



Safety First – Coaches, Wear a Helmet!



By Coach Rex

We often talk about Safety in Minor Hockey in terms of fair play, sportsmanship, playing by the rules etc. Now, we want to get down to you, the minor hockey parent/coach. We want to look at your physical responsibilities of providing a safe environment for you – the coach!

Tucker Hockey encourages all coaches who instruct on the ice, especially minor hockey coaches, to wear a helmet. The reason I make this statement is truly based on my own personal experience. For more than 12 years, I conducted numerous minor hockey practices, power skating programs and hockey skills sessions without wearing a hockey helmet. Unfortunately, it took a bang to the ole melon before I became consciously aware of my own safety on the ice and decided to smarten up!

During the fall of 2003, I was conducting a minor hockey practice as a guest instructor for a community peewee team. We were doing a fun drill called “the duck and the goose”. This fun racing drill for the kids involved practicing glide turns and forward crossovers around the circle. There were approximately five players per circle. I was eagerly shouting encouragement to one of the groups, when it happened! A player from an adjacent group lost an edge and accidentally hit me from behind! The player accidentally hit me at the calf level. I wiped out and hit the back of my head on the ice. It was such a shocker! I felt dazed and stunned for a few seconds than the feelings of a concussion began to set in. The concussion effects of the fall lingered for several days. However, I felt very lucky. The symptoms from this accident could have been much more severe!

After telling my family and friends, who are not really into the game of hockey, about what happened, they caringly said “What! You were not wearing a helmet on the ice?!” They were shocked! They couldn’t believe it! “What kind of an example are you setting for the kids you are coaching?” This was the popular remark of the day. I thought about it and realized they were truly right. As a result, I decided to smarten up and now I wear a hockey helmet!

When operating any group hockey program especially at the tyke/novice or adult beginner level it is imperative that coaches wear a helmet. Often low skilled players are not in control of their skating and you never know what they will do on the ice.

Last August, I discussed the lack of helmet usage by minor

hockey coaches across Canada briefly with Paul Carson, Director of Development, Hockey Canada at Father David Bauer Arena. At the time, Hockey Canada was conducting a summer hockey skills program on the ice. It was good to see all the Hockey Canada on ice instructors wearing helmets.

I asked Paul why it wasn’t mandatory for all minor hockey coaches across Canada to wear a helmet. He said “It is basically a political thing and impossible to police.”

From my understanding, it appears to be bureaucratic situation. Most of the various minor hockey associations do not want to be told what to do. If Hockey Canada tried to implement a mandatory helmet policy, who would police this policy at the grass roots level? With a lack of resources, the logistics of policing such a thing would seem to be impossible. Even though Hockey Canada is the governing body of hockey in Canada, the organization often it seems has very little control of our game at the grass roots level.

I feel safety awareness and education are the keys to implementing a mandatory helmet policy but how do the various hockey governing bodies do this? Why not make it a part of the coach level certification requirements. All coaches wear skates, gloves and a stick on the ice... just add a helmet to the equipment list for all coaches. When coaches obtain their team jerseys/equipment for the season, have the coaches sign a document regarding helmet usage. Any other ideas?

The writer welcomes any thoughts or ideas regarding this subject matter.

If coaches wish to be safety conscious and positive role models for their players, it is recommended that they wear a helmet. For now it’s a personal preference whether to wear one or not. But I truly feel based on my own personal experience; the smart choice is to wear a helmet. Avoid learning the hard way by banging one’s head on the ice! During an on ice session practice, players accidentally fall, collisions happen between players and coaches; coaches may step on a puck, as well as encounter ruts on the ice.

Remember coach for the love of the game, coach to have fun, coach to help the kids and coach to win, but most importantly, coach to be safe! Safety first!