



ADMINISTRATIVE

Player Selection and Evaluation



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OBJECTIVES

- To develop different evaluation methods
- To design outline for tryout sessions
- To assign evaluators responsibilities for player evaluation
- To develop a plan for releasing players

INITIAL CONSIDERATION IN DEVELOPING A PLAYER SELECTION PLAN

In most youth hockey situations, coaches are faced with the task of choosing from a large pool of players to fill a limited number of positions on a team. Coaches are usually expected to complete this task in a relatively short period of time. Therefore, it is very important for the coach to be organized in advance with a plan for the player selection process. To properly develop this plan, the coach must take into consideration a number of significant factors. The answers to the following questions will assist the coach in designing the most effective player selection plan.

How Many Players will Attend the Team Tryouts?

Ideally, there should be some form of pre-registration so that the coach can be given a complete list of players in advance of the first tryout session. This may not always be possible and, thus, a coach may have to be prepared to make some last minute adjustments for the initial session. Having a reasonable estimate of how many players will attend will greatly assist the coach in deciding how to use the available ice time. For example, it may be unrealistic to plan for a 30 minute scrimmage if there are only 22 players. On the other hand, a number greater than 50 may require splitting into two separate groups for the first few sessions.

How Much Ice Time is Available?

The amount of ice time available for the tryouts is another important consideration. Knowing how much time you have to get down to the final team will affect not only the content of the individual

tryout sessions but also the timeline for the release of players. The norm in youth hockey is a relatively brief tryout period with about five to eight hours of ice time. Thus, the coach must plan the tryout sessions to be as efficient as possible.

How Many Players Do You Plan to Keep?

Obviously you must determine in advance the desired make-up of your team. Do you plan to keep 12 or 17 players on a team? Nevertheless, in youth hockey you must consider how many players you can effectively use in games to ensure they receive sufficient opportunity to play. Very little benefit will be gained by marginal players who see limited ice time. You have a responsibility to play the players you choose.

In addition to the absolute number, the coach must also consider what special qualities to look for in players. For example, it may be desirable to have at least a few players with the versatility to play both forward and defense positions.

Criteria for Evaluation

In order to select the best players from a talent pool, it is necessary to establish criteria on which to make comparisons among players. Thus, the first step in player evaluation is to determine what variables to measure. What qualities are you looking for in your players? Are some of these more important than others? The answers to these questions will depend to a great extent on the age category as well as the competitive level of your team.

The following is a list of some of the player qualities that might be evaluated during the tryout period:

Individual Skills

- skating
- passing
- pass receiving
- shooting
- puck control
- checking

Team Skills

- offensive ability
- defensive ability
- ability to play with others

Mental Qualities

- hockey sense
- reading and reacting
- concentration

Physical Qualities

- strength
- endurance
- balance
- agility
- coordination
- power
- quickness

Individual Characteristics

- self-control
- coachability
- patience
- desire
- attitude

What About Goaltenders?

As you might expect, the characteristics that should be evaluated for goaltenders will differ significantly from those for players at other positions. In addition to individual skills, such as skating, puck handling and passing, goaltenders must be evaluated on their ability to stop the puck, using the stick, gloves, pads and body. Physical and mental characteristics should also be evaluated.

Evaluating

Once you have determined what to evaluate, the next step is to organize your tryout sessions in such a way that the players can be assessed on the

identified variables. This assessment may be carried out using the following methods:

- **Specific Skill Drills** – Individual skills such as skating and passing can be evaluated using combination skill drills. Initially these drills may be very artificial with little or no resistance. However, there should be an attempt made to simulate game conditions in a progressive manner.
- **Skill Testing** – A number of skill tests are now available, particularly for skating speed and agility. These can be used by coaches as a means of comparing players. As a cautionary note, however, it must be remembered these tests are typically far removed from actual game situations. In addition, they can use up a great deal of ice time, particularly for a large group of players.
- **Competitive Drills** – Paired races and other drills that pit two players against one another in a confined space with a specific objective (e.g., beat your partner to the loose puck) are excellent methods of evaluating individual skills as well as mental and physical abilities. Although competitive evaluation drills can be used throughout the tryouts (and during the season as practice drills), they are particularly useful in the latter stages of the tryouts when the coach wishes to create specific pairings to compare players being considered for final positions on the team.
- **Scrimmage** – Naturally, the best way of evaluating a player's ability to play the game is to evaluate the individual under game conditions. Such conditions can be easily simulated in scrimmages. Scrimmages can be effectively used throughout the tryout period, beginning with the first session. You can evaluate most of the previously listed player characteristics during these scrimmages.

Here are a few additional considerations related to the use of scrimmages and exhibition games in your evaluation of players:

- Change line combinations and defense pairings in order to observe players under different situations.
- Use exhibition games to help you make decisions about borderline or marginal players.
- Unless skill deficiencies are extremely obvious, you should not release a player prior to seeing that individual under game conditions (i.e., scrimmage and/or exhibition game).

An important task for any coach, then, is to plan the tryout sessions in such a way as to make the most efficient use of the available player assessment methods.

DESIGNING THE TRYOUT SESSIONS

A constructive way to approach a tryout is to see it as a way of placing athletes on teams on which they will benefit the most, not as a dead-end experience in which players are cut away from hockey.

The tryout is a good opportunity to get some preseason skill observations that can tell both you and the athlete in what areas work may be needed. It should be as well thought out and organized as other parts of your program.

Planning for the First Tryout Session

Proper planning will eliminate a lot of potential problems at the first tryout session. Therefore, the coach should ensure that the administrative details are taken care of in advance. In many situations, the youth hockey association will assume responsibility for some of these tasks, but the coach should be aware of them in any case. The following are some guidelines related to the first tryout session.

