



Coaches,

Hope your off-season is going well, and that you have had time to step away from the rink to recharge your batteries. The subject matter of this issue is just that, walking away from the game for a few months. We hope the articles on the following pages will help stimulate and educate you. Now sit back and enjoy the sports of this season, golf, tennis, soccer, and of course watch a baseball game at the corner of 161 St. and River Ave.

On another note, I would like to thank Jim Cooney for his years of dedication as the National ACE Director. Jim's vision and efforts really helped get the ACE program moving in the right direction. Jim is still staying on as the ACE Director for Massachusetts. Jim's replacement is yet another dedicated individual to the sport of Hockey and the ACE Program, Tom Kehr. Tom is currently the ACE Director for Michigan and has stepped in to take over as the National ACE Director. Thanks Tom and good luck. We know you will do a great job.

As always, please feel free to contact me with any comments or article suggestions.

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Ice Melts in the Summertime

Adam Naylor, Ed.D., AASP-CC

Each year when the sun brightly shines, and the temperatures rise into the 90's and above, We should pondering our approach to hockey in the summertime. There is little doubt that the cool air of the rink is sometimes a welcome respite to the heat. Also it certainly is fun to be able to leave the rink in flip flops.

Over a decade ago, the popular youth sport mantra was "Don't put a professional model of sport onto youth athletes." This was good wisdom with the premise being that mites through midgets are not mini-adults regardless of their skill level. A wise coach and sports program understands and appreciates the developmental needs of its athletes. While holding on to the premise beneath this mantra, perhaps it is time to start considering, "Putting a professional model of sport onto youth athletes."

The Stanley Cup final recently ended and the last of this year's NHL competitors will begin their off-season. As ice-melts for the summer, many will head to the golf courses, many will begin off-season strength training, and a few will skate occasionally in the months of June and July. They will all rest, relax, and for the most part get away from hockey. Priorities will become recovering from a grueling hockey season and perhaps take up another sport such as baseball or lacrosse.

#### Summer Hockey Priority List:

1. Rest and relax
  2. Train to prevent injuries
  3. Skill development
- Increases/nagging injury
  - Poor performances

In an era of youth sport where opportunities abound, it is easy to think that young athletes need to play each and every day in order to stay a step ahead. The off-season has diminished and there is a cost. The lack of an off-season minimizes the opportunity for players to adequately recover both mentally and physically. An athlete without ample recovery time is at risk for burnout that can be categorized by four things: 1) physical and emotional exhaustion from intense training and competition, 2) performances below expectations, 3) loss of passion / "I don't care attitude," and 4) a reduced sense of accomplishment on the ice. The most important goals of summer activities should be to allow the athlete to recover from a winter of hockey and re-embrace the passion for skating – ultimately allowing the athlete to avoid the tribulations of burnout.

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Does this mean that players should avoid the rink in the summer? Not necessarily, it does suggest that rigorous on-ice workouts and a grueling competitive schedule would be a particularly bad idea for the player striving for excellence. Perhaps it is best to remember that time off of the ice in the summer will actually lead to a better player in the long run. The goals for a player in the off season should be to rest and to recover most effectively, striving towards increased energy and enthusiasm for the next competitive season. The other two valuable hockey goals in the off-season ought to be to build up the body to prevent in-season injuries and work on skills that one is afraid to attempt during the pressure of competitive play. This being said, coaches, parents, and administrators do best by the players when they advocate for rest and relaxation first during the summer. As ice-time goes up parents and associations must be cognizant of the potentials for increased risk of injury, decreased motivation, and stunted player development.

The player that schedules summer hockey most wisely develops a few new skills, but most importantly enters the next season refreshed and ready to play. It is important to also remember that an increased off-season hockey schedule leads to fewer opportunities to participate in other sports, minimizing opportunities to learn transferable sport skills and strategies as well as taking away opportunities for general athletic development that are provided by the unique balance, power, and movement demands of other sports. With never ending opportunities to skate it is easy to forget that summer is the time for barbecues, beach, and other sports. A camp or two or recreational game here and there can be great to stay in the shape, but remember ice melts in the summertime - take this cue and take time away from the rink. Wisely embrace off-ice relaxation time to maximize gains and performances during the next competitive season.

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#### Useful References

*Bushie, J & Lobe, C. (2007). Are we training smart, or just hard? Athletic Therapy Today, 12 (2), 39-42.*

*Goodger, K., Gorely, T., Lavallee, D., & Harwood, C. (2007). Burnout in sport: A systematic review. The Sport Psychologist, 21 (2), 127-151.*

Naylor, A. (2007). *The coach's dilemma: Balancing playing to win and player development*. *Journal of Education*, 187 (1), 31-48.

