



Rebounds-October 2007

Hal,

Thanks for the newsletters. Always a good read. My kids are mite aged and younger. I am just starting out on that youth hockey adventure and I appreciate your seasoned expertise.

In the last issue, under Season Planning, you brought up scheduling issues and addressed the challenges of late night ice on growing Bantams. I couldn't agree more with your concerns. We often lament the loss of multi-sport athletes as hockey becomes more 365/24/7, yet we are losing more. Our kids are also missing out on family time, religious time, study time, and sleep time. These are all important parts of healthy development. I remember a parent commenting last winter that he hoped that the outdoor ice would be too warm the next Sunday and his daughter's game cancelled because the hockey schedule hadn't given him a break to take his family to church in over 2 months. And she was a mite! The pressure to be at every practice and game is intense. And it is additionally tough because hockey doesn't offer a set schedule (e.g. every Tuesday at 5) - It can be anytime, any day, anywhere, plus ice is always being rescheduled and the expectation is attendance no matter what. My neighbor has 3 kids in hockey. He commented that last season from October to March his family only had 3 days with no hockey scheduled. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and 1 other. Where is the day off for a family activity? I think many parents are scared to do anything because then they will be labeled as non-committed and be relegated to 'C' teams. What can be done to help associations give families a break?

You mentioned families who hope their kids would not make the 'A' team because of the disruptive schedule. Conceivably an association's "A" team may not represent their best hockey players! What if they were given freedom to miss once a week without repercussions? This could allow a family to relax at home together, go to church, catch up on homework, do another activity, get to bed early, etc. It would be a great boon to life development. Is this a practical idea? What other possible solutions are there?

Regards,

(name withheld by request)

Playing Up:

Each year I get questioned by parents regarding the issues of playing up or in other words playing at a level above your age level This usually occurs with the last year mites whose parents want the kids to move to squirts on the argument that staying in mites is a waste of time and is hindering their child's career. When I get one of these, and I recently did, I respond like this:

"Minnesota Hockey is organized around a community based format in which the players move through our system in accordance with their age and school grades. This is done in the recognition that social development, friendships and having fun are an important part of youth hockey. The extensive academic research from child development experts across the world all agree that there is no value in accelerating a youngster in athletics before the age of ten and in fact the research also indicates that starting competitive athletics before age nine has no bearing on the eventual outcome for most children with the exception of early burn out. "

Here is my take on it .For 99.9% of the players there is no need to move up. Let the kids play with their friends and develop as they mature We do seem to have that last one tenth of one percent of the players in our system that are clearly dominant players with skills way before their years in the game. . They are early maturing players or perhaps they are indeed gifted players. When these kids come along, I would absolutely favor moving them up to the highest level they can play. My reason for this might not be as you would think, solely for the benefit of the kid. My main reason for this is for the benefit of the players he or she leaves behind. I have seen this situation several times in the past 30 plus years and have coached several of these types of players over the years .My observation is that when one player dominates a group year after year it is not good for that player nor is it a good situation for the other players on the team. The team usually wins lots of games but without that one player the group is usually average at best. The other players rely on the superstar and they do not ever push themselves to excel. Since the team wins, mostly on the shoulders of one player, the remaining players and parents become convinced that they are also exceptional players. Usually this is just not the case. It is also hard to coach that player and the team. If you think about it I believe you will agree. In the case of the exceptional talent, for whatever reason he or she is exceptional, that player should move up to a level that is better suited to his or her level of play. This will create a new set of challenges on and off ice for that player but in the long run it might be better for all concerned. The hard part is who should make that call? I believe there are enough knowledgeable hockey people available in any community or area that can make that judgment call in conjunction with the parents of the player. Again, it is really a decision that impacts many players not just the one who may move up.

Players game day attire: Response to readers taking me to the woodshed.

I was taken to task by a couple readers for my opinion that making pee wees wear a suit, white shirt and tie to the arena for their games in an off season (or even in season) tournament constituted coaching abuse. (OK, abuse might be a bit to much). They stated that they felt it was a way to intimidate their opponents and to make sure the players were taking the games seriously. One respondent said that they do this with college and midget teams also. I am paraphrasing as they did not respond to me when I requested permission from them to publish their comments.

I agree that it is a great idea to have a team uniform for off ice which includes what the players wear to the arena before games. I have done this for my teams for years. Since this is an athletic event, not a business meeting, I would defer to wearing a warm up suit made for hockey players so that they look like a team and are suitable for pre game warm ups and activities. A dress suit for young kids is hardly the proper attire for a kid's game. As a business man myself, suits are uncommon in the work place for adults and I am quite confident that they are out of place in a locker room for 12 year old kids. Heck, if you coach college kids and want to do that more power to you but not in youth hockey.

Lastly, how many of you have solid color practice socks for your teams and prohibit laces tied around the legs instead of clear tape or Velcro straps? Kids will do anything they can to be different on and off the ice. Team uniform at practice, games and off ice. All good ideas.

Hal Tearse
Coach in Chief, Minnesota Hockey
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