



“If It Is Going To Be, It Is Up To Me”

Individual attitude and commitment are important in the development of a hockey player during youth and high school hockey. Players who recognize that they alone are responsible for the long term outcome in their sport will inevitably seek out the opportunities they need to get better. It is important for parents and coaches to help their players understand this concept and to help players understand what qualities they need to possess to be a “Hockey Player” versus just playing hockey. There is no particular formula to becoming a “player” but in order to make the point the thoughts below might help coaches and parents assess and guide their youngsters.

- **Any where, any time, any body.** These players will play any time they get a chance. They (or you) will drive several hours just to play. It does not matter with whom or about wins or loses to them; they just want the puck on their stick. They are usually smiling.
- **When nobody is looking;** These players shoot hundreds of pucks everyday all year long. They do not need a fancy shooting station. Just a net and bucket of pucks. They are never satisfied and always want to do better. For the older players you can find them at the school weight room actually lifting weights and getting stronger. They might be with a couple friends but as often as not they are alone.
- **Play other sports:** “Hockey Players” love to compete at anything be it hockey, lacrosse, football, or hackysack. They would rather play than watch sports. Parents and coaches should encourage their kids to play other sports to help them become better athletes and learn new skills.
- **Coachable:** Coachable players recognize that every coach has something to offer to them. By the time they are seniors most players have had over 50 coaches. By keeping an open mind and learning along the way each team and season builds for the next. Coaches and parents should encourage their players to learn every time they get on the ice or engage in any sport related opportunity.
- **Resilient:** Disappointment is part of sports and life. Allowing players to experience disappointment and then to bounce back is a valuable lesson. Parents and coaches need to allow players to experience losses without placing blame on

the officials or some other factor. For “hockey players” disappointments strengthen their resolve to do better the next time.

- **Patience:** As each player grows older they have certain windows of time when they are most receptive to learning and acquiring the various skills they need to play. These windows of time vary a bit for each player. Through age 15 most practice sessions should consist of fundamental skills development including small area games. The 12-15 year old window is when players are most receptive to fundamental skill development. Players then continue to develop all through high school and into college and need to continue to refine their skills and build strength. High school coaches should be careful not to neglect fundamental skill work in favor of team skills.
- **Motivation:** The only motivation that is sustainable is internal. External motivation based on fear or some sort of artificial reward system will fail. About ten percent of players are motivated to become “players”. The rest merely play hockey. When coaching youth or high school players’ coaches are advised to assess which category each player falls into in order to deliver the correct messages and training to each individual player. Players who are willing to give up something in order to get something of greater value understand the trade offs and willingly move ahead with their eye on the future.

As a coach or parent you can assess any player based on the qualities above. If several of the points are lacking you have an individual who is simply playing hockey and hopefully having fun. In the instance of a player where many of the above are present and combined with above average athletic ability, that individual could perhaps move into the elite level of players that could be called “hockey players”.

For Boston Bruins rookie and Plymouth native Blake Wheeler, he recognized at age 15 that he needed to focus on development and forget about current disappointments. You can hear his interview on this subject by clicking on this link.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKOeuhMhw_A

The link is also available on the home page of www.minnesotahockey.org

By taking a long term view of player development and understanding the process that players go through as they move from childhood to adolescence and then into young adults it is easier to forgive their day to day transgressions, mistakes and blunders as they learn to play the great game of hockey.

To Win the Game is Great
To play the game is Greater
To Love the game is Greatest of All

Hal Tearse
Coach in Chief, Minnesota Hockey, January 2009