

HOCKEY SMARTS

Session 2 – Practice Approach – Coaching vs. Coachability



QUOTATIONS



“Practice does not make perfect, perfect practice make perfect”





WHAT IS PRACTICE?

Practice is where coaching (the coach) and coachability (the players) meet to introduce, repeat and modify habits that will enhance the players and the teams performance.

A good coach breaks down and explains components of the game via drills and not the other way around. At upper levels like AAA, Juniors etc. team practices work mostly on game components focusing on establishing and beating systems, perfecting recurring game situations (zone entry, breakouts, regroup) by teaching fundamental concepts (timing, time/space, gap control, positioning, supporting the puck etc.).

While team practices will enhance your understanding of the game, it is important you put yourself in a “game mode” while executing the drills by applying imagination, skill and work-ethic to enhance your development while executing the practice. ***Usually, coaches come prepared with a vision, but players fail to do so.*** Players become followers of the tutor where they monotonously go through practice and leave the thought process behind. This session will focus on how YOU, the player, can enhance your experience in practice to develop your skill-set more than what was set out by the coach.





WHAT ARE WE PRACTICING..... REALLY?

Get it out of your head that a drill is where a coach draw lines on a board and you go skate those lines. Instead, ask yourself the question “what part of the game is he drawing?” and “how can I use this drill in a game?”. This will ensure you 1) put yourself in “game mode”, 2) are able to ask the right questions, 3) can implement additional elements to the drill (saucer pass, skate fakes, deception etc.) that directly translate to the game.

This is the successful outcome of practices to a coach considering team practices only.

- 1) Better strategy implementation by either
 - 1) Fixing a recurring team problem, or;
 - 2) Enhancing a team strength
- 2) Developing players to implement such strategy
 - 1) Skill drills
 - 2) Strength/Endurance drills

So what is strategy really?

Strategy is, at any level, equipping players with as much of an expectation as possible given any game scenario (forecheck, special teams etc.). Clear expectations will limit confusion (which cause players to slow down, act individually and become frustrated) and increase effectiveness/chemistry between players. Clear expectations mean that YOU understand what your AND your teammates responsibilities are when something occur (with and without the puck OR offensively and defensively). Without strategy, teams look out of position and players act alone a lot. Without strategy players play distribute the puck when in trouble, act alone a lot, play combative hockey and the pace of the game is determined by how fast players skate more often than not. With strategy, support players focus on being an option, puck carriers have liberty to act and do so to use the opponents weaknesses against themselves (there is ALWAYS a weakness) and players let the puck do the work where the speed of the game is much higher because the puck travels faster than anyone or anything.

Think of strategy as the tool that allows you to play ahead of the game. It is very crucial that you understand a coaches strategy. Now what are drills?



WHAT ARE DRILLS..... REALLY?

Drills are components that teach you the game. They can be fundamentally based (stand alone drills to teach you skill such as, for example, passing/shooting/skating drills) or they can be team based (drills that teach you strategy and/or game situations, for example, 2 on 1 rushes).

Fundamental drills simply need your imagination and execution for you, and subsequently the team, to get better. **Taking the drill to the next level will segregate you from the competition.** For example, when asked to do a one-touch pass drill, after feeling comfortable with the initial drill, try doing it by looking at the receivers stick the whole time, then when you have that under control, do it by looking at the receivers eyes instead of at the puck.

Team drills need your imagination but within your role and while understanding the team strategy. It is important that you understand the meaning of the drills and how they apply to the game, and especially your teams strategy. So if the coach wants you to execute rushing drills, such as a 3 on 2, avoid making that drill a 1 on 1 drill, but actually use your teammates to solve problems. Even if your linemates are not as good as you, or if you are not as good as them, always work together so you can **COLLECTIVELY** get better. Communication and clear intentions off the puck is key (for example, call for the puck and put your stick down where you want it, BUT remember that he does not have to pass to you just because you really want the puck).





HOW DO I GET BETTER?

While technique and breaking down skills is important to understand shortcomings, some very simple understandings to do during practice that will enhance your game.

How do I become a faster skater?

Skate fast! Accelerate! Tempo-Change

How do I shoot harder?

Put 100% into every shot every time

How do I dribble better?

Move the puck in line and in drills

How do I hit better?

Finish checks, hit hard and effective, win the puck

How do I score more?

Focus on finding the net, not making Sportcenter

How do I pass better?

Vary your pass executions, repeat and repeat

Practice is all about repetition, repetition, repetition!!

