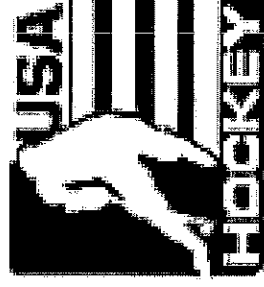




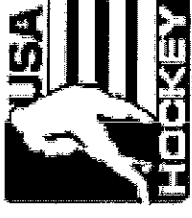
Ron Hayes

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR





Initiation Program Report



- The skill development presentation is still available to any association or group that wishes to host it. Since the last annual report, I haven't made any presentations in the state. The C/D is still available to any association that would like to have it. I, again, offered the "I" program presentation to the associations at the MAHA annual meeting. It was my hope that it would generate interest in the Initiation Program presentation at a local level. This has not happened.
- As mentioned in previous reports, I am available to go anywhere in the state in an effort to help set up and advise the Michigan programs.
- The fact that associations have no desire to host an initiation program presentation has led me to ask that an outline of the program be included in this report. It is my hope that it will generate some interest in what we have to offer.



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INTRODUCTION PROGRAM THOUGHTS

As you start in your coaching career, I think it is important that you realize how great an impact you will have on your players. You will not only be teaching your players the game of hockey, but you will influence them in many other areas that you may not even think about. You will become one of the most important persons in their lives and will be right up there with their favorite teacher and aunts and uncles. They will watch you and how you act in many situations that you may not even be aware of. You will be viewed as a person that can do no wrong; after all, you taught them how to skate backward and how to perform a hockey stop among many other things. They will look upon you as a role model; a person they want to be like, this is a heavy responsibility and one you should take very seriously. It's not just how you conduct yourself at practice and during game, but also how you talk to the other coach, parents, officials, and the players on both teams. How you conduct yourself when things don't go the way you think they should have gone. How you react to a questionable call by an official or to a tough loss in an important game is also observed. You will be watched and your players will be influenced by your actions. Coach is another name for teacher and you will be your player's favorite teacher. I guarantee it. As you go through your coaching career, keep saying "I'm M A D". I'm "Making A Difference" and that difference is a positive thing. In closing, I ask that you keep it fun, make it challenging, and use your coaching skill to advance your players to the next level.

PREPARATION

GROUP SIZE

Have your registration open all year to allow new players to join at any time. As the season approaches, you can determine by the number of players how many will be in each session as well as how many will be in each group. This number can be adjusted as needed and could fluctuate during the year. If you are going to have two sessions each week, split the players by age to start (3-4-5 year olds = session 1) (6-7 and older = session 2). This can also be changed if you feel it is necessary. You may see that a 5 year old is not being challenged in session 1; you can move that player to session 2. The reverse of this move can also be used. If you see a session 2 player getting frustrated because the drills are beyond his present abilities, you can move him back to session 1 where he will feel more comfortable. This can also be done within the same session by moving a player to a different group. This should only be done after talking to the parents. The player may have a buddy or a brother that he wants to stay with or some other factor that you know nothing about may come into play. It only takes a minute to make sure everyone agrees with the move before it's made.

ON-ICE & OFF-ICE PERSONNEL

Prior to the first skate, it is advantageous to have a meeting with all personnel involved in the program. At that time it can be decided who will be assigned to the many jobs both on and off the ice that have to be covered. Among these tasks are: on-ice, which group the on-ice coaches will work with – how many coaches in each group – how the preliminary evaluation will be conducted. Off-ice – who will create the attendance sheet – who will sign the players in each week – who will maintain and update the bulletin board – who will gather all the information needed to get all the players and

coaches registered with USA Hockey – who will co-ordinate any fund raisers you may have – who will act as liaison between the program and the association to get information and answer questions that new hockey parents may have.

At this time, an inventory can be made to insure that the equipment needed is on hand and ready to go. Pucks and pylons are probably the two major items that come to mind. You may want to have a few extra sticks, a pair of gloves, a cup and pelvis protector, a helmet, and a pair of shoulder pads, and a pair of elbow guards. These are things that players forget and they must have all of their equipment on before they can be allowed to go onto the ice. Rather than a player missing a session or having to go home to get the forgotten equipment, it's an advantage to be able to loan the equipment for the session. This may not be possible for many programs and is something that can be incorporated over time.

An area that is often overlooked is the visual inspection of the arena for safety and location of certain things. Things such as where the first aid kits are, where the telephones with outside lines are, the condition and location of the locker rooms you will be using and the condition of the ice and boards. This must be done prior to the first skate. These are some of the things that will be helpful and you can check them periodically throughout the season. This task can be given to a person who expresses a desire to get involved.

