



From the Mail Bag -Notes and comments from a couple readers:

Hal:

I particularly appreciate the articles addressing the proper role of emphasizing winning at early ages. Winning the game should be the objective for the players. Winning the game should not be the objective of the coach.

Too many kids get left behind because the coach (And the parents) want to win the game. As the adults in the situation it is incumbent on us to make sure no kids gets left behind or miss out on the life lessons of playing and the fun. Kids need to be given the opportunities to succeed or fail. These opportunities occur during games. If a coach isn't mature enough to accept this, and the loss of the game, they probably shouldn't be coaching youth. In my opinion this is true for any team Bantam B or below.

The forward in Dick Vraa's coaching manual said that the only coach in your association that should be concerned about winning is the high school varsity coach. I think he was right. The irony is that in my experience is you win more than you would otherwise when everyone, including the worst player, truly feels part of the team. My other experience is that almost everyone sings this song but many of them don't practice it.

I heard Rod Carew interviewed on the radio this spring. He said his high school coach in New York told him that he was not good enough to play high school baseball. There are many coaches of young kids that shorten their bench, shameful. How many Rod Carew's got discouraged and quit playing?

Again, please keep up the good work.

John Sauer 2007

Hal,

I've written to you before and though I am only a hockey mom, who happens to love photography, I felt I wanted to share with you a very fortunate experience I had.

I used to work for Bob May in his dental office. We would go to the North Star practices and take impressions for Proform mouth guards and then I'd get to go back with Bob to deliver the mouth guards.

Each time we'd sit up above the glass and watch practice for a while before walking down to rink side - all the while talking about the game, where the players were and how they moved. Bob taught me from above first: to watch not the puck, but the pattern of play. Watch how the players kept moving their circle of play so that as the puck moved down the ice the players adjusted their position to put them in the zone of play. Transitional play and how seamlessly offense worked with defense. As the puck moved to the net these zones would tighten up and become compact.

There were times I was fortunate to have Bob Johnson and Herb Brooks among others join us... and each time I think they delighted in "teaching" this nineteen yr old kid something about hockey. I learned so much from them, Hal. It is the reason I take good pictures. I watch and feel the play - the passion is there, the heart for the game. And it intensifies so much as you move down closer to play. Perspective certainly changes and it becomes much more difficult to see where you'd need to be, but from what I learned it was apparent to keep your "zone of play", if you will, overlapping with the neighboring zones.

I'm sorry I don't know coaching terminology but I know that as a beginner watching the game it helped to learn pattern of play first. To watch where the open ice was, I think you described it as a fundamental of Canadian play: taking and saving ice. I used to watch Mario Lucia play as a Mite on my son's team and though I think he carries definite instinctual play he also moved to the open area before the puck got there. I'm sure it helped to observe many, many hockey practices and games and learn from the best but he sure took it to heart! I know the "instinct" of young players seems to be along the lines of "Damn the torpedoes!" and just go to the puck - amoeba play as I call it because it reminds me of the action of an amoeba! Ha! They all go to the puck! But there has to be a good way to simplify it and develop it much like they try to do with math. same kind of concept intellectually I think. Work the patterns and keep revisiting it and adding to it new skills as you spiral up. As always, discipline enters into the equation and learning to control a young player's impulse to get to the puck before anyone else has to be controlled for the play to unfold. And for the patterns to work....

OK. so I'm rambling. I just wanted to comment on your article. As always I enjoy reading the newsletter. Thank you.
See you at the rink, Stacie