



Getting Started in Coaching

Is this your first time coaching hockey? Were you recruited to coach on registration day? If so, there is help available.

As a first-time coach, you will have a major influence on your athletes. Not only will you affect the development of their hockey skills and long-term enjoyment of the game, you will also play a role in their development as people. It is important that you have effective resources to guide you through this first season.

The first thing you should do is obtain a copy of the booklet, "Getting Started in Hockey", produced by the Coaching Association of Canada and the Canadian Hockey Association (CHA), and sponsored by 3M. Available through the CHA Resource Centre (1-800-667-2242) or your Branch office, this booklet is a valuable resource.

"Getting Started in Hockey" includes the following features to make your first season a successful one:

- * five (5) sample practice plans
- * checklists to co-ordinate pre-season details, check players' equipment, and maintain your First Aid kit
- * forms to organize your player directory, medical information and Emergency Action Plan

- * information outlining your role as a coach, and tips to help you communicate with players and parents

- * material devoted to teaching basic hockey skills and Fair Play principles

To get you started, obtain the following information from your league convenor as soon as possible:

- age range and level of your players
- number and location of practices and games
- insurance considerations
- special rules for your league

While "Getting Started" is an excellent resource, it doesn't replace coaching certification. Ask your Branch about the next National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) Clinic in your area.

Good luck coach!

For more information on improving your coaching skills, contact the Canadian Hockey Association, 613/748-5613, or the Coaching Association of Canada, 613/748-5624; or write to the associations at 1600 James Naismith Drive, Gloucester, Ontario K1B 5N4.



Hockey Coaching Tips

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Releasing Players

One of the toughest tasks a coach faces is telling players they did not make the team. Although difficult, releasing players must be approached with planning and sensitivity to ensure try-outs are a growth experience, not one which damages players' self-esteem.

The first step is effective planning of your try-out sessions. Develop a clear player selection plan, taking into consideration the number of players, the qualities you are looking for, how to evaluate these qualities, and the ice-time available.

Once your plan is in place, inform players and parents of all details. Outline your player selection plan, including evaluation criteria, objectives of drills and scrimmages and timelines for selection. Clear communication here will prevent misunderstandings later.

Before you make decisions to release players, develop a clear plan to inform them. Never post a list or read the names of players to be released in front of the team. Always meet with each player individually.

Here are suggestions for these meetings:

- be honest and straightforward: tell players why they did not make the team, identifying strengths and weaknesses
- invite questions and provide players with constructive feedback to guide further improvement
- don't make future promises: direct players to other teams, thank them for their efforts, and encourage them to work hard and improve

After releasing players, be prepared to answer questions from parents. Be honest and straightforward with parents, and avoid confrontations.

Remember, try-outs are a vehicle to place players on teams where they will benefit most. Releasing players is never easy, however, it's really important to meet with players one-on-one!

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The Multiple Roles of a Coach

Being well organized and prepared on game day is one of the keys to getting your players to do their best and have fun during games.

Arrive at the arena well before game time. For safety, make sure you have your First Aid Kit and all its supplies. Ensure that your players have all equipment on properly and insist they complete a proper warm-up. Also make sure that referees, timekeepers, scorekeepers and other officials are present and ready to go.

Have a short meeting with your players before the game. Stress only a few points of instruction and encourage them to relax, have fun and do their best.

During the game, remain cool behind the bench by not shouting at officials and opponents. Be positive and enthusiastic with your players, and give corrective feedback in a constructive, quiet manner.

Change lines frequently to let every player participate. Always set a good example for your players.

After the game, insist that all players and staff shake hands with opponents and officials. Meet briefly with your players to offer encouragement and positive feedback, and ask for input regarding team strengths, attitude and areas for improvement. Make announcements about upcoming games and practices, and attempt to say something positive to each player before leaving.

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Checking From Behind: Education and Prevention

The most common cause of serious spinal injuries in hockey is when a player is checked, pushed or bumped from behind, and goes head first into the boards. Such injuries have left some victims paralysed for life.

As a coach, it is your responsibility to ensure that your players develop the proper attitudes and skills to protect themselves and opponents from dangerous hits from behind. Education must begin at the start of the season.

