



“Players need to understand and believe exactly what they should be doing on the ice in different situations, and why, before they get on the ice for practice or for games to try it.”

OFF ICE - PRE PRACTICE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Off ice team meetings immediately before the players and coaches get ready for practice are key to successful team or player development and learning.

Why?

Because a lot of kids at all levels sometimes have no clue what the coaches are trying to teach them or why for a whole lot of reasons. The players need clear, crisp communication in language they can understand. They need a chance to ask questions and say they don't understand if that's the case. They need a chance to say what their ideas are. They need reinforcement of the plan.

Ice time is a costly and precious commodity so on the ice coaches tend to speak quickly, don't reinforce or say why the players should be doing what he says, and don't realize half the kids can't hear him very well. Before a game is a good reinforcement time but not a good new play/Tip time, nor is in a game.

Have the meeting in the dressing room 1 hour before practice for just ½ an hour. That's about as long an attention span that is reasonable for the players. You will get far more attention in this setting than if you have it in a home or separate meeting area at the arena with pizza etc.

Make these sessions mandatory for all players and coaches.

No parents should be allowed to attend and if you are in any doubt about this ask the players to vote on whether they want their parents in or out of the room. The players will be far more open on their own.

Use the blackboard that is in most dressing rooms to demonstrate plays. If you have a computer projector use it to put Tip diagrams up on the wall. Personally demonstrate e.g. faceoff techniques or stick checking right in the room.

Let the players, particularly the captains and alternates quiet the room. If someone won't stop talking, stop the session until they do or invite them to share their thought with the team. If it gets really bad use loss of ice time at the practice as the consequence.

No yelling or screaming. All that does is diminish you in the players' eyes.

Make the session interactive, not a monologue. Ask the team captain and assistants to show leadership by participating. Make it fun, ask questions of the players and get some humor into it.



Pick no more than one or two plays or situations to emphasize per session and choose drills and controlled scrimmage in the following practice to reinforce the “talk”. Get input from forward lines, defensive pairs and 5 player units that play together on the Tips in front of the team..

At each session start with “Is there anything you would like to talk about first? Game situations, an idea or difficulty? ”

E-mail play Tips to the players before the meeting or refer to a specific Tip on this site and ask them to read the Tip and come ready to ask questions. Emphasize there is no such thing as a dumb question.

Emphasize over and over the importance of the physical and mental skills of the game and that:

“Hockey is like chess on skates ... to win, it takes the integrated development of physical and mental skills ...including the 7 T’s ... Talent + Tactics +Training + Teamwork + Tenacity +Thinking + Toughness.”

Remember, every time you communicate with players your credibility with them and their belief in you as their coach either goes up or down.