



Tips for Getting Noticed

By Michael Caples, 10/04/17

What Danton Cole Looks for on the Recruiting Trail

With his new job, Danton Cole is back on the college hockey recruiting trail.

After four years with USA Hockey's National Team Development Program, Cole is now the head men's ice hockey coach of the Michigan State Spartans – his alma mater.

That means he – along with the rest of his MSU coaching staff – is visiting youth hockey games trying to identify players who can contribute to the Spartans' hockey program.

So, what's he looking for?

"There's always the obvious – you want to see the kids that can skate and make plays and handle the puck," Cole said. "Skating is real, real important in today's game."

More than just skills

Of course, there's much more than just one's hockey skill set.

"On top of that, you want to see a young athlete that is coachable," the former NHL forward said. "If you're watching a practice, if they're going through something, and the coach talks to them about something, the next time they're trying to do that. Guys that aren't afraid to make a mistake if they're trying to apply whatever the drill is or the game is, if they're trying to apply what they're being taught and that they're trying to figure that out. If they go a little too fast the first time, and then the second time they go a little too slow – the third time they pick it up. That's a young athlete that has the mind for it, has a good growth mindset. Those are things you like to see."

Character and leadership

He's seeking players who demonstrate leadership characteristics and a positive outlook.

"One intangible that's really evident in games, but you can see it in practices as well, is what kind of teammate a guy is," Cole said. "What's his body language? If things go wrong, is it a learning moment, or is a slam your stick on the ice moment? We notice those kinds of things. Are you upset about it, or do you give the guy a tap on the shin pads and then keep moving on? Those things speak really, really loudly when you watch kids."

Game speed

Sure, he wants to see skills in his potential recruits. But Cole wants to see skills that can be done at game speed. He wants players who play and think the game as quickly as possible in a sport that isn't slowing down any time soon.

"Skill-wise, we want to see guys who are able to pass the puck, we want to see guys who can shoot, we want to see players who can do things at a pretty high pace," Cole said. "It's one thing to coast around and be able to pass and shoot, but to be able to do it with your feet moving, you like to see guys who think the game and that use other players."

Playing without the puck

What you do away from the puck is just as important as what you do with it, however.

“Playing without the puck is always an interesting to watch,” he said. “When the players don’t have the puck on their teammates? There’s a lot of stuff. A lot of it is thinking your way around the rink.”

Background research

Coaches are doing their homework away from the rink, too. When asked how much background research he does on a player, Cole said, “quite a bit.”

“At the college level especially – the pros it might be even longer – we’ve got guys for four years, and we want to make sure that they’re the kind of young men that we want to have around us that long - that they’re going to represent our university on and off the ice and in the classroom,” Cole said. “You do as much digging as you can. You don’t only talk to their coaches, you get to know their parents and maybe you talk to their teammates. It’s a big decision, and it’s a big investment in a player when you look at a four-year commitment. You want to be as sure as you can be what type of character the young man is.”

Three things

So, what can you control when you know you’re playing in front of scouts and coaches?

“We’re looking for kids that work hard and have fun out there,” Cole said. “At the end of the day, you can take care of three things – you can work hard, you can be a good teammate, you can have fun. Most hockey players do those three things every practice and every game.”