



Teaching Techniques

Factors That Influence Learning

For effective teaching, a coach must recognize the differences between athletes and their ability to learn skills. Specifically, the coach must pay close attention to the following dimensions of the players:

- Age and physical make-up
- Skill level
- Interest level

Age and Physical Make-Up

The age and physical attributes of players are important considerations when examining learning capabilities. For example, snap shots require a great deal of arm strength in order to be executed properly. Before puberty, most young athletes do not have the strength in their arms to correctly perform this shot. Obviously then, a coach who tries to teach snap shots to eight year-olds is not making good use of the time available.

Skill Level

The skill level of the players dictates those components of the game which are beneficial to introduce. For example, it would not be worthwhile to attempt to teach the concept of a 2-1-2 forechecking system to a group of eight and nine year-olds. Unless they are unusually skilled, most athletes in this age group will require training in basic skills; for example, balance, skating, and puck-handling. To introduce skills beyond the athletes' physical and mental capabilities will primarily frustrate most players, while robbing them of the basic skill education which is vital to the development of young hockey players.

Interest Level

The interest level of the player is also a very important factor that affects learning skills. If an individual likes hockey very much and wants to participate, hard work and learning should naturally follow. However, if the player is there because the athlete's parents think it is important for their child to be a hockey player, the young athlete may show little enthusiasm. A player's reasons for participating in hockey will influence that athlete's interest in hockey and thus affect the coach's approach to the athlete.

In attempting to adhere to the aforementioned principles, the following points may act as a checklist in your pursuit of teaching excellence:

- **Teach only what a player can handle**

If a skill is too difficult, a player will become discouraged and learning will suffer. However, if a skill is too simple, the player will soon become bored. It is your responsibility, as a coach, to determine your players' capabilities and create challenging yet attainable goals.



- **Teach new things early in a practice**

Young athletes learn best when they are fresh and alert. In teaching new skills at the beginning of a practice, the elements of fatigue and distraction are removed.

- **Work from simple to complex**

It is important to build a solid base before progressing on to new skill areas. In so doing, skill acquisition is simplified while athletes experience a sense of accomplishment as opposed to frustration. For example, first teach stopping without, then with the puck.

- **Correct major errors at once**

Although you cannot expect an athlete to immediately execute a skill perfectly, you should not allow a player to practice major mistakes. Correct errors as soon as they occur to prevent players from developing poor habits which are difficult to rectify.

- **Repeat drills for short periods of time over many practices**

Correct repetition of a skill is essential for learning; however, you must guard against boredom by using a variety of short drills.

- **When practicing skills players already possess, drills should be in game-like conditions**

Practicing previously learned skills in game-like conditions is the best method to create carry-over skills into games. If practice of simulated game conditions does not take place, players will become frustrated when confronted with the increased dimensions of game conditions.

- **Praise good performance**

Positive reinforcement for a job well done enhances further learning.