PLANNING

PRACTICE

Drill Design – The Anatomy of a Drill

Ask any hockey coach, at any level, anywhere, what would be most helpful to them in their coaching endeavors, and the answer will be pretty much unanimous. Drills. What to work on in practice and how do to it are the biggest questions that most coaches have.

Every coach everywhere copies, steals, borrows, adapts, whatever you want to call it, drills from other coaches. And they should. Drills really don't belong to anyone. Any drill that you think you created, has probably already been created and utilized by someone else, or at least a form of it has.

In reality, there are a limited number of skills, concepts and situations that occur in a hockey game. But there are an infinite number of ways that you can go about practicing those skills, concepts and situations. That's the beauty of it. With a little thought and a little creativity, any coach can design a drill and put it to use with his or her team, at any level of play. Here are some thoughts to consider in drill design.

What are you trying to accomplish?

Whether it is a mite coach looking for a drill that allows his players to improve their crossovers, or a junior coach trying to come up with something to make his players better at recognizing defensive situations and whom they are responsible to cover, the question is the same. You have to ask yourself, what it is that you are trying to accomplish. Once you have established that, you can go about doing it.

In reality, there are a limited number of skills, concepts and situations that occur in a hockey game. But there are an infinite number of ways that you can go about practicing those skills, concepts and situations. That's the beauty of it. With a little thought and a little creativity, any coach can design a drill and put it to use with his or her team, at any level of play.

What can't your players do?

Obviously, if there is something that you are looking to improve upon, then your team can't do it very well to start with. What you don't want to do is design a drill where they have absolutely no chance of success. For example, if you want to go over some sort of positioning system or structure for moving the puck out of your own end (a breakout), and your players can't make one 15-foot, tape to tape pass, let alone three in succession, then you are pretty much setting yourself up for a train wreck before you even start. You need to have a good understanding of the skill level, and limitations of the players you are working with, and design something that is realistically attainable for them.

What can your players do?

What can you reasonably expect from your players? For any new drill, you should design something that they will have a good chance of being able to do. Once they get the hang of the set-up and the idea of what you want from them, then you can adapt it so they are able to work on what is more difficult and more challenging for them. For example if you want your players to be able to receive a pass in a good position where they are able to make a play with the puck, you wouldn't want them to be confronted immediately when they received a pass. You would design a drill where they move into the right place at the right time, receive the pass, then finish the play off with a shot. Once they have had good success with that, you would add in an "opponent" positioned to confront the player once they have received the pass. Initially, you would try to set it up where the pass receiver had a good chance of success (a good amount of time to make a play, either stickhandle around the defender, or make a give and go pass with a coach to get around the defender. Once they were having a reasonable amount of success, you would make the drill more challenging, by positioning the defender so the pass receiver had less time and space to make a play.

What is required to do it?

How much ice is required? How many players are needed? How many coaches are needed to be involved? Can you do it in small groups or do you need more ice and more players? Do you need a goalie? Do you need nets? Do you need equipment like cones, or tires to help organize the drill?

How does it fit into the practice you have planned?

Does it require all of the players on the ice, and if not, what can the rest of the players be doing while these players are doing this drill? Should it be done at the beginning of practice or at the end? If it will chew up the ice in a certain area, then maybe it should be done later in practice so it doesn't cause problems in later drills. If it will tire the players out, maybe it should be done later in practice so they are fresher for the rest of the practice.