

Carp's Commandments for winning hockey



Doug Carpenter, former NHL head coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs and New Jersey Devils has spent his life playing and coaching hockey. Here are "CARP'S COMMANDMENTS", guaranteed to get you out of the coaching wilderness and on the path to winning hockey.

1. The road to success is always under construction

Carpenter says you must strive to encourage your players to continually improve their game no matter how successful they are. "Don't be satisfied that you scored three goals in this game. Go out and try to get four the next game. You have got to practice hard, concentrate, and execute to obtain the highest degree of excellence that you can." There are no shortcuts if you are forced to detour from the road to success.



2. Perfect practice makes perfect

Carpenter disagrees with people who preach that, "Practice makes perfect". "(A player) can practice for two hours but not accomplish anything because he might be dogging it, cutting corners, and going hard only when the coach is looking. Players can practice hard and players can practice long, but I know that players can't practice hard long." You must raise the level of your practice play so that when you get into a game you are at that same level. "It doesn't tell me anything by your team practicing for an hour. But I know you've accomplished something with perfect practice for an hour."

3. The "high turnover" is the achilles heel of hockey

Watch enough videotape and you'll see how often a goal is scored after a puck changes possession in what Carpenter calls the "trigger zone," which encompasses 10 feet on either side of the blueline. "That's because everybody is thinking offense when the puck is turned over there on the rush," Carp explained. "But all of a sudden the other team gets possession and three or four seconds later it's in your net because nobody is thinking defense on the rush." Make sure your players know about the trigger zone and why the high turnover can be deadly.

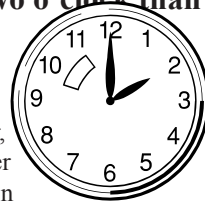
4. No tails on a drop pass

Stop the puck, or "deaden" it, if you want to leave it for a trailing teammate on a rush. "That way the player coming in for the puck skates into it and by skating into it he can adjust to the puck wherever it is lying. But if it's got a tail on it coming back at him, the puck might go wide, be in his feet or on the other side of his body away from the stick and these are all situations that are very hard to adjust to." Jack Adams, longtime coach of

the Detroit Red Wings, used to say a tail on a drop pass was a free ticket to the minors. He apparently used to send guys down just for that reason.

5. It's easier to play in two o'clock than five o'clock traffic

A lot of hockey players like to take the path of least resistance, to the outside and around the perimeter, when they have the puck. Carpenter uses a football analogy to explain why players who aren't afraid of rush hour tend to be more successful. "It's like the football receiver who's willing to pay a physical toll by going down and across the middle seam to catch the ball. That's the guy who catches 25 or 30 more passes a year than the receiver who grabs 80 footballs but they're all to the outside, down and out in the flats." NHL power forwards such as Eric Lindros, Adam Graves and Brendan Shanahan love to play in rush hour traffic.



6. The stiff-legged defenseman is the worst defenseman

Carpenter came by this wisdom while playing junior hockey in Montreal for Claude Ruel, who later coached the Canadiens to the Stanley Cup. "When you get a guy who is straight-legged he is going to get beaten both to the inside and the outside. Defensemen should never be standing still. They should always be moving, maybe into check the guy in front of the net and then backing off because somebody else might be coming in." This leads to another "Carpism" which states, "Defensemen Must Keep Their Head On A Swivel," and constantly be checking out what else is going on around them.

7. Defensemen can't get caught poaching

Poaching occurs in the neutral zone or near your own blueline in a loose puck situation. "Let's say you're a forward coming out of your end, I'm a defenseman at the red line, and there's a loose puck on my side on the boards. I can move up and try to get that loose puck or play the body on you. But if I miss on either account and the puck gets chipped by me it can result in a two-on-one towards my net." Carpenter maintains you can't play defense going forward in today's hockey. "People see the ice too well, people move the puck too well and everybody can execute the give and go. There's also a lot more swinging with players coming from the other side of the ice. Hockey used to be a series of one-on-ones but now two-on-ones and three-on-ones are created on the same side of the ice which was unheard of a few years ago." Don't get caught poaching in the glare of the red light behind your goalie.

"Those who could sing, sang and those who could dance, danced."

SCOTTY BOWMAN

Coach of the 1997 Stanley Cup Champions Detroit Red Wings on why they won the Cup.

8. Catch-up hockey is losing hockey

Check out winning percentages in any league for teams scoring the first goal of a game for proof of this. It applies anytime but particularly in the first period when Carpenter prefers his team take an offensive posture. "I've always wanted to jump the gate right off the bat and, especially at home, I don't want to start a game by thinking defensively and worrying about preventing the other team from scoring first. I love to play power against power because that means you're going to play checkers against checkers, and that's especially good on the road."

9. Communication prevents duplication and breakdowns

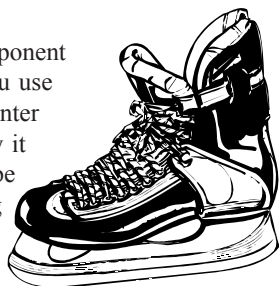
The speed of hockey necessitates constant verbal communication. "A coach should always be reminding his defense pairings to keep talking to each other, make sure the center is always



talking to his wingers and the goalie serves as an extra pair of eyes for the defensemen. You have to be talking so that two people don't go for the same loose puck or for the same guy as far as checking is concerned. Because a breakdown occurs when two people try to do the same job and something gets left out." The next time you're at an NHL game listen how much players talk to their teammates and what they're saying, and compare that to the limited verbal communication you hear at the college or youth level.

10. Value skating speed

Speed is the most important component in the game today, the one thing you use on both offense and defense. Carpenter says you can't find it, you can't buy it and you can't teach it. You might be able to improve a player's skating speed, but only marginally. "It's like the guy who can throw a 90 MPH fastball in baseball. Oh, you can improve his technique for location



and maybe add a couple of pitches to his repertoire but can you take a guy who throws 90 MPH and make him throw 98 MPH. I really don't think so." It's the same with skating which definitely can be improved upon in terms of stride, balance, strength and endurance. But I don't know if you can teach speed. A player either has it or he doesn't."

They also say speed never goes into a slump and we hope your team never does either with an assist from "Carp's Commandments".