



“Players love individual and team stats ... focus on the team stats as the most important, but also recognize individual achievements and identify areas for team and player improvements”

HOCKEY ANALYTICS – INTRODUCTION

Players are motivated by and like stats and usually have a lot of fun with them.

Team and individual statistics can also be very helpful to coaches to help motivate improvement, to help to select players for various positions, to help to decide who plays with whom on forward, defence and specialty units, and as a diagnostic tool, to identify team and individual strengths and areas for improvement.

When players first start playing recreational or competitive hockey at a very young age they are very aware of who is scoring and who is not even when no one is keeping score. The reason is obvious – that’s the game - putting the puck in the net more than they do, and players notice that people cheer when it happens. Sure, hockey for almost all players is just recreational and fun and all the elements of “real winning” in minor hockey referred to earlier in this site are very important, but look at the look on the kids’ faces when they score – it’s priceless!

From almost day one, players receive reinforcement from their parents, coaches and team mates every time they score. They come home and say: “We won and I got 2 goals today” or “I got 1 goal and 3 assists today”. The response from whoever is listening is normally very positive. Most parents also ask “Did you have fun?” and “How did the team do?” to deflect away from just self-interest.

Coaches tend to buy into this and congratulate players for the team win after a game and their goals and assists while the players who are great defensive players and goalies sometimes tend to get second fiddle. The better coaches find ways to reinforce good plays that have nothing to do with just the offensive part of the game.

Professional and high level amateur hockey reinforces these “who got the most goals” values too as the top goal scorers and point getters often get to be the first round draft choices, receive the largest contracts, are named one of the three stars, are the featured TV interview and so on.

As players start playing better hockey on competitive teams where they have to try out to make the team, what they have learned at a very young age as they have come along stays with them. The individualistic attitude remains fairly dominant in many, especially the elite players.

So the better minor hockey coaches don’t focus only on individual goals and assists, but also find team statistical and other goals to talk with the players about.

You can make these like a game within a game and refer to them often as you are teaching new skills, systems and tactics.



You can reward outstanding performance, for example by starting the game with the 5 player unit that has achieved the highest standards you have set.

If you want to emphasize defence first, offence second as this site suggests, keep a running total of defensive minded stats as well as offensive, and communicate them to the players often. They will help motivate players to achieve team goals and adjust their play to the team's systems.

Coaches and team managers of minor hockey teams have a lot to do so get other parents who comes to all the games to collect the data for the stats for the team during a game. An added bonus is he/she will feel involved with the team a little more.

Don't over emphasize the importance of stats, however, as we all know stats can sometimes not tell the real story.

So, be sure to communicate to the players that you know that certain stats may be misleading if looked at too precisely and why that is the case. Let them know that normally the positive and negative distortions probably even out over a season and that as a coach you are only using them as one guide and are looking at wide margins of results. Explain you are not looking at the stats simplistically or on a micro basis, for example, Jim has a plus 2 and Ian a plus 4 so Ian is better than Jim.

Whether, when, or what stats you use with your team depends a lot on the level and age you are coaching. I would not suggest it for house league for example or young ages say under 10 years old normally. But for select hockey and up where the players are over 10 years old where there are tryouts to make the team and the hockey is supposed to be reasonably competitive, try some basic stats, but not the more sophisticated statistical analyses that will follow in this website.

Again a word of caution. Don't micro analyze the stats. Look for trends and the wide gaps among players. Let the players have fun with them and use them as an objective guide to challenge your subjective impressions about players. I've had situations, for example, where a defenceman seemed very average to me but the stats said otherwise, calling for a reassessment of the subjective "what my eyes tell me".

Some parents may think this brings too much analysis and professionalism to minor hockey but the kids love it and they can learn some life lessons from it, particularly that when you are playing on a team, the team comes first, and individual accomplishments come second.

And of course another useful life lesson for the players concerns understanding the value of, and the limitations of some statistics.