

Thoughts From The Bench

By Hal Tearse, Minnesota Hockey Coach-In-Chief

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A New Season Begins

With the cooling weather, birds flocking as they get ready to head south, and some of the leaves starting to turn, it must be about time for hockey season. By that I mean the “winter hockey” season. It seems however that we are starting earlier each year. Many large programs have tryouts starting mid September even though District play does not begin until November. Whatever happened to playing fall sports?

As a Bantam coach a few years ago we started tryouts after MEA(late October). Now they start shortly after Labor Day. Hard to play two sports at the same time and go to school. I know that some large programs front end load their practice schedules due to ice availability but there is a point of diminishing returns with this philosophy. Players need a steady diet of practice sessions throughout the season along with their game schedule and days off. To front end load your practices makes the last half of the season less meaningful from a development point of view and your teams will not perform well during the last month when it really matters. I know this as a fact having experienced it first hand at the pee wee level.

At a Level 3 clinic that I spoke at recently a coach ask what I felt was the right number of games for bantams and pee wees? My answer was that it depends on how much practice ice is available and how many days a week the team wants to skate (not 7). A past article entitled [“If Games Made Us Better”](#) addresses this issue. The definitive answer is 45 for bantams and 35 for pee wees plus play off games.

CEP Certification: A reminder to all coaches to make sure you have the proper level of certification for the age level you are going to coach. Your level is good for 3 years and then needs to be renewed or you can go to the next level. Clinics are supposed to be run in every District in Minnesota. When you look at the USA Hockey website for clinics and cannot find one in your district, I suggest you contact your District Director (see the list to the left) and ask when the district is having the clinics.

HELMET REMINDER: Recently a coach in Calgary fell and fractured his skull. He nearly bled to death on the ice in front of his son and teammates and then again at the hospital. Fortunately it appears that he has a good chance of surviving the injury and should recover after months of rehab. There have been several of these types of injuries in Calgary over the past couple of years, and now helmets on coaches are mandatory in Calgary Hockey. Most of Canada requires helmets on coaches because of similar incidents each year. Last winter a Minnesota youth coach was practicing outdoors with a

team and chose not to wear his helmet. He suffered a severe head injury resulting in the permanent loss of vision in one eye, memory issues and he is now permanently disabled. The USA Hockey and Minnesota Hockey rule requires all on ice coaches to wear a helmet and the chin strap be snapped. It is the rule. Every time you step on the ice without a helmet or with the strap hanging free you are telling your players that the rules do not matter. I am not sure this is the right message to send our players. Whether you agree with the rule or not, it is the rule. Please wear your helmet and snap the chin strap. If not for yourself, do it for your family.

IN THIS ISSUE:

This fall I have presented some ideas about "[*Changing the Dialogue*](#)" at a couple level 3 and 4 clinics. The concept is that youth coaches need to be aware of how they are communicating with their players and should spend more time asking questions and soliciting understanding and ideas from the players. The feedback from coaches who have heard the presentation has been quite good so I thought we should share the ideas. I would appreciate more feedback on the topic.

[*"Advice to Parents"*](#) is my gift to you. Print this article and hand it out to the parents of your team at the first team meeting. Help them read it.

[*"Player Burnout"*](#) is a good article that discusses the ideas that more is not necessarily better and quite possibly damaging to kids. This goes back to the question of how many games should we be playing at each level. A 15 year old player that is a classmate of my son played 135 games last year as a Bantam. This was a 90 game winter schedule and 35 off-season games. Remember that kids only need 35-45 games in the winter months because they will likely play another 25-50 in the off season. To run them at 60-90 games in the winter is unnecessary and as the article reflects, damaging long term. Too much too soon is not a good developmental model.

[*"Overcoaching and the Romance of Leadership"*](#) is reproduced, with permission, from the Double-Goal Coach by Jim Thompson, founder of Positive Coach Alliance. www.positivecoach.org. Herb Brooks wanted us to "Give the Game Back to the Kids" so let's try to find ways to follow his advice.

Player safety is an important part of coaching and one area where coaches have some legal liability. USA Hockey has partnered with the American Red Cross with an on line first aide course. All coaches are strongly urged to take first aide training and occasional review sessions

First Aide Training

USA Hockey's Coaching Education Program, together with the Safety and Protective Equipment Committee, has joined with the American Red Cross to provide additional training for our coaches and other participants.

Available online through the Indianapolis Chapter of the Red Cross "First Aid for Coaches" was developed by the Red Cross in conjunction with the USOC for use by its member National Governing Bodies. To access "First Aid for Coaches" go to www.USAHockey.com and click on "Coaches" from the top menu. The Red Cross link is on your left. There is complete menu of

available training and "First Aid for Coaches" is the course that will be most relevant for our members.& nbsp; USA Hockey's CEP recommends all coaches consider obtaining this training, and highly recommends at least one coach from each team.

Coaches Resource Center: Every article we have published and shared is archived on the Minnesota Hockey website. There are over 200 articles for you to use as you wish. The link is: http://www.minnesotahockey.org/coaches/coaches_resource_center.asp
Here are a couple articles you may want to refer to:

["Early Season Coaching Ideas"](#)

["Suggestions for a Successful Parent Meeting"](#)

There is a link here and on the Minnesota Hockey website for the SLE, Hockey Players Edge website. It is loaded with great ideas about hockey, nutrition and health. The best part is that now it is free. Check them out and tell me what you think about it. Remember to make a lasting *positive* impression on all of your players.

See you around the rink.....

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