

Chalk Talk

Time For A Change? Make Decisions in the Best Interests of The Player



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As the conclusion of the 2005-2006 ice hockey season will soon be drawing to a close, many young boys and girls, along with their parents, will be preparing for next season's try-outs and possibly will

be looking for a new hockey team to play for. There are a number of reasons why players look to change teams. But whatever the reason, this can be a stressful time for parents and their children during a transition from one team to another or even one level to another. Hockey parents... this article is directed at you!

It is important for you, and your child, that as a parent you must step back from the emotions that are involved with being cut from a team or leaving a team based on your own decision. If you are leaving a team based on a personal decision make sure it is the right choice. As we know, the grass is not always greener on the other side, so make sure as a parent you are making choices in the best interest of your child because many times in minor hockey the changes are made to appease the parents without the child's input at all. Younger kids have no idea at all where they are playing or care for that matter. So make sure you put them in an environment to succeed. If your child is being cut or removed from a team, again step back from the emotional aspect of the situation and realize that the majority of hockey players have been cut or didn't make a roster spot on a desired team at some point in their hockey careers. Also realize that being cut from a minor hockey team is usually one coach's decision, and therefore one man's or woman's opinion and not the end of the world. Understand that although this one coach doesn't appreciate your child's level of play, there is a coach and team out there who will. Parents, it is crucial to realize that in many cases, when a player is being removed from a team, it is actually the parent who is being "cut" for a variety of possible reasons.

If you do find yourself looking for a new team for either reason, there are several factors you should consider in selecting a team for next season. First of all, make sure your child is playing at the proper level whether it is AAA, AA, A, Select, or House

League. You would want your child to play at the level where they will get plenty of ice time to develop and mature as a player. There are many players at the AAA and AA level that see very little playing time and if they moved down a level, they would be playing in all situations such as power-play, penalty-killing, and crucial minutes like the last minutes of periods and games. That is how kids develop. They must play to get better. Sitting on the bench won't allow them to get better. So make sure your child is at the level where the most development will take place and they will have an opportunity to maximize their ice time.

Another consideration and the most important factor in selecting a new team in my opinion is, finding out about the perspective coach. As a parent, one should do some homework regarding the coach. Make sure you put your child on a team where the coach will develop your child as both a player and a person. Hockey should be used by parents not only for physical exercise but also to develop children's fundamental life skills in order to succeed as adults. Coaches through dress codes, time curfews, diets, exercise, interaction and communication develop such life skills and discipline. So find a coach who has structure and understanding that hockey is much more than what takes place on the ice. You want to find a coach who has a good past record with respect to development and progression. Does he or she rebuild every year from the ground up or is there a plan? Are the coach's teams competitive? Do they gradually improve or do they get worse? What do past players and parents have to say about the coach? Do the kids on these teams enjoy going to the rink? Do they have fun? These questions must be asked and satisfactorily answered.

In regards to on ice coaching, you want to find a coach who has an understanding of both the game of hockey and the level of hockey that is being played by your child. By this I mean that a coach must consider such factors as age, intelligence, physical capabilities, and present skill level in establishing practices and development both individually and for the team. Many minor coaches demand systems and skills that young players are physically incapable of performing. It is also crucial for families looking for a new team to find a coach whom you and your child like personally.

Your children spend a large amount of time around the team and coach, so it is a must that you get along socially with the entire staff. Your child must want to be around the rink and team for development and success to take place. By success I don't mean winning every game and the championship, I mean enjoying hockey and wanting to be at the rink. If your child is happy and smiling when going to and being at the arena, then, as a parent that is success.

Other social factors to be considered during this process are team costs and practice locations. With the cost of hockey ever increasing, the decision on where to play can be an economic burden. Make sure that the investment to play is well within the family budget. You do not want to mortgage your house just so your child can wear a certain team jacket. If you are stressed out from the economics of hockey your child will also be negatively affected and therefore their enjoyment and development will suffer along with wasting your hard earned money. Also, take into account where the team practices. Most games in minor hockey rotate around the arenas throughout the city, but a practice rink is usually constant. As a parent around the G.T.A., you do not want to spend most of your day in a car getting to hockey. Find a team with a practice facility within a reasonable driving distance. Nowadays hockey is a family commitment and for a child to be happy and succeed, they must play on a team that works for the entire family.

The process of looking for a new team can be emotional. As a parent you owe it to your child to step back from the emotions and make responsible decisions. Do what is best for your child in the long run. Put them in situations to succeed. Do some homework because the investment of time and money is huge. It is important to use hockey as a tool to get something in return for your effort. Success and development comes in many forms through hockey both on and off the ice and once you and your families understand this, personal and family goals can be attained wherever you play.

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