



## Bench Management

BENCH MANAGEMENT is a challenging undertaking for coaches of all levels. Hockey is the one of the most challenging, dynamic and interactive games of all of the major sports.

As a result, coaches need a game plan, strategy and structure to develop their teams'.

### Strategies to Coach the Game:

"**You can't coach what you can't see!!**", is the premise behind effective Bench Management. Learning to see is a difficult challenge for coaches as we become hypnotized by the puck and are impacted by all of the other variables within the game (line changes on the fly, penalties, equipment problems.....). It is ironic to consider that 99% of the game is played away from the puck and yet 99% of the feedback we provide to players is when they have the puck or are in close proximity to it!! We've summarized some thoughts and ideas on Effective Bench Management and we hope these will assist you in your coaching journey.

1. Be specific in your feedback and frame all information in a positive way. **RELENTLESSLY POSITIVE!!!!** USA Volleyball has also come up with the concept of "Feed-forward...which leads to guided discovery". Absolutely brilliant.
2. Adapt your feedback and teaching to the learning style of the player. Some players are audio learners, other visual and still others kinaesthetic. Great coaches recognize how their players learn and adapt their teaching accordingly.
3. Provide unconditional support. Regardless of how badly the player screws up coaches will always respect them as a person and ensure the player and coach relationship is intact.
4. Find Teaching moments and avoid nattering and stating the obvious. Players will tune out coaches that continually repeat cliches (work hard, skate,.....).
5. Link games to practices and practices to games. Many times there is a significant disconnect between the two.
6. Be open minded and willing to learn. Once you think you know a lot, it is time to step away from the game .Continue to seek out resources and ideas to improve yourself.
7. Commentate to the players on the bench as the game is going on the things that you see that are working well. At times, coaches spend all of their time yelling instructions to players on the ice who are in the middle of the play. Ask yourself if you want to develop dependent order takers or creative decision makers that can read and react.
8. Lay out the roles on the bench for all coaches. Coaches need to know what they are responsible for: Divide and conquer.
9. Utilize a consistent vocabulary and ensure all coaches are on the same page. Coaching cue cards with offensive and defensive keys to success help guide coaches when they have brain lock on the bench.
10. Present a "Positive" Bench Image. Cool, controlled and professional. Be smart with language use and swearing. Emotional control is challenging but at the same time critical.
11. If you bench or sit a player they need to understand why. Ensure you don't make assumptions and be clear and concise in your explanation. Saying "they'll figure it out", is wrong.
12. Manage your shift length and line changes effectively.
13. Have a clear and precise plan for each game with a maximum of three keys to success. Reference these keys throughout the game and build on them. More than three items to focus on is too much information for many young players.
14. Know the officials and ensure you have one coach doing the communicating with the officials, versus having three coaches all yelling throughout the course of the game.
15. "Make mistakes", attitude on the bench is important. Coaches want to eliminate stress and not create more pressure. Players that are afraid of failure are paralyzed and will not perform at their optimal level.
16. Look ahead with respect to line changes and who is out next. Be as proactive as possible versus reactive.
17. Watch away from the puck. Specifics like gap control are at times missed as coaches become so involved in watching the play.
18. Cheat on the change!! Players need to be on the ice as quickly as possible and not standing at the door waiting for it to open.
19. If speaking on the bench between periods be quick and to the point with your observations. Have the goaltending coach speak to the goaltender.
20. Utilize the "Lets try, how about, next time....." and stay away from "No, you can't, stop....." adages.
21. "What you do speaks so loudly, I can't hear what you are saying".
22. Remember that it is easy to find mistakes. Can you provide solutions? Providing solutions goes way beyond verbal feedback during the game and involves creating drills which allow your players to work on their weaknesses.
23. In hockey there are thousands of situations that occur over the course of the game. Don't focus on teaching each and every situation, focus on teaching the fundamentals which allow the player to assess every situation and and react accordingly. "Don't prepare the path for the player, prepare the player for the path".
24. Excellence is not an accomplishment, it is a spirit and a process.
25. Never use referees as an excuse. Good coaching is eliminating excuses and creating reasons to succeed versus reasons to fail.
26. Set your dressing room so all line combinations, defensive pairings and goaltenders are sitting together. The dressing room is not a play pen and learning to

prepare prior to games is critical.

27. Keep coaching regardless of the circumstances (blow out).
28. Never compromise your values and be a great person. If you become frustrated and emotional the step back, gather yourself and think prior to acting.
29. Make contact with every player, every game.
30. Be yourself and don't attempt to coach within a style that doesn't suit your personality.

## **DEALING WITH OFFICIALS**

One of our greatest challenges as coaches is working effectively with the officials. The game is intense, emotional and many times we become caught up in every off-side call, penalty and so forth. We have a few thoughts on dealing with officials to help coaches navigate the waters as effectively as possible.

1. Ask yourself the following question? "When do referees have an opportunity to practice"? Frankly, they don't. Their practice is our games!!! Many young officials take a one day course and are expected to execute within a pressure filled environment with parent's yelling and so forth. As coaches, we need to realign our expectations and keep the game in perspective.
2. Ask yourself a secondary question? "What if that was my son or daughter out on the ice officiating? How would I respond when people are not pleased and express their displeasure in various ways?"
3. Introduce yourself at the start of the game to the officials. Step down from the bench to ice level, shake hands, find out their name.
4. Avoid nattering and barking out opinions over and over as the play occurs. Nobody likes to be nattered at and continually told what to do. Allow the officials to make the call and allow them to do their job.
5. Designate which coach does the communicating with the official. Many benches have two to three coaches in this role which is confusing and overwhelming for the officials.
6. Don't expect the officials to change their calls!! Many times we may believe we can influence the calls, after the fact, and we fruitlessly waste our time and energy in trying to do so.
7. Never use the officials as an excuse. Doing this removes accountability from your team and lays responsibility outside of the things within your control. The officials very seldom cost your team the game. If the officials become your focus during the games then expect your players to focus on officials as well. This will lead to huge problems.
8. Your perspective and what you see from the bench is much different than what the official may see due to the altered sight lines. Keep this in mind.
9. If you find yourself becoming emotional and upset then step back and collect yourself prior to doing something you regret.
10. As a role model know that all of the players and parents are watching what you say and how you say it!
11. Refereeing is a tough job and we all know it. We play a key role in growing the game and influencing young officials to stay in the game, improve and develop. As a result, we all win!!