



“Let them play”

COACHING LEADERSHIP – THE CONTROLLER

Most amateur coaches start their coaching roles at lower levels and younger ages where the players need constant teaching of various fundamental aspects of the game including the physical elements of skating, puck handling, passing and basic systems.

As these coaches progress to higher levels of player skill and hockey IQ, and the coaches themselves become increasingly good at the technical aspects of the game, and as their teams start winning championships, some coaches believe the team’s success is dependent on their constant instruction on and off the ice. Some do the same with their assistant coaches. The smallest of details are constantly emphasized. So much so, that many players are listening for their bench instruction when they are on the ice during games.

Some players tell me that they tune out much of what these coaches instruct, particularly in games.

How does this excessive instruction help the development, confidence and creativity of the players? It does not. Yes, excellence in playing hockey depends on the execution of many details large and small, but coaches must learn to prioritize their instructions, and time their delivery or many players, particularly teenagers will tune them out. Still others will try to play the coaches game and start holding the stick too tight.

Particularly in pre-game talks, if there are too many diagrams and instructions, rather than motivational and inspirational communication, the players’ brains shift to the analytical side and for some that adversely affects their motor skills performance.

If for example, your team constantly has slow starts and lots of technical pre-game instruction, try the opposite for a few games focusing on motivational and inspiration dialogue and body language.

In addition, put yourself in the players’ position. Who likes to get constant do this do that all the time. Some players may feel the head coach has so little confidence in my game that he feels he has to tell me what to do all the time. You do not want your players thinking like that. Over time they will begin to resent your constant so-called help, and it will erode their confidence in you as a coach.

Sometimes these coaches back off a bit and declare “have fun’ to the players, or don’t be afraid of making a mistake but after over analysis and instruction, this communication will not run true particularly if every time players come off the ice after making a mistake the coach calls them out on it. Don’t these coaches realize that most times the player knows what he did wrong and doesn’t need a reminder in front of his team mates.



In summary, prioritize what your team needs to improve, practice it, video it, chalk talk it and in a game for the most part “let them play”.