- Thoughts become Words
- Words become Actions
- Actions become Habits
- Habits become Character
- Character become Destiny

1. Say it
2. Act it
3. Repeat it / Push it
5. Become it
6. Enjoy it



HOW DO I HELP THE TEAM TO GET BETTER?



This is simple, IMPROVING YOURSELF WILL IMPROVE THE TEAM. Take responsibility and improve weaknesses, even if they are not “fun” to do.

Example: I am the best player but I am out of shape. The team would be better off if you, the best player, would work harder and be able to think better towards the end of the game (as you are most likely playing and deciding the outcome of the game at that point). **Solution,** get your butt working harder in practices, off the ice, at the gym etc. Create habits and goals which will give you purpose and that will motivate you to put the time in.

Example: I am so slow I am just going to pass the puck as soon as I get it. The team would be better off if you were not so easy to read. If you constantly get rid of the puck right away, other players have to carry your game on the ice. If you could carry the puck more and make opponents think you were going to attack yourself, the other skaters would not have as strong of a coverage to execute their game. **Solution,** work your butt of on power, quickness, agility and acceleration.

Example: I am good enough to “hang”. The team would be better off if you stopped “hanging” and started making a difference. Push yourself in practice, stop being content, stop being mediocre, put yourself on the line and be accountable and responsible for your own development. **Solution,** get out of your comfort zone and start pushing your boundaries. Work on your foot work to create more space so you can make more plays. Keep your head up to create hockey as much as you take options away from opponents.





PRACTICE WITH INTENT

Leave the good looks at the door. Come to practice ready to not look good until you make it look good. Players are inherently afraid to embarrass themselves. This hinders development in practice. Always come to practice with at least one personal intent of improvement.

For example, (problem) the opponents picked off every pass you made last game, (solution) take every possible opportunity in practice to work on peripheral (no look) passes and deception.

Another example, (problem) you shot the puck into the goalies chest last game, (solution) before you shoot every shot in practice try to deke, fake or change direction to open the goalie up.

You should always come to practice to work on something. I purposely ask the players without notice what they are working on today and hold them to whatever answer they give me. I know what I want the team to perfect, but its up to each player to build their OWN GAME into what I teach to bring that extra edge when we implement a strategy in games.



ACTIVE REST



While standing in line, it is a great time to work on;

- 1) **Coordination** – dribble the puck and pay attention to when it is your time to go.
- 2) **Short Passing** – work on short one-timers and saucers with peers in your line until it is your turn.
- 3) **Long Passing** – work with players in a line across from you. Don't hit skating players with the puck but keep your head up and pass the puck back and forth.
- 4) **Goalies** – between drills, unless called in by the coach, work on;
 - 1) Passing the puck back and forth
 - 2) Shoot to glove, control the puck and pass it back to the other goalies glove
 - 3) Posture drills – have the other goalie put his glove on your head, work on up-down and side to side movements without dropping the glove on your head onto the ice.
 - 4) Skating drills (alone) work on movement while waiting for the next drill to start.





BECOME A BETTER PASSER/RECEIVER

Work on the following passing patterns inside drills

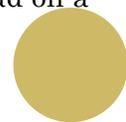
1. Receive the puck with one hand on the stick (simulating pressure at reception) gain control of the puck and continue the drill.
2. Work saucer passes into the drill where you release the puck
 - a) high, low, long and short saucers. Forehand and backhand
3. Work on backhand passes and receptions
4. When doing one-timers avoid looking at the puck coming at you, focus on looking at the receiver as much as possible to avoid miss-direction of the puck while in flight.
5. Work on passing while crossing over
 1. Use your backhand and forehand (off the back foot) if crossing over with the puck on the backhand
 2. If crossing over with the puck on your forehand, work on passing while crossing over
 3. In neither case should you stagger your feet to deliver the pass, work on passing without breaking your crossover stride.
6. Receive the puck off your feet **WITHOUT** breaking stance. You have to break your stride, as little as possible, while receiving the puck off your feet, just make sure to elevate the receiving foot slightly off the ice to angle the puck up to your stick as soon as possible.
7. Work on receiving the puck in your hand while in flight, standing still or accelerating and quickly gain control to make another play or separate yourself from the opponents.
8. **LOVE IT WHEN SOMEONE MAKES A PASS THAT IS TOUGH TO CATCH.** This is where the money is. If you are able to take a bad situation and make it great quickly, you are able to do something most can't. So the next time someone gives you a pass on your skate instead of your stick, give him/her a high-five and say "thanks" and mean it.



