

Developing Skills is all About Ice Time; Part 2

The trick to developing skills in any sport or endeavor is to acquire the fundamental skills and practice them over and over again. It is certainly more fun to acquire and practice skills if you are in an environment where you do not actually notice that you are practicing. The problem today is how to get enough of this type of skill development.

In last month's article I discussed the concepts of how much time a youth hockey player actually spends on the ice during the course of a year. I estimated that number to be about 108 hours per year. I also estimated that kids 30 years ago spent more than twice as much time on the ice in one third as much time during the year. We can argue about the precise numbers but I think that whoever you cut it, kids today do not get enough time on the ice.

The problem defined is; How to get players on the ice more? We already spend a great deal of time going to and coming home from hockey. In many instances we spend far more time travelling to and from than actually playing the game. We spend a lot of money going to tournaments and travelling all over North America. Consider a AAA team travelling to Vancouver for four games (1 hour of actual ice time per player). If only one parent accompanies each player, you can figure the cost for the weekend to be about \$1,300 for each player to play a total of one hour.

The off season is the place to start: Local associations with access to ice time should sponsor a "Rink Rat" program. This is an 8-week program in the spring and fall designed to provide lots of ice time to players. Teams at each age level are randomly chosen and assigned a color. Teams play twice a week for 75 minutes. Each team would be made up of no more than 12 players and no fewer than 6 players. The rules are simple. **No coaches! No officials! No checking! No scoreboard! Helmets/facemasks/mouth guards required.** One adult supervisor would be present to enforce the rules. Squirrels and mites could have two or three games on one ice surface.

Now let's do the numbers again. This program provides 40 hours of ice time in the off season. The cost? About \$5 per session or \$200 per year per player. Add true skill development programs like STP and Acceleration Minnesota, and you have a great package for your kids at a very reasonable cost. Your players will improve; you will spend far less money and time at hockey. Besides, the kids will have fun, and after all isn't that what it's all about?

See you at the rink.

Hal Tearse

