



Parent Coaches: Good or Bad?

The majority of coaches in youth hockey have a player on the team. They coach because their child is playing, and it is the only way to provide coaches to the thousands of teams in Minnesota and across the nation. For the most part, there are very few “career coaches” who show up every night when they do not have a child participating. The system works well for the majority of the teams, but there are many opportunities for it to go all wrong.

Last season a coach for District 10 pee wee team featured his own son by awarding him 2 out of 3 shifts all season long. The coach is considered to be very powerful in his association so nobody dared to question this self serving behavior. A District 3 Bantam team imploded during playoffs by shortening the bench and featuring the two coach’s kids. A team that should have been a contender to go to state collapsed in one weekend due to poor decisions by the coaches. These are examples of how well meaning parents can ruin a season for all the players on the team. Featuring one or two players does not help the team and certainly does not help their own kids. The favored coach’s child becomes isolated from their teammates and the parent group becomes very divided and bitter. The coach’s child will eventually play for someone else and may have difficulty adjusting to not being given special attention.

Many associations have a “no parent” rule for their A team head coaches and strive to do the same for as many of their B teams as possible. This approach eliminates the favoritism issue but has other problems. Often times the recruited coaches are young and perhaps have a strong playing background, but do not have a strong coaching background.

The Wayzata association has worked hard to place non parent coaches in their A team coaching spots. They also have a rule that board members may not be a head coach. This eliminates the political jockeying by board members and the coaches’ selection committee. This would be a good rule for all associations.

Some associations are so strict with the non parent coach rule that they eliminate some outstanding former players as coaches. This is a mistake also. Former Olympians and high level players can be valuable assets to your program if used properly.

It seems that the best solution is to strive for non-parent head coaches whenever possible. The coaches' selection committee for each association needs to be independent of the board and have a defined process for recruiting and interviewing coaches. This past summer I provided an association with a 22 question format for interviewing three candidates for their A Bantam team. The committee felt all three were good candidates. The questions were designed to explore the competencies, values, and commitment of each candidate. The committee reported back that when they were finished with the process, one candidate clearly was the best choice. By asking the candidates the same questions and exploring their passions, depth of knowledge, and values they were able to make a good decision.

Recruiting younger people as coaches is also a great way to fill coaching staffs. Former players from your program who are now in their 20's are ideal candidates. They should spend a couple years as assistant coaches. When younger coaches have demonstrated that they are ready to be a head coach be sure to pair them with an older and experienced assistant coach to help with the parent issues and other aspects of coaching that they may not have mastered. In this way you develop your future head coaches.

Coaching takes many years to learn. Being a former college player or professional player does not mean an individual will be a good coach. It only means that he or she was a good player. Coaching is a teaching and development activity that takes patience, time, knowledge and education to do it well. The USA Hockey CEP clinics are a good start to the education process but should only be a beginning to the process. Local associations and districts should also provide coach education opportunities through out the year.

This fall Minnesota Hockey is offering to run on ice clinics at the local level. The focus will be teaching coaches how to teach skating skills. An association only needs to provide 2 ½ hours of ice time and Minnesota Hockey will provide an instructor. These can be arranged by contacting Mark Jorgensen at Minnesota Hockey.

Coaches are the most important ingredient to the players having a fun and rewarding experience playing hockey. Selecting, training and monitoring coaches should be an on going process for every hockey association. Coaches that act inappropriately, demonstrate poor sportsmanship and place winning above all else should be removed from their positions. Your children are learning lessons besides hockey from their coaches. Be sure they are learning the right lessons.

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