

Northern Plains Hockey

Coaching Newsletter

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Don't Ever Underestimate the Value of Fun!!

I hope everyone is off to a good start this hockey season! Hopefully we have reminded ourselves that every time kids touch the ice we need to do our part to make it a fun experience. All coaches need to make sure we create an environment that is fun for the kids...and the coaches need to have at least as much fun as the kids! No matter what age you are, what would anyone come back if it is not fun?

Active Practices

I recently spoke to a group of "hockey people" about the ADM and how it should fit into a youth hockey program at all levels. At the end of the presentation, I was asked what I thought would be a good starting point for an organization with regard to implementing the principles of the ADM at all levels of their youth hockey program. While I don't claim to have the official answer I suggested that expecting all of their youth coaches to make their practices more active for all of their players would be a good starting point.

I have suggested to a lot of coaches this year that they give themselves an honest evaluation as to how active each of their practices is. I have really tried to do this myself as a coach of a high school team. On a few occasions I have had another coach use a stopwatch to time a player to see how much of the practice the player is active in the drills. The statistics that are out there tell us that in a typical 60-minute youth hockey practice players are active for 12-15 minutes. That's it! I often tell youth coaches that if we have drills with 4 or 5 kids in each line then the players are probably active $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{5}$ of the practice- there's your 12-15 minutes.

I would never suggest that every practice needs a coach timing players, but I think an honest evaluation is important periodically. If I look at the watch at the end of a practice and see 20:24, then I have to ask myself if that is appropriate for the age-level of the players- and can I do a better job than that. Players of all ages need to be more active in all of their practices. More active practices should lead to more repetitions of the important skills in hockey. And if this is done consistently with players for not just 1 day, or a week, or a month, or a season...but instead for a youth hockey player's career, how good would these young players turn out to be?

This is where the adults need to remember what is age-appropriate. The practices are for the kids. Make them as active as possible. Realize that the work to rest

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ratio will change as the players get older, but they still need to be active. I think practices at all levels of hockey could use improvement in this area. I know I have heard that players can learn by watching and I certainly understand the value of this. However, I believe each of us as coaches can do a better job of involving our players in the active part of the practice. Kids aren't coming to practice hoping to watch and learn.

I am also the athletic director at the small school for which I work. I oversee all sports in our school from grades 5-12. Active practices are not just a hockey-thing. I walk into gyms and out onto fields and see the same thing...too many kids standing and waiting to participate. Every youth sport should be examining how much time their players are spending standing and watching. I get very frustrated when I see our players in all of our sports standing and watching- we seem to do a lot of that in our practices. I have asked myself one question- "How much better could our players be if we did a better job of making players active in practices in all of our sports for the 8 years that they are members of our teams?" Eight years is a long time. I can only imagine how much better our student athletes could be.

I will keep encouraging youth coaches in all sports to improve on how active each of their participants is in a typical practice. Let's trust the stopwatch and challenge ourselves to do better. It takes more planning and organization but is ultimately much better long-term for the kids we coach.

Contact Information

Feel free to contact me if you have any thoughts, questions, or ideas. I would be more than happy to come to your association and visit about any hockey-related topic.

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