Coaches at all levels, contact and non-contact, must help players develop respect for opponents and rules. Players must be aware of the consequences of checking, shoving, or bumping an opponent who is in the "danger zone", the 3-4 metres of ice in front of the boards. Teach your players to treat opponents as they like to be treated themselves!

Coaches in categories with contact should recognize that checking is an advanced skill which must be taught using proper teaching progressions, and only once the players have mastered all skating skills. Safety must be the first priority when teaching checking skills.

Here are more suggestions:

- ensure your players stretch properly before all games and practices
- make sure your players include exercises to strengthen neck muscles in off-ice training programs
- teach your players the proper technique for receiving checks, and to always be alert when in the "danger zone"
- encourage referees to enforce all rules that penalize checking from behind

For more resources, obtain the videos "Smart Hockey" with Mike Bossy, and "NCCP Checking" from your Branch office or the CHA Resource Centre.

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Risk Management: The First Line of Defence

Sports which involve physical contact, like hockey, always carry the risk of serious injury to participants. Risk management is the process by which amateur hockey organizations identify, assess, minimize or eliminate and insure against the risk of bodily injury or financial loss resulting from their activities.

While insurance is available to protect against unavoidable risks, risk management, or identifying, assessing, and minimizing or eliminating risks is the first line of defence. All those involved in amateur hockey, including coaches, players, parents, administrators, volunteers, and officials, must help to identify and minimize or eliminate risks.

As a coach, you must assume a leadership role on this risk management team:

- instill respect in your players for rules, officials and opponents and teach them to never hit an opponent from behind.

- teach your players technical skills using proper progressions, especially proper techniques for giving and receiving checks and making contact with the ice and boards.

- ensure your players' equipment fits properly, provides quality protection and is adequately maintained.

- develop an Emergency Action Plan to be prepared for any serious injuries.

- ensure players follow proper stretching and warm-up routines before games and practices, and participate in off-ice training programs.

- inspect ice surface, bench area and dressing rooms for potential risks such as debris, protrusions and inadequate lighting.

- encourage officials to enforce all rules.

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The Emergency Action Plan: Safety Requires Teamwork

While serious injuries are rare, the potential always exists in contact sports like hockey. Accidents can happen anywhere, anytime, to anyone, and you must be prepared if a serious injury occurs.

The CHA recommends that all of your team's volunteers obtain formal training in First Aid and CPR. This will provide you with the knowledge and confidence to deal with medical emergencies.

As a coach, you are responsible for developing and implementing an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) for your team. The EAP prepares you in the event of a serious injury.

An EAP requires the co-operation of three individuals:

PERSON IN CHARGE: - most qualified person with training in First Aid and emergency procedures

- tends to injured player and directs others until medical personnel arrive

- familiar with emergency equipment at arena

CALL PERSON: - keeps list of emergency telephone numbers, knows location of telephones and makes call for emergency assistance

- guides emergency crew to arena and in and out of facility

CONTROL PERSON: - secures room for Person In Charge and emergency crew to treat injured player

- discusses EAP with officials, opponents and arena staff

- ensures route for emergency crew is clear and seeks other medical personnel if requested by Person In Charge

Outline the details of your EAP, discuss it with your staff, and keep a copy, including emergency telephone numbers and diagram of the facility, in your First Aid kit. In a medical emergency, time is short, and teamwork is crucial.

For more resources, ask your Branch about the "Safety Requires Teamwork" booklet and video.

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Running a Quality Practice

Are you running a quality practice for your players?

Quality instruction is built on six basic principles: planning what you want to achieve, effective drills, progressional teaching, observing, motivating your players and success in learning by your players.

No two hockey practices are the same. However, all practices should follow these fundamental steps:

1. Set specific objectives for practice.
2. Plan the practice with assistant coaches and discuss with players before going on the ice.
3. Begin with a proper warm-up, starting with stretching in the dressing room or on the ice.
4. Teach and practise new skills and plays early in the practice before players become tired.
5. The practice should conclude with drills which improve players' conditioning and skating skills.
6. After practice, you should evaluate its effectiveness by getting feedback from players and assistant coaches.

