



## Coaches; are you teaching what you're preaching?

Coaches, we are approximately one month into the season. Here are a few questions to help evaluate where we stand. How do you rate your first month's performance? Were you prepared for the season? Did you approach it with a plan, or are you a "teach on the fly" coach? Does your plan seem to be accurate? How are the players responding to your lessons? Is there good communication between you and your parents? Does your local association assist in developing you as a coach; do they give guidance? As a coach are you willing to learn how to teach? To be an affective coach you need to continuously assess your teaching methods. You have a full team, of typically 17 players, that all come from different backgrounds, are at different levels of maturity, and a wide range of skills. As a coach you need to be prepared every day to reach every single player on your bench.

Lets us focus on the Peewee level. To start off let's take a look at the composition of your team. Who makes up the players on your team? In a typical Peewee team you have a mixture of first year players making the jump from Squirts; second year players ranging from last year's B or C teams; and a few returning "A" Peewee players from last year's team. With the different dynamics of ages and experience, maturity is a factor that is important to consider. Typically you have 6<sup>th</sup> graders coming from the elementary school and the 7<sup>th</sup> graders are in the midst of junior high. Or maybe you are in a school district that classifies this age level; as a middle school ranging from 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Regardless, there is a difference between a possible 5<sup>th</sup> grader and a potential 8<sup>th</sup> grader. The learning curve is different based on maturity, puberty, and other factors so keep that in mind. Size and strength vary across the board at the Peewee level so being able to reach all of your players in a way that they can all relate is important.

What skills do these players need to know? What kind of background have they come from? Maturity wise, how fast can they comprehend what you're teaching? It would be a mistake to assume they know it, or have they even been exposed to it. If you coach day by day, or game by game, your taking an adult mind that is jumping around from topic to

topic and introducing it to a child's learning process. Think about your lesson, prepare for your lesson, and plan for the season.

What is the one thing every player and parent thinks about when they are talking about Peewee hockey? CHECKING! This is the first level that checking is allowed. Now assess your season teaching plan. Where do you fit this new skill in to the practice plans, and how much time should be spent on it to develop this skill? Have you taught your players how to give and receive a check? Are you assuming they already know it? Are you making them aware of the new "Standard of Play" that came out a few years ago? I asked a coach of a game I officiated last week, "Just out of curiosity, you seem to tell your players over and over again to take the body; it must be challenge teaching them a new skill. How much time do you spend on this new skill in practice?" He looked at me with this blank look and his reply was, "We haven't spent any time, what's there to teach?" I did not ask any more questions after that.

As a coach it's your job is to teach your players the skills necessary to not only to play the game but to teach them to play it in a safe way. Taking the body is a new skill that is legal at the Peewee level for the first time in their young playing careers. Too many peewee coaches skip right past this important skill to teach their unique fore-checking system or work on special teams.

Are you a coach one who yells, "Take the body" but has never taught their players how to do it correctly? Look at it from the player's perspective, "What do you mean coach? Run into someone? Crush them?" Teach your players how to give and receive body contact on the ice. Teaching them the right way to do so will help protect themselves as well as other players on the ice with them. Help them deal with the size differences that are presented at the Peewee level, and by doing all of this it will help keep them out of the penalty box. Giving your players the right skills that will make them successful on the ice will help build their confidence as well. Confidence goes a long way in a player's development on and off the ice. Coaches if you need assistance on learning about this topic don't hesitate to look for help. Good resources include USA Hockey, Minnesota Hockey and Canada Hockey websites; they all have some very useful information on teaching body contact. The Minnesota Hockey website has a 20 minute video with instruction and drills for coaches and players to watch. Building confidence in young players can go a long way to keep our game fun and safe for all of your players.

If you catch yourself yelling from the bench, make sure your taking the time to teach what you preach.

By Jim Herbert

*Jim is a father of four hockey playing boys, active in the Forest Lake Youth Hockey Association and a level 3 USA Hockey Official. He has also participated as an instructor in the Minnesota Hockey local association coach skill development program.*