THREE STEPS OF SEPARATION

Time and Space is ALL ABOUT THREE STEPS. Time and Space defined by one word is “***distance***” If positioned right, you should be three steps away from closing a gap, or if you are separating yourself from coverage you are three steps away from getting enough gap to make a play.

- 1) Separation works best by changing direction with three hard steps coming out of that change.
 - 1) While taking the three steps, take a look around to see if a new opportunity has become available.
 - 2) If you are supporting a change in direction as an F2, seek an outside drop pass and subsequently look to give it back to the previous F1 in case the Defense has released him.
 - 3) Changes in direction are most applicable on rushes and sustained pressure in the offensive zone. If you don't have space then fake and take three hard steps in the new direction, try to move the puck and accelerate to top speed into a position to receive a give-and-go.
 - 4) Try to avoid 1 on 1 battles as much as possible. Instead draw opponents away from the middle to the outside, change direction to separate yourself and use your teammates to break through the defense together.
- 2) A shoulder is all you need.
 - 1) If you get ahead of an opponent by a shoulder while in a rush or accelerating away, take it by placing yourself right in-front of the opponent and angling the opponent directly away from the net. Lower your stance to avoid a poke check around your hip and move the puck away from the opponents strong side (if he is a lefty, the one-handed poke will come from your right side and vice versa).
 - 2) Close battle with acceleration are the most likely causes for penalties drawn on the other team. By moving your feet away from battle aggressively, the opponents are usually still physically minded.
- 3) Anticipate Outcomes
 - 1) Defensively, you should be three steps away from engaging on your coverage (assuming man to man situations). Be proactive and close gaps before play's are made to slow the opponents down.
 - 2) If you fail to anticipate, be careful recovering your mistake engaging late on your coverage. The first thought in this situation should be what the most dangerous outcome is from another play being made. Put your head on a swivel and don't give up the inside opportunity by pressuring the outside.





THE SLOT

If you are carrying the puck into the slot in a game, you rarely do it without being slashed, players throwing themselves or physicality coming your way. This area is a 1 second area where decisions have to be fast, speed has to be high, strength has to be powerful and passes most often have to be hard and/or elevated.

Now, ask yourself what you do in practice every time you are on a 2 on 0 or coming down to finish up a flow-drill..... You slow down, stagger your feet and make it look pretty. Well, change that right now. Approach the slot with

- 1) speed, power and look for the net first,
- 2) peripherally scan for passing options.
- 3) Be deceitful, don't telegraph your decisions, make opponents commit to you and either adjust to open up net or pass to an open player.
- 4) Don't be afraid to shoot with the intent to get a good rebound at times as well.
- 5) Lateral movement is best as rebounds are at an open net, north to south is not as affective
- 6) Move the goalie if you can, pump fake and find angles/lanes
- 7) If you have a passing lane open, use it early and stay open for a pass back
- 8) Just because you are closer to the net, you are NOT closer to scoring, STAY OPEN, hashmarks is the best distance to score. Make moves early instead of last minute. Make several moves if necessary.
- 9) Without the puck, the rule is 1) if the puck is below the hashmarks, position yourself on the hashmarks (strong side), and 2) if the puck is above the hashmarks, get in front of the goalie.





GOALIES.... ALL ABOUT THE %

NHL goalies who win Stanley Cup usually post .925 save percentages or higher. If you are going to make the NHL, you need to be consistently over .900% each season. As such you should break down practices in shots of 10 and try save 9 out of them each time. Reset and repeat this pattern through each practice.

If there is a rush drill, where you have time between shots, try to save the puck and pass it back to a line after each rush or put the puck in play if covered.

If you are receiving outside shots (blue top of circles or higher) work on;

- 1) rebound control
 - a) cover the shot
 - b) re-direct the shot to a specific corner spot each time
- 2) follow the puck, direct your stance to face where the puck ends up

Communicate! Goalies are the quarterbacks during defensive coverage, keep talking about what goes on behind players. Talk to defenseman during 1 on 2's where you say "I got the shooter" so you are on the same page.





IF YOU DON'T SEE NET – FIND IT!

The reason why great players don't know how they did a move or what they were thinking when executing a decision that results in a great play, is because they are only processing answers to one question – where is the net?

The puck is 1 inch thick, 3 inches in diameter and weigh 5.5 ounces and you can fit about 1,152 of them stacked on the goal line in a net. That fact is the same to EVERY player.

