



PRACTICE PLANNING

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In this chapter, you will learn how to develop a good hockey practice. The practice is the basic preparation unit for the athlete. It is the fundamental building block of coaching. Skills are learned, conditioning is achieved, and confidence is built.

Chapter Overview:

- plan a practice using a five step process,
- write overall goals,
- write specific performance and non-skill goals for a practice.

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:

- **Set Overall Goals**
Statements of the philosophy of hockey and the desired results for your players.
- **Set Specific Goals**
Realistic, achievable and measurable goals.
- **Build in the Principles of Effective Practices**
The activities and characteristics of an effective practice.
- **Consider the Psycho-Social Aspects and the Bio-Physical Aspects**
The people skills and the physical and technical skill elements.
- **Design the Practice**
The key elements that make up a practice. Following these steps is a good way to start.

Set Overall Goals

Overall goals refer to the reasons and philosophies behind participating in the game of hockey and to general statements about desired results for your players.

For example:

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

Answers to these questions will define your overall goals. Here are two examples:

“The overall goal I have as a coach is to provide an opportunity for my athletes to master skills, learn how to cooperate as members of a team, and to build their self- confidence”.

“The overall goal I have as a coach is to do everything I can to assist my athletes in reaching their full potential in competition and as maturing individuals”.

Setting overall goals determines the direction your practices take, and can be used to keep the practices on track.

For the Coach

You are starting a new hockey season. What will be your overall goal?

Set Specific Goals

Specific goals are the refinement of the 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.

How to Write Specific Goals

The criteria for outlining specific performance skill and non-skill goals are fourfold:

- State what it is you want (e.g., I want my players to learn how to stop effectively).
- Describe the end product (behaviour) you want (e.g., to be able to execute effectively a two-foot parallel stop in both directions in practices and games).
- State the conditions of the performance (e.g., from the centre line on the ice and starting from a skating stride perform a complete stop on the blue line on the ice).
- Decide the current criteria of acceptable performance – the specific goal for today (e.g., to be able to stop properly, effectively using both skate edges 75 percent of the time).

Examples of Criteria of Acceptable Performance for Specific Goals:

Performance Goals

- Player skates as fast as possible over a test course. Acceptable performance is determined by the player's best of two times being faster than the player's start-of-the-season time.
- Player performs stationary passes to a specific target. Acceptable performance is determined by the player's best two passing percentages being better than the player's start-of-the-season passing percentage.

Non-Skill Goals

- Reduce the number of penalties assessed to the team during the previous game by at least 50 percent.
- Increase the number of positive comments to one's teammates by 50 percent over last week's comments.

For the Coach

Write two specific goals for your team which can be introduced at a practice. One goal should be in a performance or skill area and the second goal in a non-skill area. Use the four step procedure to ensure that you specify the details of the goal, then outline the four statements that you have written on the goal into one specific goal statement.

- Performance Goal: _____
- State what you want to achieve (general): _____
- Describe the end product (behaviour): _____
- State the conditions of the performance: _____
- Decide on the specific goal for today: _____
- Final specific goal statement: _____

Note: Repeat the exercise for a non-skill related goal.

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.

Keep Everyone 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.).

Give Clear, Concise Instructions

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

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.

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.

Give Positive Feedback

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

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).

Allow for Individual Differences

Allow 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.

Provide Variety

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

Stimulate Enjoyment

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

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.

Example

Avoid situations where groups of players are left standing as spectators. When such a large teaching area as the ice surface is available, yet only a few of the players are involved simultaneously in a drill, the coach is not using available ice time and space very efficiently.

When the coach desires to work on a specific skill, the teaching situation must first be created and then a drill devised which will allow the players to practise this skill. Before proceeding this far, it is important that the coach begin to look at the ice in sections and not as one large area. Very quickly a coach will be able to divide the ice into two, three, or four sections using the markings already present on the surface of the ice.

Having done this, it is easy to see that a series of teaching areas are possible at the same time. The coach is now thinking about maximizing the use of the ice. Once specific teaching areas have been selected, the coach can look at what is to be accomplished during the practice and how to make the most of the available time for practice.

For example, the coach wants to time practice the following skills:

- long shots on the goalkeeper
- backward skating
- forward crossovers

One example of how the ice can be divided up to practice these three skills simultaneously is illustrated in Figure 1. In the left-hand section of the ice, long shots are being taken (this can be further improved by having two nets in this end); in the centre, backward skating is being practiced; in the third section, players are practicing forward crossovers by skating Figure 8s around the face-off circles.

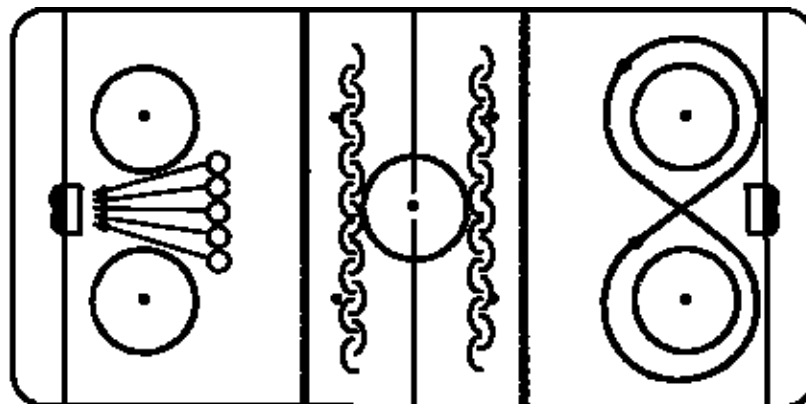


Figure 1.

