



Quality Instruction: On-Ice Demonstrations

Editor's Note: During the hockey year, there are many hockey schools and programs, which teach, power skating and hockey skills development. However, the quality of the instruction varies greatly depending on which program is chosen. In the Spring/Summer 2006 issue of Hockey Zones, Coach Rex's corner discussed quality of hockey instruction. This past article can be found on our web-site at www.tuckerhockey.com/newsletters.

Hockey instruction is the art and science of teaching hockey skills – technical and tactical. It is a “specialized component” within the coaching profession. Here’s a closer look at the aspect of on – ice demonstrations component of instruction.

Hockey players learn a skill in different ways.

- Very few players can hear a description and execute the skill. They do not see the skill but mentally understand the concept and can perform it immediately.
- A few players can hear and see a skill and then execute it properly.
- There are players who hear, see and require piece by piece skill progression to execute a skill.
- There are players who hear, see and require physical moulding / shaping by an instructor so as to execute the skill.

The majority of players fall into the last two types.

A picture is worth a thousand words. The foundation of the skill development is a good on ice demonstration. This is especially true for the hockey technical skills such as skating, passing, puck control, shooting and checking.

When an instructor, properly demonstrates a drill such as a skating skill, a player sees first hand the right way to do the

skill. The instructor must do a slow demo or several slow demos stressing the proper technique, breaking down the skill and explain the key and correct teaching points within the drill. Often I will gather the players in a group on one knee and I will demo the drill several times in front of them. Also, I will ask if there are any questions regarding the skill prior to the players trying the skill.

Secondly, the players must be given opportunities to perform enough repetitions to attempt, improve on and master the skill. However, no matter how many repetitions a player performs if the technique is poor / incorrect, the player will not improve the skill.

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Thirdly, tweaking is imperative so as to enhance performance. The instructors need to give good and accurate feedback to each skater depending on the ability. This feedback may involve reinforcing the proper teaching points, build on or expand or again demonstrate the skill again in front of the player to mould a player’s technique so the player can then duplicate what has been shown.

Fourthly, players like to receive praise and positive reinforcement. Give good encouragement and positive reinforcement!

Finally, the on ice curriculum needs to be presented with a “building block” approach. Start with drills, which provide confidence and then advance to drills, which challenge and stretch the players. First emphasize technique and then speed. For power skating drills, players can do the drills without pucks first and later progress to doing the drill with pucks.

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“I am careful not to confuse excellence with perfection.
Excellence I can reach for. Perfection is God’s business”

- Michael J. Fox