

Tucker Hockey Tips

Connecting With Players

In today's fast paced and information filled world, one of the buzz words is connecting. We can connect via phone, email, texting, as well as social media such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. It seems we have many communication tools to reach out and connect with people but it will never replace face to face interaction / connections. Face to face contact is real, interactive and by far the best way to connect with anyone especially within the coaching fraternity.

As a professional hockey coach who has taught power skating and hockey skills to ages 4 to 75 and learn to skate to semi pro levels, I pride myself on my ability to be a good mixer with people. I strive to be a strong communicator and work towards having a good connection on and off the ice with each of my students.

Each individual is unique in their skill set and how they understand and learn skills. As a coach it is discovery time the first time working with a player or players. It's important to assess a player's or group skills and work on eliminating bad habits and bridging the skills gap. A coach must always be adapting to one's audience. A coach must impart to give each player or players what he or she needs to know not what the coach knows after many years of being in the profession.

To connect with my players depending of course on their age and skill levels, I will often incorporate many of the following into my coaching methodologies:

- Create a partnership between coach and player to achieve optimal results
- Ask if there's any specific requests the player or parent would like me to work on to customize the upcoming session or program
- Talk to the players - not at them - with open conversations
- Ask questions - get the player or players talking about what we are doing on the ice and why?
- Relate - ask them off ice questions about their favourite player, team, school subject or interests in other activities besides hockey
- Try to understand and enjoy each players individual and unique personality

- Search for what buttons to push to enhance on ice success
- Read their energy and interest levels as it can vary greatly from session to session
- Mix up the drills - provide a variety of high tempo practices and challenge / stretch the player's minds and athletics
- Conduct practice plans with a mix of skill development and fun games
- Friendly 1 on 1 scrimmages for older players or shootouts for younger players
- Have fun - keep the smile and enjoyment in playing hockey

Connecting - to have strong relationships with different individuals especially hockey players requires caring, patience, empathy, insightfulness and expert advice. It takes hard work! But a coach's due diligence can lead to many special and rewarding hockey relationships. It's about teaching life skills as well. Work towards developing good citizens not just hockey players is the main goal. To make a "difference" in the life of a child / player!

