



The Importance Of Playing Multiple Positions

→ By Dan Jablonic

My colleague Kenny Rausch, who serves as director of youth hockey, recently met Martin Dahlin, the father of Rasmus Dahlin, the first overall pick in last year's NHL Draft, and asked him how long his son had been playing defense on a full-time basis.

His response was pretty shocking. "Since last year," he said.

Imagine being the top pick in the NHL Draft as a defenseman and having only played the position for a year? That's what long-term athlete development is really all about, and why we stress the importance of developing the athlete first and focusing on specialization farther down the road.

The best way to do that is to play multiple sports, and once you hit the ice to play multiple positions. Here's a few things every coach and parent should keep in mind when it comes to developing young hockey players.

1 Encouraging your players to continuously try multiple positions will improve their on-ice awareness and give them a better perspective of the game. It also gives them another tool that will make them a better player in the future. The more skills that they can add to their game the more it's going to help them as individuals, and their team.

2 Being able to see the game through the eyes of different positions gives players a greater empathy and understanding for what their teammates are going through. Try strapping on the goalie pads sometime and you will see how challenging it is.



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3 Having your players play multiple positions will give you greater flexibility as a coach in case you lose a player to injury, illness or other commitments. If you're down a defenseman late in a game, it's comforting to know you can look down your bench and find a forward who can step in. The ability to develop technical skills increases confidence and ultimately leads to more fun.

4 If you pigeonhole a kid into being a stay-at-home defenseman when he or she is 9 or 10 the game can be pretty boring. If you limit a player's creativity, it's not only going to stunt their growth but also have a negative impact on their passion for the game. Roles will evolve as the player develops.

5 Today's game is more dynamic, which means a defenseman spends less time skating backward and more time joining the rush. Having a bit of a forward's mentality will help them when it comes time to jump up into the play.

6 All players sign up to PLAY. Nobody wants to be backup goalie, especially at a young age. Coaches should look at new ways to rotate goalies. Coaches have found success by rotating goalies each period or every five minutes. Additionally, encourage your goalies to skate out when they're not in net. That way they can still be involved in the game and learn a new position and new skills. ☆

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