

I am excited to coach the Bantam AA Blue team this season.

I was asked to write an article for the Royals Magazine and think the topic 'What Is Hockey' is relevant to consider as we start a new season. If the coaches and players are going to put their time and effort into becoming 'elite', it is important that we know what skills we need to constantly improve.

I play hockey a few times a week with Rich Preston who was a very good NHL player and was assistant coach with the Daryl Sutter and Mike Keenan in Chicago, San Jose Calgary and Major Jr. Head coach in Regina and Lethbridge. <http://www.hockeydb.com/ihdb/stats/pdisplay.php?pid=4380> I met for coffee with Rich at Tim Hortons and brought my coaching board with me and listened as he showed me his thoughts on how the game should be played.

Rich stressed that it is critical that a player has to learn to play with speed in all aspects of the game. He must be a great skater, have solid habits where he is always ready for the next play and skates so he can see the ice at all times. Players need to have seamless skills which means that you puck handle, pass and shoot while skating without having to glide between each skill. The game is played with team mates vs. opponents and you have to know where you and everyone else is on the ice. So individual skills have to be appropriate to the situation.

'Hockey is a Game of Transition'

As an introduction I have posted one minute of Detroit vs. Pittsburgh video that shows the constant transitions in a hockey game. All of the skating, offensive and defensive skills and good habits are needed to be effective.

The video was prepared by Kai Katajalehto who coaches in Finland.)

Detroit vs. Pittsburgh - a demonstration of the transition between the 3 game situations, and 4 game playing roles in one minute of an NHL game.

The colours are appear at the top right corner when Detroit is:

Yellow – battling for a loose puck.

Green - on offense

Red - on defense.

It is a great example of what really happens in a hockey game and why it is a game of transition. The video link is below.

<http://www.hockeycoachingabcs.com/mediagallery/media.php?f=0&sort=0&s=20140409155804705>

In one minute there are 7 loose puck situations, Detroit is on offense 7 times and Pittsburgh is on offense 4 times. (Detroit was winning the loose puck battles.)

When we look at the game like this we have to re-evaluate our idea of 'What Is Hockey?'

Here are some hockey facts.

In a game between 2 equal teams with good skills you are playing:

- *offense 35% of the time*
- *defense 35% of the time the puck is loose 30% of the time (not on someones stick)*
- *The average for someone to carry the puck is about 2.5".*
- *The average for the team to have the puck is about 4.5".*
- *Each team has possession and loses possession of the puck about 180-200 times during a game.*

So a hockey game is a constant transition between the 4 Game Playing Roles. Every player is always in one of these roles. There is never a time when a player has nothing to do.

Role One: player has the puck.

Role Two: players supports the puck carrier.

Role Three: player checks the puck carrier with either a pressure or contain decision.

Role Four: player gives either close or farther support to the first checker.

If you look at the game in this manner then you realize that good habits like facing the puck, always having your stick on the ice, angling, moving to open ice quickly with the puck and again to open ice once you pass it are essential. It takes a team about 3" to get into good defending position after losing the puck, so quick transition to the attack is essential if you want to attack an un-organized defense as compared to an organized defense.

Good technique - at game speed are the tools you need.

So if you want to become an elite player the understanding that hockey is a game of constant transition will help you reach those goals.

Have a great season!

Tom Molloy – Head Coach – Blue Bantam AA Royals