



# Tucker Hockey Tips

## *Instruction for Timbits & Novice Players*

Many parents start coaching hockey when their first child begins to play. After attending an early season weekend coaching certification course they begin their journey. For many rookie coaches they will follow their son or daughter through the minor hockey system from timbits, to novice, to atom etc.

I began teaching the 6 to 7 year old age group back in 1997 during my early power skating days in the Czech Republic. Based on my experiences, I wish to share a few pointers on what I have learned and incorporated into my teaching over the past 18 years on the ice.

For starters, one of my favorite age groups is the 6 to 7 year old Timbits / Novice level. It's so rewarding to witness first hand the improvement in player's skills, their love of hockey grow on a session to session basis and witness the smiles on their faces! However, on many occasions it can be a very challenging task teaching this age and skill level! Why? Like Forrest Grump's quote - "You never know what you are going to get!" Some days the kids are awesome - they are eating out of the palm of your instructional hand - paying attention i.e. watching and listening. But there are other days when they are indeed a handful - lacking attention, focus and commitment to skill development. They are kids! I have learned over the years as an instructor - always go on the ice being focused and well prepared; otherwise it will be a valuable lesson in the art of teaching. You will have your hands full indeed and the coaching experience and / or results will not be so rewarding.

First and foremost, what I have learned is that on-ice instruction for this age group requires a great deal of patience and the ability to be repetitive. If I had a dollar for every time I have said "Keep your head up", "Bend your knees" or "Keep your stick on the ice" I would be a very wealthy man. However, it's important to remember that they are only 6 or 7 years old in their physical, mental and emotional

development. Often on ice instructors, coaches and parents need to lower their expectations of what the kids can handle for hockey advancement on a daily basis.

There are often many factors beyond your control in this vocation. Over the years, the Tucker Hockey staff has discovered that many young players show up at the rink and can be challenged by any of following:

- Equipment that does not fit properly especially skates, sticks too long, improper skate sharpenings etc. which endures performance.
- Lack of a good meal. Players of all ages need proper nutrition and good calories to spend energy.
- Lack of a good night's sleep. Player's need proper rest to enjoy and perform well on the ice.
- Home and / or school issues can distract players and their enjoyment of the sport.
- Hyper personality from too many video games being played in their spare time.
- Sometimes it's the parent's wish not the child's desire to be on the ice. It's important for parents to listen to their child and understand what activities their child wants to do and enjoy. Do they desire more or less hockey?
- Also many 6 to 7 year olds are physically ready, but some kids are not ready because they lack the emotional maturity, to participate in a group hockey program.

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**"I fell in love with coaching. I loved interacting with young people, having the opportunity to make a tremendous impression on them."**

**~Morgan Wootten**

# Teaching Timbits / Novice (Cont'd from Page 9)

This past season I conducted a power skating team session with a Novice minor team. The kids lacked focus, and were quite hyper on the ice. One of the novice team coaches said jokingly "Maybe they are off their meds!" Never thought of it in this way... but there may be a little truth to this statement for some players especially after school during the late afternoon 4 pm team practice ice sessions.

**We enjoy and preserve what we love**

**We love what we understand**

**We understand because we have been taught**

**The Tucker Hockey Way!**

The Tucker Hockey Way has been to provide a positive and fun learning environment for the kids. The role of the instructors is to teach skating, hockey skills, life skills, and to have fun in the process so as to instill and grow the love of the game. There's an art and science to connecting with the kids and helping them improve on their skating and hockey skills. It's a balancing act to teach skating skills, not get too serious and make it an enjoyable experience.

Often we will start teaching a skill and see how long we can work on the skill before we have to change things up! 2 repetitions or 3 repetitions, 1 length of the ice or 2 lengths of the ice of skating, 5 minutes or 10 minutes of skill development. It's like squeezing juice from an orange. We will see how much we can get out of the group today! Work on 5 to 10 minutes of skill development and then switch to a fun skating game such as hockey soccer, British bull dog, gorilla drill, battle ship, relay races, tennis ball scrimmage etc. We are always trying to adapt and to be flexible because the group dynamics change from one on ice session to another.

Here are a few coaching tips that we have employed in our programs to be successful:

- Name tags on the helmets – it helps to mention player's names when instructing them
- Brief intro: of instructors and chat prior to the start of each session
- Effective communication requires short chats with simple direct language
- Instructor down on both knees at eye level when talking to the kids, shoulder to shoulder
- Players have their stick up - butt end on the ice / players on one knee

