

15 Things Coaches Love to See in a Player

By Greg Bates, Special to AHAI – Amateur Hockey Association of Illinois

Character counts when it comes to impressing coaches



Every hockey coach has certain aspects he or she likes to see in a player, whether it is being a hard worker on the ice, a dedicated student off the ice or a strong leader during a game as well as in the classroom.

When Rob Klein is putting in time as the assistant coach for the Lake Forest Academy boys' hockey team, he likes to address the guys in the preseason about what he'd like to see from them throughout the season.

Klein came up with 15 things coaches love to see, in no particular order, from their players.

1) Focus in the classroom – *That's a big aspect at Lake Forest Academy, because it strives to develop student-athletes. "College hockey's becoming such a big part of our hockey world these days, and you need to have the grades to move on," Klein said. "If you're not focusing on that at an early age, I think that it can really affect you negatively down the road."*

2) Character – *What Klein looks for is professionalism. "Do you show up to the rink in a professional manner? Do you look approachable?" Klein said. "I think that also has a lot to do with respect."*

3) Leadership on and off the ice – *A player can be a leader in the classroom, but how does that translate to the locker room and vice versa? "In the classroom, leading group discussions, being the first to volunteer," Klein said. "Leadership on the ice, maybe taking a captain's role, being first to demonstrate a drill."*

4) Work ethic – *"Definitely shooting for no off shifts," Klein said. "Just a good, hard-working individual. Shows up with their lunch pail and goes to work."*

5) Coachability – *"Looking for kids who really want to learn," Klein said. "Kids who are really engaged and can take what you tell them and translate it to on-ice performance."*

6) Attention to detail – Coaches always tell players to do the little things. “That’s something as simple as communication on the ice with your teammates,” Klein said.

7) High level of compete – “I want to instill in our players that we want to be battling in all facets of the game,” Klein said. “We want to maintain that all three periods, sustain pressure. We’re looking for players that can do that.”

8) A two-way hockey player – Klein said it’s a big aspect in today’s game: who can go up and down the ice hard and who can backcheck for their teammates. “I think it really shows when a team has good two-way players how much more well coached they look, how much more compete level is translated into that,” Klein said.

9) Teamwork – Playing for your teammates. “It’s not only about you, it’s about the rest of the team,” Klein said. “Standing up for guys, going to those greasy areas of the rink to try and get goals and assists, whatever it may be.”

10) Hockey sense – “Really focusing on on-ice awareness, knowing where to be, playing attention to the coach when they tell you where to go on the ice and not having to have that coach come back to you multiple times telling you the same thing,” Klein said. “It starts to get instilled in your brain, you know where to go on forecheck, backcheck, penalty kill, power play.”

Klein noted that hockey sense is hard to coach. Either a player has it or they don’t.

11) Representing the name on front and back of the jersey – “Respecting the game is definitely a big part of what we look at,” Klein said.

12) Multi-sport athletes – Getting involved in another sport besides hockey. “What I’ve seen from my own experiences, and then some of the kids I’ve coached, footwork might not only come from hockey, it might come from soccer, it could come from lacrosse,” Klein said. “You might be able to pick up on some good balance aspects of your game just through different footwork exercises that you’re seeing in a different sport. It kind of develops the whole player.”

Some kids get burned out playing hockey year-round. This is a way to get away from the game but still stay in shape. It’s a good diversification method for the kids, noted Klein.

13) The love of the game – Players need to remember it is a game and should enjoy playing it. “Players we look for, are they having fun?” Klein said. “Do they like what they’re doing? Do they enjoy being out on the ice when it’s a barnburner — 3-2 late in the third. Do they want to be out there?”

14) Parents who respect the game – “That goes into in some cases in selection of a player on a team,” Klein said. “Are the parents obnoxious or are they respecting the game and do they want their kid to get better.”

Remember it's just a game and parents are role models for the kids.

15) Respect to the officials – “As coaches, I think it's very important to teach the kids to respect what the officials do for us during the game,” Klein said. “They're trying to keep us safe; they're trying to keep the game fair. We've got kids that are going off on the officials during the game and it shows a lack of responsibility, a lack of self-awareness on the rink and it can affect the decision of the coach taking or not taking a player.”

Klein knows that's a long list for players and coaches to digest. There are three attributes in Klein's mind that really stand out from the rest: character, the clear-cut No. 1, followed by work ethic and being a two-way player.

“If you're checking off half these things on this list, I think that kid's doing pretty darn good,” Klein said.