

TOTAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT MODEL

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Every hockey person in the world must understand the importance of the Player Development Pyramid. This model provides organizations, coaches, players, parents, and facilitators the framework and outline needed for the successful implementation of all youth programs. The strength of any triangle is the base. The base provides the structure and foundation for all other supporting elements. This is the whole concept behind the Player Development Pyramid.

Let's take a closer look:



Player Development Model created by Hockey Canada

It is vital that coaches teach from the bottom of the pyramid and move up the progression only after the TECHNICAL SKILLS and INDIVIDUAL TACTICS of their hockey players are mastered.

Understanding the Pyramid:

- **Technical Hockey Skills:** The base provides the structure and foundation for all other supporting elements. Our base is Skating, Puck handling, Passing, and Shooting. These are the fundamental skills required in order to play hockey. Specifically, skating – every other technical hockey skill, puck handling, passing, and shooting is in some way related to skating.

- **Individual Tactics:** A player using a combination of technical skills in order to create and or take away the advantage of an opponent. A tactic may be classified as offensive and/or defensive. For example, one on one, an offensive fake and driving to the net.

- **Team Tactics:** A collective action of two or more players using technical skills and/or individual tactics to create an advantage over their opponents. An example of a team tactic would be a numerical advantage, 3 vs. 2 or 2 vs. 1.

- **Team Play Systems:** A pattern of play in which the movement of all players is integrated in order to accomplish an offensive or defensive objective. An example of a system would be 2 – 1 – 2 forecheck. F1 plays body, F2 supports, and F3 plays high and provides safety valve. D1 and D2 hold blueline.

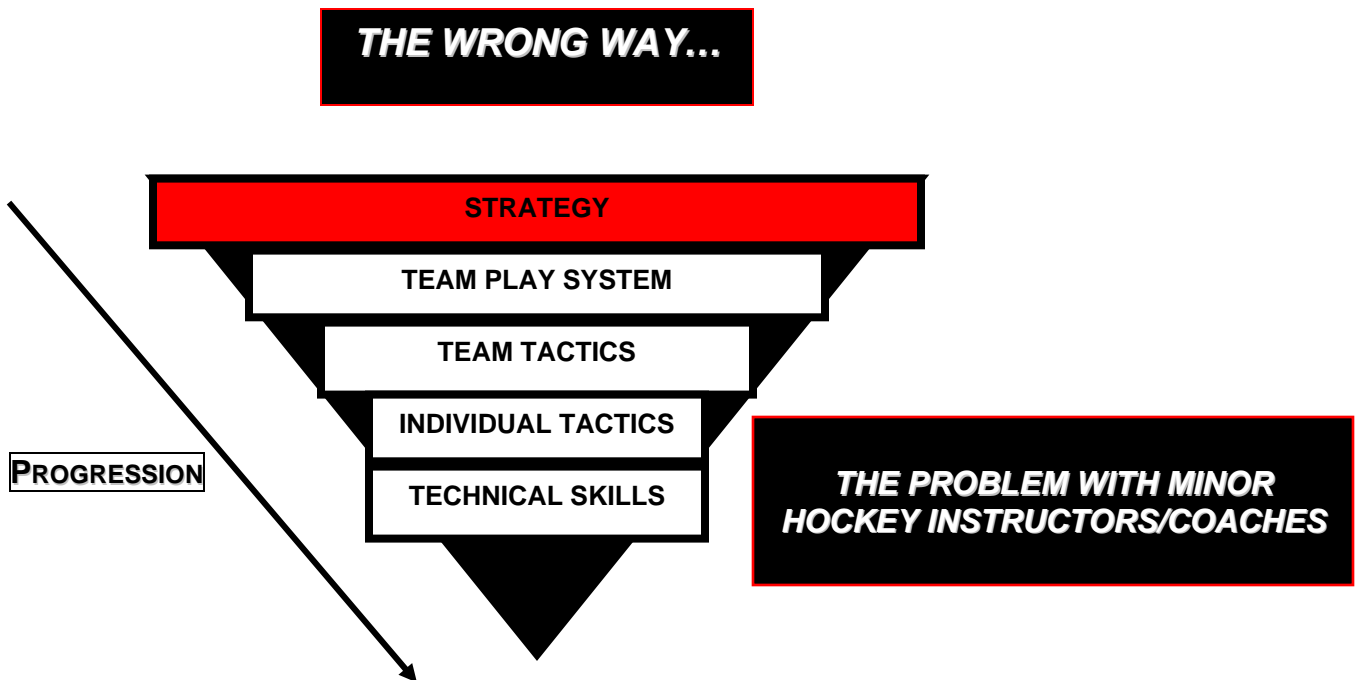
- **Strategy:** The selections of team play systems and tactics that take advantage of the opponent's weaknesses. How do we counteract a non-effective/effective team play system? An example of a strategy would be counteracting a 2 – 1 – 2 forecheck system. Where is pressure coming from? What are the D options? Forwards?
 - This pyramid was developed by some of the best hockey minds in the world.
 - The natural progression at the base of the triangle emphasizes the development of fundamental skills. Fundamental skills are the foundation of each player's success.
 - As you move up the progression of the pyramid, more emphasis is placed on individual tactics. Once a player has developed the skills of skating and puck handling the individual tactics can be learned.
 - Moving up the pyramid, players perform drills that will develop team tactics and systems. The bantam and midget levels of hockey emphasize team performance practices.
 - Strategy is the peak of the pyramid. It sets the style of play that will combat the opposition. The coach determines the strategy based upon their own philosophy, age of the players and skill level of the team.