- Gentle Approach, captivate their interest, instill good values – discipline, respect, work hard and do their best. Instilling good values at an early age is very important.
- Ask the odd question to keep them engaged and it two-way communication.
- Keep them active – very little standing around. Explain the drill, demo the drill and get them practicing the drill, correcting as they go.
- Water break every 10 minutes
- Provide a variety of drills but give them time to play throughout the session.
- Good hockey stance, strong edge control and balance - the core fundamentals - at this age.
- Progression for technical skills – it starts with skating fundamentals, progresses to puck control, to passing and then to shooting.
- Try to improve their skills to do well at the next level – Atom etc.
- Smile, avoid being too serious or too intense – don't intimidate or scare the kids.
- Avoid negative feedback, lots of praise and positive reinforcement helps learning.
- Raise your voice to get their attention but a constant diet of yelling gets stale; they will tune you out.
- Maximum instructor to player ratio of 1 to 5.
- High energy – players feed off your energy and mood
- No sliding on the ice – safety first
- Notice kids who do a drill correctly and let them demo to the group. Kids want to be noticed and recognized – it helps them pay attention. Their parents like it too!
- The weaker skating skills include stopping, outside edge control and backward skating. Parents especially love to see their child improve in these areas for sure.
- Gradual pace - baby steps with more progressions, teaching falling and getting up properly.
- We often randomly give out most improved helmet stickers to players after each session. They like the recognition and they pay attention and work harder as a result.
- High 5 the players after each session before going off the ice. Praise the kids for a good job well done! Wish them well! Show them you care!

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**A good teacher is a determined person.**

**~ Gilbert Highet**

## Meet the Instructor (Cont'd from Page 28)

Plan to continue what I am doing now. I play men's hockey league with some old buddies once a week in the winter and a pick up once a week with some other old buddies year round.

I sure hope to be skating/playing hockey until I am 80! And especially instructing with Coach Rex and Coach Dave! I enjoy making a "difference" on the ice with Tucker Hockey. I look forward having grandchildren some day and to teaching them what I have learned at Tucker Hockey.

### *Editor's note:*

*Thanks Frank for taking the time from your busy family and work schedule to complete a Tucker Hockey Instructor*

*Profile. Having spent many hours on the ice with Coach Frank, the following personal traits come to mind. Frank projects a very appreciative and positive view on life. A good kindred spirit! He is a very personable guy and works really well 1 on 1 with on ice participants. With his strong people, communication and transferable teaching knowledge and skills from other sports such as basketball, Frank excels helping the lower skilled Adult and Minor skaters get to another level. Over the past few years Coach David and I have enjoyed mentoring Frank to the role of a strong assistant on ice instructor. Frank, my friend, I have valued your contributions to Tucker Hockey...much appreciated! I look forward to many fun times on the ice in the years ahead. Yes, hope to be skating until I am 80 as well! Love your snap shot demo...it's true sweetness on ice!*

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## Teaching Timbits / Novice (Cont'd from Page 29)

Since 1999, Tucker Hockey has a formula that works, with proven results. Kids need to feel comfortable on the ice, to be themselves, to be relaxed so that they can listen, watch, and learn. Players will often fall down during the skating drills again and again. We often say you can fall down...we want to see more players falling...it shows that you are trying hard to learn and to improve. But if you fall down you must get up faster than you fall down! Kids need to be instilled with a thirst to learn, to want to come to the rink and to be upset if they can't. It's important to have a gentle approach...not to be too intense and end up turning the kids off. It's so important for player's to pay attention – to watch and listen in order to maximize their opportunity for advancement. However, not all kids learn the same way, some learn by listening, some by watching, and all by doing. We often use the expression "It's like throwing a pizza against the wall.... more sticks for some kids than others!" It is what it is. We have to keep our expectations realistic.

Often parents will ask me what their son or daughter need to work on? My reply "Everything!" at this age level. A player may be a top skater at the Novice level compared to his peers but will he or she be a top skater at the Atom, Peewee, Bantam, Midget or Junior A levels compared to his peers? It's important to keep working on the skills if a player wishes to progress and excel in the years to follow. A player needs to grow the desire to work hard, to learn to get better. We want to ensure that we have a positive influence on their skating

skill development and love for the game. A better skater becomes a better hockey player. When you become a more accomplished hockey player, you become more successful, and therefore have more fun playing the game.

Bottom line for Tucker Hockey, it's not about getting players to the NHL, rather it's about instilling a love for the game, to enhance skating and hockey skills, and to make a "difference" in the life of a child. Below are a couple of testimonials from recent past participants.

*"Regardless of age, gender and initial skill level, Tucker Hockey is a great program for any child interested in improving their skating skills. The on-ice curriculum progresses at gradual pace and the instructors are very informative and helpful. Simply put, Tucker Hockey is an awesome program that I would highly recommend."*

*~ Julie Hickey, Mother to Bret, Novice 2 Christmas 2013 Program*

*"We liked the fact that the ice was always well run, great use of ice and time. The transition of drills to teach backwards skating was excellent. We would absolutely recommend and re-register in Tucker camps and/or ice sessions. Best camp my son has ever been in."*

*~ Kim & Srecko Zizakovic, Parents to Maksim, Novice 3 Summer 2013 Program*