



TEACHING

Effective Teaching



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OBJECTIVES

- To define what the coach must know in order to be an effective teacher
- To understand what guidelines the coach should follow when teaching young athletes
- To understand the characteristics of a good practice
- To identify qualities of a “good” drill
- To understand what the coach must know in order to conduct safe practices and games
- To identify the seven components of risk management that are required of all youth ice hockey coaches

INTRODUCTION

The modern day youth ice hockey coach is called on to fill many roles, but none is more important than that of being a good teacher. In fact, if the coach is not a good teacher, all of the other roles will be diminished, too. The coach’s effectiveness as a counselor, substitute parent, role model, friend, and mentor is increased if the coach is a good teacher.

*Good teaching is the foundation
for successful coaching.*

EFFECTIVE TEACHING GUIDELINES

There are many ways in which you, as a coach, can impart information to young athletes. There are also many styles or methods that have been shown to be effective. Despite the variety of styles that coaches use, certain rules or guidelines are common to all good instruction.

To be an effective teacher a coach must:

- clearly communicate what is to be learned
- be able to evaluate the athletes’ abilities
- use a coaching style that fits the needs of young athletes
- be consistent and systematic in teaching young athletes
- be able to alter lesson plans and game strategies on the basis of how effectively objectives are being met

In the following section each of these guidelines will be discussed in more detail.

Communicate Clearly

The results that a coach expects young ice hockey players to obtain can be placed into three categories:

Physical: pertaining to the skills of skating, passing, checking, puck control, shooting and possession, as well as the physical conditioning that permits players to do these tasks without undue fatigue.

Mental: relating to the concepts, rules and responsibilities of the young athlete as a team member.

Social: referring to the personal characteristics of players, such as loyalty to a common cause, supporting team members, respecting opponents, officials and spectators, listening to the coach’s instructions, and conducting oneself as a responsible citizen.

You, as a coach, are responsible for identifying precisely what is to be learned by the athletes within each of the previously identified categories. Players will not learn desirable skills, values, and attitudes simply by exposure or by having adults wish that certain fundamental laws of good citizenship will be acquired. Learning requires instruction, practice and progression under realistic situations, corrective action and then more practice. This cycle must be repeated until the desired outcome is attained.

Coaches must be certain that their definitions of what is to be learned are pertinent to the developmental levels of their athletes. Hence, some young players may be advanced with regard to social skills and be delayed regarding their physical skills. Others may be advanced or delayed in all aspects of the agenda that a coach wishes to teach during the season. For this reason, clearly stated objectives by you as the coach are essential prior to the time when you initiate any instruction. Failure to define your objectives will lead to confusion during your instruction.

Evaluation of Athletes' Abilities

The coach must be able to assess the abilities of **all** youth players **prior to** determining the instructional objectives for the year. The accurate assessment of the players' abilities determines a coach's instructional strategies, as well as the expectations and goals that can be set for the season.

Assessment must include each player's status in the areas of physical, mental, and social skills. For example, a player with excellent physical skills, but who has a bad attitude, could cause major disruptions on the team if the coach does not address the deficiencies in the player's social skills. Conversely, players who have excellent social and mental skills will not be able to realize their potential as team members if they are unable to translate these abilities because of underdeveloped physical skills.

The assessment of players' abilities is essential to a good beginning in the ice hockey season, but assessment by the coach must also occur practice-by-practice, throughout the season. In fact, accurate assessment of players' needs is one of the most essential components of good teaching. All good bench coaches have the ability to assess a situation and then take corrective action during the teachable moment when instruction has the greatest chance of being effective.

Assessing Needs and Taking Corrective Action

Physical Skills

Coaches can learn much about their players' physical skills by observing them in drills and scrimmages. The assessment of physical skills depends on:

- knowing the correct way to perform a skill

- knowing the sequence of actions that result in the correct performance of the skill
- being able to detect your players' correct and incorrect actions
- being able to tell your players how to correct their faulty performance

Once again, the judgment of the coach is the key to improving your athletes' performance. If you are inexperienced in the analysis of skills you should review the outstanding videos on skill development that are available from USA Hockey. Demonstration of the essential physical skills in slow-motion will assist you in observing the essential components when the skill is performed at its normal speed. The explanations provided by these videos can also be used as you instruct your players.

There is no substitute for experience when you attempt to identify errors and correct the physical techniques of your players. However, inexperienced coaches have learned that the process of observing and correcting mistakes can be enhanced by the following guidelines:

- Choose a vantage point so that you can see the entire skill being performed.
- Observe the entire skill before dissecting it into its parts, then have the player attempt to correct only the one part or segment that is most important to success. When this segment has been corrected, proceed to the next most important segment.
- Have the player practice the essential component until the correct motor pattern has been achieved.
- Be ready to encourage the player while the new pattern is being learned. Remember that the speed and total coordination with which the old pattern was performed will be reduced while the player is learning the adjustments.

