

Conditioning for Hockey

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Many times while I am leaving the rink and I am get in my car after work; I may see some young hockey teams doing their “dry land training” before their practice on the ice. I may see something that I think is really good where the coach actually put in some thought into a progressive session with the focus on helping the players get better in a fun environment. Unfortunately, and most of the time, I may see something that in my opinion, isn't beneficial at all for young hockey players. What is the good and what is the bad? To me, for a young player, they need to be having fun while working on the physical components that would help them become better athletes. Drills such as agilities, plyometrics, tag games, and speed drills that promote competitiveness and enjoyment should be what are most important. What I don't like to see are kids being told to take long runs around the block or the arena. Sometimes, and I still see this at much higher levels, I may see young players riding stationary bikes at a steady state pace for a long period of time. Ask yourself, how many marathon runners play hockey to help them get prepare for marathons? Or, does Lance Armstrong play hockey to prepare for the Tour de France? It makes no sense and unfortunately, in a lot of situations, today's training for hockey is done this way!

At a recent seminar that I attended, a speaker talked about an athlete's “speed window”. He was quoting a researcher who is the world's expert on young athletes and the maturation process. What he said was that boys and girls have 2 windows of developing speed in their maturation. For boys, the windows are ages 7-9 and 13-16. For girls, their windows are between 6-8 and 11-13. Basically, what he was saying was that during this time, to take advantage of this opportunity, kids should be doing athletic movements as fast and hard as possible. In relating this to hockey, it could mean sprinting and jumping while doing dry-land training, while also skating fast and shooting the puck as hard as they can on the ice. Usually, when I see these youngsters on these long, slow runs or rides, guess how old they are? They are usually between 11 and 13. They are training to be slow during the optimal time for developing speed.

It now makes even less sense to have these youngsters go out on these long distance runs or these long stationary bike rides to help them play in a game where speed is the most important factor. Some of the best quotes I have heard from some of the strength and conditioning coaches that I have learned from include “Train Slow, Be Slow” and “Want to run fast then you better be running fast”. (I think this would also apply to skating). Off-Ice training sessions and on-ice practices should always take this into consideration.