## **Working With First-time Players – Part 5**

### **Practice Format**

Once you have survived the first few practices you should be able to fall into a practice routine. In fact, I would encourage you to do just that. Develop a practice format that is simple and effective. It may seem boring and repetitive to you, but that is exactly what the kid's want and need. It will take a few practices for them to catch on, but once they do, you're "home free". Here is an example of a typical practice plan for first year skaters:

**(5 Minutes) Free Skate** – Throw out some balls, pucks, and other "toys" for the kids to play with. Let them play around.....no structure.

**(2 Minutes) Center Ice Talk** – Bring them into the center, on one knee, for a quick "Hello".

**(5 Minutes) Agilities In-Place** – Have them stand up in the center area and spread out. You will lead them in agility drills, while standing in place. Here are some that I use:

- "Ready Position"
- Arms up stretch/Touch the ice
- Turn in a circle
- Balance on one leg
- Down on ice/get up quick or "Dead bug" (lie down and get up quick)
- Jump as high as you can
- Step over stick
- Jump over stick (side to side, then forward to backward)
- Skate around stick (stay close to stick, first forward, then backward, then forward to backward)
- Figure 8 around and over stick

**(20 Minutes) Station Training** – You will set up 4 stations on the ice. You will divide the kids into 4 equal groups. Each group will start at a station. The whistle will blow approximately every 5 minutes. (The number of stations, number of kids per group, and the number of groups can be changed to fit your group). Here is a description of 4 possible stations:

**Station # 1** - (Inside one blue line) – **SKATING** – Have the kids skate across the ice surface (side-to-side). They start against the boards.....a coach demonstrates what you want them to do, and then they go. They stop at the other side. The coach demonstrates the next one, etc. Here are some things I like to use in the SKATING station:

- Glide in the "ready position" – skate across - halfway - glide in ready position.
- Sitting Glide - skate across – halfway – glide in sitting position.
- Superman – skate across – half way – dive on belly and get up – skate to other side.
- Dead Bug – lie on back - get up quick on coaches whistle (or signal) and skate to other side.
- Spin in center – skate across - halfway – turn in a circle – continue to other end.
- Egg roll - skate across ice – halfway – dive on belly and roll over – continue to other end.
- Skates glued to ice – skate across ice – keep skates on ice....can't pick feet up.
- Crazy legs – run across ice (don't skate).
- March – march across ice – pick knees up as high as possible.
- Play game – kick tennis ball from one side to other.

**Station# 2** – **TURNING** –



- Set up a line of cones (6-8 ft. apart). Have kids skate through cones. Start out slow, and then gradually increase speed.
- Line up on boards. Walk sideways while picking feet and crossing legs one over the other. Use boards for balance.
- Skate around face-off circle, crossing over.

- Play “duck-duck-geese”.

### **Station #3 - STOPPING –**

- Line up along boards. Use boards for balance. Make snow with skate (both feet).
- Practice stopping.
- Play “red light/ green light”

### **Station # 4 – STICKHANDLING**

- Stationary stick handling.
- Stick handle inside face off circle while skating.
- “Everybody is Gretzky” – everyone has a puck and skates with it wherever they want.

**(10 Minutes) Game**- Always try to finish practice with a fun game. Here are some to consider:

- British Bulldog or Tag.
- Tag using tennis balls (shoot tennis balls at kid’s legs to tag them).
- Soccer (using different size balls).
- Cross-ice hockey

**(3 Minutes) Center Ice Talk** – Bring the kids back into the center to tell them just how well they did today. Give lots of “high fives” and positive feedback on the way off the ice. According to Dr Eric Margenau, “The most important psychological reward offered by sports is the opportunity to experience and build self esteem.” (Burnett, 1993) You can see a sense of satisfaction on their faces when you praise them coming off the ice. You can see the benefits of this simple gesture many years later when you see the well-adjusted young adults that they become.

Burnett, Darrell J., Youth, Sports & Self-Esteem, Masters

### **Year-Round Hockey: How much is too much?**

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Well ACE coordinators its time to tackle a tough question, “How much hockey is too much hockey?” Which leads us to more practical questions such as, “Should parents send their children to summer hockey camps instead of playing other sports?” “Should adolescent hockey players have a break from hockey so they can ‘recharge their batteries’?” What do you tell parents when they ask you?

There are proponents on each side of the argument. Many intense hockey coaches, general managers, and camp instructors tell players that they need to play year-round to reach their potential. In contrast, opponents to year-round hockey argue that taking a break is good for a player’s development. Have fun and do other things while you’re young. They will be going year-round soon enough when they get a job! These contrasting perspectives are confusing for parents and players.

### *Year-Round Hockey vs. Taking a Break*

We should look closely at each side's argument. Proponents of year-round hockey might be gaining some benefit from it. There has been an explosion of entrepreneurs in youth hockey that make a living from kids playing and training for 12 months. It is their business to have kids in summer skating and skills camps, leagues, and tournaments. As a hockey director I personally experienced the dilemma of hosting summer camps to fill empty ice even though I felt that kids should be outside playing baseball like I did in my summers.

