



PUNISHMENT SKATES
Saturday, April 14, 2007

Question and Answer Session
"Punishment Skates"
provided by Dr Clint Steele

Hi Dr. Steele,

I'm a Better Hockey member and would like to ask you to share your expertise with me. I've had numerous discussions and read a number of articles regarding "punishment" and "conditioning" skating of hockey players. The skates usually involve skating the players to the point of exhaustion. I have read that doing so actually destroys skating mechanics, I know it does nothing to add to the love of the game.

I have witnessed these skates as a coach and do not subscribe to that school of thought. It is hard to change the mindset of individuals who learned that way and are teaching what they know. The local high school coach and many travel coaches use this skating "method" regularly especially after a loss. Do you have any articles discussing this practice? We do a lot of our "conditioning" by having the players work at a high tempo doing fun activities such as small area games. Your feedback on this would be greatly appreciated as well as any articles or places I could read up on this.

Sincerely,

Mike

Thanks for the question Mike

As I read this question I find myself thinking about the movie "Miracle" when Coach Brooks punishes his skaters for a bad game by doing sprints until he finally "breaks" them and they at that point realize they are a team of USA Hockey players and not individuals from different schools.

I think about how coaches are watching that and saying to themselves, hey it worked for Coach Brooks, it can work for me and my team of 10 year olds.

As you know there were many schools of thought that were subscribed to in the 70's and 80's that have since changed in the 90's and the 00's. Unfortunately these schools of thought are still followed by those players who were playing in the 70's and 80's and are now passing this on to their young players.

One of the things that I have been working on is teaching coaches the difference between conditioning drills and skating drills. I find all too often that coaches either don't know the difference or ignore the difference, thinking it is not going to make that much of a difference. Let me just state for the record that you CANNOT perform skating technique drills and conditioning drills at the same time. Most conditioning drills will "destroy" skating mechanics, at least the way most coaches perform conditioning drills and skating drills will not condition the player the way the most coaches want them to be conditioned.

First and foremost coaches need to understand that conditioning drills are just that, conditioning drills. They can consist of sprints if they want, or as you suggested fun, high speed drills or any other type of skate till you drop drills. It is very important that as a coach you perform these "conditioning" drills at the end of practice as once you have fatigued the athlete to a point where they have a hard time recovering they cannot then work on proper skating mechanics and cannot develop fast twitch muscle fibers to work on speed and quickness within the hour to hour and half time period you have on the ice.

As you pointed out in your question, conditioning drills will not allow for a player to perform a proper skating motion. It is therefore, my opinion, that you perform your skating drills at the start of practice making sure that the players know that they are to be focusing on skating technique. Speed/quickness and agility drills can be incorporated at this time as this is when the skater is fresh and can best work with fast twitch muscle fibers.

Work in groups of 3-4 to give the player a work to rest of 1:3/4. This is enough time to allow for full recovery of the fast twitch muscle fibers.

I am a big advocate of keeping a practice upbeat and high tempo with players working hard on each drill but then being able to rest long enough to recover so that every drill can be done with the best techniques possible.

If a coach wants to then work on conditioning at the end of the practice then go for it. I agree with you however that conditioning drills at the end of practice should be fun. The BEST way to do this is too allow the players to compete. These are athletes we are talking about, and athletes love to compete. When are athletes going to work harder, when a coach is yelling at them to hurry up or when they are racing a player on their team to win a specific competition. Players ALWAYS work harder when they are competing...and the great thing about it is they are having fun as well and so they don't even realize they are working so hard.

As you might guess, I do not agree with the "punishment" skate philosophy that some coaches adhere to today. As you can see it will not only hurt the player but also the team as a whole. Yes hockey is supposed to be fun, it is also about hard work and making sure you are in shape so I do believe that you do at times need to condition your athletes however do not use conditioning as a form of punishment.

Yours for Better Hockey,

Dr. Clint Steele, DC, CSCS

Dr. Steele specializes in training hockey players off ice and in the weight room. His programs have helped hockey players from all over the world from peewees through the pros improve their game and reach their ultimate potential. In addition he is founder and president of Better Hockey Inc., which runs betterhockey.com, and TOPDOG Off-ice strength training and conditioning programs for players in person or over the internet/phone. Dr. Steele can be reached at info@betterhockey.com.

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