



## Coaching is Teaching

Coaching young people in hockey or any other sport is primarily a teaching position. Like any other teaching assignment, the instructor needs to possess the following qualities:

- Competency in the subject matter
- Organizational skills
- Strong Communication Skills
- Leadership Skills
- Passion for the subject being taught
- A desire to improve as a teacher/coach (commitment)

Hockey is a very dynamic game that requires a multitude of individual skills and team skills. Every coach needs to be able to assess all of the skills of each player and then decide how best to coach the team. Once the assessment is completed a coach can then determine where to focus the practice time so that all of the players have the opportunity to improve their individual skills and their team skills. Each season will bring new challenges and wise coaches tailor their season plan to the talent they have. The saying, "We coach the team we have, not the one we wish we had" is quite true.

So this is all good in theory but what does it mean to you? Maybe I can bring it down to ice level with some examples and suggestions.

Drills are used to teach specific skills either individual or team. Each drill has a primary objective and perhaps one or more secondary objectives. Most all drills have one or two teaching points that a coach needs to understand and then communicate to the players on a regular basis. Telling your players the objective of each drill is very important. Then they know where to focus their attention.

The teaching method is described as follows: ***Tell-Demonstrate-Observe-Correct***. This sequence covers the three dominate learning styles that individuals favor. It is important to utilize this process for all of your drills so that all of your players understand each drill.

The area that is most difficult for many coaches is the "***observe and correct***" aspect of the process. This is where the rubber meets the road. First of all the coach needs to observe the player as the drill is performed. Does the skater do it correctly? If not, then the player needs to be stopped and shown the correct way to do the drill. Allowing

skaters to continually do drills incorrectly is a disservice to the players and lazy on the part of the coach. Players develop habits by the thousands of repetitions that they perform. If they are doing them incorrectly they will develop bad habits that will shorten their playing days. Players who have bad habits by the time they are 15 year olds have only their coaches to thank (blame).

One example that is easy to observe is crossovers performed on a circle. Many young players are uncomfortable on their outside edges and therefore do not cross over and finish with a push from the underneath leg. Instead they quickly switch to the outside skate and repeat the process over and over and then faster to increase speed. The problem with this is that never get comfortable with the outside edge and they have trouble handling the puck with such a choppy motion. Although they may go a bit faster with the quick steps there is a limit to their ability to accelerate as they are turning. The solution is to slow them down and make the skaters perform the skill correctly. This needs to be a consistent message from mites all the way through high school.

Correcting players is also a bit of an art. Players' often times are a bit sensitive to constructive criticism. There are many ways to go about it and have success. Phrase like; "I would like you to try doing that a slightly different way" or "Please watch how I do it" or perhaps "I think if you can improve this skill it will help you take your game to the next level. Do you want to try to do that?"

Punishing players verbally or with things like push ups when they do not do a skill drill correctly demonstrates weakness on the part of the coach. Patience and quality repetitions will make your players better.

In the academic world teachers are constantly learning new ways to teach. At the upper levels of the coaching profession, the coaches are also looking for new ways to teach their players. I am part of an informal network of outstanding coaches and development people who are dedicated to finding improved ways to teach the game. We attend symposiums here and in Europe. We make presentations at coaching clinics , share videos and ideas with that will help us a coaches. It is really important that youth coaches continually improve their knowledge base and coaching skills. The USA Hockey CEP clinics are only a beginning to the process not the end.

To develop into a highly skilled player takes 10,000 hours of practice and playing. Learning to coach well also takes many years of coaching and learning from experience and from other coaches. Considering the many lives we all touch the effort is worth the effort.

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September 2006