

10 good tips for our youth coaches!

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by Tommy Boustedt, 25 September 2014



Hockey-Sweden is dependent on many participants for continued success. We are disproportionately successful on the international stage in comparison to the country's size and population. A main reason for the success story is the annual efforts of all the Swedish youth coaches.

We humans often want to emphasize some single intervention or some single person when we try to understand and explain the reason and the background for success and successful achievements. Unfortunately, it's not so simple. It is more about all the peoples' hard work together with the right guiding principles and the right objectives.

Without all of our youth coaches' everyday work, we would never have been a top nation in hockey. Sweden is currently number 1 on the IIHF's rankings of the world's best hockey nations. Unbelievable! But – if we want to keep ourselves there, there is no opportunity to sit back and take it easy. On the contrary, we need to increase the pace/ to raise the bar.

The vast majority – well, almost all – of the Swedish youth coaches are volunteers and unpaid. In spite of this the demands from society are many times higher than those previously on such hired and trained teachers. With this column, I want to pay tribute to the amazing Swedish youth coaches, while hopefully providing some good advice for the coming season.

10 good tips:

1 / Make a plan for next season. Plan how much and what you want to practice. Training Planning is important from Tre Kronor Hockey School and all the way up. Use the Swedish Ice hockey Association's "Ice Hockey's ABCs" as help. There are many useful and good guidelines on how to plan the season.

2 / Gather parents and players and go through how you have planned the season. It's always good to be clear and tell what the season will look like. **It builds a basic foundation in the important relationship with the parent group.** In this area there are good parent education materials to use. They can be found on Swedish Ice Hockey Association's instructional site "Hockeyakademin.se".

3 / Add a lot of time to practicing hockey's basic skills. The five key basics are; I) skating, II) puck handling/feints, III) passing/receiving, IV) shooting/goal scoring, and V) checking/checks. If these areas are not learned during youth hockey times, one may not get it again in adulthood! So – a lot of technique/skill training! Lots of suggested drills are available in the Swedish Ice Hockey Association's educational materials.

4 / Also practice technique/skills "off-ice". Work with imitation of skating and skating jumps, dribbling and passing wooden balls, practice shooting on the shooting platform, practice on checking and battling drills. Do not forget the useful and fun street hockey. Where not only techniques/skills are developed, but also the game concepts and game understanding.

5 / Start with strength training early. Preferably from 7 years of age. When we talk about the right kind of strength training, not "bodybuilding" at the gym. **Please use your own body weight as resistance.** Professor Tonkonogi's research in this area has led to a whole new approach to weight training for children. More detailed advice can be found in the Swedish Ice Hockey Association's educational materials. Check on "Hockeyakademin.se."

6 / Work a great deal with games in various forms. Scrimmage on the whole rink, in the end zones and in small areas are good drills. Play 5 on 5, but also for example 3 vs. 3 and 2 vs 2. Use various conditions such as two pucks, direct/touch passing, direct shot/one-timers to finish off the play, etc. The Swedish coaching legend Åke "The Professor" Lundstrom said and wrote in the 60's that scrimmaging is the best hockey drill.

7 / Creating an environment where players feel joy of playing, skating fun and where you have fun together. It's no secret that **learning works best in an environment where you have fun. Try as a coach to think positively and act positively. Emphasize what is good, and teach the kids to praise and encourage each other.** Everyone needs praise. It is underestimated, and works better than other hocus pocus.

8 / Talk a lot of hockey with the players and encourage the players to talk a lot of hockey with each other. Discuss and explain solutions to various game situations. Listen to the players and learn yourself. Use tactical boards, and the resources available for them. Explain drills and educate the players theoretically in why you are practicing this or that, and what happens in your body when you are working in a certain way.

9 / Teach the players to compete. Use many drills with competitive elements . Relays, shooting competitions, tournaments in small team games, technique/skill courses based on time limits, battling drills on the ice and off-ice, penalty shot competitions, etc. It's not negative to battle and do their best to win, but **it is important to learning both how to win and lose.** The effort is more important than the result. Teach the players to do their best and not worry about the outcome.

10 / See to it that all players have an individual development plan. It's every Swedish players right. Before the season then the coach should sit down with each player and draws up a plan for the player's development. The plan will, for instance contain the player's

strengths and parts to develop in terms of techniques/skills, tactics, physical capacity, psychology, nutrition, games, etc. **Furthermore coaches and players together should set up objectives for the different areas. The plan is evaluated and followed up on a few occasions during the season.** For more info, see Hockeyakademin.se.

<This article was supplied and translated from Swedish into English from my coaching colleague, Kevin Sullivan (USA). It is very timely with the start of a new season upon us. Thanks Kevin! – DH