Here are more essential ingredients of a quality practice:

- make fun a priority.
- utilize the 100% rule: 100% use of the ice, 100% players participation, 100% effort and 100% coach control.
- keep players active, not passive.
- give clear, concise instructions.
- give positive feedback to team and individuals.
- treat all players equally.
- focus on practising a few areas well rather than trying to cover many areas.
- arrive at the arena early and insist that players be punctual.

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Respect for Rules, Officials, Opponents

Your influence as a coach extends beyond the hockey arena. By instilling respect in your players for rules, officials and opponents, you will help them develop as athletes, and more importantly, as people.

Rules are necessary for fair and fun competition. You must teach your players the importance of rules and abide by the rules yourself.

Make it clear that you expect your players to obey the rules at all times. For example, you must emphasize that players should never hit an opponent from behind, or engage in illegal stickwork.

Following the rules also means developing respect for the officials who enforce them. Officials are trained individuals who make the game more fair and fun for all.

You must start by respecting and accepting officials' calls, even if you think they are wrong. If you must address an official, this should be done in a professional manner after the game, away from your players.

Think about inviting an official to one of your practices to discuss the rules, or have your players officiate during practices. This will emphasize that officials are human and make mistakes just like everyone else.

Your players must understand that opponents also demand respect and without them, there would be no game. Players should never injure or ridicule an opponent, and should recognize good performances by opponents, extending good sportsmanship at all times.

Players learn best by example. The example you set not only affects their long-term participation in hockey, but also their development as individuals.

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Teach Attitudes First, Skills Second

What is the First Commandment of Coaching? If you said winning, better read on.

Fair Play is the First Commandment, and is based on this Golden Rule: treat others as you would like to be treated yourself. You and the parents of your players are responsible for instilling this Fair Play attitude.

Everyone must show respect for rules, referees, teammates and opposing players and coaches. You can start by setting a good example. Don't argue with referees or opposing players and coaches, and teach your players to never check or hit in a manner that might cause injury to an opponent.

There's nothing wrong with winning, but overemphasizing it can lead to decreased enjoyment and restricted participation for players, and result in undesirable behaviour and high anxiety levels. Never ridicule or condemn your players for making mistakes or losing games, and don't overplay your talented players. All players have a right to fair ice time.

Always consider the welfare of your players first, by making certain they are participating in a safe environment. Ensure that facilities, equipment and practices are safe and appropriate to the age and ability level of your players. Downplay toughness and intimidation, and stress that players should never hit an opponent from behind.

Teach attitudes first, skills second. Good coaches emphasize having fun, developing positive values, personal development and satisfaction, and improving health and fitness.

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Designing A Yearly Plan

Do you have a plan for this season?

Whether you coach a house league or competitive team, planning is an important part of your role as a coach. Designing a yearly plan at the start of the season allows you to organize games, practices, training and socials, and establish and monitor long and short-term goals.

Start by organizing pre-season meetings with players, parents and support staff. Gain an understanding of each group's expectations for the season and seek their input regarding issues like tournament and practice schedules. It is especially important to consider what your players want out of the season when you establish team goals.

Here are some suggestions:

- establish long and short-term goals around major events like playoffs and tournaments: depending on the age and skill level of your players, you can establish goals such as skill development, wins and losses, goals for and against and penalty minutes

- divide your plan into three sections: pre-season, in-season and post-season

- depending on the age and skill level of your players, establish training goals, including physical, mental and tactical preparation and technical development

- the planning process never ends: be flexible and make appropriate adjustments throughout the season, giving players the chance to evaluate their own performance and development

- ensure that fun and fair play are always part of your plan

- use your plan to motivate and evaluate your team and provide players with specific feedback on their progress

A yearly plan prepares and organizes you for the season, which enhances the hockey experience for all involved.

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Developing Team Rules

Does your team have a code of conduct?

As a coach, you must establish a set of team rules so that players are aware of your expectations both on and off the ice. This must be done at the start of the season, to ensure fairness and consistency.

On-ice rules should emphasize respect for opponents, rules, officials, teammates and other Fair Play principles. Team rules must insist that players should never check, bump or push an opponent from behind or use other dangerous tactics which might injure an opponent or teammate.

