



Competitive Edge Coaches Clinic for Orono Hockey: How to Get the Most Out of Skills Practices

Please Contact Andy Blaylock at Andy@compedgehky.com for more information on any of the content in this clinic. Andy can also provide drill diagrams upon request to assist in setting up any of the drills we will cover.

Practice Planning and Execution Considerations

Goal: What is our goal in each practice? Aside from fun for the players and getting specific about addressing areas of need, our goal pretty much comes down to the players executing **repetitions with guidance**.

We cannot maximize repetitions or guidance without sacrificing some time with the other, so at some point we have to strike the right balance between the two. Keep in mind though, that...

- Guidance without repetitions leads to no skill-learning
- Repetitions without guidance leads to poor quality skill

So, how can we get a lot of repetitions and a lot of guidance in our practices?

Remember, **guidance is relatively permanent**, so we can teach something before the first time a player executes a skill and that guidance will have an impact in the future to ensure quality reps. In other words, a detailed explanation in one practice can be recalled with a quick explanation in the next.

Conversely, players don't need to know all of the details of the skill you are building to on the first time through the drill. A well thought out progression where they focus on the simplest details with the first repetitions and you guide them to more complexity as they start to grasp the various parts is a great way to **"teach as they go"**.

Speaking of **Teaching as they go**, don't forget that players can still hear you as they attempt a drill. You do not need to stop the whole group, or in many cases, pull a kid out and talk to him or her, if you can help them with a simple correction within the act of performing a drill.

- Correcting the whole group is often most efficient if a good percentage of the players are making the same mistakes.
- Pulling players out is great for complex corrections when they apply to an individual or a few.
- Correcting as they go is great for simple corrections for individual issues.

Lets look at some additional strategies for getting the most out of your ice-time for both repetitions and guidance.

The Single Set Up Progression

- Remember, it is not the drill, but the skill set we are trying to cultivate that matters
- If we have a series of turning skills (for example) we can do them all out of a drill that follows the same path
- Start with the simplest and most known skill, teach the path, and turn them loose
- Then move to more complex skills with the same path
- This allows them to focus on the skills since they do not have to worry about the path
- This also eliminates time spent changing the on-ice set-up to keep more time for guidance or reps

The Best Explanations: **Good guidance in minimal time**

1. Explain the path of the drill
2. Explain the technique(s) of the drill
3. Demonstrate the path of the drill
4. Demonstrate the technique(s) of the drill
5. Let players know what to look for in order to activate into the drill (on a whistle, when the player ahead gets to a certain point, etc.)

Notes:

- Many of these steps (above) should be skipped or abbreviated on future explanations for the same drill or format. In order to do the drill to the best effect, they need to know all of this, but, as a coach, you need to know which of these they already know.
- If you will wind up overloading players just by explaining it to them (giving them too much info to handle), rethink the drill.
 - Is it too advanced for this group?

- Is there an intermediate step that can lead to this more complex version?
- Can we have them focus on fewer techniques or details at first and get to other ones on later reps?

Work to Rest Ratio

While we typically want to maximize repetitions, it is possible to have too many reps! If players are practicing under fatigue, technique can suffer. As such, consider how tired they get in a drill and how much downtime they have in between reps to ensure they have the energy to execute properly.

Aside from that, let's discuss some drill set ups and methods to get lots of reps out of them.

- **Stations** - Stations inherently help to get lots of reps for players. Not all station-based practice plans need to have many different stations though. The same set-up can be used in different parts of the ice, and to ensure quality the coach can have everybody learn the drill at one station before breaking into many stations.
- **Line Drills** – Line drills are actually a type of station drill. It is just that the stations are like lanes up the ice. Blow the whistle in relatively short intervals during line drills and it is easily possible to get a lot of reps for each drill in a short time.
- **Full Ice Drills** – Start players close together (tell them it is not a race, however) and you can use the whole ice for one drill and still get a lot of players going at the same time for lots of reps.
- **Half or Third Ice Drills** – These set ups are a middle ground between the advantages and challenges of stations and full ice drills. The same strategies can apply that apply to either of those.

Spectator Coaches

When youth teams practice, it is common for assistant coaches to defer to the head coach or whomever is running the practice. That is a necessity when that coach is addressing the team. However, all coaches should be involved in “teaching as they go” and / or pulling players out to give guidance. They should learn what guidance to give simply by paying close attention to the coach who is running the practice. If you don't understand what that coach is emphasizing, please ask. If you are running practices, please welcome these questions. Avoid “spectator coaches”.

Controlling Player Speed

Some young skaters tend to go hard on every drill and are tough to get to slow down to work on a complex new skill. Other players are tough to get to go full speed when the drill calls for it. For our purposes here, it is simply important to note that players need to be coached to go at “the right speed to do the drill right” and that this does not always mean full speed. In order to learn it is important to have “correct” repetitions. It is hard to execute a new skill correctly at high speed so we should have players start slow and add speed as they learn to most efficiently help them to acquire the skills of the game.

Fun Factor and Competition

Fun leads to the desire to play and practice. Desire to play and practice leads to engagement at practice. Engagement at practice is key to rapid skill acquisition. While a disorganized practice where there is minimal focus other than players having fun is not good for players long-term, creative use of coach personality to keep things light combined with competitive drills allows for a highly productive practice to also be fun for players. Make the most of incorporating fun when you can to maximize long-term results.

Conversely, sometimes you will need to take the fun away in order to discourage behaviors that are counter-productive to practice. Let players know that if they listen well, pay attention, and try hard, practice will be fun. And when those things don't happen, practice will be more boring. Of course, the threshold at which you determine players aren't paying attention well enough changes as players age, becoming more strict with older players. The punishment for not paying attention may become more unpleasant (push ups and endurance skating) with older players.