Assessing Mental Needs

Young ice hockey players will learn the rules and concepts of ice hockey most effectively by having you, the coach, anticipate what is to occur during games and then ensuring that you construct identical situations in your practices. The "sixth sense" that some young players possess comes from having been in similar situations before, then recognizing the options available to them and choosing the

correct course of action under the circumstances. Only if young players have experienced an identical situation in previous games and practices can you expect them to make the correct decision. Therefore, your teaching in practices must be based on the situations that you expect them to encounter in games. How they resolve these dilemmas will be directly related to their understanding of similar situations in practice and games.

Assessing Social Needs

The interaction among your players will provide you with an indication of their social needs. Often, the most skillful players are also the most popular. Their social needs are likely to be met by the recognition that they receive from teammates, parents, and fans because of their playing abilities. The coach must ensure that the recognition for skillful play must not overshadow the need to acquire the social skills of good citizenship. Too often skillful players are treated as though the rules of the team and society do not apply to them, only to find that they are societal misfits when their sports skills no longer shield them from the application of equal treatment.

Coaches should be particularly alert to the special problems of social development that are often present in immature players whose skill level is consistently below the average of his/her team and age level group. These underdeveloped players face the constant challenge of being unable to compete on an equal basis in the drills and, perhaps equally as important, they are frequently excluded from the comradeship that develops within a team.

Coaches need to get to know their players and their backgrounds. Children come to practices and games with all kinds of “baggage” from outside ice hockey. A coach must be sensitive to the feelings and emotional status of her/his players based on what is going on outside of hockey.

The coach is the essential promoter of social development within a team and is the one who must recognize the contributions of the immature, underdeveloped players by praising their successes and placing them in situations where they are likely to succeed. When players recognize that the coach values the contributions of all team members, then the leaders of the team are also more likely to

accept those whose contributions to team goals are not consistently evident.

GUIDELINES TO GOOD TEACHING

Although there are many ways to instruct young ice hockey players, the inexperienced coach will find the following sequence easy to use and effective in teaching and refining skills. **As you begin your instruction, it is best to remember that young players learn best by participating.** They do not learn well by sitting and listening to coaches lecture about topics that too often seem abstract, but which adults think are concrete. **A good rule is, “When I speak, I want you to stop what you’re doing and listen.”** Do not violate your own rule by continuing to talk when players are not paying attention.

Prior to your instruction:

- make sure you are prepared to teach and have a lesson plan for practice
- be sure you have the attention of all players
- use clear and simple language to communicate precisely what you want them to learn; do this in one minute or less, preferably with a physical demonstration of the skill
- have players practice the skill while you observe them and provide feedback
- have players come back to a group setting and discuss the adjustments that are needed for improvement
- place the players into groups by ability; continue to practice and provide feedback
- repeat the last two steps as frequently as needed until the desired level of competence is achieved

The following 10 steps to good teaching have been shown to be effective in a variety of settings, including the teaching of young athletes.

Be Realistic About Your Players’ Abilities

Players will respond to realistic and challenging expectations. Conversely, expectations that are beyond their achievement will decrease the motivation of even the most skillful players. Set short-term goals on an individual basis and adjust them when they are achieved. Players tend to achieve

according to their coaches' expectations if the expectations are realistic.

As a coach you should expect to significantly improve the skills, knowledge of rules and strategies and attitudes of each of your players during the course of the season. Make a commitment to help each of the players realize these goals.

Structure Your Instruction

Your players' progress will be directly linked to how clearly you communicate and teach toward your intended outcomes. This means that every practice must have well-defined objectives and a systematic plan of instruction. The critical steps to a structured lesson are:

- Select the essential skills, rules, and concepts from the many options available.
- Clearly identify elements of acceptable performance for each skill you include in practice.
- Organize and conduct your practices to maximize the opportunity your players have to acquire the skill(s) by using the effective teaching techniques contained in this chapter.
- Players must experience success to improve.

Establish an Orderly Environment

The achievement of objectives by coaches is directly related to the learning that takes place in a safe, orderly, and business-like environment, with clear expectations of what is to be accomplished at each practice. Players must be held accountable for being on time and coming to the practice ready to learn. Young players do not learn effectively in long, boring practices that involve drills that do not relate to their understanding of the game. Keep your practices organized, personalized, and pertinent to the needs of your team.