On-ice rules should also emphasize respect, and provide specific behavioural expectations for players when they are in the dressing room or on overnight trips to tournaments or games.

Here are some helpful suggestions:

- have a meeting to ask for players' input when developing team rules: players will be more committed to rules they have helped design

- never lecture or embarrass a player for breaking rules: speak to the player individually, away from the team, emphasizing that when one player breaks the rules, it hurts the entire team

- be consistent and impartial when enforcing rules: make no exceptions and follow through with appropriate action in all cases

- never use physical punishment such as skating laps or push-ups as these are legitimate training techniques and players should not learn to dislike or avoid them: for punishment, restrict involvement in something the player enjoys or values

Communicate and enforce team rules clearly and consistently, and you will help your players both on the ice and in their development as individuals.

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Bench Management

Are you a good bench manager?

Bench management is your ability to organize activities during a game and is an extension of effective pre-game planning.

Bench management begins with establishing clear roles for all support staff. The Head Coach must be in complete charge of the bench and players and make all final decisions, while Assistant Coaches and other staff act in supportive roles.

Bench responsibilities will vary depending on the strengths of your support staff. The Head Coach can take full responsibility for changing lines, or delegate authority for handling defence or forwards to assistants. Whatever you decide, ensure everyone knows their role.

Here are some suggestions:

- supervise your team during the warm-up, ensuring that all players complete proper warm-up routines and goaltenders are warmed-up with safe shots of increasing difficulty
- use rink diagrams for quick, visual explanations

- remain positive, relaxed and in control: your players will reflect your personality

- only the Head Coach or captains should address officials, and this must be done in a controlled, professional manner

- ensure players are ready for all line changes and see that all players receive fair and equal ice time

- never contradict support staff, it only confuses the players: address support staff individually after the game, if necessary

- all individual and team feedback should be positive and specific

The way your players perform and conduct themselves is a reflection of your bench management skills.

For more ways to improve your coaching, contact your Branch office about the next NCCP Clinic in your area.

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Equal and Fair Ice Time

Do you ensure that your players receive equal and fair ice time?

All players deserve equal and fair ice time during games and practices. Players play for fun, and would rather get equal and fair ice time on a losing team than sit on the bench of a winning one.

As a coach, you have a responsibility to encourage players to be the best they can be, and provide equal opportunities for them to develop self-esteem and sport skills. When you play your talented athletes more often, you make other players feel less important and deny them the chance to improve their skills.

Hockey is an excellent vehicle to make players feel valued and experience success.

Here are some suggestions:

- expose all players to special situations (power plays, penalty killing): experiencing both success and failure in these situations is part of sport

- provide players opportunities to assume leadership roles by allowing all to be a captain or an assistant during the season

- when planning practices, ensure that all players are always active during every drill and avoid games involving elimination: no-one learns anything by standing around

- if players, parents or support staff resist your efforts to provide equal icetime, remind them to keep the game in perspective: players play for fun, fitness, and to develop life and hockey skills

Winning games can be fun, but not when it deprives players of equal and fair ice time. Give everyone a chance, be supportive and patient, and hockey will be more rewarding for you and your players.

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Putting Fun Into Your Practice

Did you know that fun is an essential ingredient in an effective hockey practice?

Do you include fun when you develop your practice plans?

While you should establish objectives for your practice such as skill and fitness development, don't forget the main reason players participate is for enjoyment. Fun can be an element in every component of your practice, including warm-up, instruction, skill practice and fitness.

Although fun should be incorporated throughout your practice, some coaches use specific games, drills, or novel equipment to motivate players and stimulate interest. But just because a game or drill is fun, does not mean it is unrelated to objectives like skill development.

Games can be designed to incorporate fundamental skills such as skating, puck control and checking.

Here are some suggestions:

- beginning skaters can develop skating skills through games like push ball, which forces players to bend knees to move a ball, and kick ball, which allows players to develop balance and agility by playing soccer on ice

- skating skills can also be developed with games like tag, British Bulldog, red light/green light and relay races

- players can enhance puck control skills through games like 2-on-1 and 1-on-1 keep away

- players learning checking skills can practice contain and control through games like dot tag, with and without a puck, and crease tag

Even during fun drills, always use the 100% rule: 100% use of the ice, 100% player participation, 100% effort and 100% coach control.