Key Takeaways:

- ❑ Experts have shown that the critical stages of skill development are at the youth age.
- ❑ If coaches concentrate on only teaching systems, strategies and winning hockey games, than skill development will be non-existent.
- ❑ If we teach systems and strategies to youngsters who can't skate, handle the puck, pass or shoot than we are setting them up for future failure.
- ❑ Team skills will improve with age and maturity. Coaches need to focus on technical skills at the early stages of development.
- ❑ Without a proper foundation, it all comes tumbling down.

A big problem facing minor hockey organizations is the view our coaches have on the development progression of the pyramid. Because they place such an emphasis on winning hockey games, there focus is shifted to the peak. We have mite and squirt coaches teaching complex team tactics and systems. When the players they have coached are ready to advance to the peewee, bantam, and midget program levels, they are skill poor. This is why we have travel peewee players that can't skate backwards, bantam "AA" players that can't use their backhand, and midget/high school players that can't stop in both directions effectively.

Let's take a closer look at the wrong way these coaches view the pyramid:



Because of the emphasis minor hockey organizations put on winning, coaches begin to look at the development pyramid in this way. In my opening remarks, I mentioned that the strength of any triangle is the base. The base provides the structure and foundation for all other supporting elements. Here we don't have a base, therefore players don't develop. The structural foundation of the model can't be based on strategy, systems, and team tactics. We may produce short-term wins, but we are not producing long-term highly skilled hockey players.

As coaches, players, parents, and facilitators in minor hockey organizations, we need to be constantly benchmarking the development of our players with the correct model. Here is the breakdown that Hockey Canada recommends coaches use to allocate practice time with youth teams.

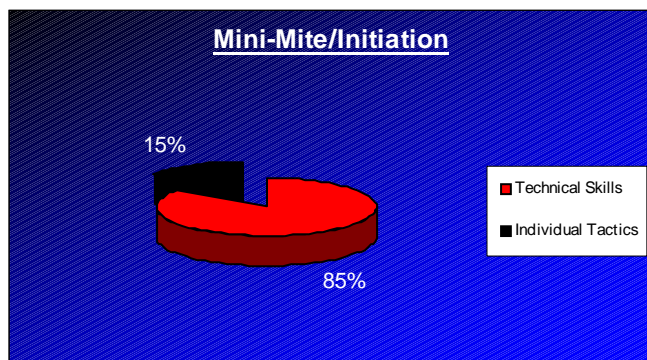
Level	Age	Technical Skills	Individual Tactics	Team Tactics	Systems	Strategy
M-M/Initiation	5-6 yrs.	85	15			
Mite/Novice	7-8 yrs.	75	15	10		
Squirt/Atom	9-10 yrs.	50	20	15	10	5
Peewee	11-12 yrs.	45	25	10	10	10
Bantam	13-14 yrs.	40	15	20	15	10
Midget	15-18 yrs.	35	15	20	15	15