Maintain Consistent Discipline

You will find that keeping control of your team is much easier than regaining control once problems with misbehavior have disrupted your authority. Thus, your role is much easier if you can prevent the types of misbehavior that arise when coaches do not anticipate and avoid problems with discipline.

Preventing Misbehavior

Although threats and lectures may prevent misbehavior in the short term, they create a hostile and negative atmosphere and, typically, their effectiveness is short-lived. Moreover, this type of relationship between a coach and team members does not promote learning the game of hockey nor does it motivate the players to accept the coach's instructions.

Sound discipline involves two steps that must be in place before misbehavior occurs. They are:

1. defining how players are to behave and identifying misbehavior that will not be tolerated
2. identifying the consequences for individuals who do not behave according to the rules

Children want clearly defined limits and structure for how they should behave. This can be accomplished without showing anger, lecturing the players or threatening them. As the coach, it is your responsibility to have a systematic plan for maintaining discipline before your season gets underway. Coaches who have taken the time to establish rules of conduct will be in a position to react in a reasonable and fair manner when children misbehave.

Defining Team Rules

The first step in developing a plan to maintain discipline is to identify what you consider to be desirable and undesirable conduct by your players. This list can then be used to establish relevant team rules. A list of potential items to consider when identifying team rules is included in Table 5-1.

Enforcement of Rules

Not only are rules needed to maintain discipline, but enforcement of those rules must be carried out so that reoccurrences are prevented. Rules are enforced through rewards and penalties. Players are rewarded when they abide by the rules and penalized when they break the rules. The next step, therefore, in developing a plan to maintain discipline is to determine the rewards and penalties for each rule. Your players should be asked for suggestions at this point because they will receive the benefits or consequences of the decisions. When determining rewards and penalties for rules, the

EXAMPLES OF DESIRABLE AND UNDESIRABLE CONDUCT IN HOCKEY

Desirable Conduct	Undesirable Conduct
Attending to your instructions	Talking while you are trying to give instructions
Full concentration on drills	Inattentive behavior during drills
Treating opponents with respect	Fighting with opponents/teammates or using abusive language
Giving positive encouragement to teammates	Making negative comments about teammates
Avoiding penalties	Intentionally committing penalties during the game
Being prompt to practices and games	Being late or absent from practices and games
Helping to pick up equipment after practices	Leaving equipment out for others to pick up
Bringing all of his/her equipment to practices	Forgetting to bring a part of his/her equipment or uniform to games and practices
Respect for coaches, teammates, opponents, and referee	Disruptive behavior

Table 5-1. Items to consider when defining rules for your team.

most effective approach is to use rewards that are meaningful to your players and appropriate to the situation. Withdrawal of rewards should be used for misconduct. A list of potential rewards and penalties that can be used in hockey is cited in Table 5-2.

The best way to motivate players to behave in an acceptable manner is to reward them for good behavior.

Remember that penalties are only effective when they are meaningful to the players. Typically, the types of penalties that are used for rule violations are ineffective because they are not important to the players. Generally, they do not leave room for positive interactions between you and your players. Examples of ineffective penalties include showing anger, embarrassing players by lecturing them in the presence of team members or adults, shouting at players, or assigning a physical activity (skating laps, extra pushups). Assigning a physical activity for certain misbehavior may develop a negative attitude toward that activity. Avoid using physical activity as a form of punishment; the benefits of hockey, such as learning skills and gaining cardiovascular fitness, are gained through activity.

Children should not associate activity with punishment.

Although threats, lectures and/or yelling may deter misbehavior in the short term, the negative atmosphere that results reduces long term coaching effectiveness. A more positive approach to handling misbehavior is to prevent it by establishing, with player input, clear team rules. Use fair and consistent enforcement of the rules, primarily through rewarding correct behavior, rather than penalizing unacceptable behavior.

Group Your Players According to Ability

Your ice hockey team will most likely have players at various levels of ability. For effective learning, the players must sometimes be divided into smaller groups. The critical consideration for grouping players effectively is to have them practicing at a level that is needed to advance their playing ability.

The general guidelines to effectively group players are:

- When a new skill, rule, or strategy is being taught that all your athletes need to know, use a single group instructional setting.

EXAMPLES OF REWARDS AND PENALTIES THAT CAN BE USED IN HOCKEY

Rewards	Penalties
Being a starter	Being taken out of a game
Playing a desired position	Not being allowed to start
Leading an exercise or activity	Sitting in the penalty box for part of practice <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. until ready to respond correctly 2. for a specific number of minutes 3. for the rest of practice
Praise from you	
Decals	
Medals	Dismissed for <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. next practice 2. next week 3. rest of season

Table 5-2. *Example of rewards and penalties.*

- As you identify differences in ability, seek to place players of similar ability in smaller groups.
- When a skill, rule, or strategy is being practiced in which individual athletes are at several levels of ability (initial, intermediate, or later learning levels), establish learning stations that focus on specific outcomes to meet these needs.

