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5 Ways to Nix Tryout Nerves

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By Jessi Pierce, Touchpoint Media

Skates are sharpened, jerseys washed and sticks freshly taped; it's time for the 2015-16 hockey season. Amid all of the excitement for the return of our state's favorite sport, there's an element of nerves as tryouts fast approach.

"The improvement you made over the last six months of the offseason should already be done," said Pat O'Leary, head boys' high school hockey coach at Wayzata. "You should have made enough strides in your improvement that you should head into tryouts with an air of confidence. Set aside your nerves and have the best tryout that you can."

So how exactly do you go in and make sure you have the best tryout possible? O'Leary shares his five tips for a stress-free, successful tryout.

Showcase Your Strengths

Are you an expert passer? Or maybe an above-average skater. Whatever your on-ice strengths are, use them to your advantage.

"Consistently do what you're good at," said O'Leary. "Stick to your specialty. If you're a good skater, show that off, or if you're a great playmaker, make sure you're doing those things every single day to show that."

There's a level of comfort in showcasing skills that you excel at.

Pay Attention

It's easy to pick out a player that isn't paying attention to instructions, and it's not an ideal trait.

"Listen to your coaches and evaluators," O'Leary advises. "Make sure you're not messing around on drills, because when it comes to those last two or three spots or the difference between making the lower-level team or the upper-level team, the evaluators do see the kids that are paying attention, finishing the drills and aren't messing around."

Just like at any practice or game, listen to your coaches and make the effort to be attentive. If you have a question, ask the coaches. Yes, it's nice to catch up with your buddies on the ice, but be respectful and don't do it while your coaches are talking.

Calm Confidence

You worked all summer on your stickhandling and shooting. Playing lacrosse, baseball and any other sports helped with hand-eye coordination and athleticism. Trust in the effort that you have already put in and believe in yourself as you head into the tryouts to help eliminate some of those nerves.

"Confidence is the biggest thing you must have before tryouts," said O'Leary. "Don't worry about the evaluators and what they're thinking. Know that you're out there doing something that you love, and something that you're good at."

On top of confidence, mental preparation is another key component as you head into the tryout week.

"I'm a big believer in mental preparation," said O'Leary. "I know that most kids are thinking about the tryouts as they are getting closer, but actually visualizing things that you're going to be doing on the ice helps calm nerves. Not so much plays, but picture yourself arriving at the rink, calming your nerves and allow yourself to play the way you know you can actually helps you play better a lot quicker to get you out of that nervous stage."

Focus on the Positives

So you shot the puck wide or missed a pass during a drill. Mistakes are bound to happen. Don't let it affect your entire tryout. Instead of focusing on the negatives, look for the things you did well.

"I think the biggest thing is just finding something positive every single day," said O'Leary. "Don't let the first day weigh you down if you didn't play so well and don't be afraid and think 'oh, did I make it?' and vice versa, if you do have a really phenomenal first day, don't try to rest on your laurels. Go in the next day and continue to show yourself and continue to focus on the positives."

O'Leary reminds the parents to keep the positive focus in mind, too, especially when it comes to being too critical of the evaluators.

"Parents need to understand that the evaluators are doing the best they can do," he said. "They are asked to be there for a reason, and for the most part, they don't know who your kids are and things are going to happen for a reason. It's not the end of the world if Johnny makes a C or B team instead of the A team, and 99 percent of the time it's not going to be the last tryout of these kids' lives. Hopefully it gets done the way it's supposed to and take the most positive things away that you can. Be an example for your kids and make it a positive experience all around, no matter the outcome."

Have Some Fun

At the end of the day, no matter which team you end up on, hockey is supposed to be about the fun of the game. When you're having fun, you can actually play better, too.

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"It's important to go out, play hard and play your best," said O'Leary. "I know it's a lot of pressure and can be stressful, but if you're having a good time and you're relaxed, you're playing much better. Keep that in perspective."



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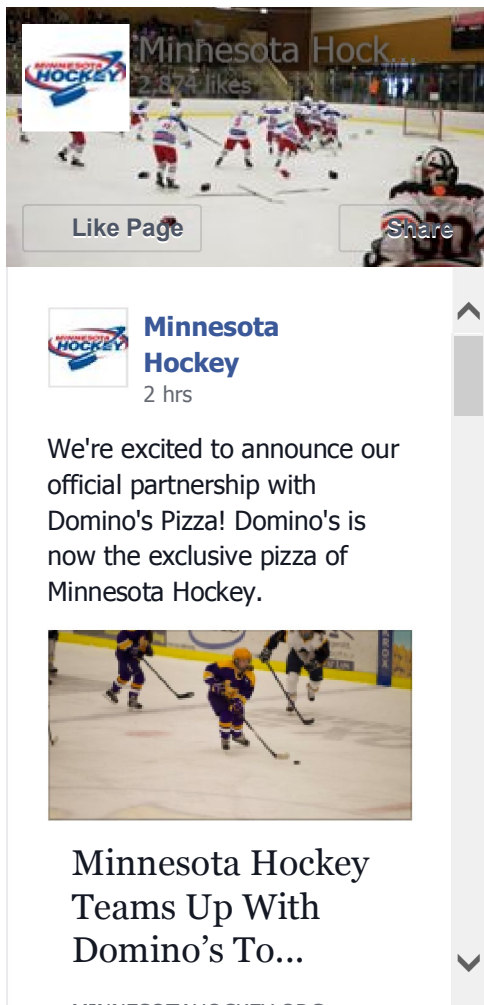
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