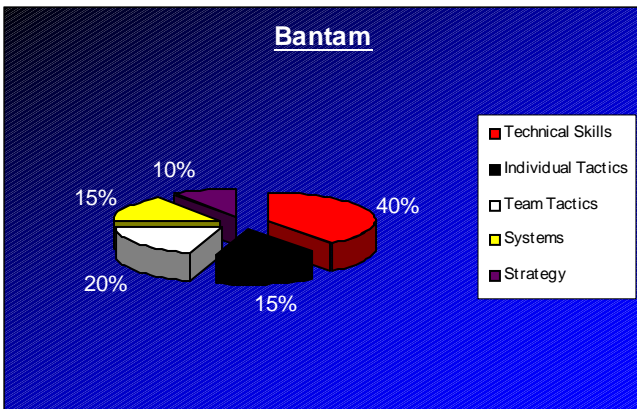
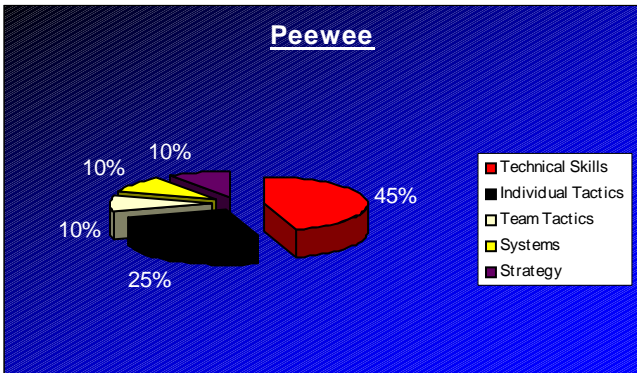
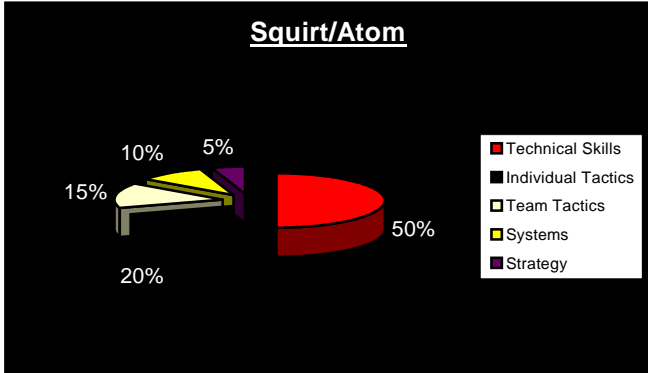
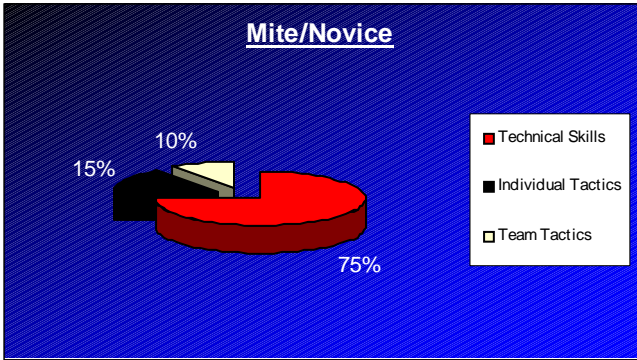
* Technical Skills, Individual Tactics, Team Tactics, Systems, Strategy (#'s in %)