Organize the groups so that there is a systematic order in which players take turns. Each group must know precisely what is to be learned. Supervise each group by rotating and spending short periods of time with each. Avoid the temptation of spending all of the instructional time with one group. If any group is favored during small group instruction, it should be those players who are the least skillful because they are also the ones who are least able to diagnose and correct their own errors.

Maximize Your Players' On-Task Time

Progress in skill development is directly related to the amount of time that players spend practicing these skills in game-like situations. Practices provide the opportunity to attempt a specific skill repeatedly under guided instruction. Coaches should anticipate game situations and then conduct their practices to simulate game situations, while still being able to adjust the environment to meet the developmental levels of the various athletes. **Practices are the**

most effective learning environment for perfecting physical and mental skills. In order to ensure that practices are conducted wisely you should consider the following time-saving techniques:

- Reduce the number of athletes who are waiting in line by using small groups in your drills.
- Provide sufficient equipment so that players do not have to wait for their turn to use it.
- Schedule your drills so that one leads into the next without major set-up time.
- Clearly outline and/or diagram each portion of practice and communicate as much of that information as possible before going on the ice.
- Complete as many pre- and post-warmup/cool down activities off the ice as possible.
- Recruit aides (parents and older players) to help you with instructional stations under your supervision.

Maximize the Players' Success Rate

Successfully achieving a desired outcome and the motivation to continue to refine the desired outcome are highly related. Therefore, coaches must structure their practices so that players are successful in lessons to be learned. This relationship between **attempts** and **successes** mandates that coaches structure their practices so that players will succeed on a high proportion of their early attempts. The

following hints have been used by successful youth ice hockey coaches:

- Reduce each skill, rule, or strategy into achievable sub-skills and focus instruction on those sub-skills.
- Provide feedback to the student such that, on most occasions, something that they did is rewarded, followed by specific instructions about what needs more work, ending with an encouraging, "Try again."

Monitor the Players' Progress

Players learn most effectively during practices that are accompanied by meaningful feedback. In youth hockey, the meaningful feedback is most frequently provided by the coach or assistant coaches. The old cliché "Practice makes perfect" is only true if athletes are practicing appropriate skills in the correct manner. If left to their own agendas, young players may practice inappropriate skills or they may practice pertinent skills inappropriately. As their coach, you must be sure that the practices are conducted with the correct balance of feedback and independent learning.

Ask Questions of the Players

Young players generally enjoy their relationships with their coaches. Asking them questions is an ideal way to build the coach/athlete relationship. Questions should be designed to provide insight into why the player is involved in ice hockey, who the significant persons are in his/her life, what his/her goals are for the season and what parts of the game are personally satisfying or depressing. Coaches who know their players are most likely to be able to meet their needs by placing the players into situations that will enhance their self-esteem.

Promote a Sense of Control

Coaches must be in control of their teams, but control is not a one-way street. Players, too, must feel that they have some control over their own destiny when they attend practices and games. They must feel that they will be rewarded for hard work, that

their goals will be considered, and that their role on the hockey team is valued and essential to the welfare of the team. As a coach you can promote a sense of control by:

- organizing your instruction to result in many successful experiences (i.e., opportunities to provide positive feedback)
- teaching your players that everyone learns various hockey skills at different rates.
- teaching young players to use effort and their own continuous progress as their primary guide. They should avoid comparing their skill level with that of other players
- encouraging individual players to put forth their best effort. Reward such effort with a comment, pat on the back, thumbs-up sign, or other means that will communicate your approval
- involving them in the selection of drills or activities, when appropriate

PROTECTING THE SAFETY OF PLAYERS

In addition to providing effective instruction, the coach has the responsibility of ensuring that all practices and games are conducted in a safe environment. Therefore, the coach's primary responsibility can be summed up in this statement: **Teach for improved competence and safety every day.**

For over a decade, courts, lawyers and professional associations have been establishing the legal responsibilities of the youth sports coach. These responsibilities include providing adequate supervision, a safe environment, proper instruction, adequate and proper planning, adequate evaluation for injury or incapacity, appropriate emergency procedures and first aid training, adequate and proper equipment, appropriate warnings, and adequate matching of players and competitors. These duties are to be met by the coach while he/she is involved in any supervisory situation related to his/her coaching responsibilities.