



“Championship teams are able to learn various team defensive, offensive and neutral zone systems and then implement those that are effective in a game to counter act the other teams’ systems”

COACHING LEADERSHIP – It’s All About Systems

In most situations, a certain level of individual physical and mental talent on your team similar to the level of talent in top 50% of the teams in your league is necessary for your team to have a realistic chance to be a contender for a championship.

But given the existence of that level of talent, the real difference in your team being able to become a champion will be learning and playing documented defensive, offensive and neutral zone systems that will work best against the systems the other teams are using.

How often have you seen teams with many talented players not win championships when everyone around including the coaches seem to think they should based on their talent level. If you look closely you may see in many cases either only a few systems in action, or the wrong systems for the teams they are playing against, or players playing together that can’t execute the chosen systems. The latter situation is common when the chosen systems are very offensive minded, high risk, complex and require great puck handling and passing skills.

It’s not easy to choose the right systems for your team talent in the first place, and then to fit the available talent to the systems and then to teach and reinforce the chosen systems. Keep things simple. Start with fundamental systems and if the players can handle the basics move on slowly. For example, don’t try to teach complex rotational style defensive zone coverage and break out systems before the players can make more simple systems work.

Players need to see a system, walk through it, understand it, believe in it and practice it over and over before it will become second nature under game situation pressure. Without formalizing the system in a diagram and brief narrative like in these TIPS, coaches and players with little practice time don’t have a chance. Systems need to be documented on a web site like this so players can frequently access them with ease or they need to be given to the players on paper or on a CD. The systems need to be discussed in off ice sessions, and reinforced in practices and games over and over.

Formal systems really matter because:

- they clearly define the game plans for the team and individual roles within these plans
- when new players join the team the systems can be used as a training tool to get these players up to speed with the rest of the team quickly
- systems are a team success tool and thus they maximize team as opposed to individual performance



- they are a good change management tool, if players get hurt and new players have to fit in quickly, or if coaches change, but the systems don't
- systems provide a road map for coaches as we fit the available player skills to the systems year by year

Part of your player selection challenge is to determine whether certain players are flexible and coachable, that is, willing to learn ways of playing the game that are different from the ways they have played before. Their previous ways may be far more individually focused. Some quite talented players have a real problem with this sometimes and need a great deal of convincing especially when they may be asked to play a less risky defensive style of play over a more high risk offensive style they are used to.

Once the players see how successful the team and they can be playing your systems they will take ownership of them as their own, hunger for adaptations that are better, become creative themselves and believe more in the team approach.