

## **Alleviating Tryout Anxiety**

With a new hockey season beginning, it's a time for players to get excited about lacing up the skates again. However, the thrill of starting anew also brings an uneasy time for many in the game, courtesy of tryouts.

"We all love and know hockey is the greatest sport out there, all the things it does for you, the life lessons," said Joe Doyle, Air Force Academy assistant coach. "But let's be honest, tryouts are the worst weekend of the season. Everybody is on pins and needles – parents sitting in the stands, all the kids are nervous, even the coaches are a little bit nervous that maybe they're not going to pick the best kids or quote-unquote the right kids."

Some youngsters thrive on tryout pressure, but those players are few and far between. If your kid is like most, there are some things you can do as a parent to help alleviate tryout anxiety.

### **Don't Project**

Hockey parents can be excitable when it comes to their son or daughter. It should be a given to leave the cowbell at home and not make a spectacle in the stands, but a child can even pick up on a parent's behavior in the car ride to the rink.

The first thing a parent should recognize is that everyone's emotions are amped up during tryouts. Realizing how your behavior can impact your child's mental state can go a long way.

"All parents want what's best for their kid," Doyle said. "But they can do more harm than good because they overtly show, not just on tryout weekend but leading up to tryouts, all this angst and anxiety. I think the kids feel that."

Doyle advised not to overemphasize, "'Hey, this is tryouts, you're a squirt now, boy it would be nice to make the AAA or AA' or whatever it is. The kids already know that. They hear it from their buddies; they know tryouts are coming up. So as much as possible, the parents should be controlling their own emotions."

### **Keep the Routine**

Hockey players are creatures of habit and it starts at a young age. If a player has a game-day routine, like showing up to the rink at a certain time or stretching before hitting the ice, stick to that ritual.

"Hopefully they're already in a good routine where they're eating three good meals and getting lots of sleep," Doyle said. "Leading up to tryout weekend, go to bed at the same time, have your favorite breakfast and/or lunch, and go to the rink with a great attitude."

### **A Word of Advice**

Now, what can a parent say to their player?

It's cliché, but regardless of the age, hard work and attitude are the two things that a player has complete control over and they are traits every coach notices, so it's important for players to work hard and maintain an eager, positive attitude.

Beyond giving it their all, a player should try to highlight their strengths. There's limited time for evaluation, so players need to show their stuff.

"If you're assessing players, not everyone is going to have a checked box in the head, hands, feet, size and compete," Doyle said. "If you're a fantastic skater, you have to showcase your skating ability during the tryouts. You have to run pucks down in the offensive end, you have to roar back like a horse and take ice and jump over one or two players on the back check. If you have a big-time shot, don't over-pass the puck. If you get the puck at the tops of the circle and down, you need to showcase your shot."

### **Pick and Play**

"Going into tryouts, hopefully you're picking an association that you know, whether you make the top team or not, that you're going to a good program," Doyle said.

Picking an association where the programming, the ice time and the interest level of the coaches is the same at every tier is crucial.

"Go to tryouts and do well and try to make the top team if that's what you're trying to do, but it's not the end of the world if you don't," Doyle said.

### **Make or Break? No Way.**

If your son or daughter doesn't make the team they were hoping for, it doesn't mean their hockey career is over. Everybody gets cut at one time or another. It's important to take the long view and know it's more important to gain a positive experience out of the season.

"If they didn't make the top team – had they made the top team – they would've been on the bubble. In other words, they weren't going to jump into that team and tear it up," Doyle said.

"If you're on the bubble, you could look at it two ways: I wish I would've made that top team and got the extra letter on my jacket, or, look at all the benefits of being in the top third of the next level, like power-play time, crucial time, leadership opportunities, etc.

"At the end of the day, it's the bigger umbrella of, regardless of what team I end up on, if that association is doing the right things, each team at that age level is going to have the opportunity to get better."

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