season. The tournament weekends are especially busy with lots of teams, players, coaches and parents moving in and out of the arenas.

Players are required by coaches to arrive at a pre determined time before their scheduled games or practices. This is the time when your responsibility and liability begins and it does not end until the players have completed the event and left the arena or are with their parents. This may seem like a minor point but you would be mistaken to believe that.

Two years ago a squirt player was involved in an incident with his team mates and players from another team. The incident occurred in the locker room area. A locker room door was slammed shut resulting in the accidental amputation of a finger of one of the boys. This preventable incident should have never occurred, however the coaches of the teams had already left the building before their players had exited the locker rooms. If the coaches had stayed with their teams until they had all changed their clothes and left with their parents the young man would not have lost his finger.

I have seen several incidents in the past several years where players were injured while fooling around in the locker room. Again, the coaches were standing out in the lobby socializing while the kids are clowning around in the locker room. A player slips and falls hitting his head on the bench, and another preventable injury occurs.

A more recent phenomenon is an activity called "helmet boxing" or "locker boxing". It is simply a fight between two players while wearing their helmets and gloves. The rules are simple; only blows to the head are allowed and the winner is determined when one player's helmet comes off, he submits or is knocked unconscious. This seems like a harmless game to adolescents but the dangers are many. The fights generally take place in the locker rooms where loose equipment and benches create hazards for the participants and cause injuries. According to Kevin E. Gordon, MD et al. in the clinical Journal of Sports Medicine, May 2006 edition, "this activity is not limited to boys and serious injuries have occurred in young females participating in such activity." The most frequent injuries suffered with this activity are concussions and hand fractures. Since the activity usually occurs when there are no adults present players suffering from concussions would not be diagnosed and could easily be put in grave danger by playing before he or she had recovered from the concussion.

So where do we go with these problems? Below are a few suggestions and guidelines to consider and follow to insure the safety of your players.

- 1) Recognize that you are responsible for the duration of the event and please treat this seriously. Be sure you arrive on time and are the last one to leave.
- 2) A coach or designated parent should always be in the locker room when players are present. Not only is this to prevent physical injury but also to insure that there is no bullying or verbal abuse occurring. This does occur if the kids are left alone for too long. Hockey is a team game and all players need to learn to get along, cooperate with each other and share common goals. You will learn a great deal about your players and team simply by watching them interact in the locker room. Your occasional interjection or comments at the right moments are teaching opportunities that you will not get anywhere else. It is also an opportunity for you to visit with individual players and get to know them a little better. By doing so you will find it easier to coach them as they know you are interested in them as individuals not just a jersey number.
- 3) The last person out of the locker room should always be the coach. No exception to this rule. It just comes with the job. Make sure the room is as clean as or cleaner than when your team took possession and collect any left behind pieces of equipment or clothing.

The last thing any of us want is for our players to get injured, especially when supervision and awareness could have prevented the injury. The game itself causes enough bumps, bruises and occasional breaks. Do yourselves and your players a favor and stay with them when they are at the arena. You might even learn a few things by just being in the locker room.

Have fun with your players and keep them safe!

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