

# Playoff Tune-Up Tips



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*Most coaches would agree that having an excellent playoff run is more important to them than the success their team may have during the early portion of the season. Coaches work hard preparing a season long plan, evaluating and updating it along the way, with the ultimate hope of having their team “peak” at playoff time.*

*We have surveyed several of the game’s top coaches who have made a living by winning in the playoffs. The following are some suggestions that you might consider as you prepare for the stretch run.*

## **Don’t Over-Coach**

Over coaching is an easy trap to fall into. Often times coaches are so concerned with being prepared, they out-think themselves, ultimately resulting in higher anxiety levels and fatigue. Both can effect your judgment come game time. It will also be noticeable to your players which may cause them to tense up.

## **Keep Practices Short and To the Point**

At the most advanced levels of hockey, many of the most successful playoff coaches that we surveyed highly recommended the use of short and “spirited” practice sessions during the closing weeks of a season. The players should already be in excellent shape (if you’ve done your job properly during the season), and should have a good understanding of your system.

Focus your practices on high tempo drills and fine-tuning certain parts of your game (i.e., special teams, breakout options, etc.).

## **Avoid Introducing New Concepts**

Concentrate on your team’s strengths and emphasize to your team that your game plan is to execute “your game” well. Avoid falling into the trap of preparing only to stop your opponent -- rather than force your opponent to prepare to stop you. Introducing major changes in style of play or philosophy at this point in the season is very risky. If you do decide it is necessary (because the team you are playing is far superior to yours, etc.) make sure that you take the time to “sell” these changes to your players. Don’t assume that they will accept them just because you suggest it -- they need to be convinced it works, and totally committed to it in order for it to work.

## **Make it Fun -- Remove the Tension**

Coaches should try to avoid creating an atmosphere surrounding their team and their playoff challenges which places unnecessary pressure on the team. Allow players to enjoy the experience. Special “team” functions at this time of year help take a player’s mind of the “big game”. Team bowling tournaments, table hockey tournaments, movies, etc. can be used to increase team camaraderie and allow players to keep their minds fresh.