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Teaching On-Ice Awareness

Are your players always aware and alert on the ice?

Developing awareness/alertness not only improves players' abilities to play both with and without the puck, but helps players avoid dangerous situations and prevent serious injuries. By being aware and alert, players can anticipate their next move and improve their abilities to read and react.

When backchecking, it is important for the defender to be aware of the position of the puck, the developing play and the opponent being checked. By using the individual defensive tactic "head on a swivel", the defender glances alternately at the puck and opponent to read and react to the developing play.

On offence, awareness helps players with and without the puck maximize offensive options. Reading the play ensures the puck carrier is aware of the positioning of teammates and defenders in order to react with appropriate individual or team offensive tactics. Reading the play allows players without the puck to provide support for the puck carrier by creating passing options, outnumbering defenders or adding movement and balance to the attack.

To prevent serious injuries, players must be alert when in the "danger zone", the 3-4 metres in front of the boards, and should keep moving when in this area. Players should also be aware of opponents in the "danger zone", and never check, shove or bump an opponent who is in this area.

To develop awareness, utilize drills which force players to read and react to offensive and defensive pressure and make players aware of the "danger zone".

The videos "Smart Hockey" and the "Goals" series are excellent resources, available through the CHA Resource Centre (1-800-667-2242).

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Body Contact and Body Checking

If you coach hockey which involves body contact, one of your greatest challenges is teaching players proper checking skills.

Checking is an advanced skill which must be taught only after players master skating skills. To ensure players learn in a safe, non-threatening environment, checking should be taught using a four-step progression: positioning/angling, stick checks, body contact and body checking.

In positioning/angling, teach players to read the degree of puck control and control skating speed to force the puck carrier in the desired direction. The angle and speed of approach puts the defender in a position to utilize stick checks like the poke, sweep and hook checks and the stick press and lift.

Progress to body contact only when players can control and contain a puck carrier without body contact. To develop contact confidence, match players in size and ability and use drills like bumping in pairs. Players should never hit opponents by going in the opposite direction or push opponents into the boards.

Body checking should only be taught to skilled, mature players. You are responsible for instilling respect in your players, teaching them to never hit opponents from behind and to keep their arms, elbows and sticks down.

Teach players proper techniques for the shoulder, hip and roller checks and the hit and pin. Ensure your players are always aware of the “danger zone”, the 3-4 metres in front of the boards, and teach them to absorb checks with the arms and body.

For more resources, contact your Branch about the video, “NCCP Checking”.

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Angling and Positioning

Do you spend enough time teaching your players effective defensive skills?

Angling/positioning skills allow a defender to check without using body contact, and are the foundation of all checking skills. Players must learn effective angling/ positioning skills in younger categories before progressing to categories with body contact and body checking.

In angling/positioning, a defender uses controlled skating and reads the degree of puck control to force the puck carrier in the desired direction. Angling/positioning must only be taught once players have mastered all skating skills.

Here are some suggestions:

- teach players to angle from the inside-out, using angle and speed to force the puck carrier to the outside, where there is only one route of escape and appropriate stick checks can be applied

- players should use a controlled angle approach when the puck carrier has full puck control and pressure when the puck carrier has less control

- emphasize that players should control skating speed, keep their feet shoulder width apart, head up and stick on the ice

- stress that players must be aware of the “danger zone”, the 3-4 metres in front of the boards, and to never push, bump or shove an opponent from behind

To develop these skills, use drills where players must play one-on-one against a puck carrier coming out of the corner, using angling/positioning to force the attacker to the outside. This can be repeated in all four corners.

For more information, contact your Branch or the CHA Resource Centre (1-800-667-2242) about the video, “NCCP Checking”.

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Working With Your Defence: Initiating The Attack

To develop effectively, defence players must practice the specialized skills of their position. Do you consider defence's special needs when preparing your practice plans?