For the Coach

Below are a number of statements on the principles of effective practices. For each statement indicate whether it is true or false. Answers are at the end of the chapter.

	True	False
1. Practices should be active not passive.	_____	_____
2. Instructions must be clear and concise.	_____	_____
3. Variety is not important to the players' learning.	_____	_____
4. Fun distracts players and interferes with their learning.	_____	_____
5. Practices should contain planned progressions.	_____	_____
6. Practices should make maximum use of resources.	_____	_____
7. A good practice allows for variable speeds of players' learning.	_____	_____
8. Audio-visuals are good for classroom learning but do not help in the learning of hockey skills	_____	_____
9. Teaching skills by the Whole-Part-Whole method is recommended to coaches	_____	_____
10. Athletes should have their progress monitored and be given feedback on it.	_____	_____
11. Good practices are planned but the planning is flexible.	_____	_____

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.

Psycho-social and bio-physical aspects to be considered in planning the practice include topics covered in other modules in this manual.

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.



For the Coach

Once you have completed this course, you may wish to briefly review the content in each of the following chapters and select the topics which are most relevant for your coaching situation. Use key words to describe the topic areas. One example has been listed under each chapter. Complete the list of topics.

Use this completed list when designing your practices. Select one or two new topics each time you plan a practice. By the end of the season, you will have incorporated all the important areas into your practices.

Role of The Coach

e.g. Leadership

Communication

e.g Use of the Body

Teaching Techniques

e.g. Feedback

Safety Program

e.g. Emergency Plan

Basic Skills

e.g. Forward Skating

Checking

e.g. Angling

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:

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.

Instruction

The instruction starts with known content and progresses to the application of skills 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.

Skill Practice

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

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 14. 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.

Fun

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

Evaluation

Evaluation is used to assess the effectiveness of the major components of the practice or of a 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 summary 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.

For the Coach

Tips for Starting the Practice on a Positive Note

When planning practices it is important to start off on the “right foot” with your athletes. Here are a few ideas to improve your practices from the start:

- Arrive well ahead of the start of practice in order to be available for coach/athlete discussions, to arrange equipment, and do a safety check.
- Greet your athletes by their first names.
- Project a good mood.
- Use idle chatter to create a feeling of ease.
- Conduct a group activity early in the warm-up phase to generate a feeling of togetherness (e.g., pre-ice stretching exercises).
- Keep your starting activities fairly constant to set a routine. As practice continues, you can vary routines. Progress from simple, familiar routines to difficult, unknown ones.
- Keep verbal communication at a high level at the start
- Use good-natured humour as a way of “breaking the ice” and for building up coach/athlete relationships, especially if you are comfortable with this kind of approach.

SUMMARY CHART

Overall Goals

General statements of intent, such as:

- skill learning,
- socialization,
- enjoyment.

Specific Goals

Statements which are measurable, believable and achievable:

- what you want to achieve,
- the end product,
- conditions of performance,
- goals for today.

Principles of Practice

- Keep active not passive.
 - Give clear, concise, instructions.
 - Give positive feedback.
 - Provide variety.
 - Stimulate enjoyment.
 - Create progressions.
 - Plan maximum use of resources.
 - Allow for variable learning speeds.
 - Stress individual interaction.
 - Use audio-visuals.
 - Progress Whole-Parts-Whole.
 - Monitor progress and give feedback.
 - Plan and yet be flexible.
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- Look for early signs of improvement in your athletes' performance and give positive feedback.
 - Give athletes leadership roles (e.g., have each athlete or group prepare and run a part of the warm-up).



For the Coach

Using the following outline of the six key elements which make up a practice, design a complete practice for your team. Remember that the outline is only presented as a guide and some of the elements may be integrated into one component.

First, write down some information about the team.

Date: _____

Team: _____

Practice Number: _____

Time: _____

Length of Practice: _____

Number of Players: _____

Location of Practice: _____

Equipment Required: _____

Safety Check: _____

Specific Goals: _____

Planning Practice

1. Warm Up	Approx Time	Organisation	Coaching Points	Comments
Exercise in order				



2. Instruction	Approx Time	Organisation	Coaching Points	Comments
Skills and/or progressions in order				

3. Skill Application	Approx Time	Organisation	Coaching Points	Comments
Activities using skills in order				

4. Fitness	Approx Time	Organisation	Coaching Points	Comments
Activities using work times				



5. Fun	Approx Time	Organisation	Coaching Points	Comments

6. Evaluation	Approx Time	Organisation	Coaching Points	Comments
Indicator of success measurements questions to be asked				

ANSWERS - TRUE OR FALSE EXERCISE

- 1. T
- 2. T
- 3. F
- 4. F
- 5. T
- 6. T
- 7. T
- 8. F
- 9. T
- 10. T
- 11. T