



Focus on Skating

As I watch youth and high school games each week I quickly spot the players that skate well and unfortunately there are not many in each group. It seems as if once the players get to the pee wee/U12 levels attention on skating skills shifts to other parts of the game. This is a big mistake on the part of coaches and players because as youth and high school players move through their growth cycles it is important that they continue to work on skating skills and techniques.

As players get older their puck handling and shooting skills are quite good however it is the skating skills that differentiate the best from the next best. Youth coaches and high school coaches should spend time each week dedicated to fundamental skating drills and teaching in order to help players improve.

To help players improve their skating, you should consider these guidelines and concepts:

1. **Knee bend:** Coaches need to emphasize this over and over again. Especially high school coaches dealing with players who are in rapid growth phases.
2. **Go slow and correctly.** This is critical. Coaches tend to make their players do all skating drills at top speed in the belief that this will make them faster. By slowing down and having skaters properly execute their strides, transitions, stop/starts, crossovers/crossunders they will get quality repetitions that they need to develop strong skating fundamentals.
3. **Focus on proper posture:** Head and shoulders up, chest out with a slight forward lean and arch in the low back area. Too many skaters bend at the waist rather than in the knees and hip area. This incorrect posture not only limits their ability to skate well but actually restricts their lung capacity and breathing.
4. **Work with your team in three small groups with feedback and lots of repetition.**
5. **NO PUCKS:** A study done several years ago demonstrated that skating efficiency dropped by as much as 30% when a puck was placed into the skating drills. Yes it is important to do drills with pucks however when the focus is on skating avoid any other distractions so put the pucks away for that segment of practice.
6. **Repetition is the mother of skill mastery.** Take the time at practice each week to focus on skating improvement. Shooting and stickhandling can be improved off ice however skating development needs to be done on ice.

Youth and high school coaches will often argue that they do not have time to spend on skating development. They may feel that those skills should be developed in the off season and in skating programs. They may feel that it detracts from getting ready for the next game. There maybe some truth to those impressions however if a coach is also focused on improving the skills of all players on the team through out the season winning should take care of itself.

Skating videos designed to help coaches learn to teach skating can be found at www.minnesotahockey.org. Click on the coaches section and then look at the skills video sections. You can download the video to your computer and take it to the rink to show your players before going on the ice.

Keep your stick on the ice

See you around the rink....

Hal Tearse
Minnesota Hockey Coach in Chief
January 2010