

Player Development: The 10, 000 Hour Rule

The Problem:

There are some constants when we want to become a maestro in music, dance, coaching, playing or basically anything in life. One of these constants is the 10, 000 hour rule. It has been found that to be amongst the best requires that we spend a lot of time to acquire the skills and understanding of any discipline.

The rule states that it takes 10,000 hours spread over 10 years but most of this time must be put in before the onset of puberty.

To focus on hockey this means that you must start as a child and learn the proper techniques and habits early in your development because we get good at what we practice. It also takes 10,000 repetitions to develop movement patterns that become entrenched i.e. after you learn to walk you no longer have to think about it like a toddler does. So we get very good at what we practice and if we practice with good technique we do things efficiently and if we practice with poor technique we get really good at being really bad. i.e. Most players my age were never shown how to handle the stick properly and are Bottom Hand dominant. This causes the shoulders to be tight, makes moves such as a toe drag almost impossible, causes problems taking passes and makes shooting very inefficient.

Now players get on the ice with teams and depend on the coach to design practices that are efficient and supply enough repetitions with good technique to develop these individual skills. The players who want to excel will take the lessons they learn in practices and do a lot of reps on their own because not many teams get enough practice time for all that individual work.

To play the game well doesn't only require individual skill development, a player also needs good playing habits and game understanding as well as a high fitness level.

Hockey specific development has to address both Health and Skill Related Fitness. If you aren't healthy it doesn't matter how good or strong you are and if you are very healthy and fit you also require the hockey specific training.

Health related fitness includes; ideal body weight, flexibility, muscular strength, muscular endurance, cardiovascular fitness.

Skill related fitness includes; speed, power, reaction time, agility, coordination, balance.

To play hockey we need a good aerobic base (the blood carries lots of oxygen and food to nourish

the body and remove wastes) because the game is mostly anaerobic (a hockey shift is too hard for the aerobic system to supply the energy so stored energy is used but it is limited and produces waste products that tire the muscles). A player needs to recover between shifts and a good aerobic base does two things; one, is that he/she can do more work before dipping into the anaerobic energy and two, aerobically fit people recover more quickly between shifts and between games.

We also have a huge problem in organized youth sport. The children are quitting hockey and other sports when they become teenagers. In hockey it is about 80% who stop playing by 14 years of age. There are lots of reasons but the second biggest reason given by both girls and boys in Bob Bigelow's research (Just Let Them Play) is that they hate going to practice.

What is the Solution?

The first thing is that a youth coach does not have the mission to produce world class players but he/she does have the responsibility to:

1. Create a good environment so that the players and parents want to be there.
2. Instruct good technique so the players are working on the right things and don't have to unlearn and then relearn later.
3. Strive for efficient practices that follow the IAM Rule. 10% instruction, 10% maintenance - moving from place to place, 80% activity.
4. Practices should include:
 - a. *Warm up activities that reinforce individual skills such as skating, shooting, passing.*
 - b. *Goalie specific warm up.*
 - c. *Individual or team play instruction.*
 - d. *Drills to practice the proper technique.*
 - e. *Transition games to isolate the technique at full speed.*
 - f. *Games to reinforce the technique under pressure.*
 - e. *Shoot-out or contest to end practice.*

4. The practices should relate to the skill level and cover the 4 Game Playing Roles.
 - *Role One – individual offensive skills.*
 - *Role Two – team offensive skills.*
 - *Role Three – individual defensive skills.*
 - *Role Four – team defensive skills.*

Of course the individual skills are emphasized more at the younger ages as the tools need to perform the team skills later.

I don't know of any existing hockey program that can supply the time needed and it doesn't have to be all in hockey. The 10,000 hours in 10 years also includes other sports whether individual or team. Any activity that enhances either the health or skill related fitness contributes to development.

Activities like gymnastics are great for balance, agility, strength, coordination, power. Soccer develops game sense, aerobic fitness, reaction time, speed, agility, etc. Baseball requires reaction time, speed, coordination, agility, power. Football needs a lot of muscular strength, agility, power, reaction time. Dance needs flexibility, agility, coordination (also helps you meet girl's later in life)

After Sweden won the 2006 Olympics they asked their team to list what sports they played growing up. The average player participated in 6 sports. Most played tennis, soccer, a form of floor hockey and various other sports. I think there is a danger in the trend to specialize in hockey too early and not do other activities.

Summary:

The goal is not to develop elite athletes but instead to make their hockey experience a good experience and something they want to continue for the rest of their lives. We don't want 80% of the children to quit our sport by the time they are 14. We need to help them acquire the skills so that when they step on the ice they "want the puck and are able to do something constructive with it." The top 1% of the players will go on to the top high school, junior, college and 10% of that 1% on to professional.

We need to change the trend that is in Canada. They quit and stay out of the game until they are adults and then a lot return and play in their own leagues with no coach and no outside pressure to ruin it for them. They love the game. They just want it to be fun again. We have lots of rinks for adults. In most countries they just quit and never play again.

Hockey is a game you can play all your life. It is easy on the joints compared with other sports. I was just at a tournament in Victoria and they had divisions 55+, 60+, 70+, 75+. The oldest player was Mario Marasco who is 87.

If the players we coach are still playing at 87 then we have done one hell of a job.

Credits:

I haven't cited where I got my information from but it has been accumulated over the years in hundreds of hours of attending coaching seminars, nine years of college and university with 3

degrees in education, teaching over 20,000 PE classes from elementary to college, coaching every level since 1972 from 5 year olds to professionals and coaching with people from 3 continents who have played and coached in the NHL, college, Olympics and World Championships.

The goal of the Hockeycoachingabcs site is to deveolp more Mario's who love the game and to help and not hinder players like Dany Heatley and Mason Raymond along their journey to be elite players.