PLANNING

PRACTICE

Keeping Players Active

Ice time is expensive and scarce. Therefore, it has to be used productively. A player can't improve while sitting on the ice listening to a coach talk or draw on the board, or standing in a line for long stretches of time. The following are tips to keep in mind to keep your players involved and on the move in your practice sessions.

Keep teaching time to a minimum. Hit on a one to three points for players to focus on in a drill and be active in reinforcing those points while they do the drill. Be very brief and be sure to tailor your comments to the age level that you are speaking to.

Adapt drills. Virtually every drill is adaptable to the amount of ice you have to work with. Look at the skill that is being worked on and try to get as many players doing it at the same time as possible within the space you have to work.

Use multiple nets. Whether there is a goalie or shooter tutor in it or not, it doesn't matter. Players love to shoot the puck in the net. To them, it is the reward, or pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Full-ice practices should always use four nets. Half-ice should always use a minimum of two. Structure drills so that there is a shot at the end to reward your players for completing the task.

Be aware of work/rest ratio. Depending on the drill, understand that players need time to rest between repetitions so they have the best chance of success. Watch your players to see if they are getting tired, because that is the first sign the drill is about to break down. Plan the order of the drills so that the more "tiring" drills are toward the end of practice, so fatigue is not a factor in causing your practice to deteriorate.

Players can be "passively active" in line. While waiting for their turn, there is no reason why players can't be stickhandling or passing (definitely not shooting). As soon the player(s) at the front of the line begin the drill, the next player(s) should start a skill while standing still. For example in a stickhandling drill, the player in line should stand still and practice dribbling the puck with his head up until it is his turn to go. In a passing drill, players might do 3-5 stationary passes in line until the coach signals them to start the drill.

Be active during drills. As a coach, don't stand and watch during the drill. Be constantly talking to individual players before, during and after their repetitions, reminding them of what they need to do before they go, encouraging them as they go, and correcting them or providing positive reinforcement after they have finished.

Control the pace. A good rule of thumb is to have eight players at a time moving on a full sheet of ice and four players at a time moving on a half sheet. On full ice, as four players are finishing up a drill, four more should be starting out. On half-ice, two should be finishing, and two should be starting out. This holds true whether it is a non-competitive drill such as stickhandling through cones, or passing with a partner, to end with a shot, or whether it is a "competitive" one-on-one or other situation drill.

Control the duration. As a rule of thumb, a drill should last 5-8 minutes – and during that time a player should get a minimum of four repetitions. Be aware of which players started the drill, and the number of times they go through it, making sure each player gets the same amount of turns.

Teach effectively. After a couple of repetitions for each player in a drill, stop it briefly and explain to them what they might be doing incorrectly, and what they should try to do to correct it. Then have them get right back into the drill so they can try it immediately.

Recommended Practice Plan

Skating warm-up and stretching — 5 minutes
Be sure to incorporate elements of balance and agility, forward skating, backward skating, pivoting, crossovers and tight turns during the skating – skating forward in a straight line doesn't accomplish much of anything – even 30 seconds of working on other areas of skating each practice will help.

Puckhandling warm-up — 5-8 minutes
Choose one simple drill that gets all players moving with a puck so they get a feel for it and can gain some confidence to move on to more complex drills. Drill can end with a shot – in a rapid-fire fashion - to get the goalie warmed up as well.

Skill Drills — 25-30 minutes
Try to accomplish 3 or 4 drills in this time period that work on developing skating and puckhandling skills. Again, skating in a straight line with a puck is of little value unless it is at full speed. Drills should be adjusted to be achievable for players at that age level and should be challenging, and end with a reward like a shot on goal.

Fun Drill — 5-8 minutes
End with a game of tag, a race, or some sort of "altered" scrimmage (cross-ice, 2 puck, no-pass, have to pass, etc) where the kids can be working on their skills and having fun at the same time. Be sure to save this to last. If you do it earlier, you will lose the focus of the players for the remainder of the practice, and by saving it to later you can always use it for motivation for them to stay focused during the practice.