

THE TEN COACHING COMMANDMENTS

“Never loose site that we coach for the players ~ not for the parents or for ourselves.”

Dennis Freed

I

HAVE FUN

This is the sole reason why the players and coaches are brought together. It's simple, if you're not having fun coaching then it is a good bet that your players are not having a good time either. Players will develop quicker and reach higher levels if they enjoy your coaching. This does not infer that you don't work them hard. You and your players can still have fun while working very hard. A true indication of a fun and productive practice is when the players leave the ice dripping with sweat and brimming with a smile. *(Thank you Armand!)*

II

THINK LIKE A PLAYER

Actually, think like a kid! Would you be having fun at your practices or games? Would you have understood the drill or play the way you just explained it? Is the play or drill too hard or simple for your players at their current level? Ask yourself these questions before you begin. Then remember – offer advice, praise and discipline on their level, not yours. Follow the Platinum Rule, “DO ONTO OTHERS AS THEY WANT”. Analyze the difference between the Platinum Rule and the standard Golden Rule. If you apply the Platinum Rule you will create a team which is having fun and winning.

III

TEACH BY GAMES - LET THEM LEARN ON THEIR OWN

Part of your practice should consist of themed games which teach the skills you are targeting during the practice. They learn & practice the skill on their own thus reinforcing it. Juhani Wahlsten and Tom Molloy's book "Hockey Coaching - The ABC's of International Youth Hockey" describes in detail this method of teaching and gives many examples. It is a suggested addition to your hockey library.

IV

BY THE INCH IS A CINCH - BY THE YARD IS HARD

This is the Golden Rule of coaching, teaching and learning anything! Teach new concepts and skills in pieces. Break down each skill into individual components; and teach the entire skill over the course of one or more practices. It is easier to digest small bites than large chunks.

V

SINCERE AND HONEST PRAISE

Right out of Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People: Pointed, detailed, short praise to a player is more valuable than hours of condemnation. Always praise a player for a proper action before correcting them of an improper action. If you must discipline a player, QUICKLY follow it up with praise once the player acts correctly. Remember, children do not have the same tolerance for, and understanding of, criticism as adults *(most adults)*.

VI

CHALLENGE

Adding challenge to the most basic of drills will motivate your players tremendously. Athletes, at all levels, are competitive by nature. Find unique ways to integrate challenges into all aspects of your coaching. For example, the so-called “Suicide” drills demand the most from your players – physically. Add a “rabbit” to the drill. The last player(s) to finish the drill becomes the next “rabbit”.

VII

KEEP THE PLAYERS MOVING

Most line drills are BORING! Plan drills that keep the players moving; or standing around as little as possible. In the event line drills are absolutely necessary, divide the players into as many lines or sections possible. Remember a good indication that your players are bored or standing idle too long is that they are shooting pucks at the boards or fooling around as they wait their turn to perform the drill. Added bonus: your players' endurance will benefit from constant movement.

VIII

REPETITION

An average mite/squirt player must repeat a skill hundred, sometimes thousands, of times before they can perform the skill automatically. An average mite/squirt player must repeat a skill hundred, sometimes thousands, of times before they can perform the skill automatically. The more difficult the skill – the more it has to be repeated. Repeat the skill in several forms both during a single practice session, and over the course of several practices.

IX

20-SECOND EXPLANATION

Most mites/squirts lose interest after 20 seconds. Therefore, it your responsibility to be concise in your explanation of a drill/skill so as not to lose the players attention. Because the playing surface is so large, it is difficult for players to hear or understand you if you are moving and talking. Begin by explaining the drill in a stationary position; then, follow it up with a demonstration. Also, address your players with your back to the boards. This will prevent the players from being distracted by other happenings taking place on the ice.

In addition: Try to keep drills to a maximum of eight minutes. After eight minutes, drills become tedious and the players will stop having fun. Occasionally, I will schedule several simple three-minute drills to drive home a specific skill point. This approach keeps practices moving and maintains the players' attention levels.

X

DO NOT MAKE NEGATIVE COMMENTS TO PLAYERS IN FRONT OF TEAMMATES OR PARENTS

Never put down or ridicule a player in front of other players or parents – especially when that player is not present. Likewise, do not allow other players or parents to make the same mistake. Other players are keen to negative remarks made by coaches such as “that player stinks”, and it reduces their trust and confidence in you. Simply put: *Give a dog a bad name and the dog will bite. Give a dog a bone and it will perform tricks.*

XI

ESTABLISH A CODE OF CONDUCT EARLY

Establish a code of conduct and administer it equally (i.e. the best player and the coaches' sons/daughters). Lack of control will be inevitable if favoritism is evident. Let your players' parents know the code also. If a player is not conforming to the team's code let their parents know promptly.

XII

OLD DOGS CAN LEARN NEW TRICKS:

As coaches, we should constantly seek out new ideas and methods. Swap drills with other coaches, watch and read skills videos and books, attend coaching clinics and keep abreast of the latest developments. Hockey is played differently today than it was in the 60's, 70's and 80's. Players are motivated differently too. A knowledgeable and informed coach is a good coach – so keep learning new tricks!