

Bench Management: It's Part of the Game



Legendary University of Wisconsin hockey coach, Badger Bob Johnson, said it best, "Coach on the bench not from the bench." Game management and bench management are part of a winning strategy for your team. From tasks as seemingly simple as how to conduct line changes, which coach mans which door to handling running clocks and which players to play are all part of game management.

Who is responsible for what on your bench? Who handles injuries, match-ups, discipline, constructive criticism, and praise? As the head coach, it is your responsibility to organize your bench, organize your

assistants, and organize your players. Beyond these more obvious management areas there are other more complex tasks the coach needs to deal with. Let's look at a few topics.

Officials

One very important aspect of the game is the coach-official interaction. Many times a tone can be set very early with the officials based on the way the coaches react to a call or non-call. From the opening handshake with the official to the final buzzer, how you treat the officials can have a major impact on the game. The folks from the Illinois Hockey Officials Association (IHOA) will tell you that yelling at the officials or standing on the dasher will not help your cause. Ask yourself, after all the yelling or worse, has an official ever changed a penalty call?

Typically getting upset only sets the stage for your players to start chirping at the officials. From there it usually escalates into the parents reacting and getting on the officials. The real concern for coaches should be what is the example you are setting for your players? What are you teaching them in that moment? The time you are spending yelling at the official may be better spent instructing your team in a positive manner, setting up the next lines, or the next faceoff play. If you coach under control, your players will probably play under control.

Players

How many times have you caught yourself screaming instructions to your players during the play? Joystick coaching only serves to confuse the players, especially at the younger ages. For the young players there is already too much going on out on the ice that they need to be aware of - they very rarely even hear or understand the instructions being shouted from the bench anyway. As Coach Bob says, coach them on the bench. When they return from their shift, instruct them on what just happened and how you would like them to handle the situation next shift. Remember, at every age repetition is key; they will make mistakes and will need to be instructed again, probably several times.

The key is to not berate the kids for a bad play, but to encourage them, educate them, and send them out there on their next shift feeling confident in their ability. Whether dealing with the officials or the players, a coach needs to respect them both. Neither of them will respond in a positive manner to shouting and screaming over a bad call or bad play.

Next issue we will take a look at game situations and how do you handle them.