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Evaluation Anxiety



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As the current hockey season comes to a close, many players and parent's attention turn to the future. The question repeatedly asked is which team will my son or daughter play for next year. This usually brings upon a certain amount of anxiety when the word "tryout" is mentioned.

It seems sometimes that we get very wrapped up in the need for our children make the Tier 1 team, or the AAA team, and that if that doesn't happen, all is lost. This increases the anxiety level for all involved, however that should not be the case. Tryouts, if done correctly, place players in the appropriate competitive category that will increase the participant's enjoyment level. Remember, the primary reason players play the game is to have fun!

Playing and practicing with players of similar ability ensures that each athlete can achieve a certain amount of success. This makes the game fun for all the participants. No one enjoys being the worst player on the ice.

Having been involved in player development and evaluation over the years, the one certainty is, that all players change. Through my experience, the best 8U player is never the best U18 age player. You can almost bank on it! Kids develop at different paces, some rocket out of the gate at an early age and then slow down while others seem to slowly build up momentum and are just hitting stride at 17 or 18. Interest level, dedication and genetics all play factors in a child's growth as a player. Today's tryout is just a snapshot in time. If a child doesn't make the top team this year, there is no reason why they can't the following season. If they enjoy going to the rink each day, then they are certainly going to improve!

The other thing to consider is, what's really in a name? Tier 1, Tier 2, AAA, AA, A...each seems to have a different distinction depending upon where you live in the United States. Just because a team has a AAA or Tier 1 patch on their jacket does mean that that's the level they really play at. There are a number of NHL players that didn't play AAA or Tier 1 hockey growing up.

My best advice to players for a successful tryout is to be yourself. Don't try to change what you do to what you think someone else wants to see. As the saying goes, "dance with the one who brung ya!" In essence do what you do best, work as hard as you can, have fun, and let the chips fall where they may. Hopefully you are then placed on a team that suits your abilities at the current time. In the long run, this should maximize your enjoyment and keep the fun factor high.