



Steps in Planning a Practice

As a coach, you need to know how to most effectively use the time available to you for practices. A good starting point is to follow the five steps outlined here:

1. Set Overall Goals

Overall goals refer to the reasons and philosophies behind participation in the game of hockey and to general statements about desired outcomes for your players. For example:

- What do you want the athletes to get out of their hockey experience?
- What is the overall philosophy and goal(s) of your organization? Is it skill development, fun, fitness, social values or some combination of the above mentioned?

Answers to these questions will give you statements about overall goals. Setting overall goals determines the direction your practices take, and can be used to keep the practices on track.

2. Set Specific Goals

Specific goals are the refinement of overall goals into more precise statements which will result in actions that are measurable, achievable, and realistic.

To clearly state specific goals, you need to consider the needs of your athletes and the physical and sport resources you have to meet those needs. Athletes' needs are related to their levels of development, physical ability, interest, skill, fitness, competition and motivation. Physical resources refer to physical space, facilities, and equipment. The quality, quantity, accessibility, and safety of these resources must be part of your planning. Resource material in the form of skill charts, progress charts, teaching progressions, coaching tips, and technical manuals can be of real value to help you get your points across. Sport resources are available through your branch office or Hockey Canada's national office.

3. Build in the Principles of Effective Practices

The third step of the planning process is the creative mixing of various elements into your practice. When designing your practice, incorporate the following principles of effective practices.

a. Keep All Active

Maximize the activity of your players. The athletes should be active, rather than passive viewers or listeners (e.g. use them as examples for demonstrations of drills, etc.)



b. Give Clear, Concise Instructions

Learning improves when expectations are understood by the players. Demonstrations, films and pictures help improve the accuracy of the instructions.

c. Create Progressions

Learning is enhanced if it progresses from material that is: – known to unknown – simple to complex – concrete to abstract. Progress from non-competitive skill practice to simulation of game conditions.

d. Use Whole-Part-Whole

Complex tasks are most easily learned using the whole-part-whole method. Present the total skill before breaking it down and teaching the parts. Use visual presentations (e.g. charts, pictures or ice examples) often.

e. Give Positive Feedback

Emphasize and reward the skills and activities the players are doing correctly. Give feedback both on an individual and team basis.

f. Chart Progress

Learning is enhanced when players are informed of their progress. Drills and exercises should be designed to allow a measurable means by which the coach or athletes may assess progress (e.g. record times, number of passes).

g. Allow for Individual Differences

Allows for variations in learning rates and in the different ways athletes learn. Plan for and yet be flexible to meet the needs of the situation and the individuals within the situation.

h. Provide Variety

Maintain interest by varying activities. Boredom decreases motivation and learning. Interest can be maintained by use of short time spans for instruction.

i. Stimulate Enjoyment

Practices should be fun. Interest and motivation are stimulated by use of novel equipment, exercises, and drills.

j. Plan Maximum Use of Resources

Maximize the use of limited resources to insure the maximum participation by all athletes. That is, use the entire ice surface.



4. Consider the Psycho-social Aspects and Bio-physical Aspects

Psycho-social aspects refer to the “people” side of coaching. Bio-physical aspects refer to the physical, physiological and technical skill aspects of hockey.

A coach setting out to design an effective practice draws upon knowledge from each of the areas outlined above. It is the integration of this knowledge into practices that ensures the practice will be in the best interest of the athletes and the coach.

5. Design the Practice

Six key elements make up a practice. The order or emphasis of the elements may change at various points throughout the season and at various levels of play, but the basic components remain the same. The six key elements are:

a. Warm Up

Warm-up starts slowly and covers all muscles and major body areas which are used during skill instruction. Stretching should begin in the dressing room prior to going on the ice. Once on the ice, skating and stretching drills can complete the warm-up.

b. Instruction

The instruction starts with known content and progresses to the application of the skill(s) to situations simulating a game. Instruction may be in hockey, personal, social skills or in sport values. It is important to progress from simple to complex skills (e.g. stationary passing to passing while in motion). Keep your athletes active by including them in the demonstrations during instruction.

c. Skill Practice

During this part of the practice the athletes practice skills that have been demonstrated during the instructions. Emphasis should be upon creating competition-like conditions. It is important to practice at game speed whenever possible.

d. Fitness

This area of the practice is concerned with physical conditioning activities which are specific to the players' needs. This is done by setting work times for your athletes that stress the correct energy systems. Although hockey is primarily an anaerobic activity, the aerobic component should also be emphasized as aerobic fitness is essential to top performance, particularly in young athletes under the age of fourteen. Often fitness activities can be built into the drills that are designed to practice technical skills. The players then receive the benefit of improving both their fitness and their skills.



e. Fun

Fun should be tied into all components of your practice, however, be careful that you achieve the objectives of your practice.

f. Evaluation

Evaluation is used to assess the effectiveness of the major components of the practice or of at total practice. It is useful to spend a few minutes with your athletes after practice to get some feedback on the practice. It can take the form of a five minute rap session on areas that went well and areas that the athletes and/or coach need to work on. The topics discussed can then be built into the next practice.