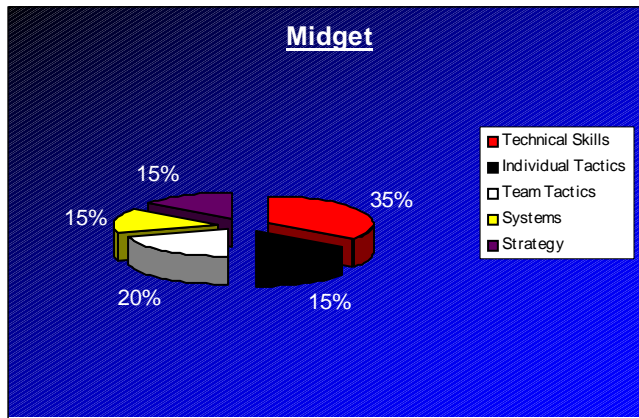
* Statistics - Hockey Canada

Therefore at the squirt level, coaches should spend 50 percent of practice time on technical skills. In a 60-minute practice, this model shows that time spent on technical skills should be 30 minutes. As players move up to the peewee, bantam, and midget program levels, a greater focus is on team tactics, systems, and strategy. Please see exhibit A for a breakdown of this analysis

Exhibit A (practice allocation based on the HC Player Development Pyramid):







* *Technical Skills, Individual Tactics, Team Tactics, Systems, Strategy (#'s in %)*

* *Statistics - Hockey Canada*

Analysis prepared by Misha Donskov

Over the years numerous task forces have studied the issues related to the development of hockey players. During the last decade, the dramatic increase in the number of European players that are playing at the elite level sent inquiring minds overseas to study a very different philosophy of player development.

From 2001-2003, I had the opportunity to play semi – professional hockey in Norway and Sweden. I also worked with coaches and trainers teaching the game of hockey. From my experiences I found the following:

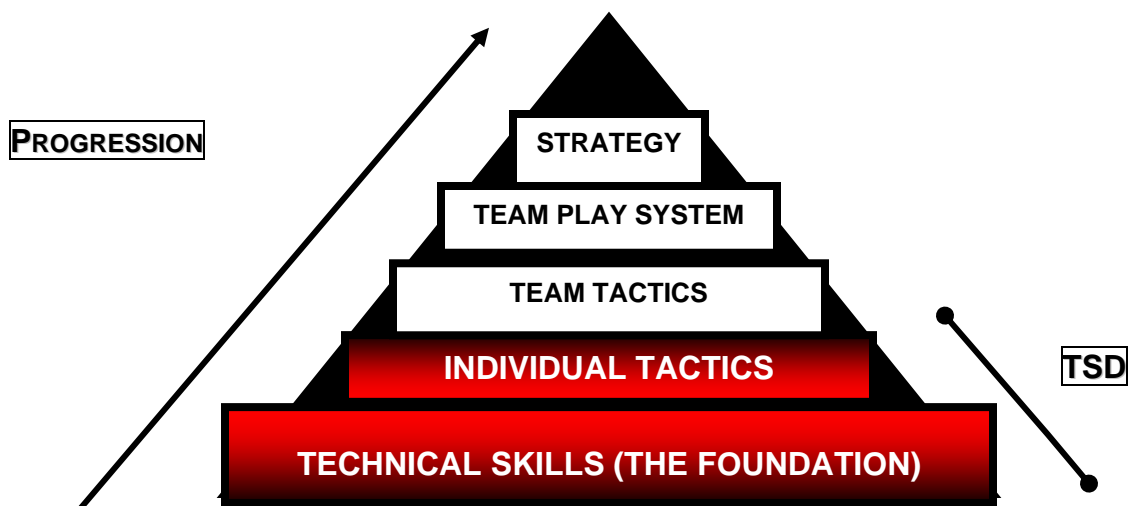
- Competitive hockey begins between the ages of 12 – 14.
- At an early age the focus is on skill development through the use of low intensity practices and small area games.
- Fun and fundamentals are the keys to European skill development.
- Athletes are encouraged to play multiple sports and NOT play hockey 12 months a year (soccer and tennis are big summer sports).
- Ironically, European kids spend more time on the ice during a hockey season...but NOT playing 120 games a year. In Europe, kids practice at

- the very least – 3 times to 1 game. Kids are encouraged to attend public skating sessions and skills clinics.
- On average, coaches are more competent, believe in skill development, and design their practices around the development of individual and team skills, rather than systems, strategies and winning hockey games.
 - The pressure to win in youth hockey is pale in comparison to the North American system.
 - Kids play because they love the game, not because mom and dad want them to.

