

Goaltenders Need to Freeze the Puck in Practice!!

I know if you read the title I'm sure you are wondering if he is going to write an article completely related to freezing the puck. The answer is No. But I would ask you this, "How often have you heard a parent holler during a game for a goaltender to freeze the puck?" I know I have heard it many times. I wonder if parents and fans really know how often youth goaltenders freeze a puck in practice.

My point with the title is that we need to allow players the opportunity to do specific skills in a practice that they are expected to do in a game. I believe freezing the puck is not the only one of these skills, but is certainly one of those skills that is expected in games but not practiced nearly enough.

It is up to coaches to figure out ways to force players to replicate some of these skills in a practice setting. Repetition is one of the keys in players mastering any particular skill. I would challenge all coaches to think about these seldom-practiced skills that are essential in games. Then go out and have your players practice them in a variety of ways.

More About the ADM

I had the opportunity in early November to spend 4 days in Chicago listening to some of the leading experts in North America and Europe speak on issues related to skill development in youth players. It is one of the best experiences that I have had in coaching hockey. I thoroughly enjoyed it! I would be willing to share the thoughts and ideas with any of you- just let me know.

I would like to share a brief story from one of the leaders in Swedish youth hockey. He and a few fellow coaches decided many years ago that they really needed to promote skill development- they were going to allow players to work on stickhandling, skating, and passing at young ages. They realized players were going to develop at different rates and they were going to allow this without pressuring the athletes. They were also going to commit to cross-ice hockey from ages 6-8. They did

so- all the while trying to do so in a fun environment. It was about developing- not winning!!

Finally at 9 years old these young kids were going to play their first full-ice game. The coach remembers going into the locker room before the game and asking if anyone would like to be the goaltender. He had forgotten that they had never had a goaltender with goaltending equipment. One young boy quickly volunteered, however they soon figured out that he was left-handed and was going to have to play with right-handed gloves as they did not have another set of equipment.

Well they played the game and when it was done they had won 12-0. As he recounted the story he told us that winning was not important but was interesting because they were playing a team led by a radical group of parents who had spent the last couple of years playing as many games as possible. They thought 7 & 8 year olds needed to play games to develop.

After leaving the locker room he ran into some of the parents from the opposing team. All they could ask him was, "What is wrong with your team? Your players were offsides 36 times today." He answered, "But we scored 12 goals." He continued, "I can teach kids offsides in 2 weeks when they are mentally ready to learn it but we just spent 2 years developing a lot of skill that will be tough to match in the future."

We worry so much about teaching things to kids that they are not necessarily ready to learn. We need to focus on a fun environment where kids are developing the skills they will need. Coaches using ADM practices should not worry a lot if a 7-year old does a drill wrong. Let him continue!! We spend way too much time telling kids what to do, where to go, and when to do it. Give them the basic instructions and then let them participate. The majority will do it right and with time the others will be ready to grasp the instructions. Just realize- Many kids are not ready for the fine details of each of our drills. Does it really matter which way they go around the cone? Don't make robots...make hockey players!

Remember- The FUN part of practice is the WHOLE practice!