



Some Rules About Rules

Hockey has many rules that insure that the game is played fairly and safely. Hockey coaches also have rules that they establish for their teams for a variety of reasons. I have seen teams with numerous rules and some teams with very few rules. They all seem to function just fine but there are a few guidelines about rules that you should consider.

- 1) The most important rule is rules need to be written down and communicated to each family so that every player and their parents understand the rules. This must be done before the season begins, if at all possible, but at least the first meeting of the team. As long as you have a good reason for the rules most people will not object.
- 2) Fewer rules are better than more rules. The reason for this is that the more rules you impose on your team, the more you have to track the offenders (there are always offenders) and apply the punishment.
- 3) Many rules are well intentioned but may not be practical. For instance; All players must arrive 45 minutes before ice time. But what do you do if a player does not arrive 45 minutes before ice time? In youth hockey, players cannot drive so they generally are not even responsible for getting to and from the arena. How can you hold them accountable?
- 4) Rules should address areas that players have control over. Then they can be held accountable.
- 5) Make the punishment fit the crime. Kids make mistakes and forget things just like adults. Be sure the punishment or consequence is appropriate for the situation.
 - a. For example: Many teams require each player to bring their own water bottle in order to minimize the possible spread of germs and other nasty things. If a player forgets, and they will, what is an appropriate consequence? Since water is so important for hydration and energy, it would seem that some sharing would be in order. Maybe picking up pucks after practice is an appropriate consequence. Anything more severe like one forgets, and all players cannot drink during the game is of course way out of line. I remember skating at the U of M three decades ago and if we wanted a drink of water during practice we had to ask the head coach for permission. Naturally nobody asked and we all got dehydrated. Coaches are smarter these days.
 - b. Skipping practice or games may be a situation where the skater would then be penalized by sitting all or part of the next game. This applies more for the A and B travel programs where the communicated commitment levels require regular attendance.

- 6) Enforce the rules. This is the hard part because if your rules are cut and dried and you start making exceptions, your credibility is instantly gone.

Most rules are anti-fun in nature yet we are in the fun business. Take a careful look at your rules and ask yourself this question; ***“Is this rule really necessary and will it help us as a team?”*** If the answers are NO and NO/MAYBE perhaps you should drop the rules altogether and go back to having fun.

See you around the rink,

Hal Tearse
Minnesota Hockey, Coach in Chief
December, 2005