

Youth Hockey Success Is a 3-Piece Puzzle: Part I



By Adam H. Naylor, Ed.D., AASP-CC
Lead Consultant
Telos Sport Psychology Coaching
www.telos-spc.com

The values of participation in sport are innumerable for youth. In a well-coached and supportive setting the young athlete gains self-confidence, develops positive character traits, improves physical fitness, and learns how to be a team player. In order for these things to occur, it is important to coach, parent, and play with the “end in mind.” While each athlete and family might have personal motives for participating, there are three ultimate goals of youth sport that are critical to keep in mind...

Fun

The passion to play is at the foundation of all athletic successes. Youth hockey players should laugh lots, be encouraged to experiment on the ice, and simply, be kids. Take a moment to watch a great player on T.V., notice the child-like enthusiasm with which he crashes the net and exuberant celebration that often follows. A good measure of the fun that is being had is by considering who is dragging who to the rink. Does the youth hockey player dream about playing? Does the youth hockey player nag her parents to get her to practice? Even during early morning skates is the player enthusiastic?

With this all being said, a naysayer might suggest that fun is an “ideal” concept that might have to be thrown out when considering players striving for high performance.

This is a shortsighted thought that neglects the performance benefits of fun and enthusiasm:

- A player enjoying himself on the ice learns most quickly because of a willingness to try new skills.
- A player that is enthusiastic on the ice is less stressed and therefore less prone to the tension and distraction that can lead to injuries.
- An athlete that is having fun is confident and confidence leads to competitive successes.

Instilling fun into a youth hockey environment is far more than a utopian ideal, but rather it is a performance enhancer.

As a coach or parent, be aware of a child's enthusiasm on the ice. Maximize activity and minimize standing around at practices, movement and energy equates to youthful enjoyment. Focus on the efforts and successes of each player, encouraging during mistakes as they are learning opportunities. Enthusiasm is contagious, a child's smile and motivated gaze will lead to inspired coaching and enjoyment for all at the rink. Fun is at the foundation of timely player development and creates an environment where families flourish at the rink. Nonetheless, fun alone is only one part of the three piece puzzle...

Join us next month to learn about the second piece of the youth hockey success puzzle.

Adam H. Naylor, Ed.D., AASP-CC the lead consultant for Telos Sport Psychology Coaching (www.telos-spc.com) and is sport psychology coach and center coordinator at the Boston University Athletic Enhancement Center (www.bu.edu/aec). He serves as a consultant to USA/Mass Hockey and works with youth, junior, collegiate, and professional players and coaches. He can be contacted at adam@telos-spc.com.