From my experiences playing, teaching, and coaching the game, I wanted to take a closer look at the North American Player Development model and see how the Europeans have interpreted it. In doing so, I have gone one step further to create the ***TSD (Total Skills Development) system***. TSD is the summation of the two most important pieces of the skills development pyramid, technical skills and individual tactics. I believe that TSD should be the single most important piece of all youth coaches' development goals as it is critical in building a successful hockey player. This philosophy of player development is pure. It focuses, in detail, on the players need to master and refine the most essential hockey skills needed in order to be successful at our game. It is what the Europeans have always known. A player that masters the TSD piece instantly becomes more of an asset to his/her hockey club. For example, in a squirt practice, a coach should spend 70% of on – ice instruction on TSD. The 70% is allocated the following way: 50% technical skills, and 20% individual tactics (see exhibit B). This allocation accounts for 42 minutes of a one-hour practice. As

players grow and mature to the peewee, bantam, and high school age, this allocation becomes smaller and smaller (as we spend more time on team tactics, systems and strategy). For example, high school coaches will spend 50% of practice time on TSD. This allocation accounts for 30 minutes of a one-hour practice (see exhibit B).

Let's take a closer look:



$$\text{TSD (Total Skills Development)} = \text{Technical Skills} + \text{Individual Tactics}$$

Key Takeaways:

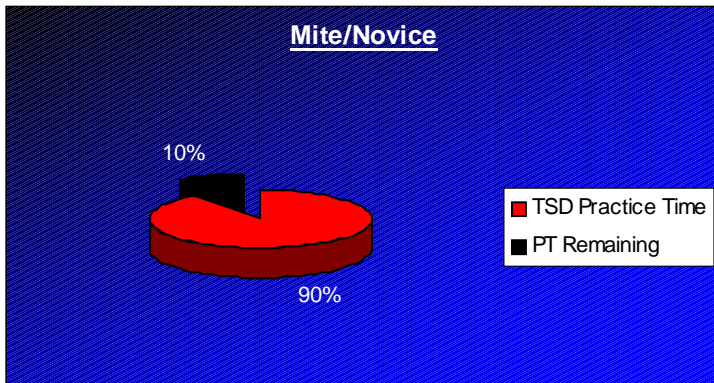
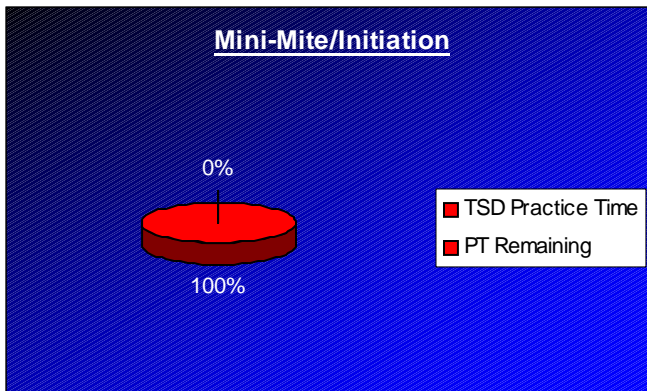
- TSD (Total Skills development) is the summation of the two most important pieces of the skills development pyramid, technical skills and individual tactics.
- A player's ability to skate, handle the puck, pass, shoot, and use these skills in multiple combinations is essential for proper development.

