Player Evaluation

Player evaluation is often thought of only with regards to selecting players for a team that will compete for the upcoming season. An important aspect that is missing in many cases is that most Minor Hockey Associations do not use player evaluations as a tool for coaches to develop players based on their individual strengths and weaknesses. Placing players on teams is one thing, but what you do with players once those selections are made is another. Whether you have one team or multiple teams in each category, player evaluation can and should still be used as a way of developing players.

Having a solid player evaluation process in place can help make the process much easier. Not only will it give the association a reference point in dealing with parents, it will also give you and your coaches a starting point to determine where your players are at skill wise. This allows you to begin using Hockey Canada’s programs to help players, coaches and parents in the areas of skill development.

As mentioned, there are two basic types of evaluations:

1) Evaluations during pre-season for use in selection of players to teams.
2) Evaluations at the end of the season as a post season report card.

Although both are important, it is what is done with the information collected that matters most. After using the evaluations to select teams, the information should be passed along to coaches so that they can see what the strengths and weaknesses of those players are, and implement a plan to help develop those players over the course of the season.

Another key point is to post the criteria of what the evaluators are looking for so that parents can see what the players are being judged on. The criteria should be clearly defined, objectively assessed and justifiable. A great set of evaluations tools that can be used throughout the year is the Hockey Canada Skills Testing program. For more information on that, consult the Hockey Canada website at www.hockeycanada.ca

Since the vast majority of team and player selections have already been made at this point in the hockey season, it becomes paramount to focus on the opportunity to use evaluation techniques and information with the specific goal of improving and developing individual skills. Having accurate information on player strengths and weaknesses enables an effective coach to plan and implement the a development program that will ensure a player graduates his or her team with improvements necessary to compete the following season.

There are several key factors to remember when instituting an effective and useful evaluation plan:

When should player evaluation sessions take place?
It is important to have a set schedule and be able to inform parents and players of when the sessions will be taking place and what the plan is for further sessions. Aside from team selection in the pre-season, some specific player evaluation on skills needs to take place as well. The same information can be used for both purposes.
What is being evaluated?
All individual skills should be evaluated. Certain group tactics can also be evaluated depending on the age and skill level of the players you are working with. Hockey Canada’s Skill Testing program provides a great guideline framework for evaluation.

Who should do the evaluations?
There are three main groups that may need to be involved, depending on the time of year and the intended use of the information (team selection or skill development):

1) On-ice coaches to take players through the sessions.
2) Off-ice evaluators who are responsible for evaluating every player on the ice. This is particularly important for team selection.
3) Off-ice administrators who are responsible for tracking evaluations, contacting players and parents, and scheduling sessions.

How will the information be used?
Players that are tested will be able to access their results and identify how they compare to players in similar age categories based upon Hockey Canada standards through the Skills Testing program. Coaches should meet with their players and inform them of their results. At the same time, they can communicate a plan to help enhance skill deficiencies throughout the season.

Player evaluation is the foundation for skill development in minor hockey. Without being able to address a player’s individual strengths and weaknesses, a coach will not be able to fully take advantage of the opportunity to help make that individual a better player. Evaluator objectivity, clear and concise lines of communication, effectively run ice sessions, definitive roles and a succinct reflection and feedback mechanism will all play a vital role in developing and building an effective player evaluation process.

Player evaluation with regards to both placement and development is a process – effective management of the process will make a young players experience in hockey a more positive one.