

Coach Rex's Corner

Guest Instructing with Minor Hockey Teams

Since starting up my Tucker Hockey business 18 years ago, I have been a guest instructor working with many minor hockey coaches and their players from the Timbits to Midget AA levels. Minor hockey coaches, managers and or parents have hired me to work with their team on their practice ice times throughout the season. Often team's have raised funds throughout the season and wish to use these fund raising dollars to further the development of their players and coaches. The number of team ice sessions has varied from 1 ad hoc time to upwards of 10 sessions per season. The main focus has been power skating but I have taught other technical skills including puck control, passing, shooting and checking. Also offensive or defensive individual and team tactics have been instructed on some occasions to older ages and more skilled teams.

Over the years I have instructed more than 400 ice sessions on various minor hockey team practice ice times during the October to March hockey season. Weekend ice times have ranged from 7:00 am on a Saturday or Sunday morning, to late mornings, to afternoons and to early evenings as well as on weekdays Monday to Friday spanning from 4 pm to 10 pm. Of the approximately 60 rinks in the City of Calgary area, I reckon having conducted minor team practices on probably most if not all of them. As well, I have traveled to the following towns and communities near Calgary - Airdrie, Beiskerer, Black Diamond, Cochrane, Cross Fields, Indus, Morley, Okotoks, Strathmore and Turner Valley.

Sessions have been instructed on full ice, half ice as well as having 2 teams combine and participate in a full ice session with 2 Tucker Hockey instructors - myself and Coach Dave, a Tucker Hockey instructor for the past 12+ years. With 2 teams and 30 players we have to be conscious of keeping the players active! For minor teams we can run standard power skating sessions consisting of: hockey stance and balance, forward and backward edge control, forward striding, stopping and fun skating games etc or customized power skating sessions based on the team coaches or manager's specific requests such as backward skating, foot speed, lateral movement, skating agility etc.

Coming out and working with a group of coaches you have not met or players that you have not seen skate before can sometimes be a challenge. However, generally we have a pretty good idea of the skill level knowing the division level of the team. For example most peewee division 1 players can perform an outside edge drill but can they do the outside edge drill well with a puck? For peewee division 4 or 5 usually only a hand full of players have an outside edge while peewee division 9 or 10 none of the players have an outside edge! Often we may need to adapt the practice plan according to the skill level – progress at times or regress at other times. There's an art to it. Give the players what they need to know not what you know as an instructor. Right thing, right time and right amount is the development motto.

Over the years I have met some great people, dedicated parents following their child or children up through the minor hockey system. However, having worked with so many teams over the years I have been exposed to many different hockey team environments of which the majority of them have been quite positive but occasionally some have been rather negative.

Often the problems evolve around poor coaching or a lack of winning by a team throughout the season. These factors have created some unhappy campers! Big problems were losing streaks where parents and players get down on themselves and the coaches. Often the coaches were perceived as not being good coaches just because the team was not winning! Certainly not fair to the coaches! Sometimes it's the situation – not even Scotty Bowman could work a miracle every time! My coaching philosophy has been to come out and run a high tempo practice and try to raise the morale of the team to inject some positive energy to the coaches and players. Often coaches and parents need to lower their expectations about the team's success and keep the proper perspective on things especially at the lower age levels. It's only a game at the community level! A very small percentage of players will develop to play quadrant hockey. Even less will play pro hockey.

Cont'd p. 11

Guest Instructing (Cont'd from 10)

Here are a few observations. At the lower age levels between timbits to peewee and especially lower divisions 5 to 10 of these age levels, the norm is new volunteer coaches. Unfortunately, some of these coaches have limited experience playing or coaching hockey. They have generously agreed to volunteer their time to coach their son's or daughter's team because no one else has stepped up for the challenge. Sometimes they choose the position half heartedly but the team desperately needs a coach. They do the required weekend coaching certification course and jump into the minor hockey arena environment! Often it's a very thankless job from many parents who have been quite unrealistic about the team's success. Parents often are too focused on winning and not enough about having fun and getting the players ready for the next age level - for example advancement from novice to atom. Many coaches have run skating drills but do not teach proper skating technique or correct bad skating habits of the players.

We have worked with experienced coaches of 5 to 10 years who know what they don't know. They are very competent and good with the kids but realize they need help teaching skating skills. Also, we have worked with very inexperienced first year coaches who lack overall skating, hockey skills and coaching knowledge. The benefits to the minor hockey coaches of having Tucker Hockey guest instruct on their practice ice range from:

- Learning new drills
- Learning new teaching points to help skill development
- Learn what to look for so as to correct bad skating habits
- Possibly discover new and different teaching approaches with the kids
- Head coach receives a standard power skating handout

- Most times coaches have appreciated the expertise, a new voice or way of doing things on the ice. They have been keen to learn and wanted a professional coach to help their players develop and become better skaters.

After 25 years of coaching, it's still continuously learning for Coach Rex; learning from interacting with fellow coaches, players of all ages and skill levels and learning about myself. There's always room to improve and to learn new aspects of the game – its constant personal growth and development. Instilling the love of the game to the kids, helping the player's develop skills and the mentoring of minor hockey coaches is my passion and joy! See you at the rink! It's my sanctuary and where I like to hang out!

The Road Not Taken

By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Acknowledgement:

This poem is submitted by Roy Stanley Rowsell of St. John's NL. Rowsell and I grew up and played hockey together on the harbour and ponds of Little Bay Island, Newfoundland. We have traveled such different roads in our adult lives. However, we are still the same - best of friends. A strong and valued friendship of more than 48+ years!

