

The Importance of Skill-Building

By Pat Markham, a 15+ year veteran hockey mom and feature writer for Micro Ice Training Centers, the Illinois and Missouri Hockey Stop publications

There are some born to play this great game. Others, like myself, were born to watch. I am an avid spectator of this fast-paced sport, and I am lucky enough to have two young men who started their hockey "careers" before they started elementary school. I tend to favor youth hockey over the "real" thing. I get some of my greatest joy from watching the little ones on the ice, jerseys to their knees, full concentration required to stay vertical while moving forward. I don't understand the physics, but I understand how much these kids love the game and how much they want to get better so they can continue to play at higher levels of competition.

Looking back I recall my boys' early days on studio ice (approximately half the size of regulation ice). They skated during open ice sessions, played 5 minute periods 3 on 3, and alternated positions throughout the game. From these sessions, my boys always emerged with a smile. They did what they liked best – play. They skated for hours, practicing forward and backward crossovers, chasing their pals, and learning the basics. I remember the drills and skill-building exercises that included everything from the skating and stick handling basics to jumping over stacked tires on the ice.

Coaches and instructors try to instill the physical and mental aspects of the game. Both require repetition, visualization and training. By their nature, most youngsters are interested in learning. They want to garner a spot on the higher level team. Even young children can understand that in order to be a better player they have to get better at what they do. For game play, young athletes must become proficient in basic skills so they can use their powers of concentration for the mental aspects of the game. The flawless execution of a play does not happen by chance. It is the combination of good training and intelligent application of the skills and concepts.

The amount of development that occurs during a young hockey player's experiences is impressive. To understand this, I suggest you sit through a mite game and then watch a midget level game. Take in a Tier I Pee Wee Major game and then go across the rink and watch first-timers trying to get across the ice without incident. The disparity from level to level is one thing. The disparity from player to player at the same level is another.

The need for individual players to bring something special to the ice in order to get attention is greater as players mature, but it is the early training that often makes the difference. The little guys who are so far ahead of their peers may fail to perfect their skills development because they see success at the mite level. However, success at the mite level may be more dependent upon who skates fastest rather than who develops the best skating or stick handling maneuvers. It is important to understand that a phenomenal mite does not necessarily become an outstanding pee wee player. Size, ability to execute and take a hit, speed, agility, mental acuity, intelligence, an understanding of the game, tenacity, and other traits and skills will be needed at these higher levels of competition. Understanding proper technique and practicing these skills will go a long way in the continuum of development.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM MICROICE

September, 2007



"The Insider" with Scott and Jay

Scott Gomez and Jay Pandolfo have been skating at Micro Ice and are very excited about the upcoming season, much of their enthusiasm due to the fact that they have polished their skills with us. "We feel very confident that we will both have great years, we know that after skating at Micro Ice we hold an advantage over other players" say the two NHL stars.

"Not only do we feel more prepared, but we feel like we are in the shape of our lives. It is much more effective to be skating on a smaller ice surface, since today's hockey is all about skills in small areas".

Since signing with the New York Rangers, Scott knew right from the beginning of the summer where he was going to train:

"I knew that going to a new team and playing for a larger fan base, I would have to be in the best shape possible. I weighed my options and came to the conclusion that I had to spend time in the area to work out with Mike Boyle and skate at Micro Ice".

Micro Ice wishes both Scott and Jay good luck this upcoming season and we are certain that we will see them back again next summer!

MicroIce Corner: Hockey Responsibility

Today, companies in the hockey training business have a responsibility to operate in the best interest of the players they target. Micro Ice is developing programs that have a positive impact on all its participants. We believe there must be a reasonable balance between the number of games played and skills developed. Massachusetts has experienced a serious decline in developing top level players who gain recognition through being drafted by professional teams. Hockey experts feel a shift must take place by decreasing the amount of games played and increasing the concentration on small group skills training sessions.

European players spend more time on skills training in reduced rinks and less on games. It is no surprise that most professional teams have an abundance of European players on the power play, where puck and stick handling skills are needed. As our pledge to the Micro Ice community, we have provided a setting for Massachusetts players to develop the much needed European hockey skills. We have a solution to developing players as they were once developed in the past. Please think about how best to use the hockey resources provided and what it is you need to do in order to invest personally and be assured that your son/daughter is getting the best hockey experience money can buy. In considering what is appropriate for your son/daughter we recommend no more than 30-35 games per season for developing hockey players. Micro Ice is sensitive to the needs of developing hockey players and remains firm in providing programs that will teach all players the skills to compete effectively at all levels of the hockey spectrum.

If you would like to know more about the happenings at our MICROICE facility in North Andover, contact Kim at kim@microicecenters.com.



You Won't Improve in Games
Michael Boyle

Next time you're trying to decide how to best help your child improve their skill level pull out the chart pictured below. Let's face it; games are fun for parents to watch. We get to see little John or Jane score a goal. What we don't realize is that the limited amount of puck contact is not really good for development

The following chart was compiled by statisticians in the 2002 World Championship Final

Player	Shifts	IceTime	PT	PR	PA	SA	Touch
Sakic,J	27	15:25	1:19	21	21	7	44
Modano	28	19:47	:58	17	22	4	44
Amonte	22	12:51	:46	11	4	5	33
Key							
PT	Possession time						
PR	Passes received						
PA	Pass attempts						
SA	Shots attempted						
Touch	Puck touches						
Game notes							
Canada wins Gold, USA takes sliver. Sakic has 2 goals and two assists and was MVP. Amonte had 1 goal on 3 shots on net, Modano had 1 assist.							

Look at the ice times of the Worlds best. Sakic averaged 34 seconds per shift. Amonte's average shift was thirty two seconds. Modano's were slightly longer. This was some of the most intense hockey in history. An average of one minute of possession in a sixty minute game? An average of about five minutes of ice time per period? Ice time averaged out to approximately sixteen minutes for the entire game and the average number of shifts was 25.

For youth hockey, maybe divide by two in a 50 minute game. This means your child might get 30 seconds of puck possession time if they are lucky. Think they can better in 30 seconds?

The Perfect Combination?

Small surface skill work and strength training may be the real keys to development. This is the reason that Mike Boyle Strength and Conditioning joined with Micro Ice. If you improve skills *and* improve size and strength you are a long way to being a better player.

Small ice surface training like the Micro Ice program drastically increases the amount contact your child has with the puck. Strength training effectively creates a "bigger motor". Lower body strength is the key to skating speed. Increased strength is the fastest way to increased speed.

Micro Ice + Mike Boyle Strength and Conditioning = the perfect combination?