The goal for defence in the defensive zone is to gain possession of the puck and initiate the offensive attack. In order to initiate effective breakouts, defence must develop skating, puck control, passing, and read and react skills.

Teach your defence to move the puck to an open teammate as soon as they gain possession, using direct passes whenever possible. Defence should never hesitate when passing to an open teammate, and should use the net as a screen to avoid forecheckers if all teammates are covered.

Here are a few more tips:

- teach defence to use head and body fakes when making breakout passes to deceive forecheckers and to use puck protection tactics such as deception and skating agility to maintain possession

- defence should read forechecking pressure by looking back over their shoulders when skating back for the puck

- encourage defence to carry the puck as a last alternative, and only when there is little or no pressure from defenders

Here are some suggestions for practice:

- use passing drills which force defence to pass and receive while skating forward, backward and laterally: they should never stand still with the puck

- to develop read and react skills, utilize drills where the defence must skate back to their own end to retrieve a puck, read pressure applied by a forechecker and react with appropriate tactics

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Working With Your Forwards: The Offensive Triangle

Do your forwards attack in triangles?

One of the fundamentals of offence is the principle of support. Support requires players away from the puck to include themselves in the attack by creating passing options for the puck carrier. Players must read opponents' checking intentions and the puck carrier's movements and react accordingly.

Triangulation is a formation in which two attackers position themselves around the puck carrier to create an offensive triangle. This formation provides support by creating two passing options for the puck carrier while adding width and depth to your team's attack.

Offensive triangles provide your attack with more puck control, which leads to more scoring chances, and ultimately, more goals. Coaches must begin teaching triangulation to players at a young age by developing read and react skills through a variety of drills.

Here are some ideas to teach your players about triangles:

- design and implement a drill progression where players drive to the net alone, attack in pairs, and in forward lines, emphasizing that players must read the intentions of their linemates and react accordingly to form offensive triangles

- teach players to use effective communication techniques on the ice, such as shouting, eye contact, nodding the head or other body language, especially when passing and receiving passes

- insist that players never try to force passes through a defender's skates or stick or into areas with strong defensive support

For more resources on triangulation and read and react, obtain a copy of the "Goals!" video series, available through your Branch or the CHA Resource Centre (1-800-667-2242).

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Developing Offensive Creativity

You can make your team's offense more effective by improving your players' creativity.

The object of offensive play is to create high percentage scoring opportunities. By developing creativity, through the use of tactics which create time and space, players will enjoy more scoring opportunities.

Teach your players the six keys to scoring goals:

- anticipate and react by being aware of the position of the goaltender, net, puck, opponent and teammates.
- concentrate on shooting or creating an opportunity when in traffic.
- use effective positioning to time moves into openings at the same instant as the puck.
- be determined; don't be prevented from driving to the net; be ready for rebounds and loose pucks, and don't turn away after taking a shot on net.
- be unpredictable; develop a large variety of dekes and shots.
- release the puck quickly after receiving passes or making dekes.

Players must develop good one-on-one individual tactics like change of pace, inside-out and outside-in skating fakes, and fakes using the head, upper body and lower body. Tactics like faking shots, looking away, driving to the net, walkouts and delaying also help create offensive advantages.

Players must also develop the ability to read and react to changing situations. The puck carrier must read open ice, defensive pressure and passing options, and execute the best tactic. Other offensive players must decide whether to back up the puck carrier, create a passing option, set a screen or help create a numerical advantage.

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Top 20 Hockey Coaching Tips

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3. The Multiple Roles of a Coach
4. Checking From Behind: Education and Prevention
5. Risk Management: The First Line of Defence
6. The Emergency Action Plan: Safety Requires Teamwork
7. Running a Quality Practice
8. Respect for Rules, Officials, Opponents
9. Teach Attitudes First, Skills Second
10. Designing A Yearly Plan
11. Developing Team Rules
12. Bench Management
13. Equal and Fair Ice Time
14. Putting Fun Into Your Practice
15. Teaching On-Ice Awareness
16. Body Contact and Body Checking
17. Angling and Positioning
18. Working With Your Defence: Initiating The Attack
19. Working With Your Forwards: The Offensive Triangle
20. Developing Offensive Creativity