OFF ICE PERSONNEL

This is an area that is very important to the program. The off ice people are the ones the parents will see and talk to every session. It is advisable to have one person that you can rely on to co – ordinate all off ice activities. You can then go to that person and stay attuned to all that is going on in all areas of the program. Try to have one person who is familiar with MAHA and USA Hockey guidelines and rules. If this cannot be achieved, have a contact within the association that you can go to for information. All personnel must have a positive and friendly attitude. This is an area where you will have many parents volunteer their services. Try to get all volunteers involved in the program. These people are the future of your hockey program and should be made welcome.

ON ICE PERSONNEL

This is the most important area of your program and must be monitored at all times. The staff you put on the ice will be the deciding factor as to the quality of the program. First of all, all coaches must be USA Hockey certified. Check the background of the coach. Where has he coached? What age group did he coach? Were there any problems with the team he coached? How many years has he coached? If you can, talk to some of the parents and players that have been on his teams. Select one coach to be the lead coach for each group. Try to select one that will commit to the program every session. Young players will grow comfortable when they have the same instructor every session. The coach's instructions are understood when given by the same person. The coaches practice plan follows a sequence that the player understands because of past sessions. One thing that I will not tolerate is what I call a "BOOMER". This is the person who is on the ice to show all the young players how hard he can shoot the puck. He goes around the rink taking slap shots off the boards with no regard to the young players on the ice around him. One badly timed or badly directed shot can spell disaster. If I see this occur, I give the person and only one warning. If I see it again, that person is off the ice with no chance of returning. One thing to avoid is having too many coaches on the ice. I feel that two or three coaches in a group are plenty. In the weakest group, you may want to have more, as the players need

more one on one coaching especially at the start of the year. Too many coaches confuse the players and sometimes one coach is telling a player to do one thing and another is telling the player to do something else. If you have too many new coaches volunteer to go on the ice, keep your nucleus on the ice for the entire season and put the rest on the ice a month at a time. Many times you will have parents get their USA Hockey coaching card and want to get on the ice with their child. When this happens, I put them on the ice, usually for a month, and they are instructed to help the lead coach and do as asked. I try to do this so that the new coach will be able to observe how the lead coach interacts with the players. This gives the new coach a chance to see how the coach communicates, teaches, and demonstrates up close and he will be able to ask questions. Ask that your lead coaches be available after each session to answer any questions that the parents may have. This is one of the most enjoyable times each session for me. I have a chance to put a player with their parents. Most parents will ask basic questions such as, what can be done to improve a certain skill off ice between sessions. This is just one example of the type of question you will get. If you don't have the answer, find out and get back to them with the correct answer.

FIRST SKATE

Your first skate is going to be chaos. The first skate is like the first day of school for the players and parents who are new to the sport of hockey. Have a mandatory meeting for all families 2 hours before the on-ice session. At that time, you can introduce all of the on-ice and off-ice personal involved in the program. You can present an outline for the program for the year. This can include fund raisers, the program's ice schedule if it varies from a standard time and day, and some extra things that the program may try to do. Set some goals for the year. These should be program goals not individual goals. What do I mean by this? If you were to say that every player will be skating backwards by Christmas, you may not accomplish this goal. If you say that everyone will have fun, everyone will play in an all-star game, or everyone will be on a "pond hockey" team; these are positive things and the players know that they will be a part of this regardless of their abilities. This is also a great time to have the coaches check the equipment of the players. I can't tell you how many times I have seen used skates that have no support left in the boot or too large for the player's foot. It is understandable that parents are reluctant to spend money on skates when they are unsure if their child really wants to play hockey. I've seen football shoulder pads and soccer shin guards being used. Some may not have a cup or pelvic protector. As a coach, you can advise the parent on the quality of equipment, but the final decision is up to them. Remember that all players must have all the equipment required before going on the ice. This is also a good time to put a 2 inch strip of adhesive tape on the front of their helmet with the player's first name in bold letters on it. This also identifies the player and it also helps the coach learn the names of his players. Emphasize to the parents that everything must be positive and that what their child is trying to do is very difficult. They must stress the positive and be up beat at all times. Nothing, I repeat NOTHING should be negative. I have found that chairs and pylons as skating aids really don't work. Players will use them as crutches and will be reluctant to try to skate without them.