Those making a living from youth hockey will definitely argue that hockey players need to get an edge; to use the summer to work on skills that are ignored during the busy season. Others may brashly argue that taking time off to play other sports is effectively taking a step back. Based on the research detailed in the book *Expert Performance in Sports* by Starkes and Ericsson, youth need 10 years, or 10,000 hours, to master a skill. This gives well-meaning, eager parents evidence to say "let's get our 10,000 hours now!" At the same time, coaches that may not have a business interest in a child playing 12 months per year may still push year-round hockey because it can help their team. Finally, and with very good intentions, coaches may advocate year-round hockey because they see it as critical for talent development. It makes sense that the more time you put into your game the better you will be.

Those arguing against 12-month hockey seasons do not always view playing at an elite level as the primary objective for young hockey players. Opponents of extended seasons talk about the kids they see burn out and consequently drop out; their interest and motivation level decreased because hockey becomes a "job." At the same time other opponents see summer breaks as beneficial to player development. They contend that playing other sports is beneficial to developing well-rounded motor skills. Many examples exist in the NHL. For example, Wayne Gretzky's father Walter was asked about what Wayne did during his summers to improve his hockey skills. Walter would reply that Wayne played baseball, lacrosse, and many other sports to improve his hand-eye coordination (from *Total Gretzky*, page 19). Ultimately, Wayne got to his 10,000 hours and 10 years, much of it in the backyard!

Playing other sports has other benefits such as giving youth an opportunity to play for different coaches and meet new people outside of hockey. Finally, parents can also burn out due to the time, the travel, or the financial burden.

Maybe the best evidence for taking a break comes from tracking injuries in youth sports. Dr. John DiFiori of UCLA wrote in *Athletic Therapy Today* (2002, p. 27) that "Rapid increases in training frequency, duration, or intensity can lead to overuse injury. A failure to incorporate scheduled rest periods in the training program can also be a factor." Thus, playing hockey increases the chances of injury due to overuse of the same muscles, tendons, and joints which can break down under the constant stress.

### *Recommendations for coaches*

So, what should we do? First, look at the lives of those players that played at an elite level. These players often played many sports during their youth. Based on this evidence children should play multiple sports as long as they can because of the development that occurs and the break it provides from hockey. As a coach, I would prefer to have a fully focused hockey player for 8 months rather than a less focused one for 12 months. Competing in hockey requires great emotional energy especially over a season. The summer is a great time to refill the emotional tank. We see in the NHL that teams that go to the Cup Finals often struggle the next season because they don't have time to recover from the emotionally-draining run in the spring.

You must also factor in the age and maturity of the child. Although we don't have much research on specialization, our best opinion is to not specialize during the fun and fundamental or learning to train

years. This means waiting to specialize until at least age 14 or 15 and then only for those players that are more physically and emotionally mature.

Most important is to talk to players about their goals. If fun and being with friends are priorities year-round hockey makes no sense. Their goals can be achieved in baseball, soccer, track, etc. If the goal is to play at an elite level then proceed with caution. Players on an elite track should plan breaks from hockey to keep it fun, motivating, and to minimize overuse injury possibilities. My suggestion would be to take the summer to work on physical skills or fitness, especially for older players. Going to a camp is ok if it doesn't create stress on the child and eliminate other opportunities such as family vacations. I would highly recommend playing sports like baseball, lacrosse, tennis, and golf that improve hand-eye coordination, fitness, and just a break from hockey training.

Breaks from hockey do not have to be "cold turkey." Instead, breaks from intense, competitive hockey over the summer benefit recovery physically and emotionally. Playing street hockey or inline hockey might provide enough of a change to keep players refreshed and avoid a burned out feeling. A young player may even want to try a new position—which would provide a break of sorts, while broadening the player's skill-set. Doing other activities will provide a refreshing change from the consistent practice mode.

In conclusion, I am a proponent of taking breaks from hockey to do other things, especially since the evidence seems to be that it does not hurt development (as long as the break is reasonable). There are too many benefits from adjusting summer participation to ignore. At the same time I recognize that each situation is different. Parents and their children must look at the child's goals, their potential, and the sacrifices that have to be made. If there is any doubt from the child about his or her willingness to do the training, it is best to participate at an appropriate level during the summer. Joint decisions should be made with adolescents as to the length, as well as the intensity (competitive vs. recreational) of the hockey season. Finally, competent coaches that are trusted by parents should be involved in the decision-making process. These coaches can provide an expert opinion on quality camps, taking breaks, and your child's hockey developmental course. Finally, coaches should study growth and development in hockey and in general, as well as the development of talent. Inform yourself as much as possible and you will be able to provide better advice to coaches, players, and parents. In the end, don't listen to me, listen to Walter Gretzky, it seemed to work for Wayne.

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