

Playoff Tips

The regular season is winding down and the playoffs are due to start. Whether you finished 1st or 8th during the regular season, the Playoffs are a whole new ballgame. There will be some upsets and a few higher seeded teams will be eliminated. Coaches and parents should mentally prepare their players for these very emotional and stressful games with the possibilities of winning or losing.

Coaches must prepare a sound game plan and tell your players who are the top players of the opposing team. Try to have their stats as to goals and assists and know their sweater number because if you let them skate freely and don't cover/check them closely, they will fill your net with pucks and you will be eliminated in the first round.

COACHES

During the playoffs it is much easier to prevent goals than it is to score them. If you can convince your players to buy into this strategy you can dramatically cut down your goals against and compete against the top seeded teams. One way of doing this is to Play sound defensive hockey when the opposition have the puck especially in your defensive zone. The first thing you must do is to limit the opposition's shots on goal. Set a goal of cutting their shots on goal from 30 to 20 or by 33% a game. The less shots on goal the less goals against. If shots can't be prevented, try to make them originate from a bad angle near the boards, this should help your goaltender make the initial save. If possible, block as many shots from the slot and points and clear any rebounds. Backcheckers must be ready to pick up all loose pucks and start a rush out of your end zone.

For a lower seeded team playing a top scoring team, I suggest you use a 1- man forechecking system. The closest forward to their puckcarrier must aggressively check him while the 2 other forwards peel off to cover both their wingers and prevent them from receiving a pass. They must be covered all the way back to your goal line. If they do receive a pass, try to angle them towards the boards and a bad shooting angle. If you can, try to get your stick on the puck and deflect any shot into the seats or netting but prevent it from getting on goal. If the closest forechecker was successful in taking the puckcarrier of the puck, you must be quick off the mark to retrieve the loose puck in the offensive zone and create a scoring opportunity. Good backcheckers cover their wing and watch the success or failure of their closest forechecker at the same time.

By playing this 1-2-2 system it allows your 2 defensemen, to play any puckcarrier outside your blue line and force the shooter to dump the puck into your defensive zone where it can be retrieved by your backchecking wingers.

By playing a disciplined defensive system, playing your position by not running all over the ice trying to catch their puck carrier you will keep the games close by reducing quality shots on goal and eliminating dangerous scoring chances. Forechecking, backchecking, positional play, short shifts and positive comments from the coaching staff for every shift in which no goal was scored against you are the keys to build confidence, team spirit and playoff competitiveness even against the 1st place team.

On the other hand, if you are a top team with lots of scoring power, a 2 man forechecking System will create many turnovers in the oppositions end creating many scoring opportunities. Coaches know their teams strengths and weaknesses and will devise a game plan they think will help their team get to the next round of playoffs. Remain flexible and if one system is not working go to plan "B". Also match lines with your best against their best line.

PLAYERS

To be competitive in the playoffs you must concentrate on what to do away from the puck. On offense, when your team has the puck, you must get into an open area or seam between two players like Brett Hull does to receive a pass and get a quality shot on goal. On defense, when the opposition have the puck, you must find an open man and cover him/her like a blanket so they cannot receive a pass. This will cut down the opposition's shooting and scoring chances.

In your defensive zone, the Defense must cover the closest player to the net while his partner fights for the puck in the corner. The Center, must cover the slot, and the Wings, be ready to cover the points if the puck goes back to them. Play aggressively and with intensity every time you are on the ice. You must win the battles for the loose puck at both ends of the ice. The goal you prevent is the one that might win the game for the opposition. Clear any rebounds out of harms way and your goals against will fall like Wal-Mart prices.

PARENTS

Playoff hockey is different from regular season hockey. There is more checking, more hitting and usually goals are hard to come by. Your son or daughter's role now is to prevent goals on every shift. A successful shift is one in which no goals were scored against your child. An unsuccessful shift is one in which a goal was scored against your child. A fantastic shift is one in which your child's

line scored a goal. Applaud all the good defensive plays which saved a goal as this is Playoff Hockey. Playoff Hockey is very stressful, emotional and exciting for all parents, but please remember, it's only a game where fun is the number one priority for the players.

For 100's of other tips to help with your playoff hunt for the Championship, get your copy of Hockey Made Easy - Canada's Best Instruction Manual in print or e-Book format.

Check out www.HockeyMadeEasy.com for complete details.

Good Luck to all teams and players in this year's playoffs.

Yours in hockey,

John Shorey
Author, Hockey Made Easy