



Teaching Read and React Skills: Opinions and Thoughts

Hal – I am fascinated with the biology of the brain and how it influences skill development and character development. I would argue with some...that you can develop the intellectual thinking part of the game! What we call "Hockey Sense"

First of all I think we are thinking for the players too much. We adults are the thinkers. We are not allowing our kids the opportunity to think for themselves. Whose Game Is It? That is the fundamental question. Give the game back to the players in an environment that allows for them to think the game and to figure out for themselves what works and doesn't work....I feel we need to have more unstructured practices/ice sessions where the ice/environment is the teacher! This is to answer your question, I would use more Competitive confined area teaching that forces the players to read and now must react to situations quicker! The game is played in a lot of small confined areas so we should practice how we play in order to prepare our kids to be successful in game situations; this is why I like to make these situations competitive with something on the line. This is why I have gone away from the term small area games and have been calling this "competitive confined area development" these are Instinctive games and instinctive games are games that require players to act on their "instincts" in order to have success. Time is a critical factor involved with instinctive games. Players that are able to recognize the opportunity and execute on the recognition in a "timely" manner are at a competitive advantage. If the recognition of the opportunity is too slow, then the opposing team will react and defend against the opportunity. If the execution of the hockey play is too slow, then the opposing team will react and defend against that opportunity. Recognition skills are intellectual skills, commonly referred to as "Hockey Sense." Or ones ability to read and react!

I believe that the areas that need to be discussed would be what an "Ideal Development Environment" would look like. And what characteristics do these environments possess? 1.) Passion to play needs to be at the forefront. Do the kids love being at the rink and do they love what they are doing? Are they enjoying themselves and is this the FUN...2.) A technical and tactical development model that makes sense. The coaches can not be working on systems and strategy. The emphasis is on the broad base fundamentals, technical, tactical, and intellectual skills to be successful in the sport. The focus needs to be on the mastery of those skills. 3.) The process needs to begin early when the kids are primed for neuro-muscular development, agility and motor skill development. We start the development process too late with our young players.

Jim Johnson
Phoenix Coyotes

Hal,

My first thoughts are of those old Hockey Canada tapes on "Read and React", I think that they had a very solid plan to teach those skills. The Czech Coaching Manual (USA had Horsky translate for them is another excellent source of dividing technical skills from tactical ones). As for other thoughts, regardless of what age the players are, the player must understand that:

1. R/R means looking to use teammates in an effective, positive way.
2. R/R means make yourself available to the puck carrier, in an area that he can get the puck to you (support).
3. "Buying time and creating space by reversing or countering the puck by a skating maneuver or skating in one direction and then passing back to where you once were. I am amazed at how well the Wild does this all over the ice. The impact of the Slovaks or Lemaire's implementation of European tactics is clever and very effective.

I would say that in teaching R/R coaches need to start with two players without resistance. I think that the key to getting players to learn R/R that we don't use is "passive resistance" where there is a measured amount of defense put on the offense, but they can overcome it. Think of the "give and go". I watch coaches try to teach cycling and I see players dumping the puck back into the corner when they have their check beaten-they should be going to net! They are just not getting it!

One aspect of teaching R/R that I have learned from lacrosse, is that in lacrosse (as you probably know), is that offense is almost always practiced in a "man up" situation. I have seen this in almost every DVD I have purchased and I have them from the national team and the college national championships teams. It has been an interesting perspective to see how another sport teaches about the tactics of offense.

Gary Gregus
Ted Brill Award Winner
Former Coach in Chief, Minnesota Hockey

Hal

Interesting stuff. I do think this is the basis for all of hockey since the objective seems to me to be to create an odd-man situation (2-on-1) and take advantage. The give and go, cycle, or basic pass are all trying to do the same thing...create space where the puck carrier has the advantage. As a student, I got the most out of class when the instructor asked more questions and let us get the answers wrong and then offered the correct situation, kind of like getting lost...I won't get lost in that area again once it happens. I try to ask a lot of questions of the boys to get them thinking, even if it's not the answer I am looking for. The same can be applied to Reading and Reacting since there is not a set way to do it on the ice, or to teach it. It's about creating options for the puck. Sometimes a dump is the right play. Sometimes it's to carry, or escape or even just shoot. I don't know if there is an ideal situation to teach it as hockey is a fluid game that requires many options for each situation. Is it better to work on a set number of options for basic understanding and progress from there to more creative ways? Or is it easier to let the creativity start the

teaching and offer some basic options at a later time. Both work and maybe there is even another option.

Whatever the case, hockey can be taught using big words and be effective. It can also be taught using simple terms that teach complex solutions. Hockey doesn't have to be complex to be effective. Players don't need to understand the complexity of a drill; they need to understand the outcome is to create an advantage. In reading and reacting, the simple outcome is to put the puck in an area that creates an advantage and let the players decide how to get there, with the goal being the focus. Offering some options is also needed but the danger is in getting into a habit of relying on only those options. The chicken or the egg if you will.

Matt Roadfeldt