

# Plan for a Good Season



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*With the hockey season just around the corner, most coaches are busy organizing and preparing themselves for the upcoming season. An important part of this preseason preparation includes creating a tentative season long plan for your team.*

*A season long plan will lay the groundwork for what you want to accomplish with your team during the season. The plan will help you set attainable goals and monitor your team's progress as the season unfolds.*

The season plan should start with your coaching philosophy and an honest assessment of your team's strengths and weaknesses. Most coaches have a style that they feel comfortable teaching and want their teams to play. A defensive minded coach will prepare his team to take care of their own end first, and everything else comes from that defensive posture. More offensively oriented coaches might allow their players a little more freedom to create on the ice.

Assessing the players' skill level, fitness level, and strengths and weaknesses can help you determine what to emphasize in practice sessions and will also aid in setting realistic team goals.

Providence College coach Paul Pooley suggests determining your team's strengths and weaknesses position-by-position, from goaltending on out.

"You have to assess what your team is all about," Pooley said, "and analyze what kind of players you have. With a young defensive unit, you might want to focus on the defensive side in the beginning of the year and later incorporate the offensive side."

Coaches of younger players should concentrate on skill development and having fun in practice. The main goal of a youth coach should be to see improvement in his players as the season progresses.

"We have a goal at Providence to improve daily," Pooley says, "and youth coaches should work on improving the skills of younger players. Defensemen could work to improve their turns with the puck and forwards can begin to learn to cycle down behind the net."

Most collegiate programs use physical testing to determine a player's preseason fitness level. U.S. National Team coach Jeff Jackson used these tests when he coached at Lake Superior State University to get an idea of how much work would be needed to get

his players into game-ready condition.

"We always spent the first half of the year on offensive skills and the transitional part of the game," Jackson said. "So we worked hard to get into shape. Testing them when they first came to camp helped determine how much we would have to work to get into peak condition for the rest of the season."

Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your players will also help in setting team goals for the season. Team goals should be achievable goals that will help the team win games.

"We stress goals, but you can't always set goals for winning a certain amount of games," Jackson said. "You should try to identify the important things that will get you there, those are your goals."

Goals like being the least penalized team in the league, having the top penalty killing percentage, or giving up under 20 shots a game are attainable goals that will improve the team.

Team goals should also go hand-in-hand with a coaches philosophy. A defensive minded team that stresses defense first could have a goal to finish in the top half of the league in goals against. They should not have a goal of scoring eight goals a game.

The season long plan should be flexible and map out what you want to accomplish over the season. Create a tentative time frame that you will spend working on each of the things that will help your team improve.

Jackson draws up a weekly practice schedule based on what he thinks the team needs to work on. Pooley uses a monthly plan and has an idea on how long he will spend with his younger defensemen working on defensive concepts before he lets them take chances in the offensive end. But even the best plans are open to changes, so be flexible.

Jackson makes adjustments based on injuries and personnel available. If his players show up at camp in good condition, he will spend less time on conditioning, and move onto something else his team needs to improve on. By monitoring the progress of your players, you can adapt your plans to fit the needs of your team.

"You want to have a flexible time frame," Pooley said, "and be able to move (new) things up or back depending on what happens on the ice."