



“Players need to define their own strengths and weaknesses with assistance from coaches, and then develop their own concise plan to improve”

COACHING LEADERSHIP – THE 5 POINT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Over the course of a season players receive so many suggestions for improvement that sometimes the key areas don't get the focus they deserve and therefore while some improvements happen the most important don't.

Like in almost every learning situation the learning steps are for a player to first of all know what exactly needs to be improved, second to understand why it needs to be improved, third to believe that improving it will make him a better hockey player and help the team more, and lastly and most importantly to actually do what he knows he needs to do. The latter is obviously the most step and is more likely to happen when he “knows”, “understands”, and “believes”.

A very useful process in getting to the desired result is to start with the player defining his own improvement areas realistically in a 5 or 3 point plan handed to the coach and then discussed. The player should be told the player must believe the improvement points are doable and that when each one is done the team as a whole will be helped. The coach no doubt may elaborate on the points made by a player or even add new key points if they are important enough and the player has missed them. Again, it should be clear to the players that their individual points should be directed at improving team performance not just their own.

At practice and in games the coach should be giving help to the players on teaching whatever is required to help with the improvement plan and to give feedback on progress. After 6 weeks to 2 months give formal feedback on the original plan. Be very honest and be as positive as you can but if progress has not been made say so bluntly, and don't wait too long to give feedback.

Here's a sample plan. The player's original plan is in black, the coach's additional comments in blue and the coach's feedback comments 6 weeks later in red:

Jim Jefferson

February/08

Jim, we agreed on your five point plan in December and we wanted to give you some important feedback.

Overall, you are contributing to the success of the team and having fun I can see but your lack of physical play is holding your development back as a hockey player and is hurting the team to some extent. You have the talent to do much more to help the team. You are 5th on the team in total points, tied for second in assists, 6th in shots on goal all of which is very good. On the other hand you are 10th on the +/- stat, and 14th on bodychecks/finishing checks.



My feedback is in red below. The original 5 point plan you wrote is in black. My comments in December were in blue. The team needs significant improvement on #'s 1 & 2 please. I'll talk with you about all this soon.

1. Hit More, I have been trying to hit more this year and plan to work on it throughout the year. This is very important key to hockey and also one of the parts I'm the least effective in. Mentally decide that whomever you are checking they will not get by you, and you will win or dislodge the puck, skate in front of or beside him and lower your shoulder into his arms and hands with your stick underneath his at the puck lifting to dislodge the puck from him – not a stick lift alone - see Smart Bodychecking TIP under ALL ZONES.

Part of this is just making up your mind to play more aggressively and physically all over, to stick your nose in there 100% and win one-on-one puck battles with the Under - Stick-Body – Puck technique. Count how many you win or lose.

We have not seen significant improvement in this area. Occasionally we see you trying to apply the squeeze out body checking style we've been teaching to win the puck while avoiding penalties for our team but when you do this you do so rather tentatively, not aggressively and not finishing the check, like you really don't want any physical contact. As we have talked with you about quite a lot, sometimes when their player is coming at you with the puck you simply have to skate into him and dislodge the puck, not just try to poke check him. You may not win the puck but he will have lost it, thus helping our team. This applies particularly to their rushing defencemen gaining speed coming out of their zone and in the neutral zone. It becomes very difficult for our defence to control their high speed players at our blue line if they are not slowed down in the neutral zone by our forwards bodychecking them.

Also, at the ½ boards in our end when you get the puck, we've noticed that as you try to make the pass or chip out play when their D is skating towards you, you are backing up tentatively trying to avoid contact when you should be standing your ground, making the play and applying contact to their player coming at you. Backing up lessens the strength of your pass or chip out and sometimes causes them to win the puck in our zone. A very key part of our team's strategy going into the playoffs is to win the battles along the boards and get the puck out of our zone successfully as we have been reinforcing for a long time now. We need you to step up your game in this area to help the team. You have lots of protective equipment on.

As well, when the puck comes to their D at our blue line when we are 5 on 5 and you are checking him you are not finishing the check by running into him with



speed to make him either shoot the puck to the corner or to affect the accuracy of his shot.

There should be no stick checking in our zone just bodychecking unless there is a hitting from behind risk that must be avoided.

2. Get more confidence from coaches to play on power play and penalty kill. This is not really a skill improvement, but if you are asking what skills you have to improve on to get on the power play to help the team, part of it is in what's in the above. An important part of the power play is the ability to play physically either to win the puck in a one-on-one puck battle or to physically bull your way to the net on a wrap around without bailing out or to stand in front of their net on a screen to get a rebound in traffic or to deflect the puck. Another important aspect is in quick release hard shooting, and fast puck movement on the cycle. You have the puck handling and passing skills and you are an accurate shooter. Practice harder shooting as well. Learn the formations on the power play in the Power Play TIPS under OFFENSIVE ZONE. Winning one-on-one puck battles continues to be something very important for you to work on by being more physical Under Stick-Body-Puck as we have requested. Also continue to work on quick release hard shooting. Shoot prepared to take their bodycheck while you are shooting without pulling up
3. Shoot more when I get the puck sometimes. I try to make the fancy move and not shoot. It is more effective to shoot than to make the fancy deke. Continue working on this please.
4. Be more effective on the faceoff, tie up my man on defence and go to the point on offence. We see improvement here.
5. Think less than do, if I see an open man, pass the puck before it is too late or make the shot. Thinking too much can be bad. Yes, it can be bad if it produces hesitation or slower skating but one of the skills you need to learn is to think and do, both at full speed at the same time because that is what hockey is all about, the combination of physical talent and mental skill to read the situation, to anticipate and choose the best option in full skating flight and to execute the option. Please learn the 3 on 2 plays in the TIPS under Offensive Zone. They will give you and your line mates more options for very good scoring chances. I believe you know some of these plays but review them all again please.

Coach Mark

Some coaches feel asking for 5 improvement points is too much so they only ask for 3.