FIRST SKATE ON-ICE

The First time the session steps on the ice, all coaches must be prepared to assist the skaters onto the ice. For many, this will be the first time and they will be reluctant to venture very far from the door. The coaches must be ready to clear the area around the door to allow the rest of the players enter the ice area. Talking to the players as you move them from the entrance as well as assisting them will make it easier. At this time it will be easy to spot the first timers and at that point you can assign them to the new skaters group. After allowing the players to acclimate themselves to the ice (about 5 minutes or so – at this time you can also evaluate more of the players), line the players at the goal line. Have the players skate toward the far boards and to stop any way they can when you blow the whistle. This is a preliminary way to sort the players into groups. If you have 2 groups, split the players in half. If you have 3 groups split the players into thirds. Try to keep the groups even in number. The players who have skated the greatest distance can be placed in the stronger group, mid-ice in the second group and weakest skaters in the third group. Keep in mind that a player may be moved at any time during the year based on improvement. Keeping the groups the same size is important because groups that have too many players get fewer repetitions in the drills and repetition is the key to improvement. After the initial evaluation is complete, have the coaches take their group to the portion of the ice that will be their area every week. If 2 groups are used, which half is theirs; if 3 are used, which section is theirs. Coaches will introduce themselves to the players and begin their training program. To identify players and which group they belong to, I use a round sticker that is affixed to each side of the helmet. In my system, a yellow sticker represents group 3 (the weaker skaters), a red sticker represents group 2 (The middle of the road skaters), and a blue sticker represents group 1 (the better skaters). Again, this is a preliminary assignment and during the next 2 sessions players will probably be moved from group to group. You now have 2 means of identifying the players. You have the players name on tape on his helmet and the sticker identifies the group he is with.

CROSS ICE SET UP

Once you are comfortable with the make up of the groups, jerseys are given to the players. The color of the jersey will match the color of the sticker on his helmet and the jersey color and number will be entered on the attendance sheet. You now have 3 means of identifying the player; name on helmet, sticker on helmet, and jersey color and number. This identifies the player within the system for everyone and is very helpful. I use 3 groups for each session and will be addressing that format. The ice is divided into 3 areas. Group1 (blue) uses the portion of the ice nearest the entry door. Group 2 (red) uses the portion of the ice farthest from the entry door. Group3 (yellow) uses the center ice area. My reasoning for this is that the better skaters will go everywhere on the ice once they enter. Group 2 will be forced to skate to the far end of the ice to join their group. And group 3 will have to skate to center ice to join their group.

WEEKLY FORMAT

You must have a “game plan” if you want to best utilize the ice time you have available to you. Time is wasted when you can’t go from one drill to the next in an orderly fashion. USA Hockey has a practice plan outline. Use it if you aren’t sure what you are going to do for the whole session. The main thing to remember is that you must keep the players moving as much as possible. I have seen many programs where one or two players are doing the drill and everyone else is standing at the

boards waiting their turn. This defeats the cross concept and can be avoided by having all of the players doing the drill at the same time. Remember repetition is the key to skill development. Start off with very basic drills. As the players progress, drop the easiest drill and add a new drill that is more demanding and requires a little more skill. Sometimes you may add a drill that the group isn't ready for. You will know when that happens. Discontinue that drill and bring it back later in the season. There can be no time line for adding new drills. This will depend on the players in each group. If you try to go too fast, the players will get frustrated and lose interest and you don't want that to happen. Go with the drills that the players are comfortable with and add a new one near the end of the session. Ask the players what they think of the new one and get some feedback from them. That will also give you an indication as to whether they are ready for it or not.

My weekly session starts with about 5 minutes of "free time". You will find that no matter how many times you ask the parents to have their child ready to go on the ice 10 minutes before the session starts, it just doesn't happen. I find that "free time" helps the players get acclimated to the ice and have a little fun before the actual practice starts. Prior to any player going on the ice; a coach puts pylons, pucks and any other training needs on the ice. I have about 100 pucks on the ice at the start of each session for "free time" and those pucks are in the center ice circle. This forces the weaker skaters to get to center ice if they want a puck to play with. After all the players are on the ice a whistle is blown and all the players line up on the goal line at one end of the ice. At this time, players are told of any upcoming events that are planned and any other information that needs to be shared. Players are then sent to their respective groups for the practice portion of the session which usually lasts 40 minutes. The last 5 minutes are again "free time" for the players to unwind and have some fun. You may find that a few players want to be goal tenders and that's fine, however, I don't think that "wearing the pads" every week is a good idea. They may fall behind the rest of the group in their skill development. Skating is hard enough without goalie equipment for a new player. I'll let the player wear the goalie equipment periodically and as he gets more skilled, he can do it more often. Remember, always be upbeat and positive and the players will respond.

