PLANNING

PRACTICE

Recipe for a productive practice

Each and every practice, no matter the length, no matter the age level, needs to possess a few critical elements to give it the best chance of being a positive and productive experience for the players and coaches on the ice. Obviously, at the younger age groups, fun and skill development should be the major focus, with an increasing amount of concept and strategy added as the players grow older, develop their skills and have a greater ability to comprehend and implement the "thinking" side of the game.

Fun

The days of players skating, skating, skating and coaches yelling, yelling, and yelling are over. And if they are not, they should be. The sport needs to be fun for players and coaches. If it's not, they won't participate. Nowadays, there are just too many other things to do. Therefore fun is probably the most important element to consider at every level, but especially at the younger ages (up through 14). In addition, for players to really have the desire or passion to work hard to improve, they need to be having fun. Ask any player at the professional level how they got to the level they got, and almost always, the answer will be some form of "I always really enjoyed playing". Conversely, when players end their pro careers, sometimes prematurely, the reason is usually "It just wasn't fun any more". Fun is definitely the foundation for any kind of individual or team development.

Ages	Level	Fun	Skill Development	Concepts & Strategy
5-6	Mini Mite	100%	100%	0%
7-8	Mite	100%	90%	10%
9-10	Squirt	100%	80%	20%
11-12	Pee Wee	100%	70%	30%
13-14	Bantam	100%	60%	40%
15-17	Midget	100%	50%	50%
	High School	100%	50%	50%
17-19	Junior	100%	50%	50%
20-40	Professional	100%	50%	50%
20-60	Adult Rec	100%	50%	50%

Skill Development

Without developing the basic fundamental skills, you really can't do anything else. Teaching team concepts and strategy can't be done if players can't skate, stickhandle, pass and shoot. It would be like a teacher trying to teach science to a group of students who can't read and write, or math to students who can't count. It just can't be done. Fundamental skills are the building blocks that need to be in place before your players and team can get to the next level. Skills are progressive, and need continuous building and development at every level. For example, once a player can skate forward in a straight line with the puck, he needs to be taught stickhandling moves to go around a defender, how to stop while controlling the puck, how to turn while controlling the puck, how to crossover or cut laterally with the puck, how to pivot with the puck, and how to skate backwards with the puck. Then once he has a "basic command" of those skills, they need to be done at a faster pace, and then under the pressure of someone trying to take it away from him.

Concepts and Strategy

Once players have a "grasp" or "command" of the skills, they can start to work on the beginning principles of concepts and strategy. But developing skills still needs to be a priority to be able to get to more complex concepts and strategy. For example, players at the mite age group, once they get a grasp of skating with the puck, need to be taught how to beat someone in a one-on-one situation. On the flip side, even at that age, once they get a basic command of backward skating, they can start to learn the beginning principles of defending in a one-on-one situation. But if they are struggling to skate backwards and can't get to where they need to be, it really doesn't matter that they know what to do once they get there. Once players are able to give and receive several passes in succession, they can begin to work on the positioning necessary to succeed offensively in a two-on-one or three-on-one or three-on-two situation. Remember, ice time is very costly, and is at a premium. Most skills can only be taught and developed on the ice during practices. Concepts like basic positioning, basic rules, and basic strategy can be taught off the ice and reinforced during games.