Inform Parents/Players of Tryout Details in Advance

Parents and players should be advised, well in advance, about the requirements for the tryouts. This is particularly important at the younger age levels at which parents may not be aware of the need, for example, of full and proper protective equipment. In addition to informing them about the association's policies regarding such aspects as protective equipment, medical examinations and

age classifications, they should also be provided with a complete schedule of sessions and other pertinent information regarding the conduct of the tryouts. Where feasible, this information should be provided at a parent meeting in order to permit parents to ask any additional questions. This meeting format will also provide you with an opportunity to outline your player selection process.

Ensure that Necessary Resources are Available

To be able to plan the content of the sessions, it is necessary to know what resources will be available. You should have sufficient pucks (at least one for every player), pylons, scrimmage vests and water bottles. A first aid kit should also be available for all sessions, along with a qualified first aid person or trainer.

Obtain Required Support

You must anticipate your needs in terms of human support to ensure that the required assistance is available to handle any last minute details. For example, it may be necessary to have someone available to handle late registration and collection of registration fees. Support might also be required to assign identification jersey numbers to players. As already mentioned, a trainer or first aid person should also be available. By assigning these responsibilities to others, you will be able to concentrate on the more immediate tasks of coordinating and conducting the sessions. A coach should also have a minimum of two other individuals to assist with the on-ice sessions. A large number of assistants may be required depending on the number of players in attendance.

Locker Room Supervision

USA Hockey is concerned with locker room activities between minor players; minor players and adult players; adults being alone with individual minor players in locker rooms; and with non-official or non-related adults having unsupervised access to minor participants at sanctioned team events.

It is the policy of USA Hockey that all affiliates, districts, leagues, and local hockey programs have at least one responsible adult present directly monitoring the locker room during all team events to assure that only participants (coaches and players),

approved team personnel and family members are permitted in the locker room and to supervise the conduct in the locker room. Any individual meetings with a minor participant and a coach in a locker room shall require a responsible adult be with the coach.

Further, responsible adults must personally monitor the locker room environment at all times while participants are present and also make sure the locker room is appropriately secured during times when minor participants are on the ice.

Arrive at the Rink Early

Although proper planning should eliminate most problems, it is advisable to arrive at the rink well in advance of the actual starting time. This will provide you with ample time to check that everything is in place and to answer any questions from parents, players or your support staff. Since most of the administrative tasks have been assigned to others, you should also have time to review the tryout plan with your assistants and make any last minute adjustments.

Prepare the Players

Prior to going on the ice, you should outline the tryout process to the players. This session should include the following information:

- what player qualities you are looking for
- explanation of the drills to be run and their purposes
- objectives of scrimmage sessions
- target timeline for team selection

In addition, you should stress the importance of stretching and a proper warm-up. The players should be led through a series of stretching exercises in the dressing room or corridor and on the ice. The first few ice sessions should include a good 15-20 minutes warm-up period to ensure that players are physically ready to go through the evaluation drills and scrimmages without risking injury.

ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PLAYER EVALUATION

The third step in the player evaluation process is the recruitment of other personnel to assist in the assessment of players.

On-Ice Assistants

You should have two or more on-ice assistants to help conduct the tryout sessions. These individuals can assist in player evaluation for specific positions (forwards, defensemen, goaltenders), by carrying out evaluation drills with small groups of players. In drills involving a larger number, they can also focus on specific individuals.

Impartial Observers

Another means of obtaining player assessment information is to use “expert” observers in the stands who are assigned the task of rating players on specific criteria. In addition to providing you with a second opinion on borderline players, observers can also be used to record more detailed player assessment information for later analysis.

Does a certain player win consistently against all other players? Where you have three relatively equal players, is there one who comes out on top of most match-ups with the other two? If possible, try to get a rating of every player at the end of each session.

Coaching Staff

In the end, final decisions for player selection rest with you, the coach. In some cases you may be familiar with a number of players, having observed them in previous seasons. Such prior information, combined with player assessments from observers and on-ice assistants, is invaluable. However, it is also essential that you create opportunities for yourself during tryouts to screen and evaluate all players as effectively as possible.

Although it is probably more efficient to assess players from the stands since this usually affords a wider view of the various drills and scrimmages, you should also spend some time on the ice in order to get closer to the action and observe some of the more subtle aspects (e.g, emotional characteristics, passing and receiving skills, soft hands in handling the puck and the ability to understand instructions). As a general guideline, however, you should spend considerably more time observing from the stands during the player selection period.

RELEASING PLAYERS

Once decisions have been made regarding the release or cutting of players during the tryout period, you must have a plan for informing these players. Although the details of this plan will vary from coach to coach, and will depend to some extent on the age level of the players, the following guidelines should be adhered to as much as possible:

Avoid Public Announcements – Do not post a list of player cuts or read the names of players to be released in front of the rest of the team. Instead, whenever possible, you should try to take individual players aside briefly towards the end of the session and ask them to meet privately with you afterwards.

Speak with the Player Individually – Talk to each player individually and briefly explain the player's weaknesses as well as pointing out some strengths. Be honest and straightforward.

Invite Questions from the Player – Provide the player with an opportunity to ask further questions about the evaluation. In addition to helping you select the team, a major objective of the evaluation process should be to provide the player with constructive feedback to guide improvement.

Direct the Player to Another Team – If your association has teams at other levels of competition, ensure that released players are provided with a schedule of their tryouts. Ideally, the coach of this team should also be at the arena in order to personally meet the players. Where no such tiering system exists, you should make the player aware of whatever options do exist (e.g., recreational league, school league).

Leave on a Positive Note – Thank the player for participating in the team tryouts and encourage the individual to continue working to improve in areas of weaknesses.