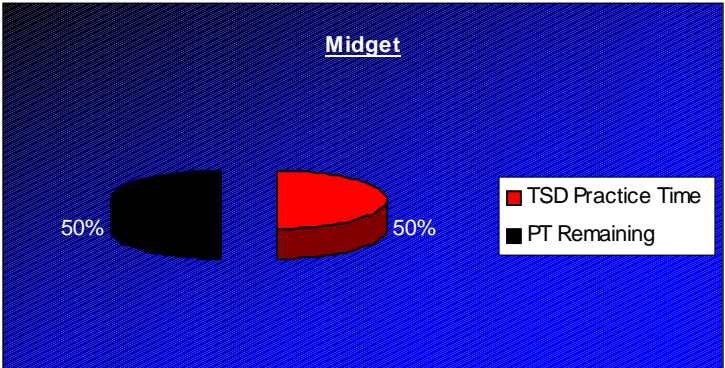
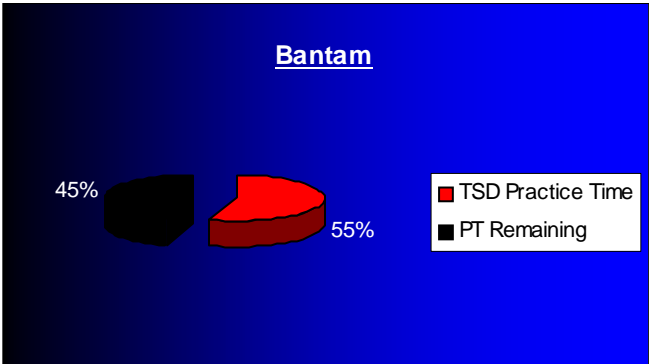
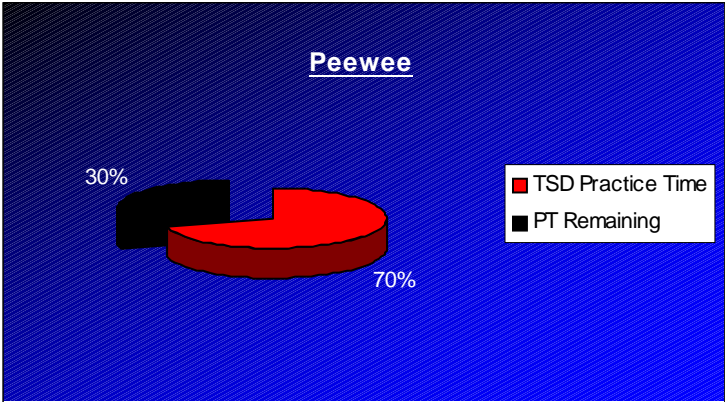
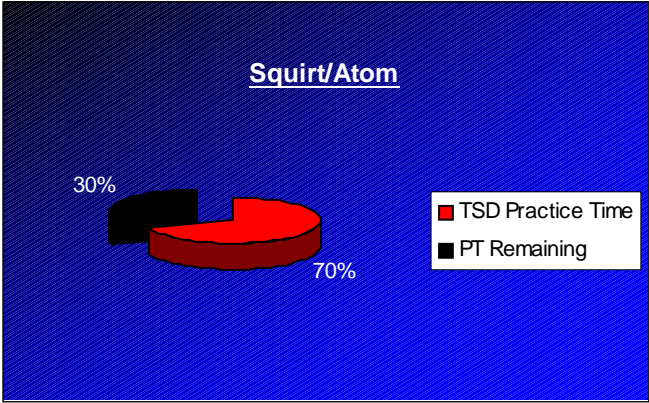
- Players who master the TSD piece will automatically become more of an asset to their hockey club.
- Please see exhibit B for a visual “view” of the TSD philosophy.

Exhibit B (practice allocation based on my Total Skills Development System):

Total Skill Development (TSD)								
Level	Age	Technical Skills	Individual Tactics	Team Tactics	Systems	Strategy	TSD/%Practice	TSD Practice Time
M-M/Initiation	5-6 yrs.	85	15				100%	60
Mite/Novice	7-8 yrs.	75	15	10			90%	54
Squirt/Atom	9-10 yrs.	50	20	15	10	5	70%	42
Peewee	11-12 yrs.	45	25	10	10	10	70%	42
Bantam	13-14 yrs.	40	15	20	15	10	55%	33
Midget	15-18 yrs.	35	15	20	15	15	50%	30

* Technical Skills, Individual Tactics, Team Tactics, Systems, Strategy (#'s in %)
 * TSD Practice Time - assumes 60 minute practice (#'s in minutes)
 * Statistics - Hockey Canada
 * Analysis prepared by Misha Donskov





So, the question becomes inevitable. What can your organization do to influence and encourage the **Total Skills Development** philosophy? Here are my recommendations:

- Educate parents and youth hockey players on the importance of the player development pyramid. Technical hockey skills (i.e. skating, puck handling, passing and shooting) are the foundation of every hockey player's success. Without this foundation, it becomes nearly impossible for any hockey player, regardless of age and/or experience, to be a valuable asset to his/her hockey club. Here are some tips:
 - ❖ Talk to parents and players and develop a vision that supports and educates quality coaches.
 - ❖ Be a model – incorporate technical skills and individual tactics into your coaching plan – every practice (regardless of age, experience, skill level). Even if you're a pro, fundamental skill development is the key to hockey success.
 - ❖ Promote skills development camps, specialty clinics and power skating classes. There is no replacement for ice time.
 - ❖ Emphasize skill development over team performance.
 - ❖ Be a believer – FUN and FUNDAMENTALS are the key to youth hockey.

- Skating – The most essential technical hockey skill
 - ❖ Stress the importance of skating. Every other technical hockey skill (puck handling, passing, shooting) is in some way related to skating.
 - ❖ Remind parents and players that skating is a learned skill. Like anything, you must practice religiously to be great.

- Encourage (at least) a 3:1 practice to game ratio with minor hockey players. Practice is another essential key to youth hockey player development. Players, parents and coaches need to understand the importance of practice. Please consider the following statistics taken from Hockey Canada during a 60-minute peewee level hockey game.
 - ❖ Players will have the puck on their stick for an average of 8 seconds a game.
 - ❖ Players will take 1-2 shots per game.
 - ❖ Players will take an average of 18 shifts per game.
 - ❖ 99% of feedback coaches give is when players have the puck. Ironically, players only have the puck on their stick for 0.2% of the game.

Now – consider these stats taken during an EFFECTIVE 60 minute practice

- ❖ 1 efficient practice will give a player more skill development than 11 games collectively.
- ❖ Each player should have the puck on his or her stick for approx. 8-12 minutes.
- ❖ Each player should have a minimum of 30 shots on goal.

The numbers don't lie; practice is where development takes place. Running an EFFECTIVE practice is key; all coaches need to effectively utilize the ice. Coaches should try to run 4/5 drills, games, activities each practice...more is NOT better, execution is the key to development. Strive to keep players moving at all times. Ice time is valuable, use it wisely!

- Encourage kids to play a variety of sports. Kids need to get away from the rink and do other things away from hockey. Hockey players are athletes. To continue to enhance athletic ability, encourage your players to bike, play tennis, golf, swim, play soccer. Coaches will find that not only are these great cross-training sports for hockey, but they also enhance player development.

- Encourage youth hockey coaches to use cross – ice games and practices. In this type of environment, skill development greatly increases due to the following points:
 - ❖ Each player's activity greatly increases.
 - ❖ Players touch the puck more – improving puck handling skills.
 - ❖ Tactical skills develop much faster.
 - ❖ Decisions must be made quicker and in less space.

- ❑ Skill development **MUST** take precedence over winning hockey games.

Make it clear to all parents that your philosophy is to develop hockey players.

The more skilled you are the more FUN the game becomes.

- ❑ Believe in what you do...have a passion for Player Development!

My advice to young children who play this great game:

- ❑ FUN is the key...smile every time you hit the ice.
- ❑ Work on the fundamentals (i.e. SKATING, puck handling, passing, shooting).
- ❑ SKATING is the foundation of hockey (every other technical hockey skill is in some way, connected to skating).
- ❑ Practice, practice, practice!
- ❑ Play as much as you can in an uncontrolled, relaxed, FUN environment...with friends!
- ❑ Keep the parents, politics and pressure OUT!
- ❑ At an early age, play as many positions as possible.
- ❑ Learn the value of hard work, dedication and team.
- ❑ Develop good, sound friendships with teammates and other players.
- ❑ Take something from every practice/game.
- ❑ FUN and FUNDAMENTALS are the key!

My advice to parents:

- ❑ Do everything that you can to support your kids' hockey dreams...however, don't dream on their behalf.
- ❑ You can't preach the two F's enough...FUN and FUNDAMENTALS are the key to youth hockey.

Total Skills Development Model

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