After each practice, meet in the coach's area and discuss the session. The coaches in our program have their own room to change into our skates and sweats. We discuss individual player development and the movement of players between groups. We identify which drills work and which drills the players enjoy performing. The lead coaches for each area can share any positive or negative thoughts that they may have with a new coach brought onto the ice to assist them. This can include problems with a "boomer" (you remember him from above), a player or a parent. "Boomer" problems are easy, get him off the ice. Parent problems can usually be solved early in the year. A lot of times, parents want their child to be Wayne Gretzky and really push them to the point where the player is afraid of disappointing them. This can turn a player off in a matter of weeks. Talking to the parent usually will solve or at least slow their demands down and a little reminder every once in a while will work wonders. The hardest area is the problem player. First of all, no 2 children are alike and there is no 1 solution to the problem. Many players at an early age don't pay attention for too long. It is, therefore, advisable to explain the drill quickly and get it going. You can keep instructing as the drill progresses, pointing out things the player isn't doing correctly or have omitted from the drill because they forgot that portion of it. I don't allow any punching or hitting another player with a stick. This is punished by a trip to the penalty box for about 2 minutes. If it happens again, another trip to the box and this trip will last much longer. A third occurrence results in a return to the box where the player will sit until one of the parents comes to the box and gets involved in a solution to the problem. You may not see a player do the above and a parent may call your attention to it. I will confront the player and ask if the incident did in fact happen. Whether it happened or not, you can talk to the player and let him know

that you won't tolerate that type of conduct. Be nice, after all you didn't see him do it. If nothing works, you must think of removing the player before someone gets hurt.

POND HOCKEY

Pond hockey is what the players really look forward to after January first. There are many ways to set up the teams. I try to have at least 4 teams for each session. Session 1 never plays session 2 because of the age difference. Starting with the better group of skaters, players are put on teams until that group is exhausted. Then the middle group and the weaker group are placed in the same way. This way, there is an equal amount from each group on each team. This is a good time to get the parents who have gone through a coaching seminar a chance to coach. Select coaches for each team and ask them to try to match lines so that the better players are playing each other and so on. Nets are placed at the red line and on the goal line and the half boards are set up along the red line. Leave enough room between the goal at the red line and the half boards to allow players to skate behind the net. If you don't have half boards, 2 coaches on skates can be stationed on the red line on each side of the net to insure that the pucks remain in their proper end. They will also drop the puck half way between the goals after each goal. Coaches are not to interfere with play and should stay out of the way. No score is kept. A 3 minute buzzer is used to change lines. Coaches are responsible for all equipment used during the game. It is advisable to have volunteers ready to get the half boards on the ice as soon as possible and to disassemble them after the game. If you have enough players, split each group in half and run 3 games at once using the three zones on the ice.

EXTRA THINGS WE DO

The following is what the program I'm involved with does above and beyond the regular skating sessions. Each player gets a jersey in the color of the group in which he skates. This is theirs to keep. They will also get a Tim Horton jersey to keep and it will be worn during "pond hockey" games. On the first skate each month, the player may wear any jersey they desire. I've found that many players have a favorite jersey and this gives them a chance to wear it for a practice. We always take care of our skaters on Halloween. A little "goodie bag" is something the players look forward to. During the early part of the season, we have a stick day where every player gets to pick out a stick. A local sports store brings the sticks to the rink and the players pick 1 out before going on the ice. Another special thing is our Christmas party. We get the parents involved with bringing passing dishes and helping before, during and after the party. This is a family affair and even grandparents and aunts and uncles are invited. Each player gets a hockey related gift. Every year we have an all star game for each session. Everyone plays and it's full ice with referees. The players love it! We also have a skills competition late in the season. Fastest skater, best stick handler and best shot by age receive awards. A player may only receive 1 award. All participants receive a medallion. We recognize 1 player from each session each month as our "player of the month". This award is usually given to a player who shows determination on the ice to do the drills and has a positive attitude. I can honestly say that this award rarely goes to the best players in a group. 3 years ago, we designed a patch called the "hustler award". Every session, coaches give out 1 or 2 in each group. This is given for trying not

accomplishment. If a player is doing everything he has to do the drills, he qualifies for the patch. It is to be sewn on the left sleeve of his jersey as recognition for his efforts. The end of the year award is a token for all of the effort that every player has given to become a hockey player.

RON HAYES