Goal scorer's find the net, they don't hope for the puck to go in. If they don't see net, they make the goalies and defenders move to give open the net up. Effective ways to score in normal game situations are;

- 1) Fake to lateral movement and shoot (slap shot or snap shot, goalie goes down and move to the side to open up corners or upper net).
- 2) One-touch shot (goalies in transition)
- 3) Lateral movement and shoot (cut across the slot, one or two steps is fine)
- 4) In-stride shots (deceptive release)
- 5) No look shots
- 6) Pass fake to shot
- 7) If you have a bad angle, pump fake to take the goalies glove or blocker down and put the puck upstairs.

Practice Practice Practice





GIVE YOURSELF A SHOT TO TAKE A SHOT

Shooting is dependent on technique but it is also very important to time your shots with anticipation and timing. In practice, vary your shots and put yourself in game mode while doing it. Have as much imagination as you can!!

Give yourself a shot to get a shot.... On net

- 1) Open up shooting lanes by
 - 1) Moving laterally to get a clear view to the net if your initial lane was covered by an opponent
 - 2) Fake and move to a new position to open up a lane straight to the net
- 2) Make sure lanes are open by scanning the ice before you get the puck and taking the shot where you avoid shooting through people unless intended to do so (i.e. shoot through someone's legs on a rush.)
- 3) If you are shooting from the blue-line, time your shot by learning how to shoot, especially slap shots, with your heads up looking at the net.

By applying the above mentioned techniques, you can get more out of practice and, most likely, increase your point production as more shots will reach the net than before.

Here is an example of a fake slap shot pass to by Lecavalier to Stamkos. Note how Lecavalier is moving laterally to open up a lane while scanning the ice along the slot. As players dive to avoid the shot the lane to Stamkos opens up with Lecavalier notices and fakes the shot to a pass where Stamkos can easily tap in the puck. Great deception, awareness and head's up hockey.

Go here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lx69xbF4Ies>





SPECIAL TEAMS IN PRACTICE

In practice and games, you showcase your special team skills all the time. *Every drill touches base on special teams one way or another.* For Example;

Power Play focuses on anticipation, timing, puck-control (low turnover), vision, hockey smarts, positioning, shooting, passing, deception, peripheral awareness and hand/eye coordination (slot players). You show your ability to execute this in every drill. The actual structure of a PP is determined by the coach but it all comes back to these concepts and coaches know who will fit the best.

Penalty Kill focuses on sacrifice (block shots), lane awareness, positioning, strength (win battles), stick movement, communication, keep-away, timing and patience.

If you want assignments on either of these, you need to continuously show your ability to implement this in practice. Either unit's, at the AAA level and above, will play the best players who can get the job done. Games are usually won and lost with special team execution and it is just as important to stop opponents from scoring (PK) as it is beating them (PP). At the younger ages, there is less focus and pride playing on the PK over PP. On PK, you usually find captains and leaders who have the ability to inspire their teammates by sacrificing themselves doing the painful job to win a game. Not only do they inspire team-mates, but also coaches and certainly the scouts.



IMAGINATION



Imagination is the strongest sense a player can have in hockey. While being able to apply your fundamental skills, the execution of those skill are driven by your imagination. Imagination is driven by the ability you have to see the ice while playing the game. It is as simple as that and this is why the game is never the same game after game.

Each Practice

- 1) Put yourself in game mode and approach the practice accordingly. Tempo changes, fake when nobody is in front of you, deke before you shoot, take the game to the max!!
- 2) Dare to fail, dare to fall, dare to miss, just don't dare not to dare. If you push yourself to the limit, you will expand your horizon.
- 3) Create habits in practice, example; always follow through for a rebound in practice, or if you can, stop by the net when the next shooter comes try to deflect his shot.
- 4) Talk, Talk, Talk is a good habit to start doing in practice. I suggest you start with a "hey" each time you want the puck.
- 5) Put your puck carrying peers in the periphery and give them a target while you place yourself, with speed and position, in the optimal place supporting that player once a play is most likely to be made. If so, just remember to scan the ice more than you watch your puck-carrying team-mates. By simply looking around, you will play the game much better, have more space and give yourself a better chance to make an impact. If position is off, think triangle, if opponents are slow think speed (fast), if opponents are fast think lateral attacks, if opponents backcheck hard with 5 guys think second wave. Simplify your thoughts!!!!

