



## Herbie's, Ladders, and Boards No More

There was a time when these types of drills were commonplace in hockey practices. No matter what the name of the drill it involves having players skate long distances, with changes of direction due to the boards or typically the blue or red lines on the ice surface. This type of drill is thought to make kids tough and really sweat. Some people believe it helped to condition the players. Some coaches use drills like this as punishment for inattention or a poor performance in the prior game.

The belief in the value of such drills is part of the lore of hockey that is passed down from one generation to the next without any real basis in fact. It is time to put these drills into the history books and move on to a more enlightened approach to coaching youngsters.

As coaches prepare for practices it is advisable to design your activities in such a way that the players have received plenty of opportunities to extend themselves physically without negatively impacting them due to excess fatigue. For example, the most important fundamental skill is skating and to skate well requires that the skater maintain correct posture with knees bent out over the toes, forward lean, head and shoulders up. As players fatigue during the course of a practice session, their posture and skating technique deteriorate. If you then add one of the above named type of drills that require the player to skate several series of said drill you accomplishing nothing positive for your team. The impact of pushing a fatigued skater through these types of drills is to reinforce "incorrect skating techniques" that need to be corrected at a later time. Since the majority of youth coaches spend little or no time on skating fundamentals the players are getting negative training and no positive training in regards to skating.

Coaches should train their players to play the games and therefore use activities that more closely represent what their players experience in a game setting. Jack Blatherwick and other sport physiologists have studied

hockey and concluded many years ago that the best way to help players perform at a high level is to use interval drills with a rest to work ratio of 3 to 1. In other words, if your skaters can skate from the goal line to the center red line in 10 seconds they should rest for 30 seconds before doing the next sprint. By altering the distances and times a coach can accomplish the conditioning that is desired, and continuously remind the skaters to maintain proper skating techniques. If you desire to include conditioning into your practice sessions, include three interval sessions of 5 minutes each into your practices.

Another idea if you desire to have a practice ending skate is to use a competitive drill or better yet a competitive small area game that your players will enjoy and skate hard. The key in these activities is that they are going all out when competing and resting for at least three times as long as they compete.

It is tempting to skate players hard at the end of practice so that when they get off the ice the parents comment to you, “the kids will really sleep well tonight”. For some reason this validates a coach and everybody feels great except the players. . If you feel that after 45 minutes your players are not showing signs of fatigue, or at least that they have not had a good skate the fault is yours. Do not punish them by breaking down their skating technique with herbie’s or other similar counter productive drills.

Well designed up tempo practices will provide your players with the proper amount skill work, team work and conditioning activities. A combination of skating and puck handling skills drills, situational competitive drills, flow drills and small area competitive games will prepare your players for games and more importantly they will enjoy practice and have fun learning.

Hal Tearse  
Coach in Chief, Minnesota Hockey  
November 2007