

TRY-OUTS

One of the first tasks to be carried out by a coach at the beginning of each season is the selection of players for a team. This is a major responsibility, regardless of age level or competitive category. This chapter will present some important aspects of the player selection process. Particular attention will be paid to the steps to be followed in selection a team at the minor hockey level. In addition, a brief supplementary section will deal with a few additional considerations for player selection at higher levels of competition.

After reading this you will be better prepared to:

- Develop a prioritized checklist of variables to be evaluated while selecting players
- Select different evaluation methods
- Design the content for try out sessions
- Assign responsibilities for player evaluation
- Develop a plan for releasing players

Developing a Player Selection Try Out Plan

In most youth hockey situations, coaches are faced with the task of choosing from a large pool of players to fill a limited number of positions on a team. Coaches are usually expected to complete this task in a relatively short period of time. Therefore, it is very important for the coach to be organized in advance with a plan for carrying out the player selection process. To properly develop this plan the coach must take into consideration a number of significant factors. The answers to the following questions will assist the coach in designing the most effective player selection plan.

Number of Players Attending Team Try Outs?

There should be some form of pre-registration so that the coach can be given a complete list of players in advance of the first tryout ice session. This may not always be possible and, thus a coach may have to be prepared to make some last minute adjustments for the initial session. Having a reasonable estimate of how many players will attend will greatly assist the coach in deciding how to use the available ice time. For example, it may be unrealistic to plan for a 30 minute scrimmage if there are only 22 players. On the other hand, greater than 50 many require splitting into two separate groups for the first few sessions.

Available Rink Time?

The amount of ice time available for the tryouts is another important consideration. Knowing how much time you have to get down to the final team will effect not only the content of the individual tryout sessions but also the timeline for the release of players. The norm in youth hockey is a relatively brief tryout period with about four to six hours of ice time. Thus, the coach must plan the tryout sessions to be as efficient as possible. One reason for the short duration available for selecting a team is that often other teams at lower levels must wait for the releases from the higher level teams before beginning their tryouts.

How Many Players To Keep?

Obviously you must determine in advance the desired make-up of your team. Do you plan to keep 8 players for 10? Nevertheless, in youth hockey you must consider how many players you can effectively use in games to ensure they receive sufficient opportunity to play. Very little benefit will be gained by marginal players who see limited ice time. You really have a responsibility to play and develop the players you choose.

In addition to the absolute number, the coach must also consider what special qualities to look for in players. For example, it may be desirable to have at least a few players with the versatility to play both forward and defense positions.

Skills to Evaluate

In order to select the best players from a large pool of candidates, it is necessary to establish criteria on which to make comparisons among players. Thus, the first step in player evaluation is to determine what variables to measure. What qualities are you looking for in your players?

Are some of these more important than others? The answers to these questions will depend to a great extent on the age category as well as the competitive level of your team. For example, at the junior high level there will likely be more of an emphasis on evaluating basic skills rather than individual and team tactics. Similarly, physical characteristics such as strength and endurance will be more relevant at the Midget category than at the younger age levels.

The following is a list of some of the players qualities which might be evaluated during the tryout period:

Individual Skills:

- skating
- passing
- pass receiving
- shooting
- stick handling

Team Skills

- offensive tactics
- defensive tactics
- ability to play with others

Mental Qualities

- intelligence
- reading and reacting
- concentration

Physical Qualities

- strength
- muscular endurance
- cardiovascular endurance
- balance
- agility
- coordination
- power

Emotional Characteristics

- self-control
- patience
- desire
- attitude

For the Coach

Player Evaluation Checklist: Develop a checklist of the variables on which you would evaluate players in selecting your team. List them in order of priority and provide some specific examples for each.

For example:

Individual Skills

- shooting
- ability to execute an accurate wrist shot on both the forehand and backhand
- ability to shoot in stride

What About Goaltenders?

As you might obviously expect, the characteristics which should be evaluated for goaltenders will differ significantly from those players at other positions. In addition to individual skills such as skating, puck handling, and passing, goaltenders must be evaluated on their ability to stop the puck using the stick, gloves, pads and body. Mental, physical, and emotional characteristics should also be evaluated. Once again, however, there may be a difference between goaltenders and other players in both the specific components to be assessed as well as their relative priorities.

Other Considerations?

Although you will now have a comprehensive list of skills/characteristics on which to evaluate your players, there is at least one other factor for you to consider in selecting players for your team. The players attending the tryouts will come with varied summer hockey experiences and different competitive backgrounds. Some may have played summer hockey or attended a hockey school or power skating camp while others will be on inline rink for the first time in five or six months. Therefore, if you have adequate time in your tryout period, it may be advisable to devote the first few sessions to skill development drills and exercises in order to assist in putting all players on a more equivalent basis prior to initiating the evaluation process. In addition, at the younger age levels, a player's previous experience in competitive hockey may range from more (e.g., recreational hockey only) to a number of years at the highest level of competition (e.g., AAA hockey).

In some youth hockey associations, teams are selected prior to the summer. This certainly alleviates the problems associated with varied summer experiences. However, the issue of the player's potential to improve as well as the effects of growth and development may be magnified in these situations and should be taken into consideration.